

Colombia

Country Focus Report

2025



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A) An 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 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. Rather than offering a singular index to rank countries, the report aims to measure the enabling environment for civil society across the six 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.

Brief Overview of the Country Context

Colombia continues to face pervasive and escalating violence that shows no sign of abating, with profound consequences for the enabling environment and the conditions necessary for democratic participation. Illegal armed groups linked to drug trafficking, illegal mining, and other illicit economies maintain and expand territorial control across extensive parts of the country, with ongoing armed disputes in strategically important regions. This violence affects communities directly, particularly social leaders, human rights defenders, journalists, environmental defenders, and signatories of the Peace Agreement. Its impact reinforces patterns of silencing, self-censorship, and weakened collective action, especially in rural areas where institutional presence and state capacity remain limited.

These security dynamics are exacerbated by deep social fragility. More than a third of Colombians continue to live in poverty and exclusion, restricting their ability to access mechanisms for participation. Although both the 1991 Constitution and the 2016 Final Peace Agreement establish citizen participation as a foundational democratic principle, implementation has been uneven and insufficient. The killings of social leaders remain at critically high levels, with 2025 reflecting a continued upward trend compared with recent years. This underscores the State's limited capacity to prevent attacks, provide protection, and conduct coordinated, territorially grounded investigations. Responses remain largely reactive, fragmented, and poorly coordinated, weakening guarantees for rights defence and press freedom throughout the country.

This situation is unfolding at a moment of deteriorating institutional legitimacy and in the lead-up to the 2026 presidential elections. Corruption scandals, poor performance in security and transparency, and strained governance have eroded public confidence. As the electoral cycle advances, political polarisation intensifies, while institutions focus on administrative transition rather than addressing the structural factors undermining rights protection and democratic participation. Consequently, the enabling environment is subject to heightened pressures from political contestation, misinformation, and severe territorial security risks.

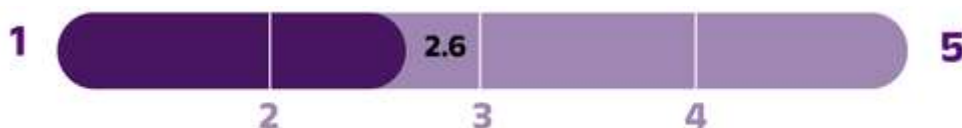
Against this backdrop, this report analyses the enabling environment for civil society through six core principles. Its purpose is to examine the tensions between formal guarantees and the lived realities of exercising rights, participating in public life, and mobilising collectively at a decisive juncture for Colombia's democratic trajectory.

B) Assessment of the Enabling Environment

PRINCIPLE SCORE

1. Respect and Protection of Fundamental Freedoms

Score: ¹



Colombia's constitutional and international human rights commitments formally guarantee freedom of association, assembly and expression. The 1991 Constitution enshrines these rights, reinforced by the country's ratification of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)* and the *American Convention on Human Rights (ACHR)*. Yet throughout 2025, the effective exercise of these freedoms has been severely compromised by intensifying violence perpetrated by illegal armed groups and the state's limited protective capacity. Freedom House's [Freedom in the World 2025](#) report notes that despite Colombia's longstanding democratic institutions, violence and weak civil liberties protections continue to reduce political participation outside major cities. In addition, the [CIVICUS monitor](#) rated Colombia's civic space as repressed in 2025.

The [escalation of targeted killings](#)—documented by organisations such as Indepaz, [EU SEE](#), and international media—demonstrates the widening gap between formal guarantees and real-world conditions. More than 40 social leaders had already been assassinated by March 2025, including the killing of a community leader in Barrancabermeja. These patterns severely restrict civic actors' ability to associate, assemble and speak freely, eroding Colombia's enabling environment for civil society.

¹This is a rebased score derived from the [CIVICUS Monitor rating](#) published in December 2025.

1.1 | Freedom of Association

Colombia's 1991 Constitution (Article 38) and its international commitments guarantee freedom of association, enabling individuals to form organisations without prior authorisation. These legal protections are clear and robust. However, the gap between legal guarantees and actual conditions remains profound, as the state struggles to prevent attacks against those exercising this right.

The scale of violence affecting civil society actors in 2025 starkly illustrates the lack of effective protection. By mid-2025, [Indepaz](#) had documented dozens of murders of social leaders in conflict-affected regions such as Cauca, Nariño and Chocó. As of March 2025, at least [40 social leaders](#) had been assassinated—including environmental, community and peace-process leaders—reflecting a pattern that mirrors the 173 assassinations recorded the previous year. The [2025 Justice for Colombia human-rights update](#) further reports that more than 150 activists had been killed by September 2025, regions such as Cauca and Antioquia have been particularly hard hit.

These attacks are concentrated in areas with strong illegal armed-group presence, where FARC dissidents, ELN units and the Gulf Clan have expanded their operations—documented in [Human Rights Watch's World Report 2025](#), which notes exponential increases in armed-group control across municipalities.

The sustained targeting of organised civic actors has a chilling effect far beyond individual victims. Murders, threats and displacement undermine organisational capacity, leadership development and coalition-building. Associations in rural and ethnic territories face particularly hostile conditions, leading to self-censorship and the disruption of long-standing community structures. In practice, freedom of association becomes geographically contingent: effectively protected in urban centres, but severely compromised in rural zones governed by armed actors. This undermines the pluralism and social participation essential for democratic life.

1.2 | Freedom of Assembly

The right to peaceful assembly is recognised in Article 37 of Colombia's 1991 Constitution and international human-rights treaties. Public protest is formally protected, and successive governments have acknowledged the importance of social mobilisation as a mechanism for democratic accountability and participation.

Despite these guarantees, exercising the right to assemble in 2025 frequently entailed high risk. Armed confrontations, confinement, and territorial control by armed groups restricted mobility and prevented public gatherings in large swathes of the country. [Human Rights Watch](#) reports that between January and July 2024–2025, over 71,000 people were forcibly confined by armed groups, preventing community organisation and collective action. Fighting in Chocó, Cauca, and Nariño displaced more than 34,000 people in early 2025, directly obstructing mass mobilisation and local assemblies.

In addition to non-state actors, state institutions have provided inconsistent protection. [International observers](#), including the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, have raised concerns about inadequate responses to threats against peaceful organisers and the excessive risks faced by protestors in certain regions.

These dynamics severely restrict civil society's ability to organise, protest, and demand accountability. Territorial blockades, fear of retaliation, and the absence of secure routes for gatherings limit participation to actors in safer urban centres, deepening participation inequalities. Even where protests do occur, the risk of violent disruption by armed groups or criminal networks constrains willingness to mobilise. Consequently, the right to assemble—while constitutionally protected—is severely eroded in practice, curbing civil society's capacity to influence policy and advocate for rights.

1.3 | Freedom of Expression

Article 20 of Colombia's 1991 Constitution and its obligations under ICCPR and ACHR guarantee freedom of expression and press freedom. However, the legal protections are undermined by widespread insecurity, weak justice mechanisms and persistent impunity.

