Media and Journalism Research Center

INDEPENDENCE UNDER SIEGE

The State Media Monitor 2025 Global Study

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Media and Journalism Research Center

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Introduction

This report is the 2025 edition of an annual global analysis of the editorial independence of state and public media. Published every year since 2021, the study tracks changes and trends in how state and public media are funded, governed, and operated editorially. Its purpose is to capture not only long-term structural shifts but also the significant developments that unfold from one year to the next.

The study has expanded gradually over time. In 2023, it covered 157 countries. In 2024, 13 new cases were added, raising the total to 170 countries. The scope remained unchanged in 2025, providing a stable global dataset for comparison across years.

The analysis is built on the State Media Matrix, a typology developed in 2021 and refined in 2023. The Matrix goes beyond the simplistic binary of “propaganda outlets” versus “public service media” and instead offers a nuanced classification of state and public media according to three key factors: funding, ownership and governance, and editorial control. Based on these dimensions, the typology identifies the following models:

- **Independent Public Media (IP)** – funded and governed in ways that insulate them from government interference, enjoying the highest level of independence.
- **Independent State Managed/Owned Media (ISM)** – state-owned or governed, but not predominantly state-funded, with editorial autonomy generally respected.
- **Independent State Funded Media (ISF)** – reliant on state funding but independent in governance and editorial agenda, with financial dependence posing a risk.
- **Independent State Funded and Managed/Owned Media (ISFM)** – both funded and managed by the state, but without direct editorial interference; independence remains fragile.
- **Captured Private Media (CaPr)** – privately owned but financially dependent on government contracts or advertising, leading to compromised editorial agendas.
- **Captured Public or State Managed/Owned Media (CaPu)** – state-owned or managed outlets where authorities use governance control to shape editorial content.
- **State Controlled Media (SC)** – fully subordinated to state authorities, functioning as propaganda arms, with the lowest level of independence.

This typology is the foundation of the State Media Monitor project and of the present study. *(please consult the Methodology section for the full description of the Matrix and the research design behind it)*

As in past editions, the 2025 study is based on a mix of ongoing monitoring and fresh annual updates, drawing on interviews with local experts and journalists, as well as continuous research conducted by a global network of specialists commissioned by the Media and Journalism Research Center (MJRC). This international collaboration allows the study to track and document reforms, setbacks, and emerging patterns in state and public media worldwide with accuracy and consistency.

The importance of this work lies in the fact that state and public media remain among the most influential sources of information for billions of people all over the world. When they operate independently, they can strengthen democracy, provide citizens with trusted news, and hold those in power to account. When they are captured or controlled, they become instruments of manipulation, undermining public trust and democratic institutions. Monitoring their evolution is therefore not only an academic exercise but also a crucial contribution to protecting media freedom and ensuring that journalism serves the public rather than political or commercial interests.

Ultimately, the goal of the State Media Monitor series is to provide an evidence-based assessment of how state and public media are evolving and to inform debates on how these institutions can serve the public interest in increasingly complex political and technological environments.

Key Findings

The 2025 State Media Monitor reveals a further erosion of editorial independence in state and public media worldwide. Out of the 606 outlets surveyed, 512 (85%) are captured or controlled, compared to 505 out of 601 (84%) in 2024. This marginal decline underscores a continuing downward trajectory since monitoring began in 2021.

The State Controlled (SC) model remains the most widespread, accounting for 392 outlets in 2025, only slightly below last year's 393. Most SC outlets are located in Asia (86), Sub-Saharan Africa (116), MENA (52), and Eurasia (54). By contrast, the number of Independent Public Media (IP)—the benchmark for editorial autonomy—remains stubbornly low. The total rose from 18 outlets in 2024 to 19 in 2025, representing just 3% of the global sample, with 13 based in Europe, 4 in Asia, and 2 in North America.

Overall, the number of outlets displaying genuine editorial independence declined from 96 in 2024 to 94 in 2025, the lowest since the launch of the Monitor. The deterioration was marked by the loss of six outlets that had previously been ranked as independent. At the same time, Captured Private Media (CaPr) grew from 48 in 2024 to 53 in 2025, showing how governments increasingly rely on economic leverage to bend private ownership structures to their advantage. Captured Public or State Managed Media (CaPu) also increased slightly, from 64 in 2024 to 67 in 2025.

The most dramatic shift occurred in the United States, a country traditionally perceived as safer ground for editorially independent media. In a historical development, a North American outlet was downgraded to SC status. In early 2025, the US Agency for Global Media (USAGM)—the umbrella for Voice of America, Radio Free Asia, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, the Office of Cuba Broadcasting, and the Middle East Broadcasting Network—was brought directly under the control of President Trump's administration. Funding freezes and management purges left most of these broadcasters dormant, with only VOA surviving at a third of its former staff capacity. In parallel, Congress froze funding for PBS, effectively suspending operations and putting its workforce on indefinite leave. This shift illustrates how quickly public media independence can collapse even in established democracies.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, conditions were not much better. The region counted 51 state-controlled outlets in 2025, roughly the same as in 2024, with only six media companies retaining some form of independence.

Elsewhere, patterns remained broadly consistent with the previous year. Europe continued to stand out as a relative stronghold of independence, with 54 outlets out of 116 maintaining editorial freedom, though losses in Spain demonstrate that even in Europe the trend is fragile.

Sub-Saharan Africa offered the starkest imbalance: of 137 outlets surveyed, 116 were state controlled and only two displayed any degree of independence. MENA remained dominated by state influence, with 52 SC outlets, unchanged from 2024. Asia recorded a small improvement in the IP category, which rose from three to four outlets, but still had one of the highest concentrations of SC media globally with 86. Oceania remained the most balanced region, with four ISFM outlets, three ISF, and one SC, though its sample is small at only nine outlets in total.

Taken together, the results confirm a world in which independent public media are increasingly rare, captured media are on the rise, and the United States—long seen as a bastion of editorial independence—is no longer immune to the global trend of political interference and state control.

Global overview of state media by typology and number of media outlets, 2025

State Media Matrix: SC: State Controlled Media; CaPu: Captured Public/State Managed/Owned Media; CaPr: Captured Private Media; ISFM: Independent State Funded and State Managed/Owned Media; ISF: Independent State Funded Media; ISM: Independent State Managed/Owned Media; IP: Independent Public Media. Note: The 2025 study includes two countries, Monaco and Liechtenstein, which do not have any state-administered media outlets.

	SC	CaPu	CaPr	ISFM	ISF	ISM	IP	Total region
Europe	31	8	23	26	5	10	13	116
Eurasia	54	8	5	1	1	0	0	69
Sub-Saharan Africa	116	15	4	2	0	0	0	137
MENA	52	17	12	2	0	1	0	84
Asia	86	15	8	4	0	3	4	120
Latin America and the Caribbean	51	4	1	5	6	0	0	67
North America	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	4
Oceania	1	0	0	4	3	1	0	9
Total	392	67	53	44	16	15	19	606

Source: Media and Journalism Research Center • Created with Datawrapper

Despite the relentless assault on media independence recorded this year, the 2025 results also reveal important shifts, both positive and negative, across all regions. They show that editorial capture is not a one-way street and that changes in political context or governance can trigger rapid reclassifications within the State Media Matrix.

Several countries announced reform processes in 2025 that could, in principle, improve their media landscapes. Bangladesh, Syria, and Nigeria all launched initiatives to overhaul their public media systems following regime changes. Yet these plans remain fragile and largely aspirational. In places where institutions have been severely weakened, such as Syria, the prospect of building truly independent public media will be an especially arduous and uncertain task. Even in Bangladesh and Nigeria, where reforms appear more structured, entrenched political interests and unstable governance make the implementation of editorial safeguards far from guaranteed. These developments are important to note, but they should be treated with caution rather than celebrated as clear gains.

In Asia, the most notable improvements came from Indonesia, where both Television of the Republic of Indonesia (TVRI) and Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI) were upgraded from State Controlled (SC) status to Independent State Funded and Managed (ISFM). These changes were driven by the appointment of seasoned media professionals to their boards and by ambitious digital transformation programmes that helped counter disinformation during the 2024 general election. In South Korea, the Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) regained its Independent Public Media (IP) ranking after major reforms to broadcasting laws strengthened its editorial safeguards. Similarly, Japan's NHK improved its position, moving from the Captured Public (CaPu) category to Independent State Managed (ISM) status as part of a broader government commitment to strengthen independence in public broadcasting.

In Europe, the return of Donald Tusk's liberal government in Poland in late 2023 translated into real improvements in 2025. Three of the country's major outlets—Polish Television (TVP), Polish Radio, and the Polish Press Agency (PAP)—were upgraded, with TVP and Polish Radio now classified as ISFM, and PAP as ISM. This represents a remarkable turnaround after years of political capture under the previous administration. Yet despite these formal upgrades, the Polish case remains highly complex: the government faces the monumental task of rebuilding institutions that were hollowed out during years of politicisation, and genuine independence will not be easy to achieve. The case of Poland highlights both the possibility of recovery and the enormous structural challenges that follow capture.

Elsewhere in Europe, however, setbacks dominated. Spain witnessed the loss of independence in multiple regional broadcasters. Ens Públic de Radiotelevisió de les Illes Balears (EPRTVIB) and Corporació Audiovisual de la Comunitat Valenciana (CACVSA) were downgraded to SC, joining Catalonia's CCMA, Radio Televisión Canaria (RTVC), and Corporación Aragonesa de Radio y Televisión (CARTV), all of which lost their independence in 2024. Although Radio Televisión Ceuta (RTVCE) regained ISFM status, the overall picture is of serious deterioration in Spain's regional public media sector. Similarly, Montenegro's RTCG fell back into SC, erasing the limited progress achieved in 2023, while Greece's AMNA slid from ISFM to SC. These developments underscore the fragility of editorial autonomy even within EU member and candidate states.

Sub-Saharan Africa saw further expansion of captured private conglomerates, particularly in Tanzania, where Sahara Media Group, Uhuru Media Group, IPP Media, and Azam Media Ltd all shifted into the CaPr category, illustrating the growing reliance of private outlets on state patronage and concessions. In Burkina Faso, the leading public media house Sidwaya was downgraded to SC, underlining the country's broader democratic backsliding following the coup that happened in 2023

In Eurasia, Moldova's Teleradio-Moldova (TRM) was reclassified from ISFM to ISF, indicating a cautious improvement as its governance board began implementing reforms designed to reduce direct government influence. But Central Asia showed further evidence of capture: Kazakhstan's Qazcontent was downgraded to SC, while in Uzbekistan new outlets such as Mening Yurtim (MY5) and Daryo.uz were classified as CaPu, and Radio Grand as CaPr.

In Latin America, the overall picture remained mixed. The Dominican Republic's CERTV gained independence in 2024, but Mexico's Canal 22 slid into SC in 2025. In El Salvador, the consolidation of power under President Bukele extended to the private sector, with both Grupo Samix and Grupo Orbita now classified as CaPu, confirming the entanglement of private owners with government patronage.

Taken together, these changes show that the global picture of the public media landscape remains one of gradual deterioration, but also with pockets of resistance and even recovery. The reinstatement of independence in Indonesia, South Korea, Japan, and Poland illustrates that reforms are possible, especially when backed by political change and professionalised governance. At the same time, the setbacks in Spain, Montenegro, Greece, and, especially, in the United States underline how fragile independence remains, and how difficult it will be to rebuild trust and autonomy in systems that have been deeply damaged.

