

YEAR IN REVIEW

PROTEST:
CITIZENS IN ACTION



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CITIZENS IN ACTION: THE YEAR IN PROTEST

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Each year the CIVICUS State of Civil Society Report examines the major events that have involved and affected civil society around the world. We seek to celebrate our achievements as civil society, identify the challenges we have faced and assess how recent events have impacted on civil society, as well as how civil society has responded to them. This section of the report looks at the impacts and challenges of protest movements. Other sections discuss the current crisis of democracy and its implications for civil society, the freedom of expression as a vital part of the space for civil society, and the international-level actions of civil society.

Our report is of, from and for civil society. As well as the four parts of our year in review, our report has a special section on this year's theme, civil society and the private sector, including 27 guest contributions from civil society activists, leaders, experts and stakeholders, and a thematic essay that draws from those contributions. This report is also informed by responses to our annual survey of members of our Affinity Group of National Associations (AGNA), made up of national and regional-level civil society coordination and membership bodies, and a series of interviews with members of our alliance who were close to the year's major stories. We are very grateful to all our contributors for their efforts in helping to develop this report.

PROTEST AS DEMOCRATIC DISSENT

In turbulent times, citizens speak out. The past year, as every year of this decade, was again characterised by sustained surges of protest in countries all around the world. Those covered below are merely some of many. The last year showed that protests will continue to be a key means by which citizens express dissent and demand change.

What the examples offered below should make clear is that protest is normal. No society is perfect, and so protest happens. Protests call attention to failures, and these are usually failures of the state. Citizens use protests to highlight governance deficits, rights abuses and the state's failures to meet their essential needs. Protests give notice to power-holders that they must take citizens' complaints more seriously. In a participatory democracy, dissent should be heard and lead to policy dialogue.

In the past year, many protests have focused on issues of women's rights. They have come in response to the misogynist turn taken by contemporary politics in many contexts, as discussed in part one of this review, as well as against ingrained cultures of sexism. More broadly, protests have mobilised as part of the response that critiques and resists the new wave of populist leaders that have come to power in several countries. In some cases, as in protests against US President Donald Trump's policies, and protests for women's rights in Latin America, movements have crossed national boundaries

to inspire mobilisations in multiple countries. International Women's Day, 8 March 2017, brought these two trends together when [women went on strike](#) in the [USA](#) and in countries on [every inhabited continent](#), highlighting issues such as wage inequality, the political underrepresentation of women and sexual and reproductive rights.

It is important not to see protests as occurrences that are somehow abnormal. They entail the straightforward exercise of a human right – the right to peaceful assembly – that is guaranteed in the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#). At the same time, protests may be indicative of a major governance dysfunction, and of poor quality space for civil society, otherwise known as civic space. They can signal that something is badly wrong.

The example of [Ethiopia](#), discussed below, shows that even when civic space is tightly constrained, mass protests can still break out. In such cases, they do so because other participation routes, such as voting in elections or joining civil society organisations (CSOs), are blocked or so constrained as to be meaningless, meaning that protests become the only way that citizens can express dissent. Disaffected citizens may get to the point where their frustration is such that their risk thresholds fall and they become more prepared to accept the dangers of detention, injury and death; they face higher risks because when protests break out in conditions of restricted civic space the dangers are greater, since security forces are closely linked to state repression and are often able to act with impunity.

Overall, however, the need is to assert that a level of protest is an indicator of a healthy society, and that dissent is an essential part of a participatory democratic process. Protests are a means by which ideas are [advanced](#) and discourse developed. The willingness of a state to accept and enable protest should therefore be seen as a benchmark test of a state's respect for democracy and human rights. And yet protests find themselves on the frontline of the global attack on civic space.

RESTRICTIONS ON PROTESTS

Protests are targeted because they offer arenas where grievances are aired and difficult questions asked, and are done publicly and visibly in ways that can make power-holders feel insecure, embarrass states and risk harming their international reputations. The increased proliferation of mobile and social media has raised the stakes of protest: it has made the organisation and promotion of protest easier, but it has made states fear exposure more. This means that in several cases discussed below, it is not only protesters who have experienced harassment and restriction, but also journalists who are simply trying to do their job of reporting on protests and policing: attacks on the freedom of assembly and freedom of expression, covered in part two of this review, go hand in hand.

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Recent research from 22 countries that took part in the [Enabling Environment National Assessment](#) (EENA) process, national-level civil society self-assessments that applied a methodology developed by CIVICUS and the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), identifies some common tactics of restriction.¹ The EENA research suggests that states can, broadly, be separated into two camps: those that have notification regimes for peaceful assemblies, including protests, in which organisers must merely notify the authorities of a planned event, and those with approval regimes, in which permission must be given by the authorities before a protest can proceed. For example, the EENA research records that approval must be sought in Honduras and Uganda, and in Tajikistan, where the authorities can change the date, timing and location of events.

However, the research recognises that even in countries that are supposed to have notification regimes, authorities often exceed their power and impose conditions and limitations on assemblies. This is noted, for example, in Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Cameroon, [South Africa](#) and Zambia. Often the challenge here comes from local-level authorities that take on excessive powers.

In several countries, including Tajikistan and several Latin American countries discussed below, laws have been passed or proposed in recent years to make it harder for citizens to use popular protest tactics such as occupying public space, blocking roads and wearing masks. Further, penalties for violations of laws by assembly organisers can be excessive: organisers may be blamed for any infringement by participants, a challenge noted in Burkina Faso, Jordan and South Africa, and there may be harsh and broad provisions for fines and jail sentences, a concern in Cameroon, Honduras, India, Jordan and Zambia. These dangers were exemplified in [Lebanon](#) in January 2017, when the state used [military courts](#) to try 14 people who organised 2015's 'You Stink' protests against poor governance and corruption.

The EENA research also highlights how decisions on whether assemblies can proceed may be made on political grounds: it is observed that in Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Cameroon, South Africa and Zambia, assemblies that adopt positions supportive of the state or ruling parties rarely meet with the same levels of obstruction as those that raise issues to which the state and ruling party is opposed. This is also seen in South Korea, discussed below.

In some EENA countries, a particular challenge around holding LGBTI assemblies was reported, notably in Nigeria, Uganda and Zambia. In Uganda, the police denied repeated attempts to hold an LGBTI pride parade in 2016: in August 2016, they arrested [around 20 people](#), with [reports of beatings](#) and [sexual assaults](#), at an LGBTI fashion show in the capital, Kampala.

¹ The 22 EENA countries were: Benin, Bolivia, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Cameroon, Colombia, Honduras, India, Jordan, Lebanon, Mexico, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria, Panama, the Philippines, South Africa, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Uganda and Zambia. Assessments took place between 2013 and 2016.

This led to the postponement of the planned parade. A further attempt to hold a pride parade in nearby Entebbe the following month was [halted by armed police](#), who insisted that the gathering was illegal. The Minister for Ethics and Integrity had [earlier threatened](#) to have mobs attack participants.

As well as restrictions in laws and regulations, security force violence is often a problem. [CIVICUS research](#) conducted with the leaders and active members of three ongoing protest movements, in Bahrain, Chile and Uganda, identifies the tactics most commonly used to restrict protests. The first-ranked challenge is the excessive use of force by the state against protesters, followed by the arbitrary arrest of protesters and the introduction of laws that restrict the freedom of assembly. The EENA research also suggests that excessive force is a widespread challenge, with reports of state violence in a wide range of countries, including Bolivia, Brazil, Cambodia, Lebanon, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, Tunisia, Uganda and Zambia. The EENA research also notes that the police have wide powers to break up assemblies in some countries, including Honduras, Jordan, Mexico and Tajikistan. Accusations that the authorities sometimes use acts of provocation to stimulate violence as a pretext for suppressing protest were made in Burkina Faso, Cambodia and Nigeria. A lack of proper investigation of security force violence, noted for example in Cambodia, Tunisia and Uganda, is a further challenge that fuels impunity.

The [CIVICUS Monitor](#) indicates that excessive force is most often used against protests when people come together to criticise government decisions and policies, complain about government corruption, draw attention to human rights abuses or demand that their social and economic needs are met. What these have in common is that they draw attention to the failures of the state, and bring state backlash.

The CIVICUS Monitor provides ample evidence that states are resorting to the use of excessive force to deny the freedom of assembly. Between June 2016 and March 2017, the Monitor recorded 112 separate cases where security forces applied excessive force to disrupt peaceful protests. This makes the violent suppression of peaceful protests one of the most common of all tactics tracked by the Monitor through which states restrict civil society's fundamental rights.

As many examples offered by the CIVICUS Monitor attest, when excessive force is deployed, it typically involves the use of tear gas, rubber bullets, water cannon and police batons; in the worst examples, security



Joelle Hatem, You Stink protest Lebanon

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forces use live ammunition, with fatal results. In the June 2016 to March 2017 period, the Monitor recorded 32 separate instances where protesters lost their lives as a consequence of state violence. While the excessive use of force was most seen in Sub-Saharan Africa, followed by the Americas, examples were also recorded in Asia, Europe and the Middle East and North Africa. In the worst cases, including in [Democratic Republic of the Congo \(DRC\)](#), [Mexico](#) and [Nigeria](#), numerous peaceful protesters were killed, and many more detained: in December 2016 alone, at least [34 people](#) were killed in DRC protests against President Joseph Kabila's refusal to step down at the end of his term. [Ethiopia](#) offers a particularly dismal recent hotspot for killings and detentions. In such contexts of low accountability, it is also common for security forces to blame protesters themselves for inciting violence.

Given the apparently increasing level of restrictions on protests, the current climate could seem gloomy. Restrictions on protests, and attacks on participants, are intended to spread fear, and therefore have a deterrent effect. And yet, as the examples below show, people continue to protest, and in huge numbers. The story of protest in the past year is not solely one of restriction and repression; it is more one of inspiring mobilisations in which citizens have continued to demonstrate and develop their own power. Protest movements are resilient and capable of sustaining themselves over time. We can be sure that, when grievances remain unaddressed, protests will continue to occur.

DEMOCRATIC DISSENT IN THE USA AND BEYOND

In the last year, no protests were as widespread or visible as those that mobilised around the world in response to the inauguration of US President Trump. Spontaneous protests formed in [many US cities](#) in [November 2016](#) in reaction to Trump's shock victory, but these were in turn eclipsed by the mobilisations that took place following his January 2017 swearing in. As with protests in Poland and several Latin American countries, discussed below, many mass marches and gatherings were led by women, and focused on women's rights. The protests sought to repudiate the deeply sexist and misogynist sentiments and language that characterised the US election campaign, not least as used by the incoming president. They aimed to resist the normalisation of sexist language in political discourse that has been seen not just in the USA, but in a growing number of countries around the world.

