



the
wheel

Stronger Charities.
Stronger Communities.

SUMMIT

Croke Park, 23 May

2023

UNITY IN THE FACE OF OPPOSITION

AGENDA

- Liam Herrick, Executive Director, The Irish Council for Civil Liberties - ICCL Self-Censorship Survey: Preliminary Results
- Moninne Griffith, CEO, BeLong To Youth Services - The Impact and Experience of Extremist Threats
- Niamh McDonald, Coordinator, Hope and Courage Collective - Why Target NGOs/Community and Voluntary Organisations? Freedom of Assembly as a Challenge to the Far Right
- Alessandro Bellantoni, Head of the OECD Open Government, Civic Space, and Public Communication Unit - Lessons from the Civic Space Scanning Assessments
- Panel Discussion



FREE TO ADVOCATE?

SURVEY ON ADVOCACY RESTRICTIONS IN IRELAND AND FREEDOM
ASSOCIATION AND EXPRESSION



Irish Council for
Civil Liberties

FOR ALL OUR RIGHTS. NO EXCEPTIONS.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION & EXPRESSION IN IRELAND

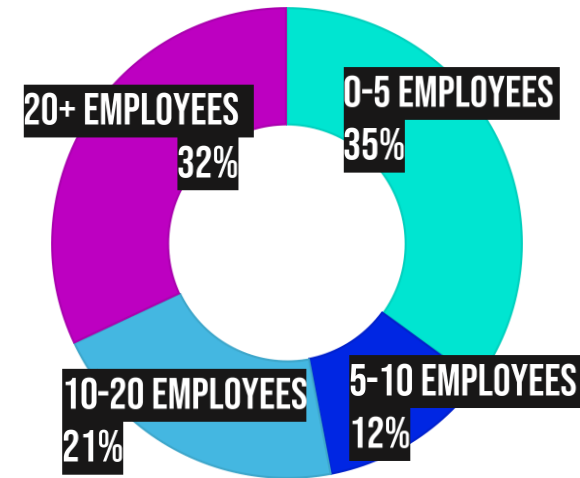
- Approaching the study from a rights impact perspective, specifically freedom of association, expression and public participation
- The overlap and interlinkage between the expression of these rights is necessary for a fully enabled civic space
- These rights are guaranteed by the Irish Constitution, The European Convention on Human Rights, The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- As party to these treaties, the state is obligated not only protect but also to foster and cultivate a free and open civic space. See for example “*The Protection and Promotion of Civic Space: Strengthening Alignment with International Standards and Guidance*” (OECD, 2022)

237

THE TOTAL NUMBER OF
ORGANISATIONS WHO TOOK
PART IN THE SURVEY

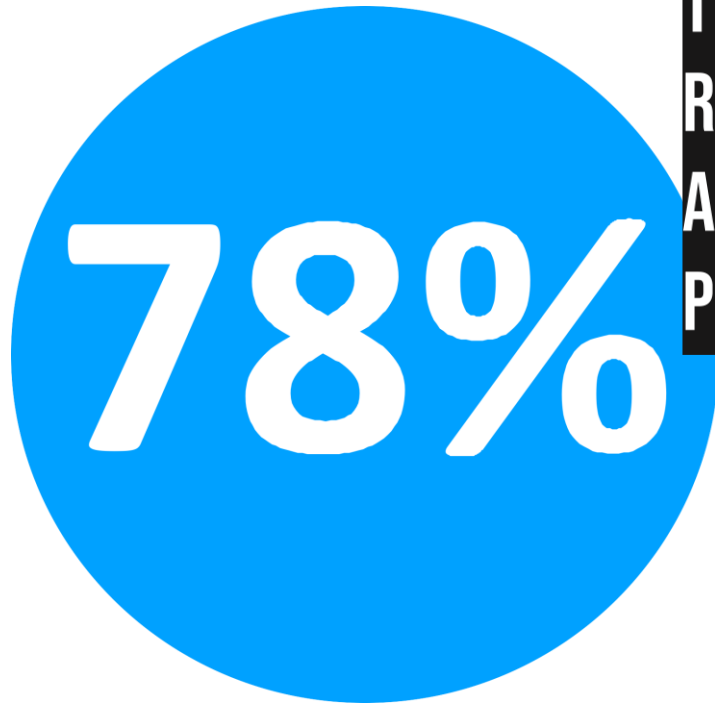
- Mixed methodology survey (quantitative with qualitative open-ended elements to capture stories)
- Disseminated through ICCL, The Wheel and Community Work Ireland and other networks from April 11th-26th 2023
- Builds on international and domestic work on situation facing civil society in Ireland:
 - See for example “*Challenges facing civil society organisations working on human rights in the EU* (EU Fundamental Rights Agency, 2018) & “*Regulating Political Activity of Civil Society - A look at 4 EU countries* (Civicus, 2018)
 - Domestically see “*Are we Paying for that?: Government Funding & Social Justice Advocacy* (Brian Harvey/The Advocacy Initiative, 2014)
- Critical to emphasise anonymity of participants as there is a genuine fear of repercussions for speaking out against funders or policies in certain sectors

WHAT SIZE WERE THE ORGANISATIONS WHO TOOK PART?



