There were 3,719 violations of freedom of information in 180 countries in 2014, or 8% more than in 2013, according to Reporters Without Borders.

Many countries with serious violations of freedom of information are still receiving significant funding from the World Bank.
Universal Declaration of Human Rights
Article 19

"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."

Countries are violating this right through abuse of media censorship and harassment, imprisonment, or murder of journalists. Perpetrators within these countries go unpunished for these violations of human rights. Many of them continue to receive significant funding from the World Bank, an influential global lending institution.

Deadliest countries for journalists in 2015 include Bangladesh, Brazil, Ukraine, and Mexico, all of which receive large amounts of money from the World Bank.

1,124 journalists have been killed since 1992
87% of these resulted in impunity for the killers
221 journalists were imprisoned in 2014
409 journalists have been forced into exile since 2009

As the World Bank continues to fund countries that carry out abuses of freedom of the press, this institution is failing to abide by international human rights standards. The Bank must push its beneficiary countries to abide by Article 19 of the UNDHR in order to create a safer world for journalists and allow for a fair and unbiased access to information for global citizens.
10 Countries that Are Censoring the Media and Harassing Journalists

Mexico  Vietnam
Turkey   Ethiopia
Pakistan Morocco
Egypt    Uzbekistan
China    Sri Lanka

Over the past five years, these countries received a total of $50 billion in World Bank funding.*
All of them practice some sort of media censorship and arbitrary imprisonment or fining of journalists.

*All World Bank Data is taken from Country Summaries on worldbank.org, 2011-2015, and includes funding from the IDA and IBRD
MEXICO

Most threats and armed attacks against journalists are carried out by organized crime or corrupt officials with impunity. Freedom of the press is restricted by the close connection between media and politicians and the lack of pluralism which drives individuals to increasingly rely on social media to share information.

In 2014, a journalist was assaulted every 26.7 hours
Over 325 journalists were attacked and five were killed during 2014

Atilano Roman Tirado, murdered in October 2014, had been using his weekly radio program to defend the civil rights of the farming community members that were affected by the government construction of the Picachos dam

Journalist Octavio Rojas Hernandez was shot in Oaxaca after publishing an article accusing the police and state officials of being linked to a gang involved in fuel theft

The 2015 firing of Mexico’s famous radio personality, Carmen Aristegui, for exposing a corruption scandal involving the President sparked several protests in which police brutality is common. The New York Times referred to her as the ‘emblem of press freedom under siege’

Due to the climate of violence and impunity, journalists are self-censoring. The growth of ‘soft censorship’ includes “government use of financial incentives and penalties to pressure news media, punish critical reporting, and reward favorable coverage” (Telesur).

Defamation is decriminalized at the federal level but 12 of the 32 states still use criminal defamation laws to intimidate journalists.

The Federal Telecommunications and Broadcasting Act permits the government to monitor and shut down internet activity during protests which in turn enables authorities to identify whistle-blowers and journalists’ sources. In addition to government censorship, many media outlets skew their coverage to gain more favourable government ad contracts.

World Bank Loans
2011—$2.8 billion
2012—$1.5 billion
2013—$62 million
2014—$0.4 billion
2015—$0.9 billion

Reporters Without Borders Ranking*:
148 / 180

Freedom House Score:
61 / 100


*Rank out of 180 based on qualitative questionnaire (pluralism, media independence, environment and self-censorship, legislative framework, transparency, infrastructure, abuses) and quantitative abuses score
There were 7 jailed journalists on December 1, 2014, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. Bianet, an independent Turkish press agency, estimated this number to be at 22 journalists and 10 publishers and records the cause of the imprisonment of 10 of these to be blasphemy, defamation, or inciting hatred.

Kadri Bagdu was shot on October 14, 2014, in Adana, Turkey, while delivering the pro-Kurdish daily newspaper, Azadiya Welat. A reporter from the same newspaper was found hanging from a tree in 2010.

