

## Survey Methodology

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The 2009 survey, which provides analytical reports and numerical ratings for 195 countries and territories, continues a process conducted since 1980 by Freedom House. The findings are widely used by governments, international organizations, academics, and the news media in many countries. Countries are given a total score from 0 (best) to 100 (worst) on the basis of a set of 23 methodology questions divided into three subcategories. Assigning numerical points allows for comparative analysis among the countries surveyed and facilitates an examination of trends over time. The degree to which each country permits the free flow of news and information determines the classification of its media as “Free,” “Partly Free,” or “Not Free.” Countries scoring 0 to 30 are regarded as having “Free” media; 31 to 60, “Partly Free” media; and 61 to 100, “Not Free” media. The criteria for such judgments and the arithmetic scheme for displaying the judgments are described in the following section. The ratings and reports included in *Freedom of the Press 2009* cover events that took place between January 1, 2008, and December 31, 2008.

### *Criteria*

This study is based on universal criteria. The starting point is the smallest, most universal unit of concern: the individual. We recognize cultural differences, diverse national interests, and varying levels of economic development. Yet Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states:

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.

The operative word for this survey is “everyone.” All states, from the most democratic to the most authoritarian, are committed to this doctrine through the UN system. To deny that doctrine is to deny the universality of information freedom—a basic human right. We recognize that cultural distinctions or economic underdevelopment may limit the volume of news flows within a country, but these and other arguments are not acceptable explanations for outright centralized control of the content of news and information. Some poor countries allow for the exchange of diverse views, while some economically developed countries restrict content diversity. We seek to recognize press freedom wherever it exists, in poor and rich countries as well as in countries of various ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds.

### *Research and Ratings Review Process*

The findings are reached after a multilayered process of analysis and evaluation by a team of regional experts and scholars. Although there is an element of subjectivity

inherent in the survey findings, the ratings process emphasizes intellectual rigor and balanced and unbiased judgments.

The research and ratings process involved several dozen analysts—including members of the core research team headquartered in New York, along with outside consultant—who prepared the draft ratings and country reports. Their conclusions are reached after gathering information from professional contacts in a variety of countries, staff and consultant travel, international visitors, the findings of human rights and press freedom organizations, specialists in geographic and geopolitical areas, the reports of governments and multilateral bodies, and a variety of domestic and international news media. We would particularly like to thank the other members of the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX) network for providing detailed and timely analyses of press freedom violations in a variety of countries worldwide on which we rely to make our judgments.

The ratings were reviewed individually and on a comparative basis in a global meeting involving analysts and Freedom House staff. The ratings are compared with the previous year's findings, and any major proposed numerical shifts or category changes are subjected to more intensive scrutiny. These reviews are followed by cross-regional assessments in which efforts are made to ensure comparability and consistency in the findings.

### *Methodology*

Through the years, we have refined and expanded our methodology. Recent changes are intended to simplify the presentation of information without altering the comparability of data for a given country over the 29-year span or the comparative ratings of all countries over that period.

Our examination of the level of press freedom in each country currently comprises 23 methodology questions and 109 indicators divided into three broad categories: the legal environment, the political environment, and the economic environment. For each methodology question, a lower number of points is allotted for a more free situation, while a higher number of points is allotted for a less free environment. Each country is rated in these three categories, with the higher numbers indicating less freedom. A country's final score is based on the total of the three categories: A score of 0 to 30 places the country in the Free press group; 31 to 60 in the Partly Free press group; and 61 to 100 in the Not Free press group.

The diverse nature of the methodology questions seeks to encompass the varied ways in which pressure can be placed upon the flow of information and the ability of print, broadcast, and internet-based media to operate freely and without fear of repercussions: In short, we seek to provide a picture of the entire “enabling environment” in which the media in each country operate. We also seek to assess the degree of news and information diversity available to the public in any given country, from either local or transnational sources.

