

# EXPLORATORY MAPPING

OF PRO-DEMOCRACY CIVIC  
ACTORS AND CIVIL SOCIETY  
IN THE HORN OF AFRICA.



**HORN  
CENTER FOR  
DEMOCRACY**  
*NURTURING DEMOCRACY*



**HORN CENTER FOR DEMOCRACY**

*NURTURING DEMOCRACY*

# **EXPLORATORY MAPPING**

**OF PRO-DEMOCRACY CIVIC ACTORS AND  
CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE HORN OF AFRICA**

**About**

The Horn Center for Democracy (HCD) is an independent, not-for-profit policy advocacy and research institution based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The main objective of the Center is to foster and entrench the culture of democracy, good governance, and inclusive citizen empowerment in the HoA countries. As a think-and-do tank, the Center also engages in program implementation, mainly with objectives of policy advocacy, capacity building and convening actors on democracy and governance in the Horn of Africa. HCD aims to provide a convening platform for dialogue, coordination, and exchange of best practices at national and regional levels among national and regional CSOs, citizen movements, governments and intergovernmental regional institutions such as IGAD. In this process, the Center aims to generate evidence and identify policy options on effective ways of democratization, human rights, and governance issues.

For more information: [www.horn-center.org](http://www.horn-center.org)

**Acknowledgement**

We want to express our gratitude to the HCD staff members and lead author Dr Seife Ayalew- for displaying unwavering commitment towards the successful finalization of this groundbreaking research. The Horn Center for Democracy truly believes that the outcome of this report will immensely contribute towards shaping the democratization trajectory in the HoA.

We are grateful for the generous financial support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and the Institute for Security Studies (ISS).

**Copyright**

© 2024, Horn Center for Democracy

Copyright in the report as a whole is vested in the Horn Center for Democracy, and no part may be reproduced in whole or in part without the express permission, in writing, of HCD.

The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the HCD, its Board of Directors, members of the Advisory Council, Associates or donors.

# Table of Contents

<b>i</b>	<b>List of Acronyms</b>
<b>iii</b>	<b>Executive Summary</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>The Concepts of Democracy and Pro-Democracy Movement</b>
<b>5</b>	Institutional Features of Democracy in the Context of the Digital Age
<b>7</b>	Pro-Democracy Actors and the Evolving HoA Landscap
<b>9</b>	<b>Mapping Pro-Democracy Actors in the HoA Today</b>
<b>11</b>	Civil Society and Democratization Challenges in the HoA
<b>17</b>	Present Status of HoA Democracy and Civil Society
<b>21</b>	Challenges and Barriers: Political-Legal and Socioeconomic Trends
<b>31</b>	Deciphering Cross-Country Patterns in the HoA: Multifaceted Challenges for Civic Actors
<b>34</b>	An Illustrative List of Key National and Regional Actors
<b>38</b>	National Coalitions and Networks for Advocacy, Resource Sharing, and Scaling
<b>39</b>	Emerging Pro-Democracy Initiatives and Actors
<b>48</b>	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats to Civil Society in the HoA
<b>50</b>	Strategies for Overcoming Challenges
<b>52</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>

# List of Acronyms

ACDEG	African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance
ACHPR	African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights
ACJPS	African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies
ACR	Action for Conflict Resolution
ACSO	Agency for Civil Society Organization
AfriCOG	The Africa Centre for Open Governance
CARD	Center For the Advancement of Rights and Democracy
CBO	Community-Based Organization
CDRIE	Citizens for Democratic Rights in Eritrea
CEHRO	Consortium of Ethiopian Human Rights Organizations
CIGPJ	Centre for Inclusive Governance, Peace and Justice
CJGEA	Center for Justice Governance and Environmental Action
CSCOV	Center for Strengthening Community Voices
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
CSRC	Civil Society Resource Center
DGF	Democratic Governance Facility
EHRCO	Ethiopian Human Rights Council
EHRD	Eritrean Human Rights Defenders
EHRDC	Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Center
EMDHR	Eritrean Movement for Democracy and Human Rights
EPHRC	Elman Peace and Human Rights Centre
EWLA	Ethiopian Women Layers Association
FFC	Forces for Freedom and Change
FHRI	Foundation for Human Rights Initiative
FIDA-Kenya	The Federation of Women Lawyers-Kenya
FIDA-SS	Federation of Women Lawyers South Sudan
FSI	Fragile State Index
HCD	Horn Center for Democracy
HoA	Horn of Africa
HRC	Human Rights Centre
HRCE	Human Rights Concern – Eritrea
HRCU	Human Rights Centre Uganda
HRD	Human Rights Defender
HRFN	Human Rights Funders Networks
IFA	InformAction Kenya
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development

IMLU	Independent Medico-Legal Unit
ISER	Initiative for Social and Economic Rights
JFJ	Journalists for Justice
KHRC	Kenya Human Rights Commission
KI	Katiba Institute
LHR	Lawyers for Human Rights
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
NCHRD-K	National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders-Kenya
NCHRD-U	National Coalition for Human Rights Defenders-Uganda
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
NISS	National Intelligence and Security Service
OLA	Oromo Liberation Army
PHRA	Puntland Human Rights Association
R-ARCSS	Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan
RRC	Relief and Rehabilitation Center
RSF	Reporters Without Borders
SHRM	Sudanese Human Rights Monitor
SOHRA	Somali Human Rights Association
SPA	Sudanese Professionals Association
SRB	Self-Regulatory Body
SSHRDN	South Sudan Human Rights Defenders Network
SSLS	South Sudan Law Society
SUWRA	Sudanese Women Rights Action
TAHURID	The Advocates for Human Rights and Democracy
TIE	The Independent Expert (on the situation of human rights in Somalia)
TISA	The Institute for Social Accountability
TMC	Transitional Military Council
TSM	Transnational Social Movements
UNNGOF	Uganda National NGO Forum
UW	Unwanted Witness
UWONET	Uganda Women's Network
VFC	Voice for Change
WHRDN-U	Women Human Rights Defenders Network-Uganda

# Executive Summary

This report originates from a larger mapping study that was commissioned by the Horn Center for Democracy (HCD) that critically examined the capacities and challenges of civil society and pro-democracy civic actors in the Horn of Africa (HoA) for purposes of offering a strategic roadmap for improved sociopolitical engagement and resilience in the region. The HoA encompasses a region marked by historical richness and complex sociopolitical dynamics and thus a unique civil society landscape. This region, comprising Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, and Uganda as members of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), confronts a range of challenges including, for instance, political instability, recurrent civil wars, and pervasive poverty.

However, the role of civil society and pro-democracy civic actors in the HoA cannot be viewed in isolation from the broader African sociopolitical and economic context with which it shares certain commonalities as a nation-state of the continent. Central to the research was thus the development of a baseline dataset needed to both inform HCD's strategic planning and enhance its engagement strategies. Specifically, insights from the study aimed to refine HCD's engagement approaches, research methods, and resource mobilization efforts, thereby shaping future programs and partnerships effecting in the HoA. Any organization, public figure, or private citizen concerned with HoA progress and sustainability may be equally benefited from the strategic use of this data to refine their approaches and mobilization efforts.

Importantly, the study also focused on profiling and evaluating key entities to help guide strategic planning, engagement, and future initiatives for HCD, its stakeholders, and allies. To that end, significant trends within a dynamic mix of established and emerging groups are identified in this report, along with notes on variations in capacity, innovation, and response to sociopolitical challenges. The resilience of organizations amidst diverse and often restrictive operational environments are also highlighted, with emphases on the critical role of socio-economic conditions and external pressures on organizational sustainability and effectiveness.

Key findings underscore the vibrancy and complexity of the civil society landscape, marked by diverse democratization processes and challenges including political, legal, and socioeconomic barriers. Countries in the HoA reveal a mix-

ture of stunted, vibrant, and emerging civil society landscapes and pro-democracy actors, each contextually specific and uniquely shaped by degrees of political repression, openings in democratic spaces, political volatility, and overarching factors of development, such as erosion of trust, impact of conflict, influence of external geopolitics, and systemic disparities in funding that all government officials in the region should be aware of and committed to supporting or retooling for sake of expanding human rights and freedoms.

At closer inspection, one finds that HoA's democratic need at the present hour is not only for an overview of civil society actors by name, location, and other descriptive variables, but also the capturing of the uniqueness of each actors' evolution and roles within the region and broader African context. Namely, findings call for continued research and targeted support to capitalize on emerging opportunities and navigate the multifaceted challenges faced by pro-democracy and civil society actors in the HoA. Civil society plays an indispensable role in the HoA through organizations and groups that act as critical intermediaries, representing diverse community interests and contributing to the region's socioeconomic development. Each are key players in advocacy, service delivery, and policy formulation. A thorough understanding of civil society that considers historical, political, and socioeconomic conditions is crucial to meaningful engagement with the region, be it through developmental aid, policy-making, or academic research.

Hence, the importance of this report extends from recognition of the HoA's civil society organizations (CSOs) to the realization of strategic scaling of the region's internal capacity for positive, pro-democracy change. Because this report represents a crucial step toward understanding and navigating the intricate sociopolitical landscape of the HoA, it reinforces the Horn Center for Democracy's commitment to fostering partnerships to build knowledge and skills that serve to secure Africa's future.

# Introduction

Democracy promotes inclusiveness and equity, offering a platform for citizens to voice their daily life concerns. Characterized by largely peaceful political collaboration, democratic systems regularly provide opportunities to alter government leadership via elections, highlighting the significance of the right to vote. The democratic formations of Horn of Africa (HoA) countries present a mixed bag, however, characterized by nascent democracies and repressive political environments with varying degrees of democratization. These diverse political climates, from emerging democratic structures to authoritarian regimes, significantly influence the civil society sector which is itself marked by struggles with political instability wherein the quest for fully democratic governance often contends with entrenched authoritarian practices of old. This intricate political landscape underscores the importance of a comprehensive understanding of the role of civil society for the HoA.

From this intricate backdrop, the present study aims to broadly map civil society and pro-democracy actors in the region. This will involve a historically informed examination of both existing and emerging civil society and pro-democracy actors. A historically contextualized lens acknowledging the dynamic sociopolitical and socioeconomic realities shaping the civil society landscape is necessary because social evolution and the emergence of pro-democracy actors in the HoA and elsewhere are contingent upon political and economic conditions.

Within this broad spectrum, some civil society organizations (CSOs) and pro-democracy actors have been engaged in the building of a legacy of activism for a while, while others are just emerging. Their visibility and vocalization vary accordingly, often influenced by the political climate. Additionally, in environments with potential political repercussions, some opt for a less visible, discreet approach, while others use their visibility to draw attention to critical issues. The spectrum of actors includes grassroots organizers, individual and group activists, faith-based initiatives, self-help groups, professional associations, marginalized communities, and professionally managed non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including foreign-based NGOs and advocacy networks.

Considering, mapping and analyzing these varied actors posed significant challenges due to the politically sensitive nature of their work and the diverse, often difficult environments they operate in. Accessibility to accurate information, the need for discretion in data collection, and the potential risks faced by these

actors in sharing information, for instance, were key concerns. These concerns were compounded in regions where government control is tight and civil society actions are closely monitored or restricted. As such, innovative and protective methods were employed to accurately capture the landscape of HoA civil society and pro-democracy actors, ensuring that the richness and diversity of human and data capital in this sector were thoroughly and safely documented.

Moreover, the HoA civil society landscape is a product of interlinked endogenous and exogenous factors and actors. State-civil society relations in this region are commensurately complex and multifaceted, often reflecting the tension between governmental control and civic autonomy. Understanding these relationships is crucial for comprehending the nuances of civil society's impact and the trajectory of democratic development in the region. To facilitate this understanding, six major goals are strategically informed by this report:

***Designing Program Interventions:*** One of the key outcomes of this report will be enabling pro-democracy actors to design program interventions that are directly aimed at addressing the key challenges identified within the HoA civil society and pro-democracy landscape.

***Identifying and Addressing Future Research Directions and Information Gaps:*** There is a notable dearth of action-oriented research in the civil society sector in the HoA, which this report helps to fill by providing insights and analysis and suggesting actionable steps and strategies as well as direction for future research.

***Scaling Up Best Practices:*** Findings reported will enable pro-democracy actors to devise strategies and programmatic interventions that scale up best practices by identifying what works well within the civil society and pro-democracy landscape across the HoA.

***Devising Engagement Strategies:*** This report will help pro-democracy actors in the HoA to devise engagement strategies that are both effective and context-sensitive.

***Supporting Democratic Processes and Building Capacity:*** In the broader context, this report will enhance the HCD's ability to support democratic processes and build the capacity of civil society actors in the region.

# The Concepts of Democracy and Pro-Democracy Movement

Democracy is fundamentally about the power and rights of people to determine their own destinies in various spheres of life, including political, economic, social, and cultural domains. The UN World Summit in 2005 defined democracy as a universally valued principle, emphasizing individuals' autonomy in molding their various systems through active participation. Although a universally accepted definition of democracy remains elusive, the United Nations views it as the expression of people's will to establish their own political, economic, social, and cultural systems and their complete involvement in every aspect of their lives.<sup>1</sup>

Functionally, democracy involves governance by the populace, underscoring the significance of human rights, equitable and impartial elections, diversity in political parties, and a well-informed and engaged citizenry. This includes active participation in every phase of policymaking, from its development to implementation and evaluation.<sup>2</sup> The African Charter on Human and People's Rights additionally reaffirms the right to peace, security, and freedoms of association, assembly, expression, and information access, which are crucial in a democratic setting.

From these perspectives, democracy can be seen both as a process and an outcome, encompassing comprehensive democratic structures as defined by the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG), including effective governance, human rights, community participation, the rule of law, accountability, and peace and security.<sup>3</sup> Pro-democracy actors, encompassing a diverse array of formal organizations, informal groups, and dedicated individuals, are actively engaged in promoting accountable governance, transparency, and responsive administrations through their commitment to non-violent and peaceful civic initiatives.<sup>4</sup> When examining social movements and their dedication to nonviolence, it is crucial to acknowledge the inherent risk of these groups to spiral

---

1 UN GA.(2007).UN Guidance Note of the UN Secretary-General on Democracy.[GA Res A/RES/62/7]. [https://www.un.org/democracyfund/sites/www.un.org.democracyfund/files/un\\_sg\\_guidance\\_note\\_on\\_democracy.pdf](https://www.un.org/democracyfund/sites/www.un.org.democracyfund/files/un_sg_guidance_note_on_democracy.pdf)

2 UN General Assembly.(1966).International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, UN Treaty Series.[vol.993].p. 3. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b36c0.html>

3 African Union.(2007).African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.Art.2.Retrieved from <https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36384-treaty-african-charter-on-democracy-and-governance.pdf>

4 Ackerman, Peter, and Jack DuVall."A Force More Powerful:A Century of Nonviolent Conflict." *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics* 1, no. 4 (2002): 121-147.

into violence, often including armed conflict though this method detracts from political, economic, and social effectiveness.

Numerous studies support the idea that nonviolent movements generally outperform violent ones, even against strong opposition. The seminal work by Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan in their text, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*,<sup>5</sup> highlights the significant impact of peaceful movements on democratization. Their comparative analysis of 323 campaigns in many countries, both violent and nonviolent, showed that those employing nonviolent tactics were twice as likely to succeed in overthrowing nondemocratic regimes and expelling foreign occupiers. They also found that nonviolent movements tend to draw a larger and more varied group of participants to boost their impact and success rate with democratic stability and civic peace.<sup>6</sup>

In the contemporary world, there has been a remarkable surge in the pro-democracy movement phenomenon which transcends political systems, affecting autocracies, democracies, and transitional democracies alike. This uptick in democracy activism, highlighted in Foreign Policy's 2019 "Year in Review" as a "Year of Global Protest," represents a pivotal moment in the global struggle for democratic values.<sup>7</sup> These movements have aimed to reinforce democratic institutions and civil liberties, and their scale has reached an unprecedented level, surpassing historic periods like the fall of the Soviet Union and the Arab Spring. At the core of these movements is their context-driven emergence.

These entities are themselves governed by a dynamic interplay between organizations, networks, communities, and individual activists, collectively unified by their engagement in sociopolitical challenges and the construction of shared identities shaped by a grassroots ethos that underscores a bottom-up, community-centric approach to effectuating political transformation. Diverse in their composition and scope, these collectives exhibit fundamental characteristics: (1) concerted actions aimed at systemic change, (2) operation outside established institutional frameworks, (3) potential confrontations with existing power structures, and (4) contribution to the expansion of democratic realms. Despite potential fluctuations in their specific goals, leadership structures, and methodologies of collective action, these movements demonstrate a degree of organizational coherence and temporal persistence that highlight their adaptability and enduring presence within the sociopolitical fabric.<sup>8</sup>

---

5 Chenoweth, Erica, and Maria J. Stephan. *Why civil resistance works: The strategic logic of nonviolent conflict*. Columbia University Press, 2011.

6 Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (West Sussex, England: Columbia University Press, 2011).

