

# **WHO CARES ABOUT FREE SPEECH?**

Findings from a Global Survey of Support for Free Speech



*Who Cares about Free Speech?: Findings from a Global Survey of Support for Free Speech*

© Justitia and the authors, May 2021

**WHO WE ARE**



Justitia is Denmark's first judicial think-tank. Justitia aims to promote the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms both within Denmark and abroad by educating and influencing policy experts, decision-makers, and the public. In so doing, Justitia offers legal insight and analysis on a range of contemporary issues.



The Future of Free Speech is a collaboration between Justitia, Columbia University's Global Freedom of Expression and researchers from Aarhus University. We believe that a robust and resilient culture of free speech must be the foundation for the future of any free, democratic society. Even as rapid technological change brings new challenges and threats, free speech must continue to serve as an essential ideal and a fundamental right for all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, gender or social standing.

The publications can be freely cited with a clear indication of source.

This report was made possible by the generous support of The John Templeton Foundation.



Further donations from Facebook and Fritt Ord made the publication possible.

Justitia is solely responsible for the report's content.

# Who Cares about Free Speech?

## Findings from a Global Survey

*If large numbers of people are interested in freedom of speech, there will be freedom of speech, even if the law forbids it; if public opinion is sluggish, inconvenient minorities will be persecuted, even if laws exist to protect them.*

— George Orwell<sup>1</sup>

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. High level of general support for free speech</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2. Divergent support for different forms of speech</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>3. Support for free speech has not decreased in recent years</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>4. Support for free speech varies across groups</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>5. In the US</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>6. Biases in alleged support for free speech</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>7. Widespread support for regulation of social media</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>8. Conclusion</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>9. Survey methodology</b>	<b>30</b>

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1

Support for free speech varies across the globe. Among the 33 countries surveyed, Scandinavians and Americans are most supportive while Russians, Muslim-majority nations, and the least socio-economically developed nations express the lowest levels of support.

2

In Egypt, Hungary, the Philippines, Russia, Turkey, and Venezuela, the actual level of freedom of expression is very low compared to the popular demand for free speech.

3

Support for free speech is generally expressed by great majorities in all countries when people are asked their opinion.

4

However, when confronted with controversial statements – e.g., statements offensive to minorities or religions, supportive of homosexual relationships, or insults to the national flag, the support is generally lower and varies much more between countries and across issues and individuals. Likewise, variation between countries increases and the rankings are different when people are confronted with potential trade-offs regarding information that might be sensitive to national security, harm economic stability, or undermine the handling of epidemics.

5

General support for free speech has not decreased since 2015. Most nations demonstrate stable or even increased levels of support. However, there are exceptions. Most notably, the acceptance of unrestricted criticism of the government has declined in the US.

6

Individual background conditions in the form of gender, age, education, and placement on a left-right spectrum are related to support for free speech in different ways in different countries. There are some general tendencies, however, including higher tolerance among left-leaning individuals regarding insults to national symbols and more acceptance among right-leaning individuals of statements offensive to minority groups – particularly, in Western countries.

7

In the US, young people, women, the less educated, and Biden voters are generally less supportive of free speech.

8

In many countries, people have a tendency to understate tolerance of statements that criticize their own religion and beliefs. At the same time, many citizens have a tendency to exaggerate how important they consider the right to criticize their governments.

9

In all the countries surveyed, a majority prefers some kind of regulation of social media content. However, only a few want the government to take sole responsibility for this. People in two-thirds of the countries surveyed favor such regulation to be carried out by social media companies themselves while a plurality in the rest prefer social media companies along with national governments to be responsible for regulating the content.

10

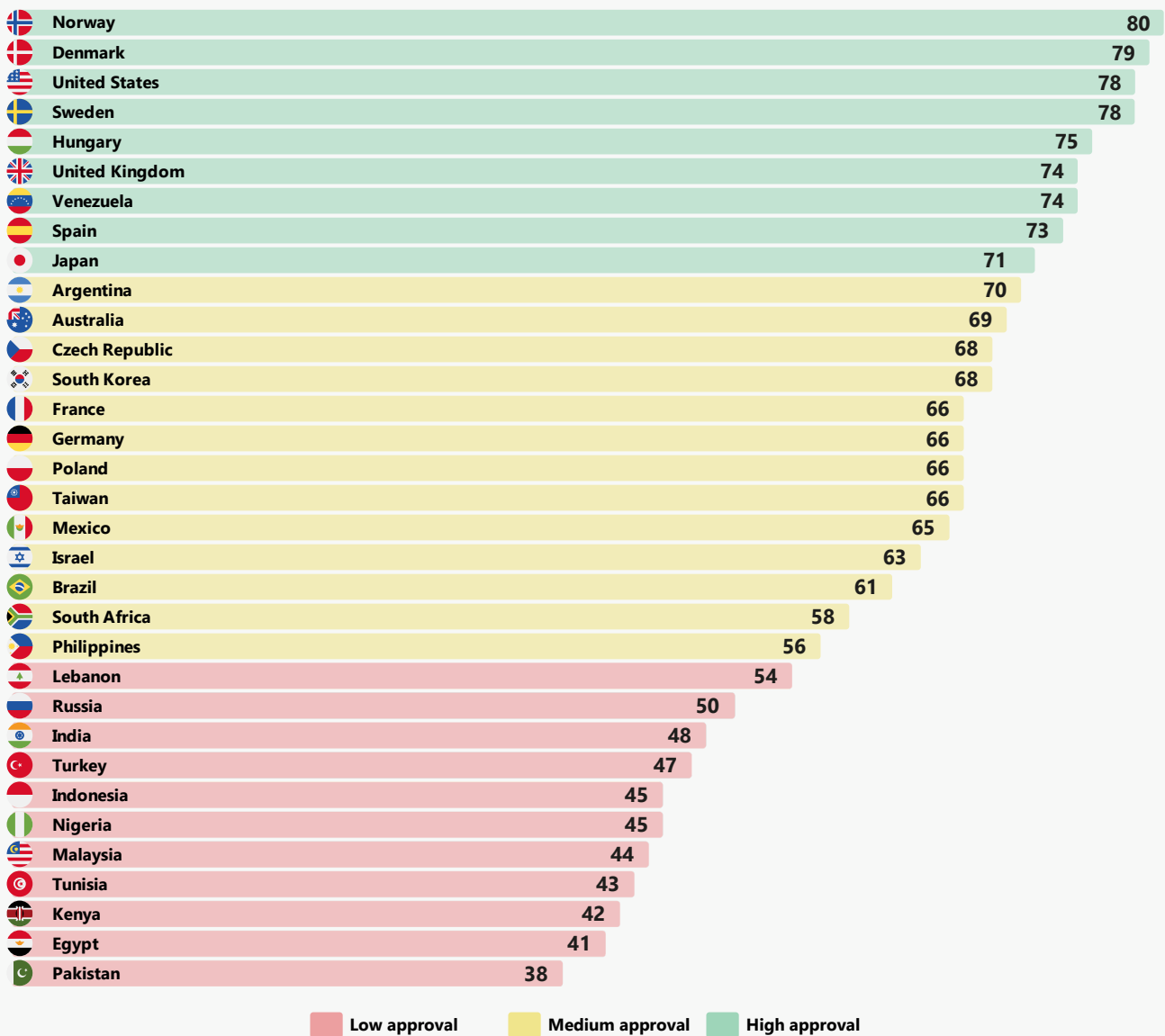
Opinions about the regulation of social media content are sensitive to whether the issue is linked to statements about fake news or the repression of free speech.

The right to freedom of expression is recognized under international human rights law and by almost all national constitutions as a fundamental right.<sup>2</sup> Free speech is important for personal autonomy, and it is instrumental for the protection of other rights, including popular sovereignty, and for the progress of knowledge and human development.<sup>3</sup> In the words of former Secretary-General of the UN, Ban Ki-moon, and the Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, "freedom of opinion and expression ... are essential to democracy, transparency, accountability and the rule of law. They are vital for human dignity, social progress and inclusive development."<sup>4</sup>

Against this backdrop, it is disheartening that different independent organizations have reported a decline in respect for freedom of expression in recent years caused by overt as well as covert attacks by intolerant groups and governments. Most recently, the Covid-19 crisis seems to have augmented the problem.<sup>5</sup> From 2012 to 2020, 32 countries experienced significant decline in respect for freedom of expression, while only twelve improved their status.<sup>6</sup> But to what extent do ordinary citizens in different nations support the principle of free speech? This report seeks to answer this question based on data from representative surveys of individuals from 33 countries around the world.<sup>7</sup> The surveys were developed by Justitia and implemented by YouGov and some of its international partners in February 2021 (see Appendix for details, including the specific formulation of questions).

We have constructed a composite measure, the Justitia Free Speech Index, to assess the overall support for free speech in different countries. It is based on answers to eight questions about the willingness to allow controversial types of speech, such as the ability to offend religion and minority groups and to publish information that could destabilize the national economy.<sup>8</sup> The overview reveals that people living in the Western world generally show more support of free speech than elsewhere. This finding is in line with previous studies.<sup>9</sup>

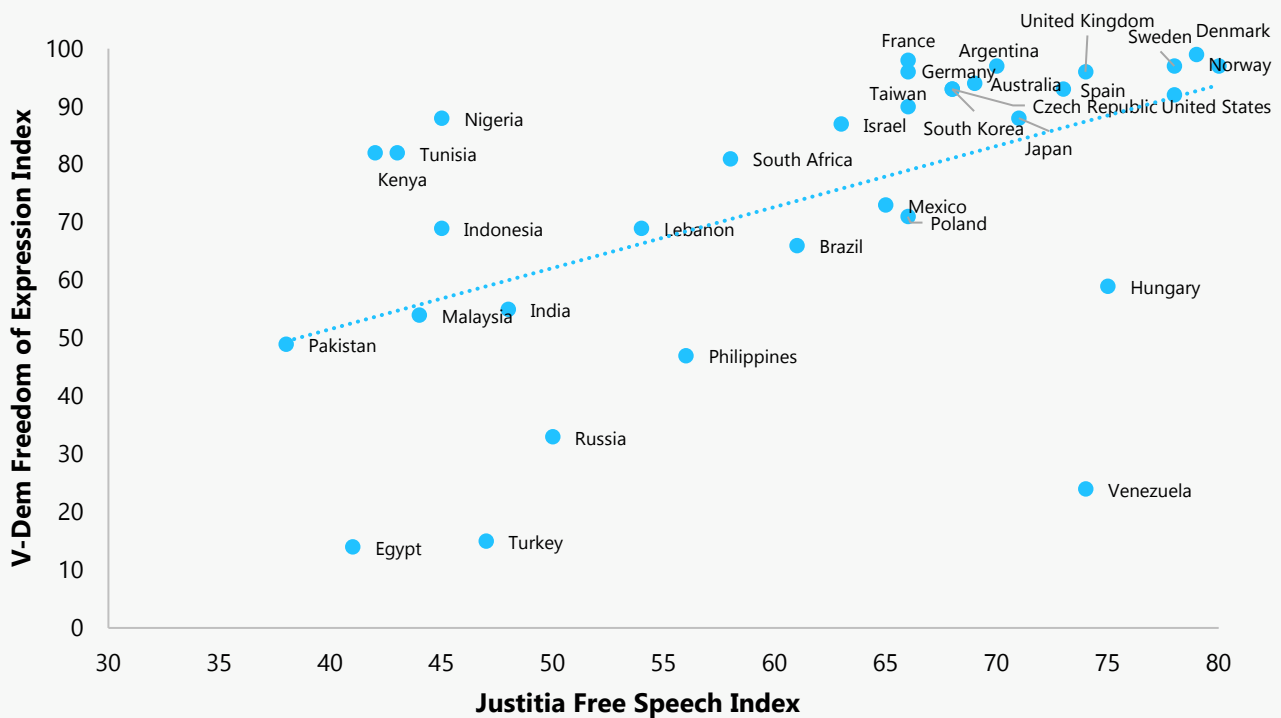
**Figure 1: Global variation in the Justitia Free Speech Index**



Scandinavians and Americans are most supportive while citizens in Latin America, other parts of Europe, as well as Australia, Israel, and the East Asian democracies (Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan) also show relatively strong support. At the same time, support for free speech is weaker in Russia, Turkey, other parts of Asia, and Africa. Egypt, Kenya, Pakistan, Malaysia, and Tunisia receive the lowest scores on our index.

When we match the Justitia Free Speech Index scores with country scores from V-Dem’s Freedom of Expression Index<sup>10</sup>, there is a clear, positive association (the Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.55). This means that public opinion about free speech (popular demand) tends to go hand-in-hand with the actual enjoyment of this right (government supply).

**Figure 2: Nations supportive of free speech enjoy more freedom of expression in practice**

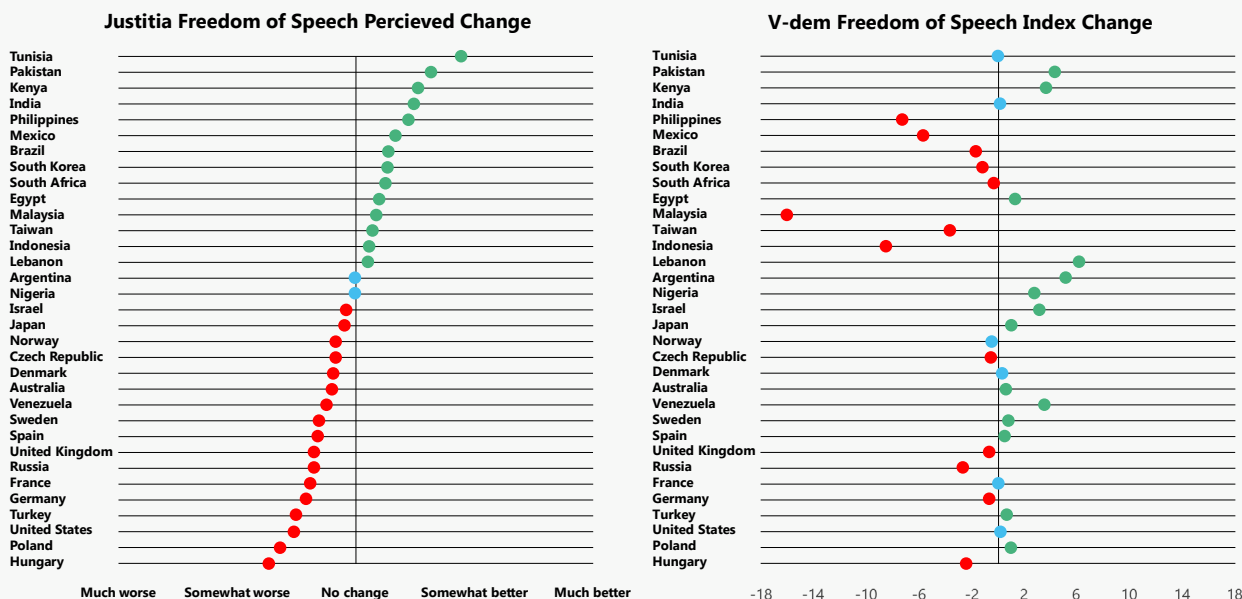


In other words, nations more supportive of free speech tend to enjoy more freedom of expression in practice and vice versa. Pakistan, Malaysia, and India score relatively low on both support and practice. By contrast, the Scandinavian and Anglosphere (i.e., Australia, the UK, and the US) countries are at the upper end of the scale on both accounts. There are noteworthy exceptions to this pattern, however, as indicated by the countries placed far above and far below the regression line. Kenya, Tunisia, and Nigeria achieve relatively high values on the V-Dem measure, reflecting a relatively high actual enjoyment of the right, even though the popular support for free speech is relatively low. By contrast, Egypt, Turkey, Russia, the Philippines, Venezuela, and Hungary represent cases in which the popular demand for free speech is relatively high compared to how little the citizens may actually exercise freedom of expression without being sanctioned.

We do not have sufficiently detailed data to do a robust assessment of whether the Covid-19 pandemic has increased such mismatches between demand and supply. Nonetheless, when we ask people whether they think their ability to speak freely about political matters has improved or worsened over the last year, there are roughly as many countries in which the citizens believe that freedom of expression has declined over the last year as the opposite.

Tunisians, Pakistanis, and Kenyans state that they have experienced witnessed the greatest improvements. It is more surprising to see that, given recent democratic backsliding, citizens in the Philippines and India also think the conditions for free speech have improved. By contrast, Hungarians, Poles, Americans, and Turks believe that, on average, their right to free speech has decreased the most. These are all polarized countries in which incumbents have been intolerant of free and independent media both before and during the pandemic. However, many German and French citizens also feel that the situation has worsened substantially in their respective countries.

**Figure 3: Perceived changes in ability to speak freely over the last year and changes in V-Dem Freedom of Expression Index from 2019 to 2020<sup>11</sup>**



The changes in V-Dem’s Freedom of Expression Index from 2019 to 2020 do not indicate a uniform decline during the Covid-19 crisis. Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Mexico represent the largest negative changes, whereas Lebanon, Argentina, Pakistan, and Kenya have apparently improved their performance. Most countries in the sample did not experience a significant change.

Finally, there is not much agreement between the perceptions of ordinary citizens and experts regarding recent developments. This is interesting since it puts into question the ability of either ordinary people or experts (or both) to make valid judgements about factual trends in freedom of expression. However, one has to take into account that the periods assessed are not exactly the same. The V-Dem assessment covers a calendar year, and our surveys were carried out in February.

