

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

Costa Rica

Costa Rica | [Freedom of the Press 2012](#) |

Costa Rica's constitution guarantees press freedom, and this right is generally upheld. However, punitive press laws, particularly concerning defamation, are occasionally used to restrict the operations of the media. In 2004, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights overturned the 1999 conviction of a Costa Rican journalist for criminal defamation, ruling that the country needed to amend its outdated criminal defamation laws. In addition, in a landmark ruling in February 2010, the Supreme Court eliminated a provision from the country's anachronistic 1902 printing press law that had imposed prison sentences for defamation. And in December 2011, the Costa Rican courts created an appeals process for overturning criminal libel sentences. However, despite these advances and calls for further reform, journalists remain vulnerable to criminal charges for defamation, with punishments including excessive fines and the placing of one's name on a national list of convicted criminals. The constitution also reserves for readers the right of reply to newspapers in response to information that the readers deem incorrect or egregious. The parliament in 2011 continued to postpone discussion of a bill that would expand the scope of the right of reply from information to opinions. The Inter American Press Association has warned that the bill could reduce press freedom and freedom of expression.

Accessing government information continues to be difficult. In 2011, a bill before the legislature related to transparency and access to information was dismissed, and discussion of the Freedom of Expression and Press Freedom Bill, originally introduced in 2002, was postponed yet again. Local journalism groups criticized a measure announced by the government that would limit the number of journalists attending the president's weekly press conference and the number of questions they would be allowed to ask.

Journalists are not often victims of physical threats or violence in Costa Rica. However, the Journalists' Union of Costa Rica sent a letter to President Laura Chinchilla complaining of aggressive behavior by her security staff toward journalists during 2011. Separately, a reporter with the *Diario Extra* was physically attacked on December 28 by a private security guard while attempting to cover a public annual holiday event.

Costa Rica has a vibrant media scene, with numerous public and privately owned newspapers, television outlets, and radio stations. There are nine major newspapers, and cable television is widely available. Radio is the most popular outlet for news dissemination. The press is relatively free to cover sensitive political and social issues, and to openly criticize the government. Private media ownership is highly concentrated, however, and tends to be conservative.

The internet served as an additional source of unrestricted information and was accessed by more than 42 percent of the population in 2011. New online news organizations have become very popular.

2012 SCORES

PRESS STATUS

Free

PRESS FREEDOM SCORE

19

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

5

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

8

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6

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