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Freedom Of The Press - Uruguay (2011)

Status: Free
Legal Environment: 8
Political Environment: 10
Economic Environment: 7
Total Score: 25

The 1967 constitution provides for press freedom and freedom of expression, and the government generally respects these rights. The 2009 Actual Malice Law decriminalized defamation. In July 2010, the Appeals Court overturned a defamation sentence for the first time in accordance with this law. However, in August, a public prosecutor called for journalist Alvaro Alfonso to be sentenced to two years in prison for libel associated with his book *Secrets of the Communist Party*, which would be inconsistent with the Actual Malice Law. A law on access to public information was passed in 2008, but retrieving certain information, such as the salaries of officials and audits of government departments, may remain difficult at times. Press advocates criticized a decision by the Access to Public Information Unit—tasked with enforcing the law—to merely “suggest” that the Supreme Court allow public access to court documents, which it currently protects from public scrutiny.

The media in Uruguay are vibrant, and journalists generally do not practice self-censorship. However, reports about the 1972–85 military dictatorship still sometimes prompt reprisals. Political polarization in the country is muted by regional standards. Although President José Mugica, a former leftist guerrilla, has criticized the press on certain occasions, he has taken no systematic steps to favor left-leaning outlets or rein in criticism from more conservative news sources. Journalists generally can cover the news freely. There were no reported cases of extralegal harassment or attacks against journalists during 2010.

The press is privately owned and boasts more than 100 daily and weekly newspapers. The broadcast sector is mostly private, with the exceptions of the state-owned television station and radio outlet. There is no evidence that state advertising is used to systematically reward progovernment media, as was the practice prior to 2005, though sporadic complaints from conservative newspaper owners continued until the end of former president Tabaré Vázquez’s term in March 2010. In December, President Mugica indicated that he would shelve months of work by a technical commission of policy experts from government, civil society, and the private sector who had proposed further reforms concerning private media ownership. The recommendations included the addition of anticoncentration requirements to decisions about granting frequency concessions; greater balance in public, private, and community media; and the creation of an independent oversight agency and audience ombudsman. There were no government restrictions on the internet, which was accessed by 43 percent of the population during the year.