



# STATE OF CIVIL SOCIETY REPORT 2018

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## YEAR IN REVIEW: TOP TEN TRENDS



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Wherever possible, we have provided hyperlinks to additional information related to the text. You will also see colour-coded text, which indicates additional information in our month-by-month sections.



Thousands of migrants, mostly from Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Mali, take part in the 'Fight Right, Rights Without Borders' demonstration in Rome, Italy, December

Credit: Getty Images

# FOREWORD

## FROM DHANANJAYAN SRISKANDARAJAH, CIVICUS SECRETARY GENERAL

This year, we have modified the format of our annual State of Civil Society Report. This report details ‘the year in review’, chronicling some of the most important developments relating to civil society around the world in 2017. In the second half of 2018, CIVICUS will publish our thematic report on the theme of ‘reimagining democracy’, complete with the usual collection of essays from members, partners and experts.

Anyone who has read previous CIVICUS reports will recall the optimism in our analysis a few years ago. The uprisings in the Arab world, the Occupy movement and the impact of digital campaigning had inspired many in civil society to believe that we were at a dawn of a new era of citizen participation. Unfortunately, as documented by report after report, the last few years have seen a systematic and global crackdown on the conditions for civil society.

What is perhaps unusual about this year’s report is the focus on the resistance and the fact that the fightback is on. Almost everywhere we look, we see signs of citizens organising and mobilising in new and creative ways to defend civic freedoms, fight for social justice and equality, and push back on populism. I know that these are difficult times for many in civil society but I hope this year’s report offers some strength and inspiration to our members and partners.

Something else is also becoming clear. Reclaiming the basic rights we’re losing in the clampdown on civic space, working out what our democratic rights look like in a digital world, responding to democratic deficiencies exposed by rising tides of populism and recasting our intergovernmental institutions as wellsprings of substantive democracy: these challenges aren’t so much about reviving our weakening democracies, as about reimagining democracy for a radically changed world. This is why the thematic part of this year’s State of Civil Society report will focus on democracy itself. Watch this space.



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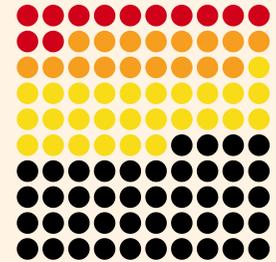
## INTRODUCTION: THE FIGHTBACK IS ON

As 2017 gave way to 2018, the battle lines seemed more starkly drawn and our societies more divided than ever: on one side are those who seek the creation of a just, inclusive and sustainable world, and on the other, those who actively fight against such efforts; on one side are those who strive to make democracy real, encouraging debate, dialogue and dissent, and on the other, those who seek to manipulate the institutions of democracy to perpetuate their power and advance elite interests; on one side are those who march to demand human dignity and justice, and on the other, those who support insular world views and repressive politics that appeal to narrow self interests.

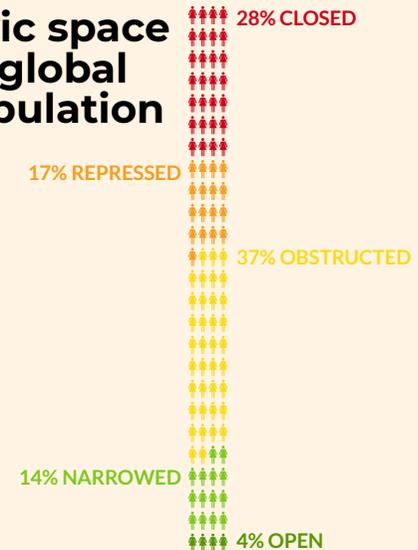
As our societies divided, in many countries repressive forces came to the fore. Attacks on the core civic freedoms – of association, peaceful assembly and expression – have become more brazen. The **CIVICUS Monitor** reports that at present there are serious systemic problems with civic space (the space for civil society) in 109 countries, the majority. In 2017, attacks on civic space came even in countries where they were rarely seen before. It seems that the enemies of human rights and social justice have grown more confident. Perhaps they think they are winning.

But they are wrong. If it is time to pick a side, many are making a positive choice. In 2017, people the world over made a conscious decision to stand for human rights, social justice and progressive values. In country after country, the year saw civil society at our finest: defending rights, demanding proper services and speaking out about corruption, election fraud and constitutional rigging. Sometimes, as in **South Korea**, we mobilised in such huge numbers that we changed the political calculus, forcing self-serving and corrupt leaders to stand aside. When governments showed the worst of humanity, as in **Myanmar**, **Syria** and **Yemen**, civil society showed the best, voluntarily placing ourselves in the firing line, doing what we could to help and exposing human rights abuses. When devastating **earthquakes hit Mexico** and **hurricanes struck the Caribbean**, it was civil society that mobilised as first responders. Thanks to civil society advocacy, serious steps were taken towards the

109 countries have **closed**, **repressed** or **obstructed** civic space



Civic space by global population



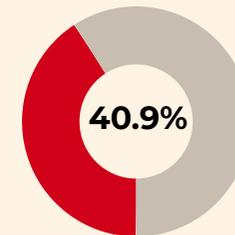
All diagrams relate to CIVICUS Monitor as at February 2018.



