



SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Enabling Environment Baseline Snapshot

Liberia

October 2025

Period covered in this report: October 2024 -October 2025

Context:

Since the 2023 general elections, Liberia has experienced notable political change, social protest, and civic activism. These developments have created both new opportunities and revealed persistent challenges in the environment for civil society.

In October 2023, Liberia held [general elections](#) (presidential, legislative, and part of the senatorial elections) in which incumbent president George Weah was narrowly defeated in a presidential runoff by the current President Joseph Nyumah Boakai. Compared to [previous elections](#), this peaceful transition has been hailed by observers as relatively free, fair, and transparent, contributing to democratic consolidation. Nevertheless, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) [documented](#) several incidents of election-related violations of fundamental freedoms ahead of the elections. These included voter trucking—the transport of individuals to register or vote outside their constituencies—which triggered tensions and sporadic violence in towns such as Geynimah and Brewerville. Additionally, arbitrary arrests, curbs on freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly, as well as impunity for perpetrators of election-related violence were observed.

Protests over governance, public service, and corruption continued in the following years. In early 2024, protests by the wives of soldiers who were dissatisfied with their husbands' pay, benefits, living conditions and corruption claims forced the [defence minister to resign](#). In July 2025, a [large protest](#) under the slogan “Enough is enough” brought together thousands of Liberians to the capital hill to demand better governance, accountability, and relief from socio economic hardship, including deteriorating public services, corruption and government neglect.

1. Respect for and protection of fundamental freedoms:

While [Liberia's Constitution](#) guarantees freedom of expression and assembly, civic actors, particularly women, face systemic threats that restrict their engagement. Activists or journalists working on politically sensitive issues such as corruption or female genital mutilation (FGM) are often [targets of intimidation, online harassment, and stigma](#).

While freedom of assembly is legally protected, its exercise in practice is marred by assembly notification requirements under the [Liberia National Police Act](#) (2016), which grants the County Attorney the power to cancel the assembly on a number of grounds, including endangering public order. Freedom of assembly is further negatively impacted by the use of excessive force against protesters. For example, in late 2024, [anti-government protests erupted over the attempted removal of the Speaker of the House of Representatives](#). The legislative building [suffered a fire](#) during these protests, and law enforcement responded with tear gas and arrests. In addition, the use of overly broad regulations of the [1978 Penal Code](#) continues to lead to the harassment and detention of activists and journalists.

Article 15 of the Constitution covers freedom of expression and press, which may be “limited only by judicial action in proceedings grounded in defamation or invasion of the rights of privacy and publicity or in the commercial aspect of expression in deception, false advertising or copyright infringement.” Despite this, democratic space in Liberia, including Kakata, continues to narrow as journalists and media outlets face harassment, threats, and political interference. Recent reports highlight assaults on OK FM journalists (December 2024), Daily Observer staff (January 2025), and abductions like journalist Alex Seryea Yormie in Nimba

(June 2025). Such violations are often exacerbated by impunity for the perpetrators, therefore adding to a disabling environment for press freedom.

Growing self-censorship, pressure tied to government advertising budgets, and new accreditation requirements have deepened [concerns](#) about press freedom and civic expression. The hostile climate for dissent is further reinforced by the [use of “insult laws”](#) to fire civil servants for critical social media comments.

The situation is complicated by discriminatory laws, such as criminalisation of same-sex relationships under the [1976 Penal Code](#), with [attempts in 2024](#) to introduce harsher penalties. The environment to work or advocate for the LGBTQ+ community is not safe and this work is not openly carried out by human rights defenders in Liberia.

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

The [National Aid and NGO Policy of Liberia](#) was officially [launched](#) on 5 September 2020, in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County, by the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP), which governs Liberia’s civil society environment. Together with the [Private Voluntary Organisations Act](#) (as amended in 2025), these instruments formally recognise civil society organisations (CSOs) as development partners and provide a statutory basis for their engagement in governance, peace building, service delivery, and decentralisation.

Registration under the National Aid and NGO Policy (2020) and PVO Act involved manageable but moderately bureaucratic processes via [Ministry of Foreign Affairs incorporation and MFDP accreditation](#), including fees of US\$150-350 and annual registration renewal. While larger NGOs were able to absorb these costs, grassroots and rural CSOs faced barriers due to lengthy procedures, costs, and limited decentralisation. There are no requirements to process permits for individual activities, and CSO operations are not heavily monitored, preserving operational autonomy.

Recent improvements to the administrative framework include online registration introduced in 2022 and upgraded in 2025. CSOs report uneven accessibility of registration processes but no evidence of 'stricter approval' or 'chilling effects' from legislative changes.

