

UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL:

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RULE OF LAW DECLINING WORLDWIDE FOR THIRD YEAR IN A ROW

2020 WJP Rule of Law Index Shows Sustained Negative Slide Toward Weaker Rule of Law Around the World

Fundamental Rights, Constraints on Government Powers, and Absence of Corruption Lead Areas of Greatest Decline in Global Report

WASHINGTON, DC (11 March 2020) – The World Justice Project (WJP) today released the *WJP Rule of Law Index® 2020*, an annual report based on national surveys of more than 130,000 households and 4,000 legal practitioners and experts around the world.

The *WJP Rule of Law Index* measures rule of law performance in 128 countries and jurisdictions across eight primary factors: Constraints on Government Powers, Absence of Corruption, Open Government, Fundamental Rights, Order and Security, Regulatory Enforcement, Civil Justice, and Criminal Justice. The Index is the world’s leading source for original, independent data on the rule of law.

Global Trends

More countries declined than improved in overall rule of law performance for a third year in a row, continuing a negative slide toward weakening and stagnating rule of law around the world. The majority of countries showing deteriorating rule of law in the 2020 Index also declined in the previous year, demonstrating a persistent downward trend. This was particularly pronounced in the Index factor measuring Constraints on Government Powers.

The declines were widespread and seen in all corners of the world. In every region, a majority of countries slipped backward or remained unchanged in their overall rule of law performance since the 2019 *WJP Rule of Law Index*.

At a global level, countries experienced the biggest declines over the past year in the areas of Fundamental Rights (54 declined, 29 improved), Constraints on Government Powers (52 declined, 28 improved), and Absence of Corruption (51 declined, 26 improved). This is not a new pattern; WJP data shows the same three factors were the largest decliners over a five-year time horizon as well. Fundamental Rights showed the most backsliding with 67 countries dropping in score since 2015.

Civil Justice showed the most positive movement over the previous year, with 47 countries improving versus 41 declining. Since 2015, Regulatory Enforcement has improved the most, with 65 countries improving versus 29 declining.

“What we are witnessing is a steady erosion in core dimensions of accountable governance affecting democracies and dictatorships alike,” observed WJP Executive Director Elizabeth Andersen. “This is the third year running that our data has shown the rule of law in retreat globally, including in traditionally strong performers that have served as good examples and advocates for these norms around the world. This leadership vacuum is contributing to the spreading rule of law malaise.”

Country Highlights

Denmark, Norway, and Finland topped the *WJP Rule of Law Index* rankings in 2020. Venezuela, Cambodia, and DR Congo had the lowest overall rule of law scores—the same as in 2019.

NOTE TO EDITORS: INDIVIDUAL COUNTRY PROFILES, WITH ISSUE-SPECIFIC SCORES AND RANKINGS, AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD HERE: [WORLD JUSTICE PROJECT RULE OF LAW INDEX 2020](#)

Countries in the top ten of the Index in overall rule of law score remain unchanged since our last report in 2019. This year, for the first time, the United States fell out of the top 20 countries, replaced by Spain. France fell from #17 to #20, with Singapore trading places with United Kingdom, moving from #13 to #12.

Countries with the strongest improvement in rule of law were Ethiopia (5.6% increase in score, driven primarily by gains in Constraints on Government Powers and Fundamental Rights) and Malaysia (5.1%, driven primarily by gains in Constraints on Government Powers, Fundamental Rights, and Regulatory Enforcement).

“Recent leadership transitions in these countries have ushered in reforms and given citizens hope that we begin to see in the data. It shows how political will matters,” Andersen said. “Next comes the key phase of implementation, testing whether these leaders can deliver on their promises and stay on a path of progress.”

The most downward movement in the rule of law was seen in Cameroon (-4.4%, driven primarily by falling scores in Order and Security and Fundamental Rights) and Iran (-4.2%, driven primarily by falling scores in Criminal Justice).

Over the last five years, countries experiencing the largest average annual percentage drop in the rule of law were Egypt (-4.6%), Venezuela (-3.9%), Cambodia (-3.0%), Philippines (-2.5%), Cameroon (-2.4%), Hungary (-2.1%), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (-2.1%).

The single biggest decline by factor over the past five years was Egypt’s and Poland’s score for Constraints on Government Powers, with an average annual decline of -8.5% and -6.8%, respectively.

Countries leading their regions in overall rule of law scores were: Nepal (South Asia), Georgia (Eastern Europe and Central Asia); Namibia (Sub-Saharan Africa); Uruguay (Latin America and the Caribbean); United Arab Emirates (Middle East and North Africa); New Zealand (East Asia and Pacific), and Denmark (Western Europe and North America, defined as EU + EFTA + North America).

“The rule of law is not just a matter for judges or lawyers,” said William H. Neukom, WJP founder and CEO. “It is the bedrock of communities of justice, opportunity, and peace. We are all stakeholders in the rule of law and therefore we all have a role to play in upholding it. The 2020 Index underscores that we have our work cut out for us.”

The complete 2020 report—including country profiles, data visualizations, methodology, and download options—is available on February 28 at: www.worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index

ABOUT THE WJP RULE OF LAW INDEX

The *WJP Rule of Law Index*[®] is the world’s leading source for original, independent data on the rule of law. Now covering 128 countries and jurisdictions, the Index relies on more than 130,000 household surveys and 4,000 legal practitioner and expert surveys to measure how the rule of law is experienced and perceived worldwide. The Index provides current and reliable information to policy makers, civil society organizations, academics, citizens, and legal professionals, among others, and is intended to encourage policy reforms, guide program development, and inform research to strengthen the rule of law.

ABOUT THE WORLD JUSTICE PROJECT:

The World Justice Project (WJP) is an independent, multidisciplinary organization working to create knowledge, build awareness, and stimulate action to advance the rule of law worldwide. Effective rule of law reduces corruption, combats poverty and disease, and protects people from injustices large and small. It is the foundation for communities of justice, opportunity, and peace—underpinning development, accountable government, and respect for fundamental rights.

The World Justice Project defines the rule of law as a durable system of laws, institutions, norms, and community commitment that delivers: accountability, just laws, open government, and accessible justice. Learn more about these four universal principles and our work at: www.worldjusticeproject.org

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