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Enabling Environment Snapshot

Israel

2025

Disclaimer: This report monitors the enabling environment for civil society only within Israel. It does not cover the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Context

Israel is a [democratic state](#) with an active and vibrant civil society. It is currently experiencing a continuous narrowing of [democratic space](#) including gradual erosion of the freedom of action of civil society organisations and activists. The process intensified and accelerated with the establishment of the current right-wing government in late 2022 and the war that broke out in October 2023, but its beginnings date back more than two decades.

To understand Israel, it is important to know that there are a number of [internal rifts](#) at the heart of Israeli discourse. They stem from gaps in religious perceptions, ethnic, national, class divides, and different attitudes towards security policy. In recent years, tensions have intensified between the conservative-religious and nationalist camp, which emphasises the national-Jewish identity of the state, and the liberal camp, which holds pluralistic views and emphasises its democratic identity. These tensions and rifts, which have accompanied Israel for many decades, are expressed in political affiliations and voting patterns.

The conservative-religious and nationalist camp have been in power for most of the last two decades. Despite this, many of its members feel that liberal forces are preventing them from realizing their views and policies. Against this backdrop, the current government – which was formed after five election rounds within three years (between 2019 and 2022) – is working to bring about [far-reaching changes](#) in the character of Israeli democracy through what its leaders call 'legal reform' and its opponents call 'a regime coup'. This move aims to erode the long-standing system of checks and balances in Israel. It intends to weaken the legal system, academia, the media, professional bureaucracy, and civil society, while granting additional power and authority to the executive and legislative branches. These efforts have been accompanied by widespread and sustained public protest — unprecedented in scope and duration — reflecting deep concern among many segments of Israeli society. Part of the sharp division in Israel originates from the October 7, 2023 attacks that led to the [outbreak](#) of the long and painful war.

The war, which came completely by surprise, caused many casualties and resulted in severe psychological harm. Due to immediate danger, tens of thousands of Israeli families had to evacuate their homes. Civil society responded with an extraordinary level of civic response, providing emergency housing, food and clothing, psychological assistance, and more. In many cases, CSOs response was a substitute for government service that were unable to adequately respond to the immense need in real time.

As the war continued and worsened, some of this civic energy was diverted into protest activities, primarily demanding that the government act to bring about the release of the Israeli hostages. At the same time, there were calls and protests, more limited in scope, among the Jewish and Arab public in Israel, to stop the war, avoid civilian casualties, ensure humanitarian assistance entered the Gaza Strip, and promote a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Despite changes that the current government is promoting, it is possible to demonstrate, protest, speak out against the government, establish civic organisations, and take action in the public and political arena. Legal system officials are speaking out, there are protests almost daily, and the discourse from those supporting the government and those opposing it is lively and heated. An analysis of new legislation, bills currently being promoted, and government decisions and actions (see below), make many people feel that we cannot assume that current levels of enabling environment will be guaranteed in the future.

1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

Freedom of expression, association and protest are not explicitly anchored in a dedicated Basic Law (the foundation for a future Constitution) in Israel. However, all three are referenced in other laws and are recognised as fundamental rights within Israel's constitutional framework - primarily through judicial interpretation and case law of the [Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty](#) (1992), mostly by the Israeli Supreme Court. These allow the long tradition of active media, civic discourse and protest that exists in Israel.

The courts have consistently emphasised the central role of these freedoms in a democratic society. Freedom of expression is considered a cornerstone of democracy, with landmark decisions such as [Kol Ha'am \(1953\)](#) establishing its elevated status in Israeli constitutional law, while freedoms of association and protest are viewed as essential to civic participation and political engagement. It is understood to include the right to organise, protest, and form groups, including labour unions and political organisations.

Although there is no single piece of legislation that codifies these rights in full, they are afforded substantial protection under Israeli law. Limitations—such as those related to public order, safety, or national security—may be imposed, but must adhere to principles of [proportionality and necessity](#), as established in jurisprudence.

