

REPORT

What are the benefits of a healthy civil society?

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Executive Summary

The report paints a grim picture of the state of civic space worldwide, with a growing number of countries facing restrictions on civic freedoms and an increasingly hostile environment for civil society. In 2023, about a third of the world's population resided in countries with a closed or repressed civic space. Urgent measures are required to address this trend and create an enabling environment for civic participation and the protection of human rights and freedoms. The global community must remain vigilant in defending these fundamental principles.

In fact, this research report focuses on developing an advocacy tool to promote awareness of the importance of a healthy civil society. It establishes the diminishing recognition of the value of civic space and seeks to understand the reasons behind this trend. The report also works to define the characteristics of a healthy civil society, assess recognition among different stakeholders, improve the accessibility of related language, and emphasize the benefits of a strong civil society for communities.

Although civil society is separate from the state, it influences and is influenced by the state. For civil society to function properly, an open civic space is needed, which depends on three key fundamental rights: (1) the right to freedom of association, (2) the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and (3) the right to freedom of expression. It is often said that civic space and civil society are a prerequisite for a functioning democracy, but this report argues that civil society is a prerequisite for and a consequence of democracy.

The latest data indicates that democracy is in decline. Many democratic countries are experiencing democratic backsliding, while a growing number of countries are moving towards an authoritarian rule. Although authoritarianism and democracy are often seen as two opposite ends of a spectrum, many authoritarian regimes nowadays employ democratic-looking institutions to increase their legitimacy and international recognition, while many democratic regimes increasingly employ traditionally authoritarian tactics to monopolize power.

In 2024, a global trend of further regression of civic space freedom is continuing to be observed. According to the CIVICUS Monitor, civil society faces an increasingly hostile environment with 27 countries rated as closed, 50 rated as repressed, 40 rated as obstructed, 42 rated as narrowed, and 38 countries rated as open. Although only 42.7% of the countries have been rated as closed or repressed, CIVICUS estimated that 70.7% of the world's population resides in those countries. On the other hand, 19.3% of countries have been rated as open, but only 3.2% of the population resides there and enjoys an open civic space. The top 10 violations of civic freedoms in 2022 were: harassment, protestor(s) detained, intimidation, restrictive law, attack on journalists, protest disruption, censorship, human rights defenders (HRD) prosecuted, HRD detained, and journalists detained. What is particularly concerning about the shrinking civic space is that violations are less exclusive to closed and repressed countries, and restrictions are concerningly spreading to countries with more enabling civic spaces.

The Global State of Democracy Indices estimate that, currently, the majority of states are democratic regimes, 11% are hybrid and 29% are authoritarian regimes. Nevertheless, the number of countries moving towards authoritarianism is more than double than the number of countries moving towards democracy, while the number of backsliding countries remains at its peak. The growing number of authoritarian regimes, as well as the

increased use of traditionally authoritarian tactics by democratic regimes, poses a serious threat to the survival of democratic norms and governance.

Moreover, the latest data from the World Values Survey (WVS) shows that support for 'strong' leaders who do not have to bother with parliament and elections has grown in the last ten years. Although these results are concerning, the majority of respondents also believe that having a democratic political system in their country is 'good'. These answers suggest that people concurrently hold opposing views and this requires deeper analysis. It is possible that these results express the people's disappointment in their democratically elected representatives and their governance of the country, instead of the people's support for authoritarian regimes. These results raise many questions. What do the respondents consider to be a democratic political system? Do they understand what it means for the country to be governed by a 'strong' leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections? What role do they think that parliaments and elections have in a democratic political system? What is a 'strong' leader? These are all very important questions which are necessary to understand and correctly interpret the results of the World Values Survey.

Although civic space is very often equated with civil society, it is important to understand and recognize that while not everyone is a part of civil society, everyone is affected by the civic space freedom or lack thereof. In order to explain the importance and the role of civic space and civil society in promoting and protecting democracy to the general population, it is important to not get bogged down in technical and dry definitions of what 'civil society' is or what 'civic space' is. The danger of people perceiving civil society and civic space as complex and difficult to understand concepts is that they may consequently see them as inaccessible and foreign to them. Therefore, the focus should be on the values that CSOs put into practice in a tangible way that brings to life the end products and experiences that people get to enjoy when CSOs have a supportive environment in which to operate.

There are many benefits of a healthy civil society for communities and mainstream populations which include contributing to development, providing essential services, protecting and advocating for human rights, empowering and providing stability, functioning on commitment, allowing for flexibility, shaping policy, and providing information for citizens. Particularly in a situation where civic space is closing, service providing organizations can play a big role in promoting civic space.

Based on the analysis, this report identifies 5 characteristics and 20 indicators of a healthy civil society. The five identified characteristics are: structure, available resources, enabling environment, values and impact of civil society. A healthy civil society is composed of many different organizations and voices, who collaborate amongst each other, have the necessary human, financial, organizational and technology resources, have financial independence and autonomy, have access to public information, function in an open civic space, are able to act independently of the state and advocate positions different from those of public authorities, have public trust, and can make a positive impact on the different aspects of society including social, economic or political problems.

To promote a healthy civil society and make it accessible for the mainstream population, the report proposes the following recommendations: promote trust; nurture civic engagement skills among the mainstream population, but especially the youth; promote the inclusion of competences for democratic culture in primary and secondary education; and increase the capacities of civil society to promote itself.

1. Introduction

On the International Day of Democracy 2023¹, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe (CoE), Marija Pejčinović Burić, organized an exchange of views with civil society where she proclaimed that civic space is shrinking² and that “[c]ivil society is a prerequisite for a functioning democracy.”³ In response to her speech, the CSO representatives in the room asked a very important and difficult question: ***is civil society a prerequisite for a functioning democracy or is a functioning democracy a prerequisite for a healthy civil society?***

Historically speaking, the origin of both concepts can be traced back to Ancient Greece; however, the concept of ‘democracy’ precedes the concept of ‘civil society’ by about one century. As a political system, democracy first appeared in Ancient Athens in the 5th century BCE⁴ and it referred to the direct rule of the people, i.e. where everyone participates in the decision-making process.⁵ However, at that time, ‘the people’ included only a very limited part of the population⁶ since women and slaves, for example, were excluded from direct participation in governance.⁷ Nowadays, democracy refers to the rule of the people through elected representatives, who are meant to represent the entire population.⁸

On the other hand, the origin of civil society can be traced back to 4th century BCE and Aristotle’s concept of the *politike koinonia* (*political community*), which was further developed by Cicero and translated into *societas civilis*, “from which the modern English term is derived”.⁹ These ancient notions of civil society were closely associated with the state.¹⁰ In political thinking, the separation of civil society from the state happened centuries later. Civil society was, for the first time, defined as voluntary associational life by Alexis de Tocqueville (1805 – 1859),¹¹ who highlighted “the importance of political associations for limiting the power of the central government, viewing freedom of association as a vital safeguard against the tyranny of the majority.”¹² This notion of civil society is much closer to today’s understanding of the concept and, therefore, much more relevant to enhance our understanding of the role of civil society in modern governance structures.

The term civil society became popular in the 1980s¹³ but “since the turn of the millennium, fascination with the term has somewhat declined”¹⁴ and a global trend of a shrinking civic space can be observed.¹⁵ In 2022, 70.7% of the world’s population resided in countries with a closed or repressed civic space,¹⁶ while only 3.2% enjoyed an open civic space, 11.3% experienced a narrowed civic space, and 14.9% faced an obstructed civic space.¹⁷ Additionally, global freedom has declined the 17th consecutive year¹⁸ and internet freedom has declined for the 13th consecutive year.¹⁹

Despite these worrying findings, the role of civil society in upholding human rights and democracy cannot be denied. According to the latest results from the World Value Survey,²⁰ 37% of people in the surveyed countries believe that civil rights are an essential characteristic of democracy.²¹ In fact, civil society has played a key role in responding to conflicts and humanitarian crises all around the world by providing essential services, helping and advocating for victims, monitoring human rights and collecting evidence of violations.²² Additionally, in the past year, “digital activism, civil society advocacy, and independent judiciaries drove real-world improvements for human rights online.”²³

Civil society plays a very important role in today’s world, but it is also faced with many threats and challenges. This report aims to define and conceptualize the characteristics of a healthy civil society by investigating whether there is a decline in the recognition of the

value of civic space among various stakeholders, assessing the accessibility and understandability of the language used in discussions related to civic space, and identifying and highlighting the benefits of a healthy civil society for communities and mainstream populations.

