

Americas



Noteworthy breakthroughs in Central America ; Brazil vaults back into the top of the Index

After **Honduras** in 2009, drained more than ever by the consequences of the coup d'état on the freedom to inform, the year's most impressive changes concern three other Central American countries. Christian Poveda's murder on 2 September 2009, at the beginning of the period considered, should logically have hurled **El Salvador** into the bottom of the Index. Yet the opposite occurred because of efforts undertaken and results obtained by Mauricio Funes' government against impunity in this case. Even if the media (particularly those of the community) are not safe from threats, the absence of any aggression or serious acts of censorship are rocketing this reputedly dangerous country into an enviable position. A positive trend is also emerging in **Guatemala**, where results included no one killed, unlike in preceding years.

Panama has taken an opposite direction, in an atmosphere growing increasingly tense between the media and the authorities. Three serious episodes explain this sudden drop. First, the detention – at the end of June and for nineteen days – of retired journalist Carlos Nuñez, on grounds of a conviction for “defamation and “insult” which happened twelve years earlier and of which he had not even been aware. Next, the harsh treatments inflicted in his cell on a photographer arrested because of a harmless negative. Lastly, the threats, accompanied by an expulsion procedure, which were imposed on Spanish journalist Paco Gómez Nadal, a critical columnist and defender of indigenous rights.

During this time, neighbouring **Costa Rica** was still holding its position among the highest-ranked Latin American countries.

Further to the north, the **United States** (50 states of the union) and **Canada** still occupy the continent's best positions, but they lag behind some twenty other countries. The initial results of the Obama administration in terms of access to information are disappointing.

Honduras brings up the rear in Central America, with a human track record comparable to that of **Mexico**, which is nonetheless slightly ahead of it, but followed, heading southward in the Index, by **Colombia**, where havoc caused by the country's Administrative Department of Security (DAS) was accompanied by two murders of journalists (one of which involved a confirmed work-related motive). The situation is still tense in the **Dominican Republic**, where it is not healthy to be involved in corruption or drug trafficking, but it is becoming critical again in the Andean countries. **Bolivia's** and **Ecuador's** rankings have lost ground because of the violent acts, intimidations and blocked activities fostered by a pervasive climate of media-related political polarisation. The situation is affecting the state-owned, as well as privately owned, media. Peru has once again dropped some places because it still has not only a high incidence of assaults, but also of censorships ordered by high-ranking officials, and of abuses of process against the media. The same factors explain **Venezuela's** new plunge, where the regime's monopoly of the audiovisual terrestrial broadcast network and the excessive use of lengthy presidential speeches leaves little room for pluralism.

Cuba gained several places after the wave of dissident releases – notably the “Black Springtime” of March 2003 – which began in July 2010. So far, five journalists remain imprisoned in the continent's only state which does not recognise any

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independent media. If the regime has made some concessions on behalf of its political prisoners in exchange for forced exile, it still has not made any with regard to public freedoms.

Persistent problems in the South

The other countries share some persistent problems – an over-concentration of media, economic disparities, local tensions, excessive number of legal proceedings, media coverage restrictions. Brazil can now be added to the countries with improved rankings already observed in the South Cone (**Argentina, Chile, Paraguay** and **Uruguay**). The Latin American giant owes its better position to a decline in incidents of serious violence – which had previously been undermining certain regions – and to some pledges to fight against impunity in certain affairs. It also owes its improved

ranking to favourable legislative changes in matters relating to access of information and editorial freedom, such as the reaffirmation of the right to caricaturise in an election period. Lastly, **Brazil** is one of the world's most active Internet communities. The situation there would be better still if preventive censorship measures were not being imposed on certain media outlets.

In the area's English-speaking nations, only **Guyana** experienced a significant reversal, due to the often strained relations between the media and the presidency, as well as to the government's radio monopoly. It is somewhat outranked by the six islands of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (**OECS**), which entered the Index with the same rankings, right after **Haiti**, where the media are ensuring their survival by focusing on rebuilding after the 12 January 2010 earthquake.

