

GLOBAL ASSESSMENT

ON PROTEST RIGHTS 2022



CIVICUS



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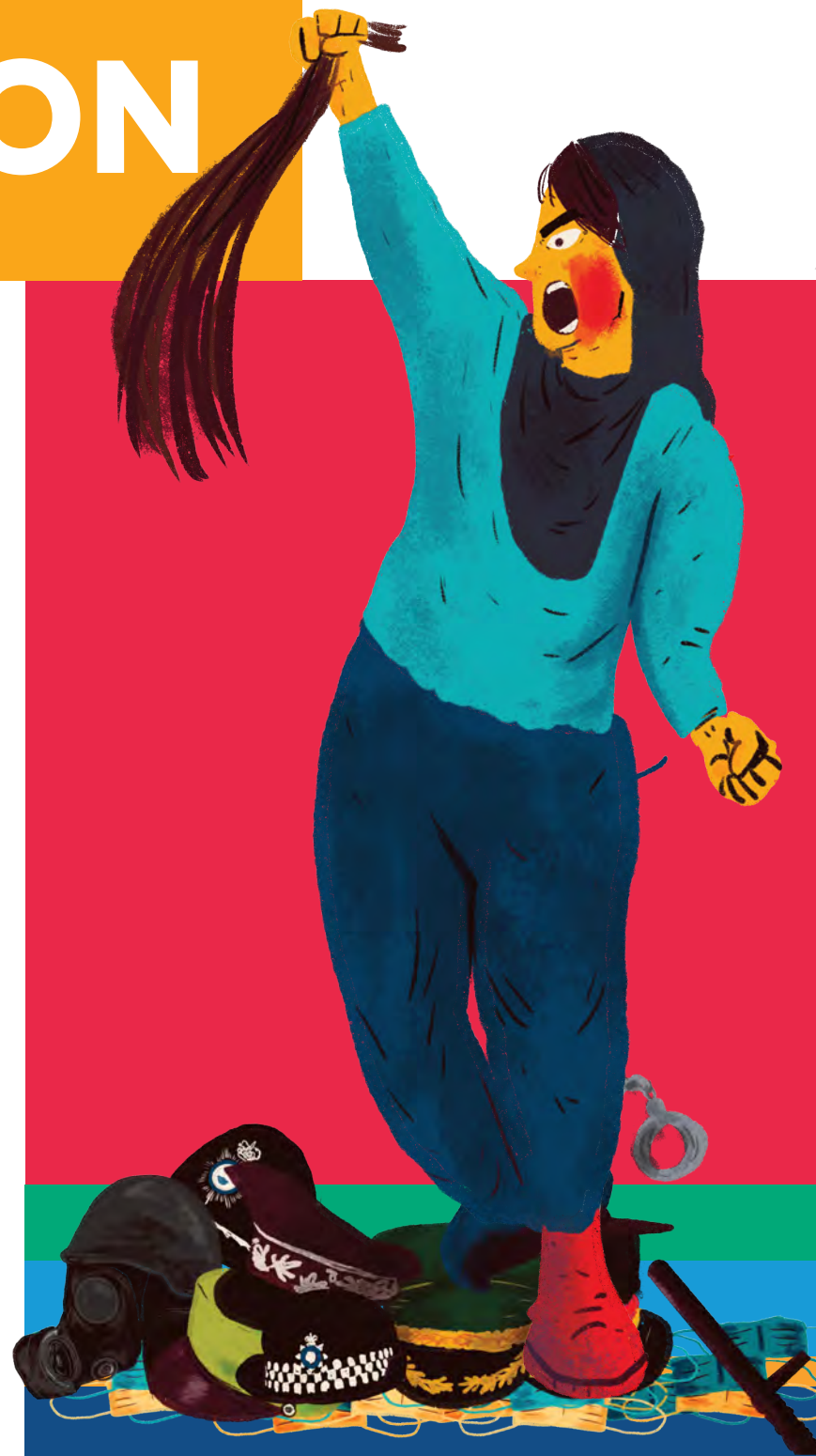
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INTRODUCTION

From mass protests demanding social and political change in Iran to protests around the world over the climate crisis and the rising cost of living, people continue to take to the streets to voice their opinions, express dissent and call for justice. But even though this fundamental right is guaranteed by international human rights law and standards, governments keep limiting these laws and restricting the right to protest.

Since 2017, the [CIVICUS Monitor](#) has tracked an ongoing crackdown on the right to peaceful assembly. Most recently governments have used the COVID-19 pandemic as a pretext to [further restrict](#) fundamental freedoms, including the right to protest. Despite this, people are continuing to mobilise, including by using creative and alternative forms of protest when pandemic restrictions are applied, such as masked and distanced demonstrations and online protests. Technology has broadened the opportunities for mobilising, but at the same time new challenges have emerged for critical voices, as governments expand their tactics to restrict online access and put people under surveillance.

Though challenges persist, protests continue to be a powerful and effective means of defending rights and advocating for their realisation. In 2022, the rising cost of food and fuel have [sparked](#) mobilisations against corruption, mismanagement and inequality. Mass protests have taken place in many countries around the world, even in authoritarian contexts. In some countries, smaller-scale protests have drawn attention to pressing issues. Protests initially sparked by regressive economic policies and increases in the cost of living have often turned into protests against corrupt political leaders and systemic injustice.



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According to CIVICUS Monitor data, protests took place in at least 131 countries during the past year, with the majority of them considered peaceful.¹



Out of 33 categories of violations of civic freedoms tracked by the CIVICUS Monitor, since 2020 the [detention of protesters](#) has been the number one violation. Detention is a pervasive practice used by the authorities to prevent and disrupt protests and punish protesters. Women, LGBTQI+ people, Indigenous people, Black people, migrants and other excluded groups often face harsher repression due to discriminatory and unjust practices.

While restrictions used by the authorities prior to protests are challenging to quantify, due to the different state elements involved and methods employed, this paper describes restrictions by illustrating some of the most significant cases documented by the CIVICUS Monitor in the past year.

Across the globe, governments are using a range of tactics to crack down on protests. Although international human rights law and standards establish that, as a general rule, states must [ensure](#) the right to peaceful assembly, restrictions of the right often begin even before any protest occurs. Authorities prevent demonstrations by refusing permission or blocking routes adjacent to a planned protest area. Organisers face intimidation, harassment and surveillance when planning a protest, and sometimes are subject to house arrest just before a protest.

¹ Out of all CIVICUS Monitor updates covering incidents related to protests, 17 per cent documented cases in which protests became violent because of the actions of protesters. Although isolated violent incidents might have occurred, protests were largely peaceful.

Restrictions that precede protests create a chilling environment by generating an atmosphere of fear and violence that discourages people from exercising their right to peaceful assembly. This means that protests are more common in countries with open and enabling civic space compared to closed and repressed environments.

Detention is not only used as a tactic to stop protesters taking part; it is also used to disrupt protests as people are gathering and during protests to break them up. Excessive force is also frequently deployed. International human rights law [establishes](#) that force should only be used if strictly unavoidable. However, excessive force was used in over 57 countries during the past year. In at least 24 countries, protesters were killed while peacefully protesting. And although every person should be able to [observe and report on](#) protests, journalists are often victims of violence and arrests while covering protests. At times, violations continue after protests, with the harassment and prosecution of protest organisers and participants.

Lack of accountability for freedom of peaceful assembly violations is common, despite the [obligations](#) placed on states under international human right law to provide adequate and prompt remedies to protesters whose rights have been violated.

This report does not provide an exhaustive list of restrictions faced by protesters. Rather, it seeks to expose the wide range of impediments and violations that protesters experience, highlighting the regional nuances and key cases that exemplify the tactics used to restrict the right to peaceful assembly.

DRIVERS OF PROTESTS

Over the past year economic, political and governance issues were key drivers of protests. The **spike in the prices** of fuel and food led to mass demonstrations against the rising cost of living. Inflation and shortage of essential goods, together with **economic mismanagement**, underpin **poverty** and **inequality**, which prompted numerous demonstrations demanding governments to confront the economic crises and end **corruption**.

Oppression and **abuse of power** were also common drivers of protests around the world, including mobilisations against military juntas and anti-coup protests. Demonstrations calling for **free and fair elections** and the request to **release political prisoners** also set the scene for many protest

The defence of human rights has also been at the centre of mass mobilisations. Restrictions on civic freedoms and **uneven rights for women** have also ignited many protests. Planetary problems have also been a driver, as the **climate crisis** intensifies, environmental and indigenous activists continue to take to the streets to hold policymakers and corporate leaders to account.



PART I: A CHILLING ENVIRONMENT FOR PROTESTS

Repressive governments create a chilling environment to hinder the free and full exercise of the right to peaceful assembly. Authorities use different measures in law, policy and practice to undermine the ability to mobilise, gather and take to the streets. In some countries, the law requires that people obtain authorisation to hold protests. In other countries, a legal requirement to notify the authorities in advance of a planned protest is misconstrued by them as meaning that permission is required before holding protests. Instances have also been documented of law enforcement officers arresting protest organisers and protesters ahead of protests as a tactic to prevent protests.

In some restrictive environments, the authorities apply outright bans on gatherings and protests. In countries such as Belarus, where popular movements sparked [mass protests](#) against the government and electoral fraud, the authorities have enacted laws and regulations aimed at preventing and undermining further protests. Internet blockages and attacks against protesters and protest organisers ahead of demonstrations are also common occurrences in multiple countries.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, states across the globe invoked legal and policy measures to curb the spread of the virus. However, many authorities imposed overly broad emergency powers and other measures to limit the right to gather, using the pandemic as a pretext.