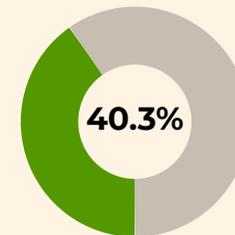
aspiration of a world **free of nuclear weapons** with the agreement of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Civil society successfully advocated for progressive new laws on **access to information**, **protection for human rights defenders** and **women's** and **LGBTI** rights, and mobilised to stop existing laws being changed for the worst. We challenged impunity for **sexual harassment and institutionalised sexism**. Many in civil society found a renewed sense of purpose in fighting back against repression. The story of 2017 told in this report's pages is therefore not solely one of restriction; it is also one of resolute resistance. The fightback is sure to grow in 2018.

## 2017: REPRESSION AND RESISTANCE

Percentage of reports on the CIVICUS Monitor in 2017 that contained news of...



...activists detained...



...peaceful protests.



## 10 TRENDS FROM 2017

Looking back at last year for civil society, some clear trends emerge. Many of them challenge civil society, but at the same time there are positive trends in civil society action.

### 1. ROGUE MARKETS AND DANGEROUS ALTERNATIVES

Today's world is poised between a broken model of crony capitalism and profoundly pessimistic alternatives. The post-cold war economic and political model of globalised neoliberalism – promoted on the basis that minimally regulated markets would yield the greatest benefit for the highest number – has failed people all around the world. It has seen governments grant tax breaks to the richest, offload their basic responsibilities onto favoured corporations, create advantages for big business and bail them out when they fail. At the same time, it has seen public spending slashed and social safety nets clawed back, denying excluded populations the protection they need from the state. It has fuelled increasingly extractive economic behaviour that has stretched planetary boundaries beyond breaking point and created vast scope for grand corruption, enabled by deregulation. It has fuelled searing inequality through the growth and enrichment of an unaccountable super-elite, in whom wealth and power are grotesquely concentrated, to the detriment of society's wellbeing: globally, **82 per cent** of the wealth created in 2017 went to the richest 1 per cent, while the poorest half of the world's population saw no increase in their wealth.

But as one model founders, the alternatives that threaten to fill the void are at least as dire. Chief among them is the Chinese model of tightly-directed state capitalism, promoting economic development while suppressing democracy and rights. As China's President Xi Jinping made clear in his triumphalist **October 2017 speech**, the Chinese model is actively being exported and promoted by its originators. It appeals to political and economic elites who want power free from scrutiny, and economic growth without people's

participation in decision-making. Several of the states listed by the CIVICUS Monitor as having **closed civic space** are among the most avid adopters of the China development model.

These models of governance, old and new, do not put people at their centre, other than a handful of extremely rich and powerful people. Because their success depends on suppressing human rights and denying people's participation in decision-making, they demand an increasing repression of civil society, seen in country after country in 2017.

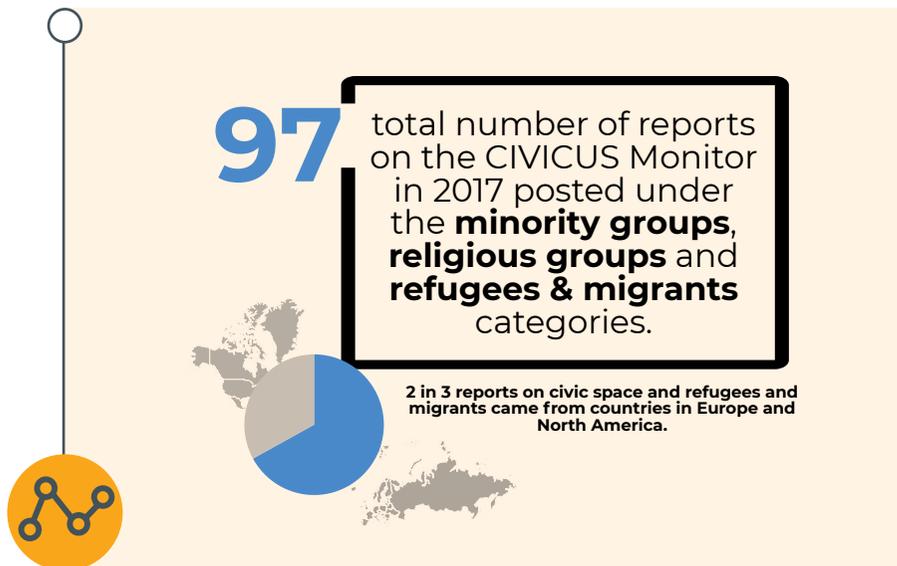
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**While as civil society we are mobilising and resisting in an impressive range of ways, we sometimes get caught up in the moment; in decrying particular political leaders and platforms we may miss the bigger picture of the power structures from which they spring and which they uphold. We may become timid in the face of repression or bogged down in seeking incremental change as we work to ameliorate the most pressing problems. We need to decide whether we are passive participants in broken systems or active agents of change. To connect with people, we need to speak up against the dismal current models of governance and offer bold, compelling possibilities. The challenge is how to bridge from our daily acts of resistance against the impacts of repressive structures to the vision we can offer of another, better world, and how we can keep sight of that vision while engaged in defensive acts.**

