



ADVANCING FREEDOM FOR 73 YEARS

PRESS FREEDOM IN 2012: MIDDLE EAST VOLATILITY AMID GLOBAL DECLINE

by Karin Deutsch Karlekar and Jennifer Dunham

Ongoing political turmoil produced uneven conditions for press freedom in the Middle East in 2012, with Tunisia and Libya largely retaining their gains from 2011 even as Egypt slid backward into the Not Free category. The region as a whole experienced a net decline for the year, in keeping with a broader global pattern in which the percentage of people worldwide who enjoy a free media environment fell to its lowest point in more than a decade. Among the more disturbing developments in 2012 were dramatic declines for Mali, significant deterioration in Greece, and a further tightening of controls on press freedom in Latin America, punctuated by the decline of two countries, Ecuador and Paraguay, from Partly Free to Not Free status.

These were the most significant findings of *Freedom of the Press 2013: A Global Survey of Media Independence*, the latest edition of an annual index published by Freedom House since 1980. While there were positive developments in Burma, the Caucasus, parts of West Africa, and elsewhere, the dominant trends were reflected in setbacks in a range of political settings. Reasons for decline included the continued, increasingly sophisticated repression of independent journalism and new media by authoritarian regimes; the ripple effects of the European economic crisis and longer-term challenges to the financial sustainability of print media; and ongoing threats from nonstate actors such as radical Islamists and organized crime groups.

The trend of overall decline occurred, paradoxically, in a context of increasingly diverse news sources and ever-expanding means of political communication. The growth of these new media has triggered a repressive backlash by authoritarian regimes that have carefully controlled television and other mass media and are now alert to the dangers of unfettered

political commentary online. Influential powers—such as China, Russia, Iran, and Venezuela—have long resorted to a variety of techniques to maintain a tight grip on the media, detaining some press critics, closing down or otherwise censoring media outlets and blogs, and bringing libel or defamation suits against journalists. Russia, which adopted additional restrictions on internet content in 2012, set a negative tone for the rest of Eurasia, where conditions remained largely grim. In China, the installation of a new Communist Party leadership did not produce any immediate relaxation of constraints on either traditional media or the internet. In fact, the Chinese regime, which boasts the world's most intricate and elaborate system of media repression, stepped up its drive to limit both old and new sources of information through arrests and censorship.

Authoritarian powers were joined in the Not Free camp by a total of five countries that had previously ranked as Partly Free: Ecuador, Egypt, Guinea-Bissau, Paraguay, and Thailand. The disheartening reversal in Egypt was driven by a constellation of factors, including officially tolerated campaigns to intimidate journalists, increased efforts to prosecute reporters and commentators for insulting the political leadership or defaming religion, and intensified polarization of the pro- and anti-Muslim Brotherhood press, which reduced the availability of balanced coverage.

Meanwhile, Ecuador's slide into the Not Free range capped one of the largest cumulative declines for any country in the index over the past five years. The latest setbacks stem from President Rafael Correa's ongoing and multi-faceted assault on the press, which has included attempts to hinder the monitoring roles of local and regional freedom of expression watchdogs.

In 2012, the percentage of people worldwide who enjoy a free media environment fell to its lowest point in more than a decade.

Other notable declines occurred in the Maldives, which remained Partly Free, and Cambodia and Kazakhstan, which were already Not Free.

The past year also brought a series of declines in both established and young democracies. Mali, which had been Africa's freest media environment for a number of years, suffered the year's largest numerical slide, and a status change to Partly Free, due to media restrictions associated with a military coup and the capture of the northern half of the country by Islamist militants. Meanwhile, political unrest and financial pressures brought on by the European economic crisis took a toll on media freedom in Greece, which fell into the Partly Free category as well. A more modest deterioration was noted in Israel, now rated Partly Free due to instances of political interference with content and financial pressure on independent print outlets.

As a result of declines in both authoritarian and democratic settings over the past several years, the proportion of the global population that enjoys a Free press has fallen to its lowest level in over a decade. The report found that less than 14 percent of the world's people—or roughly one in six—live in countries where coverage of political news is robust, the safety of journalists is guaranteed, state intrusion in media affairs is minimal, and the press is not subject to onerous legal or economic pressures. Moreover, in the most recent five-year period, significant country declines have far outnumbered gains, suggesting that attempts to restrict press freedom are widespread and challenges to expanding media diversity and access to information remain considerable.

There were some promising developments during the year to partially offset these worrisome trends. Positive movement occurred in a number of key countries in Asia (Afghanistan and Burma), Eurasia (Armenia and Georgia), and sub-Saharan Africa (Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Malawi, Mauritania, Senegal, and Zimbabwe), as well as in Yemen. Many advances occurred in the context of new governments that either rolled back restrictive legal and regulatory provisions or allowed greater space for vibrant and critical media to operate. Particularly noteworthy was the continued dramatic opening in Burma, which

registered the survey's largest numerical improvement of the year due to people's increased ability to access information and the release of imprisoned bloggers and video journalists, among other factors.

