

Day 1, Morning agenda

Introduction and political risk concept

900 - 930

Country operation-level challenges

930 - 1045

Global pressure on civil society space

1045 - 1215

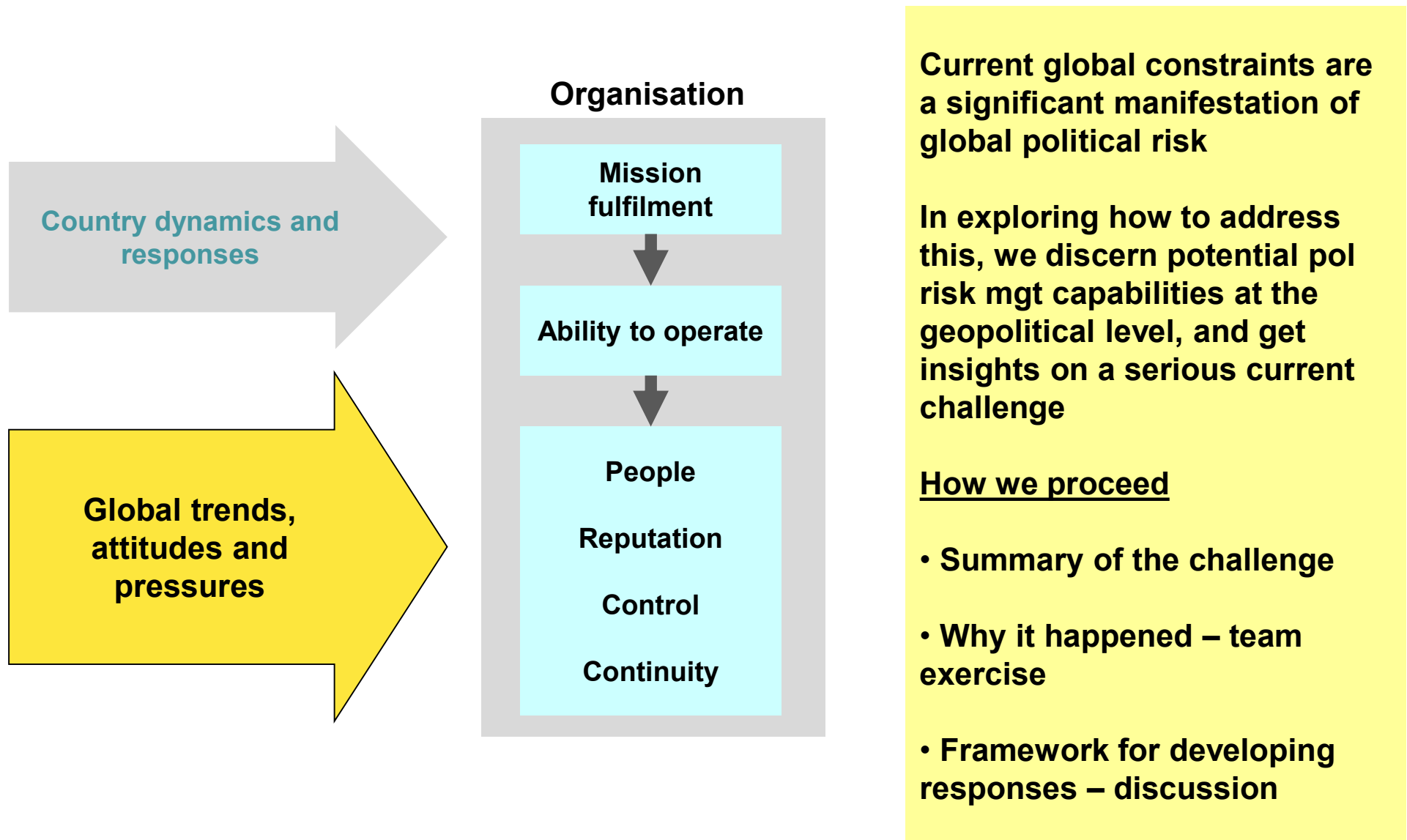
Effects of geopolitical rivalries

1215 - 1245

Summary discussion

1245 - 100

From country we move to a shared issue at the geopolitical (global, strategic) level, the narrowing of civil society space – in the context of pol risk management...



