

PEOPLE POWER
UNDER ATTACK 2022
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](#).

The CIVICUS Monitor team is very grateful for the expertise and guidance of an advisory panel that reviews all suggested ratings changes and provides overall guidance and advice. Current members of the advisory panel are: Betty Barkha, Silke Pfeiffer, Mireille Tushiminina, Deanne Uyangoda and Nawa Villy.

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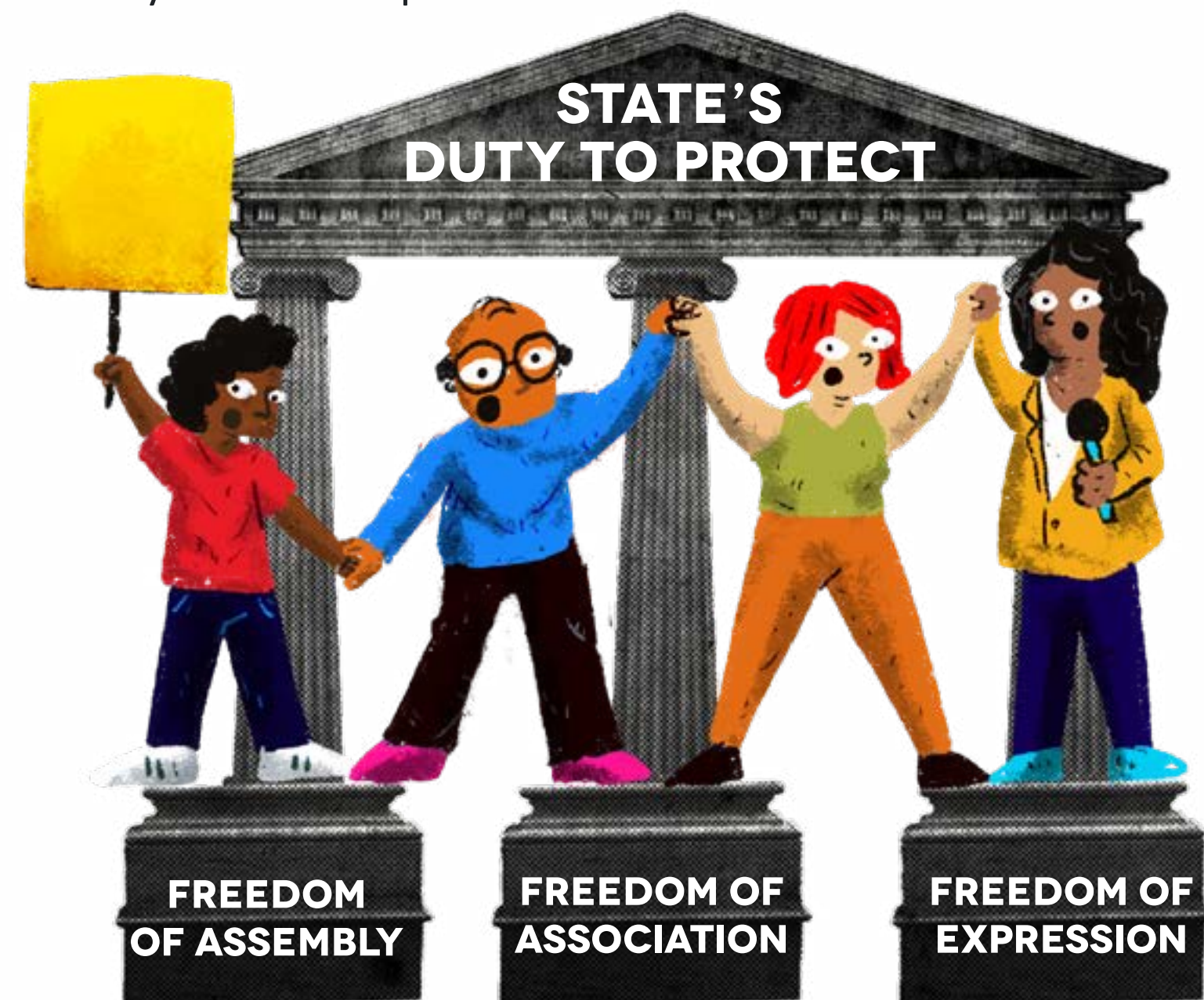
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METHODOLOGY

The CIVICUS Monitor aims to provide a comprehensive assessment of the enabling conditions for civil society within countries and over time. It analyses civic space, [defined](#) as the respect in policy, law and practice for freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression and the extent to which the state protects these fundamental rights.

In an attempt to capture these dynamics on a global scale, [over 20 organisations](#) with research expertise from around the world work on the CIVICUS Monitor with the aim of providing an evidence base for action to improve civic space.

Civic space updates from CIVICUS Monitor research partners contain qualitative, narrative information related to the situation for civic space in a country. This qualitative information is directed by a set of [guiding questions](#) and the resulting data is gathered from a variety of primary and secondary sources. In many cases, country-specific updates come directly from national civil society themselves. In countries where there is no research partner, the CIVICUS Monitor relies on a variety of other sources produced at the national, regional and international levels to produce analysis on civic space.



These civic space updates are then triangulated, verified and [tagged](#) by the CIVICUS team. The tagging system enables classification of the information included in the updates and analysis of the most common violations and restrictions faced by civil society groups, activists, human rights defenders (HRDs) and journalists when defending their rights as well as positive developments related to civic space.

The research partners collectively posted a total of 493 [civic space updates](#) from 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2022. They form the basis for the analysis presented in this report.



In addition to the qualitative information presented in the civic space updates, in order to draw comparisons at the global level and track trends over time, the CIVICUS Monitor produces civic space scores and ratings for 197 countries and territories. Each country's civic space is rated in one of five categories – open, narrowed, obstructed, repressed, or closed – based on a [methodology](#) that combines several sources of data on freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression and the state's duty to protect those fundamental freedoms.

METHODOLOGY

IN NUMBERS

TACTICS OF REPRESSION

BRIGHT SPOTS

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

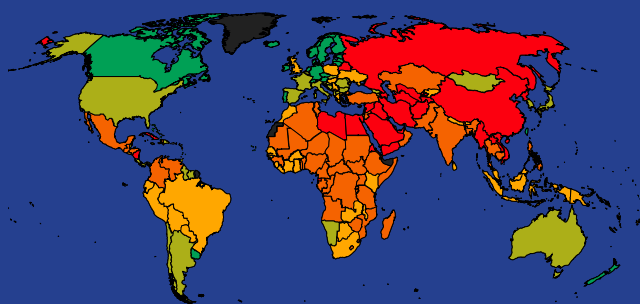
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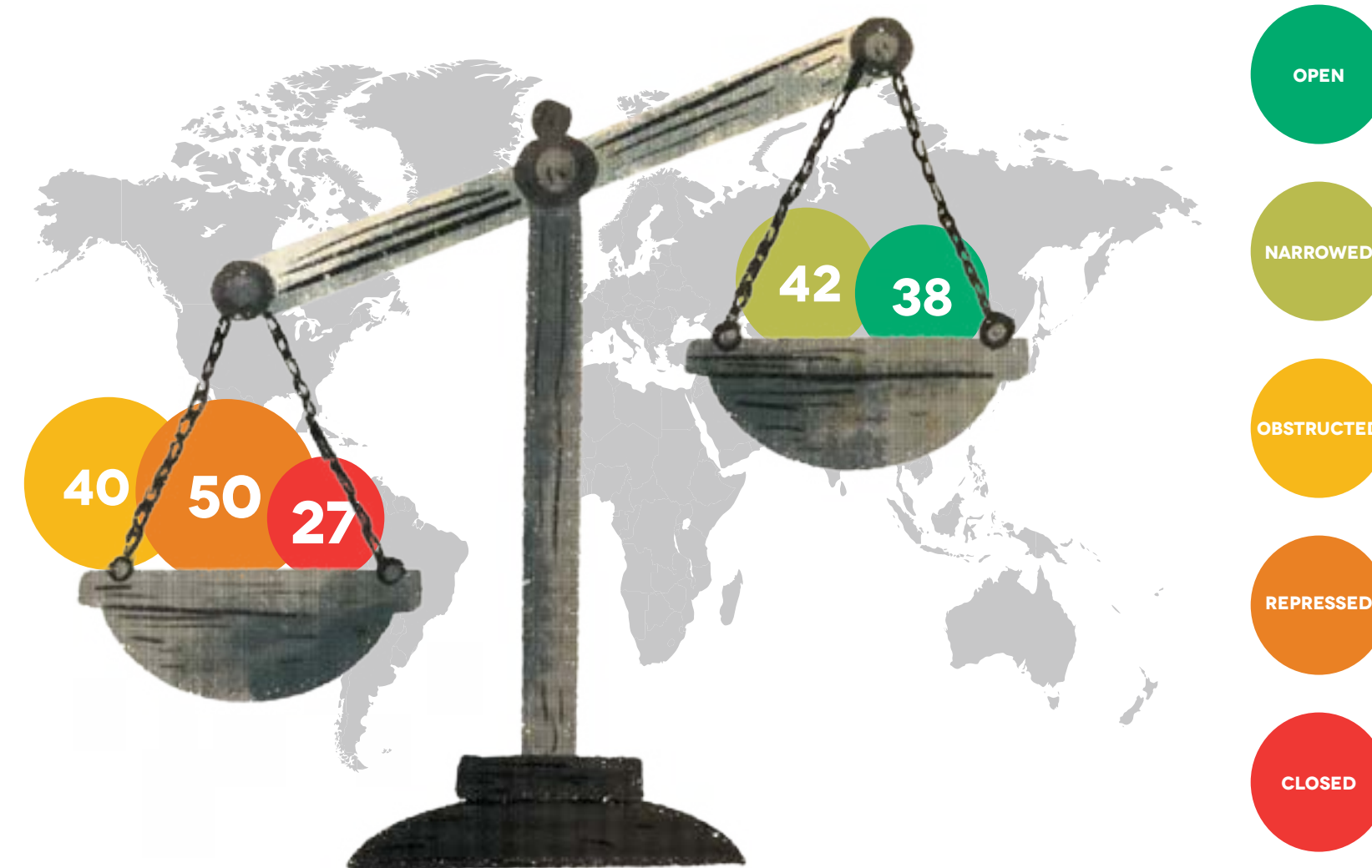
REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION



IN NUMBERS

THE CIVIC SPACE CRISIS DEEPENS

Civil society activists and HRDs hold governments accountable for their actions and demand compliance with human rights commitments according to international standards. These efforts come with great risk. In many countries, the exercise of fundamental freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression can lead to dire consequences. 2022 was marked by a serious decline in civic space, with more people living in countries with closed civic space than ever. Twenty-eight per cent of the world's population – approximately two billion people – are subject to extreme levels of repression.

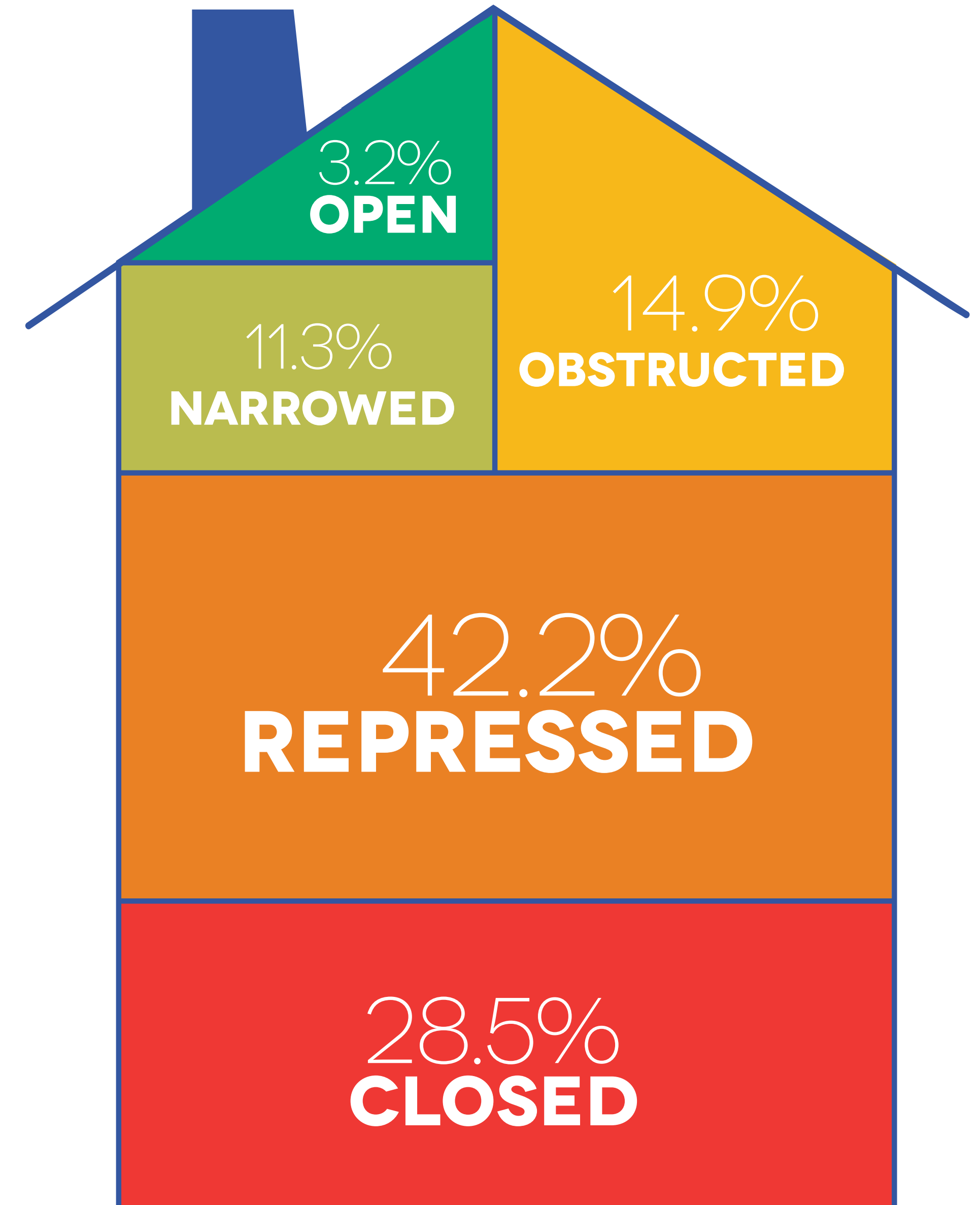


Since the previous edition of this [report](#), published in December 2021, the story has been one of further regression: civic space ratings have changed for 25 countries in the last year, worsening in 15 countries and improving in only 10.¹

The latest update of CIVICUS Monitor country ratings in March 2023 indicates that civil society faces an increasingly hostile environment. There are 27 countries or territories with closed civic space, 50 with repressed civic space, and 40 with obstructed civic space, meaning that 117 of 197 countries and territories are experiencing severe restrictions on fundamental freedoms. In comparison, 42 countries have narrowed civic space, and just 38 have an open rating.

¹ For some countries in the Caribbean – Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Dominica and Suriname – the CIVICUS Monitor added more indicators this year compared to 2021. Therefore ratings changes were prompted by additional information rather than a change in the situation on the ground.

WHERE DO PEOPLE LIVE?



BASED ON WORLD BANK POPULATION DATA 2021

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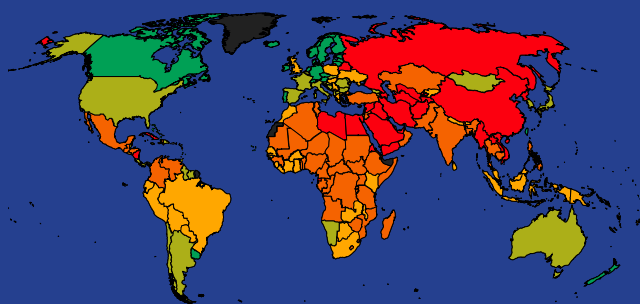
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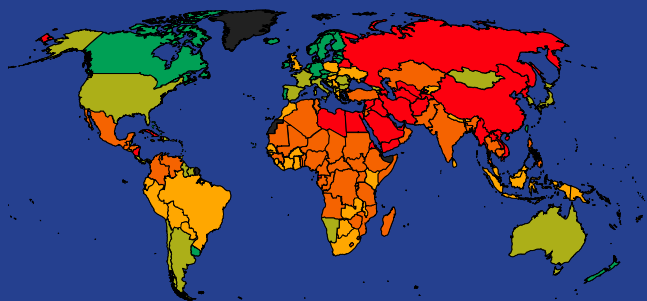
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THE CIVIC SPACE CRISIS: A STORY FORETOLD

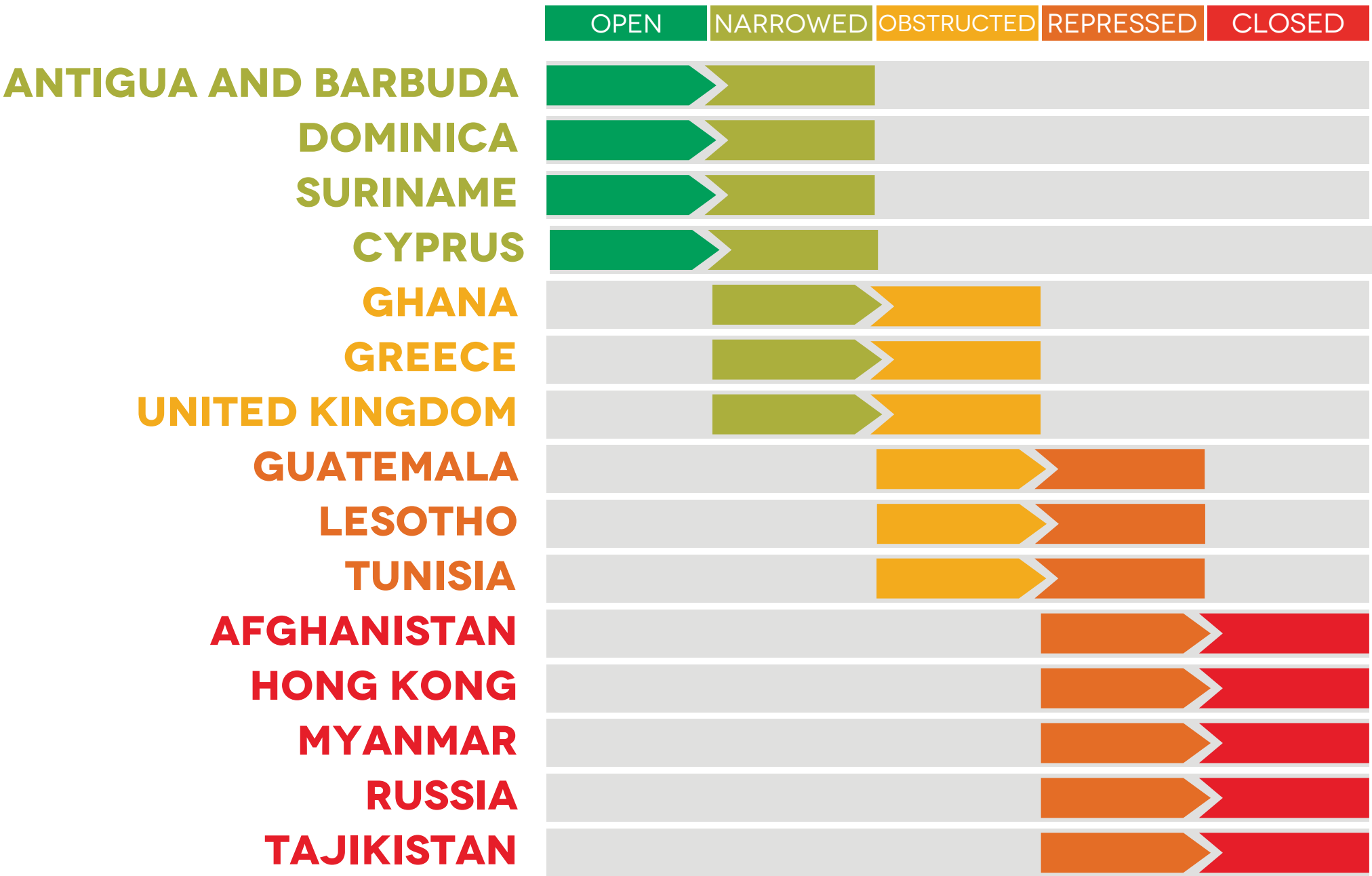
The further regression of civic space conditions should not come as a surprise. In many countries, the increased level of restrictions on civil society has been the subject of warnings by activists and human rights watchdogs. [The CIVICUS Monitor Watchlist](#), which highlights serious civic space concerns, has in recent years included most of the countries now being downgraded.

Five countries are downgraded to the worst category: Afghanistan, Hong Kong, Myanmar, Russia and Tajikistan are now rated as closed. Guatemala, Lesotho and Tunisia are downgraded to the repressed rating as conditions for civil society continue to worsen.

In addition, three countries drop down into the obstructed category: Ghana, Greece and the UK. Very few countries are rated as open and narrowed in Africa, and there is now one less with the downgrading of Ghana, where attacks against journalists, including physical attacks, arbitrary detentions and prosecutions, have increased in recent years.

Although Europe has the most countries rated as open, ratings changes highlight that no region is immune to state restriction of civic freedoms, with Greece and the UK now downgraded to the obstructed rating and Cyprus to narrowed rating. Over the past five years, eight European countries have seen their ratings downgraded due to deteriorating civic space conditions.