Colombia remains one of the most dangerous countries in the region for journalists. [Human Rights Watch](#) highlights ongoing killings, threats and attacks against media workers, many of which occur with minimal accountability. Journalists reporting on corruption, armed conflict or illegal economies face repeated intimidation. Real-life cases in 2025—documented across multiple sources—include targeted attacks on reporters covering community violence or territorial disputes, with patterns of retaliatory threats from both armed actors and local criminal networks.

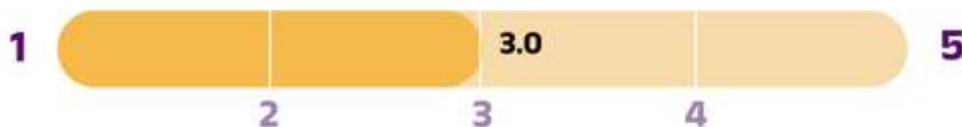
The [2025 EU SEE alert](#) also notes increased threats against human-rights defenders and social leaders, which indirectly pressure journalists who investigate these cases or report on abuses. Moreover, the [Freedom House 2025](#) report identifies declining civil-liberties protections and rising political tension ahead of the 2026 elections, contributing to self-censorship and a shrinking investigative landscape.

[Impunity for attacks](#) on journalists profoundly undermines freedom of expression. The combined pressure of armed-group control, corruption and institutional weakness restricts media access to conflict zones, reduces coverage of public-interest issues and limits transparency in democratic processes. This shrinking informational space hampers civil society's ability to advocate, monitor public authorities, and expose abuses. As expression becomes increasingly risky, public debate narrows and citizens' access to accurate information diminishes—directly affecting the health of Colombia's civic space.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

2. Supportive Legal and Regulatory Framework

Score:



Colombia's regulatory framework provides formal guarantees for the establishment and autonomy of civil society organisations, yet the practical environment remains uneven and often exclusionary. Registration procedures, while standardised in law, are applied inconsistently across territories, generating uncertainty, additional costs, and higher rejection rates for rural, Indigenous, Afro-descendant and women-led groups. Recent provisions enabling ex officio dissolution for non-renewal or failure to submit information pose particular risks for organisations with limited digital access or administrative capacity.

Operationally, CSOs face stringent reporting duties, complex tax requirements and intrusive oversight mechanisms that, although designed to ensure transparency, disproportionately burden small and community-based organisations. Broad supervisory powers and complaint-driven investigations create opportunities for harassment, especially for organisations working on sensitive issues.

Despite constitutional safeguards against interference, weak institutional capacity, slow protection responses and territorial inequalities restrict many CSOs' ability to participate effectively. The result is a civic space where formal freedoms coexist with structural barriers that undermine sustainability and inclusion.

2.1 | Registration

In Colombia, civil society organisations (CSOs) generally must register in order to obtain legal personality and operate formally. According to [Article 40 of Decree 2150 of 1995](#), complemented by Article 1 of Decree 427 of 1996, non-profit entities (entidades sin ánimo de lucro, ESAL) such as associations, foundations, corporations, community action boards and other private non-profit entities are legally required to register their constitutive documents with

the Chamber of Commerce of their main domicile in order to obtain legal status. In effect, chambers became the gatekeepers for ESAL formation and for subsequent filings (appointments, statute amendments, dissolution). Registration makes the organisation's existence public and allows it to carry out legally recognised actions such as signing contracts, holding assets, hiring staff, receiving funding, and being represented in judicial or administrative proceedings. Unregistered groups may gather and advocate under the constitutional freedom of association, but they cannot enter into legally binding agreements nor access most funding mechanisms, and they are not recognised as juridical persons before the State. After registering with the Chamber of Commerce, the registration must be filed with the relevant authority in the area where the CSO seeks to be formally recognised — either the departmental government (Gobernación) or the municipal or district administration (alcaldía).

Chambers publish model statutes and step-by-step [ESAL guides](#), which, in principle, standardise requirements and improve clarity for incorporators. However, civic-space monitoring repeatedly flags [“excessive discretion”](#) and subjective application of registration rules by authorities—an inconsistency that undermines de facto standardisation across territories.

Article 166 of Decree-Law 019 of 2012 requires ESAL registered with chambers to [renew](#) within the first three months of every year; chambers apply the same tariff framework as the commercial registry. DIAN's [Special Tax Regime](#) adds an annual web update for qualifying ESAL, with reclassification to the ordinary regime if not maintained—another recurrent compliance task.

The [Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2022–2026](#) (Law 2294 of 2023), [Article 86](#) authorises the [ex officio dissolution and cancellation of legal status](#) when an ESAL (i) fails to register within 12 months of the law's entry into force, (ii) fails to renew for three consecutive years, or (iii) fails for three consecutive years to provide information required by its oversight authority. A Government decree is tasked with regulating the procedure. The Ministry of Trade has already circulated [draft regulations](#) to operationalise Article 86, confirming a stricter enforcement posture. However, there is no regulatory decree yet, which is one of the concerns of CSOs.

These article 86 measures increase uncertainty for small or community-based entities with low accounting or technological capacity, [an issue that civil society has been denouncing](#). The impact of this measure is expected to begin to be felt more strongly from 2026 onwards and, as mentioned above, will particularly affect CSOs that do not have the resources or capacity to comply with the requirements, which may constitute an incentive for informality.

Procedural opacity and discretion compound these risks. Where chambers apply criteria unevenly, weaker organisations encounter higher rejection rates and repeat filings—each incurring extra costs (notarial updates, new inscriptions, travel). The absence of public data on appeal outcomes makes it harder to correct local inconsistencies or monitor indirect discrimination.

However, Chambers provide administrative remedies—reposición and apelación—with [10 working days](#) from notification to lodge appeals. If the Chamber of Commerce refuses to accept the appeal, the matter can be taken to a higher authority — the Superintendence — by filing what is called a recurso de queja (a complaint appeal). These stem from Colombia's general administrative procedure (CPACA) and are implemented in chamber guidance. While the Bogotá Chamber provides a route to file “peticiones y recursos” online, there is no consolidated public dataset reporting appeal volumes or success rates across chambers, which hampers accountability.

Additional compliance layers—e.g., Self-Control and Comprehensive Risk Management System for Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing (SAGRILAF) and Transparency and Business Ethics Program (PTEE) [obligations for foreign ESAL](#) provided by Colombia's Law 2195 of 2022 (Article 9) requiring all legally established organisations to create, implement, and monitor PTEE—further raise costs and capacity requirements (risk systems, policies, audits). The tax-regime maintenance (Régimen Tributario Especial) and anti-money-laundering programmes—though justified by integrity aims—scale poorly for micro-budget ESAL; failure to keep pace leads to loss of benefits or sanctions, again skewed against marginalised actors with the least back-office capacity.

