



Freedom of the Press 2017 - Cameroon

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Press Freedom Status: Not Free

Total Score: 66/100 (0 = Most Free, 100 = Least Free)

Legal Environment: 22/30

Political Environment: 23/40 (↓1)

Economic Environment: 21/30

Quick Facts

Population: 24,400,000

Freedom in the World Status: Not Free

Internet Penetration Rate: 20.7%

Key Developments in 2016:

- Authorities took efforts to quash reporting on a protest movement among members of Cameroon's Anglophone community, who claimed their interests were being marginalized in the majority-Francophone country. Authorities responded to the movement by threatening journalists and outlets with a variety of sanctions, and by seeking internet blockages in affected areas.
- In December, France 24 journalist Zigoto Tchaya was detained for a day by masked security officers while reporting on Anglophone protests in Bamenda.
- Also in December, Cameroon's media regulatory body, the National Communication Council (CNC) banned three newspapers and sanctioned over 20 journalists, publishers, and outlets.
- Government officials and government-aligned media outlets sought to portray social media as a dangerous source of misinformation after the government was lambasted online for negligence, following a deadly railway accident in October.

Executive Summary

The media environment in Cameroon is constrained by a restrictive legal regime. Journalists reporting on sensitive subjects risk police questioning, lawsuits, and extrajudicial detention. Nevertheless, some independent outlets continue to operate, sometimes in defiance of government sanctions, but frequently self-censor in order to avoid reprisals. Corruption in the media is considered pervasive, with contributing factors including low wages for journalists and a widespread lack of formal training. The state frequently uses its position as the largest advertiser in the country to withhold advertising revenue from outlets that publish stories critical of the government.

In 2016, authorities undertook extensive efforts to restrict coverage of a protest movement that erupted toward the end of the year among members of Cameroon's Anglophone communities, who claimed they were being marginalized in a majority Francophone country; the protests gave way to a number of violent

incidents involving Cameroonian security forces. Authorities responded to the unrest by issuing directives to private broadcasters to stop airing debates about demonstrators' grievances, and by threatening journalists, media outlets, and mobile network providers with sanctions in connection with coverage of the protest movement. For example, mobile network providers were warned that they could face criminal prosecution for facilitating the spread of information that could not be proven, while private media outlets were informed that they could lose their operating licenses in connection with sympathetic coverage of demonstrations. In November, as protests continued, the opposition-aligned *Cameroon Journal* reported that Cameroon's information minister had met with mobile phone and internet service providers and asked them to shut down internet access, but that his request was rejected; nevertheless, there were sporadic reports of internet blockages in the areas where protest actions took place. In December, France 24 journalist Zigoto Tchaya was arrested in Bamenda by masked security officers while reporting on the Anglophone protests; he was released the following day, apparently without charge.

Also in December, the CNC issued a flurry of sanctions against more than 20 outlets, publishers, and journalists, primarily for defamation. Three newspapers – *L'Aurore*, *L'Aurore Plus*, and *Dépêche du Cameroun* – were permanently banned, and their publishers barred from practicing journalism in Cameroon.

Separately, government-aligned media in 2016 sought to portray social media as a dangerous source of misinformation. The campaign, which saw the government-controlled *Cameroon Tribune* call social media "a threat to peace and a secret instrument of manipulation," came after authorities had been lambasted online for negligence in the wake of a deadly railway accident in October. In November, the speaker of Cameroon's National Assembly called social media a "real social pandemic."

Members of the media were occasionally subject to various forms of extralegal intimidation and violence in 2016. In May, Moki Edwin Kindzeka, a journalist for Voice of America (VOA) and the state-owned broadcaster, was forced into a vehicle and subsequently interrogated and threatened by his abductors, after publishing unfavorable coverage of President Paul Biya. He was held for several hours, during which his abductors also reportedly offered him money in exchange for more favorable coverage.

Explanatory Note

This country report has been abridged for *Freedom of the Press 2017*. For background information on press freedom in Cameroon, see [Freedom of the Press 2016](#).

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