

# The Fundamental Freedoms Monitoring Project in Cambodia: a 9 Year Overview

OCTOBER 2024



# The Fundamental Freedoms Monitoring Project in Cambodia: a 9 Year Overview



This Report was prepared by the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL). The Report draws from data gathered in the Fundamental Freedoms Monitoring Project. The Fundamental Freedoms Monitoring Project (FFMP), is a multi-year project, carried out by the American Center for International Labor Solidarity (ACILS, also known as the Solidarity Center), the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR) and the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC), with technical assistance and support from ICNL.

Published in October 2024

# Table of Contents

---

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2. Background of FFMP</b>	<b>3</b>
A. LEGAL MEASURES IMPACTING FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS	3
B. KEY TRENDS IN RESTRICTIONS & VIOLATIONS ON FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS	5
C. PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING AND PERCEPTION OF FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS	9
D. FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS BY PROVINCE	11
E. GENDER & AGE	18
F. ENVIRONMENT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS AND TRADE UNIONS	23
<b>3. Conclusion</b>	<b>27</b>

# 1. Introduction

Since April 1, 2016, the Fundamental Freedoms Monitoring Project (FFMP<sup>1</sup>) has examined the state of three fundamental freedoms – association, assembly, and expression – in the Kingdom of Cambodia. The FFMP’s annual reports have become a leading source of information on the state of fundamental civic freedoms in Cambodia.

Overall, civic space and the exercise of fundamental freedoms has not changed much since 2016. Civic space remains highly restricted.

Since 2016, the FFMP has recorded 5,170 incidents of the exercise or attempt to exercise fundamental freedoms.<sup>2</sup> Despite more than 4,000 violations and restrictions recorded,<sup>3</sup> the FFMP documented just six instances of RGC officials being held accountable for violations of fundamental freedoms. A total of 3,660 incidents were recorded by the FFMP’s Media Monitoring tool, which examines restrictions, violations, and protections reported in media and news coverage.<sup>4</sup> Only 18.26% (668 incidents) of all media monitored incidents constituted protections of fundamental freedoms, and only 5 protection events were recorded from 2022 to 2024. The FFMP documented nearly 30 new legal restrictions to fundamental freedoms, while highlighting a systematic increase in violations and restrictions to civic space before elections. The FFMP has demonstrated that the public understands fundamental freedoms less in 2024 than in 2016, and Cambodians feel increasingly less able to exercise these rights.

---

1 The Fundamental Freedoms Monitoring Project (FFMP), is a multi-year project, carried out by the American Center for International Labor Solidarity (ACILS, also known as the Solidarity Center), the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR) and the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC), with technical assistance and support from ICNL.

2 The underlying data discussed in this report is up to date as of August 9, 2024.

3 The FFMP incidents are divided into three categories: restrictions, violations, and protections. Restrictions are defined as restrictions to fundamental freedoms permitted under international human rights law (IHRL), which recognizes the authority of states to impose restrictions on individuals under certain circumstances. These restrictions may be necessary to maintain public order, national security, public health, or morals. However, IHRL also establishes clear limitations on the types and scope of permissible restrictions. These limitations ensure that restrictions do not unduly interfere with fundamental human rights. Any restriction that goes beyond these limitations is considered a violation of these standards. A protection is an incident where the authorities act to protect fundamental freedoms, such as through enforcing laws or regulations to enable the exercise these freedoms.

4 The other monitoring tool, the Incident Reports, only recorded restrictions or violations.

## 2. Background of FFMP

Using its uniquely designed Monitoring Tracking Tool (MTT), the FFMP systematically assesses whether, and to what extent, these freedoms are guaranteed and exercised in Cambodia.

The MTT is comprised of 152 individual elements and corresponding indicators, which examine the following four key milestones:

- KM1: The legal framework of fundamental freedoms meets international standards;
- KM2: The legal framework for fundamental freedoms is adequately implemented;
- KM3: Individuals understand fundamental freedoms and feel free to exercise them; and,
- KM4: Civil society organizations (CSOs) and trade unions (TUs) are recognized and can work in partnership with the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC).

The FFMP utilizes six key data collection methods each year to assess the key milestones: 1) Incident Reports,<sup>5</sup> 2) Media Monitoring,<sup>6</sup> 3) Desk Review of relevant laws and policies,<sup>7</sup> 4) Trade Union Registration Evaluation Tool,<sup>8</sup> 5) Public Poll,<sup>9</sup> and 6) the CSO/Trade Union Leader Survey.<sup>10</sup>

This 9-year overview report highlights some key trends and data points that have emerged over the FFMP's lifespan. In particular, the report highlights some data trends that have not previously been published in the annual FFMP reports. Drawn from five key data collection methods: Desk Review, Incidents Report, Media Monitoring, Public Poll, and the CSO/TU Leader Survey.

### A. LEGAL MEASURES IMPACTING FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS

From April 2016 to July 2024, the FFMP tracked 28 new legal measures (new laws, new amendments to existing laws, royal sub-decrees, and ministerial *prakas*) likely to impact fundamental freedoms in Cambodia. Out of the 28 legal measures, only two contained

---

5 Incident Reports are collected through a form developed to capture restrictions of freedom of association and related rights against individuals or associations.

6 Media Monitoring is carried out daily by CCHR. It focuses on media releases and newspaper coverage of fundamental freedoms and is governed by a set of Media Monitoring Guidelines which are based upon the MTT.

7 The Desk Review is an expert analysis of Cambodian laws, policies, reports and other official documents that assesses the degree to which legal guarantees and other conditions are in place to ensure the protection of fundamental freedoms.

8 The Trade Union Registration Evaluation Tool records the experiences of TU representatives as they attempt to register their unions under the Law on Trade Unions.

9 The Public Poll aims to gauge the general public's sentiment towards the fundamental freedoms. The Public Poll is typically conducted over a two-month period.

10 The CSO/TU Leader Survey is conducted on an annual basis online and through face-to-face interviews to capture the beliefs and experiences of CSO and TU leaders in relation to their ability to exercise the fundamental freedoms.

provisions that were enabling rather than restrictive for the freedom of association, assembly, or expression, or the right to privacy.<sup>11</sup>

Figure 1. Legal Measures Impacting Fundamental Freedoms (2016-2024)

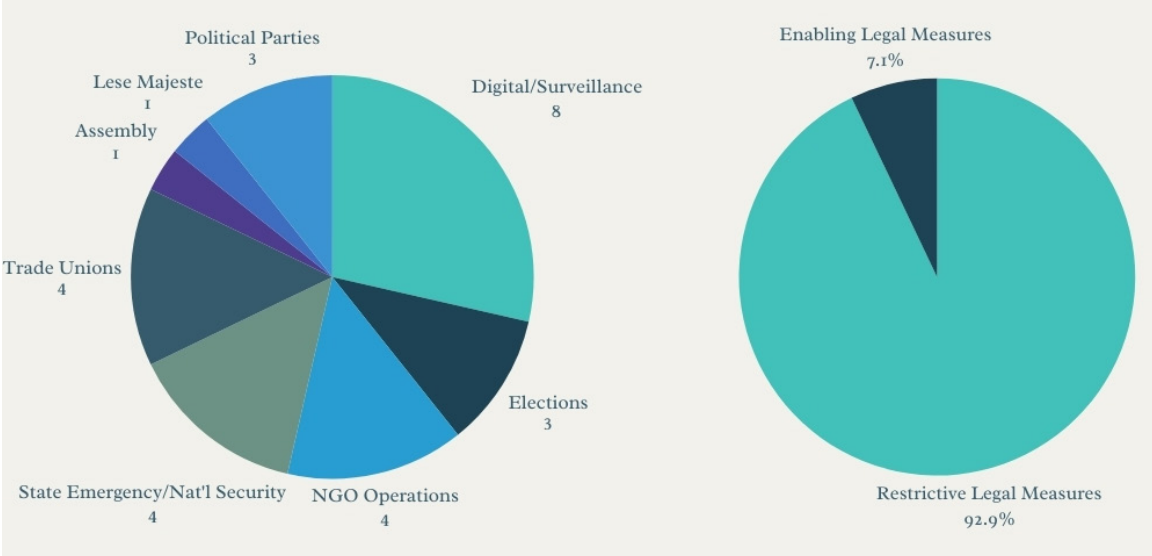


Figure 1 shows the legal measures by topic. Eleven of the twenty-eight measures targeted associations: trade unions, NGOs, and political parties. The second largest category is digital or surveillance measures, six of which were implemented in the last three years (out of eight total), including the introduction of the National Internet Gateway in 2021.

In 2020 and 2021, the government passed two laws granting the authorities wide scope of power during times of emergency: the 2020 Law on the Management of the Nation in State of Emergency and the 2021 Law on Measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other Serious, Dangerous, and Contagious Diseases (COVID-19 Law). Many provisions of these two laws were vague and disproportionately broad in their application, in contravention to international human rights law. For example, both the 2020 Law on State of Emergency and the 2021 COVID-19 Law enable the RGC to restrict rights such as peaceful assembly for vague and broad purposes such as “which may cause the spread of COVID-19” or for “severe chaos.” The 2020 Law on State of Emergency also did not provide limits to the number of extensions the RGC could have on establishing three-month “temporary” restrictive measures, opening the possibility for restrictions to be extended indefinitely. The *Sang prakas* (Monk *prakas*), enacted in 2021, provides another example. This *prakas* specifically forbids monks from joining protests, strikes, or other forms of peaceful assembly that “lead to the loss of their dignity.” The purpose of this

11 In 2020, the Law on Trade Unions was amended in numerous ways, including two provisions that loosened reporting requirements to the Ministry of Labor. In 2018, the Directive on Facilitating Procedures and Formalities for Union Registration removed certain requirements that must be provided when registering a union, including providing information about a union leader’s family members.