The [size of the January 2017 protests](#) was unprecedented, exceeding even the most optimistic expectations of the organisers. What started as an idea on Facebook saw hundreds of thousands assemble in Washington DC, and huge numbers take to the streets of other US cities, with as many as 750,000 people mobilising in Los Angeles, 600,000 in New York and 200,000 each in Boston, Chicago and Denver. The demonstrations were echoed across many cities [outside the USA](#), including in a number of African and European countries, Australia and New Zealand, and neighbouring [Mexico](#), indicating both the level of global unease about the election result and the determination, among women in particular, to make the voices heard of the many who did not have a direct say in the decision but are still affected by it. In all an estimated 670 protests, known as [Sister Marches](#), took the movement to every continent, mobilising several million participants.

Protests were overwhelmingly peaceful, characterised not by bitterness or divisiveness, but by their optimism and sense of creativity and fun. They suggested that there is enthusiasm for building an ongoing, [broad-based coalition](#) of response, reaching across civil society and bridging between diverse groups. They tapped into other aspects of the response. The [Indivisible Guide](#), a resource for community organising for advocacy and resistance, was downloaded more than a million times in six weeks; other such resources quickly followed. People also responded to the election result by donating to and offering to volunteer for established CSOs that might expect to be attacked by or needed more under the new regime, including the [American Civil Liberties Union](#), the [Council on American-Islamic Relations](#) and [Planned Parenthood](#), as well as many community organisations, again in [unprecedented numbers](#). [UK CSOs](#) received a similar giving bounce. The protest potential was demonstrated again by [spontaneous demonstrations, including at US airports](#) and in other countries, notably [Canada](#) and the [UK](#), against the introduction of a travel ban on seven predominantly Muslim countries in January 2017. Thousands also protested in multiple cities across [Mexico](#) in February 2017, against both the Trump administration and the inadequacies of their domestic politics, while [April 2017](#) saw people demonstrate in every continent under the banner of the [March for Science](#), asserting the facts of climate change in the face of political denial.

Those who have recently come to power on populist tickets, in the USA and elsewhere, may feel that the tide of public opinion is in their favour, but recent mobilisations showed that there is a large national and global community that they do not speak for. Ahead of the January 2017 protests we spoke to [Nicole Barner](#), a US-based economic justice activist, about the response, and how it can continue beyond the immediate reaction of protests:²

I look at the history of the country, and I know that backlashes to progress occur. Under the Obama administration we saw the first black president, we made progress on LGBTI issues, we took steps in the right direction on immigration, and we approached the end of this presidency with the most viable female candidate for President of the USA looking to succeed Barack Obama. That's a lot of progress.

Many people I know are approaching this time with resilience. They say we've made it through so many bad times, slavery and segregation, and we will make it through this. I know various groups are finding their own ways of being courageous and their own sources of strength that come from their history and culture.

Many human rights and social justice advocates, across the spectrum of issues and identities, are mobilising for actions and digging deeper into their work, which is really the work that will change outcomes and improve opportunities for

² This is an edited extract of an interview conducted in January 2017. The full interview is available at <http://bit.ly/2ldyXTN>.

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marginalised groups. That is the long work of building organisations, strengthening ties between organisations, and doing important community organising. The shock and sadness that some people felt post-election may still be there for some people, but most people have turned those feelings into action. They have tapped into a righteous rage.

In part, the mobilisation was the message. To hold demonstrations across many different countries simultaneously is to embrace internationalism in the face of a political position that rejects 'globalism' and promotes the closing of borders and the building of walls. Through their sheer scale as well, the protests achieved an impact, communicating that there is a massive constituency that will not remain voiceless, and positioning solidarity as an alternative to despair. Such was the size of the response that it simply had to be taken seriously. It also fuelled a bizarre political debate that indicated how sensitive the new US administration is to public dissent. The evidence was clear that many more people attended the Washington DC protest than had witnessed the presidential inauguration the day before, as indeed it was obvious that crowds for the 2017 inauguration were far lower than for President Obama's two inaugurations. And yet the administration furiously and very publicly attempted to muddy the waters and establish a [counterfactual narrative](#) in which the 2017 inauguration had attracted superior support. While this might have distracted from the content of the protests, the response paid an unwitting compliment to their power: the rattled reaction showed how dissent can unsettle the seemingly powerful and expose their insecurities.

Many of President Trump's supporters were also quick to try to characterise those protesting as somehow standing in defiance of a democratic decision that was taken at the November 2016 election. Under this narrow notion of democracy, once a ballot has been held, a decision is regarded as having been made until the next election, and no further dissent is deemed legitimate. For example, President Trump's lawyers [argued](#) that protesters have no right to express dissent at his rallies. This kind of rhetoric has started to creep in wherever new regressive politics have taken sway. It was seen, for example, in the UK, following the June 2016 European Union (EU) membership referendum. Even though the result of the referendum was a narrow 52 to 48 per cent decision in favour of leaving the EU, prominent leave supporters frequently called on remain voters to cease campaigning following the decision. The implication was that, a vote having been taken, millions of people should immediately fall silent and have no say in what might happen next.

Such rhetoric is dubious in the context of narrow electoral victories, and even more so in the USA, where the winning candidate lost the popular vote by almost three million. It is also as dangerous as it is disingenuous: it goes against the governance and democracy standards that global north donors have typically sought to encourage in emerging and fledgling democracies, because it is dangerous when elections are seen as winner-takes-all opportunities in which the winning side claims all the power and rules and distributes the spoils as it wishes.

DEMOCRACY
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Scott Lynch, arrested during protest

Populist politicians seek to encourage narrow rather than participatory notions of democracy because the winner-takes-all approach helps them to focus on serving their major voting blocs while ignoring minority voices, and to evade scrutiny. But democracy must mean more than picking a side in an election. What needs to be encouraged, in the USA and elsewhere, is a recognition that decision-making should be participatory. The most robust democratic traditions are those in which there are numerous platforms and opportunities for citizens to express dissent, and in which dissent is accepted as an intrinsic part of [democratic culture](#).

However, the response among some leading politicians in the USA, presumably alarmed by the [size of the protests](#), has been to try to make protest harder. For example, in February 2017, [Arizona senators](#) passed a law that allows police to arrest people simply for planning a protest, and extending the definition of rioting to damage to private property. They were not alone: in the aftermath of the January 2017 protests, politicians in [at least 19 US states](#) moved to introduce bills to [criminalise common protest tactics](#), such as the blocking or obstruction of [traffic](#), the wearing of masks, and the practice of non-violent resistance towards police forces. If passed into law, these moves, condemned by UN [human rights experts](#), could result in large fines or prison sentences being handed to protesters. Tough responses are already being applied. [Six journalists](#) were left facing heavy potential punishments after being detained on rioting charges while covering incidents of violence during the [Washington DC](#) January 2017 protest, activists were [arrested](#) for organising a sit-in outside the office of the incoming Attorney-General in January 2017, and [four](#) of the women's strike organisers were arrested while protesting in March 2017.

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The multiple demonstrations sparked by Trump's victory were not the only mass mobilisations seen in the USA in the past year, and not the only that brought harsh reprisals from security forces. The Black Lives Matter movement, covered in [previous editions](#) of this report, continued to highlight the disproportionate numbers of killings of black people by police officers. In August 2016, 25 different black activist groups, including Black Lives Matter, came together to present a [shared agenda](#) on economic, social and environmental issues, as well as on racial equality. In 2016, there were signs that the movement had achieved some impact: while police shootings of black men continued to spark outrage, such as that seen in [Charlotte, North Carolina](#), in September 2016, which led to the declaration of a state of emergency, overall under [half the number](#) of unarmed black men were killed by the police in 2016 as in 2015. It is hard to imagine that this would have happened without Black Lives Matter highlighting abuse and challenging impunity; the knowledge that they are more likely to be exposed and prosecuted would surely change the calculations of those wielding a gun.

But part of the price Black Lives Matter campaigners had to pay was increased harassment: in June 2016, campaigner [Jasmine Richards](#) was sentenced to 90 days in jail for the obscure crime of 'felony lynching' after trying to free someone arrested during a 2015 protest in Pasadena; [at least 200 people](#) were arrested during protests in July 2016; and in September 2016 the New York Police Department's routine use of [undercover surveillance](#) against the movement came to light.

Through much of 2016, thousands of people also mobilised against the [Dakota Access Pipeline](#). The oil pipeline was planned to run under the Standing Rock Indian Reservation, prompting concern from indigenous inhabitants that the area's watercourse and ancient burial grounds would be threatened. At issue was not just the construction itself, but also the [lack of consultation](#), the apparent attempts to avoid public scrutiny over potential environmental impacts, and the evident undervaluing of spiritual and cultural assets.

At the peak of protest, [several thousand people](#) gathered in camps on the reservation, joined by thousands more at weekends. When, on a holiday weekend in [September 2016](#), construction workers went to work on a section of land seen as sacred, even while legal action was pending, a protest flashpoint was reached. Unarmed protesters occupied the construction site in an attempt to halt digging, but they were met with violence from a private security firm. Pepper spray was used and several protesters were [bitten by dogs](#). Images of the forcible break-up of the protest went viral, encouraging more to join the cause. An occupation was established in the direct path of the pipeline in [October 2016](#), but people were removed by [militarily-equipped](#) soldiers and police.

There were [numerous reports](#) of [heavy-handed policing](#), including the use of attack dogs, teargas, water cannon in freezing conditions and [military equipment](#), such as armoured personnel carriers, as well as the strip searching of detained protesters. In contrast, a group of [military veterans](#) offered to act as human shields to protect protesters from security force violence. Because images of brutality helped recruit support for the protesters' causes, those trying to cover the violence found themselves in the firing line. For example, North Dakota police pursued the prosecution of journalist [Amy Goodman](#), who filmed security force violations and was charged with taking part in a riot, a charge that could have brought a significant jail term. Film-maker [Deia Schlosberg](#) faced felony

conspiracy charges that could have led to a staggering 45 years in jail. While charges in these high-profile cases were eventually dropped, they were indicative of a [wider response](#) of attempting to criminalise protest and damp down publicity: such was the level of arrests that in November 2016 it was reported that the [North Dakota court system](#) was overwhelmed and unable to process the huge number of cases. Journalists also had their equipment [confiscated](#), threatening their livelihoods. At the time of writing, a [series of trials](#) was beginning, not only of people who tried to shut down pipelines in a coordinated action in October 2016, but [also of those](#) who had no involvement beyond filming or live-streaming these actions.

When protesters made use of classic civil disobedience techniques, such as occupations and blockades, opponents considered that they had forfeited their right to peaceful protest; echoing tactics often seen in the global south, opponents also criticised protesters for standing in the way of economic progress, job creation and energy sovereignty, all [disputed claims](#).