The rest of this report provides an overview of responses to the many specific questions in the survey. It is divided into six sections, focusing on different but related themes. Section 1 shows the level of support for free speech when people are asked directly without being confronted with moral dilemmas or potential trade-offs. Section 2 reveals how, on average, respondents in different nations respond when they are asked about more specific types of free speech and particular trade-offs. Section 3 demonstrates how much support for free speech has changed in particular countries from 2015 to today. Section 4 disaggregates the responses and shows how support for free speech in selected countries varies across groups defined by age, education, gender, and political orientation. Section 5 follows up on the disaggregate perspective with a special focus on group differences in support for different types of free speech in the US. Section 6 presents the results from two *list experiments*, which shed new light on when and where there is a tendency to under- or over-report opposition to free speech. Section 7 shows how widespread support for regulation of social media content is and whom people think should be allowed to regulate it – if anyone.





# 1. High level of general support for free speech

There is strong global support for the value of free speech in the abstract. That is, when people are asked how important it is to have the ability to exercise free speech (versus government censorship in some circumstances), they tend to value it highly. This is the finding no matter whether people should be allowed to say what they want, whether the media should be allowed to report news, or whether people should be allowed to use the internet. For all three questions, the median across all countries is more than 90 percent for those who consider these rights to be important or very important.

Figure 4: Median support for freedom of expression across all countries

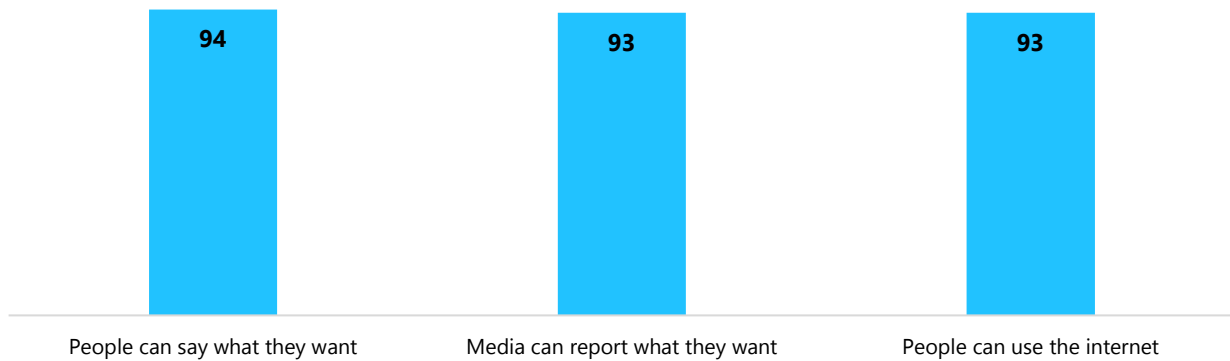
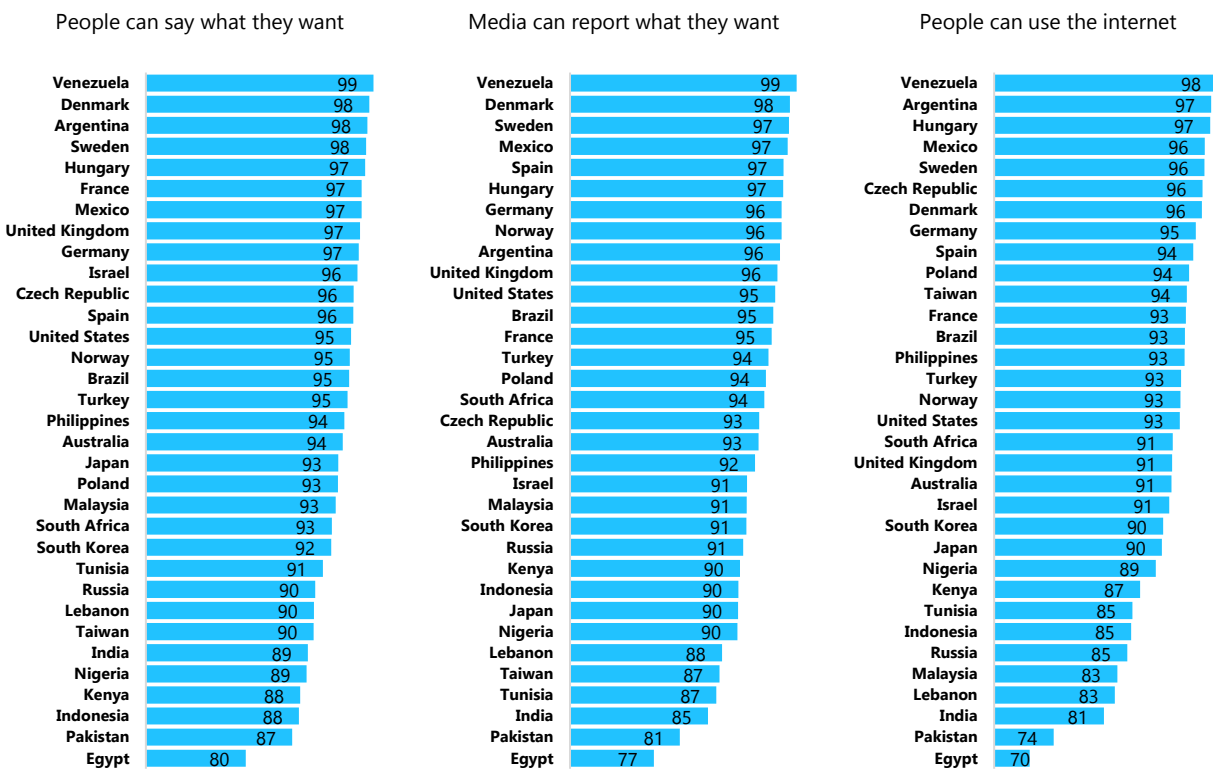


Figure 5: Support for freedom of expression without censorship in individual countries





Widespread embrace of free speech is found in all the countries included in the sample. Yet, approval of free speech in the abstract still varies significantly across regions and states. The North American, Latin American, and European citizens in our survey show the highest disapproval of censorship – with the noteworthy exception of Russians.

It is interesting to find Hungary, Venezuela, and, to some extent, Mexico among the countries with the highest support, given the recent declines in media freedom in these countries. Argentina, Denmark, and Sweden, where the right to free speech has not been challenged nearly as much recently, are also at the top for all three issues.

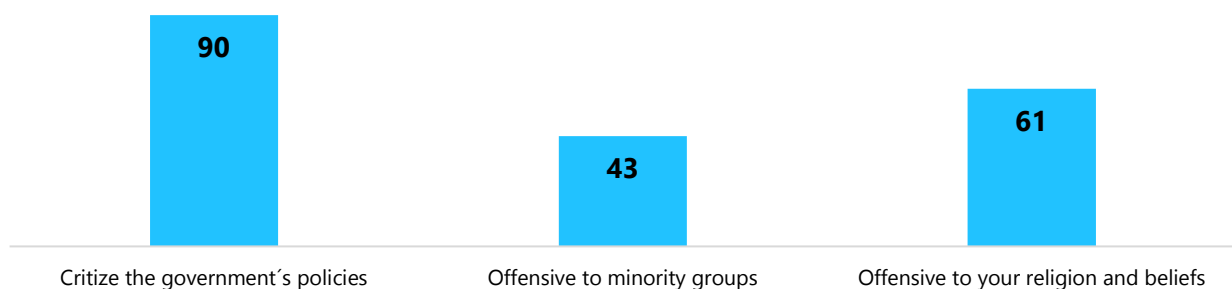
In the countries located in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, there is also substantial opposition to censorship although to a lower degree. Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, Indonesia, and Pakistan stand out as having the largest shares of people who do not outright reject state censorship.

## 2. Divergent support for different forms of speech

Free speech is generally praised as a universal human right, and most people have a clear interest in being able to speak freely and gain access to information. Therefore, the high level of support might not be that surprising. But how deeply felt is this principle? Do people still support free speech in the same way when they are asked about more specific categories of controversial statements that mirror the justifications many governments actually use when restricting free speech in practice?

To shed light on the degree and type of such reservations, we have included five questions in the survey asking: “Do you think people should be able to say these types of things publicly OR the government should be able to prevent people from saying these things in some circumstances?” The first three questions concern statements that criticize government policies; statements that are offensive to minority groups, and statements that are offensive to the respondent’s own religion or beliefs.

**Figure 6: Median support for particular types of free speech across all countries**

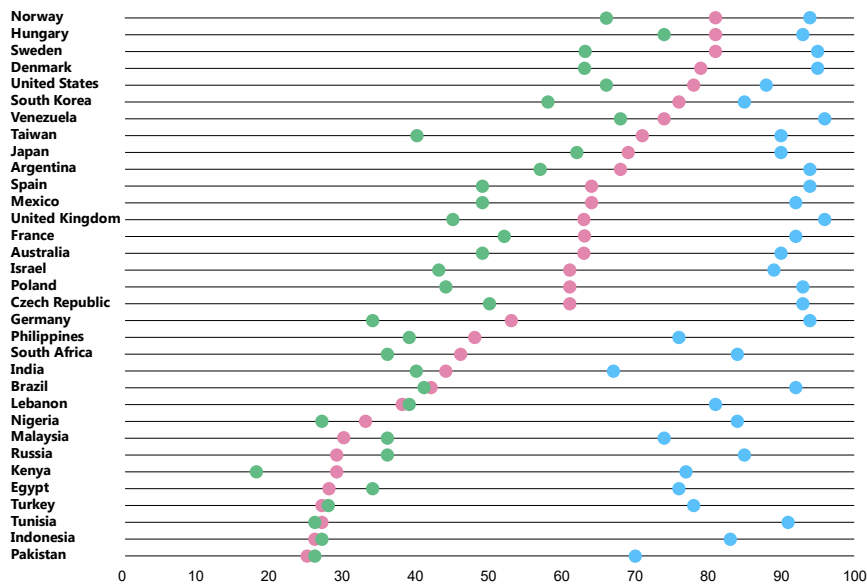
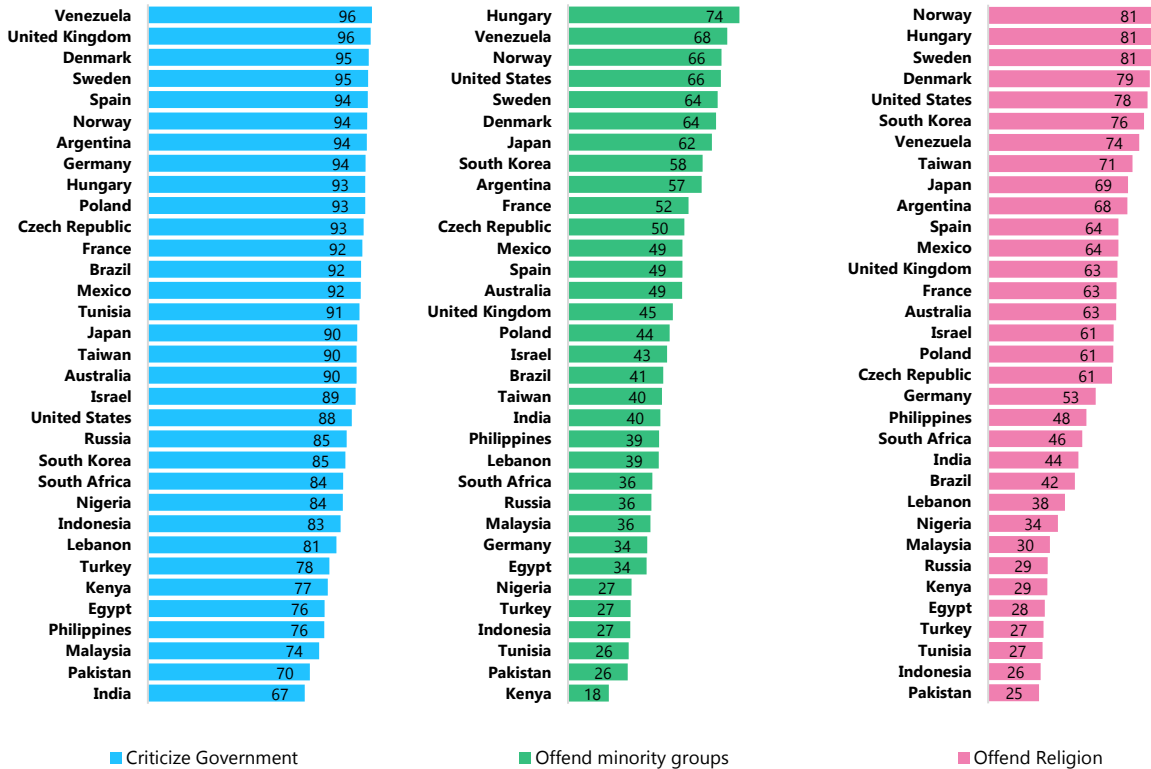


The responses indicate that people are generally in favor of allowing criticism of the government, while support for statements that offend minority groups and one’s own religion is much more limited.

Looking at the numbers for the individual countries, it is clear that the freedom to criticize government policies finds support across the board.



Figure 7: Support for ability to criticize government, offend minority groups, or offend religion



Note, however, that, in some countries where the government tends to be less open to criticism, support levels tend to be lower. On one hand, this could mean that a substantial share of people back their government and actually prefer limitations on this type of free speech. On the other hand, it could indicate that respondents are more afraid to provide an honest answer in the context of overt and covert attempts to curb criticism in places such as Turkey, Egypt, Malaysia, and India.



It is also striking that Australia and the US are ranked relatively low on this question despite very long and strong traditions of free speech. High levels of polarization combined with the insurrection at the Capitol on January 6 might be partly responsible in the US case (see Section 5 for a disaggregated analysis of the US). That said, the difference between most countries is not that large.

The shares of people who think that one should be able to offend their religion and minority groups, respectively, are quite similar. In the cases in which there is a substantial difference in responses to these two questions (e.g., South Korea, Taiwan, the UK, Israel, and Germany), people are less supportive of free speech extending to statements offensive to minority groups.

There is less than fifty percent support for free speech with respect to statements offensive to minority groups in as many as 19 of the 33 countries surveyed (as little as 19 percent in Kenya). It seems that citizens from ethnically heterogeneous and conflict-ridden societies generally favor more restraint on this issue, but the pattern is not without exceptions as indicated by the high level of support in the US and the low level in Tunisia. Moreover, in almost half of the countries surveyed, there is less than 60 percent support for free speech with respect to religion (the lowest level is 28 percent in Pakistan). Hence, there is a widespread demand to restrict free speech regarding issues that may be interpreted as blasphemous (i.e., derogatory statements about religions) or hate speech (i.e., the use of pejorative or discriminatory language about particular identity groups). Non-Western countries generally have the least lenient citizens, but one Western exception is Germany, whose history of persecution of minorities under Nazi rule seems to play a special role in public opinion.

Unsurprisingly, all cases show markedly higher support for the ability to criticize the government compared to statements offending minority groups or religion. Only in Norway, Hungary, Sweden, Denmark, the US, and South Korea are the differences relatively small, reflecting the belief that free speech should apply broadly, no matter the "target".

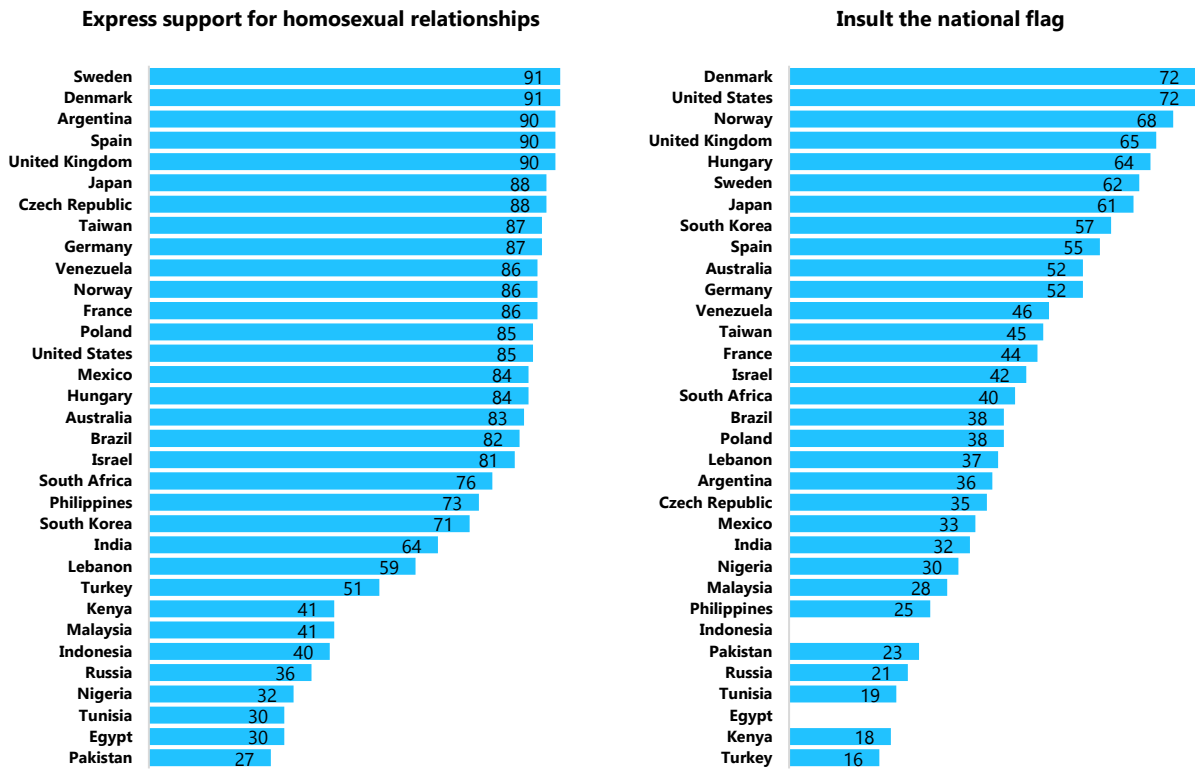
In two additional questions about controversial issues, we have asked whether people should be allowed to express support for homosexual relationships or insult the national flag. The responses to these questions also vary significantly between nations. In Denmark, Sweden, Spain, the UK, and Argentina, there is almost uniform support for allowing people to express support for homosexual relationships. By contrast, there is widespread opposition to allowing such statements in Kenya, Russia, and all Muslim-majority countries in our sample.

