

## FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

# Tonga

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

**Status change explanation:** Tonga improved from Partly Free to Free due to the new government's commitment to strengthening press freedom and a general reduction in the harassment and intimidation of journalists.

Tonga's media landscape has matured and strengthened in recent years. The kingdom held elections under new rules in November 2010, with the parliament rather than the king empowered to choose the prime minister. The election campaign reflected a more robust and open media climate than in the past, and a clearer commitment by the government to uphold Clause 7 of the constitution, which guarantees a free press. In May 2011, Prime Minister Siale 'Ataongo Kaho (Lord Tu'ivakanō)—who was elected as national leader ahead of the prodemocracy politician Samuela 'Akilisi Pohiva, a former broadcaster and publisher—declared in a World Press Freedom Day statement: "With a new and more democratic system of government, it is more critical now than ever that the government, the media, and the public understand the importance of transparency, freedom of information and freedom of the press in building a more informed and educated society."

Journalists found guilty of libel and defamation are usually punished with fines. In May 2011, cabinet minister Clive Edwards won a defamation lawsuit against the newspaper *Kele'a* for a story published on the day before the elections that accused him and other candidates of forming a "secret" political party backed by the government. Edwards claimed that the front-page story was false and played a key role in the loss of his seat in the parliament. The newspaper was fined 14,275 pa'anga (\$8,300).

A longtime publishing foe of the monarchy, Kalafi Moala, now heads an independent newspaper, *Taimi 'o Tonga*, in Nuku'alofa and has been contracted to revive the state-owned *Tongan Chronicle* as a weekly English-language newspaper, with some success. Moala also established the Taimi Media Network website. The independent monthly magazine and news website *Matangi Tonga* is an important media provider and book publisher. The state-owned Tonga Broadcasting Commission owns one AM and two FM radio stations as well as the free-to-air station Television Tonga.

The government does not restrict access to the internet, which was used by more than 25 percent of the population during 2011.

## 2012 SCORES

### PRESS STATUS

Free

### PRESS FREEDOM SCORE

29

### LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

10

### POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

9

### ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

10

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