

Freedom to Protest Is Under Attack – Why It Matters for Everyone

[Blog](#), [Civil Rights and Freedom](#), [Azerbaijan](#), [Freedom of Assembly](#), [Hungary](#), [Kazakhstan](#), [Pride](#), [Turkey](#)

When states suppress public protests, they don't just target activists, they erode the rights of all citizens. The latest crackdowns in Hungary, Turkey, and beyond show why defending freedom of assembly is more urgent than ever.

On 8 March, people took to the streets to mark International Women's Day, but their right to march was actively suppressed in many places. From Kazakhstan to Turkey and Azerbaijan, authorities used intimidation, force, and legal threats to prevent women from gathering, exposing a broader pattern of restrictions on civil society. Meanwhile, in Hungary, the government has escalated its efforts to suppress freedom of assembly, passing a law that explicitly bans Pride marches and introduces surveillance measures to deter participation.

Crackdowns on feminist and LGBTI protests

Ahead of Women's Day, Kazakhstan authorities [detained](#) LBT activists from Feminista, using penal and administrative tactics to suppress their activism. In Turkey, nearly 200 people were detained in Istanbul alone, with police blocking demonstrations across multiple cities on the 8th. Among those detained was a trans woman, underscoring how trans activists are often specifically targeted. In Azerbaijan, feminist activist Rauf Heydarov was [sentenced](#) to 30 days of detention after attempting to display a poster on 8 March, with fabricated charges used to justify their arrest. These cases illustrate how states use arbitrary detentions and legal mechanisms to intimidate activists and restrict their right to assemble and protest.

Hungary: From threats to an outright ban on Pride

In Hungary, restrictions on freedom of assembly have intensified dramatically. What started as a "child protection" law—banning the "depiction or promotion" of homosexuality to minors and widely condemned by EU leaders, the European Commission, and the Council of Europe as violating international human rights standards—has now escalated into a nationwide [ban on Pride marches](#). The new law not only criminalises these events but also permits the use of facial recognition technology to track and penalise participants. Despite this, the Budapest Pride organisers remain committed to marching, demonstrating the resilience of the movement in the face of increasing authoritarianism.

A key indicator of democratic health

These events in Hungary, Turkey, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan are not isolated incidents. They reflect a broader trend in which governments seek to silence peaceful and legitimate dissent by restricting public demonstrations, targeting women's rights and LGBTI activists, and using legal measures to suppress fundamental rights. The ability to protest is a key indicator of democratic health. When states criminalise peaceful assembly, they erode not just rights for LGBTI people and women, but the broader foundation of civil liberties for all.

As these threats grow, the international response must be clear. Governments, the EU, and international

institutions must hold states accountable for these violations and stand in firm defence of the right to protest. Freedom of assembly is not just an LGBTI or feminist issue; it is central to human rights and democracy. When one group's right to gather is restricted, the ability of all people to organise and demand change is at risk.

The human right to assemble and protest must be protected, defended, and upheld.