

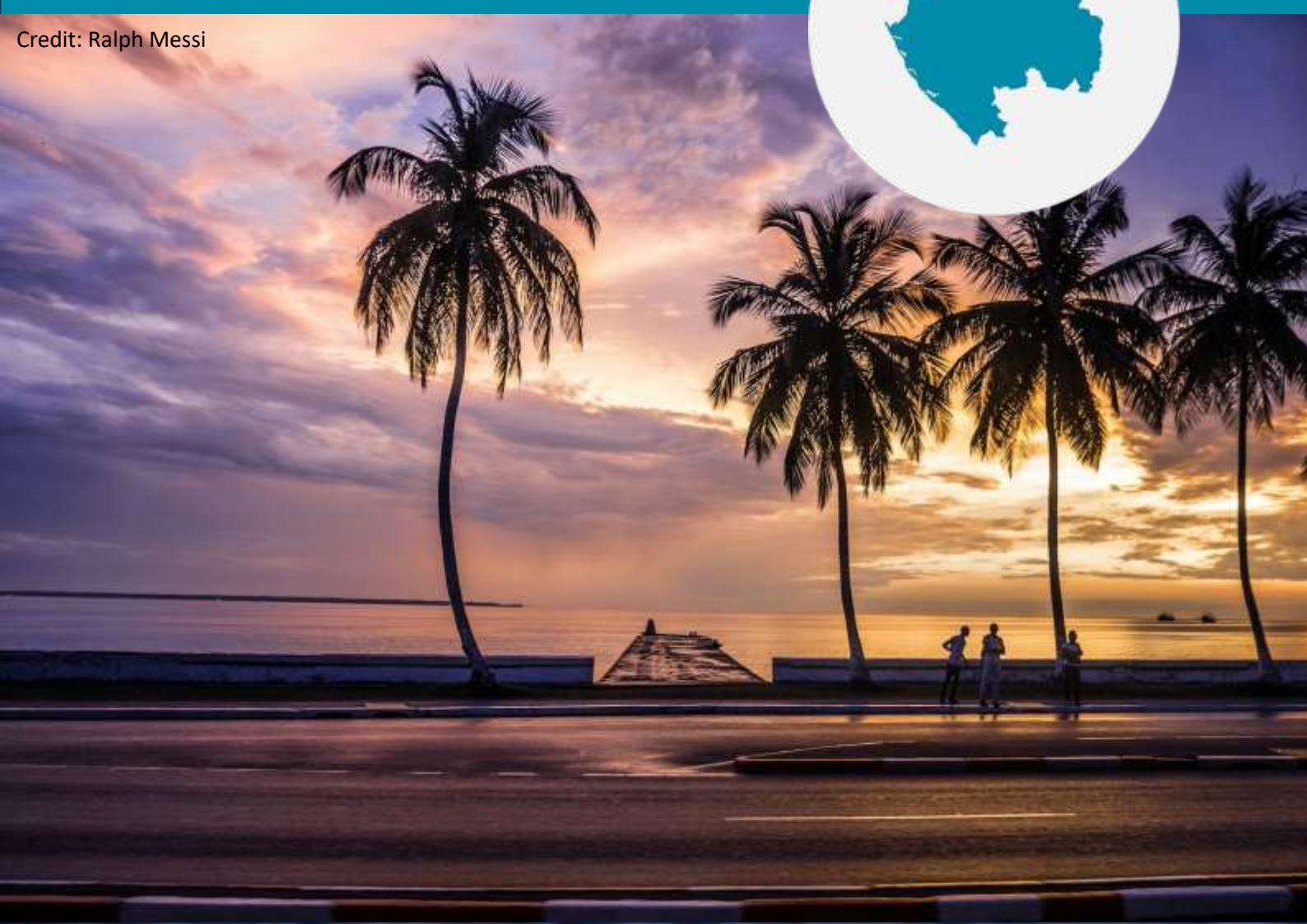
# Gabon

## Country Focus Report

2025



Credit: Ralph Messi



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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

Gabon has undergone significant political and institutional changes since the [August 2023 coup](#), which ended over five decades of Bongo family rule and ushered in a military-led transition under General Brice Oligui Nguema. This transition aimed to restore democratic governance and stabilise the country following years of contested elections and governance failures.

A key milestone was the [Inclusive National Dialogue](#) held in April 2024, widely praised for creating a platform where political actors, civil society, and other stakeholders could debate reforms and envision a more inclusive future. It marked a significant departure from Gabon's historically closed governance model and demonstrated a commitment to participatory processes during the transition. This process culminated in the [constitutional referendum](#) of 16 November 2024, where voters approved a new constitution introducing a seven-year presidential term (renewable once), abolishing the prime minister's role, and prohibiting dynastic succession. These changes were intended to prevent power monopolies and streamline governance. Yet, the extended presidential term [sparked debate](#): while proponents argued it would ensure stability during reforms, opponents warned it could entrench executive dominance and weaken checks and balances, especially given the absence of a prime minister.

The [presidential election of 12 April 2025](#) marked Gabon's first post-coup vote and a critical step in its democratic rebuilding. Transitional leader Brice Oligui Nguema [won decisively](#) with over 90% of the vote, amid high turnout (70%) and generally peaceful conditions, though concerns about military influence persisted. [Legislative and local elections](#) followed in September–October 2025, completing the transition timetable despite reports of irregularities.

Throughout these developments, civil society organisations (CSOs) [played a pivotal role](#) in promoting dialogue, monitoring elections, and advocating for transparency. Initiatives such as [domestic observation missions](#) and campaigns against disinformation strengthened electoral integrity. Despite constitutional guarantees, Gabon's civic space remains "[obstructed](#)", with [restrictions on association and expression](#) still in place. However, [modest gains](#)—such as increased media freedom, CSO engagement in governance and the overall rule of law score increase by 1.3% ([2025 WJP Rule of Law Index](#))—signal opportunities for a more enabling environment.

In sum, Gabon [stands at a crossroads](#). While challenges remain—such as consolidating institutional reforms and addressing lingering political tensions—the current context offers a

more open and collaborative space for civil society engagement. The transition has created opportunities for CSOs to influence policy, monitor governance, and advocate for human rights, laying the foundation for a stronger democratic culture in Gabon.

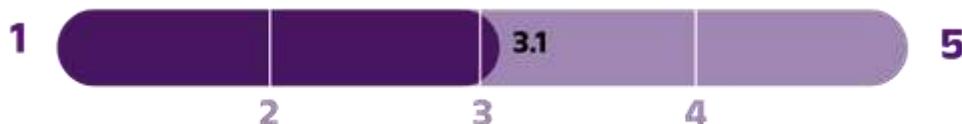
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# B) Assessment of the Enabling Environment

## PRINCIPLE SCORE

### 1. Respect and Protection of Fundamental Freedoms

Score: <sup>1</sup>



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Despite Gabon's 2024 Constitution enshrining freedoms of association (Article 21), assembly (Article 22), and expression (Article 14), the civic space in 2025 remains fragile, reflecting a persistent gap between law and practice. Outdated association laws, permit regimes, and vague "public order" clauses combine with residual criminalisation of speech and administrative discretion to constrain civil society actors, including journalists, activists, and trade unionists. While freedom of expression—though bolstered by improved press rankings—continues to be restricted by summons, intimidation risks, and residual criminalisation of speech. Empirical evidence—from disrupted campaigns and funding blocks to media summons—underscores a persistent gap between formal guarantees and practice, shaping a civic space that is legally protective yet substantively restricted.

#### 1.1 | Freedom of association

Gabon's [2024 Constitution](#) provides a robust normative framework for civic participation. Article 7 explicitly recognises civil society as a key actor in democratic governance and development—signalling intent to include CSOs within governance and policymaking—though operationalisation depends on enabling legislation and practice. Article 21 guarantees the right to form associations, subject to conditions defined by law. These provisions affirm the legitimacy of CSOs and their role in shaping public life.

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

Despite these constitutional guarantees, the operational environment remains constrained by an [outdated legal framework](#) that requires realignment with the constitution. The principal statute governing CSOs—[Law No. 35/62 of 1962](#)—has not been revised to reflect contemporary standards. It [fails](#) to clearly distinguish between associations, NGOs, and foundations, creating legal ambiguity and enabling administrative discretion. Reports from [Gabonese legal commentators and CSOs](#) highlight lengthy registration delays, opaque status recognition, and suspensions without transparent appeal, all of which hinder access to funding and public-utility status essential for credibility.

Freedom House's [2025 assessment](#) rates Gabon at 21/100 ("Not Free"), citing systemic restrictions on associational rights and governance practices that undermine civic space. These findings were echoed by local organisations documenting procedural hurdles and discretionary enforcement—including the [detention and public humiliation](#) of eight Energy and Water Company (SEEG) trade unionists from SYPEG and SYNTEE+, [held by military intelligence](#), shaved bald, paraded at Camp Baraka, and [accused without charges](#) from 8–11 December 2023, and the [allegations](#) surrounding the disappearance of education union leaders Alain Mouangouadi and Thierry Nkoulou following their meeting with the Civil Service Minister on 1 March 2024. However, there have been no recorded cases of obstruction to civil society actors' freedom of association in Gabon during 2025.

