



## ***Press Freedom in 2009: Broad setbacks to global media freedom***

***By Karin Deutsch Karlekar***

Global press freedom declined in 2009, with setbacks registered in nearly every region of the world. This marked the eighth straight year of overall deterioration, and produced a global landscape in which only one in six people live in countries with a Free press. These largely negative developments constitute the principal findings of *Freedom of the Press 2010: A Global Survey of Media Independence*, the latest edition of an annual index published by Freedom House since 1980. The year was notable for intensified efforts by authoritarian regimes to place restrictions on all conduits for news and information. The trend included repression of print and broadcast journalism, but a growing focus on the internet and other new media was also apparent. While there were some positive developments, particularly in South Asia, significant declines were recorded in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East. Countries with largest downgrades included South Africa, Iran, Mexico, the Philippines, Senegal, and Guinea.

***“In 2009 only 1 in 6 people lived in countries with a free press”***

Threats have emerged both within and across state borders. China’s government introduced several new methods of internet censorship, and it remained a global leader in the jailing of journalists. Moreover, the Chinese authorities attempted to control expressions of dissent overseas, demanding that the organizers of foreign cultural gatherings remove speakers or works of art that they found objectionable. In another attempt to globalize censorship, the Organization of the Islamic Conference spearheaded a campaign aimed at embedding onerous anti-blasphemy language into international law.

In a year when significant declines outnumbered gains by a two-to-one margin, press freedom suffered setbacks even in Free media environments. In southern Africa, both Namibia and South Africa were reduced from Free to

Partly Free status. Mexico and Senegal also showed notable deterioration, and substantial negative trends were apparent elsewhere in the Americas (Ecuador and Honduras) and in Asia (Fiji and the Philippines). Conditions for journalists in strategically important authoritarian states such as China and Russia remained extremely repressive, while Iran’s already highly controlled media space contracted further due to a crackdown on both old and new media in the wake of the flawed presidential election. By contrast, South Asia provided a glimmer of hope, with substantive improvements in several countries.

### **The Historical Context**

In the 30 years since *Freedom of the Press* began publishing, the overarching trend has consisted, until recently, of gradual and occasionally dramatic improvement in the level of media freedom worldwide. In 1980 the survey showed a grim global landscape in which 38 (25 percent) of 154 countries had fully Free media, while 34 (22 percent) had Partly Free media and 82 (53 percent) had Not Free media. Western Europe was the only region where a Free press prevailed. While there were positive developments in the Americas, the majority of countries in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa were rated Not Free, almost all countries in the Middle East and North Africa were Not Free, and the Soviet sphere, including the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, was entirely Not Free.

By 1990, these figures had shown a modest improvement. Of 159 countries, 56 (35 percent) had Free media, 29 (18 percent) had Partly Free media, and 74 (47 percent) had Not Free media. These gains were largely driven by openings in Latin America, where a number of countries shifted from Partly Free to Free status, and by

smaller improvements in Asia and Central and Eastern Europe.

By 2000, the survey reflected a genuine blossoming of press freedom. Of 186 countries and territories, 69 (37 percent) were rated Free; 51 (27 percent) were rated Partly Free; and 66 (35 percent) were rated Not Free. A number of countries where media repression was the order of the day registered significant progress in facilitating the free flow of information. There had been a dramatic opening in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union in the early 1990s, and significant improvements in sub-Saharan Africa had propelled a number of countries from the Not Free to the Partly Free range. Meanwhile, smaller gains in Asia led to several shifts from Partly Free to Free.

Over the past decade, the positive momentum that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall has stalled, and in some cases has been reversed. For the past eight years, there have been gradual declines on a global scale, with the most pronounced setbacks taking place in Latin America and the former Soviet Union. Globally and within several regions, there appears to be a shift toward the middle, including a worrying trend in which societies that previously boasted robust press freedom are suffering declines significant enough to place them in the Partly Free category.

