



# CIVICUS MONITOR

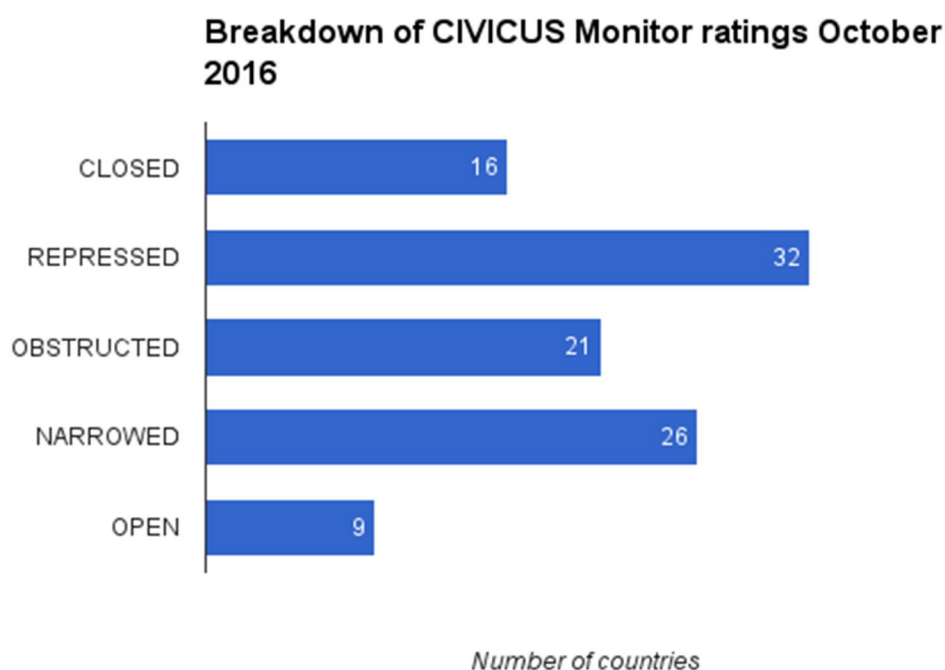
TRACKING CIVIC SPACE WORLDWIDE

## FINDINGS REPORT

October 2016

# Summary

Data from the CIVICUS Monitor shows that 3.2 billion people live in countries where civic space (which is made up by the freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly) is repressed or closed.

