



# STATE OF CIVIL SOCIETY REPORT 2019

## THE YEAR IN REVIEW







Women across Brazil protested against far-right candidate and eventual winner Jair Bolsonaro during the September elections.

Credit: Victor Moriyama/Getty Images



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*Date of publication:* March 2019

*Cover photo:* On International Women's Day, hundreds of thousands marched in protest and celebration along Avenida 18 de Julio in Montevideo, Uruguay.

*Credit:* Inés M. Pousadela



Citizens in the Philippines marched to call for an end to short-term employment contracts ahead of President Rodrigo Duterte's State of the Nation Address in July.

*Credit:* Jes Aznar/Getty Images



Bangladeshi journalists formed a human chain to call attention to attacks on them while covering protests.

Credit: Mamunur Rashid Nur Photo via Getty Images

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

Since 2012, CIVICUS has published the annual State of Civil Society Report to analyse how contemporary events and trends are impacting on civil society, and how civil society is responding to the major issues and challenges of the day. This is the eighth edition of our report, focusing on civil society action and trends affecting civil society in 2018.

Our report is of, from and for civil society, drawing from over 50 interviews with and guest articles from civil society activists, leaders and experts, and others close to the major stories of the day. Our 2019 report is also informed by CIVICUS' ongoing programme of research, analysis and advocacy, and the work of our members, networks and partners. In particular, it presents findings from the **CIVICUS Monitor**, our online platform that tracks the conditions for civil society in 196 countries. Our report covers four key areas in which civil society was active in 2018:

- Everyday issues and people's protests
- Challenging exclusion and claiming rights
- The state of democracy
- Civil society engaging at the international level



# FOREWORD

## LYSA JOHN, CIVICUS SECRETARY GENERAL

This, the eighth edition of our annual State of Civil Society Report, makes a call to put the value of compassion at the heart of our societies, at a time when it is ever more under attack.

In the Mediterranean Sea and the deserts that surround the Mexico/USA border, civil society is being vilified and criminalised simply for trying to save the lives of people making hazardous crossings. Rather than empathising with the immense fear and need that cause people to flee conflict, repression and poverty, citizens are being told it is acceptable for people to die or be denied essential rights, simply because they come from a different place, have a different coloured skin, or practise a different faith. We believe that the right to provide humanitarian response is under attack in a way unparalleled since the Second World War.

The political context is one in which right-wing populist politicians are mobilising major population blocs against excluded groups - women, ethnic and minority faith groups, refugees and migrants, indigenous peoples, LGBTQI people. They are persuading citizens that their real problems - of insecurity, inequality, poverty, powerlessness - can be solved by attacking these groups, rather than by a fundamental redistribution of political and economic power. Everywhere, the civil society that defends the rights of excluded groups and questions political and economic power is subjected to heightened levels of attack. Walls and borders are being reinforced, and international-level institutions are being undermined.



Our report sets out an alternative to this present, dismal state of affairs, inspired by a vision of compassion, shared humanity and human dignity, and human rights for all. It calls for societies organised around democratic freedoms, open space for civil society, multiple platforms for excluded groups to make their voices heard, economic fairness and democratic internationalism. As our report describes, civil society is already working, in organised groups, social movements and moments of spontaneous protests, to make this vision a reality. The story of last year was not simply one of repression and strife: our report details how civil society helped oust corrupt leaders, win rights - including for women and LGBTQI people - and build pressure for action on climate change.

The CIVICUS alliance will follow up on this report by working to increase our efforts to stand with, join together and strengthen the many brave manifestations of civil society that are reasserting the power of compassion. We believe our report offers a powerful opportunity to frame discussions of relevance to civil society across the world. We actively encourage you to use the contents of this report to advance understanding of the commitment and actions of groups, small and large, to create a more just world - and welcome any inspirations you may have on how we can amplify this discourse in public and policy spheres.

