

A YEAR IN CIVIL SOCIETY - CITIZEN ACTION TO THE FORE

Our round-up of what has happened since the last CIVICUS State of Civil Society Report shows a new burgeoning of public protest, state pushback against civil society in a number of regions, an increasing focus on inequality and the excesses of the market, and fresh hope being born out of global processes to develop new, comprehensive and inclusive development goals.

1. CITIZENS' ACTION IN 2013-2014: A SECOND WAVE OF DISSENT

The era of mass protest has not come to an end. Many rushed to write off the peoples' uprisings against authoritarianism in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and the protests against market fundamentalism in Western Europe and North America, between 2010 and 2012, as not sustained and lacking in impact. But the last 12 months have shown that the age of mass dissent is here to stay. In 2013 and 2014, struggles for economic justice and democratic rights spread to new locales, including Brazil, Malaysia, Turkey, Ukraine and Venezuela, in what can be characterised as a second wave of protest.

Some clear patterns emerge from major recent protests. Firstly, there are similarities in the manner in which protests develop. Many of the major protests of 2013-2014 started off with a small group of protesters raising local issues. In Brazil, protests started in opposition to public transport fare hikes, in Istanbul 50 people gathered to demonstrate against the conversion of a city park to a shopping mall and in Ukraine protests were initiated by the Yanukovych government breaking off a trade agreement with the European Union. Disproportionate

and violent responses to protest by the state led to a scale shift. Images of heavy-handed police officers attacking small numbers of protesters in Brazil, Turkey, Ukraine and Venezuela were strewn across conventional and social media, provoking greater outrage, thereby rapidly increasing the number and type of protesters and broadening the range of their demands. The scope of the protests went beyond the initial issues and unearthed deep-seated public resentments.

Diverse, multifaceted, multipronged movements sprung up, with many first-time protesters taking to the streets, caught up in excitement about national opportunity for change.¹ In terms of the tactics and process of protest, similarities with the first wave of protests of 2010 and 2011 seem clear. It can also be seen that in a few countries that saw failed attempts to organise protests in 2010 and 2011, protests exploded in 2013 and 2014. This suggests that while patterns of protest growth may be predictable, there is a need for an appropriate local flashpoint to be reached before protest can spark.

Secondly, many of the sustained and large-scale protests of 2013-2014 took place in large middle-income countries in which there is some functioning routine of formal electoral democracy. These protests were not necessarily driven by the poorest or most voiceless. But what they reveal is deep dissatisfaction with, and rejection of, practices of politics and economics that serve and entrench elites, as well as frustration with the inadequacy of formal politics in which people have few practical opportunities to influence the decisions that affect their lives. Civil society groups have highlighted rising inequality² and declining civil liberties.³ In the face of these, a growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and an opportunity to elect a president every four or five years are not enough for increasingly restless populations.



PEOPLE POWER IN BRAZIL



A high point of civic action in 2013 took place in Brazil, with the ruling party forced to accede to public demand for better services. June and July 2013 saw an explosion of dissent, dubbed the Revolta do Vinagre (referencing vinegar's use as a remedy against tear gas) and the Outono Brasileiro (Brazilian Autumn).

Shortly after the start of the demonstrations, Brazilian blogger, Dennis Russo Burgierman, shared his views with CIVICUS:

“When you see it happen and you see it rising from the ground, it is a surprise because it didn't seem to be possible. It didn't seem possible because until yesterday people were saying Brazilians are satisfied with the government enjoying a record high rate of popularity. Why did it suddenly start? When people start to see a way of changing things, change comes very quickly. Collapses are just like that. Collapses are like avalanches.

Everyone knows that living in the city is awful, that working conditions are poor, that there's a universal difficulty in finding meaning in what we do. And this is happening at a moment when people are more connected than ever. And this enormous connection creates possibilities for some things which were impossible before.

The great catalyst for this story was the way the police reacted, maybe, the way the state reacted. And I think it made people want to go to the street and protest. There were a lot more people on the streets yesterday, because of the police violence, than because of the 20 cents increase in the public transportation fare. I think there is a generational issue there. Great demonstrations are initiated by young people. That's the way it happens. The older people get, the more they have to lose.

But I think that the nature of what is happening is precisely the lack of leaders. The leaders were rejected by the masses. People don't want them. They don't recognise themselves in the traditional structures. We don't want your solutions, we want something else.

Everybody that was on the streets yesterday went home sure that 'I have more power than I knew'."

While the Movimento Passe Livre (Free Fare Movement) has been active since 2005, and the Movimento Contra Corrupção (Anti-Corruption Movement) has worked to highlight mass corruption and embezzlement for many years,⁴ something new happened in 2013. A national poll indicated that 46 percent of participants had never taken part in a protest prior to the Outono Brasileiro protests.⁵

A number of factors combined to form this new protest community. Discontent had been brewing for a while due to fare hikes for public transportation in some Brazilian cities, including Natal (September 2012), Porto Alegre (March 2013), Goiânia (May 2013) and São Paulo (January 2011, February 2012 and June 2013). But while the increasing cost of public transport sparked the initial São Paulo protests, it was the indiscriminate launching of stun grenades and firing of rubber bullets against protesters and bystanders by the military police on 17 June 2013 that escalated the demonstrations. The remit of the protests expanded. Protesters took to the streets to register their discontent with an inefficient, distant political elite tarnished by corruption scandals who failed to curb the rising cost of living and reverse high levels of income inequality. While overspending on the development of stadia for the 2014 football World Cup,⁶ the government was seen to have failed on the delivery of quality public services,⁷ even though Brazilians pay the highest taxes of any developing country.⁸

Brazilian protesters were highly optimistic about their impact. According to a poll conducted in seven cities, 94 percent of protesters believed that their actions would result in positive change.⁹ Their

belief was not misplaced. The Rouseff administration acted quickly to diffuse anger. Within a few weeks the government approved a reduction in public transport costs and Congress repealed all taxes on public transport; Congress approved the classification of corruption and embezzlement as heinous crimes; the government launched a national pact to improve education; Congress allocated petroleum royalties to education (75 percent) and health (25 percent); and the government pledged to control inflation.¹⁰ The Brazilian protests forced the government to take swift, progressive action to meet public demands, representing a victory for citizen action. The Brazilian story demonstrates that the criticism that emerged in 2011 – that mass protests do not achieve impact – is not always borne out.

The Brazilian protests suggest a rejection of failed party politics. Many protesters claimed to be non-partisan (*sem partido*) and had low levels of associational affiliation, with only 4 percent belonging to a political party and 14 percent belonging to trade unions or student organisations.¹¹ This suggests a rejection of traditional political participation routes and an emerging divide between the arena of formal party politics and a dynamic, civic, change-seeking arena. People still want to make political demands, but they disassociate these from party politics and choose to find new spaces to make their claims. It is, however, also important to acknowledge that the strong democratic foundations of the Brazilian state contributed to the success of the protests; demands made in civic space brought a response from the political arena.

For established civil society organisations (CSOs), of which Brazil has a great many, this represents an opportunity to forge new alliances and reach new, large groups of like-minded people. But it also offers a challenge for CSOs – if they are unable to win the support of newly engaged and mobilised protesters – and particularly for that part of organised civil society that has traditionally prioritised formal relationships with governments, parliaments and politicians as a way of achieving influence.

UNREST IN TURKEY

Parallels can be drawn with Turkey, where 2013-2014 saw unprecedented numbers – of young people in particular – take to the streets. Although Turkey is a functioning democracy, neoliberal economic policies have seen the ruling AKP (Justice and Democratic Party) government, headed by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, sell off power stations, bridges and state-owned banks to private interests.¹² The proposal to bulldoze Gezi Park, one of the last green spaces in Istanbul’s cosmopolitan Beyoğlu area,¹³ to build a shopping mall symbolises both the relentless pursuit of economic growth and a broader democratic deficit, where profits for elites may be prioritised over people’s wishes to enjoy public space. The proposed redevelopment provided the necessary spark for a broader citizens’ movement to challenge authoritarian approaches to urban development, development in general and social policy-making.

