

Press release, 2 October 2020

The impact of COVID-19 on the global struggle for freedom

The COVID-19 outbreak has worsened the state of democracy and human rights worldwide. The fight against the pandemic is abused by many governments to limit civil liberties and suppress critical voices. This is the alarming conclusion of the Freedom House report: *Democracy Under Lockdown*. International supervision to reverse the limitations is needed to put a hold on the deterioration of democratic development.

Free Press Unlimited has supported the report of Freedom House: *Democracy Under Lockdown*, to gain insight into the impact of COVID-19 on democratic development and press freedom specifically worldwide. The survey conducted under 398 journalists, activists and experts in 105 countries, along with additional research into 192 countries, showed that **freedoms and democratic values are under great pressure**. Not only in countries where the democracy was already threatened, but also in countries like Poland, Montenegro and the United States the situation is alarming.

Press freedom is under assault

91 countries experienced new or increased restrictions on the news media as a result of the outbreak. Journalists covering the crisis have been arrested and targeted with violence, harassment, and intimidation. Governments use the pandemic as an excuse to censor content, suspend printing of newspapers, block websites, and limit internet access. The increased public need for reliable information during a pandemic makes such methods of suppression particularly severe and concerning.

Democracy in crisis

COVID-19 has also deepened the fractures in societies that are regarded democratic, like the United States, where public health has been politicized. Freedom House and Free Press Unlimited are concerned that this crisis for democracy will also hit the “free” world, structurally and for a long period of time, even after a vaccine is in place. Governments should therefore continuously assess measures intended to stop the COVID-19 pandemic, against the effect of the measures on the democratic rule of law, freedom of the press and freedom of information.

Resilience of society

Yet even amid devastation and disruption, societies remain resilient. Journalists continue to inform the public while risking fines and imprisonment. And although 158 countries have had new restrictions placed on demonstrations, people still take to the streets to protest. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, significant demonstrations have been identified in at least 90 countries.

Democracy is suffering around the world, but the public’s demand for it has not been extinguished.

As the pandemic drags on, public attention will inevitably turn elsewhere, permitting even further abuses to go unpunished. The burden of preventing this will largely fall on democracy advocates and independent journalists, who must continue to place pressure on governments to remain transparent and adhere to the rule of law. They deserve our support.

[Read the full report from Freedom House here.](#)

