



CIVICUS

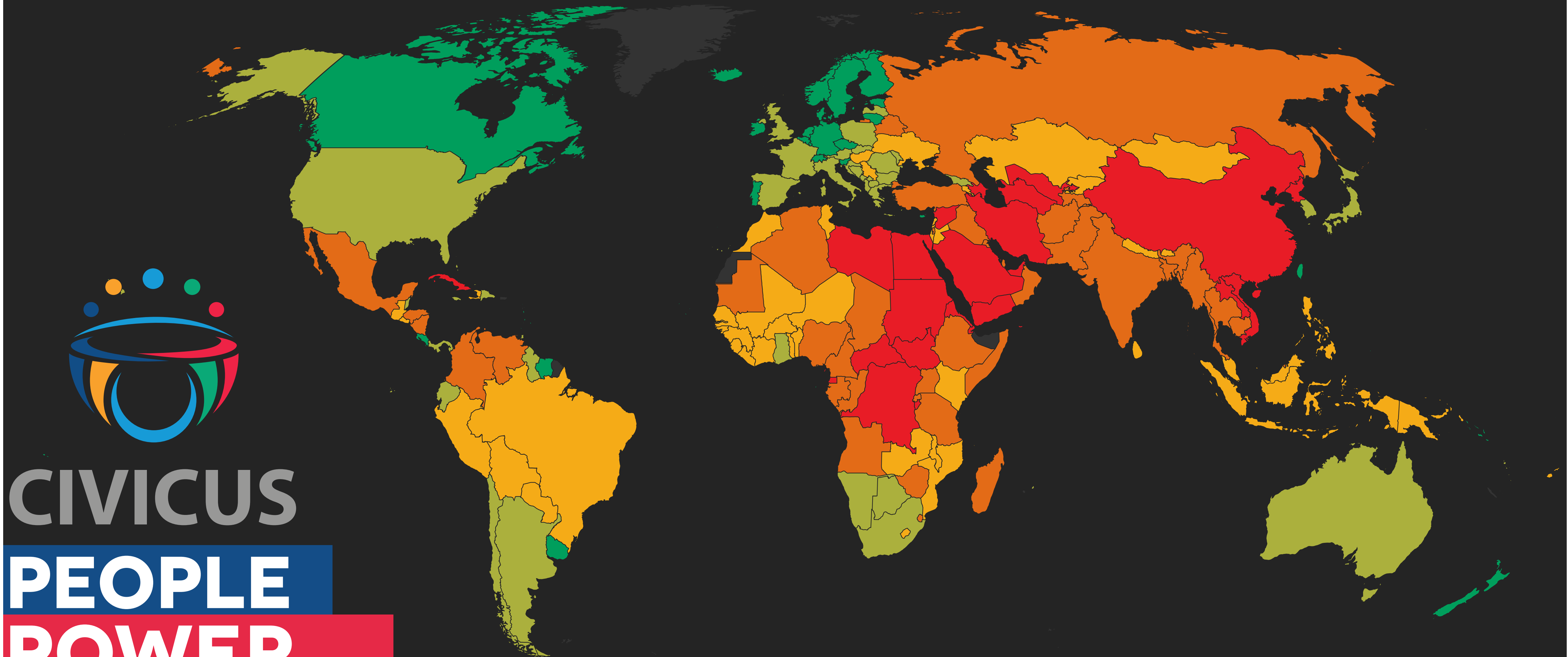
PEOPLE

POWER

UNDER ATTACK

DECEMBER 2019

A REPORT BASED ON DATA FROM THE CIVICUS MONITOR





Colombia | Photo by: Ovidio Gonzalez



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: Salwa Abdel Wahed, Gayoon Baek, Myriam Hernández, Khoo Ying Hooi, Tiseke Kasambala, Ana María Palacios, Shariq Siddiqui and Dr Shailendra Singh.

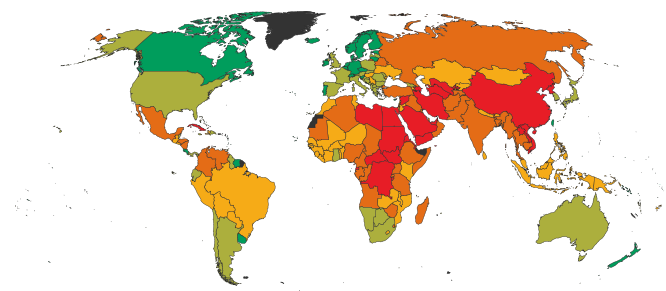
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Colombia | Photo by: Ovidio Gonzalez

METHODOLOGY.....	4	AN UNEVEN CRISIS.....	10	EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA.....	34
A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS.....	5	BRIGHT SPOTS.....	11	MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA.....	38
2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS.....	7	AFRICA.....	13	RECOMMENDATIONS.....	43
GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT.....	8	AMERICAS.....	20	REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION.....	44
REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES.....	9	ASIA AND PACIFIC.....	27		



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

PEOPLE POWER UNDER ATTACK



Afghanistan | Photo by Ebrahim Noroozi

METHODOLOGY

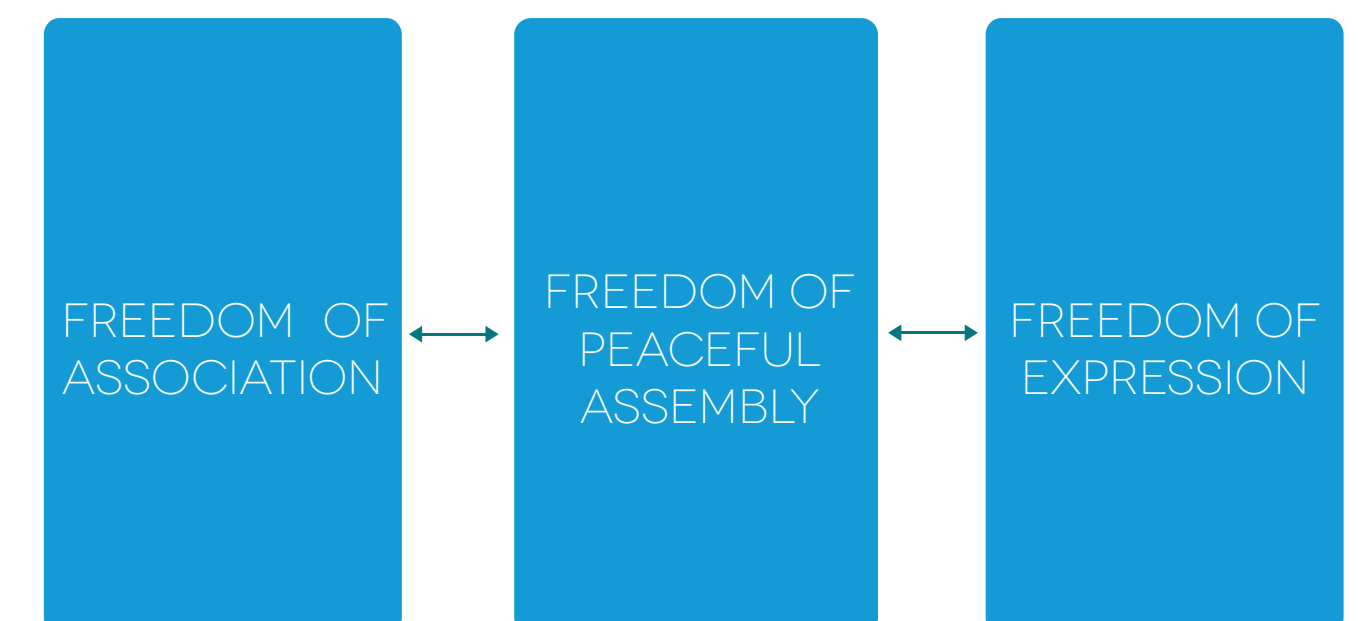
Civic space – space for civil society – is the bedrock of any open and democratic society. When civic space is open, citizens and civil society organisations (CSOs) are able to organise, participate and communicate without hindrance. When people are free to participate, they are able to claim their rights and influence the political and social structures around them. This can only happen when a state holds by its duty to protect its citizens and respects and facilitates their fundamental rights to associate, assemble peacefully and freely express their views and opinions. These are the three key rights that civil society depends upon. The CIVICUS Monitor analyses the extent to which these three civil society rights are being respected and upheld, and the degree to which states are protecting civil society. In an attempt to capture these dynamics on a global scale, [over 20 organisations](#) from around the world have joined forces on the CIVICUS Monitor to provide an evidence base for action to improve civic space. In order to draw comparisons at the global level and track trends over time, the CIVICUS Monitor produces civic space ratings for 196 countries. 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 the freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression.

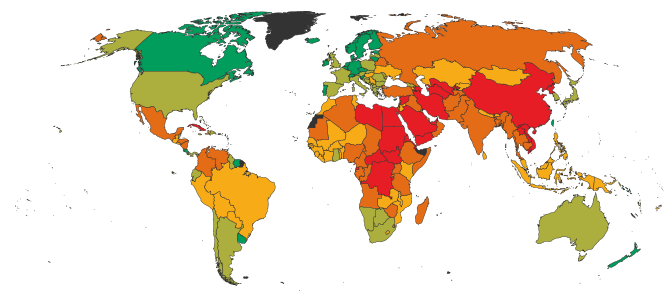
Civic space updates from our research partners contain qualitative, narrative information related to the situation for civil society in a country. This qualitative information is directed by a set of [guiding questions](#) and the resulting data is gathered from a variety of primary and secondary sources. In many cases, country-specific updates have come directly from national civil society themselves.

In countries where we do not have a research partner, the CIVICUS Monitor relies on a variety of other sources produced at the national, regional and international levels to arrive at country ratings. These civic space updates are then triangulated, verified and [tagged](#) by the CIVICUS team.

Together, the research partners posted 536 [civic space updates](#) from 1 October 2018 to 11 November 2019 which form the basis for the analysis presented in this report. For the time period assessed, these civic space updates cover 153 countries.

This report analyses trends and developments since our previous report, published in [November 2018](#). As well as global-level trends, it analyses trends in five regions: Africa, Americas, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Central Asia and Middle East and North Africa (MENA).





METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

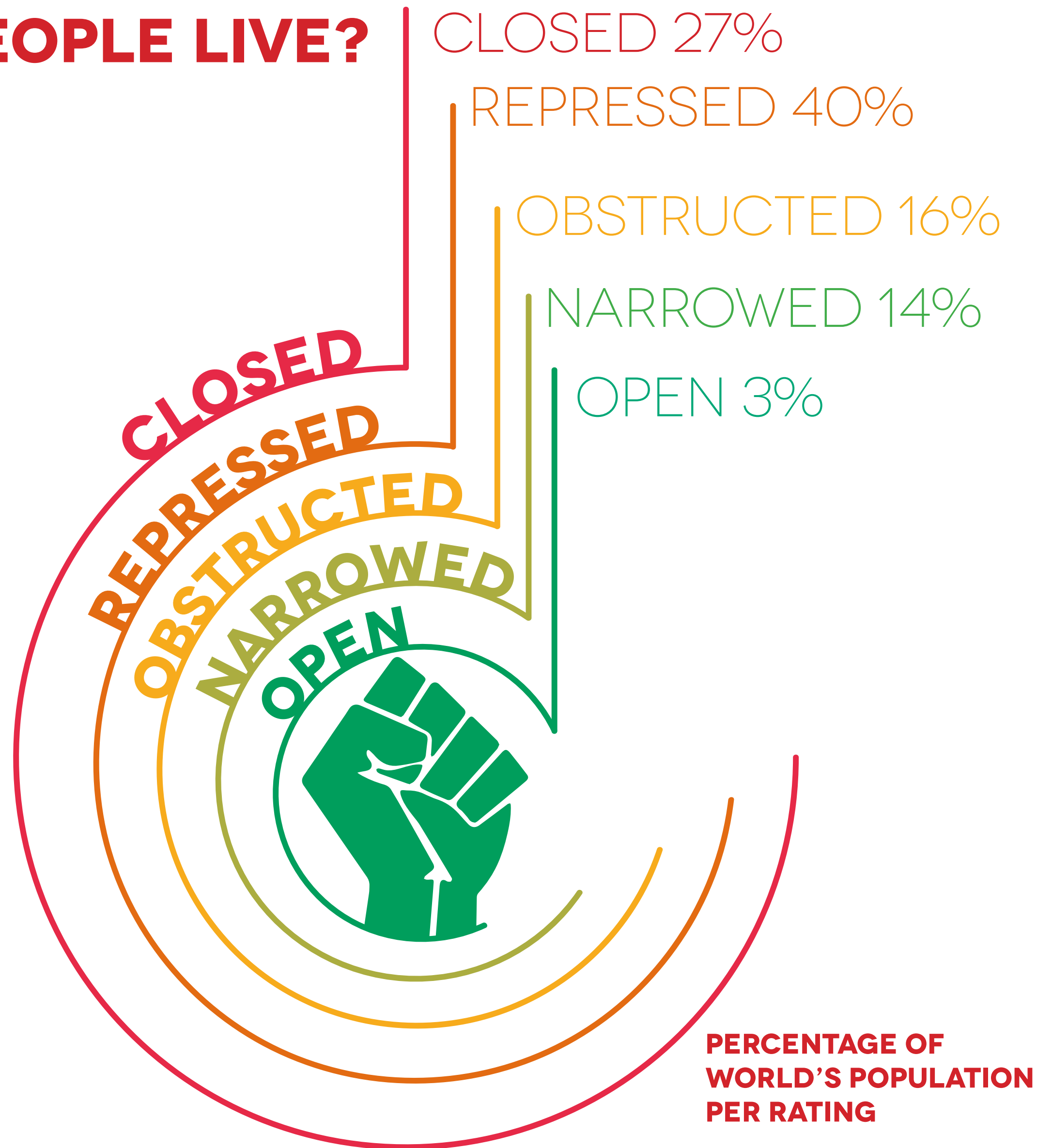
MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

PEOPLE
POWER
UNDER ATTACK

WHERE DO PEOPLE LIVE?



PERCENTAGE OF
WORLD'S POPULATION
PER RATING

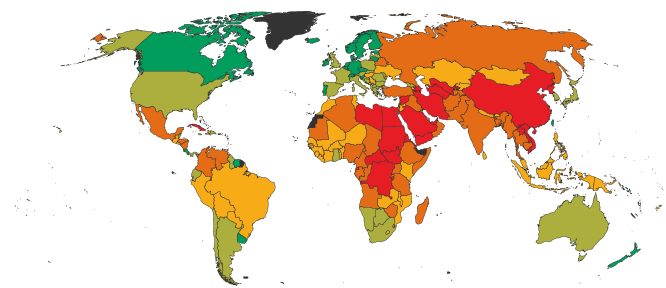
Based on World Bank Population Data 2018. Total global population in closed category 2,026,629,076, in repressed category 3,022,861,910, in obstructed category 1,203,143,656, in narrowed category 1,079,962,643 and in open category 258,566,990.

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

Following an update of our ratings in November 2019, the CIVICUS Monitor continues to tell a worrying story. The data shows that there are 24 countries with closed civic space, 38 countries with repressed space and 49 with obstructed space. Just 43 countries receive an open rating, and 42 countries are rated narrowed. Since our previous [report](#), published in November 2018, space for activism has reduced: only three per cent of the world's population now live in countries with open civic space.

Nine countries have changed their civic space rating since our November 2018 update: two have improved their ratings, while seven have worsened. This indicates that repression of peaceful civic activism continues to be a widespread crisis for civil society in most parts of the world.

Worrying signs for civic space continue to be seen in Asia, where two countries, [Brunei](#) and [India](#), dropped their rating from obstructed to repressed. Given the size and global role of India, the decline in the quality of its civic space must be of particular concern. One country in the Pacific – [Australia](#) – dropped from an open to narrowed rating, partially due to increased restrictions on the freedom of expression and government surveillance.