Insults to the national flag are tolerated to a lower degree across the board. Americans, Danes, and Norwegians are rather open to this type of expression. However, in 20 countries, including France, Israel, and Brazil, less than 50 percent are willing to allow insults to the national flag. In Turkey, Kenya, Tunisia, Russia, and Pakistan, the support is even lower than 25 percent.

The largest differences in support for the two types of statements are found in Argentina (90 vs. 36), the Czech Republic (88 vs. 35), and Mexico (84 vs. 33). These discrepancies reflect a high degree of inconsistency in the support for free speech. In other words, the support is highly conditional on the particular issue in question. Tolerance of one type of speech does not necessarily imply tolerance of another.



Figure 8: Allowing statements that support homosexual relationships or insult the national flag



Our survey includes three additional questions that may be used to probe the conditionality of support for free speech. The respondents were asked: "Do you think media organizations should be able to publish information about these types of things OR that the government should be able to prevent media organizations from publishing information about these types of things in some circumstances?" The question was asked about economic issues that might destabilize the country's economy, sensitive issues related to national security, and sensitive issues that make it more difficult for the government to handle epidemics, such as the COVID-19 crisis.

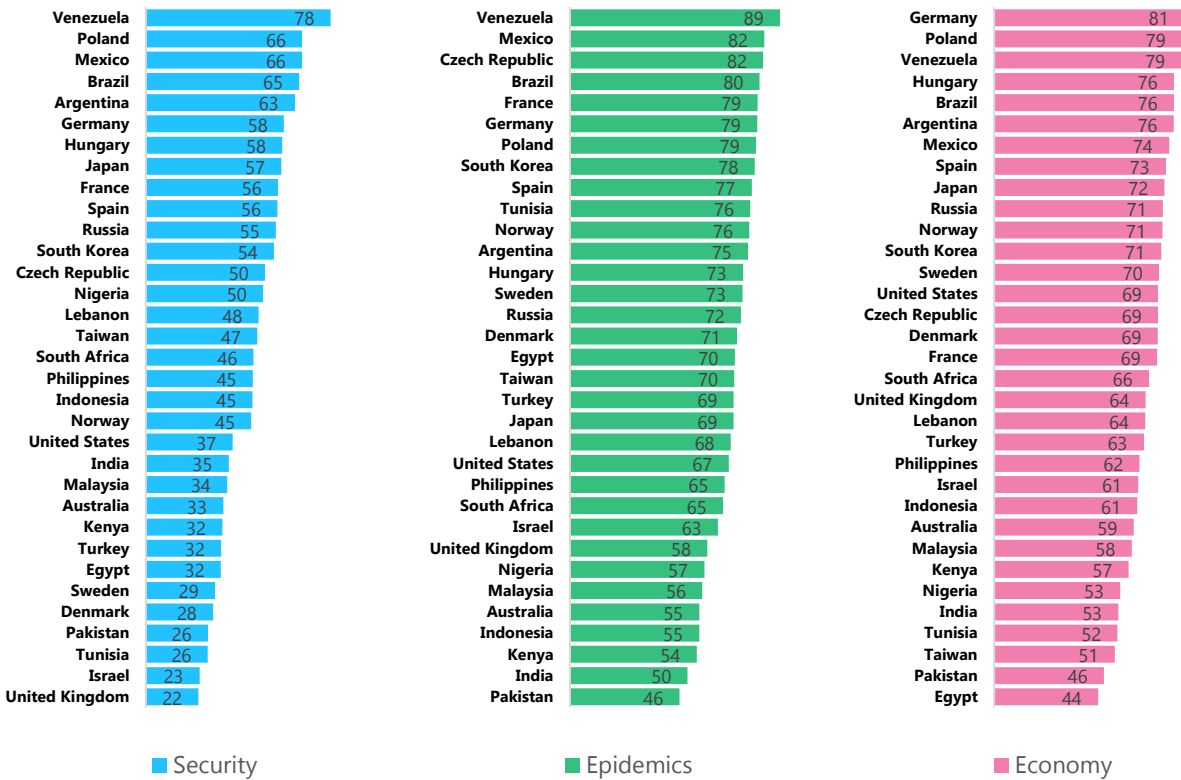
Ordinary citizens are most concerned about information that can harm national security. This applies in virtually all countries. At the same time, the level of support is almost identical in relation to information that can either destabilize the national economy or make it difficult for the government to handle epidemics. There are only substantial differences in Tunisia, Taiwan, and Egypt, where fewer people would allow media to publish information that can harm the economy.

The ranking of many countries on these questions is quite different from that on the previous questions relating to critical and offensive statements. Britons, Israelis, Danes, and Swedes are among the most unwilling to allow media to publish sensitive information about national security issues without government restrictions. Australians, Norwegians, and Americans are also hesitant to allow free speech on security matters. It is evident that support for free speech is not unconditional even in long-established liberal democracies. Fear of terrorism probably influences these responses, but



we cannot be certain about this based on the limited evidence at hand. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that people in Poland and Latin America represent the most liberal perspective on this issue.

**Figure 9: Support for ability of media to publish information that can destabilize the economy, make it difficult to handle epidemics, or is sensitive to national security**



Similarly, many Australians, Britons, and Americans agree with the idea that governments – under some circumstances – may legitimately limit media freedom with respect to information that could

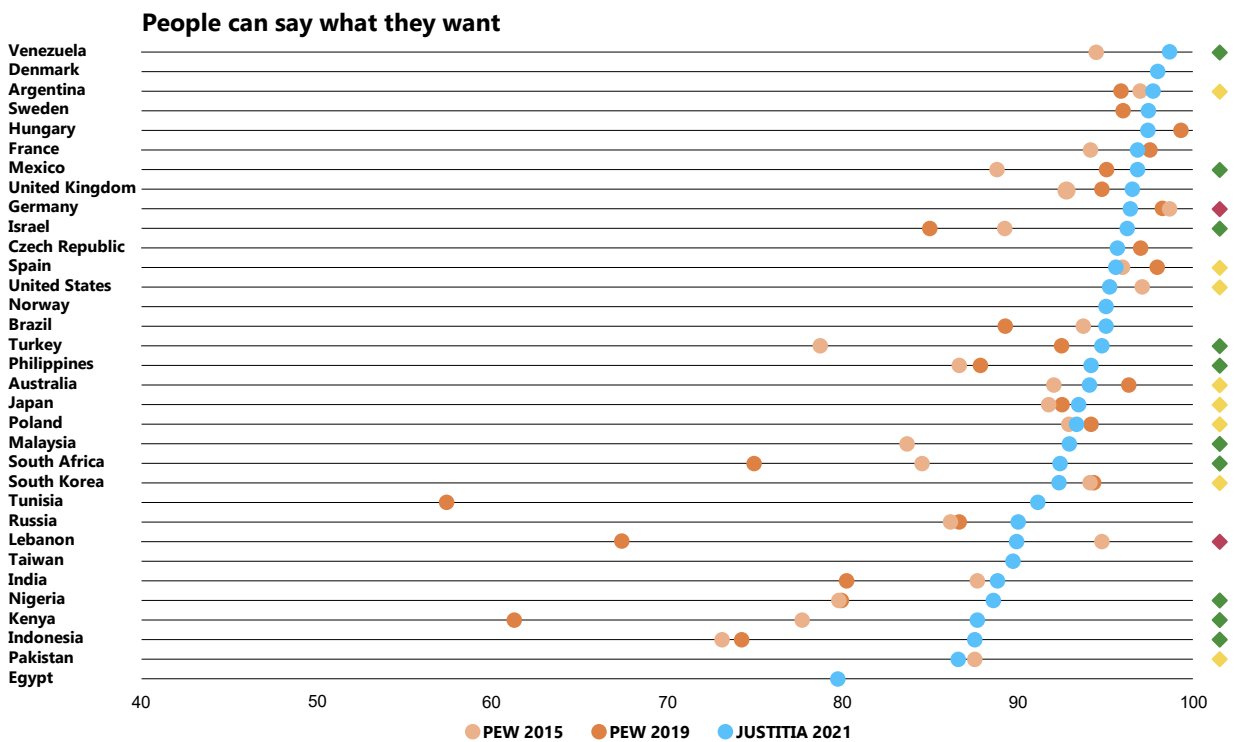


potentially undermine the efficient handling of epidemics. The Scandinavian countries are placed somewhere in the middle on this question; whereas, people in Venezuela, Mexico, the Czech Republic, Germany, and France do not want governments to restrict access to information. The figures are likely related to recent national experiences with respect to COVID-19 infection ratios, the severity and length of lockdowns, as well as general trust in government institutions. This hunch might also be relevant for answers to the trade-off question about economic stability since COVID-19 has not only led to a health crisis but has also had a severe economic impact.

### 3. Support for free speech has not decreased in recent years

The level of support for free speech in a country today is one thing; changes over time are another. It is important to reveal trends in support levels because they may indicate where we are heading. They may also be used to reveal drivers of increases and decreases in opposition to free speech. To explore developments, we utilize a PEW Research Center survey that asked some of the same questions in many of the same countries in 2015 and in 2019.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, it was a deliberate choice to replicate a number of the original PEW questions to make such comparisons feasible.

Figure 10: Support for individual freedom of speech, 2015, 2019<sup>13</sup>, and 2021<sup>14</sup>



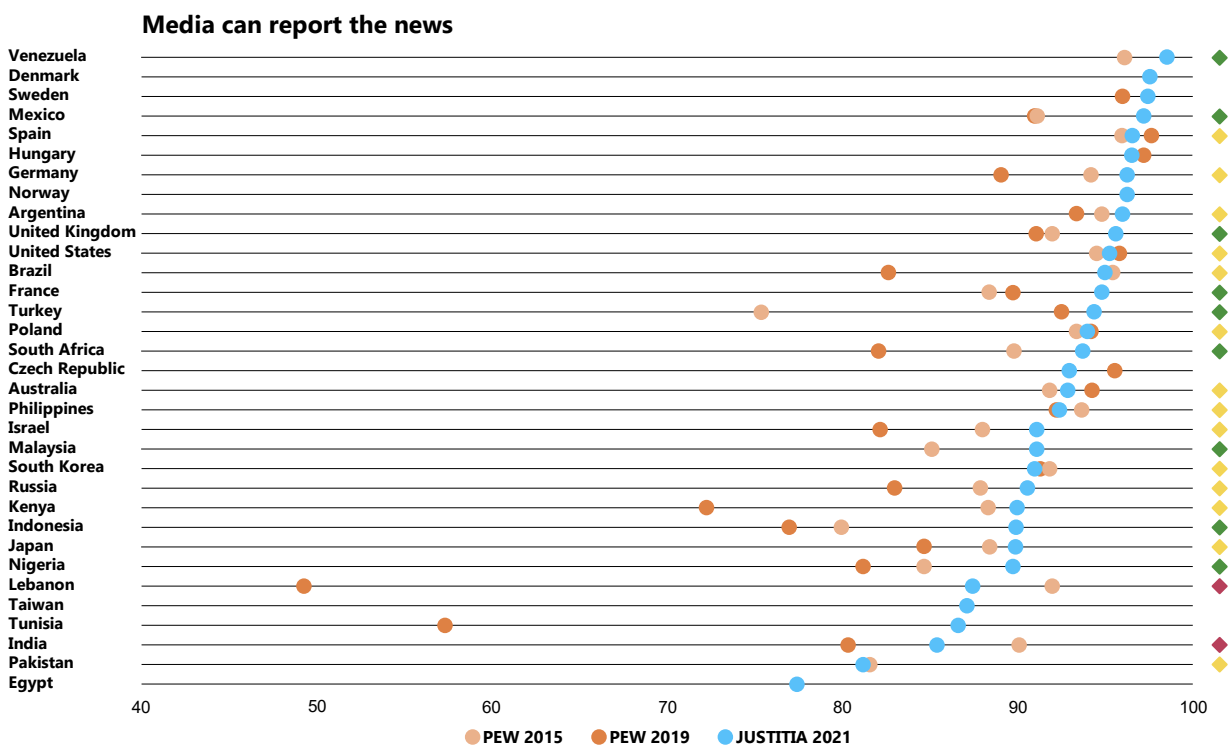
Out of the 25 states with data for both 2015 and 2021, almost half show increasing support of the principle that people should be able to say what they want without government censorship. This applies to Venezuela, Mexico, the UK, the Philippines, Australia, Malaysia, South Africa, Russia, Nigeria, Kenya, and Indonesia. Several of these countries have recently been characterized by decreasing government respect for free speech. This finding might indicate that people begin to value free speech more when it is under threat.



However, there is obviously not a one-to-one relationship between practices and opinions. For example, the citizens of Poland and India have not increased their support of freedom of expression significantly even though freedom of expression has been under increased pressure in recent years. Germany and Lebanon stand out with their significant declines over the period while the remaining nine nations have not changed their degree of support in significant ways.

Similarly, the percentage of citizens who think that it is important or very important for media to be allowed to report news without government censorship has been stable or improving since 2015 in most countries. Only Indians and the Lebanese<sup>15</sup> tend to be more critical of media freedom today. By contrast, citizens of nine countries, including the UK, France, Turkey, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Nigeria, are now significantly more in favor of free media.

Figure 11: Support for media freedom, 2015, 2019, and 2021

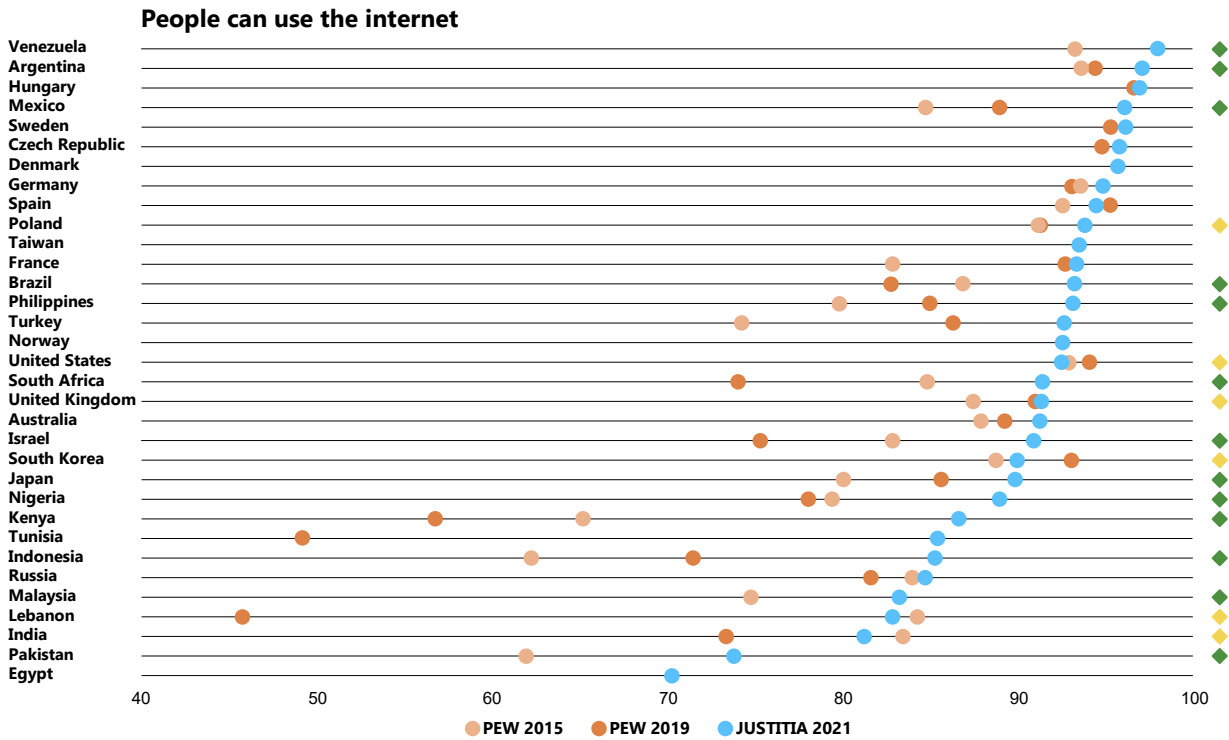


Positive change is even more widespread regarding whether people should be allowed to use the internet without government censorship. Not a single nation has become less favorable about this issue; whereas, 15 (including Mexico, Brazil, Turkey, Indonesia, Kenya, and Pakistan) have become more favorable. It may be that, because increasing numbers of people use the internet and rely on it for communication and gathering information, they may be more prone to support internet freedom.





