



WORLD ANTI EXTREMISM
NETWORK
BUILDING A FREE WORLD



UNCENSORED WATCH

Defending Freedom, Challenging Extremism and Authoritarianism

Issue 21 | September 2026

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***Defending Freedom, Challenging
Extremism and Authoritarianism***

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<https://worldantiextremism.org>



info@worldantiextremism.org

Issue:

Uncensored Watch | Issue 21, September 2026

Credits:

Editor-in-Chief: Marwa Tahir

Design: Rahim Sultani

Contributors: WAEN's Research and Intern Teams

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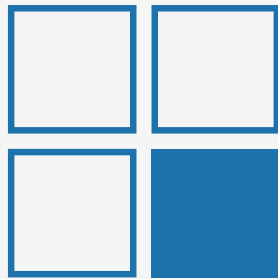
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Table of Contents

SECTION - 1: Welcome to Uncensored Watch - A Project of World Anti-Extremism Network	4
SECTION - 2: Global Crisis in Focus.....	6
Deadly Bombing at Pakistan Mosque Leaves 21 Dead and Over 100 Injured.....	7
LGBTQ+ activists and journalists targeted in wave of arrests across Turkey	9
Hong Kong Tiananmen activists sentenced to up to seven years in prison.....	10
Journalist Mohamed Yousfi arrested as Tunisia intensifies pressure on critics	12
China Tightens Rules on Leaving the Country.....	13
Pakistan Rights Lawyers Face New Detention After Bail	14
Pakistan Detains Imran Khan's Relatives and PTI Supporters Ahead of Protests.....	16
Georgian Authorities Punish Online Expression with Detention.....	18
Russia Escalates Campaign Against VPNs and Online Censorship Workarounds	19
Niger Strips Five Exiled Critics of Nationality.....	20
SECTION - 3: Multimedia Update: Voices Against Authoritarianism.....	21
Write-up by an International Human Rights Certificate Program Participant	22
From Education Ban to Domestic Violence: How Taliban Rule Has Increased Afghan	
Women's Vulnerability to Violence by Rahila Poya	22
SECTION - 4: Contact us.....	23



SECTION-1

**Welcome to Uncensored Watch - A Project of
World Anti-Extremism Network**

Welcome to Uncensored Watch – A Project of World Anti-Extremism Network

Dear Readers, welcome to the September edition of Uncensored Watch!

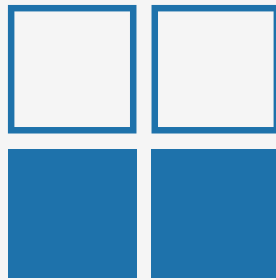
This month, we look at human rights developments across different regions, including the targeting of LGBTQ+ organizations and activists in Türkiye, arrests over online speech in Georgia, and the prosecution of journalists, lawyers, and opposition figures in Tunisia and Pakistan. We also examine restrictions on freedom of movement in China, access to information in Russia, and the stripping of nationality from exiled critics in Niger.

This month's edition also looks at violence against civilians, including the deadly mosque attack in Pakistan. Additionally, we feature a contribution from a graduate of our International Human Rights Certificate Program exploring how restrictions on Afghan women's rights have increased their vulnerability to domestic violence.

Take a closer look at the people, stories, and struggles behind today's human rights concerns.

Enjoy Reading!

The Uncensored Watch Team



SECTION-2

Global Crisis in Focus

Deadly Bombing at Pakistan Mosque Leaves 21 Dead and Over 100 Injured

A devastating suicide assault targeting a mosque within a police complex in northwestern Pakistan has left at least 21 people dead and more than 100 others wounded, according to authorities. Among those who lost their lives were 15 police personnel and a four-year-old child. The attack occurred in Kohat, a city in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, and reportedly involved both an explosives-laden vehicle and armed militants who opened fire on the security installation, state-run APP reported. Footage reviewed by BBC Verify showed extensive destruction at the location, with debris scattered across the area as emergency responders and bystanders assisted the injured.

