



SUPPORTING  
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT  
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

# Country Focus Report

Thailand

July 2025

# Introduction to the Enabling Environment

What we understand by an Enabling Environment is the combination of laws, rules and social attitudes that support and promote the work of civil society. Within such an environment, civil society can engage in political and public life without fear of reprisals, openly express its views, and actively participate in shaping its context. This includes a supportive legal and regulatory framework for civil society, ensuring access to information and resources that are sustainable and flexible to pursue their goals unhindered, in safe physical and digital spaces. In an enabling environment, the state demonstrates openness and responsiveness in governance, promoting transparency, accountability, and inclusive decision-making. Positive values, norms, attitudes, and practices towards civil society from state and non-state actors further underscore the supportive environment.

To capture the state of the Enabling Environment, we use the following six principles:

## Six key enabling principles:

1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms
2. Supportive legal and regulatory framework
3. Accessible and sustainable resources
4. Open and responsive State
5. Supportive public culture and discourses on civil society
6. Access to a secure digital environment

In this Country Focus Report, each enabling principle is assessed with a quantitative score and complemented by an analysis and recommendations written by our Network Members (NMs). Rather than offering a singular index to rank countries, the report aims to measure the enabling environment for civil society across the 6 principles, discerning dimensions of strength and those requiring attention.

The findings presented in this report are grounded in the insights and diverse perspectives of civil society actors who came together in a dedicated panel with representatives from civil society to discuss and evaluate the state of the Enabling Environment. Their collective input enriches the report with a grounded, participatory assessment. This primary input is further supported by secondary sources of information, which provide additional context and strengthen the analysis.

## A) Introduction

Civil society in Thailand has long served as a robust vehicle through which citizens work as one to better their communities, their country, and the wider world. Although civil society in the country has "[deep historical roots](#)," formal regulation of civil society organizations (CSOs)

[emerged in 1925](#) with the enactment of Thailand's Civil and Commercial Code. Since then, legislation has evolved, governments have changed, countless CSOs have been established, and social movements have risen and fallen with the shifting demands of the community. Yet, underneath these inevitable fluctuations brought alongside the march of time, some of the most fundamental issues for civil society remain: overbearing oversight of CSOs by the government, access to funding in a less-than-lucrative field, and limited meaningful participation for individuals from marginalized communities. Moreover, the advent of technology has brought on a slew of new troubling developments, handing governments the tools to monitor CSOs through advanced means such as spyware.

This report provides a landscape view of the state of civil society in Thailand. It explores why, despite the presence of a civilian-led government, the country is still classified as “repressed” by the CIVICUS Monitor. This status is largely due to the continued and widespread use of restrictive laws on free speech, such as the lèse-majesté law and the Computer Crimes Act. It also explores looming developments in the field, from the constrictive draft “NPO law” currently being reviewed by the Ministry of Interior, to the draining effects of shriveling funds from global donors. Lastly, the report expands upon other relevant factors to the operating environment of civil society, such as public perception of CSOs, citizens’ access to digital rights, and government transparency with legislative documents.

Though civil society’s place in Thailand has been cemented through decades of existence, the current trajectory of increasing restrictions on CSOs threatens to stifle the voices of civil society in a year where they stand as one of the last lines of defense against the world’s current bent towards authoritarianism. Despite these significant challenges, civil society in Thailand continues to play a vital role in advocating for positive change and contributing to the betterment of communities.

## B) Assessment of the Enabling Environment

### Principle 1: Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

**Score: 2.5<sup>1</sup>**

Though Thailand has had a civilian-led government since September 2023, the state of fundamental rights remains grim. Individuals exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly continue to be targeted, including through prosecution and arbitrary detention.

#### 1.1 | Freedom of Expression

Thailand's civic space is currently classified as [“repressed” by the CIVICUS monitor](#), indicating serious restrictions on fundamental civic freedoms, including the rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly. Between July 2020 and May 2025, no fewer than 1,974

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<sup>1</sup> This is a recalculated score based on the CIVICUS Monitor rating published in December 2024. The country is classified as Repressed in the Monitor, with a score of 39/100, which has been converted to align with our 1-to-5 scale.

people have been charged in 1,316 politically motivated cases under various repressive laws, including Section 112 (lèse-majesté) of the Criminal Code, which criminalizes royal defamation. Under the lèse-majesté law, which is considered “[among the strictest in the world](#)”, a person can be imprisoned three to fifteen years for allegedly defaming, insulting, or threatening the “King, the Queen, the Heir-apparent or the Regent.” It has been [interpreted broadly](#) with severe punishments to even minor alleged violations. For example, one individual received a five year prison sentence for allegedly [sharing a BBC article](#) about King Rama X on Facebook. Another received a three year prison for [wearing a crop top](#) deemed to present a satirical take on the role of the monarchy; note that the defendant in this case was just a child under 18 years of age when the alleged offence was committed.

## 1.2 | Freedom of Assembly

In July 2020, Thailand witnessed a youth-led pro-democracy movement call for, *inter alia*, democratic reforms, constitutional reforms, reforms of the monarchy, and the amendment of the lèse-majesté law. In response, then-PM General Prayut Chan-o-cha declared that all laws would be used against the protesters, including laws criminalizing free speech and peaceful assembly. Authorities also [used force against protesters](#), in conjunction with criminalizing activism and imprisoning movement leaders.

