



CIVIL SOCIETY WATCH REPORT

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CIVICUS

Who We Are

CIVICUS is a global alliance of civil society organisations and activists dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society around the world. Founded in 1993, CIVICUS strives to promote marginalised voices, especially from the Global South, and has members in countries throughout the world.

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RESPECT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY FREEDOMS SIGNIFICANTLY WORSENERD IN 2015

THE LATEST CIVICUS MONITORING SHOWS THAT IN 2015 ONE OR MORE OF THE CORE CIVIL SOCIETY FREEDOMS OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY WERE SERIOUSLY VIOLATED IN AT LEAST 109 COUNTRIES.

Global civil society alliance CIVICUS has documented serious violations of the freedoms of association, expression and peaceful assembly in 109 countries over the course of 2015. The list shows that instead of heeding calls to reverse the trend of closing civil society space, more and more states are failing their commitments under international law and reneging on their duty to protect and enable civil society. Several non-state actors also stand accused of seriously violating civil society freedoms.

This report and list was compiled based on the analysis of Civil Society Watch reports, and additional monitoring by national and international civil society organisations from the CIVICUS alliance. The following table briefly summarises the nature of the violations captured in this report.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION VIOLATIONS	Includes raids on CSO premises; attacks* on individual human rights defenders or leaders and staff of CSOs; introduction of restrictive NGO regulations or laws; confiscation of computers, documents, equipment; public vilification or denigration of a CSO or category of organisation; selective targeting of organisations through the courts by, for example, impeding their ability to generate resources or by deregistering individual organisations.
FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION VIOLATIONS	Includes closure of media houses; attacks* on individual journalists or bloggers; restricting circulation of newspapers; censoring news and social media sites; use of criminal laws to curtail free speech; denial of access to information; introduction of restrictive media laws or laws that impose state censorship.
FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY VIOLATIONS	Excessive or unlawful use of force (tear gas, rubber bullets, live ammunition, baton charges) on public assemblies by police; attacks* on individual protestors; mass arrests of peaceful protestors; unlawful or unreasonable denial of permission to gather peacefully; unwillingness of states to protect peaceful protestors from violent counter-demonstrators; introduction of new security or anti-terrorism laws that have the effect of curtailing the right to freedom of peaceful assembly.

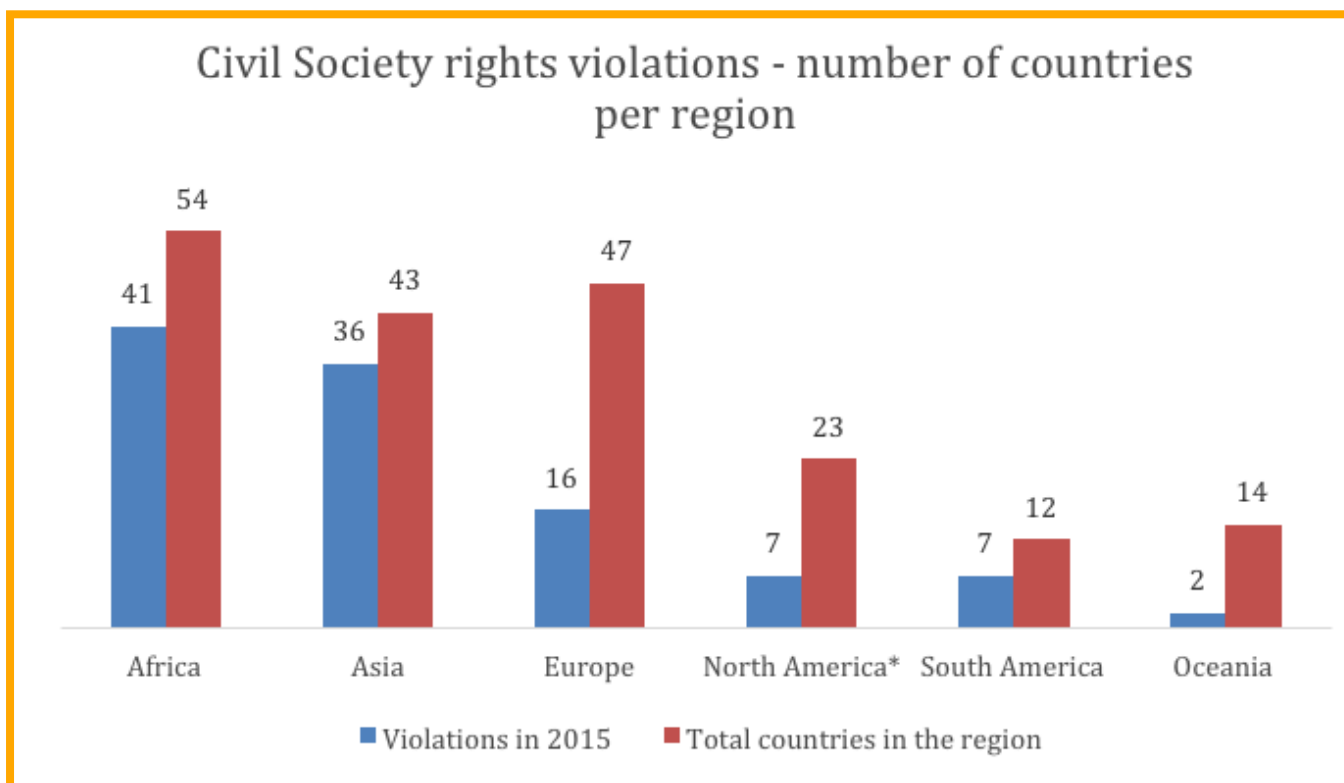
* In all three categories above, attacks on individuals are understood to include intimidation, harassment (through the courts or otherwise), assault, torture, disappearance, or assassination