CIVICUS’ research on Turkey, published in 2011, suggested that the potential for participation through formal civil society structures was low: our research revealed that only 11.6 percent of Turkish people had engaged in political acts such as signing a petition, joining boycotts and attending peaceful demonstrations in the previous five years, and a mere five percent were members of CSOs.¹⁴ A lack of civic participation was cited as major worry for 87 percent of Turkish CSOs.¹⁵

Fast forward to 28 May 2013, when around 50 environmental protesters gathered in Gezi Park to demonstrate against its demolition. As was the case with the protests in Brazil, the Turkish police responded with disproportionate levels of force, and the image of the “woman in red”, a female protester sprayed with pepper gas directly in her face by riot police, went viral.¹⁶ The scope of the protests expanded, encompassing concerns about the authoritarian slide of the Erdoğan government, which has recently increased restrictions on freedom of expression, association and assembly, and has undermined the Republic’s

founding principle of secularism.¹⁷ A survey on the motivations of Taksim Square protesters found that the main causes for their participation were the prime minister’s authoritarian attitude (92.4 percent); the police’s disproportionate use of force (91.3 percent); the violation of civic freedoms (91.1 percent); and the media’s lack of coverage (84.2 percent).¹⁸

Pro-democracy and pro-secular demonstrations spread to 20 Turkish cities, and Turkish communities abroad. The passage of tight Internet controls in March 2014, including the blocking of Twitter and YouTube, provided another flashpoint for protests. Protest became a mass phenomenon: according to official government statistics, there were nearly 2.5 million participants in protests,¹⁹ while unofficial figures indicate that the number might be twice as high.²⁰ The protests mobilised a wide cross-section of people, previously considered to be apathetic, including young people, older people, poor and wealthy people and the conservative and liberal-minded.²¹ Most of the young protesters had never taken part in political activities.²²

Again, this can be seen as a civic mobilisation that cannot be understood in partisan terms. The fact that the AKP won the March 2014 local election should not be glossed over; it further suggests a schism between participation in the civic and partisan arenas, as well as a mismatch between conventional politics as expressed through voting and new politics as expressed through public mass dissent.

POPULAR UPRISING IN UKRAINE

In Ukraine, on the eve of the ninth anniversary of the Orange Revolution,²³ on 21 November 2013, protesters took to the streets after the government of then President Viktor Yanukovich postponed the signing of a free trade agreement with Europe in order to pursue closer relations with Russia. The protest movement was dubbed Euromaidan as protesters converged on Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) in Kiev. While this may have seemed to be a rather remote issue, far from the everyday concerns of people's lives, it served as a catalyst for broader discontent. Again, government overreaction galvanised a critical mass of people to take to the streets. On 30 November 2013, riot police started to attack protesters and even raided a cathedral where injured marchers sought sanctuary. Protest forces increased dramatically, mushrooming to at least 400,000 persons.²⁵ In December, the Ukrainian government's decision to accept a contentious bailout package from Russia invoked further anger, with Vitaly Klitschko, one of the opposition leaders, telling protesters at Independence Square: "He [President Yanukovich] has given up Ukraine's national interests, given up independence and prospects for a better life for every Ukrainian."²⁶

The protests went far beyond the initial issue of integration with Europe. Demonstrators demanded an end to autocracy, the promotion and protection of human rights and the removal of the corrupt, political elite. Echoing the techniques of the Occupy movement and the Indignados, the Ukrainian demonstrators occupied Kiev's Independence Square and organised blockades of key government buildings, including the City Hall. Throughout December and January, civil unrest broke out, and there were frequent clashes between protesters and the police, resulting in over 75 deaths to date.²⁷

Legislation was introduced to curb protests on 19 January 2014 in a desperate bid to silence dissent. Shaken by the protests, Ukraine's Parliament hurriedly passed a series of laws imposing restrictions on traditional media and the Internet, while requiring internationally funded civil society groups that engage in 'political' advocacy to register as 'foreign agents'. These attempted constraints imitated those introduced in Russia in July 2012, following large-scale protests against the election of President Vladimir Putin amid claims of electoral fraud. These laws were quickly repealed a few days later.

The protests culminated in over 70 percent of Ukrainian Members of Parliament voting to remove Yanukovich from the post of President.²⁸ They also freed jailed former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko. On 24 February 2014, an arrest warrant was issued for Yanukovich and his cohorts for their role in the death of protesters. He fled to Russia, where he remains in exile.

In March 2014, Russia annexed Crimea from the Ukraine after a rushed referendum organised a mere two weeks after Russian forces occupied the region. The vote was roundly condemned internationally, including by the United Nations General Assembly, as fraudulent and contrary to Ukrainian and international law.²⁹ Oleksandra Matviychuk, a Euromaidan activist, speaking at an event organised by the Human Rights House Foundation and co-sponsored by CIVICUS at the United Nations in Geneva on 12 March 2014³⁰ warned that the annexation has made the situation worse for civil society:

“Crimea is presently under an armed dictatorship involving Russian Federation armed forces. There is widespread obstruction (at least 62 cases) of journalists trying to carry out their work, and attacks on press and television staff. All Ukrainian television channels have been removed from air. Peaceful protests against the occupation are brutally dispersed by armed vigilante groups which were partly formed from several thousand Cossacks brought in from Russia. The law enforcement bodies are abdicating their direct duties. Civic organisations report that activists are facing beatings, harassment, damage to belongings, threats and intimidation in connection with their public activities, even enforced disappearance or being taken hostage. Over the last three days 11 activists have been abducted and the whereabouts of several are still unknown. There is a real danger of inter-ethnic conflict between the aggressors and so-called self-defence vigilantes on the one hand, and the Crimean Tatars on the other.”

Further, she cautioned that protesters in Ukraine have been demonised by the pro-Russian camp:

“There were numerous attempts throughout the entire EuroMaidan protest to give the civic resistance a ‘fascist face’ and to present the protesters as anti-Semites and xenophobes. This is particularly cynical, given the fact that Maidan was officially supported by national communities and associations. Its participants took on the task of guarding Jewish religious buildings; and there were representatives of various national minorities in the protests, including a Jewish self-defence unit.”

The stigmatisation of protesters is a common theme. Protesters in Turkey have been denounced as elitist and opposing a democratically-elected leader that has grassroots support,³¹ *sem partido* protesters in Brazil have been labelled as promoters of fascism³² and, as highlighted in the following section, in Venezuela, President Nicolás Maduro dismisses his opponents as being puppets of the West.

DISSATIS- FACTION IN VENEZUELA

In Venezuela, a crime rate spiralling out of control, record inflation and dissatisfaction with the ruling party led to protests erupting in 2014. According to the Venezuela Violence Observatory, a CSO, the murder rate in Venezuela has increased fourfold in the past 15 years, with a record homicide rate of 79 per 100,000 inhabitants.³³ The government has been accused of underreporting crime statistics and ascribing the crime situation to gang warfare, which it has failed to combat. There has been a scarcity of basic goods, which the opposition attributes to tight currency and price controls and the government blames on private sector hoarding.³⁴ The 2013 inflation rate has been estimated at 56 percent.³⁵ In an attempt to delegitimise the protesters, President Maduro has lambasted demonstrations as an attempt at a 'soft coup', focused on forcing his resignation, with the support of foreign powers.³⁶

Venezuelan human rights advocate, Feliciano Reyna, told CIVICUS on 4 March 2014:³⁷

"It should [...] be noted that in 2013 there were over 4,100 protests in Venezuela (a slight decrease on 2012 as President Chavez was ill for two months and people stopped protesting). The protests are mostly about labour rights, public services, the health crisis, and personal safety issues. Since 2008, protests doubled

year after year, and they are not just from one sector of society but many, mostly from workers and low-income communities, demanding social and economic rights. They are legitimate actors who are asking for dialogue. The national government has become increasingly difficult to talk to and this has been reported by many different civil society organisations, including environmental organisations, indigenous groups and human rights advocates. The largest protest to date took place on 12 February this year in different cities, including the capital, Caracas. During this protest, three people died, and in the unrest that followed, hundreds have been wounded and detained

There are 28 cities in which there have been protests by people, including rural farm workers, fisherfolk and labour unions. The Venezuelan people clearly have their own minds and this sort of official rhetoric [of a foreign plot] implies they do not."

By 11 February 2014, 19 protesters were detained for participating in intermittent anti-government demonstrations.³⁸ The 200th anniversary of the Bolivarian war of independence on 12 February 2014, when Youth Day was celebrated, proved to be a major flashpoint. According to unofficial reports, there were student marches in over 30 locations across Venezuela.³⁹ Following the killing of three people in the protests, an arrest warrant was issued for one of the protest organisers Leopoldo López⁴⁰ of the Popular Will Party for terrorism, murder and conspiracy.⁴¹ He was taken into custody after a public appearance on 18 February 2014.