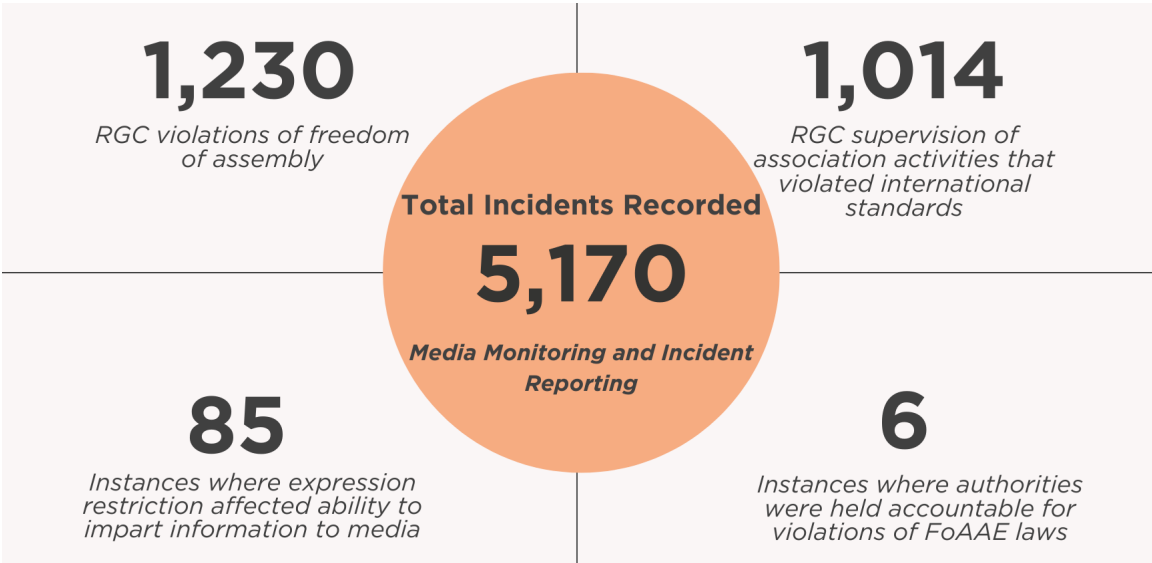
*prakas*, to protect the monks’ dignity, does not serve a legitimate purpose for restricting assembly under international law, nor does a complete prohibition on peaceful assembly constitute a proportionate to the aim of the law.<sup>12</sup>

In May 2018, two months before the General Elections, the National Election Committee passed a Code of Conduct for the Media, regulating news coverage, online and offline, of the 2018 and future elections. For example, the Code prohibits journalists from conducting interviews at registration and polling stations. Journalists are also prohibited from broadcasting news that could lead to “confusion and confidence loss in the election.”<sup>13</sup> Before the General Elections in 2023, the RGC passed a series of amendments to the Election Law, including criminalization of ballot destruction as a form of protest and new restrictions for candidates running for office.

## B. KEY TRENDS IN RESTRICTIONS & VIOLATIONS ON FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS

The FFMP tracks the number of restrictions and violations of fundamental freedoms of association, assembly, and expression in Cambodia through two primary tools: media monitoring and incident reports, which track violations against individuals and associations, including trade unions, opposition political parties, and civil society organizations (CSOs) (See Figure 2).<sup>14</sup>

Figure 2. Four Key Findings in Incidents Reports and Media Monitoring



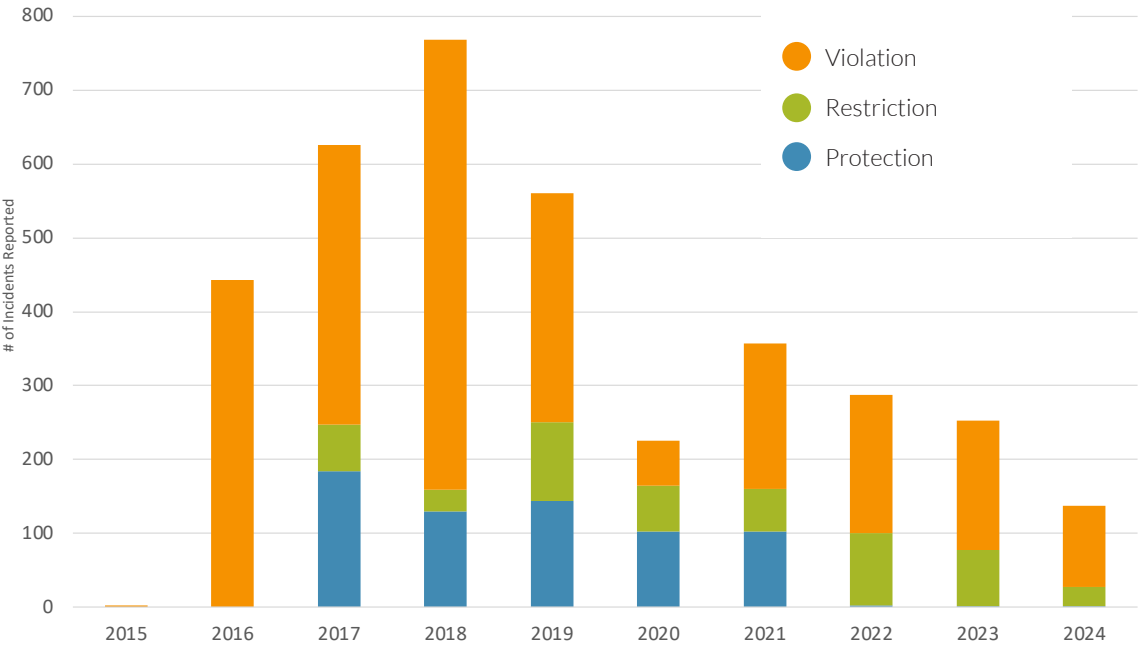
12 For a more in-depth analyses on these laws, see the 2020 and 2021 FFMP Annual reports, available at <https://www.icnl.org/post/assessment-and-monitoring/cambodia-fundamental-freedoms-monitoring-project>.

13 For more details, see the 2018-2019 FFMP annual report, available at [https://www.icnl.org/wp-content/uploads/FFMP-Year-3-Annual-Report-2018-2019\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.icnl.org/wp-content/uploads/FFMP-Year-3-Annual-Report-2018-2019_ENG.pdf).

14 Figure 2 contains some illustrative data points from the Media Monitoring and Incident Report. For the annual data, please refer to the FFMP Annual Reports, available at <https://www.icnl.org/post/assessment-and-monitoring/cambodia-fundamental-freedoms-monitoring-project>.

The majority of incidents recorded by the FFMP have constituted restrictions or violations of the freedoms of association, assembly, and expression, with few incidents that constituted protections of these freedoms (see Figure 3).<sup>15</sup>

**Figure 3. Restrictions, Violations, and Protection Incidents Recorded in Media Monitoring (2015-2024)**

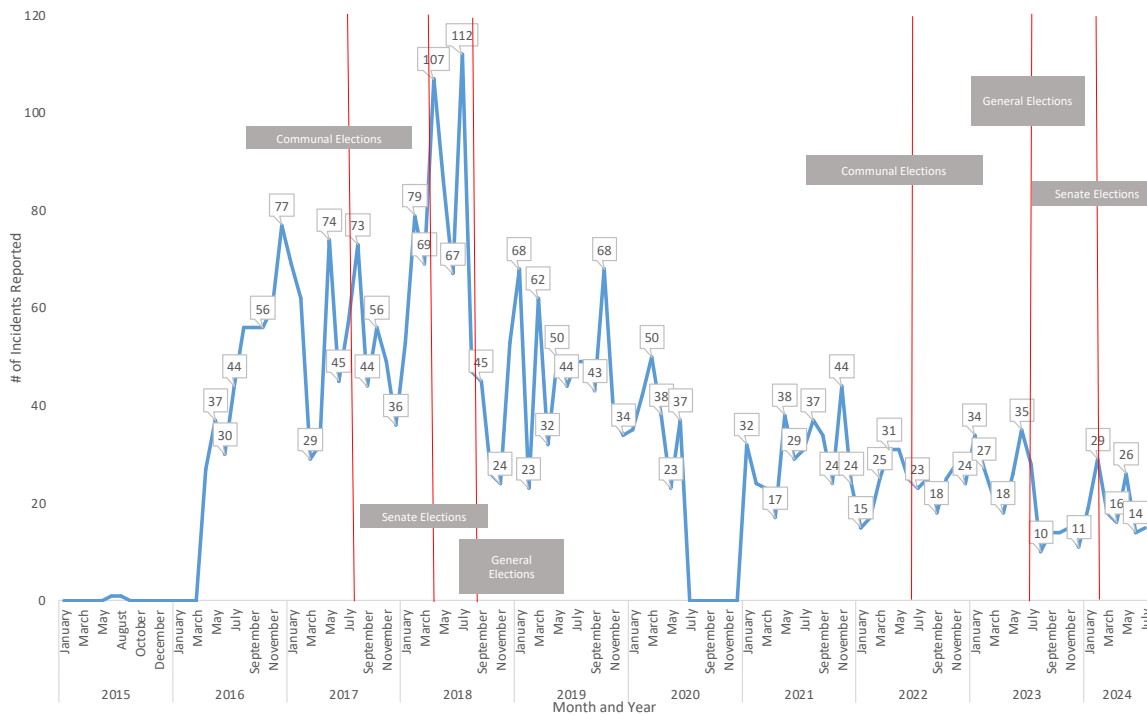


<sup>15</sup> The data in Figure 3 comes from the Media Monitoring tool.



## Election Cycles

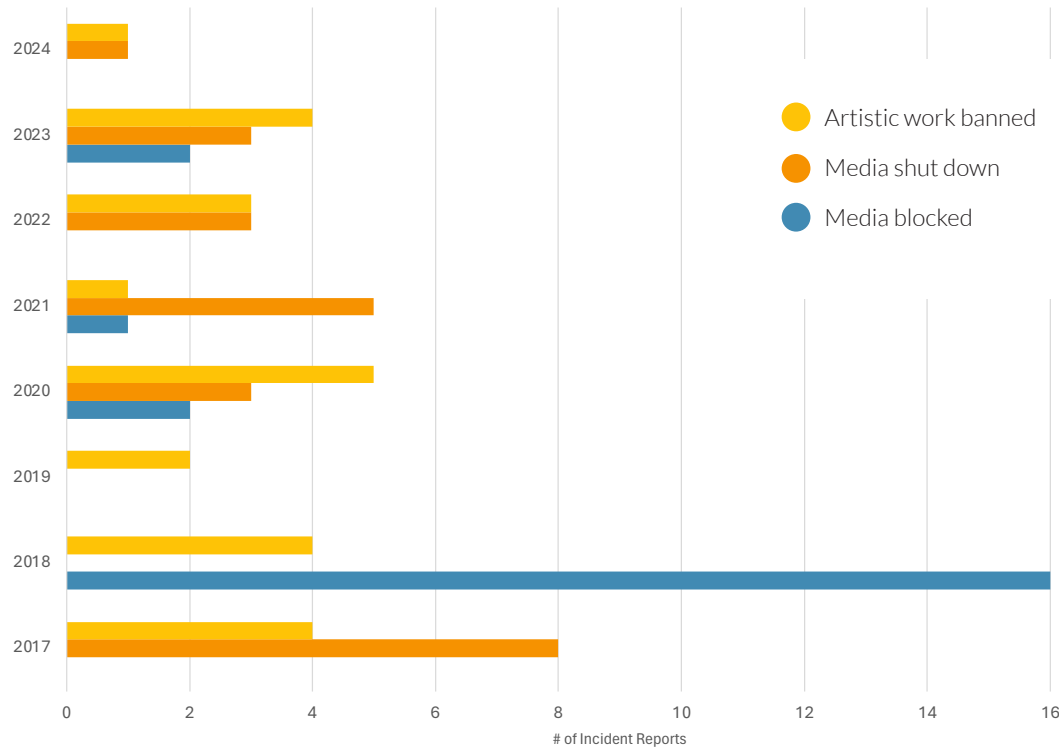
Figure 4. Media Monitored Incidents by Year and Month



Over the FFMP’s nine years of monitoring, the number of restrictions and violations to the freedoms of association, assembly, and expression increases during the run-up to elections (Figure 4). Based on media monitoring, the number of incidents peaked leading up to the general elections in July 2018 and July 2023, with the 2018 election recording an all-time high in number of incidents covered by the media. Similar peaks were observed during the communal elections in June 2017 and June 2022, as well as senate elections in February 2018 and February 2024.

