

## Press Freedom in 2011: Breakthroughs and Pushback in the Middle East

by Karin Deutsch Karlekar and Jennifer Dunham

The year 2011 featured precarious but potentially far-reaching gains for media freedom in the Middle East and North Africa. Major steps forward were recorded in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia, where longtime dictators were removed after successful popular uprisings. While trends in these countries were not uniformly positive, with important setbacks to democratic prospects in both Egypt and Libya toward year's end, the magnitude of the improvements—especially in Tunisia and Libya—represented major breakthroughs in a region that has a long history of media control by autocratic leaders. The gains more than offset declines in several other countries in the Middle East. And even the greatest declines, in Bahrain and Syria, reflected the regimes' alarmed and violent reactions to tenacious protest movements, whose bold demands for greater freedom included calls for a more open media environment.

The improvements in the Arab world were the most significant findings of *Freedom of the Press 2012: A Global Survey of Media Independence*, the latest edition of an annual index published by Freedom House since 1980. The gains came on the heels of eight consecutive years of decline in the global average press freedom score, a phenomenon that has affected practically every region in the world. Furthermore, they were accompanied by positive changes in several key countries outside the Middle East and North Africa: Burma, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Zambia. Other countries that registered progress include Georgia, Nepal, Niger, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

Three of the countries with major gains—Burma, Libya, and Tunisia—had for many years endured media environments that were among the world's most oppressive. Both Libya and Tunisia made single-year leaps of a size practically unheard of in the 32-year history of the report.

At the same time, press freedom continued to face obstacles and reversals in many parts of the world. China, which boasts the world's most sophisticated system of media repression, stepped up its drive to control both old and new sources of news and information through arrests and censorship. Other authoritarian powers—such as Russia, Iran, and Venezuela—resorted to a variety of techniques to maintain a tight grip on the media, detaining some press critics, closing down media outlets and blogs, and bringing libel or defamation suits against journalists.

Another disturbing development in 2011 was a decline in press freedom in several well-established democracies, most notably Chile and Hungary. As a result of status downgrades in a number of previously Free countries over the past few 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 only 14.5 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. Deterioration was also seen in a number of Partly Free media environments, such as Ecuador, Macedonia, Malawi, Uganda, and Ukraine.

### Key Trends in 2011

- **New Media—Promise and Limits:** New media and citizen journalism made major contributions to both the Egyptian and Tunisian uprisings and were crucial to the creation of a new and potentially more democratic political dynamic in Russia. Even in Syria, where the foreign media, including the influential Qatar-based satellite network Al-Jazeera, were refused entry, ordinary citizens were able to use mobile-telephone cameras to record regime atrocities and prevent the government from escaping global scrutiny. Nevertheless, events in countries such as Egypt and Russia demonstrated that while new media—particularly when amplified by traditional mass media—can be quite effective at disseminating news of government abuses and mobilizing civic action against illiberal regimes, they

play a much less significant role in the construction of democratic institutions, especially in societies where most of the population still gets its information from state-controlled broadcast outlets.

- **Repression in Wake of Arab Spring:** Authoritarian regimes around the world, fearing domestic unrest, censored news of the Arab uprisings. They employed techniques ranging from information blackouts in the state media, as in Zimbabwe and Ethiopia, to sophisticated internet and text-message filtering, as in China. However, some people in these countries were able to follow events in the Middle East via satellite television networks and the internet, or in China's case by using circumvention tools to evade online censors. And in nations where antigovernment protests did take hold, such as Uganda, Angola, and Djibouti, the authorities cracked down, sometimes violently, on journalists covering the demonstrations.
- **Television Wars:** While a dramatic growth in cable and satellite channels has broadened media diversity in a number of countries over the previous decade or more, state control of domestic broadcast media remains the norm in many societies and is a key method of restricting critical content. In the aftermath of mass demonstrations in Russia to protest the presidential candidacy of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, members of the opposition included in a list of demands the creation of a public television station that would be free of Kremlin control. Since first taking power in 2000, Putin has made control of national television the foundation of his authoritarian system, transforming a medium that had been diverse and critical into a conduit for both propaganda and frivolous distraction. Other authoritarian-minded leaders—Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe, the presidents of most Eurasian states, the Communist leaders of China and Vietnam—have similarly retained or extended their control of television news.
- **Need for Vigilance in Democracies:** Various pressures impinged on press freedom in democratic countries as diverse as India, Israel, Italy, South Africa, and South Korea. Heightened harassment of journalists trying to cover protest movements contributed to a decline in Chile's status, from Free to Partly Free. And following a sharp numerical slide in 2010, Hungary was downgraded to Partly Free due to concerted efforts by the conservative government of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán to seize control over the legal and regulatory framework for media. This two-year drop of 13 points in what had long been a Free country is extremely unusual in the history of the index, but it demonstrates that media freedom cannot be taken for granted even in seemingly well-established democracies.
- **Fragile Freedoms in Latin America:** Chile's decline to Partly Free and major setbacks in Ecuador are the latest in a series of negative developments in the region over the past decade. Whether due to violence by criminal groups, as in Mexico and Honduras, or government hostility to media criticism, as in Venezuela, Argentina, and Bolivia, media freedom is on the defensive in much of Central and South America.

