



SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Enabling Environment

Snapshot

Thailand

May 2025

Summary

The respect and protection of fundamental freedoms remains largely unchanged since the submission of the [baseline snapshot](#). There are some troubling developments looming, however. Non-profit organisations still risk losing their freedoms to operate under the draft Act on Associations and Foundations, which is currently being reviewed by the Ministry of Interior. In late February 2025, the Thai government deported 48 Uyghur detainees to China, despite assuring civil society and international organisations otherwise. Individuals prosecuted for exercising their right to free speech continue to face fair trial rights violations in court. Notably, American academic Dr. Paul Chambers was charged under lèse-majesté for allegedly posting statements inviting people to join a webinar on military and police reshuffles in Thailand. The threat of criminal prosecution for exercising academic freedom sets a chilling precedent on the academic space in Thailand.

Context

In May 2020, Thailand witnessed a youth-led pro-democracy movement advocating to amend the lèse-majesté law, monarchy reform, and constitutional redrafting. In response, then-PM General Prayut Chan-ocha [declared that all laws would be used against protesters](#). This includes laws criminalising free speech and peaceful assembly, such as lèse-majesté, the royal defamation law. However, the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly in Thailand are guaranteed in sections 34 and 44 of the 2017 Constitution of Thailand respectively, as well as articles 19 and 21 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR) to which Thailand is a state party.

This EE Snapshot has been drafted by [Thai Lawyers for Human Rights](#) (TLHR), an organisation committed to cultivating a healthy democracy in Thailand. TLHR provides legal and litigation assistance to individuals whose civil and political rights have been violated as a result of exercising their right to free speech and peaceful assembly.

1. Respect and Protection of Fundamental Freedoms

According to [CIVICUS Monitor](#), civic space in Thailand is classified as “repressed”, meaning there are serious constraints on fundamental civil society freedoms, including freedom of association and peaceful assembly. As of March 2025, there are currently 46 political prisoners in detention, 29 of whom (63%) are detained under Section 112 (lèse-majesté). Twenty-eight are detained pending trial and appeal. As of May 2025, no fewer than 1974 people in 1316 cases have been charged under various repressive laws since July 2020, and 1248 people in 687 cases are still at various stages of the justice system. Of these, 217 are children involved in 135 ongoing cases. Although Thailand has had a civilian-led government since September 2023, the state of fundamental freedoms remains grim. People exercising their right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly continue to be targeted, including through prosecution and detainment. There is little political will in parliamentary [discussions regarding political amnesty](#) to include lèse-majesté in the list of offences. In response to political repression, TLHR and 12 partners formed the Network for People’s Amnesty, mobilising over 35,000 supporters and submitting an amnesty bill to parliament while addressing ongoing

complex litigation challenges. The draft law, along with other versions from political parties, will be debated by Parliament in 2025.

2. Supportive Legal Framework for the Work of Civil Society Actors

The Thai government has made several attempts to regulate the operations of CSOs, including the draft Not-For-Profit bill in 2021 and 2022. Following international and domestic backlash, the bill was scrapped.

In October 2024, Thailand's Department of Provincial Administration [proposed](#) the "draft Act on Associations and Foundations" to amend the Civil and Commercial Code to regulate "associations and foundations" – legal forms usually adopted by civil society organisations. Though the initiative officially aims to update outdated provisions to ensure that these entities operate in compliance with current legal standards, it is feared that the bill will constrict the ability of civil society to operate freely. Under the new draft bill, non-profit organisations (NPOs) are subjected to extensive reporting requirements, which will burden already strained budgets. Additionally, the draft bill would also allow authorities to inspect an organisation's premises and documents without advance notice or without a search warrant "when there is ground to believe the creation or conduct of activities by the association and the foundation is illegitimate."

This unmitigated access to information on NPOs could reveal identities of NPO leaders, human rights defenders, funders, and beneficiaries. The possibility of reprisals may deter individuals from seeking the help of the civil sector.

3. Accessible and Sustainable Resources

As of January 2025, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in Thailand, including associations and foundations, face [certain restrictions](#) when accessing both international and national funding. While there are no explicit prohibitions on receiving foreign funds, proposed legislation, such as the draft Non-Profit Organisation (NPO) law, aims to monitor all sources of income of NPOs, either governmental, private, or foreign funding. This draft law has raised concerns about increased governmental control over CSO operations. Additionally, CSOs are required to disclose important information, particularly financial data, which is not that different from compulsory registration. If the law is approved, it is likely that all non-profit, non-political groups, and even all CSOs will automatically become NPOs and be subject to strict disclosure rules. These developments suggest that while CSOs can access funding, they must navigate an increasingly complex regulatory environment.

4. State Openness and Responsiveness

In the past, Thailand has shown some receptivity to international criticism. For example, when the aforementioned Draft Act on the Operation for NPOs received backlash from international actors in 2021, it was revised ahead of the examination of Thailand's Third Universal Periodic Review. However, the government and courts in Thailand remain resistant to calls to amend Section 112 (lèse-majesté) or to respond to the demands of human rights advocates. In August

2024, the Constitutional Court [ruled to dissolve the progressive Move Forward Party](#) due to the political party's proposal to amend Section 112, and some of the party's parliamentary candidates being charged under Section 112. The Court ruled that the proposal to amend Section 112 is tantamount to an attempt to overthrow the system of government and can be characterised as a hostile act against the democratic form of the government with the King as the Head of State, pursuant to Section 92, para. 1(1) and (2) of the Organic Act on Political Parties B.E. 2560. The Court also banned the Move Forward Party's executive committee members from holding political office for ten years; the 44 former Members of Parliament are now under investigation and facing a [potential lifetime ban](#) from politics.