The restrictions and violations that take place before protests have a chilling effect on the right to peaceful assembly in an attempt to discourage people from taking collective action. In countries with closed civic space, restrictions are often more severe and the consequences of protesting more serious. Over the past year, protests were documented in only 12 countries rated as closed by the CIVICUS Monitor, while protesting was widespread in countries rated as having more open civic space.

Total number of countries recording protests

1 Oct 2021-30 Sep 2022



SOURCE: CIVICUS MONITOR UPDATES—DATASET INCLUDES INFORMATION ON 155 COUNTRIES:

23 FROM THE AMERICAS, 37 FROM AFRICA, 36 FROM ASIA & PACIFIC, 42 FROM EUROPE & CENTRAL ASIA AND 17 FROM THE MENA REGION.

ANALYSIS BY REGION

In some **African** countries, such as [Angola](#), the country's constitution contains a legal provision requiring notification for protests, which is turned into an authorisation exercise, with authorisation frequently denied by the authorities.

Under the [Stage of Siege](#), which since May 2021 has imposed martial law in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's (DRC) conflict-ridden eastern provinces of Ituri and North Kivu, the military can search people's homes, ban meetings and publications, restrict movement and arrest anyone accused of disrupting public order. Additionally, civilians – including protesters – are prosecuted before military courts rather than civilian courts.

In [South Africa](#), the Johannesburg city government attempted to impose high fees for protests – ranging from ZAR 172 (approx. US\$10) for a picket convened by civil society to ZAR 15,000 (approx. US\$906) for a union strike march – arguing that protests require additional municipal services. Following a legal case initiated by civil society, the Johannesburg High Court sided with civil society in June 2022, finding the levying of such fees unconstitutional.

In [Kenya](#), the Public Order Act, enacted during British colonial rule when police were centralised, militarised and given extensive powers to exert control, requires that organisers of a public procession notify the authorities at least three days in advance. This provision, however, continues to be misused by law enforcement officers who grant or deny permission to protest at their arbitrary discretion. In many instances, the authorities deny permission to hold protests, as was seen on 28 June 2022 when a letter notifying the police about an intended protest by the Social Justice Centre working group, a Nairobi-based grassroots group, was rejected without explanation by the Officer Commanding Station in Kasarani.

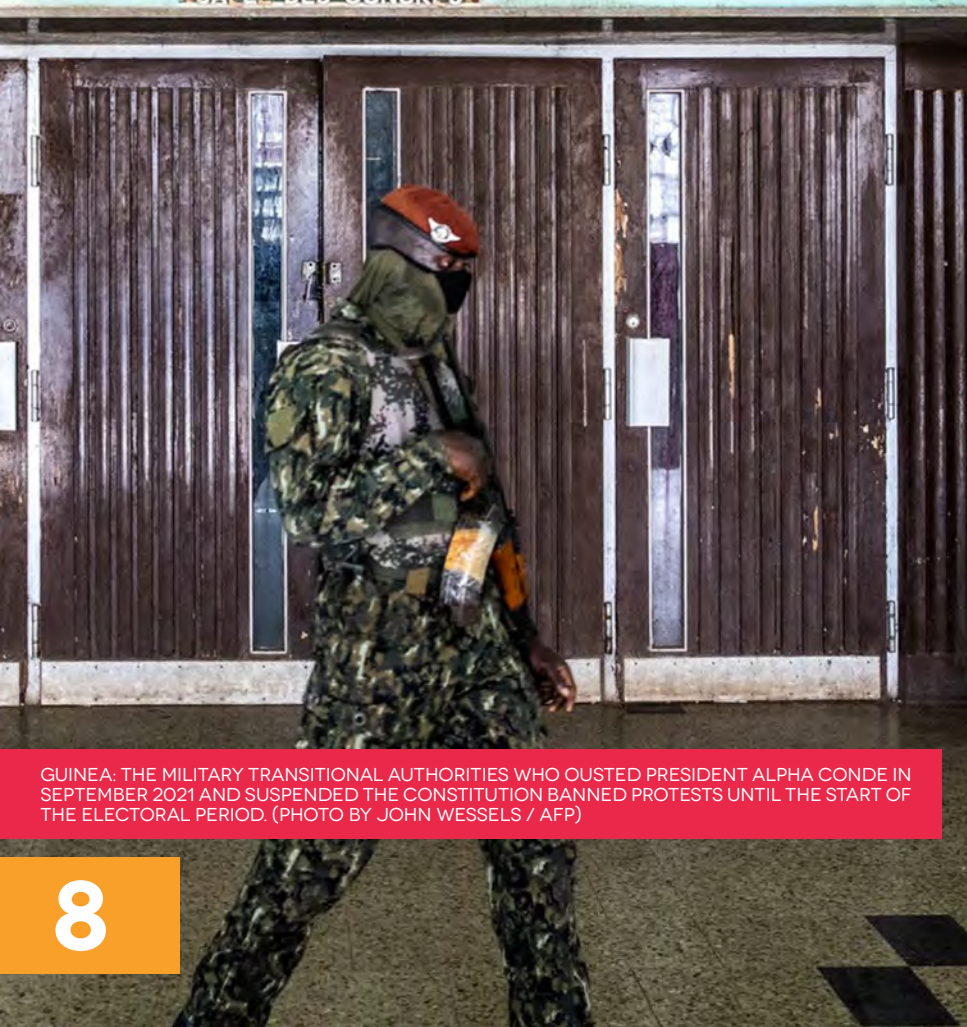


KENYA: THE PUBLIC ORDER ACT, ENACTED DURING BRITISH COLONIAL RULE, CONTINUES TO BE MISUSED BY LAW ENFORCEMENT TO RESTRICT PROTESTS. (PHOTO BY TONY KARUMBA | AFP)

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SALLE DES CONGRES



GUINEA: THE MILITARY TRANSITIONAL AUTHORITIES WHO OUSTED PRESIDENT ALPHA CONDE IN SEPTEMBER 2021 AND SUSPENDED THE CONSTITUTION BANNED PROTESTS UNTIL THE START OF THE ELECTORAL PERIOD. (PHOTO BY JOHN WESSELS / AFP)

In several countries the authorities have used outright bans to prevent protests – particularly civil society and opposition demonstrations – happening, often using grounds such as disturbing public order, security concerns, or public health reasons. In [Togo](#), the health emergency due to the COVID- 19 pandemic has often been misused over the past two years as a pretext to ban public meetings and protests.

In [Chad](#), the military has almost systematically banned protests organised by the Wakit Tama coalition, which brings together civil society groups and the opposition, which has been protesting for a swift return to civilian rule since the [military takeover](#) following President Idriss Déby's death in April 2020. In Guinea, the military transitional authorities, which took over following a [military coup](#) in September 2021, [announced](#) in May 2022 that all public protests 'likely to compromise social tranquillity and the proper implementation of the activities contained in the timetable' for transition are banned until the start of the electoral campaign period – which could be [several years away](#).

In some countries, the authorities have banned or prevented civil society meetings and public conferences. On 21 May 2022, police in Cabinda, Angola [blocked](#) the entrance to the hotel where a conference on peacebuilding, organised by human rights organisations OMUNGA and Associação para Desenvolvimento da Cultura e Direitos Humanos was to take place.

In Cameroon, public meetings, including press conferences, are routinely [banned](#) by local authorities. For example, in December 2021, local authorities in Yaoundé banned a subregional civil society conference on national reconciliation, convened by human rights organisation Réseau des Défenseurs des Droits Humains en Afrique Centrale (REDHAC), on grounds of alleged attempts to disturb 'public order and public tranquillity' and 'threats emanating from the new COVID-19 variant called Omicron'. Shortly after submitting

notification of the conference, on 10 December 2021, the Direction of Judicial Police summoned REDHAC's executive director, Maximilienne Chantal Ngo Mbe, for questioning. A speaker at the conference, South African activist Corlett Letjoane, was detained for 30 hours after her arrival in Cameroon, without access to a lawyer.

Arrests of protest organisers or of people and groups mobilising for a protest is another tactic used to quell protests. In Sierra Leone, two opposition politicians were [arrested](#) on 3 July 2022 on accusations of inciting unlawful street protests. The arrests occurred a day before protests under the banner of 'Black Monday', where hundreds of women took to the streets to protest against the high cost of living, economic hardship and economic policies.

Ahead of planned nationwide anti-government protests scheduled for 30 August 2021 in South Sudan, organised by the People's Coalition for Civil Action (PCCA) as part of a public campaign calling for political change, the National Security Service (NSS) and the police [cautioned](#) people against participating. Three days before the planned protests, on 27 August 2021, the streets filled with a large presence of police officers with orders to arrest any protesters. On the day, four activists were arrested in Wau and two others, together with a bishop, were arrested in Yei after the NSS accused them of 'possessing information' related to the PCCA. On 2 September 2021, the NSS arrested two staff members from the Foundation for Democracy and Accountable Governance for allegedly being among the people who planned the protests. On the eve of the planned protests, the government also shut down internet access until 30 August 2021, when it became clear the protests would not take place. The police spokesperson did not authorise the protests on the basis that the protests would allegedly 'cause public disorder'.

Meanwhile in the **Americas**, countries across the region have adopted or proposed legislation to make it more difficult to protest. In the USA, anti-protest laws have been a significant trend over the past five years. Between October 2021 and September 2022, 11 US state legislatures [introduced](#) bills to limit demonstrations and set harsher penalties for protesting. The Alabama legislature, for example, [expanded](#) the definition of critical infrastructure to include pipelines and mining operations, and created new penalties for those protesting near such structures.

Following protests over fuel prices in March 2022, a group of senators in Paraguay [proposed](#) a change to the Criminal Code to criminalise traffic obstruction, a measure they said would 'dissuade' protesters from blocking roads and encourage them to engage in dialogue with the government. The proposal was later [shelved](#) by the Senate.