### The Global Picture in 2011

Of the 197 countries and territories assessed during 2011, including the new country of South Sudan, a total of 66 (33.5 percent) were rated Free, 72 (36.5 percent) were rated Partly Free, and 59 (30 percent) were rated Not Free. This balance marks a shift toward the Partly Free category compared with the edition covering 2010, which featured 68 Free, 65 Partly Free, and 63 Not Free countries and territories.

The analysis found that only 14.5 percent of the world's inhabitants lived in countries with a Free press, while 45 percent had a Partly Free press and 40.5 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 2011 declined by a 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 Partly Free countries jumped by three percentage points, reflecting the move by populous states such as Egypt and Thailand into this category.

After eight years of decline in the global average score, including particularly steep drops in 2007, 2008, and 2009 [see Graph 1], there was a slight improvement of 0.14 points for 2011. This break from the negative trend was driven by a significant net improvement in the Middle East and North Africa, coupled with a more modest improvement in the Asia-Pacific region. The positive openings were nearly balanced by negative movements in the regional averages for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia, the Americas, and to a lesser extent sub-Saharan Africa. The regional average score for Western Europe remained largely unchanged. In terms of thematic categories, the global average score improvement appears to stem from gains primarily in the legal category, and secondarily in the economic category. The political category showed a global decline when compared with the previous year.

There were a total of 10 status changes, four negative and six positive, with most representing improvements from Not Free to Partly Free. In terms of significant numerical shifts of three or more points, the ratio was identical to that for 2010, with declines (12 countries) almost evenly balanced by 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. During 2011, significant improvements in Burma and Libya allowed them to emerge from this cohort, reducing the number of states where free media remain overwhelmingly circumscribed to its lowest point in the past five years. However, conditions worsened in Iran, which earned the dubious distinction of having the most journalists behind bars in the world (42) as measured by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). And in Uzbekistan, the authorities shut down one of the country's last independent newspapers. Meanwhile, the Syrian government's crackdown on independent reporting by citizen journalists and foreign reporters moved that country to the brink of the 90–100 range.

### **Regional Findings**

**Americas:** In the Americas, 15 countries (43 percent) were rated Free, 16 (46 percent) were rated Partly Free, and 4 (11 percent) were rated Not Free for 2011. In terms of the region's population, 39 percent lived in Free countries and 44 could be found in Partly Free media environments, with the remaining 17 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 Hispanic America, meaning the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking parts of the region, only 15 percent of the countries were rated Free, and just 1.5 percent of the population lived in Free media environments. There were two negative status changes in the Americas, with Chile and Guyana moving from Free to Partly Free, as well as a significant numerical decline in Ecuador. The regional average score worsened, with gains in the legal category, such as the passage of freedom of information laws and the decriminalization of libel, overshadowed by declines in the political and economic categories.

Press freedom remained extremely restricted in **Cuba**, which has one of the most repressive media environments worldwide, and in **Venezuela**, where the Chávez government continued its efforts to control the press. In 2011, journalists in the country began to feel the effects of a new law that extended existing controls on broadcast media to the internet.

After falling to Not Free status in 2010, **Mexico** continued to suffer from high levels of criminal violence in 2011, especially against journalists and communicators who used social media to bypass self-censorship in the traditional press. Eight media workers were killed in 2011, and journalists reported receiving threats from drug cartels as well as the police and politicians. **Honduras** also stayed in the Not Free category because of continued harassment and intimidation of journalists. Although fewer journalists were killed than in 2010, self-censorship and a lack of access to information were still problems.