2. Theoretical Background

Civil society and civic space

Although it is a commonly used term, civil society can sometimes seem elusive and difficult to define. There have been “significant changes over time in the civil society landscape” and the concept has evolved to “comprise a wide range of organized and organic groups of different forms, functions and sizes.”²⁴ Nevertheless, there are several features that seem to be common among the many different contemporary definitions of civil society.

Namely, civil society is always defined as separate from the state, but also as separate from the market.²⁵ It refers to a voluntary²⁶ collection of individuals that have come together to pursue a common goal or shared interests²⁷ with the purpose of creating social value²⁸ in what they consider to be the public interest.²⁹ Although it is separate from the state, civil society influences and is influenced by the state³⁰ and “plays the role of mediator between public authorities and citizens.”³¹ Civil society organizations (CSOs) are task-oriented and they can be local, national or international.³² According to CIVICUS, “civil society is broad and covers non-governmental organizations, activists, civil society coalitions and networks, protest and social movements, voluntary bodies, campaigning organizations, charities, faith-based groups, trade unions and philanthropic foundations.”³³

Generally, civil society promotes democratic values and human rights, and performs a variety of humanitarian functions,³⁴ provides different services, advocates/campaigns, acts as a watchdog, participates in governance processes, and is involved in building active citizenship.³⁵ Additionally, civil society is “an important source of information for both citizens and government.”³⁶

In order for civil society to function properly, an open civic space is needed. According to CIVICUS, civic space refers to the environment in which individuals and civil society can act without hindrance, are able to claim their rights, and can influence the certain political and social structures around them. This kind of environment depends on three key fundamental rights: (1) right to freedom of association, (2) right to freedom of peaceful assembly and (3) right to freedom of expression.³⁷ The CIVICUS Monitor assessed the civic space conditions around the world and rates them as: (1) open, (2) narrowed, (3) obstructed, (4) restricted and (5) closed.³⁸ On one end of the spectrum, an open civic space is an environment in which citizens enjoy freedom of association, freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression both in law and in practice. There is a low level of fear in the society, civil society is able to criticize the government and there is space for open dialogue. Citizens are protected by the police when demonstrating and the national peaceful assembly laws adhere to international law and standards. The media is free, there is no censorship of online content, and government information is easily accessible.³⁹ On the other end of the spectrum, closed civic spaces are characterized by the inability to exercise freedom of association, freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression in law and in practice. When citizens attempt to exercise these rights, they are routinely imprisoned, injured and killed by state and non-state actors which enjoy impunity. There is a high level

of fear in the society and atmosphere of violence. Criticism of the government is severely punished, both offline and online. The media is not free, many websites are blocked and there is heavy censorship of online content.⁴⁰

Democracy

Democracy is a concept which is easier to define in theory rather than in practice.⁴¹ Cunningham talks about a conversation he had with a participant at the 1989 Tiananmen Square demonstrations who told Cunningham that neither he nor his friends, some of whom had lost their lives for the democratic cause, could claim to know what democracy is.

Nevertheless, one aspect of democracy has remained constant across contexts and time: “[d]emocracy means rule by the people”⁴² or “power of the people: a way of governing which depends on the will of the people.”⁴³ The concept has evolved significantly since its conception in Ancient Athens, but the political ideals on which it was developed – equality among citizens, liberty, respect for the law and justice – have remained the bedrock of democracy to this day.⁴⁴ Nowadays, democracy refers to the rule of the people through elected representatives, while free and fair elections are one of its defining characteristics.⁴⁵

For the purposes of this report, democracy will be defined based on the Global State of Democracy (GSoD) Indices methodology. The methodology identifies two core principles of democracy: popular control (over public decision-making and decision-makers) and political equality (equality of respect and voice between citizens in the exercise of that control).⁴⁶ Namely, the GSoD Indices measure “the extent to which there is effective popular control over public decision-makers (vertical accountability); the extent to which the citizens hold politically relevant freedoms and power resources; the extent to which executive powers are checked effectively by other powers (horizontal accountability); the extent to which public authorities are impartial and predictable in implementing the law; and the extent to which people have and make use of various opportunities for political participation at different levels.”⁴⁷ To better quantify democracy, it has been defined through four measurable attributes:⁴⁸

1. **Representation** – free and equal access to political representation;
2. **Rights** – individual liberties and fundamental resources;
3. **Rule of Law** – predictable and equal enforcement of the law and judicial checks on government power; and
4. **Participation** – refers to active political involvement by the citizens.⁴⁹

Each of these four attributes is further specified through sub attributes,⁵⁰ which can be seen in the table below:

Representation	Rights	Rule of Law	Participation
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Credible elections; 2. Inclusive Suffrage; 3. Free Political Parties; 4. Elected Government; 5. Effective Parliament; and 6. Local Democracy 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Access to Justice; 2. Civil Liberties; 3. Basic Welfare; and 4. Political Equality 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Judicial Independence; 2. Absence of Corruption; 3. Predictable Enforcement; and 4. Personal Integrity and Security 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Civil Society; 2. Civic Engagement; and 3. Electoral Participation

Table 1. - Attributes and Sub attributes of Democratic Rule, as defined by the GSoD Indices⁵¹

Additional relevant concepts

Moreover, for the purposes of this report, it is relevant to define a few additional concepts including democratic backsliding, authoritarianism, and democratic authoritarianism. “The latest GSoD Indices data show that democracy is in decline,”⁵² and one of the reasons for this decline is the phenomenon of democratic backsliding.

“Countries that are experiencing the most severe declines in democratic quality are classified as experiencing **democratic backsliding**. [...] This process included the sustained and deliberate process of subversion of basic democratic principles by political actors and governments. [...] Backsliding democracies are those that have experienced gradual but significant weakening of Checks on Government and Civil Liberties, such as Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Association and Assembly, over time. This is often through intentional policies and reforms aimed at weakening the rule of law and civic space. Backsliding can affect democracies at any level of performance.”⁵³ Democratic backsliding has become a serious problem which also afflicts “large and influential democracies that account for a quarter of the world’s population.”⁵⁴

Another concern is the growing number of countries moving towards an authoritarian rule.⁵⁵ **Authoritarianism** is characterized by the concentration of power in the hands of one authority which remains in power by restricting civic freedoms and undermining democratic processes, such as elections, separation of state powers, checks and balances and so forth.⁵⁶ Freedom House defines authoritarianism as “closed societies in which dictators prevent political competition and pluralism and are responsible for widespread violations of basic political, civil, and human rights.”⁵⁷

Although authoritarianism and democracy are often seen as two opposite ends of a spectrum, Bajpai and Kureshi argue that they should not be treated as mutually exclusive and that the concept of ‘**democratic authoritarianism**’ can be used to understand and explain the global trend of democratic regression.⁵⁸ Democratic authoritarianism is “the mobilization of multiple democratic-looking institutions across state and civil society, including elections, constitutional courts, and private media, to expand authoritarian forms of power in a polity.”⁵⁹ They outline two inter-related processes that characterize this phenomenon: “institutional capture, or the removal of political opposition from positions

of power in key institutions, and ideational capture, or the exclusion and delegitimization of competing or opposing ideological frameworks.”⁶⁰ The goal is to achieve monopolistic control of the political system by creating the appearance of popular support for the regime.⁶¹

3. Research Design and Methodology

The purpose of this research report is to develop an advocacy tool that encourages civil society to recognize the significance of a healthy civil society. The project aims to explore whether there is a decline in the recognition of civic space's value and, if so, the reasons behind this trend.

To achieve the objectives of the research, desk research was conducted to define and conceptualize the characteristics of a healthy civil society (in alignment with the work and definitions of CIVICUS), to investigate whether there is a decline in the recognition of the value of civic space among various stakeholders, to assess the accessibility and understandability of the language used in discussions related to civic space and offer more accessible terminology, and to identify and highlight the benefits of a healthy civil society for communities and mainstream populations.

The desk research was conducted based on a literature review of academic articles and a comparative analysis of relevant reports and indices on civic space, civil society and democratic trends, predominantly published no earlier than January 2018. The first part of the literature review was exploratory in nature and the initial findings were categorized under several topic based on the objectives of the research: (1) Shrinking civic space, (2) Growing popular support for authoritarian regimes, (3) Recognition of the value of civic space among various stakeholders, (4) Accessibility and understandability of the language used in discussions related to civic space, and (5) Promoting civic space. The desk research was based on academic articles, reports by civil society and international organizations, policy documents, media articles, and legal texts.

In addition to the literature review, two exploratory interviews were conducted with AFSC members. One interview was conducted with Mike Merryman-Lotze about the role of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) in the Middle East and the Americas, and another interview was conducted with Bilal Olimat about the tools used to promote civic space and civic engagement in Jordan through AFSC's program.

