

Press Freedom in 2007: A Year of Global Decline

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Press freedom declined on a global scale in 2007, with particularly worrisome trends evident in the former Soviet Union, Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa. This marked the sixth straight year of overall deterioration. Improvements in a small number of countries were overshadowed by a continued, relentless assault on independent news media by a wide range of actors, in both authoritarian states and countries with relatively open media environments. Unsurprisingly, many declines—such as those in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Georgia—took place in the context of broader political crises that led to crackdowns on the media. A number of these crackdowns appeared to focus on newer forms of media, such as satellite television and internet-based news outlets, which are helping to provide more diverse and independent sources of information in otherwise restrictive media environments.

These disturbing developments constitute the principal findings of *Freedom of the Press 2008: A Global Survey of Media Independence*, an annual index published by Freedom House since 1980.

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, we assess 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. Finally, under the economic category we examine 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. 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."

The Global Picture

Of the 195 countries and territories assessed in the latest survey, 72 (37 percent) were rated Free, 59 (30 percent) were rated Partly Free, and 64 (33 percent) were rated Not Free. This represented a modest decline from the 2007 survey, covering the year 2006: 74 Free, 58 Partly Free, and 63 Not Free countries and territories. The findings for the year 2007 also represent a negative shift from the survey results of six years ago, which was the last recent high point of press freedom.

In terms of population, the survey found that only 18 percent of the world's inhabitants live in countries that enjoy a Free press, while 40 percent have a Partly Free press and 42 percent have a Not Free press. These figures are notably affected by two countries—China, with a Not Free status, and India, with a Partly Free status—which together account for more than two billion of the world's six billion people. The percentage of those enjoying Free media in 2007 remained steady, while the percentage of people who live in countries with a Partly Free media environment improved slightly from 39 percent in 2006.

The overall level of press freedom worldwide, as measured by the global average score, worsened slightly in 2007, continuing a six-year downward trend. The averages for the legal, political, and economic categories all worsened as well, with the political category showing a particularly sharp decline.

As demonstrated by the score movements, there were few dramatic openings or closures in the world's media environments—changes that are typically seen in cases of coups, new governments, or serious political conflicts. However, there were significant movements, in some cases a continuation of past trends, in a large number of countries. In terms of countries whose score shifted by three or more points in 2007, declines outnumbered gains by a two-to-one margin.

Key Trends in 2007

Although decline is the overarching theme of this year's index, it is not a simple story of government-led crackdowns that manage to permanently restrict media freedom. The declines are driven by a complex set of factors, including broader authoritarian crackdowns on civil society, political upheaval, violence targeting the media by both state and nonstate actors, the imaginative use of legal mechanisms against journalists, and subtle economic pressures. In many cases, an overall decline in numerical score encompasses both positive and negative factors, including sustained efforts by journalists themselves to push back against a panoply of restrictions.

We have identified several trends that underpin the numerical movements in the latest index:

- **Media have played a key role in countries racked by political unrest and upheaval.** Coups, states of emergency, and electoral disputes have taken place in a growing number of settings. In many cases, the media have played a central role in covering political conflict and are a prime target when a crackdown sets in. Overt restrictions have included shutdowns of leading or pro-opposition news outlets and other forms of direct censorship. In the past year, this was a major factor in the Caucasus, Central and South Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa. Meanwhile, somewhat less egregious instances of pressure and editorial interference occurred in a number of highly ranked countries in Central Europe and the Caribbean.
- **Violence against journalists and impunity regarding past cases of abuse are important factors in a country's level of press freedom.** The level of violence and

physical harassment directed at the press continues to rise in many countries, contributing to a number of score declines. In conflict zones such as Iraq and Somalia, the press is in constant danger. Other regions of concern are Latin America (especially Mexico), the former Soviet Union (most notably Russia), and South and Southeast Asia (particularly the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan). Apart from the direct impact on individual journalists, these attacks have a chilling effect, adding to larger problems of self-censorship. Conversely, declines in violence and/or impunity, as occurred in Haiti in 2007, can lead to a wide-ranging numerical improvement.

