

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

- \

Guyana

Guyana | [Freedom of the Press 2012](#) |

Status Change Explanation: Guyana declined from Free to Partly Free due to heightened polarization of the media, as well as verbal intimidation of journalists by members of the ruling party, leading up to and during the November 2011 general elections. Ongoing libel cases and the passage of a restrictive Broadcast Act that dramatically increased fines for broadcasting without a license also contributed to a more restrictive media environment.

Guyana's constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press, but relations between the People's Progressive Party (PPP) government and some media outlets deteriorated during the year. Broadcasting and freedom of information bills were introduced in 2011. Although the legislation has long been seen as essential to extend media freedom in Guyana, there was criticism of the bills by local media rights organizations once they were unveiled. The Access to Information Bill was passed in September, and it creates a right to access to information, requires government bodies to publish information, and creates a commissioner of information to regulate requests and publication of information. However, critics objected to the inclusion of a clause that made the president exempt from the bill's provisions. The broadcasting bill was tabled in July 2011, and the Broadcast Act was approved later that month; however, it had yet to come into effect by year's end. The main opposition party, the People's National Congress Reform (PNCR), denounced the lack of consultation in the drafting of the bill. Reporters Without Borders noted that all seven members of the board of the new National Broadcasting Authority would be named by the president. Additionally, one clause in the new broadcasting bill states that all programs must be "fair and balanced," which could be used to obstruct the work of the media. One positive aspect of the bill relates to the issuance of additional television and radio licenses, thereby breaking the existing state monopoly on radio. By year's end, a number of media proprietors were expressing their concerns about the lack of transparency in the license-granting process, as the requirements of being "fit, proper, and financially sufficient" are vaguely defined.

There is no criminal defamation in Guyana, but public officials utilize civil libel suits to stifle criticism. In July 2010, President Bharrat Jagdeo sued journalist Frederick Kissoon, as well as the editor in chief and publishers of *Kaiteur News*, for libel related to an article criticizing him, and successfully obtained an injunction against the newspaper from printing similar content. In June 2011, the newspaper's appeal against the injunction failed. A full hearing of the case was repeatedly delayed and had not taken place by year's end.

Over the years, the government has employed various tactics—including advertising boycotts—to stifle criticism, but in the run-up to the November 2011 general election, members of the ruling party grew increasingly hostile to sections of the media regarded as favoring the opposition, and cases of censorship were reported. At the beginning of October, Jagdeo ordered a four-month suspension of CNS Channel Six, a privately owned TV station, due to a comment made by an opposition parliamentarian during a program

2012 SCORES

PRESS STATUS

Partly Free

PRESS FREEDOM SCORE

33

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

8

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

15

ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

10

broadcast in early May. After local and international media rights groups condemned the move, which would have forced the station off the air during the election period, Jagdeo announced that the ban would begin in December. Despite the postponement, the Association of Caribbean Media Workers described the ban as “evidence of efforts to stifle free expression.” Following the elections, the Commonwealth Election Observation Mission criticized the media, stating that the code of conduct for political parties and the media had not been respected, and indicated that state-owned television, radio, and print media had shown overt bias toward the government and ruling party.

Although the government employs various tactics to stifle criticism, there are still robust voices within the media. Nevertheless, due to the president’s sensitivity to criticism, some journalists have experienced difficulty in obtaining access to government events and press conferences. However, newly elected president Donald Ramotar took a positive step soon after taking office in early December when he lifted a three-year-old ban preventing Gordon Moseley, head of the Guyana Press Association and a Capitol News reporter and producer, from entering the president’s office and residence.

There are occasional cases of attacks and harassment against journalists and media outlets, but none were reported in 2011. At a PPP rally on October 9, Jagdeo pointed at journalists covering the event and described them as “vultures and carrion crows” who should be “thrown into jail” for criticizing him and his government. His remarks were echoed by his political adviser, Gail Teixeira, who compared Guyana’s media to that in Rwanda in the context of the latter’s role in the Rwandan genocide.

The government owns and controls the country’s only two radio stations, run by the National Communications Network, but licenses for private stations are now expected to be issued. There are also 23 television stations, most of which are in private hands. Including the government-owned daily, the *Chronicle*, Guyana has seven national newspapers and six other periodicals. The distribution of state advertising has for some time been a source of major controversy. Beginning in late 2006, the Government Information Agency suddenly withdrew state advertisements from the *Stabroek News*, and kept the ban in place until April 2008, when it resumed advertising without explanation. However, the majority of paid advertising appears in progovernment newspapers, including the newly launched *Guyana Times*, which is owned by a friend of *Jagdeo*. The *Kaieteur News*, which is regarded as favoring the opposition, has since opted to place government advertisements free of cost, and it is believed that this loss of revenue accounts for the December 2010 decision to charge for access to the paper’s website.

Use of the internet is unrestricted by the government, and approximately 32 percent of the population accessed this medium in 2011.

[About us](#)

[Careers](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Credits](#)

[Subscribe](#)

Related websites:

[Democracy Web](#) | [Derecho a Voz](#) | [Family Law - Khaleej](#) |

[Peace in the Caucasus](#) | [Undermining Democracy](#) |

[Voice of Freedom](#)