There have been reports of violence carried out by both sides, with unlawful attacks on demonstrators orchestrated by *colectivos*, pro-government mobs. On 23 February 2014, tensions escalated when pro-government and anti-government protesters clashed in Caracas.⁴² Increasing division between anti-government and pro-government supporters is reflected in a polarised and fractured civil society. It appears that this rift will continue as long as the government remains in power, with periodic protests occurring at flashpoints.

A SPIKE IN DISSENT IN SOUTH EAST AND SOUTH ASIA

Asian countries, many of which have experienced sustained economic growth, may on the face of it have seemed an unlikely arena for protests, but they experienced a spike in dissent in 2013-2014. A deep discontent with corruption and authoritarian government drove people onto the streets in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Malaysia and Thailand.

Elections have been major triggers of protests in these countries. In Malaysia, hundreds of thousands of citizens gathered to dispute the outcome of the May 2013 election, which was marred by allegations of corruption and saw the ruling coalition, in power since 1957, gaining another five-year term by the slimmest of margins. In Malaysia, street protests were accompanied by a series of rallies known as Black 505 organised by opposition parties, highlighting alleged electoral fraud.⁴⁴ Protests met government pushback. Andrew Khoo, co-chair of the Malaysia Bar Council's Human Rights Committee, told CIVICUS in November 2013 that according to press reports, a total of 43 people had been charged under the controver-

sial Peaceful Assembly Act in response to the May 2013 protests.⁴⁵ The law gives law enforcement agencies extensive powers to police protests and criminalises public assemblies at certain locations, denying protesters access to high-profile spaces that could attract large crowds, seeking to limit the common protest tactic of highly visible occupations of iconic public spaces.

Meanwhile in Bangladesh, the 5 January 2014 parliamentary election was fraught with violence, with 21 people reportedly killed on election day.⁴⁶ More than half the seats were uncontested by disgruntled opposition parties, and voter turnout was the lowest in 35 years.⁴⁷ CIVICUS' long-term partner in Bangladesh, Odhikar, informed us:

"After the ninth Parliamentary Elections, the Awami League and its coalition won a landslide majority and commenced an extremely repressive and corrupt regime.⁴⁸ At the 10th Parliamentary elections on 5 January 2014, the main opposition,

Bangladesh Nationalist Party and its coalition and other parties, refused to contest, as it had been demanding the reinstatement of the caretaker government system.⁴⁹ As a result, in several constituencies, candidates were elected without any votes being casted, and there were also reports of vote rigging and corruption. The Awami League and its coalition returned to power with a vengeance and a long list of human rights abuses.”

The July 2013 Cambodian election – in which Hun Sen, the prime minister for 29 years, was re-elected to power – has been tarnished by allegations of systematic corruption, with a recent study condemning its lack of credibility and legitimacy.⁵⁰ Protests have steadily continued in Cambodia since the election, with a threatened Sen instituting a blanket ban on freedom of assembly, which was revoked a few weeks later.

In Thailand since November 2013, there have been protests demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra’s government. Protests in Thailand are not a new phenomenon, and there was a prolonged period of political unrest between 2008 and 2010, but 2013 provided several flashpoints for renewed and sustained protest movements to emerge. A rallying point was provided by an attempt to pass a political amnesty bill; Shinawatra’s government is seen by many as a front for the rule of her brother, Thaksin Shinawatra, in exile and found guilty in absentia of corruption. In late May, a junta seized power in a military coup deposing Yingluck Shinawatra’s government, signalling future unrest in Thailand for its embattled civil society.

As was the case in Ukraine, the ongoing political crisis has seen anti-government demonstrators camping out at government

buildings. Since November 2013, members of the protest movement known as the People’s Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) have occupied government buildings, and in January and February 2014, they shut down key areas of Bangkok.⁵¹ Following violent clashes between government forces and protesters, resulting in five deaths on 1 December 2013, all 148 representatives of the opposition Democrat Party resigned. The government then called elections on 2 February 2014, but these were opposed by demonstrators, who have demanded the institution of an unelected ‘people’s council’.⁵² On election day, the PDRC used obstructive and sometimes violent tactics to prevent over 440,000 people from voting.⁵³ The election results were later invalidated by the constitutional council. Nineteen leading members of PDRC were arrested, but there are still very active protest voices.

Clearly, it is problematic if people who want to vote are prevented from doing so. But the level of opposition to the electoral process suggests that many are deeply disillusioned with the democratic system as it presently stands. The Thailand blockades can be seen to represent an extreme manifestation of a broader global trend of frustration with narrow electoral processes and partisan politics. As a contribution on global governance to the 2014 State of Civil Society Report from the United Nations Parliamentary Association explains, “...opinion polls... tend to show globally high support for the idea of democracy in principle, but high dissatisfaction with how it works in practice.”⁵⁴ Formal democracy, which prioritises representative structures – and in which insufficient attention is paid to developing civic space and providing opportunities for real participation – is inadequate.

A DREAM DEFERRED IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

As the above should make clear, any idea that – globally – protest has fizzled out since it came back into vogue in 2010 and 2011 is false. However, in the hotbed of the first wave of contemporary protest, MENA, the challenges of pushback and dissipation of energy are profound. If 2011 was the year of uprisings and 2012 was the year of pushback – the 2013 State of Civil Society report lamented the chaos in the region and the ensuing clampdown on civil society⁵⁵ – then 2013 and 2014 can be characterised as years of stagnation.

Entrenched patriarchal structures have reasserted themselves and combined with a surge of political opportunism, meaning that the ideals of justice and freedom that underpinned people’s revolutions, and for which many died, have not been realised. Impact has been elusive. For example, a poll suggests that women’s rights are no better in MENA countries that have experienced recent political and social upheavals than before.⁵⁶

Nowhere is this tragic irony more pronounced than in Egypt. The country’s first presidential election in mid-2012 saw Mohammed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood elected to power. In the lead up to the one year anniversary of Morsi’s inauguration, the Tamarod⁵⁷ movement organised large demonstrations calling for his resignation. On 3 July 2013, Morsi was ousted from office with the backing of the military, sparking counter-demonstrations demanding his reinstatement. These were brutally suppressed by Egypt’s security apparatus, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of protesters. To date, justice eludes the victims.⁵⁸ In March 2014, a court sentenced 529 Muslim Brotherhood supporters to death in a highly controversial mass trial.⁵⁹ With Egypt’s military chief, General Sisi, resigning to stand for president, prolonged internal conflict and the suppression of other voices seems set to continue.

Egyptian activist, Sharif Higazy, shared his disappointment with CIVICUS:

“Reflecting back on 2013 is tough... It is a year of blood, treason and fade of hope. I was one of the global citizens inspired by the 2011 revolution. I share its values, quests and hopes. 2011 gave me hope in the people and in our ability to actualise change. For me, it was not about toppling Mubarak; rather, it was the general concept of fighting tyranny and bringing democracy to our own people.

Unfortunately, many did not approach the matter the same way. Instead, 2011 for them was an opportunity to make it to power and tighten their grip on the nation. The means of reaching to power had no value to them. If they can win democratically, then great, if not, then treason, killing and fraud are always options on the table. Different powers capitalised on the illiteracy and political naivety of many Egyptians. Seeded rumours led to chaos and turbulence in the whole nation. Even those who are politically savvy were left wondering. Waves of political manipulation forced everyone to be on the defence trying to protect any glimpse of truth out there. The ecstasy of political triumph in 2011 soon vanished, and we ended up facing the new realities of division and polarisation.

The year 2013 marked a bloody coup. For the first time we witnessed thousands of Egyptians murdered by fellow Egyptians and tens of thousands persecuted. The police state is back, with no mercy in dealing with those who beg to differ. The hope of a free, democratic and evolving country is fading, but not lost. Egyptian youth are the majority. Many of them tasted the victory in toppling a brutal dictator, and they have what it takes to reboot till we are truly free.”

