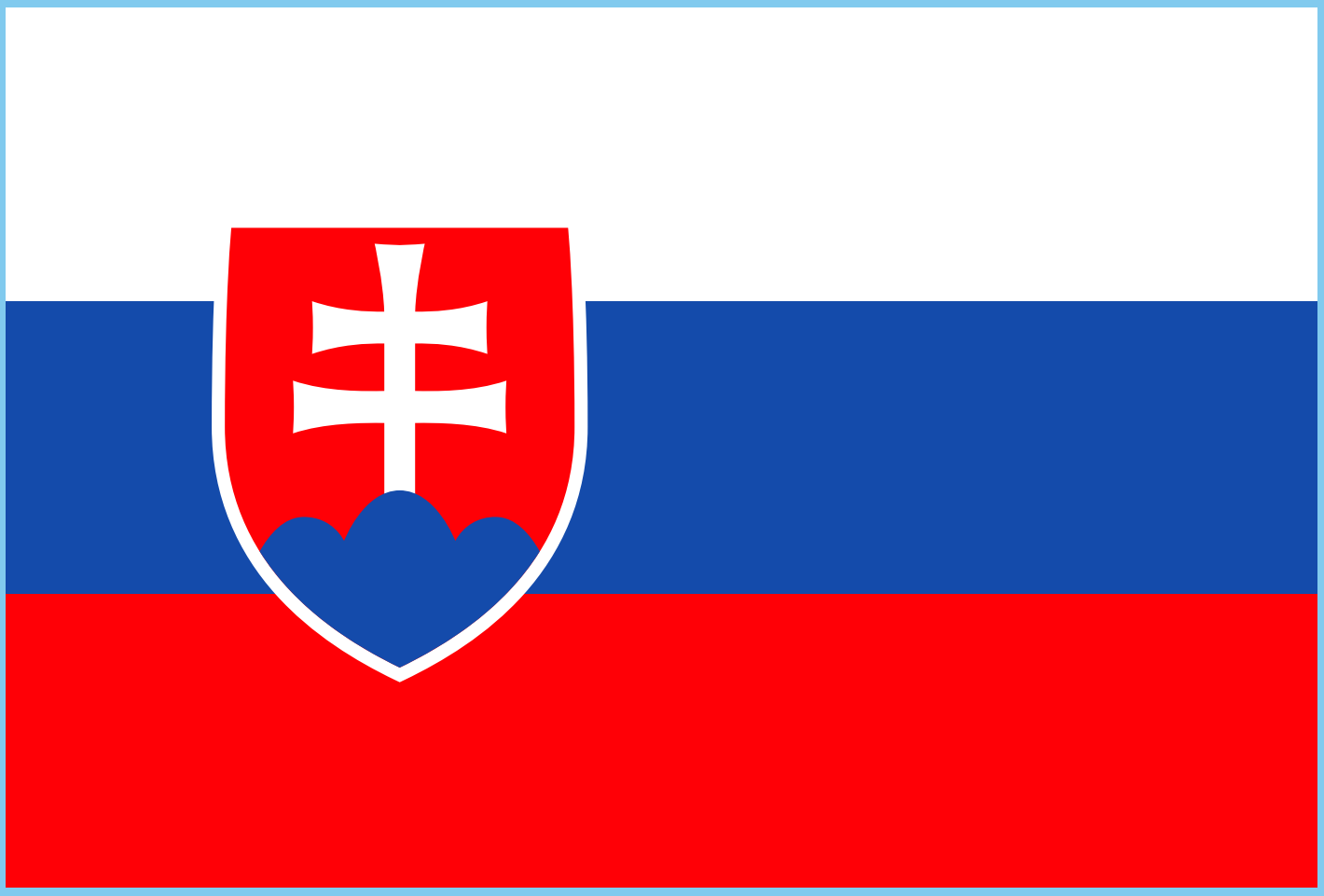
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Civic Space Report
October 2026



Boris Strečanský

Civic Space Report Slovakia

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Civic Space Report 2025/2026

Slovakia

Country Score: **Mixed – Restrictive Leaning** Country Trend: ↘

2.35

Cluster A: 1.80
A1 Equal treatment: 2
A2 Political recognition as partners: 2
A3 Refrained authorities from smearing: 1
A4 No weaponization of state powers: 2
A5 Transparent and open public institutions: 2

Cluster B: 2.80
B1 Free establishment and operation: 3
B2 CSOs enjoy a safe space: 3
B3 Liberty of resourcing: 2
B4 Enabling fiscal environment: 3
B5 Free expression of criticism: 3

Cluster C: 2.80
C1 Citizens trust: 3
C2 Present in media: 2
C3 Free engagement: 3
C4 CSOs embedded in communities: 3
C5 Freedom of assembly: 3

Cluster D: 2.00
D1 Decision-making participation: 2
D2 Timely consultations: 2
D3 Policies for cooperation: 2
D4 Free advocacy: 3
D5 Government listens: 1

Civic Space Report – Slovakia

Introduction

Since late 2023, civic space in Slovakia has faced strong pressure from the 4th government of Robert Fico, which pursues populist economic policies, an anti-European, sovereignist foreign policy, and an illiberal, soft-authoritarian, and nationalistic-conservative domestic policy that explicitly targets and vilifies critical civil society, independent media, and political opposition.