During this time period, dramatic structural changes have occurred in the overall media landscape. Much of the world has benefited from a significant diversification of information driven by the development of online media, the expansion of cable and satellite television, and the breakup of state monopolies. In some regions—South Asia and the Middle East in particular—these changes have meant that governments no longer can wield total control over news and information. At the same time, new restrictions on broadcast media have been imposed by several large authoritarian governments—Russia and Venezuela are especially notable in this respect. And while the Chinese government has allowed a dramatic increase in citizens' abilities to receive information and transmit their views in certain areas, political reform, human rights and other topics remain taboo. Indeed, the Chinese regime has become a world leader in the development of

### What the Index Measures

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

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

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

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

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

new and more sophisticated methods of information control. Finally, in the developed world, the growth of the internet and the decline of newspapers are driving a major restructuring of the news industry—the consequences of which are still being hotly debated

### The Global Picture in 2009

Of the 196 countries and territories assessed during calendar year 2009, 69 (35 percent) were rated Free, 64 (33 percent) were rated Partly Free, and 63 (32 percent) were rated Not Free. This represents a move toward the center compared with the survey covering 2008, which featured 70 Free, 61 Partly Free, and 64 Not Free countries and territories.

The survey found that only 16 percent of the world's inhabitants live in countries with a Free press, while 44 percent have a Partly Free press and 40 percent live in Not Free environments. The population figures are significantly affected by two countries—China, with a Not Free status, and India, with a Partly Free status—that together account for more than two billion of the world's roughly six billion people. The percentage of those enjoying Free media in 2009 declined to the lowest level since 1996, when Freedom House began incorporating population data into the findings of the survey.

The overall level of press freedom worldwide, as measured by the global average score, worsened slightly in 2009, contributing to an eight-year negative trend. The averages for the legal, political, and economic categories all worsened as well, with the political and economic categories showing the largest declines.

The most significant regionwide declines were seen in the Americas and sub-Saharan Africa, while smaller negative trends were apparent in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the Middle East and North Africa, and Western Europe. The Asia-Pacific region represented the only bright spot, with parts of the South Asia subregion driving an improvement in the average regional score.

### Trends in 2009

- Continued declines in important emerging democracies demonstrate the fragility of press freedom in such environments.** Over the past five years, steady declines have been recorded in countries such as Mexico in the Americas; Thailand, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka in Asia; and Senegal and Uganda in sub-Saharan Africa. Overall, declines of 10 or more points have outnumbered gains of a similar scale by a two-to-one margin. Mexico's loss of 18 points over the past five years is unusual, as it has not been accompanied by political upheaval (as in Thailand) or civil war (as in Sri Lanka). Instead, violence associated with drug trafficking has led to a dramatic increase in attacks on journalists who try to cover drug-related corruption or gang activities, as well as rising levels of self-censorship and impunity. Senegal's drop of 20 points is the world's largest in the past five years, and also took place in the context of a fairly democratic political environment. Government support for media freedom and tolerance for critical or opposing viewpoints has declined considerably, and official rhetoric against members of the press has increased. More importantly, the incidence of both legal and extralegal forms of harassment—including physical attacks against journalists and the closure of media outlets—has risen sharply, leading to a much more restrictive environment for the press.
- Governments with an authoritarian bent have moved to consolidate control over traditional media while also encroaching on the comparatively free environment of the internet.** The space for independent media in Russia has been steadily reduced as legal protections are routinely ignored, the judicial system grows more subservient to the executive branch, reporters face severe repercussions for reporting on sensitive issues, most attacks on journalists go unpunished, and media ownership is brought firmly under the control of the state. Russian authorities are also moving to restrict internet

freedom through manipulation of online content and legal actions against bloggers. In Venezuela, the government has increased its control over the broadcast sector through the arbitrary application of licensing and other regulatory procedures, and it is increasingly threatening to extend such measures to new media. In both Ethiopia and The Gambia, independent outlets have faced growing pressure, journalists have been forced into exile, and internet-based news sites run by citizens living abroad have been censored.

