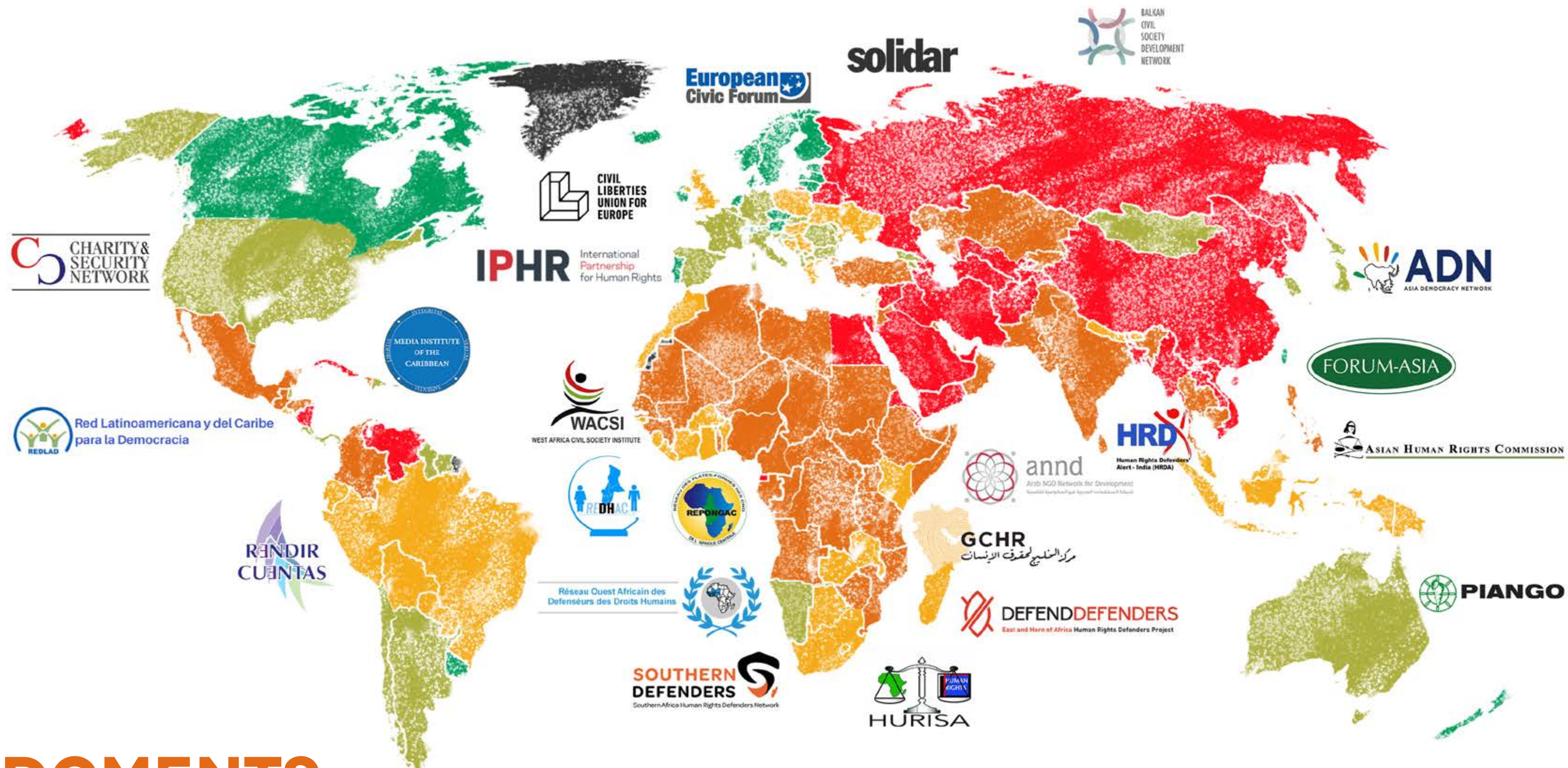


PEOPLE POWER  
**UNDER ATTACK** 2023

A report based on data from the CIVICUS Monitor





## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The CIVICUS Monitor is an ongoing research collaboration between global civil society alliance CIVICUS and over 20 research partner organisations that have contributed the bulk of the data on which this report is based. A full list and description of our partners is [here](#).

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# METHODOLOGY

The CIVICUS Monitor is a participatory research platform that assesses the state of civic space worldwide and offers insights into its developments. We define civic space as the respect in law, policy and practice for freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression and the extent to which the state protects these fundamental rights.

In an attempt to capture civic space dynamics on a global scale, the CIVICUS Monitor works with over 20 civil society [research partners](#) from around the world. These partners periodically produce civic space country updates, drawing insights from a set of guiding questions and a rich array of primary and secondary sources. These updates, often coming directly from national civil society bodies, undergo rigorous triangulation and verification processes before publication.

The CIVICUS Monitor consolidates this information to identify top civic space violations and positive developments recorded throughout the year. Between 1 November 2022 and 31 October 2023, we published 469 updates and identified more than 2,600 incidents related to civic space, with 1,898 of them categorised as a violation.

Our researchers evaluate each of the incidents and tag them to identify the type of civic space violations that occurred. We also identify the victims and the action that led to the violation. This information allows us to detect the main global and regional civic space trends that are analysed in depth in this report.

To draw comparisons at the global level and track trends over time, the [CIVICUS Monitor](#) also produces and updates civic space scores and [ratings](#) for 198 countries and territories.<sup>1</sup> Each country's civic space is rated in one of five categories – open, narrowed, obstructed, repressed, or closed – based on a [methodology](#) that combines several sources of information on freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression and the state's duty to protect those fundamental freedoms. This report focuses on countries that experienced rating changes and those that had relevant civic space developments over the past year.

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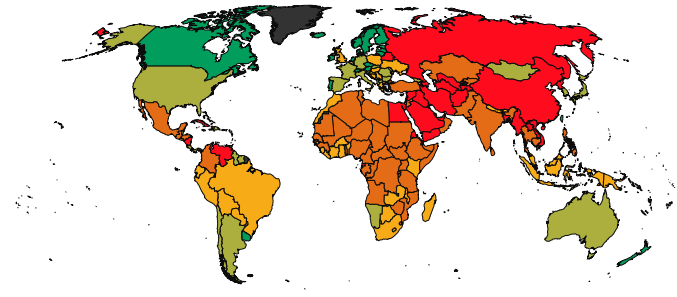
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<sup>1</sup> In 2023 we added Somaliland as a separate territory.



# THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY: CIVIC SPACE DYNAMICS



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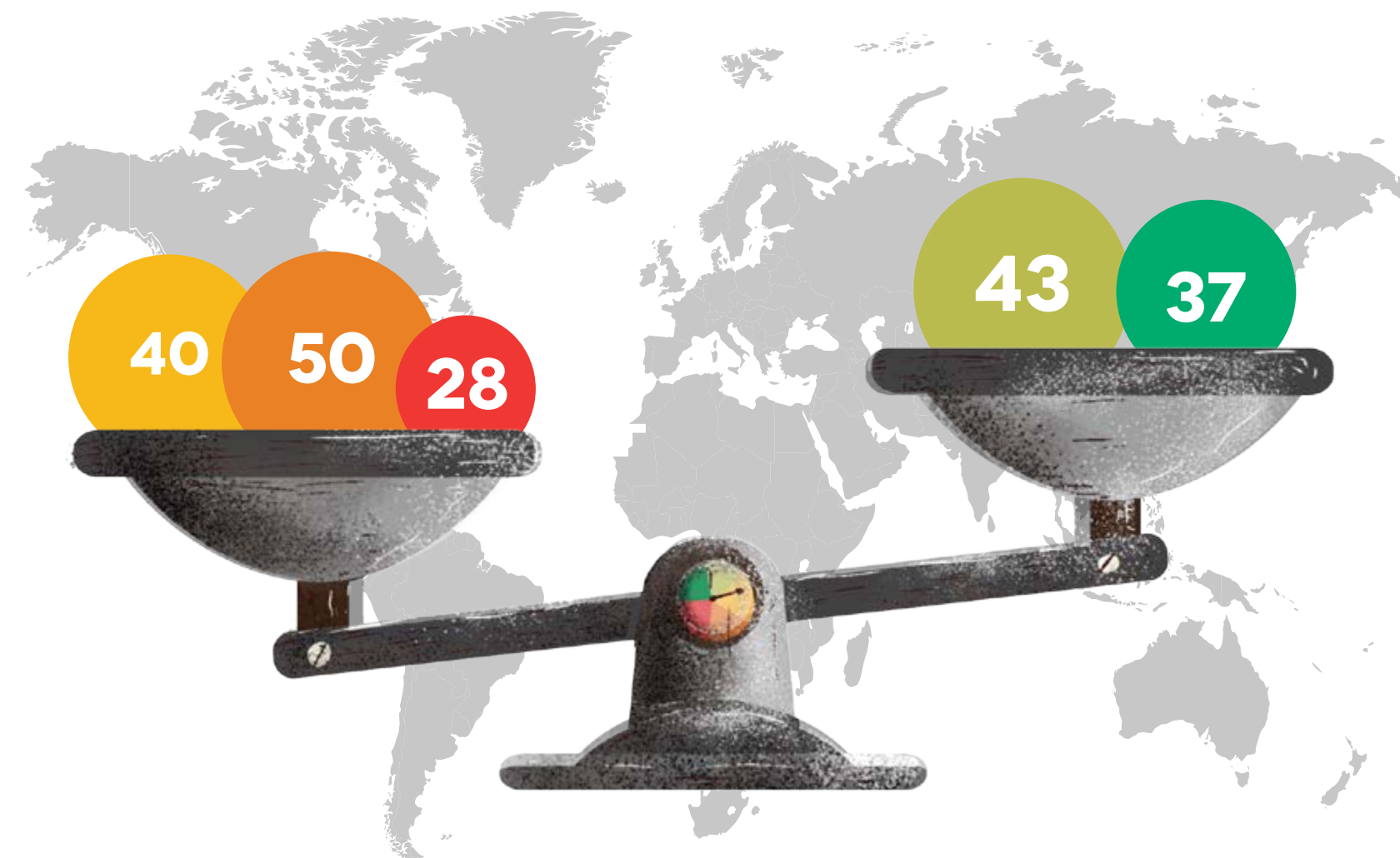
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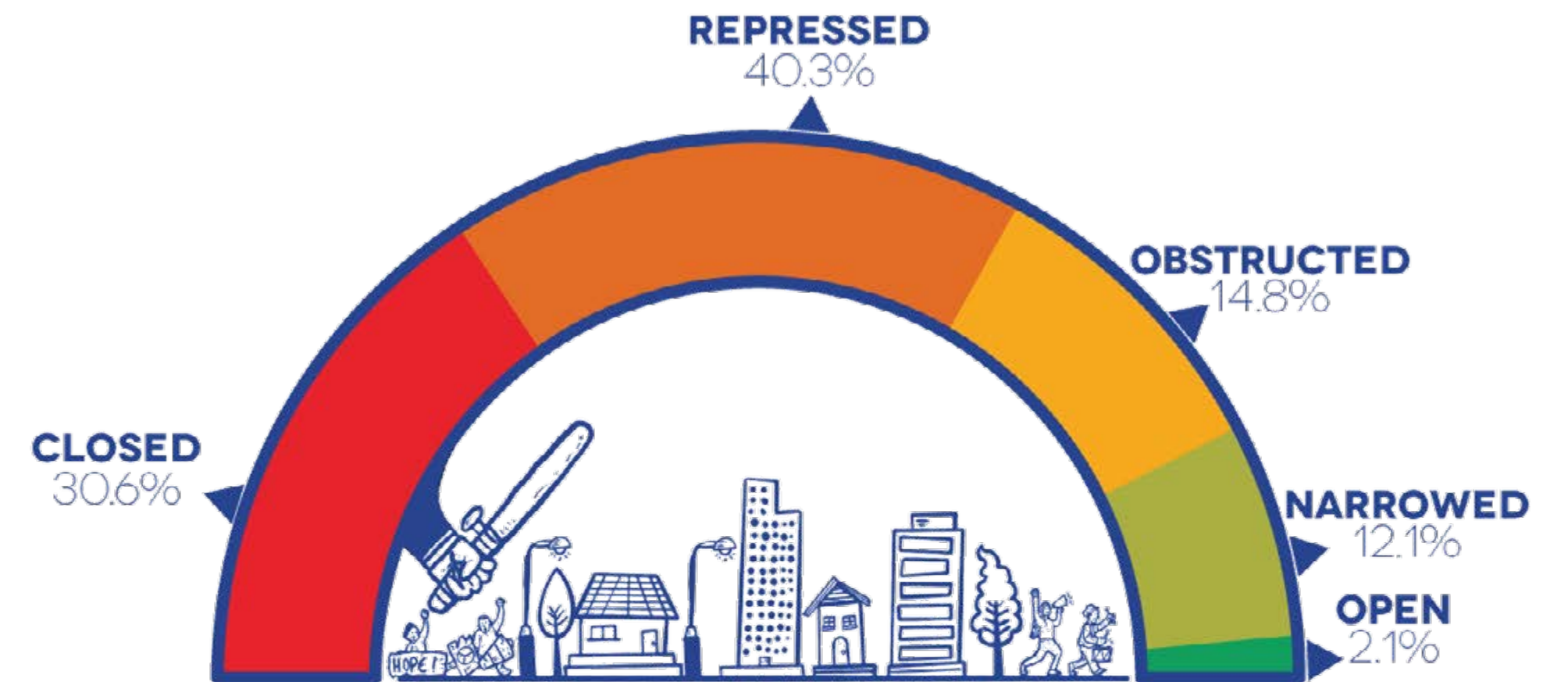
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Almost a third of the world's population now lives in countries with [closed](#) civic space. This is the highest percentage since 2018, when CIVICUS began systematically tracking civic space conditions around the world. This startling decline – from 26 per cent living in closed countries in 2018 to 30.6 per cent today – points to a major civic space crisis that requires immediate, global efforts to reverse. This year we also recorded the lowest percentage of humanity living in [open](#) countries, where civic space is both free and protected. Today, just two per cent of the world's population enjoys the freedom to associate, demonstrate and express dissent without significant constraints, down from almost four per cent just five years ago.

Since the previous edition of this report, which covered 2022, civic space ratings have changed for 12 countries over the last year, worsening in seven countries and improving in five.



- OPEN
- NARROWED
- OBSTRUCTED
- REPRESSED
- CLOSED

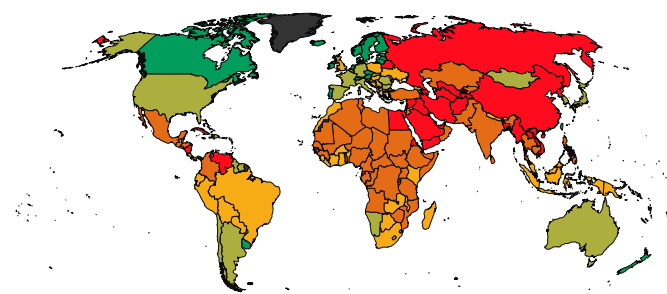


## WHERE DO PEOPLE LIVE

Based on World Bank population data 2022

The latest CIVICUS Monitor country ratings update in December 2023 indicates that civil society faces an increasingly hostile environment. There are now 28 countries or territories with closed civic space, 50 with repressed civic space and 40 with obstructed civic space, meaning that 118 of 198 countries and territories are experiencing severe restrictions in fundamental freedoms. In comparison, 43 countries have narrowed civic space and just 37 have an open rating.

The severity of the civic space deterioration is exemplified by the number of countries moving to the repressed or closed category. Of the seven countries being downgraded, five moved to the two worst categories. Bangladesh and Venezuela are now rated as closed and Kyrgyzstan, Senegal and Sri Lanka are downgraded to the repressed rating as conditions for civil society continue to worsen.



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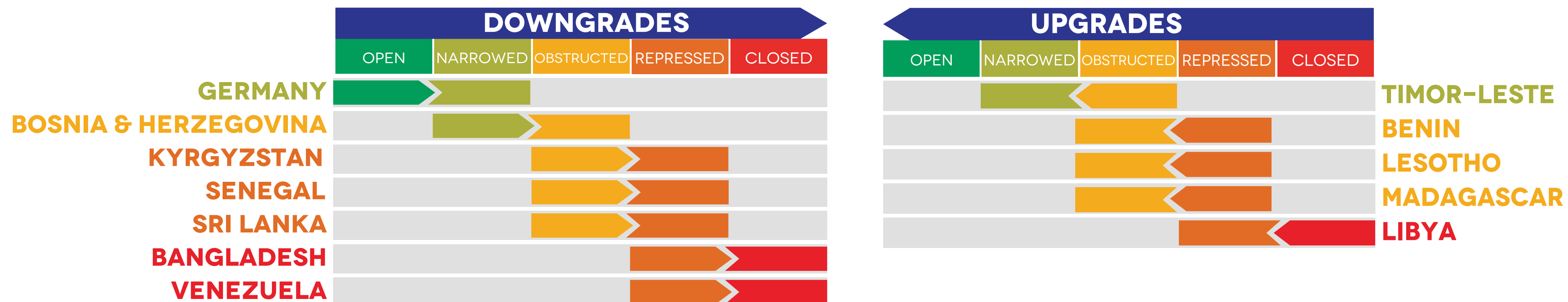
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Europe continues to add to the list of downgraded countries, with Bosnia and Herzegovina now placed in the obstructed category and Germany moving from an open to a narrowed rating. Over the past six years, 12 European countries have seen their ratings downgraded due to deteriorating civic space conditions.

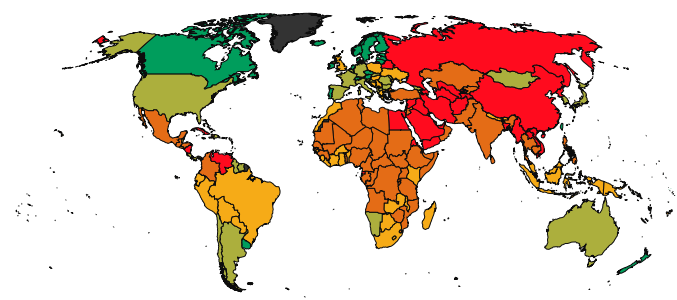
Five countries have upgraded ratings in 2023, although, as in previous years, the situation for civil society in these countries continues to be challenging. Libya moved from the closed to the repressed category. Benin, Lesotho and Madagascar have moved from the repressed to the obstructed category. Notably, Timor-Leste has joined the narrowed category. Regional sections describe the conditions that led to ratings changes.



# TACTICS OF REPRESSION

Of the three freedoms tracked on the CIVICUS Monitor, freedom of expression is most commonly targeted by state and non-state sources, accounting for around half of the total violations recorded. Intimidation was the most featured violation during the reporting period, with almost 65 per cent of intimidation incidents targeted against journalists and media outlets. Other freedom of expression violations recorded are censorship and detention of journalists.

States also regularly violate the right to freedom of peaceful assembly through the detention of protesters and the use of excessive force. Other commonly reported violations on the CIVICUS Monitor are incidents of harassment against human rights defenders (HRDs) and journalists and the detention and prosecution of civil society activists.



# TOP TEN VIOLATIONS TO CIVIC FREEDOMS

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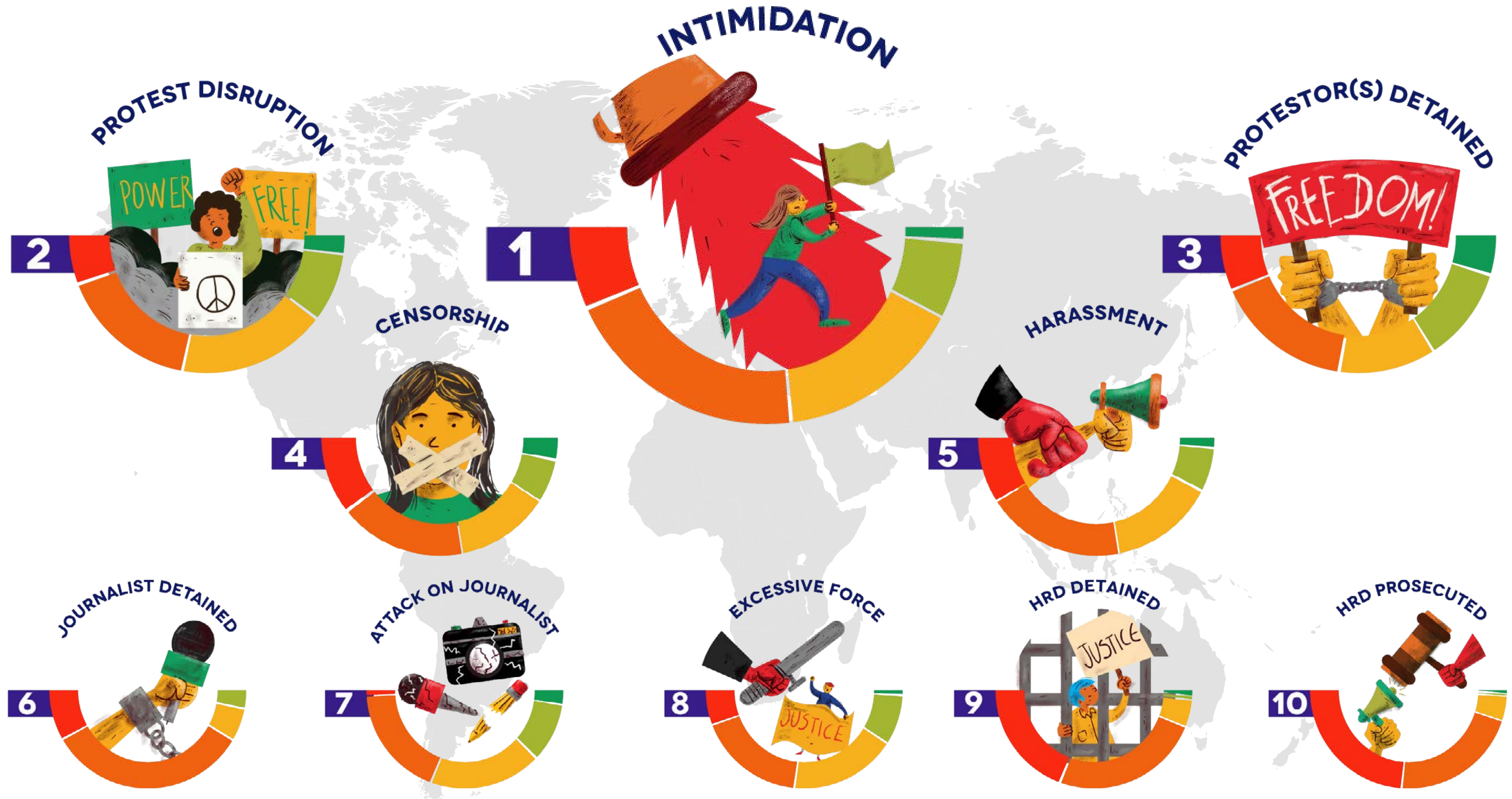
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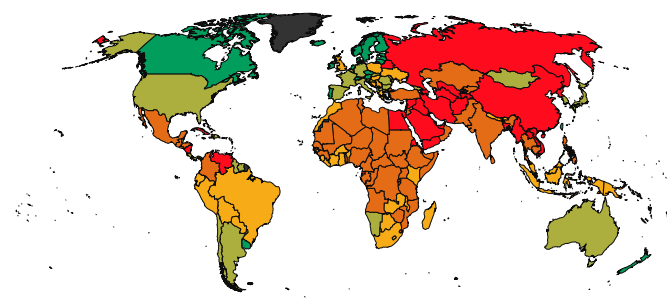
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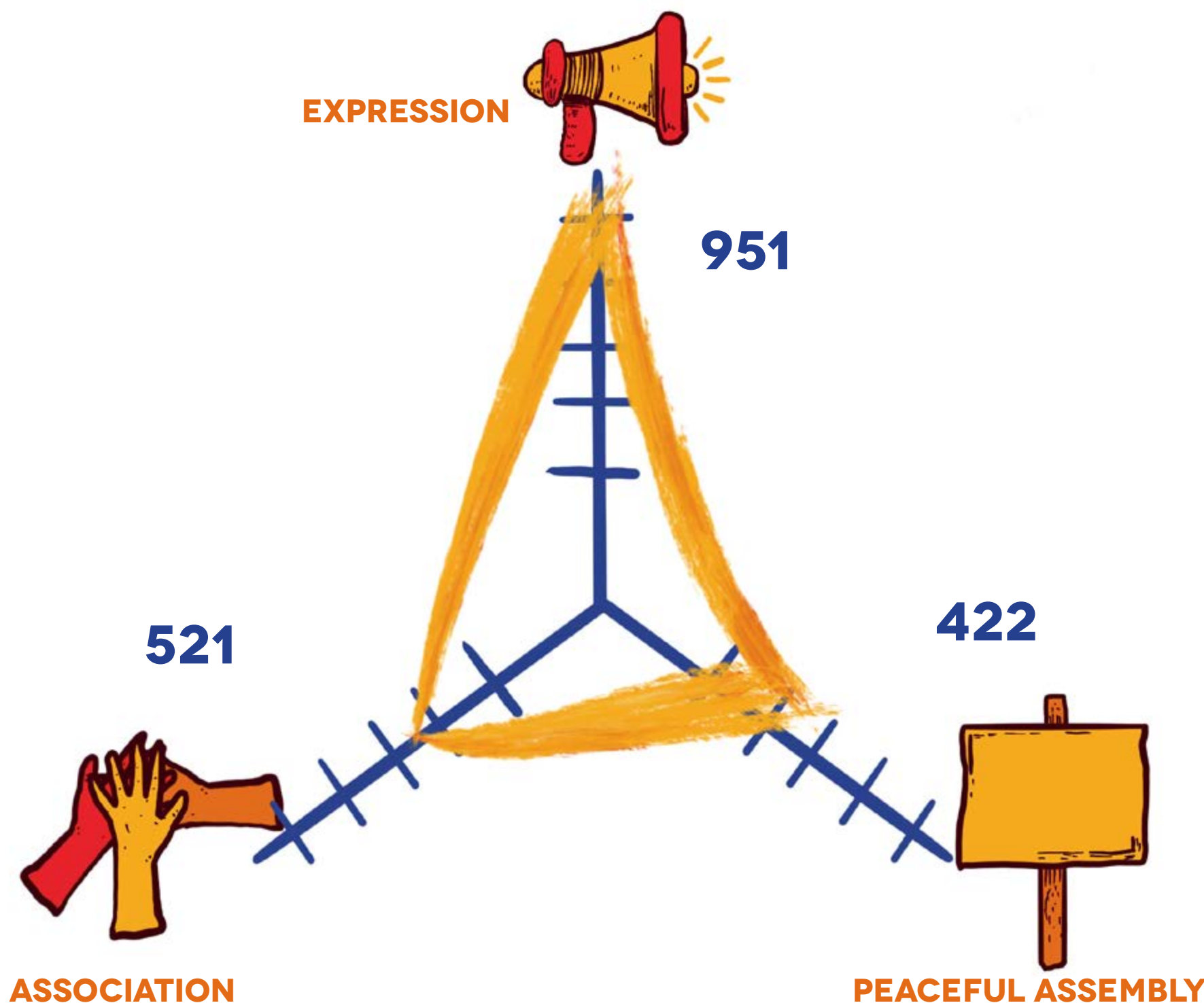
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# FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN DECLINE

Freedom of expression is essential for transparency, accountability and participation, which are the pillars of good governance and participatory democracy. As such, it has become a target, particularly for many authoritarian governments that seek to suppress dissent. This analysis is in alignment with other assessments that show that freedom of expression is the aspect of democracy [undermined](#) the most in autocracies.