In order to extend its reach, the protest movement consciously made national and international connections, linking with [indigenous movements](#) across the USA, as well as [civil rights groups](#), the [Black Lives Matter](#) movement and environmental [campaigners](#). Solidarity demonstrations were held in numerous cities, with a [national day of action](#) in November 2016 seeing protests held in Chicago, Los Angeles and New York as well as hundreds of other cities. [Thanksgiving Day](#) protests were also held at Standing Rock. Social media was important: Jane Goodman's film documenting the use of attack dogs was viewed by [14 million](#) Facebook users, and in late October 2016, over one million people [checked in](#) on Facebook as attending Standing Rock, as a way both of expressing solidarity and confounding potential surveillance attempts. Protest leaders also took their grievances to the international community: Chair of the Standing Rock Reservation, [David Archambault II](#), spoke at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in September 2016, and the [UN Special Rapporteur](#) on the rights of indigenous peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, criticised the US government for excluding the local community from consultations and failing to respect their rights of peaceful assembly.

The protests appeared to achieve impact: in December 2016, then-President Obama [halted construction](#), denying a permit for its final stage pending an environmental impact assessment. However, incoming President Trump [overturned this](#) amidst a flurry of environmental setbacks in January 2017, [giving permission](#) for construction to advance again. Drilling resumed in [February 2017](#), and that same month, after a year of occupation, the protest [came to an end](#), with 10 protesters who refused to leave arrested. This does not mean, however, that dissent has ceased, and in March 2017, Native Americans [marched through](#) Washington DC to restate their opposition to the pipeline.

What this shows is that protest successes may be temporary and subject to reversal, unless more profound changes in governance are achieved. The protests against the Dakota pipeline now find themselves located within a larger movement seeking to hold the new administration to the high standards of human rights, good governance and democracy that US citizens should expect their constitution to guarantee. As the travel ban protests proved, it should now be clear that each policy of the new administration that impacts on human rights will bring a rapid and committed response.

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ACTION AND REACTION IN POLAND AND ROMANIA

Women's rights concerns were at the forefront of protests in [Poland](#) in 2016, and protests could be seen to achieve impact, at least in the short term, as the state drew back from its intentions to pursue some regressive policies.

Protests in 2016 caused the government to withdraw its support from proposed changes to abortion laws. Measures put forward by a conservative organisation, with the support of church groups and the ruling Law and Justice Party, would have introduced jail sentences of up to five years for women who have abortions and health professionals who conduct them. The measures would have further tightened what is already one of Europe's [most restrictive](#) abortion regimes, in which the fewer than 2,000 legal abortions that take place each year are vastly exceeded by an estimated 200,000 conducted illegally or experienced by Polish women who have to travel to other countries. There are powerful currents of social conservatism in Polish society, and a petition supporting the anti-abortion measures was signed by [over](#)



'The miners have arrived' reads a sign in the Romanian protests

[450,000 people](#); under Polish law, a petition with more than 100,000 signatures is considered by parliament. But with Poland's parliament dominated by the [anti-abortion](#) ruling party, the voices of women who want control over their reproductive rights were not being heard in these debates.

[Thousands of people](#) protested against the proposed measures in September 2016 outside parliament in the capital, Warsaw, in other cities, and outside the Polish embassy in the UK. A counter petition was also organised with over 200,000 signatures. However, following these responses, and despite an [opinion poll](#) stating that 74 per cent of Polish citizens were in favour of keeping the existing law, the ban's supporters announced their intent to [push ahead](#) regardless, and parliament voted to have the proposals considered by a parliamentary committee. Bigger action was called for.

That heightened response came in the form of the 'Black Monday' protests in October 2016. Up to a [hundred thousand](#) women dressed in black, flew black flags and refused to go to work and university classes in protest at the proposed law. Many men also took part in the demonstrations to show their support. Tens of thousands of people joined a public protest in Warsaw, and there were an estimated 140 other gatherings in locations [across Poland](#), as well as solidarity demonstrations in other European cities.

The Black Monday movement, imitating a 1970s women's strike in [Iceland](#), saw an escalation of protest tactics: by dressing in symbolic black clothes, protesters made their cause more visible, and by using strike tactics they brought their grievance into a new arena, the workplace, where women make up [45 per cent](#) of the workforce, signalling their essential contribution to Polish society and its economy. The tactics offered a viral means of recruiting support: a poll showed that [half of Polish citizens](#) supported the strike, indicating the existence of a mass voice that was not being heard in parliamentary discussions.

The impact was immediate: Poland's prime minister quickly distanced the ruling party from the proposal, and a [leading minister](#) reported that the protests had "...caused us to think and taught us humility." Parliament's justice and human rights committee recommended that parliament reject the proposal, and parliament subsequently [overwhelmingly voted](#) to do so.

As in the USA, the last few years in Poland have offered ample reminders that citizens' victories may only be temporary, and progress can be reversed. Even after fighting off the proposed law, campaigners emphasise that women's rights remain under sustained threat from conservative social interests and a ruling party that draws its bedrock support from these. The Law and Justice Party has pledged to work with Hungary's hard-line government and strongman leader, Viktor Orban, to lead a "[cultural counter-revolution](#)" in the EU. Counter pressures followed the ruling party's U-turn, and the government may yet attempt again to tighten abortion laws; the ruling party accused left-wing organisations of deceiving women for their own ends, while prominent women activists have also been [attacked online](#). These occurrences indicate that the issue remains in play, but protests have succeeded in raising its visibility and starting a wider conversation about conservatism and gender in Polish society, even if that produces a corresponding backlash.

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More black-clad protests [followed](#). Some involved in the protest movement also broadened their focus, encompassing issues such as the status of women, the role of the church in politics and the content of education, highlighting the connections between the women's rights movement and Poland's broader movement to defend civic freedoms, headed by the Committee for the Defence of Democracy (KOD), as discussed in the [2016 State of Civil Society Report](#). Indeed, abortion was [not the only issue](#) that brought Polish citizens to the streets in the past year. Protests led by KOD in September 2016 addressed the issue of the government's proposed changes to education provision, while another demonstration drew attention to the underfunding of health services. [Protests in December 2016](#) achieved another victory, by forcing the dropping of a proposal to limit the media's access to parliament.

KOD also organised a march in [defence of democracy](#), attended by thousands, on the 35th anniversary of the declaration of martial law in Poland, in December 2016. [Jarosław Kaczyński](#), the Law and Justice Party leader, described these protests as constituting a "crime" and being "anti-state in character." One of the major concerns of the protest was the introduction of [new restrictions](#) on the freedom of assembly. Recent protests have been allowed to take place by state authorities and have passed peacefully, but this may become harder under the [new law](#), which will protect events that are held at a regular frequency and prevent counter demonstrations being held nearby: the inference of the law is that pro-government forces could organise [regular gatherings](#) to crowd out other voices. In a move that seemed to presage the new law, in December 2016 [police removed](#) a group of demonstrators from a monthly gathering held to commemorate the plane crash that killed many of the ruling elite in 2010.

The new measures were [condemned](#) by a wide range of institutions of which Poland is a member, including the Council of Europe, the EU and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). It was not the only worrying new law. Poland's [anti-terrorism law](#), passed in June 2016, also gives the state [enhanced powers](#) to ban public assemblies, along with increased surveillance and internet control powers, while a new [Police Act](#), also passed in 2016, further expands the police's surveillance powers. These are further troubling moves by a state that has already passed numerous laws to circumscribe the country's [Constitutional Court](#) and has asserted its control over public media; in December 2016 the outgoing President of the Constitutional Court [described Poland](#) as being "on the road to autocracy." Since the state took closer control of public media, there has been a [notable increase](#) in media attacks on civil society.

It seems clear that, in a society where the dividing lines between socially conservative and pro-human rights voices have become more stark, the state is increasingly seeking to split civil society into pro and anti-government camps, and concentrate its support towards the most socially conservative parts of society. In May 2016, [the government](#) abolished its council for combating racism and ended its support to a centre that supports victims of domestic abuse, while in November 2016 it merged its human rights protection team into its migration department. Further, in November 2016, the prime minister announced that the government would create a new department for civil society, in which the state's support for civil society will be concentrated and priorities for cooperation with civil society set. But for many in civil society, this was not a progressive move, and the [danger](#) seemed clear: that the state will focus resources on pro-government bodies and [withdraw funding](#) from CSOs that defend human rights, cultivating a client civil society. A further alarm bell rang in November 2016 when 13 civil society experts [resigned](#) from a state funding body, citing a disregard of basic democratic procedures.

Poland therefore offers a story of how citizens can fight back and win important victories even amidst conditions where restrictions are increasing and the battle is uneven; but it also shows how protest successes can raise the stakes and bring stronger reactions from the state and its allies. Protest methods such as women's strikes, forged in Poland as well as in Latin America, can be seen to have inspired international imitation. Poland's civil society will need to continue to offer protest tactics that capture the imagination, recruit support and make that support visible as part of its fight back.

OUTRAGE AGAINST CORRUPTION IN ROMANIA

In nearby [Romania](#), the country's long-running corruption problem continues to bring citizens to the streets. Protests in [2015](#), fuelled by a nightclub fire that claimed 62 lives and exposed anger about corruption, caused the prime minister and his government to stand aside. Events in 2017 proved that the outrage has not gone away, and any attempts by the state to soft pedal on corruption will be met with a significant response.

The spark this time was an attempt by the ruling party, which returned to power in December 2016, to pass an [emergency order](#) that would pardon many prisoners serving sentences of five years or under, decriminalise cases of official misconduct resulting in the theft of less than 200,000 Romanian Lei (approximately US\$47,000), and reduce other corruption punishments. While the government claimed that its aim was to reduce prison overcrowding, to many citizens, this move seemed blatantly self-serving: it would potentially [free government allies](#) convicted of corruption, including the president of the ruling party, who at the time of the move was serving a two-year suspended sentence for [attempted electoral fraud](#) and was under further investigation. It would also make it harder to be convicted for the theft of public money in future.

Rumours of the plan were preceded by protests, and the announcement that the order had been passed on 31 January 2017 came late at night and unexpectedly. The only inference that could be drawn was that the government wanted to avoid attention. However, the announcement brought a swift and impressive response from citizens: [within two hours](#) of the news breaking, over 10,000 people had assembled in the capital, Bucharest, with a similar number of people protesting across other cities.

The protest momentum mushroomed, with [hundreds of thousands](#) of people taking part in a second night of protests, in the [biggest mobilisation](#) since the fall of communism. Protests continued on a daily basis after that, in Bucharest and in around [50 other towns and cities](#) across Romania, as well as among Romanian citizens in other countries. At their peak on 5 February 2017, an estimated half a million people assembled. The [solidarity networks](#) developed through earlier protests were quickly utilised, and the protesters, as before, sought to avoid political co-option, in a context where all major political parties can be accused of complicity in corruption.