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

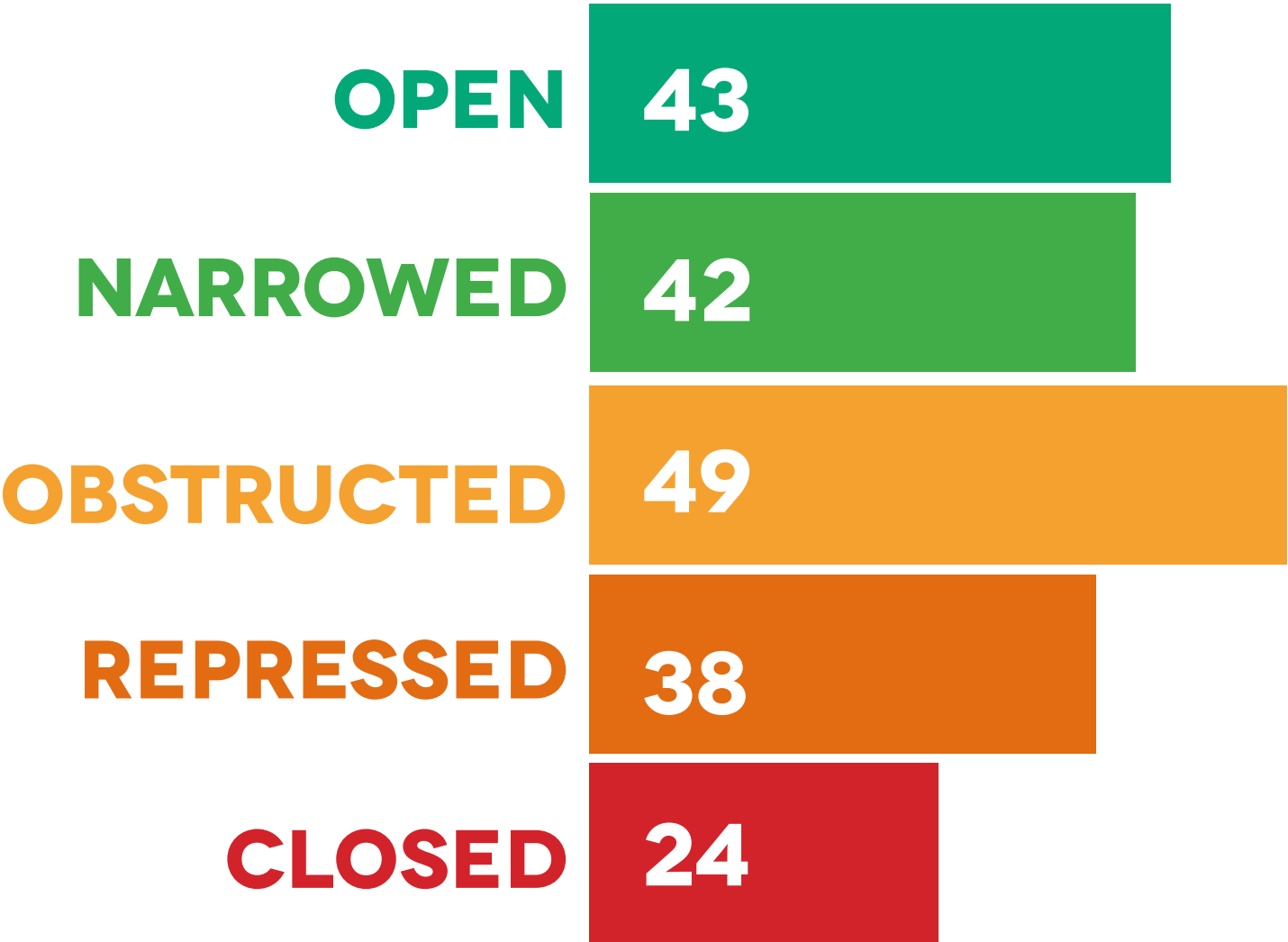
MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

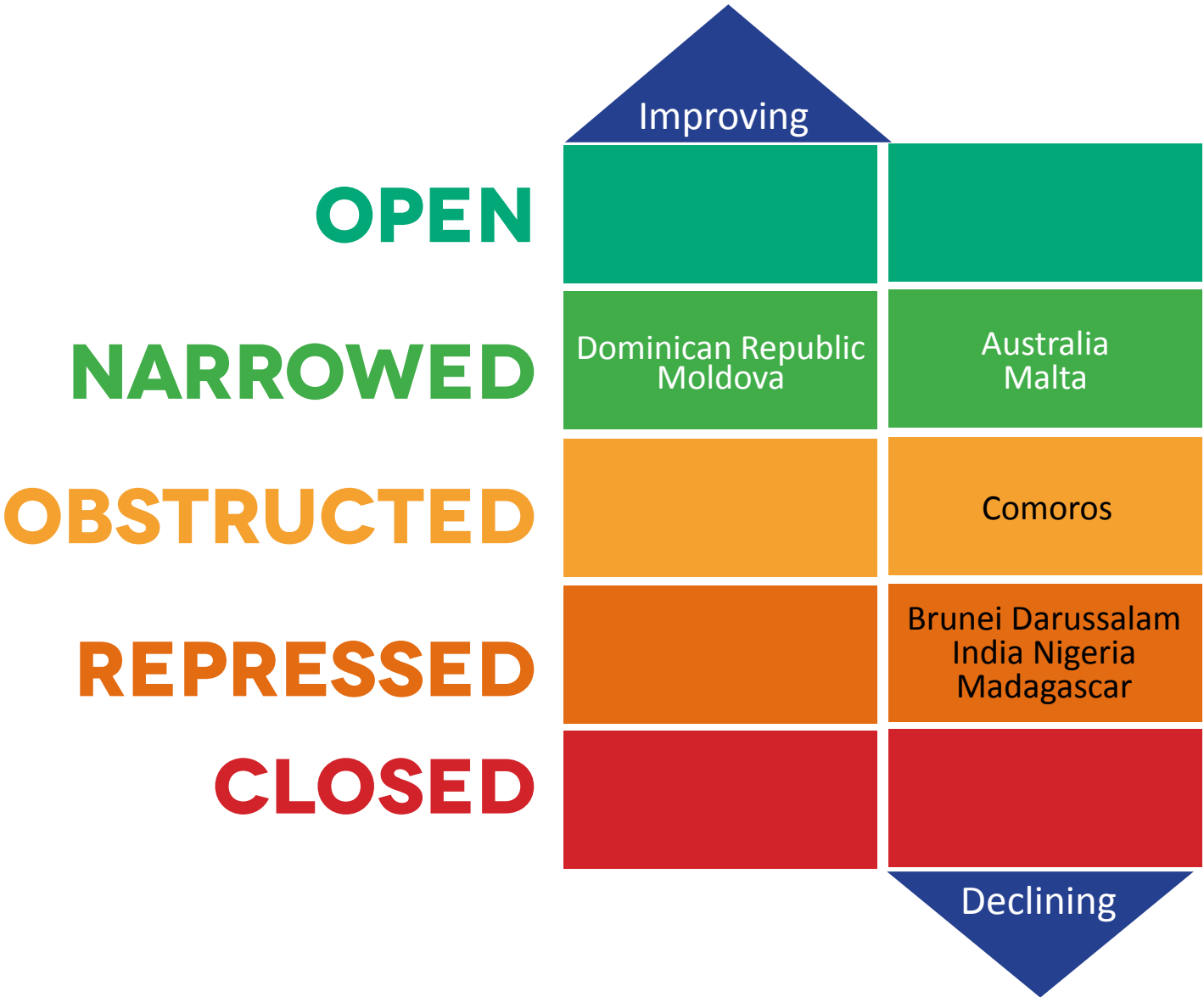
REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

PEOPLE
POWER
UNDER ATTACK

COUNTRIES PER RATING CATEGORY



COUNTRY RATINGS CHANGES



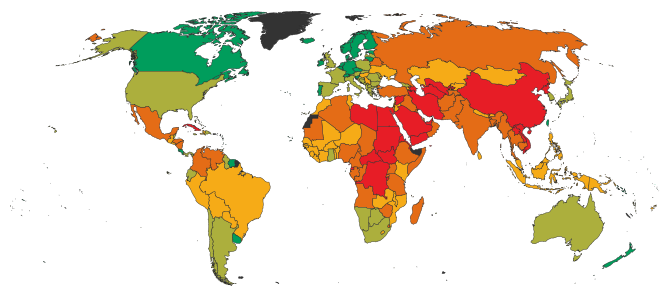
A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

In Africa, the situation continues to cause concern, with [Comoros](#) joining the obstructed category and [Madagascar](#) and [Nigeria](#) moving from obstructed to repressed ratings. In Europe, [Malta](#) fell from an open to narrowed rating and [Serbia's](#) rating changed from narrowed to obstructed in October 2019, making it the only Western Balkan country to have a rating lower than narrowed.

More positively, [Moldova's](#) rating improved from obstructed to narrowed, but difficulties and challenges for civil society remain as the government [attempted](#) to introduce legislation aimed at restricting space for civil society and, in some cases, made declarations or statements against civil society.

While the Americas continue to be a dangerous place for activism, our latest analysis shows a slight improvement in the [Dominican Republic](#), which moved from the obstructed to narrowed category.

In MENA, the situation for civic space remains dire, with none of the region's 19 countries rated narrowed or open. There was no change in this period.



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

PEOPLE POWER UNDER ATTACK

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

2019 has been a year of protest, and pushback against protest. According to the 536 updates to the CIVICUS Monitor, the fundamental right to peaceful assembly is under concerted attack across the world. Our data suggests that globally, states and non-state actors alike have used unwarranted and excessive force to disperse protests and detain peaceful protesters. Between October 2018 and 11 November 2019, 96 countries across the world used either the detention of protesters, the disruption of protest, or the use of excessive force to prevent people from fully exercising their right to peaceful assembly. Yet in the face of this repression citizen action has not been deterred. From the streets of [Sudan](#) to [Hong Kong](#), people continue to mobilise and have devised new methods of organising to defy restrictions on the right to protest.

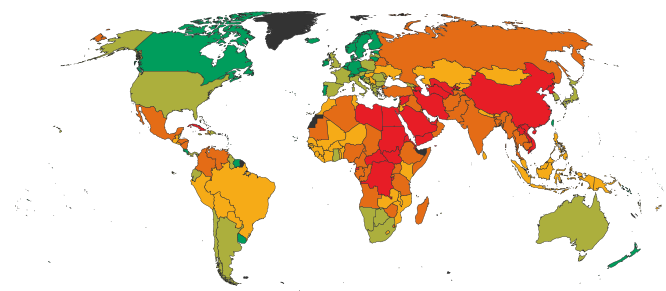
Millions of people have taken to the streets of Hong Kong to join sustained protests since June 2019, initially against proposed changes in extradition law and then more broadly to demand democracy. As reported by the CIVICUS Monitor, these protests were met with violence. Arbitrary arrests, brutal beatings and torture by the police of protesters, a ban on face masks and attacks on protest leaders and journalists are just some of the violations [documented](#) over the past months. In [Sudan](#), security forces have used live ammunition, tear gas and rubber bullets to clamp down on large-scale anti-government demonstrations that started in December 2018. The protests reflect widespread frustration over the dire economic and social situation for ordinary people in Sudan which were compounded by allegations of corruption and later broadened into demands for President Omar Al-Bashir to step down.

Growing inequality and dire economic conditions have also spurred people to take to the streets and demand change. In [Chile](#), protests against higher transport tariffs developed into a nationwide [movement](#) for democratic and economic change. Despite repression by the authorities, people continue to assemble, calling for systemic institutional changes, including constitutional reform and a new social pact. In [Lebanon](#), hundreds gathered on the streets over a proposed tax on WhatsApp calls and other messaging services. Although the tax was scrapped, the demonstrations continued as protesters galvanised over broader societal issues such as corruption and poor public services. A crackdown on the right to protest was documented in [Guinea](#), where security forces used excessive and lethal force to disperse protesters, who have mobilised to oppose the replacement of the 2010 constitution that many [believe](#) is an attempt of president



Condé to run for a third term in 2020, beyond the constitutionally two term limit.

Repression of protests took place regardless of the underlying level of freedom experienced by civil society. The CIVICUS Monitor has documented the detention of protesters and excessive use of force to disperse and disrupt protests in countries with closed or repressed ratings such as [Egypt](#), [Honduras](#), [Iraq](#) and [Zimbabwe](#), but also in countries where people typically have been able to exercise their freedoms without major hindrance, such as [Belgium](#), [Canada](#), [France](#) and [Panama](#).



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

**PEOPLE
POWER
UNDER ATTACK**

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

The growing disrespect for protest rights underscores an alarmingly normalised intolerance of dissent by states. Many states have become brazen in silencing critical uprisings that threaten established political and economic power. This is underscored by frequent violations tracked by the CIVICUS Monitor relating to the freedom of expression. Of the three fundamental freedoms tracked by the CIVICUS Monitor, the freedom of expression continues to be the one most commonly targeted by repressive regimes. Of the 536 [civic space reports](#) posted on the CIVICUS Monitor in the past year, the tag of censorship features most frequently, appearing in 33 per cent of reports. This tag is commonly associated with harassment of activists and attacks on journalists. CIVICUS Monitor data suggests that one of these three interrelated violations were recorded in 123 states between October 2018 and 11 November 2019.

In the digital age, people have become able to access and disseminate information more freely and in real time. But at the same time, states have developed measures to disrupt flows of information by controlling and manipulating the information that reaches people. Consequently, censorship has flourished. This tactic is commonly used in countries rated as having closed or repressed civic space but has also been seen in all corners of the globe as a subtle tool to silence critics.

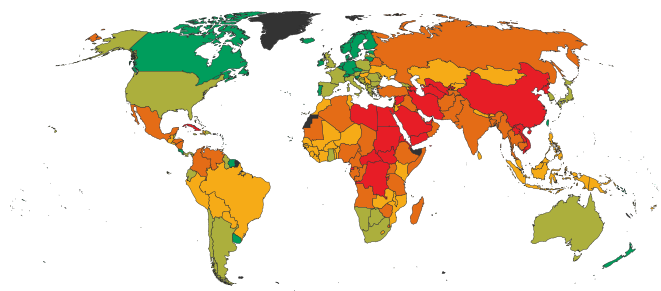
Some of the key tactics used to control the narrative by states including [Burundi](#), [China](#) and [Saudi Arabia](#) include those of banning and suspending media outlets, preventing the streaming of certain programmes and complete blocking of information to prevent the discussion of particular topics. In order to avoid accountability over human rights violations, some states have often blocked social media and other messaging applications, including [Bolivia](#), [Kazakhstan](#), [Sudan](#) and [Venezuela](#).

In [Turkmenistan](#) the government goes even further in its effort to prevent people seeking and receiving independent information about the situation in the country. Among other tactics, the authorities have recently detained people taking photos or filming in public places, blocked the use of VPN apps that are typically used to access otherwise inaccessible websites and barred people from travelling abroad to prevent them ‘slandering’ their home country. Even in open countries

censorship may be used as a [tactic](#). In June 2019 the Samoa Censorship Board banned the screening of *Rocketman*, a biographical movie about the life of British rock star Elton John. Samoa’s principal censor Leiataua Niuapu Faau told the Samoa Observer that “the homosexual activity depicted on screen violated laws and didn’t sit well with the country’s cultural and Christian beliefs.”

TOP TEN VIOLATIONS TO CIVIC FREEDOMS

-  **1. CENSORSHIP**
-  **2. PROTESTER(S) DETAINED**
-  **3. HARASSMENT**
-  **4. RESTRICTIVE LAW**
-  **5. INTIMIDATION**
-  **6. ATTACK ON JOURNALIST**
-  **7. PROTEST DISRUPTION**
-  **8. JOURNALIST DETAINED**
-  **9. EXCESSIVE FORCE**
-  **10. CRIMINAL DEFAMATION**



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC
SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON
THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE
OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES
AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL
ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND
NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL
CLASSIFICATION

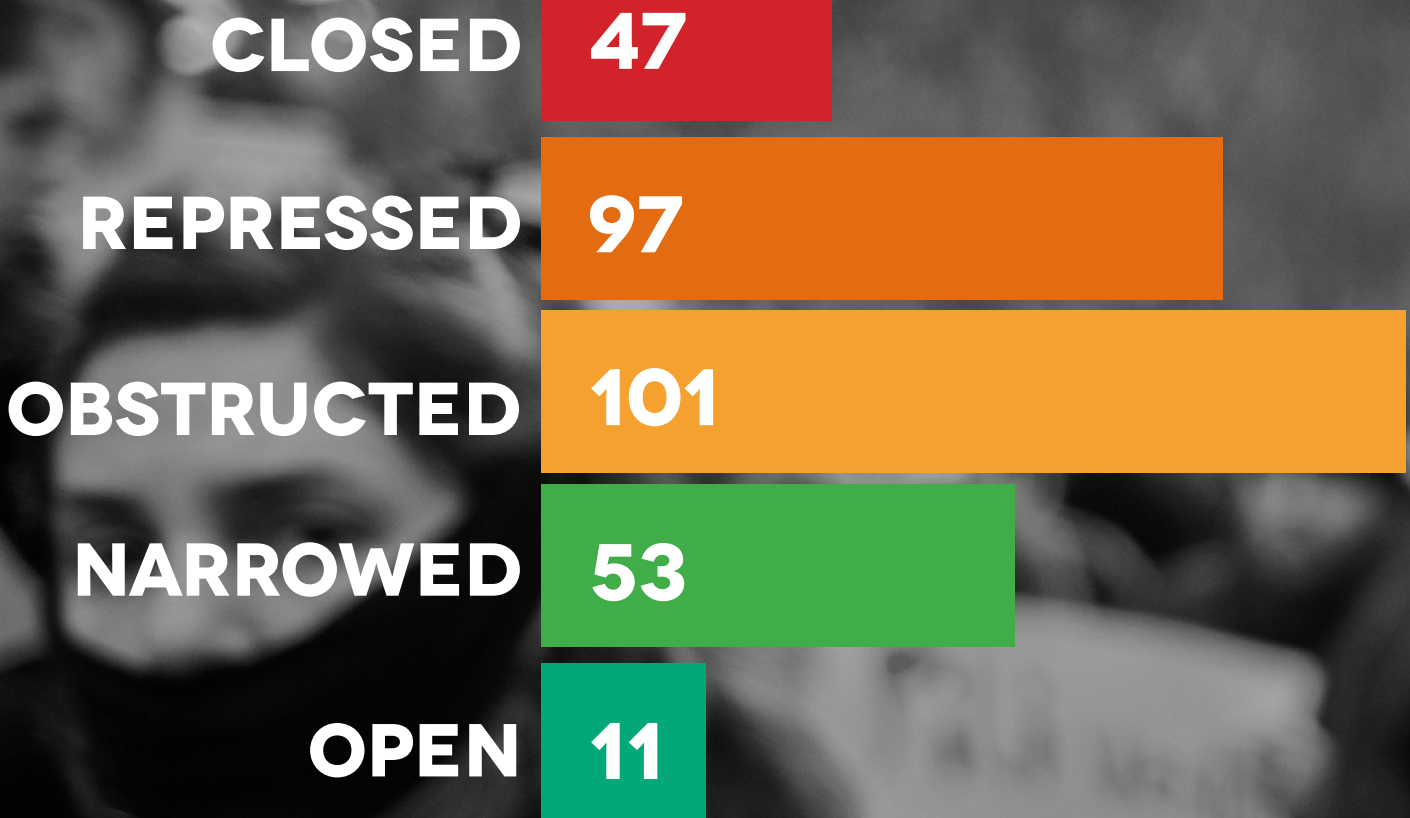
PEOPLE
POWER
UNDER ATTACK

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

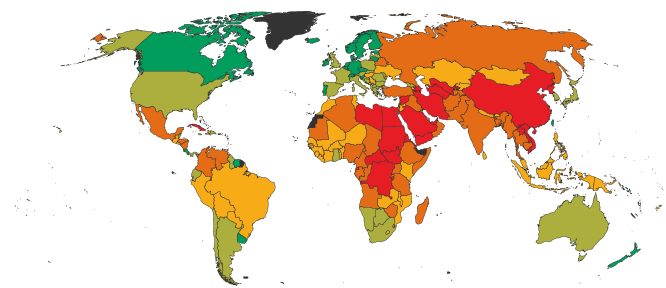
Across the five regions covered by our analysis, we see common trends, but also some regional differences. For instance, in the Americas, the detention of protesters is the most commonly reported violation, featuring in 39 per cent of all CIVICUS Monitor reports from the region. In Asia and the Pacific, censorship is the number one violation reported, featuring in over 40 per cent of the updates. Censorship also tops the list in Europe and Central Asia and MENA. For Africa, the disruption of protests tops the list, with 39 percent of reports featuring this type of civic space violation.

