A world map where countries are color-coded to represent different levels of civic space. Red indicates high risk, orange indicates medium risk, yellow indicates low risk, and green indicates very low risk. Russia, China, and several countries in the Middle East and Africa are in red. Many countries in Africa, Asia, and South America are in orange or yellow. The United States, Canada, and Australia are in green.

PEOPLE POWER
UNDER ATTACK
2024



CIVICUS

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 upon which this report is based. A full list and description of our partners is [here](#).

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Photo by Luis TATO / AFP

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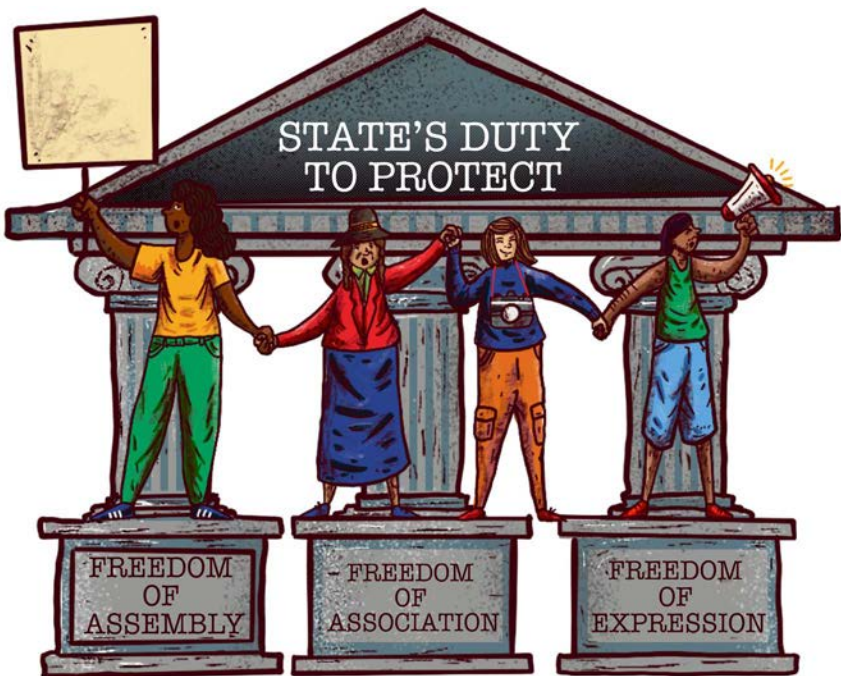
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The CIVICUS Monitor is a participatory research partnership that assesses the state of civic space worldwide and offers insights into civic space developments. We define civic space as the respect in policy, law and practice for freedoms of association,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



The CIVICUS Monitor collaborates with over 20 civil society [research partners](#). These partners periodically produce civic space country updates, often based on information directly obtained from national civil society bodies, that undergo rigorous triangulation and verification processes before being published. In 2024, the Monitor expanded its network to gain more nuanced insights into civic space conditions in Caribbean and Lusophone African countries.

The CIVICUS Monitor consolidates this information to identify top violations recorded throughout the year. Our researchers evaluate each incident documented in the updates, tagging them to specify the civic space violations, those affected and the actions that led to violations. This information allows us to identify the main global and regional civic space trends that are analysed in this report. In the period covered by this report – 1 November 2023 to 31 October 2024 – the CIVICUS Monitor was able to identify over 2,500 incidents where civic freedoms were violated.

By tagging the incidents, we aim to identify the most common tactics of repression worldwide and highlight violations that exemplify the specific challenges each region faces and the ways civic space is being restricted. Over the past year, we have identified numerous acts of intimidation. To enhance our monitoring and documentation of these tactics, we have made



some methodological tweaks, introducing specific tags to separately analyse the forms that intimidation against civil society takes. This distinction enables us to differentiate targeted threats from other forms of intimidation, such as attacks, home raids and summons, and also helps to highlight the intended victims, such as human rights defenders (HRDs), journalists and protesters.

As part of these changes, harassment, defined as repeated threats or acts of intimidation towards an individual, is no longer treated as a separate civic space violation. These acts are now captured under other existing tags. This change does not mean that harassment and intimidation against HRDs, journalists and protesters has decreased, but rather provides a more nuanced understanding of the restrictions they face.

To draw comparisons at the global level and track trends over time, the CIVICUS Monitor annually updates civic space scores and [ratings](#) for 198 countries and territories. Each country's civic space is rated in one of five categories – open, narrowed, obstructed, repressed and closed – based on a [methodology](#) that combines several data sources on freedoms of association, expression and peaceful assembly and the state's duty to protect these fundamental freedoms. In this report, we focus particularly on the countries that have experienced ratings changes and the reasons behind those changes.



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CIVIC SPACE DYNAMICS

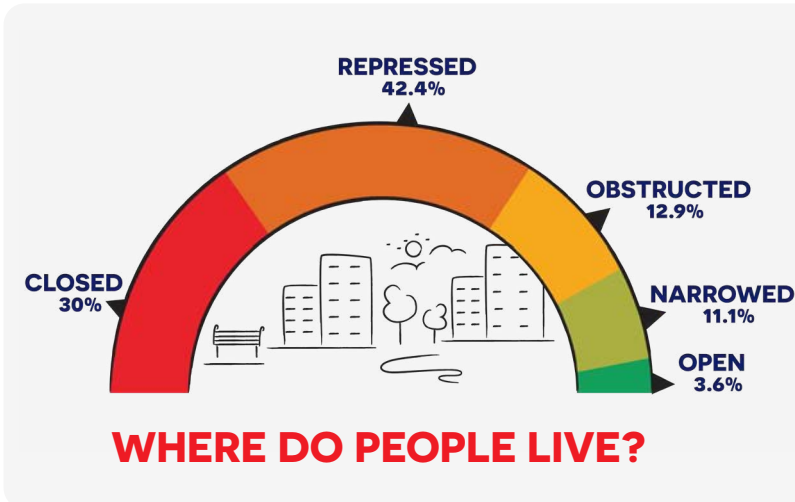
Civic space ratings have changed for 18 countries since our last report in December 2023. Conditions for civil society have deteriorated in nine countries – Burkina Faso, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Georgia, Kenya, Mongolia, the Netherlands, the Occupied Palestine Territories (OPT) and Peru – while conditions improved in nine countries – Bangladesh, Botswana, Fiji, Japan, Jamaica, Liberia, Poland, Slovenia and Trinidad and Tobago.



Only 40 out of 198 countries and territories have an open civic space rating, indicating widespread respect for civic freedoms. In comparison, 81 countries and territories are rated in the

worst two categories of having repressed and closed civic space, indicating widespread and routine repression of fundamental freedoms. Some 72.4 percent of the global population lives under these repressive conditions. Almost 30 percent lives in countries where civic space is completely closed.

Compared with last year, an additional 1.5 percent of the global population now lives in a repressed or closed country. However, despite the overall negative trends, four countries – Japan, Jamaica, Slovenia and Trinidad and Tobago – have moved into the highest category of having open civic space.



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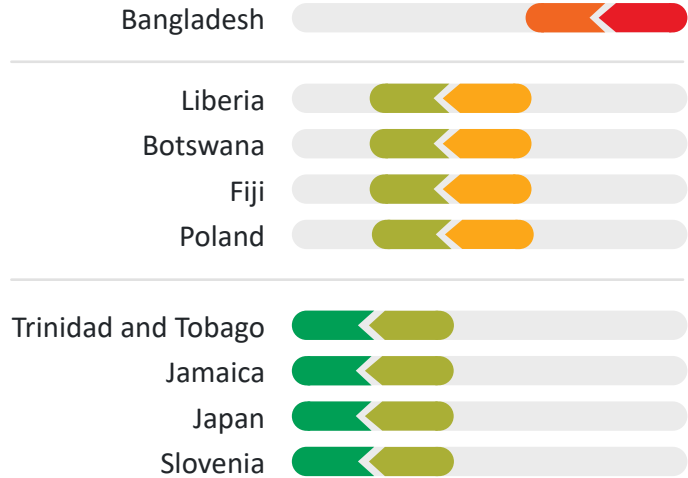
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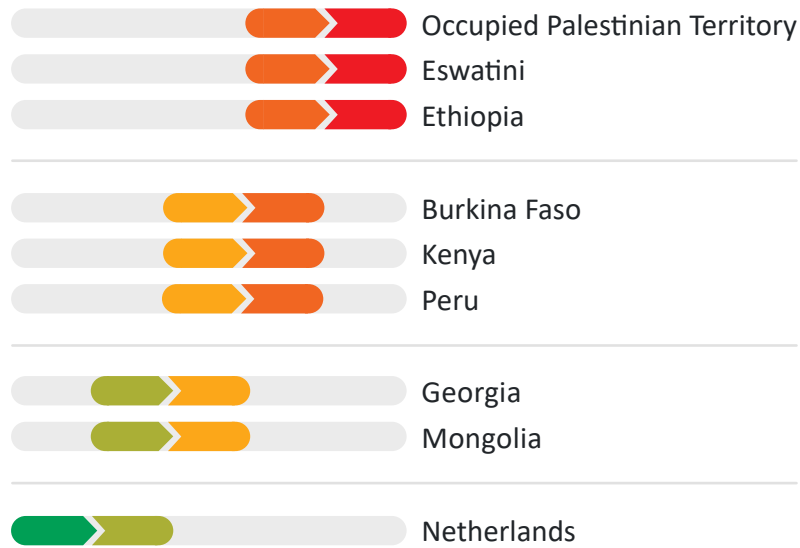
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RATINGS CHANGES

UPGRADES



DOWNGRADES



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TACTICS OF REPRESSION

Of all civic space violations recorded by the CIVICUS Monitor over the past year, 45 percent, over 1,100 violations, were related to freedom of expression. Violations of freedoms of peaceful assembly made up 29 percent of the total, and freedom of association violations constituted 26 percent.



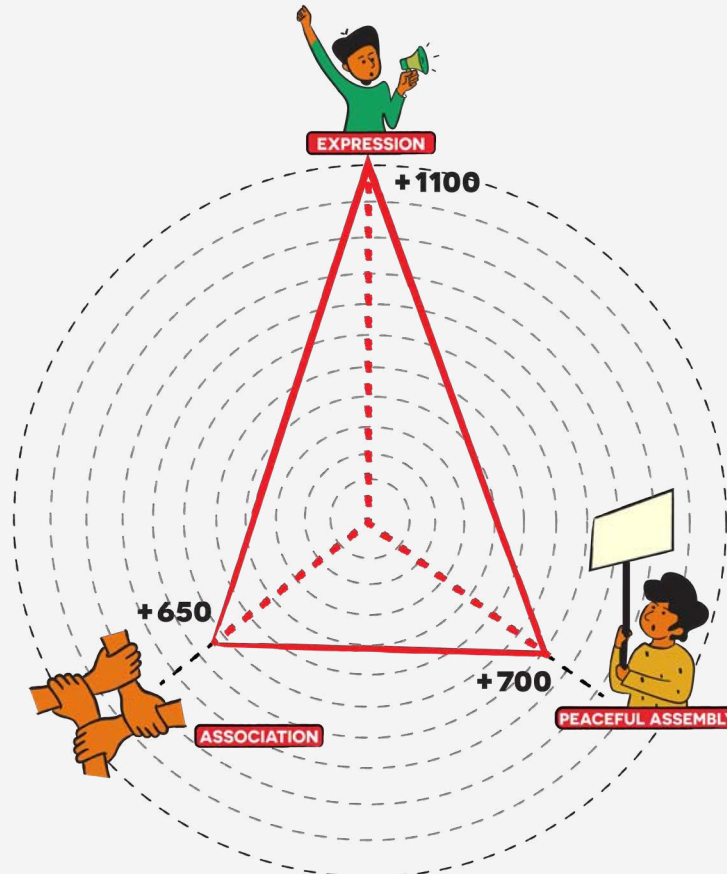
RIGHT TO PROTEST REMAINS UNDER ATTACK

As in previous years, people have taken to the streets to respond to action or inaction from authorities, demand better service delivery and accountability and protest against the high cost of

living, among other reasons. The year also saw protests in many countries in solidarity with Palestinian people.

While some protests were peaceful and passed without incident, others were disrupted, prevented or dispersed by security forces, which in many cases used violence. In 2024, protests to show solidarity with people in the OPT and climate change and environmental protests were particularly targeted, including through bans, disruption of protests and arrests of protesters, among other tactics to discourage people from gathering to have their voices heard.

TOTAL VIOLATIONS BY CIVIC FREEDOM



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In 2024, detention of protesters was a common tactic used to disperse or prevent protests, documented in at least 76 countries. In Europe and Australia, climate change protesters continued to be targeted through detention. In the Netherlands, in February 2024 alone, over 1,300 Extinction Rebellion protesters were [arrested](#) for blocking roads in Amsterdam and The Hague. While some were released, others were subjected to criminal investigation. In Australia, at least 30 people were [arrested](#) in relation to protests organised by Blockade Australia against a coal terminal in Newcastle, with one protester sentenced to three months in prison in July 2024.

Arrests of climate and environmental protesters have not been confined to Europe and Australia. In Equatorial Guinea, 37 people were [arrested](#) and the internet was shut down on the island of Annobón following protests against the harmful impact of dynamite use in mining operations in July 2024.

Opposition protests ahead of or after elections were also subjected to violations, including detention of protesters. In Pakistan on 3 March 2024, police [arrested](#) over 100 supporters of detained opposition leader Imran Khan in rallies against alleged vote rigging in the February 2024 general election.

Authorities have also detained people for taking part in protests to criticise government actions and policies. In Argentina, at least five people were [detained](#) in Cordoba on 21 December 2023 in protests against rights restrictions and economic measures introduced by newly inaugurated far-right President Javier Milei.

Authorities also met anti-corruption protests with restrictions. In Kampala, Uganda on 23 July 2024, security forces used force and [detained](#) at least 45 protesters during protests against corruption and misuse of funds. Protesters were charged with ‘common nuisance’.

Predominantly youth-led protest movements mobilised against the high cost of living in several African countries, with authorities responding with mass detentions. In Nigeria, at least 1,700 people were [arrested](#) at #EndBadGovernance protests from 1 to 10 August 2024. In Accra, [Ghana](#), 49 people were arrested during the first day of #OccupyJulorbiHouse protests on 21 September 2024. At least 1,200 people were [arrested](#) during #RejectFinanceBill2024 protests against tax rises in Kenya in June 2024.

Disruption of protests was documented in at least 53 countries. In at least 41, excessive force was used. Protesters were killed in several countries, including [Bangladesh](#), [Guinea](#), [Haiti](#), [Indonesia](#), [Kenya](#), [Nigeria](#) and [Pakistan](#).

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TOP TEN GLOBAL VIOLATIONS



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JOURNALISTS ATTACKED

In numerous countries, authorities are targeting free speech and using a range of tactics to silence critical and dissenting voices, including arbitrary detention and threats and intimidation of journalists. Meanwhile

powerful forces continue to persecute journalists as a means of preventing information about corruption and human rights violations reaching the public. The global top violation of freedom of expression was attacks on journalists, documented in at least 49 countries. Attacks on journalists came from both state and non-state sources.

Often attacks against journalists aimed to prevent journalists covering events or came in retaliation to their reporting. In Nepal in January 2024, four police officers [beat](#) journalist Bijay Rana, editor of Eparinews, for recording a video of police baton-charging people during a festival in Baglung, Gandaki. In Liberia in March 2024, two officers from the Liberia Drug Enforcement Agency and a magistrate's court sheriff [assaulted](#) and detained Radio Fuamah journalist Kesselee Sumo, reportedly in relation to his reporting alleging that a magistrate had unjustly detained two community leaders. In the OPT, Israel violently and deliberately targeted journalists, including through [airstrikes](#).

In Peru, during a transport strike in October 2024, a police officer [struck](#) a reporter with a baton after she became trapped between police lines. Despite holding her camera, displaying press credentials and verbally identifying herself as a journalist,

the officer continued to hit and push her. In Madrid and Valencia, Spain, several journalists were verbally and physically [assaulted](#) between 6 and 18 November 2023 during protests against the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, the main party in the governing coalition, in response to the announcement of an amnesty law to pardon those involved in Catalonia's independence bid in 2017. In the USA, a group of journalists was [teargassed](#) while reporting on the Stop Cop City march in Atlanta, Georgia. The march protested against the construction of a large police training centre in an urban forest, which protesters say will damage the environment and entrench police presence in a predominantly Black area.

Many assaults were documented of journalists while covering elections. In Bangladesh, a dozen men wearing badges of the Awami League, the then ruling party, [physically attacked](#) seven journalists, beating them with iron rods and bamboo sticks, while they covered an assault on independent candidate Ataur Rahman outside a polling station. Several pieces of equipment, including cameras and microphones, were confiscated or broken.

Ahead of the general election in December 2023 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), around 10 members of the Union for the Congolese Nation party [attacked](#) Jerry Lombo Alauwa, a reporter for the Canal Congo Télévision TV channel and radio Liberté Kisangani, while he was covering a rally by opposition presidential candidate Moïse Katumbi. In India in May 2024, journalist Raghav Trivedi was reportedly [beaten up](#) and locked into a room by ruling Bharatiya Janata Party workers while covering home minister Amit Shah's rally in Rae Bareli, Uttar Pradesh.



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Violations against journalists are common in Afghanistan, where the Afghanistan Journalists Centre [recorded](#) at least 89 documented incidents of violence against journalists and media workers in the first half of 2024, including 60 incidents of threats and 29 arrests.

Journalists were detained in at least 58 countries over the past year. Journalists were killed in countries including [Bangladesh](#), [DRC](#), [Honduras](#), [Lesotho](#), [Mexico](#), [Myanmar](#) and [the OPT](#).