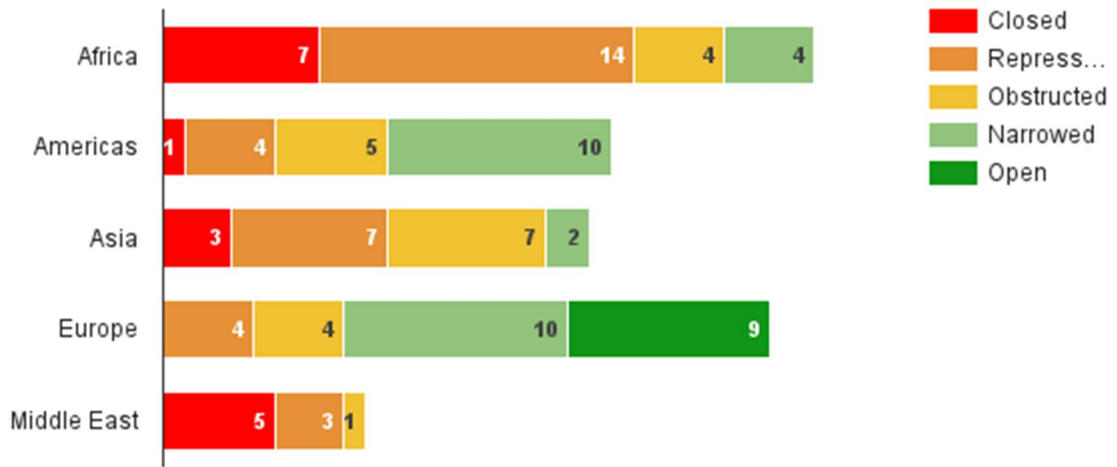


Of the 104 countries for which we have verified ratings, 16 countries are rated closed, 32 repressed, 21 obstructed, 26 narrowed and nine open. Of the closed countries, seven are in Africa, five in the Middle East, three in Asia and one in the Americas. Of the repressed countries, 14 are in Africa, seven in Asia, four each in Europe and the Americas and three in the Middle East.<sup>1</sup> Of the obstructed countries, seven are in Asia, five in the Americas, four each in Africa and Europe and one in the Middle East. Of the narrowed countries, ten each are in Europe and the Americas, four in Africa and two in Asia. All nine of the open countries for which we have verified ratings are in Europe.

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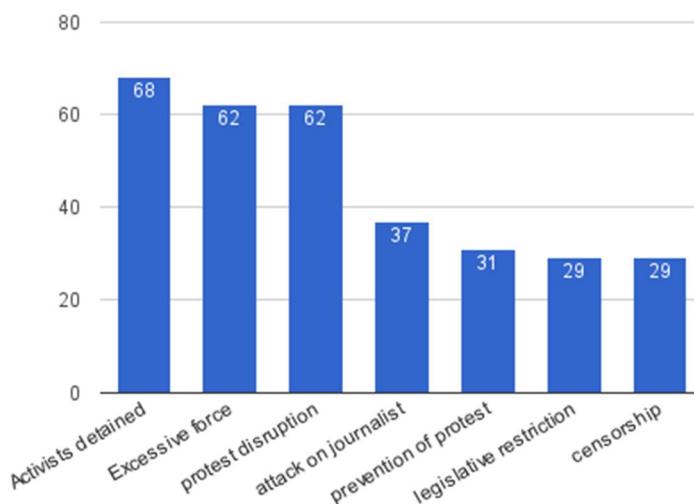
<sup>1</sup> The list of countries included in each of these regional classifications can be found here: [https://monitor.civicus.org/country/list/?country\\_or\\_region=&status\\_category=all&submit=Search](https://monitor.civicus.org/country/list/?country_or_region=&status_category=all&submit=Search)

### Ratings breakdown by region



The CIVICUS Monitor provides evidence on the tactics being used to close civic space. In the vast majority of cases, violations are committed by state authorities, which most frequently violate people’s basic civic freedoms by disrupting protests and **using excessive force** against peaceful demonstrators, and **detaining activists** and **attacking journalists**, or failing to protect them from attack.

### Number of CIVICUS Monitor updates containing reports of these violations



CIVICUS Monitor data also give us a good indication of what is driving violations on civic space. We see that states are taking drastic measures in order to prevent people from criticising authority, engaging in human rights monitoring or calling for their basic social or economic needs to be met.

Such violations are taking place on all continents, but are most concentrated in Africa, the Middle East and the Americas. In some instances, particularly in conflict situations, where states do not exercise full control over their territory, civic space is also threatened by non-state actors such as extremist and terrorist groups.

Currently, serious civic space violations are taking place in:

- [Burundi](#), where popular opposition to president Nkurunziza's decision to remain in office has resulted in a widespread campaign of violence and intimidation against human rights defenders, journalists and the political opposition.
- [Democratic Republic of the Congo](#) (DRC), where police have recently used live ammunition to shoot protestors on the streets of Kinshasa, as public anger mounts at delays in holding elections that indicate that president Kabila is attempting to cling on to power.
- [Ethiopia](#), where the state is using lethal force on a massive scale to crush peaceful anti-government protests in several locations. So far an estimated 700 people have been killed as a result.
- [India](#), where security forces have shot dead over 50 protesters amidst unrest in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, and where the central government continues to target civil society for opposing its policies including through amendments to anti-corruption legislation.
- [Syria](#), where a brutal civil war continues and indiscriminate attacks by warring parties hit civil society personnel, hospitals and humanitarian efforts.
- [Thailand](#), where the military government has amended the constitution to increase its powers in order to crack down on freedom of expression and the political opposition.
- [Turkey](#), where thousands of activists, journalists and others are being targeted in a systematic crackdown which is continuing three months after the attempted coup in July.
- [Yemen](#), where civil war is creating deadly conditions for activists and journalists, at least six of whom have been killed in the conflict since the start of 2016.