While Egypt is an increasingly polarised context, it is hard to recall the optimism of the peoples’ movements that ousted President Mubarak in 2011. However, idealism and hope are not yet dead. As another young Egyptian, Amal Albaz, told CIVICUS:

“I knew it came a little too easy. In only 18 days, we recreated the Egypt we’ve always dreamed of? My naive self wanted to believe that, but when the cruel reality hit in 2013, we were stunned beyond words – even though we subconsciously knew anything could happen. Having spent the entire summer in Rab’a square,⁶⁰ I had first-hand experience. I saw what it was like to be united, for the sake of freedom and democracy. I felt what it was like to hold a mother’s hand whose 12-year-old son was killed for no other reason than believing in a cause. I felt what it was like to have that sensation of unity demolished as soon as I stepped out of the borders of Rab’a. I understood the power of ignorance. The Egyptian media successfully brainwashed the majority of the nation, placing a spotlight on the Muslim Brotherhood, to distract from and justify the atrocities being committed. The Egyptian crisis isn’t about the Muslim Brotherhood; it never was. It’s about tasting freedom then being forced to spit it out. The year of 2013 was a year of betrayal, but it was also a year of revival. Amidst the darkness, it proved that there is light that shall one day shine through. As much as I lost hope during that year, the amount of hope I gained can’t compare. The truth will prevail. Justice will prevail, as long as there are lions roaring for freedom every passing day.”

The underlying conditions that led to the surge of recent protests in Egypt are still there: authoritarianism and a lack of adequate political representation; inequality; changing demographic trends, particularly a growing proportion of young, city dwellers; and the increased use of

social media and mobile technology.⁶¹ In Egypt, the memory of freedom and victory are not likely to fade away completely, and protests are likely to continue.

In the oil-rich Arab states, clampdowns on dissent continued through the imprisonment of activists and other forms of persecution. Large amounts have been spent to maintain paternalistic welfare states in an effort to assuage discontented populations.⁶² Improved welfare can be seen as a short-term gain achieved as a result of protests, and may subdue elements of the populace for a time, but this response does nothing to advance public demands for more voice; it also plays to divisive nationalist politics, further alienating the large swathes of migrant labourers resident in the Gulf Kingdoms, on whom the development of infrastructure depends. These inequalities can be seen starkly in Qatar, where over 500 migrant workers from India alone have died so far in building the stadia for the country's 2022 football World Cup.⁶³ A further concern is that social welfare programmes to dampen public pressure are being buoyed by Saudi lending, thereby extending the regional power of Saudi Arabia, a country with one of the least enabling civil society environments in the world.⁶⁴

Saudi Arabia remains a champion for many repressive governments in the region. In the absolute monarchy of Bahrain, the government, with the help of Saudi forces, crushed dissent and jailed the leadership of CSOs; 50 prominent activists were imprisoned on charges of terrorism in September 2013,⁶⁵ and in the run up to the 2014 April Bahrain Grand Prix, several protesters were sentenced to long prison terms for drawing attention to human rights abuses.⁶⁶ The relatively muted response of Western powers to human rights abuses in Bahrain, a country that provides a strategic regional base for the United States (US), is also troubling.⁶⁷

Maryam Al-Khawaja, from the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, told CIVICUS on 2 April 2014:

“While there are many obstacles that must be overcome on Bahrain's path to becoming a free and open society, the main issue is the deep-rooted culture of impunity that dominates all levels of government. Police officers are allowed to attack peaceful protesters with lethal force, and if they are brought to a trial, the charges are often reduced, and the sentences commuted. Impunity extends to the highest levels of government, and we have seen individuals with strong allegations of torture against them, promoted to ministerial level, rather than face an independent judiciary. Another government official, with strong torture allegations against him, was visited in his home by the Prime Minister, who clearly summarised the culture of impunity when he stated on video ‘these laws do not apply to you’.

As reinforcement to the local culture of impunity, the government of Bahrain believes that they have international impunity; the problem here is that they are correct. The authorities know that they will not face any consequences for continuing, and in some cases increasing, the human rights violations in Bahrain, and they therefore have no motivation to improve the situation.”

In Syria, amidst a political stalemate that left global powers idle, conflict continues. Syria's conflict has resulted in over 110,000 deaths and more than 6.5 million internally displaced persons and refugees.⁶⁸ A February 2014 breakthrough at the UN Security Council resulted in the first binding resolution demanding that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad allow the passage of humanitarian assistance. A number of international CSOs have worked together to keep the issue in the public attention and urge decision-makers to act, but the massacre continues unabated.⁶⁹

In Libya, the second elections since the fall of Gaddafi took place on 20 February 2014, with much less fanfare than the first. In the 2012 interim parliamentary elections, 61.58 percent of 2.7 million registered voters cast their ballots. In the 2014 elections, only 45 percent of 1.1 million registered voters turned out to elect members of the Constitutional Assembly, highlighting a rapid, deep disillusionment with the practice of democracy to date.⁷⁰

The self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, a young Tunisian vendor, was the catalyst for the citizen uprisings that resulted in the ousting of Tunisia's dictatorial President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and sparked uprisings across MENA. While the road since has not always been smooth, Tunisia is showing signs of bucking the region's regressive trend. The reasonably progressive Tunisian constitution, adopted on 26 January 2014, has been welcomed as step forward for democracy, generating cautious optimism.⁷¹



RISING INTOLERANCE THREATENING CIVIL SOCIETY IN EUROPE

Europe does not perform particularly well on the socio-cultural dimension of CIVICUS' Enabling Environment Index, which measures participation, tolerance, trust in CSOs and giving and volunteering. The 2013 report notes that:

“Low levels of giving and volunteering as well as a lack of interest in public participation are the reasons why 63.4 percent of the countries in Europe are below the global average... more needs to be done to build trust in non-profits and a culture of giving and volunteering in order to strengthen civic engagement and CSO impact.”⁷²

In May 2013, following the shooting of a Portuguese national, riots broke out in Stockholm, Sweden. Motivated by racial tension, class division, social exclusion and increasing income inequality,⁷³ first and second generation immigrant youth took to the streets of Husby in Northern Stockholm and set cars and garages on fire. A lack of integration, coupled with the rise of the far right, were identified as two underlying causes of the riots.⁷⁴ Even though Sweden scores very highly on most indicators of quality of life, these events showed there can still be frustration about lack of access and voice.

While economic crisis and the resulting politics of austerity – visited disproportionately on the poorest – spurred many of the key protest movements in Europe of 2011, contradictory protest trajectories can now be seen. It is important to acknowledge that not all protests seek positive change; some are mounted in defence of the status quo, and some seek to deepen identity divisions and scapegoat visible minorities. Europe is seeing a rise of movements that defend identity positions, and far-right political parties.⁷⁵

A low point was the killing of a Greek anti-fascism activist by members of the extremist group Golden Dawn in September 2013.⁷⁶ The President of the Hellenic League for Human Rights, Konstantinos Tsitselikis, had this to say about the situation in Greece:



“Civil society constitutes an important milieu that non-governmental and non-political party entities can form ideas about the content and the quality of democracy.

Thus, claims for a just society through the struggle for human rights has a central importance. The rise of the ultra-right and the establishment of neoliberal policies should be the target of a wide campaign, which will have an impact on the public discussion and turn the interest of the society to core problems related to economic exploitation and violation of human rights.

A common thread of thought should be that violation of human rights is a collective concern, even if it affects certain members of society in a given time. In addition, an understanding that bonds established through solidarity could secure human dignity. Fostering active citizenship is thus the final target to build barriers against the expansion of neoliberalism.”



BACKLASH AGAINST THE LGBTI MOVE- MENT

Protests for progressive change can provoke backlash by regressive forces: this was certainly the case in France, which was the site of many protests for and against the introduction of gay marriage in 2013. One of the largest protests in Western Europe in 2013 was against gay marriage, drawing more than 150,000 participants in Lyon and Paris in May 2013.⁷⁷

Laws against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) activists have emerged as a key, new area of contestation between civil society and repressive states. In June 2013 the Russian Duma (parliament) criminalised the spreading of homosexual 'propaganda' to minors. The danger of such laws is partly that they are permissive of homophobia; reports suggest there has been a surge in homophobic violence since the law was enacted.⁷⁸ Russia is also home to the largest network of vigilante groups dedicated to exposing and abusing homosexuals, the bizarrely-named Occupy Paedophilia, which is operational in 30 cities.⁷⁹ This also shows us that the international spread of protest brands and memes can be adopted and subverted by repressive forces.

Russia is not alone. In 2013, public events organised by LGBTI groups were either banned or attacked in neighbouring Armenia, Belarus,

Georgia and Ukraine, suggesting a broader problem.⁸⁰ However, recent events also have provided opportunities to shed an international spotlight on repression: the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics in Russia has been a trigger for protests against discriminatory laws. The Principle 6 campaign raised awareness of the anti-discrimination provision in the Olympic Charter and private sector actors, including Olympic sponsors showed their support for gay rights; the world's most popular search engine, Google, also came to the defence of LGBTI Olympians.⁸¹

State leaders who bid to stage high-profile sporting events for international legitimisation should be aware that the potential for embarrassing backlash to spread via social media is now high. As noted above, Brazil has seen World Cup construction becoming an issue in protests; the rulers of Russia and Qatar, hosts of the next two World Cups, should not expect an easy ride.