Key Trends in 2012

- **Heightened contestation over new media:** Citizen journalists and their use of new media tools—including microblogs, online social networks, mobile telephones, and other information and communication technologies (ICTs)—have made major contributions to revolutions in the Middle East and prevented authoritarian regimes in China, Russia, and elsewhere from gaining total domination of the information landscape. However, a range of governments intensified efforts to restrict new media. Repressive measures included the passage or heightened use of new cybercrime laws (Thailand, Russia); jailing of bloggers (Egypt, Gulf Arab states, Vietnam); and blocks on web-based content and text-messaging services during periods of political upheaval (India, Tajikistan).
- **Fair elections impossible without free press:** Political contests in a number of key countries in 2012 demonstrated that a level electoral playing field is impossible when the government, as in authoritarian settings like Russia or Venezuela, is able to use its control over broadcast media to skew coverage, and ultimately votes, in its favor. Among countries on an authoritarian trajectory, restrictive laws on coverage of candidates in Ecuador and biased coverage by state media in Ukraine were also used to the ruling party's advantage. By contrast, more balanced and open media coverage prior to electoral contests in Armenia and Georgia helped lead to gains for opposition parties and, in Georgia, a peaceful transfer of power.
- **Gains in West Africa:** Despite the notable declines in Mali and Guinea-Bissau, West Africa as a whole continued to secure improved environments for media in 2012.

What the Index Measures

The *Freedom of the Press* index assesses the degree of print, broadcast, and internet freedom in every country in the world, analyzing the events and developments of each calendar year. Ratings are determined through an examination of three broad categories: the legal environment in which media operate; political influences on reporting and access to information; and economic pressures on content and the dissemination of news.

Under the **legal** category, the index assesses the laws and regulations that could influence media content as well as the extent to which the government uses these tools to restrict the media's ability to function.

The **political** category encompasses a variety of issues, including editorial pressure by the government or other actors, censorship and self-censorship, the ability of reporters to cover the news, and the extralegal intimidation of and violence against journalists.

Under the **economic** category, the index examines issues such as the structure, transparency, and concentration of media ownership; costs of production and distribution; and the impact of advertising, subsidies, and bribery on content.

Ratings reflect not just government actions and policies, but the behavior of the press itself in testing boundaries, even in more restrictive environments, as well as the impact of nonstate actors. Each country receives a numerical rating from 0 (the most free) to 100 (the least free), which serves as the basis for a press-freedom status designation of Free, Partly Free, or Not Free.

For a more detailed explanation of the methodology and ratings review process, see p. 35.

A number of the gains took place in countries—such as Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal—where new governments demonstrated greater respect for press freedom and engaged in less legal and physical harassment of journalists than their predecessors. Increased media diversity, including an array of private broadcasters that are able to express critical opinions, was apparent in Liberia and Mauritania. Coming in the wake of recent improvements in other countries, such as Niger and Sierra Leone, these changes made the subregion a relative bright spot during the year.

- **Declines due to Europe's economic crisis:** The European economic crisis weakened press freedom in several countries. Notable declines were seen in Southern Europe, including in Greece, which fell into the Partly Free category, and Spain. Greek media suffered widespread staff cutbacks and some closures of press outlets, as well as heightened legal and physical harassment of journalists. This in turn led to a sense that the mainstream press was no longer able to perform its watchdog role and keep citizens adequately informed about election campaigns, austerity measures, corruption, and other critical issues. The problems that have emerged in Southern Europe come on top of financial pressures that are plaguing press outlets in the Baltic states and elsewhere in Europe.

The Global Picture in 2012

Of the 197 countries and territories assessed during 2012, a total of 63 (32 percent) were rated Free, 70 (36 percent) were rated Partly Free, and 64 (32 percent) were rated Not Free. This balance marks a shift toward the Not Free category compared with the edition covering 2011, which featured 66 Free, 72 Partly Free, and 59 Not Free countries and territories.

The analysis found that less than 14 percent of the world's inhabitants lived in countries with a Free press, while 43 percent had a Partly Free press and 43 percent lived in Not Free environments. The population figures are significantly affected by two countries—China,



with a Not Free status, and India, with a Partly Free status—that together account for over a third of the world’s nearly seven billion people. The percentage of those enjoying Free media in 2012 declined by another half point to the lowest level since 1996, when Freedom House began incorporating population data into the findings of the survey. Meanwhile, the share living in Not Free countries jumped by 2.5 percentage points, reflecting the move by populous states such as Egypt and Thailand back into that category.

After years of decline in the global average score that was interrupted by an improvement in 2011, there was a decline of 0.23 points for 2012, bringing the figure to its lowest level since 2004. All regions except Asia-Pacific experienced declines of varying degrees. In terms of thematic categories, the drop in the global average score was almost equally driven by declines in the legal, political, and economic scores.

