

**Forum: Human Rights Council**

**Issue: Maintaining freedom of expression in the press and on social media**

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## **Introduction**

First, the understanding of this agenda requires a fundamental understanding of the freedom of expression in the status quo. Over the last decade, for every one person who has experienced an improvement in their freedom of expression, 19 people have experienced a deterioration (*The Global Expression Report 2025*). Today, the rapid growth in the use of the press and social media has gone beyond solely sharing thoughts and opinions with the public and has reached the point of affecting other social and political issues as well. More than 5.6 billion people have experienced a decline in their freedom of expression over the past decade. Scores have sunk in 77 countries, and only 35 countries are now ranked as ‘Open’ (*The Global Expression Report 2025*).

Social media has become an indispensable part of our lives. The data provided by Our World in Data shows that billions of people worldwide use social media. Social media is known for its simple usage that allows anyone to share and show their thoughts and engage in global issues. However, the misapplication of these platforms is also increasing, especially with the spread of false information or xenophobic speeches. The fast-sharing speed, which is both an advantage and a disadvantage of social media, presents the major challenge for our society, maintaining freedom of expression while protecting each individual’s rights and human dignity.

Not only is it limited to social media, but the usage of the press is also bringing huge impacts. The press, which investigates events and facts to inform the public, is a necessary platform. However, these presses often get biased due to government power that eventually controls freedom of expression. If something is meant to inform the population about accurate facts, but if the content is damaged, the public trust will gradually decrease. Therefore, upholding

the integrity and independence of the press is highly important, as well as the protected freedom of usage of social media.

## **Definition of Key Terms**

### **First Amendment**

The First Amendment states, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances." The First Amendment prioritizes human rights and protection.

### **Multi-level Governance**

Multilevel governance represents the system that supports policies and decision-making among various types of governments, including national, regional, and local. These levels of government cooperation mostly result in a successful output of fostering development with policies.

### **Hate Speech**

Hate speech refers to the meaning of offensive targeting a group or an individual based on inherent characteristics, including race, gender, religion, descent, nationality, and other identity factors, that may threaten social place. Especially in social media platforms, or any anonymous spaces, the level of hate speech and its harsh words being said that one wouldn't be able to say in real life has been increasing rapidly, which leads to online discrimination, too.

### **Media Independence**

Media independence reflects the level of freedom of any news media from influence by State control, government, commercial interests, and other external forces. With this type of independence, individuals or groups of people are allowed to cover various viewpoints of society rather than a single official line forced by the powerful groups, which also helps to hold power accountable.

### **Digital Censorship**

Digital censorship refers to the practice of suppressing certain online content, which takes multiple forms, ranging from filtering and blocking content to monitoring users when accessing certain content. When content is censored, it becomes nearly impossible to access or view, being illegal in some instances as well. Digital censorship prohibits access to information, participation in society, and freedom of expression due to its unmanageable force and restrictions.

### **Freedom of Expression**

The foundation of human rights, which includes the right to speak up, share information, and demand a better world. Governments can create limitations; however, they must be established by law for necessary reasons. Freedom of expression may be restricted regarding privacy violations, hate speech, misinformation, to balance the rights of individuals.

### **Freedom of Press**

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says, “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.” (United Nations) It upholds the freedom and right to publish and communicate opinions through multiple social media platforms while restricting the government’s ability to monitor media content.

### **Social Media**

Social media refers to platforms where we are allowed to share and post about our own thoughts, including applications such as Instagram and Facebook. In this agenda, the usage of social media and how freedom is impacted is the major issue.

### **Press**

The press can simply be defined as a news media that informs the public about society, which has a mixture of relationships between journalism and the public. For example, the press can include newspapers, magazines, broadcasts, and radio news reports.

### **Journalism**

The activity or profession of writing for newspapers, magazines, or news websites, or preparing news to be broadcast, was the action taken before social media and the press; therefore, there's a huge connection between journalism, social media, and the press. Journalism criticizes the actions of states and powerful actors as its main function, which might lead to corruption in freedom of expression.

## Background

### **The start of freedom of expression in 1900-2000**

During the 20th century, freedom of expression was considered the greatest enemy and had to be suppressed. Such regimes would swiftly take control of all media and publishing houses to make them into state instruments for propaganda. No independent media or publishing was allowed. Major communist countries strictly blocked every sense of freedom, for example, in the earliest days of the November 1917 Russian Revolution, Bolshevik leaders imposed strict censorship, wrecked the presses of rival groups, and destroyed private libraries of "bourgeois" class enemies. Later, a strict propaganda and censorship bureau was set up that reviewed all text for printed publications and broadcasts and regulated who could be writers and journalists, as journalism was the main communication system used before the rise of social media platforms and the press.

