



Freedom of the Press 2015 - Nepal

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2015 Scores

Press Status: Partly Free

Press Freedom Score (0 = best, 100 = worst): 55

Legal Environment (0 = best, 30 = worst): 16

Political Environment (0 = best, 40 = worst): 24

Economic Environment (0 = best, 30 = worst): 15

Legal Environment

The 2007 interim constitution includes language protecting freedom of the press, opinion, and expression. However, it has long been criticized for failing to meet international standards, and the government has struggled to uphold media freedom in practice. According to the constitution, freedom of expression can be restricted in cases of defamation and incitement, as well as in the interest of promoting sovereignty, public decency, morality, and harmonious relations between different communities. A constituent assembly elected in 2013 pledged to present a new draft constitution by November 2014, but failed to produce one by the year's end. A previous draft constitution, which was scrapped because an earlier constituent assembly had failed to approve it by a May 2012 deadline, had contained restrictions on free speech.

Criminal defamation charges are rarely employed against journalists, but other legal obstacles can stand in their way. On at least two instances in 2014, police made arrests in connection with comments that had been posted on Facebook, prompting concern among media groups about a possible government crackdown on free expression on the internet. In June, Mohamad Abdul Rahman, a businessman, was arrested for allegedly violating the 2008 Electronic Transaction Act after he had posted to Facebook a comment about improving security in Saptari. The incident came weeks after government employee Raju Prasad Sah was arrested over a comment he posted to the Facebook page of the national daily *Naya Patrika*, in which he stated that a minister who had apparently committed a traffic violation should be shot. Both men were later released.

National media outlets and international advocacy groups expressed concern over a Contempt of Court bill introduced to the parliament in June 2014, which prohibits influencing a subjudicial matter, insulting a court's judgment, recording court activities without permission from a judge, or insulting a staff member or judge of the court. Convictions would carry a fine of as much as Rs 10,000 (\$125) and up to a year in jail. The bill had yet to be approved at the year's end.

The 2007 Right to Information Act, though generally welcomed by press freedom groups, has been criticized for its requirement that applicants furnish reasons for their requests. The government often fails to respect the information law.

There is no independent regulatory body to oversee the broadcasting sector. Under the current arrangement, the government is the only licensing and regulatory agency for the media – a point of contention for independent and community broadcasters.

Political Environment

Journalists sometimes encounter interference while performing their jobs. In January 2014, officials at Nepal's constituent assembly chamber prevented journalists from entering the premises while a swearing-in ceremony was taking place. The media are not generally subjected to direct censorship from the government. However, in another January 2014 incident, Nepal's state-owned media monitoring body, Press Council Nepal, ordered Himalaya Television to discontinue a news broadcast about a medical college. Additionally, the Nepal Telecommunication Authority (NTA) has ordered internet service providers to block pornographic content and any material that "incites racial and religious hatred and is against the national interest."

Journalists risk threats and harassment in connection with their work. In January 2014, the office of *Tikapur*, a daily newspaper in Dhangadhi, was set on fire; its editor claimed that the arsonists were angry about an article the paper had published about a road accident. Later in January, Santosh Pokhrel, the editor of *Bardibas* daily, and Gita Chimoriya, a reporter from Radio Darpan, received death threats in connection with their reporting about a road accident. K.P. Dhungana of the *Nagarik* daily received numerous death threats in connection with a February story about the mistreatment of elderly women and lack of transparency at a protection center in Kathmandu. In April, Suren Shakya, a technician from Khandbari FM, a radio station in a remote area of eastern Nepal, was threatened over a story about people being lured abroad for employment. In July, Ramesh Rawal of the local daily *Hamro Karnali Khabar* and of the *Karobar* daily, fled the remote area he had been working in due to continued pressure from various officials following his reporting on government corruption.

Attacks against journalists continue to occur. In October 2014, journalist Kali Bahadur Malla was seriously injured in an attack by hotel owners, in connection with his reporting on the sale and distribution of liquor. Also in October, Rejina Rodan of the local weekly *Janaandolan* was seriously injured by three assailants who attacked her while her press card was displayed, though it was unclear if the attack was directly related to her work as a journalist.

There were no journalists murdered in Nepal in 2014 according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), and Nepali authorities took some action to combat the culture of impunity. In December, all five of the suspects in the 2004 murder of Dekendra Thapa, a journalist, received prison sentences. However, the longest sentence was just two years. Four other suspects remain at large.

Economic Environment

Nepal's media sector has developed considerably in the past two decades, with 340 newspapers, 515 radio stations, and 58 television channels in operation in 2013, according to UN figures. The media generally offer a broad spectrum of political views and appear to have diverse owners, though there is no reliable information on media ownership in the country. The government owns several of the major dailies as well as the influential Radio Nepal and the Nepal Television Corporation. Political parties have also come to own an increasing share of newspapers in recent years. It is not unusual for the selection of editors at national newspapers to be governed by political deals and bargaining.

Radio remains among the most popular news sources because there are few barriers to market entry. Nepal has about 250 community radio stations, which operate in 74 of the country's 75 districts. These stations serve as a means of protecting local cultures and languages from the dominance of Nepali-language media. However, while license fees have been adjusted in recent years to support diversity, community radio stations still have difficulty competing with commercial stations for resources. Despite the large number of outlets, mainstream Nepali media often either ignore or are heavily biased against the interests of Dalits, Madhesis, indigenous peoples, and Muslims, who collectively form about 70 percent of the population. About 15 percent of the population had internet access in 2014.

Many media workers do not receive professional training, are informally employed, and are paid well below prescribed minimum wages. Since the government is a major source of advertising, journalists are often forced to self-censor in order to avoid conflict with the ruling party.

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