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS DETAINED

Detention of HRDs was the third most common civic space violation globally, documented in at least 58 countries. Authorities use detention as a tactic to discourage HRDs from continuing their work. HRDs working on environmental, land and Indigenous rights, labour rights, women's rights and anti-corruption were particularly targeted.

Climate and environmental activists continued to be subject to government harassment around the world, including by arbitrary detention. In Indonesia in January 2024, environmental activist Daniel Tangkilisan was [detained](#) under the draconian Electronic Information and Transactions law for allegedly spreading hate speech on social media after raising concerns about the environmental impact of illegal shrimp farms on the island of Karimunjawa.

In Latin America, Indigenous and land rights activists are singled out for arbitrary detention and killings. In Honduras in April

2024, police officers briefly [detained](#) land defender Lilian Borjas, regional coordinator of the National Union of Farmworkers in La Ceiba, in the country's north. The detention was related to a 2013 judicial process against Borjas due to her land rights activism against agro-industrial companies.

Authorities have also detained activists working for women's and reproductive rights. In Afghanistan, Parosa Azada, a member of the Afghan Women's Movement for Justice and Freedom, was [detained](#) in November 2024 while visiting a shop that produces signs and banners. She was released after 40 days.

Trade unionists were also targeted for their activism for labour rights. In Venezuela, police arbitrarily [detained](#) Víctor Venegas, trade unionist and president of the National Federation of Trade Unions and Schools of Education Workers in Venezuela, along with his brother, at a teacher's assembly in Barinas in January 2024. In Mali, the arrest in June 2024 of Hamadoun Bah, secretary general of the National Union of Banks, Insurance Companies, Financial Institutions and Businesses of Mali, [sparked](#) a financial sector strike, supported by other trade unions. Bah was released on 10 June 2024.

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USA: A demonstrator holds a megaphone as students of American University attend a campus protest against ongoing Israeli attacks on Gaza (Photo by Celal Gunes/Anadolu via Getty Images)

SOLIDARITY WITH PALESTINE REPRESSED

In the aftermath of the deadly Hamas attacks on Israel on 7 October 2023 and Israel's devastating military offensive in Gaza and Lebanon, people have mobilised in many countries to demand a ceasefire and accountability for human rights violations and show solidarity with Palestinians under attack. Journalists are working to document the reality of life in besieged Gaza, and civil society groups are pushing for an end to arms transfers to Israel and fundraising for urgent humanitarian aid.

However, many of these efforts have faced significant resistance. Almost 10 percent of all civic space violations recorded this year by the CIVICUS Monitor related to Israel and the OPT (see MENA section) and the expression of solidarity with Palestinian people.

In the [USA](#), many students have protested by setting up encampments on campuses. In response, authorities have restricted freedom of peaceful assembly, including by arresting or detaining over 3,200 people (see Americas section). In May and June 2024, federal lawmakers introduced at least eight bills targeting campus protests, including penalties for protesters, restrictions on financial aid and sanctions against universities perceived to be tolerant of protests. Many universities have approved policies banning encampments, limiting protests to specific times and locations and requiring prior approval, among other restrictions. Some universities have [failed](#) to protect students wanting to protest from harassment and credible threats of violence.

In some cases, university donors have pressured institutions to prevent protests and penalise students, and those taking part have been smeared as antisemitic. Some universities have [suspended](#) their students' chapters of Students for Justice in Palestine, prohibiting them from holding activities, receiving funding or posting on social media. Many organisations fear for their funding and continued existence.

Freedom of peaceful assembly has also been restricted in many other countries for people wanting to gather to grieve, show solidarity with Palestinians and demand respect for international law.

Many protests have been banned in other countries, most commonly on grounds of 'security concerns', seen for example in [France](#), [Latvia](#) and [Singapore](#). Demonstrations have sometimes been authorised subject to conditions, such as moving a protest

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to another location, as seen in [Barbados](#), or banning Palestinian flags, as in [Fiji](#). Activists and academics have been barred from entering countries to attend events, as seen in [Germany](#).



Netherlands: Student protesters (Photo by Mouneb Taim/Anadolu via Getty Images)

When protests have taken place, police and other security forces have in many instances used excessive force against protesters. Security forces have deployed teargas in countries including [Brazil](#) and [Greece](#). At the University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, in May 2024, police [used](#) batons, pepper spray, police dogs and bulldozers against protests demanding that the university cut ties with Israel-affiliated institutions.

Security forces have also removed student encampments in [Poland](#) and [Portugal](#). In Italy, police [assaulted](#) peaceful school-

age protesters with batons and in [Bahrain](#) and [Germany](#), children have been arrested for their involvement in protests. People participating in peaceful sit-ins, road blockades and marches have been dispersed and arrested in [Australia](#), [Kenya](#) and [Sweden](#).

In Egypt in April 2024, activist women marching in solidarity with women in Gaza and Sudan were [arrested](#) and detained, as were two women who protested near embassies in [Maldives](#). In Malaysia, peaceful protesters have been [summoned](#) for questioning after organising or participating in Palestinian solidarity protests. The rights of journalists covering protests have also been violated. Authorities in Jordan [detained](#) two journalists who covered a Palestinian solidarity protest in March 2024 even though they showed their press cards.

Freedom of association has been restricted through the decision of at least 18 states to [suspend](#) funding to UNRWA, the United Nations (UN) agency for Palestinian people, following allegations by Israel that 12 of its staff were involved in the 7 October attacks. Several European states, including Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Sweden and Switzerland, and the European Commission, also [suspended](#) funding to Israeli and Palestinian civil society organisations (CSOs) in response to unsubstantiated allegations that they rerouted funds to terrorist groups, and amid vilification and labelling of civil society criticism of Israel as antisemitic. CSOs focusing on advocacy and education related to the OPT, and broader peacebuilding efforts, have been subject to investigation and surveillance by authorities. In Belgium, a regional minister

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of culture is keeping organisations that have published statements on Gaza under scrutiny.

In Germany, a partly state-owned bank [froze](#) the accounts of the Jewish anti-Zionist group Jewish Voice for a Just Peace in the Middle East and demanded a list of all its members as a ‘precautionary measure’.



Occupied Territories of Palestine: Israel has killed over 180 journalists (Photo by Ali Jadallah/ Anadolu via Getty Images)

Israel has killed over 180 journalists since the start of its onslaught (see MENA section). In addition, freedom of expression is being severely restricted in many countries for voices expressing solidarity with Palestinians. Journalists and media organisations worldwide have been subjected to intimidation, threats and vilification for reporting on gross human rights violations. Legitimate criticism of Israeli authorities is often conflated with antisemitism or an endorsement of terrorism.

In Brazil, journalist Breno Altman [faced](#) judicial complaints that equated his anti-Zionist views to the crime of antisemitism. In

the UK, British-Syrian journalist Richard Medhurst, known for his commentary on Middle Eastern issues, was [detained](#) under the Terrorism Act at Heathrow Airport in August 2024 and his equipment was seized.

Media companies in [Canada](#) and [Egypt](#) have taken retaliatory measures, including suspensions and dismissals, against their employees for posts expressing personal views about the conflict on social media. Reprisals and self-censorship can result in biased and partial coverage of and debate about the conflict, helping fuel pro-Israel disinformation and propaganda.

Activists, academics, artists and other concerned citizens face attempts to silence them when they speak out or show solidarity with Palestinians. In Canada, it is now [forbidden](#) to wear a keffiyeh scarf in Ontario’s legislative assembly and there are attempts to censor the slogan ‘From the River to the Sea’ in countries including [Germany](#), [the Netherlands](#) and [the USA](#). People have faced repercussions for speaking out, including dismissal, disciplinary action lacking in due process and threats of deportation for foreign nationals. In Australia, four writers who publicly opposed Israel’s assault on Gaza had their workshop contracts with the State Library of Victoria abruptly [terminated](#). In the UK, students who have expressed solidarity with Palestinians on social media have been [referred to](#) the Prevent counter-terrorism programme or have been interrogated by the police.

WHO BEARS THE BRUNT

CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDERS REPRESSED

Civil society's global call for climate action has sparked widespread activism but has also brought heightened risks for climate, environmental, land and Indigenous rights defenders. These activists share common struggles against climate impacts, environmental degradation and land dispossession, with their efforts often targeted by governments and corporations tied to industrial exploitation.

In Europe, climate defenders and protesters have faced violence, arrests and legal action. Thousands were [detained](#) in the Netherlands during climate protests. Activists in [Austria](#), [France](#), [Italy](#) and the [UK](#) have similarly been targeted. In the UK in July 2024, five Just Stop Oil activists [received](#) up to five years in prison for planning a peaceful roadblock protest in 2022. In Italy, non-violent activists [face](#) residence bans and surveillance orders normally reserved for organised crime groups. A new law against 'eco-vandals' [prescribes](#) up to five-year prison sentences and €60,000 fines (approx. US\$63,300) for civil disobedience that targets monuments, and another law currently under



consideration would [punish](#) other forms of [peaceful protest](#), such as blocking roads, with up to two years in prison.

In Australia, protesters opposing the Newcastle [coal terminal](#) and climate activists challenging Woodside Energy's Browse [gas project](#) were arrested in 2024. In New Zealand, police [arrested](#) five Greenpeace protesters during a protest against mining practices in September 2024. In Indonesia, police [arrested and assaulted](#) Indigenous villagers protesting against a geothermal project. In Cambodia in July 2024, 10 environmental activists from the Mother Nature movement were [convicted](#) on trumped-up charges for their advocacy.

Climate and land defenders face severe threats. In the Americas, particularly in [Brazil](#), [Colombia](#), [Ecuador](#), [Mexico](#), [Paraguay](#) and [Peru](#), countries where violence and assassinations often involve criminal groups linked to corporate interests. Honduras remains one of the most dangerous countries for defenders. In September 2024, Juan López, an advocate for the Guapinol River, was [killed](#) despite calls for his protection. Criminal charges are common, as seen in Bolivia, where leaders from Chiquiacá canton were [charged](#) for opposing oil exploration in a protected reserve, and in Canada, where Indigenous land defenders were [convicted](#) for protesting against the Coastal GasLink pipeline.



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Environmental defenders also face repression in Africa, often when opposing extractive industries. In [Ghana](#), the #StopGalamseyNow movement to oppose illegal goldmining practices has mobilised large protests, but these have been [met](#) with police crackdowns. In Uganda, environmental defenders have been arbitrarily [detained](#) for opposing oil projects, with officials pressuring them to renounce activism. In Madagascar, environmental protests against a mining project [led](#) to the arrest of civil society activists in August 2024.



DEMOCRACY ACTIVISTS AND POLITICAL OPPOSITION INTIMIDATED AND REPRESSED

Repression of democracy activists and political opposition has escalated, particularly around the year's many elections, endangering activists and undermining democratic freedoms.

In several countries, authorities have used violent repression, including killings, disappearances and torture, to create a chilling atmosphere with the aim of silencing dissent. In Myanmar, the military [executed](#) two democracy activists, Maung Kaung Htet and Chan Myae Thu, on 23 September 2024 and plans to execute more political prisoners. In Burundi in May 2024, police and members of the ruling party's youth league [abducted](#) and

assaulted an activist from the opposition National Congress for Freedom. In Ethiopia, the killing of Bate Urgessa, leader of the opposition Oromo Liberation Front, in April 2024 [underscored](#) the deadly risks for political opponents. In Rwanda, opposition voices [faced](#) abuse, prosecution, enforced disappearances and unexplained deaths ahead of the July 2024 election.

Authorities have also used arrests and prosecutions. In Zimbabwe, over 160 people, including political figures, elected officials, opposition members, union leaders, students and journalists, were detained ahead of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) summit, which took place in the capital, Harare, in August 2024.

In Pakistan, police [used](#) teargas to disperse opposition rallies, and some activists were imprisoned for months. In Tunisia, over 100 candidates and campaign workers were [arrested](#) as part of President Kais Saied's campaign of repression ahead of the non-competitive October 2024 election. In Venezuela, which [held](#) a presidential election widely seen as neither free nor fair in July 2024, politically motivated detentions escalated, reaching a level not seen since the crisis that arose with rival presidential claimants in 2019.

Threats and intimidation are key tactics authorities use to silence opposition. In Cambodia, opposition supporter San Bunchhay was severely [beaten](#) by six masked assailants in April 2024. In Madagascar, politician Marie Jeanne d'Arc Masy Goulamaly was [forcibly removed](#) from her home in May 2024 after exposing election irregularities. In Nicaragua, authorities

[expelled](#) 135 political prisoners and revoked their nationality, one of the regime's harshest repressive measures, with severe consequences for those expelled and their families.

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AGAINST WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Governments across Asia and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region continue to repress women activists and journalists, with persistent violations, particularly in countries with the most restrictive civic space conditions. Women's rights defenders regularly face severe obstacles in their work to advance gender equality and human rights.



In Afghanistan, women HRDs experience severe repression under the Taliban, who returned to power in August 2021. Reports of [arbitrary arrests](#), [torture](#) and [prolonged detention](#) continue. The Taliban have shown zero tolerance for peaceful demonstrations, pushing activists to find alternative ways to protest, such as organising indoor meetings and sharing messages on social media. In response, Taliban intelligence officials have [tracked](#) down women who have appeared in photos or videos of indoor protests.

Women's rights protests have been [disrupted](#) in Pakistan, and WHRD Hooran Baloch has faced threats from police. In Kazakhstan, women's rights activists have [faced](#) protest bans and legal charges, including Dinara Smailova, an exiled activist who has been targeted for her work with domestic violence victims. Kazakh authorities placed Smailova on a wanted list in December 2023, and her organisation's bank accounts were frozen.

In [Syria](#), the murder of Heba Suhaib Haj Arif, a women's rights activist, in February 2024 underscored the deadly risks facing women HRDs in the MENA region. Violations were also documented in [Saudi Arabia](#) and [Yemen](#), including lengthy imprisonment, sexual harassment and various forms of abuse during detention.



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Across the globe, even in the face of repression, civil society continues to show remarkable resilience, achieving significant victories and progress in securing civic freedoms. The victories span from countries with the most repressed civic space conditions – showing the crucial role of civil society even in harsh environments – to those that broadly respect civic freedoms. Pressure from civil society has resulted in oppressive bills being withdrawn, historical and decades-long injustices being addressed and unjust detention and court rulings being overturned.



Thailand: Celebrations outside the Thai Parliament after the passing of the final vote on the same sex marriage bill in Bangkok (Photo by Lillian Suwanrumpha / AFP)

CIVIL SOCIETY VICTORIES

Civil society movements have played a crucial role in advocating for human rights and advancing policies that support excluded groups. In LGBTQI+ rights, two major legal milestones stand out. In February 2024, Greece became the first Christian Orthodox country to recognise same-sex marriage and also grant adoption rights to same-sex couples, marking a historic step forward. Thailand then broke new ground in May 2024 by passing a marriage equality bill, making it the first Southeast Asian country to recognise same-sex marriage. Both had been the subject of extensive civil society advocacy.

Women's rights advocacy also achieved critical breakthroughs. In the Czech Republic, civil society efforts led to a landmark reform in rape laws, with any non-consensual sexual act now classified as rape, removing the need for proof of force and strengthening protections for victims. In Kazakhstan, in response to advocacy around a high-profile murder trial, lawmakers swiftly introduced new legislation that re-established criminal penalties for battery and enhanced protections for domestic violence survivors. In Poland, the government passed a bill in February 2024 to make emergency contraception accessible without a prescription, reversing a restrictive 2017 law and marking a significant advance for reproductive rights.

The push for environmental justice also brought some significant advances in the past year. In the UK, judicial rulings [underscored](#) the necessity of environmental impact assessments for all development projects, strengthening community influence over decisions with potential environmental repercussions. In Australia in December 2023, the Supreme Court of New South Wales [repealed](#) several anti-protest laws specifically aimed at climate activists, marking a significant victory for environmental advocacy.

Progress was made for Indigenous rights in South America. In Ecuador, Indigenous communities [succeeded](#) in reclaiming control over ancestral lands after prolonged legal battles.



Ecuador: Indigenous communities succeeded in reclaiming control over ancestral lands (Photo by Rodrigo BUENDIA / AFP)

In Peru, a March 2024 court ruling [granted](#) Indigenous women access to local rivers, reinforcing their cultural and environmental rights.

Several countries made strides in safeguarding freedom of expression. In Malawi, a new data protection law [marks](#) a vital step in safeguarding personal privacy against growing surveillance threats. Meanwhile, St Kitts and Nevis [introduced](#) whistleblower protections, strengthening the rights of people reporting corruption or misconduct.