Overall, the coexistence of a progressive constitutional framework and a 1962 statute creates a dual-track reality: rights are formally guaranteed but procedurally constrained. While Gabon's 2024 Constitution signals commitment to civic freedoms, the persistence of an outdated legal framework and discretionary administrative practices constrains the full realisation of freedom of association. This gap erodes predictability and trust, discourages new initiatives, and limits the ability of CSOs to operate effectively. Without legal modernisation, administrative discretion will continue to undermine the enabling environment for civil society. Updating Law 35/62 to clarify organisational categories, streamline registration, and codify appeal rights is essential to align practice with constitutional guarantees and international norms under the ICCPR.

## 1.2 | Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

Gabon's 2024 Constitution reaffirms the right to peaceful assembly but subjects public gatherings to prior authorisation—Article 22 states that “assemblies, demonstrations or marches in public spaces must be authorised under the conditions provided for by law,” placing the exercise of this freedom within an administrative-permit regime that can be tightened during transitions or perceived security risks. In 2025, authorities framed public-order management around electoral milestones, with the [UN's Special Representative for Central Africa urging](#) a climate that is credible, inclusive and rights-respecting ahead of the 12 April 2025 presidential poll, explicitly calling out intimidation and human rights violations as threats to peace and security. These good-offices appeals underline that the state's security discourse materially affects citizens' ability to assemble in practice.

The legal environment surrounding collective political action further shifted with the Loi n° 016/2025 on political parties. Adopted on 27 June 2025, the law [introduced onerous compliance thresholds](#)—10,000 members across all nine provinces and extensive documentation—and empowered authorities to suspend parties for “disturbance of public order,” a vague ground that can justify bans and dispersals of public meetings convened by unrecognised or non-compliant formations, thereby narrowing the practical space for assemblies linked to emerging movements. Evidence compiled [by independent monitors](#) in July–September 2025 notes the use of “public order” to prohibit or disperse gatherings of the

National Labour and Progress Party (PNTP), with activists reportedly detained in connection with attempted meetings, illustrating how party-law mechanisms and authorisation rules intersect to restrict assembly rights on the ground.

While [international observers](#) broadly characterised the April 2025 presidential election and the September–October 2025 legislative polls as peaceful and orderly, those procedural evaluations do not negate the prevailing structural constraints on spontaneous or contentious assemblies in the capital and peri-urban areas. Rather, they point to tightly managed event environments contrasted with a civic space that remains controlled outside electoral days. Broader indices reinforce this reading: Gabon's civic space assessed as "[obstructed](#)", underscoring the gap between formal guarantees and lived realities.

Empirical cases illustrate this disconnect. In October 2024, an awareness campaign on women's rights led by the NGO *Femmes Debout* and implemented by MALACHIE was interrupted by local authorities, citing lack of prior authorisation. In January 2025, the association *Jeunesse Active* had its international funding blocked after organising a forum on electoral reform. Similarly, the collective *Citoyens pour la Transparence*, active in Libreville's suburbs, was dissolved without notice after denouncing irregularities in the constitutional referendum process.

Taken together, state practices—permit requirements under Article 22, elastic “public order” justifications, and a party-law compliance architecture that can be leveraged to halt or disperse meetings—enable authorities to supervise and calibrate civic mobilisation while restricting the spontaneity and reach of peaceful assembly, particularly for smaller, issue-based groups without nationwide infrastructure or for CSO-linked coalitions engaging in policy critique. CSOs face heightened transaction costs and legal exposure when convening public events, a chilling effect where the threat of denial, dispersal or detention deters participation, and a privacy risk where party-law documentation requirements intersect with assembly planning—conditions that cumulatively compress the civic arena even as electoral processes proceed under international observation.

### 1.3 | Freedom of Expression

Gabon's 2024 Constitution sets an ambitious baseline for expression, with Article 14 guaranteeing freedom of opinion, expression, communication, press and access to information, plus individual rights to access and correct personal data, and a legal framework governing ICT to safeguard privacy. Ordinance No. 00012/PR/2018 of 23 February 2018 [enshrines the decriminalisation](#) of press offences in the Gabonese Republic. In practice, however, state conduct and sectoral laws create a mixed picture. Reporters Without Borders [notes a striking improvement](#)—Gabon climbed to 41st in the 2025 World Press Freedom Index—yet RSF's delegation in Libreville recorded continuing summons of journalists by security services, limited access to official sources, and a media regulator (HAC) with weak independence; RSF therefore urged the government to ensure press offences are handled under the Communication Code rather than the Criminal Code and to strengthen HAC's resourcing and procedures. Freedom House's [2025 assessment](#) still rates Gabon “Not Free” (21/100), citing systemic constraints on civil liberties and governance practices that chill expression, despite constitutional reforms and elections.

Specific legal provisions and enforcement patterns shape an uneven enabling environment. The Criminal Code retains broad offences such as “contempt” of the president or officials, punishable by six months to five years' imprisonment, which the U.S. Department of State's

[2024 report](#) flagged as credible accounts of intimidation for public criticism—norms that remained relevant into 2025 as journalists reported pressure and questioning.

Empirical evidence from 2025 shows both progress and [persisting controls](#). International observers characterised the 12 April 2025 presidential election and the September–October 2025 legislative polls as largely peaceful and orderly, yet civil society [documents](#) continued arbitrary suspensions of outlets and prosecutorial use of “public order” narratives that limit dissent and amplify self-censorship, alongside earlier cases—including the 2024 prosecution of a minor for satirical content—that signal the fragility of expressive freedoms across digital and physical spaces.

At the same time, civil society actors—journalists, activists, and trade unionists—played constructive roles in countering disinformation and monitoring electoral integrity in 2025, demonstrating how expression can enable accountability when safe channels exist. International IDEA [documents](#) [CSO initiatives](#) that deployed electoral-risk monitoring and fact-checking across social platforms, reinforcing transparency during the presidential poll.

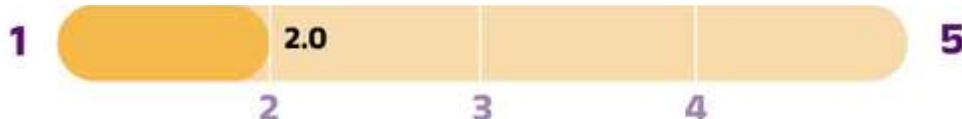
The overall impact is a hybrid environment: constitutional and sectoral reforms have opened windows for journalism and civic speech, but summons, intimidation risks, regulator weakness, and speech-criminalisation residues continue to narrow the perimeter for robust, critical expression. Unless authorities codify press-law primacy over criminal statutes, strengthen HAC independence, and align data practices with constitutional privacy guarantees, the enabling environment will remain constrained, with journalists, activists and union leaders calibrating speech against legal uncertainty and potential reprisal.

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## PRINCIPLE SCORE

### 2. Supportive Legal and Regulatory Framework

Score:



Although Gabon's 2024 Constitution guarantees freedom of association under Article 21, the enabling environment for civil society in 2025 remained constrained by outdated legislation and discretionary practices. Registration under Law 35/62 is legally defined but procedurally complex, requiring centralised filing, publication fees, and extensive personal data, with no clear appeal mechanisms—barriers that disproportionately affect rural and marginalised groups and delay access to funding. Operational autonomy is formally recognised, yet the Constitution's Article 22 permit regime for public activities and administrative reporting obligations create compliance burdens and expose CSOs to surveillance risks, while scrutiny of foreign partnerships and funding adds further uncertainty. Protection against interference is weak: dissolution grounds are broadly framed under Law 35/62 and enforcement relies on public-order clauses without transparent remedies, enabling politically motivated suspensions. Cases documented in 2025, including arbitrary restrictions on outreach campaigns and financial pressure on rights defenders, illustrate how legal ambiguity and administrative discretion undermine predictability and autonomy. Collectively, these factors produce a civic space that is constitutionally open but practically fragile, where CSOs operate under conditions of legal uncertainty, resource dependency, and vulnerability to interference—limiting their ability to plan, advocate, and deliver services effectively.

#### 2.1 | Registration

[Article 21 of Gabon's 2024 Constitution](#) guarantees freedom of association for “all persons”, suggesting formal inclusivity for women, youth, persons with disabilities, and rural communities. [Law No. 35/62 of 10 Dec 1962](#) operationalises this right but introduces conditions that shape who can effectively register. For domestic associations, Article 3 permits formation without prior authorisation, yet legal capacity—and thus access to funding and contracts—depends on compliance with Articles 8–10 (registration, filing, publication). These requirements are not discriminatory on their face, but administrative practice creates indirect

barriers: required [dossiers submitted](#) in Libreville at the Direction Générale des Élections et des Libertés Publiques include [multiple copies](#) and detailed officer data, and carry a [10,000 CFA Official Journal fee](#). For marginalised or provincial groups, travel and cost burdens are significant. Civil [society leaders](#) and [media](#) in March 2025 described the law as “obsolete”, citing [lack of typologies for NGOs](#) and foundations and procedural opacity that discourages formalisation and donor engagement.

Article 4’s nullity clause for associations with illicit or security-threatening aims provides a legitimate safeguard against criminal misuse but, without clear definitions or judicial oversight, it risks arbitrary application that can suppress dissenting voices under a broad “security” label. Article 5’s eligibility rules (adult, full civil rights, no disqualifying convictions) are proportionate and generally inclusive, yet they may exclude rehabilitated individuals and youth-led initiatives, limiting leadership diversity in civil society.