The **legal environment** category encompasses an examination of both the laws and regulations that could influence media content and the government's inclination to use these laws and legal institutions to restrict the media's ability to operate. We assess the positive impact of legal and constitutional guarantees for freedom of expression; the

potentially negative aspects of security legislation, the penal code, and other criminal statutes; penalties for libel and defamation; the existence of and ability to use freedom of information legislation; the independence of the judiciary and of official media regulatory bodies; registration requirements for both media outlets and journalists; and the ability of journalists' groups to operate freely.

Under the **political environment** category, we evaluate the degree of political control over the content of news media. Issues examined include the editorial independence of both state-owned and privately owned media; access to information and sources; official censorship and self-censorship; the vibrancy of the media and the diversity of news available within each country; the ability of both foreign and local reporters to cover the news freely and without harassment; and the intimidation of journalists by the state or other actors, including arbitrary detention and imprisonment, violent assaults, and other threats.

Our third category examines the **economic environment** for the media. This includes the structure of media ownership; transparency and concentration of ownership; the costs of establishing media as well as of production and distribution; the selective withholding of advertising or subsidies by the state or other actors; the impact of corruption and bribery on content; and the extent to which the economic situation in a country impacts the development and sustainability of the media.

### *Checklist of Methodology Questions for 2009*

#### **A. LEGAL ENVIRONMENT (0–30 POINTS)**

1. Do the constitution or other basic laws contain provisions designed to protect freedom of the press and of expression, and are they enforced? (0–6 points)
2. Do the penal code, security laws, or any other laws restrict reporting, and are journalists punished under these laws? (0–6 points)
3. Are there penalties for libeling officials or the state, and are they enforced? (0–3 points)
4. Is the judiciary independent, and do courts judge cases concerning the media impartially? (0–3 points)
5. Is freedom of information legislation in place, and are journalists able to make use of it? (0–2 points)
6. Can individuals or business entities legally establish and operate private media outlets without undue interference? (0–4 points)
7. Are media regulatory bodies, such as a broadcasting authority or national press or communications council, able to operate freely and independently? (0–2 points)

8. Is there freedom to become a journalist and to practice journalism, and can professional groups freely support journalists' rights and interests? (0–4 points)

## **B. POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT (0–40 POINTS)**

1. To what extent are media outlets' news and information content determined by the government or a particular partisan interest? (0–10 points)

2. Is access to official or unofficial sources generally controlled? (0–2 points)

3. Is there official or unofficial censorship? (0–4 points)

4. Do journalists practice self-censorship? (0–4 points)

5. Do people have access to media coverage that is robust and reflects a diversity of viewpoints? (0–4 points)

6. Are both local and foreign journalists able to cover the news freely? (0–6 points)

7. Are journalists or media outlets subject to extralegal intimidation or physical violence by state authorities or any other actor? (0–10 points)

## **C. ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT (0–30 POINTS)**

1. To what extent are media owned or controlled by the government, and does this influence their diversity of views? (0–6 points)

2. Is media ownership transparent, thus allowing consumers to judge the impartiality of the news? (0–3 points)

3. Is media ownership highly concentrated, and does it influence diversity of content? (0–3 points)

4. Are there restrictions on the means of journalistic production and distribution? (0–4 points)

5. Are there high costs associated with the establishment and operation of media outlets? (0–4 points)

6. Do the state or other actors try to control the media through allocation of advertising or subsidies? (0–3 points)

7. Do journalists receive payment from private or public sources whose design is to influence their journalistic content? (0–3 points)

8. Does the economic situation in a country accentuate media dependency on the state, political parties, big business, or other influential political actors for funding? (0–4 points)

*Legend*

**Country**

**Status: Free (0–30)/Partly Free (31–60)/Not Free (61–100)**

**Legal Environment: 0–30 points**

**Political Environment: 0–40 points**

**Economic Environment: 0–30 points**

**Total Score: 0–100 points**