The CIVICUS Monitor documented over 950 violations of the right to freedom of expression during the reporting period. According to our analysis, governments use a range of tactics to silence critical voices and free speech, from intimidation of journalists and media outlets to arbitrary detention and attacks on journalists.

## TOTAL VIOLATIONS BY CIVIC FREEDOM



Between 1 November 2022 and 31 October 2023, the CIVICUS Monitor identified more than 2600 incidents related to civic space, with 1898 of them categorised as a violation.

Globally, intimidation is one of the most common tactics used to restrict civic freedoms. Intimidation occurs in a range of forms, including police summons for questioning, threats of arrests and prosecution, public vilification, raids on the homes and offices of HRDs and journalists and online or offline threatening messages from both state and non-state sources. Intimidation was reported in at least 107 countries. Intimidation is particularly used to deter journalists and media outlets from reporting on critical issues, covering protests or speaking out. Our data shows that intimidation is being used more often by states, particularly police and security forces.

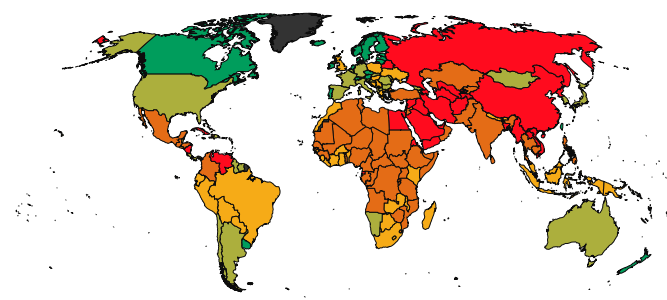
A few cases exemplified this trend. In Indonesia, an improvised explosive device was [detonated](#) outside the house of Papuan journalist Victor Mambor from independent news website Jubi. He has faced ongoing intimidation over his reporting on human rights issues in the Papuan region, home to an independence movement. In Guinea, soldiers [stopped](#) two journalists – Aliou Maci Diallo of Guinée Info and Mamadou Macka Diallo of Guinée 114 – in Bambéto, Conakry. They insulted and threatened them while they reported. In Tunisia, police [raided](#) and searched the house of Mosaïque FM head Nouredine Boutar and arrested him.

Intimidation is often used to prevent the continuation of critical investigation or the publication of information. In Mexico, the police [detained](#) an independent journalist after he attempted to film police officers who threatened him and falsely accused him of a traffic violation. Kenya’s media regulatory authority [threatened](#) to revoke the broadcast licences of six local media outlets for allegedly ‘violating the programming code’ in their coverage of protests.

Censorship is also commonly used to restrict freedom of expression. The CIVICUS Monitor documented this violation in at least 86 countries. Censorship can take many forms, such as bans or suspension of media outlets, bans on the publication of particular content online or offline and internet access shutdowns during critical periods, but the objective is the same: to prevent journalists doing their work and citizens speaking out, expressing dissent and accessing timely information, with dire consequences for the functioning of a democracy. Troublingly, censorship is a tactic used in several countries regardless of the underlying level of respect for civic freedoms.

The use of national regulatory bodies to ban media outlets permanently or temporarily is a common form of censorship across regions. Voice of Democracy, one of the few independent media outlets left in Cambodia, lost its media licence and was [shut down](#) by the Ministry of Information for an article allegedly slandering the government. In Egypt, two news websites, Masr 360 and Soult4, were [blocked](#), reportedly in relation to the content they publish.





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Despite legal and policy gains achieved globally to recognise LGBTQI+ rights, and linked to a backlash that is seeing the criminalisation of LGBTQI+ people and groups in several countries of [Africa](#), some governments actively banned or prevented the dissemination of books, movies, or publications with LGBTQI+-related content. Cameroon’s national media regulator, the National Communication Council, [suspended](#) TV channel Canal+ Elles on accusations of broadcasting programmes that ‘convey obscene practices and homosexual tendencies’. In February 2023, authorities in Kenya [ordered](#) one of Nairobi’s leading bookstores, Text Book Centre, to stop selling the teen book ‘What’s happening to me’, as it states that ‘it is possible to fancy both girls and boys’.

Hostility towards LGBTQI+ people and groups was also documented in other regions. In Lebanon, the Minister of Interior and Municipalities [banned](#) two LGBTQI+ events scheduled for November 2022. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Banja Luka police [banned](#) an indoor movie screening and panel discussion on LGBTQI+ rights. On the scheduled day of the event, dozens of masked people armed with metal bars and bottles attacked the organisers at their secret meeting location.

While not documented exclusively in the region, a common trend in Europe is for governments to prevent journalists covering protests and critical issues such as the treatment of migrants and refugees. In Spain, several journalists were [banned](#) from accessing a Madrid City Council viewpoint to take pictures of a protest staged by healthcare workers. In Italy, the head of the cabinet of the prefecture of Salerno [prohibited](#) journalists from filming or photographing migrants arriving in the port city.

Emboldened by widespread impunity, states and non-state sources have used more violent tactics to suppress dissent. The CIVICUS Monitor documented attacks against journalists in at least 66 countries and arbitrary detention in 67.

Attacks against journalists were documented both in countries with strong civic space protections and those with more repressed civic space. In Nigeria, at least 10 unidentified people [punched](#) and used sticks to beat a TV crew from Arise TV – correspondent Oba Adeoye, camera operator Opeyemi Adenihun and driver Yusuf Hassan – after the crew used a drone at voting stations in Lagos state. In Sudan, freelance journalist Shamael Elnoor [was beaten](#) by military forces with rubber hoses while covering a protest. In the USA, a reporter with the Binghamton Press & Sun-Bulletin [was pepper-sprayed](#) by police while covering a protest in Johnson City, New York. In Maldives, a Channel 13 media worker and Sangu News journalist were physically [assaulted](#) by Maldivian police while covering an opposition protest in

Malé’s Republic Square. In Germany, officers [beat](#) and pepper sprayed a journalist covering an environmental protest in Lützerath, despite him being accredited with police.

In comparison, the arbitrary detention of journalists is most commonly used in repressed countries and rarely documented in those rated as open or narrowed.

In Uganda, police officers [arrested](#) freelance journalist Andrew Arinaitwe while covering a story on claims of sexual abuse by teachers in Ugandan boarding schools, including at Kings College Budo. In India, Anjay Rana, 19-year-old reporter for the privately owned newspaper Moradabad Ujala from Uttar Pradesh state, was [arrested](#) after he questioned a local minister from the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party about unfulfilled promises made by the government.

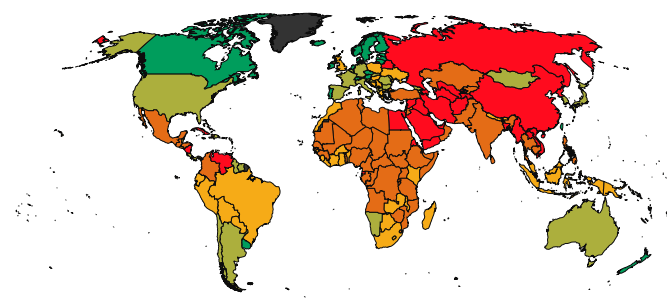
In Poland, while covering a climate protest, photojournalist Maciej Piasecki was [violently arrested](#), had his camera confiscated and was taken to a police station for questioning for ‘violating a police officer’s bodily integrity’; the officer fell while dragging Piasecki to the ground by the neck. Moroccan security forces [arrested](#) blogger Yassin Benchekroun on charges of ‘insulting legally organised and other constitutional institutions and disrespecting judicial decisions’.

## RIGHT TO PROTEST: A CONTINUOUS TARGET

People protest to express their dissent, raise awareness and mobilise for change. In many countries in 2023, people took to the streets in response and opposition to government actions, to raise awareness about climate change and demand action, to demand better working conditions and to protest against the increased cost of living, among many other reasons. The common denominator is the response by authorities to the protests.

The right to peaceful assembly is usually exercised when other rights are being violated. People take to the streets to demand rights, yet states usually ignore these rightful demands and instead disrupt protests. Those who take to the streets to show disapproval of government political decisions or those demanding action on climate and the environment are most commonly repressed.

According to CIVICUS Monitor data, states and non-state sources have used



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excessive force and the detention of peaceful protesters as the most common tactics to disperse protests. During the reporting period, more than 200 protests were disrupted by authorities. Protests were disrupted in no less than 85 countries around the world. In at least 69, excessive force was used as a tactic to prevent people fully exercising their right to peaceful assembly. In almost 40 per cent of disrupted protests, authorities used both excessive force and the arbitrary detention of protesters.

In Bangladesh, there have been mass arrests of opposition supporters taking part in protests and fabricated cases have been filed against them. Police and mobs of ruling party supporters have also attacked [protesters](#) with live ammunition, teargas, rubber bullets and sticks. In Sri Lanka, police used [water cannon](#) to disperse ethnic Tamil protesters in January 2023, as they rallied against President Ranil Wickremesinghe's visit to their district.

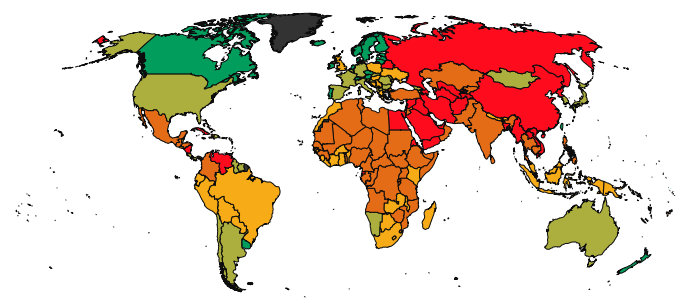
In Bolivia, police [repressed](#) a protest from a group of HRDs who gathered to demand respect for democracy and the defence of human rights. In Hungary, when students, teachers and opposition members of parliament (MPs) gathered in Budapest to protest against the proposed 'revenge law' that places new restrictions on teachers, police intervened aggressively to prevent them, dragging away several MPs and using teargas to [disperse](#) the protest.

Numerous instances in the Africa region highlight the challenges faced by opposition groups and leaders when attempting to voice dissent. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), security forces [dispersed](#) a peaceful protest organised by a coalition of opposition parties, causing injuries to at least 30 people. In Chad, the authorities [prohibited](#) a planned protest by the political party Mouvement Révolutionnaire pour la Démocratie et la Paix (Revolutionary Movement for Democracy and Peace), citing potential risks to public order. In Senegal, the conviction of opposition leader Ousmane Sonko led to [deadly protests](#) and clashes with security forces.

An ongoing trend is the repression of environmental protests. In Panama, mass protests [erupted](#) in October following the approval of Law 406, which granted mining rights to the Minera Panamá copper mine. The police used teargas and weapons to disperse the demonstration and arrested 30 people. Extinction Rebellion activists in the Netherlands protested against fossil fuel subsidies, resulting in numerous [detentions](#). In Australia, Blockade Australia activists faced [arrests](#) for protests against climate inaction, highlighting discontent over the government's response to the climate crisis.



The CIVICUS Monitor recorded excessive force in at least 69 countries from November 1st 2022 to October 31st 2023.



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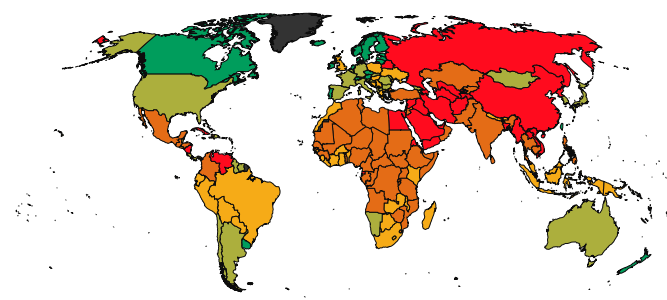
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In Vietnam, police armed with batons and shields [dispersed](#) dozens of members of the Ede ethnic group who were attempting to block a drainage project they feared would discharge waste water into a lake they depend on. Similar situations were documented in [Argentina](#), [Belgium](#), [Germany](#), [New Zealand](#) and the [Philippines](#).

Concerningly, 18 per cent of protests disrupted with excessive force resulted in the killing of at least one protester. In Peru, in protests that [erupted](#) after the dismissal of President Pedro Castillo in December 2022, over 60 people died in clashes between the police, military and protesters. In Senegal, dozens were [killed](#) after protests sparked by the indictment and arrest of Ousmane Sonko.

In the face of this repression, people continue to mobilise to defy restrictions and make their voices heard. In Afghanistan, women [continue](#) to protest even when facing brutal responses by the Taliban. In August 2023, a small group gathered to demand the right to education ahead of the second anniversary of Taliban rule. In Myanmar, activists [continue](#) to mobilise against the military junta. In Iran, after the 2022 severe crackdown by the authorities on widespread protests, women [continue](#) to fight for their rights, even while in detention: in September 2023, courageous women prisoners of conscience staged a sit-in at Evin Prison.



# WHO BEARS THE BRUNT?

Violations against HRDs often stem from their unwavering dedication to defending human rights and social justice. Among the worst-affected people are HRDs advocating for democracy and better governance and climate and environmental defenders. Women fighting for their rights in closed and repressed countries are also often the target of violations; this is at times compounded by gender-based discrimination, making their struggle all the more challenging and courageous.

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Climate and environmental defenders, driven by the urgent need for a sustainable future, stand out as one of the groups that face significant hurdles. Examples abound of restrictions on environmental activists, a trend seen increasingly in European countries that have otherwise relatively enabling civic spaces.

In May, German police [raided](#) the homes of activists from the Last Generation climate movement, intensifying scrutiny of the group. [Surveillance](#) of Last Generation activists was confirmed by the Munich public prosecutor's office in June. In Mongolia, an HRD was the target of [judicial harassment](#), repeatedly sued

by a mining company after he requested a halt to its operations and the revocation of its licence.

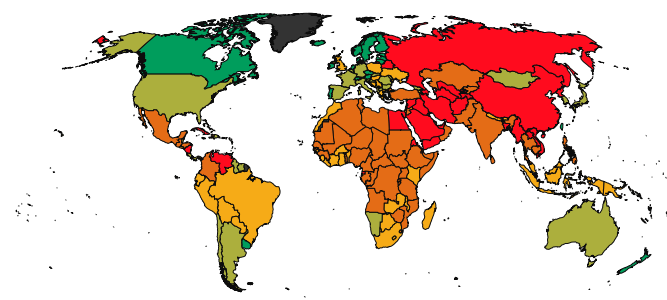
Other HRDs advocate for climate justice in a less enabling environment. Their efforts, in countries where their work is met with hostility and faces more severe violations, often takes place in the shadows of repression. In the Philippines, environmental activists have been [abducted](#) and [targeted](#) for their activism. In Iraq, an environmental activist was forcibly [abducted](#), tortured and moved between locations, raising concerns about activists' safety.

Latin America remains one of the most dangerous regions for environmental defenders: it is the only region where the killing of HRDs is listed in the top five civic space violations. In Honduras, two environmental defenders were shot and [killed](#) while resisting a mining project. In Mexico, environmental activists were brutally [killed](#), and in Colombia, an environmental leader was shot [dead](#). These targeted assaults suggest premeditation.

Activists who express political dissent and advocate for democracy and better governance are also a common target of restrictions. Unlike environmental

Honduras: People gathered to honor environmental defenders killed in Guapinol, Honduras. January 2023 (Photo: Guapinol Despierta/Facebook)





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defenders, where violations are widespread across regions, these violations are rare in countries with enabling civic space, typically occurring in repressed or closed countries, particularly in Africa and Asia.

In Senegal, Ousmane Sonko was [arrested](#) in July 2023 on charges of fomenting an insurrection and undermining state security, among other charges, in relation to deadly protests in [March 2021](#) and [June 2023](#), while his political party, Parti Patriotes Africaines du Sénégal pour le Travail, l’Ethique et la Fraternité (African Patriots of Senegal for Work, Ethics and Fraternity, PASTEF) was [dissolved](#) by the authorities.

Tinashe Chitsunge, an opposition Citizens Coalition for Change activist in Zimbabwe, was allegedly [stoned to death](#) by people affiliated with the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party. The incident occurred as Chitsunge attempted to escape from a suspected ZANU-PF mob that was assaulting opposition activists gathered for a rally.

Examples abound around Asia. In a series of concerning developments, people expressing dissenting views in China were handed severe sentences. Xie Wenfei, a vocal critic of the government and supporter of the Hong Kong democracy movement, received a four-and-a-half-year [jail term](#) for ‘picking quarrels and stirring up trouble’ while democracy activist Yang Maodong was [sentenced](#) to eight years on subversion charges for advocating for rights and freedoms over two decades. Civil society activist Xu Zhiyong was sentenced to 14 years in prison for subversion after he [criticised](#) President Xi Jinping. These incidents underscore the challenges faced by those expressing dissenting opinions or advocating for political change in China.



In Thailand, government critics continued to face severe consequences for alleged royal defamation. For example, young activist Phimchanok Jaihong received a two-year



[prison](#) sentence for a Facebook post criticising the government and an unspecified institution, presumed to refer to the monarchy. Meanwhile, in Vietnam, a court sentenced activist Phan Son Tung to six years in [prison](#) in July 2023 for advocating for the formation of an opposition to the ruling Communist Party of Vietnam.

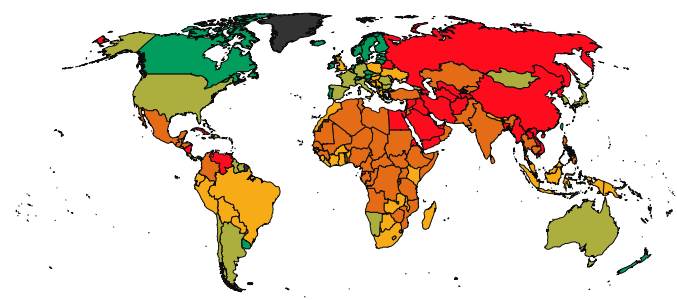
Defenders of women’s rights repeatedly faced violations, particularly in less enabling civic spaces, as in Afghanistan and countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The homes of women HRDs in Afghanistan have been continuously raided by the Taliban, particularly the homes of those involved in protests. Often, they are subjected to interrogations and [coercive tactics](#) to prevent media interaction and future protest involvement.

In Iran, the first anniversary of Mahsa Amini’s death in custody after her arrest for allegedly wearing an ‘improper’ hijab saw a new wave of [detentions](#). HRDs, mostly women, are being held on charges of ‘spreading propaganda against the state’ and ‘assembly and collusion against national security’.

In Syria, Hiba Ezzideen Al-Hajji and the Equity & Empowerment Organisation faced [death threats and defamation](#) for defending women’s rights. In Saudi Arabia, Manahel Al-Otaibi, an activist calling for women’s rights, was [arrested](#), and her sisters faced persecution, while Salma Al-Shehab received a harsh 27-year prison sentence for her online advocacy.



Iran: Flowers are seen on a portrait of Mahsa Amini during a demonstration in her support in front of the Iranian embassy (Photo by Kenzo Tribouillard/AFP)



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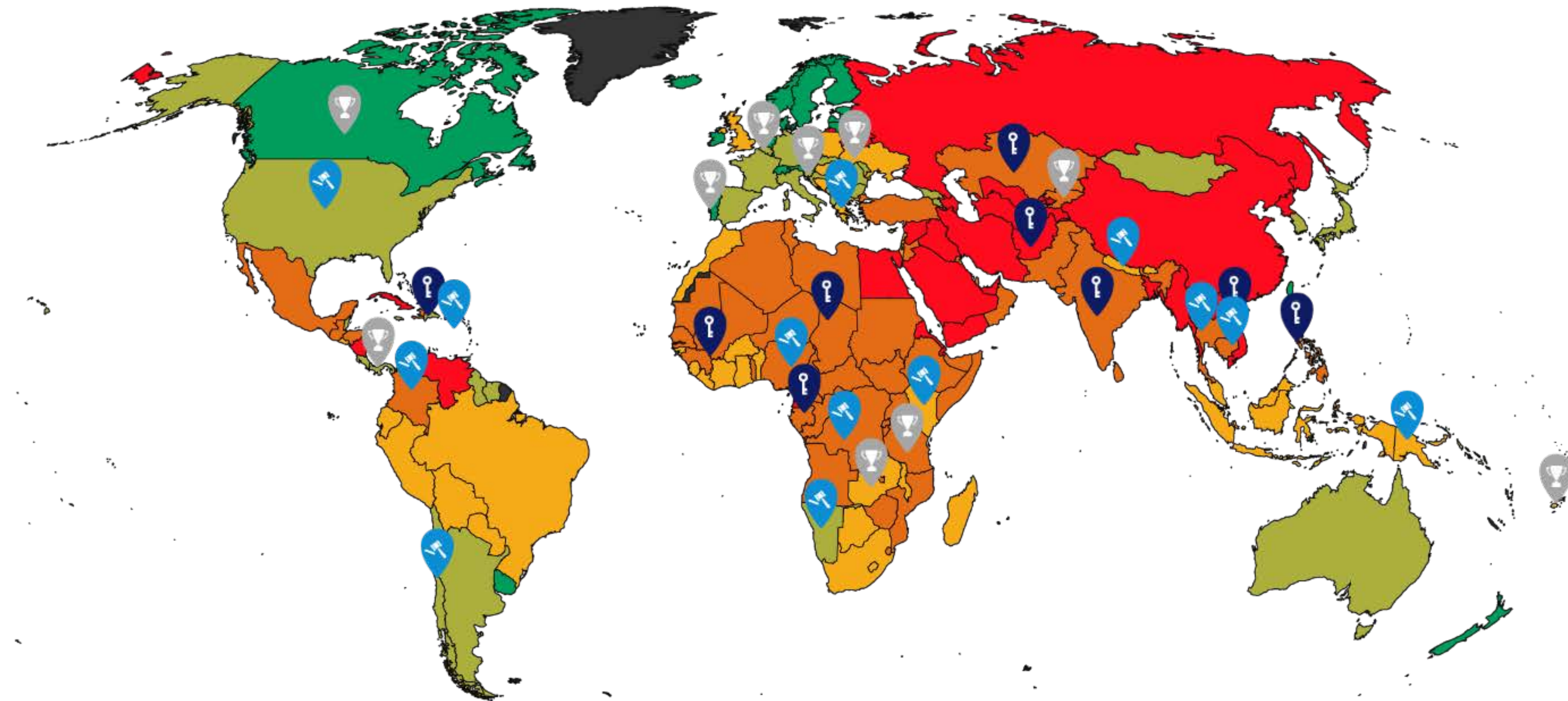
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# BRIGHT SPOTS

During 2023, the CIVICUS Monitor also documented several instances where civic space is opening up and states are making progress in improving their respect for civic freedoms. Civil society victories show civil society action continues to be a powerful and effective means of defending rights and advocating for their realisation. These bright spots are not confined to countries with open civic space or those experiencing upgrades. Alongside these positive developments, there were cases where victories served as corrective measures for past injustices against civil society, revealing a complex landscape of both progress and challenges.



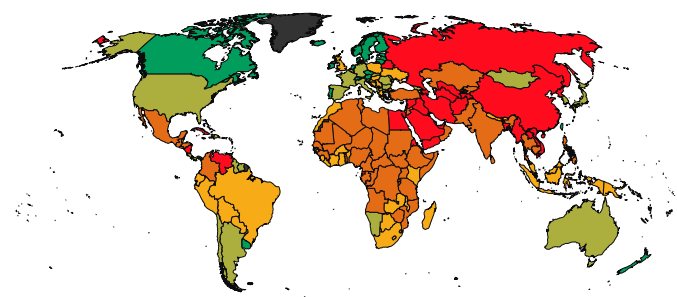
POSITIVE COURT RULING



RELEASE OR ACQUITTAL OF HRD



CIVIL SOCIETY VICTORIES



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# CIVIL SOCIETY VICTORIES

Civil society organisations (CSOs) continue to work even in the most challenging circumstances, pushing back and scoring some victories as a result of sustained advocacy. Despite adverse civic space conditions, some gains were made through civil society efforts such as legal protection for HRDs, lifting of media bans and outlawing of hate speech.