DOWNGRADES





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BRIGHT SPOTS

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AFRICA

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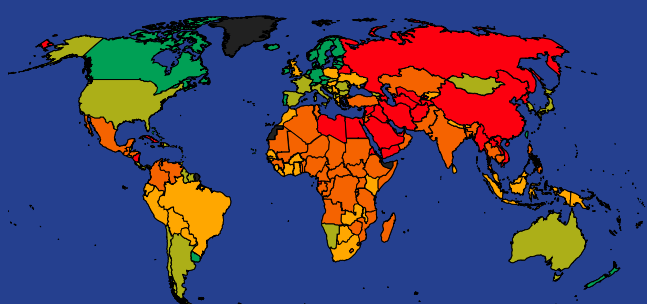
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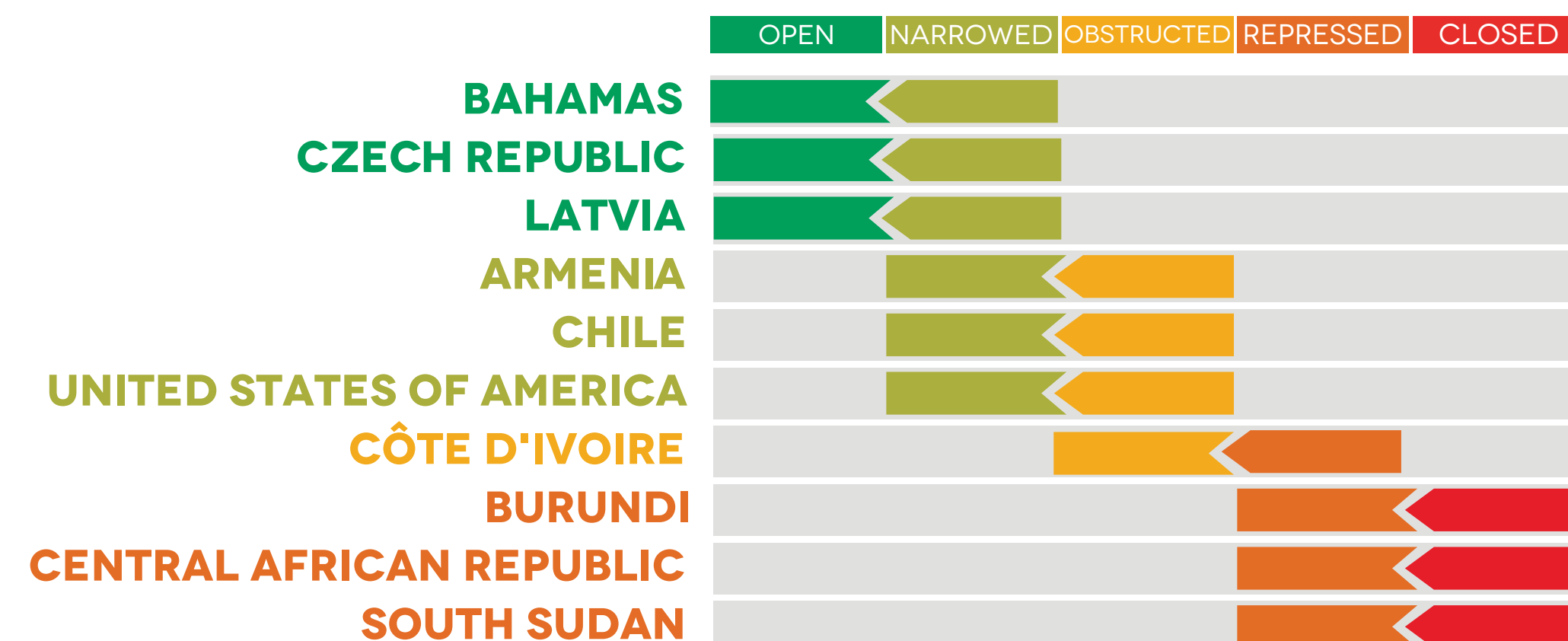


FROM MARGINAL IMPROVEMENT TO SYSTEMIC CHANGE?

Although 10 countries have upgraded ratings in 2022, there is still much room for improvement. Burundi, the Central African Republic (CAR) and South Sudan move from the closed to the repressed category, which means that people living in these countries continue to face severe restrictions when speaking out or protesting; while some improvements have been noted, structural and systemic changes that could foster an enabling environment for civil society are still pending. Côte d'Ivoire also sees a rating upgrade from the repressed to the obstructed category, as fewer civic space violations were documented compared with [2020](#), during which civic space violations rose due to a highly contested and controversial electoral period.



UPGRADES



Two countries in the Americas – Chile and the USA – also saw an improvement, moving from obstructed to narrowed civic space ratings with changes in political leadership opening a path for better protection of civic space.

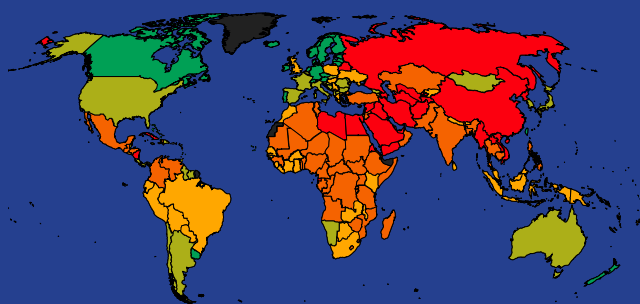
In Europe, the Czech Republic and Latvia improved their rating from narrowed to open. Under the government of Prime Minister Petr Fiala a few positive changes have been documented. For example, the draft legislative [proposal](#) to strengthen the editorial independence of Czech Television. In Latvia, civil society [reports](#) an overall favourable environment, with CSOs being more involved in decision-making. Civic space in [Armenia](#) has shown improvements, particularly after the 2018 revolution, resulting in a rating change from obstructed to narrowed.

Any steps taken towards opening civic space are welcomed, but in most of these countries changes in policies and practices still need to be made to enable the full enjoyment and protection of civic freedoms. To achieve more open and democratic societies and move from small improvements towards systematic change, civil society must be free to operate and hold governments accountable.



TOP TEN VIOLATIONS TO CIVIC FREEDOMS

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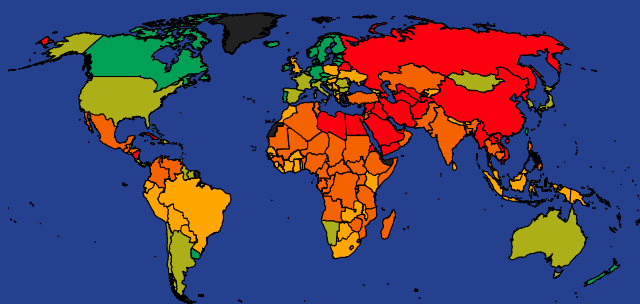
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Guatemala: A photographer holds a placard with the hashtag #They Will Not Silence Us (Photo by JOHAN ORDONEZ/AFP via Getty Images)

REPEATED TARGETING OF CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVISTS: HARASSMENT AS A TOOL TO STIFLE DISSENT

During 2022, the most common violation documented by the CIVICUS Monitor was the harassment of civil society activists and journalists.² Over the past five years, the use of this tactic by states, and increasingly by non-state actors, has spread across the world to deter activists and civil society organisations (CSOs) from continuing their work and silence dissent and criticism. The number of countries where harassment against activists was documented increased from 65 in 2018 to 106 in 2022. This tactic is widely used in all countries, with ratings from open to closed, meaning that it has become a widespread tool, regardless of the level of rights protection that may exist in a country.

Although harassment is perceived as a relatively subtle form of repression and, in some instances, is used intentionally to leave little trace and ensure impunity, it is highly effective in deterring HRDs from their work and can strategically restrict the space for CSOs. Cuba is one country where this tactic is notoriously used, with HRDs and journalists systematically harassed. For instance, during September and November 2022, several HRDs [reported](#) various forms of harassment to force them to shut down their organisations or resign from their positions. Cubalex director

Laritza Diversent's family was harassed by state security agents who reportedly told her mother that she would only receive support with housing and medical care issues if her daughter resigned from the organisation.

Another country with closed civic space where this tactic was [documented](#) was Vietnam, where hundreds of activists and dissidents are subjected to indefinite house arrests and travel bans without prior notice, along with other forms of harassment. In Uzbekistan, bloggers are pressured and [harassed](#) by police, who search their houses and send threatening messages if they write critical articles. In addition, police and security agencies use this tactic to deter journalists from reporting on sensitive and controversial issues. In Azerbaijan, a journalist was [summoned](#) by the police after posting articles about the army. Similarly, in Timor-Leste, two journalists were [summoned](#) by the police after publishing two reports on a minister's request to dismiss the Director of Internal Intelligence at the National Intelligence Service. In Argentina, a journalist [received](#) a court order that she should stop publicly speaking about a child abuse case, and though she had complied, the authorities ordered a raid on her house and seized her work materials. Beyond the direct harassment of journalists, Bangladesh authorities [detained](#) family members of journalists reporting from abroad.

This tactic is also widespread in countries with higher levels of rights protection. In [Portugal](#) and [Sweden](#), for example, journalists face periodic harassment, and in Germany, journalists can [face](#) harassment from the state and other sources when reporting on protests.

Women are a particular target of gendered forms of harassment that often targets their families as well. Activists from the Serbian organisation Women for Peace have been the target of threats and cyberattacks after criticising the allocation of city budget funds to a convicted abuser for the opening of a new centre to combat domestic violence. One of the threats explicitly [mentioned](#) one of the activists' daughters and grandchildren. Women in political positions also face sexism and [online harassment in Montenegro](#).

Harassment can in some instances pave the way for militant groups to take violent action. In Lebanon, for example, Dalia Ahmad, the presenter of Al-Jadeed TV's Fashit Kheleq show, and actress Joanna Karaky [were](#) victims of social media harassment after a satirical segment was aired on the show in response to the killing of an Irish peacekeeping soldier in Lebanon. Militants threw a petrol bomb at the TV channel's headquarters and unknown assailants opened fire on the building.

Harassment affects civil society activists and journalists in terms of their physical and digital security and mental health. Many continue to work, however, despite the effects it has on their lives and the lives of their families.

² Harassment is understood as the repeated targeting of an HRD, journalist or CSO, through conduct that is unwanted and has the intention of curtailing the exercise of one or more civic freedoms by the person or organisation



RIGHT TO PROTEST UNDERMINED: DETENTION AS A TACTIC TO PREVENT AND DISRUPT PROTESTS

CIVICUS Monitor findings show an ongoing crackdown on freedom of peaceful assembly over the past five years. These restrictions peaked during the COVID-19 pandemic: in 2020 and 2021, the detention of protesters was the number one civic space violation [documented](#) by the CIVICUS Monitor.

In 2020, when COVID-19 was declared a pandemic and restrictions on free movement started to be implemented in many parts of the world, the CIVICUS Monitor found that the authorities detained activists for protest actions in at least 97 countries. Overwhelmingly, states pushed through emergency legislation to restrict civic freedoms and passed laws that were not in line with international standards of rights protections. In many cases this led to overcrowded prisons, due to high numbers of detentions of people found to have violated emergency laws. It became evident that what states characterised as a public health emergency response was being used by some to silence dissent and as a pretext to restrict freedom of peaceful assembly and other rights.

In 2022, with the pandemic under control, the arbitrary detention of protesters continued. Out of the 133 countries where protests were documented, protesters were detained for exercising their right to peaceful assembly in 90. Concerningly, 25 of these countries are rated as open or narrowed, which demonstrates that even countries with relatively enabling legislation and strong democratic institutions are not immune from politically motivated attacks on freedom of peaceful assembly.

Russia: Police officers detain a man holding a poster reads: “No war” (Photo by Contributor/Getty Images)



METHODOLOGY

IN NUMBERS

TACTICS OF REPRESSION

BRIGHT SPOTS

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

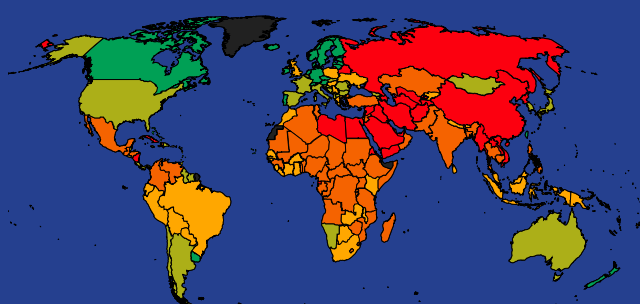
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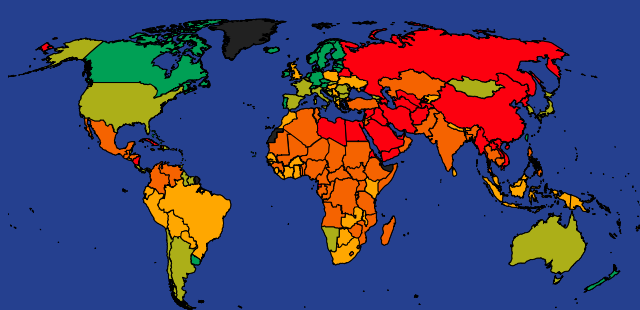
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As with harassment, arbitrary detention of protesters is used by most states, regardless of their civic space rating. It is used to prevent and disrupt protests, including protests that are political in nature, those that call for socioeconomic changes and demand improved service delivery, and those that express discontent with rising prices and the high cost of living.

In Iran, a wave of protests has been [held](#) since September 2022 following the death of Mahsa Amini, an Iranian Kurdish woman, while in police custody, after she was arrested by Iran's morality police for allegedly breaching the country's strict dress code. These large-scale protests have been met by a lethal and violent [crackdown](#), with over 18,000 protesters detained by mid-December 2022.

In China, where large-scale protests are rare due to widespread repression and censorship, protests in several cities were [documented](#), as people's frustration with the state's heavy pandemic restrictions made them [take to the streets](#).

Undeterred by restrictions and determined to advocate for their rights, women in Afghanistan continue to protest, despite the risks. For example, around a dozen women [protested](#) in the Afghan capital on 10 May 2022 against the Taliban's new mandate that women must fully cover their faces and bodies in public. Some were detained for two hours, questioned, threatened and warned that if they continued they would be imprisoned. Similarly, anti-government protests have [persisted](#) across Myanmar, despite the risk of arrest, torture and violence against protesters. Protests began in opposition to the 1 February 2021 military coup.

Political protests often lead to increased repression, particularly in Africa. In multiple countries, the CIVICUS Monitor documented the detention of protesters for demanding democratic policies and political transitions. In Chad in October 2022, hundreds were [detained](#) for protesting against the decision of the military junta to extend the transitional period by another two years. Similarly, in Guinea around a hundred protesters were [arrested](#) when people took to the streets after the military [unilaterally announced](#) a three-year transition plan in July 2022.

With the impacts of the pandemic and Russia's war on Ukraine causing economic crises and exacerbating global inequality, impacting on the most vulnerable people, many have taken to the streets around the world to protest against rising prices, the high cost of living, inflation and strict economic measures imposed by states. In Albania, several protests were held in March 2022 against rising oil and gas prices. According to [reports](#), around 200 people were arrested in these protests on charges of 'illegal gathering' and 'breaking up public order'.

High inflation in Uganda [sparked](#) protests in 2022. In one instance, police officers arrested six women protesters, charged them with inciting violence and unlawful assembly and remanded them in prison. In Panama, after [weeks of protests](#) demanding government action to address the rising cost of living and fuel and food price increases, the police [responded](#) by arresting at least 102 protesters.

Similar responses were documented in South Korea, where the authorities [detained striking](#) truck drivers who were demanding better wages. In Mongolia, protesters were [detained](#) and beaten by police after protesting against government inefficiency, debt burdens and inflation.

In many countries rated as open, the authorities are commonly responding to climate activism by detaining protesters. In Canada, four people were [arrested](#) at a protest against the construction of a housing project on a wetland that plays a vital role in absorbing greenhouse gases.

In the Netherlands in March 2022, around 18 Extinction Rebellion Netherlands activists were [arrested](#) in Amsterdam. They had gathered to raise awareness of the urgency of the climate crisis ahead of municipal elections. A few months later, in July 2022, around 40 climate activists from the Extinction Rebellion group were [arrested](#) as they demonstrated against government fossil fuel subsidies. Similarly, Extinction Rebellion activists were [detained](#) in Denmark in May 2022 for demanding climate action. Similar responses by the authorities towards Extinction Rebellion group actions were [documented](#) in Finland.

In Sweden, activists from the Fridays for Future global environmental movement were [arrested](#) in April 2022 while protesting to demand the restoration of Sweden's wetlands and to raise awareness of the climate crisis.

In Germany, a 19-year-old woman was [arrested](#) for causing a disruption during a protest action in which she glued herself to the ground to block a road, in what she saw as a necessary act of civil disobedience to urge the government to take climate change seriously and reduce fossil fuel use.

Violations of the right to peaceful assembly have been among the most common restrictions documented by the CIVICUS Monitor over the past five years. Restrictions have not deterred activists from continuing to take to the streets to demand governments uphold their obligations to protect human rights. Rather, in many instances, protest actions have gone on to call for more systemic changes, with the understanding that violations will continue until governmental policies reflect international standards of human rights protection, not only in words but in practice, with constitutional guarantees realised for all people living within a country's borders.

BRIGHT SPOTS

During 2022, the CIVICUS Monitor documented several instances where civic space is opening up and where states are making progress in improving their respect for civic freedoms. Civil society victories were documented even in countries with very repressive environments, showing that while challenges persist, civil society action continues to be a powerful and effective means of defending rights and advocating for their realisation.



CIVIL SOCIETY AS AGENT OF POSITIVE CHANGE

Freedom of expression was protected in Australia, amid ongoing campaigning by civil society, when the Labor government that came to power in May 2022 [dropped a prosecution](#) instituted against whistleblower and lawyer Bernard Collaery for revealing state spying on Timor-Leste during negotiations over oil and gas reserves in the Timor Sea in 2004.

In Sri Lanka, mass protests led to the [resignation](#) of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who presided over a [climate of repression](#) against activists, journalists and critics.

In Thailand, after many years of civil society campaigning, the authorities [formally charged](#) a former senior park ranger and three subordinates suspected of killing an ethnic Karen activist, Porlajee Rakchongcharoen, also known as Billy, in 2014. In Indonesia, activists have pushed the country's human rights commission to [investigate](#) the killing of prominent human rights activist Munir Said Talib, who was fatally poisoned on an international flight in 2004. Although three people have been convicted of involvement in the killing, there are credible allegations that those responsible for ordering his assassination are still at large. After years of advocacy by activists and victims' groups, the government finally [acknowledged](#) severe historical human rights violations.

In Hungary, a significant act of public protest, following a campaign by human rights groups, [led](#) to a referendum that was seeking endorsement for the government's anti-LGBTQI+ agenda failing as the result of an organised boycott.

In Iraq, despite the dire situation, a resilient civil society has defied all odds to push back against government excesses by continuing to take collective action to call for accountability, social justice and the protection of human rights, particularly in regard to violations against protesters during mass protests in October 2021. In response to mounting pressure from civil society, in February 2022 the authorities [arrested](#) Lieutenant-Colonel Omar Nizar on charges of killing protesters during an infamous 2019 crackdown on protests.

Mexico: People carry umbrellas with the Rainbow flag during the Pride Parade in Mexico City (Photo by ALFREDO ESTRELLA / AFP)

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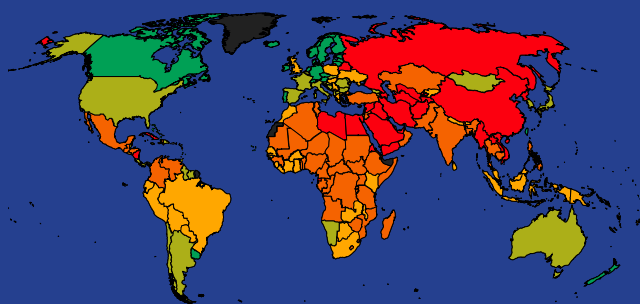
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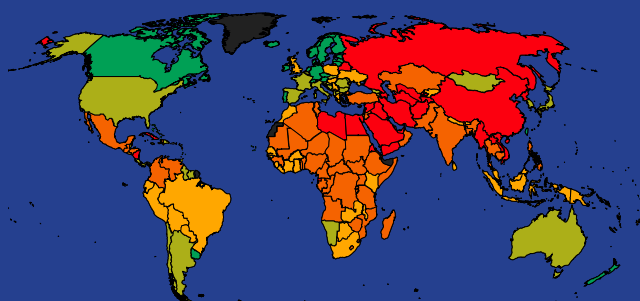
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HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS RELEASED

Civil society activists and journalists were released or acquitted in several countries. After two and a half years in pretrial detention, Honduras's Guapinol and Sector San Pedro water defenders were finally [released](#) in February 2022 when the Supreme Court reviewed an appeal that challenged the constitutionality of the charges against them. The criminal charges brought against the group [stemmed](#) from their participation in protests in defence of local rivers impacted on by open-pit mining.

In Iran, woman HRD (WHRD) Atena Daemi was [freed](#) in January 2022 after her arrest and prosecution in 2014. Daemi, who campaigns for children's and women's rights, as well as abolition of the death penalty, was sentenced to five years in prison for 'acting against national security'.

In Kuwait, the Criminal Division of the Court of First Instance [acquitted](#) the President of the Kuwait Association for Information Security, Dr Safaa Zaman, who had faced charges of broadcasting 'false news' and endangering the country's relationship with Egypt. The charges stemmed from statements made on a TV programme.

In Rwanda on 5 October 2022, a court [acquitted](#) three journalists who had been detained for four years. The three reporters for the YouTube-based outlet Iwacu – Damascene Mutuyimana, Shadrack Niyonsenga and Jean Baptiste Nshimiyima – were arrested on 9 October 2018 and charged with publishing a 'fabricated' image showing Rwandan President Paul Kagame, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni and a former Rwandan army chief, now in exile, together.





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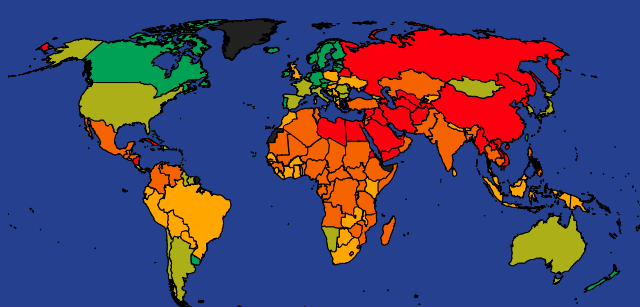
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ROLE OF COURTS IN PROTECTING CIVIC FREEDOMS

While justice systems had a mixed track record in upholding civic space in 2022, the courts continued to be a vital forum where this space is protected. In the USA, lawsuits from racial justice groups [resulted](#) in security forces adopting positive policy changes on the policing of protests.

Civil society groups also frequently used strategic litigation to appeal to the justice system to [push back](#) against restrictive laws and demand recognition of their rights. In January 2022, Ecuador's Constitutional Court [handed down](#) a ruling reaffirming Indigenous peoples' right to free, prior and informed consent, creating what environmental group Amazon Frontlines said was 'one of the most powerful legal precedents' on the matter.

All of these positive changes resulted from the sustained efforts of rights advocates, which demonstrates the crucial role of civil society in serving as a check on excessive government control and a counter to repression.

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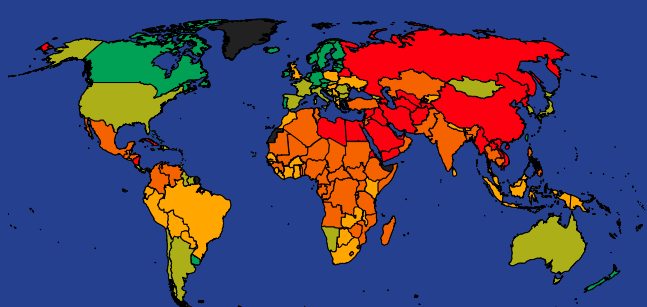
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Not everyone is evenly affected by civic space restrictions. Restrictions on groups advocating for women's rights and WHRDs feature in 36 per cent of updates as they often face more severe pressure than other groups and HRDs.

The documentation includes instances where women have been the deliberate target of violations, often gendered in nature. For example, in January 2022, Samira Attilah, a journalist for the Belgian newspaper De Morgen, [received](#) threatening phone calls and messages on social media. Most of these messages were racial and sexual in their tone.

Violence against women and girls has led women and women's movements to take to the streets to demand that the authorities take urgent and immediate measures. In January 2022, hundreds of women [protested](#) against gender-based violence in Costa Rica, [Kosovo](#) and [Mexico](#).

In the Netherlands in January 2022, people [gathered](#) at Museumplein to protest and raise awareness of sexual misconduct and call for change under the slogan 'no blame, no change' following allegations of sexual misconduct at a popular Dutch TV show 'Voice of Holland'. In March 2022, hundreds of women [gathered](#) at the National Assembly Complex in Abuja, Nigeria to protest against the rejection of five bills seeking more gender equality and opportunities for women in politics and society.