In solidarity

*Lysa John*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### A YEAR OF CONTRASTS AND CONTESTS

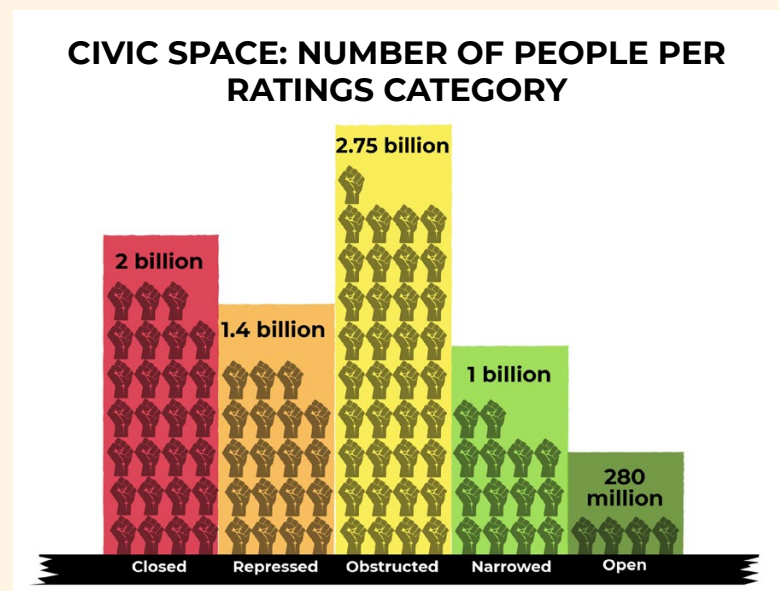
It was another year of immense contestation for fundamental rights. On one side stood the likes of mean-spirited right-wing populists sharing similar agendas, incumbent authoritarian presidents doing whatever it took to cling to power, large corporations with few scruples, and extremist groups actively fighting against human rights and social justice. They ran roughshod over rights, attacked excluded groups, asserted narrow self-interests, denied climate change. On the other side, we stood: the ranks of progressive, rights-oriented civil society, and the citizens who in multiple contexts bravely stepped forward to demand the voice they were denied. We asserted the values of compassion and our shared humanity, and demanded rights and dignity for all. Our values seemed far apart, and at times, the struggle unequal.

2018 was certainly a year when regressive forces gained ground. The space for civil society – civic space – is now under serious attack in **111 of the world's countries** – well over half – and only four per cent of the world's population live in countries where our fundamental civil society freedoms – of association, peaceful assembly and expression – are respected. There are now serious restrictions in civic space on every continent. In 2018, elections saw right-wing populists seize power – notably in Brazil and Italy – and come to prominence and skew discourse across a swathe of other countries.

This was no abstract political game, as women, LGBTQI people, minority ethnic and religious groups and migrants and refugees felt the full force of vitriol and violence. Everywhere excluded groups were attacked, so was progressive, rights-oriented civil society, because we stood up for rights.

Meanwhile, international institutions mostly struggled, hamstrung by the interests and alliances of powerful states, doing little to respond to the great challenges of the day, failing to fight overwhelming inequality, silent on the human rights abuses of states such as Saudi Arabia and Sudan, letting down the people of Syria and the Rohingya people of Myanmar, among many others.

It was tempting to view this as a clash not only of values, but also of the powerful versus the powerless, with the outcome inevitable. But on the civil society side, time and again, we developed and demonstrated our own power. In 2018, there were places – such as Armenia – where mass opposition to leaders trying to rule without end became irresistible, leading to change that might just prove decisive. Rights were claimed



Source: CIVICUS Monitor country-level civic space ratings.

– notably abortion rights in Ireland and LGBTIQ rights in India – by civil society organising, networking, advocating and winning arguments. Across Latin America, civil society mobilised to welcome and help the migrants uprooted from Venezuela by a political and economic crisis that became a humanitarian crisis. In country after country, people were motivated by the rising costs of everyday living, the lack of decent jobs, poor public services and housing, and the corruption and inequality they see daily, to rise up and challenge the exclusion from decision-making that keeps most of us poor while elites grow richer.

When institutions of governance failed the people, people came together to reproach them and urge them to live up to our expectations. In the USA, shooting survivors became activists and achieved more than established politicians have managed for decades to advance the debate on gun control. When climate change deniers in high office stalled international action on climate emergency, one Swedish student, Greta Thunberg, started a school strike movement that quickly crossed continents and saw those still too young to vote taking direct action to shame the supposed adults who are failing to safeguard their futures.

