Media repression by the Sudanese government continued in 2014. There were numerous reports of government confiscation of entire newspaper press runs, and of the outright suspension of independent newspapers. The practice of prepublication censorship persisted, and the government continued to arrest and detain journalists without charge.

**Legal Environment**

Freedom of the press and expression are nominally protected under Article 39 of the 2005 Interim National Constitution—adopted as part of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Khartoum government and the then insurgent Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM). Following the independence of South Sudan in 2011, a permanent Sudanese constitution has not yet been implemented. While the CPA initially created some space for journalists to report more freely and reduced the common practice of prepublication censorship, the legal environment for Sudanese media remains extremely difficult. The 2009 Press and Publications Act allows for restrictions on the press in the interests of national security and public order, contains loosely defined provisions related to bans on the encouragement of ethnic and religious disturbances and the incitement of violence, and holds editors in chief criminally liable for all content published in their newspapers. Several other laws have been used against the press,
including elements of the 1991 penal code, the 2010 National Security Forces Act, and emergency measures that have been enacted in the states of Darfur and Kordofan. A new media law proposed in 2013 would expand the restrictions of the 2009 Press and Publications Act, extending editorial liability to journalists and printing houses in addition to chief editors. The proposed law was pending further consultation as of the end of 2014.

Defamation is a criminal offense under the penal code, and there is no freedom of information law, making access to public information difficult.

The press law requires journalists to register with the National Council for Press and Publications (NCPP), an entity supervised by the president that also has authority to shut down newspapers for three days without a court order. The NCPP, a large proportion of whose members are appointed by the president, regulates the journalism profession and entry into the field. Journalists are required to pass a test prior to receiving accreditation and a license. The Ministry of Information manages broadcast licensing in a highly politicized manner, allowing progovernment stations to acquire licenses more easily than independent outlets.

**Political Environment**

Authorities in Khartoum maintain a tight grip on Sudan’s media sector. National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) agents have been known to summon editors to issue censorship directives, or insist that certain journalists be banned from writing or else face suspension as the penalty for noncompliance. The longstanding practice of prepublication censorship persisted throughout the year. Sudan’s information minister in May also announced plans to create a “special commission” comprised of government officials to examine proposed news reports about corruption ahead of publication.

Another censorship tactic commonly employed in 2014 was the suspension of newspapers. For example, the government temporarily suspended *Al-Jarida* in January after it reported on alleged corruption within the government and about commodity shortages. *Al-Saiha* was similarly suspended in May after it published a series of articles implicating government figures in corrupt activity. In a positive step, Sudan’s Constitutional Court in March overturned the suspension of the independent daily *Al-Tayar*, which NISS had shut down in 2012 after it had published a news report about suspected corruption within a government-owned company. According to the advocacy group Reporters Without Borders, NISS during 2014 seized 35 complete newspaper issues, confiscating all copies after they came off the printer. No grounds were ever provided for the confiscations, but they typically occurred following an outlet’s publication of critical articles on corruption within the government, or about conflict areas.

Monitoring and censorship of online content was pervasive in 2014. The National Telecommunications Corporation (NTC) closely monitors the internet, including e-mail correspondence, and a “cyberjihadist” unit housed within the NISS proactively monitors online activities and hacks into activists’ social-media accounts. The NTC has also blocked websites and proxy servers that purportedly violate norms of public morality. In March 2014, the body announced that “negative” websites would be blocked, but did not offer further details. The government has also sporadically blocked websites, including
YouTube and the news website Sudanese Online, for publishing content perceived by the regime as highly sensitive—such as the 2013 antigovernment demonstrations and articles on the war in Darfur. The popular online news outlet NubaReports.org—which focuses on events in South Kordofan, Blue Nile, and Darfur, where Sudanese forces continue fighting rebel groups—was hit by a distributed denial of service (DDoS) attack in September and was temporarily knocked offline. The government’s repressive acts against journalists continue to encourage self-censorship.

Journalists faced harassment, attacks, and arbitrary arrests and detention in 2014. In June, journalist Hassan Ishaq of Al-Jarida was arrested after attending a speech by an opposition party leader in West Kordofan. Ishaq was reportedly tortured while in custody and remained in detention without charge at year’s end. In July, the office of Al-Tayar was attacked by armed men who destroyed equipment, confiscated laptops, and beat two journalists, including the paper’s editor in chief, Osman Mirghani. A group identifying itself as the “Hamza Group Against Atheism and Heresy” claimed responsibility for the attack, which was evidently motivated by Mirghani’s calls for Sudan to normalize relations with Israel. In September, NISS agents arrested journalist Abdul Rahman al-Ajib of Al-Youm Al-Tali and freelance photographer Eisa Aizain and held them for more than a week without charge. In October, prominent journalist Al-Nour Ahmed Al-Nour of the London-based Al-Hayat was arrested in Khartoum and held for six days without charge.

Economic Environment

Despite constraints on journalists, media outlets have proliferated in recent years. There are nearly 20 political dailies operating in the country, plus dozens of sports and social affairs publications. However, all are subject to serious government intrusion, ranging from interference in management decisions to censorship of content. Newspapers are generally too expensive for most citizens. The state dominates the broadcast media, which are the main source of information for much of the population. Television programming continues to be formally censored, and radio content largely reflects the government’s views. Many private radio stations broadcast on FM frequencies, in addition to the state radio network. As the licensing of radio stations remains firmly under government control, private stations avoid reporting on political affairs and focus instead on entertainment and music. Internet penetration in Sudan is relatively high for sub-Saharan Africa, with 25 percent of the population accessing the web in 2014.

Ownership of media outlets is generally not transparent, and no laws require the release of ownership information. Moreover, many owners refrain from acknowledging their status in order to evade taxes and avoid possible attacks.

Journalists work for low pay, and many freelancers do not earn enough to cover the cost of living. Some analysts claim that difficult economic circumstances have fostered corruption within the media by encouraging journalists and editors to sell coverage to politicians. The authorities withhold state advertising from newspapers that are critical of the government.

The economic viability of newspaper outlets was further threatened in 2014 by the government’s frequent practice of confiscating entire press runs of newspapers as a
deliberate strategy to censor, intimidate, and financially cripple critical publications. Each confiscated edition resulted in significant losses for economically fragile outlets.

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