Globally, other groups regularly mentioned in CIVICUS Monitor updates include labour unions, environmental rights groups, LGBTQI+ people and young people.

GROUPS MOST COMMONLY INVOLVED IN CIVIC SPACE INCIDENTS

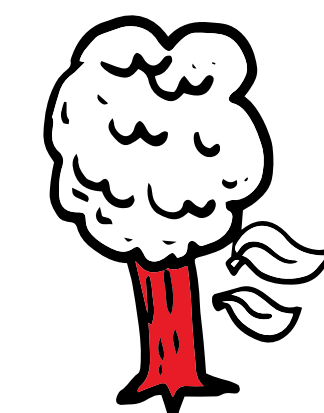
1. WOMEN



2. LABOUR RIGHTS



3. ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS



4. LGBTQI+

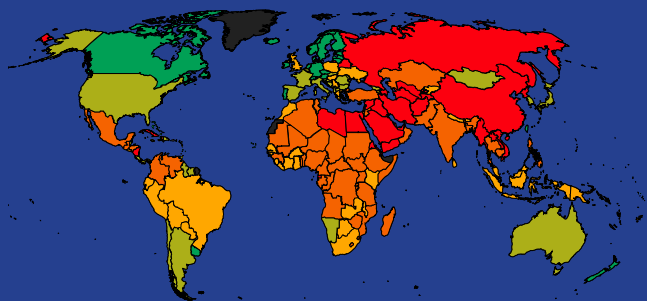


5. YOUTH





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RATING OVERVIEW

Civic space conditions in Africa³ remain highly restrictive: 44 out of 49 countries are rated as obstructed, repressed, or closed. This means that the vast majority of people in the region face significant restrictions in exercising civic space freedoms. Only in the island states of Cabo Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe is civic space open, while Mauritius, Namibia and Seychelles have narrowed civic space.

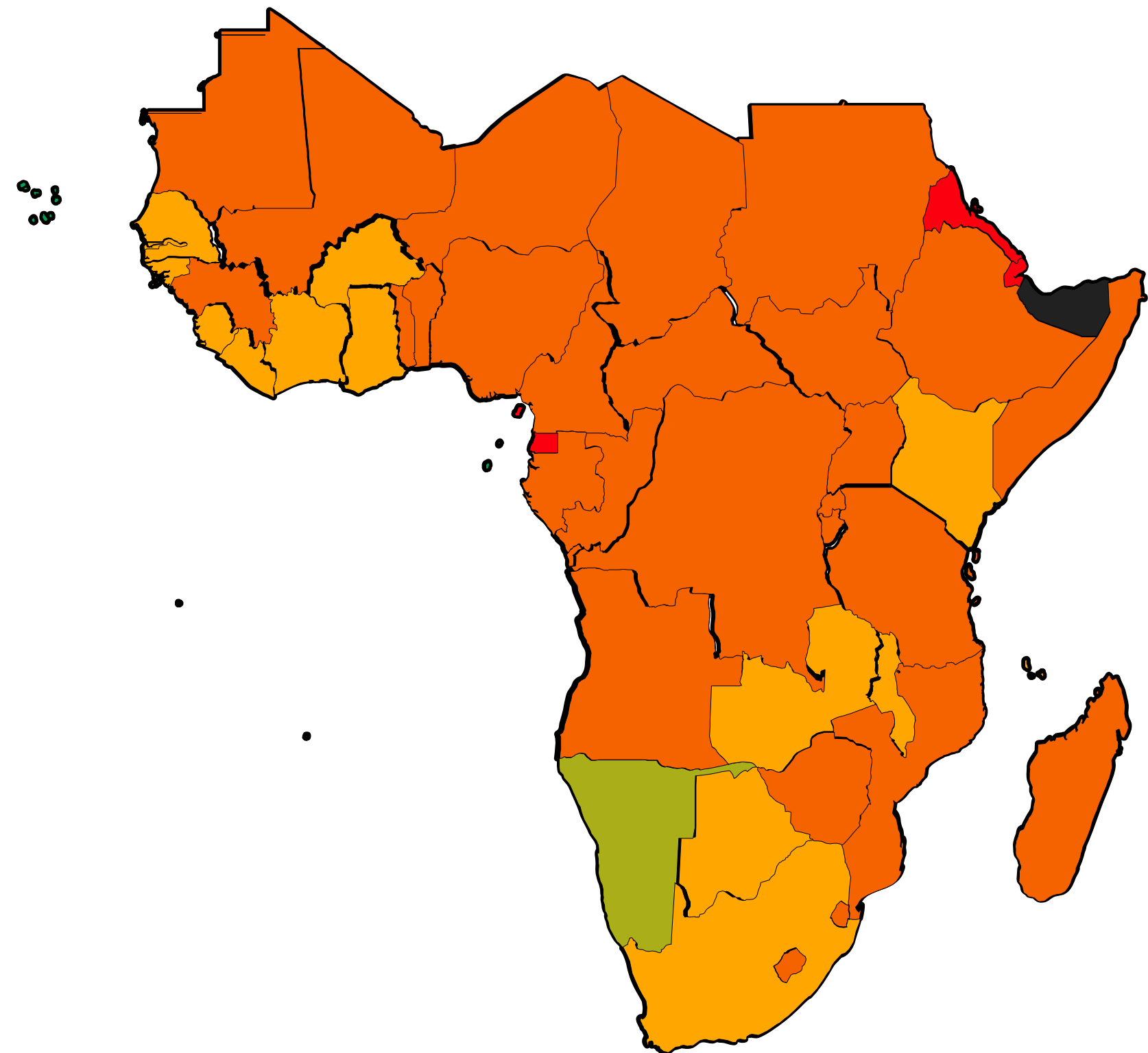
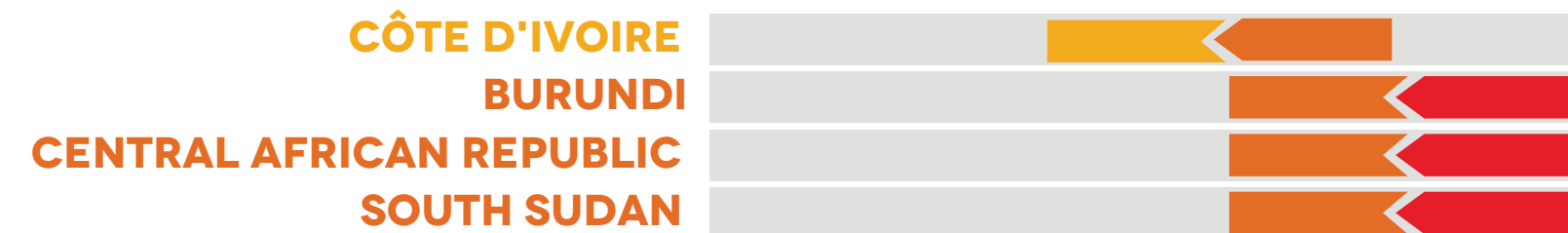
In West Africa, civic space violations in Guinea and Mali, both under military rule, have increased, with a protracted blanket [protest ban](#) in Guinea and [tighter control](#) of CSOs in Mali. Ghana, long lauded as a regional champion for its respect of civic and democratic freedoms, sees its civic space rating downgraded to obstructed as media freedom has been severely [curtailed](#), with increasing physical attacks on journalists and the use of ‘false news’ regulations to arrest journalists. Meanwhile, a draconian anti-LGBTQI+ law has been under consideration since 2021, which would, among other restrictions, criminalise LGBTQI+ advocacy. Côte d’Ivoire however sees a rating upgrade from the repressed to the obstructed category, mainly due to fewer reported civic space violations compared with [2020](#), a year characterised by a highly contested and controversial electoral period, which led to the country’s [downgrade](#) to the repressed rating in December 2020.

In Central Africa, civic space remains affected by armed conflict, weak rule of law, impunity and entrenched authoritarian governments. In Chad, the military junta has severely [repressed](#) democracy protests, killing dozens of people, and dissolved the protest coalition Wakit Tama, which brings together civil society groups and opposition political parties. Despite [promises](#) to improve media freedoms in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), journalists continued to be imprisoned, attacked and killed. Additionally, civic space violations have [multiplied](#) under the ‘stage of siege’ that in effect imposes martial law in the two eastern provinces of Ituri and North Kivu. In Cameroon, civic space remains repressed, with scores of protesters and journalists still being [kept in prison](#). While the CAR moves to the repressed rating from closed, the authorities [remain](#) intolerant of dissent. An attempt to re-criminalise press offences, numerous attacks on humanitarian workers and highly contested government plans to amend the constitution all call for continuing vigilance.

³ Covering countries South of the Sahara

OPEN NARROWED OBSTRUCTED REPRESSED CLOSED

UPGRADES



DOWNGRADES





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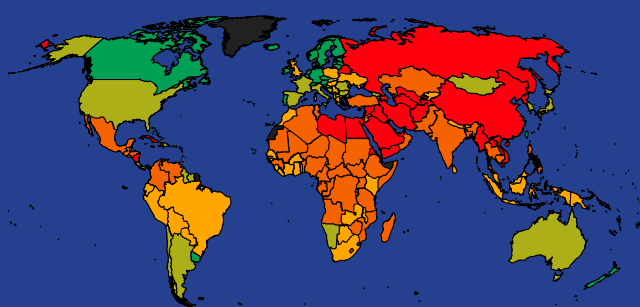
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In East Africa, Sudan's military government continued its crackdown on democracy protests and activism following a [second coup](#) on 25 October 2021, killing scores of protesters and detaining hundreds of people, often subjecting them to torture and sexual violence. In Ethiopia, as [conflict](#) in Tigray and other areas continued in 2022, the authorities [targeted](#), intimidated and punished journalists and media outlets reporting on the war.

Both Burundi and South Sudan have seen their civic space rating move from closed to repressed. In Burundi, although civic space remains severely restricted, a [slight initial improvement](#) was seen after President Evariste Ndayishimiye came into power in 2020, with at least 5,000 prisoners, including journalists and CSO representatives, [pardoned](#). Similarly, while conditions [remain](#) severely restricted in South Sudan, a slight improvement in civic space was noted with an increased number of protests being documented.

In Southern Africa, the authorities in [Malawi](#), [Mozambique](#) and [Zimbabwe](#) have proposed or enacted restrictive laws on CSOs, raising fear of increasing restrictions of freedom of association. In South Africa, the [killing](#) of activists working on land rights and the rights of informal settlement dwellers, and the vilification of CSOs by government officials and non-state actors are causes for grave concern. [Lesotho](#) sees its civic space downgraded to repressed due to continuing police brutality, increasing intimidation and attacks on journalists and the use of lethal weapons in response to a student protest in June 2022, which led to the killing of a protester.

LGBTQI+ RIGHTS AND GROUPS UNDER ATTACK

In 2022, LGBTQI+ rights and sexual and gender minority groups continued to be targeted in several countries in Africa. These groups were the most involved in civic space incidents, mentioned in 16 per cent of CIVICUS Monitor updates. In Ghana, the draconian 'Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill', introduced in the National Assembly in June 2021, [created](#) a hostile environment for sexual and gender minorities, leading to multiple forms of human rights violations, including attacks, physical violence and arbitrary arrests. In Senegal, a similar far-reaching anti-LGBTQI+ draft law was drafted by 11 legislators. However, it was [blocked](#) from being considered by the Office of the National Assembly, as the Penal Code already criminalises same-sex relations.

In August 2022, the National Bureau for Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO Bureau) in Uganda [suspended](#) the operations of CSO Sexual Minorities Uganda

(SMUG). Prior to its suspension, SMUG and its staff were harassed through surveillance, arrests and prosecution. In Eswatini in April 2022, the High Court [held](#) that LGBTQI+ people have a constitutional right to equality but this right is subject to the laws of the country, and therefore the refusal of authorities to register the CSO Eswatini Sexual and Gender Minorities as a legal entity was deemed lawful by the High Court.

In Kenya, LGBTQI+ people [continue](#) to be targeted, harassed, attacked and [killed](#). The Kenya Film Classification Board's acting head, Christopher Wambua, said in September 2022 that all movies with LGBTQI+ content are forbidden in Kenya. In Tanzania in September 2022, Information Minister Nape Nnauye [warned](#) against the promotion of same-sex relations on social media.

Kenya: Protest in Nairobi, Kenya in support of LGBTIQ school students, 13 January 2022 (John Ochieng / ZUMA Press Inc /)





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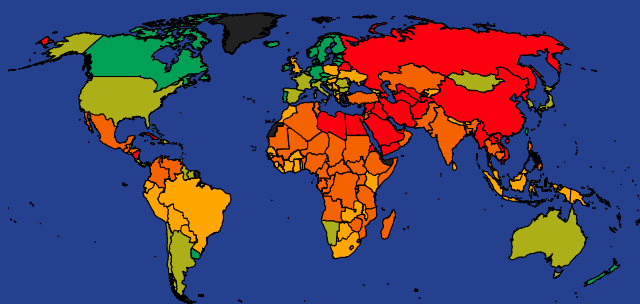
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CIVIC SPACE RESTRICTIONS

In Africa, the top civic space violations were intimidation, followed by the detention of journalists, the detention of protesters, protest disruption and attacks on journalists.

TOP 5 VIOLATIONS TO CIVIC FREEDOMS FOR AFRICA REGION

- **1. INTIMIDATION**
- **2. JOURNALIST
DETAINED**
- **3. PROTESTOR(S)
DETAINED**
- **4. PROTEST
DISRUPTION**
- **5. ATTACK ON
JOURNALIST**

INTIMIDATION

The most common civic space violation in 2022 in Africa was intimidation, documented in at least 23 countries. Intimidation as a tactic aims to discourage journalists and activists from continuing their work, and has become increasingly common in Africa. Intimidation, perpetrated by state and non-state actors, occurred in different forms, including through police summons for questioning, threats of prosecution, house searches without warrants, office break-ins and raids and online or offline threatening messages.

In Sudan, WHRDs and women protesters were [targeted](#) with intimidating tactics, including sexual violence, in an effort to silence them. The head of the Violence against Women Unit in the Ministry of Social Affairs, Sulima Ishaq, was [summoned](#) on 7 August 2022 by the prosecutor and interrogated in relation to a statement made by the head of the United Nations (UN) Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) before the UN Security Council, which detailed sexual violence perpetrated against protesters. Intimidation of HRDs and democracy protesters in the absolute monarchy of Eswatini [comes](#) in many forms, including house searches, arson attacks and threats.

In Mali, journalist Malick Konaté was [subjected](#) to numerous threats, including death threats, following his participation in a French TV documentary, broadcast on 31 October 2022, on the presence of mercenaries connected to the Russian Wagner Group, a controversial topic in the country. In early November 2022, Konaté received a call from the head of Police Judicial Investigations, saying he was 'needed', while military officers visited his home twice. Likewise, Erick Ngaba, journalist for the CAR newspaper Ndjoni Sango, [received](#) threats on social media following publication of his story on an alleged internal power struggle within a political party.

CSOs and media outlets have also been subjected to intimidation, including through office raids and public vilification. In Nigeria, the offices of the People's Gazette was raided in [January](#) and [July 2022](#) in relation to stories the media outlet covered. In both incidents, security forces said they were looking for the managing editor of the outlet and journalists involved. Ahead of elections in Zimbabwe, the authorities have [engaged](#) in an intimidation and public vilification campaign against CSOs and the foreign diplomatic missions that have supported CSOs in advocacy efforts against the [restrictive](#) Private Voluntary Organisations (PVO) Amendment Bill. Additionally, there have been an increasing number of raids on the activities of CSOs, in what appears to be a deliberate effort to prevent CSOs participating in democratic processes ahead of the upcoming elections.

Based on 74 updates published on the CIVICUS Monitor for countries in this region between 1 January 2022 - 31 December 2022



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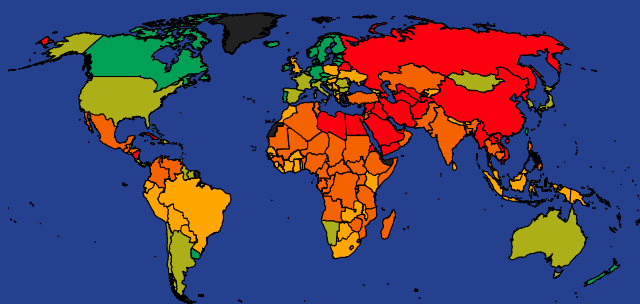
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Several HRDs and human rights organisations had their offices broken into. In the Republic of the Congo, the offices of two human rights organisations – the Congolese Observatory of Human Rights and the Forum for Governance and Human Rights – were [broken](#) into in September 2022, with perpetrators taking computers holding sensitive information. On 22 January 2022, the office of Mozambican HRD and lawyer João Nhampossa was [broken](#) into following weeks of threats. His computer, phones and work documents were stolen.

DETENTION OF JOURNALISTS

The detention of journalists was the second most common civic space violation in Africa in 2022, documented in at least 19 countries. Journalists have been detained due to their reporting on corruption and other topics considered to be sensitive or deemed insulting by the authorities, including in countries where press offences have been decriminalised.

Some of the worst jailers of journalists in Africa continued their practices of arbitrarily arresting journalists. In Somalia and Somaliland, journalists are frequently [detained](#) and subjected to intimidation and threats. On 5 July 2022, police officers detained reporter Mohamed Abdirahin Mohamed of RTN Television. According to Mohamed, the detention was related to an interview he conducted with an opposition member of the Southwest State Assembly, who had recently protested, along with other opposition legislators, against the revocation of their immunity and membership of the assembly. Mohamed was warned against broadcasting the interview or criticising President Abdiiaziz Hassan Mohamed.

In Nigeria, journalists continued to be arrested and prosecuted, particularly for alleged cybercrimes and defamation. On 19 August 2022, Agba Jalingo, publisher of online news site RiverCrossWatch, was [detained](#) by police officers in Ogudu, Lagos State, following a defamation and cyberattack complaint filed by the sister-in-law of the Governor of Lagos State. The arrest, reportedly in response to a Facebook post, came only five months after a High Court in Calabar dismissed all charges – terrorism, treasonable felony and cybercrimes – against Jalingo in a [previous case](#) that saw him imprisoned for 179 days following the publication of a report alleging the diversion of public funds by the Governor of Rivers State.

In Cameroon, long pretrial detentions and prosecutions, often in military courts, are common. In December 2022, journalist Amadou Vamoulké, who had been detained since July 2016, was [sentenced](#) by a special criminal court to 12 years in prison and



Nigeria: People stand next to a newspaper stand (Photo by REUTERS/Afolabi Sotunde via Gallo Images)

a hefty fine on charges of embezzlement. The charges were viewed by press freedom advocates to be retaliation for his management of the public broadcaster. His case had been postponed at least 74 times.

Reporting on corruption remains an essential but dangerous endeavour, with a high risk of being arrested. In the CAR, police [arrested](#) Christian Azoudaoua, editor of Le Charpentier newspaper, on 6 September 2022, reportedly on the orders of the deputy speaker of the National Assembly, following the publication of a report alleging the deputy speaker's role in embezzlement. Azoudaoua was detained for several weeks. In Malawi, journalist Gregory Gondwe was [arrested](#) in April 2022 following the publication of an article alleging corruption by the country's Attorney-General. Gondwe was detained for six hours, with police pressuring him to reveal his sources, and his phone and laptop were confiscated.

In Ethiopia, journalists who reported on the Tigray conflict and those critical of authorities were [subjected](#) to intimidation, arbitrary arrests and reprisals. On several occasions, the authorities detained journalists on accusations such as incitement to violence, collaboration with the enemy, disseminating information supporting rebel



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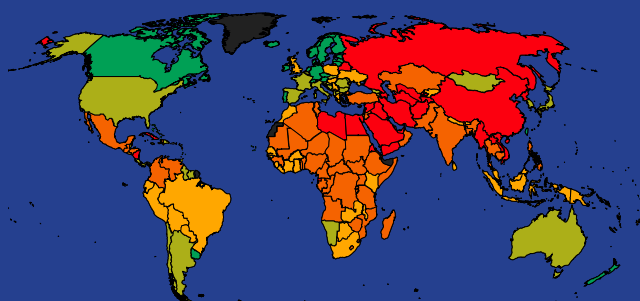
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groups and attempting to sow division between the public and the military. For example, on 7 September 2022, founder of Roha TV, Meaza Mohamed, and Voice of Amhara founder and editor, Hobeze Sisay, were arrested. They were presented in court the following day on accusations of having ties with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which has been in conflict with the federal government, and attempting to terrorise the public through the dissemination of information that supports the TPLF, although they were not formally charged. Both Roha TV and Voice of Amhara had recently covered the conflict in Ethiopia.

Journalists are also regularly detained while covering protests and public meetings, particularly protests repressed by the authorities. In [Sudan](#), several journalists were detained while covering democracy protests. For example, on 5 April 2022, military officers arrested freelance journalist Mohamed Sulaiman al-Obied and photographers Mutaz al-Naeem Adam and Mohamed al-Fatih in Omdurman. The reasons for their arrest are unknown. In Somaliland, Horyaal 24TV journalists Ahmed-Zaki and Abdinasir were [detained](#) while covering an opposition protest on 11 August 2022. In Chad, police [arrested](#) Olivier Memnguidé, journalist for radio station Radio Oxygène, when he was covering a protest in Donia on 20 April 2022. That day, clashes broke out between protesters and security forces following the arrest of a man accused of being in possession of false papers for his motorcycle. Memnguidé was accused by the police of rebellion and held for five days. In Ngorongoro, Tanzania, during a public meeting on threats of forced evictions on 4 February 2022, police [arrested](#) six journalists covering the meeting.

In the DRC, where press offences remain criminalised, journalists are vulnerable to detention and arrests. Joseph Kazadi, a journalist for the Leader newspaper and Mining News magazine, spent two weeks in detention at the headquarters of the National Intelligence Agency after his arrest on 13 July 2022, together with US journalist Nicholas Niarchos, while reporting on the links between artisanal mining and those who profit from it in Lubumbashi.

In Ghana, the authorities have increasingly used 'false news' regulations under the Criminal Offences Act and the Electronic Communications Act to detain journalists. On 24 May 2022, for example, police briefly [detained](#) Noah Narh Dameh, who works for Radio Ada, in response to a petition by a company that was granted a controversial concession to mine salt, following a story on Facebook. He was later charged with publishing false news.

Journalists were also detained in [Burkina Faso](#), [Burundi](#), [Côte d'Ivoire](#), [Mozambique](#), [Senegal](#), [Sierra Leone](#), [South Sudan](#) and [Uganda](#).

DETENTION OF PROTESTERS AND PROTEST DISRUPTION



In 2022, people in Africa continued to protest for a wide range of reasons, including to demand accountability, service delivery and democracy and speak out about the high cost of living. In the Sahel region, there were several protests against the presence of French military troops, while in conflict areas such as Burkina Faso, eastern DRC and northern Nigeria protesters mobilised against increasing insecurity, including that caused by armed militias and intercommunal conflict.

Protest violations remained rife in Africa in 2022. The detention of protesters was documented in at least 20 countries, while protest disruptions were documented in at least 18.