THE GLOBAL GAG ON FREE SPEECH

Restrictions on expression by ratings category



309 out of 536 country updates published on the CIVICUS Monitor contained either attacks on journalists, censorship or harassment.



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC
SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON
THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE
OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES
AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL
ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND
NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL
CLASSIFICATION

PEOPLE
POWER
UNDER ATTACK

GROUPS MOST COMMONLY INVOLVED IN CIVIC SPACE INCIDENTS (GLOBAL SUMMARY)

1.WOMEN



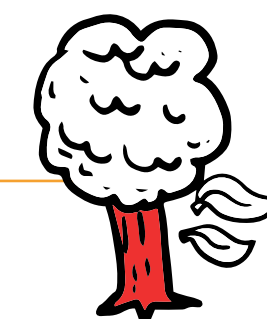
2.LGBTQI



3.LABOUR RIGHTS



4.ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS



5.YOUTH

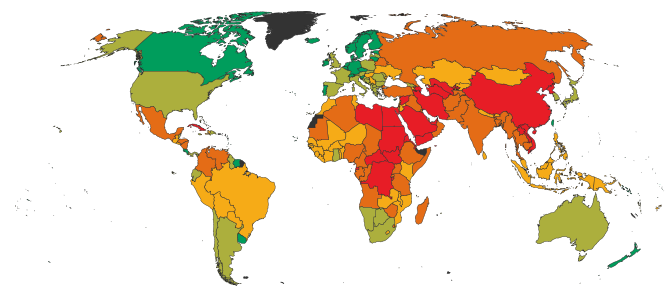


AN UNEVEN CRISIS

The assault on civic space is far from uniform and state attacks do not necessarily affect all parts of civil society in the same way. Our monitoring clearly shows that those leading protests on the ground are likely to bear the brunt of the assault on fundamental freedoms. In addition, investigative journalists and critical human rights defenders are also commonly the target of repression.

Groups advocating for women's rights and women human rights defenders are the group most commonly mentioned in reports on the CIVICUS Monitor, featuring in 22 per cent of updates. This includes incidents where women's rights are the major cause of protests, such as in [Argentina](#), where women took to the streets in the context of legislation discussed in Congress that sought to decriminalise the voluntary interruption of a pregnancy during the first 14 weeks, and those where women human rights defenders have been arrested and subjected to human rights violations because of their rights activism on gender issues, such as in [Saudi Arabia](#) and [Iran](#).

This holds true for most regions except Europe and Central Asia, where LGBTQI groups were more often referenced, and Africa, where youth groups were the group most commonly mentioned. Globally, other groups regularly mentioned include LGBTQI groups (13.6 per cent of updates) and labour rights groups (12.7 per cent). Despite these regional differences, our monitoring shows that these groups face similar backlashes when organising to claim their rights of challenge powerholders.



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

PEOPLE
POWER
UNDER ATTACK



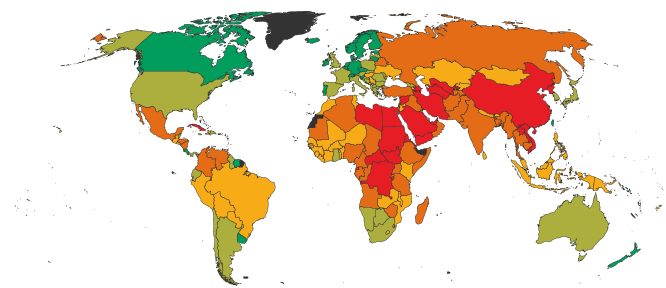
New York | Photo by Pablo Monsalve / VIEWpress

BRIGHT SPOTS

Our monitoring also describes [improvements in civic space conditions](#). While violations dominate, the CIVICUS Monitor has documented many instances where civic space is opening up and states are making progress on improving their respect for fundamental freedoms.

An improvement in civic space was documented in 11.8 per cent of CIVICUS Monitor updates. Improvements included states withdrawing proposed amendments to the legal framework that could have curtailed the freedom of association, including in [Kosovo](#) following intense civil society advocacy, and [Bhutan's](#) lower house of parliament voting to decriminalise homosexuality. This development has improved the ability of civil society to work on health, reproductive rights and LGBTQI issues.

The CIVICUS Monitor has also documented instances of [court rulings](#) that have defended or expanded civic space. For [example](#), the Dominican Republic's Constitutional Court (TC) declared unconstitutional article 284 of the new electoral regime legislation Act 15-19 (Electoral System Organic Law) which established sentences of 3 to 10 years for those sharing false or denigrating campaigns, or defamatory propaganda, against candidates. Further, the CIVICUS Monitor documented 35 instances where human rights defenders have been released or acquitted in 30 countries. For example, in [Nicaragua](#), [Azerbaijan](#), [Guatemala](#) and [Greece](#).



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

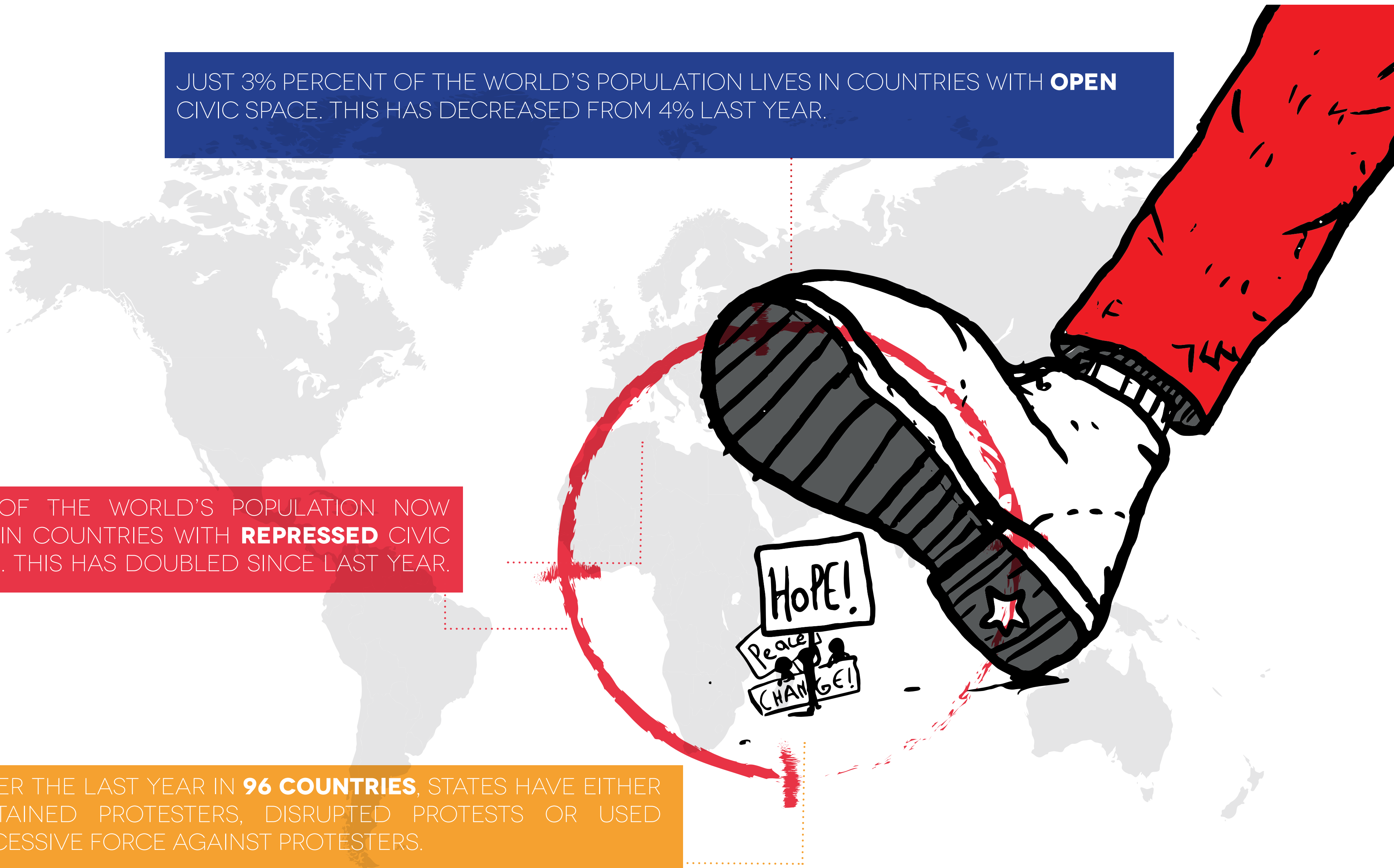
REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

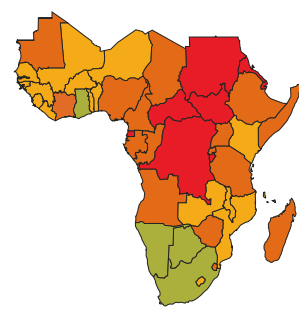
PEOPLE
POWER
UNDER ATTACK

JUST 3% PERCENT OF THE WORLD’S POPULATION LIVES IN COUNTRIES WITH **OPEN** CIVIC SPACE. THIS HAS DECREASED FROM 4% LAST YEAR.

40% OF THE WORLD’S POPULATION NOW LIVES IN COUNTRIES WITH **REPRESSED** CIVIC SPACE. THIS HAS DOUBLED SINCE LAST YEAR.

OVER THE LAST YEAR IN **96 COUNTRIES**, STATES HAVE EITHER DETAINED PROTESTERS, DISRUPTED PROTESTS OR USED EXCESSIVE FORCE AGAINST PROTESTERS.





METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

PEOPLE POWER UNDER ATTACK

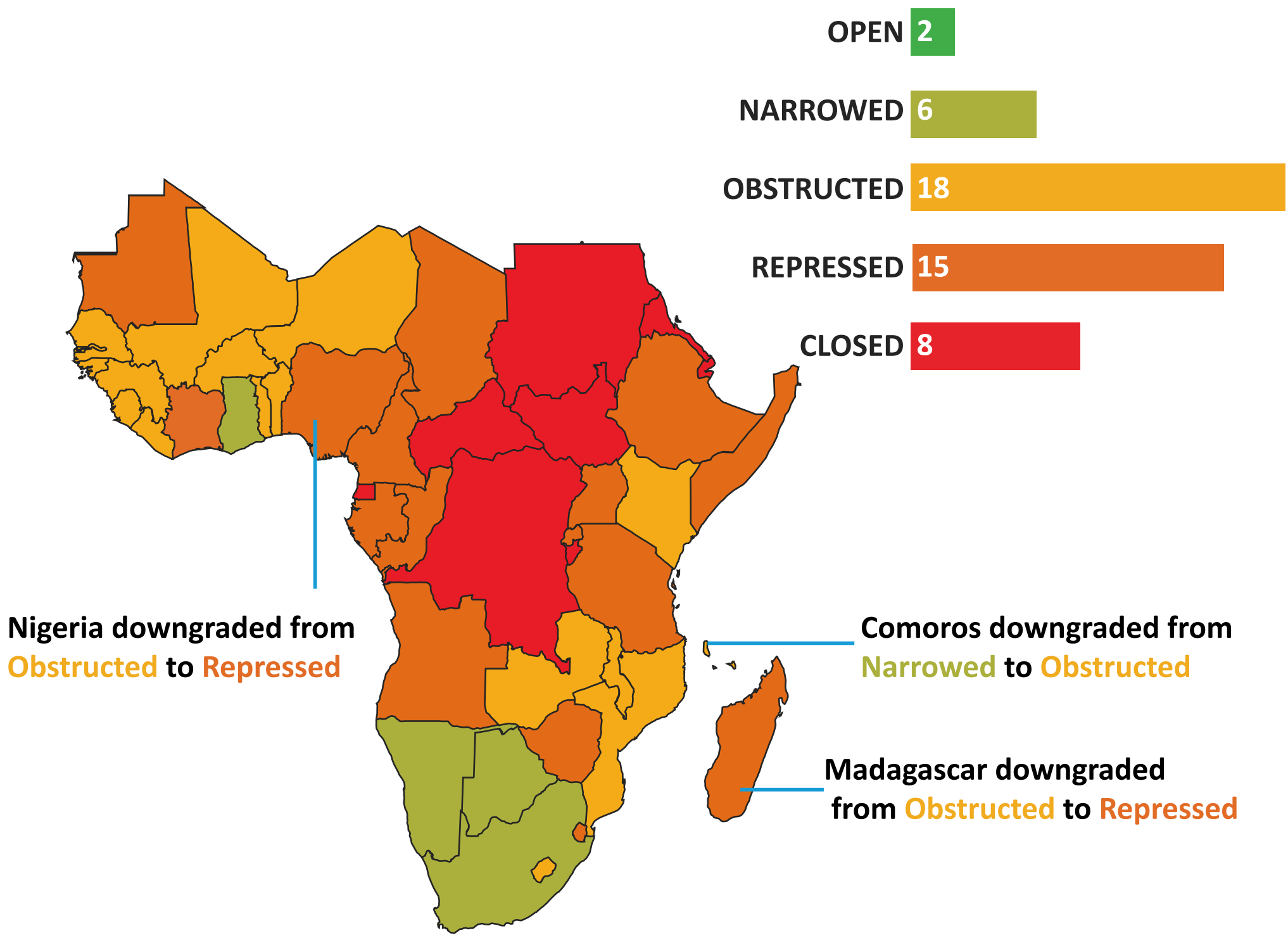
AFRICA RATINGS OVERVIEW

Africa is a vast region, consisting of 49 countries. Of these, eight countries are rated as closed, 15 as repressed and 18 as obstructed. Botswana, Ghana, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles and South Africa have narrowed civic space, while civic space in the island states of Cabo Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe is rated as open. Since the previous update, civic space ratings have deteriorated in Comoros, Madagascar and Nigeria.

Entrenched authoritarian or dominant-party governments, armed conflict, weak rule of law and impunity have negatively affected civic space in Central Africa region, where five countries have a repressed rating and three countries a closed rating. [Cameroon](#), where conflict in the two Anglophone regions remains a major concern, has witnessed a continued crackdown on civic space. In Equatorial Guinea, which is ruled by the second longest serving non-royal leader in the world, civic space conditions continued to deteriorate. In an example of the level of repression, one of the few human rights defenders left working in the country, Alfredo Okenve was [forced](#) to flee after he was beaten and left for dead following an attack from security forces.

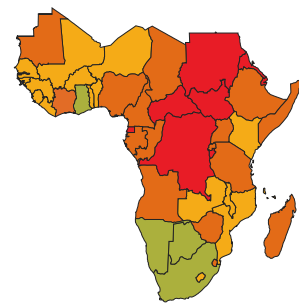
Most countries in West Africa are rated as obstructed, and several countries in this region have seen a slow but steady decline in respect for fundamental freedoms, highlighted by [Nigeria's](#) civic space rating being downgraded to repressed, violations of fundamental freedoms in the context of elections in Benin, the killing of an investigative journalist in [Ghana](#) and a crackdown on protests in [Guinea](#) against the perceived attempts of President Alpha Condé to replace the constitution in order to run for a third term.

In Southern Africa, protests against a steep rise in the fuel price and dire economic conditions in [Zimbabwe](#) were met with repression, with security forces killing several people and arresting hundreds, evaporating the hope for change brought by the fall of President Robert Mugabe in November 2017. [Malawi's](#) May 2019 elections were



followed by sustained mass protests against alleged rigging, while in [Zambia](#) censorship and harassment of human rights defenders have been on the increase, tarnishing the country's democratic credentials.

Civic space in the East and Horn of Africa remains undermined by the authorities' increasing intolerance of dissenting voices; however, positive political changes in Ethiopia and Sudan could significantly change the region's profile and enable the flowering of independent media and civil society organisations, although the political situation remains fragile. Civic space continued to decline under hardline President John Magufuli in Tanzania, where dissent and opposition voices have been met with harassment, intimidation and judicial prosecution under several repressive laws enacted since 2015, including the sweeping Written Laws (Miscellaneous Amendments) (No 3 Act) of 2019. In [Uganda](#), after constitutional changes President Museveni, who came to power in 1986, was able to run for a sixth term prompting unrest. In response, Ugandan authorities violently repressed peaceful protests, arrested leaders of the political opposition and prosecuted them while journalists were also targeted for covering protests.



