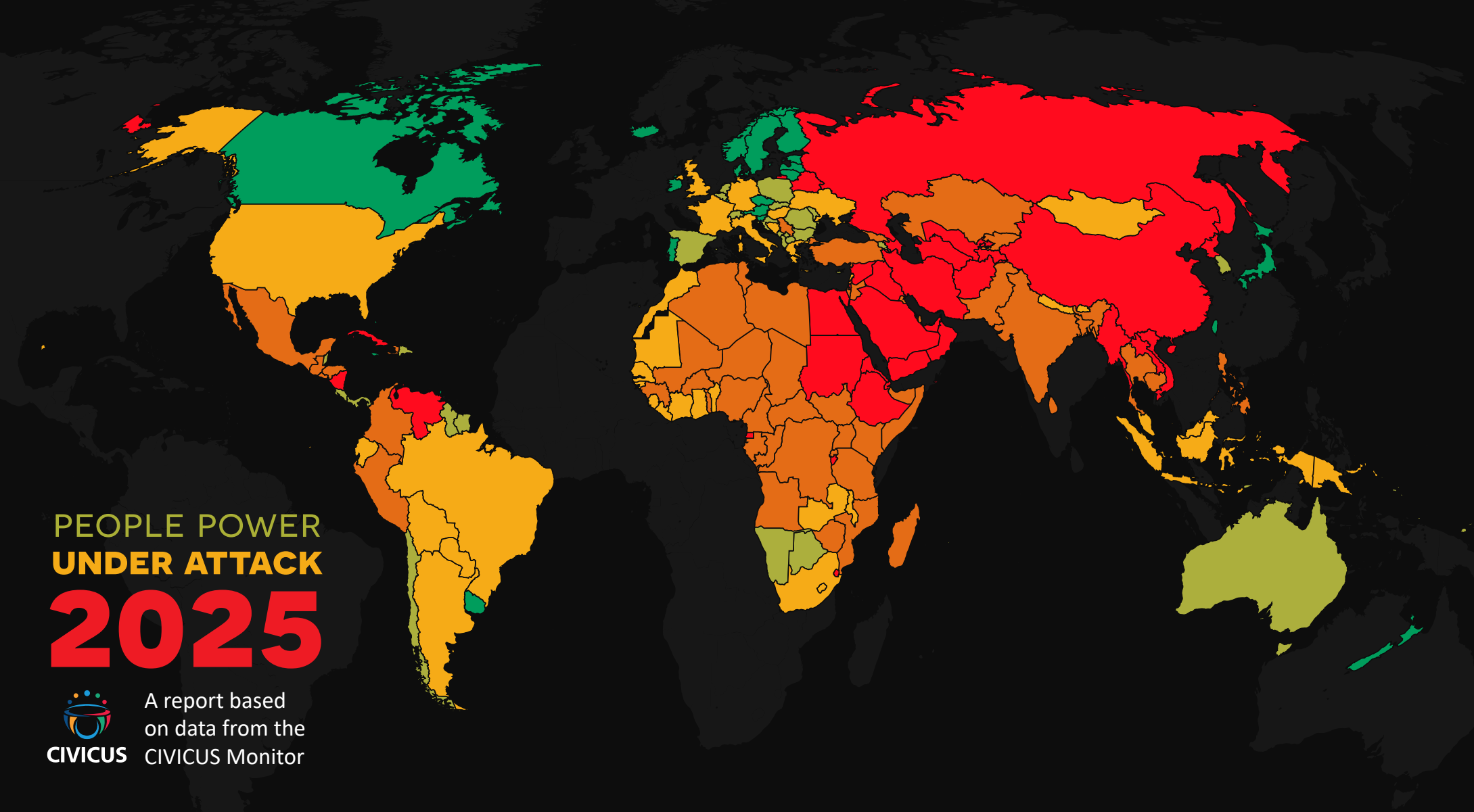


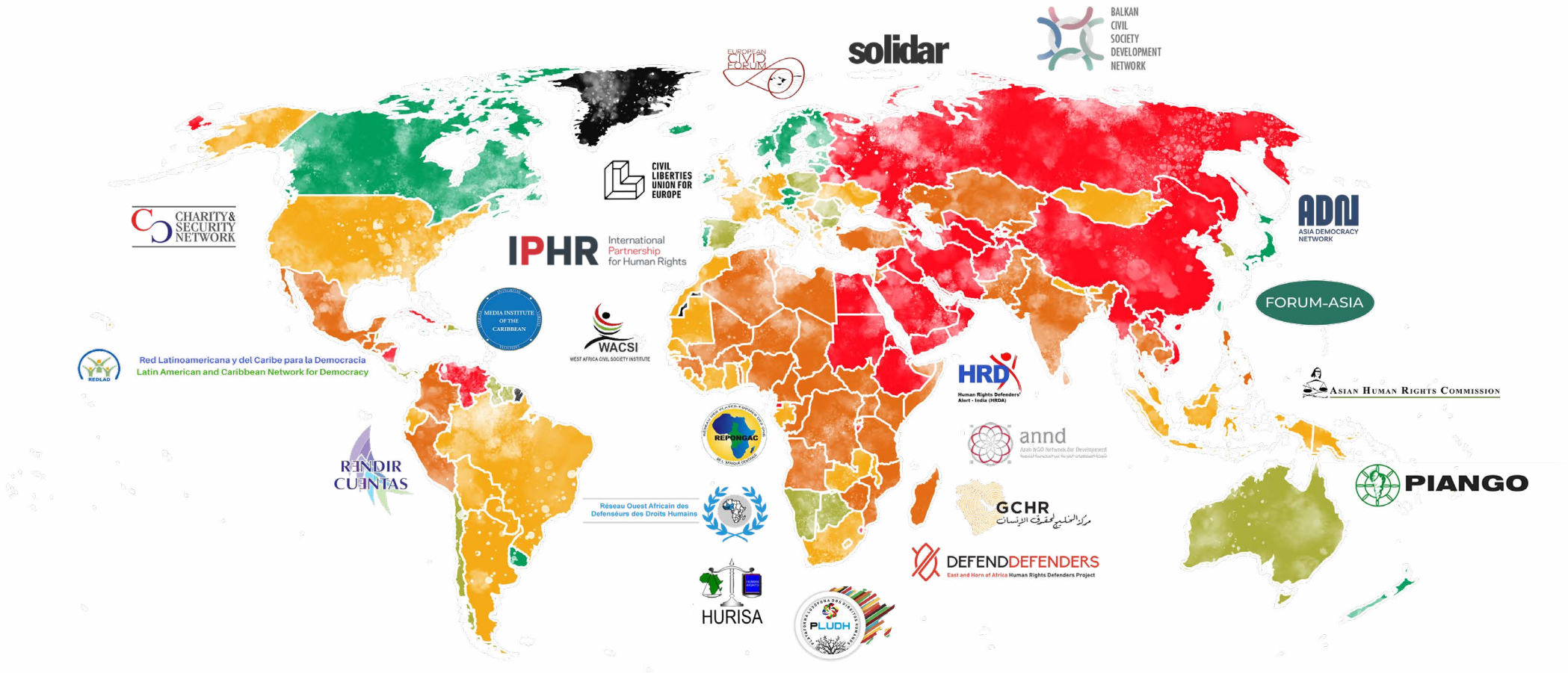
A world map with a black background. Countries are color-coded: red for high risk (Russia, China, India, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, etc.), orange for medium risk (USA, Canada, Brazil, etc.), yellow for low risk (Australia, etc.), and green for very low risk (Canada, etc.).

PEOPLE POWER UNDER ATTACK 2025



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 David Pashae / AFP

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METHODOLOGY

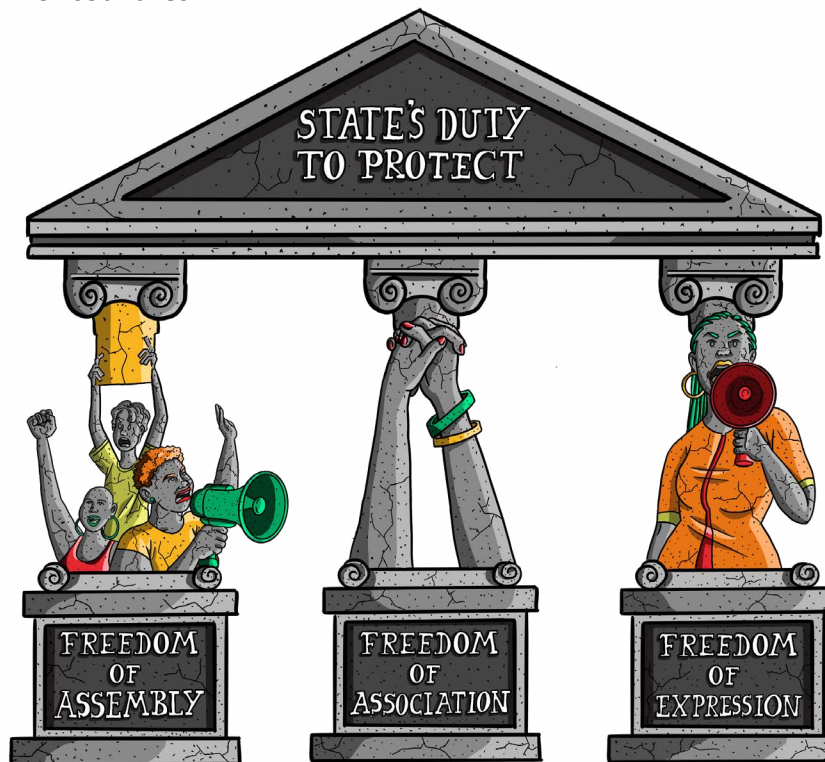
The CIVICUS Monitor is a participatory research partnership that assesses the state of civic space worldwide and offers insights into civic space developments. We define civic space as the respect in policy, law and practice for freedoms of association, expression and peaceful assembly and the extent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

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 analysed in this report. In the period covered by this report – 1 November 2024 to 31 October 2025 – the CIVICUS Monitor was able to identify 3,120 civic freedom violations.

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. Each incident represents a separate instance in which civic freedoms were abused or restricted. These figures refer to violations rather than victims. The top violations highlight the most frequently documented tactics, not necessarily those that impact on the most people or countries.



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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 countries that have experienced ratings changes and the reasons behind those changes.

OPEN

NARROWED

OBSTRUCTED

REPRESSED

CLOSED

NARROWED

 OBSTRUCTED

CLOSED



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CIVIC SPACE DYNAMICS

Civic space ratings have changed for 18 countries since our previous report in December 2024. While civic space conditions have improved for three countries in Africa South of the Sahara – Gabon, Mauritania and Senegal – they have deteriorated in 15 countries. Burundi and Sudan move to the worst rating of closed civic space while Madagascar now has a repressed rating.

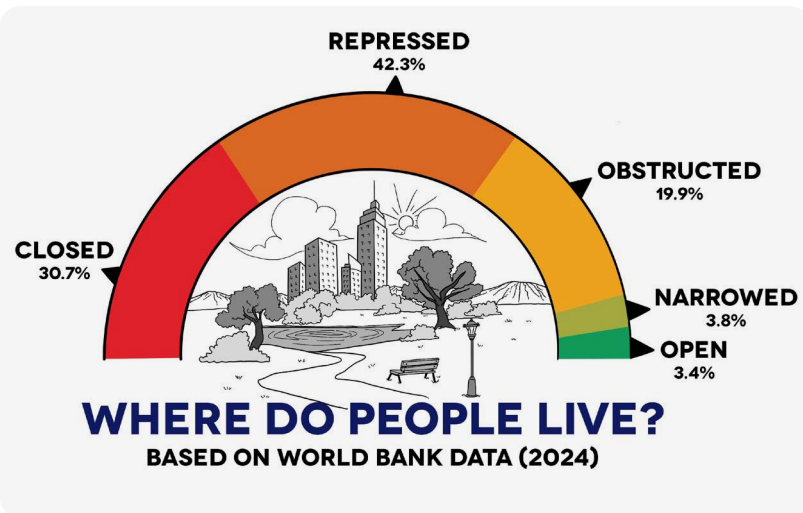
2025



In Europe, France, Germany and Italy move from narrowed to obstructed ratings, indicating a worsening environment for civil society in the European Union (EU), while Georgia and Serbia move to the repressed category, the second worst civic space rating, and Switzerland to narrowed. In the Americas, conditions for civil society have worsened in Argentina and the USA, both now rated as obstructed, and El Salvador, which moves to the

repressed category. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Israel's civic space is downgraded to repressed, while Oman moves to closed, the worst category.

Only 39 out of 198 countries and territories now have an open civic space rating, which indicates that fundamental freedoms are broadly respected in those countries, compared with 83 that are now rated as having repressed or closed civic space, indicating routine repression of fundamental civil society freedoms. Seventy-three per cent of the world's population lives under these restricted conditions. Almost 31 per cent lives in countries where civic space is completely closed.



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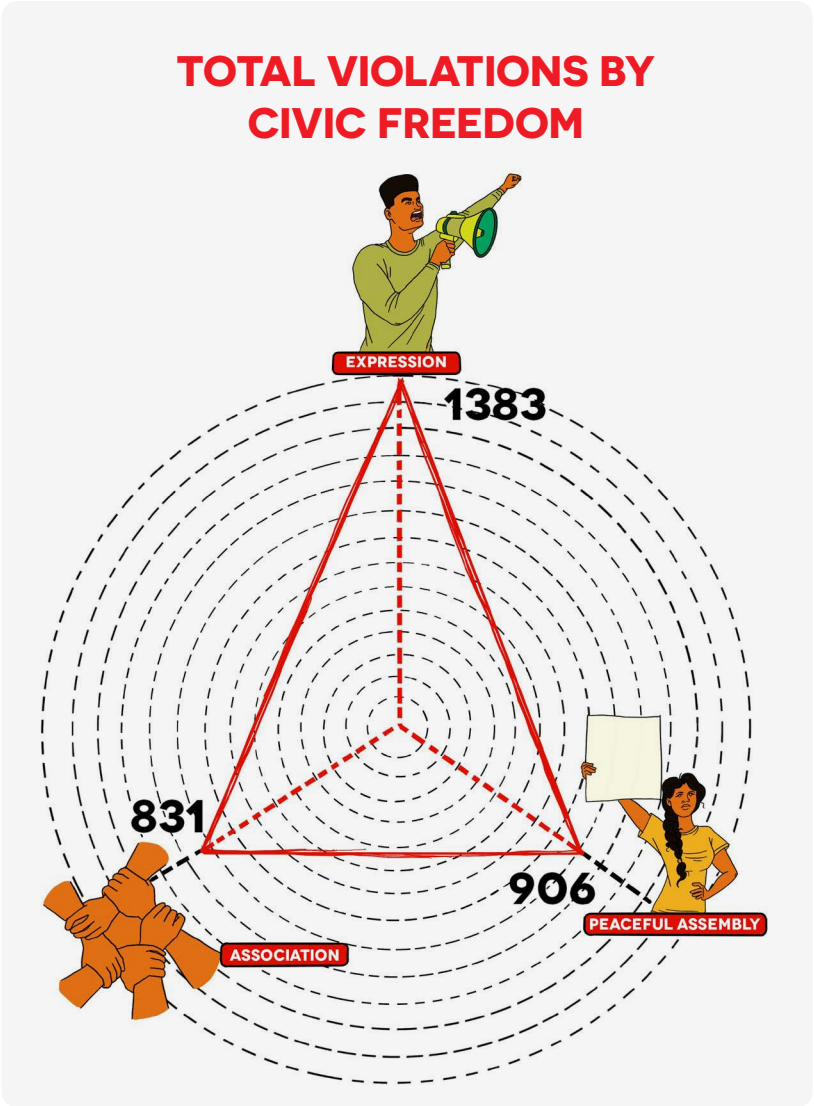
Only 7.2 percent of the global population now lives in countries where civic space is open or narrowed, 7.5 percentage points less than in 2024, indicating a further deterioration of civic space conditions globally.

TACTICS OF REPRESSION

Of all the civic space violations recorded on the CIVICUS Monitor, close to 44.8 per cent, over 1,350 civic space incidents, related to freedom of expression. Over 900 violations, 29 per cent of total violations, were recorded in the area of freedom of peaceful assembly, while violations of freedom of association constituted 26.6 per cent, with more than 800 incidents recorded.

The top global civic space violations are the detention of protesters, documented in at least 82 countries, followed by the detention of journalists, reported in at least 73, and the detention of human rights defenders (HRDs), documented in at least 71.

This year, civic space violations related to Israel and the Occupied Palestine Territories (see Middle East and North Africa (MENA) section) and the expression of solidarity with Palestinian people continued to be a concerning trend, with the latter particularly taking place in the global north.



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PROTEST RIGHTS UNDER ATTACK

In 2025, people took to the streets in countries around the world to demand action and denounce government inaction on issues including the climate crisis, corruption, electoral fraud and irregularities, the high cost of living and poor basic services. And around the world, governments reacted by detaining protesters, a repressive tactic documented in over 200 protests in at least 82 countries. Other tactics included protest disruption, documented in at least 70 countries, and the use of excessive force against protesters, in at least 67.

Climate change protests and protests showing solidarity with Palestinian people continued to be targeted with repression, including detentions, prosecution, protest bans and the introduction of restrictive laws limiting peaceful assembly (see Restrictive Laws), particularly in Europe, North America and Australia.

In Ireland in March 2025, police forcibly removed protesters from the Mothers against Genocide group from the gates of the parliament buildings and detained 11 under the Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act of 1994. They were later released with formal warnings. In the UK, police arrested hundreds in July 2025 during Defend our Juries protests to oppose the government's plan to proscribe direct action group Palestine Action as a terrorist organisation, with police targeting peaceful protesters simply for holding placards reading 'I support Palestine Action'. In March 2025, police in New York, USA, arrested around 100 protesters at a non-violent sit-in at Trump Tower to demand the immediate release of activist Mahmoud Khalil, a permanent US resident arbitrarily detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents in March 2025, and to protest against the Trump administration's stance on Palestine-related activism.



New York, USA: Police officers detain protesters during sit-in demanding release of Palestinian activist Mahmoud Khalil (Photo by Lokman Vural Elibol/Anadolu)

In the Netherlands, police arrested over 700 Extinction Rebellion (XR) activists on 11 January 2025 after the climate action group blocked a motorway near The Hague to demand an end to fossil fuel subsidies. Municipal authorities banned the protest and



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police used water cannon in freezing weather. On 28 January 2025, the Dutch parliament adopted a motion labelling XR as an ‘unlawful, society-disrupting and vandalistic organisation’ that does not serve the public interest and urged the government to revoke XR’s public benefit status. In Australia, police [charged](#) 170 people, including 14 children, in November 2024 for attending a climate protest in the Port of Newcastle organised by the activism group Rising Tide.

The use of detentions as a tactic to shut down environmental protests was also documented in several countries. In Peru, authorities arbitrarily [detained](#) five farmers during a protest against the El Algarrobo mining project in Tambogrande, a rural district in the region of Piura. The protest, organised by local farmers, community leaders and the Frente de Defensa Urbana de Tambogrande, a local organisation defending land and water, sought to defend agricultural livelihoods and water sources in a region dependent on fruit production and small-scale farming.



Netherlands: Police intervene in an Extinction Rebellion climate protest in The Hague (Photo by Mounieb Taim/Anadolu)

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Indonesia:
Greenpeace
member holds
banner protesting
nickel mining at
minerals conference
in Jakarta (Photo by
Yasuyoshi Chiba/
AFP)

On 3 June 2025, three Greenpeace Indonesia activists and a young Papuan woman were [arrested](#) after they unfurled banners and made speeches about the environmental damage caused by extractive industries at the Indonesia Critical Minerals Conference and Expo in Jakarta. In Uganda, authorities [arrested](#) 11 environmental activists during a protest in February 2025 against the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP), charging them with ‘common nuisance’. The African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights condemned Uganda’s escalating repression of environmental HRDs in its 81st Ordinary Session held in October and November 2024. In Tunisia, police violently [arrested](#) Mohamed Ali Ritmi, an activist and member of the Association tunisienne pour la justice et l’égalité, on 23 May 2025 during a peaceful protest organised by the Stop Pollution movement in the Gabès region.

2025 saw several mass mobilisations across the world, frequently led by young people, over corruption, the high cost

of living, poor basic services and other governance failures. Generation Z-led protests – sustained mass anti-government mobilisations driven by young protesters sharing common protest symbols – took place in several countries including [Madagascar](#), [Morocco](#), [Nepal](#) and [Peru](#). States responded to protests with killings, excessive force and detentions. At least three people were killed and at least 400 [arrested](#) during Morocco’s ‘Gen Z 212’ protests that erupted in September 2025 in several cities. Security forces were accused of using excessive force, including live ammunition, rubber bullets and teargas, in response to largely peaceful protests. Security forces killed and detained young protesters at other Gen Z-led protests, including in [Madagascar](#) and [Nepal](#). In Kenya, over 1,500 people were [arrested](#) and 65 people killed between 25 June and 11 July 2025 in protests to mark the anniversary of the 2024 Gen Z-led protests against tax hikes that grew into a movement against systemic corruption, poor governance and police brutality, and which was met with a violent crackdown. Other serious violations, including cases of rape and gang rape by suspected state-sponsored personnel, were reported.

Authorities also detained people in response to election-related protests, including mobilisations against electoral fraud, the exclusion of political opposition and the lack of credible, transparent elections. Police [arrested](#) over 4,200 people in largely peaceful protests that erupted in the aftermath of October 2024 general elections in Mozambique that were marred by widespread irregularities. As violence flared, local civil society group Plataforma Decide reported hundreds of killings between 21 October 2024 and 16 January 2025.

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In Côte d'Ivoire, ahead of the 25 October 2025 presidential election, police [arrested](#) around 700 people in protests against the Constitutional Council's exclusion of leading opposition candidates. Dozens were sentenced to three years in prison for disturbance of public order, participation in a prohibited march and unlawful assembly. Meetings and gatherings of excluded opposition candidates were banned.

In Turkey, police [arrested](#) or detained close to 2,000 people in a crackdown on protests in March 2025 following the arrest of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu, a key opposition figure who is widely seen as President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's main challenger in the 2028 presidential election.



Turkey: Protesters march and shout slogans during a rally in support of jailed Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu (Photo by Ed JONES / AFP)

In Bolivia, four consecutive days of protests [erupted](#) in La Paz in May 2025 after the electoral authority blocked former president Evo Morales's registration for the 2025 general election. Police prevented protesters reaching the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, leading to violent clashes, 20 detentions and several injuries. The protests reflected a struggle between Morales and former President Luis Arce, former allies competing for control of the ruling party. Authorities also detained people for taking part in protests to criticise government actions, laws and policies. Pension reforms sparked protests in Argentina, with over 100 people [arrested](#) in March 2025, including journalists, older people, passers-by unaware of the demonstration, students, workers and two schoolchildren.