Foreign or foreign-linked organisations face a stricter regime under Articles 21–28. Article 21 requires prior presidential authorisation for formation of each establishment, revocable at any time by decree. Article 22 bans political activity and foreign-country funding, backed by nullity and criminal penalties. Article 23’s broad definition—capturing entities with 25% foreign membership or “run by foreigners”—extends these constraints to hybrid groups. Prefects may demand detailed disclosures (Art. 24), and failure or misstatement triggers penalties. Applications (Art. 25) require exhaustive identity and nationality data, raising privacy concerns under Law 025/2023 on personal data. Article 26 imposes automatic nullity for noncompliance, while Articles 27–28 mandate publication of decrees and allow liquidation or confiscation of assets upon withdrawal of authorisation. These provisions create high regulatory risk and uncertainty, deterring cross-border collaboration and chilling participation among vulnerable actors.

On clarity, accessibility, and affordability, procedures remain paper-based, non-standardised, and slow. Provisional receipts are common; definitive recognition often lags, leaving CSOs in legal limbo. The centralised model privileges urban, well-resourced actors. While the SGLP platform announced digitisation in 2025, nationwide implementation is incomplete. Publication of officer data in the 2023 National Directory compounds privacy risks, contradicting the strengthened data-protection framework. These frictions—cost, delay, and exposure—are documented in domestic reform campaigns and external governance assessments.

Appeal mechanisms are virtually absent. Law 35/62 provides no explicit, time-bound review for denied or delayed registration. Recognition of public utility under Decree 286/PR/MI (1962) also lacks modern remedies. For foreign associations, presidential discretion dominates; decrees are published but not subject to statutory appeal. Without predictable timelines or independent oversight, administrative decisions operate as final in practice, reinforced by Article 28’s immediate execution powers. This vacuum undermines transparency and legal certainty, leaving CSOs reliant on informal negotiation rather than rights-based recourse.

In sum, Gabon’s framework formally permits any person to form an association, but substantive access is conditioned by procedural burdens and executive discretion. Domestic groups face indirect exclusion through cost and delay; foreign or mixed entities encounter categorical bans and asset-risk provisions. Registration thus functions as a governance bottleneck: it determines which voices enter public life and on what terms. Reform proposals—digitisation, decentralisation, typology updates, privacy safeguards, and appeal rights—reflect recognition that the enabling environment remains protective in law yet constraining in practice.

## 2.2 Operational environment

Gabon's legal framework formally permits CSOs to define their governance and objectives without prior approval (Art. 3 of Law No. 35/62), but this autonomy is conditional. Associations may form freely under Law No. 35/62 (10 December 1962), yet they lack legal capacity until they complete registration steps under Articles 8–10, including filing and publication. Article 10 further restricts operational freedom by imposing a three-month moratorium: associations cannot conduct activities until they receive a final receipt from the Interior Ministry. This delay creates a legal limbo where organisations exist but cannot act, undermining responsiveness to urgent social needs.

Substantive constraints also shape the operational space. Article 4 nullifies associations whose aims are illicit or “likely to compromise public security” or “discredit political institutions.” While legitimate in principle, these terms are broad and undefined, enabling discretionary interpretation that can suppress advocacy or governance-focused work under the guise of security. Article 5’s eligibility rules—requiring administrators to be adults with full civic rights and no serious convictions—are proportionate for integrity but exclude youth-led initiatives and rehabilitated individuals, limiting leadership diversity.

Administrative oversight is significant. Registration remains centralized in Libreville, requiring paper dossiers, multiple copies, detailed officer data, and a 10,000 CFA Official Journal fee. These requirements impose cost and access barriers for rural and marginalized groups. Post-registration, oversight persists through mandatory publication of officers’ personal data in the 2023 Annuaire for social protection associations, a measure that conflicts with Gabon’s strengthened privacy regime under Law 025/2023 and risks chilling participation among vulnerable actors.

Funding regulation is layered. Article 13 allows registered associations to collect member subscriptions (capped at 10,000 francs) and manage funds without state subsidy, while Articles 16–17 grant public-utility associations broader powers—accepting gifts and legacies subject to prefectoral or ministerial authorisation and strict asset-use rules. These controls aim to prevent misuse but introduce transaction costs and delays, particularly for high-value donations requiring Council of Ministers decrees. For foreign associations, Articles 21–28 impose categorical restrictions: prior presidential authorisation, bans on political activity and foreign-country funding, and asset-risk provisions upon withdrawal of authorisation. This regime deters international partnerships and narrows resource flows for cross-border initiatives.

Permit obligations further constrain operations. Public gatherings [require prior authorisation](#) under Article 22 of the Constitution, making outreach, marches, and awareness campaigns contingent on administrative discretion. Combined with the absence of codified, time-bound appeal mechanisms for registration or permit refusals, these rules embed uncertainty and incentivise informal negotiation over rights-based remedies.

Empirical evidence confirms these impacts. Freedom House (2025) rates Gabon “[Not Free](#)” ([21/100](#)), citing systemic civil-liberty restrictions; the [EU SEE snapshot](#) describes civic space as “formally protected yet substantively narrow.” CSOs demonstrated capacity during the April 2025 elections—deploying fact-checking and violence-monitoring initiatives—but such engagement depended on exceptional cooperation rather than predictable legal guarantees.

In sum, Gabon's framework nominally enables CSOs to self-govern, but operational autonomy is curtailed by procedural delays, discretionary security clauses, centralised registration, intrusive data practices, and layered funding controls. For foreign-linked actors, categorical bans and liquidation powers amplify vulnerability. The enabling environment remains protective in law yet constraining in practice, making civic participation contingent on resources, geography, and administrative goodwill.

### 2.3 Protection against interference

Gabon's legal framework offers partial safeguards against interference but leaves significant gaps that expose CSOs to discretionary control. On paper, the 2024 Constitution guarantees freedom of association (Art. 21) and permits restrictions only for public order and constitutional objectives (Art. 26). Law No. 35/62 reinforces this by allowing associations to form freely without prior authorisation (Art. 3). However, protection against arbitrary dissolution is weak. While Article 4 defines nullity for associations with illicit or security-threatening aims, these grounds are broadly framed—covering objects “contrary to good morals,” activities “likely to compromise public security,” or those that “discredit political institutions.” Such elastic language creates interpretive leeway that can be used to target advocacy groups under vague security rationales. Article 19 provides a mechanism for asset liquidation when dissolution occurs, empowering courts to appoint a curator if statutes or assemblies fail to decide on property devolution. This judicial role is positive for asset management but does not substitute for due process in the dissolution decision itself. Critically, the law lacks explicit, time-bound appeal rights or independent review standards, leaving CSOs with limited recourse against politically motivated or unjustified closures.

Safeguards against state or third-party interference are similarly thin. Article 18 subjects associations recognised as public utility to “special control” when they receive state subsidies, authorising cancellation of subsidies for any hindrance to oversight. While financial accountability is legitimate, the provision's open-ended phrasing allows control measures to extend beyond subsidy compliance into operational domains, creating leverage for administrative influence. Combined with permit requirements for public gatherings under the Constitution (Art. 22), these controls can be deployed to restrict outreach or advocacy under the guise of order maintenance.

Inspection and intervention powers further complicate the enabling environment. Article 18's “special control” lacks procedural limits—such as scope, frequency, or proportionality—raising the risk of intrusive audits that burden operations or serve as surveillance. Broader administrative practice reinforces this concern: registration under Articles 8–10 remains centralised and manual, requiring extensive personal data, multiple copies, and publication fees, while sectoral regulations mandate public disclosure of officers' identities in national directories. These measures, though framed as transparency, conflict with Gabon's strengthened privacy regime under Law 025/2023 and expose CSO leaders to harassment or profiling, deterring engagement by vulnerable actors. For foreign associations, the risk is amplified: Articles 21–28 impose prior presidential authorisation, revocable at will, and allow liquidation or confiscation of assets upon withdrawal—powers that, absent clear criteria or remedies, function as potent instruments of control.

In practice, these gaps translate into a governance environment where formal rights coexist with discretionary enforcement. While judicial involvement in asset liquidation (Art. 19) and statutory definitions of illicit aims (Art. 4) provide some structure, the absence of codified appeal mechanisms, narrowly tailored inspection rules, and privacy safeguards leaves CSOs vulnerable to interference by state actors and, indirectly, third parties leveraging regulatory opacity. The result is an enabling environment that is protective in law yet precarious in

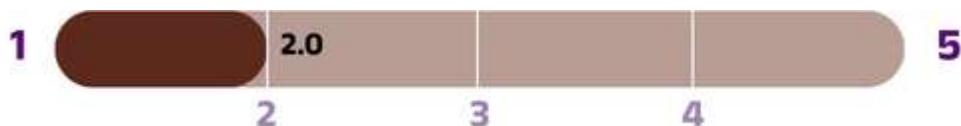
practice—where operational security depends less on rights guarantees than on administrative tolerance and political context.

