ARTICLE 19

The Global Expression Report 2021

The state of freedom of expression around the world

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ARTICLE 19 works for a world where all people everywhere can freely express themselves and actively engage in public life without fear of discrimination. We do this by working on two interlocking freedoms, which set the foundation for all our work. The Freedom to Speak concerns everyone's right to express and disseminate opinions, ideas and information through any means, as well as to disagree from, and question power-holders. The Freedom to Know concerns the right to demand and receive information by power-holders for transparency good governance and sustainable development. When either of these freedoms comes under threat, by the failure of power-holders to adequately protect them, ARTICLE 19 speaks with one voice, through courts of law, through global and regional organisations, and through civil society wherever we are present.

Cover image: A police officer orders Reuters journalists off the plane without explanation while the plane is parked on the tarmac at Urumqi airport, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, China, 5 May 2021. Photo credit: REUTERS/Thomas Peter

The Global Expression Report 2021:

The state of freedom of expression around the world

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Acknowledgements

ARTICLE 19 wishes to thank everyone who has contributed to this year's report, and all those behind the scenes who know how important the insights of such a report are.

At the time of a global pandemic, we remember that the report is the sum of many efforts, gathering as it does the work of many organisations and human rights activists all over the world. Without you, we would not have the *Global Expression Report*.

Journalist Emily Hart and statistician Nicole Steward-Streng develop and deliver the insights of this report, drawing together and making sense of a vast range of data, experience, and contexts. Emily and Nicole have worked together to evolve the GxR metric to its current form, with Emily undertaking extensive research, analysis, and writing, and Nicole generating the data set that underpins the metric – helping us to dive into layers of analysis previously difficult to reach.

Our numbers are based on the peerless data set from V-Dem, and bringing all this to life is the extensive on-the-ground experience of our regional and thematic colleagues all over the world. Thank you to everyone for all that you have contributed to this year's edition.

Our production team this year has been brilliantly led by communications expert Raahat Currim who assembled a terrific team and kept everyone focused on getting us to the finish line: thank you to Hannah Austin and Angela Yates for their detailed work on the text and to Sharon Leese for expert layout for creating the visual coherence in the design of the data.

It is because of everyone involved that we can continue to keep our **#EyesOnExpression.**

About the V-Dem Institute and data set

Founded by Professor Staffan I. Lindberg in 2014, the V-Dem Institute is an independent research institute that produces one of the largest-ever social science data-collection efforts in the world, with a database containing over 28.4 million data points. The headquarters are based at the Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

List of abbreviations

BLM	Black Lives Matter
CAR	Central African Republic
CSO	Civil society organisation
DMA	Digital Markets Act
DOS	Denial of service
DDOS	Distributed denial of service
FOI	Freedom of information
GxR	Global Expression Report metric
HRDs	Human rights defenders
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PiS	Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice Party, Poland)
SLAPPs	Strategic lawsuits against public participation

An introduction to the *Global Expression Report*

The Global Expression Report is a global, data-informed, annual look at freedom of expression worldwide. With the benefit of data and hindsight, we take a look at 2020 – how this fundamental right fared, what the key trends were, and how global events affected its exercise.

The Global Expression Report's metric (the GxR Metric) tracks freedom of expression across the world. In 161 countries, 25 indicators were used to create an overall freedom of expression score for every country, on a scale of 1 to 100 which places it in an expression category.

GxR rating	GxR score	Category
In Crisis	0–19	1
Highly Restricted	20–39	2
Restricted	40–59	3
Less Restricted	60–79	4
Open	80–100	5

The GxR reflects not only the rights of journalists and civil society but also how much space there is for each of us – as individuals and members of organisations – to express and communicate; how free each and every person is to post online, to march, to research, and to access the information we need to participate in society and hold those with power to account.

This report covers expression's many faces: from street protest to social media posts; from the right to information to the right to express political dissent, organise, offend, or make jokes. It also looks at the right to express without fear of harassment, legal repercussions, or violence.

Chapter 1 looks at the big picture – the major global shifts in expression. This section will give you a clear view of the structure of the metric, the range of data, and the big movers at a geographic level. It also presents analytical overviews of the trends and events of 2020, with essays on democracy, disinformation, and protest in the context of the coronavirus pandemic.

From Chapter 2 to Chapter 6, we zoom in on the five different regional contexts for expression, and in particular look at where progress and downward trends are visible.

Hyperlinks to sources are provided in the text rather than as footnotes.

A detailed methodology for the metric is provided in Annex 1. This section explains how the metric has been constructed and the data sets analysed. Annex 2 lists the GxR data for each of the 161 countries.

> **Freedom of expression is the fundamental human right that enables us all to demand the highest attainable standard of health. Unlike any other year in recent history, 2020 has driven home just how vital access to accurate, reliable and timely information is, and continues to be during a global health crisis.**

In a pandemic, protecting people means protecting Expression: so let us seize this moment.

Quinn McKew,
Executive Director, ARTICLE 19

The pandemic has brought the world to a tipping point where governments and private actors face a stark choice. They must either commit to building a world based on rights to expression and information or they must become bystanders to the rapid decline in the freedoms which sustain robust and engaged societies.

Around the globe, everyone is speculating on what the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will be.

> **As governments all over the world continue to grapple with the challenges of lifting restrictions, and re-opening the global economy, we are all asked to take a much closer look at where the boundaries between benefit and convenience lie.**

In times of public health crises, governments have a fundamental duty and a legal obligation to be transparent about their choices and decisions, and to protect people's lives. This means ensuring that healthcare professionals have access to accurate global information about the disease, informing and educating the public about the pandemic, and ensuring that health data is accessible to everyone – no exceptions. There simply is no rationale that can support the choices that left – and continue to leave – millions of people without essential life-saving information.

Yet these arguments have prevailed because our rights were under attack long before the arrival of the pandemic: the state of global democracy has been deteriorating for at least a decade.

We know that expression is the sharp end of the spear when it comes to attacks on our rights, and certain states and other actors have used the pandemic as a near carte blanche to accelerate those attacks and even induce former 'champions' of expression to adopt retrograde policies. Populist leaders and those who seek to entrench their own power hate accountability: that is why we have seen attacks on journalists and online censorship intensify in many countries.

This moment asks us to step back from processes of autocratisation, which always begin with attacks on media and on independent voices. And it requires us to be alert to the subsequent undermining of democratic institutions and processes.

The analysis revealed in the *Global Expression Report* this year shows unequivocally that public participation took a back seat during 2020: governments made decisions without consultation, undermined oversight, centralised powers, and limited accountability. They blatantly used the pandemic to give new life to an old

> **Democracy continued to be threatened by attacks on a free press, with two thirds of all countries imposing restrictions on media in relation to the pandemic.**

arsenal of tools to repress expression, including blanket bans on protests, censorship and the suspension of right to information mechanisms.

Never ones to let a good crisis go to waste, autocrats and populists continued to attack dissenting voices and to undermine democracies. Their politics of control intersected dangerously with the pandemic, with public health measures being abused to limit and suppress critical reporting and political opposition – particularly around elections.

Guinea and Belarus provide particularly bleak examples of suppression of manipulation and violence around important polls – and they also had two of the biggest declines in GxR scores in 2020. India and Brazil's populist autocrats continue to lay waste to democratic institutions and human rights in their countries (both seeing nosedives in GxR scores), a situation proving particularly disastrous for public health and people's lives.

The starkest deterioration in the GxR scores has come from data on freedom of assembly and public participation in decision-making. For well- and malign-intentioned reasons, governments are seeking to eliminate the final lever of power that people use to demand accountability: the right to protest.

While protests continue to show their influence in making change and raising consciousness, government responses to them have become ever-more brutal and repressive, often using them as an excuse to implement broader crackdowns on opposition. Countries like Belarus and Thailand have seen huge drops in GxR scores after protest movements in 2020 were met with repressive state responses both on the streets and in the legislature and courts.

The pandemic has exposed and deepened cracks in our systems of government: the reliance on security forces and violent police tactics, the deliberate spread of disinformation online and the weak efforts to respond to the problem, alongside increasing surveillance, as authorities continue to force people to download apps that collect highly sensitive data without assurances for adequate privacy and data protection.

Dismantling of the basic tenets of transparency will not reduce the inequalities revealed by the health crisis: they will instead, certainly deepen them. The roots of populist politics and its entry into the mainstream – deep social malaise, and disenchantment with established political systems – have gone nowhere, and the world left behind by the pandemic will see increased divisions in our societies as those failed by our economic and political systems turn to scapegoats, populists, conspiracies, and nebulous promises of re-empowerment.

Time to reclaim and rebuild

Because the rights to freedom of expression are often the first port of call for autocrats looking to erode democracy and entrench power, they must also be our harbour from the hostile human rights environment in which we find ourselves.

As the lasting effects of the pandemic become clearer, we will not only need to rigorously roll back all the restrictions that have been placed on us, and reject the surveillance imposed on us during 2020, but also heal the cracks that existed long before. That means addressing those failures of economic and political systems that have allowed single individuals to take control of resources and institutions, and which have left many by the wayside in terms of economic opportunity and political inclusion.

It also means addressing the too easily-forgotten crises that did not pause for the pandemic such as the climate crisis, which continues unabated, as do those driving

> **In rebuilding our relationships with government, media, academia, and the arts, we must demand our right to know and our right to speak – online, on the streets, wherever we feel fit. And we must make ourselves heard.**

conflict and migration. And it means looking at the impending impact of what has been called the "Great Acceleration" resulting from a supercharged digital economy powered by artificial intelligence (AI).

To tackle these issues we need more voices, not fewer. We need more information, not less. We need clarity and authenticity, not lies and deceit. We will need the full enjoyment of our human rights to rebuild a better world with free expression and information as the foundations of that future.

The false dichotomy between expression rights and public health – and between expression rights and economic recovery – must be roundly rejected because it fails to see that the former supports and strengthens the latter. These words are not soundbites: these are watch-words for solutions that will benefit all.

Despite the grim figures in the GxR this year, behind the scenes there is so much to praise and admire in the work hundreds of organisations are doing that benefit us all. There have been great strides in the teaching of media literacy, and in the calls for protection of journalists. But impunity is still a huge issue, with high-profile murders and silencing of dissenting voices, still firmly in the playbooks of power-holders. It is up to us to continue to work together to call this out, wherever it happens.

The road back from the pandemic will be slow, and that is why we need to prepare for a more engaged future now. That means constituting people's

> **In every community, in every country – if we are to address the serious global challenges we face – Expression must be at the heart of new power relationships.**

assemblies, commissioning timely and robust public inquiries, and acknowledging where collective failings lie. This requires radical transparency, and serious intent to repair the declines in Expression we have witnessed in the last decade.

International human rights organisations cannot drive this change without broader engagement from all of us. Our role is to ensure that information such as the analysis we share here in the GxR, reaches as wide an audience as possible, but combined with opportunities to engage with change. As you read this report, I invite you to consider its ramifications and reflect on where those opportunities might lie.

One critical area to address is that of meaningful investment and sustained action to centre Expression as a means of strengthening public health, drive rapid action on the climate crisis, and to support economic recovery. We are at a critical juncture. As with addressing climate change and poverty reduction, turning away is not an option. With a renewed global effort to focus on freedom of expression we can – and will – succeed in rebuilding a world where rights are respected, power is in check, and one that is safer, healthier, and more equal for all.

> **Yet, rather than focusing on controlling the virus, two-thirds of the world's governments instead spent public money and time on trying to control the narrative about their response to COVID-19, using public health measures to limit and suppress critical reporting and political opposition – particularly around elections.**

Headlines and highlights

Global

- When the pandemic hit, states across the globe responded by presenting a false dichotomy between human rights and public health, shutting down public discussion and scrutiny over key decisions in the name of crisis-management.
- Expression was the biggest human rights casualty of the pandemic: two-thirds of the world's states put restrictions on media; many countries implemented states of emergency that were counter to human rights standards; and the flow of information came under tight control, as many governments took more interest in controlling the narrative around the pandemic than controlling the pandemic itself.
- The global state of freedom of expression continues to deteriorate and is now at its lowest score in a decade. Even more concerningly, 2020 saw significant drops in protest and public participation indicators – two key elements of freedom of expression and democracy as a whole.
- Two-thirds of the world's population – 4.9 billion people – are living in countries that are **highly restricted** or **in crisis**: more than at any time in the last decade.
- Seven countries – with a combined population of 72 million people – saw a significant decline in their overall environment for freedom of expression in 2020; many more countries are in decline than are in advance.
- Disinformation spread across the world faster than any virus could, and was met with problematic attempts to legislate against it, many of which were extremely vague and open to abuse – as many countries promptly proved in their implementation of those laws. Some states and officials themselves even spread disinformation, while whistleblowers and reporters on the issue were silenced, harassed, or detained.
- The balance of power has shifted in the wrong direction: power was concentrated in the executive branch of government in countries globally, under the pretext of emergency management, while independent media and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) took huge hits financially, making them weaker and more vulnerable in the face of authorities looking to restrict their function.
- Content, and how it is accessed, continue to be controlled and hosted on platforms with opaque algorithms and unaccountable corporate monopolies; social media platforms' moves towards human rights considerations, and their attempts to tackle disinformation, have been cosmetic at best.

Africa

- No country in the region is rated **open**; more people are living in the **in crisis** and **highly restricted** categories than have been in the last decade.
- Pandemic management was characterised by security-force abuses – particularly against demonstrations and around elections – and attempts to control the narrative, while disinformation laws proliferated and economic challenges hit independent media across the region.
- Numerous leaders moved to bend and change constitutions constitutions to stay in power, often silencing all critical voices and political opposition to do so, while the pandemic was instrumentalised to control protests in many cases (see Chapter 2.3 on Guinea).

The Americas

- The regional score is at its lowest in a decade.
- The Americas are plagued by populist autocrats, many of whom poisoned the information environment through denialism and disinformation around the pandemic.
- The murder of journalists and human rights defenders (HRDs) is a chronic issue in the region; this violence continues with impunity, and is often linked to coverage of corruption or activism against extraction or agribusiness projects. Organised crime and armed groups continue to be a major factor in numerous countries.

Asia and the Pacific

- The regional score is at its lowest in a decade; 85% of the population lives in countries ranked **in crisis** or **highly restricted** – a 39% rise since 2010.
- China's influence in the region is rising; Hong Kong's score took a huge hit this year as China passed laws throttling freedom of expression.
- Ethno-religious nationalism and military influence are toxic forces in the region.

Europe and Central Asia

- 34% of the population lives in **in crisis** countries.
- The regional score fell in 2020, having held steady since 2016.
- Autocratisation continues apace in Central Europe, even within the EU; the populist leaderships of Hungary, Poland, and Slovenia continue to erode checks and balances – and to capture independent media – while other countries are following suit.

Middle East and North Africa

- The region has the world's lowest regional score by some distance – and it is still falling.
- No country in the region is ranked **open**, while 72% of the population lives in countries **in crisis**.
- Due to entrenched authoritarianism in the region – as well as extremely restricted civic space and non-existent independent press in many countries – many scores have not moved in the last 10 years.

"The most common democratic violation in relation to the pandemic was media restrictions. Populist governments have continued to threaten democracy by attacking the free press."

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The right to freedom of expression in a pandemic

Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) states the following:

1. Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.

2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.

3. The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of this Article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:

   (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others;

   (b) For the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals.

Under international human rights law, freedom of expression may be subject to restrictions for public health reasons, even in the absence of a state of emergency. These restrictions, however, must meet the following requirements:

- **Legality:** The restriction must be 'provided by law'. This means that the limitation must be contained in a national law of general application, which is in force at the time the limitation is applied. The law must not be arbitrary or unreasonable, and it must be clear and accessible to the public.

- **Necessity:** The restriction must be necessary for the protection of one of the permissible grounds stated in the ICCPR, which include public health, and must respond to a pressing social need.

- **Proportionality:** The restriction must be proportionate to the interest at stake, i.e. it must be appropriate to achieve its protective function; and it must be the least intrusive option among those that might achieve the desired result.

- **Non-discrimination:** No restriction shall discriminate contrary to the provisions of international human rights law.

Emergency measures and laws are similarly governed by international standards: state-of-emergency legislation and measures should:

- Be strictly temporary in scope,

- Be the least intrusive to achieve the stated public health goals, and

- Include safeguards such as sunset or review clauses in order to ensure return to ordinary laws as soon as the emergency situation is over.

States should take measures to prevent human rights violations and abuses associated with the state of emergency perpetrated by both state and non-state actors.

> **"2020 has seen the world face a public health crisis of unprecedented proportions. In such times, governments have a fundamental duty to be transparent about their decisions, and a legal obligation to protect people's lives."**

Chapter 1

The Global View

2021 hindsight

The seeds of the global response to COVID-19 were sown over the last decade, with tightening expression environments, isolationist attitudes, populist strongmen hostile to journalism and science, and erosion of multilateral engagement and trust.

The pandemic hit a world already fraught with censorship and denigration of dissent or political opposition – the worst global expression situation in a decade. On these foundations was built a government response that shut down public discussion and scrutiny and deepened inequality. Many governments have used the health crisis as a pretext to further control expression – online, in the media, and on the streets – at the very time we needed it most.

The rights to expression and information have been among the biggest casualties of the pandemic.

The global environment continues to decline – it is at its lowest score in a decade. Even more concerningly, 2020 saw significant drops in protest and public-participation indicators – two key elements of freedom of expression and democracy as a whole.

'Back to normal' isn't an option: We need meaningful investment and sustained action to centre Expression as a means of strengthening public health, driving rapid action on the climate crisis and to support the economic recovery.

Global scores

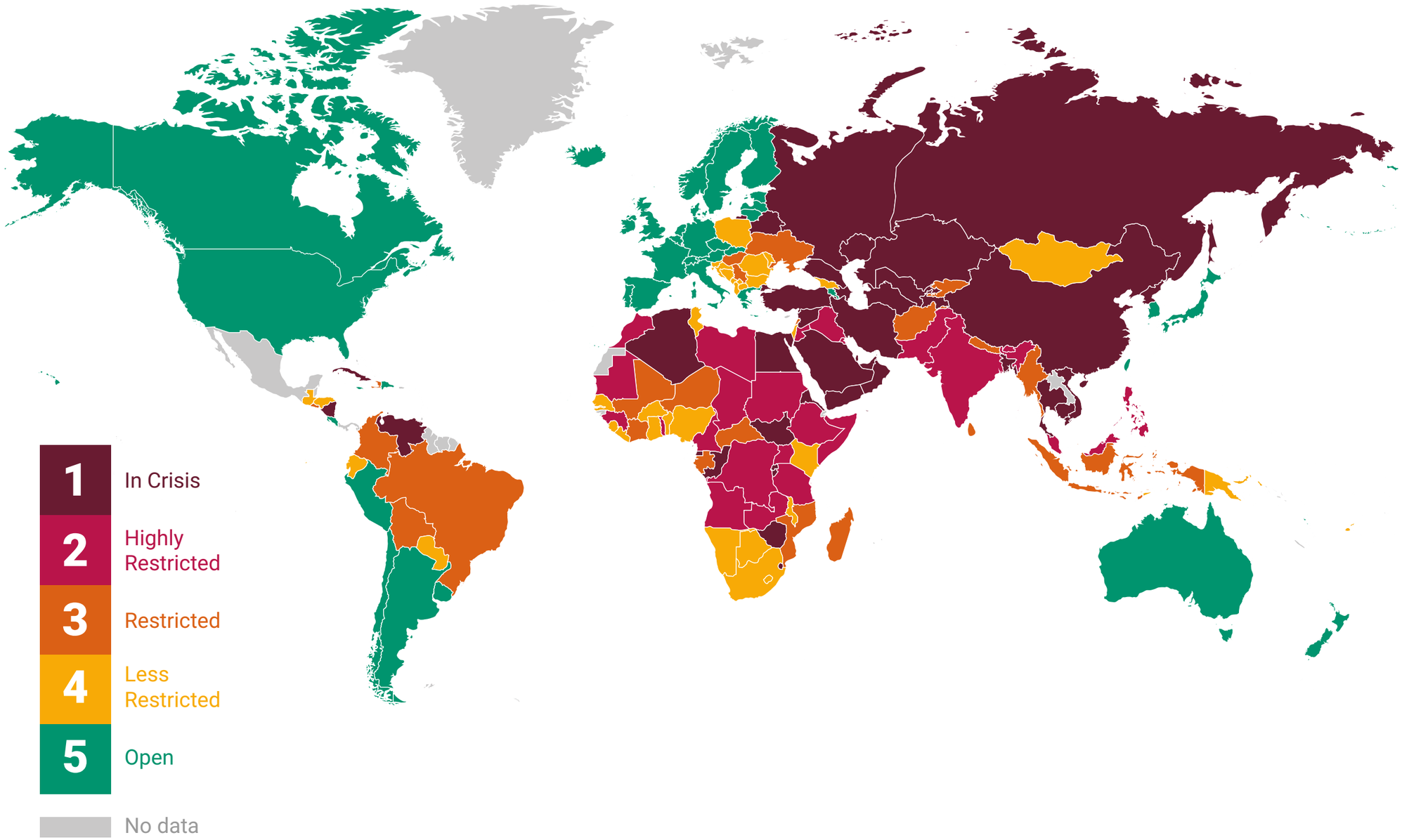

Figure 1: Global GxR map

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Global freedom of expression continues to decline and is now at its lowest ebb in a decade.

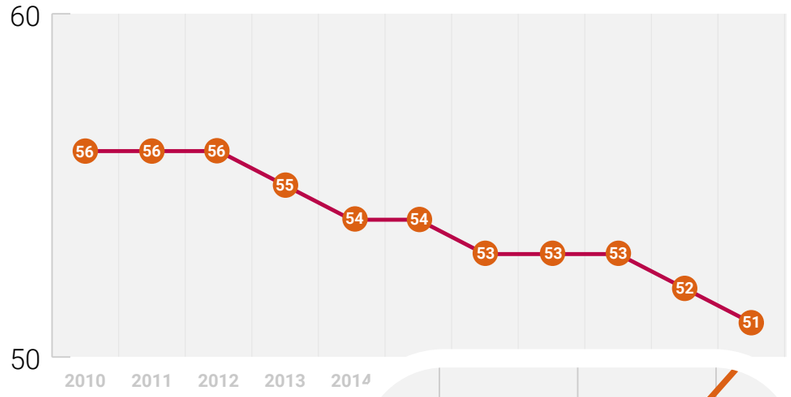

Figure 2: Global GxR scores 2010–2020

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2020: public deliberations for policy c
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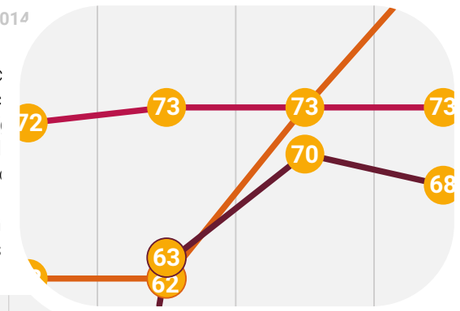
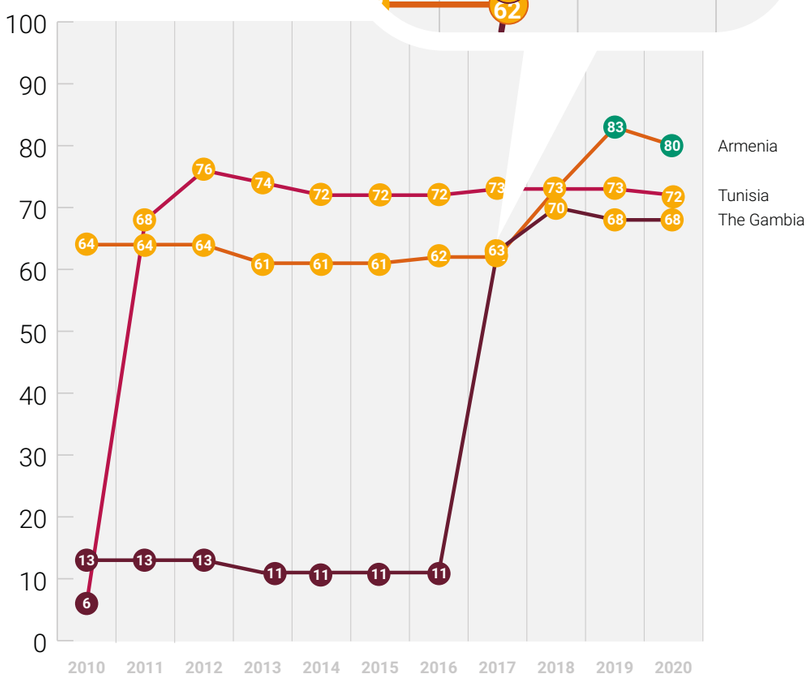
Over the last decade, the countries th
the largest rise in public deliberations

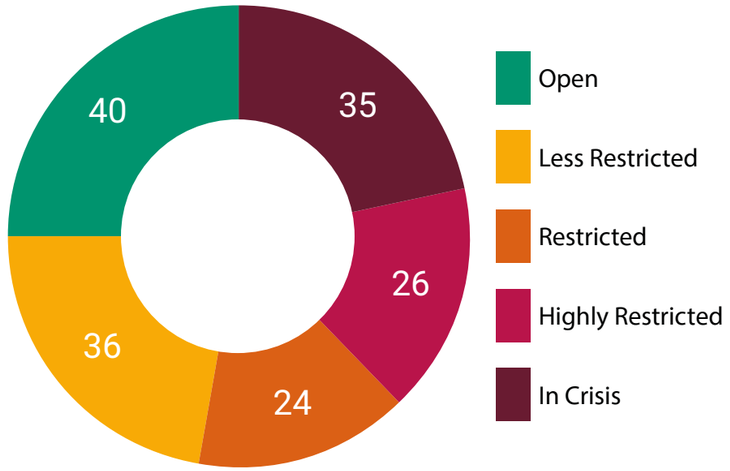




click to enlarge overlapping data points

Figure 3: GxR scores 2010–2020: The Gambia, Tunisia, and Armenia

Number of countries per expression category



% Global population per expression category

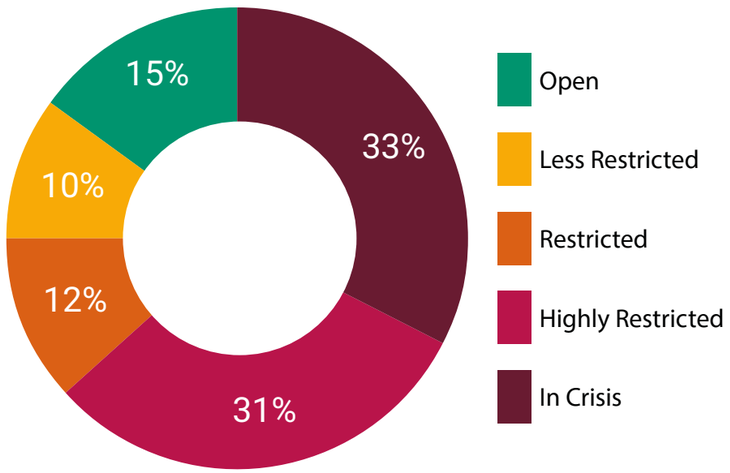


Figure 4: Number of countries and the percentage of global population in each expression category, 2020

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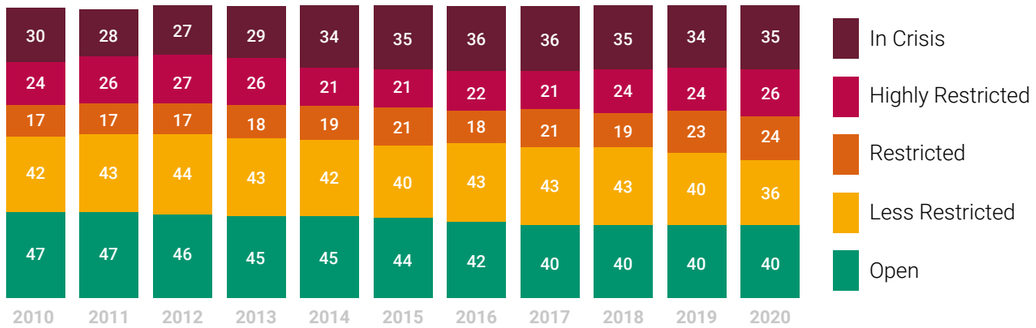
Two-thirds of the world's population (4.9 billion people) now live in countries rated either **highly restricted** or **in crisis**. This is a higher number of people than ever before. Although the number of countries in these categories has only risen by seven since 2010, the corresponding percentage of the global population has risen dramatically – from 32% in 2010 to 64% in 2020.

Number of countries in each expression category 2010–2020



Percentage of the global population in each expression category, 2010–2020

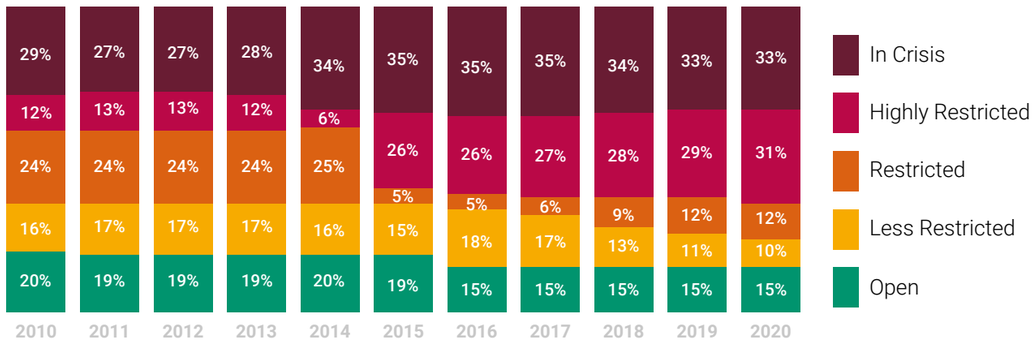


Figure 5: Number of countries and the percentage of global population in each expression category, 2010–2020

Over the last decade, a total of 44 countries have been **in crisis**, only 10 of which have been able to shift out of the category (if only temporarily) after falling into it.

The majority of countries (57%) have stayed in the same expression category for the past 10 years. Among the 69 countries that shifted, 27 moved up a category at some point. Of these, only 14 were either able to maintain this gain or were merely recovering from losses earlier in the decade (see Annex 2 for full data).

Regional scores

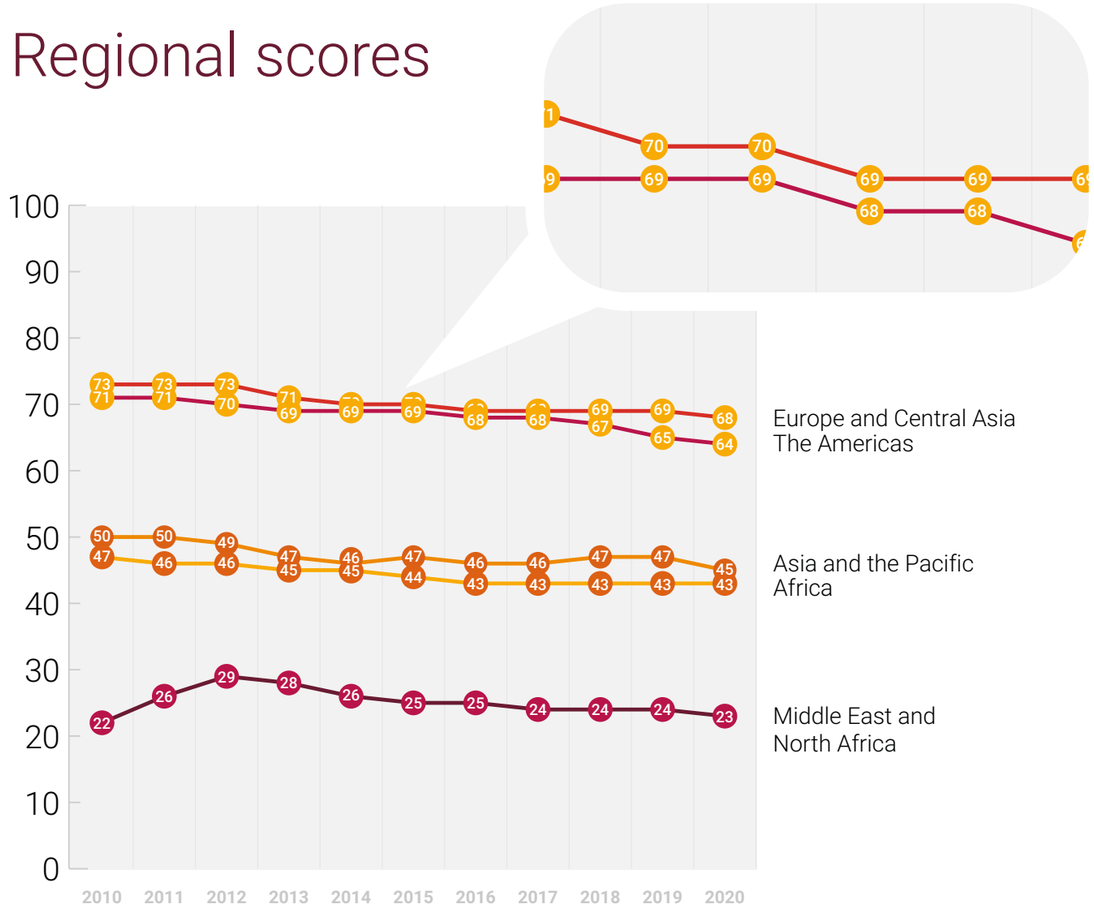


Figure 6: Regional GxR scores 2010–2020

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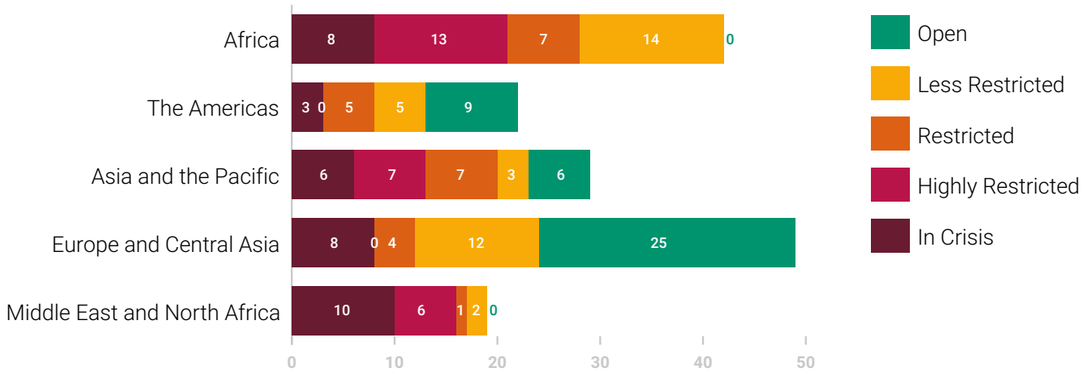
overlapping data points

Number of countries per expression category



Percentage of the population per expression category

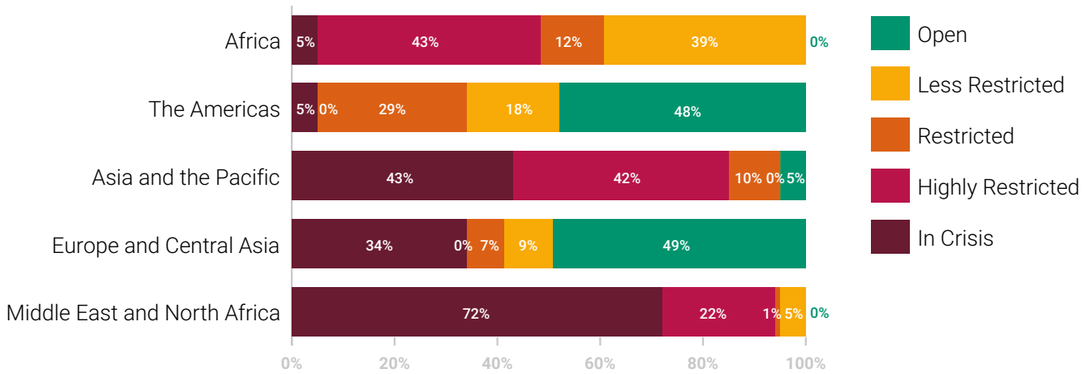


Figure 7: Number of countries and percentage of population by region per expression category, 2020

Highs and lows, rises and falls

Top 5	GxR score
Denmark	95
Switzerland	95
Norway	94
Sweden	94
Finland	94
Belgium	92
Estonia	92
Ireland	92
Uruguay	92
Latvia	91

Bottom 5	GxR score
North Korea	0
Eritrea	1
Turkmenistan	1
Syria	1
China	2
Bahrain	3
Saudi Arabia	3
Tajikistan	3
Cuba	3
Equatorial Guinea	4

Table 1: Top 10 and bottom 10 country GxR scores in 2020

GxR scores are the most consistent among the top- and bottom-performing countries. Most score changes occur in the middle-ranking countries. The bottom 10 have not changed since last year, and only one country (Cuba) experienced a score change – and only of one point.

