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Freedom Of The Press - Burkina Faso (2011)

Status: Partly Free
Legal Environment: 13
Political Environment: 15
Economic Environment: 13
Total Score: 41

Article 8 of the constitution and the Information Code of 1993 guarantee the freedoms of expression, information, and the press. Article 49 of the Information Code allows every journalist free access to sources of information, with exceptions for information pertaining to the internal and external security of the state, military secrets, strategic economic interests, ongoing investigations or legal proceedings, or anything that threatens the dignity and privacy of Burkinabes. In practice, these exceptions are used frequently by officials, and access to government information remains difficult. Libel is a criminal offense and the burden of proof is on the defendant, but few journalists have been charged in recent years.

Burkina Faso's media regulatory body, the Conseil Supérieur de la Communication (CSC), consists of 12 members appointed by the government, and has been criticized for inconsistent and mismanaged licensing procedures. The body has the power to summon journalists to hearings about their work, which can be followed by a warning that the CSC will not tolerate further "noncompliant behavior." The CSC issues approximately five summonses each year. While the CSC boasts that it has approved a growing number of private radio stations, newspapers, and television channels, as well as requests for radio frequency spectrum, critics note that it should focus additional efforts to address the economic sustainability of media outlets. President Blaise Compaoré came into power through a coup d'état in 1987 and has since been reelected by wide margins. Prior to the most recent 2010 election, the CSC held meetings with local and international journalists asking them to respect journalistic standards of objectivity and balanced reporting.

To avoid aggravating public authorities, state-run outlets generally refrain from covering controversial subjects, though programming allows for coverage of the opposition. Conversely, the private media are generally free of overt censorship, do criticize the government, and investigate more sensitive topics, although journalists occasionally face harassment by public authorities for coverage deemed unfavourable, which leads some to practice self-censorship. The media situation in Burkina Faso was relatively quiet in 2010 except for a renewed call by media institutions for the government to re-launch the investigation into the death of prominent journalist Nibert Zongo, who was assassinated in 1998 while investigating a murder tied to Compaoré's brother. No attacks on the media were reported during the year. Foreign radio stations were able to broadcast freely.

More than 239 radio and television stations are in operation in the country and there are at least 5 national dailies, but very low circulation figures and structural difficulties place the print media in a fragile economic situation. A 2009 study

by the Norbert Zongo National Press Center found that *L'Observateur Paalga*, a private newspaper, was the most read print outlet in the country. There are several other private dailies and one official daily, *Sidwaya*, which displayed a progovernment bias but also allowed opposition figures some space to air their views. Although the private media is growing, including the birth of news magazines such as *Zénith*, *Citoyen*, *Carrefour africain*, and *Le Journal du Jeudi*, ownership still lacks transparency. Only one of six journalists has more than 10 years' experience, and one out of three has less than three, according to a 2006 study. Frequent power outages interrupted production and low salaries affected the integrity of the journalism profession. Low literacy rates and poor economic conditions make the broadcast media the preferred choice for news and entertainment. Infrastructural deficiencies and poverty limited access to the internet to approximately 1.4 percent of the population in 2010. There were no reported restrictions on internet content.