During the Gezi Park protests in 2013, Twitter helped initiate mass social mobilization. Tweets by Turkish nationals were thus closely monitored. Prime Minister Erdogan took personal offense to the insulting tweets and pursued individuals in court, leading to imprisonment of many. Erdogan eventually shut down the social networking site, Twitter.

In December 2014, the police conducted raids in the homes of staff working for the country’s leading Zaman newspaper and the Samanyolu Television. 23 journalists were detained on the basis of terrorism charges, due to their link to a US-based Muslim cleric.

Political pressure on media of all forms leads to strongly biased views, including government propaganda. Journalists are fired or resign out of fear due to death threats and verbal harassment. Defamation is a criminal offense, and can lead to a fine or imprisonment and laws are in place to allow internet blocking by government authorities.

Article 314 of the penal code, or Turkey’s anti-terrorism law, uses the definitions of terrorism and membership in armed organizations extensively, applying it unfairly to journalists, particularly Kurdish or left-leaning individuals. The government-controlled Supreme Board of Radio Television (RTUK) ensures radio compliance to the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP).

World Bank Loans
2011—$1.4 billion
2012—$1.1 billion
2013—$1.3 billion
2014—$0.3 billion
2015—$1.2 billion

Reporters Without Borders Ranking:
149 / 180

Freedom House Score:
62 / 100

Works cited: Reporters Without Borders, Freedom House, Aljazeera, Committee to Protect Journalists and The World Bank Image from pomed.org
Due to the uncertain security conditions in the country, journalists are pressured and threatened both from state officials and militant groups. Cable television operators censor their own media outlets on a variety of issues in order not to jeopardize their business interests or relations with state officials.

Five journalists were killed in connection with their work in 2013 and three others were killed for unconfirmed motives. 44 journalists were killed in Pakistan since 2004.

Considering that these attacks are mainly carried out by militant groups or government officials, impunity has become the norm.

In January 2014, a car bomb exploded in Quetta, killing three journalists and injuring three others.

The widespread coverage on the October 2012 attack on teenage education activist Malala Yousafzai by Taliban militants resulted in a call for attacks on media organizations and journalists across the country by the Taliban.

In order to prevent the publication of information on sensitive subjects, assailants attack newspaper and television offices to burn records and steal computers.

The government limits the media independence on subjects such as the constitution, armed forces, the judiciary and religion. The judiciary has made use of broadly defined contempt laws to control reporting on specific cases and judges.

Media organizations that publish militant groups’ press releases face prosecution by the government on the basis of national security laws. Broadcast media are regulated by a government-controlled organization which uses heavy-handed tactics to restrain media freedom.

During the 2010 crackdown, government officials blocked popular websites, like Facebook and YouTube, and has monitored them since. By April 2013, the state and the private paid the media $16 million for favorable press coverage.

World Bank Loans
2011—$1.6 billion
2012—$1.9 billion
2013—$0.8 billion
2014—$2.1 billion
2015—$0.6 billion

Reporters Without Borders Ranking:
159 / 180

Freedom House Score:
64 / 100

Works cited: Reporters Without Borders, Freedom House, Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and The World Bank Image from Dunyanews
EGYPT

Egypt had 12 jailed journalists in 2014, many of which were arrested on grounds of terrorist intents, according to the CPJ prison census. 10 journalists have been killed since 2011, one of them resulting from murder. The remaining 9 died while on risky assignments or were caught in the middle of combat-related situations.

Peter Greste, Mohamed Adel Fahym and Baher Mohamed, three Al-Jazeera journalists, were arrested in late 2013 and sentenced in June 2014 on the basis of spreading false news and aiding the Muslim Brotherhood. Although they were granted freedom on bail in February 2015, many thought their trial to be unfair.

Al-Hosseiny Abou Deif, reporter for El Fagr, a private weekly newspaper, died after he was shot by a member of the Muslim Brotherhood during a clash between anti-government protesters and Muslim Brotherhood supporters at the time of Morsi’s presidency. Abou Deif had criticized the president for including his brother-in-law in a mass presidential pardon, and frequently covered topics related to human rights and politics. He reported being followed in the streets and receiving threats from Muslim Brotherhood supporters.

