

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

Uruguay

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The 1967 constitution provides for press freedom and freedom of expression, and the government generally respects these rights. Uruguay's press system is known as having among the best legal frameworks in the Americas, including a community media law, an access to information law, and decriminalized defamation statutes. This status did not change in 2011, although the forced resignation of National Telecommunications Director Gustavo Gómez in August drew criticism from civil society groups and independent media organizations. The groups indirectly linked the dismissal of Gómez, the former head of the World Association of Community Radio Operators, to stalled progress on a reform of an audiovisual telecommunications law to enhance competition in commercial digital television. Furthermore, in contradiction to the revised law, journalist Álvaro Alfonso was sentenced to two years in prison in February for libel in connection with his book *Secrets of the Communist Party*, which a judge decided contained one page with false information that he believed Alfonso published with the intent to harm. Alfonso was permitted to serve his sentence on parole under court supervision.

The media in Uruguay are fairly vibrant, and journalists generally do not practice self-censorship. However, reports about the 1972–85 military dictatorship still occasionally prompt reprisals. A clandestine far-right group, including members of the armed forces who were accused of human rights abuses during the dictatorship, orchestrated online threats and verbal attacks on investigative journalist Roger Rodríguez in February 2011 after he published a critical exposé on the group. Journalist Victor Carrato of *La República* newspaper also received threatening e-mails after reporting on drug dealing in a Uruguayan prison in June. In November, journalist Rodolfo Porley initiated charges for the systematic torture, imprisonment, and expulsion from the country that he had suffered during the military dictatorship as a result of his work as a journalist. Porley said he brought the charges in memory of the 31 journalists who were killed and disappeared during this period, and to help promote a democratic system and ensure that state institutions dedicated to violence and repression never exist again. The remains of teacher, journalist, and trade union activist Julio Castro, who had been kidnapped and tortured to death by security forces in 1977, were discovered in December after new evidence in the case convinced the president to revoke a general amnesty law.

The press is privately owned and boasts more than 100 daily and weekly newspapers. The broadcast sector is mostly private, with the exceptions of the state-owned television station and radio outlet. Media owners reported that President José Múgica threatened them with an advertising embargo in 2011 because he disliked their reporting on crime; however, no concrete actions had been taken by year's end. Despite the country's access to information law, the state-owned telecommunications company, Antel, refused to share information with journalist David Rabinovich on the placement of advertising, claiming that it was confidential based on competition grounds. A November 2011 report sponsored by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation detailed ownership and production concentration in the free-to-air, cable, and satellite commercial television sectors in Uruguay, calling again on the government to create a new

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regulatory framework to foster competition in commercial television and digital telecommunications.

There were no government restrictions on the internet, which was accessed by 51 percent of the population during 2011.

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