Police officials in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa indicated that the operation was likely carried out by a faction of [Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan \(TTP\)](#), commonly referred to as the Pakistani Taliban. According to investigators, a vehicle packed with explosives crashed into the mosque's entrance at approximately 1:15 p.m. local time while worshippers were gathered for Friday prayers. Authorities stated that at least six attackers were killed either in the blast itself or during the subsequent exchange of gunfire with security forces. In a statement posted on X, the provincial police reaffirmed their commitment to countering what they described as the hostile activities of "Fitna-al-Khawarij," a term Pakistani officials frequently use when referring to the TTP. Established in 2007, the Pakistani Taliban seeks to impose its interpretation of Islamic law and maintains links with both al-Qaeda and Afghanistan's Taliban movement.

President Asif Ali Zardari conveyed his condolences and expressed hopes for the rapid recovery of those injured. He also emphasized the need to eradicate terrorist networks that he described as receiving support from foreign actors. The United Nations likewise denounced the incident. A spokesperson for Secretary-General António Guterres said the UN chief strongly condemned the bombing, stressing that assaults directed at civilians and religious sites are unacceptable. Earlier this year, Pakistani authorities blamed the TTP for several violent incidents across the country, including a [suicide attack on a Shia mosque](#) in Islamabad that resulted in more than 30 fatalities. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Faisal Karim Kundi remarked that the province has paid a heavy price in its long struggle against militancy and terrorism.

Security challenges have intensified in Pakistan's border regions in recent months, with armed groups increasingly targeting law-enforcement agencies and military personnel. Pakistani officials maintain that insurgent organizations exploit Afghan territory as a refuge for recruitment, training, and operational planning. However, Afghanistan's Taliban

administration rejects these allegations, arguing that Pakistan's security problems stem from internal factors rather than cross-border support.

The attack highlights the persistent security challenges facing Pakistan, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where militant violence has intensified in recent years. By targeting a mosque inside a police compound during Friday prayers, the attackers aimed to inflict mass casualties while striking both security personnel and civilians. The incident is likely to deepen concerns about the growing threat posed by militant groups and may further strain relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, as both countries continue to disagree over the sources of regional insecurity and cross-border militancy.



Photo by [Shairyar Khan](#) on [Unsplash](#)

LGBTQ+ activists and journalists targeted in wave of arrests across Turkey

Turkish authorities have launched a broad operation against [LGBTQ+ organisations and activists](#), using allegations of obscenity and violations of NGO regulations to justify raids and detentions across the country. Police began coordinated searches early Sunday at the offices of LGBTQ+ rights and HIV-awareness organisations in [Istanbul, Ankara, İzmir, Aydın and Mersin](#). Authorities also searched nightclubs and the homes of activists. Footage released by Turkey's Interior Ministry showed officers searching offices, removing rainbow flags and taking individuals away in handcuffs. Prosecutors in Istanbul said police confiscated digital devices, drugs and a firearm during the operations. Rights organisations reported that more than 100 people were initially detained, with around 62 subsequently held in custody pending legal proceedings.



Photo by [Tong Su](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Emma Sinclair-Webb of Human Rights Watch described the campaign as one of Turkey's broadest crackdowns on LGBTQ+ people in recent years. She also argued that authorities were attempting to portray LGBTQ+ advocacy as criminal activity. Homosexuality itself is not prohibited under Turkish law. However, prosecutors in Ankara have accused LGBTQ+ organisations of breaching laws concerning "obscenity" and regulations governing civil society groups, although the precise legal basis for some of the proceedings remains unclear. Justice Minister Akin Gürlek defended the operation, known as "My Family is Safe," saying it was intended to safeguard children, family life and social order. Authorities said the investigation also focused on locations allegedly connected to prostitution and the distribution of material deemed obscene.

The crackdown has extended beyond activists. Turkey's Media and Law Studies Association said seven members of the executive board of Kaos GL, a longstanding LGBTQ+ rights organisation that also runs a news platform, were among those targeted. Journalist Tuğba Tekerek was also detained at her Istanbul home and taken to Ankara for questioning following her publication of an article about the LGBTQ+ community in Georgia. Protests followed the initial raids, prompting further arrests. Police used tear gas

against demonstrators in İzmir, while at least 150 protesters were detained in Istanbul and additional arrests were reported in Ankara. AFP reported that some Istanbul protesters were detained after displaying a banner stating that being LGBTQ+ is not a crime and chanting in support of freedom.