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## PRINCIPLE SCORE

### 3. Accessible and Sustainable Resources

Score:



Civil society in Gabon operates in a resource environment marked by structural fragility and systemic constraints. Access to resources is formally guaranteed under constitutional provisions, yet in practice it is conditioned by centralised registration, disclosure mandates, and regulatory controls that raise costs and create barriers for smaller or rural organisations. Funding streams are highly donor-dependent, with international grants dominating the landscape while domestic subsidies remain opaque and discretionary, reinforcing political patronage and excluding governance-focused actors. Most available funding is project-based, tied to rigid timelines and thematic priorities, leaving gaps between cycles that disrupt staffing and programme continuity. Core funding is rare, limiting investment in institutional development and strategic planning, and forcing CSOs into short-term survival modes. Tax and fiscal frameworks offer no broad incentives for philanthropy, while VAT and customs restrictions increase operational costs, narrowing opportunities for local resource mobilisation. Banking conditions and credit tightening further strain liquidity, making it difficult for organisations to bridge funding gaps. These dynamics collectively undermine autonomy, resilience, and long-term impact, as CSOs struggle to diversify income, build self-reliance, and maintain continuity in an unpredictable funding ecosystem. The result is a civic space that is legally protected but substantively constrained by resource insecurity—a structural vulnerability that shapes not only organisational sustainability but the capacity of civil society to fulfil its democratic role.

#### 3.1 | Accessibility of Resources

Access to resources for civil society actors in Gabon is shaped less by availability than by a dense web of regulatory and procedural controls that condition eligibility, influence funding flows, and create structural barriers for those working on sensitive issues or with marginalised communities. Law No. 35/62 allows associations to form freely (Art. 3) yet withholds legal capacity until registration and publication requirements under Articles 8–10 are met. This linkage between legal personality and eligibility for grants or contracts means that

organisations—especially those serving marginalised groups—must navigate [centralised, paper-based filing](#) at the Interior Ministry, multiple copies, and detailed personal identifiers, plus a Journal Official fee of 10,000 CFA. These costs and privacy risks discourage formalisation and limit access to institutional funding streams.

Government regulations influence resource flows most acutely for organisations working on sensitive issues. For foreign-linked actors, Articles 21–28 of Law 35/62 impose prior presidential authorisation, bans on political activity and foreign-country funding, and asset-risk provisions upon withdrawal of authorisation—categorical restrictions that effectively exclude international grants for advocacy or electoral oversight. Observed 2025 cases, such as financial pressure on Réseau des Défenseurs des Droits Humains en Afrique Centrale (REDHAC) after election monitoring, underscore how administrative discretion can be leveraged to constrain resource access in politically sensitive contexts.

Articles 13, 16 and 18 of Law 35/62 impose strict financial governance by capping member contributions at 10,000 francs, subjecting public-utility associations to state oversight when receiving subsidies, and requiring prior authorisation for high-value gifts and property ownership. While these measures aim to ensure accountability and prevent misuse, they embed discretionary controls that limit CSOs' financial autonomy, constrain resource diversification, and create dependency on administrative approval—undermining the resilience and independence of Gabon's civic space.

On availability and capacity, international funding windows exist but remain unevenly accessible. The [UNDP GEF Small Grants Programme](#) launched a Gabon call in October 2025, offering structured templates and thematic priorities for environment-focused CSOs. While this demonstrates external resource availability, it presumes legal status and proposal readiness—capabilities often lacking among grassroots actors. [The DEFI Project report, published in 2024](#), highlights that small organisations suffer from a lack of skills in project management, fundraising, strategic communication and monitoring and evaluation. This lack of technical capacity reduces their credibility with partners and their effectiveness in the field. In addition, donors provided short application windows and limited training in 2025, highlighting systemic gaps in CSO capacity to monitor calls and respond effectively.

Tax policy offers little incentive for philanthropy. Corporate charitable contributions [are not deductible](#) under Gabon's tax code, reducing motivation for domestic giving. Conversely, VAT at 18% and a 1% solidarity levy increase operating costs unless exemptions apply. A narrow offset exists for foundations: [customs rules](#) under Law N° 2/2000 of 18/08/2000 ratifying the ordinance n°2/99 of 30/07/1999 [permit duty-free import](#) of donated goods for foundations recognised by the Interior Minister, subject to prior approval, but this mechanism excludes most associations and NGO purchases. No broad-based tax deductions or exemptions exist to encourage donations, and there is no clarity on income tax treatment of grants, leaving CSOs exposed to potential double taxation risks.

Banking and financial services pose structural hurdles rather than overt denial. [Rising non-performing loans](#) (10.2% in 2024) led banks to [tighten collateral and raise interest](#) rates in early 2025, constraining CSOs' ability to secure credit lines or bridging finance. While account freezes were not systemic, anecdotal reports indicate heightened scrutiny of transactions linked to governance or rights programming, raising concerns about sensitive financial data being used for surveillance or intimidation.

Overall, Gabon's legal framework formally permits CSOs to access resources, but practical constraints—registration burdens, disclosure mandates, restrictive foreign-funding rules,

opaque subsidy allocation, lack of tax incentives, and tightened banking conditions—combine to create an enabling environment that is protective in theory yet exclusionary in practice. External funding opportunities like the GEF call show that resources exist, but compliance costs and capacity gaps keep many CSOs—particularly those working on sensitive issues or representing marginalised communities—at the margins of resource flows.

### 3.2 | Effectiveness of Resources

Donor-imposed conditions on funding for Gabonese CSOs are primarily designed to ensure accountability and thematic alignment, but they often introduce structural rigidity. International partners typically require audited financial statements, detailed reporting frameworks, and compliance with procurement standards. These conditions, while legitimate for transparency, can become exclusionary for smaller organisations lacking technical capacity. In 2025, multilateral programmes such as UNDP's GEF Small Grants demanded formal registration, structured templates, and rapid turnaround times—criteria that favour established actors and marginalise grassroots initiatives. Government restrictions amplify these challenges: for associations recognised as public utility under Articles 16 and 17 of Law 35/62, property ownership is limited to operational needs, securities must be held in registered form or deposited with the Gabonese Development Bank, and gifts above 10 million CFA require ministerial or Council of Ministers approval. These controls embed discretionary power, slowing resource flows and creating dependency on administrative goodwill, particularly for organisations perceived as politically sensitive.

Alignment between funding conditions and CSO priorities remains uneven. Donor frameworks often emphasise global agendas—climate resilience, gender equity, or biodiversity—while governance and accountability work, though critical in Gabon's context, attracts fewer flexible funds. This misalignment forces CSOs to recalibrate missions or adopt donor language to remain eligible, diluting autonomy and strategic focus. Domestic subsidies are opaque: the 2025 U.S. Fiscal Transparency Report flagged gaps in procurement disclosure, reinforcing perceptions that state-linked resources are allocated through discretionary rather than rights-based processes. For CSOs advocating electoral integrity or human rights, these dynamics translate into heightened vulnerability, as funding streams rarely accommodate politically sensitive programming without risk.

Flexibility in donor funding is limited. Most grants operate on rigid timelines and predefined outputs, leaving little room for adaptation when operational environments shift. During the 2025 monitoring period, CSOs monitoring violence and misinformation reported difficulty reallocating budgets for emergency security measures or digital protection. While some donors introduced rapid-response windows, these were exceptional rather than systemic, underscoring the need for contingency clauses and security budgets in standard agreements. The absence of such provisions exposes organisations to heightened risk, as they must absorb costs for safeguarding staff and data without external support.

Responsiveness to security concerns is uneven. Technical partners offered ad hoc risk assessments and training in 2025, but few funding frameworks integrated harm mitigation strategies or flexible disbursement mechanisms. This gap is critical in Gabon's context, where civic actors face surveillance and harassment risks, particularly when engaging in governance or rights advocacy. Without donor-backed security planning, CSOs often resort to informal networks or self-financing, which undermines programme continuity and staff safety.

In sum, while resources exist, their effectiveness is constrained by donor-driven conditions, rigid funding structures, and regulatory controls that embed discretion and limit autonomy. For

CSOs—especially those working on sensitive issues or representing marginalised communities—these dynamics translate into operational fragility, forcing reliance on short-term, compliance-heavy grants and exposing organisations to financial and security risks. A more enabling framework would require harmonising donor accountability with flexibility, codifying transparent state subsidy rules, introducing tax incentives for giving, and embedding security provisions in funding agreements to ensure resources strengthen rather than compromise civic space.

### 3.3 | Resource sustainability

The sustainability of resources for Gabonese civil society actors remains one of the most pressing structural challenges shaping their autonomy and long-term impact. Access to a diverse and reliable pool of funding sources is limited. Most CSOs depend heavily on international donors, as domestic public subsidies remain opaque and discretionary, with no statutory framework for competitive calls or eligibility criteria. This dependency creates vulnerability: when a single donor shifts priorities or delays disbursement, organisations face operational paralysis. Smaller CSOs, particularly those working on governance or rights issues, are disproportionately affected because they lack the networks and compliance capacity to diversify funding streams. Reliance on one-off grants also forces organisations into short-term survival mode, undermining strategic planning and institutional growth.

Funding cycles exacerbate this fragility. Project-based grants dominate the landscape, often tied to rigid timelines and thematic silos such as health, environment, or gender. While these streams enable targeted interventions, they rarely provide continuity. Gaps between projects are common, leaving CSOs unable to retain staff or sustain programmes. Findings from the [CSO Sustainability Index \(2025\)](#) place Gabon in the “sustainability impeded” category with a financial sustainability score of 6.3/7, signalling heavy reliance on external donors and weak local resource mobilisation. This structural weakness translates into precarious human resources: most organisations operate with volunteers or temporary allowances linked to specific projects, preventing the formation of permanent teams and limiting knowledge transfer. Programmatic interruptions also erode community trust, as beneficiaries experience inconsistent service delivery.