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

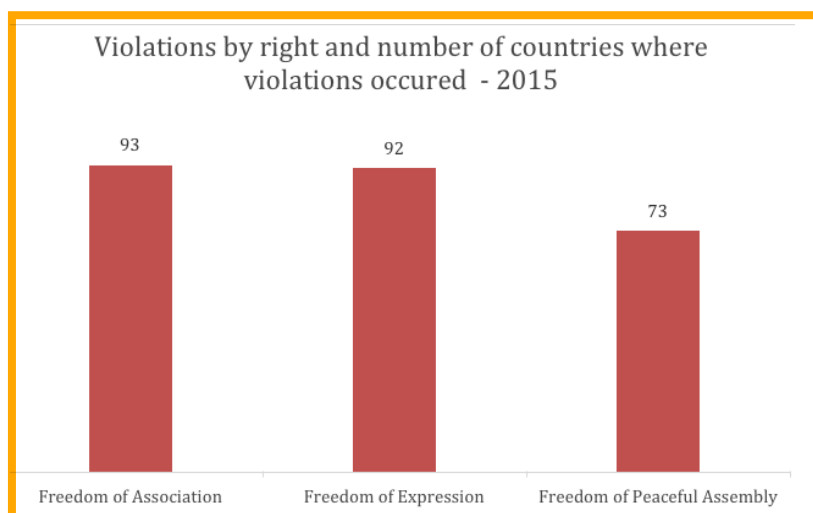
*North America here includes Central America and Caribbean countries.

Serious violations of core civil society freedoms took place on all continents in 2015. Although Africa and Asia continued to account for the lion's share of the countries on the list, South America also has an alarmingly high proportion of countries exhibiting grave violations. Notably, a significant number of European countries are also on the list.

Of the three core civil society freedoms, the freedom of association was most frequently violated. In other words, the right to set up, join or operate a formal or informal group to take collective action was most imperilled, affecting 85% of the countries. An almost equal number of countries the freedom of expression, which includes the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas, was violated. In two thirds of the countries on the list, freedom of peaceful assembly, that is, the right to gather publicly or privately to collectively express, promote, pursue and defend common ideas or interests, was violated.



TRENDS



States and non-state actors continued to use a combination of methods to clamp down on civil society rights.

Incidents of harassment and physical violence against civil society activists and both professional and citizen journalists increased. A rise in targeted assassinations was also noted. Other severe forms of punishment meted out to civil

society activists included torture, revocation of citizenship, travel restrictions and imprisonment through unfair trials. Enforced disappearances, general intimidation and surveillance were rife.

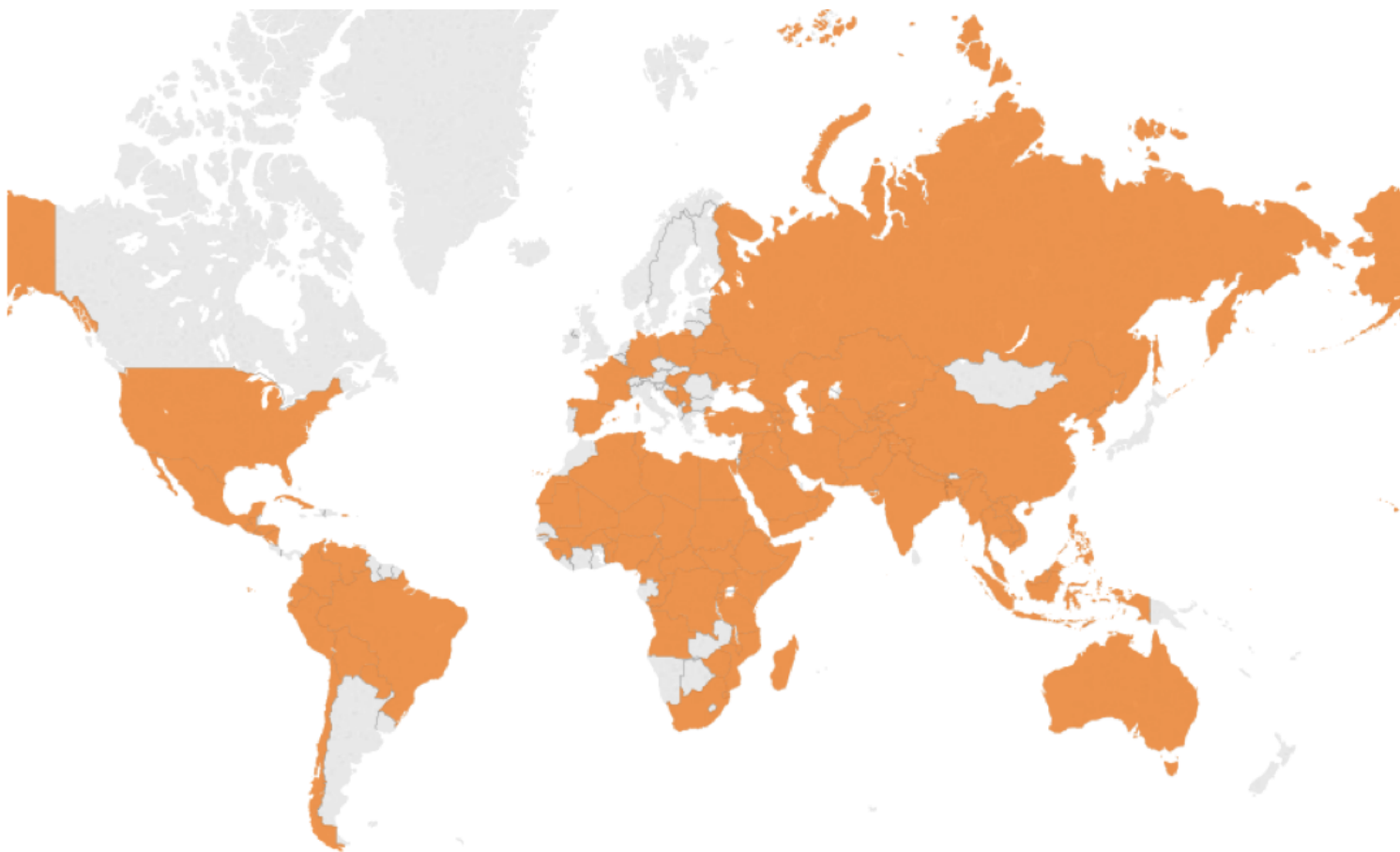
Restrictive legislation meant to hinder civil society organisations' ability to protect excluded groups and promote human rights was drawn up in a number of states. Security and anti-terrorism laws were regularly used to curtail privacy, restrict protest, criminalise activists, journalists and bloggers and close down civil society organisations.

