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Publics Around the World Believe Governments Should Not Limit Internet Access

All Nations Polled Support Principle of Press Freedom, and Half Want More Freedom

Many Muslims and Russians Accept Media Restrictions to Preserve Political Stability

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College Park, MD, May 1—A new worldwide poll finds widespread support for freedom of the press and strong opposition to government restrictions on Internet access.

Although most publics surveyed believe the media in their countries should have more freedom, those polled in Russia and many Muslim countries think their leaders should be able to regulate news coverage they consider politically destabilizing.

WorldPublicOpinion.org is releasing the new 20-country poll in advance of World Press Freedom Day on May 3. The survey, which includes 18,122 respondents, is one of a series conducted by WPO this year to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 19 of the declaration states that everyone has the right to “receive and impart information and ideas through any media.”

WorldPublicOpinion.org is a collaborative project managed by the Program on International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland that involves research centers around the world. The countries studied represent about 59 percent of the world’s population and include China, the United States, Russia and India. Not all questions were asked in every country.

Majorities in all but two of the countries polled say “people should have the right to read whatever is on the Internet.” This includes seven out of ten in China, where the government has imposed restrictions on Internet access. Overall, 60 percent of those polled favor the right to full access.

Only a third of those polled around the world (32%) say the government “should have the right to prevent people from having access to some things on the Internet.” Jordan is the only country where a majority (63%) favors such restrictions, though a plurality of Iranians agree by a margin of 44 percent to 32 percent.

The broader principle of press freedom gets even wider support. Majorities in all countries polled consider it important for the “media to be free to publish news and ideas without government control.” An average of 82 percent say this is important, including

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53 percent who consider it very important. Similarly majorities in all of the countries or an overall average of 79 percent say that people in their country should “have the right to read publications from all other countries including those that might be considered enemies.”

“The principle that the media should be free of government control receives robust support from all corners of the world,” said Steven Kull, director of WorldPublicOpinion.org. “With few exceptions, people think that the Internet should be free of government control as well.”

Majorities in ten nations polled think that the media in their country should have more freedom: Mexico (75%), Nigeria (70%), China (66%), South Korea (65%), Egypt (64%), the Palestinian Territories (62%), Azerbaijan (57%), Jordan (56%), Indonesia (53%) and Peru (51%). In no country does more than one in three favor giving the media less freedom. On average across all nations polled, 50 percent say they would like their media to have more freedom, 14 percent less freedom and 31 percent the same amount.

The biggest area of controversy is over whether the government should have the “right to prevent the media from publishing information that it thinks will be politically destabilizing.” In the majority of countries the dominant view is that it should not and on average 55 percent have this view.

However, in six-majority Muslim countries plus Russia substantial numbers think the government should have the right to restrict politically sensitive information. Majorities favor government controls in Jordan (66%), the Palestinian Territories (59%), and Indonesia (56%) while a plurality does in Iran (a plurality (45 to 31%). Views are evenly divided in Egypt, Turkey and Russia.

But this does not mean that these publics favor greater government regulation. In four of these countries, majorities think the media should have more freedom: Egypt (64%), the Palestinian Territories (62%), Jordan (56%) and Indonesia (53%). In the others, most want the media to have the same amount or more freedom, with only small minorities saying it should have less: Iran (9%), Russia (17%), Turkey (30%) and India (32%).

The countries included in this study are China, India, the United States, Indonesia, Nigeria, Russia, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Britain, Egypt, France, Iran, Jordan, Mexico, Peru, Poland, South Korea, Turkey, Ukraine, and the Palestinian Territories. Polling was conducted between January 10 and March 20, 2008.

This release is part of a series of international polls related to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Previously released polls have explored attitudes about women’s right and racial discrimination. For more information, please visit www.WorldPublicOpinion.org.

COUNTRY-BY-COUNTRY RESULTS:

AMERICAS:

MEXICO

[Reforma](#)

Mexicans have the largest majorities saying freedom of the media is “very important” and that the media in their country should have greater freedom. Mexico has one of the largest majorities in support of media being free to publish news and ideas as opposed to allowing the government to impose restrictions to maintain stability.