Overview of changes in the State Media Matrix Typology between 2024 and 2025

			2022	2023	Change in 2024	Change in 2025
Europe						
Eastern Europe	Poland	Polska Press	CaPu	CaPu	ISM	
Eastern Europe	Poland	Polish Television (TVP)	SC	SC	SC	ISFM
Eastern Europe	Poland	Polish Radio	SC	SC	SC	ISFM
Eastern Europe	Poland	Polish Press Agency (PAP)	CaPu	CaPu	CaPu	ISM
Eastern Europe	Slovakia	Radio and Television of Slovakia (RTVS)	CaPu	CaPu	SC	
Southern Europe	Greece	Athens-Macedonian News Agency (AMNA)	ISFM	ISFM	SC	
Southern Europe	Montenegro	Radio and Television of Montenegro (RTCG)	SC	ISFM	ISFM	SC
Southern Europe	Spain	Ens Públic de Radiotelevisió de les Illes Balears (EPRTVIB)	ISFM	ISFM	ISFM	SC
Southern Europe	Spain	Corporació Audiovisual de la Comunitat Valenciana (CACVSA)	ISFM	ISFM	ISFM	SC
Southern Europe	Spain	Corporació Catalana de Mitjans Audiovisuals (CCMA)	ISFM	ISFM	SC	
Southern Europe	Spain	Radio Televisión Canaria (RTVC)	ISFM	ISFM	SC	
Southern Europe	Spain	Corporación Aragonesa de Radio y Televisión (CARTV)	ISFM	ISFM	SC	
Southern Europe	Spain	Radio Televisión Ceuta (RTVCE)	ISFM	ISFM	SC	ISFM
Asia						
Southeast Asia	Indonesia	Antara	ISM	ISM	CaPu	
Southeast Asia	Indonesia	Television of the Republic of Indonesia (TVRI)	SC	SC	SC	ISFM
Southeast Asia	Indonesia	Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI)	SC	SC	SC	ISFM
Southeast Asia	Thailand	Thai Public Broadcasting Service	IP	IP	CaPu	
Southeast Asia	Vietnam	Tuoi Tre	ISFM	ISFM	SC	
East Asia	China	People's Daily	SC	SC	CaPu	
East Asia	Japan	Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK)	CaPu	CaPu	CaPu	ISM
East Asia	South Korea	Korean Broadcasting System (KBS)	IP	IP	CaPu	IP
Latin America and the Caribbean						
Caribbean	Dominican Republic	Corporación Estatal de Radio y Televisión (CERTV)	SC	SC	ISFM	
Central America	Mexico	Television Metropolitana - Canal 22	ISFM	ISFM	SC	
Central America	El Salvador	Grupo Samix				CaPu
Central America	El Salvador	Grupo Orbita				CaPu
MENA						
Western Asia	Iran	Iranian Students News Agency (ISNA)	ISF	ISF	ISF	SC
Sub-Saharan Africa						
Eastern Africa	Tanzania	Sahara Media Group				CaPr
Eastern Africa	Tanzania	Uhuru Media Group				CaPr
Eastern Africa	Tanzania	IPP Media				CaPr
Eastern Africa	Tanzania	Azam Media Ltd				CaPr
Middle Africa	Gabon	Société de presse et d'édition du Gabon (SONAPRESSE)				SC
Middle Africa	Gabon	Gabon 24				SC
Western Africa	Burkina Faso	Sidwaya	ISFM	ISFM	ISFM	SC
Eurasia						
Eastern Europe	Russia	African Initiative				SC
Eastern Europe	Moldova	Teleradio-Moldova (TRM)	ISFM	ISFM	ISFM	ISF
Central Asia	Kazakhstan	Qazcontent				SC
Central Asia	Uzbekistan	Mening Yurtim (MY5)				CaPu
Central Asia	Uzbekistan	Radio Grand				CaPr
Central Asia	Uzbekistan	Daryo.uz				CaPu

Source: Media and Journalism Research Center • Created with Datawrapper

Several broader dynamics defined the global state and public media landscape in 2025, cutting across regions and typologies.

First, governments seem to be tightening their grip on outlets that report on sensitive geopolitical conflicts. Coverage of the war in Gaza has become the clearest flashpoint. In Israel, both IPBC and Galatz faced sustained political pressure from Prime Minister Netanyahu's administration over their handling of the conflict. Although they have so far retained their classification as independent, their editorial space is under constant threat. These examples confirm a broader trend: whenever public broadcasters provide narratives that deviate from official state lines on international crises, they become immediate targets for political reprisal.

Second, budget cuts and financial restructuring are increasingly wielded as political tools. Governments present these steps as efficiency drives or fiscal prudence, but the effects are clear: weakened capacity, shrinking editorial independence, and greater susceptibility to executive influence. Taiwan's Yuan Parliament slashed PTS's budget by 25 percent; Nepal merged its public broadcasters into a new entity as a cost-saving measure; and the Israeli Knesset gave itself powers to audit IPBC's finances.

The most dramatic case is the United States, where developments went far beyond technical funding debates. Under President Donald Trump's second administration, the suspension of budgets for USAGM and PBS was not just an economic measure but part of a wider ideological offensive against public and independent media. The closures and layoffs that followed were designed to neutralize outlets seen as obstacles to the White House's agenda, leaving most of USAGM's landmark subsidiaries dormant and PBS effectively shuttered. At the same time, the administration intensified its attacks on private media companies and regulators, framing independent journalism as a partisan enemy rather than a democratic institution. This dual assault—disabling public service broadcasters while delegitimizing independent private outlets and oversight bodies—illustrates how quickly even long-established democracies can slide into an environment of systemic hostility to media independence.

Third, public media continue to be treated as political bargaining chips, reshaped after elections or regime changes. Where transitions led to reformist governments, as in Syria, Bangladesh, and Poland, new leaders moved to restructure governance boards and appoint professionals with journalistic credibility. Syria's interim administration under President Ahmad al-Sharaa has promised sweeping structural reforms, including placing a respected media figure in charge of the Ministry of Information. Bangladesh's caretaker government has set out plans to merge BTV, Bangladesh Betar, and BSS into a single National Broadcasting Corporation that would have its editorial independence guaranteed. Poland's new leadership worked on cutting the political pressures on TVP, Polish Radio, and PAP following the end of the Law and Justice (PiS) party rule. Yet, in all three cases, entrenched patronage networks and politicized legacies mean that independence will be extremely difficult to entrench. Where political change moved in the opposite direction, the results were immediate and damaging: El Salvador's President Bukele cemented control over both public and private broadcasters, while the Trump administration's direct interventions effectively collapsed U.S. public media governance.

The lesson from 2025 is that public media remain extraordinarily vulnerable to the direction of electoral politics, whether reformist or authoritarian.

Fourth, China's influence continues to expand into a structural feature of global media. In Asia, six major ASEAN countries—Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, and Singapore—deepened partnerships with Xinhua and other Chinese state media, producing joint news content, training journalists in China, and rebroadcasting Beijing's narratives domestically.

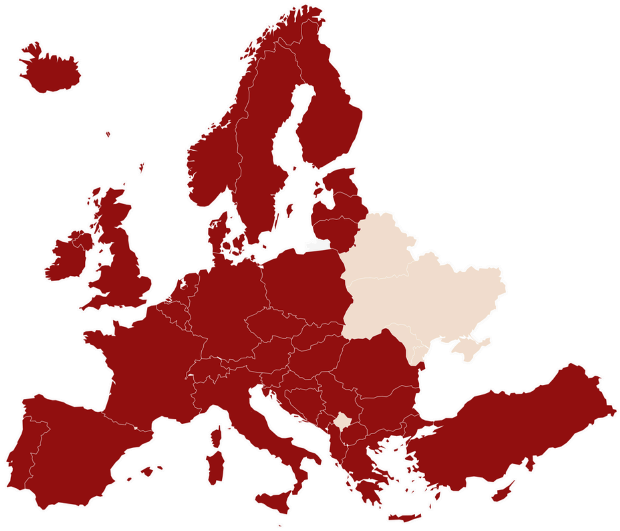
Across Sub-Saharan Africa, media outlets opened Mandarin-language programmes, often with direct support from Chinese media companies. In Cambodia and Laos, governments actively relied on Chinese funding to prop up local state media operations, effectively outsourcing financial sustainability to Beijing. This pattern is striking: where local governments cut funding or impose financial constraints, Chinese partnerships increasingly fill the gap, entrenching foreign influence in editorial agendas and reducing the scope for independent reporting.

Other dynamics reinforced these trends. Europe remains home to the world's largest cluster of independent outlets, yet the state-controlled model has consolidated as the single most common category, driven in the last year by regional broadcaster capture in Spain and political pressure in Slovakia and Montenegro. In Sub-Saharan Africa and Eurasia, the dominance of the state controlled and captured models remained overwhelming, with television and radio still the most effective control vectors. In MENA, the tiny number of independent outlets are under mounting siege, confirming the region's reputation as one of the most repressive media environments worldwide.

Taken together, the 2025 data reveal a world where independence is chipped away not only by direct censorship or propaganda, but by financial manipulation, geopolitical confrontation, electoral politics, and foreign partnerships. Where reforms emerged, as in Indonesia, South Korea, Japan, and Poland, they remain fragile, contested, and easily reversible. The long-term trajectory continues to point towards attritional decline: independence is never secured once and for all, but must be defended against a widening array of pressures.

Regional Overviews

Europe



Europe continues to lead globally in terms of editorial independence of its public media, but the trend of gradual decline has persisted in 2025. According to our latest mapping, of the 116 outlets identified in Europe, 54 (46%) fall under one of the four categories of independent state and public media. This represents a marginal decrease compared to 2024, when 56 of 119 outlets (47%) were assessed as independent, yet it continues the downward trajectory from 49% in 2023 and 50% in 2022.

