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Freedom of the Press 2010 - Togo

Status: Not Free

Legal Environment: 24

Political Environment: 28

Economic Environment: 22

Total Score: 74

Survey Edition	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Total Score, Status	73,NF	78,NF	74,NF	74,NF	72,NF

- Freedom of speech and freedom of the press are legally guaranteed in Togo, but these rights are often ignored by the government. Pervasive impunity for crimes against journalists has created a tense and illiberal media environment.
- Severe punishment for libel is infrequent but remains a cause for concern. In December 2009, a Lome court ordered the private triweekly *Golfe Info* to pay US\$172,000 directly to the plaintiff, the National Intelligence Agency; pay a fine of US\$3,220; suspend all publication for two months; and retract the offending September story and any subsequent coverage of it. The original article had claimed that a celebrity who was allegedly involved in drug trafficking had worked as a project officer for the presidential administration.
- The High Authority of Broadcasting and Communications (HAAC), which was originally intended as an independent body to protect press freedom and ensure ethical standards, is now used almost entirely as the government's censorship arm. In October 2009, the parliament passed a law allowing the HAAC to impose sanctions, seize equipment, ban publications, and withdraw press cards.
- In April, following the disruption of an alleged coup plot led by the president's brother, the HAAC issued an order banning all radio and television programs in which the public is allowed to express its opinion. While the ban was only a temporary measure, it indicated the government's willingness to clamp down on the media whenever it sees fit.
- In an improvement from 2007, foreign journalists were able to operate freely throughout the country in both 2008 and 2009, and were not banned from critical reporting as they had been in the past.
- Journalists frequently operate in fear of violent attacks and harassment for their reporting, and many censor themselves as a result. While there were no reports of such attacks in 2008, in July 2009 a reporter with the private FM Radio Metropolis was assaulted by military personnel in the capital. When members of the Association of Human Rights Journalists later attempted to demonstrate in solidarity with the reporter, the military ordered them to disperse.
- Despite the rapid growth of private media since the late 1990s, the government owns the only daily newspaper and national television station, as well as several radio stations. The size of the private media sector is impressive for a relatively small country, with 25 regularly published newspapers, eight television stations, and approximately 100 radio stations. However, many of these outlets suffer from precarious finances and a low degree of professionalism. The official media strongly support the government, while private media are largely aligned with political parties.

- Access to the internet was generally unrestricted during the year, and just under 6 percent of the population was able to access the medium in 2009 – a relatively high penetration rate by regional standards.

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