The 2014 Egyptian constitution allows for freedom of expression, opinion, media, and access to information. Broad definitions, such as Article 71’s allowing of media censorship “in times of war or general mobilization” (Freedom House), lead to violations of this right.

President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi controls the media through roundtable meetings, ensuring unwavering support for his presidency in all news sources. He had shut down two newspapers and all private television stations during his career as defense minister.

Journalism in Egypt is characterized by strong regime support and hatred for the Muslim Brotherhood. Journalists are often involved in legal entanglements or armed conflict if they separate from “obsessive nationalism and a unified political voice” (CPJ).

World Bank Loans
2011—$0.6 billion
2012—$0.4 billion
2013—$0.6 billion
2014—$0.4 billion
2015—$1.4 billion

Reporters Without Borders Ranking:
158 / 180

Freedom House Score:
68 / 100

CHINA

There is currently no law to oversee the protection of journalists or the punishment of their attackers. Instead the government uses criminal defamation laws and vague legal provisions to imprison Chinese citizens for the expression of views they deem objectionable. By December 2014, there were 44 journalists behind bars.

In January 2014 nine practitioners of the Falun Gong spiritual group were denied access to their lawyers and the opportunity to appeal their prison sentences for having distributed and installed satellite dishes that allowed people to view international channels.

Online journalist Zhang Jialong was fired in May 2014 as punishment for his comments about censorship in a meeting with US Secretary of State John Kerry and his online publication of propaganda directives.

Arbitrary detention and abuse in custody remains a concern, as can be seen by Gao Yu’s and Xiang Nanfu’s televised ‘confessions’ that were given under duress and without due process.

Foreign journalists such as Austin Ramzy are also being intimidated and restricted access by being denied visas and forced to report from Taiwan.

The CCP controls the media, forbids coverage of certain subjects and issues secret directives to guide how newsworthy events will be conveyed to the people. Journalists can be accused of defamation, leaking state secrets or spreading false rumors.

If an online post is viewed more than 5,000 times or reposted more than 500 times, the blogger can be charged with ‘seriously harming public order or state interests’ (Freedom House).

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CCP officials use the media to present positive views of the party and preempt less favorable coverage by less controlled media outlets. The government has “the world’s most sophisticated and multilayered apparatus for censoring, monitoring, and manipulating online content” (Freedom House), including the enforcement of internet blackouts during periods of unrest.

World Bank Loans
2011 — $1.8 billion
2012 — $1.3 billion
2013 — $1.6 billion
2014 — $1.7 billion
2015 — $1.6 billion

Reporters Without Borders Ranking:
176 / 180

Freedom House Score:
84 / 100

Works cited: Reporters Without Borders, Freedom House, South China Morning Post and The World Bank
Image from: Amazonaws
“Vietnam remained one of Asia’s harshest environments for the media in 2013”, according to Freedom House. Vietnam also placed 6th on the CPJ ranking for top censored countries in the world. There were 16 jailed journalists in 2014 in Vietnam, according to the CPJ prison census.

Hong Le Tho, a Vietnamese blogger with web name Nguoi Lot Gach, was arrested in his home on November 29, 2014. According to the Vietnamese government, he had published online articles with “bad content and false information”, inciting distrust and discredit among the population.

In October 2013, Le Quoc Quan, a lawyer and human rights defender who blogged about human rights violations by the government, was arrested and sentenced to 30 months in prison on tax evasion charges, after almost a year in detention. Criticism of the detention obtained no response from the government.

On the 40th anniversary of the Vietnam War, in 2013, journalists and bloggers were beaten, their homes were raided, and, in some cases, their travel plans were stopped, reflecting the harsh treatment of journalists during the War.