In Uruguay, in a referendum held in March 2022, a narrow majority [supported](#) the "full maintenance of the Urgent Consideration Law (2020), a wide-ranging omnibus" package of legislation. Among other things, the law [contains](#) provisions that limit the right to strike (article 392) and prohibit demonstrations that block traffic or circulation in public spaces (articles 468 to 470). Since 2021, the CIVICUS Monitor has documented cases of police in Uruguay using this legislation as justification for [disrupting](#) protests.

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Some countries in the Americas have also taken militarised approaches to discourage and prevent protests. Residents of the rural parish of La Merced de Buenos Aires in Ecuador saw military and police vehicles [arrive](#) without explanation in August 2021, just days after local leaders had sent a letter warning the government about abuses perpetrated by mining companies against the community. People in the area have [resisted](#) mining through longstanding protests. In another case in the Dominican Republic, hundreds of heavily armed military and police officers were [deployed](#) to the Capotillo neighbourhood of Santo Domingo when local residents organised a strike over rising fuel and food prices.

In Cuba, the authorities [deployed](#) military and police forces on the streets to prevent an anti-government march in November 2021. News outlets reported that armed police gathered on nearly every corner along Havana's seaside esplanade, while others patrolled parks and public squares. On the scheduled protest date and in the days preceding it, several prominent dissidents and journalists were detained or put under house arrest. In September 2022, as power failures [sparked](#) intermittent protests, similar tactics were used to prevent demonstrations intensifying.



CUBA: IN SEPTEMBER 2022, POWER FAILURES SPARKED INTERMITTENT PROTESTS, SIMILAR TACTICS WERE USED TO PREVENT DEMONSTRATIONS INTENSIFYING. (PHOTO BY YAMIL LAGE / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES)



SRI LANKA: THE GOVERNMENT HAS SINCE APRIL 2022 REPEATEDLY USED STATE OF EMERGENCY REGULATIONS TO CURTAIL MASS PROTESTS RELATED TO THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMIC CRISIS. (ISHARA S. KODIKARA/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES)

On some occasions, states have also [adopted](#) curfews or [put up](#) law enforcement checkpoints that have been used to restrict demonstrations and prevent access to them. There have also been cases of the authorities using smear campaigns against protesters ahead of planned protests. For instance, in El Salvador the labour minister [associated](#) International Labour Day marches with criminal gangs.

Likewise across the **Asia and the Pacific** region, the CIVICUS Monitor documented systematic attempts to prevent protests over the past year through the use of emergency measures imposed on the pretext of handling the pandemic, new regulations and decrees, and threats of arrests and attacks.

In [China](#), [Laos](#) and [Vietnam](#), where civic space is rated as closed, freedom of peaceful assembly is tightly restricted in law and practice. Strict legal provisions are also seen in countries such as [Singapore](#), where even solo protests have been criminalised.

In [Sri Lanka](#), the government has since April 2022 repeatedly used [state of emergency](#) regulations to curtail mass protests related to the country's [economic crisis](#). This has allowed the authorities to arrest and detain suspects without warrants and due process [safeguards](#). Under the state of emergency, curfews were [imposed](#), internet access restricted and social media shut down.

An emergency decree on the COVID-19 pandemic continued to be used in Thailand until the end of September 2022 to ban protests. In [Hong Kong](#), the government blocked all forms of protest as part of its [crackdown on dissent](#) and in June 2022, it [banned](#) public commemoration of the anniversary of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, for a third consecutive year, citing risks from COVID-19.

In the [Maldives](#), President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih issued a [decree](#) in April 2022 to ban protests against India's influence as a threat to national security. In [India](#), section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure is frequently used to [prohibit](#) the holding of assemblies. While the law is primarily meant to be applied in emergencies to maintain 'public tranquillity', the authorities have used it widely and frequently to prevent protests.

In [Afghanistan](#), following the Taliban's takeover, the Taliban announced a [ban on all protests](#) in Kabul and other provinces without prior authorisation. Despite the restrictions, [protests by women activists](#) to demand an end to discrimination persisted. Similar defiance has been seen in [Myanmar](#), where anti-coup protesters from the Civil Disobedience Movement face ongoing [threats](#) of arbitrary arrest, torture and deadly attacks by the junta but have continued to [mobilise](#) with flash mobs, where activists run through the streets for a few minutes before dispersing.

Even in the Pacific, where civic space is relatively open, there are concerns. In [Australia](#) in 2022, three states [passed anti-protest laws](#) that bring harsh penalties for non-violent protest, particularly aimed at climate protesters. Australian police came under scrutiny for undertaking covert surveillance and a [pre-emptive raid](#) in June 2022 of climate activist group Blockade Australia. In [Fiji](#), the Public Order (Amendment) Act 2014 has been used to deny permits for protests, including those organised by unions and [climate protesters](#).

In **Europe and Central Asia**, there is increasing use of restrictive laws aimed at targeting and preventing peaceful assembly. These contribute to creating a chilling environment for peaceful assembly by, for instance, creating extra hurdles for protesters to obtain permission or criminalising certain types of protests. In the [UK](#), police have been given sweeping powers to impose noise-based restrictions on protests, restrict static assemblies and limit protests outside parliament through the Policing, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act, passed in April 2022, despite wide opposition from [civil society](#). Further restrictions on protests are currently being proposed in the Public Order Bill.

In France, the authorities have [created](#) a new offence of 'trespassing on airport runways', punishable by six months' imprisonment and a fine of €7,500 (approx. US\$7,800), which criminalises civil disobedience by climate protesters. In Russia, since 2014 several legislative amendments [have made it](#) increasingly difficult to stage protests. For example, spontaneous protests are forbidden and notification for permission, which must be submitted to authorities for planned protest, is used as a pretext to prohibit them. In recent years, restrictive laws to limit protests have also been passed in [Belarus](#), [Greece](#) and [Spain](#).

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In some instances in Europe, protests have been banned. In October 2021, a UK court injunction, brought by the London transport network, banned climate protesters from the Insulate Britain group from obstructing traffic and accessing motorways and major roads in and around London, after the group staged several protests.



UNITED KINGDOM: POLICE HAVE BEEN GIVEN SWEEPING POWERS TO IMPOSE NOISE-BASED RESTRICTIONS ON PROTESTS AND RESTRICT STATIC ASSEMBLIES, AND RESTRICT PROTESTS OUTSIDE OF PARLIAMENT. (PHOTO BY REUTERS/HENRY NICHOLLS VIA GALLO IMAGES).

In May 2022, authorities in Germany [banned](#) several protests on Nakba Day, which commemorates the displacement of Palestinians caused by the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, deeming the demonstrations an ‘immediate danger’ and as being ‘inflammatory, anti-Semitic exclamations’. Despite this, protests went ahead and were met with excessive force and detentions.

In Hungary, the government [passed a decree](#), under emergency legislation due to the pandemic, which effectively made teachers’ strikes virtually impossible. In Turkey, the city of Van’s Governorate has repeatedly extended its ban on demonstrations and activities across the municipality, which came into effect after Turkey’s attempted coup in 2016.

In other cases, police have used intimidation tactics to discourage people from protesting, including in Serbia, where during protests against a lithium-mining project run by British-Australian company Rio Tinto, several activists [reported](#) being intimidated by the police who warned them of the ‘risks’ prior to the protests taking place.

In Central Asia, where civic space is highly restricted, the right to peaceful assembly is limited through legislation, with protests frequently prevented by the authorities. In [Kazakhstan](#), organisers of assemblies are de facto required to obtain advance permission from authorities, even though the law on assemblies adopted in 2020 formally provides for only a notification procedure. While some protests are allowed to take place, the authorities continue to deny permission selectively for protests of a political or critical nature. The authorities in [Kyrgyzstan](#) have repeatedly used temporary blanket bans to restrict protests, including most recently a month-long ban to curb protests outside the Russian embassy held to show solidarity with Ukraine. In [Tajikistan](#) and [Turkmenistan](#), protests rarely take place due to the severe repressive climate.

In the **Middle East and North Africa (MENA)** region, home to some of the most repressive regimes in the world, protesters face a chilling environment. Nine out of 19 the countries in the region, [almost half](#), have closed civic space, while the other half are rated as either repressed or obstructed. When protesters dare to organise and take to the streets, they are met with brutal violence from the authorities.

In Jordan, authorities use [pre-emptive arrests](#) to prevent activists attending protests, as seen in the March 2022 arrests of protesters scheduled to attend a march to commemorate the 24 March 2011 anti-monarchy and pro-democracy protests when young people held an open sit-in in Amman to demand political reforms and the elimination of corruption. In a similar fashion, teachers who planned to attend the weekly Teachers’ Syndicate labour protests in Amman were [arrested](#) ahead of the protests. Jordanian security forces have also used more blatant tactics to prevent protests, as seen when they [surrounded](#) protesters to prevent people joining a march against rising commodity and fuel prices in November 2021.

In Tunisia, the authorities [blocked](#) people who marched to the headquarters of the electoral commission in opposition to a [constitutional referendum](#) held in July 2022, as they called for President Kais Saïed to step down and expressed concerns over the independence of the electoral board.

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In Morocco, the authorities have reportedly used heinous tactics to prevent people attending protests. In the city of Boujdour in the disputed Western Sahara territory, police and security forces targeted five Sahrawi women activists who were on their way to participate in a protest for self-determination and brutally [assaulted](#) them sexually and physically.



TUNISIA: THE AUTHORITIES BLOCKED PEOPLE WHO MARCHED TO THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION IN OPPOSITION TO A CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM (PHOTO BY REUTERS/ZOUBEIR SOUISSI VIA GALLO IMAGES)

PART II: CRACKDOWNS DURING PROTESTS

International law decrees that all measures should be taken to protect protest participants. Nevertheless, crackdowns during peaceful protests continue around the world.

