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Freedom Of The Press - Comoros (2011)

Status: Partly Free
Legal Environment: 14
Political Environment: 19
Economic Environment: 15
Total Score: 48

Although the freedoms of speech and of the press are protected by the 2001 constitution, the Comoran government partially restricts these freedoms. In practice, journalists are subject to harassment and 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 are less common under the current administration. It is yet to be seen how a referendum on constitutional changes—which passed with 93.9 percent of the vote in May 2009—will impact freedom of the press. The reforms, which extend the term of President Ahmed Abdallah Sambi until 2011, also empower him to dissolve the federal parliament and rule by decree with parliament's approval.

On semiautonomous Anjouan island, under the renegade regime of Colonel Mohamed Bacar, press freedom was curtailed and several reporters were harassed and detained in the year before his removal by an African Union military force in March 2008. No progress was made in either the 2007 arrest and beating of four journalists by Anjouan policemen, or the detention of radio reporter Elarifou Minihadji of the Comoran Foundation for Human Rights. Since the removal of Bacar, all journalists in detention have been released, and there have been no reports of media harassment on the island. 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.

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 (RTA), and public radio from the French island of Mayotte is popular. Although the internet is available and unrestricted by the government, poverty, illiteracy, and a poor telecommunications infrastructure limited access to 5.1 percent of the population in 2010.