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## Freedom Of The Press - Lithuania (2011)

**Status: Free**  
**Legal Environment: 5**  
**Political Environment: 9**  
**Economic Environment: 8**  
**Total Score: 22**

Lithuania's constitution provides for freedoms of speech and the press, and those guarantees are respected by the government in practice. According to the criminal code, defamation is punishable by a fine or imprisonment, though no such penalties were imposed on journalists in 2010. The Law on the Provision of Information to the Public and the Law on the Right to Obtain Information from State and Local Government Institutions regulate access to public information. In June 2009, Lithuania was among 12 European countries that signed the Council of Europe's Convention on Access to Official Documents, which establishes the right to request information held by public authorities at no charge.

In July 2009, Parliament overrode a presidential veto and passed amendments to the Law on the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effect of Public Information. The changes limited or banned a wide range of public information considered harmful to young people, including materials regarded as promoting homosexual, bisexual, and polygamous relations. Following criticism by domestic and foreign human rights activists, in December 2009 Parliament revised the measure with somewhat less controversial language. The legislation, which came into effect in March 2010, still prohibits the promotion of bad hygiene, sexual intercourse, gambling, certain forms of hypnosis, and a number of other practices, but no prosecutions have been reported.

There were no reports of attacks or threats against journalists in 2010, and Lithuania's media freely criticize the government and express a wide variety of views. In addition to the public broadcast media, dozens of independent television and radio stations are available nationally, regionally, and locally, including the main commercial television stations LNK, TV1, and BTV. More than 300 privately owned newspapers—such as the dailies *Lietuvos Rytas*, *Vakarų Žinios*, and *Respublika*—publish in Lithuanian, Russian, and a few other languages. Media ownership has undergone increased concentration over the last several years, with purchases of outlets by both domestic firms and foreign companies, mainly from Scandinavia. In 2009, the Lithuanian bank Snoras became the top shareholder in the country's largest media group, *Lietuvos Rytas*, which owns the newspaper of the same name.

The global financial crisis of late 2008 had a strong impact on the country's media market, with major media outlets cutting staff and salaries and a number of periodicals ceasing publication. According to the market research company TNS LT, Lithuania's advertising market dropped by nearly 40 percent in 2009. However, as the country's economy began to recover in 2010, the decline had slowed to about 12 percent in the first half of the year, according to the

international media agency network Carat.

The government does not limit access to the internet, and the popularity of internet news portals continues to grow. The Law on the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effects of Public Information explicitly applies to websites, but no enforcement has been reported. About 62 percent of Lithuanians used the internet in 2010, up from 35 percent in 2006.