

GLOBAL PRESS RELEASE

Washington DC (14 October 2021)

## Amidst pandemic, rule of law deteriorates in over half the world

- **84.7% of the world's population (6.5 billion people) live in a country where rule of law is weakening, according to the WJP Rule of Law Index® 2021.**
- **Areas of greatest decline include constraints on government powers, civic space, timeliness of justice, and absence of discrimination.**
- **The top three performers this year were Denmark, Norway, and Finland. Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cambodia, and Venezuela, RB had the lowest overall rule of law scores.**

WASHINGTON, DC (14 October 2021) – The World Justice Project (WJP) today released the *WJP Rule of Law Index® 2021*, which evaluates rule of law in 139 countries and jurisdictions. The report is the first in this annual series issued since the COVID-19 pandemic was declared in March 2020, and it **shows multi-year negative trends worsening during this period.**

“With negative trends in so many countries, this year’s *WJP Rule of Law Index* should be a wake-up call for us all,” said WJP Co-Founder and CEO Bill Neukom.

The *WJP Rule of Law Index®* is an annual data-rich report based on national surveys of more than 138,000 households and 4,200 legal practitioners and experts around the world. The WJP’s framework for the rule of law covers eight factors: Constraints on Government Powers, Absence of Corruption, Open Government, Fundamental Rights, Order and Security, Regulatory Enforcement, Civil Justice, and Criminal Justice.

The 2021 edition of the *WJP Rule of Law Index* includes 11 new countries: Republic of the Congo, Cyprus, Haiti, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Paraguay, Slovak Republic, and Sudan. The Index also covers the entire European Union for the first time.

WJP Chief Research Officer Dr. Alejandro Ponce and Index Co-director Alicia Evangelides presented the findings at the virtual global launch event. Other speakers included Brad Smith, President and Vice Chair of Microsoft; Sandie Okoro, General Counsel and Senior Vice President of the World Bank Group; Aminata Touré, former Prime Minister of Senegal; Věra Jourová, the European Commission’s Vice-President for Values and Transparency; and Mo Ibrahim, Founder and Chair of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation.

### Deterioration in rule of law is spreading worldwide

The 2021 Index shows that more countries declined than improved in overall rule of law performance for the fourth consecutive year.

In a year dominated by the global COVID-19 pandemic, 74.2% of surveyed countries experienced declines in rule of law performance, while only 25.8% improved. **The 74.2% of**



**countries that experienced declines this year account for 84.7% of the world's population, or approximately 6.5 billion people.**

The declines were widespread and seen in all corners of the world. For the second year in a row, **in every region, a majority of countries slipped backward** or remained unchanged in their overall rule of law performance.

### **Constraints on government powers fell and civic spaces diminished amid the pandemic**

During the last year, 70% of countries covered by the Index declined in Constraints on Government Powers. **This decline was the most pronounced in three regions: South Asia; the Middle East and North Africa; and the EU, EFTA, and North America.**

Over the past year, **82% of countries in the Index experienced a decline in at least one dimension of civic space** (civic participation, freedom of opinion and expression, and freedom of assembly and association).

"Constraints on government powers have weakened, and civic space has diminished, opening the door to growing authoritarianism," warned William C. Hubbard, WJP Co-Founder and Chair of the Board of Directors.

### **Discrimination and justice delays increased during COVID-19**

During 2020, **67% of countries covered by the Index experienced declines in the indicators that evaluate equal treatment and absence of discrimination.** This decline was the most pronounced in Sub-Saharan Africa and in the Middle East and North Africa.

Over the past year, **94% of countries in the Index experienced increased delays** in administrative, civil, or criminal proceedings. In nearly two-thirds of countries, civil justice systems exhibited increased delays.

"The Sustainable Development Goals promised 'access to justice for all' by 2030, but for the past 18 months, the world has been headed in the wrong direction," observed WJP Chief Research Officer Alejandro Ponce.

### **Rankings and progress across countries**

The top three performers this year were Denmark, Norway, and Finland. Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cambodia, and Venezuela, RB had the lowest overall rule of law scores. The countries with the biggest improvement in rule of law in the past year were Uzbekistan (4.1%), Moldova (3.2%), and Mongolia (2.0%).



The countries with the biggest decline in rule of law in the past year were Belarus (-7.5%) and Myanmar (-6.3%). Nigeria, Nicaragua, Kyrgyz Republic, and Argentina tie for the third biggest decline (-3.7%).

#### **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 139 countries and jurisdictions, the Index relies on more than 138,000 household surveys and 4,200 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 underpins development, accountable government, and respect for fundamental rights, and it is the foundation for communities of justice, opportunity, and peace.

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](http://www.worldjusticeproject.org).

#### **Materials under embargo until October 14**

Access the complete report and insights booklet [here](#).

Consult complimentary media (graphs, rankings, and comparative maps) [here](#).

Regional country press releases, with issue specific scores and rankings can be seen [here](#).

#### **MEDIA CONTACT & INTERVIEW REQUESTS:**

[press@worldjusticeproject.org](mailto:press@worldjusticeproject.org)

WhatsApp: +52 5517018505