Rural, Indigenous and Afro-descendant community groups (and many women-led grassroots initiatives) face geographical distance from chambers, weaker digital connectivity, and limited access to specialised legal/accounting support. Evidence on Colombia's civic space shows persistent territorial inequalities and resource asymmetries that disadvantage smaller, community-based CSOs. In this context, [Article 86](#) has disparate impacts: the triggers for dissolution—three years without renewal or information filings—are more likely to occur where connectivity is poor, travel is costly, and leadership turnover is frequent, thereby disproportionately risking the closure of rural/ethnic/community ESAL compared with urban, professionalised NGOs. In addition, Afro-Colombian and Indigenous organisations [point out that civil society regulations remain unclear](#) because they classify CSOs as private-sector entities, failing to acknowledge the unique circumstances and challenges that non-profit groups face compared with commercial businesses.

The enabling environment is legally permissive but materially uneven. The framework (Decree 2150/1995; Decree 427/1996; Decree-Law 019/2012; Law 2294/2023, Article 86) standardises procedures and duties, yet subjective application, opaque appeals, and recurrent, UVB-indexed costs—relative to a low-income benchmark—collectively constrain access and sustainability, with disproportionate harms to rural, ethnic and women-led community ESAL.

2.2 | Operational Environment

The Colombian legal framework formally permits civil society organisations to determine their internal governance, objectives, and activities without requiring prior approval from the State. Neither Law 22 of 1987 nor subsequent regulations impose restrictions on organisational missions or structures, and CSOs are legally able to define their priorities according to their own assessment of community needs. However, although autonomy exists in principle, the day-to-day operating environment is characterised by substantial administrative burdens that materially limit this freedom, particularly for smaller organisations and groups working in remote or vulnerable regions.

CSOs face significant oversight obligations, including extensive reporting to the National Tax and Customs Directorate (DIAN) in order to maintain registration within the Special Tax Regime. [Law 2195 of 2022](#) and [Resolution 164 of 2021](#) require stringent transparency, integrity standards, and verification of beneficiaries by the Financial Information and Analysis Unit (UIAF), obligations that apply uniformly to organisations regardless of size. These requirements create disproportionate obstacles for community-based organisations lacking technical capacity, internet access, or the ability to travel to urban centres to complete compliance processes. As a result, vulnerable groups—often relying on small rural CSOs—experience a diminished enabling environment, as compliance costs divert resources from service delivery.

In terms of regulatory controls, Law 22 of 1987 authorises departmental governors and the Mayor of Bogotá to inspect and supervise CSOs, requiring annual submission of financial statements and reports of activities. Oversight can escalate to sanctions: Presidential Decree 1529 of 1990, Article 7, [permits any individual to request the cancellation](#) of a CSO's legal status on grounds such as alleged unlawful activity or deviation from stated purposes. Upon receiving a request, authorities must open an investigation, conduct an on-site visit, and issue a decision within ten working days. While intended as a safeguard, this process exposes CSOs—particularly those working on sensitive issues such as human rights or governance—to potential harassment via vexatious complaints.

Access to funding is also indirectly constrained. Although the legal framework does not formally restrict international or domestic funding, [Decree 92 of 2017](#) requires CSOs bidding for government contracts to provide a 30% financial contribution, effectively excluding organisations without substantial reserves. This disproportionately affects grassroots organisations serving vulnerable populations and limits their ability to scale their work or participate in public programmes. Combined with compliance burdens, these financial requirements narrow the practical autonomy of CSOs and weaken the broader civic space.

2.3 | Protection from Interference

The Colombian legal framework contains several provisions intended to shield civil society organisations from arbitrary interference, although these protections often prove weaker in practice. The 1991 Constitution, Articles 38 and 103, formally guarantee freedom of association and recognise the participatory role of CSOs in public life. While the Constitution establishes a foundation against arbitrary dissolution, the detailed regulatory framework governing dissolution—Presidential Decree 1529 of 1990, Article 7—sets out the grounds on which a CSO may be dissolved, including allegations of unlawful conduct or deviation from statutory purposes. Law 2294 of 2023, [Article 86](#) authorises the [ex officio dissolution and cancellation of legal status](#) when an ESAL fails to register within 12 months of the law's entry into force, fails to renew for three consecutive years, or fails for three consecutive years to provide information required by its oversight authority. Although CSOs are theoretically able to challenge such decisions through administrative and judicial review, the ease with which any individual may initiate dissolution proceedings creates opportunities for politically motivated complaints, placing organisations—particularly those working on human rights—in a vulnerable position.

Safeguards against interference are supplemented by sector-specific regulations such as [Decree 660 of 2018](#), which outlines protective measures for territorial organisations, and Decree [2150 of 1995](#), which seeks to reduce bureaucratic obstacles in administrative procedures. Furthermore, [Directive No. 07 of 2023](#) addresses the stigmatisation of human rights defenders and commits public authorities to prevent threats and violence against CSOs. These instruments represent an acknowledgement by the State of the risks faced by CSOs, but their implementation remains inconsistent due to weak institutional capacity, slow complaint mechanisms, and insufficient protection guarantees.

Regulation of inspections is primarily derived from the supervisory powers granted to departmental governors and the Mayor of Bogotá under Law 22 of 1987. While the law allows oversight to ensure legality and transparency, it lacks safeguards against excessive or selective inspection, thereby enabling practices that may generate undue burdens or function as tools of administrative pressure. In contexts of political polarisation or territorial conflict, such oversight may be compounded by external interference from illegal armed groups, private sector actors, or media outlets, whose intimidation or stigmatising narratives further

restrict the operational space for CSOs. These dynamics disproportionately harm organisations representing rural communities, ethnic minorities, women, and other vulnerable groups, for whom institutional weaknesses—such as slow responses, revictimisation, or lack of effective protection—often necessitate recourse to international human rights mechanisms.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

3. Accessible and Sustainable Resources

Score:



Access to financial and operational resources for civil society organisations in Colombia has become increasingly restricted, particularly affecting those serving marginalised communities or working on sensitive issues. A sharp reduction in international cooperation, combined with Colombia's classification as a middle-income country, has significantly reduced external funding streams, leaving many smaller organisations without the financial resilience to adapt. Public funding remains available but is often inaccessible due to highly technical application requirements and procurement rules demanding substantial counterpart contributions.

Even when resources are secured, their effectiveness is limited by short funding cycles, donor-driven priorities and administrative burdens linked to tax and compliance regimes. Project-based financing forces organisations into fragmented, short-term operations, undermining long-term planning and institutional stability.

Sustainability is further threatened by dependence on single funding sources, restricted access to banking services and limited opportunities for self-generated income. These structural constraints collectively weaken civil society's autonomy, operational capacity and long-term viability, narrowing civic space and deepening inequalities across territories.

3.1 | Accessibility of Resources

Access to resources for civil society actors in Colombia is increasingly constrained, with profound effects on organisations working with marginalised groups or addressing sensitive issues. Although resources formally remain available, the sharp decline in international cooperation—partly due to shifting [geopolitical priorities](#), the [withdrawal of USAID](#) from the country (which had a strong impact on civil society and project funding), and Colombia's [classification as a middle-income](#) country—has considerably reduced external funding streams. This disproportionately affects smaller CSOs supporting vulnerable communities, as they lack the financial resilience to absorb such losses. Regulatory conditions further influence access: public funding channels exist, yet many government-supported calls for proposals require sophisticated technical capacity that smaller or rural organisations often do not

possess. Additionally, some public procurement processes demand up to 30 per cent counterpart funding, which effectively excludes most grassroots organisations and creates a structural disadvantage in accessing State resources.

