

EMBARGOED UNTIL MAY 3 - 6am PARIS TIME (GMT +2)

2024 World Press Freedom Index – journalism under political pressure

Press freedom around the world is being threatened by the very people who should be its guarantors – political authorities. This is clear from the latest annual World Press Freedom Index produced by Reporters Without Borders (RSF). This finding is based on the fact that, of the five indicators used to compile the ranking, it is the [political indicator](#) that has fallen most, registering a global average fall of 7.6 points.

Governments fail to protect journalism

A growing number of governments and political authorities are not fulfilling their role as guarantors of the best possible environment for journalism and for the public's right to reliable, independent, and diverse news and information. RSF sees a worrying decline in support and respect for media autonomy and an increase in pressure from the state or other political actors.

"As more than half the world's population goes to the polls in 2024, RSF is warning of a worrying trend revealed by the 2024 World Press Freedom Index: a decline in the political indicator, one of five indicators detailed in the Index. States and other political forces are playing a decreasing role in protecting press freedom. This disempowerment sometimes goes hand in hand with more hostile actions that undermine the role of journalists, or even instrumentalise the media through campaigns of harassment or disinformation. Journalism worthy of that name is, on the contrary, a necessary condition for any democratic system and the exercise of political freedoms."

Anne Bocandé, RSF editorial director

At the international level, this year is notable for a clear lack of political will on the part of the international community to enforce the principles of protection of journalists, especially UN Security Council Resolution 2222. The war in Gaza has been marked by a record number of violations against journalists and media since October 2023. More than 100 Palestinian reporters have been killed by the Israel Defence Forces, including at least 22 in the course of their work.

Occupied and under constant Israeli bombardment, Palestine is ranked 157th out of 180 countries and territories surveyed in the overall 2024 World Press Freedom Index, but it is ranked among the last 10 with regard to security for journalists ([see the 2024 World Press Freedom Index security ranking](#)).

Journalism vs disinformation in a super election year

While 2024 is the biggest election year in world history, 2023 also saw decisive elections, especially in Latin America, where elections were won by persons who boast of being predators of press freedom and media diversity, above all Javier Milei in Argentina (down 26 at 66th), who has shut down the country's biggest news agency in an action of disturbing symbolism.

Elections are often accompanied by violence against journalists, as in Nigeria (112th) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (123rd). The military juntas that seized power in coups in the Sahel, especially Niger (down 19 places at 80th), Burkina Faso (down 28 at 86th) and Mali (down one at 114th), have constantly tightened their grip on the media and obstructed journalists' work. Recep Tayyip Erdogan's reelection in Türkiye is also a source of some concern. Ranked 158th, the country has continued to lose points in the Index.

In the absence of regulation, generative AI's use in the arsenal of disinformation for political purposes is disturbing. Deepfakes now occupy a leading position in influencing the course of elections. This was evidenced by the audio deepfake of the journalist **Monika Todova** during the parliamentary elections in Slovakia (down 12 at 29th), one of the first documented cases of this kind of attack on a journalist with the aim of influencing the outcome of a democratic election.