- **Media freedom remains seriously constrained by a panoply of laws used to punish critical journalists and outlets.** Both governments and private individuals continue to restrict media freedom through the use of laws that forbid “inciting hatred,” commenting on sensitive topics such as religion or ethnicity, or “endangering national security.” The abuse of libel laws has also increased in a number of countries, most notably in Africa.
- **Newer media forms—such as satellite television and internet-based newspapers, blogs, and social-networking sites—have emerged as an important force for openness in restricted media environments as well as a key area of contestation.** In the battle between government control and media freedom, relatively unrestricted access to these sources has broadened the diversity of available news and opinion. It was a driving force behind numerical improvements in the Middle East and North Africa region in 2007, and it contributed to Egypt’s upgrade to Partly Free status. At the same time, an increasing number of governments—particularly in the former Soviet Union, the Middle East, Asia, and Africa—are employing or expanding methods of control over these potentially disruptive media. While crude blocking or filtering of particular websites remains common, some authoritarian states have also produced or financed progovernment propaganda designed specifically for these new formats.

Regional and Country Declines

The year featured few positive regional trends, with declines predominating in almost every part of the world. The largest regionwide decline was seen in the former Soviet Union, while smaller negative trends were apparent in the Americas, Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa.

There were setbacks in a number of influential countries, many of which had already been on downward trajectories in recent years. A number of declines occurred in South Asia, with restrictions on media coverage imposed in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, and Vietnam’s government cracked down on dissident writers. Backsliding in the former Soviet Union continued, with Russia, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan showing declines.

The Americas and sub-Saharan Africa registered both negative status changes for particular countries and broader numerical slippage. In the Americas, Guyana’s status shifted from Free to Partly Free, while the score for Mexico deteriorated by a further three points. Sub-Saharan Africa accounted for three of the year’s five status changes:

Benin declined from Free to Partly Free, and both the Central African Republic and Niger moved into the Not Free column owing to authorities' attempts to limit news coverage, particularly in conflict areas.

Regional and Country Gains

The Middle East and North Africa region stood out by showing both overall improvement and significant gains in a specific country. The average regional score reflected the fact that in a number of countries, the media environment has benefited from greater access to satellite television service and the internet, including new formats such as blogs and social-networking websites. In addition, in the only positive status change of the year, Egypt was upgraded from Not Free to Partly Free as local journalists proved willing to cross the "red lines" that had previously restricted their work, and a greater range of viewpoints emerged not only in the traditional Egyptian media, but also in the pan-Arab press, informal media, and blogosphere. This upgrade occurred despite a continuation of, and in some cases an increase in, government harassment, repression, and imprisonment of journalists.

Numerical improvements also occurred in several fragile states where the government has relatively tenuous control, such as Haiti, East Timor, and Lebanon; one country emerging from a coup, Thailand; and another Asian country, Malaysia, where journalists, particularly those in the new media, have recently shown greater aggressiveness in covering politically sensitive stories despite authorities' attempts to restrict such expression.

Worst of the Worst

The world's worst-rated countries continue to include Burma, Cuba, Libya, North Korea, and Turkmenistan. In 2007, Eritrea joined the ranks of these exceedingly bad performers, while a crackdown in Burma worsened that country's already repressive media environment, leaving its score second only to that of North Korea. In these states, which are scattered across the globe, independent media are either nonexistent or barely able to operate, the press acts as a mouthpiece for the ruling regime, and citizens' access to unbiased information is severely limited. Nevertheless, the numerical scores for Cuba and Libya did improve slightly in 2007 to reflect the marginal openings provided by new and transnational media forms such as the internet and satellite television. Rounding out the 10 most repressive media environments are two countries in the former Soviet Union—Belarus and Uzbekistan—and two other countries in Africa—Equatorial Guinea and Zimbabwe—where media remain heavily restricted.