There were a total of eight status changes, with most representing deterioration from Partly Free to Not Free. For the first time in the survey’s history, all the year’s status changes were in a negative direction. In terms of significant numerical shifts of three or more points, the ratio was identical to that for 2010 and 2011, with declines (12 countries) only slightly outnumbering gains (11 countries).

Worst of the Worst

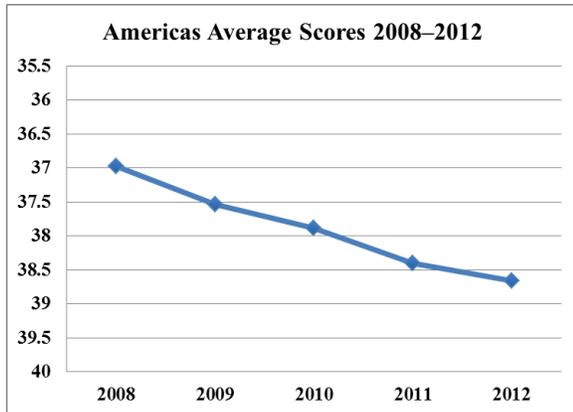
The world’s eight worst-rated countries, with scores of between 90 and 100 points, are Belarus, Cuba, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. In these states, independent media are either nonexistent or barely able to operate, the press

acts as a mouthpiece for the regime, citizens’ access to unbiased information is severely limited, and dissent is crushed through imprisonment, torture, and other forms of repression. In 2012, conditions worsened in Cuba, which fell from 91 to 92 points, due to an increase in the number of arbitrary detentions, sometimes violent, of independent journalists. Meanwhile, North Korea saw a slight improvement, from 97 to 96 points, as a result of increased attempts to circumvent stringent censorship and the use of technologies such as smuggled DVDs to spread news and information.

Regional Findings

Americas: In the Americas, 15 countries (43 percent) were rated Free, 14 (40 percent) were rated Partly Free, and 6 (17 percent) were rated Not Free for 2012. In terms of the region’s population, 38 percent lived in Free countries, and 42 could be found in Partly Free media environments, with the remaining 20 percent living in Not Free countries. These figures are significantly influenced by the open media environments of North America and much of the Caribbean, which tend to offset the less rosy picture in Central and South America. In Latin America, meaning the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking parts of the region, only 15 percent of the countries were rated Free, and just 1 percent of the population lived in Free media environments. The regional average score worsened, with gains in the political category overshadowed by declines in the legal and economic categories.

Press freedom remained extremely restricted in **Cuba**, which has one of the most repressive media environments worldwide, and to a somewhat lesser extent in **Venezuela**, where the government of President Hugo Chávez continued its efforts to control the press. Conditions in two other Not Free countries—**Honduras** and **Mexico**—also remained challenging due to high levels of violence and intimidation against the media. However, Mexico passed two positive measures during the year: a law to protect journalists and human rights defenders, and a constitutional amendment giving federal officials the authority to



investigate and prosecute crimes against the press.

The number of Not Free countries in the region swelled to its highest level since 1989, as Ecuador and Paraguay fell out of the Partly Free camp. **Paraguay**'s status change required the loss of only one point, with the score shifting from 60 to 61 as an indirect result of the "parliamentary coup" that removed Fernando Lugo as president in June. The new administration of President Federico Franco oversaw an immediate purge in the state media; 27 journalists lost their jobs at TV Pública, and there were overt attempts to influence editorial content at the channel. After several years of sustained threats to freedom of expression, fresh setbacks pushed **Ecuador** into the Not Free category as its score declined from 58 to 61. A 2011 law that placed limitations on media coverage of electoral campaigns and candidates severely restricted the press's ability to report on politics ahead of the February 2013 presidential election, and the level of investigative reporting more generally also declined. In addition, an order by President Correa to withdraw official advertising from privately owned media that are critical of the government threatened to place financial pressure on these outlets. Because of a pattern of negative official rhetoric against the press, legal and regulatory harassment, and physical intimidation of journalists, Ecuador's score has slipped by 17 points over the past five years, one of the most dramatic declines in the world.

Moderate erosion was noted in **Argentina** due to executive pressure on judges regarding implementation of a 2009 law that aims to diversify media ownership, as well as increased physical attacks and verbal threats directed

against journalists who are seen as critical of the government, particularly those affiliated with the Clarín media group. **Brazil** also suffered a two-point decline to reflect an increase in the number of journalists who were murdered during the year, coupled with the influence of political and business interests on media content. Legal action against bloggers and internet companies and proposed cybercrime laws also posed threats to freedom of expression.

The **United States** remains one of the stronger performers in the index, but it faces several challenges, including a threat to media diversity stemming from poor economic conditions for the news industry, and a lack of protection-of-sources legislation at the federal level. During 2012, the limited willingness of high-level government officials to provide access and information to members of the press was noted as a concern.