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## 2. POLARISING POLITICS AND DIVIDED SOCIETIES

People denied voice and a fair share of wealth under flawed models of governance are understandably angry. In many countries, people are tired of the conventional politics and leaders on offer; there has been a collapse in support for conventional parties, unless led by leaders who promise a decisive break with the past. People are right to be angry, but anger has fired and misfired in all kinds of directions. Some have embraced expansive and progressive platforms, but many have shown themselves prepared to back anything that seems different – including narrow identity politics that promise simple solutions to complex problems. Identity-based politics are trumping issue-based politics. People are encouraged to blame minorities and excluded groups for their problems. Neo-fascist ideologies are asserting themselves, offering the siren calls of nationalism and xenophobia. Borders, both physical and symbolic, are being reinforced, and the far right is skewing the political agenda as conventional parties try to win back voters. These trends, evident in 2016, gained further ground in 2017, as evidenced by election after election in Europe.



As a result, strong-arm leaders are on the rise, epitomised by Russia's President Vladimir Putin, who exports his insidious strategies of gaming the political system to concentrate, centralise and personalise political power. Many follow similar tactics, including Viktor Orbán in Hungary, Narendra Modi in India, Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel, Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey, Yoweri Museveni in Uganda and Donald Trump in the USA, to name a few. Hard-line rulers maintain power by ruling in the interests of population blocs that most support them, rather than society as a whole, suppressing dissenting and minority voices.

Although many in civil society have been at the forefront of exposing failed political and economic systems, civil society can find itself slurred for an alleged association with globalism and elites, putting it at odds with assertions of national self-interest. Hard-line rulers repress civil society when it tries to hold them accountable and stand up for excluded groups, such as migrants, refugees and LGBTI people. Sharply polarised societies create an urgent need for civil society to offer spaces where consensus can be rebuilt, while making such work more difficult.

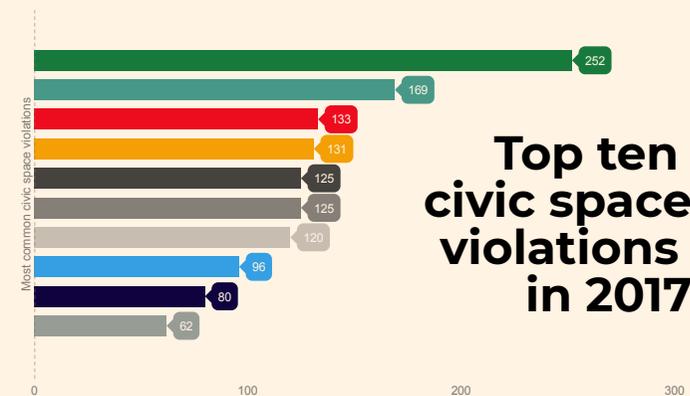
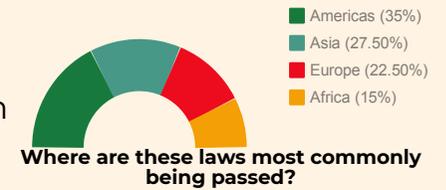
**The challenge for civil society, while fighting repression, is to acknowledge the legitimacy of anger but offer reasoned, realistic but imaginative alternatives that speak to people's aspirations for a better life, and channels through which anger can be directed towards positive change. In a context of polarising politics, we need to build understanding and support for the notion that our societies are better when power is shared. We need to promote afresh the idea that, while voting in free and fair elections is a hard-won right that many do not yet enjoy, democracy does not begin and end with elections, and dissent expressed by those not on the winning side is an important and valuable part of the democratic process. We need to encourage a deepening of democracy, founded in the notion that democracy exists wherever dialogue does: in the street, the workplace and the home as much as in the ballot box.**

## 3. PERSONAL RULE AND THE UNDERMINING OF DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Many political leaders seem to live in a different world: a global bubble in which they have more in common with other elite members – politicians, business leaders, financial market-makers – than us. Thanks to revelations such as the **Paradise Papers**, we know how they engineer the system to keep their wealth securely and secretly protected offshore. Personal rule and the politics of patronage are increasingly eclipsing the rule of law. 2017 witnessed several instances of misuse of power at the highest levels to ensure that those at the top were protected from the consequences of poor decisions or the exposure of their corruption.

To enable impunity, the past year saw constitutional principles on the separation of powers between the executive, legislature and judiciary placed under strain, parliamentary and judicial independence undermined and attempts made to erase checks and balances. 2017 threw up numerous examples, including in **Bolivia** and **Uganda**, of constitutional rewriting by leaders keen to stay in power, often when constitutions told them it was time to step down. 2017 also saw examples of laws being rewritten to criminalise public protests, notably in the **USA**, and countless civil society activists being thrown into jail by biased courts happy by design to comply with presidential whims: the detention of activists was the most common violation of civil society rights recorded by the CIVICUS Monitor in 2017. Hard-line presidents engineered courts in their favour, as seen in **Venezuela**; in the most brazen examples they jailed judges who stood against them, or appointed presidential proxies to skew courts in their favour. Opposition parties were shut down, as in **Cambodia**, or their members kept out of parliament on technicalities, as in **Hong Kong** and **Zambia**. Moments of judicial independence, such as **Kenya's Supreme Court** decision that the presidential election must be re-run, were celebrated because they were surprising and rare, although they usually brought backlash by angered political leaders.