Since the establishment of the current conservative-religious-nationalist government, there has been a consistent increase in attempts to reduce [democratic and civic space](#) and restrict freedom of expression and protest. The situation has become more complicated since war began on 7 October 2023.

Government ministers and coalition members have been at the forefront of efforts to restrict freedom of expression, association and protest [through legislation](#) aimed at reducing the scope for action of individuals and organisations that oppose the government. These include bill proposal such as imposing financial sanctions on academic institutions and [firing lecturers](#) who speak out harshly against government policy; demanding to limit [financial support](#) to CSOs, (such as the 'Tel Aviv Cinematheque', which screens films that present controversial viewpoints); and weakening the independence of [foreign media](#) and local media, for example in a law preventing broadcast of media outlets that undermine national security. A full list of bill proposals can be found [here](#).

The Israeli Police has [hardened its approach](#) towards protests and [protesters](#), both in the context of the protest against the 'regime coup', and in protests for the release of the kidnapped hostages and against the war. The police now impose stricter [licensing conditions](#) for protest events, use more force when dispersing demonstrations, and are carrying out [more arrests](#) - for example, in cases of protests in front of the homes of ministers and members of the Knesset or protests against the war. Some protest activists have been invited by the [police](#) for interviews or have received phone calls to ['clarify and deter'](#). Even so, most protests are conducted without any unusual incidents, and public and political discourse is more heated than ever. Many of the protests are led by CSOs.

The intensity of the events in the first days of the war, the shock at the large number of casualties, and the fear that similar events would occur in other areas throughout the country, led to immense fear within Israel and with it, a phenomena of violations of freedom of expression and protest. In the first weeks, there were cases of arrests of citizens, mainly Arab citizens, for statements that had previously gone unnoticed, the police restricted some of the protest actions against the war, and there were cases of dismissals of employees for statements that were perceived as threatening and offensive. Many Arab citizens and activists

feel their freedom of expression and [protest](#) has been [curtailed](#). They are cautious about expressing their positions in public, and fear and tension between Jewish and Palestinian citizens has intensified.

Although the phenomena of violations of freedom of expression and protest did not disappear, they decreased considerably when the initial shock of the war subsided.

Despite threats, CSOs both old and new, from all streams and all positions, are leading action in the public sphere. [CSOs](#) played a significant role in dealing with diverse civil needs that arose due to the security situation, filling a gap that the government was unable to respond to.

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

Israeli CSOs operate under the [Associations Law](#) (1980) and [Companies Law](#) that define registration requirements and good conduct. Additional laws, regulations, and procedures define what constitutes a 'public institution', [funding procedures](#), tax benefits, etc. Many organisations receive [government](#) and/or municipal support, and payment for services provided to public bodies.

The Guidestar website and the Ministry of Justice state that there are approximately [twenty-two thousand](#) active registered CSOs in Israel. There are also many unregistered groups and organisations. [Registering an organisation](#) requires a process of reasonable duration. Information, guidelines, and documents are clear and easily available on the websites of the Ministries of Justice and Finance.

Registered organisations are subject to (bureaucratic) oversight by the Ministry of Justice (Corporations Authority) and the State Comptroller, and, if they receive state or municipal funds, also to the Ministry of Finance, the supporting ministries and/or the relevant local authorities. There are also many informal and unregistered civil society activities and organisations that do not enjoy the tax benefits or financial support anchored in law and procedures, and are not subject to public supervision. Their activities however are legitimate and acknowledged.