7 See <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/12/23/2019-a-year-of-global-protest/>

8 Snow, David A., Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi, eds. *The Blackwell companion to social movements*. John Wiley & Sons, 2008.

Whittier, Nancy. "Meaning and structure in social movements." *Social movements: Identity, culture, and the state* (2002): 289-307.

# Institutional Features of Democracy in the Context of the Digital Age

In the fabric of democracy, the significance of foundational institutions such as legislative bodies, credible electoral processes, pluralistic political parties, independent judiciaries, and free media cannot be overstated. These pillars of democracy are unique in that they both support and are reinforced by an informed citizenry and a vibrant civil society, crucial for fostering responsive and accountable governance. However, the advent of the digital age specifically has introduced profound changes and challenges. While digital platforms have expanded civic space and revolutionized the operations of civil society and modes of citizen participation, for example, they have also raised questions about the legitimacy and credibility of traditionally organized institutions. Mostly for the better, the digital age has democratized the dissemination of information, enhanced citizen expression, and mobilized more individuals for social causes, thereby increasing civil society's impact on policymaking.

Simultaneously, the digital age presents challenges like the digital divide, the spread of misinformation, and online censorship, necessitating careful navigation to fully leverage the expanded civic spaces. Furthermore, this era challenges both traditional institutions and the civil society sector, testing their adaptability and resilience. The interplay between traditional democratic institutions and the digital realm of civic engagement is crucial for understanding contemporary political dynamics. It underscores the need for a balanced approach where digital advancements complement fundamental democratic structures, ensuring that they foster rather than undermine an engaged and empowered citizenry. The health and sustainability of democratic systems rest on the institutional capacity for a vibrant civil society that maintains responsive, accountable governance. In democracies, the rule of law stands as a bulwark against arbitrary state power, thus enabling and empowering civic engagement. As we navigate through the complexities of the digital age, it is imperative to reinforce these institutional foundations to ensure adaptation and remain effective in the face of new challenges and opportunities.

This era has also lent greater capacity to international scrutiny and engagement. As evidenced in numerous studies, the international gaze and responses to HoA

democratization play crucial roles in the region's civil society dynamic.<sup>9</sup> When the international community turns its focus towards these movements, it can significantly empower them and provide much-needed legitimacy and backing.<sup>10</sup> Conversely, the absence of such attention may inadvertently result in reactive state repression and weaken the momentum of these movements. Furthermore, the nature of relationships between pro-democracy movements and opposition political parties often displays a dualistic and opportunistic character, especially evident as parties transition from being out of power to holding power. Initially, opposition parties may champion pro-democracy initiatives, aligning themselves with the aspirations of these movements.<sup>11</sup> However, upon gaining authority, their stance can shift dramatically. This change can result in the undermining of the pro-democracy movements they once supported as they navigate the complexities of newfound power and the competing interests that come with it.<sup>12</sup>

As observed over the past two decades, globalization and the formation of a 'global civil society' have driven civil society development significantly.<sup>13</sup> New communication technologies have, for example, enabled activists and organizations to establish connections across borders, transforming localized social movements and NGOs into larger, more influential transnational social movements (TSMs). These movements, initially focused on regional or national change, have expanded their reach and impact internationally with the advent of digital connectivity.<sup>14</sup> The rise of digital technologies and social media platforms has even ushered in a new civic space in regions marked by state repression. Citizen-led campaigns harness social media's power to create an open platform where activists, often

---

9 Skocpol, Theda. *States and social revolutions: A comparative analysis of France, Russia and China*. Cambridge University Press, 1979.

10 Stephan, Maria J. "Aid to civil society: A movement mindset." (2015). <https://www.usip.org/publications/2015/02/aid-civil-society-movement-mindset>

See also, Goldstone, Jack A. "More social movements or fewer? Beyond political opportunity structures to relational fields." *Theory and society* 33 (2004): 333-365.

See also, Ulas, Hilmi. "The Dynamics of Social Movements in Unrecognized States—A Comparative Study." *Frontiers in Political Science* 3 (2021): page 2-3.

11 Chen, Xi, and Dana M. Moss. "Authoritarian regimes and social movements." *The Wiley Blackwell companion to social movements* (2018): 666-681.

Pinckney, Jonathan. "Amid Coronavirus, Online Activism Confronts Digital Authoritarianism." *United States Institute of Peace* 28 (2020).

Sa'di, Ahmad H. "Social protest under authoritarianism: A critique of regime type and instrumental rationality-based explanations." *Sociology* 49, no. 3 (2015): 455-470.

12 Porta, Donatella della. "Social Movements." In *The SAGE Handbook of Political Science*, 656-73. 55 City Road, London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529714333>. Page 656

Ulas, Hilmi. "The Dynamics of Social Movements in Unrecognized States—A Comparative Study." *Frontiers in Political Science* 3 (2021): page 2-3.

13 Craig Warkentin, *Reshaping World Politics: NGOs, the Internet, and Global Civil Society* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2001).

14 Lalit Kumar, "Do We have a Theoretical Framework to Explain Social Movement? Third System, Third Sector, Third Way – No Way," in *ISTR Fourth International Conference "The Third Sector: For What and For Whom?" Working Papers Volume*, (Trinity College, Dublin, 2000).

marginalized and repressed, can freely express dissenting views. They utilize hashtag campaigns and digital advocacy initiatives, for example, to foster virtual communities and gaining momentum. The online civic space acts as a sanctuary for dissident groups and activists, particularly in offline contexts where these voices face oppression. This transformation is not only characterized by the prevalence of hashtag campaigns, but also viral memes and the use of civic technologies for digital rights advocacy. It empowers marginalized groups to discuss sensitive topics, amplify underrepresented voices, and advocate for overlooked policies. Ultimately, the expansion of online civic spaces serves as a potent tool for amplifying voices, facilitating dialogue, and advocating for change in challenging environments.<sup>15</sup>

## Pro-Democracy Actors and the Evolving HoA Landscape

Demonstrated above, recent scholarship on civic space reveals that civic actors possess agency and can find thriving spaces, yet the extent and nature of their agency depends significantly on the dimensions of shared governance in the surrounding environment, which can either be enabling or disabling. Resultantly, the conventional, state-centric view of civic space, often described in terms of ‘shrinking,’ ‘closed,’ or ‘open’ space, is increasingly being scrutinized and challenged.<sup>16</sup> More specifically, civil societies as ‘shrinking’ or ‘closed’ spaces can be misleading by failing to account for the varying degrees of agency and opportunity across different contexts.

The diversity and decentralized nature of pro-democracy actors today lead to a wide range of effectiveness in mobilizing support, organizing at the community level, and generating momentum around critical societal issues. These actors play a key role in galvanizing public opinion, fostering solidarity networks, and sustaining engagement, all of which contribute to diverse outcomes in societal change.

---

<sup>15</sup> Kode, David. “Civic space restrictions in Africa: how does civil society respond?” *Conflict Trends* 2018, no. 1 (2018): 10-17.

See also Zeynep Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

See also, Nanjala Nyabola, *Digital Democracy, Analogue Politics: How the Internet Era is Transforming Kenya* (London: Zed Books, 2018).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid 4-8

Buyse, Antoine. “Squeezing civic space: Restrictions on civil society organizations and the linkages with human rights.” *The International Journal of Human Rights* 22, no. 8 (2018): 966-988.

CIVICUS. (2021). *People power under attack 2021*. A Report based on data from the CIVICUS Monitor. CIVICUS.

IDEA. (2021). *The state of global democracy report: Building resilience in a pandemic era*. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

Consequently, recognizing and identifying these actors is important not only for assessing their success or failure but also for appreciating their varied and dynamic contributions within civic spaces. Whether their contributions are lasting or temporary, they are essential to the development and health of democracies, highlighting their significant role in shaping responsive governance and advancing democratic principles.

Contemporary pro-democracy actors call for a more contextualized understanding of civic space that acknowledges its multifaceted nature and the complexities inherent in civil society, as well as its operational environments on a spectrum shaped by shifts and changes.<sup>17</sup> This perspective recognizes the increasing mobilization and expansion of spaces for diverse groups, including democratic and authoritarian contexts. It also posits that the process of “shrinking” civic space is far from monolithic or uniform.<sup>18</sup> It is instead a complex, multifaceted phenomenon characterized by shifting dynamics that may contract in certain aspects and expand in others simultaneously, requiring governments to employ a variety of mechanisms to “reconfigure” it to achieve goals.<sup>19</sup>

This contemporary understanding reframes civic space as a politicized and dynamic sphere, actively (re)produced and (re)shaped by an interplay between state and non-state actors deeply influenced by political regimes and historical contexts.<sup>20</sup> This viewpoint challenges and enriches the normative definition of civic space, shedding light on its ever-evolving nature and the intricate interplay of forces that continually define and reshape it. Civic space is, therefore, more than just a place or construct; it is a dynamic environment that enables civil society to actively participate in the life of societies. It allows for the expression of diverse and sometimes competing points of view, both individually and collectively. This space is a prerequisite for making development and peace sustainable, illustrating the intrinsic connection between civic engagement, societal development, and the overall health of a democracy.

---

17 Dupuy, Fransen, and Prakash, “Restricting NGOs.” 5-10.

Toepler, Stefan, Annette Zimmer, Christian Fröhlich, and Katharina Obuch. “The changing space for NGOs: Civil society in authoritarian and hybrid regimes.” *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 31 (2020): 649-662.

18 Biekart, Kontinen, and Millstein, “Introduction,” *Civil Society Responses*, 10-14, 18

McMahon, Patrice C., and Lukasz W. Niparko. “Shrinking, shifting, and strengthening: The dynamics and diversity of civic activism in Poland.” *East European Politics and Societies* 36, no. 4 (2022): 1355-1376.

19 Roggeband, Conny, and Andrea Krizsán. “The selective closure of civic space.” *Global Policy* 12 (2021): 21-23  
Anheier, Helmut K., Markus Lang, and Stefan Toepler. “Civil society in times of change: Shrinking, changing and expanding spaces and the need for new regulatory approaches.” *Economics* 13, no. 1 (2019): 20190008.

20 Biekart, Kontinen, and Millstein, “Introduction,” *Civil Society Responses*. 10

# Mapping Pro-Democracy Actors in the HoA Today

To effectively describe and analyze the current topography of civil society in the HoA through its pro-democracy actors and their various sociopolitical activities, sources with historical influence and relevance in the operational domain, including academic journal articles and official reports published since 2020 were consulted from a range of repositories (Table 1). Furthermore, to identify persistent issues in political and legal dynamics impacting the evolution of each country, datasets ranging from as early as 2009 to as recent as 2023 were also considered. These sources were chosen for their methodological consistency and ability to offer detailed information on each country of focus; particularly, the identification of prominent civil society actors and an understanding of the multifaceted relationships among them, state actors, and donors in relation to political and socio-economic dynamics in each operational space.

**Table 1**

NGO Sources	Government Sources
International Center for Not-for-Profit Law's (ICNL's) Civic Freedom Monitor Freedom House' Freedom in the World CIVICUS's Monitor Tracking Civic Space DefendDefenders Civil Rights Defenders Frontline Defenders World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index Fund for Peace's (FFP's) Fragile States Index Transparency International National Coalition for Human Rights Defenders in Uganda (NCHRD-U) Civic Space Index	African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR) U.S. Agency International Development's (USAID's) CSO Sustainability Index U.S. Department of State's annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices UN Human Development Index

**Other Authoritative Sources**

- Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA)
- Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI)
- Reporters Without Borders (RSF) Index
- Google Scholar (Peer Reviewed Articles and Journals)

DefendDefenders' annual and biannual reports, covering the period from 2018 to 2023, was particularly instrumental in tracking trends and examining the civic operating environment for human rights defenders across the region. These reports, submitted to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) provided a comprehensive overview of human rights challenges with a particular focus on the situation for Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) in countries like Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Uganda, Sudan, South Sudan, Djibouti, and Somalia. Similarly, data from the USAID CSO Sustainability Index reports were utilized for their extensive analysis of seven dimensions critical to the health and efficacy of civil societies, including (1) financial viability, (2) legal environment, (3) orga-

nizational capacity, (4) advocacy, (5) service provision, (6) infrastructure, and (7) public image.<sup>21</sup> The Index provided a detailed look at the sustainability of CSOs over a critical five-year period from 2017 to 2021 for each country in the region. By taking 2021 as a benchmark, the study effectively traced back to 2017 to track patterns and factors affecting the civil society landscape and analyzed civic actors for emerging trends in the regulatory, financial, and operational domains of CSOs.

In addition to analyzing historical and contemporary civil society data and trends from the aforementioned sources via the desk review method, key informant interviews (KIIs) were also conducted virtually. KIIs were collected for detailed and comprehensive information from individuals possessing significant expertise and experience in their respective civil society fields within the HoA. The objective was to deepen understanding of the civil society landscape in the region and obtain comprehensive insights on the regional studies and reports collected. Participants included researchers and policy advisors from various NGOs. The interview framework was designed to be both structured and adaptable to allow informants to freely share their perspectives and insights. Discussions mainly focused on the civic actors' specific area of operation (e.g., employment equity, women's rights, fair elections, etc.), detailing current challenges, opportunities, and evolving dynamics. Taken together, detailed categorization of pro-democracy actors was established based on extensive desk review and initial outreach for KII through purposive sampling to identify regional patterns in the civil society landscape.

## Civil Society and Democratization Challenges in the HoA

Data from both extant literature and KIIs with current CSO leaders revealed a robust cadre of dynamics, challenges, and opportunities within the civil society landscape of the HoA with which to map the operations and sustainability of CSOs, taking into account the myriad internal and external factors shaping the region (Table 2). Evidence provides that civil society organizations have often stepped in to fill the void left by weak or ineffective state institutions, especially in newly democratized or transitional countries.<sup>22</sup> They have successfully advocated for social inclusion programs and welfare states, and have been seen as a vital force in

---

21 <https://2012-2017.usaid.gov/what-we-do/democracy-human-rights-and-governance/cso-sustainability-index-methodology>

22 Tórres, Liv. «A Civil or Uncivil Civil Society?» (2021).6-8

combating inequality.<sup>23</sup> Also, many studies provide that the growing inequality that undermines trust in many countries is lowest where organized civil society is strongest.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, civil society has been recognized as a key driver of civic accountability, with protests and mobilizations serving as “constructive feedback channels for popular responses to governments and leaders.”<sup>25</sup>

*Historical Contributions to Human Rights:* CSOs have historically been central in shaping the landscape of human rights on a global scale. To varying degrees of success across many countries, CSO influences have been fundamental in the creation and adoption of key human rights documents, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, core UN Covenants, and treaties concerning human rights. In the aftermath of World War II, their determined activism ensured that human rights provisions were a cornerstone of the UN Charter, marking a significant evolution in international human rights norms. Their global reach and diverse representation reflect the increasing influence and recognition of civil society on the world stage.<sup>26</sup> The expectation of civil society in a democracy is to function as a watchdog—a role essential for maintaining the balance of power. Civil society is thus tasked with ensuring that those in power are held accountable and that transparency in governance is upheld. This involves monitoring government actions, exposing corrupt practices, and demanding openness in decision-making.

---

23 Ekiert, Grzegorz, Jan Kubik, and Michal Wenzel. “Civil society and three dimensions of inequality in post-1989 Poland.” *Comparative Politics* 49, no. 3 (2017): 331-350.  
Bernhard, Michael, and Dong-Joon Jung. “Civil society and income inequality in post-communist Eurasia.” *Comparative Politics* 49, no. 3 (2017): 373-397.

