



Freedom of the Press 2015 - Haiti

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2015 Scores

Press Status: Partly Free

Press Freedom Score (0 = best, 100 = worst): 50

Legal Environment (0 = best, 30 = worst): 15

Political Environment (0 = best, 40 = worst): 17

Economic Environment (0 = best, 30 = worst): 18

Although no journalists were murdered in Haiti in 2014, in contrast with the previous year, the country continued to suffer from widespread social, political, and economic instability in the aftermath of the catastrophic 2010 earthquake. The political climate deteriorated significantly during the year as legislative elections, originally due in 2011, were not called by year's end. Violent protests erupted, leading to the prime minister's resignation in December. In this context, journalists' work was hindered by entrenched poverty, lack of institutional support, difficulty accessing information, and political bias at many outlets.

Legal Environment

In the past decade, Haiti's government has improved its record on upholding constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression and of the press, which include a ban on censorship except in the case of war.

However, legal protections have been undercut in practice by impunity for some past murders of journalists. In January 2014, an appellate court in Port-au-Prince announced the indictment of nine people – most of whom had close political and personal ties to former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide – in connection with the 2000 murder of radio journalist Jean Dominique. The charges came after years of delays, and observers remained concerned about authorities' ability to move the case forward. Former senator Myrlande Lubérisse, named as the alleged organizer of the crime,

currently resides in the United States, and during the year the defendants employed stalling tactics such as requests for a change of venue. No verdict was reached by year's end.

Defamation remains a criminal offense, though only a few cases in recent years have advanced beyond the initial charge. In February 2013, Justice and Public Security Minister Jean Renel Sanon issued a press release that pledged a renewed emphasis on enforcing the defamation law, noting the strict punishments in the Haitian criminal code. The minister's remarks triggered an outcry from Haitian media outlets and journalist associations. Sanon was later called to testify before the Senate, where he stated that he was simply applying existing national legislation, and that the Senate should repeal the law if members believed it threatened press freedom.

Article 40 of the constitution stipulates that the government must publicize all laws, international agreements, decrees, and treaties. However, no legislation provides for public access to state information, which remains difficult in practice.

The state-run National Telecommunications Council (CONATEL) issues licenses to radio stations and does not regulate content. However, in April 2014, the council accused numerous stations of broadcasting "false information" and threatened sanctions as a result. It also sent a direct communication to Radio Zenith FM, discouraging it from airing certain critical material. The National Association of Haitian Media (ANMH) criticized these actions and stated that because CONATEL's mandate is a technical one, it should not be involved with radio content. Separately, since 2012, CONATEL has shut down more than 50 community radio stations on the grounds that they were operating illegally with improper licenses. In 2013, 10 of the stations appealed their closure and applied for legitimate licenses, but they were denied, with CONATEL allocating their frequencies to new stations.

In December 2011, media associations and journalists in Haiti signed their first journalistic code of ethics, which included clauses pertaining to respect for individual dignity and privacy, prohibiting discrimination in journalistic work, and encouraging an unbiased and balanced treatment of information.

Political Environment

While the Haitian media landscape is pluralistic, many media outlets are affiliated with political factions and display a partisan bias. Financial insecurity also contributes to self-censorship among journalists, many of whom may be wary of damaging the interests of employers or funders.

Access to official sources is often circumscribed. Since taking office in 2011, President Michel Martelly has been praised for his willingness to hold press conferences and his use of social media to communicate with the public. At the same time, he has been criticized for his open hostility and occasional derogatory comments toward journalists, and his frequent refusal to speak with representatives of media outlets that are critical of the government.

Although the situation has improved markedly in the past decade, journalists in Haiti occasionally face harassment, intimidation, and violence. No journalists were killed in 2014, but some crimes from 2013 were still being resolved or investigated during the year. In March, two presidential security guards who had been charged with assaulting a journalist in 2013 refused to appear in court, and the authorities refused to compel their appearance. Nevertheless, the judge announced

that he would deliver a verdict in the case in January 2015. In August 2014, a judge found Maudelaire Augustin guilty of the May 2013 murder of radio journalist Pierre-Richard Alexandre, who was shot in his home in an incident that was apparently unrelated to his work; the defendant was sentenced to five years in prison. Another 2013 murder, the drive-by shooting of the editor in chief of *Haiti Progrès*, Georges Henri Honorat, remained unsolved in 2014.

Economic Environment

Radio is by far the dominant medium, with more than 300 stations operating across the country, though not all carry news content. Many stations are affiliated with political organizations or parties. In addition to the state-owned Télévision Nationale d'Haïti (TNH), there are about 60 private television stations; audiences remain small due to lack of electricity and resources. Newspaper distribution is also limited due to high rates of illiteracy. Haiti has several weekly and two daily newspapers – *Le Nouvelliste* and *Le Matin* – all of which are privately owned and published in French, a language spoken by only about 20 percent of the population. There are no government restrictions on internet access, and roughly 11 percent of Haitians used the medium in 2014.

The concentration of wealth among a small number of Haitians and the effects of the 2010 earthquake have negatively affected media outlets' ability to obtain advertising revenue and sustain themselves financially. Journalists also struggle with low salaries, and economic hardship has led some outlets and journalists to accept bribes. Many journalists also hold multiple jobs, some of which create significant conflicts of interest.

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