

Greece

Status: Partly Free

Legal Environment: 12

Political Environment: 19

Economic Environment: 10

Total Score: 41

Survey Edition	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Total Score, Status	27,F	29,F	29,F	30,F	30,F

Status change explanation: Greece declined from Free to Partly Free due to an increasingly hostile legal, political, and economic environment for the press; a rise in intimidation of and attacks against journalists; closures of, or cutbacks at, numerous print and broadcast outlets as a result of the economic crisis; and a consequent reduction in media diversity and in comprehensive and accurate reporting about the country's political and economic situation.

In 2012, Greece's economy worsened as the government adopted additional austerity measures, leading to protests and social unrest throughout the year. Parliamentary elections held in May and again in June led to victory for the conservative New Democracy party, which formed a coalition government that continued to push through the unpopular austerity program. Meanwhile, the far-right party Golden Dawn, which captured seats in the parliament for the first time, embarked on a campaign of intimidation aimed at groups including immigrants and the political left. These factors contributed to a significant decline in the legal, political, and economic environment for press freedom in 2012.

The constitution and Greek law include provisions for freedom of speech and the press, as well as the right to access to information. However, there are some limits on speech that incites discrimination, violence, and public disharmony, as well as on publications that are obscene, offend religious beliefs, or advocate the violent overthrow of the political system. In 2012, the enforcement of these laws increased, and there were several instances in which the government threatened journalists with legal action. In the most prominent case, journalist Kostas Vaxevanis was arrested in October and charged with violation of privacy for publishing, in his investigative magazine *Hot Doc*, the so-called Lagarde List of prominent Greek citizens who had transferred funds to Swiss bank accounts, allegedly to avoid paying taxes in Greece. The list had been given to the Greek government by then French finance minister Christine Lagarde in 2010, but Greek officials had taken no action. Though Vaxevanis was initially acquitted, in November prosecutors announced that he would face a retrial because the original verdict had "lacked credibility."

Among other cases, in February the National Council for Radio and Television (NCRTV)—an independent agency that oversees broadcast media—fined radio station Real FM €25,000 (\$32,600) for comments made on the air by journalist Giorgos Tragas about German chancellor Angela Merkel that were deemed to be defamatory. In September, a blogger using the pseudonym "Geron Pastitsios" was arrested on charges of malicious blasphemy for maintaining a satirical Facebook page for Elder Paisios, a deceased religious figure who remains popular with segments of the Greek populace. In October, television journalist Spiros Karatzaferis was arrested a day before he was to broadcast potentially damning allegations regarding the

government's alteration of economic data. Karatzaferis was arrested on an unrelated warrant that had not previously been acted upon. Also in October, Public Order Minister Nikos Dendias threatened to file a lawsuit against Britain's *Guardian* newspaper for alleging in an article that detained Greek protesters were tortured and beaten at police headquarters in Athens. The story was initially not widely reported by Greek media. Dendias backed down after a medical examiner's report confirmed that the protesters had been abused.

The regulatory environment for broadcasting remains murky. The most recent licenses for radio stations were issued in 2002, and for television stations in the late 1990s. The original terms of all extant licenses have since expired. The government has passed successive one-year extensions of all broadcast licenses, and this practice continues even though a 2011 decision by the Council of State declared it unconstitutional. Many radio and television stations are operating with a permit, which can be revoked at any time, while others function without any kind of license. Since no new licenses have been issued in several years, the only way to enter the broadcast market is by purchasing an existing station. Moreover, a policy that has recently been enforced by the NCRTV requires stations to classify their programming as either news oriented or non-news oriented. Stations in the latter category are not permitted to air any news-related programming, and have been fined for doing so. It is difficult for stations to change classifications once they have been set, though enforcement of the rule is uneven, with more politically and economically influential stations often avoiding punishment.

A 2007 media law mandates that the main transmission language of radio stations be Greek. The law also requires radio stations to keep a certain amount of money in reserve and hire a minimum number of full-time staff, placing a disproportionate burden on small, municipal, and minority-owned stations. The same law permits broadcast stations owned by political parties to operate without a license. In October 2012, the Council of State ruled in favor of Hristianismos FM, a radio station belonging to the Free Apostolic Church of Pentecost. The station had been shut down in 2001 after it was unable to acquire a license. Based on the new decision, the NCRTV issued a license to the station, but it failed to allocate a frequency, and the outlet remained off the air at year's end. In December, Euronews—a pan-European news channel of which the public broadcaster Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation (ERT) is a founding member—launched its Greek-language version. Within a few days, however, its terrestrial broadcast was temporarily halted by ERT, which cited potential “harmful consequences” for ERT's own newscasts and the public interest.

Both public and private media are largely free from government restrictions, but state-owned stations tend to report with a progovernment bias. There are several independent newspapers and magazines, including some that portray the incumbent government unfavorably. However, many media owners have a close relationship with the government, and this is often reflected in a lack of critical commentary on key issues, including the debate surrounding the financial crisis. In February, economist and journalist Dimitris Kazakis was fired by radio station Alpha 98.9 as a result of his antiausterity views. In October, ERT, allegedly under political pressure, suspended television presenters Kostas Arvanitis and Marilena Katsimi for comments they made on the air about the public order minister's reaction to the *Guardian* article noted above. The two were later reinstated. Also in October, the general manager of the state-owned Athens-Macedonian News Agency (AMNA) was ousted for the agency's publication of two purportedly inaccurate wire-service reports, one of which pertained to the Lagarde List. In December, journalist Thanos Dimadis resigned from national station Skai TV, claiming that he could no longer work under the pressure of maintaining Skai's proausterity editorial line.

A trend of growing violence against journalists continued in 2012. A number of journalists were attacked and in some instances injured during protests against the country's austerity plan. In March, correspondent Anthee Carassava was attacked by police and taken to a police station after covering an independence day military parade in Athens. In April, Manos Lolos, an accredited photographer covering a protest in Athens, was hospitalized with severe injuries after being beaten by police. Journalists were also attacked by individuals affiliated with Golden Dawn during the year, including Xenia Kounalaki, who was threatened in April after publishing a critical article on the party. In November, journalist Michael Tezari was beaten by members of Golden Dawn at an anti-immigrant demonstration. Separately, Konstantinos Bogdanos, a radio presenter and journalist for Skai TV, was violently assaulted by three men in Athens in May. And in September, an attempt was made on the life of Vaxevanis outside his home in Athens. No suspects were arrested by year's end in either attack.

The contracting economy, and the resulting decline in circulation and advertising, continued to adversely affect the media sector in 2012, weakening its ability to cover the crisis and the corresponding political turmoil. Numerous media outlets have either closed, cut back staff and salaries, scaled down or eliminated their news departments, or failed to pay wages. Since the onset of the country's financial woes in 2010, an estimated 30 percent of journalists have lost their jobs. During 2012, a number of radio and television stations went off the air, including the national station 902 TV and the municipal radio station Xenios FM. In September, prominent news radio station Antenna FM switched to a music format to cut costs. Newspapers such as *Apogevmatini*, *Eleftherotypia*, *Avriani*, *Adesmeytos Typos*, the weekly financial paper *Kosmos tou Ependyti*, and the English-language *Athens News* suspended printing in 2012. Employee strikes at media outlets, most often due to unpaid wages, were frequent, causing repeated interruptions in their operations.

Approximately 53 percent of the population accessed the internet on a regular basis in 2011, and access is not restricted. With the cutbacks at traditional outlets, many journalists and citizens are using new and social media to disseminate independent or alternative viewpoints.