Regional Trends

Americas: In the Americas, 16 countries (46 percent) were rated Free, 17 (48 percent) were rated Partly Free, and 2 (6 percent) were rated Not Free in 2007. These figures are significantly influenced by the open media environments of the Caribbean, which tend to offset the less rosy picture in Central and South America. There was one negative status change during the year, and numerical declines outweighed gains. The average regional

score worsened modestly compared with 2006, as marginal improvements in both the legal and economic categories were overshadowed by a decline in the political category.

The only two countries in the region rated Not Free are **Cuba**, which has one of the most repressive media environments worldwide, and **Venezuela**, where the government of President Hugo Chavez continued its efforts to control the press. Despite significant government restrictions in both countries, the growing number of blogs in Cuba provide some space for free expression, while the vigor of opposition-aligned print media in Venezuela has endured despite the forced closure of key private television outlet RCTV.

Several important countries in the region repeated declines seen in the previous year, often for the same reasons. **Mexico**'s score dropped a further three points, to 51, to reflect the extremely high level of drug-related violence against journalists as well as the continued atmosphere of impunity surrounding attacks on the media. Intimidation and physical attacks were also a major concern in **Bolivia**, whose score worsened a further two points, to 39, owing to increased polarization among media outlets and a rise in attacks against journalists by both government and opposition supporters. In neighboring **Peru**, an increase in threats and physical attacks against media workers, an atmosphere of impunity, and the government's closure of several local radio and television stations—reportedly in retaliation for critical coverage—led to a further slippage, from 42 to 44 points.

Meanwhile, **Colombia**, which had been upgraded to Partly Free in 2006, experienced some backsliding and a numerical deterioration from 57 to 59 points owing to a rise in attacks against journalists by both state and nonstate actors as well as mounting economic uncertainty for media outlets amid the ongoing civil war.

Declines occurred not only in the Americas' midrange performers, but also in several relatively free media environments in the Caribbean. In the region's only status change, **Guyana**'s score worsened from 29 to 31 and its status declined from Free to Partly Free owing to a government decision to withdraw advertisements from the influential newspaper *Stabroek News*, apparently in response to critical reporting, as well as an armed attack against another leading paper. Preelection political tension, which included heightened pressure on and intimidation of the press, was primarily responsible for declines in both the **Bahamas**, whose score moved from 17 to 20, and **Barbados**, whose score worsened from 17 to 19. Meanwhile, **Dominica**'s score fell from 20 to 22 owing to a libel suit filed by the prime minister against a weekly newspaper for articles alleging corruption. The suit had a chilling effect on investigative journalism in the country.

Although the **United States** continues to be one of the better performers in the survey, there were continuing problems in the legal sphere, particularly concerning cases in which the authorities tried to compel journalists to reveal confidential sources or provide access to research material in the course of criminal investigations. In 2007, the numerical score for the United States worsened by one point, to 17, to reflect a slight increase in physical attacks on the press, including one murder and several cases of intimidation.

In a departure from the regional downward trend, **Haiti** showed continued improvement following substantial positive movement and a status upgrade during the previous year. In 2007, its score improved from 59 to 56 owing to a more secure political atmosphere and the launch of the Independent Commission to Support the Investigation of Assassinations of Journalists, which yielded prison sentences for several individuals found guilty of past murders. **Argentina**, after several years of decline spurred by persistent government manipulation of advertising to influence media content, showed a positive score improvement in 2007, from 49 to 47, to reflect a Supreme Court decision favoring nondiscrimination in the allocation of state advertising as well as the granting of the first five broadcasting licenses to noncommercial radio stations.

Asia-Pacific: The Asia-Pacific region as a whole exhibited a relatively high level of press freedom, with 16 countries (40 percent) rated Free, 10 (25 percent) rated Partly Free, and 14 (35 percent) rated Not Free. Yet the regionwide figures are deceptive, as they disguise considerable subregional diversity. For example, the Pacific islands, Australasia, and parts of East Asia have some of the best-ranked media environments worldwide, while conditions in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and other parts of East Asia are significantly poorer. The balanced country breakdown also obscures the fact that only 7 percent of the region's population have access to Free media, while 42 percent live in Partly Free media environments and the majority, 51 percent, live in Not Free media environments. The overall level of press freedom in Asia, in terms of the average regional score, declined marginally from the previous year, with small drops seen in both the legal and political categories.

