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Freedom Of The Press - Algeria (2011)

Status: Not Free
Legal Environment: 22
Political Environment: 23
Economic Environment: 17
Total Score: 62

The Algerian constitution guarantees freedom of expression. However, the 1992 state of emergency remained in effect throughout 2010, allowing the government to legally penalize any speech deemed threatening to the state or public order. A 2001 amendment to the Information Code further restricts press freedom by criminalizing writing, cartoons, and speech that insults or offends the president, the parliament, the judiciary, or the armed forces. Defamation and other legal charges brought against journalists continue to be a constant threat, hindering the press's ability to cover the news. A number of sentences for defamation were handed down during the year, involving both fines and prison time. In March 2010, a correspondent of *El Bilad* received a two-month prison sentence for the 2009 publication of an article criticizing a senator for corruption. In a separate case in March, Algerian courts fined the publisher of *Ennahar E Djadid* for defamation.

State agencies regularly engage in both direct and indirect censorship. Self-censorship also remains widespread, largely out of fear of defamation accusations or other forms of government retaliation. Foreign media outlets continue to face challenges in reporting freely. Officials block foreign papers when they carry content deemed subversive. In particular, coverage by international media outlets of issues related to national security and terrorism continues to be restricted. Al-Jazeera's Algeria office remained closed in 2010. In September 2010, two journalists from *Assahra Ousbouiya*, a Moroccan weekly, were detained for four days. They were held because of their attempt to report on the conditions of refugees from Western Sahara, an area of dispute between Morocco and Algerian-backed local separatists.

Algeria has a vibrant but fragile independent press, which often acts as a more effective check on official power than opposition parties themselves. There are currently more than 100 private daily and weekly newspapers, 29 of which print over 10,000 copies for each edition. Television and radio, both of which are entirely state owned, broadcast biased information, display favoritism toward the president and generally refrain from covering dissenting views. However, more than 60 percent of households have satellite dishes that provide access to alternate sources of information. The government has tremendous economic influence over print media, as most newspapers are printed on state-owned presses. In January 2008, the government placed six state-owned printing presses under the direct control of the Communications Ministry, threatening the editorial autonomy of half of Algeria's privately owned newspapers. The state-owned advertising agency continued to favor content with a pro-regime bias in 2010 by controlling the placement of ads by state entities and companies, which form the largest

source of income for most papers.

About 12.5 percent of the population accessed the internet in 2010. The government monitors e-mail and internet chat rooms, and internet service providers are legally liable for the content they host. In a break from the past, Algeria began censoring select internet sites in 2010. The websites of Algerian political movement Rachad and the country's only independent news radio station, Radio Kalima-Algérie, were blocked at various points throughout the year. Radio Kalima-Algérie is a common regime target because of its coverage of sensitive stories, including cases of alleged corruption among government officials, and the fact that it occasionally contradicts official news coverage. Bloggers, like traditional journalists, face potential defamation suits, and several have been fined for posting "defamatory material." However, there were no reported cases of legal or physical harassment against bloggers or online journalists during 2010.