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State Department releases scaled-back human rights reports



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Secretary of State Marco Rubio. Photo: Andrew Harnik/Getty Images

The State Department on Tuesday released its long-awaited reports on international human rights, which significantly scaled

back the types of abuse outlined from years past.

The big picture: The reports, which are usually released earlier in the year, were released after a prolonged delay, per multiple reports, and the sweeping restructuring of the State Department's human rights bureau.

- Amnesty International slammed the reports, which omit references to the rights of women and LGBTQ+ people included in past versions for many countries, saying they prioritize politics over a truthful accounting of human rights violations.
- The State Department said in its notes that the reports were adjusted in March and "streamlined" for "utility" and to be more aligned with the "underlying legislative mandate" and the administration's orders.

Driving the news: This year's reports are far shorter and less detailed than last year's — and language on administration allies was starkly different.

- For example, the 2023 report on El Salvador detailed "[s]ignificant human rights issues," including "harsh and life-threatening prison conditions."
- The 2024 report released under the Trump administration, however, found "no credible reports of significant human rights abuses" in El Salvador, which imprisoned hundreds of migrants sent from the U.S.

What they're saying: "We have criticized past reports when warranted, but have never seen reports quite like this," Amanda Klasing, Amnesty International USA's national director of government relations and advocacy, said in a statement.

- "Never before have the reports gone this far in prioritizing an administration's political agenda over a consistent and truthful accounting of human rights violations around the world —

softening criticism in some countries while ignoring violations in others," Klasing said.

- She said it's "clear" the administration engaged in "very selective documentation" of human rights abuses.

The other side: A department spokesperson told Axios the 2024 report removes "redundancy" and increases "readability."

- "The Human Rights Report only makes the United States — and the world — safer, stronger, and more prosperous if individual reports are useful, factual, and unclouded by political biases and cherry-picking," the spokesperson said. "This year's revised individual reports are a welcome step in that direction."

Zoom out: While the language on some countries appeared softer than past reports, policies and legal decisions the president has openly criticized were included.

- The assessment of Brazil concluded that the human rights situation there "declined during the year," citing "broad and disproportionate action" from courts to "undermine freedom of speech and internet freedom."
- It took aim at Alexandre de Moraes, the judge who oversaw the prosecution of Brazil's former President Jair Bolsonaro and briefly banned Elon Musk's X in the country. Trump has demanded an end of criminal charges against Bolsonaro, his ally.
- The report concludes that Moraes "personally ordered the suspension of more than 100 user profiles on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter), disproportionately suppressing the speech of advocates of former president Jair Bolsonaro."

The reports also concluded the human rights situation in several European nations "worsened ... during the year," citing in part "restrictions on freedom of expression."



- Vice President JD Vance in February scolded European leaders over a "retreat" from free speech.

And in the assessment on South Africa, the department criticized the country's Expropriation Act as a "substantially worrying step towards land expropriation of Afrikaners."

- Trump is a vocal opponent of the law, which allows the government to take some land and redistribute as part of an effort to address racial and economic disparities created by apartheid.
- The Trump administration earlier this year welcomed white South Africans as refugees in the U.S. — while ending deportation protections for thousands.

The Trump administration's reports on Israel, the West Bank and Gaza were also far shorter.

- In its assessment of Israel, it concluded that there were "reports of arbitrary or unlawful killings; enforced disappearance; degrading treatment by government officials; and arbitrary arrest or detention" but said the government "took several credible steps to identify officials who committed human rights abuses."
- Regarding Israeli security forces in the West Bank and Gaza, the report said there had been "reports of arbitrary or unlawful killings; and serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom."
- It again said Israeli authorities took steps to punish those accused of abuses but noted "human rights groups frequently criticized authorities for not adequately pursuing investigations and disciplinary actions."
- The report listed significant human rights violations by Hamas in Gaza and the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank,

including unlawful killings, forced labor and arbitrary arrest or detention.

Catch up quick: Secretary of State Marco Rubio in April claimed the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor had become "a platform for left-wing activists to wage vendettas against 'anti-woke' leaders" in countries like Poland, Hungary and Brazil.

- Since then, the State Department has undergone a significant reorganization.

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Zachary Basu, Dave Lawler
Jul 17, 2025 - Politics & Policy

Trump's soft-power retreat scrambles U.S.-
China race





Photo illustration: Sarah Grillo/Axios. Photo: Joshua Roberts/Getty Images

President Trump has set a radical new course in the U.S.-China rivalry, ceding ground to Beijing in pursuit of a far narrower vision of America's role in the world.

Why it matters: Six months into office, the Trump administration has hollowed out the machinery of American soft power and retreated from key arenas where the U.S. has sought to blunt China's rise.

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