

**COMMITTEE** : Human Rights

**TOPIC** : Freedom Of Press and Journalism In Russia

**STUDENT OFFICER** : Lorina Lepouras

**POSITIONS** : Vice-President

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## Personal Introduction

Dear Delegates,

My name is Lorina Lepouras, I am 16 years old and I'm going to be your vice president in the Human Rights committee for this year's LFHMUN. This will be my first year as chair, having previously participated in last year's LFHMUN, as well as in last year's Zara MUN in Zaragoza, Spain. I hope this experience is as meaningful and memorable to you as it was to me when I was a delegate. Along with your president, Calliopée Huge, we will be here to guide you and make sure you have three very productive days filled with debates.

In this study guide you will find helpful information on the subject of : Freedom of press and journalism in Russia. I advise you to read the study guide carefully as it contains valuable insights on the topic. However, personal research and investment is also necessary to help you have a better understanding of your country's position which you will need to defend throughout the three topics and specialized debate.

It is a pleasure to be able to guide your MUN experience. Do not hesitate to reach out with any questions or if any assistance is needed.

I wish you good luck and see you soon!!

## Introduction

Freedom of press protects the right to spread thoughts, ideas, news and views by publishing them. Press freedom means the government can't prevent information from being published. It is closely tied to freedom of speech. The right is enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes the right to hold an opinion and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas without interference, regardless of frontiers."

However in some countries freedom of press has been restricted. Russia is a good example of a country with a tightly regulated media and a heavily controlled journalism. In recent years, particularly under Vladimir Putin, press freedom in Russia has faced increasing restrictions, the government has a tight grip on the media through which it prevents independent journalism and shuts down articles that are not in line with the government. As a consequence journalists in Russia often face threats, harassment, arrest, and even physical violence goes against the principles of democracy.

This situation raises profound questions about the role of the press in a democratic society, the importance of free expression, and the implications for civil society. Furthermore, as members of the United Nations, individuals must contend with the issue of the erosion of press freedom in Russia without forgetting to maintain sovereignty as the implications of these developments are far-reaching, affecting not only Russian citizens but also the global understanding of democracy and human rights.

## Key Words

**Freedom of press:** The right of newspapers, magazines, etc., to report news without being controlled by the government.

**Freedom of speech:** The right of a person to articulate opinions and ideas without interference or retaliation from the government

**State-owned media:** Any type of media that is administered, funded, managed, or directly controlled by the government of a country.

**Restriction:** Limitation on activity, by statute, regulation or contract provision

**Roskomnadzor:** A federal executive authority of the Russian Federation, performing licensing and permit issuing; control and supervision in telecommunications, information technology, and mass communications

**Media Censorship:** Supervision and control of the information and ideas circulating on the media

**Fake news:** False or misleading information

**Kremlin:** Group of buildings in the center of Moscow that serves as the official seat of the government of Russia

**Internet penetration:** The percentage of the total population of a given country or region that uses the internet

**Threats of journalism:** The range of threats journalists are confronted with such as murder, kidnapping, hostage-taking, offline and online harassment, intimidation, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention and torture.

**Government surveillance:** Process of collecting information by a country's government in this case media coverage.

**Draconian laws:** government laws that are extremely severe, or go further than what is right or necessary.

**Reporters without Borders (RSF):** international organizations monitoring press freedom founded in Montpellier, France, in 1985 by Robert Ménard, Rémy Loury, Jacques Molénat and Émilien Jubineau. It was registered as a non-profit organisation in 1995

**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE):** organization for peace and security in Europe with 57 participating countries founded on July 1, 1975, as a result of the Helsinki Accords. The organization initially came together through the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), which began in 1973 and culminated in the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975.

