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Press Freedom Status: Partly Free
Legal Environment: 13 / 30 (↑1) (0 = best, 30 = worst)
Political Environment: 24 / 40 (↑2) (0 = best, 40 = worst)
Economic Environment: 16 / 30 (↑2) (0 = best, 30 = worst)
Press Freedom Score: 53 / 100 (↑5) (0 = best, 100 = worst)

Note: The scores and narrative for Ukraine do not reflect conditions in Russian-occupied Crimea, which is assessed in a separate report.

Quick Facts

Population: 42,828,300
Net Freedom Status: Partly Free
Freedom in the World Status: Partly Free
Internet Penetration Rate: 43.4%

As the political and security situation stabilized somewhat in 2015, conditions for the media in Ukraine showed signs of improvement. The government of President Petro Poroshenko continued to strengthen media legislation, and violence against media workers declined relative to 2014. Journalists' access to separatist-held areas in the east of the country remained restricted.

Key Developments

- Several pieces of media legislation were passed, including laws on access to information, protections for journalists who are attacked in the course of their work, and the privatization of publicly owned print media.
- Reports of attacks and intimidation against journalists significantly decreased.
- The government continued the process of transforming Ukraine's state television and radio stations into public-service broadcasters.

Legal Environment: 13 / 30 (↑1)

The constitutional and legal framework for the media in Ukraine is among the most progressive in Eastern Europe, though its protections are not always upheld in practice. The government made

several positive legislative changes in 2015. In February, the parliament approved the liquidation of the National Expert Commission for the Protection of Public Morals, a controversial body that had been created in 2004 to enforce the observance of morality laws by the media. Amendments to the criminal code adopted in May increased penalties for crimes against journalists, including attacks, threats, abduction, murder, and the destruction of property. The legislation also established mechanisms for financial assistance to journalists who are injured, and to the families of those who are killed, while performing their professional duties. Impunity for crimes against the media nevertheless remains a problem in Ukraine.

In April, the parliament adopted a law that bans symbols related to "communist and Nazi totalitarian regimes" – with some exceptions, including for educational purposes – and penalizes the denial of the "criminal nature" of these regimes. Related legislation, also adopted in April, established recognition for several groups that fought for Ukrainian independence in the 20th century and criminalized the public denial of their legitimacy. Local and international media rights groups expressed concerns that the broadly worded laws could discourage open debate and critical journalism about politically sensitive topics. Both laws went into force in May.

Libel was decriminalized in 2001, and in 2009 the Supreme Court instructed judges to follow the civil libel standards of the European Court of Human Rights, which granted lower levels of protection to public officials and clearly distinguished between value judgments and factual information. Officials nevertheless continue to use libel lawsuits filed in the country's politicized court system to deter critical reporting. Amendments to legislation on court fees, passed in May 2015, led to concerns that journalists facing libel suits or other claims for nonpecuniary damages could be unduly burdened by high fees, including for filing appeals.

The government made further improvements in 2015 to legislation on access to public information, which had been strengthened in the previous year to comply with international standards. In April, legislators adopted amendments that compel government agencies to regularly release open data on their websites and on a single national online portal. Legislation passed in December guaranteed free access to information about public utilities, including prices and tariffs. Enforcement of legislation on access to public information remained problematic, however. The Institute of Mass Information (IMI), a Ukrainian nongovernmental organization, reported an increase in the restriction of journalists' access to public information in 2015, recording 33 cases, compared with 14 in 2014. According to the IMI, the obstacles were mostly imposed by local government bodies.

Legal requirements for the establishment and operation of private media outlets are not unduly onerous, although print media must be formally registered with the state. In April, Ukraine's main LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) web portal again reported that it had been denied registration as an online information agency; the outlet continued to pursue official registration throughout the year. Legislation adopted in September required the National Television and Radio Broadcasting Council, the country's broadcasting regulator, to release detailed explanations of its licensing decisions.

There are no burdensome restrictions on freedom to pursue the journalistic profession, and a number of groups and associations, including the National Union of Journalists and the Independent Media Trade Union of Ukraine, are able to support journalistic interests. However, Russian-backed separatist authorities in the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk have been known to deny accreditation to both local and foreign journalists based on accusations of "propagandistic" or "negative" reporting.

Political Environment: 24 / 40 (↑2)

Some state pressure on outlets and journalists persisted at the national and subnational levels in 2015, although state interference in the affairs of both private and public media has decreased drastically since the ouster of then president Viktor Yanukovych in 2014. The content of private media outlets is often influenced by the political or commercial interests of their owners. In September, the 1+1 television station suspended a popular talk show shortly before it was to air an appearance by a political opponent of Poroshenko as part of a discussion about government corruption. The station claimed to have taken the show off air to avoid exacerbating tensions in the country, but some critics alleged that the decision was due to political pressure. The main private broadcasters – which are controlled by a handful of powerful businessmen – displayed a variety of political orientations or biases in 2015, especially during the campaign period for the October local elections.

Freedom of access to official sources varies, depending on the public institution or official. Local officials in particular have been known to restrict media access to the activities of government bodies. In November, the mayor of Hlukhiv forcibly removed the editor of a local private newspaper from a city council meeting, reportedly on the grounds that private media should not be admitted to the meetings. In December, the parliament adopted legislation requiring parliamentary committee meetings to be held openly and publicly, and ensuring the ability of journalists to access them.