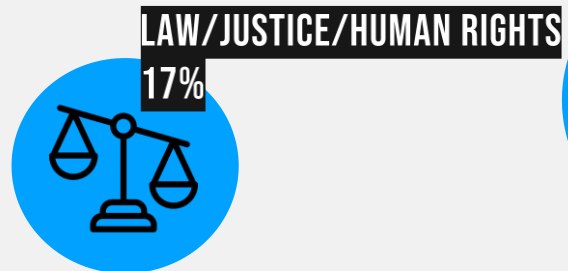
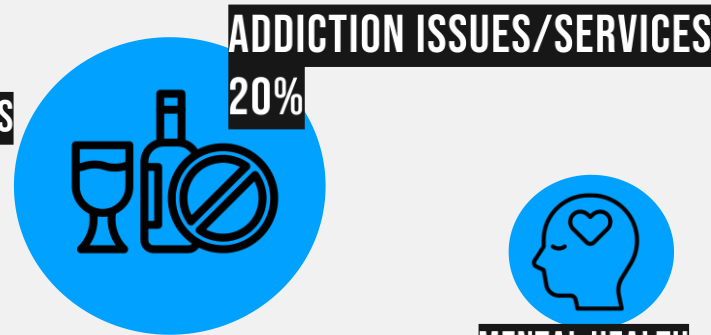
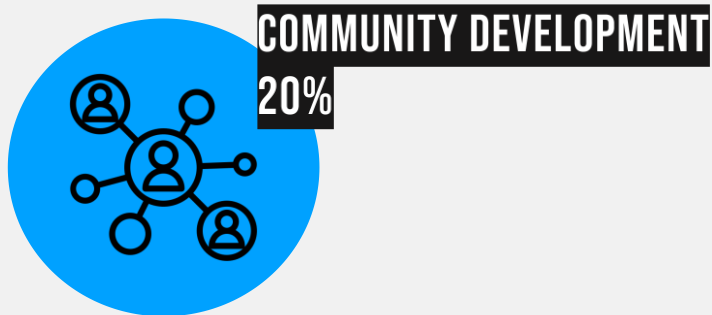
FINDINGS:

**WHO TOOK PART, HOW ARE
THEY FUNDED AND HOW DO
THEY ADVOCATE ?**



**THE PERCENTAGE OF
RESPONDENTS WHO
ARE IN RECEIPT OF
PUBLIC FUNDS**

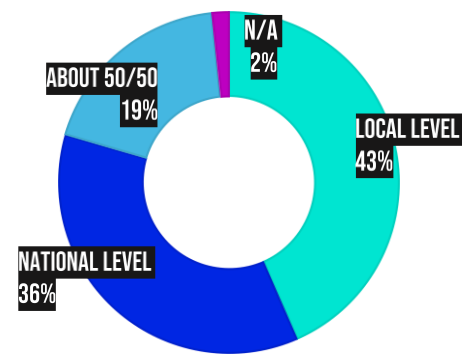
HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE MAIN FIELD(S) IN WHICH YOUR ORGANISATION WORKS?



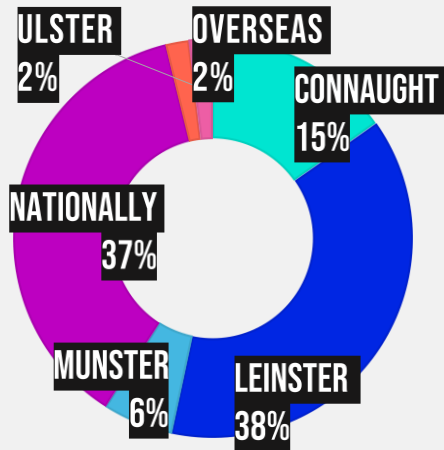
19%

THE PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO SAY THEIR FUNDING HAS BEEN CUT SIGNIFICANTLY IN THE LAST DECADE

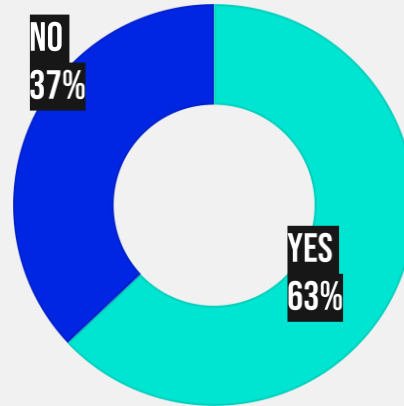
WHERE IS THE PARTICIPANTS' WORK FOCUSED?



WHERE IS THE PARTICIPANTS' WORK FOCUSED?



ARE THE PARTICIPANTS' REGISTERED CHARITIES?



64%

THE PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO SAY THEIR CHARITABLE STATUS IS CRUCIAL FOR THEIR ORGANISATION'S FINANCIAL WELLBEING

Responses to "why has your organisation chosen not to register as a charity?"