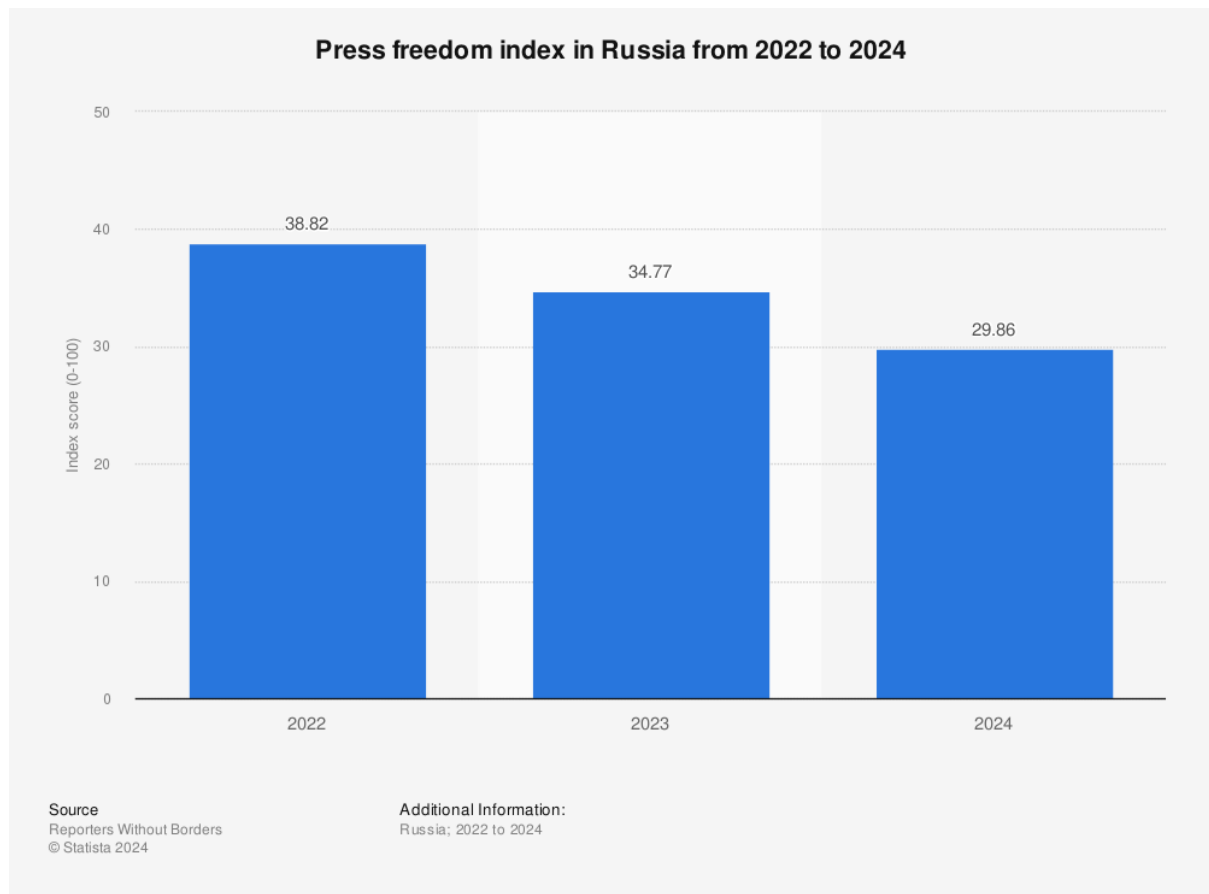
**Crowdfunding Infrastructures :** refers to the systems, platforms, and tools that enable individuals, businesses, or organizations to raise funds through small contributions from a large number of people in this case to raise funds for the operation of the news outlet particularly after facing significant legal and financial challenges, especially following its designation as a "foreign agent" by the Russian government in 2021

## General Overview

As stated in article 29 of the russian constitution\_\_:

*"The freedom of the mass media shall be guaranteed. Censorship shall be prohibited."*

However in recent years the Russian media does not consider itself free, being very much pressured by authorities, harassed, and convicted for practicing profession. Ever since the Covid-19 pandemic, President Vladimir Putin has seemed increasingly isolated from the outside world and even more so since the start of the war in Ukraine