In the 2020s, the number of incidents tracked by media monitoring decreased overall compared to the 2010s. However, the general decrease may be caused by increasing suppression of independent media outlets.

Figure 5. Type of Media Restricted (2017-2024)

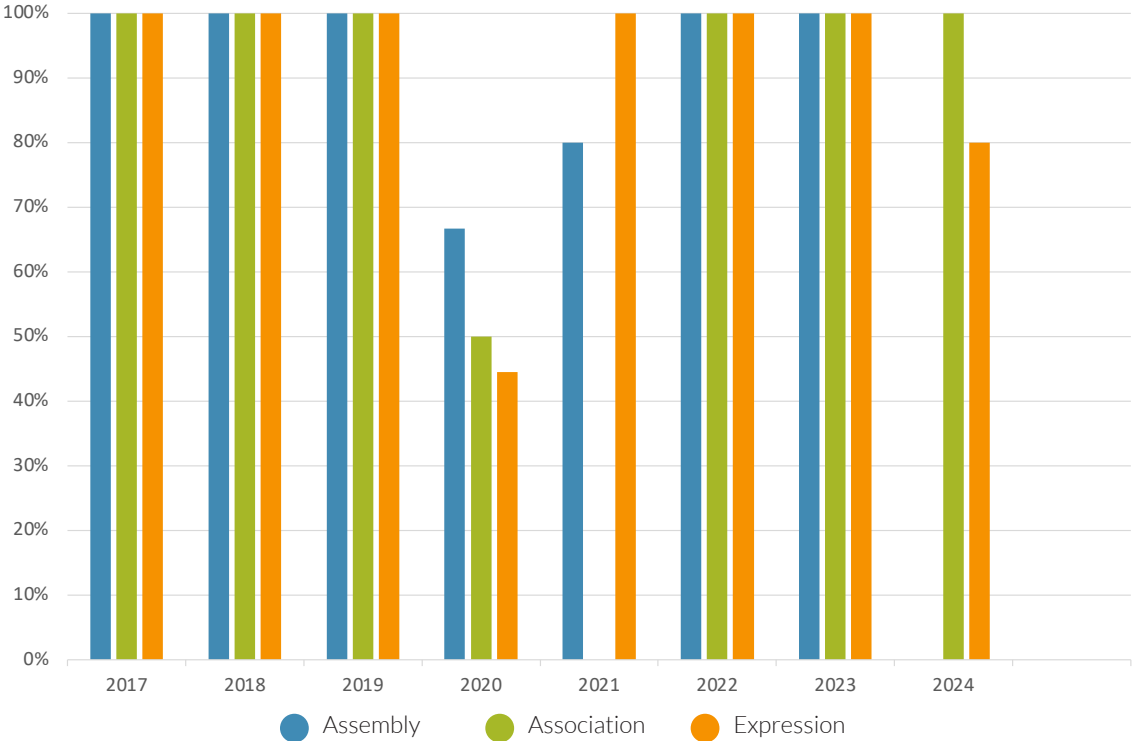


The FFMP started monitoring restrictions against media in 2017. In 2018, 16 media outlets’ webpages were blocked from online access (“media blocked” in Figure 5), and since 2020, the government has shut down at least one media outlet every year. This sustained suppression of the media likely led to an overall decrease in the reporting on restrictions and violations against fundamental freedoms.

### Misrepresentation of Fundamental Freedoms

Since 2017, the FFMP has monitored RGC representatives’ statements on fundamental freedoms (See Figure 6). The majority of statements made by RGC representatives related to fundamental freedoms demonstrate a misunderstanding or misrepresentation of the freedoms of association, assembly, and/or expression. In crucial election years (2017, 2018, 2022, 2023), 100% of statements monitored by the FFMP constituted misrepresentations or misunderstandings. Often, the statements claimed a law prohibited an activity that was in fact allowed, or claimed a fundamental freedom was more limited than it actually is, for example saying that the freedom of expression does not allow for criticism of the government.

Figure 6. Percent of Statements in the Media That Show Misunderstanding or Misrepresentation of FoAA&E Rights by RGC Representatives

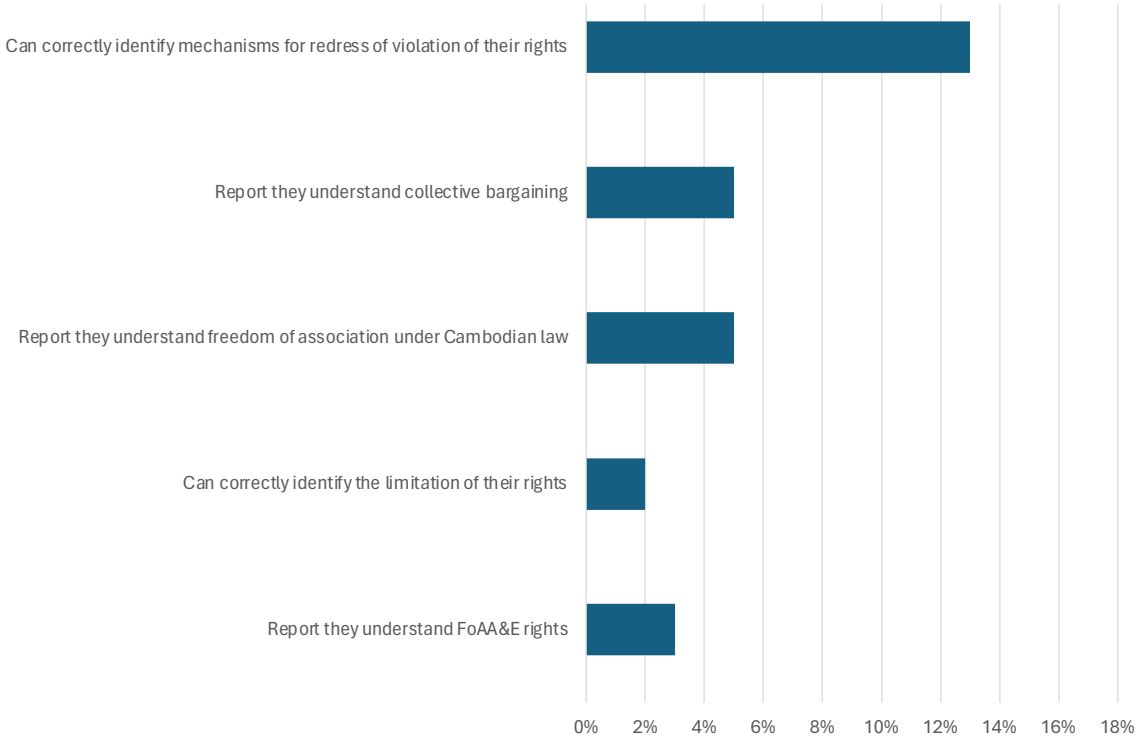


**C. PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING AND PERCEPTION OF FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS**

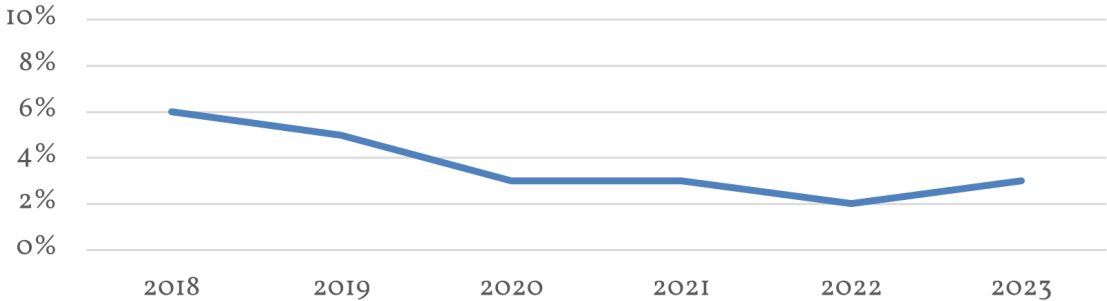
Each year, the FFMP conducts a nationwide public poll to assess individuals’ understanding and ability to exercise the freedoms of association, assembly, and expression.

Over the nine years of monitoring, the percentage of individuals polled who understand fundamental freedoms in Cambodia has remained low, experiencing a significant dip during the COVID-19 pandemic period. The percentage of individuals polled who understand fundamental freedoms has not ever reached above 7%, but the percentage has remained consistently under 3% since 2020. One of the reasons for the low level of understanding is that the RGC – the authorities who are tasked with upholding the law – consistently and systematically misrepresent what fundamental freedoms entail (see Figure 6).