The latest campaign follows a broader shift toward using existing laws to restrict LGBTQ+ activity. A proposed amendment that would have criminalised LGBTQ+ people for promoting conduct considered contrary to “biological sex and general morality” was withdrawn last year. Since then, authorities have increasingly relied on broad obscenity provisions. Last month, 11 members of the Youth LGBTI+ organisation went on trial over allegations linked to “family values” and images depicting same-sex couples, with potential prison sentences of up to three years. Gürlek has connected the government’s campaign to [President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s](#) initiative declaring a “decade of the family and population,” which seeks to address Turkey’s declining birth rate and changing family patterns. Human rights groups, however, have challenged the government’s justification. Sinclair-Webb acknowledged the importance of protecting children and families but argued that such efforts should also address issues including domestic violence, child abuse and violence against women rather than concentrating on LGBTQ+ people.

The raids show a significant escalation in restrictions on LGBTQ+ organisations, activists and journalists in Turkey. While authorities cite family values and public order, the scale of the arrests raises concerns about freedom of expression, association and the space available to civil society. Greater transparency around the legal grounds for arrests, along with dialogue between authorities and civil society groups, could help reduce tensions while protecting fundamental rights.

Hong Kong Tiananmen activists sentenced to up to seven years in prison

Three prominent Hong Kong activists have been sentenced to prison for their involvement in organising annual vigils commemorating the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown in Beijing. Lee Cheuk-yan, 69, received a seven-year sentence, while Chow Hang-tung, 41, was sentenced to seven years and three months. [Albert Ho](#), 74, who pleaded guilty earlier this year, was given five years in prison. All three were leaders of the now-disbanded Hong Kong Alliance, which organised the annual commemorations for decades. Lee and Chow were convicted last month of inciting others to subvert state power under Hong Kong’s national security law. The charges were linked in part to the Alliance’s calls to “end one-party dictatorship”, which prosecutors argued encouraged opposition to China’s Communist Party.



Photo by [Carly Hendrickson](#) on [Unsplash](#)

[The Tiananmen vigils](#), once among the few public commemorations of the 1989 crackdown permitted on Chinese territory, were prohibited by Hong Kong authorities in 2020. The ban was initially introduced under Covid-19 restrictions but remained in place after the city's national security law took effect that year. The United Nations human rights office has called for the sentences to be overturned. Rights groups including [Amnesty International](#) and Human Rights Watch have also criticised the punishments, arguing that they target peaceful commemoration and further restrict space for public discussion of the Tiananmen crackdown. Hong Kong authorities maintain that the national security law is necessary to protect stability. Critics, however, say its broad provisions have significantly narrowed political and civil freedoms in the territory.

Following Friday's sentencing, Lee's wife, Elizabeth Tang, said he planned to appeal. Outside the court, Chow's mother urged supporters not to lose hope or feel guilty over the verdict. The Hong Kong Alliance was established in 1989 to support the pro-democracy movement in Beijing. For more than three decades, it campaigned for accountability over the Tiananmen crackdown, the release of political prisoners and greater democratic reform, while holding annual candlelight vigils that at times drew tens of thousands of people. The court also imposed a HK\$1.5 million fine on the organisation.

The sentences mark a further narrowing of the space for public remembrance and political expression in Hong Kong. The activists were punished for organising vigils that had been held for decades, showing how activities once tolerated in the city can now carry serious legal consequences under the national security framework. The case also highlights the wider impact of the crackdown on civil society, as commemorating a major historical event has increasingly become a politically sensitive act.

Journalist Mohamed Yousfi arrested as Tunisia intensifies pressure on critics

Tunisian authorities have detained [journalist Mohamed Yousfi](#), editor-in-chief of investigative outlet Al-Qatiba and a prominent critic of President Kais Saied, according to the head of Tunisia's journalists' union. Yousfi was reportedly taken for questioning on Friday, although authorities have not disclosed what prompted the investigation or commented publicly on his detention. His arrest comes amid mounting pressure on journalists, activists and other government critics in Tunisia.