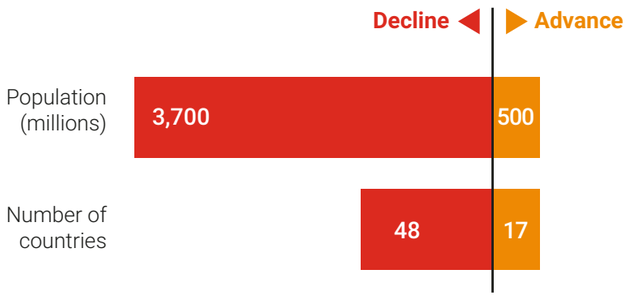


Figure 8: Population and number of countries that experienced significant advances and declines in GxR scores, 2010–2020

Far more people live in states of declining than advancing freedom of expression. Seven countries – with a combined population of 72 million people – saw a significant decline in their overall expression environment between 2019 and 2020. Only one country saw a significant advance.

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Significant advances in GxR scores

2019–2020		2015–2020		2010–2020	
Dominican Republic	+14	The Gambia	+57	Tunisia	+67
		Maldives	+31	The Gambia	+55
		Ecuador	+24	Burma/Myanmar	+37
		Ethiopia	+21	Libya	+36
		Armenia	+19	Fiji	+22

Significant declines in GxR scores

2019–2020		2015–2020		2010–2020	
Sri Lanka	-21	Hong Kong	-34	Hong Kong	-47
Belarus	-18	Brazil	-33	India	-38
Guinea	-18	Philippines	-27	Brazil	-36
Hong Kong	-17	Poland	-26	Nicaragua	-31
Slovenia	-14	Nicaragua	-23	Philippines	-28

Table 2: Top 5 countries with significant advances and declines in GxR scores, 2019–2020, 2015–2020, and 2010–2020

	Number of countries	Percentage of total countries in region
Africa	18	43%
The Americas	8	36%
Asia and the Pacific	12	41%
Europe and Central Asia	15	31%
Middle East and North Africa	5	26%
Global	58	36%

Table 3: Countries that have experienced a downward shift in expression categories at some point between 2010 and 2020

What has been driving the change?

We have looked at the changes in indicators which have contributed to changes in GxR scores over three time periods (see Table 4). What we have seen is that across all timeframes, freedom of discussion, freedom of academic and cultural expression, Internet censorship efforts, government censorship efforts, and the extent to which the government controls civil society organisations' (CSO) entry and exit into public life have been important indicators. (For more detail on regression analysis, see Annex 1)

2019–2020	2015–2020	2010–2020
Freedom of discussion for men and women	Government censorship efforts	CSO repression
Freedom of academic and cultural expression	Freedom of discussion for men and women	Freedom of discussion for men and women
Internet censorship efforts	CSO repression	Government censorship efforts
Government censorship efforts	CSO entry and exit	CSO entry and exit
Engaged society	Freedom of academic and cultural expression	Internet censorship efforts
CSO entry and exit	Arrests for political content	CSO consultation
	Internet censorship efforts	Government social media censorship in practice
	Harassment of journalists	Engaged society
		Freedom of academic and cultural expression

Table 4: Indicators tied most closely to overall changes in GxR scores

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Global trends

The rights to expression and information were among the first casualties of the pandemic. There were necessary restrictions on human rights on the grounds of public health – but many governments used the pandemic as a smokescreen to limit free speech and crush opposition.

Many governments seemed more interested in controlling the narrative than in controlling the virus itself. Two-thirds of states imposed media restrictions in response to the pandemic: it was the most common democratic violation measured by V-Dem.

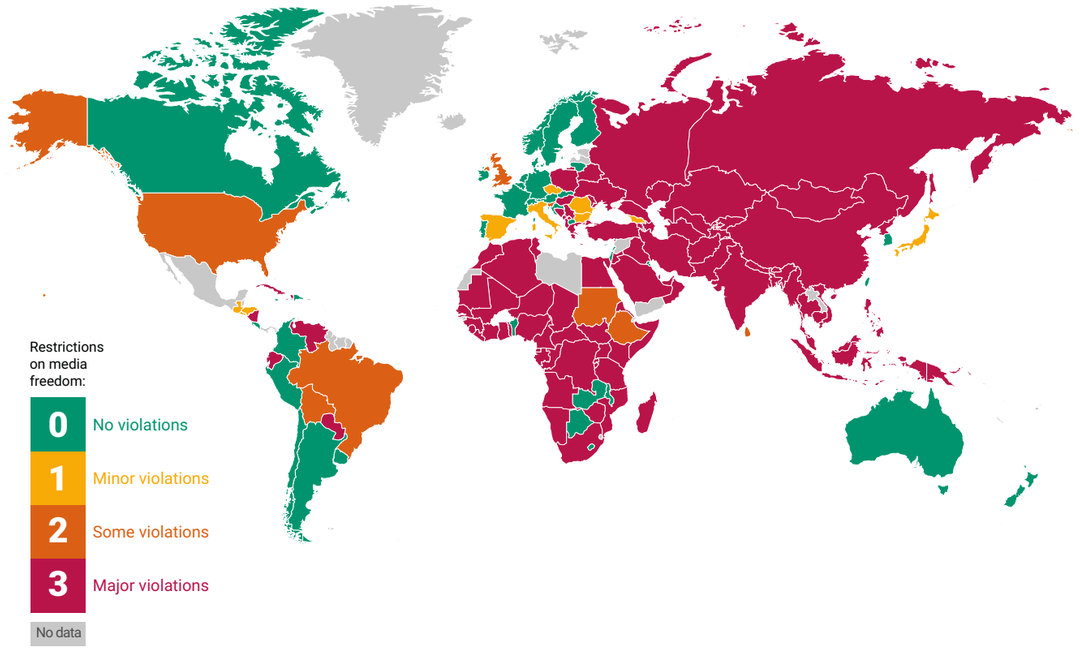

Figure 9: Restrictions on media freedom in the context of the pandemic

In 2020, 62 journalists were killed and record numbers were imprisoned (274 imprisonments). Journalists, bloggers, and whistleblowers were arrested (often arbitrarily), detained, and prosecuted for criticising governments' responses to COVID-19. China, Turkey, and Egypt were the biggest jailers.

Of 620 violations of press freedom recorded globally in the first 14 months of the pandemic, 34% were physical and verbal attacks on journalists; 34% were arrests of journalists, or charges filed against journalists and media organisations by governments; and a further 14% were government-imposed restrictions on access to information.

Arrests quadrupled from March to May 2020, and harassment and physical attacks rose across the world – from Brazil to Italy, Kenya, Senegal, and Nigeria. Journalists, bloggers, HRDs, and political activists were summoned for questioning and arrested for expressing views on COVID-19 or sharing information, including in Palestine, Poland, Madagascar, Eswatini, India, Tunisia, Niger, and Cameroon. Whistleblowers were inadequately protected – and, in many cases, even silenced by government themselves.

Most of this violence and harassment happened in a context of total impunity. Most murders of journalist do not even reach the headlines in international media. Even those that do, such as Jamal Khashoggi (UN investigators into Khashoggi's case faced death threats), Ján Kuciak, and Daphne Caruana Galizia (see Chapter 5.2), do not get justice – even with high-level government officials implicated in their deaths.

The virus also presented a brand-new risk to journalists: infection with COVID-19 itself. Many were not provided with adequate protection.

Harassment of women journalists in all regions of the world continues to be an acute issue, aggravated by communication moving into the online realm (where harassment is commonplace, often enabled or emboldened by anonymity and impunity) during the pandemic. In 2020, it was found that three-quarters of women journalists have experienced online abuse and harassment.

HRDs are also under attack. At least 331 were killed in 2020, 69% of whom were working on indigenous people's or land rights. In the five countries with the world's largest areas of tropical forest – Brazil, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Indonesia, and Peru – governments have exploited the pandemic situation to roll back social and environmental laws, regulations, and safeguards, prioritising megaprojects and mining over the rights of communities. The majority of killings of HRDs took place in Latin America; Colombia alone accounted for 53% of murders of HRDs globally (see Chapter 3).

The Escazú Agreement entered into force in November 2020, bringing hopes for change – it is the first environmental treaty in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the first to include specific provisions on environmental HRDs. However, though signatories, two of the most dangerous countries for environmental defenders – Brazil and Colombia – have yet to ratify the agreement.

The crisis, its reach, and the delayed global response is a result of limitations on expression in the country of the virus's origin: China.

When the virus emerged into this totally restricted expression and information environment, the government silenced online communication about it, withheld information from the public, stage managed state media reports, and silenced health workers – effectively preventing information from reaching medical professionals, the public, and the international community during a vital time for controlling the pandemic.

The story of Dr Li Wenliang is a testament to the importance of information and the tragic consequences of silencing experts and whistleblowers. Li tried to warn the medical community in the early days of the outbreak, alerting them to a new disease at his hospital in late December 2019 and recommending protective equipment to prevent infection.

Government security forces came to his house days later, accusing him of disturbing the public order and forcing him to sign a statement agreeing not to discuss the disease further. One week later, Li himself was infected, and died of COVID-19 in February 2020.

The Chinese state invested substantial time and resources in controlling the international narrative around its role in the pandemic, sending resources and doctors across the region – and even having the state media suggest that the pandemic originated in Italy.

Many governments have used the pandemic in attempts to justify new limits on free speech and protest, with a spate of new laws and regulations – at least 57 on free speech and 147 on protest. Accelerating trends of previous years, primary and secondary legislation on 'hate speech' and disinformation proliferated, as well failures of transparency and brutal treatment of protest. In 2020, 34 journalists were jailed for 'false news' offences, compared with 31 in 2019.

Hate speech against minority groups (particularly those blamed for spreading the virus) and disinformation proliferated throughout the year, putting public health at risk – as well as the security of minority groups. The policy response to both issues has been knee-jerk and too vague, including laws that are wide open to abuse – and that were often implemented abusively (see Chapter 1.4).

Many governments relied on or empowered police and security forces as key actors in pandemic management. This securitised response meant violence and suppression in both lockdown and protest, with journalists and activists harassed, arrested, and detained in Iran, El Salvador, Kenya, Turkey, and Thailand – to name only a few. In the Philippines, 100,000 people were arrested for lockdown violations. Egypt increased the military's legal authority in emergencies during this time, and some countries (e.g. Serbia, Lebanon, and the Philippines) brought in the military to enforce pandemic measures.

As the pandemic pushed much of the world online for social, professional, educational, and economic interaction and exchange, digital rights suffered numerous attacks. More governments than ever turned to Internet shutdowns and throttling – there were at least 155 shutdowns in 29 countries. New laws restricting online speech, under the guise of tackling issues like 'cybercrime' or 'incitement', proliferated and were enforced abusively, targeting online communicators and critical speech.

The pandemic and its corresponding measures forced an increased reliance on the digital space, which is unequal and unaccountable, reinforcing real-world inequalities and magnifying discrimination.

The digital divide continues to yawn: those without Internet access – who are disproportionately women, indigenous people, and rural communities – found themselves without access to key information about the pandemic.

The decision of most governments across the world to rely on technology and online distribution of information compounded the marginalisation of some groups, and particularly affected children, whose schooling was suddenly entirely online. Some governments even refused opportunities to alleviate that economic burden, e.g. Uganda's already-controversial social media tax was kept in place.

Some infrastructural Internet companies and mobile operators made efforts to help connect those who remained without connection, but the business models of major operators continues to disadvantage marginalised communities, which are not considered sufficiently profitable to warrant investment in infrastructure.

Many authorities also silenced creative expression. Satire, the visual arts, and music were targeted by governments across the GxR spectrum, from Spain to Cuba, where the San Isidro Collective – a group of performance artists, which has faced years of harassment – went on hunger strike in 2020, only to be interrupted by police raids on the spurious grounds of breaking pandemic regulations.

Globally, more than 300 artists were arbitrarily detained, prosecuted, or sentenced to prison terms, mostly on political grounds, like criticism of state officials or national symbols – particularly around the pandemic.

The year was also marked by vast government secrecy, massaged statistics, hidden deaths, and dodgy contracts. There was an acute lack of transparency on case numbers and the extent of outbreaks (e.g. in Brazil, Iran, and Belarus) – and harsh punishments for those who revealed alternative figures. Many regimes insisted on exclusive use of government statistics and sources (e.g. United Arab Emirates), while whistleblowers were attacked and fired across the world for reporting on the often-dire situations they encountered in their places of work (e.g. the UK and Poland).

2020 was a perfect storm of corruption in both the private and public sectors, as procurement scrambled to meet new needs for personal protective equipment and ventilators, beset by shortages, price gouging, thefts, embezzlement, and quality-control problems. Globally, an estimated USD 1 billion is involved in corruption and malfeasance cases. In the panic of the emergency, public procurement rules were ignored – even high-scoring countries, like the UK, were found to be making illegal secret contracts.

There was, however, a surge of interest in public decisions and public spending – even amid radically reduced availability of information – as many governments suspended compliance with their own freedom of information (FOI) processes.

Judiciaries proved their democratic value, particularly to transparency, in blocking executive powers' attempts to disregard FOI processes (e.g. in Poland and Scotland). Other countries' information institutions simply blocked, denied, or censored huge numbers of requests, as seen in Mexico (see Chapter 3.4) and Brazil (see Chapter 3.3).

One of the most severe effects of the pandemic was (and will continue to be) economic. The contraction of the world's economy hit media outlets financially, with huge losses of advertising revenue – much of which had already been lost to online and social media.

Though legacy media regained some public trust, only a handful of outlets saw big boosts in subscriptions. Globally, there were huge lay-offs, pay cuts, and reductions in the media's capacity to carry out public-interest journalism; in Bangladesh alone, for example, 1,600 journalists lost their jobs. 'News deserts', which have been appearing globally for years, are now propagating at alarming rates as local outlets fold.

The economic squeeze affects all of civic space, but it impacts women communicators and activists disproportionately. Cuts to public services and NGOs also hit women particularly hard, e.g. funds from domestic-violence services were cut – or even directly diverted to COVID-19 programmes.

Media – particularly local and independent media – continue to struggle with financial shortages, in part due to the disruption of the advertising market by social media and Big Tech. Some initiatives emerged, but they arrived hand-in-hand with the most acute cases of platform capitalism – at best self-interested, at worst a huge threat to media independence.

Google and Facebook increasingly offer infrastructure, tools, and funding to media, all of which further ties outlets into their platforms (e.g. for hosting and distribution of content), thereby strengthening their monopoly on expression. Without real understanding of the situation on the ground, international funding is even given to government mouthpieces.

Somewhat predictably, digital giants reported a great year, with huge hiring sprees and enormous profits. With a weakened media and a struggling civil society, the balance of power between government, society, and these corporations has shifted in the wrong direction. 2020 did, however, see some moves from the USA to investigate monopolistic practices in those corporations, and some self-regulatory practices (see Chapter 1.9).

Privacy was routinely violated in 2020, with the normalisation of surveillance and poor data practices under the guise of tracking contagion or enforcing lockdowns. Internet-governance bodies, like the International Telecommunications Union and Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, also made worrying moves towards poor standards (e.g. on facial recognition) despite a total lack of research – or even proof of effectiveness. Laws and regulations justifying the interception of digital communications continue to emerge globally, often without oversight; Niger's new law, for example, lacks judicial guarantees and appeals, and puts the power to authorise interceptions entirely in the executive's hands.

> **"Populist leaders and those who seek to entrench their own power hate accountability, which is why we have seen attacks on journalists and online censorship intensify in many countries."**

1.2

Democracy amid coronavirus

The last 10 years have seen a trend towards autocracy worldwide, with democratic institutions hollowed, media and civil society attacked, and checks and balances on executive powers eroded in polarised societies with weakened opposition and oversight.

The pandemic accelerated these trends. According to V-Dem data, the level of democracy enjoyed by the average global citizen in 2020 is down to levels last found around 1990, and 68% of the world's population now live in autocracies – up from 48% in 2010.

The public health emergency was taken up as an excuse to limit democracy and centralise power as a smokescreen for power grabs. This supposedly necessary trade-off between human rights and human life is a fallacy in terms of both autocratic and populist regimes.

No fewer than 95 countries (66%) committed either moderate or major violations of democracy during this time period. Due process for derogating from the ICCPR was neglected in many cases, minimising accountability for those effective derogations.

Pandemic management was characterised by a combination of hasty and tactical law-making that shifted power to executives; eroded checks and balances; failed to properly define terms like 'pandemic', 'fake news', and 'causing panic'; and implemented criminal penalties unnecessarily.

In the face of the pandemic, 108 emergency laws were passed, 57 of which affected freedom of expression. The most problematic included Hungary's Authorisation Act, which handed over decree power and legislative controls, and amended the Hungarian Criminal Code. Another concerning example was Cambodia's, which provided for unlimited surveillance and a catch-all category of 'measures deemed appropriate or necessary'. One-third of all countries across the world – from Albania to Mexico and The Gambia – imposed emergency laws with no time limit.

At least 78 countries and territories decided to postpone national and subnational elections due to COVID-19, of which at least 41 countries and territories decided to postpone national elections and referendums. Some of these postponements seemed to be enacted strategically (e.g. in Latin America), while other elections were subject to pandemic rules for polling or voter registration, which distorted or excluded voters.

Political participation was limited on many fronts. Many were not able to go the polls, demonstrate on the streets, or even fully inform themselves on public policy around the pandemic. Consultation with the public on emergency policy was extremely limited worldwide.

Many emergency responses undermined parliamentary and legislative balances on power – more than 2 billion people live in countries where parliaments were suspended under emergency measures. This concentrated power in the executive, as in Colombia and Uganda, where judicial proceedings were suspended during lockdown.

New emergency communications mechanisms appeared, which often took the form of direct communication between presidents and populations, via either social media or tightly managed digital press conferences. Most lacked processes of reply or space for opposition, e.g. Colombia's Presidential YouTube broadcasts, the USA's ongoing political circus, and Mexico's 'morning briefings' on social media. Globally, press conferences were characterised by selective exclusions and management of questions in problematic ways.

It comes as no surprise that, according to V-Dem's Pandemic Violations of Democratic Standards Index, more-restrictive countries committed more violations during the pandemic. However, countries **in crisis** – which did not score too highly on the V-Dem Democratic Violations metric – simply did not need to commit new violations; it seems that the restrictive tools and structures already in place served to control expression amid the pandemic – without moderation or new regulation (see Figure 10).

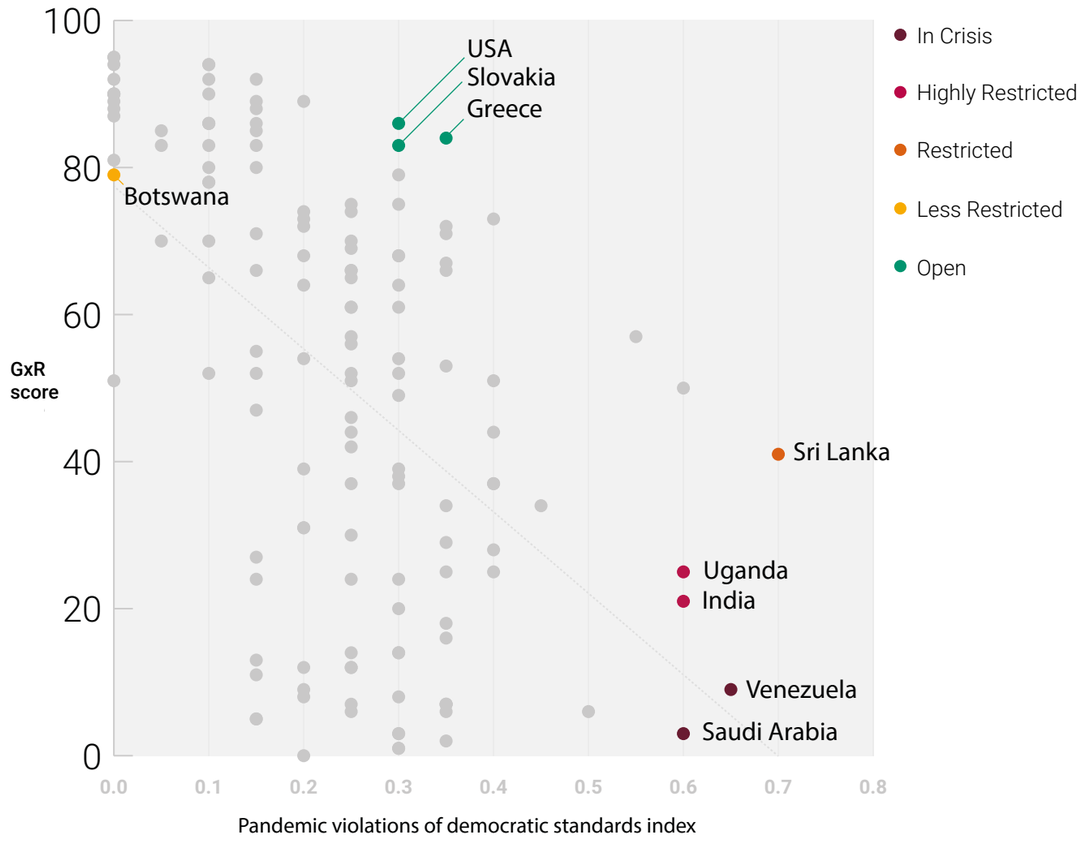

Figure 10: GxR scores and pandemic violations of democratic standards index

However, we identified some outliers to this correlation: countries that saw either more or fewer violations than would be expected, given their expression category.

Among **open** countries, Greece, Slovakia, and the USA were outliers. Sri Lanka was an outlier in the **restricted** category, as were Uganda and India in the **highly restricted** category. Of the countries **in crisis**, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela piled on new restrictions on democracy. Botswana was an outlier of another sort, with fewer violations of democratic standards during the pandemic than other countries in its expression category.

Though many regimes discarded oversight and consultation, and little legislative restraint was exercised in the emergency, there was some good news, and some countries continued to apply democratic principles in managing the pandemic. Portugal's state of emergency consisted of 15-day periods for renewal, while Germany's constitutional court ruled that health concerns linked to COVID-19 did not furnish grounds for a general ban on demonstrations. Non-executive branches of power demonstrated institutional resilience in the face of executive power, e.g. Malawi's high court barred imposition of a lockdown pending judicial review, and judiciaries across Europe blocked attempts to put the right to information on hold.

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1.3

Misinformation, disinformation, and fake news

Disinformation is not new, and will be a key issue for expression and information rights long after the pandemic passes, but the global spread of COVID-19 has made it a life-or-death issue. In Iran, hundreds died after drinking methanol alcohol, which messages on social media said had cured others of the coronavirus.

The impact of disinformation is the result of an expression crisis. Its effect has been more substantial due to the fractured information environment into which it entered, characterised by reduced pluralism, a crisis of trust in media, and a lack of media literacy, as well as a plethora of social causes and polarised political landscapes.

Though the threats posed by disinformation are very real, just as real are the threats of state-controlled information and the opaque, selective sorting of media content by dominant digital platforms. Algorithms prioritise content that keeps people on platforms, i.e. content that evokes a reaction of some sort – often sensationalist.

A wave of problematic regulation – poorly defined, broad, vague, or all three – rose to meet the wave of confusion and misinformation brought about by the pandemic. Much of this legislation is wide open to abuse by governments, many of which have already begun to weaponise it. The panic around information and disinformation has weakened human rights protections and standards worldwide.

Some of these new regulations may have been good-faith attempts to tackle a real problem, but many aimed to ensure government control of the narrative. Such regulations have been used to cover up the scale of outbreaks and incompetence in their management, or even to target political opposition.

If 'disinformation' is problematically vague, 'fake news' is disastrously so, making it a useful battle cry for despots and populist autocrats, often to delegitimise. Donald Trump popularised the term during his presidential tenure, but it has since been normalised across the globe.

And yet, despite their vagueness, these terms have become commonly used legal terms across the globe – in laws that were almost immediately used to silence criticism, dissent, and vital information.

Disinformation comes in many different forms, from many different sources, and makes many different claims. It frequently reconfigures existing or true content, rather than fabricating it wholesale – and, where it is manipulated, it is edited with simple tools.

Disinformation has spread quickly on social media and messaging applications during the pandemic. The most dangerous such disinformation has been conspiracy theories about ethnic minorities spreading the disease and hate speech, which has translated into real-world violence and discrimination, spurious home remedies for the prevention or cure of the virus, and propaganda – by both domestic and foreign states.

To minimise the effects of disinformation, public authorities, media, journalists, platforms, fact-checkers, and civil society must make authoritative health content available and visible. Another key road to take will be media literacy, i.e. advancing citizens' ability to recognise and react to such disinformation.

When disinformation reaches the threshold of being illegal, those acts should be addressed by the competent authorities, in line with applicable legal norms, of which there are already a plethora in areas such as incitement to violence, consumer fraud, etc.

Unfortunately, governments around the world resorted to a legislative approach, drafting and passing repressive and overbroad laws to target supposed misinformation concerning COVID-19. Official responses to misinformation have often relied heavily on censorship, with criminal sanctions and prison sentences that raise concerns about proportionality.

In 2020, there were at least 17 new pieces of specific legislation on disinformation and 'fake news'. Some were criminal law, some imposed fines on outlets, and others granted authorities power to force social media platforms to remove content. This has been a growing issue for years, but the drive to legislate on it was accelerated by the pandemic and fears around health disinformation.

Though South East Asia has been a particular hub of these laws, they spread across the world: Morocco, Jordan, and Vietnam have specific 'fake news' legislation; Russia made amendments to its criminal code; Thailand's new rules were part of the state of emergency in March 2020; and Malaysia brought in emergency regulation – to name but a few. Many of these laws carried draconian penalties, e.g. Bolivia's had a 10-year prison sentence, while Uzbekistan's provides for two years of correctional labour.

Under Russia's new amendment to the criminal code, media outlets found to have deliberately spread 'false information' could face huge fines, while authorities gained the power to block websites that do not fulfil requests to remove 'inaccurate' information, as well as to censor those that show 'blatant disrespect' for the state online. The law was put to use within weeks.

There was some pushback against these new laws; in Europe, for example, strong scrutiny from institutions and civil society groups has been fundamental in pushing back against these efforts.

Though it has been an immensely complex and urgent issue during COVID-19, it is important to note that identifying falsehood around the pandemic is largely a scientific exercise. Allowing social media platforms or public officials to decide what counts as 'truth' will always be an extremely hazardous path to tread – but much more so when the notion of truth is applied to politics, history, or religion.

The issue is even more complex when the disinformation is created or spread by the government itself. State disinformation campaigns have also been prevalent – a new form of propaganda with higher stakes than ever in a pandemic environment.

In other cases, the disinformation comes from high-profile individuals – even premiers, like Jair Bolsonaro – often through personal, rather than official, social media accounts. These single individuals can have a huge impact on the spread of disinformation; the President of the USA was probably the largest driver of the COVID-19 misinformation 'infodemic' in the English language.

A human rights-based approach is the best one; there is growing evidence that disinformation tends to thrive where human rights are constrained, where the public information regime is not robust, and where media quality, diversity, and independence are weak.

Social media

As disinformation spread, social media regulation was more under the spotlight than ever. Viral disinformation has arisen in a context of corporate monopolies acting as the gatekeepers of expression across the world. From the platforms on which content is exchanged to the infrastructure over which these platforms are built, online expression relies on private entities.

With the arrival of COVID-19, companies coordinated and reacted significantly more swiftly to disinformation than at any previous time. On 16 March 2020, Facebook, Google, LinkedIn, Microsoft, Reddit, Twitter, and YouTube issued a joint statement on their commitment to fight COVID-related misinformation, publicly committing – for the first time – to join forces to address misinformation.

Twitter and YouTube adopted content-removal measures, and Facebook introduced fact-checking, directing users to health information, partnering with health bodies, and partaking in some content moderation. With a new patchwork of policies, platforms posted information boxes with links to trusted institutions; downranked, flagged, or removed health disinformation; and even deleted misleading tweets from major political figures, such as Brazilian President Bolsonaro and Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

These responses have been largely reactive, reticent, and dangerously opaque. There have been more content removals than ever – a higher proportion than previously carried out by artificial intelligence – while notifications and appeals processes for content removal, as well as transparency, are as lacking as ever. This mass disappearance of content could be a huge and silent violation of freedom of expression, with no way of tracking or quantifying it.

The efficacy of these measures also remains dubious. Addressing disinformation on social media platforms must be seen in the context of overall problems with their business model; if the model is unchanged, these reactive, content-focused policies can only be considered cosmetic. Algorithmic boosting of sensationalist content boosts engagement – and the revenue generated by online advertising is one of the key drivers of disinformation. YouTube and Facebook did make some moves towards demonetising posts related to COVID-19, though they later allowed monetisation from 'reputable outlets'.

Self-regulation and the effective application of competition law are two possible roads forward for equitable outcomes in online expression. Strides were made towards these in 2020 – cause for cautious hope.

Facebook has now launched its Oversight Board, to which appeal cases can be sent. As a central, global body for the review of content-moderation decisions across a global platform, this small group of experts will inevitably appear as a distant, out-of-reach interlocutor for the majority of Facebook users. The board, based in the USA, fails to incorporate the complexities of local contexts – and social, political, historical, cultural, and linguistic dimensions are key to making informed decisions on content moderation. Facebook – and other platforms – continues to remove content without notification or adequate explanation.

The first decisions were handed down in late 2020, on topics from disinformation to hate speech to nudity. Most of them corrected Facebook's decision, but caution should be exercised in concluding that the body will provide a real check on the corporation and its content policies.

The market dominance of tech giants was finally challenged in the USA in 2020, when the 'Big Four' were called to Capitol Hill. In July, Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook, Jeff Bezos of Amazon, Tim Cook of Apple, and Sundar Pichai of Alphabet (which owns Google and YouTube) faced a subcommittee of the US House of Representatives to answer allegations of monopolistic practices, abuses of privacy, and political bias, as well as of their part in the spread of disinformation on social media. The outcome of the hearing is pending.

1.4

Protest

Protest can force societies open, compel elites and power-holders to listen, and reform the relationship between people and government entirely. Despite the risks associated with COVID-19, people continue to take to the streets to speak out against corruption, electoral manipulation, police brutality, and economic hardship – and, now, the pandemic and pandemic management.

The GxR indicator for freedom of peaceful assembly underwent a serious decline in 2020, which signals a threat to freedom of expression and democracy more widely. Many of the GxR's great advances have been driven by protest movements, as in Tunisia and Armenia. Many others – like Ethiopia, Sudan, and the countries of the Arab Spring – saw huge advances as a result of protest, but were unable to hold on to those changes, and their GxR scores have dropped again.

There are valid situations for the limitation of public assembly, justified by public health considerations, but much of what we saw in 2020 involved blanket bans and abuse of those limitations – as well as selective enforcement. In Thailand, for example, political rallies were met with a hostile state response, while football celebrations were permitted (see Chapter 4.3).

In many places, protests continue to be met with repressive state responses, emboldened by states of emergency and public order legislation, which were often selectively applied to limit and silence dissent, instead of the necessary content-neutral approach to protest.

Bottom 10
Belarus
North Korea
Eritrea
Syria
Uganda
Turkmenistan
Tajikistan
Rwanda
Hong Kong
Saudi Arabia

Table 5: Global bottom 10 scores for the indicator 'freedom of peaceful assembly'

There was a huge drop in street demonstrations in early 2020 amid absolute assembly bans in many countries. Many of these laws and regulations had no exceptions (e.g. socially distanced protests) or expiration date, and were regularly unevenly enforced – particularly when it came to opposition rallies (see Chapter 2).

The management of the pandemic sparked numerous protests over the safety of health workers, from Malaysia to Pakistan and Kenya. Many lockdowns were perceived as either politically motivated (as in Bolivia, Israel, Serbia, and Uganda) or simply unsustainable for those without economic support, and people took to the streets in protest. Huge political gain was made from pandemic restrictions on protest in countries like Belarus and Guinea, contributing to the effective repression of opposition.

Anti-lockdown protests took place in at least 26 countries. For many, lockdown was not a viable option, without savings to live on or adequate sanitation in their immediate surroundings. Honduras saw more than 100 protests, 96 of which demanded food; the majority were dispersed with disproportionate force, with tear gas bombs and even live ammunition fired at those on the streets.

Breaking a lockdown was a protest for some but a necessity for others – authorities worldwide treated both with the same disregard and violence.

Old causes stayed relevant, and many of 2019's protest movements persisted, confronting inequality, corruption, and oppression. In Hong Kong, protests against China's Security Law spiked from May to June (see Chapter 4.2), while Algeria's Hirak movement continued, and Thailand saw continued calls for democratic reforms. Gender remained in focus, with protests for reproductive rights (Poland and Argentina) and against gender-based violence (Mexico and Belarus).

Violence and security-agent overstep against protests was widespread, with police and riot-control forces given broader licence than ever to disperse, harass, and arrest protesters.

Black Lives Matter

The USA saw historic protests in 2020, despite the pandemic. The demonstrations for racial equality – known as the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement – brought millions onto the streets in a wave of demonstration sparked by the police murder of George Floyd.

Demonstrators were on the streets in all 50 states, in over 1,600 towns and cities across the country, representing the broadest protests in US history. People took to the streets worldwide in solidarity – from Rio de Janeiro to Tunis, and on to London.

US police forces responded with violence and arbitrary arrests – over 17,000 protesters were detained during the first two weeks of protests alone. Demonstrations associated with the BLM movement were more than 90% peaceful, but nearly 10% were met with government intervention, compared to 3% of all other demonstrations.

As the protests went on, they were met with an increasingly militarised and aggressive police response. Police in various states shot rubber bullets at protesters – and even at those standing outside their own homes during curfews – as well as driving vehicles into protesters and undertaking violent arrests. Video recordings also documented unprovoked attacks by the police on protesters and journalists who identified themselves and sought to comply with police instructions.

During the protests, several reports documented the police covering their badges and identification, as well as using drones and mobile surveillance towers to enable persistent audio and visual surveillance.

The use of facial recognition has also been reported. The USA's use of these technologies is known to disproportionately misidentify non-white faces and compound the discriminatory nature of rights violations against protesters, while allowing police to track down protesters even after demonstrations end.

Security forces were five times more likely to use force against BLM protests than against any other type of protests.

Throwing gasoline on the fire of national polarisation around the protests, President Trump labelled peaceful protesters as terrorists, and sent military units – National Guard troops, Secret Service agents, and US Park Police, among other federal agents – to violently disperse peaceful protests in Lafayette Square outside the White House. The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project recorded over 50 federal and National Guard deployments across the country, though it was reported that their presence escalated tension and caused more violence.

Even Twitter flagged Trump's public communications around the protests as glorying violence after he tweeted that protesters were 'thugs' and said: 'when the looting starts, the shooting starts'. The official White House account reposted President Trump's tweet after it had already been flagged by Twitter.

Particularly concerning were the counterprotests that sprung up and often turned violent. The national polarisation exploded into violence; right-wing groups drove trucks through crowds of BLM supporters, and a vigilante shooter – unrestrained by police – killed two protesters.

Between 24 May and 22 August 2020, over 360 counterprotests were recorded around the country. Of these, 43 – nearly 12% – turned violent, with clashes between pro-police demonstrators and demonstrators associated with the BLM movement.

Video recordings also documented unprovoked attacks by the police on journalists, who identified themselves and sought to comply with police instructions. Protesters also attacked journalists in some cases, assaulting them, chasing them, and destroying their equipment.

Between the murder of George Floyd and the April 2021 conviction of the police officer who killed him, press-freedom violations were reported in more than 80 cities. In that time, an average of 1.6 assaults of journalists occurred per day. More than 85% of documented assaults were committed by law enforcement.

In protests during those 11 months, there were 580 assaults of journalists, 153 arrests or detainments, and 112 reports of equipment damaged in the field. Journalists were assaulted, arrested or detained, and subpoenaed for protest-related work at numbers not before documented.

Thousands of protesters were also arrested, but most cases were dismissed. This was not the case for journalists arrested during the protests, many of whom face long-term legal issues for offences like violating curfew, failure to disperse, disturbing the peace, resisting, or obstructing an officer.

After the protests, some parts of the USA committed to real reform of police forces, or to addressing discrimination in institutions. In other places, however, restrictive bills and laws have been introduced, significantly restricting the right to protest.

Police brutality itself was a trigger point for protest in every region, as police overstep in enforcing lockdowns sparked anger and fear. Nigeria's #EndSARS protests were a major uprising against the special anti-robbery forces notorious for their abuses. Tackling police brutality, and the systematic discrimination with which police forces are poisoned, has become a transnational issue.

2020 saw a worrying rise in attacks on journalists who were covering protests – especially following the lifting of lockdowns (see Chapter 4).

With pandemic restrictions on movement and association, non-physical forms of protest have also arisen, such as virtual murals, projections, cazerolazos, and online flashmobs. Though these methods are innovative, and an admirable attempt to navigate a global emergency, it must be noted that online protest and activism puts activists at a serious disadvantage: it takes place in a non-neutral space. Many autocracies tightly control the Internet – at both user and infrastructural levels – and surveil and punish activists who post and partake.

The resurgence of street demonstrations in early 2021, even amid ongoing infection peaks, is evidence of their value to social movements. Colombia's revived 2019 'Paro' protests, which went on for months in cities across the country, restarted in April 2021, and were met with the characteristic violence of the state response – from arbitrary arrests to sexual assault.