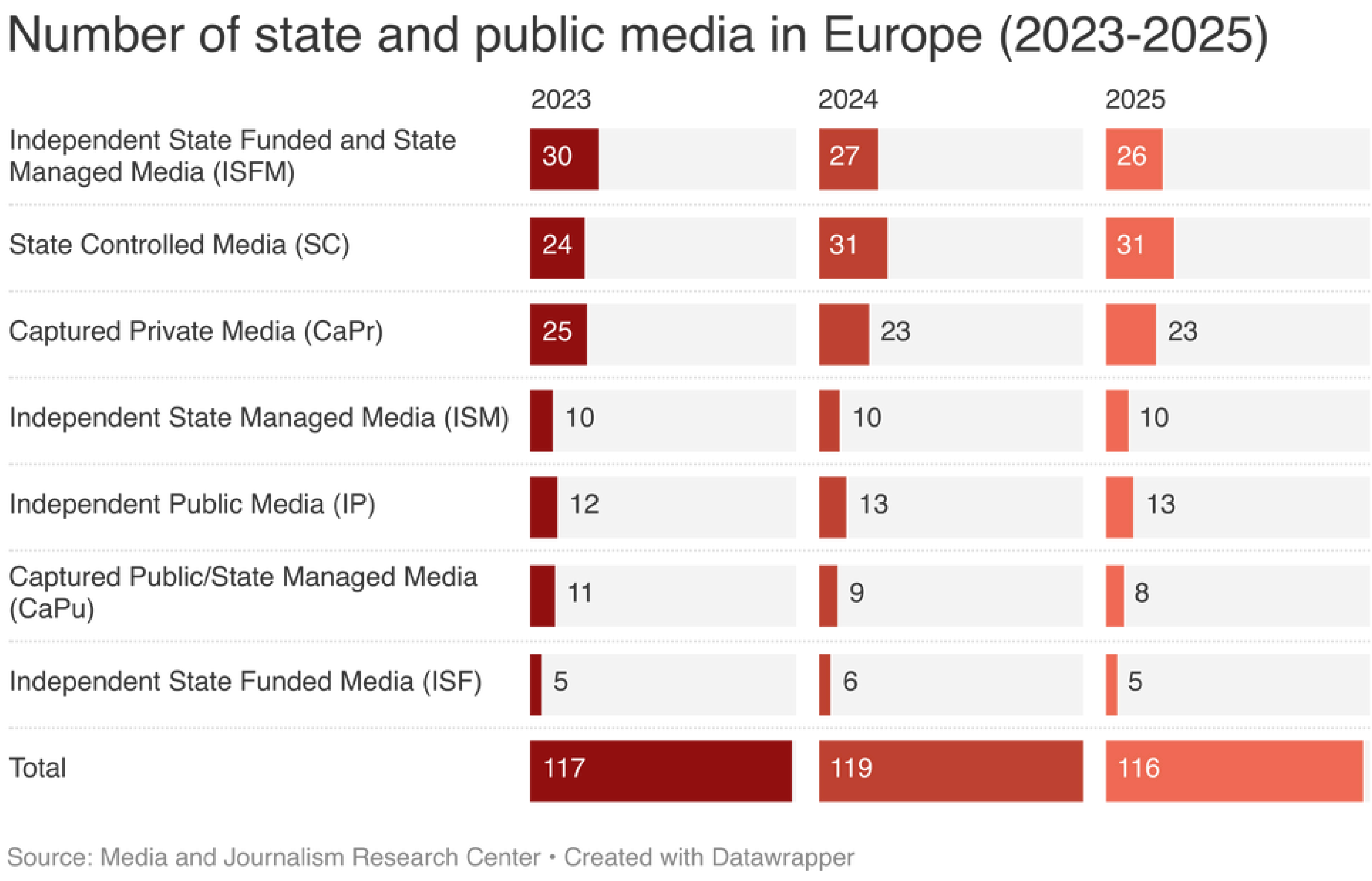
The distribution of models reveals important shifts in the past year. The State-Controlled (SC) model consolidated its position as the most widespread form of state media governance in Europe, with 31 outlets (27% of the total). This represents the second consecutive year that SC media outnumber all other models, a development first observed in 2024 when they overtook the Independent State Funded and State Managed (ISFM) category.

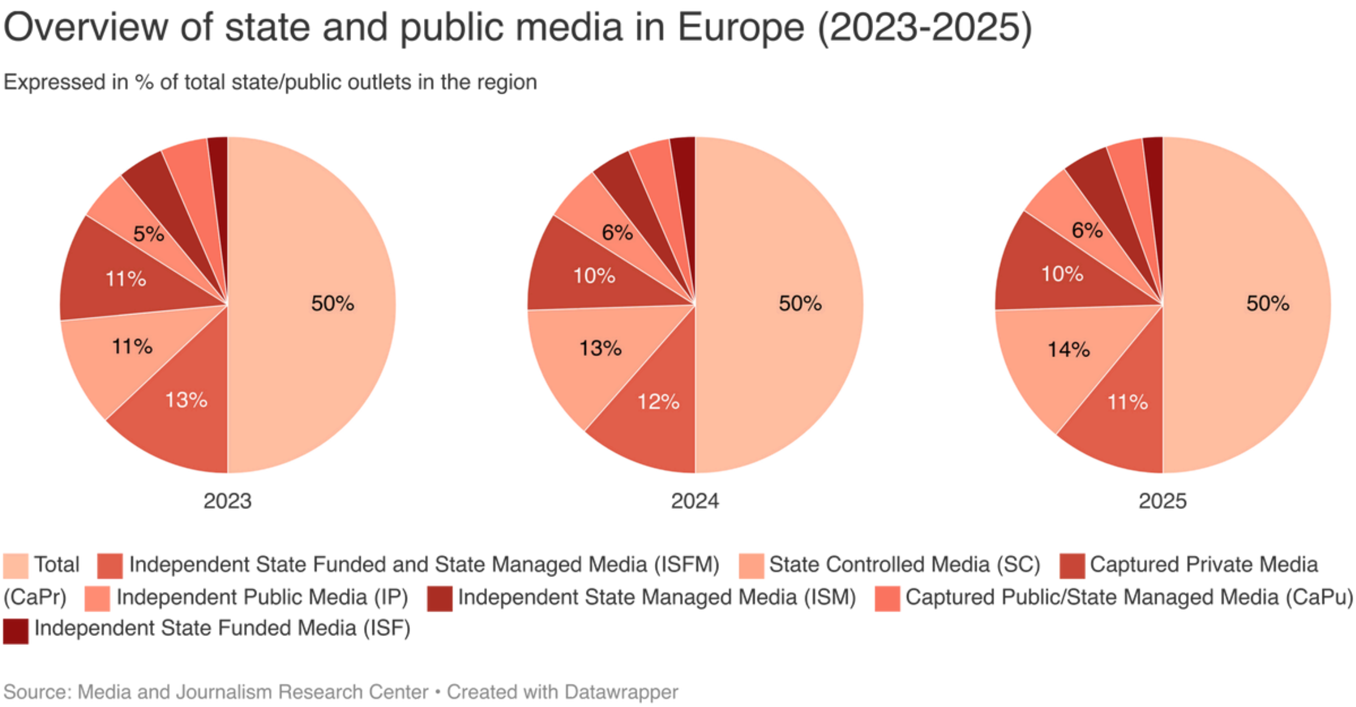
By contrast, the ISFM model, long considered the dominant type of independent public service systems in Europe, declined further to 26 outlets (22%), down from 27 in 2024 and 30 in 2023. Similarly, the Captured Public/State Managed (CaPu) category contracted to just 8 outlets (7%), compared with 9 in 2024 and 11 in 2023, suggesting a small but notable reduction in the number of public media outlets under direct political capture.

The Captured Private (CaPr) category remained stable at 23 outlets (20%), following a drop from 25 in 2023, underlining the persistence of politically influenced private media across the continent. At the same time, the Independent State Managed (ISM) model held steady at 10 outlets (9%), maintaining a small but stable segment of institutions with editorial independence under direct state management.

On a more positive note, Europe continues to be the global leader in Independent Public Media (IP), with 13 corporations (11%) operating across the region. Although the figure has not grown since 2024, it demonstrates that Europe remains the only region with a significant and enduring cluster of genuinely independent public service corporations. The Independent State Funded (ISF) category, however, shrank back to 5 outlets (4%) after a small rise in 2024.

Overall, the 2025 data confirm that Europe's public media landscape is characterized by a slow erosion of independence, primarily driven by the expansion of state-controlled outlets and the continued weakening of state-funded but independent entities. Yet, the region remains unmatched globally for its concentration of independent public media institutions, which serve as a cornerstone for democratic resilience.





In 2025, editorial independence in Europe's public media has continued to deteriorate, with several outlets downgraded in our typology. A notable case is Radio and Television of Montenegro (RTCG), which has now been classified as State Controlled (SC) following a series of government interventions that dismantled the broadcaster's independence safeguards and undermined its role as a pluralistic media platform. Similarly, in Spain, Corporació Audiovisual de la Comunitat Valenciana (CACVSA), the public broadcaster in Valencia, and Ens Públic de Radiotelevisió de les Illes Balears (EPRTVIB), the broadcaster in the Balearic Islands, were also downgraded to SC after political authorities significantly tightened their control over editorial operations. These cases illustrate how fragile the institutional safeguards of public media remain in Europe, particularly in contexts where political polarization is acute and legal protections are weak or easily dismantled.

The situation in Spain's regional public media has thus worsened dramatically. Out of the 15 regional broadcasters mapped in 2025, eight are now classified as State Controlled, compared to just one in 2022. This marks a rapid and concerning shift towards political instrumentalization of public broadcasters by regional governments. Much of this state control has been implemented by the conservative Partido Popular (PP) administrations, which have expanded their influence over regional broadcasters in communities where they govern. The tightening of editorial oversight by PP-led governments has further politicized regional public media, leaving them more vulnerable to partisan agendas and reducing their capacity to operate as independent institutions. This erosion not only undermines public trust in regional media but also contributes to the broader fragmentation of Spain's media ecosystem, which has become more vulnerable to politicization than at any point in the past decade.

In Central Europe, Czech Television (ČT) has faced sustained political attacks in recent years, particularly from parties critical of its independent editorial stance. Although ČT has so far managed to resist direct government control and therefore has not been downgraded in our typology, the persistence of these attempts to undermine its governance and independence remains worrisome. The broadcaster's ability to stave off capture illustrates the resilience of some European public media systems, but it also highlights the fragility of independence in environments where political elites increasingly view public service journalism as a target rather than a democratic asset.

By contrast, in Slovakia, the situation has deteriorated markedly since the return to power of Robert Fico's Smer party. The public broadcaster, restructured and rebranded as STVR in 2024, increasingly functions as a state propaganda channel, amplifying government narratives. As a result, STVR was already downgraded to State Controlled (SC) in 2024, and its trajectory in 2025 confirms the persistence of this captured status. The case of Slovakia underscores how quickly public media institutions can be dismantled when political leaders move decisively to replace editorial independence with partisan control.

On the bright side, Poland has moved in the opposite direction. Following the 2023 elections and the subsequent reform agenda of the new government, public media outlets TVP and Polish Radio have been upgraded in our typology. The government has also initiated plans to sell Polska Press to relieve it from state ownership, aiming to restore pluralism in the publishing sector. While these reforms remain contested and face institutional resistance, they represent one of the most ambitious efforts in Europe to roll back media capture and rebuild independent public service broadcasting. However, the efforts to depoliticize the media remain very difficult after years of capture by the former PiS regime, which left deep-rooted structures and loyalists within the media system that continue to obstruct reform.

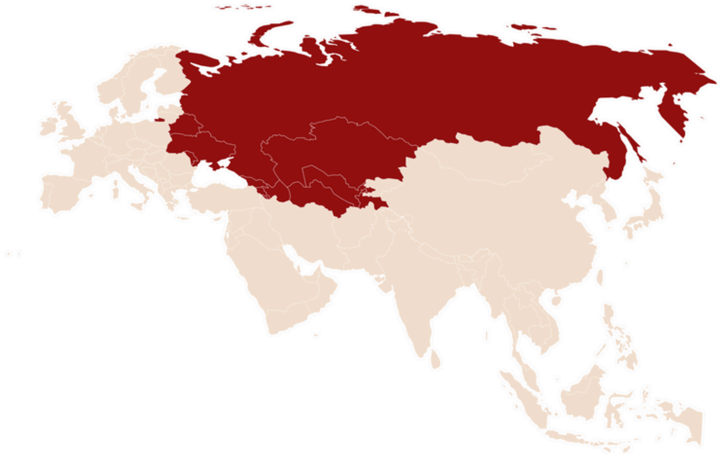
One trend that intensified across Europe is related to changes to funding models and mounting cost pressures that are reshaping public media—and, in several cases, sharpening political leverage over them. In Austria, ORF has moved through a major financing transition (from the device-based fee to a universal household contribution), but the shift has not ended the pressure: political debates around fee levels, exemptions, and efficiency mandates continue to squeeze room for investment in journalism and digital transformation, keeping ORF in a defensive posture. In Finland, Yle's tax-based funding remains comparatively stable, yet real-terms budgets are tight as inflation, wage settlements, and platform costs outpace indexation, prompting savings programs and commissioning cuts that risk narrowing output. The picture is further darkened by the closure of Liechtenstein's public broadcaster, Liechtensteinische Rundfunk (LRF), removing public service broadcasting from the country altogether.