One clear example in Tajikistan was the adoption of the [National Human Rights Strategy](#) and its first action plan on 5 August 2023. Despite the overall deteriorating human rights situation in Tajikistan, the government’s decision to adopt this strategy indicated a recognition that there are significant human rights challenges and a willingness to take steps to address them. The groundwork for this strategy was laid in 2017, and the process involved close collaboration between the governmental working group and CSOs. Many of the recommendations put forward by CSOs during the development process were incorporated into the final document.

Another positive development was the approval of the [Platform for Dialogue and Civic Participation in the Decision-making Process of the Parliament](#) in Moldova. This initiative aims to enhance civil society involvement in decision-making by creating a permanent parliamentary platform for dialogue with civil society and to facilitate its participation in policy-making, following a participatory process including public debate.

During 2023 Costa Rica embarked on a journey to combat hate speech and discrimination. The announcement of a [National Strategy against Hate Speech and Discrimination](#), in partnership with the United Nations (UN), demonstrated a comprehensive effort involving diverse stakeholders. This will be Latin America’s first-ever anti-hate strategy. In the DRC, the passing of the [Law on the Protection and Responsibility of Human Rights Defenders](#) marked a historic step in safeguarding those at the forefront of human rights advocacy. This victory, a culmination of efforts dating back to 2010, showed the resilience of civil society in the face of formidable challenges.

In a positive step for press freedom in Fiji, parliament voted to [repeal a restrictive media law](#) that gave wide powers of investigation over journalists and media outlets. In another win for freedom of expression, President Hakainde Hichilema of Zambia [assented](#) to the Penal Code (Amendment) Bill 25 of 2022 in December 2022, repealing section 69 of the Code that criminalised defamation of the president. In May 2023, the Federal Court in Abuja, Nigeria [barred](#) the national broadcasting regulator, the

National Broadcasting Commission, from imposing fines on broadcast stations.

In the early days of 2023, President Samia Suluhu of Tanzania, in a gathering with political party leaders, [revoked a prohibition on political rallies](#) that had been in place for six years. During the meeting, President Suluhu emphasised the importance of creating a conducive atmosphere for opposition critique of the government. Although Tanzania’s civic space continues to be repressed, this move was part of a series of positive developments in fostering a more enabling civic space since President Suluhu assumed power. She has also urged the [lifting of media bans](#) imposed by former president John Magufuli and committed to working with the media to enhance [press freedom](#). Suluhu has also engaged with exiled [opposition leaders](#) who fled Tanzania due to threats on their lives and assured them it would be safe to return.

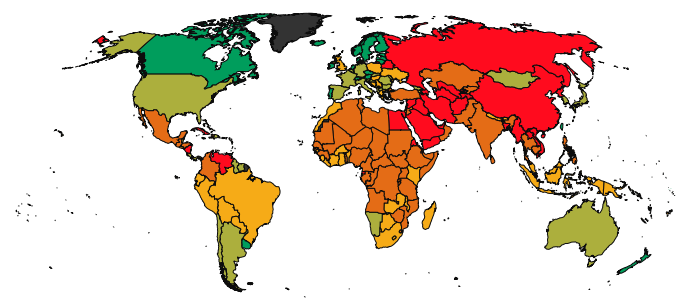
Persistent civil society efforts for climate justice in Albania brought significant results. The abandonment of plans for [hydroelectric power plants](#) marked a landmark victory, a culmination of years of environmental protests against the proposed plants and infrastructure projects. In Papua New Guinea, a court ruling established that a mining company seeking approval for a copper and gold mine must secure [prior consent](#) from the affected communities, offering a noteworthy development in pushing for responsible business practices by extractive industries.

There were also some bright spots on LGBTQI+ rights. Following a 10-year battle by activists and human rights groups, a five-judge bench of the Supreme Court of Kenya confirmed the decisions of the High Court and Court of Appeal to [permit the registration](#) of the National Gay & Lesbian Human Rights Commission (NGLHRC) as a non-governmental organisation (NGO), arguing it was unconstitutional and discriminatory to deny registration on the basis of the sexual orientation of the applicants. In Nepal, the Supreme Court instructed the government to [recognise](#) the same-sex foreign spouses of Nepali citizens.

# SIGNS OF PROGRESS

During 2023 efforts were also made to rectify past injustices and hold perpetrators accountable for their violations. These marginal improvements in the context of repression are some bright spots that should be recognised.

In March 2023, a significant development came in Chad as 64 people, previously sentenced for their involvement in demonstrations against the extension of military rule, known as the ‘Black Thursday’ protests, were granted [release](#) from prison after receiving a presidential pardon. The following month a further 259 protesters



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were [released](#). In Burundi, the authorities [acquitted](#) and subsequently released five HRDs involved in the Association of Women Jurists in Burundi and the Association for Peace and Promotion of Human Rights. In Rwanda, March 2023 saw the [release](#) of a prominent government critic. The authorities commuted his 25-year sentence on terrorism charges, signalling a hopeful development in the country’s repressive legal landscape. In the Philippines, the courts [acquitted](#) 10 HRDs who had faced over two years in jail on perjury charges.

When it comes to accountability for past abuses, in the Dominican Republic, two law enforcement officers were [sentenced](#) to four years and nine months in prison for abusing their authority in the arbitrary arrest and assault of a journalist in September 2022. In another case, in St Vincent and the Grenadines, the High Court directed three detectives and the Attorney General to [compensate](#) a prison officer for wrongful arrest and imprisonment in May 2020. The officer, an opposition activist, filed a lawsuit asserting unjust detention for approximately 32 hours without criminal charges, following an unauthorised attempt to search his home linked to a social media post. In Thailand, the Civil Court ordered the police to [pay damages](#) to two reporters shot with rubber bullets while covering a protest in July 2021.

Despite challenging circumstances, the sustained efforts of rights advocates demonstrate the crucial role of civil society in serving as a check on excessive government control and a counter to repression.

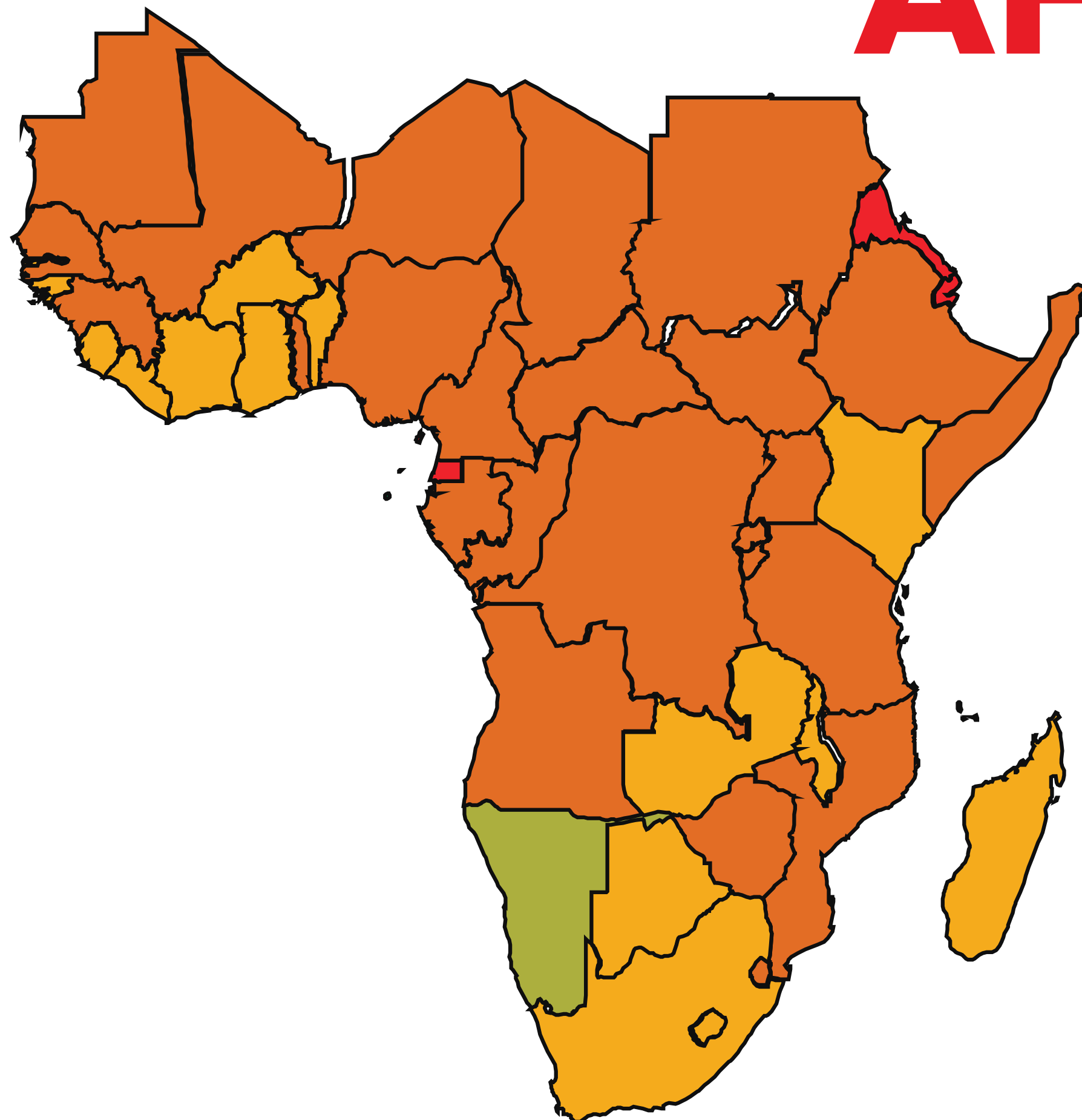
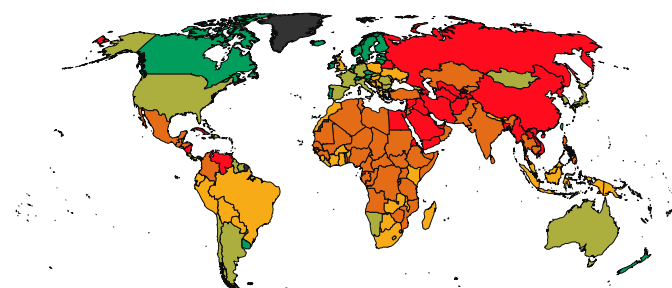
Rwanda: Callixte Nsabimana alias “Sankara”(C) arrives at the Court of Appeal escorted by wardens from the Rwanda Correctional Services. (Photo by Simon Wohlhart / AFP)







# AFRICA



## RATING OVERVIEW

Civic space conditions in Africa South of the Sahara remain highly restrictive: 45 out of 50 countries and territories are rated as obstructed, repressed, or closed. This means that the vast majority of people in Africa South of the Sahara face significant restrictions in exercising civic space freedoms. Civic space is open only in the island states of Cabo Verde and São Tomé e Príncipe, while Mauritius, Namibia and Seychelles have narrowed civic space.

The civic space rating for Senegal has been downgraded to repressed as civic space violations have [multiplied](#) ahead of presidential elections, set to take place in February 2024. While President Macky Sall finally decided in July 2023 not to run for a third term, the judicial prosecution of Ousmane Sonko, perceived by the opposition to be politically motivated, has [sparked](#) protests and unrest, which authorities and security forces have severely repressed. In this context, civic space violations have intensified, including the use of excessive and lethal force against opposition protests, arbitrary arrests of journalists, the restriction of internet and social media access, including the suspension of TikTok, the suspension of media outlets and the dissolution of the opposition party PASTEF.

Benin's civic space rating has been upgraded to obstructed as the severe civic space violations that led to its [downgrade](#) in May 2021, surrounding legislative and presidential elections, have not recurred. However, as the current rating suggests, HRDs in Benin noted that they continue to self-censor due to an atmosphere of fear of reprisals.

Lesotho has been upgraded from repressed to obstructed. A new government formed after the newly established Revolution for Prosperity party won competitive October 2022 parliamentary elections. It promises a more stable political environment with hope for an expansion of civic freedoms. However, police brutality, including during protests, remains an issue of grave concern. Other protest and media restrictions continue to be [documented](#) as key violations.

Our data shows an improvement in some indicators in Madagascar, accounting for the change in rating from repressed to obstructed. However, recent [repression](#) of opposition protests ahead of Madagascar's November 2023 presidential elections highlights that civic space conditions remain challenging and volatile.

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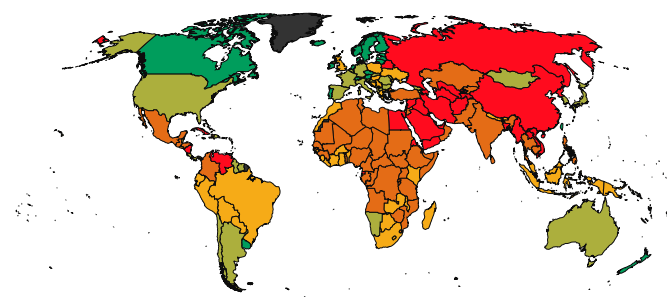
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# REGIONAL TRENDS

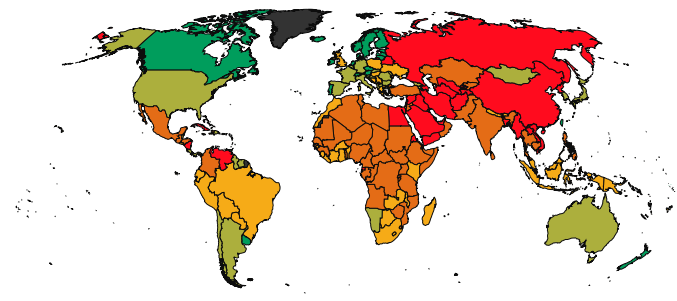
In West Africa, press freedom violations soared in the past year, including in countries ruled by military juntas. Following coups in Burkina Faso, Guinea and Mali, Niger [experienced](#) a military coup in July 2023, which was followed by repression of peaceful dissent, including the arrest of renowned activist and journalist Samira Sabou. Authorities in Senegal repressed opposition protests, arrested journalists, suspended media outlets and restricted internet and social media access in a context of heightened political tension ahead of the presidential elections. People in Nigeria [continue](#) to be faced with restrictions on their rights to protest and speak out, and the situation in [Togo](#) remains the same, with no progress made to improve civic space conditions.

In Central Africa, civic space remains affected by armed conflict, weak rule of law, impunity and entrenched authoritarian governments. In Gabon, controversial August 2023 general elections, surrounded by civic space violations, were [followed](#) by a military coup. In Cameroon, a crackdown on critical journalists was intensified through the [killing](#) of journalists, including popular radio journalist Arsène Salomon Mbani Zogo, also known as Martinez Zogo. A constitutional referendum in the Central African Republic, which removed the two-term limit for presidents, [took place](#) amid civic space violations, including threats, intimidation, harassment and public vilification.

The East and Horn of Africa reported the highest number of incidents involving the detention of journalists across the continent, with cases documented in Somalia in each country update during the year. A similar trend was observed in Somaliland, while in Ethiopia, journalists continued to face restrictions in the context of conflict because of their war-related reporting. Protest disruption remains a major cause for concern in Kenya, with incidents being reported in each of the country's updates during the year. In Uganda, a new [anti-LGBTQ+ law](#) drew worldwide condemnation, while the government's [fulfilment](#) of its threat to shut down operations of the office of the UN High Commission for Human Rights in the country raised concerns about the government's commitment to human rights.



Niger: Nigerien soldiers stand guard as supporters of Niger's National Council of Safeguard of the Homeland (CNSP) protest outside the Niger and French airbase in Niamey on September 2023 (Photo by AFP/ via Getty Images)



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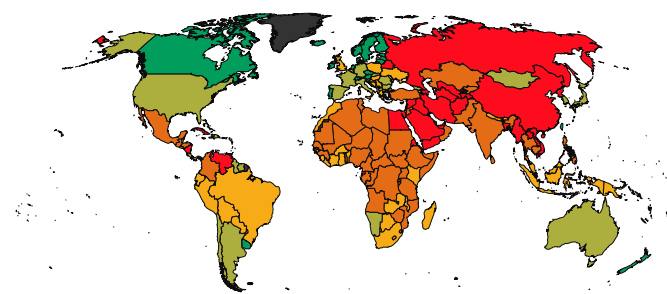
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In Southern Africa, the plight of HRDs and whistleblowers remains a matter of grave concern as they face increasing threats, intimidation and killings because of their human rights work. In Eswatini, democracy activists continue to face systematic [targeting](#) for their work, expressed most viciously in the killing of prominent human rights lawyer Thulani Maseko, shot at his home in front of his wife and children in January 2023. In Lesotho and South Africa, the brutal cold-blooded murders of investigative journalist [Ralikonelo Jokland](#) and human rights activist [Jomo Keromeng](#) also added to a worrying trend in the region. Violence was often accompanied by [threats](#) of violence against HRDs and [public vilification](#) of CSOs by public figures, as documented in [Eswatini](#) and South Africa.





# CIVIC SPACE RESTRICTIONS

In Africa South of the Sahara, the detention of journalists was the top civic space violation over the past year followed by intimidation, protest disruption, excessive use of force and attacks on journalists.

## TOP 5 VIOLATIONS TO CIVIC FREEDOMS FOR AFRICA REGION



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# DETENTION OF JOURNALISTS

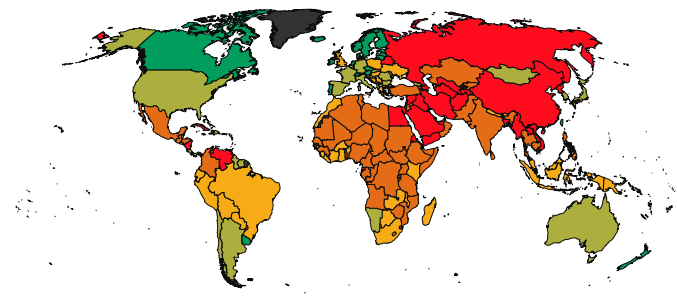
The most common violation, detention of journalists, was documented in at least 24 countries in Africa South of the Sahara. Journalists were also frequently physically attacked, the fifth most common civic space violation in the region, documented in at least 18 countries.

This is the fourth consecutive year that the detention of journalists has featured in the top three civic space violations in Africa South of the Sahara. Journalists have been detained due to their reporting on corruption and conflict, topics deemed to be sensitive or insulting to the authorities, or while reporting on protests or in the context of contested elections.

In some countries, including the DRC, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Somalia and Somaliland, the arrest of journalists remains a tactic commonly used by the authorities to silence and intimidate them. Ethiopia, Somalia and Somaliland particularly stand out under this theme, as journalists continue to operate in violent and volatile political environments. On 17 August 2023, police in Ethiopia [arrested](#) Yidnekachew Kebede, founder and editor of YouTube-based outlet Negari TV. A few days later when he appeared in court, police accused him of aiding 'anti-peace elements' and producing content 'with the intent of provoking violence'. Prior to his arrest, Yidnekachew had criticised the state of emergency and denounced the detention of political activists and civilians on Facebook. A court released him on bail on 1 September 2023.



Ethiopia: Yidnekachew Kebede of Negari TV (left) interviews Abay Zewdu of Amhara Media Center in August 2023. (Screenshot: YouTube/Negari TV)



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# #FreeStanis

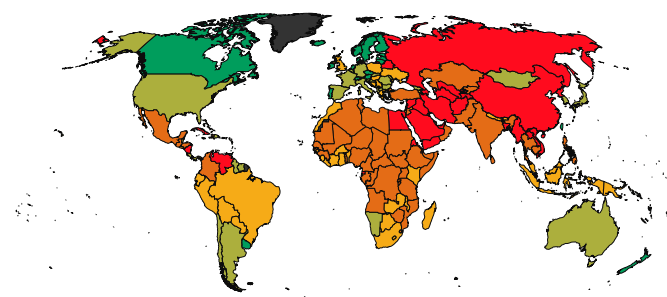


Civil Society Campaign to free Stanis Bujakera Tshiamala

On 15 August 2023, the Maroodi Jeh court [sentenced](#) Somali-British journalist Busharo Ali Mohamed to a one-year prison sentence, despite the absence of substantial evidence of wrongdoing, for having actively covered Somaliland’s declining democracy and having referred to the current leader as ‘autocratic’. She was reportedly [subjected](#) to torture following her arrest on 15 May 2023.

Although the DRC’s new press law, [adopted](#) by the National Assembly in April 2023, is a step forward from the restrictive 1996 law, it still allows space for the authorities to criminalise journalism, as does the newly adopted Digital Code. On 8 September 2023 at Kinshasa N’djili airport, police officers [detained](#) renowned journalist Stanis Bujakera Tshiamala, deputy publication director of news site actualité.cd and correspondent for Jeune Afrique and Reuters, on accusations of ‘spreading false rumours’ and ‘disseminating false information’ under the Penal and Digital Codes. This came in response to an article published in Jeune Afrique, which did not name him as author, alleging that a report by the DRC’s National Intelligence Service claims that military intelligence officers were involved in the kidnapping and murder of opposition MP Chérubin Okende Senga, who was found dead on 13 July 2023. In Nigeria, journalists [continue](#) to be arrested and prosecuted, particularly for alleged cybercrimes and defamation.

Journalists have been targeted with arrests for reporting on corruption and topics considered sensitive or unfavourable to the authorities. In Senegal, authorities arrested and prosecuted several journalists for their reporting or editorials on the ongoing prosecution of Ousmane Sonko. On 29 July 2023, police [arrested](#) journalist Pape Alé Niang, who works for news site Dakar Matin, on accusations of having called for an insurrection in the comments he made during a live broadcast about Ousmane Sonko’s arrest. He was granted provisional release on 8 August 2023. This was the third time Niang had been [arrested](#) since November 2022. In South Sudan, officers of the National Security Service [arrested](#) six journalists from the South Sudan Broadcasting Corporation on 3 January 2023 for reportedly releasing a video of President Salva Kiir urinating on himself, which went viral on social media.



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Journalists are often detained, albeit mostly briefly, while reporting on protests or public meetings, particularly those repressed and dispersed by security forces. In Zambia, police officers [detained](#) Millennium TV journalists Abel Musonda and Namu Phiri while covering an opposition protest in Lusaka. In Guinea, presidential guard members stationed at the Office of the Prime Minister [violently detained](#) Ibrahima Foulamory Bah, journalist for the independent online newspaper *Courrier de Conakry*, as he covered an anti-military junta protest on 9 May 2023. Security officers examined Bah's phone and photographed him before releasing him. In Kenya, security officers briefly [detained](#) two journalists from media outlet *Africa Uncensored* while they covered an opposition protest over the rising cost of living on 27 March 2023. That day, several other journalists covering the protests in Nairobi and other parts of the country were subjected to harassment, violent attacks and confiscation of equipment.

Journalists were also detained in [Angola](#), [Botswana](#), [Chad](#), [The Gambia](#), [Mozambique](#), [Togo](#) and [Uganda](#).



Uganda: Journalists are seen while being attacked at the headquarters of the Forum for Democratic Change in Kampala, Uganda. July 2023 (Photo: Nile Post)

## INTIMIDATION

Intimidation was the second most common civic space violation in Africa South of the Sahara documented in Monitor updates during the reporting period, observed in at least 30 countries.

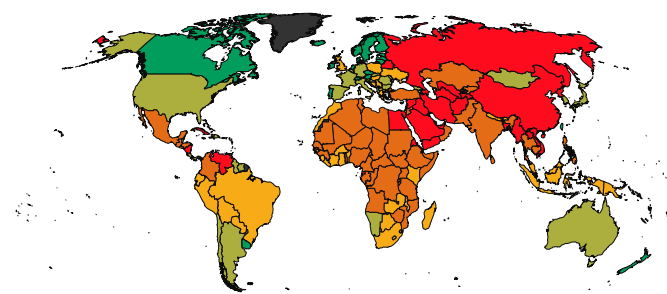
Police and judicial authorities regularly use the summoning of journalists and HRDs for questioning as a tactic to discourage and intimidate critical voices. In Tanzania, police [summoned](#) lawyer Boniface Mwabukusi on 12 July 2023 for co-hosting a news conference in Dar es Salaam protesting at an agreement for the management of the country's ports.

Threats, including death threats, and cyberbullying are used as tactics to try to silence dissenting voices. In Lesotho, journalist Ralikonelo Joki, known for his investigative reporting on subjects such as corruption and the government, was assassinated on 14 May 2023, and before then had [received](#) at least three death threats from different Facebook accounts in March and April 2023 as a result of his reporting.

In Burkina Faso, professional media organisations [denounced](#) the increasing number of journalists subjected to death threats in a context where some media outlets have been demonised and targeted as anti-patriots, terrorists, or working for terrorists. Following the publication of an article in the *Libération* newspaper alleging the involvement of military officers in the killing of children and adolescents on 27 March 2023, a well-organised smear campaign, using a bogus media network, [targeted](#) several Burkinabé journalists, including Hyacinthe Sanou and Lamine Traoré.

In Uganda, Sara Akello, an environmental HRD from Tapac sub-county, [highlighted](#), in a petition submitted to Moroto district local government calling for action against widespread environmental degradation, that their activism to combat destructive mining activities had exposed them to threats.

In conflict areas, such as eastern DRC, armed groups have also intimidated journalists and media outlets. On 14 February 2023, the armed rebel group M23, which controls parts of Rutshuru Territory, North Kivu province, [summoned](#) the heads of broadcast media operating in the area, accused them of 'inciting hatred' and ordered them to change their editorial line. M23 ordered the media outlets to broadcast a weekly programme, led by an M23 member, and prohibited the retransmission of a popular radio station and programme produced in Goma by journalists who have fled the area. Meanwhile, the national media regulator, the



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High Council for Broadcasting and Communication, threatened media outlets with legal proceedings for complying with M23 orders.