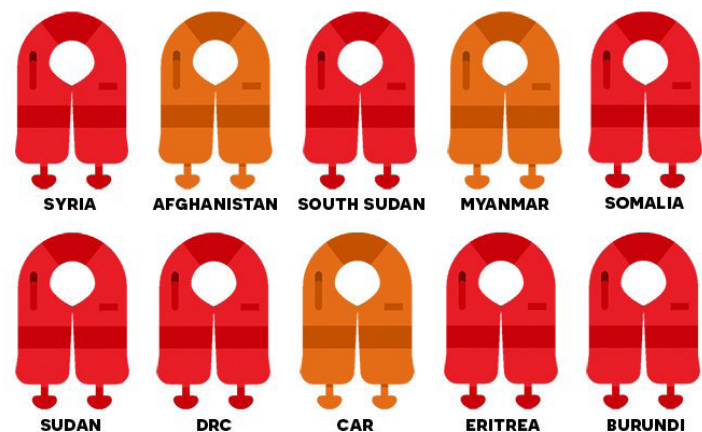
These inspiring examples – and many more covered in our report – showed that people have the power to start making a change, from individual action to the organisations we form and the networks we forge. It falls to those of us in organised civil society to help enable the agency of citizens, help channel, sustain and connect activist energy, keep making the case for a world based on rights, dignity, our shared humanity and compassion, and build a winning coalition of citizens: to prove the power of togetherness.

## KEY TRENDS IN 2018

### WHAT HAPPENED TO COMPASSION? A FRESH ASSAULT ON HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

The assault on civic space documented in past editions of this report continued across the board, but with heightened danger for particular groups. The year saw an alarming rise in attacks on the civic space of civil society organisations (CSOs) that offer humanitarian response to migrants and refugees. This could be seen in Europe, where people make the dangerous crossing from North Africa across the Mediterranean Sea, and at the Mexico/USA border. European governments that border

#### CIVIC SPACE RATINGS OF COUNTRIES THAT THE LARGEST NUMBERS OF REFUGEES ARE FLEEING FROM



● CLOSED ● REPPRESSED ● OBSTRUCTED ● NARROWED ● OPEN

Data on source country of refugees from the  
UN Refugee Agency's 2017 Annual Report





South Korean women protested against sexual harassment and illicit spycam use.

Credit: Jeon Chung/Getty Images

the Mediterranean – such as Greece, Italy and Malta – have abdicated their responsibility to save people from drowning, leaving the Libyan coastguard, complicit in human rights abuses and people trafficking, to pick up the pieces. At the same time, governments are doing everything they can to stop civil society mounting our own search and rescue operations. In the USA, CSOs were prevented from leaving life-saving water supplies for people making the hazardous journey across the desert. CSOs that work to support people driven by desperation – risking their lives to flee conflict, repression and poverty – were vilified as criminals and people traffickers, and in some cases, faced criminal charges for giving help.

Civil society is responding to help those who have the least, motivated by compassion and a commitment to our shared humanity. But the fundamental values that lie behind humanitarian response are under attack in a way unparalleled since the Second World War. Civil society, acting on humanitarian impulses, confronts a rising tide of global mean-spiritedness, a public compassion deficit. In response, we need a new campaign, at both the global and domestic levels, to restate and protect the right to humanitarian action. We need to make the case for compassion as a major pillar of any decent society.

## PUNCHING DOWN: ATTACKS ON THE CIVIC SPACE OF EXCLUDED GROUPS

The attacks on civil society's humanitarian response towards migrants and refugees are part of a broader pattern in which migrants, refugees and minority ethnic and religious groups are being vilified by right-wing populist politicians, anti-rights groups and citizens who are being persuaded to blame those who have the fewest rights for their understandable concerns about insecurity, inequality, poverty and isolation from power. Across Europe, major population blocs are being mobilised against excluded groups, with majority ethnic and faith identities instrumentalised in the name of narrowly defined national



interests to sow division for political ends. Elsewhere, as in China and India, excluded groups are being suppressed as part of a conscious strategy to promote a narrow and artificially homogenous official version of national identity.

