



Published on *Freedom House* (<https://freedomhouse.org>)

[Home](#) > Benin

Benin

Country:

[Benin](#)

Year:

2017

Press Freedom Status:

Partly Free

PFS Score:

37

Legal Environment:

13

Political Environment:

11

Economic Environment:

13

Key Developments in 2016:

- Journalists were generally able to cover the year's presidential election without interference, and opposition candidates had better access to the public broadcaster than in past years.
- The High Authority for Audiovisual Media and Communication (HAAC), the country's media regulator, shuttered a number of news outlets that were either affiliated with an opposition politician, or were critical of President Patrice Talon's administration.
- The Media Foundation of West Africa (MWFA) documented two instances of serious harassment against journalists, up from one the previous year.

Executive Summary

Benin remains one of the most open media environments in Africa. A variety of outlets operate in the country, though the media is polarized on political lines, and many outlets rely on funding from political or corporate sources. The government and private companies alike are known to use advertising contracts—and the threat of withholding them—to influence media content.

In 2016, journalists were largely free to cover the two rounds of the presidential election held in March, and candidates' campaigns. While the state broadcaster has been criticized for favoring the government, in 2016 opposition candidates had better access to the broadcaster, which also aired the country's first presidential debate. In the second round of the election, Talon, a businessman and political independent, defeated Prime Minister Lionel Zinsou, of outgoing president Thomas Boni Yayi's Cowry Forces for an Emerging Benin (FCBE) party.

The country's ostensibly independent media regulator, the HAAC, has drawn criticism for politicization and for issuing abrupt suspensions. After his inauguration in April 2016, President Talon retained Adam Boni Tessi, an ally of outgoing president Yayi, as head of the HAAC, and the body issued suspensions against media outlets under both presidential administrations. In February, it barred the private Golfe TV from carrying political coverage, after the station had reported on election-related topics before the presidential campaign period formally began. The ban was lifted six days later, after a meeting between representatives of the HAAC and the Federation of Radio and Television Employers. In November the HAAC suspended six private television stations and one radio station, which were accused of either broadcasting from unauthorized locations, or of failing to sign regulatory agreements with the HAAC. While the outlets appeared to have committed these transgressions, journalists criticized the abrupt manner in which the sanctions were enforced. Their closures also raised concerns about politicization, as several of the outlets had either criticized Talon's administration, or were affiliated with Sébastien Ajavon, a businessman who had run for president.

Following a period of active consultation with the journalistic community and civil society, a new Information and Communication Code of Benin became law in 2015. The new code eliminated custodial sentences for most press offenses, including defamation, and was praised by representatives of media organizations for the collaborative process that brought it about and for its clarification of the rights of journalists. In 2016, the new code was largely respected, and no legal cases were brought against journalists, nor were any journalists imprisoned.

The MWFA documented two incidents in which journalists were harassed in the course of their work in 2016, up from just one such incident in 2015. In February, a crew from the private Canal 3 television outlet was threatened and chased away from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by police under order of the minister, who had refused to answer journalists' questions about a workers' strike. In August, police raided the offices of the newspaper *L'Audace Info* looking for the publication's director, who was accused of defaming a university group in both the newspaper and on social media. However, the police did not possess an official summons. Representatives of the Union of Media Professionals of Benin and the HAAC met to negotiate a resolution to the incident, though the outcome of the talks was unclear.

Explanatory Note

This country report has been abridged for *Freedom of the Press 2017*. For background information on press freedom in Benin, see *Freedom of the Press 2016*.

Source URL: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2017/benin>