The period of January 2025 – June 2026 marks the continuation of high contestation and confrontation on the domestic turf, continued process of state capture by a narrow circle of party cronies and oligarchs, take-over of institutions serving narrow party agendas, and emotionally charged and antagonistic public discourse that raises polarization and broader societal mistrust. The government's rhetorics and politics have been discrediting the liberal-democratic regime, shifting toward an Orban-type electoral democracy. Power is being concentrated in clientelist, clan-like networks taking over the control of many institutions, while the remaining independent institutions keep resisting attempts to capture them. Participatory and deliberative democracy is being hollowed out. The European Commission concluded in 2026 that the civil-society environment continued to face pressure, while CIVICUS rated Slovakia's civic space as "narrowed" (Civicus Monitor, 2026; European Commission, 2026).

Cluster A – Institutional and Political Environment and Narratives

A1 – Equal treatment

Standard. *The state treats all CSOs equally with regard to their establishment, registration and activities, and does not restrict organizations because they express views critical of officials or policy without privileging loyal or government-organized/funded entities (GONGOs).*

The freedom of association and general CSO legal framework are not discriminatory. There is a constitutional guarantee of equal treatment. However, Act 109/2025, commonly referred to as the "Russian law" which was adopted in 2025, had serious implications for CSOs' access to resources, as it introduced extensive new administrative and reporting obligations and impacted their access to resources. These burdens arose not only from amendments to the legislation governing non-profit organizations, but also from the simultaneous amendment of the **Freedom of Information Act,** which extended information-disclosure obligations to certain CSOs receiving public funds but not equivalently on other private entities receiving public resources. (Batková & Čuroš, 2025; European Commission, 2025). The Council of Europe Expert Council on NGO Law and the Venice Commission questioned the regime's proportionality and non-discriminatory character. The Constitutional Court subsequently invalidated the Act so the legal framework is the same as before 2025 (ÚS SR, 2025).

In practice, registration remains broadly open, but treatment affecting CSOs' activities is selective. Authorities use a selective approach to target CSOs for a cross-agency audit and inspection regime (See A4 for more detail).

Human-rights, environmental, LGBTI+ and many cultural CSOs were disadvantaged in public subsidy schemes by administrative decisions. Coalition political parties have openly called for defunding of LGBTI+ projects. (ta3, 2025; Strečanský et al., 2026a). Critical and rights-based CSOs faced a higher risk of exclusion, reputational pressure, and administrative burden than less politically exposed organizations (Hallon, 2026b).

Trend. The trend is deteriorating overall (Day et al., 2026). The Constitutional Court judgment and removal of the Code provision demonstrate functioning checks, but they do not reverse a broader movement toward differentiated treatment according to CSO profile, activity and perceived political loyalty.

Score 2: Formal equality is maintained, but practical treatment shows high levels of selectiveness.

A2 – Political recognition as partners

> ***Standard.*** *Public institutions and officeholders recognize CSOs as legitimate, independent democratic actors and engage them as partners rather than adversaries.*

The institutional framework governing the formal relationship between government and civil society has remained unchanged. The Government Council for NGOs with its Chamber of NGOs, the Office of the Plenipotentiary for Civil Society, the Civil Society Development Concept for 2022-2030 and the 2023–2027 government Manifesto affirm cooperation (ÚSVROS, 2022; Vláda SR, 2023).

In practice, political recognition of independent CSOs has deteriorated sharply. The adversarial positioning is explicit in public statements of high government officials, including the prime minister or the Plenipotentiary of the Government for Civil Society (JOJ24, 2025; TASR, 2026).

Neither the Chamber of Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organizations nor other representatives of civil society were consulted or invited to participate in the drafting of the "Russian law" – major piece of legislation that changed the conditions for CSOs. The Government Council for Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organizations has repeatedly adopted resolutions calling on the government and members of parliament to discuss the regulation of civil society and to reject harmful legislation aimed at defamatory labeling of civil society organizations or the imposition of unreasonable administrative obligations and sanctions, including the dissolution or disbandment of an organization, but these were ignored. (Vagač et al., 2025).

The partnership principle has never been fully implemented, but since the current government took office, its practice has deteriorated significantly. CSOs increasingly approach government relations defensively and depend on individual ministries, officials, and remaining advisory structures rather than a predictable partnership framework.

Trend. The trend is strongly deteriorating.

Score 2: The dominant posture of the government is threatening independent and critical CSOs and pursues their delegitimization by all available means – legally, sub-legally by administrative measures, by stigmatizing narrative, and by dismantling the partnership principle in practical terms.