Several media figures have faced prison sentences this year, including journalist Zied el-Heni, who received a one-year sentence in May, and broadcaster Mourad Zeghidi and political commentator Borhen Bsaies, who were each sentenced to three and a half years in January. The crackdown has also extended beyond the media. The pressure extends beyond journalists, with [Human Rights Watch](#) documenting arrests, prosecutions, financial investigations and suspensions targeting civil society groups and their members since 2024. Tunisia's Court of Cassation recently upheld convictions against [40 opposition figures](#), lawyers and human rights defenders accused of plotting against the government. Rights groups have raised concerns about the shrinking space for independent journalism and dissent under Saied's rule, while government officials maintain that those prosecuted posed a threat to the country's stability.

Yousfi's arrest reflects a wider pattern of pressure on journalists and critics in Tunisia, where repeated prosecutions have raised concerns about the shrinking space for independent reporting and public dissent. The continued use of legal proceedings against journalists, activists and opposition figures also raises questions about judicial independence and the protection of basic freedoms. Tunisian authorities should ensure that journalists can work without intimidation, guarantee due process, and protect freedom of expression while addressing legitimate security concerns through transparent and lawful procedures.



Photo by [Jana Shnipelson](#) on [Unsplash](#)

China Tightens Rules on Leaving the Country

China has introduced new rules that give authorities broader powers to prevent both citizens and foreigners from leaving the country, raising concerns over the right to freedom of movement, [Human Rights Watch \(HRW\)](#) said. The 19-article regulation, which came into force on September 15, allows officials to restrict travel on broadly defined grounds including national security, national interests and certain activities abroad. It also permits authorities to discourage citizens from travelling to countries or regions considered “high-risk,” without clearly explaining how such risks are determined.

The rules also expand the circumstances in which Chinese citizens can face exit bans. Authorities can prohibit people from leaving for up to three years over activities abroad deemed to threaten national security or interests. In some cases, officials can withhold information about the ban if they claim that disclosure could interfere with an investigation or national security. Foreign nationals can also be prevented from leaving China if they are placed on certain [government blacklists](#) for allegedly threatening China’s sovereignty or national interests. Previous cases have shown that foreigners can face exit restrictions even without being formally charged with a crime.

The new regulation builds on a broader tightening of travel controls in China. Over recent years, authorities have imposed additional restrictions on human rights defenders, ethnic minorities and some government employees, while people from areas considered vulnerable to illegal emigration or online fraud have faced additional requirements when applying for passports. [International human rights standards](#) recognize the right to leave any country, including one’s own. Restrictions may be permitted in limited circumstances, but they should have a clear legal basis, serve a legitimate purpose, and be necessary and proportionate. HRW argues that China’s broad and loosely defined grounds for exit bans do not meet these standards.

The new rules raise concerns because they give Chinese authorities wider control over who can leave the country, often using terms that are not clearly defined. Such uncertainty can make journalists, researchers, activists, and ordinary citizens more cautious about their work and expression, particularly when they fear that criticism or other activities could affect their ability to travel. Clear legal limits, transparency, and effective ways to challenge exit bans are important to prevent these powers from being used arbitrarily.

