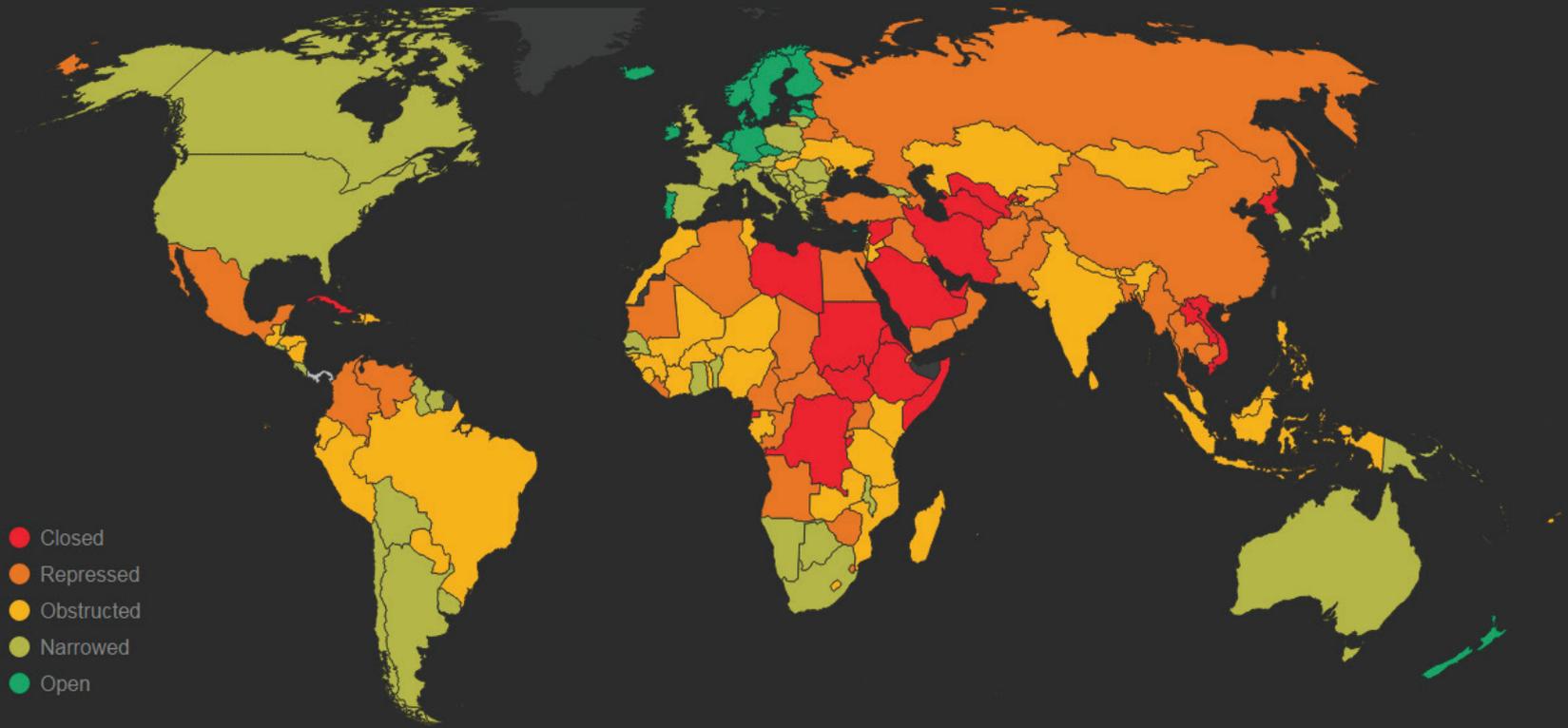


PEOPLE POWER UNDER ATTACK

FINDINGS FROM THE CIVICUS MONITOR



JOHANNESBURG, APRIL 2017





ENDANGERED CIVIC SPACE

According to new findings from the CIVICUS Monitor, just three percent of people live in countries where space for civic activism - or civic space - is truly open.¹ The first ever analysis of civic space covering all UN Member States shows people in 106 countries face serious threats when organising, speaking out and taking peaceful action to improve their societies.² These rights are guaranteed by most national constitutions and enshrined in international law.