In Indonesia, police [arrested](#) at least 161 people in the student-led Indonesia Gelap – Dark Indonesia – protests that erupted in March 2025 after the adoption of revisions to the National Armed Forces (Tentara Nasional Indonesia) Act to expand the military's role in civilian governance. In Iran and Saudi Arabia, authorities have systematically used the death penalty to target protesters, with at least two [executed](#) in Saudi Arabia, while women HRDs (WHRDs) in Iran [face](#) imminent execution after receiving the death penalty for protesting for women's rights.

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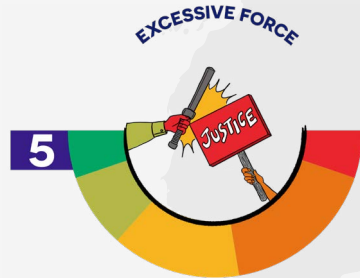
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TOP TEN GLOBAL VIOLATIONS



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JOURNALISTS DETAINED

In numerous countries, authorities are targeting freedom of expression and use a range of tactics to silence critical voices and deter journalists from holding authorities to account or reporting on issues considered sensitive.

Repressive tactics include attacks, detention, intimidation and threats against journalists. The arrest and detention of journalists, the second-highest civic space violation and documented in at least 73 countries, is used as a means to prevent journalists reporting on corruption, democracy and human rights issues. Attacks on journalists, the fourth most prevalent civic space violation in 2025, were documented in at least 54 countries.



Netherlands:
Protesters demonstrate outside a courthouse in Amsterdam in support of a detained Palestinian journalist (Photo by Ramon van Flymen/ANP)

Over half of documented detentions of journalists in 2025 occurred in Africa South of the Sahara (see Africa chapter). Detention of journalists is also one of MENA's top three civic space violations.

In 2025, authorities used a range of restrictive laws and provisions to detain journalists for their reporting, including cybersecurity laws, counterterrorism laws and false information laws, among other laws and restrictive provisions. On 17 March 2025, authorities in Mongolia [detained](#) eight journalists from Noorog Creative Studio for 'undermining national unity' under the Criminal Law Act, a charge that carries a prison sentence up to 12 years. The media outlet planned to release a documentary exploring Mongolia's democratic processes from a citizen perspective. The eight were released after hours of interrogation and the confiscation of computers and hard drives.

In Benin, authorities regularly arrest and prosecute journalists for 'harassment by electronic means' under the 2018 Digital Code. On 15 July 2025, Cosme Hounsa, editor-in-chief of La Boussole newspaper, was [arrested](#) following a complaint by a government minister, Rachidi Gbadamassi, in relation to the outlet's report on a legal dispute between Gbadamassi and another minister. Hounsa was released on summons pending further judicial proceedings.

In Turkey, authorities use counterterrorism laws to target activists and journalists. In January 2025, it was [reported](#) that three journalists, T24 editor-in-chief Doğan Akin, Gerçek Gündem editor-in-chief Seyhan Avşar and T24 managing editor Candan Yıldız, are facing eight years of prison on charges of 'spreading misleading information' and 'making terrorist propaganda' for their coverage of the killing of two Kurdish reporters in a suspected Turkish drone strike in Syria.

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Defamation, insults and sedition remain criminal offences in many countries, enabling authorities to subject journalists to judicial harassment. On 23 November 2024 in Papua New Guinea, journalist and gender activist Hennah Joku was [detained](#) and charged under the Cybercrime Act, following defamation complaints by her former partner Robert Agen. Joku, a survivor of a 2018 assault by Agen, has documented her six-year journey through the country's justice system, which resulted in Agen's conviction. Joku was released after posting bail. On 1 July 2025, Faith Zaba, journalist and editor of the Zimbabwe Independent, was [arrested](#) and charged with 'undermining the authorities or insulting the president' after the publication of a satirical article that described the country as a 'mafia state' and mocked President Emmerson Mnangagwa and his leadership, particularly in his role as chair of the Southern African Development Community.

Investigative journalists, journalists working for independent media and journalists covering corruption are particularly vulnerable to arbitrary arrests. In Vietnam, where media are closely controlled by the communist one-party state, authorities frequently jail bloggers and independent journalists. On 7 October 2025, police [arrested](#) independent journalist Huynh Ngoc Tuan, who regularly posts commentary on human rights and politics on his Facebook page. He was charged with 'propagandising against the state' under the Penal Code, which carries a prison sentence of up to 20 years. On 8 April 2025, authorities in Caracas, Venezuela arbitrarily [detained](#) journalists Gianni González Nakary and Mena Ramos after a report on rising crime rates for the independent media outlet Impacto Venezuela. A few days later, a

criminal court ordered the pretrial detention of both on charges of 'hate crimes' and 'publishing false news'.

In Nigeria on 26 November 2024, soldiers [detained](#) Fisayo Soyombo, an investigative journalist and founder of the Foundation for Investigative Journalism, in Port Harcourt. The move was believed to be in connection with his investigative work uncovering corruption and smuggling activities facilitated by the Nigerian Customs Service. Soyombo was released after being held for three days. In Egypt, Zat Masr broadcaster and writer Ahmed Serag was [detained](#) in January 2025 on allegations of spreading false news and terrorism, in relation to an interview he conducted with Nada Mougheeth, wife of detained cartoonist Ashraf Omar. In February 2025, his detention was renewed for 15 days pending investigations.

In 2025, journalists were also frequently detained while covering protests. In Belgium, police [detained](#) freelance journalist Thomas Haulotte and held him overnight after he followed activists putting up posters with messages denouncing the far right. In September 2025, police in Nouakchott, Mauritania [arrested](#) two Al Akhbar.info journalists, Mohamed Abdallah Ould al-Moustapha and Aboubakar Ould Mohamed Vall, while they covered a sit-in outside gas company SOMAGAZ. They were released without charge after being held for three hours. In India, journalist Mujeeb Shaikh was [detained](#) on 6 March 2025 and held overnight while covering a peaceful women-led demonstration against war in Hyderabad. In May 2025 in Ottawa, Canada, Ramona Murphy, a North Star volunteer journalist, was [detained](#) along with 12 protesters while covering

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a protest at the Defence and Security Trade Show. The protest denounced the complicity in Israel's ongoing genocide in Gaza of some companies at the event that allegedly sell equipment to the Israeli military.

ACTIVISM TARGETED

Detention of HRDs was the third most common civic space violation globally, documented in at least 71 countries. Authorities use detention of HRDs as a tactic to discourage activists from continuing their work, including on raising issues of public interest. Detention of HRDs features in the top violations in Africa South of the Sahara, the Americas, Asia Pacific and MENA regions.

HRDs working on environmental, Indigenous and land rights, labour rights and women's rights, along with activists, were among those targeted. Additionally, human rights lawyers have been subjected to detention.

HRDs working on environmental, Indigenous and land rights face government harassment, including arbitrary detention and prosecution. In Bangladesh, authorities arbitrarily [detained](#) prominent Indigenous leader and HRD Ringrong Mro, of the Mro community in Lama Upazila, Bandarban, in February 2025, in relation to a 2022 complaint filed by Lama Rubber Industries Limited. The HRD had been at the forefront of grassroots efforts



to protect the environment and Indigenous lands, including from corporate encroachment and land grabbing.



Philippines: Protesters stage an anti-corruption rally in Quezon City (Photo by Jam Sta Rosa/AFP)

In February and March 2025, authorities in Mendoza, Argentina [detained](#) Mauricio Cornejo and Frederico Soria, charging them under the Criminal Code for their environmental activism, with prosecutors alleging they used their activism to 'instil fear' and obstruct the San Jorge Mining Project. Both are part of the Assembly of Self-Convended Neighbours of Uspallata, a group that has peacefully opposed the mining project. They were released in April 2025.

In Paraguay, police arbitrarily [detained](#) Vidal Brítez Alcaraz, president of the Association of Yerba Mate Growers of Paso Yobái, in March 2025, on unfounded charges of 'grave coercion'. The charges relate to a January 2025 incident when a judicial order authorised trucks carrying mining waste to enter the property of a yerba mate producer. Police escorted the trucks,

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prompting a confrontation in which residents reportedly threw stones. Despite clear evidence confirming that Britez was at home five kilometres away, prosecutors indicted him alongside five other environmental defenders.

In the Philippines, Asia's [deadliest](#) country for environmental activists, authorities continue to smear activists as communists

REVOKING CITIZENSHIP AS A THREAT OR PUNISHMENT FOR ACTIVISM

According to Oman's [new citizenship law](#), citizenship shall be revoked for verbally or physically offending the Sultanate or the Sultan of Oman or for belonging to an organisation that embraces principles that harm the state's interests. In Cambodia, the government now has [the power](#) to revoke the citizenship of anyone found guilty of conspiring with foreign countries to harm the national interest. In Hungary, dual citizens may now be [stripped](#) of their citizenship for up to 10 years if they are deemed to pose a threat to public order, safety or national security. In January 2025, Nicaragua's National Assembly [approved](#) sweeping constitutional changes granting unlimited powers to President Daniel Ortega and Vice-President Rosario Murillo, including a revision to article 24 that enables the arbitrary removal of nationality. In May 2025, lawmakers adopted further amendments, imposing automatic loss of citizenship for Nicaraguans who acquire another nationality.

and detain them on baseless accusations under draconian laws, including the 2020 Anti-Terrorism Act and the Terrorism Financing Prevention and Suppression Act. In April 2025, six prominent Cagayan Valley activists, including environmental activist and journalist Deo Montesclaros, were [charged](#) in cases of financing terrorism.

Lawyers, including human rights lawyers, have increasingly been targeted with arrests, often in response to their criticism of authorities or defence of activists and journalists. In Burkina Faso, in August 2025, armed men claiming to be gendarmes [arrested](#) prominent lawyer Ini Benjamine Esther Doli on accusations of treason and insulting the head of state, over a Facebook post criticising the human rights record of the military junta under President Ibrahim Traoré. In Sudan, police [arrested](#) Abubakr Elmahi, lawyer for HRD Abubakr Mansour Abdela, on 1 October 2025, just days before Abdela was sentenced to death. Abdela was convicted for 'offences against the state' and 'waging a war against the state' under the Criminal Act, believed to be related to the humanitarian assistance he provided since the start of Sudan's civil war by handing out medicines from his brother's pharmaceutical company.

In Turkey, Firat Epözdemir, a board member of the Bar Association, was [detained](#) on 23 January 2025 on returning from an advocacy visit to the Council of Europe. He was charged with alleged 'membership of a terrorist organisation' and 'making propaganda for a terrorist organisation'. In February 2025, the Bar Association's president and 10 other

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board members were also charged with ‘dissemination of misleading information’ and terrorism, punishable with up to 12 years in prison, in a separate case.

Istanbul Mayor
Imamoğlu
Detained after
Announcing
Presidential
Bid (Photo by
Mehmet Kacmaz/
Getty Images)



Artivists around the world have faced detentions and prosecutions in retaliation for their work. In China, authorities have [cracked down](#) on artists and other creative workers whose work or views the Communist Party sees as potentially subversive. Among those detained are prominent musician Fei Xiaosheng, who has publicly supported the Hong Kong democracy movement, and Tibetan singer Tzunkte, popularly known as Asang, for having [sang](#) a song eulogising Tibet’s exiled spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama. In Afghanistan, the Taliban [arrested](#) cultural activist and poet Sayed Alam Hashemi on 16 February 2025. While the official reasons for his arrest are unknown, sources believe it is in relation to his poetry. On 30 December 2024, police in Malaysia [arrested](#) artist and activist Fahmi Reza under the Sedition Act, used to criminalise expression and dissent, after he created a mural with a satirical

graphic of Sabah Chief Musa Aman in the city of Kota Kinabalu. He was remanded in custody for a day before being released.

Others have been detained for expressing critical views on social media. In Yemen, Fawzi Ahmed Obaid, an online activist arrested in September 2015 by a Houthis-affiliated group for his Facebook posts, [remains](#) held incommunicado in an underground cell run by the Security and Intelligence Service in Sana’a. His family has never been allowed to visit him, and his case has never been presented before a court for trial. In Libya, activist Haitham Al-Werfali was arbitrarily [detained](#) in December 2024 after posting criticism of eastern Libyan authorities on Facebook. He was released four days later without legal process.

Authorities have also detained trade union leaders and members in retaliation for their advocacy for labour rights and for organising strikes. In Côte d’Ivoire, hooded men [arrested](#) Ghislain Duggary Assy, a teacher and communication secretary for the Movement of Teachers for the Dignity Dynamic Union, on 2 April 2025 in Abidjan, after a coalition of unions called for a teachers’ strike. A court sentenced him a few days later to two years in prison for obstructing the operation of the public service, a conviction an appeal court upheld in July 2025. In March 2025, plainclothes agents [arrested](#) Ali Mammeri, activist in the Hirak protest movement and president of the Syndicat national des fonctionnaires de la culture trade union in Oul El Bouaghi, Algeria. Mammeri had been targeted with reprisals and threats of legal action after organising a unionisation campaign in the cultural sector in 2024.

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El Salvador:
Protest calling
for the release
of jailed activists
(Photo by Foro
del Agua El
Salvador)



Human rights monitoring of protests has also led to arbitrary arrests. In Ecuador, police officers arbitrarily [detained](#) Jafet Guzmán and Miguel Ángel Pérez of the Regional Foundation for Human Rights Advice in Quito while they monitored protests against President Daniel Noboa, despite the two clearly identifying themselves as observers. In May 2025, HRD and Indigenous poet Esteban Binns Carpintero was arbitrarily [detained](#) while documenting a peaceful protest in Tolé, Panama. In El Salvador on 12 May 2025, police arbitrarily [detained](#) community leader José Ángel Pérez during a peaceful vigil held outside the presidential residence by over 300 families from the El Bosque community to oppose their imminent eviction. The next day, authorities detained environmental defender Alejandro Henríquez, the cooperative's legal representative, in connection with the protest. Both were charged with public disorder and obstruction of justice and remain in custody.

Women HRDs and LGBTQI+ activists remain vulnerable to attacks and detentions. In Kazakhstan, police [detained](#) Zhanar Sekerbayeva and Gulzada Serzhan, co-founders of feminist and LGBTQI+ civil society organisation (CSO) Feminita, after their event was stormed by anti-feminist agitators. Both were fined for leading an unregistered organisation. Authorities have also repeatedly rejected Feminita's registration. In Morocco, authorities [arrested](#) WHRD and blogger Saida El Alami on 1 July 2025 and in September sentenced her to three years in prison and a hefty fine for 'insulting a legally organised body, disseminating false allegations and insulting the judiciary'. In Venezuela, in early August 2025, police [detained](#) lawyer and WHRD Martha Lía Grajales after she participated in a solidarity activity in front of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Office in Caracas.

Transnational repression, encompassing a range of tactics, including illegal abduction, intimidation and surveillance, used by governments to suppress dissent of their nationals and diaspora beyond their borders, has seen an escalation this year, with cases documented in several regions. The trend of transnational repression in Asia Pacific has continued in 2025, and the CIVICUS Monitor has documented cases of government cooperation to unlawfully arrest, illegally abduct, deport and in some case kill dissidents abroad in East and Horn of Africa, West Africa, MENA and Nicaragua and Venezuela (see regional chapters).

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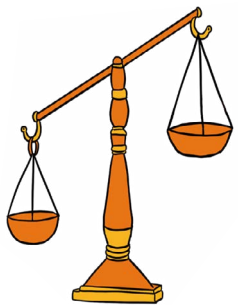
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RESTRICTIVE LEGISLATION AND REGULATION: A PERSISTENT AND PERVERSIVE TREND

In 2025, the CIVICUS Monitor documented the adoption or proposal of restrictive laws and regulations affecting civic freedoms in at least 66 countries, making restrictive laws the ninth most prevalent global civic space violation.



The adoption and proposal of restrictive laws is an ongoing multi-year trend. The UN, regional human right bodies and numerous CSOs have urged states to halt the proliferation of laws that unduly restrict civic freedoms, calls that have largely gone unheeded. Governments continue to introduce new restrictive laws across all regions and across every category of civic space rating, undermining freedoms of association, expression and peaceful assembly. The CIVICUS Monitor tracks both adopted and proposed restrictive laws, as proposed laws can influence civic space and require significant civil society effort to oppose them.

This analysis covers measures adopted or introduced in 2025, although many restrictive laws passed in previous years remain in force and continue to shape civic space.

LAWS RESTRICTING FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

Foreign agents laws have proliferated. These laws require organisations that receive foreign funding to register and label themselves as foreign agents. On top of administrative burdens, foreign agents laws hinder fundraising and usually impose punitive taxes on foreign grants, and they also stigmatise organisations. Russia, which pioneered the contemporary model of foreign agents legislation, further [expanded](#) its law this year, as did India.

DISREGARD FOR CIVIL SOCIETY'S INPUT WHEN DRAFTING AND ADOPTING LEGISLATION

The CIVICUS Monitor recorded multiple cases in which laws affecting civil society were drafted through processes that excluded CSOs or ignored their input. For instance, in 2025, Benin [adopted](#) a revision of its NGO law without inviting CSOs to review or comment on the draft. In Kyrgyzstan, although extensive consultations were held with media representatives regarding a new media law, the version ultimately [adopted](#) discarded key changes previously agreed on. Parliament passed the law hastily, combining second and third readings in a single day at the end of its session. In Canada, sweeping provincial and federal omnibus laws on infrastructure projects were [adopted](#) without the free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous peoples who will be affected by these new measures and whose consultation is legally mandated.



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Several states have introduced or threatened to introduce comparable measures in 2025, including [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), the [Central African Republic](#), [Ecuador](#), [El Salvador](#), [Georgia](#), [Hungary](#), [Israel](#), [Kazakhstan](#), [Paraguay](#) and [Slovakia](#). In El Salvador, the impacts of the adoption of such laws were immediately visible as established human rights organisations and journalists' associations closed down or were forced to move operations abroad.



Georgia: NGOs representatives and journalists staged a protest in the corridors of the Georgian Parliament against a draft bill as a group of parliamentarians registered the draft law “On Transparency of Foreign Influence”

Many governments also adopted or proposed laws that increase compliance requirements and impose new restrictions on CSOs under the guise of improving transparency, adding

barriers to the establishment, operation, funding and range of activities of CSOs. In 2025, this happened in [Azerbaijan](#), [Burkina Faso](#), [Ethiopia](#), [Nepal](#), the [Netherlands](#), [Thailand](#), [Vietnam](#), [Zambia](#), [Zimbabwe](#) and, through multiple bills, in [Ecuador](#). These measures typically expand the supervisory powers of state authorities, including the ability to restrict their operations, as in [Greece](#), limit their access to funding, as in [Hungary](#), or to dissolve them, as in [Venezuela](#).

Other governments amended existing laws with vague or overly broad provisions that can be used to target activists and organisations. Examples include revisions to counter-terrorism legislation in [Belarus](#), [Pakistan](#) and [Sierra Leone](#) and to counter-extremism laws in [Russia](#).

LAWS RESTRICTING FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

In 2025, several countries introduced legislation that further restricts the right to peaceful assembly. Between January and April 2025, at least 41 US states introduced bills to [impose](#) new restrictions on protests. In Slovenia, draft Amendments to the Public Assemblies Law were introduced that would [increase](#) the personal data required from organisers and expand their administrative obligations. In Cyprus, demonstrations are now [subject](#) to a mandatory seven-day notification period and organisers are required to provide extensive information in advance.

Some laws restrict protest topics. Hungary has [introduced](#) prohibitions on organising or attending events deemed to violate the country's child-protection laws, and a recent

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constitutional amendment authorises the government to ban public events organised by LGBTQI+ groups. In Myanmar, ahead of an undemocratic December 2025 election, protesters must now contend with a new ban on any speech or organisational activity [considered](#) to be aimed at ‘destroying a part of the electoral process’.



Hungary: Protest in Budapest after Hungarian parliament passed a ban on annual Pride march (Photo by Bernadett Szabo/REUTERS)

Governments are increasingly seeking to restrict locations where protests may occur. In Kenya, the parliament sought to propose a law seeking to [prohibit](#) demonstrations within 100 metres of key state institutions, including parliament, State House and court premises. In Canada, various provinces and municipalities are [adopting](#) ‘bubble laws’ prohibiting peaceful protest in the vicinity of social infrastructure such as places of worship and schools.

Even more concerning are the new charges or harsher penalties proposed or added to legislation. [Georgia](#) and [Italy](#) passed sweeping legal packages that further restrict fundamental rights and freedoms, such as penalties for participating in

unauthorised demonstrations. In Uzbekistan, organising and participating in ‘mass unrest’ was already criminalised, but the new version of the Uzbek Criminal Code [adds](#) penalties for organising training for mass protests. The UK [criminalised](#) the use of face coverings at specific protests and created additional offences in relation to protest.

LAWS RESTRICTING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The CIVICUS Monitor recorded several measures that undermine the independence of media outlets, broaden the basis for prosecuting journalists or work to prevent them doing their jobs in accordance with the rules of their profession. In Cyprus, a draft law could potentially result in [lifting](#) the right of journalists to protect their sources, or allow the search of journalists’ electronic devices, homes and offices. The Central African Republic [reintroduced](#) criminal penalties for professional misconduct, extending prosecution beyond content authors to editors-in-chief, managing editors and presenters.

USA: People attend a press freedom rally in New York City following the arrest of a photojournalist (Photo by Mostafa Bassim/Anadolu)



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Several governments introduced measures to weaken the independence of media outlets or media regulators, including in Ethiopia, where amendments [mean](#) the Media Authority no longer needs to include civil society representation and the prime minister rather than parliament appoints its director general. In Nicaragua, the removal of the constitutional ban on press censorship [gave](#) the government broader authority to restrict independent media. In other countries, authorities have sought greater control over media outlets by demanding detailed financial disclosures, as seen in [Peru](#), and editorial programming information, as amendments proposed in [Lebanon](#), or attempting to dictate content directly, as in [Zimbabwe](#).

2025 saw the adoption or discussion of several cybersecurity bills and bills regulating social media. While these laws can pursue legitimate aims such as protecting critical infrastructure and personal data and deterring disinformation, several governments introduced bills or laws that give authorities excessive powers without adequate oversight. These laws contain vague definitions and provide a basis to delete public interest information or criminalise online speech and silence dissent, particularly as new laws have been introduced in countries with serious civic space restrictions. Some laws clearly seem to have draconian intentions, including in [Zambia](#), where new cybersecurity laws retain vague definitions which could enable state agencies to undertake unchecked surveillance. In some cases, restrictive cybersecurity laws were amended to further control and criminalise online speech, such as in Pakistan, where amendments to the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act were [adopted](#) in January 2025.

As a result of changes in laws, media organisations could now be requested to delete content deemed ‘incomplete’, as in [El Salvador](#), or ‘against the ideology of the country’, as in [Pakistan](#), and under the threat of being blacklisted or fined, as in [The Gambia](#). China [increased](#) the penalties for failure to adhere to its already strict surveillance and censorship imperatives, while Myanmar’s Social Media Bill would [penalise](#) the unauthorised use of VPNs that people use to circumvent internet restrictions, access information and share information internationally.