It is a challenging time for organisations that oppose government positions and policy. A number of legislative and bureaucratic moves aim to make it more difficult for CSOs with non-conservative opinions to operate in public and educational institutions, reduce their financial support, and limit their cooperation with public institutions (for example, [The Parents Circle – Families Forum](#), [The Association for LGBTQ](#)). The most severe example is the CSO Tax Bill, a bill to [tax donations](#) from foreign governments and intergovernmental entities such as the EU and UN, now being discussed in the Knesset. This private bill, with government support, will impose an 80% tax on such donations. Organisations that receive state funding, or are exempted by the Finance Minister, will not have to pay the tax. This bill aims to severely limit support for dozens of organisations that promote human and civil rights, oppose Israel's presence in the Occupied Territories and represent Palestinians in Israel and the Occupied Territories by denying their main sources of funding and preventing their right to take legal action. The Member of Knesset (MK, Parliament member) promoting the bill has declared that his intention is to make it difficult for CSOs that in his opinion harm the security of the state and its residents, and to prevent [foreign countries](#) impacting on Israeli domestic politics. CSOs, legal [professionals](#), [academics](#) and citizens are advocating to stop the law from being passed.

Unlike past proposals that were withdrawn due to internal opposition and pressure from European leaders and the US, it is unclear how the current attempt will play out.

In the past year, the Israeli government has also tightened the conditions for the [registration and operation](#) of foreign civilian aid organizations operating in Israel and the territories and assisting Palestinian citizens. As part of this, the state requires the organizations to make a series of declarations and commitments that may make it difficult, and sometimes even prevent, the registration and operation of foreign aid organizations and their employees in Israel and the territories. The updated procedure was approved despite the organizations' efforts to [block it](#).

3. Accessible and sustainable resources

CSOs in Israel are responsible for 5% of the GDP and employ over 10% of the workforce. [Official data](#) from 2024 indicates about half of the income of nonprofits in Israel is from government funds, a third from fees for services, and 15% from donations from Israel and abroad. CSOs contracts for services in welfare, education and health account for most income from government and local authorities. A small amount is through government grants (as opposed to contracts for services). [Over 300](#) local and foreign foundations operate in Israel along with corporate and private donors, large and small.

[The Institute](#) of Law and Philanthropy at Tel Aviv University estimates donations to organisations in Israel in 2022 at approximately \$6.25 billion: \$2.5 billion in local donations (from foundations, businesses and individuals), and \$3.8 billion in donations from abroad. Israel is one of the few western countries that benefits from a significant inflow of donations, mostly from Jewish and Israeli communities abroad.

Government ministries, local authorities and public bodies support organisations according to formal agreements and [clear procedures](#). Many [foundations](#) and major donors have local representatives and systems for reviewing applications. Organisations raise donations through crowdfunding, designated campaigns and events. [The NGO Yearbook](#) shows that 10% of the organisations receive 85% of all funding (government and private) while the rest benefit from the remaining 15%. Advocacy organisations receive a small share of the income.

The ongoing instability of the past few years, including the Covid pandemic, five rounds of general elections in three years, massive civil protest and war, has not dramatically changed the level of donations.

Changes in government usually lead to changes in eligibility for government funding. The current government prioritises organisations with a nationalist, conservative-religious bias. In contrast, the previous government, which included parties from both the right and the left, showed greater openness to supporting liberal organisations. This openness included support for organisations representing the LGBT community, women, the Arab community, and pluralistic Judaism.

Israel is a small country with an informal culture. This allows CSOs better access to government officials and the business sector, and is reflected in a more direct dialogue with donors -- although there is still a clear power relationship between donors and those requesting support. Some organisations have difficulty raising funding, and alongside over 2,000 new organisations established [every year](#), many close due to insufficient funds and other reasons.

4. State openness and responsiveness

For years, formal and informal dialogue has taken place between CSOs, politicians and government officials in Israel. Some of this interaction is through institutionalised cross-sector [round tables](#), and some is ongoing or around a specific issue. The degree of openness and depth of the discourse usually depends on levels of personal acquaintance, respect for professionalism, topics, and ideological affinity.