**Chile**'s score worsened from 29 to 31, pushing it into the Partly Free category, due to the obstacles faced by journalists covering protests on education and environmental issues that took place throughout the year. Several journalists were harassed or detained in connection with their reporting. Meanwhile, Chile's commercial press remained concentrated in the hands of two media conglomerates that have advertising interests and control distribution channels across the country.

**Guyana** also declined to Partly Free, falling from 30 to 33 points, because of the heightened political polarization of the media and verbal intimidation of journalists by members of the ruling party. There were several ongoing libel cases, and a restrictive Broadcasting Act dramatically increased fines for broadcasting without a license. The distribution of licenses appeared to be politically motivated.

The region's largest numerical downgrade took place in **Ecuador**, which fell by six points as President Rafael Correa persisted in his attacks on critical news outlets. The country's score has dropped by 17 points since 2008, one of the most dramatic declines in the world. A controversial law passed in 2011 bars the media from disseminating any promotion of presidential candidates, making it difficult for them to cover political campaigns and inform citizens about the candidates and their points of view. In Correa's high-profile libel case against the newspaper *El Universo*, the Supreme Court ruled quickly in favor of the president, but reduced the fines against the paper to \$40 million. Media outlets practiced self-censorship to avoid becoming the targets of similar cases. Journalists and press freedom organizations continued to face harassment and intimidation, and an antimonopoly law threatened to further weaken media organizations.

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. The overall score declined by one point due to detentions, rough police tactics, and other difficulties encountered by journalists while covering protests associated with the Occupy movement. On a positive note, in 2011 the federal judiciary showed signs of resisting government demands for reporters' notes and the names of their sources in cases involving leaks of classified information.

**Asia-Pacific:** The Asia-Pacific region as a whole exhibited a relatively high level of press freedom in 2011, with 15 countries and territories (37.5 percent) rated Free, 13 (32.5 percent) rated Partly Free, and 12 (30 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, while 49 percent lived in Partly Free and 46 percent in Not Free media environments. A modest improvement in the average score for the Asia-Pacific region was caused by positive change in both the legal and political categories in 2011.

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

In **China**, the world's largest poor performer, the authorities sharply curbed coverage of the popular uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa, retained blocks on foreign social media platforms like Twitter, and tightened controls on investigative reporting and entertainment programming in advance of a sensitive leadership change scheduled for 2012. Detailed party directives—which can arrive daily at editors' desks—also restricted coverage related to public health, environmental accidents, deaths in police

custody, and foreign policy, among other issues. Dozens of writers and activists with significant internet followings were forcibly disappeared, abused in custody, and in some cases sentenced to long prison terms after anonymous messages that circulated online in February called for a Tunisian-style revolution in China. Despite the robust censorship apparatus, Chinese journalists and millions of internet users continued to test the limits of permissible expression by drawing attention to incipient scandals or launching campaigns via domestic microblogging platforms. Most notably in 2011, journalists defied censorship orders pertaining to coverage of a fatal high-speed train crash in July, while internet users shared real-time updates of both the incident and official attempts to cover up its cause.

On a positive note, the region's second-worst performer in 2010 experienced a significant opening in 2011. The press freedom score for **Burma** improved from 94 to 85 points as the regime tentatively implemented political reforms. Positive developments included the release of imprisoned bloggers, a softening of official censorship, fewer reports of harassment and attacks against journalists, and an increase in the number of private media outlets, which led to somewhat more diversity of content and less self-censorship. In addition, a number of exiled journalists were able to return to the country.

The region featured two positive status changes in 2011. **Thailand**, which in 2010 had been downgraded to Not Free, moved back into the Partly Free range due to a calmer political situation that enabled expanded reporting on elections, greater space for dissent and coverage of sensitive topics, and a significant decrease in violence against journalists. Following the end of a state of emergency in late 2010, journalists were better able to cover the news across the country, though access to the restive southern provinces remained restricted. Despite Thailand's overall upgrade, the judicial environment deteriorated toward the end of 2011, with increasingly frequent and harsh applications of the *lèse-majesté* law and the creation of a new internet security agency that can implement shutdowns more quickly and with less oversight.

The South Pacific island kingdom of **Tonga** was the only country to earn a status upgrade to Free, a result of the new government's commitment to strengthening press freedoms and a general reduction in the harassment and intimidation of journalists.