### Restrictive Laws reported on the CIVICUS Monitor by Country, Region & Type



### Top ten civil space violations in 2017

This graph shows the ten most common kinds of civil space violations reported on the CIVICUS Monitor in 2017. The data represents the number of reports in which those violations were reported. It clearly shows that the detention of activists is the tactic most often used by governments to restrict civic space.



As the rule of law is replaced by personal rule, civil society actors that stand up for constitutions and the separation of powers are targeted. When regressive changes are introduced, it becomes harder for civil society to play its essential roles of scrutinising the actions of the powerful and holding them accountable.

**Nonetheless, the stakes are simply too high for civil society to leave the chipping away of democratic institutions unchallenged. We should recommit to the difficult responsibility of shoring up, and in some cases rebuilding, democratic institutions undermined by personal rule. We need to campaign on the importance of constitutionalism, with proper respect for minority rights, and the need for clear and predictable rules for our governance institutions. To do this, we need to make new connections between organised civil society, movements resisting regressive changes, and independent parliamentarians and judiciary.**

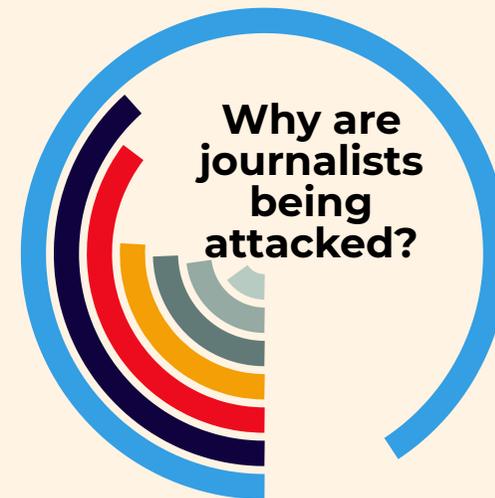


People in Paraguay protest against a proposal to change presidential term limits

Credit: Getty Images

## 4. INDEPENDENT MEDIA UNDER ATTACK

Attacks on journalists have been taken to the next level. In 2017, several high-profile journalists reporting on the manoeuvrings of political and economic leaders, following the money to expose high-level corruption or covering the year's many protests were attacked in increasingly brazen ways, revealing the perpetrators' confidence of impunity. This potential for violence was demonstrated through the car bomb attack that killed **Daphne Caruana Galizia**, who exposed high-level corruption in Malta. Attacks happened even when journalists were enrolled on schemes supposed to protect them, as was the case of **Cándido Ríos**, who in August 2017 became the 10th journalist killed in Mexico that year.



This graph represents the number of reports on the CIVICUS Monitor in 2017 which describe attacks on journalists working on a variety of issues. It clearly shows that political reporting is by far the area of work most likely to provoke attacks on journalists. Reporting on corruption and protests also commonly leads to journalists being attacked.

■ Political Reporting ■ Protest Reporting ■ Corruption Reporting ■ Reporting on Ethnic/political/religious differences  
■ Human rights activism ■ Crime Reporting ■ Conflict Reporting