24 Ibid

25 Tørres, Liv. «A Civil or Uncivil Civil Society?» (2021).5

26 T. Risse and K. Sikkink, „The socialization of human rights norms into domestic practices: Introduction”, in T. Risse and K. Sikkink ed., *The power of Human Rights. International Norms and Domestic Change* (Cambridge University Press 1999), p.152

**Table 2**

<b>Perspective</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>Action Points</b>	<b>Potential Sources</b>
Society-Centric Perspective: Autonomy and Advocacy	Understanding how organizations navigate and respond to different regulatory frameworks.	Examine legal documents; interview key organization members.	Legal Documents, CSO Leaders
	Detailed examination of CSOs' resource generation, independence maintenance, and adaptation strategies.	Analyze financial reports; conduct sustainability assessments.	Experiences and years of operation, Sources of Finance, Sustainability Reports
	Identifying new forms of mobilization or advocacy and their potential impact.	Monitor media and social networks; conduct trend analysis.	Media Outlets, Social Media Platforms
State-Centric Perspective: Control and Institutional Interplay	Mapping how state policies and legal frameworks shape CSO strategies and areas of engagement.	Review policy documents	Government Publications, Interviews with Officials
	Assessing civil society's strengths and weaknesses in engaging with state mechanisms and their influence on policy.	Analyze collaborative projects; conduct interviews.	Joint CSO-State Projects, Expert Interviews
Historical Contingency : Contextual Dynamics	Mapping the unique historical contexts of different countries, influencing current operations and resilience of CSOs.	Conduct historical research; analyze archival data.	Archives, articles and documents
	Understanding historical influences on current CSO strategies and resilience.	Review historical records; interview veteran members.	Historical Documents, Long-standing CSO Members

Opportunity Structure Approach: Strategic Adaptation and Viability	Mapping strategic responses to opportunities and constraints, highlighting adaptability and resilience.	Assess organizational strategies; monitor market trends.	CSO Strategy Documents, Reports
	Shedding light on emerging trends and the long-term sustainability of civil society initiatives.	Identify and analyze new initiatives; evaluate their impact.	Innovation Reports, Impact Studies

*Watchdog Role and Advocacy:* Acting as vigilant watchdogs, pro-democracy organizations have held states accountable and steadfastly advocated for policies aligned with international human rights norms.<sup>27</sup> Renowned for their capacity to exert substantial pressure, they have influenced state policies towards adhering to specific standards. For example, while representing a wide spectrum of interest groups, they have been active in publicizing potential or imminent human rights violations and played a crucial role in alerting the public and subjecting governments to scrutiny at both national and international levels through various means, significantly influencing governmental policy-making processes and driving changes in numerous countries.<sup>28</sup> By fulfilling this role, civil society organizations help prevent the governmental drift toward authoritarian tendencies to maintain the democratic integrity of the state. Furthermore, these organizations provide platforms for marginalized and diverse voices, fostering a democratic process that is more inclusive and representative of the entire populace. Thus, a key function of civil society is pluralization and creating a space for marginalized actors to be heard and free to organize, because “by virtue of their mere existence as autonomous actors, the various types of CSOs have a pluralizing effect and consequently strengthen the institutional arena and the entire society.”<sup>29</sup>

*Civil Society in the Shaping of Democracy in Africa:* In the early 1990s, a significant shift occurred in the global political landscape, particularly in the realm of democratic governance, and this shift was profoundly evident in Africa. Contrary to the common belief that external influences were the sole drivers of democracy in Africa, the real catalysts were the domestic civil societies, characterized by their

27 Mercer, Claire. “NGOs, civil society and democratization: a critical review of the literature.” *Progress in development studies* 2, no. 1 (2002): 5-22.

28 UNDP, *The New Yalta, Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights in RBEC region, European Bureau for Europe and CIS* (New York, 1998), p.35.

29 Jussi Laine, “Debating Civil Society: Contested Conceptualizations and Development Trajectories,” *International Journal of Not-for-Profit Law* 16, no. 1 (September 2014). p. 73.

resourcefulness, commitment, and tenacity.<sup>30</sup> These societies were instrumental in initiating and sustaining the democratic transitions that led to the establishment of elected governments across several African nations. This was particularly evident in efforts to dismantle long-entrenched authoritarian regimes, as noted by E. Gyimah-Boadi.<sup>31</sup> CSOs have greatly influenced the opening up “once-forbidden debates” on new political directions, decriminalizing dissent, and fostering pluralist politics, to facilitating the convening of sovereign national conferences and constituent assemblies, including competitive elections.<sup>32</sup>

Thus did Samuel P. Huntington term the crucial role of civil societies in the early 1990s of Africa the “third wave” of democracy.<sup>33</sup> This wave was characterized by the emergence of domestic forces demanding an end to autocracy and economic mismanagement, where civil servants, teachers, and traders led the way. Similar movements were observed across the continent, with trade unions, middle-class associations, and student groups playing pivotal roles in advocating for democratization. Beyond their role in challenging authoritarian regimes, civil societies were instrumental in the mechanics of democratic processes, such as national conferences, assemblies, and competitive elections.<sup>34</sup>

*Recognizing Civil Society Vulnerabilities in Africa:* Despite the considerable contributions of civil societies in Africa, several criticisms point out their limitations and weaknesses. Concerns have been raised about the fragility of the civil society sector, particularly its ability to act as a primary support for democracy that strengthens and safeguards democratic governance. CSO vulnerability manifests in various ways, including internal inconsistency, reliance on external aid, and financial dependency specifically, all of which raise doubts about the independence and effectiveness of civil society. Moreover, civil societies in Africa often face the threat of repression and the risk of being co-opted by state powers, challenging their ability to function independently. Thus, while African countries boast a wealth of associations and civic actors, this abundance does not necessarily result in a strong, well-connected civil society network, highlighting the need for these societies to address their internal weaknesses and develop strategies to become more resilient and effective in promoting and consolidating democracy as it is being developed.

---

30 Gyimah-Boadi, Emmanuel. “Civil society in Africa.” *J. Democracy* 7 (1996): 118

31 *Ibid* 119.

32 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

33 *ibid*

34 *Ibid*  
Gyimah-Boadi, “Civil Society in Africa.” 119-120

In the wider region of the HoA, encompassing Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda, diverse histories and complex socio-political dynamics stand as a testament to the challenges and possibilities of democratization in a rapidly changing world. The post-Cold War era, characterized by a global shift towards liberal democracy, set the stage for significant political transformations in these countries. However, the path to democracy has been anything but straightforward, marred by internal strife, external interventions, and a labyrinth of socioeconomic hurdles.

The initial optimism for democracy in the early 1990s, marked by media liberalization, multi-party systems, and expanded civil liberties in the HoA gave way to enduring challenges rooted in the historical legacy of former rebel movements and their securitized and militarized mode of governance. Despite early promises, many countries in the region remain authoritarian and marked by closed political spaces, opposition suppression, and ongoing human rights violations. This securitized and militarized mode of governance prioritizes the allocation of state resources to the security sector at the expense of vital social services like education and healthcare, fostering an atmosphere of fear and repression that stifles political dissent and undermines the democratic process. This governance approach is exemplified in Uganda, where high-ranking military officials hold key government positions, diverting resources and intimidating political participation. Eritrea demonstrates pervasive military influence with mandatory conscription and human rights abuses, hindering economic and social progress. South Sudan's reliance on securitized and militarized governance has contributed to conflict and instability, obstructing the establishment of stable democratic institutions.<sup>35</sup>

## Present Status of HoA Democracy and Civil Society

The “Freedom in the World 2023” report by Freedom House provides a nuanced view of democracy in the region.<sup>36</sup> According to this report, both the HoA and other regions in Africa exhibit significant country-specific variation in political and civil liberties. Hence, the democratic status of these countries varies widely, reflecting the diverse political landscapes in the region. Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, and Uganda are categorized as “Not Free,” with minimal political rights and

---

35 Policy Brief Governance and the State of Public Service Delivery in East Africa and the Horn of Africa Region: Impact on Peace and Security AFRICA KNOWLEDGE SERIES VOLUME 1, NUMBER 2. JULY 2022 [https://www.un.org/osaa/sites/www.un.org.osaa/files/Reports/2023/eng\\_-\\_governance\\_and\\_the\\_state\\_of\\_public\\_service\\_delivery.pdf](https://www.un.org/osaa/sites/www.un.org.osaa/files/Reports/2023/eng_-_governance_and_the_state_of_public_service_delivery.pdf)

36 [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/FIW\\_World\\_2023\\_DigitalPDF.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/FIW_World_2023_DigitalPDF.pdf)

limited civil liberties. Djibouti is considered “Not Free” as well, but it exhibits moderate political rights and relatively better civil liberties. South Sudan shares this classification as well, though with significant restrictions on both political rights and civil liberties. In contrast, Kenya is labeled as “Partly Free,” indicating more political rights and civil liberties compared to some neighboring countries. These variations underscore the unique political contexts and challenges faced by each country in the region. Exceptions like Kenya have shown progress in democratic governance, marked by relatively transparent elections and evolving political discourse. In contrast, Somalia, South Sudan and other nations in the “Not Free” category continue to grapple with deep-seated political instability and human rights abuses.

Djibouti, for instance, continues to face challenges in political repression and limited public discourse. Eritrea remains among the worst for political rights and civil liberties, with severe limitations on personal freedoms.<sup>37</sup> Ethiopia’s complex situation is marred by ongoing civil conflicts and human rights abuses, undermining its democratic aspirations, while Somalia and South Sudan are engulfed in political instability and human rights violations, exemplify the daunting obstacles to democratization in the region.<sup>38</sup> In contrast, Kenya demonstrates a more positive trend in democratic governance, though it is not without its challenges.

In this backdrop, long-standing leaders such as Uganda’s President Museveni, Eritrea’s President Isaias Afwerki and Djibouti’s President Guelleh exemplify the challenges of political stagnation and dominance, often maintaining power without significant changes in leadership or policy.<sup>39</sup> Sudan’s journey towards democracy—initially hopeful following the 2018 protests, suffered a major setback with a military coup in 2021, which disrupted its transition to civilian rule and led the country into civil war. Ethiopia’s democratic ambitions have been deeply complicated by the recent conflict in Tigray and ongoing tensions in the Amhara and Oromia regions, exacerbating ethnic divisions and posing significant obstacles to national unity and democratic progress.<sup>40</sup> Eritrea stands out as one of the most repressive states, with severe limitations on political rights and civil liberties, starkly contrasting the democratic aspirations seen elsewhere.

---

37 <https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores>

38 [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/FIW\\_World\\_2023\\_DigitalPDF.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/FIW_World_2023_DigitalPDF.pdf) According to this Report Ethiopia, Uganda, South Sudan is rated as Not Free, and Kenya rated as partly Free.

See also, Freedom House. (2022). *Djibouti: Freedom in the world 2022 country report*. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/djibouti/freedom-world/2022>

39 State of democracy in sub-Saharan Africa Democratic progress at risk. EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service Author: Ionel Zamfir Members’ Research Service PE 690.647 – June 2021 [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS\\_BRI%282021%29690647](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI%282021%29690647)

40 Crisis Group. (2022, November). *Crisis Watch Digest*. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/ethiopia-november-2022.pdf>

These varied experiences point to a common trend of stagnation in democratic advancements across the region.<sup>41</sup> Human rights violations, the dominance of ruling parties, and elections that seldom result in meaningful leadership changes are widespread. Long-standing leaders like Uganda's President Museveni and Djibouti's President Guelleh epitomize this stagnation, often maintaining power without term limits and consolidating control through their ruling parties. These challenges are compounded by deeper structural issues such as economic disparities, high illiteracy rates, and ethnic divisions. For instance, Ethiopia's Tigray conflict and ethnic violence in regions like Oromia and Amhara underscore the complexities of managing diversity within these societies. Structural challenges, including nation-building crises, institutional fragmentation, and skewed state structures, severely hinder the establishment of robust democratic mechanisms.<sup>42</sup>

According to the 2023 CIVICUS Monitor Tracking Civic Space Report, which assesses the suppression of freedoms worldwide, it is noted that several countries in the region, including Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Uganda, Sudan, South Sudan, Djibouti, and Somalia/Somaliland, are experiencing varying degrees of civic space restrictions. Specifically, Eritrea and Djibouti are identified as 'closed' civic spaces, while Ethiopia, Uganda, Sudan, South Sudan, and Somalia are characterized as 'repressed' civic spaces. Kenya, on the other hand, is noted to have 'obstructed' civic space. The report emphasizes that these countries predominantly face attacks on civic freedoms, particularly targeting the rights of association, assembly, and expression. This suggests a widespread restriction of civil liberties across the region.<sup>43</sup> The severity of the situation is further underscored by the 2022 Reporters Without Borders (RSF) Index scores, which provided a stark representation of the state of freedom of expression across various indicators such as Political, Legal, Economic, Sociocultural, and Safety contexts and frameworks.<sup>44</sup>

With Eritrea ranking at 174, Djibouti at 162, Sudan at 148, Somalia at 141, Uganda at 133, Ethiopia at 130, South Sudan at 118, Kenya at 116, and nearby Rwanda at 131, these scores particularly focused on suppression of media freedoms and safety for journalists.<sup>45</sup> These reports and scores indicate a troubling trend in the region where, despite the *de jure* constitutional guarantees of media and press

---

41 Kidane Mengisteab, "Introduction: Structural and Institutional Factors in the Crisis of Democratization in the Greater Horn of Africa," in *The Crisis of Democratization in the Greater Horn of Africa: Towards Building Institutional Foundations*, ed. Kidane Mengisteab (Boydell & Brewer, James Currey, 2020), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvxhrkpm.7>.

42 *ibid*

43 [https://monitor.civicus.org/globalfindings\\_2023/](https://monitor.civicus.org/globalfindings_2023/)

See also <https://hoacsf.org/publications-the-horn-of-africa-civil-society-forum/>

<https://www.civicus.org/index.php/state-of-civil-society-report-2023>

<https://monitor.civicus.org/search/countries/?territories=Africa&status=>

44 <https://rsf.org/en/rsf-s-2022-world-press-freedom-index-new-era-polarisation>

45 [https://rsf.org/en/rsf-s-2022-world-press-freedom-index-new-era-polarisation#:~:text=The%20world's%2010%20worst%20countries,and%20North%20Korea%20\(180th\).](https://rsf.org/en/rsf-s-2022-world-press-freedom-index-new-era-polarisation#:~:text=The%20world's%2010%20worst%20countries,and%20North%20Korea%20(180th).)

freedom, for example, the actual practice is markedly different. Such discrepancies between legal promises and the reality of civic and media freedoms reflects a regional trend of multiple barriers that are political, legal, economic, sociocultural, and safety-related, especially for journalists and media organizations in their efforts to disseminate information and hold power bases accountable.

The deterioration of the human rights environment in Sudan, South Sudan and Ethiopia between 2002 and 2023 is particularly alarming. In the Horn and wider East African region, this period was marked by a series of devastating internal armed conflicts that significantly impacted human rights and humanitarian conditions, leaving the HoA to be characterized as violent and politically unstable. In Sudan, the situation deteriorated rapidly following the aforementioned military coup of 2021, which led to a civil war between the Sudanese Army and the Rapid Special Forces. This conflict reversed the significant progress made post the 2018 and 2019 mass protests with widespread human rights violations and the disintegration of key democratic structures in the Constitutional Document. The nation was plunged into general chaos, eroding its civil society foundation.<sup>46</sup> Ethiopia's internal struggles mirrored the wider region's turbulence, particularly evident in the two-year Tigray conflict, the ongoing clashes with the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), and the confrontations involving the Ethiopian National Defense Forces and Fano militias.

Concurrently, South Sudan's protracted civil war, rooted in political and ethnic divisions, continued to wreak havoc and perpetuate violence and displacement thereby hindering peace and stability efforts. Somalia's longstanding conflict, marked by civilian abuses by both Al-Shabab militants and government forces, added to the region's instability. These conflicts threatened the safety and well-being of the Somali people, hampering developmental and humanitarian efforts.<sup>47</sup> The impact on human rights, safety, and economic stability of millions of Africans in the HoA has been profound, leaving a complex set of humanitarian challenges and human rights issues that demand urgent attention and resolution towards peace and stability against tumultuous civic engagements. Furthermore, the democratization process in the HoA is shaped by a complex interplay of internal dynamics and external influences involving a wide array of actors. This region is subject, for example, to the geopolitical strategies of established global powers like the United States, the European Union, Russia, and China, as well as emerging influential states (often referred as middle powers) such as the Gulf States, Turkey, Iran, India, Brazil, and Japan.<sup>48</sup>

---

46 <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/power-struggle-sudan>

47 <https://hoacsf.org/publications-the-horn-of-africa-civil-society-forum/>

48 <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2023/01/africa-2023-continuing-political-and-economic-volatility>

These external actors engage with African nations primarily for economic and security cooperation in exchange for political alliances, but often without a strong focus on promoting or supporting local democratic practices.<sup>49</sup> This leads to concerns among many HoA advocates about the undermining of democratic values and principles. The region, with its strategic geopolitical position, is thus caught in a web of international interests, where the actions and policies of varied HoA civil society actors negatively impact the societal trajectories of the region, albeit unwittingly.<sup>50</sup> Thus, and despite some positive trends, such as strengthened regional relations, political transitions, and economic growth, the HoA continues to grapple with serious issues like state failure, hunger, food insecurity, famine, and persistent conflicts and instability, all within the context of its strategic geopolitical significance. Overcoming these challenges requires a nuanced understanding of each country's historical, cultural, and economic contexts. A commitment to human rights, the rule of law, and active political participation is essential for advancing democracy and civil society in the region.

In summary, the state of democracy and civil society in the HoA and wider East African region is a complex and evolving landscape. Encompassing Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda, the HoA in particular is characterized by varied experiences and challenges in its democratic journey. While there are instances of progress and potential, the overall picture is marked by persistent issues such as political stagnation, human rights violations, and restricted civic spaces. Efforts toward democratization and flourishing civil societies are intertwined with historical legacies, socio-economic challenges, and the influence of militarized governance that must be continually examined.

