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Freedom of the Press 2011 - Guinea-Bissau

Status: Partly Free

Legal Environment: 15

Political Environment: 25

Economic Environment: 17

Total Score: 57

The overall condition of freedom of expression and the press in Guinea-Bissau deteriorated slightly in 2010, a reflection of unstable military-civil relations and the drug trafficking problem facing the country. In April 2010, troops under the command of the deputy chief of the armed forces staged a mutiny, briefly detaining Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Júnior. Despite guarantees of protection by the 1993 constitution and a 2005 law, the government is able to use a number of crimes to threaten and charge critical journalists, including libel, libelous denunciation, abusing press freedom, and violating state secrets. However, no cases were reported in 2010. There is no legislation guaranteeing the right to access information.

Media practitioners continue to experience harsh treatment arising from the actions of authorities, security forces, and private citizens with close connections to the military and drug traffickers. In May 2010, the owner and publisher of *Diário de Bissau*, João de Barros, was physically assaulted in his office by a businessman and his driver, who smashed the newspaper's computers, interrupting his ability to publish. The police detained one suspect but released him without charge, and the investigation remained open at the end of the year. The attack, which followed a report on drug trafficking, continues a pattern of harassment and intimidation of journalists by those linked to drug traffickers and the military. Since 2009 at least three journalists have fled into exile because of threats related to their reporting on drug trafficking. The climate of fear stemming from frequent harassment and mistreatment of journalists has led to a significant amount of self-censorship, particularly on topics relating to drug trafficking.

In the past, authorities have threatened to shut down the main opposition radio station, Radio Bombolom, and at least one journalist was forced into exile after reporting on potential connections between the armed forces and drug traffickers. Following the murder of General Batista Tagme Na Waie in March 2009 and the assassination of President João Bernardo Vieira the following day, three private radio stations were shut down by the military, though they were reopened the following day. Although there were no reports in 2010 of shutdowns or threats against radio stations, there continues to be a culture of impunity surrounding public officials and members of the armed forces who harass members of the press.

A government-owned newspaper, *No Pintcha*, operates alongside several privately owned print outlets. Three private radio stations compete with the state-run radio broadcaster. Operating in one of the world's poorest countries, Guinea-Bissau's press is plagued by financial instability. With only one state-owned printing press, publications struggle with high costs, slow production, and limited supplies. By July 2010, no newspapers were circulating in the country because of lack of availability of recycled paper used for production. Although many young people continue to pursue careers in journalism, the lack of resources hampers growth. Broadcast outlets face unreliable electricity. Access to the internet is limited to 2.45 percent of the population. No governmental restrictions on access are apparent.

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