Last but not least, quantitative data was analyzed from multiple online indices, such as CIVICUS Monitor, Freedom in the World, Freedom on the Net, Global State of Democracy, and the World Value Survey. The majority of the findings are based on data from the most recent reports, which is from the years 2022 and 2023. However, in order to explore global, regional or national trends over time, data from the past five years was also analyzed (2018–2023).

4. Summary of Findings

Shrinking civic space

In September and October of 2023, I attended two events⁶² organized by intergovernmental organizations with the aim to bring together civil society representatives from Europe and Asia to discuss how their participation in international, regional and national governance can be supported and scaled up to achieve greater impact. The overwhelming consensus at both of these events was that civic space is shrinking and that urgent steps are needed to create an enabling environment for civic participation. This trend has also been observed and documented by human rights organizations and activists across the world⁶³ since the beginning of the 2000s.⁶⁴ Recent reports from relevant international human rights organizations confirm that this trend is ongoing and seems to be getting worse.⁶⁵

The People Power under Attack (PPUA) 2022 report⁶⁶ shows a global trend of further regression of civic space freedom. Since the previous report published in 2021, the civic space ratings of 25 countries have changed with 15 countries downgrading and only 10 countries improving civic space freedom.⁶⁷ Out of the 15 countries whose ratings were downgraded, five countries were downgraded to the worst category – closed. Those five countries include Afghanistan, Hong Kong, Myanmar, Russia and Tajikistan.⁶⁸

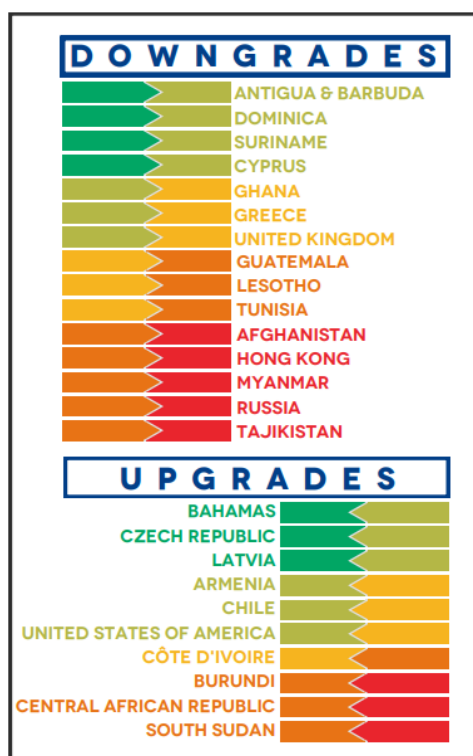


Figure 1. – List of countries whose ratings were downgraded and upgraded in 2022, according to the CIVICUS Monitor. Source: People Power Under Attack 2022 report, CIVICUS Monitor⁶⁹

A recent update of the CIVICUS Monitor in September 2023 indicates that civil society faces an increasingly hostile environment with 27 countries rated as closed, 50 rated as repressed, 40 rated as obstructed, 42 rated as narrowed, and 38 countries rated as open.⁷⁰ Although

only 42.7% of the countries have been rated as closed or repressed, CIVICUS estimated that 70.7% of the world's population resides in those countries. On the other hand, 19.3% of countries have been rated as open, but only 3.2% of the population resides there and enjoys an open civic space.⁷¹

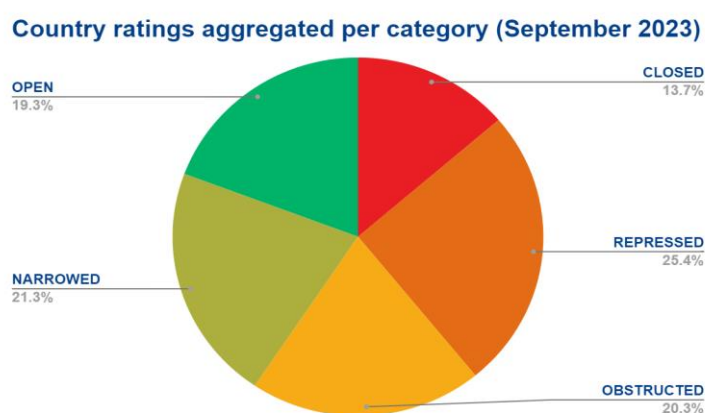


Figure 2. - Percentage of countries rated as open, narrowed, obstructed, repressed or closed by the CIVICUS Monitor

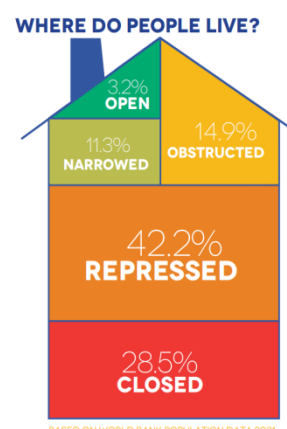


Figure 3. - Distribution of the world's population based on the civic space conditions in which people live
Source: People Power Under Attack 2022 report, CIVICUS Monitor⁷²

According to the CIVICUS Monitor, the top 10 violations of civic freedoms in 2023 were:⁷³

1. Intimidation;⁷⁴
2. Protest disruption;
3. Protestor(s) detained;
4. Censorship;
5. Harassment;
6. Journalists detained;
7. Attack on journalists;
8. Excessive force;
9. HRD detained;
10. Human rights defenders (HRD) prosecuted;

What is particularly concerning about the shrinking civic space is that “violations are less exclusive to closed and repressed countries, and restrictions are concerningly spreading to countries with more enabling civic spaces.”⁷⁵ For example, attacks on journalists are almost as widespread in narrowed countries as in obstructed or repressed. Moreover, 27.8% of the countries where protesters were detained are rated open or narrowed.

Support for authoritarian regimes

The Global State of Democracy Indices estimate that the majority of states today are democratic, 11% are hybrid regimes and 29% are authoritarian regimes.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the number of countries moving towards authoritarianism is more than double than the

number of countries moving towards democracy,⁷⁷ while the number of backsliding countries remains at its peak.⁷⁸ The growing number of authoritarian regimes, as well as the increased use of traditionally authoritarian tactics by democratic regimes, poses a serious threat to the survival of democratic norms and governance,⁷⁹ which are “especially critical in times of crisis and fear.”⁸⁰

In addition, there seems to also be increased support of these regimes by citizens. The latest data from the World Values Survey (WVS)⁸¹ shows that, on average, 42.69% of respondents believe that it is good⁸² for their country to be governed by a ‘strong’ leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections, compared to only 34.6% in 2009.⁸³ However, at the same time, 84.4% of respondents believe that having a democratic political system is good⁸⁴ and for 49.3% of respondents it is absolutely important to them to live in a country that is governed democratically, while only 4.7% state that it is not important.⁸⁵ Moreover, 60.8% of respondents believe that individual human rights are respected in their country.⁸⁶ On the other hand, only 10.3% of respondents believe that they live in a completely democratic country, while 8.1% believe that they live in countries which are not at all democratic.⁸⁷

These results from the WVS are slightly contradictory because they suggest that people concurrently believe that it is good for their country to be governed democratically and to be governed by a ‘strong’ leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections. Unfortunately, there is not enough research on this topic which explores why people hold these contradictory beliefs, but based on the findings from this report and my experience in the civil society sector I will attempt to provide a few possible explanations. Given that almost 80% of respondents believe that they do not live in a completely democratic country,⁸⁸ it is possible that the results from the WVS survey express the people’s disappointment in their democratically elected representatives, instead of the people’s support for authoritarian regimes. The fact that the majority of respondents say that having a democratic political system is good further supports this claim, but it also raises many questions. What do the respondents consider to be a democratic political system? Do they understand what it means for the country to be governed by a ‘strong’ leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections? What role do they think that parliaments and elections have in a democratic political system? What is a ‘strong’ leader? These are all very important questions which are necessary to understand and correctly interpret the results of the WVS.

Moreover, the questions posed by the WVS do not take into account the different ways in which political systems are organized around the world which may impact people’s perception of their state leaders.