Asia-Pacific: The Asia-Pacific region as a whole exhibited a relatively high level of press freedom in 2012, with 15 countries and territories (37.5 percent) rated Free, 12 (30 percent) rated Partly Free, and 13 (32.5 percent) rated Not Free. Yet the regionwide figures disguise considerable subregional diversity. For example, the Pacific Islands, Australasia, and parts of East Asia have some of the best-ranked media environments in the world, while conditions in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and other parts of East Asia are significantly worse. The country breakdown also obscures the fact that only 5 percent of the region's population had access to Free media in 2012, while 47 percent lived in Partly Free and 48 percent in Not Free media environments. The regional average score improved slightly for the year, as negative movement in the legal category was outweighed by positive change in both the political and economic categories.

Asia includes one of the world's worst-rated countries, North Korea, as well as several other restrictive media environments, such as China, Laos, and Vietnam. All of these settings feature extensive state and party control of the press.

China, although still home to the world's most sophisticated censorship apparatus, registered a modest improvement as microblogs

and other online tools enhanced Chinese citizens' ability to share and access uncensored information, particularly regarding breaking news stories. Fewer cases of violence against professional journalists and high-profile social media activists were reported than in 2011. And several public outcries and online campaigns in 2012 were credited with driving the news agenda or forcing government concessions. The authorities responded to the challenges of controlling the news with information vacuums, heavy-handed propaganda pushes, and new restrictions on entertainment programming, social-media platforms, and online videos. Constraints on print media were especially tight during the year in advance of the sensitive Communist Party leadership transition in November. Journalists and internet users who disseminated information deemed undesirable by the party continued to face punishment, with dozens of cases of interrogation, dismissal, or imprisonment documented during the year. Conditions in Tibetan areas and for foreign journalists deteriorated. The promotion of a hard-line veteran of the censorship system to the Politburo Standing Committee and subsequent measures to reinforce internet censorship and surveillance indicated the Communist Party's commitment to retaining tight information controls even under the new leadership.

Only one country in the region experienced a status change in 2012. **Thailand**, whose designation has shifted several times over the past few years, moved from 60 to 62 points and back into the Not Free range due to a trend of aggressive enforcement of lèse-majesté laws that was already apparent in late 2011. Court

decisions in 2012 found that the existing laws, which restrict speech deemed offensive to the monarchy, do not contradict the constitution's provisions for freedom of expression, and that third-party hosts may be held liable for online lèse-majesté violations. Harsh penalties continued to be handed down during the year, and even convictions coupled with relatively lenient sentences threatened to encourage self-censorship. In one case, Chiranuch Premchai-porn, the webmaster of the news site *Prachatai*, received probation and a suspended eight-month jail term for allowing 20 days to pass before she removed a comment deemed critical of the monarchy from the site's message board.

Negative trends were also apparent in **Cambodia**, whose score worsened from 63 to 66 due to an increase in the number of journalists behind bars—including the notable case of independent radio station owner Mam Sonando, who was convicted of sedition and sentenced to 20 years in prison for the outlet's coverage of land disputes—and a significant rise in threats and physical violence against the press, including the first murder of a reporter since 2008. Meanwhile, in the **Maldives**, general political turmoil in which the president was removed from office led to pressures on media freedom and a score decline from 51 to 55. Issues of concern included the passage of a Freedom of Peaceful Assembly Act that imposed new government accreditation requirements and other constraints on journalists; a significant increase in government pressure on the Maldives Broadcasting Commission (MBC) after it assumed control of all state-owned media; and an escalation in the intimidation, harassment, and violence directed toward journalists and media outlets.

Also in South Asia, **Nepal**'s score fell from 55 to 58 due to increased partisan influence on the media in the period surrounding the May expiration of the Constituent Assembly's mandate to write a new constitution; increased violence and threats against journalists across the country during the year, including the murder of a journalist and a media owner; and the failure of the courts to punish perpetrators of such violence. A smaller deterioration was noted in **Sri Lanka**, whose score moved from 72 to 74 to reflect an increase in verbal threats and



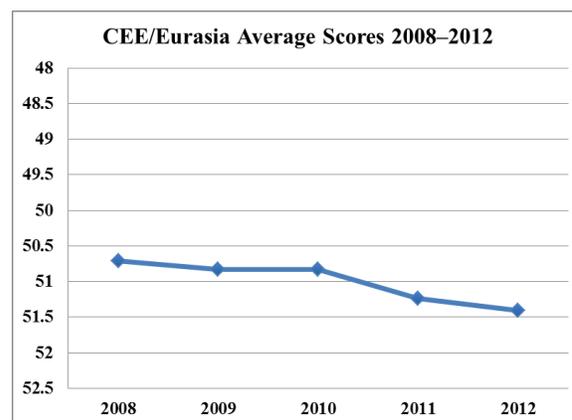
intimidation against journalists by government officials, as well as the sale of the *Sunday Leader*, formerly one of the island's most independent newspapers, to an owner with close affiliation to the ruling party.

