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Freedom of the Press 2016 - South Sudan

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Press Freedom Status: Not Free

Legal Environment: 18 / 30 (0 = best, 30 = worst)

Political Environment: 31 / 40 (↑2) (0 = best, 40 = worst)

Economic Environment: 17 / 30 (0 = best, 30 = worst)

Press Freedom Score: 66 / 100 (↑2) (0 = best, 100 = worst)

Quick Facts

Population: 12,152,000

Freedom in the World Status: Not Free

Internet Penetration Rate: 17.9%

Overview

Conditions for the media in South Sudan have remained repressive amid a civil war between the government and rebel forces supporting ousted vice president Riek Machar. Due to widespread intimidation, media outlets regularly engage in self-censorship on sensitive topics, leaving the public with limited access to independent and accurate reporting.

Key Developments

- Security forces ordered the closure of two newspapers and a producer of radio content in August 2015. Another paper, the *Nation Mirror*, was forcibly shuttered in February but reopened in October.
- Five journalists were killed in an attack on a government convoy in January, marking the first confirmed work-related murders of journalists in South Sudan since it gained independence.

Legal Environment: 18 / 30

South Sudan's transitional constitution guarantees freedom of expression and press freedom under Article 24, with possible exceptions for public order, safety, or morality. The article also calls on media to "abide by professional ethics." Article 32 of the transitional constitution guarantees the right to access official information,

with exemptions for public security and personal privacy. The government regularly violates media freedom protections in practice, and senior officials have engaged in rhetoric that contributes to a hostile environment for the press. In August 2015, President Salva Kiir publicly threatened to kill journalists who "work against the country."

The National Security Service (NSS) Law, which took effect in early 2015, grants the NSS virtually unfettered authority to arrest and detain suspects, monitor communications, conduct searches, and seize property without clear judicial oversight. Defamation remains a criminal offense under the penal code. However, under the 2013 Media Authority Act, defamation claims against the media should be adjudicated by a Press and Broadcast Complaints Council, with a number of safeguards for media freedom. That law and two others signed in late 2013 – the Broadcasting Corporation Act and the Right of Access to Information Act – have remained unimplemented, due in part to a period of confusion about when they were signed and entered into force. In 2015 the government reportedly nominated officials to head and staff various agencies tasked with carrying out the three laws, but they had not been approved by the legislature at year's end.

There are few formal obstacles to the establishment of a media outlet or entry into the journalistic profession. However, the lack of an effective legal framework for the media leaves outlets and journalists vulnerable to abuses by the authorities, including arbitrary closure or detention.

Political Environment: 31 / 40 (↑2)

Political and other pressures stemming from the civil conflict have polarized the media and reduced the number of impartial outlets, meaning most citizens only have access to one-sided narratives from the two warring parties. However, the authorities generally do not engage in prepublication censorship or proactive editorial interference, instead typically responding to critical coverage after the fact. Despite a general lack of transparency, public officials are relatively accessible to journalists seeking interviews.

The NSS continued its efforts to silence independent media outlets during 2015, often acting without a formal explanation, though fewer raids and pressrun confiscations were reported compared with 2014. In January, the NSS summoned the editorial director of the private daily *Juba Monitor* and threatened to close the paper over critical commentary by columnist Michael Koma. The outlet's chief editor issued an apology and discontinued the column. The NSS banned publication of the daily *Nation Mirror* in February, apparently due to an error in its war coverage, for which it had apologized. The chief editor left the country to escape threats and harassment, but returned when the paper reopened in October. In August, the NSS ordered the closure of *Al-Rai*, an Arabic-language newspaper; Free Voice South Sudan, a producer of radio content; and the independent daily *Citizen*. The affiliated Citizen TV later closed for financial reasons related to the newspaper's shutdown.

The government has little capacity to monitor or censor online media, and many journalists in the country contribute to news sites and online newspapers that are based outside the country. Nevertheless, the government expelled UN humanitarian coordinator Toby Lanzer in June after he posted remarks on social media that apparently angered authorities.

Journalists are subject to harassment and arbitrary detention by security forces, leading many to engage in self-censorship or leave the country. Nonstate actors also pose a threat to media workers. In January 2015, protesters reportedly attacked journalists at a Juba hospital as they investigated ethnic violence in a nearby village, and at least one reporter was injured. Also that month, an alleged rebel ambush on a government convoy in Western Bahr el-Ghazal State killed five journalists and six others, marking the first confirmed work-related killings of journalists since South Sudan gained independence, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). Four of the victims worked for the local radio station Raja FM, and the fifth was from South Sudan Television. CPJ was unable to confirm the motives in two other murders: Pow James Raeth of the privately owned Radio Tamazuj in Jonglei State was shot and killed along with a friend by unidentified gunmen in May, and Peter Julius Moi, a freelancer working for the independent bimonthly *New Nation* and the *Corporate* business weekly was similarly shot dead in Juba in August.

Economic Environment: 17 / 30

Media outlets in South Sudan are owned by the government, private companies and individuals, or nonprofit entities including churches and civil society organizations. Government-owned South Sudan Television is the sole national television station operating in the country. Journalists working at the outlet complain of self-censorship and lack of professional integrity among their superiors. Radio remains the main source of news for most citizens, due in part to widespread illiteracy and poverty. A range of stations operate across the country, but many remote areas lie outside the reach of FM broadcasts.

A number of private dailies and weeklies publish regularly, though papers allied with the ruling party are favored in terms of winning advertising contracts. Newspapers are largely concentrated in urban areas because of the high cost of transportation and a lack of reliable infrastructure. Newsprint is very expensive, and the limited printing capacity inside the country means that production often occurs in neighboring Uganda or Kenya.

Internet penetration was reported at nearly 18 percent in 2015, but estimates have varied in recent years, and further expansion of online news outlets may be limited by the same social and economic obstacles that have hampered traditional media. All media enterprises face economic challenges including the damaging effects of the civil war and reliance on generators and costly fuel to maintain electrical power.