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## FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

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# Suriname

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The government generally respects freedom of expression and of the press, as provided for in the country's constitution. Suriname has some of the most severe criminal defamation laws in the Caribbean, with prison sentences of up to seven years for "public expression of enmity, hatred, or contempt" toward the government, and up to five years imprisonment for insulting the head of state. However, these laws have not been used against members of the press in recent years. The country continued to lack freedom of information legislation.

While there have been instances of threats and physical harassment directed at journalists in the past, no major incidents were reported in 2012. However, little investigative journalism takes place, and some journalists practice self-censorship due to pressure and intimidation from government officials. Coverage of certain issues, such as drug trafficking and the human rights abuses that took place under the Desi Bouterse dictatorship in the 1980s, are also discouraged. In 2010, Bouterse returned to office after winning Suriname's democratic presidential elections, despite being on trial since 2007 for the 1982 murders of 15 political

opponents, including five journalists. On April 4, 2012, the National Assembly voted to extend the country's 1992 amnesty law to include "crimes committed in the context of the defense of the state" between April 1, 1980, and August 19, 1992, effectively granting immunity to Bouterse and the 24 other suspects in the murders and entrenching a climate of impunity for those who have committed crimes against journalists. According to the Association of Surinamese Journalists (SVJ), communication between the Bouterse government and the independent media has been poor, and the government has occasionally restricted the work of journalists. In 2012, government officials launched verbal attacks and threats toward individual journalists, particularly for their reporting on the passage of the amnesty law. The president's official spokesman publicly intimidated journalists who reported on negative reactions to the law, and the government also used a state-owned radio station to criticize independent journalists.

Suriname has a robust media, with numerous print publications. The two daily newspapers, *De Ware Tijd* and *De West*, are both privately owned, publish in either Dutch or English, and maintain independent websites. Suriname has about 30 radio stations, including the government-owned Stichting Radio Omroep Suriname (SRS), two state-owned television stations, and one privately owned television station. Many media outlets are affiliated with particular political parties, which sometimes exert influence over news coverage. Chinese investment has recently surged in Suriname, resulting in an upgrade of a state television network. Additionally, the growing Chinese community has created two daily newspapers and a new television station that operates in Mandarin. The SVJ has reported that low salaries and poor training lead to unprofessional conduct and hurt the profession.

The country has two internet service providers, and approximately 35 percent of the population accessed the internet in 2012. Access is readily available in urban areas but much more limited in interior sections of the country. While there are no official restrictions on the internet, journalists have complained of government monitoring of their e-mail and social media accounts.

## 2013 SCORES

### PRESS STATUS

# Free

PRESS FREEDOM SCORE

**24**

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

**6**

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

**12**

ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

**6**

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