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

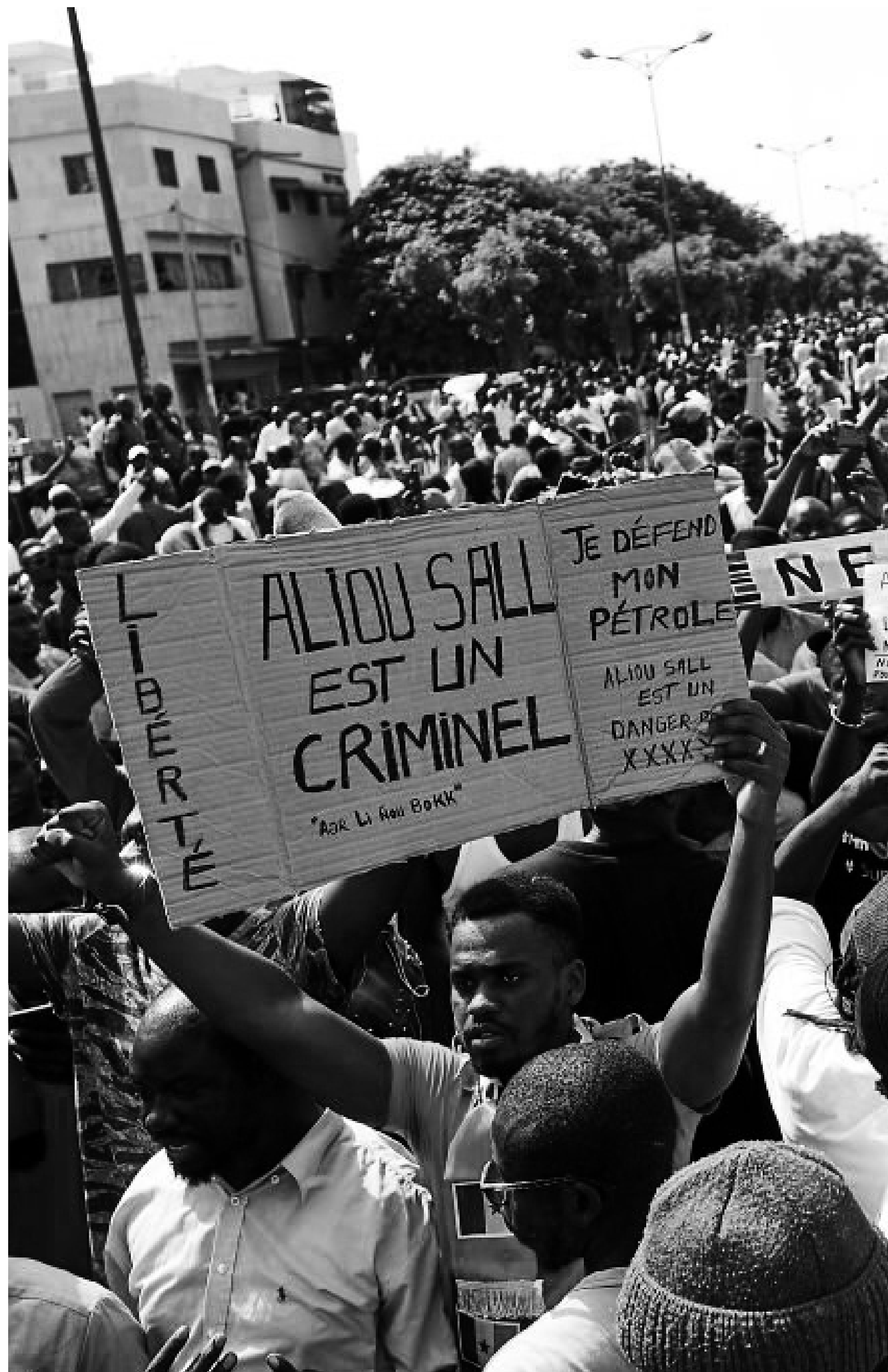
EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

**PEOPLE
POWER
UNDER ATTACK**

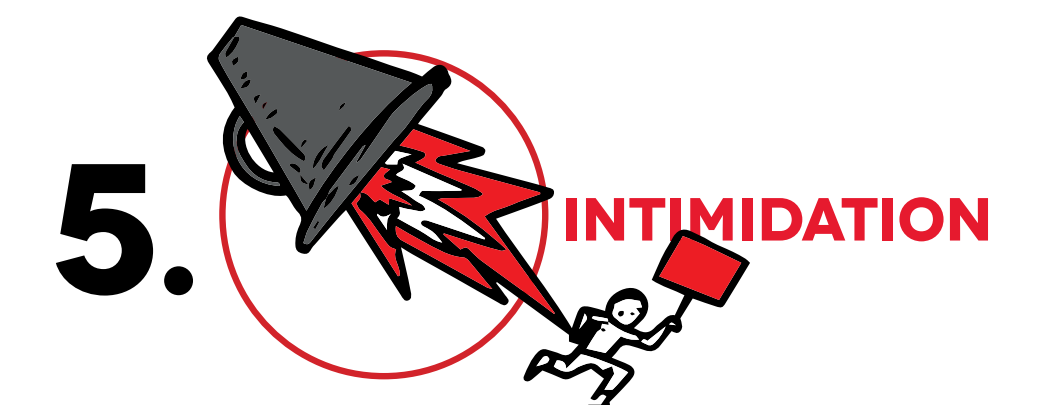
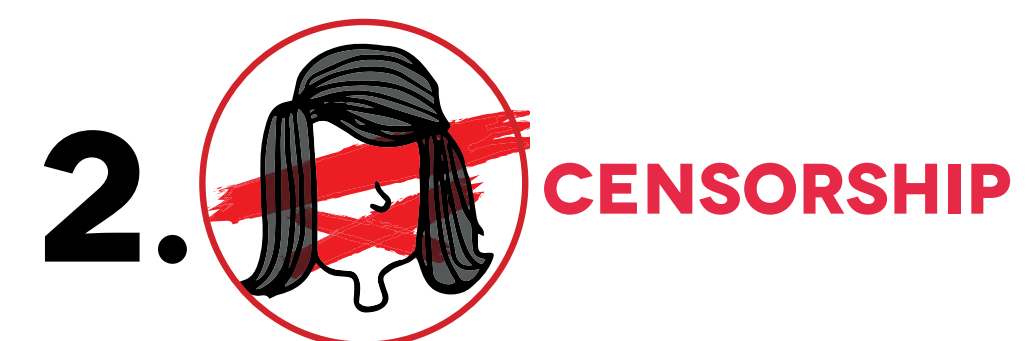


Senegal | Photo by Xaume Olleros / Getty Images

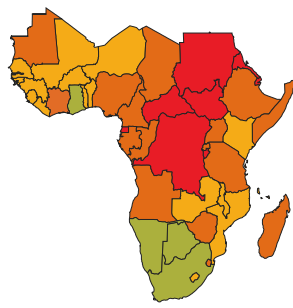
CIVIC SPACE RESTRICTIONS

In Africa, the most common civic space violations registered on the CIVICUS Monitor in the period under review have been protest disruption, censorship, the detention of protesters, attacks on journalists and intimidation.

TOP 5 VIOLATIONS FOR AFRICA REGION.



Based on 102 updates published on the CIVICUS Monitor for countries in this region between 1st October 2018 - 11th November 2019.



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

**PEOPLE
POWER
UNDER ATTACK**

PROTEST DISRUPTION AND ARRESTS OF PROTESTERS

Protest disruption was documented in 39 per cent of CIVICUS Monitor updates for Africa in the past year, often combined with the arrest of protesters, as documented in 29 per cent of the updates. Several mass protests took place in the region: in Guinea, Malawi, Senegal, Sudan and Zimbabwe, among others, and these were sometimes met with excessive use of force, arbitrary detentions, or the imposition of protest bans.

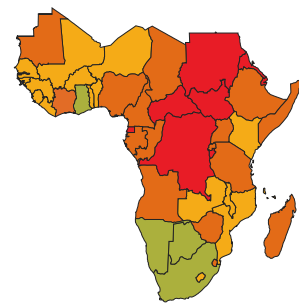
In Zimbabwe, an estimated 1,100 people were [arrested](#) in relation to the protests against a 150-per-cent increase in fuel prices and dire economic conditions in mid-January 2019. The nationwide protests were met with excessive and lethal force by security forces, leaving at least 15 people dead, followed by a continued crackdown on civic freedoms. In Cameroon, at least 100 protesters were [arrested](#) during ‘marches blanches’ (‘white marches’) in cities across the country in January 2019, called by the opposition party Mouvement pour la renaissance du Cameroun (MRC) to denounce what they called electoral fraud during the country’s October 2018 presidential elections. Five months later in June 2019, more than 350 people were [arrested](#) when MRC members and supporters attempted to protest again in defiance of a protest ban.

In East Africa, routine violations of the freedom of peaceful assembly continued in Kenya and [Uganda](#). Anti-corruption protests in Nairobi’s Uhuru Park on 30 April 2019 organised by the ‘red movement’ were [met](#) with teargas to disperse the crowd. In September 2018, ahead of the return from the USA of popular musician and opposition politician Robert Kyagulanyi, also known as Bobi Wine, following medical treatment for injuries [sustained](#) in custody, the government banned all rallies and demonstrations associated with his homecoming. Security forces broke up a preparatory meeting and arrested an organiser on 11 September 2018 and beat unarmed protesters with wooden sticks on 20 September 2018.

Anti-government and opposition protests have been frequently banned in [Guinea](#) and Togo. When people attempted to gather and protest despite these bans, protests were disrupted, and in some cases, such as [Guinea](#), were met with excessive and even lethal violence, which led to the killing of protesters and bystanders. Prior to the #RevolutionNow protests in Nigeria on 5 August 2019, Omoyele Sowore, a protest organiser, was [arrested](#) and later charged on seven counts, including treason, cybercrime and money laundering. During the 5 August protests, several protesters and journalists were arrested across Nigeria.



Sudan | Photo by Mahmoud Hjj / Anadolu Agency



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

PEOPLE
POWER
UNDER ATTACK



Sudan | Photo by Mahmoud Hjj / Anadolu Agency

Censorship remains one of the most documented civic space violations in the Africa region, recorded in 36 per cent of CIVICUS Monitor updates in the period under review.

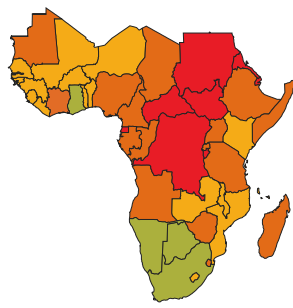
States have frequently used the tactic of blocking access to the internet and social media to try to prevent protests from happening or discourage dissent, with the authorities often invoking security reasons to justify their actions. Following the January 2019 protests, Zimbabwe's government [ordered](#) an internet shutdown, while in Chad, access to social media was only [restored](#) in July 2019 after 16 months of disruption. Even in countries with better civic space ratings, such as Benin and Liberia, states have disrupted the internet or access to social media. In Benin, access to social media and the internet was shut down on the day of legislative elections on 28 April 2019. Internet providers in Liberia [disrupted](#) access to social media platforms on the morning of 7 June 2019, the day of planned anti-government protests in the capital, Monrovia. Malawi's government [attempted](#) to shut down access to social media on election day and internet providers reported experiencing interruptions that led to outages.

Alongside internet and social media, broadcast media have been targeted. One tactic is the arbitrary suspension of licences of media outlets by national media regulators when they have been critical of the government or have reported on corruption. In Burundi, the licences of BBC Africa and Voice of America's were [revoked](#) on grounds

that the former aired a documentary that damaged the country's image and the latter employed a reporter who opposed the government. In Gabon, speculation on the health of President Ali Bongo, who suffered a stroke in October 2018, was [met](#) with the suspension of a media outlet and a journalist's accreditation. In Sudan in May 2019, amid continued protests against the military-led administration that overthrew President Omar al-Bashir, the Transitional Military Council [closed down](#) the offices of Al Jazeera and withdrew the accreditation of its correspondents with immediate effect.

In Uganda, where the introduction of a social media tax in 2018 led to a decline of more than five million users, the authorities [proposed](#) new regulations, including the power to vet new songs, videos and film scripts prior to their release, and requiring artists to obtain a licence.

CENSORSHIP



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

PEOPLE
POWER
UNDER ATTACK

ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS

Attacks against journalists were documented in 28 per cent of CIVICUS Monitor Africa updates between October 2018 and 11 November 2019. Attacks happened across the board, including in states considered to be relatively stable democracies. Attacks occurred often in the context of protests, political rallies and elections, and were perpetrated by state and non-state groups. Among non-state forces were supporters of political parties and armed groups in conflict areas.

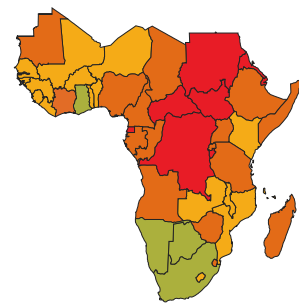
In Ghana, where civic space is rated narrowed, media organisations have been [raising concern](#) in the past few years over the deteriorating climate for the safety of journalists, as physical attacks on and threats against journalists have become commonplace. In January 2019, two unidentified people [shot and killed](#) investigative journalist Ahmed Hussein-Suale in the capital, Accra. Ahmed was a member of Tiger Eye Private Investigations, founded and led by journalist Anas Aremeyaw Anas, who was subjected to threats and intimidation, including by a member of parliament, following the release of a documentary on alleged football corruption.

Journalists are particularly vulnerable to attacks when covering political rallies and protests. In Senegal, eight journalists were [injured](#) when they were attacked during clashes between supporters of the ruling coalition and opposition supporters in February 2019. In Nigeria, three journalists [sustained](#) injuries when they were shot during clashes at a political rally in Lagos in January 2019. In July 2019 in Uganda, a journalist was [admitted](#) to hospital in a critical condition after allegedly being assaulted by a mob while covering a protest by women activists.

Journalists and media outlets in conflict areas, such as [Somalia](#), are also subject to attacks from both government security forces and armed groups such as Al-Shabaab.



Ghana | Photo by Leon Neal / Getty Images



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

PEOPLE
POWER
UNDER ATTACK



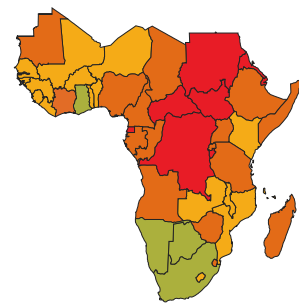
Based on 102 updates published on the CIVICUS Monitor for countries in this region between 1st October 2018 - 11th November 2019.

Sudan | Photo by Mahmoud Hjjaj / Anadolu Agency

POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS

Some positive steps were also taken. Sierra Leone is in an ‘advanced’ stage of [repealing](#) part 5 of the 1965 Public Order Act, which criminalises libel, following in the footsteps of [Liberia](#), where parliament approved a bill repealing sections of the Criminal Code that criminalised libel in July 2018.

Some of the positive developments stem from political shifts: in Ethiopia, some of the country’s draconian laws that were used to suppress civil society have been reviewed or replaced, [including](#) the 2009 Charities and Societies Proclamation. Ethiopia also saw the return of human rights defenders from exile and efforts to rebuild civil society after more than a decade of repression. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, hopes for an improvement in its civic space followed the election of President Félix Tshisekedi on 30 December 2018; the new President [promised](#) to respect the fundamental freedom of citizens and press freedom in his inauguration speech in January 2019. Hundreds of political prisoners have been released.



CASE STUDIES

METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

PEOPLE POWER UNDER ATTACK

A TURBULENT YEAR IN SUDAN: PROTEST MOVEMENT SPARKS REVOLUTION

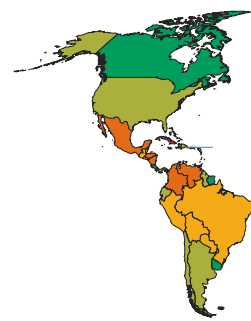
Protests [erupted](#) in several towns and cities in Sudan from mid-December 2018, initially over an increase in fuel prices and dismal economic conditions. Protesters also demanded the departure of President al-Bashir, in power for 29 years. In response to the mass protests, in which [women](#) played a substantial role, security forces used teargas and live ammunition, killing dozens and arresting hundreds, who were kept in dire prison conditions. Despite the ousting of President al-Bashir in April 2019, rights violations persisted. Protests continued, calling for the Transitional Military Council to hand over power to a civilian-led administration. During a sit-in outside the Ministry of Defence in the capital Khartoum on 3 June 2019, [more than 100 people](#) were killed when security forces, including the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, attacked the protesters using live ammunition and teargas, and prevented medical assistance to the injured. Internet connectivity was disrupted at the same time. International condemnation and pressure for mediation followed, including the African Union's [suspension](#) of Sudan's membership, which eventually contributed to a power-sharing deal between the Transitional Military Council and a coalition of opposition parties. A new military-civilian led Transitional Council was set up in August 2019 for a period of three years until elections are to be held. Additionally, a [constitutional declaration](#) was signed, which includes a chapter on rights and freedoms, promises institutional and legal reforms and seeks to bring 'comprehensive and lasting' peace. Many [challenges](#) and concerns remain on the long road ahead, including the [pressing need for accountability](#) for past human rights abuses, but there are encouraging signs for long-awaited systematic human rights reforms.



Guinea | Photo by Getty Images

CAUSE FOR CONCERN: GUINEA

Tension has been [on the rise](#) since Guinea's ruling party made a public call to change the current 2010 Constitution, claiming that it would be necessary for the 'modernisation of institutions'. Although President Condé has not publicly stated his intention to run again, the timing of the move – presidential elections are due to take place in 2020 – makes observers believe that he is aiming for a third term in office, beyond the constitutionally allowed two terms. Protests against any constitutional change in October 2019 were preceded by the [arrest and prosecution](#) of protest leaders, who received prison sentences of between six months and one year, and were met with excessive violence by security forces in their attempts to disperse protesters. Security forces killed at least nine people in three days of protests and clashes. Guinea has a history of impunity for killings of protesters and bystanders.



