



Press Freedom in 2006: Growing Threats to Media Independence

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The state of global press freedom declined in 2006, with particularly worrisome trends evident in Asia, the former Soviet Union, and Latin America. Despite notable improvements in a number of countries, gains were generally overshadowed by a continued, relentless assault on independent news media in a group of geopolitically crucial states, including Russia, Venezuela, Iran, and China, as well as declines in countries with more open press environments, such as Argentina, Brazil, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. Moreover, a growing number of governments moved in 2006 to restrict internet freedom by censoring, harassing, or shutting down sites that provide alternative sources of news and commentary.

These disturbing developments comprise the principal findings of *Freedom of the Press 2007: A Global Survey of Media Independence*, an annual index published by Freedom House since 1980.

The findings reflect a 10-year trend of media freedom stagnation and, in some cases, outright decline in key countries and regions. While press freedom made impressive gains during the 1980s and early 1990s, that progress has stalled in recent years, following a broader pattern of stagnation in political freedom that Freedom House has identified.

The Global Picture

Out of 195 countries and territories assessed, 74 countries (38 percent) were rated Free, 58 (30 percent) were rated Partly Free, and 63 (32 percent) were rated Not Free. This represented a modest improvement from the 2005 assessment: 73 Free countries, 54 Partly Free countries, and 67 Not Free countries. However, the findings for 2006 represent a negative shift from the survey results of five years ago, which was the last recent high point of press freedom.

In terms of population, the survey found that only 18 percent of the world's inhabitants live in countries that enjoy a Free press, while 39 percent have a Partly Free press and 43 percent have a Not Free press. The relatively negative picture painted by these population figures is due to the impact of two countries—China, with a Not Free rating, and India, with a Partly Free rating—which together account for some two billion of the world's six billion people. The percentage of those enjoying Free media in 2006 improved slightly from 2005, while the percentage of people who live in countries with a Not Free media environment remained steady.

The overall global average score for press freedom worsened slightly in 2006, continuing a five-year downward trend. The global averages for the legal and political categories also worsened, with

the legal category showing the largest decline.

Methodology

The annual *Freedom of the Press* survey assesses the degree of print, broadcast, and internet freedom in every country in the world, analyzing events the events and developments of each calendar year. Ratings are determined on the basis of an examination of three broad categories: the legal environment in which media operate; political influences on reporting and access to information; and economic pressures on content and the dissemination of news. Under the legal category, we assess the laws and regulations that could influence media content as well as the government's inclination to use these laws and legal institutions to restrict the media's ability to operate. The political category encompasses a variety of issues, including editorial pressure by the government or other actors; censorship and self-censorship; the ability of reporters to cover the news; and the extralegal intimidation of and violence against journalists. Finally, under the economic category we examine issues such as the structure, transparency, and concentration of media ownership; costs of production and distribution; and the impact of advertising, subsidies, and bribery on content. Ratings reflect not just government actions and policies, but also the behavior of the press itself in testing boundaries, even in more restrictive environments. The survey provides a numerical rating from 0 (the most free) to 100 (the least free) for each country and categorizes each country's level of press freedom as "Free," "Partly Free," or "Not Free" based on its numerical rating.

Reasons Behind the Threats to Media Independence

Driving the decline of global press freedom in recent years is a complex set of factors, some deriving from broad trends in overall freedom and others more specific to the media environment.