**Figure 7. Public Understanding and Perception of Fundamental Freedoms (2018-2023)**



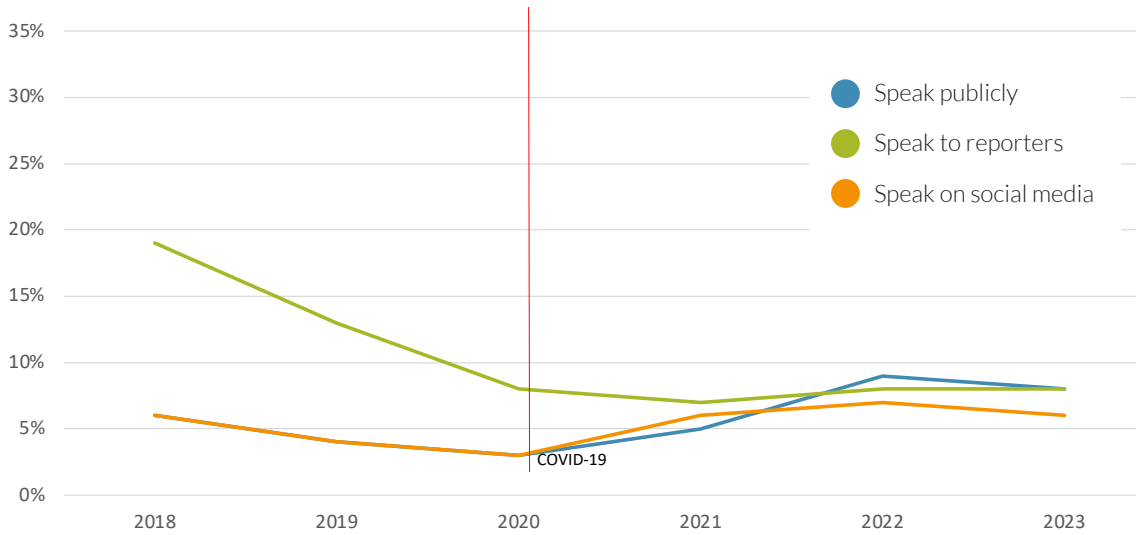
**Figure 8. Percentage of Individuals Surveyed Who Understand FoAAE Rights**



The FFMP has also monitored how free individuals felt to speak publicly, to reporters, or on social media (Figure 9).<sup>16</sup> Since 2018, individuals polled have experienced a significant decrease in ability to speak freely to reporters, with a large dip from 2018 (19%) to 2020 (8%), likely with the increased suppression of fundamental freedoms during the COVID-19 pandemic period. This percentage, which was never high, has remained at less than 10% since 2020.

<sup>16</sup> The data in Figure 9 show the percentage of individuals surveyed who responded that they feel “always free” to speak to reporters, on social media, or publicly (i.e. no self-censorship).

**Figure 9. Percentage of Individuals Surveyed Who Always Feel Free to Speak in Public**



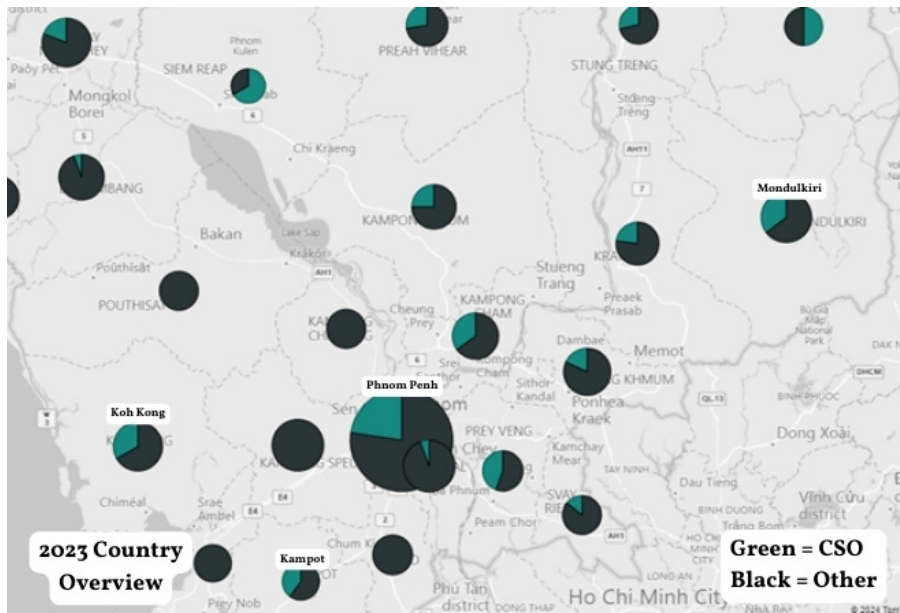
Similarly, the ability to speak freely on social media has remained low, around 4-6% during the entire period of monitoring, which demonstrates high levels of self-censorship. The percent of people who feel always free to speak on social media was at an all-time low in 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the FFMP recorded reprisals against individuals who spoke out on social media about the pandemic and the government response, along with significant repression of peaceful protests. Interestingly, the FFMP started polling individuals’ ability to speak freely in public in 2020, at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw the lowest response rate at 3%. Although still under 10%, the percentage of individuals polled who feel always free to speak publicly increased to 9% in 2022 and 8%, in 2023, following the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the percentage of individuals who feel comfortable exercising their right to freedom of expression has remained overall low, with no metric reaching over 10% since 2018.

#### **D. FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS BY PROVINCE**

The FFMP collects data by province, where possible, across its monitoring tools, including Incidents Reports and Media Monitoring, the Public Poll, and the CSO/Trade Union Leader Survey.



Figure 10 (con't)



The number of incidents against fundamental freedoms, with the majority concentrated in Phnom Penh and surrounding provinces, with some hotspots in Siem Reap and Preah Vihear, appear similar to the distribution of labor incidents (Figure 11)<sup>18</sup> and major foreign investments in Cambodia (Figure 12),<sup>19</sup> based on data from Open Development Cambodia. Provinces with significant conflict over labor and foreign interests, some of which may implicate land rights, appear to experience the highest number of violations and restrictions against fundamental freedoms. For example, Phnom Penh and nearby provinces, with the most labor incidents and foreign investment, record the highest number of incidents each year. Areas like Siem Reap, Mondul Kiri, Preah Vihear, and Battambang, which see major foreign investments from industries like energy, agriculture, and tourism, also record significant numbers of incidents.

<sup>18</sup> Link to map, generated by [Open Development Cambodia](#) licensed under [CC-BY-SA](#).

<sup>19</sup> Link to map, generated by [Open Development Cambodia](#) licensed under [CC-BY-SA](#).





Figure 13. Percentage of Respondents Who Feel Free to Peacefully Assemble by Province (2018-2023)

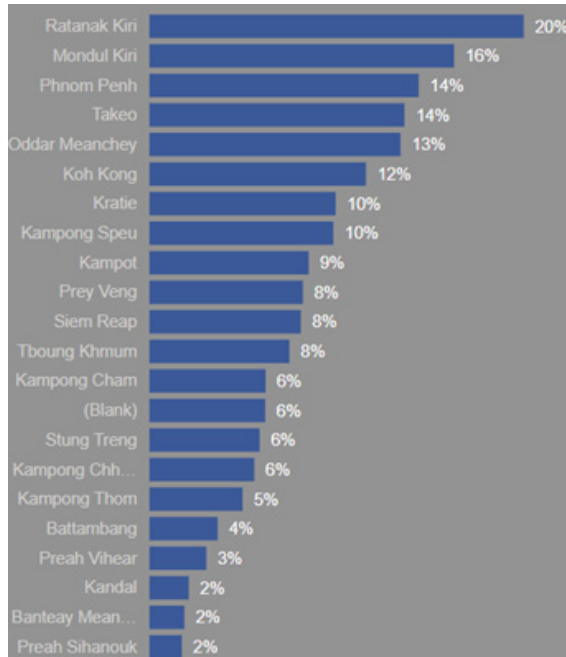


Figure 14. Percentage of Individuals Surveyed Who Feel Free to Associate for Any Lawful Purpose by Province (2018-2023)

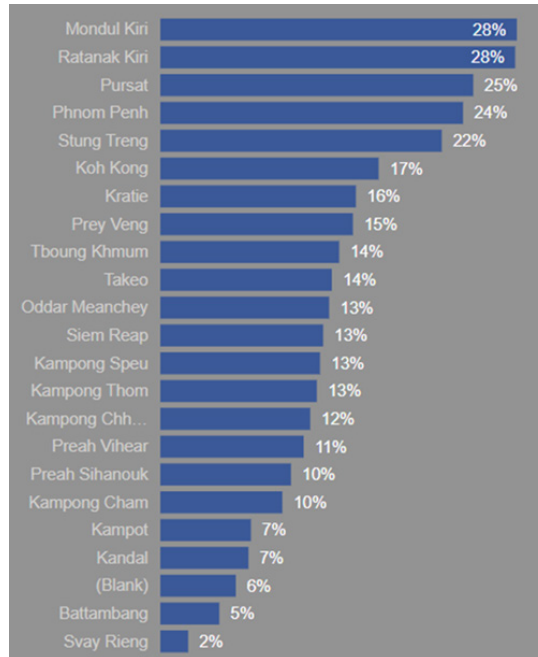


Figure 15. Percentage of Individuals Who Feel Free to Establish a Group for a Peaceful Purpose by Province (2020-2023)

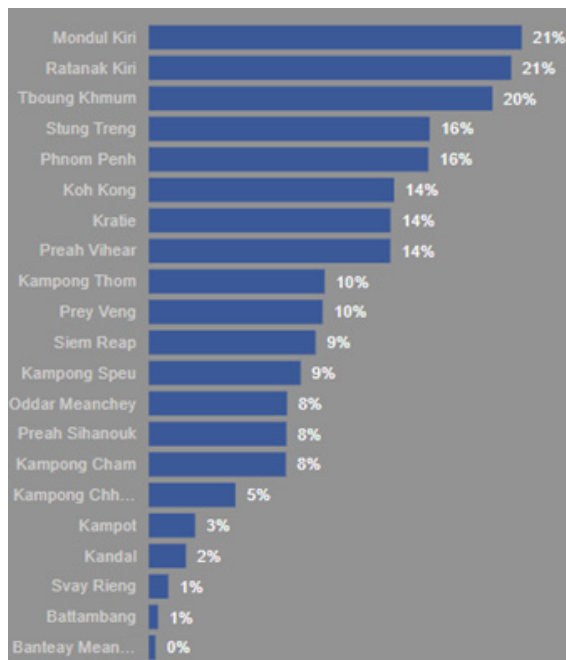
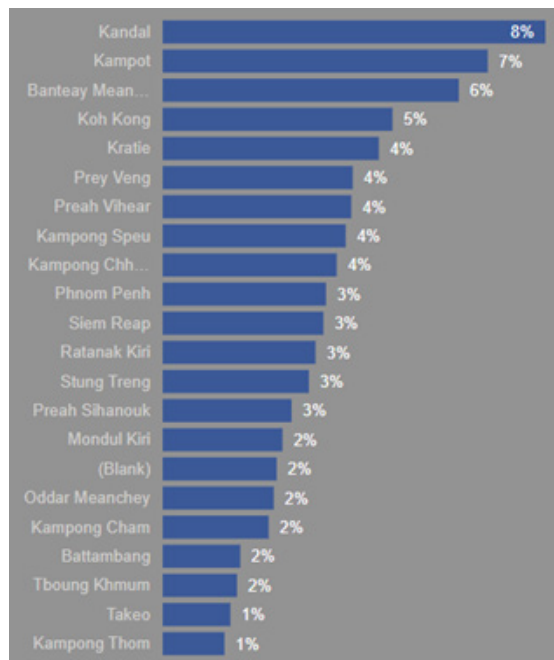