### **The contribution of individuals**

The contribution of individuals also played a huge part in the evaluation of freedom. Many suffered with tragic assumptions they had to face, but their aggressive engagement with enormous courage has truly influenced today's society. For the individuals, freedom of speech wasn't a compromise, as they meant compromising the truth itself. Journalists and activists distributed censored books and publications, broadcast news, and spread news reports. In addition, the United States and other governments attempted to break through the censorship barriers of totalitarian systems. Through such broadcast stations as Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, independent information and culture were available during the Cold War in Soviet Bloc nations. Religious institutions still acted to constrict free expression and cultural freedom;

however, some democratic governments allowed the realms of publishing, art, and thought to expand.

## The effect of the World War II

World War II occurred from 1939 to 1945 between the Allied and the Axis powers. Following the defeat of the Axis powers, the United Kingdom and the United States began to establish a global agreement on human rights through the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which aimed to achieve an international framework with Article 19, which states that, everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression. This right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and share ideas through any media, regardless of borders (United Nations).

## The current geopolitical factors in regions that affects the expression of freedom

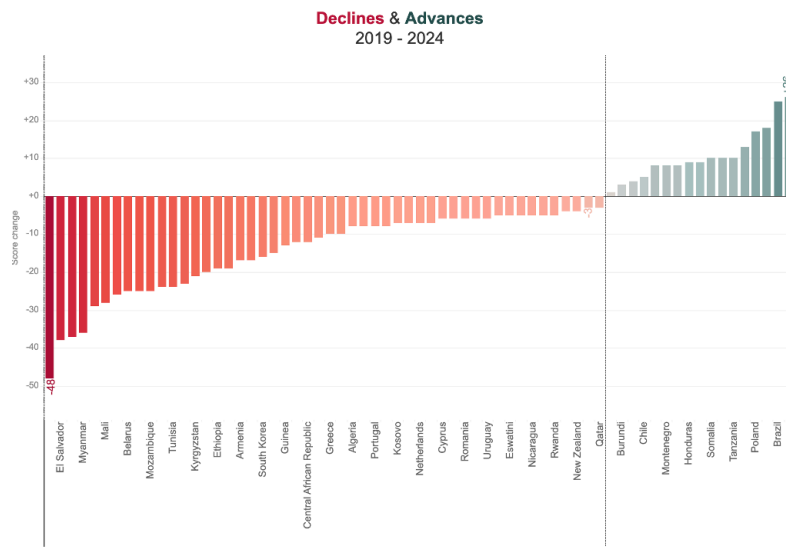


Figure 1. Comparative trend declines and advances of the freedom of expression 2019-2024 (*The Global Expression Report 2025*)

Even though the contributions of individuals and democratic nations led to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the reality of freedom is still facing challenges. Approximately 5.6

billion people across 77 nations have experienced a decline in freedom of expression over the last decade, while only 229 million people across 15 countries have seen an improvement (*The Global Expression Report 2025*). Communist countries are facing harsher issues, with North Korea and Russia having a freedom score of 0.1 on a scale of 0 to 1 (“Freedom of Expression Index”).

The balance of freedom of expression is a major issue to consider, too. Cross-border media flows can expose abuses in examples of pressure to block content and national laws on censorship due to the increasing state of power. While nations including the United States, Norway, Sweden, and Canada have the top rates for freedom in the world, nations such as Cuba, South Sudan, and Afghanistan have the lowest rate, which completely differs from other countries. “Rarely have we seen such extensive patterns of unlawful, discriminatory and disproportionate restrictions on freedom of expression by States and private actors, especially in western democracies,” Irene Khan, Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, mentioned (OHCHR).

In European nations, stifling freedom of expression via the law is an increasing challenge. The European Court of Human Rights has repeatedly found that excessive limits on freedom of expression not only violate an individual's rights but also a democratic society. Besides, in Asia, some places have legal restrictions on free speech. Still, majorities in East Asian nations support the critical speech targeting the government, generally more so than in Southern countries. In the Americas, freedom of expression varies greatly from country to country and from legal system to legal system. In Latin America and the Caribbean, genuine protections are inconsistent; the government limits access to media independence. In North America, the First Amendment protects freedom; however, discussions about online platforms’ regulations still occur. Therefore, the balance between more economically developed countries (MEDCs) and less economically developed countries (LEDCs) should be a strong consideration.

## **Major Parties Involved**

### **North Korea**

North Korea is known for its communist government, where the government doesn't provide the minimum of basic human rights to its population. North Korea ranks at the bottom of [every measure of freedom](#) — economic, political, religious, and civil. North Korea's 25 million people lack the freedoms Roosevelt spoke of: There is no freedom of speech ("Freedom From Fear: Not in North Korea"). North Korea, having one of the strictest communist governments, has harsh regulations on its people's freedom. In addition, experts' estimates of the extent of free speech and the freedom of the press in North Korea are 0.1 on a scale of 0 to 1 (most free) ("Freedom of Expression Index").

## **Russia**

On February 11, 2025, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) stated that Russia violated the right to freedom of expression by imposing fines, prosecuting individuals, and blocking independent news outlets that published information critical of the war in Ukraine (*ECtHR Finds Russia Violated the Right to Freedom of Expression* | *ASIL*). Russia's freedom of expression and press have been heavily impacted due to the Russian Ukrainian War to a negative side.