# OVERVIEW YEAR IN REVIEW

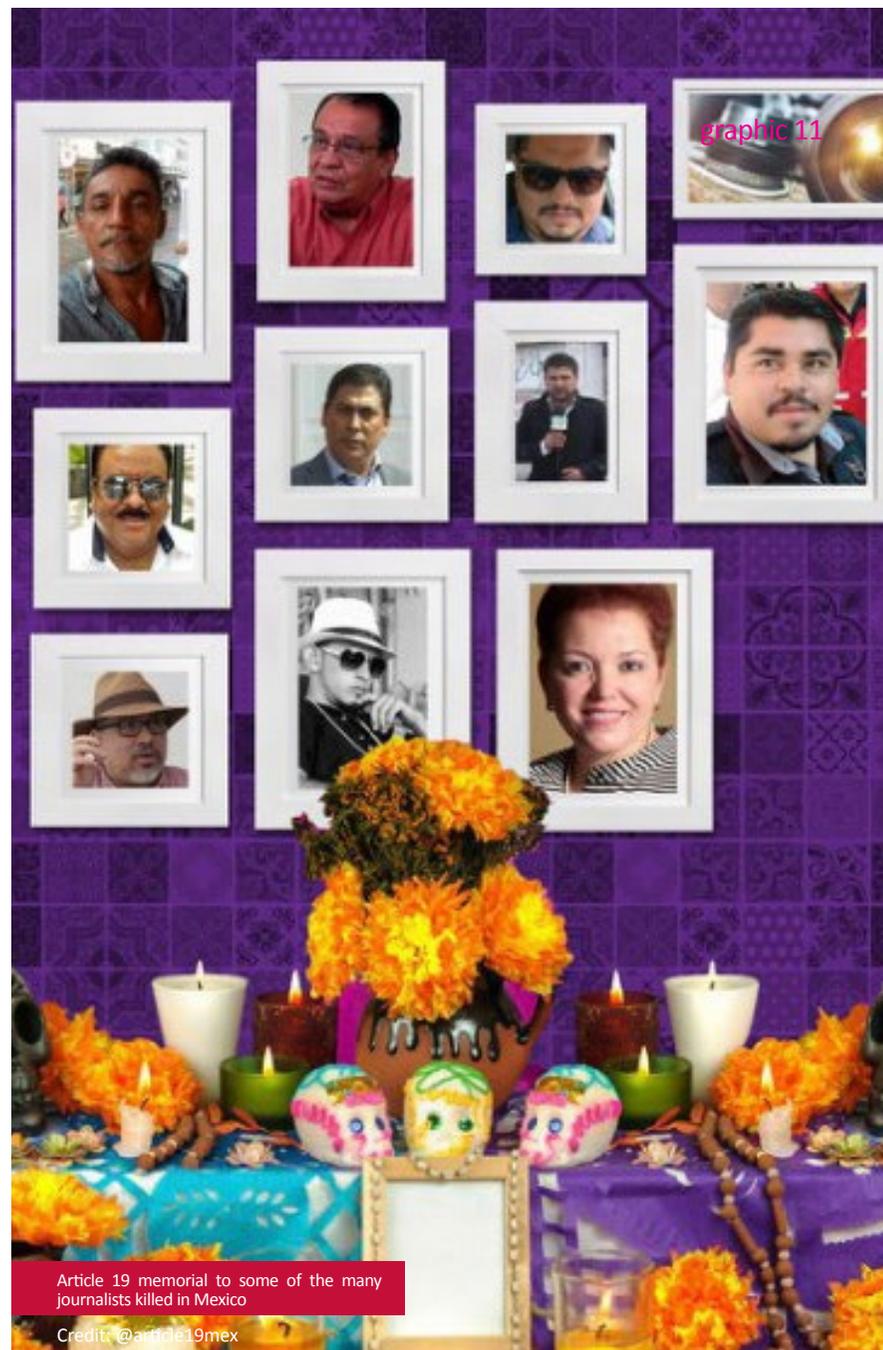
Depending on the context, journalists were threatened by combinations of criminal, business, political and extremist interests. However, the highest level of responsibility for attacks on journalists remains with the state – whether actively, as the source of attack, or passively, for failing to protect, adequately investigate attacks and bring perpetrators to justice. 2017 saw a **record number** of journalists in jail, with **Turkey** the world’s biggest jailer of journalists.

Alongside attacks, a growing means through which states undermine media freedom is the politicised distribution of advertising. Public advertising is a key source of media revenue in many global south states. By channelling advertising spending to favourable media and withdrawing it from independent outlets, tactics observed in countries including **Pakistan** and **Paraguay**, governments are shaping the media landscape and harming media pluralism. At the same time, public media in numerous countries are seeing their independence challenged by state and political interests. Meanwhile serious journalists and reputable media outlets are increasingly vilified as producing ‘fake news’ and several states have rushed to boost their censorship powers by passing or proposing new laws against ‘fake news’.

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**Once we recognise the importance of protecting dissent, we cannot escape our obligation to safeguard journalists and their work. There has never been greater need for civil society to strengthen relationships with independent media, based on a shared interest in promoting transparency. We need to stand in solidarity with journalists who are being harassed and attacked. We need to support media protests, such as when newspapers and websites go dark for a day, as seen in countries including Mongolia and Serbia in 2017. We need to push harder for effective journalist protection schemes to be implemented.**

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Article 19 memorial to some of the many journalists killed in Mexico

Credit: @article19mex

## 5. ONLINE FREEDOM EMERGENCY

The promise that the internet and social media once offered has long been compromised. At times of national contestation – around elections or during protests – people in multiple countries found their signals blocked or their apps not responding. **Cameroon** introduced the longest internet block, lasting three months, in its Anglophone regions, while major shutdowns were seen in **Iran** and **Togo** during mass protests. In many countries, people who spoke out online risked being vilified, attacked or jailed. **Viet Nam**, for example, was reported to have jailed at least 25 online activists in 2017. The extent to which people are targeted for misinformation around elections became clear in 2017, with attempts at online manipulation made in **at least 18** recent elections; in close contests, the fear is that these interventions could decisively defeat progressive voices. Meanwhile a big blow to internet freedom came in the USA, with the ending of its **net neutrality** rule, which will enable internet providers to privilege those who can pay more for better access, something that can only harm the diversity of what people can see and do online.

As civil society has used the internet and social media to connect, debate and mobilise, so have repressive state and non-state forces. State surveillance of civil society has become widespread and civil society has been targeted with false propaganda spread by extreme right-wing elements. Online platforms have become battlegrounds in which regressive voices – increasingly state-sponsored and professionalised – seek to shape opinion with misinformation and myths. Armies of trolls leap onto and implode progressive conversations and online bullies spread hateful opinions. Toxic abuse against women or people from minorities who express opinions that challenge power is commonplace.

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**In the light of these challenges, we need to campaign on ensuring that access to an open internet is recognised as a core human right. We need to get smarter about protecting ourselves online by making better use of encryption technologies. In the face of an online barrage of misinformation, we need to counter falsity with facts. And we need to get better at having the kind of provocative, attention-grabbing online presence that our adversaries have. But we need to make sure we get our facts right, because if we fail to be scrupulous, our mistakes will be seized upon and what we say will be vilified as ‘fake news’.**

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**58** total number of reports on the CIVICUS Monitor in 2017 documenting **restrictions on the internet.**



The majority of reported internet restrictions on the CIVICUS Monitor in 2017 came from countries in Asia, the Middle East and Africa.