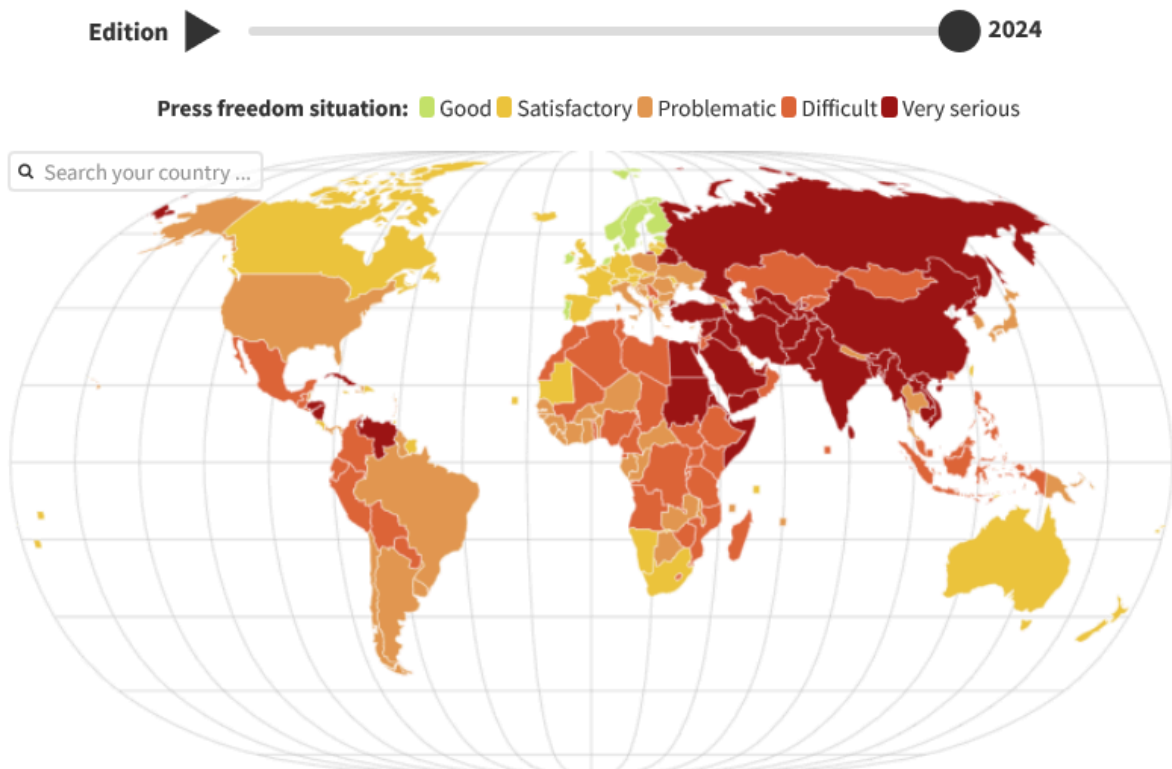
Many governments have stepped up their control over social media and the Internet, restricting access, blocking accounts, and suppressing messages carrying news and information. Journalists who say what they think on social media in Vietnam (174th) are almost systematically jailed. As well as detaining more journalists than any other country in the world, the government in China (172nd) continues to exercise strict control over information channels, implementing censorship and surveillance policies to regulate online content and restrict the spread of information deemed to be sensitive or contrary to the party line.

Some political groups fuel hatred and distrust of journalists by insulting them, discrediting them, or threatening them. Others are orchestrating a takeover of the media ecosystem, both state-owned media that have come under their control, as well as acquisitions of privately-owned media by allied businessmen. Giorgia Meloni's Italy (46th) – where a member of the ruling parliamentary coalition is trying to acquire the second biggest news agency (*AGI*) – has fallen five places this year.

Political groups often serve as channels for disseminating disinformation campaigns or even instigating them. In more than three quarters of the countries evaluated in the Index (138 out of 180 countries and territories), most of the Index questionnaire respondents reported that political actors in their countries were often involved in propaganda or disinformation campaigns. This involvement was described as "systematic" in 31 countries.

In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, media censorship has intensified in an astonishing mimicry of Russian repressive methods, especially in Belarus (down 10 at 167th), Georgia (103rd), Kyrgyzstan (120th), and Azerbaijan (down 13 at 164th). Kremlin influence has reached as far as Serbia (down seven at 98th), where pro-government media [carry](#) Russian propaganda and the authorities [threaten](#) Russian exile journalists. Russia (162nd), where Vladimir Putin was unsurprisingly reelected in 2024, continues to wage a war in Ukraine (61st) that has had a big impact on the media ecosystem and journalists' safety.

In 2024, conditions for practising journalism were satisfactory in only a quarter of the world's countries



Source: [World Press Freedom Index](#), [Link to share](#)
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Best and worst

Even the trio at the top of the World Press Freedom Index has contributed to the fall in the overall political indicator. Despite retaining its No. 1 position, Norway is among the countries that has suffered a fall in its political score. Ireland (8th), where politicians have subjected media outlets to judicial intimidation, has ceded its position as European Union leader to Denmark (2nd), which is followed by Sweden (3rd).