"Fear around being unable to criticize the state if we register"

"Have been advised in the past that we are not eligible due to nature of campaigning role"

"We tried but application is too hard"

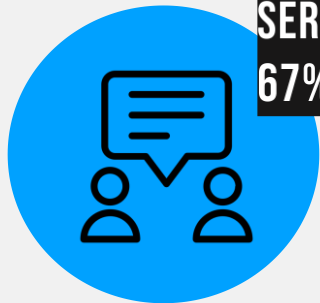
"We are small and the reporting burden would eat up all of our resources"

"Too difficult to do, far too many restrictions and red tape"

HOW DO ORGANISATIONS ADVOCATE?

**ADVOCACY ON BEHALF OF
SERVICE USERS**

67%



**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
(CAPACITY BUILDING)**

47%



EDUCATION/PUBLIC AWARENESS

RAISING
54%



SERVICE PROVISION

63%



**LOBBYING/CAMPAIGNING TO
CHANGE POLICY OR LEGISLATION**

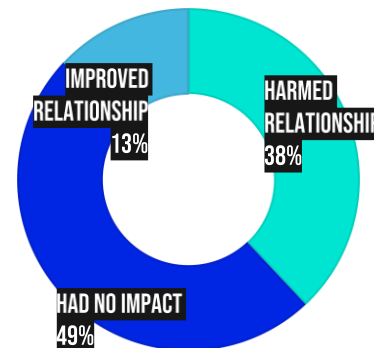
54%



86%

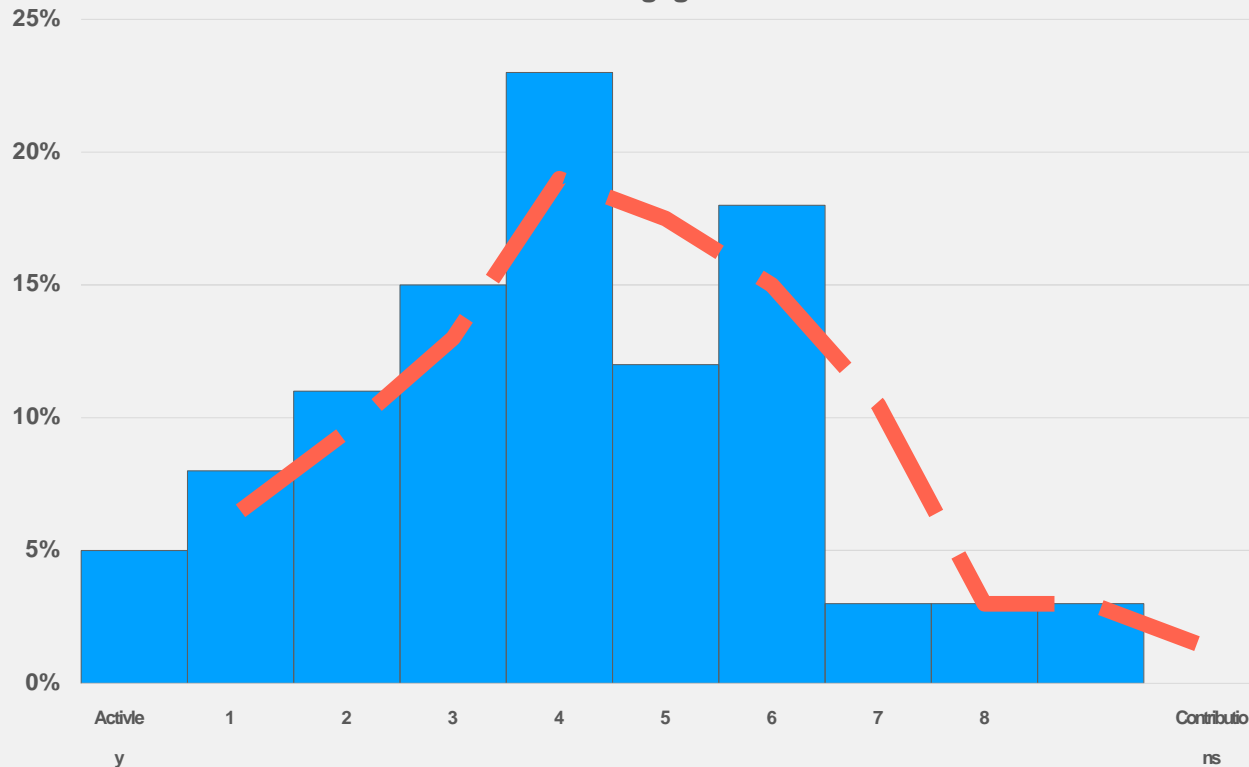
THE PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO TELL US THAT ISSUES RAISED DURING STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS ARE TAKEN ON BOARD “ONLY SOMETIMES” “RARELY” OR “NEVER”

HOW DID ENGAGEMENT IN CONSULTATION IMPACT YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR FUNDER(S)?



