



# World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development:

Regional overview of  
**ASIA AND THE PACIFIC**



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

Communication and  
Information Sector

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**Communication and  
Information Sector**

Published in 2014 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization,  
7, place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07 SP, France

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ePub ISBN 978-92-3-100010-2



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This publication was supported by Sweden.

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# INTRODUCTION

Freedom of expression in general, and media development in particular, are core to UNESCO's constitutional mandate to advance 'the mutual knowledge and understanding of peoples, through all means of mass communication' and promoting 'the free flow of ideas by word and image.' For UNESCO, press freedom is a corollary of the general right to freedom of expression. Since 1991, the year of the seminal Windhoek Declaration, which was endorsed by our Member States, UNESCO has understood press freedom as designating the conditions of media freedom, pluralism and independence, as well as the safety of journalists.

The present text is part of a compendium of regional overviews produced as a supplement to the 2014 publication *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development*.<sup>1</sup> The *World Trends* report, along with its supplemental regional chapters, examines progress as regards press freedom, including in regard to gender equality, and makes sense of the evolution of media actors, news media institutions and journalistic roles over time. The global report also contains an in-depth examination of the gender-related aspects of press freedom, through dedicated sections in each of the four thematic chapters.

*World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development* was prepared as the basis of a summary report on the global state of press freedom and the safety of journalists, presented to the General Conference of UNESCO Member States in November 2013, on the mandate of the decision by Member States taken at the 36<sup>th</sup> session of the General Conference of the Organization.<sup>2</sup>

The overarching global trend with respect to media freedom, pluralism, independence and the safety of journalists over the past several years is that of disruption and change brought on by technology, and to a lesser extent, the global financial crisis. These trends have impacted traditional economic and organizational structures in the news media, legal and regulatory frameworks, journalism practices, and media consumption and production habits. Technological convergence has expanded the number of media platforms, and access to them, as well as the potential for expression. It has enabled the emergence of citizen journalism and spaces for independent media, while at the same time is fundamentally reconfiguring journalistic practices and the business of news.

The broad global patterns identified in the report are accompanied by extensive unevenness within the whole. The trends summarized above, therefore, go hand in hand with substantial variations between and within regions as well as countries. It is these variations that are explored in the chapters that follow.

1 Available at <http://www.unesco.org/new/world-media-trends>

2 37 C/INF.4 16 September 2013 "Information regarding the implementation of decisions of the governing bodies". <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002230/223097e.pdf>; <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002230/223097f.pdf>

**ASIA AND THE PACIFIC:  
MEDIA FREEDOM**

## OVERVIEW

The 2007-2012 period has seen divergent trends in press freedom in the 44 countries classified as the Asia and the Pacific region, which is highly diverse and encompasses a range of political systems. Laws in many countries have become more aligned with international standards, with emerging trends in the decriminalization of defamation and adoption of freedom of information laws, as well as long-term trends in ratifying international conventions and including constitutional provisions for press freedom in the sense of media freedom (i.e. as distinct from a holistic conception that also includes the components of pluralism and independence). The formal legal protections have not in practice guaranteed the freedom to do journalism, and media freedom has often been violated in single-party states with constitutional and legal guarantees. Some parts of the region, such as the Pacific, have had ostensibly weaker freedom of expression legislation, with no constitutional provisions, little or no legal recognition of source confidentiality and/or were not signatories to related conventions, but nevertheless have allowed for media freedom in practice. With political turmoil and civil unrest, several countries in South and South-East Asia have seen some setbacks in media freedom, although there have also been some notable cases of improvement.<sup>1</sup>

As internet connectivity has expanded across the region, many countries have increased internet filtering and implemented new technical, legal and regulatory constraints on online content. There has been increased prosecution of bloggers in South-East and East Asia. Resistance to internet controls has emerged, as bloggers and citizen activists have opposed new restrictions, prompting public debate on the balance between security, privacy and freedom of expression.

## LEGAL/STATUTORY ENVIRONMENT

Asia and the Pacific has experienced a slow trend towards alignment with some international standards for freedom of expression. Forty-one (93%) countries in the region have guaranteed freedom of expression in their constitutions, although there has been a wide range of implementation levels and possibilities for this provision to be overridden by other laws. Limitations on expression and on the media in particular have often been

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1 According to a longitudinal analysis of the annual *Freedom of the Press* survey, over the past six years the number of countries classified as having 'Free' and 'Not Free' media in Asia and the Pacific slightly declined, whereas there was an increase in the number assessed as 'Partly Free' countries. According to 2013 data, the survey considered that 35% of the region had 'Free' media; 28% 'Partly Free'; and the remaining 40% 'Not Free.' The same data indicated that over the past six years, some countries in the region saw dramatic improvements whereas significant declines were observed in other parts, but that most countries remained relatively constant in terms of press freedom over the last six years.

imposed on the grounds of national security, blasphemy or preserving public order. Twenty-seven countries in the region (61%) have signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), of which Article 19 guarantees freedom of opinion and expression. Five (19%) of these accessions and ratifications took place in the last six years. Of the 17 countries that were not party to the ICCPR, 12 (more than two-thirds) were Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the Pacific, although many of these have been considered to have among the greatest levels of media freedom in the region.

