

RUSSIA ADDED TO CIVICUS MONITOR WATCHLIST

OVERVIEW OF RECENT RESTRICTIONS
TO CIVIC FREEDOMS





On 17th January 2021, the leader of the Russian opposition, Alexei Navalny, returned to Moscow after spending several months in a hospital in Germany, where he was flown for treatment after he was poisoned in August 2020. Immediately upon arrival, Navalny was [detained](#) at Moscow's Sheremetyevo airport, after which he was taken to a nearby police station by law enforcement. Since his arrest and detention, his supporters, including colleagues from the Anti-Corruption Foundation, have held sustained solidarity protests which the authorities, particularly security forces, have responded to by intensifying their crackdown on the rights of protesters, activists and journalists.

In response to the protests, the press secretary for the President, [Dmitry Peskov](#), announced that the protesters must bear the most severe legal consequences, alleging that many provocateurs and [hooligans](#) were observed during the 31st January protests.

Russia has been added to the CIVICUS watchlist as over the last few weeks we have documented large scale attacks on peaceful assembly and journalists during the massive nationwide peaceful protests.

Arrest and detention of protesters and activists

Authorities have responded to the mass protests by arresting and detaining over 10,000 protesters. On 23rd January 2021, solidarity protests took place in over 110 localities in the country. Over 3,700 people were [arrested](#) on that day. As protests continued across several large cities in the country the following week, [on 31st January 2021](#), over 5,000 people were detained on that day alone, and more than 40 criminal cases were initiated against the protesters. On 2nd February 2021 after Navalny's [sentence](#) to 3.5 years imprisonment was issued in the "Yves Rocher" case, where he and his brother, Oleg Navalny, are accused of fraud, at least 1,114 people were detained after his supporters [gathered](#) in Moscow and St. Petersburg to protest the sentence.

Excessive use of force on protesters

Several incidents of excessive use of force and violence by security officials have also been reported during the protests. On 23rd January, police [beat protesters](#), forcing detained people to lie face down on the ground – in some places, like Yekaterinburg, in the snow at freezing temperatures – stomped on them and dragged them towards police vehicles. On 31st January several [detained](#) people were [fined](#) or kept in the cold, on buses, and brutalised by law enforcement for several days due to lack of space in temporary detention centres. Some of the detainees were taken to places of detention near Moscow due to [overcrowding](#), and others recalled how they were [tortured](#). On 2nd February 2021, security agents also [used force](#) against peaceful protesters, [including](#) beatings and electrocution. Many were denied the right to a phone call, water, food and medicine, and lawyers found it very difficult to reach their clients as the police used COVID-19 restrictions as an excuse to deny them access.

ABOUT THE CIVICUS MONITOR

The CIVICUS Monitor is a research tool that provides quantitative and qualitative data on the state of civil society and civic freedoms in 196 countries. The data is generated through a collaboration with more than 20 civil society research partners, and input from a number of independent human rights evaluations.

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

Russia is rated '**Repressed**' by the CIVICUS Monitor



Attacks and harassment of journalists

Journalists have also not been spared from police excesses and detention while they cover the protests. At the rallies on 23rd January 2021, fifty two journalists were [arrested](#), six others experienced cases of violence, while others were sentenced to detention from two to ten days. On 31st January at least 120 journalists were [detained](#), obstructed or beaten across 32 cities while covering the protests. During the protest in Moscow on 2nd February [journalists](#) from “The Bell” telegram channel and “Vazhniye Istorii” were detained in the evening despite showing press cards and editorial assignments. Separately, a correspondent of “Our North” was interrogated for more than an hour in the Ostankino district department about work, wages and political views, while [Journalist, Fyodor Khudokormov](#), was attacked by a riot police officer while hosting a live broadcast, filming how the security forces beat people, even though he showed his press card.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Russian government

- Immediately and unconditionally release all those who have been arbitrarily detained, including any member of Alexei Navalny’s team and family and drop all the spurious charges made against peaceful protesters.
- Refrain from the use of excessive force, physical violence and detention of protesters and journalists.
- Security officials who have used excessive force towards protesters must be immediately and effectively investigated and held accountable.
- Release Alexei Navalny and stop the unwarranted persecution of activists and critics.
- Respect and implement the 2018 ruling of the European Court which called on the Russian authorities to take appropriate legislative measures to put in place mechanisms to ensure the respect of the right of peaceful assembly.

To the international community

- Call for the urgent and immediate action to address fundamental violations of the right to peaceful assembly and expression.
- Hold Russia accountable for its human rights violations and ensure that Russia follows through on past rulings by the European Court and respects its national and international human rights obligations.