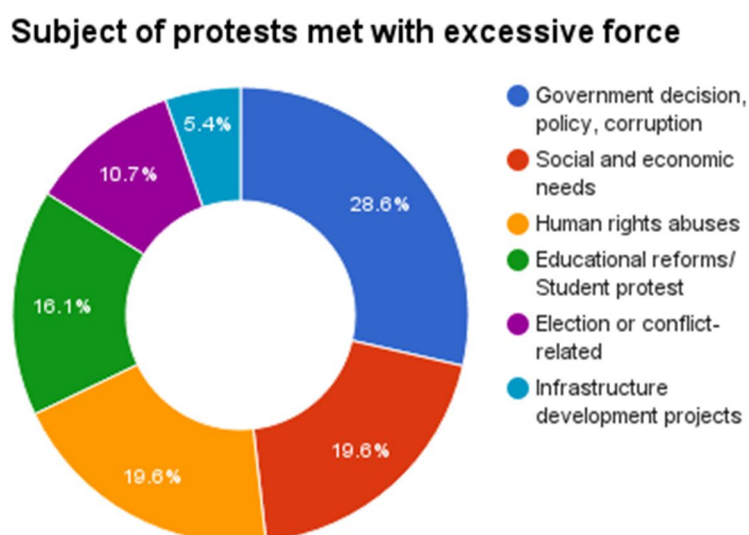
This document analyses some of the detail of over [200 individual country updates on the CIVICUS Monitor](#), posted between June and October 2016. Each of the following sections highlights a few of the most-frequently reported violations, and explores the driving forces behind them, how they were manifested and where they took place.

## Protest disruption through excessive force

Between June and October 2016, the CIVICUS Monitor recorded 62 separate cases when police employed excessive force to disrupt peaceful protests. In the most extreme cases, police used live ammunition against unarmed and defenceless crowds. Some of the worst brutality towards protestors occurred in DRC, where at least 32 people were shot dead during anti-government demonstrations in September; Ethiopia, where hundreds have been killed because of their opposition to government development plans; Mexico, where police shot dead 10 and injured 100 during teachers' protests in Oaxaca; and Nigeria, where 17 pro-Biafran demonstrators were shot dead on 30 May.

## Driving forces

Data on the CIVICUS Monitor shows that police are using excessive force most often against protesters who **criticise government decisions and policies or expose high level**



**corruption** within the government. CIVICUS Monitor reports clearly show that some governments are becoming increasingly intolerant of any public displays of dissent on the streets. This trend has been seen in [Zimbabwe](#) over recent months when authorities have used violence against civil society and social movements mobilising in opposition to the 36-year rule of president Robert Mugabe. Popular opposition to international agreements is also being met with violence, such as when police fired flares and tear gas at an anti-Trans Pacific Partnership protest in [Peru](#), injuring several protesters.

Many people are also being attacked when they protest to call for the state to do better at meeting their **social and economic needs**, including employment, social welfare payments and access to government services. In [Colombia](#), authorities used excessive force to disrupt protests of the Minga movement, which rejects the neoliberal economic model and calls for the creation of a more equitable society. In [Pakistan](#), security forces used physical force and tear gas against farmers calling for a fairer system for renting their land from the military. Protests related to people's social and economic needs have also been recently met with excessive force in Argentina, Bolivia, Botswana, Cote d'Ivoire, Jordan, Lebanon, the Philippines, Sierra Leone and Venezuela.