In Israel, police [obtained](#) the power to use cameras and microphones in personal electronic devices. In Hong Kong, the Commissioner’s Office [obtained](#) the right to request private companies to provide unspecified ‘relevant information’ if it suspects an offence has occurred, without need for a warrant.

Bills with similar vaguely worded provisions, criminalising the spreading of false news or expressions that are deemed defamatory are currently being discussed in [Angola](#), [Barbados](#) and [Nepal](#).



El Salvador: Man displays a newspaper declaring Nayib Bukele president in San Salvador after his re-election (Photo by Marvin Recinos/AFP)

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LAWS DIMINISHING PUBLIC SCRUTINY

While authorities assume increasingly broad powers based on vague concepts, the public's rights to participate or access information are being reduced. This was observed in Malta, where, despite widespread mobilisation, the Criminal Code was [modified](#) to make it more difficult for citizens to request an investigation into potential corruption. In Vanuatu, the Right to Information Act was [amended](#) to restrict public access to decisions made by the Council of Ministers. In Kyrgyzstan, the independent body mandated to monitor detention facilities and prevent torture, which closely worked with civil society, was [dissolved](#).

DIGITAL REPRESSION

Digital technologies have transformed how people and CSOs engage in public life, enabling unprecedented opportunities for advocacy, civic participation and mobilisation. Social media, for example, played a key role in helping to mobilise 2025's youth-led protests. But at the same time, there has been a troubling rise in violations of online freedoms targeting CSOs, HRDs, journalists and media.



In 2025, at least 11 per cent of civic space violations documented by the CIVICUS Monitor had a digital component. This included internet restrictions, such as internet and social media shutdowns, online censorship, such as authorities blocking websites and URLs, arrest and prosecution of HRDs and journalists for online speech, online intimidation and

harassment, the adoption of laws criminalising online expression and platform-enabled restrictions, such as algorithmic suppression and content removal driven by state pressure. However, CIVICUS Monitor figures likely underestimate digital civic space restrictions as some violations, such as coordinated content manipulation during elections and protests, coordinated disinformation and misinformation campaigns, online threats, surveillance and trolling, are either not systematically documented or hard to track.



France: Police officer stands guard near a water reservoir site ahead of a protest against “mega-bassines” in Sainte-Soline (Photo by Philippe Lopez/AFP)

INTERNET RESTRICTIONS

Governments continue to apply internet restrictions, particularly around elections and during protests, as a tactic to deter mobilisation and stifle dissent. Internet shutdowns, including complete blackouts and the selective blocking of mobile data and social media platforms, have become a powerful tool to disrupt the organisation of protests, limit the sharing of information and prevent the documentation of violations. In Cameroon, internet outages affecting several regions were [reported](#) from 22 October 2025, in a tense context where protests followed the undemocratic election that granted President Paul Biya an eighth term.

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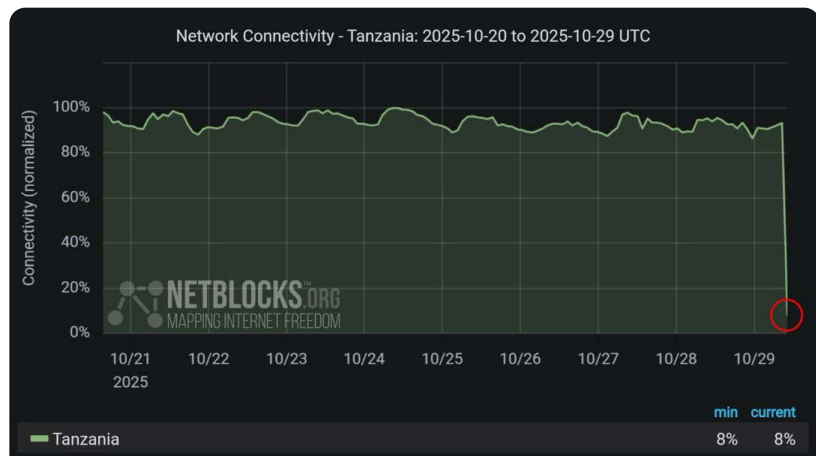
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Netblocks documented a nationwide internet shutdown in Tanzania in October.

Between 29 October and 3 November 2025, NetBlocks [confirmed](#) a nationwide internet shutdown in Tanzania during a non-competitive general election and mass post-election protests. The CIVICUS Monitor has also documented restriction of social media platforms, including messaging apps. In January 2025, South Sudan's National Communication Authority [ordered](#) all internet service providers to block access to social media for between 30 and 90 days. The media regulator claimed the temporary blanket social media ban aimed to curb the spread of videos showing alleged killings of South Sudanese nationals in Sudan, which sparked violent protests and retaliatory attacks on Sudanese nationals. In May 2025, Vietnam [ordered](#) telecommunication service providers to block the messaging app Telegram on accusations that Telegram did not cooperate in combating alleged crimes committed by its users. In September 2025, the

government of Nepal [ordered](#) the Nepal Telecommunications Authority to block 26 unregistered social media platforms, including Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, and Instagram. The decision followed repeated deadlines under the 2023 Social Media Operation Directive, which requires platforms to register locally, appoint liaison officers, and designate grievance handlers. While TikTok and Viber complied, most global platforms refused, triggering the suspension order. This ban on social media led to the events starting on 8th September 2025, when mostly youth protestors took to the streets across Nepal - including Kathmandu, Pokhara, Butwal, and other major city centres - demanding an end to corruption and the lifting of the aforementioned ban.

Authorities are increasingly using bandwidth throttling, when internet providers intentionally slow down internet speed, and selective shutdowns, when internet restrictions are targeted at specific applications, functionalities or regions, to discourage protesters from mobilising or sharing information. In Turkey during the March 2025 mass protests, authorities [imposed](#) extensive bandwidth throttling across all major social media and messaging platforms. Services including Instagram, Signal, Telegram, TikTok, WhatsApp, X/Twitter and YouTube were slowed significantly, with some users reporting restrictions lasting up to 42 hours. In Sudan in July 2025, the Telecommunications and Post Regulatory Authority [announced](#) the blocking of WhatsApp's voice and video call feature, citing security concerns and the need to protect the 'higher interests of the state'.

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SURVEILLANCE AND SPYWARE

Authorities have also used surveillance including spyware against HRDs, journalists and protesters. In February 2025, reports [surfaced](#) in Italy that investigative journalist Francesco Cancellato, who exposed pro-fascist elements in the youth wing of far-right Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's party, and two refugee rights activists who have been vocal in denouncing Italy's complicity in human rights violations in Libya, were targeted by Graphite, a military-grade spyware sold exclusively to governments. In Serbia in December 2024, investigations [revealed](#) that the Security and Intelligence Service had used spyware to monitor the phones of activists and journalists, including a student participant in sustained anti-government protests that began in November 2024.

In China, which has an extensive and sophisticated internet censorship regime, the implementation of a new government internet identification requirement, [mandating](#) users to register through the National Online Identity Authentication App, will further constrict online anonymity and increase opportunities for authorities to spy on and control online speech. In the USA, the Catch and Revoke programme, a joint initiative of the Department of Homeland Security, Department of Justice and State Department, is [using](#) AI to monitor the social media



A closer look at national surveillance in China. (Photo by Safeguard Defenders)

accounts of thousands of student visa holders, scanning for content interpreted as sympathetic to Hamas or other designated groups. Non-state actors are also involved in surveillance. In August 2025, the University of Melbourne, Australia, was [found](#) to have breached privacy laws by using information to track students involved in a 2024 Palestine solidarity protest.

ONLINE CENSORSHIP

Cases of online censorship include the arbitrary removal or blocking of online content. In Romania, ahead of the May 2025 presidential election rerun, after authorities annulled the 2024 vote on the grounds of foreign interference by Russia, authorities [introduced](#) draconian online content laws to curb the spread of Russian disinformation in support of far-right candidates. Under emergency regulations introduced in January 2025, social media users, including voters as well as candidates and political influencers, were labelled as 'political actors' if they mostly posted political content, subjecting them to strict rules on political advertising and facilitating the removal of content. By 4 April 2025, over 4,000 content-removal orders had been issued, mostly targeting TikTok. In Algeria, the website of CSO Riposte Internationale, which provides information on human rights and publishes investigations and reports on the repression of journalists and freedom of expression restrictions, was [made](#) inaccessible for internet users in April 2025.

As well as blocking and removing content, authorities have issued directions and notices to correct content. In Singapore, the government has widely used the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act to limit freedom of expression

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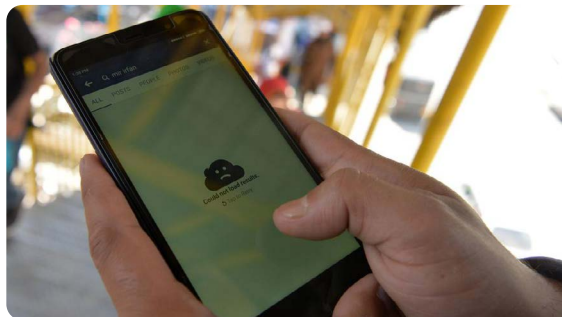
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of journalists and media. For example, in December 2024, the government [issued](#) correction directions to Bloomberg and several local outlets after they reported on luxury property purchases involving trusts and opaque ownership structures. Authorities claimed the articles contained inaccuracies, obliging four outlets to display government-mandated correction notices and link to official clarifications.



8,000-plus X/Twitter accounts, including Kashmir-based news outlets Free Press Kashmir, the Kashmiriyat and Maktoob Media taken offline. Photo AFP

Platform-enabled censorship has seen removal of social media content and accounts, often following state pressure. In July 2025, it was [reported](#) that authorities in India had ordered X/Twitter to block over 2,000 accounts, including two accounts belonging to Reuters News. The two accounts were suspended, displaying a message that they had been ‘withheld in IN in response to a legal demand’. In May 2025, Indian authorities [ordered](#) the blocking of a further 8,000-plus X/Twitter accounts, including Kashmir-based news outlets Free Press Kashmir, the Kashmiriyat and Maktoob Media, which focuses on human rights. In Ecuador, Facebook [removed](#) multiple publications from three digital media outlets – Mumarta, Radio Reloj and Radio Voz de Upano – restricting the circulation of their reports

on alleged irregularities in public contracting processes in the Municipality of Morona Canton. In January 2025, Meta [removed](#) content from Chilean journalist Daniel Matamala’s Instagram account following publication of an opinion column in La Tercera, in which he critically examined the role of digital platforms in disseminating disinformation, facilitating hate speech and shaping public opinion.

CRIMINALISATION OF ONLINE SPEECH

The CIVICUS Monitor has documented many cases of criminalisation of online speech, including criminal actions against people for online expression, typically using vague and broad legal provisions on disinformation and misinformation, false information and cybercrimes, among others. On 20 March 2025, Qatar’s Criminal Court [sentenced](#) internet activist Umm Nasser to three years in prison and a fine of 50,000 Qatari Riyals (approx. US\$13,650) on charges of spreading false rumours, managing a social media account to spread such rumours and disrespecting the Qatari judiciary. In Nepal in August 2025, journalist Dil Bhusan Pathak was [charged](#) with publishing illegal material under the 2008 Electronic Transactions Act, which is regularly used to stifle online commentary and prosecute journalists. The charges followed an allegation on Pathak’s YouTube channel that Jaiveer Singh Deuba, the son of two powerful Nepalese politicians, was linked to questionable deals.

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ONLINE INTIMIDATION AND THREATS AGAINST HRDS AND JOURNALISTS

Over 30 per cent of acts of intimidation and threats against journalists documented by the CIVICUS Monitor were made online. Online threats and violence are likely under-reported but have proliferated with the burgeoning of social media, and these have gendered dimensions with intimidation and threats specifically targeted against women. In January 2025, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, Mary Lawlor, [reported](#) having received news of an online smear campaign against Pakistani WHRD Professor Amar Sindhu, a member of a women activists' group,

poet and pioneer of a café, Khanabadosh, where activists and artists gather. Sidhu has been subjected to cyber-harassment and online intimidation. On 5 May 2025 in Ukraine, Vilne Radio journalist

Yevhen Vakulenko [reported](#) receiving insulting and threatening Facebook messages from Kyiv city military administration spokesperson Yevhen Yevlev, who allegedly threatened to 'break his face' and called him an 'enemy of the Ukrainian people'. The messages followed a Vilne Radio investigation alleging possible corruption involving Yevlev's father. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) freelance journalist Daniel Michombero, who is based in Goma, [received](#) threatening replies in January 2025 after posting a photo of his family on X/Twitter, accusing



Professor
Amar
Sindhu
(Photo by
Karachi
Literature
Festival)

him of spreading “fake news” and including suggestions that he should flee to Rwanda along with other refugees, or seek protection from the M23 insurgent forces to escape retribution.

Doxxing, the revealing of identifying information without people's consent, is another form of online intimidation against activists and journalists. On 28 March 2025, at least 18 journalists were [subjected](#) to a doxxing attack in Chiapas, Mexico when a Facebook page and a website published their names, photographs, details of their employers and, in some cases, unsubstantiated allegations of links to organised crime. In the USA in February 2025, Palestinian American Khan Sur, who was arbitrarily detained the following month, and his wife, Mapheze Saleh, [were](#) the targets of coordinated online smear campaigns and doxxing after publicly criticising Israel's genocide in Gaza.

Other tactics documented include account and website takedowns, algorithmic surveillance, coordinated online harassment, often with gendered impacts, disinformation campaigns and spyware, offering a growing and evolving threat to civic space.



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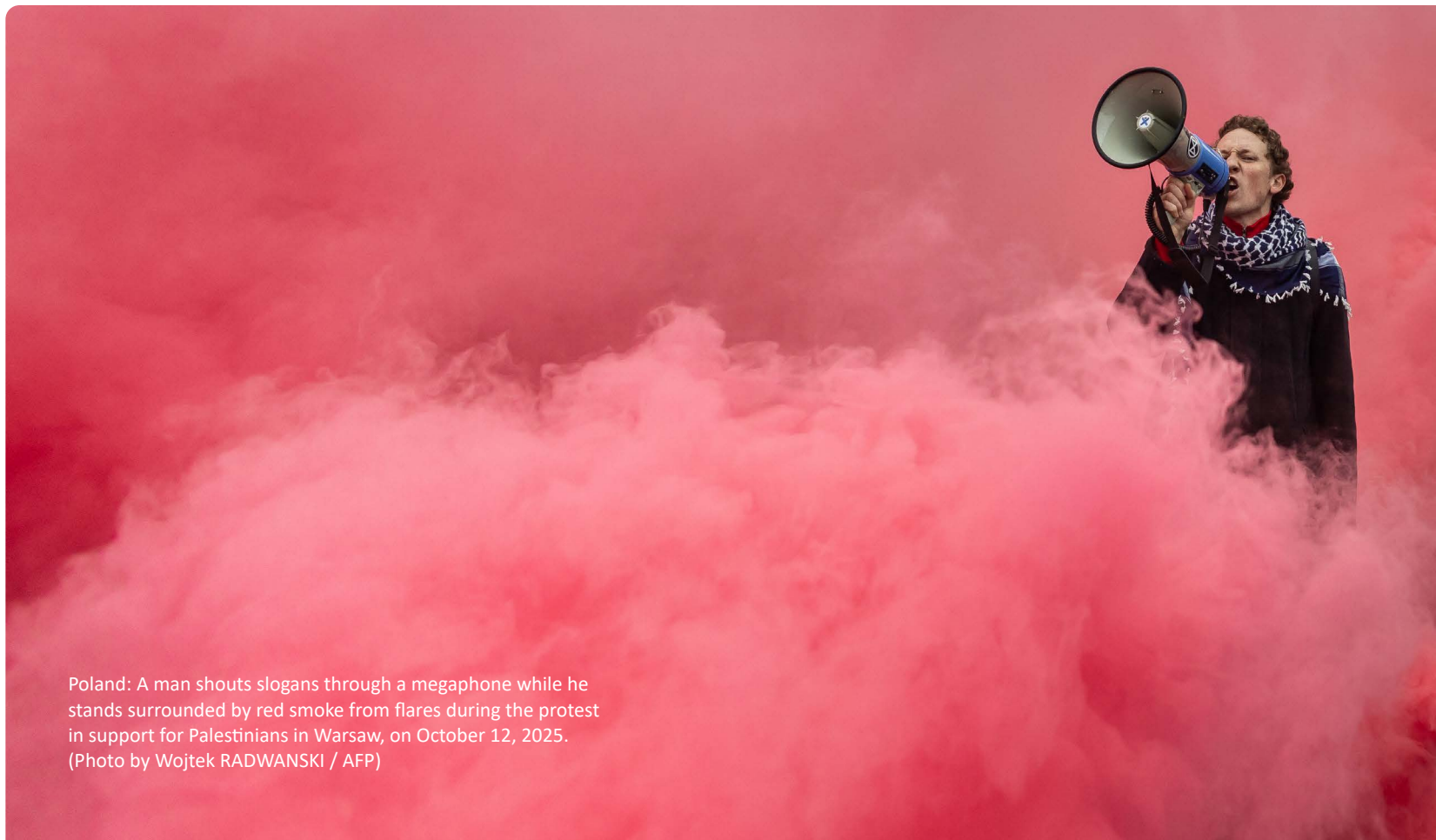
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Civil society continues to show remarkable resilience, achieving significant victories in securing civic freedoms. Sustained advocacy and public pressure have led to the withdrawal of oppressive measures, accountability for past abuses and meaningful reforms. Below are several notable examples from the past year.



Poland: A man shouts slogans through a megaphone while he stands surrounded by red smoke from flares during the protest in support for Palestinians in Warsaw, on October 12, 2025. (Photo by Wojtek RADWANSKI / AFP)

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LANDMARK BILL TO PROTECT ENVIRONMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN CHILE

In October 2025, Chile's Chamber of Deputies [approved](#) the Environmental Human Rights Defenders Protection Bill, marking the country's first comprehensive legal framework to recognise and safeguard the rights of those who defend the environment and nature. The proposal now moves to the Senate for further deliberation.

This development followed the bill's initial [approval](#) by the Environment and Natural Resources Committee in April 2025, after sustained civil society advocacy and in line with Chile's commitments under the Escazú Agreement, a 2022 regional treaty that provides safeguards for environmental defenders. If adopted, it would establish binding obligations to ensure environmental defenders can carry out their work free from violence. It also sets out guiding principles, including accountability, equality, non-discrimination, progressiveness and transparency. Civil society groups have welcomed the step as a long overdue response to escalating attacks on environmental defenders, particularly in regions affected by environmental degradation, extractive industries and forestry disputes.



Chile: Environmental advocates rally in Santiago in support of protection Human Rights Defenders Protection Bill (Photo by Escazú Ahora)

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BANGLADESH: INTERIM GOVERNMENT COMMITS TO HUMAN RIGHTS REFORMS AS IT RELEASES ACTIVISTS AND PROTESTERS AND INVESTIGATES PAST CRIMES



Since its 2024 political transition when mass protests forced a change of government, Bangladesh has taken notable steps toward accountability and human rights reform. The interim authorities [invited](#) the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to conduct an independent fact-finding mission into violations committed during the former government's crackdown on the 2024 protests. A [detailed report](#) was published in February 2025. The government also established six reform commissions, including a Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances. The government has approved an [ordinance](#) to address disappearances. Courts have begun dropping cases against HRDs, including those charged under the draconian Information and Communication Technology Act, marking early signs of progress despite ongoing tensions and reports of violence.

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)

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CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC ADOPTS LAW ON THE PROTECTION OF HRDS

On 27 December 2024, the National Assembly of the Central African Republic [adopted](#) a law dedicated to the protection of HRDs. The legislation establishes strengthened safeguards for HRDs, including access to legal assistance, guarantees against intimidation and reprisals and security measures. By promoting freedoms of association, expression and peaceful assembly, the law represents a significant step towards ensuring safer conditions for civil society working in an often hostile environment.

COMMISSION WILL INVESTIGATE ATTACKS ON CIVIL SOCIETY UNDER THE FORMER RULING PARTY IN POLAND

In April 2025, Poland's Interior Minister Tomasz Siemoniak and Justice Minister Adam Bodnar [announced](#) the creation of a commission to investigate abuses of power committed against civil society under the former government of the Law and Justice (PiS) party. The body will document attacks on freedoms of association, expression and peaceful assembly and propose measures to strengthen protections for civil society. The two ministers also noted that the commission will explore compensation mechanisms for victims. Commission chair Sylwia Gregorczyk-Abram described the PiS-era crackdown as a 'systemic attack' aimed at silencing dissent.

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HIGH COURT REMOVES REPRESSIVE PROVISION OF ZIMBABWE'S PATRIOTIC ACT

Zimbabwe's High Court delivered an important advance for the right to peaceful assembly in June 2025 by [striking down](#) section 22A(3) of the repressive Patriotic Act. This provision criminalised participation in meetings that discussed or advocated for sanctions against Zimbabwe and carried severe penalties, including disqualification from public office, loss of voting rights and revocation of citizenship. The court found the clause vague, overly broad and in violation of constitutional rights to freedoms of association and expression. Civil society welcomed the verdict in the case, brought by the Media Alliance of Zimbabwe and activist Zenzele Ndebele. However, rights groups continue to call for the revocation of the law as a whole, as other repressive provisions remain in place.

6

SWEDEN: SWEDBANK HALTS LOANS TO FOSSIL FUEL COMPANIES AFTER SUSTAINED CIVIL SOCIETY PRESSURE

Following months of pressure from campaign groups and customers, Swedbank has largely [ceased](#) issuing new loans to fossil fuel companies. The shift came after shareholder resolutions and mass mobilisation led by Fair Finance Guide Sweden and the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, which criticised banks for financing oil and gas expansion incompatible with climate goals. Fair Finance International welcomed the decision as a coordinated activism victory, noting that both Handelsbanken and Swedbank have now halted lending for fossil fuel expansion. However, campaigners emphasise that other major Nordic banks continue financing such projects, underscoring the need for sustained action.



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NEW BAGUIO CITY ORDINANCE STRENGTHENS PROTECTIONS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN THE PHILIPPINES



In September 2025, human rights groups welcomed Baguio City's [adoption](#) of the Human Rights Defenders' Protection Ordinance as a major step toward recognising the legitimacy and importance of human rights work in the Philippines. The ordinance affirms that defending human rights is a fundamental right and guarantees essential freedoms, including rights to form organisations, access resources, engage with state bodies and share information. It grants HRDs access to places of detention, strengthening safeguards against torture. It also sets positive obligations for local authorities and provides remedies such as legal and psychosocial support for HRDs and others at risk.

Philippines: Protesters take part in a rally as they demonstrate against phony flood control projects in Manila on 21 September 2025 (Photo by TED ALJIBE/AFP)

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BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: FEDERATION ADOPTS REFORMS CRIMINALISING FEMICIDE

In June 2025, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted landmark amendments to the Criminal Code criminalising femicide. The amendments define gender-based violence against women as violence directed at a woman because she is a woman or that disproportionately affects women, and classify the ‘gender-based killing of a female person’ as a crime punishable by 10 years in prison, or up to 45 years in severe cases. The amendments also criminalise the distribution of AI-generated sexual abuse material involving children. These reforms follow years of advocacy by activists, CSOs and parliamentary commissions, alongside public mobilisation against femicide and gender-based violence.



