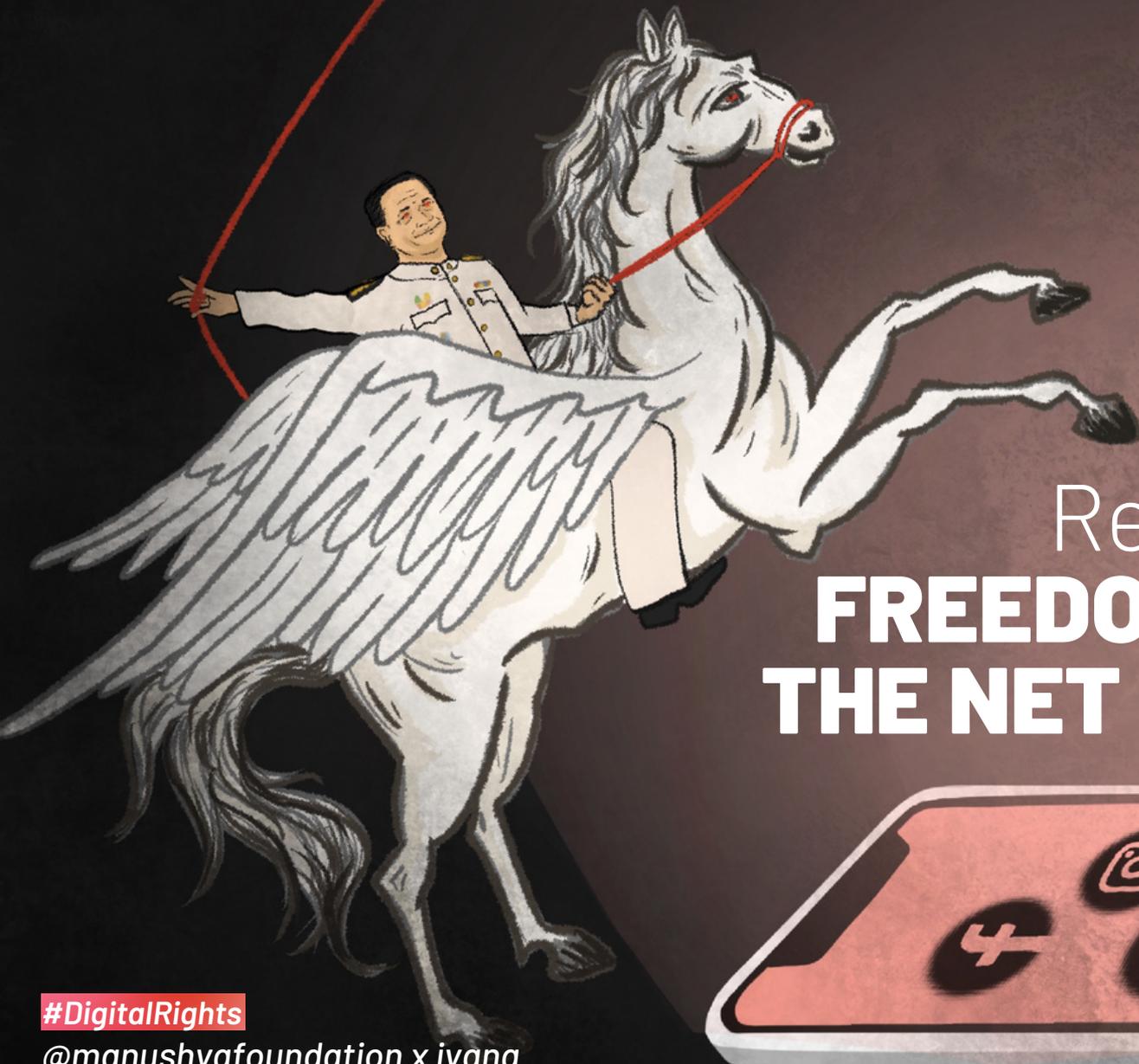


JOINT NEWS RELEASE

INTERNET IS **NOT** **FREE** IN THAILAND



#StopDigitalDictatorship



Report:
**FREEDOM ON
THE NET 2022**



JOINT NEWS RELEASE

NEW REPORT: INTERNET FREEDOM REMAINED UNDER THREAT IN THAILAND

Freedom on the Net 2022 finds that internet freedom in Thailand remained under threat. Internet freedom declined globally for a 12th consecutive year as conditions deteriorated in 28 countries, while 26 countries experienced gains.

