



Freedom of the Press 2017 - Philippines

Publisher [Freedom House](#)

Publication Date 1 November 2017

Cite as Freedom House, *Freedom of the Press 2017 - Philippines*, 1 November 2017, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/59fc67c9a.html> [accessed 14 January 2019]

Disclaimer This is not a UNHCR publication. UNHCR is not responsible for, nor does it necessarily endorse, its content. Any views expressed are solely those of the author or publisher and do not necessarily reflect those of UNHCR, the United Nations or its Member States.

Press Freedom Status: Partly Free

Total Score: 44/100 (0 = Most Free, 100 = Least Free)

Legal Environment: 14/30

Political Environment: 20/40

Economic Environment: 10/30

Quick Facts

Population: 102,600,000

Freedom in the World Status: Partly Free

Net Freedom Status: Free

Internet Penetration Rate: 40.7%

Key Developments in 2016:

- Rodrigo Duterte was elected president of the Philippines in May. His hostile rhetoric against the media inflamed an already dangerous environment for journalists and raised concerns about his government's commitment to upholding press freedom.
- In July, Duterte issued an executive order creating the country's first freedom of information regime, but its narrow scope and high number of exceptions limit its impact.
- Duterte in October issued an order creating a special task force on journalists' safety, which was empowered to investigate crimes against journalists. However, no major investigations had begun by year's end.
- Two people were convicted of murdering journalists in 2016. Nevertheless, the Philippines remains one of the most dangerous places in the world to practice journalism, and violent attacks against media workers usually go unpunished.

Executive Summary

Public and private media in the Philippines offer a wide range of views and provide coverage of controversial topics, including counterinsurgency campaigns and high-level corruption cases. However, media freedom is compromised by the threat of legal action, including under criminal defamation laws, and the Philippines remains one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists. Existing legal protections have generally failed to prevent or punish acts of violence, leading to an entrenched climate of impunity. And while the media collectively offer a broad spectrum of viewpoints, outlets are often accused of providing sensationalist content rather than investigative journalism and useful analysis.

Hostile rhetoric toward members of the media by Duterte further exacerbated an already perilous situation for journalists in the Philippines; Duterte, for example, weeks after his election asserted that "corrupt"

reporters "are not exempted from assassination." Journalists who investigated the Duterte administration's role in extrajudicial killings carried out as part of its war on drugs frequently faced harassment and death threats. In a move designed to address journalists' longstanding concerns about their safety, President Duterte in October issued an order creating the Presidential Task Force on Violations of the Right to Life, Liberty, and Security of the Members of the Media, which was empowered to investigate crimes against journalists. However, no major investigations were initiated by year's end.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), three reporters were murdered in 2016. Though none of the killings could be definitively linked to the victims' work, each had reported on sensitive issues, including official corruption and organized crime. While two people were convicted of murdering journalists in 2016, impunity for such crimes remains the norm.

Despite an ongoing campaign by a coalition of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the country lacks a robust freedom of information law, and national security and privacy justifications are regularly employed to obstruct access to government information. In July 2016, Duterte issued an executive order that established a limited access to information regime over the country's executive branch. However, transparency advocates criticized the order's long list of exceptions, which they said effectively nullified its utility. The order did not apply to the legislature or judicial system.

Legal Environment: 14 / 30

The constitution guarantees freedom of speech and of expression. However, in 2016 these guarantees were undermined by President Duterte, whose antagonistic rhetoric – including a May declaration that "corrupt" journalists "are not exempted from assassination" – contributed to a hostile environment for the press. National security legislation introduced in 2007 can be used to curb journalists' traditional rights and access to sources, as can the National Security Clearance System, which was designed to "protect and ensure the integrity and sanctity" of classified information against "enemies of the state."

Existing legal protections have failed to prevent or punish violence against journalists, leading to an entrenched climate of impunity. The trial for the alleged perpetrators of the 2009 Maguindanao massacre, in which 58 civilians – including 32 journalists – were killed when gunmen launched an ambush intended to prevent a local politician from filing his candidacy for governor, continued in 2016. The process has featured violent witness intimidation as well as the killings of a number of witnesses, and only a portion of the 197 suspects have been arraigned. However, the National Police Commission dismissed 21 officers and suspended another 11 in December 2015 for misconduct, after finding that they had failed to intervene as they witnessed the massacre while on duty.

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) ranked the Philippines as the fourth-worst country in the world for impunity in 2016. According to the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, out of the more than 170 court cases that have been brought against suspects in the murders of journalists since 1986, fewer than 20 have led to convictions. However, 2016 saw a few exceptions to this general trend. In June, a former police officer was convicted and sentenced to 40 years in prison for the 2010 murder of the radio journalist Desiderio Camangyan. And in August, the former mayor of the municipality of Lezo was sentenced to 14 years in prison for the 2004 homicide of broadcaster Herson Hinolan.