A3 – Refrained authorities from smearing

> ***Standard.*** *Officials and state bodies refrain from stigmatizing, vilifying, or delegitimizing rhetoric and smear campaigns against CSOs (e.g., "foreign agents," "enemies"), including in state-supported media.*

No law authorizes government representatives to stigmatize CSOs, while constitutional protections of dignity, reputation, association and expression remain applicable.

The standard was repeatedly violated at a high political level. In January 2025, the Prime Minister, Interior Minister, and senior security officials associated NGOs, protest organizers, and activists with an alleged coup plotted with the Georgian Legion. These were fabricated accusations used to deflect attention from failures in fiscal consolidation. CSOs, independent media, and critical citizens are systematically portrayed as 'foreign mercenaries' and enemies of Slovakia. The pattern continued after the Constitutional Court ruling, with politically active NGOs described as a danger.

Any critique of government policy has become a pretext for personalized vilification — of journalists, NGOs, and ordinary citizens alike. Representatives of ruling political parties and government institutions not rarely portray non-governmental non-profit organizations as an internal enemy and justify the adoption of stricter laws on the grounds that the state must protect itself from pests – ergo non-governmental non-profit organizations that express their views on public issues and engage in public debate. (Gedra, 2025a; Úrad vlády SR, 2025).

The stigmatization operates through rhetorical tools. (Blaščák, 2025; Gedra, 2025a, 2025b; Gluck, 2025; Úrad vlády SR, 2025) which fall on a prepared ground. 35% of Slovaks viewed CSOs as "foreign agents" (2024 wave), evidence for the reach of this rhetoric (Kaňuchová, 2025). The ruling

party SMER-SD has sponsored the majority of hate and attack advertising against journalists and non-governmental organizations in 2025 on the Slovak social media market. (ICJK, 2025).

The material effects of this practice translate into delegitimization, self-censorship, a chilling effect, and ongoing polarization (Kosnáč et al., 2025; Lindberg, 2025).

Trend. The trend is deteriorating and increasingly normalized.

Score 1: Clearly hostile attitude becomes a central feature of the political environment.

A4 – No weaponization of state powers and good governance principles

> ***Standard.*** *The state does not deploy institutional powers — audits, inspections, tax, security or law-enforcement bodies, emergency measures, or principles such as transparency and fiscal due diligence — selectively or disproportionately to pressure CSOs because of their activities or views.*

Audits, tax controls, labor and workplace safety inspections, data protection and financial audits are legitimate measures when implemented neutrally, based on objective risk, proportionality, and equal treatment.

In practice, authorities have taken these measures against select CSOs, especially in 2026, following the government's failed attempt to adopt the "Russian Law". The PM proposed new state oversight regime of NGOs extending beyond finances to labor law, occupational health and safety, and data protection (TASR, 2026; Úrad vlády SR, 2026). Since then, during 2026, sweeping audits have targeted CSOs handling public funds deemed "malevolent". They were examining compliance with workplace safety, data protection, and public funds handling. The Ministry of Finance's audit unit conducted financial audits across numerous organizations.

Since 2025, there have also been criminal investigations on trumped-up charges against several CSOs due to election interference and financial fraud. (TASR, 2026; Úrad vlády SR, 2026; Vláda SR, 2026). Numerous representatives of CSOs have also been summoned for police interrogation. In 2025, government officials held press conferences in which they publicly defamed individuals associated with civil society organizations in various fields for allegedly unlawful actions (Strečanský, 2025a). During the same period, authorities attempted to seize the Whistleblower Protection Office (the Court suspended this effort in December 2025).

This practice caused administrative obstruction, financial and material stress on organizations and individuals, financial destabilization, and defamation (Vagač et al., 2025). Resources had to be diverted to legal defense, and some CSOs disengaged from public funds to avoid harassing audits.

Trend. The trend is sharply deteriorating.

Score 2: Otherwise lawful supervisory powers are increasingly embedded in a political strategy of pressure against contested parts of civil society

A5 – Transparent and open public institutions

> ***Standard.*** *Public institutions operate transparently and proactively provide access to information, enabling CSOs and citizens to scrutinize decisions and/or access to decision-making and hold authorities accountable.*

Slovakia retains a developed freedom of information regime (base on Act 211/2000, the Aarhus Convention, and the ICCPR), publication requirements, and formal legislative transparency mechanisms. These provide a substantial legal basis for watchdog work. The 2024/2025 FOI amendment (Act 401/2024) introduced fees for "exceptionally extensive"

searches and extended response times from 8 to 12 days (European Commission, 2025). The Constitutional Court later declared these clauses for unconstitutional in 2025.

The central problem is the gap between formal openness and decision-making practice. Fast-track procedures, parliamentary proposals bypassing ordinary consultation, and major late amendments reduce the information available before decisions are made (European Commission, 2025) (See D2).

Watchdog organizations retain access to many formal tools, but their ability to scrutinize policy before adoption is weakened. This reduces accountability and evidence-based debate and shifts civic action toward post-adoption litigation or public mobilization.

Trend. Deteriorating, mainly through process and institutional practice rather than legal deterioration. Courts partly offset the administrative decisions.