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

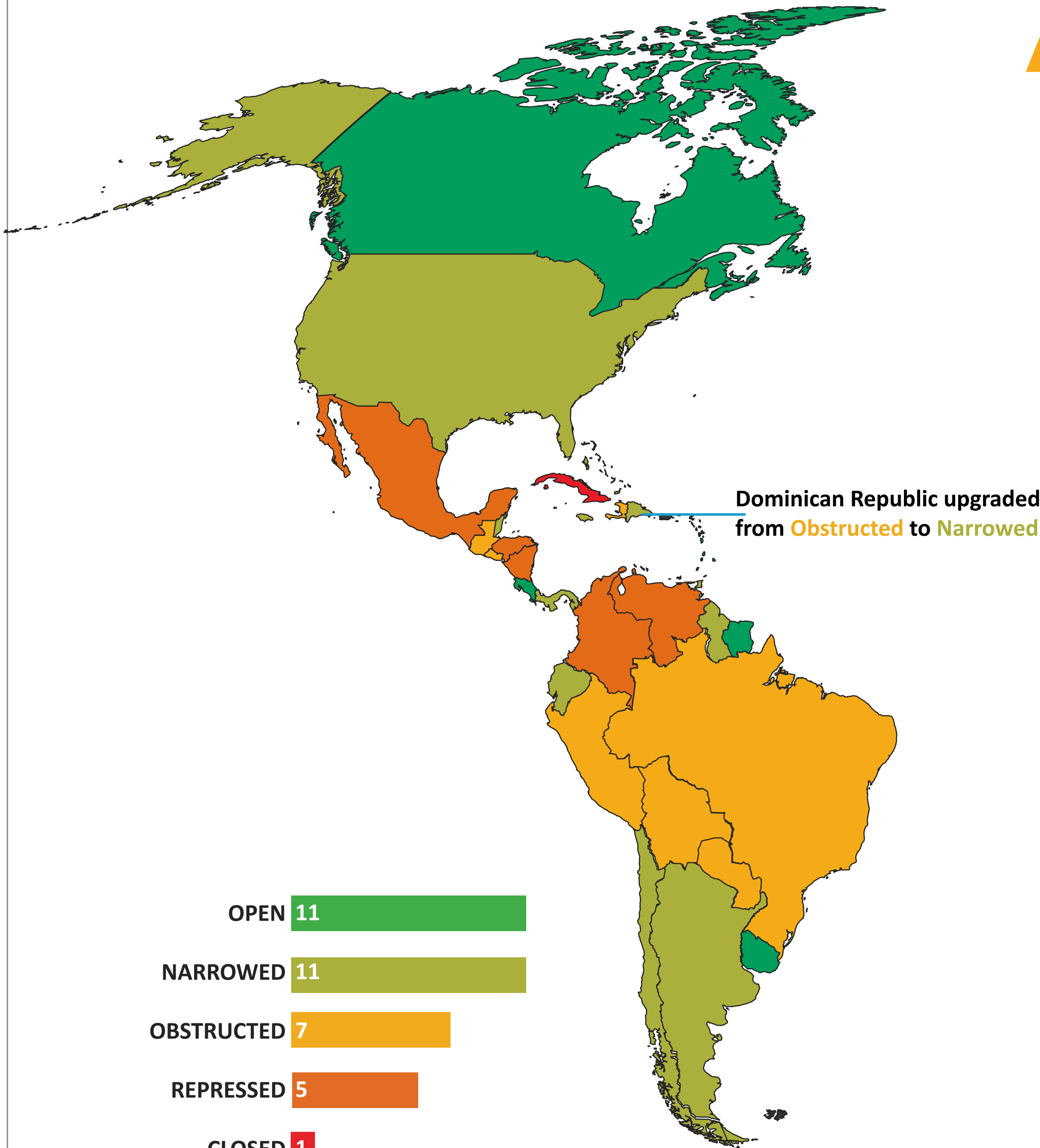
EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

PEOPLE
POWER
UNDER ATTACK



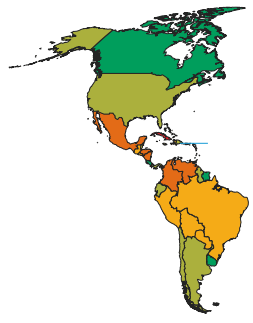
AMERICAS

RATINGS OVERVIEW

The exercise of civic freedom can put people at serious risk in the Americas. Over the past year, the detention of protesters has often been used as a tactic to dismantle opposition movements and prevent or disperse protests. Across the region, people taking to the streets in peaceful protests have been met with excessive force that has exposed the violent face of the state. Investigating and exposing corruption and crime, and expressing criticism of power, are dangerous activities: journalists in the Americas are frequently subjected to attacks and arrested for their work. State and non-state actors both use a range of intimidation strategies to frighten human rights defenders, muzzle critics and silence dissent.

CIVICUS Monitor ratings show that civic space is [open](#) in only 11 of the 35 countries of the Americas, while 11 countries have civic space that is rated [narrowed](#). Over 526 million people live in countries where civic space is severely restricted. In the region, one country – Cuba – is rated [closed](#), five [repressed](#) and seven [obstructed](#). However, the CIVICUS Monitor has documented serious violations not only in countries where freedoms are severely restricted but also in those where the state has typically imposed few constraints on civic space. Astonishing crackdowns on protests in Chile and Ecuador, both rated as having narrowed civic space, exposed the fragility of civic space even where conditions had been [improving](#). In addition, the Monitor has documented an increasingly hostile environment for press and rights defenders in countries such as Brazil and the United States.

Our analysis shows a slight improvement in the Dominican Republic, which moves its rating from obstructed to narrowed. This change reflects recent advances won by civil society in using litigation to challenge restrictive laws. Two cases brought by CSOs led the Dominican Republic’s Constitutional Court to decide [against punitive defamation](#) laws that inhibited the freedom of expression. Protests against a constitutional amendment that would have allowed President Danilo Medina to run for a third term also showed that, while important civic space restrictions remain, most Dominicans are able to mobilise and demonstrate peacefully.



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

PEOPLE POWER UNDER ATTACK



Colombia | Photo by Ovidio Gonzalez

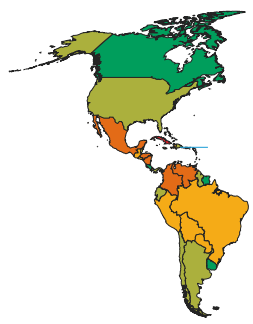
FRONTLINE DEFENDERS UNDER ATTACK

The Americas continue to be the most deadly region for human rights defenders. Between October 2018 and 11 November 2019, the CIVICUS Monitor documented killings of rights defenders in seven countries in the region; in all of these countries, Indigenous and land rights defenders fighting for their territories paid with their lives. These two groups were particularly affected by violations of civic space in the region.

The [Pemon Indigenous community](#) in Venezuela was under siege for six days in February 2019, and at least seven defenders were killed. In Brazil, Indigenous communities have [denounced](#) a significant increase in land invasions and violence since President Jair Bolsonaro took office in January 2019, with over 160 invasions reported and at least one defender killed. In Mexico, Indigenous leader [Julián Carrillo Martínez](#) received several threats and hid in the Tarahumara mountains, but this was still not enough to escape assassination. In Costa Rica, Bribri Indigenous leader [Sergio Rojas Ortiz](#) was shot and killed at home after denouncing threats against his people. During mass protests in Ecuador, Indigenous groups reported being [targeted](#) by anti-riot police and stigmatised by the media for their role in the demonstrations.

Honduran Indigenous and land rights defenders have been subjected to [repeated death threats and harassment](#), but the state has failed to offer effective protection. In February 2019, two activists who were under [precautionary measures](#) were killed. Meanwhile defenders are still subjected to [judicial harassment](#) and criminalisation for their work. A similar situation exists in Guatemala, where [women](#) environmental and land defenders have been particularly vulnerable.

In Colombia, [ethnic communities](#) have been displaced, attacked and rendered unable to access food due to restrictions on the freedom of movement. This is not a recent trend: of 347 attacks against rights defenders in Colombia in 2018, 43 per cent were committed against Indigenous and Afro-descendant groups. Beyond the figures, communities have been left exposed. In the [Cauca](#) region, attacks against the Nasa peoples have been brazen and repeated, resulting in over 36 deaths to date in 2019.



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

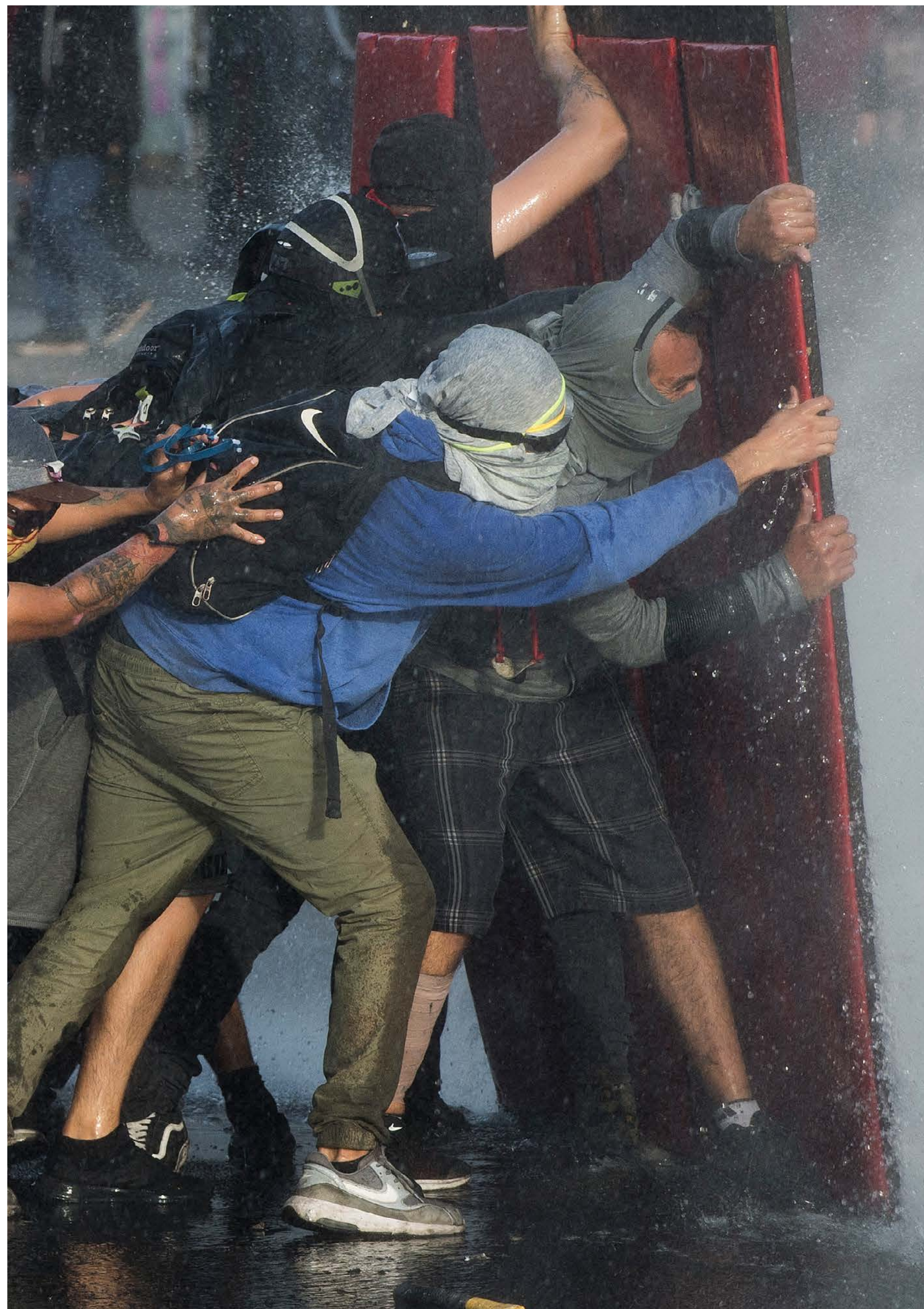
EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

**PEOPLE
POWER
UNDER ATTACK**



Chile | Photo by Claudio Santana/Getty Images

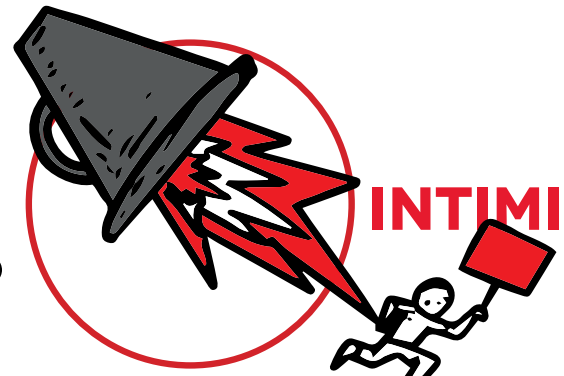
CIVIC SPACE RESTRICTIONS

In the Americas the restrictions most documented by the CIVICUS Monitor in the period under review were the detention of protesters and journalists, attacks on journalists, intimidation and the excessive use of force during protests. Censorship and harassment also remain relatively common violations.

TOP 5 VIOLATIONS FOR AMERICAS

1.  **PROTESTER(S) DETAINED**

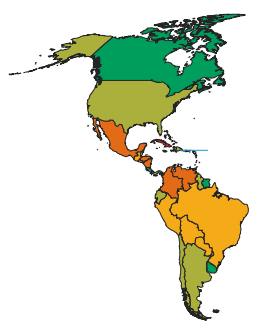
2.  **ATTACK ON JOURNALIST**

3.  **INTIMIDATION**

4.  **EXCESSIVE FORCE**

5.  **JOURNALIST DETAINED**

Based on 118 updates published on the CIVICUS Monitor for countries in this region between 1st October 2018 - 11th November 2019.



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

PEOPLE POWER UNDER ATTACK

PROTESTORS DETAINED AND EXCESSIVE FORCE

A challenging environment has not stopped people in the Americas from publicly protesting to make their demands known. Protests were documented in 82 per cent of the region’s CIVICUS Monitor reports since October 2018. However, in nearly half of these reports there were cases of protesters being detained. These incidents were documented in 18 countries, sometimes in response to violent protest but frequently as a strategy to dismantle socio-political movements. In Cuba, for instance, many key protest leaders have been detained, subjected to house arrest or threatened before or during scheduled demonstrations. Short-term detention is used by the Cuban state as a tactic to pre-empt protests.

Protests expressing political dissent, challenging government policies, or demanding basic services have frequently ended in arrests in Bolivia, Honduras, Nicaragua and Venezuela. In the first five days of the crisis that engulfed Bolivia following its disputed October 2019 presidential elections, 80 people were detained and several injured with bullet wounds. In Honduras, CSOs have reported that the government has made it a policy to repress and criminalise social protest, particularly around education and health reforms, leaving at least nine protesters dead in 2019.

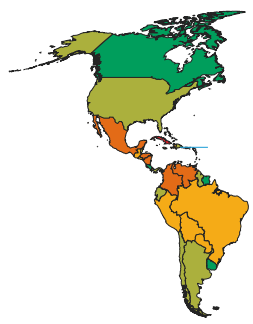
CIVICUS Monitor reports show multiple cases of the criminalisation of protesters. In February 2019, Nicaragua used terrorism laws to sentence protest leaders Medardo Mairena and Pedro Joaquín Mena Amador to prison terms of over 200 years. While the authorities rushed an Amnesty Law through the country’s National Assembly in June 2019, resulting in the release of at least 56 political prisoners, the Nicaraguan government continues to use allegations of terrorism to detain and harass people who have taken part in protests since April 2018. In Peru, two leaders of a 60-day community strike against a copper mine have been accused of extortion.

In several countries, particular movements and groups have faced unequal restrictions in the exercise of their right of peaceful assembly. In response to mobilisation against oil pipelines, for example, multiple state legislatures in the USA introduced bills restricting protests near infrastructure sites, seeking to criminalise those taking part.

Some of the most extreme cases have taken place in Chile and Ecuador. In Ecuador, widespread protests against economic austerity were repeatedly met with repression from April 2019. An economic package announced in October 2019 prompted mass protests and led to a brutal crackdown that involved violence and excessive force. In a span of 10 days of protests, at least eight people were killed, with over 2,000 protesters injured or detained. Meanwhile in Chile, over a million people took to the streets during October 2019, but the Chilean government resorted to harsh repression, deploying troops, declaring a state of emergency and imposing a curfew in parts of the country. The result shocked the continent: within a month of the protests, national human rights organisations registered at least 18 people killed, 4,271 detained and 1,305 injured in protests. Over a hundred protesters have been partially blinded and dozens more suffered eye injuries from rubber bullets and gas canisters used by security forces.

“According to the official data from Ecuador’s Ombudsman Office, there were 1,132 people detained all over the country, 1,340 people with light or severe injuries and nine killed in the protests. At the moment, there are about 30 people still detained, but there are people who are free yet being criminalised. Approximately 70 people will end up with permanent wounds.” – Julio Yuquilema Yupangui, Indigenous organisation Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador-CONAIE.

The CIVICUS Monitor also documented reports of the killing of protesters in Bolivia, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama. Notably, in four countries – Chile, Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela – allegations of torture and ill-treatment of detainees were reported.



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

PEOPLE POWER UNDER ATTACK



ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS

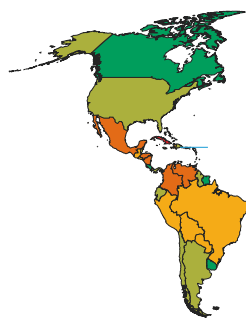
Thirty per cent of all CIVICUS Monitor reports on the Americas in this period recorded attacks from either state or non-state actors against journalists. These attacks were reported in 12 countries. Apart from conflict zones, no other country in the world is as deadly for media professionals as Mexico: [at least 10 reporters were killed](#) between January and October 2019. Alongside multiple reports of violent crimes and harassment, which include kidnappings, death threats and journalists' houses being burned and ransacked, there is an increasingly hostile rhetoric toward the media in Mexico. Perpetrators are almost never brought to account: over 99 per cent of crimes against journalists in the country go unsolved. This violence is forcing some media outlets and journalists to [self-censor](#). In one such instance, local newspaper El Monitor de Parral announced its decision to stop reporting on crime after its office was set on fire. The CIVICUS Monitor also received reports of journalists being killed in Brazil, Colombia and Honduras in 2019.

In the USA, attacks on journalists have been the most prevalent trend documented by the CIVICUS Monitor in this period. Reporters have been [attacked while covering protests](#) and [verbally attacked by public figures](#) for doing their work. [Real and simulated](#) threats led to the evacuation of newspapers' offices and one independent journalist was [shot](#) in the leg by a security guard.

INTIMIDATION

Intimidation comprises any direct or indirect action against a human rights defender or journalist that seeks to deter them from continuing their work or makes them fearful of attack. Intimidation encompasses a broad spectrum of tactics used by state and non-state actors to curtail civic space, including in countries where violent attacks are less prevalent. Incidents of intimidation were documented in 14 out of 35 countries in the Americas during the period under review. In Guatemala, several activists have faced [judicial harassment](#) for their work on land issues. In Brazil, the Minister of Justice sent the National Guard to occupy the area where the Indigenous [Free Land Encampment](#) was planning to assemble in the capital, Brasília. In Honduras, anti-riot police used roadblocks and threats of arrest to prevent human rights defenders from [documenting security forces' excesses](#) during a protest.

Smear campaigns and online harassment are also regularly used to intimidate activists and reporters, often carried out by non-state actors but emboldened by key political figures. In Argentina, the Governor of Puerto Iguazú sent an audio message [encouraging supporters](#) to abuse journalist Norma Devecchi after she published an investigation on corruption. In the USA, President Donald Trump has a [pattern of making](#) statements that use denigrating language towards journalists, seeking to defame and delegitimise them. In El Salvador, two journalists faced [defamation campaigns and online harassment](#) from supporters of President Nayib Bukele after he shared their critical comments on his Twitter account. When women are targeted, these attacks are often tinged with threats of sexual violence and misogynistic insults.



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC
SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON
THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE
OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES
AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL
ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND
NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL
CLASSIFICATION

PEOPLE
POWER
UNDER ATTACK

POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS

While several countries in the Americas have experienced political and social turmoil, the year also showed civil society’s resilience. Free speech advocates were given cause to celebrate as legal cases and campaigns resulted in the striking down of legislation criminalising defamation, libel and slander, which are charges often used to persecute activists and journalists reporting on corruption, with a notable victory in the Dominican Republic. In Honduras, the National Congress announced the removal of articles on ‘crimes against honour’ from the new Honduran [Criminal Code](#) following a campaign by civil society and the media, who mobilised to [demand a review](#) of the legislation.