[Information on funding opportunities](#) is available, but the ability to respond is uneven, as administrative complexity and highly technical application procedures limit participation. This results in a de facto narrowing of the civic space, as only well-resourced organisations can align with funding priorities or comply with procedural expectations. Tax policy also shapes the funding environment. Law 863 of 2003, Article 8, provides income-tax exemptions for non-profit entities when income is used to advance their statutory purposes, subject to strict accounting requirements. However, organisations falling under the ordinary tax regime face corporate-level obligations that frequently exceed their operational capacity, leading to unintentional non-compliance with reporting to the National Directorate of Taxes and Customs (DIAN). While the Special Tax Regime is offered as an alternative, its intensive monitoring requirements constrain organisational autonomy, including restrictions on leadership structures and social-enterprise activities.

Access to banking services presents additional barriers. Anti-money-laundering and due-diligence regulations (FATF-aligned), together with integrity requirements such as SAGRILAFI, often result in excessive documentation demands, higher service charges and, in some cases, the freezing of accounts. These practices particularly disadvantage rural organisations operating largely in cash, limiting both liquidity and access to credit. The cumulative effect of technical burdens, compliance costs and financial sector restrictions has been well documented by international observers, who note that these conditions significantly reduce the sustainability, independence and operating capacity of CSOs. As a result, the enabling environment for civil society—especially those representing vulnerable communities—is increasingly characterised by financial insecurity, administrative overload and structural exclusion from available resources.

3.2 | Effectiveness of Resources

The effectiveness of resources available to civil society organisations in Colombia is increasingly undermined by restrictive funding conditions and an operational landscape shaped more by donor priorities than by local needs. Most available support is channelled through short- and medium-term project grants, while multi-year institutional funding—essential for stability and strategic planning—has largely disappeared. This drives CSOs, particularly those serving vulnerable communities, into a cycle of “project-by-project survival”, constraining their autonomy and reducing the flexibility needed to address emerging needs. Donor conditions frequently exclude operational or core costs, and government regulations, such as compliance obligations linked to the Special Tax Regime administered by DIAN, impose administrative demands that often exceed the capacities of smaller organisations. Although Law 863 of 2003, Article 8, provides tax exemptions for non-profit entities when income is directed to their statutory aims, the parallel reporting obligations and ongoing oversight limit the practical utility of these benefits.

Funding priorities are often driven by donor agendas rather than territorial realities. Local needs—such as organisational strengthening, community participation, leadership protection and environmental justice—frequently fall outside the thematic focus of international cooperation. Donor flexibility to adapt funding instruments to shifts in the security context, or to adjust programmes when operational risks escalate, remains limited. This is particularly problematic in regions affected by conflict or criminal activity, where CSOs require adaptable support and risk-mitigation measures. While some donors acknowledge security concerns,

responses are inconsistent and often insufficient to mitigate harm arising from programmes implemented in high-risk environments.

Monitoring, reporting and audit requirements also impose significant burdens. More established organisations can navigate these expectations, but smaller or rural CSOs struggle to meet them, reducing the actual effectiveness of the funds they receive. Banking-sector requirements—such as due diligence obligations linked to anti-money-laundering frameworks like SAGRILAF—further increase compliance costs and can delay or restrict access to project funds. Together, these conditions weaken the enabling environment for civil society, limiting the ability of organisations, especially those representing marginalised populations, to operate sustainably, respond rapidly to crises and retain autonomy over their missions.

3.3 | Sustainability of Resources

The sustainability of resources available to civil society organisations in Colombia is increasingly precarious, significantly weakening the enabling environment for actors working with vulnerable communities. Most CSOs rely on a single or highly unpredictable funding source and [would struggle to continue operating](#) beyond a month without fresh disbursements. Such dependence leaves them acutely exposed to shifts in political priorities, electoral cycles and reductions in international cooperation. The withdrawal of major donors from the country—combined with Colombia’s classification as a middle-income state—has resulted in substantial gaps in funding cycles, creating operational delays, [interruptions in programme delivery](#) and declining job security for civil society workers engaged in peacebuilding, humanitarian support, migration regularisation and defence of ethnic and women’s rights.

Current funding structures, dominated by short-term and project-based grants, restrict long-term planning and weaken institutional resilience. The scarcity of core or multi-year funding prevents organisations from investing in strategic development, retaining skilled staff or building systems capable of managing risks in volatile environments. Although tax exemptions for not-for-profit entities are provided under Law 863 of 2003, Article 8—which exempts income used for statutory aims while requiring separate accounting for commercial activities—these mechanisms do little to offset the broader contraction of available resources. Furthermore, compliance obligations linked to the Special Tax Regime and DIAN reporting requirements impose significant administrative burdens that reduce the potential benefits of these incentives and undermine sustainability for smaller organisations.

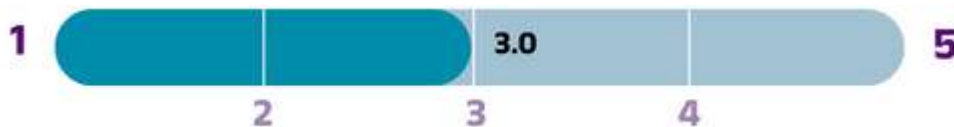
Despite occasional encouragement for CSOs to pursue self-reliance, opportunities for [generating income](#) or expanding [domestic philanthropy](#) remain limited. Innovative financing instruments, such as impact bonds or results-based payments, exist in theory but are little known and require administrative capacities that many organisations lack. At the same time, growing pressure to adopt “social enterprise” models risks diverting mission-driven organisations—particularly those focused on human rights, peace and political advocacy—towards commercial activities that could compromise their core purpose. Competition for scarce public resources, worsened by fiscal constraints within the State, forces CSOs to compete directly with government entities for the same funds, heightening financial insecurity and eroding the long-term sustainability of the sector.



PRINCIPLE SCORE

4. Open and Responsive State

Score:



Colombia's transparency, participation and accountability framework is comprehensive in law but uneven in practice, creating a civic environment where formal rights coexist with persistent structural barriers. Although the transparency regime mandates maximum publicity and proactive disclosure, implementation remains inconsistent, with delays, incomplete data and weak enforcement limiting civil society's ability to obtain reliable information. These shortcomings are most acute in rural and conflict-affected territories, where limited digital capacity and political interference heighten information asymmetries.

Participation mechanisms are similarly affected. While the legal framework guarantees broad opportunities for civic engagement, consultation processes often function as procedural formalities rather than meaningful avenues for influence. Structural inequalities, insecurity and logistical constraints restrict the ability of small or community-based organisations to participate on equal terms, while poor information flows impede timely and informed contributions.

Accountability processes further weaken civic space. Feedback on civil society input is rare, follow-up mechanisms are irregular, and monitoring systems are inconsistent, leaving many organisations—particularly those representing marginalised groups—without effective channels to track government decisions or demand corrective action.