## 6. THE RISE OF UNCIVIL SOCIETY

Our understanding of what civil society is and stands for is being challenged by the increasing assertion of regressive voices that position themselves in the civil society arena. While civil society has always been a diverse, competitive and discursive sphere, it is no longer safe to assume that only civil society that believes in fundamental rights, pursues the common good and advocates for the needs of excluded people will be able to access key decision-making processes. Uncivil society is on the rise. Socially conservative forces are claiming civil society space, among them pressure groups that seek to rob women of their reproductive rights, think tanks that act as outriders for nationalist and xenophobic ideas and market fundamentalism, and protest movements against LGBTI, refugees and migrants' rights. These regressive forces working within the civil society arena are becoming increasingly emboldened.

This is not happening by accident: it is often supported by regressive governments that want to weaken the impact of civil society that advances progressive positions. In some countries, including Poland recently, state funding schemes have been reworked to enable greater support for uncivil society. Governments can then present themselves as supporting and nurturing civil society, something that plays well internationally and enables governments to argue against criticisms that they attack civil society. Uncivil society is increasingly making its presence felt in the **international sphere**, well-organised and in numbers, funded and aided by supportive governments and narrow business interests, to claim the space, argue against rights and sow confusion about what civil society is while appearing to tick boxes about citizen consultation.

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**As anti-rights groups rise, expand and colonise civil society spaces, we need greater clarity about what civil society is, does and believes in. What matters about civil society is not its organisational form or how it works as much as what it stands for. The key test is whether we defend and advance fundamental rights, and are guided by a vision of human equality and social justice. While diversity and pluralism are important characteristics of the civil society arena, we need to be clear about and restate the essential values that define who can be identified as a member of civil society. We need to reclaim spaces in national and international forums that have been taken by anti-rights groups. We also need to pay renewed attention to efforts to demonstrate that we are accountable and transparent, so the public can understand what civil society really is and believes in.**

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Protest against racism and hate, Chicago, USA, August

Credit: Getty Images

## 7. MULTILATERALISM IN THE FIRING LINE

Recent political shifts mean that the notion of national sovereignty is being strongly reasserted but simultaneously narrowed: it is not the people who are sovereign, but presidents and ruling elites. Multilateral institutions are correspondingly being undermined. When they raise human rights concerns, they are attacked as propagators of cosmopolitan values and utopian standards, and as agents of unwelcome overreach that hinder the pursuit of national self-interest. Otherwise, they are hijacked as vehicles to advance neoliberalism and corporate agendas.

While the adoption of the **nuclear weapons treaty** was a noted multilateral success, thanks to tireless civil society advocacy, 2017 saw many setbacks for the notion of a rules-based international order. States undermined the international system by pulling out of multilateral bodies and agreements; the USA led the way with a barrage of withdrawals, including from UNESCO and the painstakingly negotiated **Paris Agreement** on Climate Change, while its recognition of **Jerusalem as Israel's capital** shredded a sheaf of UN resolutions and decades of consensus. Meanwhile Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates showed scant respect for international humanitarian law in their interventions in Syria and Yemen. The most powerful states continued to use their veto power to block action and stymie much-needed reform, as shown by the ongoing UN Security Council deadlock and the continuing lack of a strong global tax body. 2017 also showed how states can simply starve international agencies of the resources they need, with a **UN funding cut** driven by political motivations that will reduce its ability to respond to today's complex problems. In a clear indication of skewed global priorities, the UN's total peacekeeping budget is under **half a per cent** of global spending on arms.

These trends impact on civil society, because civil society looks to the international system to propagate rules and norms that uphold human rights. Civil society turns to international bodies when states refuse to listen, and

works with them to encourage oversight of states' human rights records. A withdrawal from multilateralism robs civil society of these opportunities. A contempt for international rules means that activists who cooperate with international human rights bodies face growing threats of reprisals from states, seen for example in **Bahrain** and **Egypt**.

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**While many in civil society debate whether engagement with multilateral institutions is worth the effort, given the difficulty of achieving impact, conceding the international arena would be a mistake in these challenging times. Deeper civil society engagement is needed to preserve and build on the gains civil society has made. We need to formulate a new defence of multilateralism that asserts that problems transcend borders and cannot be solved through a narrow nationalist approach. But we should not be defending a failing system. Civil society and multilateral institutions should work together towards a shared vision of a global system that is of value to citizens, and of which citizens can see the value. A new compact is needed between civil society and multilateral bodies so that multilateralism becomes people-centred rather than state-centred, and is brave and progressive rather than timid and compromised.**

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Activists for Bahraini human rights protest outside the Saudi Embassy in Washington, DC