Score 2: The formal infrastructure remains operational, but the decision-making tends to avoid public scrutiny.

Cluster B – Legal and Financial Framework for CSOs

B1 – Free establishment and operation

> ***Standard.*** *Everyone can freely establish, join, or participate in a CSO; CSOs determine their own objectives; registration is clear, simple, quick, and inexpensive. The state does not interfere in internal governance, and monitoring or reporting is defined by law, proportionate and not onerous*

Freedom of association remains constitutionally protected, and Slovakia continues to provide several established legal forms (associations, foundations, non-investment funds, non-profit organizations) with a unified register (Act 346/2018). Registration has not become generally prohibitive, and the number of registered organizations remains large. Slovakia has around 30,000 active CSOs, although over 80,000 are formally registered; many are dormant or inactive. The number of CSOs has constantly been rising since the early nineties through 2000s, and this trend continued (Štatistický úrad SR, 2025). Formation is comparatively easy.

The new obligations in the "Russian Law" adopted in 2025 added reporting, donor-disclosure, freedom-of-information and supervisory obligations which were described as administratively absurd and operationally devastating, hitting small, community-focused CSOs hardest — the organizations least able to absorb compliance costs (Via Iuris, 2026). Sector actors devoted staff time and external expertise to compliance,

while intermediaries modified fundraising systems to supply required data (Donio, Darujme.sk). The Constitutional Court later struck down the regime.

The burden fell especially on smaller organizations with limited compliance capacity. Resources shifted from mission delivery to administration, legal interpretation, and risk management, while the threat of sanctions increased the perceived cost of operating publicly.

Trend. The trend is seen as deteriorating due to 2026 administrative pressures on CSOs operations.

Score 3: Establishment remains free; the principal deficit concerns operational autonomy and proportionality of oversight.

B2 – CSOs enjoy a safe space and protection from arbitrariness

> ***Standard.*** *CSOs are protected against arbitrary or politically motivated suspension, dissolution or sanction; such measures rest on clear legal grounds, proportionality and independent judicial review.*

Strong constitutional and judicial safeguards remain in place. Dissolution and sanctions require legal grounds and are subject to independent judicial review. There was no documented general pattern of arbitrary dissolution or suspension of a CSO during the period, and access to constitutional review proved effective. However, its protective role has now been openly contested. The Prime Minister stated the Court "would no longer be able to protect NGOs" (TASR, 2026). The February 2026 cross-agency inspection regime means the Constitutional Court judgment should not be interpreted as restoring an enabling environment, but that other ways of narrowing it are pursued by administrative means.

Trend. The trend is deteriorating, but the judiciary's resilience moderates it.

Score 3: Judicial review remains meaningful and provides protection. However, administrative measures taken by the executive limit the enabling environment.

B3 – Liberty of resourcing

> ***Standard.*** *CSOs are free to seek, receive and use financial and material resources from domestic, foreign and international sources, public or private, with no distinction in treatment between foreign/international and domestic resources, and without stigmatization.*

Slovakia has not lost or impaired its legal opportunity to solicit resources from various sources domesticall or abroad. Fundraising from abroad has not been legally restricted or impaired.

Raising funds for some CSOs from public sources (government funds, ministries) has become more complicated for politically motivated decisions. There were funding delays and cancellations of calls for proposals in the fields of human rights (Ministry of Justice), culture (Ministry of Culture), and environment (Ministry of Environment). Some calls were adjusted so that CSOs were removed as eligible applicants (in the Envirofond and Green Education Fund) (TASR, 2024). Some funding schemes, such as the Art Council, were recalibrated and their priorities were reframed to make some originally eligible CSO recipients ineligible (Strečanský, 2025a). Based on analyses of human rights, culture, the environment, and development aid, the total defunding of non-governmental organizations from public funds in 2024 and 2025 can be estimated at EUR 15–16 million. Defunding has produced staff reductions, program disruptions, loss of institutional capacity, and chilling effects (Strečanský et al., 2026b).

In May 2025, the National Council of the Slovak Republic approved an amendment to the Act on Non-Profit Organizations (called by civil society the "Russian Law"), which entered into force in June 2025. The law affected the environment for private donations by requiring NGOs to disclose donors' names under the pretext of increasing transparency. This requirement would undermine NGOs' ability to raise funds from private donors who prefer anonymity. The new legislation also required qualified NGOs to submit a so-called "Report" to the Ministry of Finance. In this report, they were supposed to include the personal data (name and surname) of persons who made a financial contribution or received a loan exceeding EUR 5,000 in a calendar year, unless the contribution was used to support healthcare costs for a specific person. The Constitutional Court's suspension of the law at the end of 2025 rendered these new policies void.

CSOs struggle to diversify their income through tax designation, corporate support, online fundraising mechanisms and international funding, but smaller organizations have a weaker fundraising capacity. Still, through platforms (Donio.sk, Darume.sk, Startlab.sk) many were able to solicit support from private individuals for their causes. This is estimated at 15-20 million EUR annually (Brozmanová Gregorová & Murray Svidroňová, 2025). No disproportionate AML/CFT regime specifically targeting CSOs was identified during the period.