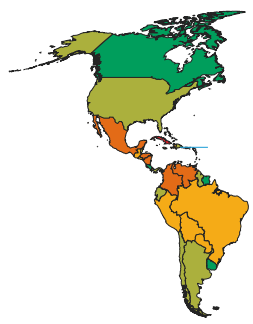
While environmental defenders in the Americas face great risks, states have acknowledged the need to counter violence against such activists with the [Escazú Agreement](#). It is the first binding instrument for the region that includes specific commitments for the protection of environmental defenders. As of October 2019, it has been signed by 21 states and ratified by six. The Agreement was strongly influenced by civil society, whose direct participation in negotiating and advocating for it was crucial.



GOOD NEWS STORIES



Based on 118 updates published on the CIVICUS Monitor for countries in this region between 1st October 2018 - 11th November 2019.”



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

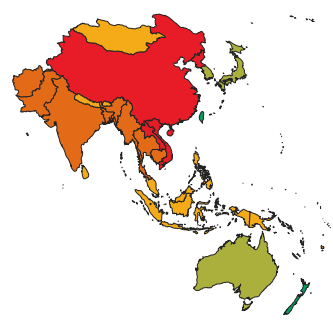
**PEOPLE
POWER
UNDER ATTACK**



Colombia | Photo by Ovidio Gonzalez / Getty Images

COUNTRY OF CONCERN: COLOMBIA

Keeping track of the violence against rights defenders in Colombia has been so difficult in 2019 that human rights organisations have sometimes chosen to refrain from publishing official numbers of activists killed. The country's persistent violence against social leaders and the high levels of impunity for these crimes led [thousands](#) to protest in July 2019. A month later, municipal elections saw an escalation in violence, leaving [seven political candidates killed](#) and 62 others attacked or threatened in two months of campaigning. In addition, various high-level state officials, including the vice-president, have made troubling statements stigmatising those who exercise their freedoms of association and peaceful assembly. At the end of September, 2019, student protests in the capital Bogotá were heavily [repressed](#) by the police. Colombian media freedom organisations have also reported that violence against the media has [increased](#), with [hundreds](#) of violations against media freedom documented in 2019.



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

PEOPLE POWER UNDER ATTACK

ASIA AND PACIFIC

RATINGS OVERVIEW

The assault on civil society and fundamental freedoms has persisted in Asia and the Pacific. The main civic space violations documented by the CIVICUS Monitor in the region since the previous update include offline and online censorship to silence activists, journalists and other government critics and the suppression of critical information by states seeking to control the political narrative. Numerous countries in Asia and the Pacific also continue to use restrictive laws to criminalise the freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, particularly criminal defamation laws. These laws have a chilling effect on people who question those in power. There are also increasing reports of harassment of human rights defenders and the arrest and detention of peaceful protesters by the authorities.

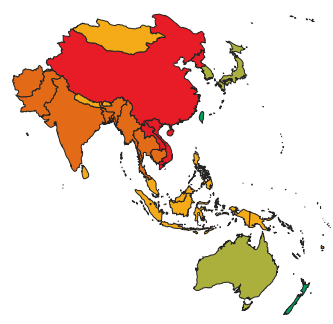
In Asia, out of 25 countries, four are rated as having closed civic space with eight repressed and 10 obstructed. Civic space in Japan and South Korea is rated narrowed, leaving Taiwan as the only Asian country rated open. In the Pacific, the story is more positive, with eight countries rated open and three rated narrowed, while Fiji, Nauru and Papua New Guinea are in the obstructed category.

Across Asia and the Pacific, three countries have been downgraded due to attempts by the state to silence activists and journalists or new legislation that will restrict civic space.



Hong Kong | Photo by Anthony Kwan/Getty Images

India, the world's largest democracy, has been downgraded to repressed due to the increased restriction of space for dissent during 2019 and particularly following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's re-election in May 2019. Dozens of [activists](#) have been intimidated, attacked, or killed, while scores of journalists have been [criminalised](#), assaulted, or [killed](#) for doing their work. According to the CIVICUS Monitor's frequent updates, [sedition](#) laws and other restrictive laws such as the National Security Act and Unlawful Activities Prevention Act have been used against [students](#), [academics](#) and activists to silence critics of the government. The Indian government has continued to use the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act to [restrict and bar foreign funding](#) or to [investigate](#) critical CSOs such as Lawyers Collective, a CSO co-founded by human rights defenders and lawyers Indira Jaising and Anand Grover. India has also witnessed severe restrictions on fundamental freedoms in Indian Administered [Kashmir](#) since August 2019. Hundreds of political activists, human rights defenders and community leaders have been [detained](#) or [put on a non-fly](#) list and a communications [blockade](#) has been imposed.



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

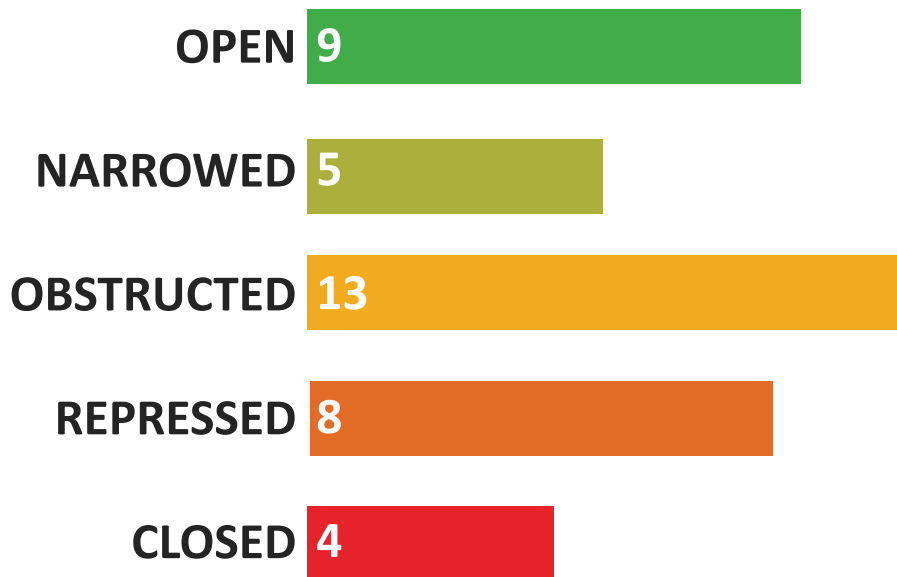
EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

PEOPLE POWER UNDER ATTACK

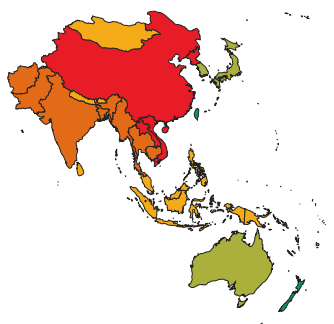


RATINGS OVERVIEW

Brunei, where civic freedoms and media freedom have been curtailed, has been downgraded to repressed. In April 2019, the revised Sharia (Islamic law) [penal code](#) came into force. The law imposes the death penalty for various offences, including insult or defamation of the Prophet Mohammad. The new law [punishes](#) people for printing, disseminating, importing, broadcasting and distributing publications against Islamic beliefs.

The CIVICUS Monitor has downgraded Australia’s civic space from open to narrowed. This comes after [raids](#) on the media in 2019, coupled with the intimidation of journalists reporting on plans to expand state surveillance as well as the prosecution of [whistleblowers](#) under the Intelligence Services Act for exposing government wrongdoing. The government has [passed](#) new legislation – the Telecommunications and Other Legislation Amendment (Assistance and Access) Bill – that would allow law enforcement authorities to force tech companies to hand

over user information, even if it is protected by end-to-end encryption, raising concerns about the right to privacy and to the protection of personal data. Human rights groups have further raised concerns about the expansive [powers](#) for law enforcement under the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation Act, which would have a [chilling](#) effect on public reporting.



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC
SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON
THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE
OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES
AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL
ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND
NORTH AFRICA


RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL
CLASSIFICATION

**PEOPLE
POWER
UNDER ATTACK**

CIVIC SPACE RESTRICTIONS

TOP 5 VIOLATIONS FOR ASIA-PACIFIC REGION.

1.  **CENSORSHIP**

2.  **RESTRICTIVE
LAW**

3.  **CRIMINAL
DEFAMATION**

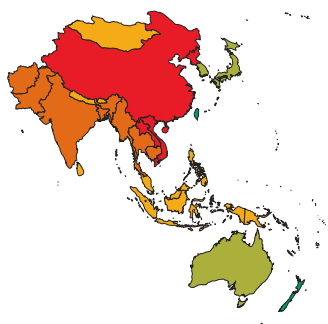
4.  **HARASSMENT**

5.  **PROTESTER(S)
DETAINED**

Based on 123 updates published on the CIVICUS Monitor for countries in this region between 1st October 2018 - 11th November 2019.



Myanmar | Photo by Myo Kyaw Soe / REUTERS



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

PEOPLE POWER UNDER ATTACK

CENSORSHIP

The most common civic space violation in Asia and the Pacific documented by the CIVICUS Monitor in this period was censorship, occurring in 24 countries. The government of China was the main perpetrator as it continued to expand its censorship regime, blocking critical outlets and social media sites. This was seen in particular ahead of the 30th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square [crackdown](#) in June 2019 and also around the anti-government protests in Hong Kong; the government [blocked](#) coverage of the protests domestically, deployed [trolls](#) against protesters and mounted [disinformation](#) campaigns. The government has also attempted to censor reporting on it across [borders](#) and at the [United Nations](#) (UN), especially around its abuses of the Uighur people.

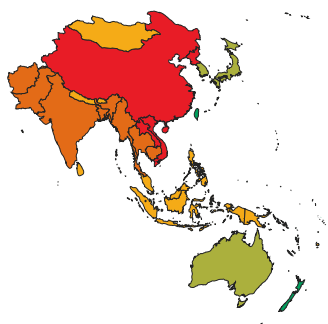
Censorship has also been used in a number of other countries in the region, including Bangladesh, Pakistan, Singapore and Thailand, through tactics such as the blocking of TV broadcasts and internet news sites and the targeting journalists. In Bangladesh, the authorities [blocked](#) Al Jazeera, popular news portal Poriborton.com and numerous other news portals and websites critical of the state. In Thailand, censorship increased rapidly in the run up to elections in March 2019. Thai authorities suspended Voice TV, cut off international outlets and targeted journalists as part of a campaign to censor reporting. In Pakistan, the authorities attempted to restrict media coverage of the mass mobilisation of Pashtun people to demand their rights by [harassing](#) and criminalising journalists. In Singapore, the authorities targeted independent news website The Online Citizen, which was threatened with [libel](#) to suppress its critical reporting. A communications blackout was imposed in [West Papua](#), where protests mobilised in support of independence from Indonesia and in [Chin and Rakhine](#) states in Myanmar. Attacks on journalists were documented in 10 countries with journalists killed in Afghanistan, India, Indonesia, Pakistan and the Philippines. In the Pacific, censorship was documented in five countries, including Fiji and Papua New Guinea.

RESTRICTIVE LAWS

The second most common violation documented during this period was the use of an array of restrictive laws to stifle civil society and criminalise civic freedoms. This has been documented in at least 22 countries in Asia and the Pacific. Criminal defamation laws were the most frequently used method of suppressing dissent,



Australia | Photo by Quinn Rooney/Getty Images



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

**PEOPLE
POWER
UNDER ATTACK**

documented in at least 19 countries in the region. In Bangladesh, scores of critics as well as journalists were persecuted under the [draconian](#) Digital Security Act while in Sri Lanka, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Act of 2007 – a [law](#) meant to protect human rights – has been used to criminalise peaceful expression. In Malaysia, criminal defamation laws have been used to [prosecute](#) online criticism of religion and the monarchy, while in the Philippines opposition politicians, religious leaders and human rights advocates who were [critical](#) of President Rodrigo Duterte are facing sedition and other charges. In the Pacific, criminal defamation laws have been used in [Samoa](#) and [Vanuatu](#) in order to silence critics.

Other restrictive laws documented include [national security](#) laws in Vietnam, where over a hundred activists are in prison, and the use of anti-terrorist laws in Pakistan to pursue activists such as [Gulalai Ismail](#) for criticism of the state. In Indonesia, the Electronic and Transaction law is used to [criminalise](#) online ‘incitement’, with human rights lawyer Veronica Koman among those targeted as a result of activism, while peaceful West Papuan protesters have been [charged](#) with ‘rebellion’.

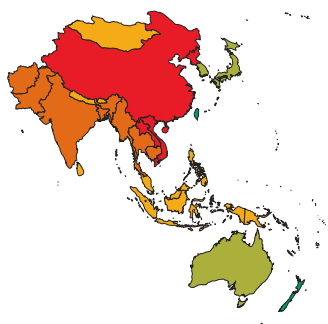
The authorities have also deployed restrictive laws to disrupt protests. In Myanmar dozens of protesters have been [charged](#) under the Penal Code and the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law for protesting against armed conflict or opposing development projects. In Fiji, the Public Order (Amendment) Act 2012 has been used to [disperse](#) peaceful protests.

HARASSMENT

The harassment of activists and journalists in Asia and the Pacific is another common violation, documented in 21 countries in the region. In China, activists continue to face various forms of harassment, including surveillance, being placed under [house arrest](#), temporary detention and travel [bans](#). In Nepal, journalists encounter a range of [risks](#) and threats for undertaking their work, while in Bangladesh civil society activists are facing [smear](#) campaigns. In Vietnam there is intense [surveillance](#) of activists, while in Cambodia, [opposition](#) activists from the Cambodia National Rescue Party have been threatened and attacked. Other countries where harassment of activists occurred include Fiji, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and Thailand.



Indonesia | Photo by Eko Siswono Toyudho/Anadolu Agency



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

PEOPLE POWER UNDER ATTACK

POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS

The CIVICUS Monitor has also documented positive civic space developments in the region over the year. In the Maldives, an anti-defamation law was [repealed](#) by the new government, while in Malaysia, the government scrapped its repressive Anti-Fake News Act and the national human rights commission concluded an [inquiry](#) into the enforced disappearance of activists. In Taiwan, there was a major victory for the island’s LGBTQI community when, following extensive civil society advocacy, parliament [legalised](#) same-sex marriage in a landmark vote. In Hong Kong, in the face of repression, the mass protests at least led to the [withdrawal](#) of the extradition law. Climate strikes saw mobilisation across the region from [Pakistan](#) to [Samoa](#).



GOOD NEWS STORIES

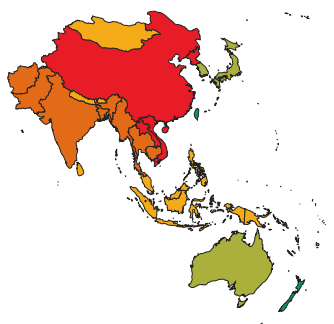
ENABLING LAW 3

RELEASE OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER 4

POSITIVE COURT RULING 7

POSITIVE CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT 13

Based on 123 updates published on the CIVICUS Monitor for countries in this region between 1st October 2018 - 11th November 2019



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

**PEOPLE
POWER
UNDER ATTACK**

COUNTRY OF CONCERN: HONG KONG

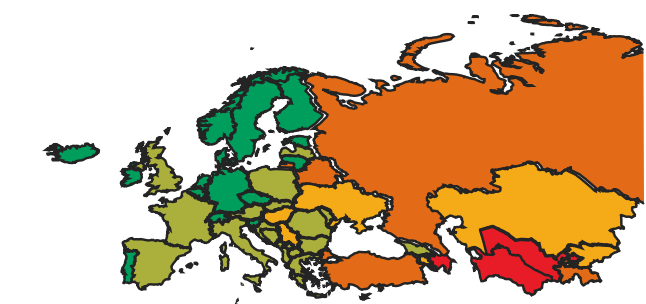
The CIVICUS Monitor has documented a significant regression of civic space in Hong Kong since the mass protests began in June 2019. There have been [reports](#) of excessive and lethal force being used by the security forces against protesters, with some being arbitrarily arrested, as well as evidence of torture and other ill-treatment in detention with impunity. At least 750 of those arrested during the first four months were children. While the vast majority of protests were peaceful, there were also acts of violence by protesters, which appear to have escalated alongside excessive use of force by the police.

There have been numerous [cases](#) of harassment and attacks against journalists, which have included journalists being pepper sprayed, assaulted and hit by rubber or sponge bullets, while protesters have been attacked with impunity by thugs. Protest leaders have also been [attacked](#) by unknown actors and some pro-democracy activists have been [arrested](#) and charged.

In October 2019 the government [invoked](#) a colonial-era law, the Emergency Regulations Ordinance, to ban face coverings at public gatherings. The law also grants the Hong Kong government sweeping powers of detention and the power to restrict the freedoms of peaceful assembly and expression. The law was later [declared](#) unconstitutional by Hong Kong's high court.