## Challenges and Barriers: Political-Legal and Socioeconomic Trends

Over the last decade, there has been a noticeable pattern in Africa of implementing administrative, legal, and institutional mechanisms aimed at obstructing the work of CSOs, and particularly those working in human rights, democracy promotion, and advocacy. Often, such designs have occurred with a pervasive pattern of harassment and intimidation against human rights advocacy groups and individuals. These laws and policies are primarily directed at increasing state oversight over civil society, especially targeting NGOs involved in human rights and

---

49 Ahere, John Rabuogi. "New Actors and Democratic Governance in a Rising Africa." *Frontiers in Political Science* 2 (2021): 24. page 8-9

50 Ibid

governance.<sup>51</sup> CSOs in the HoA thus encounter political and legal challenges that are reflective of broader African trends. However, within the HoA region, there is variability in the operating environment for CSOs.

Kenya, Ethiopia, and Uganda, for instance, present a comparatively favorable context unlike the intense political repression and severe barriers faced by CSOs in Eritrea, South Sudan, and Djibouti. Additionally, Somalia and Sudan (post 2021) present unique cases due to the absence of a functioning state, which further complicates the civil society landscape. While all these countries exhibit tendencies to limit civil society's influence, the severity and methods differ significantly across the region, including intricate administrative hurdles, stringent legal requirements, and institutional barriers, all of which collectively make it challenging for CSOs to operate freely and effectively. The range of these measures is broad, from onerous registration processes and restrictive funding regulations to invasive supervisory controls that limit NGOs' operational scopes. Especially over the past decade, there has been a notable shift in civil society being perceived by governments as entities to be regulated and confined rather than collaborated with for societal development, democracy, and human rights advocacy.<sup>52</sup> This stance is in stark contrast to the human rights commitments made by these countries under national, regional, and international treaties.

For example, the USAID Sustainability Index, which specifically measures critical aspects of civil society from 2009 to 2021, brought the unique set of contexts and challenges for CSOs in the HoA into sharp focus.<sup>53</sup> Based largely on this Index, the subsequent sections will explore the specific situations in each country within the region, offering deeper understanding of the regional patterns and trends impacting the civil society space. This expanded understanding helps to unravel the complex and often adversarial relationship between governments and civil society actors in the HoA, in many ways reflecting broader global trends in the treatment of civil societies.

## Kenya

In Kenya, while the legal and regulatory environment for the civil society sector shows notable evolution marked by improvements and predictability, the land-

---

51 Godfrey Musila, The Spread of Anti-NGO Measures in Africa 2019 <https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2019/spread-anti-ngo-measures-africa-freedoms-under-threat>

52 Maru, T. M., Bashair Ahmed, N. A. Abdalla, Mehari Taddele Maru, B. Ahmed, and A. Abdalla. "Shrinking civil society space in the Horn of Africa." (2017). <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=ZBrgcT0AAAAJ&hl=en>

53 <https://csosi.org/?region=AFRICA>

scape remains fraught with challenges. These obstacles significantly impede the operations and overall effectiveness of NGOs, tempering possible strides in regulatory implementation and making Kenya's environment more complex than many other countries in the region.<sup>54</sup> Specifically, the civil society sector in Kenya, including its NGOs, navigates a complicated legal and regulatory environment. These include a registration process plagued by ambiguity and subjectivity, leading to delays and uncertainties.<sup>55</sup> Operational challenges are further exacerbated by restricted scope and flexibility from the NGO Coordination Board. The advocacy efforts of NGOs are also constrained by legal provisions like the Computer Misuse and Cybercrime Act, risking suppression of dissent and free speech.<sup>56</sup>

Similarly, while direct legal barriers to resource acquisition are not explicitly stated, the overarching regulatory environment indirectly influences CSO abilities to garner resources. Such subtle forms of constraint can affect the financial sustainability and resource mobilization of CSOs.

Correspondingly, although there are no formal legal restrictions on international collaboration in Kenya's civil society sector, organizations must navigate the significant hurdle of obtaining prior approval from the NGO Coordination Board to become a branch or affiliate of foreign organizations of a "political nature."<sup>57</sup> Such practices limit access to global partnerships and exchange and indirectly affect resource acquisition, illustrating the regulatory complexities that impact the operational dynamics of CSOs.<sup>58</sup> Additionally, the right to assemble and organize public events presents notable constraints for NGOs in Kenya. Challenges such as the absence of a specific timeline for authorities to respond to event organization requests, combined with the ban on counterdemonstrations, and instances of excessive force by security officers significantly curtail the ability of NGOs to hold peaceful assemblies. This restricted environment highlights the diverse array of hurdles Kenyans and their allies encounter in their efforts to make a meaningful impact and effectively fulfill their missions and advocacy for societal change.<sup>59</sup>

---

54 2012-2021 CSO SUSTAINABILITY INDEX FOR SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA Report available <https://csosi.org/>

55 <https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/kenya>

56 The Computer Misuse and Cybercrime Act, specifically Sections 22 & 23, which criminalize the publication of false information, poses a risk of being misapplied to suppress dissent and independent voices. This legal framework can significantly hamper NGOs' advocacy efforts, limiting their capacity to engage in effective communication and campaign work. See <https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/kenya>

57 <https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/kenya>

58 *ibid*

59 <https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/kenya>. DefendDefenders, *Overview of the Human Rights Situation in the East and Horn of Africa, May-October 2023*, report submitted ahead of the 77th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, Banjul, The Gambia, October 2023, DefendDefenders' Bi-Annual Report to the ACHPR. See also, DefendDefenders (The East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project),

Despite these challenges, Kenya's overall environment is relatively better than other countries in the region.<sup>60</sup> This is partly due to the vibrant civic society and proactive advocacy efforts of HRDs. For instance, the CSO Sustainability Index report from 2009 to 2021 shows a bright trend of increased vibrancy and visibility in Kenya's civil society sector. This improvement in the sector's ability to influence public opinion and government policies, especially when compared to regional nations, indicates a positive shift. Hence, despite the myriad challenges, the evolving legal and regulatory environment in Kenya has empowered CSOs to become more active and effective in shaping societal and political discourse, marking distinct progress in the regional context. This juxtaposition of challenges and improvements paints a picture of a sector that is thriving more than it is struggling, reflecting the dynamic nature of civil society in Kenya.

## Ethiopia

The legal and regulatory environment governing the civil society sector in Ethiopia has also demonstrated a varied reality over the years. Between 2009 and 2018, for example, there was a noticeable deterioration in the operational environment for CSOs due to the restrictive impact of the then-prevailing Charities and Societies Proclamation. This period was characterized by a downward spiral, with severe restrictions hampering the functioning of CSOs. However, post-2018, significant political changes and the introduction of a new CSO Proclamation caused a shift towards improvement.<sup>61</sup> This new legislative framework has begun to ease some constraints, albeit partially, as the overall civic space in Ethiopia remains broadly categorized as obstructed due to substantial challenges that affect their establishment, operations, advocacy, and ability to assemble.

Under the new CSO Proclamation, the Agency for Civil Society Organizations (ACSO) is empowered with extensive oversight, including the ability to investigate or dissolve organizations. Furthermore, international organizations or those founded by non-resident foreigners are not permitted to engage in certain political activities, while charitable committees encounter even more operational restrictions.

---

*Overview of the Human Rights Situation in the East and Horn of Africa October 2018 – April 2019*, report submitted to the 64th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, April 2019. DefendDefenders (The East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project), *Overview of the Human Rights Situation in the East and Horn of Africa April 2018 – October 2018*, report submitted to the 63rd Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), Banjul, The Gambia, October 2018. Also, DefendDefenders, "Overview of Human Rights, Oct 2018 – Apr 2019, 64th Ordinary Session." April 2019.

60 Interview with David Kode, CIVICUS Advocacy and Campaigns 12/11/2023

61 <https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/ethiopia>

The Cybercrimes Law has been criticized for serving to restrict digital information access, impacting digital activism and the documentation of human rights abuses. As for assembly rights, while the Ethiopian Constitution allows for peaceful assembly, the government exercises considerable discretion in granting permission for events, often leading to legal challenges against opposition and community groups. This array of barriers significantly hampers the capacity of CSOs in Ethiopia to effectively operate, advocate for change, and mobilize communities. Here, it should also be noted that the context of conflict, and instability in Ethiopia has had a profound and detrimental impact on the civil society space.

The CSO Sustainability Index report covering 2009 to 2021 reveals a mixed pattern in the ability of Ethiopia's civil society sector to influence public opinion and government policies. While there was a notable downward trend in the influence of CSOs on public opinion and policies before 2018, the period following 2018 shows improvements. However, these improvements still fall within the 'impeded' category, reflecting a consistent pattern of limited CSO capacity.<sup>62</sup>

## Somalia

In Somalia, CSOs are confronted with numerous multifaceted barriers affecting their entry, operations, speech, advocacy, international contact, access to resources, and assembly rights, which cumulatively creates a challenging operational environment. Entry into the sector is regulated with stringent requirements. In both Somaliland and Puntland, for example, NGOs seeking registration must comply with a list of stipulations outlined by the registrars in the Ministry of Planning. This process includes mandatory annual registration, necessitating the submission of application and renewal forms each year. Additionally, NGOs are required to pay registration and renewal fees, which amount to \$110 for registration and \$60 for renewal in Somaliland, and \$200 for registration and \$100 for renewal in Puntland.<sup>63</sup>

Despite little published data existing on the issue, Somaliland's expulsion of Somalia-registered NGOs and dismantling of their authority to dissolve organizations on security grounds create a precarious environment. These NGOs must often collaborate with the government and incur costs for police protection. Additionally, the Public Order Law, primarily in English, is inaccessible to many locals, thus complicating compliance. Restrictions on speech and advocacy are severe, with journalists and media centers facing arrests and shutdowns. Ambiguities

---

62 2009-2021 CSO SUSTAINABILITY INDEX FOR SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA Report available <https://csosi.org/>

63 <https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/somalia>

in laws governing NGO resources and stringent controls over public assemblies, requiring prior notification and limiting locations, further restrict civil society operations.<sup>64</sup>

## Sudan

Even before the outbreak of civil war in Sudan, CSOs faced a complex array of barriers that severely constrained their activities. Overall, the legal and regulatory environment in the civil society sector is often described as obstructed and impeded, limiting the operational capacity of pro-democracy actors.<sup>65</sup> The Ministry of Interior, serving as the registration body, for instance, imposed mandatory registration with burdensome requirements, including a minimum of 30 founders and an annual re-registration process. Operational activities were heavily suppressed, particularly for CSOs that were not aligned with the government. Although reports of crackdowns on media or CSOs nearly ceased following the negotiations between the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC) and the Transitional Military Council (TMC) after the start of the transitional period in August 2019, the environment remained challenging.<sup>66</sup>

Namely, CSOs that publicly disagreed with the government faced fines and penalties and were excluded from participating in “national dialogue.”<sup>67</sup> The regime required “Country Agreements” for foreign CSOs to operate and made it nearly impossible to obtain permits for assemblies.<sup>68</sup> Barriers to entry included strict rules on minimum membership for registration plus additional requirements for foreign organizations, including proof of financial and technical capabilities. CSOs required permission from the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) for activities often classified as “political,” leading to the suppression of workshops and discussions. Operational activity barriers thus included interference in internal affairs, stringent reporting requirements, and government harassment.

The situation for CSOs in Sudan, therefore, is characterized by a restrictive and often hostile environment, marked by legal and practical barriers that stifled their operations, advocacy efforts, and public engagement. According to the CSO Sustainability Index report between 2012 and 2018, the civil society sector’s ability to influence public opinion and government policies in Sudan showed a downward

---

64 <https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/Somalia>

65 CSO Sustainability Index for Sub-Saharan Africa, 2012-2021.

66 <https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/sudan>

67 *ibid*

68 *ibid*

spiral, reflecting growing challenges and restrictions. However, this trend saw a significant shift with the 2019 Sudanese revolution, which resulted in improved space for civil society advocacy and influence. This positive development, unfortunately, faced a setback in 2021 due to political instability and economic decline, which threatened the integrity of the Sudanese state.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, the viability of civil society actors has been severely impacted by the ongoing civil war, suffering severe stifling of potential for CSOs to contribute to stability and transition to democracy. It remains unclear whether the current regional and international efforts to bring political settlement will succeed in restoring constitutional order and steering the country back onto a path of democratic transition.

## Uganda

According to the “Uganda’s Civic Space Index 2022” report by the National Coalition for Human Rights Defenders-Uganda (NCHRD-U), there is a prevalent negative perception of the country’s trajectory in terms of human rights and the rule of law. The report identified the rule of law and human rights, along with freedom of information and expression, and the rights to assembly and association as Ugandan’s most infringed liberties. Examples of these restrictions include continued violence and arbitrary arrests, particularly against opposition political party members, journalists, and NGOs perceived as anti-government. The report notes specific instances such as the suspension of the Democratic Governance Facility (DGF), a major funding source for civil society, and the closure of organizations like Uganda Women’s Network (UWONET) and NGO Forum due to their work in governance and democracy. Additionally, laws such as the Public Order Management Act of 2013 grant police extensive powers to prohibit or disperse public gatherings, further restricting rights to assembly and association.<sup>70</sup> Notably, the police were highlighted as the foremost violators of civic space, with the courts and judiciary system also contributing significantly to these violations.<sup>71</sup>

Similarly, the CSO Sustainability Index categorized the legal and regulatory enforcement in Uganda as obstructed, revealing a consistent downward spiral from 2012 to 2021.<sup>72</sup> This trend reflects the increasing challenges faced by civil society organizations in carrying out their activities effectively. A stringent regulatory framework has created a complex landscape for Ugandan CSOs, impacting their

---

69 CSO Sustainability Index for Sub-Saharan Africa, 2012-2021.

70 National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders Uganda, “Uganda’s Civic Space Index, 2022: Civil Liberties at Stake,” December 2022, <https://www.hrdcoalition.ug/resources>.

71 Ibid, pp. 9-16.

72 CSO Sustainability Index for Sub-Saharan Africa, 2012-2021

ability to engage in advocacy, assemble peacefully, and operate without undue restrictions. This environment poses significant hurdles for civil society actors in Uganda and constrains their efforts to contribute meaningfully to democratization, societal development and open public discourse. At the core of these challenges is the mandatory registration under the NGO Act of 2016, which encompasses not only private voluntary groupings but also community-based organizations (CBOs) and self-regulatory bodies (SRBs). This stringent regulation necessitates that all entities register with the National Bureau of NGOs, a process further complicated by the requirement for existing organizations to re-register under the new law within a tight six-month window.<sup>73</sup>

Thus, the complexity of civil society operations in Uganda is marked by multiple bureaucratic layers and stringent regulations. District and Sub-County NGO Monitoring Committees play a critical role in the registration process, with their recommendations being essential for CBOs.<sup>74</sup> Failure to comply with registration requirements, as stated in Section 40 of the NGO Act, can lead to severe penalties. The registration process itself is exhausting, demanding a comprehensive dossier for the National Bureau of NGOs, including operational details, staffing plans, and financial sources.

Recent trends show increased government oversight, including invasive information requests. Criminal penalties for non-compliance include suspension of activities, as seen in high-profile cases. There are also constraints on free speech and advocacy, with the government imposing regulations on political neutrality and media content, particularly during elections. International contact faces hurdles due to stringent staffing regulations and resource constraints, exacerbated by counter-terrorism measures leading to financial crackdowns on NGOs, including account freezes.<sup>75</sup> Top of Form

These trends were especially pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic and in the lead-up to the general election scheduled for January 2021.<sup>76</sup> For instance,

---

73 <https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/uganda>

74 <https://www.article19.org/resources/uganda-stop-intimidating-ngos/#:~:text=ARTICLE%2019%20is%20concerned%20by%20the%20suspension,ees%2C%20saying%20they%20had%20failed%20to%20comply>  
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/AFR5946522021ENGLISH.pdf>

75 <https://dig.watch/updates/uganda-new-law-imposes-restrictions-on-the-use-of-the-internet>  
FREEDOM ON THE NET 2021 report Uganda, Freedom House, [https://freedomhouse.org/country/uganda/freedom-net/2021#:~:text=During%20the%20contested%20January%202021%20elections%2C%20the,UCC%20ordered%20internet%20service%20providers%20\(ISPs\)%20to](https://freedomhouse.org/country/uganda/freedom-net/2021#:~:text=During%20the%20contested%20January%202021%20elections%2C%20the,UCC%20ordered%20internet%20service%20providers%20(ISPs)%20to)  
<https://www.theafricareport.com/125102/uganda-it-will-only-get-worse-ngos-fear-as-government-crackdown-continues/>  
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/05/24/court-ends-suspension-ngo-uganda>

76 Ibid

prominent opposition figures have faced arrest and detention, exemplifying the government's approach to silencing dissent.