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<https://monitor.civicus.org/findings>

new platform which provides quantitative ratings and narrative descriptions on civic space for every country, in addition to daily updates each weekday. They expose the real-life consequences of a startling retreat from participatory democracy which guarantees protection of fundamental civic freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly all over the world. Through our growing civic space database, the CIVICUS Monitor is tracking a consistent pattern of attacks on individuals and organisations engaged in the courageous defence of rights and fundamental freedoms from repressive state apparatuses, criminal actions linked to business entities and groups subscribing to extremist ideologies. Challenging power is becoming increasingly risky in many countries across the world as reprisals abound to prevent criticism and stifle free speech, disrupt protests and manipulate the law to lock up peaceful activists. Worryingly, trends point to more and more journalists being assaulted and killed as civil society is forced to operate in increasingly constrained environments.

Of the 195³ countries rated on the CIVICUS Monitor, civic space is closed in 20 countries, repressed in 35, obstructed in 51, narrowed in 63 and open in just 26. Almost six billion people live in countries where civic space is either closed, repressed or obstructed.

1 The CIVICUS Monitor relies on a network of twenty research partners. Details of all of our partners can be found here: <https://monitor.civicus.org/researchpartners>

2 Listed under the obstructed, repressed and closed categories.

3 In addition to ratings for 193 UN Member States, the CIVICUS Monitor provides ratings for Kosovo and Palestine.

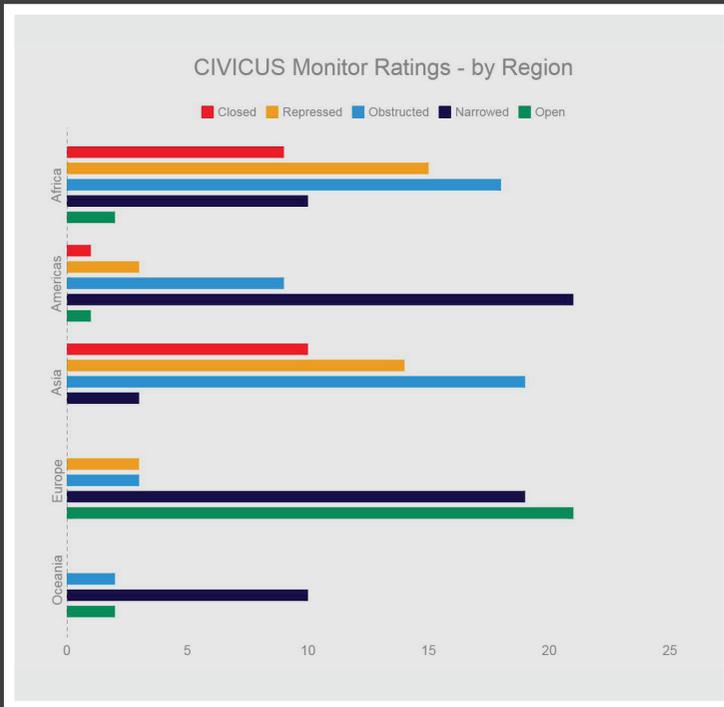
Regionally, while civic space is being encroached upon in all continents, the most brutal conditions for civil society are found in 20 **closed** countries, several of them in West Asia and Africa. In one almost unbroken swathe of territory, across a dozen countries stretching from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to Turkmenistan, it is next to impossible for activists to conduct human rights advocacy or peacefully oppose the state or extremist groups without the very real risk of attack, imprisonment or death. Pockets of closed civic space also persist in Central Asia, Southeast Asia and the Caribbean.

Africa and Asia are also home to the lion's share of countries in the **repressed** category. These are countries where civic space is heavily constrained and although some civil society organisations operate, their advocacy work is regularly impeded and they face the threat of closure by the authorities and violence from state and non-state actors. Civic space is repressed in 15 African countries, 14 Asian countries, and three countries each in the Americas and Europe.