Hong Kong | Photo by Anthony Kwan/Getty Images



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

PEOPLE
POWER
UNDER ATTACK

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA RATINGS OVERVIEW

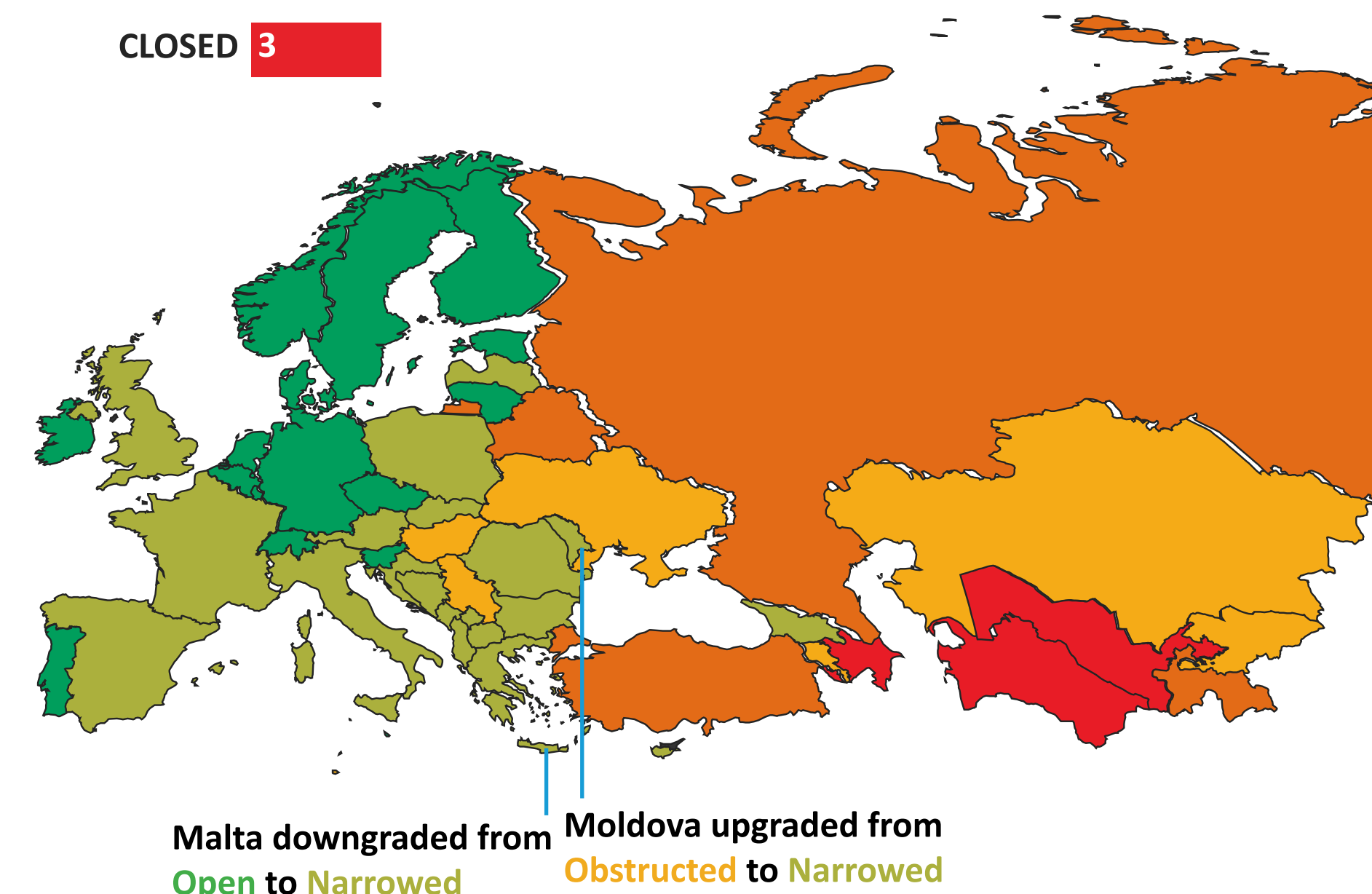
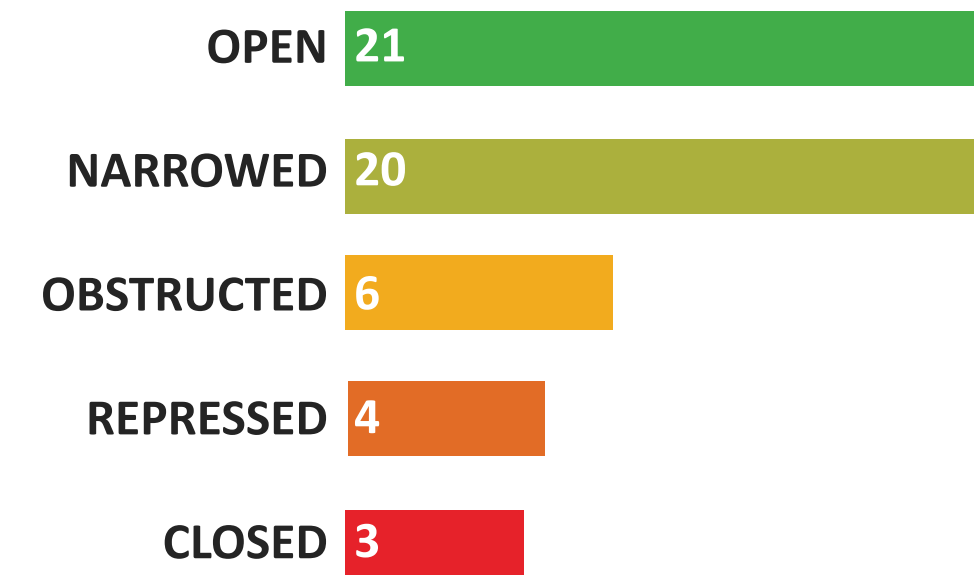
Civic space conditions in Europe and Central Asia – a region that includes 54 countries – are varied and complex. The CIVICUS Monitor’s latest analysis shows that conditions for civil society remain challenging with no major improvements documented over the past year. Since November 2018, the analysis shows a notable decline in the quality of civic space in two countries: Malta and Serbia, compared to an improvement in one, Moldova.

In the midst of [widespread](#) protests that took place across Serbia during 2019, the Serbian Progressive Party has taken a range of steps to restrict the work of independent journalists, civil society groups and others who challenge power. As conditions for civil society have deteriorated over the year, Serbia’s civic space rating has [moved](#) from narrowed to obstructed.

In Malta, the environment for journalists has become increasingly [hostile](#), particularly for those reporting on corruption. Impunity after the [killing](#) in 2017 of prominent investigative journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia has created the space for the state to intimidate and harass activists and those advocating for justice. The deterioration of the freedom of expression has made Malta fall 30 places over the past two years according to Reporters Without Borders’ World Press Freedom Index. As a result, Malta’s civic space rating has moved from open to narrowed.

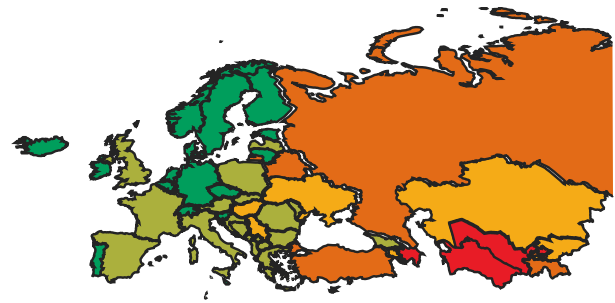
EUROPE: BUSINESS AS USUAL?

Although the European Union (EU) remains the region of the world with the largest number of countries with open civic space, conditions for civil society continue to deteriorate. Limitations to fundamental freedoms have continued to take place in



many countries, with states attempting to censor those who challenge power, often by using excessive force during protests.

In Croatia, for example, journalists are [exposed](#) to a variety of pressures, attacks, threats, censorship and prosecutions. For example, Novi List reporters were sent death threats from an unknown source in May 2019. In Czech Republic, the media is [increasingly](#) polarised and mainstream politicians continue to [undermine](#) critical media outlets. The rise of right-wing and far-right parties in a number of EU countries also [continues](#) to have a negative impact upon civic space. In Estonia, the actions of the nationalist Estonian Conservative People’s Party, including public vilification of the media, have raised [concerns](#) about the pressure on media freedom and



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

PEOPLE POWER UNDER ATTACK

independent, critical journalists. As in the previous year, the Hungarian government has [continued](#) its regressive course, including by enacting regressive legislation and attacking activists and critics, evidently undeterred by pressure from regional and international institutions.

Despite the increased pressure on civil society and activists, people have continued to take to the streets to demand justice, challenge the powerful and demand change. Some states, unable to deal with critics, have resorted to using excessive force to disperse protesters.

In France, The Gilets Jaunes (yellow vest) [movement](#) has carried out regular mass [demonstrations](#) across the country since November 2018 and through most of 2019. With a few exceptions, the protests have been largely peaceful, but police have [resorted](#) to the [disproportionate](#) use of force against peaceful protesters, causing physical harm and serious injuries to hundreds of peaceful demonstrators. Government attempts to restrict freedom of assembly rights did not stop there. President Emmanuel Macron signed into law the controversial ‘anti-rioters’ law that contains [provisions](#) that restrict the freedom of peaceful assembly.

In the countries that are not EU members, civic space conditions are much worse, with Moldova’s improved rating a rare bright spark.


Russia’s crackdown on civic space continues with the [criminalisation](#) of speech, the detention and conviction of human rights defenders and the application of the ‘foreign agent law’, which penalises civil society that has any connection with international support. In Turkey, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s government has [continued](#) to repress civic space, leaving little space for the exercise of civic freedoms, by blocking websites, targeting activists and journalists and using excessive force against protesters.


In Central Asia, although some positive signs of change have been seen, human rights improvements have generally been slow; of the area’s five countries, two have civic space that is rated obstructed, one repressed and two closed. In Kazakhstan, although President Nursultan Nazarbayev stepped down in March 2019 after almost three decades in power, there have been no signs of improvement under the newly elected President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. During the period up to the June 2019 presidential election, human rights violations reached a new high, marked by the repressive [response](#) of the authorities to peaceful protests. During several days of protests, the


police and special forces detained several thousand peaceful protesters, often using excessive force. In addition, the authorities periodically blocked access to social media and messaging applications and obstructed the work of journalists covering the protests.


In Uzbekistan, despite some signs of change and the government’s stated intent to allow space for civil society and human rights defenders to carry out their work, the operating environment for CSOs remains [highly](#) challenging. There have been reports of harassment and intimidation by state officials against lawyers who assist with the attempted registration of human rights NGOs. In addition, civil society activists, journalists and human rights defenders have continued to face reprisals for their peaceful activities and many of the former political prisoners who were released from prison since President Mirziyoyev came to power, have been kept under state surveillance.


TOP 5 VIOLATIONS FOR EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

- 

1. CENSORSHIP
- 

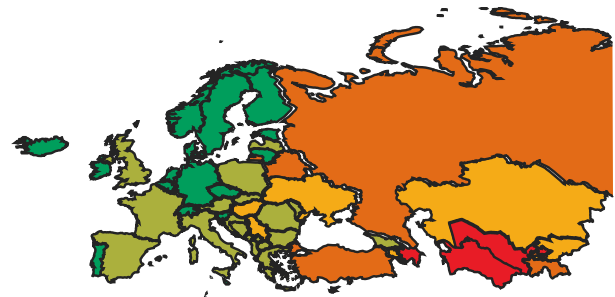
2. PUBLIC VILIFICATION
- 

3. POLITICAL INTERFERENCE
- 

4. HARASSMENT
- 

5. PROTESTER(S) DETAINED

Based on 152 updates published on the CIVICUS Monitor for countries in this region between 1st October 2018 - 11th November 2019.



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

PEOPLE POWER UNDER ATTACK

CIVIC SPACE RESTRICTIONS

In Europe and Central Asia, the restrictions most frequently documented by the CIVICUS Monitor over the past year were censorship, public vilification, political interference, harassment and the detention of protesters.

CENSORSHIP

As was the case [last year](#), the CIVICUS Monitor has documented censorship as the most frequent violation used by the authorities in Europe and Central Asia to stifle dissent and debate and control the public narrative. In Hungary, public TV [refused](#) to broadcast the latest [video clip](#) of the band Besh o DroM, which portrayed oligarchs playing with the population as with pawns. In other countries, conservative parties are working to prevent coverage of topics they deem unsuitable, including of [gender](#) and LGBTQI issues. The blocking of websites has become a common [practice](#) in Azerbaijan, under the pretext that some of their content is defamatory.

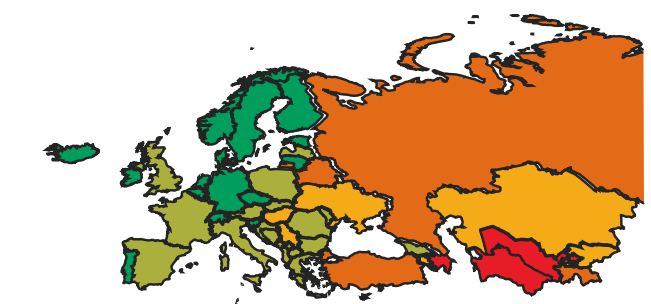
Censorship can also result in the public being denied access to some parts of the internet, usually to avoid accountability for human rights violations, as was [shown](#) in Kazakhstan during its June 2019 election. In the most extreme cases, access to foreign social media sites and messaging apps are not available, including in Turkmenistan, given the [prevention](#) of VPN access.

PUBLIC VILIFICATION

States in the region are showing less tolerance for critical views, accountability and the freedom of expression. A frequent tactic documented by the CIVICUS Monitor is the use of smear campaigns against civil society. In Austria, [statements](#) attacking the reputation of critical independent CSOs are becoming used systematically. There is an ongoing and alarming tendency of Serbian public officials to smear CSOs. In September 2019, Serbia's President Aleksandar Vučić took [aim](#) at two CSOs involved in election monitoring and good governance, targeting them as 'liars'.



Serbia | Photo by Filip Stevanovic / Anadolu Agency



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

**PEOPLE
POWER
UNDER ATTACK**

POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS

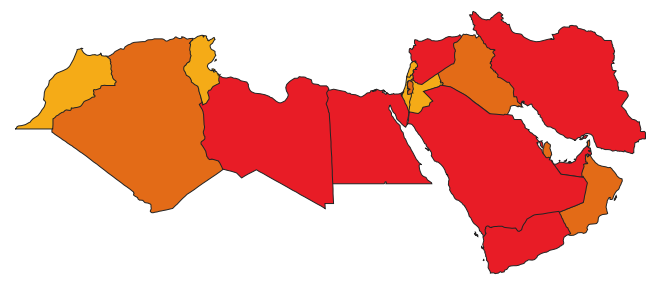
Some positive developments have been reported on the CIVICUS Monitor during this period as civil society continues the struggle for a more just and equal society in the face of restrictions. After two years of intensive advocacy by CSOs, Lithuania's government [promised](#) to establish a National NGO Fund by amending the Law on the Development of NGOs. In the past year, the CIVICUS Monitor also documented 11 cases where human rights defenders were released from detention, including in Azerbaijan and Turkey, and published seven reports involving a court ruling that had a positive impact on civic space.

COUNTRY OF CONCERN: MALTA

In 2017, prominent investigative journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia, who had reported on state corruption, was [killed](#) by a car bomb. The attack signalled the increasing hostility towards journalists in Malta. Two years after the assassination, CSOs [stated](#) that the authorities have failed to take the necessary steps to ensure justice for Daphne. Her family, as well as the activists who campaign for justice in her case, have continued to be targets of harassment.

In addition, cases of harassment have been documented, especially against anti-corruption activists. For example, a recent investigation by The Shift News [documented](#) coordinated attacks against anti-corruption activists and Daphne Caruana Galizia's family, including calls for sexual violence by members of Facebook groups that support Malta's Prime Minister Joseph Muscat.





METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

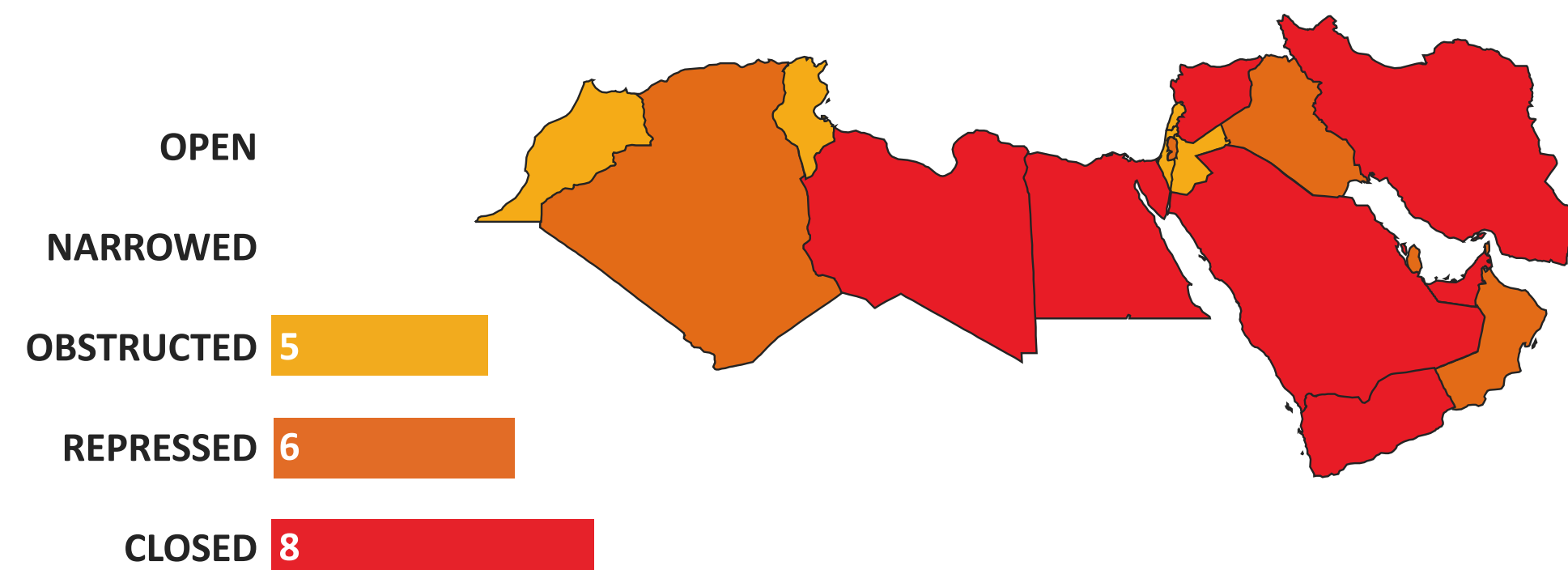
MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

**PEOPLE
POWER
UNDER ATTACK**

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA RATINGS OVERVIEW



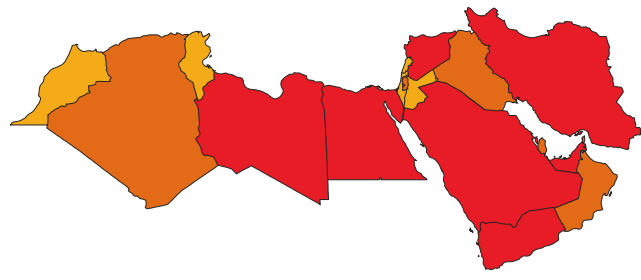
Civic space continues to be challenged in the MENA region, which holds one of the worst records of civic freedoms globally. Latest CIVICUS Monitor ratings show that civic space in eight countries is rated closed, while six countries are rated repressed and five are rated obstructed. No MENA countries have open or narrowed civic space.

