

Please cite as: EUAA, '8.3.1. Civic space under the new government' in *COI Report - Bangladesh: Country Focus*, August 2025.

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.913 Under the former government, civil society faced shrinking civic space in an increasingly restrictive legal environment,914 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.915 The former government also allegedly made use of enforced disappearance as a tool to suppress dissent and spread fear,916 and arbitrary arrests and surveillance of human rights activists and political dissidents were reported.917

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,918 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.919

As reported by Freedom House,'[d]uring the first five months of the interim government's tenure, it reopened political and civic space […].'920 According to CIVICUS, civic space improved in 2024,921 and the organisation updated its civic space rating for Bangladesh from 'closed' to 'repressed.'922 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.923 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'.924 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.925 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.926

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.927 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.'928 In response to criticism, 929 the draft ordinance was updated in January 2025, with inter alia the removal of provision on warrantless searches by law enforcement.930

- 913

  Hossain, N. and Lewis, D., Draft for discussion, Revisiting civil society in Bangladesh, January 2024, url, pp. 1–2

- 914

  Asia Foundation (The), A Glass Half-Full: Civic Space and Contestation in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, March 2023, url, pp. 3, 10, 16

- 915

  USA, USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights for 2023 -Practices: Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, url, pp. 29, 30

- 916

  ADPAN et al., Bangladesh, Government must cease enforced disappearances, stop harassment of the victims' families and hold perpetrators accountable, 29 August 2023, url ; Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2024, 19 March 2024, url, p. 12

- 917

  HRW, World Report 2025: Bangladesh: Events of 2024, 16 January 2025, url

- 918

  New Age, HC scraps jail term against ex-Odhikar secretary Adilur, director Elan, 22 August 2024, url

- 919

Hossain, N., Bangladesh: A Fragile Opening After a Successful Popular Uprising, European Democracy Hub, 31 March 2025, url

- 920

  Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025: Bangladesh, 2025, url

- 921

  CIVICUS, CIVICUS Monitor, People Power Under Attack 2024, December 2024, url, p. 7

- 922

  CIVICUS, The CIVICUS Monitor upgrades Bangladesh's civic space to "Repressed" from “Closed” after reforms by interim government, 4 December 2024, url

- 923

  CIVICUS, CIVICUS Monitor, People Power Under Attack 2024, December 2024, url, pp. 46–47

- 924

  UN OHCHR, Human Rights Violations and Abuses Related to the Protests of July and August 2024 in Bangladesh, 12 February 2025, url, para. 227

- 925

  Business Standard (The), VOICE expresses concern over shrinking civic space, spread of gender disinformation, 28 June 2025, url

- 926

  Odhikar, Quarterly Human Rights Report, January-March 2025, 14 May 2025, url, pp. 25-26

- 927

  Bdnews24.com, Bangladesh scraps controversial Cyber Security Act, introduces new AI-focused Cyber Safety Ordinance, 22 May 2025, url

- 928

  Daily Star (The), Oppressive mechanism still there in draft law: TIB, 1 January 2025, url

- 929

  Daily Star (The), Draft data law: Privacy still under threat, 22 January 2025, url

- 930

  New Age, Draft Cyber Protection Ordinance: Cyberbullying, warrantless search clauses dropped, 23 January 2025, url

© European Union Agency for Asylum 2026 | Email: info@euaa.europa.eu