While the year saw inspiring moments in which people rose up to challenge their own exclusion, such as #MeToo movements in Cameroon, Chile and South Korea, there were also many instances in which groups long denied their rights and voices were attacked, as was the civil society that defends them. They were attacked because they challenge the power of economic and political elites, both the old elites that have benefited from decades of globalised economic neoliberalism and the new elites of right-wing populist leaders who are pushing narrow economic nationalism. Civil society that asserts women's rights was attacked because it challenges economic power relations and the conservative support bases of many political leaders. LGBTQI civil society was attacked because it challenges that same conservative constituency, reinforced by social taboos. Civil society that defends indigenous peoples', environmental and land rights in the face of vast corporate, often transnational power, and corporate-state connections, was attacked because it challenges economic power, and the corruption associated with it. Trade unions were attacked because they demand labour rights and decent pay, call attention to economic inequality and other negative impacts of neoliberalism, and so challenge entrenched economic power. In so many contexts, independent media were attacked when they reported on these struggles and exposed wrongdoings.

In response, in civil society we need to do more to analyse, understand and expose the politics and power mechanisms that underpin civic space restrictions, and develop specific strategies to defend and enable the civic space of the sections of civil society that are most targeted.

### **A NEW NARRATIVE: AN INCREASINGLY URGENT NEED**

In every country where right-wing populist forces have risen, we have responded in civil society, by mobilising to defend rights and bringing like-minded people together to reject messages of hate and division. However, our responses have often been defensive and reactive, and as such they have been somewhat scattered and disconnected. We have been focused on fighting back against right-wing attacks, combating wilful misinformation and holding onto the gains we made over the past decades. It is no longer novel to say that in response to the right-wing populist surge, civil society, and progressive forces everywhere, need a new narrative – a new take on the world and its problems, a clear sense of how we intend to bring about change, and a new

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way of talking about ourselves and what we stand for – that resonates with angry citizens and challenges the power-holders who have failed us all. But the need for that compelling narrative has become ever more urgent.

In the absence of this, right-wing populist leaders have continued to command and direct the lion's share of public anger. In country after country, people continued to reject establishment politicians and conventional politics, and in 2018, sometimes that rejection marked a break with the past that seems to hold some promise for progressive, rights-oriented civil society – such as Mexico's rejection of long-established political parties that institutionalised impunity for corruption and presided over decades of failure. Sometimes what happened was fragmentation, political division and polarisation, as people scattered across the political spectrum. But mostly anger took a rightwards turn, and dragged the political spectrum with it, as established parties made concessions to try to win back supporters. 2018's most troubling example was Brazil's election of Jair Bolsonaro as president, after he ran on a viciously misogynist, homophobic and anti-rights platform, bringing immediate setbacks for many in civil society. Hungary's hardline leader Viktor Orbán, a figure of inspiration for right-wing populists around the world, won yet another landslide victory and doubled down on his attacks on migrants and refugees, and on civil society. Italy is now governed by an anti-civil society, anti-migrant and anti-European Union coalition. As the example of Italy suggests, right-wing populist movements tend to unite people less by what they stand for than what they stand against.

In responding as civil society, we need to make a positive case that changes the calculus of those recruited to negative coalitions, that brings people with us on the basis of what we stand for rather than against, and offers real solutions rather than the deceptively simplistic answers peddled by populist politicians. We need to make clear the contradictions in the arguments of the far-right and show how already their ideas are falling apart as they are being tested in the countries where they have won

power. We need a vision that is ambitious but achievable, that unlocks our collective power to change our societies, heals polarisation and unites people across divisions on the basis of human solidarity. We need a response that grows and spreads compassion, and makes clear that today's big challenges – climate change, economic failure, insecurity – can only be tackled by solutions that cross borders.

Any new narrative cannot be imposed from the top down by CSOs, often accused of being part of the problem and representing cosmopolitan elites; it needs to be built from the ground up. This calls for many more connections with citizens, much more listening and more measures to build the public trust in civil society that is falling.