- 94% of Mexicans say it is important for the media to be free to publish news and ideas without government control, including the largest majority (79%) that says it is very important.
- Two-thirds (67%) agree that people should have the right to read whatever they want on the Internet, rather than believing the government should have the right to prevent access to some things (28%).
- Presented two arguments, very few (17%) agree that the government should have the right to prevent media from publishing things it thinks will be destabilizing, while a majority (77%) feels that the media should have the right to publish news and ideas without government control, the third-largest majority out of all nations asked.
- An overwhelming 95% feel that they should have the right to read publications from other countries, even those considered enemies, the largest majority out of any nation asked.
- Only 29% in Mexico say that the media have a lot of freedom, while 38 percent says it has some freedom. Three in four (75%) in Mexico think that the media should have more freedom, the most out of any nation asked.

UNITED STATES

[Program on International Policy Attitudes](#) / [Knowledge Networks](#)

Americans have the second-largest majority in support of having the right to read whatever they want on the Internet and one of the largest majorities in favor of the right to read publications from all other countries. Americans are one of only three publics where the most common view is that the media already have a lot of freedom as opposed to just some. Americans also show some of the most widespread support for the media having the freedom to publish news and ideas without government control.

- Nearly nine in 10 (88%) Americans say it is very important for the media to be free to publish news and ideas without government control, including 56% that say it is very important. Three-quarters (75%) believe they should have the right to read whatever they want on the Internet without government restrictions.

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- Very few (27%) favor the argument that the government should have the right to restrict this freedom in order to preserve stability, as opposed to 72% who say that the media should have the right to publish news and ideas without government control.
- A very large majority (92%) feels that they should be free to read publications from other countries, even those considered enemies.
- Two-thirds (66%) in the US feel that the media have “a lot” of freedom, while a majority (52%) says it should have the same amount of freedom it does and significantly fewer say it should have either more (25%) or less (22%).

ARGENTINA

[Graciela Romer y Asociados](#)

- An overwhelming majority of Argentines (94%) consider freedom of the media to be important, with 70% saying it is “very important” for the media to be free to publish news and ideas without government control.

PERU

[Grupo de Opinión Publica, Universidad de Lima](#)

Peruvians are among the largest majorities that say freedom of the press is important and are the largest majority that rejects the argument for government restrictions on the press in order to preserve political stability. A slight majority favors more freedom for the media.

- An overwhelming majority (96%) says that it important for the media to have the right to publish news and articles without government control, including 65% that say it is “very important.”
- Presented two arguments, only 12% say that the government should have the right to prevent the media from publishing things that could be politically destabilizing, while a very large majority (83%) favors the position that the media should have the right to publish news and ideas without government control.
- A slight majority (51%) says that media in Peru should have more freedom, while 40% feel it should have the same amount and 7% say it should have less.

EUROPE:

FRANCE

[Efficiencia 3](#)

The French are among the three nations where the most common view is that the media have a lot of freedom in their country, although a significant number says it should also have more freedom. However, they are among the smallest majorities that favor people having the right to read whatever is on the Internet, rather than allowing the government to restrict access to some things.

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- 80% in France feel it is very important for the media to have the right to publish news and ideas without government control and a smaller majority (52%) feels that people should have the unrestricted right to read whatever is on the Internet.
- Seven in 10 (70%) favor the argument that the media should have the right to publish news and ideas without government control, over the position that the government should have the right to prevent the publication of things it feels could be politically destabilizing (26%).
- A very large majority (82%) feels that they should have the right to read publications from all other countries.
- Half (50%) of the French says that the media already have “a lot” of freedom. The French are largely divided between 43% who believe the media should have more and 44% feel that it should have the amount it does now.

GREAT BRITAIN

[Chatham House \(Royal Institute of International Affairs\)](#) / [GlobeScan](#)

Britain has the largest majority saying the media have a lot of freedom in their country. Correspondingly, it has the largest majority expressing satisfaction with the amount of freedom it currently has. Britons are also among the largest majorities that say they should be free to read publications from all countries.

- Nearly nine in 10 (88%) in Britain say it is important for the media to have freedom, including 65% that say it is “very important.” A majority (61%) feels that they should have the right to read whatever is on the Internet.
- 69% of Britons say that the media should have the right to publish news and ideas without government control, as opposed to just 28% that feel the government should have the right to prevent the media from publishing things it thinks could be politically destabilizing.
- A very large majority says that Britons should have the right to read publications from all countries, even those considered enemies (89%).
- A large majority (71%) says that the media have a lot of freedom in Britain, the largest majority out of all nations asked. Fifty-nine percent feel the media should have the same amount of freedom it has now, as opposed to smaller numbers that say it should have more (25%) or less freedom (15%).