It is important to also consider the notion of a ‘strong’ or ‘dominant’ leader and what that really means. This concept has been explored in academic literature and an analysis of such literature shows that a strong leader does not always mean an authoritarian leader. In fact, Kakkara and Sivanathana suggest that support for dominant leaders⁸⁹ is often a consequence of economic uncertainty which is further increased by a sense of a lack of personal control. In these situations, individuals prefer an external agent who can lower the threat posed by one’s environment and reduce the feeling of lacking control over one’s life, which results naturally from economic uncertainty and hardship. To reduce this threat, Kakkara and Sivanathana find that people specifically “prefer a leader who is perceived to be decisive, authoritative, and dominant over a leader who is respected, knowledgeable, admired, and permissive.”⁹⁰

However, a dominant leader does not have to mean an authoritarian leader. In fact, Jiménez, Flitton and Mesoudi reexamine the findings of Kakkara and Sivanathana and conclude that economic uncertainty increases the preference for leadership in general, including both dominant and prestigious leaders. Additionally, they show that the perception of a leader as dominant or prestigious depends on one's own political ideology. For example, left-wing individuals perceive right-wing leaders as dominant and left-wing leaders as prestigious, while right-wing individuals perceive left-wing leaders as dominant and right-wing leaders as prestigious.⁹¹ Therefore, they suggest an alternative explanation according to which electoral support of populist leaders is due to the discourse they use, which tends to be simple, concrete, emotional or negative.⁹² Additionally, populist leaders analyze "social problems as differences in power between racial, gender and sexual orientation groups and seek to rectify these power imbalances between groups," while appealing to a common-enemy.⁹³ These are some of the reasons why "strong leaders" tend to appeal to the electorate. Unfortunately, the concept of strong or dominant leaders has not been sufficiently researched in the context of democratic and authoritarian regimes but rather in the context of left-wing and right-wing political ideologies. Further research is required in this field to better understand the implications of the WVS results.

Recognition of the value of civic space among various stakeholders

Although civic space is very often equated with civil society, it is important to understand and recognize that while not everyone is a part of civil society, everyone is affected by civic space. This section of the report focuses on the recognition of the value of civic space among various stakeholders, including intergovernmental organizations,⁹⁴ donors, the private sector, civil society and citizens.

Intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) are principally a mechanism for states to collaborate in the areas of mutual self-interest, such as trade, economic integration, development, dispute resolution and so forth. The UN is still to this day the only universal multi-purpose IGO, while other IGOs operate on regional or sub regional levels, or are specialized in a specific field.⁹⁵ In the post World War II era, IGOs emerged as major actors in the international system and took on a bigger role in global governance⁹⁶ by promoting peace and security, human rights, democracy and the rule of law. This is especially the case in Europe, where organizations such as the European Union (EU), the Council of Europe (CoE), and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) play a significant role in setting international standards and promoting civic space.⁹⁷ In general, IGOs recognize the value of civic space⁹⁸ and try to promote the inclusion of civil society in national, regional and global governance.⁹⁹ They recognized that civic space is shrinking,¹⁰⁰ and that civil society plays a crucial role in defending and opening up civic space.¹⁰¹

IGOs, in addition to many other actors, can also find themselves in the role of donors. For example, states, international organizations, other non-profit or civil society organizations, private businesses, and private individuals can all provide funding to civil society. Donor support is crucial in strategically combating shrinking civic space¹⁰² and, in general, donors recognize the value of civic space. However, 'donors' are not a homogenous group. This section focuses on international donors - more specifically Western donors or development donors - and their impact on civic space in developing or transitioning states. Civic space matters to international donors because of its impact on development outcomes and effectiveness,¹⁰³ democracy and human rights. However, donors are often more concerned with their own priorities and objectives, rather than the specific conditions or needs of the

country in which they are operating. “Poorly coordinated and ad hoc donor responses can in practice facilitate the shrinking of space,” especially since the reasons for the restrictions, as well as the restrictions themselves, differ from country to country.¹⁰⁴ This is a serious problem in regions where CSOs completely depend on foreign funding, such as the South-Western Asia and Northern Africa (SWANA) region.¹⁰⁵ The perception is that donors usually have good intentions and they want to support the work of CSOs.¹⁰⁶

In the case of Jordan, the NGO sector plays a key role in the economy, with hundreds of organizations responding to all types of social issues at the local, national, and international levels. However, the sector has fallen under extensive criticism due to the tendency for donors to leverage resources and dictate the direction of interventions and services. Government agencies, donor institutions, and INGOs (through the practice of sub-granting to local organizations) hold significant power as they outline the nature of projects, define priorities, and control messaging. Jordanian based NGOs scramble to compete for funding, which is often unstable, dependent on political developments and current trends, and lacks long-term sustainability.¹⁰⁷ When local CSOs lack the ability to control the direction of their work and respond to community needs in a culturally appropriate manner, projects are sometimes implemented which lack sensitivity to the local context or are even harmful to communities, which in turn damages the reputation of CSOs and brews distrust. Disregard for societal and cultural norms, and disconnection from the realities which communities are facing, has led to growing disillusionment with the humanitarian sector as a whole and, by consequence, a weakening of civil society.

Equally troubling is the practice of conditional funding, or funding that is provided by donors only to then be weaponized against recipients due to political or ideological differences. This trend, which has long been employed, became increasingly common due to escalations in regional tensions following the outbreak of the war in Gaza in October 2023. Jordanian civil society organizations have played a crucial role in mobilizing around the ongoing genocide, launching advocacy campaigns and submitting statements discussing human rights violations. In response, several Western donors pressured Jordanian CSOs to change their messaging or disengage from their advocacy efforts.¹⁰⁸ Those who refused were subject to additional penalties including the withdrawal of funding. This lack of independence and conditionality threatens the autonomy, freedom of speech, and sustainability of CSOs who are already facing significant challenges.

There are over 6,600 registered humanitarian organizations in Jordan,¹⁰⁹ which consists of a collection of “...standard nonprofits (NGOs), community-based organization (CBOs), civil society organizations, royal nonprofits, government nonprofits, or charities.”¹¹⁰ These organizations are in turn typically registered with the Ministry of Social Development or the General Union of Voluntary Societies, and thus are subject to several restrictions stipulated by the ministries.¹¹¹ For example, detailed requirements outline the minimum standards required to register an organization, placing administrative and financial burdens on small-scale entities. Some CBOs are unable to meet the minimum criteria to register as an NGO, and instead are relegated to operating at a smaller scale, distributing resources and information and relying on the support of more prominent stakeholders. Other restrictions, such as the Foreign Funding Mechanism, further limit the growth of small nonprofits through granting the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC) oversight of all international contributions, complicating the process and ability for local organizations to receive foreign funding.¹¹² The duality of a restrictive environment created by the Jordanian government, alongside donor constraints and the practice of conditional funding, results in a wealth of obstacles which CSOs must navigate, and a repressed civic space.

Although the private sector is often seen as most removed from civic space and civil society, in the past decade both the role of the private sector in protecting civic space, as well as the impact of civic space on the private sector has been emphasized.¹¹³ Namely, free civic space enables “stable, profitable and predictable business environments in which companies thrive and economies and people prosper.”¹¹⁴ The private sector is becoming increasingly more and more involved in global governance. Businesses are among the richest entities in the world. Some of the world’s biggest companies are richer than some countries¹¹⁵ and there is increasing pressure and expectations on companies to protect democratic values and human rights.¹¹⁶ On paper, the larger private companies support and promote civic space¹¹⁷ and they have often issued statements in defense of democracy and human rights.¹¹⁸ For example, many corporations condemned Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022,¹¹⁹ and over 150 companies condemned the Hamas attack on Israel.¹²⁰ However, most major companies are silent about Israel’s retaliatory actions against Palestinians in Gaza.¹²¹ Not only are private companies unwilling to take a stand which they believe may hurt their bottom line, but they are often the ones violating human rights.¹²² Nevertheless, the momentum is building for the private sector to uphold their human rights duties and protect the civic space,¹²³ and civil society and citizens are putting increasing pressure on companies to do so. For example, many global companies are currently the target of a nonviolent, global protest as individuals are calling for the boycott of companies who have expressed their support for Israel.¹²⁴

Social media has allowed individuals and civil society to raise their voices and take a stand on issues that matter to them. However, research on public attitudes towards civic space and civil society is lacking. In general, CSOs are seen as trustworthy and as an essential element of a democratic society.¹²⁵ For example, the World Values Survey shows that around 73% of individuals in 2022 believed that civil rights are an essential characteristic of democracy.¹²⁶ However, there is some evidence to suggest that the public perceives activists themselves negatively and, consequently, is reluctant to support their cause.¹²⁷

One of the few surveys which measure the public opinion of civil society is the Edelman Trust Barometer. According to the 2023 results, 51% of individuals see NGOs as a reliable source of trustworthy information.¹²⁸ When people perceive their country as polarized, they also do not trust NGOs and the media.¹²⁹ NGO leaders are more likely to be seen as a unifying force that brings people together, while journalists are more likely to be seen as a dividing force that pulls people apart.¹³⁰ In 2023, trust in NGOs declined in 17 out of the 27 countries surveyed by the Edelman Trust Barometer, while it improved in only 6. Similarly, trust in media declined in 16 countries, while improving in 6.¹³¹ According to the results of the survey, the World Health Organization is the most trusted Multinational Organization, followed by the United Nations and the European Union.¹³² However, trust in the United Nations decreased in 21 out of the 27 countries (almost 80% of the surveyed countries).¹³³ Lastly, when individuals were asked whether they trust different types of sources for general news and information, they responded that they trust search engines, they are neutral about traditional media, and they distrust owned media and social media.¹³⁴

Accessibility and understandability of the language used in discussions related to civic space

Civic space and civil society are not concepts that are familiar to the general population. They are often cloaked in ambiguity and confusion. Therefore, when talking about civic space or civil society and explaining their role in promoting and protecting democracy to the general population, it is important to not get bogged down in technical and dry definitions of what ‘civil society’ is or what ‘civic space’ is. The danger of people perceiving civil society and civic space as complex and difficult to understand concepts is that they may consequently see them as inaccessible and foreign to them. Although an open civil space is necessary for the proper functioning of civil society, we are all affected by civic space freedom.

