



ARTICLE 19

# The Global Expression Report 2022

The intensifying battle for narrative control

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Cover image: A Buddhist nun rallies in a protest against the military coup and to demand the release of elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi, in Yangon, Myanmar. Photo: 8 February 2021, Reuters / Stringer

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# Acknowledgements

Our gratitude and admiration as always to the report's authors, journalist Emily Hart and statistician Nicole Steward-Streng. Their combined strengths have once again shaped the GxR through extensive research, engagement with mountains of data, and all within a completely unreasonable time frame.

The GxR numbers are based on the peerless data set from V-Dem. Thank you to Steffan Lindberg and his team for being available to answer our queries and guide us through the codebook earlier this year.

Our gratitude to our regional and thematic experts who supported the development of this year's report and helped to fine tune the analysis at various stages.

Thank you to our terrific production team Raahat Currim, Angela Yates, Sharon Leese and Brendan Lyons: thank you for staying with the project's many stages... and for also meeting unreasonable deadlines.

The report is the sum of many efforts, gathering as it does the work of many organisations and human rights activists all over the world.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this year's report, and all those working to protect the two basic freedoms which underpin all that we do: the freedom to know and the freedom to speak.

It is because of you, that we can keep asking, **#HowFreeAreWe?**

“

This year's Global Expression Report sends a clear message: we can no longer afford to look the other way. The international community needs to take concrete and decisive action to protect free expression - regardless of whether the violations happen thousands of miles away or in our own backyard. When the lights go out in one country, the world dims for all of us.

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# If you care about democracy, stop ignoring attacks on expression.

## Freedom of expression is under attack.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is the most acute manifestation of the moment we are living through. Some viewed the aggression as surprising, unthinkable. But for those who had been paying attention, the global decline in freedom of expression over the past decade pointed to this present crisis in democracy.

Control the information space. Build your own truth. Use it to consolidate power. This is the playbook we see repeated over and over again across the world.

In Russia, the Kremlin now has a virtual monopoly on truth. It did not happen overnight. Vladimir Putin has been eroding the public debate since he took power in 2000, moving from attacking independent journalists, destroying independent media, to dismantling institutions, and finally, centralising power. He spent 2021 tightening the noose, in preparation for what was to come.

The regime has criminalised any reporting of news not sanctioned by the Kremlin, creating an environment where propaganda and nationalistic rhetoric rose to a fever pitch. Control of information is useful for dictators in times of peace, but it is completely crucial in wartime. This war has been made possible, in part, because so many of the voices who could challenge it have been silenced.

When freedom to know and to speak vanish, it is clear what happens next. The V-Dem data shows that autocrats censor the media and repress civil society first, then attack institutions and electoral democracy.

While international support for Ukraine is commendable, international decision makers continue to ignore the wider lessons. Brutal attacks on free expression for political gain are plain to see elsewhere – Russia is not an exception.

In Ethiopia, the government has gone to extreme lengths in its attempts to gag the flow of information about the brutal conflict in the Amhara and Oromia regions. Blocking social media sites, arresting journalists, and accusing foreign media of disseminating 'fake news'. These are tools from a well-established playbook used by autocrats to cover up crimes and escape accountability.

Myanmar started its transition from military to civilian rule a decade ago only for the brutal military coup to erase the progress overnight. Peaceful resistance was met with violence, as officers fired into the crowds. Militarisation is a trend cutting across the GxR categories: the violent logic of hard power fights to stifle expression.

But conflicts, invasions, and coups are not the only factors that kill expression. Brazil has witnessed one of the world's most shocking deteriorations in the past decade, all under the influence of a democratically elected leader. Bolsonaro's harassment and stigmatisation of the media go hand-in-hand with persistent attacks on the judiciary and questioning the integrity of the electoral system. This incremental erosion is happening across the globe: from El Salvador and Colombia to Hungary and Poland.

Extraterritorial violations of human rights should also sound the alarm. In 2018, the world was shocked by the brutal killing of Saudi Arabian journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Turkey, and even more by the Saudi state's brazen confidence in its ability to commit crimes and silence free expression beyond its borders without consequence.

That confidence was not misplaced: trade deals with Saudi Arabia continue to take priority over sanctions or consequences for the crimes committed against not only Khashoggi, but anyone in the country who dissents, debates, or disagrees with the regime. The alarming speed with which the UK's Prime Minister Boris Johnson travelled to Saudi Arabia to replace Russian oil imports speaks volumes as to how double standards play out: Johnson seemed blissfully unaware of the hypocrisy of his plan.

When governments look the other way, or use platitudes to condemn these violations, they fail to pressure aggressors and feed the cycle of democratic decline. Increasingly, such actions have brought the level of democracy enjoyed by the average global citizen in 2021 back to where it was in 1989. The global data is unequivocal: the last 30 years of democratic advances have been eradicated.

Another way is possible, but we have few beacons to follow. Following yet more evidence of atrocities committed in Xinjiang, Germany's Economy Minister announced that the country will prioritise human rights in its dealings with China – we hope these words will be accompanied by action. We need more leaders to take a stand and act.

The suppression of freedom of expression is not just a symptom of autocracy: it creates the environment for autocracy to flourish. Autocrats around the world, from Jair Bolsonaro and Victor Orbán to Xi Jinping and Narendra Modi, are hiding in plain sight, as we turn a blind eye for reasons of trade or short-sighted diplomacy. We ignore their actions at our own peril.

Without exception, this comes at a great long-term cost. We need concrete and decisive action to protect free expression – regardless of whether the violations happen thousands of miles away or in our own backyard. When the lights go out in one country, the world dims for all of us.

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# A brief introduction

The *Global Expression Report* is an annual look at the rights to freedom of expression and information across the world.

Our data, the GxR metric, tracks freedom of expression across 161 countries via 25 indicators to create a score between 0 and 100 for every country. That score places it in an expression category.

GxR score	Expression category
80–100	Open
60–79	Less Restricted
40–59	Restricted
20–39	Highly Restricted
0–19	In Crisis

In each year’s report, we explore score changes over time across three time periods: the preceding year (2020–2021), the last five years (2016–2021), and the last 10 years (2011–2021).

We measure the freedom of everyone – not just journalists or activists – to express, communicate, and participate. How free is each and every person to post online, take to the streets, investigate, and access the information we need to hold power-holders to account? And can we exercise those rights without fear of harassment, legal repercussions, or violence?

This report is based on quantitative measurement, and ARTICLE 19 acknowledges the limits of that approach to represent groups whose specific experiences lack data and often research more generally.

### How to use this report:

- Sources are provided as hyperlinks in the text, rather than as footnotes or endnotes.
- [Annex 1](#) details the methodology for generating the scores and analysing the data sets.
- [Annex 2](#) contains the GxR data for each of the 161 countries.

# Chapter 1

## The global view

Expression continues its steady downwards shift: the global score has declined significantly since 2011.

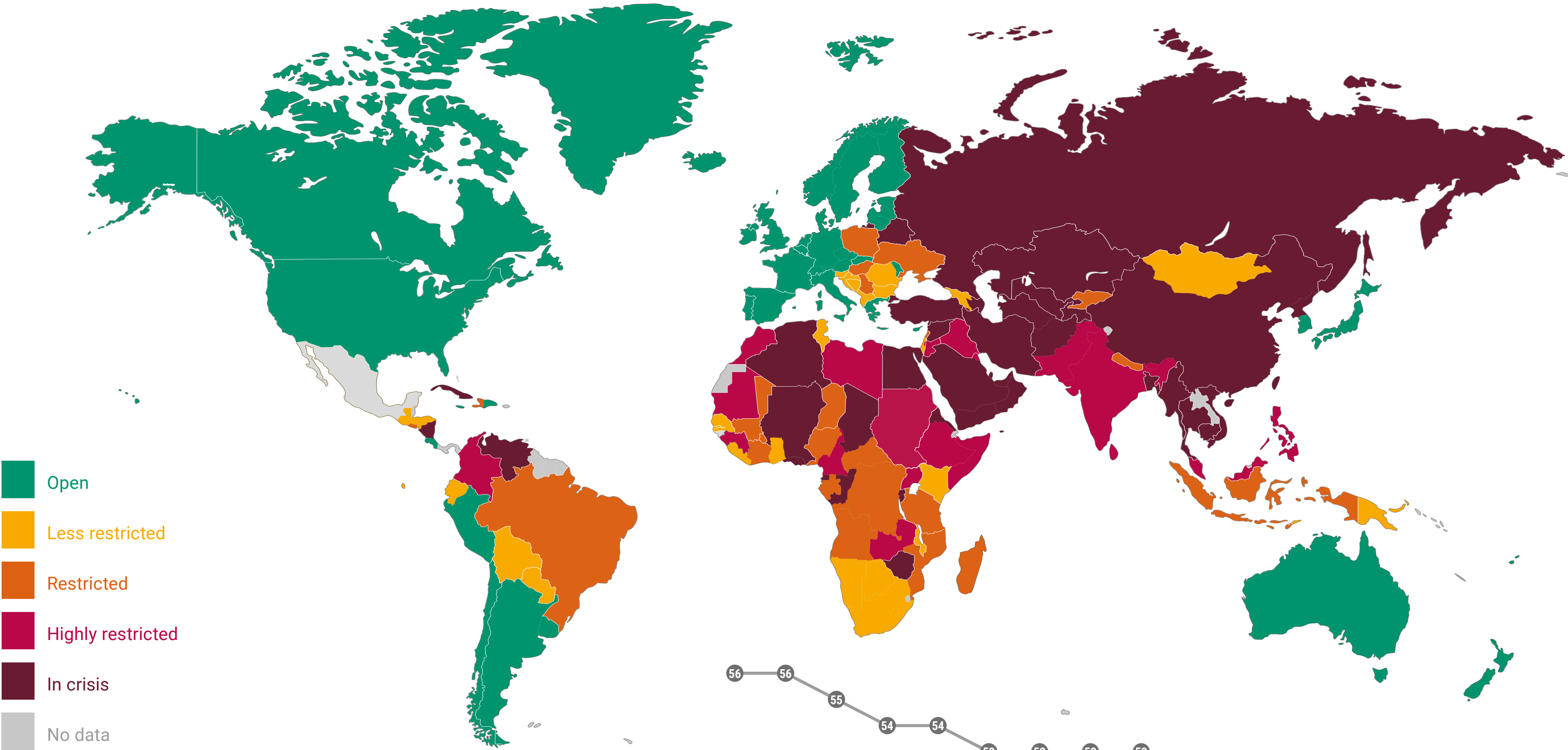


Figure 1: Global GxR map

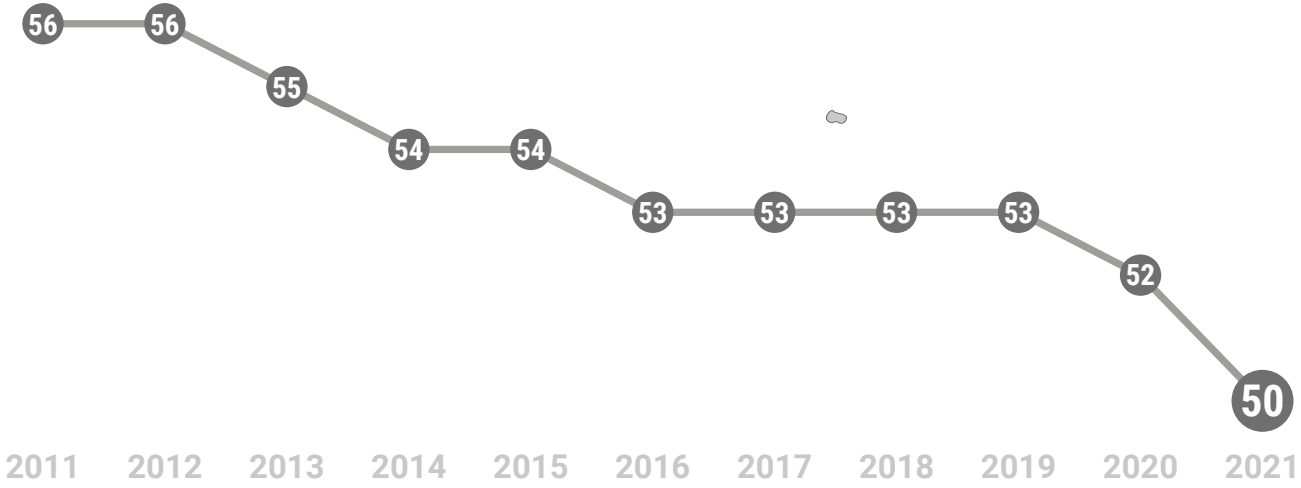


Figure 4: Global GxR score 2011-2021

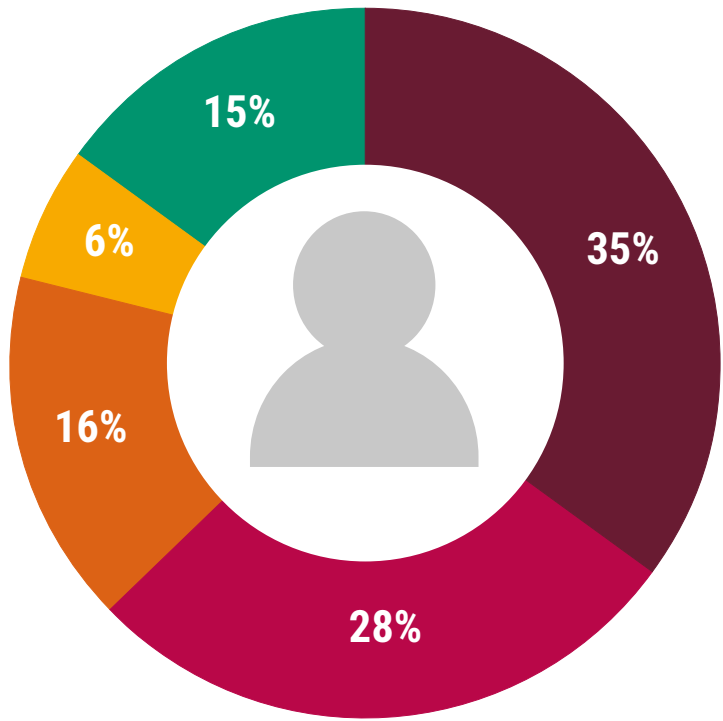


Figure 2: Percentage of global population in each expression category, 2021

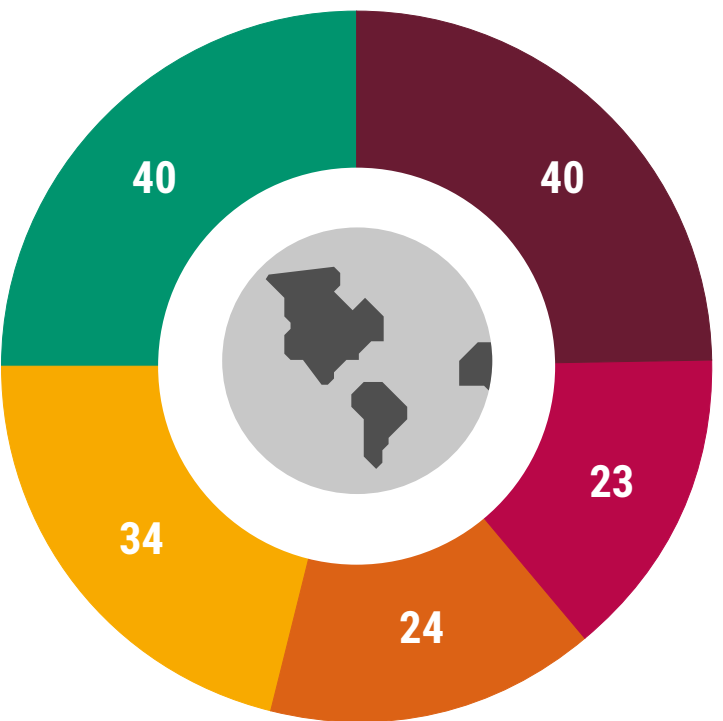


Figure 3: Number of countries in each expression category, 2021





Figure 5: Percentage of the global population with declines and rises in scores between 2011 and 2021

**80%** of the global population live with less freedom of expression than they had a decade ago.

**Only 7%** have seen an improvement since 2011.

- **Only 15%** of the global population live in **open** countries.
- **35%** of the global population (2.7 billion people) now lives in a country **in crisis**. It is now the largest category, both by population and by number of countries.
- **5** new entries fell into the **in crisis** category in 2021: Myanmar, Afghanistan, Sudan, Hong Kong, and Chad.

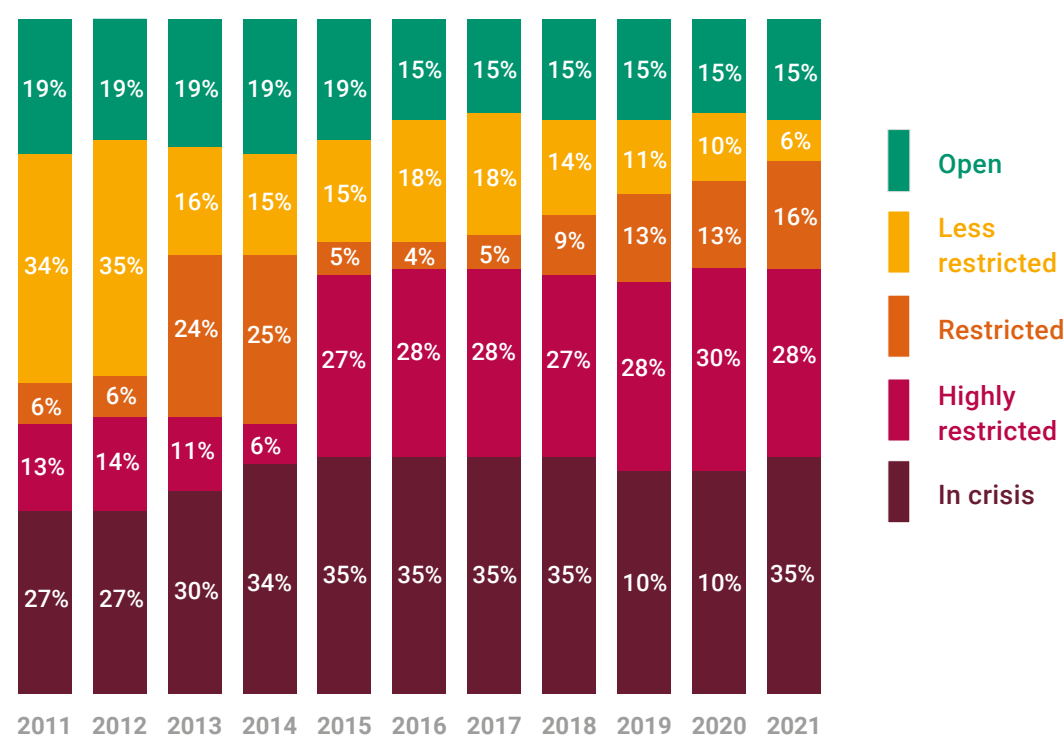


Figure 6: Percentage of the global population in each expression category, 2011–2021

A huge number of people have shifted from living in **less restricted** to being in **highly restricted** countries: these are not stories of violent regime change or extremity, and are unlikely to make headlines, but lives change radically nonetheless.

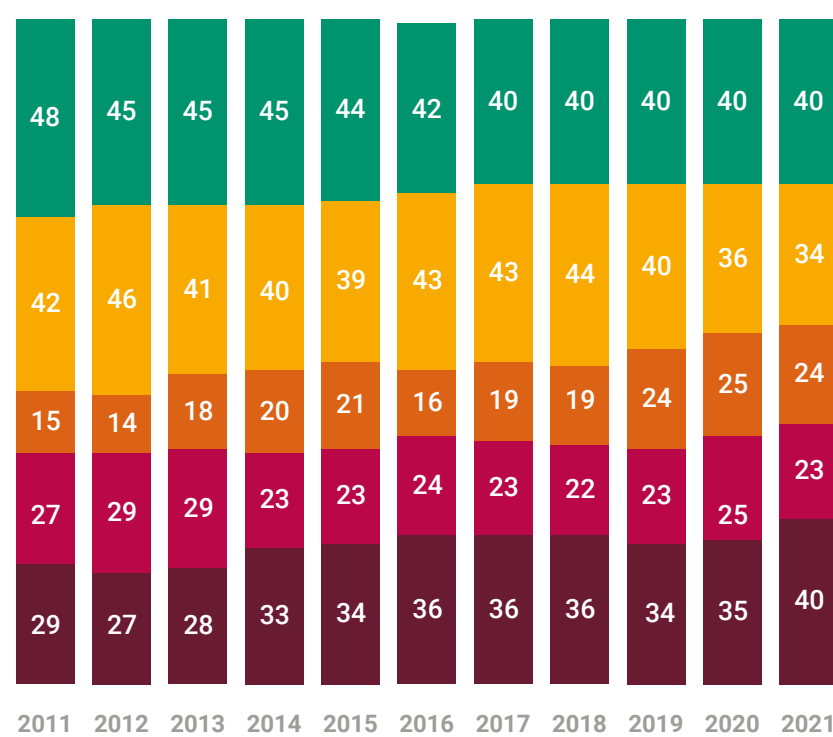


Figure 7: Number of countries in each expression category, 2011–2021

There are 11 more countries **in crisis** than a decade ago and eight fewer **open** countries.

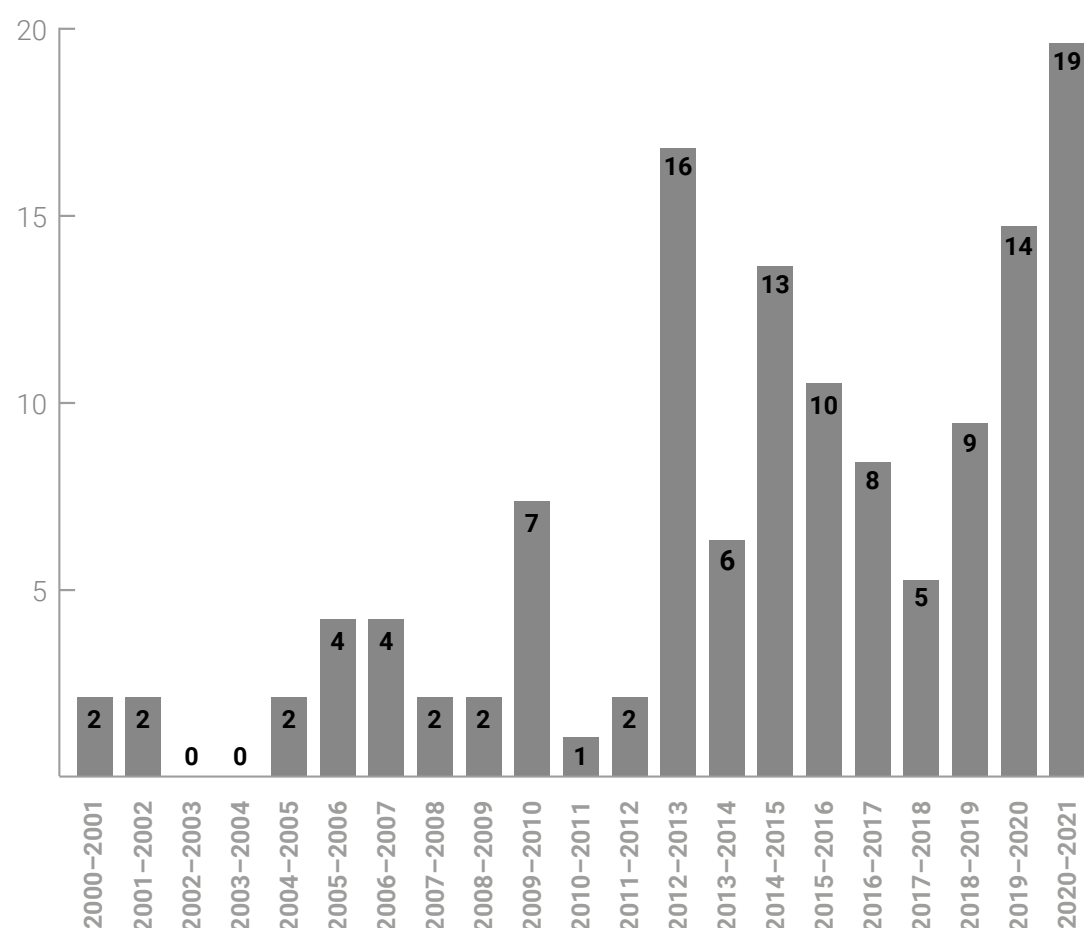


Figure 8: Number of countries with a decline in score, 2001–2021

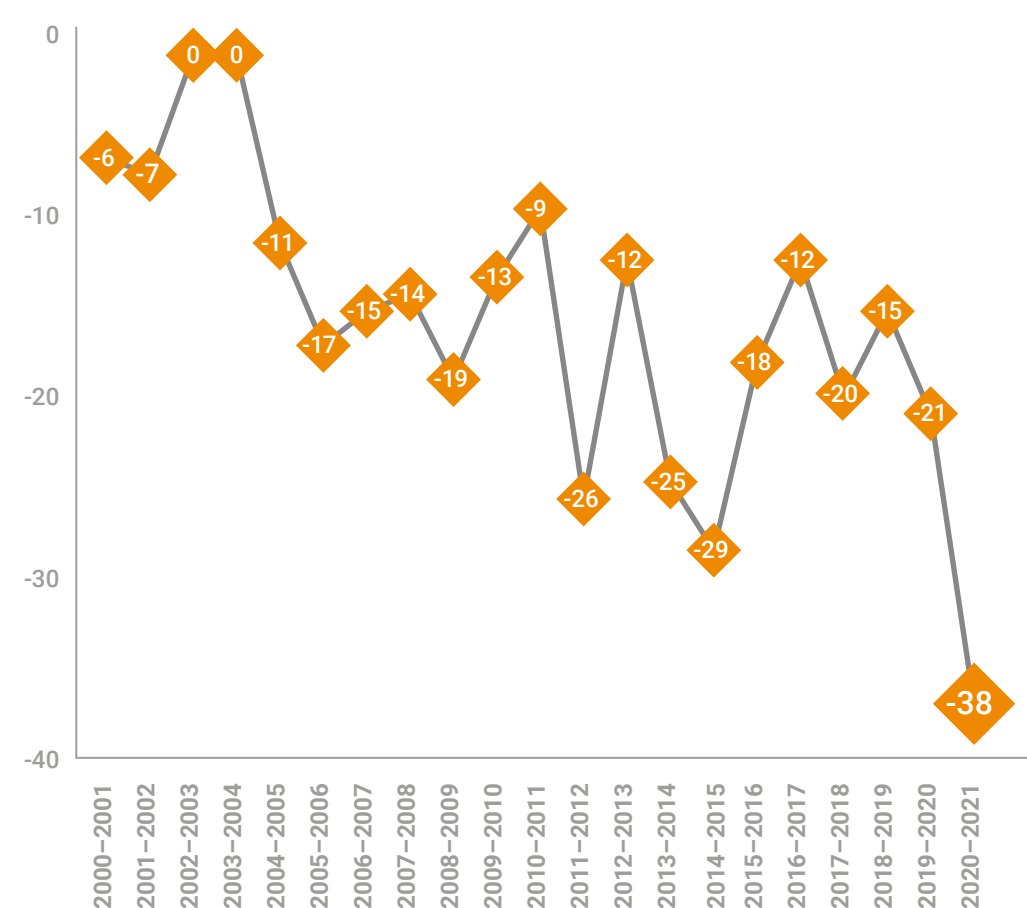


Figure 9: Largest declines in individual country GxR, 2001–2021

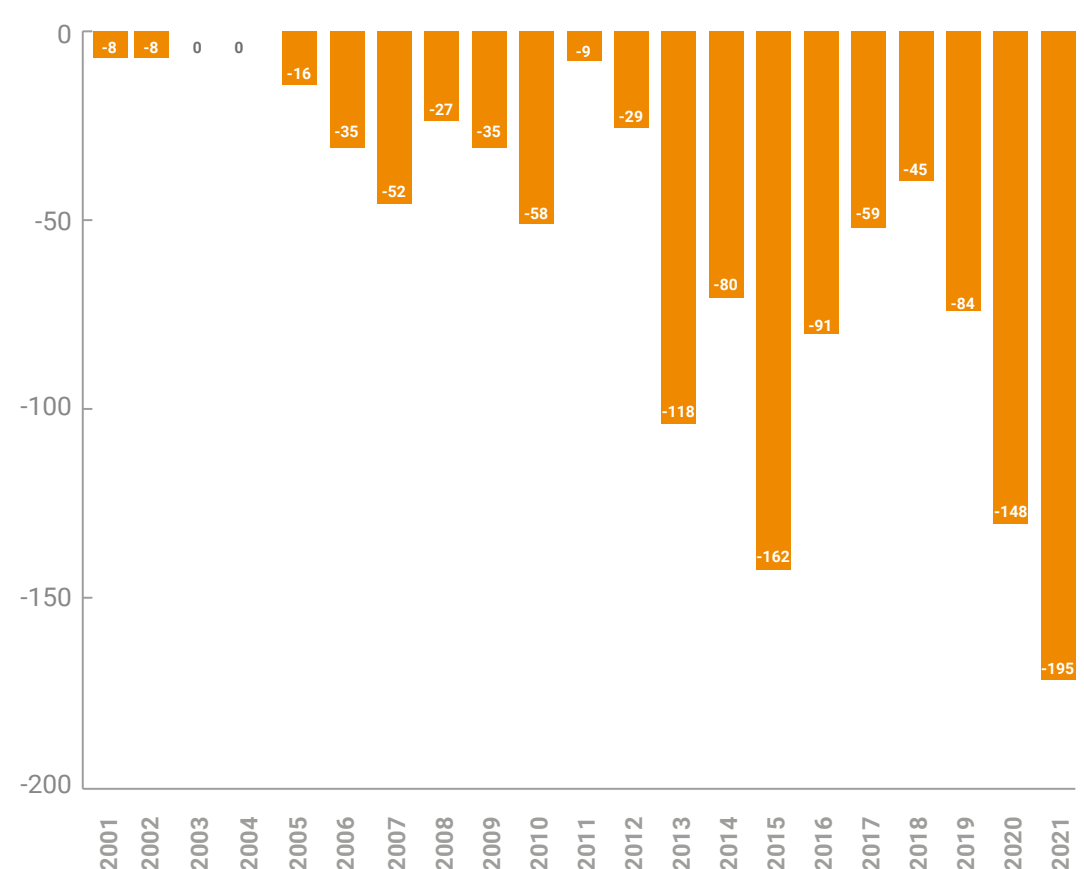


Figure 10: Combined country declines in scores, 2001-2021

Freedoms are more precarious than ever, and scores are plummeting at higher rates than ever before. The data shows bigger one-year decreases in scores than the GxR has ever recorded – and in more countries: 19 countries saw shrinking freedom of expression environments from 2020 to 2021, compared to only one country between 2010 and 2011. In 2011, the combined decrease in scores for countries in decline was nine; in 2021 it was 195.

**Freedom of expression is the first right authoritarian leaders attack as they move to undermine democracy. Autocrats, populists and dictators know that the defining battle for power is a battle to control the narrative.**

# Highs and lows, rises and falls

Table 1: Top 10 and bottom 10 country scores, 2021

Top 10	GxR score	Bottom 10	GxR score
Denmark	95	North Korea	0
Switzerland	95	Turkmenistan	1
Sweden	94	Syria	1
Norway	94	Eritrea	1
Estonia	93	Belarus	2
Finland	93	China	2
Ireland	92	Cuba	2
Portugal	92	Nicaragua	3
Belgium	91	Saudi Arabia	3
Latvia	91	Equatorial Guinea	4

Nicaragua and Belarus are new entries to the bottom 10 for 2021.

Portugal is a new entry into the top 10 and Uruguay dropped out this year.

The entire top 10 is now composed of European countries.