A worrying legislative trend against LGBTI rights has also been seen in Sub-Saharan Africa, with the enacting of draconian anti-homosexuality laws in Nigeria and Uganda. Nigeria's Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act bans the registration of any gay club, society or organisation and threatens their supporters with imprisonment of up to 10 years. Like Nigeria's law, Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act is broad enough to criminalise the entire community of human rights activists and organisations. New laws exacerbate a situation in which anti-gay legislation is already widespread; the International Gay and Lesbian Association reported in May 2013 that homosexual acts are illegal in at least 78 countries around the world.⁸²

Kene Esom, a prominent LGBTI activist from Nigeria, told CIVICUS in February 2014:

“With regard to discourse on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) in Africa, in the words of Charles Dickens, *‘it was the best of times, it was the worst of times.’* In the last year we have witnessed the signing into law of the worst statutes criminalising same-sex relationships and identity in Uganda and Nigeria and high levels of violence and gross violations of human rights based on SOGI. However, we have witnessed great resilience across the continent as groups come together in countries to support each other, to affirm their humanity. We have also seen unprecedented levels of support from CSOs speaking out against SOGI-based discrimination, working together to support victims of violence and other violations. In other countries, we have witnessed government agencies working together to improve access to legal and healthcare services for LGBTI individuals and limit the enforcement of criminal sanctions. In religious and cultural communities, a few strong leaders are taking a stand for equality and non-discrimination.

Although the grimmest picture is usually painted of Africa, lots of positive organising is happening within the movement asserting the voice of the African movement in regional and international spaces and moving forward the rights agenda in a context-sensitive and sustainable way.”

Promoting an agenda of intolerance and unjust discrimination goes against key provisions of the African Charter of Human and Peoples’ Rights; on that basis 25 CSOs in Africa recently combined to condemn these pieces of regressive legislation.⁸³ Kene Esom’s perspective suggests a two-way relationship between state repression and pushback; attempts to repress particular parts of civil society can provoke activism in defence across a broader sweep of civil society. If the defence of LGBTI CSOs and activists is becoming a more mainstream part of the civil society human rights agenda in African countries, then this is a welcome development, as this has not always been the case in the past, when LGBTI issues have tended to be marginalised within civil society.

BUT WHAT HAPPENED TO THE MOVEMENTS OF 2011–2012?

It is not the case that the first wave of protest movements uniformly failed to achieve visible impact. For example, Chile's student-led protests of 2011 led to changes in the composition of electoral representatives and to a sustained political focus on inequality by the New Majority coalition that came to power in the 2014 elections. Former Secretary-General of the Student's Federation of the Catholic University of Chile, Sebastian Vielmas, shared with CIVICUS his views on these developments: ⁸⁴

“In Chile, as in much of the world, there is a crisis of political representation. Distrust of the authorities, regardless of their ideology, opens questions about the future of political organisation in our country.

In this context, student leaders from the protests for the right to education in 2011 went to Parliament to propose changes. Four of them were successfully elected as deputies, while those who were defeated received a significant number of votes.

From this, we can see that it is possible for social movements and civil society to push the boundaries and influence political institutions. Progress is expected on the demands for a public, free and quality education system.

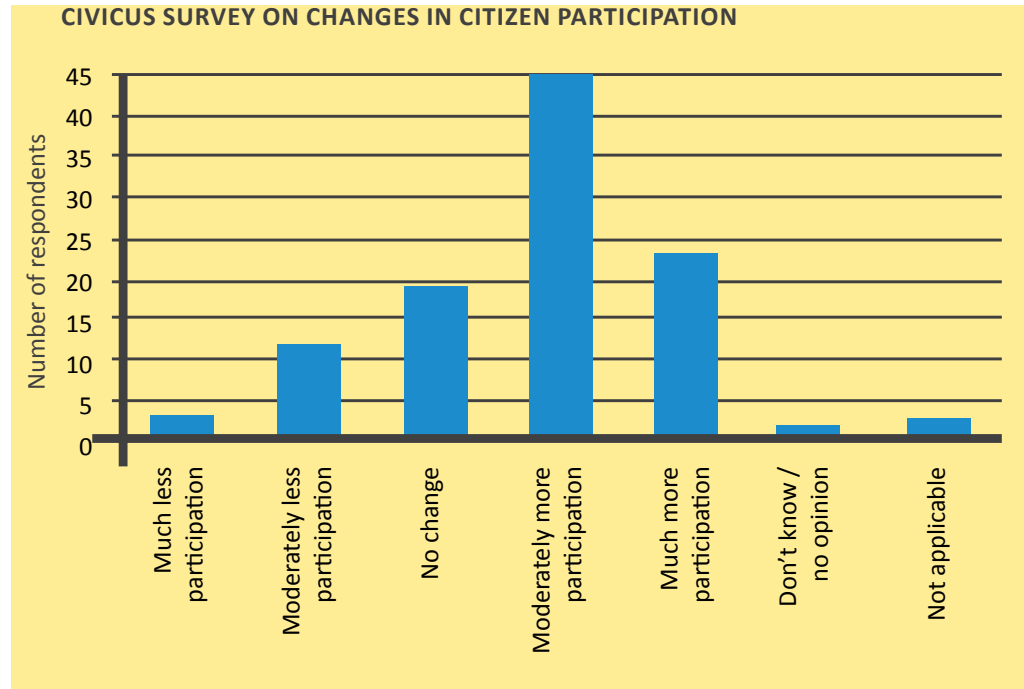
However, it remains to be seen whether these newly elected officials will be able to overcome the excessive influence of the executive influence in the drafting of laws, many of whom have close links to big business.

Regardless, young people have earned a place as political actors and no matter who governs, this is a generation that has decided to take part in public affairs.”

While it is noteworthy when civil society leaders move into political office on social justice agendas, CSOs and social movements can be weakened by the loss of their leaders, and it can also give rise to accusations that civil society is partisan. Questions may then arise about what makes these movements distinct from party politics, and what the added value of the civic arena is compared to that of the partisan political sphere? Further indicators of success are needed.

Indicators, however, prove elusive: the protest movements of the global North that dominated the headlines in 2011, such as the Indignados and Occupy, received much criticism for lacking leadership and not articulating clear agendas and specific demands; they insisted in turn that such perspectives were too narrow, and that the processes of self-organisation and public mobilisation are important in their own right. While it may be argued that these movements have lost visibility and momentum, they have impacted on national and global political narratives, with the issue of inequality remaining a hot political topic, and the term 99% remaining global shorthand for structural injustice.

Further, some of those mobilised as the Indignados and Occupy may be active under different banners; part of the impact of these movements has been to bring new participants into civil, non-partisan politics. A survey of CIVICUS constituents indicates that from 2013 to 2014, there is perceived to be an increase in citizen participation: 69 percent of respondents say that there has been either much more or moderately more citizen participation in their countries. Although the sample size was rather modest, this offers an indication that there has not been a lull in citizen participation.



Results from CIVICUS' Annual Constituency Survey conducted in January 2014. The question posed to respondents was: "Compared with a year ago, how has citizen participation changed where you work?"

21ST CENTURY PROTEST: NEW TECHNOLOGY AND NEW TACTICS IN CONNECTING AND ORGANISING

Further, the philosophy, organising strategies, memes and methods of the 2010 to 2012 protests have been reproduced by more recent movements. Many protesters in 2013 and 2014 employed similar techniques of satire, parody, popular slogans and symbols. Cross-pollination could be seen between protests. As two academics writing on events in Turkey note, “Despite their significant differences, in particular in terms of the reactions from the Turkish and Brazilian authorities, both Turkish and Brazilian protesters seemed to be coming from similar class backgrounds and ages, and they were making similar demands of democracy in similarly innovative ways.”⁸⁵ Guy Fawkes masks, previously so visible across North America and Europe, were now worn on the streets of Istanbul and São Paulo. In Turkey, protesters re-appropriated a word used by President Erdoğan to denigrate protesters as looters (*çapulcu*) and invented the term ‘chapulling’, meaning to stand up for one’s rights.⁸⁶ A parody of a popular hit song featuring protesters chapulling went viral on YouTube.⁸⁷

State of Civil Society / The Year that Was

Another shared tactic was that in Bangkok, Istanbul and Kiev, a common protest strategy was to occupy public spaces and government buildings, drawing directly on the tactics used by the 2010-2012 movements.