Trend. The trend is deteriorating despite private sector engagement and grassroots resilience.

Score 2: Resourcing remains possible, but there are profound systemic problems in access to some (not all) public funding.

B4 – Enabling fiscal environment

Standard. *CSOs and their donors enjoy a favorable and stable tax environment that supports CSO resourcing and encourages philanthropy. Anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism measures and sanctions regimes are applied to CSOs proportionately and on a risk basis.*

The tax treatment of CSOs and philanthropy has been comparatively favorable and stable — among the strongest features of the environment. Slovakia's key fiscal support mechanism – the tax designation system – survived the assessed period and generates over €100 mil annually (ifp, 2024). Proposals to abolish corporate tax designation did not become law and corporations may designate 1% or 2% of their corporate income tax to non-profit organizations. Individuals may also continue assigning a share of 2% income tax to eligible non-profit recipients, with enhanced designation plus extra 1% linked to volunteering certified by an organization receiving the help.

Non-business public-benefit entities also received an exemption from the financial transaction tax. This applied to civic associations, foundations, non-investment funds, non-profit organizations providing generally beneficial services, special facilities of churches and religious societies, interest groups of legal entities, research and development entities, organizations with an international element, and the Slovak Red Cross. (Lukačovič, 2024) To obtain an exemption, non-governmental organizations had to submit an application through their bank.

The adverse effects during the period came more from general fiscal pressure and politicized funding decisions than from the dismantling of the fiscal-support architecture itself. Private giving via platforms (Donio, Darujme, Ľudia ľuďom) has grown steadily.

Trend. The trend is broadly stable, with economic pressure rather than structural fiscal dismantling.

Score 3: The invalidation of the "Russian law" and the continuation of the existing tax designation law provide for a mostly enabling environment.

B5 – Free expression of criticism

Standard. *CSOs, activists and journalists can express opinions and criticism freely, online and offline, and are protected from SLAPPs, legal intimidation and disproportionate sanctions.*

Article 26 of the Constitution, Article 10 ECHR and EU fundamental-rights protections provide a strong formal basis for freedom of expression; censorship is prohibited, and journalist-source and whistleblower protections exist.

The main deterioration is indirect legal and political intimidation rather than general censorship. Amnesty International documented harassment and pressure against human-rights defenders, while the European Commission recorded three reported SLAPP cases in 2025 and numerous verbal and legal threats against journalists in 2025–2026 (Amnesty International, 2026; European Commission, 2026). The Minister of Culture filed criminal complaints against the organizers of a public call for her resignation and against writer and cultural activist Michal Hvorecký over a critical commentary. She also sued the former director of the Slovak National Theater for defamation, seeking 50,000 euros in damages. The criminal charges were dismissed (SME.sk, 2025), and the defamation charges are still ongoing. Initiating these legal measures can create a chilling effect, increase legal and financial risks for critics, and encourage self-censorship among journalists, activists, and other civic actors (Vagač et al., 2025).

The current Slovak government's actions not only jeopardize the country's media landscape but also pose a significant challenge to EU-wide efforts to protect media freedom and democracy, particularly in light of the newly adopted European Media Freedom Act (ECPMF, 2025). Changes affecting whistleblower protection and public-interest scrutiny increased uncertainty.

The June 2026 adoption of legislation transposing the EU Anti-SLAPP Directive has only partially improved the situation due to its focus on cross-border cases mainly (European Commission, 2026). Politically exposed critics devote growing resources to legal review, security and crisis communication, and some face incentives to reduce visibility or self-censor. Some actors reduce visibility or avoid politically sensitive engagement because criticism can trigger reputational or administrative retaliation.

Trend. The deteriorating trend is driven primarily by intimidation and legal/political uncertainty rather than direct censorship.

Score 3: Critical expression remains active and legally protected, but the costs and risks of exercising it have increased materially.

Cluster C – Public Engagement and Perceptions towards the Work of CSOs

C1 – Citizens' trust

Standard. *Citizens broadly trust CSOs and regard them as legitimate, valuable contributors to public life.*

The most recent comparable survey evidence available for this assessment shows that public trust in CSOs is limited and strongly differentiated by organizational type, while overall there is a slim uptake in trust in CSOs. The generic "NGO/CSO" label appears to carry less trust than charitable or humanitarian activity. In 2025 38% trusted CSOs (Focus agency for Slovak Academy of Sciences, April 2025), compared with 2024, when 37% of respondents said they trusted CSOs in general, and with 35.8% in 2023 (Gloss et al., 2025). Trust is considerably higher for charitable and humanitarian CSOs. In 2025 it was at 60.7% (Gloss et al., 2026) compared to 50.6% in 2023.

In 2024 36% trusted organizations focused on civic activism and changing attitudes in society (Gloss et al., 2025) and 53.2% trusted environmental organizations in 2025 (Gloss et al., 2026).