HOW ORGANISATIONS ADVOCATE

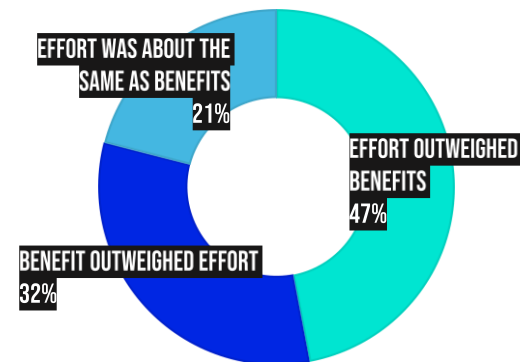
In your organisation's policy area(s), what do you think the state's attitude to stakeholder engagement is?



70%

THE PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO HAVE MISSED THE OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE PART IN A RELEVANT CONSULTATION BECAUSE THEY FOUND OUT ABOUT IT TOO LATE

DID THE BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATING IN A CONSULTATION OUTWEIGH THE EFFORTS?

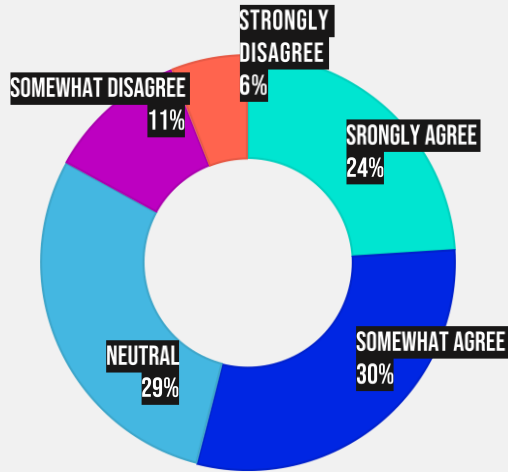


FINDINGS: HOW RESTRICTIONS ARE UNDERSTOOD

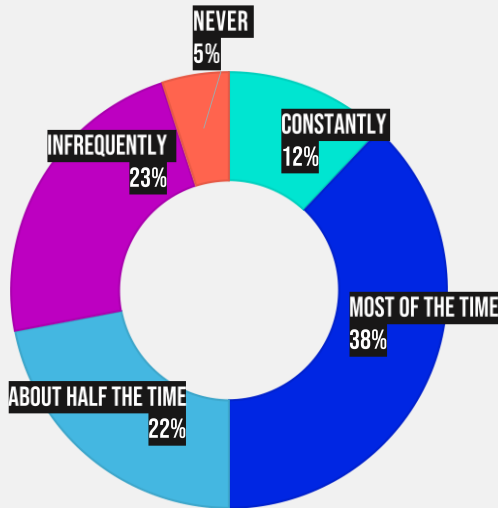
37%

**THE PERCENTAGE OF
RESPONDENTS WHO HAVE
RESTRICTED THEIR
ADVOCACY EFFORTS BECAUSE
OF FEAR IT WOULD IMPACT
THEIR FUNDING**

**ORGANISATIONS THAT DISSENT FROM
GOVERNMENT POLICY RISK HAVING
THEIR FUNDING CUT**



**IN MY EXPERIENCE, ORGANISATIONS
FACE PRESSURE TO TAILOR PUBLIC
STATEMENTS TO BE IN LINE WITH
GOVERNMENT POLICY**

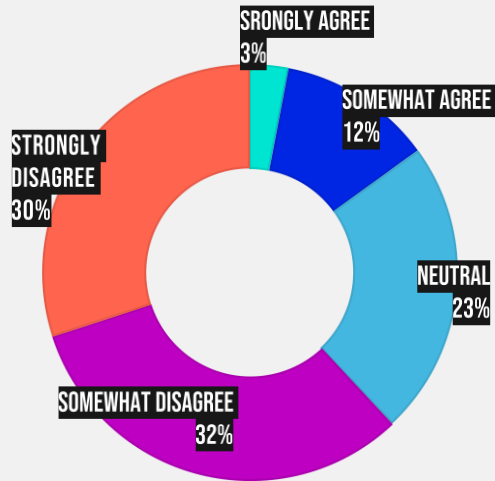


28%

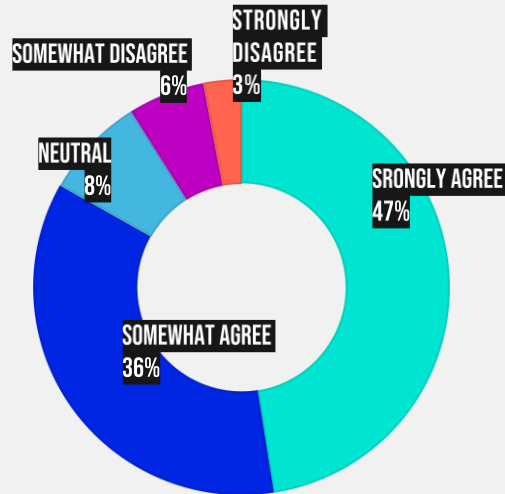
THE PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO HAVE FUNDING CONTRACTS WHICH FORMALLY RESTRICT THEIR ABILITY TO PUBLICLY COMMENT ON GOVERNMENT POLICY

"[Government Department] official has clearly stated to both the board and CEO that an organisation in receipt of funding from [Same Government Department] is not free to disagree with government policy."