At times, the detention of protesters is used as a strategy to shut down protests. As a result, some detentions may not always result in criminal charges or legal proceedings against protesters, but are rather used as a means to intimidate protesters and bring protests to an end. Our data show that the detention of protesters is a widespread practice in countries of all civic space ratings, even open countries, and across all regions. The detention of protesters, whether as they are attempting to gather, during a protest, or as a protest is breaking up, was documented in at least 92 countries during the past year.

The use of excessive force during protests may include the disproportionate or indiscriminate use of physical force, teargas, water cannon and rubber bullets. Our data show that excessive force was used in at least 57 countries. It is a particularly common practice in the Americas and Asia and the Pacific.

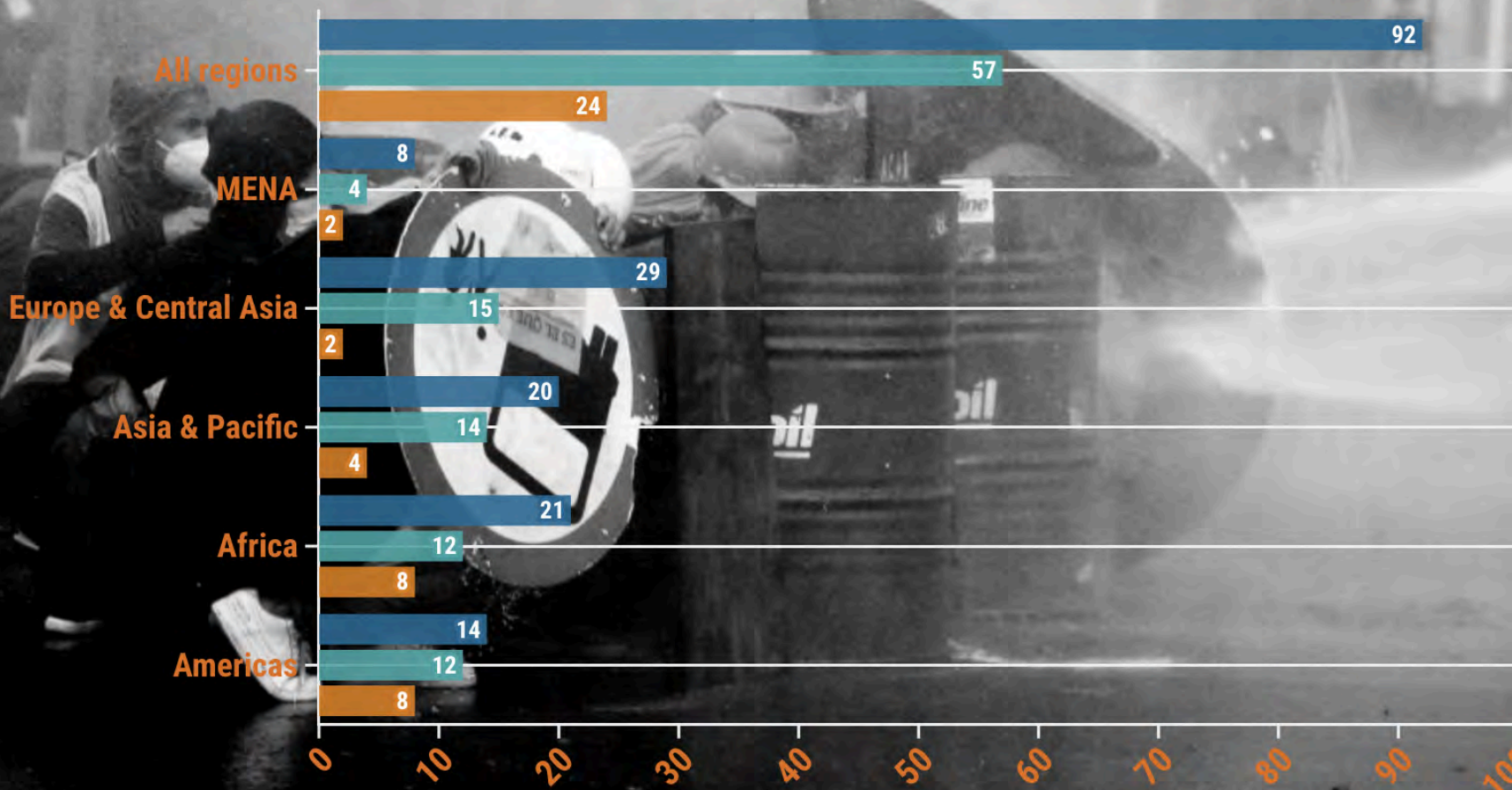
Taking to the streets to demand rights can be lethal, with security forces in some countries using live ammunition against protesters. The CIVICUS Monitor has documented the killing of people who were exercising their right to peaceful assembly in 24 countries during the past year. Killings of protesters were particularly documented in African and American countries; this was not as common a violation in Europe. Killings were only documented in countries with obstructed or repressed civic space. Killings were not documented in closed countries, since these are highly repressive environments where protests rarely take place.



Total number of countries recording protest restrictions

1 Oct 2021-30 Sep 2022

■ Detention of protesters ■ Excessive force ■ Killing of protesters



SOURCE: CIVICUS MONITOR UPDATES—DATASET INCLUDES INFORMATION ON 155 COUNTRIES:

23 FROM THE AMERICAS, 37 FROM AFRICA, 36 FROM ASIA & PACIFIC, 42 FROM EUROPE & CENTRAL ASIA AND 17 FROM THE MENA REGION.

ANALYSIS BY REGION

Between October 2021 and September 2022, security forces used excessive force in at least 12 countries in **Africa**, with protesters killed in at least eight countries.

Military transitional authorities in Chad, Guinea and Sudan have cracked down on protests demanding a return to civilian rule. At least 50 people were [killed](#) on 20 October 2022 in nationwide protests in Chad. Human rights groups believe that the death toll is likely much higher. On the day, security forces – police, gendarmerie and military officers – used live ammunition, rubber bullets and teargas against protesters. Hundreds of people were arrested. Some were subjected to torture and some taken to the high security prison of Koro Toro, located in the desert in the north of the country. A curfew was announced from 9pm to 9am, lasting until ‘the total restoration of order’ in Doba, Koumra, Moundou and N’Djamena, while some internet users indicated a disruption or slowing of access to the internet.

In July and August 2022, at least seven people were [killed](#) by live ammunition in protests against the ‘unilateral management’ of the transition to civilian rule in Guinea. In [Sudan](#), ongoing tensions between military and civilian factions in the government resulted in an [October 2021 coup](#) by military leadership, which sparked new mass protests. Protests have been met with excessive and lethal force and arbitrary arrests of protesters. As of September 2022, at least 117 protesters had been killed during pro-democracy protests. A further concerning development is how [women human rights defenders](#) and women protesters have been targeted with sexual violence to silence them. Reports indicate that at least 16 women were raped during protests in the capital Khartoum as of 22 March 2022.



RELATIVES AND FRIENDS GATHER AROUND THE COFFIN OF OREDJE NARCISSE, THE JOURNALIST WHO WAS KILLED DURING A PRO-DEMOCRACY DEMONSTRATION, N'DJAMENA, 28 OCTOBER 2022. (PHOTO BY REUTERS/MAHAMAT RAMADANE VIA GALLO)

In several African countries, protests over the high cost of living have been met with violence. In Kenya, police officers [arrested and beat](#) human rights defender Julius Kamau for protesting outside the Treasury building against the high cost of living. Kamau stood holding a banner reading 'lower food prices', as part of the 'NjaaRevolution' protests that began online. Kenyan citizens have been demonstrating against the high cost of living using the hashtag #NjaaRevolution.

Protesters are frequently killed during protests over the increasing insecurity in DRC's eastern provinces, which demonstrations often also call for the withdrawal of the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping force, the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO), for its perceived failure to protect civilians against armed groups. On 24 January 2022, security forces [used](#) live ammunition while attempting to break up a peaceful protest in Beni, North Kivu province, fatally injuring Mumbere Ushindi Dorake, a 22 year old activist from the Lutte pour le Changement (LUCHA) social movement. LUCHA and other groups had called for a five-day long protest action against insecurity in Beni and to denounce the State of Siege. In violent protests in eastern DRC between 25 and 27 July 2022, up to 36 people were [killed](#), including five UN peacekeepers, and over 170 people were injured. While protesters reported that UN peacekeepers fired live ammunition, MONUSCO has denied these claims.

Protests in Nigeria are frequently banned and dispersed by force, and protesters are regularly arrested. On 1 October 2021, Nigeria's Independence Day, the group #RevolutionNow [held](#) anti-government protests over bad governance and other grievances in Abuja, Benin, Ibadan, Lagos and Osogbo. In Osogbo, Osun State, security officers reportedly used teargas against protesters and briefly detained 11 protesters. Around 30 people were arrested in protests in Lagos, while photojournalist Olukayode Jaiyeola was reportedly assaulted by the Lagos State Police command.

In Africa, protesters were arrested in at least 21 countries in the past year. A few days prior to the [general election](#) in Angola, on 17 August 2022, a protest organised by civil society organisations (CSOs) to draw attention to irregularities in the electoral process was [dispersed](#) by police, who arrested dozens of people, including journalist Coque Mukuta.

In Zimbabwe, people are frequently arrested for picketing, rallying and protesting. For example, 10 students belonging to the Zimbabwe National Students Union were [arrested](#) for protesting peacefully against fee hikes at the University of Zimbabwe in March 2022. Another student was arrested on 4 April in relation to further protests.