The resource environment significantly constrains CSOs’ ability to achieve long-term goals and engage in strategic planning. With funding largely project-based and rarely covering core costs, organisations cannot invest in institutional development, governance systems, or innovation. Strategic priorities are often subordinated to donor agendas, forcing CSOs to adapt missions to fit available calls rather than community needs. While multi-year partnerships—such as UNFPA’s engagement with youth-focused CSOs in 2025—illustrate the stabilising effect of sustained funding, such cases remain exceptional. For most actors, the absence of core funding mechanisms perpetuates a cycle of short-termism, where survival eclipses impact.

Self-reliance remains aspirational rather than achievable. Legal and fiscal frameworks offer little incentive for domestic philanthropy: Gabon’s tax code does not provide meaningful deductions for charitable contributions, and [VAT at 18%](#) applies to most goods and services, increasing operational costs unless exemptions are granted. Customs benefits for foundations recognised by the Interior Ministry exist but exclude most associations, narrowing opportunities for resource diversification. Income-generating activities—such as training services or consultancy—are pursued by some structured CSOs, but these remain limited due to market constraints and regulatory ambiguity. Membership fees, capped at 10,000 CFA under Article 13 of Law 35/62, provide negligible revenue, further restricting financial

autonomy. Volunteer engagement offers some relief, but reliance on unpaid labour cannot substitute for sustainable financing and often leads to burnout and high turnover.

The cumulative effect of these dynamics is an ecosystem where CSOs struggle to maintain continuity, invest in institutional resilience, and scale impact. Resource insecurity forces organisations into reactive modes, chasing short-term grants and donor-driven priorities rather than pursuing long-term strategies rooted in local needs. Networking and coalition-building offer partial solutions: regional and international platforms have enabled joint funding applications and capacity-building in 2025, but these remain insufficient compared to systemic reforms needed to institutionalise transparent public funding, incentivise philanthropy, and expand fiscal benefits for civil society.

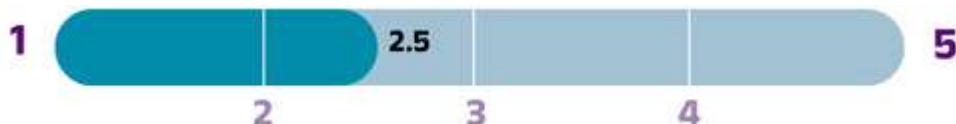
In sum, Gabon's civic space is formally protected under Article 21 of the Constitution, yet substantively constrained by resource fragility. Without structural changes—such as tax incentives, core funding mechanisms, and predictable domestic support—CSOs will remain dependent on external donors, vulnerable to funding shocks, and unable to achieve the autonomy and sustainability required for meaningful democratic engagement.

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# PRINCIPLE SCORE

## 4. Open and Responsive State

Score:



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Gabon's 2024 Constitution enshrines transparency, participation, and accountability as governance principles under Articles 14 and 9, yet the enabling environment for civil society in 2025 remains structurally weak. Transparency obligations are fragmented: while some decisions and budgets are published online and sectoral frameworks like EITI provide disclosure, the absence of a comprehensive access-to-information law, unreliable fiscal reporting, and limited audit publication restrict timely oversight. Participation has expanded symbolically through national dialogues and constitutional reform consultations, but CSOs rarely influence final decisions, and early-stage input remains constrained by late disclosures and lack of codified timelines. Accountability mechanisms are embryonic: outside EITI's multi-stakeholder processes, there are no statutory duties to document how CS input is used, no clear rationales for non-adoption, and no enforceable appeal rights. Cases from 2025—including EITI's moderate validation score and fiscal transparency gaps—illustrate a governance model where civil society is invited to consult but lacks tools to track, challenge, or co-shape outcomes. Without systemic reforms to institutionalise open data, structured feedback loops, and binding accountability standards, Gabon's civic space will remain formally participatory yet substantively limited, undermining CSOs' capacity to drive evidence-based policy and democratic oversight.

### 4.1 | Transparency

The constitution of Gabon provides a foundational guarantee for access to information. Article 14 affirms that the State guarantees citizens equal access to information and recognises the right of everyone to freedom of opinion, expression, communication, and the press. It explicitly states that access to administrative documents is open to all citizens and extends to personal data held in files, archives, or computer records, with rights to correction and updating under conditions set by law. Article 9 complements this by requiring neutrality, transparency, and integrity. However, Article 26 of the Constitution allows proportionate restrictions to protect

public order. Read together, these clauses frame transparency as a constitutional value but also permit limits that can affect disclosure in practice.

Although the Constitution clearly recognises the right of individuals to access information held by public institutions, Gabon does not yet have a comprehensive access to information statute that translates this constitutional guarantee into enforceable obligations across all tiers of government. Proactive publication occurs in certain areas: enacted budgets are posted online, and major acts and decrees are published through [the Official Journal](#), including the [February 2025 decree](#) appointing members of the Autorité de Contrôle des Élections et du Référendum (ACER). These measures demonstrate some digital accessibility of core decisions. Nevertheless, the [2025 U.S. Fiscal Transparency Report](#) identifies significant gaps: the executive budget proposal was not released in a timely manner, debt disclosures were incomplete, quarterly budget execution reports were unreliable, audit reports were delayed, and procurement information was rarely publicised. These deficiencies directly hinder civil society organisations in monitoring government performance, conducting budget advocacy, and pursuing litigation strategies. In the extractive sector, Gabon's participation in the [Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative](#) (EITI) provides a more structured transparency framework, with the [2025 Validation](#) scoring 73.5 overall but only 54.5 on transparency, signalling progress but also persistent weaknesses.

While constitutional provisions and sectoral laws such as the Electronic Transactions Law impose general duties of openness, Gabon lacks a unified legal framework requiring all public institutions to publish draft laws, policies, budgets, and audit reports in accessible formats and within defined timelines. Current practice focuses on promulgated acts rather than draft-stage disclosure, limiting opportunities for early public input. Audit reports and procurement data are particularly under-published, weakening accountability mechanisms. The EITI process partly fills this gap by mandating disclosure and enabling civil society input through validation and [multi-stakeholder oversight](#), but it is sector-specific and does not replace a general right-to-information regime.

Despite constitutional recognition of the right to access administrative documents, Gabon has no codified procedures for filing information requests. There are no standardised forms, fee structures, waivers for vulnerable groups, or legally binding timeframes for processing requests. CSOs and journalists typically rely on informal administrative correspondence or, in some cases, court petitions, which are costly and unpredictable. The absence of clear procedures increases transaction costs and delays, disproportionately affecting smaller organisations and those operating outside Libreville. Digitalisation [initiatives announced in 2025](#), including an ordinance aimed at improving online service delivery and administrative traceability, could enhance accessibility, but without statutory timelines and enforcement mechanisms, these reforms will remain incomplete.

The current transparency landscape is hybrid: constitutional guarantees and sectoral tools like EITI enable targeted access, and some decisions and budgets are published online. Yet the absence of a comprehensive statutory regime, weak audit publication, unreliable budget execution reporting, and limited procurement disclosure collectively narrow the enabling environment for civil society. Organisations face higher costs to obtain data, reduced timeliness for advocacy, and minimal remedies against denial—constraints that are most acute for governance and accountability actors in provincial areas. A coherent legal framework establishing enforceable rights, proactive publication mandates, and independent oversight would significantly strengthen civil society's ability to operate effectively and align practice with constitutional principles.

## 4.2 | Participation

Civil society actors in Gabon are formally recognised under the 2024 Constitution, which guarantees participation in public affairs through Articles 15 and 26. Article 15 guarantees the right to participate in elections and management of public affairs directly or indirectly through a representative, and Article 26 allows proportionate limits to protect public order—provisions that enable participation and consultation in principle but permit administrative control over how and when civil society actors participate. This normative framework does not translate into binding mechanisms for co-decision or institutionalised representation. CSOs lack permanent seats in key governance bodies such as public fund committees or regulatory commissions, leaving their role largely advisory and confined to ad hoc consultations. While policymakers increasingly solicit civil society input, these engagements often occur late in the policy cycle, limiting the ability to shape outcomes. For example, the 2025 [Fiscal Transparency Report](#) noted that executive budget proposals were not published early enough for meaningful feedback, and audit reports were delayed, pushing CSOs toward reactive commentary rather than proactive co-design.

Participation opportunities vary in form but remain uneven in substance. Large-scale forums such as the 2024 Inclusive National Dialogue and the constitutional referendum process showcased broad consultation, yet [observer reports](#) highlighted the dominance of transitional authorities and weak follow-through on recommendations. Sector-specific platforms, notably the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), offer more structured engagement. Gabon's [February 2025 Validation](#) commended inclusive debate within the multi-stakeholder group [and awarded a moderate score of 73.5](#), but also flagged restrictions in the broader civic space and insufficient government responsiveness to recommendations. These findings underscore that meaningful influence depends on early-stage access to draft decisions, predictable timelines, and systematic follow-up—conditions rarely met outside EITI.

Non-discrimination in participation is generally observed in principle, as diverse civil society actors were invited to national dialogues and EITI processes. However, structural constraints—such as financial dependence on donors and lack of formal recognition of expertise—limit autonomy and bargaining power. Modalities remain predominantly in-person; while ministerial portals and the [Journal Officiel](#) provide digital access to promulgated acts, they seldom host draft texts or interactive consultation windows. A late-2025 ordinance on [public-sector digitalisation](#) could improve [online participation](#) if implemented with open data and feedback modules, but this remains aspirational.