State agents, and in particular police forces, continued to overstep their powers by using excessive force against peaceful protestors. Intimidation tactics included the use of live ammunition, water cannons with capsaicin liquid, tear gas and baton charges on unarmed protestors. Such attacks took place in both authoritarian states and relatively stable democratic ones. In addition, disruption of protests linked to extractive, agribusiness and construction megaprojects was widespread.

Civil society organisations, particularly those engaged in the promotion of electoral democracy, good governance and anti-corruption measures were on the receiving end of public threats from high-ranking officials and other politicians. Many of these threats were accompanied by the familiar allegations that civil society organisations were working with foreign powers to overthrow or destabilise the government. Such threats often preceded the approval of restrictive legislation designed to control the activities of civil society. Complex factors, such as religious and ideological extremism, ethnic conflict and the rise of right-wing politicians led to curtailment of civil society freedoms by non-state actors.

The internet is becoming the new frontier in the global campaign to silence civil society. As physical spaces become increasingly constrained, more activism takes place online, simultaneously opening up new avenues for citizen mobilisation and exposing activists to the pervasive risk of electronic surveillance. In 2015, numerous states monitored and blocked social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, in addition to a wide range of other news and networking websites. Many bloggers and online activists were threatened, detained and sometimes imprisoned. Social media and internet regulations were also mooted to further constrain online freedom of expression.

SUMMARY OF ABUSES BY COUNTRY



[CLICK HERE TO BROWSE AN INTERACTIVE VERSION OF THIS MAP.](#)

Map of the 109 countries where civil society rights were significantly violated in 2015

COUNTRY	SUMMARY OF ABUSES IN 2015	FREE ASSOCIATION VIOLATIONS	FREE EXPRESSION VIOLATIONS	FREE ASSEMBLY VIOLATIONS
Afghanistan	The government closed down 250 NGOs for failing to comply with reporting requirements. There were numerous violent attacks on journalists, and perpetrators were not held to account. Activists, and particularly women human rights defenders continued to face huge risks as armed conflict and terrorist attacks escalated. Three human rights defenders were assassinated; some protests were broken up and demonstrators beaten.			

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Algeria	Demonstrators were imprisoned for taking part in 'unauthorised protests' and the authorities continued to block the registration of certain human rights organisations. Human rights defenders were also attacked, tortured and imprisoned. Defamation laws were used to silence dissent and state media vilified human rights defenders. The authorities further limited free speech by censoring news content and arresting journalists.			
Angola	The state's campaign to silence criticism and stifle peaceful activism was exemplified by its treatment of 17 activists who were unlawfully detained and held in dire conditions for meeting to read a book on nonviolent mobilisation. Many other human rights defenders faced harassment as the government also passed a restrictive NGO law and denied citizens the right to protest.			
Armenia	Police beat and detained more than 200 protestors during officially approved demonstrations in Yerevan and damaged journalists' equipment as they attempted to cover the unrest. Journalists experienced several attacks during the year as impunity prevailed for the perpetrators. LGBTI activists faced harassment, discrimination and physical violence.			
Australia	Australia's robust civic space was threatened at both the federal and state levels through the continued implementation of measures to curb criticism of the treatment of refugees and environmental damage, and to allegedly prevent terrorist attacks. As a result, critical advocacy organisations were under increased scrutiny and financial pressure.			
Azerbaijan	Civil society organisations, activists and the media continued to face an almost total denial of basic rights. Independent news websites were blocked and activists were harassed through the courts and imprisoned on trumped up charges. Protest remained virtually impossible. A human rights defender was killed in August, after receiving threats.			
Bahrain	Human rights defenders and civil society leaders continued to be rounded up and unlawfully detained, as authorities attempted to suppress all dissent or calls for democratic reform. Some activists also had their citizenship revoked. Social media users, bloggers and journalists were targeted through defamation laws. Police used excessive force against demonstrators.			

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Bangladesh	A state crackdown on civil society led to the use of excessive – and sometimes deadly – force against protestors, a blanket ban on protests in the capital Dhaka, mass arrests and the targeted harassment of activists in the courts. Online activists faced increased restrictions on their freedom of expression as the state made plans to introduce a restrictive new NGO law.			
Belarus	A presidential decree made it harder for human rights organisations to use foreign sources to fund activities, while authorities continued to clamp down on activists through intimidation and the deregistration of CSOs. Citizens were denied access to independent news websites and hackers attacked the websites of human rights organisations.			
Benin	In May 2015, the government placed a ban on protests until the end of the election process (March 2016). During the year, demonstrators were dispersed with teargas and protesting students were fired on with live ammunition. Journalists were also threatened after criticising the president.			
Bolivia	The police used violence to break up protests by miners who wanted the government to address developmental problems in their region. Many CSOs resorted to self-censorship as a coping mechanism in the face of harassment against activists and organisations. NGOs were publicly named for being “irregular” and not complying with the registration law.			
Bosnia and Herzegovina	There were at least 20 documented cases of threats and intimidation of media workers. Vague language in social media legislation in the Srpska region criminalised “attempts to disturb the public peace”. Fines were imposed for offensive or disruptive social media content.			
Brazil	There were numerous violations of the basic rights of journalists, protestors and civil society activists. Several indigenous peoples’ rights activists, bloggers and journalists were intimidated, violently attacked and assassinated. Protection mechanisms for human rights defenders failed as several activists were harassed through the courts and excluded from professional life because of their activities.			
Burkina Faso	Police fired at protestors killing 14 people after an attempted coup. Freedom of the media was severely restricted with press violations punishable with prison sentences. Several physical attacks, threats against journalists and destruction of equipment by soldiers were documented.			