1. **Pushback Against Democracy:** A growing drive to neutralize or eliminate all potential sources of political opposition has emerged in countries as diverse as Russia, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe in recent years. Along with the institutions of civil society, the press has been a principal target of this movement for near-absolute political domination and is often one of the first targets of authoritarian regimes. The methods used tend to be legalistic: print or broadcast outlets are taken over by the state or by forces aligned with the political leadership; license renewals are denied; journalists are jailed or hit with heavy fines for libel or defamation. Russia, under President Vladimir Putin, is the template for this phenomenon. During Putin's tenure, the lively and probing press that had emerged during the *glasnost* and post-Communist periods has been transformed into a toothless sounding board for the opinions of the leadership.
2. **Political Upheaval:** Although not yet a major trend, coups and states of emergency brought on by political unrest or civil war have arisen in a growing number of formerly democratic settings over the past several years, delivering a striking blow to press freedom. This has

become an increasingly important factor in Asia, as the media in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Thailand, and Fiji have all suffered important setbacks amid political upheaval or mounting polarization.

3. Violence Targeting Journalists:

The tragic murder of crusading Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya is but one of the latest examples of what has become a disturbing global trend. The killing and beating of reporters is a particular problem in Latin America, where Mexico has recently replaced Colombia as the most dangerous environment for reporters who investigate controversial subjects. The murder of journalists has also emerged as an alarming pattern in Russia, Iraq, the Philippines, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. And, in most of these places, a culture of impunity persists, with half-hearted or ineffective efforts being made to punish those responsible.

4. Laws Prohibiting Blasphemy, Hate Speech, Insult, and “Endangering National Security”:

Governments have increasingly resorted to legal action in their efforts to punish the press for critical reports on the political leadership, as well as for “inciting hatred,” commenting on sensitive topics such as religion or ethnicity, or “endangering national security.” This has long been a key barrier to media freedom in the Middle East, but it is increasingly occurring in Asia and Africa, and in some countries of the former Soviet Union. In Turkey alone, 293 writers and journalists were prosecuted

under Article 301 of the revised penal code, which broadly prohibits denigrating “Turkishness.”

Regional and Country Declines

The year saw no genuinely positive regional trends; indeed, in practically every region, stagnation or decline was the rule. In the Middle East and North Africa, where progress had occurred over the past several years, governments pushed back against greater openness and livelier coverage of political and social developments, which negatively impacted ratings for a number of countries in the region. Overall trends in the Americas and Asia were also disappointing, as was the case in the former Soviet Union. Sub-Saharan Africa presented a mixed picture.

The year saw setbacks in a number of key countries, many of which had already been on downward trajectories in past years. The most significant numerical declines occurred in Asia, where restrictions on media coverage were imposed following military coups in Fiji and Thailand and states of emergency in the Philippines and Sri Lanka. This led to negative status changes in Fiji, which shifted from Free to Partly Free due to a crackdown on the media following a coup in December, and Sri Lanka, whose status declined from Partly Free to Not Free as media faced increased restrictions and harassment from both the government and the Tamil Tiger rebels in the context of a general slide back into civil war during the year.

Backsliding in the former Soviet Union continued, with Russia and Kyrgyzstan registering declines. In the Americas,

Argentina continued to slide in a negative direction due to misuse of official advertising, while political turbulence and polarization weakened media freedom in Bolivia and Peru. In several other countries in the region, such as Brazil, Paraguay, and the Dominican Republic, increased violence against journalists covering issues related to drug trafficking or corruption led to declines during the year.

Major declines in a number of countries over the last six years illustrate the broader assault on press freedom. Since 2002, Venezuela has registered a decline of 30 points on a 100-point scale, the greatest decline for a single country. Other major declines include a 29 point decline for Thailand; a 16 point decline for the Philippines and Ethiopia; a 15 point decline for Eritrea, Russia, and Yemen; and a 12 point decline for Uganda, Argentina, Peru, and Bolivia.

Notable Country Gains

Having been the only European Union member state with a press freedom status lower than Free, Italy stands out among the countries that registered important gains in 2006. The country's ratings had been lowered in 2003 due to excessive media concentration and political influence over media content during the government of Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. His exit from office in 2006 led to Italy's upgrade from the Partly Free to the Free category.

