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## Freedom Of The Press - Congo, Republic of (Brazzaville) (2011)

**Status: Partly Free**  
**Legal Environment: 16**  
**Political Environment: 21**  
**Economic Environment: 17**  
**Total Score: 54**

There was little change in the press freedom environment in the Republic of Congo in 2010, although fewer infringements were reported than in the election year of 2009. The constitution and the law recognize freedom of the press, but certain types of speech, such as incitement of violence or ethnic hatred, are criminalized and carry monetary penalties. The law provides for revoking the accreditations of journalists at government and foreign-owned media outlets if their reporting reflects adversely on the government's image, although there have been no reports of such revocations in recent years. In May 2010, the High Council on Freedom of Communication issued new censorship orders, which resulted in the suspension of the weeklies *Le Trottoir* and *Le Choc* for two months and three months, respectively. The broadcaster Forum TV and Radio also was suspended for its critical commentary of the government.

The government under President Denis Sassou-Nguesso has a long history of human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary imprisonment, abuse of detainees, official impunity, and restrictions on freedom of the press and freedom of association. In 2009, journalist and activist Bruno Jacquet Ossébi died of injuries sustained in a house fire that killed his companion and her two children. Ossébi had recently reported on corruption in the management of Congo's oil wealth. The Brazzaville fire service identified the cause as a short circuit, although in a subsequent interview with the Committee to Protect Journalists, the commander of the Brazzaville fire rescue center admitted that the finding was not based on a forensic investigation. The fire coincided with a similar fire at the house of exiled dissident Benjamin Toungamani in France. Toungamani and Ossébi had been planning to join an international lawsuit against Sassou-Nguesso. Ossébi's death was ruled an accident, and no further developments in the case have subsequently come to light. There were several other reports of harassment of journalists around the time of the July 2009 presidential elections, but no similar incidents were reported in 2010.

Most Congolese get their news from television and radio. There are five television stations in Congo: state-run Télé-Congo expresses the government's views, two private channels are owned by relatives of Sassou-Nguesso, one private channel is owned by Army General Norbert Dabira, and the remaining private channel is named for the president's older brother. However, there have been reports that some private channels have been more critical of the government in recent years. Of the country's six radio stations, three are government-owned and the remaining three are private but exhibit a progovernment bias. Print media are more independent and critical, occasionally

publishing letters from opposition leaders, but are heavily concentrated in Brazzaville and do not reach far into rural parts of the country. The internet and satellite TV are unrestricted but not widely used, with only 5 percent of population having access to the internet in 2010.