A number of significant numerical improvements were also seen in Asia during the year. **Indonesia** moved from 53 to 49 points as a result of reduced restrictions on the broadcasting authority and press council, less official censorship, and journalists' greater ability to cover news events freely in most of the country. The **Philippines** continued to make gains—moving from 46 to 42 points after a major decline in 2009—due to a reduction in violence against journalists, attempts by the government to address impunity, and expanded diversity of media ownership. And in **Nepal**, the score improved from 59 to 55 points thanks in part to better access to information and a decline in censorship. There were no journalists killed during the year, and fewer restrictions on the production and distribution of news.

**India** suffered a two-point decline in 2011 because of a worrying attempt to extend content controls over the internet and the murder of a senior newspaper editor in Mumbai, among other problems. The score for **Pakistan** also declined by two points, as threats against the press from a variety of actors reached unprecedented levels. CPJ now considers Pakistan to be the deadliest country in the world for reporters. As a result of this danger, self-censorship has increased, particularly on sensitive topics like blasphemy laws and the role and reach of the security forces.

**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 since 2003. In 2011, the regional average score underwent a significant decline, with negative movement in all three thematic (legal, political, and economic) categories. While the average for the Eurasia subregion was almost completely static, deterioration in the typically better-performing subregion of Central and Eastern Europe was marked, driven by significant numerical declines in Hungary and Macedonia in particular.

It is notable that three of the eight worst press freedom abusers in the entire survey—Belarus, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan—are found in Eurasia. Other countries of special concern include Russia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan. The media environment in **Russia** 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. This was mitigated somewhat by an increase in use of the internet, social media, and satellite television to disseminate and access news and information, especially during the December parliamentary elections and subsequent protests. 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.

Several countries in the region suffered continued and significant declines. **Hungary**, whose score deteriorated sharply in 2010, was downgraded to Partly Free to reflect the ongoing erosion of press freedom under Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. This was seen in the establishment of the National Agency for Data Protection, which will restrict access to information; evidence of a politically motivated licensing procedure that resulted in a critical radio station losing its frequencies; increased reports of censorship and self-censorship, especially at the public broadcasters; and worsening economic conditions for independent media entrepreneurship.

**Ukraine**'s score fell from 56 to 59 points as a result of growing government control over the media. Many national media council members are loyal to government official and media tycoon Valery Khoroshkovsky, and media owners increasingly face political pressure regarding content. In **Macedonia**, the score moved from 48 to 54 points due to the declining legal environment, including politicized decisions by regulatory bodies and the lengthy pretrial detention of a leading opposition-oriented media owner in a politically fraught tax case. As part of that case, the country's most popular television station and three affiliated newspapers were forced out of business in 2011.

The only significant numerical improvement in the region occurred in Partly Free **Georgia**, which moved from 55 to 52 points. The change reflected the establishment of a number of new publications, the issuing of a broadcast license to a media group that is critical of the government, and the enforcement of new requirements on transparency of ownership. More modest improvements were also noted in **Montenegro**, which decriminalized defamation and libel, and in **Kosovo**, which benefited from a continuing trend of fewer attacks on journalists and greater ownership transparency.

**Middle East and North Africa:** The Middle East and North Africa region continued to have the world's poorest ratings in 2011, with a single country (5 percent) rated Free, 5 (26 percent) rated Partly Free, and 13 (69 percent) rated Not Free. Similarly, in terms of the breakdown by population, only 2 percent of the region's people lived in Free media environments, 27 percent lived in Partly Free countries, and the vast majority, 71 percent, lived in countries or territories designated as Not Free. Although transnational satellite television and internet-based information platforms have had a positive impact, the media in much of the region remained constrained by emergency rule, state ownership and editorial directives, harsh blasphemy legislation, and laws against insulting monarchs and public figures.

However, in 2011, thanks to extraordinary openings in some formerly closed media environments, the regional average score underwent a dramatic improvement, particularly in the legal and political categories. There were three positive status changes, as a series of uprisings that started in late 2010 overthrew entrenched leaders and either disrupted or demolished their systems of media control. While the gains are remarkable, it is important to note that many are not yet supported by new institutional, legal, and regulatory structures. Vigilance will be required as these countries seek to consolidate their transitions and begin adopting new laws and constitutions.

