



# PERU

## CIVICUS MONITOR WATCHLIST

### OVERVIEW OF RECENT RESTRICTIONS TO CIVIC FREEDOMS



Photo by Getty Images



## INTRODUCTION

Serious violations of civic freedoms have been taking place in Peru since the ousting and arrest of former President Pedro Castillo.

The opposition-controlled Congress was often at odds with President Castillo during his fifteen months in office, making several [attempts](#) to remove him from early in his presidency. Beset by political instability and facing corruption allegations, on 7th December 2022 President Castillo tried to shut down the legislature and govern by decree but [encountered](#) little support for the move. Members of his own cabinet resigned and he was removed by Congress in just a few hours. He was then arrested under charges of ‘rebellion’. His vice-president Dina Boluarte was [sworn in](#) as president on the same day.

This rapid turn of events deepened Peru’s long-term institutional crisis and sparked protests by Castillo’s supporters, who saw his removal and arrest as a coup by political elites. Many called for the dissolution of Congress and for new elections, as well as for Castillo’s release. As protesters, particularly those in rural areas, were [met with](#) disproportionate force by law enforcement, demonstrations spread across the country.

At the request of President Boluarte, in December 2022 lawmakers voted to bring general elections [forward](#) to April 2024 from 2026, but protests continued unabated. On 19th January 2023, the Ombudsperson’s Office [re-reported](#) over 120 blockade points on 44 roadways, and demonstrations in 20 provinces. Authorities’ [failure](#) to condemn and rein in the brutality of security forces led to growing calls for an [investigation](#) into their role in ongoing human rights violations.

While President Boluarte has [urged](#) Congress to consider moving up general elections to the end of 2023, the crisis continues and many have [vowed](#) to maintain protests – which now also demand justice for those dead and injured in the turmoil.

## EXCESSIVE FORCE

Between 8th December 2022 and 27th January 2023, at least [57 people](#), among them six minors, died amid the unrest. According to the National Human Rights Coordinator (CNDDHH), at least 46 of these were [killed](#) in extrajudicial executions during the repression of protests. 18 people were [killed](#) in Juliaca, Puno, on 9th January 2023 alone.

By 27th January, the Ombudsperson’s Office had [reported](#) 1,658 people injured in protests. Civil society organisations (CSOs) have also [recorded](#) multiple other violations, including arbitrary arrests, the use of prohibited

## ABOUT THE CIVICUS MONITOR

The [CIVICUS Monitor](#), an online platform that tracks threats to civil society in countries across the globe, rates civic space – the space for civil society – in Peru as “**Obstructed**”.

The data provides the basis for civic space ratings, which are based on up-to-date information and indicators on the state of freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression. Countries can be rated as:

CLOSED

REPRESSED

OBSTRUCTED

NARROWED

OPEN



munition by law enforcement, disproportionate use of tear gas and instances of officers [firing](#) tear gas canisters from close range directly at protesters' bodies. On 21st January 2023, police violently [raided](#) a university campus to evict and arrest members of social organisations who had [travelled](#) to Lima to take part in anti-government protests. 193 people were arrested in the operation, including children and elderly people, students, Indigenous people and four journalists.

During the weeks of protests, road blockades in some regions [obstructed](#) the passage of ambulance services, also contributing to the death toll. There have also been [reports](#) of violent acts by protesters, including arson, vandalism and attacks on journalists.

Emergency measures which [suspended](#) freedom of peaceful assembly and enabled the deployment of the armed forces to address the unrest were [extended](#) in several departments until mid-February. In this regard, Human Rights Watch [underscored](#) that Peru's armed forces lack the equipment, training and mission to carry out activities related to maintaining order.

These ongoing abuses are all the more concerning in light of the 2020 Police Protection Law (No. 31,012), which [revoked](#) previous regulation explicitly establishing that the use of force by security forces must be proportionate. There is a risk that this law, which exempts officers and soldiers from criminal responsibility for deaths or injuries caused while 'fulfilling their constitutional duty', will enable impunity for the excessive force used by law enforcement.

## DECLINE IN FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Civil society groups have [warned](#) against the lack of diversity and pluralism in the country's media, with Lima-based mainstream outlets closely [associated](#) with conservative editorial lines while community and Indigenous media is marginalised. Political polarisation has [contributed](#) to a climate of hostility against the press, which endured during Pedro Castillo's presidency. On multiple occasions in 2022, journalists were physically [attacked](#) by supporters of public officials across the political spectrum – at local, regional and national levels.

In the ongoing political and institutional crisis, dozens of journalists covering demonstrations have reported facing attacks. On 7th January 2023, EFE photojournalist Aldair Mejía was [threatened](#) by the police for recording an arrest in Juliaca. Security agents told him, 'If you do that again, I'll blow your head off'. He was later shot in the leg with pellets by security forces. Between the outbreak of protests and 10th January 2023, the National Association of Journalists [recorded](#) at least 72 cases of violations of the work of media and aggressions against journalists. Most of these attacks were perpetrated by police and the military.

## ATTACKS ON CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

The environment for human rights defenders (HRDs) in Peru is marked by recurrent violence, with dozens of cases of intimidation, harassment, stigmatisation and some killings. Government inaction in the face of multiple attacks has allowed perpetrators to escalate violence with impunity. Those from Indigenous and ethnic communities are [most at risk](#), in particular in the context of decades-long struggles for recognition of their territorial rights, [drawn out](#) land-titling processes and lack of compliance with the right to free, prior and informed consent.



Human rights organisations and defenders have also faced an escalation in harassment and attacks by extremist groups linked with the far-right. Members of these groups have repeatedly [adopted](#) intimidatory practices such as surrounding the offices of human rights organisations to harass and attack people entering and leaving the premises. In January 2023, members of extremist group La Resistencia [used](#) these tactics against CNDDHH, the Legal Defence Institute (IDL), and the Pro Human Rights Association (APRODEH), organisations which have monitored and denounced the repression of protests and other authoritarian abuses in the current crisis.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### To the government of Peru:

- Immediately and impartially investigate all cases of extrajudicial killing and excessive force committed by security forces in the context of the protests, make the findings public and bring the perpetrators to justice.
- Repeal the Police Protection Law (No. 31,012) in order to fully guarantee the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, and publicly condemn at the highest levels all instances of the use of excessive force by security forces in response to protests.
- Investigate extremist groups' actions to intimidate, harass and silence human rights organisations and defenders, and strengthen mechanisms for their protection.
- Consult and engage with civil society to find a path out of the political and institutional crisis and enable meaningful public participation in the measures to overcome it.

### To the international community:

- Call on the Peruvian government to protect the rights to peaceful assembly and expression and to ensure an impartial and thorough investigation into the use of force against protesters and journalists.
- Follow up with Peru's government on the implementation of UPR recommendations and Human Rights Committee's concluding observations and ensure continued scrutiny over the country's respect for its obligations under international law.
- Establish a protection mechanism to immediately support human rights defenders and activists facing harassment and persecutions, which includes support for legal aid, relocation, and other means of protection.
- As mandated by the operative paragraph 5f of GA resolution 60/251, the UN Human Rights Council should use its prevention mandate to work 'through dialogue and cooperation, towards the prevention of human rights violations' and to avert a further escalation of the crisis.