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report  
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# silencing dissent through fear

restrictions on civic  
space in Argentina

Since December 2023, national and provincial political authorities in Argentina, along with judicial officials, have made a series of decisions that paint a troubling picture of increasing restrictions on rights and freedoms grouped under the concept of “civic space.”

The notion of civic space refers to the conditions that create a more or less enabling “environment” for citizens to engage in matters of public interest. From this perspective, civic space in Argentina is shrinking. It is becoming increasingly difficult to participate, express opinions, or influence public debates and policies without facing various forms of retaliation. This climate fosters fear and aims to discourage different social actors from engaging in public matters. Below, we outline the most concerning measures taken over the past 10 months, which have raised alarms both nationally and internationally.

## restrictions on public demonstrations

In December 2023, the new national government, through the Ministry of Security (Resolution 943/23), introduced a [“Protocol for maintaining public order in the event of traffic obstructions”](#) that limits the exercise of the rights to assembly and free expression. With this administrative decision, the government now considers any public demonstration that impedes vehicle traffic to be a flagrant offense, thus authorizing security forces to repress, remove, and arrest demonstrators without a judicial order. Additionally, the protocol allows the police to collect information on individuals and organizations involved in protests for potential criminal prosecution. Throughout 2024, this “protocol” has served as a blanket justification for the police to act violently and arbitrarily in almost any situation, leading to constant harassment of demonstrators.

Policies restricting the right to protest, particularly Resolution 943/23, have raised concerns within both regional and international human rights protection systems. On January 23, 2024, three UN Special Rapporteurs (on the rights to peaceful assembly and association, the promotion and protection of freedom of opinion and expression, and the situation of human rights defenders in Argentina) [issued a statement to the national government](#), highlighting the serious issues with the resolution. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) has also [repeatedly reminded](#) the Argentine government of the inter-American standards, stressing that “social protest is an essential element in democratic societies and that the State must respect, protect, facilitate, and guarantee the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.”

The Ministry of Security also published a [“cyber-patrolling”](#) protocol (Resolution 428/24), granting the police broad powers to conduct open-source monitoring (websites, platforms, social media). Under the guise of a measure to prevent crime, it allows police to observe any type of activity on open platforms, which results in an inherently chilling effect on freedom of expression in the digital space. Furthermore, this practice is authorized to prevent “any crime that may come to light in cyberspace,” and, under Resolution 943/23, most forms of protest are now considered flagrant offenses. This creates a very real risk that cyber-patrolling efforts could be directed toward collecting information and eventually criminalizing expressions of political dissent.



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### repression of public demonstrations

Since December 2023, following the enactment of Resolution 943/23, the national government's policy has been to suppress and disperse public demonstrations. These [events](#) have been characterized by the repeated excessive use of force, arbitrary arrests, mistreatment, and humiliation of detainees, followed by legal prosecution. The most violent acts of repression occurred outside the National Congress, especially on [June 12](#), during the vote to pass the so-called "Ley Bases," a sweeping reform bill consisting of more than 200 articles and significant fiscal measures. In September 2024, there were further incidents of police violence, including the indiscriminate use of tear gas against pensioners and [children](#). Lawmakers/National deputies and union representatives were also gassed.

As of September 2024, at least 723 people had sustained [injuries of varying severity](#) due to police actions. Among them, 50 were members of the press.

### criminalization of protesters

The repression of protesters has been accompanied by arbitrary arrests, often carried out by police forces during the dispersal of protests. Since December 2023, at least 102 individuals have been detained during police operations against public demonstrations in the cities of Buenos Aires, Córdoba, and Rosario. Some individuals were arrested for resisting police efforts to remove them from public spaces, but the majority were detained at random. In some cases, individuals who were not even participating in the protests, but merely passing through nearby areas, were also detained.

The [criminalization](#) of protesters during the June 12 demonstration was particularly severe. On that day, [33 people](#) were arrested, and the prosecution accused them of extremely serious offenses, such as sedition and trying to overthrow the government. These individuals were transferred to federal prisons as though they posed a maximum-security threat. The charges brought by the prosecution were entirely based on a series of public statements made by the national government during the course of the repression. On social media, the president himself, alongside several officials and digital militias, labeled the protesters as "[terrorists](#)," promoting the idea that the goal of the protest was to orchestrate a coup. The prosecutor's office pressed charges against the demonstrators in line with this governmental narrative, without any supporting evidence. The judiciary took several days, and in some cases weeks, to verify that [no evidence existed](#) to sustain the prosecutor's claims. Detainees were gradually released in stages, with the last individual released on September 8, after spending 85 days in detention for protesting.