Therefore, Butler proposed that the focus should be on “the values that CSOs put into practice in a tangible way that brings to life the end products and experiences that people get to enjoy when CSOs have a supportive environment in which to operate.”¹³⁵ He gives the following examples of value statements:

<i>Don't say</i>	<i>Try instead</i>
A CSO is an organisation that is not a business, is not government, does not operate to create profits and pursues a charitable purpose.	Most of us want to know that no matter where we live or how much we have in our wallets, each of us gets a fair start in life / can count on clean air to breathe and water that's safe to drink. We work with citizens to demand that our leaders deliver on things all of us find important.
Civic space refers to the room that CSOs have to operate free from undue restrictions or burdens from the government.	When citizens are free to work together we can make sure that our representatives listen to our concerns and fund the things we want for our loved ones, like good health and a good education.

Figure 4. - Examples of value statements. Source: How to Talk about Civic Space: A Guide for Progressive Civil Society Facing Smear Campaigns by Israel Butler (2021)¹³⁶

Another useful tool to make discussions around civic space is metaphors. “To be effective, a metaphor should be easy to understand, easy to remember and easy to repeat.”¹³⁷ One example of a metaphor used in the civic space is referring to some CSOs as watchdogs “that make sure that those in power stick to the rules and who alert the public when this is not the case.”¹³⁸ However, when using metaphors, it is important to be mindful of the fact that metaphors are subject to personal interpretation which may not always be positive.¹³⁹ Butler explains also how to talk about solutions to the particular problems that civil society is facing, as well as how to respond to smear campaigns.¹⁴⁰ His main point is that the discussions should focus on the end result of the proposed action and how that action will make a difference in people’s lives.¹⁴¹

5. Benefits of a Healthy Civil Society

As citizens of the 21st century, we live in an unprecedented time of innovation, technological advancement and opportunities. Despite this, there is evidence that civic

space is shrinking. Namely, civic space across the globe is closing and the world is moving away from democratization. However, the question remains: is civil society a prerequisite for a functioning democracy or is a functioning democracy a prerequisite for a healthy civil society? Looking at the findings from the previous section, it is clear that the answer to this question is not that simple. In fact, the most accurate answer is that **civil society is a prerequisite for and a consequence of democracy.**

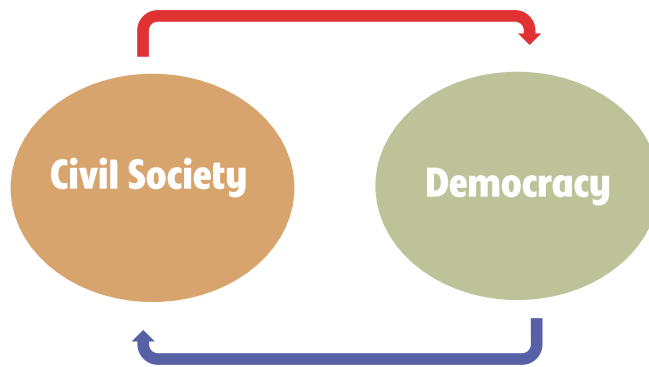


Figure 5. - Visualization of the interconnectedness between civil society and democracy

Whatever the case may be, democracy and civil society are inextricably linked and civil society plays a very important role in promoting and protecting democracy, rule of law and human rights. Some of the benefits of a healthy civil society for communities and mainstream populations include:

1. **Contributing to development.**¹⁴²
2. **Providing essential services** that are normally the responsibility of the state or the other sectors such as the market or the family.¹⁴³
3. **Protecting and advocating for human rights** and working to change and uphold social norms and behaviors.¹⁴⁴
4. **Empowering and providing stability** to a society by creating a space where people can talk, create, engage and support each other and it provides an alternative to formal political participation.¹⁴⁵
5. **Functioning on commitment.** Individuals who are part of the civil sector are often motivated by their commitment to a certain cause they believe in, which is part of the reason why CSOs do things that the state, the market, and the family will never do, and why their autonomy is so important.¹⁴⁶
6. **Allowing for flexibility** by having low costs of entry (in some cases). Anyone can organize themselves to volunteer or clean up a park or fundraise for a specific cause. The flexibility of civil society is also the reason why it responds first to a crisis or it can respond to unexpected new needs.¹⁴⁷
7. **Shaping policy** by advocating for the needs and demands of citizens, strengthening public participation in democracy, and providing expertise and information. Civil society can bring new information to decision-makers through research and close contacts with particular populations, as well as it can provide public authorities with new ideas and perspectives.¹⁴⁸
8. **Providing information for citizens** by monitoring government institutions, policies and activities, reporting on their progress and implementation, and holding governments accountable.¹⁴⁹

According to the CIVICUS Monitor report, only 10 countries have upgraded their civic space ratings in 2022.¹⁵⁰ If we examine some countries where civic space has improved in the last year, it is undeniable that the state plays the key role in opening up civic space. For example, the civic space in Chile and the USA improved from obstructed to narrowed in 2022 due to a change in political leadership which opened a path for better protection of civic space. In the Czech Republic there was a draft legislative proposal to strengthen the editorial independence of Czech Television, while in Latvia CSOs were more involved in decision-making.¹⁵¹ The judicial system also plays a big role in protecting and opening up civic space. Human rights defenders were released or acquitted in several countries such as Honduras,¹⁵² Iran,¹⁵³ Kuwait,¹⁵⁴ and Rwanda.¹⁵⁵

Some other good practices that can be employed by states to protect and promote civic space include:

- ***Protecting journalists and press freedom*** by adopting a legal framework for protection of human rights defenders which also applies to journalists or adopting legislation which specifically protects journalists, introducing aggravated sanctions for homicides of journalists, and ensuring editorial independence.
- ***Reforming CSO registration procedures*** by creating a registration system based on notification instead of state authorization, not charging fees for registration, making information about registered NGOs publicly available, and reducing the number of administrative steps and required documents for registration of CSOs.
- ***Providing core and unconditional funding for CSOs***, such as subsidies for operational and capacity-building costs, subsidies for the construction of educational and cultural sites, funding to strengthen CSOs' autonomy and networking, or unconditional funding that can be used for whatever purpose the CSOs see fit.
- ***Creating an environment for giving*** by, for example, providing exemptions from obtaining a license for small-scale fundraising from obtaining a license or providing exemptions from VAT for donations sent by text message to CSOs.¹⁵⁶

Although the state plays a critical role in opening up civic space, civil society is key in promoting civic space and pushing back against authoritarian forces that are trying to suffocate civil society organizations.

There are many ways civil society can promote or protect civic space:

1. First, civil society can promote civic space through protests.

For example, the 2018 'Velvet Revolution' in Armenia dislodged the country's kleptocratic ruling elite and resulted in the election of a new government which promised domestic reforms.¹⁵⁷ Since then, civic space in Armenia has been improving.¹⁵⁸ A similar revolution took place in North Macedonia in 2016, called the 'Colorful Revolution',¹⁵⁹ which succeeded in forcing the government (which had captured the state) to step down and resulted in the election of a government which opened up civic space and drastically improved media freedom. "In Sri Lanka, mass protests led to the resignation of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who presided over a climate of repression against activists, journalists and critics."¹⁶⁰

2. Second, civil society can promote positive change through campaigning and advocacy.

In Thailand, civil society has managed to pressure the authorities to formally charge a former senior park ranger and three subordinates suspected of killing an activist, after eight years of campaigning.¹⁶¹ In Indonesia, civil society finally managed last year to push the country's human rights commission to investigate the killing of a human rights activist which happened in 2004.¹⁶² Also, after years of advocacy by activists and victims' groups, the government of Indonesia finally apologized for and acknowledged severe historical human rights violations going back more than 50 years.¹⁶³ In Hungary, civil society organized a successful campaign calling for the boycott of a referendum that was seeking endorsement for the government's anti-LGBTQI+ agenda.¹⁶⁴ "In Iraq, despite the dire situation, a resilient civil society has defied all odds to push back against government excesses by continuing to take collective action to call for accountability, social justice and the protection of human rights, particularly in regard to violations against protesters during mass protests in October 2021. In response to mounting pressure from civil society, in February 2022 the authorities arrested Lieutenant-Colonel Omar Nizar on charges of killing protesters during an infamous 2019 crackdown on protests."¹⁶⁵

3. Campaigns against repressive civil society laws are crucial in promoting civic space, but they are not always successful.