Legal improvements, particularly the decriminalization of libel, led to both Cambodia and the Central African Republic moving from Not Free to Partly Free. General improvements in the political environment, greater respect

for media freedom by the government, and the increased ability of journalists to report on important events freely contributed to Cape Verde's upgrade from Partly Free to Free, and to positive movement in the Americas as Haiti and Colombia both shifted from Not Free to the Partly Free category.

The final positive category shift to Partly Free, which was accompanied by the largest numerical improvement of the year (19 points), took place in Nepal, where journalists were at the forefront of an effort to end the monarchy's direct rule and restore parliamentary government. Nepal saw dramatic improvements in all aspects of its media environment as harsh laws and decrees were scrapped, censorship was lifted, physical repression and attacks by official forces against journalists eased, and hundreds of private and community radio stations were reopened.

The Internet: Expanding Restrictions on a Key Outlet for Free Expression

The internet has emerged as one of the most potent weapons against censorship and lack of transparency in authoritarian societies. Even in China and Iran, where the authorities have devoted significant resources to the control of internet content, internet-based outlets have remained a vital source of news about social upheaval, labor disputes, official corruption, and acts of state abuse against the citizenry.

Developments in 2006 also reflect the extent to which government authorities are becoming increasingly aware of this phenomenon and acting boldly to curb it. China, Vietnam, and Iran—all restricted media environments in which internet

usage has exploded in recent years—continue to convict and imprison large numbers of journalists and “cyberdissidents” who publish political material online, and this trend is spreading to other countries with restrictive media environments where the internet is an important source of unfiltered information. In Russia, legal action was taken against website owners, and the Putin administration has announced plans to regulate internet content. Several African countries with increasingly restrictive press environments, such as Ethiopia and The Gambia, have also moved to impose controls on local and expatriate bloggers and websites, despite the relatively low levels of local internet penetration.

Worst of the Worst

The five worst-rated countries in 2006 continue to be Burma, Cuba, Libya, North Korea, and Turkmenistan. In these states, which span the globe, independent media are either nonexistent or barely able to operate, the press acts as a mouthpiece for the ruling regime, and citizens’ access to unbiased information is severely limited. The numerical scores for these five countries have barely changed in relation to the previous year, reflecting a level of extreme repression and stagnation for the media. Rounding out the 10 most repressive media environments are two countries in the Former Soviet Union—Belarus and Uzbekistan—and three countries in Africa—Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, and Zimbabwe—where media are heavily restricted.

Regional Trends

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 2006. Just under half the countries in the region have media that remain classified as Free, although this includes the Caribbean, whose countries generally have very open media environments, offsetting the less-rosy picture in Central and South America.

During the past five years, the percentage of Latin American countries classified as having Free media has slipped from 60 percent to 48 percent. More worrisome, ratings over the past 16 years reflect an overall decline in media freedom in the Americas. The number of Free countries has dropped from 22 in 1990 to 17 in 2006, the most significant decline for any region. The average regional score declined from that of 2005, with drops seen in both the legal and political categories.

Countries of particular concern continue to be Cuba, which has one of the most repressive media environments worldwide, and Venezuela, where the government of President Hugo Chavez has further intensified its efforts to control the press. While **Cuba** has by far the worst score in the hemisphere and ranks in the bottom five worldwide, **Venezuela** has seen one of the most dramatic declines globally over the past six years, with the largest numerical drop (from 44 to 74 points) of any country in the survey. In 2006, Chavez’s intention to further squeeze the private media sector was made apparent by the government’s December decision not to

renew the license of a major television station, RCTV.

The region did have some noteworthy positive developments in 2006, as both Haiti and Colombia registered status changes from the Not Free to the Partly Free category. **Colombia's** score improved from 61 to 57 due to the increased willingness of local journalists to report critically on political issues, including the high-level corruption scandals that erupted during the year, as well as a gradually improving security situation. **Haiti** registered an even more dramatic numerical improvement, from 68 to 59, as the election of a new, more media-tolerant government in April and a reduction in overall political tensions led to openings in the legal and political environment in which journalists operate.