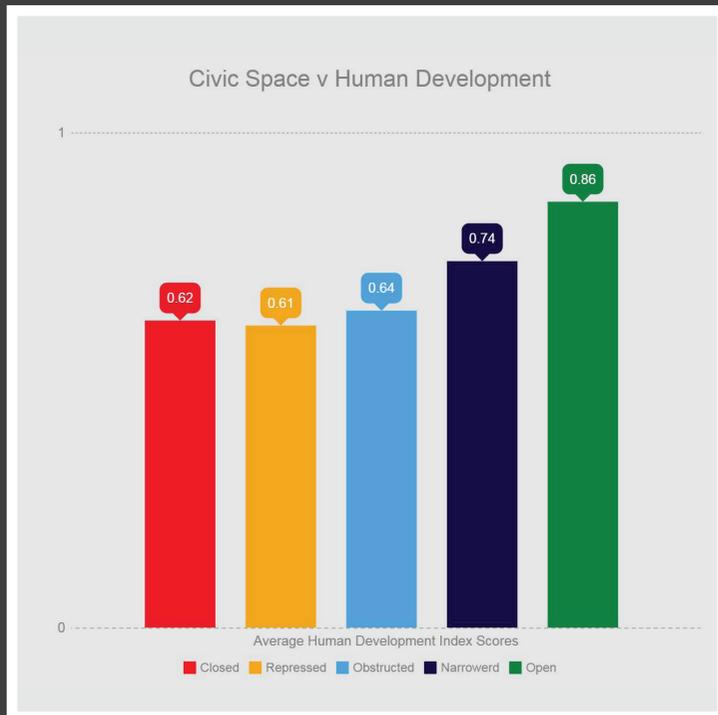
Just over a quarter of countries are rated **obstructed** on the CIVICUS Monitor. Again, most of these are in Africa (18) and Asia (19). There are nine obstructed countries in the Americas, three in Europe and two in Oceania. Obstructed countries have civic space which is heavily contested by power holders imposing constraints on the full enjoyment of fundamental civic freedoms.

A total of 63 countries are in the **narrowed** category, where the state allows individuals to organise, protest and speak freely, but violations of these rights also take place and laws may give the authorities more power than they should have under international law. Notably, 60% of countries in the Americas are narrowed, with just under a third of European countries in the narrowed category. There are also ten narrowed countries in Oceania, ten in Africa and three in Asia.

Of the 26 countries with **open** civic space, 21 are in Europe, 14 of those European Union Member States. These are countries in which the state both enables and safeguards the enjoyment of civic space for all people. There are two open countries in Oceania, two in Africa and one in the Americas. There are no open countries in Asia.