There have been several cases of public officials or law enforcement officials publicly threatening journalists and HRDs with arrests or worse. On 21 January 2023, King Mswati of Eswatini [warned](#) democracy activists in the country ‘not to shed tears’ about ‘mercenaries killing them’, just hours before Thulani Maseko was assassinated. This was not the first time King Mswati had issued a stern warning against dissenting voices. In South Africa, Gwede Mantashe, Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy, repeatedly [used](#) public platforms to attack and vilify CSOs and their funders, most recently during an oil and gas conference. Mantashe accused CSOs of being CIA agents with negative agendas to block development in South Africa, in reaction to a High Court ruling that set aside Shell’s coastal seismic surveys following a challenge initiated by CSOs.

Media outlets and HRDs had their offices or houses broken into. On 17 July 2023, unidentified people [stole](#) equipment from the offices of media outlet Ethiopia Insider in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Allegations suggest that the perpetrators selectively took equipment to inflict damage on the company’s video reporting capabilities, a

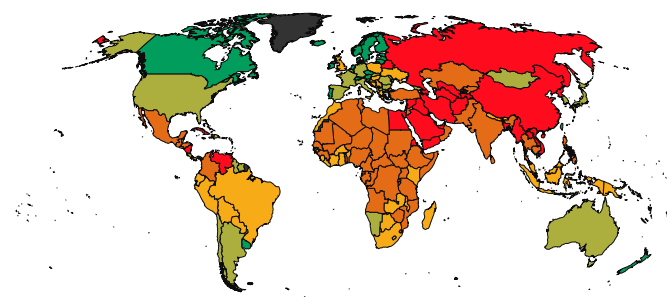
suspicion intensified by the significant pressure the media outlet had previously faced due to its reporting. On 28 March 2023, armed intruders [broke into](#) the home of HRD Dismas Kitenge, president of the CSO Lotus Group, in Kisangani, the DRC. The intruders searched the house for Kitenge, stole valuables and fired into a field in front of the house, threatening to return when they could not find Kitenge. He was also subjected to anonymous death threats and attacks following an interview he gave to the media on 25 March 2023, in which he commented on the appointment of a new government.

## PROTEST DISRUPTION AND USE OF EXCESSIVE FORCE

The third most common civic space violation in Africa South of the Sahara was protest disruption. As in previous years, many protests have taken place in Africa on a wide range of topics, including the high cost of living, the lack of basic service delivery, demands for a return to civilian rule and elections, among others. Disruption of protests was documented in at least 22 countries, with the use of excessive force in at least 20.

People in several countries held protests against the increasing cost of living and social inequality, including in [Ghana](#) and [Liberia](#). In Kenya, several of the protests were disrupted. On 20 March 2023, during the first of a weekly series of opposition protests against skyrocketing costs of living and allegedly fraudulent elections held in August 2022, police [fired](#) teargas and arrested dozens of people, including two opposition leaders. In Kisumu, police used live ammunition to disperse protesters, killing university student William Mayange. On 30 April 2023, the Nairobi Regional Police Commander [announced](#) a ban on these protests, while President William Ruto also publicly said the protests were illegal.

Pro-democracy protests were disrupted in Guinea and Sudan, both countries ruled by military juntas. In Sudan, where pro-democracy, anti-coup protests continued until fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) erupted in April 2023, security forces used excessive force and arrests to disperse protests. On 14 March 2023, police [arrested](#) 11 peaceful protesters in Khartoum during an anti-coup protest and charged them with disturbing the peace under the Penal.



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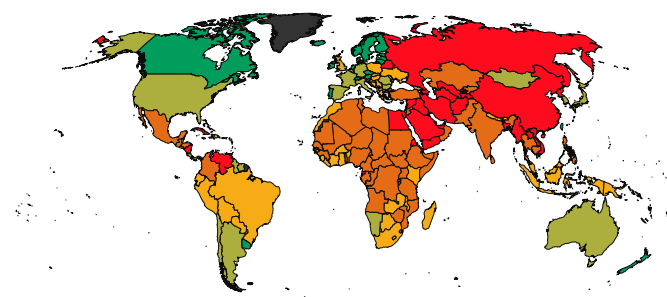


Demonstrators march during an anti-government demonstration in the Sharoni area in the north of Sudan's capital Khartoum. March 2023 (Photo by AFP/ via Getty Images)

Election-related and opposition protests were also disrupted by security forces, often with the use of excessive force. Ahead of Madagascar's November 2023 presidential elections, security forces [fired](#) teargas to disperse an opposition protest in Antananarivo against what protesters called an 'institutional coup', injuring several people, including a presidential candidate. Previously in March 2023, the Minister of Interior had announced a ban on demonstrations in open places. In Senegal, security forces have since March 2021 cracked down on several opposition protests against the ongoing prosecution of Ousmane Sonko ahead of February 2024 presidential elections. Dozens of people were [killed](#) in protests and clashes on 1 and 2 June 2023 in Dakar and Ziguinchor following Sonko's conviction, in absentia, for 'corrupting youth'. In an attempt to quell the protests, the authorities in Senegal [restricted](#) mobile internet and social media access.

In eastern DRC, people continued to protest against the insecurity and abuses caused by the armed conflict and to demand the departure of the UN peacekeeping force, the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC, with protests often violently disrupted, including with live ammunition. On 30 August 2023, over 50 people were [shot and killed](#) during a protest in Goma, North Kivu province, when the military was deployed to disperse the protests, banned by local authorities. The North Kivu military court convicted four military officers for the killings.





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Environmental and women’s rights protests have also been disrupted. On 23 May 2023, the Lesotho Defence Force forcefully [confiscated](#) advocacy placards during a protest against the negative effects of the construction of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, with protesters concerned about the impacts on the community and drinking water quality. In Uganda, authorities [arrested](#) 11 female lawmakers as they headed to the Ministry of Internal Affairs to protest against women’s rights violations.

# OF CONCERN

## MEDIA FREEDOM IN AFRICA ON A DOWNWARD SPIRAL

The past year has seen increasing attacks on press freedom in Africa, through the detention and prosecution of journalists, intimidation, harassment of and threats against journalists, acts of censorship such as the suspension of media outlets, censorship of LGBTQI+ and protest-related content, attacks against journalists and disruption of internet and social media access. Over half of civic space violations the CIVICUS Monitor documented in Africa South of the Sahara were violations of freedom of expression.

Media freedom violations in post-coup countries, particularly in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali and Niger, have soared as military juntas and their supporters have shown intolerance of criticism and peaceful dissent. French broadcasters Radio France Internationale and France 24 were indefinitely suspended in [Burkina Faso](#) while the broadcasters’ signal was [blocked](#) in Niger following the military coup in July 2023. The two broadcasters had already been suspended in [Mali](#) in 2022. On 23 June 2023, Burkina Faso’s national media regulator, the Superior Council of Communication, [suspended](#) French media outlet La Chaîne Info for a period of three months on accusations of ‘false information’ for statements made on the deadly violence and attacks in the country during a broadcast. Mali’s national media regulator [suspended](#) TV channel Joliba TV News and its Facebook page for a period of two months on 3 November 2022 for ‘serious and repeated breaches’. In Guinea, in the context of protests against the military junta, military transitional authorities [have applied](#)

editorial censorship, including intimidation, confiscation of media equipment, restrictions to internet and social media access, public threats to close media outlets and the interruption and jamming of signals of some radio stations. Some news sites also became inaccessible for users in Guinea. In Niger, renowned blogger and journalist Samira Sabou was [arrested](#) and charged with ‘production and dissemination of data likely to disturb public order’. Journalists in [Burkina Faso](#), [Guinea](#), [Mali](#) and [Niger](#) have been subjected to threats, intimidation, physical attacks and smear campaigns.

In several countries, national media regulators, or in some cases local authorities, have suspended media outlets, including in [Cameroon](#), [Chad](#), [the DRC](#), [Ethiopia](#), [Gabon](#), [Guinea](#), [Nigeria](#), [Senegal](#) and [Sierra Leone](#). In Nigeria, telecommunications engineers, contracted by local authorities in Rivers State, [dismantled](#) the transmitter mast and demolished the transmitter complex of Radio Raypower FM and Africa Independent Television in Port Harcourt on 3 September 2023 over a land dispute, effectively shutting down the media outlets. In Senegal, Walf TV has been [suspended](#) twice, in February and June 2023, over its coverage of anti-government protests, accused of ‘dissemination of images of violence exposing minors, accompanied by subversive and hateful remarks undermining the stability of the State’. In another act of censorship, the authorities have denied press accreditation to or have expelled foreign correspondents, including in [Burkina Faso](#) and [Gabon](#).

The safety of journalists remains a concern in many countries in Africa South of the Sahara. The CIVICUS Monitor documented physical attacks against journalists in at least 18 countries. In [the DRC](#), [Ghana](#) and [Nigeria](#), journalists continue to be subjected to assaults from state and non-state sources, such as supporters of political parties and armed groups. Journalists were killed or died in mysterious circumstances in [Cameroon](#), [Lesotho](#) and [Rwanda](#). A concerning development in Kenya, with potential repercussions for the safety of journalists, is the practice of police officers [impersonating](#) journalists during protests and in courtrooms, a trend condemned by the Media Council of Kenya in July 2023. In Ethiopia, LGBTQI+ journalists are [subjected](#) to intimidation, invasion of private lives and the threat of torture. An anonymous journalist [explained](#) that engaging in any form of reporting on human rights could result in journalists being linked with LGBTQI+ issues, leading to self-censorship.

As in previous years, the authorities have imposed internet restrictions, particularly during anti-government protests or in the context of elections, including in [Guinea](#), [Gabon](#), [Senegal](#) and [Tanzania](#).



# AMERICAS

## RATING OVERVIEW

Civic space conditions in the Americas continue to deteriorate. In 2023, Venezuela joined Cuba and Nicaragua in the list of countries rated as closed, where civil society faces severe consequences when expressing dissent and a climate of impunity prevails.

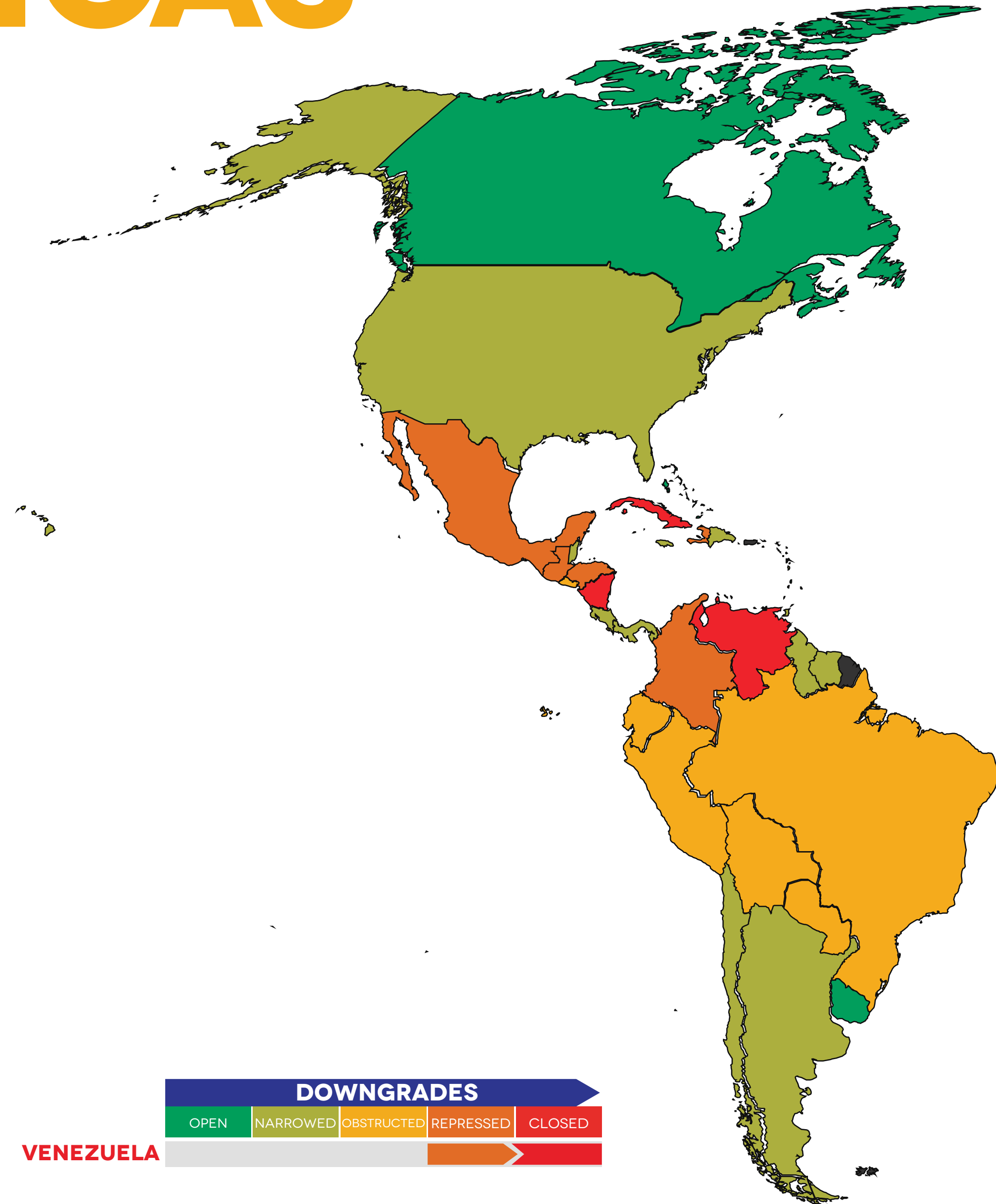
Out of the 35 countries in the Americas, civic space is considered closed in these three countries, repressed in five and obstructed in six. Thirteen countries in the Americas are rated as narrowed, and eight have open civic space.

Over the past year, many states intensified their control over civic space by abusing punitive powers against HRDs and journalists, resulting in significant setbacks for the civic freedoms that underpin democratic values. The consolidation of authoritarian governments, such as Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela, starkly exemplifies this trend. Until 2021, only Cuba had been [rated](#) as closed in the Americas. In 2021, Nicaragua [joined](#) this category, following a crackdown on civil society since 2018.

Although Venezuela was rated as repressed over recent years, the cumulative impact of repressive measures and systemic crackdowns on HRDs and dissenting voices had finally led to a downgrade to the closed category. These measures have in practice suspended fundamental civic freedoms, leaving civil society in a precarious state of vulnerability.

Several censorship mechanisms are part of a strategy to persecute activists and limit speech criticising the government. For instance, in May 2023, a radio opinion programme [decided](#) to cancel transmission due to pressure after reporting on a scandal involving the manager of Venezuelan state-owned oil company PDVSA Gas Comunal in Barinas.

Regulatory uncertainty over the media is a control mechanism that [led](#) to the closure of 81 radio stations in Venezuela in 2022 and at least five during the first part of 2023. This figure makes 2022 the period with the highest number of closed stations in the last two decades. Further, in the past nine years, over 60 Venezuelan newspapers ceased circulation indefinitely due to government control, a lack of funds or the inability to purchase sufficient paper to print their editions. TV networks have been



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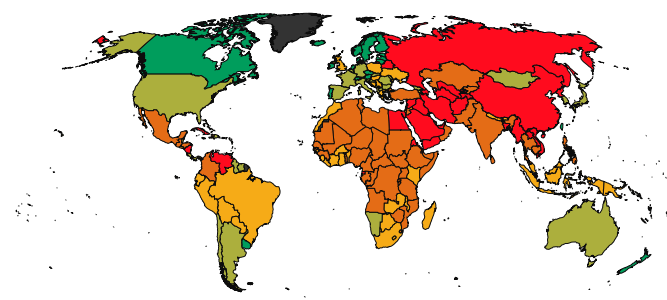
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Venezuela: A copy of the last print edition of El Nacional, with a headline that reads 'El Nacional is a warrior and will keep on fighting.' (Photo: Federico Parra/AFP)

[forced](#) to self-censor or close, and 10 foreign networks have been expelled from the country.

The right to association is also at risk in Venezuela. In January 2023, the National Assembly [approved](#) on first reading a draft NGO Law that could be used to control, restrict and potentially criminalise and close CSOs working in the country. Similar legislation has been used in other countries, such as Nicaragua, to close down hundreds of CSOs and arrest opposition leaders, journalists and HRDs.

In March 2023, Venezuela's National Assembly [adopted](#) the International Cooperation bill on its first reading. Similar to the draft NGO Law, this bill, initially introduced in May 2022, raised concerns due to the imposition of arbitrary limitations on the operation of civil society bodies. These bills are highly restrictive and could potentially lead to the arbitrary suspension and dissolution of CSOs.

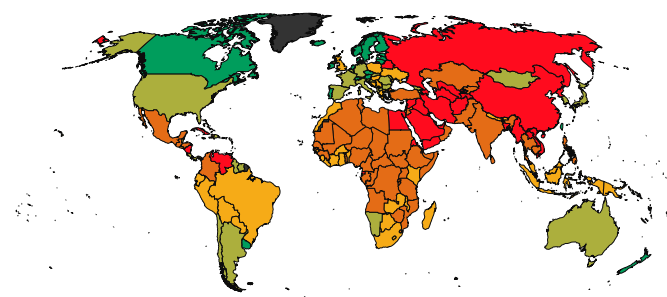
The legal situation for CSOs in Venezuela is already precarious. Under the current legal framework, some reports [estimate](#) that 28.3 per cent of CSOs operating in Venezuela have been unable to obtain legal status. Meanwhile, almost 55 per cent of registered organisations have reported facing obstacles when changing their boards of directors or undergoing similar administrative changes. In a more recent development, on 4 August 2023, the Supreme Court of Justice [ordered](#) the intervention of the National Committee of the Venezuelan Red Cross. As a precautionary measure, it established an ad hoc restructuring board with the authority to manage the organisation's assets and convene internal elections.

## CIVIC SPACE RESTRICTIONS

In the Americas, the most frequent violations documented during the reporting period were intimidation, attacks on journalists, harassment, killings of HRDs and the disruption of protests.

### TOP 5 VIOLATIONS TO CIVIC FREEDOMS FOR AMERICAS REGION





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# INTIMIDATION AND HARASSMENT AGAINST JOURNALISTS AND HRDS

Over the past year, intimidation and harassment were two of the most widespread civic space violations documented, observed in at least 24 countries in the Americas. Intimidation tactics instil fear and can serve as a tool to dissuade journalists and HRDs from persisting in their work. Harassment has the same strategy and goal but is characterised by the repeated targeting of CSOs and media outlets. Often interlinked, these practices involve a wide range of tactics such as threats, smear campaigns and recurrent police summons.

In the face of repressive and intimidating practices, a concerning trend persists in the Americas where HRDs and journalists find themselves often treated as adversaries of the state, despite their entitlement to specific legal protections. The weakening of democratic institutions exacerbates these civic space violations, along with the erosion of judicial independence and high levels of impunity in cases involving human rights violations.

For instance, in El Salvador, intimidation [continues](#) to be frequently used against independent media. In October 2022, at least 12 people from Radio Suchitlán, a

community radio station, [reported](#) intimidation and surveillance by local political figures. Unidentified people inquired about the residence and working hours of staff, mostly young volunteers. Elected in 2019, President Nayib Bukele has actively spearheaded a ruthless crackdown on criminal gangs in recent years, imposing a state of emergency and suspending fundamental rights. This has [led](#) to severe restrictions on journalists' work.

In Cuba, authorities [employed](#) harassment and surveillance tactics to prevent HRDs raising concerns about the human rights situation. This was prevalent during the G77+China Summit, held in Cuba, with at least 134 acts of repression [documented](#), including police surveillance that frequently commenced a day before the event.

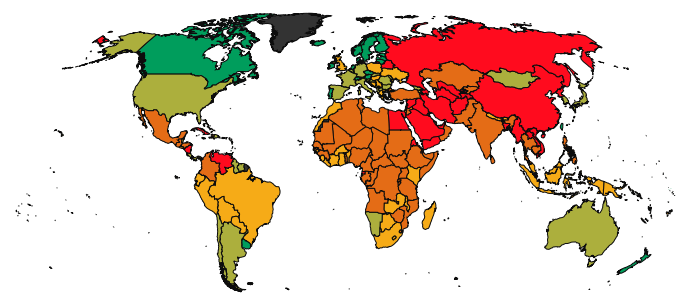
Journalists were frequent targets of threats while covering crime and corruption cases. In Mexico, several journalists in Sinaloa reported being [threatened](#), having their cars and work equipment stolen or damaged and being forced to flee during a violent series of attacks in the region. In Venezuela, investigative journalist Ronna Rísquez and her family members [faced](#) threats following the publication of her new book on the Tren de Aragua criminal gang. Released in early 2023, Rísquez's book details the rapid rise of the criminal group, implicated in extortion, murder, drug trafficking and people smuggling.

Women's organisations are often particularly targeted with harassment. From March to August 2023 in Guyana, the Red Thread Women's Organization [received](#) several threatening emails due to its opposition to key clauses in the country's oil contracts with ExxonMobil. The group has also actively called for the resignation of Local Government and Regional Development Minister Nigel Dharamlall, who faces accusations of raping a 16-year-old Indigenous girl. In November 2022, Nicaraguan police and public employees [harassed](#) four women's rights defenders and local leaders during municipal elections held without significant opposition.

Police summons for interrogations, threats of arrests and persecution and smear campaigns are among the tactics used to intimidate journalists and HRDs. In January 2023, officers of Venezuela's investigative police unit [took](#) El Nacional news editor José Gregorio Meza and human resources manager Virginia Nuñez to the Attorney General's Office for questioning. They were investigated for crimes under the 'Anti-Hate Law', which has often been used to criminalise dissent.



El Salvador: President Nayib Bukele. October 2023 (Photo: Reuters/José Cabezas)



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# JOURNALISTS ATTACKED



## IN AT LEAST 15 COUNTRIES

In May 2023 in Venezuela, Oscar Costero and Santiago de Viana, both Wikipedia editors, were [stopped](#) and questioned by police while trying to renew their passports. The police informed Costero for the first time that there was an investigation being conducted on him. Venezuelan authorities have frequently [used](#) administrative, legislative and judicial measures as repressive practices.

## ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS

The right of journalists to work safely and without fear is integral to freedom of expression, but they often experience threats and physical and verbal attacks, with most incidents going unpunished. Since 2018, attacks on journalists have repeatedly topped the list of civic space violations in the Americas, pointing to the persistence of a hostile environment for the media and the great personal risks journalists can face for doing their crucial work. The CIVICUS Monitor documented physical attacks on journalists in at least 15 countries of the Americas.

State and non-state forces have attacked journalists and others involved in reporting on protests. In February 2023 in Argentina, the Buenos Aires police violently [repressed](#) journalists reporting on protests against power cuts in the Villa Lugano

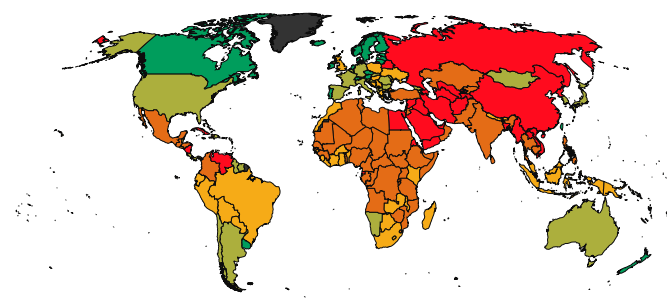
neighbourhood. In Suriname, media workers were [injured](#) and their equipment destroyed or stolen during a protest in Paramaribo to denounce austerity measures, including the elimination of subsidies, in the context of high inflation. In the USA, police [pepper-sprayed](#) a journalist covering a protest demanding justice for the police killing of Tyre Nichols and the arrest of Hamail Waddell.

Since December 2022, journalists and media workers have reported at least 94 cases of attacks during [widespread](#) anti-government protests in Peru, predominantly perpetrated by police and military forces.

In Brazil, cases have been reported of public officials engaging in verbal and physical attacks on journalists. For example, in January 2023, the Mayor of Pelotas in Rio Grande do Sul [began](#) a speech by verbally attacking journalist Rafaela Rosa of Diário Popular. This attack stemmed from a report published that day outlining plans to create and modify positions and rules of the legislature. A month later, one of the



Peru: A demonstrator shouts next to riot police during a protest against the government of Peru's President Dina Boluarte, in Lima. March 2023. (Photo: Ernesto BENAVIDES / AFP via Getty Images)



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city hall secretaries and security guards physically [assaulted](#) Sara York, a columnist for website 247, when she tried to photograph the municipal carnival event. York, a transgender woman who is visually impaired, was removed from the city hall even though she had authorisation to be there.

Women have been particularly targeted with physical and sexual assault. In Mexico, the police unlawfully [detained and assaulted](#) Enlace Noticias reporter Natalie Hoyos López and photojournalist Michelle Hoyos López after the two journalists covered a women’s rights event. They both reported that the police sexually assaulted them and released them only after they paid a fine.

In some countries, including [Bolivia](#), [Brazil](#), [Haiti](#), [Mexico](#) and [St Vincent and the Grenadines](#), assaults and gunshots are common. In Haiti, insecurity and violence continued to affect the daily lives of press workers, some of whom report facing attacks both from criminal gangs and Haitian security forces.



Ecuador: Supporters of slain journalist and presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio pay their respects during an act organized by the Movimiento Construye party and friends at the Quito Exhibition Center in Quito. August 11, 2023 (Photo: Rodrigo Buendia/AFP)

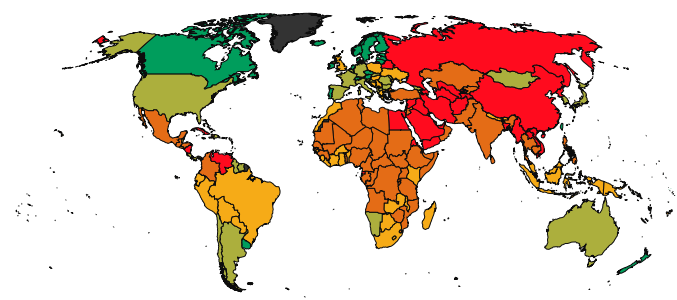
With multiple violent incidents including gunshots, death threats and attacks on journalists’ houses, Ecuador is [experiencing](#) an increasingly hostile environment towards the media. In December 2022, two people on a motorcycle fired gunshots at the home of Andrés Solórzano, owner of Radio Sono Onda in Portoviejo, Manabí province. He had received threats in the months before this attack. In March 2023, Ecuavisa journalist Lenin Artieda sustained injuries after a device exploded when he inserted USB drives containing threatening messages. These threatening letters were sent to five news outlets in Guayaquil and Quito. Situation further escalated with the tragic [assassination](#) of journalist and presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio in an electoral campaign rally in August 2023.