By continuing to protest, visibly and in such large numbers, protesters made the issue prominent and forced others to take a stance on it. The changes were quickly condemned by [European Commission officials](#), and [six foreign embassies in Bucharest](#) expressed their concern about the government's plan.

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Domestically, the [President of Romania](#) took up the campaign against the move, the minister of business, trade and entrepreneurship [resigned](#) and the [Superior Council of Magistrates](#) expressed the view that the emergency orders were unconstitutional, while Romania's socially important [Orthodox church](#) called for strong sanctions on those guilty of corruption.

The prime minister bowed to pressure after a week of protests, and the emergency orders were rescinded on 4 February 2017, with the stated aim of putting them to parliament instead. The [justice minister](#) subsequently resigned, but as has happened previously, [protests continued](#) beyond their initial impact. Presumably doubtful about the role of a parliament dominated by the ruling party, protesters [called on the government](#) to once again stand aside. As protests entered their [second week](#), further ground was won: Romania's parliament agreed to the president's proposal to put the issue of anti-corruption reforms to a [referendum](#), and in a vote on 21 February, parliament [confirmed the repeal](#) of the emergency orders. Smaller weekly protests continued into March 2017.

While at the time of writing the details of the referendum have yet to be hammered out, it can be said that protesters have made clear that they [do not trust](#) their government to take corruption seriously, and will take to the streets again if they do not see real action on corruption. [Other protests](#) have flared in 2017, including on pay and environmental issues. At a time when politicians in many countries are assuming that they can do as they please once they win an election, the massive mobilisations of Romania have offered another example of the value of democratic dissent.

DISSENT REFUSES TO DIE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Experiences from the past year also show that the grievances behind protest do not necessarily dissipate when the authorities refuse to give ground. The [2016 State of Civil Society Report](#) described the protests led by South African students in 2015 under the 'Fees Must Fall' banner. In a trajectory followed by many protests, the movement grew from its initial focus, on high student tuition fees, to encompass broader questions about South Africa's governance, leadership and political direction. In doing so, protesters built upon a rich tradition of discursive democracy that has flourished since apartheid ended in 1994, which has often led to South Africa being described as the [protest capital of the world](#).

But the 2015 protests ended at something of an impasse: student fees were frozen but did not fall, and South Africa's broader governance problems remained stubbornly unaddressed. It should not have come as any surprise, therefore, that protests came back with a vengeance in 2016.

Schools and universities were again the key locations of protest in 2016, and again protests went beyond a concern with student fees, although this remained a key issue for many involved. Questions of race grew in salience. For example, [high school protests](#) about [restrictions on hairstyles](#) that started in Pretoria in August 2016 and spread to other schools were protests about [black identity](#) in settings historically associated with white privilege. University protests, which flared back to life in September 2016, called for [decolonised education](#): a change in the Eurocentric education curriculum associated with the apartheid era. Protests also made some broader economic demands, seen for example in a march on the [Chamber of Mines](#) in September 2016 to demand that South



Fees must fall

Africa's prosperous extractive industry help foot the bill for education.

As student concerns remained unaddressed, protest increasingly centred on the role and leadership of the African National Congress (ANC), South Africa's ruling party since the transition to democracy in 1994. [Thousands protested](#) in November 2016 following the release of a report, which President Jacob Zuma had sought to block, that expressed 'serious concerns' about his close links with the heads of a business empire. A new coalition, [Save South Africa](#), backed by citizens, CSOs and business leaders, formed to uphold the constitution and democratic values. Wide scale protests held in [April 2017](#) explicitly called on President Zuma to stand aside.

Protest tactics seen in 2016 included occupations and disruptions, such as the holding of [a silent protest](#) during a speech by President Zuma in August 2016, and the occupation of a [Fees Commission](#) meeting in September 2016. As the protests continued into October 2016, several universities closed doors, unable to continue to offer education. Students blocked the main entrances to the [University of Cape Town](#) and caused classes to be suspended at the [Cape Peninsula University of Technology](#). Wits University in Johannesburg, one of the key protest locations, was forced to [send staff home](#) and close the campus, as well as postpone its [general assembly](#), following [violent clashes](#) between police and students. The university held a [text message poll](#) to ask students whether

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they wanted the university to reopen, and while the majority who responded affirmed that they wanted classes to resume, [others criticised](#) the poll. When the university reopened, protesters [disrupted lessons](#), causing many to be abandoned.

As the Wits text message vote suggests, there was a sense that the debate was [more polarised](#) in 2016 than 2015, with some students organising [counter-protests](#) for [campuses to reopen](#), and [positions hardening](#) on both sides. To accompany this polarisation, it appeared the response of security forces was more brutal than in 2015.

While police initially adopted a cautious approach, as September 2016 progressed, their responses became more violent. Such was the [level of force](#) used against protesters from Rhodes University and the University of Johannesburg that university officials condemned the violence, and senior government figures publicly expressed their concern and called on police to act within the law. The use of private security forces on university campuses was an enduring concern. A number of [university lecturers](#) expressed apprehension that the presence of [private security forces](#) added to an air of tension. The worry among many in civil society was that the use of force against protesters was becoming [normalised](#).

Despite these concerns, the violence continued. A civil society leader was [hospitalised](#) after being shot in the mouth with rubber bullets as police broke up a meeting at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in October 2016. And when protesters tried to gather outside President Zuma's office to call for his resignation in November 2016, they were met with [rubber bullets](#), stun grenades and water cannon.

As in other cases where excessive force was used, such as the USA pipeline protests, journalists trying to cover protests and violence were roughly treated: in August 2016, several journalists covering a protest at the University of Johannesburg were [physically attacked](#) and pepper-sprayed by private security staff. The reporting of protests became a political issue: South Africa's public broadcaster SABC seemed to show itself on the side of the state, rather than of citizens and journalists seeking both sides of the story, when in [May 2016](#) it announced that it would not show footage of violent protests. Many in civil society felt that this amounted to censorship, and would make it harder to expose the violent policing of protests. Several civil society groups brought legal action to try to reverse the move, and [eight SABC employees](#) were dismissed after protesting against the decision, being reinstated only after labour court action.

[Arrests](#) of some student [protest leaders](#) in October 2016 helped sap the momentum of protests. But as the recurrence of protests from 2015 to 2016 showed, the issues - of both the cost of education and broader governance questions - are not going to go away. It is worth bearing in mind here the findings of the South African Human Rights Commission's [report](#) on education protests, published in September 2016. The report pointed to the fact that there are at least 13,000 protests a year in South Africa, often focusing on the failures of the state to meet citizens' [essential needs](#). It concluded that the protests were about much bigger issues than access to education, and that violence came when political leaders were clearly seen as not listening to grievances, and when the state was slow to respond. The protests thus arise from failures of governance, and are in turn exacerbated by those same failures. Only when governance

improves – when the state convinces citizens that it is doing its best to meet their needs, and is prepared to listen and respond when it manifestly fails to do so – will South Africa stop being the protest capital of the world.

A PRESIDENT FALLS IN SOUTH KOREA

Another context where protests arose from governance failures is [South Korea](#), where protests have become more commonplace. The [2016 State of Civil Society Report](#) reported on the large demonstration held in November 2015 on a range of issues such as economic inequality, employment conditions and the freedom of expression. These were not the first mass protests of 2015: in April and May of that year, protesters marked the first anniversary of the [Sewol Ferry Disaster](#), in which over 300 people died; the disaster came to symbolise poor government regulation and failures to hold those responsible to account.

Protests were typically met with [heavy-handed](#) state response. Protester [Baek Nam-gi](#), knocked unconscious by a [police water cannon](#), died in September 2016 after spending 10 months in a coma. Police [were not investigated](#) or [held accountable](#) for their actions towards protesters, including those that led to Mr Baek's death, and the police [added further insult](#) by questioning the causes of his death.

[Han Sang-gyun](#), leader of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), received a five-year jail sentence in July 2016, [reduced to three years](#) on appeal, for his role in organising a 'People's Rally' as part of the November 2015 protests. Mr Han was judged to be culpable for acts of violence carried out by a small number of protesters. Around [1,500 citizens](#) were investigated following the People's Rally, including over 500 KCTU members, but police actions were not investigated. Excessive force was also used against protesters at a five-day demonstration on education standards held at the [Ewha Women's University](#) in August 2016; around 1,600 police officers were deployed and used force to break up an occupation, far outnumbering the estimated 700 protesters. The authorities also [denied entry](#) to the country for people of Korean descent who were suspected of wanting to join protests.

[Park Lae-goon](#) of the Human Rights Center (SARAM) and Coalition 4.16 on the Sewol Ferry Disaster, gives more background on the continuing protest movement, and sets out the kinds of restrictions protesters can face:³

The Special Law on the Sewol Ferry Tragedy was enacted in November 2014, creating an independent investigative body on the tragedy, the Special Investigation Committee. The Committee was expected to sanction those responsible, and establish a framework of laws to enhance due diligence for public safety. However, the government has not fully cooperated

³ This is an edited extract of an interview conducted in June 2016. The full interview is available at <http://bit.ly/2lzhW73>.

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with the Special Investigation Committee and attempted to undermine its independence and efficacy by appointing pro-government officials, not allocating sufficient resources and not allowing full access to all necessary sources of evidence and information. In addition, the ruling party issued a number of public statements critical of the work of the Committee in attempts to undermine its credibility.

The government is not taking responsibility for this tragedy, in which more than 300 people lost their lives due to preventable negligence, which the state has failed to investigate adequately. Rather, the government mobilised pro-government media, politicians from the ruling party and partisan organisations to suppress peoples' right to dissent, and harass activists calling for the truth to be revealed about the tragedy.

As a consequence, an organised and sustained protest movement has emerged that includes Sewol victims' families, civil society and concerned South Koreans, to pressure the government and the National Assembly to guarantee the independence of and full cooperation with the Special Investigation Committee. The movement, under the auspices of the Coalition 4.16 on the Sewol Ferry Disaster, has undertaken campaigns and activities in 100 locations across South Korea and in about 30 cities abroad. The Coalition is focusing on amending the Special Law on the Sewol Ferry Tragedy and undertaking a number of campaigns in support of good governance.

In South Korea, protests have been unjustifiably limited by the Assembly and Demonstration Act which unduly restricts the right to the freedom of assembly. Also, the police apply double standards towards protests. The police frequently reject protest notification when groups critical of government policy attempt to organise demonstrations and forcibly prevent the demonstrators from marching to the president's office. When pro-government protests are organised they are never rejected and are not subjected to the same limitations.

The government has also utilised judicial harassment to punish and silence those involved in the protest movement. For instance, I was detained for almost three months and indicted, while my colleague, Kim Hye-jin, was indicted without detention. Both of us were found guilty at our first trial, in which I received three years' imprisonment and four years' probation, including 160 hours of community service. Kim received a two-year prison sentence, three years' probation and 120 hours of community service.