The 1990 press law states that “all media working in Vietnam must serve as ‘the mouthpiece of Party organizations’” (CPJ). Decree №2, the Sanctions for Administrative Violations in Journalism in Publishing, allows arbitrary punishments of journalists and bloggers based on wide definitions of “the interests of the country and the people”.

Decree №72 of 2013 prohibits sharing of news on social media sites. Online journalists and bloggers are highly vulnerable to official government crackdowns and police raids, often used as a means for intimidation.

Finally, the ruling Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) prohibits anti-government speech in its criminal code and strictly controls print media outlets.

World Bank Loans
2011—$2.4 billion
2012—$1.1 billion
2013—$2.1 billion
2014—$1.6 billion
2015—$1.0 billion

Reporters Without Borders Ranking:
175 / 180

Freedom House Score:
84 / 100

ETHIOPIA

The 2005 criminal code includes several provisions to limit the right to freedom of the press. These include restrictions on obscene communication, defamation, and criticism of public officials. The state controls the only national television station, almost all radio outlets and the telecommunications sector.

In 2014, 30 journalists fled the country

**Eskinder Nega**, a journalist and blogger, has been **sentenced** to 18 years in prison for criticizing the government after the Arab uprisings.

A member of the international advocacy group, **Article 19**, travelled to Ethiopia to provide journalists with **security training** but was **detained** upon arrival, held without access to a lawyer for more than a day and **deported** with a warning not to return.

In April 2014 six **bloggers** with the **Zone 9 Collective** and three other journalists were **arrested**. Their trial has been adjourned 27 times and their requests for release on bail systematically denied.

In July 2014, photojournalist **Aziza Mohamed** was **arrested** for covering mass protests.

By publishing information about government-designated terrorist organizations or conducting interviews with their leaders, journalists can be accused of terrorist collaboration and prosecuted under the 2009 antiterrorism law. This law has led to the arrest of 150 people by 2012.

Journalists are rarely guaranteed due process or a fair trial due to the absence of an independent judiciary and the government’s selective enforcement of the laws.

In order to obtain coerced confessions, journalists are subject to unlawful interrogation tactics, denied access to basic needs as well as to family members and lawyers.

There is limited access to information and only state-owned media can cover official events. Media outlets are censored through official control of content or plain obstruction of access to these.

**World Bank Loans**
- 2011 — $0.6 billion
- 2012 — $1.0 billion
- 2013 — $1.1 billion
- 2014 — $1.6 billion
- 2015 — $1.0 billion

**Reporters Without Borders Ranking:**
142 / 180

**Freedom House Score:**
81 / 100

Works cited: Reporters Without Borders, Freedom House, Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Article 19 and The World Bank

Image From: Anyuakmedia.com
“Self-censorship is widespread, and journalists tend to stay within unofficial red lines to avoid heavy fines, prison sentences, or extralegal intimidation and physical violence in retribution for their stories”
(Freedom House)

**Al-Jazeera**, the Doha-based online newspaper, was made inaccessible to Moroccans in the period from 2010 to 2013

**Hicham Mansouri**, a Moroccan press freedom advocate working for the Moroccan Association for Investigative Journalism (AMJI), was sentenced to 10 months in prison and a $4,057 fine on March 30, 2015. He was arrested on adultery charges but was initially given no explanation as he was beaten and stripped in his own home.

In September 2013, **Ali Anouzla**, co-founder of Lakome, an online news website, was arrested for linking a YouTube video uploaded by al-Qaeda originally published in El Pais. He was charged as a defender of terrorism and a symbol of “material assistance” to the terrorist group, based on the 2003 anti-terrorism law.

The 2011 constitution in Morocco protects freedom of the press but its vague provisions provide space for violations of this right. Criticism of the monarchy and Islam is prohibited and punished through intimidation or legal sanctions. On the same grounds, both foreign and national publications can be arbitrarily banned.

King Mohamed VI and his government appoint heads of the public radio and television stations as well as 4 of 8 members of the High Authority for Audio-Visual Communication.