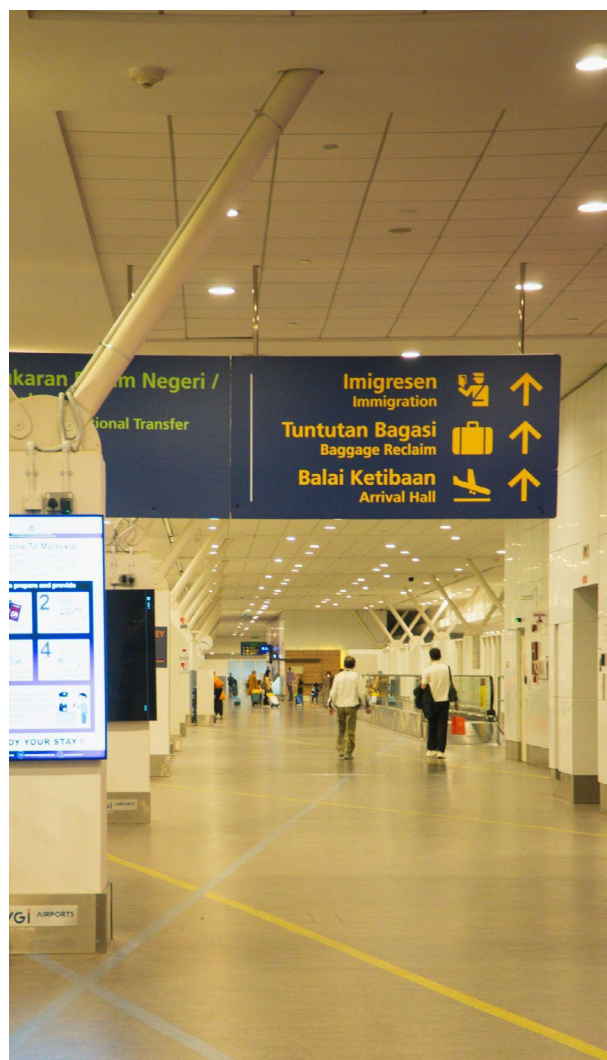


Photo by [Habib Ilmi](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Pakistan Rights Lawyers Face New Detention After Bail

Pakistani authorities have rearrested human rights lawyers [Imaan Mazari-Hazir and Hadi Ali Chattha](#) just hours after the Supreme Court granted them bail, prompting renewed concerns over the use of criminal proceedings against government critics. The couple was initially convicted over social media posts supporting local activists and criticizing the military. On September 17, the Supreme Court ordered their release on bail while their appeals were pending before the Islamabad High Court. Police, however, detained them again the same day in connection with a separate case dating back to a [March 2025 protest](#) in Islamabad.

Authorities allege that the lawyers took part in an unauthorized demonstration, chanted anti-government slogans, and obstructed a public road. The case was later brought under Pakistan's Anti-Terrorism Act, although those provisions were not used when the protest originally took place. An anti-terrorism court subsequently rejected a police request for 30 days of custody and ordered that the two remain in detention outside police custody while proceedings continue. The case follows their January conviction under [Pakistan's Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act](#), when they were sentenced to 10 years in prison over online posts considered hostile to state institutions. Rights groups and lawyers' organizations have previously criticized the proceedings, warning that broad cybercrime laws can be used to restrict criticism and peaceful expression. Pakistan is bound by international standards protecting fair trials, freedom of expression, and the independence of lawyers.

The case of Imaan Mazari-Hazir and Hadi Ali Chattha reflects the growing pressure faced by lawyers who take on sensitive human rights cases or openly criticize state institutions. Their rearrest shortly after being granted bail raises concerns about the repeated use of criminal proceedings to keep them behind bars, particularly when the new charges relate to an older protest. Beyond the immediate case, such actions can create a climate where lawyers and activists may hesitate to speak out or defend others for fear of facing similar consequences. Authorities should ensure that any prosecution is based on credible evidence and that legal safeguards, including the right to bail and a fair hearing, are respected throughout the process.



Photo by [Tingey Injury Law Firm](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Pakistan Detains Imran Khan's Relatives and PTI Supporters Ahead of Protests

Pakistani authorities have detained several relatives of former Prime Minister Imran Khan, including three of his sisters, along with members and supporters of his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party ahead of nationwide protests planned for September 27. [Amnesty International](#) said the arrests raise serious concerns over the rights to liberty, peaceful assembly, freedom of expression, and political association. The organization called for the immediate release of those detained solely because of their family connections, political affiliation, or intention to participate in the demonstrations. Khan's sister Aleema Khan was placed in 30-day administrative detention in Lahore on September 20 under the Punjab Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance. The following day, his sisters Noreen Niazi and Uzma Khan were also detained under similar orders. Several other relatives were briefly taken into custody and later released. PTI members of parliament and dozens of party workers have also reportedly been detained across Punjab, with some released after signing undertakings not to join the planned protests.

