

Academic freedom unevenly distributed: Report

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Credit: Friedrich–Alexander University Erlangen–Nurnberg

Academic freedom today is not available for 3.6 billion people, or 45.5% of the world's population. After a global peak in academic freedom in 2006, the situation today is comparable to circumstances

fifty years ago in 1973.

This is one of the results of the [2024 Update of the Academic Freedom Index \(AFI\)](#), which researchers at the University of Gothenburg and Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU) have presented today. The new AFI data provides an overview of the state of academic [freedom](#) in 179 countries.

However, there is reason for optimism: Over the same period, academic freedom has improved in 56 countries and reached high levels in 61 countries with a total of 1.1 billion inhabitants. The researchers identified ten countries in which academic freedom actually increased steadily in 2023—a positive development that was last observed more than 20 years ago.

Academic freedom and polarization

Academic freedom faces risk in countries with pronounced societal [polarization](#). This year's AFI Update identifies the top six countries and territories that experienced an ongoing decline episode in academic freedom in 2023. In each case—El Salvador, Hong Kong, Hungary, India, Russia, and Venezuela—the downturn in the Academic Freedom Index was preceded by a rise in polarization.

On the other hand, academic freedom expanded in Brazil, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Thailand despite polarization. That is, the relationship between academic freedom and polarization is far from straightforward. The [legal framework](#) and also universities' and academics' own agency likely play a role in mitigating polarization pressures on free science and higher education.

International data collection

The AFI is the result of cooperation between the V-Dem Institute at the University of Gothenburg and political scientists at FAU. It is composed of five indicators: the freedom to research and teach; the freedom of academic exchange and dissemination; the freedom of academic and cultural expression; the institutional autonomy of universities, and campus integrity.

The AFI provides data on academic freedom worldwide for the period from 1900 to 2023. The index rests on assessments by 2,329 country experts from around the world, one million observations at coder level and a customized, peer-reviewed [statistical model](#) that systematically aggregates expert assessments into a single score.

Open access and interactive visualization of world map

The detailed data that make up the AFI 1900–2023 are available [open access](#) to facilitate further studies. You can find interactive visualization of the data, country profiles, and information on the index project [here](#). Easy-to-use graphing tools are also available for anyone interested; they can be consulted by researchers, students, university administrators, research funders, and policymakers.

More information: [2024 Update of the Academic Freedom Index \(AFI\)](#)

Provided by Friedrich–Alexander University Erlangen–Nurnberg

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