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Europe falls from its pedestal, no respite in the dictatorships

“Our latest world press freedom index contains welcome surprises, highlights sombre realities and confirms certain trends,” Reporters Without Borders secretary-general Jean-François Julliard said as his organisation issued its ninth annual index today. “More than ever before, we see that economic development, institutional reform and respect for fundamental rights do not necessarily go hand in hand. The defence of media freedom continues to be a battle, a battle of vigilance in the democracies of old Europe and a battle against oppression and injustice in the totalitarian regimes still scattered across the globe.

“We must salute the engines of press freedom, with Finland, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland at their head. We must also pay homage to the human rights activists, journalists and bloggers throughout the world who bravely defend the right to speak out. Their fate is our constant concern. We reiterate our call for the release of Liu Xiaobo, the symbol of the pressure for free speech building up in China, which censorship for the time being is still managing to contain. And we warn the Chinese authorities against taking a road from which there is no way out.

“It is disturbing to see several European Union member countries continuing to fall in the index. If it does not pull itself together, the European Union risks losing its position as world leader in respect for human rights. And if that were to happen, how could it be convincing when it asked authoritarian regimes to make improvements? There is an urgent need for the European countries to recover their exemplary status.

“We are also worried by the harsher line being taken by governments at the other end of the index. Rwanda, Yemen and Syria have

joined Burma and North Korea in the group of the world’s most repressive countries towards journalists. This does not bode well for 2011. Unfortunately, the trend in the most authoritarian countries is not one of improvement.”

European Union loses its leadership status

Reporters Without Borders has repeatedly expressed its concern about the deteriorating press freedom situation in the European Union and the 2010 index confirms this trend. Thirteen of the EU’s 27 members are in the top 20 but some of the other 14 are very low in the ranking. Italy is 49th, Romania is 52nd and Greece and Bulgaria are tied at 70th. The European Union is not a homogenous whole as regards media freedom. On the contrary, the gap between good and bad performers continues to widen.

There has been no progress in several countries where Reporters Without Borders pointed out problems. They include, above all, France and Italy, where events of the past year – violation of the protection of journalists’ sources, the continuing concentration of media ownership, displays of contempt and impatience on the part of government officials towards journalists and their work, and judicial summonses – have confirmed their inability to reverse this trend.

Northern Europe still at the top

Several countries share first place in the index again. This year it is Finland, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland. They have all previously held this honour since the index was created in 2002. Norway and Iceland have always been among the countries sharing first position except in 2006 (Norway) and 2009 (Iceland).

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These six countries set an example in the way they respect journalists and news media and protect them from judicial abuse.

They even continue to progress. Iceland, for example, is considering an exemplary bill, the Icelandic Modern Media Initiative (IMMI), that would provide a unique level of protection for the media. Sweden distinguishes itself by its Press Freedom Act, which has helped to create a particularly favourable climate for the work of journalists, by the strength of its institutions and by its respect for all those sectors of society including the media whose role in a democracy is to question and challenge those in positions of power.

Ten countries where it is not good to be a journalist

In recent years, Reporters Without Borders drew particular attention to the three countries that were always in the last three positions – Eritrea, North Korea and Turkmenistan. This year, a bigger group of ten countries – marked by persecution of the media and a complete lack of news and information – are clumped together at the bottom. The press freedom situation keeps on deteriorating in these countries and it is getting harder to say which is worse than the other. The difference between the scores of the “best” and worst of the last 10 countries was only 24.5 points this year. It was 37.5 points in 2009 and 43.25 points in 2007.

It is worth noting that, for the first time since the start of the index in 2002, Cuba is not one of the 10 last countries. This is due above all to the release of 14 journalists and 22 activists in the course of the past summer. But the situation on the ground has not changed significantly. Political dissidents and independent journalists still have to deal with censorship and repression on a daily basis.

Freedom is not allowed any space in Burma, where a parliamentary election is due to be held next month, and the rare attempts to provide news or information are met with imprisonment and forced labour.

Finally, in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Mexico, countries either openly at war or in a civil war or some other kind of internal

conflict, we see a situation of permanent chaos and a culture of violence and impunity taking root in which the press has become a favourite target. These are among the most dangerous countries in the world, and the belligerents there pick directly on reporters such as French TV journalists Stéphane Taponier and Hervé Ghesquière, who have been held hostage in Afghanistan for the past 300 days.