Especially striking was **Libya**, which had long ranked as one of the world's worst violators of press freedom, but ended the year in the Partly Free category after a numerical improvement from 94 to 60 points. The media environment in Libya changed drastically in 2011 in all three thematic categories. The transitional constitutional charter drafted after the ouster of Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi guaranteed several

fundamental human rights and offered a broad definition of freedom of expression, though these provisions fell short of international standards, and institutions to implement them had yet to be established. The Libyan media began to experience unprecedentedly free working conditions in practice. While censorship was not explicitly banned, there were no longer laws against libeling officials in Libya, and journalists were able to report critically as al-Qadhafi's rule broke down. Five journalists were killed in 2011, mainly while covering the conflict between rebel and Qadhafi forces. Roughly 800 new media outlets had registered by the time the new transitional government officially took control in October, creating a far more diverse and unfettered media environment than had ever existed under the old regime.

The score for **Tunisia**, where conditions in 2010 had also been highly repressive, rose from 85 to 51 points after the overthrow of President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, bringing Tunisia well into the Partly Free range. The draft constitution as well as a transitional press code provided major new protections for the media. Imprisoned bloggers and freedom of expression activists were released after Ben Ali fled into exile, and journalists now have the ability to work without fear of detention or official censorship. Threats and intimidation against media workers by extremist Islamist groups were problems, but they paled in comparison to the constraints of previous years. Also during 2011, the number of independent media outlets increased significantly, and social media platforms added further pluralism to the media landscape.

**Egypt**, which had been downgraded in 2010 due to a crackdown surrounding the November parliamentary elections, also improved to Partly Free after a popular protest movement forced the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak. However, the country's score change, from 65 to 57 points, was less dramatic than in Libya or Tunisia, reflecting Egypt's less dismal starting point as well as the survival of many features of the old system. The political upheaval led to a flourishing of new media outlets, a reduction in self-censorship, and some loosening of the centralized editorial control over state media that had been in place during the three decades of Mubarak's rule. Journalists and media outlets covered controversial stories and produced critical and investigative reports, despite intimidation by the transitional military regime. Two journalists were killed in 2011, and there were several reports of violence and harassment as reporters attempted to cover the uprising and its aftermath. There were also multiple reports of interference in broadcast media content by the military authorities. Among other lingering problems, the Emergency Law was still in effect at year's end, and nearly 30 restrictive legal articles that allow journalists to be prosecuted for their reporting remain on the books.

Antigovernment protests in several other countries led to increased restrictions on the press. The largest numerical decline globally occurred in **Bahrain**, which fell from 72 to 84 points as journalists faced defamation cases and the government frequently invoked restrictive press laws to deter media criticism. Journalists and bloggers were also subjected to severe harassment, arrests, and torture as a result of their reporting on the ongoing demonstrations, and several fled into exile. Though the government does not own newspapers, the Ministry of Culture and Information maintains control over private publications, imposing fines on those that carry information it finds objectionable.

**Syria** also suffered a significant decline, from 84 to 89 points, due to the increased attacks, intimidation, and detentions faced by local and foreign journalists. The government revoked the press passes of foreign reporters, and several media workers were arrested as a result of a press law passed in August. The few existing media outlets with a degree of independence were forced to close, leaving only those controlled by the government and ruling party. Citizen journalists and activists worked to get information out of the country, but the authorities made every effort to hunt them down. These conditions, combined with mounting state-led violence in many areas, made the collection and dissemination of accurate news nearly impossible in the country.

**Sub-Saharan Africa:** Out of a new total of 49 countries—with South Sudan assessed separately for the first time—5 countries (10 percent) were rated Free, 23 (47 percent) were rated Partly Free, and 21 (43 percent) remained Not Free in sub-Saharan Africa. In terms of population, 5 percent lived in Free media environments, while a majority (54 percent) lived with Partly Free media and 41 percent lived in Not Free environments. The regional average score suffered a marginal decline, with improvements in the legal and economic categories balanced 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.

A number of key countries experienced decline and backsliding in 2011. **Guinea**, which had been upgraded to Partly Free in 2010 following efforts by the transitional government to open the legal and political environment for the press, slipped backward to the Not Free category, as the government of newly elected president Alpha Condé failed to implement those reforms. Moreover, the state regulatory body imposed a brief media blackout after a July attempt to assassinate Condé, and several media workers were detained, suspended, and threatened by the government and security forces during the year.

**Uganda** dropped from 54 to 57 points as a result of biased election coverage by the state-controlled media prior to February balloting, as well as physical attacks on journalists attempting to report on postelection protests. **Malawi** declined from 55 to 60 points due to alleged bias in the issuing of broadcast licenses, and a ban preventing media outlets from addressing key political events such as July antigovernment demonstrations. Reporters, particularly those who attempted to cover the protests, faced a substantial increase in attacks and harassment, which in turn led to a rise in self-censorship.