Moreover, the government has introduced draft regulations that could lead to further restrictions on freedom of expression and satire. These incidents collectively indicate a pattern of stifling free expression and criticism of the government, further exacerbating the challenges to the civic space in Uganda.<sup>77</sup>

## South Sudan

The legal and regulatory environment governing the civil society sector in South Sudan is described as *severely* obstructed and impeded, significantly restricting the operational capabilities of pro-democracy actors. The CSO Sustainability Index report from 2012–2021 highlighted a deteriorating pattern in legal and regulatory enforcement in South Sudan, marking a consistent decline over this period.<sup>78</sup> In South Sudan, CSOs face a multitude of barriers, beginning with the mandatory and stringent registration requirements under the NGO Act of 2016. This Act criminalizes operating without registration and imposes heavy fines or imprisonment for non-compliance which creates a significant entry barrier for CSOs. The complexity of the registration process is further heightened as NGOs are required to secure certificates from both the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and the Relief and Rehabilitation Center (RRC), each with their own fees and requirements. Additionally, the registration requirements vary across different states, leading to a multitiered system that is both challenging enter and navigate.<sup>79</sup>

Thus, in South Sudan, NGOs face significant operational challenges, including the financial burden of registration, required legal assistance, and additional costs for those outside Juba. Furthermore, a restrictive regulatory framework post-registration demands strict compliance with vague principles like respecting sovereignty, leading to governmental interference, including office closures. The precarious security situation further impedes effective NGO and other CSO functioning, especially in more politically unstable regions. Even advocacy is risky, evidenced by activist abductions. International contacts are regulated, favoring local employment and creating an unpredictable environment for foreign workers. Resource mobilization is indirectly hampered by operational and security challenges. The right to assembly in South Sudan is severely restricted, with government respons-

---

77

78 CSO Sustainability Index for Sub-Saharan Africa, 2012-2021.

79 <https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/south-sudan>

es to demonstrations being repressive, indicating a strategy to suppress dissent and limit the civic space.<sup>80</sup> These challenges collectively impede the basic functioning of civil society in South Sudan and constrain CSO capacity to advocate for change, engage in international collaborations, access resources, and organize public assemblies, thereby stifling the establishment and growth of democracy in the country.

## Eritrea

Eritrea is characterized as one of the most closed and militarized authoritarian states *globally*, with a civic space that is extremely constrained. Politically, Eritrea is a dictatorship under President Isaias Afewerki, lacking an elected legislature and independent CSOs, media, or judiciary. The regime's control over information and public discourse was solidified with the closure of all independent newspapers in 2001 along with the ongoing detention of journalists. Since gaining independence in 1993, Eritrea has not held elections, nor has it implemented the 1997 constitution that guarantees civil rights and seeks to limit executive power. The government enforces a rigorous and arbitrary annual registration process for all NGOs, confining their activities mainly to humanitarian relief. This regulation has led to the absence of independent NGOs operating within the country. Thus, the civil society space is under tight control, effectively shutting off any meaningful rights of association, assembly, or expression whereby all trade unions are government-controlled, public gatherings are banned, NGOs are absent, and the activities of international organizations are heavily restricted.<sup>81</sup>

The Implementation of Proclamation No. 145 of 2005 was a pivotal moment, further limiting the operational freedom of CSOs. Under this law, CSOs are only allowed to operate in conjunction with government agencies. Furthermore, the Eritrean government systematically blocks external human rights organizations from entering the country, isolating it from international partnership and watch.<sup>82</sup> Regarding the severe restrictions on freedom of assembly in Eritrea, public gatherings of over seven people require a government permit, and unauthorized protests or assemblies often result in lethal force or arbitrary detention by state security officers. This suppression effectively erases the right to peaceful assembly which is fundamental to democratic societies. Reports of routine physical and

---

80 Ibid

81 <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/location/eritrea>

82 Freedom House, "Eritrea: Freedom in the World 2023," <https://freedomhouse.org/country/eritrea/freedom-world/2023>. See Also, CIVICUS, "Eritrea: When the government reacts to our work, we know what we do is making an impact," Interviews, 03 October 2023, <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/news/interviews/6607-eritrea-when-the-government-reacts-to-our-work-we-know-what-we-do-is-making-an-impact>.

psychological torture in both civilian and military detention centers have been highlighted by UN investigators, revealing serious human rights abuses. Deaths in custody due to torture or harsh conditions are common yet go uninvestigated. Additionally, security forces in Eritrea frequently use lethal violence with impunity, particularly against those trying to evade military service or leave the country.<sup>83</sup>

## Djibouti

The government in Djibouti exerts substantial control over political and civic activities, severely limiting the freedoms necessary for a vibrant and independent civil society. While the constitution and law permit freedom of association by community groups upon registration and award of a permit from the Ministry of Interior, this provision is undermined by the government's actions. Human rights groups, labor unions, and individual activists regularly face harassment and intimidation, with the government employing tactics such as surveillance, arbitrary arrests, and the suppression of open discussion on sensitive political issues, including monitoring of social media to target individuals who post critical content about the government online.<sup>84</sup>

Local human rights organizations working on politically sensitive matters face especially significant obstacles, including difficulties in registering with the authorities and direct government harassment. Although organizations focused on social and economic development, such as women's rights groups are generally tolerated, the overall environment remains hostile to independent civic engagement. The labor sector is similarly constrained, with the union registration process being onerous and subject to government discretion resulting in progovernment unions being favored, and independent labor groups often facing denials of registration. Labor leaders are, reportedly, generally intimidated and union activities obstructed. Teachers' union activists, for instance, have reported dismissals, demotions, transfers, and denial of wages as forms of retaliation.<sup>85</sup> Thus, civil society in Djibouti is markedly restricted, with the government implementing laws and practices that impede the effective operation and advocacy of CSOs, thereby limiting their role in promoting democratic principles and human rights.

---

83 Human Rights Watch, "World Report 2023: Eritrea," <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/eritrea>. See also, United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "A/HRC/53/20: Situation of human rights in Eritrea - Report of the Special Rapporteur," <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc5320-situation-human-rights-eritrea-report-special-rapporteur>.

84 Freedom House, "Djibouti: Freedom in the World 2023," <https://freedomhouse.org/country/djibouti/freedom-world/2023>. See also, U.S. Department of State, "2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Djibouti," <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/djibouti/>.

85 Ibid. See also: International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), "Djibouti: Repression, Human Rights Under Attack," <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/Africa/djibouti/djibouti-repression-human-rights-attack>.

# Deciphering Cross-Country Patterns in the HoA: Multifaceted Challenges for Civic Actors

In the context of the HoA, encompassing Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Sudan, South Sudan, Djibouti, Eritrea, and Somalia like other segments of East Africa, a plethora of scholarly studies and comprehensive reports have delineated a discernible pattern regarding state interventions and their consequent impact on the operational milieu for civil society entities.<sup>86</sup> Patterns and trends across countries in the region indicate that CSOs face multifaceted threats that severely limit their operational scope and effectiveness. Prominent among these are stringent legal and regulatory measures that hinder CSO registration, assembly, and resource access, often leading to their de-registration or closure. Additionally, covert tactics are increasingly employed to constrict civic space, including efforts to undermine social media activities, as well as widespread intimidation and harassment, such as arrests and public defamation.

The rise of government-sponsored NGOs further complicates HoA civic landscapes, diluting genuine civil society efforts and the increasing politicization of the sector stifles growth and sustainability in the region. These issues collectively present a daunting array of threats that challenge CSO abilities to operate and make meaningful change in the region.<sup>87</sup> While all countries in the HoA exhibit tendencies to limit civil society's influence, the severity and methods employed vary significantly, offering key insights into state-civil society relations. In extreme cases like Eritrea, governments exert near-total control over civil society. In contrast, countries such as Uganda employ a more calculated approach: While not entirely closing off civic space, they strategically curtail civil society's influence through a web of administrative mechanisms, including for example, mandatory and complex registration processes, operational restrictions, and continuous

---

86 See country specific rating, scores and ranking for further reference: Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2023," (March 2023), [PDF file], [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/FIWW\\_World\\_2023\\_DigitalPDF.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/FIWW_World_2023_DigitalPDF.pdf). See also, FHI 360, "Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index Reports," (December 2023), <https://www.fhi360.org/resource/civil-society-organization-sustainability-index-reports>. CIVICUS, "Global Findings - Africa," CIVICUS Monitor, <https://monitor.civicus.org/globalfindings/africa/>. World Justice Project, "Rule of Law Index 2023," (2023), [PDF file], <https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/downloads/WJPIIndex2023.pdf>. See also, U.S. Department of State, "2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices," <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/>.

87 Thomas Carothers and Saskia Brechenmacher, "Accountability, Transparency, Participation, and Inclusion: A New Development Consensus?" Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 20, 2014, accessed December 24, 2023, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2014/10/20/accountability-transparency-participation-and-inclusion-new-development-consensus-pub-56968>. See also, Herbert, Sian. "Restricting space for civil society." *Applied Knowledge Services* (2015).

monitoring and inspection, reflecting a nuanced method of using bureaucratic barriers to limit civil society's impact.

The arbitrary application of laws, broad discretion granted to administrative agencies, and the use of vague legal provisions across these countries also serve as common tools for state control. Legal ambiguity allows governments to interpret and apply laws in ways that suit their interests, often leading to self-suppression to avoid government suppression. Notably, the challenges faced by CSOs across many African countries display common patterns that are also deeply influenced by the socioeconomics.<sup>88</sup> High poverty rates significantly limit CSO internal fundraising capacity, for example, as the general populace often lacks the disposable income necessary to contribute to charitable causes. This issue is compounded by the lack of a well-developed philanthropic sector, which in other contexts serves as a crucial source of support for civil society initiatives. Additionally, the absence of government incentives such as tax write-offs for private donations plays a pivotal role.<sup>89</sup> In countries where such incentives exist, they often encourage private entities and individuals to contribute to NGOs and other civil society actors. Moreover, laws that restrict or prevent NGOs from seeking and obtaining external resources impact the sustainability and efficacy of these organizations.

These factors create a challenging environment for CSOs in Africa, hampering the ability of civil society actors to effectively serve their communities and achieve their missions. Challenges in resource acquisition and staffing in particular limit organizational capacity to function effectively and reach goals. Moreover, the differential impact on types of CSOs is notable, with organizations engaged in politically sensitive activities or advocating for human rights and democratic reforms often facing more severe targeting than those in less contentious areas, like development or humanitarian work. Suppressive measures beyond legal frameworks, including intimidation tactics, harassment, and in some cases, outright violence or criminalization of civil society activities, serve to reinforce legal, administrative, and finance barriers. Environments of fear and repression limit the operational capacity and freedom of CSOs and undermine the broader democratic principles they exist for in the HoA and beyond in Africa.

Similarly, across the Horn of Africa (HoA) countries, there is a recurring pattern of civil war and conflict, which erodes trust within civil society and disrupts relation-

---

88 Human Development Index <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/country-insights#/ranks>

89 Godfrey Musila, "The Spread of Anti-NGO Measures in Africa: Freedoms Under Threat," Special Report 2019, Freedom House, [https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2019/spread-anti-ngo-measures-africa-freedoms-under-threat#-footnote2\\_0fpnzyl](https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2019/spread-anti-ngo-measures-africa-freedoms-under-threat#-footnote2_0fpnzyl). See also, Maina Kiai, "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association," UN Human Rights Council, April 24, 2013, para. 8, <https://ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session23>.

ships between citizens and the state. In countries with high fragility, these challenges are exacerbated by political instability, social fragmentation, and security threats.<sup>90</sup> For instance, the 2023 Fragile State Index (FSI) global report highlights the changing dynamics of state fragility in HoA countries.<sup>91</sup> Ethiopia's decline in ranking from 26th in 2006 to 11th in 2023, and Sudan's slight rise to 7th in 2023 compared to being the most fragile in 2006, illustrate a worrying trend in state stability. Similarly, South Sudan and Somalia's consistently low rankings indicate extreme fragility. These rankings not only reflect a lack of democratic evolution in these countries but also underscore the challenges they face in political stability, social cohesion, and governance. In this context, the impact on CSOs is profound. In environments marked by high fragility, these organizations struggle to function effectively. The lack of social cohesion, heightened security threats, and political instability create a hostile and unpredictable environment for civil society actors. HRDs and civic engagement initiatives find it increasingly difficult to operate in such settings, where advocating for human rights and democratic processes becomes not only a challenging task, but a life threatening one as well. The FSI thus provides a valuable framework for understanding the complexities and risks associated with contexts of fragility and armed conflict, offering evidence and insight to further illustrate the important of identifying and addressing issues that undermine the civil society sector.

## An Illustrative List of Key National and Regional Actors

Many groups and individuals are championing democratic principles in the HoA, within varying national contexts. The work and impact of these key national and regional actors are grounded in existing literature based on their visibility, impact, and transformative influence in the HoA civil society landscape. These CSOs and HRDs actively advocate for issues such as freedom of speech, racial equality, sex and gender equity for women, environmental protection, children's welfare, disability rights, and the rights of refugees, migrants, indigenous peoples, journalists, and prisoners.<sup>92</sup> Though not an exhaustive list, Table 3 provides an illustrative list

---

90 O'Regan, Davin. *Civil Society and Civil War Onset: What is the Relationship?* Center for International & Security Studies, U. Maryland., 2018. See also, Davenport, Christian, Håvard Møkleiv Nygård, Hanne Fjelde, and David Armstrong. "The consequences of contention: Understanding the aftereffects of political conflict and violence." *Annual Review of Political Science* 22 (2019): 361-377. See also, Collier, Paul. *Breaking the conflict trap: Civil war and development policy*. Vol. 41181, no. 4. World Bank Publications, 2003.

91 <https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/>

92 To access a comprehensive list of civil society organizations from Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, and Djibouti that have 'Observer Status' at the African Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR), you can visit their official website. Follow this link to the NGO network page: [ACHPR NGO Network](#). This page will provide the detailed information and status of various organizations within the ACHPR framework.

of the efforts underway to strengthen democracy in the region.

**Table 3**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Organization/Initiative</b>	<b>Description of Key Activities</b>
<b>Sudan</b>	<b>Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA)</b>	Umbrella association of 17 trade unions, promoting democracy and workers' rights. Crucial in the 2018–2019 protests against Omar al-Bashir's government.
	<b>Sudanese Women Rights Action (SUWRA)</b>	Dedicated to promoting gender equality, actively involved in the 2019 revolution.
	<b>No to Women Oppression Initiative</b>	Campaign against restrictive laws, contributing to the repeal of the Public Order Law in 2019.
	<b>African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS)</b>	Uganda-based NGO operating in Sudan, focusing on human rights monitoring and legal reform.
	<b>Sudanese Human Rights Monitor (SHRM)</b>	Focuses on human rights protection and advocacy in Sudan.
	Adeela	Youth organization using culture and art to promote human rights and democracy.
	<b>Resistance Committees</b>	Grassroots neighborhood groups central to Sudan's pro-democracy movement since 2019.
<b>Uganda</b>	<b>Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER)</b>	Champions social and economic rights, advocating for social justice.
	<b>Women Human Rights Defenders Network-Uganda (WHRDN-U)</b>	Advocates for women's rights and provides support to women HRDs.
	<b>Unwanted Witness (UW)</b>	Promotes online freedoms and digital rights.
<b>Country</b>	<b>Organization/Initiative</b>	<b>Description of Key Activities</b>
	<b>Chapter Four Uganda</b>	Safeguards civil liberties and promotes human rights in Uganda.

Country	Organization/Initiative	Description of Key Activities
	<b>Human Rights Centre Uganda (HRCU)</b>	Promotes and protects human rights and fundamental freedoms in Uganda.
	<b>Foundation for Human Rights Initiative (FHRI)</b>	Engaged in human rights research and advocacy in Uganda.
	<b>National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders – Uganda (NCHRD-U)</b>	Supports HRDs across Uganda.
	<b>Uganda National NGO Forum (UNNGOF)</b>	National platform for NGOs in Uganda.
	<b>DefendDefenders</b>	Promotes and protects HRDs in East Africa and the Horn of Africa.
<b>Kenya</b>	<b>The Institute for Social Accountability (TISA)</b>	Committed to improving local development policies and governance.
	<b>The Africa Centre for Open Governance (AfriCOG)</b>	Enhances governance and public ethics in East Africa.
	<b>The Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC)</b>	Focuses on human rights and democratic reforms.
	<b>Journalists for Justice (JFJ)</b>	Promotes human rights and democracy through journalism.
	<b>The Federation of Women Lawyers – Kenya (FIDA-Kenya)</b>	Provides free legal aid to women and children.
	<b>The Katiba Institute (KI)</b>	Dedicated to achieving social transformation through the Constitution.
	<b>The Independent Medico-Legal Unit (IMLU)</b>	Addresses cases of torture in Kenya.
	<b>The Center for Justice Governance and Environmental Action (CJGEA)</b>	Protects human and environmental rights of marginalized communities.
	<b>The National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders-Kenya (NCHRD-K)</b>	Protects and strengthens HRDs in Kenya.
	InformAction Kenya (IFA)	Utilizes film and community discussions to encourage activism on social justice issues.