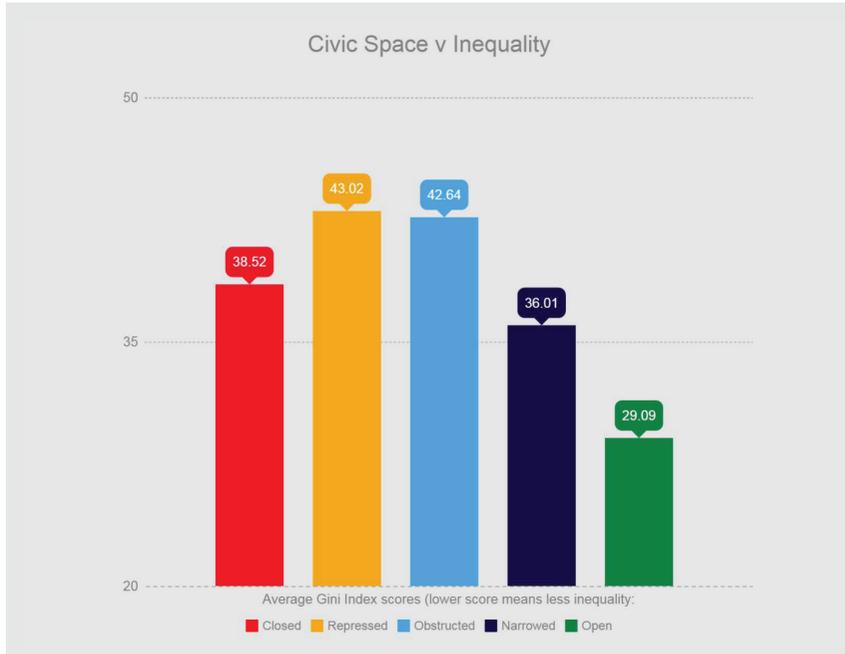
THE GEOGRAPHY OF A GLOBAL EMERGENCY



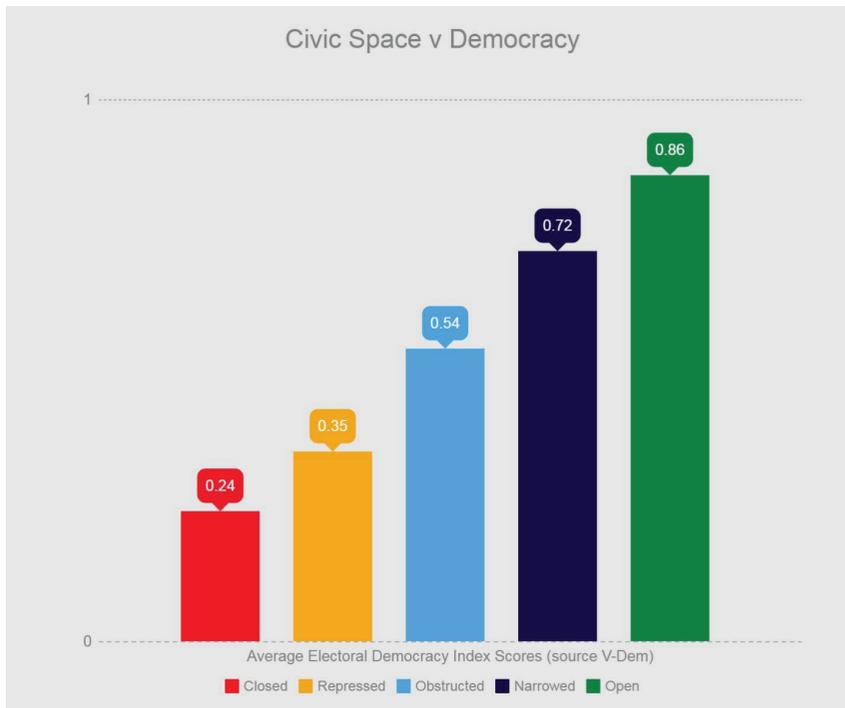
As a matter of principle, and under international law, it is vital that states respect, protect and fulfil people's basic rights to organise, protest and speak freely. Beyond that, the protection of fundamental civic freedoms is vital to the health, stability and success of societies because it is only within an open civic space that people are free to share opinions, robustly debate ideas and hold those in power to account. With this relaunch of the CIVICUS Monitor, we can now compare global data on civic space with other measures of responsive societies. While we cannot yet draw causal relationships from this data, what already emerges is a clear connection between open civic space and better measures of human development, income inequality and democracy.

The first chart on the left shows how countries with open civic space have an average Human Development Index (HDI) score of 0.86, whereas those in the closed and repressed categories have much lower average scores of 0.62 and 0.61 respectively.

WHY CIVIC SPACE MATTERS?



The second chart compares average Gini Index scores across the different ratings categories. We see that inequality generally reduces when there is more open civic space – with the clear exception of closed countries, which have a better average Gini Score than those in both the repressed and obstructed categories.



The third chart compares CIVICUS Monitor ratings with average scores from the Electoral Democracy Index (produced by V-Dem). We see a clear correlation between more open civic space and an increasing ability by states to deliver free and fair elections. For more detailed visualisations of the relationships between these data, please visit the findings page our website: <https://monitor.civicus.org/findings>.

