

*Citation: ICPA (2024) Safeguarding Civic Space: Harnessing Narrative Change to restore public trust in CSOs. URL: <https://www.narrativechange.org/toolkit/safeguarding-civic-space-harnessing-narrative-change-restore-public-trust-csos>*

Narrative	Explanation and Illustration
<p><b>1</b></p> <p><b>‘Threat to stability’</b></p> <p>Present in 72% of cases analysed</p> <p><b>Examples:</b> Nepal, Kazakhstan, Bahrain, Guatemala</p>	<p>This narrative builds on old Cold War/imperialism frames to claim that some Western countries have a plan to meddle, control or even overthrow the state through foreign funding. Following this logic, these <b>foreign actors and their local CSO partners are accused of representing a threat to stability.</b></p> <p>In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the so-called ‘Colour Revolutions’ are often cited as evidence for this narrative.</p> <p>It is commonly used in combination with the ‘Undermining Traditions’, ‘Foreign Agent’ and ‘Ties to Terrorism’ frames.</p>
<p><b>2</b></p> <p><b>‘Wasteful &amp; Corrupt’</b></p> <p>Present in 61% of cases analysed</p> <p><b>Examples:</b> Ecuador, Bosnia &amp; Herzegovina, Nepal</p>	<p>In this narrative, <b>CSOs are portrayed as inefficient, wasteful of money who take funding from the ‘real’ people and are not contributing to national plans or priorities.</b> In addition, the frame accuses CSOs of not being transparent about what they do with funds, and are thereby, portrayed as corrupt.</p> <p>In Kazakhstan, this frame is captured in the accusation that CSOs are “grant eaters” and this is used to justify heavily increased government oversight under the guise of holding CSOs accountable.</p> <p>It is commonly used in combination with the ‘Threat to Stability’ and ‘Undermining Traditions’ frames.</p>
<p><b>3</b></p> <p><b>‘Foreign Agent’</b></p> <p>Present in 44% of cases analysed</p> <p><b>Examples:</b> Hungary, Kenya, Malaysia</p>	<p>In this narrative, <b>CSOs are portrayed and vilified as corrupt, entitled elite who act as partners of meddling foreign entities.</b> This ‘traitor’ motif often builds on ideas of a big globalist conspiracy at play. Depending on the culture, this narrative often links to antisemitism (e.g. how George Soros is depicted by many states) or other figures who have become historical bogeymen.</p> <p>Not surprisingly, this narrative is directly tied to so-called ‘foreign agent’ laws which force CSOs to mark themselves in public as traitors, which serves to undermine their reputation. This often leads to intimidation, hate speech and even violence against CSOs.</p> <p>It is commonly used in combination with the ‘Threat to Stability’ and ‘Undermining Traditions’ frames.</p>

Narrative	Explanation and Illustration
<p data-bbox="133 378 161 415">4</p> <p data-bbox="319 279 452 347"><b><u>'Ties to terrorism'</u></b></p> <p data-bbox="291 380 481 439">Present in 39% of cases analysed</p> <p data-bbox="330 445 442 469"><b>Examples:</b></p> <p data-bbox="299 476 473 534">Mexico, Nigeria, Kyrgyzstan</p>	<p data-bbox="567 266 1202 356">In this narrative, <b>CSOs are framed as a conduit for extremism and terrorism</b>, especially in the accusation of facilitating criminality and corruption through money laundering</p> <p data-bbox="567 376 1174 467">Post 9/11, this narrative has led to many restrictions on banking and access to funding for CSOs, especially from foreign sources<sup>25</sup>.</p> <p data-bbox="567 487 1163 545">It is commonly used in combination with the 'Threat to Stability' frame.</p>
<p data-bbox="133 729 161 766">5</p> <p data-bbox="295 630 477 698"><b><u>'Undermining Traditions'</u></b></p> <p data-bbox="291 733 481 792">Present in 28% of cases analysed</p> <p data-bbox="330 798 442 822"><b>Examples:</b></p> <p data-bbox="284 829 488 887">Nepal, Kazakhstan, Uganda</p>	<p data-bbox="567 585 1202 741">This narrative <b>frames the work of CSOs as a threat to the state-defined fabric of societal traditions</b> — often focused on the family - and involves heavy criticism of LGBT+ and gender issues, human rights, secularism, and even democracy agendas.</p> <p data-bbox="567 761 1184 851">This narrative finds resonance among traditionalists and has driven a global right-wing religious coalition seeking to protect "the family"<sup>26</sup>.</p> <p data-bbox="567 872 1163 929">It is commonly used in combination with the 'Threat to Stability' and 'Foreign Agent' frames.</p>
<p data-bbox="133 1191 161 1228">6</p> <p data-bbox="288 1110 484 1179"><b><u>'Good' vs 'Bad' CSOs</u></b></p> <p data-bbox="291 1214 481 1273">Present in 11% of cases analysed</p> <p data-bbox="330 1278 442 1302"><b>Examples:</b></p> <p data-bbox="271 1310 501 1334">Kazakhstan, Hungary</p>	<p data-bbox="567 970 1205 1190">This frame <b>seeks to define and marginalise human rights groups, watchdogs and certain think tanks</b> (often focused on tackling corruption and violation of rights, and monitoring elections) <b>as 'bad'</b>. It also contrasts them with the perceived 'good' CSOs, such as community groups, football associations, unions, churches, and those who toe the political line — often GONGOs<sup>27</sup>.</p> <p data-bbox="567 1197 1167 1254">This frame is commonly used to justify funding of CSOs who are more in line with government, i.e. GONGOs.</p> <p data-bbox="567 1275 1188 1398">While the good/bad wording is not literally used in many cases, it is often implied behind the vilification of CSOs as traitors, undermining stability and not supporting the national project.</p> <p data-bbox="567 1419 1136 1476">It is often used in combination with any of the other frames used to explain and portray the "bad" CSOs.</p>

Table 1 \_ Dominant Civic Space Attack Narratives in Detail (ICPA 2024)

25 Including international banking oversight procedures like The Financial Action Task Force (2024) [What we do?](#)

26 For example, World Congress of Families (2019) [Verona – The Wind of Change: Europe and the Global Pro-Family Movement About the Congress](#)

27 "A government-organized non-governmental organization (GONGO) is a non-governmental organization that was set up or sponsored by a government in order to further its political interests and mimic the civic groups and civil society at home, or promote its international or geopolitical interests abroad"; [Wikipedia](#) (2024).