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International Group Warns of Deepening Civil Rights Erosion in U.S. Under the Current Administration

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The United States continues to face mounting criticism from international watchdogs over what they describe as a troubling decline in civic freedoms and democratic norms. CIVICUS, a South Africa-based global civil society alliance, has reiterated its concerns

about the state of American democracy, placing the U.S. on its “watchlist” for ongoing threats to civil liberties.

In a recent update, CIVICUS pointed to a series of developments that reflect a tightening grip on free expression and dissent. Among the most notable concerns is the federal government’s use of military force in response to domestic protests and the targeting of journalists covering demonstrations. One incident cited occurred on June 9, when Australian journalist Lauren Tomasi was struck by a rubber bullet while reporting on a protest in Los Angeles. Another involved Salvadoran journalist Mario Guevara, a legal U.S. resident, who was detained during a demonstration and later transferred to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody, where he remains.

CIVICUS Secretary-General Mandeep Tiwana emphasized that the erosion of institutional safeguards and disregard for constitutional norms is cause for significant alarm. “Once institutions are dismantled... it takes a long, long time to rebuild,” Tiwana said in an interview with *Salon*. He warned that continued suppression of civil society and the media mirrors behavior typically seen in authoritarian regimes.

The group also expressed serious concern over the treatment of pro-Palestinian activists. CIVICUS cited the cases of students Mahmoud Khalil, Mohsen Mahdawi, and Rumeysa Ozturk, alleging they were targeted for their political views. In addition, the organization criticized U.S. actions toward Francesca Albanese, the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, describing her sanctioning as an illegitimate effort to silence international voices critical of Israeli policy.

Tiwana noted that America’s diminishing role as a global advocate for democracy and civil rights has created a vacuum increasingly filled by authoritarian governments. “The public rollback of established American foreign policy principles... is very worrying,” he said, warning of broader international consequences.

Currently, CIVICUS rates the United States as having a “narrowed” civic space, defined as a climate where civil freedoms are hindered by harassment or punitive action against dissenters. Other countries with this designation include Italy, Germany, Romania, and Argentina.

Additional watchdogs have echoed similar concerns. In 2021, Freedom House downgraded the U.S. in its global democracy rankings, citing racial inequities, excessive political

influence by wealthy donors, and deepening partisan polarization. More recently, Reporters Without Borders lowered the U.S. in its 2025 World Press Freedom Index. The decline was attributed in part to attempts to politicize the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and exclude press outlets like the Associated Press from official briefings. The firing of CBS's Late Show host Stephen Colbert, which occurred shortly before the administration approved a media merger involving Skydance, has also sparked debate over political influence in the media industry.

While the U.S. has long been viewed as a global standard-bearer for democratic principles, these reports suggest a shift that continues to raise red flags among international observers.