In this way, [freedom of assembly is curtailed](#), especially for protests or gatherings addressing political sensitive issues. In 2023, the first national elections since 2019 were held, and Thailand witnessed a transition from a military rule to one led by the Pheu Thai Party. However, even though a new government came into power in September 2023, [new charges of lèse-majesté continue](#) to be brought against pro-democracy activists every month. [No clear changes to policy](#) on freedom of assembly have been observed despite the change in government; surveillance and intimidation against activists, students, and politically active citizens are still employed by state authorities.

## 1.3 | Freedom of Association

The extent of associational rights in Thailand depend heavily on the nature and work of the association. Groups that work on sensitive topics, such as freedom of expression or environmental issues, face [extra scrutiny](#), harassment, and potential criminal prosecutions under the lèse-majesté law (Section 112). For example, activist and human rights lawyer Arnon Nampa is currently facing [disbarment proceedings](#) for his legitimate work as a lawyer on freedom of speech issues. Similarly, environmental activists also report Thailand to be “[among the most dangerous countries in Asia](#)” for activists working on land and environmental issues. Several environmental defenders [have even been killed](#) due to their opposition to development projects that would [pollute the environment](#) of local communities..

### Case Study: Dissolution of Move Forward Party

On 7 August 2024, pursuant to a petition from the Election Commission of Thailand, the Constitutional Court [ruled \(Case No. 10/2567\) to dissolve](#) the Move Forward Party. The petition from the Election Commission stemmed from several factors, including the party’s proposal to amend Section 112 (lèse-majesté) of the Criminal Code. The Court determined that such acts are tantamount to an attempt to overthrow the government regime with the King as the head of state, and banned Move Forward Party’s executive committee members from holding political office for 10 years. Yet, the right of people to voice their concerns, criticize, and campaign for amendments or repeal of laws, including Section 112, is a right guaranteed

under freedom of expression. The Constitutional Court's ruling significantly violated democratic principles and further chilled any discussions on amending the problematic lèse-majesté law.

#### Case Study: Paul Chambers

On 8 April 2025, Dr. Paul Wesley Chambers, an American academic affiliated with the Center of ASEAN Community Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Naresuan University, was [charged under Section 112](#) (lèse-majesté) of Thailand's Criminal Code and Section 14(1) (entering distorted, fake or false computer data into the computer system in a manner likely to cause harm to the public) of the Computer Crimes Act. He was accused of posting statements on the website of ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute on 11 October 2024, in which he allegedly invited people to join a webinar on military and political reshuffles in Thailand. Dr. Chambers denied all charges and maintained that he did not post the statements at issue, was not involved with the website, and was not an administrator of the website.

These charges against Dr. Chambers constitute a serious violation of his right to freedom of expression and academic freedom. Criminal proceedings against Dr. Chambers may create a chilling effect on public discourse and academic research relating to the Thai military.

#### Case Study: Arnon Nampa

Arnon Nampa, a renowned human rights lawyer and activist, has been [convicted under the lèse-majesté law](#) 10 times for peacefully advocating for democratic and monarchy reforms in Thailand. He has been in prison since September 2023, and as of the time of publishing this report, his total prison sentence stands at 29 years, 1 month, and 20 days, with lèse-majesté accounting for 27 years and 8 months of the total sentence. Mr. Nampa faces four more lèse-majesté cases in which the court has yet to issue verdicts.

In his public speeches at peaceful demonstrations, Arnon has denounced the military coup, called for reforms of the restrictive lèse-majesté law, and pressed for democratic reforms of the monarchy. Because of the criminalization of the right to freedom of expression, Mr. Nampa may spend the remainder of his life behind bars.

#### Conclusion

In conclusion, despite Thailand having a civilian-led government, fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, remain curtailed. The country's civic space is classified as "repressed" by the CIVICUS monitor, with widespread use of repressive laws like the lèse-majesté law leading to politically motivated charges and arbitrary detentions. The dissolution of the Move Forward Party and the ongoing prosecutions of activists like Dr. Paul Wesley Chambers and Arnon Nampa exemplify how the state aggressively uses laws to suppress dissent and critical discourse, creating a chilling effect on public and academic freedom. These actions highlight an ongoing environment where exercising fundamental rights carries significant risks, undermining the democratic principles essential for a thriving civil society.

## Principle 2: Supportive legal and regulatory framework

Score: 1.7

While Thailand's current legal framework [generally facilitates](#) the establishment and operation of civil society organizations (CSOs), significant barriers remain. These include burdensome registration, onerous operational requirements ([particularly for CSOs advocating for human rights and democracy](#)) and undue state intervention in CSO activities. The applicable rules and regulations vary depending on the legal classification of the organization, with [most CSOs](#) registered as foundations. Of particular concern is the draft Act on Associations and Foundations, proposed by Thailand's Department of Provincial Administration under the Ministry of Interior in October 2024, which poses serious risks of restricting civil society operations in manners that are [inconsistent with international law](#). For example, the draft bill violates several provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), including freedom of association (Article 22) by prohibiting the existence of unregistered groups, and freedom from interference (Article 17) by allowing unannounced searches of associations and foundations.

### 2.1 I Registration

#### Registration Requirements for International Organizations Operating in Thailand

The operation of international organizations (also known as foreign private organizations) operating in Thailand is governed by the [Rule of the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare regarding the Entry of Foreign Private Organizations to Operate in Thailand B.E. 2541](#) (1998) (the "1998 Rule"), and the [Rule of Committee on Consideration of the Entry of Foreign Private Organizations to Operate in Thailand and the Establishment of Regional Office in Thailand B.E. 2543](#) (2000) (the "2000 Rule"). These laws place the operations of foreign NGOs under the authority of the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, and regulate the registration, operation, and dissolution of foreign NGOs.