Crucially, the institutions attacking CSOs are themselves among the less trusted — government trust reached 35.9% in 2025, up from 30% in 2024 and parliament sits at 36.1% in 2025 (Gloss et al., 2026) compared to 25.8% in 2024 (Gloss et al., 2025).

During January 2025–June 2026, CSOs operated in an increasingly polarized information environment in which senior political actors repeatedly portrayed critical, advocacy-oriented and foreign-funded organizations as politically motivated, foreign-controlled or destabilizing. Such narratives increase the risk of further erosion of generalized trust and reinforce the divide between organizations perceived as charitable and those associated with advocacy or public-policy change. A committed, mobilizable constituency actively defends civic actors, but a large distrusting bloc — reinforced by state smear campaigns — prevents broad legitimacy.

Trend. The trend is stable but sharply polarized and under significant negative pressure;

Score 3: Trust is polarised.

C2 – Pluralistic presentation in media

> ***Standard.*** *CSOs are represented in the media fairly and pluralistically, with access to diverse, independent outlets that report on their work without systemic bias.*

Slovakia retains independent private, digital, and print media and formal constitutional guarantees of media freedom and pluralism. However, the public media (STVR) governance regime was reconstructed politically, and editorial independence has been violated.

The public broadcaster's capture was completed in 2025 by the abolition of Radio and Television Slovakia (RTVS) and the creation of new entity - STVR (Slovak Television and Radio) with coalition-only Board, a politically appointed Director General. The result was editorial purges and pro-government drift (IPI/MJRC, 2025). Slovakia fell to 38th on the RSF Index (its lowest in 15 years); politicians branded journalists "parasites"/"foreign agents" and ran 523 defamatory ads (ICJK/MEMO98, 2025). Independent

private outlets (Denník N, SME, Aktuality) remain robust and cover CSOs fairly. Private broadcasters also experienced political and commercial pressure. Government officials themselves became important transmitters of narratives depicting critical media and CSOs as political, foreign-controlled, or hostile (RSF, 2026).

CSOs face systemic bias in captured/state media and rely more on social and local channels — raising costs and harassment exposure. Independent outlets continue to provide space to CSOs and are themselves part of civic resilience. However, fewer impartial or broadly trusted channels make it harder for CSOs to reach audiences beyond already sympathetic constituencies.

Trend. The trend is worsening as disinformation media and related influencers exert influence, erode cognitive space, and demonize CSOs.

Score 2: Important independent outlets remain active and accessible, but the environment is materially less pluralistic and secure.

C3 – Free engagement

> ***Standard.*** *Citizens can engage freely and safely in civic activities — volunteering, activism, donating, protest — and such participation is socially accepted and not penalized.*

Volunteering, giving, civic activism, public campaigning and protest participation remain legal. There is no general legal prohibition on citizens supporting or joining CSOs. Actual civic engagement demonstrates considerable vitality.

Large decentralized protests mobilized tens of thousands in Bratislava, Košice and more than 40 towns (Civicus Monitor, 2025). Demonstrations against justice reforms, the Kremlin-leaning foreign policy line, and the April 2025 NGO bill, often coordinated by civic coalitions (SITA, 2025), became the largest since 2018, with strong student, cultural, and regional

participation. Protest organizers were accused by senior government and security officials, without substantiated evidence, of involvement in preparations for a violent coup, while activists involved in regional protest mobilization reported threats and alleged surveillance. Politically exposed CSOs faced vilification and increasing online harassment (Ballová, 2025; Strečanský, 2025a; Vagač et al., 2025; Zigová, 2025).

Domestic crowdfunding and individual giving grew (Darujme.sk, 2026; Zaťko, 2026). Organized volunteering remained steady, with modest institutional momentum. The reputational risk of being associated with targeted organizations can discourage participation even where no formal prohibition exists.

Trend. The trend is stable. Penalization of protest organizers through trumped-up accusations did not discourage participation.

Score 3: Giving and volunteering are stable or rising. The social acceptance of protests is not deteriorating.

C4 – CSOs embedded in communities

> ***Standard.*** *CSOs are embedded in their communities and can mobilize grassroots support, public solidarity, and cross-sector backing in defense of civic space.*

Slovakia shows evidence of civic embeddedness in communities. Around 30,000+ active CSOs operate in nearly all municipalities, and outside the main cities the sector is dominated by small, volunteer-based associations—sports clubs, folk and cultural groups, fire brigades, and community initiatives—giving it a dense local constituency (Strečanský, 2025b). CSOs operate nationwide, including numerous local volunteer associations, cultural groups, and community organizations. Platform for Democracy links more than 90 organizations, coordinates legislative monitoring and regional activity, and communicates beyond its

membership (Janočko, 2025). Cross-sector initiatives connect NGOs with municipalities, media, experts, businesses, and educational actors. This depth materially limits the state's capacity to isolate civil society and provides alternative resources when institutional channels close. Hostile conditions have also strengthened sectoral solidarity, joint legal work, fundraising, and mutual support, although these resilience strategies rely heavily on volunteer energy and informal networks. Increasing support through crowdfunding reflects connections among civil society organizations, local initiatives, and the broader civil public. (Brozmanová Gregorová & Murray Svidroňová, 2025)

Trend. The trend is stable, slightly strengthening, although uneven geographically and sectorally and constrained by burnout and weak resources.

