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FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

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Guinea

[Guinea](#)[Freedom of the Press 2013](#)

Throughout 2012, President Alpha Condé continued to oversee uneven progress on serious governance and human rights issues. Constitutional and legislative reforms enacted in 2010 that improved the legal environment for press freedom remained unimplemented, and members of the media continued to be subject to censorship, suspension, detention, threats, and assaults by the government and security forces.

The transitional government promulgated a new constitution by decree in March 2010 that guarantees press freedom, and in June of that year it passed two new media laws that were viewed as significant improvements by international press freedom groups. The first removed prison penalties for press offenses and narrowed the previously vague definition of defamation. The second called for the creation of a new media regulatory agency with 5 of the 11 members selected by media organizations, as opposed to being appointed by the president, as in the past. However, libel against the head of state, slander, and false reporting remain offenses under the new law and can be subject to high fines. In late 2010, a law on

access to information was adopted. By the end of 2012, none of these laws had been effectively implemented. The lack of implementation is reportedly a result of bureaucratic delays, procedural errors, and—in the view of critics and Guinean media members—disinterest or resistance on the part of government officials.

Various incidents in 2012 demonstrated the government's willingness, particularly through its media regulatory body, the National Communication Council (CNC), to restrict reporting on political issues as well as critical commentary of government action. In August, private radio station Liberté FM was shut down by the government, without explanation, in advance of a public protest scheduled for the following day to demand that delayed legislative elections be held. As a result, the station was unable to report live on the protests. The station was allowed to resume broadcasting the day after the protests. In December, the CNC suspended a popular radio show on privately owned Planète FM for five weeks and its host for a week after the show received a defamation complaint from a presidential adviser over critical commentary aired early in the month. Later in December, the CNC issued a formal warning to another private station, Espace FM, over its commentary on a fatal political demonstration, and questioned the host of a Planète FM show for criticizing the previous sanctions imposed on the station. In general, there were no government restrictions on access to the internet or reports that the government monitored internet activities, and the internet is gaining importance as a platform for voicing antigovernment criticism, with the most popular sites managed by the diaspora community.

Media practitioners continued to operate in a politically polarized and occasionally dangerous environment in 2012, particularly when reporting on antigovernment protests. In May, several journalists were assaulted while reporting on a protest in Conakry, the capital, including a reporter for the newspaper *Aminata*, who was beaten with batons by six police officers despite the fact that he had identified himself as a reporter. In August, while on their way to report on the barring of opposition members from antigovernment demonstrations, six journalists from Espace FM and Renaissance FM were severely beaten by a group of men believed to be connected to the Rally of the Guinean People, Condé's political party. Also in August, reporters for Soleil FM and Espace FM were harassed by riot police while covering protests against police brutality and violence. In September, a trainee journalist for the privately owned newspaper *Lynx-Lance* was attacked and robbed by progovernment militants while reporting on a political riot. On the same day, the premises of Conakry-based Sabari FM were vandalized by unknown persons,

leading to significant destruction of reporting equipment.

The new media laws passed in 2010 guarantee the freedom to open a newspaper. A number of private publications, mostly weeklies, are published in Conakry, though distribution in the interior is irregular. The only daily newspaper is state-owned and avoids criticism of the government. Advertising revenue is insufficient to cover the costs of operating a newspaper, but since 1996 the government has provided increasing subsidies for both print and online media, regardless of their political allegiances. Low pay for journalists has led to ethical compromises, such as accepting bribes to suppress unflattering stories.

In a country with high illiteracy rates, radio is by far the most influential medium. Radio Télévision Guinéenne (RTG) operates radio and television stations with programming in French, English, and a number of vernacular languages. Numerous private radio stations operate throughout Guinea. Some local newspapers and broadcast outlets are thought to be controlled by political or business interests. Many citizens listen regularly to foreign radio programs on FM and shortwave radio. The government did not restrict access to or distribution of foreign television programming via satellite or cable, though few citizens could afford these services. Although access to the internet has expanded through the growing number of privately run internet cafés in the capital and a few large towns, only about 1.5 percent of the population used the medium in 2012.

2013 SCORES

PRESS STATUS

Not Free

PRESS FREEDOM SCORE

62

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