Asia is home to the two worst-rated countries in the world, Burma and North Korea, as well as other poor performers like China, Laos, and Vietnam, all of which use state or party control of the press as the primary means of restricting media freedom. **Burma's** score deteriorated in 2007 from 96 to 97 (leaving it in second to last place worldwide) owing to increased state violence against journalists and additional restrictions imposed on internet access during and after prodemocracy demonstrations in August and September. **Vietnam** witnessed a larger numerical decline, from 77 to 82, as the government cracked down on peaceful dissent with a severity not seen in several years. Over a dozen individuals who had pushed for a more open media environment or posted prodemocracy writings online were sentenced to long prison terms. Ironically, the move came shortly after Vietnam gained membership in the World Trade Organization. Conditions in the world's largest poor performer, **China**, did not lead to a numerical change; increased media commercialization balanced tighter official control over content and a general crackdown on dissent, especially online, in the run-up to the 17th Party Congress.

Asia saw many negative developments in 2007, continuing the downward regional trajectory noted in the previous year's survey. Conditions in South Asia were particularly worrisome, with four countries registering significant declines. In Bangladesh and Pakistan, political crises accompanied by the imposition of emergency decrees negatively affected media freedom, while both Sri Lanka and Afghanistan were troubled by ongoing civil conflicts. **Pakistan's** score worsened from 63 to 66 to reflect increased attacks on journalists who attempted to cover the growing political and constitutional crisis, in

addition to overt censorship and other restrictions, particularly on the broadcast media, associated with the imposition of martial law in November. In **Bangladesh**, heightened media restrictions following the January 2007 emergency declaration, including censorship and controls on permissible content, were reflected in a numerical slippage from 66 to 68 points. After a status downgrade in 2006, **Sri Lanka**'s numerical score declined by a further four points, to 67, to reflect a worsening media environment throughout the country, including enhanced legal restrictions, verbal and physical harassment by authorities, and an increase in attacks on and murders of journalists—particularly ethnic Tamil reporters in the north and east, where the government and the Tamil Tiger rebels are fighting an escalating civil war. **Afghanistan**'s score fell from 69 to 71 as a result of journalists' increased difficulties in covering the news, particularly in lawless or rebellious areas of the country, as well as a rise in attacks on reporters and media outlets.

Declines were also apparent elsewhere in Asia. After a status upgrade in 2006, **Cambodia**'s numerical score slipped from 58 to 60 to reflect increased censorship and attacks on journalists, especially in the wake of the publication of a report on illegal logging by the London-based nongovernmental organization Global Witness. In **Mongolia**, ongoing legal harassment of journalists and the judiciary's inability or unwillingness to prevent it led to a numerical slippage from 36 to 38 points.

While the majority of score changes in 2007 were negative, several bright spots are worth noting. A number of these gains came in countries whose scores in 2006 had been negatively affected by coups or other political conflicts. Despite intimidation of journalists by the military in the early months of the year following a December 2006 coup, **Fiji**'s score improved from 39 to 37 points owing to reduced government pressure on the media over the course of 2007 and an improved legal environment as the new regime asserted that the constitution had not been suspended. In **East Timor**, the transition to a new coalition government headed by former president Xanana Gusmao led to an improved political atmosphere and initiatives that enhanced access to information for those outside the capital, boosting the country's score from 42 to 38. **Thailand**, which also experienced a coup in 2006, reversed course slightly with the passage of a new constitution in October that included protections for freedom of expression, leading to an improvement in the legal environment and a score adjustment from 59 to 56 points.

In two other Asian countries, numerical improvements stemmed from the tenacity of journalists, particularly from online and new private media outlets, in reporting on sensitive topics despite the authorities' attempts to restrict such expression. **Malaysia**'s score moved from 68 to 65 owing to more aggressive coverage of official corruption and antigovernment protests by online media, even in the face of continuing restrictions on content. In the **Maldives**, a modest opening in the media environment included the launch of new private radio stations and continuing efforts by pro-opposition outlets to present coverage that was critical of the government, leading to more diversity and debate in a changing political arena.