Bosnia: Citizens gather to protest under the slogan ‘I want to live from my work’ to mark International Women’s Day on March 8, 2025, in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. (Photo by Samir Jordamovic/Anadolu via Getty Images)

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AFRICA SOUTH OF THE SAHARA

UPGRADES



Gabon



Mauritania



Senegal



DOWNGRADES



Burundi



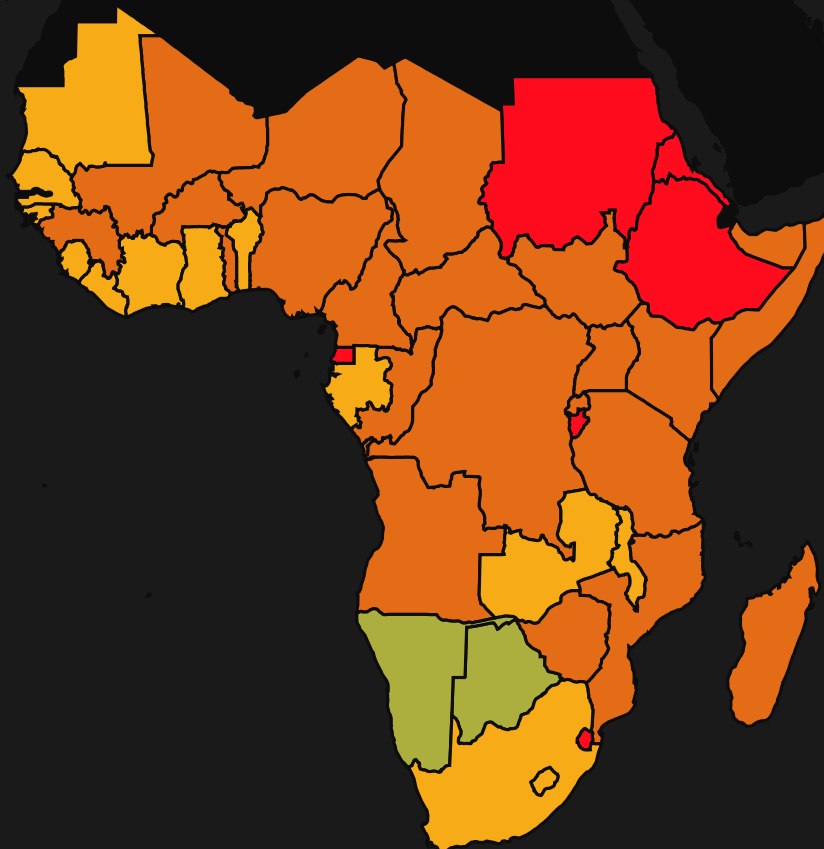
Liberia



Madagascar



Sudan



● OPEN ● NARROWED ● OBSTRUCTED ● REPRESSED ● CLOSED

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RATINGS OVERVIEW

Civic space conditions in Africa South of the Sahara remain highly restrictive: 44 out of 50 countries and territories are rated as obstructed, repressed or closed, and over 80 per cent of people live in countries where civic space is repressed or closed. Civic space is open only in the island states of Cabo Verde and São Tomé e Príncipe, while Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia and Seychelles have narrowed civic space.

[Sudan](#)'s civic space rating has been downgraded from repressed to closed. Thousands of civilians have been [killed](#) since the outbreak of intense fighting between the Rapid support Forces (RSF) militia and Sudan's armed forces in April 2023. Humanitarian workers, HRDs and journalists are being killed, attacked, detained and threatened. The war has weakened civil activity across all regions, whether controlled by the army or RSF, while multiple emergency orders have imposed curfews and restricted freedoms of expression, movement, opinion and peaceful assembly.

[Burundi](#) has also been downgraded from repressed to closed. Burundi's June 2025 legislative and local elections [took place](#) in a deeply repressive political environment, marked by widespread restrictions on expression, media independence and political participation. Cases of extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances, attacks on and torture of political opponents and intolerance of all forms of criticism or dissent by HRDs, journalists and members of the public are [continuing](#), while perpetrators such as the Imbonerakure militia – the ruling party's youth league – and the National Intelligence Service enjoy state immunity.



Sudan:
People gather to denounce the siege imposed by paramilitary forces in Port Sudan (Photo by AFP)

[Madagascar](#)'s civic space rating has been downgraded from obstructed to repressed. Security forces regularly deploy excessive force and arbitrarily arrest protesters, and protests are regularly banned. Sustained youth-led anti-government protests erupted on 25 September 2025, initially over chronic electricity and water shortages, leading to the military seizing power in October 2025. In response to the protests, security forces [used](#) rubber bullets, stun grenades and teargas, and arrested, beat and threatened protesters. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights estimated that at least 22 people were killed and over 100 injured in the first few days

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of protests and ensuing violence, with some killed by security forces. Protests against the Toliare mining project also [saw](#) the arrest and [prosecution](#) of activists and protesters. In recent years, restrictive laws have been [used](#) against environmental HRDs, social media users and whistleblowers.

[Liberia's](#) civic space rating has been downgraded from narrowed to obstructed. This [reflects](#) attacks on freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly. Political party supporters and security forces have abducted, threatened and physically assaulted journalists. For example, ruling party youth members [assaulted](#) journalist Nyantee Togba, while Alex Seryea Yormie was abducted and tortured for broadcasting a government directive. Peaceful protests have been met with violence. A public protest in December 2024 [escalated](#) when law enforcement officers used teargas and allegedly live ammunition, leading to injuries and arrests. These incidents, including the temporary [closure](#) of a community radio station on the orders of a local official, point to a deteriorating environment where state and non-state actors increasingly restrict fundamental freedoms.

More positively, [Gabon's](#) civic space rating has been upgraded from repressed to obstructed, [reflecting](#) improvements after the 2023 military coup that ended decades of repression by the former ruling Bongo family. Conditions for journalists have improved, allowing exiled reporters to return, and the transitional government maintained the timeline for presidential and legislative elections in 2025, which CSOs were able to [monitor](#). A new bill aims to modernise the legal framework for CSOs. However, significant restrictions persist. The new electoral code

[barred](#) opposition figures from running for president, and the law on political parties sets high membership thresholds, excluding smaller movements. The election enabled the leader of the coup to retain power. Journalists [face](#) summonses from security forces, and protests continue to be frequently banned or dispersed.



Gabon: Citizens gather to celebrate the results of the presidential election in Libreville (Photo by Nao Mukadi/AFP)

[Mauritania's](#) civic space rating has also been upgraded from repressed to obstructed. This [reflects](#) several positive developments, including the government's decision to join the Partnership for Information and Democracy, an intergovernmental initiative that seeks to address challenges posed by misinformation and the decline of independent

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journalism, and the regularisation of contracts for public service journalists, which enhances their professional stability. However, civic space [remains](#) restricted due to continued judicial harassment of activists and journalists. For instance, authorities arrested and convicted anti-slavery activist Ablaye Bâ for a video criticising the government’s migration policy and detained several journalists for their reporting. Law enforcement agencies also frequently use excessive force against protests, indicating that significant challenges to fundamental freedoms persist.



Senegal: Citizens gather to celebrate the results of the presidential election in Dakar (Photo by Patrick Meinhardt/AFP)

[Senegal](#)’s civic space rating has similarly been upgraded from repressed to obstructed. The upgrade [follows](#) a period of political transition, including peaceful early legislative elections in November 2024 and the [adoption](#) of a whistleblower protection law in August 2025. The new government has taken steps toward accountability for past abuses by offering financial assistance to the families of people killed in protests from 2021 to 2024 and revising a controversial amnesty law. Despite these positive steps, civic space remains restricted. Journalists [continue](#) to face arrests and judicial harassment for their reporting, including Simon

Pierre Faye and Bachir Fofana, detained for allegedly spreading false news. Additionally, the government suspended 381 media outlets for non-compliance with regulations.

REGIONAL CIVIC SPACE TRENDS



Cameroon: Protester waves national flag near police during post-election rally in Garoua (Photo by AFP)

Central Africa faced severe civic space restrictions, including suppression of dissent through censorship and judicial harassment, in 2025 amid political tensions and conflict. In eastern DRC, the M23 offensive [led](#) to censorship, internet shutdowns and targeting of journalists. Cameroon’s presidential election in October 2025 [drove](#) restrictions including the exclusion of the opposition and protest bans and crackdowns, resulting in arrests and deaths. In Gabon, despite the civic space upgrade, journalists [face](#) summonses from security forces, and protests continue to be frequently banned or dispersed. The Republic of the Congo [saw](#) increased repression, including an opposition leader’s abduction and arrest of a lawyer supporting activists, and the [exclusion](#) of prominent civil society figures and CSOs from key political processes, further indicating declining freedoms before elections in 2026.

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In 2025, countries in West Africa saw a deterioration of civic space, notably in countries under military rule. In Mali, the junta [banned](#) political parties, suppressed demonstrations and was alleged to be involved in disappearances of regime critics. Niger's military government arrested journalists reporting on military matters, [recriminalised](#) online defamation and suspended international media outlets. In Guinea, security forces [used](#) lethal force against protests demanding a return to civilian rule, while activists [faced](#) abduction and torture. Beyond the Sahel, Nigeria [arrested](#) journalists for critical articles and protest coverage. Sierra Leone's Counter-Terrorism Bill [raised](#) concerns among press freedom advocates for potentially criminalising journalism.



Kenya: Protester in front of burning barricade during protest marking anniversary of parliament storming in Nairobi (Photo by Luis Tato/AFP)

In the East and Horn of Africa, 2025 saw state repression through violent crackdowns on protests, the use of judicial tools to crush dissent. In Kenya in June and July 2025, protests commemorating the 2024 demonstrations against tax hikes [faced](#) lethal force, causing 65 deaths and injuring over 600 people. Authorities were [accused](#) of deploying armed gangs to attack protesters. In Uganda, authorities [continued](#) to arbitrarily arrest environmental activists opposing EACOP and opposition members. Somalia [saw](#) increased media repression, with 46 journalists arrested and media outlets raided between January and April 2025 alone, while security forces targeted journalists covering protests. Ethiopia's government [suspended](#) the Ethiopian Health Professionals Association for supporting a strike and arrested journalists reporting on it.

In Tanzania, October 2025 elections [characterised](#) by the exclusion of opposition parties and the [arrest](#) and detention of opposition leader Tundu Lissu [sparked](#) deadly protests that the state met with a ruthless crackdown, leaving hundreds dead and over 300 facing prosecution in only the first few days.

A surge in state repression of protests was observed in Southern Africa, with authorities violently cracking down on protests and intensifying pressure on dissenting voices. In Mozambique, authorities [met](#) post-election demonstrations with a lethal response, resulting in hundreds of deaths and more than 4,200 arrests. In Angola, security forces violently [suppressed](#) protests against fuel price hikes, using excessive force, including live ammunition, tear gas and batons, leading to 30 fatalities and over 1,500 detained in the protests and the violence.

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that ensued. Use of excessive force against protesters was also evident in South Africa, where a community leader, Vusi Banda, the chairperson of the Mondlo Township Civic Space Organisation, was [assassinated](#) after leading a service delivery protest. Malawi [witnessed](#) state complicity in violence ahead of the 2025 general elections as masked assailants attacked peaceful protesters demanding electoral reform while security forces stood by. The region also saw judicial harassment of activists and journalists as a result of critical reporting and social media posts, including in [Lesotho](#) and [Zambia](#).



Madagascar: Protester faces security forces during demonstration against water and electricity outages in Antananarivo (Photo by Rijasolo/AFP)

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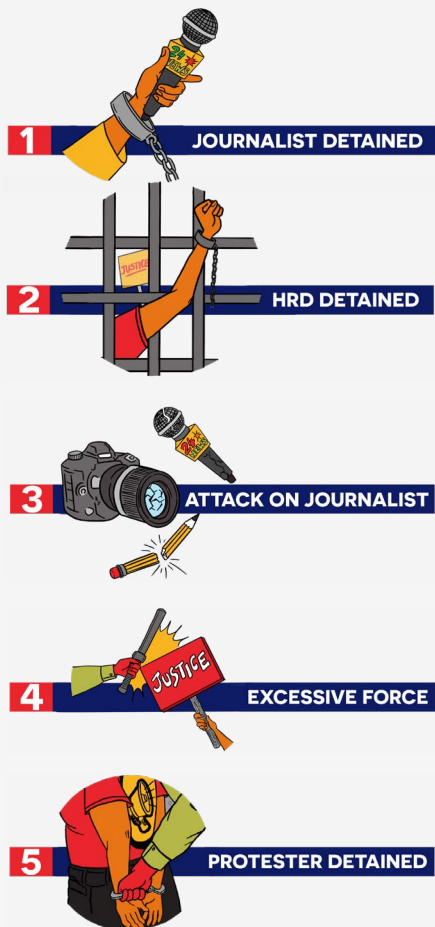
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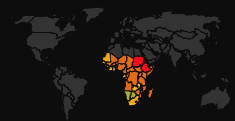
CIVIC SPACE RESTRICTIONS

DETENTION OF JOURNALISTS AND ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS

The detention of journalists was documented in at least 33 countries and territories in Africa South of the Sahara, with attacks on journalists in at least 16 countries. The detention of journalists was the top violation in Central, East and Horn and West Africa. Journalists were detained in at least 11 West African countries, nine in Southern Africa, seven in East and Horn of Africa and six in Central Africa. In countries including the DRC, Somalia and Somaliland, authorities continued to arrest journalists as a tactic to intimidate and silence them.

Somalia is steadily emerging as Africa's top detainer of journalists, recording the highest number of journalists detained over the period covered by this report. Out of 180 detentions of journalists documented in Africa, 70 were from Somalia, the highest documented in a country in Africa South of the Sahara during the period under consideration. Between January and April 2025 alone, authorities [arrested](#) 46 journalists, kidnapped two and raided several media outlets. Government ministries actively targeted critical reporting, leading many journalists to self-censor or go into exile. For instance, between 22 and 24 May 2025, security forces [intensified](#) their crackdown by arresting multiple reporters from Five Somali TV, Goobjoog Media, Himilo Somali TV, RNN TV, Shabelle TV, Somali Cable TV and SYL TV while they covered protests or engaged with the public in Mogadishu. In May 2025, National Intelligence and Security Agency agents raided the homes and media studio of journalists Mohamed Omar Baakaay and Bashir Ali Shire. During the raid, the agents blindfolded and [arrested](#) Bashir, detained Baakaay's brother and confiscated equipment.

Despite government promises to decriminalise press offences in DRC, journalists face arrests under criminal provisions. For example, Glody Ndaya of L'Association Congolaise des Femmes Journalistes de la Presse Écrite (ACOFEPÉ) was [arrested](#) on 4 August 2025 for alleged defamation and taken to Makala Central Prison without summons. In M23-occupied areas of eastern DRC, journalists [face](#)



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abductions and intimidation. In February 2025, Congo River Alliance and M23 armed coalition forces in Goma [abducted](#) journalist Tuvur Wundi, and in May they abducted Jérémie Wakahasha Bahati, both for critical reporting. On 5 August 2025, in Bukavu, South Kivu province, assailants [abducted](#) and killed journalist Fiston Wilondja Mukamba, former staff member of the Media monitoring Centre - a self regulation programme of the National Union of the Press of Congo (UNPC).

Authorities across Africa South of the Sahara have increasingly used cybercrime laws and other restrictive legislation to prosecute journalists and online critics. In Niger on 30 October 2025, authorities [arrested](#) six journalists and charged them with ‘complicity in distributing documents likely to disturb public order’, believed to be related to the circulation of a press briefing invitation, subsequently shared online by critics of new mandatory levies introduced by the military junta. In Kenya, police [arrested](#) blogger and teacher Albert Ojwang in June 2025 for a social media post allegedly spreading false information about a senior police official. He died in police custody the following day under suspicious circumstances, with an autopsy later revealing injuries consistent with blunt force trauma, sparking widespread protests.

In 2025, several journalists were attacked and detained while covering protests. In Madagascar, several journalists were [injured](#) by security forces while covering the youth-led anti-government protests. Security officers shot journalist Hardi Juvaniah Reny and struck photojournalist Alain Rakotondrainabe on the head even though both wore clearly visible press vests. In Togo, authorities [detained](#) French journalist Flore Monteau in

June 2025 as she filmed police actions during anti-government protests, forcing her to delete her footage.

The safety of journalists and bloggers is at risk from state and non-state actors, including armed militia and supporters of political parties, particularly around elections. In December 2024 in Mozambique, police [shot and killed](#) blogger and musician, Albino Sibia while he livestreamed a post-election protest. In Ghana, supporters of the New Patriotic Party [assaulted](#) JoyNews reporter Latif Iddrisu in May 2025 for covering the detention of a regional party chair. Journalists were also attacked or detained in countries including [Ethiopia](#), [Lesotho](#), [Liberia](#), [Malawi](#), [Uganda](#) and [Zimbabwe](#).



Gambia: Protester holds sign calling for an end to impunity for politically motivated murders (Photo by Muhamadou Bittaye/AFP)

DETENTION OF HRDS

HRDs were detained in at least 25 countries in Africa South of the Sahara. Authorities commonly used this tactic to deter, intimidate and silence activists. HRDs working on democracy, environmental issues and labour rights were particularly targeted.

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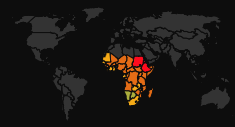
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As in 2024, democracy activists were targeted in countries under military rule. In February 2025 in Guinea, unidentified gunmen [abducted and tortured](#) prominent civil society leader Abdoul Sacko, coordinator of a network calling for a return to constitutional order. He was found in a critical condition, having been beaten and abandoned in the bush 100 kilometres from Conakry. In Mali, unidentified people [abducted](#) civil society leader Aliou Badra Sacko in March 2025 during a meeting to oppose a new mobile money tax. He was reportedly detained in a secret state security prison for two months before his release. In Burkina Faso, armed personnel [abducted](#) democracy activist and lawyer Hermann Yaméogo in July 2025 shortly after he published a critique of President Traoré's military regime on social media. Hermann was taken to the National Intelligence Agency before being released after 24 hours.

Authorities also arrested HRDs in connection with protests and strikes. In Kenya in June 2025, following protests over the killing of Albert Ojwang, police [arrested](#) three HRDs – Mark Amiani, Francis Mwangi and John Mulingwa Nzau – charging them with incitement to violence, despite civil society groups refuting the claims. In the Central African Republic, seven civil society activists were [arrested](#) in June 2025 during a vigil to commemorate students who died in a tragic explosion and to call for accountability.

HRDs have also been arrested for criticising authorities. In Mauritania, HRD Ahmed Ould Samba was [sentenced](#) to a year in prison in May 2025 for a Facebook post in which he accused the president of implementing 'racist and corrupt' policies. In Togo, activist and poet Honoré Sitsopé Sokpor was [arrested](#) in January 2025 and charged with 'undermining the internal security of the state' after publishing a poem online that condemned governmental oppression.

Lawyers have also been targeted. In the Republic of the Congo, lawyer Bob Kaben Massouka was [arrested](#) in July 2025, allegedly for supporting a group of young activists who were planning a peaceful protest against deteriorating socioeconomic conditions. He was charged with attempting to breach state security and criminal conspiracy. In Uganda, security officers [assaulted and arrested](#) human rights lawyer Eron Kiiza on 7 January 2025 as he tried to access a military courtroom where he was representing opposition leader Kizza Besigye. In Algeria, human rights lawyer Mounir Gharbi was [sentenced](#) in absentia to three years in prison on 16 February 2025, for 'publicly displaying publications likely to harm the national interest' after he posted Facebook comments.

PROTESTERS DETAINED AND EXCESSIVE FORCE

Detention of protesters was documented in at least 19 countries in Africa South of the Sahara and the use of excessive force during protests in at least 20. As in previous years, many protests took place on a wide range of issues, including bad governance, corruption, the high cost of living and poor basic services. Authorities often detained protesters to try to break up protests and dissuade people from joining them.



Kenya: Protester shields himself from a police water cannon during an anti-government protest in Nairobi (Photo by Simon Maina/AFP)

Youth-led movements and protests against economic hardship have often been met with brutal state repression, leading to mass detentions and fatalities. Kenya's crackdown on youth-led protests commemorating the 2024 demonstrations against tax hikes, [caused](#) at least 65 deaths and injured over 600 people, and led to the arrest of more than 1,500 people between June and July 2025, with some facing terrorism charges. During one protest on 17 June 2025, at least one bystander was killed and 25 others hospitalised after police used live ammunition. Similarly, in Madagascar, security forces [responded](#) with disproportionate and lethal force. Following

clashes on 9 October 2025, police [arrested](#) and referred for prosecution at least 28 protesters. Angola's protests in July 2025 over fuel subsidy cuts were [met](#) with a violent police response. The crackdown on a three-day strike that escalated into larger protests saw police using excessive force, including live ammunition, tear gas and batons. At least 30 people were killed and 277 injured in the protests and violence, with over 1,500 people detained and hundreds facing summary trials. In The Gambia, during a peaceful protest against high internet data tariffs in August 2025, law enforcement officers [arrested](#) around 23 young protesters, including rapper Ali Cham, alias Killa Ace, and journalist Yusuf Taylor.



Madagascar: Police detain a protester during a demonstration calling for constitutional reforms in Antananarivo (Photo by Luis Tato/AFP)

Elections and political tensions were another major trigger for protests, frequently met with state-sanctioned violence. Amid a crackdown on dissent in Togo, rapper and activist Aamron was [arrested](#) in May 2025 after releasing a video considered by authorities to be a veiled call for protests. He was detained at a psychiatric hospital for almost a month and reported being

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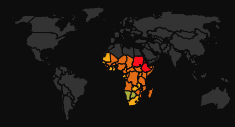
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subjected to torture. In addition, authorities violently [suppressed](#) peaceful demonstrations in June 2025 against the high cost of living and constitutional changes allowing the president to extend his rule. Security forces and militia used disproportionate force, including batons and water cannon, and police arbitrarily arrested at least 81 protesters. In Cameroon, the period ahead of and following the October 2025 election was [marked](#) by repression. On 4 August 2025, security forces arrested at least 53 opposition supporters outside the Constitutional Council. On 26 October 2025, security forces used live ammunition and teargas to disperse protesters who defied a protest ban, leading to the killing of four people in Douala and the arrest of at least 105 people.

Protests by environmental activists and students also led to arrests and detentions. In Uganda, authorities [arrested](#) 15 environmental activists in November 2024 for protesting against the destruction of the Lwera wetland. In February 2025, another 11 environmentalists from the Students Against EACOP group were [arrested](#) during a protest at the EU mission and charged with ‘common nuisance’. In South Africa in February 2025, 15 students from the University of the Free State were [arrested](#) during protests over registration and funding issues.