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Burundi	Political turmoil quashed civil society freedoms as human rights defenders were killed, attacked or forced into hiding or exile. Private radio stations were forced off the air as journalists also bore the brunt of escalating repression. Protestors frequently clashed with police who used excessive force including live ammunition. CSOs' bank accounts were frozen.			
Cambodia	A restrictive new NGO law limited the freedom of association by imposing mandatory registration for CSOs, over which the authorities have unfettered discretion. Activists working on land issues continued to be persecuted and arrested. Online expression was limited through arrests. Protestors were denied the right to assemble on multiple occasions.			
Cameroon	Human rights defenders who criticised the government were arbitrarily detained and persecuted through the courts. The government passed new anti-terrorism laws that infringe the freedom of assembly. Break-ins and theft of electronic equipment and sensitive documents from civil society activists' homes and offices were reported, while others received threatening calls demanding that they stop their work.			
Central African Republic	Political instability and violence against civilians continued to obstruct the space for peaceful citizen and civil society actions. As armed groups continued to hold sway, the rule of law remained suspended in many parts of the country despite progress made towards elections. Freedom of religious expression for both Muslims and Christians remained constrained in some areas of the country.			
Chad	Chad tightened anti-terror laws, undermining protections for the freedoms of assembly and expression in the process. Authorities also maintained control over media, including social media. A short video from March 2015 captured men in uniform whipping protestors who had been rounded up after a demonstration. Human rights defenders were arbitrarily detained and harassed.			
Chile	In Southern Chile the police used disproportionate force against peaceful indigenous protestors, a group that was especially targeted. For instance, in September excessive force was used to disperse Mapuche community activists peacefully occupying a government building in the city of Temuco.			

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China	After several decades of repression, Chinese activists described 2015 as one of the worst years in the on-going crackdown against lawyers, activists and scholars. In the face of an increasingly vocal public and more visible civil society activity, authorities tightened restrictions on citizens' freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression under the pretence of 'protecting national security and preventing terrorism'.			
Colombia	Violent attacks and the murder of journalists, lawyers, community and religious activists and indigenous peoples occurred frequently, making Colombia one of the most dangerous countries in the world to be a reporter or a human rights defender. The structure of media ownership, and threats against journalists – especially those covering corruption, crime, human rights abuses, and elections – undermined the freedom of expression.			
Cuba	Restrictions on all freedoms remained in place despite the reestablishment of diplomatic relationships with the United States. Security forces continued to harass and intimidate individuals and groups organised for political purposes outside of the Communist Party. All traditional media are state-owned, with no editorial independence, and internet access, although increased, still remains very limited. The use of short-term arbitrary arrests as an intimidation tactic against human rights defenders, independent journalists, political dissidents and protestors dramatically increased.			
Djibouti	Security services massacred 27 people and wounded 150 during a peaceful public gathering in December. A leader of a human rights organisation was later shot and denied medical care. The organisation's offices were raided and computer equipment confiscated. Another activist was charged with criminal defamation in connection with the massacre.			
Democratic Republic of Congo	Attempts to peacefully oppose the extension of the president's mandate resulted in a violent crackdown on fundamental freedoms that saw at least 42 protestors killed, civil society leaders imprisoned and television, radio and internet services interrupted. Domestic and international CSOs continued to face significant barriers to their legitimate activities.			
East Timor	Traditionally a country where press freedoms were respected, Timor-Leste suffered a decline in those freedoms with the introduction of a new press law which requires domestic and foreign journalists to be registered with a government-established body. Some beatings of journalists were also reported during the year.			

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Ecuador	The government attempted to shut down the website of the only remaining media freedom NGO in the country. It also increased its capacity to intercept digital communications while responding to escalating social protests with increased police pressure and by infiltrating demonstrations. Environmental and land rights activists faced a range of threats and attacks.			
Egypt	New anti-terrorism legislation allowed the government to expand its crackdown on fundamental freedoms. Scores of protestors and civil society members were arbitrarily arrested and tortured in detention, and many NGOs were closed down. Media freedoms were blatantly violated: a number of journalists were jailed and a cybercrime law limiting online freedoms was drafted.			
El Salvador	The murder of a transgender activist highlighted the on-going violence against human rights defenders. Specific targeting of women human rights defenders was also reported. The number of criminal violations against the media rose substantially.			
Equatorial Guinea	The state continued its campaign of repression against civil society and free speech by arresting activists who were critical of the country's hosting the African Cup of Nations. Protesting students were tear-gassed, beaten and detained for raising issues related to scholarships. The state retained control of the media.			
Eritrea	Few countries provide worse conditions for civil society freedoms than Eritrea. In 2015, this all-out assault maintained a climate of fear in which few people dared to voice dissent. The crackdown on freedom continued to result in mass exodus. Media space and internet freedoms remained almost non-existent.			
Ethiopia	Although a group of bloggers arrested on terrorism charges were acquitted, the persecution of journalists continued as newspapers were shut down and restrictions were imposed on access to international media news websites. The operation of civil society organisations in the area of human rights and democracy continued to be difficult. Protests concerning land use were violently repressed, leading to the deaths of dozens of protestors.			
France	The Parliament introduced an Emergency Law after a series of high profile terrorist attacks in Paris. The law curtails freedoms of expression and association, allowing for increased surveillance and the interception of citizens' communications. The state of emergency also limited the ability to hold public demonstrations, for instance in the lead up to the Climate Summit (COP 21).			