Due to all the challenges and administrative burdens of operating a foreign or international NGO in Thailand, some law firms in Thailand [recommend](#) creating a Thai registered foundation instead. According to one such firm, foreign NGOs must first obtain permission from the Committee on Consideration of the Entry of Foreign Private Organizations before they can operate in the country. Under the 2000 Rule [qualifications for foreign private organizations](#) are many; for example, the organization must not have any "political purpose", pose a "threat to national security", engage in activities that contradict "public order or good moral of the people", or undergo projects which are "detrimental to good relations" between Thailand and other countries. (Clause 6) These phrases are not clearly defined, giving the Committee broad discretion to deny applications. Additionally, the organization must provide much detail on its operations, from an organizational chart specifying names and positions of all workers, to the reasons why foreign staff is required instead of Thai personnel. (Clause 13(1) and (3)) During the Panel, one organization mentioned that part of their documentation requires proving that the organization has a clear physical office location (Clause 13(2)), which often means renting a space to meet expectations regarding the organization's image and operations, adding to the costs of operations of the CSOs.



Even after a foreign NGO is registered, the license to operate is subject to limitations and must be renewed up to every two years. In deciding whether to grant a renewal, the Committee is required to assess the organization's "performance" over the past year, as well as the operational plan of its headquarters. (Clause 7) International staff must undergo two separate processes: obtaining a work permit and a visa, both of which require regular renewal. Each work permit renewal involves a comprehensive inspection of the organization's work, including whether it cooperates with state authorities or promotes constructive engagement in the country. Foreign staff in particular often feel restricted and are unable to work to their full capacity.

### *Registration For Foundations and Associations*

To avoid the challenges of operating as a foreign private organization, an organization may register under the form of a "foundation" or "association" instead, though these entities face their own challenges as well. A foundation must obtain authorization from the Thai [Ministry of Interior](#)'s Department of Provincial Administration. The relevant legislation governing the operation of a foundation is the [Ministerial Regulations on Foundation Registration, Business Operations and Foundation Registration B.E. 2545](#).

The documentation required for registration is extensive, and registration fees amount to 200,000 or 500,000 baht (~5,400 or ~13,000 euros). Often, registration cannot be done independently, and a lawyer is required for the process. These high cost and extensive documentation requirements pose potentially prohibitive administrative and financial costs on CSOs.

Experts have raised concerns regarding self-censorship among CSOs in response to stringent registration and reporting requirements, particularly when working on high-risk topics such as national security or refugee protection. For example, experts explain that the use of the term "refugee" in registration applications with the Ministry of Interior has reportedly been discouraged, as the use of such terminology—though not explicitly prohibited by law—was understood to increase the likelihood of rejection. Once an application is rejected, the risk of subsequent rejections increases. As a result, the organization has to substitute the term "refugees" with "vulnerable persons." Experts highlighted facing such restrictions while fulfilling their reporting requirements, particularly when identifying the people they assisted. For example, disclosing support for undocumented individuals may expose organizations to legal or political complications. As a result, such organizations often narrow the scope of their operations, limiting assistance to migrant workers or individuals holding documentation from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

CSOs registered in Thailand's Southern Border Provinces (SBPs) face even stricter scrutiny than those registered in Bangkok. This is the case even if the CSO registered in Bangkok is working in the SBPs or on issues related thereto. Most CSOs that succeed in registering in SBPs tend to be for education-related foundations.

Lastly, some organizations are denied registration based on the backgrounds of proposed board members. When this occurs, registrars use Section 115, para. 1-2 to reason that proposed board members "do not have status or conduct suitable for implementing the object of the foundation." Appeals are possible under Section 115, para. 4 of the Civil and Commercial Code. The appeal goes to the Interior Minister, whose decision is final. In one case, an organization attempted to register as an NGO but faced difficulties because many of

the proposed board members were former political activists with prior charges, including those stemming from the exercise of the right to freedom of expression. The registration process was stalled, and the case remains unresolved.

## **2.2 | Operational Environment and Interference in CSO Operations**

Even after registration, CSOs face barriers to operating and threats of interference from the government.

### **Current Operational Environment**

Reports find a “[continuous decline](#)” in the legal operating environment for civil society in Thailand since 2018, through various laws aimed at repressing civil society activity. As the legal framework stipulates that CSOs “[may not act contrary to the law, disturb public peace or morality, or pose a threat to national security](#),” these terms are not defined, and are applied unevenly to CSOs working on politically sensitive issues. At times, civil society actors are targeted for questioning by the government when working on sensitive issues perceived as critical to the government. This is especially the case for CSOs that work on issues like Section 112 (lèse-majesté) and political free speech; these CSOs have their activities and financial accounts scrutinized. In the southern border provinces, CSOs have extra restrictions via the [special security laws](#) that allow for increased surveillance of activists and civil society.

### **Looming Changes to Operational Environment**

The Thai government has made several attempts to regulate the operations of CSOs, including the [Draft Act on the Operation of Not-for-Profit Organizations](#) in 2021 and 2022. Following international and domestic backlash, the Act was scrapped. In October 2024, Thailand’s Department of Provincial Administration proposed another bill to regulate CSOs titled the [Draft Act on Associations and Foundations](#), which contains many provisions which would further curtail the freedom to operate for associations and foundations.

