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Freedom of the Press 2010 - Honduras

Status: Partly Free

Legal Environment: 17

Political Environment: 27

Economic Environment: 15

Total Score: 59

- Freedoms of speech and of the press are constitutionally protected. However, press freedom showed a marked deterioration in 2009, especially after the June 28 coup that led to the ouster of President Manuel Zelaya Rosales.
- Despite the fact that in 2005 Honduras abolished the penal code's *desacato* (disrespect) provision, which was aimed at protecting the honor of public officials, other restrictive press laws are still used to subpoena and punish journalists who report on sensitive issues such as official corruption, drug trafficking, and human rights abuses.
- Under former president Zelaya, radio and television stations were required to air a series of 10 interviews with public officials starting in May 2007, following an increase in anti-Zelaya reporting. Zelaya frequently criticized the media and exerted pressure on journalists to curb negative coverage. According to a 2008 report by the Open Society Institute, journalists often entered into contracts with government officials and received payments in return for favorable reporting. The government under Zelaya was also prejudicial in supplying journalists with official information, favoring the more friendly outlets. Such problems were even more visible at the local level.
- The 2009 coup led to the suspension of constitutional guarantees, and journalists faced a high level of aggression and intimidation by coup supporters and opponents alike.
- Programming on several broadcast stations was suspended in the days following the coup, due to military occupation in some cases and frequent power outages or blocked transmissions in others. The military in this period blocked the signals of privately owned television stations Canal 6, Canal 11, Maya TV, and Canal 36 in Tegucigalpa; La Cumbre and Televisora in Aguan; and Canal 5 in Colon province. The operations of Radio Globo and Canal 36 were later suspended for several weeks.
- On July 8, July 16, and August 31, Radio America's transmission wires in Tegucigalpa, Marcala, and Olanchito were cut off. In November, unknown attackers threw a

grenade at the offices of Radio America in Tegucigalpa.

- Journalists received death threats throughout the year, while others were assaulted both by supporters of the ousted president and by police officers. Seven journalists working for foreign outlets were detained on June 29 by armed military personnel at their hotel in Tegucigalpa and subsequently taken to an immigration office, though they were released shortly thereafter. Separately, a group of Venezuelan journalists left Honduras in July after being harassed at their hotel and detained at a Tegucigalpa police station.
- In June, Zelaya supporters beat *El Heraldo* photographer Jhony Magallanes. They also attacked three Canal 42 reporters, punching them and smashing their cameras.
- Fatal violence against journalists occurred both before and after the June coup. In March, unknown assailants in San Pedro Sula shot and killed Radio Cadena Voces correspondent Rafael Munguia Ortiz. According to local reports, his assassination may have been related to his reporting on organized crime. An unidentified gunman fatally shot journalist Gabriel Fino Noriega in July as he was leaving the Estelar radio station in the town of San Juan Pueblo. Noriega had worked for Estelar, Channel 9 television, and as a correspondent for Radio America.
- There is some self-censorship among journalists, and this increased after the coup.
- Most of the media sector is owned by a small group of business magnates who also have political interests.
- Honduras has nine daily papers. There are six private television stations and five radio stations – including one state-owned station – that broadcast nationally.
- Corruption among journalists and government manipulation of state advertising purchases remain common.
- Nearly 10 of the population had access to the internet in 2009. The government did not restrict access to the medium until the June coup, after which Radio Globo reported that its website was taken offline on a number of occasions.

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