During the past two decades, discourse between government, civil society and the public has become more institutionalised. Many government ministries have officials in charge of managing [this dialogue](#). During the current government's term, tension around political and ideological positions has affected the frequency and depth of the discourse. Stakeholders with views close to the government's positions, like [Kohelet Forum](#), are [welcomed](#), while those whose positions differ find it more difficult to engage in discourse and embark on joint initiatives.

As the current government is nationalist and religiously conservative, dialogue with CSOs working to promote and ensure human rights for women, Arab citizens, the LGBT community, migrant workers and religious pluralism is much more charged. Many CSOs are frustrated by the lack of attention to these issues and by unwelcome attempts to promote restrictive legislation and [conservative policy](#). Some organisations continue to engage in dialogue with the government and its ministries, but this interaction is less productive than in the past. Others are deliberately excluded from dialogue and policy-making processes.

Part of the dialogue with CSOs is conducted around the state of war that exists since October 2023. In this context, joint dialogue and [round tables](#) have been and are being conducted on a variety of topics: developing joint solutions to the plight of thousands of Israelis who have been forced to flee their homes, the needs of organisations during emergencies, dealing with children's trauma, or the plight of foreign workers. This is a professional dialogue whose participants also include organisations that are not close to the government's positions.

5. Political Culture and Public Discourses on Civil Society

The current Israeli government has faced a broad and ongoing wave of protest against what many call a 'regime coup' that began soon after it was sworn in. The protest, led by CSOs and activists, new and old, is [seen](#) by the government and its supporters as an illegitimate attempt to thwart their plans and oust them from power. Some members of the government and the coalition [speak harshly](#) of these organisations, accusing them of ignoring the will of the voters, attempting a coup d'état, and harming the State of Israel and its security. The adversarial discourse is expressed in the media, in the Knesset, and on social media. This attitude is later reflected in the views of ordinary citizens, who accept the statements at face value, and identify some of the protest organisations as a home-grown threat.

Public pressure and the ongoing war are making it difficult for some government ministers and coalition members to hear opinions different to theirs, and many perceive criticism of their policy and attempts to block their actions as a threat to them [remaining in power](#). However, in 'less political' arenas such as welfare and other 'soft' issues, the discourse is less charged. In these areas, dialogue and cooperation often occur and civil society input is appreciated.

The media is often mobilised to [promote support](#) for mostly mainstream organisations that work in education, welfare, health, etc. In relation to the regime coup, we see a wide range of

stances, from support and sympathy to fierce opposition. Newspapers and media outlets affiliated with the factions that make up the government, like Channel 14, tend to echo [negative statements about CSOs that challenge the government](#). Mainstream media outlets provide extensive and often [sympathetic coverage](#) of the organisations and their activists, although they also consistently reflect the voices of the government and its supporters.

6. Access to a secure digital environment

CSOs, like all citizens, have easy access to high-quality networks at affordable prices, and most Israeli CSOs have websites and are active in the digital arena. Many of them have Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) accounts, and regularly publish their positions online. Like in other arenas in Israel, the digital space is vibrant but at the same time turbulent. Discourse is often full of criticism and harsh words, but there is considerable openness and freedom of expression to a range of views as part of Israeli democratic discourse.

The ongoing instability in recent years is expressed in heated, judgmental, and intolerant discourse online toward anyone who holds different positions. However, this atmosphere is not the result of frequent government intervention or legal restrictions. The number of cases in which action has been taken against activists who expressed extreme views on social media is very limited, and official steps against CSOs are rare.

Exceptions to this are found around security issues. The complex security situation in Israel, with internal incidents of violence between Jews and Arabs that have occurred over the years, the ongoing war that divides the Israeli public, as well as terrorist incidents from home and abroad, means that security agencies monitor social networks for extreme statements and expressions that they define as threats to public safety. Authorities sometimes threaten to [indict](#) individuals who they believe are a danger, and these actions are usually taken against [individuals](#) and not [organisations](#).