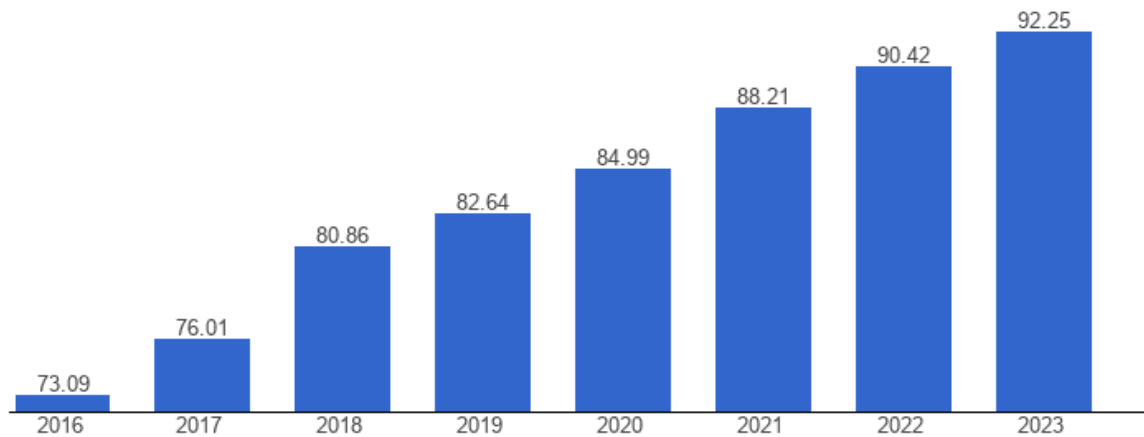
Press freedom index in Russia 2022-2024

Published by [Statista Research Department](#), May 3, 2024

Reporters Without Borders' press freedom index in Russia in 2024 was recorded at 29.86 points, having decreased compared to the previous year. That corresponded to a deterioration of the media freedom situation, according to the index methodology. Thus, Russia was placed 162nd in the global ranking of 180 countries and one of the lowest in Europe. Furthermore, Freedom House ranked freedom on the internet in Russia at 21 out of 100 points in 2023, where 100 points referred to the highest degree of internet freedom.

## State Control and Censorship

### *Evolution of internet penetration in Russia*



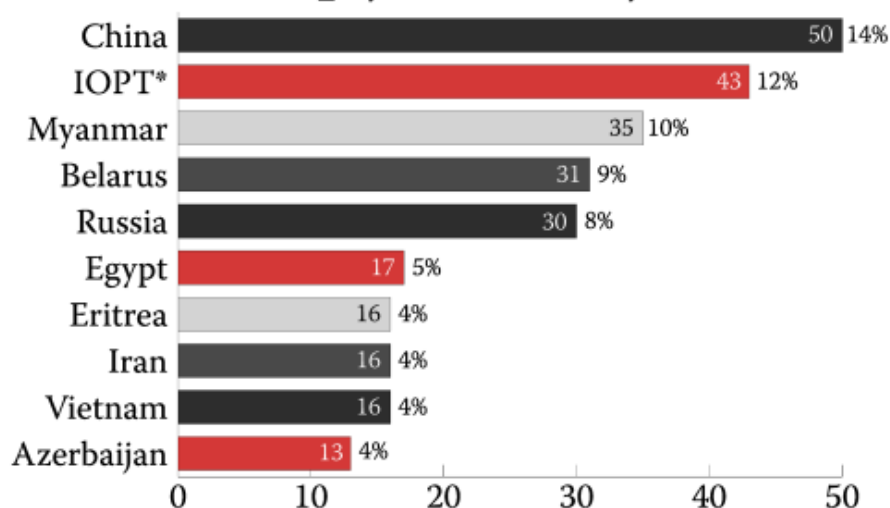
[https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Russia/Internet\\_users/](https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Russia/Internet_users/)

Despite having a very high internet penetration most of the media outlets in Russia are state owned or are aligned with the Kremlin and independent media is heavily restricted from discussing certain political issues. Content is regulated by the state through agencies like Roskomnadzor which suppresses or blocks information that is not in harmony with the government. Some of these media include BBC, France 24, and Euronews which have been blocked or restricted in some way. Furthermore, Russia has enacted laws that make the coverage of certain matters illegal for instance the government and the military.

## *The Impact of State Control on Journalists in Russia*

### CPJ's 2024 Prison Census

## Top jailers of journalists



\*Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory

CPJ/Charles Spicer

<https://cpj.org/special-reports/in-record-year-china-israel-and-myanmar-are-worlds-leading-jailers-of-journalists/>

Journalists in Russia face serious penalties. Charges of “extremism” and “condoning terrorism” are increasingly used while heavy sentences, even torture, used mainly in the regions, the frequent use of fines and short-term detention under various pretexts have been added to the methods employed to intimidate journalists. According to Reporters without borders, in the last decade 131 journalists have been killed, gone missing, imprisoned or held hostage in Russia. No journalists, even those in exile, are safe from the threat of serious charges based on vaguely worded draconian laws, often adopted in haste.