Overall, civil society actors are consulted more frequently than in previous cycles, yet participation often risks being symbolic. Without codified procedures for timely disclosure, inclusive consultation, and guaranteed responsiveness, civil society's role remains peripheral, reducing opportunities for evidence-based advocacy and public oversight.

## 4.3 | Accountability

Government feedback to civil society actors remains limited and inconsistently documented. The [2025 Fiscal Transparency Report](#) notes that while the enacted budget is posted online, the executive budget proposal was not made public within a reasonable period, quarterly execution reports were unreliable, and the supreme audit institution did not publish audits

promptly—gaps that prevent CSOs from verifying whether and how their budget submissions or policy comments were incorporated, and that dilute the rationale provided for accepting or rejecting CS input. In the absence of a general access-to-information statute establishing time-bound feedback duties and appeal rights, accountability hinges on ad hoc disclosures and sectoral frameworks rather than enforceable, cross-government obligations.

The extractive sector offers the clearest accountability architecture. Within EITI, Gabon's February 2025 Validation assessed transparency, outcomes and stakeholder engagement; the March 2025 Board decision awarded a moderate overall score (73.5), commending high performance on outcomes/impact but highlighting "fairly low" transparency and urging stronger mechanisms to follow up on recommendations—explicitly recognising that CS input is gathered yet insufficiently tracked to demonstrable policy reform. ITIE Gabon's 2025 [operational plan](#) and MSG [press conferences](#) created spaces for CS follow-up and public reporting, but these are sector-specific islands of accountability rather than a general practice across fiscal, social or environmental policy.

Where feedback is not adopted, clear explanations are scarce. The Fiscal Transparency assessment points to weak audit publication and procurement disclosure, making it difficult for CSOs to trace the government's reasoning or to pursue administrative or judicial remedies based on timely evidence. Media-sector signals reinforce the accountability gap: [RSF's 2025 profile](#) reports continued summons and HAC sanctions, and limited access to official sources, constraining watchdogs' ability to monitor adherence to commitments and to publicly test official rationales against primary data.

There were prospective 2025 reforms that, if implemented robustly, could improve institutional follow-up. An [ordinance on public-sector digitalisation](#) announced in September 2025 aims to make administrative processes traceable, strengthen data security and interoperability, and improve online service delivery—conditions conducive to automating feedback logs, publishing consultation summaries, and standardising public rationales for policy choices. As of year-end, however, this remained a framework to be operationalised rather than a functioning accountability system.

Overall, the government's accountability to civil society in 2025 was uneven and varied by sector. The EITI showed that structured systems for incorporating civil society feedback can work well. However, in fiscal and broader government processes, there were no formal requirements to record how civil society input is used, to explain why certain suggestions are rejected, or to provide clear timelines for follow-up or appeal. In the absence of an access-to-information law, regular publication of audits, and standardised consultation reports, the environment is open in theory but still weak in practice. As a result, civil society organizations struggle to hold authorities to their commitments or translate participation into tangible policy change.

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## PRINCIPLE SCORE

# 5. Supportive Public Culture and Discourses on Civil Society

Score:



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Between 2024 and 2025, public discourse increasingly portrayed civil society as a partner in governance, with CSOs visible in constitutional reforms and transparency initiatives, yet their influence on policy was limited and consultations often symbolic. Citizens expressed strong support for democracy and recognised CSOs' contributions, but trust in institutions and formal participation remained low due to late-stage engagement, weak civic education, and fears of reprisals. Efforts to promote equality and inclusion through legal reforms and gender strategies signalled commitment, but operational gaps and entrenched norms continued to marginalise women, youth, and vulnerable groups. Overall, Gabon's reforms improved tone and visibility, but without systemic guarantees for early engagement, robust civic education, and inclusive practices, progress risks remaining superficial.

### 5.1 | Public discourse and constructive dialogue on civil society

Between 2024 and 2025, public discourse on civil society in Gabon evolved significantly under the Fifth Republic's political transition. Government statements frequently portrayed civil society organisations as partners in reform, particularly in constitutional revision, governance, and transparency. Transitional authorities emphasised their role in promoting democratic maturity, as seen during the November 2024 constitutional referendum, when CSOs were mobilised for public awareness campaigns across major cities. Media coverage amplified these efforts, featuring prominent civil society figures such as Georges Mpaga and Justine Lekogo, framing CSOs as constructive actors in national dialogue. This narrative fostered a perception of collaboration and inclusivity, at least at the level of official discourse.

However, this positive framing coexisted with structural ambivalence. While authorities acknowledged CSOs publicly, decision-making processes often remained controlled and opaque. The March 2024 protests by trade unions and CSOs against the government's

handling of the [Inclusive National Dialogue](#) revealed persistent scepticism about the sincerity of engagement. [Calls for postponement](#) due to inadequate conditions for open debate underscored the gap between rhetoric and practice. Similarly, when Gabon's first biennial transparency report was released in December 2024, CSOs noted that their recommendations—such as improving extractive revenue traceability and community participation—were largely absent from the final document. These omissions reinforced perceptions of tokenistic consultation, where civil society is heard but rarely heeded.

Media dynamics further shaped this ambivalence. While mainstream outlets highlighted civil society contributions during high-profile events, coverage of dissenting voices—such as critiques of dialogue processes—was less prominent, limiting public awareness of structural constraints. Social media provided a more pluralistic space, enabling CS actors to challenge official narratives and advocate for accountability. Yet, polarised debates and sporadic disinformation occasionally undermined constructive dialogue, reflecting broader fragility in Gabon's civic culture.

Respectful and evidence-based engagement remains inconsistent. Although CSOs produced substantive analyses on fiscal transparency and governance, these inputs seldom influenced policy outcomes. Dialogue tends to prioritise symbolic inclusion over systematic incorporation of civil society expertise. The culture of public debate—shaped by hierarchical governance traditions and uneven media independence—continues to constrain CSOs' ability to shape decisions. While transitional authorities project openness, administrative control over consultation timelines and agenda-setting limits genuine co-creation of solutions.

Overall, public discourse on civil society in Gabon improved in tone and visibility during 2024–2025, signalling recognition of CSOs as stakeholders rather than adversaries. Yet, the depth of dialogue remains shallow, with structural barriers and selective responsiveness tempering progress. Media narratives oscillate between endorsement and omission, while social media offers both opportunity and risk. Without institutional guarantees for early-stage engagement and systematic integration of evidence-based proposals, civil society's role in shaping governance will remain peripheral, despite its growing prominence in public debate.

## 5.2 | Perception of civil society and civic engagement

Between 2024 and 2025, citizens' perceptions of civil society in Gabon reveal a complex interplay between recognition of its positive contributions and persistent systemic barriers to civic engagement. Surveys such as the 2024 [Afrobarometer](#) indicate that a significant portion of Gabonese [respondents prefer democracy](#) and believe in political participation as a key right. This suggests general belief in the value of civil society, yet citizen trust wavers when institutional responsiveness is lacking.

Many Gabonese acknowledge CSOs as positive contributors to community development and governance, especially when these groups visibly engage during constitutional processes and transparency initiatives. However, this trust is fragile: where consultations result in limited policy uptake—such as omissions in the December 2024 transparency report—citizens perceive CSOs as ineffective or symbolic. Public protests by unions and NGOs in 2024 exposed disillusionment and underscored that many view civil society as marginalised from genuine decision-making.

Despite constitutional guarantees, most citizens feel unable to influence political decisions. Political power remains highly centralised and consultation late-stage, which decreases belief

in personal agency. Afrobarometer data reinforces this, showing high [regard for democracy](#) alongside limited trust in institutions to translate citizen input into action. Engagement at the grassroots level—through local associations, volunteering, and community initiatives—is stronger, [reflecting Africa-wide trends](#) where around half of citizens participate in community meetings and join with others to raise issues. Nevertheless, formal political involvement remains low, with fears of reprisals and institutional inertia discouraging participation.

Civic education in Gabon reflects both normative ambition and practical shortcomings. UNESCO's [national consultation](#) on SDG 4 highlights persistent gaps between policy objectives and classroom delivery, noting that instruction on political rights and civic responsibility remains sporadic and often superficial, particularly outside urban centres. While NGOs and international partners have attempted to bridge this gap through awareness campaigns during events such as the 2024 constitutional referendum, these efforts lack scale and continuity. At the same time, Gabon's legal framework demonstrates a formal commitment to citizenship education: Law No. 21/2011 on the general orientation of education explicitly prioritises civic formation, with Chapter 7 mandating moral, social, environmental, civic, and legal education alongside economic and business training. This dual reality [underscores a tension](#) between strong legislative intent and weak implementation, driven by resource constraints, uneven teacher preparation, and limited monitoring. Without sustained investment in curriculum development and community-based programmes, civic education risks remaining aspirational rather than transformative, perpetuating low levels of citizen engagement and limiting the effectiveness of democratic reforms.

The culture of engagement in Gabon remains shaped by hierarchical governance norms and a weak institutional framework for grassroots participation. While citizens express growing belief in civil society's importance, structural and cultural barriers constrain their influence. Without robust and accessible civic education, transparent consultation mechanisms, and assurances of safety, civic engagement remains uneven. Progress will require both systemic reforms and grassroots empowerment to translate recognition into real influence.