The Arab-Palestinian public, one fifth of Israel's population, feel their [freedom of expression](#) in the digital environment (and in general) is much less protected than in earlier times. The fierce disputes provoked by the ongoing war, with its many victims, are expressed in focused discourse on social networks.

The government has taken legal measures against individuals, and parliament coalition members have introduced new restrictive legislative initiatives such as an amendment to the [Anti-Terrorism Law](#) that expands the definition of support for terrorism. This has created a chilling effect – by, for example, lowering the evidentiary threshold required to initiate criminal investigations and obtain convictions – on the way in which some individuals and organisations express themselves on certain issues, both in the [digital space](#) and beyond.

Threats online and [cyber-attacks](#) harm [CSOs](#), individuals, and public and business entities - both criminal attacks for ransom or attacks carried out by individuals, organisations or countries that [oppose Israeli](#) policy in various arenas.

CSOs recognise the importance of understanding and implementing new professional tools, including AI. Many organisations are working to deepen their knowledge and expand the use of these tools. These processes occur in a more orderly manner in established organisations that have appropriate resources and equipment.

There are laws and regulations governing the activities of CSOs in Israel, including their activities on the internet. The relevant legislation pertains to both the general operations of nonprofits and specific aspects of online activities, such as online fundraising, transparency, data security, and advertising.

CSOs that collect personal data online must comply with the [Privacy Protection Law](#), 1981. This requires them to ensure the protection of users' privacy. In some cases, they may need to register their data collection systems with the Privacy Protection Authority.

Under the [Communications Law](#) (Telecommunications and Broadcasting) (Amendment No. 40), 2008, CSOs are prohibited from sending unsolicited marketing communications (spam), including donation solicitations, without obtaining prior consent ("opt-in") from the recipient. Under the [Anti-Money Laundering Law](#), 2000, nonprofits that collect donations online must comply with regulations aimed at preventing money laundering and terrorist financing. This involves tracking the sources of donations and maintaining proper documentation for oversight purposes. Under the Equal Rights for Persons with Disabilities [Law](#), CSOs are required to make their websites accessible.

Challenges and Opportunities

The upcoming months are likely to be turbulent. The internal struggle between supporters of the government and those who oppose it is intensifying. A series of moves (including: policy and administrative changes considered by government offices; potential government decisions; restrictive bills) to continue the backslide of Israeli democracy are coming up for discussion in the Parliament, and friction between different parts of the Israeli public is growing.

Among the planned government and parliamentary moves are actions and new bill proposals (ex. The CSO Tax Bill) that may harm the ability of some CSOs to raise funds, express their positions, and influence decision-making processes. It seems that a change in the status of civil society organisations is connected to a broader question about the direction in which Israeli democracy is heading. Will it remain a liberal democracy or will it become a procedural democracy or an authoritarian regime?

For most ordinary citizens, daily life continues almost as usual despite the domestic and foreign challenges. However, the process of narrowing the democratic space described in this document does not bode well for civil society's ability to operate freely. As long as this government is in power, it is likely these trends will continue.

The challenges for organisations are diverse: attempting to block legislative moves that limit freedom of expression and protest, preventing the imposition of bureaucratic and legal restrictions on fundraising, maintaining broad civic support, and advocating to preserve Israel's democratic character. These are not easy challenges, and they will likely accompany us throughout the coming year and beyond.

The current situation presents challenges for organisations and activists who are coping with questions of both economic and emotional resilience. At the same time, against the backdrop of intense political polarisation and ongoing security instability, civil society organisations and activists in Israel have become [central](#) and influential players in shaping the social and political arena. They are present in the digital sphere, active in protests, and involved in a wide range of civil support and aid initiatives. The circle of [donors and activists](#) is expanding, and continuous processes of learning and professionalisation are under way. These trends are

expected to continue in the coming months, and civil society organisations are likely to keep playing a central role *in shaping Israel's political and social reality*.

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