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FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

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Ghana

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The environment for freedom of expression and the press in Ghana remained generally healthy in 2012, despite the potential for political turmoil surrounding the death of President John Atta Mills and the succession and subsequent election of his vice president, John Dramani Mahama of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), as the new head of state. Freedom of the press is legally guaranteed, and the government typically respects this right in practice. Criminal libel and sedition laws were repealed in 2001, but Section 208 of the 1960 criminal code, which bans “publishing false news with intent to cause fear or harm to the public or to disturb the public peace,” remains on the books and is occasionally used against journalists. Moreover, current and former public officials and private citizens sometimes bring civil libel cases that seek crippling amounts in compensation from media outlets, which can encourage self-censorship. In November 2012, the general secretary of the NDC, Johnson Asiedu-Nketia, sued the private *Daily Guide* newspaper over a story alleging that he had purchased multiple properties in Accra and Kumasi.

The cabinet approved a Right to Information Bill in November 2009 that would reinforce the constitution’s guarantee of freedom of information. However, at the end of 2012, the parliament had yet to pass the measure. The Ghana Right to Information Coalition (GRIC), an advocacy group, has lamented the delay, but the Ghana Trades Union Congress (TUC) vowed to oppose any version of the bill that does not provide for an independent information commission. The TUC also argues that too many public and government entities would be exempt from supplying information under the current draft.

While the state-run Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) is protected from government interference by the 1992 constitution, political parties attempt to influence coverage. Private media face a degree of editorial pressure from their owners, particularly those with political connections, and some journalists practice self-censorship for political or commercial reasons. Government offices and political parties occasionally boycott media outlets or programs that they perceive as biased. In one such case, industry groups brokered a truce in March 2012 between the government and Multimedia Group Limited, which runs a number of radio stations.

There was no spike in harassment of journalists associated with the 2012 elections. However, journalists and photographers continued to face intimidation and physical attacks on the job, with a number of incidents reported during the year. In January, Gifty Lawson, a photographer for the *Daily Guide*, was attacked by state security agents while attempting to cover a story about a police official involved in a drug-smuggling case. In June, Victor Kwawukume, a reporter for the state-owned *Daily Graphic*, was assaulted by police officers while observing a raid on suspected drug traffickers in the Volta Region. In December, attacks were reported against journalists from Joy FM, TV3, and Metro TV who were covering the aftermath of the presidential election. The victims were all assaulted by supporters of the opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP). The NPP later apologized and condemned the attacks.

Dozens of newspapers, including two state-owned and two private dailies, publish regularly, and there are 28 television stations in operation, of which 20 are free-to-air. Radio is the most popular medium, with more than 240 FM stations nationwide, of which 33 are state-run and over 150 are commercial. The first community radio station, Radio Ada, was launched in 1999 and became a founding member of the Ghana Community Radio Network. By September 2012, 27 of the 41 community radio stations granted licenses by the National Communications Authority (NCA) were functioning. Community radio stations have effectively informed citizens in marginalized communities throughout the country, contributing to stronger public involvement in local politics. However, the NCA has been criticized for slow licensing procedures and bias. Poor pay and unprofessional conduct, including the fabrication of highly sensationalist news stories, remain problems in the media sector. Economic sustainability is a challenge for both public and private media. The GBC receives inadequate funding from the government and must sell advertising slots to remain afloat, leaving it dependent on the large corporations that can afford its rates.

2013 SCORES

PRESS STATUS

Free

PRESS FREEDOM SCORE

28

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

8

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

10

ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

10

Use of the internet is growing and remains unrestricted, but the level of penetration is still low, at 17 percent of the population in 2012. Active blogging and usage of social media have increased in urban centers, most notably in Accra.

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