The importance of independent and pluralistic media in Asia and the Pacific was underscored by the 1992 Declaration of Alma Ata, which was endorsed by UNESCO's General Conference in its 28th session. Building on the Declaration of Windhoek, the Declaration of Alma Ata encouraged the creation of 'laws that create enforceable rights' to freedom of expression, opinion and the press, as well as access to information, and the abolition of monopolies and discrimination in broadcasting.<sup>2</sup> More than two decades later, significant achievement gaps have remained as laws continued to be unenforced and media monopolies have remained common [see ASIA AND THE PACIFIC: MEDIA PLURALISM]. In 2012, the Association of South-East Asian Nations adopted the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration, which included language similar to Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights but without the phrase 'regardless of frontiers.' This was the region's first human rights instrument.

The majority of countries in the region (86%) have had laws that impose criminal penalties for defamation. Six countries have decriminalized defamation, with four having done so in the last six years, indicating the potential emergence of a trend in this direction and one that has been in line with the global trend towards decriminalization. However, both criminal and civil defamation charges against journalists and media organizations have continued to pose a large threat to media freedom in much of the region. Furthermore, in South-East Asia, regional press freedom groups have found that threats to censor media and control the free flow of information continued in parts of the subregion, which was a trend that had also spread to the more established democracies. Other forms of legal harassment have been used against journalists and bloggers in different countries over the last six years, with a particular trend towards the use of charges of terrorism, blasphemy, 'inciting subversion of state power', 'acting against the state', and 'conducting activities to overthrow the state.'

Although the majority of countries in the region have not had laws restricting religious defamation or blasphemy, a sizeable number do, and this has extended to online content. In 2011, the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life found that anti-

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2 The Declaration of Alma Ata was adopted in 1995 by the UNESCO General Conference in Paris and emerged from a UN/UNESCO seminar held in Alma Ata, Kazakhstan in October 1992 at which participants declared their support for the Declaration of Windhoek and called for contribution to and implementation of projects related to legislation, training, free flow of information, safety of journalists, public service broadcasting, professional associations and special economic issues. It is the only international document concerning the promotion of independent and pluralistic media and journalist safety in Asia.



blasphemy laws existed in eight countries in the region (18%) while 15 (34%) had laws against 'defamation of religion'.<sup>3</sup>

Asia and the Pacific has been home to extensive and technically sophisticated internet filtering systems in some countries. As the overall internet penetration has steadily increased in the last six years, more governments have resorted to online surveillance and threats of imprisonment directed towards bloggers and citizen journalists [see ASIA AND THE PACIFIC: MEDIA SAFETY]. The presence and extent of filtering varies greatly, from near total control of content and tools in some countries to relatively light filtering, or none at all, in others. Between 2006 and 2012, the OpenNet Initiative found evidence of internet filtering in 13 (62%) of the 21 countries where it conducted tests in the region, nearly half of which displayed evidence of 'pervasive' filtering of political, social, or conflict/security content and/or internet tools. Online news sites and blogs have been targeted since at least 2007 for content deemed offensive by the authorities, and either blocked directly by the state or through pressure on private internet service providers. In general, internet filtering has persisted and controls have increased through new technical, legal and regulatory mechanisms. The rise of real-name registration requirements has led to increased levels of self-censorship while cyberattacks, notably distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks against media outlets, have emerged as a new threat to media freedom. Cyberattacks on opposition media, blogs or social media sites have also become increasingly common during politically sensitive periods. The trend towards tighter restrictions has been observed across the region, with the notable exception of one country undergoing extensive reform, which saw a dramatic reduction in filtering. In parts of the region, there has been a steady increase in capacity to prosecute individuals for the content they post online. Resistance to control of the internet has emerged in many parts of Asia and the Pacific, as many civil society and activists oppose restrictions.

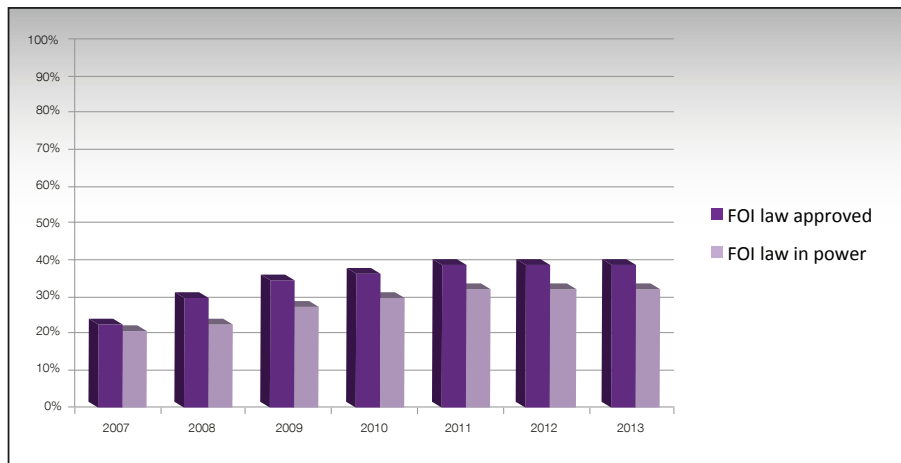
Rising internet penetration has been accompanied by a rise in cybercrime and has led to an emerging trend of the adoption of cybercrime legislation. In some cases this has prompted public debate about encroachment on freedom of expression and privacy and has constituted an otherwise countervailing trend to reform. Public pressure, however, has been successful in rolling back some contentious articles.

