

[Print](#)

## Freedom Of The Press - Maldives (2011)

**Status: Partly Free**  
**Legal Environment: 17**  
**Political Environment: 17**  
**Economic Environment: 16**  
**Total Score: 50**

Following significant gains in 2009, the level of media freedom in the Maldives remained steady in 2010, as some legal reforms stalled and journalists remained subject to occasional cases of attacks and harassment. The 2008 constitution protects freedom of expression, but also places restrictions on speech deemed "contrary to the tenets of Islam." The overall legal framework protecting free expression remained weak, with many proposed media reform bills still awaiting passage. However, in a positive step, in November 2009 the parliament passed an amendment to the penal code that abolished criminal defamation. There were no reported defamation cases in 2010.

Legislation to transform the state broadcaster, the Maldives National Broadcasting Corporation (MNBC), into the Maldives Broadcasting Corporation, a public broadcaster, was passed in April 2010, but the government delayed implementing the handover. In August 2010, the Broadcasting Act was passed and ratified, establishing a commission to oversee the licensing and regulatory process. In November, the president submitted nominations for the new Maldives Broadcasting Commission to the parliament. A 2008 law called for the establishment of an independent Media Council, consisting of eight media workers and seven members of the public, tasked with developing a code of conduct for journalists and investigating complaints from the public against both print and broadcast outlets. While advocacy groups warned about the potential for government influence (the minister of information nominates the public candidates) and noted that self-regulation was preferable to statutory regulation, they cautiously welcomed the formation of the council and an end to formal control over media content by the ministry. After a considerable delay, elections to the council were held in May 2010. The elections process was criticized for not being sufficiently transparent, and former members of political parties were nominated as candidates to the council. The Maldives Journalist Association (MJA), formed in 2009, regularly made statements regarding media freedom issues and journalists' rights during the year, accusing the government and political leaders of interference with the private media in a number of cases. An alternate group, the Maldives National Journalists' Association, was founded in 2010, reportedly in response to the perceived politicization of the MJA.

Greater media diversity has led to improved coverage of major political events and issues, such as the May 2009 parliamentary elections. Reforms at the state-run Television and Radio Maldives, which remain under the umbrella of the MNBC, have led to somewhat more balanced coverage by the state broadcaster as well, though the outlets still suffer from progovernment bias. The MJA alleged in July 2010 that

the MNBC had given instructions for state media to avoid broadcasting opposition views. Investigative journalism remains hampered by the lack of an access to information law and a culture of secrecy at government departments. Journalists remain subject to some harassment; incidents in 2010 included an attack on the office of private television station VTV by unknown assailants in August and a police attack on journalists covering a political protest in October, as well as verbal attacks on journalists and specific media outlets by a number of high-ranking party officials, including Reeco Moosa Manik, leader of the Maldives Democratic Party. In March, a freelance journalist received repeated death threats from Islamist extremists, allegedly due to his writings. In late January, police ordered that DhiFM suspend its transmission, halting a live broadcast of an opposition demonstration; authorities later requested copies of the station's recordings, accusing it of incitement to violence.

Private print media have expanded, and the sector's coverage presents a fairly wide diversity of viewpoints. However, some publications are owned by allies of former president Maumoon Abdul Gayoom or other political actors, who exercise considerable control over content. The number of private radio stations has increased to at least six, while the country's first private television channels, DhiTV and VTV, began operating in 2008. Private outlets are authorized through individual agreements with the government rather than new broadcasting legislation, limiting their legal protections. Moreover, broadcasters remain subject to high annual licensing fees and must be relicensed every year. Most newspapers are not profitable and rely on financial backing from businessmen with strong political interests. Private media came under further financial pressure in September 2009, when the government began publishing its advertisements in the weekly official gazette instead of private media outlets. Such notices had been a major source of revenue for private publications, and following the decision at least one publication, the *Manas Daily*, was forced to close, while others faced financial hardship. In August 2010, the MJA criticized a delay in disbursing government subsidies for private media outlets, most of which were allocated for the development of private television stations.

The government generally did not interfere with the internet, which was accessed by about 28 percent of the population in 2010. Opposition websites remained unblocked and the number of web-based news outlets has greatly expanded, but the Ministry of Islamic Affairs (MIA) had announced in 2008 that Christian and anti-Islam websites would be blocked, arguing that they could negatively affect belief in Islam, and a number of websites were blocked by the Telecommunication Authority at the MIA's request during 2009.