## THE URGENCY OF THE EVERYDAY: PROTESTS TO THE FORE

Any new narrative needs to understand the economic and material underpinnings of the anger and deprivation many people feel. So many of the protests of 2018 covered in our report related to what could be classed as basic, everyday issues, rather than lofty appeals to abstract goals. Often protests were sparked by increases in the cost of fuel or essential foods. People demanded decent jobs and pay, proper public services and housing. Across a belt of Central and West African countries, protests resulted from anger at austerity policies imposed by governments because they made people worse off. Many people are having to do more with less, and are vulnerable to even small shifts in essential costs. In 2018, there was a sense that fuses were becoming shorter and tipping points had become smaller: that when people feel they have little to lose, it takes little to make protests erupt. The repression many protests on these everyday issues were met with by governments made clear that, even if protesters did not see themselves as posing political questions, governments did, and felt rattled.

As civil society, we should always empathise with people living on the edge and understand the material issues that bring people into protest





Security forces intervened in a protest by Tunisia's Fech Nestannew ('What are we waiting for?') youth movement against the high cost of living outside Tunisia's Parliament in January.

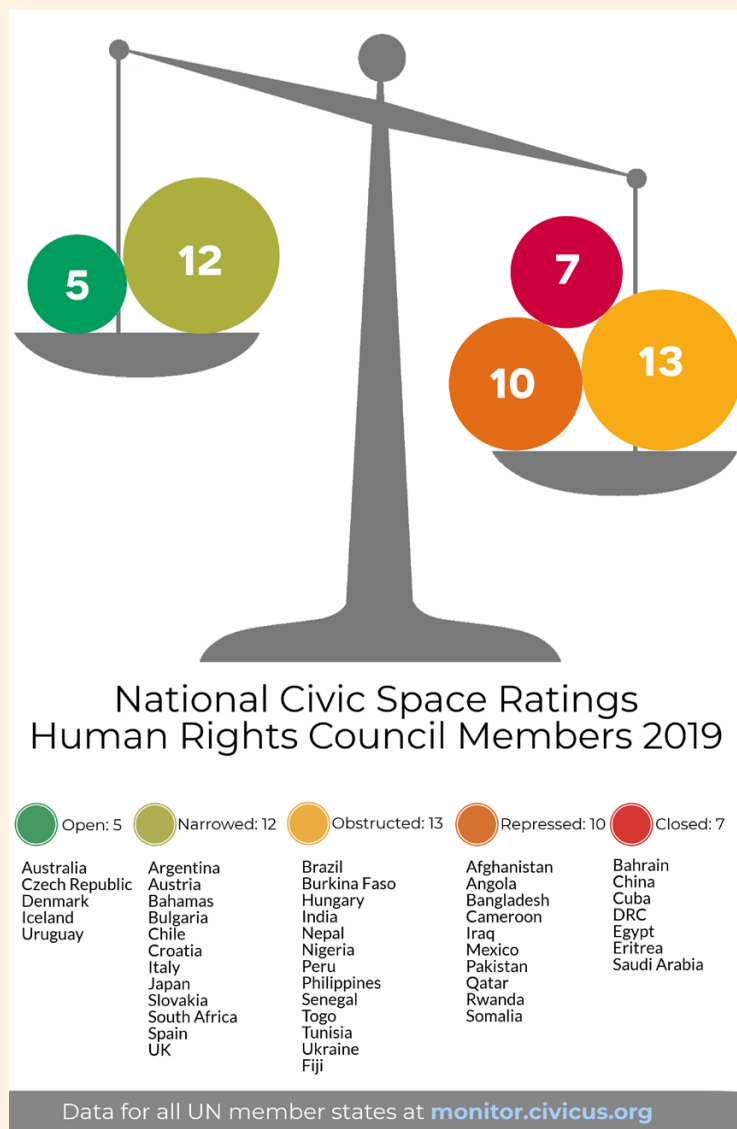
Credit: Yassine Gaidi/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

