



Freedom of the Press 2015 - Ghana

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2015 Scores

Press Status: Free

Press Freedom Score (0 = best, 100 = worst): 28

Legal Environment (0 = best, 30 = worst): 8

Political Environment (0 = best, 40 = worst): 10

Economic Environment (0 = best, 30 = worst): 10

The environment for press freedom in Ghana remained generally stable in 2014. Some progress was made toward advancing a bill for the implementation of the right to information, although the legislation had not yet passed at year's end. Media watchdogs noted a significant increase in attacks against journalists in 2014 as compared to the previous year.

Legal Environment

Freedom of the press is legally guaranteed, and the government typically respects this right in practice. Criminal libel and sedition laws were repealed in 2001, but Section 208 of the 1960 criminal code, which bans publishing false news with intent to "cause fear or alarm to the public or to disturb the public peace," remains in force and is occasionally used against journalists. Current and former public officials, as well as private citizens, sometimes pursue civil libel suits with exorbitant compensation requests against media outlets, which can encourage self-censorship. In 2014, the *Daily Guide* and the *Informer* newspapers were each fined approximately \$100,000 in two separate civil libel cases. In February, a court in Accra ruled in favor of a former chair of the state power company, who had sued the *Daily Guide* for publishing allegations that he had embezzled public funds for personal use. Also in February, the same court ruled against the *Informer* in a case brought by a timber company; the newspaper had published an article alleging the company's collusion with corrupt state authorities and involvement in tax evasion.

The 1992 constitution provides for freedom of information, but there is no legislation to implement this guarantee. After more than 10 years of consultation between Parliament and civil society organizations, progress on a right to information (RTI) bill has been slow. In 2014, however, a number of important steps were made. In September, following months of discussion and significant input from civil society, a parliamentary review committee approved a draft RTI bill. Journalists and media advocacy groups – most notably the Right to Information Coalition of Ghana, an alliance of 80 nongovernmental organizations – had been critical of numerous

weaknesses in the initial version of the bill, noting broad exemptions to information disclosure and a lack of independent oversight in enforcement. The revised bill received praise – including from the Right to Information Coalition – for addressing the problems of exemptions and oversight, and for shortening processing times for requests. A full legislative vote is expected in 2015.

The National Communications Authority (NCA) has been criticized for slow licensing procedures and bias. The National Media Commission in Ghana was established in 1993 in accordance with the 1992 constitution and is charged with monitoring the media's performance and adherence to professional ethics, but it has historically lacked enforcement power due to inadequate funding. Poor pay and unprofessional conduct, including the fabrication of sensationalist news stories, remain problems in the media sector.

Political Environment

While the state-run Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) is protected from government interference by the constitution, political parties attempt to influence coverage. Private media face a degree of editorial pressure from their owners, particularly those with political connections, and some journalists practice self-censorship for political or financial reasons. Government bodies and political parties occasionally boycott media outlets or programs that they perceive as biased.

Journalists sometimes face intimidation and physical attacks, and reports of such incidents significantly increased in 2014. The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) noted at least nine physical assaults on journalists during the year, in addition to several arrests and detentions by security forces. In January, police raided the offices of the Sungmale FM radio station during a program broadcast, arresting and detaining the host and two panelists; the three individuals were later released on bail. In March, a *Ghanaian Times* photographer was attacked by a military officer while attempting to photograph a confrontation between state security officials and local youth. Several other media workers faced interference or physical harassment by security forces during the year. A culture of impunity for such attacks prevails in Ghana, and perpetrators are rarely held accountable.

Economic Environment

Dozens of newspapers, including two state-owned and two private dailies, publish regularly, and there are close to 30 television stations in operation, most of which are free-to-air. Radio is the most popular medium, with approximately 300 operational FM stations nationwide, of which nearly 40 are state-run. The first community radio station, Radio Ada, was launched in 1999 and became a founding member of the Ghana Community Radio Network. As of the end of 2014, there were approximately 60 functioning community radio stations, according to the NCA. Economic sustainability is a challenge for both public and private media. The GBC receives inadequate funding from the government and must sell advertising to support operations, which leave the outlet dependent on the large corporations that can afford its rates.

Use of the internet is growing and remains unrestricted, but the level of penetration remains low – approximately 19 percent of the population accessed the medium in 2014. Various civil society organizations have called on the government to improve access to the internet in Ghana. Active blogging and usage of social-networking websites have increased in urban centers, most notably in Accra.

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