ORGANISATIONS THAT DISSENT FROM CURRENT GOVERNMENT POLICY ARE VALUED IN THE POLICY FORMATION PROCESS



THE GOVERNMENT WOULD PREFER IF WE ENGAGED IN NO ADVOCACY AND ONLY SERVICE DELIVERY



“All communications with the media must be channeled through [Government Agency] first.”

“It has been made clear to us verbally that if we keep our current position on a piece of legislation our funding would be at risk”

“In our SLAs we must inform funders of press releases and other media comment. We are also not permitted to allow media personal into our services, where the buildings are owned by the funders. Further restrictions were sought but [organisation] resisted and opposed collectively.”

WHAT KIND OF RESTRICTIONS ARE REPORTED

“We recognise that our answers here reflect a particularly negative experience in recent years with [Government Department and Agency] and we accept that experience with other Depts and agencies may be more positive. However, a key learning from our experience is that when there are difficulties with a specific dept/agency and in particular with key officials within those depts/agencies there is absolutely no mechanism for addressing it and in effect they can act with impunity.”

“[The threats were] subtly done, but had real consequences e.g. including defunding of a project (it was made clear privately why); not winning a particular contract (it was made clear privately why); etc. At one point it was stated by a public servant in a meeting that the organisation was to choose between advocacy or service delivery. That the organisation couldn't do both.”

“[Government Department] official has clearly stated to both the Board and CEO that an organisation in receipt of funding from the [Government Department] is not free to disagree with government policy and implicit in that member organisations of our networks, without having been directly threatened, are reluctant to be seen to take positions that would be at odds with [Government Department]”.

“Any direct and indirect funding has the nonpolitical unwritten rule, we have to get creative about how we deliver what we wish to do, and we have withdrawn from funding or not applied due to conditionality.”

“Funding from [State Agency] was withdrawn following a review by [State Agency] that we were not part of nor consulted. We were told that our work on a community engagement in relation to [issue] was not [issue] related, despite it being included as an action in [Government Strategy]. We had been extremely vocal about a range of issues and critical of government policy and have always felt that it was a targeted withdrawal. We lost one staff member and a project that had been embedded in the community.”

WHAT KIND OF RESTRICTIONS ARE REPORTED

“When we received funding under [Funding stream], we were a very outspoken organisation and we consistently challenge government policy even through local politicians however one of those politician was a junior minister in [Government Department] at the time and we firmly believe he viewed the project as a threat, and he was instrumental in removing the funding”

“We have been in the room when a senior civil servant said it was not our role to criticise government policy.”

“There is a cultural tendency in most organisations to do nothing that is likely to upset or challenge authority such that if you stand out and voice concerns or take a differing perspective you can be silenced, side-lined or ignored. There is no obvious threat but there is an implicit culture of compliance with government departmental objectives that effectively ensure that the more critically-minded are kept out of the picture. As funding is awarded by these voices and we are delivering services and supports on behalf of the government all activities are necessarily going to be formed to ensure we do not jeopardise our working relationship with our future paymasters.”

“It has often been alluded to, to not rock the boat’ or it’s not the role of our organisation to bring certain issues to light.”

“We find this particularly at local level with local authorities. Any comment on [issue], waiting lists for services, people being turned away because of capacity causes friction with funders. It is often most difficult for the managers of our front-line services, who have the most contact with funders on a day-to-day basis, even though these staff do not do any media work, lobbying or highlighting [issue].

Our SLA is always referred to & the restrictions within it are often exaggerated. All our campaigning and media work is based on published figures and our own data and is fact, but this seems irrelevant. If there’s a tender for a new service coming up, we’ll avoid media work as it will impact our chances of success. There is often comments about our media work at inter-agency meetings and it continues to be a bone of contention for us. The issue varies from county to county and seems to be personality driven and often historical.”

WHAT ARE THE IMPACTS FROM A RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE?