## ENGAGING WITH THE MATERIAL: TOWARDS A NEW ECONOMICS

Of course, protests were often about so much more than food and fuel; in many cases, a change in the daily costs of people living precariously was the tipping point that unleashed years of pent-up frustrations – at the denial of voice, exclusion from power, politicians who only seem interested in the perpetuation of their own power, corruption – a huge issue that can cause protests to explode, as seen for example in Haiti and Romania. Ten years on from the economic crisis that touched many parts of the world, people are fed up with daily struggle. The globalised economic neoliberalism that has been orthodoxy since the 1980s is clearly failing many people. People contrast their own precariousness with ever-expanding elite wealth, corruption, tax avoidance and evasion, impunity of the wealthy and the tight connections between political and economic elites, seen at every level, from the village to international institutions. This makes the calls to narrow economic nationalism being offered by right-wing populist politicians appealing to many.

The response this suggests is to argue against both globalised neoliberalism and narrow economic nationalism. As civil society, we should lead the debate about how collectively we can advance towards a more democratic, accountable, post-neoliberal economy that works for all. In civil society, we have protested against sweeping and undemocratic neoliberal trade deals that boost corporate power, and the austerity policies imposed by international financial institutions. We have engaged around G20 meetings and in processes to develop a binding international treaty on transnational corporations and human rights. In Latin America and the Caribbean, civil society achieved a key gain in 2018 when the Escazú Agreement was adopted, a binding treaty that, thanks to extensive civil society involvement in its development, extends protection for the rights of environmental rights defenders, who have long been exposed to attacks from transnational corporations.

and offer protest flashpoints. At the same time, we need to be aware of the risk that such protests can turn inwards, be organised around narrow or exclusionary sectional interests and focus their anger on groups who have the least power, rather than those responsible for decisions. We should work to make connections between different protests motivated by issues such as food and fuel prices, poor public services and low pay and limited labour rights. We should continue to advocate for the right for peaceful assembly to be respected for all protests.



But at the same time, many of us in civil society, coming from a background that tends to focus on human rights and sustainable development, are traditionally not strong in taking on the detail of macroeconomic arguments. This needs to change, and we need to place ourselves at the forefront of the economic debate. The field cannot be left open to jargon-peddling economists wedded to neoliberal orthodoxy.

## WEAKENING MULTILATERALISM: INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM UNDER PRESSURE

Right-wing populists and progressive voices sometimes became unlikely bedfellows when they both rejected neoliberal trade deals, albeit for different reasons. But more broadly, civil society that works at the international level is increasingly concerned about the evident undermining of international institutions. Whether we engage with international human rights bodies to help hold states to account on their human rights records and propagate progressive norms, use the opportunities provided by international arenas to seek solidarity and draw attention to domestic-level civic space restrictions, or campaign for key international agreements, such as the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Sustainable Development Goals, to be implemented properly, we are finding that the spaces are becoming smaller and the challenges growing harder.

The international system and multilateral ways of working are being rewritten by powerful states that refuse to play by the rules – including China, Russia, the USA and a slew of states newly led by right-wing populist leaders. Borders and walls are being reinforced. National sovereignty – narrowly understood as presidential sovereignty, rather than inclusive and democratic notions of sovereignty – is being reasserted and used as an excuse to override international agreements. The principle of non-interference is increasingly being invoked, often hypocritically by powerful states that interfere selectively or covertly.



Attacks on international institutions are being made in three main ways: first, rights-repressing states are joining international bodies – as happened in 2018 when a slate of rights-abusing states, including Bahrain, Bangladesh and Eritrea, joined the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council, meaning that 62 per cent of its members are now states with serious civic space restrictions. In doing so, they are making decisive action less likely.

Second, states are withdrawing from international institutions and agreements, with the USA leading the way and the Philippines pulling out of the International Criminal Court, and seeking to avoid international accountability for widespread human rights violations in doing so. In 2018, the new Global Compact for Migration also saw a string of states with hardline migration policies pull out between the agreement of the deal and its signing.

Third, rogue leaders are bringing their styles of personal rule into international affairs, ignoring existing institutions, agreements and norms, acting as unilateral strongmen or striking bilateral deals with other hardmen, undermining multilateralism and making it harder to scrutinise their actions. Potentially everything seems up for negotiation and nothing can be assured at the international level, even the 70-year-old international human rights norms that underpin civil society action. We may be heading towards a full-blown crisis of the multilateral system.