Central and Eastern Europe/Former Soviet Union: For the combined CEE/FSU region, 8 countries (28 percent) remain classified as Free, 10 (36 percent) were Partly

Free, and 10 (36 percent) were Not Free. However, a majority of the people in this region (56 percent) live in Not Free media environments, while only 18 percent have access to Free media. In 2007, the regionwide average score showed the biggest drop of any region. Declines were particularly noticeable in the legal and political categories.

While the region shares a common history of communist oppression, the trajectory of countries in the former Soviet Union has diverged significantly from that of Central and Eastern Europe in terms of respect for fundamental political rights and civil liberties. The press freedom ratings for these subregions reflect a similar divergence. All of the countries of Central Europe and the three Baltic states, which have managed to overcome a decades-long legacy of Soviet media culture and control, are assessed as Free. In contrast, 10 of the 12 non-Baltic post-Soviet states are ranked as Not Free. Of the 195 countries and territories examined in the survey, 3 of the 10 worst press freedom abusers—Belarus, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan—are found in the former Soviet Union.

In 2007, the region featured no status shifts in either direction, and all of the significant numerical changes were negative. This trend was apparent in the best-performing countries, including several in Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic states; countries that had recently showed positive improvement, such as Kyrgyzstan and Georgia; and some of the region's worst performers, including Russia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus.

Slippage was apparent in a number of countries with Free media environments, and in most cases it reflected increasing government influence over content at public media outlets. **Latvia's** score moved from 19 to 22 owing to apparent government intervention in the editorial decisions of public broadcasters, particularly regarding coverage of Russia, and a lack of transparency on private media ownership. Similar concerns over government influence at public broadcasters were an issue in **Slovakia, Slovenia, and Poland**, whose scores all dropped two points to 22, 23, and 24, respectively. Meanwhile, **Romania's** score fell from 42 to 44 to reflect a Constitutional Court decision that reinstated criminal defamation.

Political strife and polarization negatively affected media freedom in several midrange performers. After a promising opening in its media environment two years ago, **Kyrgyzstan** saw continued backsliding in 2007 amid an increase in attacks on journalists and the confiscation of the print runs of several newspapers; the country's score dropped another three points, to 70. In the Caucasus, **Georgia's** score moved from 57 to 60 to reflect increased polarization of the media environment, the forced closure of the pro-opposition Imedi television station, and the suspension of all broadcast media during a temporary state of emergency. In neighboring **Armenia**, increased government pressure on the media ahead of parliamentary and presidential elections—including legal harassment of journalists and severe financial pressures on the independent Gala TV station—led to a slippage from 64 to 66 points.

Press freedom also suffered in a number of countries with already restrictive media environments. **Azerbaijan's** score worsened from 75 to 77 owing to the forced closure of two Russian-language newspapers and the sentencing of at least eight journalists to prison during the year. In **Kazakhstan**, the forcible closure of two media outlets after

they defended their owner (a member of the presidential family who had fallen from grace), a rise in progovernment media coverage prior to parliamentary elections, and increasing harassment of journalists all pulled the country's score down to 78. **Belarus's** score worsened from 89 to 91 to reflect an increase in legal harassment and intimidation of independent media outlets as well as the strengthening of restrictions on the internet.

Most important, **Russia**, which serves as a model and sponsor for a number of neighboring countries, saw continued and substantial declines in 2007. Its score worsened from 75 to 78 to reflect a significant deterioration in the legal and political environment for the media, with hundreds of journalists facing criminal or civil cases and at least two taken into temporary psychiatric detention after criticizing local authorities. Reporters continue to suffer from a high level of personal insecurity, and impunity for past murders or physical attacks against journalists is the norm. State control or influence over almost all media outlets remains a serious concern, particularly as it affects the political landscape and Russians' ability to make informed electoral choices.