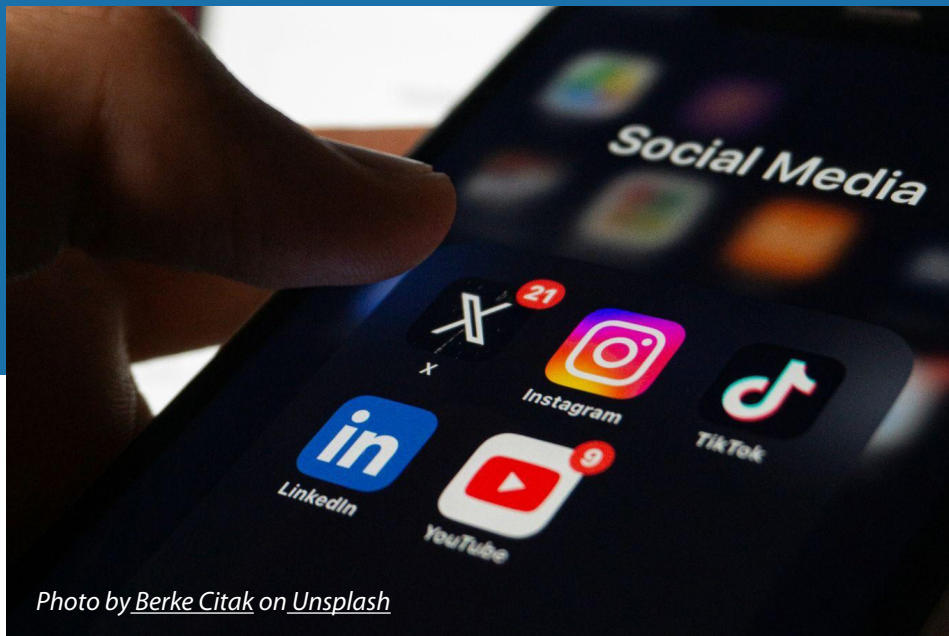
The detentions come as PTI prepares to march toward Islamabad to demand Khan's release and better access to healthcare and regular contact with his family and lawyers. Khan has been imprisoned for several years while serving sentences in corruption and state-gifts cases. Authorities have said the march will not be allowed to enter Islamabad, while security measures including roadblocks have been put in place. The Islamabad High Court has also ruled that political parties cannot occupy public roads, highways, or government buildings. Amnesty, however, stressed that authorities should not treat a planned demonstration as violent before it takes place and should facilitate peaceful assembly while avoiding unlawful measures or excessive force.

The detention of Imran Khan's relatives and PTI supporters ahead of planned protests raises concerns about the shrinking space for peaceful political participation in Pakistan. Detaining people before a protest has even taken place, particularly when some are reportedly released only after agreeing not to participate, can discourage others from exercising their right to peaceful assembly. Authorities have a responsibility to manage public order without using preventive detention to silence political activity, while protesters should also respect the law and avoid violence.



Photo by [Nuhha Ahmed](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Georgian Authorities Punish Online Expression with Detention



Georgian authorities are increasingly using administrative laws to punish people over comments made online, with journalists and activists facing fines and detention for language considered insulting or offensive, [Human Rights Watch \(HRW\) said](#). The crackdown intensified after the Interior Ministry created a special unit in June to monitor public statements, including social media posts, for alleged hate speech and offensive content. By August, the ministry said the unit had referred around 300 cases to courts, with roughly 130 already resulting in fines or administrative detention.

Several recent cases illustrate how the rules are being applied. Journalist Vakho Sanaia received a 14-day detention sentence in July over a Facebook post concerning senior government officials, after previously being fined 6,000 lari in a separate case involving similar posts. [Physician and civic activist Giorgi Akhobadze](#) received a 25-day jail term for remarks he made concerning government officials and a police officer. Blogger Tornike Razmadze also faced proceedings in September over a Facebook comment that authorities considered insulting. The cases follow legal changes adopted in 2025 that allow fines or detention for conduct described with broad terms such as verbal abuse, swearing, or persistent insults toward public officials. The rules carry penalties of up to 60 days in detention for repeat offenses. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has raised concerns that the vague wording could allow the provisions to be applied inconsistently or arbitrarily.

Human rights standards protect freedom of expression, including criticism that may offend or upset public officials. Restrictions can be imposed in certain circumstances, but they must have a clear legal basis and be necessary and proportionate. Georgia is also required

to provide appropriate procedural safeguards when administrative cases result in serious restrictions on a person's liberty. The growing use of fines and detention over online comments shows how vague speech laws can quickly turn into a tool for discouraging criticism. When people can face punishment for comments about public officials, journalists, activists, and ordinary users may become more cautious about what they say. Protecting public debate requires clear limits on state power and ensuring that offensive or unpopular opinions are not treated as crimes simply because they are uncomfortable for those in power.

