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Freedom of the Press 2011 - Chad

Status: Not Free

Legal Environment: 23

Political Environment: 31

Economic Environment: 21

Total Score: 75

Chad's constitution allows for freedom of expression, but authorities have routinely used threats and legal provisions to censor critical reporting. However, 2010 saw a lull in harassment of the press and a slight shift away from draconian legal penalties. A 2008 press law, Decree No. 5, increased the maximum penalty for false news and defamation to three years in prison, and the maximum penalty for insulting the president to five years. Separately, the High Council of Communication (HCC), Chad's media regulatory body, banned reporting on the activities of rebels and any other information that could harm national unity. In August 2010, the National Assembly first rejected and then overwhelmingly passed a government-submitted bill, Law No. 17, which removed Decree No. 5's prison sentences, but replaced them with sentences of six months to a year in prison and heavy fines for inciting racial or ethnic hatred and "condoning violence." Defendants bear the burden of proof in defamation cases and face a prejudiced judicial process.

Journalists and publishers risked harassment, especially from authorities, when publishing articles critical of the government, and many practiced self-censorship to avoid reprisals. Impunity remains high for perpetrators of harassment against journalists. In 2009, the authorities summarily expelled the Cameroon-born editor of *La Voix du Tchad*, Innocent Ebodé, after he wrote an op-ed in response to a government official's suggestion that the Nobel Peace Prize should have been awarded to Chadian president Idriss Deby. After Ebodé's expulsion in December 2009, authorities brought a case challenging *La Voix*'s legality and license. When Ebodé returned to Chad to challenge the order, he was abducted and detained by unknown men in late December 2009. In January 2010, a court issued an order for the seizure of all issues of the paper, but the order was lifted later in the month. In a separate case in October, after local newspaper *N'Djamena Bi-Hebdo* published an article that the prime minister deemed dangerous to the country, the HCC warned media houses, especially *N'Djamena Bi-Hebdo*, to not print articles that may incite violence or hatred.

Private newspapers circulate freely in the capital, but they have little impact on the largely rural and illiterate population. The state-run Chad Press Agency is the only news service in the country. Permission from the prosecutor's office, the HCC, and the Ministry of Commerce is required to establish a newspaper. The only television station is state owned. Radio is the primary means of mass communication, and licenses are granted by

the HCC, which is considered to be greatly influenced by the government. The licensing fee for commercial radio stations continues to be prohibitively high, at five million CFA francs (\$11,000) per year. The HCC is also said to monitor and control radio content. There are over a dozen private and community-run stations on the air. Advertising is the main source of revenue for media outlets, but it is scarce. Nevertheless, media outlets depend on advertising heavily, since other sources of revenue, such as government subsidies, are even more unreliable. There are no reports that the government restricts internet access, but the internet infrastructure remains government owned, and approximately 1.7 percent of the population accessed this medium in 2010.

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