Freedom of the press is protected under the constitution, and Salvadoran journalists are generally able to report freely. Critical reporting on the government and opposition parties is for the most part permitted. On September 8, 2011, the Legislative Assembly approved amendments to the criminal code to decriminalize slander, libel, and defamation, replacing punishments of jail time with fines and suspensions for journalists who commit crimes against public image and privacy. Limits were also established to prohibit excessive levels of compensation. The law was officially published in December. Draft laws on the right of reply were under consideration by the National Assembly at year’s end.

While press freedom is hindered by a lack of public transparency, the National Assembly ratified the Access to Public Information Law in March. However, Salvadorans will have to wait until 2012 to use the new law to solicit official requests for information.

Although El Salvador is generally a safe place to practice journalism, there are still sporadic threats and acts of violence against journalists, especially in the provinces. In April 2011, Canal 33 cameraman Alfredo Antonio Hurtado Núñez was shot to death by alleged gang members while riding a bus in Ilopango in the department of San Salvador. Hurtado had previously reported on gang violence and had allegedly received threats prior to his death. Two gang members were arrested for his murder in September and awaited trial at year’s end. In a victory against impunity, 11 men were convicted in March for the 2009 murder of Christian Poveda, a Franco-Spanish documentary filmmaker. Poveda had also documented gang violence in El Salvador. Journalists with Radio Victoria, a community radio station in the northern department of Cabañas that has been supporting environmental activists in their opposition to a Canadian company’s local gold-mining operations, continued to receive death threats in 2011.

While there are four daily newspapers, each with an estimated circulation of 250,000, most of the country depends on privately owned television and radio networks for news. In July 2011, President Mauricio Funes announced proposed legal reforms to state media that would increase their autonomy and independence from political influence. Limited resources prevent many media outlets from producing to their full capacity, and self-censorship is often exercised to avoid offending media owners, editors, and government officials. According to the UN special rapporteur for freedom of expression, there is little access to community radio stations due to the bidding method used to grant radio frequencies.

Access to the internet was limited to 18 percent of the population in 2011. There were no reported government restrictions on the internet, and online newspapers such as El Faro provided independent, investigative journalism.