During critical democratic moments, such as elections, both state and non-state forces often target journalists as a means of trying to dissuade them from investigating stories, restricting the capacity of independent media to report on elections, and as a result impinging on voters’ rights to access information. This was exemplified in Guatemala’s recent elections, where two journalists from a TV news programme [faced](#) gunfire threats while covering the campaign. Throughout the campaign period in Guatemala, at least 96 incidents were reported, most of them linked to restrictions on public information.

## UNSETTLING PATTERN: KILLINGS OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS ON THE RISE

Human rights killings continue to be an issue of concern in the Americas, as HRDs work in a hostile environment marked by stigmatisation, threats, harassment and physical attacks. Although Colombia and Honduras represent the most extreme cases, they are not isolated examples. Since the previous report, the CIVICUS Monitor has also recorded cases of killings of HDRs in at least five other countries: [Brazil](#), [Ecuador](#), [Mexico](#), [Paraguay](#) and [Peru](#).

Indigenous, land and environmental defenders face severe risks as they bear the brunt of adverse impacts due to the exploitation of resources in their territories and a lack of effective legal protection while defending their rights. For instance, Colombia stands out as one of the deadliest countries for HRDs. The Department of Cauca is one of the most [affected](#) regions with more than 22 cases of killings registered from January to August 2023. Sixty-eight social activists and 14 signatories of the peace agreement were [murdered](#) in the first four months of 2023. Among those targeted were Indigenous leaders, LGBTQI+ activists, political campaigners and trade unionists.



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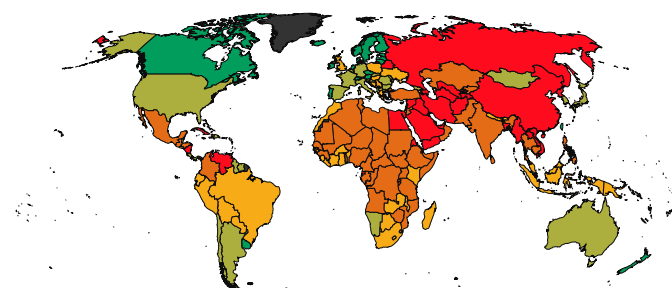
Reported killings of HRDs can be linked directly to their gender and their fight to combat systemic discrimination. In Colombia, this is evident in cases such as lethal attacks [targeting](#) Lenis Yaneth Salazar Vera, a community council member, and Dania Sharith Polo, an LGBTQI+ HRD.

In Honduras, those [working](#) on issues related to land, the environment and agrarian conflicts remain at high risk of violence, particularly Indigenous peoples and Garífuna (Afro-descendant) communities. On 28 May 2023, Martín Morales, a land rights defender and member of Organización Fraternal Negra Hondureña (Honduran Black Fraternal Organisation) was found [dead](#) in the Gama River. His family had reported

him missing the day before. It was the second time this year that a land rights defender from Triunfo de la Cruz community was found dead in the Gama River.

In Mexico, the targeted killings of mothers seeking their disappeared loved ones may be connected to factors including organised crime, extortion, human trafficking, kidnapping networks and corruption. This context underscores the complex and multifaceted nature of the challenges faced by those engaged in the pursuit of justice. An illustrative case occurred in November 2022, when HRD María Carmela Vázquez Ramírez was [killed](#) in Abasolo, Guanajuato. Vázquez was a member of Colectivo Personas Desaparecidas in Pénjamo (Collective of Missing Persons in Pénjamo) and was looking for her son, who disappeared in June 2022.





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## GUATEMALAN DEMOCRACY UNDER THREAT

During the 2023 general elections, the stability of Guatemala's democracy faced constant and intense pressure. Ongoing and persistent legal proceedings, initiated in June 2023, to undermine the official results and suspend the winning Seed Movement party's legal personality have [raised](#) concerns. Additionally, there are [incidents](#) of intimidation and criminalisation targeting electoral authorities and Seed Movement supporters. CSOs have also reported severe restrictions on the right to peaceful assembly for protesters demanding that the integrity of the electoral process be upheld.

A [surge](#) in attacks on HRDs, journalists and media workers has further compounded Guatemala's current situation, encompassing intimidation, stigmatisation, criminalisation, arbitrary detention and defamation campaigns. Some of those cases exhibit a pattern of gender and racial discrimination.

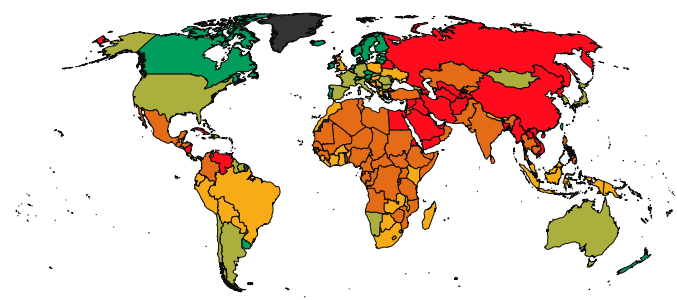
Over the past three years, President Alejandro Giammattei's administration and his allies have moved to [reverse](#) anti-corruption efforts and pursued abusive prosecutions, particularly against those reporting on abuse of power and corruption. In this context, substantial interference by political and economic elites, notably in the judiciary, amplifies the challenges.

In 2022, Guatemala significantly shifted its standing on the CIVICUS Monitor. It was first [added](#) to the CIVICUS Monitor Watchlist, which highlights countries experiencing significant declines in respect for civic freedoms, and then [downgraded](#) from an obstructed to repressed rating. This shift was prompted by a pronounced pattern involving the criminalisation of justice operators, HRDs and journalists, marking a distinct and troubling trend in the erosion of civic space through the institutionalisation of violence against civil society.



Guatemala: Riot police stand guard as demonstrators block a road during a protest demanding the resignation of Attorney General Consuelo Porras and prosecutor Rafael Curruchiche in Guatemala City. October 2023 (Photo by JOHAN ORDONEZ/AFP via Getty Images)





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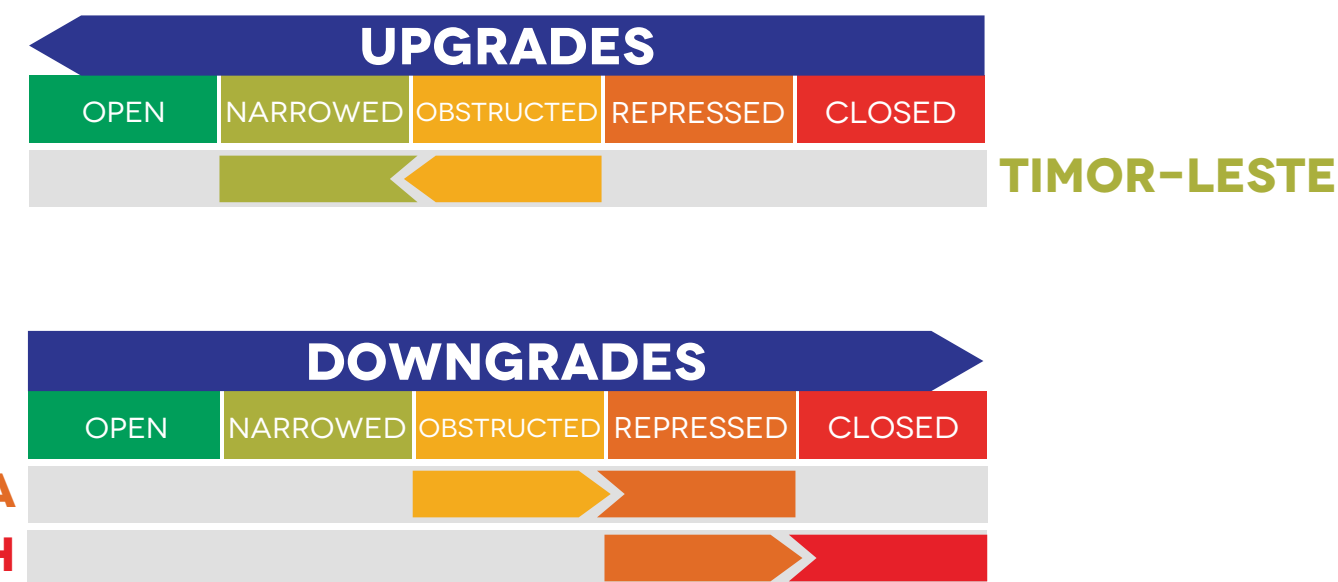
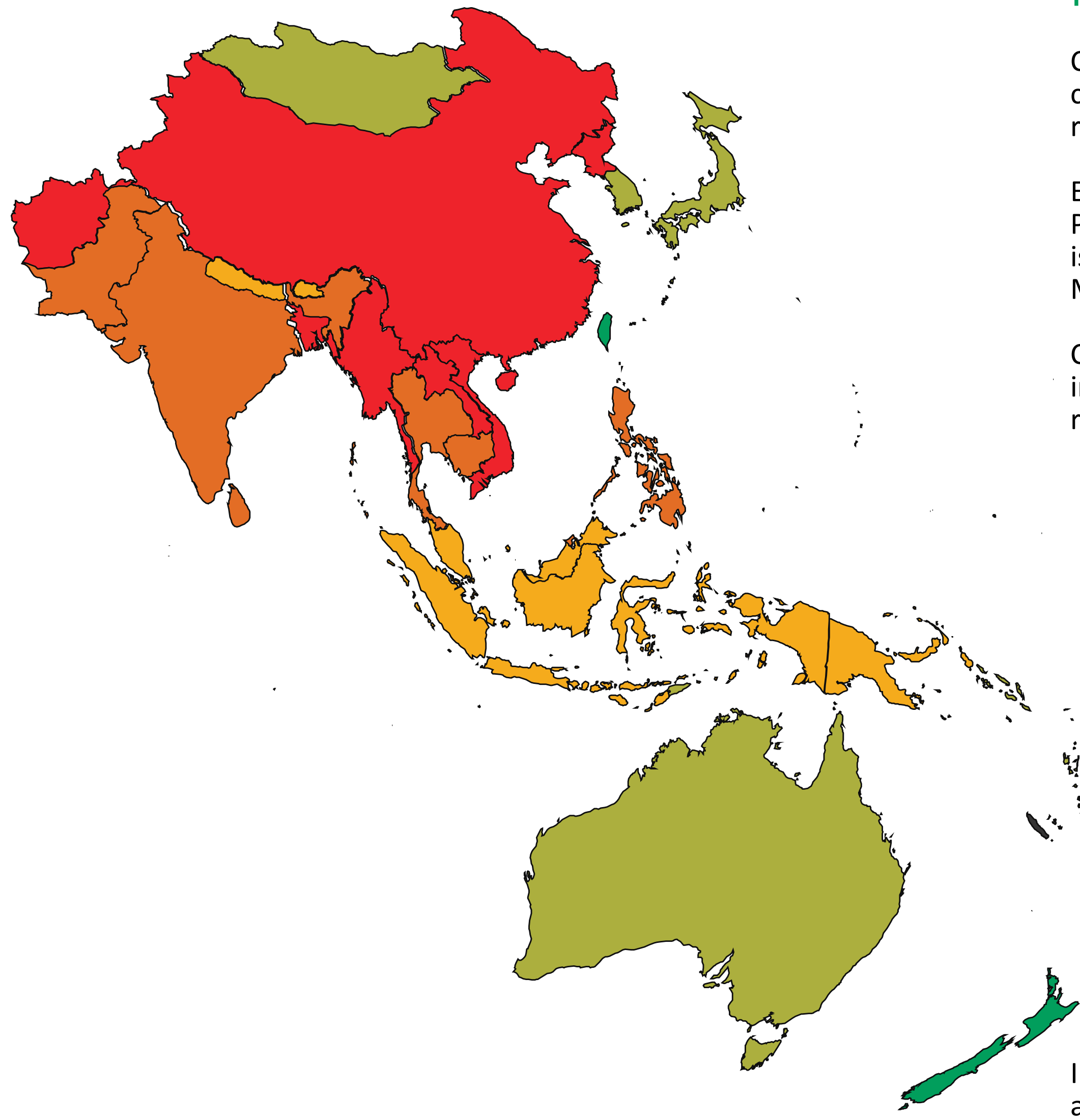
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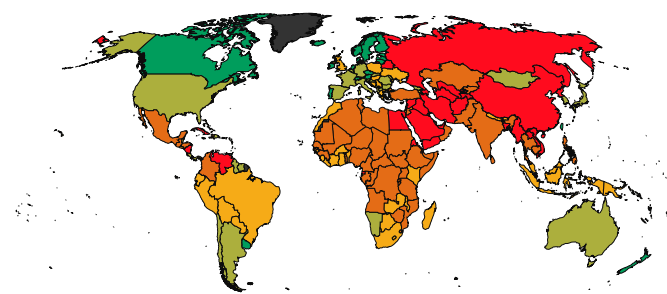
Concerningly in Asia, the closed category has grown this year from seven to eight countries. Afghanistan, China, Hong Kong, Laos, Myanmar, North Korea and Vietnam remain in this category and Bangladesh has now joined them.

Eight countries are now rated repressed. Seven – Brunei, Cambodia, India, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand – remain in that category and the latest addition is Sri Lanka. Five are in the obstructed category: Bhutan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives and Nepal.

Civic space in Japan, Mongolia and South Korea is rated narrowed with Timor-Leste improving its rating to join this category, while Taiwan remains the only country rated open.



In the Pacific, the civic space situation is better, with seven countries rated open and four rated narrowed: Australia, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Nauru remain in the obstructed category.



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Bangladesh: Police fire tear gas at student protests. (Photo: Mohammad Ponir Hossain/ REUTERS)

Bangladesh has been downgraded to closed due to an escalating crackdown on the opposition, activists, journalists and dissenting voices ahead of national elections scheduled for January 2024. Since the start of 2023, the authorities have [ramped up](#) their targeting of the opposition with thousands of fabricated cases filed against them, and there has been a brutal crackdown on their protests. The government has also escalated its targeting of HRDs through judicial harassment and smear campaigns, as experienced by the human rights CSO Odhikar. Authorities have also increasingly [attempted to silence the media](#) through censorship and the judicial harassment of journalists. Critical media outlets have been shut down and attacked and journalists and their families targeted. The draconian [Digital Security Act](#), which was used to criminalise thousands of online critics, has been replaced by the Cyber Security Act, which retains most of the repressive offences. The government continues to use the Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act and the NGO Affairs Bureau, which sits under the prime minister's office, to restrict and harass CSOs. [Enforced disappearances](#) are used as a tool to suppress dissent.

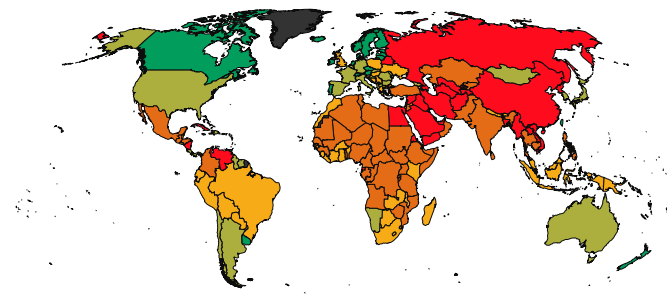
In Sri Lanka over the past year, authorities have [harassed](#) HRDs, protest leaders and social media activists by hauling them up for [interrogation](#) or prosecution while others have faced surveillance, intimidation and threats. Journalists have been [targeted](#) with judicial harassment and restrictions for undertaking their work and assaulted during protests. There were reports of excessive force, including the use of teargas, by the police in response to several protests, particularly by [students](#),

as well as intimidation of people from the Tamil minority seeking justice for past crimes in the Northern and Eastern provinces and restrictions on their protests. The [International Convention on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\) Act No. 56 of 2007](#) is used to stifle expression while the [Prevention of Terrorism Act](#) is used to target and harass activists, journalists, protest leaders and minorities. A revised version of the anti-terror law still put rights at risk while an Online Safety Bill could be used to further restrict online expression.

There has been some progress in Asia and the Pacific, as the upgrading of Timor-Leste from obstructed to narrowed shows. Fundamental freedoms have [generally been respected](#) by the Timorese authorities and the government has created an enabling environment for HRDs. Journalists are mostly free to report the news although a few have faced [police harassment](#). The country is [ranked](#) in 10th place in the World Press Freedom Index published in May 2023 by global media watchdog Reporters Without Borders. Freedom of peaceful assembly is respected in practice, although the law places some [unjustified restrictions](#) on protests.

Bangladesh: Police fire tear gas at student protests. (Photo: Mohammad Ponir Hossain/ REUTERS)





# CIVIC SPACE RESTRICTIONS

The main civic space violation documented in the Asia Pacific region is the use of intimidation to stop activists speaking out and journalists exposing violations. Another widespread trend across the region is censorship, used to block criticism of those in power or deny people the ability to receive and share information. Governments also detained protesters in numerous countries and prosecuted HRDs, using an array of restrictive laws.

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## TOP 5 VIOLATIONS TO CIVIC FREEDOMS FOR ASIA PACIFIC REGION



## INTIMIDATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND JOURNALISTS

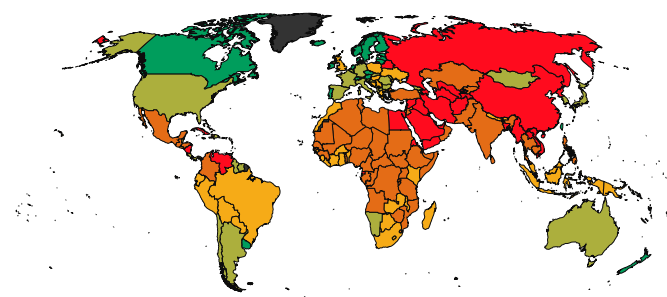
The use of intimidation as a tactic to silence HRDs and journalists was documented in at least 22 countries in Asia and the Pacific. Among the methods deployed were the surveillance of activists and civil society groups, raids on the homes and offices of activists and journalists, and vilification and threats against their lives and safety.

In Afghanistan, the homes of women HRDs, particularly those involved in protests, have been frequently raided by the Taliban. Often, women HRDs have been interrogated to pressure them to give up information or [sign documents](#) vowing they will not talk to the media or take part in any further [protest activities](#) before being released. In [India](#), activists have faced intimidation from the National Investigating Agency and are often accused of being [security threats](#) while others have faced [abductions](#) and [attacks](#). Media outlets such as the [BBC](#) and [NewsClick](#) have faced raids for their critical reporting while activists and journalists in Indian-administered Kashmir have increasingly been [targeted](#).

In Bangladesh, [journalists](#) have been targeted, while the authorities have also harassed the [families of journalists](#) in exile and those demanding justice for [enforced disappearances](#). Activists and people involved in commemoration initiatives in relation to the former civil war in Sri Lanka often face [surveillance, intimidation and harassment](#) by intelligence services, the military and the police. There have also been reports of the intimidation of [journalists](#) as well as [protesters](#) seeking justice for past crimes in the Northern and Eastern provinces. In [Nepal](#), there are continuing reports of harassment, threats and [physical attacks](#) against journalists from both state and non-state sources.

Journalists continue to face [harassment and threats](#) in Indonesia, particularly those in the [Papuan](#) region, while activists were stifled when organising civil society events around the [G20](#) and Association of Southeast Asian Nations ([ASEAN](#)) summits. In July 2023, civil society groups [cancelled](#) a regional gathering of LGBTQI+ activists in Indonesia in response to harassment and death threats from Muslim conservatives.

In Malaysia, protesters are often hauled up for [questioning](#) and an HRD found an [improvised explosive device](#) under her car. In [Cambodia](#), CSOs have faced ongoing



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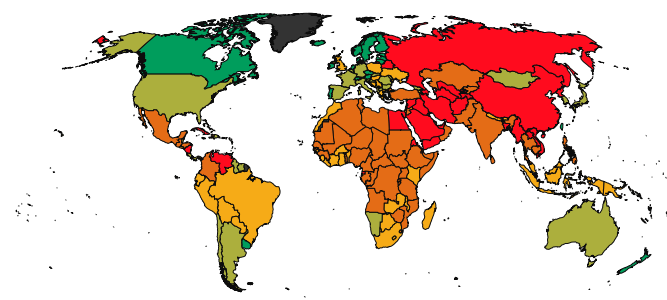
threats of being shut down, and there were physical attacks on the political opposition and critics. In the Philippines, red-tagging – labelling people as communists – has continued against HRDs, particularly Indigenous rights activists, along with designating them as terrorists, putting them at great risk of facing attacks. There have also been reports of state surveillance of progressive groups including Anakbayan and Gabriela and cases of abductions of development workers, labour rights activists and Indigenous and environmental activists.

In July 2023, the Hong Kong authorities announced that eight exiled democracy activists will be pursued for life for alleged national security offences and issued bounties for their arrest. Police officers from the national security department also harassed and interrogated their family members in Hong Kong. Trade unionists in South Korea have faced vilification, harassment and attacks.

In the Pacific, journalists have faced intimidation for carrying out their work. In Papua New Guinea, at least two journalists from The National and Post Courier were harassed and threatened by supporters of a former parliamentarian while covering a court case he was involved in. In May 2023, a journalist from the Samoa Observer was summoned by a minister who was unhappy with her coverage of him and threatened with detention when she refused to reveal her sources.

Cambodia: Supporters of the Candlelight Party shout slogans from a vehicle during a rally on the last day of campaigning for the commune elections in Phnom Penh. June 2022. Photo by TANG CHHIN Sothy / AFP





# CENSORSHIP OF CRITICAL VOICES

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Another key civic space concern in the Asia Pacific region is the use of censorship by governments, documented in at least 21 countries. Over the year, the authorities used their powers to restrict access to information critical of the state by blocking TV broadcasts and news portals, deleting social media posts, ordering the media to remove news coverage, banning publications and targeting journalists and news outlets.

China, which has an extensive censorship regime, deployed it to [prevent people](#) seeing scenes of protests in multiple Chinese cities at the end of 2022. Videos and posts on social media about the protests were deleted by the ruling party's vast online censorship apparatus and words that referenced the protests were censored. In June 2023, censors scrubbed the internet of any words or symbols that could be used to reference the [Tiananmen Square massacre](#) in the run-up to its anniversary. The [North Korea](#) regime continues to [block access to foreign media](#), particularly from South Korea. Punishments for accessing or distributing such media include jail, forced labour and execution.

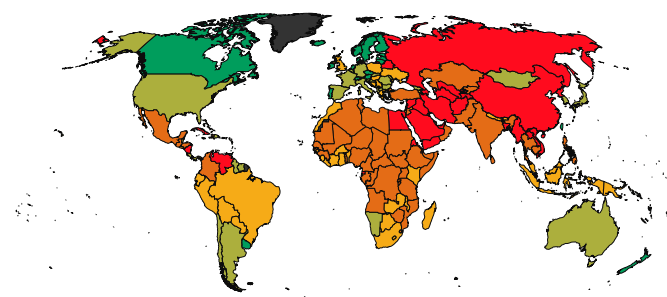
In Malaysia, [censorship efforts](#) have increased under the government of Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. In June 2023, the news portal MalaysiaNow was inaccessible to some users and blocked by some internet service providers. In July 2023, the blog of a political commentator based in the UK and a website of a government critic were restricted. In August 2023, the government blocked some internet users accessing another news site, UtusanTV.com. In [Thailand](#), a major satellite and cable TV provider appeared to have [blocked broadcasts](#) about the Thai election by several international news agencies in June 2023. The BBC's interview with the leader of the opposition Move Forward party was taken off the air by cable and satellite TV provider TrueVisions. Other international news agencies also reportedly had their election-related news segments blocked.

In Vietnam, hundreds of websites have been [blocked](#) and the authorities have pressured social media platforms to step up their [censorship](#) of 'anti-state' posts. In [Singapore](#), the Protection against Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act permits a single government minister to declare that information posted online is 'false' and to order the content's 'correction' or removal if this is deemed to be in the public interest. In June 2023, the authorities used the law to [block access](#) to news website Asia Sentinel because of an article critical of the government.

The government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in India has also sought to censor critical reporting. In January 2023, the government used emergency powers under the 2021 Information Technology Rules to [ban a documentary](#) critical of Modi and his role and passivity during 2002 riots in Gujarat state. It was blocked from being accessed or shared online in India. Indian-administered Kashmir has experienced regular [internet shutdowns](#) and restrictions that prevent critical reporting in the region. The Kashmir Walla outlet was [forced to shut down](#) after its site was blocked. An internet shutdown was also imposed in [Manipur](#) following the outbreak of violence in May 2023.



India: Members of the media protest after the police raided the office of a news portal and the homes of journalists. October 2023 (Photo: Reuters/Anushree Fadnavis)



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# PROTESTERS DETAINED



## IN AT LEAST 21 COUNTRIES

In [Pakistan](#), the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) blocked the transmission of critical news programmes and revoked media licences. In March 2023, PEMRA banned TV channels from broadcasting speeches and news conferences by former prime minister Imran Khan. In May 2023, authorities also [restricted access](#) to social media platforms in major cities and cut off mobile internet services amid mounting protests generated by the arrest of Imran Khan.

In the Pacific, it was reported that the Tonga Broadcasting Commission had [banned a song](#) in July 2023 that commemorated a 2009 ferry tragedy, while there has been a [lack of transparency](#) about a group of asylum seekers intercepted in September 2023 as they attempted to arrive in Australia by boat, who were sent to [Nauru](#).