In East Asia, **Hong Kong**'s score declined by two points, to 35, to reflect growing government restrictions on journalists' access to information and several violent and technical attacks against reporters, websites, and media entities. In addition, Beijing's efforts to influence media production in the territory intensified and touched on internal Hong Kong politics, marking a departure from past trends in which the targets of Chinese pressure were primarily voices and topics regarded as politically sensitive on the mainland. Meanwhile, **Taiwan**'s score declined slightly as regulatory delays in approving a license for a new television station compelled the owner to declare that the project was no longer financially sustainable.

Other countries in the region experienced significant improvements in 2012. In **Afghanistan**, a continuing decrease in violence against journalists, the opening of a number of new private media outlets that are free to criticize the government, and a decline in official censorship and prosecutions of journalists caused the score to improve from 74 to 67. Even more impressive gains were recorded in **Burma**, which earned the year's largest numerical improvement worldwide, moving from 85 to 72 points. Building on openings in 2011, the country benefited from positive developments including the release of imprisoned bloggers and video journalists, an end to official prepublication censorship and dissolution of the censorship body, the establishment of several independent journalists' and publishers' associations, fewer cases of harassment and attacks against journalists, improved access for the foreign media, greater access to foreign radio broadcasts and the internet, and some progress toward a new media law. However, restrictions remained on ethnic minority journalists and coverage of ethnic violence in Rakhine State during the year. Among other issues of concern, efforts to repeal restrictive legislation and reconcile the new media law with international press freedom standards encountered official resistance.

Central and Eastern Europe/Eurasia: In the CEE/Eurasia region, 7 countries (24 percent) remained classified as Free, 13 (45 percent) were rated Partly Free, and 9 (31 percent) were rated Not Free. However, a majority of the people in this region (56 percent) lived in Not Free media environments, while 29 percent lived in Partly Free countries and only 15 percent had access to Free media—the smallest share in a decade. The regional average score underwent a modest decline, led by negative movement in the economic category. The average for the Eurasia subregion remained the worst in the world, at 75; meanwhile, deterioration in the typically better-performing subregion of Central and Eastern Europe continued in 2012, again especially in the economic category.

It is notable that three of the eight worst press freedom abusers in the entire survey—Belarus, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan—are found in Eurasia, with Turkmenistan now tied with North Korea for last place in the index at 96 points. Other countries of special concern include Russia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan. The media environment in **Russia**, whose score declined by one point to 81, is characterized by the use of a pliant judiciary to prosecute independent journalists, impunity for the physical harassment and murder of journalists, and continued state control or influence over almost all traditional media outlets. Following Vladimir Putin's return to the presidency in May 2012, which was aided by an overwhelming media advantage ahead of the March election, the regime enacted a series of laws that could be used to further restrict media freedom, included a broadly worded measure allowing for the censorship of internet-based content that took



effect in November. The situation in Russia is mitigated somewhat by a recent increase in use of the internet, social media, and satellite television to disseminate and access news and information. However, new media users have yet to achieve a real breakthrough in reaching the general public in Russia, and face an uphill battle against a range of political, economic, legal, and extralegal tools at the disposal of the authorities.

In **Kazakhstan**, which suffered a three-point decline from 81 to 84, the authorities narrowed the space for independent voices even further in 2012 by banning around 40 opposition media outlets and stepping up violence and legal persecution of the remaining independent and critical journalists. **Azerbaijan**'s score declined by two points, to 82, due to an increase in violence against journalists and legal amendments that limited access to information.

Ukraine followed its three-point drop in 2011 with a decline from 59 to 60—just short of the Not Free range—due to the politicized nature of the digital licensing process, which resulted in a number of independent stations losing their licenses. The year 2012 also featured the abuse of state media to favor of the ruling Party of Regions during parliamentary elections, as well as an escalation in threats and attacks on journalists in the preelection period.

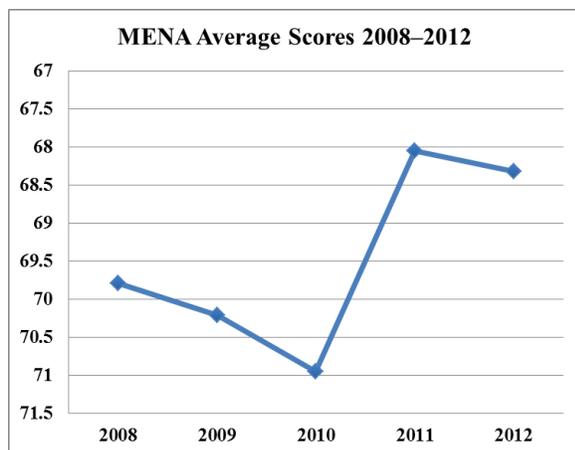
Conditions in **Hungary**, which was downgraded to Partly Free in 2011, remained steady in 2012, though there were persistent concerns regarding extensive legislative and regulatory changes that have tightened government control of the media. A series of rulings by Hungary's Constitutional Court and legal amendments adopted to meet objections from the European Commission in 2011 and 2012 have done little to curb the power of a new media authority controlled by the ruling Fidesz party. Meanwhile, the critical radio station Klubradio had yet to regain control of its main frequency at year's end.