Democracy protests in Chad and Sudan were violently broken up by security forces, killing scores of people while arresting hundreds of protesters. The UN Expert on



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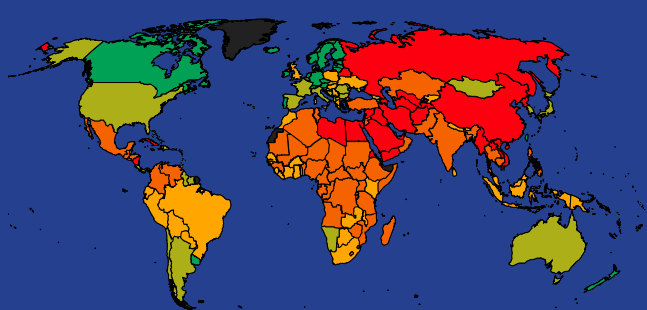
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South Africa: Members of Abahlali baseMjondolo, a shack dwellers movement, protest against harassment (Photo by Mail & Guardian)

Human Rights in Sudan [documented](#) the arbitrary arrest and detention of 1,293 people in democracy protests between the military coup of 25 October 2021 and 10 April 2022, which does not include those detained for short periods and released without charge. Most of the protesters arrested were charged under Code 1991 on charges of public nuisance, breach of public safety and offences related to ‘public tranquillity’, including rioting. Arrests and detention have remained ongoing.

Security forces [cracked down](#) on ‘Black Thursday’ protests on 20 October 2022 in Chad, organised in response to the military junta’s announcement of a two-year extension of the transitional period. At least 50 people were killed during the protests and hundreds were arrested, most of whom were taken to the Koro Toro high security prison, a notorious maximum-security jail located in the desert, 600 km away from Chad’s capital, N’Djamena. There were also [reports](#) alleging the disappearance of protesters. In early December 2022, 261 people were [sentenced](#) to two-to-three-year prison sentences on charges including taking part in an unauthorised gathering, destroying belongings, arson and disturbing public order. In Guinea, protests in July and August 2022 against the military’s extension of its rule were violently repressed by the junta. Around 100 protesters were [arrested](#), including 34 minors, during protests on 28 and 29 July 2022, in which at least five people were killed by live ammunition.

Protests ahead of and after elections were disrupted in several countries, in most cases accompanied by the arrest of protesters. In Somaliland, security forces [fired](#) live ammunition in an attempt to disperse protesters against an alleged attempt to delay presidential elections and arrested around 100 protesters. Ahead of general elections in Angola on 24 August 2022, protests to demand free and fair elections and to call out electoral irregularities were either banned or dispersed.

On 17 August 2022, dozens of people, including Voice of America correspondent Coque Mukuta, were [arrested](#) during a civil society protest in Luanda. In Senegal, many people – over 200 according to opposition coalition Yewwi Aksan Wi – were [arrested](#) on 17 June 2022 in opposition protests against the invalidation of the coalition’s list of candidates for the legislative elections, which took place on 31 July 2022. Three people were killed, while the opposition protests were banned, along with other planned protests.

As the cost of living and inflation soared in 2022, so did protests and attempts to discourage people from gathering. Security forces [attempted](#) to prevent protests against high inflation and the cost of living taking place in Uganda, and where they could not prevent protests, they dispersed and arrested protesters. Six women



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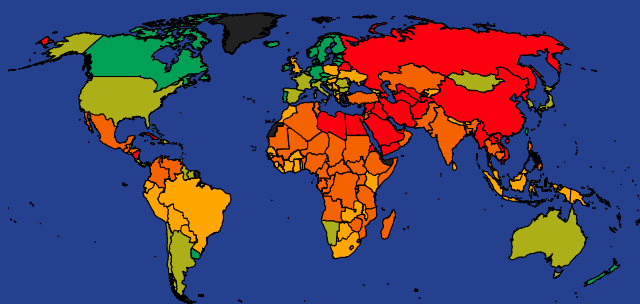
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Mozambique: Police officers as they stand guard, in anticipation of rumours of a national demonstration in protest against the high cost of living (Photo by REUTERS/ Grant Lee Neuenburg)

protesters were arrested on 30 May 2022 and were later charged with inciting violence and unlawful assembly. A few days earlier, on 25 May 2022, opposition figure Kizza Besigye was arrested while organising a demonstration against high commodity prices.

In Sierra Leone, dozens of protesters were [arrested](#) during a women's protest in Freetown, known as the 'Black Monday' protest. Hundreds of women took to the streets to protest against economic hardship as a result of rising prices. In Malawi on 20 July 2022, 76 protesters were reportedly [detained](#) during a protest, organised by civil society group Malawi Human Rights Advocacy in Lilongwe, to denounce the high cost of living and what protesters [characterised](#) as 'selective justice' on the part of the judiciary. Police used teargas to disperse the protesters. In April 2022, police officers [arrested](#) and beat HRD Julius Kamau for protesting against the high cost of living in Nairobi, Kenya.

Protesters were also detained in [Burkina Faso](#), [Côte d'Ivoire](#), [Cameroon](#), [DRC](#), [Ghana](#), [Kenya](#), [Mozambique](#), [Republic of Congo](#), [South Sudan](#) and [Zimbabwe](#).



COUNTRIES OF CONCERN: ZIMBABWE AND ESWATINI

Ahead of general elections in Zimbabwe, planned for July 2023, the authorities have [closed](#) the space to participate in democratic processes and cracked down on civil society and the opposition. The 2022 PVO Amendment Bill, recently passed by both parliamentary chambers and awaiting presidential assent, will [see](#) tighter restrictions, undue targeting and closure of prominent CSOs, which were previously not required to register under the PVO Act. The law will give the authorities unfettered, discretionary power to overregulate and interfere in the governance and operations of CSOs and unchecked powers to revoke registrations. Even before the new bill comes into effect, the authorities have arbitrarily [deregistered](#) at least 290 CSOs. Since March 2022, the government has embarked on an intimidation and vilification campaign against CSOs and foreign diplomatic missions that have supported CSOs in advocating against the new law. State-controlled outlets have complemented government efforts to delegitimise CSOs through propaganda and a smear campaign, painting CSOs as conduits of foreign agents and criminal activities, among other narratives.

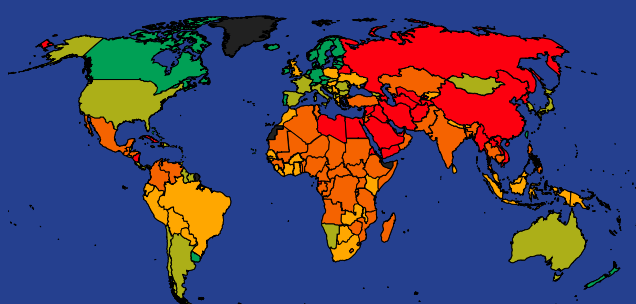
In 2022, there have been several cases of disruption of activities by CSOs and detention of CSO staff. For example, in May 2022, a women's empowerment meeting organised by Transparency International Zimbabwe and Shamwari yeMwanasikana was [disrupted](#) by Central Intelligence Organisation officers for alleged failure to notify local authorities. Three staff members were arrested and charged with convening an unlawful gathering.

In addition to the PVO Amendment Bill, the cabinet [approved](#) the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Amendment Bill in November 2022. If passed, this law will criminalise the lobbying of foreign governments to implement or extend sanctions against Zimbabwe and its officials.

Meanwhile, a concerted [crackdown](#) on opposition members and their supporters has further closed off democratic space. Opposition members and supporters, in particular the newly formed Citizen Coalition for Change, have been targeted with arrests, attempts to ban its rallies and gatherings and attacks from ruling party supporters.



Zimbabwe: Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) party supporters protest in front of police after their party rally was banned from hosting an election campaign rally in the stadium venue, March 12 2022. (Photo by JEKESAI NJIKIZANA/AFP via Getty Images)





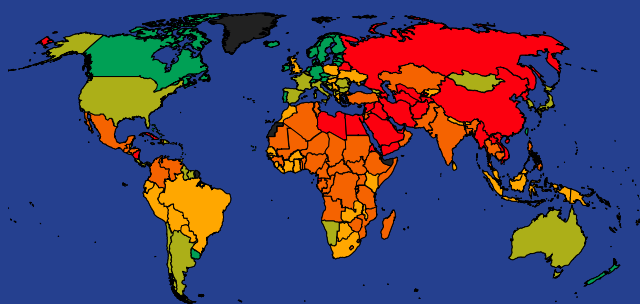
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Pro-democracy protests (Photo by @TshwaneEff)

Authorities in Zimbabwe have [continued](#) to crack down on protests and gatherings, including non-political gatherings. Protesters face arbitrary arrests and are regularly [prosecuted](#) on charges of incitement to public violence. For example, renowned novelist Tsitsi Dangarembga and co-accused Julie Barnes were found guilty of participating in a gathering with the intent to incite public violence by Harare magistrates' court on 29 September 2022.

In 2022, the authorities in Eswatini continued with their brutal, retaliatory attacks and arrests targeting activists who mobilise and participate in protests and campaigns calling for democratic reforms, with the latest wave of protests having begun in 2021. Youth activists have been at the forefront of the campaign and have been increasingly [targeted](#) by state security agents through tactics including abductions, torture, arrests and intimidation. Student activists Colani Maseko and [Sakhile Nxumalo](#) were abducted by the police and assaulted, and Nxumalo was tortured by electric shocks. A wave of [arson attacks](#) on public and private property, particularly on properties owned by absolute monarch King Mswati III, escalated to also target those seeking change, such as Wandile Dlodlu and Ngomyayona Gamedze, members of the opposition People's United Democratic Movement which is leading calls for democratic reforms. The authorities also arbitrarily raided the homes of democracy activists under the pretext of searching for illegal firearms, including in the raid on Wandile Dlodlu's house. Police continued to violently disperse protests, with the unnecessary use of rubber bullets and teargas against peaceful protesters.



AMERICAS

RATING OVERVIEW

The past year in the Americas showed that significant civic space changes can be incremental, just as they can be precipitous and abrupt. In most cases, it is not a radical transformation that drives civic space to improve or worsen but a combination of practices, regulations and policies. Structural change, such as the adoption of a new constitution, is rare. Instead, fundamental rights to freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression are often preserved and protected through specific court decisions, progressive adoption of enabling regulation, efforts by political leaders to recognise the importance of civil society and dozens of other developments.

This is illustrated by some of the rating changes seen this year. Chile and the USA move from the obstructed to the narrowed category. Both countries were [downgraded](#) in 2020 following the violent repression of mass protest movements and have seen leadership changes since then. In both cases improvements have not come about in a straight line but amid setbacks. Meanwhile, Guatemala is downgraded from obstructed to repressed, following years of gradual erosion of democratic institutions and reduction of the space for civil society and the press.

Of 35 countries in the region, there are now eight where civic space is considered open. Thirteen countries are rated as narrowed, six as obstructed and another six as repressed. In two countries civic space remains closed, the only category that saw no regional changes compared to 2021. In addition to the rating changes mentioned above, the Bahamas was moved from narrowed to open while Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica and Suriname moved to narrowed⁴.

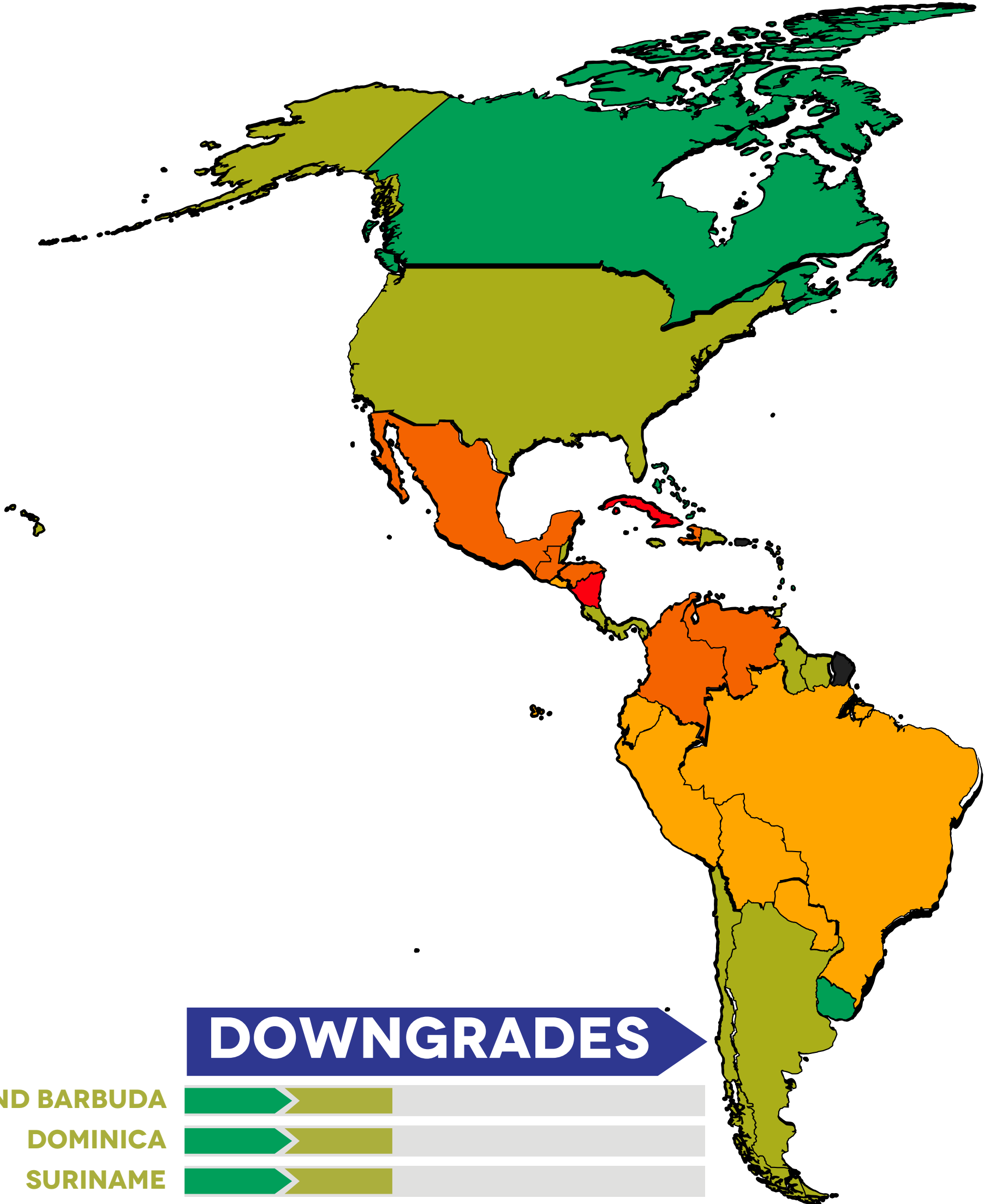
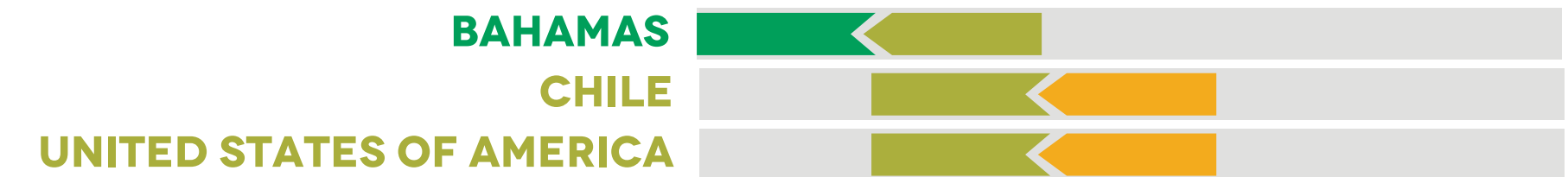
In Chile, the path toward a new constitution was extended after voters [rejected](#) the proposal from a Constitutional Assembly convened on the heels of the 2019 social uprising. The south of the country saw [continued](#) unrest and militarisation, with the government of President Gabriel Boric failing to make progress in resolving the longstanding conflict with Indigenous Mapuche people.

However, the new government changed course in relation to the social uprising, [withdrawing](#) some prosecutions of protesters and taking steps to [provide](#) reparations and access to justice for victims of repression. President Boric also [signed](#) and

⁴ For Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Dominica and Suriname – the CIVICUS Monitor added more indicators this year compared to 2021. Therefore ratings changes were prompted by additional information rather than a change in the situation on the ground.

OPEN | NARROWED | OBSTRUCTED | REPRESSED | CLOSED

UPGRADES



DOWNGRADES





METHODOLOGY

IN NUMBERS

TACTICS OF REPRESSION

BRIGHT SPOTS

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

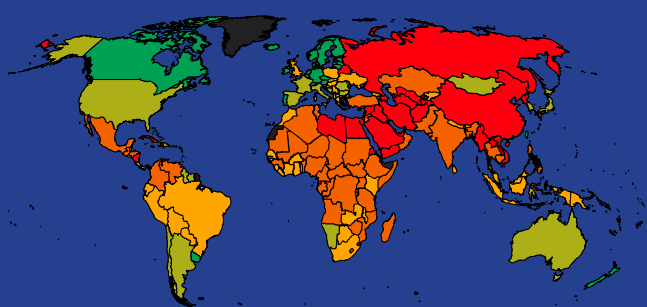
ASIA PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION



[championed](#) the ratification of the Escazú Agreement, a binding environmental treaty that includes provisions to improve the situation of HRDs. While much more could be done to ensure durable changes, these advances have put Chile on a more positive trajectory, recognised in its rating upgrade.

A similar scenario is seen in the USA, where the Biden administration has [sought to](#) improve on Trump's relationship with the media and stressed the importance of democratic institutions. The government [took steps](#) to safeguard fundamental freedoms and civil society, with policies to strengthen police accountability, support workplace organising and protect humanitarian assistance worldwide. Yet while civic space in the USA has improved enough to drive a change of rating, trends that negatively affected the space for civil society and the media endure. The year saw lawmakers [adopting](#) further restrictions on protests and a slew of state-level bills limiting free speech in schools. Incidents of excessive force and arbitrary arrests of

protesters remain [recurrent](#), and those charged are subject to increasingly harsh penalties. The authorities also continue to [criminalise](#) whistleblowers.

Conversely, in Guatemala, there was a much clearer trend in the deterioration of civic space as the government [moved](#) to undermine the rule of law and reverse the anti-corruption efforts of recent years. The authorities have gradually [chipped away](#) at judicial independence and adopted restrictive legislation. Over the past three years, the government of President Alejandro Giammattei has systematically [pursued](#) abusive prosecutions of peace and justice advocates, judicial officials and journalists, in an effort to silence critics and those who have sought to tackle political corruption. HRDs have [faced](#) increasing attacks, while the institutional spaces for monitoring their situation and ensuring their protection have been [weakened](#). Increasing authoritarianism is particularly concerning in light of the country's general elections in June 2023, which could lead to a consolidation of this reduced civic space.

Panama: Protesters march to demand steps to curb inflation, lower fuel and food prices. (Photo by REUTERS/Erick Marciscano)





METHODOLOGY

IN NUMBERS

TACTICS OF REPRESSION

BRIGHT SPOTS

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

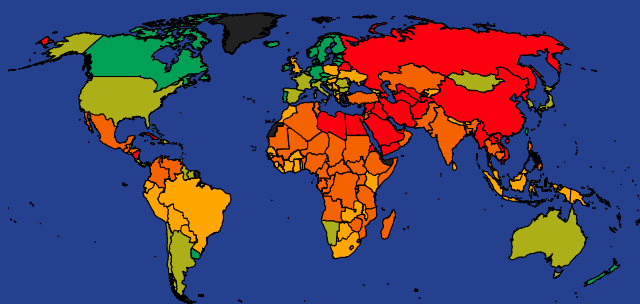
ASIA PACIFIC

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AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION



CIVIC SPACE RESTRICTIONS

In line with the global trend, there has been a sharp increase in cases of harassment in the Americas over the past year, making this the top violation recorded across the region. Attacks on journalists, the detention of protesters, intimidation and protest disruptions were also frequent. Women, Indigenous and environmental defenders were commonly involved in civic space incidents, often coming under fire from state and non-state actors.

TOP 5 VIOLATIONS TO CIVIC FREEDOMS FOR AMERICAS REGION

1.



HARASSMENT

2.



ATTACK ON
JOURNALIST

3.



PROTESTOR(S)
DETAINED

4.



INTIMIDATION

5.



PROTEST
DISRUPTION

HARASSMENT

Across the region, hostile authorities and non-state actors have carried out repeated attacks and threatening actions to terrorise HRDs and journalists. These behaviours put pressure on HRDs and journalists to stop their activities, often by causing them emotional and mental distress. Harassment can lead to self-censorship and, in extreme cases, push those targeted into displacement or exile. In 2022, these cases were documented in at least 18 countries in the region. Their occurrence was widespread, featuring in 44 per cent of all CIVICUS Monitor reports on the Americas over the year.

Harassment can unfold in multiple forms, from repeated police citations to house break-ins, menacing phone calls and online smear campaigns. Often HRDs and journalists who are subjected to harassment experience more than one type of threatening behaviour, including physical attacks. In many cases, those carrying out the harassment are empowered by impunity for their actions. Faced with an escalation of hostility against the Cabécar people in Costa Rica, Indigenous land defender Doris Ríos [said](#), 'What is frustrating is that you file complaints and nothing is done'. Ríos's comment followed an attack on her territory that left 13 people injured in February 2022. Two months later, her son was [threatened](#) at knifepoint just days after she publicly warned about the repeated death threats she and her family had received from local ranchers.

In Venezuela, a human rights lawyer [moved](#) her family out of the country after being faced with recurrent threats and surveillance for cooperating with UN human rights mechanisms. In El Salvador, HRDs and journalists were exposed to online harassment, often championed by the authorities, who used their social media accounts to [stigmatise](#) them. This behaviour by leaders, which has [worsened](#) under the current government's exceptional measures against gang violence, encouraged waves of attacks, insults and threats from supporters. In some cases, outspoken government critics have also been [hacked](#), subjected to surveillance and have had their privacy [exposed](#) online.

In Nicaragua, harassment was part of a complementary toolbox of tactics adopted by the authorities to silence civil society voices. Leaders and members of CSOs were personally [targeted](#) with harassment and criminalisation, and alongside this, thousands of organisations had their legal status [cancelled](#) using arbitrary procedures, forcing many to shut down their operations. Some groups had their offices and equipment seized.

Based on 116 updates published on the CIVICUS Monitor for countries in this region between 1 January 2022 - 31 December 2022



METHODOLOGY

IN NUMBERS

TACTICS OF REPRESSION

BRIGHT SPOTS

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

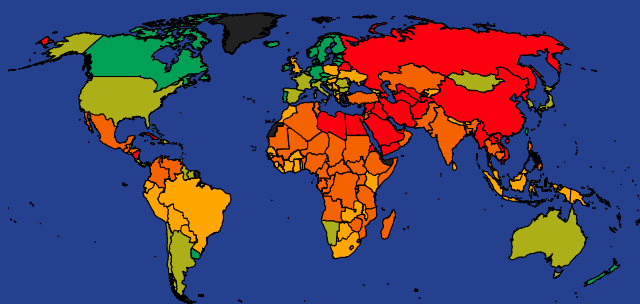
ASIA PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION



Particularly when women are targeted, harassment can involve threats of sexual violence and sexist language. A journalist in Bolivia [received](#) anonymous rape and death threats over her reporting on femicides. The messages against her seemed to indicate that she may have been stalked for some time, which led the country's Ombudsperson's Office to call on security forces to provide her with urgent protection measures.

ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS

Throughout 2022, physical attacks on journalists and media outlets took place in at least 17 countries of the Americas. It is the fifth year in a row that this violation has appeared among the top three for the region, displaying the persistence of a hostile environment for the media and the great personal risks journalists can face for doing their crucial work.

The CIVICUS Monitor documented cases of journalists being [shot at](#) by unidentified assailants and [assaulted](#) by police and protesters while covering demonstrations, and being [attacked](#) by politicians and their supporters, along with many other violent incidents. Offices of media outlets were attacked with explosives, firearms and arson attacks in several countries, including [Argentina](#), [Bolivia](#), [Colombia](#), [Haiti](#), [Honduras](#), [Mexico](#) and [Peru](#).

Perpetrators remained unknown in many of the attacks, but in some cases those responsible were identified but not sanctioned. In Guatemala, a journalist was [beaten](#) and detained and had his equipment damaged by police officers when covering the repression of a protest. Investigators shelved his complaint against the officers who assaulted him. Meanwhile, charges against him, initially dismissed by a local court, were [reinstated](#) at the request of public prosecutors.

In extreme cases, violence resulted in killings, with 2022 one of the region's [most deadly](#) years on record for press workers. The CIVICUS Monitor documented such cases in nine countries in the Americas. In Chile, Francisca Sandoval became the first journalist to be [killed](#) in the line of duty since the Pinochet dictatorship ended in 1990. Shooters opened fire on Workers' Day protesters in Santiago, hitting her and two other journalists. In Honduras, Indigenous communicator Pablo Isabel Hernández Rivera was [shot and killed](#). He had previously been subjected to threats and a smear campaign. The community radio station where he worked had also been sabotaged and threatened with closure.

In Mexico, the violence grew so extreme that journalists [held](#) multiple protests demanding justice for murdered colleagues and urgent measures to protect the safety of press workers. Haitian journalists also [faced](#) a spiral of violence while attempting to cover the country's [multidimensional crisis](#). They became targets of criminal gangs, with cases of [kidnapping](#), [drive-by shootings](#) and [ambushes](#), and have also been victims of [police brutality](#) in protests.



Mexico: Portraits of murdered journalists are seen pasted on the doors of the building of the Attorney General of the Republic during a demonstration held by Mexican journalists (Photo by PEDRO PARDO/AFP via Getty Images)



METHODOLOGY

IN NUMBERS

TACTICS OF REPRESSION

BRIGHT SPOTS

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

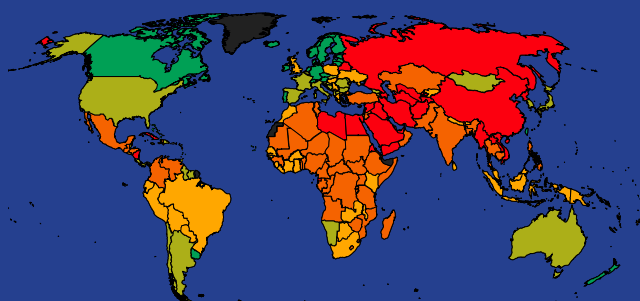
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REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION



DETENTION OF PROTESTERS

Across the region, the rising cost of living drove masses to the streets to demand living wages and public policies to contain price surges and support those living in poverty. Protesting remained an important tactic for people to call for change, from those protesting against environmentally damaging projects to women urging action against gender-based violence. However, security forces repeatedly resorted to detentions to disrupt protests. The CIVICUS Monitor recorded protests in at least 23 countries of the Americas, and in 13 of those, there were instances of detention of protesters. Detentions were documented in 40 per cent of all reports on protests in the region throughout 2022.

Protest-related detentions occurred in countries in every rating category, from places where civic space is generally protected to those where it is most constrained. In Canada, peaceful protests by climate and environmental activists were often [disrupted](#) with detentions and police said they [planned](#) to pursue charges against those staging disobedience actions and blocking roads. Similar instances were seen in the [USA](#) and [Argentina](#), where the frequent repression of protests against

the construction of a highway led a court in Córdoba to issue a preventive habeas corpus for those arrested for protesting.

The cost of living crisis [led](#) thousands to protest in Panama, in the largest demonstrations seen in the country in recent years. After three weeks of protests, the police disclosed they had arrested 102 people, 80 of whom had hearings for obstruction of transit and disrupting peaceful coexistence. There were also multiple reports of protesters being dispersed by police using teargas and pellets. In Venezuela, unions [held](#) multiple protests against hyperinflation and the loss of purchasing power, calling for living wages. In some cases, protesters were [detained](#) and prevented from marching.

In Cuba, relatives of detained protesters and feminist advocates who were supporting them were [arrested](#) for protesting near a court. One of the activists detained later [said](#) she continued to face harassment and surveillance for her advocacy work.

Ecuadorian Indigenous peoples and other movements [striking](#) against the government's social and economic policies were met with a [crackdown](#) in June 2022. In just 18 days, the civil society coalition Alianza DDHH [registered](#) 127 cases of human rights violations, including nine deaths, 318 people injured and at least 199 protesters detained. Among those arbitrarily arrested was Leonidas Iza, leader of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, who was accused by the authorities of paralysing public services. At the end of September, charges against him were [thrown out](#) in court.

Ecuador: Indigenous protesters met by police outside the National Assembly (Photo by Franklin Jacome/Agencia Press South/Getty Images)





METHODOLOGY

IN NUMBERS

TACTICS OF REPRESSION

BRIGHT SPOTS

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

AFRICA

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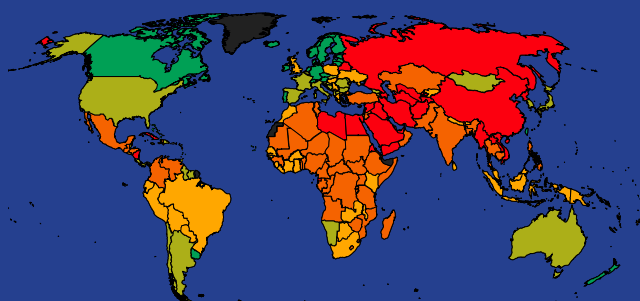
ASIA PACIFIC

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IN THE LINE OF FIRE

Violence against HRDs and journalists remains acute in the Americas. The region accounted for a disproportionate number of killings of HRDs recorded by the CIVICUS Monitor, with over 60 per cent of the total cases documented in 2022. Similarly, it was the region with the highest number of reports of killings of journalists. HRDs were killed in at least eight countries and journalists in at least nine.

Indigenous, environmental and land rights defenders were disproportionately affected by this violence. In [Brazil](#), Indigenous advocate Bruno Pereira and British journalist Dom Phillips were ambushed and killed as they returned from a reporting trip in a remote part of the Amazon rainforest. They had been documenting Indigenous people's efforts to resist predatory criminal activities in their territory. The 10-day search for them was driven initially by Indigenous organisations in the face of government negligence, something symptomatic of the attitude of the government of former President Jair Bolsonaro toward human rights, Indigenous peoples and independent media.

Sadly, [Colombia](#) saw a new record number of assassinations of HRDs and social leaders. According to the country's Ombudsperson's Office, nearly 200 of these advocates were killed in 2022. Frontline defenders and community leaders were particularly targeted. In [Honduras](#), a trans activist who advocated for the rights of people with HIV was killed in a brazen attack in her home. Before she died, Thalía Rodríguez had underscored in an interview that she was one of the last Honduran trans activists of her generation still living.

In [Mexico](#), at least five women defenders who searched for answers about missing people were killed. Press workers [faced](#) a particularly deadly year in the country, with four journalists [assassinated](#) in January 2022 alone. The authorities have [failed](#) to coordinate a comprehensive response to the violence. Mexico's underfunded and understaffed protection mechanism lacks the capacity to ensure the safety of the hundreds who need it. 2022 ended with Mexico again [topping](#) the list of countries outside war zones with the most journalists killed during the year.

The reproduction of this shameful trend, year after year, displays the urgent need for governments across the region to adopt and improve measures to protect HRDs and journalists and to tackle the prevailing impunity for crimes committed against them.



Brazil: Vigil demanding justice for journalist Dom Phillips and Indigenous expert Bruno Pereira, who were murdered in the Amazon. (Photo by REUTERS/Carla Carniel)



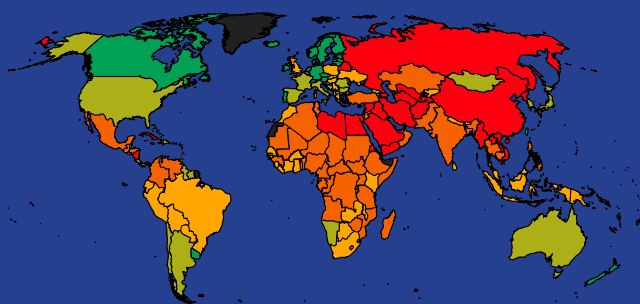
COUNTRY OF CONCERN: PERU

At the end of 2022, Peru was [launched](#) into a new chapter of its long-lasting institutional crisis when former President Pedro Castillo was removed by Congress on 7 December 2022, directly after his attempt to dissolve the legislature. The move followed months of political instability, with the opposition-controlled Congress often [at odds](#) with Castillo during his 15 months in office. The rapid turn of events that brought former Vice-President Dina Boluarte to power sparked [protests](#) by Castillo supporters, who saw his removal and arrest as a coup by political elites.

Protests, particularly those in rural areas and led by Indigenous and campesino people, were met with excessive force by law enforcement agencies. Between 8 December 2022 and 27 January 2023, at least 57 people died, including six minors, and over 1,500 were injured. The majority of the deaths were alleged extrajudicial killings perpetrated by law enforcement officers. Civil society has [recorded](#) numerous other human rights violations, including arbitrary arrests, excessive use of force, sexual violence and attacks on journalists. President Boluarte and other officials have [failed](#) to condemn abuses by police and armed forces and sometimes blamed protesters for ‘causing chaos’ and stigmatised them. Amid the turmoil, human rights organisations have been targeted and harassed by radicalised far-right groups.

The violent police response to these protests is shocking but not unprecedented. Just months earlier, a strike led by transport workers against rising fuel, fertiliser and food costs was also [met](#) with detentions and excessive force. In recent years, security forces have repeatedly [used](#) disproportionate force in response to protests, particularly those led by excluded populations away from the major cities. Rather than pursuing reforms to address police violence, in recent years Peruvian authorities have [adopted](#) a law shielding officers from prosecution for abuses.

Peru: Protesters blockade a highway at the entrance of Abancay, Peru (Photo by MARTIN BERNETTI/AFP via Getty Images)



ASIA PACIFIC

OPEN NARROWED OBSTRUCTED REPRESSED CLOSED

DOWNGRADES

AFGHANISTAN
HONG KONG
MYANMAR



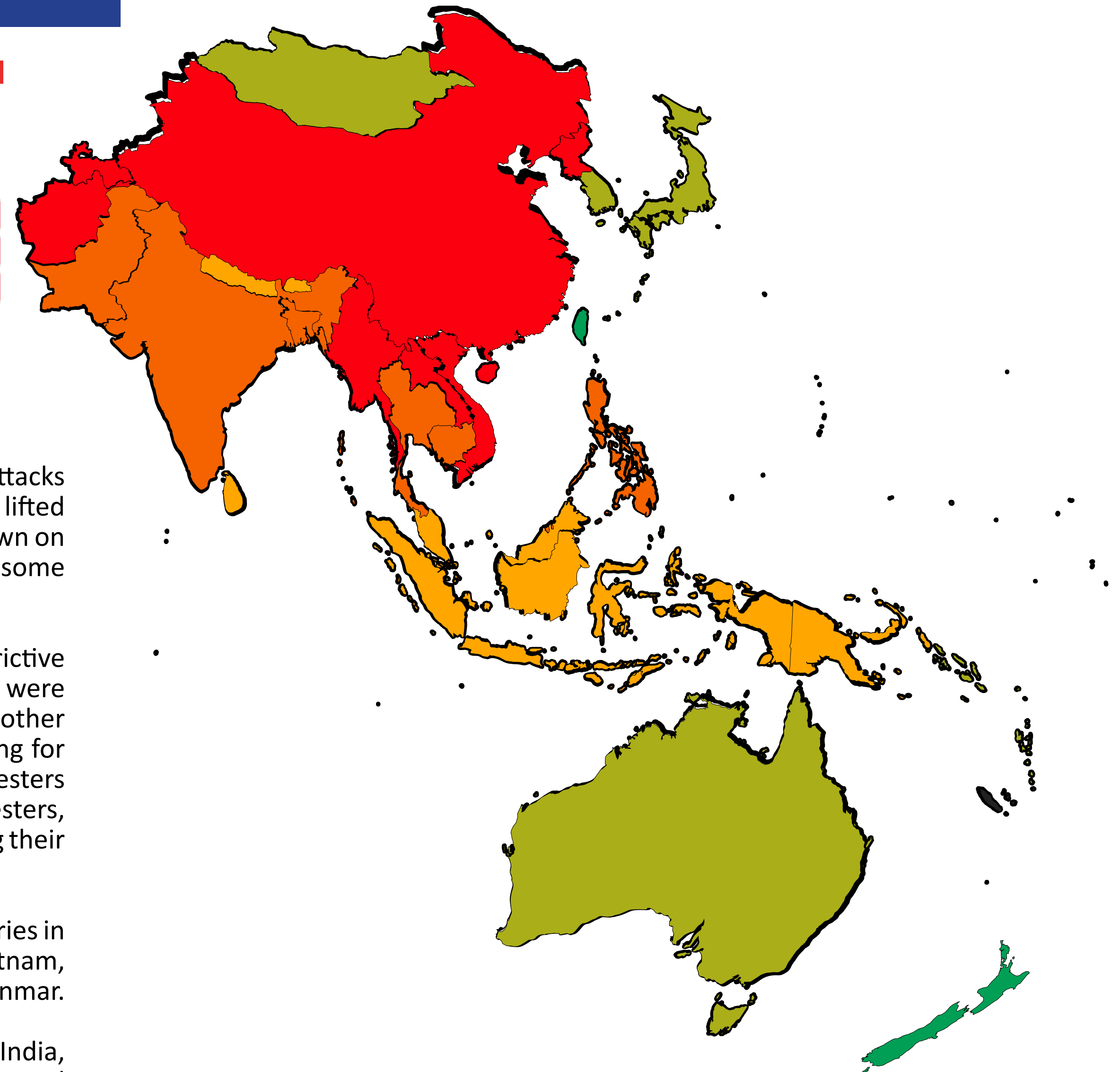
RATING OVERVIEW

In 2022, the CIVICUS Monitor continued to document restrictions and attacks on civic freedoms across the Asia Pacific region. As most governments lifted controls in relation to the pandemic, efforts to stifle dissent and crack down on civil society and social movements remained prevalent and escalated in some countries.

Among the most common violations were the passing and use of restrictive laws to criminalise activists and critics. In several countries these laws were used to prosecute HRDs and keep them behind bars for long periods. Another widespread trend across the region was the disruption of protests calling for political or economic reforms, with the authorities often detaining protesters and using excessive force. The authorities also harassed activists and protesters, including by hauling them in for questioning, detaining them, intimidating their families and imposing travel bans, in addition to digital attacks.

In the Asia region there is civic space regression with an increase in countries in the closed category from four to seven. China, Laos, North Korea and Vietnam, remaining in this category, are joined by Afghanistan, Hong Kong and Myanmar.

Eight countries are rated as repressed – Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, India, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand – and seven are in the obstructed category: Bhutan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste. Civic space in Japan, Mongolia and South Korea is rated as narrowed, with Taiwan remaining the only country rated as open.



METHODOLOGY

IN NUMBERS

TACTICS OF REPRESSION

BRIGHT SPOTS

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

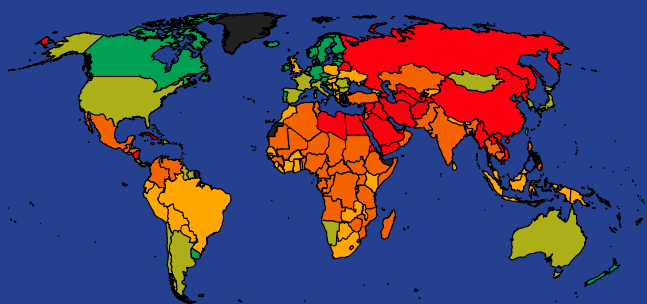
ASIA PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL
ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH
AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION





METHODOLOGY

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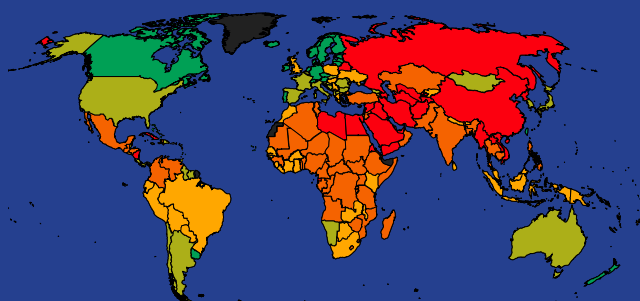
ASIA PACIFIC

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REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION



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

All three countries downgraded to a closed rating have been on the CIVICUS Monitor Watchlist, alerting to a deterioration in civic space.

[Afghanistan](#) has been downgraded due to severe restrictions on civic space imposed by the Taliban following their takeover in 2021. Activists who have been [critical](#) of the Taliban have faced arrest, unlawful detention, abductions, torture and extrajudicial execution. Women rights activists [protesting](#) against discriminatory education and employment policies have been met by restrictions and violence. [Journalists](#) have been arrested, threatened and attacked while media outlets have been forced to shut down. The Taliban have also [clamped down](#) on CSOs, [barred](#) women from working in them and effectively [banned](#) political parties. They [dissolved](#) the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission.

In [Myanmar](#), during two years of military rule following an illegal coup, thousands of activists, students, artists, lawyers, politicians and critics have been [jailed](#) by the junta in secret military tribunals on fabricated charges. The junta has continued to torture detainees with impunity and four activists were executed in July 2022. Scores of [journalists](#) have been detained and at least four were killed at the end of 2022, while media outlets have been banned. The arrest and jailing of anti-coup [protesters](#) has also persisted. Many civil society groups have [shut down](#) their offices. In October 2022, the junta enacted a new NGO law that will further [shackle](#) what is left of civil society.

Hong Kong has been downgraded due to the [systematic crackdown](#) on dissent following the passage of the draconian National Security Law in 2020. It punishes secession, subversion, terrorism and collusion with ‘foreign forces’, which all carry a maximum life jail sentence. The crimes are vaguely defined and have become catch-all offences to prosecute activists and critics with heavy penalties. More than 200 people have been [arrested](#) under the security law and dozens of civil society groups and trade unions have disbanded or relocated since the law came into place. Activists have also been criminalised for [sedition](#), while around 3,000 protesters have been prosecuted for their [participation](#) in peaceful gatherings and protests, such as Tiananmen Square vigils which until recently were held annually. Independent and pro-democracy [media outlets](#) have been targeted with raids and forced to close and journalists have been criminalised.

CIVIC SPACE RESTRICTIONS

The top civic space violations in the Asia Pacific region in 2022 were the enactment and use of restrictive legislation, followed by protest disruption, harassment, the detention of protesters and prosecution of HRDs.

TOP 5 VIOLATIONS TO CIVIC FREEDOMS FOR ASIA PACIFIC REGION

1.



RESTRICTIVE LAW

2.



PROTEST DISRUPTION

3.



HARASSMENT

4.



PROTESTOR(S) DETAINED

5.



HRD PROSECUTED

Based on 106 updates published on the CIVICUS Monitor for countries in this region between 1 January 2022 - 31 December 2022



CRIMINALISATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND CRITICS

The most widespread civic space violation in the Asia Pacific region in 2022 was the use of laws to restrict fundamental freedoms, documented in at least 27 countries. Among the legislation most often used to stifle dissent were laws related to national security and anti-terrorism, public order and criminal defamation. HRDs were prosecuted under restrictive laws in at least 17 countries in the region.

In [China](#), rated as closed, the ongoing crackdown worsened as President Xi Jinping sought an unprecedented [third term](#) in office. The authorities detained and prosecuted scores of HRDs in 2022 for broadly defined and vaguely worded

offences such as ‘subverting state power’, ‘picking quarrels and provoking trouble’ or ‘disturbing public order’. In [Hong Kong](#), the National Security Law and colonial-era sedition law were deployed to arrest and imprison activists. Among those [detained](#) under the security law is human rights lawyer Chow Hang-Tung, from the now-defunct Hong Kong Alliance, the main organiser of Tiananmen Square vigils.

Restrictive laws that establish offences such as ‘abusing democratic freedoms’ or ‘spreading materials against the state’ are used in [Vietnam](#) to keep more than a hundred activists in jail. The one-party state also used [tax evasion laws](#) to criminalise activists such as environmentalist Nguy Thi Khanh. Thailand continued to charge, detain and convict critics for [royal defamation](#) under its lèse-majesté law, which carries a punishment of up to 15 years’ imprisonment, and also prosecuted protesters under an [emergency decree](#) introduced in response to the pandemic, which was

METHODOLOGY

IN NUMBERS

TACTICS OF REPRESSION

BRIGHT SPOTS

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA PACIFIC

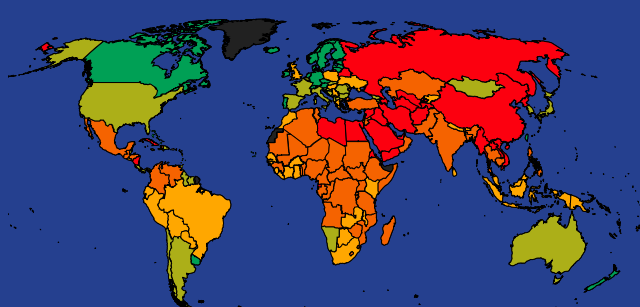
EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

India: Protestors demand the release of activist Teesta Setalvad (Photo by REUTERS/ Francis Mascarenhas)





METHODOLOGY

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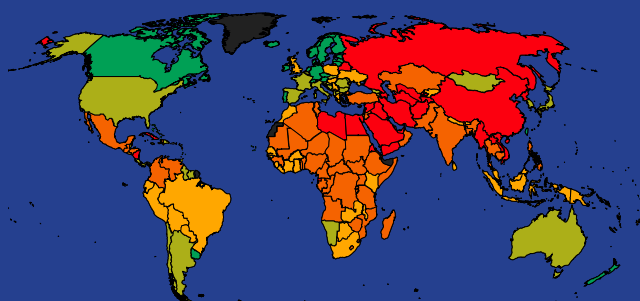
ASIA PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION



lifted in September 2022. In [Myanmar](#), fabricated charges of terrorism, incitement and sedition were used by the junta to jail thousands of activists. In Cambodia, ‘incitement’ provisions were used to [criminalise](#) activists and union leaders such as Chhim Sithar and to hold them in pretrial detention without bail. These provisions were further used to [prosecute](#) the political opposition.