Table 2: Top 5 countries with the largest rise in scores at each key time period: 2020–2021, 2016–2021, and 2011–2021

2020–2021		2016–2021		2011–2021	
Bolivia	+13	The Gambia	+58	The Gambia	+57
The Democratic Republic of the Congo	+8	Maldives	+35	Fiji	+19
Moldova	+7	Dominican Republic	+21	Dominican Republic	+37
		Ecuador	+21	Ecuador	+17
		The Democratic Republic of the Congo	+20	The Democratic Republic of the Congo	+15

Table 3: Top 5 countries with the largest decline in scores at each key time period: 2020–2021, 2016–2021, and 2011–2021

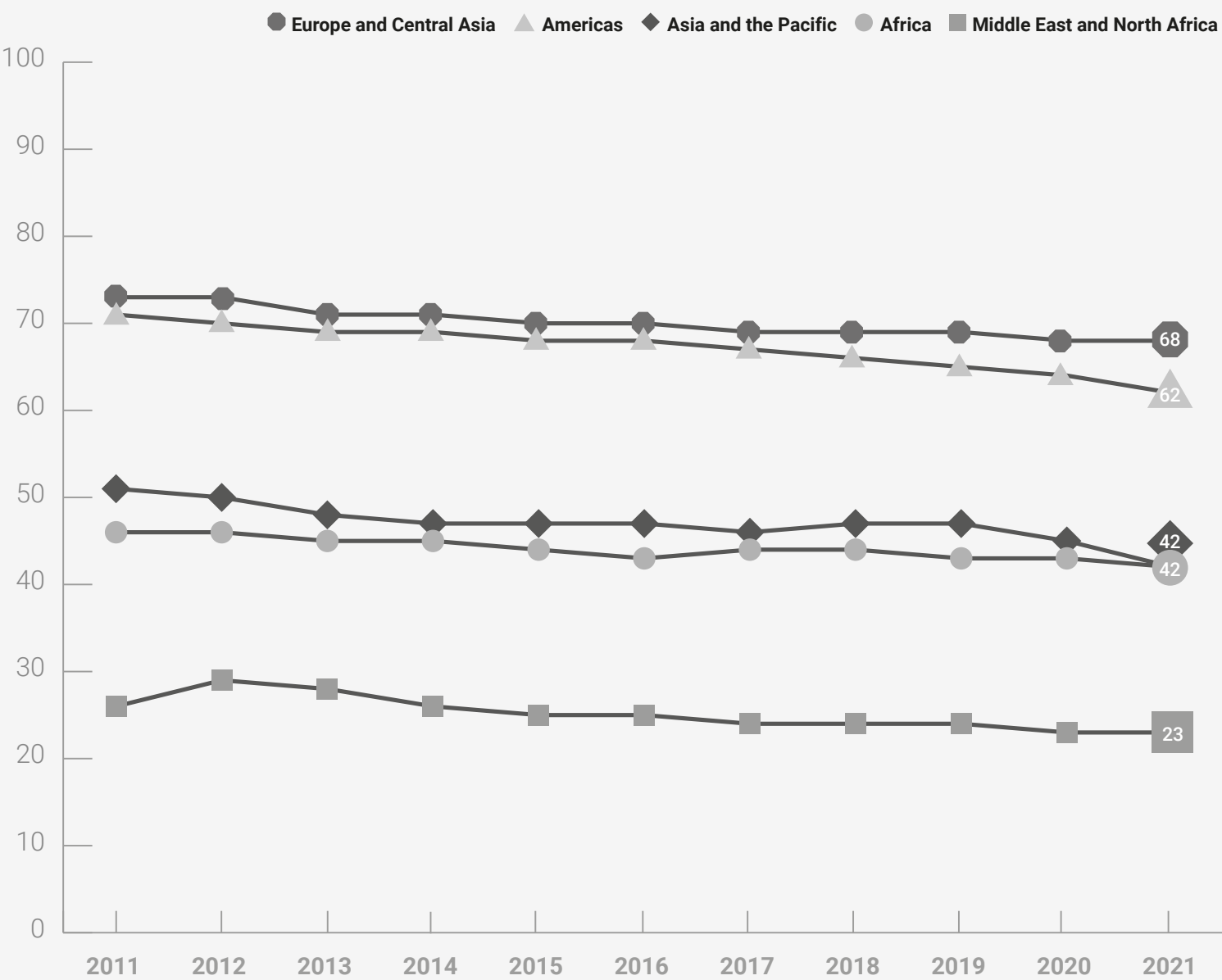
2020–2021		2016–2021		2011–2021	
Afghanistan	–38	Hong Kong	–43	Hong Kong	–58
Myanmar	–34	Afghanistan	–37	Afghanistan	–40
Colombia	–15	El Salvador	–34	Brazil	–38
El Salvador	–12	Colombia	–32	India	–37
Sudan	–10	Myanmar	–28	Nicaragua	–35

The data is unequivocal: The level of democracy enjoyed by the average global citizen in 2021 back to where it was in 1989.

We are seeing more dramatic downward shifts than at any time during the last two decades. Many of these occur as the result of power grabs or coups, but many are more of an erosion than a landslide – often under democratically elected populist leaders.

Myanmar and Afghanistan both dropped two categories in just one year – the two biggest drops the metric has measured since it began in 2000.

# Regional comparison



All regional scores have been stagnant or in decline over the last decade: The Americas; Asia and the Pacific; and Europe and Central Asia have declined.

There are now two regions with no countries ranked **open**: Africa and the Middle East and North Africa.

The Middle East and North Africa region is much less free than the other regions: as well as having a regional score well below the others, a majority of its population lives in countries **in crisis**.

Figure 11: Regional comparisons of scores, 2011–2021

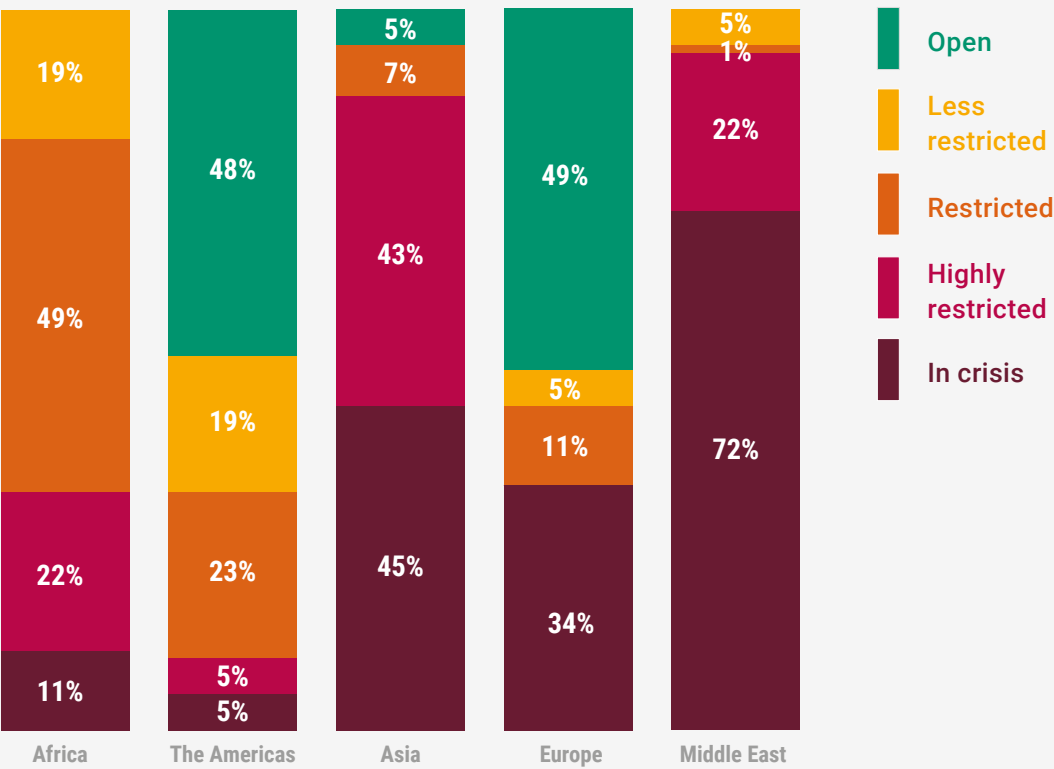


Table 4: Number of countries in each expression category by region, 2021

	Africa	Americas	Asia and the Pacific	Europe and Central Asia	Middle East and North Africa
Open	0	9	6	25	0
Less restricted	12	6	3	11	2
Restricted	12	3	3	5	1
Highly restricted	8	1	8	0	6
In crisis	10	3	9	8	10

Figure 12: Percentage of population in each expression category by region, 2021



# Continuity in silence: Repression drivers consistent over the decade

Table 5 shows the key indicators where rises or falls in scores predict similar rises and falls in GxR scores during the same period. For more detail on the GxR regression analysis, see [Annex 1](#).

Table 5: Indicators tied most closely to overall changes in score

2020–2021	2016–2021	2011–2021
Government censorship efforts	Government censorship efforts	Government censorship efforts
Media self-censorship	Freedom of academic and cultural expression	CSO repression
Freedom of academic and cultural expression	CSO consultation	CSO consultation
CSO entry and exit	CSO repression	Arrests for political content
	Arrests for political content	Harassment of journalists
	Harassment of journalists	Media self-censorship
	CSO entry and exit	

Government censorship efforts appear across each of the three time periods. Forms of civil society repression, academic and cultural expression, harassment of journalists, media censorship, and arrests for political content each appear across two of the three time periods.

Digital repression receives a lot of attention for its scale, seriousness, and potential for harm – and certainly repressive governments are increasingly turning to digital tactics. But the tactics at the centre of government crackdowns are the same as ever: control the media and silence civil society by censorship, harassment, and arrests and the public narrative will be safely under control, whether they apply these tactics online or off.

“

When freedom to know and to speak vanish, it is clear what happens next. The V-Dem data shows that autocrats censor the media and repress civil society first, then attack institutions and electoral democracy.

”

# 2021 Global overview: Fragile freedoms, dramatic declines.

In 2021, the GxR metric registered two of the most dramatic declines ever seen: both Afghanistan and Myanmar dropped more than 30 points, plummeting two categories, as democratic governments were driven out and people were brutally attacked as they resisted the takeover of their governments.

Countries working towards democracy and slowly shaking themselves free of embattled pasts found progress undermined, and years of work opening up the space for expression disappeared.

Non-democratic changes in power rarely bode well for freedom of expression: the violence with which regimes immediately target journalists, activists, and populations shows that repressive regimes – militia and military alike – are keenly aware of the power of information and expression.

Polarisation and disinformation continue to characterise many media environments, often serving those in power and sometimes driven by leaders and ruling parties like Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro ([see In focus: Brazil](#)). These types of content, by design of algorithms, thrive on social media platforms.

With five coups in 2021 (plus another in Burkina Faso in January 2022), leaders act against democracy in increasingly brazen ways, both in power grabs and within democratic government, eroding systems and institutions from the inside.

Militarisation is a trend across the GxR categories. National security narratives and coups are proliferating, military courts are increasingly used, and military institutions are given new and varied roles in the management of government, infrastructure, and civilian life. Many countries put military actors at the centre of their pandemic response, deepening their intrusion into civilian life. Military structures are rarely a good sign for expression. They are strictly hierarchical, authoritarian, and non-democratic, as well as deeply patriarchal, excluding women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) people. They embody rule by rank, not by consent, and the violent logic of hard power.

Many military men who have regained power in recent years have track records of violence, repression, and human rights abuses, including war crimes and genocide. The generals and army chiefs currently in charge of Sudan, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka (to name only a few examples) have histories which augur poorly for the future of expression in those countries.

Climate change, armed conflict, and mass displacement continue to intensify and intersect, creating an impossible environment for expression and information. These factors silence communicators and activists in innumerate ways, and cut populations off from vital information as infrastructure is destroyed or people are displaced.

The last decade witnessed an uptick in internal armed conflicts which reached a record high in 2020. By mid-2021, more than 84 million people had been forcibly displaced, even before the invasion of Ukraine. These contexts halt the free flow of information, constructive debate, community building, participatory governance, the construction of civic space, and self-expression.

“

**Around the globe autocrats are pushing the boundaries of how far they can restrict freedom of expression. The international community continues to turn a blind eye, prioritising profit over people. Governments rightly condemn Russia, at the same time discussing trade with Saudi Arabia. This hypocrisy feeds the cycle of democratic decline and comes at a great long-term cost.**

”

# Attacks on the frontlines of expression

## Killings in 2021:

- **358** human rights defenders were killed globally
- **55** journalists were killed globally
- A further **65** journalists went missing
- **64%** of the global population live in a country where human rights defenders were killed
- **37%** of the global population live in countries where journalists were killed

Killings are spread across expression categories – fewer are taking place in **open** countries, but no category is safe from these events.

More than 70% of murders of human right defenders occurred in The Americas. The three countries with the most murders (Colombia, Mexico, and Brazil) were all in that region ([see Chapter 3](#)).

The proportion of journalists killed in peacetime countries has increased significantly over the last five years: local journalists and TV and radio journalists are most at risk. Over the past five years, public figures and even national leaders have aggravated and legitimised an unsafe environment by stigmatising and denigrating journalists in public speech, which often takes a virulently misogynistic form when women journalists are involved.

## Detentions in 2021

- **293** journalists were behind bars at the end of the year
- **60%** of the global population live in a country where journalists were imprisoned

Four of every five detentions were in countries **in crisis** (59%) and **highly restricted** (27%). Unlike killings, detentions take place in countries with lower scores.

The number of reporters jailed for their work hit a new global record of 293, up from 280 in 2020. The top jailers are China (50 detainees), Myanmar (26 detainees), Egypt (25 detainees), Vietnam (23 detainees), and Belarus (19 detainees). Both Myanmar and Belarus saw huge jumps in the number of jailed journalists in 2021 – both new to the top five this year.

## Harassment and ‘lawfare’ in 2021

Journalists and human right defenders worldwide face judicial harassment (also known as strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) or ‘lawfare’) from the state which prosecutes them for anything from tax evasion to ‘fake news’ and even terrorism – and from private parties that use, for example, defamation laws to silence and paralyse investigations into business.

Using military courts to try civilians is a concerning trend worldwide. National security is used as a weak pretext to keep people in long pre-trial detention and to carry out trials behind closed doors, violating fair trial rights.

New legal trends tied into national security narratives, like ‘foreign agents’, ‘foreign interference’, or ‘undesirable organisations’, provide easy pretexts for binding civil society organisations and groups in red tape, raiding or banning media, and stigmatising communicators and activists.

**Impunity remains the rule for crimes against communicators and activists alike.**



## Digital dangers are rising for communicators and activists

Just as by owning a printing house, a government can stop newspapers hitting the stands, an internet infrastructure controlled by government can be an extremely efficient way to control the narrative.

During 2021, there were 182 Internet shutdowns in 34 countries - now a favourite tool of the digital-era autocrat. Disturbingly, seven new countries started using the tactic, along with the usual suspects including Myanmar, Iran, and India – the global leader in Internet shutdowns for the fourth year running.

Eighteen governments cut mobile internet during protests on at least 37 occasions – a significant increase compared to 2020. Not only are there more shutdowns, but the shutdowns are lasting longer than ever.

Numerous regimes are slowly marching down this path: Russia's cyber sovereignty, Iran's [National Information Network](#), the Great Firewall of China, Cambodia's National Internet Gateway, and Myanmar's 'whitelisting' can control what and who is online. As well as contributing to the 'splinternet', these policies give governments not only control of what is seen but also knowledge of what has been seen, through monitoring and surveillance.

Some governments find more intrusive means to surveil: states used NSO's (an Israeli company) spyware to facilitate human rights abuses across the world. It emerged in 2021 that NSO has clients in around 20 countries (most of which are **highly restricted** or **in crisis** countries), with nearly 200 journalists as targets, as well as family and friends of murdered Saudi Arabian journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

But it is not just journalists under the prying eye of government: surveillance of citizens, migrants, protesters – of everyone – continues to spread across societies, including the enthusiastic take-up of [new artificial intelligence tools](#) by governments across the world. Techno-determinism and profit models hamper the integration of human rights impacts into the discussion, meaning that technologies like [biometric systems](#), from facial recognition to [emotion recognition](#) (both pseudoscientific and ineffective), are often bought and implemented without consideration of the impact on human rights.

Under claims of 'cybercrime' and 'sovereignty', numerous states have imposed new laws on online behaviour, some are poorly executed good faith laws, others are designed to silence critical voices online. At the UN in 2021, Russia proposed a [Cybercrime Treaty](#), whose provisions are so vague that they threaten the right to freedom of expression at the global level.

## Transparency is on the mend, driven by civil society and environmental activists

The Covid-19 pandemic laid waste to a lot of transparency practices globally – the amount of information shared proactively, and from requests, dropped dramatically as government offices closed. We are slowly moving back towards 'normal', but there is a long way to go.

Extensive government secrecy, manipulated numbers, hidden deaths, and dodgy contracts characterised the pandemic. In many countries, the extent of Covid-19 outbreaks was unclear – while many regimes insisted on exclusive use of government statistics, [journalists and whistleblowers were attacked](#) and fired across the world for reporting on the often-dire situations they encountered. In the scramble of the emergency, public procurement rules were ignored – even high-scoring countries, like the UK, were found to be making illegal secret contracts.

The relationship between government and individuals was weakened as populations were plunged into ignorance and kept off the streets. However, this link can be rebuilt – and for the better – on a foundation of transparency and freedom of information. While the pandemic continues, the world faces numerous new crises in which transparency will be crucial for both finding and implementing solutions.

The good news is that structures are in place: 91% of the global population live in a country with a law or regulation on the right to information. Implementation, however, is another matter: without an independent oversight commission, resources, and political will, these laws cannot translate into positive human rights outcomes.

These laws mostly only apply to public bodies: private sector transparency remains a huge issue across all sectors – from the algorithms that control what information we see online, to the secret ownership of enormous wealth used for tax evasion and money laundering.

Transparency will be a key driver in the battle against the biggest crisis facing the world today: climate change. But there is severe resistance. The industries involved – extractives and megaprojects – typically lack consultation and public participation. These are some of the least transparent businesses in the world and are often the root of vexatious litigations (SLAPPs) from the private sector – most often by businesses involved in mining and palm oil.

Civil society is leading the way on climate change, often by indigenous and women rights defenders, though these activists are the most murdered and stigmatised worldwide. They are called terrorists, extremists, and anti-development saboteurs, especially where they stand in the way of profit – even when that profit comes at the cost of destroying biodiversity, pumping carbon into the atmosphere, or destroying community life.

Stigmatisation and criminalisation are carried out by countries within all categories and across regions, with governments [stretching legal definitions](#) of ‘critical infrastructure’ and ‘national interests’ to protect profit-driven, often extractive, projects.

Despite this harassment, huge steps are being taken. Discussion and activism on this issue are driving impressive reforms, and new conventions and mechanisms, which could provide impetus for real improvements and protections for those who advocate for them.

The Escazú Agreement, which came into force in 2021, is the first environmental treaty in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the first to include specific provisions for the protection of environmental human rights defenders. The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the effects of climate change and the role of environmental defenders, including a list of closely-tracked priority countries.

The 46 countries party to the Aarhus Convention (which grants the public rights regarding access to information, public participation, and access to justice) have established a special rapporteur intended to function [as a rapid response mechanism for the protection of environmental defenders](#). The rapporteur’s role is to take measures to protect any person experiencing or at imminent threat of penalisation, persecution, or harassment for seeking to exercise rights under the Aarhus Convention. In early 2022, the UN created and [appointed](#) a new rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change.

Discussions are also growing around corporate transparency. The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and a new law from Norway aim to give individuals access to information rights that can be used on companies. The discussion around the Ruggie Principles (the UN’s [Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#)) is moving towards more concrete, even compulsory actions and standards.



Figure 13: 91% of the global population live in countries with national Right to Information laws, regulations and initiatives.

## There is cause for hope: people resist, communities persist, and innovation shines through

Though the picture is certainly not an optimistic one for freedom of expression worldwide, there are many reasons for hope: civil society are driving new mechanisms and treaties, and discovering new tactics to break silences, gather information, and hold regimes accountable for violations of freedom of expression and other rights.

Even in the most difficult and high-stakes circumstances, grassroots and civil society movements continue to organise and take to the streets to demand their rights. Protest movements in Thailand, Cuba, and Iran, to name just a few, show incredible bravery in the face of huge odds: it is often through these movements that the world becomes aware of the issues people face in those contexts.

After [a year of widespread mass protest \(at their peak half a million peoplestrong\) in India](#), in December 2021, the government repealed the controversial laws which would have allowed private companies to control the planting, storage, and price of crops. which had sparked the protests. The Modi administration was forced to discuss other demands including guaranteed prices for produce and a withdrawal of criminal cases against protesting farmers.

Innovation also continues, including the [mushrooming use of universal jurisdiction](#) – the creative use of international court systems to bring repressive regimes to justice. This is breaking cycles of impunity, not just for those who commit crimes materially but also for those leaders who mandate and permit human rights violations.

While international mechanisms, and even governments, often fail to sanction or even speak out about human rights abuses by foreign states, the courts could provide an alternative route to accountability, from cases against the Saudi Crown Prince over the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi [in US courts](#) to [new cases](#) against Myanmar’s military junta [in multiple jurisdictions](#), from London to Turkey and even Indonesia.

Along with an active civil society, quality journalism, and protected whistleblowers, accountability can be driven by information and informed discussion. It can reduce corruption and bring life to a democracy – and provide us with tools to face the many challenges the world faces today.

# Inequality on the ground: Discrimination in the context of protest

Protests continue to show their force in making change and raising consciousness – but they amplify the dynamics of inequality and risk present in the exercise of the right to express and dissent: some demographics face more brutality on the street, and a reduced probability that their demands will translate into meaningful change in their societies.

In 2021, despite the ongoing pandemic, demonstration activity [increased by 9%](#) globally compared to 2020, with protest movements in countries from Colombia to Iran protesting issues from wages to water and tax reform, as well as protesting democratic overthrows in countries like Sudan. The [countries with the most protests in 2021](#) were India, the USA, France, Italy, and Pakistan.

Some protest movements manage to bring authorities to the negotiating table. For example, following the 2019 protests in Chile, a participatory process to rewrite the country's constitution began. The newly-elected convention started drafting in July 2021, with a referendum on the text planned for 2022. This is the first constitution ever written [as part of a participatory process](#) – and has quotas for both women and indigenous representation.

These, unfortunately, are exceptional cases.

Most leaders respond to people on the streets with neither listening nor negotiation; mostly, they just want people off the streets again by whichever means available. In [at least 12 countries](#), live ammunition was fired at demonstrators in 2021. As policing continues to be militarised, with the increased use of 'non-lethal weapons' – often deployed with the intention to harm – security forces exact violence on demonstrators, who are already criminalised by legal systems.

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**The dynamics of power and inequality at play in the world are played out manifold in the streets during protests. Freedom of expression – both exercise and its consequences – varies enormously depending on gender, race, colour, language, religion, and political opinion, among many others.**

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This discrimination differs according to context and history: indigenous protests face particular challenges in exercising the right to protest, LGBTQ+ protesters in Poland face violence and smear campaigns, and in Mexico, women protesting face huge discrimination and even gender-based violence in the context of protests. Thailand's protest response also [turned markedly more violent as the protest moved from middle-class students to working-class people](#). These examples barely scrape the surface of the diverse experiences of protesters around the world.

**But no country has demonstrated discrimination more starkly in the context of protest than the USA.** Not only do Black people face more state intervention and state (as well as non-state) violence while demanding basic safety and human rights, but the barriers for change are also higher, and the likelihood of backlash is higher.

On 25 May 2020, Minneapolis police murdered George Floyd, sparking a wave of protest across the USA. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, and its treatment by the state, are *par excellence* examples of this, where political polarisation, structural racism, and historically-entrenched police brutality towards Black people all coincide to create a uniquely challenging environment for protest and change-making.

Protests continued well into 2021 – though not at the intensity of 2020 – rising again around new cases of police brutality and racism, as well as around the conviction of the officer who murdered George Floyd: Derek Chauvin.



Police have consistently taken a militarised and extremely heavy-handed approach, escalating tensions and intervening unnecessarily in demonstrations: [authorities in the USA were three times more likely to intervene](#) in pro-BLM demonstrations than any other demonstration.

Physical force was used against demonstrators for BLM in [52% of interventions](#), twice as often as against all other demonstrators.

This cannot be explained by the elements of the BLM protests which employed civic disobedience. Not only were around [94% of BLM protests peaceful](#), but even in purely peaceful demonstrations, the police still used [force 37% of the time against non-violent demonstrators](#) – other peaceful demonstrators suffer the use of force in under 20% of interventions.

## The USA in data

In 2011, the USA was ranked 9th in the world; it is now ranked 30th.

Over the last decade, the USA has seen a 9-point drop in their score, putting the country on the lower end of the **open** expression category.

**The USA is now globally ranked in the lowest quartile in 2021 in their scores for:**

- Social group equality for civil liberties
- Political polarisation
- Political violence
- Polarisation of society

**Looking at how social media is used to mobilise individuals, the USA is also in the bottom quartile globally for:**

- Use of social media to organise offline violence
- Riots mobilised on social media
- Vigilante justice mobilised on social media
- Terrorism mobilised on social media

**Between 2019 and 2021, the USA saw a:**

- Decrease in social class equality in respect for civil liberties
- Rise in political violence
- Rise in riots mobilised on social media
- Rise in vigilante justice mobilised on social media

Despite thousands of demonstrations in thousands of locations across the USA and promises from the Biden Administration that actions would be taken, authorities did not adopt or implement significant measures relating to police oversight and accountability. The US Senate failed to introduce the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act.

Although the use of excessive force by police is [not reliably tracked in the USA](#), in 2021, the police killed at least 1,000 people. Black people continue to be disproportionately affected by the US police's use of lethal force.

Worse still, the legal backlash to the BLM movement has been remarkable: more than a hundred proposals in over 30 states have pursued 'anti-protest bills'. Nine states had enacted [10 bills by the end of 2021](#), many of which use vague terminology that could be abused against future protesters.

Numerous state officials have cited looting and violence as the motivations for this, belied by the lack of correlation between states pursuing these laws and states which were host to violent demonstrations.

There is, however, a correlation between the states proposing these laws and the number of BLM demonstrations. These are also the states in which police took an excessive, interventionist, or violent approach.

The laws, as well as criminalising protest, encourage aggressive state action against protesters, attempting to exclude those convicted of protest crimes from public benefits or providing civil immunity for law enforcement officers who kill peaceful protesters or even nearby bystanders and journalists.

In some cases, these laws also attempted to create criminal immunity for private citizens who injure or kill protesters. In the context of the various car-ramming attacks against the BLM protests, these proposals are a message of approbation to the vigilantes and white-supremacist militias who turned out to 'counter-protest' and assault BLM protests.

These attempts from the highest levels of government to limit the right to protest safely reflect attacks and stigma right from the top, as well as in the US media. Throughout the George Floyd protests, media and politicians labelled peaceful protesters 'thugs' and 'rioters'. Predictably, then-President Donald Trump's Twitter was littered with these words, as well as referring to ['acts of domestic terror'](#).

In a country where Black people are [not safe in their homes](#), their [places of worship](#), or even [in their neighbourhood grocery stores](#), it is no surprise that people are at risk while raising their voices on the streets of the USA, but it is an often-ignored and massive human rights violation, and a symptom of a deeply sick political situation.

The racist treatment of the BLM protests by authorities, police, media, and citizens has roots in historical racism and is further enabled by the USA's political stew of polarisation, white supremacy, gun 'freedoms', and racist hate speech right from the very top of government.



# Breaking point: Has the world had enough of the social media giants and their control of what we see online?

Huge corporate conglomerates now control the Internet – from platforms to infrastructure. A handful of companies, allowed to run free during decades of digital monopolisation, have dictated policy at a global level, and have been allowed to dictate the terms of online freedom of expression, often maximising profit at the expense of people's rights and well-being. But finally, the wind is starting to change.

Companies around the world have been able to escape accountability through a lack of competition and toothless regulation practices, even when their terms and conditions have caused serious harm, or when those terms and conditions are not enforced fairly.

The pandemic exacerbated structural issues facing the media sector, putting more money in the pockets of social media giants. Although the global advertising market is recovering, advertising revenue is [increasingly concentrated, with three global conglomerates](#) – Alphabet, Meta, and Amazon – and large national companies. Smaller outlets and platforms are struggling more than ever.

The arbitrary nature of content regulation appeared in an increasing stark light over the last couple of years, from pandemic misinformation to extremism, incitement of atrocities, and harmless content being taken offline while illegal content stays online. The rules occasionally change with the tide of public opinion, e.g. the suspension of Donald Trump's Twitter account after the Capitol Hill insurrection, or new exceptions regarding [Russia-Ukraine relations](#), but these only highlight the arbitrariness of the policies – as it becomes clear that there is no method in the madness.

Content moderation in languages other than English has been disastrously underfunded, from the lack of translation of content rules for users to the lack of consultation on those rules and their application in the global context.

But the global mood has shifted towards serious discussion of regulating those who have spent decades running roughshod across both norms of the freedom of expression and anti-monopoly rules in numerous jurisdictions.

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**The EU is on the brink of finalising a regulatory framework – the [Digital Markets Act](#) – which will bring much-needed measures to curb harmful behaviour by the most powerful digital firms and create fairer, more competitive digital markets in Europe, meaning a better governed digital public sphere.**

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However, although it represents an important first step in the right direction, the Digital Markets Act is not as ambitious as it could have been, and it does not provide sufficient focus on the needs and voices of end-users. As things stand, the ability of this framework to achieve its objectives depends more on how its provisions will be enforced by the regulator and courts in the years to come.

These EU regulatory reforms will echo around the world, for better or worse. The Federal Trade Commission now has progressive and anti-monopoly leadership, and President Biden has presented a plan to tame monopolies.

The [Digital Services Act](#) provides an opportunity alongside the Digital Markets Act to open up Big Tech online services to scrutiny, protect human rights online, and [integrate the right to freedom of expression into the frameworks](#) that govern the major spaces for expression in this era. The Digital Services Act codifies self-regulation practices in many ways, but much will depend on how, and indeed to what extent, the provisions are enforced.

In early 2022, the unimaginable power inequalities of the digital age posed a new and unpredictable threat: the purchase of Twitter by one billionaire. Elon Musk, a self-styled 'free speech absolutist' with a huge following on the social media site, vowed to relax content restrictions, among other short-sighted proposals. Whether he will be able to pull his vision into reality is unclear, but it is just another face of the same issue: private actors (mostly privileged, anglophone, white men in North America) are dictating the conditions of our basic human rights.

And it does not stop at social media: infrastructure is key. Those who control the infrastructure of expression control the narrative and who partakes. The norms of profit-driven connection services have not changed, despite the terrifying power of three companies who have a majority control over online spaces, who is connected, and who complies with government demands.

Worse, the two ends of the Internet journey may be coming together, creating a nexus of the issues of the last two decades of monopoly and corporate control: tech giants now design, build, and [own substantial pieces of Internet infrastructure](#), including new undersea cables providing Internet to Africa. In 2010, Google, Meta, Microsoft, and Amazon had invested in only one long-distance cable; by 2024, they will own [all or portions of more than 30](#). The net neutrality issues that came with 'Facebook Zero' as an Internet provider were clear, but a vertically-integrated model is an unprecedented level of power.

There is no single solution – the rebalancing act will be a fine one. Whether or not fulfilling the right to freedom of expression and information is profitable should not be a deciding factor. However, whether the Digital Markets Act and Digital Services Act can shift our digital town square towards human rights remains to be seen, but we know the global mood is beginning to change.