The most significant numerical improvements in the region occurred in the Caucasus. **Georgia**, whose score moved from 52 to 49, benefited from increased political diversity in the television market, including through the return of Imedi TV to its previous private owners. **Armenia** improved from 65 to 61

points because media coverage of the parliamentary elections was generally more balanced than in previous election periods, opposition parties made greater use of online media, harassment and violence against journalists declined compared with the last election year, and there was a dramatic reduction in defamation or slander complaints against journalists.

Middle East and North Africa: The Middle East and North Africa region continued to have the world's poorest ratings in 2012, with no countries ranked in the Free category, 5 (26 percent) designated Partly Free, and 14 (74 percent) assessed as Not Free. Similarly, in terms of the breakdown by population, none of the region's people lived in Free media environments, 8 percent lived in Partly Free countries, and the vast majority, 92 percent, lived in countries or territories that were designated Not Free. Although new information platforms—including blogs, social media such as Twitter and Facebook, and smartphones—have had a positive impact, traditional media in much of the region were still constrained by emergency rule, state ownership and editorial directives, harsh blasphemy legislation, and laws against insulting monarchs and public figures. Moreover, ruling authorities have stepped up efforts to control new media using similar measures as well as censorship and surveillance. Following significant positive movement in the regional average score in 2011, particularly in the legal and political categories, there was some backsliding in 2012, with improvements in the legal and economic categories outweighed by declines in the political category.

In 2011, the Arab Spring uprisings led to extraordinary openings in Libya and Tunisia, and more modest improvements in Egypt. However, these gains were not yet supported by a broad array of institutional, legal, and regulatory structures in 2012, remaining tenuous in the first two countries and quickly eroding in the third. **Libya** saw positive developments in the legal sphere, with the transitional charter providing a measure of respect for freedom of expression and the constitutional court overruling government proposals that would have restricted media freedom. In addition,



access to official information and government ministries has improved in practice. Nevertheless, the poor security situation in the country hindered the work of journalists, with unclear accreditation rules imposed by various militias and a number of reporters detained as they attempted to cover sensitive stories. Overall, Libya's score improved by one point, to 59, for 2012. **Tunisia** also presented a mixed picture. Access to information and official sources improved in practice. However, a new constitution had yet to be passed, and language added to the draft would allow restrictions on freedom of expression in the name of morality and decency. Increased polarization of the media landscape, in which both the government and the opposition influenced editorial content, coupled with intimidation and attacks against independent reporters by government supporters and hard-line Islamist groups, led to an overall score decline of one point, to 52.

Egypt underwent significant backsliding in 2012, with its score dropping from 57 to 62 points and its status reverting to Not Free. The new constitution, passed in December, enshrined the right to freedom of the press, but it allows for limitations based on social, cultural, and political grounds, and prescribes legal punishments for overstepping these limits. In addition, in a number of cases brought against the press during the year, the judiciary came under pressure from Islamist groups and issued rulings against the journalists involved. The level of violence and intimidation against journalists and media outlets remained high, with the death of a journalist covering a protest in December and numerous instances of physical

harassment at the hands of police, political party supporters, and hard-line Islamist groups. Media polarization increased in the wake of the June election of the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi as president, with outlets aligned into pro- or anti-Islamist factions, government favoritism toward pro-Islamist outlets, and official pressure placed on state-owned media. Moreover, the explosion of new, independent outlets in 2011 proved difficult to sustain economically; a number of outlets were forced to close or cut back, contributing to the continued prominence of state-controlled media.

Across the Arabian Peninsula, governments systematically cracked down on the media to stifle growing political dissent. After its precipitous drop in 2011, the score for **Bahrain** continued to deteriorate in 2012, falling an additional two points to 86 as the government's censorship and intimidation of journalists intensified. **Kuwait**, long considered one of the freer media environments in the area, also declined by two points, to 59, as its ongoing political crisis led to the shutdown of multiple media outlets and widespread arrests of journalists who used Twitter to spread information on demonstrations. The authorities in the **United Arab Emirates** (UAE) also escalated their efforts to silence critics of the regime, arresting bloggers, blocking access to dissidents' Facebook and Twitter accounts, and passing a highly restrictive yet vaguely worded law to criminalize the online dissemination of news that could "endanger national security" or "harm the reputation of the regime." The UAE's score consequently declined by two points to 74.