4.1 | Transparency

Colombia has established an extensive legal framework recognising the right of individuals and organisations to access information held by public bodies and by private entities

performing public functions. The cornerstone of this framework is [Law 1712 of 2014](#), Article 1, which expressly regulates the right of access to public information and sets procedures to guarantee it, while Article 2 enshrines the principle of maximum publicity, requiring that all information held by obliged entities be presumed public unless legitimately restricted by law. This law mandates proactive publication of information and obliges public entities to disclose data in accessible formats, forming the basis for national, departmental and municipal transparency obligations. Complementing these guarantees, [Law 1474 of 2011](#) strengthens anti-corruption mechanisms and reinforces duties of public accountability, while [Law 1757 of 2015](#) requires public institutions to support democratic participation by ensuring open access to decision-making processes, including consultation procedures and access to policy-related information.

Although the legal framework establishes clear rights and obligations, its implementation remains uneven, with significant implications for the enabling environment for civil society actors, particularly those representing vulnerable groups. Procedures for filing access-to-information requests exist under Law 1712 of 2014, and the law requires that access be facilitated without excessive administrative barriers, guided by principles such as non-discrimination, facilitation and gratuity (Articles 2–3). However, delays, inconsistent publication practices and weak enforcement mean that requests are not always processed within legal timeframes, and the Attorney General’s Office has not imposed sanctions for unjustified refusals. This undermines the protective guarantees intended by the law, including the requirement that authorities provide clear reasons when information is withheld.

At the subnational level, transparency initiatives such as Cali’s [‘Pa que veás’ platform](#) demonstrate positive practice, yet disparities persist due to limited digital capacity, poor connectivity and high staff turnover. Rural and conflict-affected territories face additional risks, as public information may be incomplete or subject to manipulation by local actors. These structural limitations reduce the ability of civil society organisations—particularly those supporting marginalised communities—to access timely, reliable information essential for oversight, advocacy and participation in public decision-making. While Colombia has advanced through commitments like the [Open Government Partnership](#), [CONPES 4070](#) (2021), and [the Fifth Open Government Action Plan](#), transparency remains hindered by institutional weaknesses and a persistent culture of opacity, thereby constraining meaningful participation and accountability.

4.2 | Participation

Colombia’s legal framework recognises a broad right to democratic participation, particularly through the 1991 Constitution, Article 103, formally recognising the participatory role of CSOs in public life. [Law 1757 of 2015](#), Article 1-3, also guarantees citizen engagement in political, administrative, economic, social and cultural decision-making and regulates mechanisms such as referenda, popular consultations and open town halls. While this framework formally obliges public institutions to promote participation and consider citizens’ contributions from early stages of policy formulation, participation in practice remains uneven. Policymakers often consult civil society actors only as a procedural formality, and opportunities to influence decisions meaningfully are limited by the absence of clear feedback mechanisms or assurances that inputs will shape policy outcomes. Participation standards set out in the [National Development Plan](#), the commitments undertaken through the [Escazú Agreement](#) and the Decentralisation Mission (2023-2024), specifically in area no. [4: Citizen participation and](#)

[open government](#), have driven incremental reforms, yet these remain pending approval and thus have not fully translated into operational guarantees.

Procedurally, the law does not permit discrimination among CSOs based on their position toward the government, and participation mechanisms are legally open to all. However, structural inequalities—such as insecurity, political pressures, and logistical constraints in conflict-affected territories—disproportionately restrict the participation of smaller or community-based organisations. This results in de facto exclusion despite formal equality. Moreover, although Law 1712 of 2014, Article 1, establishes the right to access public information necessary for informed participation, deficiencies in information timeliness and accessibility hinder CSOs' ability to prepare substantive contributions within consultation timeframes. As a result, many consultations occur late in policy cycles, offering limited scope for genuine influence.

Participation opportunities are offered both online and in-person, yet effectiveness varies significantly across territories. While digital mechanisms exist, connectivity challenges in rural and marginalised areas, combined with institutional weakness and the presence of armed groups, constrain safe and informed engagement. National dialogues—such as the [Binding Regional Dialogues](#) (2022–2023) and the [National Participation Committee](#) (2024)—expanded formal access but highlighted persistent shortcomings in traceability, real-time access to inputs and clarity about how contributions were integrated. The cumulative effect is a participatory environment in which organisations with financial stability and technical capacity are able to remain present, while grassroots organisations face high mobility costs and limited resources, undermining equitable participation and weakening accountability.

4.3 | Accountability

The Colombian government provides only limited and uneven feedback to civil society actors on how their contributions are used in decision-making processes. Although [Law 1757 of 2015](#), Article 1-3, formally guarantees democratic participation and obliges authorities to support mechanisms enabling citizen engagement in public decisions, public entities rarely issue detailed reports explaining how CSO input shaped final outcomes. While information is usually published as required under Law 489 of 1998, the documentation tends to be descriptive rather than analytical, offering little clarity regarding the rationale for adopting or disregarding specific proposals. As a result, civil society actors often lack the information needed to assess whether their contributions influenced policy or were merely acknowledged as a procedural necessity.

When government authorities choose not to adopt or meaningfully consider feedback submitted by civil society actors, clear explanations are seldom provided. Under [Law 1712 of 2014](#), entities must justify any withholding of public information and are expected to act according to principles of transparency and accountability. However, in practice, the absence of formal mechanisms that require authorities to justify the acceptance or rejection of civil society input results in limited opportunities for organisations to question or contest governmental decisions. Although participation spaces exist, the lack of mandatory, reasoned responses means civil society actors have few practical avenues for holding authorities accountable, particularly in territories where state presence is weak and political or economic elites dominate decision-making processes.

The government does not consistently provide clear and structured spaces for civil society actors to follow up on the use of their input or to hold institutions accountable for how feedback is incorporated. Follow-up opportunities are therefore irregular and highly dependent on the commitment of individual institutions, leaving many CSOs, especially smaller and community-based organisations, unable to monitor whether their advocacy efforts have been considered in a meaningful way.

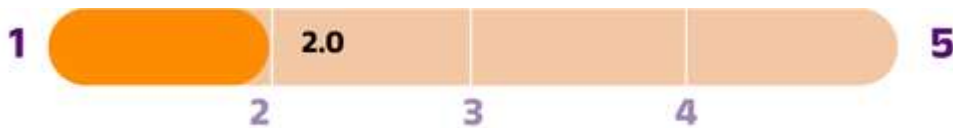
Finally, although the legal framework implies the existence of processes for monitoring government adherence to its commitments, in reality these mechanisms remain weak and inconsistently applied. Formal accountability spaces do exist, yet they rarely allow for systematic monitoring by CSOs or provide transparent traceability of how citizen input is integrated into policy cycles. In regions with limited state presence or where armed groups exert influence, accountability processes can deteriorate into administrative rituals with minimal oversight value. Without structured channels enabling CSOs to track government commitments, evaluate policy changes or report non-compliance, Colombia's accountability system continues to fall short of supporting an enabling environment for civil society, with particularly adverse effects on organisations representing vulnerable or marginalised populations.