- **A positive attitude on the part of governments or ruling parties has proven critical for gains in media freedom.** During 2009, this was primarily apparent in South Asia, the subregion that made the year's greatest gains. Newly elected and reform-minded governments in Bangladesh, Bhutan, and the Maldives have enacted positive constitutional or other legal changes that have improved protections for press freedom, and there have been fewer cases of legal or physical harassment. These governments have also allowed the establishment of independent print and broadcast outlets, increasing the diversity of voices available and improving access to news and information. The trend is also apparent in the countries that have shown the greatest numerical improvement over the past five years, with changes in government representing a key factor behind gains in countries such as Haiti, Liberia, and Nepal.
- **Threats to media freedom remain a concern even in stronger democracies.** While Israel regained its Free status in 2009, some curbs on media freedom, primarily concerning travel restrictions and military censorship, remain in place. In Italy, a country with a Partly Free ranking, conditions worsened as Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi clashed with the press over coverage of his personal life, leading to lawsuits against both local and foreign news outlets as well as the censorship of critical content by the state-owned broadcaster. In a worrying development, two countries in southern

Africa slipped into the Partly Free category. Namibia was tested during an election year, suffering from biased campaign coverage and an increase in negative official rhetoric and verbal threats against certain outlets. Official rhetoric against independent or critical voices has also increased in South Africa in recent years, as have legal threats to the print media and a lack of independence at the dominant state-run broadcaster, pushing the country into the Partly Free category.

### Key Reasons for Declines

Despite some promising positive movements in 2009, the overall trend remained negative in terms of numerical declines. Behind this deterioration lie a number of themes that help to place the global findings in context:

- **Most governments appear unwilling to reform or eliminate the array of laws used to punish journalists and news outlets, and some have been applying them with greater determination.** Both governments and private individuals continue to restrict media freedom through the broad or disproportionate application of laws that forbid "inciting hatred," commenting on sensitive topics such as religion or ethnicity, or "endangering national security." Libel and defamation laws are also commonly used to muzzle the independent media.
- **In countries experiencing political upheaval and conflict, media are caught in the crossfire and become a prime target for threats and restrictions.** In a variety of countries in 2009, press freedom suffered declines due to coups or other dramatic political changes. The largest numerical decline of the year took place in Fiji, where the abrogation of the constitution and the imposition of censorship by the government led to a slew of practical impairments. Similarly sharp declines took place in Madagascar, which moved to the Not Free category, as well as in Guinea, Niger, and Honduras.

- **Continuing impunity for past cases of murder and other crimes against journalists is encouraging new attacks, significantly hampering media freedom.** The level of violence and physical harassment directed at the press by both government and nonstate actors remains a key concern in a number of countries, contributing to many score declines. In conflict zones such as Iraq, Pakistan, and Somalia, the press is in constant danger. Other countries with high murder rates among journalists are Mexico, Russia, the Philippines, Afghanistan, and Sri Lanka. Apart from the direct impact on individual journalists, these attacks have a chilling effect on the profession as a whole, adding to the existing problem of self-censorship. Countries with high murder rates are not necessarily those with the world's most repressive media environments, but are generally places where private or independent voices do exist and some journalists are willing to pursue potentially dangerous stories. The attacks go unpunished due to a lack of political will coupled with weak rule of law and judicial institutions.
- **Because they provide a relatively open forum for the exchange of information in otherwise restrictive environments, the internet and other new media have become sites of contestation between citizens attempting to provide and access news and governments attempting to maintain control.** In most of the world, the internet is freer than traditional media, providing an essential conduit for the relatively unfettered flow of information and dissenting viewpoints. However, governments are employing traditional means of repression to restrict internet freedom, from lawsuits and direct censorship to content manipulation and the physical harassment of bloggers. Authorities in some countries, such as Kazakhstan, have drafted new legislation specifically to extend state control over internet-based content, while others have simply applied existing, broadly written laws. Bloggers and internet-based journalists now account for more cases of

imprisonment than their counterparts in traditional media, according to research conducted by the Committee to Protect Journalists. In 2009, the Chinese government attempted to expand internet filtering by requiring the installation of its Green Dam software on all computers, a plan that was later partially retracted following a domestic and international outcry. More dramatically, Iranian authorities responded with remarkable aggression to citizens' attempts to disseminate information through new media following the postelection crackdown on traditional journalism.

- **The globalization of censorship represents a growing threat to freedoms of expression and the press.** Although there has been discussion of a legislative remedy to the practice, libel tourism remains a serious problem in Britain. Foreign business magnates, princes, and other powerful individuals have increasingly turned to the British court system to quash critical research or commentary, a phenomenon that has had a global impact on investigative journalists and scholars. Meanwhile, Muslim-majority countries have banded together under the umbrella of the Organization of the Islamic Conference in a bid to restrict speech by inserting an antiblasphemy provision into an international human rights covenant. And China has issued threats against book fairs, film festivals, and other cultural and scholarly venues around the world if they plan to feature content that is interpreted as critical of Beijing's internal policies.