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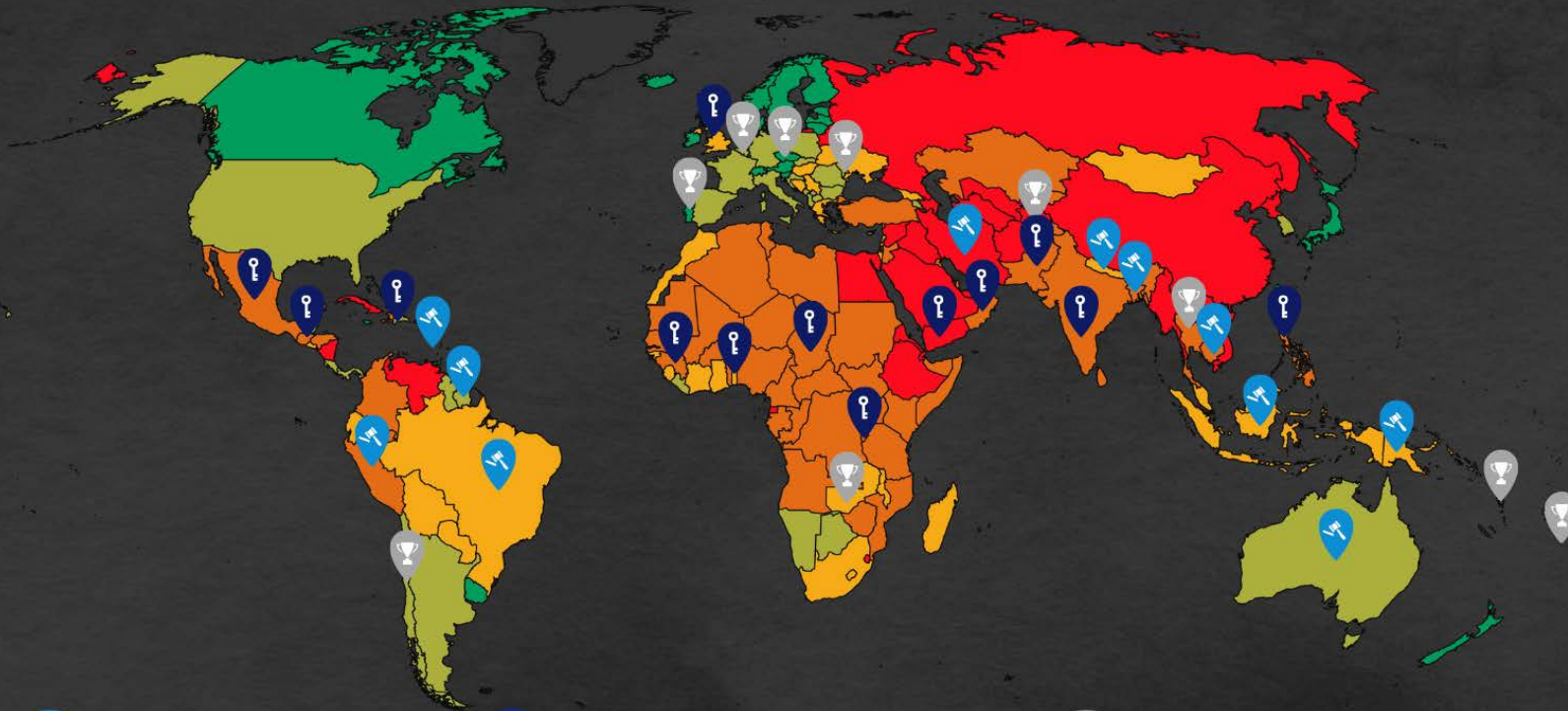
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-  POSITIVE COURT RULING
-  RELEASE OR ACQUITTAL OF HRD
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POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS



Guatemala: Virginia Laparra, a former prosecutor for Guatemala's Special Prosecutor's Office Against Impunity was released after two years in detention. (Photo by Simone Dalmaso)

Efforts to address past injustices have seen positive shifts in several countries, particularly in the release of unjustly detained people and accountability for perpetrators of past abuses. In [Bahrain](#), over 1,500 political prisoners were [released](#) following royal pardons. In January 2024, Virginia Laparra, a former prosecutor for Guatemala's Special Prosecutor's Office Against Impunity, known for leading key anti-corruption investigations, was [released](#) after almost two years in detention. However, she then [left](#) the country to safeguard her life and freedom amid rising threats. In Brazil, two former military police officers were [sentenced](#) for the 2018 murder of

councillor Marielle Franco, revealing connections between Rio de Janeiro's political elite and local paramilitary groups formed by retired and active police officers.

WikiLeaks' founder Julian Assange was released in July 2024. Photo by REUTERS/Stephane Mahe TPX IMAGES OF THE DAY



In response to sustained pressure from civil society, authorities in some countries have begun to address past abuses against press freedom, resulting in corrective actions in several high-profile cases. In the UK, Julian Assange of WikiLeaks was [released](#) in July 2024 after five years in detention. In Yemen, journalist Al-Azazi was [freed](#) in February 2024 following persistent appeals from civil society groups, after enduring four months of solitary confinement under poor conditions. In India, the Supreme Court [ordered](#) the release of NewsClick founder Prabir Purkayastha in May 2024 after 225 days in detention, which was part of a broader police crackdown on journalists connected to the outlet. Iran's judiciary also [reversed](#) prison sentences of over 10 years for two women journalists.



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Mexico: David Hernandez Salazar, photo by Santiago Navarro

Further legal successes included rulings in favour of Indigenous communities and environmental defenders. In Mexico in May 2024, a judge [overturned](#) a 46-year sentence imposed on David Hernández Salazar, a land defender, while also dismissing charges against 17 members of the Binniza Indigenous community. In March 2024, Indonesia’s Supreme Court [upheld](#) the acquittals of environmental defenders Haris Azhar and Fatia Maulidiyanti. In February 2024, the Cambodian Supreme Court [overturned](#) convictions against Boeung Kak Lake Community land activists.

There were some developments in delivering justice in cases of accountability for past abuses, although much more needs to be done. In December 2023, Suriname’s High Court [upheld](#) former President Desi Bouterse’s conviction for the 1982 ‘December Murders’, which involved extrajudicial killings of political opponents. In the Netherlands, two police officers [faced](#) prosecution for using excessive force during a 2021 COVID-19 protest. In Peru, the Superior Court of Justice in Ucayali [sentenced](#) four people to over 28 years each in jail in April 2024 for the 2014 murders of Ashéninka Indigenous leaders who had fought for land rights.

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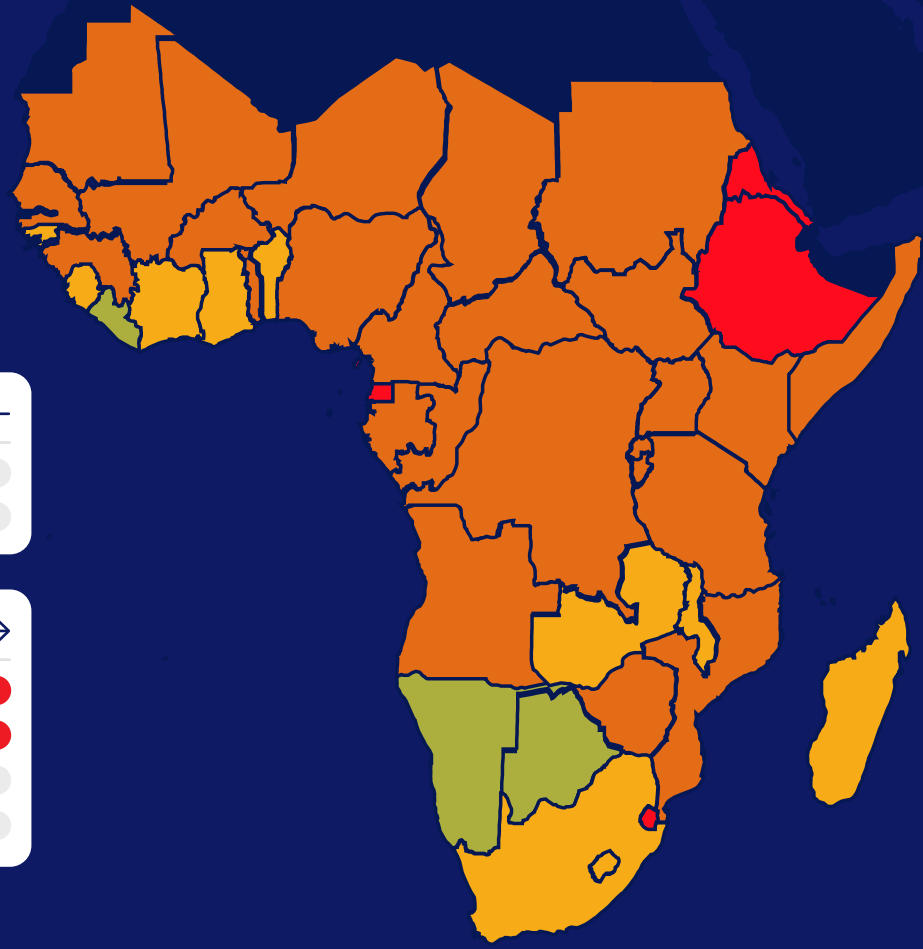
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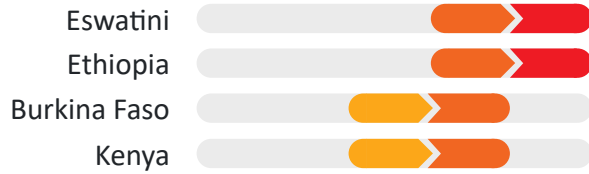
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RATINGS OVERVIEW

Civic space conditions in Africa South of the Sahara remain repressive. Forty-three of 50 countries and territories have obstructed, repressed or closed civic space. Over half of countries and territories, close to 70 percent of the population in Africa South of the Sahara, are rated as repressed. 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, now joined by Botswana and Liberia.

Over the past year, while civic space conditions have improved in Botswana and Liberia, they have deteriorated in Burkina Faso, Eswatini, Ethiopia and Kenya.



Burkina Faso: Military leader Ibrahim REUTERS/Vincent Bado

Fundamental freedoms have been curtailed since Burkina Faso's latest [military coup](#) in September 2022, leading to the country's rating being downgraded from obstructed to repressed. Press freedom violations and censorship have escalated under the military junta led by Ibrahim Traoré. At least 12 foreign and local media outlets and programmes have been [suspended](#) since October 2023, often due to their coverage of the security situation. Since November 2023, military authorities have increasingly used an emergency law – an April 2023 general mobilisation decree – to forcibly conscript HRDs, journalists, magistrates and opponents. Meanwhile, HRD and lawyer Guy Hervé Kam has been detained while journalist Alain Traoré was subjected to enforced disappearance.

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Kenya: anti-riot police officers detain a protester during anti-government protests in Nairobi (Photo by SIMON MAINA / AFP)

Kenya has been downgraded from obstructed to repressed following the government's brutal and ongoing [crackdown](#) since nationwide June and July protests sparked by a proposed Finance Bill, which sought to raise taxes and sharply further increase the cost of living amid unchecked government corruption. The government's violent response caused the [deaths](#) of at least 60 unarmed protesters and police [arrested](#) at least 1,000 people. Abductions of protesters and online supporters of the protests have continued months after the protests, as security forces hunt down those they suspect of involvement, creating a chilling effect on civic freedoms.

In Botswana and Liberia, civic space upgrades from obstructed to narrowed reflect the fact that violations have notably decreased. Since Liberia's second peaceful democratic transfer of power, when incumbent President George Weah [conceded](#) defeat to Joseph Boakai following elections in October and November 2023, the CIVICUS Monitor has documented fewer civic space violations, particularly in the areas of press freedom and peaceful assembly. A similar situation is noted in Botswana, with fewer violations documented. Civil society [pushed back](#) against a proposed executive-led constitutional review process due to its lack of meaningful public participation. Parliament subsequently rejected the Constitution Amendment Bill.

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TOP VIOLATIONS

In Africa South of the Sahara, the detention of journalists remained the most common civic space violation in the past year, as in previous years, followed by attacks on journalists, the detention of HRDs, the detention of protesters and censorship.

JOURNALISTS ATTACKED AND DETAINED

The detention of journalists was documented in at least 21 countries in the region and attacks on journalists in at least 16 countries.

Authorities have detained journalists due to their reporting on corruption and on topics authorities deem sensitive or insulting. In some countries, such as Cameroon, the DRC, Nigeria and Somalia, authorities continued to arrest journalists as a tactic to try to intimidate and silence them. In Nigeria, authorities continued to arrest and prosecute journalists under the 2015 Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc) Act, despite its amendments in February 2024. For example, Foundation for Investigative Journalism reporter Daniel Ajukwu was arrested on 1 May 2024 for breaching the 2015 Cybercrimes Act in relation to his reporting on alleged corruption by an official of the presidency. He was granted bail after spending 10 days in detention.

In Cameroon, authorities use criminal provisions such as ‘spreading false news’, ‘insults’ and ‘inciting revolt’ to detain and prosecute journalists, and often tries them in military courts. On 6 February 2024, Bruno Bidjang, managing director of L’Anecdote, was arrested in Bafoussam over a video he posted criticising the



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arrest of a local socialite and urging the authorities to focus on issues such as corruption and electricity and water access. Bidjang was initially charged with ‘incitement to uprising’, ‘endangering state security’ and ‘incitement to insurrection’. In March 2024, a military judge sentenced him to six months in prison for ‘spreading false news’. Two other incarcerated journalists, Kingsley Fumunyuy Njoka and Amadou Vamouké, were [sentenced](#) to 10 and 20 years in prison respectively. Both had been in detention for years.

The picture is similar in the DRC. In March 2024, a court in Kinshasa [found](#) renowned journalist Stanis Bujakera guilty of a series of charges, including ‘propagation of false rumours’, ‘forgery’ and ‘transmission of an erroneous message’, sentencing him to a six-month prison sentence and a fine. He had been detained since 8 September 2023 over an article published in Jeune Afrique, which did not name him as author, alleging that a report by the DRC’s National Intelligence Service claimed that military intelligence officers were involved in the kidnapping and murder of opposition politician Chérubin Okende Senga, who was found dead on 13 July 2023.

In Somalia, Journalists are frequently threatened and arrested, and in some cases killed. In January 2024, reporter Mohamed Abdi Ilig was [arrested](#) along with two colleagues after moderating an X/Twitter discussion hosted by MM Somali TV on a controversial memorandum of understanding between Ethiopia and Somaliland. Although Ilig’s colleagues were released without charge, Ilig remained incarcerated for 43 days before he was acquitted and released.



Senegal: Cheikh Yerim Seck, founder of the Dakaractu news site and contributor to Jeune Afrique, was summoned, questioned, detained and charged with disseminating false news and defamation. Photo by Le Citoyen

Journalists continued to be arrested for criticising authorities or investigative reporting on sensitive topics such as exposing corruption. In Senegal on 1 October 2024, Cheikh Yerim Seck, founder of the Dakaractu news site and contributor to Jeune Afrique, was summoned, questioned, detained and [charged](#) with disseminating false news and defamation for having refuted Senegalese government figures on the economic situation inherited from the previous administration during a programme on 7TV. In Uganda, police [arrested](#) GrapeVine journalists Dickson Mubiru and Alirabaki Sengooba in June 2024 over investigative reports on a judicial conflict and an article exposing parliamentary corruption. They were charged with ‘publishing information without a broadcasting licence’, a regulation intended only for radio and television, and later released on bail. In Zambia, police arbitrarily [detained](#) journalist Thomas Allan Zgamo in August 2024 for two days on sedition charges for having called, on the Facebook page of media outlet *Zambian Whistleblower*, for the government to be transparent about the links between a property it had rented and President Hakainde Hichilema.

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Military authorities in Niger, where media freedom is increasingly under threat, have also criminalised journalists. In April 2024, judicial police officers [arrested](#) Idrissa Soumana Maïga, editor of newspaper L'Enquêteur, over an article the newspaper published that cited and questioned allegations made by French media outlet Le Figaro that listening devices were installed in government buildings by Russian agents. Maïga was later charged with 'undermining national defence' under Niger's Criminal Code.

Several journalists have been arrested in Burundi. On 3 March 2024, National Intelligence Service officers [arrested](#) La Nova Burundi journalist Sandra Muhoza for allegedly having made comments in a WhatsApp practitioners' group discussing the distribution of machetes to the ruling party's youth wing. She was reportedly subjected to beatings and other ill-treatment.

Nigeria: The press report on protests against bad governance (Photo by Adekunle Ajayi)



In the past year, several journalists were attacked and detained while covering protests. In Nigeria, at least 56 journalists were [attacked, harassed or detained](#) when covering the August 2024 #EndBadGovernance protests. In Mali, Yeri Bocoum, director of

the Facebook news page YBC-Communication, [disappeared](#) after he covered an opposition protest on 7 June 2024. Malian state security services reportedly held Bocoum for 19 days before releasing him. Police [arrested](#) two Zambian journalists – Rodgers Mwiimba of Millenium TV and Innocent Phiri of KBN TV – in Kafue on 13 April 2024 as they covered a banned opposition protest. They were filming a clash between police and opposition leaders when arrested. They were subjected to physical abuse and questioned before they were released a few hours later.

The safety of journalists has been at risk from state and non-state sources around elections, including from members of armed groups and supporters of political parties. In Madagascar, at least nine journalists were [injured](#) when a police officer threw teargas and stun grenades at the feet of reporters who were covering an opposition protest in Antananarivo ahead of controversial presidential elections, which took place on 16 November 2023. In Mozambique, private security guards assaulted and threatened reporter Jorge Marcos and camera operator Verson Paulo of STV as they covered an event organised in Zambézia province by opposition party RENAMO in May 2024, ahead of the October 2024 general election. Several journalists were [attacked](#) in the run-up to the DRC's general elections in December 2023, including RFI correspondent Pascal Mulegwa, who was punched and dragged into a gutter by supporters of President Felix Tshisekedi's party.

Journalists were also attacked or detained in countries including [Chad](#), [Ethiopia](#), [Lesotho](#), [Malawi](#), [South Africa](#), [Tanzania](#) and [Togo](#).

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HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS DETAINED

HRDs were detained in at least 17 countries in Africa South of the Sahara. Authorities commonly use this tactic to deter, intimidate and silence activists. HRDs working on democracy, environmental issues and labour issues were particularly targeted.



