



SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Enabling Environment Snapshot

Somalia

May 2026



HiiL Law Firm

Context

Period covered by the report: August 2025-May 2026

Somalia continues to experience prolonged insecurity and political instability since the collapse of its central government in 1991. Although gradual state-building efforts have been ongoing since [2012](#), the overall enabling environment for civil society organisations (CSOs) and independent media remains severely constrained.

Civil society actors and journalists continue to operate in a fragile environment marked by insecurity and weak institutional protection. Somalia remains one of the most dangerous countries for [media professionals](#), with continued reports of threats, arbitrary detention, and violence contributing to a climate of impunity. Human rights organisations continue to document [violations](#) by both state and non-state actors, further limiting accountability and [civic participation](#).

Somalia's civic space is currently classified as ["Repressed"](#) by the CIVICUS Monitor. The country received a score of 8 out of 100 in the Freedom House Freedom in the World [2026](#) report, and ranked 136th out of 180 in the 2025 Reporters Without Borders World Press [Freedom Index](#) without any change. CSOs are forced to scale back activities, relocate to safer areas, or operate clandestinely. They struggle to promote human rights, accountability, and inclusive development.

Recent early warning signals indicate emerging pressures on civic space, including risks linked to [digital governance](#) and online expression, [localised insecurity](#) and armed violence in areas such as [Baydhabo](#), and ongoing political and institutional tensions between federal and regional authorities. Emerging electoral dynamics, including signals of divergence in Puntland, further reflect fragmentation risks within Somalia's political environment.

Overall, civil society organisations continue to operate under severe constraints while playing a key role in promoting human rights, accountability, and service delivery in an increasingly complex and fragile environment.

1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

Somalia's formal legal guarantees on freedom of expression, assembly and association remain intact under Articles 16, 18, and 20 of the [Provisional Constitution](#), but in practice these civic freedoms continue to [deteriorate](#). The period August 2025–May 2026 shows a clear pattern of repression, particularly targeting journalists and demonstrators. Penal Code Articles 215 (subversive propaganda), 269 (insult to public bodies) and 328 (false news)—despite [the 2020 Media Law](#) formally guaranteeing press freedom—are routinely and [selectively applied](#) to criminalise dissent, enabling broad executive discretion to arrest journalists and CSOs on vague "national security" grounds. This undermines rule of law, weakens legal predictability, and creates a chilling effect that shrinks civic space, discourages advocacy, and erodes the independence and operational security of civil society actors. Overall, the trend was rated as ["Not Free"](#) by Freedom House [and repressed](#) by the CIVICUS monitor by the end of 2025.

Key events and evidence:

- August 2025 – Somali police [raided](#) SMS TV in Mogadishu, confiscated media equipment, and arbitrarily detained two journalists, Hussein Isse Mohamed and Osman Abdullahi Arab, in a case condemned by media rights organisations as a violation of press freedom.

- September 2025 – The Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS) reported that at least 10 [journalists were arrested](#) within three weeks in Somaliland, reflecting escalating intimidation, censorship, and restrictions on independent reporting.
- October 2025 – Mogadishu police raided Himilo Media studios and [detained two journalists](#) after the outlet reported on forced evictions of vulnerable families, highlighting growing pressure on independent media outlets covering sensitive social issues.
- November 2025 – The Somali Media Women Association (SOMWA) warned of [increasing harassments](#), censorship, arbitrary arrests, and online attacks targeting women journalists across Somalia, documenting more than 60 violations during the reporting period.
- January–April 2026 – Systematic media violations, as over 30 violations, including arrests and harassment, [were recorded](#) in a four-month period, indicating a sustained crackdown on freedoms of expression.
- March 2026 – Bajaj driver [protests](#) met with arrests as security forces detained protesters following peaceful demonstrations over fuel price hikes. In addition, a female tuk-tuk driver was [detained for days](#) for participating in protests, drawing criticism from observers, reflecting continued restrictions on spontaneous public gatherings and civic expression related to socio-economic grievances.
- March 2026 – Journalists were [assaulted and re-arrested](#) as police violently arrested and beat reporters covering protests, confiscating equipment and conducting follow-up raids.
- May 2026 – At least [five journalists were detained](#) and equipment confiscated while covering forced evictions in Mogadishu.

The evidence points to a repressed civic space, where both media actors and ordinary citizens face increasing risks when exercising basic freedoms. The repeated use of arrests, force and intimidation suggests a systematic approach to controlling dissent. This environment discourages reporting and peaceful protest, reinforcing self-censorship and public disengagement. Overall, fundamental freedoms exist largely on paper but remain severely constrained in practice.

