

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

Laos

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

Press freedom in Laos remains highly restricted. Despite advances in telecommunications infrastructure, government control of all print and broadcast news prevents the development of a vibrant, independent press. Article 44 of the 1991 constitution guarantees freedom of the press, and the government has demonstrated some willingness to enact positive legislation related to expression and association. In collaboration with international donors, the country passed a new press law in 2008, but it had little practical effect on conditions for journalists. Under the criminal code, individuals may be jailed for up to one year for reporting news that “weakens the state” or importing a publication that is “contrary to national culture.” Defamation and misinformation are criminal offenses, carrying lengthy prison terms and even the possibility of execution. However, due to high levels of official censorship and self-censorship, legal cases against media personnel are extremely rare.

The country’s media remain under the tight control of the ruling Lao People’s Revolutionary Party (LPRP). Media personnel are appointed mostly from within the LPRP, and publications must be approved by the Ministry of Information and Culture. Journalists write primarily about uncontroversial topics, though stories on social issues that were never previously broached have begun to appear in newspapers. Physical attacks and extralegal intimidation aimed at journalists are rare, as reporters avoid covering politically sensitive topics. Foreign journalists face significant barriers in establishing a permanent presence in the country, but are generally permitted to enter and travel to cover specific stories. The government continues to limit journalists’ access to the 4,000 Hmong refugees who were forcibly repatriated from Thailand in 2009.

The number of media outlets has increased in recent years. There are around 24 regularly printed newspapers, all government affiliated. Newspaper circulation figures remain extremely low due to low literacy rates and an insufficient distribution infrastructure outside the capital, Vientiane. The government is eager to boost Laos’s information and communication technology capabilities, and advancements in this sector have resulted in an increase in television and radio stations. All 32 television stations and 44 radio stations are government run, though companies are increasingly permitted to buy airtime and run privately produced content. Much of the investment in the broadcast infrastructure has been provided by China and Vietnam. A few community radio programs, covering mostly local interest stories, have sprung up with the help of international development organizations. Foreign television and radio services, such as Voice of America and Radio Free Asia, broadcast in Laos without disruptions. A number of citizens watch Thai television and radio, and wealthier individuals have access to satellite television.

About 9 percent of the population accessed the internet in 2011, and Lao-language content, though minimal, is growing. The state controls all internet service providers, and there are some reports that the government sporadically blocks web activity. The government’s technical ability to monitor the internet is limited, though concerns remain that Laos is looking to adopt the

2012 SCORES

PRESS STATUS

Not Free

PRESS FREEDOM SCORE

84

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

26

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

33

ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

25

copyright policies and technologies of its neighbors, Vietnam and China.

[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](#)