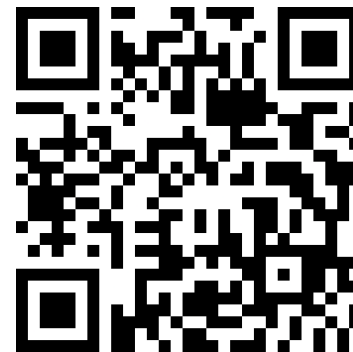
- The approach of some government departments and agencies is at odds with freedom of association and expression rights
- Must be said that the restrictions are not reported evenly across government departments/geographically, certain departments and agencies (those extensively involved in outsourcing of funding) are mentioned most frequently
- **Key finding 1:** Fear of being seen to oppose government policy is, to differing degrees, silencing sector
- **Key finding 2:** Dissatisfaction with how findings from consultations and other engagements are incorporated into policy and legislation is alienating organisations



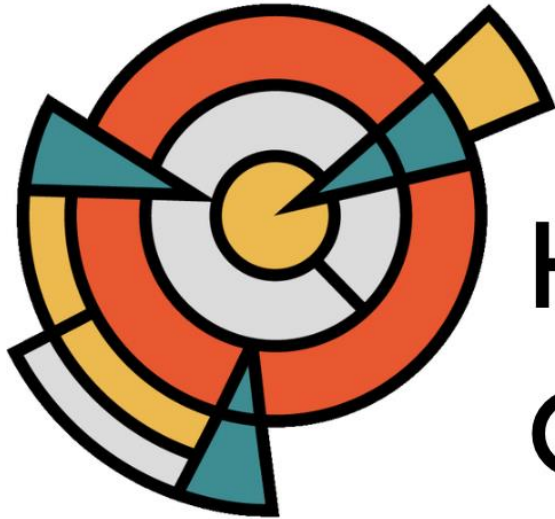
SCAN HERE TO
TAKE PART OR VISIT
[WWW.ICCL.IE/ADVOCA
CYSURVEY](http://WWW.ICCL.IE/ADVOCA
CYSURVEY)

NEXT STEPS:

- **Survey now re-open until June 9**
- Findings will be examined in more detail and written up by ICCL and published in Autumn
- Campaign? Advocacy tool? Recommendations to government? OECD Civic Space Scan? TBD!
- Thank you to those who have already taken part and please consider sharing your stories in the survey if you haven't done so already!



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WWW.ICCL.IE/ADVOCA
CYSURVEY**