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

Somalia's legal framework for civil society remains fragmented, outdated and inconsistently applied. At the federal level, civil society organisations in Somalia are primarily regulated under Article 54 of [Civil Law No. 37 of 1973](#), which mandates [registration](#) with the Ministry of Interior, Federal Affairs & Reconciliation. The process requires submission of detailed documentation, including a constitution, objectives, and founding member information. While the Ministry's website provides forms and guidance, CSOs frequently report that the process is lengthy, opaque, and inconsistently applied across federal and regional levels. Delays in feedback, unclear requirements, and non-transparent registration fees—especially burdensome for grassroots organizations—create significant barriers to formalisation. While [reform efforts](#) exist, including the draft [Non-Governmental Organisations Act of 2019](#), implementation gaps persist. Overall, the trend is stagnant, with structural barriers unresolved.

Key events and evidence:

- Ongoing (to 2026) – Reliance on outdated legal framework as CSOs continue to operate under legacy laws requiring formal registration and oversight by state authorities.

- 2019 Act remains unimplemented in practice despite its intent to regulate and enable the sector, the Act has not been fully operationalised, leaving legal uncertainty.
- Mandatory registration provisions remain restrictive [as draft provisions](#) impose compulsory registration and broad state oversight, raising concerns about independence.
- April 2024 (ongoing effect in 2025–2026) – CSO bank accounts frozen [as authorities froze accounts](#) of the Somali Journalists Syndicate amid legal investigations, widely viewed as retaliation.
- October 2025 – Freezing of media-related financial assets continues to shape CSO risk environment as legal and administrative measures, including [ongoing restrictions](#) on organisations linked to media advocacy, reinforce concerns over selective enforcement and the use of financial tools to pressure civil society actors, limiting operational independence and increasing compliance uncertainty.
- January 2026 – Ministry of Interior [pledged](#) to accelerate the NGO Bill process and share the latest draft with civil society for consultation; however, the law remained pending, reflecting continued legal uncertainty and fragmented oversight.
- March 2026 – Civil society organisations reported [continued exclusion](#) from formal legislative and policy processes, with advocacy groups highlighting the absence of a clear legal framework guaranteeing CSO participation in lawmaking and public oversight.
- Financial reporting requirements tied to donor funding are often burdensome and lack harmonisation, particularly for smaller organisations.

The persistence of mandatory registration, overlapping mandates and weak safeguards continues to limit CSO autonomy. The use of legal and administrative tools—such as financial restrictions—signals a risk of selective enforcement and political interference. As a result, civil society operates in an environment marked by legal uncertainty and vulnerability, constraining its independence and effectiveness. Without meaningful reform or implementation, the framework remains inhibitive rather than enabling.

3. Accessible and sustainable resources

The funding environment for Somali CSOs remains fragile and increasingly constrained, with heavy reliance on external donors. The period shows no meaningful improvement, with financial and operational barriers persisting. The 2025 [suspension](#) and reduction of major donor funding, particularly from USAID, continues to have [significant effects](#) in 2026, with many organisations still experiencing operational disruptions, staff layoffs, and reduced service delivery. Funding shortages have persisted due to shifting [donor priorities](#), reducing support for Somalia and forcing CSOs to scale down operations, highlighting continued vulnerability and lack of sustainable funding. While foreign funding is not formally prohibited, access to financial services is increasingly politicised. Overall, the trend is deteriorating in sustainability terms.

Key events and evidence:

- 2025–2026 – Continued donor contraction as reduced external funding has led to operational cutbacks and staff losses across CSOs (contextual trend; widely reported across sector analyses).

- August 2025 – Continued [disruption of aid flows](#) and NGO programming due to USAID funding suspension effects, with humanitarian and development partners reporting halted or scaled-down operations, staff reductions, and interruption of services for vulnerable populations dependent on CSO delivery systems.
- October 2025 – Macroeconomic and donor contraction pressures deepen CSO funding instability, as aid reductions and fiscal shocks linked to international [donor cuts](#) negatively affect Somalia’s broader economy, reducing fiscal space and indirect support available for civil society programming.
- December 2025 – Significant [donor-driven job losses](#) and programme scaling-down across UN and NGO systems, with over 680 staff cuts reported among UN agencies in Somalia due to reduced funding, directly reflecting constrained resource flows affecting CSO partners and implementing organisations.
- April 2024 (continuing impact into 2026) – [Freezing](#) of Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS) accounts [as court-ordered](#) suspension of SJS bank accounts on allegations linked to defamation and media law violations demonstrates how financial and legal instruments can be selectively deployed to restrict CSO operations; this undermines financial accessibility and organisational autonomy, signals heightened regulatory and reputational risk to donors, and contributes to a chilling effect whereby civil society actors face increased vulnerability, reduced sustainability, and constrained capacity to operate independently.
- 2026 – Persistent financial access barriers as CSOs continue to face difficulty maintaining bank accounts and meeting burdensome reporting requirements (sector trend linked to regulatory environment). Moreover, information on funding opportunities is not always accessible, and bureaucratic hurdles further limit equitable access.
- 2026 – Rising operational costs due to fuel hikes, illustrated by [Bajaj protests](#), reflect broader cost pressures affecting CSO transport and field work.