The challenge to civil society space has been a concern for some time, and noted at the highest levels of international human rights advocacy

**Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, UN
Commissioner for Human Rights,
2014 - 2019**



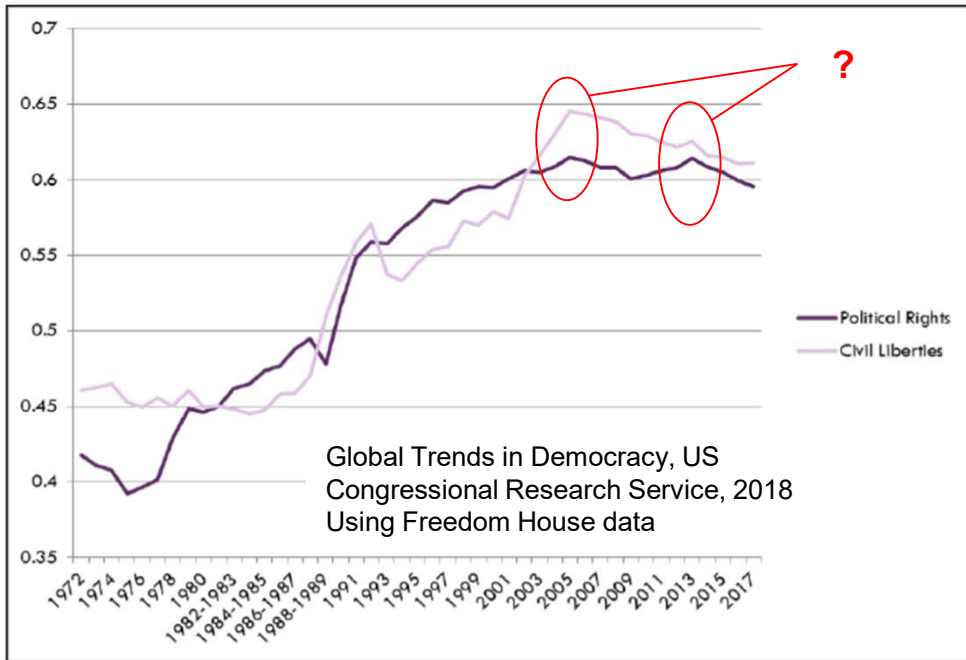
‘[F]or several years, I and my predecessor have enumerated at this Council states that have taken extremely serious steps to restrict or persecute the voices of civil society. While I will continue to list them, I am devastated to have to report that there are now too many countries on that list for me to name them here today.’* (2014)

From Global Governance Institute *Policy Brief 2017

Context is wider trend in backtracking on quality of democracy

Figure 1. Freedom in the World's Political Rights and Civil Liberties Ratings Since 1972

