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## Central African Republic

**Country:**

Central African Republic

**Year:**

2017

**Press Freedom Status:**

Not Free

**PFS Score:**

71

**Legal Environment:**

21

**Political Environment:**

28

**Economic Environment:**

22

### Key Developments in 2016:

- Some media outlets were looted or otherwise saw their operations disrupted during unrest that erupted toward the end of the year.
- The Maison de la Presse et des Journalistes (MPJ), which represents several professional journalists' associations, was shuttered in December as a result of a dispute over ownership of the property.

### Executive Summary

Persistent insecurity in Central African Republic makes reporting very difficult. Journalists self-censor in order to avoid intimidation and harassment, as well as legal cases filed in response critical reporting. The economic situation too is difficult; there is virtually no private advertising market, and many journalists are compelled by a lack of regular pay to cover certain stories, including those promoting politicians. Much reporting consists of cultural and sports-related stories, and many journalists depend heavily on international support.

The press freedom situation remained restrictive but relatively stable in 2016, a year that saw largely peaceful general elections and the promulgation of a new constitution.

Intercommunal clashes took place during the year, and while some stations were looted or otherwise saw operations disrupted, no journalists were killed. In October, attackers looted a radio station in Kaga Bandoro amid a deadly attack on the town by Séléka militants. There were reports the same month that the community radio station Radio Barangbaké, in Bria, closed down in order to avoid looting. In December, computers were reportedly stolen from Radio Maigaro in Bouar, interrupting its operations. However, in a positive development, Radio ICDI in Boali resumed broadcasting in February; it had gone off the air for three months after armed youths threatened its staff.

Central African Republic's new constitution, approved in a 2015 referendum and promulgated in March, reiterates guarantees of press freedom. However, certain laws can be invoked to restrict journalists' activity; these include some criminal defamation provisions, as well as measures prohibiting incitement of ethnic or religious hatred, and the publication or broadcast of false information that could "disturb the peace." In December 2016, Marcellin Zoumadou, editor of the newspaper *L'Harmattan*, was arrested for defamation in connection with an article levying corruption allegations against a law professor at the University of Bangui. Zoumadou was released a few days later, upon the announcement of his acquittal by a public prosecutor. Earlier, in April, Serge Vikos, director of the *L'Expansion* newspaper, was arrested in connection with an article about a campaign by a cousin of newly inaugurated president Faustin-Archange Touadéra to gain a cabinet post. It was unclear whether Vikos was charged with any crime in connection with the arrest. Separately, in February, security agents confiscated journalist Prudence Yamete's video recorder as she was covering activities at a polling station in the capital during the year's general elections; Yamete was working with a joint media project of the MPJ and the UN Multidimensional Integrated Mission in Central African Republic (MINUSCA).

In late December, the offices of the MPJ, which houses several professional associations for journalists, was shuttered, reportedly by the family of the late former president Ange-Félix Patassé, who at one time had purchased the building; equipment was also confiscated from the premises. The closure came amid a dispute over ownership of the property between the Patassé family, and journalists who were bequeathed the offices by former President François Bozizé following Patassé's fall from power in 2003.

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

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