For example, Section 8 of the Draft Act seeks to regulate foreign funding by requiring that associations or foundations report any foreign financial support exceeding a threshold to be determined by the Interior Minister to the Registrar within 15 days. Notably, the draft legislation does not specify the penalties for non-compliance, creating legal uncertainty. Moreover, the bill would empower authorities to inspect the premises of organizations without a search warrant or prior notice. These provisions risk undermining the privacy and operational independence that CSOs require, particularly those working on sensitive issues involving vulnerable individuals.

Additionally, numerous provisions in the Draft Act carry disproportionate and severe penalties in the event of even small alleged violations. For example, Section 26 allows the Registrar to remove CSOs board members if they are perceived to “pose a threat to the economy, national security, public order, or good morals of the people.” The Registrar can even appoint their own proposed board members to operate the association in the event of an entire board being removed. Alongside supplanting an entire board with its own appointed board members, the Registrar can terminate an association or foundation for minor violations. For example, the Registrar can remove foundations from the register if a foundation fails to submit annual and financial reports within thirty days of general meetings (Section 44).



CSOs have the right to appeal dissolution orders under the Draft Act, but there is no clear timeline within which the Committee must rule on appeal. Additionally, the Committee would be dominated by members affiliated with the government, with little CSO representation (Section 9).

The Draft Act would also have a [detrimental impact](#) on non-Thai CSOs or human rights defenders—especially those from Vietnam, Myanmar, and Cambodia—who operate in Thailand. In addition to the aforementioned operational constraints, the draft legislation would impose a requirement that at least half of an organization's board of directors hold Thai nationality and that all directors must not exhibit “disreputable or inappropriate behavior,” nor be suspected of posing a threat to “national security,” “public order,” or “good morals of the people.” These vague and overly broad provisions would create obstacles for many non-Thai CSOs, thereby limiting cross-border civil society engagement and regional human rights work. Many non-Thai CSOs have [expressed concerns](#) about these provisions.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, while Thailand's legal framework offers a formal operating framework for civil society, Principle 2 explores significant challenges that impede the full and free operation of CSOs. Burdensome registration processes, the chilling effect of vague legal provisions, and the looming threat of restrictive new legislation like the Draft Act on Associations and Foundations create an environment where CSOs must navigate constant scrutiny and potential interference from the government. These issues, ranging from high financial costs and self-censorship to targeted oversight of sensitive work, highlight the pressing need for reforms that truly align Thailand's legal and regulatory landscape with international standards for an enabling civil society.

## Principle 3: Accessible and sustainable resources

### Score: 2.3

The sustainability, sufficiency, and flexibility of resources available to CSOs depend on the nature of the organization, the thematic focus of its work, and the sources of its funding.

#### **3.1 | Accessibility**

In general, many CSOs [rely heavily on foreign funding](#), which is often distributed in the form of grants. This form of funding comes with its own limitations and is highly competitive. Organizations that are able to access foreign grants tend to be those with the ability to write proposals in English and the institutional knowledge to navigate complex application processes. Additionally, eligibility for funding often requires formal registration—such as as a foundation or association—alongside a defined internal structure, the ability to produce detailed narrative and financial reports, and the capacity to communicate with donors in English. These administrative requirements impose a disproportionate burden on youth-led and marginalized groups, which are often already operating with limited resources and institutional support.

Additionally, funding from certain global donors such as the [United States](#) and [United Kingdom](#) has dropped drastically. Major countries that used to be key donors [no longer prioritize](#) supporting pro-democracy causes or human rights issues. This makes CSOs uncertain about which direction they should head for funding.

Some CSOs receive funding from the state. However, such funding often comes with [many limitations](#), requiring that the objectives of the organization or project align with government-approved mandates. For example, public agencies such as Thai PBS and Thai Health Promotion Foundation allocate funds to civil society actors annually, but only for initiatives deemed consistent with state priorities—such as projects related to public well-being or accident prevention—and only to recipients pre-approved by the state.

Some civil society actors working on projects aimed at improving the lives of elderly individuals and bedridden patients reported that the Thai Health Promotion Foundation blocked funds for beneficiaries who were relatives of detainees, illustrating how political considerations affect fund disbursement. They also noted that restrictions on the use of state-facilitated funding are even more severe when it comes to assisting non-Thai nationals, which poses additional challenges for migrant- or refugee-focused CSOs.

### **3.2 | Restrictions on Funding Usage**

Managing and using funds “requires a lot of creativity,” as funding, especially from institutional donors, is frequently subject to numerous conditions. While some institutions and private donors provide “core funding,” which tends to be more flexible on how it can be used, civil society actors have observed a recent shift towards project-based or highly restricted funding models. This poses challenges when the funding framework does not exactly align with the work being done on the ground, requiring CSOs to redesign activities, reframe objectives, or bundle projects in ways that satisfy donor requirements while still addressing community needs.

Restrictions vary widely, ranging from stipulations on eligible expenditures to requirements concerning participation metrics. For example, some CSO actors explain that certain funders impose conditions on the number of children and youth who must be involved in a project, or mandate collaboration with a specified number of partner organizations. They also report that some funders even require staff salaries to be paid in US dollars—an impractical condition for many local CSOs.

Some funding conditions raise concerns for smaller organizations with limited capacity. For example, some funders require that recipient organizations keep their accounts audited by a high-level auditor or mandate the use of specific accounting software—rendering commonly used tools such as Microsoft Excel insufficient. There have been cases where, even after submitting the required documentation, organizations were blacklisted by a funder because the auditor did not understand the financial information provided.