Fourteen (32%) of the countries in Asia and the Pacific have had a freedom of information (FOI) national law, with eight of those laws adopted between 2007 and 2012. Draft national FOI laws have been developed in at least another 14 countries. There have continued to be shortcomings in regard to international standards, in many of the national FOI laws, as highlighted by the Global Right to Information Rating. These have included: a broad or vague regime of exceptions and the possibility of freedom of information being unduly curtailed by other laws; a non-mandatory or limited public interest override provision; the lack of an oversight body or one with sufficiently strong powers or independence; and the exclusion of non-citizens or non-residents from filing FOI requests. Vague requesting procedures, insufficient promotional measures or limited scope (not extending,

3 The percentage was calculated based on UNESCO's voting group categorization of countries in the Asia and the Pacific countries, not that given by Pew.

for instance, to legislative or judiciary branch, or containing blanket exceptions for police, security and intelligence bodies) have also been aspects in some FOI laws that fall short of international standards. Effective implementation of FOI legislation has also posed challenges. Even the most robust FOI national legislation in Asia and the Pacific, has faced significant obstacles in practice, such as bureaucratic resistance, insufficient capacity among public officials, weak public awareness, and shortcomings related to compliance with proactive disclosure obligations and ensuring coherence between FOI laws and other legislation.

**Figure 1**  
**Percentage of Member States with freedom of information (FOI) laws:**  
**Asia and the Pacific**



**Sources:** freedominfo.org. (2013, March). *Consensus list of 93 countries with freedom of information laws or the equivalent*; Vleugels, R. (2012, 30 September). *Overview of all FOI laws. Fringe Special*; Open Society Justice Initiative. (2013, March). *List of Countries with Access to Information (ATI) Provisions in their National/Federal Laws or Actionable Decrees, and Dates of Adoption & Significant Amendments*

Despite significant state control of the media in some countries, journalists have increasingly served a watchdog role against public and private corruption, although some studies have also suggested that politics have continued to exert a strong influence in this area and official secrets laws curtail its practice. A handful of countries have investigative journalism centres, and inclusion of investigative reporting techniques in journalism education in some countries has helped to ensure the continued vibrancy of this genre.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See for example the Centre for Investigative Journalism Nepal, Center for Investigative Reporting in Pakistan, and the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism.

According to a 2007 study conducted by Banisar for Privacy International, around half of the 44 countries in Asia and the Pacific recognized the right of journalists to protect their sources. Some countries have adopted absolute protection in their constitutions or laws, while others have provided qualified rights to protection; the remaining countries, including the majority of SIDS in the Pacific, have no legal protection of journalistic sources. In several countries, new anti-terrorism laws have raised concerns for media freedom, by allowing wiretaps and requiring the disclosure of information. Long-standing laws on state secrets have also continued to pose a substantial threat to journalists' work, particularly in South Asia, as these laws forbid the publication of information about the government that has not been officially released. Both countries with and without source protection laws have often lacked specific protections against searches of newsrooms and journalists' homes.

# **ASIA AND THE PACIFIC: MEDIA PLURALISM**

## OVERVIEW

Digitization, privatization and increased accessibility have transformed the media landscape in the 44 countries of Asia and the Pacific over the past six years, enabling a substantial increase in the production, consumption and distribution of media across the region and contributing to greater pluralism. In the largest and most populous area of the world, with countries in varying stages of development, media in Asia and the Pacific face different opportunities and challenges for media pluralism. In much of the region, governments have continued to firmly control media outlets and their editorial policies and internet content. Nevertheless, privatization and competition have opened up the media and communication sector in large and previously highly-regulated countries. Specific recognition of community media as part of pluralism has been lacking in many countries. Nevertheless, more complex information, infotainment and entertainment spheres have been created amid the flow of media products from these countries.

The dramatic rise of online and mobile media has had multiple impacts on pluralism. The internet has continued to provide new openings for individuals and groups seeking independent means of self-expression and outreach. However, their projects have tended to be small, and they have remained difficult to monetize. The entry of amateurs and activists as citizen reporters, combined with populations increasingly adept at sharing news, views and images through social networks, has been especially important in countries where professional media have been insufficiently independent to represent the people adequately. The new choices available to their audiences have started putting competitive pressures on news media, prodding them to raise their standards and redouble their commitment to professional independence and credibility. However, the expansion of online media and internet use has eroded the business model of professional media faster than they can respond to by raising quality.

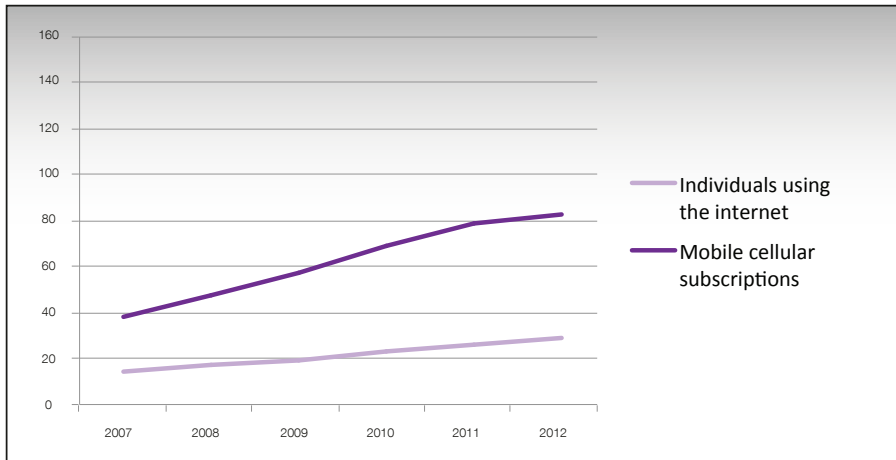
## ACCESS

The media sphere has expanded rapidly, and half of the world's mobile subscriptions were in the Asia and the Pacific region. Mobile cellular penetration rates have increased by more than 120% since 2007, with regional penetration rates reaching 83 subscriptions per 100 inhabitants in 2012, and in 2013 active mobile broadband subscriptions were estimated at 22 subscriptions per 100 inhabitants.<sup>5</sup> The regional internet penetration rate more than doubled from 13 internet users per 100 inhabitants in 2007 to 28 per 100