However, these positive developments were overshadowed by negative changes in a number of countries, some of which were continuations of trends noted previously. **Argentina's** score dropped by a further four points, from 45 to 49, to reflect the persistent manipulation of advertising by government officials at both the national and state levels with the intention of influencing media content, either by rewarding supportive outlets or by punishing critical ones. This more subtle form of economic harassment was accompanied by a rise in the number of physical attacks on journalists, often perpetrated by representatives of the state.

Intimidation of and attacks against journalists also appeared to be on the rise in **Peru**, which saw a three-point decline, and in **Bolivia**, primarily in the context of political protests and rallies

that took place near the end of the year, resulting in a four-point decline. In several other countries, including **Brazil**, **Paraguay**, and the **Dominican Republic**, rising violence against and harassment of journalists (including murder) was linked to their coverage of sensitive topics like drug trafficking and organized crime.

Continuing the year's negative trend was **Mexico**, where improvements in the legal sphere were outweighed by an appalling level of violence against journalists, who were often the victims of drug lords, and by governmental ineffectiveness in prosecuting those responsible for the murders. Although the **United States** continues to be one of the better performers in the survey, there were continuing problems in the legal sphere, particularly concerning cases in which the authorities tried to compel journalists to reveal confidential sources or provide access to research material in the course of criminal investigations.

Asia-Pacific: The Asia-Pacific region as a whole exhibited a relatively high level of press freedom, with 16 countries (40 percent) rated Free, 10 (25 percent) rated Partly Free, and 14 (35 percent) rated Not Free. Yet the regionwide figures are deceptive, as they disguise considerable subregional diversity. For example, the Pacific islands, Australasia, and parts of East Asia have some of the best-ranked media environments worldwide, while conditions in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and other parts of East Asia are significantly poorer. Among those with poor records of press freedom are large and geopolitically significant countries such as China and Pakistan.

Asia is home to two of the five worst-rated countries in the world, Burma and North Korea, which have extremely repressive media environments, as well as several other poor performers like China, Laos, and Vietnam, all of which use state or party control of the press as the primary tool to restrict media freedom.

The overall level of press freedom in Asia, in terms of the average regional score, declined from the previous year, with drops seen in both the legal and political categories. Two countries received status upgrades and two were downgraded in 2006.

While the majority of the trends noted in 2006 were negative, there were several bright spots worth noting. The survey's greatest score jump of the year was in **Nepal**, where wide-ranging political change led to a dramatic opening in the media environment. Following the overthrow of direct rule by the monarchy, the reintroduction of a parliamentary form of government, and the signing of a peace accord with the Maoist rebels, repressive legislation was either scrapped or amended, authorities became more tolerant of media freedom, and hundreds of private and community radio stations were reopened. Nepal's score improved from 77 to 58 and its status shifted to Partly Free as a result of the events of 2006, during which journalists were at the forefront of promoting a more democratic society.

Positive developments in the legal sphere were primarily responsible for **Cambodia's** upgrade to Partly Free and its score improvement from 61 to 58. Defamation was decriminalized, and there were fewer cases of attacks and

harassment as the government adopted a generally more positive attitude toward the media. Defamation was also a key issue in **Indonesia**, whose score improved by four points to 54 in 2006. A constitutional court ruling struck down an article of the Penal Code that criminalized defamation of the president, and several other rulings in high-profile defamation cases were decided in favor of the journalists involved. Meanwhile, media concentration in the small kingdom of **Bhutan** became less pronounced with the opening of the country's first private radio station and the launching of two new private weeklies, leading to a three-point upgrade to 62.