### 5.3 | Civic equality and inclusion

Gabon's recent democratic reforms have placed civic equality and inclusion at the centre of national discourse, yet implementation remains uneven. Legally, the 2024 constitutional revision and the Inclusive National Dialogue signalled commitment to equal participation, [gathering over 680 delegates](#) and 38,000 citizen contributions on governance and social issues. These processes aimed to broaden representation and embed accountability mechanisms. Similarly, Law No. 21/2011 on education and the 2024–2033 [Gender Equality Strategy](#), developed with the African Development Bank, underscore normative efforts to guarantee rights and opportunities for marginalised groups, including women and persons with disabilities. The gender strategy seeks to dismantle barriers to decision-making and combat discrimination, while initiatives such as the Forum on Inclusive Education, supported by UNICEF, promote integration of vulnerable populations into schools.

Despite these advances, structural and cultural obstacles persist. Women and youth remain underrepresented in political and administrative bodies, and persons with disabilities [face systemic barriers](#) to accessing public services. Economic disparities and geographic isolation further restrict participation for rural communities, while social norms continue to reinforce gender hierarchies. Although Gabonese law prohibits discrimination, enforcement is inconsistent, and civic spaces remain fragile. Afrobarometer [data for Central Africa](#) suggests

that while citizens broadly support equality, trust in institutions to uphold these principles is limited, reflecting scepticism about the depth of reforms.

Social tolerance and respect for diversity show gradual improvement but remain uneven. Public discourse during the 2024 National Dialogue emphasised inclusion, yet minority groups—particularly linguistic and sexual minorities—report persistent stigma. Civic engagement initiatives often concentrate in urban centres, leaving underserved populations with limited access to participatory platforms. Economic vulnerability compounds exclusion, as marginalised groups lack resources to engage in consultations or advocacy.

Overall, Gabon's legal framework provides a strong foundation for civic equality, but operational gaps and entrenched social norms constrain progress. Inclusion remains aspirational where policies lack clear implementation strategies and monitoring mechanisms. Without targeted measures to reduce economic and geographic disparities, strengthen enforcement of anti-discrimination laws, and institutionalise participatory practices, marginalised communities will continue to experience limited influence in civic processes. Sustained investment in inclusive education, gender equity programmes, and community-based engagement is essential to transform formal commitments into tangible equality and ensure that democratic reforms translate into meaningful participation for all.

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## PRINCIPLE SCORE

# 6. Access to a Secure Digital Environment

Score:



Between 2024 and 2025, Gabon's digital landscape evolved through a mix of legal innovation and persistent structural constraints. New data protection, cybersecurity and electronic transactions laws strengthened formal guarantees for privacy and online participation, yet expansive regulatory powers and selective enforcement continued to place civil society at risk, especially during politically sensitive periods. Efforts to professionalise cybersecurity governance improved institutional capacity, but limited coordination, uneven digital literacy, and gaps in implementation left CSOs vulnerable to surveillance, data exposure, and cyber threats despite formal protections. Connectivity indicators suggested strong national performance, but high costs, unstable networks and stark rural–urban disparities restricted meaningful access, while low ICT skills among citizens and CSO staff further narrowed who could safely and effectively navigate the digital sphere. Emerging technologies such as AI offered new opportunities for innovation and civic engagement, yet preparedness to engage with them remained limited, risking deeper divides in the absence of targeted capacity-building. Overall, Gabon's reforms signalled intent and improved the formal architecture of digital rights, security and access, but without stronger safeguards, equitable infrastructure, and sustained investment in digital capabilities, progress risks remaining uneven and inaccessible to those who rely on the digital public sphere the most.

### 6.1 | Digital rights and freedoms

Gabon's digital rights landscape is characterised by a tension between progressive legal guarantees and regulatory mechanisms that hold significant potential to constrain civic space online. The legal framework has expanded considerably in recent years, particularly through three key statutes: the Data Protection Act (Law No. 025/2023), the Electronic Transactions Act (Law No. 025/2021), and the Cybersecurity and Cybercrime Act (Law No. 027/2023).

The [Data Protection Act](#)—Law No. 025/2023—recognises an individual's right “to decide and control” the use of their personal data (Arts. 2–4), creating a baseline for privacy-respecting

activism and safeguarding CSO mailing lists and petitions online; it also imposes security duties on controllers (Arts. 113 et seq.), which, if implemented proportionately, protect against leaks and doxxing of activists. The [Electronic Transactions Act](#)—Law No. 025/2021—explicitly covers the online publication of public information and allows administrative procedures to be conducted electronically (Arts. 2 and 5), a pro-participation lever for CSOs seeking e-consultations and e-filings. The [Cybersecurity and Cybercrime Act](#)—Law No. 027/2023—aims to protect rights while organising national cyber-defence (Art. 2), but its enforcement toolbox (illicit-content and platform obligations) can be used expansively during contentious debates, with implications for lawful dissent. These statutes were complemented by Gabon's ratification of the AU Malabo Convention in October 2024, aligning with continental norms on privacy and cybersecurity—again an opportunity *and* a compliance burden for CSOs. For CSOs, these instruments present both opportunities—such as privacy protections, the facilitation of digital participation, and clearer cybersecurity obligations—and significant risks arising from broad discretionary enforcement powers.

With respect to internet and social media shutdowns, the pattern in 2025 was shaped more by threat than by repeated execution. Ahead of the 12 April 2025 elections, the [#KeepItOn](#) coalition formally urged authorities to keep the internet on, invoking Gabon's past election-time blackouts and their chilling effects on monitoring and mobilisation. The deterrent effect of past shutdowns continues to shape CSO behaviour, as many remain alert to the possibility of sudden loss of connectivity around politically sensitive events.

Censorship and surveillance signals were more targeted than systemic. On 30 April 2025, the High Authority for Communication (HAC) announced stepped-up control of *social-media content* and plans to work with Meta, Google, TikTok, and X to neutralise “malicious accounts,” extending broadcast-style regulation into the social-media sphere; [critics questioned](#) the legal reach and safeguards for political speech. Legally, HAC's remit stems from [Law No. 014/2023](#) reorganising the authority (Art. 3 covers “written, audio-visual, digital and advertising” sectors), while [watchdogs note 2023 changes](#) increased executive control over HAC appointments—raising independence concerns for online regulation. While Gabon's cybercrime law provides legitimate tools to curb online manipulation or coordinated disinformation, the broad scope of HAC's mandate risks conflating legitimate dissent with harmful content, especially during politically polarised periods.

Evidence of censorship and surveillance practices in 2025 points to targeted rather than systemic interventions. While Gabon did not engage in widespread website filtering or mass takedowns, specific incidents—particularly involving journalists—signal pressure points for online political expression. Summons issued to media personnel, such as the 4 June 2025 [summons of Gabon Media Time's editor](#) prompted industry bodies to warn against backsliding on press-offence decriminalisation when disputes involve digital publications. Subsequent 3 [September summonses](#) and a 15 October [arrest of Harold Leckat](#) reignited concerns about criminal-law pathways being used alongside HAC procedures, with knock-on chilling effects for CSO-linked platforms and sources. At the same time, RSF noted Gabon's improved [2025 press-freedom ranking \(41/180\)](#) while urging an end to police summonses and a more independent HAC—evidence that space exists for reform if regulatory practice aligns with the pro-rights clauses in law. These cases indicate that while online expression is not uniformly censored, critical actors are vulnerable to selective enforcement and intimidation.

Taken together, Gabon's digital rights environment reflects a dual trajectory. Legal protections for privacy, digital participation, and cybersecurity continue to expand, yet enforcement practices reveal areas where regulatory power can be deployed to restrict online freedoms—

particularly around elections, protests, and politically sensitive discourse. Strengthening due-process guarantees, enhancing HAC's institutional independence, and establishing transparent state-platform accountability mechanisms remain essential steps for ensuring that digital rights protections become operational realities rather than aspirational legal provisions.

## 6.2 | Digital security and privacy

Digital security and privacy have emerged as central concerns within Gabon's broader digital transformation agenda, particularly as civil society actors increasingly depend on online tools for coordination, information-sharing, and advocacy. Since the adoption of [Ordinance No. 15/PR/2018](#), Gabon has introduced a regulatory framework intended to address cybercrime, safeguard electronic communications networks, [and protect](#) the privacy of users in cyberspace. Between 2024 and 2025, reforms such as the Gabon Digital Programme and the [presidential order of September 2025](#) further consolidated the government's ambition to build a secure and resilient digital environment.

However, when assessed against the research questions guiding this study, several gaps and risks remain evident. First, although Gabon has invested in strengthening defensive cybersecurity capabilities, there is limited publicly available evidence indicating whether government agencies or other actors (including private companies or non-state groups) have deployed spyware, malware, or hacking tools specifically targeting CS actors. Reports from local organisations suggest occasional concerns about compromised communications or suspicious access attempts, yet these incidents are rarely documented formally and seldom investigated. As a result, it is difficult to assess frequency with precision, though the absence of robust protective systems—combined with weak digital literacy among CSOs—means even isolated incidents can significantly affect actors' sense of safety and their willingness to communicate online.

Second, Gabon has taken steps to establish data protection and privacy-oriented institutions. The National Agency for Digital Infrastructure and Frequencies (ANINF) [plays a leading role](#) in implementing cybersecurity policies, securing public digital infrastructure, and protecting the confidentiality and accuracy of private information. In parallel, the National Commission for the Protection of Personal Data (CNPDCP) is tasked with regulating the collection, processing, and storage of personal data by both public bodies and private actors. While these mechanisms theoretically provide avenues for redress in cases of data breaches, surveillance, or other violations, CS groups report that enforcement remains inconsistent. Few civil society actors are aware of complaint procedures, and investigation outcomes are seldom shared publicly. Moreover, certain legislative instruments—such [as Order No. 00003/MSAS/CAB-M of 23/02/2023](#), which mandates publication of officers' personal data in the national directory of associations—undermine privacy protections and may expose activists to additional risks, despite being framed as administrative transparency measures.