### **Worst of the Worst**

The world's 10 worst-rated countries are Belarus, Burma, Cuba, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Iran, Libya, North Korea, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. In these states, which are scattered around the globe, independent media are either nonexistent or barely able to operate, the press acts as a mouthpiece for the regime, citizens' access to unbiased information is severely limited, and dissent is crushed through imprisonment, torture, and other forms of repression. Despite

hope in recent years that the impact of the internet and other new media would lead to improvements in these countries, most of their scores remained stagnant. In one notable development, however, Iran replaced Zimbabwe in the worst-performing group. Zimbabwe's score improved slightly as the establishment of a new "government of national unity" led to small openings in media coverage and editorial bias, as well as less stringent application of harsh media laws, whereas Iran suffered a dramatic deterioration as both official and unofficial avenues for news and information sharing were severely curtailed following the flawed presidential election, and journalists were arrested, imprisoned, and tortured.

### Regional Findings

**Americas:** In the Americas, 17 countries (48 percent) were rated Free, 16 (46 percent) were rated Partly Free, and 2 (6 percent) were rated Not Free in 2009. These figures are significantly influenced by the open media environments of the Caribbean, which tend to offset the less rosy picture in Central and South America. There were no status changes during the year, but overall numerical declines outweighed gains. The average regional score worsened significantly compared with 2008, with the bulk of the decline occurring in the political category.

The only two countries in the region with a status of Not Free are **Cuba**, which has one of the most repressive media environments worldwide, and **Venezuela**, where the government of President Hugo Chavez continued its efforts to control the press. In 2009, Venezuela's score declined by two points, to 75, to reflect increased violence against journalists, including the murder of Orel Sambrano, director of the political weekly *ABC de la Semana* and the radio station Radio America. In addition, regulators' use of the Law of Social Responsibility in Radio and Television to launch probes against television and radio stations forced over 30 of them to shut down, and the effort placed a special emphasis on outlets that were critical of the government. Media conditions also remained

worrying in **Colombia** and **Guatemala**, which suffered from high levels of intimidation and self-censorship.

Following declines in 2008, further significant slippage was seen in both Ecuador and Mexico in 2009. **Ecuador's** score fell three points, to 47, due to increased government controls and threats to punish outlets for "irresponsible content." This reportedly led Ecuadorian journalists to practice more self-censorship on controversial topics. An even more worrying decline was noted in **Mexico**, due to a significant rise in violence against journalists and continued impunity for their attackers. Journalists were targeted by drug traffickers, state security forces, and local officials, and were accused of aiding drug traffickers if they addressed problems with

*"A score of 60 for 2009 places Mexico on the cusp of the Not Free category, and represents a dramatic slide from 2004..."*

the government's anticrime efforts in their reporting. Self-censorship has markedly increased, with negative implications for diversity of news coverage and independent reporting. A score of 60 for 2009 places Mexico on the cusp of the Not Free category, and represents a dramatic slide from 2004, when the country was placed at the top of the Partly Free category.

Press freedom in **Honduras** was severely tested in 2009 following the ouster of President Manuel Zelaya in June. In the aftermath of the coup, the de facto government imposed a news blackout and shut down several broadcast stations. Constitutional protections for press freedom were suspended, and journalists found it increasingly difficult to carry out their professional duties safely, facing threats, aggression, and intimidation by the supporters of both sides in the political standoff. After years of relative stability, the score for Honduras tumbled from 52 to 59 points, placing the country at the bottom edge of the Partly Free category. In addition, a smaller numerical decline was noted for **Nicaragua**, which slipped by two points, to 47, due to increased criticism of media outlets by the president and taxes levied on community radio stations in an effort to curtail their operations.

The only significant positive movement in the Americas during 2009 took place in **Haiti**, which

made a four-point jump, to 49, due to expanded space for diverse and independent views, as well as fewer attacks on journalists and press freedom advocates.

