



SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Enabling Environment Snapshot

Honduras

March 2025



Context

Following the political crisis resulting from the 2009 coup d'état, Honduras experienced a deterioration in governance and citizen participation. The events of the last decade show tensions between the population and state institutions, with repeated whistle-blowers reporting restrictions on the right to protest, intimidation of activists and attacks on journalists and human rights defenders. During subsequent administrations, especially Juan Orlando Hernández' presidency (2014-2022), [allegations of corruption and restrictions on civil liberties](#) increased markedly.

Although there were initial expectations regarding improvements in human rights and transparency under the current administration of Xiomara Castro (2022-present), the reality continues to be complex as President Castro has shown [resistance to being questioned by civil society](#). Important challenges remain, such as structural impunity in cases of violence against human rights defenders and journalists, which directly affects citizen participation and limits the actions of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).

1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

Honduras maintains a rating of "repressed" according to the [CIVICUS Monitor](#) and "partially free" according to [Freedom House](#). The state of emergency, in force since December 2022 ([Executive Decree PCM-29-2022](#)) and repeatedly extended until 2025, suspends constitutional guarantees such as freedom of association and the inviolability of the home and has negatively impacted the enabling environment for civil society. Organisations such as the [National Commissioner for Human Rights \(CONADEH\)](#) have expressed concerns about these prolonged restrictions and their impact on the fundamental rights of the population.

Despite some progress compared to previous administrations, restrictions on the freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association, coupled with impunity for crimes against environmental and social defenders, continue to generate an atmosphere of insecurity and fear that inhibits activism and citizen participation. The [CIVICUS report](#) highlights that journalists, human rights defenders and civil society organisations suffer harassment, threats and violence, despite the existence of state protection mechanisms, which are ineffective in practice.

In addition, an increase in attacks against human rights defenders and journalists has been documented. According to [Human Rights Watch](#), in 2023 there were 453 cases of harassment, threats or intimidation against these groups, and 17 killings, most of them of environmental and land defenders. These facts not only demonstrate the state's failure to comply with its

international obligations but also reflect an alarming structural lack of protection for those who exercise community leadership and defend the environment. The repetition of this type of crime - in a context of impunity, institutional inefficiency and stigmatisation of social work - seriously weakens the enabling environment for the exercise of rights in the country. It deters citizen participation, criminalises activism and generates a climate of fear and insecurity that undermines democratic foundations and the rule of law. As a result, it limits the work of social organisations, indigenous and peasant communities, as well as local leaderships who, for fear of reprisals, are forced into silence or displacement.

Although Congress has not recently passed laws as restrictive as the former "Law on Public Meetings", reforms to the Penal Code (articles 335 and 335-B, 2021) are still in force with broad definitions of terrorism and sedition, which CSOs consider susceptible to arbitrary use against social protest. These provisions, according to CSOs, facilitate possible abuses and perpetuate an environment of insecurity for human rights defenders, [limiting civic space in Honduras](#).

2. Supportive legal framework for the work of civil society actors

The legal framework regulating CSOs in Honduras has been the subject of debate in recent years, especially in relation to Decree 32-2020, known as the [Law on Non-Governmental Development Organisations](#) (NGDOs).

This decree establishes regulations for the creation and supervision of CSOs, including provisions allowing the state to dissolve organisations that allegedly "undermine state security". Although Decree 32-2020 has not yet been used to dissolve NGOs on the grounds of state security, its ambiguous wording, combined with internal political polarisation and precedents of mass closures in the region, fuels legitimate concerns about the possibility of restricting civic space in Honduras. Various civil society networks have [questioned](#) the ambiguity of these terms and the broad powers of state intervention granted by the law.

In February 2025, the Executive Regulation that aims to operationalise Decree 32-2020 was submitted for public consultation. During this process, several CSOs [submitted observations](#) to some members of congress, highlighting the need to guarantee freedom of association in accordance with the standards of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). The importance of avoiding provisions that could be interpreted broadly and allow for the arbitrary dissolution of organisations was emphasised.

3. Accessible and sustainable resources

In Honduras, financial resources for civil society organisations (CSOs) remain limited, which is evidence of a historical dependency on external funding. Reports such as the OECD's [Development Cooperation Report](#) highlight the need to diversify these sources in order to avoid vulnerability to changes in international policies.

In January 2025, the administration of US President Donald Trump ordered a near-total suspension of US foreign aid, directly affecting the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). This measure had a [considerable impact](#) in Honduras, where USAID has been a key source of funding for development programmes, institutional strengthening and community support. Moreover, after the suspension of funding, the national congress, through its chair Luis Redondo, [announced](#) the creation of a special legislative commission to investigate all public and private institutions that have received funding from USAID in the country. This generated reactions from some sectors of civil society, which considered it a direct attack on the organisations that promote the defence of human rights in Honduras.

In addition, the Association for a More Just Society (ASJ) in Honduras highlighted the [importance of diversifying funding sources](#) to ensure financial stability and continue their work in the midst of these challenges. This is a challenge for CSOs, generating uncertainty about the continuity of social and environmental projects in Honduras, exacerbating the vulnerability of the sector in the face of diminishing essential resources, and highlighting the need for sustainability strategies.

4. State openness and responsiveness

The relationship between civil society and government in Honduras has historically been complex, marked by tensions, institutional distrust and episodes of repression, some of which were used to endorse government actions without opposition. However, in recent years there have been signs of openness, especially through initiatives led by the Secretariat for Transparency and the Fight against Corruption (STLCC), aimed at promoting greater citizen participation and strengthening public management.

