

Title	Freedom of the Press 2012 - Mali
Publisher	Freedom House
Country	Mali
Publication Date	24 October 2012
Cite as	Freedom House, <i>Freedom of the Press 2012 - Mali</i> , 24 October 2012, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/50895d8cc.html [accessed 6 March 2013]
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Freedom of the Press 2012 - Mali

2012 Scores

Press Status: Free

Press Freedom Score: 24

Legal Environment: 9

Political Environment: 7

Economic Environment: 8

Article 4 of Mali's constitution protects the right to free speech, and the country's broadcast and print media have ranked among the freest in Africa in recent years, a trend that continued through 2011. Severe criminal punishments for libel still exist under a 1993 law, and the accused face a presumption of guilt despite improvements to the law in 2000. However, no journalist has been prosecuted under this law since 2007. Mali has no legislation that guarantees the right to access information.

Mali is a particularly easy country in which to open a media outlet. There are no restrictions on the establishment of a newspaper, and although new private broadcasters must first receive authorization from the state, the procedures are inexpensive and easy to follow and denials of licenses are rare. However, the capacity of the government to regulate the media is limited, as the two government bodies responsible for the media – the High Communications Council and the Committee for Equal Access to the State Media – lack the capacity to mediate press affairs due to insufficient funding. In a positive development, in December 2009 the government officially opened a new, partially government-funded Maison de la Presse, providing journalists with facilities from which to work, as well as training in journalism skills and area specialization. This new center held a number of training workshops for Malian journalists in preparation for the upcoming 2012 election.

Since 2008, there have been virtually no reports of journalists being harassed in the course of their work, and in 2011 the government generally upheld the country's long-standing tradition of allowing a space for independent media to operate freely. The only recent reported incident was in 2010, when Diakaridia Yossi, a journalist for the daily *L'Indépendent*, was detained and beaten while covering the police dispersal of a demonstration outside the Court of Appeals. Yossi apparently had been mistaken for a demonstrator, and after being released from custody, he received an apology and 25,000 CFA francs (\$50) for medical expenses from the director of the National Police.

Mali boasts a diverse media environment, with some 300 FM radio stations – many of which are community radio stations – operating throughout the country and 40 newspapers and magazines that publish on a regular basis, though few beyond the state-

owned *L'Essor* have a circulation that exceeds 1,000. However, the only domestic television station with national reach is the public broadcaster, which typically takes a progovernment line. In October 2011, the government announced the launch of a new public broadcaster targeting the younger population that will begin broadcasting in 2012. The government also runs eight public radio broadcasters. However, the overall quality of the media in Mali is limited by the lack of adequate journalism training – though this has been improving – and the high level of poverty, which leads many low-paid journalists to take bribes.

With one of the lowest internet penetration levels in West Africa, only 2 percent of Malians had access to internet in 2011. Internet connection costs have been dropping in the last few years, improving access to this medium, but it is still restricted predominantly to internet cafés in Bamako due to infrastructure limitations. There are no government restrictions on access to the internet, and no reports of official monitoring of the content of e-mails or chat rooms.

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