### *International Response*

Countries like the **United States** or **European Union members** have publicly opposed to Russia's limited press, even imposing sanctions such as banning Russian media

For instance, the **Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)** has denounced the shrinking space for freedom of expression and media freedom in Russia, highlighting concerns over new legal restrictions that undermine these

freedoms for example, in 2022, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Russia enacted even more stringent laws that severely curtailed press freedom. These included laws criminalizing the spread of "false information" about the military and the war in Ukraine. Media outlets critical of the government's actions were shut down or forced to leave the country, and journalists faced severe consequences for reporting independently. The **OSCE's** press freedom representative once again denounced these laws as a direct attack on media freedom, noting that they "undermine the public's ability to make informed decisions" and severely restrict the role of free journalism.

Similarly, the **Media Freedom Coalition** which combines countries committed to promoting media freedom, freedom of expression, and the safety of journalists, aims to support the free flow of information and hold governments accountable when they restrict these fundamental rights have condemned the closure of independent outlets like Dozhd (TV Rain) and Meduza, and the harassment and imprisonment of journalists. It highlighted the use of legal tools to silence independent voices, such as labeling media as "foreign agents" and imposing penalties for "fake news."

The statement called for international solidarity with Russian journalists and urged Russian authorities to end these practices and respect international human rights standards

Furthermore, several countries and regional organizations including the **European Union (EU)**, the **United States**, and the **United Kingdom** have imposed sanctions targeting Russian media entities and officials groups such as the **European Commission** who welcomed the Council's decision to suspend broadcasting activities of certain Russian media outlets, including Voice of Europe, RIA Novosti, Izvestia, and others, as part of efforts to counter disinformation.

However countries such as Belarus and China have openly supported Russia's domestic media policies in international forums.

For instance, **Belarus**, under President **Alexander Lukashenko**, has often echoed Russia's position on media control. In **2021**, during a joint press conference with Russian President **Vladimir Putin**, Lukashenko praised Russia's measures to control the media landscape, suggesting that such actions were necessary to protect the nation from foreign interference. Lukashenko stated, "*We must protect our countries from foreign propaganda, which destabilizes our societies.*"

Similarly, **China** has expressed support for Russia's crackdown on independent journalism. During the **2022 United Nations** meeting, China's representative **Zhang Jun** backed Russia's legislative efforts, asserting that Russia had the right to safeguard its sovereignty and media from external pressure. He remarked, "*Each country has the right to manage its media environment according to its own legal framework, without foreign interference.*" This statement reflects China's broader

position of supporting state control over media as part of maintaining national security and stability, in line with Russia's approach.

### *Impact on the population*

The limited access to news resources has a significant impact on the Russian citizens as for most, television remains the main source of the news. It is firmly controlled by the Kremlin and pumps out relentless propaganda. The fact that the majority of Russians tune in to TV news means they are inclined to at least hear the Kremlin's message and possibly believe it which can lead to massive misinformation. Criticism of the government has been silenced meaning that much of the information disseminated to the public is biased in favor of the government which disrespects the basic human rights.

### Case Study:

#### American journalist imprisoned



<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cg64npg33r3o>

Evan Gershkovich, the first American journalist jailed in Russia since the Cold War, was released on August first 2024 after more than 16 months in custody.

The Wall Street Journal reporter was detained by Russia's Federal Security Service in March 2023 while on a reporting assignment in Yekaterinburg, a city about 1,000 miles east of Moscow.

Sentenced to 16 years in prison after being found guilty of espionage by a Russian court, he is now a part of the largest prisoner swap between Russia and the West since the Cold War.

## Case study:

### Meduza

Meduza, an independent, Russian-language media outlet, accused the Russian authorities of carrying out an unprecedented wave of cyberattacks with the intent to shut the site down

On March 11 2024 the Latvia-based Meduza said the attacks began around the time when Aleksei Navalny, Russia's most prominent opposition leader, died in an Arctic prison while facing a long prison term.