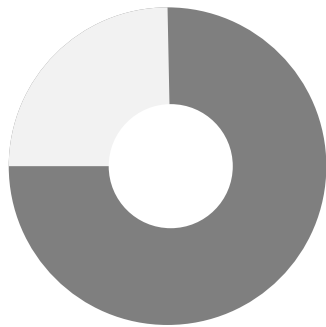
## persecution of social organizations

The national government has launched a campaign of persecution against organizations commonly known in Argentina as “social movements,” which typically represent unemployed individuals or those engaged in the informal grassroots economy. In recent years, these organizations have played key intermediary roles between the state and the country’s most impoverished sectors, such as distributing food, managing social welfare programs, and organizing cooperatives. They have also become a significant political force by organizing and voicing these communities’ demands through public demonstrations.

The persecution operates on two fronts. On one hand, administrative decisions that restrict protests and impose fines on organizations that organize, disseminate, or participate in public demonstrations. The Ministry of Security has implemented an [unprecedented measure](#): attempting to charge these organizations for the excessive costs of the police operations deployed during protests. By doing so, the state not only shirks one of its key responsibilities (protecting protesters and ensuring the exercise of their rights) but also signals its view of protests as irregularities or disturbances for which the organizers should be financially responsible.

The second front is the initiation of [legal cases](#) against social movements, often on the pretext of alleged coercion of individuals to participate in protests or mismanagement of state resources. These cases, spurred by anonymous complaints encouraged by the government, have led prosecutors to request—and courts to generally approve—highly invasive investigative measures. These include raids on organization offices and community kitchens, the seizure of mobile phones and computers, etc. Information contained in these devices is often leaked to the media, which then launches smear campaigns against the organizations, their leaders, and activists by publishing their personal data.

The government has also stigmatized and harassed labor unions. In the case of education workers and employees of the state-owned airline, it proposed classifying their activities as “essential services” to restrict or eliminate their right to strike. In response to salary disputes with airline workers, the government went as far as declaring that Aerolíneas Argentinas is now “[subject to privatization](#).” Additionally, a Ministry of Security [protocol](#) (Resolution 901/2024) specifically targets another form of union protest: blockades of company entrances. This resolution, without any changes to criminal law, reclassifies the practice as a crime and authorizes security forces to intervene without a court order, break up blockades, identify those responsible, and report them to the judiciary.



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### **digital militia attacks on human rights defenders**

In recent years, and especially during the 2023 electoral campaign that brought the La Libertad Avanza party to power, coordinated [online attacks](#) against human rights defenders have escalated. These campaigns seek to distort political positions, question the validity of information, discredit public figures, and ultimately [silence, intimidate, and drive progressive](#), feminist, anti-racist, decolonial, and [human rights movements](#)—and those associated with them—out of the digital public sphere. [Journalists](#), social leaders, and even ordinary supporters have also been targeted.

Since December 2023, some of these digital actors have been appointed to the national government's Digital Communication team. Journalistic investigations have revealed that both organized and informal groups involved in these attacks are [funded by government resources](#), granting them state legitimacy. A few weeks ago, the government attempted to allocate a large sum of [secret funds](#) to the intelligence system through a decree that would have remained exempt from stringent oversight. While Congress annulled the decree, appointments within the communication and campaign departments continue with little transparency regarding their objectives or funding sources. Many of the online attacks on journalists or political figures often originate from the account of President Javier Milei, who also frequently republishes false information or disinformation.

The far-right "[digital militias](#)" in Argentina primarily operate anonymously in virtual spaces, using tactics like doxxing, harassment, and threats to control public discourse through fear and intimidation. This anonymity shields the perpetrators from both consequences and social accountability. Research indicates that 75% of female journalists have experienced restrictions on their freedom of expression online. In some cases, these online attacks have escalated beyond the digital realm.

## disregard for mechanisms of participation and prior consultation

One of the longstanding human rights issues in Argentina is the lack of effective mechanisms for participation, prior consultation, and seeking agreements with Indigenous peoples and other stakeholders affected by extractive industries or other activities (such as tourism) on their lands. The country lacks a national law governing this matter, and provinces have adopted their own approaches. These approaches are generally bureaucratic, fail to meet basic protection standards, or blatantly bypass any form of consent, allowing commercial projects to proceed without necessary approvals from local communities.

The current government and National Congress have exacerbated this longstanding issue by bypassing Indigenous and small-scale farming communities in their decision to pass the so-called “[Regime of Incentives for Large Investments](#)” (RIGI). This legislation grants extraordinary tax, customs, and foreign exchange benefits to companies in sectors like forestry, infrastructure, mining, energy, technology, tourism, steel, oil, and gas for a 30-year period. Despite the direct impact on their territories and livelihoods, Indigenous communities, rural groups, neighborhood assemblies, and environmental defenders were excluded from any consultation or participation processes regarding these economic projects.