In Niger, police [arrested](#) four activists of the pro-democracy movement Tournons la Page Niger on 10 December 2021 as they took part in the 'citizen caravan of democracy', an event organised annually in Niamey on International Human Rights Day. Half an hour before the arrest of the four activists, a fifth activist, who was not at the demonstration, was violently detained by plainclothes police officers. The five faced charges of 'illegal assembly' despite the fact that the event was not banned by local authorities. The five were released on 13 December 2021, but charges against them were retained.



In Uganda, police [arrested](#) 33 medical staff on 16 December 2021 while they were attempting to deliver a petition to the Speaker of Parliament. The petition demanded that the Ministry of Health ensure all hospitals have personal protective equipment, pay interns at least 2.5 million Ugandan shillings (approx. US\$694) and improve general working conditions.

In the **Americas**, excessive force was commonly employed to disrupt protests over the past year, used in at least 12 countries of the region. This included cases of officers using live rounds in the policing of protests or employing less-lethal weapons indiscriminately. The CIVICUS Monitor documented cases of killings of protesters in eight countries in the region. There were also cases of journalists being killed while covering protests and CSOs being raided in crackdowns on protests.

In March 2022, Ecuadorian police [responded](#) to peaceful International Women's Day demonstrations in Guayaquil and Quito with excessive force, including the use of teargas and pepper spray. Viviana Erazo, a journalist with the digital media outlet Wambra, was [covering](#) a protest in Quito when a police officer reportedly cornered her and struck her with a club. She was pepper sprayed while attempting to move away. In June 2022, when Indigenous protesters [mobilised](#) in a national strike, there were several reports of Ecuadorian law enforcement officers shooting less-lethal weapons directly at protesters' bodies, resulting in injuries caused by the impact of gas canisters and pellets in sensitive areas such as around the eyes.

Throughout 2022, Haiti's deteriorating [economic and political situation](#) led people to hold frequent protests over insecurity, labour rights, fuel prices, lack of food and basic goods and other pressing issues. Police often responded with indiscriminate force. On 23 February 2022, for instance, police [opened fire](#) on protesters in Port-au-Prince as they demanded an increase in the minimum wage. A photojournalist was [killed](#) and two other reporters were wounded when police fired at protesters from a vehicle. As protests over the country's crisis spread in

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August and September 2022, there were [multiple reports](#) of protesters being killed and police using firearms to repress demonstrations. Similarly, during the past year, there were multiple cases of protesters being [injured](#) by police using firearms in Peru. Various other tactics were used to disrupt and curb protests across the region, including militarisation and arbitrary arrests. In October 2021, Guatemala's government [declared](#) a state of siege and militarised the municipality of El Estor in response to protests against mining. Police raided the premises of Indigenous rights organisation Defensoría Q'eqchi' and imposed censorship on an Indigenous community radio station. In the same month, environmental groups in the USA reported that over 600 people were [detained](#) in just five days of protests and civil disobedience actions for climate justice.

Across the **Asia Pacific** region, protests were documented in at least 27 countries over the last year. People mobilised for political and economic reforms, to seek justice and to demand their rights. Protests were held in countries rated as obstructed and repressed but also in authoritarian regimes where civic space is rated as closed', such as China and Vietnam. The authorities responded to these protests in various ways, including by harassing and arbitrarily arresting protesters and using excessive and at times deadly force, including with use of firearms, to disrupt protests.

In Cambodia, the authorities [harassed](#) striking members of the NagaWorld casino workers' union in 2022 for demanding their rights. Scores were arrested, detained or ill-treated, with the government seeking to justify its crackdown as part of its measures related to COVID-19. Protesters from the Papua region of Indonesia continued to face [arrests](#) and ill-treatment from security forces for demanding an end to discrimination and exploitation. In Pakistan, groups [protesting](#) against enforced disappearances were arrested in June 2022. Arrests were also documented of [climate protesters](#) in Australia and [anti-vaccine](#) protesters in New Zealand.



HUNDREDS OF WORKERS FROM THE LABOUR RIGHTS SUPPORTED UNION OF KHMER EMPLOYEES OF NAGAWORLD (LRSU), A CASINO WORKERS' UNION, HAVE BEEN ON STRIKE. (VIA GETTY IMAGES)

The use of excessive force was documented in at least 14 countries in Asia and the Pacific during the year. In Afghanistan, the [Taliban](#) responded to protests by women activists by pointing firearms at them or firing in the air as well as beating, threatening and insulting protesters. The Taliban snatched phones and tore up banners and arrested and threatened women. In Sri Lanka, police [disrupted](#) protests over the economic crisis, and used excessive and unprovoked force, including rubber bullets, teargas and water cannon against peaceful protesters, bystanders and journalists. Security forces also forcibly removed parts of a three-month-long rolling peaceful [protest site](#) in July 2022, beating protesters and lawyers in the process.

In China, unidentified men in white shirts – believed to be security personnel – violently dragged, kicked and beat protesters who had [gathered](#) in central Henan province in July 2022 seeking to recover frozen funds held in rural banks. In Bangladesh, the ruling party [unleashed](#) both security forces and its activists to violently attack protests by students, the opposition and workers.

Killings of protesters by security forces were documented in at least four countries in the past year, particularly in Myanmar, where the junta has continued its violent [crackdown on anti-coup protests](#) by using lethal weapons. More than a thousand people have been [killed](#) by the junta and there have been reports of the military using vehicles to [ram](#) into protesters.

In Nepal, police in Rupandehi district used deadly force during an [eviction](#), killing four protesters and injuring dozens. In Indonesia, security forces killed two people in the Yahukimo regency in March 2022 when they [fired](#) into a crowd opposing the government's plan to create new provinces in the Papua region, where there is a sizeable independence movement. Other countries where killings occurred with impunity include Sri Lanka.

In **Europe and Central Asia**, there has been frequent detention of protesters during protests. This was documented in at least 29 countries in the past year, including in at least eight countries where civic space is rated as open and civic freedoms are otherwise generally respected. Excessive force was documented in at least 15 countries in the region. Protests on a range of issues, from women's rights to youth and environmental rights, have faced repression.

In Greece, [Italy](#) and [Turkey](#), protests by young people against police brutality and for academic freedoms have been met with repression. During [May, June](#) and [September](#) 2022, students at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in Greece staged protests against an education bill that enables the police to have a presence on university campuses. During one protest, police riot units set up a barricade and reportedly hit students with teargas and stun grenades.

Environmental rights protests have also been targeted. In [Denmark](#) in May 2022, Extinction Rebellion activists blocked bridges leading to parliament in Copenhagen as part of their Vendepunktet (Turning Point) protests, calling on Danish policymakers to demand fair and democratic action on the climate crisis. Over two days 110 activists were arrested on the basis of maintaining peace and order. The police also issued fines to other activists under the Traffic Act law during the demonstrations.

ITALY: YOUTH PROTEST THE DEATH OF LORENZO PARELLI, WHO DIED DURING AN UNPAID INTERNSHIP (PHOTO BY ANTONIO MASIELLO/GETTY IMAGES).



In the UK, the detention of protesters has consistently been documented, including during climate justice protests. Detentions during climate actions have also been documented in countries including [Finland](#), [Germany](#), the [Netherlands](#) and [Sweden](#). In addition, detentions at climate justice demonstrations have been accompanied by restrictions on journalists trying to report on the protests.

The killing of protesters has been documented in at least two countries in Central Asia. Protests [erupted](#) in the state of Karakalpakstan, western [Uzbekistan](#), and other cities in June 2022, after constitutional amendments proposed the removal of the region's autonomous status and its constitutional right to secede from Uzbekistan. Official figures indicate that 21 people died, including 17 citizens and four law enforcement officials. However, media reports indicate a higher death toll.

Protests in the **MENA** region are typically met with heavy-handed responses and extensive crackdowns characterised by brutal dispersal, often with lethal or excessive force, arbitrary arrests and internet shutdowns. In some countries, protesters face a double risk, with attacks and abuses coming from state and non-state sources such as armed militia.

In Iran, the continuing wave of protests that [began](#) in September 2022 as collective action against the country's compulsory head covering laws, which quickly expanded to articulate broader grievances and demands for fundamental political and social change, have been met with a [ruthless crackdown](#) characterised by use of lethal force. The authorities have used live ammunition against numerous peaceful protesters, killing hundreds and injuring many others. By 28 October 2022, at least [400 protesters](#) had been killed and thousands had been arrested.

In Palestine, Israeli police have used vicious, heavy-handed and brutal methods to disperse protests and religious gatherings by Palestinians, including a [raid](#) by Israeli occupation forces on a mosque in East Jerusalem, which used teargas and stun grenades against thousands of worshippers, resulting in injuries to at least 158 people and hundreds of detentions. At least 40 other Palestinian protesters were injured in a separate incident during a march by Israeli Jewish settlers when Israeli forces [used rubber-coated bullets and teargas](#) against Palestinians who were protesting against the march, which was headed to the abandoned outpost of Homesh in the occupied West Bank.

Cases of assault and use of force against protesters were also documented in [Lebanon](#), including in an incident where army personnel and riot police assaulted university professors at the Presidential Palace junction in Baabda during a sit-in to demand that the government look into the affairs of university lecturers and staff.

In Qatar, the authorities have sent groups of Qataris abroad to [attack protesters](#) and disrupt peaceful gatherings by their citizens in other countries, as seen in a protest calling for respect of human rights in Qatar, organised in Munich, Germany by Qatari human rights defender Abdullah Al-Maliki in July 2022.

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In Iraq, protesters face attacks by both state forces and non-state armed extremist groups. For example, armed men in Wasit Governorate [attacked](#) protesters in January 2022. A similar trend was documented in Libya, where militia and armed groups arrested and [abducted](#) protesters because of their support for particular electoral candidates.