*"In February 2024, the Russian authorities launched a series of cyberattacks against Meduza more intense than any we've ever faced"* the outlet said in the statement.

*"While we don't have direct evidence, we believe this campaign is an attempt to completely destroy Meduza,"* it said.

Meduza said Russian authorities and Kremlin-affiliated organizations are increasingly blocking its mirror servers; launching distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks to disable its website; attempting to disrupt its crowdfunding infrastructure ; and hack into its journalists' accounts using phishing and other techniques. The outlet said the "high-value" attacks show the Russian authorities are willing to spend vast resources to achieve their goal. Meduza said the attacks are part of a wider campaign by the authorities to "carpet bomb" the Russian Internet, including Internet outages and interference with messaging apps.

## Case Study:

### Novaya Gazeta



<https://amp.dw.com/en/russia-revokes-independent-media-outlet-novaya-gazetas-online-license/a-63143615>

Novaya Gazeta is one of the last Russian newspaper that remained independent since its creation in 1993. It is known for its investigative journalism on government corruption, human rights abuses, and military operations. Over the years, several of its journalists, including Anna Politkovskaya, were assassinated for exposing state abuses, highlighting the dangers of critical reporting. In 2022, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the government intensified its crackdown on independent media, forcing Novaya Gazeta to suspend operations and later revoking its media license showcasing the limit of press freedom in the country as well as the consequences of independent journalism in Russia . The newspaper remains functioning in exile under Novaya Gazeta Europe.

## Concerned Countries

**United States:** The United States have openly opposed Russia's restriction to media as stated by US ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield at the UN security council on April 17th 2023

*"We will continue to advocate for press freedom and the safety of journalists worldwide. We urge Russian Federation authorities to release those they hold on political grounds, and to end the draconian crackdown on freedom of expression, including against members of the media."*

However, with Donald Trump's reelection in 2024, there are growing concerns about the future direction of U.S. foreign policy, particularly in relation to Russia's treatment of the media. As of March 14 the US President cut funding for international public radio stations Voice of America and Radio Free Europe, which broadcast programmes aligned with "democratic values" to millions of listeners around the world. In their absence, Russia and China are now set to fill the gap with their own state media offerings. As a result Donald J. Trump's reelection could potentially lead to a shift in how the U.S. engages with Russia's press freedom issue.

**United Kingdom :** The UK has gone against Russia several times in the topic of freedom of journalism. Furthermore during the OSCE 2024 conference in June 2024 at Vienna UK ambassador Neil Holland called upon Russia and Belarus to live up to their OSCE principles and commitments, to enable freedom for the media to report on matters of public interest without undue interference, threats, and intimidation, urging participating States to invest in Securing media freedom.

**China :** Having similar regulations with the Russian government and being one of their greatest allies, the cooperation between Russia and China has been deepening due to their shared interest in controlling internet information and a "shared distaste for the United States and the West" (Bandurski, 2022). Both countries have imposed stricter controls on the international information available to their respective domestic audiences, particularly targeting content that poses a threat to their authority. In addition, China has demonstrated support for Russia's stance on press freedom, particularly in the context of international media operations. Following President Donald Trump's executive order in March 2025 to shut down the Voice of America (VOA), Chinese state media outlets like CCTV continue their operations globally.

**Countries of the European Union :** The European Union (EU) has actively supported press freedom in Russia, particularly in response to increasing restrictions on independent media within the country. The EU has started various different initiatives to help with the issue such as Financial Support for Exiled Journalists, and even taking legal actions against Russia

**Belarus:** While Belarus faces international criticism for its own press freedom record, it has also expressed support for Russia's stance on media freedom, particularly in the context of the conflict in Ukraine. Belarus has positioned itself as a steadfast ally of Russia, supporting Russian narratives and actions in international forums.