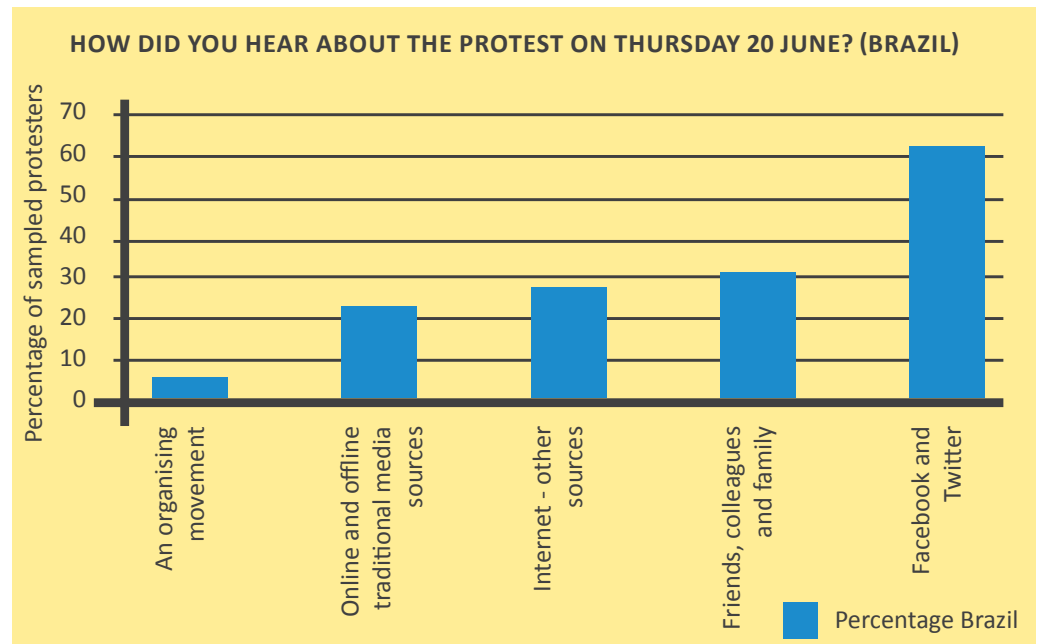
Social media and word of mouth were critical to the organisation of the Brazil and Turkey protests. National surveys in these countries illustrate that the majority of protesters were informed about protests and motivated to participate in events by social media. Twitter and Facebook played a crucial role in publicising protests.

Social media is particularly important to young people, who were a critical mass in many recent protests. According to Facebook's statistics, 48 percent of 18-34 year olds login to Facebook when they wake in the morning.⁹⁰ There is also research that suggests young people's experience of the ease of participation and having their voices heard in social media is flowing out into the offline world; expectations of being listened to have been raised, and when these expectations are thwarted, dissent results.⁹¹

Groups working on governance and democracy now have the option to engage in new ways with constituents that they cannot reach through older traditional methods of outreach. However, horizontal organising enabled by social media can also be difficult for conventionally structured, internally hierarchical organisations, including CSOs, to get to grips with.

Jesse Chen of American Civix Technologies told CIVICUS, in a survey of partners:⁹²

“CSOs do not have a choice but to adapt technology in cutting-edge ways (specifically through engagement) as it continues to spread throughout the masses.



Graph 1: Ibopes survey of participants in protests in seven cities in Brazil⁸⁸

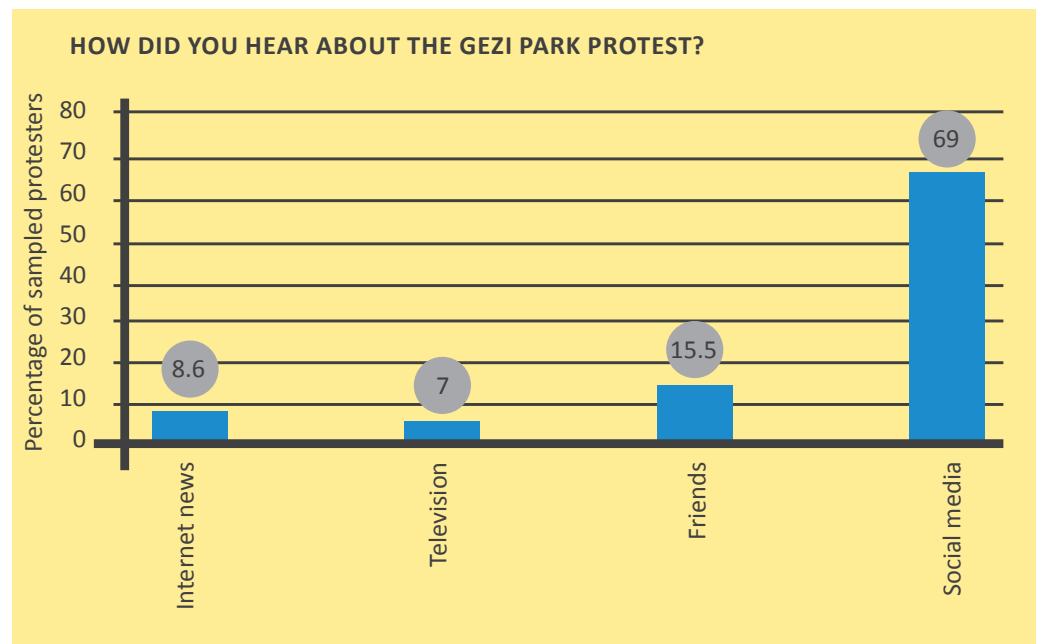


Chart 2: Results of a Konda survey of Gezi park protesters⁸⁹

Otherwise civil society will be behind the curve and individuals will be less likely to engage since they're active in a different space."

There are numerous examples of successful online campaigns,⁹³ and social media was an essential part of the protests discussed above. Social media offers tools for communicating, connecting, organising, building solidarity and expressing dissent. But established CSOs are not always strong in realising the multiple applications of these tools to develop and service constituencies. In his evaluation of civil society's relationship with new media, Chen adds:

"Civil society organisations need to be mindful of how they use technology to build support. The current trend to utilise petitions as list-builders is a perfect example. In the zeal to build email lists, some organisations have started creating numerous types of petitions on as frequent as a weekly basis. While seasoned 'campaigners' know this helps build email lists, it does not necessarily equate to building faith in movements. It is concerning for a simple reason. Petition fatigue can lead to reduced trust between supporters and the petition-authoring organisation. CSOs need to be mindful of how frequently they are posting, and the follow-up they are doing with their supporters, to ensure that real people understand there's an impact to signing a petition besides getting onto an email list. Although petitions run the risk of becoming civil society's 'advertisement' equivalent if they are over-published, they remain a great way to recruit additional supporters to one's organisation."

In some contexts, social media is used as an alternative platform for expression. Venezuela is the lowest ranked country in the Americas on CIVICUS' 2013 Enabling Environment Index, scoring particularly poorly on media freedom⁹⁴ as the government maintains a tight grip over the broadcast media. Given the fact that traditional media avenues are all but closed, it is little wonder that Twitter penetration in Venezuela is the fourth highest in the world.⁹⁵

Similarly, in Saudi Arabia a heightened crackdown on civil society has led to the imposition of travel bans on activists and the intimidation of human rights defenders through politically-motivated legal proceedings, and yet the country has the highest rate of Twitter penetration in world.⁹⁶ Despite severe intimidation from the Interior Ministry, there were several acts of defiance of the ban on women driving on 26 October 2013, coordinated through the Internet, and particularly through social media.⁹⁷

What these examples tell us is that social media can offer ways around government control; this implies in turn that repressive governments will seek to limit social media usage.

For example, at the height of the Gezi Park protests, President Erdoğan fumed, "There is now a menace which is

called Twitter. The best examples of lies can be found there. To me, social media is the worst menace to society.”⁹⁸

After heated parliamentary debate in February 2014, a law was passed which allows for the blocking of websites prior to obtaining a court order and compels Internet service providers to store data on users’ activities for up to two years and make this data available to the authorities.⁹⁹ On 21 March 2014, access to Twitter was blocked, although millions found ways around this. A few weeks later the Constitutional Court overturned this ban as it violated freedom of expression.¹⁰⁰

At the same time, social media should not be seen as a panacea. For example, online participation may be superficial. As Jesse Chen told CIVICUS:

“In the United States, the widespread adoption of mobile technology and social networking technology is changing society before our very eyes. In some ways, it has helped simplify certain civic engagement processes. In too many others, it has led to citizens thinking that a ‘tweet’ or a ‘like’ is enough - what we call ‘the technology-enabled illusion of democracy’. With the revelation of the National Security Agency (NSA) privacy scandal in the US, it is not yet known how individual citizens will change their online activist behaviour.”