Another common tactic in the region is the arrest of protesters, which is used to intimidate and scatter crowds during protests. This has been documented in mass protests in Iran since November 2021 over the state's severe mismanagement of water resources, where protesters have been subjected to regular arbitrary [arrest](#).

Digital repression, especially noted during protests involving large masses of people, is also a key tactic used by authoritarian regimes to interfere with protests by disconnecting people and undermining their capability to mobilise and access information. The authorities in Iran, notorious for their tight rein on internet access, have [disrupted the internet](#) and social media during recent protests.

A photograph showing a woman in a green shirt cutting her hair at a protest. She is holding a pair of scissors and a large clump of her hair. In the background, other protesters are visible, some holding signs. One sign in the background has the text "Women's rights must not be destroyed".

"IRAN: AN ONGOING SERIES OF PROTESTS WHICH BEGAN IN SEPTEMBER 2022 AS COLLECTIVE ACTION AGAINST THE COUNTRY'S COMPULSORY VEILING LAWS, BUT WHICH QUICKLY EXPANDED TO AIR BROADER GRIEVANCES AND DEMANDS FOR FUNDAMENTAL POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE (PHOTO BY AFP)"

PART III: HARASSMENT AND PROSECUTION OF PROTESTERS

Following peaceful protests, protesters and protest organisers have often been judicially harassed, including through being questioned and prosecuted. In some countries prosecution is undertaken by military courts. Authorities have also taken retaliatory actions, such as dissolving organisations at the forefront of protests. Over the past year, the CIVICUS Monitor also recorded criminal acts against protesters and protest organisers, including physical attacks, enforced disappearances and killings.

ANALYSIS BY REGION

In **Africa**, protesters have faced arrests, judicial harassment and criminal prosecution, as well as lengthy periods in pretrial detention, in retaliation for their participation in protests. Protest coalitions have been dissolved or banned, and protest conveners have been summoned for questioning.

Following the mass protests against military juntas in Chad and Guinea, the military transitional authorities banned the activities of or dissolved coalitions at the forefront of protests: Wakit Tama in [Chad](#) on 20 October 2022 and Front National pour la Défense de la Constitution (FNDC) in [Guinea](#) on 6 August 2022. Additionally, FNDC and Wakit Tama activists have been repeatedly arrested and prosecuted in relation to the protests. Ibrahima Diallo and Oumar Sylla, prominent members of FNDC and the pro-democracy group Tournons la Page – Guinée, were [arrested](#) on 30 July 2022 and charged a few days later with ‘participation in a prohibited assembly, looting, destruction of public and private property, setting fires and intentional assault and battery’. At the time of writing, they [remain](#) in detention. Six members and supporters of Wakit Tama, including



organisers of protests on 14 May 2022, were [arrested](#) between 14 and 17 May 2022. The six were charged with gathering to cause public disturbance, harm to property and physical assault. On 6 June 2022 they were given a one-year suspended prison [sentence](#).

In Angola, 22 protesters who were arrested during a peaceful protest to demand the release of political prisoners and free and fair elections, held in Luanda on 9 April 2022, were [prosecuted](#) for rioting and disobeying a police order to disperse. On 14 April 2022, two of the 22 accused were sentenced to a justice tax of 60,000 kwanzas (approx. US\$138) and '40 days in fines', meaning the activists have a period of 20 days to pay the fines, and if they do not, the fine will be converted into prison time. The remaining 20 were acquitted due to lack of evidence.

In eastern DRC and Cameroon, protesters have been prosecuted by military courts. Under the State of Siege in eastern DRC, military courts have [prosecuted](#) and convicted activists for their participation in peaceful protests, often after long pretrial periods of detention. On 1 April 2022, 12 LUCHA activists received one-year prison sentences on charges of 'provocation and incitement to breaches of public authority'. The activists were arrested on 11 November 2021 while protesting peacefully outside Beni town hall to demand the protection of civilians and an end to martial law under the State of Siege. On 25 February 2022, a military court in Goma convicted three activists from the Jicho la Raiya (Eye of the Citizens) social movement to prison sentences of two years for 'harmful accusations' and 'slandorous denunciation'. The three had been arrested nine months before in Kirotshe, North Kivu as they were planning to protest against 'illegal road taxation' and alleged mismanagement of the Kirotshe health district.

In Cameroon, protesters are often prosecuted under the 2014 anti-terror law, which criminalises protests, and then languish for extended times in prison. Over 100 people arrested for participating in peaceful protests in the Anglophone regions in 2017 and anti-government [opposition protests](#) in September 2020, in response to President Paul Biya's announcement of regional elections, [remain](#) in prison. This has sparked a campaign, 'Don't Shut Them Up: Free victims of arbitrary detention now' by human rights groups. On 27 December 2021, 47 members and supporters of Mouvement pour la Renaissance du Cameroun, an opposition party, were sentenced by the military court of Yaoundé to between one and seven years in prison on a range of charges, including rebellion and attempt at insurrection. On 31 December 2021, the military court of Douala [sentenced](#) four activists from Stand Up Cameroon, a movement of opposition parties and CSOs, to 16 months in prison and a fine of 376,000 francs CFA (approx. US\$585) for insurrection. The four were arrested in September 2020 as they left a meeting of the opposition Cameroon People's Party in Douala and spent 15 months in preventive detention.

Protesters in Zimbabwe are regularly prosecuted on charges of incitement to public violence. For example, renowned novelist Tsitsi Dangarembga and her co-accused Julie Barnes were [found guilty](#) of participating in a gathering with the intent to incite public violence by Harare magistrates court on 29 September 2022. The two received a six-month suspended prison sentence on the condition they do not commit a similar offence for five years and a fine of 70,000 Zimbabwean dollars (approx. US\$193). They were [arrested](#) during a peaceful anti-government protest on 31 July 2020 while holding a placard that read: 'We want better. Reform our institutions'.



ESWATINI: THERE HAS BEEN A SPATE OF RETALIATORY ATTACKS AGAINST ACTIVISTS FOLLOWING THE PRO-DEMOCRACY PROTESTS THAT STARTED IN JUNE 2021 (VIA GETTY IMAGES)

In Eswatini, there has been a spate of [retaliatory attacks](#) against activists following the pro-democracy protests that [started](#) in June 2021, including arson attacks, abductions, torture and the raiding of activists' homes. The cars of Wandile Dlodlu and Ngomyayona Gamedze, members of the People's United Democratic Movement, a banned opposition party, were petrol bombed on two separate occasions in April 2022. The two have been at the forefront of calling for democratic reforms. Colani Maseko, a student activist and president of the Swaziland National Union of Students, was abducted and assaulted by police in January 2022, then subsequently arrested and charged with sedition for allegedly burning pictures of Eswatini's [absolute monarch](#), King Mswati III. A few months later, in late May 2022, Maseko was again abducted and tortured by the military, just a few days after leading a student protest.

Intimidation can also come in the form of summons to and questioning of protest conveners following protests. Following street and online protests in several locations against rising insecurity in northern Nigeria, in December 2021, Zainab Naseer Ahmad, co-organiser of the protest in Kano, was [invited](#) to the offices of Nigeria's security agency, the Department of State Services (DSS), where she was questioned. Ibrahim Birniwa, co-convenor of the protests in Kaduna, was likewise summoned by the DSS.

Many countries in the **Americas** have laws on obstructing traffic or interrupting public services that can be used to hinder protest movements and actions. As a result, protest organisers and participants can face charges that carry severe penalties under laws on criminal association and sabotage.

In Honduras, a criminal investigation was [launched](#) against an Indigenous Garífuna leader and a human rights lawyer after peaceful protesters briefly entered the headquarters of the Public Prosecutor's Office in August 2022. The protesters were demanding answers in the case of four young Garífuna men who were forcibly [disappeared](#) in Triunfo de la Cruz two years before. The two were accused under the Penal Code of 'disturbance of the public order', which can carry a prison sentence of up to three years, and 'unlawful deprivation of liberty', which can bring a seven-year sentence.

In Canada, environmental and land defenders have frequently been [detained](#) for organising peaceful civil disobedience actions. In May 2022, an Indigenous defender was [sentenced](#) to 28 days in jail for obstructing access to a terminal on the controversial Trans



HONDURAS: CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS PROTEST IN FRONT OF THE SUPREME COURT, TEGUCIGALPA. (PHOTO CC/JORGE CABRERA VIA TWITTER)

Mountain pipeline. In another ongoing action, by mid-September 2021 over a thousand people had been [arrested](#) at protests against old-growth logging in Fairy Creek, Vancouver Island. More than 400 of these protesters are [facing](#) charges for ‘criminal contempt’.

Cuban authorities have [convicted](#) over 300 people who took part in July 2021 [anti-government protests](#). They face charges of sedition, sabotage and public disorder. The crackdown [targeted](#) well-known dissidents as well as citizens in general, with prosecutors often pushing for disproportionately long sentences. CSOs that [monitored](#) the situation estimate that over 1,400 people were detained in the context of these protests. Criminalisation in this case was used both to punish protesters and to instil fear and help [prevent](#) future mobilisations.

Protesters across the region are also subject to harassment, intimidation and stigmatisation in reaction to their actions. In [Argentina](#) and [El Salvador](#), for example, feminist activists were threatened on social media after participating in protests. Mexican feminist protesters, detained at a demonstration in Guanajuato, reported being [threatened](#) by police with trumped-up charges and sexual assault. Meanwhile in Ecuador, President Guillermo Lasso and other authorities have smeared Indigenous protesters by [associating](#) their demonstrations with narco-trafficking and criminal groups.

In the **Asia Pacific** region, the detention of protesters has been documented in at least 20 countries. In some cases, these detentions have led to prosecutions. A range of public order, national security and other laws have been used to criminalise protesters. The authorities have also harassed and punished protesters through means including the use of surveillance, denial of bail, travel bans, the destruction of homes and torture and ill-treatment in detention.