OF CONCERN

TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION AND THE DEEPENING CRACKDOWN ON DISSENT ACROSS BORDERS

In 2025, a deeply concerning trend of transnational repression intensified across Africa, signalling a collaborative effort by states to silence dissent beyond their borders. This escalating campaign, characterised by abductions, illegal renditions, judicial harassment and torture, has effectively erased safe havens for activists, journalists and opposition figures, creating a continent-wide climate of fear. Governments are increasingly using diplomatic ties and security agreements to hunt down dissidents, fundamentally violating international human rights laws, state sovereignty and the core principles of asylum and non-refoulement. This practice demonstrates a blatant disregard for due process and marks a strategic shift toward a more coordinated, regional approach to crushing dissent.

Central and West Africa are significant hotspots for this form of state-sponsored attack on dissent. The case of Burkinabe activist Alain Christophe Traoré, known as Alino Faso, offers one grim example. [Arrested](#) in Côte d’Ivoire on charges of ‘intelligence with agents of a foreign state’, he was later found dead by hanging in detention under highly suspicious circumstances. Such charges are often used to delegitimise and persecute exiled critics. Côte d’Ivoire was the site of another cross-border operation when Ivorian police arrested Beninese journalist Comlan Hugues Sossoukpè, who was living in exile, and promptly [extradited](#) him to Benin to face terrorism charges for his critical reporting. This incident highlights how governments exploit diplomatic ties to target activists and journalists who have fled persecution. It

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followed a similar case in Benin in which another Beninese critic, digital activist Steve Amoussou, was [abducted](#) from exile in Lomé, Togo in August 2024 and sentenced to two years in prison for ‘politically motivated insult’ and ‘spreading false information’ linked to a Facebook page critical of the government.



Kenya: Protesters hold placards with messages against repression during rally in Nairobi (Photo by Simon Maina/AFP)

The East and Horn of Africa witnessed some of the most blatant acts of transnational repression. A coordinated operation between Kenyan and Ugandan authorities led to the [abduction](#) of prominent Ugandan opposition leader Kizza Besigye from Nairobi. He was illegally rendered to Uganda to face charges in a military court, a move that circumvents civilian legal protections and demonstrates the misuse of state security apparatus to neutralise political opponents. In a shocking display of regional impunity, suspected Tanzanian military agents [abducted](#), tortured and sexually assaulted Kenyan activist Boniface Mwangi and Ugandan journalist Agather Atuhaire while they were in Dar es Salaam to observe Tundu Lissu’s trial. The Kenyan government’s actions were also scrutinised following the [unlawful deportation](#) to Uganda of Martin Mavunjina, a

senior legal advisor at the Kenya Human Rights Commission, in what was widely condemned as a politically motivated move to silence a key civil society voice. These events collectively paint a picture of an alarming authoritarian alliance.

In Sudan, the government has [extended](#) its crackdown on dissent beyond its borders, targeting anti-war figures and political opponents living abroad. A significant instance of this transnational repression occurred in April 2024, when the acting Attorney General filed serious criminal charges against the former civilian Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok and other leaders of the Taqaddum political coalition, many of whom are not in Sudan. The charges included grave accusations such as crimes against humanity, ‘inciting war against the state’ and undermining constitutional order, with some carrying the death penalty. This legal persecution of prominent figures in exile is a clear strategy to silence opposition and those advocating for an end to the conflict from outside Sudan. Other journalists, lawyers and WHRDs outside Sudan have reported receiving threats, indicating a broader campaign to intimidate the Sudanese diaspora.

In Comoros, we have the case of Abdousalam Ibrahim Mpingou, a Comorian national residing in Tanzania. Known for his criticism of Comorian authorities on social media, Mpingou was detained in Tanzania and subsequently [extradited](#) to the Comoros on 10 May 2025. He is being prosecuted for charges including defamation, public insult, and slander.

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AMERICAS

● OPEN
 ● NARROWED
 ● OBSTRUCTED
 ● REPRESSED
 ● CLOSED

DOWNGRADES

→ → → → →

Argentina



El Salvador



United States
of America



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RATINGS OVERVIEW

Civil society in the Americas was fiercely tested in 2025, as the region is experiencing a widespread rollback of civic freedoms. Most people now live in obstructed civic space environments (around 60 per cent), while a further 30 per cent of the population is exposed to the worst conditions, closed or repressed civic space. Of 35 countries, civic space is rated as closed in three, repressed in seven, obstructed in six, narrowed in nine and open in 10.

Amid this decline, long-established democracies are showing signs of rapid authoritarian shift, marked by weakened rule of law and growing constraints on independent civil society. Argentina and the USA exemplified this trend.



USA: Protester holds up hands as police intervene in anti-Trump demonstration in Los Angeles (Photo by Mario Tama/Getty Images)

The [USA](#) appeared twice on the CIVICUS Monitor Watchlist, which alerts to countries experiencing a rapid decline in civic freedoms, in 2025. It has now been downgraded from a narrowed to obstructed civic space rating following Donald Trump's return to office in January 2025. Trump has issued unprecedented executive orders [designed](#) to unravel democratic institutions, global cooperation and international justice. Authorities have [adopted](#) a militarised response to large-scale protests triggered by aggressive and racist federal operations targeting migrant communities. Press freedom is under pressure, with censorship, judicial harassment and political interference manifesting in the cancellation or suspension of major talk shows, funding cuts [affecting](#) independent media and tighter [restrictions](#) on White House press access. Legislative and financial moves to rein in civil society have also [gathered](#) pace, with states pushing foreign-influence registration bills and officials [floating](#) contentious revisions to the Foreign Agents Registration Act that would make it easier to target and sideline independent civil society.

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Repression of Palestine solidarity activism also intensified in 2025, with authorities [cracking down](#) on dissent across university campuses, including criminalisation of foreign-born students, disproportionate disciplinary measures against students and faculty, funding freezes and tax pressure on institutions and suspension of student groups, [echoing](#) a similar pattern of reprisals in 2024 during the Joe Biden administration. The government [imposed](#) sanctions on the International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutor and judges, Palestinian organisations and Francesca Albanese, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967.

[Argentina](#)'s rating has moved from narrowed to obstructed, as civic space has [deteriorated](#) sharply since President Javier Milei took office in December 2023. His administration has [pursued](#) aggressive restructuring of the state and economic austerity measures, reducing the capacity of the bodies responsible for guaranteeing fundamental rights. These reforms have triggered sustained mass mobilisations, with authorities responding by [enforcing](#) a 2023 'anti-picketing' protocol and increasingly using arbitrary detentions and excessive force. In March 2025, police [met](#) a pensioners' protest in Buenos Aires with one of the most brutal police operations of the past two years, resulting in around 700 injuries and at least 114 arbitrary detentions. Activists have also [faced](#) reprisals, including those defending Indigenous Mapuche territories amid wildfires in Patagonia in February 2025, and others [opposing](#) mining projects in Mendoza. Journalists report [heightened](#) levels of physical attacks, particularly in the context of protests, along with

intimidation and public vilification, reflecting growing hostility from government officials.



El Salvador: Woman displays photos of political prisoners during a protest against President Nayib Bukele's government in San Salvador (Photo by Marvin Recinos/AFP)

[El Salvador](#)'s downgrade from obstructed to repressed comes after years of erosion of civic freedoms and the dismantling of institutional checks and balances. Since his first term in 2019, President Nayib Bukele has [governed](#) under an ongoing state of emergency that suspends constitutional guarantees and concentrates unparalleled power in the executive, now [reinforced](#) by constitutional changes enabling indefinite presidential re-election. In 2025, repression [deepened](#) steadily through the systematic targeting of activists and journalists,

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with [alarming](#) cases of criminalisation, including of prominent human rights lawyer Ruth López, and the adoption of a sweeping Foreign Agents Law imposing a 30 per cent tax on foreign funding and extreme sanctions, including administrative and criminal proceedings, cancellation and suspension of legal status or operating authorisation and fines of US\$100,000 to US\$250,000. The new restrictive legal framework, combined with a constrained environment for civil society, has seriously hindered CSOs' operations and led major organisations to close their offices. Pressure on independent media [soared](#), driving at least 53 journalists into exile by October 2025, as documented by the Association of Journalists of El Salvador.

Activists from countries rated as closed have increasingly become targets of attacks while in exile. The Group of Human Rights Experts on Nicaragua have [documented](#) transnational repression incidents against exiled Nicaraguans and their relatives, including killings, assaults, unlawful arrests and deportations and digital threats. The June 2025 [killing](#) of retired army major and outspoken government critic Roberto Samcam Ruiz in Costa Rica, after he reported death threats, shows how far the risks have grown. He had condemned military abuses since 2018 and was stripped of his nationality in 2023, joining at least 452 people deprived of their Nicaraguan nationality since February 2023.

Venezuelan authorities have employed different tactics, including systematically [obstructing](#) activists' and journalists' movement and human rights work by arbitrarily annulling or retaining passports. By May 2025, authorities had unlawfully revoked at least 40 people's passports. Human rights organisations have [raised](#) alarm over the lack of protection for Venezuelan activists and opposition figures who fled after contested elections in 2024, driven out by political persecution. But exile has not kept them safe. In October 2025, Venezuelan HRD Yendri Velásquez and political consultant Luis Peche Arteaga were shot and injured by unknown assailants in Colombia. Both had left Venezuela due to the post-election crackdown. For now, there is no evidence linking the attack to the Venezuelan authorities, while investigations in Colombia remain stalled, a failure civil society has repeatedly criticised.

The assault on civic freedoms extends beyond the countries with the worst civic space restrictions: even in countries where civic freedoms are broadly protected, such as [Canada](#), [Chile](#), the [Dominican Republic](#) and [Panama](#), there were incidents of excessive force during protests.

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TOP 5 VIOLATIONS FOR AMERICAS



CIVIC SPACE RESTRICTIONS

The most common violations of civic freedoms documented in the Americas in 2025 were, in order, attacks on journalists, intimidation of journalists, the detention of HRDs, the killing of HRDs and the use of excessive force during protests.

JOURNALISTS ATTACKED, INTIMIDATED AND THREATENED

Freedom of expression remained the most violated civic freedom in the Americas. Attacks, intimidation and threats against journalists continue to be among the region's five most common violations since 2018, pointing to a steadily hostile climate for the media and rising dangers for journalists. This challenge is seen across all civic space ratings, from Canada's open rating to Nicaragua's closed status.

Attacks against journalists were documented in at least nine countries, intimidation in 14 and threats in 12. Protests are a particularly dangerous setting, accounting for 40 per cent of attacks against journalists recorded in the region. Security forces have frequently been identified as the main perpetrators of violence, raising concerns about excessive force.



Argentina: Elderly man sprayed with tear gas during protest demanding pension increases in Buenos Aires (Photo by Luis Robayo/AFP)

In Argentina, the National Gendarmerie fired a teargas canister horizontally at photojournalist Pablo Grillo during pensioners' protests near Congress in March 2025, striking him on the head and causing a severe brain injury that put him in intensive care. In Peru, police assaulted journalists covering the youth-led protests in Lima in September and October 2025, including firing projectiles, shoving them, striking them with teargas canisters, beating them with batons and hauling them out of protest zones.



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Organised crime has made journalism a high-risk job in parts of the Americas. The situation has become particularly dire in Haiti. A deepening crisis, [fuelled](#) by spiralling gang violence, political deadlock and longstanding systemic injustices, has left journalists openly targeted. In April 2025, gang members in Mirebalais [kidnapped](#) journalist Roger Claudy Israël and his brother Marco, releasing a video threatening to execute them before freeing both after negotiations led by SOS Journalistes. In Petite-Rivière de l'Artibonite, gang members [kidnapped](#) journalist Valéry Pierre in December 2024, holding him for 45 days and beating, burning and torturing him before releasing him in January 2025.



Mexico: Vigil on March 15 for victims of clandestine grave discovered March 5 in Teuchitlán at Zocalo square in Mexico City (Photo by Seila Montes/REUTERS)

In the most extreme cases, reporting on sensitive issues can be deadly. [Brazil](#), [Colombia](#), [Ecuador](#), [Guatemala](#), [Haiti](#), [Honduras](#), [Mexico](#) and [Peru](#) remain among the most unsafe places for journalists, with Mexico still the deadliest place outside a warzone. The dangers were made brutally clear at the start of 2025. At least four journalists were [killed](#) in Mexico between January and March, including Raúl Irán Villarreal Belmont in Guanajuato and Calletano de Jesús Guerrero in the State of

Mexico, both murdered by unidentified assailants after reporting on corruption and political issues. The continued killings show how state protection systems are failing, leaving journalists exposed and impunity entrenched.

Hostile authorities and non-state actors have carried out threats, mainly against investigative journalists, with around half of these attacks taking place online. In Uruguay, journalist Patricia Madrid [received](#) a string of threatening messages on Instagram allegedly sent by the brother of a mayor after she published an editorial on a corruption case involving him. Particularly when women are targeted, intimidation can involve misogynistic and racist language. In Brazil, TV anchor Luciana Barreto was [subjected](#) to racist social media comments in March 2025 after condemning discriminatory speech in sport. In June 2025, journalist Sílvia Tereza reported threats that included suggestions of sexual violence. In Colombia, journalist Diana Saray Giraldo [faced](#) a wave of online harassment in January 2025 after a senator accused her of 'profiling' and called her posts 'dangerous'. The senator's remarks triggered misogynistic attacks across social media.

A worrying trend is emerging in which laws meant to protect women from violence are being weaponised to silence the media. In [Guatemala](#) and [Paraguay](#), authorities have used these protections to censor journalists, securing gag orders and no-contact rulings that block investigations and shut down reporting. For instance, in Paraguay, a woman senator from the ruling Colorado Party [targeted](#) journalist Laura Martino and two colleagues, filing complaints under Law 5,777/2016, on

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the Comprehensive Protection of Women Against All Forms of Violence. In December 2024, a court order banned them from making allegedly insulting or denigrating statements about the senator and barred any actions deemed to constitute harassment, intimidation or persecution on the basis of gender, under warning of judicial contempt.

Journalists were particularly at risk during elections. In Bolivia, during the August 2025 general election, at least 20 reporters were [assaulted or harassed](#) by unknown assailants, and at least one was followed and questioned by police throughout her election-day coverage. In Guyana, tensions [arose](#) during the September 2025 general election when President Irfaan Ali verbally attacked the Guyana Press Association as ‘biased’, ‘politically motivated’ and ‘undemocratic’ after it raised alarms about growing hostility toward the press. Election-season pressure took a different form in Canada: journalist Rachel Gilmore [faced](#) online harassment in March 2025 after a Conservative Party spokesperson publicly smeared her over a fact-checking segment, launching a wave of attacks that led the TV station to cut her slot.

Pressure from top officials on journalists has increased across the [Caribbean](#). In the Bahamas, Prime Minister Phillip Brave Davis publicly [lashed out](#) at a reporter in July 2025 after she exposed inaccurate budget claims. In St Vincent and the Grenadines in February 2025, Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves [repeated](#) unproven allegations that the media and opposition receive foreign funding recasting critical reporting as a threat to national sovereignty.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS DETAINED

Detentions of HRDs has entered the region’s top five violations for the first time, with cases recorded in at least 12 countries, including [Argentina](#), [Dominica](#), [Ecuador](#), [El Salvador](#), [Mexico](#) and [Paraguay](#). Authorities are increasingly abusing criminal law to label activists as criminals, enemies and terrorists, using public smears, vague charges and prolonged pretrial detention to silence them.

In countries with longstanding authoritarian governments, political tensions have been met with a sharp escalation in repression. Arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances are being used as systemic tools to crush dissent, with activists arrested without warrants, held incommunicado and convicted without proper legal defence. In Nicaragua, a July 2025 police sweep [led](#) to the arrest of an entire family who were accused of conspiracy and treason in apparent retaliation for their opposition to the government. Shortly after, opposition politician Mauricio Alonso Petri was taken, disappeared and later found dead after 38 days in state custody. The crackdown surged after the anniversary of the Sandinista Revolution, with at least 33 people detained, including whole families and children, with authorities refusing to reveal their whereabouts or wellbeing.

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In Venezuela, authorities are using incommunicado detention and vague national security charges to target prominent HRDs, including well-known activists from leading Venezuelan CSOs. On 7 January 2025, authorities arbitrarily [detained](#) Carlos Correa, director of the freedom of expression organisation Espacio Público. His whereabouts remained unknown for eight days, despite repeated requests for information from his family and legal representatives. Two days later, officials took him before an antiterrorism court without access to trusted legal counsel or the ability to communicate externally. Yet authorities continued to deny knowledge of his location, even as it rejected a habeas corpus petition filed on his behalf. Correa was released on 16 January 2025.



Venezuela: Demonstrators hold a banner demanding the release of political prisoners at a protest in Caracas ahead of the presidential inauguration (Photo by Juan Barreto/AFP)

In May 2025, Eduardo Torres, a lawyer with the Venezuela Program Education-Action on Human Rights (PROVEA), was forcibly [disappeared](#) for 96 hours. His detention was only acknowledged following public pressure from civil society and a statement by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk. The Attorney General linked him, without formal charges, to alleged conspiracy, criminal association, terrorism and treason in relation to parliamentary and regional elections. Between January and August 2025, at least 44 arbitrary detentions were [documented](#) by the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, evidence of a wider pattern of repression and the systematic criminalisation of independent civil society in the [aftermath](#) of the 2024 election crisis.

Authorities continue to target democracy activists in Cuba. Independent writer and journalist José Gabriel Barrenechea was arbitrarily [detained](#) in November 2024 on public disorder charges linked to protests. His detention has been marked by serious due process violations, denial of family contact and a dramatic deterioration in his health while in prison. De facto house arrests also remain a common tactic of suppressing dissent.

In the USA, Palestine solidarity activism has come under intense pressure. Following campus protests in 2024, authorities [escalated](#) their response, and from early 2025 began using immigration enforcement to silence dissent. Federal authorities have arbitrarily detained foreign-born students despite having no evidence of criminal activity, revoking visas and stripping away due-process protections using archaic and obscure clauses

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of the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act, which allows deportation on grounds of ‘potentially serious adverse foreign policy consequences’.



March to Free Mahmoud Khalil, to oppose deportations in Washington DC.
(Photo by Diane Krauthamer)

One emblematic case is that of Mahmoud Khalil’s arbitrary detention. ICE agents, without documentation, informed him his visa and residency had been revoked. He was transferred 1,600 kilometres away from his home to the Central Louisiana ICE Processing Centre, a facility long criticised for abusive conditions and inadequate medical care by human rights organisations, without any notice to his family or legal representatives. Similar actions targeted doctoral student Rûmeysa Öztürk and postdoctoral fellow Badar Khan Suri in March 2025, and

undergraduate Mohsen Mahdawi in April 2025. These form part of a broader crackdown in which student activists are doxxed, interrogated, suspended and subjected to surveillance simply for speaking out.

In Guatemala, HRDs continue to face relentless persecution as the Prosecutor’s Office and allied judges deepen practices that criminalise civil society, particularly Indigenous movements, the backbone of resistance to corruption and impunity. In April 2025, authorities arbitrarily [detained](#) Héctor Chaclán and Luis Pacheco, former Indigenous authorities of the 48 Cantons of Totonicapán, on obstruction of justice and terrorism charges for their role in peaceful October 2023 mobilisations defending the general election victory of President Bernardo Arévalo. Despite early efforts by the Arévalo administration to open dialogue with civil society, progress remains limited. Meanwhile, emblematic cases, such as the continuing criminalisation of former anti-corruption prosecutor Virginia Laparra and the three-year arbitrary detention of journalist José Rubén Zamora, show that politically motivated prosecutions persist.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS KILLED

In 2025, the Americas remained the world’s deadliest region for HRDs, with killings documented in at least nine countries, including [Brazil](#), [Colombia](#), [Guatemala](#), [Honduras](#), [Mexico](#) and [Peru](#), which are among the most dangerous. Many of those murdered were environmental and land defenders resisting extractive industry projects. Others were killed for promoting democratic freedoms, LGBTQI+ rights and social justice.

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Colombia is at the epicentre of this crisis, as Global Witness has repeatedly [warned](#). The Institute for Development and Peace Studies recorded close to 200 killings between January and October 2025, most carried out with total impunity. The killings are concentrated in regions already experiencing acute violence, including Antioquia, Cauca, Nariño, Norte de Santander and Valle del Cauca, where Afro-Colombian, campesino and Indigenous communities bear the brunt of armed conflict.

For example, in June 2025, Indigenous Awá defender Aurelio Araujo Hernández, coordinator of the Awá Indigenous people's traditional authority in Ricaurte Camawari, was assassinated alongside his two protection officers. The attack followed months of threats, the burning of his home and growing pressure from armed groups attempting to infiltrate Awá governance structures. Four Awá leaders had been killed by mid-2025, despite longstanding precautionary measures.



Colombia:
Awá defender
Aurelio Araujo
Hernández
(Photo by:
Social media)

In Honduras, environmental defender Juan Bautista Silva and his son, Juan Antonio, were [murdered](#) after gathering evidence of illegal logging with the aim of supporting a complaint to prosecutors. Their bodies were found at the bottom of a cliff, showing signs of extreme violence. Shortly before he and his son disappeared, Silva received a call from an unknown number, allegedly impersonating an official. Silva had spent decades defending community forests and had survived a 2020 attack, yet his repeated complaints were ignored.

Year after year, the recurrence of this shameful trend reveals an urgent regional need for far stronger protections for HRDs. The Escazú Agreement remains under-enforced as more needs to be done to translate its commitments into practical national action plans.

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Civic space conditions are rapidly deteriorating in [Ecuador](#). President Noboa is advancing sweeping laws that threaten CSOs. Security forces used excessive and lethal force against Indigenous-led peaceful protests in September and October 2025. The crackdown resulted in the killing of two Indigenous leaders, hundreds of injuries and over 200 detentions, amid reports of enforced disappearances. The government's recurrent imposition of states of emergency has further restricted freedoms of association, movement and peaceful assembly, disproportionately affecting Afro-Ecuadorian and Indigenous communities. Attacks on journalists have escalated, including killings, threats and forced exile, extending the pattern that saw Ecuador placed on the CIVICUS Monitor Watchlist in 2023.

[Peru](#) is another country of concern as civic space declines amid renewed political turmoil following the removal of President Dina Boluarte and appointment of interim president José Jeri in October 2025. Security forces have met youth-led protests with lethal force, and in late October, a state of emergency was declared in Callao and Lima, leaving key constitutional guarantees suspended and heightening the risk of arbitrary detentions and abuses by security forces. Congress has advanced legislation that falls far short of international human rights standards, including amendments to the Peruvian Agency for International Cooperation law that expand the agency's oversight powers and classify any unapproved activity or use of funds as a serious

infraction, and a new law approved in August 2025 that grants broad amnesties for security forces implicated in serious human rights violations. Combined with ongoing violence against HRDs and journalists, these developments are driving a heavily constrained civic space. In 2024, Peru's civic space rating was downgraded from obstructed to repressed, reflecting years of cumulative and systematic erosion of civic freedoms.