On 27 February 2025, the Thai government deported [48 Uyghur detainees](#) who first arrived in Thailand in 2014 to flee persecution in Xinjiang. Notably, this deportation occurred even as the Thai government had promised civil society and international organisations that it had no plans to deport. A group of UN experts had indeed [called on Thai authorities](#) not to send the detainees back to China, where they face imprisonment, torture, or worse.

Moreover, after the deportation, the Thai Deputy Prime Minister Phumtham Weychayachai [said that no country made any concrete offers](#) to resettle the 48 Uyghurs: "We waited for more than 10 years, and I have spoken to many major countries, but no one told me for certain." However, [Reuters reported](#) that Canada and the United States offered to resettle the 48 Uyghurs but that the Thai government refused, for fear of upsetting China. The Thai government then reversed its position and acknowledged that Bangkok had received offers from other countries to resettle the Uyghurs.

5. Political Culture and Public Discourses on Civil Society

Civil society in Thailand is stigmatised as a threat to the national security and peace of Thai people. Authorities then use this negative framing to justify the violation of rights in court decisions. For example, under international law, defendants in a criminal trial are entitled to a fair and public hearing. However, Thai courts call for [secret trials](#) by citing "the benefit of public order or good morals" or "preventing national security secrets from being revealed." Courts usually fail to substantiate how a public trial for these cases may affect public order or good morals, or reveal national security secrets.

Like many other CSOs in Thailand, TLHR has been subjected to [vitriolic statements and harassment in online discourse](#). CSOs have also been subjected to threats of violence: for example, between 13 and 15 February 2024, TLHR was subjected to malicious phone calls, during which staff members were threatened with armed violence. Additionally, an unidentified individual visited the offices of TLHR as a result of the organisation's representation of Ms. Tantawan Tuatulanon and Mr. Nutanon Chaimahabut, activists prosecuted in the [royal motorcade case](#). TLHR has [documented no less than 121 cases](#) of harassment of activists by state officials in 2024.

On 3 March 2025, TLHR published a [comprehensive report](#) detailing monitoring policies from the NCPO (the military junta) era to the present, with statistics and incident reports. Over five years, there have been at least 368 cases of harassment towards activists, students, or citizens active in political dissent.

6. Access to a Secure Digital Environment

The lèse-majesté provision and the Computer Crimes Act in Thailand make it challenging to freely access and share information online. Many of the lèse-majesté prosecutions are used to stifle online freedom of expression, especially on social media platforms. Internet users can be charged for publishing posts, sharing posts, liking posts, or even leaving posts up for too long. Of 309 lèse-majesté cases documented by Thai Lawyers for Human Rights, 171 (i.e., more than half) involve online expression. Often the lèse-majesté provision is used in conjunction with the Computer Crimes Act to police online spaces and repress free speech. These repressive laws make it difficult for journalists to report freely.

In March 2025, an opposition [parliamentarian leaked materials](#) from a Cyber Team under a Joint Command Center operated by Thai police and military. The materials revealed that several individuals and organisations, including Thai Lawyers for Human Rights, were identified as a “high-value target” by the Cyber Team. The Cyber Team coordinated attacks against these high-value targets, including through influencing public narratives (e.g. portraying protesters as violent) and responding “aggressively” to content posted on social media.

The Cyber Team also targeted social media accounts of activists and political opponents through “brute-force attacks” during the 2023 election period; the attacks served to gain access to data and networks and to compromise online security.

Challenges and Opportunities

CSO operations will face further clampdowns, especially with the looming potential promulgation of NPO bills. Additionally, politicians seem reticent to voice support for including lèse-majesté in any discussion of proposed amnesty bills.

Individuals who are prosecuted for exercising their rights to free speech and assembly are facing fair trial rights violations in court. For example, in the case of human rights defender Arnon Nampa, the Court refused to issue subpoenas for evidence crucial to his defence against charges of lèse-majesté and sedition. At times, courts insist on conducting trials in absentia. Prisoners in political cases consistently and systematically have their right to bail denied. Even before trial begins, several judges have made negative comments about the defendants’ alleged conduct.

On 8 April 2025, American academic Dr. Paul Wesley Chambers was charged under lèse-majesté and the Computer Crimes Act for allegedly posting statements on the website of ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, in which he is accused of inviting people to join a webinar on military and police reshuffles in Thailand. The charges against Dr. Chambers constitute a serious violation to his right to freedom of expression and academic freedom. Academics must be able to study and present information about public issues without the threat of criminal prosecution looming over their heads.

Opportunities: Thailand is a member of the UN HRC for 2025-2027. In campaigning for this seat, Thailand [pledged](#) to support the work of the HRC. This presents an opportunity for CSOs to call on the government to carry out recommendations of the HRC. For example, the

[subsidiary bodies](#) of the HRC have [issued opinions](#) in support of human rights defenders and the [right to freedom of speech](#) and assembly.

The European Parliament recently adopted a [human rights resolution](#) on violations of democratic principles and human rights in Thailand, notably commenting on the lèse-majesté law and the deportation of Uyghur refugees.

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