<sup>5</sup> Mobile cellular subscription rates reflect UNESCO's regional grouping, with data on subscriptions from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and data on population from the World Bank. Data on mobile broadband penetration reflect the ITU's regional grouping, not UNESCO's.

in 2012.<sup>6</sup> With the mobile internet, making 3G phones affordable and accessible, this trend is likely to further accelerate. As television news has converged with online delivery mechanisms and social media – widely used by the youth – this trend will likely expand and lead to more Asian and Pacific news content circulating on the web.

**Figure 2**  
Internet and mobile cellular penetration per 100 inhabitants in Asia and the Pacific



**Sources:** For internet penetration rates and number of mobile subscriptions, see International Telecommunication Union (ITU). (2013, June). 'Individuals using the Internet' and 'Mobile Cellular Subscriptions'. *World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators database 2013 (17th Edition)*. For population, see World Bank. (2013). *World Databank: World Development Indicators*.

The internet has emerged as an increasingly important forum in the region, providing opportunities for developing and strengthening a transnational network of journalists and information activists to cooperate and exchange ideas about global issues. Online content in Asian scripts and ideographic writing systems, like Mandarin, has become more accessible, as evidenced by increased traffic, since ICANN approved in 2009 the Internationalized Domain Name (IDN) country code Top-Level Domain (ccTLD) Fast Track Process. Easy to navigate, increasingly multilingual and sophisticated search engines have ensured the expansion of 'social computing,' with cyberactivists and bloggers producing and distributing news and commentary. This communication connectivity has created new horizontal media links among global, regional and national media, both at a commercial corporate level through viral advertising, as well as alternative networks representing political groups in the region and across the world.

<sup>6</sup> According to UNESCO's regional grouping, with data on Internet penetration from the ITU and for population from the World Bank.

## ECONOMIC MODEL

The rapid liberalization, deregulation and privatization of media industries, coupled with the increasing availability of digital delivery and distribution mechanisms, have led to a diversity of economic models for media in the Asia and Pacific region. While news provision through state broadcasters – via television, radio and, increasingly, online – has continued to be the most important aspect of many national media systems, a thriving private-sector dominated news market has also evolved in many nations in the region. The growth of the internet, especially in countries where state control of the media has been strongest, has also provided an alternative space for enriching and widening public discourse.<sup>7</sup> In several parts of the Asia and Pacific region, Facebook has emerged as the dominant social network, surpassing local platforms in popularity, with a significant percentage of users using it for news and information exchange. Some independent news outlets and journalists in the region have turned to online platforms, including Facebook and Twitter, as a means to disseminate information quickly and bypass state censorship.

The growth of digital delivery and distribution technologies has transformed the business of journalism in the region, particularly with migration to online news, increasingly via mobile digital devices. Online journalism and citizen news portals have also become sources for media plurality in the Asia and Pacific region. Several citizen journalism outlets that emerged a decade or so ago, including *Malaysiakini*<sup>8</sup> in Malaysia, *OhmyNews*<sup>9</sup> in the Republic of Korea and, more recently, *Merinews*<sup>10</sup> in India, have gained substantial readership over the past six years.

Although the privatization of the airwaves has been a relatively new phenomenon for most of the Asia and Pacific region, it has helped to break, or at least to dilute (as elsewhere), the state monopoly of broadcast new media in many countries. In others, however, media remain state-owned and government controlled, and highly-regulated media ownership rules have limited private investment in the news sector. At the same time, the expansion of satellite TV has increased choice and put pressure on state-controlled media.

In Northeast Asia and parts of the Pacific, the public-service tradition of broadcasting has remained strong, while in South-East Asia, public service broadcasting (PSB) has more recently been introduced. Elsewhere in the region there has not been a strong tradition of PSB supported by public funds, dedicated to the public good, and editorially independent of government control. Several countries have introduced PSB principles on paper but have continued to allow de facto government interference, while many still have had broadcasters that were directly government-run. Community radio, while still a small part of the region's media landscape, has also enhanced media pluralism in the region.

7 For example, local social networking platforms, such as the Renren Network and Sina Weibo, a Chinese micro-blogging site, have emerged as new spaces for discussion and news flows.

8 [www.malaysiakini.com](http://www.malaysiakini.com) was founded in 1999.

9 [www.ohmynews.com](http://www.ohmynews.com) was founded in 2000.

10 [www.merinews.com](http://www.merinews.com) was founded in 2006.

