

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

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Senegal

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

Political tensions rose in Senegal in 2011, as President Abdoulaye Wade's maneuvers to remain in power beyond a two-term limit gave rise to a rejuvenated opposition movement led by civil society groups, journalists, and musicians. Protests and riots broke out in the capital Dakar on June 23 as parliament considered constitutional amendments that would have virtually assured Wade victory in the first round of the February 2012 presidential election. The amendments were withdrawn later that day in response to the protests; however, more than 100 people were injured when police used rubber bullets, tear gas, and water cannons to subdue demonstrators. The government responded to the more vocal opposition with increased attempts to silence criticism, ranging from clampdowns on protests to arrests of activists and journalists.

Senegal's laws provide for press freedom, but Wade's government continued to limit this in practice. The government has occasionally employed provisions of the 1977 penal code—including Article 80, which criminalizes vaguely defined threats to national security—to harass, prosecute, fine, and incarcerate critical journalists. Article 8 of the 2001 constitution ostensibly protects freedom of expression and of the press, and Article 10 guarantees the “right to express opinions freely, in words, in writing, in images, [and] by peaceful marching.” However, defamation, libel, and insult are criminal offenses, and such charges are frequently brought against journalists in order to block or punish critical reporting or commentary. In April 2011, Abdou Latif Coulibaly, one of Senegal's most prominent and critical journalists, was found guilty of criminal defamation for stories published in 2010 that accused a businessman, who was a close friend of Wade, of engaging in fraudulent deals with the government. Coulibaly was sentenced to a three-month suspended jail sentence and fined 10 million CFA francs (\$20,000). In December, Coulibaly accepted the nomination of an opposition coalition to be its candidate in the 2012 presidential election. The threat of legal action, accompanied by aggressive official rhetoric against the press, has reportedly led to a rising level of self-censorship among some journalists. Still, many media outlets continue to publish and broadcast strident antigovernment views and reports.

Following a seminar with civil society leaders and journalists in June, legislators and the minister of communication made a commitment to adopt access to information legislation; however, no legislation was passed by the end of 2011.

Journalists faced harassment, detention, and assault, mainly from the authorities, for covering the news, and this increased in the wake of the June 23 protests. In July, four journalists with *Walfadjiri l'Aurore*, a privately owned daily newspaper, were interrogated by the authorities for more than 10 hours over an article that criticized the president's aides. In September, the police detained three journalists from the private daily *La Tribune* overnight in response to a story in which they allegedly discredited the police. The story, and the photographs published with it, accused police of using heavy-handed tactics against demonstrators during the protests.

Many private, independent print publications and three government-affiliated

2012 SCORES

PRESS STATUS

Partly Free

PRESS FREEDOM SCORE

55

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

21

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

20

ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

14

newspapers continue to publish regularly in the capital, though their distribution in rural areas is irregular at best. Radio is the most important source of news due to high illiteracy rates, and a number of community, private, and public radio stations operate across the country, with more than 80 radio frequencies allocated to date. Critics allege that Wade's associates in politics, business, and the religious community receive preferential treatment in the allocation of frequencies and enforcement of broadcasting fees. The five private television channels that now operate carry mostly entertainment programming. The only national television station, state-owned Radio Télévision Sénégalaise (RTS), generally favors the government in its news coverage. The executive staff members of RTS are all directly or indirectly selected by the president. In July, members of a local media trade union held a sit-in at the studios of RTS to protest the alleged bias of its programming toward Wade and the ruling party. The government has also been accused of selectively granting or withholding state subsidies to influence media outlets. Foreign satellite television and radio stations, including Radio France Internationale and the British Broadcasting Corporation, are available and unrestricted.

Internet access is also unrestricted, and approximately 17.5 percent of the population accessed the medium in 2011.

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