Among the most important actions is the holding of 17 open meetings in various municipalities in the country, promoting closer ties between citizens and their authorities. Likewise, at the end of 2024, the [National Transparency Roundtable](#) was established, a space for intersectoral

dialogue that brings together government representatives, CSOs and other actors to coordinate joint actions against corruption and foster more effective collaboration.

However, the impact of these efforts is limited by structural restrictions. The state of emergency has generated an adverse environment by restricting constitutional guarantees such as freedom of association and assembly, which are fundamental for effective citizen participation. This situation has [generated uncertainty](#) about the real opening of civic space and respect for human rights

In the framework of the Open Government Partnership (OGP), Honduras has adopted the [Fifth Open Government Action Plan 2023-2025](#), which includes 14 commitments aimed at improving institutional transparency, strengthening accountability and facilitating citizen participation. Some of the most relevant commitments are:

- The creation of an early warning system to prevent acts of corruption.
- The strengthening of the Citizen Transparency Commissions (CCT).
- The promotion of a more open judicial system, facilitating public access to information on judicial processes (OGP Honduras, 2023).

Despite criticism, the Honduran government, through the STLCC, has shown willingness to open dialogue with CSOs and consider their proposals. Working groups and bimonthly meetings have been held to review and adjust key regulations, with the aim of aligning them with international human rights standards and contributing to the protection of civic space.

In addition, international cooperation actors such as the [Delegation of the European Union in Honduras](#) have launched calls for proposals aimed at empowering CSOs in surveillance, participation and public decision-making. These initiatives aim to promote good governance, transparency and the fight against corruption at the municipal, departmental and national levels.

These actions reflect a recognition of the need for an enabling legal and political environment for the work of civil society, as well as the need to guarantee its **active participation in the democratic life** of the country.

5. Political culture and public discourses on civil society

There is a duality in public recognition of CSOs. On the one hand, political leaders highlight the important role that CSOs play in the defence of human rights and transparency. On the other hand, there is [frequent stigmatisation](#) of organisations critical of the government by

official bodies, accusing them of partisan bias or of being "reactionary", which affects public perception and limits their influence on public policy. One example is the constant stigmatisation of CSOs critical of the official discourse, a phenomenon documented by various [international reports](#). This discursive strategy not only negatively affects the public perception of CSOs, but also considerably limits their capacity to effectively influence the formulation of democratic and transparent public policies.

Media coverage plays a decisive role in the construction of this public perception. While independent media and specialised reports recognise and disseminate the achievements of CSOs in the defence of human rights and social development, some [media close to power amplify negative narratives](#), highlighting isolated episodes of protests or alleged ideological biases in order to discredit their work. This media [polarisation](#) generates a contradictory and often unfavourable perception, making it difficult to fully recognise the positive impact of civil society in Honduran society.

6. Access to a secure digital environment

In Honduras, in general, people have access to the internet and can share information online, although the digital environment faces characteristic challenges, such as [widespread cyber-attack practices](#), targeted surveillance, hacking and disinformation.

There are cases targeting journalists, critical organisations and human rights activists. For example, in August 2024, the digital media *Contracorriente* suffered a distributed denial of service (DDoS) attack that paralysed its website for 48 hours, preventing access to its news content.

A publication went viral on Facebook in which the director of the Asociación Calidad de Vida, Ana Cruz, is [alleged to "head a criminal organisation dedicated to human trafficking"](#). The allegations describe Asociación Calidad de Vida as a front for laundering millions of lempiras and focus on the image of the Association's Executive Director, Ana Cruz, a woman who has worked for decades to defend the rights of women, victims of violence and human trafficking.

Also the National Anti-Corruption Council (CNA) and its director, Gabriela Castellanos, are [targets of coordinated and inauthentic campaigns on social media](#). In this context, according to the Freedom on the Net Index, Honduras is still in a vulnerable situation in terms of digital freedom.

Social media and digital platforms facilitate the communication and organisation of citizens' movements, but they have also been the scene of [cyber-attacks, harassment and](#)

[disinformation campaigns](#). Over the past year, incidents have been reported in which state and non-state actors employed [surveillance and monitoring techniques](#) to identify and silence critical voices.

These challenges are compounded by the dissemination of disinformation, [scams and account hacks](#) affecting public perception and the credibility of information shared. Consequently, although access to the internet remains relatively free, the security of the digital environment is precarious and requires the implementation of [robust cybersecurity and data protection measures](#).

Challenges and opportunities

In the coming months, given the [electoral context and high social and political polarisation](#), CSOs face important challenges in terms of security, effective advocacy and financial stability. However, there are concrete opportunities to strengthen the enabling environment through civic education initiatives, effective use of digital tools against disinformation and strategic alliances with international actors that can support and make visible their advocacy and protection of fundamental rights.

In the next four months, civil society in Honduras will face considerable challenges arising from the climate of high political and social polarisation. Hate speech, intensified after the 9 March 2025 primary elections, where serious irregularities in the distribution of electoral material caused delays of up to 16 hours at polling stations in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula, has contributed to fuel tensions. This polarising environment not only weakens citizen dialogue, but also fosters mistrust and hinders CSO advocacy in a context that prepares for the general elections of 30 November 2025.

Despite these challenges, there are opportunities to improve the enabling space. Civil society organisations can take advantage of this scenario to promote accountability initiatives and foster inclusive dialogue, using digital tools to counter misinformation and promote civic education, generating spaces for dialogue with candidates for elected office (deputies, mayors), political forums, and encouraging citizen participation and observer groups during the electoral process, among other initiatives, considering these elections as a great opportunity to strengthen democracy.

Collaboration with international bodies, such as the [Inter-American Commission on Human Rights \(IACHR\)](#), and monitoring platforms such as the [CIVICUS Monitor](#) can support civil society efforts and give them credibility.

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