Ultimately, organisations must demonstrate significant sophistication in drafting proposals and managing compliance to navigate an increasingly competitive and uncertain funding landscape. Donor reporting requirements are often highly detailed, demanding precise audits and strict adherence to specific language and conceptual frameworks. These conditions create challenges for CSOs engaged in political or legislative processes, such as advocating for legal and policy reform.

### 3.3 | Sustainability

Funding for CSOs in the current global climate remains extremely uncertain, creating sustainability issues for organizations that rely on foreign grants. The policies of many countries no longer provide strong support for the work of CSOs.

As such, civil society actors emphasize the critical need for CSOs to diversify their funding sources to enhance the sustainability of their work amid an increasingly uncertain funding landscape. Past experiences have shown the risks of overreliance on a single donor; for instance, several organizations that depended on U.S. funding were forced to cease operations following abrupt shifts in U.S. foreign policy. Some organizations have navigated the current uncertain funding situation by working across multiple sectors, broadening the human rights issues they address, and aligning their programming with evolving donor priorities and trends. [Other types of funding and alternative strategies](#) that CSOs use for income generation include self-fundraising, or using network-based grants.

#### Conclusion

In summary, Principle 3 highlights that CSOs in Thailand primarily depend on foreign grants and this reliance comes with significant limitations, including complex application processes and reporting requirements that disproportionately burden smaller, grassroots, or marginalized groups. Furthermore, the global decline in funding for democracy and human rights issues, coupled with restrictive conditions on state funding and a shift towards project-based models, creates an increasingly uncertain and competitive financial landscape. To ensure sustainability and independence, CSOs are increasingly compelled to diversify their funding sources and enhance their institutional capacities in financial management and reporting.

## Principle 4: Open and Responsive State

### Score: 2.4

#### 4.1 | Transparency – public access to government information

Despite the existence of legislation to facilitate transparency, such as the [Official Information Act](#), and access to government information and resources, civil society actors and the general public continue to face significant challenges in obtaining such information.

First, Thailand's legal system is very opaque; researching and locating legal documents is a byzantine process that is nearly impossible for the lay person. Draft laws, regulations, or court judgments and orders are difficult to find and access. It is difficult to find relevant secondary legislation on, for instance, immigration issues. Lawyers report they cannot freely access regulations, guidelines, and/or announcements; at times they resort to making direct requests to the Supreme Court. Even still, they have been denied access after making these direct requests for relevant documents.

Second, while the Official Information Act provides a formal mechanism to request information, its implementation is inconsistent. Experts noted the challenges they face using the Official Information Act. In some cases, attempts to obtain information from government agencies under the Official Information Act have been unsuccessful, with requests denied—often on the

grounds of national security, which is an allowable [exemption](#) under the law. Similarly, applications made through the Information Disclosure Committee are frequently rejected at first, although these rejections are typically overturned upon appeal by organisations. Even still, the requirement to go through the appeal process raises issues when the information requested is time-sensitive; appealing is time-consuming, and the information may lose its relevancy in the interim.

Third, experts report that government agencies are increasingly denying requests for information on the grounds that, under the [Personal Data Protection Act](#), they cannot disclose personal data.

In some cases, access to information is issue- or organization-specific and the government does not present draft legislation in an accessible way. Some CSO actors observed that access to information on the environment has improved somewhat, as more villages and local communities turn to their organization for advice on where to locate relevant information. However, they emphasized that without such support, many communities remain unaware of how or where to obtain the information they need. Similarly, others pointed out that their organization can access draft documents and legislation related to children's rights due to their longstanding collaboration with government agencies; in contrast, children's groups themselves have very little chance to access such information because they do not know where to locate it.

Lastly, persons with disabilities face additional barriers in accessing documents from government agencies. Generally, electronic copies of requested documents are not available, requiring persons with disabilities to travel to the relevant agencies to obtain physical documents—an often burdensome task for those with mobility impairments. Moreover, many persons with visual impairments or other disabilities encounter difficulties reading printed documents, and accessible formats such as screen-reader compatible files or Braille versions are rarely provided. The absence of inclusive information dissemination practices further marginalizes persons with disabilities and undermines their right to equal access to public information.

#### **4.2 I Participation & Accountability – involving CSOs and using input to influence decision-making**

Although CSOs have some opportunities to meet with government agencies to offer input on policies and draft legislation, such participation is often lip service and rarely results in substantive changes to governmental behavior.

Civil society actors have reported ongoing efforts to engage with government bodies, including through providing information on societal issues and recommending government actions that can be taken to remedy such issues. Public consultations are frequently perceived as formalities conducted to meet legal requirements, with input from civil society and the public “rarely” leading to meaningful change.

Some CSO actors posit that the extent of influence a CSO can exert on government decision-making depends on the level of political will present for any given issue. For example, when the Move Forward Party was active, party members invited one CSO to take part in policy discussions and were responsive to the CSOs' requests and input.

#### **Conclusion**

Principle 4 highlights that despite the existence of laws promoting transparency, government information can still be difficult to access. This is due to an inaccessible legal system, ineffective implementation of the Official Information Act, and increasing reliance on the Personal Data Protection Act to deny requests. While some CSOs with established government ties may gain limited access or participate in discussions on "pre-selected topics," such engagement often amounts to mere formality, with civil society input rarely translating into tangible policy changes. This lack of genuine participation and accountability, coupled with the aggressive use of laws like the Public Assembly Act against activists, underscores a significant barrier to a truly open and responsive state.

