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## FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

# Equatorial Guinea

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The regime of longtime president Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo continued to clamp down on the media during 2012. Freedoms of expression and the press are legally guaranteed and assured in public declarations by Obiang, but these rights are ignored in practice. As in past years, the government relied on its extensive powers under the Law on the Press, Publishing, and Audiovisual Media to severely restrict journalistic activity. By law, the government has prepublication access to press materials, which encourages self-censorship. There are no laws guaranteeing freedom of information. Local journalists and private publications are required to register with the government through a prohibitively complex and bureaucratic process.

Almost all local coverage is orchestrated or tightly controlled by the government, and state-controlled media do not cover international news unless the president or another senior official travels abroad. Journalists in recent years have been permitted to voice mild or vague criticism of government institutions, but criticism of the president, his family, other high-ranking officials, or the security forces is not tolerated. The media have been unable to report on the multiple international criminal investigations into alleged money laundering by the president's son. Several acts of international news censorship emerged in 2012. Just as in 2011, when news of the Arab Spring uprisings was blacked out, the state radio and television broadcaster RTVGE was instructed not to report on the political unrest in Mali or on the ongoing civil conflict in Syria. Few international journalists are granted access to the country, and those who are face routine censorship, particularly on coverage of poverty and the oil sector.

Journalists who cross the line into impermissible reporting typically suffer reprisals. In May 2012, the director general of RTVGE barred independent journalist Samuel Obiang Mbana from participating in a televised debate on press freedom because he was deemed "problematic." In October, state officials canceled the RTVGE radio program *Cultura en Casa* after a guest criticized a Supreme Court judge for his involvement in the demolition of homes in the city of Bata.

The most influential medium in the country is radio, and all domestic radio and television stations are operated by the government or members of the president's family. The top two radio stations are the state-run Radio Nacional de Guinea Ecuatorial and the private Radio Asonga, owned by the president's son. Applications to open private radio stations have been pending for several years but remain unapproved. Uncensored satellite broadcasts are increasingly available to those who can afford the service. The government operates at least two newspapers, while a handful are published by nominally independent figures or members of the small political opposition. *El Lector*, which claims to be an independent newspaper, was launched at the National University of Equatorial Guinea in 2012. However, the paper's articles tend to praise the Obiang government. The country has little of the infrastructure necessary for independent media to operate, such as printing presses and newspaper retailers, and the lack of a well-developed local private sector hinders the ability of media outlets to raise revenues through advertisements. There are no national

## 2013 SCORES

PRESS STATUS

**Partly Free**

PRESS FREEDOM SCORE

**91**

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

**27**

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

**37**

ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

**27**

journalist unions or press freedom organizations registered in the country, and the only publishing facility for print media is located at the Ministry of Information. Print media are generally unavailable in rural areas.

An estimated 14 percent of the population accessed the internet in 2012. The government does not overtly restrict internet access, due in part to a lack of basic internet and mobile-telephone infrastructure. However, in 2011 a large drop in online visits by Equatoguineans to Afrol News, an African online news service that is often critical of the Obiang regime, has fueled speculation that the government was attempting to block this site. There were no credible reports that the authorities monitored e-mail or internet chat rooms in 2012. According to the U.S. State Department, the internet has replaced broadcast media as the primary medium for opposition views.

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