In France, the government has revived plans to merge the main public media—including France Télévisions—into a single holding as a route to rationalize governance and cut costs. While advocates frame the merger as a digital-era modernization, unions and editorial staff warn that consolidation without ring-fenced, predictable funding could erode remit diversity and editorial autonomy.

Finally, the UK is entering the most consequential financing debate in decades: the BBC's Charter renewal process (toward 2027) is now formally under way, with broad political consensus that the current license-fee model will be reworked. The direction is still open—ranging from a reformed license fee or household levy to forms of general taxation—but most scenarios point to a material change in the BBC's funding model, with long-term implications for universality, scale, and independence.

Taken together, Europe's trajectory is negative but the slide isn't inevitable. Yet, the spread of state controlled models and tightening budgets show how fast gains can unravel. The decisive tests for 2026 will be whether governments lock in independent governance and predictable, insulated funding in line with the European Media Freedom Act provisions to help public media fulfil their mission to serve the public, not the party in power.

Eurasia



The Eurasian region presents significant challenges for state-controlled media. Traditional outlets such as television and radio remain dominant, enjoying extensive reach and large audiences. Their popularity makes them valuable instruments for governments, which leverage them to advance political agendas.

The media landscape in Eurasia continues to tighten under heavy state influence, with the share of government-dominated outlets rising by one percentage point to 98% of the 69 surveyed in 2025, despite the addition of five new outlets. This trend underscores the persistence of an autocratic environment and the erosion of progressive media.

Although the share of state-controlled (SC) organizations (media directly controlled by the government) has fallen slightly (from 83% to 79%) the number of captured private and public outlets (indirectly controlled by the government) has reached a record high of 13, representing a five-point increase in their overall share and effectively offsetting the decline in SC-classified media.

Independent public media remain extremely limited, represented only by two outlets, in Moldova and Ukraine: Teleradio-Moldova (TRM) and the Public Broadcasting Company of Ukraine (Suspilne). TRM was recently reclassified from Independent State-Funded/State-Managed Media (ISFM) to Independent State-Funded Media (ISF) because leadership appointments are increasingly made through independent mechanisms rather than state-influenced appointments. Still, Eurasia records the world's second-lowest concentration of independent public media after Sub-Saharan Africa. This overwhelming government dominance restricts access to unbiased and neutral information sources, particularly foreign ones, for much of the region's population.

The five newly identified media outlets added to the database, three in Uzbekistan, one in Kazakhstan, and one in Russia, share a common characteristic of subordination to government oversight.

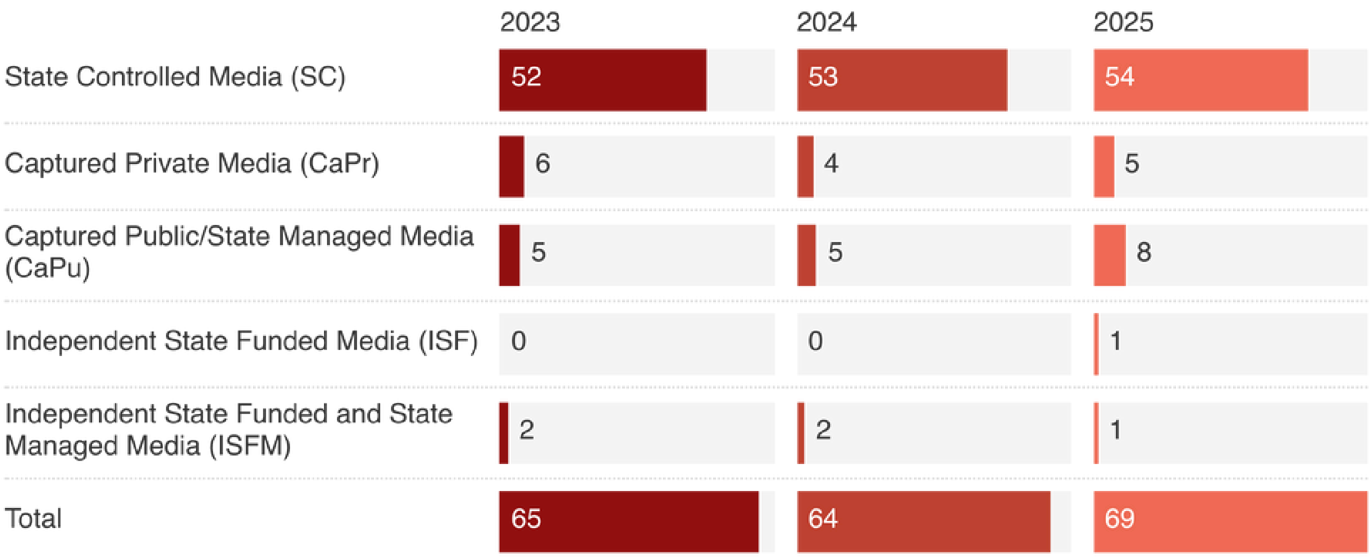
Kazakhstan's Qazcontent is a typical example of state-controlled media, with a board appointed by government officials and funding drawn almost entirely from state coffers. Editorially, it serves as a vehicle for state propaganda, reinforcing national values and disseminating official policies.

The other four outlets, Russia's African Initiative and the three Uzbek outlets Mening Yurtim (MY5), Daryo.uz, and Radio Grand, are classified as captured media (either Captured Public (CaPu) or Captured Private (CaPr) in our typology).

Launched in 2023, African Initiative is another Russian government-controlled outlet created to promote propaganda abroad. While officially presented as a project to strengthen cultural ties between Russia and African audiences, including younger viewers, its activities align to a large extent with Moscow's broader information strategy.

The Uzbek outlets, by contrast, are inward-looking and focused on domestic audiences. All are subject to government influence through editorial directives and structural leadership. MY5 and Daryo.uz are operated by state-owned corporations and target younger audiences with entertainment and educational programming, with Daryo.uz maintaining a particularly strong digital presence. Radio Grand, although formally registered as a private entity, retains links to the state through partial government ownership. Primarily a music and information broadcaster, it must, like all radio stations in Uzbekistan, strictly follow the guidelines issued by Uzkomnazorat, the country's de facto media regulator, when covering political and social issues.

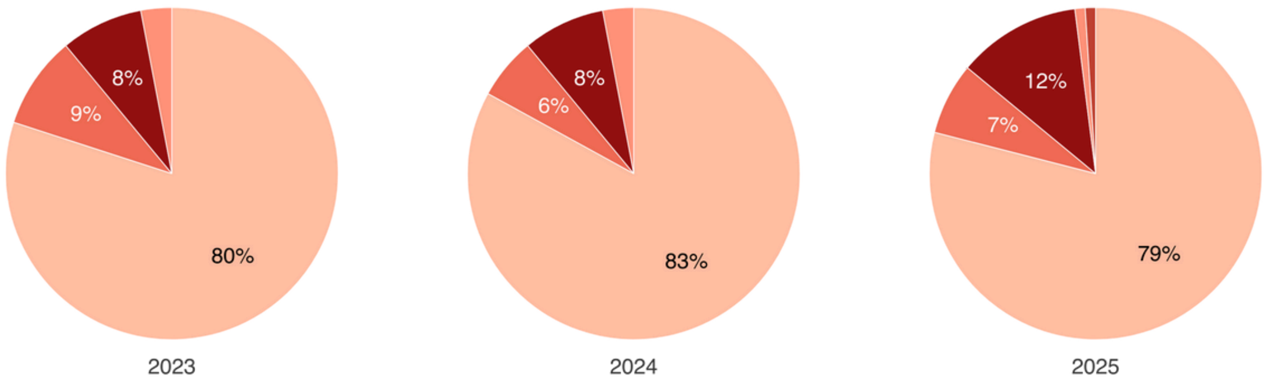
Number of state and public media in Eurasia (2023-2025)



Source: Media and Journalism Research Center • Created with Datawrapper

Overview of state and public media in Eurasia (2023-2025)

Expressed in % of total state/public outlets in the region



State Controlled Media (SC) Captured Private Media (CaPr) Captured Public/State Managed Media (CaPu) Independent State Funded and State Managed Media (ISFM) Independent State Funded Media (ISF)

Source: Media and Journalism Research Center • Created with Datawrapper

Media outlets across much of Eurasia have traditionally fallen within Moscow's sphere of influence. Since the onset of Russia's war in Ukraine, however, the picture has become more fragmented. In Belarus, for instance, media remain fully synchronized with Russian propaganda, while countries such as Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine have stepped up their anti-Russia strategies by introducing bans or restrictions on Russian television channels and news content. By contrast, media systems in Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan present a more mixed picture: although domestic governments exercise strong control over local outlets, Russian narratives continue to circulate widely, particularly through cable, satellite, and online platforms. Unlike Moldova or Ukraine, however, Central Asian outlets remain heavily government-controlled, which reinforces the influence of state-driven agendas.

The broader trend of de-globalization—exacerbated by the United States' retreat from international engagement under the Trump administration, particularly through cuts to funding for independent media organizations worldwide—has created further space for non-Western powers, including Russia, to shape global discourse. In the media sphere, this shift is visible both in the operation of an expanding network of Russian-backed outlets targeting international audiences (the launch of the African Initiative being the most recent example) and in the strengthening of strategic ties with other major powers, illustrated by the cooperation agreement between Russia's state news agency TASS and China's Xinhua.

Overall, the Eurasian public media landscape is likely to remain deeply divided, particularly in the context of the war in Ukraine. Much will depend on the trajectory of the conflict and the outcomes of political contests across the region, which may tilt the balance either against or in favor of Moscow. What is certain is that Russian state propaganda continues to work tirelessly to influence political processes in Eurasian countries, with significant implications for how the media operate. In such a politically charged environment, media freedom can be expected to remain strictly limited and severely constrained for the foreseeable future, reinforced by the tight grip that states maintain over most of the region's media ecosystems.

Sub-Saharan Africa

In Sub-Saharan Africa, government dominance over the media landscape remains overwhelming, with 96% of the region's 137 media outlets either directly state-controlled or effectively captured by government entities. Although this represents a modest decrease of two percentage points from previous measurements, Sub-Saharan Africa still records the highest concentration of state-controlled (SC) outlets globally. In the SC category—where government influence extends across all three dimensions assessed by the State Media Monitor—the region stands as the most tightly controlled in the world.

This year's review expanded the dataset to include four additional outlets in Tanzania and two in Gabon. It also reclassified Sidwaya, a public media outlet in Burkina Faso, from "independent state-funded and state-managed/owned media" (ISFM) to "state-controlled" (SC). The downgrade followed the collapse of proposed legislation aimed at strengthening the outlet's governance, which would have afforded Sidwaya's journalists greater institutional protection. As a result, only two editorially independent outlets (categorized as ISFM) remain in the region—both in Côte d'Ivoire: the Société Nouvelle de Presse et d'Édition de Côte d'Ivoire (SNPECI), a state-owned publishing house, and the Agence Ivoirienne de Presse (AIP), the official news agency.