This further suggests that sustained follow-up and mutual gains can be achieved by the building of closer connections between movements that are largely online and established CSOs.

Prior to the existence and popularisation of the Internet, much of the organisation of protests took place in campuses, bars, cafes and community centres. With the advent of the Internet, it was tempting to believe that we had moved into a new era of online civic space, in which the Internet would be the primary arena for organising and coordinating protests. But while the Internet and social media play a critical role, because of the increasing surveillance of activists, many of the organisers of social movements now have to plan and coordinate the organising of protests offline. Activists at a March 2014 consultation organised by CIVICUS in Istanbul noted that they have had to go back to traditional forms of organising dissent; they have returned to campuses, bars, cafes and community centres to plan protest action.

PERSECUTION OF WHISTLE-BLOWERS

The United States government in particular has pursued a policy of aggressively prosecuting whistle-blowers, partly with the aim of deterring future potential activists. On 30 July 2013, Chelsea Manning was sentenced to 35 years imprisonment for espionage and theft for leaking diplomatic cables and videos documenting war crimes to WikiLeaks, a non-profit website that publishes classified information. Manning felt compelled by a moral obligation to expose the now infamous 'Collateral Murder' video, in which US Apache helicopters indiscriminately shot civilians, after her superiors refused to act. Jeremy Hammond, a hacker-activist, met with a similar fate. He revealed that private security firms were hired to conduct surveillance on Occupy protesters, the Anonymous movement and environmental activists in Bhopal, India.¹⁰¹ He was sentenced to the maximum sentence of 10 years in November 2013.

One of the most serious cases relating to persecution of whistle-blowers is that of American system administrator and former contractor for the US National Security Agency, Edward Snowden. The July 2013 revelation by Snowden of widespread Internet and telephone surveillance in gross violation of privacy rights by the US government resulted in federal prosecutors in the US charging him with theft of government property and two counts of espionage. Snowden also revealed that the Australian government had been gathering intelligence on their neighbours through their embassies and high commissions, including those in China, Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam.¹⁰² Snowden is presently stuck in limbo at an undisclosed location in Russia. Similarly, WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange is confined to the Ecuadorean Embassy in London for the foreseeable future, while freedom of information advocate Aaron Schwartz was driven to suicide due to malicious prosecution and pre-trial surveillance by the US government in early 2013.¹⁰³

Governments and the private sector are partnering on Internet surveillance; it is rarely good news for transparency and democratic oversight when governments and large corporations work together. Companies are creating, marketing and peddling surveillance technologies to repressive states. Privacy International's 2014 report estimates the value of this unregulated industry to be US\$5 billion per year.¹⁰⁴ The report affirms that across the globe, "These sophisticated and customised technologies are often used to target human rights defenders, activists, political dissidents and journalists."¹⁰⁵

Finally, as a contribution by the Internet Governance Forum to the State of Civil Society Report makes clear, Internet governance remains a contested area, including within civil society.¹⁰⁶ A pluralistic governance structure that has grown organically suits some states, such as the US, which as the market leader enjoys privileged surveillance access; many repressive states would prefer a narrow multilateral management of the Internet that legitimises their desire to interfere. Civil society needs to fight for more inclusive and participatory Internet governance.

2. LEGAL RESTRICTIONS: THE ONSLAUGHT ON CIVIL SOCIETY CONTINUES

If the protests aren't dissipating, neither are the efforts of governments and elites to push back against them. Over the past year, in contradiction of international human rights standards, a raft of draconian laws have been drawn up in diverse locations around the globe to impede civil society activists and their organisations from speaking out and mobilising. Justifications offered range from the perceived need to protect national security to safeguarding religious and cultural values.¹⁰⁷ In October 2013, CIVICUS reported on rising restrictions for CSOs and persecution of civil society activists, despite states having committed to guarantee an 'enabling environment' for CSOs at the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid and Development Effectiveness, in Busan, South Korea in November 2011.¹⁰⁸

If protesters in different countries are borrowing tactics from each other, then governments too are replicating bad practices. Repressive legislation is being cloned from one country to another. In May 2013, in his second thematic report, UN Special Rapporteur Maina Kiai drew particular attention to a surge in copycat legislation preventing foreign funding, underscoring that a key component of the right to associate was also the right to seek, receive and use resources from domestic, foreign and international sources.¹⁰⁹

The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law notes, "With foreign funding entirely cut off to them, many organizations with advocacy missions will likely face dissolution."¹¹⁰

As the Map 1 illustrates, there are two particular geographical clusters of concern, with a majority of recent adverse legislative developments for civil society taking place in former Soviet states and Sub-Saharan Africa. Constraints imposed on civil society include those that narrowly circumscribe their permissible activities (Indonesia,¹¹¹ Israel,¹¹² South Sudan,¹¹³ Sudan¹¹⁴); restrict the receipt of funding from foreign sources (Kenya,¹¹⁵ Israel,¹¹⁶ Pakistan,¹¹⁷ South Sudan¹¹⁸); limit media freedom (the Gambia,¹¹⁹ Kenya,¹²⁰ Turkey,¹²¹ Ukraine¹²²); introduce complex registration requirements (Azerbai-



Map 1: Legal restrictions on CSOs introduced or proposed since April 2013 jan,¹²³ Cambodia,¹²⁴ Ecuador,¹²⁵ Zambia¹²⁶); spread homophobia with a view to silencing civil society, in particular LGBTI activists (Nigeria, Russia, Uganda);¹²⁷ and impede freedom of assembly and the right to protest peacefully (Azerbaijan,¹²⁸ Cambodia¹²⁹ and Uganda¹³⁰). Such restrictions impose limitations on the ability of civil society groups and activists to undertake the full range of legitimate civil society activity. The spate of repressive laws have further closed space in several countries classed by in CIVICUS' Enabling Environment Index as having some of the least enabling environments for civil society.¹³¹

Government perceptions of civil society are an important factor here. Officials may consider some roles of civil society to be legitimate, but not others. Charitable organisations and CSOs that deliver vital services, which governments are unable to provide, are rarely challenged. However, when CSOs question policy implications or undertake advocacy to influence government actions, they tend to face challenges to their legitimacy. When CSOs are vocal in opposing government policies, accusations of being partisan or being tools of vested interests and foreign governments tend to fly thick and fast.

3. MARKET FUNDAMEN- TALISM AND ENCROACH- MENTS BY THE PRIVATE SECTOR



Much of the focus in the previous section has been on the often fraught relationship between CSOs and governments. Increasingly, civil society is also facing threats from big businesses as market fundamentalism takes root. Part of the anger behind some protest movements, and related to the issue of inequality, is due to the encroachment of the private sector into many aspects of public life and the privileging of big business in governance. The issue of privatisation of the post-2015 development agenda continues to cause concern for many in civil society.¹³²

One of the key concerns motivating protests in Turkey was the ruling AKP undertaking a relentless economic expansion and privatisation drive, with many basic functions of the state being taken over by the private sector. Public-private partnerships, which are increasingly gaining traction, not only impose increased costs on individual citizens for basic services, but also have the effect of hiving off parts of the public sphere from scrutiny by citizens.¹³³

Market reforms, pushed hard by international agencies and donor governments, have in many contexts not led to greater political freedoms, but rather to the entrenchment of wealthy elites opposed to participatory democracy. In the Gulf Kingdoms and in many post-Soviet states in particular, elites have been able to benefit from privatisation sprees, capturing assets and creating oligarchies while personalising the political sphere to protect their economic interests.

A further challenge comes with the size of transnational corporations. With their turnover dwarfing the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of many developing countries, corporations can in effect shop around for the most

lenient jurisdictions where they are least bound by regulatory regimes. Countries also compete to attract foreign investment. In such circumstances, governments often succumb to big business and fail to discharge their duty to protect civil society from illegitimate encroachments.

