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Press Freedom Status: Partly Free

Total Score: 51/100 (0 = Most Free, 100 = Least Free)

Legal Environment: 14/30

Political Environment: 22/40

Economic Environment: 15/30

Quick Facts

Population: 186,500,000

Freedom in the World Status: Partly Free

Net Freedom Status: Partly Free

Internet Penetration Rate: 47.4%

Key Developments in 2016:

- Two bloggers were arrested under provisions of the Cybercrimes Act after criticizing public officials.
- In May, the Senate rejected the proposed Frivolous Petitions Bill, which would have increased the government's power to restrict and punish online speech.
- Several journalists were attacked by security officers during the year.
- The military's continued success in fighting the militant group Boko Haram in the country's northeast provided the media with greater access to the region.

Executive Summary

Nigeria has a vibrant and varied media landscape, with outlets that openly criticize 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.

However, journalists risk prosecution under restrictive laws, including the broadly worded Cybercrimes Act. Two bloggers were arrested under its provisions in 2016, after criticizing public officials. However, as of September 2016, no journalists had yet been convicted of violating the act.

Journalists face attacks while carrying out their work, sometimes by security officials. Attacks against journalists often go unprosecuted, and an environment of impunity for attackers, combined with the threat of legal prosecution and harassment in connection with critical coverage, encourages self-censorship.

Legal Environment: 14 / 30

The constitution guarantees freedom of expression and of the press, and courts in recent years have issued rulings that expanded legal protections for journalists. However, criminal and civil laws punish various press and speech offenses, including sedition, criminal defamation, and the publication of false news. Sharia (Islamic law) statutes, which are in effect in 12 northern states, impose severe penalties for alleged press offenses, though they are not implemented in practice. Impunity for those who commit crimes against journalists remains a problem. Many past murders of journalists, including a number of which were believed to have been committed by members of Boko Haram, remained unsolved.

The 2015 Cybercrimes Act prohibits the online transmission of falsehoods, or of material sent "for the purpose of causing annoyance, inconvenience, danger, obstruction, insult, injury, criminal intimidation, enmity, hatred, ill will, or needless anxiety to another." Violators can receive heavy fines and a prison sentence of up to three years. Security forces have used the Cybercrimes Act to arrest and prosecute bloggers who criticize government officials and powerful businessmen, with at least two bloggers arrested in 2016 under its provisions. In August, police arrested Musa Babale Azare over his criticism of the Bauchi State governor on social media. He was later released on bail. The same month, Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) ordered the arrest of Abubakar Sidiq Usman after he criticized the commission on his blog. He was released after a day and a half in detention, though his electronics and personal effects were confiscated. However, as of September 2016, it did not appear that any journalists had actually been convicted of violating the Cybercrimes Act.

In a positive development, the Frivolous Petitions Bill, which was introduced to the Senate in 2015 and would have strengthened restrictions on online speech, was withdrawn in May 2016.

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. However, an April 2016 report by the Carter Center found that the law was not being fully implemented due to "a pervasive culture of secrecy in government business," misuse of the Official Secrets Act, low usage by the public, and a lack of institutional preparedness by government agencies. Some state governors have also balked at complying with the law, arguing that the federal legislation is not applicable to the states.

Legally, individuals and corporate bodies can establish and operate private media outlets, especially print and online media, without undue interference. However, public agencies responsible for media licensing and regulation are run by government appointees whose decisions are subject to political influence. The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), the broadcasting regulator, has come under scrutiny for processes and decisions that critics view as opaque and politically biased.

People may freely enter the practice of journalism in Nigeria. Several professional bodies, such as the Nigerian Union of Journalists and the Nigerian Guild of Editors, support and defend journalists' right to freely practice their trade.

Political Environment: 22 / 40

Nigeria has one of the most vibrant and varied media landscapes in Africa, and journalists working in the print sector in particular can be outspoken in their condemnations of unpopular government policies. However, journalists and outlets can face interference or pressure from owners, public officials, and regulators as a result of criticism of the government or coverage of sensitive issues like corruption and national security.

In recent years, both security forces and Boko Haram have impeded reporting in the country's northeast. However, the continuing success of Nigeria's military campaign against Boko Haram has led to greater access to the area for journalists.

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 Internationale (RFI) are among the key sources of news in the country.

There is no official censorship body. Some journalists self-censor on sensitive political, social, ethnic, or religious issues due to the risk of harassment or attack, as well as due to reluctance to displease media owners and sponsors.

Journalists continue to face obstruction, harassment, violence, and arbitrary detention while working, as well as in retaliation for their work. In February 2016, three journalists working for separate independent television stations were detained by police in the city of Owerri. Police reportedly suspected that two of the journalists had observed road safety officials demanding a bribe from a passing motorist, and the officers demanded the journalists turn over their phones, believing they had recorded the incident. When they refused, they were arrested, along with a third journalist who had observed the altercation. The three were later released, and the arresting officers disciplined.

In March 2016, police in Lagos detained Yomi Olomofe, publisher of *Prime* magazine, on accusations of assault and extortion. In 2015, Olomofe was beaten by a group of men while reporting on an illegal smuggling operation on the Nigerian border with Benin. Olomofe later filed a police report accusing the men of his assault. The group eventually filed a counterclaim alleging Olomofe has attacked them, precipitating his arrest. Olomofe was later released without formal charges.

In May 2016, police officers in Lagos assaulted and arrested Sampson Unamka, a reporter with the independent daily newspaper the *Nation*, for filming them while they were beating two people. The officers then took him to a police station, where he was ordered to delete the video before being released. Also in May, police detained a correspondent with the independent station Channels Television, Pius Iroja Angbo, and his cameraman Mike Umele, after the two were caught filming officials of the Benue State Water Board stealing water to sell on the black market. They were held for about four hours before being released. And in September, soldiers and secret police arrested ten journalists and media support staff of the independent news website *Watchdog Media News* in Benin, the Edo State capital. The site's editor, Taiye Garrick, alleged that the team members – who went to the city to cover gubernatorial election – were beaten with barbed wire and doused with water by the soldiers. The army denied wrongdoing and said they suspected that the journalists were connected to illegal gangs that had threatened to disrupt the election, a charge the journalists denied.

Economic Environment: 15 / 30

There are more than 100 national and local news publications, the most influential of which are privately owned. The two main nationwide broadcast networks are state owned: the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), and the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA). Some private broadcast stations, such as Channels Television and Africa Independent Television (AIT), offer robust national news coverage. 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 that makes their survival precarious. A number of state-owned daily papers are poorly produced and have low circulations, and receive large advertising subsidies.

As traditional outlets are increasingly burdened by high operating costs or subject to editorial interference, people are increasingly turning to online outlets and social media platforms for news. According to the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), about 26 percent of people accessed the internet in 2016, though other studies have issued higher percentages.

Bribery and corruption remain problems in the media industry, particularly in the form of small cash gifts that sources give to journalists. Meanwhile, a 2016 recession led to a number of job losses in the media sector. In June, the parent company of AIT Raypower FM Stations laid off all of their workers in the city of Benin; the workers had been protesting more than two years of unpaid salaries.

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