Score 3: Dense networks help absorb shocks, sustain counter-narratives and mobilize public solidarity under pressure, but broad societal polarization is present in communities as well.

C5 – Freedom of assembly

> ***Standard.*** *Everyone can freely enjoy the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, organizing and participating in assemblies (including online), without unwarranted interference.*

Freedom of peaceful assembly remains constitutionally protected and is governed principally by a notification-based system under Act 84/1990. No cases have been recorded where a notified assembly was prohibited, restricted, or otherwise limited. Any natural or legal person, including civil organizations, can organize an assembly.

In practice, major protests and Pride events continued, and police generally cooperated with organizers. Some formal deterioration came from the post-assassination attempt on the Prime Minister in 2024 through

the ‘Lex Assassination’, which introduced assembly restrictions around residences and state institutions and increased sanctions. More significant politically were January 2025 allegations that anti-government protest organizers were preparing a violent coup. The security framing delegitimized protest and raised perceived risks for organizers and participants, but it did not produce a systematic pattern of bans or violent dispersal (Batková, 2025).

Trend. The trend is deteriorating moderately because formal restrictions expanded and hostile security framing emerged.

Score 3: Large peaceful assemblies continued throughout the period and, the practical ability to assemble remained substantial.

Cluster D – CSOs as Policy Makers

D1 – Right to participate in decision-making including in the policy cycle

Standard. *Everyone has the right to participate in decision-making, and authorities use mechanisms ensuring meaningful public and CSO participation, with redress for non-compliance, across the whole policy cycle and without discrimination.*

Slovakia retains comparatively developed formal mechanisms: public consultation through the legislative process, advisory bodies, Government councils, CSO representation in the Government Council for Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organizations.

The problem is in implementation. There is an increasingly systematic circumvention of these mechanisms through legislative initiatives submitted outside standard consultative frameworks, shortened procedures and last-minute parliamentary amendments. (Vagač et al., 2025). Participation therefore often exists institutionally while losing influence over actual policy decisions. A growing number of cases showed the government taking a tokenistic approach to policy consultation, soliciting input from more politically convenient interlocutors while retaining the formal architecture of plural participation (Lizák, 2026). A CSO survey recorded a strong perception of deteriorating opportunities to participate and of the state's willingness to consult.

As many as 96.3% of organizations in a CSO survey perceive a deterioration in legislative conditions, with similarly negative assessments regarding participation in decision-making and the state's willingness to consult with the civil sector on policies. These factors contribute to a sense of threat and weakening of the position of non-governmental organizations in society (Gallo Kriglerová, 2025). CSOs increasingly shift from routine policy partnership toward external advocacy, protest, litigation and public campaigning. Some sector-specific bodies continue to function, including mechanisms for civil society representation in EU-funded structures, so participation has not disappeared uniformly.

Trend. Deteriorating, particularly at the central-government level.

Score 2: formal participatory infrastructure still in place, but its practical effectiveness has been significantly hollowed out.

D2 – Timely consultations and equal participation

Standard. *Consultations are launched early, allow adequate time, and supply the information needed for substantive input. Participation is adequately resourced and accessible, so that grassroots and under-resourced CSOs are not excluded due to limited means.*

Standard legislative procedures provide for public consultation, access to draft legislation and comment mechanisms. Consultation rules require notice and adequate time.

The problem is in implementation. Domestically, the executive has successfully marginalized the legislative branch through the continued and unjustified use of fast-track procedures, preventing meaningful public consultation and expert involvement and leading to legal chaos and a profound loss of legal certainty. Around one-fifth of legislation adopted in 2025 used fast-track procedures. (Day et al., 2026). Counterexamples include expert roundtables on lobbying involving NGOs. CSOs may formally submit views but frequently lack the time, information, or procedural moment needed to influence substantive choices. Consultation becomes procedural rather than genuinely deliberative (Vagač et al., 2025).

Trend. The trend is deteriorating, with exceptional and parliamentary procedures increasingly functioning as mechanisms for bypassing participation.

Score 2: Consultation has not ceased altogether, but timeliness, equality and practical influence are significantly compromised.

D3 – Policies encourage cooperation with CSOs

> ***Standard.*** *State policies actively facilitate cooperation with CSOs: there is a strategy/policy on cooperation, and transparent consultative bodies that genuinely feed into decision-making.*

Slovakia formally possesses the institutions contemplated by the standard: the Government Council for NGOs, the Office of the Plenipotentiary, and the Civil Society Development Concept 2022–2030, and Slovakia's membership in the OGP.