Land and environmental rights activists engaged in exposing collusion between political and economic elites are increasingly under fire. Front Line Defenders notes a substantial need to increase assistance to human rights defenders (HRDs) fighting for the preservation of their ways of lives and livelihoods in the face of extractive industries, which seek to takeover, and also pollute, land and water.¹³⁴ A report by multiple international human rights and environmental groups, documenting cases of persecution of land and environmental activists' points out that government response to their activities is often stigmatisation, repression and criminalisation.¹³⁵

Among other cases, CIVICUS has recorded the following:

“In Cambodia, land rights activists opposing official plans to forcibly acquire land for big companies have been subjected to brutal attacks by security forces and lengthy prison terms. In Honduras, peasant farmers' groups involved in land disputes with companies have been subjected to murderous attacks. In India, peaceful activists ideologically opposed to the government's economic policy have been charged under draconian laws of being members of outlawed terrorist organisations. In Canada, non-profit groups opposed to the conservative government's policy of loosening environmental restrictions to enable extraction of oil and gas from ecologically sensitive zones have been subjected

to surveillance and funding cuts, while being accused of being obstructive of the country's economic development.”¹³⁶

A 2014 report commissioned by CIVICUS highlights that space for civil society has been steadily opening in Myanmar, but challenges remain:

“In line with recent political trends, the enabling environment for civil society in Myanmar continued to improve in 2013. Civil society has been able to benefit from expanding space, thanks mostly to political changes at the highest levels of government... Nonetheless, some significant restrictions remain that hinder civic space. The post-2010 reforms are based on a top-down centralised democratisation process, leaving many remote and marginalised groups – mainly ethnic minorities – behind. In spite of some noticeable improvement in local governance, state representatives at the lowest levels often continue to operate as they did under the former junta. Some issues are still taboo, especially those related to government and private sector control of resources.”¹³⁷

Several land rights and environment activists have recently been imprisoned and detained in connection with their advocacy work in diverse locations across the globe. The arrest of the crew of the Greenpeace ship Arctic Sunrise by Russian security forces captured the imagination of concerned citizens around the world, triggering a massive campaign for their release. Arctic 30 carried out a peaceful protest at the Russian state controlled oil company Gazprom's oil rig, to call attention to the threat posed by oil drilling in the ecologically fragile arctic zone. Initially they were charged with the offence of piracy, which was changed to hooliganism.¹³⁹ They were granted amnesty

in December 2013 by the Duma, Russia's Parliament. James Turner, the Communications Director for Greenpeace International's Save The Arctic Campaign, told CIVICUS on 17 April 2014:

"The story of the Arctic 30 was defined by unity. From the strength of the activists themselves to the environmental movement as a whole, this was a moment that brought people together in the face of extraordinary oppression. Those of us who were working for their release were enormously humbled by the level of support that the campaign received, from Nobel Prize winners to coalition allies, from Sir Paul McCartney to Russian human rights activists. The disproportionate charge of piracy levelled against 30 people from many different countries acted as a lightning rod for civil society. Millions of us stood up for those who believe that peaceful civil disobedience is an honourable practice, when all other options have been exhausted. Thousands took to the streets in solidarity and, crucially, the madness of drilling for oil in the melting Arctic was brought to a massive global audience. This is their legacy, and it is one that we are trying hard both to protect and build upon.

The story also showed the willingness of many countries to trample over civil rights to appease the wishes of the fossil fuel industry. While the links between Russia's state-owned companies and the persecution of our activists was obvious, less clear was the involvement of international oil companies like Shell, BP and ExxonMobil in the affair. All remained notably silent, denying any involvement in the matter despite close business ties with both Gazprom and Rosneft, Russia's largest firms. The imprisonment of the Arctic 30 is just the latest in a string of excessive measures meted out by governments on behalf of the oil industry, from punitive injunctions in the US to frivolous and expensive lawsuits in Bolivia. We believe that the sacrifice of Sini, Marco, Dima and the rest of the brave Arctic 30 has helped to bring this dangerous

collusion to light, and that alongside a wide movement we can continue to fight the pollution of our democracies by an industry which belongs in the last century."

On a further positive note, recent years have seen some important steps in redressing imbalances in the face of big business, including in the extractive industries.¹⁴⁰ Global Witness in its contribution to this report highlights that in 2013:

"A landmark European law with global reach was passed, the G8 and multinational mining companies voiced their support for legally binding rules, and great strides were taken to improve a key voluntary initiative implemented in 41 countries. Indeed, 2013 will be remembered as the year that a global standard for the extractive industries emerged. That said, the movement also suffered a number of setbacks, and the fight is by no means won."¹⁴¹

Further, the Maastricht Principles on Extraterritorial Obligations of States, a set of normative principles adopted in September 2011, aim to clarify the extraterritorial human rights obligations of states, and in doing so challenge the impunity of large corporations over human rights violations.¹⁴² CSOs, academics and UN officials are currently calling for legally binding treaties to support these emerging norms of international law in order to improve corporate responsibility.¹⁴³

These developments, while they are not a panacea, offer important steps in regulating the exploitation of natural resources to the detriment of communities and the environment. It is important for transnational networks of concerned actors, particularly the Publish What You Pay coalition, to continue to shine light on extractive deals.

4. GLOBAL POTENTIAL, GLOBAL CHALLENGES

This section of the 2014 CIVICUS State of Civil Society Report has concerned itself largely with some of the main locations and occasions of protest at the national level over the past year. It has looked at how people have come together to demand change and forged new forms of civic action in some of the major cities of the world; while the initial issues raised and flashpoints are often local, the issues raised by protest often have wider, indeed global, resonance. This section of the report has also set out how national level governments have acted in response to protest, sometimes to make concessions, but most often to try to find new ways to stop the expression of people's voices. It has also raised the question of privileged access and the influence large corporations have over governments, development agendas and arenas of politics.

CIVICUS believes that in today's interconnected world, some of the national level challenges can only be addressed by working at the international level. Working across borders, the sharing of good practice and peer learning are ways in which civil society can become stronger to overcome common challenges and for protest movements to sustain themselves. Civil society activists who have found themselves targeted, harassed and detained by their governments often attest to the power of international solidarity in sustaining them. Civil society that seeks to achieve political change therefore necessarily needs to adopt an internationalist mindset. The international arena can offer a source of progressive norms that can shape national level practices, and international institutions can offer tools for monitoring and raising awareness of the failures of governments and the abuses of large corporations.

But the international arena can also be a source of problems. Large companies that transcend borders defy national controls. The inordinate influence enjoyed by powerful states in international relations can be inimical to people's sovereignty. Bad laws, policies and practices towards civil society spread from one government to the next. International institutions should provide safeguards for democracy and human rights, but they are often compromised by the interests of member states. Further, citizens lack access to international institutions, and do not easily understand them. It is the job of civil society to demystify these institutions and prise open access for people's voices and indeed to make these institutions more responsive to people's needs.

Nevertheless, international institutions often tend to be inaccessible and far removed from the daily realities of the people they are expected to serve. How, then, can they help to solve national level democratic challenges, without themselves being subject to reform? It is this question that the next sections of the 2014 State of Civil Society report will consider.

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¹²⁴For the past six years, Cambodia CSOs and an international coalition of freedom of association advocates have lobbied against the proposed notorious draft law on Associations, which would introduce complex, onerous and mandatory registration processes and give authorities wide discretion to refuse applications. B Lun, Resistance and Solidarity: Cambodian CSOs confront a repressive draft law on associations and NGOs, 2013 State of Civil Society Report, CIVICUS, April 2013, available at: <http://socs.civicus.org/?p=3765>.

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¹²⁶In 2013, in Zambia, the government signalled its intent to start implementing its controversial 2009 NGO law, which criminalised the non-registration of NGOs. According to CIVICUS’ sources, only 82 of the 904 NGOs identified by the government have registered under the law, with many preferring to face sanctions than submission to a law they believe unjust. Support, not undermine Zambian Civil Society, CIVICUS, 10 January 2014, available at: <https://civicus.org/media-centre-129/press-releases/1949-support-not-undermine-zambian-civil-so>

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¹²⁷See the section entitled “Backlash against the LGBTI movement” in this report.

¹²⁸In May 2013, the Azerbaijani National Assembly extended criminal defamation to the online sphere. New Legislative Amendments Further Erode Rights To Freedom Of Expression And Peaceful Assembly, Reporters Without Borders, 16 May 2013, available at: <https://en.rsf.org/azerbaijan-new-legislative-amendments-further-16-05-2013,44622.html>.

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¹⁴³Ibid.

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