Police in several countries have also used excessive force against protesters calling for action on **human rights abuses** committed by state or non-state actors. In [Honduras](#) for example, police violently attacked a group of indigenous people after they gathered outside the president's office to demand an investigation into the murder of Berta Cáceres, an environmental and indigenous people's rights activist. Authorities also used excessive force against people in Iraq's capital [Baghdad](#)

who were demonstrating peacefully for the state to investigate abuses against their communities. Similar incidents have taken place against human rights-related protests in Bolivia, Chad, Germany, Mali, Palestine, Swaziland, Togo, USA and Uganda.

The CIVICUS Monitor is also tracking a wave of teacher and student protests which is being met with excessive state force. Teacher and student protests calling for **educational reform or student demands** to be met are particularly common in parts of Latin America ([Chile](#), [Mexico](#) and [Peru](#)) and Africa ([Benin](#), [Senegal](#) and [South Africa](#)). Typically protesters are occupying campuses and taking to the streets to make a range of demands, including better working conditions for teachers, reduced student fees and an end to corruption by university authorities.

Just over one in 10 of the reports currently on the CIVICUS Monitor relate to the violent repression of protests in conflict- or election-related settings, while around half of that number are concerned with the use of excessive force against protesters seeking to highlight the damage done by large-scale infrastructure development projects.

## How

In the worst-case scenarios, such as Ethiopia, Iraq and Mexico, police officers opened fire with live ammunition on unarmed protesters, shooting and killing indiscriminately with the intention to forcing protesters to disperse. In the June to October 2016 period the CIVICUS Monitor recorded 21 instances where protesters lost their lives. In addition to the immediate loss of life when live ammunition has been employed, large numbers of protesters have also been injured. Death and serious injury are also caused by police use of rubber bullets, tear gas and beatings to control protesters.

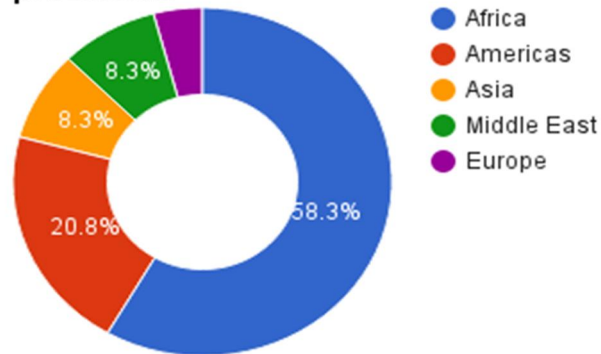
Excessive force of this kind is designed to instil fear in protesters and deter people from taking to the streets. As the evidence on the CIVICUS Monitor makes clear however, the spread of internet-enabled mobile phones with cameras means that the state's use of excessive force against protesters is now much more likely to be filmed and shared immediately on social media. This kind of evidence makes it much more difficult for governments to deny allegations of abuse and may make police more hesitant to engage in this kind of behaviour in future. The CIVICUS monitor will track this closely over the coming months.

## Where

Well over half of reports about the use of excessive force come from African countries, with about one in five coming from countries in the Americas. The Middle East reports relatively few instances of the use of excessive force against protesters. However this may be indicative of the fact that

fewer protests are attempted there due to the severity of repression in many countries in that region.

**Geographical spread of countries where excessive force is used against protestors**



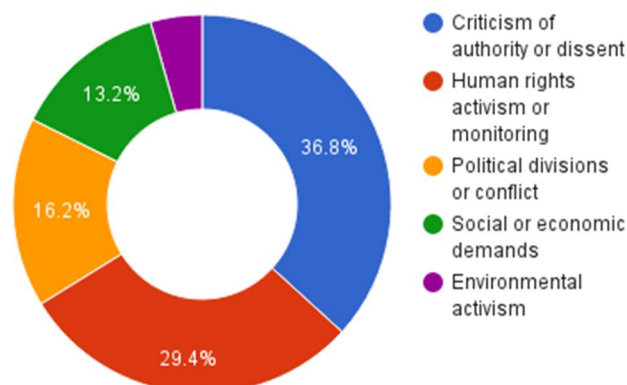
## Detention of activists

More than a third of updates received between June and October 2016 contain information about people detained because they tried to protest, organise or speak out.