Russia Escalates Campaign Against VPNs and Online Censorship Workarounds

Russian authorities have intensified efforts to restrict access to uncensored information by targeting [virtual private networks \(VPNs\)](#), according to Human Rights Watch. The latest measures include large-scale blocking of VPN infrastructure, cyberattacks, and increased pressure on technology companies to remove VPN applications from digital marketplaces. Since mid-2026, numerous VPN providers have reported major service disruptions after authorities blocked extensive ranges of IP addresses linked to their networks. Some providers said the broad nature of these restrictions has made recovery more expensive and time-consuming than previous censorship efforts.



Photo by [Petter Lagson](#) on [Unsplash](#)

One of Russia's most widely used VPN services, Amnezia VPN, [reported](#) facing a combination of mass IP blocking, phishing attempts against staff, and denial-of-service attacks that disrupted operations for weeks. The crackdown extends beyond technical restrictions. In April, Russian authorities reportedly instructed major internet companies to identify users connecting through VPNs and restrict access to certain services. Researchers later found that dozens of popular Russian applications were collecting information that could help authorities detect and block VPN usage.

VPNs have become an [essential tool for millions](#) of people in Russia seeking access to independent media outlets, foreign social networks, and messaging platforms that have been restricted by the government. Despite increasing censorship measures, VPN use remains widespread across the country. Authorities have also stepped up efforts to limit VPN availability through app stores. Apple and Google have faced repeated requests to remove VPN applications, and several popular services were taken down from Apple's Russian App Store in 2026 following government demands. Russian courts have also imposed penalties on technology companies accused of failing to comply with such orders.

Russia's expanding crackdown on VPNs highlights how digital restrictions are increasingly being used to control access to information rather than simply regulate online activity. As independent media, social platforms, and other sources of information become harder to reach, many people rely on VPNs to stay connected to uncensored content. Limiting these tools not only narrows access to diverse viewpoints but can also increase concerns about privacy and surveillance. Ensuring secure and open access to information remains important for protecting freedom of expression and informed public discourse in the digital age.

Niger Strips Five Exiled Critics of Nationality

Niger's military authorities have provisionally [revoked the nationality of five opposition figures](#) living abroad, further expanding a policy that has increasingly been used against critics of the junta, Human Rights Watch said. Junta leader Gen. Abdourahamane Tiani signed the decree on September 17. Those affected include former Prime Minister Ouhoumoudou Mahamadou, three former advisers to ousted President Mohamed Bazoum, and social media activist Boubacar Seyni Souley. The authorities accuse them of offenses including spreading information that could disrupt public order, cooperating with foreign powers, defaming officials online, and threatening state security.

The measure is based on a 2024 order that established a [national terrorism database](#). Rights groups have raised concerns over the database's broad criteria and limited safeguards. The latest decision also appears inconsistent with Niger's existing nationality law, which does not provide for temporary loss of citizenship and requires individuals to be notified and given an opportunity to present a defense. The latest cases bring the number of people provisionally stripped of Nigerien nationality under the 2024 order to 25. Critics say the measure is increasingly being used to target political opponents and other dissenting voices outside the country. At least four of the five affected reportedly hold no other passport, raising concerns that they could be left stateless.

Niger is a party to international agreements protecting people from arbitrary loss of nationality and statelessness. Removing citizenship can also leave affected individuals without legal protection and may prevent them from returning to their own country. The latest action comes amid a wider crackdown on political opposition, civil society, journalists, and government critics since the 2023 military takeover. The authorities have also increased scrutiny of criticism coming from Nigeriens living abroad, adding to concerns about the shrinking space for dissent both inside and outside the country.

The decision to strip exiled critics of their nationality is concerning because citizenship is more than a legal status, it provides people with protection, identity, and the right to return to their country. Using nationality as a way to pressure political opponents can leave affected individuals vulnerable, particularly when proper legal safeguards are unclear. It may also discourage people living abroad from speaking openly against the authorities. Niger's government should ensure that any decision affecting citizenship follows clear legal procedures and does not leave people at risk of statelessness.