Democracy, although a supportive factor, is not a determinative factor for an effective campaign. Similarly, the amount of foreign aid is not a determinative factor, but rather the priorities set by the donors. According to Cheeseman and Dodsworth, there are four main characteristics of an effective campaign against repressive civil society laws: (1) cohesive coordination between local and international actors, (2) the campaign is pre-emptive and sustained, (3) is framed in a manner that resonates with the electoral incentives of parliamentarians, and (4) it engages pragmatically with the both the informal political rules that govern the behavior of legislators and the formal procedural mechanisms of legislatures.¹⁶⁶

4. Last but not least, civil society can take advantage of the legal system to promote civic space.

"In the USA, lawsuits from racial justice groups resulted in security forces adopting positive policy changes on the policing of protests. Civil society groups also frequently used strategic litigation to appeal to the justice system to push back against restrictive laws and demand recognition of their rights. In January 2022, Ecuador's Constitutional Court handed down a ruling reaffirming Indigenous peoples' right to free, prior and informed consent, creating what environmental group Amazon Frontlines said was 'one of the most powerful legal precedents' on the matter."¹⁶⁷

"In settings characterized by authoritarianism, violent conflict, and restricted civic space, relations between governments, civil society, and citizens at best tend to be fragile and fraught."¹⁶⁸ This situation is additionally complicated in times of crisis, such as a global pandemic. Crises accentuate the need for a healthy civil society, while at the same time restricting civic space. This paradox is referred to as the governance shock doctrine.¹⁶⁹ Civic space was not only temporarily reshaped by the COVID-19 pandemic, but also reconfigured in the long term. Just as we will have to live with the COVID-19 virus, we will also have to live with the consequences of the pandemic on civil society and civic space, since measures adopted in emergency situations have a tendency to persist or become permanent.¹⁷⁰ Civil

society organizations must also keep this in mind when designing action to reopen or to keep civic space open. Moreover, CSOs should attempt to maintain into the post-pandemic context the solidarity instinct that characterized the pandemic responses, “building and maintaining alliances with each other across causes and identities.”¹⁷¹

In a situation where civic space is closing, service providing organizations can play a big role in promoting civic space. “[S]ervice providers tend to be more capable of functioning “under the radar” thus contributing to democracy in both direct and indirect ways, and thus escaping closing space restrictions”.¹⁷²

After considering all of the different aspects of closing civic space and the role of civil society in promoting it, it is important to also define and outline the characteristics of a **healthy civil society**.¹⁷³

Healthy Civil Society

Characteristics	Indicators
Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → How large is the civil society sector? → Is it composed of diverse civil society actors? → Do those actors collaborate amongst themselves? → Are all civil society actors enabled to participate in public life, without discrimination of any kind?
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Does civil society command the necessary human, financial, organizational and technology resources to achieve its objectives? → How is it funded? Is civil society dependent on donors or does it have financial independence and autonomy? → Does civil society have access to public information? → Does it have access to long-term support and resources?
Enabling environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Is civic space open (based on the CIVICUS Monitor)? → Are civil society actors able to act independently of the state? → Are they able to advocate positions different from those of public authorities? → Do they have shared goals and objectives with public authorities? → Is there public trust and support for civil society? → Is the role of civil society in society recognized by the state? → Is the role of civil society in society recognized by the citizens? → Is the legislation in line with international standards and safeguard civil society activities? If so, are the laws and policies being implemented in practice?
Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Does civil society promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law? → Does civil society act with transparency and accountability towards the public?
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Does civil society have an impact on the different aspects of society including social, economic or political problems? → Does civil society have a place in decision-making processes?

Table 2. - Characteristics and indicators of a healthy civil society

6. Conclusion

The findings of this report paint a grim picture of the state of civic space worldwide, with a growing number of countries facing restrictions on civic freedoms and an increasingly hostile environment for civil society. Urgent measures are required to address this trend and create an enabling environment for civic participation and the protection of human rights and freedoms. The global community must remain vigilant in defending these fundamental principles.

A significant concern is the growing number of authoritarian regimes and the increased popular support for strong leaders who do not have to bother with parliamentary or electoral processes. The data from the World Values Survey shows a rise in the percentage of respondents who believe such leaders are good for their country. Interestingly, despite this, a majority of respondents still view having a democratic political system as good and consider it important to live in a democratically governed country. This reflects a complex and potentially contradictory set of beliefs, which require further exploration.

The report underscores the importance of civic space in democratic governance and development, as well as the role various stakeholders play in supporting or potentially hindering this space. The interplay between IGOs, donors, citizens and civil society is complex, and finding the right balance between them is a significant challenge. However, addressing these challenges is vital to protect and promote civic space worldwide.

The following recommendations are proposed to promote a healthy civil society and make it accessible for the mainstream population:

- **Promote trust.** “Research shows that people who trust CSOs are more likely to support them and the causes they promote [...] by donating, volunteering, defending them from criticism, participating in protests and campaigns, or repeating their messages to others.”¹⁷⁴ Additionally, when public trust towards CSOs is high, authoritarian regimes cannot easily restrict civil society. In order to build trust, civil society should identify and focus on the shared values and things that the mainstream population finds important, such as individual freedom and autonomy. Civil society can emphasize how it gives individuals greater liberty.¹⁷⁵
- **Nurture civic engagement skills among the mainstream population, but especially the youth.** Create actions through which individuals would be able to engage in solving community issues in a collective way, by involving different members of the community.¹⁷⁶
- **Promote the inclusion of competences for democratic culture in primary and secondary education.** For example, the Council of Europe has created a set of materials¹⁷⁷ that can be used by education systems to equip young people with “the competences that are needed to take action to defend and promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law, to act as active citizens, to participate effectively in a culture of democracy, and to live peacefully together with others in culturally diverse societies.”¹⁷⁸ The materials simply provide a framework that teachers can easily incorporate into their existing curriculum. The aim of the materials is to equip teachers with the resources and tools to be able to develop competences for democratic culture among their students. In order to promote civic space, these materials can be translated and adapted to different contexts so that they could be used in other regions as well. The

implementation of these materials would also require training of teachers and school staff.

- **Increase the capacities of civil society to promote itself.** CSOs themselves have to take an active role in promoting their work and their role in society. However, many CSOs and civil society actors do not know how to do that. The capacities of civil society in this regard should be increased through training, tools and resources. For example, Butler's guide on "How to talk about civic space: A guide for progressive civil society facing smear campaigns"¹⁷⁹ can be used to develop such training or resources.

Future research

Research on public attitudes towards civic space and civil society is severely lacking. The research that exists on the topic does not provide a very in-depth understanding of those attitudes. For example, it does not take into account that people have different attitudes towards different types of CSOs, nor does it explore the reasons behind those attitudes. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct additional qualitative and quantitative research on this topic to gain a better understanding of public attitudes towards civil society.

Additionally, it would be interesting to conduct research to study why support is growing for strong leaders who do not have to bother with parliament and elections, while at the same time, the majority of individuals report that it is important to them to live in a country that is governed democratically. These findings point to the importance of ongoing research and analysis to understand the factors and dynamics that drive these perspectives. Research on this topic is crucial to address the challenges posed by the rise of authoritarian tendencies, while safeguarding democratic principles and values.