Figure 12: Support for internet freedom, 2015, 2019, and 2021



We are able to compare our 2021 responses with PEW data for 2015 on five additional questions, which seek to identify reservations about specific forms of free speech. More particularly, they address public statements that criticize the government, offend minority groups, or offend the religion or beliefs of the respondents as well as media reports that could harm the national economy or security.

There are more nations with significant positive trends than negative trends over the last six years (11 vs. 7) when the question concerns criticism of government policies. On average, the support has increased by approximately three percentage points. In the group characterized by significant increases, for instance, we find Turkey, Japan, South Africa, South Korea, and Nigeria. The second group of countries with declining support includes, among others, India, the US, and Australia. It is not evident why Americans, in particular, but also Australians – each of whom have a strong tradition of free speech – have reduced their support of an unconditional right to criticize the government. The ongoing pandemic may play a role. As we saw above, both countries have many citizens who are willing to trade-off media freedom for an efficient handling of epidemics. Another reason may be increased fear of disinformation (see also Section 5). This is a topic that has been hotly debated in these societies. However, other Western countries such as the UK, France, and Germany have not followed suit despite similar debates, which indicates a need for more country-specific explanations.

An almost equal number of nations have increased or decreased approval, respectively, of the ability to make statements offensive to minority groups (9 vs. 8), and the average change from 2015 to 2021 is close to zero (0.9).



Figure 13: Support for ability to criticize government, 2015 vs. 2021<sup>16</sup>

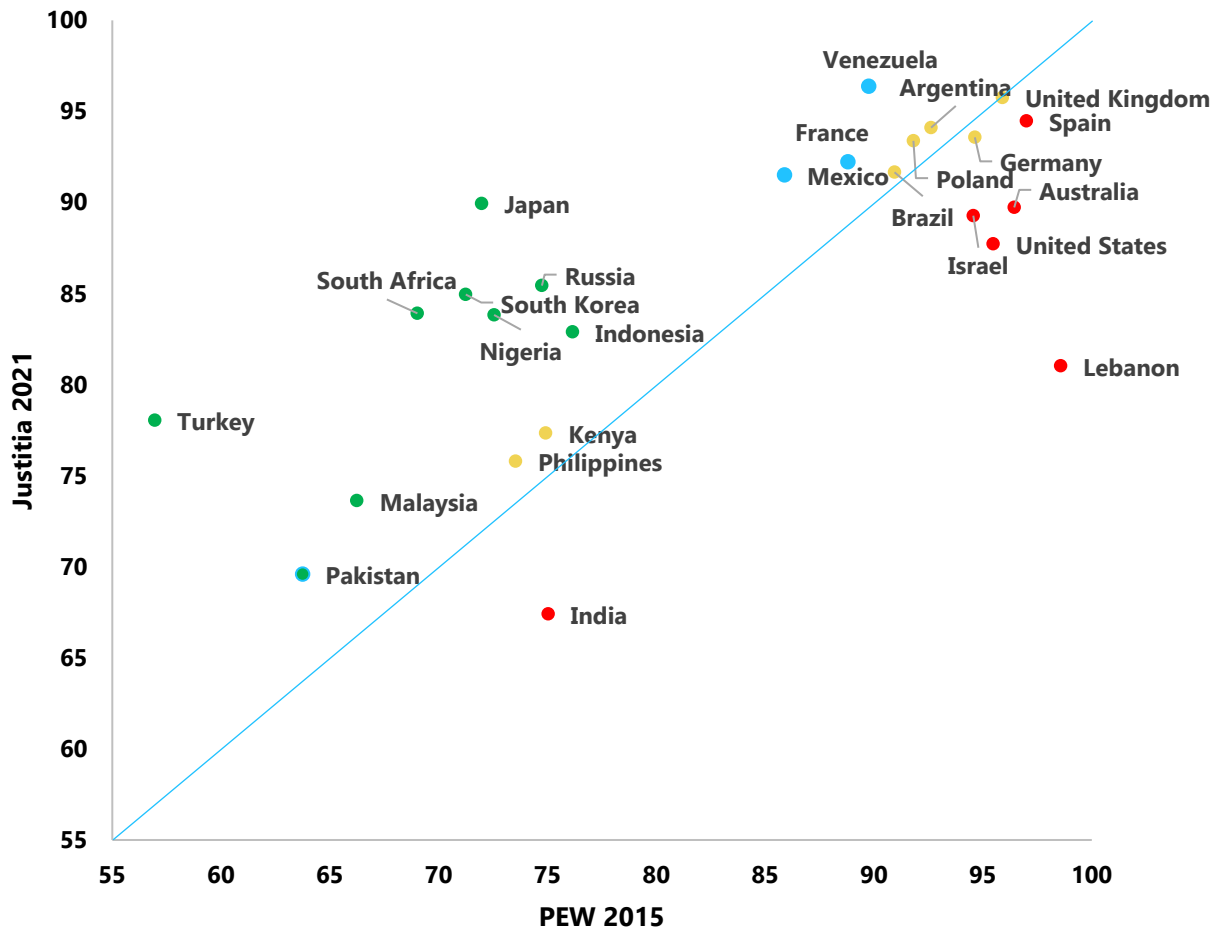


Figure 14: Support for ability to offend minority groups, 2015 vs. 2021

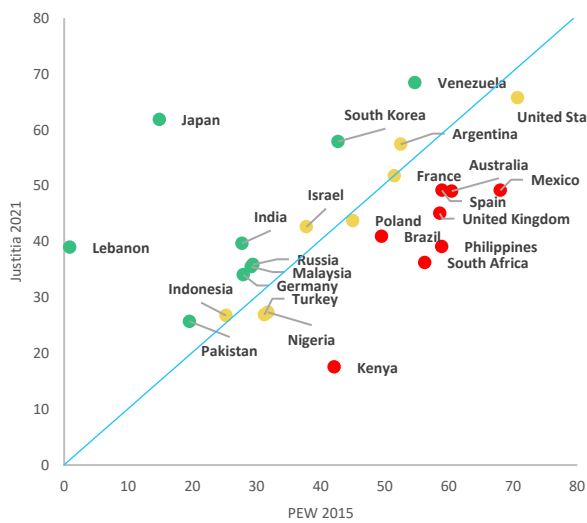
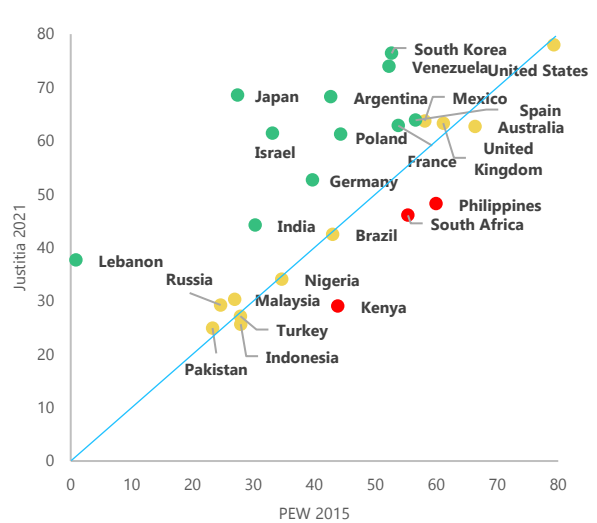


Figure 15: Support for ability to offend religion and beliefs, 2015 vs. 2021





Moreover, , the Japanese and South Koreans show growing support for allowing statements that are offensive to minorities. Other countries, such as the Philippines, Mexico, South Africa, Spain, Australia, and the UK, reveal contrary trends. Increasing attention to identity politics may have influenced views on this subject matter. However, the fact that the "average opinion" on hate speech in the US has not changed significantly reminds us that the identity politics agenda is facing resistance from traditionalist forces as well as civil libertarians.<sup>17</sup>

Only three nations show significant increases in their disapproval of offensive statements against their own religion and beliefs while eleven have become more open-minded on this issue, including Poland, Israel, and India, where the relationship between religion and politics has been much debated in recent years. The average change across all countries has been a little more than eight percentage points, which is quite substantial for such a short period.

One might think that the fact that most economies are currently challenged by the COVID-19 crisis would result in more caution regarding information that has the potential to destabilize national economies. Yet, no general trend is identifiable compared to 2015. Together with Russians, Turks and Pakistanis have most clearly moved in the opposite direction on this issue, but the level of support is quite stable in a majority of countries.

**Figure 16: Support for ability to publish economically destabilizing information, 2015 vs. 2021**

PEW 2015	Difference	Justitia 2021
38	Turkey 25	63
26	Pakistan 20	46
57	Russia 14	71
50	Lebanon 13	64
41	Nigeria 12	53
59	South Korea 11	70
60	Japan 11	72
74	Germany 6	80
55	Philippines 6	61
52	Kenya 5	56
72	Argentina 3	76
50	India 2	52
77	Venezuela 2	79
64	South Africa 1	65
77	-1 Brazil	76
60	-2 Malaysia	58
62	-2 Indonesia	60
62	-2 Israel	60
77	-4 Mexico	74
84	-5 Poland	79
77	-8 France	68
83	-11 Spain	72
84	-15 United States	69
81	-18 United Kingdom	64
80	-21 Australia	59
64	Country average	66

That said, notable declines have occurred in a handful of Anglosphere and Western European countries: Australia, the UK, the US, Spain, and France. Their citizens have been seriously affected by




























multiple lockdowns and serious economic downturns that could make them more accepting of restrictions on free media when the alternative is economic instability.

People in India and Poland, among others, are apparently more hesitant today than six years ago to let media publish security-sensitive information. Partial explanations for the Indian decrease may be terrorist attacks and the escalation of India-Pakistan tensions, which went from bad to worse in 2019 when India withdrew the special status of Jammu and Kashmir and bifurcated the state into two union territories.

However, Pakistan has held onto its (already very low) level of support. The drop in the figures linked to Poland might reflect anxiety about an ever more confident Russia but, perhaps, also increasing pressures by EU partners due to democratic backsliding. The Russians themselves have become less concerned about the release of security-related information than before, which might be related to somewhat less heated external relations today than shortly after the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

Figure 17: Support for ability to publish security-sensitive information, 2015 vs. 2021

PEW 2015	Difference	Justitia 2021
38	South Korea  16	54
42	Japan  15	57
33	Lebanon  14	47
50	Brazil  14	64
43	Russia  11	55
46	France  10	55
50	Germany  8	58
19	Israel  3	22
30	Turkey  1	31
24	Pakistan  1	26
77	Venezuela  1	78
31	Australia  1	32
50	-1  Nigeria	49
37	-1  United States	36
46	-2  Indonesia	45
51	-6  Philippines	45
61	-6  Spain	55
72	-7  Mexico	66
42	-8  Malaysia	34
30	-8  United Kingdom	22
46	-12  India	35
57	-12  South Africa	45
77	-14  Argentina	63
80	-14  Poland	66
53	-21  Kenya	32
47	Country average	47

On this issue, too, Japan and South Korea are among the nations that have experienced the greatest positive change. This is somewhat surprising given the breakdown in nuclear talks with North Korea and the growth of Chinese assertiveness in international affairs.



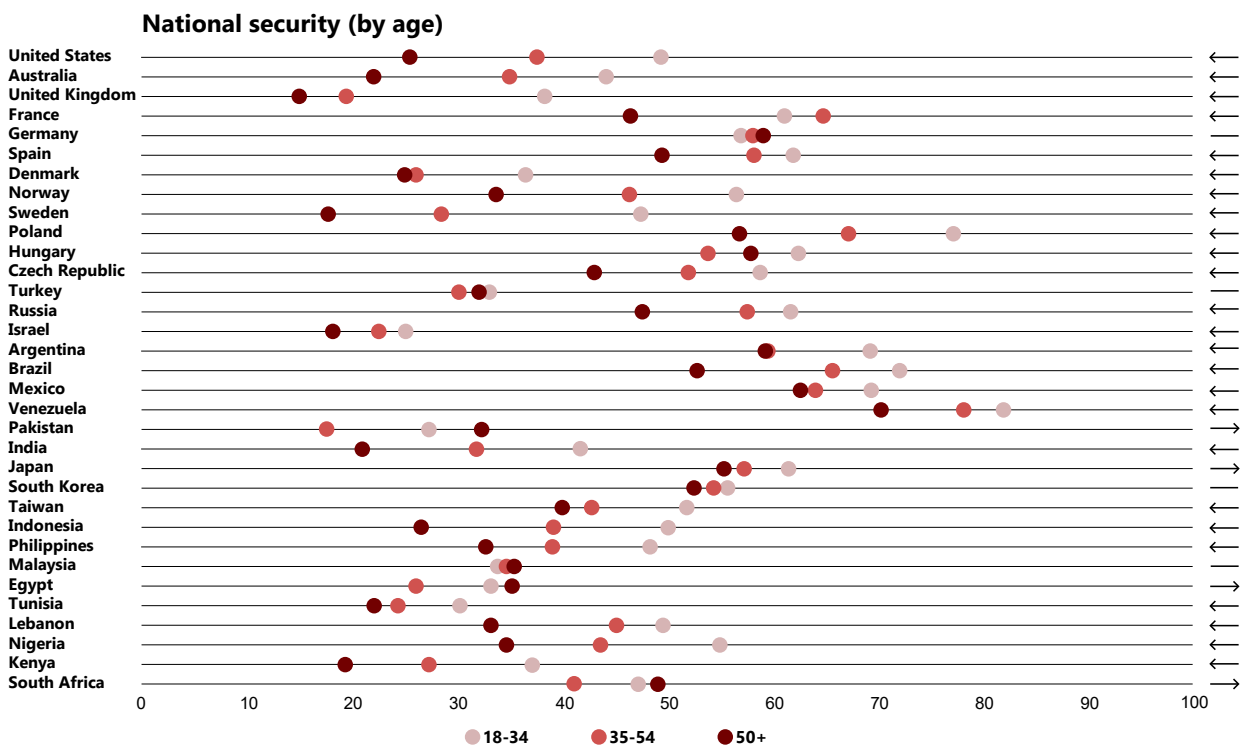
## 4. Support for free speech varies across groups defined by age, education, gender, and political orientation but shows only a few universal patterns

We have so far revealed quite a bit of divergence in the average national support for different types of speech. These aggregate numbers may reflect large differences between particular groups of individuals within each country. This is, indeed, the case. For many of the questions, there are significant differences between the average responses by men and women, young and old, people with low and high levels of education, and people with leftist and rightist political views.

Nonetheless, there are only a few systematic patterns across most countries. In other words, what groups express the highest support for free speech varies from country to country. To avoid overloading this report with disaggregate analyses, we have handpicked a few combinations of individual characteristics and questions about which there appear to be some systematic tendencies.

The first example concerns age and whether the media should be allowed to publish information on national security. Generally speaking, the older segments of the population are more in favor of free speech restrictions on this issue. Apparently, the younger generations are less concerned about national security when presented with this trade-off. However, the tendency is not clear-cut across all countries. Some of the most obvious exceptions include Hungary, Turkey, Pakistan, and South Africa.

