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Freedom of the Press 2012 - Guinea-Bissau

2012 Scores

Press Status: Partly Free
Press Freedom Score: 57
Legal Environment: 15
Political Environment: 25
Economic Environment: 17

The overall conditions for freedoms of expression and the press in Guinea-Bissau remained unchanged in 2011. Despite guarantees of protection for these rights in the 1993 constitution and a 2005 law, the government is able to threaten critical journalists with a number of criminal charges, including libel, the abuse of press freedom, and the violation of state secrets. However, no such cases were prosecuted in 2011. There is no legislation guaranteeing the right to access information.

A primary incident concerning the press in 2011 was the temporary suspension of the private newspaper *Última Hora* in April. Government minister Maria Adiatu Djalo Nandigna threatened to permanently revoke its license if it failed to bring its "editorial policies into line with the higher interests of Guinea-Bissau." The newspaper resumed publication later the same month. While there were no reports of permanent shutdowns in 2011, authorities in the past have threatened to close the main opposition radio station, Radio Bombolom, and other outlets have been temporarily shuttered during periods of political turmoil.

Media practitioners continue to experience harsh treatment at the hands of government officials, security forces, and private citizens with close connections to the military and drug traffickers. In May 2010, the owner and publisher of *Diário de Bissau*, João de Barros, was physically assaulted in his office, allegedly by a businessman and his driver who smashed the newspaper's computers, interrupting its ability to publish. The police detained one suspect but released him without charge, and the investigation remained open at the end of 2011. The attack, which followed a report on drug trafficking, continued a pattern of harassment and intimidation of journalists who cover sensitive topics like the drug trade and the military. Since 2009, at least three journalists have fled into exile because of threats related to their reporting on drug trafficking. The resulting climate of fear has led to a significant amount of self-censorship. Impunity is the norm for public officials and members of the armed forces who harass members of the press.

A government-owned newspaper, *No Pintcha*, operates alongside several privately owned print outlets. A number of private radio stations compete with the state-run radio

broadcaster. The press in Guinea-Bissau, one of the world's poorest countries, is plagued by financial instability. With only one state-owned printing press, publications struggle with high costs, slow production, and limited supplies. Broadcast outlets face unreliable electricity that hinders steady operations. Although many young people continue to pursue careers in journalism, the lack of resources hampers growth.

Around 2.7 percent of the population had access to the internet in 2011. No governmental restrictions on access are apparent, though a lack of equipment and infrastructure drastically limits practical access to the internet. In March, blogger Ali Silva was charged with defamation by the prime minister; the case was still pending at the end of the year.

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