Credit: Getty Images

## 8. PRIVATE SECTOR MANDATE CREEP

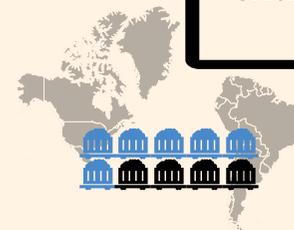
As the UN's funding base has declined, it has increasingly embraced the private sector, something that many in civil society who attended the **2017 UN General Assembly** noted with concern. At the national level, the private sector plays an ever-growing role in the delivery of core services, while governments prioritise the promotion of business growth to drive economic development. The role of the private sector seems hardwired into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which position its resources as key to advancing ambitious development targets, even though privileging the private sector may make other goals harder to achieve, such as those on decent work, income inequality and responsible consumption and corruption, which require radical and systemic change to address root causes, something businesses that benefit from current models of governance are unlikely to embrace. While there are positive examples of partnership between civil society and businesses that respect rights and want to make the world a better place, there are many that intervene in the development and governance arenas in pursuit of profit or to defend business models based on the obstruction and denial of rights. Close connections between governments and businesses also open up opportunities for the normalisation of corruption.

For civil society, the growing role of the private sector in national and international governance raises several concerns. Projects with extensive private sector involvement tend to offer less scope for democratic oversight and accountability. When the private sector has privileged access to governance institutions, including those of the UN, civil society may be crowded out and find our own prospects of access and influence suffer.

**To fill a crucial gap in international law, a wider range of civil society should engage in the process to develop a binding treaty on transnational business and human rights currently under way at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. Where governance is dominated by government-private sector partnerships, we need to ensure we are connected with excluded groups and local communities to help channel the voices of those otherwise left out. We need to develop progressive partnership principles and broker people-centred relationships between CSOs and progressive businesses. We need to share, learn from**

**and promote the still too few examples of good practice in which businesses have worked to enable and defend fundamental rights, including to defend civil society. And we need to find new ways of nurturing and connecting with groups that straddle the line between civil society and business.**

**137** total number of reports on the CIVICUS Monitor in 2017 posted under the **labour rights, private sector, and extractive industries** categories.



6 in 10 reports on civic space related to the extractive industries come from a country in the Americas.



## 9. PATRIARCHY UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT

In October 2017, the **#MeToo** hashtag spread through social media, and stories of sexual harassment flooded the internet. An avalanche of revelations, first in the entertainment industry, then in politics and beyond, ensued. Every single woman who spoke out meant someone realising she was not alone and daring to break the silence. The viral campaign made clear the scale and institutionalised nature of sexism and sexual harassment and their crippling effect on women's lives. As this became one of the defining issues of current times, a marked divide opened between those in denial about sexual harassment and those committed to doing something about it.

The launch of the **Time's Up** campaign showed a determination to democratise the issue by encouraging and enabling women in more disadvantaged positions to report sexual harassment and seek justice. Not only had sexual harassment become increasingly unacceptable and inexcusable, it had also become a crucial part of the debate about wider gender inequalities and power and wealth imbalances. Systemic inequalities came to be recognised as the breeding ground for the abuse and harassment of women, bringing to the fore issues such as the need to increase the number of women in leadership and decision-making positions, guarantee equal pay and opportunity, foster a better work environment and recognise women's unpaid work.

**These are issues that demand long-term change, and it is our duty as progressive civil society to deepen the discussion and recognise overlapping inequalities and discriminations, and push for greater representation and remedies for the disadvantages faced by women from excluded groups, impoverished and immigrant women, and lesbian and transgender women, among others. We need to take an active part in movements that put patriarchy under the spotlight and challenge behaviours and attitudes that enable sexism, gender discrimination and other forms of intersecting discriminations, wherever we see them. This means we have to get our own house in order first: revelations and rumours of sexual harassment within civil society must be**

**taken seriously and investigated fully, perpetrators dealt with and findings shared transparently. We need to lead by example by putting in place and implementing clear policies on workplace harassment in CSOs. We have to ensure we model and promote best practice as civil society, on this issue as in all others.**

**81** total number of reports on the CIVICUS Monitor in 2017 which related specifically to **women** involved in activism.



## 10. RESISTANCE WORKS

In the face of the challenges set out above, civil society fought back and won some tremendous victories. We came out onto the streets and spoke out online in huge numbers, and in some cases protest moments formed into movements that kept up momentum for change. In **Romania**, we protested in hundreds of thousands to resist government plans to soft pedal on corruption. In **El Salvador**, after years of advocacy, we persuaded the government to pass a law banning the gold-mining practices that harm the land, water and communities. When the US government pulled out of the Paris Agreement, local politicians, businesses and civil society came together to show that many of the country’s citizens still recognised the threat of climate change, while donations to progressive CSOs surged as people tried to do something, anything, to be part of the resistance. At their best, these movements, such as the **Dominican Republic’s Green March Movement** against corruption, brought together people from different sections of society who had not found common cause before but were now united by a shared and sustained determination to make change happen.



