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## FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

# Guinea-Bissau

[Guinea-Bissau](#) | [Freedom of the Press 2013](#)


**Status change explanation:** Guinea-Bissau's status declined from Partly Free to Not Free due to restrictions on coverage of the April 2012 coup and subsequent protests, as well as increased abuse, intimidation, and threatening of journalists by the military in the aftermath of the coup.

The latest episode in Guinea-Bissau's history of political instability—an April 12, 2012, coup in which the prime minister and interim president were arrested by the military—led to a sharp deterioration in press freedom. The military authorities imposed restrictions on coverage and harassed, attacked, and threatened journalists.

Freedoms of expression and the press are guaranteed in the 1993 constitution and a 2005 law. However, these rights are restricted in practice due to the existence of criminal laws banning libel, abuse of press freedom, and violation of state secrets. There is no legislation guaranteeing the right to access information.

The April coup was followed by a news blackout. The military shuttered all radio and television stations, using only the state-owned Rádio Nacional to broadcast music and directives to the population. After four days, the military allowed media executives to resume broadcasting on the condition that they did not cover ongoing protests in Bissau, the capital, or criticize the coup. While there were no reports that any outlets were permanently shut down in 2012, authorities in the past have threatened to close the main opposition radio station, and other outlets have been temporarily shuttered during periods of political turmoil.

In the aftermath of the coup, journalists found themselves under threat from the military. António Aly Silva, who publishes the well-known blog *Ditadura do Consenso*, was reportedly detained and beaten on April 13 after photographing troops surrounding the prime minister's residence. He was released after nine hours, but according to some reports, his photographic equipment was confiscated. On the same day, soldiers restricted access to the offices of Rádio e Televisão de Portugal (RTP), Portugal's state broadcaster and the only television station in the country that is not owned by the Bissau government, threatening journalists at gunpoint and stealing cameras and other equipment.

Threats against the media eased somewhat when a transitional civilian government was installed in late May. However, an attack on military barracks in late October resulted in renewed tensions. The transitional government, which accused former colonial power Portugal of masterminding what it called an attempted counter coup, ordered the expulsion of RTP's Bissau bureau chief, Fernando Teixeira Gomes; the deportation order was later reversed. In another incident, the armed forces' chief of staff directly threatened reporters at a press conference, saying, "Any journalist who asks questions about former president Nino Vieira's [2009] assassination will not leave this barracks alive. I will kill him. We are at war." Silva reported receiving death threats in late October from soldiers who came to his home, and the blogger was forced to go into hiding.

In addition to the coup-related repression, media workers in recent years have experienced increasingly harsh treatment at the hands of government and military officials, as well as private citizens, who have close connections to South American drug traffickers. Since 2009, at least three journalists have fled into exile due to threats related to their reporting on drug trafficking in the country. The resulting climate of fear has led to a significant amount of self-censorship, with many journalists afraid to cover drug-related issues at all. Impunity is the norm for public officials and members of the armed forces who abuse members of the press.

A government-owned newspaper, *Nô Pintcha*, operates alongside several privately owned print outlets. The state-run Rádio Televisão de Guinea-Bissau and RTP's Africa service operate the country's two television networks. A number of private radio stations compete with the state-run radio broadcaster. The press in Guinea-Bissau, one of the world's poorest countries, is plagued by financial instability. With only one state-owned printing press, publications struggle with high costs, slow production, and limited supplies. Broadcast outlets face unreliable electricity that hinders steady operations. Although many young people continue to pursue careers in journalism, the lack of resources hampers growth.

## 2013 SCORES

PRESS STATUS

# Not Free

PRESS FREEDOM SCORE

# 65

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

# 19

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

# 29

ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

# 17

Around 2.9 percent of the population had access to the internet in 2012. No governmental restrictions are apparent, though a lack of equipment and infrastructure drastically limits access to the internet in practice.

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