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Freedom of the Press 2011 - Libya

Status: Not Free

Legal Environment: 29

Political Environment: 36

Economic Environment: 29

Total Score: 94

Libyan media remained among the most tightly controlled in the world in 2010. While the law provides for freedoms of speech and the press within the confines of "the principles of the Revolution," other legislation, including the 1972 Publication Act, contains provisions banning libel and slander and broadly restricts critical speech. In July 2010, three journalists were investigated for defamation because of their report on financial and administrative corruption. The government severely limits the rights of the media in practice, and journalists who violate the harsh press codes can be imprisoned or sentenced to death. As with other forms of abuse, Libyan security forces enjoy virtually complete impunity for acts of violence against journalists.

Those who criticize the government from outside the country may be arrested upon entering Libya. There have been several cases in recent years in which the authorities have harassed or imprisoned Libyans who denounced the government on websites based in Europe. However, no such incidents were reported in 2010. Secret police and informants are commonly used to root out dissident activities. Given the extreme controls imposed by the government, self-censorship is widespread in Libya. The press avoids publishing any material that could be deemed offensive or threatening, particularly to Islam, national security, territorial integrity, or the country's longtime leader, Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi.

Libya remains a threatening environment for journalists. In August 2010, Mohamed al-Sarit of *Mal Wa Aamal* magazine was stabbed by four unidentified assailants, suffering serious injuries; he had previously written an article detailing poverty in the country, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. The regime pursues a strategy of continuous harassment and frequently summons journalists for questioning, often forcing them to travel long distances on short notice. There were multiple cases of arrest during the year. For example, four journalists were arrested in January, following their investigation of corruption in Libya's second city, Benghazi.

There is no independent press in Libya. The government owns and strictly controls nearly all print and broadcast media, including the official Jamahiriya News Agency (JANA). State media outlets function as government mouthpieces, and journalists censor their own work to avoid harassment. The General Press Institute owns three daily

newspapers – *Al-Jamahiriyah*, *Al-Shams*, and *Al-Fajr al-Jadeed* – while the government-supported Movement of Revolutionary Committees owns the fourth daily, *Al-Zahf al-Akhder*. A semi-independent media group, Al-Ghad, began operating in 2007. Founded by the leader's son, Saif al-Islam al-Qadhafi, the group was allowed to launch the satellite television station Al-Libiya, two radio stations, and two daily newspapers at its inception. This quasi-liberalization proved short lived, however, as the group was nationalized in April 2009, possibly due to its relatively moderate reportage. Authorities continued to target Al-Ghad outlets in 2010. The government reportedly forced two of the group's newspapers, *Quryna* and *Oea*, to shut down from January to July because of critical coverage of the regime. Twenty journalists from the group's Libya Press news agency were arrested in November, apparently as a result of an ongoing power struggle between reformers and members of the conservative governing elite. The journalists were released within two days, but the head of the media group resigned over the incident, claiming that he was no longer able to protect his employees in the hostile environment. Libya Press shut down its Tripoli office in December, but planned to continue working from foreign capitals.

Although satellite television is accessible, the government occasionally blocks foreign programming. Popular pan-Arab satellite television stations such as Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya do not have local correspondents covering Libya. Few foreign publications have traditionally been available, though authorities are reportedly allowing a greater variety of international print media to appear on newsstands.

Internet penetration remains relatively low; about 14 percent of the population used the medium in 2010. Nevertheless, the government reportedly monitors internet communications, regularly blocks opposition websites based overseas, and began blocking the video-sharing site YouTube in 2010 after users posted videos of protests that had supposedly taken place in Libya. The country's only internet-service provider is government owned.

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