RUSSIA

[Levada Center](#)

Although a substantial majority of Russians agree it is important for the media to be free to publish news and ideas without government control, it is the second smallest majority. More significantly, Russians are one of the few publics (and the only non-Muslim one) divided on whether the government should have the right to control the media in the effort to preserve stability. They are among the publics with the lowest levels of support for the media gaining more freedom than it already has.

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- 64% of Russians feel it is either somewhat (41%) or very important (23%) for the media to be free to publish news and ideas without government control, while 57% believe they should have the right to read whatever is on the Internet.
- Given two positions, Russians are one of the few publics divided on whether the media should have the right to publish news and ideas without government control (45%) or whether the government should have the right to prevent the media from publishing things in order to preserve stability (44%).
- 71% in Russia believe that they should have the right to read publications from all other countries, even those considered enemies.
- Asked how much freedom the media currently have in Russia, the most common view is it has “some” (44%), followed by “a lot” (25%). Only 39% believe the media should have more freedom, while 33% believe it should have the same amount and 17% believe it should have less.

UKRAINE

[Kiev International Institute of Sociology](#)

Ukrainians agree with most other publics that it is important for the media to have freedom. Approximately half believe the media in their country should be more free than it is now.

- 74% of Ukrainians agree it is important for the media to have the freedom to publish news and ideas without government control and a majority (64%) believes people should have the right to read whatever is on the Internet rather than having the government impose restrictions.
- Ukrainians tend to reject the argument that the government should have the right to restrict the media’s freedom in order to preserve stability (31%), while nearly three in five (59%) agree more that the media should be free to publish news and ideas without control.
- A large majority of Ukrainians (82%) believes people should have the right to read publications from any country, even those that could be considered enemies.
- 46% in the Ukraine say the media only have “some” freedom, while just 18% feel it has “a lot.” 45% believe it should have more freedom than it does now, 35% feel it should have about the same, and 10% say it should have less.

POLAND

[CBOS](#)

- A very large majority of Poles (78%) believes that the media should have the right to publish news and ideas without government control, while very few (13%) believe government should have the right to restrict this freedom.
- An overwhelming majority (84%) agree that people in Poland should have the right to read publications from all other countries, even those that might be considered enemies.

MIDDLE EAST/EURASIA:

AZERBAIJAN

International Center for Social Research

Azerbaijanis have the largest majority supporting the right to have unrestricted access to material on the Internet. While most say the media in Azerbaijan have at least some freedom, they are among the smallest numbers saying the media have a lot of freedom and a majority believes the media should have even greater freedom.

- A very large majority of Azerbaijanis (86%) say that it is important for the media to have the freedom to publish news and ideas without government control and 79% say that people should have the right to read whatever they want on the Internet, the largest majority out of all nations asked.
- Few Azerbaijanis (34%) find the argument convincing that the government should have the right to prevent the media from publishing news and ideas that could be politically destabilizing, while 55% favor the media having the right to publish news and ideas without government control.
- Nearly three in four (73%) say that people should have the right to read publications from all other countries, including those that could be considered enemies.
- Azerbaijanis most commonly say that the media have “some” freedom (38%), while very few say it has “a lot” of freedom. Fifty-seven percent feel that the media should have more freedom than it does now, significantly more than those who say it should have the same amount (23%) or less freedom (13%).

EGYPT

Attitude Market Research

Egyptians are among the publics most supportive of the principle of media freedom—they have the highest number saying media freedom is important. However they are also one of three divided on whether the government should have the right to restrict freedom to prevent political instability. Egyptians are also one of the five largest majorities calling for more freedom.

- An overwhelming majority (97%) of Egyptians say it is important for the media to be free (64% very important) and 65% believe that people should have the right to read whatever is on the Internet.
- Presented two arguments, Egyptians are among the few publics divided on whether the government should have the right to prevent the media from publishing things it thinks will be destabilizing (52%) and whether the media should have the right to publish news and ideas without government control (49%).
- Nearly three in four (74%) say that people in Egypt should have the right to read publications from all other countries, even those that might be considered enemies.

- A majority in Egypt (63%) says that the media have “some” freedom, although 31% also say it has “a lot” of freedom. A large majority (64%) also feels it should have more freedom, while just one-third (32%) says it should have the same amount and 4% say it should have less freedom.