3. Accessible and sustainable resources:

CSOs in Liberia mainly depend on international donors like UNDP, USAID, and the EU, with minimal domestic funding. Economic challenges and changing donor priorities have reduced funding options, particularly harming grassroots organisations outside Monrovia.

Domestic resource mechanisms for CSOs have been envisioned as part of initiatives aimed at decentralisation and transparency in local budgeting like the Open Government Partnership Action Plan 2024-2026 and the Local Government Act. However, in practice, resource flows have remained minimal and grassroots communities continue to rely on international donors.

The Open Government Partnership [Action Plan 2024-2026](#) offers pathways for funding sustainability and civic engagement with OGP commitments emphasising transparency in local budgeting, fostering some donor interest (e.g., [UNDP’s LDSP II support](#)), but critics note persistent central funding bottlenecks limiting real resource gains.

The Local Government Act (LGA) of 2018 [empowers counties](#) to generate and retain local revenues. Section 3.2 grants county councils—including CSO representatives—authority to levy taxes, rates, duties, fees, and fines (up to legislative limits) and approve annual budgets/development plans, fostering local ownership. CSOs benefit via formal council seats, allowing influence over revenue allocation for community projects (e.g., Bong County's CDA dialogues where CSOs monitor tax compliance and 40% retention under the Revenue Sharing Act). This enables sustainable resource use through oversight and partnerships, like UNDP-backed awareness on fiscal decentralisation, though full revenue mobilisation remains uneven amid central bottlenecks. CSOs also gain indirect sustainability through local tax authority and service centres, [cutting travel costs](#) for tax payments and vendor payouts. Changes to the LGA proposed by lawmakers in 2025 have been [criticized](#) by CSOs for recentralising power and reducing civil society influence over funds for local development.

Nearly 52.3% of Liberians live in multidimensional poverty per [UNDP multidimensional poverty index](#) (based on a 2019/2020 survey), forcing many local CSOs to prioritise immediate community needs over sustained advocacy or governance work. This economic vulnerability spanning health, education, and living standards severely limits CSOs' capacity for rights-based initiatives. Donor priorities have thus shifted toward humanitarian and climate-focused interventions, leading to reduced support for governance and accountability programming.

Implementation plans are [driven largely by donor priorities](#), producing outputs that mirror donor measures and metrics, as donors remain accountable to their own organisations. Many national CSOs report [difficulties in sustaining staff](#) and community operations without external aid.

4. State openness and responsiveness:

Liberia's 1986 Constitution and laws such as the [Freedom of Information Act \(2010\)](#) provide a legal foundation for transparency and access to information. Additionally, the Government of Liberia launched its [5th National Action Plan in February 2025 under the Open Government Partnership](#), emphasising transparency, accountability and citizens' participation, signalling formal space for CSOs engagement. Despite this, institutionalising inclusive and accountable governance processes remains a critical task to ensure meaningful civil society participation.

There has been some improvement in government consultations with civil society, including inclusive development planning and policy dialogues on issues such as women's land rights and legal reforms. However, CSO inputs are often only symbolically considered, with limited influence on final legislative outcomes.

Successful consultations with CSOs often happen with external support. For example, between July and August 2024, the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, supported by the UN and the Government of Sweden, led county level consultation for the ARREST Agenda for Inclusive Development ([2025-2029](#)). The [process](#) involved diverse civil society actors, women, youth, persons with disabilities, traditional leaders and students, reflecting a positive step forward. Similarly, in February 2025, Forumciv, with EU support, held a [national dialogue on land rights for women and rural communities](#) in Grand Gedeh, River Gee and Sinoe counties. Representatives from the Liberia Land Authority and civil society participated, highlighting state responsiveness to land and gender inclusion.

In December 2024, the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection (MGCSP) held a [National Policy Dialogue](#) with women-led organisations and civil society to review laws on women’s empowerment. Government representatives, including ministers, lawmakers, and line ministries, actively participated in the dialogue alongside CSOs. The government reacted positively by endorsing consultation, pledging legislative support, and committing to implement agreed-upon reforms. Despite persistent challenges such as limited inclusion of grassroots voices and transparency issues, the event laid a foundation for institutionalising participatory governance through ongoing engagement and collaborative accountability mechanisms.

[Local governance reforms](#) envisioned under the Local Governance Act (2018) remain unevenly implemented, limiting CSOs’ influence in county level decision making and development planning. In September 2024, a coalition of CSOs including Integrity Watch Liberia publicly [condemned](#) political interference in country council structures. Mr. Harold Marvin Aidoo, Executive Director of Integrity Watch said, “unfortunately, recent actions by some political actors who seek to manipulate these bodies for personal gains threaten to derail the progress made in promoting inclusive governance, transparency, and accountability at the local level.”