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Gambia	A number of journalists and artists were arrested, tortured, detained and/or forced to flee as the government sought to repress dissent. Police used excessive force against protestors. LGBTI groups faced particularly harsh treatment, including physical assaults.			
Georgia	Civil society raised fears that the government had interfered with media organisations in an attempt to strengthen its position. Citizens faced undue restrictions on their freedom of assembly on a number of occasions as police sought to restrict protests. LGBTI rights defenders faced specific obstacles, including discrimination, harassment, smear campaigns and physical violence.			
Germany	Human rights defenders faced new challenges as a result of concerns about terrorism and an increased focus on security and surveillance. In July, the authorities opened an investigation on charges of treason against two journalists for reporting on surveillance by the country's security agency. The attorney general eventually resigned over the incident and the investigation was closed. The rise of right wing anti-immigrant groups vitiated the atmosphere for civil society to operate.			
Guatemala	Protests against poor governance succeeded in removing the president who was accused of corruption. Violence, killings and intimidation of human rights defenders, journalists and trade unionists continued. Environmental and indigenous rights defenders were the worst affected. There was continued impunity for past crimes against human rights defenders as well as intimidation of prosecutors, judges and lawyers.			
Guinea	Sporadic but serious assaults on activists took place as a presidential election was held. Although the situation was largely peaceful compared to other polls in the past, the police were accused of clamping down violently on opposition street protestors leading to deaths in the campaign period.			
Honduras	There was an increase in crimes against journalists and civil society activists, especially LGBTI defenders and women human rights defenders. Although a law was enacted to protect human rights defenders, it was not adequately implemented and civil society was not widely consulted. The government was reported to have purchased spyware software. Civil society continues to face burdensome administrative requirements.			

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Hungary	The environment for media, especially those questioning the government's treatment of migrants, weakened further. Independent media experienced self-censorship due to increased litigation against media houses. Civil society organisations critical of the government were harassed and threatened with the loss of their registration.			
India	The government cancelled the licenses of 4 470 NGOs under the Foreign Contribution Regulations Act, which makes it hard for NGOs to receive foreign funds. Detention, judicial harassment and arbitrary arrests were recorded against human rights defenders and protestors. Journalists, authors and artists faced harassment from the state and other interest groups. Some laws against free speech were lifted by the Supreme Court.			
Indonesia	Jakarta authorities issued regulations restricting freedom of assembly to only three specific spots in the city, but as a result of pressure from civil society more lenient regulations were issued. The National Counterterrorism Agency urged government to revise freedom of assembly and speech laws to better confront terror. An activist protesting illegal sand mining was stoned to death and three human rights defenders were assassinated.			
Iran	Iran was one of the most censored countries in 2015. Blasphemy laws were used to curtail discussions on religion and corruption. State-owned and private media stigmatised human rights defenders through defamatory accusations. Human rights activists suffered judicial harassment, were held incommunicado, tortured and even jailed for inciting violence. Media was tightly controlled. The state allegedly ordered media to praise its nuclear plans.			
Iraq	There was a slight improvement in the political environment but violence was still used against protesters. Civil society activists, especially those working on religious and minority rights and women human rights defenders faced increasing threats, torture and ill treatment from militant Islamist groups and state actors. Many fled to other countries in the region.			
Israel and Palestine	Draft legislation requiring CSOs that receive foreign funding to- among other restrictions - wear badges identifying themselves as "foreign agents" was introduced in Parliament. Political figures used threats to silence journalists or to cause them to self-censor. In the occupied Palestinian territories, activists faced prolonged administrative detention, military trials and travel bans.			

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Jordan	New administrative regulations burdened civil society organisations with strict procedures to secure authorisation to benefit from foreign funding. The freedom of expression was violated through an overbroad application of counter terrorism laws. Charges were brought against at least nine journalists, An activist was imprisoned for a Facebook post criticising the United Arab Emirates.			
Kazakhstan	An administrative code came into effect imposing severe punishments for leaders of organisations carrying out activities beyond those defined by their statutes. Amendments to the NGO law restricting foreign funding were pending presidential approval. Restrictions on media freedom were recorded, and civil society activists were detained for social media posts. LGBTI rights defenders suffered physical attacks. Protesters were routinely jailed.			
Kenya	The bank accounts of several civil society organisations were frozen by the state using the anti-terrorism law. A controversial bill was passed to punish journalists for defaming of Members of Parliament. Terrorism concerns were used as a pretext to target civil society, and several protests were unduly restricted and repressed. Death threats were reported against some activists.			
Kuwait	A new cybercrime law took effect, extending parts of Kuwait's restrictive Printing and Publishing Law to internet use. Individuals can receive prison sentences and fines for insulting religious figures. Critics, especially online activists, were routinely given prison sentences for insulting Arab leaders. Citizenship was revoked as punishment for some human rights defenders.			
Kyrgyzstan	Civil society activists were subjected to smear campaigns depicting them as driven by foreign interests. A draft foreign agents law was drawn up. LGBTI activists were targeted and intimidated while the general atmosphere for the exercise of civil society freedoms remained tense.			
Laos	The Ministry of Home Affairs amended a 2009 decree on civil society organisations adding a requirement that they get government permission to receive foreign funding and sign-offs from various government departments that could curtail their work and independence. Impunity for human rights violations prevailed. No progress was made in investigating the case of a prominent civil society leader who disappeared three years ago.			