The CIVICUS Monitor also tracks the details of how this global crisis of civic space is affecting civil society. The number one tactic of repression identified by the Monitor is the arbitrary or unlawful detention of human rights defenders by states. Between June 2016 and March 2017, 160 reports related to the detention of activists were published on the CIVICUS Monitor.

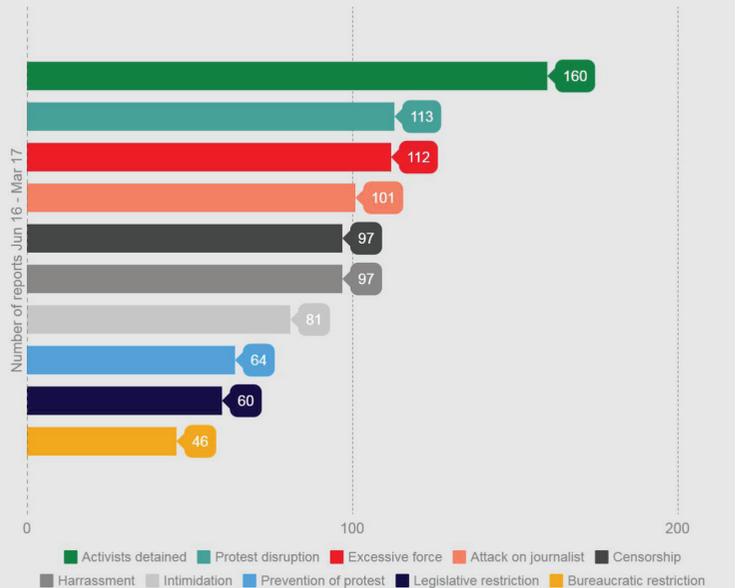
State security forces also far too often resort to using excessive force (tear gas, rubber bullets and sometimes live ammunition) during protests to curb dissent and mobilisation, with 112 cases being reported in this period. Data from the CIVICUS Monitor also show that alarming numbers of journalists continue to be attacked, often with impunity for the state agents or non-state actors responsible - 101 such reports were received in this period.

Other common features of restrictions on civic space include the harassment or intimidation of human rights defenders, often by threat of legal action; direct or indirect censorship of the media and, increasingly, of online content; and legislative or bureaucratic restrictions which make it difficult for civil society to organise and carry out its work.

CIVICUS Monitor data also give us a good indication of what is causing violations of civic space. We see that state apparatuses 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.

These violations are taking place on all continents, but are most concentrated in parts of Africa, Asia 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.