## PROTESTERS DETAINED

Across the Asia Pacific region, people mobilised to call for democratic reforms, labour and environmental rights and push for justice, equality and accountability. In response, states deployed security forces to arrest and detain protesters in at least 21 countries.

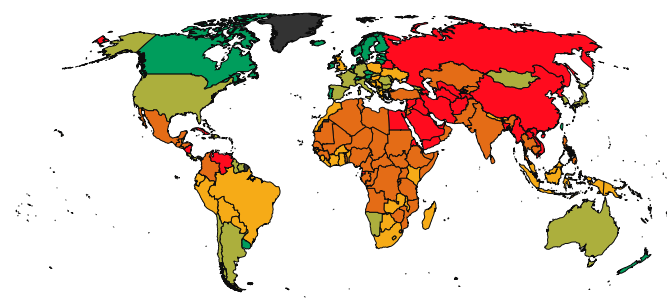
In Afghanistan, scores of protesters, the vast majority of them women, who mobilised to demand access to education and employment were [detained](#) by the Taliban. Some were held for a relatively short time but others endured weeks or months of detention and torture and ill-treatment. Most recently, women protesters Zholia Parsi and Neda Parwani were [detained](#) in September 2023. The Taliban routinely use violence to [gain access](#) to detainees' mobile phones so they can identify other members of protest networks.

In Maldives, protests by the opposition coalition through the year were often met with [arrests and ill-treatment](#) including through the police chasing and dragging protesters and using pepper spray, resulting in injuries. In Bangladesh, hundreds of members of the main opposition party have been [detained](#) and prosecuted on fabricated charges for their involvement in mass protests ahead of the 2024 elections. Some were [picked up](#) by the police ahead of protests.

In [Pakistan](#), in May 2023, police [carried out mass arrests](#) and detained more than 4,000 people, including members of the political opposition, in the wake of protests over the arrest of Imran Khan. Many were charged under vague and broad laws that

Afghanistan: Afghan beauticians close their beauty salon in Kabul. July 2023 (Photo: REUTERS/Ali Khara)





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prohibit rioting and creating threats to public order. Some are being [tried in military courts](#), raising questions around due process and fair trial rights.

Protesters have also been detained in Indonesia, particularly in the Papuan region. In one incident in August 2023, at least 37 supporters of the pro-independence West Papua National Committee were [arrested](#) in relation to peaceful demonstrations in various cities. Police used excessive force and arrested [dozens of people](#) in September 2023 for protesting against government plans to evict thousands of people in the Riau Islands province.

In Cambodia, [trade union leaders](#) were convicted in May 2023 for organising a protest strike. In [Thailand](#), [democracy activists](#) have been detained and convicted for making speeches during protests while [activists](#), including students, have been detained and convicted on royal defamation charges for their speeches or social media posts during protests.

In the Pacific, scores of [climate activists](#) have been arrested across Australia for various protests including disruption of traffic to draw attention to the global climate emergency. At least five states have passed anti-protest laws, including South Australia in May 2023, to ramp up fines for disruptive protests. Climate protesters have also been [arrested](#) in New Zealand.

## HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS PROSECUTED

Another top violation documented across the Asia Pacific region was the prosecution of HRDs, reported in at least 13 countries. Many were criminalised under national security, public order or criminal defamation laws.

In China, scores of HRDs were [prosecuted](#) under vague and broad provisions of ‘subversion of state power’ or ‘picking quarrels and stirring up trouble’. In Hong Kong, the draconian National Security Law has been used to detain and [prosecute](#) democracy activists, including human rights lawyer Chow Hang-Tung, and keep them behind bars.

In Vietnam, more than 100 HRDs remain in prison, jailed on [trumped-up charges](#) of ‘conducting propaganda against the state’ and ‘abusing democratic freedoms’. More recently, [tax evasion laws](#) have been used to jail HRDs. In Cambodia, [‘incitement’ provisions](#) have been used to prosecute trade unionists, such as Chhim Sithar, as well as environmental and land rights activists. In Myanmar, dozens of HRDs were [jailed on fabricated charges](#) of ‘high treason’, ‘terrorism’ or ‘incitement’ after unfair

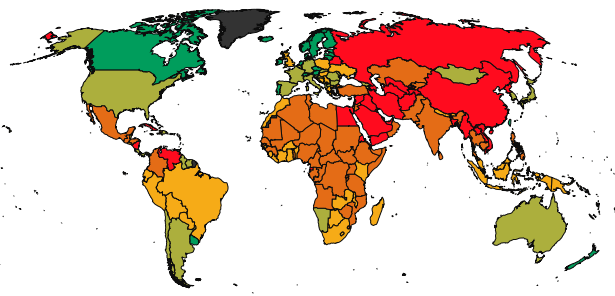


China: Protesters hold white signs in protest of the Chinese Government in Melbourne (Photo: Tamati Smith/Getty Images)

trials. In Thailand scores of democracy activists and critics of the regime have been prosecuted for royal defamation, including human rights lawyer Anon Nampa, who was sentenced to four years in jail, while others have been denied bail. In Indonesia, authorities have used the Law on Electronic Information and Transactions to [criminalise](#) HRDs, including Haris Azhar and Fatia Maulidiyanti for a video discussing military involvement in the mining industry in Papua. Treason charges have been used to prosecute peaceful pro-independence activists in the Papuan region. Singaporean human rights lawyer M Ravi has also faced [legal persecution](#) for his work

In India, there is an increasing use of the draconian Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, an [anti-terror law](#), against HRDs. Many people remain in pretrial detention for long periods including activists charged with violence in [Bhima Koregaon](#) and Kashmiri HRD [Khurram Parvez](#). In Bangladesh, HRDs Adilur Rahman Khan and ASM Nasiruddin Elan from Odhikar were [sentenced](#) by the Cyber Tribunal of Dhaka to two years in jail in retaliation for their work documenting human rights violations. In Pakistan, HRDs including Muhammad Ismail have faced [charges](#) under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016.

In the Pacific, whistleblower David McBride is being prosecuted for [leaking classified information](#) of misconduct by Australian special forces in Afghanistan, while another whistleblower, Richard Boyle, is being prosecuted for exposing aggressive debt recovery practices by the Australian Taxation Office.



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# OF CONCERN

## INDIA AND CAMBODIA

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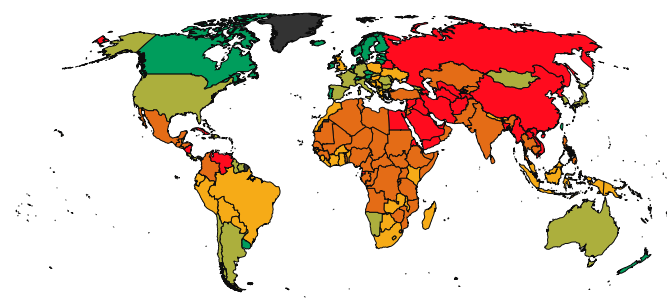
There are serious concerns about the ongoing regression of civic space in [India](#). Over the year, HRDs and journalists were arrested or [detained](#) under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act or for other offences. Other have faced harassment, raids and assault by the police. [News outlets](#) have been raided and prolonged internet shutdowns have been imposed in [Indian-administered Kashmir](#) and Manipur. The government has also cracked down on international funding for CSOs using the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act. There have been [repression](#) of protests and a growing practice of [demolishing](#) the homes of Muslim protesters. The judicial harassment of activists and journalists in Indian-administered Kashmir has persisted.

Another country of concern is [Cambodia](#) where repressive laws are routinely misused to criminalise HRDs, trade unionists, environmental and youth activists and journalists. Highly politicised courts mean that those arbitrarily detained and charged are often held for prolonged periods in pretrial detention. The media continues to face restrictions, exemplified in the closure of Voice of Democracy in February 2023. Around the [elections](#) in July 2023, the political and civic space environment became more repressive with the leading opposition Candlelight Party barred from running and opposition activists facing various forms of harassment and [physical attacks](#). The 2015 Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organizations continues to restrict the right to freedom of association.





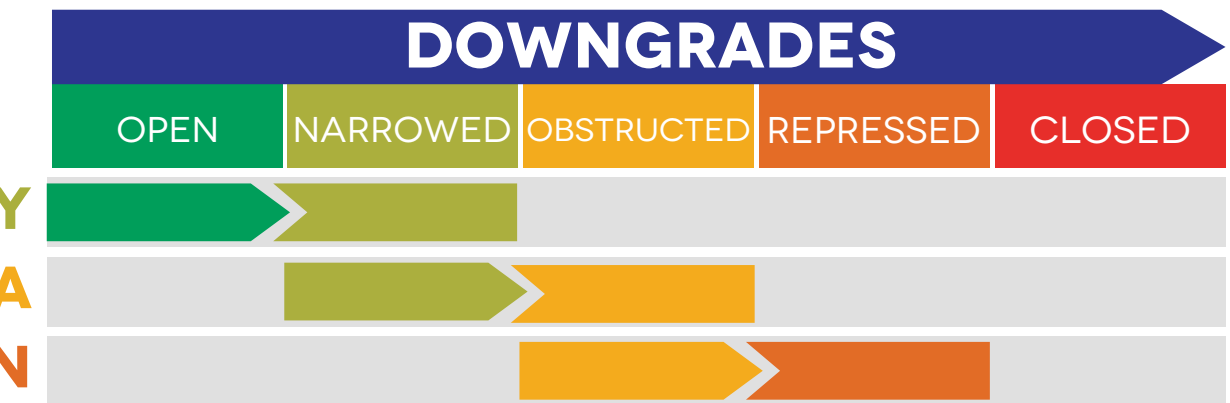
# EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA



## RATING OVERVIEW

In the past year, civic space has continued to be eroded in Europe and Central Asia. Of 54 countries, civic space is now rated as open in 19, narrowed in 19, obstructed in seven, repressed in three and closed in six.

In 2023, Europe grappled with the political and economic fallout of Russia's war on Ukraine. Widespread protests erupted in response to rising energy prices and cost of living increases in various European Union (EU) countries, including [Belgium](#), the [Czech Republic](#), [Greece](#) and [Portugal](#). Climate groups vehemently [opposed](#) shifts in energy policies adopted by EU countries in response to the conflict's [disruption](#) of the energy market. In response, European states escalated repression of environmental activists, responding to non-violent protests and civil disobedience actions with arrests, prosecutions and intimidation.



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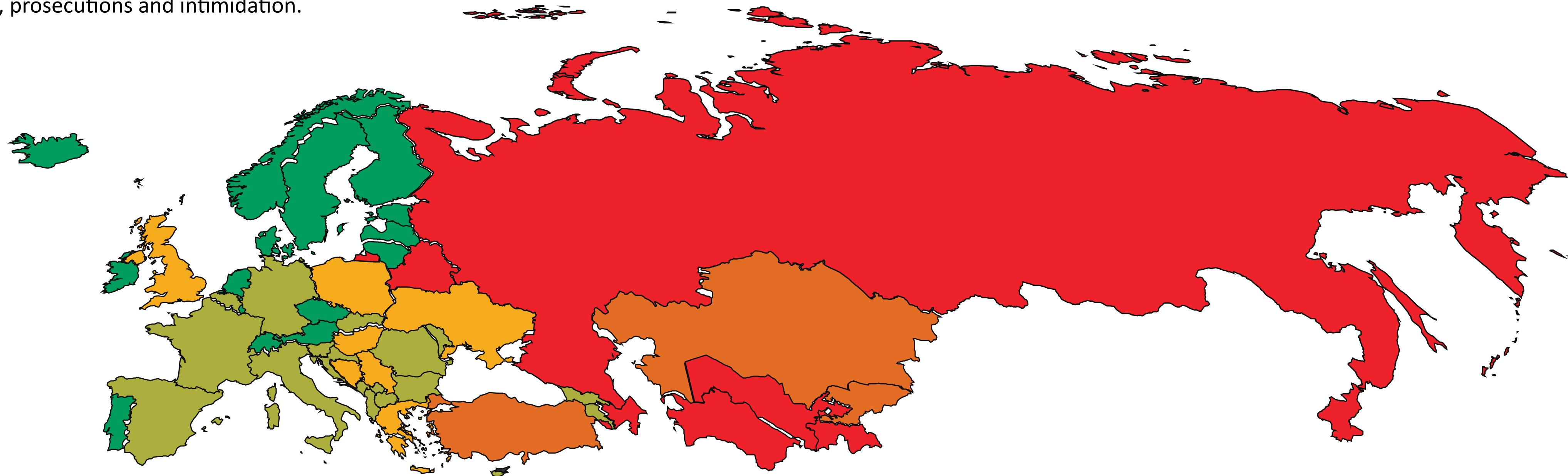
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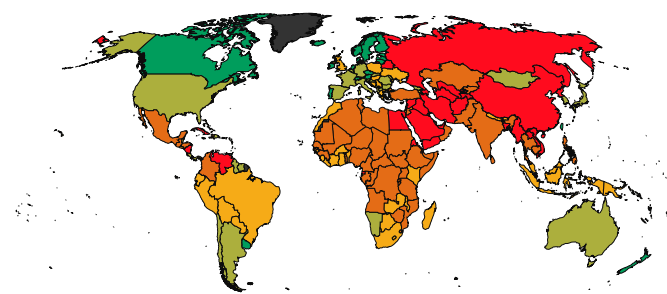
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Germany: Police officers carry activist Greta Thunberg away from the edge of the Garzweiler II mine during a protest, after the clearance of Luetzerath, Germany. January 2023 (Photo: Federico Gambarini / AP)

Country ratings in Europe and Central Asia have deteriorated further overall. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Germany, an EU member state, both saw a downgrade in their ratings. Kyrgyzstan, once viewed as the most democratic country in Central Asia, also witnessed a downgrade. As a result, all Central Asian countries are currently classified as either repressed or closed.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was added to the CIVICUS Monitor [Watchlist](#) in September 2023 due to a rapid decline in its civic space, has moved from narrowed to obstructed, joining [Serbia](#), previously the only country in the Western Balkans with this rating. The ongoing political crisis triggered by threats of secession by the country's Serb-majority entity, Republika Srpska (RS), has increased pressure on civil society and the media. During the year, RS President Milorad Dodik sought to 'cleanse Bosnia and Herzegovina of foreign influence' by introducing laws to silence dissent, including a Russian-style ['foreign agent'](#) law and the reintroduction of [criminal defamation](#) into the legal system. Violence and threats against journalists and activists, particularly targeting [LGBTQI+ rights advocates](#), continue to be common across the country.

In 2023, Germany experienced a concerning decline in civic space, largely due to the repressive measures implemented by the authorities to curtail the activities of environmental activists, leading to the country's ranking shifting from open to

narrowed. In January, police used [excessive force](#) to remove some 700 protesters who had been occupying the village of Lützerath, whose residents had been evicted to allow for the expansion of a coalmine. The [Letzte Generation](#) (Last Generation) movement, known for its high-profile civil disobedience actions in airports, roads and museums, has been particularly targeted, with home raids, asset seizures and the blocking of its online platform. Members of the climate group are now facing the serious charge of forming a [criminal organisation](#) in connection with their non-violent protests targeting public infrastructure.

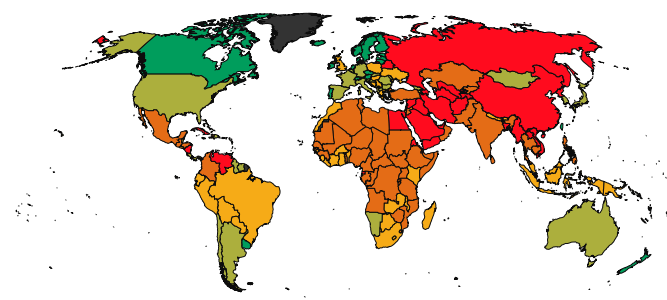
Kyrgyzstan's civic space assessment shifted from obstructed to repressed due to an escalating crackdown on civil society and media, emphasised by the introduction of repressive draft laws. Despite strong objections from the international community and civil society, as of November 2023, parliament was in the process of adopting a law on NGOs with provisions similar to those in Russia's ['foreign agent'](#) legislation. Another draft law currently under consideration provides for excessive state regulation of media and online platforms, raising concerns it could be used to target critics. The number of politically motivated criminal prosecutions has [increased](#), further shrinking the space for critical expression. In one notable case in October 2022, Kyrgyzstani authorities [arrested](#) almost 30 journalists, bloggers, HRDs and public figures who had spoken out against a land swap with Uzbekistan over the Kempir-Abad water reservoir. A year later, some of the defendants in the case are still in pretrial detention and the [trial](#) is taking place behind closed doors.

## 'FOREIGN AGENT' LAWS

Global conflicts and political instability in Europe and Central Asia have led to a proliferation of 'foreign agent' and 'foreign influence' laws, ostensibly to protect national sovereignty, but often with far-reaching implications for civil society activity.

March 2023 saw thousands flooding the streets of Georgia to denounce a restrictive draft law on 'transparency of foreign influence'. The law mandated CSOs that receive over 20 per cent of their income from foreign sources to register as [foreign agents](#), with heavy fines for non-compliance. When the law was put on the parliamentary agenda on 7 March 2023, over 10,000 protesters in Tbilisi voiced their opposition, resulting in clashes with security forces, which used teargas and water cannon. In response to the protests, the government withdrew the law from parliament pending further public debate.

On 23 March 2023, the government of the RS in Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted



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a draft law to establish a [special register](#) for CSOs supported from abroad. These organisations are to be designated as ‘agents of foreign influence’ and will be subject to stricter control and a vague ban on ‘political activities’, making advocacy a punishable offence. Parliament [passed](#) the first reading of the draft in September 2023.

In Kyrgyzstan, a ‘foreign agent’-style draft law was submitted to parliament in May 2023. It would require CSOs that receive international funding and that engage in broadly defined ‘political activities’ to register as ‘foreign representatives’, with the risk of suspension of their activities for up to six months without a court decision as the penalty for non-compliance. Those that do register would be subjected to burdensome reporting obligations and unannounced inspections. In October 2023, the draft law passed its first reading. In neighbouring Kazakhstan, the government [introduced](#) a public record of foreign-funded CSOs in a move clearly aimed at stigmatising such groups.

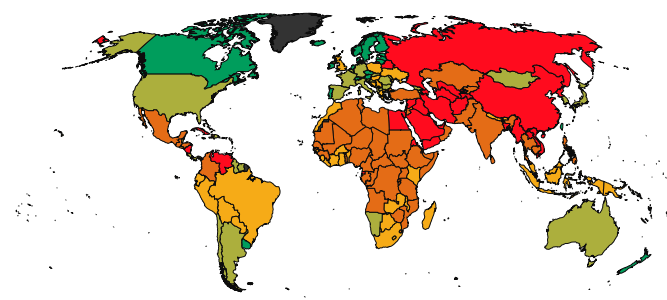
Georgia: Protesters brandish placards and a European Union flag as they demonstrate in front of the Georgian parliament, in Tbilisi on March 7, 2023. - Georgian police used tear gas and water cannon against protesters Tuesday as thousands of demonstrators took to the streets in the capital Tbilisi to oppose a controversial “foreign agents” bill. March 2023 (Photo: AFP via Getty Images)



Kyrgyzstan: People take part in a rally calling for media freedom and the release of journalist Bolot Temirov, who was detained the night before, in Kyrgyzstan’s capital, Bishkek, on January 23, 2022. (Photo: AFP/Vyacheslav Oseledko)

In May 2023, the EU presented its [‘Defence of Democracy’](#) package, which included a directive on ‘foreign interference’ that raised concerns among civil society across Europe. The proposed directive would require CSOs to disclose funding from sources outside the EU and subject them to strict registration and reporting restrictions. Over 200 European CSOs signed [a letter](#) opposing the proposal, arguing that it undermines the EU’s credibility in opposing the use of similar measures to stifle civil society within or outside its borders. In July 2023, the European Commission [responded](#) with assurances that a thorough impact assessment would be undertaken before any such legislation was implemented.

Russia continues to stifle civil society activities through its notorious ‘foreign agent’ legislation, designating international CSOs [Transparency International](#) and the [World Wide Fund for Nature](#) as ‘undesirable’, and their Russian branches as ‘foreign agents’. In neighbouring Belarus, as of May 2023, over 800 organisations were undergoing forced [liquidation](#), as part of the [campaign](#) announced in 2021 by President Aleksandr Lukashenko as a ‘mopping-up operation’ against ‘bandits and foreign agents’.



# CIVIC SPACE RESTRICTIONS

In Europe and Central Asia, the most common violations of civic freedoms documented in 2023 were intimidation, detention of protesters and disruption of protests, censorship and the passing of restrictive laws.

## TOP 5 VIOLATIONS TO CIVIC FREEDOMS FOR EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA REGION

**1**  **INTIMIDATION**

**2**  **PROTESTOR(S) DETAINED**

**3**  **CENSORSHIP**

**4**  **PROTEST DISRUPTION**

**5**  **RESTRICTIVE LAW**

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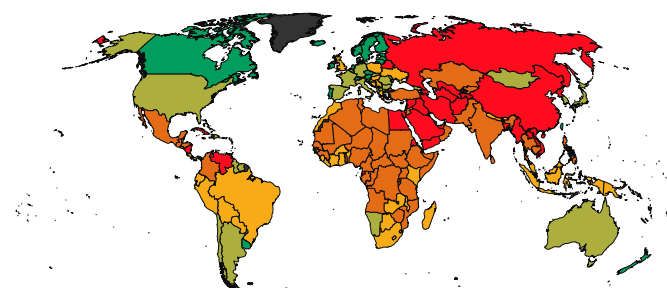
# INTIMIDATION

Intimidation was the main violation of civic space in Europe and Central Asia during the reporting period, documented in at least 28 countries and most often used against journalists and media. Other groups particularly affected were environmental activists, refugee rights activists and women HRDs.

Attempts at intimidation often took the form of attacks on the property and premises of media outlets and CSOs. In Banja Luka in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the cars of two journalists, Nikola Morača and Aleksandar Trifunović, were [vandalised](#) after they spoke out against the proposal to recriminalise defamation. Not long after, unknown people [vandalised](#) the premises of a social centre in the city, smashing windows and stealing an LGBTQI+ Pride flag. In Kazakhstan, a series of acts of intimidation and harassment targeting independent media were reported ahead of March 2023 parliamentary elections. For example, the car of journalist Dinara Yegeubayeva was [set ablaze](#) near her home in Almaty and the office of the Elmedia online outlet was [attacked](#) six times by unknown perpetrators.



Russia: Journalist Maria Ponomarenko was recently sentenced to six years in prison. February 2023 (Photo: Sota)



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Legal intimidation through strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) filed by public officials, companies and powerful individuals continued to occur frequently in Europe and Central Asia. Such lawsuits were documented in multiple countries, including [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), [Bulgaria](#), [Croatia](#), [Greece](#) and [Italy](#). In Serbia, Aleksandar Šapić, the Mayor of Belgrade, filed two [lawsuits](#) against the Balkan Investigative Research Network over articles about his real estate holdings. Other forms of legal harassment were recorded, as states have initiated criminal and administrative proceedings against HRDs in order to intimidate them. In May 2023, Greek media reported that prominent HRD Panayote Dimitras was [under investigation](#) by the anti-money laundering authority for embezzlement of EU funds. Dimitras had previously been [questioned](#) by authorities in December 2022 after he was charged with ‘establishing a criminal organisation with the aim of facilitating the illegal entry and stay of third-country nationals in Greece’ in connection with his work with refugees.

In Central Asia, prosecution continued to be used frequently as a means of intimidation and suppression of dissent, and prosecutions of journalists and HRDs are some of the most common violations in the region. Particularly concerning was the use of extremism charges in [Kazakhstan](#) and [Tajikistan](#) against government critics, including HRD [Manuchehr Kholiknazarov](#) and opposition party leader [Marat Zhylanbaev](#), and the pursuit by authorities in Turkmenistan of the forcible repatriation of outspoken activists abroad, accompanied by pressure on their relatives within the country. Notably, Turkey-based Turkmen activist Dursoltan Taganova reported intimidation [targeting](#) her 12-year-old son who lives in Turkmenistan, who security services questioned and attempted to recruit as an informant. In Tajikistan’s Gorno-Badakhshan (GBAO) region, security officials have reportedly summoned civil society representatives and threatened to bring criminal charges against them or their relatives unless they ‘voluntarily’ close their organisations. The number of CSOs in Turkmenistan that have been shut down or pressured into closing significantly [increased](#) in 2023.

## PROTESTERS DETAINED

The detention of protesters was the second most common violation in Europe and Central Asia, documented in at least 22 countries, while protests were disrupted in no fewer than 18 countries. The most common protest drivers were women’s rights, environmental rights and labour issues. Environmental and climate protests, and protests against war and conflict, were more likely to encounter restrictions.

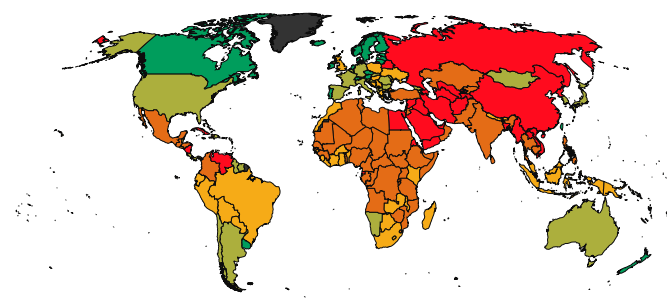


France: May Day Protests In Paris Amid Continued Outrage Over Pension Reform. May 2023 (Photo: Pierre Crom/Getty Images)

As part of the crackdown on environmental activists, climate protests in European countries were increasingly broken up and protesters arrested. In November 2022, around 500 climate activists staged a dramatic [protest](#) at Schiphol Airport in the Netherlands, occupying the runway, chaining themselves to aeroplanes and sitting on the tarmac. The police responded forcefully, arresting over 200 activists and using physical violence against those chained up, resulting in at least one hospitalisation. In March 2023, police in The Hague used [water cannon](#) to disperse activists on the A12 motorway, resulting in 700 arrests, all but three of whom were later released. During another blockade of the A12 motorway in May, 1,579 people were arrested with 40 people charged.