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- ⁴⁰ CIVICUS Monitor Ratings
- ⁴¹ Frank Cunningham, *Theories of Democracy: A Critical Introduction* (1st edn, Routledge 2002) 2-3 <<https://www.routledge.com/Theories-of-Democracy-A-Critical-Introduction/Cunningham/p/book/9780415228794>> accessed 30 November 2023
- ⁴² Svend-Erik Skaaning and Alexander Hudson, 'The Global State of Democracy Indices Methodology' (2023) International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance 9 <<https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/GSOD/global-state-of-democracy-indices-methodology-v7-2023.pdf>> accessed 30 November 2023 [GSOD Methodology 2023]
- ⁴³ CoE Democracy

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- ⁴⁴ Held 2006, 24
- ⁴⁵ CoE Democracy
- ⁴⁶ GSoD Methodology 2023, 10
- ⁴⁷ GSoD Methodology 2023, 12
- ⁴⁸ GSoD Methodology 2023, 11
- ⁴⁹ GSoD Methodology 2023, 12
- ⁵⁰ GSoD Methodology 2023, 13-18
- ⁵¹ GSoD Methodology 2023, 26-31
- ⁵² Democracy Assessment team, 'The Global State of Democracy 2022: Forging Social Contracts in a Time of Discontent' (2022) International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance 6
<<https://www.idea.int/democracytracker/sites/default/files/2022-11/the-global-state-of-democracy-2022.pdf>> accessed 30 November 2023 [GSoD Report 2022]
- ⁵³ GSoD Report 2022, 2, iv, x
- ⁵⁴ Democracy Assessment team, 'The Global State of Democracy 2021: Building Resilience in a Pandemic Era' (2021) International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance iv <<https://www.idea.int/democracytracker/sites/default/files/2022-11/GSOD21.pdf>> accessed 30 November 2023 [GSoD Report 2021]
- ⁵⁵ GSoD Report 2021, 3
- ⁵⁶ Kalu N. Kalu, *A functional theory of government, law, and institutions* (Rowman & Littlefield 2019) 161
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- ⁵⁷ 'Nations in Transit Methodology' (Freedom House) <<https://freedomhouse.org/reports/nations-transit/nations-transit-methodology>> accessed 30 November 2023
- ⁵⁸ Rochana Bajpai and Yasser Kureshi, 'Mechanisms of democratic authoritarianism: decentring the executive in South Asia and beyond' (2022) 29(8) Democratization 1375-1376 <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13510347.2022.2062324>> accessed 30 November 2023 [Bajpai and Yasser Kureshi 2022]
- ⁵⁹ Bajpai and Yasser Kureshi 2022, 1376
- ⁶⁰ Ibid.
- ⁶¹ Ibid.
- ⁶² The first event was the 'Exchange of Views with Civil Society' by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, which was held in Strasbourg on 15 September 2023. Read more here: 'Secretary General's Roadmap on Civil Society engagement with the Council' of The second event was the 'Regional and global efforts to advance the anti-corruption agenda: dialogue for Asia and Europe' by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), which was held in Vienna on 17-18 October 2023. Read more here: https://grace.unodc.org/grace/uploads/documents/news/Agenda_Regional_dialogue_Europe_Asia_-_Vienna_-_16.10.2023.pdf The same dialogue was also organized in [Latin America](#) and [Africa](#).
- ⁶³ MENA Chapters of Transparency International and the UNCAC Coalition, 'Statement on Shrinking Civic Space in Arab countries' (UNCAC Coalition) <<https://uncaccoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/Shrinking-Civic-Spaces-in-the-MENA.pdf>> accessed 30 November 2023; Tomaž Deželan and Laden Yurttagüler, 'Shrinking democratic civic space for youth' (2021) The Council of Europe and the European Union <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/59895423/TDLY_CSYP.pdf/cb8643c1-2707-0f1b-3f81-f13704dc9081> accessed 30 November 2023; Róisín Dunbar, 'Shrinking civic space in Bangladesh, the Philippines and India continues unabated' (CIVICUS, 27 September 2023) <<https://www.civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/news/united-nations/geneva/6596-shrinking-civic-space-in-bangladesh-the-philippines-and-india-continues-unabated>> accessed 30 November 2023; 'CIVIC SPACE ON A DOWNWARD SPIRAL' (CIVICUS Monitor, 2020) <<https://findings2020.monitor.civicus.org/downward-spiral.htm>> accessed 30 November 2023; Nicolas Bouchet and Inga Wachsmann, 'A Matter of Precaution—Watching the Shrinking Civic Space in Western Europe' (2019) The German Marshall Fund of the United States <<https://www.gmfus.org/sites/default/files/A%20Matter%20of%20Precaution%E2%80%94Watching%20the%20Shrinking%20Civic%20Space%20in%20Western%20Europe.pdf>> accessed 30 November 2023 [Bouchet and Wachsmann 2019]; Commissioner for Human Rights, 'Bosnia and Herzegovina: Republika Srpska authorities should refrain from further restricting the rights of NGOs' (Council of Europe, 21 September 2023) < Secretary General's Roadmap on Civil Society engagement with the Council of Europe > accessed 30 November 2023

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- ⁶⁴ Bouchet and Wachsmann 2019, 1
- ⁶⁵ People Power Under Attack 2022, 5; Freedom in the World 2023, 1; Allie Funk, Adrian Shahbaz and Kian Vesteinsson, 'Freedom on the Net 2023: The Repressive Power of Artificial Intelligence' (2023) Freedom House 1
<<https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/Freedom-on-the-net-2023-Digital-Booklet.pdf>> accessed 30 November 2023; Mike Smeltzer and Alexandra Karppi, 'Nations in Transit 2023: War Deepens a Regional Divide' (2023) Freedom House 1
<https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/NIT_2023_Digital.pdf> accessed 30 November 2023; GSoD Report 2022, vii
- ⁶⁶ People Power Under Attack (PPUA) is a report published based on the data from the CIVICUS Monitor – a tool which tracks civic space in 197 countries and assigns ratings on the state of civic space.
- ⁶⁷ People Power Under Attack 2022, 5
- ⁶⁸ People Power Under Attack 2022, 6
- ⁶⁹ Originally published here: <https://civusmonitor.contentfiles.net/media/documents/PPUA2022FactsheetGlobal.pdf>
- ⁷⁰ 'CIVICUS Monitor' (CIVICUS) <<https://monitor.civus.org/>> accessed 30 November 2023
- ⁷¹ People Power Under Attack 2022, 5
- ⁷² Originally published here: <https://civusmonitor.contentfiles.net/media/documents/GlobalFindings2022.pdf>
- ⁷³ People Power Under Attack 2022, 8
- ⁷⁴ Harassment is the most common violation observed, and it is defined as “the repeated targeting of a HRD, journalist or CSO, through conduct that is unwanted and has the intention of curtailing the exercise of one or more civic freedoms by the person or organization.” – People Power Under Attack 2022, 9
- ⁷⁵ 'People Power Under Attack 2022 Factsheet: Data Country Ratings and Top Violations' (2022) CIVICUS 3
<<https://civusmonitor.contentfiles.net/media/documents/PPUA2022FactsheetGlobal.pdf>> accessed 30 November 2023 [People Power Under Attack 2022 Factsheet]
- ⁷⁶ GSoD Report 2022
- ⁷⁷ GSoD Report 2021, 3
- ⁷⁸ GSoD Report 2022, 2
- ⁷⁹ GSoD Report 2021, 37
- ⁸⁰ GSoD Report 2022, vii
- ⁸¹ World Values Survey Wave 7: 2017–2022 available at <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp>
Haerpfer, C., Inglehart, R., Moreno, A., Welzel, C., Kizilova, K., Diez-Medrano J., M. Lagos, P. Norris, E. Ponarin & B. Puranen (eds.). 2022. World Values Survey: Round Seven – Country-Pooled Datafile Version 5.0. Madrid, Spain & Vienna, Austria: JD Systems Institute & WVSA Secretariat. doi:10.14281/18241.20
- ⁸² World Values Survey Wave 7, Question 235, Aggregate of response categories 'very good' and 'fairly good'.
- ⁸³ The GSoD 2022 Report states (pg. 5) the following: “Survey data indicates that the proportion of people who agree with the idea that having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament or elections has been consistently growing in recent years. In 2009, the World Values Survey reported that only 38 percent of respondents thought this idea was fairly good or very good. In 2021, that figure had risen to 52 per cent (Figure 4).”
The GSoD Report does not offer any explanation as to how it arrived at these aggregate percentages, and based on the data provided by the World Values Survey, I did not arrive at the same conclusion. I am not sure why this discrepancy occurs. The percentages and the analysis I have provided in this report are based on my own calculations.
- ⁸⁴ World Values Survey Wave 7, Question 238, Aggregate of response categories 'very good' and 'fairly good'.
- ⁸⁵ World Values Survey Wave 7, Question 250, Aggregate of response categories 1(not at all important) to 4.
- ⁸⁶ World Values Survey Wave 7, Question 253, Aggregate of response categories 'A great deal of respect for individual human rights' and 'Fairly much respect'.
- ⁸⁷ WVS Online Analysis
- ⁸⁸ World Values Survey Wave 7, Question 251, Aggregate of response categories 2 to 9.
- ⁸⁹ “Dominant leaders tend to be decisive, assertive and controlling. They often use coercion and instill fear in others to pursue their goals and maintain their status, and they generally do not worry about what these behaviors cost the people around them.”
“Prestige leaders tend to be capable or accomplished, but also share their knowledge and skills with others around them, earning them respect, gratitude and admiration. But they can be seen as lacking the ability to make quick decisions, or the ability to place the interests of their group above those of outsiders at all costs.”

