

AUSTRALIA

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1/What is the basic political system in your country (e.g. democratic, semi-authoritarian, authoritarian or other type of hybrid regime)?

Constitutional multi-party democracy at three levels, national, state and territory and local governments.

2) What are the main features of your media landscape? (private / public, print / broadcast / internet usage, ownership concentration, government control, etc.)

Australia has a mix of private and public media. The national government funds the editorially independent broadcaster and web content producer, The Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Every three years the ABC asks for funding for ongoing operations (four television networks, five radio networks, ABC Online and for innovations) and the government provides funding in the annual budget (always less than has been sought). Currently the ABC costs about a billion Australian dollars a year and is the country's main cultural institution. No advertising is permitted on the ABC but it raises additional funds through commercialisation of popular music, videos, magazines and books.

Additionally there's another national radio and television broadcaster and web producer, the Special Broadcasting Service, the charter of which requires it to produce programs which reflect the diversity and interests of the country's many ethnic communities. SBS is partly funded by advertising.

Three commercial networks dominate the television industry in the capital cities. Competition is fierce, focussed on news, current affairs programs; the reality genre is strong, as is US and Australian drama. Commercial radio is highly competitive, heavily focussed on local news, opinionated comment and telephone call in programs.

The Australian newspaper industry is dominated by the News Limited group, headed by Rupert Murdoch. News' papers tend to dominate the market in each state's capital. The Fairfax news organisation remains a considerable force in the biggest cities of Sydney and Melbourne and the national capital, Canberra.

3) Where does your country come in the rankings of Freedom House (on freedom of the press) and Reporters Without Borders?

37th on the FH 2010 index

http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/fop10/Global_Table_2010.pdf

17th on the Reporters Without Borders 2010 Index

<http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index-2010,1034.html>

4) Would you broadly agree with their characterisation of your situation?

The ReportersWithout Borders index is probably more accurate.

5) a) what are the main challenges facing the media in your country in the next five years (economic, political, technological etc.)?

Commercial television and radio networks remain profitable and provide news services ranging from poor to excellent. The government funded broadcasters continue to produce good quality programs. Newspapers are losing circulation but unlike many western countries newspapers are not closing. Much good reporting is still being produced. Magazines, particularly those focussed on lifestyle, food and fashion are surviving.

Politically there have been some gains with legislation in the national parliament giving reporters more protection of sources. But national security legislation is sweeping, some state crime investigative bodies have the power to summon journalists; and while some states governments have enhanced freedom of information legislation generally FOI reporters find it a frustrating process. More detailed information can be found on the main media union website http://www.issuu.com/meaa/docs/press_freedom_report_20

Technologically there's been significant growth in digital television services in the past two years. All media are investing more heavily in websites and the development and marketing of apps. And some niche web services are growing. The challenge, as in the rest of the world, is to find financially viable models. The national government is planning to spend \$40 billion building a national broadband network, though this remains politically contentious.

b) What are the main limits on the practice of a free media in your country, based on your own practical experience of working there?

Excessive concentration of newspaper ownership (an estimated 70% belong to the News Limited Group) restricts the range and diversity of reporting. Funding for the ABC and SBS has declined over the past 25 years restricting their capacity to innovate, particularly online. Australians in rural and regional areas are less well served by broadcasters than they were decades ago. Amalgamation of services has resulted in less local news. While much good work has been done to harmonise defamation laws across state borders they remain inimical to investigative reporting; a campaign for privacy laws would, if successful, be negative for reporting.

6) What are the main roles that new media play in your country?

Web media has had an enormously liberating influence. The sheer range of knowledge and experiences available to anyone with a laptop or phone is extraordinary. For the mainstream media there's been a period of painful adjustment –needing to stay relevant twenty four hours a day, seven days a week in the face of niche services by start-ups. You Tube, Facebook, Twitter and other social media are extremely popular.