> **"Governments are getting worried. Their responses to protests have become more brutal and repressive because they – and we – know that protest is central to raising consciousness and creating change."**

Chapter 2

Africa

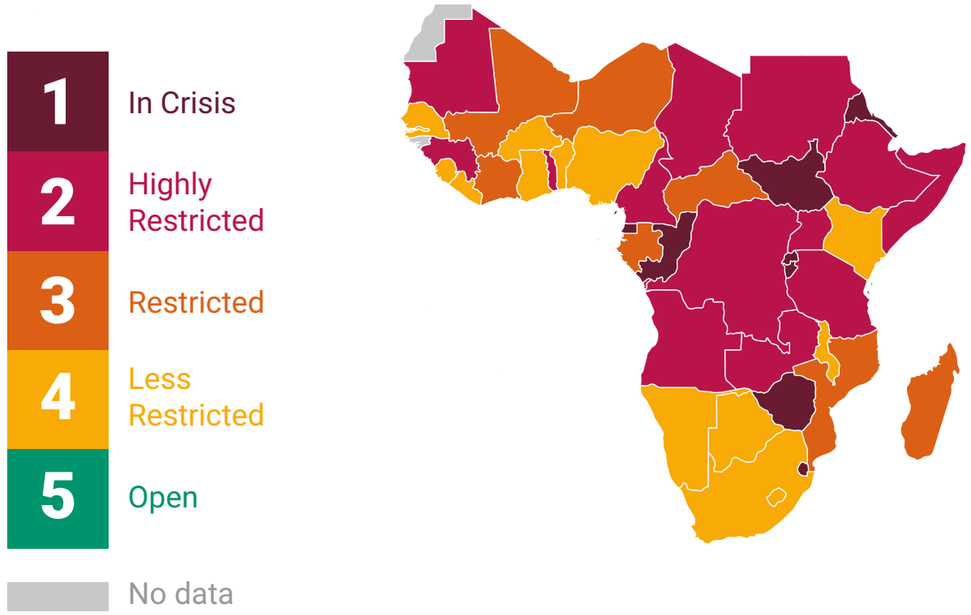


Figure 11: Africa GxR map

GxR score
43

Population
1.1 billion

Number of countries
42

- There are no countries rated **open** in the region. More people are living in the **in crisis** and **highly restricted** categories than have been in the last decade.
- Pandemic management was characterised by security-force abuses – particularly against demonstrations and around elections – and attempts to control the narrative; disinformation laws proliferated, and economic challenges hit independent media across the region.
- Numerous leaders moved to bend and change constitutions to stay in power, often silencing all critical voices and political opposition to do so. The pandemic was instrumentalised to control protests in many cases (see Chapter 2.3 on Guinea).

2.1

Regional overview

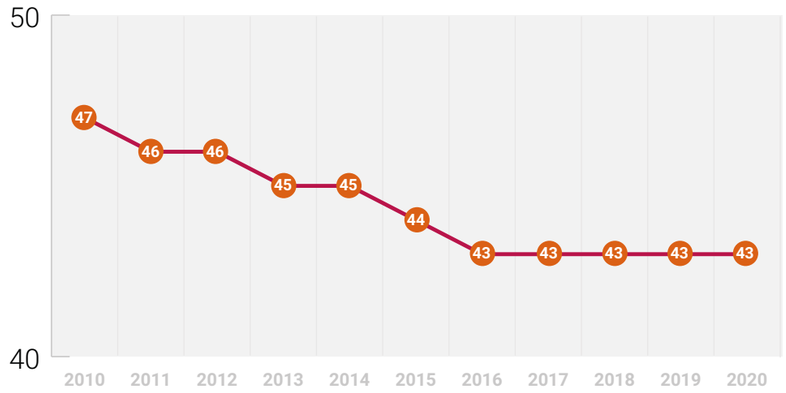
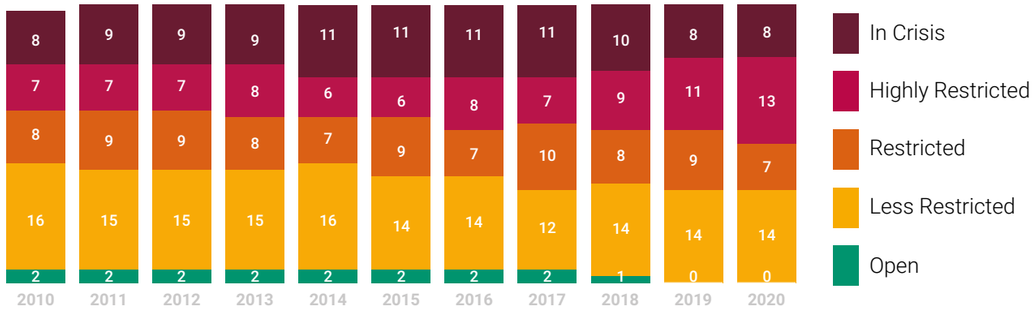


Figure 12: Africa regional GxR scores, 2010–2020

Number of countries in each expression category: Africa



Percentage of population per expression category: Africa

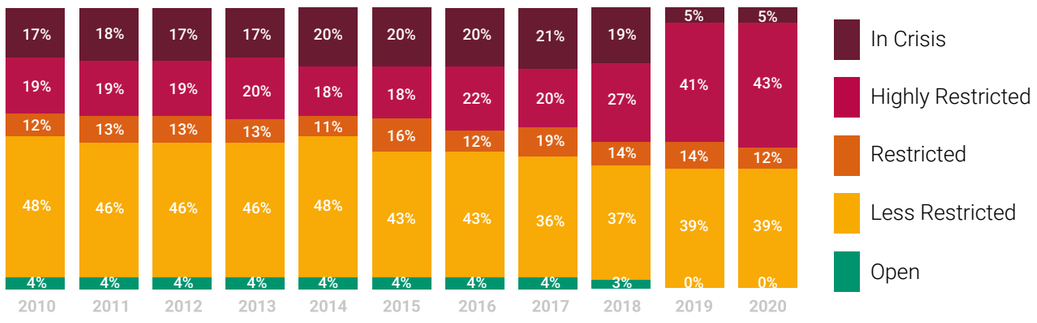


Figure 13: Number of countries and percentage of population in Africa per expression category, 2020

Though the regional GxR score has remained at 43 since 2016, major shifts have taken place in the expression categories. In 2015, only 38% of the people living in the African region lived in **highly restricted** or **in crisis** countries; by 2020, that figure was 48%.

Since Ghana shifted out of the **open** category between 2018 and 2019, no countries in the region have been rated **open**.

Top 5	GxR score	Bottom 5	GxR score
Botswana	79	Equatorial Guinea	4
Ghana	79	South Sudan	5
Senegal	75	Burundi	6
Sierra Leone	75	Rwanda	9
Namibia	74	Eswatini	10

Table 6: Top 5 and bottom 5 GxR scores for Africa in 2020

Significant advances in GxR scores

2019–2020	2019–2020		2010–2020	
None	The Gambia	+57	The Gambia	+55
	Ethiopia	+21	Ethiopia	+20
	Sudan	+19	Sudan	+17
	Angola	+14	Angola	+11
	Democratic Republic of the Congo	+10		

Significant declines in GxR scores

2019–2020		2019–2020		2010–2020	
Guinea	-18	Guinea	-22	Tanzania	-25
		Benin	-22	Zambia	-23
		Togo	-16	Benin	-20
		Tanzania	-15	Guinea	-19
		Ivory Coast	-13	Burundi	-18

Table 7: Top 5 countries in Africa with significant advances and declines in GxR scores, 2019–2020, 2015–2020, and 2010–2020

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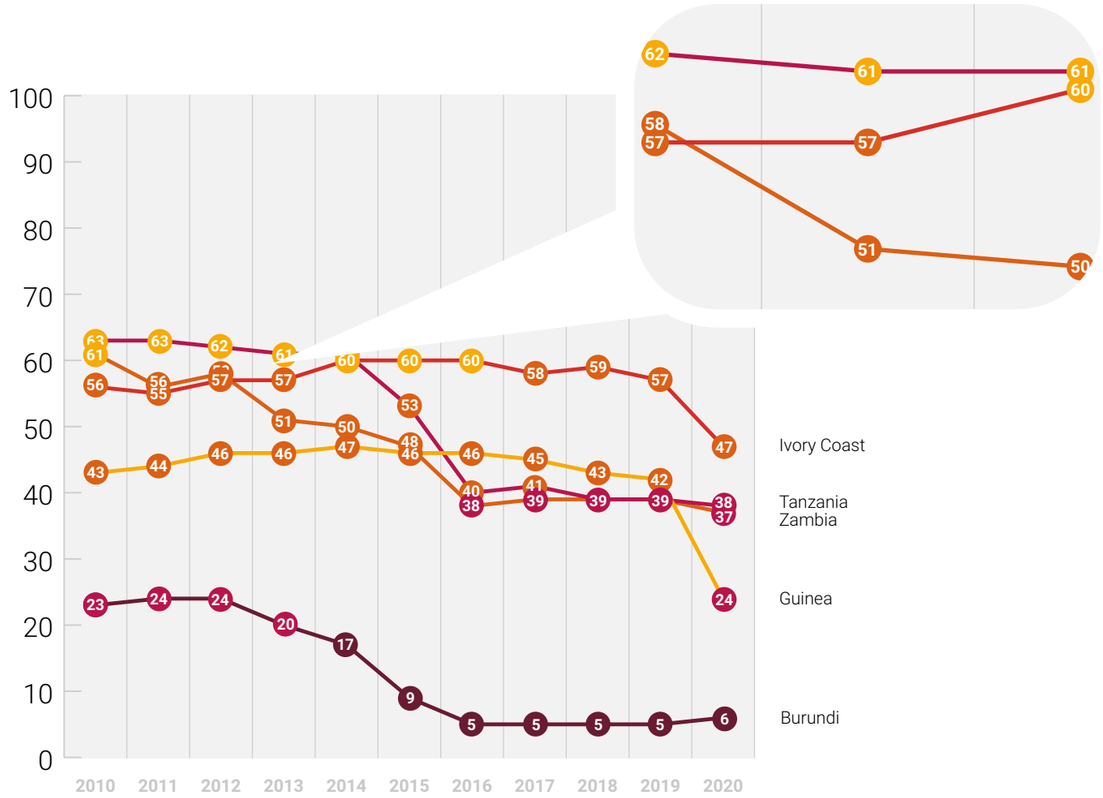

Figure 14: GxR scores 2010–2020: Decliner countries in Africa

NB: No country in the region saw a significant advance in GxR score over the last year.

click to enlarge
overlapping data points

2.2

2021 Hindsight: Regional trends

Africa was the region least affected by the pandemic, in terms of cases, in 2020. However, some leaders enthusiastically embraced autocratisation, problematic law-making, and harassment of media workers and HRDs under the guise of emergency response.

Some countries declared states of emergency; others quickly drafted 'pandemic response' legislation – much of which threatened to provide a blank slate to limit fundamental freedoms, often for an unspecified duration of time. South Africa's (GxR score: 71) indecipherable amendments to the Disaster Management Regulations also posed a threat, through their vagueness, while Zimbabwe's (GxR score: 18) Public Order Act has a 20-year sentence attached.

While many regimes resorted to judicial harassment, arbitrary arrest, or simply force to prevent journalists doing their job, violence against communicators spiked. Journalists were attacked in Ghana (GxR score: 79) and Senegal (GxR score: 75), where unidentified assailants repeatedly attacked a range of outlets, destroying equipment and property and assaulting reporters.

There has been a marked rise in attacks against journalists in many countries, most notably Nigeria (GxR score: 64) and Kenya (GxR score: 61), at a time when journalism was more important than ever. Activists and journalists revealed the first cases, in some countries, and many were prosecuted and fined as a result.

The extremity of harassment suffered by those who question – or even report on – COVID-19 management has been highly concerning. Even private expression was limited in Niger (GxR score: 56). In Malawi (GxR score: 65), correspondents for the BBC and *The Telegraph* were attacked while filming enforcement of COVID-19 provisions; similar arrests were made in Nigeria.

Concerns about 'false information' have driven worrying responses to the pandemic, with legislative fever breaking out all over the region and restrictive laws coming into force immediately, often with prison sentences wildly disproportionate to the offence; Zimbabwe's (GxR score: 18) law allows for 20 years in prison.

Putative attempts to control online crime have proven effective tools to repress free speech in West Africa, where Niger and Nigeria's cybercrime laws have been wielded against communicators.

The economic suffering caused by the pandemic, and the corruption revealed in its management led to numerous protests and dissent in countries, including South Africa, Angola (GxR score: 37), and Zimbabwe – many of which were treated violently. Demonstrations in Nigeria against the Special Anti-Robbery Squad were met with violence in October; security forces killed 56 protesters, and the military, at one point, opened fire into crowds. Protests were suppressed across the continent with bans, harassment, and arbitrary arrests.

When the police were given powers to enforce the COVID-19 regulations on top of existing laws, there was a wave of police brutality – already long an issue in the region. Security forces across the continent were complicit in serious human rights abuses in the context of not only protest but also lockdowns and curfews; brutal assaults, shootings, and killings were reported from Zimbabwe, Kenya, Rwanda (GxR score: 9), South Africa, Ghana, and Nigeria, where, by April 2020, more people had been killed by the security forces than by the virus itself.

The media environment was a major casualty of the economic contraction caused by COVID-19. Already-fragile bottom lines were broken across the region; Senegal saw a 70% revenue loss for the written press during the first four months of the pandemic, a 54% loss for television networks, and a 40% loss for radio stations and news sites. In countries including South Africa and Kenya, hundreds of journalists were fired, many saw pay cuts of up to 50%, and news broadcasts were replaced by music shows to save on capacity.

Corruption and mismanagement of emergency pandemic funds (e.g. in Kenya and Zimbabwe) provided ample evidence of the need for transparency and public-interest journalism on the continent, even as newsrooms ground to a halt. While information was hidden from the public, many governments began to hoard data on their citizens, often via new coronavirus-tracking apps – like those of Kenya and Uganda (GxR score: 25), which have data-protection issues.

As in other regions, some leaders denied the issue entirely – Tanzania's (GxR score: 38) President John Magafuli said there was no virus in the country, and called it a 'Western conspiracy' kept at bay 'by force of prayer'. Authorities provided no information on the virus after April 2020, while several news outlets – including the country's leading Swahili-language newspaper, *Mwananchi* – were closed down, and others were forced to issue apologies after publishing stories about COVID-19.

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Magafuli – whose strongman rule has been responsible for much of Tanzania's score drop since 2015 when he was sworn in – died suddenly in March 2021; many suspect it to have been a COVID 19-related death.

More than 15 African Presidents have ruled for more than a decade – some since their countries won independence from colonial powers and many have altered or broken constitutional rules to do so. In this context, political opposition is particularly difficult to sustain, even more so around election time.

The region's beleaguered political opposition was attacked with a range of approaches. In the run-up to Uganda's 2021 elections, Robert Kyagulanyi (aka Bobi Wine) was arrested shortly after his nomination in November 2020. Media covering his campaign trail were violently targeted, and rallies and protests organised by his party were treated with serious violence – including live rounds and the murder of at least 50 unarmed citizens. Enforcement of the COVID-19 ban on public gatherings disproportionately targeted Wine's People Power group.

Zimbabwe saw a similar campaign against political opponents. Three members of the main opposition party, Movement for Democratic Change Alliance, were detained at a checkpoint in May, ostensibly for violating lockdown orders to attend a peaceful protest. All three women report being abducted, tortured, and sexually assaulted – and they were arrested for allegedly lying about the crimes committed against them.

Elections were held across the region, many of which were marred by repression, violence, and allegations of fraud – all aided by pandemic restrictions to hinder voter registration and turnout, along with media restrictions, arrests of opposition leaders, and harassment of critics. This was the case in Tanzania, Burundi (GxR score: 6), and the Central African Republic (CAR) (GxR score: 44), as well as with two constitutionally dubious third-term wins in Ivory Coast (GxR score: 47; one of the year's big decliners), which was accompanied by a brutal crackdown, in which at least 80 were killed, and in Guinea (GxR score: 24; see Chapter 2.3). Even more established democracies, like Ghana and Benin (GxR score: 61), saw crackdowns on free speech around election time, while Mali's (GxR score: 57) democratically elected leaders were overthrown in a military coup.

On election day in Burundi, there were two Internet shutdowns, following the arrest of 600 opposition leaders in the lead-up. Social media platforms were disconnected when citizens began making their way to the polls. Togo (GxR score: 39) and Guinea also shut down social media platforms and the Internet during their recent elections.

In Uganda, incumbent President Yoweri Museveni won the 2021 election, commencing his sixth term. This was accompanied by an information blackout and a massive surge in abuses against journalists; Wine was arrested again immediately after the results were announced, along with hundreds of his supporters.

> **"There simply is no rationale that can support the choices that left – and continue to leave – millions of people without essential life-saving information."**

Figure 15: GxR scores 2010–2020: Zimbabwe

Both Zimbabwe and Tanzania provide warnings for over-optimism at the end of single rulers: almost no real political change has followed the much-fêted end of Robert Mugabe's 37-year rule in 2017 (see Figure 15), and there has been little promise of wide-reaching reform following Tanzania's Magafuli's death in early 2021. Leaders such as these rely on a plethora of corrupted institutions, political and military allies, and social factors.

Ethiopia's (GxR score: 31) recent democratic gains were shaken as civil conflict broke out. Ethnic tension also took the form of protest and violence by security forces, killing hundreds of people. In June 2020, the violent dispersal of protests, triggered by the killing of a renowned Oromia musician, led to at least 166 deaths in Oromia alone. The Ethiopian government responded with a wave of arrests, including of several high-profile opposition leaders, and imposed an Internet shutdown.

Figure 16: GxR scores 2010–2020: Ethiopia

The ruling party in the Tigray Region held elections in September – against the will of the federal authorities – and named Abiy Ahmed's government illegitimate. Within months, the conflict had escalated into violent conflict between federal and regional security. Rape and massacre were increasingly reported, while telecommunications blackouts and interference with journalists trying to cover the unrest have been common.

In West Africa, enjoyment of human rights is made near-impossible by continuing losses of state control – especially in the Sahel, where armed groups maintained footholds and attacked civilians in numerous countries. Further conflicts continued in Cameroon, CAR, and Chad, as well as in the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa.

The Gambia (GxR score: 68) is one of the big success stories in the region over the last decade. Its new regime seems to be holding onto the advances made since the departure of Yahya Jammeh in 2016. Progress is slow and faltering, however, and the country's GxR score declined slightly in 2019. Some concerning crackdowns around protests were reported in January 2020, as well as prosecutions under a problematic 'false news' law.

Figure 17: GxR scores 2010–2020: The Gambia

"Because the rights to freedom of expression are often the first port of call for autocrats looking to entrench their power, they must also be our safe harbour from the hostile human rights environment in which we find ourselves."

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2.3

Country in focus: Guinea

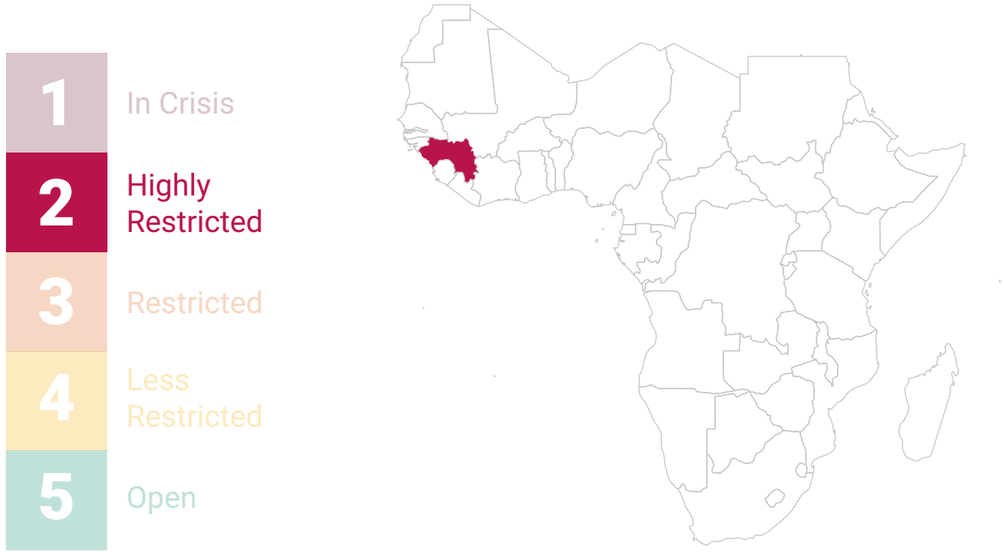

Figure 18: Country in focus: Guinea

FACTFILE

GxR score
24

Capital city
Conakry

Population
13 million

GDP per capita
USD 960

Global ranking
122/161

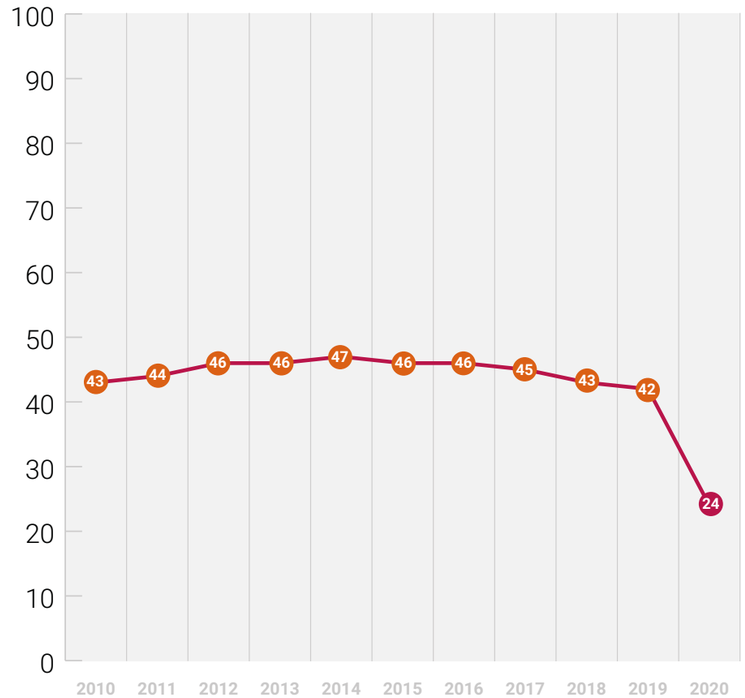

Figure 19: GxR scores 2010–2020: Guinea

Guinea was one of the biggest global declines over 2020 – dropping 18 points in a year and moving from **restricted** to **highly restricted** – in the midst of a murderously heavy-handed response to protests and a constitutional power grab. Over 2020, Guinea suffered the second-largest drop in the freedom of discussion indicator globally.

After a coup in 2008, Guinea returned to democratic rule in 2010, and has held multiple elections since – all of which have been marred by violence, corruption, and procedural flaws.

In the last couple of years, politics have centred around 82-year-old President Alpha Condé's controversial constitutional-reform agenda – a key element of which is new provisions that would allow him a third term in office. Protests against the third term began in late 2019 and were met with a violent state response, resulting in at least nine deaths, nearly 100 wounded, and several arrests.

A state of emergency and measures to curb the coronavirus contagion were announced in March, banning gatherings and movement. The response to the pandemic was highly securitised and violent; security forces carried out numerous murders of those breaking lockdown measures at roadblocks. These rules were subsequently invoked repeatedly to repress demonstrations against the constitutional reform.

In March 2020, the new constitution was voted through, resetting Condé's term limit – as well as allowing for Presidents to serve beyond term limits. Official results claimed that 92% of voters approved the new constitution, though the process was questionable, turnout was low, and many boycotted the poll entirely.

The text on the basis of which the referendum was run was also altered after the vote, and the constitutional amendment made was not the provision on which Guinea had voted.

Simultaneously, parliamentary elections were held, and Condé's Rally of the Guinean People Party won a majority – marred by communications disruptions and the general crackdown on dissent.

The crackdown around the referendum and parliamentary elections resulted in at least 100 deaths, cuts to the Internet, and the arrest of two parliamentarians, as well as of members of the main opposition party and civil society. Journalists covering the unrest were targeted with violence and the withdrawal of accreditation.

In the lead-up to the election, the Guinean regime also took steps to undermine media independence, adopting a law that gave the President the power to intervene in the governance of the Haute Autorité de la Communication – the country's media authority.

In October, Condé won the presidential elections – a vote characterised by serious issues around fairness; some who sought to register to vote were unable to do so, due to COVID-19 restrictions.

In keeping with the pre-election and election periods, the period immediately following the election was marked by violence, disappearance of opposition figures, and disruption of Internet connections. The security forces used tear gas to disperse peaceful gatherings, and shot protesters dead. Hundreds have been arrested since, and are being kept in dire conditions.

After disagreement between the parties, the electoral commission's final announcement that President Condé had won the presidential election escalated tension; security forces fired live ammunition on peaceful protesters, causing the deaths of at least 27 more people and injuring 200.

The legal environment in Guinea allows for censorship and state violence with impunity, and deteriorated significantly as part of Condé's power grab – including one law that allows security forces to fire guns in protests, and another that allows the President to interfere in media regulation by appointing the chair of the media commission.

Condé attacked freedom of expression with all available tools – and to great effect – controlling the streets, media coverage, the online space, and even the constitution itself. As such, it is no surprise that Guinea saw a precipitous fall in its score in 2020.

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Chapter 3

The Americas

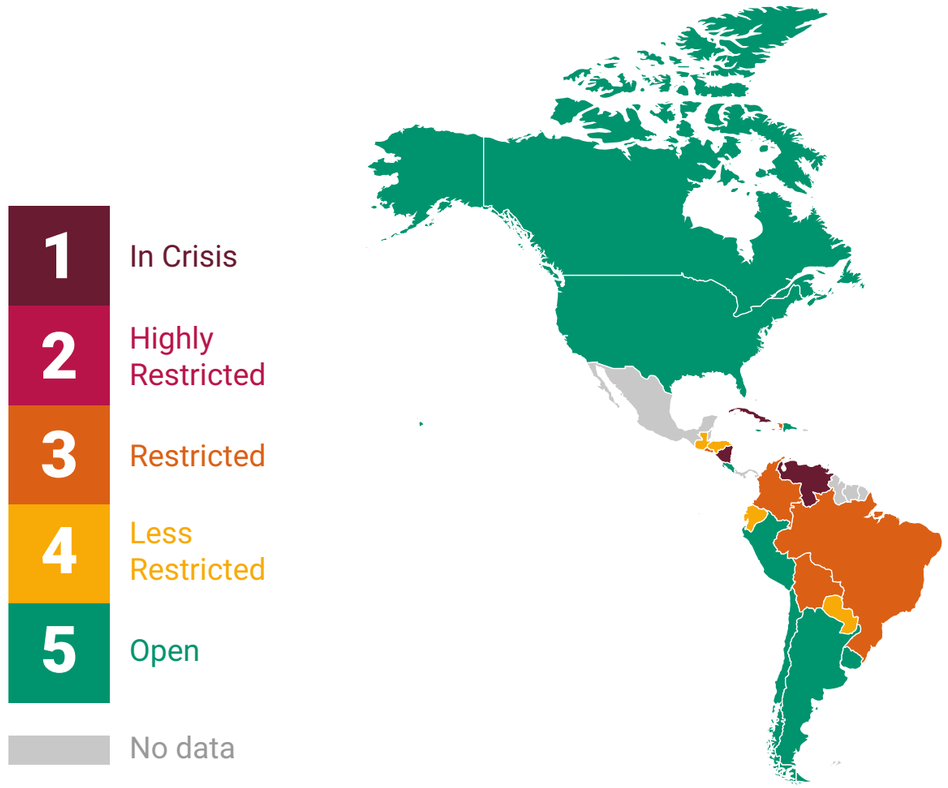


Figure 20: The Americas GxR map

GxR score
64

Population
1 billion

Number of countries
22

- The regional score is at its lowest in a decade.
- The Americas are plagued by populist autocrats, many of whom poisoned the information environment through denialism and disinformation around the pandemic.
- The murder of journalists and HRDs is a chronic issue in the region. This violence continues with impunity, and is often linked to coverage of corruption or activism against extraction or agribusiness projects. Organised crime and armed groups continue to be a major factor in numerous countries.

3.1

Regional overview

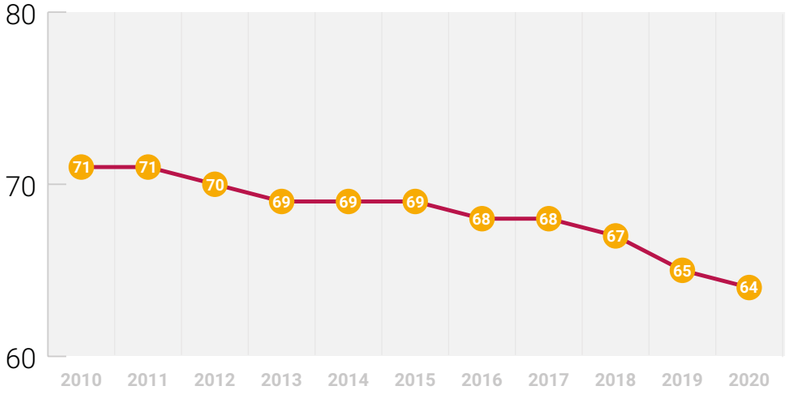
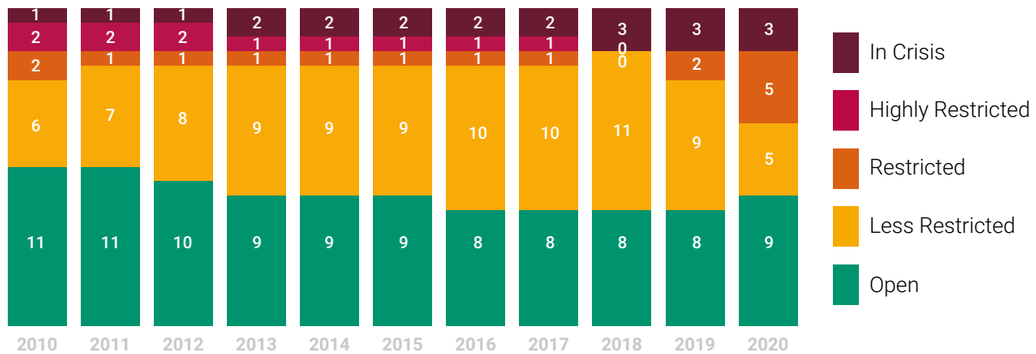


Figure 21: The Americas regional GxR scores, 2010–2020

Number of countries in each expression category: The Americas



Percentage of population per expression category: The Americas

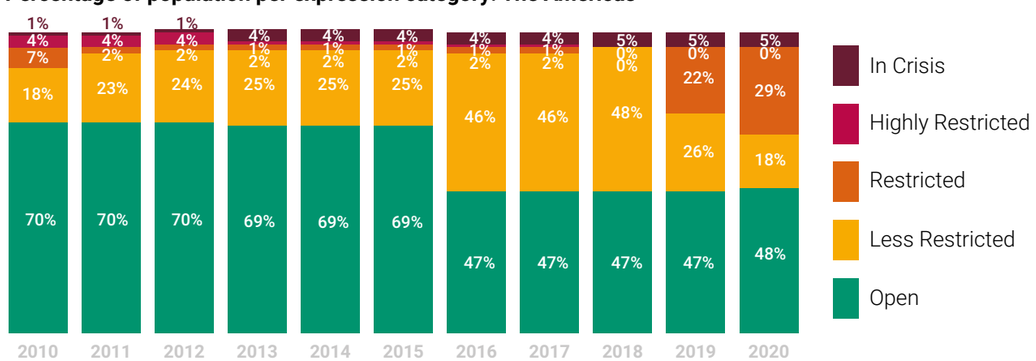


Figure 22: Number of countries and percentage of population in The Americas per expression category, 2020

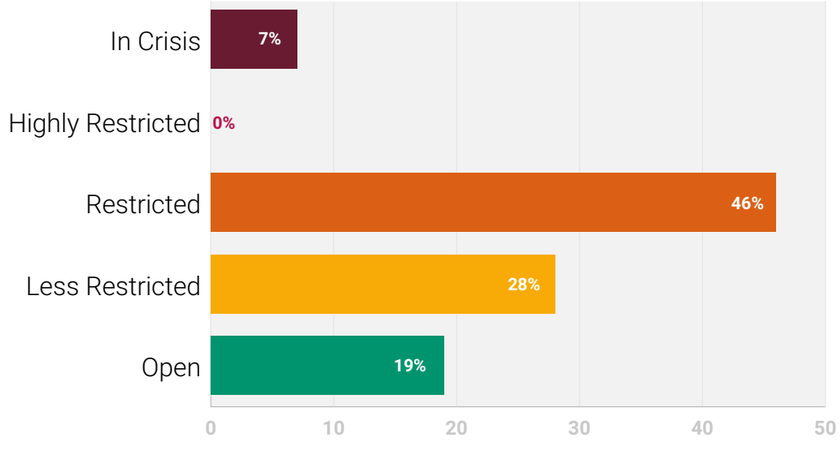


Figure 23: Percentage of the population in each expression category in The Americas (excluding USA and Canada), 2020

Top 5	GxR score
Uruguay	92
Canada	90
Costa Rica	89
Argentina	88
Dominican Republic	87

Bottom 5	GxR score
Cuba	3
Nicaragua	8
Venezuela	9
Bolivia	51
Colombia	52

Table 8: Top 5 and bottom 5 GxR scores for The Americas in 2020

NB this ranking does not include Mexico, as ARTICLE 19 Mexico uses its own methodology to track freedom of expression (see Chapter 3.4).

Cuba has been **in crisis** for more than a decade; Venezuela shifted to the category in 2013, and Nicaragua followed in 2018.

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Significant advances in GxR scores

2019–2020		2019–2020		2010–2020	
Dominican Republic	+14	Ecuador	+24	Ecuador	+19
		Dominican Republic	+15	Dominican Republic	+11

Significant declines in GxR scores

2019–2020		2019–2020		2010–2020	
El Salvador	-13	Brazil	-33	Brazil	-36
Bolivia	-12	Nicaragua	-23	Nicaragua	-31
		El Salvador	-21	Bolivia	-25
		Bolivia	-17	El Salvador	-22
		Colombia	-16	Venezuela	

Table 9: Top 5 countries in The Americas with significant advances and d scores, 2019–2020, 2015–2020, and 2010–2020

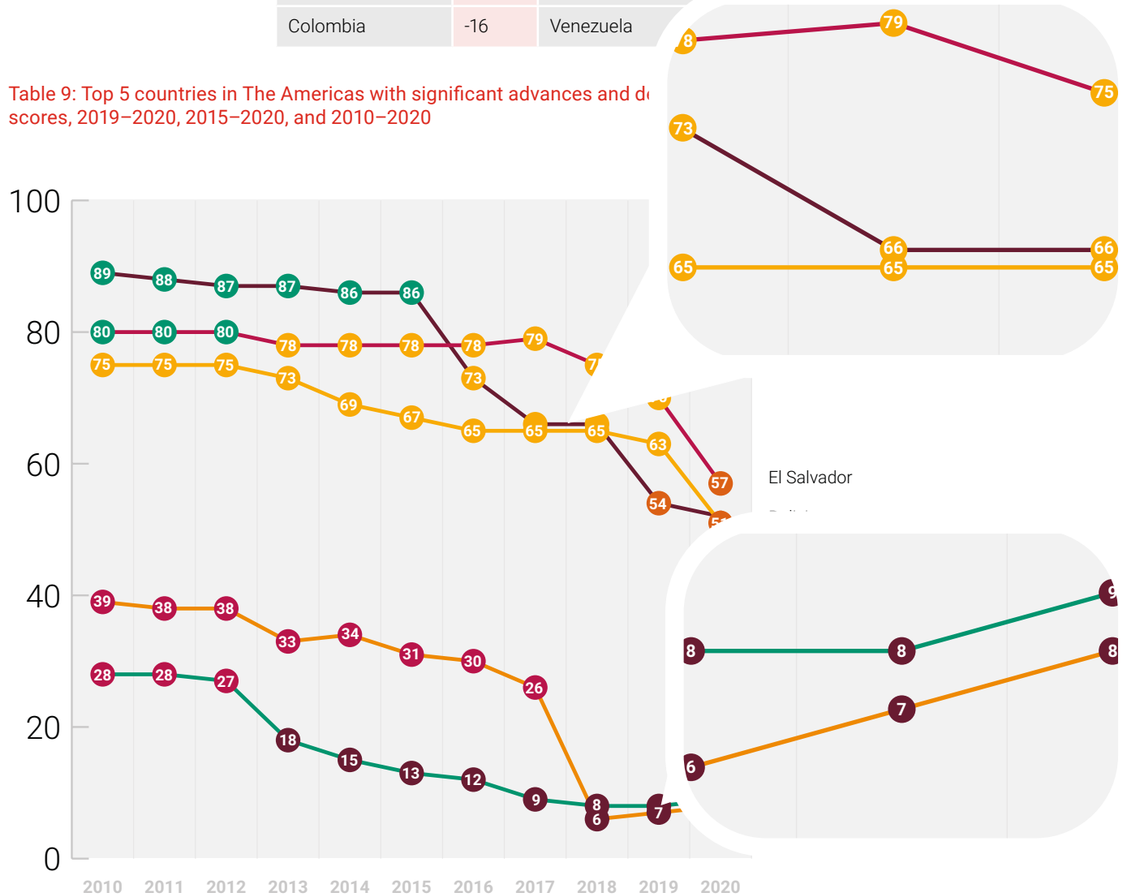

Figure 24: GxR scores 2010–2020: Decliner countries in The Americas

NB: For Colombia's decline, see Figure 25.

3.2

2021 Hindsight: Regional trends

Governance trends during COVID-19 accelerated in the wrong direction. Power was increasingly concentrated in the executive, among strongman politicians and elites, amid weak institutions and high-level corruption. Much of this erosion took place behind a façade of democratic discourse – a simulation of democracy.