PRINCIPLE SCORE

5. Supportive Public Culture and Discourses on Civil Society

Score:



Public discourse and civic engagement in Colombia in 2025 were shaped by deep political polarisation, weakening the legitimacy and influence of civil society organisations. Although CSOs are formally recognised as key democratic actors, national-level narratives frequently cast them either as allies or adversaries, reinforcing mistrust and diminishing their ability to influence public debate. Media coverage often amplifies scepticism, prioritising narratives of conflict and security over constructive reporting, which contributes to the criminalisation of social mobilisation and limits the visibility of civil society contributions.

Citizens' perceptions of their own civic influence remain low, constrained by insecurity, institutional mistrust and limited awareness of participation mechanisms. Civic education gaps further reduce the capacity for meaningful engagement, particularly in rural and marginalised territories. Structural inequalities and widespread violence—especially against women, Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities and LGBTQI+ people—continue to hinder equitable participation. Despite legal advances, persistent discrimination and impunity undermine civic equality, leaving vulnerable groups disproportionately excluded from public life.

5.1 | Public Discourse and Constructive Dialogue on Civil Society

In 2025, the government's public framing of civil society actors in Colombia remained marked by ambiguity, oscillating between recognition and [suspicion](#). While institutions formally acknowledge CSOs as key democratic actors, national-level discourse often portrays them through the lens of political polarisation. The [2025 reports](#) note that distrust of democratic institutions is widespread, with 74% of respondents believing democracy is "in danger", contributing to a context in which CSOs are frequently perceived by political leaders as either

allies or adversaries depending on their stance toward government initiatives. This polarised framing undermines their legitimacy and weakens their influence on public decision-making.

Media coverage significantly shapes public perceptions of CSOs, often amplifying scepticism rather than highlighting their social contributions. The [same 2025 analysis](#) records an environment in which violence, repression of protests and security narratives dominate public debate, reducing space for constructive reporting on civil society work. For example, a [2025 study by Escobar](#) on the coverage of the 2021 national strike shows that the main Colombian media outlets ‘systematically criminalised social mobilisation,’ using delegitimising and moralising language instead of analysing the structural causes of the demonstrations. This media narrative contributed to reinforcing the negative perception of the protest and weakened trust between the state and civil society.

The [broader research on civil society ecosystems](#) in 2025 shows that many CSOs lack the strategic communication capacity to influence discourse effectively, enabling dominant media outlets to shape narratives with limited counterbalance from grassroots actors. As a result, civil society contributions are often overshadowed by narratives of conflict, insecurity or political bias.

Dialogue between government, media and civil society in 2025 remained uneven and rarely centred on evidence-based contributions from CSOs. The 2025 [landscape analysis](#) notes that smaller organisations struggle to enter national debates due to limited technical capacity and unequal access to platforms, leaving the policy arena dominated by larger, better-resourced organisations. Although CSOs continue to produce evidence on issues such as human rights violations, conflict dynamics and exclusion, this evidence is inconsistently incorporated into public debates, particularly in security-related discussions where state narratives take precedence.

The broader culture of public dialogue—shaped by political polarisation, media framing and increased online disinformation—further constrains CSOs’ ability to participate constructively. The [2025 Snapshot](#) records high levels of intimidation against journalists and persistent threats to freedom of expression, with 57 threats and one killing of journalists in the first five months of 2025, conditions that diminish the quality of public debate and create an environment where civil society voices may be silenced or delegitimised. Initiatives to counter harmful online content emerged, such as the [UNESCO-supported 2024–2025](#) digital civic-space alliance aimed at reducing disinformation and hate speech, yet these efforts remain nascent. Overall, the culture of dialogue in 2025 continued to constrain civic participation by reinforcing polarisation, limiting access to balanced information and reducing opportunities for civil society actors—particularly those representing vulnerable communities—to shape national conversations constructively.

5.2 Perception of Civil Society and Civic Engagement

In 2025, public attitudes toward civil society in Colombia remained deeply ambivalent. While many communities—particularly Indigenous, Afro-Colombian and rural groups—continued to value CSOs for their defence of rights, local development efforts and territorial advocacy, national-level perceptions were far more fractured.

Citizen belief in their ability to influence political decision-making also remains limited. Research indicates that structural obstacles, violence and institutional mistrust restrict meaningful participation. The [2025 Civic Space Monitoring Report](#) highlights that

Afro-Colombian and Indigenous organisations face substantial barriers to participating in decision-making due to insecurity, lack of resources and the limited responsiveness of public institutions. National-level [data from Bogotá](#) further illustrates low engagement: between 57% and 67% of city residents report not knowing about basic participation mechanisms, while 64% believe participation is dangerous, 59% consider it difficult, and 47% view it as useless, weakening the civic culture needed for democratic accountability.

Civic education remains uneven despite its formal inclusion in the national curriculum. The gap between legal requirements and practical implementation persists, with education on rights, democratic processes and civic engagement varying widely across regions. The [2025 State of Civil Society Report](#) observes that inequalities in access to information and civic learning opportunities weaken citizens' ability to engage constructively in public life. Smaller municipalities, rural schools and conflict-affected territories often lack the resources, trained educators and institutional support needed to deliver comprehensive civic education. This deepens territorial disparities and limits the capacity of marginalised populations to exercise their political rights fully.

Together, these dynamics shape an enabling environment in which civil society's legitimacy, citizens' trust in participation and the accessibility of civic education are all under strain. The combined effects disproportionately disadvantage vulnerable communities, whose ability to engage safely and meaningfully in public life is already compromised by violence, poverty and limited state presence.

5.3 Civic Equality and Inclusion

Although Colombia's legal framework—rooted in the [1991 Constitution](#), anti-discrimination provisions, and progressive jurisprudence—formally guarantees equal civic participation for all individuals, the lived reality in 2025 shows profound disparities that undermine inclusive civic engagement. Colombia is among the leading countries where same sex marriages were legalised in 2016, and in 2024, the government launched the CONPES 4147, a national plan aimed at guaranteeing the rights of LGBTQI+ people. However, structural inequalities continue to marginalise women, Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, rural populations and [LGBTQI+ people](#). In 2025, [research indicates](#) that over 16 million people live in poverty and exclusion, creating significant obstacles to political participation and limiting the ability of vulnerable groups to engage in civic processes on equal terms. Although gender parity initiatives have expanded opportunities for women, political representation remains [far below parity](#), and ethnic communities—despite legally protected seats—face entrenched socio-economic barriers that reduce their actual influence. Women's representation stood at 19.7% of deputies, 17% in departmental assemblies, 18% in municipal councils, 12% in mayors' offices and 15% in governors' offices, despite the fact that more women than men graduated from higher education in 2025. Improvements include initiatives such as [Bogotá 50/50](#) and [legal provisions](#) that seek to promote women's political participation, although in many municipalities, including Bogotá, there is still a lack of female candidates for key positions. Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, which represent more than 10% of the population, [have special seats in Congress and constitutionally recognised spaces for participation](#). However, they still face structural limitations that restrict their real and sustained political influence in public and community decision-making.