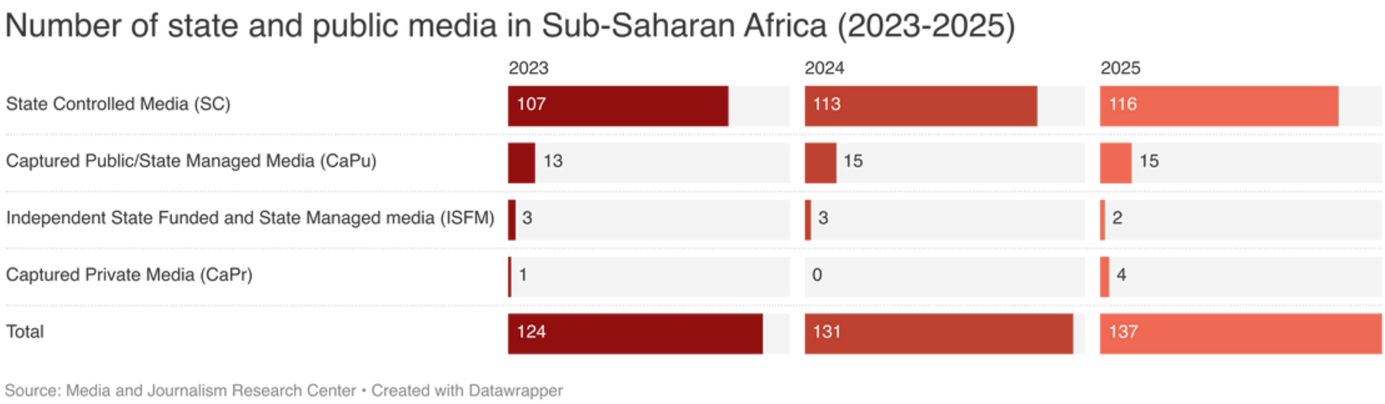
The 2025 findings thus mark yet another step in the steady erosion of state media independence across Sub-Saharan Africa. Beyond that, this year's findings identify a couple of trends that now shape the region more profoundly than ever.

One is the growing influence of Chinese media across Africa, which has been the subject of debate since President Xi Jinping's outreach to African leaders under the Belt and Road Initiative. New evidence has further shown the scale and sophistication of the Chinese presence. Researchers from the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) have traced financial flows from Chinese state media organizations, such as CGTN, Xinhua, and China Daily, directed towards African outlets.

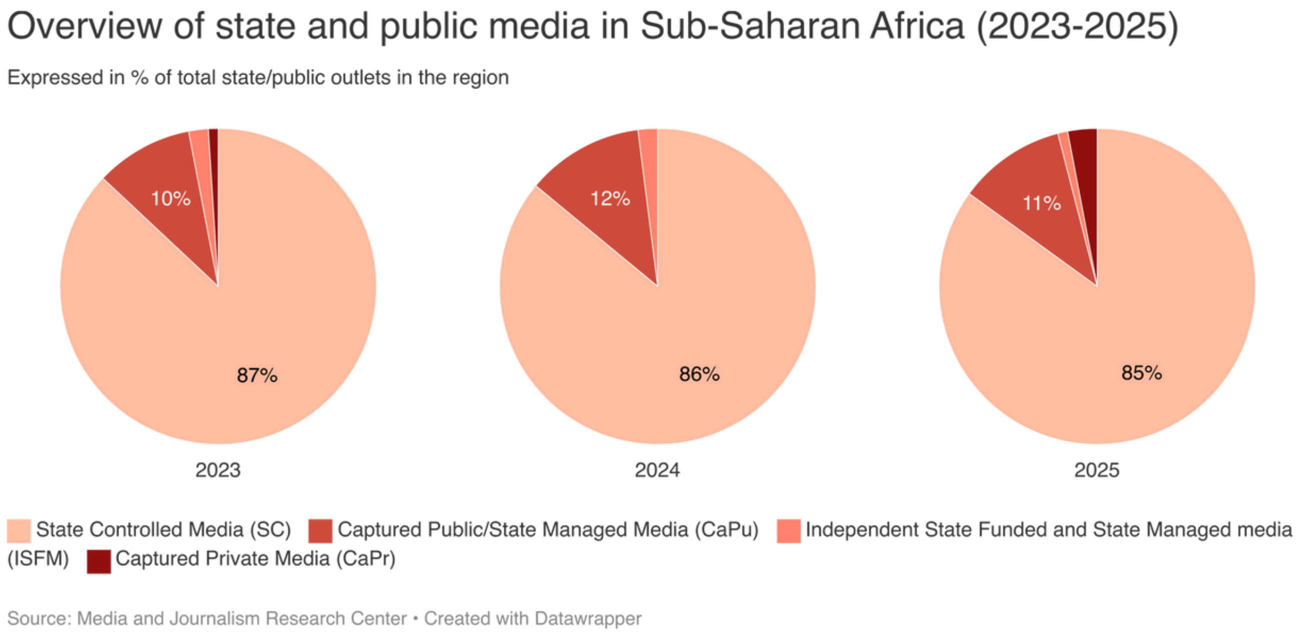
These funds have been used to both disseminate Chinese news content and produce locally tailored material, often in collaboration with African media companies.[1] The Africa Center for Strategic Studies has likewise documented[2] the rise of the Chinese television network StarTimes, now Africa's second-largest digital TV provider after South Africa's DSTV, with satellite installations in over 10,000 homes across 20 countries. In parallel, under the 'Digital Silk Road' initiative, an increasing number of young African journalists and media executives are being trained in China, with costs covered by Chinese media conglomerates. While such initiatives are framed as partnerships, concerns persist that this expanding digital footprint serves Chinese strategic interests at the expense of African media independence and local development priorities. The State Media Monitor has also documented a growing number of cases in which African media outlets receive support from, or enter into cooperation agreements with, Chinese state-controlled media.

A second significant trend is the fragility of recent gains in African public media, where apparent improvements in editorial objectivity and financial stability often rest on precarious political foundations. In South Africa, for instance, the public service broadcaster SABC, which operates four television channels and 18 radio stations, reported a 95% reduction in operational debt in FY 2024/2025 and earned praise for balanced coverage during the 2024 general election. Yet, interviews with SABC journalists reveal that many editors and newsroom staff remain closely connected to African National Congress officials, with editorial decisions still subject to political influence and behind-the-scenes bargaining. Financially, much of SABC's recent revenue growth came from a one-off surge in advertising linked to the launch of its digital platform, SABC Plus OTT. Its primary statutory funding source, the television licence fee, continues to collapse, with fewer than 20% of households paying as of FY 2024/2025, underscoring sustained public distrust. A government proposal in October 2023 to replace the licence fee with a direct household levy was shelved ahead of the 2024 election.

In Nigeria, an overhaul of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA)'s executive board, bringing in locally experienced industry figures, has sparked cautious optimism over editorial reform. However, as the NTA chairman remains a presidential appointee, concerns over political influence persist. In March 2025, President Bola Tinubu appointed party officials to the role, prompting watchdogs and NGOs to warn that without an independent oversight commission, the NTA continues to serve primarily as a government mouthpiece.



[1] Cissé, D. (2025). How China is Reshaping Africás Information and Media Landscape. The China Institute School of Oriental and African Studies University of London. Retrieved on August 6, 2025, https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/china-institute/2025/07/30/how-china-is-reshaping-africas-information-and-media-landscape/.
[2] Nantulya, P. (2024).China's Strategy to Shape Africa's Media Space. Africa Center for Strategic Studies. Retrieved on August 6, 2025, https://africacenter.org/spotlight/china-strategy-africa-media-space/.

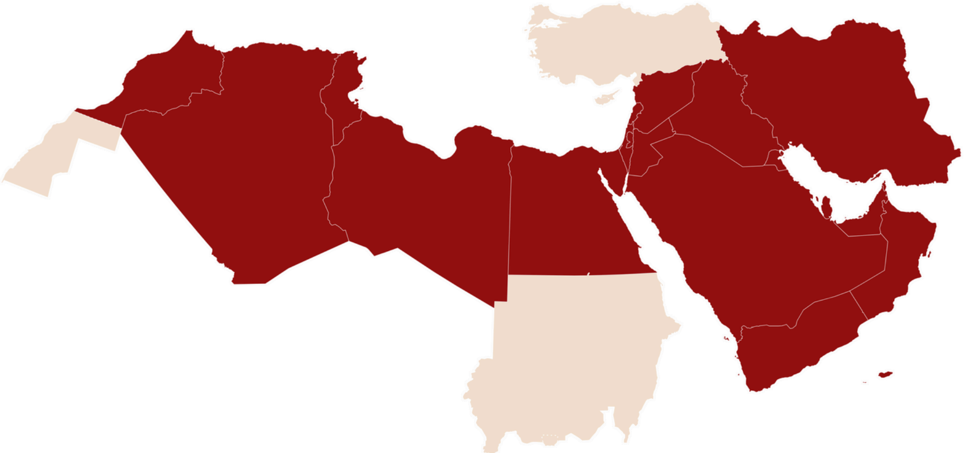


The six new entries in this year's State Media Monitor—Tanzania's Sahara Media Group, Uhuru Media Group, IPP Media, and Azam Media Ltd, along with Gabon's Société de presse et d'édition du Gabon (SONAPRESSE) and Gabon 24—are all either largely state-controlled or heavily influenced by government authorities in their editorial policies and news production. While the four Tanzanian outlets are, on paper, privately owned, in practice they maintain close ties to the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party. In some cases, these connections are explicit, such as Uhuru Media Group, which is directly owned by the party, while others are deeply intertwined with state enterprises and business conglomerates, functioning in effect as informal government propaganda arms.

In Gabon, SONAPRESSE and Gabon 24 serve as key state media outlets. SONAPRESSE is owned by the state and operates under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Communication, while Gabon 24 falls under the tight control of the president's office.

Overall, apparent gains in public media freedom in Sub-Saharan Africa, whether through structural reforms, increased funding, or more balanced coverage, should be viewed with caution. Political backroom dealings continue to erode public trust, and without robust legal safeguards such as transparent budgets, independent oversight bodies, and merit-based leadership appointments, these surface-level improvements are unlikely to translate soon into a genuinely free and independent public media environment.

Middle East and North Africa (MENA)



State and public media across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) remain firmly under government control. As of 2025, an overwhelming 97% of surveyed outlets lack editorial independence—marking a 1% increase from 2024. In total, 52 institutions, representing nearly two-thirds of all state and public media entities in the region, are classified as “State-Controlled” (SC) under the State Media Monitor typology.

Out of the 84 media institutions assessed in this year’s report, only three are considered to maintain editorial independence: the Israeli public broadcasters IPBC and Galatz, and Sky News Arabia, a joint venture between the UK-based Sky Group and the Abu Dhabi Media Investment Corporation (ADMIC), a firm linked to the Emirati royal family.

However, the situation appears to be deteriorating further. Two of the region’s few independent outlets—IPBC and Galatz—are facing mounting political pressure amid the escalating conflict in Gaza. The Israeli government, led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, has come under heightened international scrutiny, particularly from the UK, Canada, and several European states, which have signalled their support for recognising Palestinian statehood. In this context, Netanyahu’s administration has intensified its efforts to undermine the editorial independence of Israel’s public broadcasters.

In March 2024, the Knesset, the Israeli legislature, passed a new regulation empowering a government-appointed committee to scrutinize IPBC’s financial records and banning the organisation from producing films and documentaries. The move is widely seen as a means to coerce journalists into toeing the official line under threat of budget cuts. Similarly, officials have exerted pressure on Galatz, an IDF-run radio network, to adopt more government-friendly narratives in its coverage of the Gaza conflict. Nonetheless, both outlets have, thus far, held the line, demonstrating notable journalistic resilience. Their resistance has warranted their continued classification under the "Independent State-Funded and State-Managed" (ISFM) category in our typology.