The combination of shrinking donor support, financial restrictions and rising costs is undermining CSO sustainability. Financial tools are increasingly politicised, creating deterrents for both donors and local organisations. This weakens CSO independence and limits their ability to deliver services or engage in advocacy. Overall, the resource base for civil society is unstable and increasingly insecure.

4. State openness and responsiveness

State–civil society engagement remains limited, inconsistent and largely symbolic despite the right to political participation being protected under article 22 of the constitution. While consultation mechanisms exist on paper, meaningful responsiveness is weak. Earlier initiatives, such as the [2023 Cooperation Forum](#) and consultations under the National Transformation Plan (2025–2029) indicated some openness; however, these have not translated into sustained or institutionalised dialogue. Civil society [input](#) remains inconsistently reflected in policy processes, and government responsiveness to feedback and information requests continues to be limited. The trend is generally stagnant to negative. The lack of institutionalised participation frameworks and weak protections for civic actors undermine state accountability, while the absence of legal guarantees for formal consultation channels constrains civil society engagement, rendering its role in governance largely symbolic rather than substantive.

Incidents of public protest, including [demonstrations](#) by Bajaj drivers in Mogadishu and the [reported response](#) by security forces, indicate ongoing limitations on civic engagement and constrained channels for constructive dialogue between citizens and authorities. Protesters reported the absence of government action or dialogue on rising costs. Despite consultative

development of the [National Transformation Plan](#) (2025–2029), the absence of clear follow-up and accountability mechanisms—alongside [persistent](#) harassment, surveillance, and [arbitrary detention](#) of independent media and critical CSOs—signals declining trust, constrained civic space, and limited opportunities for inclusive, accountable governance.

The absence of an enacted access to information law despite the 2024 [draft Official Information Bill](#) proposing disclosure standards and appeals mechanisms, persistent denial of access to government-held data—particularly on sensitive issues—reflects weak transparency frameworks; this constrains informed civic participation, limits evidence-based advocacy, and reinforces power asymmetries, thereby restricting accountability and undermining meaningful CSO engagement in policymaking.

Key events and evidence:

- September 2025 – [Arrest of at least 10 journalists](#) in Somaliland within a short period, highlighting ongoing restrictions on independent reporting and limited state responsiveness to repeated civil society concerns over press freedom violations and arbitrary detentions.
- December 2025 – Fuel price surge worsened livelihoods of Bajaj drivers, with protests met by [arrests](#) and no structured government consultation or dialogue, reflecting weak state responsiveness and limited civic engagement mechanisms.
- May 2026 – [Detention and intimidation of journalists](#) covering politically sensitive issues and protests in Mogadishu, where journalists were assaulted and briefly detained by security forces while reporting on public grievances and planned demonstrations, reinforcing a pattern of coercive state response instead of institutionalised engagement or consultation with civil society actors.
- 2026 – Ongoing restrictions on media access as journalists continue to [face blocked access and arrests](#) while covering public-interest issues.

The lack of structured dialogue and limited responsiveness to civic concerns indicate a closing space for participation. Arrests and restrictions replace engagement, reducing trust between the state and civil society. This environment weakens accountability mechanisms and sidelines CSO input in policymaking. Civil society participation remains ad hoc and largely ineffective.

5. Political culture and public discourses on civil society

Public discourse around civil society remains highly polarised, with persistent narratives questioning CSO legitimacy. Government officials and state-aligned media frequently frame civil society entities as foreign-driven or politically subversive, especially when they engage in human rights or anti-corruption work. The period shows continuity rather than improvement, with distrust reinforced by state practices. Overall, the trend is negative.

Key events and evidence:

- October 2025 – Consilient Limited raid in Somaliland over false “[anti-state](#)” allegations, where staff were briefly arrested before authorities confirmed the claims were based on misinformation; the incident highlights persistent suspicion toward CSOs and weak safeguards for their legitimacy and operational security.
- November 2025 – Documented rise in gendered harassment and smear campaigns against women journalists and civic actors, where civil society monitoring reports highlight increasing online abuse and [reputational attacks](#), contributing to reduced legitimacy and growing mistrust of women in public advocacy roles.
- 2026 – [Continued targeting of journalists](#) through arrests and harassment—exemplified by the 2026 [arrest of Abdiqani Dhulmar](#)—underscores a persistent pattern of repression that

constrains media independence, reinforces perceptions of a shrinking civic space, and drives self-censorship across journalism and civil society, weakening transparency and public accountability.