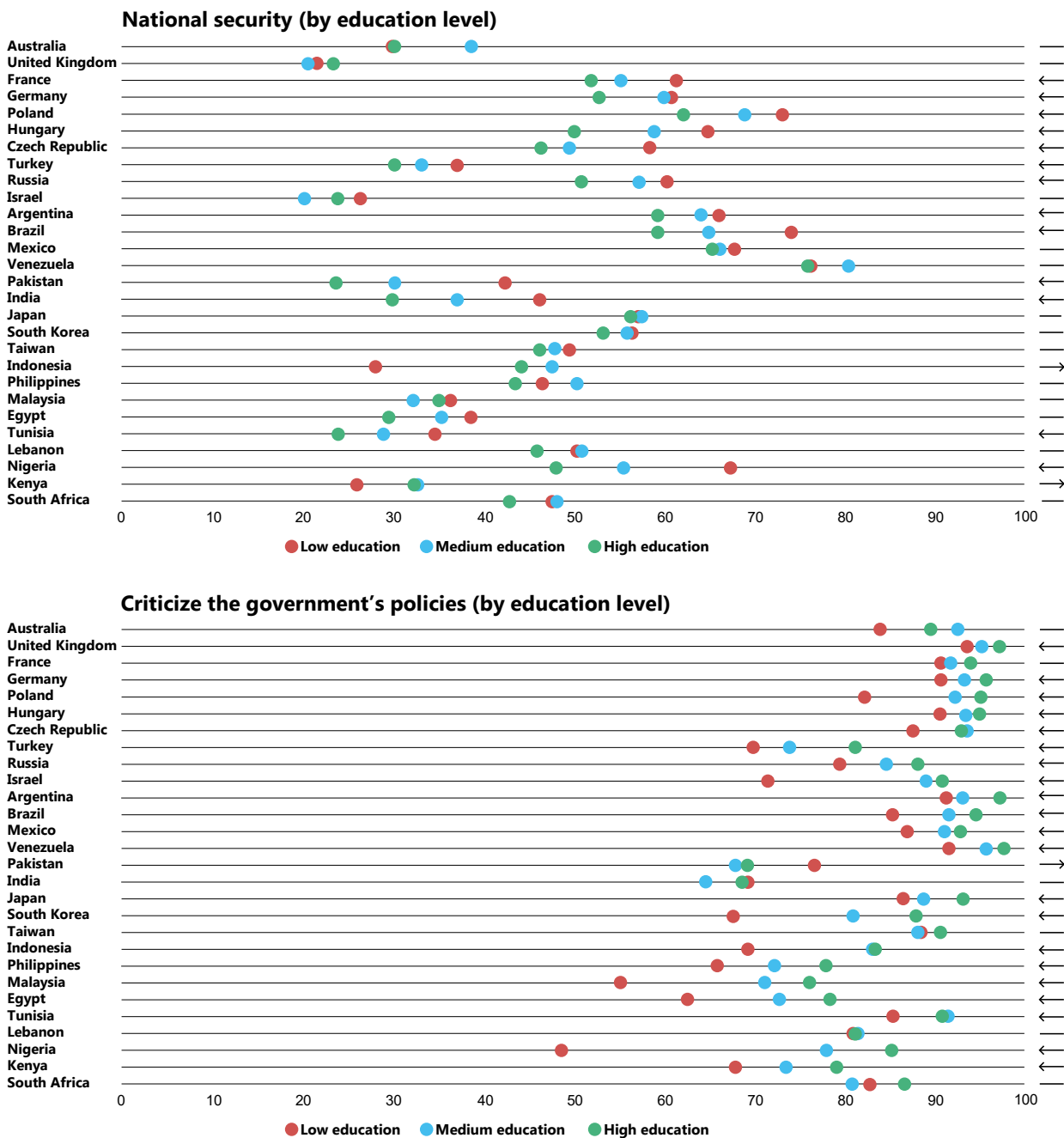
Figure 18: Support for ability to publish information on national security (by age)<sup>18</sup>





In the second example, we compare whether people with different educational levels demonstrate different degrees of concern regarding the publication of security-sensitive information.<sup>19</sup> Conventional wisdom has it that individuals with more education should be more supportive of free speech and other values related to individual emancipation and self-expression.<sup>20</sup>

**Figure 19: Support for ability to publish security-sensitive information and to criticize the government (by education level)<sup>21</sup>**



Regarding this issue, however, many nations show an inverse association; this holds true for countries from different parts of the world, such as France, Nigeria, Egypt, Pakistan, and Argentina. The data

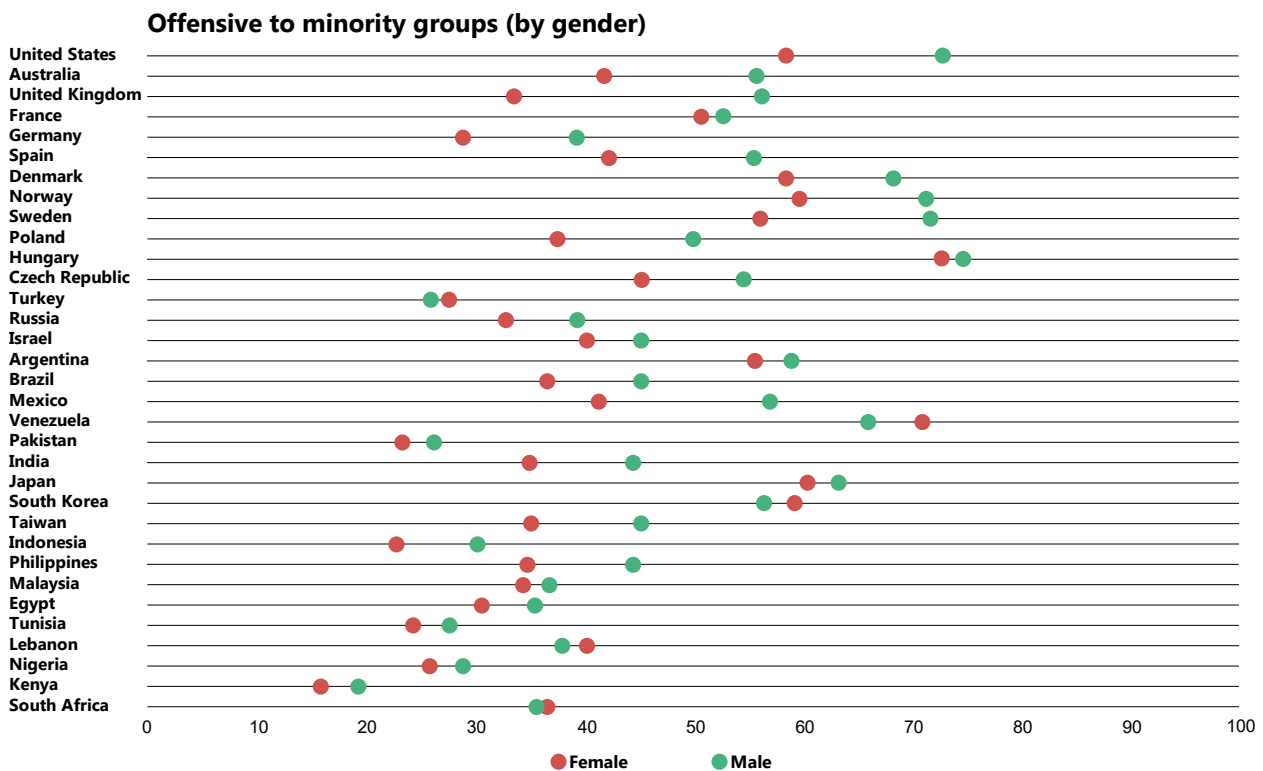


even reveal that no country in our sample represents a case in which the most highly-educated citizens are the most willing to allow security-sensitive statements.

It is important to emphasize, however, that people with low levels of education are generally less willing to allow criticism of the government. This relationship is particularly pronounced in Poland, Israel, South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Nigeria. Higher educational levels are not consistently associated with support for different types of free speech. This is also reflected in the fact that, in many Western countries, high levels of education are positively associated with less tolerance of statements offensive to minority groups and more tolerance of statements in support of homosexual relationships.

A similar discrepancy is found when we disaggregate the findings by gender. There are not many gender differences that are similar across most countries. Yet, two noteworthy exceptions are the issues of whether statements offensive to minority groups and in support of homosexual relationships should be allowed. Specifically, women tend to be less supportive of free speech on the former issue but more supportive on the second. The commonality seems to be the protection of (perceived) disadvantaged groups whether or not this means more or less free speech, but note also that there is much variation in the magnitude of the differences between countries.

Figure 20: Support for ability to offend minority groups (by gender)



In order to assess the last distinction between people holding left-wing and right-wing political views, respectively, we constructed a composite scale based on opinions about immigration and taxation (see the Appendix). Anti-immigration and anti-taxation views are here understood as reflecting rightist political observations and vice versa. These indicators may not be the best for distinguishing



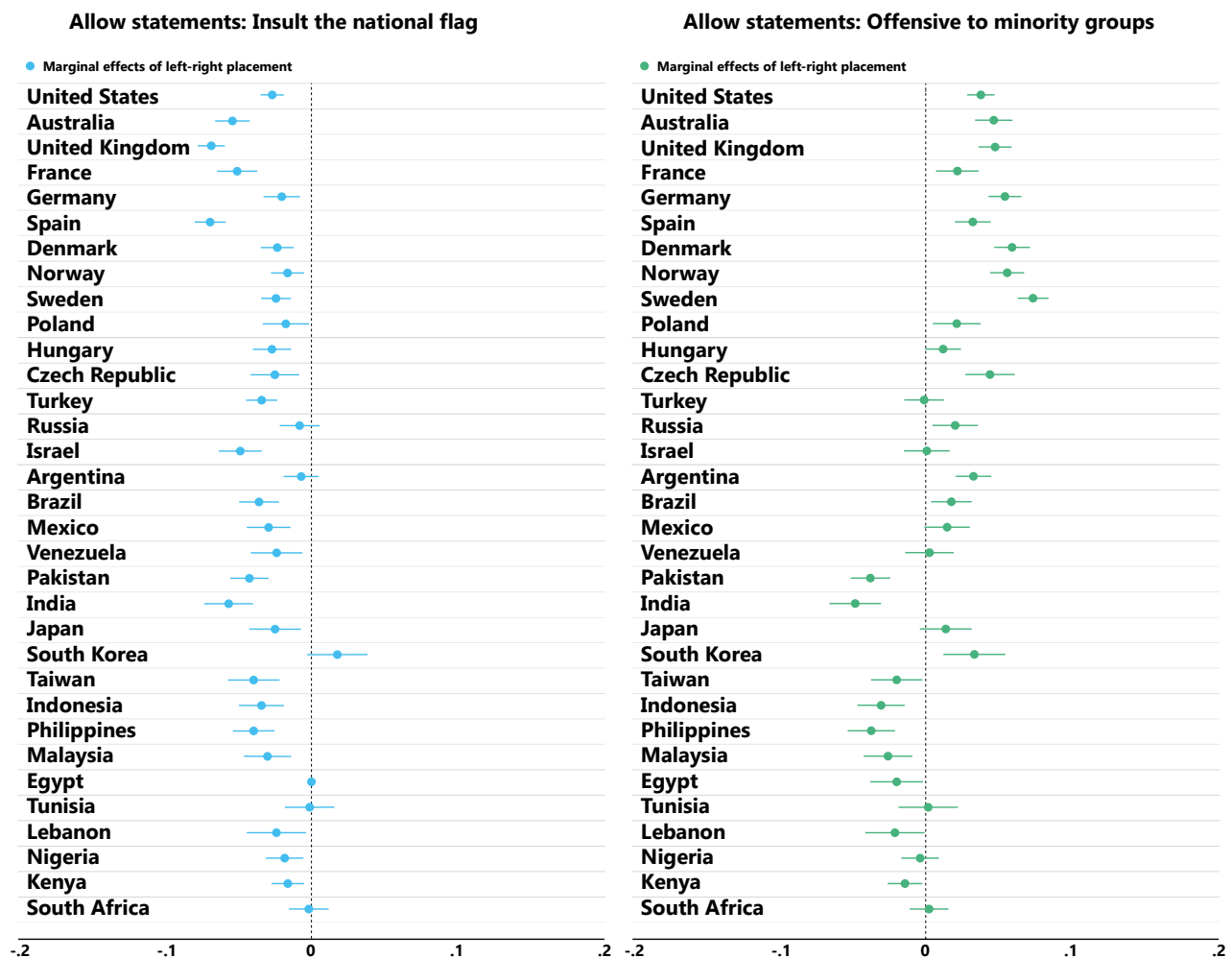
left-right placements in all countries. However, they are the best proxies at hand that do not directly overlap with our free speech questions.

The results from statistical regression analyses with this index as the independent variable and the different questions about free speech as outcome variables do not reveal many strong tendencies that hold across nations. Two partial, although not particularly surprising, exceptions concern the readiness to allow statements that insult the national flag or offend minority groups.

Americans, Australians, and Europeans show a relatively large discrepancy in the support for free speech on these two issues, depending on left-right placement. In many other places, there is not much of a difference.

Left-leaning individuals are generally more tolerant of insults to the national flag. This tendency is particularly strong in the UK, Spain, Australia, France, and India. Only in six countries, including South Korea and Argentina, is the relationship insignificant, and there are no examples of the reverse relationship.

Figure 21: Marginal effect of left-right placement on two types of free speech







The results related to offensive statements about minority groups look like a mirror image for many countries, especially the OECD members. First and foremost, the Scandinavian and Anglosphere nations show a positive relationship between rightist political views and the willingness to allow statements that offend minority groups.

The picture is more muddled, however, among developing countries. The relationship is insignificant in multiple cases; and, for quite a few of them, such as India, Pakistan, and the Philippines, the relationship is even negative, indicating that right-leaning persons are, on average, less inclined to allow this type of speech.

## **5. In the US, young people, women, the less educated, and Biden voters are generally more restrictive regarding free speech**

Free speech understood as the public expression of opinions without censorship, interference, and restraint by the government is protected by the First Amendment to the US Constitution, which says that “Congress shall make no law ... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press”. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the US Supreme Court added ever more layers of protection to the First Amendment. Among other things, the Court has held that, “[i]f there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion”.<sup>22</sup>

The Court has also emphasized that, “if there is a bedrock principle underlying the First Amendment, it is that government may not prohibit the expression of an idea simply because society finds the idea offensive or disagreeable.”<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, in the words of Columbia University president and free speech scholar Lee Bollinger, the United States has become “the most speech protective of any nation on Earth, now or throughout history”.<sup>24</sup> And according to the above-mentioned 2015 PEW Research Study on global attitudes, Americans are the most supportive of free speech and a free press.

Nonetheless, as shown above, there is far from uniform support for all types of free speech in the US<sup>25</sup> – or in any other country for that matter, and the data seem to suggest a relatively small but significant decline in tolerance for criticism of the government. This begs the question of the extent to which groups in society are willing to let the government prevent people from making particular kinds of statements.

The distribution of answers across various categories reveals some interesting differences between groups and issues. First, women are generally less willing to allow statements that are offensive to minority groups, offensive to their religion, or insult the national flag.

Second, compared to older cohorts, young people (18-34 years old) are less tolerant of all kinds of statements apart from insults to the national flag. This finding speaks to a recent debate about whether young people are less invested in democracy and – if so – whether this may be linked to



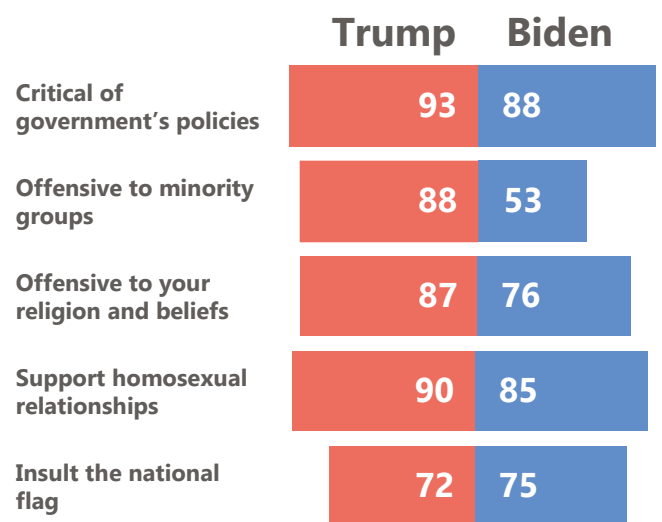
their age (meaning that one should expect increased levels of support when they grow older) or their generation (meaning that their lower levels of support are expected to endure).

**Table 1: Support for different types of free speech among different groups of Americans<sup>26</sup>**

		<b>Critical of government's policies</b>	<b>Offensive to minority groups</b>	<b>Offensive to your religion and beliefs</b>	<b>Support homosexual relationships</b>	<b>Insult the national flag</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Female	87	58	74	83	67
	Male	88	73	82	86	77
<b>Age</b>	18-34	81	59	71	79	71
	35-54	87	69	80	87	74
	55+	93	69	82	88	71
<b>Education</b>	High school (or less)	84	64	74	79	64
	Two years college	88	65	78	87	73
	Four years college	92	71	84	89	81
	Postgraduate	96	69	85	91	82

Third, higher levels of educational achievement tend to go hand-in-hand with more support for the different types of free speech. Finally, it is interesting to note that Trump voters, who are often characterized as having authoritarian leanings by their opponents, actually show more consistent and higher support for free speech in relation to four out of the five issues compared to Biden voters.<sup>27</sup> The exception concerns insults to the national flag, where 72 percent of Trump voters accept that people should have that ability; whereas, the number is 75 percent for Biden voters. Given the deeply polarized nature of American politics, it is likely that the lower support of Biden voters regarding statements critical of the government's policies would have been reversed if Trump were (still) in power.<sup>28</sup>

**Support for different types of free speech among different presidential vote**





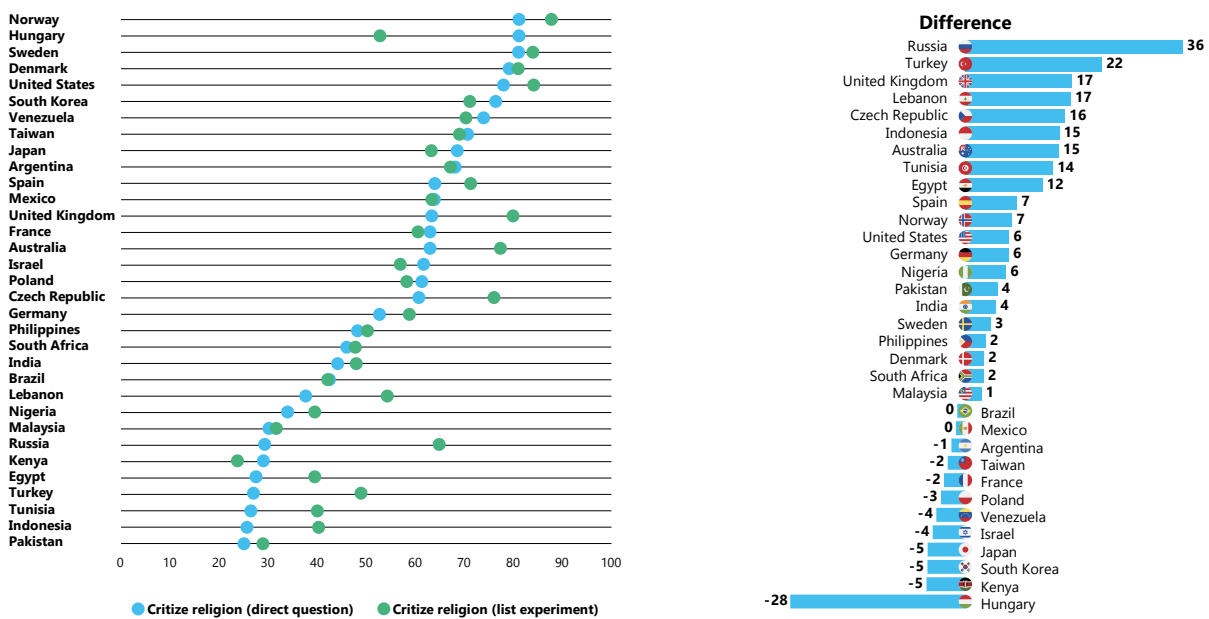
## 6. Biases in alleged support for free speech

Opinions about specific forms of free speech are sensitive. Thus, there is a risk that the answers provided by respondents are characterized by social-desirability bias, i.e., a tendency to answer questions in a manner that will be viewed favorably by others such as the government or peers. It may take the form of over-reporting “correct opinions or under-reporting “wrong” opinions.