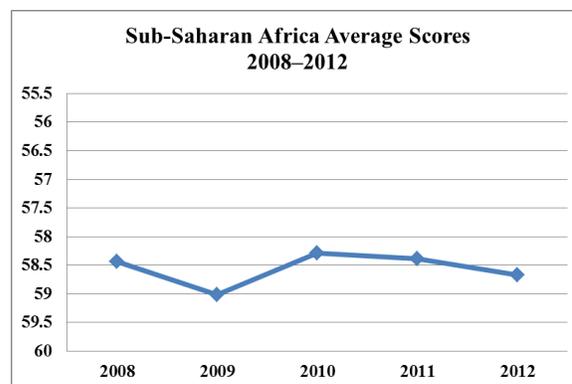
The only country on the peninsula with a net improvement was **Yemen**, whose score rose from 83 to 79 because the government allowed private radio stations for the first time; this, combined with the rising number of television outlets, led to an increase in media diversity. In addition, the government passed a freedom of information act, and the level of violence against journalists decreased relative to the previous year. Yemen's improvement is the first in five years among the countries on the Arabian Peninsula.

In **Syria**, the worsening civil war has transformed the media landscape. The government continues to forcibly restrict

coverage of the conflict and misreport events via state-run television stations, and journalists and bloggers operate in an environment of considerable fear and insecurity. However, the loss of centralized control in large swathes of the country has allowed a rise in citizen journalism, the opening of new media outlets, and a decline in self-censorship. This has been crucial for the dissemination of information about the conflict, including reports of atrocities, to an international audience, and led to a one-point improvement in Syria's score in 2012, to 88. At the same time, the new outlets are generally aligned with the opposition, leading to a highly polarized news environment.

Israel, an outlier in the region due to its traditionally free and diverse press, nevertheless experienced several challenges during 2012, resulting in an overall one-point decline for a score of 31 and a status downgrade to Partly Free. Although several Supreme Court rulings during the year were supportive of journalists' rights, reporter Uri Blau was indicted for possession of state secrets, marking the first time this law had been used against a journalist in several decades. Blau ultimately pleaded guilty and avoided prison time. Instances of interference with the content of Israeli Broadcasting Authority radio programs raised concern over political influence at the public broadcaster, as did the direct involvement of the prime minister's office in protracted negotiations over a license renewal for the private television station Channel 10. Finally, the newspaper industry suffered from the cumulative, multiyear impact of *Israel Hayom*, a free paper owned and subsidized by American businessman Sheldon Adelson that is openly aligned with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and has grown to become the largest-circulation daily. With advertising prices falling under pressure from *Israel Hayom*, the daily *Maariv* went bankrupt and was bought out by a rival newspaper owner toward the end of 2012; the handover was accompanied by significant layoffs.

Sub-Saharan Africa: Four (8 percent) of the 49 countries in sub-Saharan Africa were rated Free, 23 (47 percent) were rated Partly Free, and 22 (45 percent) were rated Not Free. In terms of population, 3 percent lived in Free media



environments, while a majority (56 percent) lived with Partly Free media and 41 percent lived in Not Free settings. The regional average score underwent a modest decline, caused predominantly by a deterioration in the political category. Press freedom conditions remained dire in Equatorial Guinea and Eritrea, two of the world's eight worst performers. Their authoritarian governments continued to use legal pressure, imprisonment, and other forms of harassment to suppress independent reporting.

Mali, traditionally one of Africa's top performers, suffered the index's largest single-year decline in a decade, falling from 24 to 46 points and from Free to Partly Free due to repression of the media in the south as a result of the March military coup, and the near-complete suppression of press freedom in the north, which was seized by Islamist militants. Violations in the south included a temporary suspension of the constitution, arbitrary arrests of journalists, the takeover of the state broadcaster, and restrictions on reporting on the coup. In the north, militants closed or took over nearly all outlets and imposed a crude imitation of Islamic law. Harassment and attacks on journalists were prevalent in both sections of the country. In **Guinea-Bissau**, the score dropped from 57 to 65 and the status fell from Partly Free to Not Free due to restrictions on coverage of an April 2012 coup and subsequent protests, as well as increased abuse and intimidation of journalists by the military.

Several gains in West Africa offset the two major declines in the subregion. **Côte d'Ivoire** jumped from 70 to 61 points—the largest numerical improvement of the year other than Burma's—due to the generally less restrictive legal and political environment for the press

under the government of President Alassane Ouattara, including a decrease in harassment and attacks on foreign and local journalists, more space for critical reporting, and the opening up of radio and television airwaves to private broadcasters. In **Senegal**, the score improved from 55 to 52 due to an improved climate for the press under new president Macky Sall, including a reduction in the use of restrictive laws against the media and a decrease in harassment and attacks against journalists. **Liberia's** score improved from 60 to 56, a result of reduced pressure from libel and slander laws, an increased diversity of opinion in the media, and a reduction in violence against journalists. **Mauritania** moved from 52 to 47 points due to a decline in extralegal intimidation and libel suits against journalists, the licensing and launch of new radio stations, increased inclusion of women in the media sector, and moves toward a greater role for media professionals in the regulatory body.