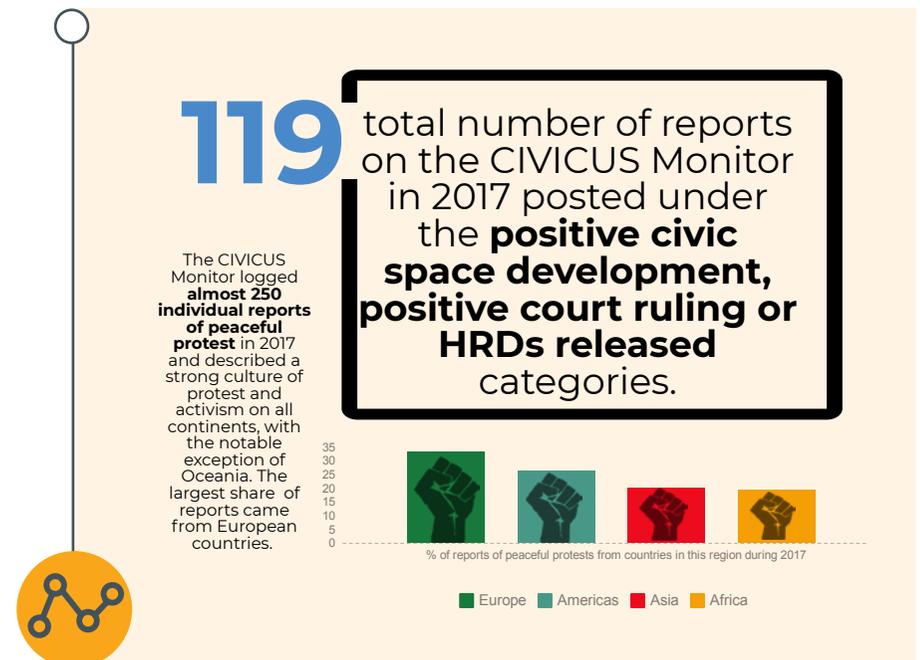
Thousands of Dominicans came together in the Green March Movement

Credit: Getty Images

Some of these actions involved people taking small but important steps. Some of them called for considerable bravery, in circumstances where people who speak out risk harassment and violence. Some brought new people into

participation. What they all demonstrated is a renewed desire to mobilise. They showed people sharing outrage – at broken promises, institutionalised corruption, impunity for the powerful, social injustice, profound inequality, environmental and climate emergency – and determined to do something positive in response.

**The challenges are now those of sustaining momentum, making connections and moving beyond moments of defiance to a shared vision of a changed world. For those of us who have long been working on these fronts, the challenge is to reach out to the newly mobilised, help them see themselves as part of a wider movement and offer pathways to sustained participation. The positive change we want to see in the world is happening, at the same time as the negative change we resist. We now need to rise up and deepen, sustain and scale up our acts of resistance.**



# SUSTAINING THE FIGHTBACK: MAKING COMMON CAUSE

As progressive civil society, we are stepping up our efforts to respond to the challenges identified in this report, and make real the fightback against repression. But we cannot do it alone, and nor should we try to. We need to make common cause with others who are striving for human rights and social justice. In particular we urge the following:

- **For active citizens:** we call on active citizens all around the world to take their activism to the next level, by connecting with each other locally, nationally and internationally, finding points of commonality between different issues and movements, and linking online activism with offline action. We encourage active citizens to speak out and mobilise in different ways, including by supporting social justice and rights groups through volunteering and offering financial and in-kind contributions to help enhance their sustainability and independence. We encourage active citizens to join or start their own CSOs, social movements and social enterprises. Organised civil society and its supporters should enable this by providing easy-to-follow routes for people to join and form civil society groups and offering new forms of membership and support.
  - **For democratic governments:** we urge democratic governments to model best practice in defending and enabling civic space within their countries, because when bad practice happens in democratic states, more repressive governments use this to justify their attacks on civil society. Democratic governments can also help by resisting moves to weaken international human rights standards at multilateral forums while focusing energy towards better norm setting and compliance. We also call on them to model the deepening of democratic practice
- by enabling spaces for discussion, dissent and dialogue at all levels. We urge development partner governments to give direct support to global south civil society, support civil society activists and human rights defenders who are under attack and prioritise the defence of civic space as an essential element of development cooperation and sustainable development.
- **For the private sector, media and academia:** we call on progressive businesses, independent media and academia to champion democratic norms and make common cause with civil society in defence of human rights and shared values, by forming new alliances, sharing platforms and developing and partnering in joint campaigns. Connections need to be made between the defence of civic space, media freedom, freedom of thought and opinion and the rule of law. As civil society, we should increase our potential for learning by deepening our connections to other groups and reinforcing the primacy of democratic values in sustaining media, academic and entrepreneurial agency.
  - **For multilateral institutions:** we urge multilateral institutions to reinforce the primacy of civil society participation in decision making and to make efforts to open up spaces for public participation in their activities. Civil society and multilateral bodies should work together to find new ways to make the case for progressive, people-centred multilateralism that reinforces the primacy of internationally agreed norms on human rights, sustainable development and climate justice while placing due emphasis on the need to resource international institutions adequately and safeguard their independence.

## CREDITS

### INTERVIEWEES

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**Our report is of, from and for civil society, drawing from a wide range of interviews with people close to the major stories of the day. Our report also draws from CIVICUS' ongoing programme of research and analysis into the conditions for civil society. In particular, it presents findings from the CIVICUS Monitor, our online platform that tracks civic space in 195 countries.**



South Koreans celebrate after the Constitutional Court upholds the impeachment of President Park Geun-hye, March

Credit: Getty Images

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