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Guinea-Bissau

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PRESS FREEDOM STATUS: Partly Free

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT: 18 / 30 (↓1)

(0=BEST, 30=WORST)

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT: 24 / 40

(0=BEST, 40=WORST)

ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT: 18 / 30

(0=BEST, 30=WORST)

PRESS FREEDOM SCORE: 60 / 100 (↓1)

(0=BEST, 100=WORST)

QUICK FACTS

Population: 1,788,000

Freedom in the World Status: Partly Free

Internet Penetration Rate: 3.3%

Overview

Although conditions for the press improved in 2014 following that year's return to elected civilian rule, a political crisis in 2015 in which the president

dismissed the prime minister and his cabinet led to increasing government interference with the media. Organized crime and continued military influence in politics and society also contributed to fear and self-censorship among journalists.

Key Developments

- A blog editor was arrested and charged with libel and slander in March for publishing criticism of the prime minister.
- In August, at the peak of the year's political crisis, the government replaced the heads of the public television and radio services, and the latter was prevented from broadcasting parliamentary debates.
- The attorney general ordered the cancelation of a political discussion program on the public radio station in December.

Legal Environment: 18 / 30 (↓1)

Freedoms of expression and the press are guaranteed in the constitution and in a 2005 law. Though the elected government largely respected these rights in 2014, they were violated several times in 2015.

Criminal laws still ban defamation, abuse of press freedom, and violation of state secrets. In March 2015, editor Danilson Lopes Ferreira of the blog *Doka Internacional–O Denúnciante* was arrested on libel and slander charges for publishing posts that were critical of Prime Minister Domingos Simões Pereira. He was later released from detention; the status of the charges remained unclear at year's end.

No specific legislation guarantees the right to access government information, though Article 34 of the constitution states vaguely that “all have a right to information and judicial protection, according to the terms of the law.”

Political Environment: 24 / 40

The return to elected civilian rule led to the reopening of private news outlets, though politicized government interference remains a problem. In August 2015, after President José Mário Vaz fired Prime Minister Pereira and unilaterally replaced him with Baciro Djá, the new prime minister dismissed the heads of the public television and radio broadcasters for failing to “calm emotions” in their reporting on the crisis, arguing that it was “necessary to impose a new direction” on the broadcasters. Equipment from the radio network was also removed from the parliament chamber, preventing the broadcast of debates about the political dispute. Following the formation of a new government under another prime minister in October, the public radio broadcaster faced interference again in December, when the attorney general ordered the cancelation of a weekly political discussion program and summoned the network’s director general for a “working meeting.”

Unofficial censorship also remains a problem, as does self-censorship stemming from fear of violent reprisals. There is consequently little reporting on the connections between military and government officials and drug traffickers. Since 2009, at least three journalists have fled into exile due to threats related to their reporting on drug trafficking. Impunity has been the norm for government and military officials who abuse members of the press, though no additional attacks against journalists were reported in 2015.

Economic Environment: 18 / 30

The state-run Rádio Televisão de Guinea-Bissau (RTGB) and the Africa service of Portugal's public broadcaster operate the country's two main television networks. Guinea-Bissau's first community television station, TV Klélé, has managed to sustain itself since launching in 2013. A number of private radio stations, such as Rádio Bombolom, Rádio Sol Mansi, and Rádio Jovem, compete with RTGB. The government weekly *Nô Pintcha* operates alongside several less prominent private print outlets. The press in Guinea-Bissau, one of the world's poorest countries, is plagued by financial instability, lack of resources, and low salaries. The state owns the only high-capacity printing press, and print publications have historically struggled with high costs, slow production, and limited supplies of affordable newsprint. Broadcast outlets face unreliable electricity that hinders steady operations.

No governmental restrictions on the internet are apparent, though a lack of equipment and infrastructure drastically limits access to the medium in practice, contributing to frequent service interruptions. Only around 4 percent of the population had access to the internet in 2015. Nevertheless, online news outlets such as *Bissau Digital* contribute to the information environment, and the African Bureau of the International Federation of Journalists has been working to train Bissau-Guinean journalists to maintain online security and to protect digital publications and data from government or private interference as internet traffic grows.

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