

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

Niger

Niger | [Freedom of the Press 2012](#) |

Media freedom, which had deteriorated in 2009 in the wake of an attempted power grab by then president Mamadou Tandja and a subsequent military coup, continued to improve in 2011 under the government of newly elected president Mahamoudou Issoufou. In the year leading up to the March 2011 presidential election, the transitional government had introduced and adopted several reforms. Since taking office, Issoufou continued these reforms. In November, he became the first African president to sign the Declaration of Table Mountain, which calls for the repeal of criminal defamation and insult laws, as well as a press environment in Africa that is free from government, political, and economic control.

Article 23 of the Nigerien constitution guarantees the right to freedom of thought, opinion, and expression. However, press freedom in Niger remains restricted somewhat by the government's control of media licensing, a requirement that journalists be accredited, and bias in the judiciary; self-censorship was also reported. A series of new measures resulted from the March 2010 National Conference on the Media, which was hosted by the interim government in order to find ways to improve the media climate.

In June 2010, the transitional government adopted a draft decree written during the conference that decriminalized media offenses and allowed for fines but not jail time as punishments for libel and publication of false information. However, in July 2011 journalist Modibo Oumarou Aliou, editor of the independent newspaper *Le Canard Déchain*, was arrested and held in prison overnight for alleged "dissemination of false information" against former transitional government leader Djibo Salou's press secretary. The Media Foundation for West Africa called for the use of civil litigation in the case. Also in July 2011, the National Communication Observatory (ONC), the official media regulatory body, temporarily suspended eight newspapers for "unwarranted attacks on citizens by flagrantly violating the provisions of the charter of professional journalists." While the offending articles were said to have included exaggerations, they reportedly did not reach the standard for libel.

In February 2011, the transitional government approved the Charter on Access to Public Information and Administrative Documents, which aimed to improve transparency and the public's access to information.

Another result of the March 2010 conference was the creation of an independent journalists' organization, the Niger Independent Monitoring Center for Media Ethics and Conduct, to self-regulate the industry by monitoring broadcasts and publications. Plaintiffs who bring complaints to the media self-regulatory body cannot also take legal action on those complaints, and according to a July 2011 report by Reporters Without Borders, journalists appear to trust the self-regulatory body and prefer it to the courts. In April 2010, veteran journalist Abdourahamane Ousmane was appointed to head the ONC, which had replaced Tandja's repressive High Council on Communication. Ousmane at the same time served as the chair of the Nigerien Reporters Network for Human Rights; he was also a former editor in chief of a privately

2012 SCORES

PRESS STATUS

Partly Free

PRESS FREEDOM SCORE

49

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

15

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

17

ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

17

owned media group, Alternative. The ONC commenced its work in 2010 by authorizing the reopening of a privately owned FM station, closed down by the Tandja administration, and it issued new licenses and license extensions for a number of private television stations and commercial and community radio stations. In January 2011, the ONC played a critical role in ensuring media fairness during the election campaign, passing two resolutions that standardized the production and distribution of messages from candidates and parties, and overseeing a code of conduct signed by 36 political parties and 2 independent candidates.

Despite the friendlier media landscape, 2011 saw an apparent increase in articles with slanderous and defamatory intent. In July, the publisher of *Le Visionnaire* newspaper was suspended from the National Association of Independent Press Publishers after an investigation concluded that the publisher had used the paper to further a personal vendetta against the head of a privately owned company in Niamey, the capital, by making false accusations.

There were no reported cases of physical attacks or intimidation of journalists in 2011. Also, unlike in 2010, there were no reports that the government inhibited the work of foreign journalists, including while they were covering politically sensitive events in the north of the country.

Some 45 private newspapers compete with a state-run daily in the print media market and provide some criticism of the government. The state continues to dominate the broadcasting landscape, though there are 15 private radio stations that broadcast in French and local languages. Some stations air programming from foreign services such as Voice of America and Deutsche Welle. Radio is the most widely accessible source of news. Three private television stations operate alongside two state-run stations. Restrictive press licensing legislation and a heavy tax on private media outlets continues to hinder the development of the private media sector. In September 2010, the Niger Press Club appealed for an end to the practice of outside individuals and groups paying journalists “bonuses” for certain articles.

Although the government does not restrict internet access, only 1.3 of the population used the medium in 2011.

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