Uganda: Environmental activists hold banners and chant slogans as they protest against the East African Crude Oil Pipeline Project (EACOP) in Kampala. (Photo by BADRU KATUMBA/AFP)

In Uganda, 11 environmental HRDs, including Ezama Chirilo, Adriko Sostein and Julius Tumwiine, were [arrested](#) between 27 May and 5 June 2024 for their advocacy work against the East African Crude Oil Pipeline, a major infrastructure project aimed at transporting oil for export from Uganda's oilfields near Lake Albert to the Tanzanian port of Tanga. Environmental HRDs were also [arrested](#) and convicted in Madagascar.

Democracy activists were particularly targeted in Burkina Faso, Guinea and Mali, countries under military rule. In Burkina Faso, democracy activists Bassirou Badjo and Rasmané Zinaba were [abducted](#) and taken to an unknown destination in February 2024. Badjo and Zinaba are among a dozen HRDs, journalists and political opponents who have been unlawfully conscripted to fight Islamist armed groups due to the government misuse of its emergency law to silence dissent. In Guinea, democracy activists Mamadou Billo Bah and Oumar Sylla, also known as Foniké Mengué, of opposition coalition Front National pour la Défense de la Constitution were [detained](#) on 9 June 2024. Authorities have not revealed their exact location. A fellow activist, Mohammed Cissé, who was detained with the two but released a day after, said they were taken by security forces and subjected to torture. In Mali, activist and university professor Etienne Fakaba Sissoko was [arrested](#) on 25 March 2024 following the publication of a book criticising the alleged use of propaganda in the government's public information campaigns. In May 2024, Sissoko was sentenced to two years in prison, one of which was suspended, and a fine of around US\$4,900.

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In Eswatini in July 2024, pro-democracy lawmakers Mthandeni Mduduzi Bacede and Mabuza Dube received severe prison sentences of 18 and 25 years respectively on terrorism and murder charges connected to protests in 2021 against King Mswati’s regime. They had been in detention since July 2021.

Authorities in Equatorial Guinea, where civic space is closed, continued to arbitrarily detain HRDs and often subject them to torture in detention. On 1 August 2024, police arrested HRD Joaquín Elo Ayeto at his home in the capital, Malabo. Ayeto is accused of carrying out illegal activities through his civil society platform Somos+, which authorities say is not registered. He was reportedly first transferred to Black Beach prison and then Oveng Azem prison. Further, the whereabouts of human rights lawyer Anacleto Micha Ndong remained unknown as of April 2024. Ndong was arrested on 26 January 2024 and held in pretrial detention at Black Beach prison following a criminal complaint of outrage and calumny.

Authorities have also arrested HRDs in connection to protests or strikes. In Cameroon, Abdoulaye Math, president of human rights organisation Mouvement pour la Défense des Droits de l’Homme, was summoned and held in custody in Maroua in February 2024, on accusations of contempt and organising a protest demonstration. In Nigeria, Joe Ajaero, a labour rights activist and head of the National Labour Congress trade union, was detained twice. Police first detained Ajaero on 1 November 2023 ahead of a mass protest and strike announced by the union in response to violations of workers’ rights in Imo State. They detained him again for two days on 9 September 2024 after he criticised the government over hiking petrol prices and reportedly said that union leaders would meet over strike action.

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Angola: Zola Ferreira Bambi, lawyer and president of the Observatory of Social Cohesion and Justice of Angola



Human rights lawyers have also been targeted. In Angola, police officers placed human rights lawyer and civil society activist Zola Ferreira Bambi under house arrest on 5 January 2024, without an arrest warrant, and later escorted him to the police station, where they held him for several hours. Ferreira Bambi had been due to represent two HRDs in court that day and this prevented from doing so.

In Chad on 2 October 2024, police officers [detained](#) and later expelled US lawyer Reed Brody, who had been invited along with two colleagues by the US Embassy and the Centre for Development Studies and Training to present a book about the judicial pursuit of Chad's former dictator Hissène Habré. Police officers invaded the venue and dispersed participants.

PROTESTERS DETAINED

Detention of protesters was documented in at least 15 countries in Africa South of the Sahara. As in previous years, many protests have taken place on a wide range of issues, including the high cost of living, the lack of basic service delivery, corruption and bad

governance. Detention of protesters was often used to break up protests or dissuade people from joining protests.

In Madagascar on 27 August 2024, security forces [arrested](#) civil society activist Solonarivo Tsiazonaly for 'unauthorised demonstration and disturbance of public order'. Tsiazonaly was involved in organising a protest in Tuléar against a possible reopening of the Base Toliara mining project after it was bought by an US-based international mining company. Opponents say its reopening would have dire impacts on the environment and health of local residents. Protesters attempted to gather on 27 August 2024 but security forces stopped them. Tsiazonaly was released after reportedly being [forced](#) to sign an undertaking promising to stop participating in 'strikes' against Base Toliara.

Uganda: A protestor is detained during a rally against corruption and human rights abuses by the country's rulers in Kampala. Photo by REUTERS/ Michael Muhati



Police [detained](#) at least 45 protesters during protests against corruption and misuse of funds in Kampala, Uganda, on 23 July 2024 and charged them with 'common nuisance'. Police also responded to the protests with violence. Ahead of the protests, President Yoweri Museveni warned protesters that they were 'playing with fire'.

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In Malawi, HRD Bon Kalindo was [arrested](#) along with others during a protest against the high cost of living, held in Zomba on 23 November 2023. Police used teargas to disperse the protest. In Accra, [Ghana](#), Police arrested 53 people during the #OccupyJolurbiHouse protests against worsening economic conditions and government mismanagement on 22 and 23 September 2024.

In Zambia, despite government promises to replace the outdated 1955 Public Order Act with a progressive Public Gatherings Bill, authorities continue to violate the right to peaceful assembly. In July 2024, four members of the Fix Zesco movement were [arrested](#) when police prevented a protest against power outages at the headquarters of public power company Zesco. The four were taken into custody on charges of charges of ‘idle and disorderly conduct’.



Ghana: #OccupyJolurbiHouse
Photo by @gyaigyimi

Some student protests were also met with arrests. In South Africa on 1 March 2024, police [arrested](#) 22 protesters when they dispersed a student protest outside the main campus at the Central University of Technology in Bloemfontein, Free State. The students protested against funding delays with the National

Student Financial Aid Scheme, resulting in a lack of funding for food, housing and study materials. In Zimbabwe in June 2024, police [arrested](#) 44 members of the Zimbabwe National Students Union, including the union’s president Emmanuel Sitima, after violently breaking up their meeting to discuss education policies. This action was part of the broader crackdown on opposition and dissent ahead of Zimbabwe’s hosting of the SADC summit.

In Guinea, police prevented a protest against media restrictions imposed by the military junta, planned for 18 January 2024 in the capital, Conakry. It had been organised by the Union of Press Professionals of Guinea, among others. Police [arrested](#) nine journalists and Sékou Jamal Pendessa, the union’s general secretary. Pendessa was charged with organising an unauthorised demonstration and was detained until 28 February 2024.



VIOLENT CRACKDOWN ON YOUTH-LED PROTESTS IN KENYA AND NIGERIA

As highlighted above, mass protests led by young people took place in several countries, including Kenya and Nigeria, to highlight economic hardship, bad governance and corruption. In both countries, authorities responded violently, killing dozens of people.

In Kenya, the #RejectFinanceBill2024 movement [gathered](#) thousands on the streets in June 2024 to protest against the

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controversial Finance Bill and its heavy tax implications. Police used excessive and brutal force, including by deploying snipers to shoot peaceful and unarmed protesters, while other police

Kenya: Police fire water cannons against people protesting against the tax hikes planned in 'Finance Bill 2024' (Photo by Gerald Anderson/ Anadolu via Getty Images)



officers, wearing plainclothes and facemasks and in unmarked vehicles, shot live ammunition and teargas directly at people, including medical personnel and journalists. National security and intelligence operatives arrested and abducted protesters, including social media influencers who had been vocal in supporting the protests, on allegations of leading and funding the protests. According to the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, as of 31 October 2024, at least 60 people had been killed and 71 cases of enforced or involuntary disappearances documented. While the government reported in September 2024 that at least 1,208 people had been arrested during the protests, and at least 132 were missing, civil society groups have estimated the numbers to be much higher.

Bodies of some of those reported missing have been found in abandoned quarries, forests, rivers and mortuaries, showing signs of torture, with some mutilated and dismembered.

Thousands gathered across Nigeria from 1 to 10 August 2024 in the #EndBadGovernance protests against the high cost of living, economic hardship and endemic corruption. Security forces responded with excessive force, using live ammunition as well as rubber bullets and teargas, killing at least 22 people, including in Abuja, Borno, Kaduna, Kano, Jigawa and Niger. Several states declared curfews in response to the protests. According to media sources, over 1,100 people were arrested. In September 2024, police in Abuja announced that some protesters arrested in relation to the protests, including minors, were being charged with conspiracy to commit treason, attempting to destabilise Nigeria, seeking to remove the president, waging war against the government and inciting mutiny. The crime of treason can carry the death penalty. President Bola Tinubu later ordered the minors to be freed and the treason charges against them to be dropped.

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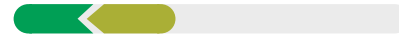
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Trinidad and Tobago



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Peru



● OPEN ● NARROWED ● OBSTRUCTED ● REPRESSED ● CLOSED

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RATINGS OVERVIEW

Around 30 percent of people in the Americas live in countries where civic space is closed or repressed, and less than five percent live in countries with open civic space. Out of 35 countries, civic space is closed in three, repressed in six and obstructed in five. Eleven countries in the Americas are rated as narrowed, while 10 have open civic space.

Civic space has tightened with worsening political repression, the debilitation of democratic institutions and the concentration of executive power. Nicaragua and Venezuela offer emblematic examples of how civic space has been closed.

The Nicaraguan government continues to use severe repressive tactics, using violence and restrictive laws to silence opposition and stifle civil society. By August 2024, authorities had shut down over 5,664 CSOs. Local organisations report that almost 80 percent of CSOs that operated between 2007 and 2024 have been arbitrarily dissolved. The disappearance of journalist Fabiola Tercero Castro in July 2024, following a police raid on her home in Managua, indicates the climate of fear and intimidation.

Venezuela’s closed civic space underwent a further deterioration in the context of the disputed 2024 presidential election marred by a lack of



transparency and an intensified crackdown on dissent. In March 2024, Venezuela was added to the CIVICUS Monitor Watchlist, which draws attention to countries where there is a serious and rapid decline in respect for civic space, due to the government’s targeting of HRDs and suppression of freedom of expression, highlighted by the arbitrary detention of prominent HRD Rocío San Miguel in February 2024. Government tactics have included arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances, with violence escalating after the election, with brutal repression of peaceful protests questioning the integrity of the results and demanding transparency and accountability. The approval of the Law for the Control, Regularisation, Performance and Financing of Non-Profit Social Organisations in August 2024 further restricts and potentially criminalises the work of civil society, while moves to introduce an ‘Anti-Fascism’ bill threaten to increase restrictions on freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly.

Civic space has steadily diminished in El Salvador under an extended state of emergency, which has become a key tool for the state to entrench authoritarian practices and suppress fundamental freedoms. Since 2019, President Nayib Bukele’s aggressive campaign against organised crime has been coupled with increasingly restrictive measures that target critics and allow him to consolidate power. Activists, CSOs and journalists face a climate of public intimidation, smear campaigns and vilification, with limited access to information. According to human rights organisations, the past four years have been some of the most challenging.

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Peru:
Protestors
sit in front
of a police
barrier
(Photo by
Klebher
Vasquez/
Anadolu
via Getty
Images)



Peru has been downgraded from obstructed to repressed following years of gradual erosion of civic freedoms. A hostile environment for civil society is characterised by escalating violence, including harassment, physical attacks, threats and vilification, from the state and far-right extremist groups. There is pervasive violence in regions plagued by deforestation, illegal mining and narcotrafficking. Indigenous leaders and environmental defenders face increasing risks, with at least two Indigenous Kakataibo leaders [killed](#) since December 2023. Journalists are vulnerable to [judicial harassment](#), smear campaigns and physical attacks, particularly when [reporting](#) on protests. The repressive conditions are underpinned by widespread impunity.

peaceful assembly is generally [respected](#) and no significant incidents were reported in the past year. However, isolated challenges persist, with some protests occasionally becoming violent due to protesters' actions.

Only a few countries have taken meaningful steps toward protecting fundamental freedoms, offering limited but important signs of progress. Trinidad and Tobago's civic space rating has been upgraded from narrowed to open, reflecting [improved](#) conditions. Although challenges to press freedom remain, including the handling of defamation and sedition cases, the availability of legal redress has proved crucial for upholding freedom of expression.

Jamaica's rating has also been upgraded from narrowed to open. Freedom of

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TOP VIOLATIONS

The most common violations of civic freedoms documented in the Americas in 2024 were attacks on journalists, the killing of HRDs, the detention of protesters, disruption of protests and threats against journalists.



JOURNALISTS ATTACKED AND THREATENED

Attacks on journalists were documented in at least 17 countries. Year on year this violation has consistently ranked among the region's top five, indicating that there is a persistently hostile environment for media and significant risks for journalists. Threats, including

death threats, were documented in at least 12 countries, leaving many journalists fearing for their safety and causing some to curb their work.

Journalists are often the target of attacks when covering protests. This was recorded in several countries, including [Argentina](#), [Bolivia](#), [Haiti](#), [Mexico](#), [Peru](#), the [USA](#) and [Venezuela](#). Security forces have frequently been identified as the main perpetrators of violence, raising concerns about excessive use of force, including of lethal weapons. In Venezuela, Bolivarian National Guard officers [shot](#) Jesús Romero, a reporter with independent media outlet Código Urbe, while he covered a demonstration in Maracay amid a nationwide crackdown on post-election protests in July 2024. Romero's leg was struck by a bullet, injuring an artery, and he also sustained a buckshot wound to his abdomen.

TOP 5 VIOLATIONS FOR AMERICAS

-  **1** ATTACK ON JOURNALIST
-  **2** KILLING OF HRD
-  **3** PROTESTER DETAINED
-  **4** PROTEST DISRUPTION
-  **5** JOURNALIST THREATENED



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In several instances security forces have fired rubber bullets and teargas directly at journalists. In Argentina, photojournalist Mariano Dalaison sustained a rubber bullet injury to his face while documenting protests opposing a controversial package of laws proposed by President Milei. The bullet struck him between his eyebrows, causing a serious injury.

Ecuador: heavily armed gang members stormed the TC Televisión studio in Guayaquil, interrupting a live broadcast of the El Noticiero news programme



In countries where gang violence has surged, journalists and media outlets have become frequent targets of attacks. In Ecuador, following the declaration of a 60-day state of emergency after the escape of a gang leader in January 2024, heavily armed gang members stormed the TC Televisión studio in Guayaquil, interrupting a live broadcast of the El Noticiero news programme. Attackers threatened media workers with firearms, brandished grenades and fired shots, all broadcast live across the country.

Journalists have been frequent targets of threats for exposing criminal and corrupt activities. Instances were recorded in at least five countries, including Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay and Uruguay. In Uruguay, where civic space is open and such events are rare, two media outlets received threatening messages asking them to stop reporting on the activities in Bolivia of Uruguayan drug trafficker Sebastián Marset.

In Mexico, there are significant gaps and challenges in state-sponsored protection mechanisms, leaving journalists at risk. In May 2024, unidentified assailants drove past the home of journalist Alberto Amaro Jordán in Apizaco, Tlaxcala, shouting death threats at his bodyguards. Amaro, founder of La Prensa de Tlaxcala, has faced threats over several years and is enrolled in a government protection programme.

Journalists are at risk of being killed in some countries, with Colombia, Guyana, Honduras and Mexico among the most dangerous for journalists. Mexico continues to be one of the world's most lethal countries for journalists. In July 2024, two journalists were killed over two days, and in October 2024, two more were killed within 24 hours.

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HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS KILLED

In recent years, the Americas have witnessed a disturbing surge in killings of HRDs. In the past year, the region has seen the highest number of killings of HRDs worldwide, with [Brazil](#), [Colombia](#), [Guatemala](#), [Honduras](#), [Mexico](#) and [Peru](#) the most dangerous countries. Activists working for social justice and peace, environmental and land rights, Indigenous rights and LGBTQI+ rights are being met with lethal reprisals aimed at silencing demands for rights.

Colombia:
Life-size
images of
killed and
missing
people (Photo
by Raul
ARBOLEDA /
AFP)



There is an ongoing crisis of violence in Colombia. HRDs continue to be targeted amid territorial disputes and entrenched violence by armed groups, as progress on Colombia's peace process has stalled. Between January and October 2024, civil society [reported](#) 148 killings. Most perpetrators of attacks remain unidentified, contributing to a chilling atmosphere of impunity. Colombia accounts for most of the region's killings of HRDs documented by the CIVICUS Monitor.

In February 2024, armed assailants [entered](#) the home of Ludivia Galindez in Florencia, Caquetá, and shot her shortly after her protection team from the National Protection Unit had dropped her off. Galindez was a leader in Caquetá and a member of the Association of Women for Peace and the Defence of Women's Rights in Colombia. In March 2024, Dairo Yovani Aquite, an Indigenous leader from the Nasa community in Cauca, was fatally shot by armed assailants while travelling by motorcycle. He had previously reported threats from armed groups. Cauca has seen a surge in violence against HRDs.

In Brazil, Indigenous leaders are leading the fight to protect ancestral lands from encroachment and aggressive development practices that disregard their rights and threaten their communities. This defence comes at a heavy cost, as shown by the murders of Pataxó leaders Lucas Kariri-Sapuyá in [December 2023](#) and Maria Fátima Muniz de Andrade, known as Nega Pataxó, in [January 2024](#). The killings [occurred](#) in the context of territorial disputes, and shortly after a congressional debate about a law that aims to curtail Indigenous rights.