In Iran, the last vestiges of editorial autonomy were effectively extinguished in 2025 when ISNA, the country's only remaining semi-independent outlet, was brought entirely under state control, largely in response to its extensive reporting on Gaza. This development marks the final consolidation of Iran's media environment under state dominance. The government's tightening grip is further evidenced by the 2025 national budget, which dramatically increased allocations for state propaganda and ideological messaging.

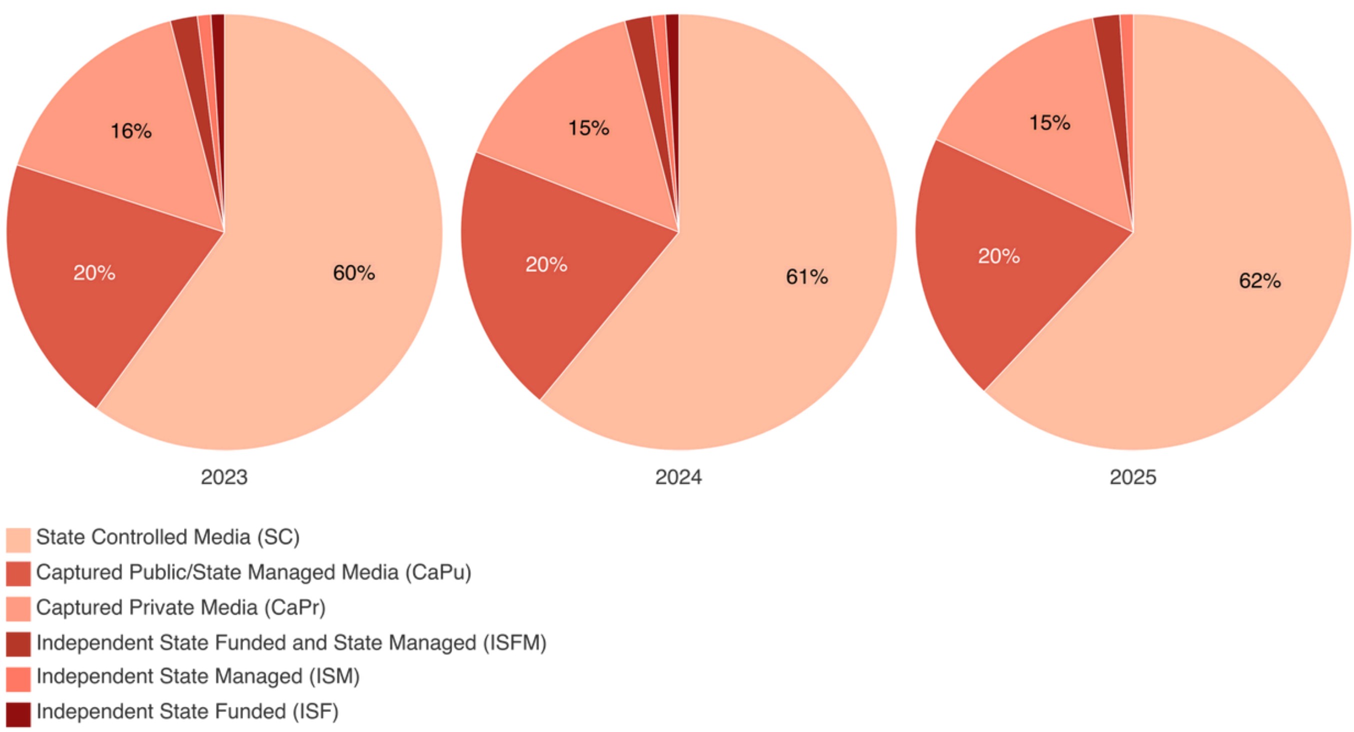
Number of state and public media in MENA region (2023-2025)

	2023	2024	2025
State Controlled Media (SC)	51	51	52
Captured Public/State Managed Media (CaPu)	17	17	17
Captured Private Media (CaPr)	14	12	12
Independent State Funded and State Managed (ISFM)	2	2	2
Independent State Managed (ISM)	1	1	1
Independent State Funded (ISF)	1	1	0
Total	86	84	84

Source: Media and Journalism Research Center • Created with Datawrapper

Overview of state and public media in the MENA region (2023-2025)

Expressed in % of total state/public outlets in the region



Source: Media and Journalism Research Center • Created with Datawrapper

Amid this bleak regional outlook, a few green shoots of reform have nonetheless emerged. The fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria in December 2024 has sparked cautious optimism about the future of Syrian public media. The newly installed administration, led by President Ahmed al-Sharaa, appointed Hamza al-Mustafa, a figure with a reputation for independence and experience in media management, as Minister of Information. Furthermore, investigations have been launched into historic financial mismanagement at the Syrian Arab Publishing and Distributing Company and the Al Wahda Foundation, two of Syria's major state-run media conglomerates. Whether these initial steps will translate into genuine liberalization of Syria's long-captive media sector remains to be seen.

In conclusion, the public media landscape in the MENA region remains largely bleak, with no substantive improvement, and, in many cases, further deterioration, observed over the past year. Tight state control, opaque governance, and punitive censorship continue to define the region's media ecology. Barring sweeping structural reforms, these trends are expected to persist in the immediate future.

Asia

The state and public media landscape in Asia has undergone dynamic changes in 2025. Although the sector remains heavily dominated by government influence, with over 70% of the 120 public media outlets surveyed in this report still classified as State-Controlled (SC), the overall number of SC outlets has dropped from 92 in 2024 to 86 in 2025. Four significant reclassifications occurred in Indonesia's public broadcaster TVRI and national radio network RRI, along with Japan's NHK and South Korea's KBS, which all have regained editorial independence from state authorities. This shift signals both a pushback by critical journalists and a groundswell of support from the general public.

At the same time, many Asian state-administered media organizations have seen their budgets severely cut, as governments scale back financial support and curtail official incentives for these organizations. Whether these measures reflect genuine efforts at sound fiscal governance or serve as a warning signal from governments unhappy with certain media narratives, the strain on budgets represents a troubling trend across the region.

Efficiency measures have also driven many domestic state-administered media institutions to seek additional funding from Chinese enterprises and to forge closer partnerships with Chinese state media. In particular, China's expanding media presence and growing influence in leading Southeast Asian media companies has not only provided a lifeline for struggling outlets but has also contributed to shaping a more favorable image of China among Southeast Asian audiences.

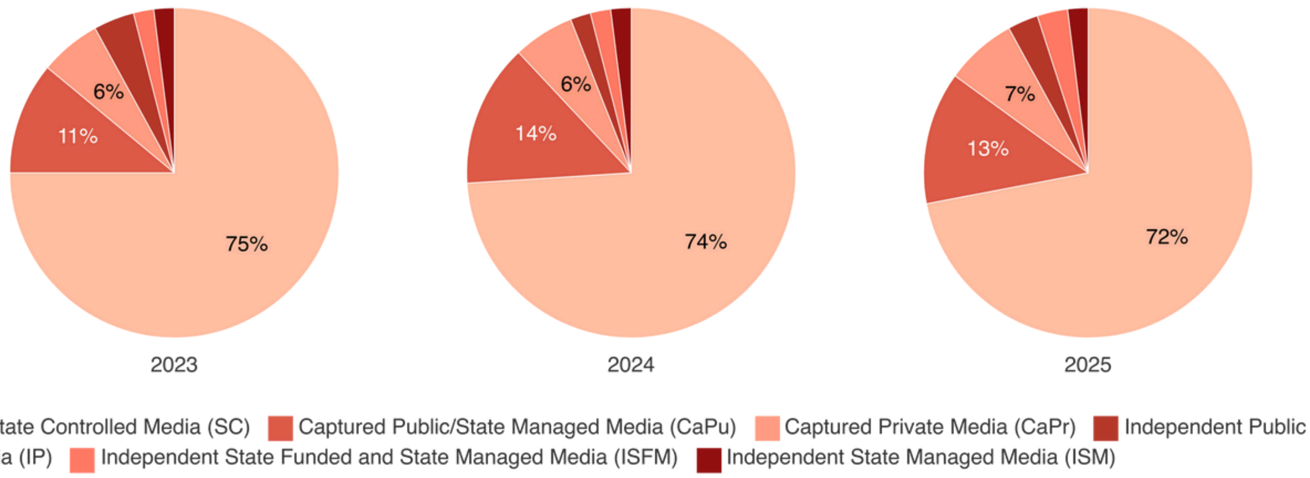
Number of state and public media in Asia (2023-2025)

	2023	2024	2025
State Controlled Media (SC)	93	92	86
Captured Public/State Managed Media (CaPu)	13	17	15
Captured Private Media (CaPr)	8	8	8
Independent Public Media (IP)	5	3	4
Independent State Funded and State Managed Media (ISFM)	3	2	4
Independent State Managed Media (ISM)	3	2	3
Total	125	124	120

Source: Media and Journalism Research Center • Created with Datawrapper

Overview of state and public media in Asia (2023-2025)

Expressed in % of total state/public outlets in the region



Source: Media and Journalism Research Center (MJRC) • Created with Datawrapper

Turning first to the encouraging developments, the progress achieved by Indonesia's TVRI and RRI owes much to the determination of their media professionals, who have pushed both outlets to take a more active role in airing local and national debates, often on politically sensitive and controversial issues, as well as broader social concerns. Despite the absence of an independent commission or an ombudsman-style body to handle public complaints and protect editorial autonomy, both TVRI and RRI are pursuing ambitious digital transformation strategies, emphasizing credibility and adaptability in today's era of information disruption.

The two outlets were also commended for their joint efforts to counter disinformation and hoax campaigns during the 2024 General Election. In parallel, the Indonesian parliament has proposed a bill to merge TVRI, RRI, and ANTARA, the national news agency, into a single media holding, in an effort to accelerate innovation and consolidate resources.

Japan's world-renowned national broadcaster, NHK, also operating a major English-language international television network, has managed to regain its editorial independence, with no documented cases of direct government intervention in its reporting uncovered since 2024. Like many other state-administered nationwide media companies in Asia, NHK remains highly vulnerable to political interference through board appointments and the pressures of self-censorship, particularly when covering major government scandals. Nevertheless, NHK has historically been regarded as a respected independent public broadcaster committed to providing balanced coverage of Japanese politics. Despite the positive developments in the past year, NHK's relationship with government officials will require close monitoring.

Similar to NHK, South Korea's KBS has long stood as a champion of independent public media in Asia throughout its nearly century-long existence. However, in 2024 the State Media Monitor downgraded KBS to the category of Captured State/Public Media (CaPu), citing significant government pressure on its financial autonomy and the cancellation of a major current affairs program under the politically appointed president, Park Min. The political resurgence of the Democratic Party and the electoral victory of its candidate, Lee Jae-myung, in the 2025 General Election reignited debates on KBS's governance and led to the introduction of a reform bill. Passed in August 2025, the amendment to the Broadcasting Act paves the way for greater public participation in selecting KBS leadership and limits political influence in determining the composition of its new Board of Governors. All of these developments resulted in KBS being reclassified in 2025 as Independent Public (IP), the highest category of independence within the typology applied in this project.

Further improvements may soon materialize in Bangladesh. Following the collapse of former President Sheikh Hasina's autocratic regime and her self-imposed exile to India, the interim government led by Muhammad Yunus established the Media Reform Commission in September 2024. The commission was given two primary mandates: to secure editorial autonomy for journalists at Bangladesh Television (BTV) and Bangladesh Betar, the country's flagship public service media outlets, and to review all media-related policies enacted over the past 15 years. In March 2025, the commission also proposed merging BTV, Bangladesh Betar, and BSS, the national news agency, into a unified entity called the National Broadcasting Corporation, overseen by a single regulatory board. At the same time, reforms have begun within the existing media organizations, with new leadership teams drawn from experienced journalists and media professionals, while the creation of an independent oversight body is currently under debate in parliament.