In Sri Lanka, more than a [hundred](#) people involved in the mass protests over the economic crisis have been [arrested](#), including students, civil society activists and unionists. There have been [reports](#) of alleged torture and ill-treatment in detention and some people have been charged with ‘unlawful assembly’ and ‘obstructing the duties of police officers’, among other offences. The government also used the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act to [detain](#) three student activists in August 2022. Other tactics used to penalise protesters include [travel bans](#).

In India, a number of student protesters, including Gulfisha Fatima and Umar Khalid, remain in detention without bail under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, an anti-terrorism law, for their involvement in [demonstrations](#) against the discriminatory Citizenship Amendment Act. Rights groups have also documented instances of the authorities [bulldozing](#) and destroying the homes of Muslim protesters in Uttar Pradesh state.

In Hong Kong, numerous [activists](#) have been jailed for participating in or organising an ‘unauthorised assembly’ under the Public Order Ordinance, which carries a five-year maximum sentence. Democracy activist Chow Hang Tung was [jailed](#) for 15 months in January 2022 for organising a vigil to commemorate the Tiananmen Square crackdown.

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HONG KONG: ACTIVISTS MA CHUN-MAN, TONY CHUNG , KOO SZE-YIU, AND CHOW HANG TUNG (CLOCKWISE L-R)



In Thailand, hundreds of protesters have been [charged](#) for violating the Emergency Decree that bans gatherings in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and on allegations of [royal defamation](#) and sedition. Some have consistently been [denied bail](#) or forced to be [electronically tagged](#) as part of their bail conditions. Others have been placed under surveillance through the installation of Pegasus [spyware](#) on their phones.

In Myanmar, thousands of anti-coup protesters [languish in detention](#) on trumped-up charges of ‘incitement’ or ‘treason’ after facing secret military tribunals, with [hundreds](#) being tortured or ill-treated with impunity. In Malaysia, the police have [brought](#) scores of protesters, including activists and opposition politicians, in for questioning for holding spontaneous demonstrations related to issues such as corruption, price hikes, the war in Ukraine and the death penalty. In Singapore, activists have faced [police harassment](#) for protests against the death penalty.

In the aftermath of protests in **Europe and Central Asia**, protesters have faced prosecution, fines, intimidation, harassment and ill-treatment and torture.

In Hungary, five teachers were dismissed after [staging acts](#) of civil disobedience as part of protests over teaching conditions. In Turkey, students [holding protests](#) for academic freedoms were suspended and face disciplinary hearings.

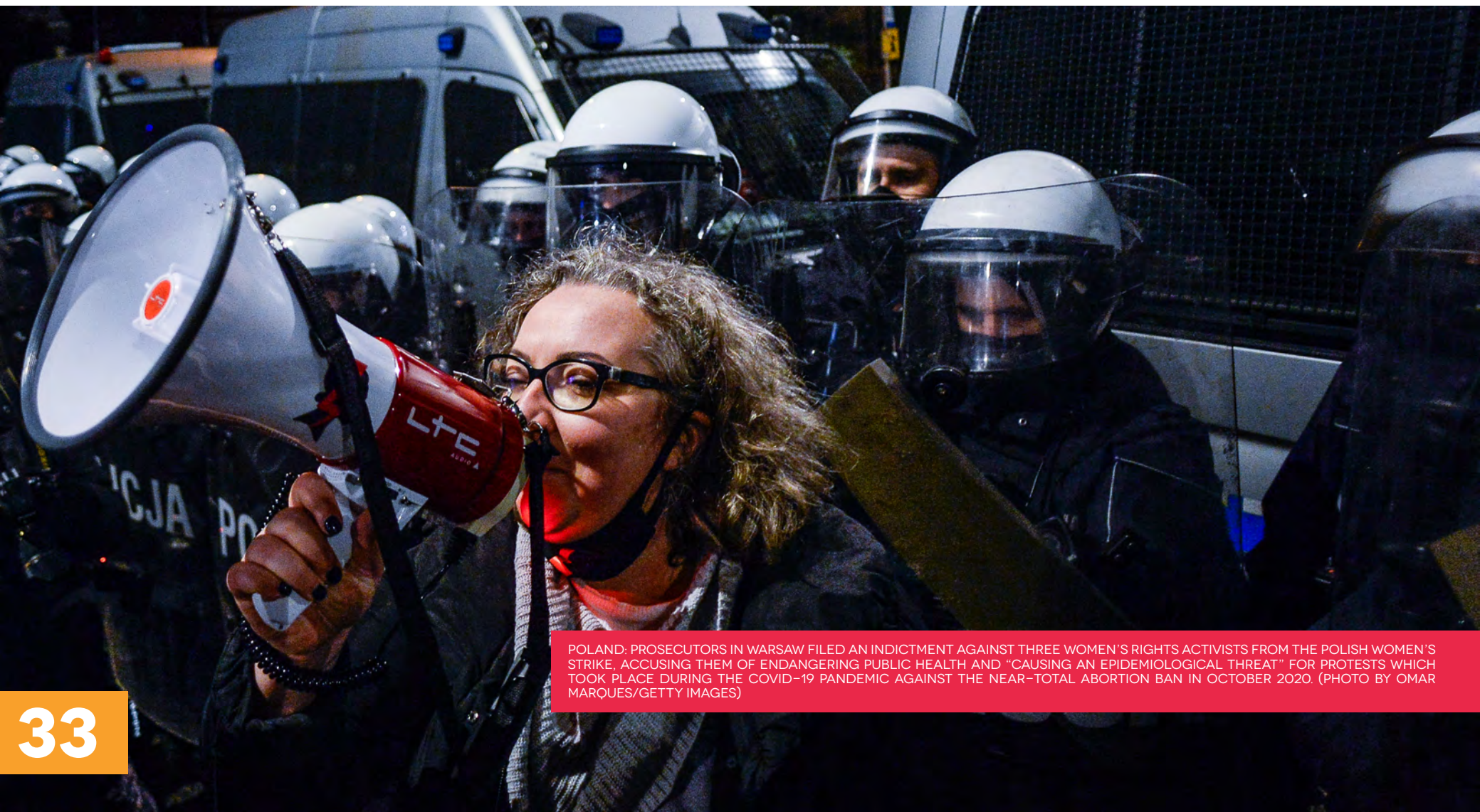
In [Kosovo](#), the ‘We march, we do not celebrate’ collective was fined by the police for ‘disturbing public order and damaging public property’ after protesting against femicide and throwing red paint at the buildings of law enforcement agencies. Anti-government protesters in Slovenia, who have staged cycling protests each Friday since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, have fined. Prominent protester Jaša Jenull received three fines amounting to €35,000 (approx. US\$36,400) under the government of former prime minister Janez Janša. In [Norway](#), climate activists who blocked the road as part of their ‘Stop Oil Exploration’ campaign were arrested and fined NOK 12,000 (approx. US\$1,130). Additionally, since some activists were foreign nationals, the leader of the Progress Party asked the Ministry of Justice to deport them and issue an entry ban against them.

In Poland, women's rights activists are facing [judicial harassment](#) following their participation in [pro-abortion protests](#) during 2020 and 2021 amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Marta Lempart, from the Polish Women’s Strike, is facing over 100 charges, including endangering public health and ‘causing an epidemiological threat’, punishable by up to eight years in prison.

Criminal prosecution for ‘violent behaviour’ has been initiated in [Serbia](#) against three activists of the Youth Student Action for after they interrupted a debate on the Novi Sad General Urban Plan by unfurling a banner and setting off pyrotechnic devices as an act of protest. The activists, who are facing up to five years in prison, have been the target of smear campaigns by pro-government newspapers branding them as ‘Serb haters, traitors, and destroyers of the state’.

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Protesters and human rights defenders in [Belarus](#) have been targeted since protests erupted in 2020. For example, Marfa Rabkova from the Viasna Centre is accused in 13 cases of ‘allegedly organising and encouraging activities that violated civil order, publicly calling for activities that threatened national security, creating an extremist formation, running an extremist organisation, inciting social hatred, hooliganism, vandalism, damaging private property, and for illegal activities with the use of explosives’ and faces up to 20 years in prison. In Finland in March 2022, 12 activists from Elokapiina, the Finnish Extinction Rebellion movement, were [convicted of insubordination](#) for staging protests where they blocked two main streets and reportedly refused police orders to clear the road.



POLAND: PROSECUTORS IN WARSAW FILED AN INDICTMENT AGAINST THREE WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACTIVISTS FROM THE POLISH WOMEN'S STRIKE, ACCUSING THEM OF ENDANGERING PUBLIC HEALTH AND "CAUSING AN EPIDEMIOLOGICAL THREAT" FOR PROTESTS WHICH TOOK PLACE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AGAINST THE NEAR-TOTAL ABORTION BAN IN OCTOBER 2020. (PHOTO BY OMAR MARQUES/GETTY IMAGES)

In [Kazakhstan](#), following mass protests for [economic and political change](#) in January 2022 that were suppressed with lethal force, the authorities have continued to target those who participated. Dozens of civil society and opposition activists were detained during protests and some are facing criminal charges in apparent retaliation for their activism. Additionally, there are allegations of ill-treatment and torture of detainees.

The authorities allegedly continue to target and detain people they suspect of playing leading roles in the mass protests in Karakalpakstan, [Uzbekistan](#). Unconfirmed reports indicate that some of those detained were extrajudicially killed and that officials removed dead bodies from the houses of people believed to have been killed to hide evidence of crimes.

Likewise in the **MENA** region, incidents of attacks, harassment, prosecution and jailing of protesters and protest supporters – in some instances years after protests – are some of the post-protest tactics documented by the CIVICUS Monitor.