### Driving forces

CIVICUS Monitor data shows that states most commonly detain people to prevent them from **criticising or challenging state officials, policies or institutions**. Countries that have

**Reason for detention of activists**



done this recently include [Bahrain](#), [Belarus](#), [Iran](#), [Macedonia](#), [Morocco](#) and [Zimbabwe](#). Often, arrests and detentions come as part of concerted efforts to suppress rising tides of anger and frustration at an ineffective, corrupt and authoritarian state. We are seeing this most clearly in [Ethiopia](#) where, in addition to the killing of hundreds of protesters, there have been mass arrests and detentions. While

governments sometimes arrest large numbers of critics during demonstrations, they also target key individuals who may be leaders of social movements, protest organisers or journalists covering protests.

People are also regularly arrested because they carry out **human rights advocacy or monitoring** which draws attention to abuses - including targeted killings, enforced disappearances and torture - committed by state or non-state actors. Many of the recent arrests in this category were made by states trying to prevent information on their human rights abuses from reaching a wider audience. This was demonstrated clearly in [Cuba](#) when authorities arrested members of the Ladies in White group to prevent them from highlighting historical human rights abuses committed by the government. Included in this category are human rights advocates calling for greater recognition of LGBTI rights. LGBTI activists are also being arrested in [Russia](#).

The presence of **political polarisation, or armed conflict**, in a country also increases the risk of arrest and detention by the state, or attacks by armed extremist groups. Civil society activists are often caught up in targeting of the political opposition, as we are witnessing in the [DRC](#), where civil society is protesting side-by-side with political parties against president Kabila's attempt to extend his term in office. Sometimes - as we recently saw in [Turkey](#) - arrests are happening on a massive scale as the government attempts to quash support for political opponents.

Large numbers of people concerned with issues of **basic economic and social needs** are being arrested and detained simply as a result of exercising their civic rights. In one out of every six cases documented on the CIVICUS Monitor, authorities detained people because they were making public calls for the state to meet their basic needs, including access to land, decent working conditions and greater social protection. We reported an example of this recently in [Jordan](#), when authorities arrested at least 22 people who protested to highlight high levels of unemployment.

A handful of updates also recorded the arrest of activists working on **environmental activism**.

## How

Most of the reports received in this period concern people being held in short-term, pre-trial detention, often without charge and on flimsy grounds. Some of them are released without charge, while others are charged and released on bail. It is not possible to say at this stage what proportion of people who are charged will ultimately receive custodial sentences, although this is something that the CIVICUS Monitor can track over time.

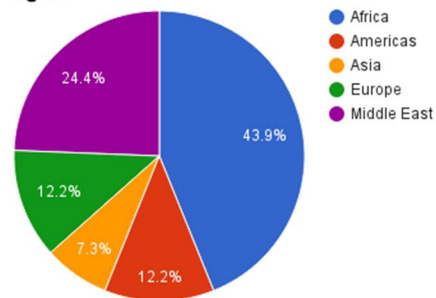
People are most commonly held in police stations and arbitrary detentions are used as a tactic to intimidate or send a message to the detainee that he or she should refrain from exercising their rights to freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression. While in custody, psychological, verbal or even physical abuse are not uncommon tactics used by security services. The CIVICUS Monitor has also documented [one case](#) in which a detainee was sexually abused by police officers during detention.



## Where

In recent months people have been detained for exercising their civic rights on all continents, but most of the violations were concentrated in Africa (19 countries) and the Middle East (10 countries).