Commonly-Reported Violations on the CIVICUS Monitor Jun 16 - Oct 17

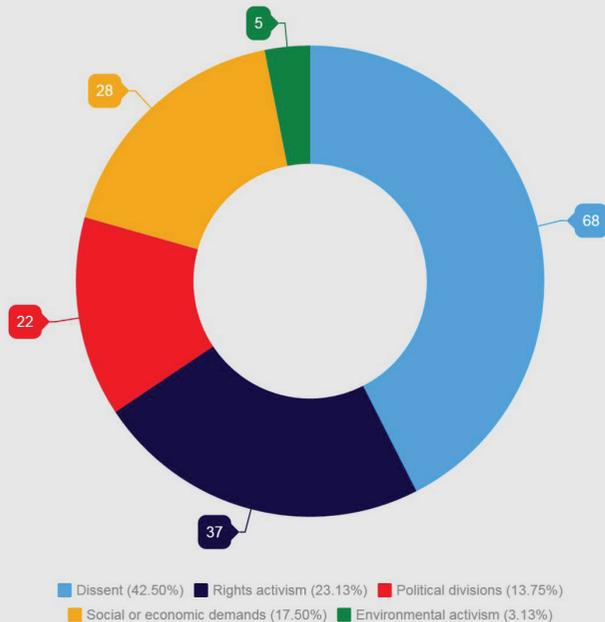


ANATOMY OF A GLOBAL CRACKDOWN

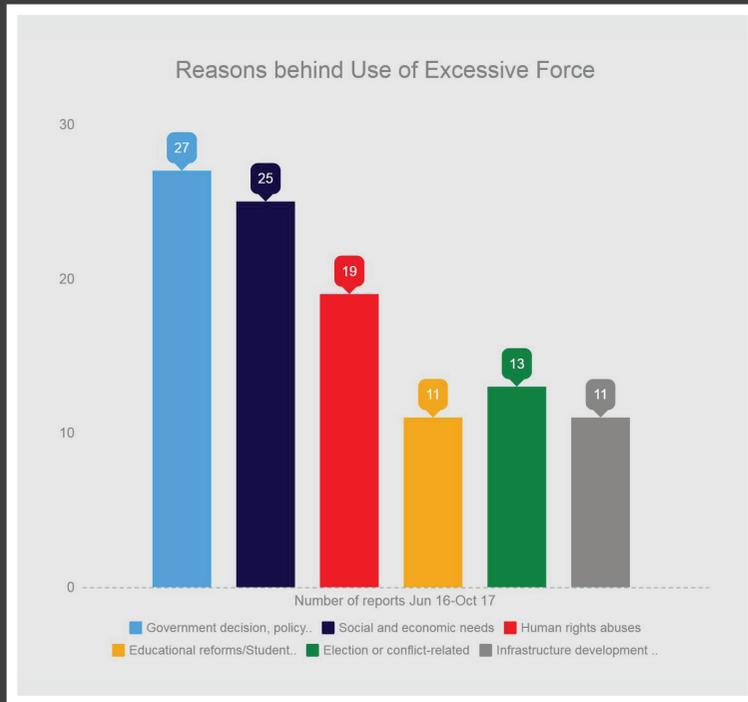
Almost a third of updates received between June 2016 and March 2017 contain information about people being detained because they tried to protest, organise or speak out. CIVICUS Monitor data show that states most commonly detain people to prevent them from dissenting or challenging state officials, policies or institutions. 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. The presence of political polarisation, or armed conflict, in a country also increases the risk of arrest and detention by state security forces, or attacks by armed extremist groups. 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 fundamental civic freedoms. A handful of updates also recorded the arrest of activists working on environmental activism.

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.