Barriers are even more acute for marginalised and under-served populations. [Reports highlight](#) that Indigenous, Afro-descendant and [LGBTQI+ communities face violence](#),

displacement, discrimination and insufficient institutional support, which collectively weaken their capacity for civic participation. Social tolerance remains uneven across territories: while some regions value community-level organising, national public discourse is shaped by polarisation, stigmatisation and mistrust. This environment fosters discriminatory attitudes that particularly affect LGBTQI+ people, including trans women who experience disproportionate levels of violence, exclusion and impunity.

[Violence against social leaders](#) is the main obstacle to inclusion. In 2025, there were [at least 187 murders](#) of people including human rights defenders, mainly affecting indigenous leaders and environmentalists. More than 70% of cases remain unpunished, which exacerbates vulnerability.

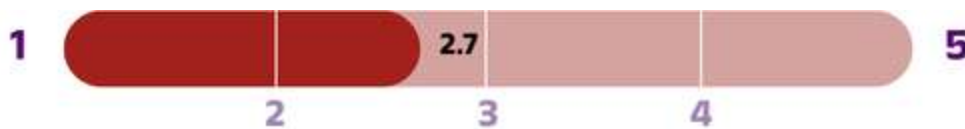
The Colombian Penal Code contains provisions relevant to LGBTQI+ protection, yet gaps persist between law and enforcement. Although hate-motivated violence can be prosecuted under aggravating circumstances in homicide and assault cases, reports document persistent impunity and inadequate state response. By mid-2025, 45 LGBTQI+ homicides [had been recorded](#), with gay men and trans women the most affected, according to civil society monitoring. In 2023, 78 cases of police violence and 203 threats [were documented](#), revealing systemic risks for LGBTQI+ people and a disconnect between anti-discrimination law and on-the-ground protection. Advocacy organisations note that although homosexuality was decriminalised in 1981 and anti-discrimination norms exist within the Penal Code, enforcement is limited, and bias-motivated crimes are rarely investigated or prosecuted effectively, leaving LGBTQI+ communities vulnerable and weakening their ability to participate safely in civic life. The [UN Independent Expert on SOGI](#) reaffirmed in 2025 that significant gaps remain between legal protections and daily lived realities, particularly for trans women and LGBTQI+ individuals facing intersecting marginalisation.

In this context, civic equality and inclusion in Colombia remain aspirational rather than fully realised. Despite legal advances, structural inequalities, discrimination and widespread violence—especially against LGBTQI+ people—continue to restrict safe and equitable participation, disproportionately harming communities already affected by poverty, exclusion and territorial conflict.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

6. Access to a Secure Digital Environment

Score:



Colombia's digital environment in 2025 presented a complex landscape in which formal guarantees of online rights collided with uneven enforcement, surveillance practices and persistent structural inequalities. Although full internet shutdowns were rare, targeted disruptions—such as the temporary blocking of Reddit—exposed regulatory opacity and created uncertainty for civil society organisations. Constitutional Court rulings strengthened digital freedoms, yet state and non-state actors continued to misuse digital tools, as illustrated by illegal surveillance within military intelligence units and attempts to censor journalists through official social-media accounts.

Digital security threats intensified, with rising cyberattacks, harassment of digital journalists and the spread of coordinated disinformation, particularly in conflict-affected regions where armed groups weaponised online platforms. These pressures heightened risks for CSOs, especially those representing vulnerable communities.

Meanwhile, deep disparities in internet access and digital literacy—particularly in rural and marginalised territories—limited the ability of CSOs to communicate, mobilise and engage with emerging technologies. Together, these factors significantly constrained Colombia's digital civic space.

6.1 | Digital Rights and Freedoms

In 2025, internet and social-media shutdowns in Colombia remained infrequent, yet [targeted disruptions occurred](#), notably the [blocking of the platform Reddit](#) for several days, reportedly on the orders of the national gambling regulator, raising concerns about the opacity and proportionality of such measures. While not full shutdowns, such selective blocks restrict civil society organisations' ability to communicate, mobilise and monitor public affairs, particularly

during politically sensitive periods. The country's legal framework, including cybercrime ([Law 1273 of 2009](#)), [Law 2108 of 2021](#) guaranteeing universal internet access and the protection of digital expression under [Constitutional Court rulings](#), coexists with regulatory practices that create risks for CSOs' operational autonomy.

Government policies governing internet freedom and online content continued evolving in 2025. The Constitutional Court issued rulings reinforcing digital rights, such as [declaring that blocking journalists](#) from official social-media accounts constitutes censorship, and banning [zero-rating practices](#) that limited equitable access to online information. However, enforcement gaps persist, and concerns remain regarding state and non-state misuse of digital tools. The [disciplinary action](#) taken in May 2025 against nine military intelligence officers who engaged in illegal open-source surveillance of politicians, activists and journalists exposed systemic vulnerabilities in oversight of state surveillance practices.

Direct government censorship of political content remains limited but not absent. The 2025 case in which the Governor's office of Cesar censored journalist José Manuel Vega de la Cruz by blocking them on its official X (formerly Twitter) account—later [overturned](#) by the Constitutional Court—illustrates both the persistence of censorship attempts and the reliance on judicial intervention to uphold rights.

Private platforms play a complex role in moderating content. Although they formally align with principles of transparency, their compliance with government blocks—such as ISPs implementing the Reddit restriction—demonstrates a susceptibility to state directives without sufficient safeguards for due process. The absence of binding transparency obligations limits accountability and affects CSOs working on sensitive issues, who depend on stable, predictable access to digital platforms.

Threats and reprisals against online actors remain a significant concern. According to [Freedom House \(2025\)](#), violence against digital journalists persisted, including targeted killings and assassination attempts, while cyberattacks against media outlets increased, with 35% of surveyed journalists reporting website hacks, up from 24% in 2023. These incidents often affect journalists and CSO activists operating in rural and conflict-affected regions, where non-state armed groups exert control. Such digital repression reduces the safety of online civic engagement and undermines the enabling environment for civil society, especially for those advocating for marginalised communities.

6.2 | Digital Security and Privacy

Digital security risks facing civil society organisations (CSOs) in Colombia intensified in 2025, with evidence of state and non-state actors deploying intrusive surveillance technologies and coordinated cyber operations. Although Colombia [registered](#) more than 36 billion cyberattack attempts in 2024, the [Freedom on the Net 2025](#) report documents cases directly affecting activists and journalists, including the illegal deployment of open-source intelligence tools by [nine military intelligence officers](#), who were disciplined in May 2025 for spying on politicians, magistrates, journalists and social leaders. Such practices undermine the safety of civil society actors, contribute to self-censorship and expose human rights defenders—particularly women, LGBTQI+ activists and rural leaders—to targeted harassment and violence. Cyberattacks also increased, with 35% of [surveyed journalists](#) reporting hacking of their outlets' websites, a significant rise from 24% in 2023, reducing their ability to report safely and maintain secure communication channels.

