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Freedom Of The Press - Mali (2011)

Status: Free

Legal Environment: 8

Political Environment: 8

Economic Environment: 8

Total Score: 24

Mali's constitution protects the right to free speech, and the country's broadcast and print media have ranked among the freest in Africa in recent years. Severe criminal punishments for libel still exist under a 1993 law, and the accused face a presumption of guilt despite improvements to the law in 2000. However, no journalist has been prosecuted under this law since 2007. Mali has no legislation that guarantees the right to access information.

Mali is a particularly easy country in which to open a media outlet, as the government places few if any restrictions on the establishment of new radio stations or newspapers. The capacity of the government to regulate the media is also limited, as the two government bodies responsible for the media—the High Communications Council and the Committee for Equal Access to the State Media—lack the capacity to mediate press affairs due to insufficient funding. In a positive development, in December 2009 the government officially opened a new, partially government-funded "Maison de la Presse," providing journalists with facilities from which to work and training in journalism skills and area specialization.

Unlike in 2008, there were almost no reports in either 2009 or 2010 of journalists being harassed in the course of their work, and the government generally upholds the country's long-standing tradition of allowing a space for independent media to operate freely. The only reported incident in 2010 occurred in November, when Diakaridia Yossi, a journalist for the daily *L'Indépendant*, was detained and beaten while covering the police dispersal of a demonstration outside the Court of Appeals. Yossi apparently had been mistaken for a demonstrator, and after being released from custody he received an apology and 25,000 CFA francs (\$50) for medical expenses from the director of the National Police.

Mali boasts a diverse media environment, with some 300 FM radio stations operating throughout the country. Similarly, there are more than 50 privately run newspapers and magazines, though few aside from the state-owned *L'Essor* have a circulation in excess of 1,000. However, the overall quality of the media in Mali is limited by the lack of adequate

journalism training—potentially an issue that will be ameliorated by the Maison de la Presse—and a high level of poverty, which leads many low-paid journalists to take bribes. While the government does not restrict access to either foreign media or to the internet, due to infrastructure limitations, Mali has one of the lowest internet penetration levels in West Africa, at only 2.7 percent.