Global Averages, 1972-2017

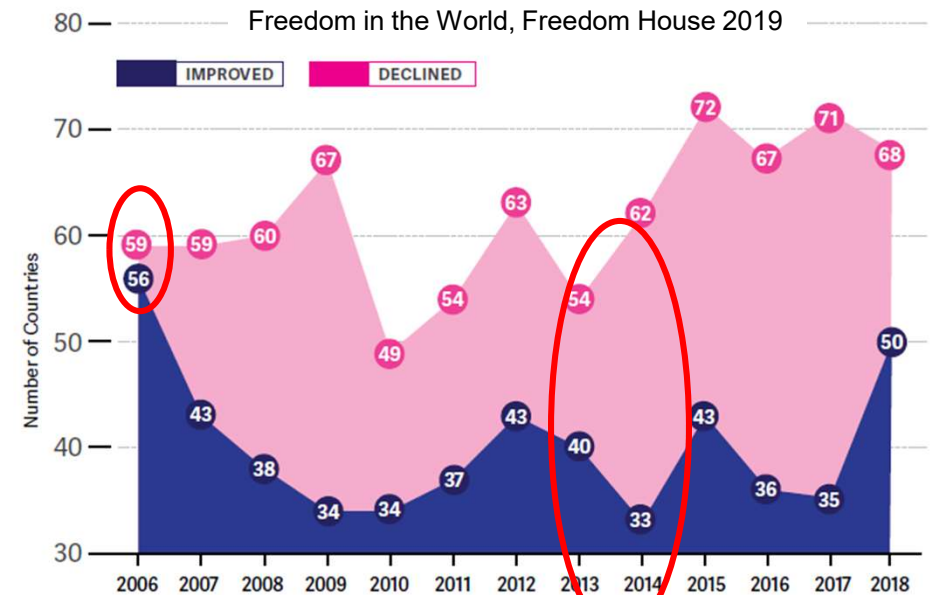


- Steep increase in rights & liberties to early 1990s, still upward
- Until 2005 – 2007, then persistent decline begins

- For 13 years decline has been more prevalent than improvement, a major reversal of a three decade trend

13 YEARS OF DECLINE

Countries with net declines in aggregate score have outnumbered those with gains for the past 13 years.



What the narrowing of civil society space means in terms of actual restrictions*

Legal / compliance barriers	Registration barriers, approval delays, arbitrary non-renewal, funding constraints (esp. from foreign sources), arbitrary dissolution	For international NGOs: Constrained / tenuous access “Foreign agent” label and related scrutiny Local partners severely hindered, and hard to transfer funds / resources Increased threat of detention / harm State press “foreign agents” fake news
Scrutiny	Random intensive audits / tax and compliance investigations – hinders normal operations, gives excuses for non-approval (or charges)	
With us or against us	Pressure for self-censorship, reporting to security agencies, “terrorist / subversive / foreign agent” label as stick, continued permit as carrot	
Extra-legal threats / hassles	State proxy and state killings and detentions (esp. human rights), fake news, threats, hostile state “NGO” & state media campaigns, trolling...	

* Combines with similar restrictions of freedom of press and assembly as part of wider decline in quality of democracy