Park Lae-geon's sentence was [upheld on appeal](#) in September 2016; at the time of writing he is making an appeal to the supreme court.

The threat of harsh punishments did not, however, deter South Korean citizens from mounting still larger demonstrations in the late months of 2016. This time the trigger was the revelation of a scandal involving President Park Geun-hye and her close friend [Choi Soon-sil](#). Ms Choi was accused of using her closeness to President Park to interfere in state affairs, including over the content of presidential speeches, policy towards North Korea and the appointment of an ambassador, and to gain advantage for family members. She was further accused of using her position to solicit payments to cultural and sporting



Ken Shin, South Korea

foundations with which she was connected from major South Korean businesses, including South Korea's corporate behemoth Samsung.

The revelations proved a flashpoint for grievance about government competence, corruption and lack of accountability, common threads that had run through earlier protests. It tapped into anger with the President's perceived [poor performance](#) over the Sewol Ferry Disaster, including an unaccounted absence on the day of disaster, which was also allegedly linked to Ms Choi.

After the revelations broke, thousands took to the streets of the capital, Seoul, to call for President Park's resignation. Protests continued despite several attempts by President Park to sap their momentum, including by [sacking 10 senior officials](#), attempting to appoint a [new prime minister](#) and finance minister, issuing a [public apology](#) and [offering to shorten](#) her time in office.

Political events moved quickly. By November 2016, President Park's approval rating was down to a historic low of [four per cent](#), and Ms Choi had been [arrested](#). In December 2016 President Park was [impeached](#) and therefore suspended from office. In January 2017, Ms Choi's daughter, [Chung Yoo-ra](#), was arrested in connection with the scandal, and in February, the de facto head of Samsung, [Jay Y Lee](#), was arrested and charged with paying large bribes to Ms Choi. In [March 2017](#), President Park's dramatic downfall continued when she was removed from office by the constitutional court, arrested and detained.

Public protests played a huge part in keeping up the pressure. Demonstrations took place in Seoul each Saturday following

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the revelation of the scandal, and numbers grew. [Around a million people](#) were estimated to have assembled in Seoul in November 2016. But this figure was eclipsed when as many as [1.7 million people](#) – the largest such gathering in South Korean history – took to the streets of Seoul in December 2016, with half a million more people protesting at the same time in other towns and cities. Following President Park’s impeachment, the weekly protest turned into a celebration involving [around half a million people](#); still, participants continued to call for the President to resign immediately, rather than undergo the impeachment process. Protesters gathered on [New Year’s Eve](#) to urge the country’s constitutional court to approve the impeachment.

Crucially, given the history of heavy-handed police response to protests, the demonstrations against President Park were clear to emphasise their [non-violent nature](#), in order to deny the police opportunities to deploy violent response. Some protesters decorated the police buses that are customarily used to block roads with [pictures of flowers](#), while others made sure that protest sites were cleared afterwards. However, there were still instances of security force violence: [three people](#) were reported dead in protests held outside the [constitutional court](#) in March 2017.

It should be clear that while the calculations of politicians inevitably played their part in the downfall of President Park, sustained mass protests ensured that the issue was kept alive and the demand for change was made visible. Corruption scandals involving elite politicians and large companies are sadly nothing new in South Korea, but citizens have shown their anger and demonstrated their collective muscle. The public outrage expressed in earlier protests, in 2015, was sustained and amplified: citizens involved in earlier protests also took part in those of 2016, but found more people standing beside them, and from a wider cross-section of South Korean society. The economic and social [dissatisfaction](#) that fuelled earlier protests also motivated many to turn out in 2016, with protests focusing on wider issues beyond the presidency.

The lesson from South Korea is, again, that a grievance ignored does not go away; it grows and demands to be heard at the next opportunity. The removal from office of President Park should be seen as a victory for democracy and the [rule of law](#). This means that if South Korea’s politicians believe that, post-President Park, they can return to corruption and poor governance as usual, they should know that public anger, now raised and sustained, is unlikely to be satisfied.

ETHIOPIA: DEADLY DISSENT IN CLOSED CIVIC SPACE

One place where an entrenched governance crisis has been harder for citizens to confront is Ethiopia, and the scale of the challenge has been grimly underlined with hundreds of deaths and thousands of detentions. As covered in the [2016 State](#)

THE LESSON FROM SOUTH KOREA IS, AGAIN, THAT A GRIEVANCE IGNORED DOES NOT GO AWAY; IT GROWS AND DEMANDS TO BE HEARD AT THE NEXT OPPORTUNITY

[of Civil Society Report](#), long-suppressed grievances first came to the surface in November 2015, over the highly centralised and authoritarian government's plans to develop the area around the capital, Addis Ababa. This anger burgeoned into an expression of deeper-rooted dissent about the unequal distribution of wealth and exclusion of some population groups.

While the government cancelled its plan to develop the capital region in January 2016, fresh protests demonstrated that unhappiness with economic inequality, autocratic governance and human rights abuses ran deeper. In July 2016, [tens of thousands of people](#) gathered in Gonder in northern Ethiopia to call for a change of government. But as protests spread across the northern Amhara and Oromia regions, the state fell back on its customary response of meeting dissent with lethal force, gunning down [around 100 protesters](#). This added further to the state's death tally, with [around 400 people](#) killed in the earlier protests.

Ethiopia's civic space is rated as [closed](#) by the CIVICUS Monitor, with the ruling elite keeping a tight grip on the economy, political system, judiciary and media. While Ethiopia holds elections, such is the intolerance of dissent that parties other than the ruling party and its client parties stand little chance: no opposition parties were able to win seats in the [2015 election](#).

However, despite the high levels of civic space restriction, and the use of lethal force, protests continued. The [police intervened](#) to stop another large protest planned for mid-August 2016, beating would-be protesters. In response to the dangers of protesting publicly, people started to hold [stay-at-home protests](#). But then in October 2016, the situation took another turn for the worse. Police fired teargas and rubber bullets into a crowd holding a peaceful protest at the Irreecha cultural festival, the most important annual festival for Oromo people. This action sparked a stampede in which the state reported that [at least 50 people](#) died, although the [real figure](#) was likely in the region of hundreds. The state declared a period of national mourning while simultaneously trying to blame the deaths on protesters but, for once, found itself unable to control the narrative and damp down the dissent. As protests continued to flare, and significantly, started to unsettle the [multinational businesses](#) that the state has long cultivated as part of its economic growth strategy, the government upped the stakes by declaring a [state of emergency](#).

Under the state of emergency, initially imposed for a six-month period but subsequently [renewed](#) to last into mid-2017, fundamental rights, including of assembly and expression, were further restricted and the army was given broad [powers of detention and punishment](#). The [sharing of information](#) that could lead to dissent was banned. In just one example of the impact of this, the [Addis Standard](#), a popular and influential magazine, was forced to close its print edition as printers refused to proceed with production. The internet was [widely disrupted and blocked](#), with [mobile internet](#) access cut for two months and the use of [social media](#) to contact 'outside forces' [prohibited](#), making it hard to communicate the violent state repression of protest. Protests without prior permission were [banned](#), people were [forbidden from closing businesses](#) as a show of protest, [curfews](#) were imposed and roads around Addis Ababa were [blocked](#). Even to make the [protest gesture](#), of raised arms crossed at the wrists, [became dangerous](#).

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Arrests accelerated sharply under the state of emergency: by November 2016, it was reported that [over 11,000 people](#) had been arrested under the state of emergency, mostly in the Amhara and Oromia regions, with [journalists](#), bloggers and academics among those arrested; by February 2017, this figure had risen further, with at least [24,000 people](#) estimated as having been arrested. This meant that even when the state announced the release of [9,800 detainees](#) in December 2016, many thousands more remained in detention. Those released were subject to a sinister, Soviet-style ‘[retraining course](#)’ of indoctrination before they were freed. Even the country’s [non-autonomous](#) National Human Rights Commission [estimated](#) that over 660 people were killed in the conflict; the reality is likely to be much higher. And yet, once again, the grievances that fuel dissent have been left largely unaddressed.

The Ethiopian state is generally little troubled by donor governments and international institutions, which disregard and thereby enable its long history of suppressing human rights because the state positions itself as a [bastion of stability](#) and a secure haven for business in a troubled region; even as the protests continued, the state was proud to announce the opening of a new, [Chinese-built railway](#) between Addis Ababa and the Red Sea to further boost business in Ethiopia. Ethiopia’s role as host of the African Union further helps dampen potential regional pressure. In recent years, global north governments have also become concerned about the flow of refugees from the region: the EU, World Bank and UK government are currently engaged in a [US\\$500m project](#) to develop jobs for African refugees within Ethiopia in a bid to stop them coming to Europe. Accordingly, the state fell back on [blaming outside influences](#), from [Egypt and Eritrea](#), for stirring up dissent, and moved to reassure businesses that it would restore stability.

However, for once Ethiopia found itself in an uncomfortable international spotlight: while visiting Ethiopia to discuss the refugee situation, Germany’s [Chancellor Angela Merkel](#) called on the state to allow protests and tolerate political opposition. Following the July 2016 killings, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, [Zeid Raad Al Hussein](#), called for an international investigation of the deaths, and for the [release of those detained](#). Unusually, the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights also [issued a statement](#), in September 2016, expressing its “deep concern” at the reports of excessive force and detentions, and called for regional rights mechanisms to have access to the country.

With Ethiopia’s human rights commission compromised and ineffectual, and autonomous rights-oriented domestic civil society entirely repressed, [international civil society](#) continued the pressure, [calling for a UNHRC investigation](#) and using its presence at key forums such as the [UNHRC to focus attention](#) on Ethiopia. Under unaccustomed pressure, the state responded by internationalising its repression, [detaining the relatives](#) of members of the Ethiopian diaspora who organised protests in Australia, and arresting an [opposition leader](#) from Oromo [on return from a meeting](#) with European parliamentarians. The state also [refused](#) to allow UN or EU investigators to visit Ethiopia.

These instances suggest a clear way forward in which the momentum of protest can be sustained while safeguarding the lives and security of Ethiopian citizens: international civil society needs to keep the spotlight on the abuses being perpetrated by the Ethiopian state, and pressure other states, international institutions and, importantly, international businesses with a presence in Ethiopia, to stop giving the state an easy ride. These institutions need to be pressured



until it is understood that they can no longer tolerate the notion that their economic and security interests are best served by the suppression of human rights and the repression of dissent in Ethiopia.

TURKEY: A SUCCESSFUL MOBILISATION IN A CONTEXT OF RESTRICTION

Civic space in Turkey is rated as [repressed](#) by the CIVICUS Monitor. As AGNA member the Third Sector Foundation of Turkey (TUSEV) relates, it has become increasingly difficult to demonstrate following the increase in restrictions imposed after the attempted coup, unless in support of the government and ruling party. However, even in these difficult conditions, 2016 saw a successful mobilisation, to defend women's rights:

The freedom of peaceful assembly has become severely restricted in Turkey after the failed coup attempt, particularly when exercised by anti-government groups. There were instances of excessive use of force by the police, including beating, during peaceful demonstrations during 2016.

