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Africa

New disinformation and propaganda laboratory

Disinformation keeps on growing in sub-Saharan Africa. In countries beset by conflicts and security threats, governments treat the media as propaganda tools. The military governments in [Mali](#) (113th) and [Burkina Faso](#) (58th), which do not hide their association with the Russian privately-owned military company Wagner's mercenaries, have indefinitely suspended local broadcasting by two French international news broadcasters and have expelled foreign reporters. In the [Central African Republic](#) (98th), a great deal of content from the Russian propaganda media *RT* and *Sputnik* is retransmitted. The defence and promotion of a pro-Russian narrative have contributed to a disinformation explosion and to development of a propaganda ecosystem throughout Africa. Bogus media networks now help to denigrate and smear journalists who do not comply with patriotic directives issued by the new military juntas.

A similar phenomenon is discernible in [Ethiopia](#) (130th). The Tigray war has resulted in a wave of arrests of journalists and have encouraged intense propaganda by both the federal authorities and Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). In the [Democratic Republic of Congo](#) (124th), journalists receive conflicting orders from M23 rebels and governmental troops in the eastern province of North-Kivu.

Still a high-risk continent for journalists

Propaganda and disinformation are developing in what is still one of the most dangerous terrains for journalists. The French reporter Olivier Dubois was finally released after 711 days as a hostage in Mali, but five journalists were killed in connection with their work from September 2022 to January 2023 in [Cameroon](#) (138th), [Kenya](#) (116th), [Somalia](#) (141st) and [Rwanda](#) (131st). Even when investigations were opened, they did not always lead to identification of the instigators, as seen in the cases of Cameroonian journalist Martinez Zogo and Rwandan journalist John Williams Ntwali.

In this environment dominated by impunity, arbitrary arrests on spurious grounds are on the rise, targeting investigative reporters in particular. Until now a regional model, [Senegal](#) (104th) has fallen 31 places in the Index, above all because of the judicial proceedings against two journalists, Pape Alé Niang and Pape Ndiaye, and a sharp decline in security for reporters. In [Burundi](#) (114th), radio journalist Floriane Irangabiye's extremely harsh 10-year prison sentence helped to keep this country in the lower part of the index.

Although the situation is now classified as "bad" in nearly 40% of the countries (as against 33% in 2022), small positive developments were seen in countries such as [Niger](#) (61st),



where a cybercrime law used to imprison journalists was amended in June 2022, and in [Uganda](#) (133rd), where the constitutional court overturned a provision in the law on computer misuse that criminalised “fake news.”