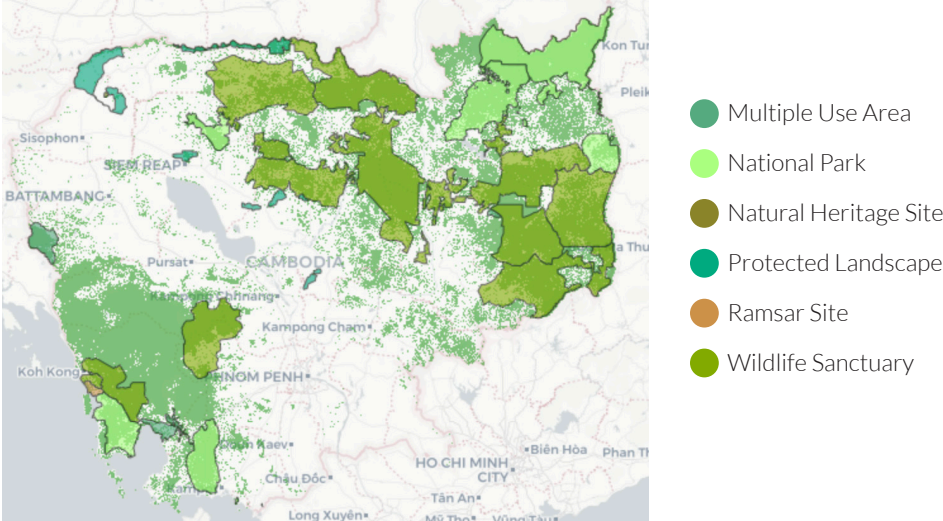
Figure 16. Percentage of Individuals Surveyed Who Understand Fundamental Freedoms by Province (2018-2023)



Mondulkiri and Ratanakiri are provinces with the least population, and majority indigenous communities. Interestingly, they are also provinces with the highest percentage of respondents who report feeling free to associate and establish a group for peaceful purpose (Figures 14-15). Notably, however, these two provinces also reported the lowest levels of understanding of freedoms of assembly, association, and expression (Figure 16).

The high level of association activity in these provinces may also relate to the high level of deforestation and conflict between logging interests and local communities in these provinces.<sup>20</sup> For example, in Mondulkiri, community organizations have formed to protect forests from logging and other commercial use of forest lands (see Figure 17).<sup>21</sup> The high level of environmental and community groups in these provinces may also explain the relative high portion of restrictions and violations of fundamental freedoms against CSOs compared to individuals.

**Figure 17. Forest Cover (2023) and Reclassification of Natural Protected Areas (2023)**

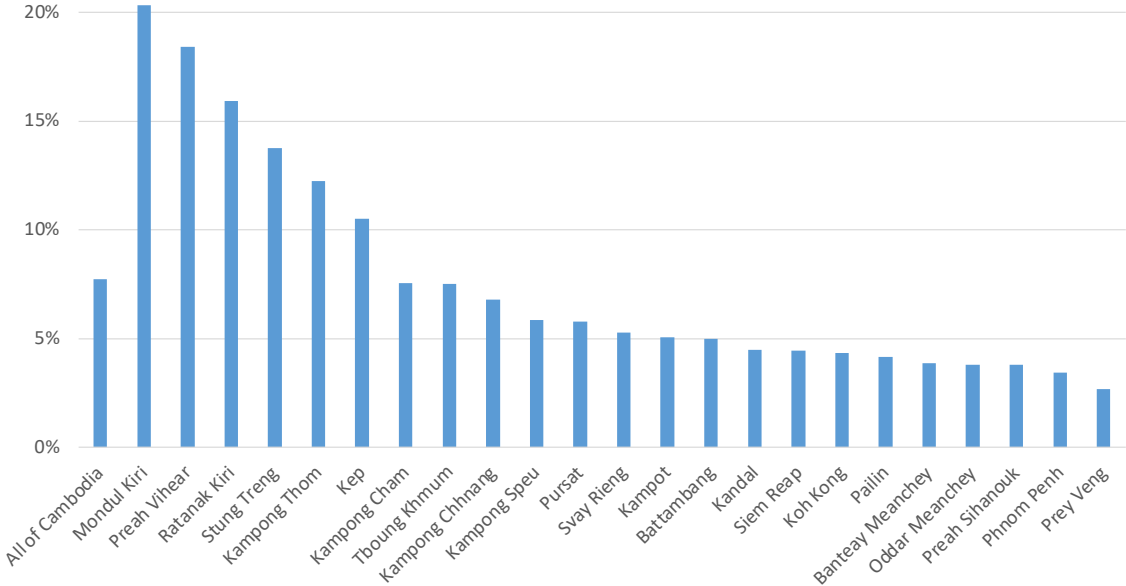


The provinces with higher percentages of individuals who feel free to exercise freedoms of association also seem to correlate with those that report higher percentages of collaboration with the RGC on protecting marginalized groups, with Mondulkiri, Preah Vihear, and Ratanakiri reporting the highest level of collaboration with the RGC, between 15 and 20% (Figure 18).

20 See for example, <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501103824/illegal-logging-in-mondulkiri-soars-after-border-reopens/>

21 Link to map, generated by [Open Development Cambodia](#), licensed under [CC-BY-SA](#).

Figure 18. Percentage of CSO Leaders Surveyed Who Partner with the Government to Respect and Promote the Rights of Marginalized Groups



The discrepancy in feeling free to exercise the freedom of association versus the freedom of assembly, in places like Mondul Kiri and Ratanakiri, may stem from the RGC’s belief that it is the gatekeeper of fundamental freedoms. In other words, opportunities for engagement are available only when sanctioned by the RGC (as shown in Figure 18) but are condemned when not sanctioned, i.e., peaceful assemblies (as shown in Figure 16).

## E. GENDER & AGE

The FFMP’s Public Poll disaggregates respondents by gender and age. The distribution of male and female respondents is close to even, and about 15% of respondents selected “Other,” “prefer not to say,” or did not answer when choosing their gender identity.<sup>22</sup>

Figure 19. Gender Demographics of the Public Poll (2016-2023)

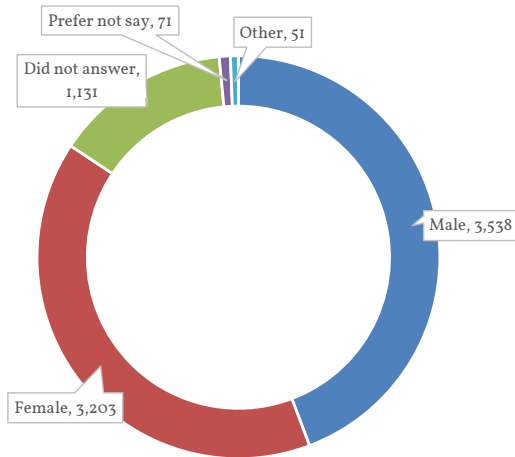
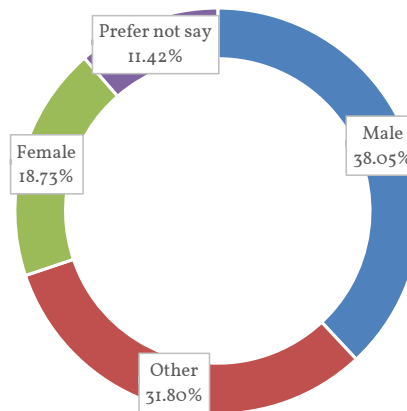


Figure 20. Percentage of Respondents Who Understand FoAAE Rights by Gender (2018-2023)



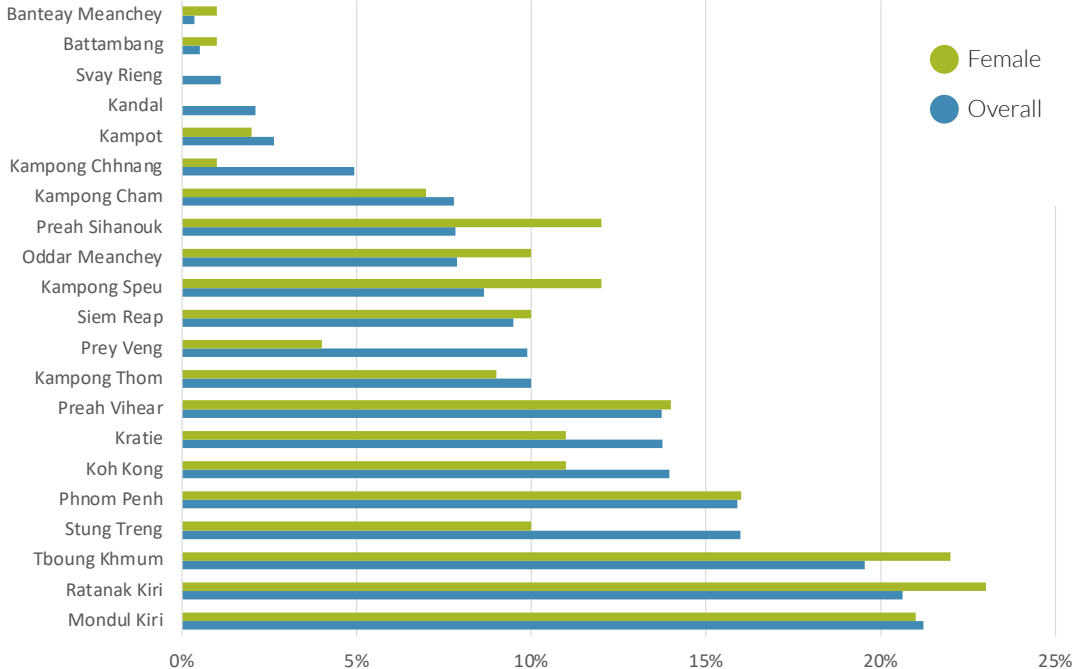
Over the lifetime of the FFMP, women respondents amount for only 18.73% of all those who understand the fundamental freedoms (Figure 20). The percentage of men is more than double, at 38.05%. Notably, since the Public Poll began providing an option for “other,” including nonbinary gender identity, respondents who selected this option for gender identity represent a higher percentage of those who understand fundamental freedoms (31.8% of all respondents who understand these freedoms) than respondents who identified as women in the Poll.