Indications of scope of the problem and its distribution

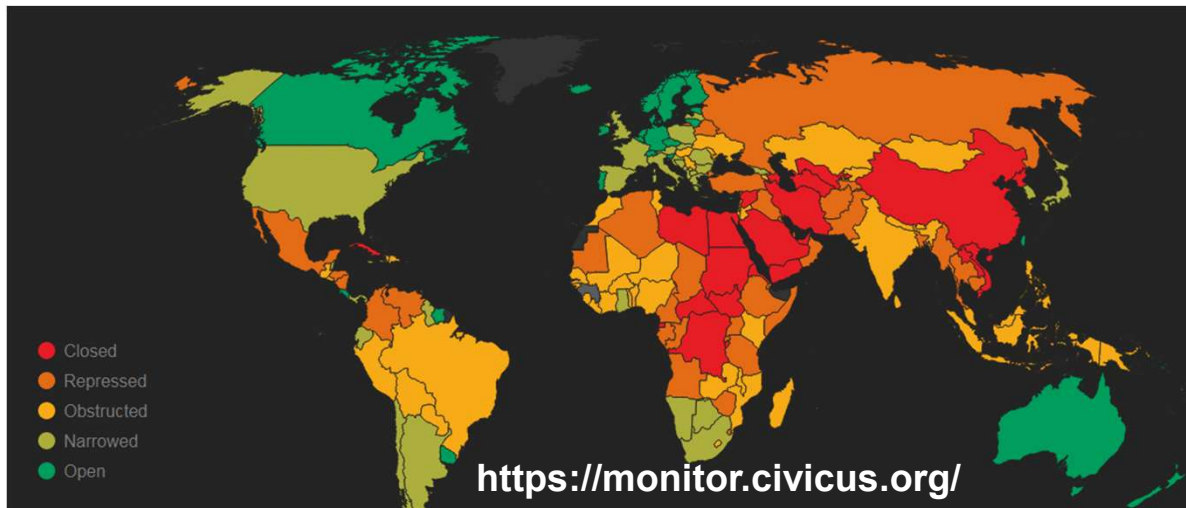
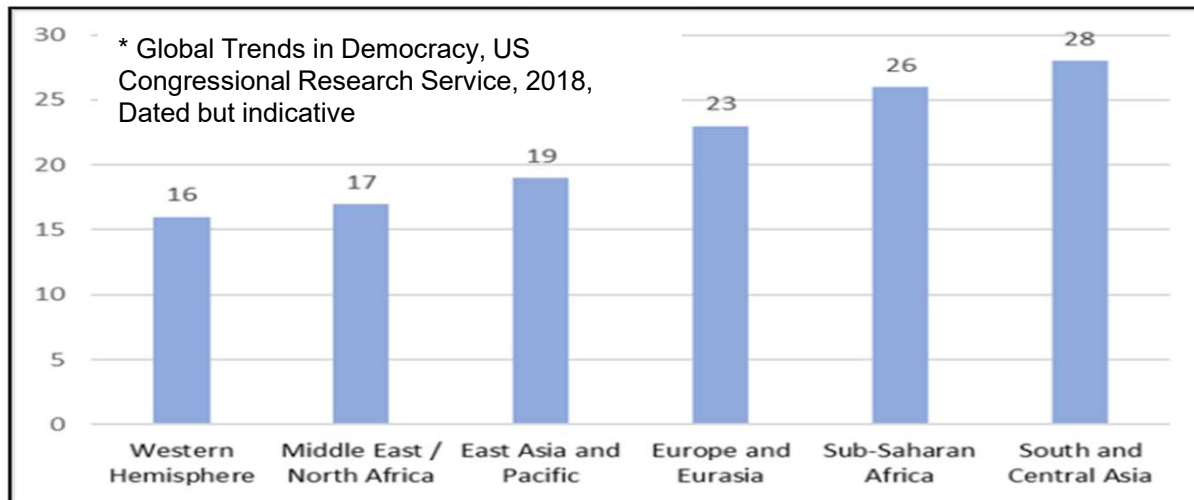


Figure 7. Geographic Distribution of Initiatives to Restrict Civil Society 2012-2015



Source: Graphic adapted from Douglas Rutzen, "Civil Society Under Assault," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 26, no. 4 (October 2015), pp. 28-39.

- 2012-2015, approx 60 countries, 120 laws*
- Intl Ctr for Non-Profit Law, 64 new laws 2015-16
- AI 2019: 40 new or planned laws in last 2 years
- 100+ countries moved towards CSO restriction in last 10 – 15 years
- Not counting Western counter-terrorism regulations
- Not counting extra-legal threats and impediments

Discussion framework for narrowing of civil society space – we take a more strategic long-term view since this is where most ambiguity remains

1. Explaining origins and why

Team exercise

Discern and share relevant drivers, factors and actors in the global narrowing of civil society space

