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Freedom Of The Press - Ghana (2010)

Status: Free

Legal Environment: 8

Political Environment: 9

Economic Environment: 9

Total Score: 26

- In 2009, Ghana attempted to strengthen its reputation as a country with unfettered freedom of expression following a transfer of power from the New Patriotic Party to the National Democratic Congress (NDC) party. However, there were several assaults on and acts of intimidation against journalists during the year.
- Freedom of the press is legally guaranteed, and the government generally respects this right in practice. The administration of former president John Kufuor failed to pass a freedom of information bill despite repeated promises to do so. However, under John Atta Mills, who was inaugurated as president in January 2009, the cabinet approved the Right to Information Bill in November. Advocacy groups called on Parliament to move quickly and pass the bill into law.
- Ghana's criminal libel laws were repealed in 2001, but former public officials and private citizens have brought a spate of civil libel cases seeking crippling amounts in damages from media outlets in the past few years, encouraging self-censorship. In May 2009, defamation claims were brought against the publishers of the *Daily Graphic* and the *Daily Democrat* newspapers by the former minister of aviation. The publishers face potential payments amounting to US\$207,000, but the trial had not begun by year's end.
- Several journalists were arrested, attacked, or detained during 2009. In February, two female reporters covering a soccer match were assaulted by police after attempting to access the players' locker room following the game. The regional editor of Metro TV, Clement Kegeri, was detained by authorities in August after trying to cover a rape trial. Police physically attacked, searched, and detained a journalist with the local station Radio Progress in October for trying to photograph the officers' mistreatment of a young man. Two reporters were assaulted in November while covering the trial of six police officers. In December, NDC political activists attacked five journalists at a party function in central

Ghana. The incident was condemned by the vice president, who called for public cooperation in investigating the matter.

- Dozens of newspapers, including two state-owned dailies, publish regularly in Ghana, and there are 27 television stations in operation.
- Radio remains the most popular medium, with more than 150 FM radio stations in operation nationwide, 11 of which are state run. The first community radio station, Radio Ada, was launched in 1999 and became a founding member of the Ghana Community Radio Network (GCRN). Nine additional stations have started broadcasting, and several others have been awarded licenses by the GCRN. Community radio stations have effectively informed citizens in marginalized communities throughout the country, contributing to stronger public involvement in local politics. However, the GCRN has been criticized for slow licensing procedures.
- Journalists regularly complain about the bias they experience when applying for a license to open a media outlet, particularly in the broadcast sector. Some applied as long ago as 2000 and have yet to receive a response.
- Poor pay and unprofessional conduct, including the fabrication of highly sensationalist news stories, remain problems.
- Use of the internet is growing and unrestricted, but the access rate remains low at 5.4 percent of the population.