On the night of the coup attempt, 15 July 2016, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım called on the public 'to claim the streets'. The mass rallies, named as

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'democracy watches', spread throughout major cities, and thousands of people, mostly supporters of the ruling party and President Erdoğan, gathered in the country's squares and streets each night. The authorities promoted these rallies, since these gatherings were regarded as a continuation of the civilian resistance to the coup attempt. Public transportation was free for residents of Ankara and Istanbul to enable the gatherings. Turkish mobile operators, such as Turkish Telecom, provided free calls, text and data packages for their customers to help facilitate rallies and post-coup gatherings.

However, other attempts at mobilising received a less warm welcome:

Earlier in 2016, the authorities banned the annual gay pride march, citing public order and security concerns. Riot police used teargas and plastic bullets to disperse a small number of demonstrators at the banned pride parade on 27 June 2016. On 17 October 2016, in Ankara, the capital, all demonstrations and assemblies were outlawed by the authorities until the end of November due to 'possible terrorist attacks'. The arrest of the leaders and sitting parliamentarians of the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) sparked a wave of protests. In all, the protests throughout Turkey led to the arrest of over a hundred people by Turkish security forces.

The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) brought a controversial bill to parliament on 18 November 2016. This motion stated that in the case of the sexual abuse of girls under 18 years of age, committed before 11 November 2016, if the act was committed without "force, threat, or any other restriction on consent" and if the aggressor "marries the victim" the sentence would be postponed.

This proposal caused an angry reaction, and #tecavuzmesrulastirilamaz (rape cannot be legitimised) became a trending topic on Twitter. Social media users, including opposition party members, journalists and representatives of CSOs, expressed their discontent. Thousands took to the streets of major cities to protest against the bill. In a [joint statement](#), UNICEF, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), UN Women and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) expressed their deep concerns over the bill, stating that "if adopted in its current form, the draft bill would weaken Turkey's ability to combat sexual abuse and child marriage." One hundred and twenty-six women's organisations signed a common declaration.

Street demonstrations played an important part of the response, with [thousands protesting](#) in Istanbul and other cities. Crucially, the protests [raised the visibility](#) of the measure, which had been quietly introduced. As TUSEV relates, the government quickly performed a rare reversal:

On 22 November 2016, Prime Minister Yildirim announced that they were withdrawing the proposal and would seek the opinion of the opposition and CSOs in reformulating it. This is considered to be a rare setback for the government and ruling AKP.

This example from Turkey demonstrates that, even in highly-restricted conditions, protest action can make a difference; in this case, a proposed law that would have impacted on women's rights was rebuffed by a broad-based response that combined demonstrations with other actions. It shows that Turkish civil society, however embattled, is refusing to give up the fight for human rights.

PROTEST AND PUSHBACK IN LATIN AMERICA

Three notable protest trends combined and interacted in Latin America in 2016. First, as in Poland and the USA, many protests were led by women, in demand of women's rights. Second, as in South Africa, many other protests were led by students and focused on or had their origins in grievance about education issues. Third, as highlighted earlier, in several countries, new laws and regulations were introduced or proposed that limit the right to protest, including on grounds such as the prevention of obstruction to traffic.

CIVICUS research on [civic space in Latin America](#) highlights how laws have been passed that make it harder to block roads, most recently in Chile and Guatemala. This is significant because the organisation of roadblocks and pickets has long been a legitimate tactic in Latin America's robust protest tradition. In addition, laws that contain broad provisions against terrorism, and that have the effect of making it harder to protest, have been passed in Brazil and Paraguay. Meanwhile, a new [Police Code](#) approved in July 2016 in Colombia, where demonstrations that block roads or access to infrastructure are already prohibited, gives the authorities the power to dissolve protests, and makes it compulsory to give prior notification of any plans to hold a demonstration. These new laws have begun to have an impact on the extent to which protest is enabled in practice. However, they have yet to dampen the region's protest spirit.

WOMEN MOBILISE IN ARGENTINA, AND ACROSS LATIN AMERICA

In [Argentina](#) in October 2016, hundreds of thousands of women took part in a protest and strike labelled [Black Wednesday](#). The trigger of the protest was the horrific gang rape and murder of 16 year-old [Lucía Pérez](#), calling attention to broader currents of male violence towards women, and the failure of the law to protect women. As in Poland, women wore black and [walked out](#) of their workplace for an hour. [Ana Correa](#), a member of the organising group for the protests, describes the anger that fuelled the response:⁴

Almost no reaction to the killing came from political and judicial sectors. So much so that in the same city where the crime occurred, Mar del Plata, a big meeting was being held between business people and representatives of the federal and provincial governments, and nobody there seemed to be aware of the brutal crime that had just happened, as if they had become accustomed to these horrible things happening over and over. That's when the decision was made to call for a Black Wednesday mobilisation and a women's strike on 19 October. On that afternoon it was pouring with rain, but thousands upon thousands of women dressed in black marched through the city. It was necessary - again - to shake the apathy in the face of a new atrocity.

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It is clear that Argentina, and Latin America, has a [structural problem](#) with male violence towards women: seven of the 10 countries with the highest rates of femicide in the world are in Latin America. In Argentina, on average one woman is killed every 31 hours, many of them young women, and in Brazil, domestic violence is said to be responsible for the deaths of 15 women a day. Impunity is an entrenched challenge. Laws may exist but they are not enforced, police forces have been accused of not taking violence against women seriously, and [even data](#) can be hard to obtain as crimes against women are not reported on adequately.

The [Black Wednesday](#) protests spread from Argentina around the region, sparking solidarity mobilisations in Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Mexico, Paraguay and Uruguay. They were not the first such protests, and built on the footprint of earlier efforts, with protest sentiments and tactics crossing borders: under the banner of #NiUnaMenos (Not One Less), a protest slogan that has continued to be used, mass protests were held in 2015 across a wide expanse of Latin America, including Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Uruguay. These protests [drew the backing](#) of high-level political figures, sports stars, and significantly, the Catholic Church.

Protests were also sparked in [June 2016](#) in Argentina and Brazil by further acts of grotesque violence towards women, while demonstrations [held in Peru](#) in [August 2016](#) involved more than 50,000 people, an unprecedented mobilisation on women's rights in that country. Peruvian anger was sparked by several high-profile cases of lenient sentences being given to the perpetrators of violence against women. The inspiration spread further still, to the Caribbean, where thousands of [Jamaicans](#) mobilised in protests, including black-clad and silent protests, against gender-based violence in February and March 2017.

Ana Correa relates the origins of the Argentinian protest movement, for which the killing of 14-year-old [Chiara Páez](#) in May 2015 proved the tipping point:

The femicide of Chiara Páez in Rufino, Santa Fe province, unleashed a wave of indignation at what appeared to be a total lack of public reaction to the succession of crimes against women. People were already fed up, so the tweet published by journalist Marcela Ojeda fell on fertile ground: "Women: they are killing us. Are we not going to do anything?" At that point an organising group was formed with the aim of holding a great mobilisation event, a loud call of attention from the citizenry to force political, social and media actors to react. We wanted to give a strong message, and at the same time we imagined this as a 'hinge moment' regarding demands for women's rights. If gender-based violence affected us all, then it was important for all of us to join forces to make that claim heard.

⁴ This is an edited extract of an interview conducted in February 2017. The full interview is available at <http://bit.ly/2l6MsBl>.

IT IS CLEAR THAT ARGENTINA, AND LATIN AMERICA, HAS A STRUCTURAL PROBLEM WITH MALE VIOLENCE TOWARDS WOMEN

The movement deliberately cultivated a broad base, steering a careful course around Argentina's polarised politics:

From the beginning we set out to do something massive. We saw this as the only way our goals could be achieved. This could not be just another march. That's why we appealed to resources that were disruptive at the time: we sought the support of celebrities, women and men, so they could help us disseminate the call for mobilisation as far and wide as possible. Let's keep in mind that we didn't have any budget to do this, and we did not want to accept help from the very same sectors we were addressing our demands to either. We needed allies in the mass media, women and men. We did not ask for seniority credentials within feminist movements, although we obviously set some boundaries.

It was an electoral year in Argentina and political forces were very polarised. Over the previous few years there had been virtually no mobilisation encompassing all sectors. So all the while we were disseminating the call for our big march, we met with representatives from political parties, the government and the judicial branch to make our message clear: we are not protesting against anyone in particular; we just want you to do well at your job in combating gender-based violence. Everything pointed in the same direction: towards the generation of a movement around the defence of women's rights cutting across all political, social and cultural forces.

On the evening prior to the march, both then-president, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, and Supreme Court Justice Elena Highton de Nolasco, publicly and independently claimed to support the mobilisation. We did not see this as a problem; on the contrary, the fact that the highest representatives of the state were acknowledging the protest was perceived as a step forward. However, during the weeks leading up to the march various candidates had begun to see it as an advantage to have their photo taken holding the #NiUnaMenos banner. It was too easy for a legislator or candidate to take a selfie and attract the female vote. We needed something more from them, so we asked them that if they took a picture, they also sign a five-point commitment that they would work to eradicate sexist violence.

As Ana Correa relates, both traditional and new media were important in promoting and recruiting support for the movement:

The logic of social media helped a lot when putting out a message. We defined a hashtag, #NiUnaMenos. This was backed up by a document that was read at the end of the rally on 3 June 2015, and which was the result of lots of joint work. But the motto that made our demand compelling was summed up in just three words.

#NiUnaMenos demonstrated the importance that social media may have when it comes to making a massive call and disseminating a message without the mediation of political and media structures. Social media does not replace activism of any kind. The woman who devotes most of her time to her work, inside and outside the home, without proper care policies and without any help, has an important limitation when it comes to participating in

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organisations. Social networks allow for and activate another form of activism, which adds to the traditional ones. What matters is to rattle structures and open participation to all women - to each one in a form that is attainable for them.

When organising the first march, we wanted to make sure that the media aligned with each sector would provide non-partisan coverage of the march. And right after the demonstration, for the first time in years, the front pages of all Argentine print media highlighted the same event, our march, as the most important of the day. It was a historic moment in that sense too.

When protests are repeated, as happened in Argentina and across Latin America, protest movements could be accused of having failed to make an impact. In the case of Argentina, however, participants in the movement believe that some headway has been made, as Ana Correa suggests:

The main impacts were that women's rights were placed on the agenda and

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that a state of constant alert and mobilisation around these issues was achieved. There were also small but concrete steps forward, such as the judiciary launching the first [Femicides Registry](#) and the newly appointed president of the Council for Women presenting an [action plan](#) to eradicate gender-based violence.