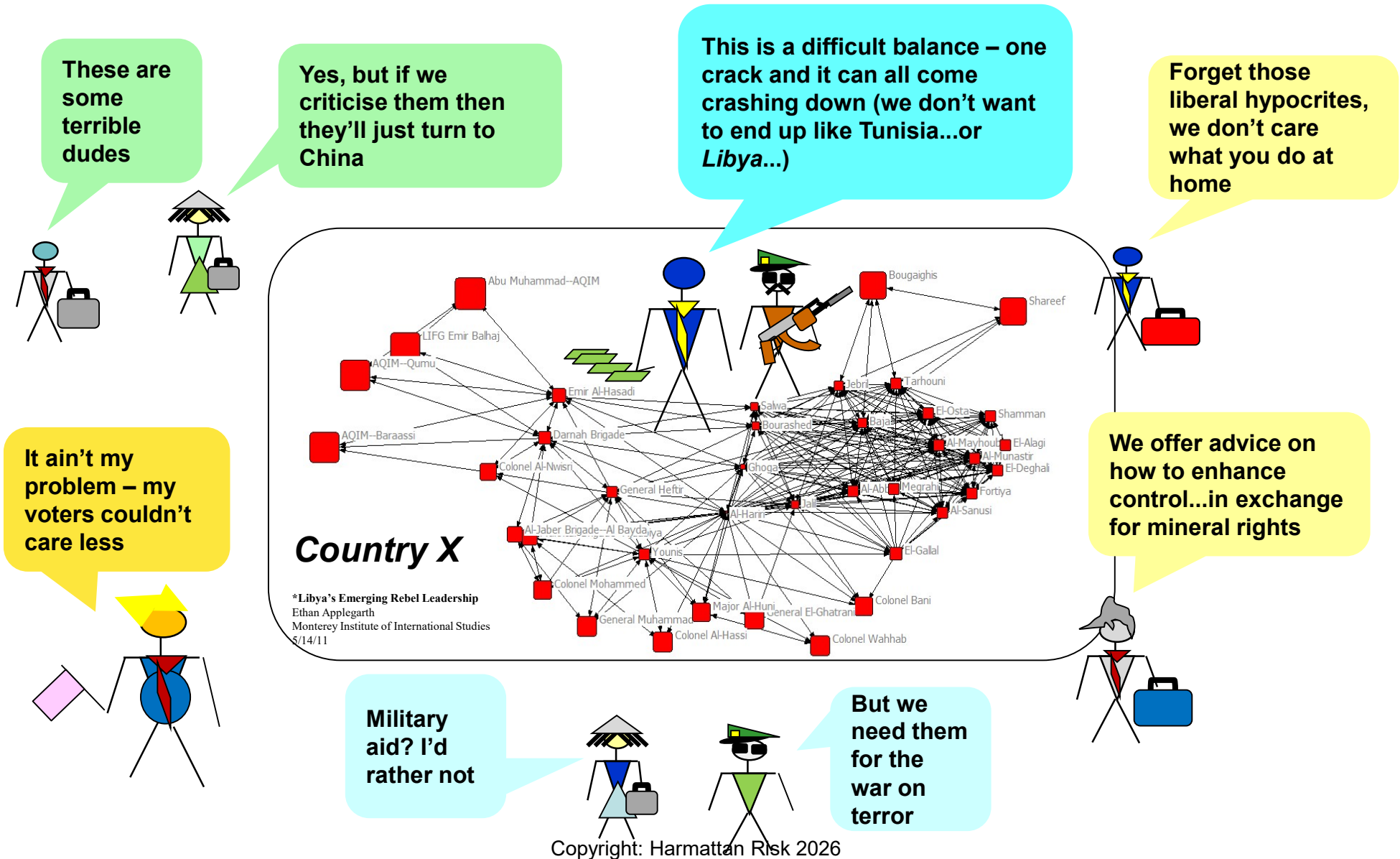
30 min

40 min

2. A framework for testing and solidifying a response

- NGOs as political influencers
- Objectives of an NGO response
- Re-framing an argument
- Responding to instability concerns
- NGO leverage and influence
- Civil society support under the radar
- Wrap up - a tentative global plan

Part 1, A vague hypothesis on only a part of the problem, just to kick start thinking on the question of why civil society came under concerted global pressure



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Over to 2 teams to fill in the blanks and explain how the current restrictive global environment arose

2 teams

One leader / coordinator – get structured ideas / insight from team

Someone to summarise the story / key point write up (for max 5 min group briefing)