Geographical spread of countries where activists were detained for exercising civic space rights

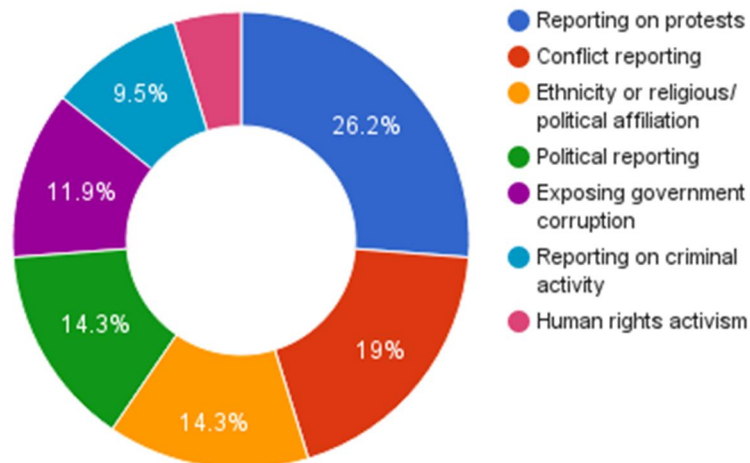


## Journalist killings and attacks

### Driving forces

Data on the CIVICUS Monitor shows that there are a wide variety of reasons why journalists are physically or verbally attacked, or killed. The chart below illustrates that over one quarter

Likely motivation for attacks on or killing of journalists



of attacks on journalists between June and October 2016 took place while they were **reporting on protests**. In some cases these attacks were perpetrated by security force officers attempting to prevent the journalist from photographing or recording the use of inappropriate policing tactics or excessive force during protests. Sometimes these attacks are highly targeted and perpetrated, despite the journalists wearing visible identification of their role. At other times, journalists get

caught up in untargeted violence against protests. Sometimes, as happened recently in the [Netherlands](#), attacks come from protesters angered at a journalist's perceived political affiliation.

The perils of **conflict reporting** are clearly identified in the CIVICUS Monitor data for June to October, with almost one in five reports concerning the death or injury of journalists in a conflict setting. In this period, journalists were killed by warring parties in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen. At times these killings are targeted and motivated by a desire to control the media as a weapon of war. At other times, journalists are caught in the crossfire.

Journalists are also attacked not because of their coverage, but because of their **ethnicity, or religious or political affiliations**. Over the past few months, such attacks have taken place in [Bangladesh](#), [Burundi](#), [Serbia](#), [South Sudan](#) and [Turkey](#).

Reporting on **political affairs** in general can, in some countries, be dangerous. CIVICUS Monitor reports show how, in countries as diverse as [Brazil](#), [Cote d'Ivoire](#), [Guinea](#), [Lesotho](#), [Macedonia](#), and [Mexico](#), stating an opinion or reporting on political events can have serious consequences for journalists. The situation in Mexico is particularly grave, with rights groups documenting 16 attacks against the press in a four day period in June.

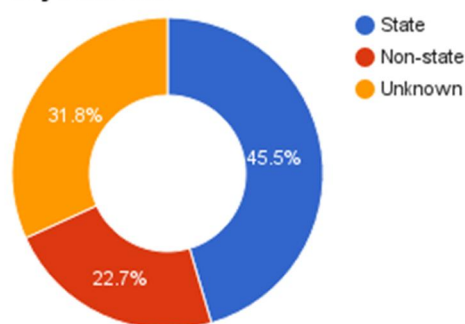
Similarly, those who publish articles in order to **expose government corruption or mismanagement** run a serious risk of being attacked, with more than one in 10 of the reports to the CIVICUS Monitor indicating this as a motivation. These reports often concern local media being attacked because of their reporting on wrongdoing in local municipalities or police stations.

Other reasons behind attacks on journalists include their reporting of criminal activities (for example in Colombia and El Salvador) and human rights activism (for instance in Pakistan).