Asia saw many negative developments in 2006, however, continuing the downward regional trajectory noted in the previous year's survey. Coups and military intervention were responsible for the suspension of legal protections for press freedom and new curbs imposed on media coverage in **Fiji**, whose score worsened from 28 to 39 and status slipped to Partly Free due to the government crackdown on the media following a military coup in December. In **Thailand**, the elected government of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra had employed varied forms of harassment of the press, contributing to a slide of 20 points since 2002. In 2006, Thailand's score dropped further, to 59 points, following a bloodless coup in September in which the military deposed Thaksin, introduced a new transitional constitution that does not protect press freedom, and imposed restrictions on media content.

Heightened political and civil conflict during the year in several countries also

contributed to declines. **Sri Lanka's** score declined by five points to 63, and its status was downgraded to Not Free, to reflect new official restrictions on media coverage as well as a rise in attacks against journalists—particularly ethnic Tamils—and media outlets in the north and east, where the government and the Tamil Tiger rebels effectively resumed their civil war. Political violence in April, including debilitating attacks on journalists and media outlets, led to a worsened score for **East Timor** in 2006. An even more significant decline occurred in the **Philippines**, whose score dropped six points to 46, contributing to a dramatic 16-point drop since 2002. The driving forces include the government's clampdown on opposition media during the state of emergency in February, an excessive use of defamation suits to silence criticism of public officials, and the continued threat of attacks on journalists amid a climate of impunity for such crimes.

Heightened restrictions on coverage, as well as harassment of reporters and media outlets that overstep official and unofficial boundaries, contributed to declines in several Asian countries in 2006. In **Malaysia**, official attempts to suppress public discussion of divisive issues such as race and religion led to further restrictions on free reporting, resulting in a three-point decline to 68. The government of **China** also stepped up its restrictions on content, introducing new media regulations, jailing outspoken journalists, and further limiting coverage of breaking news. In **Pakistan**, reporters who attempted to cover sensitive issues such as terrorism, particularly those who were caught between government forces and the Taliban in the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan, faced heightened

threats and physical attacks by both sides. Several deaths of journalists and dozens of incidents of intimidation were reported in the country during 2006.

The connected issues of violence and impunity continue to be issues of serious concern in South and Southeast Asia, particularly in countries such as Bangladesh and the Philippines, where frequent physical threats by both state and nonstate actors, coupled with a deterioration in the rule of law, has had a negative impact on media freedom.

Central and Eastern Europe/Former Soviet Union: For the combined CEE/FSU region, 8 countries (28 percent)—out of a new total of 28 countries, after Montenegro's independence—remain classified as Free, 10 (36 percent) are rated as Partly Free, and 10 (36 percent) as Not Free. These relatively even figures belie the fact that in terms of population, a majority of the people in this region (56 percent) live in Not Free media environments, while only 28 percent have access to Free media.

While the region shares a common history of Communist oppression, the trajectory of those countries in the former Soviet Union has diverged substantially from that of Central and Eastern Europe in terms of respect for fundamental political rights and civil liberties. The press freedom ratings for these subregions reflect a similar divergence.

The repressive media landscape in the former Soviet Union is illuminated by the fact that 10 of the 12 non-Baltic post-Soviet states are ranked as Not Free. The only two that enjoy Partly Free status,

Georgia and Ukraine, have recently experienced political upheaval and democratic opening. Of the 10 Not Free countries, none is moving in the direction of more freedom, and most have a decidedly downward trajectory. Of the 195 countries and territories examined in the survey, three of the 10 worst press freedom abusers—Belarus, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan—are found in the former Soviet Union.

By contrast, all of the countries of Central Europe and the three Baltic states, which themselves needed to overcome a decades-long legacy of Soviet media culture and control, are assessed as Free. Although they contend with the challenges and imperfections that media in democratic systems invariably face, the media from the Czech Republic to Estonia have achieved pluralistic and competitive news environments. In Georgia and Ukraine, which had shown improvement in the wake of democratic transitions in 2003 and 2004, progress has stalled. Indeed in much of the FSU, recent trends have pointed to stagnation or backsliding.