“ Private sector transparency also remains a huge issue across all sectors – from the algorithms that control what information we see online, to the secret ownership of enormous wealth used for tax evasion and money laundering. ”

Chapter 2  
Africa

Regional score:  
42

Regional population:  
1.2 billion

Number of  
journalists killed:  
10

Number of human rights  
defenders killed:  
20

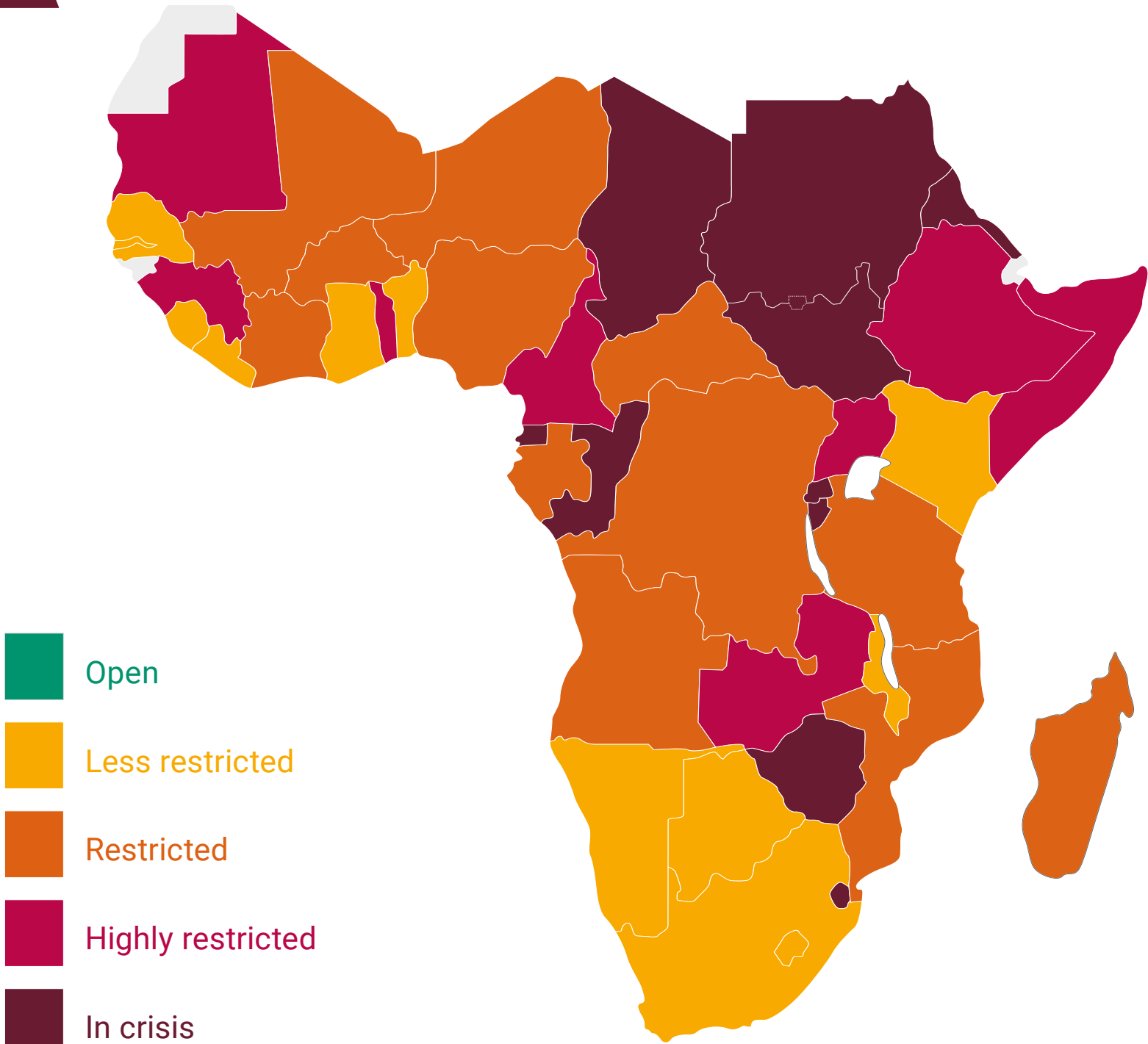


Figure 13: GxR score map: Africa

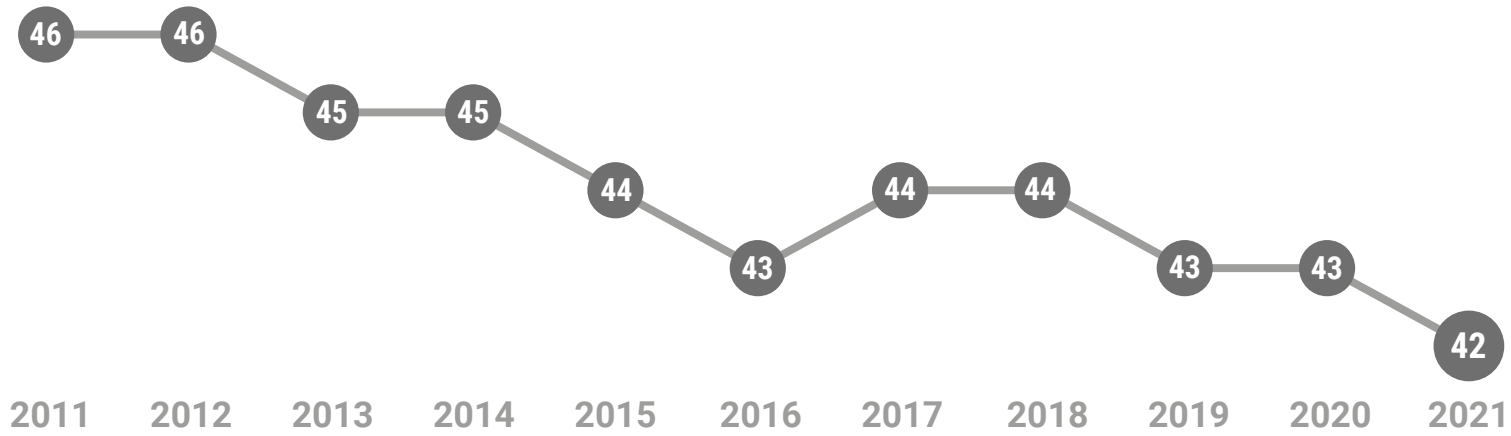


Figure 14: Africa regional GxR, 2011-2021

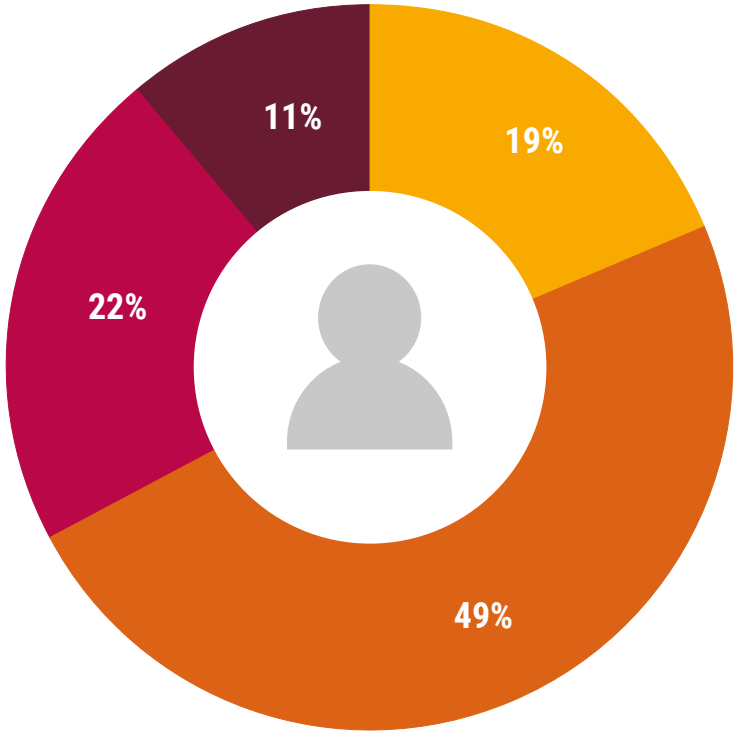


Figure 15: Percentage of population per expression category in 2021: Africa

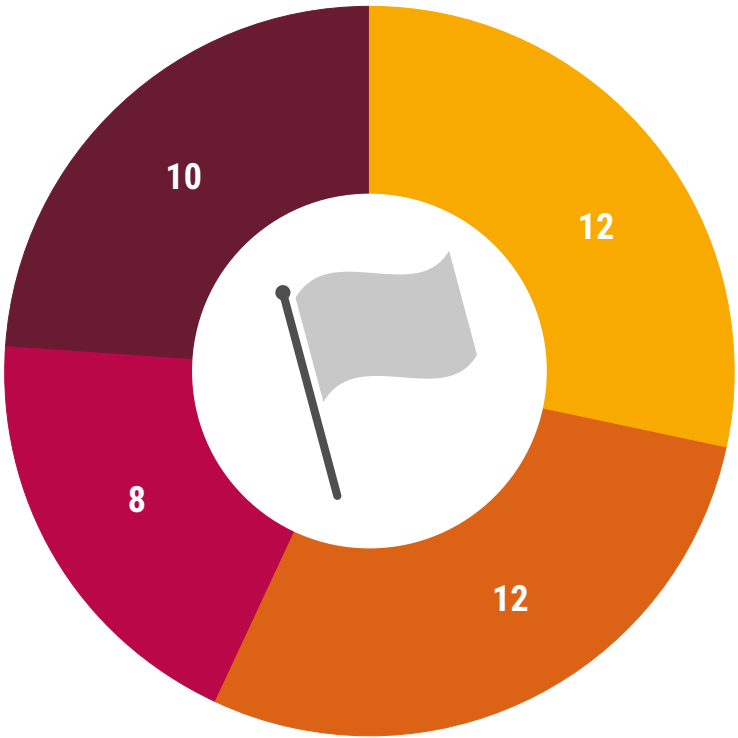


Figure 16: Number of countries per expression category in 2021: Africa

There are no **open** countries in Africa, for the third year running. Nearly four in five of the continent's population lives in restrictive environments (**restricted**, **highly restricted**, and **in crisis**).

The number of people living **in crisis** doubled between 2020 and 2021 and is now at 11%, although it remains smaller than a decade ago.

There were five military coups in Africa in 2021 – plunging countries like Sudan ([see In focus: Sudan](#)) into crisis. Political opposition faces major hurdles, and protests are met with violence in many places – as well as Internet shutdowns, an increasingly favoured addition to the autocrat armoury.

Table 6: Top 5 and bottom 5 country scores in 2021: Africa

Top		Bottom	
Country	GxR score	Country	GxR score
Botswana	79	Eritrea	1
Ghana	77	Equatorial Guinea	4
Namibia	75	South Sudan	5
South Africa	75	Eswatini	5
Sierra Leone	74	Burundi	7

Table 7: Top 5 rises and declines in score in 2020–2021, 2016–2021, and 2011–2021: Africa

Top 5 score rises					
2020–2021		2016–2021		2011–2021	
Democratic Republic of the Congo	+8	The Gambia	+58	The Gambia	+57
		Democratic Republic of the Congo	+20	Democratic Republic of the Congo	+15
		Angola	+15	Angola	+13
		Ethiopia	+11	Malawi	+9
		Sudan	+7	Ethiopia	+9

Top 5 score declines					
2020–2021		2016–2021		2011–2021	
Sudan	–10	Benin	–20	Togo	–20
Nigeria	–9	Togo	–19	Benin	–19
Burkina Faso	–8	Burkina Faso	–13	Tanzania	–18
Ethiopia	–8	Guinea	–13	Burundi	–17
Eswatini	–6	Gabon	–13	Zambia	–16

## Democratic transitions face insecurity, coups, and entrenched dictators

People across the region are calling for change, but it is hard to get, with entrenched leadership, corrupt elites, and high-risk environments for demanding change on the streets or in the media. At the other end of the spectrum, change can come too fast or in the wrong direction, with military takeovers.

There were five military coups in 2021, four of which were in Africa: Chad, Mali (its second coup within 9 months), [Guinea](#), and Sudan ([see In focus: Sudan](#)). This continued into 2022, with Burkina Faso's coup in January. Internal conflicts continue across the continent, with millions displaced, and West Africa and the Sahara continue to be destabilised by conflict, terrorism, armed groups who attack civilians, and state military forces committing human rights abuses.

In other parts of Africa, leaders cling to power, making constitutional changes to remove term limits and tampering with elections – or, most subtly, repressing political opposition in such a way that electoral success becomes impossible, manipulating the narrative or more simply arresting or charging opposition politicians, as occurred in Ethiopia and [Tanzania](#) in 2021.

Incumbent President Yoweri Museveni banned TV stations in Uganda [from hosting politicians wearing red berets](#) – the hallmark of opposition leader Robert Kyagulanyi – also known as Bobi Wine – who lives under constant threat of prosecution after repeated arrests since he began his opposition to Museveni's rule.

When an incumbent has regained power, those who expressed dissent during elections can suffer the revenge of the returning leader. Shortly after Museveni won the election (the opposition alleged fraud), Kyagulanyi was put under house arrest and denied access to lawyers. In August, more than 50 non-governmental organisations (NGO) were suspended, mostly on bureaucratic grounds, seemingly in retaliation for election monitoring.

Opportunities for reform at the polls in Africa are marred by broken term limits, which are often extended unconstitutionally by ageing leaders trying to stay in power.

Many rulers hold onto power, shifting term limits to remain at the head of zombie democracies until they die, but even this is not always a new start for a country. Death offers little respite, as demonstrated by Zimbabwe's unchanged status (**in crisis**) in the wake of Robert Mugabe's death. Tanzania's John Magafuli died in 2021, and his successor Samia Suhulu Hassan claimed to be a reformist, [but her track record is mixed](#). Idriss Déby – one of Africa's longest serving leaders, with three decades as Chad's President – also died in 2021, spurring a coup which [put power into the hands of his son](#).

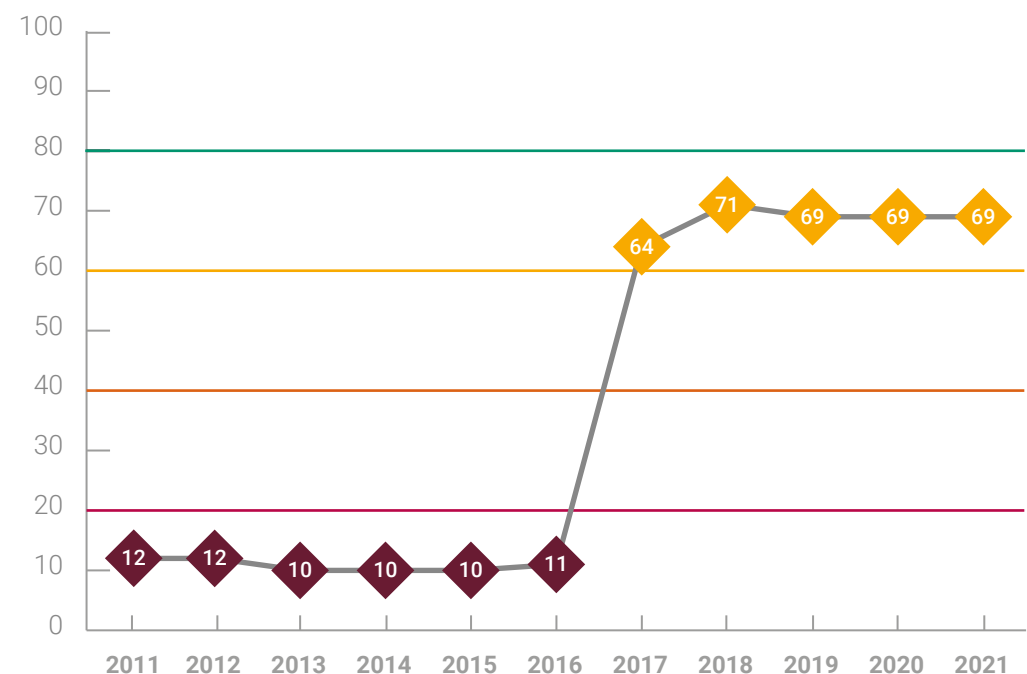


Figure 17: Scores 2011–2021: The Gambia

There are bright spots – even as Zambia braced for tensions facing August elections, suffering Internet shutdowns and protest bans, the country saw a peaceful transfer of power to an opposition candidate.

After the plummeting declines of numerous countries, which showed advances in recent years, The Gambia is the only remaining example of a notable advance that has proven sustainable over the last decade. The situation is far from perfect, but the country continues to consolidate democratic gains, with a peaceful election in which incumbent Adama Barrow was voted back in, along with an [Access to Information Law](#) and a Disability Rights Law passed in 2021, and a key anti-corruption bill in process. It was Adama Barrow's 2017 election win against Yahya Jammeh (who had been in power for two decades after taking power in a military coup) which swept the country from the **in crisis** category to a **less restricted** environment.

## People are being brutally silenced on the streets, in the courts, and online

Political instability and the pandemic have provided an arsenal of pretexts to limit discussion, information, and expression in the region, as well as justifying a powerful wave of militarisation.

Protesters suffered severely in 2021. In various countries, live ammunition was fired into crowds and [protesters were killed in at least 17 countries](#), including Angola and Benin. Kenya's security forces [unlawfully killed 167 protesters](#) over the course of the year, and many were arrested for breaking pandemic restrictions. The killing of protesters is not restricted to countries **in crisis** – countries considered more **open** environments in Africa still subject people to policy brutality and overstep by security services.



Security services killed 80 people during Eswatini's pro-democracy protests in May. The country, already **in crisis** and governed by an absolute monarchy, halved its score to five. More than a thousand protesters were put behind bars and reports emerged of [torture of journalists](#).

Anti-coup protests were treated with particular brutality as military regimes took hold, for example Sudan's security forces killed more than 50 during anti-coup demonstrations in October ([see In focus: Sudan](#)). Along with the killings, arrests reached astonishing heights: Chad's security forces killed around 20 protesters and arrested 700 after the military takeover in April.

Security crises in many parts of Africa have palpable consequences for freedom of expression. Nigeria's spiralling security situation in 2021 caused a sharp downturn in a score that has been mostly stable for the last decade. Ethiopia, whose score saw a significant increase between 2017 and 2019, is now seeing a steep decline – with new restrictions on reporting on the war-torn Tigray region, as well as one of the world's most persistent Internet and telecoms blackouts.

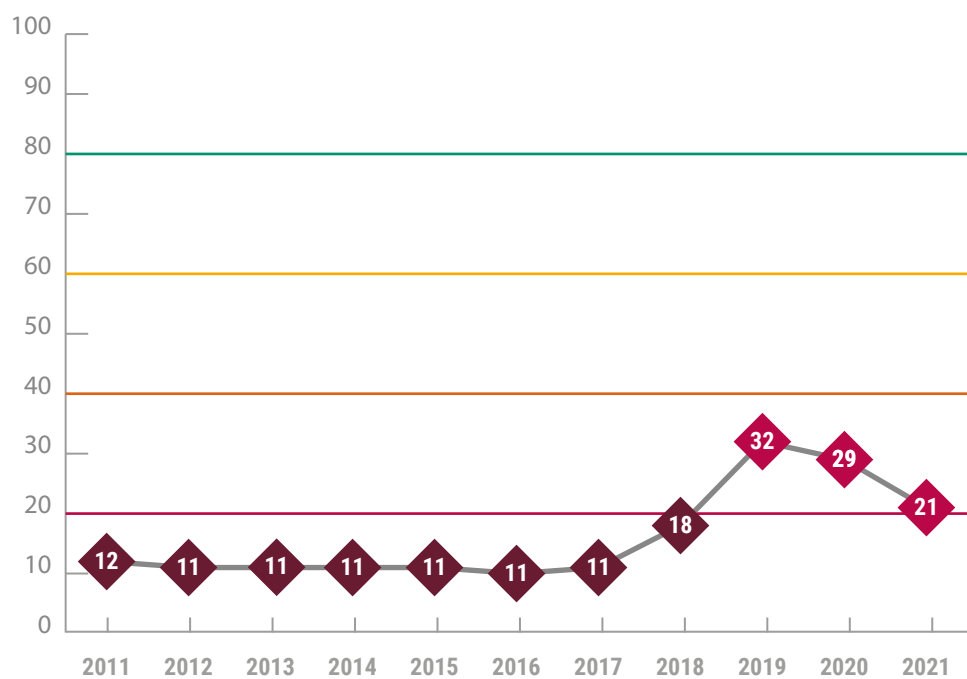


Figure 18: Scores, 2011–2021: Ethiopia

But communicators in peacetime also face substantial barriers amid persistent criminal defamation prosecutions. In many countries, newspapers and broadcasters continue to face bans – even in Senegal, comfortable in the region's top 10, [two TV stations were suspended](#) for coverage of protests following the arrest of opposition leader Ousmane Sonko.

Kenya's Film and Classification Board continues its campaign for conservative Christian values. They [banned a film](#) about a relationship between two men under the Penal Code which criminalises homosexuality, and [prosecuted a comedian](#) under obscenity law for sharing his reality show via his social media channels.

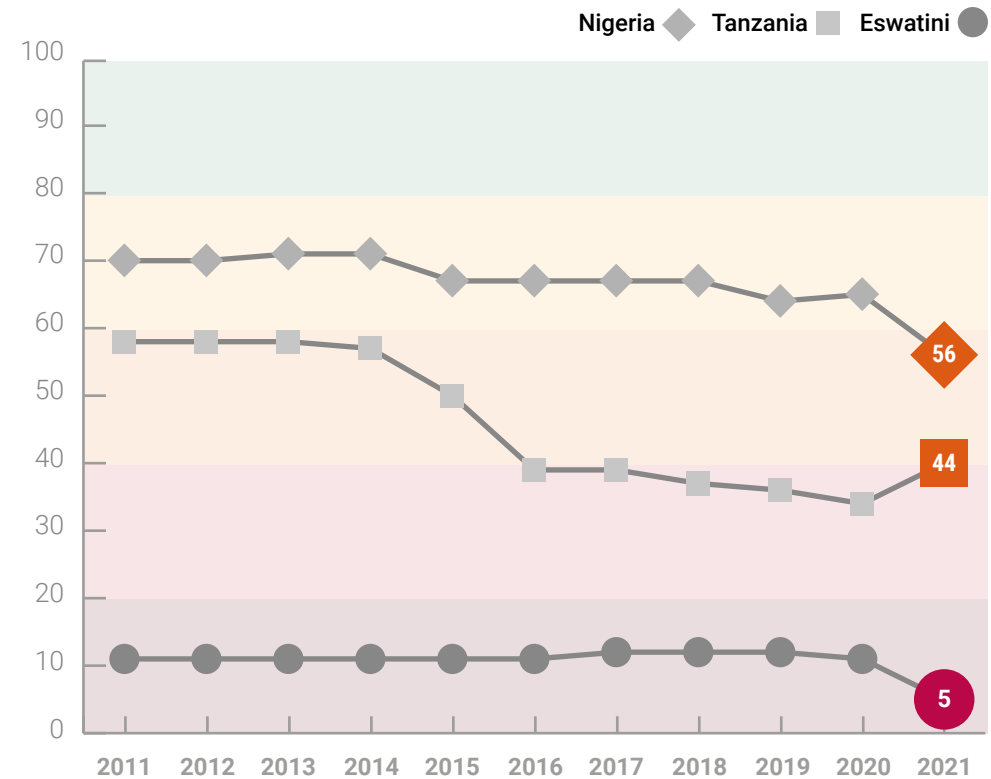


Figure 19: Scores 2011–2021: Nigeria, Tanzania, and Eswatini

## Leaders turn to tech as worrying additions to the autocrat armoury

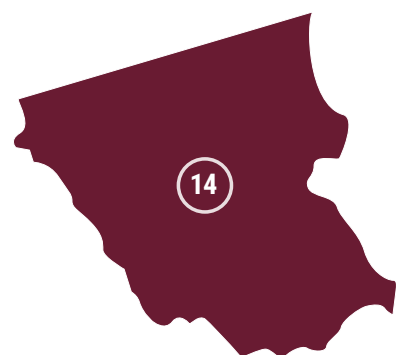
Internet shutdowns are increasingly used by tech-savvy regimes in Africa, proliferating across the region in 2021: seven countries across the globe which had never implemented shutdowns did so last year and six of those were in Africa.

On the night of the elections, Uganda was completely disconnected from the Internet, a shutdown that lasted four full days. This was far from unique: governments continue to shut off or throttle the Internet and mobile services – with shutdowns, throttling, and platform blockings on election day (e.g. in [Chad, Niger, Congo, Zambia](#)) and even in conflict, notably in Ethiopia.

Seven governments in the region also cut mobile Internet during protests. In the context of protest, these shutdowns caused demonstrators to not only lose contact with one another, making organisation more difficult, but also prevented the reporting of human rights violations during protests. In all contexts, it is a blunt and disproportionate measure that carries heavy personal, democratic, and economic costs.

Nigeria entered into a strange form of tit-for-tat after Twitter deleted President Buhari's tweet for violation of community rules. [Authorities suspended Twitter for seven months](#), and only lifted the ban in January 2022, seemingly to avoid sanction from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). [Some mobile providers](#) in Nigeria also blocked specific online news outlets.

# In focus: Sudan



Sudan's military seized power and dissolved the civilian government. Hundreds of thousands took to the streets in protest and were met with live ammunition, deadly violence, and communications blackouts. Sudan's score plunged 10 points, and the country re-entered the **in crisis** category – after just two years of respite during the democratic transition.

**Score:**

**14**

**Status:**

**In crisis**

**Global ranking:**

**129/161**

**Regional ranking:**

**35/42**

**Population:**

**45 million**

**GDP/capita:**

**USD 500**

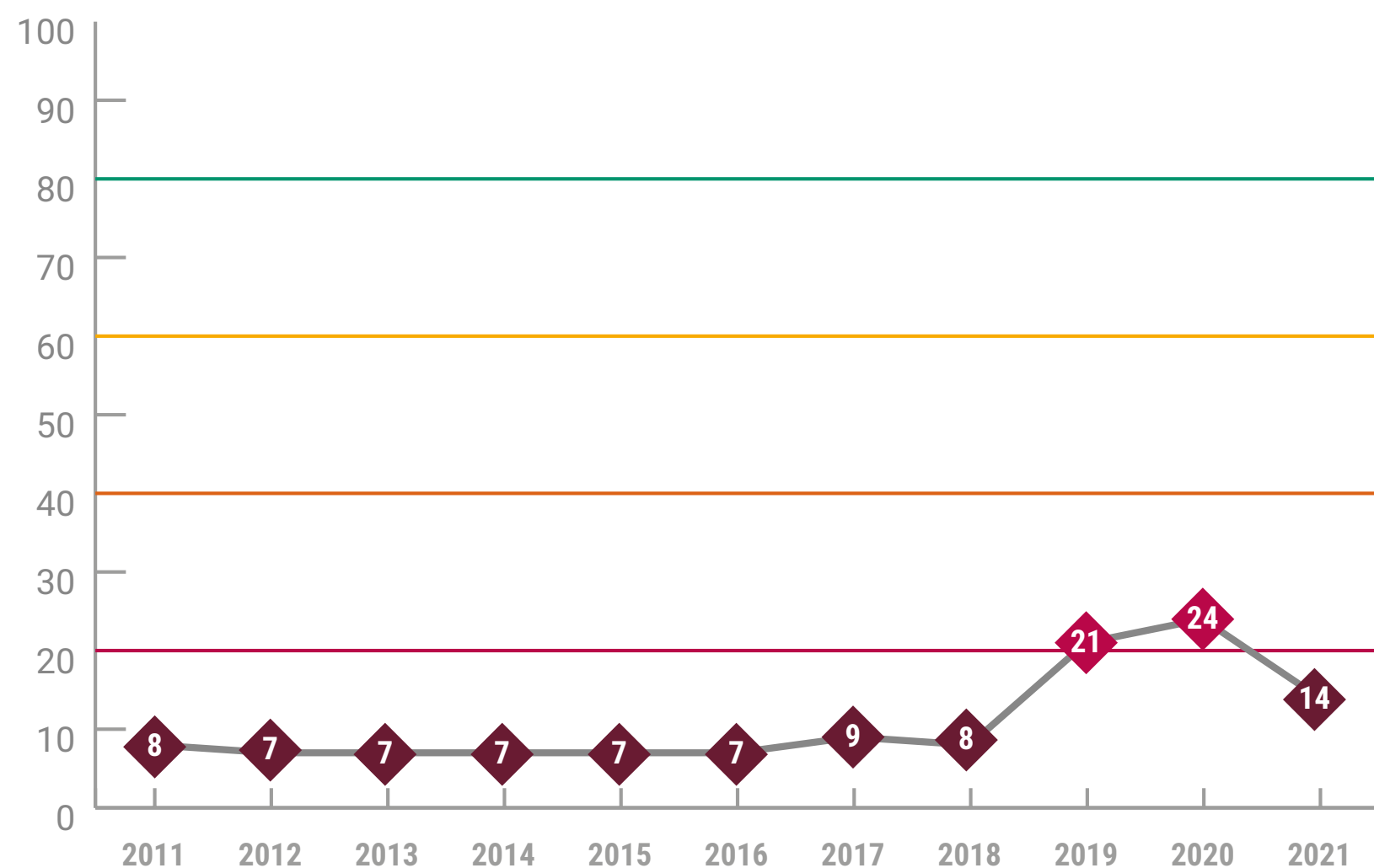


Figure 20: Scores 2011–2021: Sudan

In the wake of the 2019 popular uprising against Omar al-Bashir's three-decade dictatorship, the Sovereign Council was established – a power-sharing agreement between civilian and military leaders meant to guide the country to democracy. The agreement integrated into government the military and security elites who had been [responsible for a series of attacks and massacres](#) against the very protesters who had brought down Bashir, and with whom they were joining in government.

## In 2021, Sudan saw some of the world's biggest indicator-level declines in political killings, civil society organisations repression, and Internet shutdowns.

After two years of shaky reform and ongoing power struggles between the military and civilian wings, calls for the reduction of military power in the country were growing, including calls for the handover of leadership of the Sovereign Council by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan to civilian leadership. There were also calls for the prosecution of those same military leaders for their crimes against citizens (for which they have enjoyed immunity due to their role in the government).

On 25 October, the army seized power, announcing the end of the coalition and declaring a state of emergency.

Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok was put under house arrest, and most of the cabinet was imprisoned. The military soon took over the national broadcaster, as well as [disrupting Internet and mobile connections for weeks at a time](#). Civil society groups and journalists suffered raids, attacks, and arrests, including the [bureau chief of Al Jazeera](#) in the capital city, Khartoum. The streets filled with people protesting, who were met only with lethal violence from the army.

Burhan rose to power under Bashir, and beneath him in the hierarchy is Muhammad Hamdan Dagalo, Head of the Rapid Support Forces – a paramilitary heir to the Janjaweed, which was responsible for the genocidal massacres and violence in Sudan's Darfur region – a conflict that continued to rage through 2021.

In November, the army reinstated the Prime Minister. In a televised ceremony, the Prime Minister signed a new agreement that allowed his release from house arrest, but handed over increased control to the same generals who had ousted him.

The agreement did not defuse the tension, and more pro-democracy protests broke out, rejecting the military's actions. Various branches of the country's sprawling security and military sectors turned live ammunition on protesters, killing more than 50 and injuring hundreds. Two rapes were reported in December.

This coup has elevated the role of the military and security elites in Sudan, consolidating their hold over both political power and resources at the very moment they were due to be transitioning out – and these men are no friends to protest, debate, or transparency. In fact, the empire of military-owned companies and appropriated businesses in Sudan is widely seen as a form of armed kleptocracy.

This shift in the balance of power does not bode well for Sudan's freedoms and human rights – as military coups tend not to – but the violence against the 2021 protests, and also the 2019 protests perpetrated by these same leaders, is deeply concerning, as is the immediate attack on both communications infrastructure and civil society groups by the military.

Though elections are now supposed to take place in 2023 (postponed from this year), Burhan seems to have the power to dismiss the Prime Minister and any of his ministers, while the Sovereign Council has been almost entirely replaced with military officials. Impunity for the crimes committed both historically and during the coup is likely to continue as long as Burhan and Dagalo remain in power.

Protests continued into 2022, and on 2 January, Prime Minister Hamdok resigned.

Chapter 3

# The Americas

Regional score:  
**62**

Regional population:  
**1 billion**

Number of journalists killed:  
**14**

Number of human rights defenders killed:  
**252**

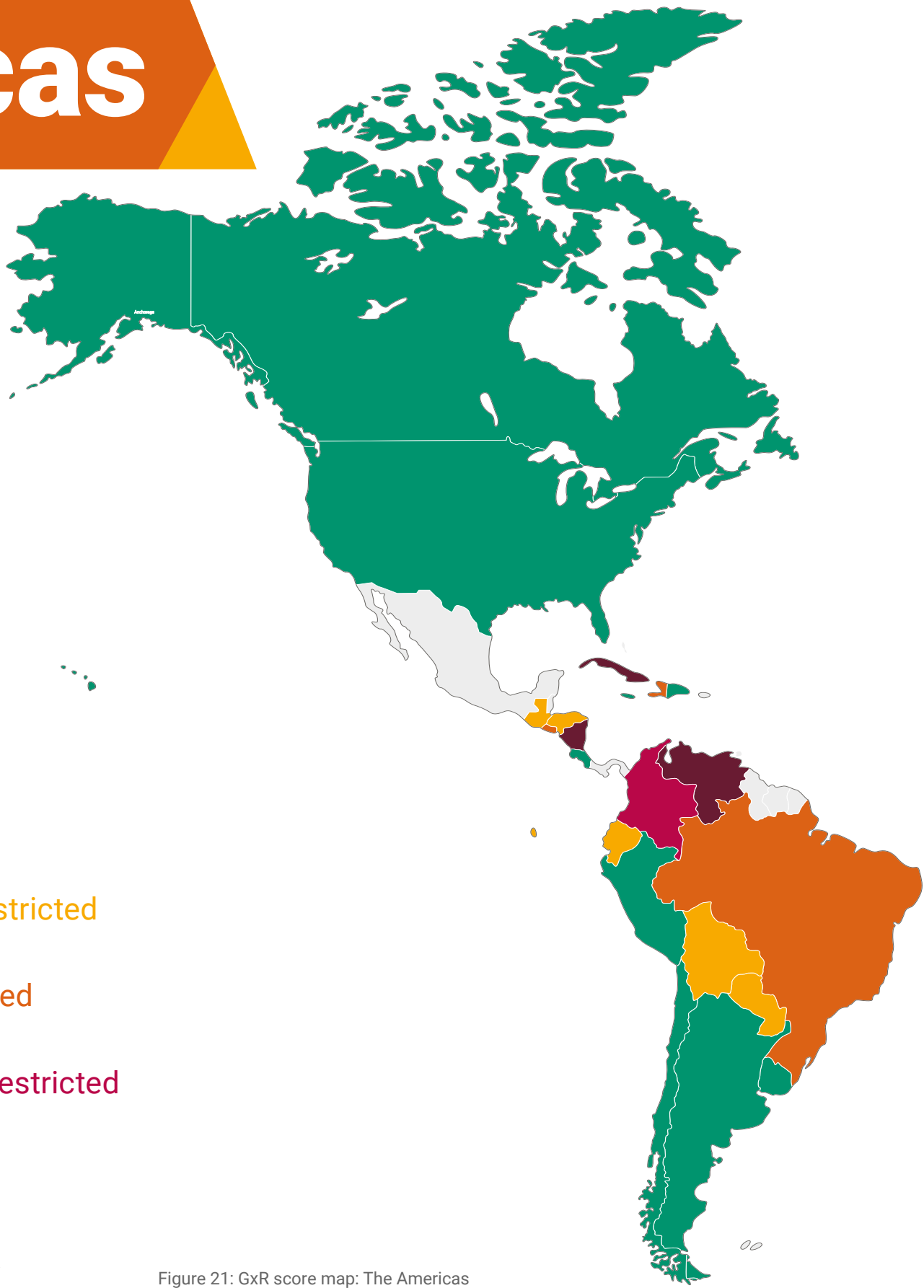


Figure 21: GxR score map: The Americas

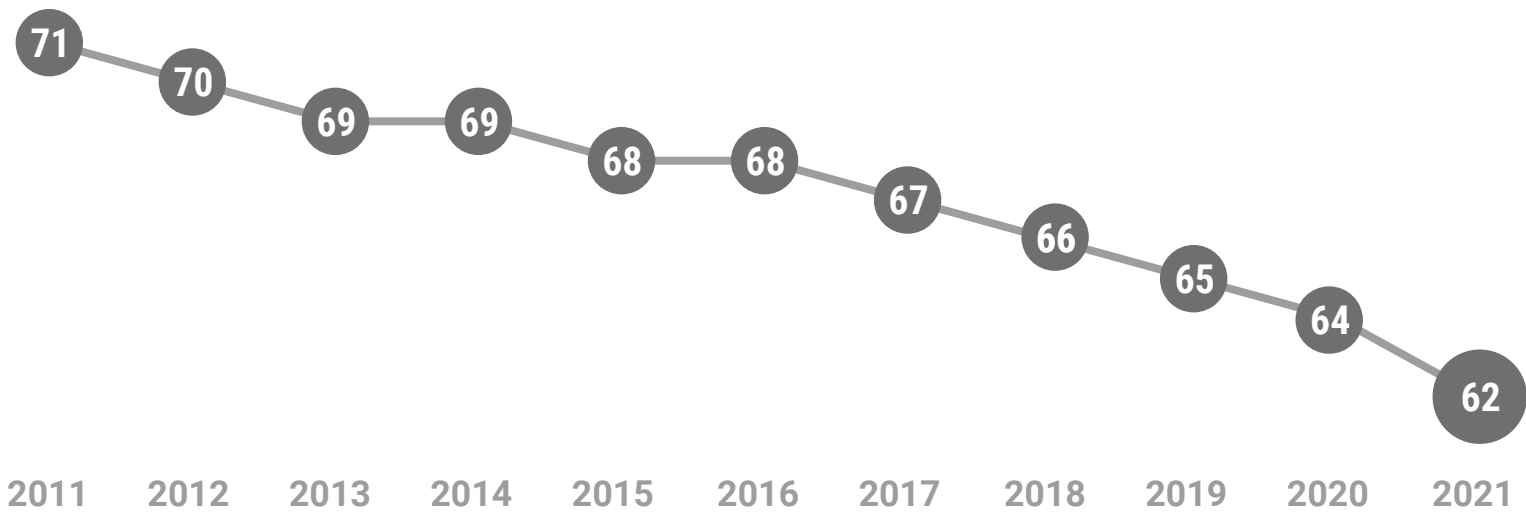


Figure 22: Regional scores, 2011–2021: The Americas

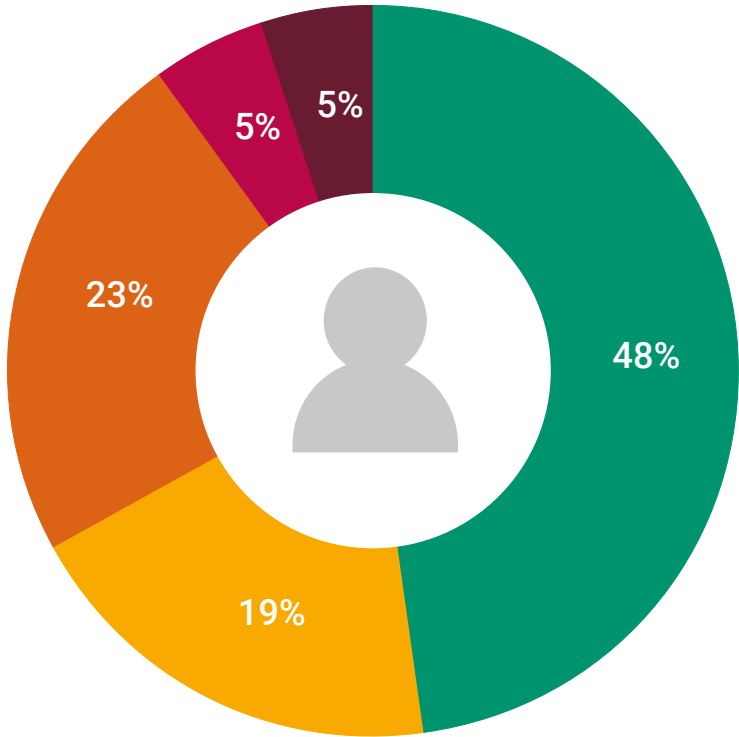


Figure 23: Percentage of population per expression category in 2021: The Americas

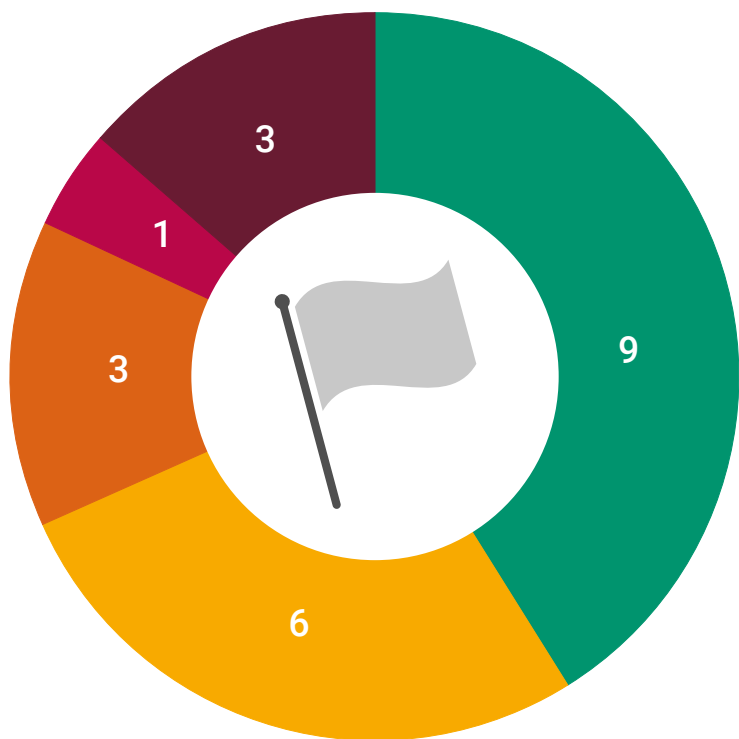


Figure 24: Number of countries per expression category in 2021: The Americas

While 48% of the people in this region live in **open** environments for expression (driven by the populations of the USA and Canada), the autocracies are digging in their heels: Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Cuba scrape the bottom of the scale.

