

Eight in ten African countries seriously restricting civic freedoms

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Findings based on data released today by the [CIVICUS Monitor](#) a global research collaboration which rates and tracks respect for fundamental freedoms in 196 countries.

CIVICUS has today released [People Power Under Attack 2018](#), a new report showing that the space for civil society (or civic space) is under sustained attack in Africa. Civic space in 40 of 49 African countries is rated obstructed, repressed or closed, meaning that people experience serious restrictions on their fundamental freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression. Only two countries (Cape Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe) – have an open civic space rating. Our findings reflect a continuing crisis facing civil society organisations and activists in the region, with the space for civic activism most commonly undermined through the excessive use of force against protesters, the prevention of protests, attacks on journalists and censorship.

“A worrying 82 percent of African countries have a poor civic space rating, with governments across the region failing in their duty to protect civil society.” said Ine Van Severen, Civic Space Research Officer at CIVICUS. “We are particularly concerned about countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo, where it is extremely risky for civic activists to mobilise and speak out, and Tanzania, where space for freedom of expression has been rapidly eroded during 2018.”

TOP 10 VIOLATIONS: AFRICA



- Excessive force
- Attack on journalist
- Protest disruption
- Censorship
- Prevention of protest
- HRD detained
- Intimidation
- Protestors detained
- Harassment
- Journalist detained

Based on analysis of civic space updates published on the CIVICUS Monitor since 24th October 2016: 312 updates for Africa. The numbers above represent the percentage of reports in which that violation was referenced.

There are only seven countries in the open and narrowed civic space categories on the CIVICUS Monitor: Botswana, Cape Verde, Comoros, Ghana, Mauritius, Namibia, São Tomé and Príncipe, Seychelles and South Africa. In this latest update, civic space ratings have improved for four African countries: Ethiopia, The Gambia, Liberia and Somalia, while Gabon, Senegal and Tanzania all saw their civic space rating downgraded.

Our research reveals that the most common civic space restrictions in Africa in the past two years were the excessive use of force by security forces against protesters, including through the use of tear gas, batons and even live ammunition. Other violations frequently reported on the CIVICUS Monitor include attacks on journalists, the disruption of protests and censorship. The prevention of protests, intimidation, harassment and the detention of HRDs, protesters and journalists are other commonly cited violations in Africa.

Countries of concern include Tanzania, which was downgraded from obstructed to repressed as the government of President Magufuli undermined civic space through a combination of restrictive laws, intimidation and a crackdown on dissent and media. Authorities in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have systematically silenced dissenting voices, including by targeting activists and HRDs. The DRC remains a country of serious concern for the CIVICUS Monitor in the run-up to the upcoming elections of 23rd December 2018.

Despite widespread repression, the CIVICUS Monitor also recorded a number of positive civic space developments in Africa, including the adoption of a law on the protection of human rights defenders in Mali and the approval of a bill repealing provisions in the Penal Code on sedition, criminal malevolence and criminal libel against the president in Liberia. Bright spots include Ethiopia and the Gambia. In Ethiopia, a wave of reforms has quickly opened civic space since Abiy Ahmed took over power as Prime Minister, after the stepping down of Hailemariam Desalegn. Scores of political prisoners, including journalists, activists and opposition leaders, were released between April and June 2018, and a justice reform advisory council was set up to revise restrictive laws, including the draconian Charities and Societies Proclamation. In the Gambia, space for civil society has opened after the end of the brutal, 22-year regime of former President Yahya Jammeh.

“Recent improvements in Ethiopia show what is possible when political will is present and leaders take courageous decisions to respond to the calls of civil society,” said Van Severen. “This should encourage those seeking change in repressive countries everywhere. By removing restrictions and protecting civic space, countries can tap into civil society’s true potential and accelerate progress on a wide range of fronts.”

[Over twenty organisations](#) collaborate on the CIVICUS Monitor to provide an evidence base for action to improve civic space on all continents. The Monitor has published more than 1,400 [civic space updates](#) in the last two years, data which is analysed in People Power Under Attack 2018. Civic space in 196 countries is categorised as either **closed**, **repressed**, **obstructed**, **narrowed** or **open**, based on a [methodology](#) which combines several sources of data on the freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression.

For more information or to arrange an interview, please contact::

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