## Principle 5: Supportive public culture and discourses on civil society

### Score: 2.7

Perception and portrayal of civil society in Thailand is heavily dependent on the context, including the type of work done by civil society, the stakeholders involved, and whether the organization is state-sponsored.

#### 5.1 | Public Discourses on Civil Society

Though CSOs dedicated to certain issues, such as children rights or preservation of natural resources, can be viewed positively by the state, those engaging on topics perceived as critical of the government often face constraints. Specifically, criticisms of the government, military, or the monarchy are heavily censored and penalized. CSOs working in these areas are seen as interfering with national security and are portrayed as a [threat to society](#).

In the context of CSOs in the SBPs, civil society actors are harassed through legal means, lawsuits, and online media attacks aimed at discrediting them. This is particularly true for youth groups in the SBPs that unite to address environmental issues, as they are placed under close scrutiny and often perceived as potential threats to national security.

Additionally, religious differences are an important aspect to consider in the SBPs, as they are used to add to the narrative that certain CSOs threaten national unity and order. For example, in Thai-Buddhist communities, Muslim NGOs are viewed as supporters of the BRN (Barisan Revolusi Nasional)—an Islamist movement involved in many violent attacks in the SBPs.

Experts also affirm that State actors also attempt to redefine the term "minority" to justify their interventions in CSO activities as measures to "protect minorities." For example, in the SBPs, Muslims can be considered a minority in practical terms, as they face limitations in participating in decision-making and accessing national resources. However, state-backed CSOs often apply a definition of "minority" based solely on numerical population size. Under this framework, Buddhists in the SBPs are classified as the minority, allowing state actors to frame their interventions in CSO activities as efforts to protect the "minority group" of Buddhists.

Environmental CSOs are often portrayed as [obstructions to society](#) by the government. Although certain environmental issues generate minimal controversy, CSO involvement in other issues is often framed as obstructive to progress and development. For example,

general environmental concerns—such as PM 2.5 pollution, the [blackchin tilapia fish](#), or pollution from factories—typically do not provoke significant opposition when raised by CSOs. However, when CSOs and local communities mobilize against development projects that threaten environmental rights, they are frequently portrayed as hindering progress. In such cases, NGOs and community activists may face [threats and violence](#). Some note a stark contrast in media portrayal: independent media often view such protests as a legitimate exercise of rights by affected communities, while state-aligned media frequently depict them as sources of public disorder and national disruption.

## **5.2 | Perception of Civil Society and Civic Engagement**

Citizens' beliefs on the impact of civic engagement vary based on the context and influence their level of participation.

The convened Panel also remarked one positive success story in which the work of the civil society in the SBPs “helped awaken people” to the power of political participation was when the local community succeeded in getting a community representative elected as an MP; this showed people that their demands and calls for change could translate into concrete policy. This, in turn, led to more people speaking out and getting involved.

However, when activists and CSOs do not see any progress resulting from civic engagement, a sense of powerlessness tends to permeate people in those communities. For example, there are cases of peace negotiations that have been ongoing for more than 20 years, with virtually no response from the government to the public in affected areas. This discourages people from future civic engagement, as their efforts do not bear any fruit.

## **5.3 | Civic Equality and Inclusion**

In spite of the government passing the Sex Equality Act in 2015, individuals [face denial of equal opportunity](#) and access to institutional assistance based on identity characteristics such as gender, race, or even political preference. Additionally, the ability of all individuals, and particularly marginalized individuals, to participate in civic and political processes depends on the state's attitude towards certain issues. For example, CSOs were able to participate and make tangible progress in helping enact the Marriage Equality Bill. However, legal barriers on political participation still exist, particularly for issues that fall outside of these “pre-selected topics” chosen by those in power to align with certain human rights narratives. These barriers include laws criminalizing freedom of speech, such as the lèse-majesté or royal defamation law. As one panel participant put it, “it's not inclusive participation. It's more like selective engagement.” For example, CSOs working to increase freedom of political speech and expression are framed as threats to Thailand's national security.

In the case of refugees, although there has been a positive trend towards empowering refugee representatives and providing them with platforms to speak on the issues affecting their lives, legal restrictions and status-related conditions still act as barriers. In many cases, refugees are unable to engage directly with authorities and must rely on NGOs to act as intermediaries. For example, if refugees want to make a request to the Ministry of Interior, they cannot do so directly. These limitations hinder refugees' ability to exercise agency and participate meaningfully in decisions that affect their rights and well-being.



Lastly, shifting global attitudes have had a negative effect on civic inclusion and equity. This can be seen with refugees and migrant workers from Myanmar, especially around the time when USAID cut funding for humanitarian efforts in Thailand, which affected refugee camps. Public sentiment of some Thai people shifted to opposing tax money going to such causes.

### Conclusion

The assessment of Principle 5 reveals that public perception of civil society in Thailand is highly contextual, largely dependent on the nature of an organization's work and its stakeholders. The state actively shapes public discourse, often portraying CSOs engaged in critical commentary on the government, military, or monarchy, or those challenging development projects that threaten environmental rights, as detrimental to national security or societal progress. This deliberate framing, alongside the manipulation of concepts like "minority" to justify intervention and the harassment of CSOs in sensitive regions, underscores a challenging environment where civil society's positive contributions are frequently overshadowed by state-driven negative narratives.

