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## Freedom Of The Press - East Timor (2011)

**Status: Partly Free**  
**Legal Environment: 11**  
**Political Environment: 11**  
**Economic Environment: 13**  
**Total Score: 35**

The media environment in East Timor remained stable in 2010, largely owing to the implementation of a new penal code in 2009 that decriminalized defamation. Freedom of press and expression is protected under Articles 40 and 41 of the constitution. The controversy over five draft media laws proposed by the United Nations Development Program continued, as Timorese and regional press organizations argued that the proposed laws would place new restrictions on journalists. The London-based freedom of expression advocacy group, Article 19, noted a number of positive features in the laws, such as a provision giving the Media Council the power to mediate defamation cases. However, the council would also be given the authority to fine journalists and news organizations for violations that Article 19 called "vaguely defined." Cases that could not be resolved by the Media Council would be sent to the courts.

A culture of deference and respect for hierarchy continues to pervade journalism in East Timor, and most news reported out of Dili, the capital, features verbatim accounts recorded during organized press conferences. While most public officials pay lip service to freedom of the press, not all are comfortable with its actual practice, and there is a sense among many—including some international advisors—that journalism should ideally be linked with the process of nation-building. However, journalists are able to cover the news freely, and there are few cases of reporters being harassed or attacked. In June 2010, several officers of the national police force beat Joao da Silva, a journalist from *Diario Nacional*, when he was taking pictures of the Government Palace. In August, José Belo received a threat against the *Tempo Semanal* newspaper, for which he is an editor. The threat was purported to be from the wife of a shareholder in Maubere Security, a Dili-based security company whose collapse the newspaper had covered in a high-profile article in 2009.

One weekly and three daily newspapers operate on a regular schedule in East Timor, and several more appear sporadically. Circulations are very small, and are hampered both by low purchasing power and a lack of distribution outside Dili. After the country gained independence in 2002, broadcast media outlets became dominated by public radio and television outlets, but community radio stations—many with international funding—also play an important role in the media landscape. According to a 2009 Southeast Asia Press Alliance fact-finding mission, there are more than 15 community radio stations across the country, along with 1 national and 3 commercial stations. There is one national and one private television station. However, technical difficulties limit the reach of many broadcast media outlets in the rural areas, leaving many without access to any media. The presence of internationally funded media-assistance

organizations has had mixed effects on journalists in East Timor. These organizations have made significant financial contributions, thereby decreasing the importance of funding from the state and arguably increasing journalistic independence. At the same time, evidence suggests that their presence has contributed to what some Timorese journalists call a "project mentality," in which news organizations become dependent on grants from nonstate actors and find it difficult to be independently sustainable. International media development organizations have had limited success in attempting to train a new generation of local journalists, but media work continues to be poorly paid, and journalists with good language and writing skills can easily find work in other industries.

Internet access was limited to just 0.21 percent of the population in 2010 due to poverty and inadequate infrastructure. Nonetheless, the government does not censor websites or restrict users' access to diverse content.