



Freedom of the Press 2013 - Guyana

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2013 Scores

Press Status: Partly Free

Press Freedom Score: 33

Legal Environment: 9

Political Environment: 14

Economic Environment: 10

Guyana's constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press, but relations between the People's Progressive Party (PPP) government and some media outlets have deteriorated in recent years. While defamation is not a criminal offense, public officials have utilized civil libel suits to stifle criticism. In 2010, then president Bharrat Jagdeo sued journalist and political activist Freddie Kissoon as well as the editor in chief and publishers of *Kaieteur News* for libel over a critical article, and obtained a preliminary injunction barring the newspaper from printing similar content. Hearings in the case took place in late 2012, and the courts had not rendered a final decision by year's end.

The 2011 Access to Information Act guarantees the right of access to information, requires government bodies to publish documents, and creates a commissioner of information to regulate data requests and releases. However, the government had not implemented the law by the end of 2012, and critics objected to the inclusion of a clause that made the president exempt from the legislation's provisions.

A new Broadcasting Act went into effect in 2012. Although initially seen as an opportunity to extend media freedom and reduce government influence, the act has been widely criticized for its failure to advance either of those goals. The law gives the president the power to appoint six of the seven members of the new National Broadcasting Authority (NBA). President Donald Ramotar stacked the body with PPP insiders who had little or no broadcasting experience. In addition, a clause in the Broadcasting Act states that all programs must be "fair and balanced," which could be used to control content. The law allows the NBA to issue licenses for private television and radio operators, but none of the radio stations that received licenses have begun operating, and licenses have been denied to television stations operating in opposition strongholds. In late 2011, then president Jagdeo controversially used executive power to grant radio licenses to friends and political allies before the new broadcasting regulations took effect.

Guyana has a vibrant, though threatened, opposition press. Cases of censorship aimed at opposition-leaning media were reported in the run-up to the November 2011 general elections. In October 2011, Jagdeo ordered a four-month suspension of CNS Channel Six, a privately owned television station, due to a comment made on the air by an opposition lawmaker earlier in the year. After local and international media rights groups condemned the move, which would have silenced the station during the election period, Jagdeo postponed the ban until December 2011. In November 2012, CNS Channel Six reported signal interference that it characterized as an intentional attack.

There are occasional cases of attacks and harassment against journalists and media outlets. In August 2012, Kissoon was assaulted after publishing a column in which he claimed that he had been "a victim of state oppression." Earlier in the year, he was dismissed from his lecturer position at the state-run University of Guyana, which he had held for 26 years. In November, police began an investigation to determine how reporters received information about the country's Central Intelligence Agency, a move the Guyana Press Association called a form of intimidation.

The government owns and controls the country's only two radio stations, run by the National Communications Network, though licenses for private stations have been issued. There are 23 television stations, most of which are in private hands. Including the government-owned daily, the *Chronicle*, Guyana has seven national newspapers and six other periodicals. The majority of paid advertising appears in progovernment newspapers, including the *Guyana Times*, which is owned by a friend of Jagdeo's, and this affects the economic viability of opposition papers. *Kaieteur News* has opted to place government advertisements free of charge, and it is believed that this loss of revenue accounts for the paper's December 2010 decision to charge for access to its website.

Use of the internet is not restricted by the government, and approximately 34 percent of the population accessed this medium in 2012.

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