The National Television and Radio Broadcasting Council obtained court orders in 2014 to temporarily suspend the retransmission of certain Russian channels in Ukraine. The suspensions came after Russian state-controlled news outlets carried aggressively propagandistic content that was apparently designed to support the Russian occupation of Crimea, encourage pro-Russian separatism in eastern and southern Ukraine, and discredit the new government in Kyiv. The issue of censorship continued to be a topic of debate in 2015, and despite criticism of the suspensions by international media rights groups, the retransmission of several Russian television channels remained barred during the year.

In occupied areas of Donetsk and Luhansk, Russian-backed separatists retained control of broadcasting facilities, which they had seized in 2014, and continued to block the transmission of most Ukrainian television channels. The self-proclaimed governments of these regions also restricted access to several websites in 2015. Local journalists and media groups reported increasing self-censorship on politically sensitive issues; the problem persists to a lesser degree in areas controlled by the Kyiv government.

In 2014, violence during the popular uprising against Yanukovych and open warfare in the east had made Ukraine one of the world's most dangerous and difficult working environments for the media. Violence against journalists significantly decreased in 2015, although members of the press still faced intimidation, threats, and attacks from both state and nonstate actors in the course of their work. According to the IMI, there were at least 100 cases of interference with journalists attempting to cover newsworthy events, particularly during local elections in October. The organization also recorded dozens of beatings and assaults against reporters, most of which were committed by nonstate or unidentified actors; in 2014, security forces and public officials had been responsible for most incidents. Scores of journalists have fled the separatist-held eastern regions since the outbreak of violence in 2014, and independent media have limited access to these areas. Two reporters were killed during the year: Serhiy Nikolayev, a photojournalist for the Ukrainian newspaper *Segodnya*, was killed in cross fire while covering fighting in Donetsk in February, and Oles Buzyna, a journalist with strong pro-Russian views, was murdered in Kyiv in April.

In September, Poroshenko signed a decree barring hundreds of individuals, including 41 international journalists and bloggers, from entering Ukraine for one year on national security

grounds. Following an outcry from international media and human rights groups, the government removed a number of journalists from Western outlets – among them the British Broadcasting Corporation – from the list. Ukrainian authorities deported several Russian journalists during the year, citing concerns about propaganda and misinformation.

Economic Environment: 16 / 30 (↑1)

Most media in Ukraine are privately owned, and the most popular source of news is television. Throughout 2015, officials continued the process of transforming Ukraine's state television and radio outlets into public-service broadcasters. A law signed in April established a new public broadcasting corporation that would be overseen by a supervisory board with strong civil society representation. In December, the president approved a law to facilitate the privatization of print media owned by central, regional, and local government authorities, which watchdogs praised as an important step toward increasing pluralism in the sector. Separate legislation signed in December initiated the formation of a state-run multiplatform news service to boost the country's international media presence and image, and to provide "prompt and objective information about developments in Ukraine."

A package of amendments that came into force in October requires broadcasters and program service providers to disclose detailed information about their ownership structures, including the identities of ultimate beneficiaries; companies are obliged to comply within six months. Media ownership has long been nontransparent in practice, although it is widely understood that most of the sector is controlled by a small number of wealthy businessmen with interests in politics and other industries. President Poroshenko, also a powerful businessman, retained ownership of his 5 Kanal television station in 2015 despite widespread calls for him to give up the outlet as a conflict of interest. The Inter Media Group is reportedly owned by gas trader Dmytro Firtash and Serhiy Lyovochkin, a member of parliament and former head of Yanukovych's presidential administration. Star Light Media, reportedly owned by billionaire industrialist Viktor Pinchuk, is composed of six television stations and an assortment of other media and advertising companies. 1+1 Media Group is reportedly owned by Ihor Kolomoysky, the former governor of Dnipropetrovsk. Former legislator Rinat Akhmetov, considered Ukraine's wealthiest person, reportedly controls Media Group Ukraine.

The October legislation also banned individuals or entities from offshore economic zones or "aggressor or occupier states" – a designation determined by the government – from establishing or owning broadcasting or program service provider companies in Ukraine. Despite such restrictions, the costs of establishing and operating media outlets are not generally prohibitive. Zeonbud, the country's only digital terrestrial television transmission company, announced substantial price cuts for its services in August. The company, which had obtained an exclusive license through an opaque process in 2010, was declared a monopoly in 2014 and fined 44 million hryven ($1.9 million) by the state antimonopoly committee in December 2015 for abuse of its dominant position in the market.

The government does not restrict access to the internet, which was used by about 43 percent of the population in 2014. Ukrainians have increasingly turned to online platforms, including social media, for their news and information.

Advertising revenue for print media has declined in recent years, leaving newspapers even more financially dependent on politicized owners. Paid content disguised as news, known as *jeansa*, remains widespread and weakens the credibility of journalists, especially during elections. Difficult economic conditions in Ukraine have placed the media sector, particularly small outlets, under financial strain in recent years.

Countries

- Ukraine

Topics

- Freedom of expression
- Freedom of information
- Security situation
- Threats / Intimidation