Economic growth does not mean press freedom

The BRICs – Brazil, Russia, India and China – may all be at a roughly similar stage of economic development but the 2010 index highlights major differences in the press freedom situation in these countries. Thanks to favourable legislative changes, Brazil (58th) has risen 12 places in the past year, while India has fallen 17 places to 122nd. Russia, which had a particularly deadly preceding year, is still poorly placed at 140th. Despite an astonishingly vibrant and active blogosphere, China still censors and jails dissidents and continues to languish in 171st place.

These four countries now shoulder the responsibilities of the emerging powers and must fulfil their obligations as regards fundamental rights.

Heavy falls

The Philippines, Ukraine, Greece and Kyrgyzstan all fell sharply in this year's index. In the Philippines this was due to the massacre of around 30 journalists by a local baron, in Ukraine to the slow and steady deterioration in press freedom since Viktor Yanukovich's election as president in February, in Greece to political unrest and physical attacks on several journalists, and in Kyrgyzstan to the ethnic hatred campaign that accompanied the political turmoil.

The changes are unfortunately often deceptive. Some countries have risen sharply in the index this year but in fact all they have done is recover their traditional position after a particularly difficult if not disastrous 2009. This is the case with Gabon, which rose 22 places, South Korea (+27) and Guinea-Bissau (+25).

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World Press Freedom Index 2010

The rankings

Rank	Country	Note	
1	Finland	0,00	=
-	Iceland	0,00	↑
-	Netherlands	0,00	↑
-	Norway	0,00	=
-	Sweden	0,00	=
-	Switzerland	0,00	↑
7	Austria	0,50	↑
8	New Zealand	1,50	↑
9	Estonia	2,00	↓
-	Ireland	2,00	↓
11	Denmark	2,50	↓↓
-	Japan	2,50	↑
-	Lithuania	2,50	↓
14	Belgium	4,00	↓
-	Luxembourg	4,00	↑
-	Malta	4,00	↓
17	Germany	4,25	↑
18	Australia	5,38	↓
19	United Kingdom	6,00	↑
20	United States of America	6,75	=
21	Canada	7,00	↓
-	Namibia	7,00	↑↑
23	Czech Republic	7,50	↑
-	Hungary	7,50	↑
25	Jamaica	7,67	↓
26	Cape Verde	8,00	↑↑
-	Ghana	8,00	↑
-	Mali	8,00	↑
29	Costa Rica	8,08	↑
30	Latvia	8,50	↓↓
-	Trinidad and Tobago	8,50	↓
32	Poland	8,88	↑
33	Chile	10,50	↑
34	Hong-Kong	10,75	↑↑
35	Slovakia	11,50	↑
-	Surinam	11,50	↑

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Rank	Country	Note	
37	Uruguay	11,75	↓
38	South Africa	12,00	↓
39	Spain	12,25	↑
40	Portugal	12,36	↓↓
41	Tanzania	13,00	↑↑
42	Papua New Guinea	13,33	↑↑
-	South Korea	13,33	↑↑
44	France	13,38	↓
45	Cyprus	13,40	↓↓
46	Slovenia	13,44	↓
47	Bosnia and Herzegovina	13,50	↓
48	Taiwan	14,50	↑↑
49	Burkina Faso	15,00	↑
-	Italy	15,00	=
51	El Salvador	15,83	↑↑
52	Maldives	16,00	↓
-	Romania	16,00	↓
54	Paraguay	16,25	=
55	Argentina	16,35	↓
56	Haiti	16,38	↑
57	Organization of Eastern Caribbean States	16,50	nc
58	Brazil	16,60	↑↑
59	Guyana	16,63	↓↓
60	Togo	17,00	↑
61	Cyprus (North)	17,25	↓↓
62	Botswana	17,50	=
-	Croatia	17,50	↑↑
64	Bhutan	17,75	↑
65	Mauritius	18,00	↓↓
-	Seychelles	18,00	↑
67	Guinea-Bissau	18,25	↑↑
68	Macedonia	18,40	↓↓
69	Central African Republic	18,50	↑↑
70	Benin	19,00	↑
-	Bulgaria	19,00	↓
-	Comoros	19,00	↑↑
-	Greece	19,00	↓↓
-	Kenya	19,00	↑↑
75	Moldova	19,13	↑↑
76	Mongolia	19,42	↑↑
77	Guatemala	20,25	↑↑
78	Lebanon	20,50	↓↓
79	Malawi	21,00	↓↓
80	Albania	21,50	↑

