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Press Freedom Status: Partly Free

Legal Environment: 14 / 30 (0 = best, 30 = worst)

Political Environment: 22 / 40 (↑1) (0 = best, 40 = worst)

Economic Environment: 15 / 30 (↑1) (0 = best, 30 = worst)

Press Freedom Score: 51 / 100 (↑2) (0 = best, 100 = worst)

Quick Facts

Population: 181,839,400

Net Freedom Status: Partly Free

Freedom in the World Status: Partly Free

Internet Penetration Rate: 47.4%

Overview

Nigeria has a highly vibrant and varied media landscape, with outlets that openly criticize unpopular government policies. President Muhammadu Buhari's relatively successful efforts in fighting Boko Haram as well as a peaceful political transition in 2015 have brought some limited improvements to the media environment in Nigeria. Nevertheless, self-censorship, physical assaults, and intimidation along with impunity for crimes against journalists remain major concerns.

Key Developments

- Nigeria's first peaceful transfer of power to the opposition, following the March 2015 elections, led to modest improvements in the country's media environment.
- The new government promised to promote press freedom.
- The military's success in fighting the militant Islamist group Boko Haram led to improved media access in the group's stronghold in the northeast.
- However, a number of journalists were intimidated, harassed, and physically assaulted throughout the year in connection with their work, including in the run-up to the elections.

Legal Environment: 14 / 30

The amended 1999 constitution guarantees freedoms of expression and of the press. Courts sometimes expand legal protections for journalists and provide fair rulings on cases involving the media. Sharia (Islamic law) statutes, which are in effect in 12 northern states, impose severe penalties for alleged press offenses, though they have not been implemented in practice. Other criminal and civil laws applicable to the entire country punish various press and speech offenses, including sedition, criminal defamation, and publication of false news.

A Frivolous Petitions Bill, which passed its second reading in the Senate in December 2015, would mandate a two-year prison sentence and/or a 2 million naira (\$10,000) fine for posting on social media outlets abusive statements against a person, group, or government institution. Nearly two dozen Nigerian and international organizations, including the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), called on the government to reject the bill because it marked an encroachment on freedom of expression. However, the new administration of President Muhammadu Buhari sought better relations with the country's independent media.

Many journalists have been charged with criminal defamation in recent years, though in most cases the charges were eventually withdrawn. One of the more serious cases involved *Leadership* newspaper editor Tony Amokeodo and political correspondent Chibuzor Ukuibe, who were charged in 2013 over the publication of a memo allegedly written by then president Goodluck Jonathan on plans to increase fuel prices and disrupt the merger of opposition political parties. The two journalists and the paper's parent company faced 11 criminal counts, including forgery, conspiracy to commit a felony, and incitement of public disaffection against the president. The government withdrew the charges shortly thereafter.

Impunity for those who commit crimes against journalists remains a problem. Nigeria was ranked 13 on CPJ's 2015 Global Impunity Index, which assesses countries based on the number of unsolved journalist murders per capita over the preceding decade.

The 2011 Freedom of Information Act guarantees citizens' right to public information and has put pressure on government agencies to release records in response to petitions by media and activist groups. Some state governors have balked at complying with the law, arguing that the federal legislation is not applicable to the states. According to an October 2015 study by the Right to Know Nigeria group, none of the 39 government institutions assessed had complied in 2012 or 2013 with the legal obligation to proactively disclose information.

Public agencies responsible for media licensing and regulation are run by government appointees whose decisions are not independent, according to CPJ. The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), the agency responsible for processing applications for broadcast licenses and upholding the broadcast code, has come under particular scrutiny for processes and decisions that critics view as opaque and politically biased.

Political Environment: 22 / 40 (↑1)

Nigeria has one of the most vibrant and varied media landscapes in Africa, and the print sector in particular is generally outspoken in its condemnation of unpopular government policies. However, the media occasionally face interference from public officials and regulators over government criticism or coverage of sensitive issues, such as high-level corruption and national security. In 2014, the NBC issued a directive requiring all broadcasters to submit written notice 48 hours before live transmissions of any political program. The NBC claimed that the directive was meant to preserve national unity ahead of the 2015 elections by stemming "inciting, provocative, and highly divisive comments." The following month, the NBC suspended the broadcast of a popular radio show on Splash FM after a promotional clip referred to a federal lawmaker as a criminal.