In May 2023 in Belgium, 14 international activists occupying a liquefied natural gas terminal were [arrested](#) for trespassing and released after 48 hours. During the year, climate activists were also detained in [France](#), [Germany](#), [Italy](#), [Norway](#) and [the UK](#) for non-violent civil disobedience actions. Peaceful environmental protests in [Azerbaijan](#) and [Serbia](#) were also met with excessive police force.

Amid a [wave of protests](#) in France, arrests of protesters were often accompanied by widespread and brutal police violence, causing concern among the EU, UN and international human rights organisations. In March, police used disproportionate and indiscriminate force to disperse around 30,000 environmentalists protesting against the construction of irrigation mega-basins in Sainte-Soline. Subsequently, during riots that took place between 27 June and 4 July following the shooting of



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an unarmed teenager by police, more than 3,000 people were arrested. Those arrested had an average age of 17, with some as young as 12.

Throughout the year, anti-war sentiment remained an important catalyst for protests, with protests related to war and conflict spanning at least 17 countries in Europe and Central Asia in 2023. In February, demonstrations were held across Europe to commemorate the first anniversary of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. In Russia, peace activists marked the date with symbolic acts such as laying flowers at statues of Ukrainian poets and solitary pickets. However, the Russian authorities reacted with repression, with over 50 [arrests](#). In addition, since October 2023, several European countries, including [France](#), [Germany](#) and the [UK](#), have imposed restrictions on mass protests in solidarity with Palestine amid Israel’s assault on Gaza.

In Central Asia, a widespread lack of accountability continued for severe human rights violations stemming from the suppression of anti-government protests in 2022. These incidents, notably violently suppressed protests known as ‘Bloody January’ in [Kazakhstan](#), unrest in the GBAO in [Tajikistan](#) and events in the Republic of Karakalpakstan in [Uzbekistan](#), have seen insufficient efforts to investigate alleged human rights violations against protesters. Government attempts to investigate these allegations and hold those responsible to account have lacked independence, thoroughness and efficiency. As a result, a climate of impunity prevails, allowing serious human rights violations such as excessive force, torture and ill-treatment to continue unchecked.

## CENSORSHIP

Censorship is a prominent violation in Europe and Central Asia, with more than 50 incidents reported across 26 countries. Over the year, authorities targeted the spread of ‘fake news’, ‘banned’ or ‘extremist’ content on social media platforms and often used these provisions to prosecute people who criticised military interventions and wartime human rights violations. In [Russia](#) and [Belarus](#) in particular, hundreds of people were arrested and imprisoned for speaking out against the war in Ukraine. For example, Igor Baryshnikov, a 64-year-old activist, was sentenced to seven and a half years in prison in Kaliningrad for spreading ‘fake news’ about the Russian army on Facebook. In the first month following Azerbaijan’s offensive in Nagorno-Karabakh on 19 September, which displaced more than 100,000 Armenians, over [20 people](#) were arrested for criticising the ‘anti-terrorist operation’, mainly for disseminating ‘banned’ content.

# ACTS OF CENSORSHIP



## IN AT LEAST 26 COUNTRIES

Authorities in [France](#), [Germany](#) and the [UK](#) announced their intention to deport all non-citizens perceived to be expressing support for Hamas in the aftermath of its terrorist assault on Israel. In the UK, students have been [interrogated](#) by the police for social media posts referencing Palestine’s ‘right to resist occupation’ and referring to Israeli settlers as ‘fascist’. Academics have also faced accusations of justifying Hamas militant attacks in online posts. In Berlin schools, state authorities have [banned](#) any ‘demonstrative behaviour or expression of opinion’ that could be understood as an expression of approval for attacks on Israel or terrorist activities, which in their view includes common pro-Palestinian symbols such as keffiyehs and stickers reading ‘Free Palestine’.

The few independent media outlets remaining in Central Asia were subjected to ongoing pressure and access to online content was restricted. Draft laws in [Kazakhstan](#) and [Kyrgyzstan](#) risk increasing state control over media, while new blogging restrictions have been initiated in several countries. In [Tajikistan](#), at least two independent outlets, the New Tajikistan 2 website and Pamir Daily News were [banned](#) as ‘extremist’ by court order, and in Kyrgyzstan, a request to [close down](#) the Kloop portal due to its critical reporting was pending in court as of November 2023. Extensive internet censorship continued in Turkmenistan, with [thousands](#) of websites arbitrarily blocked.



# OF CONCERN

## ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDERS

From the end of 2022, climate groups including Extinction Rebellion, Just Stop Oil and Last Generation organised increasingly high-profile civil disobedience actions across Europe, strategically [blocking](#) traffic, [gluing](#) themselves to roads and throwing food and washable paint at [buildings](#) and [artworks](#). In response, politicians called for tough measures against these actions, leading to an increasingly harsh crackdown

on environmental activists in the EU and beyond. The impact has seen people arrested, prosecuted and intimidated, in a wave of government action aimed at stemming the growing tide of climate activism.

In the Netherlands, two of the three Belgian activists from Just Stop Oil Belgium who [glued](#) themselves to Vermeer’s ‘Girl with a Pearl Earring’ painting in the Mauritshuis museum in The Hague were sentenced to two months in prison. In Italy, three activists from the Last Generation movement [splattered](#) the Senate building in Rome with washable orange paint, in protest against the government’s apparent reluctance to transition towards a carbon-neutral economy. The three activists were arrested and will face trial for vandalism, potentially facing up to three years in prison.

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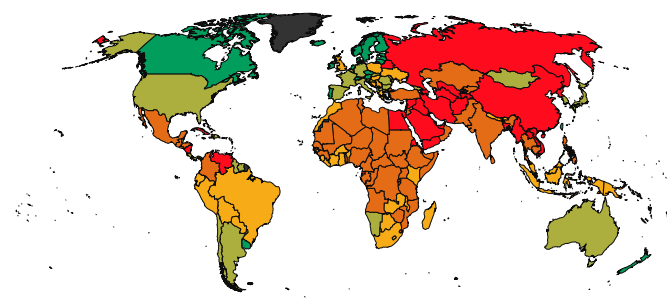
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Germany: Activists of “Letzte Generation” (Last Generation) who glued themselves to a street to protest for a speed limit on highways as well as for affordable public transport, hold hands as they sit on the tarmac, in Munich, Germany. December 2022 (Photo: Michaela Rehle/REUTERS)



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The charges levelled against environmental defenders have increased in severity, with authorities in some countries accusing them of organised crime and sedition, which enables the use of more repressive measures. In December 2022, German police [raided](#) the homes of 11 Last Generation activists and confiscated their phones and computers. On 24 May 2023, the investigation was widened with further [raids](#), focusing on suspicion of establishing and supporting a criminal organisation, including direct involvement in the planning of crimes such as attempting to sabotage an Italy-Germany oil pipeline. In June 2023, the Munich Public Prosecutor’s Office confirmed that it had engaged in surveillance of Last Generation’s communications, which included phones, email accounts and GPS location data. In the Netherlands, six activists were [arrested](#) for sedition in January 2023 for planning a blockade of the A12 motorway.

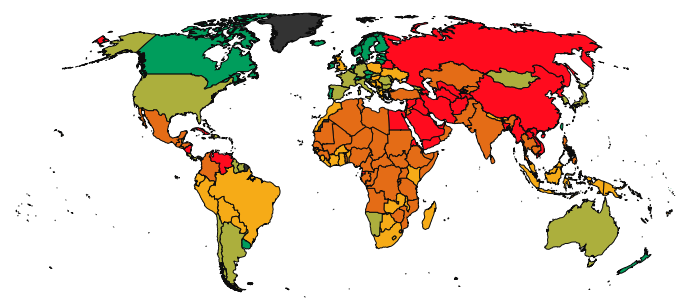
A worrying development is that in the UK, activists who were already on trial for these non-violent acts have additionally been charged with [contempt of court](#) for trying to explain their motives and beliefs to juries. Those who gather outside the court in their support face the same charge if they hold messages urging the jury to acquit. For example, 68-year-old Trudi Warner faces a prison sentence for holding a poster urging jurors in a climate trial to vote according to their conscience. A further 12 people are being investigated for contempt of court for displaying similar posters during another trial. Insulate Britain protesters Giovanna Lewis and Amy Pritchard were sentenced to seven weeks in prison for defying a judge’s order not to mention climate change during their trial.







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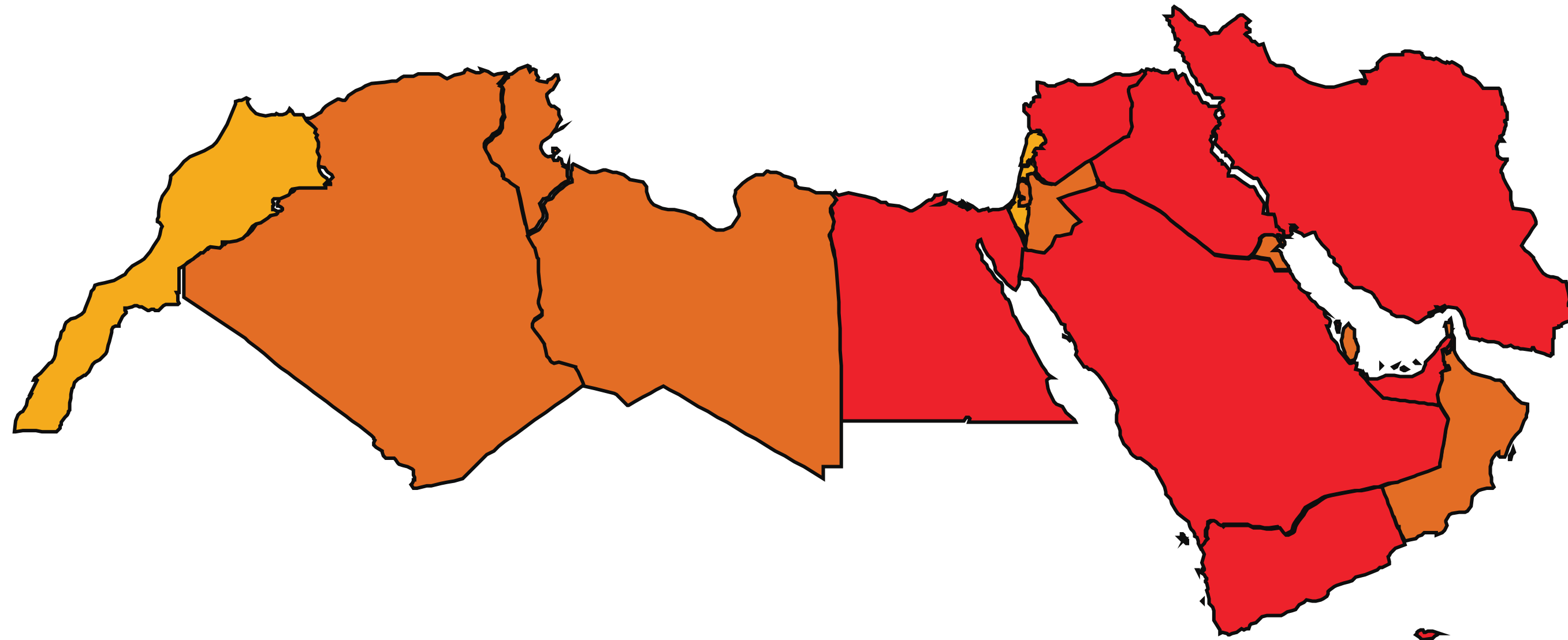
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## RATING OVERVIEW

The MENA region continues to be home to some of the most repressive governments in the world. There have been no significant improvements in civic space throughout the MENA region in the past year, highlighting the persistent challenges faced by civil society and HRDs in particular. As governments intensify their efforts to restrict civic space, HRDs, journalists and other activists continue to bear the impact of authoritarian measures.

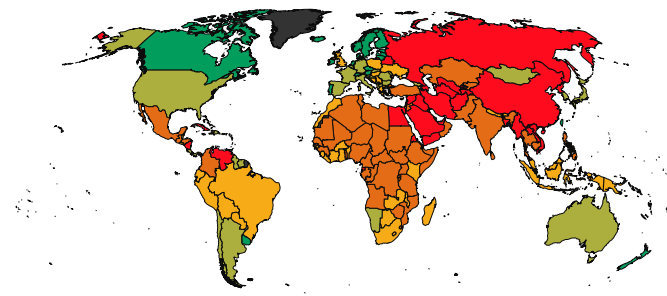
Across the region, arbitrary and mass imprisonment of those perceived to be political opponents of governments continues unabated. In Tunisia, president Kais Saïed’s [crackdown](#) on critics resulted in at least nine people including prominent critics being arrested, with some detained on security and graft charges in February 2023. In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the increasingly retaliatory and punitive context [forbids](#) criticism of ‘the state or the rulers’ and imposes punishments, including life imprisonment and the death penalty, for association with any group opposing ‘the system of government’ under the Cybercrime Law. A group of democracy activists known as the UAE 94 remain arbitrarily imprisoned for signing an online petition calling for political reform in 2012, despite most of them having completed their sentences.

Similarly, Saudi Arabia also continued its growing trend of keeping HRDs in detention after completion of their sentences, a pattern in both countries documented in last year’s report. CSOs continued to [call](#) on Saudi authorities to release HRDs [Issa Al-Nukhaifi](#) and Mohammed Al-Qahtani, who had served their full sentences in November 2022 but continued to be held incommunicado in arbitrary detention for over a [year](#), and are facing new charges.

Censorship remained widespread, with authorities attempting to introduce legislative changes that would have far-reaching consequences for criticism of authorities and leaders in [Jordan](#) and [Kuwait](#). Internet restrictions on online news outlets were [documented](#) in Egypt, while the authorities [banned](#) TV outlets in Palestine. In Iraq, authorities also stopped the broadcast of some shows.

Across several countries, the rights of women and other excluded groups continued to come under an unrelenting onslaught. In Iran, authorities continue to target women’s rights defenders. Those advocating for the rights of women continue to face severe retaliation, with [detentions](#) of women, their advocates and journalists continuously being documented. Violations against defenders of women’s rights were also documented in Saudi Arabia and Syria, as detailed below.

In Kuwait, the situation of the stateless Bedoon community remained dire, with



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UAE: Activists in prison in the UAE (Photo: AFP/File photo)

the authorities showing no signs of relenting in their crackdown on the rights of community members and their advocates. Mohammed Al-Barghash, a human rights activist who peacefully and tirelessly defends the rights of the Bedoon community, was arrested and detained by the State Security Apparatus in relation to four charges reportedly connected to state security. Kuwaiti authorities also deported writer and Bedoon rights defender Dr Mona Kareem as soon as she arrived in Kuwait to visit her family. All of her family members are prevented from travelling abroad because they are Bedoon residents of Kuwait.

In the MENA region civic space ratings are largely unchanged. Out of 19 countries, civic space is rated as closed in eight, repressed in eight and obstructed in three. As in previous years, no countries are rated as open or narrowed in MENA.

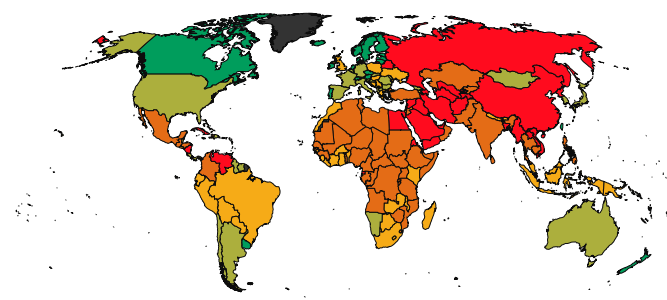
Libya's rating has moved from closed to repressed, with marginal improvements in civic space having been observed during the past year. Although protesters are able to hold demonstrations, these are often violently dispersed by local militias, with accompanying incidents of detentions. A restrictive law that unduly allowed arbitrary suspension and dissolution of CSOs was suspended by the courts, but other repressive regulations are still operational.

Despite the gloomy picture, civil society in MENA continues to show remarkable resilience and solidarity in speaking out against violations.

For example, as the UAE prepared to host the COP28 climate summit, CSOs joined efforts to demonstrate the glaring contradiction between the government's efforts to present an image that promotes a diversity of voices while UAE HRDs face exile and prolonged imprisonment for speaking up. The UAE was added to the CIVICUS Monitor Watchlist in September. CSOs raised concern that over 60 prisoners of conscience remain in prison despite completing their sentences, the practice of torture and solitary confinement in prisons and detention centres, including against HRDs, remains widespread, HRDs and peaceful critics continue to be systematically targeted by the authorities in retaliation for their peaceful human rights work, while the recently adopted 2022 Cybercrime Law criminalises the work of journalists, whistleblowers, activists and peaceful critics in a bid to silence dissent. UAE authorities made clear that unauthorised protests and online dissent during COP28 would not be tolerated.

Libya: Photo (Zohra Bensemra/REUTERS)





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# WOMEN: UNBOWED HEROINES CONFRONTING OPPRESSION DESPITE ENTRENCHED GENDER BIASES

As with several previous reports, throughout the MENA region, our analysis reveals the significant contributions of women in advancing civic space and promoting gender equality. From advocating for the [abolition](#) of the guardianship system and women’s right to drive in Saudi Arabia in 2017 and 2018, to taking a [leading](#) role in organising and mobilising protests in Lebanon’s 2019 popular uprising and [participating](#) in their thousands in Iraq’s 2019 popular protests, the CIVICUS Monitor continues to document the remarkable leadership that women have demonstrated across MENA in advocating for human rights, and women’s rights in particular. UAE: (Photo: Sascha Schuermann/Getty Images)

Despite the heavy price involved, women have shown remarkable tenacity. Women and their advocates continue to face systematic targeting due to their peaceful human rights work, in what has been a persistent and visible aspect of civic space violations across MENA, and in a context of increasing gender repression.

In Iran, the first anniversary of the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, who died in custody after being detained by the Iranian morality police for allegedly wearing an ‘improper’ hijab, sparking mass nationwide protests, was marred by a new round of detentions which began on 30 July 2023. At least 22 activists, most of them women, were [arrested and detained](#) in just one month.

A poster of Mahsa Amini, the young girl killed by the morality police in Iran for her hijab, is displayed in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., her death sparked the Woman, Life, Freedom movement. (Photo by Ali Khaligh / Middle East Images / Middle East Images via AFP)

In Syria, woman HRD Hiba Ezzideen Al-Hajji and the staff of the Equity & Empowerment Organisation were [subjected](#) to death threats and a fierce defamation campaign across several social media platforms in direct retaliation against their work defending women’s rights. The defamation campaign, conducted across Facebook, Telegram and WhatsApp, included anonymous pages that published explicit and fabricated images and employed offensive language to slander them.

In Saudi Arabia, internet activist and online fitness trainer Manahel Al-Otaibi, who uses social media to call for women’s rights, was [arrested](#) in November 2022 for calling for the abolition of the guardianship system. Her case is being tried by the Specialised Criminal Court (Terrorism Court), which was established to hear the cases of those accused of terrorism, but has often been used as a tool to imprison HRDs, and frequently imposes heavy sentences. Manahel’s two sisters, Fawzia and Maryam Al-Otaibi, have also been targeted by Saudi authorities. Maryam is a woman HRD who has been banned from travelling for more than four years due to her peaceful activism in defence of women’s rights on social media, while Fawzia, who lives in the UK, has received death threats for continuing to use social media to speak out about the plight of her sisters and the rights of women in Saudi Arabia. Women’s rights defender Salma Al-Shehab is currently [serving](#) one of the harshest sentences for her online advocacy for women’s rights, with a sentence of 27 years in prison, reduced from 34 years.



People take part in a protest ahead of the first anniversary of the death of Mahsa Amini. September 13, 2023 (Photo by Dan Kitwood/Getty Images)



## CIVIC SPACE RESTRICTIONS

In the MENA region the detention of HRDs, intimidation and harassment, censorship, detention of journalists and prosecution of HRDs were the top five civic space violations over the past year. The violations remain largely the same as in the previous year's report, with detention of HRDs taking the lead this year after being in fourth place last year.

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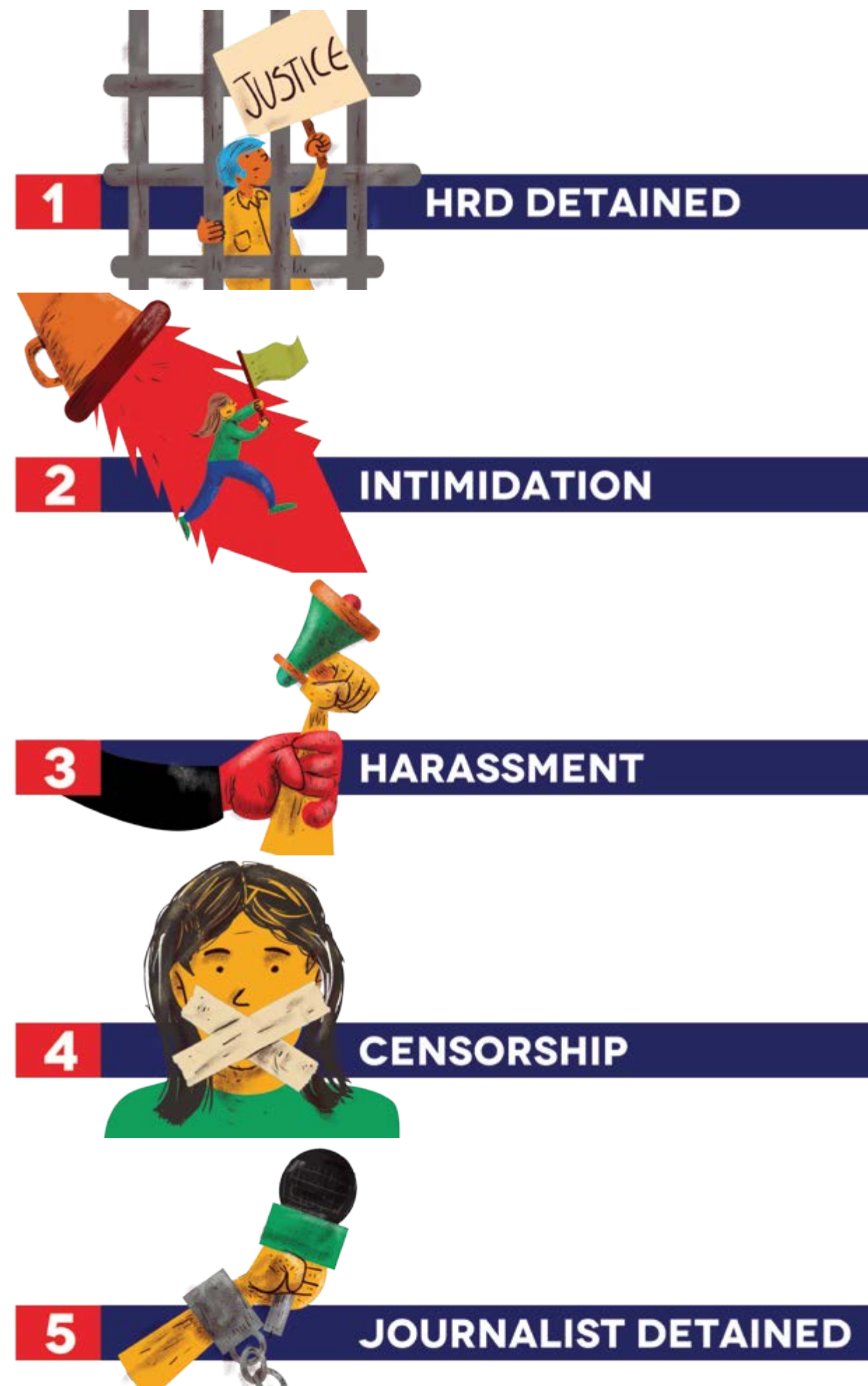
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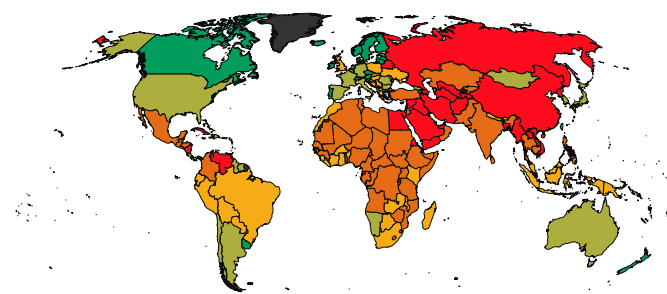
### TOP 5 VIOLATIONS TO CIVIC FREEDOMS FOR MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA REGION



### DETENTION OF HRDS

The detention of HRDs, the most documented violation in MENA, was reported in at least 12 out of 19 countries. HRDs were detained for a range of reasons relating to their peaceful human rights work. In particular, HRDs were often detained for expressing opinions and advocating for human rights on their social media accounts, with women HRDs particularly targeted for advocating for the rights of women both online and offline.

In Palestine, in events before the start of the current conflict, Israeli forces [arrested](#) HRD Issa Amro in December 2022 after he was summoned for an investigation at the Ja'bara Israeli police station just days after documenting and publishing a video of Israeli soldiers violently attacking an Israeli activist during a solidarity visit. In Iraq, security forces [arrested](#) a political analyst, Dr Mohammad Na'na Hassan, in Baghdad following a complaint filed against him by Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani, who accused Dr Hassan of attacking him verbally before he assumed office. In Oman, online activist Majid bin Abdullah Al-Ruhaili, who uses his Twitter account to advocate for political and legal reform, was kidnapped by the Internal



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Iraq: Iraqi environmentalist Jasim Al-Asadi (Photo: Sebastian usher /Twitter)

Security Service in Muscat and [held incommunicado](#) just two days after he tweeted about the use of election propaganda.