<b>Country</b>	<b>Organization/Initiative</b>	<b>Description of Key Activities</b>
<b>Ethiopia</b>	<b>Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO)</b>	Ethiopia's oldest independent human rights organization.
	<b>Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA)</b>	Advocates for the rights of Ethiopian women.
	<b>Center For the Advancement of Rights and Democracy (CARD)</b>	Empowers citizens to promote human rights and democratic governance.
	<b>Civil Society Resource Center (CSRC)</b>	Supports human rights advocacy and governance.
	<b>Consortium of Ethiopian Human Rights Organizations (CEHRO)</b>	Protects human rights and advocates for democracy and conflict management.
	<b>Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Center (EHRDC)</b>	Protects human rights defenders in Ethiopia.
	<b>Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR)</b>	Advocates for human rights and constitutional adherence in Ethiopia.
<b>Eritrea</b>	<b>Human Rights Concern – Eritrea (HRCE)</b>	UK-based organization promoting rights of Eritreans worldwide.
	<b>The Eritrean Movement for Democracy and Human Rights (EMDHR)</b>	Promotes democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in Eritrea.
	<b>The Eritrean Human Rights Defenders (EHRD)</b>	Promotes human rights for Eritreans both within and outside the country.
	<b>The Arbi Harnet Campaign</b>	Encourages opposition to the Eritrean regime through phone call activism.
	<b>Citizens for Democratic Rights in Eritrea (CDRiE)</b>	London-based CSO supporting pro-democracy movements in Eritrea.
<b>South Sudan</b>	<b>The Advocates for Human Rights and Democracy (TAHURID)</b>	Promotes human rights standards and peacebuilding in South Sudan.
	<b>South Sudan Non-Governmental Organization Forum</b>	Networking body of NGOs in South Sudan.

Country	Organization/Initiative	Description of Key Activities
	<b>South Sudan Human Rights Defenders Network (SSHRDN)</b>	Protects and promotes human rights in South Sudan.
	<b>South Sudan Law Society (SSLS)</b>	Promotes justice, human rights, and the rule of law in South Sudan.
	<b>Action for Conflict Resolution (ACR)</b>	Focuses on peace and dialogue in South Sudan communities.
	<b>Center for Strengthening Community Voices (CSCOV)</b>	Enhances community participation in South Sudan.
	<b>Centre for Inclusive Governance, Peace and Justice (CIGPJ)</b>	Aims for a peaceful and inclusive society in South Sudan.
	Federation of Women Lawyers South Sudan (FIDA-SS)	Advocates for women's rights in South Sudan.
	<b>Voice for Change (VFC)</b>	Empowers and advocates for marginalized groups in South Sudan.
<b>Somalia</b>	<b>The Somali Human Rights Association (SOHRA)</b>	Investigates and documents human rights violations in Somalia.
	<b>The Human Rights Centre (HRC)</b>	Advocates for human rights needs in Somaliland.
	<b>The Puntland Human Rights Association (PHRA)</b>	Monitors and advocates for human rights in Somalia.
	<b>The Elman Peace and Human Rights Centre (EPHRC)</b>	Promotes human rights, peace, and development in Somalia.
	<b>The Independent Expert (TIE) on the situation of human rights in Somalia</b>	Monitors and reports on human rights in Somalia.

## National Coalitions and Networks for Advocacy, Resource Sharing, and Scaling

Conventional knowledge, other country experiences, and studies all suggest that networks and coalitions are important platforms for sharing resources, exchanging best practices, increasing peer learning, and general information exchange, ultimately strengthening their members. Although there is no comprehensive study specifically focusing on the HoA, anecdotal evidence from countries like Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia,

South Sudan, and Sudan provide valuable insights into the impact of collaborative networks and coalitions in the region. Table 4 offers insights into the types of coalitions and networks that are keeping civil societies connected in the HoA.

## Emerging Pro-Democracy Initiatives and Actors

Emerging civil society actors, innovative campaigns, and grassroots movements are increasingly shaping the landscape in the HoA—and surrounding East Africa region—diverging from traditional CSOs that are or were formally organized and structured. These burgeoning entities are adeptly leveraging innovative technologies, digital platforms, and social media for resource mobilization, recruiting members, promoting their causes, and advocating for various issues. Their strength lies in their flexibility, agility, and innovative approaches to utilizing the benefits of digital space and disruptive methods for mobilizing massive numbers of supporters. Members span a wide array of professions and backgrounds, including civic organizations, lawyers, journalists, doctors, and individuals from various walks of life, creating physical and virtual community. Considering, the virtual civil society presence should not be underestimated, as these actors possess substantial mobilizing capacity and the ability to convene large numbers of people to shape public discourse, raise awareness, sensitize communities, and organize collective action that influences and shapes public debate and policymaking. They play a critical role in monitoring and amplifying the voices of marginalized groups, communities, and issues, showcasing the profound impact and potential of these emerging digital and grassroots movements in advocating for change and fostering a more inclusive and responsive civil society.

**Table 4**

**Policy Advocacy Coalitions**

---

**Uganda**

DefendDefenders

UNNGOF, UWONET, & the Coalition for Human Rights Defenders

Uganda Women Parliamentary Association, Development Network of Indigenous Voluntary Associations (DENIVA) & Chapter Four Uganda

Civil Society Budget Advocacy Group

Civil Society Coalition on Oil and Gas (CSCO)

Advocates Coalition on Development & Environment (ACODE)

**Kenya Coalitions**

Institute of Social Accountability (TISA), Kenya Legal & Ethical Issues Network (KELIN),<sup>93</sup> & the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)

Good Governance Coalition for Transparency

**General Mission**

To protect human rights and advocate for democratic principles under challenging circumstances.

Government engagement, particularly regarding increased governmental scrutiny of CSOs and women's rights.

Enhance governance and regulatory compliance to reduce CSO vulnerability to potential suspensions and de-registrations using the Quality Assurance Mechanism (QuAM) of DENIVA.

Engage in fiscal policy advocacy.

Support sustainable governance of Uganda's oil and gas resources.

The inclusion of community and environmental protection measures concerning the oil and gas extractive industries.

**Mission**

Submit policy suggestions to parliament to promote transparency and accountability, as well as emphasize a human rights-based approach in handling health pandemics such as COVID.

Advocate for transparent and accountable management of pandemic funds by county governments.

---

93 <https://www.kelinkenya.org/>

Building Bridges Initiative (BBI)	Introduce 74 amendments to the 2010 Constitution focusing on issues for women, youth, and people with disabilities.
Uwazi, Kituo Cha Sheria, & the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC)	Challenge the BBI for being a top-down initiative, questioning its proposed amendments, including those that could undermine constitutional rights and expand executive power.
Women Lead Nairobi coalition	Work with Nairobi County to develop gender-focused budgets and youth policies.
Elimu Yetu Coalition	Enhance curriculum and ensure educational equity as well as engage in policy discussions with education authorities.
Kenya Water & Sanitation Civil Society Network (KEWASNET)	Campaign against the coercive practice of “sex for water” and other significant barriers to accessing clean water.

**Ethiopia Coalitions**

Vote “Le Ethiopiaye,” Center for Advancement of Rights & Democracy, & the Initiative for Peace and Development

EHRCO & the Coalition of Ethiopian CSOs for Elections

CEHRO & Vision Ethiopian Congress for Democracy (VECOD)

South Sudan Coalitions

Community Empowerment for Progress Organization (CEPO)

**Mission**

Voter education.

Observe elections, with many members receiving training from the National Democratic Institute.

Facilitate political debates.

Mission

Advocate vigorously for political and security reforms as outlined in the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS).

South Sudan Youth Organizations Coalition

Work alongside the Christian Agency for Peace and Development (CAPaD) with focus on youth empowerment, particularly through its advocacy for the establishment of the Youth Enterprise Development Fund, a key component of R-ARCSS.

#### Resource Sharing & Scaling Coalitions

Uganda

Mission

ActionAid-Uganda's Activista Network, the Western Ankole Civil Society Forum (WACSOF), & the Make Bushenyi Great Again (MBUGA) movement

Actively work to construct social movements aimed at addressing the challenges posed by Uganda's diminishing civic space.

The Alternative Uganda

Foster youth-led change, establishing The Alternative Digitalk, a not-for-profit online media platform dedicated to providing a no-cost space to those barred, unheard, marginalized, or vulnerable in social discourse.

Rhizing Women Uganda

Empower women to assert their power in their communities and confront various forms of injustice, including but not limited to corruption, land grabbing, environmental degradation, and patriarchy.

#### **Kenya**

#### **Mission**

Civil Society Reference Group (CSRG) & the Yetu Initiative

Unite CSOs for common causes and focus on issues like legal advocacy and community problem-solving.

KELIN & the Federation of Women Lawyers Kenya

Provide crucial support to CSOs within their respective coalitions.

National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders in Kenya

Provide peer support, facilitating experience sharing and enhancement of capacity building within the civil society sector.

#### **Ethiopia**

#### **Mission**

CEHRO & EHRDC

Build capacity for civic engagement among their member CSOs.

Coalition of Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations for Elections (CECOE)

Enhance Ethiopian CSO involvement in election oversight, voter education, and prevention of electoral conflicts.

### **South Sudan**

### **Mission**

Civil Society Alliance & Civil Society Network

Prioritize solidarity and collective support, particularly during periods of political turbulence.

### **Sudan**

### **Mission**

Sudan NGO Forum & the Darfur Network for Peacebuilding & Development

Enable cooperation and foster peace-building initiatives.

Cross-Regional Coalitions/Networks

The East & Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (EHAHRD-Net)

Dedicated to protecting, promoting, and providing updates on human rights, with DefendDefenders serving as its secretariat.

The Network of African National Human Rights Institutions (NANHRI)

Focuses on capacity building, event coordination, and promotion of cooperation among NHRIs, and facilitates their connection with key human rights actors at regional and international levels.

The Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA)

Focuses on strengthening women's rights groups, fostering regional solidarity and initiating grassroots advocacy especially concerning gender-based violence via research, capacity-building, sub-granting, and more.

The African Women's Development & Communications Network (FEMNET)

Dedicated to amplifying the voices of African women and prioritizing their needs and aspirations in policy dialogues. convening, organizing, and facilitating discussions on critical issues nationally, regionally, and globally.

The Horn of Africa Civil Society Forum (HoACS Forum)	Serves as a collaborative regional network of CSOs dedicated to monitoring and advocating for the expansion of civic space in the HoA with focus on addressing the challenges of shrinking civic space.
The East African Civil Society Organizations' Forum (EACSOF)	Engages in human rights development, peace and security strategies, and provides recommendations to decision-makers through collaboration and dialogue.
Africans Rising	Advocates for gender justice, ethical governance, and expanded civic space with widespread campaigns aligned with the Kilimanjaro Declaration, emphasizing unity and political action.
CHARM Africa Consortium (CHARM Africa)	Focuses on enhancing human rights and democratic freedoms in sub-Saharan Africa to bolster the resilience and capabilities of journalists and activists, particularly in regions with restricted civil liberties.
The Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa (CIPESA)	Focuses on improving governance, livelihoods, and human rights across the continent through various ICT initiatives including extensive research and analysis to inform policymakers for online freedom, promotion of civic participation, and broader internet governance debates.
Solidarity Uganda	A training facility in East Africa specifically designed for civil resistance for activists, community organizers, and political education trainers via the Wii Otem Center for Civil Resistance and Alternatives.

Global and regional trends in Africa indicate that emerging civil society actors and grassroots movements are increasingly leveraging digital technologies for mobilization and advocacy. The HoA civil society landscape is in a transformative phase, redefining the identities of civic actors and reshaping social organizing, mobilization, advocacy, and campaigning strategies. The methods of networking and coalition-building are, therefore, evolving and significantly impacting the overall civil society landscape.<sup>94</sup> This change is altering how organizations operate and interact, marking a new era of civil engagement and collective action. The contemporary digital age offers transformative opportunities for CSOs, revolutionizing their organizing and mobilizing strategies, campaigning, advocacy, resource galvanization, networking, and overall operations.<sup>95</sup> Ultimately, organizations can now reach wider audiences, mobilize resources faster, and coordinate actions across different regions more efficiently.

Innovative campaigning strategies are facilitated through real-time updates on human rights issues and rapid dissemination of critical information. In this regard, social media has notably transformed civic engagement and political mobilization across the world, and particularly in Africa. Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have become critical tools for various civic actors, social movements, and youths organizing protests and engaging in socio-economic and political dialogues. These tools have offered unprecedented opportunities for mobilizing support, coordinating activities, and disseminating information rapidly and broadly.<sup>96</sup> This has also brought new forms of increasingly sophisticated threats and challenges, including state-sponsored cyber-attacks, online harassment, and the spread of misinformation, breach of data privacy, security risks, and a digital divide that creates inequalities in access and participation.<sup>97</sup>

Moreover, digital advocacy and informally organized groups have leveraged various social media campaigns to significantly alter the landscape and visibility of political activism. Within this swiftly changing digital environment, there is a continuous effort to decipher the complex influence of social media on political activism. In fact, numerous studies have identified social media as a powerful catalyst

---

94 Nina Hall, Hans Peter Schmitz, and J. Michael Dedmon, "Transnational Advocacy and NGOs in the Digital Era: New Forms of Networked Power," *International Studies Quarterly* (2019): 1–9, accessed December 18, 2023, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335034725\\_Transnational\\_Advocacy\\_and\\_NGOs\\_in\\_the\\_Digital\\_Era\\_New\\_Forms\\_of\\_Networked\\_Power](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335034725_Transnational_Advocacy_and_NGOs_in_the_Digital_Era_New_Forms_of_Networked_Power).

95 Hall, Nina, and Phil Ireland. "Transforming activism: digital era advocacy organizations." *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (2016).

See also, Clare Saunders and Silke Roth, "NGOs and Social Movement Theory," in *Routledge Handbook of NGOs and International Relations*, edited by Thomas Davies, 139 (New York: Routledge, 2019).

96 Edmore Chitukutuku, "Going Virtual: Social Media and Youth-Led Social Movements in Africa," in *Youth-Led Social Movements and Peacebuilding in Africa*, ed. Ibrahim Bangura (London: Routledge, 2022), page 60-66, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003253532>.

97 See also Poonam Joshi, *Emerging Technology Civic Space Future Trend Report*, resource paper for the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law Civic Space 2040 Initiative (March 2020), <https://www.icnl.org/wp-content/uploads/CS2040-Trend-Report-Emerging-Tech-vf.pdf>.

for political mobilization and engagement.<sup>98</sup> The widespread adoption of these online platforms has broken down geographical barriers, enabling activists to form global networks and expedite the proliferation of sociopolitical movements. Yet, it is crucial to recognize the dual nature of social media's impact. Namely, while it provides a stage for various voices and new narratives, it can simultaneously foster divisive echo chambers that exacerbate political polarization.<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, the capacity of social media to enhance the speed and breadth of activism is undeniable. Features like instant information sharing, real-time dialogue, and flexible coordination are invaluable assets for activists interested in orchestrating large-scale protests, spreading awareness, and garnering support for pivotal causes. However, the efficacy of these digital tools in effecting real political change hinges on their integration with physical, offline activism, as the most successful movements are those that effectively blend online mobilization with direct, on-the-ground action, affirming that while social media is an instrumental facilitator, it is ultimately a means to a more tangible end.<sup>100</sup>

In the context of the HoA and broader East African region, emerging digital advocacy actors, social movements, pro-democracy actors, and digital networks are marking a critical shift in the civil society and mobilization landscape. For example, popular movements and digital advocacy networks in Ethiopia, Sudan, and Uganda demonstrate how the digital space has provided opportunities for citizen-led campaigns and informal groups, often surpassing traditional CSOs in advocacy efforts. Again, in Uganda, the "People Power Movement," led by musician-turned-politician Bobi Wine, has resonated with the youth, showcasing the potential of charismatic leadership to mobilize political action. In Ethiopia, the "Oromo Protests" that began in 2015 underscored the influential role of ethnic identity and grassroots grievances in rallying citizens against government policies and perceived marginalization. More recently, in Sudan, the 2018–2019 "Su-

---

98 Hadji, A. "Breaking boundaries. The opportunities for using social media in civil society networking, activism and civic engagement." *Reality check: Assessing the impact of social media on political communication and civic engagement in Uganda* (2016): 72-88.

See also: Sandoval-Almazan, Rodrigo, and J. Ramon Gil-Garcia. "Towards cyberactivism 2.0? Understanding the use of social media and other information technologies for political activism and social movements." *Government information quarterly* 31, no. 3 (2014): 365-378.

99 Keith, Divine. "The Impact of Social Media on Political Activism." *International Journal of Humanity and Social Sciences* 1, no. 1 (2023): 16-29.

See also, Jungherr, Andreas, Gonzalo Rivero Rodríguez, Gonzalo Rivero, and Daniel Gayo-Avello. *Retooling politics: How digital media are shaping democracy*. Cambridge University Press, 2020.