While the instincts of many of us in civil society are to defend international institutions, at the same time we may increasingly question the value of our engagements with them and ask how much effort we should put into institutions that are becoming less able to act. The failures of multilateralism – as exemplified by the deadlocked UN Security Council – have helped enable the attacks on the international system that are being made. Civil society should neither defend a broken system nor withdraw, but rather assert a better form of multilateralism. We need to forge and grow alliances for international democratic reform that strengthens institutions and makes them more relevant by opening them up to the voices of citizens rather than state power.

## FLAWED ELECTIONS: THE NEW NORMAL?

2018 brought some democratic surprises, when incumbent authoritarian leaders and parties, despite doing everything they could do to skew votes in their favour, were ejected from office by publics that refused to be cowed by intimidation and used their votes to defy established power – for example, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malaysia and Maldives. There were also some rare examples – in Ecuador and Ethiopia – of leaders coming into office and driving through reforms that enabled some expansion of democratic freedoms and civic space. Such changes,

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Abortion rights demonstrators defied anti-rights groups as they gathered outside Congress in Buenos Aires, Argentina, ahead of a decisive vote in June.

Credit: Agustin Marcarian/Getty Images

wherever they came, called for renewed civil society engagement to hold new political leaders to account for their power and ensure that change speaks to people's ground-level needs. But these positive examples were outweighed by the great number of flawed, fixed and fake elections in 2018 – among several, in Azerbaijan, Cambodia and Egypt. Non-free elections are in danger of becoming the new normal.

In response, we need to campaign for the development of new international standards for elections, including on the independence of key election institutions, the management of malicious misinformation and the prevention of covert outside interference. We need to push for much more space for citizen-led election monitoring and reporting. We need to counter the narrow notions of sovereignty that are being aggressively asserted to avoid scrutiny on electoral practice.

## THE ATTACK DOGS OF RIGHT-WING POPULISM: THE GROWING POWER OF ANTI-RIGHTS GROUPS

Part of the means through which right-wing populism was mobilised against the ranks of progressive, rights-oriented civil society in 2018 was through extremist groups that attack human rights and social justice. Anti-rights groups position themselves in the civil society arena and often self-identify as civil society groups, but they do not share the same fundamental and progressive values that motivate many of us to be part of civil society. They do not share our ways of working, which emphasise the importance of respectful dialogue about our differences. Indeed, their function is to attack our values.

There have always been conservative and narrow sectional interest groups in civil society, as well as fake civil society groups that operate as state proxies, but what is new is that anti-rights groups clearly serve a political, often partisan, agenda in attacking rights and those of us who stand for them. Their messages are simplistic and toxic, but also effective. These groups are increasingly confident, aggressive and organised, and



are claiming civil society spaces at the domestic and international levels, crowding out legitimate civil society voices. They are even co-opting the language of rights and using it against us, for example, by claiming to speak for the rights of the unborn to attack the rights of women, or the rights of working-class people to attack migrants. They are connecting with each other, sharing tactics and messaging and receiving international funding, particularly from US evangelical groups.

In response, we need to explore the potential to reconceptualise civil society as a progressive, rights-based arena, political but not partisan, where people are brought together by shared values of human rights, humanitarian impulse and compassion, and where diversity of opinions are recognised, but we debate our differences in ways that are tolerant and inclusive. Hate has no place in civil society. While working to build bridges with those who do not share our points of view but may be open to persuasion, at the same time we should not be scared of calling out the malicious forces that will never find a home in the civil society family.

