



Freedom of the Press 2015 - Central African Republic

Publisher [Freedom House](#)

Publication Date 20 October 2015

Cite as Freedom House, *Freedom of the Press 2015 - Central African Republic*, 20 October 2015, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/562f6f74c.html> [accessed 18 May 2016]

Disclaimer This is not a UNHCR publication. UNHCR is not responsible for, nor does it necessarily endorse, its content. Any views expressed are solely those of the author or publisher and do not necessarily reflect those of UNHCR, the United Nations or its Member States.

2015 Scores

Press Status: Not Free

Press Freedom Score (0 = best, 100 = worst): 72

Legal Environment (0 = best, 30 = worst): 21

Political Environment (0 = best, 40 = worst): 29

Economic Environment (0 = best, 30 = worst): 22

The press freedom situation improved somewhat after Michel Djotodia, leader of the Séléka rebel movement that seized power in 2013, resigned as president in January 2014 under domestic and international pressure. He was replaced by former Bangui mayor Catherine Samba-Panza, who formed a transitional government that displayed greater respect for media independence. However, violence in the country remained rampant, with media outlets and journalists caught between warring parties or forced to self-censor to avoid retaliation.

Legal Environment

The 2004 constitution of the Central African Republic (CAR) guarantees freedom of the press, and a press law that took effect in 2005 abolished imprisonment for many offenses, such as libel and slander. However, criminal penalties remained in place for some defamation charges, incitement of ethnic or religious hatred, and the publication or broadcast of false information that could "disturb the peace."

The new government under Samba-Panza was generally more respectful of journalists' rights and imposed fewer restrictions than its predecessor. For example, a special police force created under Djotodia, tasked in part with monitoring the media, was apparently discontinued in 2014. Nevertheless, some legal harassment persisted. In April 2014, the editors of two newspapers were

arrested on various insult charges after publishing stories that were highly critical of President Samba-Panza. A warrant was issued on similar grounds for a third journalist, who evaded capture but was forced into hiding. Media advocates expressed concern not only over the arrests but over the specific charges, several of which were decriminalized in 2005. After more than a week of detention, the two editors were granted bail and were awaiting trial at year's end.

The absence of a freedom of information law makes accessing official information in the CAR challenging for journalists. The High Council for Communications (HCC), tasked with granting licenses and promoting press freedom, is nominally independent but has extremely low levels of institutional capacity. By the end of 2013, it was totally nonoperational following political and military turmoil under the Séléka regime. In May 2014, Samba-Panza named nine new members to the transitional HCC, including four women, with the goal of revitalizing the body. The government initially tried to block the appointment of the nominee chosen by the country's print sector, which is allowed to select a representative for the council. After significant pushback from national journalist unions and press groups, the authorities relented and confirmed the nominee. Nevertheless, the HCC remains weak and unable to consistently enforce the country's regulatory framework for the media.

There are several professional groups for journalists, including the Union des Journalistes de Centrafrique (UJCA) and the Observatoire des Medias Centrafricains (OMCA), which are active despite their fairly low level of capacity.

Political Environment

The new government in 2014 interfered less with news content, allowing more space for critical and investigative journalism. Several local outlets were able to report without reprisal on accusations that President Samba-Panza and her daughter were involved in massive corruption. However, in June the government blocked the transmission of text messages, citing vague security concerns. Journalists complained that the move hampered their ability to gather information and communicate with sources. Service was reportedly restored after one month.

Journalists also remained exposed to harassment and physical violence, and general insecurity in the country seriously hampered newsgathering. In April, two local journalists, Désiré Sayenga of the newspaper *Le Démocrate* and René Padou of the Protestant radio station Voix de la Grâce, were killed in their homes, allegedly by armed Muslim residents. It was unclear whether these journalists were specifically targeted for their work. Weeks later, in May, the French photojournalist Camille Lepage was killed while traveling with a Christian "anti-balaka" militia when their convoy was ambushed by a rival group.

Economic Environment

All newspapers, including six dailies published in French, are privately owned. Low literacy levels, high poverty rates, and the lack of a functioning postal service in rural areas limit the reach of print media, which have small circulations and are largely restricted to Bangui. There are no local printing presses, and newspapers are often produced using standard computer printers and photocopiers.

Radio is the most important medium for news consumption and is much more popular and professionally run than print. The state owns Radio Centrafrique, the only station with national reach, though its coverage is mostly limited to government activities. More than a dozen community radio stations serving rural areas were broadcasting prior to 2013, but most have suspended operation due to looting and damage to their equipment during the political unrest. Only one local commercial station exists, supported by a Swiss nonprofit organization, though many international outlets such as the British Broadcasting Corporation and Voice of America are available. The state owns the sole television station, which does not broadcast outside of Bangui. Much like state radio, it serves mainly to publicize government activities.

Financial problems and the lack of an organized advertising market continue to plague newspapers and radio stations, and some journalists are motivated by poverty to accept bribes to cover certain stories, as many are not paid regularly for their work. Most journalists are poorly trained, although a journalism department was established at the University of Bangui in 2009.

Infrastructural constraints have also limited internet penetration, which stood at only 4 percent in 2014. Some websites, such as the Network of Human Rights Journalists, provide strong coverage of local events, but they remain inaccessible to the vast majority of the population.

Copyright notice: © Freedom House, Inc. · All Rights Reserved

Search Refworld

by keyword
and / or country
Clear Search
[Advanced Search](#) | [Search Tips](#)

Countries

- [Central African Republic](#)

Topics

- [Freedom of expression](#)
- [Freedom of information](#)
- [Generalized violence](#)