- May 2026 – Media crackdown intensifies [as arrest of journalists](#) covering evictions further entrenches suspicion of independent reporting.
- Mixed public perceptions and weak civic awareness illustrated through [diverging public views](#) on CSOs—shaped by state narratives and limited civic education—combined with their minimal integration into formal education and low institutional promotion, constrain societal trust and awareness, weakening the foundation for inclusive participation and accountability in governance.
- The absence of systematic integration of civil society education into national curricula, coupled with limited institutional recognition and feedback mechanisms, reflects weak state commitment to participatory governance and undermines the meaningful inclusion of CSOs in policy processes.
- 2026 – Reports of gendered and reputational attacks highlight smear campaigns and harassment against journalists, especially women.

Negative state narratives and repeated crackdowns contribute to public mistrust of CSOs. This weakens civic legitimacy and discourages engagement, particularly among marginalised groups. The result is a hostile operating environment, where civil society actors are viewed with suspicion rather than as partners in governance. Trust deficits remain a major structural barrier.

6. Access to a secure digital environment

Somalia's digital space remains uneven and insecure, with limited access and rising risks of surveillance. While policy frameworks are emerging, enforcement is weak. The trend is mixed, with more risks than gains.

Key events and trends:

- 2025–2026 –The digital divide persists as low internet penetration ([27.6%](#)), coupled with urban–rural disparities, high data costs, and limited infrastructure, restricts digital access for civil society actors and the communities they serve, undermining equitable participation, weakening outreach and advocacy, and narrowing the enabling environment for inclusive and representative civic engagement.
- Despite 2025 [Inclusive Digital Policy](#) commitments to expand digital access and literacy, and events like [Universal Acceptance Day](#) promoting awareness, persistent structural barriers—particularly affecting rural populations, women, persons with disabilities, and linguistic minorities—limit equitable access to digital tools, constraining inclusive civic engagement, weakening CSOs' outreach capacity, and reinforcing disparities in participation within the enabling environment.
- August 2025 – Somalia's [Cabinet approved](#) the Cybercrime Bill aimed at strengthening digital security and regulating online activity; however, broad provisions related to public morality and online conduct raised concerns over potential misuse against freedom of expression and civic participation in digital spaces. While the [2025 Cybercrime Bill](#) aims to enhance digital security, its broad provisions raise concerns about potential restrictions on freedom of expression, creating an uncertain regulatory environment that may deter civil society participation and advocacy in digital spaces.
- November–December 2025 – Major security vulnerabilities and data breaches were reported in Somalia's electronic visa system, [exposing sensitive personal](#) data of thousands of users

and highlighting weak digital protection safeguards and limited enforcement capacity despite existing data protection frameworks.

- Despite the establishment of a [Data Protection Act](#) (2023) and Authority (2024), limited enforcement capacity weakens safeguards for privacy and personal data, reducing trust in digital spaces and constraining civil society's ability to engage safely and effectively online.
- Journalists tracked, arrested, and pressured via digital surveillance methods: incidents such as the March 2025 [arrest of 19 journalists](#) and the [tracking and detention](#) of Sharif Abdi via mobile data illustrate the misuse of surveillance technologies, reinforcing a climate of fear, encouraging self-censorship, and further narrowing the enabling environment for independent civil society and media actors.

Limited connectivity and weak protections restrict civil society's ability to operate safely online. At the same time, emerging surveillance practices increase risks of monitoring and reprisals. This dual constraint—low access and high risk—undermines digital civic space. Overall, the digital environment remains constrained and insecure for CSOs.

Challenges and opportunities

In the coming months, civil society in Somalia is likely to face continued challenges linked to political uncertainty, electoral processes, disputed constitutional amendments and a constrained civic space. Despite expectations of progress, recent developments indicate persistent restrictions on freedoms of expression, assembly, and media, alongside limited state responsiveness and weak legal protections.

One key concern is the limited engagement of CSOs in official electoral processes, which undermines their ability to advocate for transparency and fair participation. Fragmented coordination among CSOs also weakens their collective influence and ability to respond to emerging threats.

Despite these obstacles, the electoral period presents a critical opportunity for civil society to advocate for transparency, civic education, and inclusive participation. To effectively seize this moment, civil society actors must be supported through legal reforms that guarantee their independence, the establishment of sustainable and diversified funding mechanisms, and strengthened coordination platforms. Additionally, targeted capacity building in digital security, advocacy, and public engagement is essential to ensure that civil society can play a meaningful and resilient role in Somalia's democratic processes.



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