Communicators and activists in Latin America face extreme levels of physical violence and threat: more than 70% of human rights defenders’ murders occurred in The Americas. The three countries with the most murders were all in this region: Colombia, Mexico, and Brazil.

Table 8: Top 5 and bottom 5 country scores in 2021: The Americas

Top		Bottom	
Country	GxR score	Country	GxR score
Canada	91	Cuba	2
Costa Rica	90	Nicaragua	3
Dominican Republic	89	Venezuela	8
Uruguay	87	Colombia	39
Argentina	86	El Salvador	44

Table 9: Top 5 rises and declines in score in 2020–2021, 2016–2021, and 2011–2021: The Americas

Top 5 score rises					
2020–2021		2016–2021		2011–2021	
Bolivia	+13	Dominican Republic	+21	Dominican Republic	+17
		Ecuador	+21	Ecuador	+17
				Canada	+4

Top 5 score declines					
2020–2021		2016–2021		2011–2021	
Colombia	–15	El Salvador	–34	Brazil	–38
El Salvador	–12	Colombia	–32	Nicaragua	–35
Guatemala	–6	Nicaragua	–27	El Salvador	–36
Uruguay	–4	Brazil	–25	Colombia	–29
Nicaragua	–3	Haiti	–10	Venezuela	–21



# Democratically-elected populists drive deterioration in The Americas

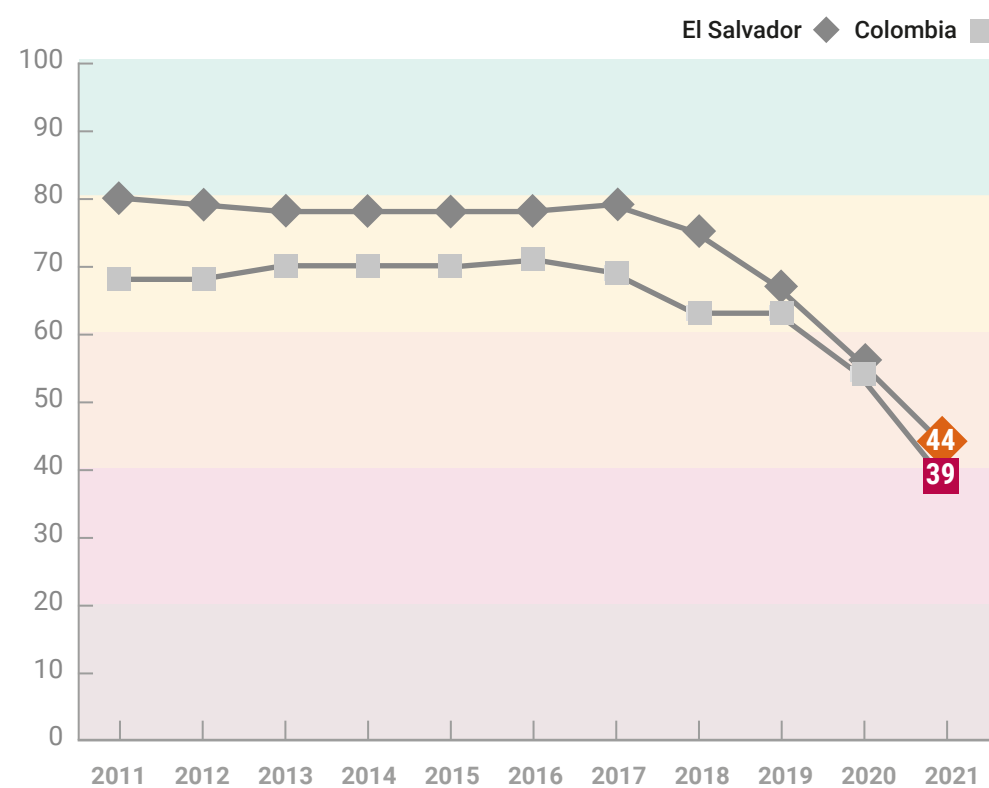


Figure 25: Scores 2011–2021: El Salvador and Colombia

Latin America hosts two of the top five global declines of 2021: Colombia and El Salvador. These are also the only two of the top five not related to the overthrow or collapse of a government system. Brazil is also one of the world's most shocking declines of the last decade, which happened under a democratically-elected leader ([see In focus: Brazil](#)).

Though the declines are not as precipitous as those of Afghanistan, Sudan, and Myanmar, both Colombia and El Salvador saw a consistent decline across all three timeframes: the population of these countries are suffering a sustained, ongoing erosion of their rights to expression and information, often accompanied by state or criminal brutality.

In the context of Latin America's weak state capacity and struggles with the rule of law in the face of powerful organised crime, democratically elected administrations like these can cause serious and immediate harm to human rights. Brazil is another example, and all three espouse right-wing populist politics.

Brazil and El Salvador's leaders have much in common: from animosity towards independent media and the judiciary to a hyper-loyal legion of followers, who attack and harass on command, particularly on social media. Much like Bolsonaro, President Bukele avoids press conferences and uses Twitter to give orders, insult journalists, and [dismiss public authorities](#). Bukele's stigmatisation of media, along with a refusal to provide information, is not a unique case: many high-ranking officials make the work of journalists tougher than ever.

Bukele started his mandate with a cascade of autocratic shifts, by occupying the legislative assembly with the army. He now has a supermajority of allies in the legislature who replaced five Supreme Court judges who had resolved to enable his re-election. El Salvador's regime also used [Pegasus spyware](#) against journalists and NGOs, and then [legalised spying](#) on journalists and civil society through legal reform. Shortly after [a journalistic investigation](#) into a pact between his government and criminal group, the MS-13, Bukele reformed the Penal Code to include [criminalising coverage and expression related to gangs](#).

Colombia's decline has deep roots in its recent civil conflict and ongoing armed violence, but the data shows that the deterioration has accelerated since the arrival of Iván Duque, whose presidency ends in 2022 after a controversial mandate.

## The stakes are unimaginably high for expression and environmental rights

The Americas hold the world's largest remaining rainforest, along with huge natural resources and more than 60% of the world's biodiversity. But climate leadership is faltering: the leaders of the region's two biggest economies – Mexico and Brazil – did not even show up to COP26, the historic UN Climate Change Conference. In 2021, Amazon deforestation reached its highest rate since 2006.

Those who do rally to protect the environment face vast and often lethal challenges. More than 70% of murders of human rights defenders occurred in The Americas – the three countries with the most murders were all in that region: Colombia, Brazil, and Mexico. Of the 358 human rights defenders killed in 2021, 138 were in Colombia – number one in the world and responsible for nearly 40% of the global total.

Environmental rights are the most dangerous to defend: a third of human rights defenders' murders were of environmental, land, and peoples' rights defenders. In a region where both large-scale fossil fuel extraction and renewable energy are actively expanding, high levels of corruption and securitised state response to protest are dangerous for activists. Strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) are also common in the region, particularly from mining companies and other extractive businesses.

The Escazú Agreement entered into force in [April 2021](#), bringing hopes for change. It is the first environmental treaty in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the first to include specific provisions on environmental human rights defenders. However, two of the most dangerous countries for environmental defenders, Brazil and Colombia, who are both signatories, [have yet to ratify the agreement](#). Mexico and Argentina ratified in early 2021.



But it is not just professional activists and campaigners who face repression in The Americas: anyone who takes to the streets to be heard can be subjected to increasingly militarised police forces, who act with near-total impunity.

Colombia's huge anti-government protests, which started in April 2021, suffered both the country's militarised police force and the [notoriously violent anti-riot squadron](#) – both of which are under the Ministry of Defence's mandate. Forty-four civilians were killed during the protest, with 49 reports of sexual violence, and [thousands of registered cases of violence and detention](#). In echoes of Chile's 2019 protests, protesters were shot by 'non-lethal weapons' at close range or face height, [blinding many demonstrators](#).

## Latin America's autocrats are digging in their heels

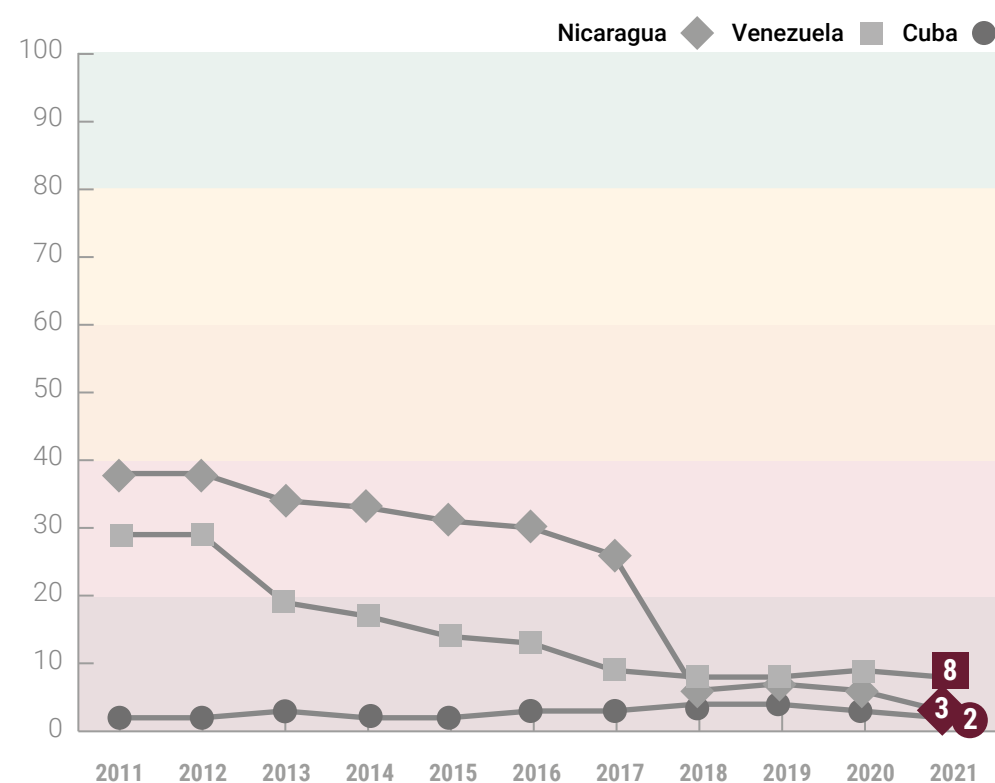


Figure 26: Countries in crisis, 2011–2021: Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Cuba

The three countries at the bottom of the regional rankings are two inveterate dictatorships opposed to freedom of expression, and one relatively new entry: Nicaragua.

Joining the global bottom 10 in 2021, Nicaragua is now in the bottom five countries for seven GxR indicators, and has had the world's biggest drop in the 'arrests for political content' indicator over the last five years.

Nicaragua held elections in November, but not before cracking down even further on dissenting speech and political opposition, and detaining human rights defenders, journalists, and politicians, including seven potential presidential candidates – the culmination of years of tightening repression. [Twenty independent media journalists have disappeared](#) under

President Daniel Ortega, and since the crackdown in 2018, when this new chapter of autocracy began, [at least 120 journalists have fled](#) into exile. Ortega was, unsurprisingly, ushered in for a fourth term – having abolished term limits in 2014.

In the same month, Venezuela held elections, widely considered a farce, given the country's complete lack of political plurality, discussion, and right to protest.

Cuba, whose score has crawled along [the bottom of the GxR scale for decades](#), responded with brutality to a historic protest over a deepening healthcare, economic, and political crisis in July 2021. Authorities [detained more than 1,000 people](#) and sentenced more than 500 [to prison terms of up to 30 years](#). The regime subsequently made [legal reforms](#) increasing sentencing for crimes like espionage, sedition, and association.

## Bolivia bounces back from electoral crisis

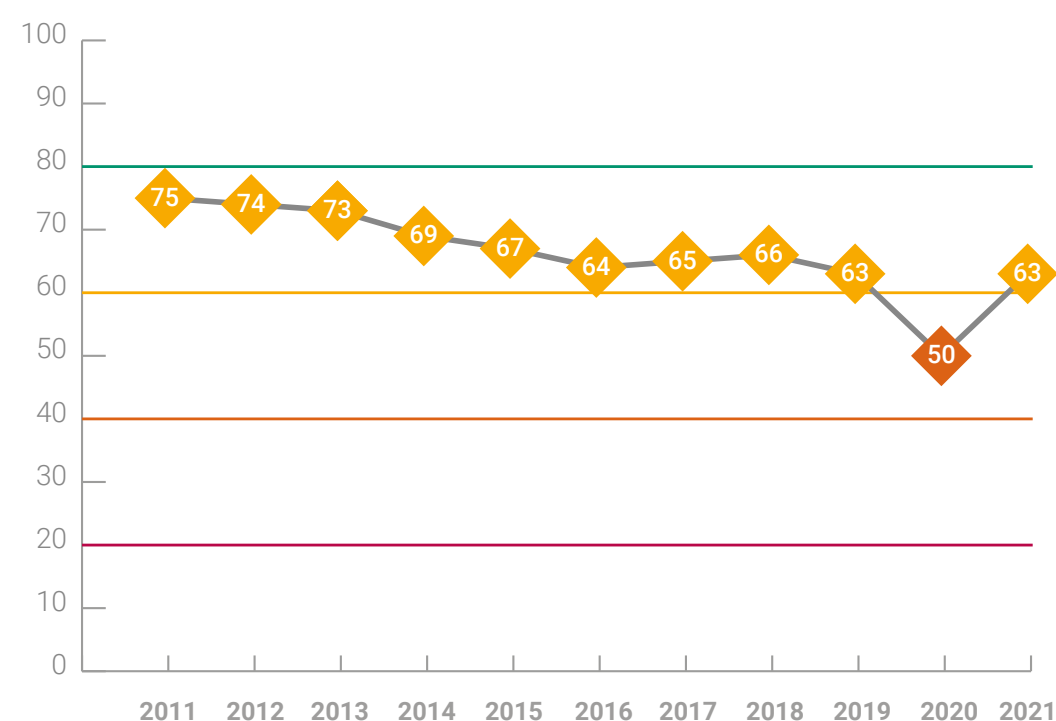


Figure 27: Scores 2011–2021: Bolivia

Bolivia is the only country to see a rise in score between 2020 and 2021 – both in the region and globally – but it is less an advance per se and more a recovery from the democratic crisis which followed the contested election result in 2020, after which incumbent Evo Morales fled the country and an interim government took over.

# In focus: Brazil



Brazil has seen a shocking decline both in actual and relative terms: not only has it dropped from being **open** to **restricted**, but its global standing has seen a huge drop. In 2015, Brazil was ranked **open** and 31st in the world; it is now ranked 89th and has dropped into the **restricted** category.

**Score:**  
**50**  
**Status:**  
**Restricted**  
**Global ranking:**  
**89/161**  
**Regional ranking:**  
**17/22**

**Population:**  
**214 million**  
**GDP/capita:**  
**USD 7,000**

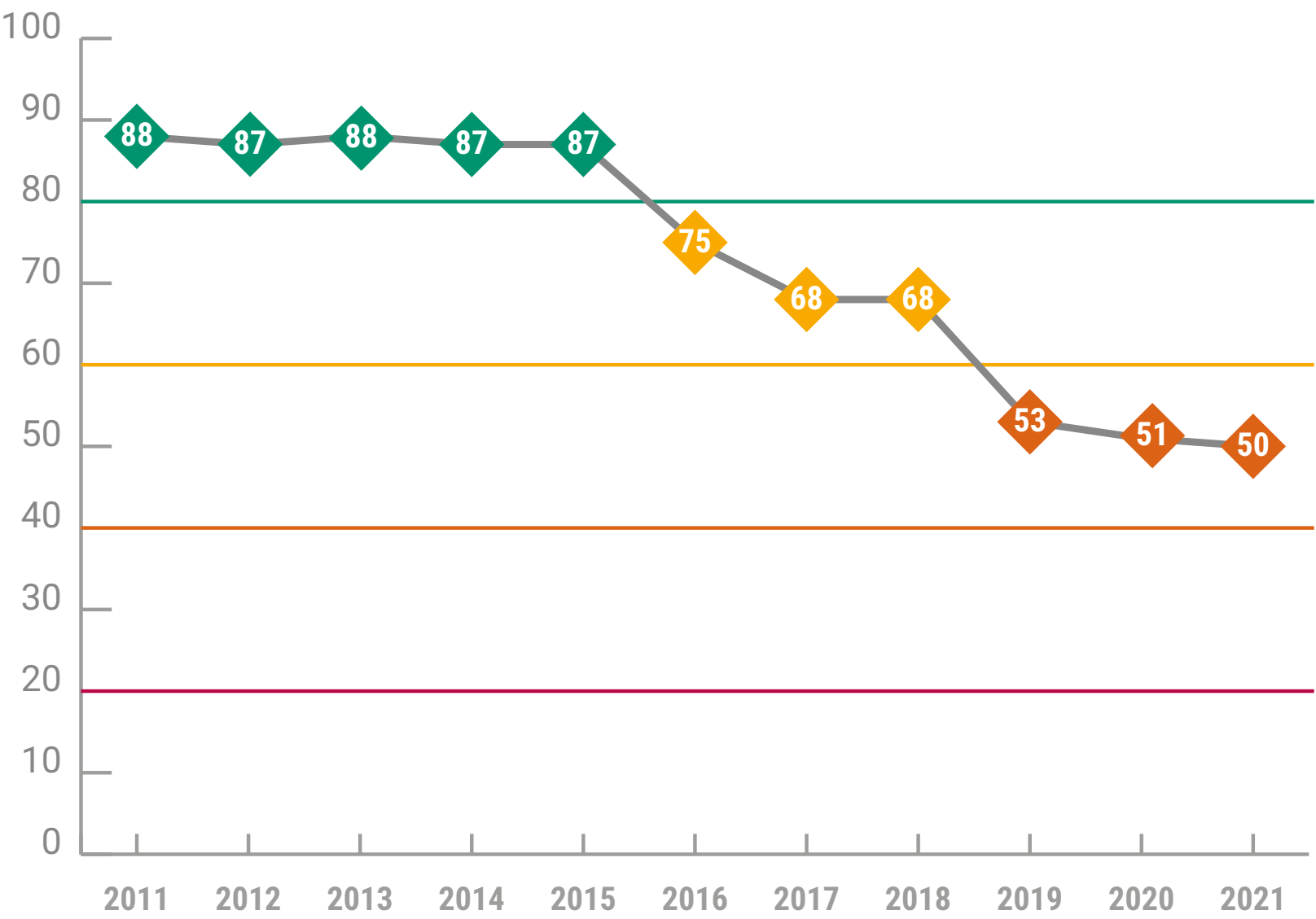


Figure 28: Scores 2011–2021: Brazil

Journalists killed in 2021: 1

Human rights defenders killed in 2021: 27

Attacks on journalists and media workers are alarmingly common. In 2021, the number of attacks on journalists and media outlets was the highest since the 1990s, with 430 attacks last year. The rise in violations of press freedom in Brazil has shown clear correlations with both the scores and the number of attacks, which rose more than 50% in the year of Bolsonaro's election.

The stigmatisation of media and polarisation from the top of Brazil's Government has made it hard for media to do their jobs. When reporting in the field, rather than being protected by wearing media logos, journalists are often specifically picked out, harassed, and attacked for the very markings which should protect them. Online harassment from Bolsonaro and his sons is increasingly influential and deputised – they are [responsible for much of the online harassment](#) suffered by the media.

The hurricane of disinformation, which has flourished online during significant polarisation and the presidency of a man with either a loose grip on or a total disregard for scientific fact, has had devastating effects during the pandemic. In Brazil, 430,000 people died as a result of [denial and disinformation](#), which included Bolsonaro's constant marketing of medications with no proven efficacy against the coronavirus.

Protests, notoriously over-policed in Brazil, are now also over-legislated. The UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to peaceful assembly and of association [expressed serious concern](#), not only about the use of force against protesters, but also about the 20 bills in front of Congress that threaten social movements under the pretext of national security concerns.

Typical of this style of leader, Bolsonaro seeks to bypass institutions – both media and democratic. He favours direct communication via Facebook Lives (during which he regularly broadcasts disinformation) and through Twitter, though he has blocked [around 200 journalists](#), congressional representatives, and NGOs (including Amnesty International), despite sharing official information through those channels.

## Bolsonaro's animosity towards the media is matched only by his hostility towards the judiciary, particularly the Supreme Court – which currently has four investigations open into him.

Justice Alexandre de Moraes is overseeing most of the investigations and has become a particular target of Bolsonaro, from attempts to have him impeached to claims at rallies that "[any decision made by \[him\], this President will no longer obey](#)". Bolsonaro's followers take his word and have called for the closure of the Supreme Court and a return to military rule.

The judiciary has been a huge bolster against the executive and a force in favour of the press. In 2021, the Supreme Court passed down a [key decision](#) to hold the state accountable for injuries sustained by journalists at the hands of security forces while covering protests.

That case related to the blinding of photojournalist Alex Silveira in 2000, but abuses by Brazil's police – particularly the military police – continue. A single police operation in Rio de Janeiro resulted in the massacre of at least 25 people. In the wake of that tragedy, a five-year secrecy order was put on the documents around the operation, preventing justice.

Most dangerously, Bolsonaro has called into question the integrity of the electoral system, baselessly claiming that the last two elections were fraudulent and that the 2022 election, in which he is trying to win a second term, would not happen without reform.

Though Brazil's decline in score has levelled out since 2019, the 2022 presidential elections will be a test of Brazil's democracy. While Bolsonaro continues to make statements like "[Only God can take me from presidency](#)" and commentators draw comparisons to Trump and the Capitol Hill insurrection, 2022 may reveal how much has been eroded during the mandate of Jair Bolsonaro.

# In focus: Mexico



**Population:**  
**129 million**  
**GDP/capita:**  
**USD 8,000**

**Note:** Mexico does not have a score or a place in the rankings. ARTICLE 19 Mexico has its own methodology for tracking and measuring the state of freedom of expression in the country. This chapter is an adaptation of ARTICLE 19’s [Annual Report on the State of Freedom of Expression in Mexico](#).

Nine journalists were killed in Mexico in 2021, but by mid-May 2022, [that number had already been surpassed](#).

Violence against journalists in Mexico remains appallingly high, with the numbers of journalists killed rivalling those of countries in entrenched and bloody civil conflicts, as the levels of violence against communicators have done for years. Mexico’s levels of overall violence [rose in 2021](#), compared to an active war zone. Civilian targeting also increased, and the official number of disappeared persons has passed a harrowing 100,000.

## Journalists murdered in relation to this work in 2021: 7

- There were 644 attacks on the Mexican Press in 2021; 43% involved public authorities
- 98% of crimes against journalists remain unpunished. Since the creation of the Special Prosecutor for Crimes against Freedom of Expression (FEADLE), there have only been 28 convictions from 1,469 investigations.
- A further 65 journalists went missing
- Mexican state authorities were linked to two out of every five attacks against the press in 2021
- 44% of aggressions against the press related to coverage of corruption and politics, and a further 24% related to security and justice, the majority of which were carried out by organised crime.
- 3 journalists or media outlets were sued per month in 2021
- [42](#) human rights defenders were murdered in 2021: the 2nd highest rate in the world

The crisis is deepening. In 2021, for the first time, ARTICLE 19 Mexico registered at least one attack against the press in every Mexican state. Nearly half of the attacks against the press happened in five states: Mexico City, Guerrero, Puebla, Baja California, and Yucatán. Protection measures are not working: seven journalists who were protected under the Federal Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists were killed between 2018 and 2021.

The trends which emerged with Andrés Manuel López Obrador's (AMLO) presidency were consolidated in 2021: official disinformation, the concentration of discursive power in the hands of the President himself, and the restriction of the right to information via the closure and dysfunction of formal mechanisms.

Mexico's President continues to lie, and broadcasts directly to millions of citizens through his 'morning conferences' via social media platforms. Verificado found, for the third year running, that 40% of the President's statements were untrue in 2021.

In June 2021, a worrying development emerged: a new segment of the morning conferences accusing journalists and communicators themselves of lying to the public – named 'The who's who of lies'. This new segment was considered sufficiently serious an attack on the plurality of opinion that the InterAmerican Commission on Human Rights directly asked the President to reconsider it.

This is just one of the many tactics of the current government for stigmatising the press and undermining criticism: the executive branch of government publicly denigrated the press 71 times during 2021, dismissing them as *fifís*, *chayoteros*, and *vendidos*. The use of these insults by government and state agents creates a permissive environment for insults and the harassment of journalists, which is a growing trend, particularly online, where political polarisation, often marked by anti-media sentiments, is particularly extreme. This kind of discourse further precludes the possibility of serious discussions around press protection, which is more urgent than ever.

Journalists are not just routinely physically and verbally attacked in Mexico; they also suffer judicial harassment regularly. On average three journalists or media outlets were sued per month in 2021.

In July 2021, it was discovered that of the 50,000 phone numbers which were potential targets of Pegasus, [more than 15,000 had a Mexican country code](#), including human rights defenders, relatives of the 43 students from Ayotzinapa Rural School who were disappeared and were then murdered in 2014, researchers from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and more than 25 journalists. The threat that this form of surveillance poses is far from abstract: in 2017, journalist Cecilio Pineda Brito was killed just a few weeks after being targeted by Pegasus.

Militarisation marches onwards in Mexico under AMLO, with increasing resources now under the control of the military, who are deployed for law enforcement and customs, and managing immigration, social programmes, and even the operation of megaprojects and infrastructure.

Faced with a military that is not only opaque and unaccountable but also regaining power and resources in Mexico, the right to truth in Mexico is an ongoing battle, with emblematic cases such as the forced disappearance of 43 students from Ayotzinapa still marked by impunity.

The increasing militarisation of public life under AMLO bodes badly for freedom of expression in the country, not only taking over infrastructure that should be administered by civilian institutions, but also echoing a history of human rights violations by the armed forces against citizens, which directly counters the guarantee of non-repetition.