RIGI guarantees these benefits, shielding them from any contingencies or local regulations, including [environmental laws](#) or provincial requirements for prior consultation. Companies registered under RIGI can request exemptions from local participation or consultation processes, as the regime does not mandate them and provincial laws may be deemed inapplicable in these cases.

## the public security apparatus at the service of private companies amid social conflicts

The Ministry of National Security has issued a series of resolutions signaling the government’s stance on potential social conflicts involving companies from key sectors of the economy, which, according to the government, “require heightened security measures in the production or transportation of goods” (Resolution 499/2024). To this end, the government established a “Productive Security Unit,” initially involving federal security forces, but later expanded to provincial forces through a subsequent resolution (893/2024) with the creation of a “Unified Command for Productive Security.”

The concept of “productive security” is a euphemism masking the political decision to prevent any protest or conflict that could hinder the operations of extractive mining, hydrocarbon exploitation, or agribusiness. In this way, security forces—a public resource—are being deployed to serve private interests. Their role is not focused on ensuring the security of all citizens; rather, it aligns with broader governmental measures aimed at suppressing social protests. The objective is clear: to preemptively address, suppress, or disband conflicts to ensure the continued operations of these companies without disruption.

## restrictions on access to information and increasing State opacity

The Argentine government has been [limiting access to public information](#), increasingly invoking the principle of “state secrecy” in recent months to justify withholding information and avoiding public debate on government decisions that impact fundamental rights.

The case of the intelligence systems clearly illustrates this point. The current administration [reformed the national intelligence framework](#) through an emergency decree (DNU 614/24), reinstating the highest level of secrecy concerning intelligence activities. Additionally, the decree granted new powers for collecting digital information without implementing adequate oversight mechanisms. Simultaneously, through a separate decree, the government allocated a substantial budget of reserved funds to intelligence services. While the Argentine Congress rejected the decree regarding these funds on September 17, 2024, there are strong suspicions that they may have already been used. However, it remains virtually impossible for the public to determine what happened to those funds.

The logic of secrecy is also being applied arbitrarily to deny access to information that poses no legitimate threat to national security. The Ministry of Security used these justifications to refuse the release of information regarding police operations during public protests. It also declined to disclose the names of the [national deputies who visited individuals convicted of crimes against humanity](#) during Argentina’s last military dictatorship. Similarly, the state-owned airline Aerolíneas Argentinas refused to provide details to the press regarding its advertising expenditures and which media outlets benefited from this spending, claiming the information was “secret.”

In September 2024, the national government formalized its political decision to extend this logic of secrecy across national administration. By issuing [Decree 780/2024](#), the government modified the regulations of the Public Information Access Law (27.275). Although this law aligns with international standards and represents a significant advancement in ensuring public transparency, the new decree introduces unnecessary barriers and excuses to withhold information. It broadens the scope of information excluded from public interest, reinforces state secrecy, and grants public officials greater discretion in determining what qualifies as a public document versus private information, thereby providing them with additional protection from scrutiny.

## harassment of journalists

The environment for [journalistic work](#) has become increasingly complex and dangerous. In addition to journalists and press workers being injured while covering protests and facing harassment from digital militias, they are now also the target of systematic attacks from senior government officials, particularly from the president himself. In his infrequent public speeches—whether in parliament, in media interviews, or at international forums—the president often labels journalists as “liars,” “corrupt,” “imbeciles,” and “prophets of truth,” among others. He also regularly accuses them of being “paid” to criticize his administration.



The president's social media account on platform X is another venue where he uses similar language to respond to any dissent voiced by journalists, social leaders, or political figures.

[These remarks](#) are frequently echoed by other members of his administration. In some instances, government officials have even pursued [legal actions against journalists](#), such as the Minister of Justice filing lawsuits against Nancy Pazos and Darío Villaroel. Additionally, threats of multimillion-dollar civil suits against journalists have been made.

Even the presidential spokesperson has been known to harass or mock journalists who ask difficult questions during official press briefings. The government has also announced its intention to revise the criteria for admission to the Government House press room, ensuring that only those deemed “worthy” are allowed to attend.

### **closing remarks**

The measures described in this document over the past few months have significantly impacted fundamental freedoms essential to democratic life, such as the right to demonstrate in the streets, express oneself in digital spaces, belong to social organizations, carry out journalistic work, be informed, give (or withhold) consent to high-impact environmental projects, access public information, and even exercise the right to strike. Viewed collectively, they depict a troubling narrowing of civic space in Argentina, a regression occurring in tandem with the worsening socio-economic conditions faced by most of the population.



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