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FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

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Antigua and Barbuda

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The constitution provides for freedoms of speech and of the press, but the government enforces those rights somewhat selectively. Defamation remains a criminal offense, punishable by up to three years in prison. Cases are occasionally brought against journalists, and politicians often file libel suits against opposing party members. In February 2012, a court ruled in favor of opposition Antigua Labour Party (ALP) leader Lester Bird in a defamation case against Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer and Crusader Radio, owned by the ruling United Progressive Party (UPP), for statements Spencer made during a 2008 campaign rally that were aired by the station. The judge awarded EC\$75,000 (US\$28,000) in damages to Bird, and declared that radio stations would be held responsible for defamatory comments made during live broadcasts without a time delay. In August, a controversial song to be played during the annual Carnival, which some claimed celebrated violence against women, led to calls for the establishment of a broadcast commission to monitor the country's airwaves. The proposal received government support, but a commission had yet to be created by year's end.

The 2004 Freedom of Information Act grants citizens the right to access official government documents and established a commissioner to oversee compliance, though Antiguan citizens have complained of difficulties in obtaining information. In November 2012, local and regional media associations, along with Bird and a group of prominent attorneys in the country, condemned a clause in legislation governing the Citizens by Investment program that prohibits the media from publishing or disseminating information on the initiative, with potential fines of up to EC\$10,000 (US\$3,700). The program allows Antiguan passports to be issued to foreign investors.

The islands have one daily newspaper, one biweekly paper, and more than 10 radio stations. These include the state-owned Antigua and Barbuda Network (ABN), the UPP's Crusader Radio, the pro-ALP ZDK Liberty Radio, and the independent Observer Radio. The ALP has complained that the government-run media do not offer equal access to the opposition. In October 2012, radio journalist Percival Simon was banned from ZDK, which is owned by the Bird family, for openly supporting Bird's opponent in an ALP leadership contest, Gaston Browne. 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. Antigua and Barbuda also receives broadcasts from a pan-Caribbean radio network, the Caribbean SuperStation (CSS), based in Trinidad.

The global financial crisis has negatively affected the country's media. Due to an increase in the price of paper, the *Observer* daily raised its advertising rates in December 2010, but did not change its newsstand price. A number of businesses have since been unwilling to advertise with the *Observer*, and the company has suffered. Also in 2010, Antigua and Barbuda's only other daily newspaper, *Antigua Sun*, was forced to close down because of financial constraints.

There are no government restrictions on the internet, which was accessed by 84 percent of the population in 2012.

2013 SCORES

PRESS STATUS

Partly Free

PRESS FREEDOM SCORE

38

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

9

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

16

ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

13

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