Reasons behind detention of HRDs



DETENTION OF ACTIVISTS

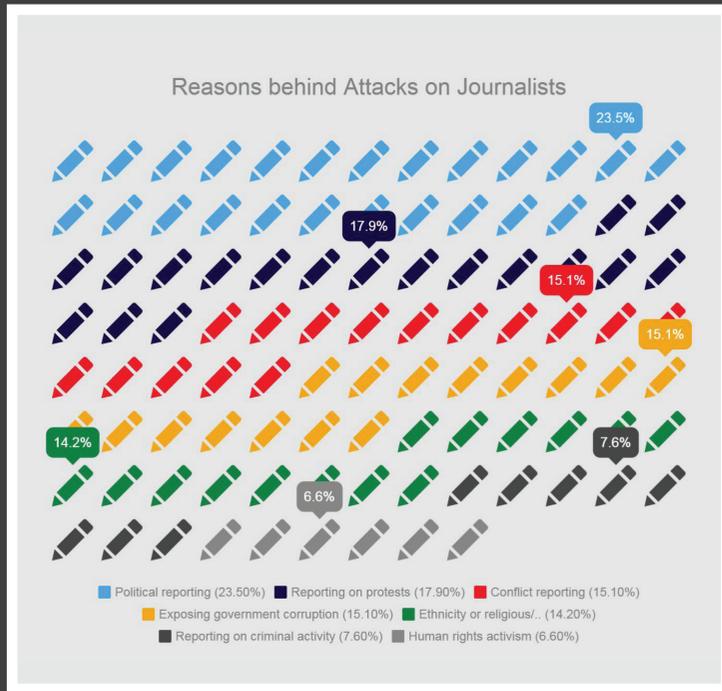


Between June 2016 and March 2017, the CIVICUS Monitor recorded 112 separate cases when police employed excessive force to disrupt peaceful protests. The CIVICUS Monitor shows that police are using excessive force most often against protesters who criticise government decisions and policies or expose high level corruption within the government. 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. 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. The CIVICUS Monitor is also tracking a wave of teacher and student protests which is being met with excessive state force. Just over 10% of reports currently on the CIVICUS Monitor relate to the violent repression of protests in conflict - or election - related settings, while a similar number are concerned with the use of excessive force against protesters seeking to highlight the damage done by large-scale infrastructure development projects.

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 2016 to March 2017 period the CIVICUS Monitor recorded 32 instances where protesters lost their lives. In addition to the immediate loss of life, 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 documented 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 the future.

USE OF EXCESSIVE FORCE DURING PROTESTS



Data on the CIVICUS Monitor show that there are a wide variety of reasons why journalists are physically or verbally attacked, or killed. One quarter of attacks on journalists between June 2016 and March 2017 were motivated by political reporting, with attacks ranging from online vilification of political reporters in the Balkans to the assassination of a journalist who criticised authorities in Mexico. Almost one in five violations against journalists 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 inappropriate policing tactics or excessive force during protests. The perils of conflict reporting are also clearly identified, with almost one in five reports concerning the death or injury of journalists in a conflict setting. Journalists are also attacked not because of their coverage, but because of their ethnicity, or religious or political affiliations in many instances. Reporting on political affairs in general can, in some countries, be dangerous. 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 seven of the reports to the CIVICUS Monitor indicating this as a motivation.

A wide range of tactics are employed to attack journalists including bomb attacks on media offices, machete attacks, enforced disappearances, and physical force by police officers during protests. Attacks are perpetrated by both state and non-state actors. Worryingly, in almost a third of cases the perpetrator of the attacks remained unknown at the time of reporting to the CIVICUS Monitor, further undermining the conditions for journalists to operate in.

JOURNALIST KILLINGS AND ATTACKS

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 contested elections. Over seven per cent of the reports on the CIVICUS Monitor to date concern a restriction or interference with social media.

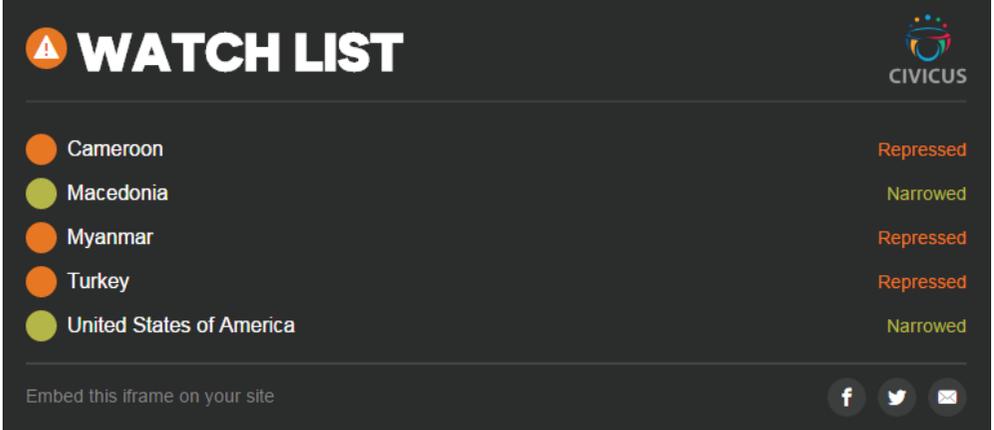
Censorship is also a persistent threat to the freedom of expression in many parts of the world. States intent on curtailing criticism are censoring public media by exerting control over editorial policy, dominating governance structures and removing non-compliant journalists. Many governments also attempt to influence the private media by controlling its ownership and conducting targeted audits. Journalists and bloggers are often forced to censor themselves following public vilification from state officials or targeted comments by members of the public designed to stir up hatred against them based on race, creed or gender.