Freedom of expression is particularly under severe threat in the region, as various restrictions were documented showing that journalists, writers and others who express dissent bear much of the brunt of closing civic space. The targeting of, violent attacks on and killing of [journalists in Palestine](#) and the killings of prominent Libyan journalist [Mohammed Bin Khalifa](#), Iraqi writer and novelist [Dr Alaa Mashthob Abboud](#) and Saudi Arabian journalist [Jamal Ahmad Khashoggi](#) are just a few examples of people paying the ultimate price with their lives, as the authorities and non-state groups have taken brazen measures to silence their voices.

Across the region, women and those advocating for women's rights continued to be systematically targeted by the authorities.



Lebanon | Photo by Sam Tarling / Getty Images



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

**PEOPLE
POWER
UNDER ATTACK**

CIVIC SPACE RESTRICTIONS

During the past year, the three most common violations in the region as documented by the CIVICUS Monitor were censorship, the detention of journalists and harassment. The detention of human rights defenders and intimidation complete the list of the five most common civic space violations reported in MENA.

TOP 5 VIOLATIONS FOR MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA REGION

-  **1. CENSORSHIP**
-  **2. JOURNALIST DETAINED**
-  **3. HARASSMENT**
-  **4. HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER(S) DETAINED**
-  **5. INTIMIDATION**

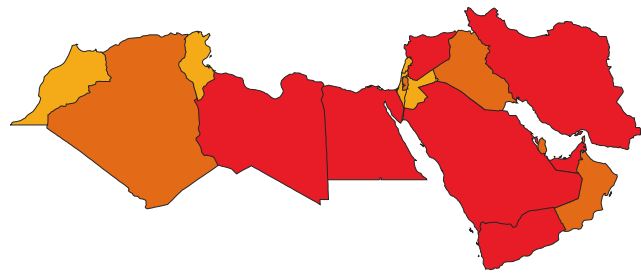
Based on 41 updates published by the CIVICUS Monitor for countries in this region between 1st October 2018 - 11th November 2019

CENSORSHIP

Censorship was the most commonly reported violation documented by the CIVICUS Monitor over the past year. This marks a shift from the analysis of the top violations in our November 2018 report, when the detention of human rights defenders was ranked as the most common violation in the region.

Censorship took a range of forms, including the [blocking of websites](#), as happened in Egypt during the lead-up to the April 2019 referendum vote on the constitutional amendments that strengthened President Abdel Fattah-el-Sisi's power. [Blocking and disruption of social media](#) was also reported during protests that started in September 2019 against state corruption in Egypt. In Saudi Arabia, the authorities censored and caused the removal of a satirical comedy show from streaming service [Netflix](#). Censorship also involved the banning or suspension of media outlets, as happened in Iraq, where authorities [suspended](#) the licence of Al-Hurra, a regional broadcaster, after it aired an investigative report that implied ties between state bodies and armed groups; in October and November 2019, the internet and social media were also completely cut off in Iraq.

Governments often used cybercrime laws to punish dissenting voices. In Kuwait such laws saw human rights defenders such as Abdulhakim Al-Fadhli, Hamed Jameel and Khalifa Al-Anezi [summoned](#) by the authorities for their activities on social media; they remain in prison, among 10 activists for the rights of the stateless Bedoon people. In Bahrain, the Court of Cassation, the court of last resort, denied human rights defender [Nabeel Rajab's](#) appeal, thus confirming his five-year prison sentence for social media posts he published in 2015 that were critical of the Bahraini government. In the United Arab Emirates, human rights defender [Ahmed Mansoor](#) remains in poor health in solitary confinement in Abu Dhabi's Al-Sadr prison with no bed and no running water, serving 10 years' imprisonment for his online human rights activities; blogger Osama Al-Najjar was finally released two years after his sentence ended.



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

PEOPLE POWER UNDER ATTACK

DETENTION OF JOURNALISTS

Journalists continue to be on the frontline of restrictions on the freedom of expression in the region. The detention of journalists was the second most commonly reported violation for the region in the past year.

Authorities detained journalists for a number of reasons. In Lebanon, reports show a worrying trend in the authorities harassing, interrogating and arbitrarily detaining journalists, as was the case for Syrian journalist [Abdel Hafez al-Houlani](#), who was detained without charge because of his reporting on refugee rights, while in Iran journalist [Yashar Soltani](#) was sentenced to five years in prison after exposing extensive corruption.

Journalists were also detained for criticising the authorities, state institutions and officials, as was seen when Syrian writer [Souleman Yousph](#) was detained for days without charge for criticising the Kurdish Democratic Union. In Yemen, journalist [Sabri Salmeen Bin Makhashin](#) was detained for criticising a governor on social media, while in Libya, journalist Ismail [Bouzreeba al-Zway](#) was arbitrarily detained without charge for weeks on accusations of working for Al-Nabaa TV, which has been critical of the Libyan National Army.

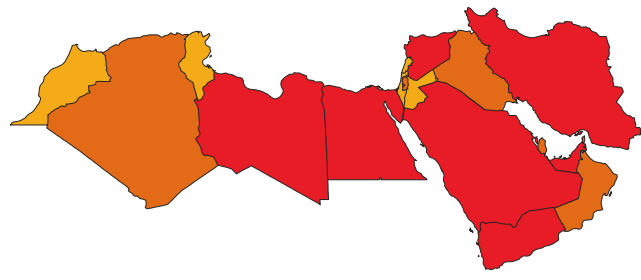
States in MENA have also arrested and detained bloggers and online activists for expressing dissenting opinions, as was seen in the detentions of Oman's internet activists [Sultan Al-Maktoumi](#), Salem Al-Arimi and [Hatem Al-Maliki](#) for expressing pro-Palestinian positions and in the detention of Tunisia's social media activist [Sahbi Amri](#) for criticising prosecutors on social media for failing to open investigations into state corruption. One of the worst cases was that of Moroccan journalist Hajar Raissouni, who was falsely [sentenced to a year in prison for allegedly having an illegal abortion](#) and premarital sex, with the real motive being the suppression of her right to the freedom of expression. Hajar was pardoned in October 2019, but not acquitted.



Sri Lanka | Dinuka Liyanawatte / REUTERS

HARASSMENT

The third most commonly reported violation in the MENA region was harassment. Harassment took various forms, including deportation and refusal of entry, as was seen in Israel, where activists such as [Omar Shakir](#), Human Rights Watch's Israel and Palestine director, was ordered to leave the country, and a Palestinian-US student was denied entry and held for 15 days at the airport under the country's infamous Boycott Laws. Judicial harassment was also used by the authorities, for example in Morocco, where human rights defender and journalist [Omar Radi](#) was summoned by the authorities, subjected to a four-hour interrogation about a post on Twitter which was critical of a judge, and later released with no charges. In Morocco, the authorities harassed media outlets by raiding their offices, as was seen when [NessmaTV's](#) office was raided and equipment confiscated in what was suspected to be a politically motivated attack that aimed to silence them.



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

PEOPLE POWER UNDER ATTACK

WOMEN DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECTED BY RESTRICTIONS

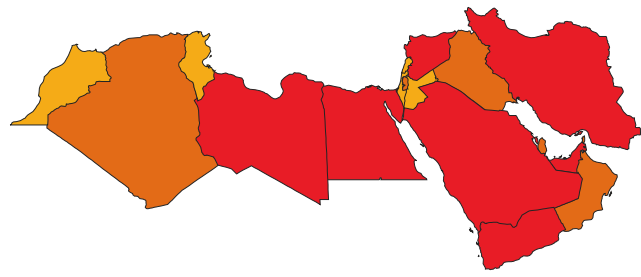
The region retains the trend revealed by our findings last year: that women and activists advocating for women's rights and empowerment are targeted by the authorities.

In Bahrain, women human rights defenders [Hajer Mansoor, Najah Yusuf and Medina Ali](#) were subjected to [reprisals](#) in Isa Town Prison after their cases were raised by the UN and the UK Parliament; Najah Yousuf has revealed that she was raped after being imprisoned for protesting against the repressive regime's hosting of the Formula 1 Grand Prix race. Iranian authorities arrested three women human rights defenders, [lawyer Hoda Amid, sociologist Najmeh Vahedi and gender studies student Rezvaneh Mohammadi](#), in connection with training workshops on equal marriage rights and other activities in defence of women's rights. Iranian women's rights defenders have also been sentenced from 10 to over 30 years in prison for [removing their hijab](#) or encouraging other women to do so, including human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh, [who was sentenced to 38 years in prison and 149 lashes](#) for representing two women who were charged with removing their hijabs in public as well as founding an CSO that campaigns against the death penalty. In Iraq, [Dr Su'ad Al-Ali](#), a woman human rights defender, was assassinated by a shot fired by an unknown person after she led a July 2018 protest in Basra that sparked a wave of protests in several other cities.

In Saudi Arabia, women human rights defenders who had been detained since May 2018 were subjected to [torture](#), including sexual assault and harassment, and over 20 women's rights defenders are still in prison without being sentenced, including Loujain Al-Hathloul, Samar Badawi and Nassima Al-Sadah, in addition to [Israa Al-Ghomgham](#), who was charged and detained for participation in peaceful protests in 2015. In Oman, human rights lawyer and writer [Basma Al-Keumy](#) has been regularly subjected to harassment by the authorities as a result of her work in defence of human rights and her preference to not wear the hijab.



Photo by Murtadha Sudani / Anadolu Agency



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

**PEOPLE
POWER
UNDER ATTACK**

POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS

Our analysis also showed some positive civic space developments during the year. In Tunisia, the Court of Appeal in Tunis ruled in favour of the [LGBTQI rights group Shams](#), finding that the government did not have grounds to shut the organisation down. In Jordan, the authorities withdrew restrictive draft [cybercrime laws](#) after pushback by civil society.

COUNTRY OF CONCERN: IRAQ

The freedoms of peaceful assembly and expression have been under severe threat in Iraq in the past year. Journalists and writers, including Dr Alaa Mashthob Abboud and [photojournalist Samer Ali Hussain](#) were killed and many others arrested, while the Iraqi government also sought to introduce a new cybercrime law that would seriously undermine the right to the freedom of expression and impose severe penalties on internet activists and bloggers. In addition, protests that began in July 2018 to call for improved essential services delivery and an end to corruption continued to escalate throughout much of the year in several cities across Iraq.

In a [recent wave of protests](#) that began on 1 October 2019, protesters in various locations were met with excessive force, including security forces firing live ammunition directly at crowds and using stun grenades, water cannon with hot water and tear gas against protesters, leaving over [300 people dead and over 10,000 injured](#) since early October. In addition, over 800 protesters were arrested in the first 10 days of protests alone. Among those who died were journalists Amanj Babany and Lana Mohammad and their child, who were gunned down in their car in Iraqi Kurdistan on 16 October 2019.



GOOD NEWS STORIES

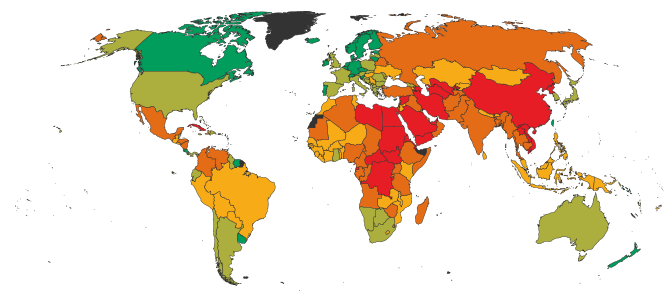
HUMAN RIGHTS
DEFENDER ACQUITTED 1

POSITIVE COURT RULING 2

POSITIVE CIVIL SOCIETY
DEVELOPMENT 3

RELEASE OF HUMAN RIGHTS
DEFENDER 6

Based on 41 updates published on the CIVICUS Monitor for countries in this region between 1st October 2018 - 11th November 2019.



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

**PEOPLE
POWER
UNDER ATTACK**

RECOMMENDATIONS

STATES:

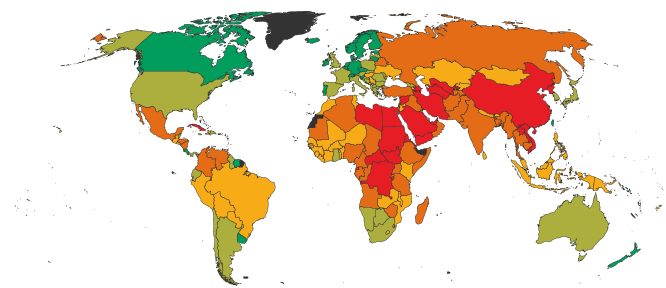
- Explicitly recognise and reaffirm the work and legitimacy of human rights defenders (HRDs) and journalists and publicly support their work. Take measures to foster a safe, respectful and enabling environment for civil society and work with these groups to establish effective national protection mechanisms which respond to the needs of those at risk.
- Ensure that the freedom of expression is safeguarded in all forms and refrain from censoring social and conventional media. Any restrictions should be pursuant to an order by an independent and impartial judicial authority, and 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.
- Take steps to address impunity for violations against HRDs and journalists, ensuring that these violations are independently and promptly investigated and that perpetrators are brought to justice.
- 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. This should be coupled with ensuring accountability when violations occur while policing protests.
- All states should extend a standing invitation to all UN Special Procedure mandate holders and prioritise official visits especially with the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression and the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Association and Assembly on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association;

INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL BODIES:

- Pressure states to repeal or substantially amend restrictive legislation that is not in accordance with international law and standards in protecting freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression.
- Protect and open spaces for civil society to advocate and participate in decision-making. Strengthen existing mechanisms and put in place new mechanisms to address reprisals against human rights defenders who cooperate with international and regional mechanisms.
- Take the necessary measures to ensure that activists and civil society actors are not put at risk because of the information they provide, and publicly call out states who impose restrictions to the participation of civil society.

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 grantmaking. Include human rights organisations in designing schemes and conduct situation assessments with CSOs; maintain engagement at every stage, including when the fund has been granted, to create adaptation and re-allocation strategies with grantees when required by a difficult working environment.
- Prioritise security. In sensitive cases, donors need to balance transparency and security needs. Where civil society and human rights work is criminalised, defenders are under surveillance or facing constant harassment, key information such as the identity, work, activities and location might need to remain undisclosed. Support programmes to ensure that defenders have appropriate training, skills and equipment to conduct their work safely.



METHODOLOGY

A CONTINUING CIVIC
SPACE CRISIS

2019: A YEAR FOUGHT ON
THE STREETS

GROWING INTOLERANCE
OF DISSENT

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES
AND SIMILARITIES

AN UNEVEN CRISIS

BRIGHT SPOTS

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA AND PACIFIC

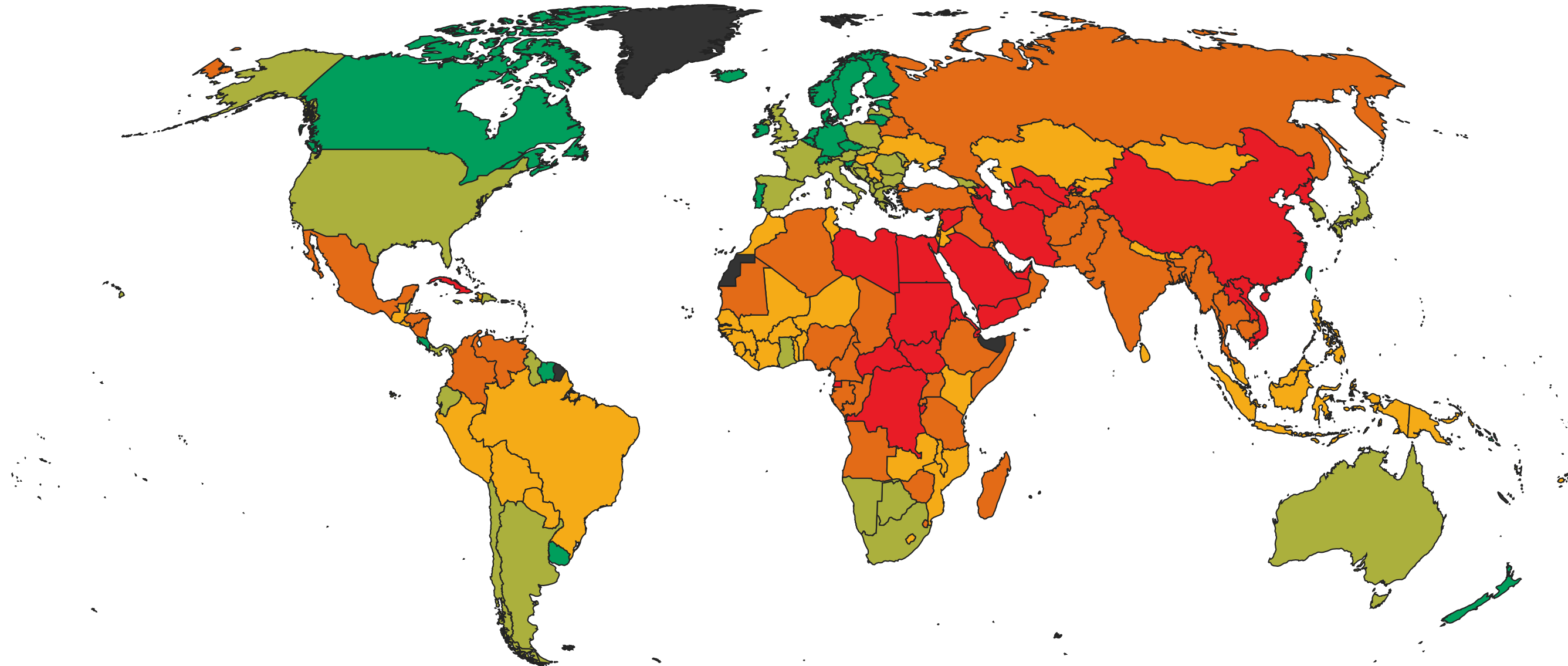
EUROPE AND CENTRAL
ASIA

MIDDLE EAST AND
NORTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL
CLASSIFICATION

PEOPLE
POWER
UNDER ATTACK



REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

Africa: Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, 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, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

Americas: 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.

Asia and Pacific: Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Fiji, 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.

Europe and Central Asia: 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, Macedonia, Malta, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Kingdom, Uzbekistan.

Middle East and North Africa: 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

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