This disparity is not consistent across all indicators measured by the Public Poll. For example, across all years of the FFMP, more women felt free to establish a group for peaceful purposes (22%) compared to men (19%). In certain provinces, such as Phnom Penh, Ratanakiri, and Tboung Khmum, women feel more free than the overall population<sup>23</sup> of respondents to establish groups (see Figure 21).

<sup>22</sup> The “other” and “prefer not to say” options were introduced in 2022. The Public Poll was not conducted in 2017, and was conducted in 2016 and annually from 2018 to 2023.

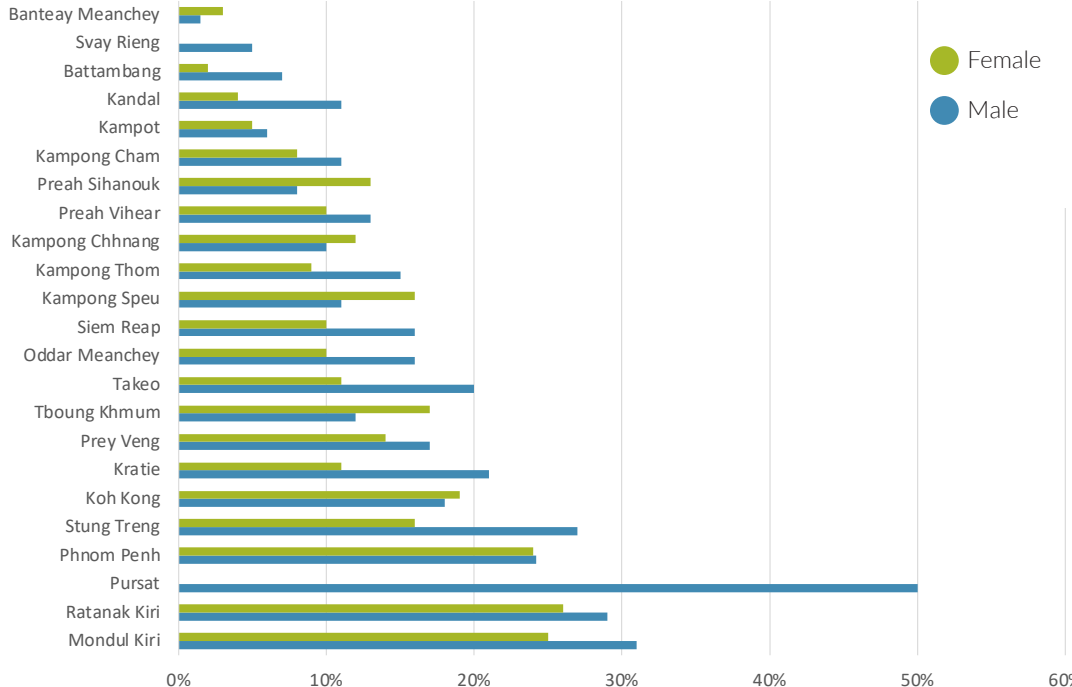
<sup>23</sup> “Overall” population refers to all respondents to the Public Poll, including women, men, and those who indicated “other” or “prefer not to say” to the question about respondent gender identity.

Figure 21. Percentage of Women who Feel Free to Establish a Group by Province (2020-2023)



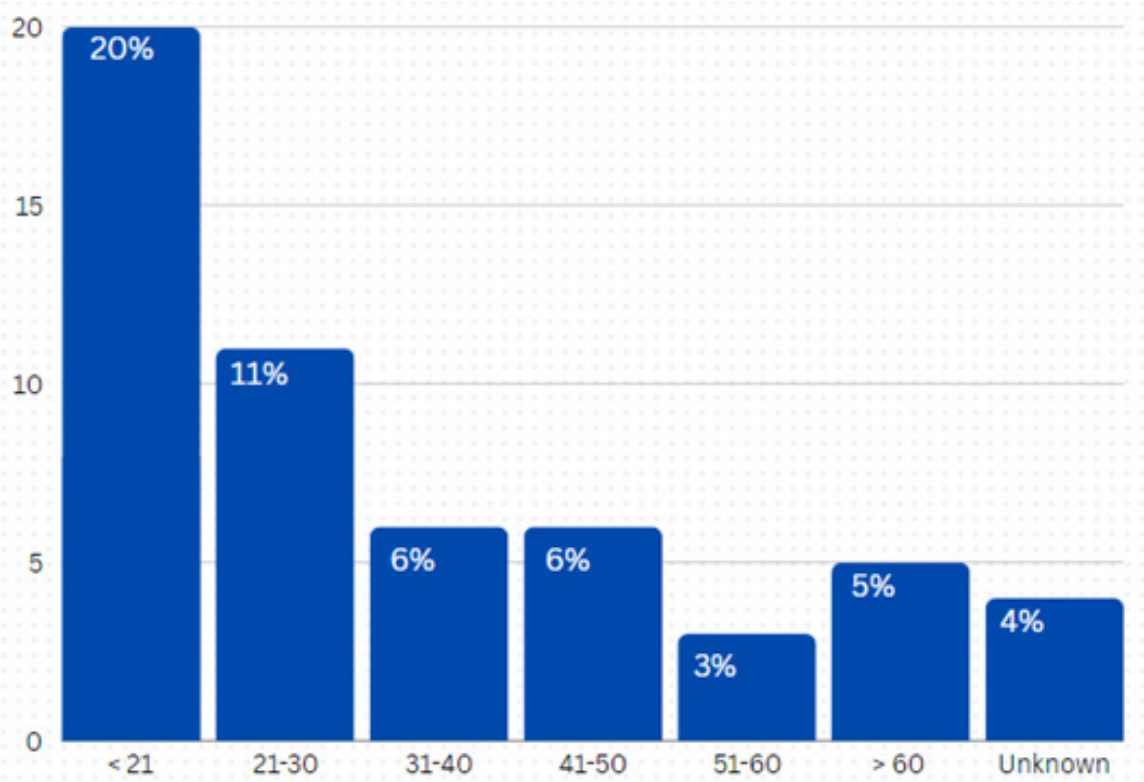
By contrast, women respondents feel less free than men to join associations for peaceful purposes. This might be reflective of gender inclusivity and mainstreaming challenges faced by groups at the community level (See Figure 22).

Figure 22. Percentage of Men and Women Surveyed Who Feel Free to Join an Association by Province (2018-2023)

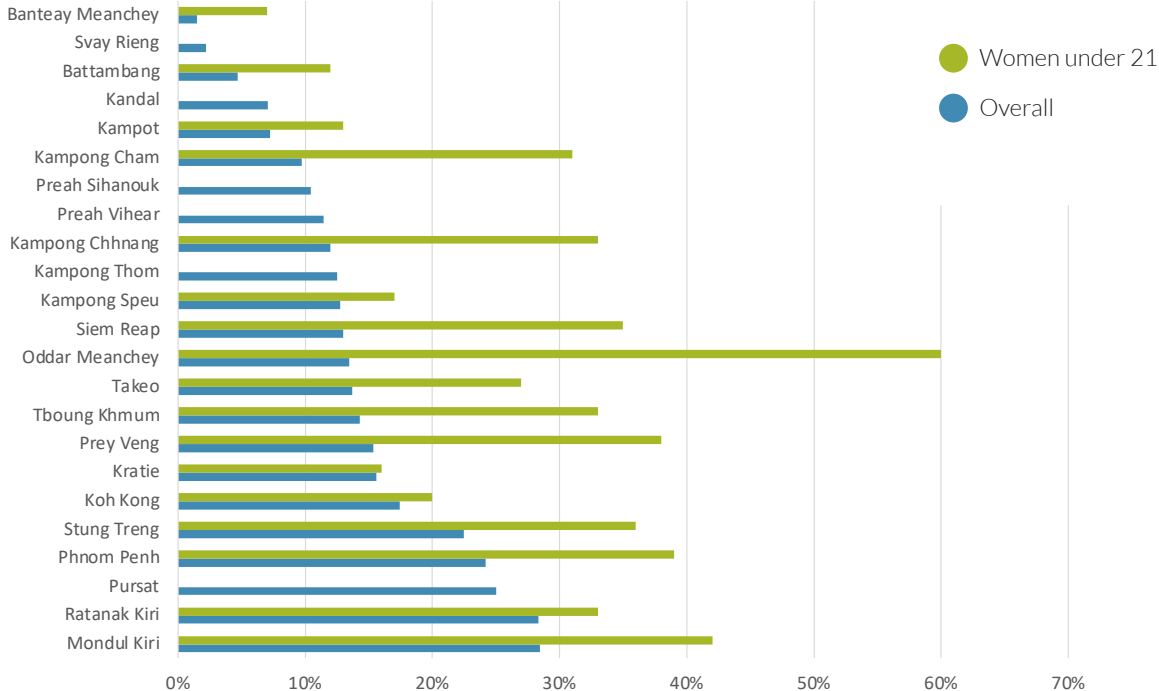


As the data is disaggregated by age, however, the FFMP indicates that younger women, especially those under 21, are significantly more willing to exercise their freedom of assembly and association. The percent of women under 21 who felt free to form an association is nearly double the next oldest group, and more than three times the respondents for those aged 31 and up. In certain provinces, the percentage of women under 21 who feel free to form associations is significantly higher than the general respondent population, including in Phnom Penh, where it is almost 29% (see Figures 23 and 24). Some of this age and geographic variances may be linked to garment sector, where a large percentage of workers are young women. The garment industry is also a leading sector in terms of unionization, which is a key component of the freedom of association.