In the Philippines, the authorities used a [terrorist financing law](#) to persecute humanitarian workers and activists. In Indonesia, the Electronic Information and Transactions Law (ITE Law) has been weaponised to silence online dissent: two HRDs were charged with [defamation](#) under the ITE Law for speaking up online about human rights violations connected to corporate crime in the Papua region, allegedly linked to government officials. In Papua, people involved in peaceful activism for independence continue to be prosecuted and imprisoned by the Indonesian authorities for [treason](#). A [new Criminal Code](#) passed in December 2022 could further restrict civic freedoms. Singapore continued to use [criminal defamation](#) laws as well as the 2009 Public Order Act against activists and journalists.

In India, anti-terror laws such as the repressive Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act have been [systematically used](#) by the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to keep student activists and HRDs – such as people the state alleges to have instigated violence in the village of Bhima Koregaon in 2018 – in detention. Among those detained under the law is Kashmiri HRD [Khurram Parvez](#). The government also used the restrictive [Foreign Contribution \(Regulation\) Act](#) to raid and harass critical CSOs such as the Centre for Promotion of Social Concerns and Oxfam India and block CSOs’ access to foreign funding.

In Bangladesh, the draconian [Digital Security Act](#) continued to be used to target journalists and critics, including those in exile such as Tasneem Khalil, chief editor of Netra News, while journalist Rozina Islam is facing [charges](#) under the Official Secrets Act for exposing corruption. In Pakistan, the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act was used against journalists and critics to criminalise [online defamation](#) while HRDs including [Muhammad Ismail](#) and [Idris Khattak](#) have been prosecuted on trumped-up charges.

In the Pacific region, the passage of [anti-protest laws](#) in Australia puts climate protesters at risk. Other concerns include the use of the [Public Order Act](#) to restrict protests in Fiji and laws in [Samoa](#) and [Vanuatu](#) that criminalise online defamation.



Afghanistan: The Taliban fire in the air to disperse a protest by Afghan women (Photo by REUTERS/Ali Khara)



METHODOLOGY

IN NUMBERS

TACTICS OF REPRESSION

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AN UNEVEN CRISIS

AFRICA

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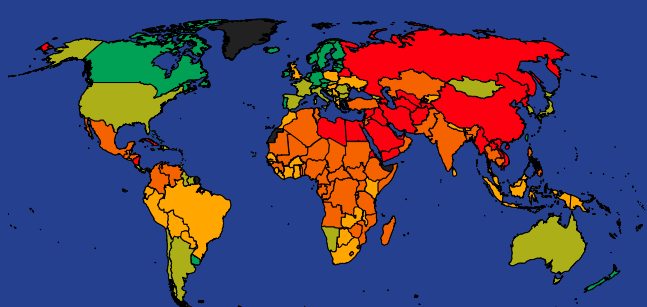
ASIA PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL
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AFRICA

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Malaysia: Malaysian anti-riot police blocking a protest (Photo by Annice Lyn/Getty Images)

RESTRICTIVE LEGISLATION USED AGAINST HRDS AND JOURNALISTS



IN AT LEAST **27** COUNTRIES DURING 2022.

CRACKDOWN ON PROTESTS AND DETENTION OF PROTESTERS

Another key violation documented in the region was the disruption of protests, which occurred in at least 25 countries including five countries in the Pacific. The CIVICUS Monitor documented the detention of protesters in at least 20 countries.

Unprecedented protests that [erupted](#) across China in December 2022, due to widespread public frustration with the government's strict pandemic regulations, were met with restrictions, arrests and excessive force. Police installed barricades and deployed sophisticated surveillance tools to track down and detain protesters. There was widespread censorship of online posts and videos related to the protests.

In Cambodia, striking unionists from the NagaWorld Casino, who held regular protests, were [detained](#) at quarantine centres for allegedly violating COVID-19 protocols. Some were forced onto buses and driven to the outskirts of the city where they had to pay for their own transport home. Strikers, mostly women union members, experienced [sexual harassment](#).



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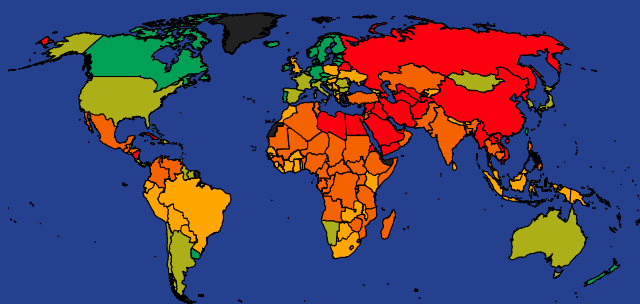
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Hong Kong: Members of 612 humanitarian fund leave the courts in Hong Kong (Photo: REUTERS/Tyrone Siu)

Riot police also used [violent tactics](#) in Thailand to disperse peaceful protesters, including in the context of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in November 2022, when they beat protesters with batons and fired rubber bullets. They also attacked journalists at the scene. In Indonesia, [mass protests](#) by Papuans against the central government's policies and in support of independence were forcibly dispersed with unnecessary use of force. Arrests were made and [injuries](#) reported.

[Protests](#) in [Bangladesh](#) by the political opposition, students and workers were met with restrictions and excessive police force. In some instances, supporters of the ruling Awami League party were involved in attacks against protesters with impunity. In August and September 2022, there was a [brutal crackdown](#) by the government on nationwide protests by the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party against a hike in fuel and commodity prices and mismanagement in the energy sector. In December 2022, the authorities again disrupted an opposition rally with live ammunition, rubber bullets and teargas. Mass arrests were reported.

[Sri Lanka](#) was included on the CIVICUS Monitor Watchlist in 2022 due to a [crackdown on mass protests](#), as the country suffered its worst economic crisis in decades. The authorities used sweeping [emergency powers](#) to curtail protests, make arrests and shut down social media networks. Human rights groups documented the use of excessive force by the police against protesters, with the deployment of water

cannon, teargas and rubber bullets. Hundreds were arbitrarily arrested and there were allegations of torture and ill-treatment in detention, including denial of access to medical care and lawyers. The draconian [Prevention of Terrorism Act](#) was used to detain three student activists. [Journalists](#) reporting on the protests were assaulted by security forces.

There were also restrictions on protests and arrests of protesters by the authorities in Maldives. In April 2022, President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih [issued a decree](#) restricting anti-India protests as a threat to national security. In Nepal, protests against a contentious [aid grant](#) and [fuel price hikes](#) were disrupted with excessive force. The Taliban [repressed](#) protests in Afghanistan, especially by women's rights activists, disrupting their protests by firing shots into the air and detaining, interrogating and ill-treating them. In some cases, teargas and batons were used. They also assaulted journalists and confiscated their equipment to stop them covering the protests.

In the Pacific, the disruption of protests was documented in [Australia](#), [Fiji](#), [New Zealand](#), [Papua New Guinea](#) and [Vanuatu](#). [Papua New Guinea](#) security forces [opened fire](#) on protesters in Jiwaka Province around the general election in August 2022, killing four men and injuring 15 others. In Australia, the police undertook a [pre-emptive raid](#) ahead of protests by Blockade Australia climate protesters in June 2022, arresting at least 40 people.



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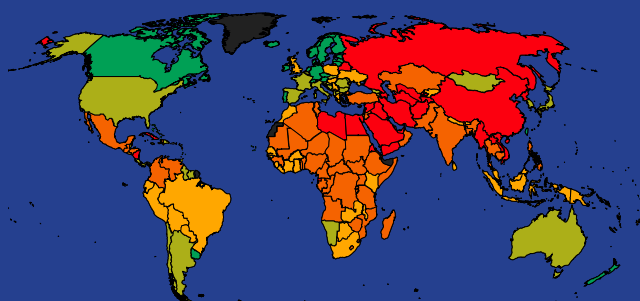
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HARASSMENT OF ACTIVISTS AND JOURNALISTS

In at least 23 countries in the region the harassment of activists, journalists and critics was reported.

In [China](#), the harassment of activists escalated to silence dissent ahead of the country hosting the Winter Olympics in February 2022. HRDs and some academics had their WeChat messaging app accounts [restricted](#), with some unable to use their accounts entirely and forced to re-register. Around the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre in June 2022, the authorities [ramped up](#) surveillance of dissidents and placed dozens of democracy activists under house arrest or forced them temporarily to leave Beijing. Human rights groups also [exposed](#) how authorities are sending activists to psychiatric wards for medically unnecessary compulsory treatment or using the ‘residential surveillance in a designated location’ procedure – a [form](#) of enforced disappearance – to [detain](#) activists.

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



In the Philippines, activists continue to be red-tagged – accused of being communists – and then arrested on fabricated charges. People who have been red-tagged include [community doctor](#) Maria Natividad Castro and [environmental](#) activist Vertudez ‘Daisy’ Macapanpan. The authorities also brought [perjury charges](#) against 10 HRDs from the human rights group Karapatan, women’s rights organisation Gabriela and the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines in retaliation for their human rights work.

In Malaysia, the police [brought](#) scores of protesters, including activists and opposition politicians, in for questioning for holding spontaneous demonstrations related to corruption and price hikes and in opposition to the death penalty. Journalists and whistleblowers also faced [harassment](#) for their reporting. Activists and lawyers in Singapore faced [police harassment](#) for their activism against the death penalty and the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act continued to be used to curtail freedom of expression. In Indonesia, activists were subjected to [hacking and intimidation](#) via WhatsApp in July 2022 after they held a Twitter Space discussion on the blocking of multiple websites.



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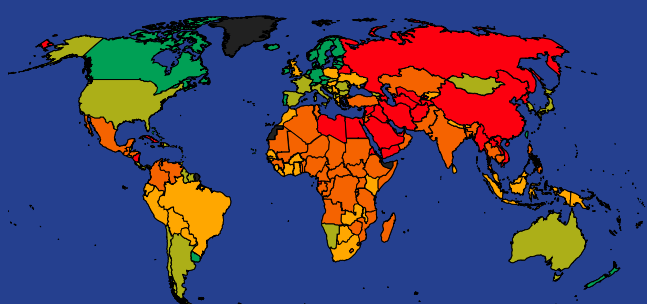
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In 2022, the Bangladesh authorities [coerced and intimidated](#) families of victims of enforced disappearances to silence them and targeted [families](#) of journalists and activists in exile. They also vilified leading human rights group Odhikar and arbitrarily [revoked](#) its registration. In India, the government sought to [block](#) activists and journalists from travelling abroad including the chair of Amnesty International India, Aakar Patel, journalist Rana Ayyub and [Kashmiri photojournalist](#) Sanna Irshad.

In the Pacific, the CIVICUS Monitor [documented](#) the harassment of the media in Solomon Islands and the [suspension](#) of judges in Kiribati.

COUNTRIES OF CONCERN: BANGLADESH AND CAMBODIA

There are serious concerns about the regression of civic space in [Bangladesh](#) in recent years, including judicial harassment of and threats and attacks on HRDs, journalists and the political opposition. The Digital Security Act has been used to silence online dissent and target critics and journalists, including those in exile. The police have also cracked down on protests and there have been allegations of torture, ill-treatment and enforced disappearances committed by the security forces, including the Rapid Action Battalion, an elite anti-terrorism unit. CSOs have been targeted, with the government [arbitrarily revoking](#) the registration of leading human rights group Odhikar and intensified its smear campaign against them. There has also been a [sustained attack](#) on the opposition in the lead up to the 2024 elections.

Another country of concern is [Cambodia](#) where repressive laws are routinely used to restrict civic freedoms and criminalise HRDs, trade unionists, youth activists, journalists and other critical voices. Prime Minister Hun Sen continued to use a draconian state of emergency law to severely restrict fundamental freedoms. The 2015 Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organizations continues to restrict the right to freedom of association due to its onerous registration requirements, reporting obligations and broad grounds for denial of registration and deregistration. Independent media outlets have been silenced and Hun Sen has intensified his crackdown on the political opposition ahead of elections in July 2023.

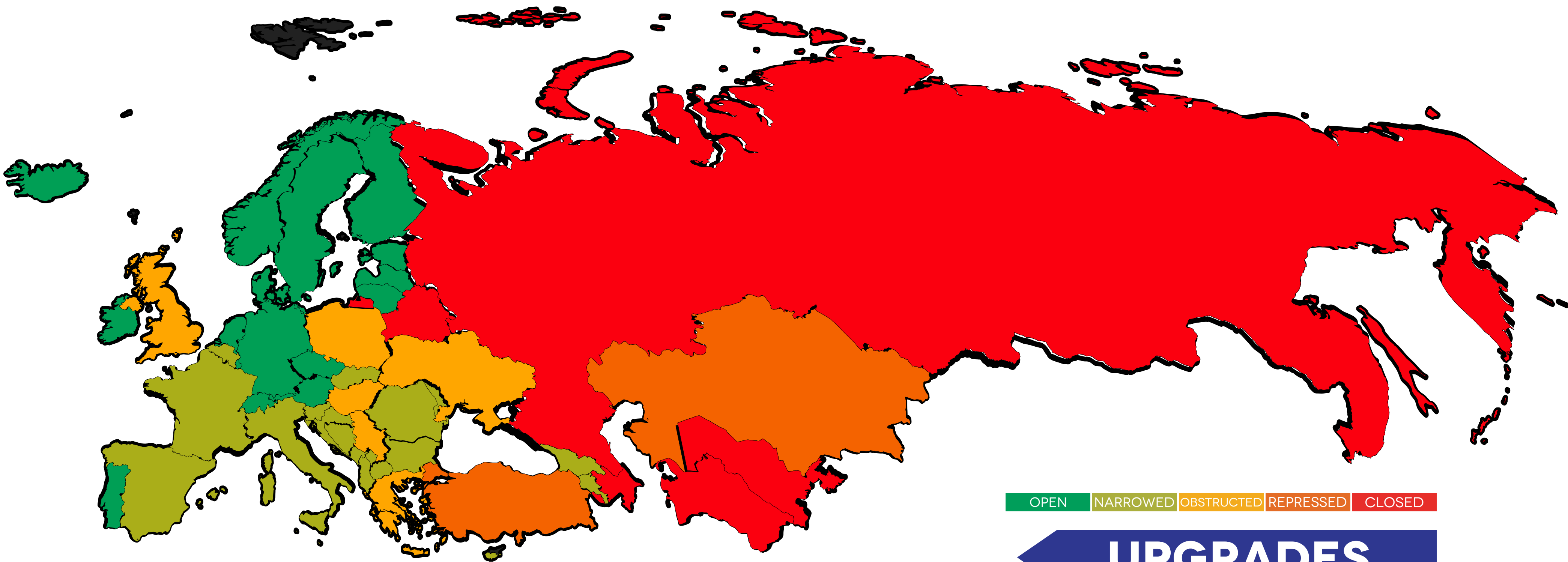
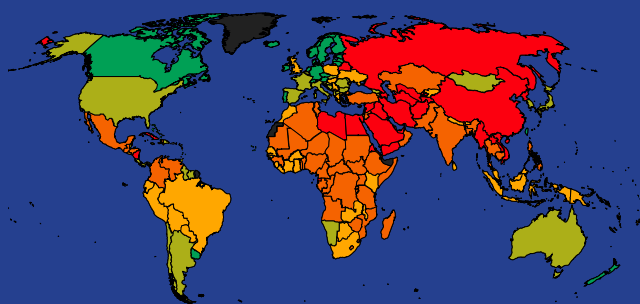


Bangladesh: Bangladesh anti-riot police in Dhaka (Photo by REUTERS Mohammad Ponir Hossain)

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA



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RATING OVERVIEW

Civic space continues to come under attack in the Europe and Central Asia region. Of the region's 54 countries, civic space is rated as open in 20, narrowed in 19, obstructed in seven, repressed in two and closed in six.

In 2022, democratic backsliding continued in Europe with several authoritarian leaders, such as [Hungary's](#) Viktor Orban and [Serbia's Aleksandar Vučić](#), further consolidating their power, bringing increased concerns for civic freedoms. Far-right leaders also made significant gains, including in [Italy](#) and [Sweden](#), while long-established democracies such as the [UK](#) saw further restrictions on civic freedoms.

OPEN | NARROWED | OBSTRUCTED | REPRESSED | CLOSED

UPGRADES



DOWNGRADES





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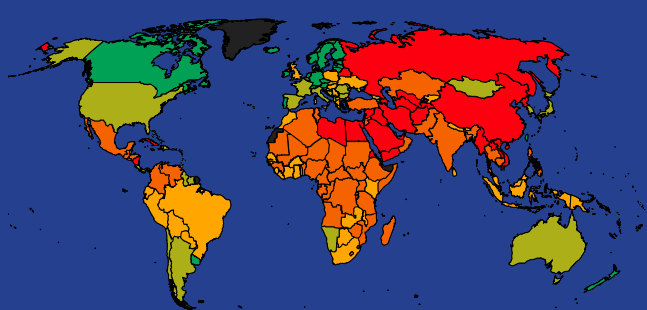
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Estonia: Support outside the Ukrainian embassy (Photo by REUTERS/Benoit Tessier via Gallo Images).

Russia's war on Ukraine had significant political, economic and social implications for the region, with civil society both in and outside the conflict area mobilising to support people fleeing the war.

Central Asia saw several serious crises where the authorities forcibly cracked down on mass protests and ensuing unrest in [Kazakhstan](#),⁵ [Tajikistan](#) and [Uzbekistan](#), resulting in significant loss of life and injuries. Across Central Asia people faced ongoing persecution for criticising the authorities and standing up for justice, human rights and the rule of law.

Overall country ratings in the region have worsened. The ratings of four European countries have been downgraded: Cyprus, Greece, Russia and the UK. Two of these countries are European Union (EU) member states. The situation in Central Asia has also worsened, with Tajikistan experiencing a particularly severe decline in civic space, resulting in a rating downgrade.

Cyprus has been downgraded from "open" to "narrowed". Concerns include the ongoing legal battle by the Action for Support, Equality and Antiracism (KISA), which was removed from the registry of associations in 2020 and since then is operating under significant restrictions. The organisation continues to legally challenge its dissolution and believes that this restriction is part of the government's widening crackdown on those working to protect refugees and asylum seeker rights. Funding for civil society is a challenge, with national banks treating NGO bank accounts as high risk which has resulted in CSOs facing additional administrative and financial burdens.

Concerns over the repeated targeting of civil society working with refugees and asylum seekers, disproportionate [responses](#) to [protests](#) and continuous legal harassment and surveillance of journalists has prompted a ratings change from "narrowed" to "obstructed" in Greece. Several CSOs and human rights defenders (HRDs) working on migrant rights have been targeted. Four CSOs who have [challenged](#) the government in several cases of push backs, were put under investigation for "possible links to smuggling", while activist Panayote Dimitras is [accused](#) of "setting up a criminal organisation with the purpose of facilitating the illegal entry and stay in Greece of third-country nationals". In addition, Greek journalist Thanasis Koukakis and several others, including opposition politicians, [were subject to](#) surveillance via Predator spyware.

In Russia, the government's crackdown on civic space further intensified since it launched its full-scale war on Ukraine, prompting a rating change from repressed

⁵ The country was downgraded from obstructed to repressed in June 2022



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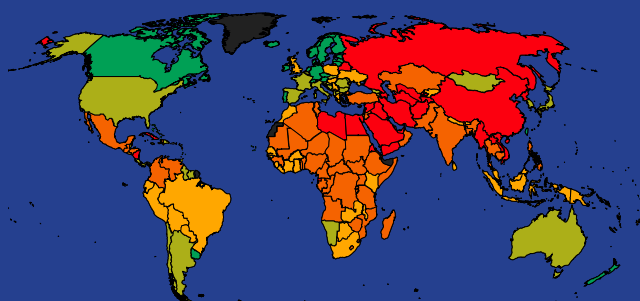
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to closed. Nationwide anti-war [protests](#) have been brutally repressed, with over 19,500 people [detained](#) since February 2022. Journalists reporting on protests have faced brutal attacks. Several independent media outlets have [shut down](#) as a result of ongoing pressure from the authorities, while a recently passed [foreign agents law](#) is likely to be used to further stifle civil society. Russia's downgrade follows its addition to the CIVICUS Monitor [Watchlist](#) in March 2022.

Civic space deteriorated dramatically in Tajikistan during the year, prompting a rating change from repressed to closed. The authorities cracked down on mass protests in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO), which saw people taking to the streets of the city of Khorog to demand the resignation of the regional leader and justice for a young man killed during a police operation. In response, the authorities carried out special security operations in the region, which brought allegations of excessive force, arbitrary detentions, torture and extrajudicial killings of detainees. Since then the authorities have failed to [impartially and effectively investigate](#) reported human rights violations. As part of the crackdown, around 20 human rights activists and journalists critical of the government's policies in the GBAO were detained and prosecuted, with others facing growing intimidation and harassment. The space for independent media remains limited, with the arbitrary blocking of independent news sites and social media networks.

A significant deterioration in civic freedoms in the UK, particularly the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, has led to the country being downgraded from narrowed to obstructed.

However, a positive shift for civil society came in the Czech Republic under the government of Prime Minister Petr Fiala, prompting a rating change from narrowed to open. The new government has put forward a draft legislative [proposal](#) to strengthen the editorial independence of Czech Television. Journalists, however, continue to face [harassment](#) from the former prime minister. Latvia's civic space rating has also improved to open. Civil society [reports](#) that there is an overall favourable environment, with CSOs being involved in decision-making, and an online portal that enables engagement in consultation processes. Civic space in Armenia has shown improvements, resulting in a rating change from obstructed to narrowed, with indications of [enhanced collaboration](#) between the state and CSOs in policy-making processes and [increased transparency](#) of allocation of state funds to CSOs. In June 2022, amendments to the Criminal Code saw the [decriminalisation](#) of the offence of grave insult.

CIVIC SPACE RESTRICTIONS

In Europe and Central Asia, the most common violations of civic freedoms documented in 2022 were harassment, intimidation, detention of protesters, attacks on journalists and the passing of restrictive laws. Over the past five years, harassment has been one of the most common tactics used in the region to crack down on civil society.

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

1.



HARASSMENT

2.



INTIMIDATION

3.



PROTESTOR(S)
DETAINED

4.



ATTACK ON
JOURNALIST

5.



RESTRICTIVE LAW



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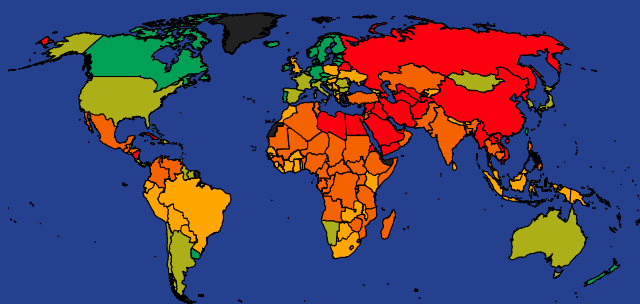
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Turkey: Protests against the sentencing of Osman Kavala (Photo by Hakan Akgun/ dia images via Getty Images).

HARASSMENT AND INTIMIDATION

In 2022, harassment was the most common civic space violation, documented in at least 36 countries in the region, while intimidation was documented in at least 25 countries. The groups most commonly targeted in the region were women, LGBTQI+ groups and labour rights groups.

In many countries harassment and intimidation takes place online and extends to offline spaces, and at times can lead to physical attacks on activists and journalists. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, LGBTQI+ activists faced online [harassment](#) before and after holding a Pride march, including from high-level politicians. In North Macedonia, Bekim Asani, president of the LGBTQI+ United CSO, was [subject to](#) threats and insults, leading up to a physical attack that took place in Strumica at a public event to promote the organisation. Activist Dragan Dmitrović [reported that](#) police officers threatened him with death shortly before he was forced to sign a false confession incriminating three other activists for protest in Serbia after violence.