IRAN

WorldPublicOpinion.org

While two thirds of Iranians favor press freedom, overall their support is among the weakest. Iranians are one of two publics asked that lean in favor of the government having the right to restrict access to information on the Internet and among the few nations that feel the government should have the right to prevent the press from publishing news and ideas that could be destabilizing. However, a large majority believes Iranians should have the right to read publications from all other countries.

- A majority of Iranians (65%) agrees that it is important for the press to have the freedom to publish news and ideas without government control.
- 44% support the government having the right to prevent people from having access to some things on the Internet, while 32% believe people should have the right to read whatever is on the Internet.
- A plurality (45%) favors the argument that the government should have the right to restrict the press’ freedom to publish things it thinks could be destabilizing, while 31% prefer the argument that the press should have the right to publish news and ideas without government control.
- A very large majority (79%) believes people in Iran should have the right to read publications from all other countries.
- Iranians most commonly say that the press has “some” freedom in their country (45%), while just very few (17%) say that it has “a lot” of freedom. Most say that the press should have the same amount of freedom as it does now (43%), while fewer say it should have more (34%) or less freedom (9%).

JORDAN

[Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan](http://CenterforStrategicStudies,UniversityofJordan)

Despite a robust eight in 10 supporting media freedom in principle, among the nations asked, Jordanians are the only case in which a majority favors the government restricting access to things on the Internet. Jordanians also favor the argument that the government should have the right to prevent the media from publishing things in order to maintain stability.

- Nearly four in five (78%) Jordanians agree on the importance of the media having freedom to publish news and ideas.
- A majority (63%) says that the government should have the right to prevent people from having access to some things on the Internet (one of two nations where this is the most common view), while just 29% say people should be able to read whatever is on the Internet.

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- A majority of Jordanians (66%) favors the argument that the government should have the right to restrict the media from publishing things that could be destabilizing, while just 26% feel that the media should be free to publish news and ideas without government control.
- 54% in Jordan say the media have at least “some” freedom, while 24% feel it has “a lot” of freedom. A majority (56%) also believes the media should have more freedom, while only 26% say it should have the same amount and 12% feel it should have less.

PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

[Palestinian Center for Public Opinion](#)

Palestinians are among the publics more willing to tolerate government restrictions on media freedom in order to maintain stability. However Palestinians have the smallest number agreeing that the media have “a lot” of freedom now, and has one of the largest majorities feeling that it should have greater freedom.

- 82% of Palestinians agree that it is important for the media to have the freedom to publish news and ideas without government control.
- A slight majority (52%) favors people having the right to read whatever is on the Internet, although 44% take the opposite view that the government should have the right to prevent people from having access to some things on the Internet.
- A majority of Palestinians (59%) subscribes to the argument that the government should have the right to restrict media freedom to prevent instability, while 36% find the argument that the media should have the right to publish news and ideas without government control more convincing.
- 72% believe that Palestinians should have the right to read publications from all countries, even those that could be considered enemies.
- Palestinians most commonly say that the media have “some” freedom (51%), and very few (10%) feel it has “a lot” of freedom. A large majority (62%) believes the media should have more freedom than it does now, while 20% feel it should have the same amount, and 15% say it should have less.

TURKEY

[ARI Foundation](#) / [Infakto Research Workshop](#)

Among Muslim publics, Turks have the largest number saying the media already have a great deal of freedom. Though supporting freedom of the media in principle, Turks are one of the few publics divided on whether the government should have the right to restrict media freedom in order to maintain political stability.

- Nearly three in four (74%) Turks say that freedom of the media is important, and 60% believe that people should have the right to read whatever they want on the Internet.
- Presented two arguments, Turks are among the few publics that are divided between the media having the right to publish news and ideas without government

- control (45%) and the government having the right to prevent the media from publishing things that it thinks will be politically destabilizing (42%).
- 74% say that the people in Turkey should be able to read publications from other countries, even those considered enemies.
 - Many Turks believe the media have “a lot” (41%) of freedom, the largest number among the Muslim publics asked, while an additional 31% say it has “some” freedom. Thirty-eight percent say it should more freedom than it does now, while 30% feel it should have less and 25% feel it should have about the same amount.

AFRICA:

NIGERIA

Market Trends Research International

Nigerians have the largest number saying the media lacks freedom in their country and have the second-most widespread support for greater media freedom among all nations asked. Nigerians are also among the largest majorities favoring the right to read publications from all countries and rejecting the argument that government should restrict media freedom to preserve stability.