# Chapter 4

## Asia and the Pacific

Regional score:

42

Regional population:

4.2 billion

Number of journalists killed:

23

Number of human rights defenders killed:

79

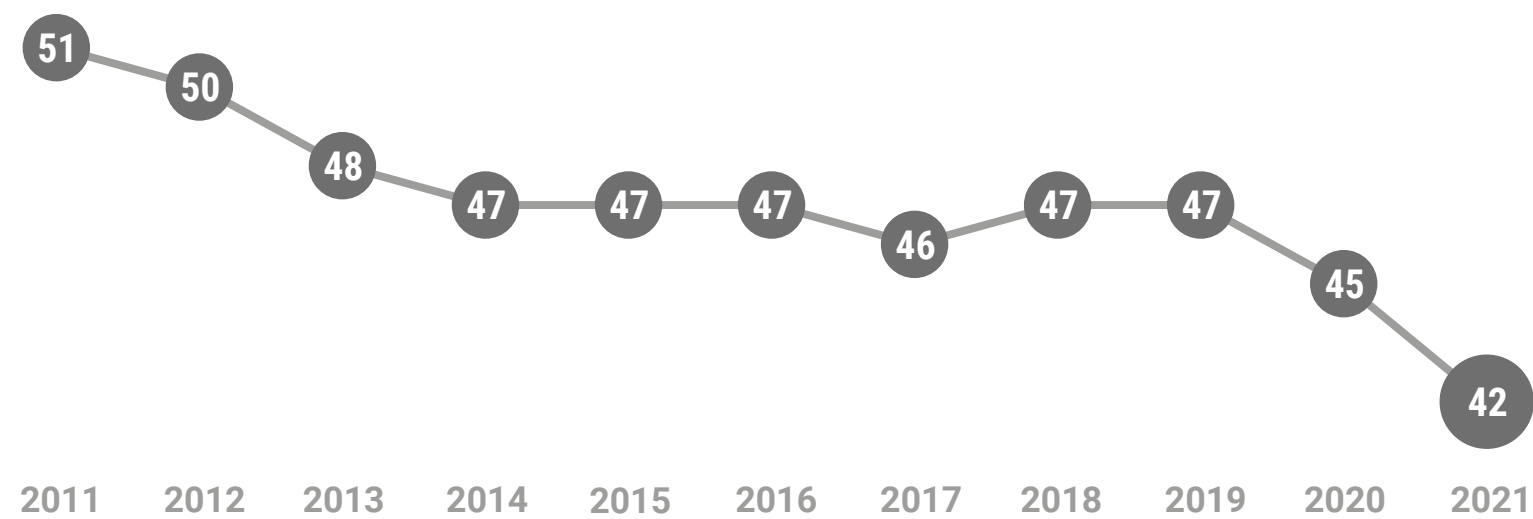
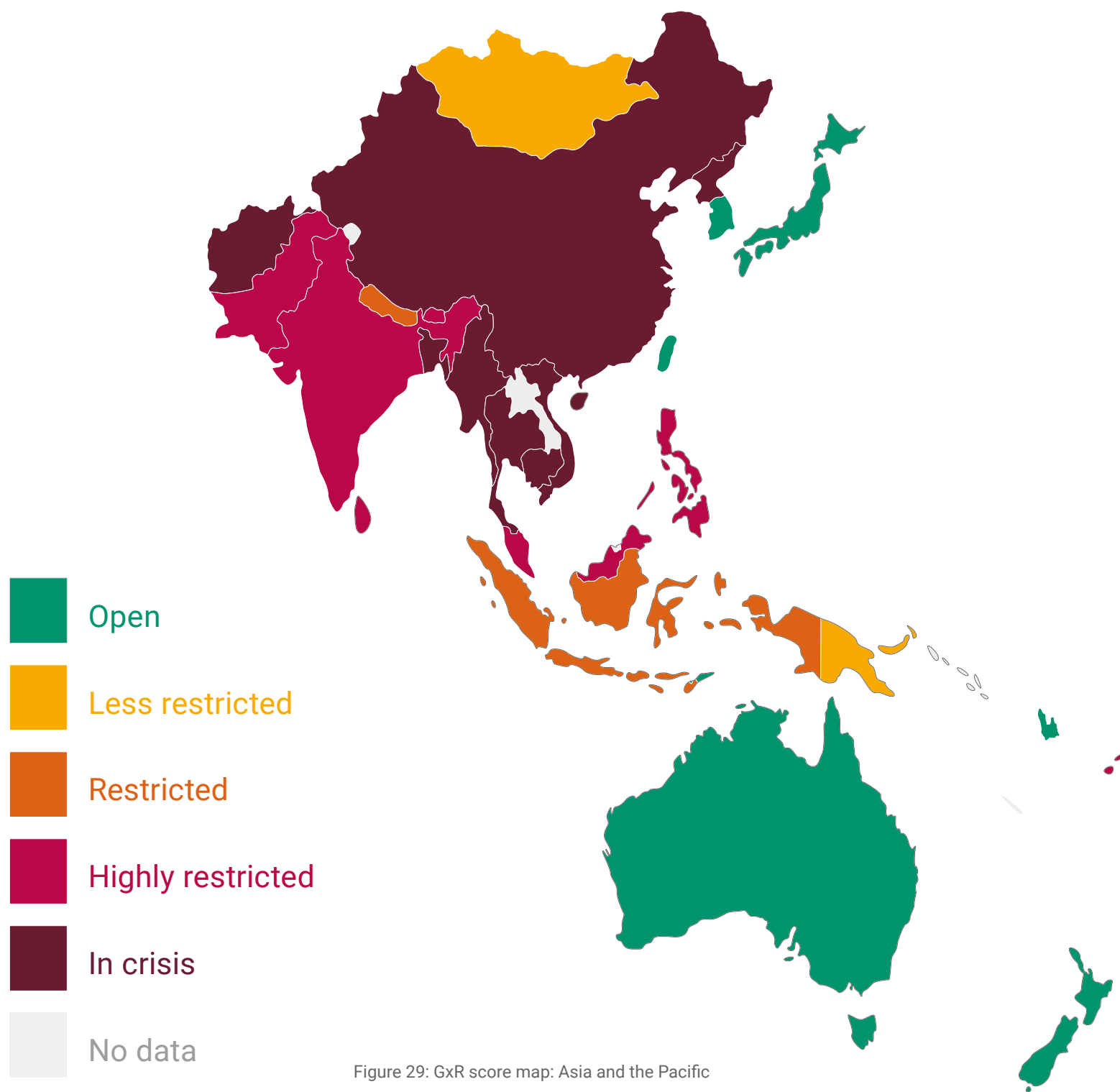


Figure 30: Regional scores, 2011–2021: Asia and the Pacific

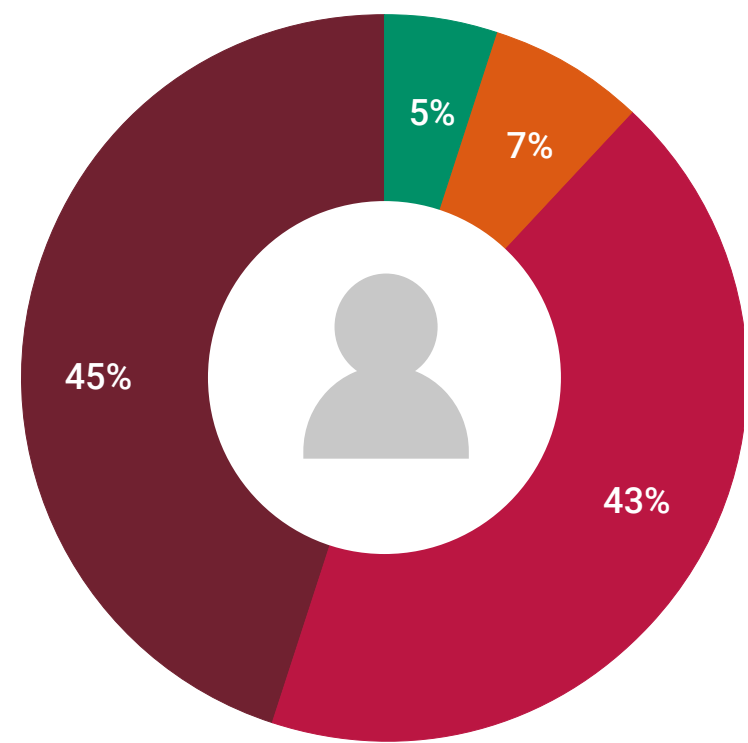


Figure 31: Percentage of population per expression category in 2021: Asia and the Pacific

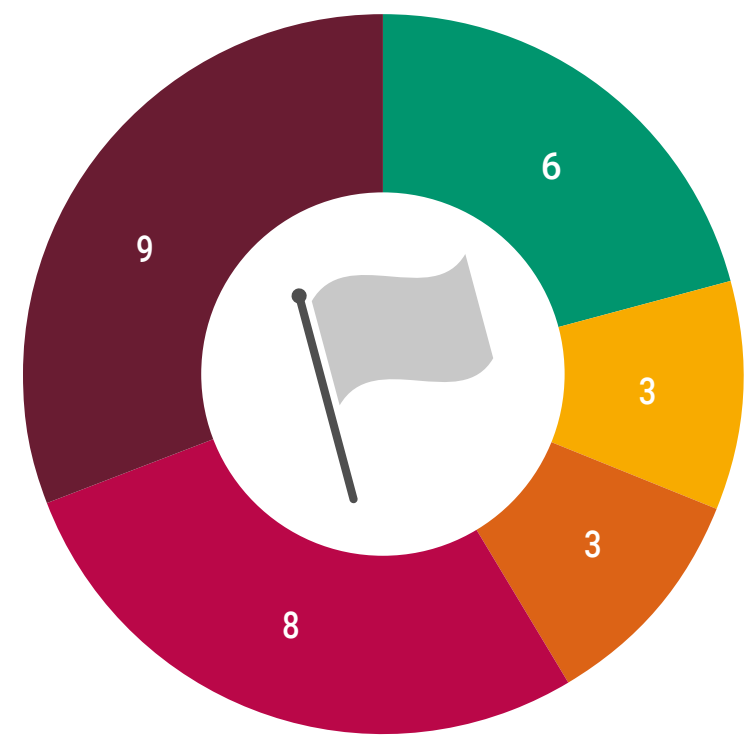


Figure 32: Number of countries per expression category in 2021: Asia and the Pacific

Two of the most dramatic one-year score-drops in the history of this data occurred in this region in 2021. A military coup in Myanmar and the Taliban retaking control in Afghanistan were followed by immediate and severe restriction of the environment for freedom of expression by the new regimes.

Nearly 90% of the region's population live in **highly restricted** or **in crisis** environments. In 2011, countries in the **less restricted** category (28%) dominated the region. There are now only three countries in that category, holding less than 1% of the population. The **highly restricted** category has grown from 7% of the population to 43%, while the population **in crisis** has averaged 42% across the decade (see Tables 10 and 11 in [Annex 2](#)).

Table 10: Top 5 and bottom 5 country scores in 2020: Asia and the Pacific

Top		Bottom	
Country	GxR score	Country	GxR score
New Zealand	91	North Korea	0
Japan	86	China	2
Vanuatu	85	Burma/Myanmar	7
Australia	84	Cambodia	9
South Korea	83	Afghanistan	11

Table 11: Top 5 rises and declines in score in 2020–2021, 2016–2021, and 2011–2021: Asia and the Pacific

Top 5 score rises				
2020–2021		2016–2021		2011–2021
None	Maldives	+35	Fiji	+19
	South Korea	+17	South Korea	+13
	Malaysia	+10	Malaysia	+9
	Thailand	+5	Sri Lanka	+7

Top 5 score declines					
2020–2021		2016–2021		2011–2021	
Afghanistan	–38	Hong Kong	–43	Hong Kong	–58
Myanmar	–34	Afghanistan	–37	Afghanistan	–40
Hong Kong	–10	Myanmar	–28	India	–37
Sri Lanka	–6	Sri Lanka	–27	Philippines	–29
New Zealand	–3	Philippines	–14	Thailand	–23

# Historic declines, militarisation, and brutal rollbacks on human rights gains

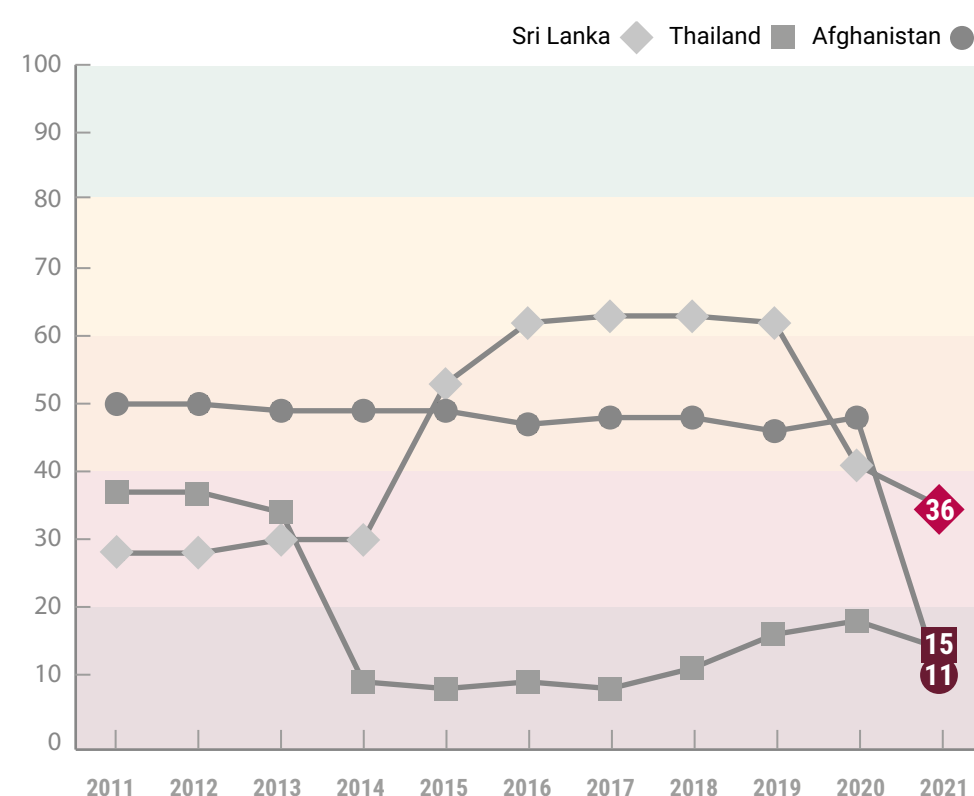


Figure 33: Scores 2011–2021: Sri Lanka, Thailand, Afghanistan

Afghanistan and Myanmar ([see In focus: Myanmar](#)) saw their democratic governments overthrown and a plummeting environment for information, expression, and discussion, with hundreds of activists and protesters arrested, and live ammunition fired at those who dared to dissent.

In Afghanistan, the Taliban swept back into power in August 2021, two decades after US forces toppled their rule. The Taliban enforced hard-line Sharia rule, brutally suppressing women's rights, including the denial of education, and even freedom of movement. [TV, music, and cinema were also banned.](#)

As they returned to power, media freedoms and women's rights – moderate achievements under the former regime – were the first targets. Seventy per cent of the country's media outlets closed, more than 6,000 journalists were without work, and four of every five women journalists lost their jobs. The level of fear and self-censorship under which the remaining outlets and journalists are working cannot be measured, but a free and functional media cannot operate in an environment like Afghanistan's new political landscape.

Security forces and military presence in civilian life augur badly for expression. Sri Lanka saw a dramatic decline after the return to power of the Rajapaksa dynasty in 2019 in the wake of the Easter Sunday terrorist attacks, with Gotabaya Rajapaksa trading his military strongman image to win the Presidency. The country fell nearly 30 points and two categories in two years. It is now considered **highly restricted**.

Using [national security as a framework](#) to respond to dissent, the pandemic, and governance, has accelerated militarisation. Surveillance has increased, civil society are harassed and documented, and minority groups are more and more marginalised. However, Rajapaksa and his brother, who has held both president and prime minister roles as well as being considered culpable for war crimes during the civil war, are [facing the consequences](#) of poor governance: an economy in ruin, a huge loan default, and island-wide protests calling for their removal from power in 2022.

## Lawfare silences voices across the region with nationalist rhetoric and stigmatisation of communicators and activists alike

South-East Asia has seen a generalised crackdown on dissenting voices. Vietnam, Malaysia, and Cambodia continue to harass, sue, and imprison activists at alarming rates. Stigmatisation creates a permissive environment for attacks against them.

In the Philippines – a **highly restricted** environment – activists continued to be [vilified](#) and 'red-tagged' (labelled as communists or terrorists). In March, security forces killed nine people and arrested six others in [simultaneous raids against 'red-tagged' groups](#).

Throughout 2021, regimes continued to prosecute anyone who dared criticise the Covid-19 response. Bangladesh went as far as to [charge reporter Rozina Islam](#) under the Official Secrets Act for exposing government corruption and mismanagement of the pandemic.

## Low barriers to legislation, and lacking oversight, consultation, or participatory processes make it easy for authoritarian leaders to codify their attitudes.

A raft of new and concerning legislation appeared in 2021, many of which limited freedoms on the grounds of national security and anti-terrorism. Some of these laws are written in such an open, vague manner that they are only one step up from arbitrary detention – a thin veneer of legality on a surging regional attempt to silence dissent.

Singapore's [‘foreign interference’ law](#) joins a global trend (from Venezuela to Russia) of claiming national interests as a pretext for censorship of content, demanding blocks on sites that ‘endangered national security’. These kinds of laws bind media and NGOs in red tape and block them from funding.

Malaysia bolstered its legal arsenal during the Covid-19 pandemic by introducing a [‘fake news’ ordinance](#), operational under the country’s proclamation of emergency. Meanwhile, the government continued to use the Communications and Multimedia Act to restrict freedom of expression throughout 2021, including against [two prominent satirical cartoonist](#). These sorts of silencing have been a feature of the current regime’s [first year in government](#), which has also cracked down on [peaceful protest and civil society](#).

Taking online control to the infrastructural level, Cambodia’s Prime Minister Hun Sen [signed the law establishing the ‘National Internet Gateway’](#), which requires all Internet traffic to be routed through and monitored by a state-controlled entry point before it reaches users. This would supercharge the government’s powers to block, disconnect, and surveil on vague grounds including safety, economy, order, dignity, and culture. [This is the latest step in a marked decline](#), dropping into crisis status in 2016, with the opposition party dissolved in 2017 and mass trials against hundreds of politicians and human rights defenders in 2021.

As well as new laws, tried and tested repressive laws continued to cause serious problems to anyone trying to express themselves – either in the streets or online. Many ordinary citizens find themselves on trial just for posting online – in Vietnam there was a spike in incarceration of people for social media posts under 2020’s fake news law in the [lead-up to the communist party’s leadership selection](#) congress.

Thailand’s pro-democracy movement came under intensified attack as protests [continued into 2021](#): the Prime Minister ordered authorities to use [‘all laws and all articles’](#) against protesters. As well as brutal use of force, [more than a hundred people faced prosecution](#) under the revived *lese majesté* laws – on which there had been a moratorium for years. The [longest sentence on record](#) – 87 years in prison – was handed down to Anchan Preeert, a retired civil servant who had re-posted video clips critical of the monarchy. She had already been held in pre-trial detention for nearly four years.

The abusive use of the notorious Digital Security Act in Bangladesh continues: 443 people were imprisoned under the Act – mostly under the ‘false information’ provision – a significant rise compared to 2020.

In February 2021, the death of Bangladeshi writer Mushtaq Ahmed in prison during judicial custody sparked fresh protests against the act – Ahmed was arrested in May 2020 and charged with ‘tarnishing the image of the nation’ and ‘creating hostility, hatred, and adversity’ – all offences under the Digital Security Act. However, in early 2022, a minister publicly recognised that the provisions were being abused.

Ahmed was reportedly tortured by the Rapid Action Battalion, a notorious anti-terror unit under investigation for [enforced disappearances on a mass scale](#). Between December 2021 and February 2022, the homes of at least 10 relatives of forcibly disappeared individuals were raided late at night by the same unit, which routinely harass human rights defenders and families of activists.

# China marches onwards at rock bottom, with effects on freedom of expression further afield

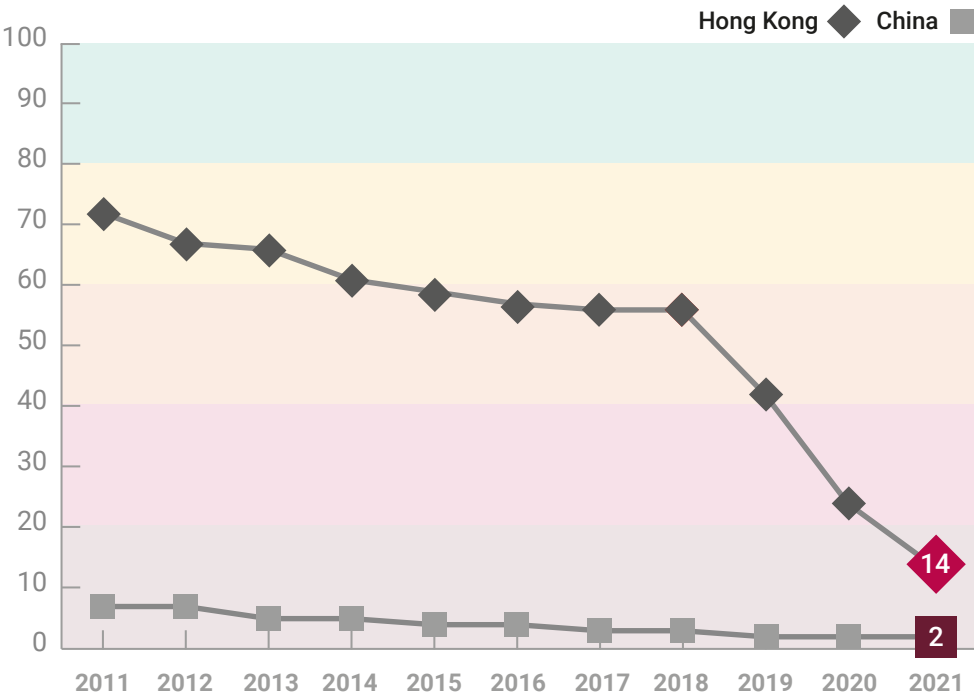


Figure 34: Scores 2011–2021: Hong Kong and China

China’s economic and political influence in the region and beyond has continued to grow as a result of foreign investment, trade, and vaccination diplomacy.

Hong Kong is the most acute representation of China’s influence. The National Security Law, a [‘blueprint for authoritarianism’](#) imposed in 2020, was considered a threat to freedom in Hong Kong, but 2021 has shown how this single law has been [catastrophic for association, civil society, and debate](#). Around 150 people were arrested in its first year in force.

The law imposed conveniently broad and vaguely defined criminalisation of secession, subversion, terrorism, and collusion with foreign forces, and carries a maximum penalty of life imprisonment. Setting the tone, the first conviction under the law was Tong Ying-kit, who had ridden a motorbike with a flag showing a protest slogan.

At least 50 organisations, including unions, had to disband, dozens of opposition party members were arrested, and independent newspaper [Apple Daily](#) was forced to close after a raid in June by hundreds of police officers.

Initiatives such as ‘Going Out’ and ‘Belt and Road’ have massively increased China’s foreign direct investment: with that increase has come a [marked increase in reports of social, environmental, and human rights violations](#). Between 2013 and 2020, there were about 700 allegations of human rights abuse linked to Chinese businesses abroad – many in metals, mining, and construction projects. Issues which feature frequently include protests, arbitrary detentions, Indigenous Peoples’ rights, beatings and violence, security issues and conflict zones, and as well as safety and labour issues – all marked by a lack of transparency.

# In focus: Myanmar



Myanmar’s slow march to democracy has been brutally reversed, with the second largest drop ever seen in this data set. A military coup and brutal violence against those who speak out against it mean the country has plummeted into crisis – dropping two categories and 34 points in just one year.

**Score:**  
**7**

**Status:**  
**In crisis**

**Global ranking:**  
**140/161**

**Regional ranking:**  
**27/29**

**Population:**  
**55 million**

**GDP/capita:**  
**USD 1,000**

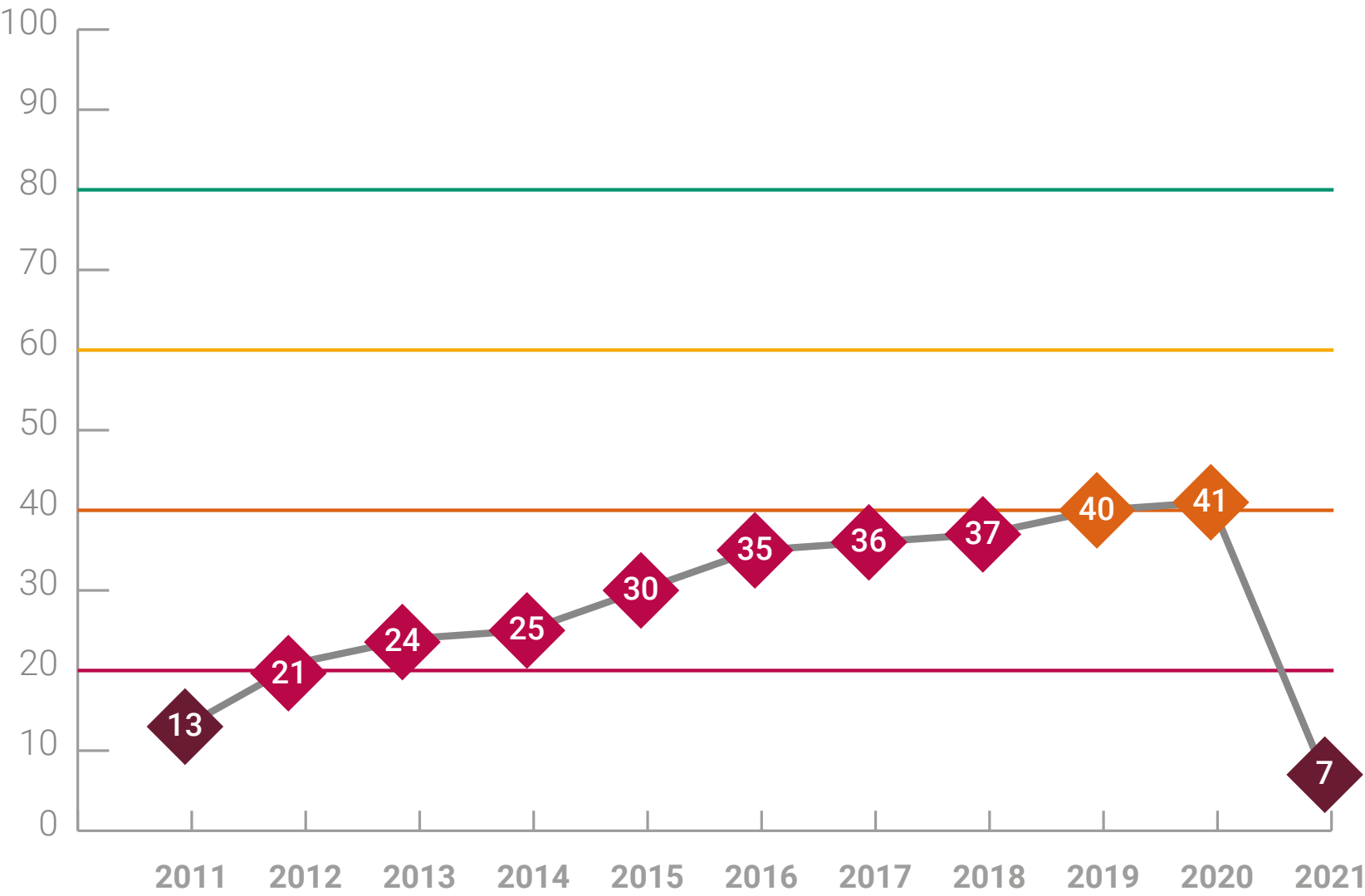


Figure 35: Score 2011–2021: Myanmar

**1,500** killed by the junta at the time of writing

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**10,700** political prisoners at the time of writing



A decade ago, to the surprise of many, generals took the first steps towards a democratic transition, having held power for nearly half a century – decades characterised by the brutal suppression of democratic activism.

Known as the ‘Tatmadaw’, Myanmar’s military allowed democratic elections with the full participation of political parties such as the National League for Democracy, while retaining much of its power under a constitution it drew up.

But after a November 2020 election in which the National League for Democracy won around [80% of seats with a high turn-out](#), the military claimed the elections had been fraudulent.

On 1 February, [Myanmar’s army toppled the government](#), arrested its leader, and declared a state of emergency. Soldiers were posted in the streets, the Internet was disconnected, and hundreds of politicians were put under house arrest. The military formed a junta to rule the country under a manufactured and indefinite ‘state of emergency’.

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**Myanmar is now in the global bottom 5 scores for seven indicators, including freedom of discussion, government censorship, and arrests for political content.**

**The country also saw the world’s steepest declines in 2021 in its scores for political killing, harassment of journalists, freedom of assembly, government censorship, and repression of NGOs.**

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Popular resistance was immediate and powerful: a widespread civil disobedience movement saw thousands of civil servants, doctors, teachers, and nurses strike, leading the military to implement new crimes designed to crush acts of resistance.

People took to the streets in huge numbers and were met with brutality and lethal force, as military officers [fired into the crowds](#) demonstrating against military rule. In the first month after the coup, the military killed nearly 50 protesters, despite [more than 98%](#) of the protests being peaceful. The military ordered martial law in several townships across the country,

allowing military tribunals to hear civilian cases and order the death penalty for crimes not normally considered for capital punishment.

The military has employed tried and tested repressive techniques to suppress expression, including revoking media licences, [arresting reporters](#), and even a televised ‘wanted list’ broadcast every evening and printed in newspapers – at least [19 journalists have been featured in these lists](#) and at least 150 journalists have been [arrested since the coup](#).

At the end of 2021, an estimated [10,000 people had been arrested](#), and around 7,500 remained behind bars. Measures taken by the junta have led to extreme deterioration in civic space, leading many civil society organisations to close offices and their staff to go into hiding or flee the country.

Across the country, the People’s Defence Forces began an armed resistance, targeting military personnel and infrastructure. In many of the areas with strong resistance, the military responded with indiscriminate attacks and acts amounting to crimes against humanity, including murder, torture, imprisonment, enforced disappearance, and rape.

This may have been the most digital-savvy coup in history. Plunging the country [into a communications blackhole](#), the junta temporarily shut down the Internet, mobile phone networks, social media access, and radio and TV channels. They also launched assaults on already-threadbare online protections to throttle expression and information sharing, with retaliation for online posts and virtual private network (VPN) use.

These blackouts intensified in areas of conflict, facilitating the concealment of crimes against humanity. During the blackout, people could not seek help, communicate with family, organise, or report human rights abuses.

The military is actively considering additional repressive measures, such as those contained in a proposed [Cybersecurity Law](#), to fortify censorship controls.

The Tatmadaw have also moved to take greater [control over telecommunications operators](#), having privately approved the sale of Telenor Myanmar to M1 Group and military-linked Shwe Byain Phyu Group. The sale was completed in March 2021, meaning three of the four telecommunications providers operating in Myanmar are directly controlled by the junta. Given reports of the deployment of more sophisticated surveillance technology, the sale is likely to allow the military to escalate its targeting of those who oppose it.

In the space of just one year, the military has gained near-absolute control of the digital space.

# Chapter 5

## Europe and Central Asia

Regional score:

68

Regional population:

924 million

Number of  
journalists killed:

6

Number of human rights  
defenders killed:

2



Figure 36: GxR score map: Europe and Central Asia

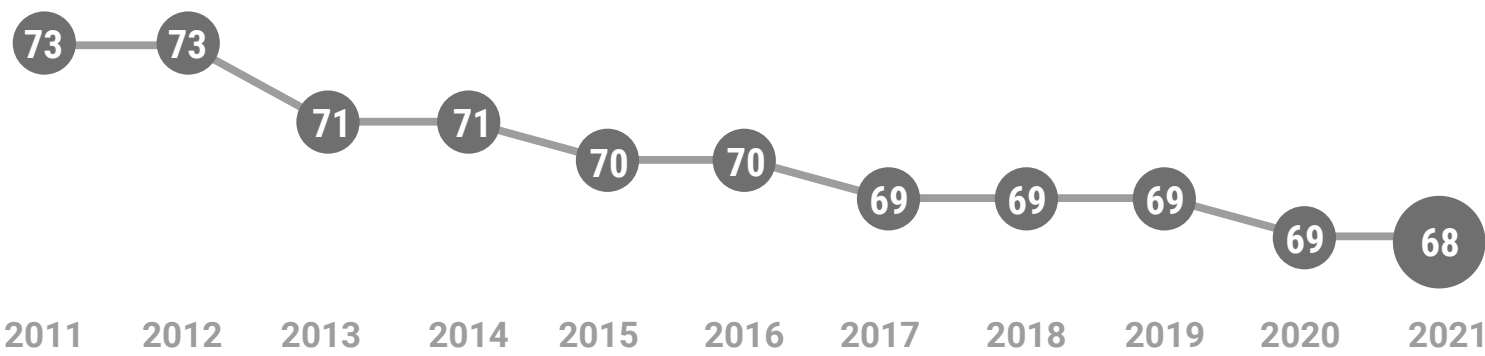
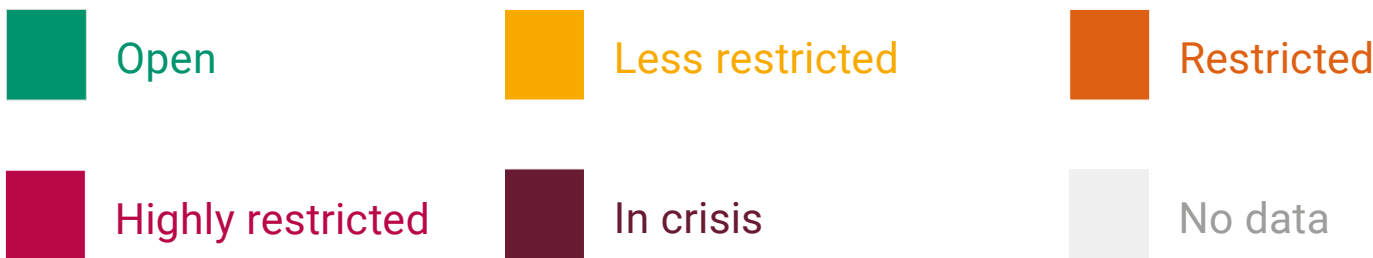


Figure 37: Regional scores, 2011–2021: Europe and Central Asia

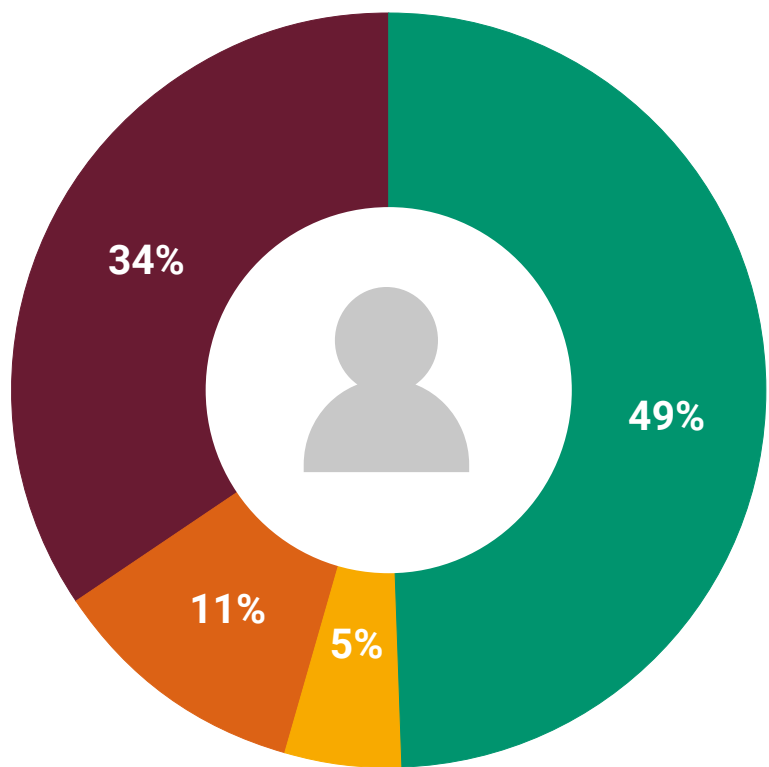


Figure 38: Percentage of population per expression category in 2021: Europe and Central Asia

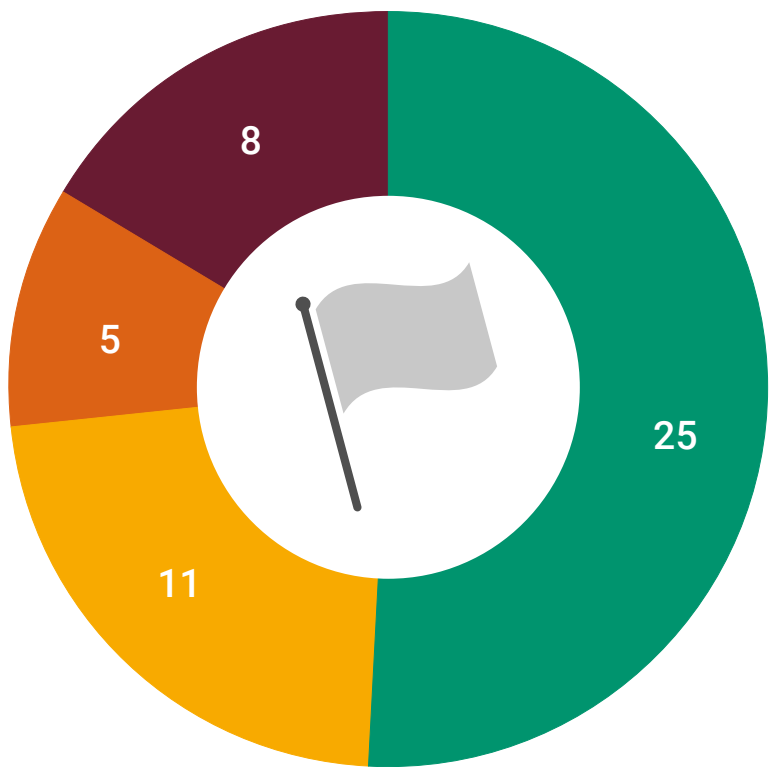


Figure 39: Number of countries per expression category in 2021: Europe and Central Asia

The region now has eight countries **in crisis**, containing a third of its population, and two countries in the global bottom 10. Belarus suffered a steep decline over the last two years, and dropped into the **in crisis** category in 2020 and the global bottom 10 in 2021.