100 Ibid

Leong, Carmen, Shan L. Pan, Shamshul Bahri, and Ali Fauzi. "Social media empowerment in social movements: power activation and power accrual in digital activism." *European Journal of Information Systems* 28, no. 2 (2019): 173-204. See also, Rita Makumbi, "Youth Activism in Uganda: Causes and Methods," in *Youth-Led Social Movements and Peacebuilding in Africa*, ed. Ibrahim Bangura, Routledge Studies in Peace, Conflict and Security in Africa (Routledge, 2022), page 153-155

dan Uprising” led to the resignation of President Omar al-Bashir after decades in power, illustrating citizens’ determination to pursue democratic reforms. Such movements underscore the evolving dynamics of political activism, often rooted in concerns over accountability, freedom, and social justice.<sup>101</sup>

In the context of these transformative developments and in the need to overcome increasing State repression and constrained civic space, civil society actors are increasingly collaborating with activists, social movements, and various other civic actors within the digital space.<sup>102</sup> Such collaboration reflects growing recognition of the digital arena as a potent platform for advocacy as well as organization and amplification of citizens’ voices in their quest for social and political change. Although these actors are still nascent and emerging, they have been at the forefront of harnessing digital tools for advocacy, significantly increasing their visibility and impact on public discourse and policymaking. As they navigate the opportunities and challenges presented by digital technologies, they signify a new era of activism poised to reshape the future of civil society in Africa. The burgeoning field of digital activism is ripe for further research to understand its full impact and potential. Table 5 provides an illustrative list of actors from the HoA and broader region who are harnessing digital means to help realize political ends.

---

101 Keith, Divine. “The Impact of Social Media on Political Activism.” *International Journal of Humanity and Social Sciences* 1, no. 1 (2023): 20-21

102 Edmore Chitukutuku, “Going Virtual: Social Media and Youth-Led Social Movements in Africa,” in *Youth-Led Social Movements and Peacebuilding in Africa*, ed. Ibrahim Bangura (London: Routledge, 2022), page 55-58, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003253532>.

**Table 5**

<b>Organization/ Initiative</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Key Activities</b>	<b>Region</b>
<b>This Is Africa (TIA)</b>	A pan-African digital media platform operating as a community trust and social enterprise. Established in 2013, focusing on news, analysis, and views across Africa.	Delivering credible news and analysis, developing multimedia hubs, promoting pan-African storytelling.	East and Southern Africa, Diaspora
<b>Don't Gas Africa</b>	A campaign led by African civil society actors advocating against fossil fuel production and for renewable energy adoption. Launched at COP28 in Dubai.	Advocacy against fossil fuels, promoting renewable energy, raising awareness of energy injustices.	Africa
<b>Kongamano La Mapinduzi</b>	A coalition of Kenyan progressives, including individuals and various groups, advocating for justice and freedom across multiple domains.	Mobilizing for social justice, human rights, gender equality, and democratic governance.	Kenya
<b>African Digital Rights Network (ADRN)</b>	A collaborative platform uniting individuals dedicated to the study and advocacy of digital rights in Africa.	Research initiatives, production of reports, advocacy for digital rights.	Various African Countries
<b>African Coaching Network (ACN)</b>	A non-profit organization providing movement coaching for activists and social movements in Africa.	Training and coaching for effective community organizing and understanding power dynamics.	Africa
<b>Digital Human Rights Lab (DHR-Lab)</b>	A collaborative initiative focusing on human rights in a digitalized world. Part of the 'Human Rights Protection in the Digital Age' project.	Strengthening human rights via digitalization, supporting innovative digital human rights solutions.	Uganda
<b>Network for Digital Rights in Ethiopia (NDRE)</b>	A network of human rights, media, and digital rights advocacy groups and individuals in Ethiopia.	Increasing awareness and advocacy for digital rights, influencing digital policies and regulations.	Ethiopia

<b>Organization/ Initiative</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Key Activities</b>	<b>Region</b>
<b>Digital Rogue Society Experiment Group (DRSE.G)</b>	An Ethiopian digital civil society organization focused on fostering peaceful coexistence and accountability.	Promoting digital inclusion, combating misinformation, advocating for digital literacy and rights.	Ethiopia

## Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats to Civil Society in the HoA

In the HoA, a sub-Saharan region characterized by significant challenges from security instability to intricate involvement in state-building processes and persistent issues of war and conflict, there are also countries with emerging economies and vibrant sociopolitical movements within the landscape. Civil society and pro-democracy actors in the HoA thus find themselves at the heart of transformative potential. The region's youthful demographic brings dynamic and productive potential to the forefront of social and political change. Considering each of these sociopolitical complexities, identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) to its civil society actors is paramount. Thus, Table 6 summarizes the major SWOT features to clarify how (1) strengths bolster civil society resilience and advocacy, (2) weaknesses may impede progress, and (3) understanding both opportunities and threats can lead to more strategic action.

**Table 6**

### SWOT Summary

#### Strengths

HoA civil society actors' unique attributes and contributions not only endure but thrive despite the myriad challenges they face, showcasing their (1) diverse and dynamic nature, (2) innovative approaches to advocacy and campaigning, (3) remarkable resilience and adaptability in the face of adversity, (4) effective networking and coalition-building, (5) unwavering commitment to human rights and democratic values, and (6) deep cultural and contextual understanding of the civil society landscape in the region.

Ability to Withstand Government Hostility and Legal Crackdowns  
 Adaptability of Local CSOs Through Difficult Times  
 Maintenance of Grassroots Presence and Community Support

---

## SWOT Summary

---

**Weaknesses** While exceptions exist at the country-specific level of civil society development, and within individual organizations themselves, the prevailing pattern and trend in the internal capacity of CSOs often reveal significant challenges and weaknesses. As reflected in the various studies and reports referenced above, these issues primarily stem from internal structural and organizational shortcomings, coupled with capacity gaps. Additionally, CSOs often grapple with underdeveloped planning efforts and internal structures and policies, including inactive boards due to inadequate understanding of their roles, or limited funding for board operations.

Infrastructural Development Needs  
Lack of Funding to Support Missions  
Counterproductive Dependence on Foreign Aid  
Stagnate Civil Society Leadership

**Opportunities** The rapid expansion of the internet and communication technologies, coupled with the increasing penetration of social media, presents significant opportunities for CSOs and HRDs in the HoA. Digital tools provide innovative ways to engage with communities, mobilize support, and conduct advocacy campaigns, and social media platforms in particular enable civil society actors to reach wider audiences, raise awareness about their causes, and generate support from global communities, including new and renewed avenues for fundraising, networking, and collaboration.

Emerging Digital Advocacy and Increased Opportunities for Collaboration  
The Youth Population and Expansion of Education  
Diversity of CSO Actors and Potential for Collaboration  
Emerging Economies and Expanding Private Sectors  
International Support and Solidarity  
Legal and Political Socioeconomic Reforms

**Threats** CSOs and HRDs in the region face a variety of threats that significantly restrict their civic space and operational capacity. Additionally, there is a lack of support for organizational and institutional development and a constriction of operational space, manifesting in limited rights to form and associate with civil society actors, harsh regulations surrounding foreign funding, and arbitrary or severe actions leading to the termination or dissolution of organizations. Such stringent oversight, control, and criminal penalties against individuals further compound the challenges faced by CSOs.

Arbitrary Applications of Law and Administrative Overreach  
Vague Legal Provisions and Political Muzzling  
Climate of Suspicion and Apprehension  
Violence as a Tool for Non-State Applied Control  
Volatile Funding Landscapes  
Breeding Grounds for Organizational Competition Over Collaboration

---

# Strategies for Overcoming Challenges

The future of democracy and a vibrant civil society in the HoA hinges on the collective efforts of national governments, regional bodies, and international CSOs to create and sustain conducive environments for the critical components of a stable and prosperous society. The following brief set of recommended strategies for supporting the civil society efforts in the region are based on a thorough assessment of the strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats demonstrated in the data that informed this analysis on pro-democracy and civil society in eight HoA countries. Top of Form

**Leverage Strengths for Greater Impact:** The CSOs in the East African region under study are characterized by their resilience, adaptability, and innovative approaches to advocacy and campaigning. Their grassroots presence and community support stand as their core strength, enabling them to reach and mobilize the most vulnerable populations effectively. Each CSO has demonstrated a remarkable ability to navigate through restrictive environments, utilizing innovative methods to continue their advocacy work. To amplify their impact, CSOs must continue to capitalize on those strengths, enhancing their organizational capacities, and fostering their unique attributes. Strengthening ties with communities and leveraging innovative advocacy methods can further enhance their credibility, expand their reach, and solidify their role.

**Address Weaknesses to Build a Sustainable Future:** Despite their strengths, CSOs face significant internal weaknesses, including gaps in strategic planning, leadership, and fundraising. The heavy reliance on foreign funding and the need for improved governance and transparency present considerable challenges. To mitigate these weaknesses, there is a critical need for internal capacity building, particularly in fundraising, leadership development, and strategic planning. Cultivating local support and developing sustainable funding models are essential for reducing dependency on unpredictable external funding sources. Improving governance structures and enhancing transparency is also key to building trust and credibility, both locally and internationally.

**Seize Opportunities in a Changing Landscape:** This study highlights several opportunities that, if harnessed effectively, can propel CSOs forward. The rapid expansion of digital technologies offers innovative ways to engage communities, mobilize support, and conduct advocacy campaigns. The demographic shift towards a younger, more educated population presents a valuable opportunity for

CSOs to engage and mobilize this segment of society, tapping into their energy, creativity, and potential. By embracing digital advocacy, fostering educational initiatives, and expanding volunteerism programs, CSOs can broaden their membership base, cultivate the next generation of activists, and enhance their overall impact.

**Mitigate Threats through Strategic Actions:** CSOs in the HoA operate in an environment fraught with threats, including restricted civic spaces, legal constraints, and a challenging political climate. The precarious funding landscape further exacerbates these threats, making it crucial for organizations to adopt proactive and strategic measures. Advocating for more enabling legal and political environments, diversifying funding sources, and developing robust networks and coalitions are vital strategies for mitigating these threats. By doing so, CSOs can resist external pressures, maintain their operational space, and continue their vital work in promoting democracy, human rights, and social justice.

## Conclusion

The insights and findings in this report offer a foundational understanding for further research and strategic engagement in the Horn of Africa (HoA). In this region, civil society is dynamically evolving, with emerging civic actors, social movements, and grassroots organizing challenging traditional concepts in the era of digital activism. This transformation occurs against a backdrop of resource constraints, exacerbated by a global economic downturn, and is further intensified by political instability, internal conflicts, as well as a challenging operational environment and volatile political landscape. The civil society landscape in the HoA is diverse and dynamic but faces significant challenges, including complex democratization processes, varied democratic developments, political repression, human rights violations, and socioeconomic hurdles. These issues, along with distrust between governments and civil societies, hinder the innovation and operational freedom of civil society organizations (CSOs), often redirecting their focus from long-term goals to crisis response. Media freedom and civic engagement are also constrained, yet there are signs of resilience through robust advocacy and legal reforms. In such a setting, the pressing needs for survival and basic sustenance often dominate, leaving little room for traditional forms of civic engagement. The report underscores the critical need for ongoing, country-specific in-depth research to generate evidence, alongside strategic engagement to support and empower civil society. The role of international and regional donors is critical in supporting democracy, emphasizing the need for transparency and local alignment. Overall, the situation in the HoA presents a mix of persistent challenges and emerging opportunities for civil society, underscoring its adaptive and resilient nature in a complex environment.

# Conclusion

The insights and findings in this report offer a foundational understanding for further research and strategic engagement in the Horn of Africa (HoA). In this region, civil society is undergoing a dynamic evolution, marked by the emergence of diverse civic actors, social movements, and grassroots organizing that are redefining traditional activism paradigms in the digital age. This transformation is unfolding against a complex backdrop characterized by a wide array of grassroots, informal, and spontaneous political organizations, social movements, protest movements, and digital activism actors. These varied groups and initiatives are reshaping the landscape of civil engagement and political discourse in the HoA, reflecting a profound shift in how societal change is being pursued and achieved.

The civil society landscape in the HoA is diverse and dynamic, yet it confronts significant challenges, including complex democratization processes and a varied degree of democratic development. These challenges are further compounded by political repression, human rights violations, socioeconomic hurdles, political instability, internal conflicts, as well as a challenging operational environment and a volatile political landscape. These issues, along with distrust between governments and civil societies, hinder the innovation and operational freedom of civil society actors, often redirecting their focus from long-term goals to crisis response. Media freedom and civic engagement are also constrained, yet there are signs of resilience through robust advocacy and legal reforms. In such a setting, the pressing needs for survival and basic sustenance often dominate, leaving little room for traditional forms of civic engagement. The report underscores the critical need for ongoing, country-specific in-depth research to generate evidence, alongside strategic engagement to support and empower civil society. The role of international and regional donors is critical in supporting democracy, emphasizing the need for transparency and local alignment. Overall, the situation in the HoA presents a mix of persistent challenges and emerging opportunities for civil society, underscoring its adaptive and resilient nature in a complex environment.

The importance of creating a region-wide coalition and fostering networks among civic actors in the Horn of Africa (HoA) cannot be overstated. A unified approach towards common causes that promote an enabling environment for these actors is essential in addressing the myriad challenges outlined in this report. This calls for a strategic focus on cross-border solidarity, where civic actors across the region can leverage their collective strengths and experiences to advocate for change and address regional challenges more effectively. In this vein, initiating new programs or enhancing existing relationships with regional mechanisms becomes paramount. This effort must prioritize dialogue and engagement with government actors. Such engagement is critical in establishing collaborative relations and

fostering an environment where trust and cooperation are built through open communication. Close working relations and collaboration with existing regional platforms such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the East African Community (EAC) are crucial steps in this direction. These platforms offer a valuable framework for civil society organizations (CSOs) to align their activities with broader regional objectives, thus enabling a more impactful engagement.

Furthermore, building strong networks and partnerships at various levels – regional, international, and with key entities like IGAD, EAC, and the African Union (AU), African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR) – is essential for the growth and effectiveness of civil society in the HoA. These networks provide civil society with robust platforms for advocacy, legal reform, and policy influence. Collaboration with these entities not only aligns civil society activities with broader regional goals but also leverages support from influential organizations. It’s about creating a synergistic relationship where civil society can contribute to and benefit from broader regional initiatives.

Thus, the necessity for a more coordinated and strategic approach among civil society actors in the Horn of Africa is evident. Establishing a region-wide coalition and enhancing networks is crucial for creating an environment that supports and amplifies civic engagement and effective advocacy.

This collaborative approach presents an opportunity to foster an ecosystem conducive to positive change and advocacy. By focusing on open dialogue and cooperation with government bodies and regional entities like IGAD and EAC, civil society can significantly influence the creation of a more democratic, inclusive, and stable region. Effective coordination and collaboration among civil society actors will be instrumental in addressing the immediate challenges and working towards the long-term transformation of the Horn of Africa.

# Bibliography

## Books, Book Chapters, Articles and Reports

- Ackerman, Peter, and Jack DuVall. "A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict." *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics* 1, no. 4 (2002): 121-147.
- Advancing Human Rights. "Sub-Saharan Africa, 2019." In *The State of Global Foundation Grantmaking*. Accessed December 24, 2023. <https://humanrightsfunding.org/regions/africa/#bilateral-and-multilateral-funding-panel>.
- Africa Knowledge Series, "Governance and the State of Public Service Delivery in East Africa and the Horn of Africa Region: Impact on Peace and Security." AFRICA KNOWLEDGE SERIES VOLUME 1, NUMBER 2. JULY 2022. United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa. Accessed December 25, 2023. [https://www.un.org/osaa/sites/www.un.org/osaa/files/Reports/2023/eng\\_-\\_governance\\_and\\_the\\_state\\_of\\_public\\_service\\_delivery.pdf](https://www.un.org/osaa/sites/www.un.org/osaa/files/Reports/2023/eng_-_governance_and_the_state_of_public_service_delivery.pdf).
- Ahere, John Rabuogi. "New Actors and Democratic Governance in a Rising Africa." *Frontiers in Political Science* 2 (2021): 24.
- Anheier, Helmut K., Markus Lang, and Stefan Toepler. "Civil society in times of change: Shrinking, changing, and expanding spaces and the need for new regulatory approaches." *Economics* 13, no. 1 (2019): 20190008.
- ARTICLE 19. "Uganda: Stop Intimidating NGOs." Accessed December 17, 2023. <https://www.article19.org/resources/uganda-stop-intimidating-ngos>.
- Bernhard, Michael, and Dong-Joon Jung. "Civil Society and Income Inequality in Post-Communist Eurasia." *Comparative Politics* 49, no. 3 (2017): 373-397.
- Biekart, Kees, Tiina Kontinen, and Marianne Millstein. "Introduction: Civil Society Responses to Changing Civic Spaces." In *Civil Society Responses to Changing Civic Spaces*, EADI Global Development Series. Springer Nature, 2023.
- Biryabarema, Elias. "General seeking to unseat Uganda's long-ruling president detained on treason charges." *Reuters*. March 13, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN20Z3EU/>.
- Buyse, Antoine. "Squeezing Civic Space: Restrictions on Civil Society Organizations and the Linkages with Human Rights." *The International Journal of Human Rights* 22, no. 8 (2018): 966-988.
- Carothers, Thomas, and Saskia Brechenmacher. "Accountability, Transparency, Participation, and Inclusion: A New Development Consensus?" *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, October 20, 2014. Accessed December 24, 2023. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2014/10/20/accountability-transparency-participation-and-inclusion-new-development-consensus-pub-56968>.
- Chatham House. "Africa 2023: Continuing Political and Economic Volatility." January 2023. <https://www.chatham-house.org/2023/01/africa-2023-continuing-political-and-economic-volatility>.
- Chen, Xi, and Dana M. Moss. "Authoritarian Regimes and Social Movements." In *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, (2018): 666-681.
- Chenoweth, Erica, and Maria J. Stephan. *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*. Columbia University Press, 2011.
- Chitukutuku, Edmore. "Going Virtual: Social Media and Youth-Led Social Movements in Africa." In *Youth-Led Social Movements and Peacebuilding in Africa*, edited by Ibrahim Bangura, 60-66. London: Routledge, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003253532>.
- Council on Foreign Relations africa-civil-society-forum/. "Global Conflict Tracker: Power Struggle in Sudan." Accessed November 12, 2023. <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/power-struggle-sudan>.