Persistent patterns of violence against press and HRDs are concentrated in Mexico, Honduras (GxR score: 65), Colombia (GxR score: 52), and Venezuela (GxR score: 9): these worsened amid a security-heavy approach to management of both the pandemic and social protests. The constitutional court of one of the highest-scoring countries in the region, Peru (GxR score: 83), recognised the right to protest as a constitutional right in 2020 – but still engaged in excessive use of police force against protesters and journalists, and detained protesters during demonstrations in November 2020.

This violence walks hand-in-hand with the ongoing stigmatisation of journalists and activists, which is commonplace across the region – from Brazil (GxR score: 52) and Mexico (see Chapters 3.3 and 3.4, respectively) to Nicaragua (GxR score: 8) (whose Vice President claimed the media have 'small brains' and 'devilled souls') and Guatemala (GxR score: 66) (whose President wished aloud that he could 'put the media in quarantine', and sprayed disinfectant on them during a press conference).

The pandemic even provided new excuses for violence against journalists and protesters: Guatemala's hastily passed 'state of calamity' and Cuba's (GxR score: 3) new crime – 'propagation of the pandemic' – were used to ban journalists from certain places.

The rule of the region's most prominent authoritarian populists came to an end in 2020. Trump lost the USA's (GxR score: 83) presidential election – but he was neither the only nor the worst strongman populist in The Americas; those who remain continue to use the pandemic in power grabs and coverups, shoring up their power and manipulating the narrative. Neither can we be complacent after the fall of a populist: Trump's departure signified the end of neither the extreme Right in the USA nor the sociopolitical malaise that led to his presidency. Indeed, the malaise of populist autocracy is prevalent on both sides of the political spectrum in this region.

Latin America has a strongman issue across the political spectrum – from the hard-Right autocrats like Bolsonaro in Brazil to the self-proclaimed socialists in Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Cuba.

Central America's democratic erosions often come via the ballot box: Nayib Bukele, President of El Salvador (GxR score: 57), is enacting a concerning erosion of democracy along the all-too-familiar path of undermining democratic institutions and demonising opposition and critics. Guatemala's judiciary similarly continues to suffer attacks – particularly when it moves to investigate corruption or hold the executive to account. El Salvador followed suit in 2021; the country's new congress, which took office on 1 May 2021, immediately voted to remove the attorney general and five members of the Supreme Court's Constitutional Chamber – and replace them with allies of Bukele.

Some of the region's regimes predictably adopted a wartime mentality, making the police and military key actors in implementing emergency measures, enforcing quarantines and curfews, and detaining – and even employing riot-control tactics and weaponry on – quarantine breakers. Some levelled 'national security' arguments against journalists trying to do their jobs; Guatemala's regime accused those who reported on or shared information about the pandemic in the country of attempts to destabilise the country. Bolivian (GxR score: 51) Minister, Wilfredo Rojo, declared: 'As we are at war we are not going to argue, citizens in times of war only obey'.

Following global trends, the great populists of the continent took an anti-science approach, vigorously silencing information on the pandemic and exacerbating already-profound issues of misinformation. Venezuela's President Maduro and Brazil's Bolsonaro used social media and official campaigns to promote remedies for COVID-19 (Carvativir and Chloroquine) whose efficacy has never been demonstrated in medical research, while Trump (USA), Bolsonaro (Brazil), Daniel Ortega (Nicaragua), and Andrés Manuel López Obrador (Mexico) opted for denialism or downplaying the virus. This is strategic: by deepening suspicion and polarisation, many autocrats strengthen their base.

Many others hid or manipulated the real fatality figures; in August, Anonymous hacked into the Nicaraguan Ministry of Health and leaked files showing they had hidden thousands of positive cases in their statistics – all while having doctors fired for sharing information with the public.

FOI processes were suspended in many countries, from El Salvador and Mexico (see Chapter 3.4) to Brazil. There was also huge corruption in public procurement across the region; irregularities and corruption were reported in the procurement of key

equipment like body bags in Ecuador, respiratory ventilators in Mexico, and ambulances in Colombia.

Information was often made available only in Spanish and, too often, only online. This put indigenous communities – already hugely marginalised across the region – at a huge disadvantage, in terms of access to crucial information, increasing the exclusion of those who do not speak Spanish as a first language, cannot read, or live in rural or remote areas where there is no Internet access. Particularly prominent cases occurred in Mexico, Guatemala, and Brazil – where Bolsonaro continued to show a stunning disregard for indigenous groups in his pandemic management (and in his government more broadly).

Already suffering more inequality and economic slowing than any region on the planet, Latin America's substantial informal economy was hit particularly hard by the lockdowns implemented throughout the continent. The region started as the most unequal on the planet, and has been hit the hardest economically; millions are newly living in poverty, and inequalities yawn wider.

Without savings or means to survive lockdown, protests broke out across the region, many of which were treated brutally or with excessive legal action; in March 2020 alone, 20,000 people were detained in Guatemala, many of whom were simply leaving their homes to do necessary work. In Colombia, red flags were hung outside homes that had run out of food.

In 2020, 264 HRDs were killed in the region with near-total impunity, the huge majority of whom were working on indigenous and land rights; mining and agribusiness are the industries most closely associated with attacks.

The emerging narrative in many places is that governments must choose between economic recovery from COVID-19 and human rights obligations. This is a false dichotomy, and a pretext to focus on unrestrained short-term economic gains at the expense of human rights obligations or ecological concerns. Extractive projects have been treated preferentially during the pandemic – particularly in Central America, where megaprojects have been given exceptional status, even in lockdowns.

In Colombia, there was a rise in the level of violence directed against HRDs, particularly those participating in implementing the peace process, engaging in voluntary drug-crop eradication initiatives, or opposing the aggressive extraction of natural resources. During the first six months of 2020, there was a 61% increase in the number of defenders killed compared to the same period in 2019.

> **"Populist leaders took an anti-science approach, vigorously silencing information on the pandemic and exacerbating already-profound issues of misinformation. This is strategic: by deepening suspicion and polarisation, many autocrats strengthen their base."**

Figure 25: GxR scores 2010–2020: Colombia

Colombia continues to be plagued by armed groups (a combination of organised crime and guerrilla legacy groups), which were emboldened by the state's absence during the pandemic and by the government's reticence to implement the 2016 peace deal since it came to power. Journalists routinely receive death threats from armed groups.

Bolivia's score dipped dramatically in 2020, falling into the **restricted** category, as the government took the opportunity of a health crisis to criminalise critical expression. They imposed severe sanctions for those who did not comply with quarantine – including journalists, who were harassed while covering the pandemic and its related protests. Journalists also faced new obstacles, including vague provisions that imposed criminal sanctions on those who 'misinform or generate uncertainty'.

The Minister of Public Works Iván Arias warned that people who spread false news would be taken to hospitals to help care for infected patients, and would be imprisoned for 10 years (revoked months later under civil society pressure). Meanwhile, health workers who provided information to the press were sanctioned.

Central America continues to suffer from the blurring of borders between political, military, and economic elites, as well as organised crime groups. Organised crime and corruption create an extremely high-risk environment for journalists – and, therefore, huge levels of self-censorship (see also Chapter 3.4 on Mexico).

In Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua – GxR countries **in crisis** – there is a pattern of coordinated attacks by the state against journalists, media, and activists, many under the guise of pandemic management. There are numerous forms of censorship of national and foreign media, arbitrary arrests, and tight control of the online sphere by both legislative and technological means.

Some institutions have demonstrated resilience – regional governments and congress have been an effective counterweight in Brazil, while the judiciary in Mexico has blocked some of López Obrador's more problematic initiatives.

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Bringing hope for real change, Chile's 2019 mass protests translated into a referendum in 2020 in which an overwhelming majority voted in support of rewriting Chile's constitution, which dates back to the military rule of Augusto Pinochet.

In further good news, the Escazú Agreement entered into force in November 2020; it is the first environmental treaty in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the first in the world to include specific provisions on environmental HRDs. It may prove a useful tool for enhancing governance by fostering access to climate information, public participation in climate decision-making, and the protection of climate activists. However, despite being signatories, two of the worst countries for environmental defenders – Brazil and Colombia – have yet to ratify the agreement.

"As the lasting effects of the pandemic become clearer, we will not only need to rigorously roll back all the restrictions that have been placed on us, and reject the surveillance imposed on us during 2020, but also heal the cracks which existed long before. That means addressing those failures of economic and political systems which have allowed single individuals to take control of resources and institutions, and which have left many by the wayside in terms of economic opportunity and political inclusion."

3.3

Country in focus: Brazil

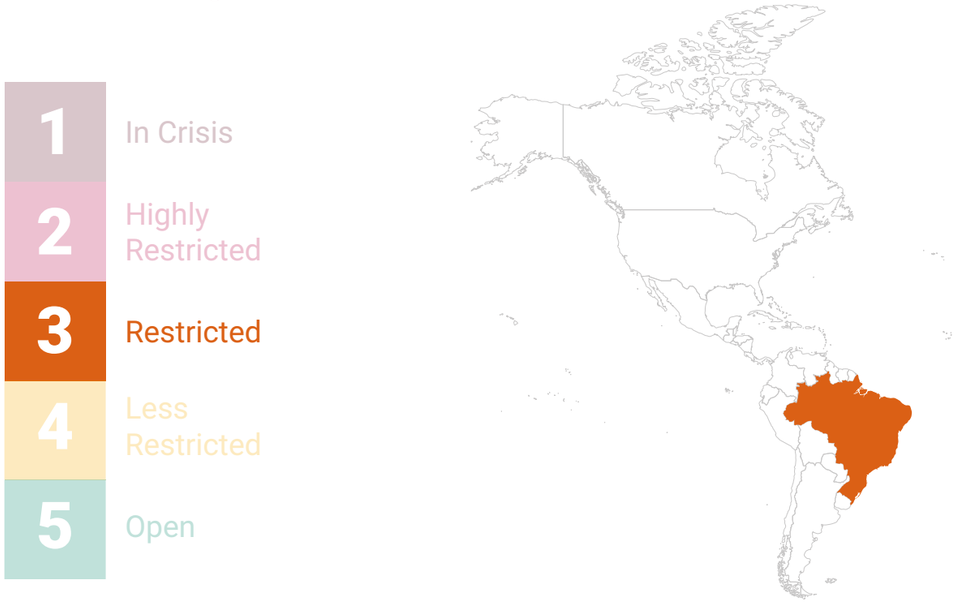

Figure 26: Country in focus: Brazil

FACTFILE

GxR score
52

Capital city
Brasilia

Population
213 million

GDP per capita
USD 8,700

Global ranking
86/161

Freedom of expression is protected under Title II, Chapter I, Article 5 of the Constitution. Brazil ratified the ICCPR in 1992.

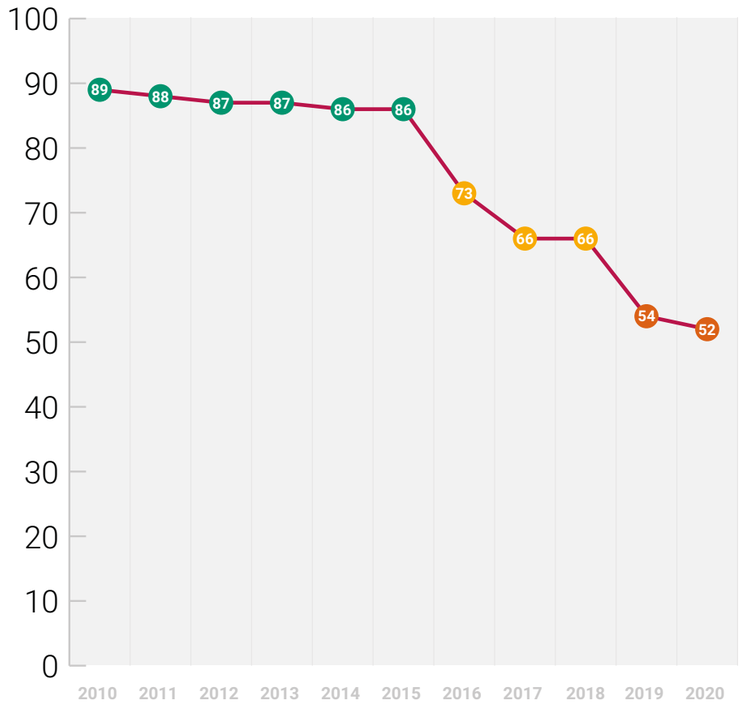

Figure 27: GxR scores 2010–2020: Brazil

In the last five years, Brazil has dropped from being among the world's highest-scoring countries to being considered a crisis of democracy and expression – and now a crisis of public health, too. Brazil is the perfect storm of contemporary expression issues: autocratic populism, disinformation, acute inequality, and technological control. The pandemic consolidated trends seen in the last year.

In 2020, Brazil's beleaguered expression environment enabled the wildfire dissemination of denialist and false narratives about the virus, which the President himself referred to as 'a little flu' while promoting anti-vaccine and anti-isolation discourses, exacerbating infection rates, and causing an information crisis, with discourses highly polarised. Since taking office in January 2019, President Bolsonaro has reportedly made 2,187 false or distorted statements – an average of three per day – though the daily volume of disinformation was significantly higher in 2020 amid the pandemic, an economic crisis, and municipal elections.

The population has been systematically silenced with an arsenal of legal measures when criticising the management of the pandemic. The military dictatorship-era National Security Law was weaponised against protesters and journalists who challenged the President over his lack of action, even as evidence grew of the scope of the COVID-19 emergency.

There were 254 violations against journalists and communicators in 2020. Of those, almost 50% (123 violations) were perpetrated by public agents, while 18% (46 cases) were racist, sexist, or biased against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) people.

There were 20 cases of serious violations (murders, attempted murders, and death threats) in 2020. Threats against women, black, and LGBTQI+ journalists increased, as well as against media outlets that cover human and environmental rights issues.

Stigmatising discourse has been a defining feature of Bolsonaro's regime; in August, the President threatened to punch a journalist in the face; in March, Health Minister Luiz Henrique Mandetta described the media as 'sordid' and 'toxic', and urged Brazilians to turn off their televisions.

In 2020, ARTICLE 19 registered 464 public statements made by the President of the Republic, his ministers, or his close advisers that attacked or delegitimised journalists and their work. Bolsonaro's children, who hold public offices, were the perpetrators of many attacks. These attitudes filter down to local authorities, and manifest in real-world action, harassment, and judicial action against journalists. This level of public aggression has not been seen since the end of the military dictatorship. The increasing social hostility against journalists, and its chilling effects, should not be underestimated.

At the start of June 2020, several media outlets – including Globo, Folha, and Metrópoles – announced that their journalists would no longer be able to report from the presidential residence due to the high risk of attacks from Bolsonaro's supporters.

There was an exponential rise in attacks in the digital sphere, mainly on social media; of the 254 violations observed in 2020, at least 83 (33%) were perpetrated online, with women disproportionately attacked.

The current Brazilian Government is pursuing the destruction of civic space by means of weakening social participation and demonstration. There is an intense legislative push to criminalise political action. In addition to the numerous bills that attempt to broaden the Anti-Terrorism Law (no. 13260/2016), the Brazilian Government and its supporters have frequently used the National Security Law (no. 7170/1983) – which was formulated during the dictatorial period – for the purpose of political persecution, especially against communicators and activists.

As well as being silenced, the population has been deprived of real information. Bolsonaro's administration has repeatedly attempted to withhold COVID-19 case numbers and information from the public – his health minister was fired for defending the World Health Organization's recommendations. There is also evidence of intentional state disinformation campaigns on COVID-19 responses, even amid spurious attempts to control 'fake news' with new, rights-abusing legislation.

During 2020, Bolsonaro issued 1,682 false or misleading statements – an average of 4.3 per day. The President promoted remedies and treatments whose efficacy is not proven, including defending the use of hydroxychloroquine (a dangerous chemical with no proven medical benefit against COVID-19) on at least 28 occasions.

After Bolsonaro suspended deadlines for government agencies to respond to public-information requests, and for citizens to appeal their declined requests, the Supreme Court overturned these orders. However, the institutional obstacles Bolsonaro has designed and raised in recent years have still created a hugely restricted information environment.

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In ARTICLE 19's research, 35% of information requests were answered with incorrect information, 25% with intentional misinformation, 20% with censored information, and 5% with partial information – leaving only 15% of information requests answered fully.

Brazil's legislative branch made moves to reduce civic space by passing laws on national security and the right to protest, and closing mechanisms for public participation that have been in place for 20 years, including the Federal Food Security Council.

This kind of attack on key public bodies has fuelled the exponential growth of inequality, poverty, and discrimination among vulnerable populations. Indigenous communities in Brazil are particularly under attack; indigenous peoples are struggling for survival, in terms of expressing their culture, tradition, and language – as are their traditional territories, including in the Amazon rainforest.

Indeed, Bolsonaro's disregard for indigenous peoples has been so severe that it has captured the attention of the International Criminal Court, where he may face charges.

Municipal elections took place in November 2020 in an environment extremely hostile to freedom of expression, characterised by numerous aggressions against politicians – as well as journalists and press – who defended a human rights agenda.

There were at least 15 cases of violations of freedom of expression relating to the election period between 14 October and 17 November 2020 – 16% of the total observed in the year (42 cases). These findings show that special attention should be given to coverage of the next electoral period (2022) – which, it seems, will be at least as polarised as the previous one.

"Tackling these issues mean we need more voices, not fewer. More information, not less. Clarity and authenticity, not lies and deceit."

3.4

Country in focus: Mexico

Mexico does not have a GxR score or a place in the GxR rankings. ARTICLE 19 Mexico has its own methodology for tracking and measuring the state of freedom of expression in the country (see below).

FACTFILE

Capital city
Mexico City

Population
127 million

GDP per capita
USD 10,000

Freedom of expression is protected under Title One, Chapter I, Articles 6 and 7 of the Constitution.
Mexico ratified the ICCPR in 1981.

In 2020, six journalists in Mexico were murdered for their work, while 24 are missing. ARTICLE 19 recorded 692 attacks against journalists and media outlets. This represents 13.62% more than in 2019, meaning that attacks against media and journalists continue to grow.

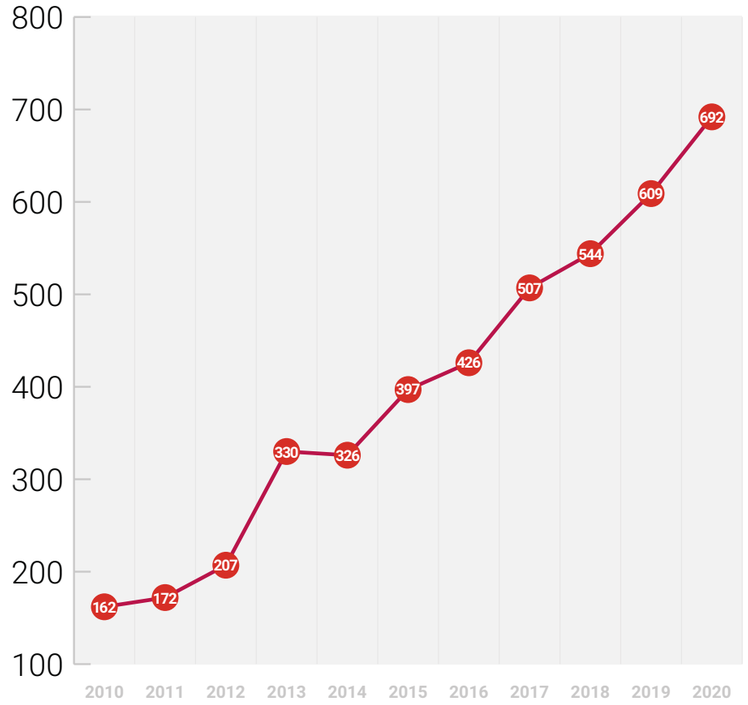

Figure 28: Aggressions against journalists in Mexico, 2010–2020

In just over two years of the current administration, 17 journalists have been murdered in association with their work. The murder of journalists constitutes the most extreme form of censorship, and impunity contributes to the self-censorship of the press.

The authorities themselves are responsible for the largest number of direct attacks against journalists and the media: 46% of intimidations and harassment, and 36% of threats. It is not surprising, therefore, that (continuing the trend of the last seven years) attacks by the state against the press reached 343 in 2020 – 78 attacks more than the previous year – which means that, almost every day, the authorities attack the media and journalists.

Public servants perpetrated 188 of these 343 attacks (55%). The most common aggressions were the illegitimate use of public power (mainly judicial harassment and stigmatisation), intimidation and harassment, and blocking or altering content. Attacks on the press associated with coverage of corruption and political issues accounted for 43% of cases, and those linked to security and justice issues accounted for 19%.

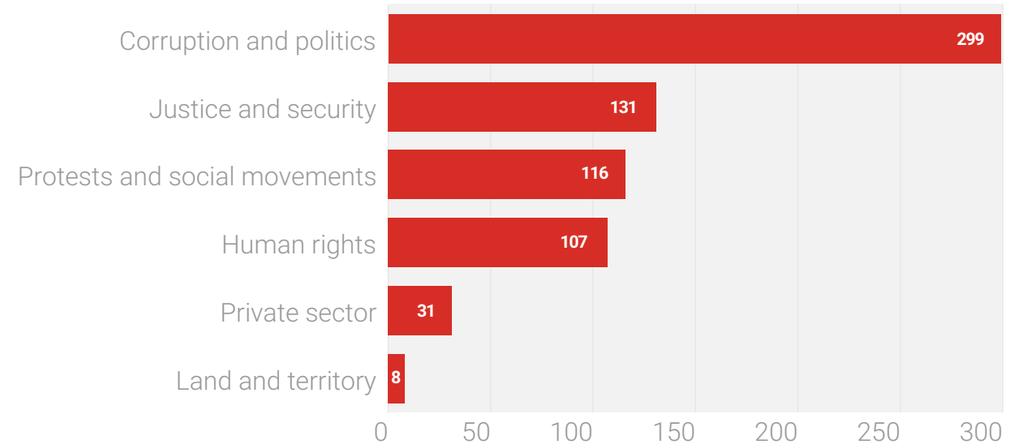

Figure 29: Aggressions against journalists in Mexico, by type of coverage, 2020

It must be noted that identifying direct aggressors is difficult when it comes to organised crime; in 2020, it was only possible to recognise criminal groups or their members in 6% of the total number of attacks during the year, though the true number is assumed to be higher. There are indications that five of the six murders documented were carried out by organised crime groups, which probably also carried out the two disappearances documented this year.

These patterns have been repeated – and even worse – at local level, with local governors and authorities stigmatising and harassing the media via social media and press conferences.

Three chat groups on WhatsApp were discovered (ARTICLE 19 Mexico collected more than 10 testimonies, as well as ITESO's Signa Lab analysis) in which the director of the State News Agency, Notimex, directly coordinated aggressions on Twitter against journalists. Notimex organised smear campaigns against journalists using chats called Avengers, Fiesta de Halloween, and SOS.

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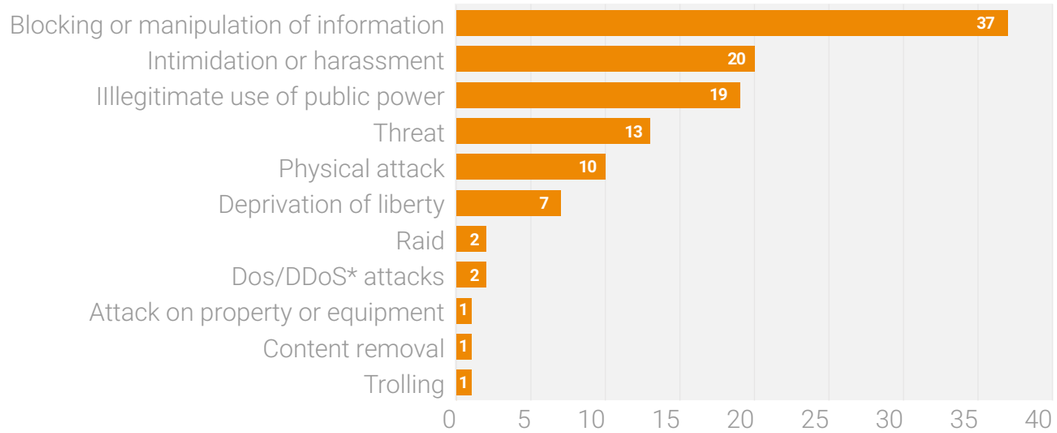
From March to December 2020, there were 113 attacks linked to news coverage of the pandemic, 64% of which were perpetrated by public servants. In 2020, approximately one in eight attacks against the press occurred during coverage of the pandemic. Of the 87 documented information blockages in 2020, 37 were associated with coverage of COVID-19 in Mexico, representing 4 out of 10 refusals to provide information to the public.



*Denial of service/distributed denial of service (Dos/DDos)

Figure 30: Aggressions relating to the pandemic in Mexico, by type of attack, 2020

The huge majority of journalists were not provided with adequate equipment to protect themselves while working; in 2020, 69 journalists died from COVID-19, and many were infected while reporting.

As in so many places, journalists are suffering substantial economic losses; more than 60% of the journalists ARTICLE 19 interviewed have suffered a reduction in their salary or income, while 60% have no social security – only around half are working under a full-time contract. All of this renders journalists vulnerable.

In spite of the health emergency, protests broke out across Mexico in 2020, many of which were met with state violence – targeting journalists in particular. During feminist demonstrations, 35 female journalists were assaulted by both police forces and private individuals, further highlighting the double risk of being a woman and a communicator.

Disinformation rages in Mexico, in part fuelled by the President himself; Verificado collated López Obrador's statements and found that, from 2 December 2019 to 30 November 2020, 1,499 verifiable phrases were identified – 264 misleading, 262 incorrect, and 973 true. This means almost 4 out of every 10 verifiable statements the President made during his second year in office were not true. Many of these statements were made during the President's morning press conferences, watched by millions.

Information requests have been denied in record numbers via the use of two mechanisms to deny access to public information: the declaration of nonexistence (that the information does not exist) and the declaration of noncompetence (that the body information is being requested from is not the correct body). Bodies have reportedly started issuing automatic responses to information requests, claiming that the requests are incompetent.

Although the quantities spent have been reduced, official advertising remains a problem in Mexico, where, of the total amount spent in 2020, 54% went to just 10 media companies, while the remaining 46% was distributed among 387 companies.

Underlying all this is a situation of near-total impunity in which responsible state bodies are not competent – the advancing 'impunidemic'. In 2020, impunity rate for crimes against free expression stood at 98%. The Special Prosecutor's Office for the Attention of Crimes Committed against Freedom of Expression tends to only hand down convictions to the material perpetrators of crimes against communicators, and has made no progress in investigating the perpetrators or masterminds of such crimes. Similarly, the Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists is extremely weakened – two journalists under its protection were killed in 2020.

> **"The road back from the pandemic will be slow, and that is why we need to prepare for a more engaged future now. That means constituting people's assemblies, commissioning timely and robust public inquiries; and acknowledging where collective failings lie. This requires radical transparency, and serious intent to repair the declines in Expression we have witnessed in the last decade."**

Chapter 4

Asia and the Pacific

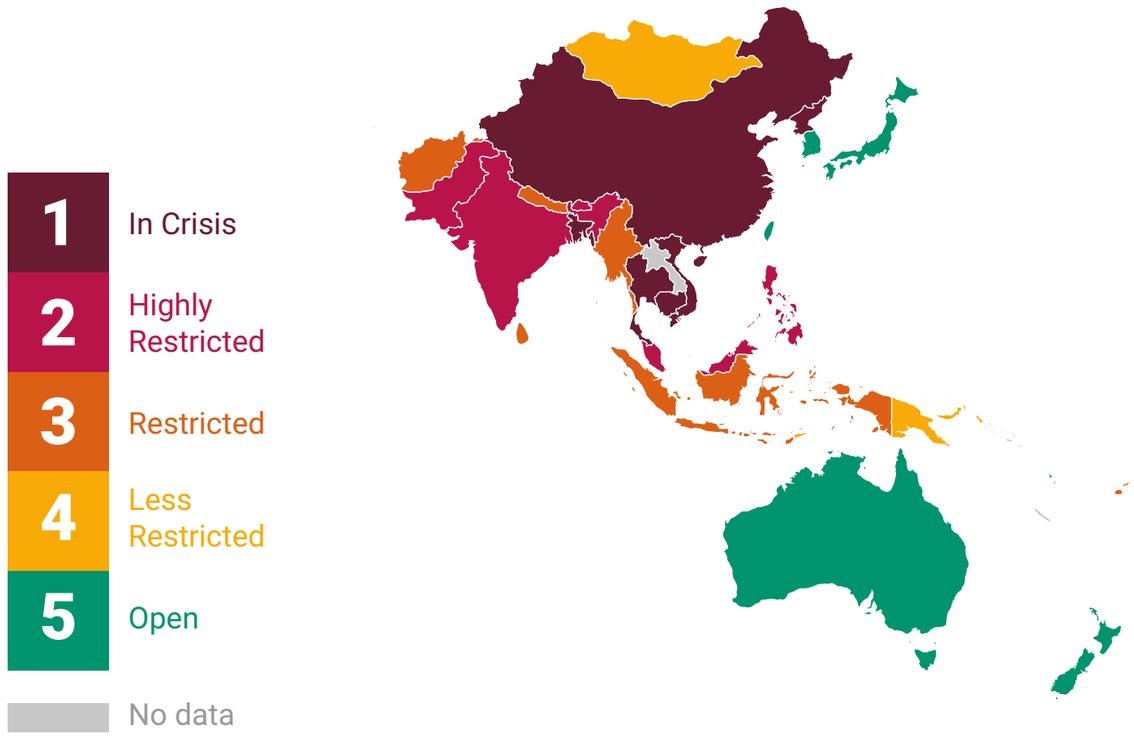


Figure 31: Asia and the Pacific GxR map

GxR score
45

Population
4.2 billion

Number of countries
29

- The regional score is at its lowest in a decade and 85% of the population lives in countries ranked **in crisis** or **highly restricted** – a rise of 39% since 2010.
- China's influence in the region is rising; Hong Kong's score took a huge hit this year, as China passed laws throttling freedom of expression.
- Ethno-religious nationalism and military influence are toxic forces in the region.

4.1

Regional overview

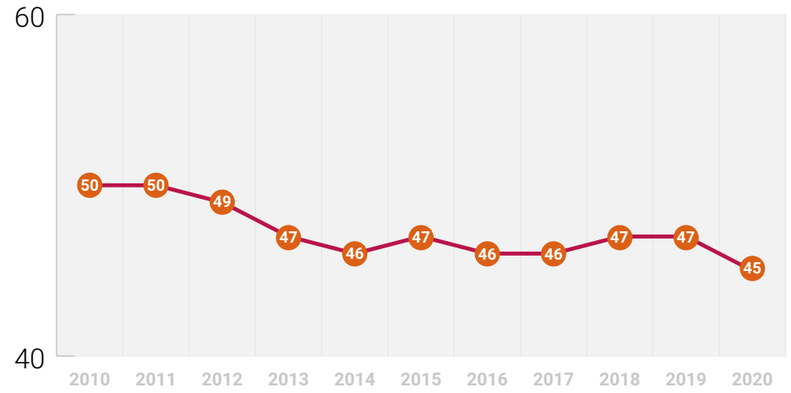
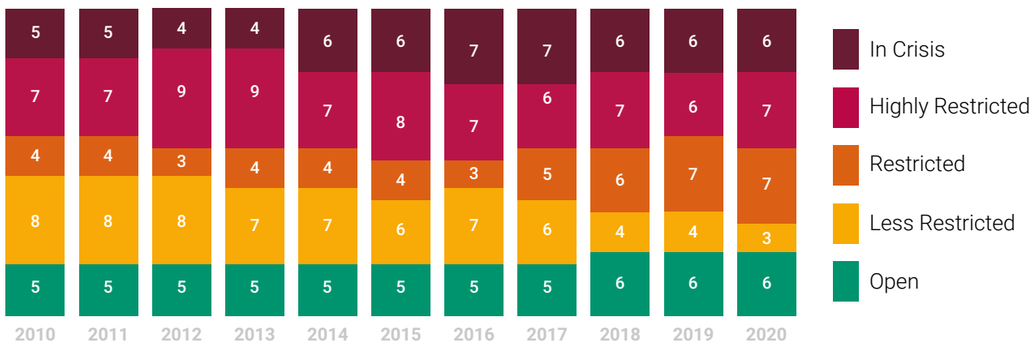


Figure 32: Asia and the Pacific regional GxR scores, 2010–2020

Number of countries per expression category: Asia and the Pacific



Percentage of population per expression category: Asia and the Pacific

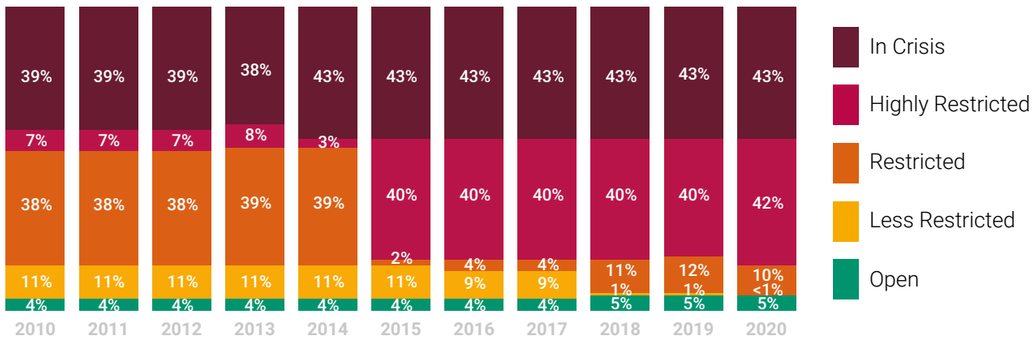


Figure 33: Number of countries and percentage of population in Asia and the Pacific per expression category, 2010–2020

Top 5	GxR score	Bottom 5	GxR score
New Zealand	90	North Korea	0
Japan	85	China	2
Australia	83	Cambodia	11
South Korea	83	Bangladesh	12
Taiwan	81	Vietnam	13

Table 10: Top 5 and bottom 5 GxR scores for Asia and the Pacific in 2020

Significant advances in GxR scores

2019–2020	2019–2020		2010–2020	
None	Maldives	+31	Burma/ Myanmar	+37
	South Korea	+17	Fiji	+22
	Burma/ Myanmar	+13	Sri Lanka	+13
			South Korea	+12

Significant declines in GxR scores

2019–2020		2019–2020		2010–2020	
Sri Lanka	-21	Hong Kong	-34	Hong Kong	-47
Hong Kong	-17	Philippines	-27	India	-38
		India	-13	Philippines	-28
		Sri Lanka	-12	Pakistan	-17
		Indonesia	-11	Thailand	-17

Table 11: Top 5 countries in Asia and the Pacific with significant advances and declines in GxR scores, 2019–2020, 2015–2020, and 2010–2020

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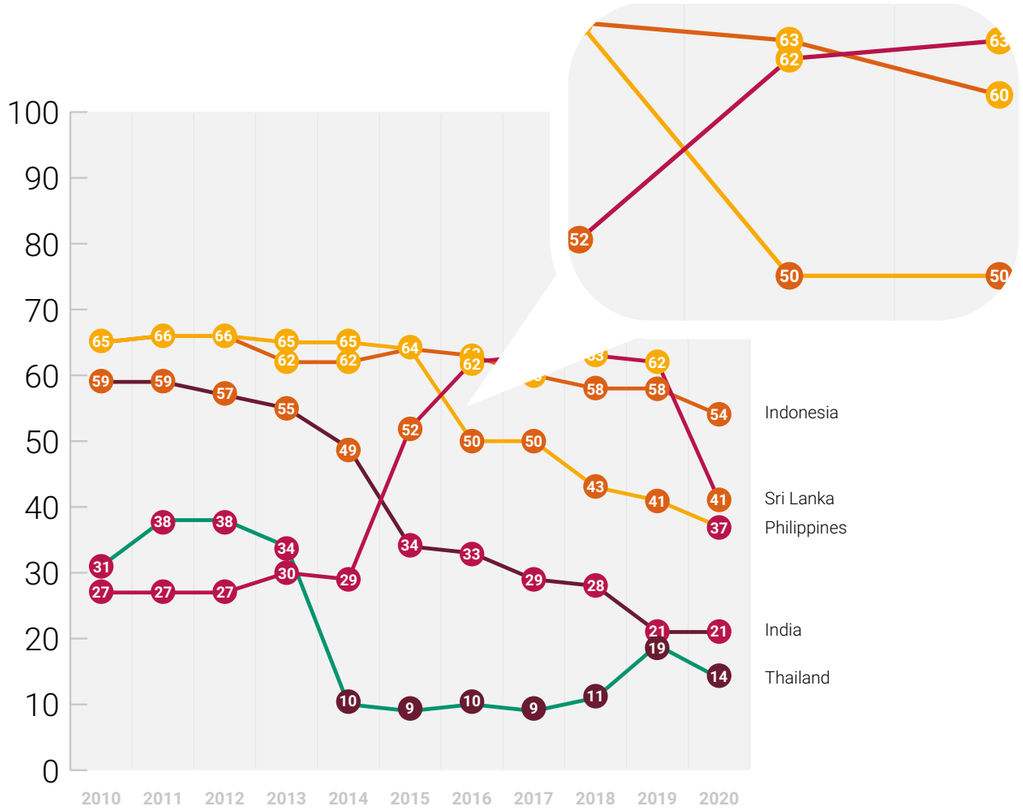


Figure 34: GxR scores 2010–2020: Decliner countries in Asia and the Pacific

click to enlarge overlapping data points

NB: For Hong Kong's decline, see Figure 35

Though India's decline seems to have evened out during 2020, it was certainly the year in which the seeds were sown for the crisis we have seen in 2021.