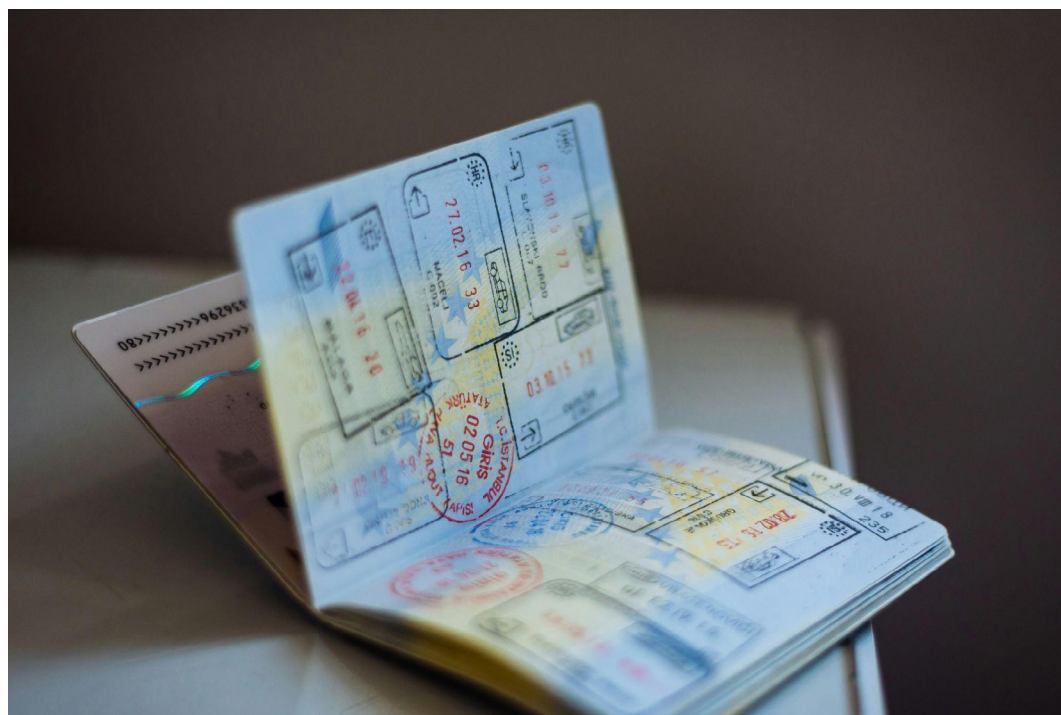
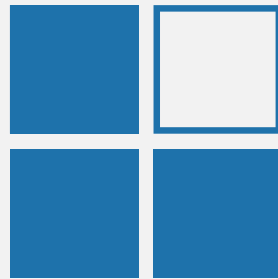


Photo by [Global Residence Index](#) on [Unsplash](#)



SECTION-3

**Multimedia Update: Voices Against
Authoritarianism**

Write-up by an International Human Rights Certificate Program Participant

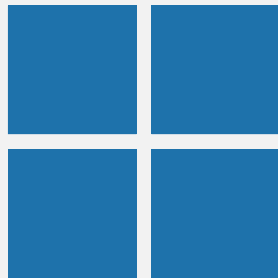
This September, we are pleased to share the work of a graduate from the International Human Rights Certificate Program. This article examines how restrictions on Afghan women's education, employment, movement, and access to justice have increased their vulnerability to domestic violence and weakened the support systems available to survivors.

From Education Ban to Domestic Violence: How Taliban Rule Has Increased Afghan Women's Vulnerability to Violence by Rahila Poya

Since the Taliban returned to power in 2021, Afghan women and girls have faced sweeping restrictions on their basic rights, including access to education, employment, freedom of movement, and participation in public life. As these opportunities have disappeared, many women have also lost economic independence and access to important legal and social support systems.

In this [insightful article](#), Rahila Poya, a graduate of the International Human Rights Certificate Program, examines how the erosion of women's rights under Taliban rule has contributed to greater vulnerability to domestic violence. The article explores the impact of education and employment bans, the weakening of protections and support systems for survivors, and the normalization of harmful attitudes toward women within families and communities. The article further considers how community-based education, vocational training, awareness, and psychosocial support can help women and girls strengthen their resilience and preserve opportunities for learning and empowerment.

To learn more about the impact of restrictions on Afghan women and girls, and the importance of community-based support in addressing these challenges, read the latest publication on our [website](#).



SECTION-4

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