Defamation is a criminal offense that can be punished with prison terms and large fines. For nearly two decades, journalists and advocacy groups have been frustrated in their campaign to decriminalize libel and defamation. Cases continue to be filed against journalists whose reporting angers officials and other powerful individuals.

Weaknesses in the judicial system often affect the handling of cases related to media freedom. Those with the means to hire strong legal representation are able to manipulate the technicalities of the law in their favor, or delay cases to the point where justice is effectively denied.

National security and privacy justifications are regularly employed to obstruct the public's access to government information. In July 2016, President Duterte issued an executive order that established a limited access to information regime over the country's executive branch. However, transparency advocates criticized the order's long list of exceptions, which they said effectively nullified its utility. Moreover, the order covers only information held by the executive branch and does not apply to the legislature or judicial

system. An access to information law that would cover the entire government has been stalled for years despite a vigorous campaign by civil society organizations.

There are no restrictive licensing requirements for newspapers or journalists, and the country has numerous journalists' associations.

Political Environment: 20 / 40

While the media collectively offer a range of views, reporting by private outlets tends to reflect the political or business interests of their owners and financial supporters. Both the private media and the many publicly owned television and radio stations address controversial topics, including alleged election fraud, ongoing counterinsurgency campaigns, and high-level corruption cases. However, the country's outlets are often accused of providing shallow and provocative content as opposed to investigative journalism and useful analysis.

In October 2016, a watchdog group, the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility, issued a report on its monitoring of a series of television news specials that marked the first 100 days of the Duterte administration, and evaluated the new administration's activities during that period. The group found that the outlets were generally deferential to the president, and lacked substantive coverage of the human rights implications of Duterte's drug war. However, the study also noted that some newspapers, since Duterte's inauguration, had offered more critical perspectives.

A censorship board has the power to edit or ban content for both television and film, but government censorship does not typically affect political material. Politically motivated libel cases and the threat of violence, including aggressive online harassment, leads some journalists and media outlets to practice self-censorship.

Journalists are subject to harassment, threats, stalking, illegal arrests, raids on their outlets, and murder. Hostile rhetoric from President Duterte has further inflamed the already dangerous environment for journalists in the country. Media investigations into the Duterte administration's role in extrajudicial killings carried out as part of its war on drugs have been followed by harassment and threats of murder and rape against the journalists conducting them. According to CPJ, three journalists were murdered in 2016. Though none of the killings could be definitively linked to the victims' work, each reported on sensitive social and political issues, including antidrug operations, corruption, and organized crime.

In October, President Duterte issued an administrative order creating the Presidential Task Force on Violations of the Right to Life, Liberty and Security of the Members of the Media, a body established to investigate crimes against journalists. However, no major investigations had begun by year's end.

Economic Environment: 10 / 30

Most media outlets are privately owned. A wide variety of views is presented on state television and radio. There are hundreds of newspaper titles. Private television ownership is concentrated, with the two largest media networks, ABS-CBN and GMA-7, controlled by wealthy families with interests in other sectors of the economy; together the networks reach more than 80 percent of television audiences. Radio is also a popular medium, and there are more than 600 stations in the country. ABS-CBN and GMA-7 are also major players in radio, reaching nearly 50 percent of FM listeners.

Just over 55 percent of the population accessed the internet in 2016. Internet use is not restricted, and Filipinos are among the region's most active users of social media such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, which often carry news content. Fixed-line broadband penetration remains low, particularly in rural areas, and many users access the internet through their mobile phones.

The practice of using bribes or strategic "favors" to elicit positive coverage is widespread; it is a subject openly debated among journalists, and various organizations offer ethics training in an effort to combat bribery. In another common practice known as block-timing, individuals or groups lease airtime from broadcast stations using their own sponsors. Block-time programs are often designed to promote or attack political interests, especially during election campaigns, though they are also used by local environmental,

human rights, or anticorruption activists. These programs are prone to sensationalism and unethical practices, and their hosts are frequently victims of violence.

Job security is tenuous for many journalists, as salaries are small and employment uncertain, and contractual work continues to replace permanent positions. Some reporters are expected to seek advertisers to supply revenue for their own wages.

Copyright notice: © Freedom House, Inc. · All Rights Reserved

Search Refworld

by keyword

and / or country

[Advanced Search](#) | [Search Tips](#)

Countries

- [Philippines](#)

Topics

- [Freedom of expression](#)
- [Freedom of information](#)