

GOVERNMENTS ARE USING COVID-19 TO FUEL AUTHORITARIANISM

Since the start of the pandemic, more than 170 countries have adopted emergency measures as part of their pandemic response. Many of these measures are unnecessary, disproportionate, and use COVID-19 as an excuse to consolidate power. Governments, multilateral institutions, and civil society must act together now to ensure COVID-19 emergency powers do not become a permanent means of suppressing dissent, violating rights, and expanding authoritarianism.

Examples of emergency power overreach

The government in **Brazil** threatened critics, blocked reporting, and restricted citizens' access to information about the pandemic

The **Tunisian** government increased surveillance, including through a contact-tracing app that uploads individuals' location and personal information to a central database

Malawi's former president tried to use COVID-19 to suppress dissent, squash separation of powers and extend his rule

Hungary's government issued hundreds of decrees, many unrelated to public health, undermining independent media and academia and targeting members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community

Malaysia's ongoing state of emergency suspends parliament, allows the government to enact laws without parliamentary approval, and postpones national elections



Globally, governments are abusing COVID emergency powers to:

- Suspend elections and legislative bodies
- Target the poor, minorities, refugees, LGBTQ, and other marginalized groups
- Silence media and political opposition
- Dramatically expand state and corporate surveillance powers
- Violently crack down on peaceful protest



What can be done?

- **Formally review emergency measures** to determine what powers are needed – and what are not – to stop the spread of the virus. Any review must include a chance for the public, including civil society representatives, to participate.
- **Establish clear end dates or sunset clauses** for any continued states of emergency, and formally register any restrictions on rights.
- **Develop new international guidelines and mechanisms for rapid review of emergency measures** adopted in response to public health crises.
- **Ensure regular public reporting on the impact of emergency restrictions** on rights as well as independent monitoring and oversight by civil society.
- **Consider the rollback of rights-harming emergency measures** and the resumption of suspended elections, legislative oversight, and due process in decisions on provision of security and other government-to-government assistance.

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