Ecuador: A protestor in front of riot police officers during national strike, called by Ecuador's largest indigenous organisation (Photo by Rodrigo Buendia/AFP)

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ASIA PACIFIC

● OPEN ● NARROWED ● OBSTRUCTED ● REPRESSED ● CLOSED

RATINGS OVERVIEW

The main civic space violation in the Asia Pacific region is the detention of HRDs, with an array of restrictive laws and trumped-up charges being used to arrest and prosecute them. Another widespread trend is the detention of protesters for mobilising or participating in protests against corruption and human rights violations and to call for. Governments are also using censorship to block criticism of those in power and deny citizens access to information.

In Asia, seven countries and territories remain rated as closed: Afghanistan, China, Hong Kong, Laos, Myanmar, North Korea and Vietnam. Nine countries are rated as repressed: Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, India, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

Six countries are in the obstructed category: Bhutan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia and Nepal. South Korea and Timor-Leste retain their narrowed civic space rating while Japan and Taiwan are the only two countries rated as open in Asia.

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

There have been no civic space rating changes over the past year in the region.



Bangladesh: Police use a water cannon to disperse protesters in Dhaka demanding a review of teacher recruitment exam results (Photo by Munir Uz Zaman/AFP)

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TOP 5 VIOLATIONS FOR ASIA PACIFIC



CIVIC SPACE RESTRICTIONS

ARRESTS OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Authorities detained HRDs in at least 15 Asian and Pacific countries. Many were criminalised under anti-terrorism, criminal defamation, national security and public order laws. In some cases, there were reports of deaths, ill-treatment and torture in custody. There are also increasing concerns about transnational repression leading to the detention of HRDs.

The detention of HRDs remains widespread in China, with scores detained and prosecuted in secret trials under broad and vague provisions such as ‘picking quarrels and stirring up trouble’ and ‘subversion of state power’, including citizen journalist Zhang Zhan, filmmaker Chen Pinlin and human rights lawyer Xie Yang. Some were subjected to torture or ill-treatment. In Hong Kong, dozens of pro-democracy activists have been criminalised under the draconian 2020 National Security Law and the 2024 Safeguarding National Security Ordinance, including human rights lawyer Chow Hang-Tung and media owner Jimmy Lai. The authorities have also continued to carry out transnational repression by issuing warrants, offering bounties, cancelling passports and prosecuting family members of Hong Kong activists in exile. Meanwhile in Laos, lawyer Lu Siwei was convicted for ‘illegally crossing the border’ in May 2025 after being detained.

HRDs have been criminalised in numerous Southeast Asian countries. They have been systematically detained in Vietnam and prosecuted on trumped-up charges of ‘abusing democratic freedoms’ and ‘spreading propaganda against the state’ for their peaceful expression, including journalist Truong Huy San, land rights defender Trinh Ba Phuong and lawyer Tran Dinh Trien. In Cambodia, incitement charges have been the weapon of choice to criminalise activists, including environmental HRD Ouk Mao and labour and political activist Rong Chhun, while five environmental activists from the Mother Nature movement remain



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behind bars. The Cambodian government has also engaged in transnational repression by pursuing HRDs across borders in [Malaysia](#) and [Thailand](#). Thai authorities have used article 112 of the Criminal Code that criminalises criticism of the monarchy, known as the lèse-majesté law, to detain and convict scores of HRDs for speaking out. Courts routinely deny bail to people charged with the offence. Among those criminalised is human rights lawyer Arnon Nampa, who has now had 10 convictions and has been [sentenced](#) to a total of 29 years in jail for his activism. He faces four more trials.



Cambodia:
Environmental activist
Thun Ratha is escorted
by police officials
outside the Supreme
Court in Phnom Penh
on April 30, 2025
(Photo Credit: TANG
CHHIN Sothy/AFP)

The military junta in Myanmar has detained HRDs in various prisons across the country on fabricated charges since its 2021 coup. In May 2025, journalist Than Htike Myint was [sentenced](#) to five years in prison on terrorism charges. Many HRDs are held in solitary confinement and have [faced](#) systematic torture and ill-treatment, with some dying in detention due to a lack of medical care. In July 2025, student activist Ma Wut Yee Aung [died](#) in the notorious Insein Prison from injuries reportedly sustained during torture while under interrogation by the junta.

In the Philippines, HRDs including Indigenous activists have been [detained](#) on trumped-up charges of murder and terrorism financing while Salome (Sally) Crisostomo Ujano, a WHRD [accused](#) of rebellion, is serving a minimum 10-year sentence. Eight detained activists, including Delpedro Marhaen, are [facing](#) six-to-12 years' imprisonment in Indonesia for simply expressing their opinions and posting on social media in support of the August 2025 Gen Z-led protests triggered by the government announcement of a housing allowance for lawmakers. The activists are accused of inciting violence.

HRDs in South Asia have also been detained and criminalised. In Pakistan, there has been a systematic and a relentless [crackdown](#) on activists from the Baloch ethnic group who are demanding accountability, justice and an end to enforced disappearances. The Counter Terrorism Department has detained scores of people, including Mahrang Baloch, central leader of the Baloch Yakjehti Committee, a human rights group. Authorities have also [detained](#) journalists.

In India, six HRDs accused of involvement in communal violence in Bhima Koregaon in 2018 [remain detained](#) under the draconian Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, an anti-terrorism law. Kashmiri HRD Khurram Parvez, arrested in 2021 under the same law, is in [detention](#) in a maximum-security prison in Delhi in reprisal for his human rights work.

In Afghanistan, the Taliban have continued to detain and persecute HRDs, including academics and cultural and education

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activists. In February 2025, Taliban officials [arbitrarily arrested](#) education activist Wazir Khan at his home in Kabul. They tied his hands, blindfolded him and took him to the General Directorate of Intelligence. There has also been a relentless crackdown on journalists, with dozens detained and ill-treated. Taliban intelligence agents [arrested](#) Sulaiman Rahil, director of Radio Khushal, in Ghazni province in May 2025 after he reported on impoverished women, sentencing him to three months in jail.

PROTESTERS DETAINED

Across Asia Pacific, people mobilised to call for democratic reforms and human rights, demand better public services and an end to corruption, urge climate and environmental justice and show solidarity with Palestine. In response, states deployed their security forces to arrest and detain protesters in at least 18 countries.

In Southeast Asia, Indonesian authorities severely cracked down on protests. In March 2025, police [used](#) arrests and excessive force against tens of thousands of activists, members of labour groups and students who took part in a nationwide protest against the controversial military law revisions. According to the Advocacy Team for Democracy, the military and police were identified as the primary perpetrators of violence. A total of 161 people were arbitrarily detained during the protests. A further brutal crackdown was [unleashed](#) against the August 2025 mass protests. According to human rights groups, over 3,000 protesters were detained, including children. Some were denied access to adequate legal assistance and coerced and intimidated into signing official statements.

In the Philippines, tens of thousands took to the streets in September 2025 to protest against government corruption after it was alleged taxpayers had lost billions of dollars in bogus flood relief projects. Human rights groups [reported](#) that police used excessive force, arbitrarily arrested and detained over 200 people, including 91 children, and denied those arrested access to lawyers and their families. Police filed a range of charges against the detainees under the dictatorship-era Public Assembly Act 1985, long criticised for curtailing the right to protest.



Philippines: Police officer arrests protester during anti-corruption demonstrations in Manila (Photo by Ezra Acayan/Getty Images)



Three student activists were [detained](#) in Malaysia in June 2025 and investigated under the Sedition Act for a protest in Sabah state, aimed at pressuring the prime minister to act against corrupt politicians. In September 2025, police [detained](#) a group of around seven Palestine solidarity protesters who had gathered near the US embassy in Kuala Lumpur.

In Timor-Leste in September 2025, at least twelve 12 students were [arrested and detained](#) for hours after police fired teargas at people protesting against a plan to buy new cars for lawmakers.

Authorities also detained protesters across South Asia. In Pakistan, there are [ongoing restrictions](#) on protests by Baloch activists. In January 2025, Karachi police obstructed and arrested activists ahead of a peaceful demonstration in Sindh province. In March 2025, prominent members of Baloch Yakjehti Committee were arrested during a peaceful protest in Quetta. That same month, at least six activists were detained following a protest in Karachi for disregarding a blanket ban on assemblies. In February 2025, Pakistan police [arrested](#) multiple opposition members ahead of a planned protest by jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party to mark the first anniversary of national elections PTI supporters say were rigged to benefit establishment parties. In July 2025, an anti-terrorism court [sentenced](#) eight PTI members to 10 years in jail for inciting protests outside military sites in 2023.

In India, at least nine student protesters [remain](#) in custody, including Gulfisha Fatima and Umar Khalid, for participating in 2020 protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, which

discriminates against Muslims. They have been held in custody for around five years on terror charges and their trial has yet to start. In Sri Lanka in March 2025, police [arrested](#) 27 student activists in Colombo for protesting against the recruitment process for civil service jobs, while some protesters detained during the 2022 mass Aragalaya protests that forced a change of government [remain](#) in custody. In the Maldives, there have been continued reports of opposition protesters and youth activists [facing](#) arrest and excessive force.

In China, solo protester Peng Lifa was [sentenced](#) to nine years jail in July 2025 for peacefully expressing his dissent about the government's COVID-19 lockdown and the anti-democratic rule of President Xi Jinping in October 2022. He was forcibly disappeared for more than two years after being detained. Police [arrested](#) at least 12 people in Hong Kong to block any form of protest or vigil on the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square Massacre in June 2025.

A University of Bristol study [showed](#) that Australian police are world leaders at arresting climate and environmental protesters. According to the study, over 20 per cent of all climate and environment protests involved arrests, more than three times the global average. In June 2025, five people were [arrested](#) during a Palestine solidarity protest in Sydney against an Australian company supplying arms to Israel. Ill-treatment by the police was also reported.

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CENSORSHIP OF CRITICAL VOICES

Another key civic space concern in the region is the use of censorship by governments, documented in at least 14 countries. Over the year the authorities used their powers to restrict access to information critical of the state by blocking news portals and social media platforms, imposing internet shutdowns and banning publications.

[China](#) employs one of the most sophisticated censorship regimes in the world, which it uses to block access to blogs, social media platforms and websites critical of the Chinese Communist Party. North Korea's totalitarian 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.

In Southeast Asia, Singapore has rampant censorship. The Protection against Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act 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 if deemed to be in the public interest. The government used the law in January 2025 to [block access](#) to the Australia-based academic website East Asia Forum following an article it published on Singapore. In April 2025, the government ordered Facebook owner Meta to [block](#) Singaporeans' access to posts made by foreigners ahead of the national election. In June 2025, a [theatre production](#) was cancelled for highlighting issues 'contrary to national interest'.

In Malaysia, the government has continued to use the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984 to [ban](#) books to 'prevent the spread of beliefs, ideologies or movements that could compromise security, public order and social harmony'. They include books with LGBTQI+ characters and themes and books considered religiously deviant.

In Vietnam, authorities [banned](#) a May 2025 print edition of The Economist, which featured the country's top leader on its cover, while in the Philippines, a documentary depicting the harassment of Filipino fishers in the West Philippine Sea was [pulled](#) two days before its scheduled premiere, raising concerns that political pressure may have played a role.



In Vietnam, authorities banned a May 2025 print edition of The Economist

In January 2025, a punk rock band in Indonesia, Sukatani, had to issue a public apology and [withdraw](#) their song about police corruption from online platforms. Many believe the police had

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put pressure on them to do so. The Indonesian authorities also sought to [restrict](#) coverage of the August 2025 protests, with the broadcasting commission issuing a circular to media not to broadcast anything that could tarnish the government's image. Authorities further [disrupted](#) internet access, including the suspension of TikTok's livestream feature, which had become a vital tool for documenting protests in real time.

In April 2025, a Thailand court of appeal upheld a lower court order from 2022 to [block and remove](#) 52 URLs under Section 20 of the Computer Crime Act, including the website [www.no112.org](#), which was used to collect signatures for a petition to repeal the lèse-majesté law. It found that the content, which advocates for the repeal of Criminal Code article 112, violated morality and public order by undermining the monarchy.

Censorship was also documented in South Asia. In July 2025, a judicial magistrate in Pakistan, acting on a request from the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency, [ordered](#) YouTube to block 27 channels, including those of reporters Matiullah Jan and Asad Toor and the PTI's official channel, along with those of several other political commentators. In May 2025, YouTube told exiled investigative journalist Ahmad Noorani it had [blocked](#) his channel, which has 173,000 followers, in Pakistan based on a legal complaint from the government. Internet shutdowns have been [imposed](#) around opposition rallies.

In India in April 2025, following a militant attack in Kashmir, authorities [blocked](#) social media accounts and YouTube channels. The government also ordered the blocking of the 4PM News

Network YouTube channel, citing national security and public order concerns, following its coverage of the anti-war movement. In May 2025, authorities ordered the blocking of over 8,000 social media accounts on X/Twitter, including those of the Kashmir-based news outlets Free Press Kashmir, The Kashmiriyat and Maktoob Media, which focuses on human rights and minorities.

In July 2025 came reports that the Indian government had ordered X/Twitter to block 2,000-plus accounts, including two Reuters News accounts, while in August 2025, authorities [banned](#) 25 academic and journalistic books on Kashmir. These books addressed abuses in Kashmir and the region's political journey over the decades.



Nepal: Opponents to the measures say the government is trying to impose censorship and curtail citizens' rights online. Photo by Subaas Shrestha/NurPhoto/picture alliance

In Nepal in July 2025, the Nepal Telecommunications Authority [instructed](#) service providers to block Telegram, claiming the move was aimed at combating online fraud and money laundering. The government's sweeping ban on 26 social media platforms, [imposed](#) in September 2025, was the spark

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for mass Gen Z-led protests that brought a brutal response from the state that left 76 people dead before forcing the prime minister's resignation.

Taliban authorities in Afghanistan [enforce](#) stringent control over media content, effectively limiting the dissemination of information to state-approved narratives. Media outlets have been suspended or closed and women journalists arrested or fired.

In the Pacific, online defamation laws create a chilling effect and have been used to criminalise [critics](#) and [HRDs](#) who speak out. Journalists also face challenges in their reporting, including [restrictions](#) against accessing information and [online abuse and threats](#). In Papua New Guinea, journalist Culligan Tanda was [sacked](#) for featuring an opposition parliamentarian on his show while in Samoa, Lagi Keresoma was [charged](#) with criminal defamation in May 2025 after reporting on a police officer. In Vanuatu, the government [monitors](#) news outlets to ensure content does not contradict its messaging while Nauru [imposes](#) a high fee for international media personnel intending to visit the country. Environmental activists [remain](#) at risk of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs), legal actions intended to tie civil society up in lengthy and expensive legal processes.



Radio Begum, a women's radio station that was raided and suspended by the Taliban in February 2025 (Photo Credit: @Twitter/GTBundy)

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An ongoing regression of civic space is underway in [Indonesia](#). Over a year into the administration of President Prabowo Subianto, serious concerns have been raised about efforts by the authorities to restrict civic space and silence dissent. Scores of HRDs have faced arrest, criminalisation, intimidation, physical attacks and surveillance. There are also concerns about the government's brutal crackdown on protests with impunity, particularly in March and August 2025. The media has faced threats and attacks, including while covering protests, and the government has continued to repress activism in the Papua region, where there are longstanding grievances against systematic abuses by the security forces and exploitation of resources.



Indonesia: Labour union and civil society members march with flags and signs during a protest against police repression in Jakarta (Photo by Aditya Irawan/AFP)

Another country of concern is [Pakistan](#), where the criminalisation of HRDs and journalists, an ongoing crackdown on human rights movements and protests and digital restrictions continue to escalate. There has been a systematic crackdown on Baloch activists since March 2025, with many detained and facing baseless charges. The government has also banned the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement, a movement that has mobilised nationwide to advocate for the rights of the Pashtun ethnic minority. Journalists remain at risk, with many facing charges under the draconian Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act for their reporting. Authorities have blocked social media apps and YouTube channels of journalists and the opposition and there has been a crackdown on protests by the PTI, with many prosecuted.

Pakistan:
Baloch activists
detained in
Quetta, October
2025 (Photo
Credit: X/@
BalochYakjehtiC)





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● OPEN ● NARROWED ● OBSTRUCTED ● REPRESSED ● CLOSED

DOWNGRADES



France	→
Georgia	→
Germany	→
Italy	→
Serbia	→
Switzerland	→

RATINGS OVERVIEW

The year saw continued backsliding on civic and democratic freedoms in Europe and Central Asia, with growing restrictions on CSOs and protests fuelling an urgent civic space crisis. Of the region's 54 countries, civic space is now rated as closed in six, repressed in five, obstructed in eight, narrowed in 17 and open in 18.

The CIVICUS Monitor has tracked a steady decline: in 2019, 58.3 per cent of Europe and Central Asia's population lived in countries rated as open or narrowed. By 2025, that figure has collapsed to just 26.5 per cent, meaning far fewer people can exercise fundamental freedoms without significant barriers. This shift is largely due to intensifying crackdowns on HRDs and protests in some of Europe's largest democracies.

This year, three EU countries — France, Germany and Italy — have had their ratings downgraded from narrowed to obstructed, indicating serious civic space constraints.

In [France](#), strong waves of mobilisation in recent years have faced increasing restrictions. Repeated governmental deadlock has led to four prime ministers stepping down since President Emmanuel Macron called a snap parliamentary election in 2024. Against the backdrop of this deepening political crisis, power holders have adopted an increasingly hostile attitude towards civil society.

In particular, authorities have repeatedly used the Separatism Law, which requires associations to comply with 'Republican values' and refrain from disrupting public order, to [disband](#)

associations and restrict their access to funding. In June 2025, the Council of Ministers [initiated](#) dissolution proceedings against the antifascist movement La Jeune Garde and the Palestine solidarity group Urgence Palestine. In September, leaders of the Belgium-based CSO Collective Against Islamophobia in Europe, along with members of a French partner organisation, were [arrested](#), questioned and placed under judicial supervision with restrictions on their activities, reflecting a broader pattern of state harassment against Muslim organisations under the Separatism Law.



France: Protesters march in Bordeaux during nationwide strikes over the national budget (Photo by Christophe Archambault/AFP)

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Authorities have met public mobilisations, including environmental protests, protests in solidarity with Palestine and mass, social-media driven actions against proposed economic austerity measures with bans, militarised police and hundreds of [detentions](#).



Germany: Police detain demonstrators during protest against Israel's policies in Berlin (Photo by Michael Ukas/picture alliance)

[Germany's](#) intense state crackdown on solidarity with Palestine has led to a rapid deterioration of civic space. In February 2025, Berlin police [reported](#) almost 9,000 criminal charges linked to Palestine solidarity protests in the city since 7 October 2023. Participants, journalists and parliamentary observers at such protests are constantly subjected to police brutality, including choking, kettling, pepper spraying and punching. Any perceived breach of overly broad protest

restrictions leads to forceful police intervention. In January 2025, police violently [arrested](#) five protesters at a silent vigil for Palestine, including one woman dragged away for carrying a heart-shaped hand warmer misidentified as a Hamas symbol. Police [shut down](#) another protest with excessive force the following month due to a ban on Arabic-language chants.

Political and social pressures have gone hand in hand with police enforcement to shut the space for free expression. After an event featuring Francesca Albanese was relocated following threats, 100 riot officers [stormed](#) the venue it was moved to. Police also maintained a presence at the Free University of Berlin where the event was being unofficially livestreamed.

As protests erupted against the Christian Democratic Party's (CDU/CSU) collaboration with the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party to pass a restrictive anti-immigrant agenda, and the AfD's rise in popularity ahead of the February 2025 general election, some of them were also met with [excessive force](#). Following the election, in which the CDU/CSU came out on top, chancellor-elect Friedrich Merz and his party [launched](#) a sweeping parliamentary inquiry into public funding for CSOs accused of lacking political neutrality, including those behind the protests against the far right.

[Italy](#) was added to the CIVICUS Monitor [Watchlist](#) in March 2025 as the government prepared to push through the controversial 'anti-Gandhi bill', described by rights watchdogs as the most serious attack on the right to protest in decades. Adopted in June 2025, the sweeping legal package significantly [expanded](#)

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police powers and introduced dozens of new criminal offences and harsher penalties under the pretext of public security, criminalising non-violent civil disobedience with severe prison sentences. In parallel, reports surfaced that critics of the government had been [targeted](#) with Graphite.

Italy: Pro-Palestinian demonstrators gather near the Colosseum in Rome to protest interception of Global Sumud Flotilla (Photo by Tiziana Fabi/AFP)



[Switzerland](#) has been downgraded from open to narrowed amid increasing restrictions on civil society activists, journalists and protests. Police [met](#) protests against police brutality and racism and in solidarity with Palestine with excessive force, including rubber bullets and teargas. Concerns have also been raised about surveillance of climate activists and social movements. In April 2024, during criminal proceedings to identify activists who had painted an illegal bike lane in Geneva, reports revealed that police had [profiled](#) over 100 XR members. Investigators traced activists' incomes, family ties, donations and holidays, despite the group's non-violent actions causing only minor property damage. Switzerland's strict banking secrecy laws also limit press freedom. Police

[raided](#) journalist Lukas Hässig's home and office and seized his devices due to his reporting on the former CEO of Raiffeisen Bank and his adviser. The laws impose penalties of up to five years in prison for disclosing banking information, even when publication is clearly in the public interest.

Two countries in the region, Georgia and Serbia, saw their ratings drop from obstructed to repressed as authorities sought to suppress persistent protests with increasing severity.

In [Georgia](#), the deterioration of civic space has progressed at whirlwind speed. After being [downgraded](#) from narrowed to obstructed in 2024, the country has now fallen further to a repressed rating. Nightly mobilisations have [continued](#) for over a year, sparked by the government's decision to suspend EU accession negotiations until 2028 following a disputed parliamentary election.

Georgia: Protester waves Georgian and European Union flags in front of riot police during opposition rally in Tbilisi (Photo by Giorgi Arjevanidze/AFP)



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Successive amendments to protest laws have [imposed](#) increasingly harsh restrictions. Offences such as blocking roads and wearing face coverings result in administrative detention, with repeat violations triggering criminal charges and imprisonment. At the same time, the government has intensified its targeting of critics under the guise of countering foreign interference. After adopting a foreign agents law in 2024, authorities [introduced](#) a further such law in 2025, a direct translation of the US Foreign Agents Registration Act, which extends to individuals and imposes criminal liability for non-compliance. The new law was adopted alongside other legislation aimed against government critics, including restrictions on foreign funding for media and new requirements for CSOs to secure government approval before accepting foreign grants.

The government has also moved to dismantle the political opposition. By June 2025, authorities had [jailed](#) or detained eight leaders of pro-European parties for refusing to testify before a parliamentary commission investigating alleged human rights abuses under the previous United National Movement (UNM) government. On 28 October 2025, the commission's findings were used to [petition](#) the Constitutional Court to outlaw the UNM and other opposition parties the government deemed its satellites. Weeks earlier, a restrictive bill was [proposed](#) to penalise people linked to banned parties and prevent them standing in elections or holding public office.

In [Serbia](#), fundamental freedoms are in crisis as protesters continue to call for snap elections despite increasing restrictions.