In Kuwait, the authorities harassed protesters by [summoning](#) them for questioning after participating in protests on the human rights of the stateless Bedoon community. A similar trend is noted in Lebanon, where state security is reported to have [summoned](#) protesters after they demonstrated to denounce [government inaction](#) in response to the huge explosion in Beirut in August 2020.

In Qatar, the courts sentenced people to life imprisonment for participating in peaceful popular protests that culminated on 9 August 2021. In one notable case, two of those [sentenced to life imprisonment](#) in May 2022 did not actually participate in protests but only vocally supported them on social media.

Similarly, in Iran, the authorities have misused the justice system to [judicially harass](#) and prosecute those who call for accountability in cases of violations against protesters, as was seen in the [brutal assault](#) and subsequent imprisonment November 2021 of prominent woman human rights defender Narges Mohammadi, following her arrest in order to begin serving a jail sentence in connection to her vocal support for the bereaved family of victims of the crackdown on nationwide protests in November 2019. In the protests that began in September 2022, at least [1,000 indictments](#) have been issued by the judiciary against protesters as of 31 October 2022.

In Kuwait, the authorities have gone further to [demand extradition](#) of exiled protesters in order to jail them, as documented in the case of critical blogger Mesaed Al-Musaileem who faces a lengthy prison sentence and is at risk of torture after being convicted of offences related to his online expression and peaceful participation in gatherings.

Protesters are at risk of death and violence even after protests. In Iraq, the body of Haider Sabri, a prominent activist who participated in the October 2019 protest movement, was [found](#) dead in Basra city in late January 2022 under circumstances that remain ambiguous. In Lebanon, protesters who are held in detention are subjected to torture and [enforced disappearance](#), as reported after protests in January 2022 over the economic crisis and a renewed lockdown.

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However, despite the dire situation, and amid increased repression of civilian protesters in the MENA region, a resilient civil society has defied all odds to push back against government excesses, continuing to take collective actions to call for accountability, social justice and the protection of human rights. In response to mounting pressure from human rights defenders in Iraq, in February 2022 the authorities [arrested](#) Lieutenant-Colonel Omar Nizar, who was affiliated with the Rapid Response Division, on charges of killing protesters during the infamous 2019 crackdown on protests. Similarly, a case against Iraqi activist Faisal Salman Gharib Al-Barki and 14 others in relation to their participation in October 2019 protests was also [returned](#) by the court for further investigations because of notable deficiencies, in what may be a positive step by the courts to protect the rights of protesters. It remains to be seen whether the courts will maintain the momentum to protect the rights of these and other protesters, and whether the arrest of Nizar will mark the beginning of a new era of accountability for protest abuses, or whether these are superficial attempts to whitewash the government's poor human rights record.

LEBANON: PROTESTS STAGED OVER LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY FOR BEIRUT PORT EXPLOSION. (PHOTO BY REUTERS/ MOHAMED AZAKIR VIA GALLO IMAGES).



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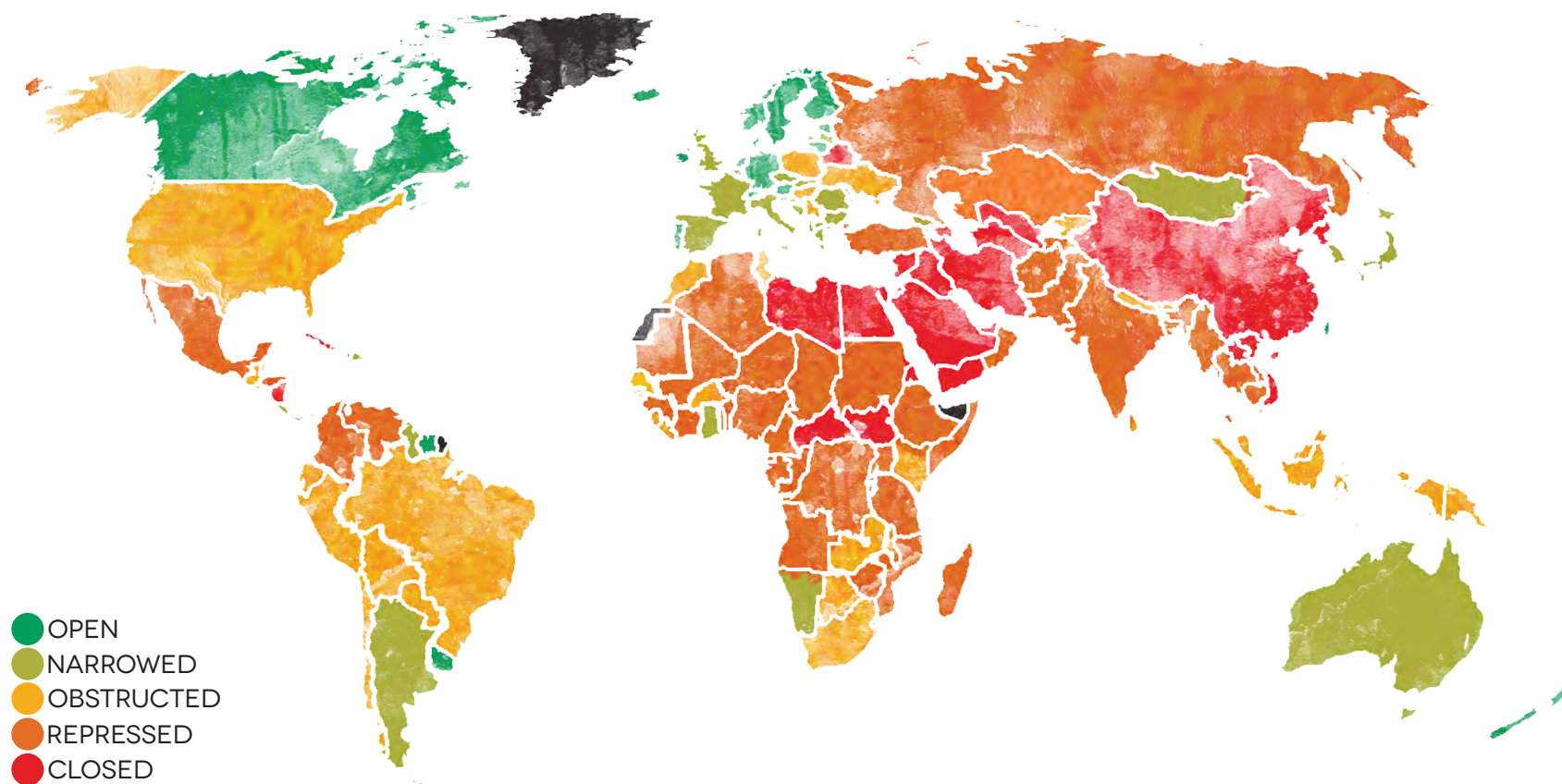
RECOMMENDATIONS TO STATES

- Respect the right to peaceful assembly and ensure its free exercise without discrimination. This requires states to allow assemblies to take place without unwarranted interference and ensure that protesters are protected.
- Amend all laws and regulations in order to guarantee fully the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and adopt best practices on freedom of peaceful assembly, as put forward by the 2012 report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association, which calls for simple processes for the notification of assemblies being held rather than permission being required, and by General Comment No. 37 on the right to peaceful assembly adopted by the UN Human Rights Committee in 2020.
- Halt hostile rhetoric that stigmatises peaceful protests, such as portraying them as destabilising and as a threat, and adopt all necessary measures to ensure that individuals, organisations and communities exercising their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly are not subjected to attacks, harassment, threats and intimidation from state and non-state sources.
- Ensure that journalists, human rights defenders and others involved in monitoring or reporting on assemblies are not be prohibited from, or unduly limited in, exercising these functions, including with respect to monitoring the actions of law enforcement officials. They must not face reprisals or other harassment, and their equipment must not be confiscated or damaged.
- Cease internet shutdowns and repeal any laws and policies that allow for network disruptions and shutdowns, including in the context of protests, and refrain from the use of biometric identification and recognition technologies, such as facial recognition, for arbitrary surveillance of protesters online and offline.
- Ensure that public health emergencies such as COVID-19 are not used as a pretext to suppress the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, and ensure that quarantine measures are never used to punish or prevent people joining peaceful protests.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO STATES

- Unconditionally and immediately release all protesters who have been detained for exercising their right to freedom of peaceful assembly and drop all existing charges against them or quash their convictions.
- Publicly condemn at the highest levels all instances of the use of excessive and brutal force by security forces in response to protests.
- Ensure independent, thorough and impartial investigation of human rights violations in the context of protests, including arbitrary arrests, excessive force and extrajudicial killings committed by security forces and hold perpetrators command responsibility, accountable.
- Provide recourse to judicial review and effective remedy, including compensation, in cases of unlawful denial of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly by state authorities.
- Review and if necessary update existing human rights training and protocols for police and security forces, with the assistance of independent civil society, to foster a more consistent application of international human rights standards, including the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms.
- Establish and strengthen independent police oversight and investigatory bodies, including by providing sufficient resources, and ensure they are able to effectively investigate allegations of unlawful use of force against protesters.

METHODOLOGY



The data is extrapolated from the CIVICUS Monitor’s country updates, which are published every weekday. These [country updates](#) use a standardised template for providing assessments on: freedom of expression; freedom of peaceful assembly; and freedom of association. Each of these country updates is assigned a number of tags from our taxonomy, these tags are then processed to get the number of countries where violations took place. For example: if a protester is detained or a number of protesters are detained in the country during the analysis period, the country is assigned this tag/label and gets entered into our database. From the past year (1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022), there were a total of 476 country updates, 351 of which covering incidents related to protests.

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