Furthermore, under the LGA, county councils—comprising youth, women, persons with disabilities, traditional leaders, and civil society—play a central role in approving local development plans and budgets. However, proposed changes, such as Representative Jeremiah Sokan’s bill amending Sections 2.2(e) and 2.2(f), are [viewed as](#) re-centralising power to lawmakers, weakening local autonomy, and undermining inclusive governance.

While Liberia shows openness to consultation, challenges remain, including limited inclusion of civil society feedback in decision-making, exclusion of rural voices, and lack of transparency. Sustained progress requires institutionalising participatory governance with inclusive and accountable processes.

5. Political Culture and Public Discourses on Civil Society:

Public discourse in Liberia remains highly adversarial, with activists often delegitimised in media and political spaces. In Gbarpolu County, for example, community members questioned the credibility of local activists, weakening their advocacy for civic reforms.

This dynamic erodes trust and fuels harassment, particularly against Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) and grassroots groups. At the same time, perceptions of CSOs among the public and government are mixed; many view them as “noisemakers” attacking the state or advancing their own interests rather than promoting accountability. Such perceptions have been long [reinforced](#) by state-linked rhetoric portraying CSOs as politically biased, discouraging activism and leaving civil society actors in a dilemma: advocate quietly and risk irrelevance, or speak loudly and face delegitimation.

Persisting gender stereotypes, structural barriers, and high levels of gender-based violence continue to limit women’s organisations in decision-making, with disproportionate harassment shrinking their operational space. Furthermore, civil society actors [warn](#) that proposed recentralisation of control over local development plans risks marginalising local priorities—especially for women and youth.

Efforts by projects like the Liberian Electoral Support Project seek to promote inclusive participation, particularly for women and marginalised groups, through civic education and advocacy. It has supported dialogue to increase women’s participation and that of

marginalised groups such as the [#IncludeDoNotExclude campaign](#), providing civic and voter education to promote inclusion for all.

6. Access to a secure digital environment:

Despite growing reliance on social media and mobile technology, CSOs face challenges with [poor internet access](#), cyberattacks, and misinformation campaigns. Rural organisations remain particularly disconnected due to high data costs and limited network coverage.

Liberia's digital infrastructure is [improving](#), but vulnerabilities still exist. While the infrastructure remains mostly reliable, civil society entities continue to raise concerns about cybersecurity threats and cyber-attacks using social media. [Reports](#) of the Liberia Information Technology Student Union (LITSU) show that "both the government and private sector ICT infrastructures are under attack". Internet disruptions that raise concerns about political manipulation have also been [reported](#), for example in Nimba County, when a female candidate was running for the senatorial by-election in 2025. Limited public awareness, weak legal safeguards, and insufficient digital security capacity, especially for vulnerable civic groups, create additional vulnerabilities.

Addressing weak legal safeguards and the lack of a standalone data protection law and a functioning regulatory authority to enforce privacy rights, ongoing legislative efforts aim to enhance protections through [data privacy and cybercrime laws](#). The proposed Cybercrime Act (2025) represents progress through critical infrastructure protections and SIM registration mandates, but civil society warns of risks to free expression.

Women human rights defenders (WHRDs) [face disproportionate hostility](#), with several reporting digital abuse campaigns aimed at silencing them. Institutional weaknesses exacerbate these threats. Liberian media practitioner Nehmisa Kargbo warns that rampant Facebook account hacking, website attacks, sextortion, and cyber bullying - disproportionately targeting women and girls - will persist without sustained media-driven cybersecurity awareness.

Challenges and Opportunities:

Civil society organisations in Liberia are strong in advocacy, community awareness, monitoring court procedures to guide court processes involving GBV survivors and alleged perpetrators, and women's economic empowerment, with emphasis in village savings and loan association for income generation. Nevertheless, the enabling environment continues to be characterised by challenges and opportunities in the coming months:

Challenges:

- Financial Fragility: Severe funding shortages for CSOs, combined with high data costs, are causing "organisational collapse" for smaller, rights-based groups.
- Rural Marginalisation: Uneven decentralisation amid the local government reforms means that rural organisations remain disconnected from national policy discussions. This exclusion is exacerbated by limited network coverage and expensive bandwidth.

Opportunities:

These represent the positive developments that can be leveraged to improve civic space:

- Inclusive Leadership: Growing participation of youth and women in governance and CSO leadership, supported by the national "[ARREST Agenda](#)."

- Strategic Infrastructure: [Proactive regulatory efforts](#) to expand fibre-optic connectivity and stabilise the national digital grid.

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