Global internet freedom declined for a 12th consecutive year as more governments erected digital barriers designed to censor dissent and monitor users, according to [Freedom on the Net 2022: Countering an Authoritarian Overhaul of the Internet](#), the annual country-by-country assessment of internet freedom released on October 18, 2022 by Freedom House. The study finds that more than three-quarters of the world's internet users now live in countries where authorities punish people for exercising their right to free expression online. The report also found that internet freedom in Thailand remained under threat.

"The global internet is more fragmented than ever," said Allie Funk, Research Director for Technology and Democracy and co-author of [Freedom on the Net 2022](#). "More governments are blocking foreign websites, hoarding personal data, and centralizing their countries' technical infrastructure so they can control what people see and share online. Safeguarding a free and open internet is essential to countering global authoritarianism more broadly. Democratic leaders should recommit to preserving internet freedom, including by adopting new regulations that protect human rights online, increasing multilateral coordination on global tech policy, and investing in civil society organizations that continue to serve as a first line of defense in resisting digital repression."

The sharpest downgrades on the report's 100-point scale were documented in [Russia](#) (-7), [Myanmar](#) (-5), [Sudan](#) (-4), and [Libya](#) (-4). Following the Russian military's disastrous invasion of [Ukraine](#), the Kremlin dramatically intensified its ongoing efforts to suppress domestic dissent and accelerated the closure or exile of the country's remaining independent media outlets. Myanmar now hosts the second worst environment for human rights online, outperforming only [China](#). Since the February 2021 coup, the country's military junta has cultivated a domestic intranet to help silence opposition to its takeover and consolidate its power.

Despite an overall global decline, the report documented some significant improvements in internet freedom, made possible by the tireless work of civil society activists, media groups, and human rights defenders. A record 26 countries registered net gains in internet freedom for the year.

The internet is severely restricted in Thailand. A wide-ranging crackdown on online expression was carried out by the military-led regime in response to pro-democracy protests that started in July 2020 and continued throughout the coverage period. Authorities significantly increased the use of lèse-majesté law and sedition, charging and imprisoning individuals for online expression. Pro-democracy activists face heavy prison sentences.

“The government’s goal is to truly put an end to the pro-democracy movement by exhausting activists physically and mentally in order to maintain the authoritarian establishment in power,” said Emilie Pradichit, Founder and Executive Director of [Manushya Foundation](#), and report co-author of Freedom on the Net: [Thailand Country Report](#). *“Now, more than ever, we must mobilize and join forces to resist Thailand’s digital dictatorship and ensure pro-democracy activists remain strong and brave and can care for themselves as a priority.”*

State-sponsored attacks, intimidation, and harassment targeting individuals for their online activities also continued. The government repeatedly extended the enforcement of a repressive emergency declaration issued in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, imposing further constraints on fundamental freedoms, though the courts found some measures unconstitutional.

Tech companies have also been instrumental in Thailand’s escalating digital dictatorship. *“Tech companies have enabled the harassment and intimidation of activists to proliferate online,”* said Letitia Visan, Human Rights Researcher & Advocacy Officer at [Manushya Foundation](#), report co-author of Freedom on the Net: [Thailand Country Report](#). *“These tech giants should put people first and ensure that technological advances do not come at the expense of human rights,”* she concluded.