### Organizations:

**Reporters without Borders :** Founded in Montpellier, France, in 1985 by Robert Ménard, Rémy Loury, Jacques Molénat and Émilien Jubineau this non-profit organisation has as a goal to leave no breach of freedom of information unreported and to raise international awareness and support for affected media professionals

**Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ):** Based in New York the Committee to Protect Journalists was founded in 1981 in response to the harassment of Paraguayan journalist Alcibiades González Delvalle by Walter Cronkite since 1991, it has held the annual CPJ International Press Freedom Awards Dinner, during which awards are given to journalists and press freedom advocates who have received beatings, threats, intimidation, and prison for reporting the news. The CPJ actively campaigns against the Russian government's designation of international organizations

**Glasnost Defense Foundation (GDF):** Established in 1991 by Yegor Yakovlev, Vladimir Molchanov, Igor Golembiovsky, Mark Rozovsky, Elem Klimov, Aleksei German and other prominent Russian filmmakers and journalist, the GDF is dedicated to defending journalists' rights and freedom of expression in Russia. They provide legal assistance to journalists facing persecution, support the families of slain journalists, and maintain records of press freedom violations.

**Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)** : The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) is an American think tank based in Washington, D.C founded in 1962 . The center conducts policy studies and strategic analyses of political, economic and security issues throughout the world. CSIS hosted a discussion on the future of independent media and freedom of speech online in Russia.

**Media Freedom Coalition:** The Media Freedom Coalition was formed in July 2019 at the Global Conference for Media Freedom. It is a partnership of 51 countries working together to advocate for media freedom and safety of journalists and hold to account those who harm journalists for doing their job. In October 2021, they released a statement expressing concern over Russia's treatment of journalists, calling for the cessation of repression against independent voices and the end of politically motivated proceedings against journalists.

## UN involvement

The UN has intervened quite a few times to put a stop at the oppression of freedom of press in Russia :

Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right as stated in **Article 19** of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**:

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

This article states that each individual has the right to express themselves freely however the Russian Federation has designated Article 19 as an 'undesirable organisation

In May 2024 the UN rights chief also expressed concern over the frequent use of the broad legislative framework to combat terrorism and extremism, urging the authorities to amend the legislation.

*"Journalists should be able to work in a safe environment without fear of reprisals – in line with Russia's international human rights obligations," he said. "I call on the*

*authorities to immediately drop charges against journalists detained solely for doing their jobs, and to release them.”*

In January 2024, the Russian authorities designated ARTICLE 19 as an ‘undesirable organisation’, further highlighting the government’s desire to avoid accountability for its repeated and long-standing violations of freedom of expression. This action is emblematic of the broader repression targeting any entity that seeks to uphold fundamental human rights in Russia.

The **UN** during the 57th session of the UN Human Rights Council then urged the Russian authorities to immediately repeal the legislation on ‘undesirable organisations’ and other laws restricting freedom of expression and to renew the mandate of the Special Rapporteur so that these critical issues can continue to be addressed. Also insisting on the fact that Russian authorities should face scrutiny and accountability for these ongoing violations of the right to freedom of expression and other human rights.

Furthermore, the UN has funded a program named **the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity** is the result of a process that began in 2010 upon request of **UNESCO's Intergovernmental Council of the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC)**. It was endorsed by the UN Chief Executives Board on 12 April 2012, and has been welcomed in resolutions of the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council, and UNESCO.

The UN Plan of Action aims to create a free and safe environment for journalists and media workers, both in conflict and non-conflict situations, with a view to strengthening peace, democracy and development worldwide. The Plan includes measures such as the establishment of an inter-agency mechanism to strengthen the contribution of each UN actor and enhance UN-wide coherence; cooperation with States to develop legislation and other mechanisms for safeguarding the freedom of expression and information as well as the safety of journalists; and the establishment of partnerships, awareness-raising and fostering initiatives.

## Previous attempts to solve the issue

While various international actors have tried to protest against censorship in Russia such as Reporters Without Borders while others have taken legal actions like Barents Observer a Norwegian newspaper that was blocked from Russian media. The publisher, supported by ADC Memorial, appealed through Russian courts without success. The situation has only worsened with increasing government control and a climate of intimidation hindering the work of independent journalists and media outlets.