Middle East and North Africa: The Middle East and North Africa continued to show the lowest regional ratings, with just 1 country (5 percent) rated Free, 3 (16 percent) rated Partly Free, and 15 (79 percent) rated Not Free in 2007. The average regionwide score improved slightly and was the only one to do so in a year marked by global and regional declines. The gains fall within a pattern of longer-term positive movement in the region, owing to the continued spread and influence of pan-Arab satellite television networks and internet-based media such as blogs and social-networking sites, which serve as alternative sources of news and information. In some countries, print media have also become more critical as journalists push the boundaries of acceptable coverage, even when faced with varied forms of harassment or reprisals by autocratic governments.

However, media in the region generally remain constrained by extremely restrictive legal environments in which laws concerning libel and defamation, the insult of monarchs and public figures, and emergency rule hamper the ability of journalists to report freely. Of particular and long-standing concern are Libya, Iran, Syria, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, and the Israeli-Occupied Territories/Palestinian Authority. Although **Iraq** remained by far the most dangerous country in the world for media workers, a reduction in the number of arrests and detentions of journalists by Iraqi and U.S. security forces contributed to a marginal improvement in Iraq's score for 2007.

In addition to the overall regional improvement, the Middle East saw positive change in a number of key countries, including both relatively good and weak performers. In the only positive status upgrade of the year, **Egypt's** score improved from 62 to 59 points, lifting it from Not Free to Partly Free. The upgrade reflected Egyptian journalists' increased willingness to cross the "red lines" that previously restricted their work. It was also linked to the greater range of viewpoints represented not only in the traditional Egyptian media, but also in the pan-Arab press, informal media, and blogosphere. It is important to note that the change occurred despite a continuation of, and in some cases an increase in, government harassment, repression, and imprisonment of journalists during 2007.

Other country improvements during the year included a four-point gain to 55 for **Lebanon** owing to a substantial decrease in violence against journalists and a drop in government censorship of the media, and a two-point increase to 54 for **Kuwait** as a result of the licensing of six new Arabic-language dailies—the first licensing of any new paper in 30 years—a positive step that increased media diversity. Scores also improved marginally in two of the region’s most restricted media environments, largely to reflect citizens’ access to new and freer media forms. **Tunisia**’s score improved from 83 to 81 owing to the launch of an independent journalists’ union and the increased availability of satellite television, despite authorities’ continued prosecution of critical reporters. The score for the region’s worst-rated country, **Libya**, improved from 96 to 94 owing to a lack of government blocking of websites and increased availability of satellite television.

While transnational factors have led to improvements in many countries, the level of press freedom in much of the region continues to be seriously constrained by a restrictive legal framework and by authorities’ consistent efforts to limit critical reporting through either legal or physical harassment of journalists. **Morocco** saw further declines in 2007, from 62 to 64 points, as legal harassment led to the forced closure of two prominent publications—*Le Journal Hebdomadaire* and *TelQuel*—following coverage that was critical of the government. In **Jordan**, whose score worsened from 61 to 63, security agencies were primarily responsible for harassing journalists, while the government interfered to prevent the launching of ATV, the country’s first private television station.

Sub-Saharan Africa: Overall, 7 countries (15 percent) were rated Free, 18 (37 percent) were rated Partly Free, and 23 (48 percent) remained Not Free in sub-Saharan Africa. The average regionwide level of press freedom declined during the year, as did the average score in the legal and political categories. Trends in individual countries presented a mixed picture, with some improvements but a greater number of declines, including three negative status changes. Press freedom conditions continue to be dire in Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, and Zimbabwe, where authoritarian governments use legal pressure, imprisonment, and other forms of harassment to sharply curtail the ability of independent media outlets to report freely. All 3 countries continue to rank among the bottom 10 performers worldwide.

Reasons for the negative movement during 2007 varied from country to country, but it appeared to be driven by either legal or political factors and in many cases a combination of the two. **Benin**’s score worsened from 30 to 31, which tipped it over the cusp from Free to Partly Free status, owing to the continuation of criminal libel cases and polarization in a growing number of politically funded media outlets. An increase in legal harassment, particularly through libel cases, was also an issue in **Mali**, whose score worsened from 24 to 27; **Burkina Faso**, whose score decline from 39 to 41 was aggravated by several cases of physical harassment; **Senegal**, whose score moved from 46 to 49 amid biased judgments by the regulatory commission and attacks on the press; and **Djibouti**, whose score fell from 69 to 72, in part because of the shutdown of the country’s only private newspaper.

