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Freedom Of The Press - Suriname (2011)

Status: Free
Legal Environment: 4
Political Environment: 12
Economic Environment: 7
Total Score: 23

The government of Suriname generally respects freedom of expression and of the press, as provided for in the country's constitution. Libel is a criminal offense and can be punished with either fines or prison time; however, no cases against journalists were noted in 2010.

Little investigative journalism takes place, and some journalists practice self-censorship on certain issues, particularly drug trafficking and the human rights abuses that took place under the Desi Bouterse dictatorship in the 1980s. In 2010, Bouterse was democratically elected president of Suriname. Although he continues to face charges for the murders of five journalists in 1982, legal proceedings are suspended for the duration of his presidency. Many fear his new position will lead to heightened self-censorship by journalists.

Occasional instances of threats and harassment directed at journalists continue to occur. In 2009, the Suriname correspondent for Reporters Without Borders received telephone threats after his reports on the unexplained disappearance of 90 kg of cocaine from a police station after its seizure. Although he had been in touch with the attorney general, he did not receive protection from authorities. In June 2010, the editor in chief of the monthly publication *Parbode*, Armand Snijders, was attacked by unknown assailants and was warned to stop writing "trash." Although an investigation was launched, no arrests were made. This had been the fourth physical attack on Snijders linked to his work as a journalist.

Suriname has a diverse media, with numerous newspaper publications. The two daily newspapers, *De Ware Tijd* and *De West*, are both privately owned, published in either Dutch or English, and maintain independent websites. Suriname has 24 radio stations, including the government-owned Stichting Radio Omroep Suriname (SRS). The stations reach approximately 300,000 radios. Two state-owned television stations and one privately owned station broadcast to approximately 63,000 televisions. According to the Association of Surinamese Journalists (SVJ), low salaries and poor training are leading to unprofessional conduct and are hurting the profession. The country has two internet service providers, and there are no restrictions on access. Approximately 32 percent of the population accessed the internet in 2010.