## How

A wide range of tactics are employed to attack journalists including bomb attacks on media offices (Panama), machete attacks (Bangladesh), enforced disappearances (Burundi), and physical force by police officers during protests (South Africa). Attacks are perpetrated by both state and non-state actors, but in almost a third of cases the perpetrator of the attacks remained unknown at the time of reporting to the CIVICUS Monitor.

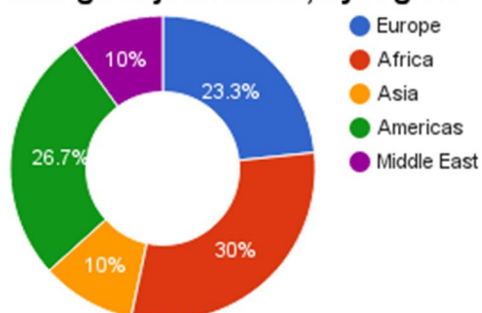
### Perpetrators of attacks on and killing of journalists



### Where

Of the three main categories of abuse included in this paper, attacks on journalists are the most evenly spread geographically. Almost a third of attacks were reported in African countries, more than a quarter in the Americas and slightly less than that in Europe. One in 10 of attacks reported took place in the Middle East and the same number in Asia.

### Country spread of attacks on and killings of journalists, by region



## Summary of other violations

The CIVICUS Monitor is tracking the full range of tactics being used by states and non-state groups to restrict civic space.

As more and more media content moves online and as citizen journalism through social media expands rapidly, **online restrictions** are being reported very frequently on the CIVICUS Monitor. This takes a number of forms, including requests by states to take down content on social media platforms and blocking access to social media platforms, particularly during times of social unrest or elections. Almost one in 10 of the reports on the CIVICUS Monitor to date concern a restriction or interference with **social media**.

**Censorship** is also a persistent threat to the freedom of expression in many parts of the world. States intent on curtailing criticism are censoring public media by exerting control over editorial policy, dominating governance structures and removing non-compliant journalists. States also attempt to influence the private media through ownership structures and targeted audits. Journalists and bloggers are often forced to censor themselves following **public vilification** from state officials or targeted **hate speech** by members of the public.

According to dozens of reports on the CIVICUS Monitor, **restrictive laws**, particularly to target civil society organisations and online expression, are still being proposed, enacted and implemented in most parts of the world. In many cases, governments are using the threat of terrorism or cyber crime to pass laws which typically give government officials wide-ranging powers to interfere with the operations of civil society or control online expression.

**Attacks on LGBTI groups** were frequently reported to the CIVICUS Monitor in the June to October period. These reports show how LGBTI people continue to be targeted through physical attacks and killing (Turkey), public denouncements (Tanzania) and the refusal by state bodies to register their organisations (Uganda).

## Bright spots

While there is little doubt that civic space is under serious pressure, civil society continues to fight to defend its space. In some cases, civil society has also successfully pushed for improvements. The CIVICUS Monitor is tracking a number of improvements in civic space - including [improvements to laws](#), the [release of activists](#) and [progressive court judgments](#). We documented 10 examples of legal improvements, nine of activists being released and six progressive court judgments.

In [Togo](#), for example, civil society and the media celebrated earlier this year when the parliament approved a new access to information law. In May, prominent Azerbaijani journalist [Khadija Ismayilova](#) was released from prison, following international and domestic civil society pressure. And in August, the courts in [Belize](#) took a strong stand in support of equal rights for LGBTI people.

We are also tracking examples of the successful exercise of the rights to the freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression, including the successful conduct of [peaceful protests](#), for which we documented 40 reports. This reflects the reality that, in the vast majority of cases, peaceful protests are well-policed and people are able to take to the streets to make their voices heard without being disrupted or attacked. The CIVICUS Monitor will continue to track these trends in the months ahead.

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If you have questions about this analysis, or would like to find out more about the CIVICUS Monitor, please send an email to [monitor@civicus.org](mailto:monitor@civicus.org).

# CIVICUS

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