To reveal the degree to which such biases are present in our data, we have implemented a so-called *list experiment*. A list experiment is a questionnaire design technique used to mitigate social-desirability bias in respondents when eliciting information about sensitive topics. By comparing the results from the list experiment with the answers from the direct question about the same sensitive issue, we get an estimate of the direction and size of the bias in the various countries.<sup>29</sup>

The results of this exercise indicate that there is sizeable under-reporting in several countries of the willingness to allow statements that are critical of one’s own religion and beliefs. In other words, people tend to be *more* tolerant of criticism of their own religion than they indicate when asked directly about this issue. Hungary is the only case with a large negative difference, indicating that they are actually less tolerant of statements criticizing their religion.

**Figure 22: Assessment of social-desirability bias regarding criticism of own religion and beliefs**



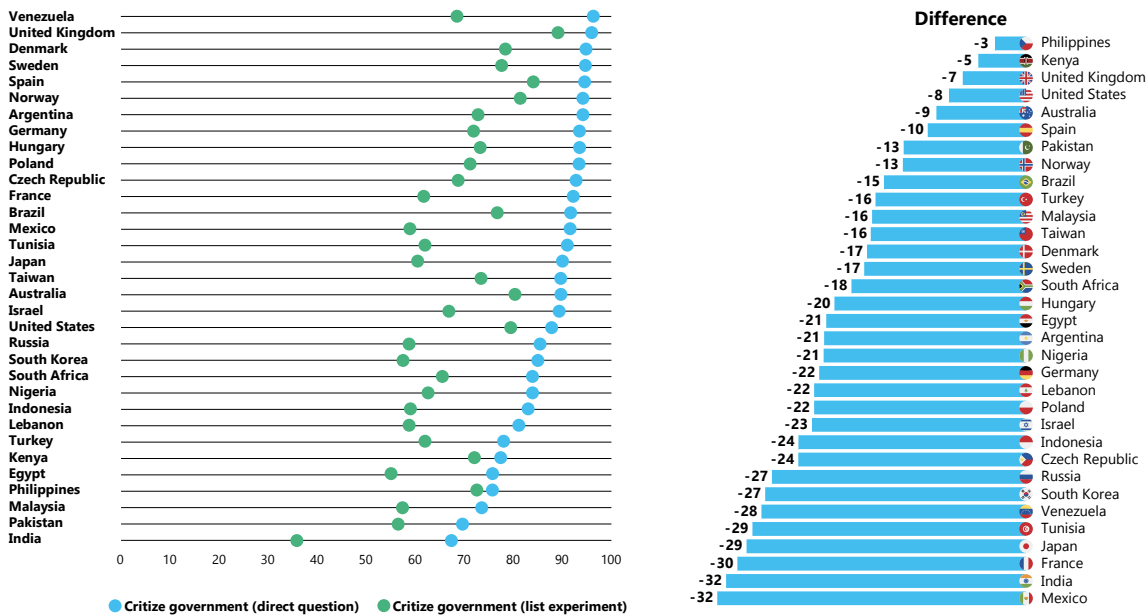
Russians represent the highest positive difference, but Britons, Czechs, and Australians also tend to be more open to criticism of their own religion than they indicate when asked directly. A similar tendency is found in a number of Muslim-majority countries: Turkey, Lebanon, Indonesia, Tunisia, and Egypt.

This conclusion also applies to the question of whether people find it very important to be able to criticize the government. Here, however, the actual support seems to be lower. It is striking that there are only examples of over-reporting. This may be because many people do not really care that much



about the right to criticize the government. Another reason could be that some think that statements critical of the government should, indeed, be restricted – maybe, because they support the current government and want to promote efficient leadership or simply because they dislike public disagreement and divisive rhetoric on political matters.

Figure 23: Assessment of social-desirability bias regarding criticism of government



The Anglosphere nations, the Philippines, and Kenya demonstrate the lowest discrepancies between direct and covert responses. Among the countries with the largest discrepancies, we find India, France, Tunisia, Russia, and Japan. This means that citizens of these states actually value the right to criticize government less than one would think from their responses when asked directly. Accordingly, the result suggests that predominant social norms or official policies shape the degree to which respondents provide authentic answers to questions about free speech.<sup>30</sup>

## 7. Widespread support for regulation of social media content by social media companies but not governments

The debate about whether the content of social media should be regulated and – if yes – who should be responsible for doing so has become increasingly relevant and intense.<sup>31</sup> On one hand, hate speech, conspiracy theories, disinformation, etc., are spread via social media, which may have detrimental consequences. On the other hand, restrictions imposed by social media companies and governments may be biased and arbitrary. Regulation limits individual autonomy and the free exchange of information and ideas by default. This could undermine the ability to hold governments accountable and opportunities for gaining and disseminating valuable insights that facilitate human progress.

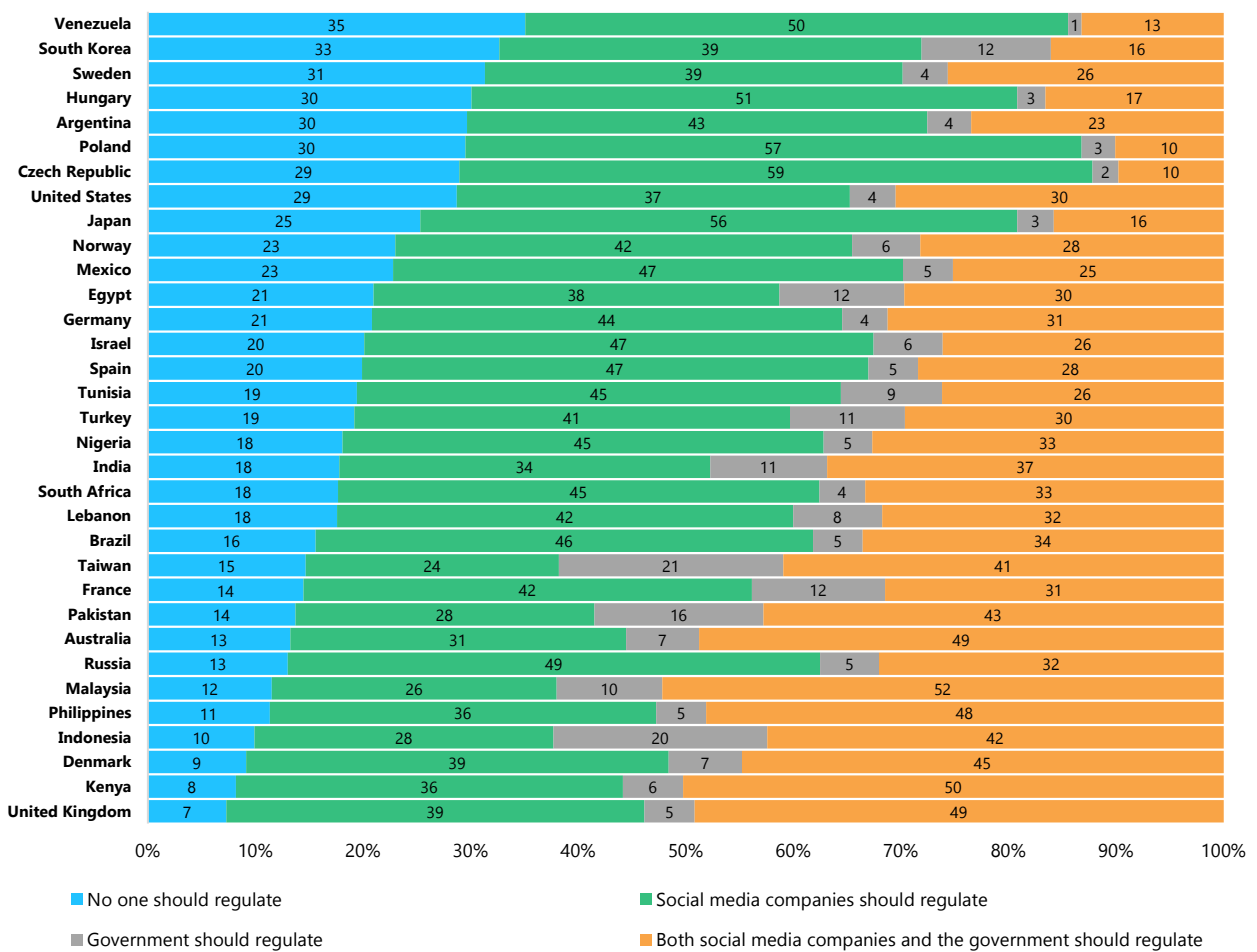


In all countries, there is more support for some kind of regulation than for the proposition that no one should regulate. Most opposition to regulation exists in Venezuela, Poland, Argentina, Sweden, the Czech Republic, the US, and South Korea. Moreover, a disaggregate analysis reveals that, in virtually all countries, more men than women have a preference for no regulation.

Among those with a preference for some kind of regulation, larger shares of citizens prefer social media companies (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube) to be solely responsible for the task as opposed to governments. This view is particularly pronounced in Venezuela and the post-Communist countries. The opposition to regulation in the latter group (i.e., Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Russia) is understandable, given their experience with extremely tight regulation of the public sphere and no access to alternative channels of information during Communist rule.

Only in Indonesia and Taiwan is the percentage of people supporting government as the principal regulator of almost equal size. A plurality of the citizens in ten countries express a preference for shared responsibility by the government and social media companies.

Figure 24: Support of regulation of social media content



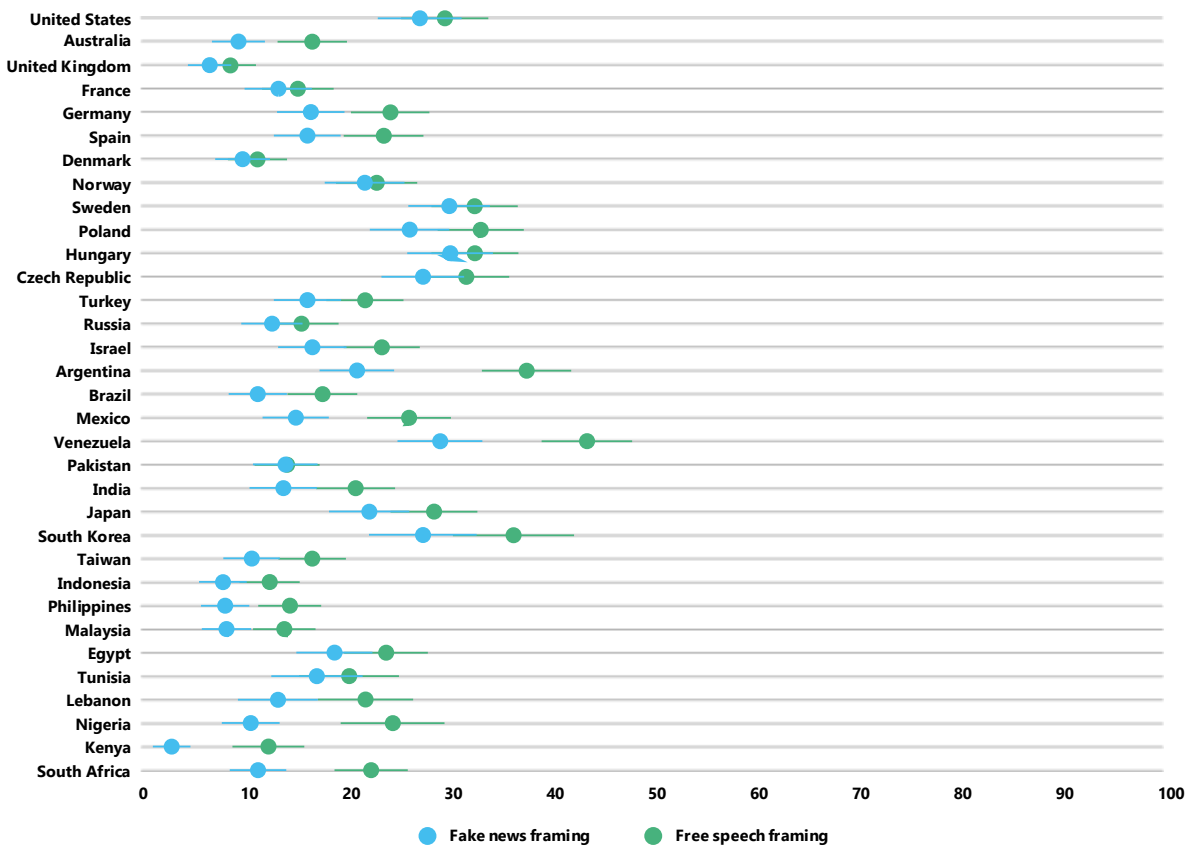


Supporters of regulation often emphasize problems related to disinformation while opponents point to the importance of free speech. To examine the degree to which answers to this question are sensitive to the framing of the issue, we exposed one group of respondents to a disinformation framing and another group to a free speech framing. Before answering the question, the first group of respondents in each country was told that fake news is said to be disseminated widely on social media. The second group of respondents was told that free speech is said to be widely repressed on social media.

The results illustrate that the framing of the issue does matter. All nations show lower levels of support for regulation when the issue is presented together with the statement that free speech is under duress. In comparison, when the question is linked to a statement about the prevalence of fake news on social media, support for regulation is generally higher.

Not all the differences are significant. However, particularly in Latin American and African countries, the framing tends to have quite an impact on the answers. This result also applies to Australia, Germany, and Spain.

Figure 20: Sensitivity of support for no regulation of social media content (by framing)

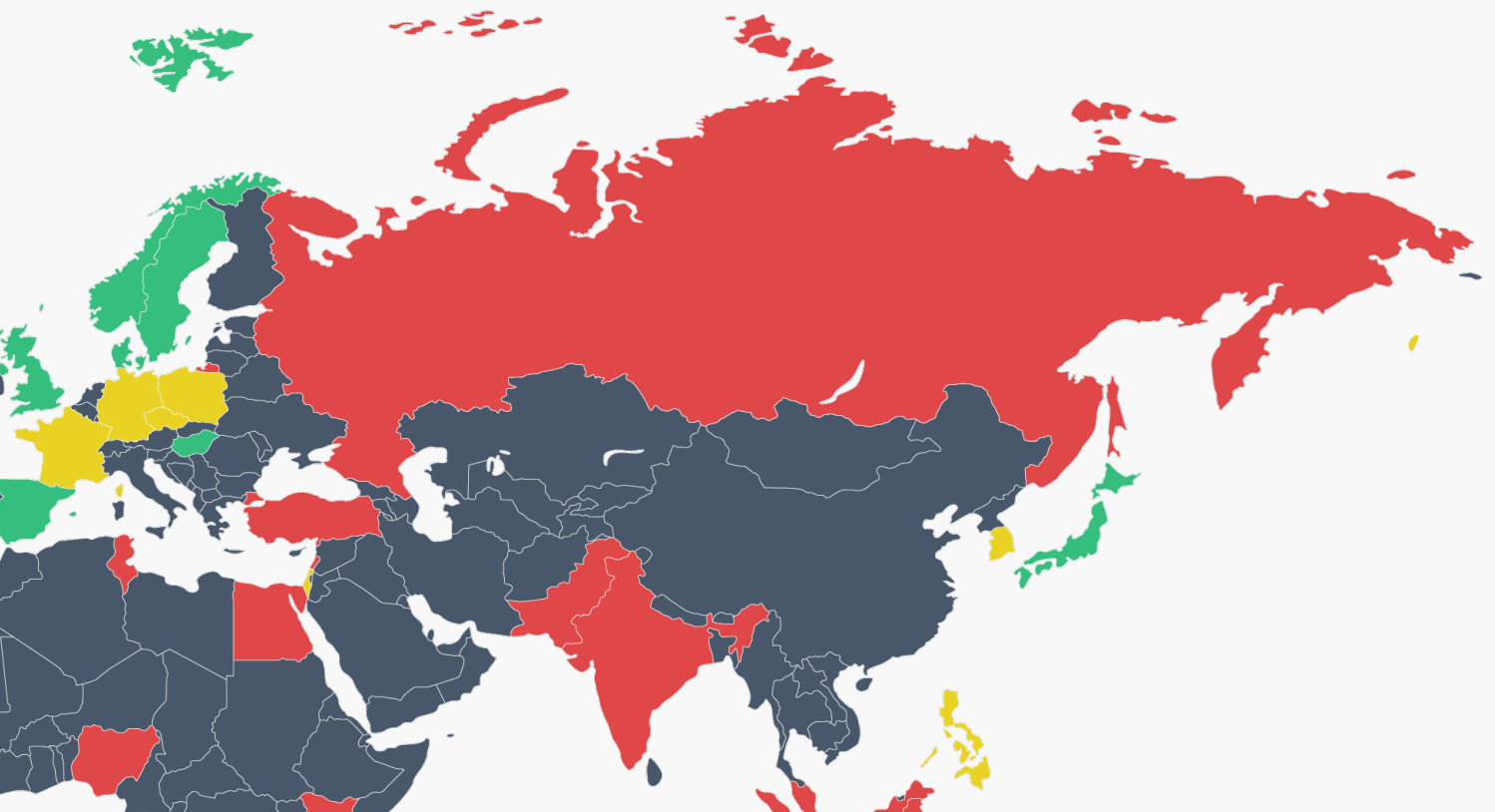


## 8. Conclusion

Free speech is an ideal supported by large majorities of citizens in countries from all corners of the world. This has not changed since 2015 despite COVID-19, increasing polarization, the spread of disinformation on social media, and anti-pluralist tendencies, including – but not limited to – government repression. Indeed, support for free speech has grown in many places. Its persistent popularity in relatively hostile environments indicates resilience that bode well for the future of free speech. This is the good news to take away from this report.

