Shrinking Civic Space: Survey Responses from Transparency, Accountability, and Citizen Participation Organizations

November 2018
We are a **Donor Collaborative** of leading funders of transparency, accountability and participation efforts worldwide.

Associate Members

TAI is responsible for the content that follows; this information does not reflect TAI members’ views.
A. Research framing
• Civic space learning questions
• Defining civic space

B. Methodology
• Online survey approach
• Interpreting the survey findings

C. Key survey findings

D. Survey respondent profile
• Survey respondent office location
• Survey respondent staff size
• Survey respondent operations

E. Survey findings
• Civic space environment
• Freedom of association
• Access to resources
• Freedom of expression
• Grantee responses
What did TAI seek to learn from this research?

1. Have member grantees been affected by closing civic space, and if so, how?
2. How are grantees responding to changing civic space conditions?
3. What are the implications of these findings for grantees and grantee-funder relationship?
Defining civic space

The ability of civic actors to organize, participate, and communicate freely to influence the political and social structures around them.

Survey components:
- Overall civic environment
- Freedom of association
- Ability of CSOs to access resources
- Freedom of assembly
- Freedom of expression

Among other resources, TAI referred to the CIVICUS Monitor civic space framework
Online survey approach

- **Total population sampling** of TAI members’ transparency, accountability, and participation portfolios
- Unit of analysis = grantee organization / office
- Responses collected in March 2018
- Preliminary survey findings webinars with members and grantees
Interpreting the survey findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key limitations</th>
<th>Contributions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Population only TAI member</td>
<td>a. Appears to be only TAP-specific data on shrinking civic space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grantees, not all groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pursuing TAP issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. 45% non-response; uncertain</td>
<td>b. 55% response rate offers some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>if findings are representative</td>
<td>clear signals for civic space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of TAI grantee ecosystem</td>
<td>learning questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Survey online and in English,</td>
<td>c. Findings a good start for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uncertain of respondent</td>
<td>funder and grantee dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comprehension</td>
<td>and reflection in any language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Respondents and data are not</td>
<td>d. Can triangulate with available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>geographically representative</td>
<td>civic freedoms country data</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
121 out of 220 (55%) grantee organizations completed the survey

- Widespread awareness of and concern with closing civic space reported
- Most concerns reported featured limitations with
  - freedom of expression (including self-censorship), and
  - freedom of association (including access to international funding)
- Grantees reported applying a variety of responses to closing civic space
- International and national grantee responses often differed
Survey respondent office location

Most have offices based in Africa or North America

- 31% (38) North America
- 4% (5) South America
- 37% (45) Sub-Saharan Africa
- 20% (24) European Union*
- 2% (2) Eastern Europe
- 3% (4) South Asia
- 3% (3) Other

* Also Switzerland + Norway
Most respondents have 50 or less full-time staff.
Survey respondents self-identified their main geographic operating scale.

**International Respondents**
- 64 organizations | 53% of respondents
- Main operating scale in multiple countries in one or more regions

**National Respondents**
- 57 organizations | 47% of respondents
- Main operating scale in one country at the national or sub-national level
Civic space environment

International grantees report more areas of critical concern* in the context of closing civic space than national grantees.

* Critical concern = 70% or more of respondents are ‘highly’ or ‘slightly’ concerned

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>National Concerned</th>
<th>International Concerned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excessive bureaucratic requirements</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Propaganda attacks</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic surveillance</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of public trust</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restrictions to free speech</td>
<td>53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inability to access funding from abroad</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal safety</td>
<td>46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inability to work with certain partners</td>
<td>46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restrictions in programs</td>
<td>47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
National and international grantees identified relatively similar* actors or institutions contributing to closing civic space, some of which may also be key accountability actors or programmatic partners.

* Except for armed groups (national) and private companies (international)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>National (57)</th>
<th>International (64)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic* gov't bureaucracies</td>
<td>58% (33)</td>
<td>84% (54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political parties</td>
<td>40% (23)</td>
<td>41% (26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indv. politicians</td>
<td>39% (22)</td>
<td>45% (29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armed groups</td>
<td>21% (12)</td>
<td>28% (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military forces</td>
<td>18% (10)</td>
<td>28% (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media outlets</td>
<td>14% (8)</td>
<td>23% (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private companies</td>
<td>12% (7)</td>
<td>41% (26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of above</td>
<td>12% (7)</td>
<td>3% (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 'Domestic' only for national respondents
87% of respondents expressed concern about threats to their organization's digital security. *

*Examples include state-sponsored surveillance of electronic communication, phishing, hacking, malicious viruses or spyware.
Freedom of association

More than a quarter of respondents report an increase in the threat of de-registration in past 5 years.

Also of note – 34% reported no changes, and 31% reported that this is not an issue for their organization.

121 responses
‘Donor requirements’ the most frequently cited factor making it harder to access international funding.

Though most respondents reported no changes in their ability to access international resources.
Freedom of expression

International grantees report more deterioration, while national grantees report greater improvements in their organizations’ ability to exercise freedom of expression.
International and national grantees reported different factors contributing to reduced freedom of expression for their organizations or networks.

- **There has been no change**: 22% (International) vs. 22% (National)
- **Self-censorship by civil society**: 26% (International) vs. 26% (National)
- **Threats of state violence or intimidation**: 23% (International) vs. 23% (National)
- **Public order laws**: 18% (International) vs. 18% (National)
- **National security laws**: 14% (International) vs. 14% (National)
- **Counter-terrorism laws**: 9% (International) vs. 9% (National)
- **Official (state) secrets laws**: 5% (International) vs. 5% (National)
- **Threats from private companies**: 4% (International) vs. 4% (National)

There has been no change (37%) and self-censorship by civil society (47%) are the most severe factors. Counter-terrorism laws (28%) and official (state) secrets laws (27%) are also significant factors.
At least half of all respondents cited three common measures in response to closing civic space.

- Collaborating with other CSOs: 95 active, 10 considering, 10 not active
- Engaging in advocacy: 79 active, 8 considering, 24 not active
- Capacity building/support for initiatives by other CSOs: 76 active, 15 considering, 21 not active

121 respondents
At least 30% of all grantee respondents are active in the top three common responses to closing civic space.

At least 30% of international grantee respondents are also active in other responses to closing civic space.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>National Active (57)</th>
<th>International Active (64)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating with other CSOs</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in advocacy</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity building/support for initiatives by other CSOs</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New digital or cybersecurity procedures</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusting operational structures/locations</td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New staff safeguard protocols</td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lowest value: .., Highest value: ..
Shifting Sands: Experiences and Responses to Shrinking Civic Space from the Transparency, Accountability, and Participation Field

Learn more about this research through TAI's research brief, which includes survey findings, grantee organization voices from post-survey interviews, and recommendations to inform future funder efforts.