> **When leaders look to concentrate their power, they typically attack our rights to freedom of expression first. They begin with attacks on the media, then attacking civil society and ultimately destroying the independence of elections.**

4.2

2021 Hindsight: Regional trends

Asia was the first region affected by the pandemic, and the region's numerous military, monarchical, and autocratic regimes grasped the opportunity to seize extra powers and crush dissent behind the veil of a health emergency.

Regimes spent the year implementing coverups and tightening their grip on expression. Measures to contain protests and enforce lockdowns were often brutal – even extending to a 'shoot to kill' order in the Philippines (GxR score: 37), where President Rodrigo Duterte's tenure continues to garner violence and human rights violations.

Military power continues to plague the region and derail democratisation. The pendulum between military coup and (usually incomplete) handover to civilian rule, followed by slow decline back into constitutional crisis and military-backed autocracy, continues in countries like Sri Lanka (GxR score: 41) – whose score has been significantly unstable over the last decade.

Similarly, Myanmar (GxR score: 42) appears on the advancer list for the past five- and 10-year periods, but transition from military to civilian government brought more serious human rights abuses – including genocide – before another coup in 2021 (GxR scores will reflect these changes in next year's *Global Expression Report*). Once again, protests have filled the streets, and the army has killed hundreds of civilians.

Ethnic and religious nationalism has been a growing issue in the region, seen at its most deadly in Myanmar but also visible in Malaysia (GxR score: 37), India (GxR score: 21), and Sri Lanka. Hate speech around COVID-19 has been extreme, with hatred stoked up against minority groups across the region; the pandemic was used to promote conspiracy theories and pseudoscience-promoting nationalist and xenophobic political goals, while accusations of intentionally spreading the virus were made against, for example, Muslims in India.

The rise of fundamentalism and ethno-religious nationalism are hindering pluralism and affecting equality and expression in countries from Malaysia to India. The Hindu nationalism endorsed by India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, is proving to be a particularly egregious manifestation of this.

Internet shutdowns in the region – an ongoing issue – have a strong discriminatory intent. The most serious shutdowns have targeted Rohingya refugees in Myanmar and Bangladesh, as well as Kashmir (a predominantly Muslim region of India). Despite a Supreme Court ruling in January 2020, which invalidated the government's indefinite Internet shutdown orders, Kashmir has been limited to the use of 2G services – which allow only an exchange of text messages – preventing 8 million Kashmiri residents from accessing reliable health information about COVID-19.

This is all profoundly concerning, and an outright attack on human rights, but there are concerns that worse is still to come in the region, e.g. Cambodia's (GxR score: 11) new National Internet Gateway requires all Internet traffic to be routed through a regulatory body, which is charged with monitoring online activity before it reaches users.

Asia has also been a nexus of false-information prosecutions. Bangladesh (GxR score: 12) saw dozens of new cases of false information, along with accusations of torture and death in custody, while Cambodia, Indonesia (GxR score: 54), and the Philippines brought in new laws and legal provisions to control the flow of information around COVID-19.

In April 2020, the Indonesian authorities ordered the police to scour the Internet and take action against 'hoax spreaders' and anyone insulting the government; at least 57 people were arrested. As well as prosecuting over 30 members of the former opposition party for allegedly spreading 'fake news', Cambodia (**in crisis** since 2013) has also stepped up prosecution under older Penal Code provisions, like 'incitement' – at least 14 youth and environmental activists were charged with baseless incitement charges for peaceful protest activities.

Cybersecurity laws have proliferated, to the detriment of freedom of expression – including Bangladesh's highly problematic Digital Security Act, which saw unfettered use in 2020; nearly 1,000 were charged and more than 350 detained under its broad provisions for online expression, including reporting corruption in the use of pandemic relief funds. The broad provisions of this law made it open to abuse during the pandemic, and its widespread use has led to high levels of self-censorship in the country.

Bangladesh has seen one of the biggest global drops in its GxR indicator for Internet censorship efforts since 2015, and is in the global bottom 10 for Internet legal regulation and government social media monitoring.

Cambodia – consistently **in crisis** since 2013 – enacted a state-of-emergency law that embodied many of the classic problems of pandemic legislation

– broad, vague, open to abuse, and giving the government power to surveil and arrest dissenters. It was implemented fiercely: over 30 opposition activists were detained as of November 2020.

Vexatious lawsuits against communicators and activists – known as strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) – continued, impeding work and crippling outlets and organisations with fines. Maria Ressa's case in the Philippines is emblematic of attempts to silence public-interest journalism with spurious legal cases. In 2020, Ressa was sentenced to an 'indeterminate sentence' – a minimum of 6 months and 1 day, and a maximum of 6 years. In addition to this case, Ressa and her colleagues face seven other cases in various courts – a campaign generally understood to be retaliation for the website's reporting on Duterte's 'war on drugs'.

Sri Lanka is on both the advancer and decliner lists, having experienced big gains in its GxR score between 2015 and 2019 but a huge drop in 2020. This drop was due to the consolidation of new autocratic structures. Having gained a parliamentary 'supermajority', Mahinda Rajapaksa has been sworn in for a fourth time as Prime Minister. The new cabinet has seen the Rajapaksa brothers retain powerful ministries and other family members appointed as ministers – allowing the Rajapaksas to pursue their campaign promise to return Sri Lanka to an executive presidency through constitutional changes. This has led to rapid securitisation and a broader deterioration of the environment; the Army Chief was appointed to lead pandemic management, and serious concerns were raised about religious discrimination against Muslims, with forced cremations and arbitrary arrests.

Other bright spots in the region have gone dark: Malaysia's reformist Pakatan Harapan government fell in February 2020, giving way to a hardline conservative government, which cracked down on critical speech and dashed hopes for progress.

China's (GxR score: 2) abusive governance continues unchallenged – as do its consistently low GxR scores – with total online control, violent restrictions on religious freedoms, punishment of whistleblowers, and expulsions of foreign journalists (see Chapter 1, page 31). The Chinese state invested substantial time and resources in controlling the international narrative around its role in the pandemic, sending resources and doctors across the region – and even having the state media suggest the pandemic originated in Italy, or from a visiting US military delegation.

Mass detentions of ethnic and religious minorities – particularly the Uighur – continued in Xinjiang, as did forced-labour programmes, systemic rape, and draconian punishments inside the internment camps.

Concerningly, states in the region are increasingly turning towards the Chinese model, with increasing Chinese presence – both economically and diplomatically – and a perception of increasing chaos in Europe and the USA. Respect for freedom of expression was often tied to agreements over aid, trade, and investment with, for example, Europe or the USA. More recently, however, conditionality has faded, as China has risen as an alternative source of financial benefit with no political strings attached. In particular, the Chinese Government is exporting both its technology and its vision of how the Internet should be governed, through its Digital Silk Road policy.

China's effect was most visible in 2020 in Hong Kong (GxR score: 24). The pro-democracy movement continued to call for reform in early 2020; but in June, Chinese authorities abruptly passed a new National Security Law for Hong Kong, with no consultation and with immediate effect.

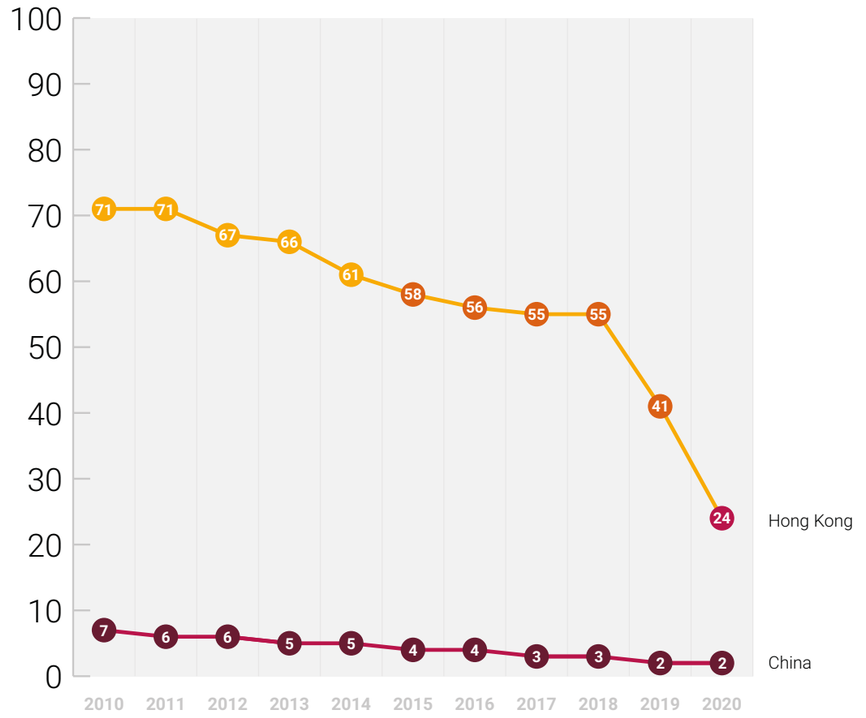


Figure 35: GxR scores 2010–2020: China and Hong Kong

The measure created broadly worded new offences – separatism, subversion of state power, terrorism, and collusion with foreign states – allowing the transfer of cases to mainland China for trial, as well as establishing a new security apparatus and providing for closed trials by hand-picked judges. The law has since been used to arrest and charge media workers, politicians, and activists. Hong Kong suffered 2020's largest loss in the indicator for public participation in decision-making.

4.3

Country in focus: Thailand

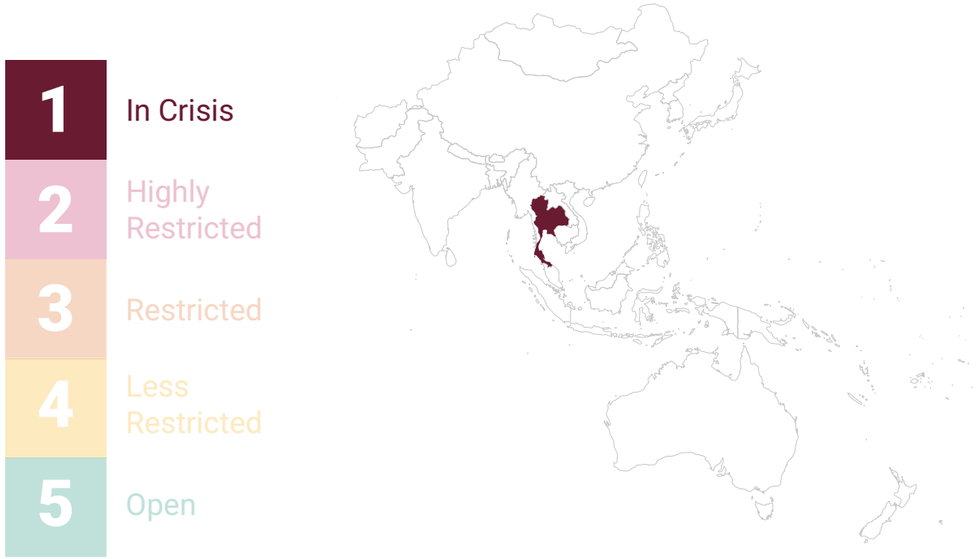


Figure 36: Country in focus: Thailand

FACTFILE

GxR score
14

Capital city
Bangkok

Population
70 million

GDP per capita
USD 7,800

Global ranking
131/161

Freedom of expression is protected under Chapter III, Section 34 of the Constitution. Thailand ratified the ICCPR in 1996.

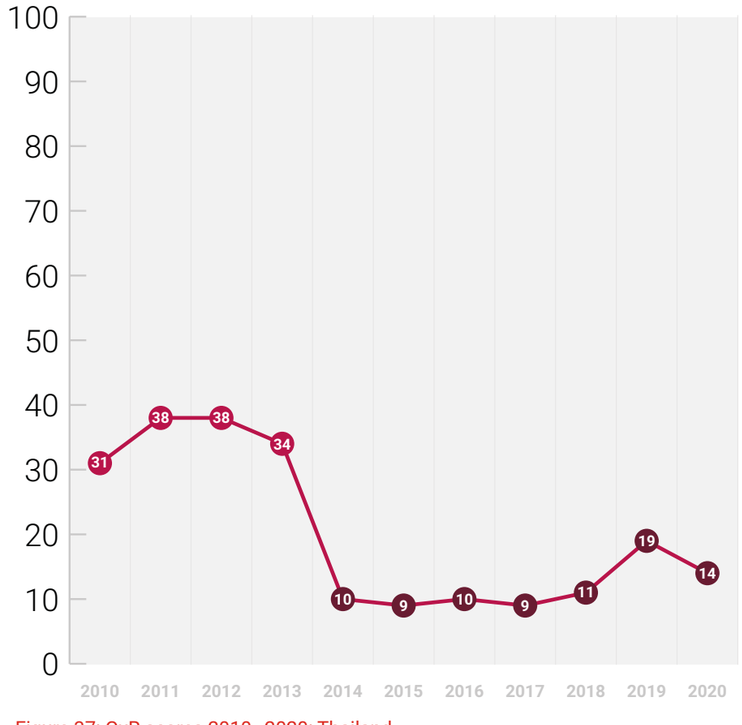


Figure 37: GxR scores 2010–2020: Thailand

Thailand's authorities used the pandemic to restrict freedoms – but the emergency decree was just one tool in the arsenal wielded against a burgeoning pro-democracy movement. Spurious charges were handed down to protesters, demonstrations were obstructed and dispersed, and independent media were targeted, amid harassment and surveillance of activists.

After a brief rise in score in 2019, Thailand was hit by a wave of repression on multiple fronts in 2020 – directed against a pro-democracy movement that inspired thousands to take to the streets demanding the dissolution of military-backed government, a new constitution, reform of the monarchy, and an end to the harassment of activists and government critics.

A military coup in 2014 saw GxR scores plummet. General elections held in March 2019 marked the end of absolute military rule, but political manoeuvring and the military-drafted constitution allowed Prayut Chan-o-cha – the leader of the 2014 military coup – to form a military-backed government and retain the post of Prime Minister.

After the dissolution of the main opposition group, the Future Forward Party – ostensibly on the grounds of an illegal donation its founder supposedly accepted – the movement intensified in February 2020.

Though briefly subdued by the onset of the pandemic, protests flared again from May to the end of the year, mostly led by youth calling for democratic reforms. In September and October, tens of thousands gathered in Bangkok and were met with numerous arrests and escalating riot-control measures, including water cannons laced with chemical irritants to disperse crowds.

Notably, gatherings that were not anti-government were permitted, without interference or prosecutions under the emergency or public assembly legislation, including huge parades celebrating an English Premier League championship victory in late July.

The government harassed and obstructed protest organisers at every turn. At least 200 individuals were charged over their role in the protests. Security forces harassed and intimidated protest organisers and participants, even visiting them at their homes and schools.

States of emergency were used in layers to limit expression; an initial state of emergency was declared in March, complete with sweeping measures to limit protest and draconian provisions to punish publication of information deemed 'false or capable of causing fear'.

A state of 'extreme emergency' was then declared in September in Bangkok, on the grounds of national security, after a close encounter between a royal motorcade and protesters. There was no evidence that the protests – which have been overwhelmingly peaceful – constituted a threat to others, and certainly not a threat of the magnitude that would justify the severe measures.

Many protesters are accused of violating emergency measures – which carries a penalty of up to two years' imprisonment – or of breaching the military-era Public Assembly Act. Others have been charged with sedition, the illegal use of megaphones, obstructing road traffic, or violating laws on public 'cleanliness' – particularly in response to tying white ribbons to structures at various locations across the country.

Calling for reform of the monarchy is particularly high risk in Thailand, where the institution is protected by laws carrying severe criminal penalties. Since 2018, authorities had respected a de facto moratorium on the use of Section 112 – which protects members of the Thai monarchy from insults, threats, and defamation – but those penalties came back into common use in late 2020, amid an explicit desire to expand the arsenal of weapons against protesters.

This led to the longest-ever sentence being handed down: Anchan Preelert was sentenced to a record of 87 years in prison for sharing video clips allegedly criticising the monarchy back in 2015. Her sentence was cut in half because she admitted guilt. Many more were detained under the same law.

Three prominent activists were charged with committing an act of violence against the Queen under Section 110 of the Criminal Code – a crime that carries a maximum penalty of death or life imprisonment.

Amid the crackdown on the streets, the government sought to control the narrative online, pressuring social media platforms to block critical content and taking legal action against independent media outlets reporting on the protests. Social media users were pressured to remove posts and sign memoranda of understanding stating they would refrain from making similar posts in the future. The Computer Crimes Act and new Cybersecurity Act were also weaponised against dissenters and protesters, and a new cyber police unit with 1,700 officers was approved in May 2020 to monitor cybercrimes, including those related to 'fake news'.

The Ministry of Digital Economy and Society announced it was investigating 300,000 web addresses that purportedly violated the emergency

decree. The Technology Crime Suppression Division sought to block more than 2,000 websites and social media pages that included ‘inappropriate content that could harm the country’s security’ – including ‘content that harassed the monarch’.

The government also sought to block online broadcasts by independent media outlets; Voice TV – one of the primary platforms broadcasting from the protests – was suspended.

The authorities ordered Facebook to block the hugely popular page Royalist Marketplace, a forum for open discussion about the monarchy in Thailand. Facebook complied with the order, stating it was ‘compelled’ to do so, but later initiated a lawsuit against the government seeking to overturn it.

The government later launched a complaint against Facebook and Twitter after the companies failed to comply with content-takedown orders. Several Tinder users also reported being banned from the platform for sharing pro-democracy content.

> **“The false dichotomy that pits expression rights against public health must be roundly rejected because it intentionally ignores that expression strengthens public health and supports economic recovery.”**

Chapter 5

Europe and Central Asia

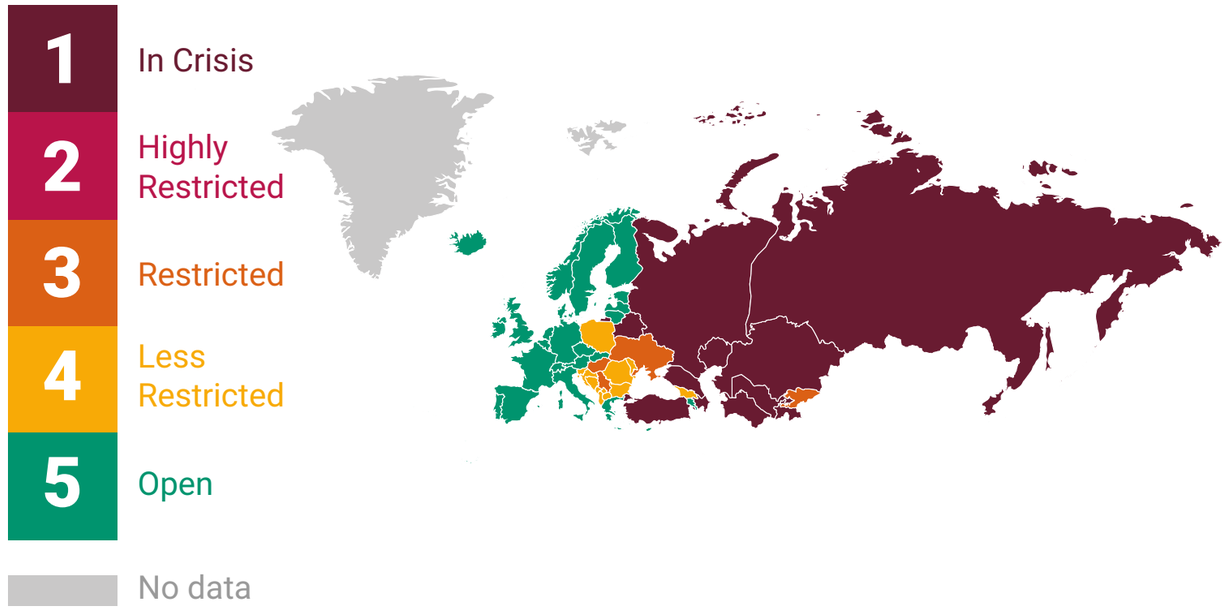


Figure 38: Europe and Central Asia GxR map

GxR score
68

Population
923 million

Number of countries
49

- 34% of the population lives in countries that are **in crisis**.
- The regional score fell in 2020, having held steady since 2016.
- Autocratisation continues apace in Central Europe, even within the EU. The populist leaderships of Hungary, Poland, and Slovenia continue to erode checks and balances and capture independent media – and other countries are following suit.

5.1

Regional overview

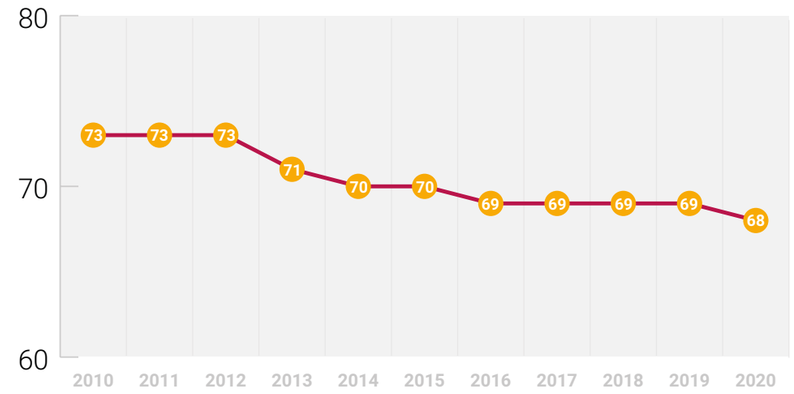
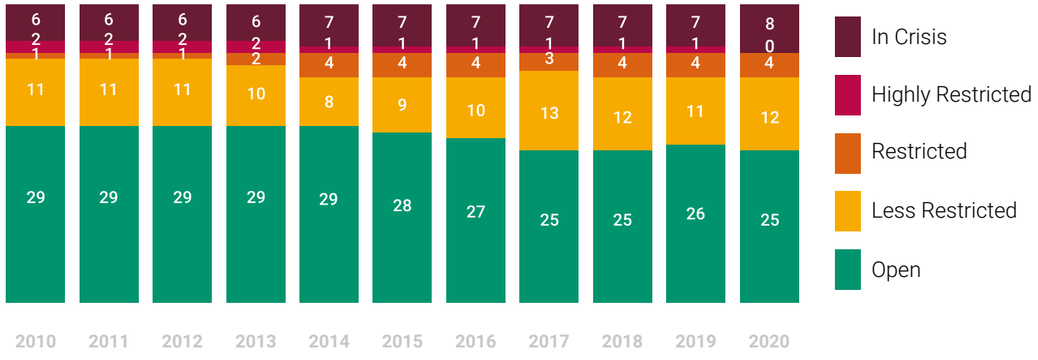


Figure 39: Europe and Central Asia regional GxR scores, 2010–2020

Number of countries per expression category: Europe and Central Asia



Percentage of population per expression category: Europe and Central Asia

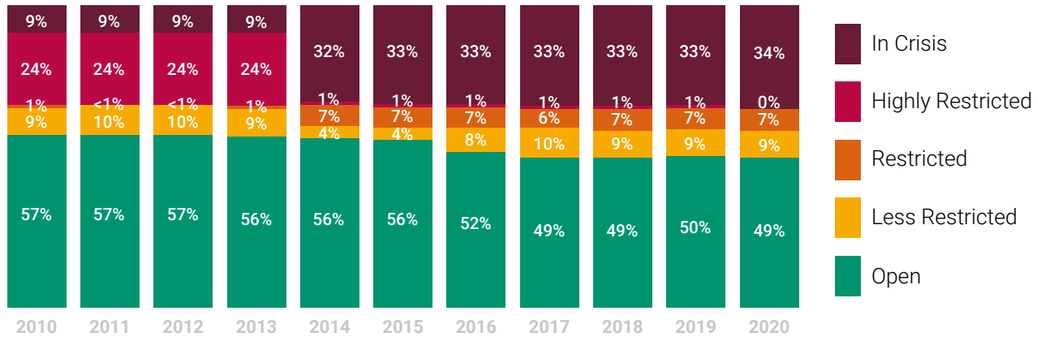


Figure 40: Number of countries and percentage of population in Europe and Central Asia per expression category, 2010–2020

Europe and Central Asia has a higher average score than any other region, and nearly half the regional population live in countries rated as **open**. About one-third of the regional population, however, live in countries rated as **in crisis**.

With countries in the EU excluded from the calculation, the proportion of the population living in countries rated **in crisis** increases to 77%, with only 5% living in **open** countries.

Top 5	GxR score	Bottom 5	GxR score
Switzerland	95	Turkmenistan	1
Denmark	95	Tajikistan	3
Finland	94	Belarus	6
Norway	94	Turkey	6
Sweden	94	Azerbaijan	8

Table 12: Top 5 and bottom 5 GxR scores for Europe and Central Asia in 2020

Significant advances in GxR scores

2019–2020		2019–2020		2010–2020	
None		Armenia	+19	Armenia	+16
		North Macedonia	+14	Uzbekistan	+11
		Uzbekistan	+10		

Significant declines in GxR scores

2019–2020		2019–2020		2010–2020	
Belarus	-18	Poland	-26	Poland	-27
Slovenia	-14	Slovenia	-18	Serbia	-27
		Belarus	-15	Turkey	-25
		Hungary	-12	Hungary	-23
		Kyrgyzstan	-10	Slovenia	-18

Table 13: Top 5 countries in Europe and Central Asia with significant advances and declines in GxR scores, 2019–2020, 2015–2020, and 2010–2020

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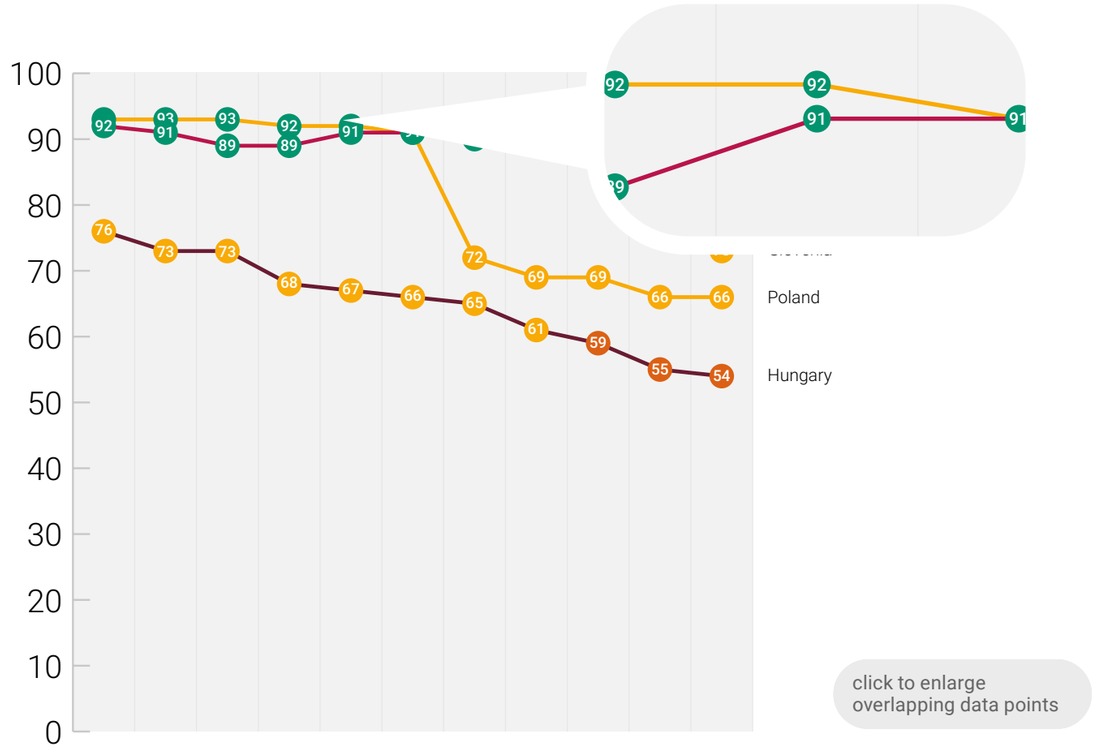

Figure 41: Significant GxR score declines in the EU, 2

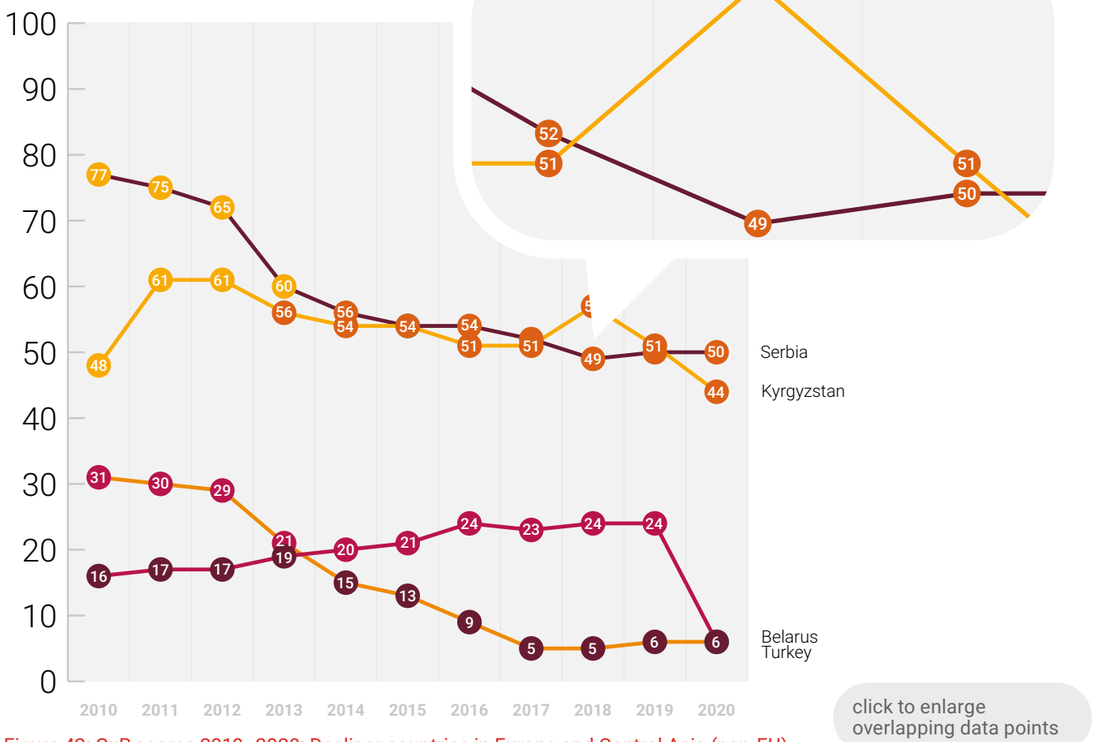

Figure 42: GxR scores 2010–2020: Decliner countries in Europe and Central Asia (non-EU)

5.2

2021 Hindsight: Regional trends

This region is host to some of the world's most established democracies and highest-scoring countries – but even some strong democracies, and those with good human rights, failed to confront the pandemic while respecting human rights and international standards.

The region is, however, also host to numerous crumbling democracies, where attacks on democratic institutions and independent media threaten to undermine the rule of law.

While 10 countries followed process to derogate from provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights (several for long periods), many simply discarded human rights processes in their scramble to enact states of emergency or legislation.

Attacks on journalists saw a significant rise. The Council of Europe registered 201 media freedom alerts in 2020 – the highest annual total ever recorded, and almost 40% more than in 2019. A record number of alerts related to physical attacks. As lockdown measures started to lift in late 2020, Europe saw a serious spike in attacks on journalists – particularly those covering protests – from Italy (GxR score: 90) to Poland (GxR score: 66), where journalists were assaulted by protesters and arrested by police.

Albanian (GxR score: 61) media owner, Kastriot Reçi, was murdered outside his own home. Editor-in-chief of the Russian (GxR score: 16) Koza Press, Irina Slavina, died by self-immolation after sustained official harassment. Impunity for murders in Europe remains the norm; the intellectual author of Ján Kuciak's murder in Slovakia (GxR score: 86) is still at liberty, and a third year passed without justice for Daphne Caruana Galizia's murder in Malta (GxR score: 80).

The last few years have seen a hollowing out of institutions, concentrations of power, and removal of checks and balances – trends that accelerated in 2020. V-Dem's data shows us that the slide towards autocracy begins by gaining control of civil society and media, before chipping away at democratic institutions, and ultimately destroying the independence of elections. The indicator-level data in countries like Hungary (GxR score: 54), Turkey (GxR score: 6), Poland, and Serbia (GxR score: 50) consistently show us this pattern.

Hungary and Poland – two notable GxR decliners (see Figure 41) – continue to autocratise, following similar playbooks in which media capture is a key tactic. The economic struggles faced by independent media make outlets much more vulnerable to predatory buyouts, as well as fines and harassment.

Poland saw a serious takeover of independent press by the state oil company, amid 'repolonisation' of the media, in a deal that handed the ruling Law and Justice Party, Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS), indirect control over 20 of Poland's 24 regional newspapers. This was a tactic straight out of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's playbook. In March 2020, a businessman close to Fidesz (Hungary's ruling party) bought 50% of the Indamedia Group, a partner of Index – the country's largest independent news outlet. In June, the editor-in-chief of Index was dismissed for voicing his concerns about the outlet's independence. Albania's Government also took control of two independent TV channels in 2020.

Perhaps the most concerning autocratic contagion is Slovenia (GxR score: 73), whose hard-Right Prime Minister, Janez Janša, returned to power for a third term in March 2020 when a Left-leaning coalition collapsed. Janša's career and tactics echo that of close ally Orbán, with whom he shares an open distaste for the press – as well as a habit of expressing that distaste on Twitter, earning him the nickname 'Marshall Tweeto'.

Rule of law and media freedom are under siege in Slovenia, where attacks on checks and balances are increasingly normalised – including the judiciary: Slovenia's Chief Auditor suffered intimidation after he opened an investigation into government procurement of protective equipment. Institutions are being hollowed out, and press freedom is being eroded, but people are increasingly taking to the streets to express their anger towards the government.

Problematic emergency legislation proliferated across the region as the pandemic broke out. Hungary was a particularly egregious example; although the state of emergency only held for three months, it allowed Orbán to rule by decree, and various measures were passed under its auspices that will have serious long-term effects on democracy in the country – including a 'fake news' provision allowing for up to five years in prison. Russia's new 'fake news' law was immediately employed to harass journalists who questioned official COVID-19 statistics or the state response.

'Fake news' was not the only cover for repression; across the region, journalists undertaking public-interest investigations into the pandemic were arrested or fined under provisions ranging from 'incitement to hatred' to 'causing panic and disorder'.

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In Turkey, over 400 people – including journalists and doctors – were detained in March alone for their 'provocative' and 'abusive' social media posts about the pandemic – as well as a new Internet bill, which restricted an already-impossible environment in which thousands of sites are blocked. The new bill makes it compulsory for social media companies based outside Turkey to have a legal representative in Turkey, and to keep user data from Turkey locally.

SLAPPs are a form of legal harassment. Pursued by law firms on behalf of powerful individuals and organisations who seek to avoid public scrutiny, their aim is to drain the target's financial and psychological resources and chill critical voices – to the detriment of public participation. These vexatious cases are on the rise in Europe – from big corporations, powerful individuals, and ruling parties (e.g. Poland's PiS) – but there is some movement towards a solution in the courts after civil society pressure.

Information also came under attack in the region in 2020. Using the pandemic as justification, a handful of governments either extended or suspended deadlines by which public bodies were required to respond to FOI requests. Bulgaria, Serbia, and Romania doubled the maximum response time, while Hungary trebled it (from 30 to 90 days). Italy, Spain, and Slovenia suspended FOI deadlines altogether.

While blocking the passage of information to citizens, governments continued to collect it in huge quantities. This trend, while observable over the last few years, dangerously accelerated during the pandemic, with its various data-heavy and tracking-application-focused responses.

The EU put forward a white paper on artificial intelligence that failed to ban biometric surveillance in public spaces; the body's approach to this technology fails to protect human rights. The UK (a relatively high-scoring country with a GxR score of 85) put forward concerning proposals for an increase in the number of public institutions that can access communications data collected under the UK's draconian surveillance law, the Investigatory Powers Act.

The closed markets currently in place in the digital sphere are bad for competitors – and for freedom of expression. In 2020, the EU also published drafts of key new regulations on social media platforms – the Digital Services Act and the Digital Markets Act – two pieces of legislation with major implications for freedom of expression online. It is particularly important that the Digital Markets Act will aim to tackle high market concentration. Despite a number of positive aspects of the draft, the two acts do not challenge the status quo of gatekeeper platforms, which monopolise digital markets and insufficiently protect users' human rights.

