

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

Haiti

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

The constitution guarantees press freedom and forbids censorship except in the case of war, and these provisions have increasingly been upheld in practice in recent years. However, journalists in Haiti are forced to cope with widespread and entrenched poverty, a corrupt judiciary, violence, intimidation, and a tradition of excessively biased media. These challenging conditions intensified in the aftermath of the catastrophic January 2010 earthquake.

The media situation in Haiti had steadily been improving over the past few years, and there were efforts to address violence against journalists and the related problem of impunity for past crimes. However, the new president, Michel Martelly, displayed a marked lack of respect for the press after taking office in May 2011, insulting and threatening individual journalists who posed questions he deemed unfavorable, and refusing to speak with representatives of media outlets that had criticized him.

Article 40 of the constitution stipulates that the government must publicize all international agreements, decrees, treaties, and contracts. However, according to the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti, the government makes it very difficult for local journalists to access these public documents. The state-run National Telecommunications Council (CONATEL) issues licenses to radio stations and does not regulate content. On December 14, media associations and journalists in Haiti signed their first journalistic code of ethics at the UNESCO office in Port-au-Prince. The guidelines include an overall respect for individual dignity and privacy, prohibition of discrimination in journalistic work, and encouragement of an unbiased and balanced treatment of information.

Defamation remains a criminal offense in Haiti. In April 2011, five journalists were fired by the state-owned Télévision Nationale d'Haiti (TNH), soon after a visit by president-elect Martelly, for allegedly putting their political preferences before their professional duties. The journalists in turn accused TNH of biased coverage in favor of Martelly during the second round of the presidential election. In response, TNH director general Pradel Henriquez brought a criminal defamation case against three of the journalists, which could result in a three-year prison sentence. In June, two Radio Prévention journalists in the town of Petit-Goâve were summoned to the office of the city commissioner to respond to complaints filed against them by the mayor and other local officials over opinions they had expressed during one of their programs. As a result, violent protests erupted outside of the commissioner's office; the journalists were held responsible and arrested on charges of defamation, destruction of public property, and disturbing public order, despite the fact that they remained inside during the protests. The radio station was shut down and its equipment was confiscated that same day. While the journalists were freed the following month, the charges were not dropped.

Years of campaigning against impunity for those who commit violent crimes against journalists and other members of civil society continued in 2011, with the filing of multiple criminal complaints against former dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier upon his surprise return to Haiti in January after nearly 25 years in

2012 SCORES

PRESS STATUS

Partly Free

PRESS FREEDOM SCORE

50

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

14

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

18

ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

18

exile. Michèle Montas, a renowned Haitian journalist and former UN spokesperson, was one of the individuals who filed a lawsuit against his for the threats, detention, and an assassination attempt she experienced during the Duvalier regime as a result of her work as a journalist. In addition to corruption and embezzlement charges brought by the Haitian government, three other Haitian political prisoners filed separate complaints against Duvalier in January for crimes against humanity. The investigation of the charges against Duvalier continued at year's end.

While violence directed toward the media has not been a common problem in recent years, a community radio station, Tèt Ansanm Karis, was burned to the ground in the northeastern city of Carice in April 2011 by armed men who were identified as supporters of the INITE party. The arsonists targeted the station after it broadcast coverage of disputed legislative election results. There were also several reports during the year of journalists receiving death threats and being physically assaulted in the course of their work.

There are four weeklies and two daily newspapers—*Le Nouvelliste* and *Le Matin*—all of which are privately owned. Radio remains by far the most popular news medium, with more than 90 percent of the population enjoying radio access. Over 290 FM stations operate without a license, and there are more than 70 community stations scattered across the country. Many of these stations are affiliated with political organizations or parties. TNH is government owned, and there are several private television stations. However, Haiti's television audience is small due to lack of electricity and resources. The concentration of wealth among a small number of Haitians and the effects of the 2010 earthquake negatively affect media outlets' ability to obtain advertising revenue and sustain themselves financially. Journalists also struggle with low salaries, and some media outlets and journalists accept bribes due to economic hardship.

There are no government restrictions on the internet, which was accessed by just 8.6 percent of the population in 2011, according to Internet World Stats.

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