

## FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

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# Seychelles

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The media environment in Seychelles over the past decade has been characterized by government monopolization of radio and television, draconian libel laws that have been used liberally against opposition newspapers, occasional attacks against and harassment of media workers, and extensive self-censorship. The constitution provides for freedom of speech, but also restricts this right by protecting the reputation, rights, and privacy of citizens as well as the “interest of defense, public safety, public order, public morality, or public health.” It grants the minister of information the power to prohibit the broadcast of any material deemed contradictory to “national interest.” Since the court of appeals in 2007 overturned a libel conviction against the opposition weekly *Regar*, which had forced it to close, the filing of libel charges and libel convictions has diminished. Nevertheless, civil libel suits can still be used against journalists. In July 2010, a cabinet minister filed a libel lawsuit against *Regar* for its publication of allegations of a conflict of interest in a land sale.

The state has a *de facto* monopoly over the widely consumed broadcast media (both radio and television), and private broadcasters have been slow to develop because of restrictive licensing fees of more than 800,000 rupees (\$60,000) per year. Following one opposition party’s efforts to raise enough money for a radio license, the National Assembly in 2006 passed an amendment to the Broadcasting and Telecommunications Act prohibiting politically affiliated groups from obtaining a license. In August 2009, a report by two independent consultants recommended the formation of a media council, media association, and joint consultation committee, as well as the amendment of the libel laws. In late 2009, the Seychelles Media Association, a grouping of media professionals, was reconstituted after a 10-year absence. In December 2010, the National Assembly approved the Seychelles Media Commission Act 2010, setting up an independent media arbitration body; however, questions have been raised about its neutrality.

A new Seychelles Broadcasting Corporation Act was passed in March 2011, replacing legislation from 1992. The act was intended to make the Seychelles Broadcasting Corporation (SBC), which runs the nation’s only television station and two radio stations, more independent. However, the period surrounding the campaign for the May 2011 presidential election highlighted the continued bias of the SBC in favor of the ruling Parti Lepep and its candidate, President James Michel, who won reelection. SBC media coverage is still overwhelmingly dominated by the government, giving opposition parties only limited access. No cases of attacks or harassment against journalists were reported in 2011.

There are two daily newspapers, the privately owned *Rising Sun* and the state-owned *Seychelles Nation*, which rarely publish stories critical of the government. Three weekly newspapers—*Regar*, the *People*, and *Le Nouveau Seychelles Weekly*—are affiliated with political parties. Along with operating the government-owned television and radio stations, the SBC also relays foreign stations.

Although the internet is available and unrestricted, there have been reports of

## 2012 SCORES

### PRESS STATUS

# Partly Free

### PRESS FREEDOM SCORE

# 56

### LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

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### POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

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the government monitoring the e-mail, chat rooms, and blogs of the 43 percent of the population with access in 2011. During the year, several individuals were detained, arrested, and eventually released for critical comments about government officials posted on social networking websites. Telecommunications companies must submit subscriber information to the government, though the law was not enforced in 2011.

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