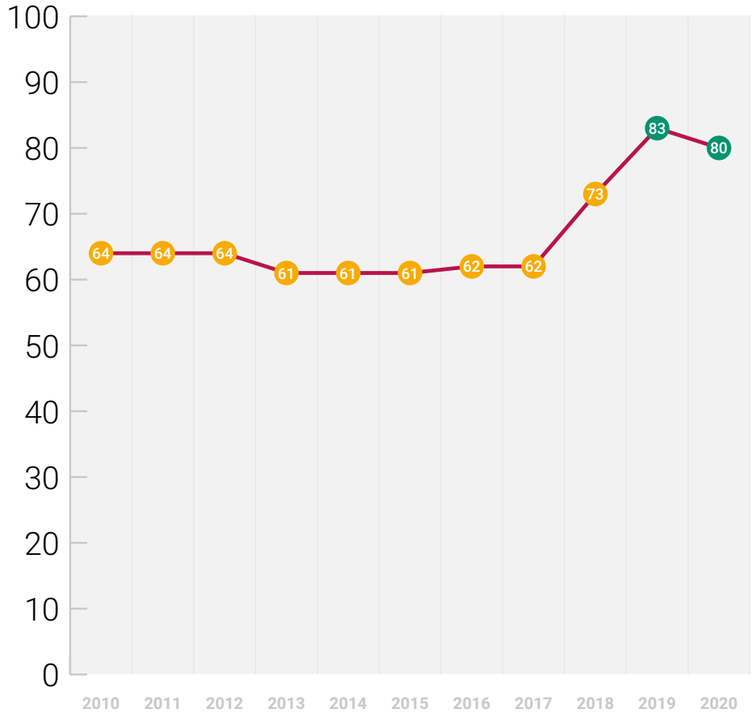


Figure 43: GxR scores 2010–2020: Armenia

One of the great hopes of the last few years – Armenia (GxR score: 80) – saw the gains of the Velvet Revolution (a peaceful protest movement, which pushed a government to not only give up its leader but also install the leader the public wanted) threatened by war with Azerbaijan (GxR score: 8), which triggered a domestic crisis, claimed many civilian lives, and caused mass displacement.

Russia's limited rule of law and hostile expression environment closed even further in 2020. Putin gained the right to stay in power until 2036 in a referendum, and the scope of the repressive 'foreign agents' law was extended, while the attempted murder of opposition leader, Aleksey Navalny, was followed by his imprisonment in a penal colony.

Violent responses to protests and tightening restrictions of online expression – often under the guise of 'national security concerns' – leave little reason for hope in the Russian expression landscape. 'Fake news' and tight control of the narrative were somewhat predictable responses to the pandemic emergency.

"While blocking citizens from accessing information, governments continued to collect it in huge quantities. This trend of imposing surveillance has accelerated dangerously during the pandemic, with its various data-heavy and tracking-application-focused responses."

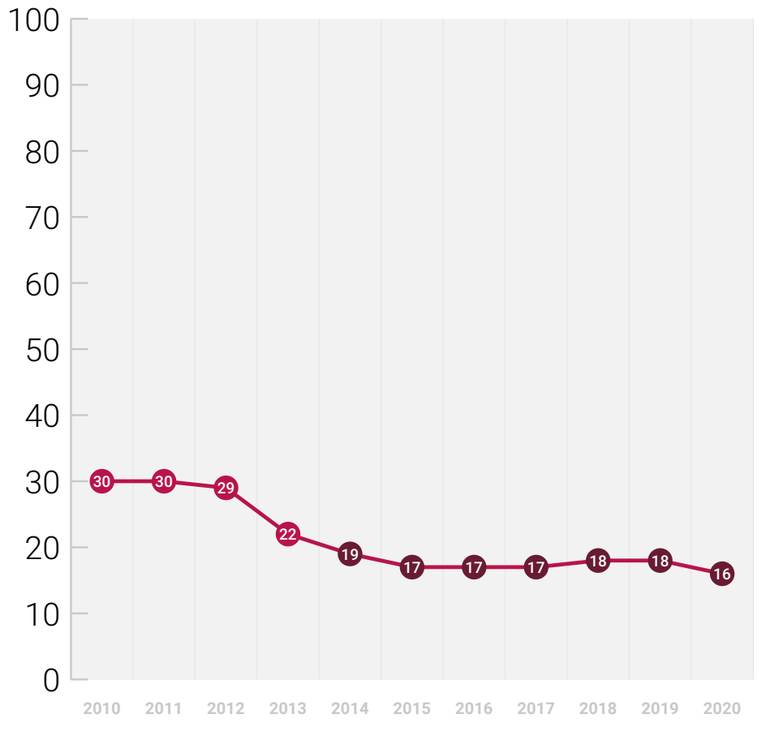


Figure 44: GxR scores, 2010–2020: Russia

Fraudulent parliamentary elections took place in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan (GxR score: 44), where Sadyr Japarov – a nationalist politician serving time on a kidnapping conviction – seized power before passing a highly problematic new constitution.

In an attempt to establish censorship, the Draft Constitution provides for the possibility to limit or ban media dissemination of information and content that can harm the 'morals and culture' of the people of Kyrgyzstan, and bans publications and events that are against the morals of the country.

Consistently at the bottom of the region's GxR scores, Turkmenistan (GxR score: 1) saw little change in 2020, when President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow maintained that the country was entirely free of COVID-19.

"Despite the grim figures in this report, there is much to praise and admire in the work hundreds of organisations are doing that benefit us all. There have been great strides in the teaching of media literacy, and in the calls for protection of journalists. Working together, we can continue to make a difference."

5.3

Country in focus: Belarus

Figure 45: Country in focus: Belarus

FACTFILE

GxR score
6

Capital city
Minsk

Population
9 million

GDP per capita
USD 6,700

Global ranking
146/161

Freedom of expression is protected under Section 2, Article 33 of the Constitution. Belarus ratified the ICCPR in 1973.

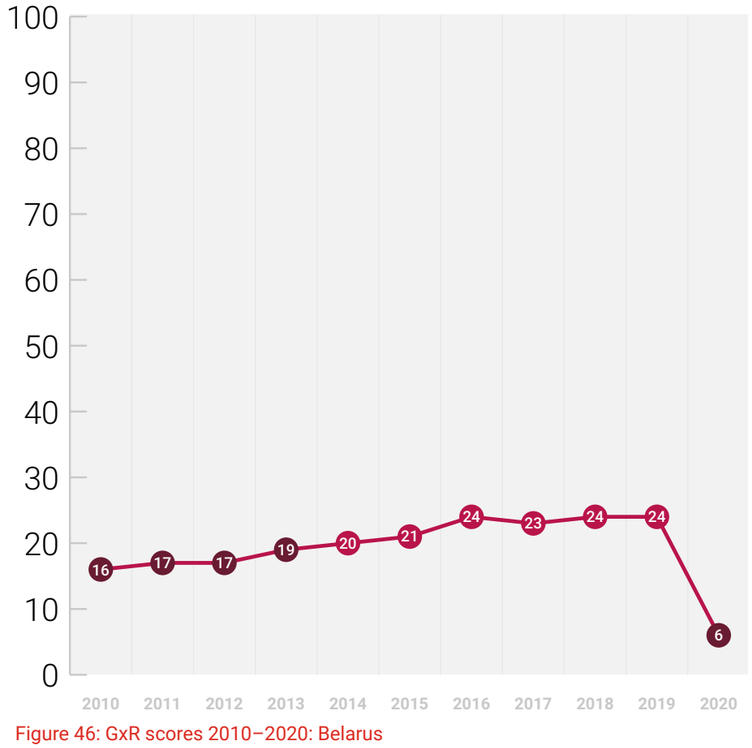


Figure 46: GxR scores 2010–2020: Belarus

Belarus (GxR score: 6) left the **in crisis** category in 2014 but fell dramatically back into it in 2020 with one of the biggest global declines of the year, amid a generalised and violent crackdown on protest and media, accompanied by reports of beatings and torture of detained protesters. A moment of hopeful pro-democratic uprising collapsed into heightened repression and tighter control.

Repression centred around the election, which saw crackdowns in both the lead-up and post-election period. The lead-up was marked by arrests of the opposition and communicators; authorities launched more than 500 criminal cases against potential presidential candidates, their teams, and their funders.

Belarus suffered 2020's biggest global drop in the freedom of discussion indicator, for which it is now in the global bottom 10. It also dropped into in the bottom 10 for freedom of assembly, government censorship efforts, and several other indicators.

Opposition in Belarus is notable for its women protagonists. Opposition leaders Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya (who stepped in after her husband was jailed), Veranika Tsepkalo, and Maria Kalesnikava spearheaded the campaign against President Alyaksandr Lukashenka in the lead-up to the election, after male opposition leaders were arrested or barred from running. Viktor Babaryko – Lukashenka's main rival – was arrested on his way to register as an election candidate, with 400,000 signatures of support.

Protests began to take place every Sunday, characterised by being totally nonviolent, with women on the frontlines, dressed in white, waving the white-and-red flag of the 1918 Belarusian Republic, and carrying flowers. The protests were known to some as 'the Slipper Uprising'; many carried slippers in their hands onto the streets, referring to Lukashenka as 'the cockroach' that needed to be crushed.

Even so, many protesters were arbitrarily detained and tortured and mistreated while in detention – including beatings, prolonged stress positions, electric shocks, and rape. Many women protesters reported threats of sexual and gender-based violence and humiliating treatment in custody. Between 9 August (election day) and 12 August 2020 alone, the government confirmed the detention of 6,700 protesters.

Lukashenka claimed an 80% majority at the election, giving him a sixth term. The elections were immediately condemned as fraudulent by much of the international community, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe called for a new election in line with international standards. Lukashenka has consistently claimed to have won elections on similar landslides.

On election day, the Internet was restricted to 2G networks, and access to over a hundred news websites and social media was blocked within Belarus for the three days around the election. There was limited or no access to YouTube, Viber, Telegram, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or Vkontakte. In the subsequent months, authorities continued to shut down mobile networks, block websites (including news sites and the websites of charities working with police victims), and social media, and to throttle mobile data – especially on Sundays, when Belarusians regularly held demonstrations.

Authorities blamed this on cyberattacks from foreign agents, but external and independent experts confirmed it was an attempt to restrict public organising and a functioning independent press.

Following the election, protests intensified, with hundreds of thousands of Belarusians regularly on the streets. The crackdown also intensified – an estimated 25,000 people had been detained by mid-November. Police used excessive force, including firing rubber bullets into crowds at short range, stun grenades, and water cannons, and at least four were killed by government forces.

Attacks on journalists were commonplace, both for covering protests and coronavirus. The President dismissed COVID-19 as a 'psychosis', while publicly recommending vodka, saunas, and driving tractors as ways of warding off the virus.

Raids were carried out on journalists' homes and offices, and equipment was destroyed and confiscated. In October, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus cancelled all the accreditations of journalists working for foreign media, and denied renewals to most outlets – save a few Russian companies.

Between August 2020 and March 2021, the authorities detained 400 journalists, giving at least 100 jail terms and fining others on charges including 'violating the rules on mass gatherings', 'disobeying the police', and 'violating the laws on mass media'. Additionally, the state-owned printing houses refused to print at least five independent newspapers – one of which tried to self-publish, and had an entire print run confiscated by law enforcement.

Early 2021 saw a fresh wave of raids on journalists' homes and criminal charges for journalists covering the protests, as well as more problematic legislation, signalling that Belarus's authorities have not yet hit rock bottom.

Chapter 6

Middle East and North Africa

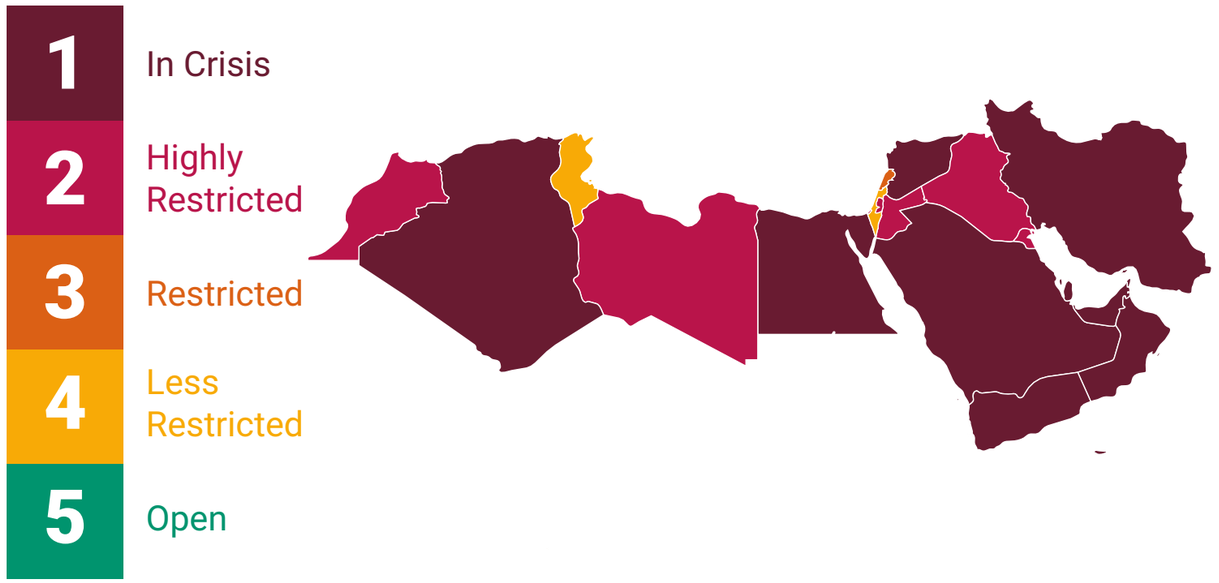


Figure 47: Middle East and North Africa GxR map

GxR score
23

Population
463 million

Number of countries
19

- The region has the world's lowest regional score by some distance – and it is still falling.
- No countries are ranked **open** in the region, and 72% of the population live in countries **in crisis**.
- Entrenched authoritarianism in the region means that many scores have not moved in the last 10 years in countries where civic space is extremely restricted and independent press is non-existent.

6.1

Regional overview

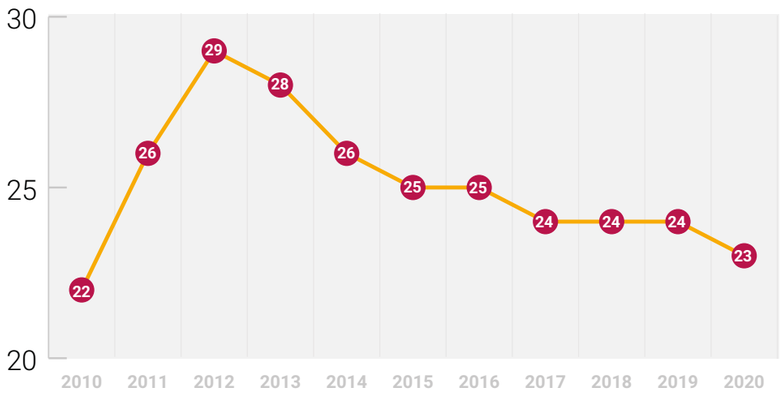
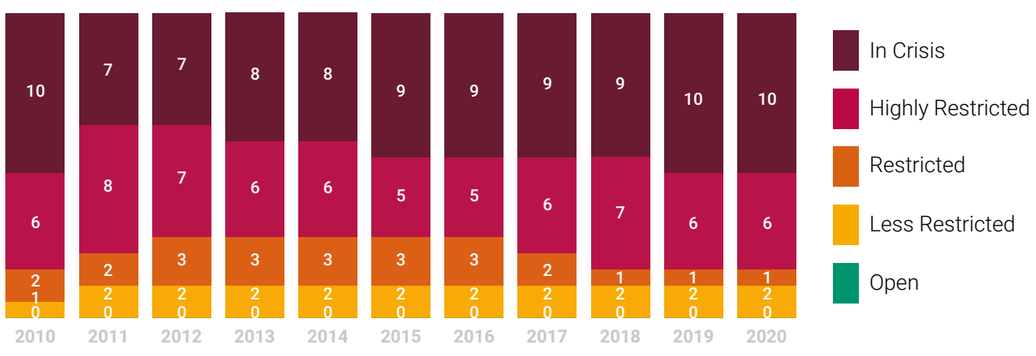


Figure 48: Middle East and North Africa regional GxR scores, 2010–2020

Number of countries per expression category: Middle East and North Africa



Percentage of population per expression category: Middle East and North Africa

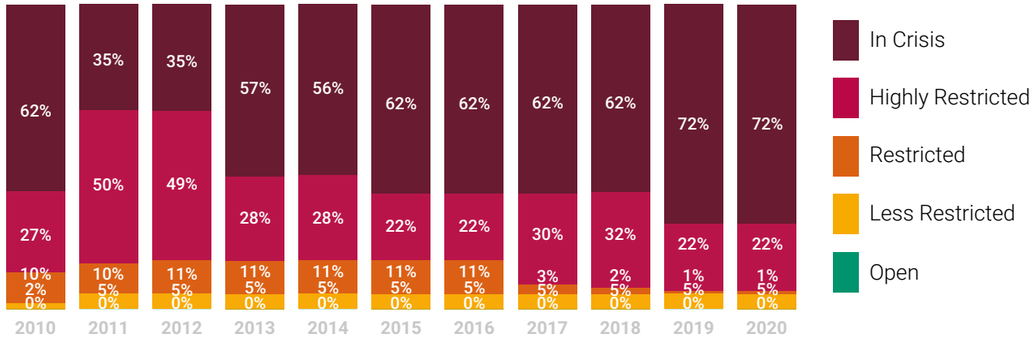


Figure 49: Number of countries and percentage of population in Middle East and North Africa per expression category, 2020

Top 5	GxR score	Bottom 5	GxR score
Tunisia	72	Syria	1
Israel	70	Bahrain	3
Lebanon	46	Saudi Arabia	3
Morocco	39	United Arab Emirates	5
Libya	38	Yemen	5

Table 14: Top 5 and bottom 5 GxR scores for Middle East and North Africa in 2020

The majority of the countries at the bottom of the list have been consistently **in crisis** over the past decade; only Yemen shifted downwards to the **in crisis** category in 2015.

Significant advances in GxR scores

2019–2020	2019–2020	2010–2020	
None	None	Tunisia	+67
		Libya	+36

Significant declines in GxR scores

2019–2020	2019–2020	2010–2020	
None	None	Yemen	-19
		Bahrain	-12
		Algeria	-11

Table 15: Top 5 countries in Middle East and North Africa with significant advances and declines in GxR scores, 2019–2020, 2015–2020, and 2010–2020

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6.2

2021 Hindsight: Regional trends

The region hosts most of the lowest-scoring countries in the world (with no countries ranked **open**), and has a regional score consistently lower than other regions. The regional score rose during and after the Arab Spring, but has since dropped nearly back to its 2010 level.

The region is plagued by entrenched authoritarianism and theocratic regimes, with many scores near rock bottom and little change in the last decade.

Many regimes in the region were not simply blocking and controlling information about the pandemic and their management of it, but actively using the pandemic to crack down on speech and dissent. Jordan (GxR score: 28), for example, used emergency laws to detain thousands of teachers who went on strike and protested, ultimately dissolving their union.

States of emergency and new repressive legislation were a common response to the pandemic. Many countries in the region criminalised legitimate expression under states of emergency or new legislation around the pandemic – from criminalisation of 'fake news' (e.g. Bahrain (GxR score: 3), Egypt (GxR score: 7), Iran (GxR score: 7), Kuwait (GxR score: 31), Morocco (GxR score: 39), Saudi Arabia (GxR score: 3), and the UAE (GxR score: 5)) to 'obstructing pandemic management' (Algeria (GxR score: 14), Jordan, and Morocco) – and even formation of judicial teams dedicated to prosecute those 'spreading rumours' (Bahrain, Iran, and Oman (GxR score: 7)).

But for some states in the region, it was simply more of the same; they did not need to add to their arsenal, and merely used already-punitive penal codes targeting journalists and social media users, e.g. defamation laws and silencing whistleblowers. Many regimes followed patterns they had been following for years – if not decades.

Protests were, as is often the case in the region, met with severe violence. Hundreds were killed amid live rounds shot at protesters in Iraq (GxR score: 27), hundreds were injured by rubber pellets in Lebanon (GxR score: 46), and there was generalised violence against protesters in Iran and Jordan.

Algeria's Hirak protest movement was hit hard by a sweeping protest ban in name of COVID-19, amid an election crackdown and fears that the military were to regain ground at the polls. The country dropped a further four points in 2020, and is now comfortably in the **in crisis** category into which it dropped in 2019. With the world's attention fixed on the pandemic, Algerian authorities pushed through prosecutions targeting activists, journalists, and supporters of the Hirak movement in May.

Despite the adoption of a new Algerian Constitution on 1 November 2020, and a presidential speech announcing more guarantees for freedom of expression, many journalists in Algeria are still imprisoned for their work, or face charges.

Digital rights also suffered under new Internet censorship and violations of digital privacy, particularly in Gulf States, including Bahrain, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. The free flow of information online was severely hindered as blockings continued (e.g. Wikipedia in Iran, 16 news sites in Algeria, and many news sites in Egypt) and newspaper bans were implemented (e.g. Iran, Egypt, Jordan, Oman, Morocco, and Yemen (GxR score: 5)) – despite lack of evidence of necessity.

Many authorities in the region hid and manipulated COVID-19 case numbers and death statistics. In Syria (GxR score: 1), the government decreed that the state press agency, the Syrian Arab News Agency, was the only source of valid information. Iran had one of the region's biggest early coronavirus outbreaks – and one of its biggest coverups amid crackdowns, propaganda (e.g. fuelling conspiracy theories about biological warfare), and the regime's usual human rights abuses. In the run-up to the 2021 presidential elections, the regime prioritised control of the narrative, amid escalating diplomatic and economic crises – both exacerbated by US sanctions.

A raft of concerning legislation and legal projects emerged from Iran in 2020, extinguishing hopes for broader reform and putting limits on critical speech and religious freedoms.

Egypt remains in a dire situation. Military power has a strong hold, with little popular action in the near-extinguished civic space. New amendments to the country's emergency law granted President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi additional sweeping powers, which allowed him to ban or limit public gatherings – even outside of health emergencies – and expanded the jurisdiction of military courts amid an escalating crackdown on dissidence in all its forms. Meanwhile, international journalists were expelled for questioning official statistics, and websites were blocked over 'fake news'.

Hopes of political transformation seem dashed in Lebanon. Even after the chemical explosion in Beirut's port, and huge protests against government failures and corruption (more than 700 were injured by the violent state response), the country's elite even resisted the investigation of the port explosion. The Cybercrime Bureau of the Internal Security Forces was particularly active in 2020, summoning, arresting, and prosecuting bloggers, journalists, activists, and ordinary citizens over critical comments about the corruption of politicians and state officials. Authorities forced some to sign promises to stop their activism in exchange for their release.

Israel (GxR score: 70) is among the highest scores in the region, but it is key to note the serious effects of the Israeli state and its attacks on freedoms in Palestine (GxR score: 34), which has neither the resources nor the situation of a sovereign state. Israel used the pandemic to exercise an unprecedented power grab, implementing invasive tracking and surveillance and shutting down parliament and the courts of justice – which were due to begin a trial against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu himself. Israeli-run company NSO's Pegasus surveillance software continues to be used against journalists and HRDs, like Moroccan HRD Maati Monjib and independent journalist Omar Radi, both of whom face trumped-up charges.

Countries at the very bottom of the GxR rankings, like Saudi Arabia and the UAE, continue to invest in soft-power strategies, selling themselves as destinations for investment and tourism while continuing to choke their expression environments and imprison critical voices.

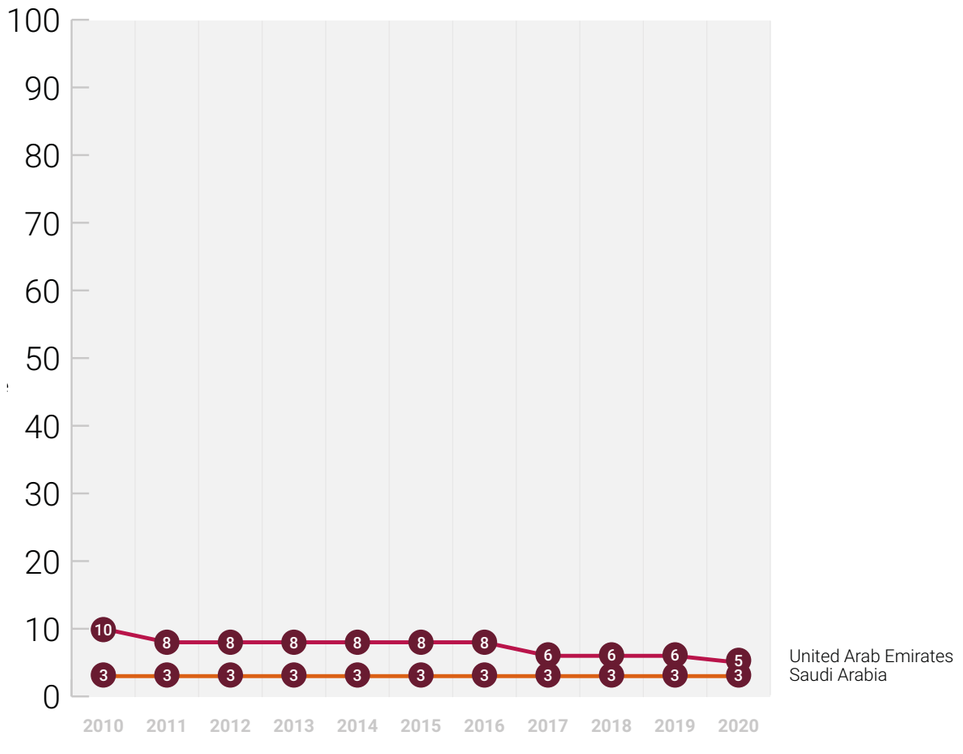


Figure 50: GxR scores 2010–2020: Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates

Two years after the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Turkish Embassy (in which there is evidence of the involvement of the Saudi Crown Prince), those behind his brutal killing have escaped accountability. Agnes Callamard, the UN investigator working on his case, faced death threats from senior Saudi officials over her work.

6.3

Country in focus: Tunisia

Figure 51: Country in focus: Tunisia

FACTFILE

GxR score
72

Capital city
Tunis

Population
12 million

GDP per capita
USD 3,300

Global ranking
51/161

Freedom of expression is protected under Title 2, Article 31 of the Constitution. Tunisia ratified the ICCPR in 1969.

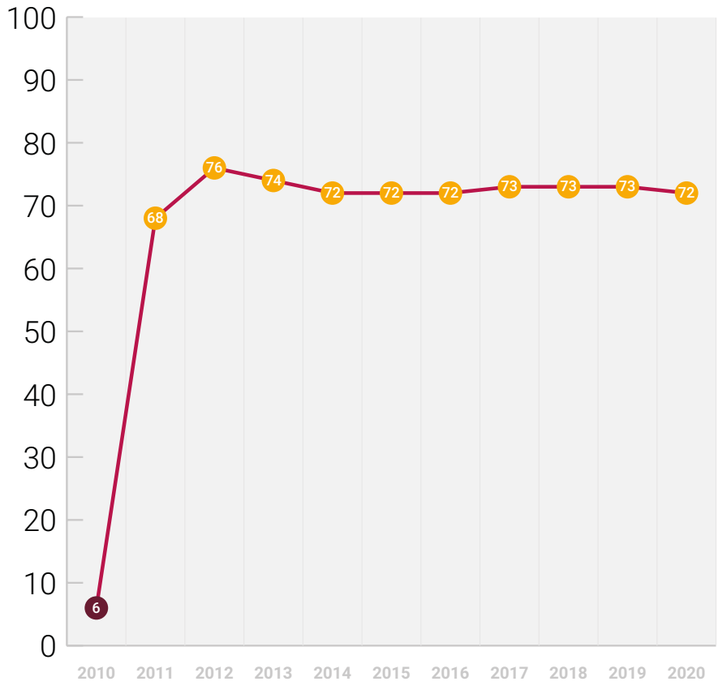
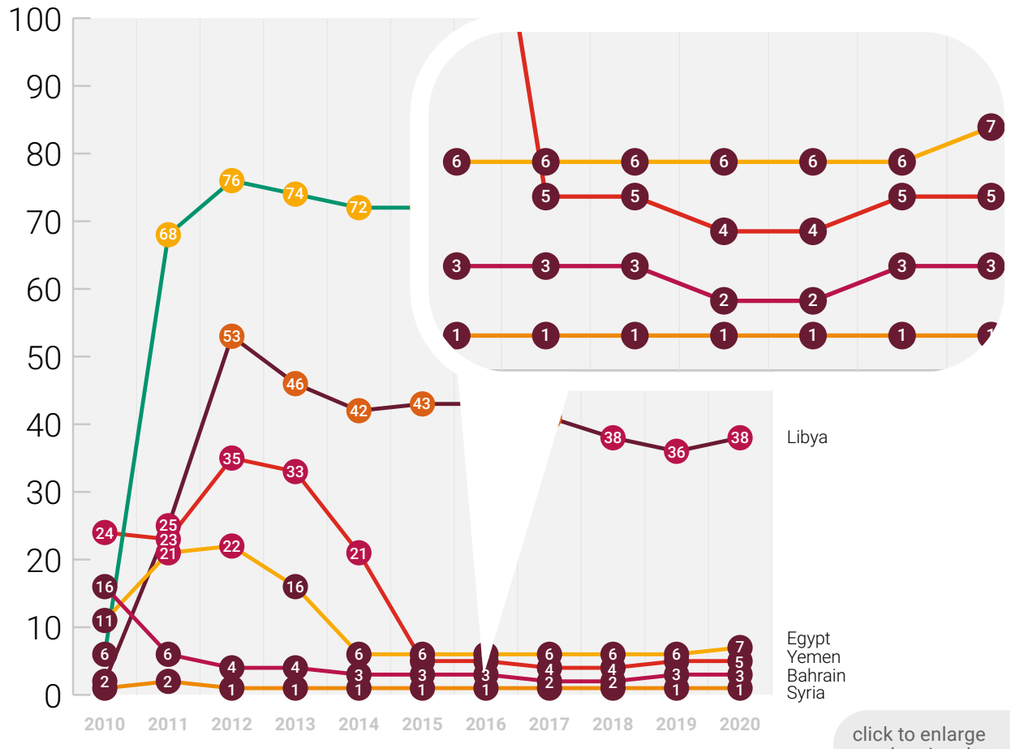


Figure 52: GxR scores 2010–2020: Tunisia

Tunisia's meteoric rise in score between 2010 and 2011 – amid social movements during the Arab Spring – quickly tapered off, and even dropped a point, in 2020. Generally, its gains have been sustainable, maintained by taking the revolution from the streets to the corridors of state institutions.



click to enlarge overlapping data points

Figure 53: GxR scores, 2010–2020: Arab Spring countries

In the decade since 2011, Tunisia has been consolidating democracy – citizens enjoy unprecedented political rights and civil liberties.

The 2014 Constitution was a pivotal moment, incorporating vital protections for freedom of expression, but implementation of key provisions has been elusive, and the influence of old regime officials, endemic corruption, economic challenges, and security threats remain obstacles to applying the principles of the uprising.

Tunisia experienced a small score dip in 2020. The government enforced a highly securitised pandemic lockdown (which was partially enforced by the military) and cracked down particularly hard on protests, increasing the number of prosecutions under repressive laws like Articles 125 ('Insult to a public officer'), 128 ('Illegal acts to a public official'), and 245 (on defamation) of the Penal Code; Article 86 ('online defamation') of the Telecommunication Code; and Article 91 of the Code of Military Procedures.

Hundreds of those who gathered to celebrate the decade anniversary of the revolution were arrested, while civil society was banned from demonstrating, even as political parties continued their events.

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Similarly, those who took to the streets in April over living conditions amid pandemic lockdowns were violently dispersed, while communicators who covered them were arrested; Anis Mabrouki and Hajer Awadi were both charged under the country's penal code for Facebook posts in April 2020. In June, the El-Kamour peaceful protest movement was violently dispersed, with at least 11 arbitrary arrests and violence including beatings, kickings, and use of tear gas.

Over the last two years, freedom of expression has been hit by increasing prosecutions for defamation and insult to state officials – often under outdated laws from the regime of ousted President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali.

Social media communicators were targeted with blockings, and even arrests, which demonstrated little tolerance for criticism of either the government or religious freedoms. At least nine bloggers were investigated or prosecuted; Emna Charqui was sentenced to six months in prison and a fine for sharing a satirical COVID-19 post on Facebook, written in the style of a Quranic verse. The charges were 'incitement to hatred', and Charqui subsequently received numerous hate messages and threats of death and rape online.

As the pandemic worsened in 2021, there were no signs of relief. Blogger Salim Jebali was arrested for criticising officials on his Facebook page, and charged with insulting the President of the Republic, based on Article 91 of the Code of Military Procedures and Sanctions. The use of military justice to prosecute civilians is particularly concerning.

Though huge progress has been made in terms of media regulation since the revolution of 2011, shaking off the legacy of the old regime and its formation of the country's media as a mouthpiece, progress seems to be stalling on media independence. Reforms made and proposed to the media sector in Tunisia are increasingly concerning – some overly restrictive, others vague, and many lacking consultation with relevant stakeholders.

Ominous legislative proposals abounded in 2020 – e.g. the Decree on Distribution of Financial Aid to Private Media Sector and Amendment to Law on Freedom of Audiovisual Communication – though, thanks to civil society pressure, the latter was dropped in October 2020. The former, however, fails to set appropriate conditions under which institutions can benefit from the financial aid, focusing only on institutional status (as opposed to respect for journalistic ethics or informative reporting). The process for distributing aid also lacks transparency.

In a positive move, however, 2020 saw the formation of the Press Council – the first independent press council in the Middle East and North Africa, and a significant milestone in Tunisia's reform process.

The Press Council brings together representatives of journalists, media owners, and civil society, with the aim of safeguarding press freedom and the right to free expression – including by acting as a tribunal for journalists, guaranteeing the public's right to information, and strengthening the principles of self-regulation and journalistic ethics among media institutions.

"Meaningful investment and sustained action are the only ways to centre expression as a means of strengthening public health, driving rapid action on the climate crisis, and supporting an economic recovery.

We are at a critical juncture. As with addressing climate change and poverty reduction, turning away is not an option. With a renewed global effort to focus on freedom of expression we can – and will – succeed, in rebuilding a world where rights are respected, power is in check, and one that is safer, healthier and more equal for all."

Annex

Annex 1: Methodology

Developing the GxR metric

The complete V-Dem data set includes more than 600 indices and indicators that measure different aspects of democracy worldwide.

Our analyses this year incorporate both the core V-Dem dataset and the Pandemic Violations of Democratic Standard Index.

In producing this *Global Expression Report*, ARTICLE 19 selected the 25 indicators, described below, which best matched with our broad and holistic view of freedom of expression. These indicators were included in a Bayesian measurement model for countries with available data from 2000 to 2020 to create our metric: the GxR.

V-Dem draws on theoretical and methodological expertise from its worldwide team to produce data in the most objective and reliable way possible. Approximately half the indicators in the V-Dem dataset are based on factual information obtainable from official documents, such as constitutions and government records. The remainder consists of more subjective assessments on topics like democratic and governing practices, and compliance with de jure rules. On such issues, typically five experts provide ratings for the country, thematic area, and time period for which they have expertise.

To address variation in coder ratings, V-Dem works closely with leading social science research methodologists, and has developed a Bayesian measurement model that, to the extent possible, addresses coder error and issues of comparability across countries and over time. Additional data (including coder score changes for previous years) are incorporated in every update, which improves the overall model. For version 11 of the V-Dem dataset, the team changed some interpolation/reduction procedures, which has improved scores at the end of the time series, and also improved their method for calculating the Bayesian factor analysis used to calculate GxR.

V-Dem also provides upper- and lower-point estimates, which represent a range of probable values for a given observation. When the ranges of two observations do not overlap, we are relatively confident that the difference between them is significant. V-Dem is continually experimenting with new techniques and soliciting feedback from experts throughout the field. In this sense, V-Dem remains at the cutting edge of developing new and improved methods to increase both the reliability and comparability of expert survey data.

The GxR for each country falls between 0 and 1. Throughout the report, we calculate actual score change across our key time periods. We rescaled this value and rounded the value to report GxR as an integer (0–100) throughout the report. Countries are placed in their respective expression categories based on these final integers. However, the changes in scores that we examine to identify significant declines/advances in expression are calculated from the original scale values (versus reported rounded integers).

NB: ARTICLE 19 Mexico has its own methodology for tracking the freedom of expression situation in the country, and is not included in our GxR rankings, nor in any country-level analyses using the metric.

Key periods analysed

We looked at GxR score changes across three time periods: the last year (2019–2020), the last five years (2015–2020), and the last 10 years (2010–2020). For each timeframe, we identified countries showing meaningful and holistic improvement or deterioration, defined by a significant score change over the period.

Country and population data

Our final data file contains 161 countries (after combining Gaza and West Bank to report results for Palestine) with at least one year of data between 2000 and 2009. Results for Palestine were calculated using population weights based on data from Palestine's 2007 Census and the Central Intelligence Agency's 2020 estimate for both regions. We use the 2007 population for 2009–2010, the average of the 2007 population and 2020 estimate for 2011–2019, and the 2020 estimates for each region for 2016–2019.

For our analyses, population data was pulled from the World Bank database. Populations reported for 2010–2019 are based on actuals, while 2020 is based on the World Bank 2020 projection. Eritrea is missing population data for 2012–2020, and Taiwan is not represented in the Word Bank data. The 2020 global population for the countries represented by our GxR data is 7,696,325,308.

To better explore recent events in Hong Kong, we do not combine it with China.

Overall GxR scores and country rankings

For each country, we provide an overall score based on point estimates from the Bayesian measurement models. Each country has an overall score, and where it sits in relation to other countries, across the continuum of expression described below. Both globally and for each region, we sorted the countries by their freedom of expression for 2020. The top and bottom country lists are provided at the beginning of each section.