According to dozens of reports on the CIVICUS Monitor, restrictive legislation, particularly to target civil society organisations and online expression, are still being proposed, enacted and implemented in most parts of the world. Forty reports of restrictive NGO laws were received in this period. 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.

A total of 42 civic space updates related to LGBTI groups were reported to the CIVICUS Monitor in the June 2016 to March 2017 period. These reports show how LGBTI people continue to be targeted through physical attacks and killing, public denouncements and the refusal by state bodies to register their organisations.

SUMMARY OF OTHER VIOLATIONS

Today, CIVICUS also releases the *Watch List*. These are countries where we have an immediate concern about a serious and rapid decline in respect for civic space and where we will be keeping a particularly close eye on developments in the coming weeks. The Watch List will be constantly updated and, right now, includes the following countries:



WATCH LIST

| | |
|--------------------------|-----------|
| Cameroon | Repressed |
| Macedonia | Narrowed |
| Myanmar | Repressed |
| Turkey | Repressed |
| United States of America | Narrowed |

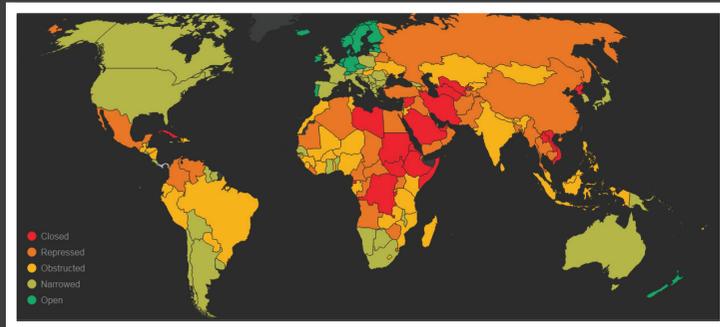
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In **Turkey**, an ongoing widespread crackdown against independent civil society and media continues to be a serious cause for concern and the upcoming referendum to increase the president's powers means there is an increased likelihood of a further closure of civic space.

In **Cameroon**, the state's campaign of repression against citizens in Anglophone parts of the country has resulted in hundreds of activists and ordinary citizens being arbitrarily arrested, physically assaulted and tortured while being subjected to an internet blackout.

Since Donald Trump's election in the **USA**, media freedoms have been significantly damaged by the President's vilification of mainstream media houses, while a growing number of states pass or prepare new laws to curtail protest rights.

In **Myanmar**, recent months have seen a decline in respect for free speech, including the barring of journalists from travelling to Rakhine state, as evidence of targeted violence and discrimination against Rohingya and certain other groups mounts.



COUNTRIES OF CONCERN

Macedonia's civil society is facing a serious and ongoing targeting of NGOs supported by international funders. The situation in Macedonia is part of a wider trend against foreign-funded NGOs in the Balkans and neighbouring regions with similar developments being tracked in Hungary, Croatia and Serbia.

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 17 examples of legal improvements, 17 of activists being released and 16 progressive court judgments.

In Togo, for example, civil society and the media celebrated in 2016 when the parliament approved a new access to information law. In August 2016, the courts in Belize took a strong stand in support of equal rights for LGBTI people. In February 2017, Uzbekistan journalist Muhammad Bekjanov was released from prison after spending 18 years in confinement. Also in early 2017, with the removal of the country's longstanding ruler Yahya Jammeh, conditions for civil society were expected to improve in Gambia.

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 162 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.

For an extensive visualisation of all of our findings, please visit: <https://monitor.civicus.org/findings>

Data analysed in this report is produced by the CIVICUS Monitor. Data on the Monitor is produced by Marianna Belalba, Cathal Gilbert, Dom Perera, Bobbie Traut, with significant contributions from Andrew Firmin, Teldah Mawarire and Ines Pousadela. This report was edited by Mandeep Tiwana.