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PROTESTS REPRESSED AND PROTESTERS DETAINED

Argentina:
Riot police use pepper-spray on demonstrators during a protest outside the National Congress in Buenos Aires (Photo by Luis ROBAYO / AFP)



In line with global trends, the Americas saw a sharp rise in the detention of protesters over the past year, indicating a troubling shift in how authorities handle public dissent. Across the region, people continue to turn to protest as a vital means to demand change, voice grievances and hold leaders and corporations accountable. Security forces have increasingly responded by detaining protesters, as documented in at least 15 countries, including [Argentina](#), [Canada](#), [Chile](#), [Costa Rica](#), [Panama](#), [Suriname](#), the [USA](#) and [Venezuela](#). Detentions have the intent of sapping protest momentum. Protests opposing conflict or expressing political dissent were more likely to encounter restrictions.

University students across Canada and the USA have established peaceful encampments in solidarity with Palestinians, calling on their institutions to divest from companies associated with Israel. Institutions such as the University of Toronto have

[pursued](#) legal action to dismantle protest encampments rather than safeguarding the rights of protesters. A July 2024 ruling by the Ontario Superior Court of Justice upheld the University of Toronto’s right to remove protesters from campus property. The court ruled that freedom of expression does not constitute a defence for trespass, prioritising property rights over the right to speak out.

Other universities, including the University of Calgary, have [taken](#) action without seeking legal injunctions. In May 2024, riot police dispersed an encampment at the University of Calgary, leading to confrontations where police deployed pepper spray against protesters. Police detained four people on trespass charges, later releasing them with a summons.



USA: Protest in solidarity with Palestine held at University of Michigan (Photo by Katie McTiernan/Anadolu via Getty Images)

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Since October 2023, the USA has [seen](#) one of the largest displays of support for Palestinian people in recent history, expressed through an unprecedented wave of solidarity protests. This surge in protests has been met with a heavy-handed and violent response. In April and May 2024 alone, authorities [detained](#) over 3,200 students, faculty, staff and journalists in nationwide campus raids. University authorities have [accused](#) students and organisations showing solidarity with Palestinians of offences such as ‘material support for terrorism’, despite a lack of evidence, and have proposed discriminatory actions such as visa cancellations and deportations.

Outrage over economic and political conditions and demands for change have led to mass protests across the Americas. In Argentina, tensions have been particularly high since President Milei [took](#) office in December 2023, implementing sweeping economic and political changes. A key flashpoint came on 14 December 2023, when the Ministry of Security introduced Resolution 943/2023, commonly known as the ‘anti-picket’ protocol, to criminalise street protests that obstruct traffic. The policy sparked significant backlash, resulting in violent repression by security forces. In September 2024, Argentina was [added](#) to the CIVICUS Monitor Watchlist.

In June 2024, thousands gathered near Argentina’s Congress as the Senate debated an omnibus bill aimed at deregulating industries, privatising key public services, cutting state spending and weakening labour protections. What began as a peaceful demonstration ended in [clashes](#) between protesters and security forces. Over 200 people were injured and 35 were

detained on charges such as incitement to violence, public intimidation and obstructing legislative proceedings. At the time of writing, a federal court has released 28 detainees due to lack of evidence, criticising sloppy police work and noting insufficient training of security forces.

The CIVICUS Monitor has documented the killing of protesters in at least four countries: [Haiti](#), [Mexico](#), [Panama](#) and [Venezuela](#). In Venezuela, the government [intensified](#) violence to suppress peaceful protests after the July 2024 election. At least 25 people were killed and over 1,600 detained on terrorism-related charges, including 114 teenagers. There have been frequent reports of systematic violations of due process and ill-treatment in detention.



HAITI

In recent years Haiti has been home to a worsening security crisis, causing the alarming [erosion](#) of civic space. Amid a legacy of colonialism, exploitation and decades of political turbulence, the rule of law and human rights have come under attack.

An outbreak of killings in November 2018, known as the La Saline Massacre, marked the start of an intensification of gang violence that continues to this day, as seen in an October 2024 massacre in Pont-Sondé, where gangs killed at least 115 people. Instability was intensified by the 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse. By 2023, the absence of elected officials and weak and corrupt structures had allowed gangs to seize control of vast areas and

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instil fear through violence and extortion. Gangs have powerful patrons with deep connections to political parties.

The consequences have been particularly severe for civil society. HRDs frequently receive threats to which authorities pay no attention. Acts of intimidation are common: armed gangs have repeatedly targeted CSOs by attacking their members and premises, particularly in rural areas. The security situation severely constrains CSOs. In November 2023, one organisation was forced to suspend operations temporarily due to rising security threats.

In early 2024, anti-government protests sparked by opposition demands for the resignation of then de facto Prime Minister Ariel Henry were met with excessive force from security forces, leading to deaths and injuries. During this period, at least five journalists sustained injuries.

Journalists have been targeted with kidnappings, including the abduction of journalists Lucien Jura in March 2024 and Pierre-Fils Saintamour and his family in November 2023. On 24 July 2024, security agents and local police assaulted journalists and members of human rights organisation Osvatwa Pou Egalite as they documented a hospital strike in Les Cayes. The perpetrators confiscated their phones and issued threats.

HRDs and journalists face violence with impunity in Haiti, with civic space deteriorating as a result.



Haiti: A demonstration in Port-au-Prince (Photo by Guerinault Louis/Anadolu via Getty Images)



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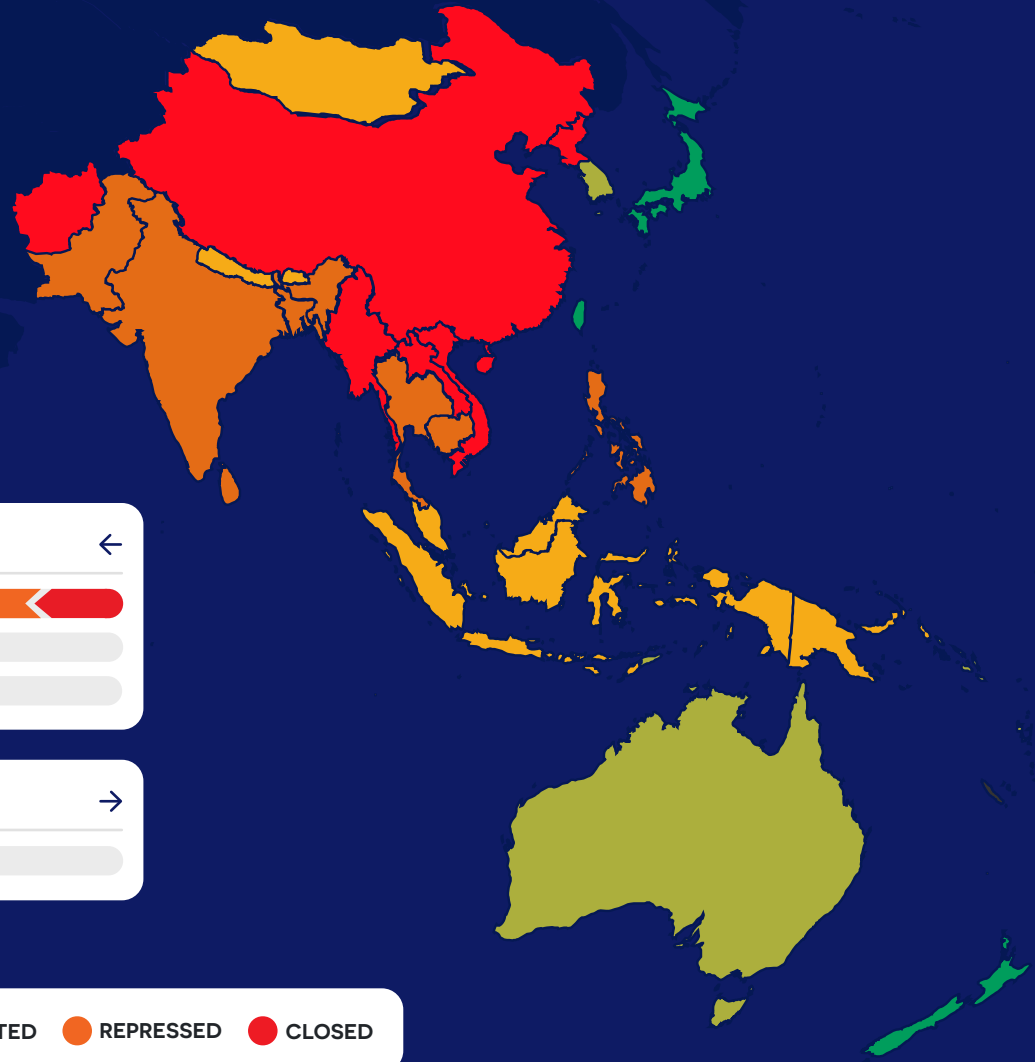
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UPGRADES ←



DOWNGRADE →



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RATINGS OVERVIEW

The main civic space violations documented in Asia and the Pacific over the past year are the arbitrary detention of protesters and the use of excessive force by security forces against peaceful protests. Another widespread trend was the detention of HRDs and the use of an array of restrictive laws and trumped-up charges to prosecute them. Governments also used censorship in many countries in the region to silence expression, block criticism of those in power and deny people access to information.

In Asia, seven countries and territories are rated as closed: Afghanistan, China, Laos, Myanmar, Hong Kong, North Korea and Vietnam. Nine countries are rated as repressed: Brunei, Cambodia, India, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand, along with Bangladesh, which has been upgraded from a closed civic space rating.

Six countries are now in the obstructed category: Bhutan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives and Nepal, along with Mongolia, which has been downgraded to this category.

South Korea and Timor-Leste retain their narrowed civic space rating while Japan has now joined Taiwan as the only two countries rated open in the Asia.

The civic space situation is more positive among Pacific countries, with seven rated as open. Five are rated as narrowed: Australia, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu, joined by Fiji, which has been upgraded to this category. Nauru and Papua New Guinea remain in the obstructed category.



Bangladesh: Demonstrators wave Bangladesh's national flag during Martyr March, a rally organised by Students Against Discrimination to mark one month to the ousting of the country's former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina (Photo by Munir UZ ZAMAN / AFP)

[Bangladesh's](#) upgrade results from steps taken by the interim government to address civic space concerns following mass protests that led to the fall of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her government in August 2024. This includes the release of protesters and HRDs. The government has signed the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances, formed a commission of inquiry on all cases of enforced disappearances and scrapped the jail terms resulting from the convictions of two HRDs from Odhikar, a leading human rights CSO. Despite this, more



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work is needed to protect journalists, repeal restrictive laws, ensure an enabling environment for civil society and pursue accountability for past crimes.

[Japan](#)'s upgrade to an open rating reflects the fact that over the year, civil society groups have been able to undertake their work without barriers and the right to peaceful assembly has generally been respected and protected. Further, media have been able to operate without major restrictions. However, concerns remain that business interests and pressure from politicians often [prevent journalists](#) completely fulfilling their role as watchdogs, while national security laws impose some restrictions on journalists.

In [Fiji](#), upgraded from obstructed to narrowed, the government that came to power in December 2022 has taken steps to improve civic space, including by [repealing](#) a restrictive media law used to silence the press since 2010 and reversing politically motivated travel bans against government critics. It has also taken steps to [strengthen](#) the independence of the Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission and is establishing a Truth and Reconciliation commission to address past abuses. However, the Public Order (Amendment) Act, which has been used to [restrict](#) peaceful assembly and expression, remains on the books and Palestinian solidarity protests have been blocked.

[Mongolia](#) has however been downgraded to an obstructed rating. This is because HRDs have faced reprisals, particularly those working to defend cultural, economic and social rights. Further, provisions of the Criminal Code related to 'cooperation with foreign intelligence agencies' have been used to [criminalise](#) HRDs for their legitimate activities. Journalists, including Bayarmaa Ayurzana and Naran Unurtsetseg, have been [targeted](#) on baseless charges for their work and peaceful protesters have been criminalised.

Mongolia:
Journalist,
Unurtsetseg
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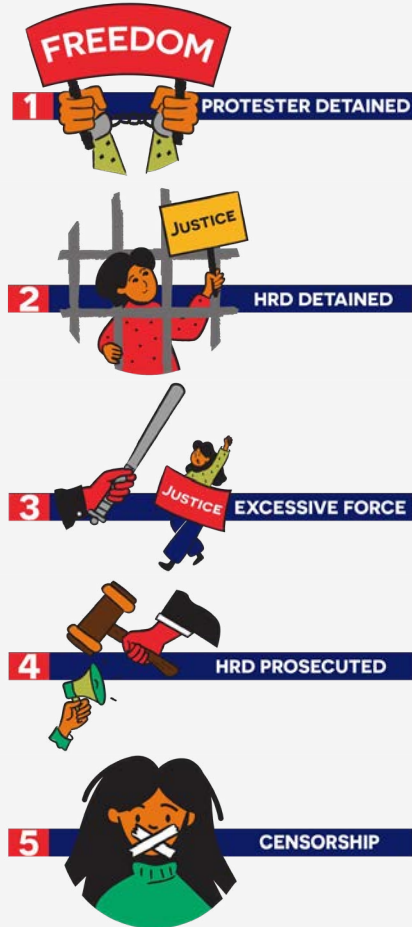
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TOP 5 VIOLATIONS FOR ASIA PACIFIC



PROTESTS REPRESSED

Protesters were detained in at least 22 countries in the Asia Pacific region. In addition, in at least 10 countries, security forces used excessive force, leading to injuries and in some cases unlawful killings. Journalists and protest observers were targeted in some instances.

Among the protesters targeted were those calling for democratic reforms,

environmental rights, Indigenous rights, labour rights, accountability, equality, justice and end to the human rights violations in the OPT.

The crackdown on protests is particularly strong in South Asia as governments have sought to stifle the opposition, ethnic minorities and students, among others. In Pakistan, the government severely cracked down on the opposition around the February 2024 election, particularly protesters linked to Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party. Scores of protesters were attacked with batons and sticks and arbitrarily detained by the police across the country. In May 2024, police met protests against rising costs in Pakistan-administered Kashmir with arrests and teargas while in July 2024, hundreds were detained in response to a march seeking to raise awareness of human rights concerns in Balochistan, with excessive force used to prevent protesters reaching the port city of Gwadar.

In Bangladesh, hundreds were detained as part of a brutal crackdown on the mass student-led protests in July 2024 that ultimately brought down the Sheikh Hasina regime. At least 600 people were killed by security forces and by the Awami League's student wing. Others suffered torture and ill-treatment in detention. Firearms, teargas, stun grenades, rubber bullets and shotgun pellets were used to disperse protesters, injuring many.



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In Sri Lanka, police [cracked down](#) on opposition protests over rising costs and protests by students from the Inter-University Students' Federation and [teachers](#). In February 2024, security forces [shot](#) teargas and fired water cannon at Tamil students from Jaffna University who protested at the government's failure to resolve issues faced by people in east and north Sri Lanka. Some were arrested and ill-treated. A crackdown on protests, particularly by pro-monarchy groups, was also [documented](#) in Nepal, with arbitrary arrests and excessive force.



India: Farmers as they shout slogans at the protest while marching towards New Delhi to press for the better crop prices promised to them by the government. REUTERS/Anushree Fadnavis

In India, farmers from Haryana Punjab and Uttar Pradesh states who protested to demand support from the government in February 2024 were [met](#) with excessive police force to stop them entering Delhi. More than 100 protesters were injured. The government also blocked roads with heavy barricades, iron nails and barbed wire and deployed drones to drop teargas shells on protesters.

In Indonesia, security forces repressed multiple protests in the Papua region, home to an independence movement and consequently a region with a high level of violations. In April 2024, at least 27 protesters were [detained](#) and eight injured at a peaceful protest in Nabire in response to a video showing soldiers torturing an Indigenous Papuan person. In August 2024, over 200 protesters were [arrested](#) and 41 injured at gatherings led by the West Papua National Committee, a Papuan civil resistance movement demanding an independence referendum. There was also a [brutal crackdown](#) by police and the military on protests in August 2024 across cities in Indonesia over plans to pass an amendment to a regional election law. Over 200 protesters, including minors, young people and students, were arbitrarily arrested and some were denied access to legal aid.

Other countries in Southeast Asia where protesters were detained or excessive force was used include [Cambodia](#), [Laos](#), [Malaysia](#), [Myanmar](#) and [Thailand](#).

The space for protests remains extremely restrictive in China. Police arrested hundreds of Tibetans in Sichuan province in February 2024 after they protested against the construction of a dam expected to destroy six monasteries and force the relocation of two villages. In Hong Kong, several people involved in 2019 democracy protests were convicted and handed jail sentences, and authorities arrested others around the Tiananmen Square Massacre anniversary in June 2024.



Hong Kong: police placing bounties of HK\$1m (US\$128,000) on five overseas pro-democracy activists (Photo by Getty Images)

In the Pacific, protesters across Australia mobilising on climate and environmental issues and in solidarity with Palestinians have faced detention. Arrests and excessive force were documented at a protest outside a weapons exhibition in Melbourne in September 2024. Protest observers reported the use of pepper spray, teargas, rubber bullets and flash-bangs against peaceful protesters, with some being punched and

having their heads slammed against walls. Protest observers were themselves assaulted.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS DETAINED AND PROSECUTED

HRDs were detained and prosecuted over the past year in at least 15 countries in the region. Many were criminalised under anti-terrorism, criminal defamation, national security and public order laws. In addition, transnational repression, where countries collaborate to target HRDs beyond their borders, is on the rise.



China: Sophia Huang Xueqin and labour activist Wang Jianbing

The criminalisation of HRDs remains pervasive in China, where the authorities use broad and vague provisions of ‘subversion of state power’ and ‘picking quarrels and stirring up trouble’.