Significant declines/advances in expression

We identified countries that have seen significant changes in their score (declines/advances in expression) based on movement outside the upper and lower bounds over the specified period (i.e. where the two intervals do not overlap, or the prior-year observation falls outside the confidence interval for the current year). After identifying countries that meet these criteria, we restrict our final list to those countries with an actual score change of at least +/- 10.

Indicators of GxR

The V-Dem data set contains several versions of the variables coded by country experts. For this report, we used both the ordinal scale and V-Dem model estimates, based on the type of analysis we were conducting. The point estimates from the V-Dem measurement model aggregate the rating provided by multiple country experts, taking disagreement and measurement errors into account. This score is on a standardised interval scale and represents the median values of the distributions for each country-year. The scale of the measurement model is similar to a normal z-score (e.g. typically between -5 and 5, with 0 approximately representing the mean for all country-years in the sample), though it does not necessarily follow a normal distribution.

The ordinal scale translates the measurement model back to the original scale (see original scale in variable descriptions in Table A24). While most of the indicators are originally on an ordinal scale, freedom of discussion for men and women is an index developed from multiple measures. This index is on a 0–1 scale, and is reported consistent to that scaling throughout the report.

Annual changes in indicators of GxR

To understand the annual changes in the indicators globally, we calculated the percentage change for every year between 2010–2020 from the global average of each of the indicators individually. The global average was calculated using the ordinal scale for each of the indicators (except freedom of discussion for men and women, which is an index). We identified indicators with a decline in the last year that was outside of the average annual changes we had seen in the decade, and compared these with the changes we saw during the pandemic (2019–2020). For instance, while changes in the identified indicators were flat (on average) between 2010–2019, and the prior year had seen little to no change, there was a dip in scores for these measures between 2019–2020.

The largest gains and losses for indicators across time periods were also calculated from the ordinal scale.

We also identified the top and bottom countries on each indicator of GxR by sorting the countries on their separate indicator scores. To maximise the variation across these scores, we used the point estimates for this analysis.

Examining how changes in the indicators of GxR relate to changes in overall GxR score

We performed a regression analysis to identify the changes in indicators that were tied most closely to overall changes in GxR scores over the three time periods (see Table A1). We identified that the key indicators whose score changed during each of our key time periods were significantly related to the changes in the GxR score during the same period, i.e. where these indicators move, the score tends to move as a whole.

Table A1: Indicators tied most closely to overall changes in GxR scores

2019–2020	2015–2020	2010–2020
Freedom of discussion	Government censorship efforts	CSO repression
Freedom of academic and cultural expression	Freedom of discussion	Freedom of discussion
Internet censorship efforts	CSO repression	Government censorship efforts
Government censorship efforts	CSO entry and exit	CSO entry and exit
Engaged society	Freedom of academic and cultural expression	Internet censorship efforts
CSO entry and exit	Arrests for political content	CSO consultation
	Internet censorship efforts	Government social media censorship in practice
	Harassment of journalists	Engaged society
		Freedom of academic and cultural expression

For these analyses, the indicators in their ordinal scale were used. Regression models were developed for each period to examine the relationship between the change in each indicator's score (holding all else constant) and the change in GxR for that period. We then conducted Johnson's Relative Weights analysis to quantify the relative importance of correlated predictor variables in the regression analysis (i.e. the proportion of the variance in the change in GxR accounted for by the change in our indicator variables). In the report, we identified indicators that were both statistically significant in the regression model and contributed more than 5% to the overall model fit (based on standardised dominance statistics).

Exploring the relationship between GxR and violations of democratic standards over the course of the pandemic

In this report, we also began to explore the role of democratic violations of expression during the pandemic. To do this, we performed pairwise correlations to understand the strength and direction of the linear relationship between 2020 GxR and the violations of democratic standards between March and September 2020. Because we ran multiple pairwise tests on a single set of data, we employed the Bonferroni correction to reduce the chances of obtaining false-positive results (type I errors).

The pandemic violations of the democratic standard index measures to what extent government responses to the COVID-19 pandemic violated democratic standards for emergency measures. The index is constructed from seven types of violations:

1) discriminatory measures
2) derogation of non-derogable rights
3) abusive enforcement
4) no time limit
5) limitations on legislature
6) official disinformation campaigns
7) restrictions of media freedoms

We also provide a deeper look into restrictions on media freedom during the pandemic.

Annex 2: Complete set of GxR tables

Table A2: Full country list for 2020, with rank, region, 2020 population, 2020 GxR, and 2020 expression category

Rank	Country	Region	2020 Population	2020 GxR	Expression category
1	Denmark	Europe and Central Asia	5,834,000	95	Open
2	Switzerland	Europe and Central Asia	8,633,000	95	Open
3	Norway	Europe and Central Asia	5,391,000	94	Open
4	Sweden	Europe and Central Asia	10,340,000	94	Open
5	Finland	Europe and Central Asia	5,529,000	94	Open
6	Belgium	Europe and Central Asia	11,543,000	92	Open
7	Estonia	Europe and Central Asia	1,325,000	92	Open
8	Ireland	Europe and Central Asia	4,983,000	92	Open
9	Uruguay	The Americas	3,474,000	92	Open
10	Latvia	Europe and Central Asia	1,894,000	91	Open
11	Canada	The Americas	37,916,000	90	Open
12	Germany	Europe and Central Asia	83,152,000	90	Open
13	New Zealand	Asia and the Pacific	5,018,000	90	Open
14	Italy	Europe and Central Asia	60,177,000	90	Open
15	Iceland	Europe and Central Asia	363,000	90	Open
16	Austria	Europe and Central Asia	8,915,000	90	Open
17	Portugal	Europe and Central Asia	10,254,000	89	Open
18	Costa Rica	The Americas	5,094,000	89	Open
19	Spain	Europe and Central Asia	47,133,000	89	Open
20	Netherlands	Europe and Central Asia	17,380,000	88	Open
21	Argentina	The Americas	45,350,000	88	Open
22	Dominican Republic	The Americas	10,848,000	87	Open
23	Czech Republic	Europe and Central Asia	10,690,000	86	Open
24	Jamaica	The Americas	2,961,000	86	Open
25	Lithuania	Europe and Central Asia	2,760,000	86	Open
26	France	Europe and Central Asia	67,202,000	86	Open
27	Slovakia	Europe and Central Asia	5,456,000	86	Open
28	United Kingdom	Europe and Central Asia	67,158,000	85	Open
29	Japan	Asia and the Pacific	125,769,000	85	Open
30	Greece	Europe and Central Asia	10,658,000	84	Open
31	United States of America	The Americas	330,139,000	83	Open
32	South Korea	Asia and the Pacific	51,727,000	83	Open
33	Australia	Asia and the Pacific	25,653,000	83	Open
34	Peru	The Americas	3,2972,000	83	Open
35	Cyprus	Europe and Central Asia	1,207,000	81	Open
36	Vanuatu	Asia and the Pacific	307,000	81	Open
37	Taiwan	Asia and the Pacific	Not available	81	Open
38	Chile	The Americas	19,116,000	80	Open
39	Armenia	Europe and Central Asia	2,963,000	80	Open
40	Malta	Europe and Central Asia	505,000	80	Open
41	Botswana	Africa	2,352,000	79	Less Restricted
42	Ghana	Africa	31,073,000	79	Less Restricted
43	Georgia	Europe and Central Asia	3,710,000	78	Less Restricted
44	Romania	Europe and Central Asia	19,248,000	78	Less Restricted
45	Senegal	Africa	16,744,000	75	Less Restricted
46	Namibia	Africa	2,541,000	75	Less Restricted
47	Mongolia	Asia and the Pacific	3,278,000	74	Less Restricted
48	Sierra Leone	Africa	7,977,000	74	Less Restricted
49	Slovenia	Europe and Central Asia	2,088,000	73	Less Restricted
50	Paraguay	The Americas	7,133,000	73	Less Restricted
51	Tunisia	Middle East and North Africa	11,819,000	72	Less Restricted
52	Bulgaria	Europe and Central Asia	6,923,000	72	Less Restricted
53	Moldova	Europe and Central Asia	2,656,000	71	Less Restricted
54	South Africa	Africa	59,309,000	71	Less Restricted
55	Liberia	Africa	5,058,000	70	Less Restricted
56	Israel	Middle East and North Africa	9,198,000	70	Less Restricted
57	Burkina Faso	Africa	20,903,000	70	Less Restricted
58	Papua New Guinea	Asia and the Pacific	8,947,000	69	Less Restricted
59	The Gambia	Africa	2,417,000	68	Less Restricted
60	Croatia	Europe and Central Asia	4,041,000	68	Less Restricted
61	Kosovo	Europe and Central Asia	1,795,000	68	Less Restricted
62	North Macedonia	Europe and Central Asia	2,083,000	68	Less Restricted
64	Timor-Leste	Asia and the Pacific	1,318,000	66	Less Restricted
65	Ecuador	The Americas	1,764,3000	66	Less Restricted
66	Poland	Europe and Central Asia	37,914,000	66	Less Restricted
67	Guatemala	The Americas	16,918,000	66	Less Restricted
68	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Europe and Central Asia	3,281,000	66	Less Restricted
69	Honduras	The Americas	9,905,000	65	Less Restricted
70	Malawi	Africa	19,130,000	65	Less Restricted
71	Lesotho	Africa	2,142,000	64	Less Restricted
72	Nigeria	Africa	20,614,0000	64	Less Restricted
73	Montenegro	Europe and Central Asia	622,000	63	Less Restricted
74	Benin	Africa	12,123,000	61	Less Restricted
75	Albania	Europe and Central Asia	2,850,000	61	Less Restricted
76	Kenya	Africa	53,771,000	61	Less Restricted
77	El Salvador	The Americas	6,486,000	57	Restricted
78	Mali	Africa	20,251,000	57	Restricted
79	Niger	Africa	24,207,000	56	Restricted
80	Afghanistan	Asia and the Pacific	38,928,000	55	Restricted
81	Indonesia	Asia and the Pacific	273,524,000	54	Restricted
82	Hungary	Europe and Central Asia	9,743,000	54	Restricted
83	Haiti	The Americas	11,403,000	53	Restricted
84	Colombia	The Americas	50,883,000	52	Restricted
85	Gabon	Africa	2,226,000	52	Restricted
86	Brazil	The Americas	212,559,000	52	Restricted
87	Ukraine	Europe and Central Asia	44,119,000		Restricted
88	Bolivia	The Americas	11,673,000	51	Restricted
89	Mozambique	Africa	31,255,000	51	Restricted
90	Maldives	Asia and the Pacific	541,000	51	Restricted
91	Nepal	Asia and the Pacific	29,137,000	51	Restricted
92	Serbia	Europe and Central Asia	6,912,000	50	Restricted
93	Madagascar	Africa	27,691,000	49	Restricted
94	Ivory Coast	Africa	26,378,000	47	Restricted

95	Lebanon	Middle East and North Africa	6,825,000	46	**Restricted**
96	Kyrgyzstan	Europe and Central Asia	6,564,000	44	**Restricted**
97	Central African Republic	Africa	4,830,000	44	**Restricted**
98	Burma/Myanmar	Asia and the Pacific	54,410,000	42	**Restricted**
99	Sri Lanka	Asia and the Pacific	21,898,000		**Restricted**
100	Fiji	Asia and the Pacific	896,000	40	**Restricted**
101	Morocco	Middle East and North Africa	36,911,000	39	**Highly Restricted**
102	Togo	Africa	8,279,000	39	**Highly Restricted**
103	Tanzania	Africa	59,734,000	38	**Highly Restricted**
104	Libya	Middle East and North Africa	6,871,000	38	**Highly Restricted**
105	Philippines	Asia and the Pacific	109,581,000	37	**Highly Restricted**
106	Malaysia	Asia and the Pacific	32,366,000	37	**Highly Restricted**
107	Angola	Africa	32,866,000	37	**Highly Restricted**
108	Zambia	Africa	18,384,000	37	**Highly Restricted**
109	Mauritania	Africa	4,650,000	34	**Highly Restricted**
110	Palestine - Combined	Middle East and North Africa	4,906,308	34	**Highly Restricted**
111	Democratic Republic of the Congo	Africa	89,561,000	34	**Highly Restricted**
112	Bhutan	Asia and the Pacific	772,000	33	**Highly Restricted**
113	Ethiopia	Africa	114,964,000		**Highly Restricted**
114	Kuwait	Middle East and North Africa	4,271,000	31	**Highly Restricted**
115	Pakistan	Asia and the Pacific	220,892,000	30	**Highly Restricted**
116	Cameroon	Africa	26,546,000	29	**Highly Restricted**
117	Jordan	Middle East and North Africa	10,203,000	28	**Highly Restricted**
118	Iraq	Middle East and North Africa	40,222,000	27	**Highly Restricted**
119	Uganda	Africa	45,741,000	25	**Highly Restricted**
120	Sudan	Africa	43,849,000	25	**Highly Restricted**
121	Somalia	Africa	15,893,000	25	**Highly Restricted**
122	Guinea	Africa	13,133,000	24	**Highly Restricted**
123	Hong Kong	Asia and the Pacific	7,560,000	24	**Highly Restricted**
124	Singapore	Asia and the Pacific	5,751,000	24	**Highly Restricted**
125	India	Asia and the Pacific	1,380,004,000	21	**Highly Restricted**
126	Chad	Africa	16,426,000	20	**Highly Restricted**
127	Zimbabwe	Africa	14,863,000	18	**In Crisis**
128	Russia	Europe and Central Asia	144,379,000	16	**In Crisis**
129	Kazakhstan	Europe and Central Asia	18,733,000	14	**In Crisis**
130	Algeria	Middle East and North Africa	43,851,000	14	**In Crisis**
131	Thailand	Asia and the Pacific	69,800,000	14	**In Crisis**
132	Vietnam	Asia and the Pacific	97,339,000	13	**In Crisis**
133	Bangladesh	Asia and the Pacific	164,689,000		**In Crisis**
134	Republic of the Congo	Africa	5,518,000	12	**In Crisis**
135	Uzbekistan	Europe and Central Asia	34,074,000	12	**In Crisis**
136	Cambodia	Asia and the Pacific	16,719,000	11	**In Crisis**
137	Eswatini	Africa	1,160,000	10	**In Crisis**
138	Rwanda	Africa	12,952,000	9	**In Crisis**
139	Venezuela	The Americas	28,436,000	9	**In Crisis**
140	Azerbaijan	Europe and Central Asia	10,113,000	8	**In Crisis**
141	Nicaragua	The Americas	6,625,000	8	**In Crisis**
142	Oman	Middle East and North Africa	5,107,000	7	**In Crisis**
143	Qatar	Middle East and North Africa	2,881,000	7	**In Crisis**
144	Egypt	Middle East and North Africa	102,334,000	7	**In Crisis**
145	Iran	Middle East and North Africa	83,993,000	7	**In Crisis**
146	Belarus	Europe and Central Asia	9,410,000	6	**In Crisis**
147	Burundi	Africa	11,891,000	6	**In Crisis**
148	Turkey	Europe and Central Asia	84,339,000	6	**In Crisis**
149	United Arab Emirates	Middle East and North Africa	9,890,000	5	**In Crisis**
150	South Sudan	Africa	11,194,000	5	**In Crisis**
151	Yemen	Middle East and North Africa	29,826,000	5	**In Crisis**
152	Equatorial Guinea	Africa	1,403,000	4	**In Crisis**
153	Cuba	The Americas	11,327,000	3	**In Crisis**
154	Tajikistan	Europe and Central Asia	9,538,000	3	**In Crisis**
155	Saudi Arabia	Middle East and North Africa	34,814,000	3	**In Crisis**
156	Bahrain	Middle East and North Africa	1,702,000	3	**In Crisis**
157	China	Asia and the Pacific	1,402,667,000	2	**In Crisis**
158	Syria	Middle East and North Africa	17,501,000	1	**In Crisis**
159	Turkmenistan	Europe and Central Asia	6,031,000	1	**In Crisis**
160	Eritrea	Africa	Not available	1	**In Crisis**
161	North Korea	Asia and the Pacific	25,779,000	0	**In Crisis**

Table A3: Global GxR scores with confidence intervals, 2010–2020

Global

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
GxR score	56	56	56	55	54	54	53	53	53	52	51
Lower limit	51	51	51	50	49	49	48	48	48	48	47
Upper limit	60	61	61	59	59	58	57	57	57	57	56

Table A4: Africa regional GxR scores with confidence intervals, 2010–2020

Africa

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
GxR score	47	46	46	45	45	44	43	43	43	43	43
Lower limit	39	38	38	37	37	36	35	36	36	36	36
Upper limit	54	53	53	52	52	52	51	51	51	50	50

Table A5: The Americas regional GxR scores with confidence intervals, 2010–2020

The Americas

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
GxR score	71	71	70	69	69	69	68	68	67	65	64
Lower limit	61	61	61	59	59	58	58	58	56	54	53
Upper limit	80	80	80	79	79	79	78	78	78	76	75

Table A6: Asia and the Pacific regional GxR scores with confidence intervals, 2010–2020

Asia and the Pacific

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
GxR score	50	50	49	47	46	47	46	46	47	47	45
Lower limit	40	40	40	38	36	37	36	36	36	37	35
Upper limit	60	60	59	57	56	56	56	56	57	57	55

Table A7: Europe and Central Asia regional GxR scores with confidence intervals, 2010–2020

Europe and Central Asia

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
GxR score	73	73	73	71	70	70	69	69	69	69	68
Lower limit	65	65	65	63	62	62	61	61	61	61	60
Upper limit	81	81	80	79	79	78	78	77	77	77	76

Table A8: Middle East and North Africa regional GxR scores with confidence intervals, 2010–2020

Middle East and North Africa

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
GxR score	22	26	29	28	26	25	25	24	24	24	23
Lower limit	13	17	19	18	16	15	15	14	14	14	14
Upper limit	30	35	39	37	36	35	34	33	33	34	33

Table A9: Annual expression categories, 2010–2020

Country	Region	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Any Movement	Any Downward Shifts
Afghanistan	Asia and the Pacific	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	NO	NO
Albania	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	NO	NO
Algeria	Middle East and North Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	In Crisis	YES	YES
Angola	Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	NO	NO
Argentina	The Americas	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
Armenia	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Open	Open	YES	NO
Australia	Asia and the Pacific	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
Austria	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
Azerbaijan	Europe and Central Asia	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	NO	NO
Bahrain	Middle East and North Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	NO	NO
Bangladesh	Asia and the Pacific	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	YES	YES
Belarus	Europe and Central Asia	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	YES	YES
Belgium	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
Benin	Africa	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	YES	YES
Bhutan	Asia and the Pacific	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	NO	NO
Bolivia	The Americas	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Restricted	YES	YES
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	NO	NO
Botswana	Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	NO	NO
Brazil	The Americas	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	YES	YES
Bulgaria	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	Open	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	YES	YES
Burkina Faso	Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	NO	NO
Burma/Myanmar	Asia and the Pacific	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Restricted	YES	NO
Burundi	Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	YES	YES
Cambodia	Asia and the Pacific	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	YES	YES
Cameroon	Africa	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	YES	YES
Canada	The Americas	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
Central African Republic	Africa	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Highly Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	YES	YES
Chad	Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	In Crisis	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	YES	YES
Chile	The Americas	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
China	Asia and the Pacific	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	NO	NO
Colombia	The Americas	Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Restricted	YES	YES
Costa Rica	The Americas	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
Croatia	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	YES	YES
Cuba	The Americas	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	NO	NO
Cyprus	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO

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Country	Region	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Any Movement	Any Downward Shifts
Czech Republic	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	NO	NO
Denmark	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
Dominican Republic	The Americas	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Open	YES	NO
Ecuador	The Americas	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	YES	NO
Egypt	Middle East and North Africa	In Crisis	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	YES	YES
El Salvador	The Americas	Open	Open	Open	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Restricted	YES	YES
Equatorial Guinea	Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	NO	NO
Eritrea	Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	NO	NO
Estonia	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
Eswatini	Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	NO	NO
Ethiopia	Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	YES	NO
Fiji	Asia and the Pacific	In Crisis	In Crisis	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Highly Restricted	Restricted	YES	NO
Finland	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
France	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
Gabon	Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	YES	YES
Georgia	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Less Restricted	YES	YES
Germany	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
Ghana	Africa	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	YES	YES
Greece	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
Guatemala	The Americas	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	NO	NO
Guinea	Africa	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Highly Restricted	YES	YES
Haiti	The Americas	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	YES	YES
Honduras	The Americas	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	NO	NO
Hong Kong	Asia and the Pacific	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Highly Restricted	YES	YES
Hungary	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	YES	YES
Iceland	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
India	Asia and the Pacific	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	YES	YES
Indonesia	Asia and the Pacific	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	YES	YES
Iran	Middle East and North Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	NO	NO
Iraq	Middle East and North Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	NO	NO
Ireland	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
Israel	Middle East and North Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	NO	NO

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Country	Region	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Any Movement	Any Downward Shifts
Italy	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
Ivory Coast	Africa	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	YES	YES
Jamaica	The Americas	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
Japan	Asia and the Pacific	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
Jordan	Middle East and North Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	NO	NO
Kazakhstan	Europe and Central Asia	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	NO	NO
Kenya	Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	NO	NO
Kosovo	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	NO	NO
Kuwait	Middle East and North Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	NO	NO
Kyrgyzstan	Europe and Central Asia	Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	YES	YES
Latvia	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
Lebanon	Middle East and North Africa	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	NO	NO
Lesotho	Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	YES	YES
Liberia	Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	NO	NO
Libya	Middle East and North Africa	In Crisis	Highly Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	YES	YES
Lithuania	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
Madagascar	Africa	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	NO	NO
Malawi	Africa	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	YES	NO
Malaysia	Asia and the Pacific	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Restricted	Highly Restricted	YES	YES
Maldives	Asia and the Pacific	Restricted	Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	In Crisis	Highly Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	YES	YES
Mali	Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	YES	YES
Malta	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Open	YES	YES
Mauritania	Africa	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	YES	YES
Moldova	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	NO	NO
Mongolia	Asia and the Pacific	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	NO	NO
Montenegro	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	NO	NO
Morocco	Middle East and North Africa	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	YES	YES
Mozambique	Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	YES	YES
Namibia	Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	NO	NO
Nepal	Asia and the Pacific	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Less Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	YES	YES
Netherlands	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
New Zealand	Asia and the Pacific	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
Nicaragua	The Americas	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	YES	YES

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Country	Region	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Any Movement	Any Downward Shifts
Niger	Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	YES	YES
Nigeria	Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	NO	NO
North Korea	Asia and the Pacific	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	NO	NO
North Macedonia	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	YES	YES
Norway	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
Oman	Middle East and North Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	NO	NO
Pakistan	Asia and the Pacific	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	YES	YES
Palestine - Combined	Middle East and North Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	NO	NO
Papua New Guinea	Asia and the Pacific	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	NO	NO
Paraguay	The Americas	Open	Open	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	YES	YES
Peru	The Americas	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
Philippines	Asia and the Pacific	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Highly Restricted	YES	YES
Poland	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	YES	YES
Portugal	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
Qatar	Middle East and North Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	NO	NO
Republic of the Congo	Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	NO	NO
Romania	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	YES	YES
Russia	Europe and Central Asia	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	YES	YES
Rwanda	Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	NO	NO
Saudi Arabia	Middle East and North Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	NO	NO
Senegal	Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	NO	NO
Serbia	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	YES	YES
Sierra Leone	Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	NO	NO
Singapore	Asia and the Pacific	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	NO	NO
Slovakia	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
Slovenia	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Less Restricted	YES	YES
Somalia	Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	NO	NO
South Africa	Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	NO	NO
South Korea	Asia and the Pacific	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Open	Open	Open	YES	NO
South Sudan	Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	NO	NO
Spain	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
Sri Lanka	Asia and the Pacific	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Restricted	YES	YES
Sudan	Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	YES	NO

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Country	Region	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Any Movement	Any Downward Shifts
Sweden	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
Switzerland	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
Syria	Middle East and North Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	NO	NO
Taiwan	Asia and the Pacific	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
Tajikistan	Europe and Central Asia	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	NO	NO
Tanzania	Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	YES	YES
Thailand	Asia and the Pacific	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	YES	YES
The Gambia	Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	YES	NO
Timor-Leste	Asia and the Pacific	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	NO	NO
Togo	Africa	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Highly Restricted	YES	YES
Tunisia	Middle East and North Africa	In Crisis	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	YES	NO
Turkey	Europe and Central Asia	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	YES	YES
Turkmenistan	Europe and Central Asia	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	NO	NO
Uganda	Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	NO	NO
Ukraine	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	YES	YES
United Arab Emirates	Middle East and North Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	NO	NO
United Kingdom	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
United States of America	The Americas	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
Uruguay	The Americas	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
Uzbekistan	Europe and Central Asia	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	NO	NO
Vanuatu	Asia and the Pacific	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	NO	NO
Venezuela	The Americas	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	YES	YES
Vietnam	Asia and the Pacific	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	NO	NO
Yemen	Middle East and North Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	YES	YES
Zambia	Africa	Less Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	YES	YES
Zimbabwe	Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	In Crisis	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	In Crisis	YES	YES

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Table A10: Annual percentage change of GxR indicators, 2010–2020

	2010–2011	2011–2012	2012–2013	2013–2014	2014–2015	2015–2016	2016–2017	2017–2018	2018–2019	2019–2020
Internet censorship efforts	2%	0%	-1%	-1%	0%	-2%	1%	1%	-1%	1%
Freedom of discussion for men and women	1%	0%	-1%	-1%	0%	-1%	-1%	-1%	0%	-1%
Government censorship efforts	1%	0%	-4%	-1%	0%	-1%	-1%	-1%	0%	-1%
Media self-censorship	1%	0%	-1%	-1%	-1%	-1%	-1%	-2%	0%	0%
Freedom of academic and cultural expression	0%	0%	-3%	-2%	-1%	0%	-2%	-1%	0%	-1%
CSO consultation	-1%	4%	-6%	1%	-1%	-3%	2%	1%	-2%	0%
Engaged society	2%	1%	-7%	-1%	0%	-4%	-2%	0%	1%	-5%
Transparent laws with predictable enforcement	-1%	1%	-1%	-1%	0%	-1%	-1%	-1%	0%	-1%
Harassment of journalists	1%	0%	-2%	-1%	-1%	-3%	2%	-1%	0%	0%
Freedom from political killing	-1%	0%	-2%	-1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%
CSO repression	1%	0%	-2%	-1%	-1%	0%	-1%	1%	0%	-2%
CSO entry and exit	1%	0%	-2%	-1%	-2%	-2%	0%	2%	0%	-1%
CSO participatory environment	1%	1%	-2%	-1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	-1%
Party ban	1%	0%	-1%	0%	-1%	0%	-1%	0%	1%	0%
Freedom of religion	0%	0%	-1%	0%	0%	-1%	0%	0%	-1%	-1%
Government Internet filtering in practice	0%	-1%	0%	-2%	0%	-1%	0%	0%	-1%	-1%
Government Internet shutdown in practice	-1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	-1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Government social media censorship in practice	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	-1%	0%	0%	0%	-1%
Internet legal regulation content	1%	0%	0%	-1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	-1%	0%
Government social media monitoring	0%	-1%	-1%	-2%	-1%	-1%	1%	1%	-2%	-2%
Government online content regulation approach	1%	0%	-1%	-1%	0%	-1%	0%	0%	-1%	0%
Arrests for political content	0%	1%	-1%	0%	-1%	-1%	0%	0%	-3%	-1%
Freedom of peaceful assembly	1%	1%	-1%	0%	-1%	-1%	1%	0%	1%	-7%
Freedom of academic exchange	2%	0%	0%	-2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	-1%
Abuse of defamation and copyright law by elites	1%	0%	-2%	-1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	-2%	-1%

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Table A11: Pandemic violations of democratic standards, 2020

Country	Region	2020 Expression category	2019 Expression category	Pandemic violations of democratic standards (scale 0-1)	Discriminatory measures (scale 0-3)	Derogation of non-derogable rights (scale 0-3)	Abusive enforcement (scale 0-3)	No time limit (scale 0-2)	Limitations on legislature (scale 0, 2, 3)	Official disinformation campaigns (scale 0-3)	Restrictions of media freedom (scale 0-3)
Afghanistan	Asia and the Pacific	Restricted	Restricted	0.15	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Albania	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	0.25	0	0	2	2	0	0	3
Algeria	Middle East and North Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	0.3	0	0	1	0	0	2	3
Angola	Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	0.25	0	0	2	0	0	0	3
Argentina	The Americas	Open	Open	0.15	0	0	3	0	0	0	0
Armenia	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	0.15	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Australia	Asia and the Pacific	Open	Open	0.05	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Austria	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Azerbaijan	Europe and Central Asia	In Crisis	In Crisis	0.2	0	0	1	0	0	0	3
Bangladesh	Asia and the Pacific	In Crisis	In Crisis	0.25	0	0	2	0	0	0	3
Belarus	Europe and Central Asia	In Crisis	Highly Restricted	0.35	0	0	0	2	0	2	3
Belgium	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	0.1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Benin	Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	0.25	0	0	0	0	0	2	3
Bolivia	The Americas	Restricted	Less Restricted	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	0.35	3	0	0	1	0	0	3
Botswana	Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Brazil	The Americas	Restricted	Restricted	0.3	0	0	0	2	0	2	2
Bulgaria	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	0.2	3	0	0	0	0	0	1
Burkina Faso	Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	0.1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
Burma/Myanmar	Asia and the Pacific	Restricted	Highly Restricted	0.25	1	0	1	0	0	0	3
Burundi	Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	0.25	0	0	0	0	0	2	3
Cambodia	Asia and the Pacific	In Crisis	In Crisis	0.15	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Cameroon	Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	0.35	0	0	2	0	0	2	3
Canada	The Americas	Open	Open	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Central African Republic	Africa	Restricted	Restricted	0.25	0	0	0	0	0	2	3
Chad	Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	0.3	0	0	1	0	0	2	3
Chile	The Americas	Open	Open	0.1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
China	Asia and the Pacific	In Crisis	In Crisis	0.35	1	0	0	2	0	1	3
Colombia	The Americas	Restricted	Less Restricted	0.1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
Costa Rica	The Americas	Open	Open	0.15	0	0	1	2	0	0	0
Croatia	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	0.3	0	3	1	2	0	0	0
Cuba	The Americas	In Crisis	In Crisis	0.3	0	0	1	2	0	0	3

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Country	Region	2020 Expression category	2019 Expression category	Pandemic violations of democratic standards (scale 0-1)	Discriminatory measures (scale 0-3)	Derogation of non-derogable rights (scale 0-3)	Abusive enforcement (scale 0-3)	No time limit (scale 0-2)	Limitations on legislature (scale 0, 2, 3)	Official disinformation campaigns (scale 0-3)	Restrictions of media freedom (scale 0-3)
Czech Republic	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	0.15	0	0	0	2	0	0	1
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	0.45	0	0	2	0	3	2	3
Denmark	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dominican Republic	The Americas	Open	Less Restricted	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ecuador	The Americas	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	0.15	0	0	2	0	0	0	3
Egypt	Middle East and North Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	0.35	0	3	1	0	0	0	3
El Salvador	The Americas	Restricted	Less Restricted	0.55	0	3	2	0	2	1	3
Eritrea	Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	0.3	0	3	0	0	0	0	3
Ethiopia	Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	0.2	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Finland	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
France	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	0.1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Gabon	Africa	Restricted	Restricted	0.25	0	0	0	0	0	2	3
Georgia	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Open	0.1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Germany	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ghana	Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	0.3	0	0	1	0	2	0	3
Greece	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	0.35	3	0	1	0	0	0	3
Guatemala	The Americas	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	0.25	0	0	1	0	0	1	3
Guinea	Africa	Highly Restricted	Restricted	0.25	0	0	2	0	0	0	3
Haiti	The Americas	Restricted	Restricted	0.35	0	0	1	0	3	0	3
Honduras	The Americas	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	0.25	0	0	2	0	0	0	3
Hong Kong	Asia and the Pacific	Highly Restricted	Restricted	0.15	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Hungary	Europe and Central Asia	Restricted	Restricted	0.3	0	0	0	1	2	0	3
India	Asia and the Pacific	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	0.6	1	3	2	0	3	0	3
Indonesia	Asia and the Pacific	Restricted	Restricted	0.2	0	0	0	1	0	1	3
Iran	Middle East and North Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	0.25	0	0	2	0	0	0	3
Iraq	Middle East and North Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	0.15	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Ireland	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Israel	Middle East and North Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	0.05	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Italy	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	0.1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Ivory Coast	Africa	Restricted	Restricted	0.15	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Jamaica	The Americas	Open	Open	0.1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0

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Country	Region	2020 Expression category	2019 Expression category	Pandemic violations of democratic standards (scale 0-1)	Discriminatory measures (scale 0-3)	Derogation of non-derogable rights (scale 0-3)	Abusive enforcement (scale 0-3)	No time limit (scale 0-2)	Limitations on legislature (scale 0, 2, 3)	Official disinformation campaigns (scale 0-3)	Restrictions of media freedom (scale 0-3)
Japan	Asia and the Pacific	Open	Open	0.05	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Jordan	Middle East and North Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	0.4	0	0	1	2	2	0	3
Kazakhstan	Europe and Central Asia	In Crisis	In Crisis	0.3	0	3	0	2	0	0	3
Kenya	Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	0.3	0	0	3	0	0	0	3
Kuwait	Middle East and North Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	0.2	1	0	1	0	2	0	0
Kyrgyzstan	Europe and Central Asia	Restricted	Restricted	0.4	0	3	0	2	0	0	3
Lebanon	Middle East and North Africa	Restricted	Restricted	0.25	3	0	2	0	0	0	0
Lesotho	Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	0.2	0	0	1	0	3	0	0
Liberia	Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	0.25	0	0	1	2	0	1	3
Lithuania	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	0.1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Madagascar	Africa	Restricted	Restricted	0.3	0	0	1	0	0	2	3
Malawi	Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	0.1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Malaysia	Asia and the Pacific	Highly Restricted	Restricted	0.4	3	0	0	0	2	0	3
Mali	Africa	Restricted	Restricted	0.25	0	0	0	1	3	2	3
Mauritania	Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	0.35	0	0	1	2	0	2	3
Mexico	The Americas			0.35	0	0	2	2	2	2	1
Moldova	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	0.15	0	0	0	2	0	0	3
Mongolia	Asia and the Pacific	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	0.2	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Morocco	Middle East and North Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	0.3	0	0	1	0	0	2	3
Mozambique	Africa	Restricted	Restricted	0.25	0	0	2	2	0	0	3
Namibia	Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	0.3	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
Nepal	Asia and the Pacific	Restricted	Restricted	0.4	0	0	1	2	2	0	3
Netherlands	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New Zealand	Asia and the Pacific	Open	Open	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nicaragua	The Americas	In Crisis	In Crisis	0.3	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
Niger	Africa	Restricted	Restricted	0.25	0	0	1	0	0	2	3
Nigeria	Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	0.3	0	0	3	0	0	0	3
North Korea	Asia and the Pacific	In Crisis	In Crisis	0.2	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
North Macedonia	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	0.3	1	0	0	2	3	0	0
Norway	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	0.1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Oman	Middle East and North Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	0.35	0	0	0	2	2	0	3

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Country	Region	2020 Expression category	2019 Expression category	Pandemic violations of democratic standards (scale 0-1)	Discriminatory measures (scale 0-3)	Derogation of non-derogable rights (scale 0-3)	Abusive enforcement (scale 0-3)	No time limit (scale 0-2)	Limitations on legislature (scale 0, 2, 3)	Official disinformation campaigns (scale 0-3)	Restrictions of media freedom (scale 0-3)
Pakistan	Asia and the Pacific	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	0.25	1	0	1	0	0	0	3
Papua New Guinea	Asia and the Pacific	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	0.25	0	0	0	2	0	0	3
Paraguay	The Americas	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	0.4	0	0	1	2	2	0	3
Peru	The Americas	Open	Open	0.15	2	0	1	0	0	0	0
Philippines	Asia and the Pacific	Highly Restricted	Restricted	0.4	0	3	2	0	0	0	3
Poland	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	0.25	0	0	0	2	0	0	3
Portugal	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Qatar	Middle East and North Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	0.35	3	0	1	0	0	0	3
Republic of the Congo	Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	0.2	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Romania	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	0.1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Russia	Europe and Central Asia	In Crisis	In Crisis	0.35	0	0	1	2	0	1	3
Rwanda	Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	0.2	0	0	1	0	0	0	3
Saudi Arabia	Middle East and North Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	0.6	3	3	0	0	3	0	3
Senegal	Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	0.25	0	0	1	0	0	2	3
Serbia	Europe and Central Asia	Restricted	Restricted	0.6	3	0	1	2	3	2	3
Sierra Leone	Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	0.25	0	0	0	0	2	0	3
Singapore	Asia and the Pacific	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	0.3	3	0	0	0	0	0	3
Slovakia	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	0.3	3	0	1	2	0	0	0
Slovenia	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Open	0.2	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
Somalia	Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	0.4	0	0	2	0	3	0	3
South Africa	Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	0.35	0	0	3	0	0	1	3
South Korea	Asia and the Pacific	Open	Open	0.1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
South Sudan	Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	0.15	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Spain	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	0.2	0	0	1	2	0	0	1
Sri Lanka	Asia and the Pacific	Restricted	Less Restricted	0.7	3	3	1	0	3	1	3
Sudan	Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	0.35	0	0	0	2	3	0	2
Sweden	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	0.1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Switzerland	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Taiwan	Asia and the Pacific	Open	Open	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tajikistan	Europe and Central Asia	In Crisis	In Crisis	0.3	0	0	0	2	0	1	3

