



FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

Vietnam (2004)

The Vietnamese media remain tightly controlled by the ruling Communist Party (CPV) and the government. Although the constitution guarantees freedoms of speech and of the press, both it and the criminal code contain broad national security and anti-defamation provisions that are used to restrict the media. In addition, a 1999 law requires journalists to pay damages to individuals or groups that are found to have been harmed by press articles, even if they are true. Officials have punished journalists who overstepped the bounds of permissible reporting by jailing or placing them under house arrest, taking away their press cards, or closing down their newspapers. All media outlets are owned or under the effective control of the CPV, government organs, or the army, and many journalists practice self-censorship. While journalists cannot cover sensitive political or economic matters or openly question the CPV's single-party rule, they are occasionally allowed to report on crime and official corruption. However, several of those that did so faced increasing threats and attacks from both government officials and private citizens in 2003, according to CPJ. Internet access is tightly restricted. Authorities block thousands of Web sites and require owners of domestic Web sites to submit their content to the government for approval. The regime tightened its control over Internet use in May by formally banning Vietnamese from receiving or distributing antigovernment e-mail messages and by setting up a special body to monitor Internet communications and prosecute violators. A number of cyber-dissidents were arrested or detained during the year, and several were sentenced to lengthy prison terms for their writings.