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Freedom of the Press 2010 - Algeria

Status: Not Free

Legal Environment: 22

Political Environment: 25

Economic Environment: 17

Total Score: 64

Survey Edition	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Total Score, Status	64,NF	61,NF	62,NF	62,NF	62,NF

- The constitution guarantees freedom of expression. However, the 1992 state of emergency remained in effect throughout 2009, allowing the government to legally penalize any speech deemed threatening to the state or public order. A 2001 amendment to the Press Law further restricts press freedom by criminalizing writings, cartoons, and speech that insults or offends the president, the parliament, the judiciary, or the armed forces.
- Defamation and other legal charges brought against journalists continue to hinder their ability to cover the news. A number of sentences for defamation were handed down during the year, involving both fines and prison time. For example, Nedjar Hadj Daoud, managing director of the news website *El-Waha*, was arrested in March 2009 in connection with a 2005 defamation case involving a municipal government employee. Hadj Daoud has been the target of more than 25 defamation lawsuits, and the weekly print version of *El-Waha* has been banned since 2006. In May, he was sentenced to six months in prison in connection with a separate 2006 case.
- State agencies regularly engaged in both direct and indirect censorship. Self-censorship also remained widespread, largely out of fear of defamation accusations or other forms of government retaliation.
- On March 7, *Afrique Magazine*, a Paris-based monthly, was confiscated due to an article titled "Algeria, the Twilight of the Generals" that allegedly violated "national values." Issues of three French publications – *L'Express*, *Marianne*, and *Journal du Dimanche* – were banned on April 8, one day before the presidential election. *Sirry LeIghaya*, a licensed supplement of the newspaper *Al-Monaqsa*, was banned under the false claim that it was unlicensed. This ban was issued based on the 1990 Information Act and the penal code, both of which granted the judiciary the authority to ban and fine newspapers as well as prosecute staff and journalists.
- International media faced challenges entering the country to cover the April 9 elections. Reporters stated that they waited for months to get their visas issued. Journalists such as Florence Beauge from the French daily *Le Monde*, Sihem Bensedrine, a Tunisian journalist and human rights activist, and Yahya Bentahar, a Moroccan journalist from the weekly *Assahrae al-Ousbouiya*, were either denied entry or had significant difficulty obtaining a visa during the elections.
- Coverage of issues related to "national security and terrorism" by international media

outlets continues to be restricted. Al-Jazeera's Algeria office remains closed, though Agence France-Presse (AFP) and Reuters were reaccredited in February 2009 and were able to operate for the remainder of the year.

- The vibrant print media are often critical of the authorities. There are currently more than 100 private daily and weekly newspapers, 29 of which print over 10,000 copies for each edition.
- Television and radio, both of which are entirely state owned, broadcast biased information, displaying favoritism towards the president and generally refraining from coverage of dissenting views, such as a call to boycott the 2009 elections. Access to broadcast media for opposition political parties is generally limited except during election campaign periods. However, more than 60 percent of households have satellite dishes that provide access to alternate sources of information.
- The government has tremendous economic influence over print media, as most newspapers are printed on state-owned presses. In January 2008 the government placed six state-owned printing presses under the direct control of the Communications Ministry, threatening the editorial autonomy of half of Algeria's privately owned newspapers. The state-owned advertising agency controls the placement of ads by state entities and companies, which form the largest source of income for most papers.
- About 13.5 percent of the population accessed the internet during 2009. While access is generally unrestricted, the government does monitor e-mail and internet chat rooms, and internet-service providers are legally liable for the content they host. Bloggers, like traditional journalists, face potential defamation suits, and several have been fined for posting "defamatory material." However, there were no reported cases of legal or physical harassment against bloggers or online journalists during 2009.

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