After years of boom, total newspaper circulation in China, India and elsewhere started to show signs of falling. At the same time, regionally, the dominant trend over the past six years has been an increase in the numbers of newspapers as well as in readership, with the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) recording double-digit growth in countries like India, Indonesia and the Republic of Korea. In China, the number of daily papers slightly decreased over the same period but was accompanied by a 43% increase in free dailies, indicating a changing mix of news business models. The trend in newspaper advertising expenditure since 2007, however, has been less clear, with some of the largest markets of the region experiencing double-digit declines while high-growth countries have experienced major growth in this sector. For example, Japan, Australia and the Republic of Korea experienced declines of 37%, 17% and 20% respectively, whereas China and India experienced growth in newspaper advertising of 46% and 59% respectively over the same time period.

The expanding number and reach of media outlets have enabled citizens, including those in traditionally underserved rural areas, in many Asia Pacific countries to access a wider range of information and analysis. Indeed a notable trend has been the increasing reach of media beyond the cosmopolitan and urban centres. According to the Indian Readership Survey, for example, by 2012 rural readers comprised the majority (53%) of the total national newspaper readership of nearly 348 million. The most rapid rise has been in newspapers in Indian languages, reflecting the growing literacy and purchasing power of small town and rural populations. Such trends have been discernible in other Asian countries as well, as new media technologies have percolated to the village level in conjunction with the economic rise of Asian countries.

## CONTENT

Market-driven journalism has grown in the increasingly liberalized media systems of Asia and the Pacific, in terms of quantity and income, primarily benefiting private press barons and media moguls and their corporate clients. In an increasingly competitive market, with circulation wars and ratings battles, many news operators have turned to infotainment and tabloidization which privileges information about celebrities, lifestyle and consumer journalism, sports and entertainment. The favouring of soft news over hard news has been at the expense of the 'public interest' aspects of news, and contributed to a possible erosion of public discourse in which the consumer is unable to differentiate between public information and corporate propaganda. While the state media still cover stories that have a developmental dimension, most commercial media have tended to ignore issues affecting rural areas where the majority of people in the Asia and Pacific region live.



The gender content and character of news media in the Asia and Pacific region have remained largely static over the past six years, with women representing about 20% of people in the news throughout this period. There has been a slight upward trend (three percentage points) in women reporting the news (to 40%), according to the Global Media Monitoring Project, although in the Pacific subregion there was a decline in both the number of women news subjects (from 26% in 2005 to 25% in 2010) and women reporting the news (from 44% to 39%). The *Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media* found that women have remained significantly less represented at all occupational levels in news media companies, and the majority of them have been employed part-time. Only around one-fifth of those in governance positions were women. And even at the occupational levels with the highest percentage of women, such as senior-level and junior-level, men dominated.<sup>11</sup> The average salary between women and men in news media jobs has varied profoundly, especially at higher occupational levels.

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11 The percentage of women among senior-level professional positions was 32.1% and junior-level professionals it was 24.3%.

# **ASIA AND THE PACIFIC: MEDIA INDEPENDENCE**

## OVERVIEW

The 44 countries that make up the Asia and the Pacific region in this report are hugely diverse in every respect, including in the status of media independence. There has, however, been a trend that supports independence, with several countries undergoing constitutional overhauls, media-law reforms and liberalizations, as outlined earlier [see ASIA AND THE PACIFIC: MEDIA FREEDOM], and improving economic conditions.

Many of the formal ingredients for media independence appeared to be in place across Asia and the Pacific as constitutional reforms and institution-building have been supportive of democracy and human rights. In most cases the media sectors have been deregulated to allow for private media. By and large, however, implementation has been incomplete and the potential for enhancing the independence of broadcast and print media has not been realized. Changes to regulatory frameworks have generally fallen short of what is required for independent media, while commercial success has boosted the power and profits of owners without necessarily increasing professional autonomy for journalists. Insufficient checks and balances in regulatory mechanisms, instrumentalist views about the role of the media, and underdeveloped self-regulation have resulted in media liberalization favouring vested political and economic interests. The growth of independent, professional, and public-interest news media has therefore lagged behind the expansion of entertainment media.

The media market in the region on its own has not been functioning to sustain professional journalism, and a shift from traditional to online media may also be reducing professional journalistic capacity. Online news organizations have generally employed fewer journalists and at lower cost than newspapers and TV stations.

Legal and political obstacles have also been major hurdles to promoting media independence in parts of the Asia and the Pacific region.

## INDEPENDENCE AND SELF-REGULATORY MECHANISMS

Most countries in the region have allowed individuals to enter the journalistic profession freely. How much professional independence journalists have subsequently enjoyed has varied greatly, depending on the national ownership, regulatory regimes and working cultures. Television and radio outlets have been the most likely to be directly owned or controlled by the government or to be subject to politically-influenced licensing by the state; most newspapers have been owned and operated by the private-sector, but in some countries have been subject to discretionary licensing. Websites have been generally free of any licensing requirement, with a few recent exceptions, although it has not yet become clear whether there has been a trend in this domain.

The long-term trend of opening TV to private operators has had mixed results. In some South Asian countries, private news channels have produced an increase in independent monitoring of public affairs by broadcast journalists. However, in several other countries television licences have continued to be handed to individuals and companies that are part of or close to ruling elites. The absence of independent regulatory bodies to oversee national broadcasters and ensure fair and equal access for major political contenders has been common to many countries in the region.

The state has retained a strong presence in much of the region's print media, including regulatory regimes for newspapers, although there has been some loosening of control over the past six years. In countries with one-party systems, newspapers have been mostly published by the party or affiliated institutions and companies. In several other countries, privately-owned newspapers have been under discretionary government licensing that has little or no independent oversight.

