

METHODOLOGY

This third edition of *Freedom on the Net* provides analytical reports and numerical ratings for 47 countries worldwide. The countries were chosen to provide a representative sample with regards to geographical diversity and economic development, as well as varying levels of political and media freedom. The ratings and reports included in this study particularly focus on developments that took place between January 1, 2011 and May 1, 2012.

WHAT WE MEASURE

The *Freedom on the Net* index aims to measure each country's level of internet and digital media freedom based on a set of methodology questions described below (see "Checklist of Questions"). Given increasing technological convergence, the index also measures access and openness of other digital means of transmitting information, particularly mobile phones and text messaging services.

Freedom House does not maintain a culture-bound view of freedom. The project methodology is grounded in basic standards of free expression, derived in large measure from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers."

This standard applies to all countries and territories, irrespective of geographical location, ethnic or religious composition, or level of economic development.

The project particularly focuses on the transmission and exchange of news and other politically relevant communications, as well as the protection of users' rights to privacy and freedom from both legal and extralegal repercussions arising from their online activities. At the same time, the index acknowledges that in some instances freedom of expression and access to information may be legitimately restricted. The standard for such restrictions applied in this index is that they be implemented only in narrowly defined circumstances and in line with international human rights standards, the rule of law, and the principles of necessity and proportionality. As much as possible, censorship and surveillance policies and procedures should be transparent and include avenues for appeal available to those affected.

The index does not rate governments or government performance per se, but rather the real-world rights and freedoms enjoyed by individuals within each country. While digital media freedom may be primarily affected by state actions, pressures and attacks by nonstate actors, including the criminal underworld, are also considered. Thus, the index ratings generally reflect the interplay of a variety of actors, both governmental and nongovernmental, including private corporations.

THE SCORING PROCESS

The index aims to capture the entire “enabling environment” for internet freedom within each country through a set of 21 methodology questions, divided into three subcategories, which are intended to highlight the vast array of relevant issues. Each individual question is scored on a varying range of points. Assigning numerical points allows for comparative analysis among the countries surveyed and facilitates an examination of trends over time. Countries are given a total score from 0 (best) to 100 (worst) as well as a score for each subcategory. Countries scoring between 0 to 30 points overall are regarded as having a “Free” internet and digital media environment; 31 to 60, “Partly Free”; and 61 to 100, “Not Free.” An accompanying country report provides narrative detail on the points covered by the methodology questions.

The methodology examines the level of internet freedom through a set of 21 questions and nearly 100 accompanying sub-points, organized into three groupings:

- A. Obstacles to Access**—including infrastructural and economic barriers to access; governmental efforts to block specific applications or technologies; legal and ownership control over internet and mobile phone access providers.
- B. Limits on Content**—including filtering and blocking of websites; other forms of censorship and self-censorship; manipulation of content; the diversity of online news media; and usage of digital media for social and political activism.
- C. Violations of User Rights**—including legal protections and restrictions on online activity; surveillance and limits on privacy; and repercussions for online activity, such as legal prosecution, imprisonment, physical attacks, or other forms of harassment.

The purpose of the sub-points is to guide analysts regarding the factors they should consider while evaluating and assigning the score for each methodology question. After researchers submitted their draft scores, Freedom House convened three regional review meetings and several international conference calls, attended by Freedom House staff and a range of local experts, scholars, and civil society representatives from the countries under study. During the meetings, participants reviewed, critiqued, and adjusted the draft scores through careful consideration of events, laws, and practices relevant to each item. After completing the regional and country consultations, Freedom House staff did a final review of all scores to ensure their comparative reliability and integrity.