Women are disproportionately targeted through gendered intimidation and harassment. Several cases have been documented against women journalists in the region, including in [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), [France](#), [Italy](#), [Montenegro](#), [Romania](#) and [Turkey](#). In Romania, journalist Emilia Sercan, who has faced threats since 2016, [filed](#) a police report after being threatened online and discovering that old private photographs had been stolen from her hard drive and put on porn sites. The screenshots, which she filed with the police report, were then leaked and widely shared on the internet.

Smear campaigns are another way in which harassment takes place. In Hungary in [October 2022](#), the government-financed think tank Centre for Fundamental Rights (Alapjogokért Központ) accused Amnesty International of promoting sex-change surgeries in schools because the group promotes a [project](#), 'Inclusive Spaces', which aims to provide information to teachers and students about LGBTQI+ people and their rights.

In some cases the criminal justice system is used as a tool to harass activists, including in Poland, where pro-abortion activist Justyna Wydrzyńska, from the Aborcynjny Dream Team group [faces up to](#) three years in prison for aiding and abetting a pregnancy termination. In 2020 Wydrzyńska sent abortion pills she had at home to a woman who had contacted her who was in an abusive relationship with an unwanted pregnancy. In Turkey, We Will Stop Femicide Platform, a leading women's CSO, is [facing prosecution](#) for 'acting against the law and against morality'.



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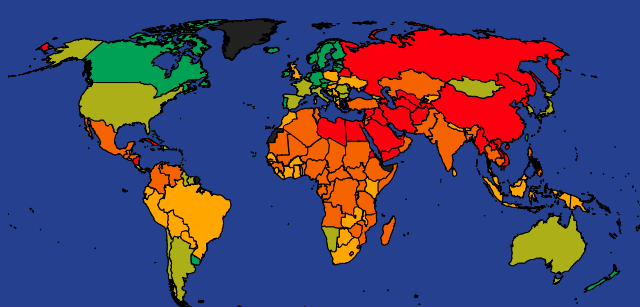
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Legal intimidation and harassment through Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) lawsuits filed by both state and private actors were frequently documented in the region, including in [Croatia](#), [Greece](#) and [Lithuania](#). These cases are often lengthy and expensive and serve to drain the resources of CSOs and media outlets in an attempt to silence critical voices. In Serbia, the Crime and Corruption Research Network (KRIK), an investigative portal, [was found guilty](#) in a SLAPP case initiated by Bratislav Gašić, former head of the Security Intelligence Agency and now Minister of Internal Affairs. The lawsuit came after KRIK reported on a public trial by quoting a wiretapped conversation used as evidence against a criminal group, which exposed the group's ties with Gašić.

Palestinian activists in [Austria](#) and [Germany](#) have also faced legal harassment. In one case, widely condemned by several UN Special Rapporteurs, a member of Boycott Divestment Sanctions Austria was found guilty of defamation and fined €3,500 (approx. US\$3,700) plus legal fees after the municipality of Vienna filed a case over a [Facebook post](#) that it argued 'incites hatred against Israeli people'. The post contained a picture of a poster stating 'Visit Apartheid' that was stuck on an official city of Vienna billboard.

Intimidation and harassment are frequently used in Central Asia to repress government critics. In addition to suppressing dissent at home, the authorities in Turkmenistan [continued to target](#) activists based abroad, particularly in Turkey, putting pressure on them both directly and indirectly through their relatives in Turkmenistan. Increasing intimidation and harassment of journalists, bloggers, lawyers, civil society activists and other critical voices was also documented in Kyrgyzstan. In one high-profile case, more than 20 activists were [arrested](#) and charged with organising riots after publicly opposing a controversial government-negotiated border agreement with Uzbekistan. The authorities in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan targeted journalists and activists in crackdowns launched in response to mass protests that were suppressed. In Kazakhstan, at least 30 activists, including Zhanbolat Mamai, leader of the opposition Democratic Party, were [charged](#) with rioting and other offences related to predominantly peaceful mass protests for social and political change in January 2022, despite the lack of any credible evidence to support charges.

Greece: Students from Thessaloniki University stage protests (Photo by SAKIS MITROLIDIS/AFP via Getty Images).





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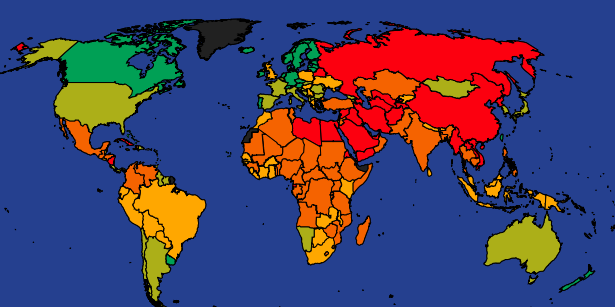
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DETENTION OF PROTESTERS AND ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS

The detention of protesters was documented in at least 29 countries in the region. Protests took place on several issues including environmental rights, LGBTQI+ rights, labour rights, socio-economic rights and democracy. In addition, physical attacks on journalists were documented in at least 24 countries, in many cases during protests.

Protests by environmental groups involving civil disobedience, calling on governments and industries to respond to the climate crisis, resulted in detentions in countries including [Belgium](#), [Denmark](#), [Finland](#), [Germany](#), the [Netherlands](#), [Norway](#), [Portugal](#), [Spain](#), [Sweden](#) and the [UK](#). In one example in Serbia, environmental activists

Greece: Students from Thessaloniki University stage protests (Photo by SAKIS MITROLIDIS/AFP via Getty Images)



[protested](#) against the planned construction of a bridge in Novi Sad, claiming it will devastate the city's last green oasis. They were met with a strong police presence, with several protesters detained. They also suffered serious injuries.

Democracy protesters in [Belarus](#) and Russia continue to face serious repression. Following Vladimir Putin's [announcement](#) of a 'partial mobilisation' of reservists to join the war against Ukraine, activists immediately called for protests. More than 2,240 [people were arrested](#) during protests between 21 and 25 September 2022.

In some cases, the authorities issued bans on protests, which often failed to deter people from protesting but resulted in repression. In Turkey, the authorities [prohibited](#) the annual Pride march in Istanbul on the grounds of preventing crime and maintaining peace and security. Despite this, thousands took the streets, resulting in the overnight detention of 373 people, including LGBTQI+ activists and journalists. In Azerbaijan, the authorities [refused](#) to authorise a protest by Tofig Yagublu, a member of the National Council of Democratic Forces coordination centre and the Musavat Party, calling for continued closure of land borders. The protest proceeded despite the refusal, with police responding by dispersing the crowd and detaining over 40 protesters.



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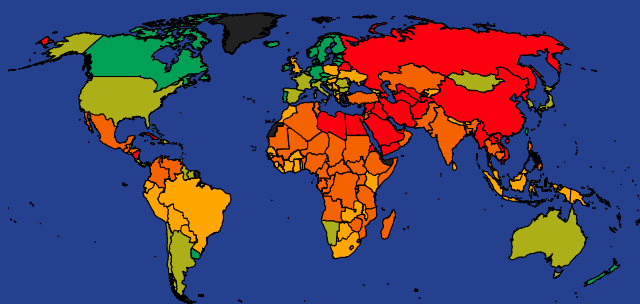
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In Central Asia, several mass protests were brutally repressed. In Kazakhstan, the authorities used excessive and lethal force during the January 2022 [protests](#), in what became known as ‘[Bloody January](#)’, in which over 230 people were killed, several thousand injured and around 10,000 detained. In Uzbekistan, proposed constitutional amendments, which would have deprived the Republic of Karakalpakstan of its autonomous status and its constitutional right to secede, [triggered mass protests](#) that the authorities responded to with [excessive force](#), arbitrary detentions and torture and ill-treatment of detainees. While official figures indicate that 21 people died and 270 were left needing medical assistance, civil society believes the true number of casualties might be higher.

While protests rarely take place in Turkmenistan, the authorities are [quick to quell](#) any attempts to mobilise. In Kyrgyzstan, the authorities [detained](#) people who peacefully gathered despite a ban on protests against Russia’s war on Ukraine.

Journalists are frequently attacked in the region while covering protests. During anti-war protests in Russia, women journalists Elizaveta Kirpanova of Novaya Gazeta and Vera Ryabitskaya of The Insider were pushed to the ground and hit with truncheons while reporting from Moscow and St Petersburg respectively. Women journalists have also come under attack in [Italy](#), [Montenegro](#), [Spain](#) and [Turkey](#). In Kazakhstan, media workers were obstructed and [attacked](#) by security forces and non-state actors when covering the ‘Bloody January’ protests. For example, Orda.kz journalist Bek Baytas was hit by a stun grenade and injured in the face, but managed to escape before the grenade exploded.

In several cases far-right groups have perpetrated attacks. In addition, violence against journalists has also frequently been documented in protests against pandemic measures. In Germany, during a demonstration against the rise in energy and food prices organised by the far-right Alternative for Germany party on 8 October 2022, freelance journalist Armilla Brandt was [physically attacked](#) and protesters hurled sexualised threats at her. A worrying number of similar attacks against journalists perpetrated by far-right militants and the Querdenker pandemic [conspiracy theorist](#) movement were reported in Germany.

In Ukraine, 15 journalists have so far [been killed](#) since the start of the war, while others have been detained by Russian occupation troops and subjected to physical and mental pressure.



Finland: Hundreds arrested at the Autumn uprising protests against the climate crisis (Photo Credit @elokapina via Twitter).



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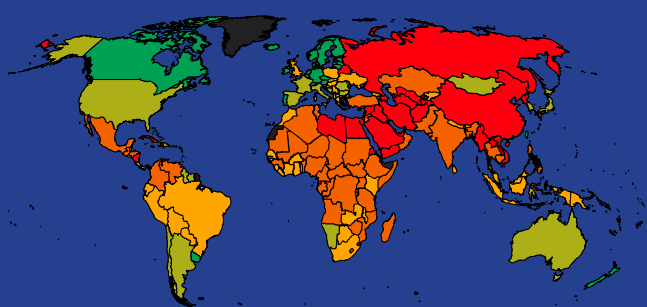
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COUNTRY OF CONCERN: THE UK

For the last three years, civic space in the UK has been in decline. In September 2021, the country [was placed](#) on the CIVICUS Monitor Watchlist to signal a rapid decline in civic freedoms. Since then, the situation has continued to deteriorate, with the government introducing a range of restrictive laws, particularly on protest. This has led to a rating change from narrow to obstructed.

Two pieces of legislation in particular seriously undermine the right to protest and give extensive new powers to the police and Home Secretary. The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act came into effect in April 2022 despite wide opposition. The Act gives police unprecedented powers to restrict protests on the basis of noise and introduces further restrictions on processions and static assemblies. Further to this, the Public Order Bill, currently making its way through [parliament](#), gives police additional powers to restrict protests. Some of the concerning measures in the Bill include Serious Disruption Prevention Orders, which could ban named

people from participating in protests, and the introduction of protest-related stop-and-search powers. Five UN Special Rapporteurs [have said](#) that the Bill ‘could result in undue and grave restrictions’ on civil liberties if not seriously amended.

Existing powers have already permitted the authorities to unduly restrict the right to protest by detaining protesters and preventing demonstrations, particularly on issues such as climate change and the environment and racial justice. Legal observers at protests have [reported](#) experiencing high levels of harassment, intimidation and aggression by police. Netpol, a police monitoring network, [estimated](#) that at the end of 2022, at least 54 people were in prison for taking part in protests. This included protesters from ‘Kill the Bill’ demonstrations against the new police laws, Black Lives Matter protesters, people from environmental groups and pro-Palestinian activists. Several journalists were also arrested while covering protests by the Just Stop Oil activist group, after which an [independent panel](#) said ‘police powers were not used appropriately’. After civil society complaints of disproportionately heavy policing towards Black Lives Matter campaigners and restrictions imposed on earlier demonstrations, in September 2022 two Black Lives Matter activists were [found](#)

United Kingdom: #KilltheBill protests staged ahead of House of Lords vote (Photo by REUTERS/Peter Nicholls via Gallo Images).





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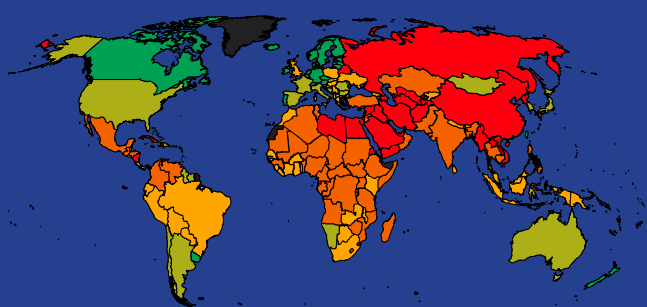
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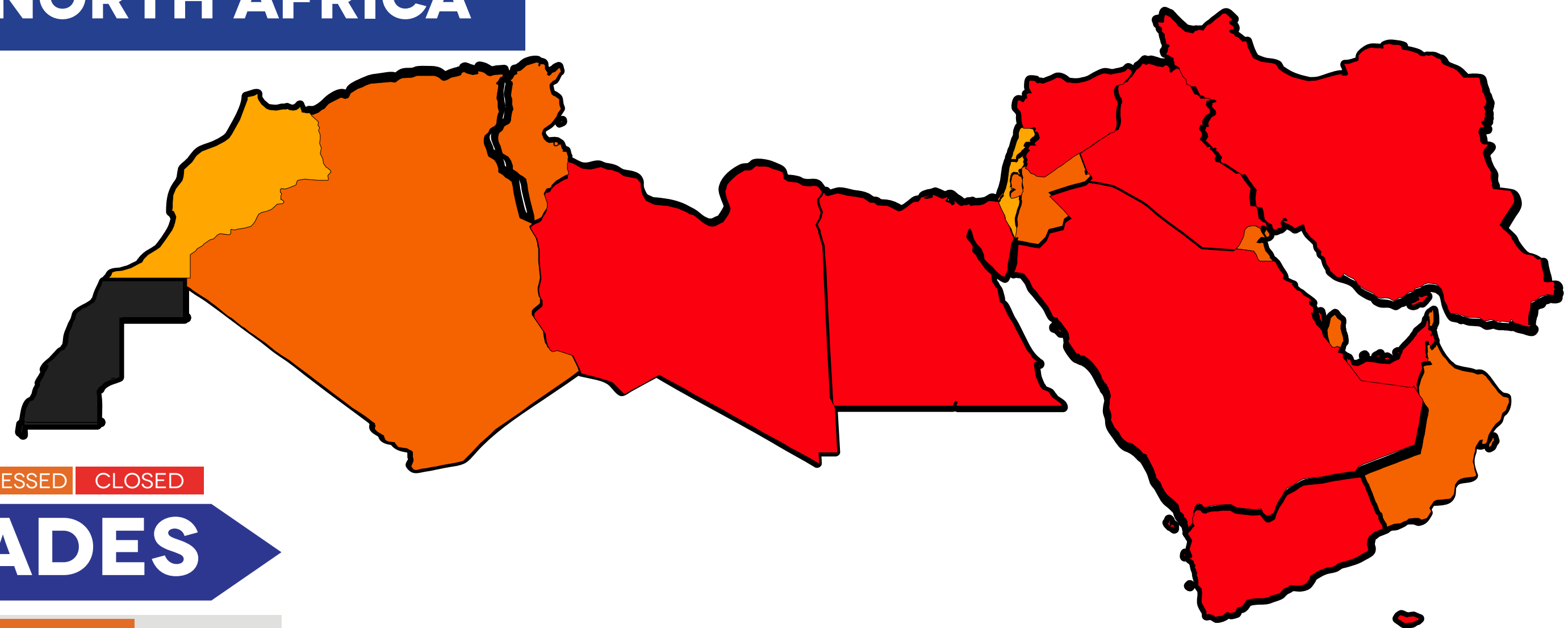
United Kingdom: A protester at the Senedd with a police officer during a Black Lives Matter protest on June 06, 2020
(Photo by Matthew Horwood/Getty Images)

[guilty](#) of ‘violent disorder’ following a jury trial and sentenced to two years and five months and two years and ten months in jail respectively. Such prosecutions, relying on the discredited principle of ‘joint enterprise’ to sentence multiple Black activists to periods of imprisonment, reflect broader institutional racism within the criminal justice system in the UK.

The decline in protest rights is taking place within a broader context of restrictions that are delegitimising civil society action. This includes limiting people’s [ability to strike](#) through the Minimum Service Levels Bill, seek justice through the courts through the Judicial Review and Courts Act, participate in elections through the Elections Act and [pursue](#) political activities or [journalism](#) through the National Security Bill. Throughout the year the government has repeatedly raised the notion of repealing the Human Rights Act by bringing in the ‘Bill of Rights’ Bill which, although currently deprioritised, has led to wider discussions about the UK’s withdrawal from the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR). This would have significant implications for access to justice. The Human Rights Act and the ECHR protect everyone from human rights abuses, from domestic abuse survivors to journalists to people being secretly monitored by the state. The current rhetoric focuses on removing rights from already excluded groups. For example, in June the ECHR [halted](#) the government’s attempts to [expel](#) asylum seekers to Rwanda, after the government sought to push ahead with the deportation despite the country being deemed unsafe. Any repeal of the Human Rights Act or withdrawal from the ECHR will have significant, far-reaching consequences.

Amidst these developments, increased critical sentiment among some [politicians](#) and sections of the media that support the ruling party towards civil society campaigning has increased over the last year. Some ministers and members of parliament have [smeared](#) and publicly vilified civil society, particularly civil society working on climate change, anti-racism and migrants’ and refugee’s rights. The former Home Secretary referred to protesters as ‘[vandals and thugs](#)’. Ministers have also been [criticised](#) for making misleading and vilifying public statements about legal professionals, as has [former prime minister](#) Boris Johnson, who suggested that lawyers working on behalf of migrants were ‘abetting the work of criminal gangs’. The current Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, has previously made comments that ‘[left-wing agitators are bulldozing British rights](#)’.

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA



DOWNGRADES

TUNISIA

RATING OVERVIEW

No major improvements in civic space were documented in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region during the past year. Out of 19 countries, civic space is rated as closed in nine, repressed in seven and obstructed in three. Tunisia is downgraded from obstructed to repressed, and as in previous years, no countries are rated as open or narrowed as in the MENA region.

In Saudi Arabia, the authoritarian government, intolerant of any criticism or dissent, continued to repress HRDs, with many of them, [including](#) Dr Mohammed Al-Qathtani, still serving long sentences behind bars. Several more [such as](#) Salma Al-Shehab and Nourah bint Saeed Al-Qahtani were sentenced to multiple decades in prison for their online activities in the past year, while many others continued to be held in detention despite [completing](#) their sentences. In Iran, protests that [began](#) in September 2022 have been met with a ruthless crackdown characterised by the use of lethal force, with the authorities killing over [500](#) protesters and detaining over [18,000](#) protesters, activists, journalists and students among others, while injuring many others.

In Algeria, an [expansion](#) of the definition of terrorism in 2021 was used to prosecute, intimidate and criminalise HRDs and activists, with at least 340 people [jailed](#) for

their participation in peaceful protests or exercise of freedom of expression as of February 2022. In February 2022 alone, 27 HRDs were arrested. In Lebanon, the ongoing economic and political crisis led to several decrees imposing banking restrictions, to which people [responded](#) though forceful withdrawal of their funds and protests, which were met with repression.

In Qatar, which hosted the 2022 World Cup, CSOs increased their [scrutiny](#) of human rights, and particularly called for the protection of the rights of [migrant workers](#) and [LGBTQI+](#) people, two groups whose rights have been systematically [violated](#). In Egypt, the authorities embarked on a crackdown on environmental rights groups and journalists in the period leading up to the country [hosting](#) the COP27 climate summit. In Palestine, a [crackdown](#) on civil society labelled as terrorist organisations saw Israeli occupying forces enter, raid and seal the entrances of offices of seven CSOs in August 2022, damaging and confiscating property while doing so.

Civic space has worsened in Tunisia. The 2021 [decisions](#) of President Kais Saïed to freeze parliament, suspend the constitution, dismiss the head of government and indefinitely extend his extraordinary powers has resulted in a more hostile environment for civil society. In the past year, Saïed [dissolved](#) the Superior Council of the Judiciary, replaced it with a provisional mechanism, granted himself

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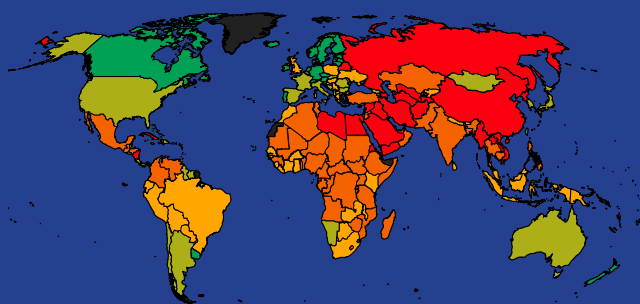
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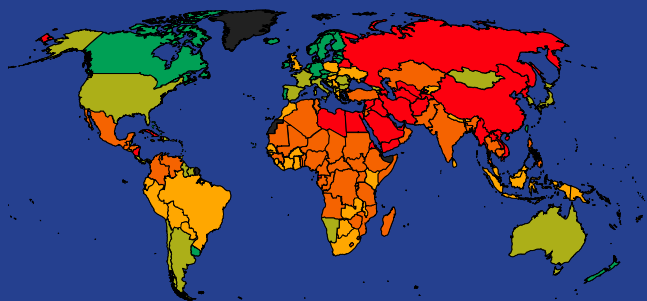
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Turkey: A woman holds up a handful of her hair after cutting it during a protest over the death of Iranian Mahsa Amini outside the Iranian Consulat (Photo by Chris McGrath/Getty Images)

absolute power to fire judges summarily and dismissed dozens of judges. A [new constitution](#) took effect in August 2022 following a flawed drafting process, limited public consultation and a critically low referendum turnout of just over 30 per cent. The new constitution gives the president further powers without checks and balances and erodes judicial independence. Saïed also continued to [crack down](#) on prominent critics, perceived political opponents and civil society, including through arrest, detention and prosecution, and by [issuing](#) or [initiating](#) decrees that restrict fundamental freedoms. In particular, Decree-law 2022-54, issued in 2022, [criminalises](#) ‘fake news’ and rumours, posing a threat to independent journalism.

In response to the brutal onslaught on democratic space and civic freedoms, in October 2022, one of Tunisia’s biggest protest actions was held to denounce Saïed’s anti-democratic rule and the economic crisis that has led to food and fuel shortages. Tunisia’s downgrade comes after its addition to the CIVICUS Monitor [Watchlist](#) in March 2022 following a rapid decline in civic space.

CIVIC SPACE RESTRICTIONS

The five most reported violations in MENA in 2022 were harassment, prosecution of HRDs, detention of journalists, detention of HRDs and censorship. The top violations remain largely the same as in 2021 report, with only the prosecution of HRDs replacing the detention of protesters as one of the top five violations this year.

TOP 5 VIOLATIONS TO CIVIC FREEDOMS FOR MENA REGION

1.



HARASSMENT

2.



HRD PROSECUTED

3.



JOURNALIST DETAINED

4.



HRD DETAINED

5.