## Principle 6: Access to a secure digital environment

### Score: 2.3

#### 6.1 | Digital Rights and Freedoms

Access to a safe digital environment for CSOs in Thailand is hindered by many issues, including Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation (SLAPP) suits, censorship, and repressive legislation. CSOs are often the recipients of cyber threats and state surveillance. Criminal defamation and SLAPP laws are enforced regularly. Often, content posted by communities or NGOs, or even comments under local government posts, are picked up and turned into criminal defamation cases. Despite the existence of anti-SLAPP provisions in the Criminal Procedure Code, experiences indicate that they are largely [ineffective](#) at SLAPP suits. The threat of constant litigation based on online content disrupts CSO work and chills free speech. Experts observed that SLAPP suits are intended to send a chilling message: opposition may lead to legal retaliation, regardless of who you are. As one expert put it, *"If you fight me, no matter who you are, you could be sued. I can fight back."*

Although there have been no internet or social media platform shutdowns since 2014, there are still frequent instances of state censorship on social media. The Thai state uses [various techniques](#) to censor content, from requesting platforms to [take down content](#), to working with intermediaries to remove URLs, and to attacking individuals who post content. The facilitation of censorship from the social media platform depends on the current climate and public activism. Social media companies are concerned with both the state and their users. During times of strong public will, social media companies tend not to comply with the state's requests. However, when public pressure fades, the relationship between the state and social media platforms tends to grow closer. Some CSO actors recount times when they reported [IO \(information operations\) accounts](#) that harass activists. Each time, Facebook responds stating that the IO accounts do not violate any platform policies, raising questions about the platform's content moderation responsibilities.

Another tactic used to manipulate public discourse online involves countering independent social media messaging with coordinated, state-approved narratives. For example, certain CSO-operated pages are intended to serve as platforms for debate and conversation. However, these spaces are often targeted through coordinated inauthentic behavior—where manipulated comments are left on these pages to harass and mislead discussions on important issues. The tactic of [coordinated inauthentic behaviour](#) uses a “mix of authentic, fake, and duplicated social media accounts to operate as an adversarial network,” and stems from the recognition that complete shutdowns of social media can be less effective than persuasion or manipulation of the narrative.

CSOs report troubling instances of content deletion on social media as well. In one refugee case, a CSO was using evidence from a refugee’s Facebook account to prove that the refugee was in a certain country, including by using the location of the refugee’s posts and the nature of his activity. The evidence was used in court. However, sometime later after the refugee disappeared, his entire Facebook account was deleted, and alongside it, crucial evidence for the refugee’s case in court. In another case, an anonymous artist in the Deep South had his account hacked, and all music about the Deep South was deleted from online platforms.

Lastly, repressive legislation such as the [Computer Crimes Act](#) restricts freedom of speech online. According to data from Thai Lawyers for Human Rights, there are over 230 active cases that involve the monitoring of online expression. There have been multiple cases in which livestreams of protests led to legal action—affecting both journalists and citizens. Moreover, there have been reports from activists that digital platforms such as X have sent the activists emails saying that Thai authorities requested the removal of specific posts.

## **6.2 | Digital Security and Privacy**

Methods of surveillance are [often used on activists or ordinary citizens](#). Sometimes, the state monitors online speech. In other cases, it is independent groups run by ordinary citizens, such as pro-monarchy factions. This kind of surveillance often leads to prosecution. As of 8 July 2025, 167 of 314 lèse-majesté cases were initiated by private citizens filing complaints with the police. Even still, these statistics likely do not capture the full extent of the level of surveillance as there is limited transparency and accountability on government budgets and operations.

Civil society organisations report repeated targeting with invasive spyware, such as Pegasus, in some cases over [ten times](#) within a short span. Between October 2020 and November 2021, at least 35 people in key civil society groups in Thailand were [“infected” with Pegasus](#). These individuals were warned by Apple that [“state-sponsored attackers”](#) targeted their phones. Victims were predominately key figures in the pro-democracy movement, including Arnon Nampa, and many have also been arrested or imprisoned for voicing their opinions on monarchy reform.

The first evidence of Pegasus being deployed to surveil citizens was [observed in May 2014](#). Yet, 11 years later, the sector still generally lacks the technical capacity to effectively detect and monitor digital surveillance, making it a high-risk but poorly understood issue.

There are also widespread reports of [online harassment and smear campaigns](#), particularly on platforms like Facebook, LINE, and TikTok. Tactics include doctored images, offensive or sexualised captions, and defamatory content. Even when such material is reported, platforms often fail to act. Authorities, including the DSI and Cyber Police, have cited jurisdictional

limitations due to platforms being registered overseas, further hindering accountability and redress.

### 6.3 | Digital Access

Digital access varies greatly depending on whether a CSO is city-based or located in a more [rural environment](#). In general, internet access is more widespread than in years prior. However, the cost for accessing the internet is still very high. In some cases, organizations must bear the internet costs for local people in grassroots networks that are based in remote areas.

Access to design and communication tools often depends on a CSO's financial capacity. The high cost of certain professional software can be unsustainable, particularly for smaller organisations with limited funding. Although some platforms offer discounts for organizations, a CSO must be officially registered first, placing administrative burdens on small CSOs. Even after registering, some organizations do not receive discounts because they are not in educational fields. In addition, many of the newest platforms are only in English, posing a language barrier.

#### Conclusion

In conclusion, Principle 6 reveals that a secure digital environment for CSOs in Thailand is severely hampered by prevalent SLAPP suits, state-sponsored censorship, and repressive legislation like the Computer Crimes Act. The constant threat of litigation and the aggressive monitoring of online expression, often initiated by private citizens, create a chilling effect on free speech and civic discourse. Furthermore, issues like content deletion, coordinated inauthentic behavior, and targeted harassment campaigns, coupled with high internet costs and language barriers for digital tools, collectively undermine the digital rights and freedoms essential for civil society to operate effectively and safely.