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Country	Region	2020 Expression category	2019 Expression category	Pandemic violations of democratic standards (scale 0-1)	Discriminatory measures (scale 0-3)	Derogation of non-derogable rights (scale 0-3)	Abusive enforcement (scale 0-3)	No time limit (scale 0-2)	Limitations on legislature (scale 0, 2, 3)	Official disinformation campaigns (scale 0-3)	Restrictions of media freedom (scale 0-3)
Tanzania	Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	0.3	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
Thailand	Asia and the Pacific	In Crisis	In Crisis	0.25	0	0	0	0	2	0	3
The Gambia	Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	0.2	0	0	0	2	0	1	3
Togo	Africa	Highly Restricted	Restricted	0.2	0	0	2	0	0	2	0
Tunisia	Middle East and North Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	0.35	0	0	0	2	2	0	3
Turkey	Europe and Central Asia	In Crisis	In Crisis	0.5	0	0	1	2	2	2	3
Turkmenistan	Europe and Central Asia	In Crisis	In Crisis	0.3	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
Uganda	Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	0.6	3	0	3	2	0	1	3
Ukraine	Europe and Central Asia	Restricted	Restricted	0.15	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
United Arab Emirates	Middle East and North Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	0.15	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
United Kingdom	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	0.15	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
United States of America	The Americas	Open	Open	0.3	0	0	0	2	0	2	2
Uruguay	The Americas	Open	Open	0.15	0	0	1	2	0	0	0
Uzbekistan	Europe and Central Asia	In Crisis	In Crisis	0.25	0	0	0	2	0	0	3
Venezuela	The Americas	In Crisis	In Crisis	0.65	0	3	3	0	2	2	3
Vietnam	Asia and the Pacific	In Crisis	In Crisis	0.15	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Zambia	Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	0.3	0	0	1	2	3	0	0
Zimbabwe	Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	0.35	0	0	2	2	0	0	3

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Table A12: Pandemic violations of democratic standards by expression category

	Pandemic violations of democratic standard index (scale 0–1)	Discriminatory measures (scale 0–3)	Derogation of non-derogable rights (scale 0–3)	Abusive enforcement (scale 0–3)	No time limit (scale 0–3)	Limitations on legislature (scale 0–3)	Official disinformation (scale 0–3)	Restrictions of media freedoms (scale 0–3)
In Crisis	0.09	0.23	0.5	0.57	0.67	0.37	0.7	3
Highly Restricted	0.19	0.52	0.26	1.13	0.43	1	0.7	2.52
Restricted	0.22	0.45	0.41	0.68	0.59	0.82	0.77	2.55
Less Restricted	0.17	0.24	0.09	0.82	0.85	0.58	0.33	2.09
Open	0.05	0.32	0	0.44	0.65	0	0.06	0.41
Global	0.14	0.34	0.23	0.7	0.65	0.5	0.47	2.02

Table A13: Countries experiencing significant declines, 2019–2020

Country	Region	2019 Expression category	2020 Expression category	Actual score change (over 1-year period)	Percentage change (over 1-year period)
Sri Lanka	Asia and the Pacific	Less Restricted	Restricted	-21	-34.0%
Belarus	Europe and Central Asia	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	-18	-76.6%
Guinea	Africa	Restricted	Highly Restricted	-18	-42.8%
Hong Kong	Asia and the Pacific	Restricted	Highly Restricted	-17	-41.6%
Slovenia	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Less Restricted	-14	-16.3%
El Salvador	The Americas	Less Restricted	Restricted	-13	-18.7%
Bolivia	The Americas	Less Restricted	Restricted	-12	-19.5%

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Table A14: Countries experiencing significant declines, 2015–2020

Country	Region	2015 Expression category	2020 Expression category	Actual score change (over 5-year period)	Percentage change (over 5-year period)
Hong Kong	Asia and the Pacific	Restricted	Highly Restricted	-34	-58.5%
Brazil	The Americas	Open	Restricted	-33	-38.9%
Philippines	Asia and the Pacific	Less Restricted	Highly Restricted	-27	-41.8%
Poland	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Less Restricted	-26	-28.1%
Nicaragua	The Americas	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	-23	-74.5%
Guinea	Africa	Restricted	Highly Restricted	-22	-47.8%
Benin	Africa	Open	Less Restricted	-22	-26.2%
El Salvador	The Americas	Less Restricted	Restricted	-21	-26.7%
Slovenia	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Less Restricted	-18	-19.4%
Bolivia	The Americas	Less Restricted	Restricted	-17	-24.9%
Colombia	The Americas	Less Restricted	Restricted	-16	-24.1%
Togo	Africa	Restricted	Highly Restricted	-16	-29.7%
Tanzania	Africa	Restricted	Highly Restricted	-15	-28.9%
Belarus	Europe and Central Asia	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	-15	-72.9%
Ivory Coast	Africa	Less Restricted	Restricted	-13	-21.0%
India	Asia and the Pacific	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	-13	-37.0%
Hungary	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Restricted	-12	-18.7%
Cameroon	Africa	Restricted	Highly Restricted	-12	-29.6%
Sri Lanka	Asia and the Pacific	Restricted	Restricted	-12	-22.4%
Gabon	Africa	Less Restricted	Restricted	-11	-18.2%
Indonesia	Asia and the Pacific	Less Restricted	Restricted	-11	-16.4%
Chile	The Americas	Open	Open	-10	-11.2%
Mozambique	Africa	Less Restricted	Restricted	-10	-16.6%
Zambia	Africa	Restricted	Highly Restricted	-10	-21.1%
Kyrgyzstan	Europe and Central Asia	Restricted	Restricted	-10	-18.1%
Croatia	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	-10	-12.3%

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Table A15: Countries experiencing significant declines, 2010–2020

Country	Region	2010 Expression category	2020 Expression category	Actual score change (over 10-year period)	Percentage change (over 10-year period)
Hong Kong	Asia and the Pacific	Less Restricted	Highly Restricted	-47	-66.0%
India	Asia and the Pacific	Restricted	Highly Restricted	-38	-63.9%
Brazil	The Americas	Open	Restricted	-36	-40.8%
Nicaragua	The Americas	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	-31	-79.7%
Philippines	Asia and the Pacific	Less Restricted	Highly Restricted	-28	-42.6%
Poland	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Less Restricted	-27	-29.4%
Serbia	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Restricted	-27	-34.7%
Turkey	Europe and Central Asia	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	-25	-81.0%
Tanzania	Africa	Less Restricted	Highly Restricted	-25	-39.8%
Bolivia	The Americas	Less Restricted	Restricted	-25	-32.9%
Zambia	Africa	Less Restricted	Highly Restricted	-23	-38.7%
El Salvador	The Americas	Open	Restricted	-23	-29.2%
Hungary	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Restricted	-23	-29.6%
Benin	Africa	Open	Less Restricted	-20	-24.9%
Venezuela	The Americas	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	-20	-69.6%
Guinea	Africa	Restricted	Highly Restricted	-19	-44.5%
Yemen	Middle East and North Africa	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	-19	-79.7%
Slovenia	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Less Restricted	-18	-20.0%
Burundi	Africa	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	-18	-75.3%
Pakistan	Asia and the Pacific	Restricted	Highly Restricted	-17	-35.9%
Thailand	Asia and the Pacific	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	-17	-54.3%
Cameroon	Africa	Restricted	Highly Restricted	-16	-35.5%
Togo	Africa	Restricted	Highly Restricted	-16	-29.0%
Cambodia	Asia and the Pacific	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	-15	-58.7%
Bangladesh	Asia and the Pacific	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	-15	-55.3%
Albania	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	-15	-20.0%
Mauritania	Africa	Restricted	Highly Restricted	-15	-31.0%
Russia	Europe and Central Asia	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	-14	-47.0%
Nepal	Asia and the Pacific	Less Restricted	Restricted	-14	-21.4%
Croatia	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Less Restricted	-14	-16.5%
Ukraine	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Restricted	-13	-20.5%
Bahrain	Middle East and North Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	-12	-78.1%
Haiti	The Americas	Less Restricted	Restricted	-12	-18.4%
Indonesia	Asia and the Pacific	Less Restricted	Restricted	-12	-17.9%
Mali	Africa	Less Restricted	Restricted	-12	-16.8%
Mozambique	Africa	Less Restricted	Restricted	-11	-18.1%
Uganda	Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	-11	-30.6%
Belarus	Europe and Central Asia	In Crisis	In Crisis	-11	-66.0%
Algeria	Middle East and North Africa	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	-11	-42.2%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	-10	-13.4%
Bulgaria	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Less Restricted	-10	-12.4%
Chile	The Americas	Open	Open	-10	-11.0%
United States of America	The Americas	Open	Open	-10	-10.4%

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Table A16: Countries experiencing significant advances, 2019-2020

Country	Region	2019 Expression category	2020 Expression category	Actual score change (over 1-year period)	Percentage change (over 1-year period)
Dominican Republic	The Americas	Less Restricted	Open	14	19.9%

Table A17: Countries experiencing significant advances, 2015–2020

Country	Region	2015 Expression category	2020 Expression category	Actual score change (over 5-year period)	Percentage change (over 5-year period)
The Gambia	Africa	In Crisis	Less Restricted	57	538.2%
Maldives	Asia and the Pacific	Highly Restricted	Restricted	31	152.3%
Ecuador	The Americas	Restricted	Less Restricted	24	57.5%
Ethiopia	Africa	In Crisis	Highly Restricted	21	210.1%
Armenia	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Open	19	30.4%
Sudan	Africa	In Crisis	Highly Restricted	19	277.0%
South Korea	Asia and the Pacific	Less Restricted	Open	17	26.5%
Dominican Republic	The Americas	Less Restricted	Open	15	20.9%
Angola	Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	14	65.2%
North Macedonia	Europe and Central Asia	Restricted	Less Restricted	14	26.1%
Burma/Myanmar	Asia and the Pacific	Highly Restricted	Restricted	13	47.2%
Uzbekistan	Europe and Central Asia	In Crisis	In Crisis	10	489.6%
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	10	41.6%

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Table A18: Countries experiencing significant advances, 2010–2020

Country	Region	2010 Expression category	2020 Expression category	Actual score change (over 10-year period)	Percentage change (over 10-year period)
Tunisia	Middle East and North Africa	In Crisis	Less Restricted	67	1213.1%
The Gambia	Africa	In Crisis	Less Restricted	55	422.0%
Burma/Myanmar	Asia and the Pacific	In Crisis	Restricted	37	818.3%
Libya	Middle East and North Africa	In Crisis	Highly Restricted	36	1727.8%
Fiji	Asia and the Pacific	In Crisis	Restricted	22	122.7%
Ethiopia	Africa	In Crisis	Highly Restricted	20	191.0%
Ecuador	The Americas	Restricted	Less Restricted	19	41.9%
Sudan	Africa	In Crisis	Highly Restricted	17	216.9%
Armenia	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Open	16	25.3%
Sri Lanka	Asia and the Pacific	Highly Restricted	Restricted	13	49.7%
South Korea	Asia and the Pacific	Less Restricted	Open	12	17.0%
Dominican Republic	The Americas	Less Restricted	Open	11	14.5%
Angola	Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	11	43.0%
Uzbekistan	Europe and Central Asia	In Crisis	In Crisis	11	663.2%

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Table A19: Regression results for the change in freedom of expression 2019-2020

Constant	Constant	-0.002	
		(0.002)	0.274
Internet censorship efforts	v2mecenefi	0.018	***
		(0.004)	0
Freedom of discussion for men and women	v2xcl_disc	0.218	***
		(0.032)	0
Government censorship efforts	v2mecenefm	0.014	**
		(0.005)	0.003
Media self-censorship	v2meslfcen	-0.001	
		(0.005)	0.868
Freedom of academic and cultural expression	v2clacfree	0.023	***
		(0.006)	0
CSO consultation	v2cscnsult	0.004	
		(0.005)	0.478
Engaged society	v2dlengage	0.020	***
		(0.004)	0
Transparent laws with predictable enforcement	v2cltrnslw	0.009	
		(0.005)	0.054
Harassment of journalists	v2meharjrn	0.016	**
		(0.005)	0.003
Freedom from political killing	v2clkill	0.007	
		(0.005)	0.16
CSO repression	v2csreprss	0.008	
		(0.005)	0.084
CSO entry and exit	v2cseeorgs	0.020	***
		(0.005)	0
CSO participatory environment	v2csprtcpt	0.030	***
		(0.007)	0
Party ban	v2psparban	-0.002	
		(0.011)	0.852
Freedom of religion	v2clrelig	-0.002	
		(0.005)	0.718
Government Internet filtering in practice	v2smgovfilprc	0.014	*
		(0.006)	0.016
Government Internet shut down in practice	v2smgovshut	-0.003	
		(0.006)	0.597
Government social media censorship in practice	v2smgovsmcenprc	0.012	
		(0.007)	0.087
Internet legal regulation content	v2smregcon	-0.002	
		(0.006)	0.779
Government social media monitoring	v2smgovsmmon	0.005	
		(0.005)	0.378
Government online content regulation approach	v2smregapp	0.012	
		(0.007)	0.072
Arrests for political content	v2smarrest	0.001	
		(0.007)	0.841
Freedom of peaceful assembly	v2caassemb	0.006	
		(0.003)	0.053
Freedom of Academic Exchange	v2cafexch	-0.004	
		(0.006)	0.45
Abuse of defamation and copyright law by elites	v2smdefabu	0.000	
		(0.006)	0.998
R-squared		0.801	
Adjusted R-squared		0.764	
No. observations		160	

***p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001**

Table A20: Importance based on relative weights in the change in freedom of expression, 2019–2020

	General dominance statistics: Epsilon-based regress			
	Number of observations = 161			
	Overall fit statistic = 0.8011			
		Dominance statistics	Standardised dominance statistics	Ranking
v2xcl_disc	Freedom of discussion for men and women	0.138	0.173	1
v2csreprss	CSO repression	0.068	0.084	2
v2clacfree	Freedom of academic and cultural expression	0.058	0.073	3
v2mecenefi	Internet censorship efforts	0.057	0.071	4
v2mecenefm	Government censorship efforts	0.057	0.071	5
v2dlengage	Engaged society	0.056	0.070	6
v2cseeorgs	CSO entry and exit	0.048	0.060	7
v2clkill	Freedom from political killing	0.043	0.053	8

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Table A21: Regression results for the change in freedom of expression, 2015–2020

Constant	Constant	-0.001	
		(0.003)	0.667
Internet censorship efforts	v2mecenefi	0.019	***
		(0.005)	0
Freedom of discussion for men and women	v2xcl_disc	0.115	**
		(0.038)	0.003
Government censorship efforts	v2mecenefm	0.016	**
		(0.006)	0.004
Media self-censorship	v2meslfcen	0.011	
		(0.007)	0.129
Freedom of academic and cultural expression	v2clacfree	0.018	**
		(0.006)	0.007
CSO consultation	v2cscnsult	0.016	*
		(0.007)	0.027
Engaged society	v2dlengage	0.010	*
		(0.005)	0.036
Transparent laws with predictable enforcement	v2cltrnslw	0.012	
		(0.007)	0.085
Harassment of journalists	v2meharjrn	0.013	*
		(0.006)	0.034
Freedom from political killing	v2clkill	0.003	
		(0.006)	0.633
CSO repression	v2csreprss	0.016	**
		(0.005)	0.004
CSO entry and exit	v2cseeorgs	0.021	**
		(0.006)	0.001
CSO participatory environment	v2csprtcpt	0.009	
		(0.007)	0.185
Party ban	v2psparban	-0.008	
		(0.008)	0.298
Freedom of religion	v2clrelig	-0.006	
		(0.006)	0.277
Government Internet filtering in practice	v2smgovfilprc	0.017	*
		(0.007)	0.022
Government Internet shutdown in practice	v2smgovshut	0.001	
		(0.008)	0.894
Government social media censorship in practice	v2smgovsmcenprc	0.012	
		(0.010)	0.195
Internet legal regulation content	v2smregcon	0.012	
		(0.008)	0.154
Government social media monitoring	v2smgovsmmon	0.009	
		(0.007)	0.179
Government online content regulation approach	v2smregapp	-0.004	
		(0.008)	0.622
Arrests for political content	v2smarrest	0.027	**
		(0.008)	0.001
Freedom of peaceful assembly	v2caassemb	0.008	
		(0.004)	0.065
Freedom of Academic Exchange	v2cafexch	0.009	
		(0.008)	0.298
Abuse of defamation and copyright law by elites	v2smdefabu	0.019	*
		(0.007)	0.011
R-squared		0.895	
Adjusted R-squared		0.876	
Number of observations		161	

***p*<0.05, ****p*<0.01, *****p*<0.001**

(standard deviation from the mean in parentheses)

Table A22: Importance based on relative weights in the change in freedom of expression, 2015–2020

	General dominance statistics: Epsilon-based regress			
	Number of observations = 161			
	Overall fit statistic = 0.8949			
		Dominance statistics	Standardised dominance statistics	Ranking
v2mecenefm	Government censorship efforts	0.075	0.083	1
v2xcl_disc	Freedom of discussion for men and women	0.069	0.077	2
v2csreprss	CSO repression	0.068	0.076	3
v2cseeorgs	CSO entry and exit	0.056	0.063	4
v2clacfree	Freedom of academic and cultural expression	0.053	0.059	5
v2smarrest	Arrests for political content	0.05	0.056	6
v2mecenefi	Internet censorship efforts	0.048	0.054	7
v2meharjrn	Harassment of journalists	0.045	0.051	8

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Table A23: Regression results for the change in freedom of expression, 2010–2020

Constant	Constant	-0.003	
		(0.004)	0.417
Internet censorship efforts	v2mecenefi	0.022	**
		(0.006)	0.001
Freedom of discussion for men and women	v2xcl_disc	0.140	***
		(0.036)	0.000
Government censorship efforts	v2mecenefm	0.017	**
		(0.006)	0.004
Media self-censorship	v2meslfcen	0.009	
		(0.008)	0.218
Freedom of academic and cultural expression	v2clacfree	0.018	**
		(0.006)	0.005
CSO consultation	v2cscnsult	0.027	***
		(0.008)	0.000
Engaged society	v2dlengage	0.016	***
		(0.004)	0.000
Transparent laws with predictable enforcement	v2cltrnslw	0.001	
		(0.006)	0.856
Harassment of journalists	v2meharjrn	0.006	
		(0.006)	0.319
Freedom from political killing	v2clkill	0.004	
		(0.007)	0.552
CSO repression	v2csreprss	0.018	**
		(0.007)	0.009
CSO entry and exit	v2cseeorgs	0.021	**
		(0.007)	0.002
CSO participatory environment	v2csprtcpt	-0.002	
		(0.007)	0.750
Party ban	v2psparban	-0.024	*
		(0.011)	0.027
Freedom of religion	v2clrelig	-0.001	
		(0.007)	0.919
Government Internet filtering in practice	v2smgovfilprc	0.012	
		(0.007)	0.103
Government Internet shut down in practice	v2smgovshut	-0.011	
		(0.009)	0.232
Government social media censorship in practice	v2smgovsmcenprc	0.033	**
		(0.010)	0.001
Internet legal regulation content	v2smregcon	-0.002	
		(0.009)	0.839
Government social media monitoring	v2smgovsmmon	0.008	
		(0.006)	0.222
Government online content regulation approach	v2smregapp	-0.002	
		(0.007)	0.746
Arrests for political content	v2smarrest	0.021	**
		(0.008)	0.005
Freedom of peaceful assembly	v2caassemb	0.010	*
		(0.005)	0.049
Freedom of Academic Exchange	v2cafexch	-0.002	
		(0.007)	0.798
Abuse of defamation and copyright law by elites	v2smdefabu	0.004	
		(0.008)	0.616
R-squared		0.924	
Adjusted R-squared		0.91	
Number of observations		160	

***p*<0.05, ****p*<0.01, *****p*<0.001**

(standard deviation from the mean in parentheses)

Table A24: Importance based on relative weights in the change in freedom of expression, 2010–2020

	General dominance statistics: Epsilon-based regress			
	Number of observations = 160			
	Overall fit statistic = 0.9239			
		Dominance statistics	Standardised dominance statistics	Ranking
v2csreprss	CSO repression	0.067	0.072	1
v2xcl_disc	Freedom of discussion for men and women	0.064	0.069	2
v2mecenefm	Government censorship efforts	0.062	0.067	2
v2cseeorgs	CSO entry and exit	0.061	0.066	4
v2mecenefi	Internet censorship efforts	0.058	0.063	3
v2cscnsult	CSO consultation	0.056	0.061	6
v2smgovsmcenprc	Government social media censorship in practice	0.056	0.06	7
v2dlengage	Engaged society	0.052	0.056	8
v2clacfree	Freedom of academic and cultural expression	0.05	0.054	9

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Table A25 - V-Dem variable descriptions

V-Dem variable name	Description	Question	Responses
v2mecenefi	Internet censorship efforts	Does the government attempt to censor information (text, audio, or visuals) on the Internet?	0: The government successfully blocks Internet access except to sites that are pro-government or devoid of political content. 1: The government attempts to block Internet access except to sites that are pro-government or devoid of political content, but many users are able to circumvent such controls. 2: The government allows Internet access, including to some sites that are critical of the government, but blocks selected sites that deal with especially politically sensitive issues 3: The government allows Internet access that is unrestricted, with the exceptions mentioned above.
v2xcl_disc	Freedom of discussion for men and women	Are men/women able to openly discuss political issues in private homes and in public spaces?	0: Not respected. Hardly any freedom of expression exists for men. Men are subject to immediate and harsh intervention and harassment for expression of political opinion. 1: Weakly respected. Expressions of political opinions by men are frequently exposed to intervention and harassment. 2: Somewhat respected. Expressions of political opinions by men are occasionally exposed to intervention and harassment. 3: Mostly respected. There are minor restraints on the freedom of expression in the private sphere, predominantly limited to a few isolated cases or only linked to soft sanctions. But as a rule there is no intervention or harassment if men make political statements. 4: Fully respected. Freedom of speech for men in their homes and in public spaces is not restricted.
v2mecenefm	Government censorship efforts	Does the government directly or indirectly attempt to censor the print or broadcast media?	0: Attempts to censor are direct and routine. 1: Attempts to censor are indirect but nevertheless routine. 2: Attempts to censor are direct but limited to especially sensitive issues. 3: Attempts to censor are indirect and limited to especially sensitive issues. 4: The government rarely attempts to censor major media in any way, and when such exceptional attempts are discovered, the responsible officials are usually punished.
v2meslfcen	Media self-censorship	Is there self-censorship among journalists when reporting on issues that the government considers politically sensitive?	0: Self-censorship is complete and thorough. 1: Self-censorship is common but incomplete. 2: There is self-censorship on a few highly sensitive political issues but not on moderately sensitive issues. 3: There is little or no self-censorship among journalists.
v2clacfree	Freedom of academic and cultural expression	Is there academic freedom and freedom of cultural expression related to political issues?	0: Not respected by public authorities. Censorshipand intimidation are frequent. Academicactivities and cultural expressions are severelyrestricted or controlled by the government. 1: Weakly respected by public authorities. Academicfreedom and freedom of cultural expression arepracticed occasionally, but direct criticism of thegovernment is mostly met with repression. 2: Somewhat respected by public authorities. Academic freedom and freedom of cultural expression are practiced routinely, but strong criticism of the government is sometimes met with repression. 3: Mostly respected by public authorities. There are few limitations on academic freedom and freedom of cultural expression, and resulting sanctions tend to be infrequent and soft. 4: Fully respected by public authorities. There are no restrictions on academic freedom or cultural expression.
v2cscnsult	Civil society organisation (CSO) consultation	Are major civil society organisations routinely consulted by policymakers on policies relevant to their members?	0: No. There is a high degree of insulation of the government from CSO input. The government may sometimes enlist or mobilise CSOs after policies are adopted to sell them to the public at large. But it does not often consult with them in formulating policies. 1: To some degree. CSOs are but one set of voices that policymakers sometimes take into account. 2: Yes. Important CSOs are recognised as stakeholders in important policy areas and given voice on such issues. This can be accomplished through formal corporatist arrangements or through less formal arrangements.

V-Dem variable name	Description	Question	Responses
v2dlengage	Engaged society	When important policy changes are being considered, how wide and how independent are public deliberations?	0: Public deliberation is never, or almost never allowed. 1: Some limited public deliberations are allowed but the public below the elite levels is almost always either unaware of major policy debates or unable to take part in them. 2: Public deliberation is not repressed but nevertheless infrequent and non-elite actors are typically controlled and/or constrained by the elites. 3: Public deliberation is actively encouraged and some autonomous non-elite groups participate, but that tends to be the same across issue-areas. 4: Public deliberation is actively encouraged and a relatively broad segment of non-elite groups often participate and vary with different issue-areas. 5: Large numbers of non-elite groups as well as ordinary people tend to discuss major policies among themselves, in the media, in associations or neighbourhoods, or in the streets. Grass-roots deliberation is common and unconstrained.
v2cltrnslw	Transparent laws with predictable enforcement	Are the laws of the land clear, well publicised, coherent (consistent with each other), relatively stable from year to year, and enforced in a predictable manner?	0: Transparency and predictability are almost non-existent. The laws of the land are created and/ or enforced in completely arbitrary fashion. 1: Transparency and predictability are severely limited. The laws of the land are more often than not created and/or enforced in arbitrary fashion. 2: Transparency and predictability are somewhat limited. The laws of the land are mostly created in a non-arbitrary fashion but enforcement is rather arbitrary in some parts of the country. 3: Transparency and predictability are fairly strong. The laws of the land are usually created and enforced in a non-arbitrary fashion. 4: Transparency and predictability are very strong. The laws of the land are created and enforced in a non-arbitrary fashion.

V-Dem variable name	Description	Question	Responses
v2meharjrn	Harassment of journalists	Are individual journalists harassed – i.e. threatened with libel, arrested, imprisoned, beaten, or killed – by governmental or powerful non-governmental actors while engaged in legitimate journalistic activities?	0: No journalists dare to engage in journalistic activities that would offend powerful actors because harassment or worse would be certain to occur. 1: Some journalists occasionally offend powerful actors but they are almost always harassed or worse and eventually are forced to stop. 2: Some journalists who offend powerful actors are forced to stop but others manage to continue practicing journalism freely for long periods of time. 3: It is rare for any journalist to be harassed for offending powerful actors, and if this were to happen, those responsible for the harassment would be identified and punished. 4: Journalists are never harassed by governmental or powerful non-governmental actors while engaged in legitimate journalistic activities.
v2clkill	Freedom from political killing	Is there freedom from political killings?	0: Not respected by public authorities. Political killings are practiced systematically and they are typically incited and approved by top leaders of government. 1: Weakly respected by public authorities. Political killings are practiced frequently and top leaders of government are not actively working to prevent them. 2: Somewhat respected by public authorities. Political killings are practiced occasionally but they are typically not incited and approved by top leaders of government. 3: Mostly respected by public authorities. Political killings are practiced in a few isolated cases but they are not incited or approved by top leaders of government. 4: Fully respected by public authorities. Political killings are non-existent.

V-Dem variable name	Description	Question	Responses
v2csreprss	CSO repression	Does the government attempt to repress civil society organisations?	0: Severely. The government violently and actively pursues all real and even some imagined members of CSOs. They seek not only to deter the activity of such groups but to effectively liquidate them. Examples include Stalinist Russia, Nazi Germany, and Maoist China. 1: Substantially. In addition to the kinds of harassment outlined in responses 2 and 3 below, the government also arrests, tries, and imprisons leaders of and participants in oppositional CSOs who have acted lawfully. Other sanctions include disruption of public gatherings and violent sanctions of activists (beatings, threats to families, destruction of valuable property). Examples include Mugabe's Zimbabwe, Poland under Martial Law, Serbia under Milosevic. 2: Moderately. In addition to material sanctions outlined in response 3 below, the government also engages in minor legal harassment (detentions, short-term incarceration) to dissuade CSOs from acting or expressing themselves. The government may also restrict the scope of their actions through measures that restrict association of civil society organisations with each other or political parties, bar civil society organisations from taking certain actions, or block international contacts. Examples include post-Martial Law Poland, Brazil in the early 1980s, the late Franco period in Spain. 3: Weakly. The government uses material sanctions (fines, firings, denial of social services) to deter oppositional CSOs from acting or expressing themselves. They may also use burdensome registration or incorporation procedures to slow the formation of new civil society organisations and side-track them from engagement. The government may also organise Government Organised Movements or NGOs (GONGOs) to crowd out independent organisations. One example would be Singapore in the post-Yew phase or Putin's Russia. 4: No. Civil society organisations are free to organise, associate, strike, express themselves, and to criticise the government without fear of government sanctions or harassment.
v2cseeorgs	CSO entry and exit	To what extent does the government achieve control over entry and exit by civil society organisations into public life?	0: Monopolistic control. The government exercises an explicit monopoly over CSOs. The only organisations allowed to engage in political activity such as endorsing parties or politicians, sponsoring public issues forums, organizing rallies or demonstrations, engaging in strikes, or publically commenting on public officials and policies are government-sponsored organisations. The government actively represses those who attempt to defy its monopoly on political activity. 1: Substantial control. The government licenses all CSOs and uses political criteria to bar organisations that are likely to oppose the government. There are at least some citizen-based organisations that play a limited role in politics independent of the government. The government actively represses those who attempt to flout its political criteria and bars them from any political activity. 2: Moderate control. Whether the government ban on independent CSOs is partial or full, some prohibited organisations manage to play an active political role. Despite its ban on organisations of this sort, the government does not or cannot repress them, due to either its weakness or political expedience. 3: Minimal control. Whether or not the government licenses CSOs, there exist constitutional provisions that allow the government to ban organisations or movements that have a history of anti-democratic action in the past (e.g. the banning of neo-fascist or communist organisations in the Federal Republic of Germany). Such banning takes place under strict rule of law and conditions of judicial independence. 4: Unconstrained. Whether or not the government licenses CSOs, the government does not impede their formation and operation unless they are engaged in activities to violently overthrow the government.
v2csprtcpt	CSO participatory environment	Which of these best describes the involvementof people in civil society organisations?	0: Most associations are state-sponsored, and although a large number of people may be active in them, their participation is not purely voluntary. 1: Voluntary CSOs exist but fewpeople are active in them. 2: There are many diverse CSOs, but popular involvement is minimal. 3: There are many diverse CSOs and it is considered normal for people to be at least occasionally active in at least one of them.

V-Dem variable name	Description	Question	Responses
v2psparban	Party ban	Are any parties banned?	0: Yes. All parties except the state-sponsored party (and closely allied parties) are banned. 1: Yes. Elections are non-partisan or there are no officially recognised parties. 2: Yes. Many parties are banned. 3: Yes. But only a few parties are banned. 4: No. No parties are officially banned.
v2clrelig	Freedom of religion	Is there freedom of religion?	0: Not respected by public authorities. Hardly any freedom of religion exists. Any kind of religious practice is outlawed or at least controlled by the government to the extent that religious leaders are appointed by and subjected to public authorities, who control the activities of religious communities in some detail. 1: Weakly respected by public authorities. Some elements of autonomous organised religious practices exist and are officially recognised. But significant religious communities are repressed, prohibited, or systematically disabled, voluntary conversions are restricted, and instances of discrimination or intimidation of individuals or groups due to their religion are common. 2: Somewhat respected by public authorities. Autonomous organised religious practices exist and are officially recognised. Yet, minor religious communities are repressed, prohibited, or systematically disabled, and/or instances of discrimination or intimidation of individuals or groups due to their religion occur occasionally. 3: Mostly respected by public authorities. There are minor restrictions on the freedom of religion, predominantly limited to a few isolated cases. Minority religions face denial of registration, hindrance of foreign missionaries from entering the country, restrictions against proselytising, or hindrance to access to or construction of places of worship. 4: Fully respected by public authorities. The population enjoys the right to practice any religious belief they choose. Religious groups may organise, select, and train personnel; solicit and receive contributions; publish; and engage in consultations without undue interference. If religious communities have to register, public authorities do not abuse the process to discriminate against a religion and do not constrain the right to worship before registration.

V-Dem variable name	Description	Question	Responses
v2smgovfilprc	Government Internet filtering in practice	How frequently does the government censor political information (text, audio, images, or video) on the Internet by filtering (blacking accessto certain websites)?	0: Extremely often. It is a regular practice for the government to remove political content, except to sites that are pro-government 1: Often. The government commonly removes online political content, except sites that are pro-government. 2: Sometimes. The government successfully removes about half of the critical online political content. 3: Rarely. There have been only a few occasions on which the government removed political content. 4: Never, or almost never. The government allows Internet access that is unrestricted, with the exceptions mentioned in the clarifications section.
v2smgovshut	Government Internet shutdown in practice	Independent of whether it actually does so in practice, does the government have the technical capacity to actively shut down domestic access to the Internet if it decided to?	0: The government lacks the capacity to shut down any domestic Internet connections. 1: The government has the capacity to shut down roughly a quarter of domestic access to the Internet. 2: The government has the capacity to shut down roughly half of domestic access to the Internet. 3: The government has the capacity to shut down roughly three-quarters of domestic access to the Internet. 4: The government has the capacity to shut down all, or almost all, domestic access to the Internet.

V-Dem variable name	Description	Question	Responses
v2smgovsmcenprc	Government social media censorship in practice	To what degree does the government censor political content (i.e. deleting or filtering specific posts for political reasons) on social media in practice?	0: The government simply blocks all social media platforms. 1: The government successfully censors all social media with political content. 2: The government successfully censors a significant portion of political content on social media, though not all of it. 3: The government only censors social media with political content that deals with especially sensitive issues. 4: The government does not censor political social media content, with the exceptions mentioned in the clarifications section.
v2smregcon	Internet legal regulation content	What type of content is covered in the legal framework to regulate Internet?	0: The state can remove any content at will. 1: The state can remove most content, and the law protects speech in only specific and politically uncontroversial contexts. 2: The legal framework is ambiguous. The state can remove some politically sensitive content, while other is protected by law. 3: The law protects most political speech, but the state can remove especially politically controversial content. 4: The law protects political speech, and the state can only remove content if it violates well-established legal criteria.

V-Dem variable name	Description	Question	Responses
v2smgovsmmon	Government social media monitoring	How comprehensive is the surveillance of political content in social media by the government or its agents?	0: Extremely comprehensive. The government surveils virtually all content on social media. 1: Mostly comprehensive. The government surveils most content on social media, with comprehensive monitoring of most key political issues. 2: Somewhat comprehensive. The government does not universally surveil social media but can be expected to surveil key political issues about half the time. 3: Limited. The government only surveils political content on social media on a limited basis. 4: Not at all, or almost not at all. The government does not surveil political content on social media, with the exceptions mentioned in the clarifications section.
v2smregapp	Government online content regulation approach	Does the government use its own resources and institutions to monitor and regulate online content or does it distribute this regulatory burden to private actors such as Internet service providers?	0: All online content monitoring and regulation is done by the state. 1: Most online content monitoring and regulation is done by the state, though the state involves private actors in a limited way. 2: Some online content monitoring and regulation is done by the state, but the state also involves private actors in monitoring and regulation in various ways. 3: The state does little online content monitoring and regulation, and entrusts most of the monitoring and regulation to private actors. 4: The state off-loads all online content monitoring and regulation to private actors.

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V-Dem variable name	Description	Question	Responses
v2smarrest	Arrests for political content	If a citizen posts political content online that would run counter to the government and its policies, what is the likelihood that citizen is arrested?	0: Extremely likely. 1: Likely. 2: Unlikely. 3: Extremely unlikely.
v2caassemb	Freedom of peaceful assembly	To what extent do state authorities respect and protect the right of peaceful assembly?	0: Never. State authorities do not allow peaceful assemblies and are willing to use lethal force to prevent them. 1: Rarely. State authorities rarely allow peaceful assemblies, but generally avoid using lethal force to prevent them. 2: Sometimes. State authorities sometimes allow peaceful assemblies, but often arbitrarily deny citizens the right to assemble peacefully. 3: Mostly. State authorities generally allow peaceful assemblies, but in rare cases arbitrarily deny citizens the right to assemble peacefully 4: Almost always. State authorities almost always allow and actively protect peaceful assemblies except in rare cases of lawful, necessary, and proportionate limitations.

V-Dem variable name	Description	Question	Responses
v2cafexch	Freedom of academic exchange	To what extent are scholars free to exchange and communicate research ideas and findings?	0: Completely restricted. Academic exchange and dissemination is, across all disciplines, consistently subject to censorship, self-censorship or other restrictions. 1: Severely restricted. Academic exchange and dissemination is, in some disciplines, consistently subject to censorship, self-censorship or other restrictions. 2: Moderately restricted. Academic exchange and dissemination is occasionally subject to censorship, self-censorship or other restrictions. 3: Mostly free. Academic exchange and dissemination is rarely subject to censorship, self-censorship or other restrictions. 4: Fully free. Academic exchange and dissemination is not subject to censorship, self-censorship or other restrictions.
v2smdefabu	Abuse of defamation and copyright law by elites	To what extent do elites abuse the legal system (e.g. defamation and copyright law) to censor political speech online?	0: Regularly. Elites abuse the legal system to remove political speech from the Internet as regular practice. 1: Often. Elites commonly abuse the legal system to remove political speech from the Internet. 2: Sometimes. Elites abuse the legal system to remove political speech from the Internet about half the time. 3: Rarely. Elites occasionally abuse the legal system to remove political speech from the Internet. 4: Never, or almost never. Elites do not abuse the legal system to remove political speech from the Internet.

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