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U.S. Added to International Watchlist Over Civic Freedom Concerns

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The United States has been added to the global watchlist maintained by CIVICUS, a civil society alliance monitoring civic freedoms worldwide. The listing, which reflects data from the first half of President Donald Trump's second term, highlights what the organization calls a troubling erosion of constitutional protections and civil liberties.

CIVICUS, officially known as the World Alliance for Citizen Participation, cited “sustained attacks on civil freedoms” as the reason behind the U.S. designation. In its July update to the Monitor Watchlist, the group said the U.S. is experiencing a “bizarre assault on fundamental freedoms and constitutional safeguards.” Mandeep Tiwana, Secretary General of CIVICUS, stated, “Peaceful protests are confronted with military force, critics are treated as criminals, journalists are targeted, and support for civil society and international cooperation has been cut back.”

The United States was added to the CIVICUS watchlist in March, following what the group claims to be escalating restrictions on public dissent and freedom of expression. Among its chief concerns are the June deployment of 700 U.S. Marines and 2,000 National Guard troops in Los Angeles in response to demonstrations against Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids. CIVICUS described the move as a “dangerous precedent,” citing its incompatibility with democratic norms.

The watchdog organization, which evaluates nations based on five civic space classifications: open, narrowed, obstructed, repressed, and closed, has rated the U.S. as “narrowed.” This designation is used for countries where citizens can technically exercise their freedoms, but violations occur with increasing frequency and seriousness.

CIVICUS also flagged the arrest and detention of Salvadoran journalist Mario Guevara, who was taken into custody while reporting on the “No Kings” protests in June. The alliance claims this represents a broader pattern of “violent repression and arbitrary arrest” of members of the press.

The July 18 congressional approval of a rescissions package was another point of contention. The package included what CIVICUS said was the first rollback of pre-approved federal public broadcasting funds in nearly 30 years, cutting support to entities such as PBS (Public Broadcasting Service), NPR (National Public Radio), and local media stations. “The targeting of journalists for documenting dissent while defunding public media is a clear red flag,” Tiwana said about the legislation and ongoing legal disputes between the Trump administration and media outlets.

In recent months, President Trump has filed lawsuits against a range of media organizations, including CBS, The Wall Street Journal’s parent company, and the Des Moines Register. The suits challenge reporting and polling related to the President’s re-election campaign, his

opponent, Vice President Kamala Harris, and past associations with figures like Jeffrey Epstein.

Further raising concern, CIVICUS referenced the case of Mahmoud Khalil, a legal permanent U.S. resident and pro-Palestinian activist who was detained for three months by immigration authorities before being released in June by judicial order. The group described such incidents as reflective of “the growing criminalization of solidarity actions.”

In addition to the United States, the CIVICUS Monitor Watchlist for this cycle also included El Salvador, Indonesia, Kenya, Serbia, and Turkey. The group’s assessments aim to track civic space trends globally and inform advocacy efforts aimed at protecting fundamental rights.

While the CIVICUS report has sparked attention among international observers and human rights advocates, critics note the organization’s methodology can be subjective, and its commentary may carry political undertones. Nonetheless, the listing of the U.S. as a “narrowed” civic space reflects ongoing international scrutiny of the country’s internal approach to dissent, press freedom, and civil society under the current administration.