

The Global Chilling of Media Freedom: New World Map of Defamation

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Defamation Map

One of the biggest threats to media freedom around the world is not the criminals, politicians, thugs or profiteering bosses who sack or attack journalists who produce material that challenges those in power. It is the very thing that is supposed to protect our rights: The Law.

Defamation is the way that society stops people lying. But in many places it is a criminal offence and is used to silence journalists who seek to expose evil and wrongdoing. Now the global freedom of expression group [Article 19](#) have produced an excellent online map that charts what is happening around the world.

It shows what the law is, how it is used and case studies. It also has information on how you can campaign against excessive defamation legislation.

While there have been some successes in reducing the sanctions on defamation, it is arguable that in some places things are getting worse. Repressive regimes enjoy using a 'legitimate' sanction to keep the news media quiet.

Because the fact is that excessive punishment of outspoken journalists doesn't just hurt those individuals or media organisations involved. It can be shown that it also has a 'chilling' effect on other journalists and newsrooms who then decide not to take risks. As Nicola Spurr from Article 19 puts it:

"Our argument is that civil defamation is a major factor impeding the right of the public to freedom of expression in many countries worldwide where the right to comment and debate freely, and democracy are not a given. Civil defamation cases may be politically motivated and used to hinder investigative journalism particularly around corruption. Claims for damages can be disproportionate and can bankrupt individuals, and media organisations, with journalists and editors falling into the trap of having to self-censor to stay safe and avoid threats of expensive law suits."

Journalists should be punished if they get things wrong or lie about people. But they should also be allowed to say things that people disagree with and that are controversial. They should even be allowed to make mistakes without winding up in jail.

If you care about media freedom then check out this excellent online facility and the other authoritative and useful information on the [Article 19 website](#).

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