KEY GLOBAL FINDINGS

- **Global internet freedom declined for the 12th consecutive year.** The sharpest downgrades on the report’s 100-point scale were documented in [Russia](#) (–7), [Myanmar](#) (–5), [Sudan](#) (–4), and [Libya](#) (–4). Following the Russian military’s disastrous invasion of [Ukraine](#), the Kremlin dramatically intensified its ongoing efforts to suppress domestic dissent and accelerated the closure or exile of the country’s remaining independent media outlets. In at least 53 countries, users faced legal repercussions for expressing themselves online, often leading to draconian prison terms.
- **Governments are breaking apart the global internet to create more controllable online spaces.** A record number of national governments blocked websites with nonviolent political, social, or religious content, undermining the rights to free expression and access to information. A majority of these blocks targeted information sources that were located outside of the country. New national laws posed an additional threat to the free flow of information by centralizing technical infrastructure and applying flawed regulations to social media platforms and the management of user data.

- A record 26 countries experienced internet freedom improvements. Two of the larger improvements occurred in [The Gambia](#) (+3) and [Zimbabwe](#) (+3). Despite the overall global decline, civil society organizations in many countries have led collaborative efforts to improve legislation, develop media resilience, and ensure accountability among technology companies. Successful collective actions against internet shutdowns offered a model for further progress on other problems like commercial spyware.
- Human rights hang in the balance amid a competition to control the web. Authoritarian states are vying to propagate their model of digital control around the world. In response, a coalition of democratic governments has increased the promotion of online human rights at multilateral forums, outlining their vision for a free and open internet. However, their progress remains hampered by problematic internet freedom practices in their own countries.

KEY THAILAND FINDINGS

- The merger of mobile service providers TRUE and Total Communication Access (DTAC) was announced in November 2021; the consolidation of the market may present affordability concerns, though the communications regulator indicated it may not have the authority to review the merger.
- Authorities sought to restrict access to content relating to criticism of the government, including by blocking a website mobilizing support to repeal the lèse-majesté law in February 2022.
- The Constitutional Court held in November 2021 that speech calling for reform of the monarchy constitutes an attempt to overthrow the king, impacting online expression.
- Internet users were arrested and charged for speech calling for government reform, with authorities notably sentencing an activist to six years' imprisonment over Facebook posts during the coverage period. However, no multidecade prison sentences were issued, in contrast to the previous coverage period.
- According to a report released in July 2022, the Thai government likely deployed spyware against prodemocracy advocates, researchers, and politicians during the reporting period.
- There were no reported cases of direct violence in retaliation for peoples' online activities, though extralegal intimidation, online harassment, and doxing of prodemocracy activists and critics of the monarchy continued.

Freedom on the Net 2022 assesses internet freedom in 70 countries, accounting for 89 percent of internet users worldwide. The report, the 12th in its series, focused on developments between June 2021 and May 2022. Global findings, detailed country reports, data on 21 internet freedom indicators, policy recommendations, and report contributors can be found at freedomthenet.org. The Thailand report can be found [here](#).

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About Manushya Foundation

Manushya Foundation was founded in 2017 with the vision to build a movement of Equal Human Beings *#WeAreManushyan*. Manushya is an intersectional feminist human rights organization reinforcing the power of humans, in particular women, human rights defenders, indigenous peoples, forest-dependent communities, environmental defenders, LGBTI groups, and Youth, to be at the heart of decision-making processes that concern them and to speak truth to power at the forefront of their fight for Human Rights, Equality, Social Justice and Peace. Through coalition building, capacity building, community-led research, advocacy and campaigning, and sub-granting, local communities become Agents of Change fighting for their rights and providing solutions to improve their lives and livelihoods, pushing back on authoritarian governments and harmful corporations. Manushya defends local communities and seeks justice with them before the United Nations, focusing on women's rights and gender equality, digital rights, climate & environmental justice, and corporate accountability across Asia.

For further information on the work of Manushya Foundation, visit:

<https://www.manushyafoundation.org/>