There is still a lot to do. We are convinced that we can only achieve our aims by remaining active in reaching out with our demands. There is a huge agenda both in Argentina and in the region. With the Trump inauguration we are already seeing setbacks at the global level that we would never have imagined. The only way to do something about this is to remain united, attentive and mobilised.

The social attitudes that enable male violence towards women have deep roots, and the failures of states to make headway against femicide are major. The murder of an anti-femicide activist, [Micaela Garcia](#), in April 2017 prompted further outrage and demonstrated the seriousness of the problem. Engagement needs to be continuous. What women in Argentina and across Latin America have demonstrated is that they are active and committed participants in challenging gender-based violence; they are not merely victims, and those who experience violence are not faceless and nameless. If brutal crimes continue, so will the outrage.

OTHER PROTESTS IN ARGENTINA

While women's rights protests were mostly peacefully policed in Argentina, there have been some incidents of violence: in the city of Rosario, police used [teargas and rubber bullets](#) to disperse an October 2016 demonstration. Further, the police [responded](#) to an isolated incident of violence during the March 2017 International Women's Day protests by using teargas and arbitrarily arresting participants. Protests in Argentina on other issues have, however, attracted heavier security force attention, while new legislative measures threaten to make protests harder.

Even as the anti-femicide protests were offering such a powerful and positive presence, repeated attempts were made to make it harder for protesters to organise street blockades, a common protest tactic. A bill introduced in 2014 did not pass into law, but the new government that came to power in December 2015 introduced a [protocol](#) against picketing in 2016, giving the state additional powers to disperse blockades. The protocol also [fails to prohibit](#) the use of firearms or rubber bullets to break up protests, potentially giving the security forces wide repressive powers. The use of excessive force was duly seen in [August 2016](#), when the police used rubber bullets and teargas against a highway sit-in by 2,000 members of the Movement of Unemployed Workers in the capital, Buenos Aires, even though their protest was authorised. This was one of several protests against the government's economic, employment and social policies that were violently repressed during August 2016. Protests against public service cuts and job cuts, and rising energy prices, [continued](#) into 2017.

[Fernando Braccacini](#) of the Civil Association for Equality and Justice (ACIJ) sets out some of the key challenges with the new protocol, including the selectivity of its application:⁵

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The problem with the 'anti-picketing protocol' is that it subordinates protest to the free circulation of traffic and dispenses with case-by-case assessments, as it mandates eviction for any situation in which traffic is obstructed. It also establishes the use of physical violence as the state's main response to protest.

⁵ This is an edited extract of an interview conducted in September 2016. The full interview is available at <http://bit.ly/2m94Nzu>.

In recent months there were large demonstrations including roadblocks, such as the one led by the five main trade union confederations in April 2016. The security forces, however, not only failed to apply the protocol, but also did not use force to end the roadblocks. In contrast, violence has indeed been used to disperse other kinds of demonstrations, which should alert us to the selective use of repression depending on the nature of the protests, and as a form of censorship of action by specific groups.

Meanwhile, indigenous social movement leader [Milagro Sala](#) spent 2016 in detention, being [sentenced](#) in December 2016 to three years' probation, and banned from participating in any CSO for the same length of time, for her role in organising a protest. Although the [UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention](#) ruled that she was being arbitrarily detained, at the time of writing she remained in detention pending further charges, and was reported as being [under severe stress](#). Fernando Braccacini draws attention to this case:

Even though legal charges were raised against Milagro Sala, the decision to arrest her was based solely on her participation in the protest that took place on 14 December 2015. ACIJ publicly stated that this was an arbitrary restriction of the right to protest. The decision is also a show of the lack of independence of the judiciary in many Argentine provinces.

Protests called for Ms Sala's release on the first anniversary of her detention, but the response was further repression, as exercised in [January 2017](#) against members of the Mapuche indigenous community, where security forces attacked citizens, including women and children, and detained a number of citizens. Despite the harassment, their protests, against the occupation of their traditional land by an international company, Benetton, will doubtless continue.

PROTESTS IN BRAZIL

In August 2016, following a politically polarised impeachment process, [Brazil's](#) Senate voted to remove President Dilma Rousseff from office over alleged illegal fiscal acts, replacing her with her centre-right deputy, Michel Temer, in what many characterised as a [parliamentary coup](#). Brazil has seen many protests in recent years, including [huge demonstrations in 2013](#)

sparked by transport price rises and [more recent protests](#) both for and against President Rousseff and against the state's policies of cutting back on public spending, something that has accelerated under President Temer.

In 2016, Brazil saw a [series of protests](#) by indigenous peoples against legislation to remove protections on [indigenous land](#), which could open up indigenous territories to private sector exploitation and foreign ownership. And in response to a government decision to impose a 20-year constitutional cap on public spending, and proposed changes in education provision that could entail school closures, [students occupied](#) schools and universities from October 2016. Occupations spread from São Paulo to over a thousand schools and universities. The occupation movement followed the self-organising tactics seen in many youth-led protest movements in recent years: students organised classes, debates and workshops, and [shared](#) cooking, cleaning and maintenance tasks. While [protests were not able](#) to halt the Senate's approval of the spending limit, students attested that part of the value of their protests was in [developing their awareness](#) of political issues and willingness to engage with them, growing their confidence and competence in [speaking out](#), and raising the visibility of the debate on education provision.

The occupations demonstrated that young people are willing to take direct action to assert their voices in the debate over their country's future. However, in some contexts, students involved in occupations were [evicted by the police](#), with young people arrested and taken away in handcuffs, sometimes [without the necessary judicial authorisation](#), while the authorities attempted to discredit protesting students.

Brazil's rich protest culture often comes up against attempts to repress it. As [Ana Cernov](#), of Conectas Human Rights, an international human rights CSO based in Brazil, points out, a long-running challenge in Brazil is the role played by the military in policing protests; another, and a common theme across many countries, is the selectivity over which protests are allowed and which are repressed.⁶

The repression of protests is not new in Brazil. However, it has indeed intensified in recent years and has become increasingly selective in the way it responds. Policing is ostensibly a military task - a regrettable heritage of the dictatorship that ruled the country from 1964 to 1985. It is also decentralised, as state governors each head their own military police. Therefore we cannot say that the Temer government is directly and solely responsible for the repression of protests. However, it is also true that there is high discretion regarding which protests are repressed, depending on which side of the political spectrum they come from. The introduction of restrictions on the space for protest has steadily intensified since the protests that took place in June 2013, so President Rousseff's removal has not been a turning point in this respect.

⁶ This is an edited extract of an interview conducted in September 2016. The full interview is available at <http://bit.ly/2IHuZE9>.

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The argument is always the same: that police take action in order to prevent acts of vandalism by demonstrators, a narrative that is also used by the media in order to shield the police's hard-line performance from criticism. We understand that the role of the police is that of singling out individual acts of vandalism and guaranteeing the exercise of constitutional rights to assemble and petition the authorities. In practice, what we see is an approach characterised by the use of disproportionate and intimidatory force to disperse protests and the violation of several international rules regarding the use of force and non-lethal weapons.

Attempts to hold protests to capitalise on the visibility of Brazil holding the [Olympic Games](#) in August 2016 were [met with violence](#) and detentions. Police violence, including [teargas](#) and beatings, was also used against a protest of [around 100,000 people](#) opposing President Rousseff's impeachment in September 2016 and against demonstrations of several thousand people in [October](#) and [November 2016](#) protesting about the imposition of the public spending limit; significantly, police violence was deployed in October 2016 when protesters tried to march to the headquarters of [Petrobras](#), the state oil company at the centre of corruption scandals. In [January 2017](#), teargas and pepper spray was used to evict several thousand homeless people occupying land in São Paulo, and a coordinator of the Homeless Workers' Movement arrested, and in [April 2017](#), police violence was used against an indigenous peoples' protest in the capital, Brasília.

As in other cases above, including the USA and South Africa, police violence was directed at those trying to report on the protests, to the extent that photojournalists held their [own protest](#) in September 2016 to draw attention to police violence against them; the following month, the police [arrested and detained](#) a prominent community journalist and a photographer who were trying to cover the forced eviction of a community.

With a government that is increasingly at odds with a wide sweep of civil society, the only thing that can be predicted with any degree of certainty is that Brazil is set to experience repeated protest actions in future.

PROTESTS IN CHILE

[Chile](#) has seen successive waves of student protests in recent years. Protests surged in [2011 and 2012](#), and some of the leaders of the movement went into elected politics in [2013](#), but still the movement's demands were not met, leading to more protests in [2014 and 2015](#). While protests have led to some reforms, the student movement has deemed these to be inadequate. [Camila Rojas](#), president of the University of Chile Student Federation (FECh), sets out the situation:⁷

For many years now Chilean society has been mobilised around the social right to education, with milestones in 2006, when high school students mobilised massively, and 2011, when even more massive mobilisation at all levels led to a social movement for public education. This movement managed to maintain its autonomy and prevented its demands from being processed in the neoliberal terms that are typical of Concertación, the centre-

left coalition that has ruled the country for almost the entire post-transition democratic period. However, over the years successive governments have been unable to respond satisfactorily to our demands, since they did not have the political will to work jointly on reforms.

Demonstrations that rejected the proposed education reforms as inadequate continued in 2016, and were met with some violent responses. Protests resulted in violent clashes in [August 2016](#), with the Mayor of Santiago, Chile's capital, blaming the protest organisers, the Confederation of Chilean Students, for failing to take adequate security precautions and raising the prospect of a ban on weekday marches in the city centre. These challenges are indicative of a wider problem in Chile, where rules originally adopted by the state [during the dictatorship era](#) impose strict [authorisation requirements](#) for the holding of protests, and give the police, and its Special Forces, broad powers to disperse demonstrations. Thresholds for police action are low: a protest is deemed violent merely if police instructions are contravened. Camila Rojas discusses how these powers have been used against the student movement:

The police repression we recently faced is directly linked to the government's inability to respond to our demands. The government's answer to our mobilisations has been to try and prevent them by deploying police onto the streets. Instead of introducing changes to solve the conflict, they have tried to silence us by way of denying authorisation for several of our marches.

It is important to note that our legislation on the regulation and management of public space use is severely lacking. The constitutional right to peaceful protest is restricted by authorisation requirements; we need to go and ask for permission in an office of the municipal government. The state has the power to authorise or not authorise demonstrations. Unauthorised demonstrations experience a much more violent environment, since the Special Forces act with disproportionate force. Given its inability to find a political solution to the conflict, the government denies permission for our demonstrations, deploys more police forces and even mistreats us at police stations just for fighting for a better education for Chileans. In this situation we cannot just sit idly by, so we continue protesting for change.