Countries in Central Asia are in serious decline, and the EU is not immune: human rights in some EU countries are deteriorating, including in Hungary, Poland, and Slovenia.

Attacks on journalists have increased, particularly those reporting on crime and corruption. An avalanche of SLAPPs continues to fall on journalists in Europe (and further afield).

Table 12: Top 5 and bottom 5 country scores in 2021: Europe and Central Asia

Top		Bottom	
Country	GxR score	Country	GxR score
Denmark	95	Turkmenistan	1
Switzerland	95	Belarus	2
Sweden	94	Tajikistan	4
Norway	94	Turkey	7
Estonia	93	Azerbaijan	10

Table 13: Top 5 rises and declines in score in 2020–2021, 2016–2021, and 2011–2021: Europe and Central Asia

Top 5 score rises					
2020–2021		2016–2021		2011–2021	
Moldova	+7	North Macedonia	+16	Armenia	+13
		Armenia	+14	North Macedonia	+11
		Moldova	+13	Uzbekistan	+9
		Uzbekistan	+8	Georgia	+7
		Azerbaijan	+3		

Top 5 score declines					
2020–2021		2016–2021		2011–2021	
Poland	–7	Belarus	–23	Poland	–34
Slovenia	–6	Slovenia	–21	Serbia	–27
Armenia	–6	Poland	–15	Turkey	–24
Belarus	–4	Hungary	–12	Slovenia	–21
		Albania	–10	Hungary	–20

## Physical violence against journalists is on the rise

Six journalists were killed in the region in 2021, two of which had [the hallmarks of organised crime murders](#): crime journalist Giórgos Karaiváz in Greece and Peter R. de Vries (a journalist who also worked as an adviser to a key witness in an organised crime-related trial) in the Netherlands, similar to the murders of Daphne Caruana Galizia in Malta in 2017 and of Ján Kuciak and his fiancée, Martina Kušnírová, in Slovakia in 2018. There are serious concerns about the [increasing threat which organised crime poses](#) to investigative journalists.

Attacks on journalists [have risen substantially](#): physical attacks on journalists rose by 61%, while harassment and intimidation, including by politicians and government officials, increased by 57%. Detention and imprisonment of journalists rose by 33%. Turkey, where 41 journalists were imprisoned at the end of the year, continues to wield ‘insulting the President’ laws to detain communicators.

Surveillance, both mass and targeted, remains a problem in the region: spyware was found on the computers of journalists in Azerbaijan, Hungary, Belgium, and Poland; and the Moroccan authorities brought defamation cases in French and German courts over allegations regarding their use of spyware against journalists and politicians.

Some contexts are more dangerous than ever for journalists: incidents of violence against the media at protests more than doubled in the last two years, though Covid-related protests (e.g. concerning lockdowns and vaccines) pose particular dangers. [At least 28 countries](#) documented physical attacks on journalists, which often took place while covering protests.

Attacks on expression often go without accountability. Serbia’s courts finally sentenced former-Mayor of Grocka, Dragoljub Simonovic, the mastermind of an arson attack on journalist Milan Jovanovic. This sentence would have set an important precedent but [was quashed on appeal](#) at the end of the year. Serbia continues to be a [cause for serious concern](#), with a 27-point decline over the last decade.

In July 2021, the Public Inquiry into Daphne Caruana Galizia’s assassination concluded that the state of Malta ‘must bear responsibility for the assassination because it created an atmosphere of impunity’. The alleged mastermind of the murder, Yorgen Fenech, was indicted, in a [small but significant win for accountability](#).

## An avalanche of SLAPPs hits Europe

SLAPPs are a form of legal harassment or ‘lawfare’ against communicators and activists to drain the target’s financial and psychological resources and chill critical voices.

These cases have [avalanched onto Europe’s journalists and activists](#) in recent years – often instigated by corporations, [powerful individuals](#), and even ruling parties (e.g. Poland’s Law and Justice PiS party) with the aim of silencing. Defamation is the primary law of choice, but [privacy and data protection laws are increasingly used for claims](#).

The SLAPP does not even have to reach the court to do its job – the threat of a lawsuit can be enough to cause a journalist or activist to desist, especially given the huge disparity in resources between claimant (often huge corporations or wealthy elites) and defendant.

In 2021, 10% of SLAPPs recorded were cross-border cases, with the most recorded in the UK – a notorious haven for libel tourism. Libel laws in the UK remain [weighted towards the claimant](#), and the bar is problematically low for bringing a case, making it easy to use legal threats as a form of reputation laundering.

However, by the end of 2021, both the Council of Europe and the [EU](#) had launched [initiatives to tackle the issue](#). Further afield, various countries have passed anti-SLAPPs legislation, including Canada and some states in the USA.

## Serious and consistent violations of media rights are happening within the EU

More and more EU countries are showing a disregard for freedom of expression, with Hungary and Poland continuing to cause concern, as well as declines in Slovenia. Slovenia held the presidency in 2021 – a year in which its score dropped six points. The [serious deterioration](#) has continued since Prime Minister Janez Jänsa returned to power in 2020. He was [ousted in the 2022 elections](#).

Following criticism of Slovenia’s media freedom and, ironically, the stigmatising behaviour of public officials on social media by the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, the Slovenian Prime Minister tweeted that the Commissioner for Human Rights [was ‘part of #fakenews network’](#). Croatia’s President Zoran Milanovic has called reporters [“tricksters and mercenaries”](#).



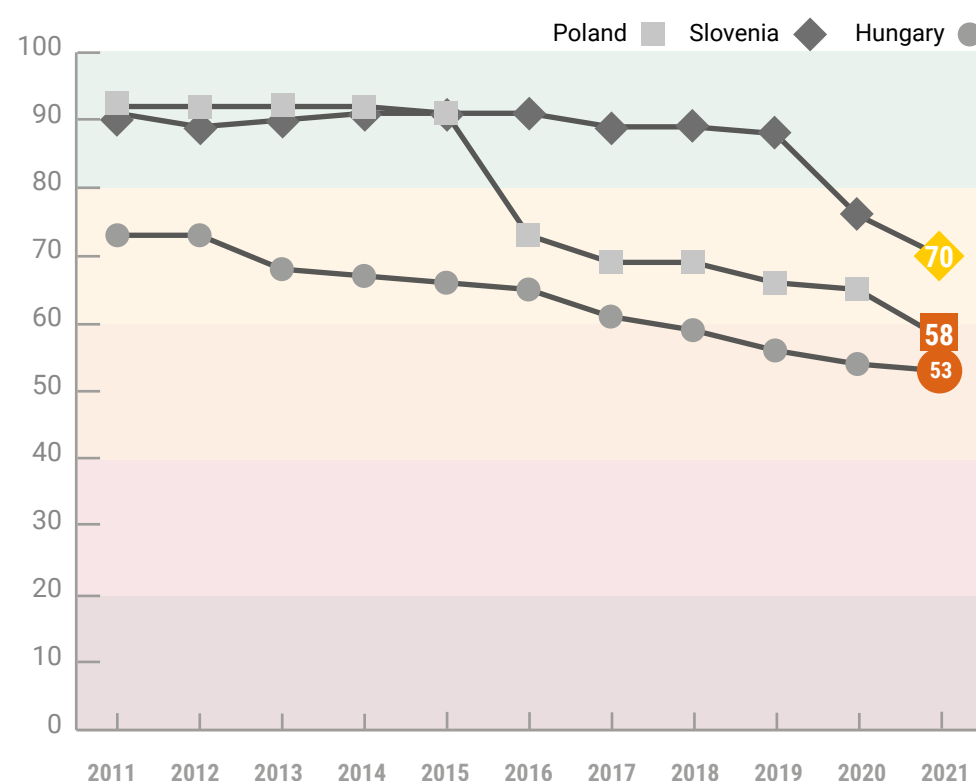


Figure 40: Scores 2011–2021: Poland, Slovenia, Hungary

Marginalising independent media, [smearing journalists](#), providing state funds to allied outlets, and influencing regulatory bodies are efficient ways of controlling the narrative and avoiding accountability for corruption and poor governance. Media capture is a growing issue within the EU. In Hungary in 2019, for example, [around 500 media outlets merged into one pro-government conglomerate KESMA](#)<sup>1</sup>.

Poland's putative 're-polonisation' of the media is, in practice, market manipulation and [engineered ownership changes](#) which put media in pro-government hands. The ruling PiS party passed new regulations to limit foreign ownership of media, allowing them to target government-critical broadcaster TVN, and forced media into allied hands – like those state-owned oil company PKN Orlen, which now owns 20 of the country's 24 local papers. In 2011, Poland was ranked 11th in the region; it is now 37th of 49.

Though these are extreme examples, they are by no means unique. Close ties between the state and the media also [threaten the independence of the media](#) in Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Malta, Slovenia, and Bulgaria. The use of [state advertising as a means of indirect control](#) is also cause for concern in Austria, Croatia, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Poland. The EU announced a large-scale legislative initiative on media freedom (The Media Freedom Act), to be introduced in 2022.

European borders, despite numerous inhumane measures to keep refugees and migrants out, do not keep journalists safe from digital harms. In Hungary, Belgium, and Poland (as well as Azerbaijan) 'spyware' was [found on the computers of journalists](#).

Journalists at EU borders have also suffered controls on reporting sensitive stories, particularly around migration, which governments have tried to

characterise as 'national security' issues. [Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania](#) declared local states of emergency and included reporting restrictions along their borders with Belarus. In France, journalists were excluded from 'security zones', and in [Greece journalists were stopped and questioned by police while trying to report on migration stories](#).

Though Northern Europe maintains a comparatively pluralistic media and high scores, protests are increasingly under threat. In France and the UK, countries comfortably in the **open** category, the trend of securitising public space deepens – bills have been passed to limit the right to freedom of assembly, while detention is becoming a more common tactic to suppress protest, particularly in the context of climate protest.

People took to the streets in both countries and were met with excessive police force and more arrests. A staggering [13,000 arrests were made in France](#) at protests against the Global Security Bill. Even Finland – comfortably in the top 10 for the last decade – [arrested more than 100](#) climate protesters at a July protest.

## Europe's status as a haven for LGBTQI+ rights is at risk

LGBTQI+ rights are being threatened and eroded, from attacks by right-wing groups and cancelled pride demonstrations to laws against sexual education. In some countries, for example Turkey, this repression comes under narratives of 'family values' or religious conservatism, while in other countries women's and LGBTQI+ rights are foreign impositions and propaganda.

Some attacks were within the EU – Poland and Hungary's governments show open hostility: in Poland, [an editor at the public broadcaster was dismissed](#) for allowing an artist to perform with a rainbow flag.

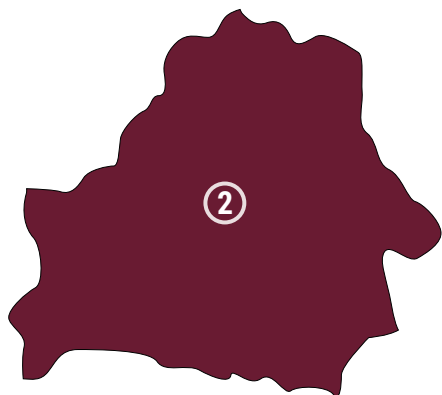
Hungary's titan media conglomerate KESMA [regularly propagates hatred against, for example, the migrant and LGBTQI+ community](#) without response, and the government criminalised content 'portraying or promoting' trans issues or homosexuality to minors. Homophobic vigilantes are more violent and emboldened: in 2021, Georgian journalist [Aleksandre Lashkarava died](#) after being beaten by anti-LGBTQI+ protesters.

In October 2021, the Italian Senate [scrapped a bill](#) that would have extended protection against incitement to violence, violence, and discrimination against LGBTQI+ people and people with disabilities, among others.

<sup>1</sup> KESMA is the Central European Press and Media Foundation, CEMPF; or in Hungarian, Közép-Európai Sajtó és Média Alapítvány



# In focus: Belarus



Belarus did not have much further to fall after 2020’s dramatic crackdown following the election, but in 2021 it scraped both the bottom of the scale and the bottom of the barrel, as President Alyaksandr Lukashenko employed new and shameless tactics to crush dissenting speech and protest.

Score:

2

Status:

In crisis

Global ranking:

157/161

Regional ranking:

48/49

Population:

9 million

GDP/capita:

USD 6,000

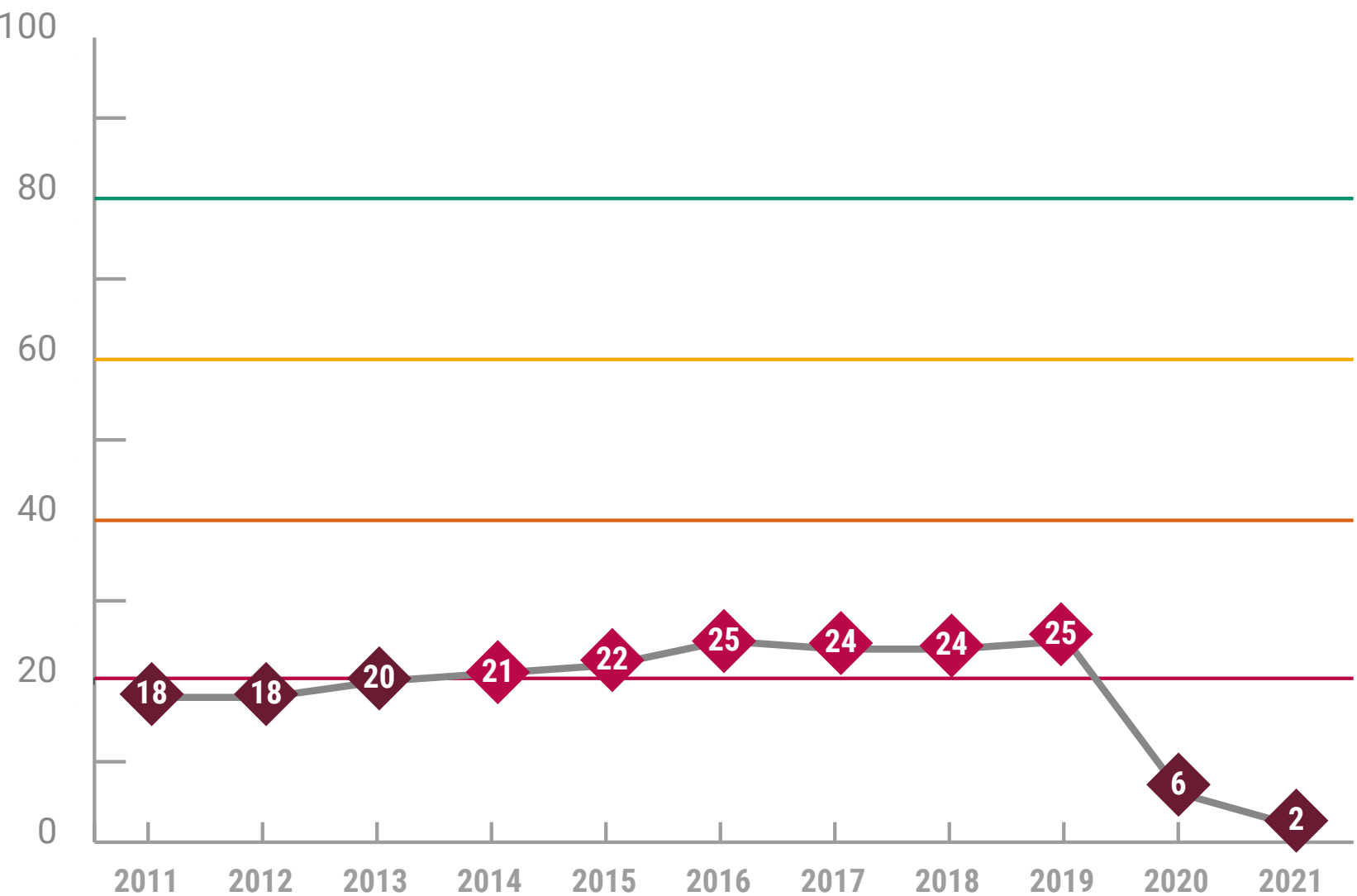


Figure 41: Scores 2011–2021: Belarus

Journalists [detained in 2021](#): 113

A contested election in 2020 pulled Belarus' freedom of expression score down by 20 points as incumbent Lukashenko sought to silence opposition and choke the mass protests which broke out after his proclaimed electoral victory gave him a sixth term in office.

**Belarus is in the global bottom 5 scores for seven indicators, including freedom of discussion, freedom of assembly, and civil society organisations repression.**

**Over the last five years, Belarus has seen the world's biggest decline in the indicator for political killings.**

Opposition politicians are now behind bars or in exile, and the regime spent 2021 consolidating control over the country's narrative and harassing those who had been involved in the protests: [more than 800 people](#) faced criminal charges for their involvement in the 2020 protests.

Since the start of the crackdown, more than 30,000 individuals have been [arrested and prosecuted](#), many of them harassed and tortured. Some are even labelled with badges reading 'prone to extremism' while in prison. Journalists, in particular, have been targeted, with home raids, arrests, and [charges of 'treason'](#) for defending free speech and 'organising protests'. Some journalists have been sentenced to many years in prison, and even sentences in [penal colonies](#).

As a plane travelled through Belarusian airspace between Greece and Lithuania, authorities claimed evidence of explosives on board, sending a fighter jet to 'escort' the plane down to the capital Minsk. No explosives were found, but a journalist who had been living in exile was arrested upon landing.

Raman Pratesevich is the founder of NEXTA, a government-critical Telegram channel with millions of followers, which played a part in the 2020 protests. He was persecuted for his criticism of the government, and in 2019 he fled Belarus and gained refugee status in the EU.

He was arrested in Belarus after the plane landed and now faces 15 years in prison for terrorist activities. He was put under house arrest and appeared days later in a televised confession, which was [suspected to be under duress](#). Sofia Sapega, Pratesevich's partner, was also arrested and has been sentenced to [six years in prison](#) for 'inciting social enmity and discord'.

As well as acrobatic interpretations of 'extremism' under existing laws, Belarus was subject to a wave of new legislation. In 2021, [new laws and amendments](#) hit Belarus, banning anti-government protest, legalising Internet shutdowns, restricting coverage of certain media, and banning unauthorised demonstrations. These laws made it even easier for the authorities to deny journalists accreditation, block websites, and prevent reporting on protests. In a simpler act of censorship, state-owned printing houses refused to print at least five independent newspapers.

Rule of law itself continues to erode and lawyers were disbarred for political reasons – including those who had represented former opposition candidate, Viktor Babaryka, who is serving 14 years in a high-security penal colony. Another politician who stood against Lukashenko in 2020, Syarhei Tsikhanouski, [was given 18 years in prison](#) in May, along with his associates, in a closed-door trial. Svyatlana Tshikhanouskaya, another opposition candidate, who has called Belarus 'the North Korea of Europe' is now in exile.

Lukashenko promised a BBC correspondent that he would 'massacre all the scum [the West] has been financing'. By the end of 2021, more than [300 civil society groups had been dissolved](#), their work labelled as 'extremist' and 'political', homes searched, and arrests made.

# Chapter 6

# Middle East and North Africa

Regional score:  
**23**

Regional population:  
**471 million**

Number of journalists killed:  
**2**

Number of human rights defenders killed:  
**3**

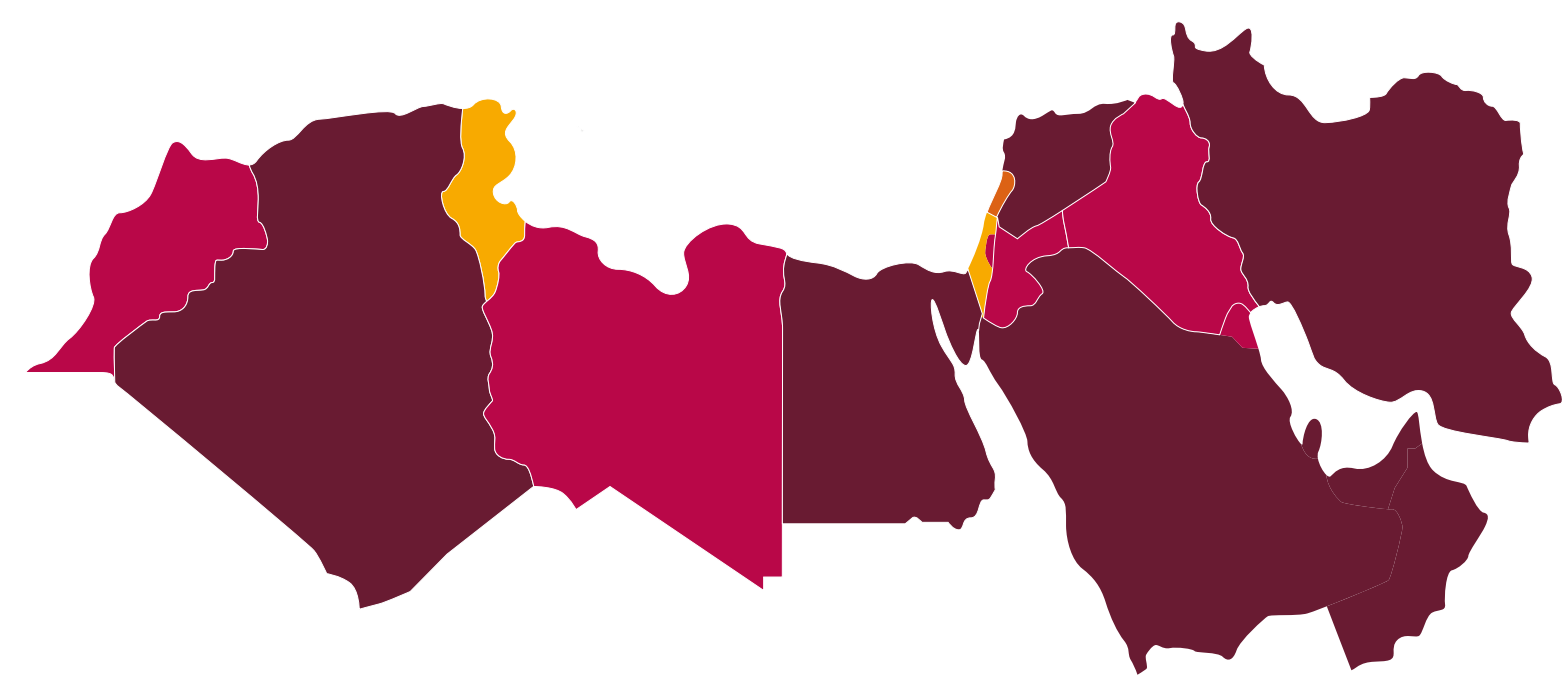


Figure 42: GxR score map: Middle East and North Africa

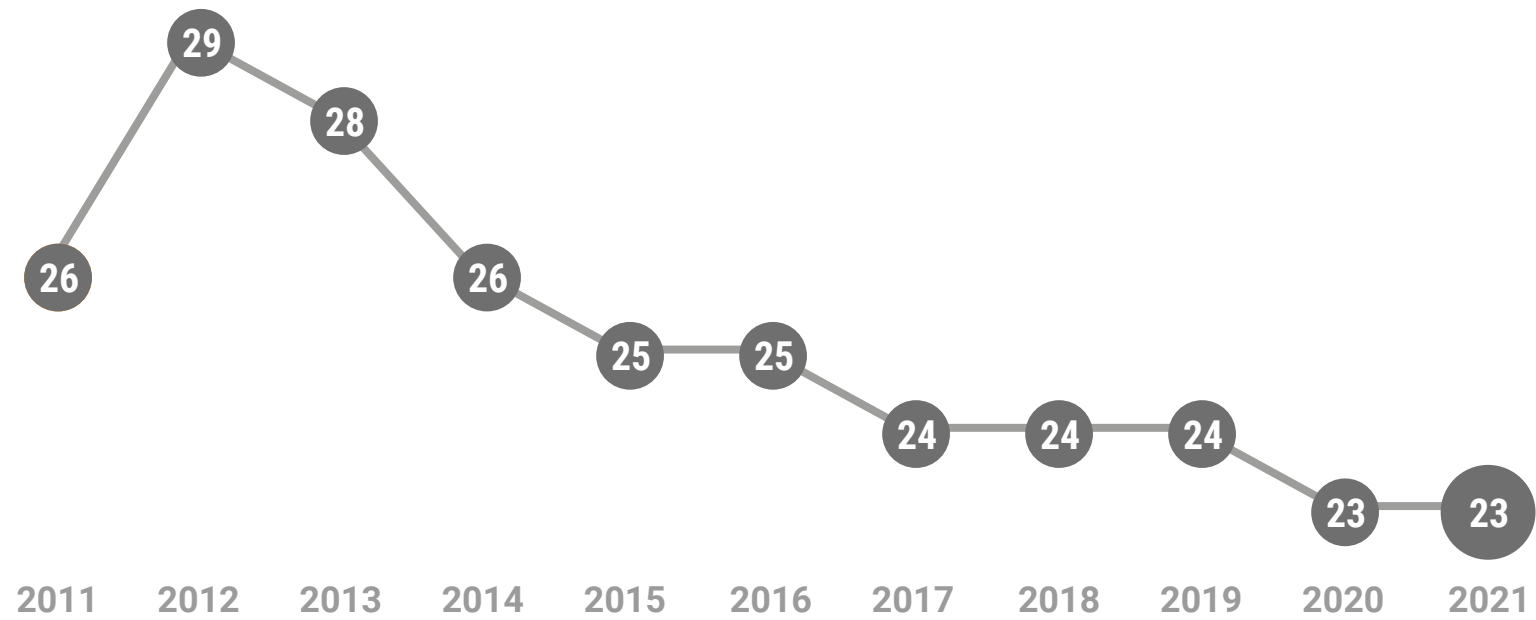
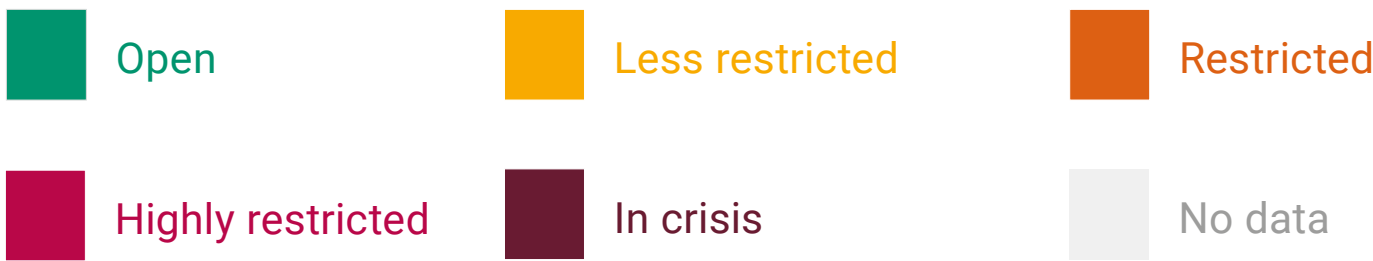


Figure 43: Regional scores, 2011–2021: Middle East and North Africa

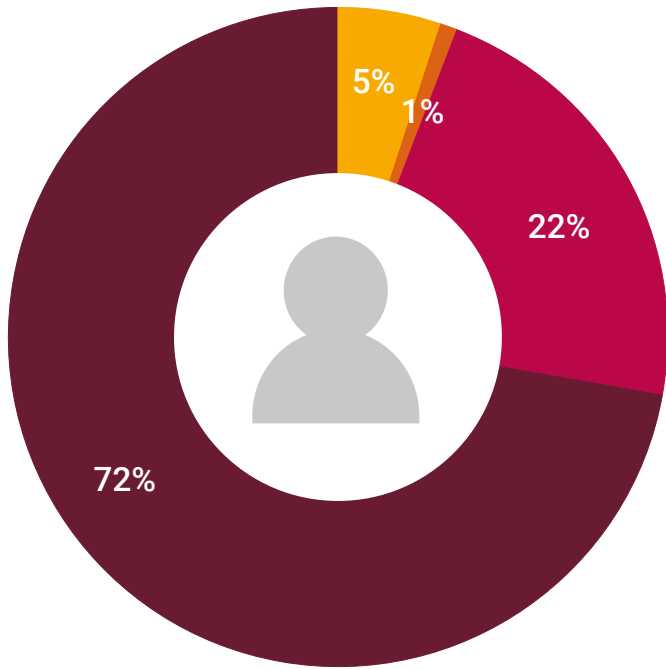


Figure 44: Percentage of population per expression category in 2021: Middle East and North Africa

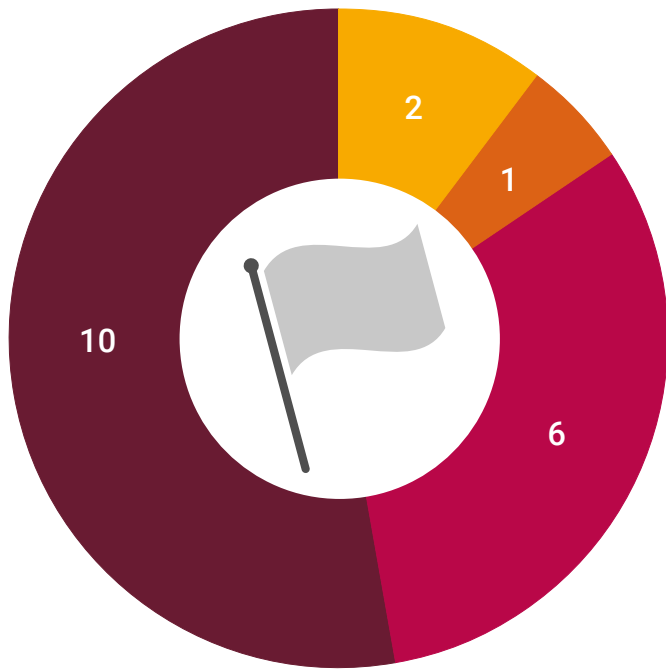


Figure 45: Number of countries per expression category in 2021: Middle East and North Africa

There are no **open** countries in the Middle East and North Africa region, and 72% of the population live in countries **in crisis** – far more than in any other region and twice the proportion it was in 2011.

Many countries in the region show little movement in their scores, but only because they have no further to fall: dictatorships with no respect for freedom of expression and brutal responses to dissent or discussion are entrenched across the region, often using national security narratives as a pretext to silence voices and bypass justice.

A decade after the Arab Spring, many of the catalysts for that movement remain unchanged: economic issues (deepened by the pandemic), unaccountable and undemocratic governments, and routine violations of the right to freedom of expression, especially protest.

Even Tunisia, the success story of the Arab Spring, took worrying steps backwards in 2021.

Table 14: Top 5 and bottom 5 scores in 2021: Middle East and North Africa

Top		Bottom	
Country	GxR score	Country	GxR score
Israel	71	Syria	1
Tunisia	67	Saudi Arabia	3
Lebanon	45	United Arab Emirates	4
Libya	39	Bahrain	4
Morocco	33	Qatar	5

Table 15: Top 5 rises and declines in score in 2020–2021, 2016–2021, and 2011–2021: Middle East and North Africa

Top 5 score rises			Top 5 score declines		
2020–2021	2016–2021	2011–2021	2020–2021	2016–2021	2011–2021
None	None	Libya +14	None	Algeria -7	Yemen -16
				United Arab Emirates -4	Egypt -14
				Qatar -3	Algeria -13
					Lebanon -7
					Palestine -6

# Freedoms are struggling more than ever a decade after the Arab Spring

The bright spots of hope in the region have faded considerably in recent years – Lebanon’s ongoing economic and political crisis has had serious human rights ramifications, and Tunisia suffered serious setbacks to its democratic consolidation in 2022 ([see In focus: Tunisia](#)).

In some Arab Spring countries, armed conflicts continue, creating a near-impossible environment for expression and information, with citizens as well as journalists targeted in the conflicts in Syria, Yemen, and Libya.

