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## 8.3.1. Civic space under the new government

As reported in the [2024 EUAA COI Report: Bangladesh – Country Focus](#), civil society in Bangladesh is characterised by a high number of active civil society organisations that have been widely recognised for, inter alia, micro-loans and other development initiatives.<sup>913</sup> Under the former government, civil society faced shrinking civic space in an increasingly restrictive legal environment,<sup>914</sup> and although the government generally respected the right to form associations, as reported by the United States Department of State (USDOS), it frequently prohibited gatherings by opposition groups, and restricted organisations' receipt of foreign funds and also 'withheld or delayed' funding approvals, especially in areas the government deemed sensitive, including human rights issues.<sup>915</sup> The former government also allegedly made use of enforced disappearance as a tool to suppress dissent and spread fear,<sup>916</sup> and arbitrary arrests and surveillance of human rights activists and political dissidents were reported.<sup>917</sup>

After the fall of the former government in August 2024, the High Court revoked the arrest of two Odhikar's members, including the organisation's director, and declared a previous decision not to renew the organisations registration illegal. This decision had been made by the Non-Governmental Organisations Affairs Bureau,<sup>918</sup> which remains 'a notoriously corrupt and deeply politicised agency with the power to control registration processes and the flow of foreign funds to civil society organisations', according to Naomi Hossain, research professor of development studies, specialising on Bangladesh, at SOAS, University of London.<sup>919</sup>

As reported by Freedom House, '[d]uring the first five months of the interim government's tenure, it reopened political and civic space [...].'<sup>920</sup> According to CIVICUS, civic space improved in 2024,<sup>921</sup> and the organisation updated its civic space rating for Bangladesh from 'closed' to 'repressed.'<sup>922</sup> According to CIVICUS, the upgrade resulted from announced and implemented reforms by the interim government, including the release of protesters and human rights defenders, the signing of CED, and the formation of the inquiry commission on enforced disappearance, but pointed out that restrictive laws remained.<sup>923</sup> In contrast, UN OHCHR reported on many journalist and civil society observers facing 'a climate of reverse intimidation' where they are 'cautious about reporting anything that could be seen as favourable to the Awami League or critical of its political opposition'.<sup>924</sup> In June 2025, VOICE, a research-based advocacy organisation, expressed concern over shrinking civic space, including journalists being

charged in criminal cases and writers and poets being harassed, and gender disinformation spreading online.<sup>925</sup> Between January 2025 and March 2025, Odhikar recorded incidents of the police blocking peaceful meetings, assemblies, and processions organised by political parties and minority groups.<sup>926</sup>

On 22 May 2025, the interim government replaced the Cyber Security Act (CSA) from 2023 with the Cyber Security Ordinance. The CSA was criticised by human rights groups for stifling dissent, and with the new ordinance several sections criticised for limiting free speech have been removed.<sup>927</sup> TIB however expressed concern over the draft ordinance stating that 'it effectively retained control and surveillance mechanisms of earlier repressive laws' and that '[f]reedom of speech, expression, free media, and organising rights are at risk.'<sup>928</sup> In response to criticism, <sup>929</sup> the draft ordinance was updated in January 2025, with inter alia the removal of provision on warrantless searches by law enforcement.<sup>930</sup>

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