

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS



Belize

Belize | [Freedom of the Press 2012](#) |

The constitution protects the right to freedom of expression, although there are several legal limitations to that right. The government may impose a fine of up to \$2,500 and up to three years in prison for anyone who questions the financial disclosures of public officials. Newspapers are subject to criminal defamation laws, and the Belize Broadcasting Authority holds the right to preview broadcasts with political content and remove material it deems libelous. In December 2010, the government announced that it was suspending normal relations with Belize's television station Channel 5, which included forbidding government officials from supplying the channel with any information or interviews. After an outcry by local groups, however, the cabinet decided to rescind this decision by the year's end, and relations stabilized in 2011.

While there are no daily newspapers in Belize, there is a vibrant market for weeklies. Papers are privately owned, with two weeklies directly affiliated with political parties. In general, reporting covers a wide range of opinions. Government-operated radio was privatized in 1998, and today there are 8 television stations and 33 licensed radio stations. The ruling United Democratic Party and the opposition People's United Party (PUP) both have radio stations with which they are affiliated. Concerns over government control of the broadcast industry began in 2009 with the "nationalization" of Belize Telemedia, the country's leading private telecommunications provider, in which the owners allegedly were offered no compensation. The PUP branded the action an "expropriation." In June 2011, Belize's Court of Appeal ruled that the government's nationalization of Telemedia was unconstitutional, and returned the company to its original owners. However, the government made additional amendments to the Telecommunications Act in order to renationalize Telemedia a second time in July.

While the government does not restrict internet access or use, lack of infrastructure and high costs limited usage to 20 percent of the population in 2011, according to Internet World Stats.

2012 SCORES

PRESS STATUS

Free

PRESS FREEDOM SCORE

21

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

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POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

8

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