Probably same person is the team presenter, up to you

Consider

- What was before the current period of restriction, when was this
- Drivers – big background / evolutionary forces
- More immediate factors / causes
- Key actors / groups – attitudes and interests
- If blank, start with types and then fill in specifics
- Try to tell a plot line / story – not just list of causes

You don't have to be "right"

Timing

- 20 minutes teamwork – to complete short storyline
- 10 min max on presentations - each team presents, no more than 5 min
- Brief mutual Q&A

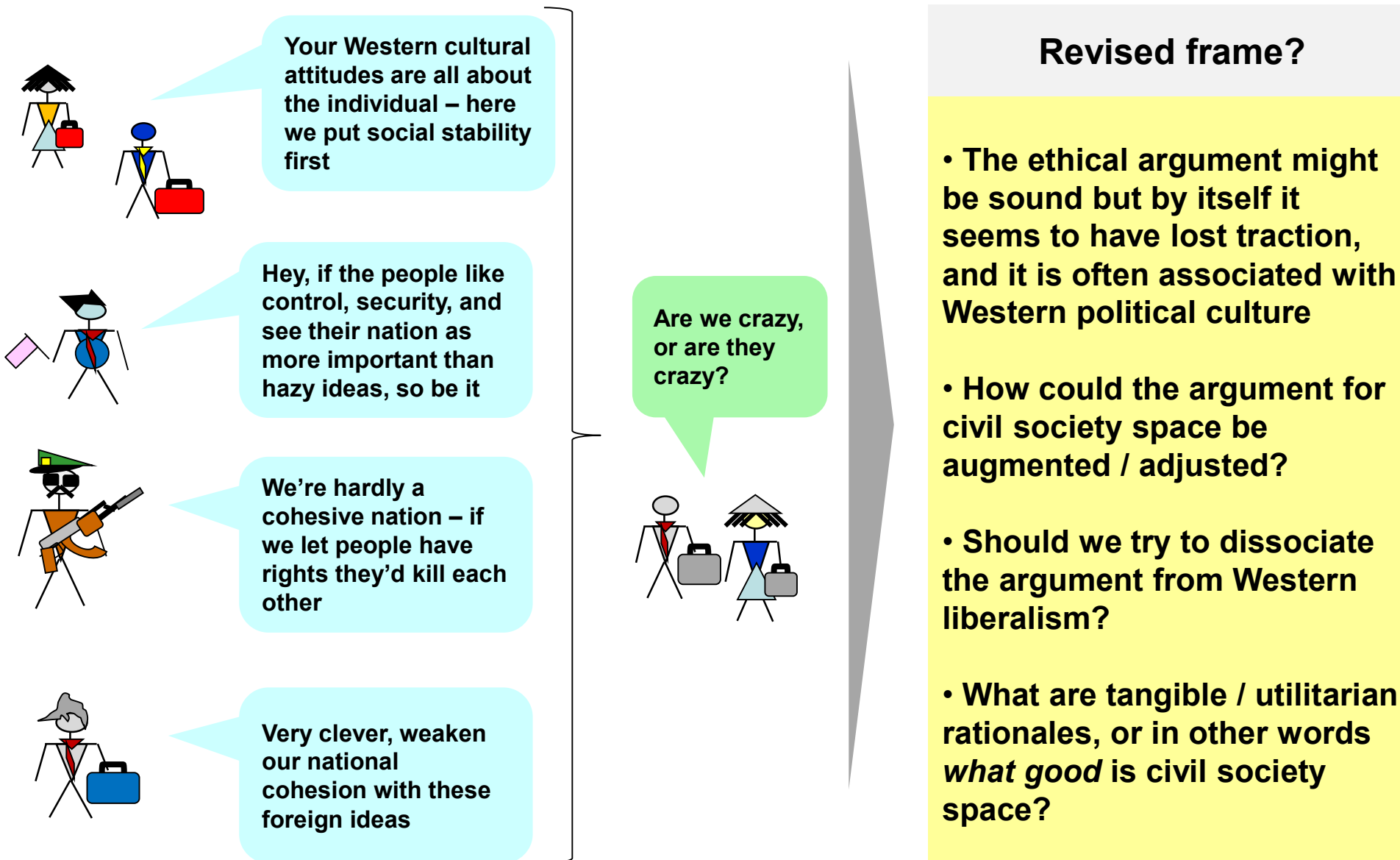
What is a reasonable objective?