The Arab Spring’s demands for bread, dignity, and justice remain unfulfilled, amid deepening economic issues and entrenched repression across the region.

In fact, 2021 kicked off with protests across the region, mostly over standards of living: Tunisia, Lebanon, and Iraq saw their streets fill with people demanding a solution to the economic problems, which had been deepened by the pandemic in many cases. Many of these protests faced hostility and violence from authorities and security forces.

Difficulties for freedom of expression are not restricted to Arab Spring countries – far from it. The Iranian security forces’ notoriously violent response to protest does not show signs of change – they opened fire on unarmed civilians and [shut off the Internet as a first response](#) to demonstrations over water security. The shutdowns are a human rights violation in themselves, but one which also serves to conceal and facilitate the brutal abuses Iran’s regime regularly commits against demonstrators.

The future also looks bleak for Iran’s online life. In 2021, a new law proposed placing the Internet under military and security bodies’ control, in addition to criminalising the use of circumvention (e.g. VPNs), increasing censorship, and consolidating the National Information Network. The future offline does not look much more hopeful: new President Ebrahim Raisi, formerly Head of the Judiciary, has overseen the arbitrary arrest and detention of thousands of individuals, including political dissidents, journalists, peaceful protesters, human rights defenders, and members of ethnic and religious minorities.

Iran is not alone in [its brutality against protesters](#), nor in its imprisonment of critics. Algeria’s Hirak movement has been subjected to violence and huge numbers of arrests: [at least 2,500 people](#) have been arrested since 2019 when the movement began.

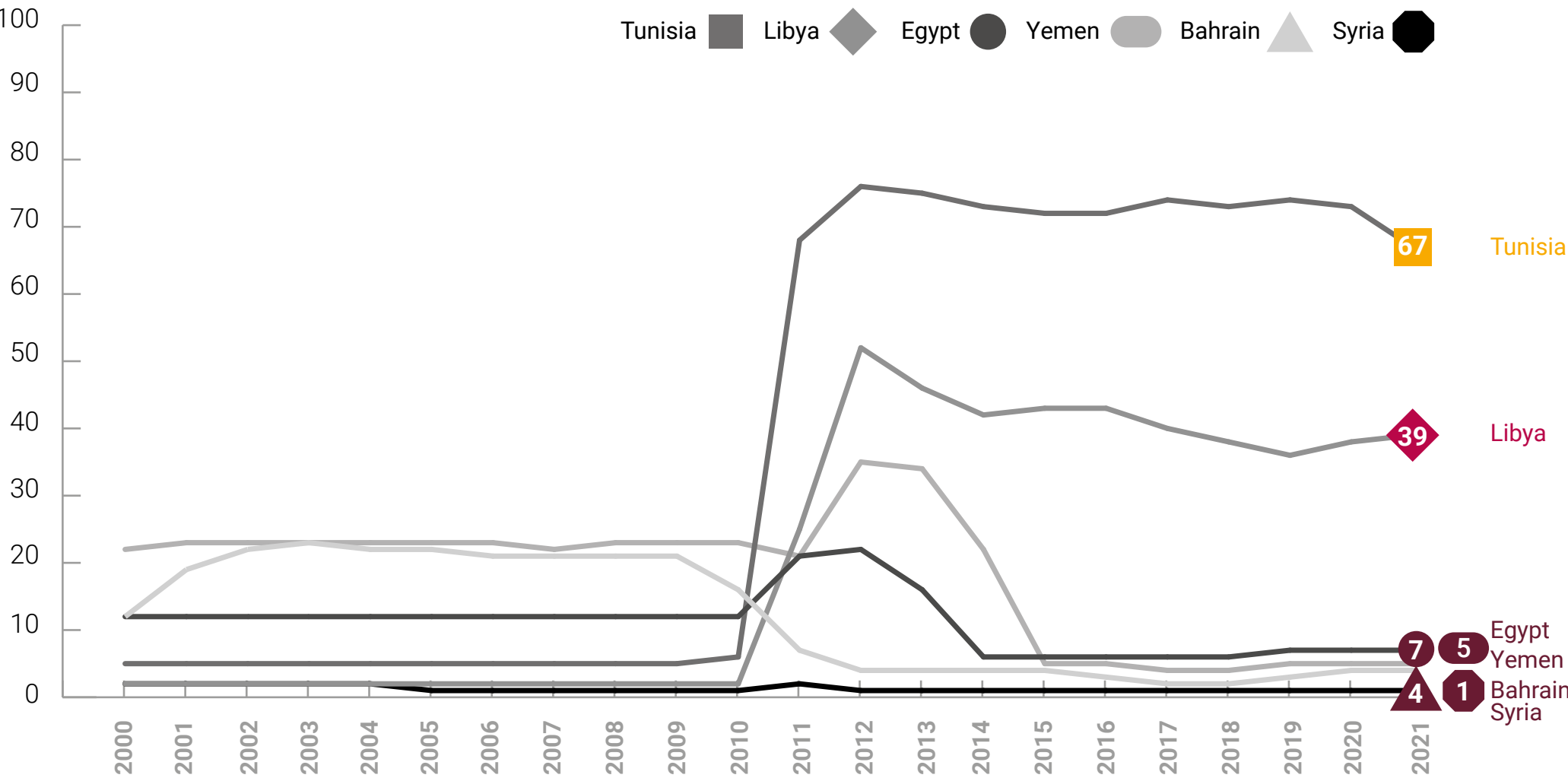


Figure 46: Scores 2000–2021: Arab Spring countries

## Despite the propaganda, thousands remain behind bars amid stagnation and entrenched autocracy

In many countries there is no downturn in scores simply because there is no further to fall: entrenched repression continues in countries like Iran and Egypt, as well as in much of the Gulf – Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain.

Despite the extremity and brazenness of some of their repressive tactics, countries – particularly those of the Gulf – continue to pose as centres of innovation, tourism, and progress. These states sell themselves as destinations for tourism, business, and sport, while activists and communicators languish in prisons, women are denied basic rights, and war crimes are committed in foreign states.

Saudi Arabia paused prosecutions of human rights defenders during their 2020 chairmanship of the G20 Summit, but resumed them again in 2021 to prosecute statements on Twitter, extend prison sentences, close social media accounts, and impose travel bans.

Saudi Arabia has spent [at least USD 1.5 billion](#) on high-profile international sporting events, from chess championships to horse racing and a 10-year deal with Formula One, as part of a plan to whitewash their reputation or distract from the ongoing human rights crisis in the country.

The 2011 Bahrain Formula One Grand Prix was [cancelled](#) amid an international outcry over the Bahraini Government's brutal suppression of the country's Arab Spring pro-democracy movement ([see Figure 47](#) – Bahrain is the only Arab Spring country to actually decline in score that year), but the event resumed only a year later despite a perpetual human rights crackdown over the last decade.

Dubai's October Expo, the first World Expo ever held in the Arab World, was met with an '[Alternative Expo](#),' exposing the United Arab Emirate's ongoing human rights abuses: [around 30 people are behind bars](#) for peaceful political expression.

When civil society question these public relations campaigns, [voices are quickly silenced](#), and police abuse, prosecutions, and reprisals against family members are common.

And with the world's eyes on sport, the human rights abuses continue. In February 2021, as some in Bahrain prepared to celebrate the anniversary of the 2011 uprising, [at least 13 children were arrested by security forces](#). Some detainees were beaten and threatened with rape and electrocution to coerce them into signing confessions.

## Critics are behind bars for life, robbing society of their voices and deterring others from speaking out

Jailing writers and activists is not only a grotesque crime against them and their right to expression, but it also deters others who might have spoken out, come forward, or defended human rights. This is doubly true in countries where people are imprisoned for just using their voices – and often for decades at a time in life-threatening conditions.

Aided by terrorism laws or military law imposed on ordinary citizens ([see In focus: Tunisia](#)), lengthy pre-trial detention and life sentences are often served to communicators and activists in closed trials. Algeria [broadened its definition of terrorism](#) in June 2021 alongside a [new legislative arsenal](#) aimed at expression and dissent, which allowed it to prosecute activists and critical voices. Since then, [dozens of citizens have been arrested](#).

Targeting not just professional journalists, but anyone using social media, fosters a climate of fear of self-censorship. Many serve their prison time in grim conditions that risk their physical and mental health. These conditions were worse during the pandemic. In 2021, three detainees died in Bahraini jails, allegedly because of medical neglect.

Egypt is one of the most consistently brutal imprisoners of those who dissent, communicate, and resist. With thousands of activists and critics already behind bars, the regime increased its use of abusive 'Emergency' Courts to imprison more, often under the guise of national security concerns, alongside announcements of a huge new 'American Style' prison complex. Extrajudicial executions on national security grounds continue.

Though Egypt has lifted the state of emergency, there are still huge risks for those who speak out, or even post outside of the conservative moral norms favoured by the state. Female social media influencers are routinely [targeted with 'indecent' charges](#) and criticised in court for being 'against the nation's values'.

Women's rights in the region continue to be suppressed, and women face greater scrutiny and harsher consequences for exercising their right to freedom of expression.

Israel has among the highest scores in the region, but it is important to note the serious effects of the Israeli state, [its apartheid policy](#) in occupied territories, and its attacks on freedoms in Palestine, which has neither the resources nor the situation of a sovereign state.



# In focus: Tunisia



Tunisia is the great success story of the Arab Spring: the country had a 60-point rise in 2011 and held onto those gains over the subsequent decade. In 2021, the President suspended key institutions and imposed a centralised vision of power that has proven hostile to criticism and public debate, shaking these historic gains for freedom of expression.

**Score:**

**67**

**Status:**

**Less restricted**

**Global ranking:**

**63/161**

**Regional ranking:**

**2/19**

**Population:**

**12 million**

**GDP/capita:**

**USD 4,000**

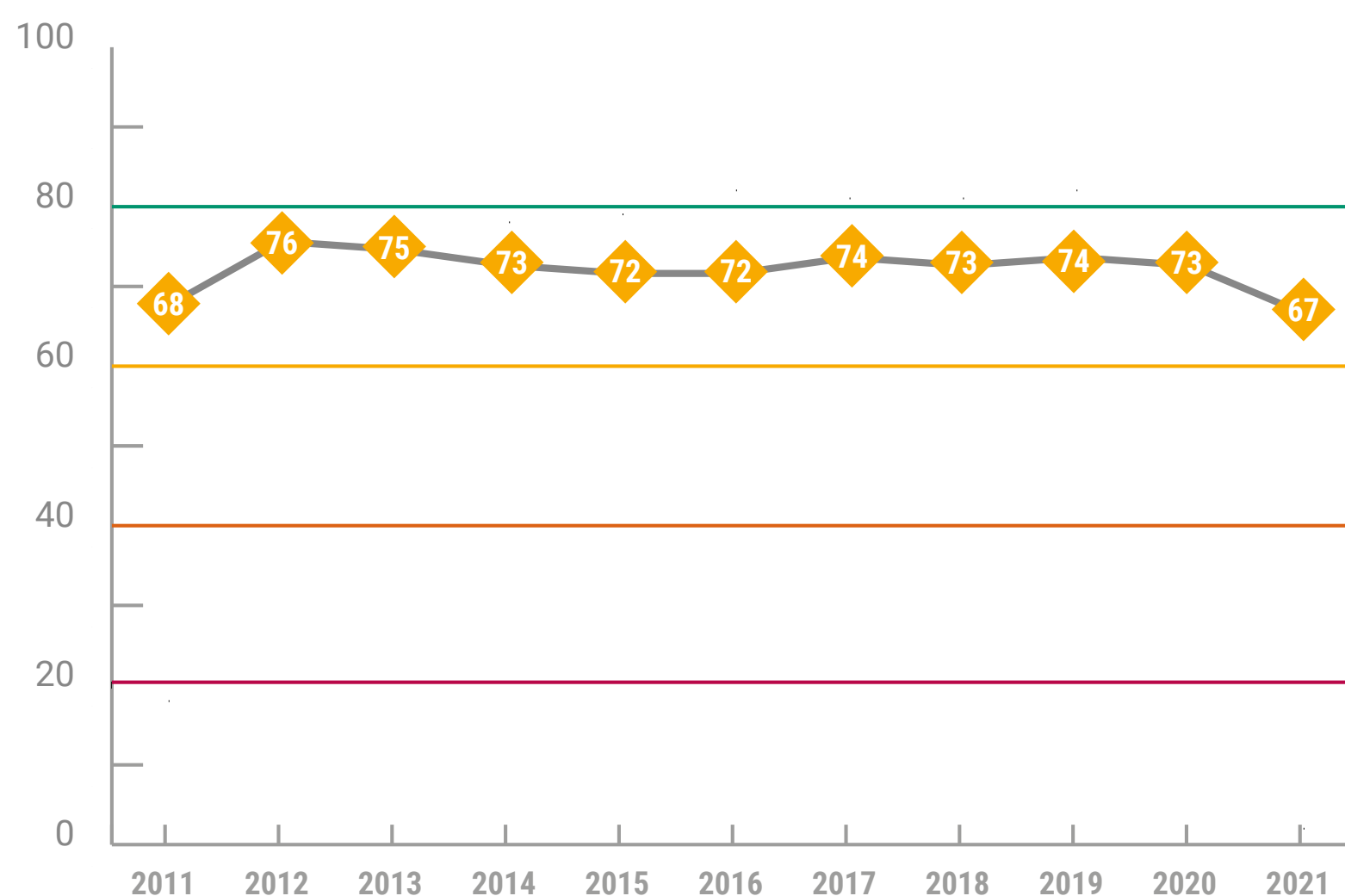


Figure 47: Scores 2011–2021: Tunisia

Tunisia's 2011 Jasmine Revolution was a protest movement that toppled President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. In the decade since, Tunisia has been consolidating democracy – citizens now enjoy unprecedented political rights and civil liberties.

The 2014 Constitution was a pivotal moment, incorporating vital protections for freedom of expression, but implementation of key provisions has been elusive, and the influence of old regime officials, endemic corruption, economic challenges, and security threats remain obstacles to applying the principles of the uprising. Tunisia has had 10 leaders in 10 years: President Kais Saied swept into power in 2019 with nearly three-quarters of the vote.

On 25 July, Saied suspended parliament and dismissed the Prime Minister, taking emergency powers and citing a political, economic, and health crisis. Saied suspended the Constitution in September, granting himself control of numerous areas of governance and legislature and even the public prosecutors' office. He also granted himself the right to rule by decree-law. These powers were declared temporary, but there has been no time limit announced or set in place.

Though there was celebration in certain sectors, many civil society groups have been left [concerned about the future of the country](#). Saied makes a direct claim on the popular will, citing the corruption of the political class and the need to defend sovereignty. This populist rhetoric rings alarm bells for human rights and civil liberties.

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## Tunisia has seen a serious deterioration of its indicators for freedom of assembly in recent years – with one of the world's biggest drops over the last year.

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The day after Saied centralised power into his own hands, [security authorities stormed the office of the Qatari Al Jazeera channel](#), demanded that staff leave, and seized the keys to the office without providing any justification or providing a warrant.

The prosecution of bloggers, activists, and human rights defenders began in the first days of the state of emergency, with numerous individuals arrested over Facebook posts. This has continued into 2022. To prosecute dissent, expression, and reporting on police abuses, both the military code and penal code are used – both of which mandate jail sentences just for expression of opinion, which is contrary to international standards.

Since Saied took power, security forces have assaulted journalists covering protests, and military law is used against others. In October 2021, TV presenter Amer Ayad was imprisoned by the military court for his recital of a poem which qualified as an ['attack on the dignity of the President'](#). Saied has also, by decree, replaced the head of Public National Television – bypassing the regulator, who has since reported that political balance in broadcasting has taken a nosedive, with a consistent [exclusion of political parties](#).

[Former President Mohamed Moncef Marzouki was sentenced in absentia](#) to four years of imprisonment on national security charges for comments made to TV channel France 24. Saied himself demanded the prosecution.

[The rise in the number of trials linked to people voicing opinions](#) and aggressions against journalists and media outlets, as well as on the right to demonstrate and protest, bears witness to an autocratic path. There have also been numerous arbitrary house arrests and at least 50 people subjected to [travel bans](#).

The use of military code and military courts to prosecute expression is an [ongoing problem in Tunisia](#), long-preceding Saied, but in the three months following the power-grab, [at least 10 civilians were subjected to military trials](#), more than in the preceding decade. At least four of those were just for criticising the President's decisions.

Since 25 July, Saied has put constant pressure on the judiciary: he demanded specific decisions from judges in several speeches and has invited high-ranking judges to the presidential palace. In December, the judiciary made [a statement of refusal](#) to jeopardise their independence, but in January 2022, Saied [dissolved the Supreme Judicial Council](#).

In December, Saied announced an exit plan of sorts: an online consultation on constitutional and political reforms in 2022, followed by a Political Reform Committee (whose members are appointed by the President), the drafting of new key legal texts and a new constitution that will be submitted to a referendum in July 2022, followed by legislative elections in December.

The details of the Committee are still unclear, which is a warning sign for the transparency of the process, and whether it will be participatory in any meaningful way. Whether a new constitution can win credibility or consensus in this current political context is highly questionable, and without legitimacy in the eyes of Tunisians, it may be unworkable.

With an educated population and little party support, it is hoped that Tunisia will find its way back to the freedoms promised, and towards the accountable institutions needed to consolidate democratic rule in the country.

Already in 2022, Tunisia has seen ongoing persecution of dissent, and [a blanket ban on protest](#): the road ahead looks uncertain.

“

To reclaim democracy, we must reclaim the right to free expression. With it, every person can ask for the most fundamental things they need. Like water, food, shelter, and clean air. Healthcare, education for our kids, decent work, and fair wages. For the freedom to practise the faith of our choice or none, to love and marry whoever we want, and to stand in solidarity with those who suffer. And for rich and poor to be treated equally before the law. In other words, expression is the lifeblood of democracy.

”

# ANNEX 1

# Methodology

## Developing the GxR metric

The complete V-Dem data set includes more than 600 indices and indicators which measure different aspects of democracy worldwide.

In producing the *Global Expression Report*, ARTICLE 19 selected the 25 indicators described below which best matched with our broad and holistic view of freedom of expression. These indicators were included in a Bayesian measurement model for countries with available data from 2000 to 2021 to create our metric: the GxR.

V-Dem draws on theoretical and methodological expertise from its worldwide team to produce data in the most objective and reliable way possible. Approximately half of the indicators in the V-Dem data set are based on factual information obtainable from official documents such as constitutions and government records. The remainder consists of more subjective assessments on topics like democratic and governing practices and compliance with de jure rules. On such issues, typically five experts provide ratings for the country, thematic area, and time period for which they have expertise.

To address variation in coder ratings, V-Dem works closely with leading social science research methodologists and has developed a Bayesian measurement model that, to the extent possible, addresses coder error and issues of comparability across countries and over time. Additional data (including coder score changes for previous years) are incorporated in every update, which improves the overall model.

V-Dem also provides upper- and lower -point estimates, which represent a range of probable values for a given observation. When the ranges of two observations do not overlap, we are relatively confident that the difference between them is significant. V-Dem is continually experimenting with new techniques and soliciting feedback from experts throughout the field. In this sense, V-Dem remains at the cutting edge of developing new and improved methods to increase both the reliability and comparability of expert survey data.

The score for each country falls between 0 and 1. Throughout the report, we calculate actual score change across our key time periods. We rescaled this value and rounded the value to report the scores as an integer (0–100) throughout the report. Countries are placed in their respective expression categories based on these final integers. However, the changes in scores that we examine to identify statistically significant declines and rises in expression are calculated from the original scale values (versus reported rounded integers).

ARTICLE 19 Mexico has its own methodology for tracking the freedom of expression situation in the country – they are not included in GxR rankings or any country-level analyses using the metric.

## Key periods analysed

We explored GxR score changes over time across three time periods: the last year (2020–2021), the last five years (2016–2021), and the last 10 years (2011–2021). For each timeframe, we identified countries showing meaningful improvement or deterioration, defined by a statistically significant score change over the period.

For some of our analyses, we show annual results dating back to 2000.

We also looked at both the annual score changes for individual countries, from 2000–2001 to 2020–2021, and report the statistically significant declines both individually and in aggregate for these countries each year.

## Country and population data

Our final data file contains 161 countries (after combining Gaza and West Bank to report results for Palestine) with at least one year of data between 2000 and 2021.

For our analyses, we extracted population data from the World Bank database. Populations reported for 2011–2020 are based on actuals, while 2021 numbers are based on the World Bank 2021 projection. Eritrea is missing population data for 2012–2021, and both Taiwan and Palestine are not represented in the World Bank data. The 2021 global population for the countries represented by our GxR data is 7,774,046,000.

Palestine’s population was calculated using population weights based on data from Palestine’s 2007 Census, the Central Intelligence Agency’s 2019 census, and July 2021 estimates for both regions. We used the 2007 population for 2007–2010, the average of the 2007 population and 2019 estimate for 2011–2015, the 2019 estimate for 2016–2019, and the July 2021 estimate for both 2020 and 2021.

## Overall scores and country rankings

For each country, we provide an overall score based on point estimates from the Bayesian measurement models. Each country has an overall score and where it sits in relation to other countries across the continuum of expression described below. We sorted the countries, globally and for each region, by their freedom of expression for 2021. Those top and bottom country lists are provided at the beginning of each section.

## Significant declines and rises in expression

We identify countries which have seen significant changes in their score based on movement outside the upper and lower bounds over the specified period (i.e. where the two intervals do not overlap, or the prior year observation falls outside the confidence interval for the current year).



## Indicators of GxR

The V-Dem data set contains several versions of the variables coded by country experts. For this report, we use both the ordinal scale and the V-Dem model estimates based on the type of analysis we were conducting. The point estimates from the V-Dem measurement model aggregates the rating provided by multiple country experts, taking disagreement and measurement error into account. This score is on a standardised interval scale and represents the median values of the distributions for each country-year. The scale of the measurement model is similar to a normal z-score (e.g. typically between -5 and +5, with 0 approximately representing the mean for all country-years in the sample), though it does not necessarily follow a normal distribution.

The ordinal scale translates the measurement model back to the original scale (see the original scale in the variable descriptions in [Annex 2](#)). While most of the indicators are originally on an ordinal scale, freedom of discussion for men and women is an index developed from multiple measures. This index is on a 0–1 scale and is reported consistent to that scaling throughout the report.

## Relationship between changes in indicators and changes in overall score

We identified the key indicators where rises or falls in scores predict similar rises and falls in GxR scores during the same period. For these analyses the indicators in their ordinal scale were used.

Regression models were developed for each period to examine the relationship between the change in each indicator's score (holding all else constant) to the change in GxR for that period. We then conducted Johnson's Relative Weights analysis to quantify the relative importance of correlated predictor variables in the regression analysis (i.e. the proportion of the variance in the change in GxR accounted for by the change in our indicator variables). We identify in the report indicators which were both statistically significant in the regression model and contributed to more than 5% to the overall model fit (based on standardised dominance statistic).

# ANNEX 2

# Tables

Table A1: Global GxR with confidence intervals, 2011–2021

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Gxr score	56	56	55	54	54	53	53	53	53	52	50
Lower limit	52	52	51	50	50	49	49	49	48	47	46
Upper limit	60	60	59	58	58	57	57	57	57	56	55

Table A2: GxR by region, 2011–2021

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Africa	46	46	45	45	44	43	44	44	43	43	42
Americas	71	70	69	69	68	68	67	66	65	64	62
Asia and the Pacific	51	50	48	47	47	47	46	47	47	45	42
Europe and Central Asia	73	73	71	71	70	70	69	69	69	68	68
Middle East and North Africa	26	29	28	26	25	25	24	24	24	23	23

Table A3: Africa regional GxR with confidence intervals, 2011–2021

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Gxr score	46	46	45	45	44	43	44	44	43	43	42
Lower limit	41	41	40	40	40	39	39	39	38	38	38
Upper limit	51	51	50	50	49	48	48	49	48	48	48

Table A4: Percentage of Africa regional population in each expression category, 2011–2021

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Open	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	3%	0%	0%	0%
Less restricted	41%	43%	41%	43%	43%	43%	36%	42%	39%	39%	19%
Restricted	17%	16%	17%	15%	15%	6%	13%	11%	15%	16%	49%
Highly restricted	19%	19%	21%	18%	18%	28%	27%	24%	40%	40%	22%
In crisis	19%	19%	17%	20%	20%	20%	21%	21%	5%	5%	11%

Table A5: Number of Africa regional countries in each expression category, 2011–2021

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Open	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	0	0	0
Less restricted	14	15	14	15	14	14	12	16	14	14	12
Restricted	9	8	8	8	9	6	8	6	9	9	12
Highly restricted	7	7	9	6	6	9	9	8	11	11	8
In crisis	10	10	9	11	11	11	11	11	8	8	10

Table A6: The Americas regional GxR with confidence intervals, 2011–2021

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Gxr score	71	70	69	69	68	68	67	66	65	64	62
Lower limit	66	66	65	65	64	63	63	62	60	59	58
Upper limit	75	74	73	73	72	72	72	71	69	68	66

Table A7: Percentage of The Americas regional population in each expression category, 2011–2021

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Open	70%	69%	69%	69%	69%	47%	47%	47%	47%	48%	48%
Less restricted	23%	24%	23%	24%	24%	46%	45%	47%	26%	18%	19%
Restricted	2%	2%	3%	3%	3%	2%	3%	1%	22%	29%	23%
Highly restricted	4%	4%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	5%
In crisis	1%	1%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	5%	5%	5%	5%

Table A8: Number of The Americas regional countries in each expression category, 2011–2021

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Open	11	9	9	9	9	8	8	8	8	9	9
Less restricted	7	9	8	8	8	10	9	10	9	5	6
Restricted	1	1	2	2	2	1	2	1	2	5	3
Highly restricted	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1
In crisis	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3

Table A9: Asia and the Pacific regional GxR with confidence intervals, 2011–2021

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Gxr score	51	50	48	47	47	47	46	47	47	45	42
Lower limit	46	45	43	42	43	42	42	43	43	41	38
Upper limit	55	55	52	51	52	51	51	52	52	50	47

Table A10: Percentage of Asia and the Pacific regional population in each expression category, 2011–2021

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Open	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	5%	5%	5%	5%
Less restricted	44%	44%	11%	11%	11%	9%	9%	1%	1%	0%	0%
Restricted	6%	6%	39%	39%	2%	4%	4%	12%	13%	10%	7%
Highly restricted	7%	9%	5%	3%	40%	40%	40%	39%	38%	42%	43%
In crisis	39%	38%	42%	43%	43%	43%	43%	43%	43%	43%	45%

Table A11: Number of Asia and the Pacific regional countries in each expression category, 2011–2021

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Open	6	5	5	5	5	5	5	6	6	6	6
Less restricted	8	9	7	7	6	7	7	4	4	3	3
Restricted	3	2	4	4	4	3	4	7	8	6	3
Highly restricted	7	10	9	8	9	7	6	6	5	8	8
In crisis	5	3	4	5	5	7	7	6	6	6	9

Table A12: Europe and Central Asia regional GxR with confidence intervals, 2011–2021

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Gxr score	73	73	71	71	70	70	69	69	69	68	68
Lower limit	69	69	68	67	67	66	65	65	65	64	64
Upper limit	76	76	75	74	74	73	73	73	73	71	71

Table A13: Percentage of Europe and Central Asia regional population in each expression category, 2011–2021

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Open	57%	57%	56%	56%	56%	52%	49%	49%	50%	49%	49%
Less restricted	10%	10%	9%	4%	4%	8%	10%	9%	9%	9%	5%
Restricted	0%	0%	1%	7%	7%	7%	6%	7%	7%	7%	11%
Highly restricted	24%	24%	26%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%
In crisis	9%	9%	8%	32%	33%	33%	33%	33%	33%	34%	34%

Table A14: Number of Europe and Central Asia regional countries in each expression category, 2011–2021

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Open	29	29	29	29	28	27	25	25	26	25	25
Less restricted	11	11	10	8	9	10	13	12	11	12	11
Restricted	1	1	2	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	5
Highly restricted	2	2	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0
In crisis	6	6	5	7	7	7	7	7	7	8	8

Table A15: Middle East and North Africa regional GxR with confidence intervals, 2011–2021

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Gxr score	26	29	28	26	25	25	24	24	24	23	23
Lower limit	22	25	24	22	22	21	20	20	20	20	20
Upper limit	30	33	32	30	29	28	28	27	27	27	27

Table A16: Percentage of Middle East and North Africa regional population in each expression category, 2011–2021

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Open	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Less restricted	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%
Restricted	1%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	2%	2%	1%	1%
Highly restricted	58%	57%	36%	36%	30%	30%	30%	32%	22%	22%	22%
In crisis	36%	35%	57%	56%	62%	62%	62%	62%	72%	72%	72%

Table A17: Number of Middle East and North Africa regional countries in each expression category, 2011–2021

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Open	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Less restricted	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Restricted	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1
Highly restricted	9	8	7	7	6	6	6	7	6	6	6
In crisis	7	7	8	8	9	9	9	9	10	10	10

Table A18: Countries with declines in GxR, 2020–2021

Country	Region	2020 Expression category	2021 Expression category	Actual score change (over 1-year period)
Afghanistan	Asia and the Pacific	Restricted	In Crisis	−38
Myanmar	Asia and the Pacific	Restricted	In Crisis	−34
Colombia	Americas	Restricted	Highly Restricted	−15
El Salvador	Americas	Restricted	Restricted	−12
Sudan	Africa	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	−10
Hong Kong	Asia and the Pacific	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	−10
Nigeria	Africa	Less Restricted	Restricted	−9
Burkina Faso	Africa	Less Restricted	Restricted	−8
Ethiopia	Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	−8
Poland	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Restricted	−7
Sri Lanka	Asia and the Pacific	Restricted	Highly Restricted	−6
Slovenia	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	−6
Guatemala	Americas	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	−6
Eswatini	Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	−6
Armenia	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Less Restricted	−6
Uruguay	Americas	Open	Open	−4
Belarus	Europe and Central Asia	In Crisis	In Crisis	−4
Nicaragua	Americas	In Crisis	In Crisis	−3
New Zealand	Asia and the Pacific	Open	Open	−3

Table A19: Countries with declines in GxR, 2016–2021

Country	Region	2016 Expression category	2021 Expression category	Actual score change (over 5-year period)
Hong Kong	Asia and the Pacific	Restricted	In Crisis	-43
Afghanistan	Asia and the Pacific	Restricted	In Crisis	-37
El Salvador	Americas	Less Restricted	Restricted	-34
Colombia	Americas	Less Restricted	Highly Restricted	-32
Burma/Myanmar	Asia and the Pacific	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	-28
Nicaragua	Americas	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	-27
Sri Lanka	Asia and the Pacific	Less Restricted	Highly Restricted	-27
Brazil	Americas	Less Restricted	Restricted	-25
Belarus	Europe and Central Asia	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	-23
Slovenia	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Less Restricted	-21
Benin	Africa	Open	Less Restricted	-20
Togo	Africa	Restricted	Highly Restricted	-19
Poland	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Restricted	-15
Philippines	Asia and the Pacific	Restricted	Highly Restricted	-14
Burkina Faso	Africa	Less Restricted	Restricted	-13
Guinea	Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	-13
Gabon	Africa	Less Restricted	Restricted	-13
Hungary	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Restricted	-12
Indonesia	Asia and the Pacific	Less Restricted	Restricted	-11
Mozambique	Africa	Less Restricted	Restricted	-11
Nigeria	Africa	Less Restricted	Restricted	-11
Haiti	Americas	Less Restricted	Restricted	-10
Albania	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	-10
Ivory Coast	Africa	Less Restricted	Restricted	-9
Mexico	Americas	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	-8
Guatemala	Americas	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	-9
India	Asia and the Pacific	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	-9
Madagascar	Africa	Restricted	Restricted	-8
Niger	Africa	Less Restricted	Restricted	-7
Algeria	Middle East and North Africa	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	-7
Cambodia	Asia and the Pacific	In Crisis	In Crisis	-7
Serbia	Europe and Central Asia	Restricted	Restricted	-7
United States of America	Americas	Open	Open	-7
Ghana	Africa	Open	Less Restricted	-7
Cyprus	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	-7
Georgia	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Less Restricted	-7
Chile	Americas	Open	Open	-7
Kyrgyzstan	Europe and Central Asia	Restricted	Restricted	-7
Eswatini	Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	-6
Uganda	Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	-6
Greece	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	-6
Austria	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	-6
Uruguay	Americas	Open	Open	-5
Romania	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Less Restricted	-5
Mongolia	Asia and the Pacific	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	-5
Venezuela	Americas	In Crisis	In Crisis	-5
Czech Republic	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	-4
United Kingdom	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	-4



Country	Region	2020 Expression category	2021 Expression category	Actual score change (over 5-year period)
New Zealand	Asia and the Pacific	Open	Open	-4
United Arab Emirates	Middle East and North Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	-4
Qatar	Middle East and North Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	-3
Turkey	Europe and Central Asia	In Crisis	In Crisis	-3
China	Asia and the Pacific	In Crisis	In Crisis	-2

