



### [Reporters Without Borders \(RSF\) Releases Its 2022 World Press Freedom Index](#)

The advocacy group Reporters Without Borders (RSF) recently released their annual World Press Freedom Index for 2022. The publication, which examines the state of press freedom in 180 countries, has drawn attention to the increasing acceleration in the degradation of this in many countries. The organization has cited a combination of what they call “Fox News-isation” of the media alongside a rise in unregulated fake news and propaganda online. This “news and information chaos” has contributed to a dramatic worsening of the political and societal polarization that plagues many democratic countries. Opinion-based media is the major culprit in causing division in not only the United States, which ranked 42nd, but all across the world. This enlarging detachment makes civil discourse significantly more difficult, leading to disunity and social upheaval. There has also been increasing control over public media in illiberal democracies which deprives citizens of unbiased reporting and consequently does not allow them to hold those in power accountable for any wrongdoings. These examples are part of a troubling trend in media freedom, and a record number of 28 countries were rated “very bad” in this year’s index.

Some countries were particularly highlighted as focal points in this year’s report. The United States and France, for example, have been the subject of increasing concern about the divisive effect of opinion-based media. This model of news reporting, along with social media, has fueled polarization in the two countries. Nations that have plummeted in rank from years past are Myanmar, which ranks 176th, and Hong Kong, which ranked 148th. The report found that press freedom in Myanmar has regressed to where it was 10 years ago. This backslide is largely due to the repressive military coup, which took place in February of last year. Hong Kong’s press freedom has also suffered. This is the result of new national security legislation which was imposed in 2020, forcing multiple media outlets to close and leading to the detainment of many journalists.

Another topic of concern is the new legislative proposals in the United Kingdom which would treat journalists like spies. There have also been multiple attempts by the government to influence the official who would be appointed to Ofcom, the UK’s communication regulators. Another worry is the increasing use of SLAPP, or Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation. This strategy is deployed by some wealthy individuals and corporations to sue the journalist writing a story in an attempt to intimidate, discredit, and delay or entirely stop the release of it. This practice is not exclusive to the United Kingdom, and has been utilized in other places around the world.

Countries traditionally associated with poor press freedom have continued to suppress the media with few international repercussions. Nations such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, North Korea, China, and Russia, which ranked 166th, 178th, 180th, 175th, and 155th respectively, have persisted in doing this both internally and externally. Rights advocates have criticized the lack of concrete actions to punish those that do not safeguard freedom of the press. This, along with deteriorating conditions for free journalism in democratic countries, is feared will contribute to the growing trend of democratic backsliding that is currently plaguing global societies.