



Freedom of the Press 2015 - Mali

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2015 Scores

Press Status: Partly Free

Press Freedom Score (0 = best, 100 = worst): 37

Legal Environment (0 = best, 30 = worst): 8

Political Environment (0 = best, 40 = worst): 19

Economic Environment (0 = best, 30 = worst): 10

Mali's ongoing conflict with Tuareg separatists and continued attacks by Islamist militants undermined stability throughout 2014, making reporting in the country a potentially dangerous task for domestic and foreign journalists alike. Self-censorship and economic difficulties also inhibited news coverage in what was otherwise a relatively open media landscape.

Legal Environment

Freedom of speech is guaranteed under Article 4 of the 1992 constitution, but no legislation guarantees the confidentiality of journalists' sources. A press law passed in 2000 imposes fines and prison sentences for defamation. It also criminalizes offenses such as undermining state security, demoralizing the armed forces, offending the head of state, sedition, and consorting with the enemy. However, journalists are rarely prosecuted. While Malian authorities have not signed the Table Mountain Declaration, a formal commitment to decriminalize defamation and insult laws across Africa, the Association of Private Press Editors of Mali (ASSEP) announced in November 2014 that it was reviewing potential reforms of the 2000 press law, including the decriminalization of press offenses.

Mali does not have a dedicated law guaranteeing public access to official information, and journalists have faced obstacles when attempting to obtain information about the military in particular.

The two bodies tasked with regulating the media – the High Communications Council and the Committee for Equal Access to the State Media – lack the funding and capacity to function effectively. The Maison de la Presse, an umbrella organization for press unions, provides journalists with work facilities, training centers, and support for the protection of their legal rights. The National Union of Journalist Reporters (SYJOR) complements the work of the Maison de la Presse with an emphasis on labor rights for media workers.

Political Environment

The media are pluralistic overall, but some private outlets display partisan bias in their reporting, and the state broadcaster – the Malian Office of Radio and Television Broadcasting (ORTM) – tends to carry progovernment programming. The media faced official pressure to self-censor when reporting on security issues during 2014, particularly after the government suffered a military reversal in Kidal in May.

Violence and intimidation directed at journalists was less severe in 2014 than in the previous two years, but many outlets remain wary of reporting critically on the security forces, and northern Mali continued to be a dangerous area for the press. Three ORTM journalists were among a group of hostages detained by Tuareg rebels following the May clashes with the army in Kidal; they were released after three days of captivity. In September, armed men attacked a crew of ORTM journalists and stole their vehicle as they traveled to Diré to cover an official's visit to the region.

Ongoing insecurity and unrest in 2014 also hindered French and Malian investigations into the November 2013 kidnapping and murder of French journalists Ghislaine Dupont and Claude Verlon, for which Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb claimed responsibility.

In the south, cases of detention and physical intimidation of journalists were rare. However, police officers assaulted and detained reporter Clarisse Njikam of the privately owned daily *L'Indépendant* in October as she covered a children's singing competition at a stadium in Bamako.

Economic Environment

Mali has long hosted a diverse media environment, with more than 300 radio stations operating across the country, as well as roughly 60 newspapers that publish on a semiregular basis. Print circulation, however, is limited; other than the state-owned *L'Essor*, few publications have circulations exceeding 1,000 copies. Foreign news services, including the British Broadcasting Corporation and Radio France Internationale, are broadcast on FM radio in Bamako and some other areas. The state broadcaster ORTM is the only domestic television station with national reach, and it is under the tight control of the executive branch; the president appoints its general manager based on the recommendation of the minister of communication.

Only 7 percent of Malians were able to access the internet in 2014. However, news websites are very popular with the educated elite and Malians living abroad. Users increasingly consume their content via internet-enabled mobile phones. Mobile phone usage in general is virtually ubiquitous, with an estimated 149 subscriptions for every 100 residents.

Insufficient funding and access to equipment and electricity continue to prevent many media outlets in Mali from operating at full capacity, particularly in the north. Regular blackouts in Timbuktu and Gao, for example, force many radio stations to limit broadcasts to evenings, when power is available. Poor working conditions, including low or nonexistent salaries, often lead journalists into unethical practices.

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