Figure 23. Percentage of Women Who Feel Free to Form an Association by Age (2020-2023)

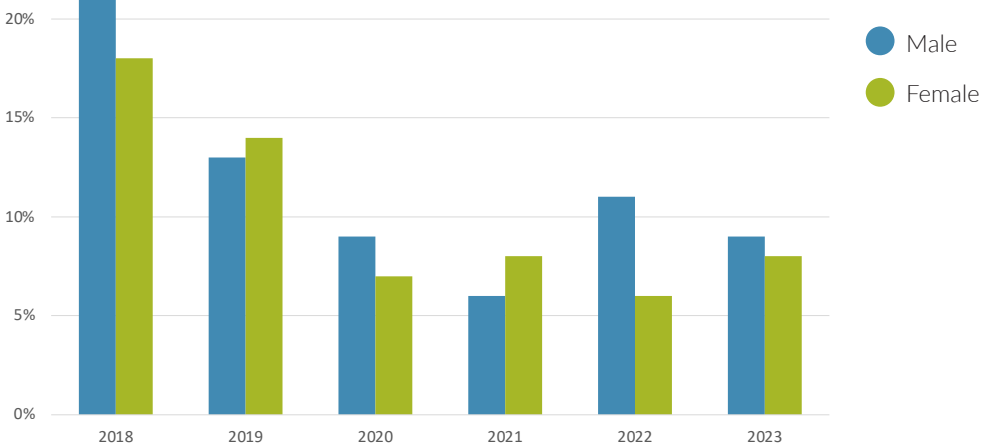


**Figure 24. Percentage of Women Under 21 who Feel Free to Join an Association**



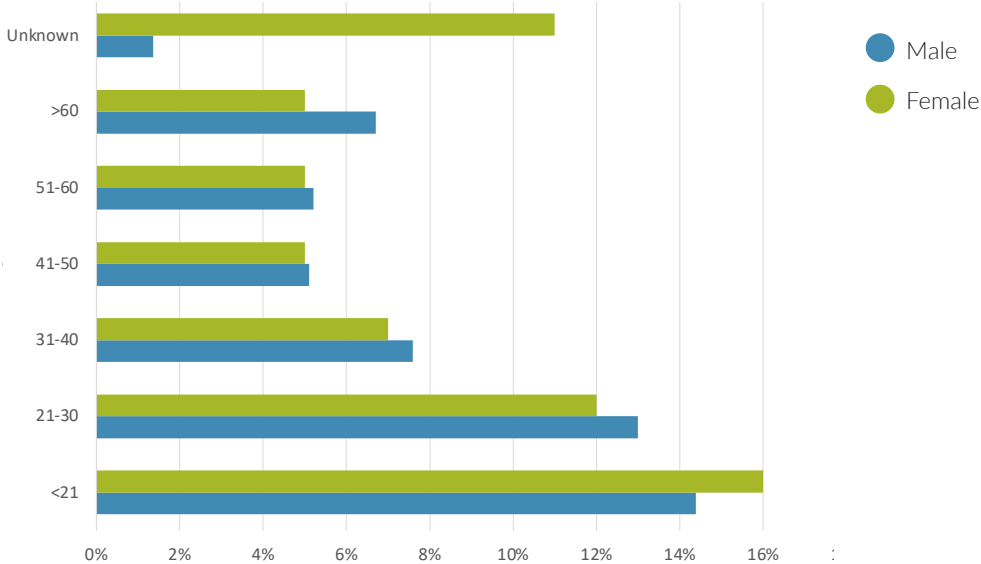
On peaceful assembly, women respondents tended to feel less free than men, but the percentage of individuals who feel free to peacefully assemble is low across both genders. In a year-by-year comparison, the FFMP found that the percentage of those who feel free to peacefully assemble has decreased significantly from 2018 to 2023, decreasing by more than 50% from 2018 to 2020 for men and women (see Figure 25). Further, for the several years since COVID-19 (2021 and after), the percentage of people who feel free to peacefully assemble has remained low for both men and women.

**Figure 25. Percentage of Men and Women Who Feel Free to Peacefully Assemble**



Younger women tend to feel more free to peacefully assemble, particularly those under 21 (see Figure 26). In general, younger people tend to report feeling more free to exercise their fundamental freedoms than older groups, especially those over age 30. These trends indicate that the younger generation is likely more politically and civically engaged, but that trend threatens to change course with increased suppression of fundamental civic freedoms.

**Figure 26. Percentage of Women who Feel Free to Peacefully Assemble by Age (2018-2023)**



This data also reflects a broader global trend of young people becoming more politically engaged and leading social movements, such as for climate change action, economic equality, democracy, and women’s rights. However, in Cambodia and other countries in Southeast Asia, this increase in youth civic engagement and activism has been met with repression, including arrests and criminal penalties being levied upon young activists and civil society actors.<sup>24</sup>

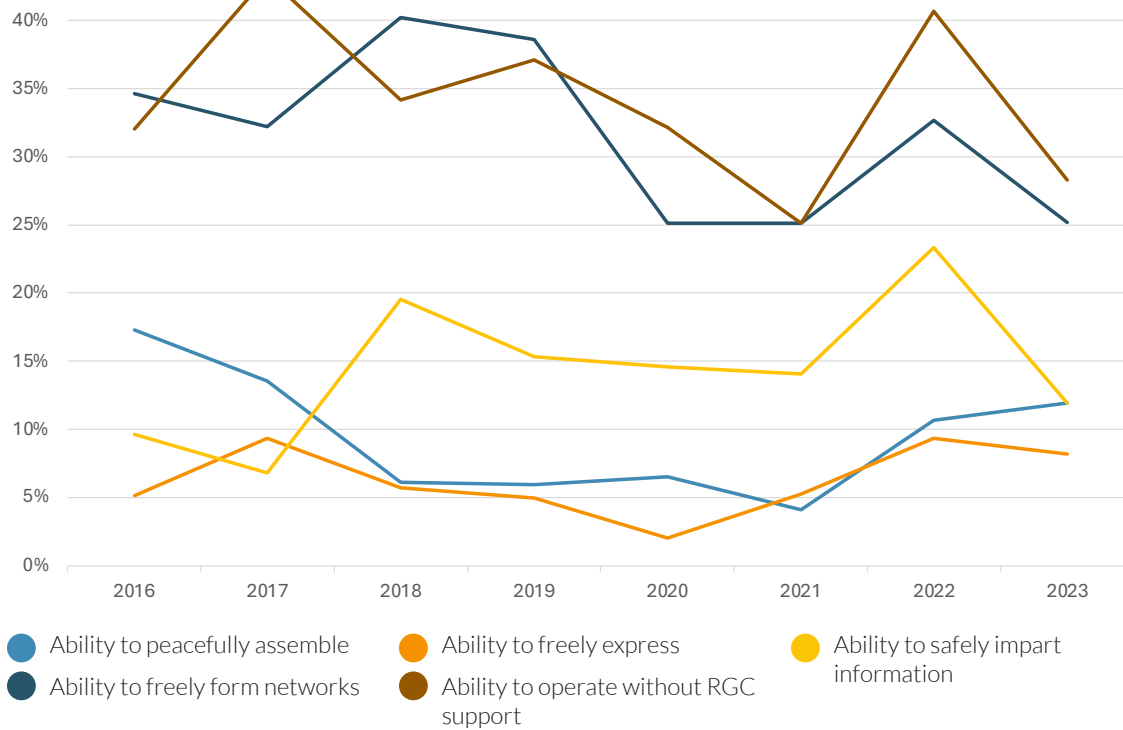
<sup>24</sup> See, e.g., the recent arrests of student protestors over an economic treaty that would impact the use of natural resources in Cambodia, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/08/at-least-20-arrested-in-cambodia-for-protests-against-economic-pact/>.



## F. ENVIRONMENT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS AND TRADE UNIONS

The FFMP conducts an annual survey of civil society and trade union leaders (“CSO/TU survey”) to examine the extent to which CSOs and Trade Unions are able to exercise their fundamental civic freedoms, including those related to the ability to operate an association.

Figure 27. Percentage of CSO & Trade Union Leaders Surveyed Who Feel Able to Exercise Fundamental Freedoms



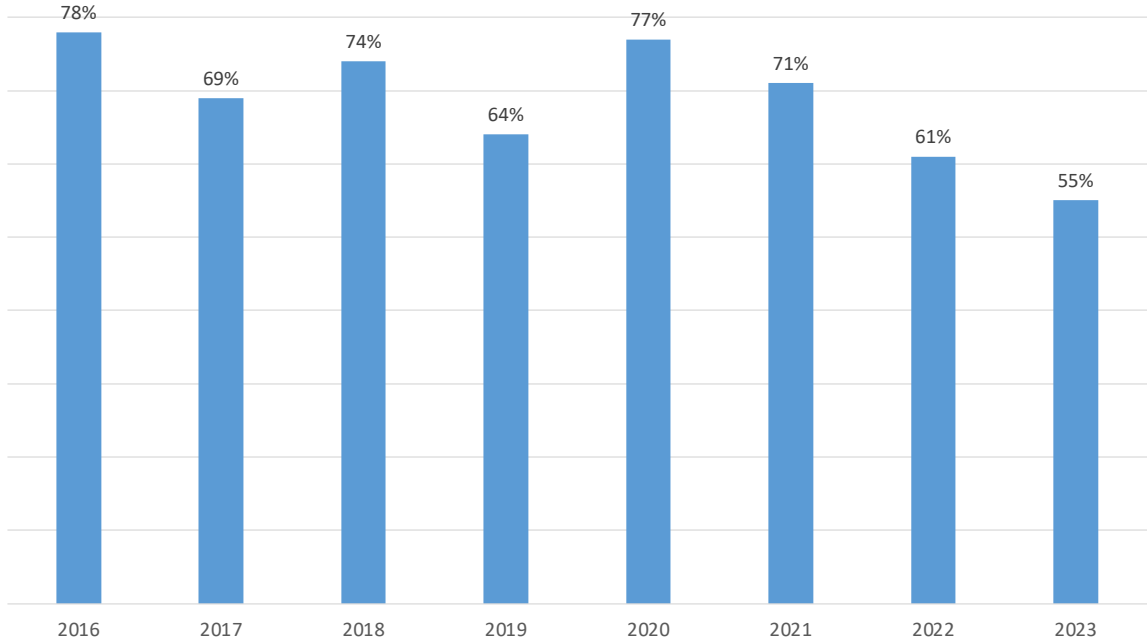
Since 2016, the FFMP has tracked how freely CSO/TU leaders feel they can 1) peacefully assemble, 2) exercise free expression, 3) safely impart information, 4) form networks, and 5) operate without RGC support (Figure 27). On crucial freedoms for organizations, like the ability to freely express themselves, safely impart information, and peacefully assemble, the percentage of leaders able to exercise these freedoms has never reached above 25%. Freedom of expression was consistently suppressed, and the percentage of leaders who felt free to express themselves has never reached above 10%. During the COVID period, free expression and assembly reached all-time lows, when less than 5% of respondents felt free to express themselves or peacefully assemble, at a time when civil society played crucial roles in Cambodia and elsewhere to meet the urgent needs created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Even on core association activities, like the ability to form networks or operate without RGC support, the percentage of CSO/TU leaders who felt able to do so never reached over 45%. For several of these indicators, 2023

represented a low after a small peak in 2022, returning to lower percentages recorded in the first two years of COVID-19.

