

Press freedom around the world

Introduction

The following report examines world press freedom. Press freedom is often violated when journalists and other publishers are misused, mistreated, or even killed. The information in this report is based on the survey of Reporters Without Borders, which is an international organization that monitors and reports on press freedom violations and advocates for policies and practices that defend the safety of journalists working in dangerous situations. Last Tuesday, the results of their 2021 survey were published. The annual index, which evaluates the press freedom situation in 180 countries and territories, shows that journalism is “totally blocked or seriously impeded” in 73 countries worldwide and “constrained” in 59 others – together representing 73% of those evaluated. These 180 countries are separated in five categories (which are shown by colors) – they show the current situation of press freedom in different countries. We picked out five countries from each category and summarized some facts about their press freedom.

Norway 1st (white)

Importance of reliable information

Norway has for years been at or near the top of all democracy and free speech rankings. A new media responsibility law that has just taken effect is portrayed by the authorities as the most important piece of legislation in years for media editors because it defines their freedoms and responsibilities. Restrictions on covering the pandemic’s impact in hospitals resulted in a very low level of photographic documentation of the biggest crisis to hit Norway in peacetime. "The crisis we are in has made us more aware of the importance of reliable information," says President of the Board of Norwegian PEN, Kjersti Løken Stavrum. "Being number one is not a reason to sit back and relax. It comes with a great responsibility of taking good care of freedom of expression and inspiring other countries to perform better.“ The discussion about press freedom is also affected by the Corona crisis. “The crisis we are going through right now, shows how important it is to have access to facts and trustworthy news.”

Austria 17th (yellow)

Attacks on press freedom

Since the inauguration of the Austrian conservative right-wing populist government on December 18th 2017, there are rapidly increasing signs that media freedom is being restricted in Austria. Journalists are publicly attacked by politicians. Reporters Without Borders Austria criticizes the defamation of constructive and critical journalists and media outlets by high-ranking government members such as former vice-chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache. At the same time, Reporters Without Borders warns of the dangers of a democracy-hostile information policy by the democratically elected government under chancellor Sebastian Kurz.

Over the last two years, the policies of the government, mentioned above, showed that the current media system can be influenced politically. In its first year under the government of Sebastian Kurz, Austria fell five places on the international press freedom ranking of Reporters Without Borders, to 16th place. According to a survey, nearly half of Austria’s journalists feel that media freedom is in a precarious state. Harassment and threats against journalists, both online and offline, also reached a new level under Kurz’s government. In addition, restrictions on journalistic access to information related to the government’s work are cause for concern about the situation of media freedom and the free flow of information in Austria.

There are plans to restrict media coverage of leaked legal information that would also jeopardize press freedom. A controversial idea by the government of the Austrian party would undermine the work of investigative journalists.

The release of the “Ibiza-Gate” video in May 2019 that brought down the conservative / far-right coalition government and forced a snap general election resulted in a government in which the conservatives are allied with the Greens, a party that claims to respect the highest press freedom standards. But the Greens have not yet succeeded in bringing about lasting improvements in the media sector, such as press financing reform. We hope they will get and use their chance.

Greece 70th (orange)

Press freedom suffered in Greece in 2020. The conservative government led by Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis controls the flow of information closely as part of its efforts to deal with both the coronavirus pandemic and the refugee crisis. Investigative media and media critical of the government were either omitted or were prohibited. Journalists had to get the government’s permission before reporting in hospitals while the health ministry banned medical staff from talking to the media. In February 2021, public TV channels were ordered not to broadcast video circulating on social media that showed the prime minister disregarding lockdown rules. The police resorted to violence and arbitrary bans to hamper coverage of the refugee crisis on the islands. In Lesbos, journalists were prevented from covering the consequences of police brutality and a fire at the refugee camp in the town of Moria. In Samos, a German documentary film crew was detained without charge and mistreated by police. The Greek public TV channel, which has been directly controlled by the prime minister although the supreme court ruled this to be unconstitutional, censored reports on the new migrant camps.

In April 2021, the community of Greek journalists was shaken by the assassination of the reporter specializing in crime issues Giorgos Karaivaz.

Brazil 111th (red)

Attacks against press and media

With threats and physical attacks, Brazil continues to be an especially violent country for the media, and many journalists have been killed in connection with their work. In most cases, these reporters, radio hosts, bloggers or other kinds of information providers were covering stories linked to corruption, public policy or organized crime in small or mid-sized cities. Insulting, denigrating, stigmatizing and humiliating journalists has become President Bolsonaro’s trademark. The coronavirus crisis exposed major problems in accessing information and gave rise to new attacks on the media by Bolsonaro. The confidentiality of journalists’ sources is under constant attack and many investigative reporters have been subjected to abusive judicial proceedings. Brazil is currently ranked 111th in the 2021 World Press Freedom Index, which results from the above-mentioned interventions. Brazil was ranked 107th in the 2020 World Press Freedom Index.

China 177th (black)

Almost the worst scenario

Since the start of Covid-19, China has tightened up their grip on the news even more, as it is shown in a report on the website the Reporters without Borders. With seven journalists still being held for their coverage of the pandemic, China places itself in the 177th place of the World Press Freedom Index. By relying on the massive use of new technology, President Xi Jinping’s regime has imposed a social model based on control of news and information and online surveillance of its citizens.

Following six months of large-scale protests in 2019, the Chinese government imposed a harsh “National Security Law” in Hong Kong on June 30, which is seen as most aggressive assault on people’s freedoms in Hong Kong. In Xinjiang, Turkish Muslims continue to be arbitrarily detained on the basis of their identity

while others are subjected to forced labor, mass surveillance, and political indoctrination. In Inner Mongolia, demonstrations broke out in September when educational authorities decided to replace Mongolian with Mandarin Chinese in several local school classrooms.

COVID – 19

How does it affect press freedom?

At a time when it's vital to have access to reliable information to combat COVID-19-related misinformation, journalism is restricted in well over two thirds of the globe. That's according to data published Tuesday by Reporters Without Borders.

According to the 2021 World Press Freedom Index, which measures curbs on access to information and obstacles to news coverage, journalism is "totally blocked or seriously impeded" in 73 nations and "constrained" in 59 others. Those 132 countries represent just over 73% of the 180 nations surveyed.

"The pandemic has been used as grounds to block journalists' access to information sources, and reporting in the field. This contradicts the basic principle of journalism", expresses RSF. They also showed concern that some restrictions would stay in place even after COVID-19 abates. "We cannot even trust that the access will be restored when the pandemic will be over." The pandemic gave governments an excuse to strengthen executive powers. As such, we're in a very dire situation and it's really important for civil society groups like RSF to push back against infringements on press freedom.

Jan Jammernegg, Jan Körbler, Florian Puchas & Tobias Pucher (6bw)

Sources:

The following sources were used to write this report:

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- [Reporters Without Borders: Media Restricted in 132 Countries | Time](#)
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