In summary, this past year has witnessed a wave of positive developments across Asia's state and public media. These shifts may suggest that government control over public media institutions is now facing heightened public scrutiny. At the same time, political interference in editorial independence has become more blatant, provoking widespread pushback against authoritarian leaders.

Nevertheless, a new and troubling trend has also emerged, with governments slashing financial contributions to state-administered media organizations. Officials often justify these measures as part of efficiency drives, introduced in response to global economic uncertainty and geopolitical tensions, including President Donald Trump's tariff agenda and the ongoing conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine. However, many media experts argue that such cuts are also intended to discourage journalists from pursuing coverage that is critical of ruling governments. Finally, such budget reductions may also reflect the pressures of a broader economic crisis, prompting governments to reassess the value of sustaining propaganda-driven media and, in turn, exposing a more pragmatic, yet instrumental, approach to the role of public media in consolidating political power.

In September 2024, the Nepalese government passed a bill to merge Nepal Television (NTV) and Radio Nepal into a new entity called Public Service Broadcasting Nepal (PSBN), which is described as an effort to "advance the communication industry as a knowledge-based industry" and to promote press freedom.[3] However, instead of granting PSBN full autonomy, the legislation placed it under the direct control of the Ministry of Communications. As part of the restructuring, early retirement packages have been offered to employees of both legacy institutions while the overall organizational framework of PSBN is still under review. The creation of PSBN has also been framed as an efficiency measure, intended to reduce spending from the national budget on media.

Elsewhere in South Asia, a similar proposal was introduced in Sri Lanka in February 2024 to merge the Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation (SLRC) and the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC) into a single media holding, aimed at addressing financial inefficiencies and reducing service overlap amid operational losses incurred since 2022. However, by June 2025 the government shelved the plan, citing structural incompatibilities between the two organizations, and instead opted to keep SLBC and SLRC separate while pursuing a more unified strategic roadmap. Critics contend that the short-lived merger proposal was less about efficiency and more about exerting pressure on journalists to align more closely with official narratives.

Continuing this wave of austerity-driven restructuring, the Vietnamese government decided to disband Vietnam Digital Television (VTC) and fold its remaining assets into Vietnam Television (VTV), now the country's sole national broadcaster. VTC had been recognized for offering more diverse programming, particularly in non-political areas such as environmental issues, sports, and niche reporting on rural livelihoods. However, with VTC now fully absorbed into VTV, which functions as the de facto propaganda arm of the Socialist Party, media activists have criticized the move as a narrowing of public discourse and a further intensification of state-driven propaganda.

The wave of austerity has also extended to some of Asia's most independent public media institutions. In March 2025, Taiwan's Yuan Parliament passed a budget-cutting amendment that targeted the country's public media. As a result, PTS, the flagship television network, saw its budget reduced by 25 percent, while TaiwanPlus, the international digital streaming service under the Taiwan Broadcasting System (TBS), faced a 50 percent cut. Media observers warn that such reductions not only threaten the quality and sustainability of Taiwan's domestic public broadcasting but also undermine Taiwan's ability to reach international audiences and counterbalance China's expanding media influence.

[3] RadioInfo Asia. (2023, May 19). Radio Nepal and Nepal Television to be merged. Retrieved from https://radioinfo.asia/news/radio-nepal-and-nepal-television-to-be-merged/

These efficiency measures, combined with intense financial pressures on operating costs and the persistent threat of budget cuts, have caused many Asian media organizations to lose editorial autonomy. Without a sustainable funding base, critical news reporting becomes increasingly untenable, creating a potential make-or-break moment for public interest journalism in the region. In response, some media firms have sought international partnerships to attract foreign investment. Yet, as in many other sectors, Asian media companies are increasingly turning to Chinese investors and influence as they expand their networks, a shift that raises serious concerns for their independence.

Vietnam, home to one of the largest Chinese diaspora communities, hosts numerous local media outlets that provide news and programming in Chinese, including Voice of Ho Chi Minh's People, Sai Gon Giai Phong, the Vietnam News Agency (VNA), and VTV. Most notably, in April 2025 VTV entered into a multi-disciplinary partnership with China Media Group (CMG) to collaborate on co-producing content focused on technology, artificial intelligence, infrastructure, and shared political and cultural milestones. The partnership is framed as a way to strengthen bilateral ties between the two countries and to promote people-to-people diplomacy.

Chinese influence has run deep in the Indochina Peninsula since the late 2010s, as demonstrated by the launch of Chinese-language news portals operated by the Lao Press in Foreign Languages on Chinese social media platforms WeChat and Weibo in 2019. Since 2018, the Chinese government has also been the primary benefactor of Lao National TV, providing equipment upgrades, technical assistance, and direct financial support that has accounted for as much as 40 percent of its annual budget.

Two other ASEAN[4] member states, which clashed in border skirmishes in July 2025, Thailand and Cambodia, are also among the prime recipients of Chinese funding in their public media sectors. Thailand signed an agreement with the Chinese government in 2019 to facilitate news-sharing initiatives between Xinhua News Agency and 12 Thai media outlets, as part of the so-called "ASEAN–China Year of Media Exchange."[5] Thailand's largest public media outlet, Thai PBS, faced backlash in 2023 when it allegedly removed an interview with Taiwan's foreign minister under pressure from Beijing.

On the other hand, Cambodian outlets Fresh News and Nice TV have both reportedly received funding from Chinese central and local government sources to sustain their operations. The explicit support of Fresh News's CEO, Lim Chea Vutha, for China is well known.[6] With its large online audience, Fresh News has not only become one of the most widely viewed news sources in the country, but it has also developed deep ties to Chinese propaganda, regularly republishing content produced by Xinhua and CGTN in both English and Khmer. Lim has also drawn frequent criticism for his lavish, Beijing-funded trips to China.[7] These cases underscore Cambodia's heavy dependence on Chinese assistance and highlight its vulnerability as an amplifier of Chinese propaganda.

[4] The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a regional intergovernmental organization founded in 1967 to promote political, economic, and security cooperation among its ten member states: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.
[5] Chia, J. (2020). Thai Media is Outsourcing Much of Its Coronavirus Coverage to Beijing and That's Just the Start. Thai Enquirer.Retrieved August 18, 2025, from https://www.thaienquirer.com/7301/thai-media-is-outsourcing-much-of-its-coronavirus-coverage-to-beijing-and-thats-just-the-start/
[6] Loomis, R. & Holz, H. (2020). China's Effort to Shape the Information Environment in Cambodia. Center for Naval Analyses. Retrieved on August 24, 2025, https://www.cna.org/reports/2020/09/IIM-2020-U-026221-Final.pdf
[7] AFP. (2018). Cambodia's Fresh News: is it journalism with Chinese characteristics?. South China Morning Post. Retrieved on August 24, 2025, at https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/east-asia/article/2149029/cambodias-fresh-news-it-journalism-chinese-characteristics?module=perpetual_scroll_0&pgtype=article

As Southeast Asia's largest economy and most populous nation, Indonesia has partnered with China so closely that it mirrors the level of Chinese influence seen among journalists in parts of Africa. Metro TV, Indonesia's leading television news network, has been broadcasting daily Mandarin-language news programs since 2000 to serve the country's sizable Chinese Indonesian community. The content was originally produced by local journalists and only later translated and presented in Mandarin. However, in 2019 Metro TV signed an agreement with China Media Group (CMG) to publish and republish Chinese-produced content, following in the footsteps of The Jakarta Post, an English-language newspaper that circulates content from China Daily, and Antara, Indonesia's official news agency, which entered into similar arrangements with China Global Television Network (CGTN) and Xinhua.

Freedom House has reported that many young Indonesian journalists have been sent to China for journalism training, organized trips, and educational programs.[8] Upon returning, a number of them echo Beijing's official narratives in a favorable light, including on sensitive issues such as human rights abuses in Xinjiang Province.

China's overarching influence in the Southeast Asian state media landscape has also extended into Singapore. Despite being a wealthy and relatively liberal nation, Singapore's largest media conglomerate, SPH Media Trust (SMT), entered into a partnership with Xinhua to deepen media collaboration and, in its own words, "to tell the China–Singapore development story." Such partnerships could further narrow critical coverage of China and embed state-driven bias within Singapore's media landscape.

The recent surge in Chinese media presence across Asia has not occurred in a vacuum. Rather, it reflects a broader trend in which more nations are being drawn into Beijing's orbit through multilateral frameworks such as the Belt and Road Initiative, the Digital Silk Road, and even BRICS. Since the majority of state-administered media organizations in Asia remain under government control, the closer Asian leaders move toward China's sphere of influence, the more normalized it may become to see Chinese-produced content flooding the region's information space.

In conclusion, Asia's state and public media landscape in 2025 is defined by a dual trajectory. On one hand, the reclassification of Indonesia's TVRI and RRI, Japan's NHK, and South Korea's KBS demonstrates that editorial independence can be reclaimed when journalists and citizens push back against political interference. On the other, budget cuts, efficiency drives, and the growing reliance on Chinese partnerships point to a countervailing trend that threatens to deepen state control and external influence. While reforms such as those underway in Bangladesh suggest possible openings for more independent public service media, austerity measures and China's expanding footprint across the region risk narrowing the space for pluralism and critical reporting. Taken together, these developments reveal a media environment in constant transition, where the struggle for independence is real but increasingly constrained by financial vulnerability and geopolitical pressure.

[8] Rakhmat, M. Z. (2022). Beijing's Global Media Influence 2022: Indonesia. Freedom House. Retrieved August 19, 2025, fromhttps://freedomhouse.org/country/indonesia/beijings-global-media-influence/202

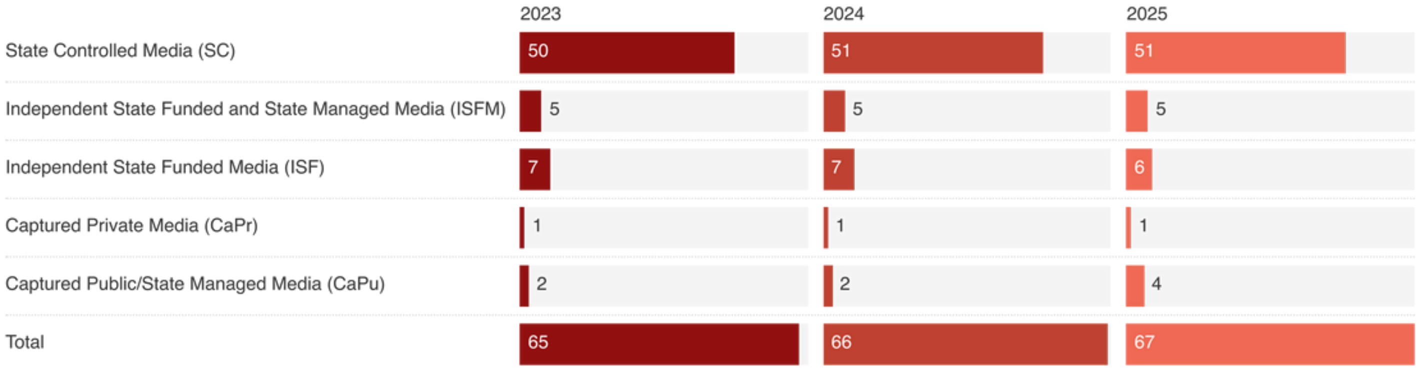
Latin America and the Caribbean

The state-control model remains the dominant paradigm across Latin America and the Caribbean, with more than three-quarters of the 67 state and public media companies surveyed in the region falling into this category. The region includes several highly centralized state economies—among them Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua—as well as the increasingly authoritarian regime of President Nayib Bukele in El Salvador, where public/state media outlets remain tightly controlled and heavily dependent on the government.