Colombia's data-protection framework, grounded in [Law 1266 of 2008](#) (habeas data for financial information) and [Law 1581 of 2012](#) (general data-protection regime), provides formal safeguards for digital privacy; however, redress mechanisms remain weak and enforcement inconsistent. The lack of clear procedures for reporting digital violations—combined with limited institutional capacity and low levels of digital literacy in rural and conflict-affected territories—restricts CSOs' ability to seek remedy. These shortcomings are compounded by recurring surveillance scandals: [Reuters revealed](#) in 2024 that Colombia had acquired Pegasus spyware, with no transparency regarding its use, raising serious concerns about unlawful monitoring of activists and journalists.

A further threat to civic space comes from disinformation and intimidation campaigns linked to political actors, coordinated bot networks and non-state armed groups. Cases of social-media manipulation, including blocking journalists from official accounts and the spread of targeted harassment through coordinated online operations [were documented in 2025](#). In rural territories, non-state armed groups increasingly weaponised platforms such as TikTok and WhatsApp for recruitment, intimidation and territorial control, placing children, adolescents and community leaders at significant risk. These dynamics collectively erode digital freedoms, creating a hostile online environment for vulnerable groups and severely limiting their capacity to mobilise, communicate safely or participate fully in public life.

6.3 | Digital Accessibility

Digital accessibility in Colombia continued to expand in 2025, yet deep structural disparities persist between urban and rural regions, with significant consequences for civil society organisations and vulnerable groups. National [internet penetration](#) reached 77.3%, with [41.1 million users online](#) at the start of 2025, but connectivity remains markedly uneven: rural areas lag far behind with only 28.8% internet access, reinforcing long-standing territorial inequalities. Unequal access is aggravated by low private-sector investment in remote regions, where profitability is limited, and by frequent power cuts that disrupt connectivity. These constraints significantly reduce CSOs' ability to share content online, mobilise communities and monitor human rights conditions in conflict-affected territories.

Basic ICT and data-literacy skills also remain unevenly distributed. Although Colombia has a growing digital user base, the rapid expansion of internet services has outpaced digital-literacy development, particularly among grassroots CSOs. [Research in 2025](#) highlighted that many community-based organisations lack the skills required to interpret online information, manage digital security risks or utilise digital tools strategically for advocacy. This skills gap directly affects vulnerable groups, who rely on CSOs to amplify their perspectives in public debates and access essential information but face compounded exclusion where connectivity and ICT literacy are weakest.

Artificial intelligence (AI) and emerging technologies present both opportunities and further divides. While AI tools could strengthen monitoring, communication and data analysis, CSOs—especially smaller organisations—remain ill-equipped to adopt these technologies due to limited financial resources and inadequate digital training. The [Digital 2025 report](#) shows that although Colombia has 36.8 million social-media users, the benefits of emerging digital tools are unevenly distributed, with rural and marginalised groups gaining little access to advanced technologies such as AI-based platforms. This digital divide restricts their participation in technology-driven civic processes and reinforces broader inequalities in the digital civic space.

Overall, digital accessibility constraints weaken the enabling environment for civil society by limiting the capacity of CSOs—particularly grassroots, rural, Indigenous, Afro-descendant and women-led organisations—to engage online, advocate effectively, and benefit from emerging technologies that increasingly shape public participation.



C) Recommendations

1. Recommendations to the Government

- Strengthen comprehensive and territorialised protection systems for social leaders, human rights defenders, journalists and peace-agreement signatories by shifting from reactive, individualised measures to preventive, context-specific strategies focused on risk patterns and territorial dynamics.
- Improve coordination between early-warning systems, local authorities, law-enforcement bodies and the justice system to ensure timely investigations, reduce impunity and dismantle structures responsible for violence.
- Guarantee the effective exercise of fundamental freedoms during protest and participation by regulating the right to social mobilisation, ensuring protocols prioritise dialogue, mediation and human rights protections over militarised responses.
- Prevent the criminalisation of social protest, particularly in pre-election periods, and ensure proportional, accountable and civilian-controlled responses to demonstrations.
- Reduce administrative, tax and regulatory burdens disproportionately affecting small, community and rural CSOs by simplifying procedures, adjusting procurement rules and differentiating requirements based on organisational size and context.
- Improve the quality, influence and traceability of participation mechanisms by strengthening feedback loops, ensuring continuity across government transitions and recognising informal and territorial participation spaces.
- Combat stigmatisation of civil society by promoting responsible public discourse, countering misinformation and safeguarding freedom of expression for CSOs, journalists and community leaders.
- Invest in digital connectivity, digital-literacy programmes and secure digital-tools access, particularly in remote, rural and conflict-affected areas, ensuring online engagement does not become an additional barrier to participation.
- Strengthen inter-institutional coordination across human rights, security, participation and transparency bodies during electoral cycles to protect civic participation and safeguard those sustaining democratic life.

2. Recommendations to Civil Society

- Strengthen collective protection mechanisms, including territorial networks, shared risk assessments and coordinated rapid-response systems to address both physical and digital threats.
- Invest in digital-security capacities, including secure communication tools, data-protection practices and organisational protocols to mitigate cyberattacks, surveillance and information theft.
- Improve internal governance, financial management and strategic planning to reduce vulnerability to administrative burdens and ensure sustainable organisational development.
- Enhance digital and AI literacy within organisations to use technology strategically for advocacy, mobilisation, monitoring and public communication.
- Strengthen coalitions to amplify evidence-based advocacy, counter harmful narratives and elevate the voices of marginalised groups such as Indigenous, Afro-descendant, women-led and LGBTQI+ organisations.
- Engage more actively in participatory processes at local and national levels, documenting gaps in state responses and advocating for reforms that shape more equitable and accountable civic-space policies.
- Build alliances with educational institutions, community networks and media actors to promote civic education, democratic values and counteract political polarisation.

3. Recommendations to the International and Donor Community

- Increase multi-year, flexible and core funding to CSOs, prioritising sustainability, organisational strengthening and reduced dependency on short-term project cycles.
- Invest in digital infrastructure, secure technological tools and ICT-capacity building for CSOs, especially those in rural, conflict-affected or low-connectivity regions.
- Support programmes that reinforce digital-rights protections, including counter-surveillance, digital-security training and responses to online harassment targeting activists, journalists and vulnerable groups.
- Back independent monitoring initiatives that document threats to civic space, attacks on social leaders, disinformation campaigns and electoral-period risks, ensuring objective data informs international advocacy.
- Promote inclusive funding practices that prioritise grassroots, Indigenous, Afro-descendant, women-led and LGBTQI+ organisations, recognising their heightened vulnerability and central role in defending rights.
- Encourage South–South cooperation, peer-learning networks and technology-ethics training to help CSOs adapt to emerging technologies such as AI while mitigating inequality and digital exclusion.

- Maintain diplomatic pressure and constructive dialogue with national authorities to uphold international standards on human rights, digital freedoms and civic participation, ensuring civic-space protection remains a priority in bilateral and multilateral engagement.



D) 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 convene a panel of representatives of civil society and experts once a year. The panel for this report was convened in October 2025. 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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