The **United States** remains one of the better performers in the survey, but it faces several challenges, including the lack of protection-of-sources legislation at the federal level and a threat to diversity stemming from poor economic conditions for the news industry. In 2009, improvements in access to government information and sources were balanced by a negative trend of increased polarization regarding news content, leaving the country's score unchanged at 18.

**Asia-Pacific:** The Asia-Pacific region as a whole exhibited a relatively high level of press freedom, with 15 countries and territories (37.5 percent) rated Free, 13 (32.5 percent) rated Partly Free, and 12 (30 percent) rated Not Free. Yet the regionwide figures are deceptive, as they disguise considerable subregional diversity. For example, the Pacific islands, Australasia, and parts of East Asia have some of the best-ranked media environments in the world, while conditions in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and other parts of East Asia are significantly worse. The balanced country breakdown also obscures the fact that only 6 percent of the region's population has access to Free media, while equal shares of 47 percent live in Partly Free and Not Free media environments. However, the movement of Bangladesh to the Partly Free category in 2009 led to a four-point jump in the percentage of people living in Partly Free media environments. The improvement in the overall level of press freedom in the Asia-Pacific region, in terms of the average regional score, was led by gains in the political category.

Asia includes the two worst-rated countries in the world, Burma and North Korea, as well as China, Laos, and Vietnam, all of which feature extensive state or party control of the press. Conditions in the world's largest poor performer, **China**, remained highly repressive in 2009. Authorities increased censorship and Communist Party propaganda in traditional and online media in the periods surrounding high-profile events, such as politically sensitive anniversaries and a

visit by U.S. President Barack Obama. Dozens of detailed party directives curbed coverage related to public health, environmental accidents, deaths in police custody, and foreign policy. Journalists investigating corruption or environmental pollution faced a growing threat from physical attacks and politicized charges of bribery, while several activists were sentenced to long prison terms for their online writings. Nevertheless, journalists, bloggers, grassroots activists, and religious believers scored several victories as they continued to push the limits of permissible expression, including the exposure of corruption, the circulation of underground political publications, and the government's retraction of orders to install Green Dam monitoring and censorship software on all personal computers.

South Asia featured two of the year's six status changes, and both were positive despite the overall global downward trend. Following numerical improvements in 2008, **Bangladesh** moved from Not Free to Partly Free in 2009 as its score jumped to 56 from 63. The generally freer media environment, which followed the lifting of emergency regulations just prior to December 2008 elections that returned a civilian government to power, included some adherence to constitutional protections for press freedom, fewer instances of censorship, and a lower incidence of attacks and harassment. The country also benefited from a recent trend of diversification and growth in private television stations. Meanwhile, **Bhutan**'s score moved from 61 to 57, and its status improved from Not Free to Partly Free, to reflect increased media diversity, the expression of more critical opinions by both print and online outlets, and official attempts to uphold press freedom provisions in the 2008 constitution.

A significant numerical improvement, from 56 to 50, was noted in the **Maldives**, where the new, democratically elected government presided over the decriminalization of libel, efforts to increase official openness and access to government information, few instances of censorship, and fewer instances of physical attacks or harassment against journalists. Moreover, a new journalists' association was able to comment openly on media freedom issues and help protect reporters' interests. Also in 2009,

**India**, the freest media environment in South Asia, improved by three points, to 33, due to reforms allowing foreign ownership of print publications as well as a decline in violent attacks against journalists, both in Kashmir and across the country.

Elsewhere in Asia, improvements were noted in **East Timor**, due to a lower level of violence against journalists and the passage of a new penal code that decriminalized defamation; **Indonesia**, due to a drop in physical attacks and harassment and less self-censorship by the media; **Papua New Guinea**, to reflect fewer instances of threats and intimidation, as well as greater media diversity following the establishment of the *Sunday Chronicle* and online news outlets; and **Mongolia**, due to a more stable situation following violence and media restrictions that surrounded the 2008 elections.

Declines were noted in a number of countries, though fewer than in previous years. **Afghanistan** suffered a two-point drop, to 76, due to official attempts to control coverage of the presidential election and President Hamid Karzai's stalling of a law that would restrict his control over the state-run media. **Sri Lanka's** score declined two points, to 72, due to increased harassment of media freedom advocates and the flawed trial of journalist J.S. Tissainayagam, which resulted in a 20-year prison sentence. In **Nepal**, increasing attacks on both the means of production and media workers, and an increased level of impunity for the perpetrators, led to a two-point decline, to 59, in 2009.