In a number of other countries, political polarization and conflict, sometimes centered on elections, and the authorities’ resulting desire to limit press coverage of certain issues had

a negative effect on media outlets' ability to cover key news stories and on the diversity of information available to the public. Following a promising upgrade in 2006 owing to legal improvements, the **Central African Republic** slipped back into Not Free status as the authorities attempted to limit coverage of the continuing armed conflict in the north of the country. Meanwhile, **Niger**, which has for some time been rated in the Partly Free category, witnessed a score decline from 58 to 63 points and a downgrade to Not Free status owing to the government's attempts to control information on the civil conflict in the north, including suspending the operation of critical media outlets, prosecuting journalists for libel, and harassing those who produced controversial reports.

Political conflict was a primary factor in the **Comoros**' score decline from 48 to 54 points, the survey's largest drop. The country has seen increased polarization and a parallel increase in censorship and harassment of media by the security forces. Election-related polarization also occurred in **Sierra Leone**, whose score dropped from 56 to 59 to reflect a tense preelection political atmosphere that negatively affected media freedom, including biased reporting, threats, and physical violence, as well as directives from the media commission regarding news coverage. In **Lesotho**, an election-related crackdown that included the shutdown of a radio station and the deportation of one of its journalists led to a numerical slippage from 42 to 46. Threats and attacks from nonstate actors, particularly regarding journalists' efforts to cover the growing problem of drug trafficking, were a key factor in **Guinea-Bissau**, whose score moved from 48 to 53. Finally, conditions in one of Africa's worst performers, **The Gambia**, worsened further during 2007, leading to a drop in score from 77 to 79, owing to a combination of legal and extralegal intimidation of journalists and media outlets that included court cases, arbitrary arrests and imprisonment, and complete impunity in past cases of press freedom abuse. At year's end, media freedom was under threat in **Kenya** in the wake of a disputed election and widespread violence that led to the shutdown of media outlets.

Although they were far outweighed by declines, Africa did see a number of improvements during 2007. In many cases, these positive movements reflected a decline in the physical harassment of journalists or the increased ability of reporters to cover sensitive political stories. Attacks on the press declined in **Tanzania**, whose score improved from 51 to 48; **Nigeria**, whose score improved from 55 to 53; and **Cameroon**, whose score improved from 67 to 65. Cameroon also benefited from the licensing of four new private broadcast outlets. Meanwhile, **Sudan** saw continued numerical improvement owing to further growth in media diversity in the south of the country. Finally, two countries that had seen declines in 2006 reversed course in 2007. A crackdown on the press was eased in **Burundi**, with fewer cases of physical harassment or jailing of journalists, leading to a positive numerical shift from 77 to 74 points. An improved political situation in **Cote d'Ivoire**, in which journalists were less prone to attack and better able to cover news events throughout the country, resulted in a positive score change from 68 to 66.

Western Europe: Western Europe continued to boast the highest level of press freedom worldwide; in 2007, 24 countries (96 percent) were rated Free and 1 (4 percent) was rated Partly Free. Although the level of press freedom remained largely steady, the average regional score did decline slightly from that of 2006. Countries registering declines

included **Portugal**, whose score worsened owing to a new law that could strip journalists of their right to protect confidential sources and gives employers the right to reuse journalists' work in any way for 30 days following its initial publication; and **Malta**, whose score deteriorated by several points owing to a series of threats and attacks against journalists covering public demonstrations and debates.

In **Turkey**, the only country ranked as Partly Free in the region, the continued prosecution of large numbers of journalists and the high-profile January 2007 assassination of Armenian editor Hrant Dink, apparently with some involvement by state actors, were the primary factors behind a two-point score decline from 49 to 51.

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