World Bank Loans
2011—$0.5 billion
2012—$0.7 billion
2013—$0.6 billion
2014—$1.2 billion
2015—$1.1 billion

Reporters Without Borders Ranking:
130 / 180

Freedom House Score:
66 / 100

UZBEKISTAN

The legal framework of the country prohibits censorship and guarantees freedom of speech but these rights are ignored in practice. Virtually all local media outlets are linked directly or indirectly to the state. Self-censorship is high in Uzbekistan and there is nearly no investigative journalism for fear of state reprisals.

Sergey Naumov, an independent journalist covering sensitive topics, was abducted by authorities and served 12 days in administrative detention for ‘petty hooliganism’ after being denied access to independent counsel.

Muhammad Bekjanov (in picture) and Yusuf Ruzimuradov, journalists of opposition newspaper Erk, have been imprisoned since 1999. Both have been tortured resulting in deteriorated health and denied the adequate medical care.

These journalists are not only being unlawfully detained on fabricated charges for having reported on the actual situation in the country but are denied their other rights in the process.

Said Abdurakhimov, charged for working ‘without accreditation’, exposed the government’s lack of compensation for those they evicted to create a motorway.

Journalists can face legal penalties for interfering in internal affairs, insulting the dignity of citizens or publicly insulting the president, a crime punishable by up to five years in prison.

The National Security Service manipulates press reports to construct a positive image of the country. President Karimov allows low-level criticism by journalists to create a façade of reform by periodically fighting officials while not addressing the true source of the problems.

There are a few remaining independent journalists who continue to face pressure and physical violence and thus contribute only to foreign media outlets. Most broadcasting comes from four state-run television channels. The low pay within the media industry makes journalists more accepting of bribes.

World Bank Loans
2011—$0.3 billion
2012—$0.2 billion
2013—$0.3 billion
2014—$0.4 billion
2015—$0.2 billion

Reporters Without Borders Ranking:
166 / 180

Freedom House Score:
95 / 100

2013 held a large number of death threats, kidnappings, and assaults on journalists. Sri Lanka ranked fourth on CPJ’s Impunity Index, indicating a high rate of murder compared to that of punishment of murderers. Sri Lanka is a top country from which journalists flee, with 14 exiled journalists since 2009 through May 2014.

In January 2009, Lasantha Wickrematunge was murdered. Writer for The Sunday Leader, he was one of the most provocative journalists in Sri Lanka. He had once said “When finally I am killed, it will be the government that kills me”. Before his death, he had been bombarded with death threats and other kinds of harassment, which were passed on to his wife and family after his death

Prageeth Eknaligoda (pictured on the right), a journalist and political cartoonist, disappeared on his way home from work prior to the 2010 election. He had written in support of the main opposing candidate for the ruling party and many believe him to have been abducted by the government, but no proof has been found

Free lance journalist N. Logathayalan was detained in April 2015 due to a story he wrote alleging a girl had been assaulted by the police

In Sri Lanka, journalism suffers from high levels of self-censorship due to government corruption. The Internet is arbitrarily licensed and influenced by government forces, censoring any sources criticizing President Mahinda Rajapaksa (through 2014) as well as those covering subjects related to the defeat of the Tamil Tiger rebel movement. Tamil-speaking outlets are targeted for censorship. Defamation is not a criminal offense but civil cases are often brought against press outlets by government officials, causing them to face large fines for covering sensitive topics. The Official Secrets Act bans reporting on classified information, with a penalty of up to 14 years in prison. The 1979 Prevention of Terrorism Act, often used against journalists, has broad restrictions enabling officials to press various unrelated charges.

World Bank Loans
2011—$0.2 billion
2012—$0.3 billion
2013—$0.2 billion
2014—$0.6 billion

Reporters Without Borders Ranking: 165 / 180
Freedom House Score: 76 / 100

Image from AFP
We urge the World Bank to consider international human rights standards, including freedom of religion, when allocating funds for development.

The World Bank, as the world’s leading institution for development finance, should acknowledge its obligations under international law and work for a more consistent respect of human rights in the fight against poverty.