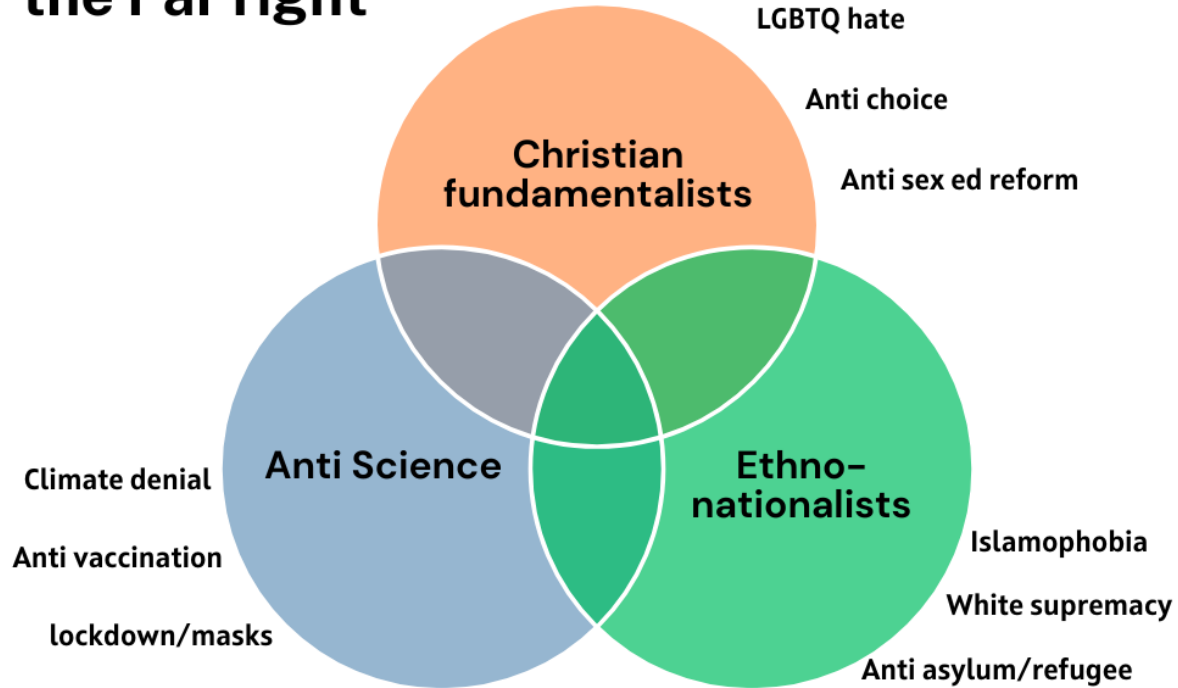


HOPE AND COURAGE COLLECTIVE

previously known as Far Right Observatory



Understanding the Far right



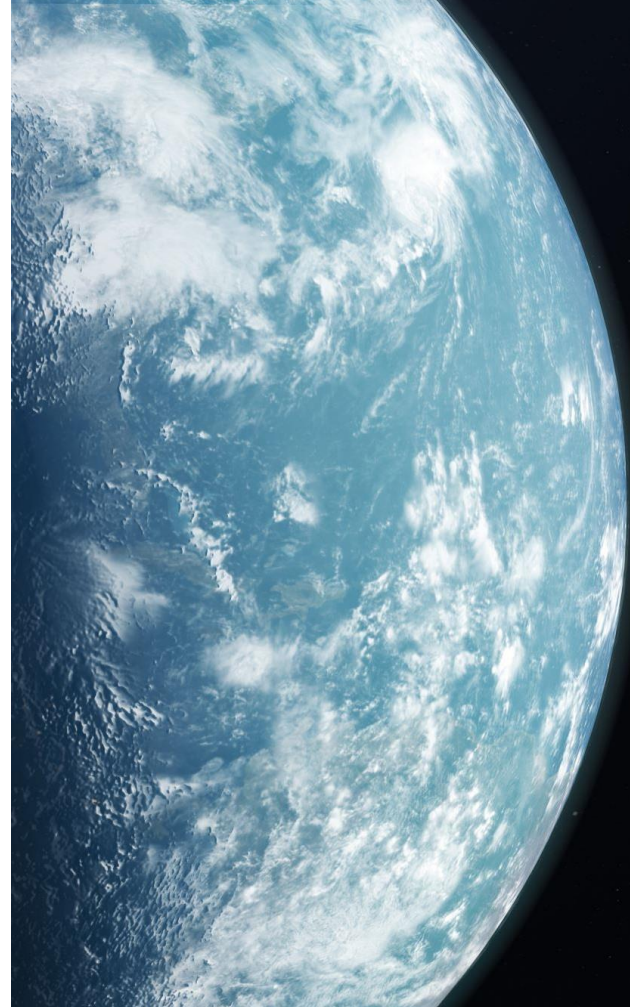
The normalisation of far-right politics

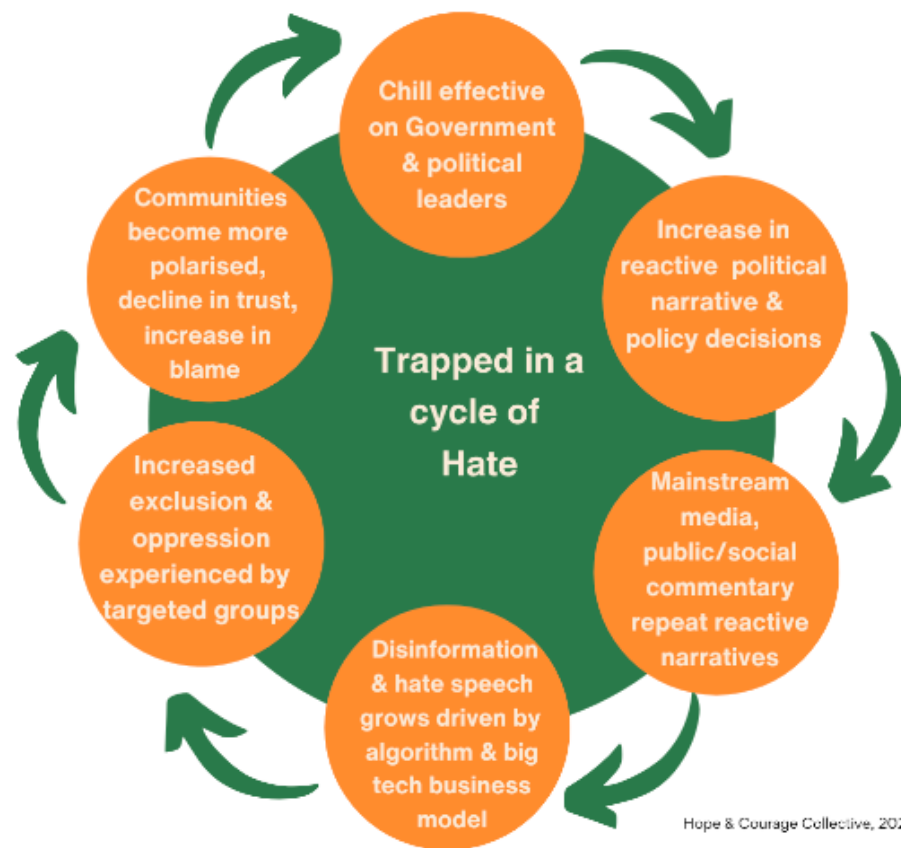
- Crash of 2008 - growing and deepening of inequalities internationally
- Centre left/centre right politics not meeting people's needs
- International growth of far right in power: illiberal democracies and authoritarian regimes.
- The far right institutionally embedded in European Parliament
- 2019 largest EU voter turnout in 20 years
- Issues: Climate Change, Growth, Economy and Immigration
- Far right in power - Hungary, Poland, Denmark, Sweden- minority gov depends on far right support. UK politics.
- Worry: Centre left and right depending on the far right for support national and EU level.
- Overton window shifting -(the ideas that define the spectrum of acceptability of governmental policies)



International impacts

- The latest update of CIVICUS Monitor country ratings in March 2023 indicates that civil society faces an increasingly hostile environment.
- There are 27 countries or territories with closed civic space, 50 with repressed civic space, and 40 with obstructed civic space, meaning that 117 of 197 countries and territories are experiencing severe restrictions on fundamental freedoms.
- In comparison, 42 countries have narrowed civic space, and just 38 have an open rating.
- Although Europe has the most countries rated as open, ratings changes highlight that no region is immune to state restriction of civic freedoms.
- Over the past five years, eight European countries have seen their ratings downgraded due to deteriorating civic space conditions.
- Russia is now closed, Greece UK Hungary and Poland moved to obstructed, Serbia, Belgium Cyprus have narrowed
- Today, only 3.2% of the world's population lives in countries with an Open civic space.