The State Media Monitor project observed no significant improvements in the independence of state and public media in the region over the past year. On the contrary, we added two more state-affiliated media firms in El Salvador—Grupo Samix and Grupo Órbita—both classified as captured public/state-managed media (CaPu). Owing to insufficient evidence of public ownership, we also removed Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala Broadcasting from SMM's typology. Likewise, the Cuban union-run weekly Trabajadores, which has ceased offering publicly available news and now confines itself to internal union updates, was excluded from this year's analysis.

Apart from spending cuts, and the persistent threat of them, across several public service media outlets, notably in Mexico, Bolivia, and Honduras, few emerging trends in the Latin America region were observed. In El Salvador, the backsliding of democracy accelerated following a constitutional amendment enabling President Nayib Bukele to remain in power for life. Independent journalism has become almost impossible, with all public media outlets repurposed to serve the government's political agenda. In Cuba, the last remaining bastion of communism in the Western Hemisphere, media freedom remains under constant assault.

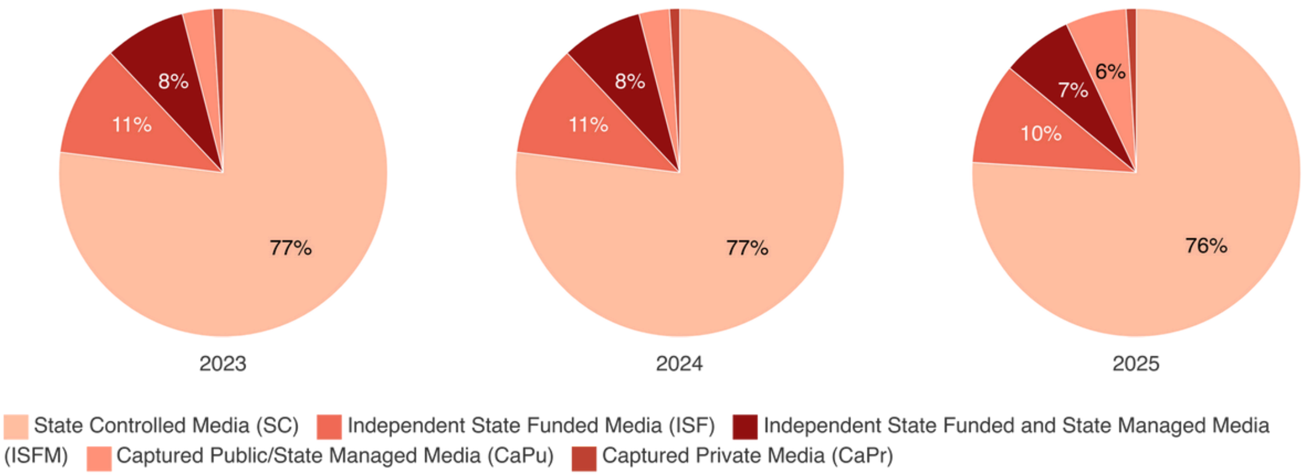
Number of state and public media in Latin American and the Caribbean (2023-2025)



Source: Media and Journalism Research Center • Created with Datawrapper

Overview of state and public media in Latin America and the Caribbean (2023-2025)

Expressed in % of total state/public outlets in the region



Source: Media and Journalism Research Center • Created with Datawrapper

While Latin America retains a more diverse state and public media landscape than many other regions, political pressure and threats to independent journalism are mounting. Populist politicians in positions of power have openly targeted state and public media they cannot fully control, fuelling self-censorship and hastening the collapse of critical reporting.

Conclusions:
The Rise of a Government-Dominated Media Order

The 2025 State Media Monitor underscores a grim reality: globally, state and public media are edging ever closer to becoming extensions of government power. What were once exceptions—the direct steering of editorial agendas by political authorities—are increasingly the rule. Independent journalism survives, but mostly in fragile pockets, often under siege.

Political leaders are tightening their grip on coverage of sensitive conflicts, governments are using financial leverage to discipline broadcasters, public media are treated as bargaining chips after elections, and major global powers—most visibly China—are expanding their influence by filling funding gaps. Together these dynamics are producing a global information space dominated less by pluralistic journalism and more by propaganda clashes between states. In many regions, the very idea of public service broadcasting as a democratic institution is being hollowed out.

This trajectory carries two major dangers. The first is that as public media lose independence and credibility, citizens turn away from them. Audiences—especially younger ones—are already shifting toward social platforms, where information flows are unregulated and disinformation flourishes. The second is systemic: as governments pour resources into their own media and attack those of their rivals, the global media system risks becoming a battlefield of competing propaganda machines, with less space for fact-based journalism that serves the public interest.

Reversing this trend is already extraordinarily difficult. The conditions that sustain editorial independence—insulated and predictable funding, depoliticized governance, and robust legal safeguards—are being eroded in most regions. Single reforms or frameworks, like the European Media Freedom Act, at best can provide partial templates and a degree of leverage in specific jurisdictions. Globally, the defense of independent public media will depend on a patchwork of strategies: stronger international monitoring and solidarity networks, legal and institutional reforms tailored to local contexts, and, critically, sustained pressure from journalists and civil society to demand transparency, accountability, and professional standards. These efforts may not prevent capture and state dominance everywhere, but without them, the space for genuine public service journalism will continue to shrink.

The lesson of 2025 is sobering: independence is not a default condition but a contested achievement. If left undefended, it will be dismantled piece by piece until public media become indistinguishable from state propaganda.

Methodology

Research process

The foundation of this study is the State Media Database, first created by media scholar Marius Dragomir in 2004 and subsequently updated in the following stages:
a) Global updates (2006, 2010, 2013, 2020–2025);
b) Latin America (2006, 2012, 2025);
c) Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand (2005, 2009, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2020, 2025);
d) Sub-Saharan Africa (2014, 2022-2025);
e) Asia, including parts of Eurasia (2005, 2008, 2012, 2015, 2019, 2022-2025);
f) Middle East and North Africa (MENA) (2015, 2019, 2022-2025).

Country coverage in 2025

The 2025 update covers a total of 170 countries, the same sample size as in 2024. In Monaco and Liechtenstein no state-administered media were identified (Liechtenstein's public radio closed in 2025). For this edition, a total of 363 interviews with local media experts and journalists were conducted.

Methodological changes in 2022

Since 2022, the study has treated media outlets as individual entities that provide services across various platforms (television, radio, print, online). To ensure comparability across countries and regions, the analysis counts operators as entities, rather than the number of channels or assets within their portfolio. This change affected the classification in some countries. For instance, in Nigeria, as of 2022 all outlets operating at the state level are counted separately from those at the federal level. Where multiple state media are operated by a single government unit or company, they continue to be counted as one entity.

Interviews and expert input

In addition to documentary and statistical sources, the study relies heavily on interviews with local experts, journalists, and civil society actors. These interviews serve several purposes: they provide up-to-date contextual insights, help verify and supplement official records, and capture informal practices of political influence that are not visible in legal or financial documents. Interviewees are selected based on their professional expertise, regional knowledge, and independence from government or media owners. Information gathered from interviews is cross-checked against documentary sources whenever possible to ensure accuracy and consistency.

Criteria

The classification of outlets in the State Media Database is based on three main criteria:
a) Funding;
b) Management and governance;
c) Editorial control.

Methods of categorization

Step 1: Data collection

a) ***Funding***: budget of state media and sources of revenue.

- **Tier 1 sources**: annual reports of state media, legal acts establishing funding models.
- **Tier 2 sources**: media coverage, NGO reports, academic studies.
- **Tier 3 sources**: interviews with experts or insiders, investigative reporting.

b) ***Management and governance***: ownership, control, and appointment mechanisms.

- **Tier 1 sources**: annual reports of state media, legal acts defining governance.
- **Tier 2 sources**: media coverage, NGO reports, academic studies.
- **Tier 3 sources**: interviews with experts or insiders, investigative reporting.

c) ***Editorial control***: assessment of whether editorial decisions are politically influenced.

- **Tier 1 sources**: legal statutes designating outlets as propaganda organs; official statements confirming propaganda roles.
- **Tier 2 sources**: media coverage, NGO reports, academic studies.
- **Tier 3 sources**: interviews with experts or insiders, investigative reporting, and content analysis (applied in specific contexts).

Content analysis note:
In selected countries, content analysis was conducted to complement other data sources. This analysis focused on periods of heightened political sensitivity—such as elections, conflict coverage, or major policy debates—and examined a sample of news items across television, radio, and online platforms. The purpose was not to measure overall output, but to identify systematic editorial patterns: disproportionate coverage of ruling parties, censorship of opposition voices, or alignment with government narratives during crises. Findings from content analysis are always triangulated with interviews and documentary sources before classification decisions were made.

Step 2: Data analysis

Using the information gathered and applying the criteria above, outlets were classified according to the State Media Matrix typology.[9]

Research limitations

The media sector is highly dynamic, and outlets can rapidly shift between categories—for example, moving from independent to captured, or from captured to state-controlled. Such changes cannot always be fully reflected in a study of this type. It is possible that, at the time of publication, some outlets qualify for a different category due to recent political developments or managerial changes. However, these discrepancies do not significantly alter the overall global trends documented here. Moreover, such changes are tracked continuously in the online State Media Monitor database[10], the most comprehensive repository of state media worldwide, which has been updated regularly as of 2020.[11]

[9] The detailed methodology of the study can be accessed at https://statemediamonitor.com/methodology/.
[10] Available at www.statemediamonitor.com.
[11] The full list of the state and public media covered by the study is available online at https://statemediamonitor.com/category/global-list/.

Appendix. State Media Matrix

State Media Matrix: A Typology of State and Public Media

Funding: Predominantly (over 50% of budget) state-funded; Governance: Control of governing structures and/or ownership; Editorial control: Editorial control: Government control over editorial decisions

Model	Funding	Ownership / Governance	Editorial Control	Description	Performance
Independent Public Media (IP)	No	No	No	Public service media insulated from government interference through funding and governance safeguards	Highest level of independence
Independent State Managed / Owned Media (ISM)	No	Yes	No	State-owned or governed but not predominantly state-funded; editorial autonomy generally respected	Medium–high independence; risk of politicisation
Independent State Funded Media (ISF)	Yes	No	No	Reliant on state funding but independent in governance and editorial agenda	Medium–high independence; vulnerable to financial pressure
Independent State Funded & Managed / Owned Media (ISFM)	Yes	Yes	No	Both funded and managed by the state but without direct editorial interference	Medium independence; risk of capture
Captured Private Media (CaPr)	No	Yes	Yes	Privately owned but financially dependent on state contracts/advertising	Lack of independence; editorial agenda aligned with government interests
Captured Public or State Managed / Owned Media (CaPu)	Yes or No	Yes	Yes	State-owned or managed outlets where authorities influence editorial content	Lack of independence; staffed by government loyalists
State Controlled Media (SC)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Fully subordinated to state authorities, functioning as propaganda arms	Lowest level of independence

Source: Designed and conceptualized by Marius Dragomir • Created with Datawrapper

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) Disclosure Statement
Grammarly was used during the editing phase of this report to correct grammar. No AI tools were involved in drafting or shaping the analytical content of this study.

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