In 2006, the region featured no category shifts and little numerical movement, indicating a general stagnation in the level of press freedom. **Macedonia's** score improved by four points to 45 as a result of positive developments in the legal environment, including the enactment of a freedom of information law and the elimination of imprisonment as a penalty for libel.

Most changes in the region were negative, however. **Kyrgyzstan**, whose score had improved in 2005, saw

backsliding in 2006 due to an increase in censorship and attacks against journalists, leading to a three-point decline, for a score of 67. In **Uzbekistan**, where the media environment was already heavily restricted, authorities targeted foreign news outlets and the local stringers they employed in an attempt to close off all remaining avenues of independent information. **Russia**, whose numerical score has deteriorated by 15 points in the last six years to 75 in 2006, saw a worsening of the legal environment and heightened impunity, as demonstrated by the lack of prosecutions of increasingly frequent crimes and attacks against journalists. Russia's attitude toward the media is especially important, as it serves as a model and sponsor for a number of neighboring countries.

Middle East and North Africa: The Middle East and North Africa region continued to show the lowest regionwide ratings, with just one country (5 percent) rated Free, two (11 percent) rated Partly Free, and 16 (84 percent) rated Not Free in 2006. During the year, the average regionwide score declined, as did the average score in the political subcategory.

Generally, media in the region remain constrained by extremely restrictive legal environments, in which laws concerning libel and defamation, the insult of monarchs and public figures, and emergency legislation continue to hamper the ability of journalists to write freely. Of particular and long-standing concern are **Libya, Syria, Tunisia**, and the **Israeli-Occupied Territories/Palestinian Authority**, where media freedom remained extremely restricted in 2006. The deteriorating security

situation in **Iraq** contributed to a highly dangerous environment for the media, with several dozen journalists and media workers, mostly Iraqis, killed during the year.

During the last several years we have noted improvements in press freedom in the region as a whole, due to the continued spread and influence of pan-Arab satellite television networks and the internet, which serve as alternative sources of news and information. In some countries, print media have also become more critical as journalists have taken the lead in pushing the boundaries of acceptable coverage, even when faced with violence or, more commonly, legal reprisals. However, this trend reversed in 2006, with several countries that had previously shown improvement moving in a negative direction.

Saudi Arabia's score declined by three points to 82 to reflect a rise in the number of journalists detained during the year, particularly those who criticized the government and the religious establishment. Conditions in **Iran** deteriorated further as authorities cracked down on independent media outlets and journalists, increasingly targeting internet-based sources of information. In **Egypt**, which had previously seen a considerable improvement, an official push-back against increased press openness halted this positive trend. The legal environment continues to constrain relatively good regional performers such as **Jordan, Morocco, and Algeria**. In 2006, the use of legal harassment against independent journalists increased in Morocco, with a highly influential editor forced to leave the country due to the

threat of crippling fines in a defamation case.

Sub-Saharan Africa: Overall, 8 countries (17 percent) were rated Free, 19 (39 percent) were rated Partly Free, and 21 (44 percent) remained Not Free. Press freedom conditions continue to be dire in **Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, and Zimbabwe**, where authoritarian governments use legal pressure, imprisonment, and other forms of harassment to sharply curtail the ability of independent media outlets to report freely. All three countries continue to rank in the bottom 10 performers worldwide.

During the year, the average regionwide level of press freedom declined, as did the average score in the political subcategory. However, the average score in the legal category improved, mostly as a result of reforms detailed below. Trends in individual countries presented a mixed picture, with two positive category changes and a number of positive numerical shifts in some countries balanced by negative movements in others.