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Lebanon	NGOs reported judicial harassment, especially for those working on cases involving the disappearance and arrests of human rights defenders. Police forcefully dispersed demonstrators during the widespread anti-government protests. Excessive force, including live ammunition, was used against protestors, dozens of whom were charged with assault and vandalism. Defamation laws were used against bloggers and journalists.			
Libya	Media freedom suffered as journalists received threats from militias. Human rights defenders were tortured and ill-treated by both state and non-state agents. The increasing influence of militant Islamist groups posed physical threats for civil society members, particularly those advocating for the rights of religious, minorities and women's rights. Many human rights defenders fled the country and at least one was assassinated.			
Macedonia	The government carried out a systematic campaign to suppress and persecute critical voices. Ahead of elections wiretapping of dissenting voices was a major concern. A mass surveillance operation that targeted opposition politicians and civil society activists led to protests which were met heavy-handedly by the police, including excessive violence and illegal detentions.			
Madagascar	Civil society activists, particularly those dealing with environmental issues, risked criminal charges and prison sentences for their opposition to extractive industries. One activist had his personal communications leaked to the media, was sued for defamation under a cybercrime law, and received a six month prison sentence and a hefty fine. In August, security forces violently dispersed a student demonstration, and a student leader was badly beaten and then convicted on public disorder charges.			
Malawi	Although no new legal restrictions were imposed and improvement in legislation led to better conditions for the freedom of expression, civil society organisations' ability to receive support for disaster relief was threatened. As the country suffered from severe floods, NGOs providing services to flood victims were instructed to work through government structures, and donors were exhorted to support only registered civil society organisations.			

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Malaysia	The government increasingly used provisions of the Penal Code against critics. Charges were brought against human rights defenders for not giving the police advance notification of protests. Mass arrests of protesters occurred on occasion mostly for refusal to disperse. Access to media was limited and a new law to police the internet was mooted. The number of reported arrests under the Sedition Act rose sharply from 44 in 2014 to 200 in 2015.			
Maldives	Human rights lawyers faced threats, and one was stabbed after giving a speech criticising the government. Hundreds of opposition supporters were arrested during a mass protest. A prominent human rights journalist has been missing since August 2014 and no progress was made in the investigation during 2015.			
Mali	A climate of violence affected civil society freedoms regardless of the peace agreement that was signed in June, with at least 30 attacks against humanitarian aid agencies in 2015. The state response to non-state violence included arbitrary arrests, torture, executions and other abuses. In August, peaceful demonstrators protesting taxes were arrested and criminally charged (then provisionally released a few months later). UN soldiers used excessive force against violent demonstrators, killing three. A journalist was killed.			
Mauritania	Threats and jailing of anti-slavery activists continued, although some were released. A blogger received the death penalty under archaic apostasy legislation. Arbitrary detention and judicial harassment were commonly used to target human rights defenders. New legislation threatening the freedoms of association and assembly was drafted.			
Mexico	Journalists active in denouncing human rights abuses and drug trafficking were killed. The government was reported to have purchased surveillance software threatening privacy rights. Eight human rights defenders were assassinated, and many others, particularly advocates for indigenous people's land rights, suffered judicial harassment, physical attacks, threats and intimidation. Women human rights defenders were reported to be at particular risk.			
Moldova	Protestors demonstrating against corruption and economic mismanagement were arrested for inciting violence while the state broadcaster disrupted the broadcast of the protests. LGBTI rights defenders faced discrimination, harassment, smear campaigns and physical attacks.			

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Montenegro	State actors escalated harassment of protestors, especially opposition supporters. LGBTI protests were also blocked. State media was used to single out and attack human rights defenders. NGOs reported the police illegally monitored the internet and mobile phones.			
Morocco and Western Sahara	Judicial harassment increased and civil society activities were banned or disrupted. Several civil society organisations were unable to register or renew registration while others had their offices raided. There was increased intolerance for journalists. Human rights defenders were subjected to travel bans, while those detained/imprisoned faced torture from state agents.			
Mozambique	The assassination of a prominent constitutional lawyer raised serious concerns. Attacks against journalists continued. A newspaper editor was charged with “abusing the freedom of the press” following a Facebook post.			
Myanmar	Human rights defenders, especially environmental activists challenging development projects, faced intimidation, physical attacks, judicial harassment and imprisonment. Internet activists also faced prosecution. A new broadcasting law was criticised for granting the state wide powers over the media. Student protests were violently dispersed.			
Nauru	An amendment to the criminal code granted authorities wide powers to impose jail sentences for a variety of free speech categories. The government also restricted the internet, blocking Facebook and other sites for weeks, ostensibly as part of efforts to protect children from abuse.			
Nepal	Political unrest continued despite the approval of a new constitution. The interruption of trade routes with India led to nationwide shortages of basic supplies, which disrupted civil society work, including relief and reconstruction efforts following the 2015 earthquakes. The police violently broke up political protests by firing live ammunition into crowds of demonstrators, killing two and injuring hundreds.			
Nicaragua	Two human rights defenders were assassinated and media self-censorship was rampant due to fear. A draft law was proposed to create a state company to manage broadband services. The Sovereign Security Act, which greatly expanded the definition of security threats, came into effect. Government informed CSOs that they would not be able to directly receive funding from international sources but only through government institutions. Several protests, including some against the Inter-oceanic Canal megaproject, were repressed.			

