

# ITALY

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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)?**

Democratic Republic

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

The Italian media landscape is characterized by a strong concentration, both in broadcasting and print sectors.

The most important newspapers and broadcasting networks are controlled by a few media giants with a strong economic and political agenda.

Three big TV networks (the public, citizen-funded RAI; the private, Silvio Berlusconi-owned MEDIASET; and the News Corps pay-tv SKY) collect 92% of the global broadcast turnover.

Five big media organizations (Mondadori, L'Espresso, Rcs, Il Sole 24 Ore, Caltagirone) control 73% of the overall Italian publishing market.

Unlike in other European countries, in Italy most of advertising expenditure on the media is absorbed by the broadcasting sector (53%). That is the more than double the figure in the UK (26%) and Germany (24%).

The public-funded broadcasting network RAI is directly controlled by the Government, through the Minister of Economy and Finance. RAI is governed by a nine-member Administrative Council, elected in part by a Parliamentary committee and in part by the Minister of Economy and Finance. Because of the spoil-system, the Council always reflects the government political agenda.

According to the last Censis report, TV is still the dominant medium in Italy (97% of regular users), followed by radio (81%), newspapers (64%), books (56%) and Internet (47%).

As regards newspapers access, Italy is a country split in two: according to ISTAT, about one Italian out of two (44%) never reads newspapers, while regular readers are four out of ten (40%).

The Internet boom (23.5 million Italians regularly access the Internet) is changing media habits: about one user out of two (47%) now gets online information on current affairs.

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

Freedom House: Number 33 - Partly Free

Reporters Without Borders: Number 49, together with Burkina Faso

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

I do agree with their characterisation. Even though freedom of expression is protected by the Constitutional Law, Italy remains a partly free country, because of its unusual media over-concentration, frequent Government interference and the lack of an effective anti-trust law. As highlighted by the last Freedom House report, “Berlusconi’s return to power in April 2008 gave him indirect control over up to 90 percent of the country’s broadcast media through the state-owned outlets and his own private media holdings”. RAI TG1 (most watched Italian news bulletin program) and other broadcasting news programs regularly undercover political scandals regarding the Government.

Newspapers are relatively more independent and free: in the last two years *La Repubblica* and *Il Fatto Quotidiano* got several scoops on Silvio Berlusconi’s public and private life. But, since their readership is low compared with broadcasting diffusion, a lot of Italians who watch only TV are not adequately informed.

Web and social-network services are becoming an interesting arena for alternative information. [beppegrillo.it](http://beppegrillo.it) (one of the 10 most read blogs in the world, run by the independent comedian and political activist Beppe Grillo) has become a very popular destination for people interested in counter-information. In the last years, Grillo has campaigned for removing members of the Italian Parliament who have criminal convictions and has organized two big mass protests. Facebook, too, is becoming more and more popular: 16 million Italians are members of the social-network and use it to socialize news not adequately covered by mainstream media.

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

The first and most urgent challenge is the approval of an anti-trust law, opening up the market to independent actors and limiting big organizations’ ownership.

The second challenge is the general reform of the public broadcasting service. At the moment RAI is mostly dependent on government political agenda and it is not as balanced and impartial as a public service should be.

From the technological point of view, the biggest challenge remains access to broadband Internet. Even if 47% of Italians have access to the Internet, there are only 19 fixed broadband connections per 100 people. That means Internet is an occasional and secondary source of information, while TV remains still dominant in influencing the public opinion.

#### **b) what are the main limits on the practice of a free press in your country, based on your own practical experience of working there?**

A limiting factor for freedom of press in Italy is the difficulty of becoming a member of the journalistic profession. To be hired in a news organization, a journalist has to be a member of the Italian Society of Journalists, a 1963 corporative institution which decides who can be considered a journalist and who not.

Another factor limiting the practice of free press is the frequent display of contempt expressed by politicians about journalists’ work.

Silvio Berlusconi routinely attacks newspapers and journalists investigating his business and legal cases. On several occasions he tried to block some popular TV-shows (Report, Anno Zero) not aligned to his political agenda. Then in 2008, the lower house of the Parliament approved a bill

restricting the publication of wiretaps transcripts during criminal investigations. Journalists publishing transcripts would face heavy fines or jail sentences. The anti-wiretaps bill has not yet been approved by the Senate.

Crime organizations too try to limit freedom of press. According to Reporters Without Borders, ten or so journalists live under police protection. Because of their public denunciations of mafia collusions with politics and business, in the last years more and more journalists received death threat. Among protected journalists, Roberto Saviano is probably the most popular one.