### Resourcing for CSOs and Trade Unions

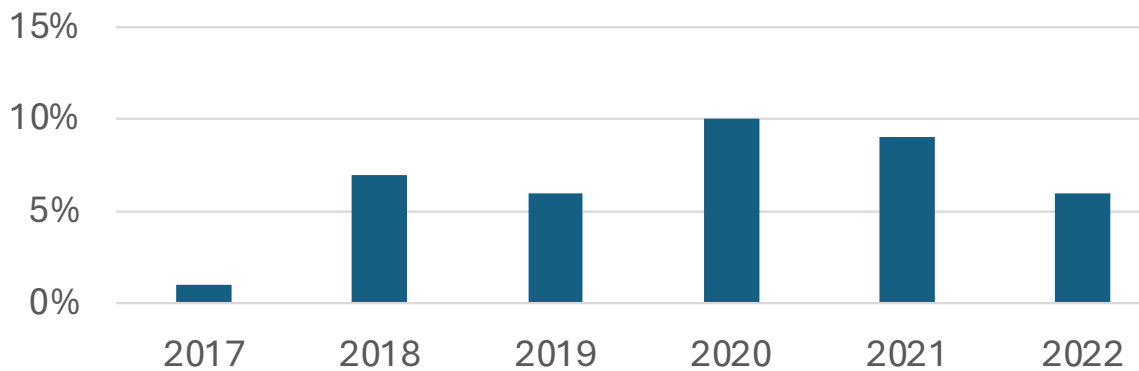
CSOs and trade unions are experiencing more restrictions in access to funding. In 2016, 78% of those surveyed reported that their organizations did not experience restrictions in access to funding. By 2023, the percentage of organizations that did not experience restrictions decreased to 55% (Figure 28). Although CSO and trade union leaders have in general felt unrestricted in access to funding, especially compared to other aspects of exercising their freedom of association, the 10-15% decrease in 2022 and 2023 compared to 2021 indicates that organizations are beginning to experience more restrictions in funding access, another way for the authorities to curtail civic space and the exercise of freedom of association.

Figure 28. Percentage of CSO and TU Leaders Who Report Associations are Not Restricted in Access to Funding



The percentage of CSO and Trade Union leaders who are able to access financing for their organization from the RGC has remained low, never reaching above 10% (Figure 29).

Figure 29. Percentage of CSO/TU Leaders Able to Access Financing for their Organization



### International vs National NGOs

Figure 30. Four Key Questions Asked in the CSO/TU Leader Survey

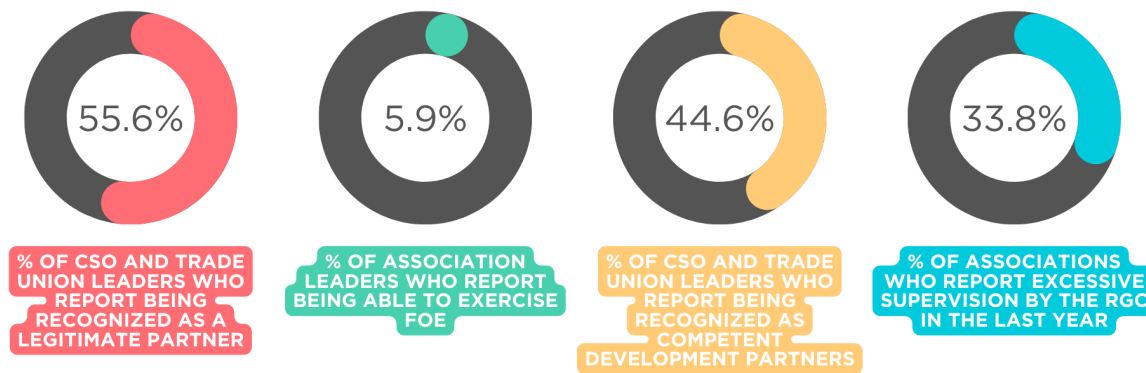
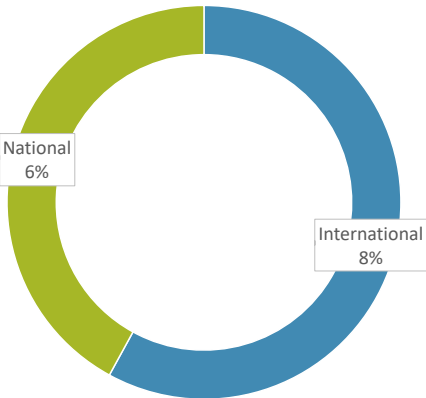


Figure 30 shows several key questions examined in the CSO/TU Leader Survey, focused on free expression, surveillance, and whether CSOs and trade union leaders feel that they are recognized as legitimate or competent partners of the RGC. In general, the ability to exercise freedom of expression is very low among CSO and trade union respondents, and almost two-thirds of respondents experienced excessive supervision by the RGC in the last year. About half the respondents feel that they are recognized by the RGC as a legitimate or competent partner.

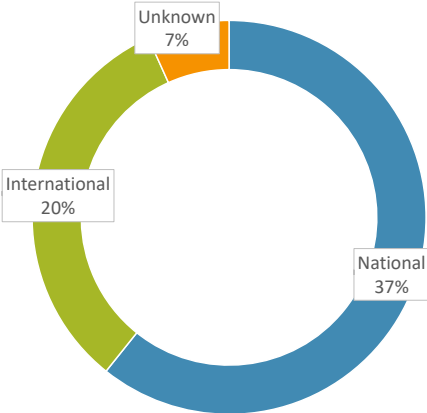
The CSO/TU Leaders Survey disaggregates data by international and national organizations, with some notable differences in how these two groups experience exercise of their fundamental freedoms and their ability to operate in Cambodia.

On these four metrics (Figures 31-34), international NGOs appear to experience lower levels of restriction and higher levels of recognition. However, on some metrics, such as ability to freely express their opinions, international NGO respondents feel only slightly more free than national counterparts.

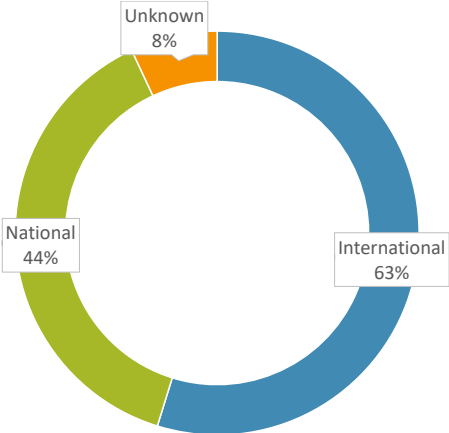
**Figure 31. 5.92% of CSO and Trade Union Leaders Report Being Able to Exercise the Freedom of Expression**



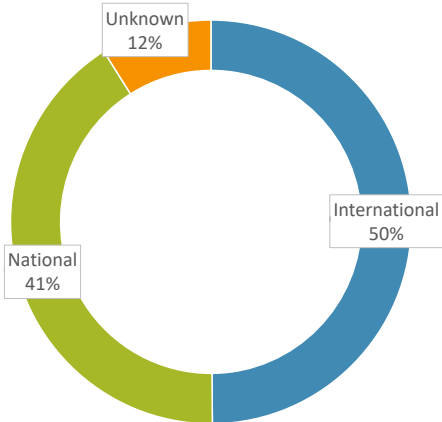
**Figure 32. 33.76% of CSO and Trade Union Leaders Report Excessive Supervision by RGC**



**Figure 33. 44.61% CSO and Trade Union Leaders Report Being Recognized as Competent Development Partners**



**Figure 34. 55.60% of CSO and Trade Union leaders Report Being Recognized as Legitimate Partner**



### 3. Conclusion

For nine years, the Fundamental Freedoms Monitoring Project has provided a comprehensive overview of the state of fundamental civic freedoms in Cambodia. Over nearly a decade, several trends have emerged from the FFMP's monitoring and data collection:

1. Legal measures were almost entirely restrictive rather than enabling for freedoms of association, assembly, expression, or the right to privacy.
2. During election periods, the government is more likely to violate or restrict fundamental freedoms.
3. Public understanding of the freedoms of association, assembly, and expression has remained low and appears to be decreasing. Although women respondents tend to understand fundamental freedoms less overall, the disparity does not apply universally across provinces or for all types of exercise of fundamental freedoms. If individuals do not understand fundamental freedoms and what these rights entail, it is unlikely fundamental freedoms will be fully exercised.
4. Overall, individuals feel less free in recent years to exercise fundamental freedoms, with a significant drop in 2018-19 that continued through the early 2020s. Younger people tend to feel more free to exercise fundamental freedoms than older individuals, but this trend may reverse with the increasing suppression of young people and students in their exercise of fundamental freedoms.
5. The ability of CSO and trade union leaders to exercise their fundamental freedoms, including core association activities such as forming networks and operating without restriction from the authorities, has remained low, particularly during periods of emergency like the first two years of COVID-19. International and national NGOs both feel restricted in their ability to operate and exercise freedom of association. However, on some measures, national NGOs experience more restriction.
6. Organizations seem to experience more restrictions in access to funding in recent years, while the ability to access financing from the RGC has remained low.

The protection of fundamental freedoms in Cambodia remains precarious. To maintain or improve upon the exercise of fundamental freedoms in Cambodia, as well as the continuation of more positive trends, such as increased exercise of fundamental freedoms by young people and women, greater protections and closer adherence to international human rights law and standards are critical.



1660 L Street NW, Suite 600, Washington, DC 20036 USA  
[www.icnl.org](http://www.icnl.org) | [facebook.com/ICNLIAlliance](https://facebook.com/ICNLIAlliance) | [twitter.com/ICNLIAlliance](https://twitter.com/ICNLIAlliance)