Robert Ferris, 'Why voters might be choosing dominant, authoritarian leaders around the world' (CNBC, 12 June 2017) <<https://www.cnbc.com/2017/06/12/why-voters-might-be-choosing-dominant-authoritarian-leaders-around-the-world.html>> accessed 30 November 2023

"The dominance strategy entails the use of force and coercion against others. Its success depends on the capacity to defeat and/or induce fear in other individuals. Consequently, people tend to dislike dominant individuals and avoid proximity to them. "In contrast, the prestige strategy entails the display of competence within valued domains and/or pro-ingroup behaviors. Its success depends on the capacity to induce admiration and voluntary deference in others because prestigious individuals are perceived as having instrumental value to accomplish one's own goals, such as socially learning valuable knowledge/skills or being provided with tangible private and public goods. This explains why people generally like and prefer prestigious individuals as both leaders and social companions.

Ángel V. Jiménez¹, Adam Flitton¹ and Alex Mesoudi, 'When do people prefer dominant over prestigious political leaders?' (2021) *Evolutionary Human Sciences* 3(e16) 2 <<https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/8625DE79C3C149662042DADAA52B5C7/S2513843X21000128a.pdf/when-do-people-prefer-dominant-over-prestigious-political-leaders.pdf>> accessed 30 November 2023 [Jiménez¹, Flitton¹ and Mesoudi 2021]

⁹⁰ Hemant Kakkara and Niro Sivanathan, 'When the appeal of a dominant leader is greater than a prestige leader' (2017) *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114(26) 6735, 6738 <<https://www.pnas.org/doi/epdf/10.1073/pnas.1617711114>> accessed 30 November 2023

⁹¹ Jiménez¹, Flitton¹ and Mesoudi 2021, 18

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⁹³ Ángel Victor Jiménez Infante, 'The Cultural Evolution of Social Hierarchy: Dominance, Prestige, Social Learning' (2020) University of Exeter (United Kingdom) 255-257 <<https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/bitstream/handle/10871/121148/Jimenez%20InfanteA.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>> accessed 30 November 2023

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'Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs)' (*Harvard Law School*) <<https://hls.harvard.edu/bernard-koteen-office-of-public-interest-advising/about-opia/what-is-public-interest-law/public-service-practice-settings/international-public-interest-law-practice-setting/intergovernmental-organizations-igos/#:~:text=The%20term%20intergovernmental%20organization%20>> accessed 30 November 2023

⁹⁵ For an overview of different types of IGOs, see Jackson A. Aluede and Matthew Onalo Agbawn, 'Global Governance and the Role of Intergovernmental Organisations in Promoting Global Peace and Security' (2023) *ABUAD Journal of Social and Management Sciences* 4(1) 30-31 <<https://journals.abuad.edu.ng/index.php/ajsms/article/view/127>> accessed 30 November 2023 [Aluede and Agbawn 2023]

⁹⁶ Aluede and Agbawn 2023

⁹⁷ An interesting thing to note is that European IGOs often spread their influence far beyond the European continent. They have established themselves in the international system as promoters of democracy, human rights and the rule of law globally. For example, the EU has external actions in [Africa and the EU](#), [Asia](#), [Central Asia](#), [Latin America and the Caribbean](#), [Middle East and North Africa \(MENA\)](#), [North America - Canada and the United States](#), and the [Pacific](#). This dynamic can be problematic, which will be explored later in this section when discussing the relationship between donors and civic space.

⁹⁸ OECD, 'The Protection and Promotion of Civic Space: Strengthening Alignment with International Standards and Guidance' (2022) OECD Publishing <<https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/d234e975-en/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/d234e975-en>> accessed 30 November 2023; Council of the EU, 'Fundamental rights: Council approves conclusions on the role of the civic space' (*Council of the EU and the European Council*, 10 March 2023) <<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/03/10/fundamental-rights-council-approves-conclusions-on-the-role-of-the-civic-space/>> accessed 30 November 2023

⁹⁹ OECD Civil Society Portal <<https://www.oecd.org/about/civil-society/>> accessed 30 November 2023; African Union: Diaspora & Civil Society Engagement <<https://au.int/en/diaspora-civil-society-engagement>> accessed 30 November 2023; The Organization of American States - Relations with Civil Society Organizations <https://www.oas.org/en/ser/dia/civil_society/index.shtml> accessed 30 November 2023; The ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum (ACSC/APF) <<https://acscapf.org/wp/>> accessed 30 November 2023; ASEAN Entities Digital Platform <<https://entities.asean.org/accredited-entities/civil-society-organisations-csos/>> accessed 30 November 2023; Mervat Rishmawi, 'The League of Arab States: Human Rights Standards and Mechanisms' (2015) Open Society Foundations and Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies <<https://www.cihrs.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/league-arab-states-manual-en-20151125.pdf>> accessed 30 November 2023

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November 2023; 'OHCHR and protecting and expanding civic space' (*Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*) <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/civic-space>> accessed 30 November 2023; 'IACHR and SRFOE publish consultation questionnaire for the preparation of the thematic report on the closure of civic space in the Americas' (The Organization of American States, 9 June 2022) <<https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/expression/showarticle.asp?artID=1240&IID=1>> accessed 30 November 2023; 'About the NGO Forum' (The African Center for Democracy and Human Rights Studies, 2023) <<https://www.acdhrs.org/ngo-forum/>> accessed 30 November 2023

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¹⁰⁸ <<https://www.annd.org/en/publications/details/jordanian-civil-societys-efficacy-is-met-with-more-restrictions>>

¹⁰⁹ <http://societies.gov.jo/ar/pages/%D8%B3%D8%AC%D9%84_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA>

¹¹⁰ <<https://newlinesinstitute.org/nonstate-actors/civil-society/jordans-small-ngos-are-in-a-financial-chokehold/>>

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ 'The Un Guiding Principles on Business And Human Rights: An Introduction' (*Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*) <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Business/Intro_Guiding_PrinciplesBusinessHR.pdf> accessed 30 November 2023; 'The role of the private sector in protecting civic space' (2021) Chatham House <<https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/2021-01-29-private-sector-protecting-civic-space-freeman-et-al.pdf.pdf>> accessed 30 November 2023 [Chatham House 2023]; Transparency International and UNCAC Coalition, 'Civil Society Guide: UNCAC and the Private Sector' (2013) The UNCAC Coalition <<https://www.unodc.org/documents/NGO/Civil-Society-Guide-English.pdf>> accessed 30 November 2023

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- The percentages represent an aggregate of response categories 6 to 10 (an essential characteristic of democracy).
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- ¹³⁰ 2023 Edelman Trust Barometer, 21
- ¹³¹ 2023 Edelman Trust Barometer, 42 and 44
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- ¹³³ 2023 Edelman Trust Barometer, 51
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- ¹³⁸ Ibid.
- ¹³⁹ For examples of more metaphors, see Butler's Guide on pages 24 and 25 <https://dq4n3btxmr8c9.cloudfront.net/files/SyG95z/Liberties_Civic_Space_Framing_Guide.pdf>
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- 'SRI LANKAN PRESIDENT CONTINUES CRACKDOWN ON ACTIVISTS AND PROTESTERS, INCLUDING USE OF ANTI-TERROR LAW' (*CIVICUS Monitor*, 25 August 2022) <<https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/sri-lankan-president-continues-crackdown-activists-and-protesters-including-use-anti-terror-law/>> accessed 30 November 2023; 'Sri Lanka: A year after Presidential elections, civic freedoms under increasing assault' (*CIVICUS*, 17 November 2020) <<https://www.civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/news/4740-sri-lanka-a-year-after-presidential-elections-civic-freedoms-under-increasing-assault>> accessed 30 November 2023
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- ¹⁷⁵ Butler 2021, 13-16
- See pg. 19 - Structure of a persuasive narrative that can stimulate support for CSOs and the causes they work on
- ¹⁷⁶ This recommendation is based on the conversation with Bilal Olimat and AFSC's program in Jordan.
- ¹⁷⁷ You can find the materials here: Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/reference-framework-of-competences-for-democratic-culture/rfcdc-volumes>> accessed 30 November 2023; Democratic and Inclusive School Culture in Operation (DISCO) <<https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/charter-edc-hre-pilot-projects/publications#%7B%228522015%22:%5B0%7D%7D>> accessed 30 November 2023
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