Student-led demonstrations have mobilised since November 2024, triggered by the deadly collapse of a railway station roof protesters attribute to corruption.



Serbia: Demonstrator holds red hand symbol of corruption during protest over railway accident in Novi Sad (Photo by Marko Djurica/Reuters)

Protesters and supporters face violence from police and groups linked to the ruling party, alongside mass detentions, intimidation and surveillance. In a stark display of impunity, President Aleksandar Vučić [pardoned](#) people accused of severe violence against protesters, including four men linked to his party who brutally assaulted a female student and a woman charged with attempted murder for driving her car into a crowd of protesters. Watchdog groups report that over 1,000 people

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have been [detained](#) since the protests began. While most were released quickly, others remain under house arrest or are subject to restricted-freedom measures. Six civic and opposition activists are being [prosecuted](#) for an alleged plot to violently overthrow the constitutional order based on a wiretapped conversation, with the trial beginning in late November 2025; six others remain in exile to be tried in absentia.

Outspoken protest supporters also face reprisals, including dismissal, intimidation by security services and smears. These measures have spread across the education sector, where administrators and professors backed student strikes

and refused to call police to disperse striking students. By September, civil society groups reported that over 100 school employees had been [dismissed](#) in retaliation for backing the protest movement.

In March 2025, government-organised [counter-protesters](#) set up encampments around key institutions in the capital. Investigative journalists have identified numerous individuals with links to organised crime among them. These camps, backed by municipal authorities and protected by police, have become flashpoints for violence, with frequent clashes between residents and anti-government protesters.

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TOP 5 VIOLATIONS FOR EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA



CIVIC SPACE RESTRICTIONS

The most common violations of civic freedoms documented in Europe and Central Asia in 2025 were the detention of protesters, along with the disruption of protests and the use of excessive force, followed by attacks on journalists and the public vilification of civil society and dissenting voices.

PROTEST RIGHTS CRUMBLING IN EUROPE: DETENTIONS, DISRUPTION AND EXCESSIVE FORCE

The detention of protesters continued to be the most common violation in Europe and Central Asia, documented in at least 30 countries. Europe accounts for a disproportionate number of protest rights violations globally, painting a troubling picture of human rights backsliding.

Climate activists engaging in non-violent civil disobedience continued to face detention and intimidation, exemplified by the police's forceful dispersion and detention of hundreds of XR activists in the Netherlands in January 2025. Detentions of environmental protesters were also recorded in Albania, Finland, Germany, Portugal and Serbia.

Netherlands: Police detain a protester during a banned Extinction Rebellion demonstration in Amsterdam (Photo by Mounieb Taim/Anadolu)



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Corruption and inequality also sparked mobilisations that faced security force repression. In Greece in February 2025, almost 430,000 people attended a rally in Athens marking the second anniversary of a train crash that killed 57 people, expressing anger at the government's failure to properly investigate the incident or take responsibility. After a small group reportedly instigated clashes, police deployed stun grenades, teargas and water cannon, [detaining](#) over 100 protesters. In France, Block Everything protests on 10 September 2025, organised to oppose budget cuts and the rejection of a proposed tax on households worth over €100 million, resulted in over 500 protesters being [arrested](#).

Greece:
REUTERS/
Florion
Goga



In Turkey in March 2025, the detention of Ekrem İmamoğlu sparked the largest protests in decades, with crowds reportedly reaching two million people. Authorities responded to largely peaceful protesters with rubber bullets, teargas and water cannon. Almost 2,000 people were [detained or arrested](#) and many were subjected to rushed mass trials, with hearings held

simultaneously for hundreds of defendants. Charges included disobeying police orders, incitement based on social media posts and participating in unauthorised demonstrations, carrying potential prison sentences of six months to five years.

Photo by:
Universal
History
Archive/
Universal
Images
Group
via Getty
Images



At times, even individual acts of protest were severely penalised. On 16 February 2025 in Russia, at least 42 people in 18 cities were [detained](#) when attempting to honour the memory of late opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who died as a political prisoner a year before. In Voronezh, a young couple were detained by plainclothes security agents after laying flowers at the memorial to a dissident poet and holding up a placard reading, 'Do not be afraid. This is our country and we have no other'. In Azerbaijan on International Women's Day, 8 March 2025, LGBTQI+ activist Rauf Heydarov was [detained](#) and sentenced to 30 days of administrative detention after displaying a poster featuring detained female journalists. He was reportedly denied medical care while in custody.

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Although protests have long been crushed inside Belarus, the authorities continue to pursue people who took part in mass demonstrations that followed the rigged 2020 presidential election. In July 2025, rights groups reported a new wave of [arrests](#) triggered by the expiry of the statute of limitations for the offence of ‘violating public order’. In June and July, two people were sentenced to a year and 18 months in prison respectively for their involvement in the 2020 protests.



Belarus: Recently released opposition figure Siarhei Tsikhanouski and wife Svetlana Tsikhanouskaya at meeting with dissidents in Warsaw (Photo by Jaap Arriens/NurPhoto)

Authorities in multiple countries also frequently resorted to extraordinary measures to disperse peaceful protests. Demonstrations were disrupted in at least 21 countries, with police using excessive force in 18.

In Denmark in February 2025, police intervened to [disperse](#) activists blocking the entrance to shipping giant Maersk’s Copenhagen headquarters in protest at the company’s alleged transportation of military equipment to Israel. Officers deployed batons, pepper spray, police dogs and teargas. Dozens of protesters reported injuries, including bruises and open wounds

from baton strikes and kicks, and sprains and pain caused by being forcibly restrained.

Denmark: Representative of Greenlandic families organization speaks during demonstration at US Embassy in Copenhagen (Photo by Ricardo Ramirez)



In Serbia, as authorities intensified their crackdown on student-led protests, police were accused of unlawfully [deploying](#) a sonic weapon at the largest demonstration to date on 15 March 2025, attended by around 300,000 people. During a silent vigil, the quiet was abruptly broken by a loud, disorienting noise, triggering panic and a stampede. Police initially denied possessing them but later admitted long-range acoustic devices had been deployed at the protest, while continuing to deny they activated them.

THREATS TO PRESS FREEDOM: JOURNALISTS UNDER ATTACK

Journalists were physically attacked in the context of their work in at least 18 countries. Almost a third of recorded attacks on journalists happened in relation to protest coverage. In Cyprus in October 2025, for example, police [assaulted](#) journalist Bisan Ibrahim while she reported on a peaceful protest in Nicosia

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against the interception of the Gaza-bound Global Sumud flotilla. Officers pushed her to the ground twice and pepper-sprayed her, despite her showing her press card. Police also used excessive force against journalists covering protests in [France](#), [Germany](#), [Serbia](#) and [Turkey](#).



Serbia: Protesters paint their hands red following the collapse of the canopy of a railway station in Novi Sad that killed 16 people (Photo by Filip Stevanovic/Anadolu)

Journalists also faced violence from protesters. In Romania, during a protest in Bucharest against the Constitutional Court's annulment of the 2024 presidential election, far-right protesters [vandalised](#) the car of the Antena3-CNN reporting team, attempting to deflate the tyres and ripping off its licence plates, and verbally and physically harassed several journalists.

Beyond protests, journalists have often been attacked to intimidate them or obstruct their work, including by bystanders, private security services and politicians. In October 2025,

a bomb [exploded](#) outside the home of Italian investigative journalist Sigfrido Ranucci, destroying his car and damaging nearby property.

As Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine enters its fourth year, Ukrainian and international journalists remain targets of Russian forces. In October 2025, a Russian drone [killed](#) Ukrainian journalists Olena Hramova and Yevhen Karmazin as they documented the aftermath of an attack in Kramatorsk.

PUBLIC VILIFICATION AS A TOOL OF REPRESSION

Efforts to publicly vilify and disparage CSOs, HRDs and the media were recorded in at least 19 European and Central Asian countries, often followed by other actions to further restrict civic space and suppress dissent.

Across Europe, authorities continued to target environmental protesters to delegitimise their work and justify heavy-handed policing. In January 2025, the Dutch parliament [adopted](#) its motion attacking XR. In France, officials continued [promoting](#) a narrative depicting climate activists as violent 'ecoterrorists'. Reports in July 2025 indicated that security forces had infiltrated a movement opposing highway construction and incited violence, setting the stage for a militarised police response.

Far-right actors, including elected officials and influential public figures, also weaponised social media to smear HRDs. In Portugal, a member of parliament from Chega, the largest opposition party, published the names of migrant pupils in a video, accusing them of taking public school places from

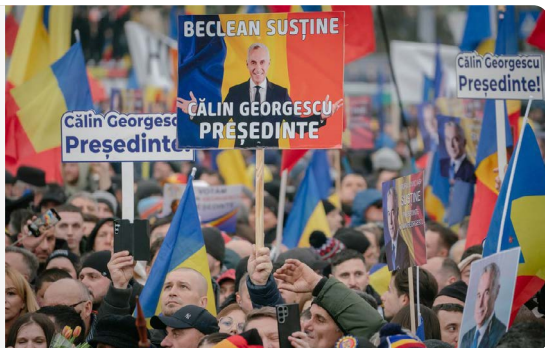
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Portuguese children and [labelling](#) activists supporting them as extremists. In Slovenia, a prominent reproductive rights advocate faced an online [smear campaign](#) accusing her of trafficking the organs of unborn babies, which was amplified by former Prime Minister Janez Janša. These attacks were particularly dangerous during periods of heightened political instability. As Romania descended into crisis after the annulment of its 2024 presidential election, tech billionaire Elon Musk [amplified](#) far-right narratives by misrepresenting a meeting between civil society, EU and Romanian authorities and social media platforms on preventing disinformation. Sharing a post by a right-wing Romanian influencer on X/Twitter, Musk accused CSOs of ‘trying to destroy democracy’.

Romania: Protesters take part in an anti-government rally in Bucharest (Photo by Andrei Pungovschi/Getty Images)



The Trump administration’s dismantling of USAID and overhaul of US foreign assistance provided an additional pretext for like-minded governments in Europe and Central Asia to threaten and intimidate civil society. In several countries, US officials’ rhetoric smearing USAID as a ‘criminal organisation’ was invoked to justify the launch of investigations on spurious

grounds. In Georgia, Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze echoed those talking points to [accuse](#) civil society and the opposition of attempting to stage a revolution at the behest of the previous US administration. Days later, prosecutors opened an investigation into alleged sabotage and ‘assistance to foreign-controlled organisations’.

In Hungary, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán [threatened](#) to criminalise acceptance of US funding, after which the government’s Sovereignty Protection Office launched an investigation into USAID’s activities. In Slovakia, Prime Minister Robert Fico publicly appealed to Musk to provide details on USAID grants to Slovak organisations. Despite public records showing otherwise, officials [accused](#) several critical CSOs and media of receiving USAID funding. This was followed by a request for information on all government subsidies awarded to CSOs. In Serbia, police [raided](#) five CSOs over allegations of ‘misusing American taxpayer funds’ based on statements from US government officials. During the raids, staff were detained for hours as police seized thousands of documents without a warrant.

This rhetoric also fuelled fresh attempts to introduce restrictive legislation. In Kazakhstan, officials including the president and members of parliament renewed attacks on CSOs, [accusing](#) them of using foreign funding to promote ‘alien values’. In February 2025, a politician from a pro-government party called for a foreign agents law, citing the Trump administration’s actions as justification to ‘rewrite the rules of the game’. The government initiated new CSO legislation, reinforcing fears new restrictions may follow.

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Slovakia:
Protesters rally in
Bratislava during
demonstration.
(Photo by
Radovan
Stoklasa/Reuters)

In February 2025, Milorad Dodik, President of Republika Srpska (RS), Bosnia and Herzegovina's Serb-majority entity, lashed out at the media following his conviction in a criminal case. Accusing media groups of taking funds from USAID to 'destroy Republika Srpska', he threatened they would be 'put on trial by the people'. Days later, the RS parliament [fast-tracked](#) a foreign agents law to automatically designate any organisation receiving international funding as an 'agent of foreign influence' and bar them from influencing public opinion or proposing legislation, effectively criminalising public interest advocacy from civil society groups. In May 2025, the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina struck down the law, arguing it violated international human rights standards and imposed undue restrictions on CSO activities.

THE SILENCING OF CRITICAL VOICES DEEPENS IN CENTRAL ASIA

In Central Asia, the main violations recorded in 2025 included the detention and prosecution of HRDs and journalists in retaliation for their work, new restrictive laws and persistent legal harassment.

Across Central Asia, critics continue to be prosecuted under vague criminal provisions such as alleged extremism, calling for mass unrest, defamation, disseminating false information and inciting hatred. Trials often take place behind closed doors without due process. Numerous civil society activists, HRDs and journalists remain in prison on politically motivated grounds, serving their sentences in harsh conditions, with more convicted in 2025. For example, in Tajikistan in February 2025, journalist Rukhshona Khakimova was [sentenced](#) to eight years in prison on treason charges reportedly linked to her research into China's influence in the country.



Tajikistan: Rukhshona
Hakimova, an independent
journalist who has worked
for a variety of media outlets
was sentenced to eight years
in prison on treason charges.
(Photo by: Social media)

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In addition to criminal prosecutions, states subject HRDs to other forms of harassment. In Turkmenistan in November 2024, journalist Soltan Achilova was forcibly [hospitalised](#), preventing her travelling to Geneva for a human rights award ceremony for the second time.

Repression increasingly extends beyond borders with states cooperating to stamp out dissent. In Uzbekistan in April 2025, Karakalpak activist Rinat Utambetov was [sentenced](#) to two years and six months in prison for ‘encroaching on the constitutional order’ and ‘disseminating materials threatening public security’ after being extradited from Kazakhstan in December 2024. He was accused of sharing video appeals by public figures related to mass protests in Uzbekistan’s Karakalpakstan region in 2022, which were brutally repressed. In April and May 2025, bloggers Umida Bekchanova, Abdulla Orusov and Alisher Sakhatov were [detained](#) in Turkey for allegedly threatening public security and faced deportation orders to Turkmenistan, despite a real risk of imprisonment and torture on return. Orusov and Sakhatov later disappeared while their deportation orders were under review, heightening concerns for their safety.

Independent media remain under intense pressure. Kyrgyzstan’s media climate has sharply [deteriorated](#). In July 2025, the independent channel Aprel TV was shut down for allegedly

discrediting the government through negative information, as was the case with the Kloop platform the year before. In September 2025, two Kloop contributors, Aleksander Aleksandrov and Joomart Duulatov, were sentenced to five years in prison on charges of publicly calling for riots despite the absence of any credible evidence of wrongdoing. A restrictive media law adopted in June 2025, along with other laws affecting freedom of expression, have heightened fears of further control. In Uzbekistan, a draft Information Code [threatens](#) to further restrict free expression, while prosecutions of critical bloggers and journalists continue.



Aprel TV presenter Valeriy Zhernakov reports on an application by Kyrgyz prosecutors to shutter the outlet during a April 23 broadcast. (Photo: YouTube/Telekanal Aprel)

CSOs also face mounting restrictions. Kyrgyzstan’s 2024 foreign representatives law has created a climate of fear, with public calls to introduce similar legislation in [Kazakhstan](#) and [Uzbekistan](#).

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As global solidarity with Palestinian people persisted amid Israel's ongoing genocide, Europe has continued to be a focal point for mobilisation and repression. In 2025, over 60 per cent of violations recorded by the CIVICUS Monitor against Palestine solidarity actions occurred in Europe. Civic space restrictions on solidarity with Palestine have been recorded in at least 17 European countries: [Austria](#), [Belgium](#), [Cyprus](#), [Denmark](#), [Finland](#), [France](#), [Germany](#), [Greece](#), [Hungary](#), [Ireland](#), the [Netherlands](#), [Norway](#), [Portugal](#), [Slovenia](#), [Sweden](#), [Switzerland](#) and the [UK](#).

Authorities across the region have used excessive force against protesters and sought to criminalise Palestine solidarity activism, often by misusing anti-extremism and counter-terrorism laws. In July 2025, the UK parliament [proscribed](#) Palestine Action under anti-terror legislation, making expressions of support, membership and publicly wearing items associated with the group offences punishable by up to 14 years in prison. The decision followed the group's civil disobedience action at an airforce base, where it spray-painted two aircraft red. As people mobilised against the proscription, police carried out unprecedented arrests, targeting hundreds of entirely peaceful protesters for holding signs reading 'I support Palestine Action'.

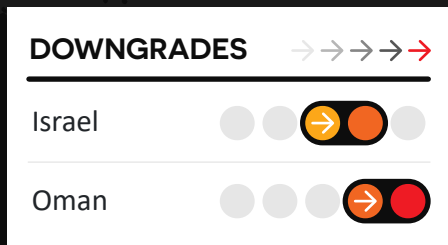
In June 2025, Germany's domestic intelligence agency [designated](#) the CSO Jewish Voice for a Just Peace in the Middle East (Jüdische Stimme) as extremist, along with another group, Palestine Speaks, and groups that are part of the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement in Berlin and Bonn. In 2024, a partly state-owned bank [froze](#) Jüdische Stimme's accounts and demanded detailed financial and personal information on all members, under threat of closure.

In Belgium, police [arrested](#) Palestinian activist Mohammed Khatib in April 2025 after he attended a daily protest, with officers citing a 'threat number' assigned by a state security agency. He was questioned without legal representation and released the next morning. His refugee status was later revoked after authorities labelled him a 'hate preacher'. In Slovenia, Palestinian-Slovenian citizen Jaber Elmasry reported sustained [harassment](#) by intelligence agents lasting over a year, including attempts to obtain information about Slovenia's Palestinian community and local solidarity activists.

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● OPEN ● NARROWED ● OBSTRUCTED ● REPRESSED ● CLOSED

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ONGOING CRISIS: ISRAEL’S GENOCIDE IN GAZA

The situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories remains dire. In December 2024, Amnesty International research [found](#) sufficient basis to conclude that Israel has committed and is continuing to commit genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. [According](#) to the Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights in Gaza, between July 2023 and November 2025, over 67,000 people were killed, including 19,000 children, more than 169,000 have been wounded and over two million people have been forcibly displaced. More than 300 journalists and media workers and over 1,600 health workers have been killed. Israeli Occupation forces (IOF) have [bombed](#) and destroyed civilian homes in residential neighbourhoods and civilian infrastructure, including electricity supply, hospitals, roads, schools and sewage and water networks, and have engineered systematic starvation, including by blocking access to humanitarian aid. In addition, the IOF has continued to enforce a policy of arbitrary arrests and detention, as well as enforced disappearance, ill-treatment and torture of Palestinians in Gaza.

RATINGS OVERVIEW

Civic space across much of MENA is severely constrained. Out of 19 countries, civic space is rated as closed in 10, repressed in seven and obstructed in two. No countries are rated as open or narrowed. Most countries retained their previous ratings, apart from Israel, which has been downgraded from obstructed to repressed, and Oman, downgraded from repressed to closed.

Between 2024 and 2025, the Israeli government [took](#) measures to restrict civil society, undermine democratic institutions and silence those who oppose the genocide in Gaza. In March 2025, its

parliament approved a proposal to alter the structure of the Judicial Selection Committee, the body responsible for appointing judges, in a move widely criticised for threatening judicial independence, the right to a fair trial and the separation of powers.

Several other legislative developments further eroded civic freedoms, including the passing of a law in October 2024 banning the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) from operating in Israel. Other proposed laws sought to criminalise cooperation with the ICC, heavily restrict foreign

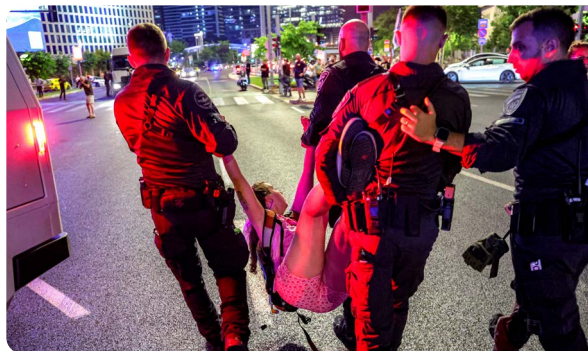


Netherlands: Photos of journalists killed in Gaza displayed to commemorate International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists in Utrecht (Photo by Fadel Dawod/Getty Images)

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funding to human rights organisations through heavy taxation and expand state surveillance powers through the proposed Computer Data Intrusion Law, which would allow police to secretly access and search private electronic devices. Additional proposals aimed to place the Public Broadcasting Corporation under direct political control, threatening media freedom. Palestinian citizens of Israel have faced growing repression, including arrests for social media activity and threats of citizenship revocation and deportation.



Israel: Policemen carry detained protestor during demonstration by families of Gaza hostages in Tel Aviv (Photo by Jack Guez/AFP)

In Oman, dissent remains tightly restricted, as critics continue to face harsh retaliation including [imprisonment](#) and politically motivated [job dismissals](#) for expressing views that challenge the authorities. A new broadly worded citizenship law [raises](#) concerns about the granting of absolute discretionary powers to authorities to revoke people's citizenship for acts that are deemed offensive to the sultan or sultanate without any avenue for judicial remedy, raising serious concerns about its impact on the rights to association and expression.

Prolonged and arbitrary detention remained a defining feature of political repression in MENA in 2025, as governments continued to persecute those perceived to be their political opponents. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) continued to put on trial innocent citizens who have mostly served their initial sentences, with the authorities evidently determined to keep them in prison indefinitely. In March 2025, the court [rejected](#) the appeals of 53 people convicted in what was known as the UAE84 case. The case, which involved a mass trial of 84 people that began in December 2023, includes over 60 activists who were already being [held](#) in prison past the end of their initial sentences on fabricated terrorism charges. Some have received life sentences, while the UAE's best-known HRD, Ahmed Mansoor, was sentenced to an additional 15 years in prison.



Activists continue to be detained in the UAE, some receiving life prison sentences.

Saudi Arabian authorities continue to [detain](#) prominent clerics, HRDs and religious scholars, despite some high-profile releases of HRDs and women's rights activists such as Issa Al-Nukhaifi, Mohammed Fahad Al-Qahtani and Salma Al-Shehab. Eight years since the mass arrest of many influential and prominent figures, shortly after Mohammed bin Salman became the country's

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Crown Prince and de facto ruler, many prominent activists, journalists and writers remain behind bars and subjected to constant legal delays and endless pending trials without dates being set. Amongst those still in detention are Hassan Farhan Al-Malki, prominent religious scholar Salman Al-Oudah, Awadh Al-Qarni and writer Essam Al-Zamel. Al-Malki, Al-Oudah and Al-Qarni have been kept in solitary confinement since their arrests. Imprisoned HRD Mohammed Al-Bajadi was sentenced to an additional 25 years in prison on 27 October 2025.

In addition, authorities continued to use detentions and prosecution as tools of censorship against activists, journalists and writers who voice dissent. In Morocco, journalist Hamid El Mahdaoui, director of the Badil website, was [sentenced](#) in November 2024 to 18 months in prison and fined around US\$150,000 following a complaint by the minister of justice over a video implicating him in an affair. In Yemen, a Houthi-affiliated armed group [abducted](#) poet and writer Oras Al-Eryani in September 2025 after he mocked the anniversary of the 2014 Houthi takeover of Sana'a. In Iraq, activist and journalist Omed Haji Fatah Baroshki was [sentenced](#) on 30 January 2025 to six months' imprisonment for a social media post calling for the release of other prisoners of conscience.