Table A20: Countries with declines in GxR, 2011–2021

Country	Region	2011 Expression category	2021 Expression category	Actual score change (over 10-year period)
Hong Kong	Asia and the Pacific	Less Restricted	In Crisis	-58
Afghanistan	Asia and the Pacific	Restricted	In Crisis	-40
Brazil	Americas	Open	Restricted	-38
India	Asia and the Pacific	Less Restricted	Highly Restricted	-37
Nicaragua	Americas	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	-35
El Salvador	Americas	Open	Restricted	-36
Poland	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Restricted	-34
Philippines	Asia and the Pacific	Less Restricted	Highly Restricted	-29
Colombia	Americas	Less Restricted	Highly Restricted	-29
Serbia	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Restricted	-27
Turkey	Europe and Central Asia	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	-24
Thailand	Asia and the Pacific	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	-23
Venezuela	Americas	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	-21
Slovenia	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Less Restricted	-21
Togo	Africa	Restricted	Highly Restricted	-20
Hungary	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Restricted	-20
Benin	Africa	Open	Less Restricted	-19
Cambodia	Asia and the Pacific	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	-18
Tanzania	Africa	Restricted	Restricted	-18
Pakistan	Asia and the Pacific	Restricted	Highly Restricted	-18
Burundi	Africa	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	-17
Zambia	Africa	Restricted	Highly Restricted	-16
Yemen	Middle East and North Africa	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	-16
Ukraine	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Restricted	-16
Belarus	Europe and Central Asia	In Crisis	In Crisis	-16
Kyrgyzstan	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Restricted	-16
Cameroon	Africa	Restricted	Highly Restricted	-16
Russia	Europe and Central Asia	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	-15
Albania	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	-15
Indonesia	Asia and the Pacific	Less Restricted	Restricted	-14
Nigeria	Africa	Less Restricted	Restricted	-14
Egypt	Middle East and North Africa	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	-14
Algeria	Middle East and North Africa	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	-13
Mozambique	Africa	Less Restricted	Restricted	-13
Mauritania	Africa	Restricted	Highly Restricted	-13
Uganda	Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	-12
Guinea	Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	-12
Mali	Africa	Less Restricted	Restricted	-12
Bolivia	Americas	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	-12
Bangladesh	Asia and the Pacific	Highly Restricted	In Crisis	-12
Croatia	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Less Restricted	-12

Haiti	Americas	Less Restricted	Restricted	-12
Mexico	Americas	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	-10
Nepal	Asia and the Pacific	Less Restricted	Restricted	-10
Gabon	Africa	Less Restricted	Restricted	-10
Burkina Faso	Africa	Less Restricted	Restricted	-10
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	-10
Greece	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	-9
Ghana	Africa	Open	Less Restricted	-8
United States of America	Americas	Open	Open	-9
Guatemala	Americas	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	-9
Liberia	Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	-8
Czech Republic	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	-8
South Sudan	Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	-8
Paraguay	Americas	Open	Less Restricted	-7
Kenya	Africa	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	-7
Lebanon	Middle East and North Africa	Restricted	Restricted	-7
Mongolia	Asia and the Pacific	Open	Less Restricted	-7
United Kingdom	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	-7
Malta	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	-7
Bulgaria	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Less Restricted	-7
Uruguay	Americas	Open	Open	-6
Cyprus	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	-6
Niger	Africa	Less Restricted	Restricted	-6
Palestine	Middle East and North Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	-6
Australia	Asia and the Pacific	Open	Open	-6
Chile	Americas	Open	Open	-6
Austria	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	-6
Eswatini	Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	-6
Lithuania	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	-6
Burma/Myanmar	Asia and the Pacific	In Crisis	In Crisis	-6
Spain	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	-5
China	Asia and the Pacific	In Crisis	In Crisis	-5
New Zealand	Asia and the Pacific	Open	Open	-4
Tajikistan	Europe and Central Asia	In Crisis	In Crisis	-4
Vietnam	Asia and the Pacific	In Crisis	In Crisis	-4
United Arab Emirates	Middle East and North Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	-4
Qatar	Middle East and North Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	-3
Germany	Europe and Central Asia	Open	Open	-3
Bahrain	Middle East and North Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	-3

Table A21: Countries with rises in GxR, 2020–2021

Country	Region	2020 Expression category	2021 Expression category	Actual score change (over 1-year period)
Bolivia	Americas	Restricted	Less Restricted	13
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Africa	Highly Restricted	Restricted	8
Moldova	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Open	7

Table A22: Countries with rises in GxR, 2016–2021

Country	Region	2016 Expression category	2021 Expression category	Actual score change (over 5-year period)
The Gambia	Africa	In Crisis	Less Restricted	58
Maldives	Asia and the Pacific	In Crisis	Restricted	35
Dominican Republic	Americas	Less Restricted	Open	21
Ecuador	Americas	Restricted	Less Restricted	21
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Africa	Highly Restricted	Restricted	20
South Korea	Asia and the Pacific	Less Restricted	Open	17
North Macedonia	Europe and Central Asia	Restricted	Less Restricted	16
Armenia	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	14
Angola	Africa	Highly Restricted	Restricted	15
Moldova	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Open	13
Ethiopia	Africa	In Crisis	Highly Restricted	11
Malaysia	Asia and the Pacific	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	10
Uzbekistan	Europe and Central Asia	In Crisis	In Crisis	8
Sudan	Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	7
Thailand	Asia and the Pacific	In Crisis	In Crisis	5
Azerbaijan	Europe and Central Asia	In Crisis	In Crisis	3

Table A23: Countries with rises in GxR, 2011–2021

Country	Region	2011 Expression category	2021 Expression category	Actual score change (over 10-year period)
The Gambia	Africa	In Crisis	Less Restricted	57
Fiji	Asia and the Pacific	In Crisis	Highly Restricted	19
Dominican Republic	Americas	Less Restricted	Open	17
Ecuador	Americas	Restricted	Less Restricted	17
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Africa	Highly Restricted	Restricted	15
Libya	Middle East and North Africa	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	14
Armenia	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	13
South Korea	Asia and the Pacific	Less Restricted	Open	13
Angola	Africa	Highly Restricted	Restricted	13
North Macedonia	Europe and Central Asia	Restricted	Less Restricted	11
Uzbekistan	Europe and Central Asia	In Crisis	In Crisis	9
Malawi	Africa	Restricted	Less Restricted	9
Ethiopia	Africa	In Crisis	Highly Restricted	9
Malaysia	Asia and the Pacific	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	9
Madagascar	Africa	Restricted	Restricted	8
Georgia	Europe and Central Asia	Less Restricted	Less Restricted	7
Sri Lanka	Asia and the Pacific	Highly Restricted	Highly Restricted	7
Sudan	Africa	In Crisis	In Crisis	6
Canada	Americas	Open	Open	4

Table A24: Pandemic violations of democratic standards by 2021 expression category: max, 2020, and 2021

	Max Pandemic Violations of Democratic Standard Index (scale 0-1)	2020 Pandemic Violations of Democratic Standard Index	2021 Pandemic Violations of Democratic Standard Index
In crisis	0.33	0.31	0.29
Highly restricted	0.34	0.34	0.26
Restricted	0.3	0.3	0.19
Less restricted	0.25	0.24	0.13
Open	0.11	0.1	0.07
Global	0.26	0.25	0.18

Table A25: Number of countries with journalists imprisoned, journalists killed, and human rights defenders by 2021 expression category

	# Countries with any imprisoned journalists	# Countries with any killed journalists	# Countries with any killed human rights defenders
In crisis	22	6	8
Highly restricted	10	6	7
Restricted	4	5	6
Less restricted	1	5	7
Open	0	2	5

Table A26: Number of countries, average GxR, and percentage of the population by 2021 expression category: journalists imprisoned, journalists killed, and human rights defenders

	# Countries	Average GxR	% Population
No journalists imprisoned	124	60	40%
Any journalists imprisoned	37	19	60%
No journalists killed	137	52	63%
Any journalists killed	24	41	37%
No human rights defenders killed	128	52	36%
Any human rights defenders killed	33	44	64%

Table A27: Access to Justice by expression category with country outliers, 2021

	Access to justice score	Outlier countries
Open	0.92	--
Less restricted	0.73	Honduras Guatemala
Restricted	0.57	--
Highly restricted	0.5	--
In crisis	0.33	--



Table A28: Regression results for the change in GxR, 2020–2021

Regression Results for the Change in Freedom of Expression Over 1-Year Period (standard deviation from the mean in parentheses)			
Constant	Constant	-0.001	
		(0.002)	0.414
Internet censorship efforts	v2mecenefi	-0.008	
		(0.008)	0.273
Freedom of discussion for men and women	v2xcl_disc	0.035	
		(0.040)	0.385
Government censorship efforts	v2mecenefm	0.015	**
		(0.005)	0.003
Media self-censorship	v2meslfcen	0.023	**
		(0.009)	0.018
Freedom of academic and cultural expression	v2clacfree	0.037	***
		(0.009)	0.000
CSO consultation	v2cscnsult	0.027	**
		(0.011)	0.012
Engaged society	v2dlengage	0.012	
		(0.006)	0.050
Transparent laws with predictable enforcement	v2cltrnslw	0.004	
		(0.009)	0.637
Harassment of journalists	v2meharjrn	0.017	*
		(0.009)	0.045
Freedom from political killing	v2clkill	0.010	
		(0.008)	0.201
CSO repression	v2csreprss	0.002	
		(0.008)	0.768
CSO entry and exit	v2cseeorgs	0.032	**
		(0.010)	0.001
CSO participatory environment	v2csprtcpt	-0.024	*
		(0.011)	0.040
Party ban	v2psparban	0.004	
		(0.007)	0.604
Freedom of religion	v2clrelig	0.010	
		(0.011)	0.348
Government Internet filtering in practice	v2smgovfilprc	0.032	**
		(0.011)	0.003
Government Internet shut down in practice	v2smgovshut	0.004	
		(0.009)	0.655
Government social media censorship in practice	v2smgovsmcenprc	0.003	
		(0.011)	0.782
Internet legal regulation content	v2smregcon	0.013	
		(0.008)	0.085
Government social media monitoring	v2smgovsmmon	0.007	
		(0.008)	0.411
Government online content regulation approach	v2smregapp	0.001	
		(0.011)	0.961
Arrests for political content	v2smarrest	0.012	
		(0.009)	0.194
Freedom of peaceful assembly	v2caassemb	0.019	**
		(0.006)	0.002
Freedom of Academic Exchange	v2cafexch	-0.018	**
		(0.006)	0.003
Abuse of defamation and copyright law by elites	v2smdefabu	0.008	
		(0.009)	0.381
R-squared		0.887	
Adjusted R-squared		0.865	
No. observations		161	
*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001			

Table A29 – Importance based on relative weights in the change in GxR, 2020–2021

Importance Based on Relative Weights: Change in Freedom of Expression Over 1-Year Period				
General dominance statistics: Epsilon-based regress				
Number of obs = 161				
Overall Fit Statistic = 0.887				
		Dominance Stat.	Standardised Domin. Stat.	Ranking
v2clacfree	Freedom of academic and cultural expression	0.066	0.074	1
v2mecenefm	Government censorship efforts	0.062	0.070	2
v2meslfcen	Media self-censorship	0.060	0.067	3
v2cseeorgs	CSO entry and exit	0.056	0.063	4
v2xcl_disc	Freedom of discussion for men and women	0.048	0.054	5
v2csreprss	CSO repression	0.047	0.052	6

Table A30: Regression results for the change in GxR, 2016–2021

Regression Results for the Change in Freedom of Expression Over 5-Year Period			
(standard deviation from the mean in parentheses)			
Constant	Constant	-0.002	
		(0.003)	0.499
Internet censorship efforts	v2mecenefi	-0.008	
		(0.011)	0.436
Freedom of discussion for men and women	v2xcl_disc	0.063	
		(0.033)	0.057
Government censorship efforts	v2mecenefm	0.030	***
		(0.007)	0.000
Media self-censorship	v2meslfcen	0.013	
		(0.010)	0.183
Freedom of academic and cultural expression	v2clacfree	0.039	***
		(0.010)	0.000
CSO consultation	v2cscnsult	0.050	***
		(0.010)	0.000
Engaged society	v2dlengage	0.011	
		(0.006)	0.078
Transparent laws with predictable enforcement	v2cltrnslw	-0.012	
		(0.010)	0.212
Harassment of journalists	v2meharjrn	0.024	*
		(0.010)	0.020
Freedom from political killing	v2clkill	-0.001	
		(0.007)	0.942
CSO repression	v2csreprss	0.022	*
		(0.008)	0.011
CSO entry and exit	v2cseeorgs	0.019	*
		(0.008)	0.023
CSO participatory environment	v2csprtcpt	-0.013	
		(0.009)	0.173
Party ban	v2psparban	-0.001	
		(0.008)	0.942
Freedom of religion	v2clrelig	-0.012	
		(0.010)	0.213
Government Internet filtering in practice	v2smgovfilprc	0.038	**
		(0.011)	0.001
Government Internet shut down in practice	v2smgovshut	-0.010	
		(0.009)	0.260
Government social media censorship in practice	v2smgovsmcenprc	0.021	
		(0.012)	0.084
Internet legal regulation content	v2smregcon	0.015	
		(0.009)	0.084

Government social media monitoring	v2smgovsmmon	0.014	
		(0.008)	0.083
Government online content regulation approach	v2smregapp	-0.009	
		(0.010)	0.370
Arrests for political content	v2smarrest	0.026	*
		(0.010)	0.011
Freedom of peaceful assembly	v2caasemb	0.013	
		(0.007)	0.079
Freedom of Academic Exchange	v2cafexch	-0.010	
		(0.007)	0.152
Abuse of defamation and copyright law by elites	v2smdefabu	-0.005	
		(0.010)	0.625
R-squared		0.934	
Adjusted R-squared		0.922	
No. observations		160	
*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001			

Table A31: Importance based on relative weights in the change in GxR, 2016–2021

Importance Based on Relative Weights: Change in Freedom of Expression Over 5-Year Period				
General dominance statistics: Epsilon-based regress				
Number of obs = 161				
Overall Fit Statistic = 0.934				
		Dominance Stat.	Standardised Domin. Stat.	Ranking
v2mecenefm	Government censorship efforts	0.074	0.079	1
v2clacfree	Freedom of academic and cultural expression	0.065	0.070	2
v2cscnsult	CSO consultation	0.064	0.069	3
v2csreprss	CSO repression	0.064	0.069	4
v2meharjrn	Harassment of journalists	0.060	0.064	5
v2cseeorgs	CSO entry and exit	0.053	0.056	6
v2smarrest	Arrests for political content	0.050	0.053	7
v2xcl_disc	Freedom of discussion for men and women	0.048	0.052	8
v2meslfcen	Media self-censorship	0.048	0.051	9

Table A32: Regression results for the change in GxR, 2011–2021

Regression Results for the Change in Freedom of Expression Over 10-Year Period (standard deviation from the mean in parentheses)			
Constant	Constant	0.001	
		(0.003)	0.727
Internet censorship efforts	v2mecenefi	-0.004	
		(0.010)	0.697
Freedom of discussion for men and women	v2xcl_disc	0.052	
		(0.035)	0.143
Government censorship efforts	v2mecenefm	0.038	***
		(0.007)	0.000
Media self-censorship	v2meslfcen	0.022	*
		(0.010)	0.030
Freedom of academic and cultural expression	v2clacfree	0.019	
		(0.010)	0.066
CSO consultation	v2cscnsult	0.029	**
		(0.011)	0.009
Engaged society	v2dlengage	0.010	
		(0.005)	0.067
Transparent laws with predictable enforcement	v2cltrnslw	0.011	
		(0.010)	0.269

Harassment of journalists	v2meharjrn	0.023	*
		(0.010)	0.019
Freedom from political killing	v2clkill	-0.007	
		(0.008)	0.351
CSO repression	v2csreprss	0.035	***
		(0.009)	0.000
CSO entry and exit	v2cseeorgs	0.007	
		(0.009)	0.401
CSO participatory environment	v2csprtcpt	-0.019	*
		(0.009)	0.045
Party ban	v2psparban	-0.013	
		(0.010)	0.170
Freedom of religion	v2clrelig	-0.004	
		(0.009)	0.170
Government Internet filtering in practice	v2smgovfilprc	0.026	*
		(0.012)	0.029
Government Internet shut down in practice	v2smgovshut	0.005	
		(0.010)	0.624
Government social media censorship in practice	v2smgovsmcenprc	0.039	**
		(0.013)	0.002
Internet legal regulation content	v2smregcon	0.003	
		(0.010)	0.770
Government social media monitoring	v2smgovsmmon	0.024	*
		(0.009)	0.012
Government online content regulation approach	v2smregapp	0.011	
		(0.010)	0.280
Arrests for political content	v2smarrest	0.028	*
		(0.012)	0.016
Freedom of peaceful assembly	v2caassemb	0.014	
		(0.008)	0.083
Freedom of Academic Exchange	v2cafexch	-0.007	
		(0.008)	0.435
Abuse of defamation and copyright law by elites	v2smdefabu	-0.014	
		(0.010)	0.176
R-squared		0.930	
Adjusted R-squared		0.917	
No. observations		160	
*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001			

Table A33: Importance based on relative weights in the change in GxR, 2011–2021

Importance Based on Relative Weights: Change in Freedom of Expression Over 10-Year Period

General dominance statistics: Epsilon-based regress

Number of obs = 161

Overall Fit Statistic = 0.930

		Dominance Stat.	Standardised Domin. Stat.	Ranking
v2mecenefm	Government censorship efforts	0.082	0.088	1
v2csreprss	CSO repression	0.070	0.075	2
v2cscnsult	CSO consultation	0.056	0.060	3
v2meslfcen	Media self-censorship	0.056	0.060	4
v2meharjrn	Harassment of journalists	0.056	0.060	5
v2clacfree	Freedom of academic and cultural expression	0.054	0.058	6
v2smarrest	Arrests for political content	0.052	0.056	7
v2dlengage	Engaged society	0.050	0.054	8
v2cseeorgs	CSO entry and exit	0.047	0.050	9

Table A34: V–Dem Variable Descriptions

V-Dem Variable Name	Description	Question	Responses
v2mecenefi	Internet censorship efforts	Does the government attempt to censor information (text, audio, or visuals) on the Internet?	0: The government successfully blocks Internet access except to sites that are pro-government or devoid of political content. 1: The government attempts to block Internet access except to sites that are pro-government or devoid of political content, but many users are able to circumvent such controls. 2: The government allows Internet access, including to some sites that are critical of the government, but blocks selected sites that deal with especially politically sensitive issues. 3: The government allows Internet access that is unrestricted, with the exceptions mentioned above.
v2xcl_disc	Freedom of discussion for men and women	Are men/women able to openly discuss political issues in private homes and in public spaces?	0: Not respected. Hardly any freedom of expression exists for men. Men are subject to immediate and harsh intervention and harassment for expression of political opinion. 1: Weakly respected. Expressions of political opinions by men are frequently exposed to intervention and harassment. 2: Somewhat respected. Expressions of political opinions by men are occasionally exposed to intervention and harassment. 3: Mostly respected. There are minor restraints on the freedom of expression in the private sphere, predominantly limited to a few isolated cases or only linked to soft sanctions. But as a rule there is no intervention or harassment if men make political statements. 4: Fully respected. Freedom of speech for men in their homes and in public spaces is not restricted.
v2mecenefm	Government censorship efforts	Does the government directly or indirectly attempt to censor the print or broadcast media?	0: Attempts to censor are direct and routine. 1: Attempts to censor are indirect but nevertheless routine. 2: Attempts to censor are direct but limited to especially sensitive issues. 3: Attempts to censor are indirect and limited to especially sensitive issues. 4: The government rarely attempts to censor major media in any way, and when such exceptional attempts are discovered, the responsible officials are usually punished.
v2meslfcen	Media selfcensorship	Is there self-censorship among journalists when reporting on issues that the government considers politically sensitive?	0: Self-censorship is complete and thorough. 1: Self-censorship is common but incomplete. 2: There is self-censorship on a few highly sensitive political issues but not on moderately sensitive issues. 3: There is little or no self-censorship among journalists.
v2clacfree	Freedom of academic and cultural expression	Is there academic freedom and freedom of cultural expression related to political issues?	0: Not respected by public authorities. Censorship and intimidation are frequent. Academic activities and cultural expressions are severely restricted or controlled by the government. 1: Weakly respected by public authorities. Academic freedom and freedom of cultural expression are practiced occasionally, but direct criticism of the government is mostly met with repression. 2: Somewhat respected by public authorities. Academic freedom and freedom of cultural expression are practiced routinely, but strong criticism of the government is sometimes met with repression. 3: Mostly respected by public authorities. There are few limitations on academic freedom and freedom of cultural expression, and resulting sanctions tend to be infrequent and soft. 4: Fully respected by public authorities. There are no restrictions on academic freedom or cultural expression.
v2cscnsult	Civil society organisation (CSO) consultation	Are major civil society organisations routinely consulted by policymakers on policies relevant to their members?	0: No. There is a high degree of insulation of the government from CSO input. The government may sometimes enlist or mobilise CSOs after policies are adopted to sell them to the public at large. But it does not often consult with them in formulating policies. 1: To some degree. CSOs are but one set of voices that policymakers sometimes take into account. 2: Yes. Important CSOs are recognised as stakeholders in important policy areas and given voice on such issues. This can be accomplished through formal corporatist arrangements or through less formal arrangements.
v2dlengage	Engaged society	When important policy changes are being considered, how wide and how independent are public deliberations?	0: Public deliberation is never, or almost never allowed. 1: Some limited public deliberations are allowed but the public below the elite levels is almost always either unaware of major policy debates or unable to take part in them. 2: Public deliberation is not repressed but nevertheless infrequent and non-elite actors are typically controlled and/or constrained by the elites. 3: Public deliberation is actively encouraged and some autonomous non-elite groups participate, but that tends to be the same across issue-areas. 4: Public deliberation is actively encouraged and a relatively broad segment of non-elite groups often participate and vary with different issue-areas. 5: Large numbers of non-elite groups as well as ordinary people tend to discuss major policies among themselves, in the media, in associations or neighbourhoods, or in the streets. Grass-roots deliberation is common and unconstrained.



V-Dem Variable Name	Description	Question	Responses
v2cltrnslw	Transparent laws with predictable enforcement	Are the laws of the land clear, well publicised, coherent (consistent with each other), relatively stable from year to year, and enforced in a predictable manner?	0: Transparency and predictability are almost non-existent. The laws of the land are created and/or enforced in completely arbitrary fashion. 1: Transparency and predictability are severely limited. The laws of the land are more often than not created and/or enforced in arbitrary fashion. 2: Transparency and predictability are somewhat limited. The laws of the land are mostly created in a non-arbitrary fashion but enforcement is rather arbitrary in some parts of the country. 3: Transparency and predictability are fairly strong. The laws of the land are usually created and enforced in a non-arbitrary fashion. 4: Transparency and predictability are very strong. The laws of the land are created and enforced in a non-arbitrary fashion.
v2meharjrn	Harassment of journalists	Are individual journalists harassed —i.e. threatened with libel, arrested, imprisoned, beaten, or killed — by governmental or powerful nongovernmental actors while engaged in legitimate journalistic activities?	0: No journalists dare to engage in journalistic activities that would offend powerful actors because harassment or worse would be certain to occur. 1: Some journalists occasionally offend powerful actors but they are almost always harassed or worse and eventually are forced to stop. 2: Some journalists who offend powerful actors are forced to stop but others manage to continue practicing journalism freely for long periods of time. 3: It is rare for any journalist to be harassed for offending powerful actors, and if this were to happen, those responsible for the harassment would be identified and punished. 4: Journalists are never harassed by governmental or powerful non-governmental actors while engaged in legitimate journalistic activities.
v2clkill	Freedom from political killing	Is there freedom from political killings?	0: Not respected by public authorities. Political killings are practiced systematically and they are typically incited and approved by top leaders of government. 1: Weakly respected by public authorities. Political killings are practiced frequently and top leaders of government are not actively working to prevent them. 2: Somewhat respected by public authorities. Political killings are practiced occasionally but they are typically not incited and approved by top leaders of government. 3: Mostly respected by public authorities. Political killings are practiced in a few isolated cases but they are not incited or approved by top leaders of government. 4: Fully respected by public authorities. Political killings are non-existent.
v2csreprss	CSO repression	Does the government attempt to repress civil society organisations?	0: Severely. The government violently and actively pursues all real and even some imagined members of CSOs. They seek not only to deter the activity of such groups but to effectively liquidate them. Examples include Stalinist Russia, Nazi Germany, and Maoist China. 1: Substantially. In addition to the kinds of harassment outlined in responses 2 and 3 below, the government also arrests, tries, and imprisons leaders of and participants in oppositional CSOs who have acted lawfully. Other sanctions include disruption of public gatherings and violent sanctions of activists (beatings, threats to families, destruction of valuable property). Examples include Mugabe's Zimbabwe, Poland under Martial Law, Serbia under Milosevic. 2: Moderately. In addition to material sanctions outlined in response 3 below, the government also engages in minor legal harassment (detentions, short-term incarceration) to dissuade CSOs from acting or expressing themselves. The government may also restrict the scope of their actions through measures that restrict association of civil society organisations with each other or political parties, bar civil society organisations from taking certain actions, or block international contacts. Examples include post-Martial Law Poland, Brazil in the early 1980s, the late Franco period in Spain. 3: Weakly. The government uses material sanctions (fines, firings, denial of social services) to deter oppositional CSOs from acting or expressing themselves. They may also use burdensome registration or incorporation procedures to slow the formation of new civil society organisations and side-track them from engagement. The government may also organise Government Organised Movements or NGOs (GONGOs) to crowd out independent organisations. One example would be Singapore in the post-Yew phase or Putin's Russia. 4: No.CSOs are free to organise, associate, strike, express themselves, and to criticise the government without fear of government sanctions or harassment.
v2cseeorgs	CSO entry and exit	To what extent does the government achieve control over entry and exit by civil society organisations into public life?	0: Monopolistic control. The government exercises an explicit monopoly over CSOs. The only organisations allowed to engage in political activity such as endorsing parties or politicians, sponsoring public issues forums, organizing rallies or demonstrations, engaging in strikes, or publically commenting on public officials and policies are government-sponsored organisations. The government actively represses those who attempt to defy its monopoly on political activity. 1: Substantial control. The government licenses all CSOs and uses political criteria to bar organisations that are likely to oppose the government. There are at least some citizen-based organisations that play a limited role in politics independent of the government. The government actively represses those who attempt to flout its political criteria and bars them from any political activity. 2: Moderate control. Whether the government ban on independent CSOs is partial or full, some prohibited organisations manage to play an active political role. Despite its ban on organisations of this sort, the government does not or cannot repress them, due to either its weakness or political expedience. 3: Minimal control. Whether or not the government licenses CSOs, there exist constitutional provisions that allow the government to ban organisations or movements that have a history of anti-democratic action in the past (e.g. the banning of neo-fascist or communist organisations in the Federal Republic of Germany). Such banning takes place under strict rule of law and conditions of judicial independence. 4: Unconstrained. Whether or not the government licenses CSOs, the government does not impede their formation and operation unless they are engaged in activities to violently overthrow the government.

V-Dem Variable Name	Description	Question	Responses
v2csprtcpt	CSO participatory environment	Which of these best describes the involvement of people in CSOs?	0: Most associations are state-sponsored, and although a large number of people may be active in them, their participation is not purely voluntary. 1: Voluntary CSOs exist but few people are active in them. 2: There are many diverse CSOs, but popular involvement is minimal. 3: There are many diverse CSOs and it is considered normal for people to be at least occasionally active in at least one of them.
v2psparban	Party ban	Are any parties banned?	0: Yes. All parties except the state-sponsored party (and closely allied parties) are banned. 1: Yes. Elections are non-partisan or there are no officially recognised parties. 2: Yes. Many parties are banned. 3: Yes. But only a few parties are banned. 4: No. No parties are officially banned.
v2clrelig	Freedom of religion	Is there freedom of religion?	0: Not respected by public authorities. Hardly any freedom of religion exists. Any kind of religious practice is outlawed or at least controlled by the government to the extent that religious leaders are appointed by and subjected to public authorities, who control the activities of religious communities in some detail. 1: Weakly respected by public authorities. Some elements of autonomous organised religious practices exist and are officially recognised. But significant religious communities are repressed, prohibited, or systematically disabled, voluntary conversions are restricted, and instances of discrimination or intimidation of individuals or groups due to their religion are common. 2: Somewhat respected by public authorities. Autonomous organised religious practices exist and are officially recognised. Yet, minor religious communities are repressed, prohibited, or systematically disabled, and/or instances of discrimination or intimidation of individuals or groups due to their religion occur occasionally. 3: Mostly respected by public authorities. There are minor restrictions on the freedom of religion, predominantly limited to a few isolated cases. Minority religions face denial of registration, hindrance of foreign missionaries from entering the country, restrictions against proselytising, or hindrance to access to or construction of places of worship. 4: Fully respected by public authorities. The population enjoys the right to practice any religious belief they choose. Religious groups may organise, select, and train personnel; solicit and receive contributions; publish; and engage in consultations without undue interference. If religious communities have to register, public authorities do not abuse the process to discriminate against a religion and do not constrain the right to worship before registration.
v2smgovfilprc	Government Internet filtering in practice	How frequently does the government censor political information (text, audio, images, or video) on the Internet by filtering (blacking access to certain websites)?	0: Extremely often. It is a regular practice for the government to remove political content, except to sites that are pro-government. 1: Often. The government commonly removes online political content, except sites that are pro-government. 2: Sometimes. The government successfully removes about half of the critical online political content. 3: Rarely. There have been only a few occasions on which the government removed political content. 4: Never, or almost never. The government allows Internet access that is unrestricted, with the exceptions mentioned in the clarifications section.
v2smgovshut	Government Internet shut down in practice	Independent of whether it actually does so in practice, does the government have the technical capacity to actively shut down domestic access to the Internet if it decided to?	0: The government lacks the capacity to shut down any domestic Internet connections. 1: The government has the capacity to shut down roughly a quarter of domestic access to the Internet. 2: The government has the capacity to shut down roughly half of domestic access to the Internet. 3: The government has the capacity to shut down roughly three quarters of domestic access to the Internet. 4: The government has the capacity to shut down all, or almost all, domestic access to the Internet.
v2smgovsmcenprc	Government social media censorship in practice	To what degree does the government censor political content (i.e. deleting or filtering specific posts for political reasons) on social media in practice?	0: The government simply blocks all social media platforms. 1: The government successfully censors all social media with political content. 2: The government successfully censors a significant portion of political content on social media, though not all of it. 3: The government only censors social media with political content that deals with especially sensitive issues. 4: The government does not censor political social media content, with the exceptions mentioned in the clarifications section.

V-Dem Variable Name	Description	Question	Responses
v2smregcon	Internet legal regulation content	What type of content is covered in the legal framework to regulate Internet?	0: The state can remove any content at will. 1: The state can remove most content, and the law protects speech in only specific and politically uncontroversial contexts. 2: The legal framework is ambiguous. The state can remove some politically sensitive content, while other is protected by law. 3: The law protects most political speech, but the state can remove especially politically controversial content. 4: The law protects political speech, and the state can only remove content if it violates well-established legal criteria.
v2smgovsmmon	Government social media monitoring	How comprehensive is the surveillance of political content in social media by the government or its agents?	0: Extremely comprehensive. The government surveils virtually all content on social media. 1: Mostly comprehensive. The government surveils most content on social media, with comprehensive monitoring of most key political issues. 2: Somewhat comprehensive. The government does not universally surveil social media but can be expected to surveil key political issues about half the time. 3: Limited. The government only surveils political content on social media on a limited basis. 4: Not at all, or almost not at all. The government does not surveil political content on social media, with the exceptions mentioned in the clarifications section.
v2smregapp	Government online content regulation approach	Does the government use its own resources and institutions to monitor and regulate online content or does it distribute this regulatory burden to private actors such as Internet service providers?	0: All online content monitoring and regulation is done by the state. 1: Most online content monitoring and regulation is done by the state, though the state involves private actors in a limited way. 2: Some online content monitoring and regulation is done by the state, but the state also involves private actors in monitoring and regulation in various ways. 3: The state does little online content monitoring and regulation, and entrusts most of the monitoring and regulation to private actors. 4: The state off-loads all online content monitoring and regulation to private actors.
v2smarrest	Arrests for political content	If a citizen posts political content online that would run counter to the government and its policies, what is the likelihood that citizen is arrested?	0: Extremely likely. 1: Likely. 2: Unlikely. 3: Extremely unlikely.
v2caassemb	Freedom of peaceful assembly	To what extent do state authorities respect and protect the right of peaceful assembly?	0: Never. State authorities do not allow peaceful assemblies and are willing to use lethal force to prevent them. 1: Rarely. State authorities rarely allow peaceful assemblies, but generally avoid using lethal force to prevent them. 2: Sometimes. State authorities sometimes allow peaceful assemblies, but often arbitrarily deny citizens the right to assemble peacefully. 3: Mostly. State authorities generally allow peaceful assemblies, but in rare cases arbitrarily deny citizens the right to assemble peacefully. 4: Almost always. State authorities almost always allow and actively protect peaceful assemblies except in rare cases of lawful, necessary, and proportionate limitations.
v2cafexch	Freedom of academic exchange	To what extent are scholars free to exchange and communicate research ideas and findings?	0: Completely restricted. Academic exchange and dissemination is, across all disciplines, consistently subject to censorship, selfcensorship or other restrictions. 1: Severely restricted. Academic exchange and dissemination is, in some disciplines, consistently subject to censorship, selfcensorship or other restrictions. 2: Moderately restricted. Academic exchange and dissemination is occasionally subject to censorship, self-censorship or other restrictions. 3: Mostly free. Academic exchange and dissemination is rarely subject to censorship, self-censorship or other restrictions. 4: Fully free. Academic exchange and dissemination is not subject to censorship, self-censorship or other restrictions.
v2smdefabu	Abuse of defamation and copyright law by elites	To what extent do elites abuse the legal system (e.g. defamation and copyright law) to censor political speech online?	0: Regularly. Elites abuse the legal system to remove political speech from the Internet as regular practice. 1: Often. Elites commonly abuse the legal system to remove political speech from the Internet. 2: Sometimes. Elites abuse the legal system to remove political speech from the Internet about half the time. 3: Rarely. Elites occasionally abuse the legal system to remove political speech from the Internet. 4: Never, or almost never. Elites do not abuse the legal system to remove political speech from the Internet.

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