CENSORSHIP

Based on 47 updates published on the CIVICUS Monitor for countries in this region between 1 January 2022 - 31 December 2022



HARASSMENT

Harassment was the most documented violation in MENA in 2022, reported in at least 14 out of 19 countries. Harassment was documented in multiple forms, affected various groups of people trying to exercise their civic rights and freedoms, and in retaliation for their efforts to do so.

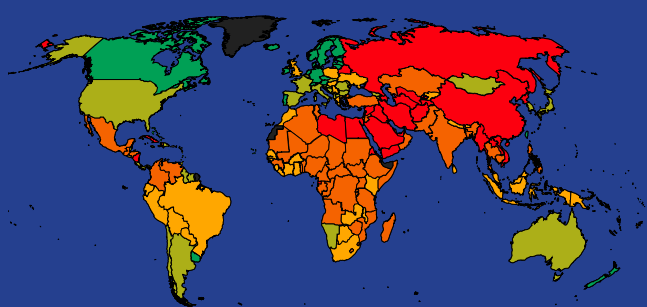
A worrying trend noted yet again in the past year was the systematic judicial and institutional persecution of HRDs who are in the criminal justice system, in deliberate efforts to keep them stuck in long cycles of criminal litigation. This was seen through the continued arbitrary detention of HRDs even after they had completed their sentences, the re-imprisonment of those recently released, the arbitrary extension of detention periods just days before release from jail was due and arbitrary summons for interrogation. These tactics, which are meant to harass and intimidate HRDs, were documented in countries including Iran, Kuwait, Palestine, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

In Iran, the status of feminist activists and WHRDs remains a particular issue of concern, as the authorities continue repeatedly to sentence and imprison WHRDs, keeping them in jail. In April 2022, WHRD Narges Mohammadi was [re-imprisoned](#) and returned to Qarchak Prison soon after being released on medical furlough following heart surgery. In Palestine, Israeli occupation authorities [repeatedly extended](#) the administrative detention of journalists just days before their release, as seen in September 2022 when they renewed the detention of journalist Bushra Al-Taweel for another three months for the third time in a row, and in November 2022 when they extended the administrative detention of journalist Amer Abu Arafah for four months days before his release was due.

In the UAE, an escalating trend was documented of the authorities keeping HRDs in detention past their prison sentences. The authorities [continued to detain](#) 40 prisoners of conscience, many of them part of a group collectively known as the UAE94, after they finished their prison sentences. The group was arrested in 2012 in retaliation against their peaceful pro-democracy activities and in 2013 sentenced to between seven and 15 years in prison following a grossly unfair trial. HRD Dr Mohammed Al-Roken also [remains in](#) detention despite completing his 10-year sentence in July 2022, after he was charged and sentenced for providing legal assistance to victims of human rights violations.



A similar tactic was documented in Saudi Arabia, when the authorities continued to [arbitrarily detain](#) Palestinian poet Ashraf Fayadh for a further eight months, even though he had [completed](#) his eight-year prison sentence earlier in 2022. In Kuwait, HRD Abdulhakim Al-Fadhli was [summoned](#) by public prosecutors in March 2022 three times in one month and interrogated for three and a half hours. The spate of repeated interrogations was linked to a complaint filed against him by the director of the Office of the Central Apparatus for Illegal Residents' Affairs in relation to content on Al-Fadhli's Twitter account. Al-Fadhli was charged with insult and defamation of a government employee. In Lebanon, state security officers [harassed and insulted](#) protesters who gathered outside the Justice Minister's home in September 2022 to protest against the Higher Judicial Council's decision to appoint an alternate investigative judge in the probe into the devastating 2020 explosion in Beirut.





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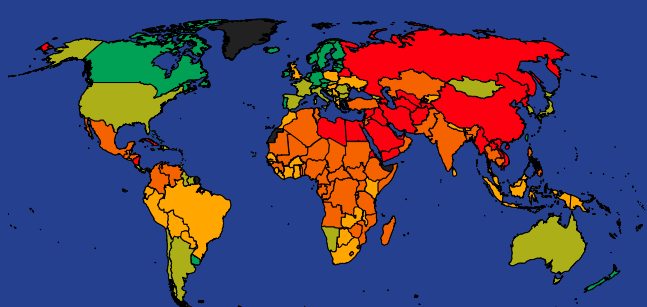
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QATAR: German team protest during team photo at the World Cup in Qatar (Photo by Markus Gilliar - GES Sportfoto/Getty Images)

PROSECUTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

The prosecution of HRDs was the second most documented violation in the MENA region, having been reported in at least 11 out of 19 countries.

In Oman, business leader Hani Al-Sarhani was charged and [sentenced](#) to a year in prison in relation to his work highlighting the difficulties small businesses faced during the pandemic. He was sentenced to an additional six months for organising a small, peaceful protest over economic conditions. HRD Mukhtar Al-Hinai [faced trial](#) because of a tweet he published about a court ruling on a matter related to fraud in a government department. He was later acquitted.

In Algeria, journalist Belkacem Haouam from local newspaper Echorouk was [prosecuted](#) in relation to an article he published about Algeria's problems in exporting dates, and sentenced to two months in prison, with a further 10-month sentence suspended and a fine of 100,000 dinars (approx. US\$730) for 'publishing and disseminating false news to the public likely to harm the general interest'.

In Qatar, the Criminal Court of Appeal [upheld life sentences](#) handed down to lawyer Dr Hazzaa bin Ali Abu Shraydeh Al-Marri and his brother, lawyer Rashid bin Ali Abu Shraydeh Al-Marri, who were arrested and charged solely because of their declarations of support on social media for protests in August 2021. In Iran, the authorities [sentenced](#) five prominent HRDs – Maryam Afrafaraz, Mohammadreza Faghihi, Arash Keykhosravi, Mehdi Mahmoudian and Mostafa Nili – to prison sentences ranging from three months to four years. The sentences were in relation to their attempts to file a legal complaint against government agencies and officials for mismanagement of the pandemic.

In Morocco, HRD and blogger Saida Al-Alami was arrested and [prosecuted](#) in October 2022 over her social media criticism of the government and security services. She was sentenced to two years in prison. In Egypt, journalist Ahmed Al-Bahy, a local correspondent for the Masrawy website, was arrested at his home and [charged](#) with inciting violence. His arrest was related to an incident that occurred the day before as he was reporting, when police officers at the scene of a young man's killing asked Al-Bahy to stop filming and not to write or publish anything about the case.



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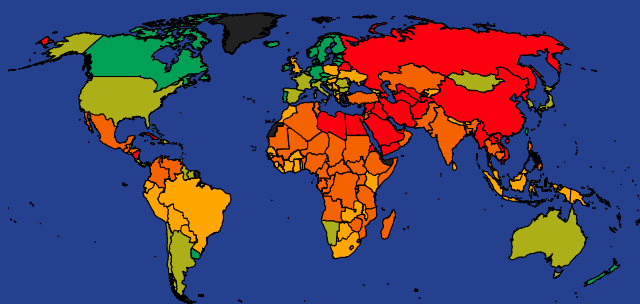
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Palestine: A mural depicting slain Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, who was killed while covering an Israeli army raid (Photo by AHMAD GHARABLI/AFP via Getty Images)

DETENTION OF JOURNALISTS

Detention of journalists was the third most documented violation in MENA, reported in at least eight out of 19 countries.

In Syria, journalist Kenan Wakkaf was [arrested and detained](#) in February 2022 after he criticised the lavish reception that a Syrian actress and her director husband had received at the presidential palace while the rest of the population struggled with constant shortages. In Jordan, seven unidentified men, including two in military uniform, [arrested and detained](#) Adnan Al-Rousan, a prominent Jordanian columnist who writes critically about the government on Facebook. Al-Rousan allegedly violated Jordan's cybercrime law by writing articles 'insulting to Jordan' and other related offences. In Palestine, journalists continued to face systematic detention. In August 2022 alone, at least [13 cases of detention](#) of journalists were documented in the West Bank.

In Iran, the mass protests that erupted in September 2022 were characterised by [mass detentions](#) that also targeted journalists. In just the first two weeks of the protests, at least two dozen journalists were subjected to arbitrary detention, including Niloufar Hamed, who first revealed the circumstances surrounding Mahsa Amini's death, and Elaheh Mohammadi, who was arrested after she covered Amini's funeral in Saqqez. Others, such as photojournalist Yalda Moayeri, were arrested

during the protests.

In Iraq, journalist Qusay Shafiq, a programme presenter on Watan Satellite Channel, was [arrested and detained](#) in March 2022 because of his harsh criticism of the government's financial policies. He was released six days later when the court suspended the charges brought against him. In Tunisia, Khalifa Guesmi, a correspondent for leading radio station Mosaique FM, [was detained](#) in March 2022 under anti-terrorism laws after he refused to reveal his sources. Guesmi was released a week later but continued to face charges.

In Egypt, the authorities continued to [charge](#) journalists with joining a terrorist group, inciting a crime and spreading 'false news'. Journalist Hala Fahmy was detained in April 2022 pending investigations on charges of 'joining a group founded in violation of the provisions of the law and spreading false news'. Fahmy had continuously spoken out against the government and led protests calling for labour rights for journalists. In March 2022, the Cairo Criminal Court renewed the detention of journalists Hisham Abdelaziz and Bahaa El-Din Ibrahim for an additional 45 days pending investigation. At least four Al Jazeera journalists were detained without charge in Egypt in March 2022: Hisham Abdel Aziz, Bahaa El-Din Ibrahim, Ahmed Al-Najdi and Rabie Al-Sheikh. In Lebanon, freelance journalist Nada Homsy was [stopped and detained](#) by officers at Beirut airport while returning from the USA and threatened with deportation. She was eventually allowed to enter the country.



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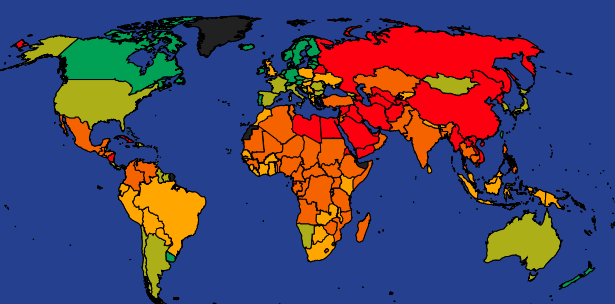
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COUNTRIES OF CONCERN: IRAN AND SAUDI ARABIA

In Iran, mass protests [began](#) in September 2022 in collective action against the country's compulsory head-covering laws and quickly expanded to articulate broader grievances and demands for fundamental political and social change. They have been met with a [ruthless crackdown](#).

Authorities have [gunned down](#) over 500 protesters since the protests began in September 2022, and more than [18,000](#) people have been [arrested](#) and detained in [overcrowded](#) prisons and deprived of their due process rights. Iranian authorities sought the [death penalty](#) for at least 21 people in sham trials designed to intimidate people participating in the uprising, and two people were [executed](#) in relation to the protests in mid-December 2022. The release of detained protesters has been marred by [suspicious deaths](#) of several recently released detainees, which Iranian authorities have labelled as 'suicides' despite significant evidence indicating otherwise. The government also doubled down on the brutal suppression of the protests by [disrupting](#) internet and social media access.

In Saudi Arabia, HRDs continue to be targeted with judicial persecution. Many face extremely long sentences and many others continue to be sentenced, with recurring cases of enforced disappearance and arbitrary detention beyond the expiry of prison sentences becoming commonplace. Mohammed Al-Qathtani, co-founder of the now-disbanded Saudi Association for Civil and Political Rights, has been [arbitrarily detained](#) since 2013 in relation to his peaceful human rights work. Al-Qathtani's sentence was supposed to end in November 2022 but he has been [forcibly disappeared](#) by Saudi authorities since October 2022. The authorities refuse to disclose any reliable information confirming his location, in what is believed to be retaliation to a complaint filed by his family about the repeated assaults he faced from other prisoners. Internet activist and aid worker Abdulrahman Al-Sadhan, who is serving a 20-year prison



Turkey: A woman holds a ball of her cut hair and a poster of Mahsa Amini, during a protest (Photo by YASIN AKGUL/AFP via Getty Images)



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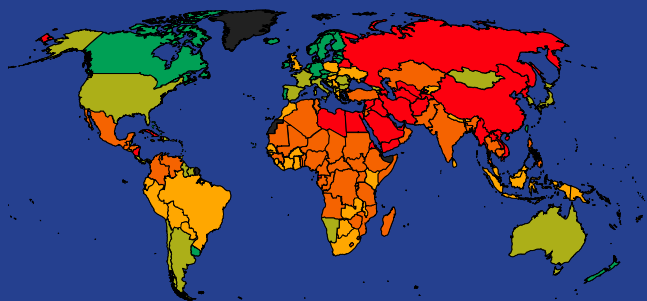
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Saudi Arabia: Saudi doctoral student Salma Al-Shehab pictured with her husband and two sons. Salma Al-Shehab was charged with following and retweeting so-called dissidents and activists. (Photo from European Saudi Organisation for Human Rights)

sentence followed by a 20-year travel ban for exercising his right to freedom of expression, [has not been heard from](#) since October 2021. Al-Sadhan was deprived of access to legal counsel during a trial lacking in the most rudimentary of international standards on fair trials and due process, and Saudi officials continue to deny him calls and visits. In keeping with the worrying trend of detaining activists in prison beyond the expiry of their sentences, poet Ashraf Fayadh continued to be [arbitrarily detained](#) for an [additional eight months](#) after completing his eight-year prison sentence, before he was eventually released.

Other HRDs serving sentences in Saudi prisons include Lina Al-Sharif, who has been [arbitrarily detained](#) on false charges since May 2021 as a result of her social media activism. While still in detention, the authorities [opened](#) new terrorism-related investigations against her in 2022 because of her social media activism. Several other WHRDs [received](#) decades-long sentences in 2022, including a 34-year prison sentence handed down to Salma Al-Shehab and a 45-year sentence handed down to Nourah bint Saeed Al-Qahtani for their online activities.

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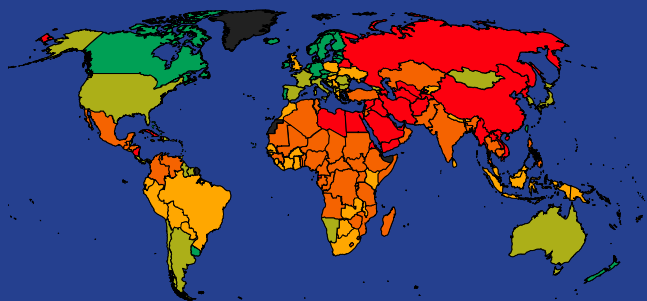
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TO GOVERNMENTS:

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



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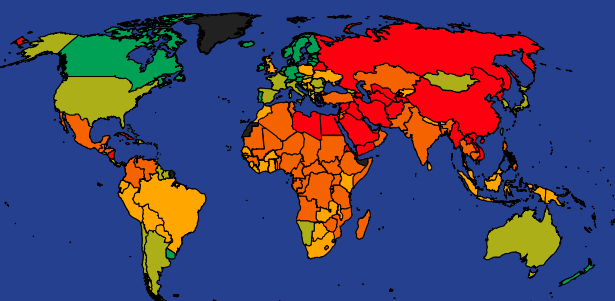
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TO THE UNITED NATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL BODIES:

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

TO DONORS:

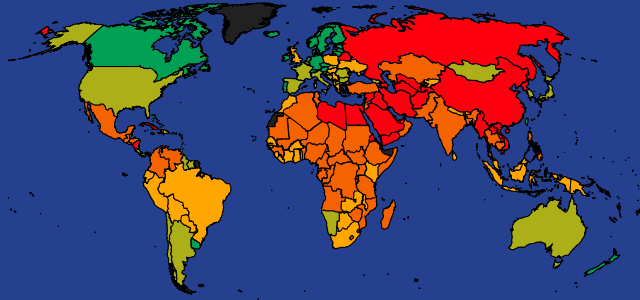
- Provide long-term, unrestricted and core support for civil society in countries where civil society is facing increasing restrictions from states. Funders should provide specific support to groups conducting advocacy in countries with rapidly closing civic space.
- Adopt participatory approaches to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





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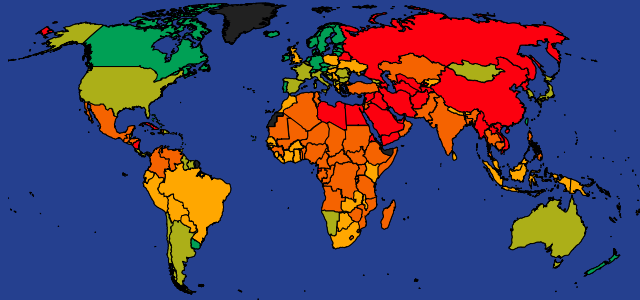
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COUNTRY	Rating 2022	Rating 2021	Rating 2020	Rating 2019	Rating 2018
Angola					
Benin					
Botswana					
Burkina Faso					
Burundi					
Cameroon					
Cape Verde					
Central African Republic					
Chad					
Comoros					
Côte d'Ivoire					
Democratic Republic of Congo					
Djibouti					
Equatorial Guinea					
Eritrea					
Eswatini					
Ethiopia					
Gabon					
Gambia					
Ghana					
Guinea					
Guinea Bissau					
Kenya					
Lesotho					
Liberia					
Madagascar					
Malawi					
Mali					

Mauritania					
Mauritius					
Mozambique					
Namibia					
Niger					
Nigeria					
Republic of the Congo					
Rwanda					
Sao Tome and Principe					
Senegal					
Seychelles					
Sierra Leone					
Somalia					
South Africa					
South Sudan					
Sudan					
Tanzania					
Togo					
Uganda					
Zambia					
Zimbabwe					



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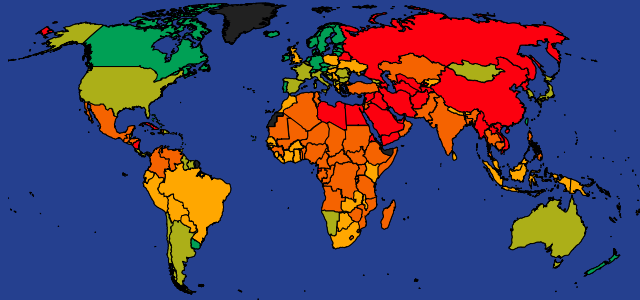
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COUNTRY	Rating 2022	Rating 2021	Rating 2020	Rating 2019	Rating 2018
Antigua and Barbuda					
Argentina					
Bahamas					
Barbados					
Belize					
Bolivia					
Brazil					
Canada					
Chile					
Colombia					
Costa Rica					
Cuba					
Dominica					
Dominican Republic					
Ecuador					
El Salvador					
Grenada					
Guatemala					
Guyana					
Haiti					
Honduras					
Jamaica					
Mexico					
Nicaragua					
Panama					
Paraguay					
Peru					
Saint Lucia					

St Kitts and Nevis					
St Vincent and the Grenadines					
Suriname					
Trinidad and Tobago					
United States of America					
Uruguay					
Venezuela					



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- TACTICS OF REPRESSION
- BRIGHT SPOTS
- AN UNEVEN CRISIS
- AFRICA
- AMERICAS
- ASIA PACIFIC
- EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA
- MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA
- RECOMMENDATIONS
- REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION



ASIA PACIFIC

COUNTRY	Rating 2022	Rating 2021	Rating 2020	Rating 2019	Rating 2018
Afghanistan					
Australia					
Bangladesh					
Bhutan					
Brunei Darussalam					
Cambodia					
China					
Fiji					
Hong Kong					
India					
Indonesia					
Japan					
Kiribati					
Laos					
Malaysia					
Maldives					
Marshall Islands					
Micronesia					
Mongolia					
Myanmar					
Nauru					
Nepal					
New Zealand					
North Korea					
Pakistan					
Palau					
Papua New Guinea					
Philippines					

Samoa					
Singapore					
Solomon Islands					
South Korea					
Sri Lanka					
Taiwan					
Thailand					
Timor-Leste					
Tonga					
Tuvalu					
Vanuatu					
Vietnam					



METHODOLOGY

IN NUMBERS

TACTICS OF REPRESSION

BRIGHT SPOTS

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

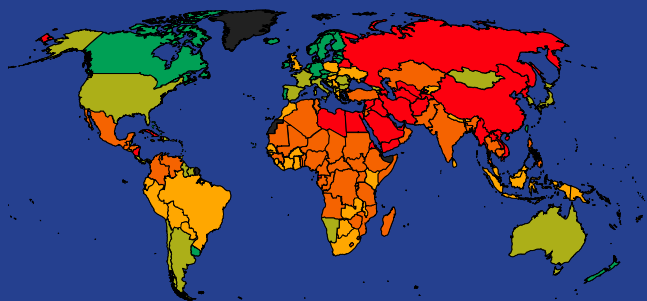
ASIA PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL
ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH
AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION



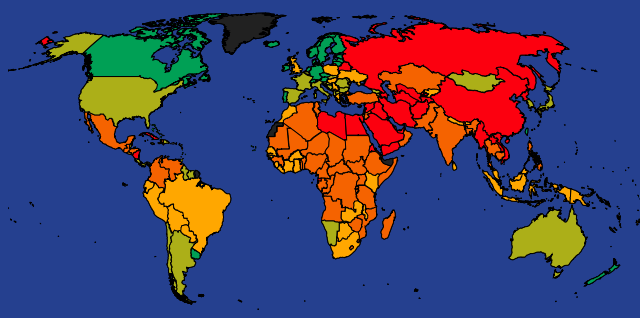
EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

COUNTRY	Rating 2022	Rating 2021	Rating 2020	Rating 2019	Rating 2018
Albania					
Andorra					
Armenia					
Austria					
Azerbaijan					
Belarus					
Belgium					
Bosnia & Herzegovina					
Bulgaria					
Croatia					
Cyprus					
Czech Republic					
Denmark					
Estonia					
Finland					
France					
Georgia					
Germany					
Greece					
Hungary					
Iceland					
Ireland					
Italy					
Kazakhstan					
Kosovo					
Kyrgyzstan					
Latvia					
Liechtenstein					

Lithuania					
Luxembourg					
Malta					
Moldova					
Monaco					
Montenegro					
Netherlands					
North Macedonia					
Norway					
Poland					
Portugal					
Romania					
Russia					
San Marino					
Serbia					
Slovakia					
Slovenia					
Spain					
Sweden					
Switzerland					
Tajikistan					
Turkey					
Turkmenistan					
Ukraine					
United Kingdom					
Uzbekistan					



- METHODOLOGY
- IN NUMBERS
- TACTICS OF REPRESSION
- BRIGHT SPOTS
- AN UNEVEN CRISIS
- AFRICA
- AMERICAS
- ASIA PACIFIC
- EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA
- MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA
- RECOMMENDATIONS
- REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION



MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

COUNTRY	Rating 2022	Rating 2021	Rating 2020	Rating 2019	Rating 2018
Algeria					
Bahrain					
Egypt					
Iran					
Iraq					
Israel					
Jordan					
Kuwait					
Lebanon					
Libya					
Morocco					
Oman					
Palestine					
Qatar					
Saudi Arabia					
Syria					
Tunisia					
United Arab Emirates					
Yemen					

PEOPLE POWER UNDER ATTACK 2022

A report based on data from the CIVICUS Monitor

CIVICUS: WORLD ALLIANCE FOR CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

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