Students are not the only ones who encounter security force violence. As in Argentina, members of the Mapuche community, Chile's largest indigenous group, are engaged in a long-running struggle to defend their traditional lands from the encroachment of forestry companies. In [January 2017](#) community members protested in Santiago, but when violence broke out, [water cannon](#) were used against protesters and many were detained. Members of the Mapuche community are also subject to [discriminatory](#)

⁷ This is an edited extract of an interview conducted in June 2016. The full interview is available at <http://bit.ly/2ICTZvM>.

YEAR IN REVIEW PROTEST: CITIZENS IN ACTION



Carol Crisosto Cadiz, Mapuche community

[use](#) of the dictatorship era Anti-Terrorism Law.

Camila Rojas argues that while there is some violence from protesters, seen for example in [May 2016](#), when violence flared among protesters in [Valparaíso](#) during President Michelle Bachelet's state of the nation address, the response from the police forces is disproportionate:

Although violent protesters are a small minority, they are the ones providing the media with the material they use to undermine our legitimate demands, as it happened in Valparaíso. Huge social discontent ends up expressing itself as violence, which is in turn fuelled by harsh repression by the Special Forces.

The suspicion in Chile must be that even if there were no violence used by protesters, the security forces would still find a pretext to use excessive force against protests. This normalisation of state violence is something that needs to be questioned and resisted.

PROTESTS IN MEXICO

State attempts to make changes in education

provision also sparked protests, this time by teachers, in several parts of [Mexico](#), including in Oaxaca state. In May 2016, teachers began an occupation of the central square in Oaxaca City, deploying a customary protest tactic. But their resistance was brutally repressed. [Yésica Sánchez Maya](#), of the Consortium for Parliamentary Dialogue and Fairness in Oaxaca, tells the story:⁸

⁸ This is an edited extract of an interview conducted in July 2016. The full interview is available at <http://bit.ly/2ljs03H>.

Since President Enrique Peña Nieto was inaugurated in 2012, Mexico has been through 12 structural reforms, including one for education. Like the others, this reform did not undergo a serious process of discussion or analysis but was fast-tracked. There was an attempt to fool citizens by making a point about the quality of education, while the truth is that no decent conditions exist in schools and there is no adequate funding to ensure access to education for all girls and boys. The main aim of the reform is to fire teachers. There is also an economic crisis at play because the national oil company where funds used to come from, Pemex, is in decline. So the government did not agree to negotiate with the teachers. When the government refused to sit and talk, Section 22, the teachers' union in Oaxaca, resorted to occupations, its historic tactic. The state insisted that there was nothing to talk about and simply ignored them, so the situation stalled and radicalised.

As it became apparent to all of us that dialogue was indeed necessary, parents, students and CSOs began to make public calls for the state and federal governments to sit at the negotiating table. As they refused to talk, harassment, intimidation and criminalisation of Section 22 leaders and members increased, leading to a climate of uncertainty. Instead of talking, the government sent the gendarmerie – the new police created by the Peña Nieto administration – to Oaxaca along with the military, planes and helicopters. Imagine a city that is suddenly flown over by helicopters and where it is announced that 500 to 1,000 troops have arrived to evict teachers. There was a lot of fear in the streets, and at night there were at least 40 vehicles of the federal, state and local police doing surveillance rounds, all of them with armed personnel, encircling the occupation camp established by Section 22 in the capital's central square. The state sought to intimidate them by making a huge show of armed power.

That's when parents organised in solidarity with teachers. To put pressure on the government, they launched blocking actions in Nochixtlán and the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. These blockades lasted two to four days, and the government was still not ready for dialogue. On the seventh day the government decided to send in the federal military police, without following protocol or even giving any eviction notice. They just stormed in with excessive force. At first the Oaxacan government claimed that their security forces were unarmed, carrying only protective gear, but then the federal government had to admit that they were indeed armed. The truth is that there are photos and videos showing armed troops repressing civilians who were resisting peacefully.

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At least eight people [were killed](#), and [over 100 injured](#), as a result of the police's aggressive attempt to break the blockade. As Yésica Sánchez Maya relates, this tragic act had the effect of increasing public pressure in support of negotiations:

Civil society called for dialogue but the government did not respond. After the executions and arrests an international alert was sent out, warning that something even worse could still happen. A very significant social bloc made up of artists, intellectuals and academics urged the government to sit at the table. Following this, the first such dialogue was established with the Interior Ministry.

Once negotiations began, many of the blockades were lifted, and many of the teachers returned to the classrooms in [September 2016](#). But as Yésica Sánchez Maya concludes, that it took several deaths to force negotiations to begin indicates a serious dysfunction of governance; the response should be a fundamental change, and this should be informed by a thorough investigation into the killings, and the prosecution of those responsible:

It is unfortunate that there had to be so many deaths for the government to accept the need for dialogue.

The army's role is not to intervene on matters of a political nature or against civilians. The government must prosecute those who have already been singled out as responsible for human rights violations. The state has so far been unable or unwilling to guarantee access to justice, even in cases where responsibilities were clear as a result of victims' testimonies. This has generated impunity, and therefore permissibility for human rights violations. For these not to be repeated indefinitely, it is important that the military or police officers, and the public officials who have been identified as having committed human rights violations, be investigated and convicted, thereby setting a precedent.

In addition, the Mexican state must stop pretending and accept that there is a human rights crisis. The world already knows that human rights are permanently and massively violated in Mexico. Denial is not helping: the state is investing more efforts and resources in denying the existence of a problem that is apparent than in solving it.

Serious barriers against protest remain. While Mexico's Supreme Court found in [August 2016](#) that the Mobility Law of Mexico City meant that capital city protests can be held on a notification rather than approval basis, at the same time it upheld rules against the blocking of primary roads. Further, the police in some states of Mexico are [allowed to use firearms](#) to disperse protests, and sadly, 2017 offered continued evidence that federal and state authorities are still failing to respect the right to protest. For example, in January 2017, [it was reported](#) that police forces threatened and assaulted as many as 20 journalists covering blockades in response to fuel price rises, and in [April 2017](#), four indigenous land rights protest leaders were killed by the police. No one should be killed or injured for taking part in a protest. In Mexico, this is all too common.

IN SUMMARY: LATIN AMERICA

Latin America, in summary, displays both the best and worst trends in contemporary protest. It offers inspiring examples of citizens, including citizens from excluded groups, self-organising to challenge the powerful forces that deny their rights and hold them back. It shows how movements can inspire action and solidarity across borders, even in politically polarised conditions, and sustain themselves over time to respond to key moments when rights are violated outrageously. But Latin America also shows how ingrained attitudes that deny rights are slow to change. It offers troubling examples of security forces routinely resorting to violence, while laws, including several recently introduced, buttress the power of the authorities to deny peaceful assemblies on issues with which they disagree. International solidarity, and regional working, including with continental human rights institutions, show the way forward: the protest movements of Latin America must continue to join together, and to connect different protest currents, including those of women, students and indigenous peoples, within countries and across borders.

LOOKING FORWARD: PROTESTS AND THE FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

The last few years have been characterised by wave upon wave of protests in multiple contexts around the world: those described above are only some of many that took place in the last year, and previous editions of this report have covered protests in every global region. Any notion that protests are a passing fad should be rejected. While individual movements may come and go, and some achieve more impact than others, it should be clear that in country after country, the grievances that drive dissent endure and will continue to provoke action. Many protest movements sustain themselves over time: they continue to pursue the grievance around which they mobilised, if issues remain unresolved, or protest momentum grows to encompass bigger challenges that demand longer-term engagement.

[CIVICUS research](#) on protest movements in three countries, Bahrain, Chile and Uganda, shows that in each context, protest movements have sustained themselves over time, to a greater or lesser degree, even in conditions of restricted civic space. Not only is this inspiring, but also the persistence of protest movements may challenge conventional notions of what civil society is, how it is organised and how it can best be supported. While protest movements in all three countries report that they connect well with domestic CSOs, they represent a distinct and diverse civil society form that needs to be understood better. Further, other [recent research](#) on new social movements points to the increasing fluidity of civil society forms that new movements are bringing, and the coexistence of established and new forms of activism, suggesting the need for more detailed analysis of any given context.

ANY NOTION
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YEAR IN REVIEW PROTEST: CITIZENS IN ACTION



Maina Kiai

The CIVICUS study further found that, compared to strong domestic connections, protest movements often found international connections lacking. In particular, protest movements indicate that they receive little support and solidarity from international CSOs, UN institutions and other multilateral bodies, but see these as potentially significant sources of support. The unrealised potential for international support to help protest movements to grow into more sustained social movements seems clear. But significantly, the leaders of protest movements identify that their greatest capacity needs are in areas such as strategic thinking, planning and organising, rather than in directly resource-related areas such as fundraising. This suggests that some relatively low cost interventions could have a strong impact on protest movements. It further indicates that the specific support needs of protest movements must be better understood before any attempt to support is made: simply providing money can be a blunt and inadequate response.

Of course, capacity support to protest movements can only be effective if the broader civic space challenges that hold

back the potential of protest movements are addressed. As should be clear from the above, restrictions on the freedom of assembly are closely associated with those on the freedom of expression; action on one must connect with action on the other. And given that connections with domestic CSOs have proved important for sustaining protest movements, restrictions on the freedom of association, as discussed in part one of this review, challenge those important connections of support and solidarity. Joined-up responses are needed that realise the [right to dissent](#) as part of any attempt to broaden and uphold civic space.

The key need that arises, at the national and international level, is to make clear that the freedom of peaceful assembly includes the freedom to protest, and that the freedom to protest must extend to the right to engage in peaceful direct action, including peaceful civil disobedience, occupations and blockades. Further, as the policing of protest is often problematic, if rights are to be realised, police impunity must be challenged.

Some helpful guidance from the UN level exists here, in the shape of the UN guidelines on the policing of protests: in September 2016, Maina Kiai, outgoing UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to the freedom of assembly and of association issued a [checklist](#) of 10 principles for the proper management of assemblies. These make clear that citizens have an inalienable right to take part in peaceful assemblies, including protests, and that states have a duty to respect rights and ensure they are upheld and facilitated. As part of the realisation of this right, there is a need to seek greater accountability over the role of security forces, and encourage the sharing of good practice in the peaceful management of assemblies.

On the legislative side, the key need is to end the practice of authorisation regimes, in which civil society must obtain prior state permission to hold a protest, and urge for the adoption of notification regimes, in which the state must merely be informed that a protest is to take place. CSOs and citizens should be free to organise meetings and events without any need for prior approval. Notification regimes should help civil society because they should enable CSOs and citizens to be assured that law enforcement services will guarantee public safety so that people can protest peacefully, and should build in potential for accountability when security forces overstep the mark.

In short, protest is a fact of democratic life and an indicator of an active citizenry. It is an arena where dissent can be safely expressed and new ideas forged. Protest is not an exception. It is a right. It is time that laws, and the actions of state actors, including governments, politicians and security forces, started reflecting this.

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