## Latest developments

|                |                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| March 21, 2025 | Alexander Skobov, a 67-year-old Soviet-era dissident, was sentenced to 16 years in prison for expressing anti-war views. This highlights the severe repression of dissenting voices in Russia.  |
| November 2024  | Russia's increased criminal charges against journalists and activists                                                                                                                           |
| March 2025     | The U.S. decision to defund the U.S. Agency for Global Media has left exiled Russian journalists without critical support, increasing their vulnerability.                                      |
| March 2024     | The UN and other human rights organizations have condemned Russia's actions against journalists, calling for the release of detained reporters and urging an end to press freedom restrictions. |
| March 2025     | President Donald Trump's cuts to United States-funded media including Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Radio Free Asia.                                                    |
| July 2024      | Operation Collateral Freedom – a project by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has unblocked nearly 50 media outlets censored by China and Russia                                                  |
| May 2024       | The European commission suspends 4 Russian media outlets (The ban applies to Voice of Europe, RIA Novosti news agency and Izvestia and Rossiyskaya Gazeta newspapers)                           |

## Possible solutions

### Providing International Support

Advocate through organizations like **Reporters Without Borders**.

Apply diplomatic pressure and targeted sanctions on officials responsible for press censorship.

Offer asylum and support to exiled journalists.

### Strengthening Independent Media

Fund and support independent outlets like **Meduza** and **Novaya Gazeta**.

Create censorship-free digital platforms for safe reporting that can be accessible globally

### Legal Protections

Push for reforms to protect press freedom, including repealing restrictive laws such as the suspension of Article 19 .

Establish legal defense funds for journalists facing prosecution.

Create sanctions if there is a violation of the Human Rights declaration

### Education and Advocacy

Implement media literacy programs to raise awareness about press freedom.

Conduct international media campaigns to highlight the importance of independent journalism.

Form partnerships between Russian and international media outlets.

Educate the Russian citizens on media censorship.

## Annex

### A bad press

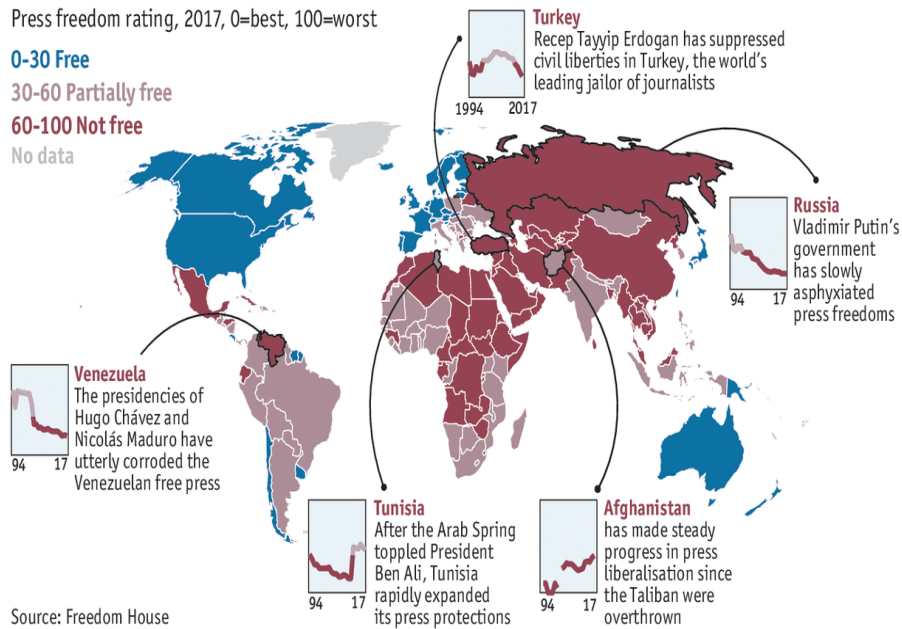
Press freedom rating, 2017, 0=best, 100=worst

0-30 Free

30-60 Partially free

60-100 Not free

No data



The Economist

<https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2018/07/23/the-global-slump-in-press-freedom>

## State of press freedom worldwide in 2023

Changes in 180 countries and territories evaluated by RSF since 2013

Filter:

Year :

| 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|

Good situation: 8 countries



Satisfactory situation: 44 countries



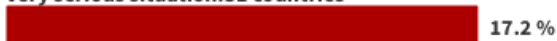
Problematic situation: 55 countries



Difficult situation: 42 countries



Very serious situation: 31 countries



Source : [World Press Freedom Index](#), [Link to share](#)  
©Reporters Without Borders



[https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2018/07/23/the-global-slump-in-press-free  
dom](https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2018/07/23/the-global-slump-in-press-freedom)

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