

Freedom of the Press 2014 - Ghana

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2014 Scores

Press Status: Free

Press Freedom Score: 28

Legal Environment: 2

Political Environment: 10

Economic Environment: 10

The environment for freedom of expression and the press in Ghana remained generally healthy in 2013, despite a politically charged atmosphere while the Supreme Court considered a legal challenge to the December 2012 presidential election results by the opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP).

Freedom of the press is legally guaranteed, and the government typically respects this right in practice. Criminal libel and sedition laws were repealed in 2001, but Section 208 of the 1960 criminal code, which bans "publishing false news with intent to cause fear or harm to the public or to disturb the public peace," remains on the books and is occasionally used against journalists. Moreover, current and former public officials, as well as private citizens, sometimes bring civil libel cases that seek crippling amounts in compensation from media outlets, which can encourage self-censorship. According to the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), in July 2013 a high court in Accra fined the state-owned *Daily Graphic* and the privately owned *Democrat* the equivalent of \$44,600 each for publishing what were ruled to be libelous stories about legislator Joe Baidoe-Ansah. MFWA, in reporting on the ruling, also urged journalists to report responsibly. The same month, Ken Kuranchie, editor in chief of the *Daily Searchlight*, was convicted of criminal contempt by the Supreme Court and sentenced to 10 days in jail after he questioned the court's decision to bar an NPP official from the hearings on the 2012 election results.

The 1992 constitution provides for freedom of information, and a draft Right to Information (RTI) bill would help enforce this guarantee. However, after more than 10 years of consultation between Parliament and civil society organizations, progress on the bill has stalled. In June 2013, the cabinet

approved the latest version of the RTI bill, and in November it was reintroduced to Parliament. Journalists and media advocacy groups – most notably the Right to Information Coalition of Ghana, an alliance of 80 nongovernmental organizations in the country – have been critical of the delays and opacity of the legislative process, and have flagged numerous weaknesses in the bill's provisions, including broad exemptions on information disclosure and a lack of independent oversight in its enforcement mechanism.

The National Communications Authority (NCA) has been criticized for slow licensing procedures and bias. The National Media Commission in Ghana was established in 1993 in accordance with the 1992 constitution and is charged with monitoring the media's performance and adherence to professional ethics, but historically it has lacked enforcement power due to inadequate funding. Poor pay and unprofessional conduct, including the fabrication of sensationalist news stories, remain problems in the media sector.

While the state-run Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) is protected from government interference by the constitution, political parties attempt to influence coverage. Private media face a degree of editorial pressure from their owners, particularly those with political connections, and some journalists practice self-censorship for political or commercial reasons. Government offices and political parties occasionally boycott media outlets or programs that they perceive as biased.

Journalists sometimes face intimidation and physical attacks on the job, with a few minor incidents reported in 2013. In March, two photojournalists – Nii Martey Botwe of the *Daily Graphic* and Vincent Dzatse of the *Ghanaian Times* – were assaulted by military agents and had their equipment destroyed as they attempted to cover Independence Day ceremonies. An initial military investigation found no wrongdoing on the part of the officers, but the chief of defense staff was later forced to apologize to the journalists in the face of a public outcry.

Dozens of newspapers, including two state-owned and two private dailies, publish regularly, and there are 28 television stations in operation, of which 20 are free-to-air. Radio is the most popular medium, with about 285 FM stations nationwide, of which some 35 are state-run and over 230 are commercial. The first community radio station, Radio Ada, was launched in 1999 and became a founding member of the Ghana Community Radio Network. As of the end of 2013, there were about 40 functioning community radio stations, according to the NCA. Economic sustainability is a challenge for both public and private media. The GBC receives inadequate funding from the government and must sell advertising slots to remain afloat, leaving it dependent on the large corporations that can afford its rates.

Use of the internet is growing and remains unrestricted, but the level of penetration is still low, at 12 percent of the population in 2013. Various civil society organizations have called on the government to improve access to the internet in Ghana. Active blogging and usage of social media have increased in urban centers, most notably in Accra.

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