More significant numerical declines were seen in Southeast Asia. The **Philippines** slid three more points, to a score of 48, to reflect a climate of increased impunity, problems with judicial independence in media-related cases, and increased attacks on journalists covering political events. In the year's worst single incident, 29 journalists were killed in a politically motivated ambush in the southern province of Maguindanao. Meanwhile, **Fiji** experienced the year's largest score decline, falling from 40 to 54 points due to the abrogation of the 1997 constitution; the imposition of blanket prepublication censorship for both print and broadcast media; and the systematic harassment of selected media outlets, particularly the *Fiji*

*Times*, including legal cases, the deportation of editors, and a state advertising ban.

**Central and Eastern Europe/Former Soviet Union:** For the CEE/FSU region, 8 countries (28 percent) remained classified as Free, 11 (38 percent) were rated Partly Free, and 10 (34 percent) were rated Not Free. However, a majority of the people in this region (56 percent) live in Not Free media environments, while only 18 percent have access to Free media. In 2009, the regionwide average score showed a modest decline, with an improvement in the political category partly offsetting a drop in the economic category.

While the region shares a common history of communist oppression, the trajectory of countries in the former Soviet Union has diverged significantly from that of Central and Eastern Europe in terms of respect for fundamental political rights and civil liberties. The press freedom ratings for these two subregions reflect a similar divergence. All of the countries of Central Europe and the three Baltic states, which have managed to overcome the legacy of Soviet media culture and control, are assessed as Free. By contrast, 10 of the 12 non-Baltic former Soviet states are ranked as Not Free. Of the 196 countries and territories examined in the survey, 3 of the 10 worst press-freedom abusers—Belarus, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan—are found in the former Soviet Union. Other countries of particular concern include Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Russia.

**Russia**, which serves as a model and patron for a number of neighboring countries, continues to have an extremely challenging media environment, marked by the consistent inability of the pliant judiciary to protect journalists; increased self-censorship by journalists seeking to avoid harassment, closure of their media outlets, and even murder; and the frequent targeting of independent outlets by regulators. Reporters suffer from a high level of personal insecurity, and impunity for past murders and other physical attacks is the norm. The state's control or influence over almost all media outlets remains a serious concern, particularly as it affects the political landscape and Russians' ability to make informed electoral choices.



In the region as a whole, the dominant theme in 2009 was stasis, with no status changes or large numerical shifts in either direction. The most movement occurred in the Baltic States, largely due to the effects of the global economic crisis on media sustainability, editorial independence, and diversity of coverage. **Latvia**'s score declined from 23 to 26 points to reflect a drop in advertising revenues as well as the nontransparent sale of a major newspaper. Similar economic pressures affected **Lithuania**, but its score decline, from 18 to 21 points, was also driven by a December ban on information that promotes "sexual relations" in general, and nontraditional family structures in particular.

Smaller negative movements were seen in **Estonia**, whose score declined from 15 to 17 due to adverse economic conditions that affected media sustainability and diversity; **Hungary**, whose score moved from 21 to 23 due to problems involving the allocation and registration of radio frequencies; and **Croatia**, whose score fell from 38 to 40 due to the removal of and legal action against journalists covering war crimes, organized crime, and corruption. There was also less diversity due to rising concentration of private media ownership.

Improvements were noted in several countries, including **Bulgaria** and **Ukraine**, primarily due to fewer cases of physical attacks and harassment, as well as greater editorial and ownership diversity. Meanwhile, **Armenia** and **Moldova** both saw numerical gains as a result of reduced censorship and restrictions on news coverage. The score improvement for **Serbia** in 2009 reflected the fact that **Kosovo** was scored separately for the first time in this edition of the survey.

**Middle East and North Africa:** The Middle East and North Africa continued to have the world's poorest regional ratings in 2009, with a single country (5 percent) rated Free, 3 (16 percent) rated Partly Free, and 15 (79 percent) rated Not Free. The regional average score continued to worsen, led by declines in the legal category.

