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Freedom Of The Press - Antigua and Barbuda (2011)

Status: Partly Free
Legal Environment: 9
Political Environment: 16
Economic Environment: 13
Total Score: 38

The constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press, and the government generally respects these rights. Defamation remains a criminal offense, and cases are occasionally brought against journalists. As in previous years, a main source of friction between the authorities and the media is the lack of clarity about what subjects can be discussed on radio talk shows. In December 2010, a prominent attorney, Anthony Astaphan, successfully appealed for a court order preventing three talk show hosts—Lennox Linton, Matthias Peltier, and Angelo Allen—from discussing an ongoing judicial process involving a former chief magistrate and another lawyer. Astaphan denied that the move constituted a curb on press freedom, stating, “The laws of the freedom of expression have expressly recognized as an exception to freedom of expression the law of contempt of court.”

The islands have 1 daily newspaper, 1 biweekly paper, and more than 10 radio stations, including the state-owned Antigua and Barbuda Network (ABN), the ruling United Progressive Party’s Crusader Radio, the opposition Antigua Labour Party’s ZDK Liberty Radio International, and the independent Observer Radio. ABN runs the islands’ only freely available television service, and there is one cable television company. Most private media outlets are owned by firms affiliated with either the current government or its predecessor. In April 2010, one of Antigua and Barbuda’s two daily newspapers, *Antigua Sun*, which was published by the Sun Printing and Publishing Company Limited (SPPC), closed because of financial constraints. Forty-eight employees of *Antigua Sun* were laid off, and there seems to be little prospect of the paper reopening. The closure is directly related to the collapse of the business empire of SPPC’s owner, Texas financier Allen Stanford. In February 2009, Stanford was charged with operating a US\$7 billion Ponzi scheme. Arrested by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation in June 2009, he remains in prison in the United States pending trial. There are no government restrictions on the internet, which was accessed by 80 percent of the population in 2010.