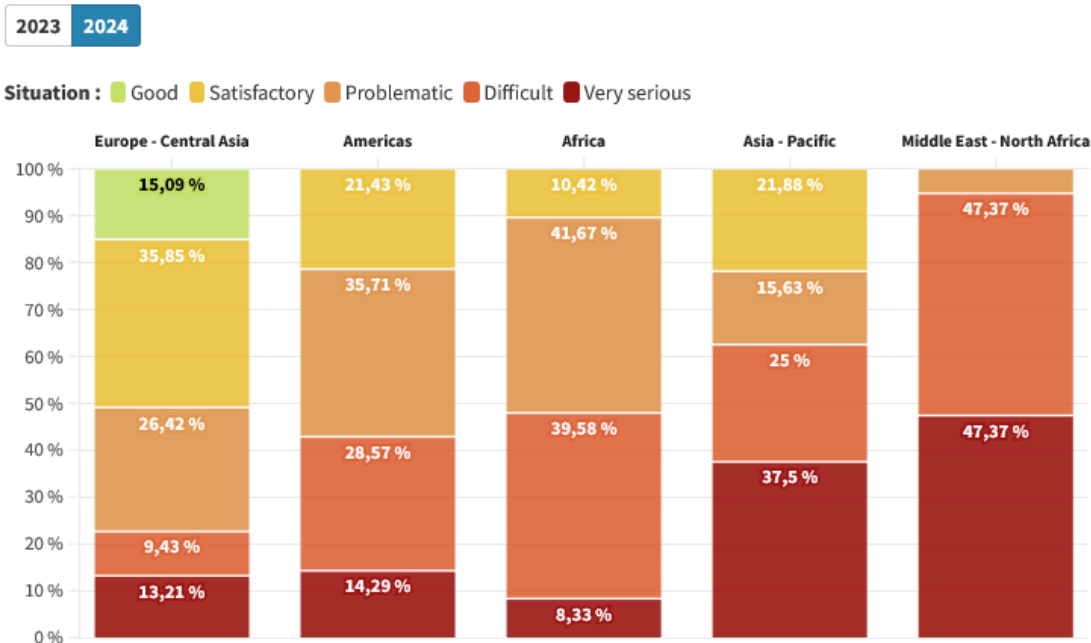
The three Asian countries at the bottom of last year's Index - Vietnam, China and North Korea - have ceded their positions to three countries whose political scores have

plummeted. They are Afghanistan (down 44 places in the political ranking), which has persecuted journalists incessantly since the Taliban recovered control; Syria (down eight political places); and Eritrea (down nine political places), which is now last in both political and general rankings. The last two countries are lawless zones for the media, with record numbers of journalists detained, disappeared or held hostage.

The Index by regions

Press freedom in the world's five regions in 2024

Press freedom in the world's five regions in 2024



Source : [World Press Freedom Index](#), [Link to share](#)
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The **Maghreb - Middle East** region is the one with the worst situation in the **2024 World Press Freedom Index**. It is followed by the Asia-Pacific region, where authoritarian governments are throttling journalism. And then by Africa, where the situation is classified as “very serious” is less than 10% of the region, but “difficult” in near half of its countries.

The countries where press freedom is in good shape are all in Europe, more specifically, within the European Union, which has just equipped itself with its first media freedom law, the EMFA. Ireland has dropped out of the Index's top three countries, replaced by Sweden, while Germany is now one of the top ten countries. Press freedom is nonetheless being put to the test in [Hungary](#), [Malta](#) and [Greece](#), the three lowest-ranked EU countries. Further to

the east in Europe, the conditions for journalism are worsening due to the scale of disinformation and media censorship that resorts to spurious terrorism charges or charges of violating national security. This is the case in Russia (162nd), [Belarus](#) (167th) and [Turkmenistan](#) (175th), while in [Georgia](#) (down 26 at 103rd), the ruling party is cultivating a rapprochement with Moscow. As a result of improvements in its security indicator – fewer journalists killed – and its political indicator, [Ukraine](#) (61st) has risen 18 places.

Sub-Saharan Africa was very affected by political violence during major elections in 2023. More than 8% of African countries are now coloured red on the press freedom map, twice as many as in 2023. Nigeria, Togo and Madagascar have seen crackdowns on reporters. The region is marked by the decline in security in several Sahel countries – Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali.

In the **Asia-Pacific** region – the world's second most difficult region for practicing journalism – five countries are among the world's ten most dangerous countries for media personnel. They are Myanmar (171st), China (173rd), North Korea (172nd), Vietnam (175th) and Afghanistan (178th). But, unlike last year, none of the region's countries is in the Index's top 15.

In the **Middle East and North Africa**, the situation is “very serious” in nearly half of the countries. The United Arab Emirates joins the eight other countries in the area shown in red on the map: Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Palestine, Iraq, Bahrain, Syria and Egypt. Palestine, the deadliest country for journalists, is also near the bottom of the Index. Qatar is now the region's only country where the situation is not classified either as “difficult” or “very serious.”

Very strong pressure on journalists must be expected in the coming elections in all of the world's regions.