

Freedom of the Press 2014 - Niger

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2014 Scores

Press Status: Partly Free

Press Freedom Score (0 = best, 100 = worst): 52

Legal Environment (0 = best, 30 = worst): 15

Political Environment (0 = best, 40 = worst): 20

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

Niger's media environment, which has improved considerably since 2011 under President Mahamadou Issoufou, remained largely stable in 2013. Article 23 of the Nigerien constitution guarantees the right to freedom of thought, opinion, and expression. However, these rights were sporadically upheld in 2013.

In 2010, the transitional government had decriminalized media offenses and replaced prison sentences with fines as punishments for libel and publication of false information. In 2011, Issoufou became the first head of state to sign the Declaration of Table Mountain, an initiative of the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) that calls for the repeal of criminal defamation and insult laws, as well as a press environment in Africa that is free from government, political, and economic control. However, journalists are occasionally subject to legal action. In May, Ali Cisse Ibrahim, director of *L'Actualité*, was found guilty of libel and fined 5 million CFA francs (\$10,000) after his paper ran an article about alleged illicit enrichment by a government minister's daughter. In June, the Niamey Court of Appeals overturned the conviction and 500,000 CFA franc (\$1,000) fine against Diaouga Hamani, director of *Le Capital* newspaper, for insult and defamation in a case brought by Ousmane Idi Amango, the director of the national oil distribution company.

In 2011, the transitional government approved the Charter on Access to Public Information and Administrative Documents, which aimed to improve transparency and the public's access to information. However, implementation of the law remains inadequate, and in practice access remains somewhat difficult.

The National Observatory on Communication (ONC), a state-run media regulatory body, and the Niger Independent Monitoring Center for Media Ethics and Conduct monitor broadcasts and publications, and occasionally censure or suspend outlets as a result of their content. Other types of content censorship generally do not take place in either the traditional or online media, although the High Commission for Technology and Communication has ordered the state-owned telecommunications company, Sonitel, to block the websites of terrorist group Boko Haram and other similar organizations. Some journalists, particularly those working for public media outlets, practice self-censorship.

Physical attacks and threats against members of the media as they were attempting to cover the news occurred in 2013. In February, Nigerien police attacked four journalists – Souleymane Ousmane and Issaka Lawali, journalists and cameramen with Bonferey Radio and Television; Hadiza Amadou of Dounia Radio and Television (RTD); and Nassa Seydou of Ténéré Radio and Television. The police threw tear gas at the group and then seized Amadou's camera, before chasing them away as they attempted to cover a peaceful protest organized by members of the Educational Unions' Permanent Consultation and Action Framework (CPRASE). In June, a four-member television crew from Qatar-based satellite network Al-Jazeera was detained in southwestern Niger for 48 hours while covering the difficult conditions of refugees who had escaped the fighting between the Nigerian army and Boko Haram in neighboring Nigeria. The Nigerien police accused the Al-Jazeera crew of espionage and confiscated their equipment and travel documents. The crew was put in a common cell with no food or water before being released without charge, and then was detained again without explanation before again being released within hours. While the Ministry of Justice publicly declared that the only reason for the journalists' arrest was the absence of a formal accreditation by the Ministry of Communication, Al-Jazeera maintains that the crew had received its filming permission from local authorities and that the local police had cleared the report before it was aired. The contradictions between local authorities and the Niamey government over the reasons for this incident mark a clear difference between what Niamey and local authorities see as permissible in terms of topics reported by local and international media.

In September, the managing editor of the private biweekly newspaper *L'Evènement* received a threatening note personally delivered by Lieutenant Aouali Hambali, an officer in the Nigerien army who allegedly took part in a coup plot a month earlier. The government is investigating the circumstances of the threat.

Several dozen private newspapers compete with a state-run daily in the print media market and provide some criticism of the government. The state continues to dominate the broadcasting landscape, though there are a number of private radio stations that broadcast in French and local languages. Some stations air programming from foreign services, including Voice of America and Deutsche Welle. Radio is the most widely accessible source of news. Three private television stations operate alongside two state-run stations. Online speech is generally free, but internet access remained very sparse, reaching only 1.7 percent of the population in 2013.

A heavy tax on private media outlets continues to hinder the development of the private media sector, and public media also receive the bulk of advertising from state-owned companies. In addition, considerable economic uncertainty has contributed to corruption within the media sector, leading to unethical behavior by journalists that can affect the quality and accuracy of news content. However, the government has doubled official press subsidies to 200 million CFA francs

(\$400,000), with the stated aim of encouraging the public service and democracy promotion functions of the press.

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