A 2004 NBC ban on the live rebroadcast of foreign programs, including news, on domestic stations remains in force. However, international broadcasters such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Voice of America, and Radio France International are among the key sources of news in the country. Some journalists self-censor on sensitive political, social, ethnic, or religious issues as a result of verbal threats and assaults, as well as due to reluctance to displease media owners and sponsors.

Journalists continue to face intimidation, harassment, and physical attacks in connection with their work. According to a survey by the Media Foundation for West Africa, Nigeria recorded 11 violations of press freedom in the second quarter of 2015, the most of any of the 16 countries analyzed during that period. A report by the Lagos-based International Press Centre revealed that followers of militia groups were the most common perpetrators of attacks against journalists in November and December, followed by police officers. In June, suspected smugglers assaulted and seriously injured two journalists – Yomi Olomofe, executive director of the monthly *Prime Magazine*, and McDominic Nkpemenyie, a correspondent with *Tide Newspaper* – near the Nigeria Customs Service office along the border with Benin. The two journalists had been investigating smuggling activities within the customs service. In November, about 10 members of the Nigerian Prison Service assaulted and handcuffed Emmanuel Elebeke, a reporter with the *Vanguard* newspaper, while he was taking photographs of murder suspects outside a court building in Abuja; he was released but his camera was seized.

Members of the press have been assaulted for their unfavorable coverage of political figures. In May, Hir Joseph, a correspondent with the independent *Daily Trust* newspaper, was left unconscious after being attacked by supporters of the governor of Nasarawa State. Joseph had received repeated threats from acquaintances of the governor, who reportedly had been unhappy with a story Joseph had written about him. In June, Kamarudeen Ogundele, a correspondent with the newspaper *Punch*, was beaten by people he described as supporters of the Ekiti State governor; he had been photographing women praying for peace after the governor's supporters tried to prevent opposition lawmakers from entering the state's parliament building. During the run-up to the 2015 elections, both security forces and militants attacked journalists, often while they were covering political rallies.

In recent years, security forces and Boko Haram have impeded reporting in the country's northeast region, where the militant group has been most active. However, the relative success of Nigeria's military campaign against Boko Haram in 2015 led to greater access for journalists, particularly toward the end of the year.

Critical news websites face occasional interference and restrictions on access. In 2014, the website of the *Premium Times*, an online newspaper based in Abuja, suffered a denial-of-service attack. Users attempting to access the site received a "website blocked" message, and two days later the site crashed for nine hours.

Economic Environment: 15 / 30 (↑1)

There are more than 100 national and local news publications, the most influential of which are privately owned. Several major privately owned daily newspapers do well in national coverage. The only two nationwide broadcast networks are state owned: the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria and the Nigerian Television Authority. The first private radio and television network license was awarded to Silverbird Communications in 2010. While radio remains the main source of information for Nigerians, television penetration has grown substantially in recent years with the proliferation of satellite dishes, even in rural areas. A number of print and broadcast media outlets are owned by state and local governments, or by individuals directly involved in politics.

Private television stations must ensure that 60 percent of their programming is produced locally, while private radio outlets must ensure that 80 percent of content is produced locally. Licensing fees and taxes for broadcast media remain high, and many outlets experience financial difficulties, limiting their viability. A number of state-owned daily papers tend to be poorly produced and require large advertising subsidies.

Private newspaper distribution was seriously disrupted by the military's 2014 crackdown on delivery vehicles and printing sites, which was coordinated across multiple states and regions. In 2015, reports emerged that the federal government had discreetly provided financial compensation to most of the newspapers affected by the disruption, paying 120 million naira (\$763,000) in total through the Newspaper Proprietors' Association of Nigeria. Distribution was not disrupted in 2015.

The internet has become an important news medium for Nigerians in recent years, as traditional outlets are increasingly burdened by high operating costs or subject to editorial interference. Nigeria has the greatest number of internet users in Africa; nearly 50 percent accessed the internet in 2014. Social-media platforms have proved influential as an alternative source of information and opinion.

Bribery and corruption remain problems in the media industry, particularly in the form of small cash gifts that sources give to journalists. A 2009 survey of 184 media professionals in Lagos found that 61 percent of them habitually received such gifts while on reporting assignments. However, 74 percent of the respondents disagreed that the gifts led to biased coverage.

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