Objectives

- If NGOs do take a role, they need to know what they're trying to achieve
- What might be a five to ten year vision?
- What key things need to change to get there, and which can NGOs influence?
- What is a realistic interim achievement?

How to respond to the arguments against open civil society?



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Same question but at the level of developing country government and specifically responding to concerns about instability

So you see, civil liberties actually contribute to stability



Hmm, this is making some sense...



Thus, there are tangible reasons to ease up on CSOs...



And give up my divine right to rule?



A rationale for wary governments?

- “Mafia regimes”, absolutists and strongmen might have a strong vested interest in tight control
- Others, especially where national cohesion is weak and state failure or conflict is a plausible scenario, might have legitimate concerns about lifting the lid of a Pandora’s box
- Is there a rationale for civil society openness in the context of state fragility and risk of instability / civil conflict? What other factors might need consideration?
- How and with whom could we make the case?

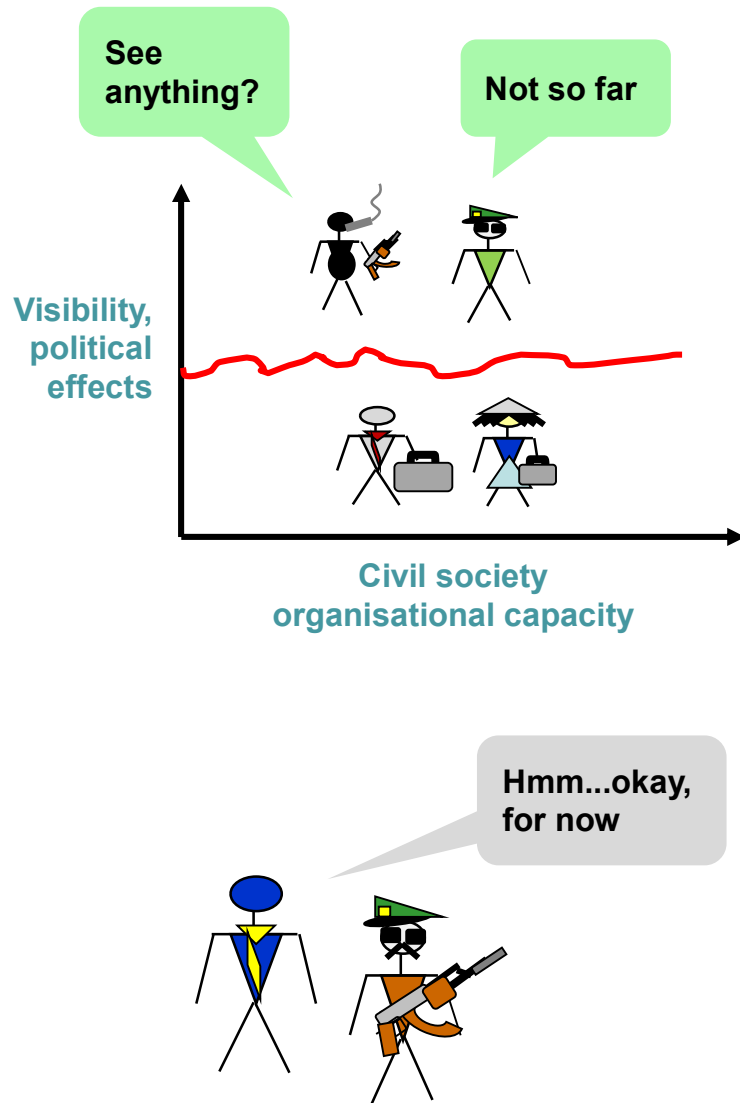
NGO leverage, in general but especially with “the international community”



- What are current sources of **NGO influence or bargaining power**, both with governments but also with respect to social awareness and concern?
- Options for collective action (other NGOs, media, donors, maybe even business...)? What's been tried, what seems to work / not work?