Although transnational satellite television and internet-based platforms for information dissemination have had a positive impact, media environments in the region are generally constrained by extremely harsh laws concerning libel and defamation, the insult of monarchs and public figures, and emergency rule. Of long-standing concern are **Libya**, **Syria**, **Saudi Arabia**, and **Yemen**, where journalists and bloggers faced serious repercussions for expressing independent views during the year. Journalists in the **Israeli-Occupied Territories/Palestinian Authority** faced pressure and threats from all sides, including from Israeli forces operating in some parts of the territories.

*"Iran registered the region's biggest decline of the year, falling four points to a score of 89..."*

Two countries in the bottom tier declined further in 2009. **Tunisia**'s already bad score slipped by another three points, to 85, to reflect the new progovernment composition of the National Syndicate of Journalists board as well as an increase in harassment and attacks against journalists surrounding blatantly rigged elections. **Iran** registered the region's biggest decline of the year, falling four points to a score of 89, due to a significant spike in violence and restrictions following the disputed presidential election. This included the arrest of dozens of journalists and a crackdown on access for foreign reporters. Officials also blocked satellite transmissions, raided homes and removed satellite dishes, and restricted internet and mobile-telephone communication, which had become key conduits for news and information.

In the region's middle tier, smaller numerical declines were noted in **Algeria**, which moved from 62 to 64 to reflect a prohibition on election coverage and restrictions on foreign reporters; **Morocco**, which moved from 64 to 66 due to increased scrutiny of journalists covering the royal family and the closure of two of the country's most lively newspapers; and the **United Arab Emirates**, which moved from 69 to 71 to reflect restrictions on coverage of the economic downturn and a new press law that incited fear and self-censorship among journalists.

On the positive side, **Israel**, which had been rated Partly Free in 2008 due to restrictions

associated with the outbreak of war in the Gaza Strip, regained its previous Free status. It received a score improvement, from 31 to 29, to reflect the lifting of a blanket ban on Israeli reporters visiting Gaza, as well as generally vibrant coverage of political events by the Israeli press throughout 2009. **Iraq** made continued gains, rising two points to a score of 65 due to a reduction in deadly violence against journalists as well as relatively unbiased coverage of elections.

**Sub-Saharan Africa:** A total of 5 countries (10 percent) were rated Free, 19 (40 percent) were rated Partly Free, and 24 (50 percent) remained Not Free in sub-Saharan Africa. The regional average score declined more than in any other region in 2009, led by a drop in the political category and a smaller reduction in the legal category.

Press freedom conditions remain dire in **Equatorial Guinea** and **Eritrea**, where authoritarian governments use legal pressure, imprisonment, and other forms of harassment to sharply curtail the operations of independent media outlets. Both countries rank among the bottom 10 performers worldwide. However, **Zimbabwe** moved out of that group in 2009 thanks to a four-point score improvement, to 84. After the formation of a government of national unity—which included the opposition Movement for Democratic Change—in February 2009, state-run media offered a slightly greater diversity of viewpoints, members of the new government promised to reform media legislation and expand media freedom, foreign broadcasters were allowed back into the country, and the authorities made less use of the restrictive Public Order and Security Act and the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act to charge journalists. Nevertheless, the media landscape in Zimbabwe remained extremely repressive, with near-total government control over the broadcast sector, foot-dragging on attempts to open new outlets, and continued legal and physical harassment of independent journalists.

**Kenya's** score moved from 60 to 57 to reflect an improvement in the media environment compared with the violent postelection period in 2008, including fewer cases of official censorship. **Sudan** saw improvements due to the end of formal prepublication censorship as well as a decrease in violence and physical harassment of journalists. And conditions in **Mauritania** improved thanks to an increase in the use of the internet by bloggers and news outlets, which enhanced the diversity of available viewpoints, as well as the government efforts to provide media outlets with financial assistance and access to printing presses in light of the economic downturn.

However, gains in sub-Saharan Africa were far outweighed by declines, many of them in key countries. There were three status changes in the region, all of them negative. Namibia and South Africa both moved to Partly Free, leaving no Free countries in southern Africa for the first time since 1990. **Namibia** fell from 30 to 34 points to reflect negative rhetoric toward the press and

*“In South Africa, press freedom has faced a growing threat from hostile rhetoric by top government officials...”*

biased coverage in favor of the ruling party surrounding the November general elections, as well as increased threats and harassment aimed at independent outlets and editors. In **South Africa**, press freedom has faced a growing threat from hostile rhetoric by top government officials, as well as official encroachments on the editorial independence of the South African Broadcasting Corporation, which dominates the national broadcast sector. Also in 2009, the country's legislature passed the Film and Publications Act, which legitimizes some forms of prepublication censorship and creates a legal dichotomy between government-recognized publications and others.