The weaponisation of citizenship through highly draconian laws is another troubling trend in MENA. As well as Oman's new citizenship law, in Kuwait, there are concerns that an escalating trend of [revoking](#) the citizenship of thousands of Kuwaiti citizens could be used to target political opponents. In May 2025, amidst its ongoing onslaught on Palestinians living in Israel, the Israeli

government [announced](#) it would begin deporting Palestinian citizens of Israel under its citizenship law, which authorises the revocation of citizenship or permanent residency under terrorism allegations.



USA: Supporters of Palestine gather at Harvard University rally in Cambridge (Photo by Joseph Prezioso/AFP)

Authorities also used deportation and forced returns as a tool of repression, as seen in Lebanon, where UK-based Omani HRD Nabhan Al-Hanshi was [barred](#) from entering the country in May 2025 after being placed on a blacklist. In Algeria in July 2025, Nassera Dutour, president of the Collective of Families of the Disappeared in Algeria, was detained at Algiers airport and forcibly [returned](#) to France. In Kuwait, authorities coordinated

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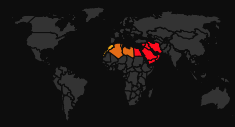
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with [Iraqi](#) and [Malaysian](#) counterparts to forcibly return bloggers Salman Al-Khalidi and Mesaed Al-Musaileem to serve sentences issued in absentia in retaliation to their peaceful activism. In Morocco, authorities [deported](#) journalists attempting to cover developments in the occupied Western Sahara.

Across MENA, the situation of migrants remained deeply precarious, marked by increasing state repression, rising hostility and shrinking protection for those defending their rights. In Tunisia, lawyer Sonia Dahmani was [sentenced](#) to over four years in prison in five separate cases for denouncing racism against

migrants from Africa South of the Sahara and was subjected to degrading treatment and denial of legal access. In Kuwait, a July 2024 rule [requiring](#) migrant workers to obtain employer permission to leave the country reinforces the kafala system – where migrant workers are tied to a specific employer – and heightens risks of abuse. In Libya, authorities in April 2025 [accused](#) CSOs that help migrants of conspiring to resettle Africans and shut down the headquarters of 10 organisations. In Algeria, migrants face [escalating](#) hate speech and racist rhetoric alongside mass deportations.

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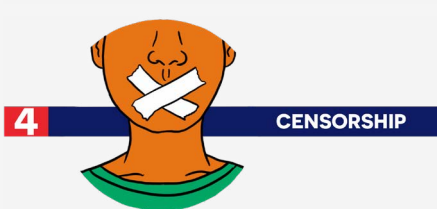
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TOP 5 VIOLATIONS FOR MENA



CIVIC SPACE RESTRICTIONS

The five most reported violations in MENA in 2025 were, in order, detention of HRDs, detention of journalists, judicial harassment, censorship and deportation of HRDs.

DETENTION OF HRDS

Across the region, governments and armed groups continued to target activists, aid workers and HRDs through arbitrary detention to silence them and obstruct humanitarian and human rights work. HRDs were detained in at least 10 out of 19 MENA countries.

In Saudi Arabia, Mohammed Al-Bajadi, who in 2009 co-founded the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association, was arrested on 24 May 2018 during a crackdown on WHRDs. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison with a suspension of five years. When his sentence expired in April 2023, he was kept in arbitrary [detention](#) for over two more years. He was eventually subjected to a retrial and on 27 October 2025, was sentenced to a further 25 years in prison.



Saudi Arabia:
Mohammed
Al-Bajadi
sentenced to
a further 25
years in prison.
(Photo by:
Social media)

In Bahrain in March 2025, HRD Ali Al Hajee was questioned about his human rights work, particularly his social media posts on X/Twitter. He was arrested and [detained](#) for seven days pending investigation on charges of misusing social media. Both his prolonged interrogation and detention occurred without his lawyer being present.

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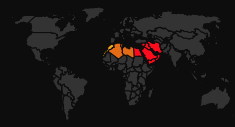
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In Morocco, arbitrary arrests and detentions against Western Saharan activists have continued in the Occupied Territories of Western Sahara. In January 2025, Hassan Zerouali, a member of the Administrative Committee of the Collective of Sahrawi Human Rights Defenders (CODESA), and Salah Dlimi, another member, were [arrested](#) and interrogated, as part of which they were subjected to physical and verbal abuse. They were released five hours later. In August 2025, police again harassed and detained Zerouali at a checkpoint.



Tunisia: Lawyer and former magistrate Ahmed Souab, sentenced to five years in prison and three years of administrative control (Photo by Lawyers for Lawyers)

In Tunisia in April 2025, the Judicial Anti-Terrorism Unit arrested and [detained](#) lawyer and retired judge Ahmed Souab after raiding his house. Souab is a member of the defence team in a case in which 40 people, including activists, lawyers, political opposition members and other public figures, are accused of conspiracy against internal and external state security and terrorism for allegedly plotting to overthrow the government of Tunisian President Kais Saied. Souab's arrest followed public statements in which he criticised trial conditions and denounced the executive's interference in judicial affairs.

In the UAE in January 2025, Sudanese democracy and human rights activist Mohammed Farouk Suleiman, who lives in the

country, was arrested and [detained](#) without charges as he was about to board a flight. Suleiman is known for his efforts to achieve a democratic civilian transition in Sudan.

Aid workers and HRDs who are at the frontlines providing critical services in conflict and warzones continue to face serious challenges to their work and serious threats to their lives. In Yemen, the de facto Houthi government arbitrarily [detained](#) seven UN staff working in areas under its control in January 2025, adding to dozens of staff from UN agencies and Yemeni and international CSOs who have been arbitrarily detained since May 2024. One of the detained UN humanitarian workers died in custody.

In the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Israeli forces have targeted healthcare workers, arbitrarily detaining them for delivering essential aid. In December 2024, the IOF [detained](#) Hussam Abu Safiya, director of the Kamal Adwan Hospital in northern Gaza, which was one of the area's last functioning hospitals before Israeli forces bombed, burned and evacuated it. Safiya was tortured and placed in solitary confinement, and authorities extended his detention for a further six months in March 2025. He is being held under the Unlawful Combatants Law, which enables prolonged detention without charges, stripping detainees of any meaningful judicial review or due process rights.

DETENTION OF JOURNALISTS

Detention of journalists was documented in at least seven countries and remains among MENA's top five civic space violations, as in 2024.



As with aid workers, journalists working in conflict settings continued to face severe challenges to their work. Israel maintained its onslaught on journalists and media in the context of its genocide in Gaza. In June 2025, French journalists Omar Faiad, a reporter for Al Jazeera, and Yanis Mhamdi, from the independent media outlet Blast, were [detained](#) in an Israeli detention centre after they refused to consent to their deportation when Israel intercepted a Freedom Flotilla Coalition ship heading towards Gaza to challenge Israel's unlawful blockade. Four activists, including Greta Thunberg, were deported to Europe.

Within the Occupied Palestinian Territories, journalists work within a severely restrictive environment. In January 2025, Palestinian reporter Amna Balalo and camera operator Sakher Taleb Zwatieh were [detained](#) and expelled while covering a military raid in Jenin. A few days later, freelance journalist Raghad Salameh was detained for interrogation while entering the Tulkarm refugee camp.

In Yemen, Houthi gunmen [arrested](#) journalist Majed Zaid in September 2025 and detained him at an unknown location. His arrest was linked to a commemoration of the 26 September anniversary of the declaration of the Republic in Yemen, a date the Houthi group opposes celebrating.



Yemen:
Journalist
Majed
Zaid
arrested
in Sanaa

Lebanese journalist Layal Ikhtiyar was briefly [detained](#) upon arriving in Beirut, Lebanon, in January 2025, over her interview with Israeli army spokesperson Avichay Adraee on al-Arabiya. She was released after being questioned by a judge.

In Algeria in December 2024, journalist Mustapha Bendjama was arrested and [detained](#) pending trial on accusations of belonging to a terrorist group, harming national unity and spreading false news. His arrest was related to his Facebook page where he reports on local political and social issues. He was released a few days later without charges after authorities questioned him about his Facebook posts. He was placed under judicial control and banned from leaving the country.

JUDICIAL HARASSMENT

Judicial harassment was documented in at least seven MENA countries. Across the region, a worrying trend noted again in 2025 was the systematic judicial persecution of HRDs who are in the criminal justice system, in efforts to keep them stuck in long and unfair cycles of criminal litigation. Tactics included fabricated charges, the bringing of new charges against imprisoned activists to prevent their release or bring them back to prison after release, undue delays and postponement of trials to keep people in prolonged detention, and unfair trials that fail to meet due process thresholds.

Iran, [flagged](#) in our previous [reports](#) for abusing the criminal and legal systems, continued to use its judicial systems to persecute HRDs. From keeping HRDs in prolonged detention and imprisonment through long cycles of litigation, authorities

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have now turned to the systematic use of death sentences and executions as a means of intimidation and repression. Death sentences have increasingly [targeted](#) people linked to labour activism and the Woman, Life, Freedom movement that [mobilised](#) mass protests following the 2022 death in police custody of Iranian Kurdish woman Mahsa Jina Amini. Authorities often impose death sentences following grossly unfair trials marked by coerced confessions, denial of due process and torture. Pakhshan Azizi, Behrouz Ehsani, Mehdi Hassani, Mojahed (Abbas) Kourkouri and Varisheh Moradi, who were arrested during the Woman, Life, Freedom uprising, have all been sentenced to death. With the absence of judicial safeguards, dozens of activists remain at imminent risk of execution.



UK: Protesters in Handmaid's Tale costumes demonstrate for women's rights in Iran at Piccadilly Circus in London (Photo by Daniel Leal/AFP)

In Iraq in August 2025, journalist Sherwan Sherwani was [sentenced](#) to another four years and five months in prison just weeks before his planned release. Sherwani is a journalist whose work, up until his arrest, focused on corruption and human rights, including freedom of expression. He was arrested in October 2020 along with four other activists and journalists and sentenced to six years in prison in a grossly unfair trial based on broad and vague laws. His latest conviction is for allegedly threatening a prison officer.



Iraq: Journalists cover clashes between security forces and Daesh in Kirkuk (Photo by Yunus Keles/Anadolu Agency)

In Algeria in April 2025, a misdemeanour court [sentenced](#) HRD Abdallah Benaoum to 18 months in prison, fined him 200,000 Algerian dinars (approx. US\$1,500) and stripped him of civil and political rights for five years. Benaoum, who has faced multiple arrests since 2018 for criticising the government online and in protests, was convicted of spreading false information and publishing content harmful to the national interest. His trial was plagued by due process violations, including arrest without a warrant, an expedited hearing that denied him time to prepare his defence, use of force and vague charges.

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In Kuwait in June 2025, Mohammed Al-Barghash, prominent defender of the rights of the Bedoon ethnic minority, was



Kuwait: Prominent Bedoon rights defender Mohammed Al-Barghash was once again detained and charged

again detained and [charged](#) with state security offences in retaliation for a video he posted on X/Twitter thanking all those who followed his case and mentioning his request to meet with the interior minister to discuss the injustice imposed on him and Bedoon people. He had been acquitted just the month before.

In Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, authorities used the courts and administrative actions to harass Al-Jazeera through bans. In January 2025, the Palestinian Authority [issued](#) a directive to suspend and freeze all Al Jazeera

operations, citing alleged legal violations. This was followed by a Palestinian court's ruling [prohibiting](#) local service providers in the occupied West Bank from broadcasting Al Jazeera. Additionally, the Attorney General ordered the blocking of several websites affiliated with the Al Jazeera network. Earlier, on 24 December 2024, the Fatah Movement Jenin Branch issued a statement [banning](#) Al Jazeera from entering the city, under the pretext of 'provoking unrest and internal fighting'. In Israel in September 2024, authorities raided and shut down Al Jazeera's offices in Ramallah, after an Israeli court [authorised](#) its closure for 45 days. In January 2025, the closure was extended for another 60 days.

In Qatar in March 2025, the Criminal Court [sentenced](#) activist Umm Nasser to three years in prison and a fine of 50,000 Qatari Riyals (approx. US\$13,650) on charges of spreading false rumours. Nasser's right to a fair trial was severely compromised by the authorities' intimidation of her defence team.

OF CONCERN

IRAN AND SAUDI ARABIA

USE OF DEATH PENALTY AND EXECUTIONS AGAINST HRDS AND JOURNALISTS

In Iran and Saudi Arabia, the death penalty is being used as a tool of political repression, targeting activists, journalists and protesters. An unprecedented surge in executions in 2025 points to a deepening crisis marked by coerced confessions, grossly unfair trials and the systematic denial of due process.

In Saudi Arabia, authorities have carried out executions at record levels, reaching at least 300 in the first ten months of 2025 alone. The victims included peaceful protesters and at least one journalist, reflecting a widening campaign of repression against dissent. Journalist Turki al-Jasser was executed in June 2025 after seven years of arbitrary imprisonment on fabricated charges related to his online publications. Authorities executed

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Jalal Labbad in August and Abdullah al-Derazi in October 2025. Both were minors when they took part in protests in 2011 and 2012. Their executions showed a complete disregard for international human rights law, which prohibits capital punishment for crimes committed by people under 18.

In Iran, authorities have intensified their use of executions to crush dissent and intimidate people. The first months of 2025 saw a 75 per cent increase in the number of executions compared to the same time period in 2024, with at least 113 executions being reported in the first 25 days of May 2025 alone. Those targeted include members of ethnic minorities,

political dissidents and WHRDs, with a troubling rise in the number of women executed.

The Supreme Court has upheld several death sentences in emblematic cases, including that of Pakhshan Azizi, whose request for judicial review was rejected in January 2025. Her execution was only temporarily halted following public pressure. Varisheh Moradi's death sentence, issued in November 2024, remains under appeal. WHRD Sharifeh Mohammadi faces imminent execution after the Supreme Court upheld her sentence in retaliation for her peaceful labour activism.



France: Portrait placards of people executed by Iran displayed during demonstration against capital punishment in Paris (Photo by Martin Lelievre/AFP)

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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, children, young people, LGBTQI+ people and people with disabilities, among others.
- Repeal any legislation that hinders the work of civil society and criminalises HRDs, journalists, protesters and members of excluded groups.
- Ensure adequate consultations are carried out with civil society and the broader public and take their views 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 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 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 making all legislation consistent with international laws and standards and refrain from censoring conventional and social media. Ensure restrictions are subject to oversight by independent and impartial judicial authorities and in accordance with due process and standards of legality, necessity and legitimacy.
- Strengthen legal protections for digital rights consistent with human rights standards.



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- 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 disinformation and ‘fake news’, as such laws are not compatible with the requirements of proportionality.
- Publicly condemn defamatory remarks, threats, acts of intimidation, stigmatisation and attacks on civil society groups, excluded communities and HRDs.
- Urgently address disinformation and misinformation through policies and partnerships with relevant partners such as CSOs, independent media and reliable tech companies.
- Condemn foreign agents laws and other repressive laws against CSOs and independent media and use diplomatic channels to challenge false transparency narratives.
- Impose targeted sanctions on officials responsible for enacting foreign agents laws and other legislation that systematically restricts civil society.
- Ensure relevant national authorities, including law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, judges, intelligence services and diplomats know how to detect and deal with different forms of transnational repression.
- 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 regional 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 those responsible are held to account. Ensure policies and mechanisms are put in place to protect them, consistent with international human rights standards.
- Institute mechanisms and policies on accountability and transparency in governance, and support and work with groups that work against corruption and promote good governance.
- Respect people’s right to protest and express dissent, including young people and artists, and hold the perpetrators of abuses against them accountable.
- Respect the right of people to protest in solidarity with people in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and refrain from arrests, vilification and violence towards HRDs and protesters. 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 meaningfully engage in UN decision-making processes and work closely with states to ensure 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 mechanisms to address reprisals against HRDs, particularly the persistence of attacks against activists, artists, child and young HRDs, environmental HRDs, gender equality advocates, women HRDs and groups mobilising solidarity with Palestinians, among others.
- Condemn democratic backsliding and human rights abuses and apply consistent diplomatic pressure on states that are failing to comply with democratic and human rights standards.
- 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.
- Create platforms for dialogue and cooperation on issues of shared concern, including abuse of environmental, Indigenous, LGBTQI+ and women HRDs, digital repression, foreign agents laws and other repressive laws that affect freedoms of association, expression and peaceful assembly, and transnational repression.
- Intensify regional and international cooperation, and work with relevant partners including independent media and tech companies against disinformation and misinformation and false narratives about gender equality, human rights and the work of activists.
- 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 of human rights, peace and security and sustainable development by evening out budgetary allocations and expanding civil society's role across the system.
- Regional human rights mechanisms should ensure that accountability, monitoring and redress mechanisms are in place to monitor transnational repression.



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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.

TO FUNDERS

- 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 activities, identity, location and operations of those receiving funds may need to remain undisclosed.
- Support programmes to ensure civil society personnel and HRDs have appropriate equipment, skills and training 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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A dark gray world map serves as the background for the entire page. The continents are outlined in a slightly lighter shade of gray.

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION



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ANGOLA	24	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
BENIN	49	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
BOTSWANA	72	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
BURKINA FASO	25	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
BURUNDI	12	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
CAMEROON	23	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
CAPE VERDE	88	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC	35	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
CHAD	31	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
COMOROS	56	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
CÔTE D'IVOIRE	53	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO	26	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
DJIBOUTI	12	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
EQUATORIAL GUINEA	15	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
ERITREA	4	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
ESWATINI	15	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
ETHIOPIA	20	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
GABON	54	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
GAMBIA	47	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

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GHANA	60	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
GUINEA	29	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
GUINEA BISSAU	44	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
KENYA	31	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
LESOTHO	60	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
LIBERIA	55	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
MADAGASCAR	35	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
MALAWI	50	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
MALI	26	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
MAURITANIA	44	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
MAURITIUS	77	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
MOZAMBIQUE	27	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
NAMIBIA	80	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
NIGER	32	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
NIGERIA	36	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO	28	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
RWANDA	25	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE	88	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
SENEGAL	47	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

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SEYCHELLES	80	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
SIERRA LEONE	44	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
SOMALIA	28	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
SOMALILAND	34	●	●	●					
SOUTH AFRICA	60	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
SOUTH SUDAN	21	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
SUDAN	9	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
TANZANIA	26	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
TOGO	29	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
UGANDA	28	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
ZAMBIA	53	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
ZIMBABWE	28	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

COUNTRY	SCORES 2025	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA	71	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
ARGENTINA	59	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
BAHAMAS	88	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
BARBADOS	90	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
BELIZE	79	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
BOLIVIA	50	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
BRAZIL	55	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
CANADA	82	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
CHILE	76	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
COLOMBIA	40	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
COSTA RICA	78	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
CUBA	13	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
DOMINICA	70	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	74	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
ECUADOR	47	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
EL SALVADOR	35	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
GRENADA	89	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
GUATEMALA	40	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

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GUYANA	71	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
HAITI	34	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
HONDURAS	38	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
JAMAICA	84	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
MEXICO	40	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
NICARAGUA	5	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
PANAMA	73	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
PARAGUAY	52	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
PERU	40	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
SAINT LUCIA	81	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
ST KITTS AND NEVIS	90	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
ST VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES	88	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
SURINAME	80	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO	84	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	56	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
URUGUAY	84	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
VENEZUELA	14	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

COUNTRY	SCORES 2025	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
AFGHANISTAN	8	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
AUSTRALIA	80	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
BANGLADESH	29	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
BHUTAN	51	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
BRUNEI DARUSSALAM	30	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
CAMBODIA	27	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
CHINA	10	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
FIJI	65	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
HONG KONG	16	●	●	●	●	●			
INDIA	30	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
INDONESIA	42	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
JAPAN	88	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
KIRIBATI	85	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
LAOS	5	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
MALAYSIA	50	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
MALDIVES	50	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
MARSHALL ISLANDS	90	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
MICRONESIA	90	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
MONGOLIA	59	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
MYANMAR	10	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

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NAURU	60	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
NEPAL	48	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
NEW ZEALAND	92	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
NORTH KOREA	2	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
PAKISTAN	24	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
PALAU	90	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
PAPUA NEW GUINEA	54	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
PHILIPPINES	38	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
SAMOA	81	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
SINGAPORE	30	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
SOLOMON ISLANDS	69	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
SOUTH KOREA	73	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
SRI LANKA	40	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
TAIWAN	88	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
THAILAND	34	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
TIMOR-LESTE	72	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
TONGA	71	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
TUVALU	88	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
VANUATU	69	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
VIETNAM	13	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

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ALBANIA	68								
ANDORRA	83								
ARMENIA	66								
AUSTRIA	83								
AZERBAIJAN	14								
BELARUS	9								
BELGIUM	77								
BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA	57								
BULGARIA	65								
CROATIA	71								
CYPRUS	75								
CZECH REPUBLIC	87								
DENMARK	89								
ESTONIA	96								
FINLAND	89								
FRANCE	60								
GEORGIA	34								
GERMANY	60								
GREECE	51								
HUNGARY	46								

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COUNTRY	SCORES 2025	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
ICELAND	86								
IRELAND	89								
ITALY	60								
KAZAKHSTAN	30								
KOSOVO	67								
KYRGYZSTAN	32								
LATVIA	86								
LIECHTENSTEIN	92								
LITHUANIA	85								
LUXEMBOURG	94								
MALTA	78								
MOLDOVA	72								
MONACO	88								
MONTENEGRO	77								
NETHERLANDS	75								
NORTH MACEDONIA	69								
NORWAY	98								
POLAND	69								
PORTUGAL	81								
ROMANIA	61								

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REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

COUNTRY	SCORES 2025	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
RUSSIA	13								
SAN MARINO	94								
SERBIA	38								
SLOVAKIA	67								
SLOVENIA	85								
SPAIN	68								
SWEDEN	81								
SWITZERLAND	78								
TAJIKISTAN	10								
TURKEY	23								
TURKMENISTAN	4								
UKRAINE	52								
UNITED KINGDOM	60								
UZBEKISTAN	18								

COUNTRY	SCORES 2025	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
ALGERIA	27								
BAHRAIN	17								
EGYPT	18								
IRAN	9								
IRAQ	18								
ISRAEL	39								
JORDAN	31								
KUWAIT	28								
LEBANON	50								
LIBYA	27								
MOROCCO	42								
OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES	13								
OMAN	19								
QATAR	21								
SAUDI ARABIA	5								
SYRIA	6								
TUNISIA	34								
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	9								
YEMEN	13								

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PEOPLE POWER
UNDER ATTACK
2025

A report based on data
from the CIVICUS Monitor

**CIVICUS: WORLD ALLIANCE FOR
CITIZEN PARTICIPATION**

25 OWL STREET, 6TH FLOOR
JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA, 2092

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