

## FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

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# Comoros

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The 2001 constitution protects freedom of speech and of the press, but the Comorian government partially restricts these freedoms in practice. Journalists are subject to harsh defamation laws, and self-censorship is reportedly widespread. The authorities have in past years arrested journalists, seized newspapers, and silenced broadcast outlets for reports that were found to be objectionable, although these practices have been less common since President Ahmed Abdallah Sambi took office in 2006. Former vice president Ikililou Dhoinine was sworn in as Sambi's successor in May 2011, after winning a December 2010 election.

In the past, the media environment has varied considerably among the union's three islands, with slightly greater levels of freedom on Grand Comore and Moheli and greater levels of repression on Anjouan. Since the removal of renegade Anjouan president Colonel Mohamed Bacar by an African Union (AU) military force in 2008, all journalists in detention on the island have been released, and there have been no reports of media harassment. In March 2011, Ali Moindjié, editor of *Al-Balad*, a privately owned daily newspaper, and Hadji Hassanali, editor of bimonthly *La Tribune des Comores*, were charged with "publishing false news" by a public prosecutor in the capital Moroni, located on Grand Comore. The charges stemmed from reports that Dhoinine's inauguration might be delayed past the scheduled May 26 date. The prosecutor alleged that these reports, which were politically sensitive due to allegations by the opposition that the presidential transition was being dragged out in order to extend Sambi's term in office, were "of a nature to trouble public order."

Comoros has six independent newspapers and one state-owned weekly, *Al-Watwan*. In addition to the state-owned Radio Comoros and Television Nationale Comorienne, several other regional and private stations have proliferated in recent years and are funded predominantly by donations from locals as well as from citizens living abroad. The Anjouan regional government operates its own stations under Radio-Television Anjouanaise. Public radio from the French island of Mayotte, as well as metropolitan France's Radio France Internationale, are also available in some areas.

Although the internet is available and unrestricted by the government, poverty, illiteracy, and a poor telecommunications infrastructure limited access to 5.5 percent of the population in 2011.

## 2012 SCORES

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