In 2006, **Cape Verde's** score improved from 32 to 29 and its status was upgraded to Free as the continued consolidation of democracy led to a greater opening in the media environment and a decrease in legal harassment and attacks aimed at journalists. In the **Central African Republic**, the government's adherence to the new press law and a 2005 constitution that respects freedom of expression and decriminalizes libel were the primary factors behind a status upgrade to Partly Free. Similarly, in **Angola**, the passage of a new press

law—which, among other things, ended the state monopoly on television broadcasting and allowed truth to be used as a defense for libel—resulted in a three-point upgrade to a score of 62. **Sierra Leone**'s score also improved, to 56, to reflect a decrease in the number of cases brought against journalists under criminal libel laws. Limited progress in the key Cardoso legal case, coupled with fewer instances of physical harassment of journalists, led to a three-point uptick in the numerical score for **Mozambique**, leaving it with 40 points.

Increased political normalcy also led to improvements for **Togo**, whose score returned to 74 following a period of heightened aggression toward journalists surrounding the 2005 coup and election, and for **Sudan**, where enhanced autonomy in the southern region, coupled with moderately increased freedom for reporters in Khartoum, led to an improvement of four points for a score of 81.

These gains were balanced by declines in a number of countries, several of which were already on a longer-term negative trajectory. **Burundi**'s score worsened by three points to 77 to reflect a targeted official crackdown on critical media outlets, particularly those that questioned the authenticity of an alleged coup attempt that the government used as a justification for its wave of attacks on the opposition. In **Cote d'Ivoire**, the blatant attempts by President Laurent Gbagbo and his supporters to control state media content, such as the January takeover of the national radio station by progovernment militias bent on inciting violence, led to a three-point decline, for a score of 68.

Conditions in one of the world's worst performers, **Eritrea**, deteriorated further to a numerical score of 94 as a result of tightened restrictions on foreign reporters traveling inside the country. Over the past six years, Eritrea's score has declined by 15 points. Similarly, in **The Gambia**, whose score has declined by 12 points to 77 over the past six years, independent media activity was further curtailed through the imprisonment, intimidation, and exile of critical journalists. Two countries that registered significant negative movement in 2005 amid long-term negative trends, Ethiopia and Uganda, showed smaller declines in 2006 as relations between the government and independent media remained rocky.

The internet has not played a major role in most African media environments due to financial and infrastructural constraints. Nevertheless, in a number of countries where the media environment is becoming more restricted and where internet-based news outlets, often run by citizens living abroad, provide a primary source of unfiltered news, authorities made concerted moves to crack down on the promising new medium.

Western Europe: Western Europe continued to boast the highest level of press freedom worldwide; in 2006, 24 countries (96 percent) were rated Free and one (4 percent) was rated Partly Free. However, more frequent instances of harassment and threats from far-right and Islamist groups during the year resulted in numerical declines for a number of top-performing countries, particularly those in Scandinavia and northern Europe. A dramatic rise in legal harassment was noted in **Turkey** in 2006, due to the aggressive use of

Article 301 of the revised penal code. Almost 300 journalists and writers were prosecuted for “insulting Turkishness” under the provision, and they were also subject to threats from nationalist groups.

However, in a major positive move, **Italy** was upgraded in 2006 to resume its Free status (with a numerical improvement from 35 to 29), primarily as a result of Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi departure from office. While the private broadcast media in Italy are still concentrated in the hands of the Berlusconi-dominated Mediaset, the public broadcaster RAI is no longer under his control. Italy, which had been rated Partly Free since 2003, had stood out as the only European Union member state with a press freedom status other than Free since 1988.

Karin Deutsch Karlekar, a senior researcher at Freedom House, served as managing editor of Freedom of the Press 2007. Overall guidance for the project was provided by Arch Puddington, director of research, and by Christopher Walker, director of studies. Extensive research, editorial, proofreading, and administrative assistance was provided by Eleanor Marchant, assistant editor of Freedom of the Press, as well as by Astrid Larson, Thomas Webb, Tyler Roylance, Camille Eiss, and Elizabeth Floyd. We would also like to thank our consultant writers and advisers and other members of the survey team for their contributions.

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