## **China**

Article 35 of China's [Constitution](#) states that "citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, of procession and of demonstration" (*Freedom of Speech – decodingchina.eu*). However, the ruling Chinese Communist Party has been restricting social media and press usage since September 2000, by creating regulations with the addition of blocking foreign applications, including most social media, such as Instagram and YouTube.

## **Nordic Nations**

In contrast to communist countries, the Nordic countries, including Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, show the top three countries with the highest freedom of expression among other democratic nations. The major reason for its highly rated freedom is due to the welcoming media environment that the Nordic government has set up.

## **Pakistan**

Pakistan has had a poor track record of applying its guarantees of freedom of expression, mainly due to Pakistan's political history with often severe restrictions on free speech. In 2022, Pakistan was ranked 157th out of 200 nations on the annual Reporters Without Frontiers (RSF) Press Freedom Index. The state's intolerant attitude towards criticism of its governance failures has resulted in Pakistan being poorly ranked in global indexes regarding freedom of expression.

## **Brazil**

Brazil's Federal Constitution allows broad access to information within a democratic environment where freedom of speech is ensured. However, Brazil still faces gaps in media regulations. Judge Alexandre de Moraes personally ordered more than 100 user profiles to be suspended on the social media platform X, and the court banned VPN use, which further undermined free expression by removing privacy.

## **International Service for Human Rights**

The International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) is an independent non-governmental organization (NGO) established in 1984 that promotes and protects human rights. The ISHR has been supporting and acting in sympathy with human rights defenders, carrying the mission of strengthening human rights policies, promoting accountability, etc.

## **Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue**

- One-pager on “incitement to hatred”: The Rabat threshold test, 20 April 2020



The Rabat Plan of Action suggests a high access for defining limitations on freedom of expression and the enforcement of article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which states that “Any advocacy of national, racial, or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence shall be prohibited by law.” The Rabat Plan of Action was a framework developed under The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN OHCHR), in 2012, which aimed to balance the right to freedom of expression with the needs of protection from misinformation at the same time. As a result, the Rabat Plan of Action of the discussions in various workshops demonstrated the absence of a legal prohibition of incitement to hatred in many domestic legal frameworks worldwide, therefore coming with a result of enhancing legislations, promotion in alternatives including school curriculum, and threshold for sanctions, including, “States should build the capacity to train and sensitize security forces, law enforcement agents and those involved in the administration of justice on issues concerning the prohibition of incitement to hatred.”

- Resolution 2686, 14 June 2023

The United Nations Security Council (SC) has taken action on issues pertaining to hate speech and discrimination by adopting [resolution 2686](#), which recognizes ‘the importance of interreligious and intercultural dialogue and its valuable contribution to promoting social cohesion, peace and development, and encourages States to speak out to prevent violence in expressions.

- Resolution 52/3, 3 April 2023

The United Nations Human Rights Council’s resolution focuses on human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the obligation to ensure accountability and justice. This resolution emphasizes the protection and enhancement of freedom of expression, including religious freedom in areas such as East Jerusalem, while maintaining the interest on the need to protect human rights and promote a non-discriminatory approach to freedom of expression.

- Promotion and protection of human rights in the context of digital technologies, 19 December 2023

The United Nations General Assembly has also contributed to the issues of human rights in the context of digital technologies, relating to the usage of artificial intelligence (AI), too. It's stated that the future-oriented responsibility mechanism by respecting human rights and technological development, both online and offline, should be strengthened. The solution aimed to establish a safe environment while preventing infringement of freedom by cooperation between nations. With this resolution, the idea of advanced technology influencing the expression was promoted, however, some nations and organizations, including the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) argues that the resolution falls short of the necessary components.

## Possible Solutions

To effectively address the issue of maintaining freedom of expression in the press and on social media, the international community must adopt a cooperative and comprehensive approach that balances freedom and restrictions. Governments and global organizations should prioritize the creation of regulations and frameworks that protect human freedom of expression, while also promoting the importance of acknowledging the current impact and making further improvements. Developing policies that maintain freedom while canceling hate speech and fake information can lead to both effective and efficient changes.

The position of international organizations related to human rights, such as Amnesty International, International Service for Human Rights, and Human Rights Watch, is also extremely important for managing collaboration with various nations. International cooperation for further developed research information and elaborating those combined ideas will lead to a closer approach towards the solution. For example, the United Nations (UN) can increase the number of global negotiations and opportunities to both reestablish relationships in the world and develop a well-developed idea.

As social media and the press target different ages, having a special education freedom-of-expression index tab to further awareness for young adults is another great way to look for future developments. Understanding the current situation of vulnerable populations, such as young women and the elderly, is crucial for recognizing the seriousness. Instead of relying on

traditional degrees and education, nations should promote accessible, lifelong learning opportunities that focus on the keywords "freedom of expression," "human dignity," and "rights." While each country may have varying approaches depending on its development level, a strong commitment to upskilling will help ensure that human rights are guaranteed.

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