Big tech and the far right

- Irish FR: three micro hate parties / 45 influencers that produce sustained online content
- Each **platform** offers specific means of being used.
- Social media **elicit emotional responses** - far right a politics of emotion
- **Twitter** since Musk, the platform has become a magnet for those pushing hate division, incitement and violence.
- **Facebook** is often used to set up local groups into which vague rumours, fears and lies are posted in order to generate anger and distrust to mobilise people to come out to demonstrations.
- **YouTube** has been a prominent tool for FR influencers and far-right micro-political organisations.
- January, H&CC documented over **one million** views of anti-migrant content created by seven Irish FR accounts.
- with over **700,000** of those views arising from the founders of a white supremacist group **Ireland First**.
- **YouTube** has been a prominent tool for FR influencers and far-right micro-political organisations

Big tech and the far right

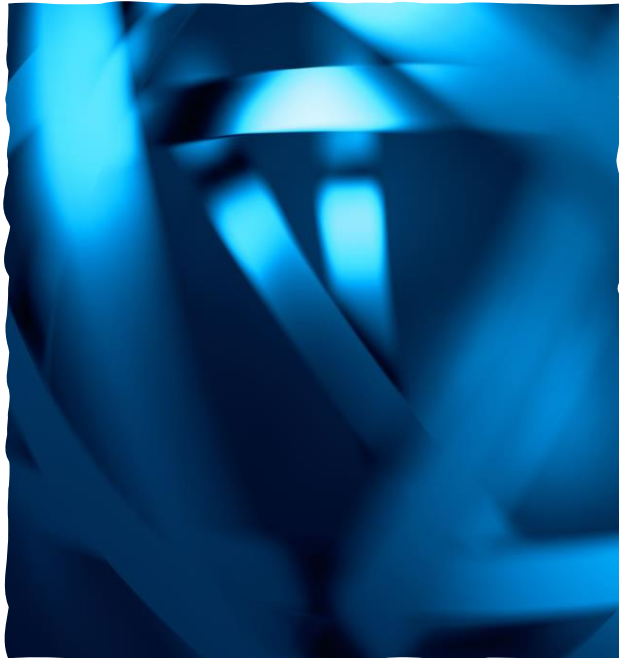
- Increasingly **TikTok** being used to promote hate and anti-migrant organising. The platform is used widely to reshare/remix video content originally posted on Twitter
- Fundraising: **Go Fund Me, Paypal and Stripe**
- **Telegram**, completely unmoderated as a principle, meaning it has been the primary space to host Irish FR movements in the last several years. (Germany forced Telegram to remove hate groups)

Immediate solutions

- Meta, Twitter, TiK Tok, Youtube are systematically failing to enforce their own community standards including ignoring reported harmful content. Youtube, in particular, is assisting in the monetization of protests and H&CC has documented far right entities using payment platforms to raise funds i.e. Paypal, Stripe, GoFundMe and others.
- [Algorithms](#) drive the content people see - amplifying toxic and manipulative content that fosters engagement via shares, likes, views. The scale and speed of viral content circulating has been instrumental to amplifying protests, and flashpoints, resulting in multiple violent incidents and escalation of vigilante mobs, with worrying trends on Telegram.
- *Government must direct digital and payment platforms to apply community standards, alter algorithms, prevent monetization, and hold them accountable for breaches and harm caused.*



Solutions



All Civil society has a vital role in strengthening democracy.

Building networks of solidarity locally nationally and internationally.

Hungary- civil society under the most toxic of political environments, built a national coalition to push back against government attacks.

Poland - government attacks brought a broad collective of civil society together to withstand attacks and frame a campaign to win citizens over.

Slovenia and Slovakia, Germany, Ireland and UK followed suit.

Beginning to see solidarity networks develop in the EU and Schengen

Source : <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/03/12/how-european-civil-society-is-pushing-back-against-democratic-erosion-pub-81254>

Hope and Courage Collective



Strengthen civil society and build networks of solidarity.

Be a trusted source of information and analysis.

Supporting communities to understand and respond to hate and extremism.

Supporting affected communities to build resilience in responding to hate

Understand the importance of framing and messaging.

Deliver rapid response support.

Support political parties to be brave in face of reactionary politics.

Developing strategies for political parties and civil society during election cycles

Holding decision makers and big tech to account

Thank you for your time today



THANK YOU!

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