In some countries, civil society pressure has led to some relaxation in government regulation and control of the media, potentially indicating the emergence of a trend. Fiji removed daily censorship in 2006, and Myanmar announced in December 2012 that it would allow privately-owned daily newspapers and began issuing permits in March 2013. The Malaysian Government has partially relaxed its newspaper licensing laws, doing away with annual renewals and introducing an avenue for appeal through the courts. These developments have been symptomatic of growing public demands for independent media and of governments responding accordingly.

Self-regulatory systems are weak, with many countries applying compulsory government supervision rather than voluntary systems of media self-regulation. Three countries in Asia and the Pacific were represented among regular members in the global Organization of News Ombudsmen. Several other countries in the region have had press councils or complaints commissions structured, in line with international best practices, as independent bodies to which media companies voluntarily belong. All were set up at least 10 years ago, which highlights the gradual or potentially stalled progress in this area of media independence.

There have been concerns expressed about whether self-regulation can rein in excesses of media, especially in the heat of competition, such as in the sensational live coverage of hostage crises. Rising to the challenge of promoting best practices for self-regulation of journalism, an Alliance of Press Councils for the Asia Pacific region was set up in 2012 at the fourth Bali Media Forum, which involved participants from 17 countries. Industry leaders also initiated discussions to form an ASEAN Press Council. This move has indicated a trend towards greater intra-Asia-Pacific cooperation in cultivating the conditions for independent media fostered by efficient and credible voluntary-based accountability mechanisms.

The 2011 *Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media* found that women accounted for 22% of news media governance positions in the Asia and the Pacific region, and were also under-represented as board members and press council members.

Progress in internet self-regulation has been hindered by several conceptual and practical challenges, including cross-border and cross-cultural issues, and the question of whether small online news players have the same ethical responsibilities as mass media. Dealings between bloggers and governments have tended to be more fraught than government-press relations, since bloggers have been generally less prone to self-censorship than professional journalists or media organizations. Bloggers have continued to rebuff calls by officials for greater responsibility and accountability, seeing these as contrary to independence.

## JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA PROFESSIONALS

The normative ideal of professional autonomy, including being detached from institutions they cover and serving as a watchdog on government, has gained currency among journalists in the Asia and the Pacific region. However, the ability to put such ideals into practice has remained a challenge. In several countries, notably in South-East Asia, reporters' low salaries have continued to sustain a culture of 'envelope' journalism, in which cash has been accepted as an inducement for attending press conferences and conducting interviews. The region's gender gap in salaries also means that men earned nearly five times the average salary for women in top management and governance, according to the *Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media*, and men outnumbered women in the media by a four to one ratio. The practice of 'paid news,' in which newspapers sell editorial space that is not clearly identified as advertising – in some cases to election candidates – has been observed in some countries, although it is unclear whether this represented a wider trend.

Even where the news media industry has appeared to be booming, professional identities and norms have been difficult to develop and sustain. Strong competitive pressures and a growing culture of commercialism have resulted in journalists being viewed, and viewing themselves, as simply employees of companies rather than also being professionals with a public responsibility. Commercial pressures have been increasingly felt by journalists of state-owned media. Among media that have reported growing profits, publishers have been less likely to see future growth coming from journalists' skills than from staff in commercial departments, new technology and promotional activities. Audiences have been rapidly shifting online, and revenues dissipating, threatening the number and quality of journalism jobs in the traditional media. Even where the news industry has appeared financially healthy, journalists have had limited bargaining power to enhance their professional autonomy.

## PROFESSIONALISM AND THE BROADER MEDIA ECOSYSTEM

In most countries in Asia and the Pacific, journalism associations and NGOs have been a key conduit for professional identities and values as well as capacity-building, while championing media independence.<sup>12</sup> Transnational NGOs performing this role include the Southeast Asian Press Alliance (SEAPA), Pacific Islands News Association (PINA) and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ). The ecosystem of professional journalism also includes media training, which is recent in Asia and the Pacific but has been growing fast. The availability and quality of on-the-job training has varied greatly across organizations, with most employers lacking the resources for systematic training programmes.<sup>13</sup> As for pre-professional programmes, the first global census of journalism education worldwide, conducted by the World Journalism Education Council between 2007 and 2010, found that the Asia and the Pacific region accounted for almost one-third of the more than 2,300 university-affiliated or privately-run programmes enumerated worldwide.

Nevertheless, in some countries, journalists continue to have had little or no opportunity for formal journalism education. Where pre-professional journalism programmes exist, their quality has been difficult to verify. Revising journalism curricula, networking among journalism faculty, and providing internship opportunities in the media for graduating students have been identified as the most pressing needs. Adapting to new technology has been another key need, to which training institutions have started to respond.<sup>14</sup> Media production training has also been catching on in primary and secondary schools in countries across the region. This has been due to the falling cost of cameras and other equipment, but also due to a growing recognition among curriculum planners that the value of such courses goes beyond training for media vocations because they also nurture creative and critical thinking.

12 The Hong Kong Journalists Association, Indonesia's Aliansi Jurnalis Independen, the Thai Journalists Association, Pakistan Press Foundation and the Philippine Press Institute are noteworthy national examples.

13 Domestic and international NGOs, foundations and professional groups play a key role in filling this gap. Noteworthy institutions with a regional reach include the Konrad Adenauer Asian Center for Journalism (ACFJ) at the Ateneo de Manila University, which started in 2000, and the Central Asian School of Contemporary Journalism, started by the OSCE Academy in Bishkek in 2010. Pan-Asian fellowships are offered by SEAPA and the Temasek Foundation's Asia Journalism Fellowship at Nanyang Technological University.