In **Angola**, which dropped from 64 to 67 points, the 32-year-old regime of President José Eduardo dos Santos stepped up its repression of the press by imposing disproportionate punishments in legal cases against journalists; increasing its attacks and harassment of reporters, especially those covering anti-government demonstrations; and making it more difficult for foreign journalists to enter and work in the country. The highly repressive environment in **Ethiopia** worsened even further, from 78 to 81 points, with the government employing a 2009 antiterrorism law to silence nearly all dissenting voices. Many journalists have fled the country to avoid prosecution. Ethiopia is the only nation in sub-Saharan Africa with a nationwide internet-filtering system, and the apparatus appeared to grow more sophisticated in 2011.

The passage of the Protection of Information Bill, which allows government officials and state agencies to withhold a wide range of information in the national interest or on national security grounds, in **South Africa**'s lower house of parliament represented yet another troubling development in a country that has been looked to for leadership on press freedom in Africa.

A few countries in the region registered improvements in 2011, in some cases building on gains from 2010. **Zambia** was upgraded to Partly Free due to reform of the public media initiated by the new government after the September 2011 elections, which led to greater professionalism and independence, less self-censorship, and a decrease in the overtly partisan character of these outlets.

The largest numerical improvement outside the Middle East and North Africa occurred in **Niger**, which rose from 59 to 49 points. Newly elected president Mahamadou Issoufou became the first African leader to sign the Table Mountain Declaration, which calls for the repeal of criminal defamation and insult laws. The legal environment also benefited from the passage of an access to information law and the prosecution of journalists under civil rather than criminal law for media offenses, including libel. There were no reported cases of official censorship, extrajudicial harassment, or attacks directed against media workers during the year.

Elsewhere in West Africa, the press freedom climate continued to improve in **Sierra Leone** under President Ernest Bai Koroma, with increased space for opposition viewpoints and criticism of the government. Moreover, no cases of intimidation or harassment of journalists were reported in 2011. **Togo** made gains due to a decrease in restrictions on opening media outlets and a reduction in attacks on journalists, among other changes. And **Nigeria** passed freedom of information legislation after more than a decade of advocacy by civil society groups and media practitioners.

**South Sudan**, which became independent from Sudan on July 9, 2011, began with a rating of Partly Free, as the ruling Sudan People's Liberation Movement attempted to build government institutions that protect political rights and civil liberties. Press freedom is guaranteed in the new constitution, but laws enforcing this principle have yet to be passed. There were reports of extralegal intimidation and attacks on journalists by security agents during the year, resulting in self-censorship. Journalists were also caught up in an ongoing border conflict with Sudan.

**Western Europe:** Western Europe has consistently boasted the highest level of press freedom worldwide. In 2010, 23 countries (92 percent) were rated Free, and 2 (8 percent) were rated Partly Free. In terms of population, 72 percent of the region's residents enjoyed a Free press, while 28 percent lived in Partly Free media environments. The regional average score was largely stable in 2011, with no major change noted. Norway and Sweden joined Finland as the world's top-performing countries, with scores of 10.

The region's largest numerical changes in 2011 were declines in Iceland and the United Kingdom. The score for **Iceland**, previously one of the world's top performers, moved from 12 to 14 points because of an increase in libel cases and the passage of a controversial new law that could restrain the media. The **United Kingdom's** score fell from 19 to 21 points due to the use of super injunctions—which prevent the media from reporting both the targeted information and the very existence of an injunction—by celebrities and wealthy individuals, as well as attacks on journalists covering riots. In addition, the police and government used the 1984 Police and Criminal Evidence Act to force a number of media organizations to hand over unedited footage of rioting in London and Northern Ireland.

**Italy** remained a regional outlier with its Partly Free status, but registered a one-point gain in 2011 due to Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's resignation in November, which significantly decreased media concentration in the country. Berlusconi is a major private media owner, and his political position had also given him control of the state media, including influence over the appointment of directors and key journalists.

In **Turkey**, which is also Partly Free, the score declined by one point as the government continued to crack down on unfavorable press coverage in 2011. Constitutional guarantees of freedom of the press and expression are only partially upheld in practice, undermined by restrictive provisions in the criminal code and Anti-Terrorism Act. Due to detentions stemming from investigations into the alleged Ergenekon conspiracy to overthrow the government, as well as a case involving suspected ties to an alleged Kurdish militant group, Turkey now has one of the highest numbers of imprisoned journalists in the world.