

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

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Jamaica

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

Jamaica maintained its free media environment in 2011, and made significant progress toward reforming its libel laws, a promise first made by the government more than three years ago. In late November, a bill to repeal the Defamation Act and the Libel and Slander Act was tabled in the House of Representatives, but was not debated before Parliament was dissolved ahead of general elections held on December 29. However, the People's National Party (PNP) victory over the incumbent Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) is not expected to impede the passage of the legislation in 2012. A Joint Select Committee of Parliament also submitted recommendations in March to repeal the Official Secrets Act, which has served as an obstacle to the implementation of the country's 2002 Access to Information Act.

Journalists and media houses face occasional threats from both state and nonstate actors, and some practice self-censorship on sensitive topics. Two notable incidents of verbal intimidation of the media occurred during the year. In March 2011, Everaldo Warmington, who had just resigned as a member of Parliament for the then ruling JLP, used abusive language in response to questions posed by journalists from RJR News and CVM Television, leading both the Press Association of Jamaica (PAJ) and the Media Association of Jamaica to issue a joint statement criticizing his behavior. In late July, Delano Seiveright, president of Generation 2000, the youth wing of the JLP, announced that the organization would "go after" journalists and media houses it deemed to be biased against the party. He later insisted that he did not mean to imply a threat of physical harm. In December, the PAJ wrote to then prime minister Andrew Holness to denounce several instances of verbal attacks on media workers by members of the JLP during election rallies. In the letter, the PAJ drew attention to the not too distant past, when such comments had resulted in attacks on journalists.

Jamaica has two national daily newspapers and a daily afternoon tabloid. There are a number of national and regional periodicals serving a variety of sectors and interests, as well as more than 20 radio stations, 3 terrestrial television stations, and multiple cable channels. The majority of media outlets are privately owned and provide a range of news and commentary.

The authorities imposed no restrictions on the internet, which was accessed by 32 percent of the population in 2011. The December 2011 election campaign was notable for the increased use of social-media networks, such as Facebook and Twitter, by the main political parties.

2012 SCORES

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18

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3

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9

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6

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