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Freedom Of The Press - Iceland (2011)

Status: Free
Legal Environment: 1
Political Environment: 5
Economic Environment: 6
Total Score: 12

Despite enduring problems associated with the global financial crisis of late 2008, the Icelandic press is still among the freest in the world. Freedoms of the press and expression are protected under Article 72 of the constitution, and the government generally does not interfere in the independent media's presentation of a wide variety of views. However, there are limitations to these rights, including fines or imprisonment for those who belittle the doctrines of officially recognized religious groups. In addition, individuals may face fines and up to two years in prison for verbal assaults based on race, religion, nationality, or sexual orientation. In June 2010, following revelations regarding the financial meltdown and inspired by the antisecrecy organization WikiLeaks, the parliament approved a resolution on an ambitious Icelandic Modern Media Initiative. The initiative aimed to create a global safe haven with unprecedented legal protection for the press, bloggers, and whistle-blowers. By year's end the initiative still had widespread support, but no progress had been made in turning the resolution into law.

The country's wide range of publications includes both independent and party-affiliated newspapers, but the financial crisis has led to cutbacks in both broadcast and print media. The Icelandic National Broadcasting Service (RUV) runs radio and television stations funded by license fees as well as advertising revenue. RUV was reestablished as a public corporation in March 2007, having previously operated as a state-owned institution; it still has public-service obligations, and holds a market share of around 50 percent. Media concentration is a concern in Iceland, as the company 365 controls much of the country's private television and radio broadcasting, one of the major national newspapers, and several magazines. There was also some concern over the appointment of a former prime minister and central bank chairman as editor in chief of the largest independent newspaper, *Morgunbladid*, in late 2009. Web-based media are flourishing, and the internet is not restricted by the government. In 2010, 95 percent of the country's population accessed the internet, and 61 percent were reported to be on the social-networking site Facebook, which serves as an active forum for debate among both citizens and public officials.