Third, regarding online intimidation and manipulation, evidence of coordinated disinformation or harassment campaigns linked to government-affiliated sources remains largely anecdotal. Some CS actors report instances where social media narratives appear engineered to delegitimise their work or question their motives, but there is insufficient systematic documentation to conclusively attribute these activities to state-linked accounts, bots, or organised networks. Nonetheless, the broader digital environment—with uneven connectivity, limited digital rights awareness, and emerging governance structures—creates conditions in which online manipulation can circulate easily and without challenge.

Despite notable progress—particularly regulatory reforms, capacity-building efforts, and expanding national infrastructure—Gabon continues to face structural challenges. Cybersecurity capacity remains limited, especially outside major urban areas; coordination across state agencies is uneven; and existing oversight bodies lack the resources to ensure rigorous enforcement. The government’s vision of a secure and innovation-friendly digital ecosystem is therefore still in formation. Ensuring that this vision effectively protects civil society will require reinforcing privacy guarantees, clarifying redress mechanisms, improving public transparency around cyber incidents, and enhancing institutional independence in oversight processes.

Overall, while Gabon has laid the legal and institutional foundations for digital security and privacy, the systems in place require strengthening before civil society actors can operate with full confidence that their digital rights—particularly freedom from unauthorised surveillance, exposure, and online intimidation—are meaningfully protected.

### 6.3 | Digital accessibility

Despite being ranked the [most connected](#) country in Central Africa according to the [2024 ICT Development Index](#), digital accessibility in Gabon remains uneven and marked by deep structural disparities. National connectivity figures—[71.9% internet penetration](#) and nearly [124% mobile penetration](#) in 2025—suggest widespread digital uptake. However, these aggregate indicators obscure the significant proportion of the population, particularly the 26.3% in rural areas, that [remains digitally excluded](#). Availability is heavily concentrated in urban hubs such as Libreville and Port-Gentil, while large inland regions continue to experience weak or non-existent coverage. Even where the internet is available, quality of service is often inconsistent: users routinely report slow speeds, network instability, and recurrent service interruptions, all of which undermine the ability of civil society actors to reliably access, share, and disseminate information online. Affordability compounds these constraints. Mobile data and broadband packages remain prohibitively expensive for many households, creating an economic digital divide that limits opportunities for online participation, including engagement with digital governance processes, online advocacy, and civic mobilisation.

While mobile phone use is widespread, basic information and data literacy remain uneven across the general population and within the CSO workforce. Digital skills training has not expanded at a pace that matches the country’s growing connectivity, and many civil society actors lack the competencies needed to fully leverage online tools, assess digital risks, or critically interpret online information. This mismatch between connectivity and capacity is further exacerbated by limited awareness of cybersecurity practices and a shortage of trained digital professionals in public institutions. As a result, both citizens and CSO staff often rely on digital technologies without the foundational skills necessary to navigate them safely or effectively. The [Gabon Digital programme](#) launched in November 2024 includes [measures to train public officials](#) in responsible digital tool use, yet comparable initiatives for civil society and the wider public remain limited. Without targeted investments in information literacy, these skill gaps risk reinforcing existing inequalities in who benefits from Gabon’s digital expansion.

At present, AI-supported systems—whether in service delivery, automated data management, or digital communication platforms—are not yet widely integrated across Gabonese institutions. However, the direction of national digital reforms indicates that such tools will increasingly influence how information is produced, processed, and accessed. This shift raises important questions about the preparedness of CS actors and citizens to engage with these technologies. Most CSOs currently lack the technical knowledge required to understand

algorithmic systems, identify biases, or leverage AI-driven tools in their advocacy or organisational workflows. Similarly, public awareness of AI, machine learning, and automated decision-making remains low, increasing the risk that these technologies could deepen information asymmetries or reproduce existing digital divides.

In summary, while Gabon's connectivity indicators signal progress, digital accessibility remains limited by affordability barriers, infrastructure inequalities, and uneven ICT skills across the population. Without substantial investment in nationwide digital literacy, inclusive skills development, and proactive preparation for AI-driven transformations, CS actors and marginalised communities will continue to face obstacles in accessing, using, and shaping the digital ecosystem.

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# C) Recommendations

## A) Recommendations to the Government of Gabon

### 1. Protect fundamental freedoms and due process

- Publish a binding directive that sets clear, narrowly tailored criteria for restricting public assemblies (time, place, manner), with appeal timelines ( $\leq 7$  days) and judicial review; require authorities to publish permit decisions and reasons on a central portal within 48 hours.
- Issue a moratorium on CSO suspensions/dissolutions without an adversarial procedure; table amendments to the associations framework to codify: notice, hearing, proportionality test, and independent appeal.
- Mandate HAC due-process safeguards for online content measures (notice to speakers/hosts, reasoned decisions, time-bound appeals, and annual public transparency reports on takedowns, account actions, and data requests).

### 2. Professionalise security and regulatory practices

- Train all crowd-management units in non-violent policing and UN-aligned standards; make training annual and tie to promotion criteria; publish use-of-force data quarterly.
- Strengthen regulator independence: adopt transparent merit-based appointments and conflict-of-interest rules for HAC; institute external audits of ANINF and CNPDCP practices on data access and cybersecurity incidents.
- Operationalise Malabo-aligned protocols: standard operating procedures for government data requests to platforms; require judicial authorisation for interception; publish biannual government transparency reports.

### 3. Finance and sustainability for CSOs

- Create a Public CSO Fund with open calls, independent board (state/CSO/academia/private), ceilings per grantee, and results-based disbursements; earmark a fixed budget line and enable matching with donor contributions.
- Adopt tax incentives (deductions/credits) for domestic philanthropy and social enterprises; simplify registration/renewal and enable e-filing under Law 025/2021.
- Institutionalise participation: require participation plans in major reforms (early-stage consultations, feedback matrices showing how inputs were used, and co-decision pilots in selected sectors—e.g., EITI, local development).

#### 4. Inclusion and digital accessibility

- Adopt gender-, youth-, and disability-inclusive quotas on advisory councils; set accessibility standards for all public buildings and e-services.
- Shift from “most connected” to “most accessible”: fund rural backhaul and last-mile sites via a Universal Service mechanism, introduce social tariffs/data vouchers for low-income users, and enforce service-quality benchmarks.
- Modernise association law for the digital era: codify cybersecurity, confidentiality, and digital sovereignty obligations proportionate to CSO size; require breach notification and provide a CNPDCP help desk for small CSOs.

### **B) Recommendations to Civil Society**

#### 1. Governance and accountability

- Establish a national CSO consultative forum to coordinate positions, track civic-space violations, and issue quarterly scorecards on assembly permits, HAC actions, and funding access.
- Publish annual reports with audited financials, conflict-of-interest policies, and results frameworks; adopt board term limits and stakeholder-feedback channels.

#### 2. Finance and autonomy

- Diversify revenue: pilot social enterprises, memberships, and crowdfunding; pool back-office services (finance, compliance) via shared platforms to reduce overhead.
- Advocate for domestic philanthropy reforms; develop donor-independence clauses to protect freedom of expression and avoid mission drift.

#### 3. Legal empowerment and rapid response

- Build paralegal networks for protest support, takedown appeals, and data-protection complaints; maintain an incident-response fund for legal aid and secure communications.
- Use strategic litigation to clarify due process in CSO regulation and proportionality standards for online restrictions.

#### 4. Digital security and skills

- Implement a baseline digital-security toolkit (device hardening, 2FA, encrypted comms, secure data handling) and conduct biannual penetration tests.
- Train staff in data protection by design, basic AI literacy (bias, explainability, safe use), and mis/disinformation counter-measures; partner with universities/tech hubs for low-cost platforms and community networks.

#### 5. Civic engagement and inclusion

- Scale civic-education campaigns (schools, radio, social media) on rights, participation pathways, and safe digital practices; co-design accessible content for women, youth, and persons with disabilities.

### **C) Recommendations to Development Partners & the International Community**

## 1. Financing that lasts

- Provide multi-year core support to CSOs ( $\geq 36$  months) alongside project grants; co-finance the Public CSO Fund with ring-fenced windows for grassroots and inclusion-focused groups.
- Tie funding to capacity outcomes (governance, MEL, digital security) rather than activity counts; support south-south exchanges on participation and digital rights.

## 2. Standards, platforms, and protection

- Support HAC independence and ANINF/CNPDCP capacity via technical assistance conditioned on transparency and due process.
- Engage major platforms to publish country-level transparency reports, adopt appeal channels in French, and protect civic-process content during sensitive periods.
- Fund human-rights defender protection (legal aid, relocation, secure devices) and open-source digital public goods (identity, payments, consent layers) aligned with privacy-by-design.

## 3. Connectivity and inclusion

- Invest in rural connectivity (backhaul, community networks) and affordability pilots (social tariffs, zero-rating of essential civic services) with rigorous evaluation.
- Support AI-readiness programmes for government and CSOs (standards for explainability, red-teaming, and bias audits) to prevent new divides.

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## 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. This panel uses a set of guiding questions to assess the status of each principle and its dimensions within the country. The panel for this report took place in December 2025. 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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