14 ACFJ launched a Diploma in Multimedia Journalism in 2011; in 2012, the industry group WAN-IFRA inaugurated an integrated newsroom training facility, Newsplex Asia, at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore.

**ASIA AND THE PACIFIC:  
MEDIA SAFETY**

## OVERVIEW

The safety of journalists across the 44 countries of the Asia and the Pacific region has become more precarious over the last six years amid an increase in the number of killings of journalists and media workers. Countries that were already unsafe for journalists at the beginning of the period have generally become even less safe, while the situation has remained stable in countries where it was already better in the past. The most dangerous subregions in Asia and the Pacific for journalists have been South and South-East Asia, where there has been an increase in the imprisonment of journalists, with only a few countries taking steps towards creating safer environments for press freedom. Nepal and Pakistan were among the countries where implementation of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity got underway in 2013, spearheaded by UNESCO.

## PHYSICAL SAFETY AND IMPUNITY

UNESCO's Directors-General condemned the killings of 135 journalists in the Asia and the Pacific region between 2007 and 2012.<sup>15</sup> Gender disaggregated data show that 12 (9%) of the journalists who were killed were women, a comparatively high percentage that could partially be attributed to the fact that women represent 40% of news reporters in the region, slightly higher than the world average [See ASIA AND THE PACIFIC: MEDIA PLURALISM]. The number of condemned killings during this period ranged from 10 in 2007 to 43 in 2009. Thirty-four of the 43 condemned killings in the region that year occurred on a single occasion.

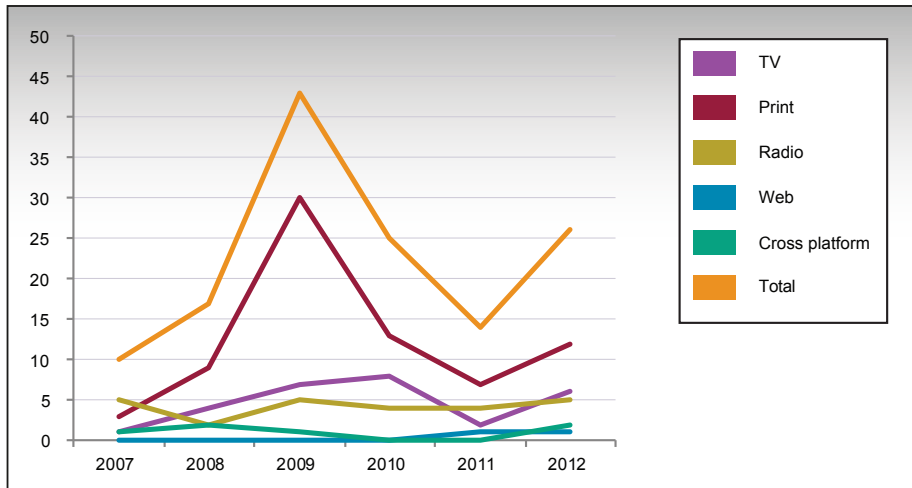
From 2007 to 2012, journalists were killed in at least 16 countries (36%) of the 44 in the region, predominantly in South and South-East Asia. During this time, the total number of states where killings of journalists occurred rose from seven in 2007 to 10 in 2012. No killings were recorded in the Pacific. Two countries accounted for more than 60% of journalist killings condemned by UNESCO's Directors-General during this period, with killings recorded every year. In three countries, journalist killings have been recorded each year since 2007.

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<sup>15</sup> Based on UNESCO's internal database of *Journalist Killings and Status of Judicial Inquiry, 2007-2012*. Unless stated otherwise, the figures on killings of journalists that follow are taken from this database.



**Figure 3**  
Killings of journalists in Asia and the Pacific per year by medium



Source: UNESCO's internal database of *Journalist Killings and Status of Judicial Inquiry, 2007-2012*

Impunity for the killers of journalists has remained in many countries of the region. That the violence has often gone unpunished there has contributed to a climate of insecurity for journalists. As of mid-2013, six (35%) of the 17 Member States in the region where journalists had been killed had responded to requests by UNESCO's Director-General for an update on the status of judicial inquiry. Of the six that responded, most noted that investigations were ongoing, while in two cases the perpetrators were reported as convicted. Several of the countries with the highest impunity rates worldwide have been located in the region, primarily in South Asia. In these countries there was relatively no improvement throughout the past six years, and in some countries impunity worsened.

Violence against journalists in the region has come in the form of physical attacks, aggressions and verbal threats, and occasionally torture. Since 2007 it has worsened in parts of South and South-East Asia. Regional media freedom watchdog Southeast Asian Press Alliance counted at least 100 cases of impunity in crimes against media workers in South-East Asia in 2012. A University of Cambridge study by Elbahtimy and Elliott found that many journalists in South Asia were threatened with physical assault as part of their daily routine and occasionally were the targets of lethal violence. In particular, the situation has deteriorated in some countries where prolonged violent conflict has created serious challenges, although in some of these countries the situation had already started declining in the previous years. Violent conflict in parts of the region has posed a serious safety threat to both local journalists and foreign correspondents. The South Asia Media Solidarity Network had already noted a general decline in safety for journalists in South Asia in 2009. In some countries in the region, violence against journalists has declined over the last six years. Although the Pacific subregion has generally seen lower levels of violence against journalists, attacks and threats have been reported, particularly in moments of political unrest.