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Those convicted over the year include [woman HRD](#) Li Qiaochu, [journalist](#) Sophia Huang Xueqin and labour activist Wang Jianbing. Some activists are [held](#) incommunicado and tortured or ill-treated in detention. In Hong Kong, dozens of HRDs remain behind bars. In May 2024, 14 activists were [convicted](#) under the draconian National Security Law for organising, joining and supporting unofficial primary elections in 2020. In the same month, eight people were [arrested](#) on sedition charges under article 23 of the new Safeguarding National Security Ordinance, including imprisoned HRD Chow Hang-tung. The UN has found both laws inconsistent with international law. The authorities have also [offered](#) bounties for activists in exile.

Scores of HRDs were [detained](#) on trumped-up charges in Vietnam over the year, including for ‘propaganda against the state’ and ‘deliberately disclosing state secrets’. They include blogger Nguyen Chi Tuyen, journalists Nguyen Vu Binh and Truong Huy San, labour rights activist Nguyen Van Binh, trade unionist Vu Minh Tien and lawyer Tran Dinh Trien. In addition, in March 2024 two ethnic Khmer Krom activists who distributed books about Indigenous rights were sentenced to prison for ‘abusing democratic freedoms’. There have been reports of activists [facing](#) torture and ill-treatment in detention. Activists in Vietnam also experience transnational repression, including Y Quynh Bdap, who [faces](#) extradition from Thailand on baseless charges.

HRDs detained across prisons in Myanmar by the junta continue to face fabricated charges for their activism. Protest leader Ko Wai Moe Naing was [found](#) guilty of high treason under Penal

Code article 122 in May 2024 and sentenced to 20 years jail by a junta court, taking his total jail time to 54 years. There are continued [reports](#) of political prisoners held by the junta being tortured and killed in detention with no one held accountable for these crimes.

Cambodia: Mother Nature Movement activists outside the Phnom Penh Capital Court on 29 May 2024 (Photo Credit: LICADHO)



In Cambodia, ‘incitement’ laws have been used to target HRDs. In April 2024, Koet Saray, president of the Khmer Student Intelligent League Association, was [detained](#) after meeting villagers following an eviction. In July 2024, 10 activists associated with the Mother Nature environmental group were convicted and sentenced for ‘insulting the king’ and ‘plotting’.

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Thailand's lèse-majesté provisions (article 112), which criminalise criticism of the monarchy, have been used to detain and convict HRDs for speaking out, including human rights lawyer Arnon Nampa. Detained activist Netiporn 'Bung' Sanesangkhom [died](#) in May 2024 following a hunger strike against her arbitrary detention. No one has been held accountable for her death. HRDs in [Malaysia](#), the [Philippines](#) and [Singapore](#) have also been prosecuted for their activism.

In India, HRDs have been detained under the restrictive draconian Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, an anti-terrorism law. At least eight HRDs are still [detained](#) under the Act on trumped-up charges after violence broke out in Bhima Koregaon village in Maharashtra state in 2018. Others detained include student activists Gulfisha Fatima and Umar Khalid, who participated in protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, which discriminates against Muslims. Kashmiri HRD Khurram Parvez, arrested in 2021, [remains](#) incarcerated in a maximum-security prison in Delhi in reprisal for his human rights work.

In Pakistan, authorities have [targeted](#) Baloch activists and those who have spoken up for them with arrests and detention. In July 2024, authorities [brought](#) sedition charges against woman HRD Mahrang Baloch. In Afghanistan, where UN experts have [raised](#) concerns about gender apartheid, the Taliban have sought to silence and create a climate of fear for HRDs, particularly women, who have been arbitrarily arrested, disappeared and tortured in detention. In February 2024, woman HRD Manizha Siddiqi was forcibly disappeared by the Taliban. She

was [sentenced](#) to two years in prison in February 2024 for her involvement in protests. Critical academics have also been arrested and criminalised.



Australia: Former Army lawyer David McBride was sentenced to five years and eight months for revealing information about alleged Australian war crimes in Afghanistan (Photo Credit: Twitter/@AssangeCampaign)

In Australia, former army lawyer David McBride was [sentenced](#) to five years and eight months in prison for revealing information about alleged Australian war crimes in Afghanistan. A climate activist was [sentenced](#) to three months in jail for a Newcastle coal terminal protest and union members have been [convicted](#) for their role in Palestinian solidarity protests.

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CRITICAL VOICES CENSORED AND JOURNALISTS TARGETED

Censorship by governments was documented in at least 16 countries in the region. Over the year, the authorities used their powers to restrict access to information critical of the state by blocking television broadcasts and news portals, restricting access to social media apps, suspending mobile internet services and targeting journalists and news outlets. Censorship increased ahead of elections.



China: CCTV (Photo by Vernon Yuen/NurPhoto via Getty Images)

China employs one of the most sophisticated censorship regimes in the world, which it uses to block access to social media platforms, websites and blogs critical of the Chinese Communist Party. In March 2024, Weibo [removed](#) from its

search results discussions about an unusual move by authorities to cancel an annual news conference by the premier. In June 2024, it censored any online discussions about the Tiananmen Square massacre. The authorities have also [continued](#) to subject foreign journalists to surveillance and threatened them with non-renewal of work permits if they report on topics the government deems sensitive. In Hong Kong, the government [banned](#) a protest song, jailed journalists and deported a Reporters Without Borders representative. 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 the death penalty.

States in Southeast Asia are also using censorship to harass and silence critics and journalists. In Myanmar the junta has [shut off access](#) to virtual private networks, which people use to circumvent banned websites and services and blocked-off access to encrypted messaging services. Dozens of [journalists](#) are in jail and some have been killed. In Malaysia, police have [hailed](#) up journalists for questioning over their critical reporting. In Singapore, the Protection against Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act has been used against anti-death penalty activists, bloggers and online media outlets. It is a sweeping law that [permits](#) a single government minister to declare that information posted online is 'false' and order the content's 'correction' or removal. In Cambodia, most independent outlets have been shut down and independent journalists continue to face [reprisals](#), including those in [exile](#).

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In South Asia, governments have taken steps to block the flow of information, particularly around elections. Pakistan [suspended](#) mobile internet services and X/ Twitter across the country around the February 2024 election, [citing](#) national security concerns. It has also [targeted](#) journalists for their reporting, including Asad Ali Toor and Imran Riaz Khan for their criticism of the military. In Bangladesh, ahead of the January 2024 election, authorities refused to issue visas to foreign journalists and blocked the Daily Manab Zamin news portal. Journalists were [assaulted and harassed](#) while covering alleged election irregularities. As mass anti-government protests erupted in July 2024, authorities [restricted](#) access to mobile internet services across Bangladesh, and blocked access to social media platforms in some areas.



Ahead of the April-to-June election, in January 2024 the Indian government blocked two websites reporting on hate speech and related crimes. The following month it [ordered](#) The Caravan outlet to take down an article from its website about allegations of torture and killings in army custody in Jammu and Kashmir. In June 2024, cable operators in Andhra Pradesh state [blocked](#) access to four TV news broadcasters for their critical reporting

during state-level elections. In Nepal, journalists have [faced](#) arrests, attacks, harassment and TikTok bans, while in Sri Lanka, journalists, particularly those reporting on the Tamil community, have [been](#) subjected to arrests, harassment and threats. In Afghanistan, the Taliban have [shut down](#) media outlets and arbitrarily arrested and detained journalists.

In the Pacific, there are censorship concerns in Nauru, with asylum seekers being held there on an Australian government programme [denied](#) smartphones and access to apps such as WhatsApp to communicate with families. Further, humanitarian websites are blocked on shared computers. In Solomon Islands in June 2024, Facebook temporarily [blocked](#) posts by independent online news outlet In-Depth Solomons, a member centre of the non-profit Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project. In Papua New Guinea, journalists have [faced](#) restrictions and harassment for their reporting.



CAMBODIA AND PAKISTAN

There are serious concerns about the ongoing regression of civic space in [Cambodia](#). Prime Minister Hun Manet, who took over from his father in August 2023, has continued an assault on fundamental freedoms by [targeting](#) HRDs, including environmental and land activists and trade unionists. Among those affected are Mother Nature activist Eang Vuthy and others from the group, Koet Saray and labour rights group the Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights. Reprisals against

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journalists [continued](#) to be reported while opposition members were arrested, harassed and attacked with impunity. The Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organisations continues to be weaponised to silence civil society while the government has also been involved in transnational repression of Cambodia activists abroad.



Pakistan: Relatives of missing Baloch community people, take part in a demonstration demanding greater civil rights for citizens in Quetta on August 18, 2024. (Photo by Banaras KHAN / AFP)

Another country of concern is Pakistan. HRDs continue to be [blocked](#) from travelling, detained or prosecuted, including Mahrang Baloch and lawyer Zainab Mazari-Hazi, forcibly disappeared and killed with impunity. Prominent Sindhi activist Hidayatullah Lohar was shot dead in February 2024. HRD Idris Khattak is currently serving a 14-year jail sentence on trumped-up espionage charges. Over the year, Baloch activists in particular faced reprisals by state authorities for their activism. Members of the opposition Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party were also systematically targeted in what clearly seemed an attempt to crush the party. Protests by the [opposition](#), ethnic minorities and [women activists](#) have faced restrictions, including arrests and the use of firearms and other forms of excessive force. Freedom of peaceful assembly is subject to significant restrictions and a new law to further regulate protests in the capital, Islamabad, was bulldozed through parliament in September. Journalists have been criminalised, threatened and killed and the authorities have blocked internet and social media platforms.

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DOWNGRADES



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In a year of elections, many people voted in Europe and Central Asia, and the far right gained ground in European Union (EU) countries, including [Austria](#), [Croatia](#), [France](#), [Germany](#), [the Netherlands](#), [Portugal](#) and [Slovakia](#), with negative civic space impacts across and beyond the bloc.

The European Commission continued with its ‘Defence of Democracy’ package against foreign interference, aimed at countering Russia’s support for nationalists and populists ahead of the June 2024 European Parliament elections, despite civil society criticism that it could inspire similar [laws against foreign interference](#) that could be used to restrict civil society. Europe also continued to shift politically rightwards and away from respect for human rights on migration, stepping up the militarisation of borders and [striking](#) agreements with repressive states to detain migrants abroad. Despite most EU countries retaining open or narrowed civic space ratings, threats persist, with rights violations reported even in high-rated states.

RATINGS OVERVIEW

With two upgrades and two downgrades, the overall balance of ratings in Europe and Central Asia remains unchanged. Of 54 countries, civic space is rated as open in 19, narrowed in 19, obstructed in seven, repressed in three and closed in six.

[Slovenia](#) is now rated as open, having been downgraded to narrowed in 2020 due to a decline in civic space under former Prime Minister Janez Janša. The Freedom Movement coalition, in power since 2022, has [increased](#) dialogue with civil society,

introduced new mechanisms for consultation and used civil society input to reform the public broadcaster RTV Slovenia. In September 2023, the government [implemented](#) an amnesty for people fined under COVID-19 restrictions, including protesters. While this represents a shift from the previous government’s openly hostile approach, CSOs still face funding challenges, including cancelled tenders and limited support for work on environmental and migration issues, alongside discreditation campaigns by politically linked media.



Poland: Pro-abortion activists are gathering at the Polish Parliament (Photo by Piotr Lapinski/NurPhoto via Getty Images)

[Poland](#) also improved its civic space rating, moving from obstructed to narrowed. December 2023 brought a change in government after eight years of rule by the nationalist Law and Justice party. The new administration immediately [took](#) steps

to resolve longstanding issues, launching initiatives to reverse much-criticised policies that reduced judicial independence and, although these moves have yet to come to fruition, to recognise same-sex partnerships and liberalise draconian abortion laws. Efforts to improve government-civil society relations included the formation of a commission to [investigate](#) the previous government's abuse of spyware against critics, including activists, and an advisory body to help shape the agenda of the country's upcoming EU Council presidency. However, concerns [remain](#), particularly about the government's use of heavy-handed tactics to 'depoliticise' the public broadcaster, and a new migration strategy that suspends the right to asylum.

The [Netherlands'](#) rating slipped from open to narrowed following increasing repression of protest rights. Authorities have continued to disrupt peaceful environmental protests,



Netherlands: Pro-Palestinian demonstrators resist the police during a protest at University of Amsterdam (Photo by Mouneb Taim/Anadolu via Getty Images)

using water cannon and arresting activists by the hundreds and thousands, with over 9,000 activists [detained](#) during motorway blockades in late 2023. In January 2024, police admitted that many environmental protesters charged with participating in an airport blockade in 2022 had been [misidentified](#) due to the controversial use of facial recognition technology. In 2024, police [responded](#) with excessive force to peaceful student encampments in solidarity with Palestinians, using pepper spray, police batons, police dogs and bulldozers against protesters. Police detained 169 protesters during the eviction of one encampment at the University of Amsterdam.

[Georgia](#) has been downgraded from narrowed to obstructed after its April 2024 adoption of a controversial law requiring CSOs receiving international funding to register as 'pursuing the interests of a foreign power'. The reintroduction of the law in 2024 after it had previously been withdrawn in 2023 triggered a resumption of mass protests that were suppressed with excessive force. Despite likely heavy fines for noncompliance, CSOs have committed to refusing to register. Opponents of the law, including CSO leaders and political activists, have faced a campaign of intimidation, including threatening phone calls from international numbers, defamatory posters and physical assaults. Ahead of the general election in October, the government [passed](#) a package of 19 anti-LGBTQI+ laws banning gender reassignment and hormone therapy, media representation of and education about same-sex relationships and any public assemblies related to LGBTQI+ issues, further restricting civic space.

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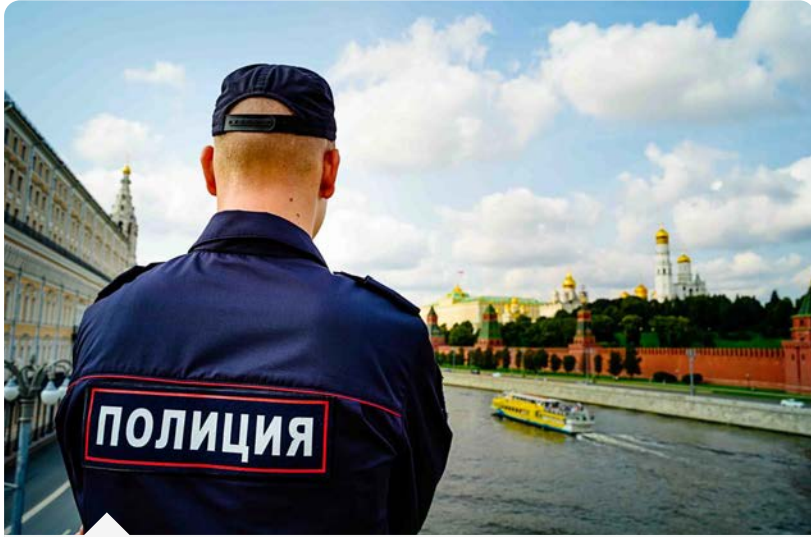
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REPRESSIVE LAWS CONTINUE TO SPREAD ACROSS EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA



Foreign agent laws were pioneered in Russia (Photo by Lara Belova/ Getty Images)

In 2024, the concerning trend of 'foreign agents' and anti-LGBTQI+ legislation, pioneered by Russia, continued to sweep across several European and Central Asian countries. Beyond Georgia, several states have advanced or enacted laws that undermine fundamental freedoms in the name of national sovereignty and what are characterised as traditional values. In Bulgaria and Slovakia, draft laws on 'foreign agents' have been accompanied by laws targeting so-called 'LGBTQI+

propaganda'. Hungary has tightened its already repressive framework to further stigmatise LGBTQI+ people by banning the sale of items seen as promoting deviations from assigned gender or homosexuality near schools, childcare facilities and religious institutions.

Forced to repeal its repressive NGO Transparency Act in 2021 following an EU court ruling, Hungary also renewed its offensive against 'foreign agents' in December 2023 by establishing an Office for the Defence of Sovereignty, with wide-ranging investigative powers to defend the country against what it calls 'undue political influence' from abroad. The office soon began targeting CSOs and critical media: independent investigative outlet Átlátszó and Transparency International Hungary reported receiving formal notices of investigation in June 2024.

Kyrgyzstan's president signed off on a contentious law on 'foreign representatives' in April 2024. The law imposes stigmatising registration requirements and invasive state oversight for CSOs that receive international funding for vaguely defined 'political' work. Severe penalties can be applied for non-compliance, including suspension or closure, and some organisations have already dissolved or restricted their activities, fearing repercussions.



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The law sets a concerning precedent for other countries in Central Asia, where CSOs with international funding already face heightened scrutiny and stigmatisation. Kazakhstan [began](#) publicly listing such organisations last year, in a move clearly aimed at discrediting them. In Uzbekistan in September 2024, parliament [approved](#) amendments to laws to allow authorities to ban foreign citizens from the country as ‘undesirable’ for vaguely defined actions including ‘demeaning the honour, dignity, or historical legacy of the Uzbek people’.

In Slovakia, amendments to core laws governing the activities of CSOs passed their first reading in April 2024. CSOs receiving over €5,000 annually (approx. US\$5,300) from foreign sources would be required to declare themselves ‘foreign-funded organisations’, and the Ministry of the Interior would have the power to dissolve CSOs that fail to meet reporting requirements. Additionally, a proposed amendment introduced by the far-right Slovak National Party in September 2024 would prohibit ‘propaganda’ of ‘nontraditional sexual orientations’ in schools under the guise of protecting children.