As discussed above, in Iran, women and those advocating for the rights of women were targeted in a new round of [detentions](#) that started in late July 2023. Those detained included prominent women’s rights activists, lawyers and journalists, [held](#) on charges of ‘spreading propaganda against the state’ and ‘assembly and collusion against national security’.

## INTIMIDATION AND HARASSMENT

Intimidation and harassment were the second and third most documented violations in MENA, with intimidation reported in at least six countries and harassment in at least eight. Intimidation was mostly used against journalists, followed closely by HRDs, CSOs and media outlets.

Intimidation occurred through a range of means. In some instances, as seen in Lebanon, authorities summoned journalists to interrogate them arbitrarily in relation to their work, often without any accompanying official charges. Jean Kassir of the General Directorate of State Security [summoned the co-founder](#) of independent media outlet Megaphone in relation to a Twitter post by Megaphone that accused Lebanese leaders of being fugitives of justice. The investigation against Kassir was dropped following protests and condemnation by Lebanese CSOs. In Tunisia, similar interrogations took a different tack, sometimes involving arbitrary searches and arrests, as seen in [arrest](#) of Mosaique FM head Nouredine Boutar. Police questioned him over the station’s operations, including on who takes editorial decisions on the station’s programming and choice of guests, all while failing to disclose the reason for the arrest.

Abductions and kidnappings were also used in some instances to intimidate activists, as seen in Iraq when an unknown armed group in civilian clothes [kidnapped](#) prominent environmental activist Jassim Al-Asadi as he travelled by car. Al-Asadi was later released after what appeared to have been an intervention by the Iraqi government. He revealed that he was subjected to ‘most severe forms of torture’ using ‘electricity and sticks’ and was moved from place to place during his captivity.

With regard to harassment, authorities have often misused the criminal justice and legal systems to punish HRDs unduly. In Kuwait, the courts [sentenced](#) blogger Salman Al-Khalidi in absentia to another three years in prison in connection with his peaceful human rights activities. He had previously been sentenced to five years in prison with hard labour in a separate case in May 2023, among other sentences.

Online threats and online harassment were also documented as a major harassment tactic, particularly against women activists, including in the [case](#) of Hiba Ezzideen Al-Hajji in Syria.

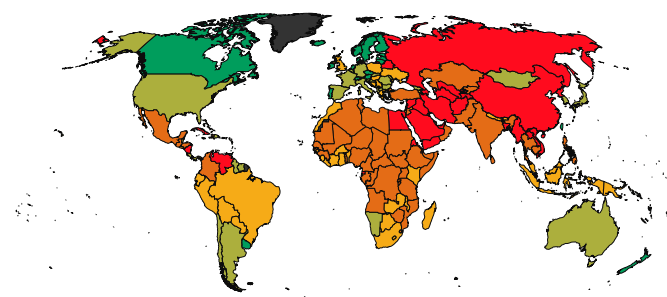
## CENSORSHIP

Censorship remained a major area of concern as the fourth most-documented violation in MENA, reported in at least nine out of 19 countries.

In some instances, legislative changes were used or attempted as a tactic to introduce censorship, as seen in Kuwait, where the Ministry of Information prepared a [draft](#)



Egypt: Human rights organizations condemn the blocking of Soultta 4 and Masr 360 websites and call on the Egyptian authorities to guarantee freedom of the press. Image by afteegypt.org



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[law](#) that contains a prohibition on criticising the Emir, the Crown Prince and the Deputy Emir, and prevents the publication of their news or activities without prior Emiri approval. It also contains clauses in its section on publications on ‘insulting or disrespecting the country’s constitution’ and ‘violating public morals’. The proposed bill faced widespread opposition from civil society, including HRDs, as well as a large number of parliamentarians, due to the restrictions it would place on freedom of expression.

Similarly in Jordan, a draft Cyber Crime law that [proposes](#) to criminalise publication of the names or pictures of public officials without authorisation, and uses vague terms such as ‘fake news’, ‘promoting, instigating, aiding or inciting immorality’, ‘online assassination of personality’, ‘provoking strife’, ‘undermining national unity’, and ‘contempt for religions’, has raised concern that it would increase online censorship and open opportunity for abuse by authorities.

Another form of censorship was internet restrictions on online news outlets, as seen in Egypt, where the authorities [blocked](#) the Masr 360 and Soult4 news websites, believed to be in relation to the content they publish. While the Soult4 website covers political and party news, particularly news of the opposition Civil Democratic Movement, the Masr 360 website mainly provides news of human rights violations and had recently criticised the acquisition of Egyptian assets by Emirati companies.

More blatant forms of censorship were seen in countries including Lebanon, where the Minister of Interior and Municipalities, Bassam Mawlawi, [banned](#) two LGBTQI+ events scheduled for November 2022, despite a decision by the State Consultative Council confirming the illegality of the minister’s decisions to prevent activities related to LGBTQI+ rights. In Palestine, the Israeli Minister of National Security [issued](#) a decision banning the work of ‘Palestine TV’ inside the Occupied Territories for a six-months period. Intelligence officers interrogated the outlet’s journalists and [warned](#) them of arrest in case of non-compliance with the decision. In Iraq, the Communications and Media Commission [stopped the broadcast](#) and deleted all previous episodes of the Al-Kasir series, which was shown on the UTV Iraqi satellite channel. The decision was based on ‘complaints received by members of the Parliament and tribal elders’.

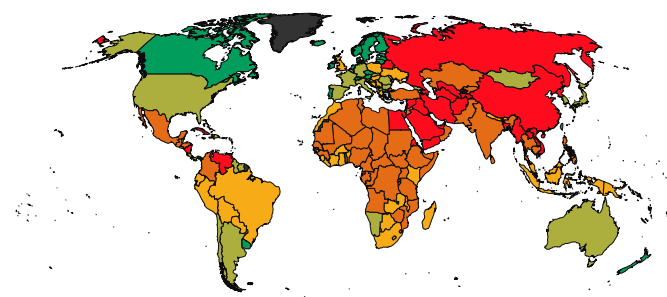
# OF CONCERN

## PALESTINE

Israeli occupation continued threatening the lives of journalists, inflicting physical injuries and preventing coverage of various events. International groups such as Reporters Without Borders continue to issue [statements](#) calling on Israel to end its systematic attacks on Palestinian journalists, which are encouraged by impunity.



Palestine: A man waves a Palestinian flags as Lebanese security forces clash with protesters outside the US Embassy in Awkar east of Beirut, during a demonstration in solidarity with the Palestinians of the Gaza Strip. October 18, 2023 (Photo by Ibrahim Amor/AFP via Getty Images)



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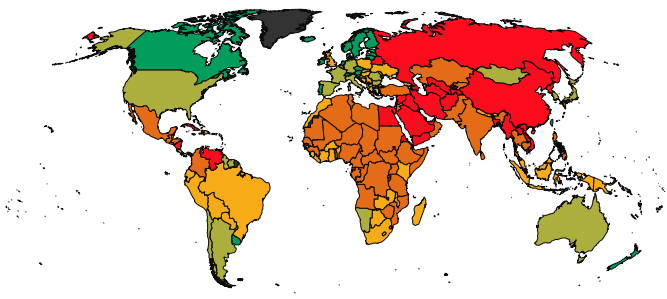
The already challenging and brutal civic context is exacerbated by the escalating conflict in the context of Israel’s forceful occupation of Palestine and the 16-year siege of Gaza. On 7 October 2023, Hamas forces launched an unprecedented attack on Israel, resulting in a devastating assault on the civilian population in areas near Gaza. This assault [caused](#) over 1,000 deaths and more than 200 people were abducted. In response, Israel’s actions have led to a significant number of civilian casualties in Gaza, with more than [11,000](#) reported fatalities as of 13 November 2023. Over 62 per cent of the victims in Gaza were women and children. MADA Palestine [reports](#) that over 30 journalists have been killed by Israeli bombs and attacks as of the beginning of November 2023.

In the northern part of Gaza, over a million people were [faced](#) with the difficult choice to flee or confront death. However, with closed borders, there was no safe haven in sight. A total siege of Gaza left people deprived of basic necessities, including water, food, fuel and medicines, leading many to describe what was happened as an ethnic cleansing exercise.

In response to these tragic developments that have garnered international attention, people in multiple countries have mobilised in solidarity with the victims (see more in the Europe and Central Asia section). CSOs have called for an immediate ceasefire and for international efforts to address the root causes of the ongoing conflict.

Before the current bombings, the CIVICUS Monitor documented civic space violations during the year. In November 2022, no less than 21 violations were [reported](#), with 12 committed by the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF), seven committed by various Palestinian authorities in the West Bank and Gaza and two committed by social media networks. In December 2022, 29 violations were [documented](#), 12 of which were committed by the IOF, seven by Palestinian authorities in the West Bank, and two by social media networks. In February 2023, 11 physical assaults were [documented](#).

Amid a growing tide of infringements, these violations have persisted within an increasingly stifling legal framework. CSOs continue to [voice](#) their opposition to the 2022 Non-Profit Companies Bylaw and call for its repeal. This bylaw, regarded by Palestinian civil society as another in a series of measures designed to constrict the Palestinian civic landscape, contains provisions that actively undermine and constrict the activities of CSOs. Among these restrictive clauses are requirements for pre-approval from authorities concerning both the receipt and disbursement of contributions. In the face of a relentless assault on Palestinian CSOs by Israeli authorities, CSOs have expressed concern that these legal provisions could be exploited to further stifle the voices of CSOs in Palestine and cloak Israeli authorities’ violations against these organisations.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

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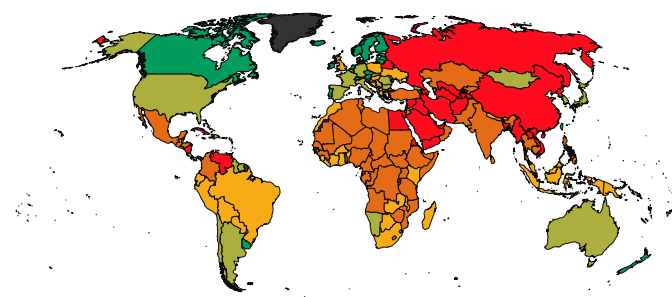
### MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

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- Take measures to foster a safe, respectful and enabling environment in which civil society activists and journalists can operate freely without fear of harassment, intimidation, attacks, or reprisals, in line with international human rights commitments.
- Work with civil society to establish effective national protection mechanisms that respond to the needs of those at risk.
- Repeal any legislation that criminalises HRDs, protesters, journalists and members of excluded groups. Ensure that adequate consultations are carried out with the public and civil society and that their input is taken into account before drafting laws that impact on freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression.
- Carry out independent, prompt and impartial investigations into all cases of attacks on and killings of HRDs and journalists and ensure those responsible are brought to justice to deter others from doing the same.
- Desist from using excessive force against peaceful protesters, stop pre-empting and preventing protests and adopt best practices on freedom of peaceful assembly, ensuring that any restrictions on assemblies comply with international human rights standards.
- Review and, if necessary, update existing human rights training for police and security forces, with the assistance of independent CSOs, to foster the consistent application of international human rights law and standards during protests, including the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms.
- Establish fully independent and effective investigations into the use of excessive force by law enforcement officers and agencies during protests and bring to justice those suspected of criminal responsibility.
- Ensure that freedom of expression is safeguarded in all forms by bringing all national legislation into line with international law and standards and refrain from censoring social and conventional media. Any restrictions should be subject to oversight by an independent and impartial judicial authority and be in accordance with due process and standards of legality, necessity and legitimacy.
- Maintain reliable and unfettered internet access and cease internet shutdowns that prevent people obtaining essential information.
- Repeal any legislation that criminalises expressions based on vague concepts such as ‘fake news’ or disinformation, as such laws are not compatible with the requirements of proportionality.
- Publicly condemn defamatory remarks, threats, acts of intimidation and attacks on HRDs and excluded communities.
- Take appropriate measures to fully implement all recommendations accepted by states made by UN Special Rapporteurs and Working Groups, including those from the Universal Periodic Review process of the UN Human Rights Council.





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# TO THE UNITED NATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL BODIES:

- Provide access for communities and civil society to engage in decision-making processes at the UN and work closely with states to ensure that laws, travel restrictions and technologies do not limit access to the UN.
- Pressure states to repeal or substantially amend restrictive legislation not in accordance with international law and standards in protecting freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression.
- Strengthen existing mechanisms and implement new ones to address reprisals against HRDs who cooperate with international and regional mechanisms.
- Take the necessary measures to ensure that activists and others in civil society are not put at risk because of the information they provide and publicly call out states that impose restrictions on civil society participation.

# TO THE PRIVATE SECTOR:

- Businesses should align their policies with international human rights standards including the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) to ensure that any censorship request from governments is not enforced.

# TO DONORS:

- Provide long-term, unrestricted and core support for civil society in countries where civil society is facing increasing restrictions from states. Funders should provide specific support to groups conducting advocacy in countries with rapidly closing civic space.
- Adopt participatory approaches to grant-making. Include human rights organisations in designing schemes and conduct situation assessments with CSOs.
- Maintain engagement at every stage, including when funding has been granted, to create adaptation and reallocation strategies with grantees in response to difficult working environments.
- Prioritise security. In sensitive cases, donors need to balance transparency and security needs. Where civil society and human rights work is criminalised or HRDs are under surveillance or facing harassment, key information such as the identity, operations, activities and location of those receiving funds might need to remain undisclosed. Donors should support programmes to ensure that HRDs have appropriate training, skills and equipment to conduct their work safely.
- Adapt grant-making modalities to the emergence of social movements and youth activists, among other key elements of civil society.





# REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

## AFRICA

Country	SCORES 2023	RATING 2023	RATING 2022	RATING 2021	RATING 2020	RATING 2019	RATING 2018
Angola	35	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED
Benin	47	OBSTRUCTED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Botswana	60	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Burkina Faso	46	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Burundi	28	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED
Cameroon	26	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED
Cape Verde	88	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Central African Republic	31	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED
Chad	25	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED
Comoros	46	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	NARROWED
Côte d'Ivoire	54	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Democratic Republic of the Congo	33	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	CLOSED	CLOSED
Djibouti	20	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	REPRESSED
Equatorial Guinea	19	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED
Eritrea	3	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED
Eswatini	24	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED
Ethiopia	31	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED
Gabon	40	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED
Gambia	55	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Ghana	55	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Guinea	26	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Guinea Bissau	49	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Kenya	50	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Lesotho	52	OBSTRUCTED	REPRESSED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Liberia	49	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Madagascar	47	OBSTRUCTED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	OBSTRUCTED
Malawi	60	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Mali	32	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Mauritania	39	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED
Mauritius	77	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Mozambique	39	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED

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BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

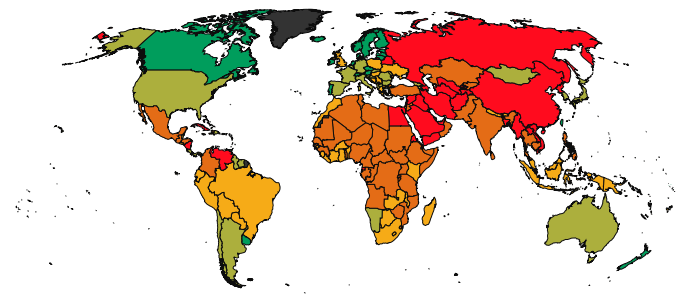
ASIA PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

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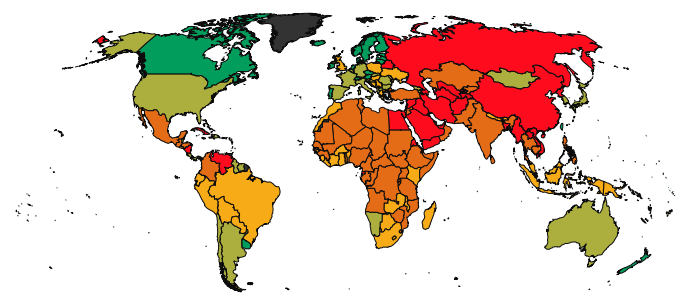
### EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

### MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

### RECOMMENDATIONS

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Country	SCORES 2023	RATING 2023	RATING 2022	RATING 2021	RATING 2020	RATING 2019	RATING 2018
Namibia	71	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Niger	35	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Nigeria	32	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	OBSTRUCTED
Republic of the Congo	33	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED
Rwanda	23	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED
Sao Tome and Principe	82	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Senegal	31	REPRESSED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Seychelles	76	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Sierra Leone	47	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Somalia	29	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED
Somaliland	35	REPRESSED					
South Africa	55	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
South Sudan	25	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED
Sudan	21	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	CLOSED	CLOSED
Tanzania	32	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED
Togo	39	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Uganda	30	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED
Zambia	53	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Zimbabwe	30	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED



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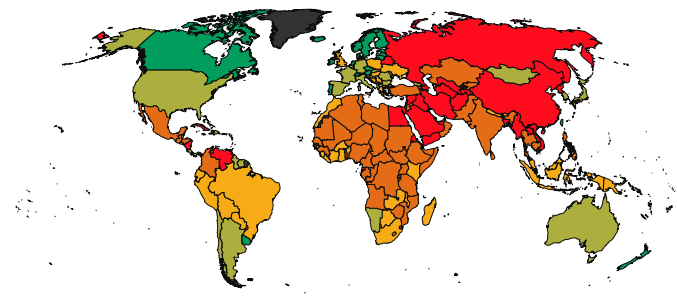
**MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA**

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION**

# AMERICAS

Country	SCORES 2023	RATING 2023	RATING 2022	RATING 2021	RATING 2020	RATING 2019	RATING 2018
Antigua and Barbuda	79	NARROWED	NARROWED	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Argentina	69	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Bahamas	88	OPEN	OPEN	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Barbados	95	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Belize	73	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Bolivia	52	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Brazil	49	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Canada	81	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Chile	67	NARROWED	NARROWED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Colombia	37	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED
Costa Rica	80	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	OPEN	OPEN
Cuba	14	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED
Dominica	80	NARROWED	NARROWED	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Dominican Republic	73	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	OBSTRUCTED
Ecuador	47	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	NARROWED	NARROWED
El Salvador	46	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Grenada	82	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Guatemala	39	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Guyana	75	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Haiti	37	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Honduras	36	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED
Jamaica	75	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Mexico	40	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED
Nicaragua	9	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED
Panama	70	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Paraguay	52	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Peru	43	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Saint Lucia	88	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
St Kitts and Nevis	83	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
St Vincent and the Grenadines	84	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Suriname	77	NARROWED	NARROWED	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Trinidad and Tobago	76	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
United States of America	65	NARROWED	NARROWED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Uruguay	84	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Venezuela	20	CLOSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED



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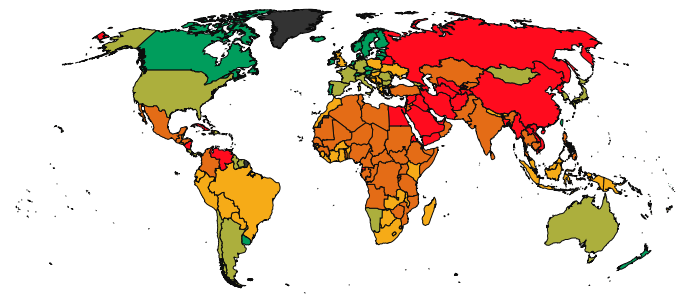
**MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA**

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

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**ASIA PACIFIC**

Country	SCORES 2023	RATING 2023	RATING 2022	RATING 2021	RATING 2020	RATING 2019	RATING 2018
Afghanistan	12	CLOSED	CLOSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED
Australia	80	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	OPEN
Bangladesh	20	CLOSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED
Bhutan	53	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Brunei Darussalam	34	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	OBSTRUCTED
Cambodia	31	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED
China	13	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED
Fiji	56	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Hong Kong	20	CLOSED	CLOSED	REPRESSED			
India	31	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	OBSTRUCTED
Indonesia	44	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Japan	79	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Kiribati	86	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Laos	6	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED
Malaysia	46	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Maldives	44	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Marshall Islands	93	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Micronesia	90	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Mongolia	67	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Myanmar	11	CLOSED	CLOSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED
Nauru	60	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Nepal	41	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
New Zealand	91	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
North Korea	3	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED
Pakistan	27	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED
Palau	93	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Papua New Guinea	60	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Philippines	31	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Samoa	81	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Singapore	28	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Solomon Islands	68	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN



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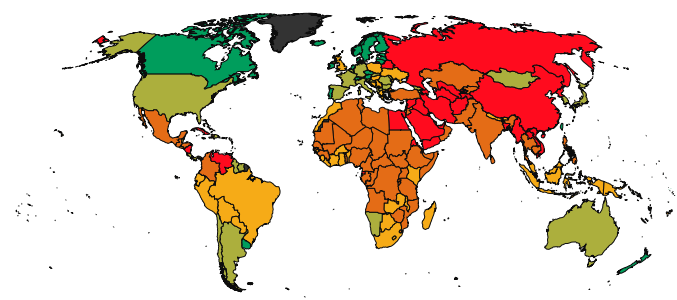
**MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA**

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**ASIA PACIFIC**

Country	SCORES 2023	RATING 2023	RATING 2022	RATING 2021	RATING 2020	RATING 2019	RATING 2018
South Korea	79	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Sri Lanka	31	REPRESSED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Taiwan	82	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Thailand	36	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED
Timor-Leste	69	NARROWED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Tonga	77	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Tuvalu	91	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Vanuatu	75	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Vietnam	13	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED



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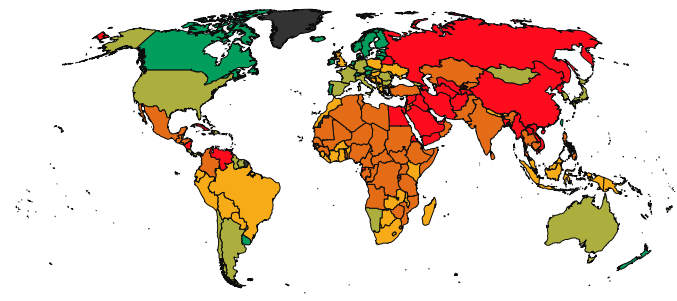
**MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA**

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

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## EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

Country	SCORES 2023	RATING 2023	RATING 2022	RATING 2021	RATING 2020	RATING 2019	RATING 2018
Albania	69	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Andorra	86	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Armenia	64	NARROWED	NARROWED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Austria	86	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	NARROWED	NARROWED
Azerbaijan	16	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED
Belarus	16	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED
Belgium	79	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Bosnia & Herzegovina	56	OBSTRUCTED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Bulgaria	70	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Croatia	74	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Cyprus	79	NARROWED	NARROWED	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Czech Republic	90	OPEN	OPEN	NARROWED	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Denmark	88	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Estonia	93	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Finland	95	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
France	71	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Georgia	62	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Germany	76	NARROWED	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Greece	58	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Hungary	50	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Iceland	87	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Ireland	88	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Italy	67	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Kazakhstan	27	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Kosovo	71	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Kyrgyzstan	40	REPRESSED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Latvia	89	OPEN	OPEN	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Liechtenstein	93	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Lithuania	91	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Luxembourg	90	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Malta	80	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	OPEN



METHODOLOGY

CIVIC SPACE DYNAMICS

TACTICS OF REPRESSION

WHO BEARS THE BRUNT?

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

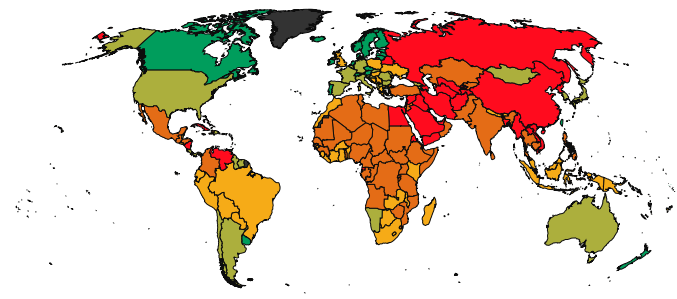
RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

## EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

Country	SCORES 2023	RATING 2023	RATING 2022	RATING 2021	RATING 2020	RATING 2019	RATING 2018
Malta	80	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	OPEN
Moldova	75	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	OBSTRUCTED
Monaco	91	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Montenegro	78	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Netherlands	82	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
North Macedonia	71	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Norway	94	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Poland	56	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Portugal	87	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Romania	73	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Russia	17	CLOSED	CLOSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED
San Marino	97	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Serbia	56	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	NARROWED
Slovakia	80	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Slovenia	70	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	OPEN	OPEN
Spain	69	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Sweden	85	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Switzerland	85	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Tajikistan	12	CLOSED	CLOSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED
Turkey	27	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED
Turkmenistan	8	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED
Ukraine	45	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
United Kingdom	58	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED
Uzbekistan	18	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED





## MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

METHODOLOGY

CIVIC SPACE DYNAMICS

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MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

Country	SCORES 2023	RATING 2023	RATING 2022	RATING 2021	RATING 2020	RATING 2019	RATING 2018
Algeria	31	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED
Bahrain	15	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED
Egypt	18	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED
Iran	11	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED
Iraq	19	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED
Israel	51	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Jordan	40	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Kuwait	32	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED
Lebanon	47	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Libya	29	REPRESSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED
Morocco	45	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
Oman	22	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED
Palestine	23	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED
Qatar	27	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	REPRESSED
Saudi Arabia	4	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED
Syria	6	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED
Tunisia	37	REPRESSED	REPRESSED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED
United Arab Emirates	15	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED
Yemen	12	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED

# PEOPLE POWER **UNDER ATTACK** 2023

A report based on data from the CIVICUS Monitor

**CIVICUS: WORLD ALLIANCE FOR CITIZEN PARTICIPATION**

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