A much sharper deterioration was seen in **Madagascar**, which dropped by 10 points, to 61, and entered the Not Free range. The media faced severe pressures during the year, as the government was overthrown and both of the main political factions routinely ignored constitutional protections for press freedom, using harassment, intimidation, and censorship to restrict media operations. Coverage became

extremely partisan and polarized, and diversity of views receded.

Significant numerical declines took place in a number of other countries, with West Africa showing particular volatility. **Senegal's** score dropped from 53 to 57 points to reflect an increase in the prosecution and jailing of journalists under the penal code and the imposition of harsher punishments for press offenses. In **Niger**, tight official control over the main regulatory body, coupled with the government's refusal to uphold press protections and an increase in arrests of and attacks against journalists, led to a decline from 64 to 68 points. Meanwhile, **Guinea's** score dropped from 66 to 71 due to numerous violations of media freedom by the military government, including threats against journalists, kidnappings, and control over private media.

A range of other countries experienced smaller setbacks. Problems regarding the power of regulatory bodies to suspend outlets or fine journalists contributed to declines in **Benin** and **Botswana**. Similar issues were noted in **Togo**, where authorities imposed a four-day ban on call-in broadcast programs in April and passed a law in October that granted regulators the authority to seize equipment, suspend publications for six months, and withdraw press cards. Retaliation against journalists for reporting on political conflict and sensitive topics was a factor in the score decline for **Guinea-Bissau**, where media outlets were temporarily closed following a March 2009 coup attempt, and journalists faced an increase in arrests, threats, and torture for criticizing members of the military. In **Gabon**, journalists' attempts to cover the president's failing health led to instances of retaliation, and biased coverage of the summer presidential election and its disputed results also contributed to the score decline. Space for independent outlets shrank further in two very repressive media environments: authorities in **Ethiopia** intensified their harassment of journalists in the run-up to the 2010 elections, while in **The Gambia** official intolerance for dissent intensified, leaving the internet as the primary forum for expressing critical views.

**Western Europe:** Western Europe has consistently boasted the highest level of press freedom worldwide; in 2009, 23 countries (92 percent) were rated Free, and 2 (8 percent) were rated Partly Free. Although the level of press freedom largely held steady, the average regional score declined slightly, with small deteriorations in both the legal and political categories.

The region registered no status changes or significant numerical shifts in 2009, reflecting a well-entrenched tradition of media freedom in most countries. The **United Kingdom** continues to be a concern primarily due to its expansive libel laws, which in the past several years have increasingly been used by both foreign and British litigants to stifle criticism from news outlets, book authors, and civil society groups within the country and abroad. **Italy** remained an outlier in the Partly Free category, registering a small score decline due to increased government attempts to interfere with editorial policy at state-run broadcast outlets. In **Turkey**, the continued use of restrictive press laws—particularly Article 301 of the penal code—to intimidate journalists and writers, and the campaign of harassment against the Dogan media group, raised concern during the year.

*Karin Deutsch Karlekar, a senior researcher at Freedom House, served as managing editor of Freedom of the Press 2010. Overall guidance for the project was provided by Arch Puddington, director of research, and by Christopher Walker, director of studies. Extensive research, editorial, and administrative assistance was provided by Nuray Inal, as well as by Eliza Young, Tyler Roylance, Eva Hoier Greene, Charles Liebling, Timothy Shenk, and Joshua Siegel. We would also like to thank our consultant writers and other members of the survey team for their contributions.*

*Primary funding for the 2010 index was made possible by the Leon Levy Foundation. Additional funding was provided by the Hurford Foundation, the Nicholas B. Ottaway Foundation, the National Endowment for Democracy, Free Voice, Amgen Corporation, the Lilly Endowment Inc., the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, the F.M. Kirby Foundation, Inc., the American Federation of Teachers, and Freedom Forum.*