An even more restrictive law is under consideration in Bulgaria. A bill was [submitted](#) to parliament in September 2024 that would see individuals or organisations receiving more than €500 a year (approx. US\$530) from abroad being designated as ‘foreign agents’. In addition to being listed in a public registry, they would be required to indicate this status on emails, publications and social media posts. The draft law further prohibits ‘foreign agents’ from engaging in activities in schools, kindergartens and universities, along with other institutions.

Although two prior proposals from the far-right Revival party failed, there is concern that this attempt may succeed, as a law banning the promotion of LGBTQI+ ‘ideas and views’ in schools proposed by the same party was passed with considerable support in August 2024.



Russia declares “international LGBTQI+ movement” as extremist (REUTERS/Maxim Shemetov)

Meanwhile, Russia continued intensifying restrictions. In November 2023, its Supreme Court [deemed](#) what it called the ‘international public movement of LGBTQI+ people’ an extremist organisation. In July, the repressive law on ‘undesirable organisations’ was further [tightened](#), expanding its scope to intergovernmental bodies such as the Council of Europe and the International Criminal Court. Another proposed law would mandate deportation of foreigners who participate in unauthorised protests or collaborate with undesirable organisations.

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In Turkey, the government revived its ‘agents of influence’ bill, threatening prison sentences of three to seven years for anyone who commits a crime against the security or political interests of the state, ‘in line with the strategic interests or instructions of a foreign state or organisation’. The law was approved by parliament’s justice committee at the end of October.

TOP VIOLATIONS

In Europe and Central Asia, the most common civic freedom violations documented in the past year were the detention of protesters and journalists, the prevention and disruption of protests and excessive use of force.

Freedom of expression continued to be the most frequently violated right in Europe and Central Asia. In Europe, violations related to peaceful assembly were particularly prevalent, with the most common protests focusing on conflict, particularly Palestinian solidarity protests, and protests on environmental and labour issues. In Central Asia, where protests are rare due to the risk of persecution associated with public expressions of discontent, violations of freedom of association were more frequent.



PROTESTERS DETAINED

The detention of protesters was documented in at least 21 countries of the region.

Mass arrests of environmental activists engaged in peaceful civil disobedience continued in Europe. In December 2023, police in Belgium arrested over

TOP 5 VIOLATIONS FOR EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

- 1  **PROTESTER DETAINED**
- 2  **PROTEST DISRUPTION**
- 3  **EXCESSIVE FORCE**
- 4  **JOURNALIST DETAINED**
- 5  **PREVENTION OF PROTEST**

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500 protesters who had attempted to occupy Antwerp airport to protest against private jets. In Austria in November 2023, police [arrested](#) 57 Letzte Generation (Last Generation) activists following strategic roadblocks on motorways around Vienna. The country's political leadership vilified the protesters, with Chancellor Karl Nehammer posting on social media that the activists 'poison the societal climate'. In November 2023, a dozen police officers entered the University of Lisbon in Portugal and [detained](#) two students while they were giving a lecture on civil disobedience and climate action, along with a third activist who was filming the lecture. Similar actions against climate activists occurred in other European countries, including [Germany](#), [Italy](#), [the Netherlands](#), [Spain](#) and the [UK](#).

Ill-treatment of protesters in detention was reported in several countries. During the 2024 Olympics in France, eight female football players were [detained](#) by over 20 police officers while attending a 'Marathon for All' event with signs advocating for the right to wear the hijab in sports. They were unveiled, stripped and searched while in police custody. In Italy, a detained Extinction Rebellion activist [described](#) being subjected to degrading police treatment following a civil disobedience action she did not directly participate in. After being arrested, photographed and fingerprinted, she said she was forced to undress and bend over in an unhygienic toilet at Bologna police headquarters.

PROTESTS DISRUPTED WITH EXCESSIVE FORCE

Protests were disrupted in at least 19 countries, and police used excessive force against protesters in at least 18 countries.

In France in June, observers [reported](#) disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force against protesters at an environmental protest against the construction of the A69 motorway, including the use of particularly dangerous weapons such as stun grenades. Medical teams evacuated 10 people, with three hospitalised.

In February 2024, police violence was [reported](#) at Palestinian solidarity protests by students in Florence and Pisa, Italy. Footage of the events shared on social media shows fully armoured officers beating young protesters, some of them allegedly middle school students, with batons. Palestinian solidarity protests in Germany were [confronted](#) with particular police brutality. Videos on social media show numerous cases of officers pushing, punching and choking non-resisting protesters. In one case, a protester was injured to the point of losing consciousness and reportedly not given any medical assistance for 20 minutes.

In Georgia, in response to the mass protests against the 'foreign agents' law, police responded with rubber bullets, teargas and water cannon. Numerous videos show police using excessive force against protesters and there are credible allegations of severe ill-treatment of protesters in detention.

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Turkey: Police detain a protester as he and others attempt to march to Taksim Square (Photo by KEMAL ASLAN/AFP via Getty Images)



Labour protests have also faced harsh repression. In Istanbul, Turkey on 1 May 2024, police [used](#) teargas and rubber bullets against May Day protesters, detaining over 200 people amid heavy security measures.

The most brutal use of force by security forces in 2024 was [observed](#) in New Caledonia, a French overseas territory in the Pacific Ocean. In response to riots in May sparked by planned constitutional changes opposed by independence advocates, French authorities declared a state of emergency, imposed internet restrictions and deployed the military. Reports indicate that at least 11 Indigenous Kanaks, including protesters, were killed, 169 injured and over 2,000 detained. Some protest leaders were deported to mainland France, with 500 cases of enforced disappearance also reported.

PROTESTS PREVENTED

Prevention of protests was among the top violations recorded in the region, documented in at least 17 countries.

In Azerbaijan, officials twice [denied](#) opposition requests for a rally to express solidarity with political prisoners and demand fairer elections, on the grounds that the proposed locations were unsuitable. Authorities claimed that the stadium protesters might have used was being repaired and traffic was too heavy in city squares. In Russia, authorities [banned](#) protests by soldiers' wives with similarly unconvincing justifications. In November 2023, the mayor of Novosibirsk claimed one such planned protest violated the 'principle of legality', without providing any further information. In Chelyabinsk, the rejection was justified by the fact that the registration for the event was submitted electronically, rather than on paper.

Authorities in Kazakhstan [continued](#) to routinely [reject requests](#) to hold peaceful assemblies and detain and penalise peaceful protesters. Independent feminist activists reported that authorities in the capital, Almaty, repeatedly rejected their requests to hold a peaceful rally on International Women's Day, 8 March 2024, on the grounds that they could 'jeopardise public order', while allowing a rally calling for a 'worthy life' for women organised the day before by an activist close to the ruling party.

Palestinian solidarity protests also faced bans and obstruction in countries including [Bulgaria](#), [Estonia](#), [Germany](#), [Hungary](#) and [Latvia](#).

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JOURNALISTS DETAINED

The detention of journalists, including citizen journalists and bloggers, was documented in at least 14 countries.

In multiple countries, including [France](#), [Germany](#), [Italy](#) and [Spain](#), journalists have been detained while covering protests and documenting police use of force. In Bulgaria, journalists covering unrest in the capital, Sofia, during a Euro 2024 football qualifier game [faced](#) violence and obstruction. Police assaulted at least seven [journalists](#) and briefly detained Darik Radio's Nikolay Ganchev, even after he identified himself with a press card, before releasing him when police confirmed his accreditation.



In Azerbaijan, host of the COP29 climate summit, the state [cracked down](#) on the country's few remaining independent media

from the end of 2023 onwards. In November 2023, authorities arrested Ulvi Hasanli, director of Abzas Media, an outlet known for its investigations into high-level corruption. Law enforcement officers raided Hasanli's home and the headquarters of Abzas Media and claimed to have found €40,000 (approx. US\$42,000), leading to a charge of smuggling, an offence that can bring up to eight years in prison. Within days, at least five more journalists were arrested on similar flimsy charges. In June, human rights groups [estimated](#) that there were over 300 political prisoners in Azerbaijan, including 23 journalists, the highest number in decades.

In Kyrgyzstan, 11 journalists from Temirov Live were [detained](#) following a raid on their homes and the group's office, and charged with calling for riots due to their investigative work on corruption. This formed part of a growing crackdown on independent media and journalists. Makhabat Tajibek kyzy, Temirov Live's director, reported experiencing abuse in detention, but prosecutors dismissed her claims as fabricated. In October 2020, journalists Azamat Ishenbekov and Tazhikbek kyzy received prison sentences, while two others were handed probational sentences. Seven defendants were acquitted.

Across Central Asia, civil society activists, bloggers, HRDs and journalists critical of authorities faced surveillance, threats and arrests. Many were prosecuted under vague criminal provisions, such as those related to disseminating 'false' or slanderous information, inciting hatred and alleged extremism. Others were charged with fabricated offences such as extortion or fraud.

In 2024, several dozen people were charged and imprisoned in Central Asian countries for exercising their right to freedom of expression and other fundamental freedoms.

In Tajikistan, author Abdukhalil Kholiqzoda was [sentenced](#) to nine years' imprisonment in February 2024 for inciting hatred after publishing his memoir, which the authorities allege insulted state officials. At least seven journalists in Tajikistan are currently serving prison sentences of between seven and 20 years, all of them convicted since late 2022. In Kazakhstan, journalist and blogger Duman Mukhamedkarim was [sentenced](#) to seven years on extremism-related charges in August 2024 following a closed

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trial. In Uzbekistan, three men were sentenced to long prison terms for allegedly ‘insulting the president’ on Telegram and other platforms, despite experts finding that their statements did not contain incitement to unconstitutional acts or insults to the president. Persecution also extended across borders. Turkmenistan’s government continued to seek the forcible return of outspoken activists based in Turkey, with several having been sent back since 2023.

OF CONCERN

SERBIA

In 2024, mass protests erupted in Serbia against a planned lithium mine. The project, which was put on hold in 2022 after public outcry, resumed in July 2024. That same month, the EU signed a strategic partnership with Serbia for raw materials, battery production and electric vehicles, with the mine expected to cover up to 90 percent of Europe’s demand for lithium, used in electrical vehicle batteries.

According to civil society reports, dozens of activists were arrested in 17 cities in August for allegedly ‘calling for a violent overthrow of the constitutional order’, based on their social media posts or participation in protests. While most detentions were brief, civil society groups criticised the use of detention as an intimidation tactic. Activists and critics have also been confronted with anonymous threats, checks and prolonged detentions at border crossings.

Of particular concern are the persistent narratives that portray resistance to the mining project as a foreign-backed plot to destabilise Serbia. In a coordinated smear campaign fuelled by high-ranking officials, civil society has been accused of plotting a violent ‘colour revolution’ to take power with the support of the EU and the USA, even though both have publicly backed the project.

This claim, allegedly supported by intelligence provided by Chinese and Russian authorities, has been widely publicised. The pro-government Informer, one of Serbia’s largest outlets, aired multiple prime-time programmes claiming to expose alleged foreign financing of a coup. The programmes revealed sensitive information, likely provided by state agencies, including donors, specific financial transactions and details of employees of a CSO accused of leading the plot, including their salaries and photos.

Demonstration in Serbia against a lithium mining project (Photo by Filip Stevanovic/ Anadolu via Getty Images)



On 1 November 2024, the collapse of a newly renovated railway station in Novi Sad, which killed 14 people, sparked fresh protests. Authorities responded with increased repression, including excessive force and arrests by plainclothes officers who refused to identify themselves, raising serious concerns about protesters’ rights and safety.

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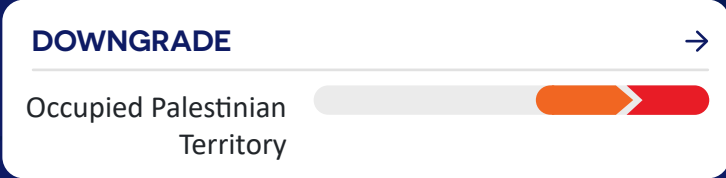
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RATINGS OVERVIEW

In 2024, the MENA region was home to escalating rights violations, intensifying with Israel’s relentless military campaign, which since October 2023 has [driven](#) Gaza into a humanitarian and human rights [catastrophe](#). This has come with an escalation of Israel’s violations of Palestinian civic freedoms, leading to a drastic deterioration of the OPT’s already restricted civic space situation (see countries of concern below).

Israel continues to cause catastrophe in the region. In Lebanon, escalating Israeli attacks have [killed](#) more than 2,700 people, injured 13,000 and displaced at least 1.3 million since 8 October 2023. Repeated [attacks](#) on aid workers by the Israeli military in southwest Lebanon have resulted in injuries to UN aid workers and the destruction of their equipment from deliberate targeting. Israeli airstrikes on the main border crossing between Lebanon and Syria have [disrupted](#) critical humanitarian operations and hindered civilians attempting to escape. Meanwhile, in [Israel](#) and [Jordan](#), authorities have instrumentalised laws to target and prosecute people expressing solidarity with Palestinians through anti-war protests and social media.



Tunisia: People gather to stage a demonstration in support of Palestinians (Photo by Yassine Gaidi/Anadolu via Getty Images)

As with previous years in the MENA region, governments have continued to persecute those perceived to be their political opponents. In Tunisia, over 100 prospective candidates, members of their campaigns and other political figures were [arrested](#) on a variety of charges, ranging from falsification of electoral paperwork to national security charges, ahead of the October 2024 presidential election. Similarly in Egypt, authorities continued to imprison people for political reasons

after a wave of unlawful arrests of potential candidates and their supporters that began ahead of the December 2023 election with the aim of preventing any meaningful competition. In February 2024, prominent Egyptian politician Ahmed Tantawy and his supporters were [sentenced](#) to a year in prison for alleged offences associated with his challenge to President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), over 60 activists belonging to the UAE84 group of democracy advocates, who were being [held in](#)

[prison](#) past the end of their sentences, were among at least 84 HRDs and political dissidents who were [subjected](#) to an unfair mass trial in December 2023 on charges of establishing a ‘terrorist organisation’ and supporting and funding this organisation.

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Transnational repression was also documented in several countries as authorities went beyond borders to target activists and HRDs in exile. Qatari authorities [refused](#) to renew Germany-based HRD Abdullah Al-Malik's official documents, in the latest of their continued efforts to [force](#) him to return to face imprisonment. The government of Kuwait [continued](#) to target exiled blogger Salman Al-Khalidi, arbitrarily revoking his citizenship in April 2024.

In Saudi Arabia, detained and imprisoned activists [continue](#) to be mistreated behind bars, with reports of enforced disappearance, medical neglect and sexual harassment, among other violations. HRD Issa Al-Nukhaifi undertook several hunger strikes in protest against his prolonged arbitrary detention and mistreatment. Detained HRD Mohammed Fahad Al-Qahtani also remains forcibly disappeared since October 2022, when he was held as part of a new investigation just a month before completing his initial 10-year prison sentence.

Across the region, the status of women HRDs and women's rights activists remains a particular concern as they continue to face blatant attacks, including murder and cycles of judicial harassment that repeatedly return them to and keep them in prison. In Syria, women's rights activist Heba Suhaib Haj Arif was [found](#) murdered in her home in February 2024 shortly after receiving threats to try to make her resign from working in a school affiliated with the Yeni Adam organisation, meaning 'new step' in Arabic. In Iran, woman HRD Narges Mohammadi [remains](#) in prison along with other women HRDs. While already serving an eight-year sentence, Narges was handed

Iran: Narges Mohammadi remains in prison along with other women rights activists (Photo by EFE)



an [additional](#) year in jail in June 2024 because of her human rights work while behind bars. Movement restrictions imposed by authorities have [affected](#) women across all parts of Yemeni society, including women working with CSOs who face targeting by checkpoint officials.

As a result, civic space continues to decline in the region. The OPT's rating has been downgraded from repressed to closed amid Israel's brutal military assault, which has resulted in a sharp decline in civic freedoms. While Israel remains in the obstructed category, its civic space is regressing due to a heightened crackdown on anti-war protests and Palestinian solidarity actions throughout the year.

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ONGOING CRISIS: JOURNALISTS KILLED

Israel's bombardment of Gaza has taken an unprecedented toll on journalists. The number of journalists killed to date is the highest ever recorded in any conflict in modern history, [according](#) to the UN. As of 7 November 2024, at least 183 Palestinian journalists had been [killed](#) in Gaza.

Killings of journalists are not random or isolated events. Since 7 October 2023, Israel has practised a [systematic](#) policy of targeting journalists in the OPT with direct attacks and excessive force. Many journalists have [reported](#) attacks that have put their lives at risk while doing their work, including the use of live ammunition, rubber bullets and tear gas assaults. The targeting of journalists must be seen within the context of Israel's wider campaign to dominate the media landscape in [Israel](#) and [the OPT](#), with the closure of Al Jazeera outlets in both countries offering an example.

Memorial for killed journalists in Gaza (Photo by Ashraf Amra/Anadolu via Getty Images)



Israel has also deliberately targeted and [killed](#) journalists in Lebanon since October 2023, with local CSOs reporting that 12 journalists have been killed since October 2023 and many more have been injured and displaced. On 25 October 2024, three journalists [were killed](#) in an Israeli airstrike on a building in Hasbaya, southeast Lebanon, where more than a dozen journalists from at least seven media organisations were sleeping. News photos showed a bombed courtyard containing cars clearly marked with the word 'press', leading Lebanon's information minister to call the attack deliberate. In September 2024, two more journalists [were killed](#) in separate Israeli airstrikes on south Lebanon.

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TOP 5 VIOLATIONS FOR MENA

- 1  HRD PROSECUTED
- 2  JOURNALIST DETAINED
- 3  CENSORSHIP
- 4  HRD DETAINED
- 5  JOURNALIST PROSECUTED

TOP VIOLATIONS

In MENA, the most common violations of civic freedoms documented in the past year were the prosecution of HRDs, detention of journalists, censorship, detention of HRDs and the prosecution of journalists.



HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS PROSECUTED

HRDs working on a diverse range of issues were prosecuted in at least eight countries in MENA in the past year. In Jordan, authorities have targeted activists who expressed solidarity with Palestinians, including activist Anas al-Jamal, was charged and convicted

for his posts about the OPT on X/Twitter. While he was released in January 2024 after payment of bail through crowdfunding, he faces a travel ban. Palestinian-Jordanian Journalist Hiba Abu Taha was also charged and sentenced after publishing an article criticising Jordan’s interception of Iranian missiles fired towards Israel in April 2024.

Activists have also faced charges for criticising government policies and officials, as seen in Egypt, where a third lawsuit was filed against poet Galal El Behairy for writing a song criticising President el-Sisi’s policies. In Oman, online activist Mohammed Ali Bakhit, also known as Abu Ali Al-Barami, was charged in March 2024 for ‘distorting the government’s image and directing insulting criticism at its ministers’, in relation to posting tweets. He was later acquitted.

People who advocate for the rights of minority groups are also targeted, as seen in January 2024, when Kuwait’s Court of Appeal sentenced Mohammed Al-

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Barghash, a prominent defender of the rights of the stateless Bedoon community, to three years in prison with hard labour on fabricated charges of spreading fake news and harming the state’s reputation, after overturning his initial acquittal.

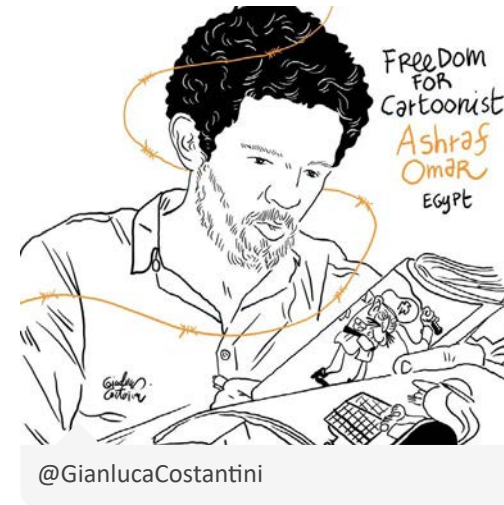
Across the region, those who advocate for the rights of women continue to face severe punishment through judicial harassment and instrumentalisation of the justice system. In [Saudi Arabia](#), woman HRD Manahel Al-Otaibi was sentenced to 11 years in prison, while in [Yemen](#), Fatima Saleh Al-Arwali was given a discretionary death sentence, both in retaliation for their work on women’s rights. Al-Otaibi has been [subjected](#) to sexual harassment and various forms of abuse while in detention.

JOURNALISTS DETAINED

The detention of journalists was the second most common violation in MENA, documented in at least six countries. Authorities particularly targeted journalists covering Palestinian solidarity protests, and those reporting on politics and public affairs.

As part of [Jordan’s ruthless](#) crackdown on large-scale Palestinian solidarity protests, authorities have arbitrarily detained reporters for covering protests. Authorities [detained](#) journalists Khair Al-Jabri, Ahmad Mohsen and Abdul Jabbar Zeitoun in March 2024 as they covered protests.

In Egypt, Ashraf Omar, cartoonist for the Al-Manassa independent news outlet, was [arrested](#) and detained in July 2024 after publishing cartoons joking about power outages. Earlier that week, journalist Khalid Mamdouh [disappeared](#) for several days and was



unjustly detained before appearing before the Supreme State Security Prosecution on accusations of joining a terrorist group and broadcasting ‘fake news’.

In a similar vein, in July 2024 security forces in Libya [arrested](#) Ahmed al-Sannusi, a regular government critic and host of the Flosna TV show. The show covers local politics and economics on the independent Wasat TV channel. In Tunisia, police [arrested](#) two journalists, Borhen Bssais and Mourad Zghidi, in May 2024 in connection with Bssais’ television and radio commentary critical of President Saied and Zghidi’s social media posts in solidarity with imprisoned journalist Mohamed Boughaleb.

In Iraq, police officers [arrested](#) journalists Kamel Al-Kaabi and Duraid Al-Khafaji of Iraq Fox News Agency after they accused them of disobeying orders while filming in the

capital, Baghdad. They released them after eight hours. In Yemen, security forces affiliated with the secessionist Southern Transitional Council arbitrarily [arrested](#) and detained photojournalist Saleh Al-Obaidi in June 2024, releasing him the following day after a widespread online solidarity campaign by press institutions and citizens.

CENSORSHIP

Censorship was the third most common violation in MENA, documented in at least nine countries. Authorities are using draconian laws to harass, intimidate and prosecute people for expressing their opinions. In the context of Israel’s bombardment of the OPT, media outlets and social media users in Israel, Jordan and the OPT are being particularly targeted with various forms of censorship of their coverage or criticism of Israel’s military actions.

Al Jazeera’s Jerusalem office was closed by Israeli authorities. REUTERS/ Ammar Awad



In Israel in May 2024, the government [used](#) the newly passed draconian Law for the Prevention of Foreign Broadcasting Harm to State Security (Temporary Order – Iron Swords), 5774-2024 to order the cessation of Al Jazeera broadcasts in Arabic and English in Israel, ban its website in Israel, close its offices and confiscate its equipment, after accusing the outlet of being a ‘ Hamas mouthpiece’. In the OPT, Israel [continued](#) its campaign of restricting journalists, media outlets and mass media coverage, including through the closure of Al Jazeera’s OPT office and the J-Media Agency through military orders.

In Jordan, authorities [arrested](#) online activists supporting Palestinian solidarity protests, threatened them with lengthy prison sentences and hefty fines under the Cybercrimes Law and told them to sign pledges to no longer share protest-related content on social media in exchange for their release.

In Libya, activists were [abducted](#) for expressing their opinions on social media, as seen with the abduction of activist Abdelaziz Jamal Boukmar by security agents over a Facebook post criticising a government official’s corruption. The Libyan Ministry of Interior has acknowledged the existence of a cybersecurity team within the ministry, tasked with monitoring online activities, with people facing imprisonment without any judicial proceedings.

In Iran in early 2024, rapper Toomaj Salehi received a [death sentence](#) and fellow musician Shervin Hajipour was sentenced to three years in prison for writing songs in support of women’s rights in the wake of the 2022 mass [protests](#) sparked by the death of Mahsa Amini.

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ISRAEL AND THE OPT

Israel's ongoing bombardment of Gaza has had a significant impact on civil liberties in Israel and the OPT. In Israel, the government has misused the state of emergency declared following the 7 October 2023 attacks to enact emergency regulations that fail to meet necessity and proportionality tests and that risk eroding the separation of powers. The Israeli government has [passed](#) at least 19 emergency regulations that restrict several freedoms, including an emergency regulation which gives the Minister of Defence the power to shut down foreign broadcasters deemed to 'harm the security of the state'. Proposed amendments to the Counter-Terrorism Law could also disproportionately harm freedom of expression by removing the probability test, as required by international law.

Police have repeatedly stopped journalists covering protests, including by using physical violence and false arrests, and have also failed to protect journalists when they have been attacked.

Palestinian citizens of Israel and some Jewish Israelis have faced political persecution and attacks on their freedoms of assembly and expression for voicing their support for or showing solidarity with people in Gaza. By 1 May 2024, over 160 indictments had been filed concerning charges of incitement to terrorism, almost exclusively against Palestinian citizens of Israel and Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem.

As people continued to mobilise anti-war protests in Israel throughout the year, widespread restrictions on the right to protest were documented, including the disproportionate use of force, arbitrary arrests, unnecessary authorisation requirements, the banning of previously approved protests and confiscation of protest signs. Civil society noted that there was evidently a systematic police practice of violent arrests, attacks on protesters, sabotaging of protest signs and prevention of people carrying signs and chanting slogans. Civil society highlighted a recurring pattern of police abuse, with protesters frequently held in overnight detention without proper justification. For example, between 31 August and 9 September 2024, police arrested at least 127 protesters during anti-war protests. They held 56 of these in overnight detention, only for courts to find no substantial grounds for their arrest in remand hearings.

Palestinian students in Israeli universities have also faced targeting and [retaliation](#) for expressing Palestinian solidarity online, with several cases of universities instituting disciplinary proceedings, suspensions and expulsions of Palestinian students for their posts on social media about the bombardment of Gaza.

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The OPT has been downgraded to a closed civic space rating and added to the CIVICUS Monitor Watchlist due to Israel’s intensified [crackdown](#) on civic space amid its military operations and the resulting humanitarian catastrophe. Israel’s bombardment has caused the highest number of deaths of [journalists](#) and [aid workers](#) reported in any conflict in modern history.

Alongside its violent targeting of journalists, Israel is frustrating the operations of humanitarian organisations by blocking aid, jeopardising the existence and funding of much-needed Palestinian CSOs and UNRWA with its unsubstantiated terrorism allegations, destroying CSO buildings and infrastructure through deliberate targeting and undermining access to life-saving information through regular internet and communications shutdowns.



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TO GOVERNMENTS

- Take measures to foster a safe, respectful and enabling environment in which civil society activists and journalists can operate freely without fear of attacks, harassment, intimidation, 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, recognising the distinct needs of diverse HRDs such as women and young people, among others.
- Repeal any legislation that hinders the work of civil society and criminalises HRDs, journalists, protesters and members of excluded groups such as Indigenous people, LGBTQI+ people, women and young people, among others.
- 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, expression and peaceful assembly.
- Carry out impartial, independent, prompt and transparent investigations into all cases of attacks on and killings of HRDs and journalists and ensure those responsible are brought to justice.
- 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 update 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 excessive use of force by law enforcement agencies and officers during protests and bring to justice those suspected of criminal responsibility.
- Ensure freedom of expression is safeguarded in all forms by bringing all national legislation into line with international law and standards and refrain from censoring conventional

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and social media. Ensure that any restrictions are subject to oversight by an independent and impartial judicial authority and 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 and sharing essential information.
 - Repeal any legislation that criminalises expression 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, stigmatisation and attacks on HRDs, civil society groups and excluded communities.
 - Take appropriate measures to fully implement all recommendations accepted by states made by UN Special Rapporteurs, Working Groups and the Universal Periodic Review process of the UN Human Rights Council.
- Ensure and invest in the effectiveness of national and human rights mechanisms that seek to address human rights violations and protect HRDs.
 - Hold impartial, transparent and prompt investigations into the growing trend of attacks and reprisals against climate justice advocates, environmental human rights defenders and Indigenous and land rights activists, and ensure that those responsible are held to account. Ensure that policies and mechanisms are in place to protect them, consistent with international human rights standards.
 - Institute mechanisms and policies on transparency and accountability in governance, and support and work with groups that work against corruption and promote good governance.
 - Respect the right of people to protest in solidarity with people in the OPT and refrain from arrests and vilification of and violence towards protesters and HRDs. Cease conflating legitimate criticism of the state of Israel with antisemitism and extremism.

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TO THE UNITED NATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL BODIES

- Provide access for communities and civil society to engage in UN decision-making processes and work closely with states to ensure that laws, travel restrictions and technologies do not limit access to the UN. Introduce reforms to enable civil society's participation, starting with the appointment of a UN civil society envoy to mainstream civil society participation in UN processes.
- Urge states to repeal or substantially amend restrictive legislation that is not in accordance with international law and standards on freedoms of association, expression and peaceful assembly.
- Strengthen existing mechanisms and implement new ones to address reprisals against HRDs, particularly the persistence of attacks against environmental HRDs, gender equality advocates, young people and activists and groups in solidarity with Palestinians, among others.
- Take the necessary measures to ensure that activists and civil society personnel are not put at risk because of the information they provide, and publicly call out states that impose restrictions on civil society participation.
- Support the work of the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders against stigmatisation of HRDs, and the promotion of positive narratives about human rights and the work of HRDs.
- Achieve a proper balance between the UN's three pillars – human rights, peace and security and sustainable development – by evening out budgetary allocations and expanding civil society's role across the system.

TO THE PRIVATE SECTOR

- Align business policies with international human rights standards, including the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and resist being complicit in human rights violations perpetrated by governments.

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TO DONORS

- Provide long-term, unrestricted and core support for civil society in countries where civil society is facing increasing restrictions from states.
- Provide specific support to groups conducting advocacy in countries with rapidly closing civic space.
- Adopt participatory approaches to grant-making. As part of this, 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, this means balancing 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 may need to remain undisclosed.
- Support programmes to ensure HRDs have appropriate training, skills and equipment to conduct their work safely.
- Adapt grant-making modalities to the evolution of social movements and youth activists, among other key elements of contemporary civil society.

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ANGOLA	28							
BENIN	51							
BOTSWANA	69							
BURKINA FASO	34							
BURUNDI	23							
CAMEROON	26							
CAPE VERDE	87							
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC	33							
CHAD	26							
COMOROS	50							
CÔTE D'IVOIRE	57							
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO	27							
DJIBOUTI	19							
EQUATORIAL GUINEA	17							
ERITREA	2							
ESWATINI	19							
ETHIOPIA	20							
GABON	40							

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GAMBIA	51							
GHANA	56							
GUINEA	30							
GUINEA BISSAU	41							
KENYA	37							
LESOTHO	52							
LIBERIA	63							
MADAGASCAR	41							
MALAWI	58							
MALI	30							
MAURITANIA	40							
MAURITIUS	76							
MOZAMBIQUE	39							
NAMIBIA	80							
NIGER	36							
NIGERIA	31							
REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO	30							
RWANDA	25							

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COUNTRY	SCORES 2024	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA	79							
ARGENTINA	65							
BAHAMAS	87							
BARBADOS	95							
BELIZE	75							
BOLIVIA	51							
BRAZIL	52							
CANADA	82							
CHILE	80							
COLOMBIA	38							
COSTA RICA	77							
CUBA	16							
DOMINICA	78							
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	76							
ECUADOR	48							
EL SALVADOR	45							
GRENADA	91							
GUATEMALA	40							

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GUYANA	73							
HAITI	39							
HONDURAS	37							
JAMAICA	84							
MEXICO	40							
NICARAGUA	8							
PANAMA	71							
PARAGUAY	56							
PERU	40							
SAINT LUCIA	88							
ST KITTS AND NEVIS	85							
ST VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES	91							
SURINAME	77							
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO	83							
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	62							
URUGUAY	88							
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COUNTRY	SCORES 2024	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
AFGHANISTAN	11							
AUSTRALIA	76							
BANGLADESH	24							
BHUTAN	50							
BRUNEI DARUSSALAM	35							
CAMBODIA	27							
CHINA	10							
FIJI	62							
HONG KONG	20							
INDIA	33							
INDONESIA	48							
JAPAN	84							
KIRIBATI	91							
LAOS	6							
MALAYSIA	50							
MALDIVES	51							
MARSHALL ISLANDS	96							
MICRONESIA	90							

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REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

COUNTRY	SCORES 2024	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
MONGOLIA	60							
MYANMAR	10							
NAURU	59							
NEPAL	50							
NEW ZEALAND	89							
NORTH KOREA	3							
PAKISTAN	28							
PALAU	96							
PAPUA NEW GUINEA	54							
PHILIPPINES	34							
SAMOA	82							
SINGAPORE	31							
SOLOMON ISLANDS	69							
SOUTH KOREA	73							
SRI LANKA	37							
TAIWAN	82							
THAILAND	39							
TIMOR-LESTE	71							

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COUNTRY	SCORES 2024	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
ALBANIA	64	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
ANDORRA	82	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
ARMENIA	69	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
AUSTRIA	84	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
AZERBAIJAN	14	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
BELARUS	10	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
BELGIUM	80	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA	56	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
BULGARIA	70	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
CROATIA	74	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
CYPRUS	80	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
CZECH REPUBLIC	86	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
DENMARK	94	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
ESTONIA	91	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
FINLAND	92	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
FRANCE	67	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
GEORGIA	54	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
GERMANY	67	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

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COUNTRY	SCORES 2024	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019
GREECE	57						
HUNGARY	46						
ICELAND	89						
IRELAND	81						
ITALY	65						
KAZAKHSTAN	31						
KOSOVO	62						
KYRGYZSTAN	36						
LATVIA	86						
LIECHTENSTEIN	95						
LITHUANIA	83						
LUXEMBOURG	94						
MALTA	80						
MOLDOVA	71						
MONACO	91						
MONTENEGRO	76						
NETHERLANDS	76						
NORTH MACEDONIA	74						

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COUNTRY	SCORES 2024	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
NORWAY	97							
POLAND	66							
PORTUGAL	83							
ROMANIA	70							
RUSSIA	14							
SAN MARINO	97							
SERBIA	49							
SLOVAKIA	79							
SLOVENIA	84							
SPAIN	72							
SWEDEN	87							
SWITZERLAND	82							
TAJIKISTAN	11							
TURKEY	24							
TURKMENISTAN	9							
UKRAINE	50							
UNITED KINGDOM	60							
UZBEKISTAN	20							

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COUNTRY	SCORES 2024	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
ALGERIA	31							
BAHRAIN	18							
EGYPT	20							
IRAN	8							
IRAQ	18							
ISRAEL	47							
JORDAN	39							
KUWAIT	27							
LEBANON	44							
LIBYA	28							
MOROCCO	43							
OMAN	23							
PALESTINE	13							
QATAR	29							
SAUDI ARABIA	4							
SYRIA	6							
TUNISIA	37							
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	11							

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PEOPLE POWER
UNDER ATTACK
2024

A report based on data
from the CIVICUS Monitor

CIVICUS: WORLD ALLIANCE FOR CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

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