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Niger	Human rights defenders were arbitrarily detained and harassed through the courts. Freedom of expression was limited as the government battled Islamist insurgent group Boko Haram. Journalists were routinely detained, and two newspapers were banned for a month.			
Nigeria	The country received praise for a peaceful election although protests by supporters of the Independent Peoples of Biafra were repressed. A restrictive Social Media Bill was seen as an attempt to curtail the freedom of expression. In battling insurgent groups including Boko Haram, the government was accused of encouraging media self-censorship. Some physical attacks on human rights defenders were also reported.			
North Korea	Basic civil society freedoms continued to be heavily curtailed along-with any remnants of independent civil society activity. Nearly all information made available to the public came from the state-controlled Korean Central News Agency. Civic space remained almost completely non-existent.			
Oman	Human rights defenders were repeatedly detained and harassed, and were imposed travel bans. Some were also subjected to police inquiries and prosecution, held incommunicado, and sentenced to prison on charges of committing or inciting violence. Cyber-crime legislation was used to stifle the freedom of expression on the internet.			
Pakistan	Both authoritarian state actors and extremist non-state actors curtailed civil society freedoms. As a result of a new policy, some international NGOs were denied registration and subjected to additional reporting requirements and a new validation process, which also burdened local CSOs receiving foreign funding. A bill controlling internet communications was proposed, with online activists already facing prosecution and imprisonment. Two human rights defenders were assassinated and others were banned from overseas travel for their advocacy work. Protestors routinely faced police repression.			
Paraguay	Human rights defenders working on environmental, indigenous peoples' and land rights issues faced physical attacks, threats, intimidation, and smear campaigns. Women human rights defenders were specifically targeted. HRDs also faced suspension from professional associations for their advocacy work. Protests, particularly those by unionised workers and peasants, were repressed by police.			

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Peru	Requirements for renewal of NGO registration were modified and reporting duties and controls were increased. Socio-environmental protest increased, and a state of emergency was declared in three provinces following violent clashes with police. Human rights defenders, particularly those opposing extractive industries, were targeted. Women's rights advocating for sexual and reproductive rights were also at risk.			
Philippines	Human rights defenders were judicially harassed, intimidated and put under surveillance. At least 31 human rights defenders were killed, mostly because of activism related to environmental, land or indigenous peoples' issues. The context remained hostile for the independent press, with seven journalists reported killed.			
Poland	Legislative changes were proposed to centralise state authority and reduce the independence of the media. The national broadcaster was one of the first targets, with its head now being directly appointed by the government. Right-wing rhetoric from the government and efforts to undermine the judiciary weakened civil society freedoms.			
Republic of the Congo	The Ras-Le-Bol citizen movement's calls for political reforms led to the arbitrary arrest of several of its leaders on charges of disrupting public order and conducting unauthorised demonstrations. The police disrupted peaceful student marches and other demonstrations, sometimes with excessive force. During times of increased tension – such as before a controversial constitutional referendum in October – internet access and text messaging were blocked to 'prevent illegal reporting' of election results.			
Russia	Civil society organisations, including international ones, were singled out as "foreign agents", fined, stigmatised and even forced to shut down. Some foreign CSOs were banned. Human rights defenders, including but not exclusively LGBTI groups, suffered harassment and smear campaigns, and many were forced into exile. Peaceful protesters were fined and jailed. Access to independent news websites was blocked.			
Rwanda	The authorities maintained tight control on civil society freedoms. One of the few remaining independent CSOs suffered police interference at its general meeting. There were attempts to hijack the leadership of groups viewed as independent. Human rights defenders were harassed and arbitrarily detained while broadcast by the BBC in Kinyarwanda was suspended.			

COUNTRY	SUMMARY OF ABUSES IN 2015	FREE ASSOCIATION VIOLATIONS	FREE EXPRESSION VIOLATIONS	FREE ASSEMBLY VIOLATIONS
Saudi Arabia	Human rights defenders were stigmatised in the media, banned from traveling, subjected to torture, politically motivated prosecution and arbitrary imprisonment. Lashings and executions were used as legal punishment, especially against critics of the royal family. Anti-terrorism and cyber-space laws were used against human rights defenders and writers. Blasphemy laws and general intolerance stifled discussion on religious issues. The right to protest remained heavily restricted.			
Serbia	Media personnel continued to report harassment and attacks, and perpetrators were rarely investigated and brought to justice. The Prime Minister publicly vilified journalists, calling them liars.			
Sierra Leone	Restrictions on freedoms increased during the state of emergency. Arrests of opposition members, bans on peaceful protests, and police repression of demonstrations also increased. In August, a radio programme was suspended on national security grounds. In December, a newspaper editor was arrested and criminally charged for allegedly publishing false information on political violence. Earlier, a citizen was criminally charged for forwarding a WhatsApp message considered to be defamatory to the president.			
Singapore	Human rights defenders, especially those using the internet for their work, faced judicial harassment, prosecution and imprisonment. Two editors were arrested on archaic sedition charges and a blogger was ordered to pay a steep sum in libel damages to the Prime Minister. Attempts to stage peaceful marches were obstructed.			
Somalia	Civil society freedoms were restricted in the name of the fight against extremist group Al Shabaab. Two human rights defenders were killed, and cases of arbitrary detention and judicial harassment of activists were reported. Journalists also suffered arbitrary arrests and other forms of persecution, and six were targeted in gun attacks or suicide bombings. A new National Communications Act threatening the freedom of expression came into effect.			
South Africa	Police used force to break up various protests against poor service delivery by municipalities. Students protesting against higher education fees were tear-gassed and arrested. The government threatened to cut off advertising revenue to media that criticises it.			