## PROVING OUR POWER: AGENCY AND ACTION

There is a need to recognise, celebrate and learn from the many civil society breakthroughs and success stories of 2018. When looking at the great mobilisations of 2018 – for women's rights, LGBTQI rights, migrants' and refugees' rights, gun control and climate action, and against dictatorship, corruption and austerity – breakthroughs often came through mobilisations that brought people into action for the first time – often young people with no experience of failure, little caution about asking the big questions about power and its distribution, and unafraid to take risks. Mobilisations worked well when they joined those newly brought into activism with those with past experience, learning from the successes and failures of past mobilisations, combining imagination and powerful narrative with groundwork and networking, and connecting the power of individual action – on the streets and social

media – with the power of collective action. Movements inspired each other, domestically and internationally: US protests about the country's migration agency sprang virally from city to city, while the school strike climate change movement acknowledged the inspiration of the gun control protests, which were in turn informed by earlier movements such as Black Lives Matter and Occupy. Mobilisations worked best when movements democratised and localised power, enabling people to take control of their own actions and have ownership of their struggles.

As organised civil society, we need to build on these successes and recognise and nurture the thirst for local-level participation that sparked so many of the great movements of the year. We need to start with individuals, recognise the agency they have, and find ways of supporting, enabling and growing that agency. We need to help create the spaces where people can lead their own struggles, and work to build out from individual responses, connect people, help build intersectional actions that cut across the things that divide us, and link individual acts with bold campaigning that asks the big questions about structural power. As civil society, many of us are doing this already, but now we need to do this more, and do it smarter.

The rapid rise of the far right has become one of the great challenges in the modern history of civil society. Things that seemed certain even a few years ago have now unravelled. This is a world where things are changing fast and all seems up for renegotiation. But the speed of that change and the dynamism of the times suggest an opportunity to mobilise, make new arguments, win arguments, carry people over from negative coalitions into positive ones, and remake our societies. If all is up for renegotiation, then surely it can be renegotiated for the better. The success stories and breakthroughs of 2018 suggest that we may already be turning the corner. In progressive, rights-oriented civil society, it is now time to take our efforts to the next level. With courage, commitment and optimism, real change can come.



The 'Los Machos Nos Matan En Mexico' (Men Kill Us in Mexico) movement protested in November to demand justice for the disappearance and murders of women.

Credit: Pedro Gonzalez Castillo/Getty Images

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Turning to the four key areas of civil society action from 2018 set out in the State of Civil Society Report, the following key recommendations are suggested for civil society follow-up:

- **To speak to people's anger on everyday issues**, as civil society we need to mobilise to help ensure that public anger at the denial of economic rights leads to opportunities for meaningful policy change. We need to develop our economic literacy and make action on economic inequality a central concern of our work. We need to develop and promote new ideas about economic democracy in order to have fairer economies that put people and rights at their centre. We need to build better connections between trade unions, academics, think tanks and other parts of civil society to develop economic alternatives. We need to reiterate continuously that international standards on the policing of protests, crowd control and the use of force and firearms are rigorously upheld, failures are exposed and those who use violence against protests are held accountable.
- **To improve the state of national democracy**, as civil society we need to develop and advocate for new standards for electoral management institutions that are free from political control and subject to democratic accountability, and new standards to keep election periods free from misinformation and illicit interference. We need to commit to increasing the role of citizens in election monitoring and reporting. We need to dialogue with new governments as they come to power to push for higher standards in civic space and democratic freedoms. We need to mainstream the promotion of democracy and good governance into our work as civil society so that people can see change on the fundamental issues they care about. As part of this, we need to demand inclusive decision-making in which the views of all citizens are heard rather than only the voices of major population blocs.
- **To challenge exclusion and claim rights**, as civil society we need to advocate for more extensive and better quality local democracy, and invest in developing and enabling the local-level spaces where people can start to tell their own stories and ask their own questions, and social movements can begin to form. We urgently need to work with citizens to co-create a new strategy that takes on the burgeoning power of right-wing populism and engages angered citizens behind a better alternative. We need to develop a new approach to analysing and combating the growing power of anti-rights groups. We need to advocate for the right to humanitarian action to help those most denied their rights.
- **At the international level**, as civil society we need to make a new case for multilateralism as the only credible response to the major, transnational issues of the day. We need to assert the value of multilateralism and call out the failures of unilateralism and bilateralism, but advocate for a more democratic multilateral system that enables much more space for citizen voices. We need to reinforce the spirit of internationalism, our shared humanity and the central importance of compassion in everything we say and do.



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