There are, however, also worrying signals from a free speech perspective. In most countries, the support for free speech is inconsistent, and there is strong skepticism about particular types of free speech. While citizens in most countries think that criticism of the government should be allowed, many people are unwilling to allow statements that are critical or insulting of particular groups, their religion, or the nation. Moreover, citizens do not always prioritize free speech when there is a potential trade-off with other things they value, such as national security, good health, and the economy.

Fortunately, there is not a negative relationship generally between freedom of expression, on one hand, and human welfare and prosperity, on the other. Indeed, much evidence speaks in favor of the opposite association – particularly, when free speech is combined with effective electoral rights over longer periods of time.<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless, the numbers indicate that, if people believe they cannot have both, many are willing to sacrifice free speech. In addition, some of our other findings indicate that the support for free speech might be shallower than one would expect – and hope for – in relation to this fundamental right.





## 9. Survey methodology

Surveys were collected in February 2021 by YouGov and their worldwide network of survey partners. All survey answers were collected online from voluntary participants who were already part of YouGov’s online survey panel (or YouGov partners’ online survey panel). All participants were recruited based on informed consent and completely anonymous. Samples are generally representative of age, gender, and region (and education and ethnicity in some countries).

### Survey collection in 33 countries

	<b>Data collection period</b>	<b>Number of respondents after attention checks</b>	<b>Representativeness and weighting</b>
<b>United States</b>	Start: 09-02-2021 End: 17-02-2021	1582	Gender; Age; Region; Ethnicity
<b>United Kingdom</b>	Start: 09-02-2021 End: 15-02-2021	1586	Gender; Age; Region; Education; Social grade
<b>France</b>	Start: 09-02-2021 End: 17-02-2021	1573	Gender; Age; Region; Education
<b>Germany</b>	Start: 09-02-2021 End: 17-02-2021	1588	Gender; Age; Region; Education
<b>Spain</b>	Start: 09-02-2021 End: 17-02-2021	1573	Gender; Age; Region; Education
<b>Denmark</b>	Start: 09-02-2021 End: 16-02-2021	1580	Gender; Age; Region; Education
<b>Norway</b>	Start: 09-02-2021 End: 17-02-2021	1538	Gender; Age; Region
<b>Sweden</b>	Start: 09-02-2021 End: 20-02-2021	1778	Gender; Age; Region; Education
<b>Poland</b>	Start: 09-02-2021 End: 20-02-2021	1550	Gender; Age; Region
<b>Hungary</b>	Start: 09-02-2021 End: 23-02-2021	1537	Gender; Age; Region
<b>Czech Republic</b>	Start: 09-02-2021 End: 19-02-2021	1586	Gender; Age; Region
<b>Turkey</b>	Start: 09-02-2021 End: 16-02-2021	1568	Gender; Age; Region
<b>Russia</b>	Start: 09-02-2021 End: 23-02-2021	1578	Gender; Age; Region
<b>Argentina</b>	Start: 09-02-2021 End: 26-02-2021	1585	Gender; Age; Region
<b>Brazil</b>	Start: 09-02-2021 End: 12-02-2021	1543	Gender; Age; Region
<b>Mexico</b>	Start: 09-02-2021	1549	Gender; Age; Region





	End: 22-02-2021		
<b>Venezuela</b>	Start: 09-02-2021 End: 23-02-2021	1563	Gender; Age; Region
<b>Pakistan</b>	Start: 09-02-2021 End: 15-02-2021	1490	Gender; Age
<b>India</b>	Start: 09-02-2021 End: 22-02-2021	1443	Gender; Age; Region
<b>Japan</b>	Start: 10-02-2021 End: 16-02-2021	1592	Gender; Age; Region
<b>South Korea</b>	Start: 09-02-2021 End: 24-02-2021	976	Gender; Age; Region
<b>Taiwan</b>	Start: 09-02-2021 End: 19-02-2021	1586	Gender; Age; Region
<b>Indonesia</b>	Start: 09-02-2021 End: 15-02-2021	1580	Gender; Age; Region
<b>Philippines</b>	Start: 09-02-2021 End: 15-02-2021	1563	Gender; Age; Region
<b>Malaysia</b>	Start: 09-02-2021 End: 15-02-2021	1587	Gender; Age; Region; Ethnicity
<b>Australia</b>	Start: 09-02-2021 End: 20-02-2021	1581	Gender; Age; Region
<b>Egypt</b>	Start: 09-02-2021 End: 15-02-2021	1515	Gender; Age; Region
<b>Tunisia</b>	Start: 09-02-2021 End: 24-02-2021	950	Gender; Age
<b>Lebanon</b>	Start: 09-02-2021 End: 15-02-2021	978	None
<b>Israel</b>	Start: 09-02-2021 End: 22-02-2021	1604	Gender; Age; Region
<b>Nigeria</b>	Start: 09-02-2021 End: 01-03-2021	1546	Gender; Age; Region
<b>Kenya</b>	Start: 09-02-2021 End: 01-03-2021	1551	Gender; Age; Region
<b>South Africa</b>	Start: 09-02-2021 End: 22-02-2021	1599	Gender; Age; Region



## 1. Survey responses

### How important is it that people can say what they want without government censorship in our country?

Country	Not important at all	Not too important	Somewhat important	Very important
United States	1	4	27	68
United Kingdom	1	3	35	62
France	0	3	31	66
Germany	1	3	21	75
Spain	1	3	17	79
Denmark	0	2	25	73
Norway	1	4	19	76
Sweden	0	2	16	82
Poland	2	5	20	74
Hungary	1	2	16	81
Czech Republic	1	3	26	70
Turkey	1	4	24	70
Russia	2	8	46	44
Argentina	1	2	9	88
Brazil	1	4	13	82
Mexico	1	2	15	82
Venezuela	0	1	12	87
Pakistan	3	10	44	43
India	3	8	40	49
Japan	1	5	27	66
South Korea	1	7	35	58
Taiwan	3	8	37	52
Indonesia	2	11	38	50
Philippines	1	5	39	56
Malaysia	1	6	43	50
Australia	1	5	37	57
Egypt	6	14	43	37
Tunisia	2	7	36	55
Lebanon	2	8	32	57
Israel	1	3	34	63
Nigeria	2	9	24	65
Kenya	4	8	27	61
South Africa	2	5	27	66



**How important is it that the media can report the news without government censorship in our country?**

Country	Not important at all	Not too important	Somewhat important	Very important
United States	2	3	19	76
United Kingdom	1	3	26	70
France	2	4	31	64
Germany	0	3	18	78
Spain	1	3	11	86
Denmark	1	2	19	78
Norway	0	3	15	81
Sweden	0	2	14	84
Poland	2	4	19	75
Hungary	1	2	18	78
Czech Republic	1	6	23	70
Turkey	1	4	26	68
Russia	2	7	43	47
Argentina	1	2	10	86
Brazil	2	3	12	83
Mexico	0	2	13	84
Venezuela	0	1	14	85
Pakistan	7	12	36	45
India	4	11	34	52
Japan	2	8	29	61
South Korea	2	7	34	57
Taiwan	3	10	35	52
Indonesia	2	8	34	56
Philippines	2	6	34	59
Malaysia	2	7	41	51
Australia	2	5	31	62
Egypt	8	15	34	43
Tunisia	4	9	33	53
Lebanon	3	9	30	57
Israel	3	6	32	59
Nigeria	3	7	21	69
Kenya	5	5	21	69
South Africa	2	4	24	70



**How important is it that people can use the internet without government censorship in our country?**

Country	Not important at all	Not too important	Somewhat important	Very important
United States	2	5	25	67
United Kingdom	3	6	37	54
France	2	5	31	62
Germany	1	4	25	70
Spain	1	4	18	77
Denmark	1	4	25	70
Norway	1	6	22	71
Sweden	1	3	19	77
Poland	2	4	17	77
Hungary	0	3	16	81
Czech Republic	1	3	20	75
Turkey	2	5	27	65
Russia	4	11	39	45
Argentina	1	2	9	89
Brazil	2	5	15	78
Mexico	1	3	15	82
Venezuela	1	1	15	83
Pakistan	11	16	37	37
India	5	14	35	46
Japan	2	8	25	65
South Korea	2	8	29	61
Taiwan	2	5	25	69
Indonesia	3	11	40	46
Philippines	1	6	38	55
Malaysia	3	13	41	42
Australia	3	6	37	54
Egypt	11	19	35	35
Tunisia	5	9	36	49
Lebanon	5	12	34	49
Israel	2	7	30	61
Nigeria	4	7	23	66
Kenya	5	8	27	59
South Africa	3	5	22	69



**Please indicate who – if any – should be responsible for regulating content shared on these platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram):**

Country	There should be no regulation of content on social media	The social media companies should regulate content on social media	The national government should regulate content on social media	Both social media companies and the national government should regulate content on social media
United States	29	37	4	30
United Kingdom	7	39	5	49
France	14	42	12	31
Germany	21	44	4	31
Spain	20	47	5	28
Denmark	9	39	7	45
Norway	23	42	6	28
Sweden	31	39	4	26
Poland	30	57	3	10
Hungary	30	51	3	17
Czech Republic	29	59	2	10
Turkey	19	41	11	30
Russia	13	49	5	32
Argentina	30	43	4	23
Brazil	16	46	5	34
Mexico	23	47	5	25
Venezuela	35	50	1	13
Pakistan	14	28	16	43
India	18	34	11	37
Japan	25	56	3	16
South Korea	33	39	12	16
Taiwan	15	24	21	41
Indonesia	10	28	20	42
Philippines	11	36	5	48
Malaysia	12	26	10	52
Australia	13	31	7	49
Egypt	21	38	12	30
Tunisia	19	45	9	26
Lebanon	18	42	8	32
Israel	20	47	6	26
Nigeria	18	45	5	33
Kenya	8	36	6	50
South Africa	18	45	4	33



**Compared to 12 months ago, do you think that your ability to speak freely about political matters in this country has ... ?**

Country	Worsened a lot	Worsened somewhat	Stayed the same	Improved somewhat	Improved a lot
United States	28	15	40	9	8
United Kingdom	10	17	68	4	1
France	14	21	54	7	4
Germany	16	15	62	5	1
Spain	15	15	55	10	4
Denmark	5	10	81	3	1
Norway	7	11	73	7	1
Sweden	12	11	71	4	2
Poland	23	25	43	6	3
Hungary	32	18	39	8	4
Czech Republic	9	12	68	8	3
Turkey	33	16	27	14	10
Russia	17	17	52	8	6
Argentina	13	21	36	16	14
Brazil	9	15	36	21	18
Mexico	7	13	43	21	17
Venezuela	19	13	47	13	8
Pakistan	7	9	29	30	25
India	9	11	28	27	24
Japan	7	9	72	9	3
South Korea	12	13	33	27	17
Taiwan	7	13	53	14	13
Indonesia	16	17	27	21	19
Philippines	6	12	35	31	16
Malaysia	8	13	43	28	8
Australia	10	15	62	8	5
Egypt	15	11	32	26	16
Tunisia	2	8	26	26	37
Lebanon	11	15	40	24	11
Israel	8	15	62	11	6
Nigeria	14	26	24	19	16
Kenya	5	19	25	27	24
South Africa	8	14	41	20	17



**Do you think people should be able to say these types of things publicly OR the government should be able to prevent people from saying these things in some circumstances?**

Statements that criticize the government's policies

Country	People should be able to say these things publicly	Government should be able to prevent people from saying these things
United States	88	12
United Kingdom	96	4
France	92	8
Germany	94	6
Spain	94	6
Denmark	95	5
Norway	94	6
Sweden	95	5
Poland	93	7
Hungary	93	7
Czech Republic	93	7
Turkey	78	22
Russia	85	15
Argentina	94	6
Brazil	92	8
Mexico	92	8
Venezuela	96	4
Pakistan	70	30
India	67	33
Japan	90	10
South Korea	85	15
Taiwan	90	10
Indonesia	83	17
Philippines	76	24
Malaysia	74	26
Australia	90	10
Egypt	76	24
Tunisia	91	9
Lebanon	81	19
Israel	89	11
Nigeria	84	16
Kenya	77	23
South Africa	84	16



**Do you think people should be able to say these types of things publicly OR the government should be able to prevent people from saying these things in some circumstances?**

Statements that are offensive to minority groups

Country	People should be able to say these things publicly	Government should be able to prevent people from saying these things
United States	66	34
United Kingdom	45	55
France	52	48
Germany	34	66
Spain	49	51
Denmark	64	36
Norway	66	34
Sweden	64	36
Poland	44	56
Hungary	74	26
Czech Republic	50	50
Turkey	27	73
Russia	36	64
Argentina	57	43
Brazil	41	59
Mexico	49	51
Venezuela	68	32
Pakistan	26	74
India	40	60
Japan	62	38
South Korea	58	42
Taiwan	40	60
Indonesia	27	73
Philippines	39	61
Malaysia	36	64
Australia	49	51
Egypt	34	66
Tunisia	26	74
Lebanon	39	61
Israel	43	57
Nigeria	27	73
Kenya	18	82
South Africa	36	64





**Do you think people should be able to say these types of things publicly OR the government should be able to prevent people from saying these things in some circumstances?**

Statements that are offensive to your religion and beliefs

Country	People should be able to say these things publicly	Government should be able to prevent people from saying these things
United States	78	22
United Kingdom	63	37
France	63	37
Germany	53	47
Spain	64	36
Denmark	79	21
Norway	81	19
Sweden	81	19
Poland	61	39
Hungary	81	19
Czech Republic	61	39
Turkey	27	73
Russia	29	71
Argentina	68	32
Brazil	42	58
Mexico	64	36
Venezuela	74	26
Pakistan	25	75
India	44	56
Japan	69	31
South Korea	76	24
Taiwan	71	29
Indonesia	26	74
Philippines	48	52
Malaysia	30	70
Australia	63	37
Egypt	28	72
Tunisia	27	73
Lebanon	38	62
Israel	61	39
Nigeria	34	66
Kenya	29	71
South Africa	46	54



**Do you think people should be able to say these types of things publicly OR the government should be able to prevent people from saying these things in some circumstances?**

Statements that support homosexual relationships

Country	People should be able to say these things publicly	Government should be able to prevent people from saying these things
United States	85	15
United Kingdom	90	10
France	86	14
Germany	87	13
Spain	90	10
Denmark	91	9
Norway	86	14
Sweden	91	9
Poland	85	15
Hungary	84	16
Czech Republic	88	12
Turkey	51	49
Russia	36	64
Argentina	90	10
Brazil	82	18
Mexico	84	16
Venezuela	86	14
Pakistan	27	73
India	64	36
Japan	88	12
South Korea	71	29
Taiwan	87	13
Indonesia	.	.
Philippines	73	27
Malaysia	41	59
Australia	83	17
Egypt	.	.
Tunisia	30	70
Lebanon	59	41
Israel	81	19
Nigeria	32	68
Kenya	41	59
South Africa	76	24



**Do you think people should be able to say these types of things publicly OR the government should be able to prevent people from saying these things in some circumstances?**

Statements that insult the national flag

Country	People should be able to say these things publicly	Government should be able to prevent people from saying these things
United States	72	28
United Kingdom	65	35
France	44	56
Germany	52	48
Spain	55	45
Denmark	72	28
Norway	68	32
Sweden	62	38
Poland	38	62
Hungary	64	36
Czech Republic	35	65
Turkey	16	84
Russia	21	79
Argentina	36	64
Brazil	38	62
Mexico	33	67
Venezuela	46	54
Pakistan	23	77
India	32	68
Japan	61	39
South Korea	57	43
Taiwan	45	55
Indonesia	25	75
Philippines	25	75
Malaysia	28	72
Australia	52	48
Egypt	.	.
Tunisia	19	81
Lebanon	37	63
Israel	42	58
Nigeria	30	70
Kenya	18	82
South Africa	40	60