## C) Recommendations

Based on the findings of this report, the following recommendations are addressed to the government of Thailand to ensure an enabling environment within which civil society can operate:

#### *Respect and Protection of Fundamental Freedoms*

1. Immediately drop all charges against victims of political prosecution, namely those prosecuted under the lèse-majesté provision and other repressive laws that infringe upon the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.
2. Amend or repeal the lèse-majesté law in order to bring it into line with [international human rights law](#).

#### *Supportive Legal and Regulatory Framework*

3. Ensure that the renewal process for international NGO licenses and international staff work permits and/or visas is based on clear, objective, and non-discriminatory criteria,

explicitly prohibiting its use to obstruct or interfere with the legitimate human rights work of these organizations and their personnel.

4. Review and clarify vague “qualifications,” such as “political purpose,” “threat to national security,” or “detrimental to good relations,” for international NGOs, which leave excessive room for discretion by the Committee on Consideration of the Entry of Foreign Private Organizations.
5. Drop the draft Act on Associations and Foundations, proposed by Thailand’s Department of Provincial Administration under the Ministry of Interior, which poses serious risks of restricting civil society operations in manners that are [inconsistent with international law](#).
6. Reduce barriers to registration for foundations and association, including the high cost of registration fees amounting to 200,000 - 500,000 baht (~5,400 or ~13,000 euros).

#### *Accessible and Sustainable Resources*

7. Ensure that state funding mechanisms for CSOs are transparent, accessible, and free from undue influence or restrictive conditions that could compromise CSO independence or limit their ability to address critical societal issues, including those not aligned with direct government priorities.
8. CSOs should dedicate resources to training staff in accounting and report writing, in order to strengthen organizational independence and sustainability once initial funding dries out.

#### *Open and Responsive State*

9. Digitize all legal documents, draft laws, regulations, court judgments, and government information, making them readily accessible on user-friendly online platforms and in formats compatible with assistive technologies. This includes ensuring secondary legislation on various issues is easily discoverable.
10. Review and revise the Official Information Act to minimize broad exemptions that currently allow agencies to refuse requests. Ensure that the appeal process for information requests is expedited, especially for time-sensitive information, to prevent delays that render the information irrelevant.
11. Encourage and institutionalize practices that allow CSOs to engage in policy discussions across all issues, not just “pre-selected topics” or those aligned with specific political parties’ agendas, ensuring that their expertise can genuinely influence decision-making.
12. Cease the use of the Public Assembly Act to crack down on activists making demands of the government and state agencies.

#### *Supportive Public Culture and Discourses on Civil Society*

13. Take necessary measures to promote public knowledge and awareness of the right to defend human rights. Such measures may include countering harmful narratives and stereotypes that portray CSOs as threats to national security or an obstruction to

progress, particularly for those working on human rights, environmental issues, or in sensitive regions like SBPs.

14. Actively work to counter discriminatory narratives, particularly those based on religious differences, that falsely link Muslim NGOs to separatist movements and undermine their legitimate work in SBPs.

### *Access to a Secure Digital Environment*

15. Prohibit and actively prevent state-led content takedowns, the removal of URLs, and attacks on individuals who post content. This includes stopping the use of “coordinated inauthentic behavior” and manipulated comments to harass and mislead discussions on CSO-operated social media pages.
16. Review and strengthen existing anti-SLAPP legislation and its enforcement mechanisms to prevent the use of criminal defamation and SLAPP suits to silence activists, CSOs, and journalists for online expression.
17. Implement policies to reduce the cost of internet access, particularly in rural areas, and explore initiatives to provide affordable access to essential digital platforms and tools for CSOs, especially smaller and grassroots organizations, regardless of their registration status or field.

## Research process

Each principle encompasses various dimensions which are assessed and aggregated to provide quantitative scores per principle. These scores reflect the degree to which the environment within the country enables or disables the work of civil society. Scores are on a five-category scale defined as: fully disabling (1), disabling (2), partially enabling (3), enabling (4), and fully enabling (5). To complement the scores, this report provides a narrative analysis of the enabling or disabling environment for civil society, identifying strengths and weaknesses as well as offering recommendations. The process of drafting the analysis is led by Network Members, the consortium provides quality control and editorial oversight before publication.

For Principle 1 - which evaluates respect for and protection of freedom of association and peaceful assembly - the score integrates data from the [CIVICUS Monitor](#). However, for Principles 2–6, the availability of yearly updated external quantitative indicators for the 86 countries part of the EUSEE programme are either limited or non-existent. To address this, Network Members once a year convene a panel of representatives of civil society and experts. This panel uses a set of guiding questions to assess the status of each principle and its dimensions within the country. The discussions are supported by secondary sources, such as [V-Dem](#), the [Bertelsmann Stiftung Governance Index](#), the [RTI Rating from the Centre for Law and Democracy](#), and other trusted resources. These sources provide benchmarks for measuring similar dimensions and are complemented by primary data collection and other secondary sources of information available for the country. Guided by these deliberations, the panel assigns scores for each dimension, which the Network Members submit to the Consortium, accompanied by detailed justifications that reflect the country’s specific context. To determine a single score per principle, the scores assigned to each dimension are aggregated using a weighted average, reflecting the relative importance of each dimension

within the principle. This approach balances diverse perspectives while maintaining a structured and objective evaluation framework.

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