

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

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Malta

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Malta's constitution guarantees freedoms of speech and of the press, but restricts these rights under a variety of circumstances. Laws against "vilification" of or "giving offense" to the Roman Catholic faith, the country's official religion, have led to restrictions on expression. In the first six months of 2011 alone, there were 119 convictions for public blasphemy. Defamation is a criminal offense, and perceived victims have a legal right to reply. Maltese law strongly defends public morality by criminalizing obscene speech, acts, and gestures.

Malta bases its laws on the European model but is one of only three European Union (EU) member states that lack an operational freedom of information law. While there is a website for Malta's freedom of information act, it states that the act is not yet fully implemented, meaning requests cannot be submitted. Malta is a physically safe environment for journalists, with no reported cases of threats or harassment in 2011.

The active independent media sector is free to convey a variety of opinions, with at least five daily and two weekly newspapers publishing in both Maltese and English. Political parties, private businesses, and the Catholic Church all have direct investments in broadcasting and print media, and these outlets openly express partisan views. The only national television broadcaster is TVM, though the country also has access to Italian television, which many Maltese watch. The several domestic radio stations are regulated through the Broadcasting Authority.

The government does not restrict the internet, and it was regularly accessed by 69 percent of the population in 2011.

2012 SCORES

PRESS STATUS

Free

PRESS FREEDOM SCORE

22

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

4

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

9

ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

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