Over the past six years some cases of pressure against women journalists have been recorded in the region, particularly in South Asia, where women journalists were reported to have been targeted because of their gender. Local journalists and foreign correspondents have been victims of such sexual aggression. However, it has been difficult to identify a trend over time, as attacks against women journalists have often gone unreported.

Since 2007, a significant percentage of attacks against journalists in the region were reportedly perpetrated by government officials and political groups, while military officials and criminal groups were also implicated in certain killings of journalists. Over the years, violent attacks against journalists by non-state actors have had an increasing impact on the overall level of journalists' safety. In several countries in the region, organized crime, religious groups and extremists have threatened journalists' safety. Citizen journalists have also come under attack, with more than 100 recorded cases of arrest or harassment in the region over the past six years, according to the Global Voices crowdsourced monitor Threatened Voices. The number of reported threats (including arrest and harassment) on Threatened Voices doubled in 2009 but has decreased since then. Women make up about 20% of those reports. While attacks on individual bloggers occurred prior to this period, they appear to have intensified as a tactic to intimidate and threaten bloggers through defamation campaigns, dissemination of false content, and physical attacks and harassment.

## OTHER DIMENSIONS

Although reporting on politics in several countries in the region has been less likely to cost a journalist's life, imprisonment was nonetheless a possible consequence. In some cases journalists have been held without charges for months. Over the last six years an increasing number of media professionals were reported to be imprisoned in around one-third of the countries in the region, and particularly in parts of South and East Asia, their numbers nearly doubling between 2007 and 2012 to about 100 reported imprisoned in the region by December 2012.<sup>16</sup> The situation improved in one country in 2012 after the government released imprisoned journalists as part of a substantive political reform process.

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<sup>16</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the figures for imprisoned and exiled journalists have been compiled from reports by the Committee to Protect Journalists.

At least 140 journalists in the region have reportedly gone into exile since 2007, with a notable increase in 2009 that saw the number of journalists taking this step that year nearly triple from those that left the previous year; this number has since declined significantly. The number of countries in the region that journalists have reportedly left to go into exile also declined from eight in 2008 to one in 2012. Restrictions on foreign reporters in the region have been relatively rare, although there were some exceptions in East Asia and the Pacific.

Violence against journalists, threats and legal harassment have also reportedly resulted in self-censorship and avoidance of particularly sensitive topics. Resorting to self-censorship has been a rather common practice in South Asia and the Pacific over the last six years, either to avoid attacks or in response to costly defamation suits and legal harassment, and reportedly occurred in other parts of the region during moments of crisis [see *ASIA AND THE PACIFIC: MEDIA FREEDOM*].

# APPENDICES

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Under the direction of UNESCO, an Advisory Group of specialists from around the globe renowned for their expertise in one or more of the thematic dimensions covered in *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development* contributed to the research, drafting and peer-review of the global report and its supplemental regional overviews. In addition, consultation with UNESCO communication and information specialists in each region and at headquarters took place at various times throughout the drafting process. Responsibility for the content herein rests with UNESCO.

Information for this report includes that sourced from several UN bodies, including the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the reports of the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression. Appreciation is also expressed to the Committee to Protect Journalists, Freedom House, Global Voices and WAN-IFRA for sharing proprietary databases, which helped the tracking of trends over time as well as quantification where appropriate.

This project was supported by Sweden.

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Asia and the Pacific
2. Internet and mobile cellular penetration per 100 inhabitants in Asia and the Pacific
3. Killings of journalists in Asia and the Pacific per year by medium

## GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

ACFJ: Asian Center for Journalism

ASEAN: Association of Southeast Asian Nations

ATI: Access to information

ccTLD: Country code top-level domain

DDoS: Distributed denial-of-service

FOI: Freedom of information

ICANN: Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers

ICCPR: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

ICT: Information and communication technology

IDN: Internationalized domain name

IFJ: International Federation of Journalists

ISP: Internet service provider

ITU: International Telecommunication Union

NGO: Non-governmental organization

PINA: Pacific Islands News Association

PSB: Public service broadcasting

SEAPA: Southeast Asian Press Alliance

SIDS: Small Island Developing States

UN: United Nations

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

WAN-IFRA: World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers

## LIST OF COUNTRIES IN THE REGION

As this publication was prepared for a report to UNESCO's General Conference, the presentation is organized around the six regions that make up the voting groupings within UNESCO.

Accordingly, the countries that make up the Asia and the Pacific region, defined on this basis, are listed below.

### GROUP IV. ASIA AND THE PACIFIC (44)

Afghanistan	Kazakhstan	Timor-Leste
Australia	Kiribati	Malaysia
Bangladesh	Kyrgyzstan	Maldives
Bhutan	Lao People's Democratic Republic	Marshall Islands
Brunei Darussalam	Niue	Micronesia (Federated States of)
Cambodia	Pakistan	Mongolia
China	Palau	Myanmar
Cook Islands	Papua New Guinea	Nauru
Democratic People's Republic of Korea	Philippines	Nepal
Fiji	Republic of Korea	New Zealand
India	Samoa	Tonga
Indonesia	Singapore	Turkmenistan
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	Solomon Islands	Tuvalu
Japan	Sri Lanka	Vanuatu
	Thailand	Viet Nam