Their formal existence increasingly contrasts with government policy. Much of the Civil Society Development Concept has been sidelined,

and implementation of many remaining measures is invisible or remains on paper (Vagač et al., 2025). Cooperation between ministries and civil organizations occurs on an ad hoc basis, depending on the topic, the bureaucratic setup, and the minister's role (Batková, 2025). Most importantly, the Office of the Plenipotentiary, designed to facilitate cooperation, was described as largely inactive in that role and instead publicly supported tighter NGO regulation and drew inspiration from Hungary (Hallon, 2026a; Platforma pre demokraciu, 2025; Zajac, 2025). The Government Council and CSO Chamber continue to function, preserving some institutional dialogue, but they no longer demonstrate that cooperation is a settled whole-of-government policy commitment.

Trend. Strongly deteriorating trend from a previously established partnership architecture toward contestation and control.

Score 2: The issue is not the absence of institutions but a substantive inversion of their intended enabling function

D4 – Free advocacy and watchdogging

> ***Standard.*** *CSOs can freely conduct advocacy, watchdog and campaigning activities to influence policy and opinion, without these being restricted, taxed or reclassified as prohibited "political" activity.*

Advocacy, campaigning, policy criticism and watchdog activities remain lawful; Slovakia has not enacted a general prohibition on 'political activity' by CSOs. However, the legitimacy of such activity became a central political target because top government officials frequently accused CSOs engaged in watchdogging, advocacy, and public policy debate of being "political NGOs".

An early 2025 proposal sought to classify NGO advocacy and media campaigning as lobbying while leaving major commercial lobbying

actors outside the same regime (JOJ24, 2025). Civil-society organizations successfully challenged this selective and non-participatory approach (Kimijan, 2025; PDCO, 2026).

Despite this pressure, organizations continued successful watchdogging, litigation, campaigns, and legislative monitoring, including mobilization against the "Russian Law" (Act 109/2025) and advocacy contributing to constitutional review. CSOs have been following the adoption process of the law on lobbying, which remains in the legislative process.

Trend. Deteriorating.

Score 3: advocacy remains practically vigorous and has not yet been legally reclassified as prohibited activity.

D5 – Government listens

> ***Standard.*** *Public authorities give CSO and public input genuine consideration and provide reasoned, traceable feedback on how contributions affected the final decision.*

Formal consultation procedures and advisory structures theoretically provide a feedback loop between citizens, CSOs and public authorities.

The assessed period contains repeated examples of formal participation without genuine consideration. The Government Council's opposition to the restrictive amendment to NGO law (Russian Law) did not prevent its adoption; major provisions were rewritten immediately before parliamentary consideration, making meaningful feedback structurally impossible.

Civil society's extensive objections were ultimately vindicated by the Constitutional Court rather than incorporated through political decision-

making. After the judgment, the executive responded with a broad alternative inspection regime rather than reconsidering the underlying policy approach.

The government is increasingly made to listen through courts, public pressure, media, and mobilization rather than through authorities incorporating CSO input. An open letter co-signed by 500+ organizations setting red lines on transparency and fair grant rules went unanswered (Hallon, 2025).

Trend. Strongly deteriorating.

Score 1: Formal channels remain, but central-government responsiveness to independent civil-society input is severely lacking.

Conclusion

In the period of January 2025 – June 2026 core freedoms of association, expression, assembly, and participation remain legally protected, and judicial review, including the interventions of the Constitutional Court in protecting democratic principles and fundamental freedoms, continued to provide meaningful safeguards. The assessment shows the gap between the continued existence of formal institutions, rules and standard legal frameworks on one hand and the deterioration of their practical enabling function on the other, which is the salient characteristic of this period. The central pattern is a widening gap between formal guarantees and the implementation practice.

In the reviewed period, a clearly hostile government attitude toward civil society became a central feature of the political environment. The assessment reports the weaponization of state powers and good governance principles against segments of civil society that are independent and maintain an autonomous posture toward the government. As a result, politically exposed and rights-based CSOs face

higher administrative, reputational, and financial costs, while consultation mechanisms are increasingly bypassed or rendered ineffective. Civic space has endured ongoing and growing pressure from blanket legislative efforts (such as the "Russian" Law) aimed at subduing critical voices by imposing stricter rules across the sector under the guise of increased transparency. Civic space also had to withstand selective targeting, selective defunding, administrative auditing, and ongoing public defamation and vilification of targeted individuals and organizations.

Despite the overall deteriorating trend, growing pressure on civic space has also generated countervailing dynamics. Cross-sector cooperation has intensified, linking CSOs with municipalities, independent media, experts, businesses, educational institutions and informal initiatives. The depth of these networks limits the state's capacity to isolate civil society and provides alternative channels of support when institutional avenues narrow or close. Hostile conditions have also strengthened sectoral solidarity, joint legal and advocacy work, fundraising and mutual support. At the same time, this resilience should not be overstated: it remains uneven and is thinly resourced. It often depends on volunteer energy, informal networks and crisis-driven mobilization rather than stable institutional resources. Nevertheless, dense civic networks help absorb shocks, sustain counter-narratives and mobilize public solidarity, providing an important source of resilience under continuing political and institutional pressure.

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