

## FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

# Iceland

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

The Icelandic press is among the freest in the world, although declines have been noted in recent years. 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.

Iceland's libel laws posed a problem to free speech in 2011. In February, a Reykjavik municipal court ordered two editors and a journalist for the newspaper *DV* to pay soccer star's Eidur Gudjohnsen 400,000 krona (\$3,100) in addition to a 150,000 krona (\$1,200) fine to the state for publishing his private financial information. The journalist highlighted several loans that Gudjohnsen had received from Icelandic banks in a story about similar loans that led to the country's 2008 financial collapse. Also in February, in southwest Iceland, a woman was forced to pay a fine of 700,000 krona (\$5,500) for using her blog to publicly accuse a man of killing a dog by allegedly stuffing it into a bag and kicking it to death. The man planned to file suit against several other individuals but had not done so by the end of 2011. In July, a Reykjavik district court ordered Jon Bjarki Magnusson of *DV* to pay Kim Gram Laursen 500,000 krona (\$4,000) plus 750,000 krona (\$5,900) in legal fees for direct quotes published in an article about Laursen's custody battle.

Despite the Icelandic Modern Media Initiative (IMMI), which was passed by parliament in June 2010 and was intended to make Iceland the freest country in the world for journalism, 2011 saw no advancements in the goals that the IMMI set; in fact, it faced several setbacks. None of the laws envisioned in the IMMI were passed by the end of 2011. Instead, a controversial new media control law, passed by parliament on April 16 and signed into law by the president on April 26, became active. Press freedom organizations opposed several components to the law, the most serious of which includes the creation of the State Media Committee. The committee is a state-run organization that will have sweeping powers to impose fines on media outlets if they do not comply with the law, as well as a new requirement to register as a media outlet by detailing the outlet's "editorial strategy." Nonregistration can result in fines of approximately \$1,600 per day. An outlet may also be fined if it does not adhere to its stated editorial strategy. The new law also includes a clause which prohibits reporting that might encourage hate speech based on "race, gender, sexual orientation, religious belief, nationality, opinion or cultural, economic, social or other standing in society." Journalists fear that the "economic and social standing" portion of this clause could be used against them by people in power, as such individuals may view it as a means to incriminate journalists if any negative information is published about them. Two positive protections afforded by the law are editorial independence from owners and the protection of sources.

## 2012 SCORES

### PRESS STATUS

**Free**

### PRESS FREEDOM SCORE

**14**

### LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

**3**

### POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

**5**

### ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

**6**

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.

In 2011, 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. Web-based media are flourishing, and the internet is not restricted by the government.

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