**Do you think media organizations should be able to publish information about these types of things OR that the government should be able to prevent media organizations from publishing information about these types of things in some circumstances?**

Economic issues that might destabilize the country's economy

Country	Media organizations should be able to publish information about these things	Government should be able to prevent media organizations from publishing information about these things
United States	69	31
United Kingdom	64	36
France	69	31
Germany	81	19
Spain	73	27
Denmark	69	31
Norway	71	29
Sweden	70	30
Poland	79	21
Hungary	76	24
Czech Republic	69	31
Turkey	63	37
Russia	71	29
Argentina	76	24
Brazil	76	24
Mexico	74	26
Venezuela	79	21
Pakistan	46	54
India	53	47
Japan	72	28
South Korea	71	29
Taiwan	51	49
Indonesia	61	39
Philippines	62	38
Malaysia	58	42
Australia	59	41
Egypt	44	56
Tunisia	52	48
Lebanon	64	36
Israel	61	39
Nigeria	53	47
Kenya	57	43
South Africa	66	34



**Do you think media organizations should be able to publish information about these types of things OR that the government should be able to prevent media organizations from publishing information about these types of things in some circumstances?**

Sensitive issues related to national security

Country	Media organizations should be able to publish information about these things	Government should be able to prevent media organizations from publishing information about these things
United States	37	63
United Kingdom	22	78
France	56	44
Germany	58	42
Spain	56	44
Denmark	28	72
Norway	45	55
Sweden	29	71
Poland	66	34
Hungary	58	42
Czech Republic	50	50
Turkey	32	68
Russia	55	45
Argentina	63	37
Brazil	65	35
Mexico	66	34
Venezuela	78	22
Pakistan	26	74
India	35	65
Japan	57	43
South Korea	54	46
Taiwan	47	53
Indonesia	45	55
Philippines	45	55
Malaysia	34	66
Australia	33	67
Egypt	32	68
Tunisia	26	74
Lebanon	48	52
Israel	23	77
Nigeria	50	50
Kenya	32	68
South Africa	46	54



**Do you think media organizations should be able to publish information about these types of things OR that the government should be able to prevent media organizations from publishing information about these types of things in some circumstances?**

Sensitive issues that makes it more difficult for the government to handle epidemics, such as the COVID-19 crisis

Country	Media organizations should be able to publish information about these things	Government should be able to prevent media organizations from publishing information about these things
United States	67	33
United Kingdom	58	42
France	79	21
Germany	79	21
Spain	77	23
Denmark	71	29
Norway	76	24
Sweden	73	27
Poland	79	21
Hungary	73	27
Czech Republic	82	18
Turkey	69	31
Russia	72	28
Argentina	75	25
Brazil	80	20
Mexico	82	18
Venezuela	89	11
Pakistan	46	54
India	50	50
Japan	69	31
South Korea	78	22
Taiwan	70	30
Indonesia	55	45
Philippines	65	35
Malaysia	56	44
Australia	55	45
Egypt	70	30
Tunisia	76	24
Lebanon	68	32
Israel	63	37
Nigeria	57	43
Kenya	54	46
South Africa	65	35



### Justitia Freedom of Speech Index

Constructed by calculating the country average of those who agree that people/media may say/publish the following things:

- (1) Statements that criticize the government's policies
- (2) Statements that are offensive to minority groups
- (3) Statements that are offensive to your religion and beliefs
- (4) Statements that support homosexual relationships
- (5) Statements that insult the national flag
- (6) Economic issues that might destabilize the country's economy

and the statistically-estimated proportion who agree with the freedom of speech option in the two list experiments:

- (7) To me, it is very important that people are not allowed to criticize my religion (reversed).
- (8) I think it is very important that citizens in my country have the right to criticize our government.

Country	Score
United States	78
United Kingdom	74
France	66
Germany	66
Spain	73
Denmark	79
Norway	80
Sweden	78
Poland	66
Hungary	75
Czech Republic	68
Turkey	47
Russia	50
Argentina	70
Brazil	61
Mexico	65
Venezuela	74
Pakistan	38
India	48
Japan	71
South Korea	68
Taiwan	66
Indonesia	45
Philippines	56
Malaysia	44
Australia	69
Egypt	41
Tunisia	43
Lebanon	54
Israel	63



---

Nigeria	45
Kenya	42
South Africa	58

---

**Note:** We were not allowed to ask respondents about support for homosexuality in Egypt and Indonesia or insulting the national flag in Egypt. For these missing values, we inserted the country scores of Tunisia for Egypt and the country scores of Malaysia for Indonesia.





## 10. Endnotes

- 
- <sup>1</sup> George Orwell (1945). *Freedom of the Park*, <https://www.orwellfoundation.com/the-orwell-foundation/orwell/essays-and-other-works/freedom-of-the-park/>
- <sup>2</sup> Zachary Elkins, Tom Ginsburg & James Melton (2021). *Characteristics of National Constitutions [v.2.0]*, <http://www.comparativeconstitutionsproject.org>; Article 19 of the UDHR; Article 19 of the ICCPR; Article 9 of the African Charter; Article 4 of the American Declaration; Article 13 of the American Convention; and Article 10 of the European Convention.
- <sup>3</sup> Amartya Sen (2013). "Press Freedom: What Is It Good For?" *Index on Censorship* 42(3): 6-14; Britt Christensen (2015). *Why Freedom of Speech Matters*, <https://insidesources.com/freedom-speech-matters/>
- <sup>4</sup> <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000220709>
- <sup>5</sup> V-Dem Institute (2021). *Autocratization Turns Viral*, [https://www.v-dem.net/media/filer\\_public/74/8c/748c68ad-f224-4cd7-87f9-8794add5c60f/dr\\_2021\\_updated.pdf](https://www.v-dem.net/media/filer_public/74/8c/748c68ad-f224-4cd7-87f9-8794add5c60f/dr_2021_updated.pdf), Freedom House (2021). *Freedom in the World 2021*, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2021/democracy-under-siege>, Reporters without Borders (2021). *World Press Freedom Index 2020*, <https://rsf.org/en/2020-world-press-freedom-index-entering-decisive-decade-journalism-exacerbated-coronavirus>
- <sup>6</sup> V-Dem Institute (2021). *Autocratization Turns Viral*, p. 24.
- <sup>7</sup> The selection of cases was based on several criteria, including the possibility of collecting representative and high quality data, population size, and variation regarding political regimes, levels of socio-economic development, and culture. The underrepresentation of developing countries is mainly due to the fact that the collection of reliable survey data in such countries is generally very challenging. We had planned to include China and Saudi Arabia, but that was not possible, given national restrictions on what kind of questions may be included in surveys.
- <sup>8</sup> The index is constructed by calculating the weighted country average of those who agree that people/media can say/publish 1) statements that criticize the government's policies, 2) statements that are offensive to minority groups, 3) statements that are offensive to your religion and beliefs, 4) statements that support homosexual relationships, 5) statements that insult the national flag, 6) economic issues that might destabilize the country's economy, and the statistically-estimated proportion of those who agree with the freedom of speech option in the two list experiments: 7) to me, it is very important that people are not allowed to criticize my religion (reversed), and 8) I think it is very important that citizens in my country have the right to criticize our government. See the appendix for more details.
- <sup>9</sup> PEW (2015). *Global Support for Principle of Free Expression, but Opposition to Some Forms of Speech*, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2015/11/18/global-support-for-principle-of-free-expression-but-opposition-to-some-forms-of-speech/>; Christian Welzel (2013). *Freedom Rising: Human Empowerment and the Quest for Emancipation* (New York: Cambridge University Press).
- <sup>10</sup> The V-Dem Freedom of Expression Index measures the extent to which the government respects press and media freedom, ordinary people are able to discuss political matters at home and in the public sphere, and free academic and cultural expression is permitted. The index is based on scores for six indicators based on the assessments by multiple experts for each country. See; [https://www.v-dem.net/media/filer\\_public/4e/1c/4e1c47ae-4800-436a-bbf1-c5fb50798bd3/methodology\\_v111.pdf](https://www.v-dem.net/media/filer_public/4e/1c/4e1c47ae-4800-436a-bbf1-c5fb50798bd3/methodology_v111.pdf). We use V-Dem (v11) data for 2020 in the comparison.
- <sup>11</sup> Red indicates a significant negative change, green a significant positive change, and blue no significant change. 'Significance' is here understood as confidence intervals not overlapping with 0 (our question) or each other for 2019 and 2020 (V-Dem index).
- <sup>12</sup> PEW (2015). *Global Support for Principle of Free Expression, but Opposition to Some Forms of Speech*, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2015/11/18/global-support-for-principle-of-free-expression-but-opposition-to-some-forms-of-speech/>; PEW (2019). *Many Across the Globe Are Dissatisfied With How Democracy Is Working*, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/04/29/many-across-the-globe-are-dissatisfied-with-how-democracy-is-working/>



<sup>13</sup> Some of the PEW figures for 2019, especially for a number of developing countries, show extremely large fluctuations compared to the PEW figures for 2015 as well as our data from 2021. This indicates that the comparability of the data is questionable. We shall, therefore, refrain from using the 2019 figures to draw conclusions about trends. This caveat also applies to the other questions with data for 2019. It bears mentioning that it is notoriously difficult to collect reliable survey data in poor, conflict-ridden, and authoritarian countries.

<sup>14</sup> On the right side of the figure, red indicates a significant negative change, green a significant positive change, and yellow no significant change. 'Significance' is here understood as confidence intervals not overlapping with the 2015 and 2021 estimates. This also applies to Figures 11 and 12.

<sup>15</sup> The figures for Lebanon tend to change a great deal from survey to survey on many questions. Some of the figures for Kenya and Tunisia do the same. We suspect that these fluctuations – or, at least, large parts of them – are due to methodological issues that undermine comparability. We shall, therefore, not emphasize changes over time in these cases in the following discussions.

<sup>16</sup> Red indicates a significant negative change, green a significant positive change, and yellow no significant change. 'Significance' is here understood as confidence intervals not overlapping with the 2015 and 2021 estimates. This also applies to Figures 14 and 15.

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., Francis Fukuyama (2018). *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux).

<sup>18</sup> On the right side of the figure, a straight line means no significant difference between the youngest and the oldest group. An arrow pointing to the right means that the older groups are significantly more supportive of this type of free speech than the younger group, and an arrow pointing to the left means that the oldest group is significantly less supportive than the youngest group.

<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, regarding education, the response categories for the US, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Spain are not comparable to those used in the other countries. These five cases, therefore, are not included in the figures in which respondents are divided into groups according to their educational achievements.

<sup>20</sup> Christian Welzel (2013). *Freedom Rising: Human Empowerment and the Quest for Emancipation* (New York: Cambridge University Press); Frederick D. Weil (1985). "The Variable Effects of Education on Liberal Attitudes: A Comparative-Historical Analysis of Anti-Semitism using Public Opinion Survey Data." *American Sociological Review* 50(4): 458-474; Jenniger L. Lambe (2002). "Dimensions of Censorship: Reconceptualizing Public Willingness to Censor." *Communication Law & Policy* 7(2): 187-235.

<sup>21</sup> The education categories refer to primary & lower secondary education or less (low GCSE and below), upper secondary and post-secondary (medium, roughly, completed A-levels), and tertiary or more (advanced professional qualification/degree). On the right side of the figure, a straight line means no significant difference between the groups with high and low levels of education. An arrow pointing to the right means that the group with high education is significantly more supportive of this type of free speech than the group with low education, and an arrow pointing to the left means that the group with high education is significantly less supportive than the group with low education.

<sup>22</sup> *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette* (1943).

<sup>23</sup> *Texas v. Johnson*, 491 U.S. 397 (1989).

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.law.columbia.edu/news/archive/free-speech-century-how-first-amendment-came-life>

<sup>25</sup> See also Emily Ekins (2017). *The State of Free Speech and Tolerance in America*, Cato Institute, <https://www.cato.org/survey-reports/state-free-speech-tolerance-america>

<sup>26</sup> The findings are very similar when we enter all the variables in five multiple linear regression models with all the group variables as predictors to estimate whether the differences are significant when holding other factors constant. Criticize the government's policies: Older cohorts more supportive; gender difference insignificant; people with four years of college or postgraduate degrees more supportive than people with no high school or only high school; Biden voters slightly less supportive. Offensive to minority groups: Hardly any significant difference between cohorts; men more supportive; no significant difference between education levels; Trump voters much more supportive. Offensive to your religion and beliefs: The oldest cohort more supportive than the youngest; men more supportive; people with four years



of college or post-graduate degrees more supportive than people with no high school or only high school; Biden voters less supportive. Support homosexual relationships: Older cohorts more supportive; gender difference insignificant; people with two years of college, four years of college, or post-graduate degrees more supportive than people with no high school or only high school; no significant difference between Biden voters and Trump voters. Insult the national flag: No significant difference between cohorts; men more supportive; people with two years of college, four years of college, or post-graduate degrees more supportive than people with no high school or only high school; no significant difference between Biden voters and Trump voters.

<sup>27</sup> Roberto S. Foa & Yasha Mounk (2017). "Signs of Deconsolidation." *Journal of Democracy* 28(1): 5-16; Erik Voeten *Are People Really Turning Away from Democracy?* [https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Journal-of-Democracy-Web-Exchange-Voeten\\_0.pdf](https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Journal-of-Democracy-Web-Exchange-Voeten_0.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> This reflection is based in part on the fact that a public opinion survey from 2018 found that "[s]ome of the limits of public support for freedom of the press are made stark with a quarter of Americans (26%) saying they agree 'the president should have the authority to close news outlets engaged in bad behavior,' including a plurality of Republicans (43%)." <https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/news-polls/americans-views-media-2018-08-07>

<sup>29</sup> The technique is relevant for situations in which people want to be sure that there is no way to identify their potentially controversial opinion (or knowledge) even if somebody has access to their responses and could link it directly to them. In other words, list experiments provide respondents with an additional level of privacy since others can never perfectly infer an individual's answer to a particular issue. Respondents are randomly divided into two groups – a control group and a treatment group. The control group is presented with a list of non-sensitive statements, and the treatment group receives an identical list plus the sensitive statement. Respondents must then report how many statements in the list they agree with (without any need to reveal which particular statements they agree with). With a large sample like ours, we can statistically estimate the proportion of people to whom the sensitive item pertains.

<sup>30</sup> This suggests that some of the findings presented above might also be affected by social-desirability bias in one direction or the other. However, more research is needed to determine to what extent this is the case, and the numbers not associated with experiments have the advantage that they are more comparable to those published by previous studies asking directly about opinions on free speech.

<sup>31</sup> See, e.g., Anshu Siripurapu & William Merrow (2021). *Social Media and Online Speech: How Should Countries Regulate Tech Giants?* <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/social-media-and-online-speech-how-should-countries-regulate-tech-giants>; Clyde Wayne Crews (2020). *The Case against Social Media Content Regulation*, <https://cei.org/studies/the-case-against-social-media-content-regulation/>; Adrian Shahbaz (2018). *The Rise of Digital Authoritarianism*, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2018/rise-digital-authoritarianism>; Frank Furedi (2020). *Democracy Under Siege: Don't Let Them Lock It Down!* (Winchester: Zer0 Books).

<sup>32</sup> See, e.g., Simon Wigley & Arzu Akkoyunlu-Wigley (2017). "The Impact of Democracy and Media Freedom on Under-5 Mortality, 1961-2011." *Social Science & Medicine* 190: 237-246; John Gerring, Carl Henrik Knutsen, Matthew Maguire, Svend-Erik Skaaning, Jan Teorell & Michael Coppedge (2021). "Democracy and Human Development: Issues of Conceptualization and Measurement." *Democratization* 28(2): 308-332; Carl Henrik Knutsen (2015). "Why Democracies Outgrow Autocracies in the Long Run: Civil liberties, Information Flows and Technological Change." *Kyklos* 68(3): 357-384; Lasse Skjoldager Eskildsen & Christian Bjørnskov (2020). *Does Freedom of Expression Cause Less Terrorism?* <https://futurefreespeech.com/working-paper-does-freedom-of-expression-cause-less-terrorism/>

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



**Svend-Erik Skaaning — Professor, Aarhus University**

Skaaning is professor of political science specialized in comparative studies of democratization, civil liberties, and the rule of law. He is currently working on historical patterns of political regime changes. His most recent books – on the measurement of democracy and on democratic stability in times of crisis, respectively – have been published by Cambridge University Press and Oxford University Press.



**Suthan Krishnarajan — Assistant Professor, Aarhus University**

Suthan is an Assistant Professor in Political Science at Aarhus University focusing on regime instability in democracies and autocracies around the world historically as well as today. His PhD dissertation won the 2019 Aarhus University Research Foundation PhD Award, and his work has been published in leading international journals such as *International Studies Quarterly*, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *British Journal of Political Science*, and *Journal of Politics*.



**THE  
FUTURE  
OF  
FREE  
SPEECH**

## **REBUILDING THE BULWARK OF LIBERTY**

