Bahrain

Country: 
Bahrain

Year: 
2017

Press Freedom Status: 
Not Free

PFS Score: 
87

Legal Environment: 
28

Political Environment: 
37

Economic Environment: 
22

Key Developments in 2016:

• In June, authorities refused to renew a journalist's accreditation, and later charged her with working for foreign outlets without proper documentation.
• According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) there were seven journalists in Bahraini prisons as of December.
• The government issued new regulations banning news outlets from live streaming events.
• In late December, Eman Salehi, a sports journalist for Bahrain’s state-run television broadcaster, was shot and killed, but it was not clear whether her murder was related to her work as a journalist.

Executive Summary

Prior to the protests of 2011, the Bahraini media’s coverage of news and politics was more critical and independent than in most other Gulf countries. However, since the protests erupted, media outlets and individual journalists have faced increased pressure from the government, including through legal prosecutions under restrictive laws including those that prohibit criticism of Islam, the king, or national emblems; inciting actions that
undermine state security; and advocating for a change in government. Journalists may also be imprisoned for libel, slander, and “divulging secrets.” According to CPJ, there were seven journalists behind bars in Bahrain as of December 2016.

Journalists also report direct intimidation by government representatives, which is aimed at discouraging reporting on sensitive topics such as prodemocracy movements. Most opposition publications have been shut down, and those that still operate are often targets of lawsuits and harassment. The internet serves as an alternative space for public expression, but is closely monitored, with the government devoting considerable resources to surveillance and cybersecurity. According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 98 percent of people in Bahrain accessed the internet in 2016.

Authorities use a variety of regulatory measures to control the flow of information, and have prosecuted journalists for purported violations. In July 2016, the information minister issued new regulations requiring newspapers to obtain annual, renewable licenses to publish online. It also prohibited live streaming video, as well as video clips longer than 120 seconds in length. Separately, in June, the ministry refused to renew the journalism license of Nazeeha Saeed, who reports regularly for France 24 and Radio Monte-Carlo Doualiya. Shortly afterward, a travel ban was issued against her, and she was charged with working for foreign media outlets without proper accreditation.

The government has restricted foreign journalists’ access to the country, both by denying journalists entry and deporting those who gained access. In February 2016, four U.S. journalists were arrested and deported after the government accused them of entering the country without registering as journalists, and posing as tourists.

In late December 2016, Eman Salehi, a sports journalist for Bahrain’s state-run television broadcaster, was shot and killed. A man turned himself in to police in connection with the killing, but the circumstances surrounding it were unclear at year’s end.

Explanatory Note:

This country report has been abridged for Freedom of the Press 2017. For background information on press freedom in Bahrain, see Freedom of the Press 2016.

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