

World Press Freedom Index



Explore the Index's map

MIDDLE EAST - NORTH AFRICA

Saudi Arabia

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INDEX 2026

176 / 180

Score : 19.11

INDEX 2025

▼ **162** / 180

Score : 27.94

POLITICAL
INDICATOR

175
12.20

POLITICAL
INDICATOR

158
23.83

ECONOMIC
INDICATOR

141
33.00

ECONOMIC
INDICATOR

86
42.28

LEGAL
INDICATOR

177
13.13

LEGAL
INDICATOR

167
21.35

SOCIAL
INDICATOR

172
21.39

SOCIAL
INDICATOR

168
28.47

SECURITY
INDICATOR

176
15.81

SECURITY
INDICATOR

169
23.74

Independent media is non-existent in Saudi Arabia, and Saudi journalists are subject to heavy surveillance, even when abroad. Despite societal reforms, journalists are still being detained and media outlets operate under strict state control.

Media landscape

Saudi outlets do not stray from the authorities' official narratives. Self-censorship is ever-present, including on social networks. Even privately owned Saudi media follow government guidelines set out by the *Saudi Press Agency (SPA)*. The press is divided into two main camps: the *Al-Watan* and *Okaz* dailies represent the "liberal" side while *Al-Riyadh* leads the conservative side.

Political context

Self-censorship is standard practice for media outlets owned by the royal family. Other media outlets are required to submit to daily scrutiny by censors, and certain topics are covered in a way that serves the interests of the State. Journalists who criticise the monarchy's choices and strategies are considered traitors. Those who prefer to stay neutral and who do not follow the official line of praise for Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman become *de facto* suspects.

Legal framework

The penal code and anti-terrorism and cybercrime laws allow imprisonment or suspension of journalists who share any criticism, on grounds of "blasphemy," "inciting chaos," "jeopardising national unity," or "harming the image and reputation of the king and the state." Since [2018](#), the government has been tightening its grip on social networks. Unjust sentences of decades in prison have been handed down for tweets.

Economic context

Saudi media outlets are, for the most part, financed by the kingdom or those close to ruling circles. The *MBC* group, which owns *Al Arabiya*, benefits from ample resources,

and its influence extends beyond the country's borders. Many prominent journalists are thriving in sports journalism, particularly following efforts to draw attention to sports in Saudi Arabia. Their coverage is popular, as is that of cultural and entertainment events in the kingdom.

Sociocultural context

The cases of [Raif Badawi](#) and [Ali Abulohoom](#), each convicted for having published comments online that were deemed to constitute apostasy, are emblematic of the tension between press freedom and respect for religious edicts in the Wahhabi kingdom. Women's rights also remain a sensitive topic due to prevailing customs and traditions. Those who attempt to criticise certain social norms may face arrest.

Safety

Journalists face long prison sentences and sometimes even the death penalty. In 2025, the authorities executed journalist Turki al-Jasser, the first reporter to be killed by the kingdom since the extrajudicial murder of Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Türkiye in 2018. Media figures who criticise the authorities are persecuted and harassed online by “electronic brigades.” The kingdom also uses high-tech espionage tools to track down journalists in exile.