Crisis Group. "Crisis Watch Digest." November 2022. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/ethiopia-november-2022.pdf>.

della Porta, Donatella. «Social Movements.» In *The SAGE Handbook of Political Science*, 656-673. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529714333>.

Dupuy, Kendra, Luc Franssen, and Aseem Prakash. "Restricting NGOs: From Pushback to Accommodation." *Global Policy* 12 (2021): 5-10.

Ekiert, Grzegorz, Jan Kubik, and Michal Wenzel. "Civil Society and Three Dimensions of Inequality in Post-1989 Poland." *Comparative Politics* 49, no. 3 (2017): 331-350.

European Parliamentary Research Service. "State of Democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa: Democratic Progress at Risk." PE 690.647 – June 2021. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS\\_BRI\(2021\)690647](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2021)690647).

FHI 360. "Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index for Africa 2021 Report." Accessed November 23, 2023. <https://www.fhi360.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/csosi-africa-2021-report.pdf>.

FHI 360. "Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index Reports." December 2023. <https://www.fhi360.org/resource/civil-society-organization-sustainability-index-reports>.

Foreign Policy. "2019: A Year of Global Protest." December 23, 2019. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/12/23/2019-a-year-of-global-protest/>.

Fowler, Alan, and Kees Biekart. "Civil Society Research: Future Perspectives." In *A Research Agenda for Civil Society*, 295-304. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022.

Freedom House. "Freedom in the World 2023 Report." March 2023. [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/FIW\\_World\\_2023\\_DigitalPDF.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/FIW_World_2023_DigitalPDF.pdf).

FREEDOM ON THE NET 2022. Freedom House. 2021-2022. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/uganda/freedom-net/2022>.

Goldstone, Jack A. "More Social Movements or Fewer? Beyond Political Opportunity Structures to Relational Fields." *Theory and Society* 33 (2004): 333-365.

Gyimah-Boadi, Emmanuel. "Civil Society in Africa." *Journal of Democracy* 7 (1996).

Hall, Nina, and Phil Ireland. "Transforming Activism: Digital Era Advocacy Organizations." *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (2016).

Hall, Nina, Hans Peter Schmitz, and J. Michael Dedmon. "Transnational Advocacy and NGOs in the Digital Era: New Forms of Networked Power." *International Studies Quarterly* (2019): 1-9. Accessed December 18, 2023. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335034725\\_Transnational\\_Advocacy\\_and\\_NGOs\\_in\\_the\\_Digital\\_Era\\_New\\_Forms\\_of\\_Networked\\_Power](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335034725_Transnational_Advocacy_and_NGOs_in_the_Digital_Era_New_Forms_of_Networked_Power).

Herbert, Sian. "Restricting Space for Civil Society." *Applied Knowledge Services* (2015).

Horn of Africa Civil Society Forum (HOACS). "Publications." Accessed December 14, 2023. <https://hoacs.org/publications-the-horn-of-africa-civil-society-forum/>.

Human Development Index. United Nations Development Programme. Accessed November 26, 2023. <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/country-insights#/ranks>.

Huntington, Samuel P. *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991.

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH). "Djibouti: Repression, Human Rights Under Attack." Accessed December 4, 2023. <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/Africa/djibouti/djibouti-repression-human-rights-attack>.

International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). "The State of Global Democracy Report." 2021. Accessed December 2, 2023. <https://www.idea.int/>.

Joshi, Poonam. Emerging Technology Civic Space Future Trend Report. International Center for Not-for-Profit Law Civic Space 2040 Initiative. March 2020. <https://www.icnl.org/wp-content/uploads/CS2040-Trend-Report-Emerging-Tech-vf.pdf>.

Jungherr, Andreas, Gonzalo Rivero Rodríguez, Gonzalo Rivero, and Daniel Gayo-Avello. *Retooling Politics: How Digital Media Are Shaping Democracy*. Cambridge University Press, 2020.

Keith, Divine. "The Impact of Social Media on Political Activism." *International Journal of Humanity and Social Sciences* 1, no. 1 (2023): 16-29.

Kenya Legal and Ethical Issues Network on HIV and AIDS (KELIN). Accessed December 9, 2023. <https://www.kelinkenya.org/>.

Kiai, Maina. "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association." UN Human Rights Council, April 24, 2013. <https://ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session23>.

Kode, David. "Civic Space Restrictions in Africa: How Does Civil Society Respond?" *Conflict Trends* 2018, no. 1 (2018): 10-17.

Kumar, Lalit. "Do We have a Theoretical Framework to Explain Social Movement?" ISTR Fourth International Conference Working Papers Volume. Trinity College, Dublin, 2000.

Laine, Jussi. "Debating Civil Society: Contested Conceptualizations and Development Trajectories." *International Journal of Not-for-Profit Law* 16, no. 1 (September 2014).

Leong, Carmen, Shan L. Pan, Shamshul Bahri, and Ali Fauzi. "Social Media Empowerment in Social Movements: Power Activation and Power Accrual in Digital Activism." *European Journal of Information Systems* 28, no. 2 (2019): 173-204.

Makumbi, Rita. "Youth Activism in Uganda: Causes and Methods." In *Youth-Led Social Movements and Peacebuilding in Africa*, edited by Ibrahim Bangura, 147-148, 153-155. Routledge Studies in Peace, Conflict and Security in Africa. Routledge, 2022.

Maru, T. M., Bashair Ahmed, N. A. Abdalla, Mehari Taddele Maru, B. Ahmed, and A. Abdalla. "Shrinking Civil Society Space in the Horn of Africa." 2017. <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=ZBrgcTOAAAAJ&hl=en>.

McMahon, Patrice C., and Lukasz W. Niparko. "Shrinking, Shifting, and Strengthening: The Dynamics and Diversity of Civic Activism in Poland." *East European Politics and Societies* 36, no. 4 (2022): 1355-1376.

Mengisteab, Kidane. "Conclusion." In *The Crisis of Democratization in the Greater Horn of Africa: Towards Building Institutional Foundations*. Boydell & Brewer, James Currey an imprint of Boydell & Brewer, 2020. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvxhrkpm.17>.

Mercer, Claire. "NGOs, Civil Society and Democratization: A Critical Review of the Literature." *Progress in Development Studies* 2, no. 1 (2002): 5-22.

Musila, Godfrey. "The Spread of Anti-NGO Measures in Africa: Freedoms Under Threat." Special Report 2019. Freedom House. [https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2019/spread-anti-ngo-measures-africa-freedoms-under-threat#footnote2\\_0fnpzyl](https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2019/spread-anti-ngo-measures-africa-freedoms-under-threat#footnote2_0fnpzyl).

Nyabola, Nanjala. *Digital Democracy, Analogue Politics: How the Internet Era is Transforming Kenya*. London: Zed Books, 2018.

Pinckney, Jonathan. "Amid Coronavirus, Online Activism Confronts Digital Authoritarianism." United States Institute of Peace 28 (2020).

Risse, T., and K. Sikkink. "The Socialization of Human Rights Norms into Domestic Practices: Introduction." In *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change*. Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Roggeband, Conny, and Andrea Krizsán. "The Selective Closure of Civic Space." *Global Policy* 12 (2021): 21-23.

Sa'di, Ahmad H. "Social Protest Under Authoritarianism: A Critique of Regime Type and Instrumental Rationality-Based Explanations." *Sociology* 49, no. 3 (2015): 455-470.

Saunders, Clare, and Silke Roth. "NGOs and Social Movement Theory." In *Routledge Handbook of NGOs and International Relations*, edited by Thomas Davies, 139. New York: Routledge, 2019.

Skocpol, Theda. *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*. Cambridge University Press, 1979.

Snow, David A., Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi, eds. *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*. John Wiley & Sons, 2008.

Stephan, Maria J. "Aid to Civil Society: A Movement Mindset." United States Institute of Peace, 2015. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2015/02/aid-civil-society-movement-mindset>.

Toepler, Stefan, Annette Zimmer, Christian Fröhlich, and Katharina Obuch. "The Changing Space for NGOs: Civil Society in Authoritarian and Hybrid Regimes." *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 31 (2020): 649-662.

Tørres, Liv. "A Civil or Uncivil Civil Society?" 2021. [https://cic.nyu.edu/wp-content/uploads/1662/65/cic\\_pathfinders\\_civil\\_or\\_uncivil\\_society\\_2021.pdf](https://cic.nyu.edu/wp-content/uploads/1662/65/cic_pathfinders_civil_or_uncivil_society_2021.pdf).

Tufekci, Zeynep. *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018.

U.S. Department of State. "2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices." <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/>.

Ulas, Hilmi. "The Dynamics of Social Movements in Unrecognized States—A Comparative Study." *Frontiers in Political Science* 3 (2021).

UNDP. *The New Yalta, Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights in RBEC region*. New York: European Bureau for Europe and CIS, 1998.

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). "A/HRC/53/20: Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea - Report of the Special Rapporteur." <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc5320-situation-human-rights-eritrea-report-special-rapporteur>.

USAID, FHI 360, and ICNL. "2021 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index for Sub-Saharan Africa: 13th Edition." December 2022.

USAID. 2021. "2009-2021 CSO Sustainability Index for Sub-Saharan Africa." Accessed December 11, 2023. <https://csosi.org/>.

Warkentin, Craig. *Reshaping World Politics: NGOs, the Internet, and Global Civil Society*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2001.

Whittier, Nancy. "Meaning and Structure in Social Movements." In *Social Movements: Identity, Culture, and the State*. 2002: 289-307.

World Justice Project. "Rule of Law Index 2023." (2023). <https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/downloads/WJPIIndex2023.pdf>.

## News Articles

Al Jazeera. "Ethiopia Declares Nationwide State of Emergency." November 2, 2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/2/ethiopia-declares-nationwide-state-of-emergency>.

Human Rights Watch. "Court Ends Suspension of NGO in Uganda." May 24, 2022. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/05/24/court-ends-suspension-ngo-uganda>.

Human Rights Watch. "Ethiopia: New State of Emergency Risks Renewed Abuses." February 23, 2018. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/02/23/ethiopia-new-state-emergency-risks-renewed-abuses>.

Monitor. "TV Presenter Held on Sectarianism Charges." Accessed December 13, 2023. <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/tv-presenter-held-on-sectarianism-charges-1909376>.

The Africa Report. "Uganda: NGOs Fear as Government Crackdown Continues." Accessed December 13, 2023. <https://www.theafricareport.com/125102/uganda-it-will-only-get-worse-ngos-fear-as-government-crackdown-continues/>.

## Human Rights Organizations Reports

African Union. African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. 2007 Art.2. Accessed November 27, 2023. <https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36384-treaty-african-charter-on-democracy-and-governance.pdf>

CIVICUS Monitor. "Global Findings - Africa." Accessed November 13, 2023. <https://monitor.civicus.org/globalfindings/africa/>.

CIVICUS Monitor. "Global Findings 2023." Accessed December 18, 2023. [https://monitor.civicus.org/globalfindings\\_2023/](https://monitor.civicus.org/globalfindings_2023/)

CIVICUS. "People Power Under Attack 2021: A Report Based on Data from the CIVICUS Monitor." CIVICUS, 2021.

CIVICUS. "State of Civil Society Report 2023." Accessed December 1, 2023. <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/state-of-civil-society-report-2023>

CIVICUS. "State of Civil Society Report 2023." Accessed November 16, 2023. <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/state-of-civil-society-report-2023>.

Civil Society Resource Center (CSRC), African Civic Leadership Programme (ACLP), and the FDRE Agency for Civil Society Organizations (ACSO). "Webinar Proceeding Report: The Impact of COVID-19 on Civil Society Organizations in Ethiopia." October 2020.

CSO Sustainability Index for Sub-Saharan Africa. (2009-2021). Accessed November 30, 2023. <https://csosi.org/>

DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project). Overview of the Human Rights Situation in the East and Horn of Africa, October 2020 – April 2021. Report Submitted to the 68th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. Banjul, The Gambia, April 2021.

DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project). Overview of the Human Rights Situation in the East and Horn of Africa, May-October 2023. Report Submitted Ahead of the 77th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. Banjul, The Gambia, October 2023.

DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project). Overview of the Human Rights Situation in the East and Horn of Africa, October 2022-April 2023. Report Submitted Ahead of the 75th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. Banjul, The Gambia, April 2023.

DefendDefenders (The East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project). Overview of the Human Rights Situation in the East and Horn of Africa October 2018 – April 2019. Report Submitted to the 64th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR). Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, April 2019.

DefendDefenders (The East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project). Overview of the Human Rights

Situation in the East and Horn of Africa April 2018 – October 2018. Report Submitted to the 63rd Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR). Banjul, The Gambia, October 2018.

DefendDefenders. "Overview of the Human Rights Situation in the East and Horn of Africa May-October 2023." Report submitted ahead of the 77th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. Banjul, The Gambia, October 2023.

DefendDefenders. "Overview of the Human Rights Situation in the East and Horn of Africa May – November 2020." Report submitted to the 67th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. Banjul, The Gambia, November 2020.

Digital Watch. "Uganda: New Law Imposes Restrictions on the Use of the Internet." Accessed December 1, 2023. <https://dig.watch/updates/uganda-new-law-imposes-restrictions-on-the-use-of-the-internet>.

Freedom House. "Freedom in the World Scores." Accessed December 12, 2023. <https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores>

Freedom House. Djibouti: Freedom in the World 2022 Country Report. Accessed November 22, 2023. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/djibouti/freedom-world/2022>

Freedom House. Freedom in the World 2023 Report. Accessed November 8, 2023. [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/FIW\\_World\\_2023\\_DigitalPDF.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/FIW_World_2023_DigitalPDF.pdf)

Horn of Africa Civil Society Forum. "Publications." Accessed December 29, 2023. <https://hoacsf.org/publications-the-horn-of-africa-civil-society-forum/>

Human Rights Watch. "World Report 2023: Eritrea." Accessed November 30, 2023. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/eritrea>.

International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL). "Ethiopia - Civic Freedom Monitor." Accessed November 24, 2023. <https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/ethiopia>

International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL). "Kenya - Civic Freedom Monitor." Accessed December 8, 2023. <https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/kenya>

International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL). "Somalia - Civic Freedom Monitor." Accessed December 21, 2023. <https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/somalia>

National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders Uganda. "Uganda's Civic Space Index, 2022: Civil Liberties at Stake." December 2022. <https://www.hrdcoalition.ug/resources>.

Reporters Sans Frontières. "RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index: New Era of Polarisation." Accessed November 18, 2023. <https://rsf.org/en/rsf-s-2022-world-press-freedom-index-new-era-polarisation>

Uganda NGO Bureau. "Registration of a New NGO." Accessed December 15, 2023. <https://ngobureau.go.ug/en/services/registration-of-a-new-ngo>

UN General Assembly. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1996 UN Treaty Series. [vol.993, p. 3]. Accessed December 5, 2023. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b36c0.html>

UN General Assembly. UN Guidance Note of the UN Secretary-General on Democracy 2007. [GA Res A/RES/62/7]. Accessed November 15, 2023. [https://www.un.org/democracyfund/sites/www.un.org.democracyfund/files/un\\_sg\\_guidance\\_note\\_on\\_democracy.pdf](https://www.un.org/democracyfund/sites/www.un.org.democracyfund/files/un_sg_guidance_note_on_democracy.pdf)



## HORN CENTER FOR DEMOCRACY

*NURTURING DEMOCRACY*

*WITH SUPPORT FROM*



**ISS** | INSTITUTE FOR  
SECURITY STUDIES



**Sweden**  
**Sverige**

[www.horn-center.org](http://www.horn-center.org)  
Email: [info@horn-center.org](mailto:info@horn-center.org)