

New Report Rates Countries on Internet Freedom

September 27, 2012

On Monday, [Freedom House](#) [1] released [Freedom on the Net 2012](#) [2], an annual report that summarizes threats to user rights online, access to ICTs, and a range of policy developments that affect openness on the global Internet. The report includes narrative profiles and Internet freedom “scores” for 47 countries around the world, with an emphasis on countries where Internet openness and user rights have historically been at risk. This year, CDT reviewed and provided updates for the Freedom on the Net profile for the United States.

In 2012, Azerbaijan, Malaysia, Pakistan, and Russia were among a handful of countries that experienced a sharp uptick in threats to user rights since 2011. In 19 of the 47 countries profiled, new laws had been introduced that threatened rights to privacy, free expression, or both. But researchers also found that civil society activism and strong due process had yielded positive results for Internet freedom in a wide range of countries.

Using metrics that aim to quantify limitations for online content, obstacles to access, and user rights, the report rates countries on a scale of “free” to “not free.” This year, the US rating became slightly “less free” due primarily to San Francisco public transit officials’ decision to shut down cell phone service on Bay Area Rapid Transit train platforms in an effort to stymie public protests, a move that CDT [argued](#) [3] stood in violation of the First Amendment. The proposed anti-piracy laws SOPA and PIPA, which constituted clear threats to users’ rights to free expression and access to information, also had a negative effect on the US score.

While the scoring method used for the report provides a simplified picture of the often complex threats to Internet freedom that exist in different countries, the accompanying narratives shed some light on critical distinctions in how threats take shape from country to country. Comparing reports from multiple years can also give readers a useful sketch of a country’s Internet freedom trajectory over time.

Readers can find highlights from the 2012 report [here](#) [4], and a downloadable PDF for the report [here](#) [2].

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