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## Freedom Of The Press - Gabon (2011)

**Status: Not Free**  
**Legal Environment: 24**  
**Political Environment: 23**  
**Economic Environment: 22**  
**Total Score: 69**

The constitution guarantees freedom of expression and of the press, but authorities continued to employ legal harassment, threats, and financial pressure to curb critical reporting in 2010. However, conditions have improved slightly under President Ali Ben Bongo Ondimba, who succeeded his father in 2009. Libel can be treated as either a civil or a criminal offense, and the government is permitted to criminalize civil suits and initiate criminal cases in response to alleged libel of government officials. Publications can also be legally suspended for libel and other offenses. In June 2010, reporter Jonas Moulenda of the state-owned daily *L'Union* was convicted of criminal defamation in a suit brought by Alfred Nguia Banda, the former director general of Gabon's maritime transport agency, whose name had not even appeared in the cited article about the murder of Banda's successor. Moulenda was given a suspended sentence and a fine of 500,000 CFA francs (\$900), and was free on appeal at the year's end. In October, the editor of the independent newspaper *Le Temps* was imprisoned for five days for failing to pay the entire amount of an exorbitant defamation fine, which had been levied in 2004 for an article that suggested a member of the ruling party could have been involved in an armed robbery.

In 2010, the government continued to use its main regulatory body, the National Communications Council to curtail critical journalism. In May, the newspaper *Ezombolo* was banned from publishing for six months for "persistently insulting the head of state." However, no media outlets were closed and there were no reports of attacks against journalists during the year. Past cases of assault and harassment were not investigated adequately.

The two government-affiliated newspapers, *L'Union* and *Gabon Matin*, are the only dailies in the country. Nine private weeklies and monthlies print sporadically due to financial constraints and government-ordered closures. Many of those outlets occasionally voice criticism of the government and ruling party, but self-censorship persists, especially when it comes to the president, although it was less common in 2010 than in previous years. Foreign publications are readily available. Gabon has seven private radio stations and four private television stations. The government owns two radio stations and two television stations that broadcast nationwide. Satellite television is also available to those who can afford it, and foreign radio broadcasts are widely accessible. Government officials and other powerful figures use financial pressure to control the press, and ownership of media outlets is opaque. In 2010, only 7.23 percent of the population accessed the internet. There were no reports that the government restricted internet access or monitored e-mail.