- Major issue is tepid response of “**international community**” including most major donor governments
- What are some options to get more concerted government commitment and action on protecting civil society space?

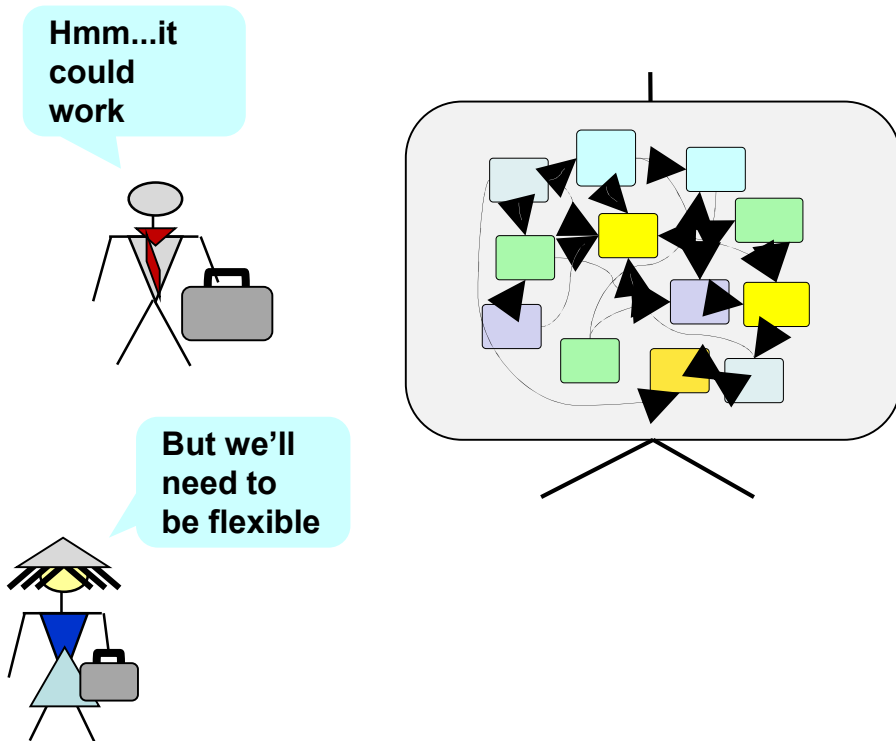
On a tactical level, how can NGOs contribute to civil society strengthening within the current challenging environment?



Keeping under the radar

- Civil society organisational capacity is necessary in community resilience (e.g. self-help in responding to crises and scarcity); challenging unresponsive governments is only one aspect
- How can NGOs help to ensure that civil society in beneficiary communities remains active and capable even when there is government wariness about its potential political effects?

A tentative plan? Or at least a few key options we should test or investigate



What to do next

- **Where is more learning required? What do NGOs need to understand better in order to develop a coherent response (or their part of it)?**
- **Who should they start talking to?**
- **What fora or coordination mechanisms can be built on or developed to share insight and resources?**
- **What might a plan at least look like?**
- **Near-term or interim actions?**

Wrap up – what does the civil society discussion tell us about NGO political risk management at the global level?

How well are NGOs equipped to research and understand global pressures? What are key shortcomings and how could they be bridged?

Civil society restrictions are a global phenomenon – it might not be hard to lobby / discuss with our own govts (Ireland, EU), but do Irish NGOs have international reach?

If not enough, how to build it?

Much of the necessary work on countering global pressures on civil society takes resources, yet NGOs are expected to spend mainly on delivery

How can NGOs make the best use of people and funds to have an impact?