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South Korea	A peaceful demonstration was met with harsh repression in November 2015, including excessive use of force causing injuries to several demonstrators, the imprisonment of a number of union leaders and police raids on their organisations' offices. The police also responded with force and detained demonstrators and human rights defenders protesting corruption and seeking an independent and impartial investigation into the Sewol Ferry Disaster in other instances.			
South Sudan	Several prominent civil society organisations were deregistered for unclear reasons and others were put under investigation. A human rights defender was assassinated, and another went missing. Under a newly enacted National Security Service Law, civil society activists were arrested, interrogated and kept in detention. A highly restrictive NGO bill was introduced for parliamentary consideration. Threats against the press increased as the government fought rebel forces.			
Spain	The controversial Basic Law for the Protection of Public Security took effect, limiting the right of public assembly by imposing fines for conduct such as "disrupting citizen safety" near legislative buildings or photographing or video recording security forces without authorisation.			
Sudan	Prominent human rights organisations were deregistered and shut down. Stigmatisation, judicial harassment and persecution of human rights defenders intensified under the 2010 National Intelligence and Security Act. Several detained human rights defenders were held incommunicado and tortured, and four were killed. Women's rights defenders were also targeted. Print publications of several newspapers were confiscated. Protests over a range of issues were violently suppressed.			
Swaziland	Civil society freedoms remained restricted. Human rights defenders, including trade union activists, were routinely harassed and persecuted for exercising their rights to organise, voice their demands and protest. Demonstrators were routinely silenced by the police and the media remained suppressed.			
Syria	Human rights defenders were systematically detained, held incommunicado, and subjected to torture and ill treatment by both state and non-state actors, including extremist religious groups. Those advocating for women's rights were specifically targeted. Prisoners of conscience were not released despite international campaigns. Several journalists were killed for their work.			

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Tajikistan	Several civil society organisations, mostly active on human rights issues, were audited by various government agencies, and one was sued by tax authorities seeking to close it down. New regulations will require declaration of foreign funds on a special registry. Harassed LGBTI human rights defenders were driven to anonymity out of fear for their lives. Access to independent news websites was blocked.			
Tanzania	The new Statistics Act and Cybercrimes Act restricted the freedom of expression by criminalising the publication of unauthorised data and allowing police to seize computers without a court warrant. The new laws also forced people to disclose information stored in computers or contained in emails, while information can be demanded from internet and mobile phone network providers.			
Thailand	Judicial harassment of human rights defenders intensified as the military junta consolidated its power. Although many activists were eventually acquitted, rulings often arrived after long periods of detention. A land rights defender was murdered, while others suffered harassment and surveillance for opposing mining projects. Impunity for abuses prevailed. Activists using the internet for their work risked prosecution and imprisonment, and protesters faced arbitrary arrest.			
Togo	A number of human rights defenders suffered physical attacks. Harassment through surveillance was also reported. A law was proposed to impose steep fines and jail terms for publishing “false news”. Several demonstrations were banned, and excessive force was used against peaceful protestors.			
Tunisia	A new counterterrorism bill criminalised “denigration” of the police and security forces, imposed harsh sentences for divulging “national security secrets,” and shielded security forces from criminal liability. Journalists and bloggers faced publishing challenges. Although an LGBTI organisation was finally allowed to register, it remained the steady target of hate speech and incitement to violence.			
Turkey	The government used media blackouts and blocked access to Twitter and news sites it deemed related to terrorist activity. Journalists and HRDs faced harassment and arrests, and a prominent human rights advocate was assassinated. LGBTI groups were under increased pressure. New regulations strengthened police powers during demonstrations and excessive police force was repeatedly used against protesters. At least 99 demonstrators were killed by bombs at a peace rally.			

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Turkmenistan	All print and broadcast media remained controlled by the state, and government critics faced judicial harassment. A restrictive visa regime prevented human rights defenders from participating in international forums. Harassment and attacks forced LGBTI activists to work in anonymity. New regulations established prior notification requirements for public assemblies.			
United Arab Emirates	Government critics were arrested and prosecuted, with persecution extending to their family members. Human rights defenders faced travel bans and were subjected to incommunicado detention, torture and ill treatment while in custody. The vague provisions of a new law allegedly against hatred and discrimination further eroded freedoms of association and expression both online and offline. Citizens were routinely detained for exercising their right to assemble.			
Uganda	An NGO bill imposed excessive controls, deliberately burdened CSOs with time-consuming requirements and reporting obligations, and restricted the employment of foreign nationals. Human rights defenders, particularly those campaigning against land grabs, faced physical attacks, repeated police summoning and interrogation, arbitrary detention and judicial harassment. Activists' homes and offices were also broken into and electronic equipment and sensitive documents were stolen.			
Ukraine	Many foreign journalists, as well as films and books produced in Russia, were barred from entering the country. LGBTI rights defenders were subjected to discrimination, harassment, and physical violence and smear campaigns.			
United States of America	Pervasive surveillance of activists and civil society groups particularly those working on racial equality and justice, coupled with militarisation of police forces remained a challenge to the exercise of civil society freedoms.			
Uzbekistan	Government critics were detained, searched, questioned, tortured, banned from travel, and imprisoned, and/or had their equipment confiscated. Three orders by the Ministry of Justice regulated visa procedures for foreigners working with Uzbek CSOs; programme reporting for CSOs; and prior authorisation requirements for all CSO events and other activities. Peaceful protesters were fined and jailed for violating restrictive public assembly laws.			

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Venezuela	Activists and journalists were harassed and criminalised, with regular public allegations levelled by senior government officials that they were working for foreign powers to destabilise the state. CSOs cooperating with UN and Inter-American mechanisms were especially harassed and accused of conspiracy. In reaction to protests in 2014, a decree allowed security forces to use deadly force against demonstrators. There were numerous significant violations of the freedom of expression.			
Vietnam	All basic civil society freedoms remained restricted. Human rights defenders and bloggers faced harassment, intimidation, physical assault, and imprisonment. Independent trade unions were not allowed to form. The country remained one of the most censored in the world.			
Yemen	Peaceful assemblies were violently disrupted, activists and politicians were arrested, and further restrictions were imposed on CSOs, dozens of which were forced to close. Human rights defenders were physically attacked and subjected to torture and ill treatment by both state and non-state actors particularly radical Islamist groups, and many fled the country. Several activists, media workers and journalists were killed.			
Zimbabwe	Senior politicians subjected CSOs to abusive language and openly denigrated them as agents of Western powers. There were cases of arbitrary detention and judicial harassment of human rights defenders. An activist who opposed the President disappeared. Protests related to economic mismanagement were violently crushed.			



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