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Rank	Country	Note	
81	Panama	21,83	↓↓
82	Zambia	22,00	↑↑
83	Nicaragua	22,33	↓
84	Liberia	22,50	↓↓
85	Serbia	23,00	↓↓
86	Israel (Israeli territory)	23,25	↑
87	Kuwait	23,75	↓↓
-	Tonga	23,75	↕
-	United Arab Emirates	23,75	↓
90	Lesotho	24,00	↑
91	Sierra Leone	24,25	↑↑
92	Kosovo	24,83	↓↓
93	Senegal	25,00	↓
-	Timor-Leste	25,00	↓↓
95	Mauritania	25,38	↑
96	Uganda	25,50	↓↓
97	Dominican Republic	26,13	↑
98	Mozambique	26,50	↓↓
99	Georgia	27,00	↓↓
-	United States of America (extra-territorial)	27,00	↑
101	Armenia	27,50	↑↑
-	Ecuador	27,50	↓↓
103	Bolivia	28,13	↓
104	Angola	28,50	↑↑
-	Montenegro	28,50	↓↓
-	Niger	28,50	↑↑
107	Gabon	28,75	↑↑
108	Burundi	28,88	↓
109	Peru	30,00	↓↓
110	Djibouti	30,50	=
111	Samoa	33,00	↕
112	Chad	33,17	↑↑
113	Guinea	33,50	↓↓
114	Congo	33,60	↑
115	Tajikistan	34,50	↓
116	Madagascar	34,88	↑↑
117	Indonesia	35,83	↓↓
118	Côte d'Ivoire	36,00	↓↓
119	Nepal	36,38	↓
120	Jordan	37,00	↓
121	Qatar	38,00	↓↓
122	India	38,75	↓↓
123	Zimbabwe	39,50	↑↑
124	Oman	40,25	↓↓

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Rank	Country	Note	
125	Gambia	40,50	↑↑
126	Bangladesh	42,50	↓
127	Egypt	43,33	↑↑
128	Cambodia	43,83	↓↓
129	Cameroon	44,30	↓↓
130	Iraq	45,58	↑↑
131	Ukraine	46,83	↓↓
132	Israel (extra-territorial)	47,00	↑↑
133	Algeria	47,33	↑
-	Venezuela	47,33	↓
135	Morocco	47,40	↓
136	Mexico	47,50	↑
-	Singapore	47,50	↓
138	Turkey	49,25	↓↓
139	Ethiopia	49,38	↑
140	Russia	49,90	↑↑
141	Malaysia	50,75	↓↓
142	Brunei	51,00	↑↑
143	Honduras	51,13	↓↓
144	Bahrein	51,38	↓↓
145	Colombia	51,50	↓↓
-	Nigeria	51,50	↓↓
147	Afghanistan	51,67	↑
148	Democratic Republic of Congo	51,83	↓
149	Fiji	52,75	↑
150	Palestinian Territories	56,13	↑↑
151	Pakistan	56,17	↑
152	Azerbaijan	56,38	↓
153	Thailand	56,83	↓↓
154	Belarus	57,00	↓
155	Swaziland	57,50	↓↓
156	Philippines	60,00	↓↓
157	Saudi Arabia	61,50	↑
158	Sri Lanka	62,50	↑
159	Kyrgyzstan	63,00	↓↓
160	Libya	63,50	↓
161	Somalia	66,00	↑
162	Kazakhstan	68,50	↓↓
163	Uzbekistan	71,50	↓
164	Tunisia	72,50	↓↓
165	Vietnam	75,75	↑
166	Cuba	78,00	↑
167	Equatorial Guinea	79,00	↓
168	Laos	80,50	↑
169	Rwanda	81,00	↓↓

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Rank	Country	Note	
170	Yemen	82,13	↓
171	China	84,67	↓
172	Sudan	85,33	↓↓
173	Syria	91,50	↓
174	Burma	94,50	↓
175	Iran	94,56	↓
176	Turkmenistan	95,33	↓
177	North Korea	104,75	↓
178	Eritrea	105,00	↓

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