- An overwhelming 91% say it is important to have freedom of the media and 72% say they should have the right to read whatever is on the Internet.
- Nigerians have one of the largest majorities rejecting the argument that the government should have the right to restrict media freedom to ensure stability (28%) in favor of the media having the right to publish news and ideas without government control (71%).
- A large majority (91%) says Nigerians should have the right to read publications from other countries, even those that could be considered enemies, one of the largest majorities among all nations asked.
- Nigerians have the largest number saying the media have “not very much freedom” (38%) or “none at all” (6%), though 42% say it has “some” freedom. 70% feel that Nigeria should have more freedom for the media, while just 18% say they should have less and 11% say it should remain about the same.

ASIA/PACIFIC:

CHINA

WorldPublicOpinion.org

The Chinese public expresses robust support for freedom of the media in principle and has the most widespread support among Asian publics asked for the right to read publications from other countries and for unrestricted access to the Internet. China also has the third-largest majority calling for greater freedom.

- 85% say it is important to have freedom of the media and 71% agree that people should have the right to read whatever is on the Internet.
- While a significant number of the Chinese (42%) favor the argument that the government should have the right to prevent the media from publishing news and ideas that it thinks will be politically destabilizing, a majority (53%) says the media should have the right to publish news and ideas without government control.
- A large majority (78%) says that people in China should have the right to read publications from other countries, even those that could be considered enemies.
- A slight majority (51%) in China says the media have a least “some” freedom, though very few (12%) say it has “a lot.” Two-thirds (66%) feel that the media should have more freedom in China, while 25% are satisfied with the freedom they have.

INDIA

[Team CVoter](#)

Indians have the most modest majorities expressing support for the importance of media freedom and for the right to read publications from unfriendly countries. They have the largest percentage calling for less freedom.

- Modest majorities of Indians (52%) say it is important to have freedom of the media and that people should have the right to read whatever is on the Internet (52%).
- Given two arguments, a plurality (42%) maintains that the media should be free to publish news and ideas without government control, while just one-third (33%) prefer that the government should have the right to prevent the media from publishing things that could be politically destabilizing.
- 56% say that people in India should have the right to read publications from other countries, including those that could be considered enemies, though one-third (33%) say people should not have this right, the most of any public asked.
- Only 29% believe the media have “a lot” of freedom in India, while 26% say it has “some.” Indians are somewhat divided on whether they favor greater freedom for the media (36%), less freedom (32%) or whether it should remain about the same (19%).

INDONESIA

[Synovate](#)

Though a large majority of Indonesians think it is important to have freedom of the media, Indonesia is one of a handful of nations to have a majority saying that restricting the media is appropriate so as to preserve political stability. At the same time a majority favors greater freedom.

- 73% say it is important to have freedom of the media and 65% feel people should have the right to read whatever is on the Internet.

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- Presented two positions, Indonesians are one of the few majorities that endorse the government having the right to restrict media freedom in order to ensure political stability, while 35% say that the media should be free to publish news and ideas without government control.
- A very large majority (84%) agrees that Indonesians should have the right to read publications from other countries, even those considered enemies.
- A significant number in Indonesia believes the media have at least “some” (47%) or “a lot” (28%) of freedom. A majority (53%) feels that the media should have greater freedom, while just 24% believe it should be about the same and 15% say it should have less.

SOUTH KOREA

[East Asia Institute](#)

Among Asian countries, South Korea has the highest support for freedom of the media in principle. South Koreans are also among the largest majorities favoring greater freedom for the media in their country, and the least supportive among Asian publics for the argument that government should be able to restrict the freedom of the media in order to preserve stability.

- An overwhelming majority (93%) say it is important to have freedom of the media and nearly seven in 10 (69%) say that people should have the right to read whatever is on the Internet.
- Presented two arguments, very few South Koreans (26%) favor the government having the right to prevent the media from publishing things it could consider politically destabilizing and are among the publics that most widely support the media having the right to publish news and ideas without government control (72%).
- 73% say that people in South Korea should have the right to read publications from other countries, including those that may be considered enemies.
- South Koreans most commonly say the media have at least “some” freedom in their country (48%), although an additional 27% say it has “a lot” of freedom. A large majority (65%) feels that the media should have greater freedom, while 23% are satisfied with the freedom they already have.

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