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## Freedom Of The Press - Jamaica (2011)

**Status: Free**  
**Legal Environment: 3**  
**Political Environment: 9**  
**Economic Environment: 6**  
**Total Score: 18**

Jamaica upheld its free media environment in 2010, and has had an Access to Information Act in place since 2002, but criminal libel and defamation laws continued to hinder freedom of expression. A reform of the libel laws, first promised by the government over two years ago, finally made some progress at the end of the year. In December, a parliamentary committee reviewed the report of a panel commissioned by Prime Minister Bruce Golding to recommend ways of revising the outdated laws. The lawmakers then proposed several changes, but drew criticism from media rights advocates for leaving intact a provision giving public officials the same protection from damaging statements as ordinary citizens. The provision's opponents said it would perpetuate the existing lack of transparency and accountability among public officials.

Relations between the government and the media have been strained by proposed changes to the daily airing of programs from the official Jamaica Information Service (JIS) on radio and television. For decades, broadcasters have aired a short JIS program once or twice a day, as required by their licenses, but early in 2010 the government proposed airing JIS headlines 10 times or more per day. Media owners argued that the change would destroy some station formats, reduce commercial stations' ability to earn advertising revenues, and effectively transform private broadcasters into government propaganda outlets. The Media Association of Jamaica (MAJ) described the proposal as an "offensive incursion against freedom of the media."

Journalists and media houses face some threats from both state and nonstate actors, and some practice self-censorship on sensitive topics. In June 2010, the media became embroiled in a controversy that engulfed the country before and after the extradition of a reputed drug lord, Christopher "Dudus" Coke, to the United States, where he faced drug- and gun-trafficking charges. Violence flared in the capital, Kingston, when security forces launched an offensive to capture Coke, resulting in the deaths of 76 people and the imposition of a limited state of emergency. During this period, the two largest media entities in Jamaica, RJR Communications Group and the Gleaner Company, were advised by the police that they were under imminent threat of violence for reporting stories that were deemed unsympathetic to Coke's interests. The police established a presence at RJR's corporate offices and instructed both companies to increase security measures to protect staff and property. In early July, the Press Association of Jamaica (PAJ) condemned the actions of a policeman who allegedly assaulted a CVM TV cameraman who attempted to film the scene of a reported police killing in Saint Ann.

The country has two national daily newspapers and a daily

afternoon tabloid. There are a number of national and regional periodicals serving a variety of sectors and interests, and there are more than 20 radio stations and 3 terrestrial television stations, as well as a number of cable channels. The majority of media outlets are privately owned and provide a range of news and commentary. The authorities imposed no restrictions on the internet, which was accessed by 26.1 percent of the population in 2010.