In southern Africa, **Malawi** reversed its decline of 2011, registering a seven-point improvement, from 60 to 53, due to the repeal of a restrictive media law and a reduction in official censorship, intimidation, harassment, and violence against journalists after Joyce Banda took over as president in April. **Zimbabwe's** score improved from 80 to 77 due to a decline in serious cases of attacks on journalists as well as the increased influence of private and exile media, which led to a greater diversity of views. Meanwhile, in **Madagascar**, the ongoing political crisis sparked by a 2009 coup contributed to a three-point decline, from 63 to 66. The media sector suffered from an increase in defamation charges and convictions against high-profile journalists, the closure of a prominent opposition radio station as a result of prolonged intimidation and harassment by the de facto government, and the continued high concentration of media ownership in the hands of political elites.

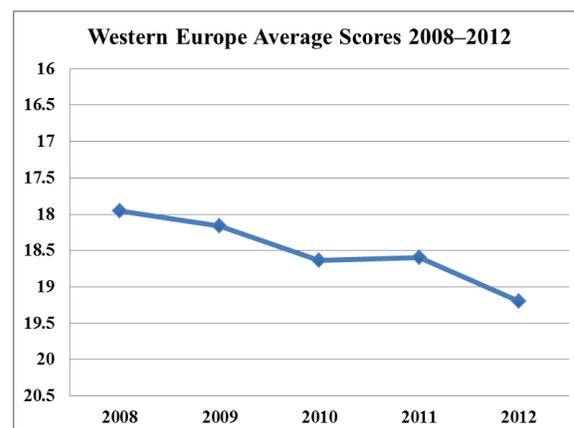
South Africa's performance has steadily eroded in recent years due to state interference in the public broadcaster, an increasingly hostile climate for government critics, and progression through the legislature of the Protection of State Information Bill, which would allow government officials and state agencies to

withhold a wide range of information in the national interest or on national security grounds. The country's score dropped another point, to 35, for 2012 due to de facto restrictions on media coverage of wildcat mining strikes in August and September.

Western Europe: Western Europe has consistently boasted the highest level of press freedom worldwide. In 2012, 22 countries (88 percent) were rated Free and 3 (12 percent) were rated Partly Free. In terms of population, 70 percent of the region's residents enjoyed a Free press, while 30 percent lived in Partly Free media environments. However, the regional average score declined considerably in 2012, led by erosion in the political and especially the economic categories. Norway and Sweden remained the world's top-performing countries, with overall scores of 10.

The region's largest numerical changes in 2012 were driven by the ongoing European economic crisis. **Greece** dropped from 30 to 41 points due to closures of, or cutbacks at, numerous print and broadcast outlets, and a related reduction in media diversity and effective reporting about the country's political and economic situation. Other side effects of the crisis included the case of journalist Kostas Vaxevanis, who was arrested and charged with violation of privacy for publishing a list of alleged tax evaders; politically motivated firings and suspensions at both state and private media; and physical attacks against journalists by the far-right Golden Dawn party.

Spain's media environment also suffered as a result of the economic crisis and a related series of austerity measures, with its score



declining from 24 to 27 points. Media diversity was affected as the advertising market contracted and a number of outlets closed, cut staff, or reduced salaries. Several journalists at RTVE, the state-owned broadcaster, were removed after voicing criticism of the government's controversial fiscal policies. Due in part to economic pressures, **Italy's** score remained at 33, with a Partly Free status, despite a decrease in political influence over media content since Silvio Berlusconi's departure from the premiership in late 2011. **Cyprus** showed a three-point decline, from 22 to 25, owing to the closure of several television stations that were unable to afford the cost of new digital licenses, and the resulting decrease in local media diversity.

Turkey remained a regional outlier with a score of 56, deep inside the Partly Free range, as the government continued to crack down on journalists in 2012. Constitutional guarantees of freedom of the press and expression are only partially upheld in practice, undermined by restrictive provisions in the criminal code and the Anti-Terrorism Act. Thanks to detentions stemming from investigations into the alleged Ergenekon coup conspiracy and a crackdown on suspected Kurdish militants, Turkey remains among the nations with the most journalists behind bars in the world.

Improvements were seen in **France** due to laws and court rulings that enhanced protection of sources, and in the **Netherlands** because of the repeal of a blasphemy law, although certain restrictions are still in place. In the **United Kingdom**, a pending bill to reform the country's libel laws, which heavily favor the plaintiff, was seen as a positive step. However, media freedom advocates as well as Prime Minister David Cameron criticized a November 2012 report by Lord Justice Leveson—launched in the wake of the 2011 *News of the World* phone-hacking scandal—that recommended the establishment of statutory regulation for the British press.

Karin Deutsch Karlekar served as the project director of Freedom of the Press 2013. Overall guidance for the project was provided by Arch Puddington, vice president for research, and Vanessa Tucker, director for analysis. Extensive research, editorial, analytical, and administrative assistance was provided by Jennifer Dunham and Bret Nelson, as well as by Zselyke Csaky, Morgan Huston, Andrew Rizzard, and Tyler Roylance. We would also like to thank our consultant writers and advisers and other members of the survey team for their contributions.

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