

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

Ghana

Ghana | [Freedom of the Press 2012](#) |

Ghana's overall climate for freedom of expression and the press remained generally healthy in 2011. The government of President John Atta Mills of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) sought to maintain the relative freedoms enjoyed by the press and media practitioners in the third year of the NDC's return to power.

Freedom of the press is legally guaranteed, and the government generally respects this right in practice. Ghana's criminal libel and sedition laws were repealed in 2001, but Section 208 of the 1960 Criminal Code, which bans "publishing false news with intent to cause fear or harm to the public or to disturb the public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. Former public officials and private citizens also occasionally bring civil libel cases seeking crippling amounts in damages from media outlets, which can encourage self-censorship. In August 2011, a team of security officials stormed the premises of the *Chronicle*, an Accra-based daily newspaper, and sealed off the offices, after the Accra High Court in June had found the paper guilty of defaming the former vice chancellor of the University for Development Studies, professor Kaku Sagary Nokoe. In 2009, the *Chronicle* had published a story accusing Nokoe of underhandedly acquiring a hostel. The *Chronicle* was ordered to pay \$331,500 in fines and damages; however, it was allowed to resume publication later in the month.

Mills's 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 2011, the Ghanaian parliament had yet to sign the bill into law. The Ghana Right to Information Coalition (GRIC), an advocacy group pressuring for the passage of the bill, has lamented the delay, and continues to object to key components of the legislation, notably the lack of an independent enforcement body to monitor violations.

The surge of election-related harassment of journalists and overzealousness of police officers that had taken place in 2008 declined substantially in recent years and remained stable in 2011. However, journalists and photographers continue to be regularly subject to harassment and physical attacks on the job, with a number of incidents reported in 2011. In what the Media Foundation for West Africa described as the latest of several similar incidents, plainclothes security officials in May harassed reporter Hannah Odame of Joy FM, an Accra-based independent radio station, and prevented her from interviewing a group of applicants who had assembled at the entrance of the Accra's National Passport Office in protest of delays in processing their passports. In October, Fred Tettey Alarti-Amoako, a correspondent in the Brong Ahafo region for the *Daily Guide*, reported receiving death threats from the paramount chief of the Goaso Traditional Area, Nana Bosomprah II, and his aides after reporting a story about the chief assaulting the Queen Mother of Dantano in public after she allegedly insulted him and refused to get up from her seat to pay him homage when he arrived at the funeral of the late Ayomso Queen Mother.

While the state-run Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) is protected from

2012 SCORES

PRESS STATUS

Free

PRESS FREEDOM SCORE

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LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

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POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

10

ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

10

government interference by the 1992 constitution, pressure from political parties to have their agenda in the limelight remains. Additionally, there is some measure of editorial pressure from owners of private media, particularly those with political connections, and some journalists practice self-censorship for political or commercial reasons.

Dozens of newspapers, including two state-owned dailies, publish regularly, and there are 27 television stations in operation. Radio is the most popular medium, with more than 150 FM stations in operation nationwide, 11 of which are state-run. The first community radio station, Radio Ada, was launched in 1999 and became a founding member of the Ghana Community Radio Network. Nine additional stations have started broadcasting, and several others have been awarded licenses by the National Communications Authority (NCA). 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. Additionally, access to affordable advertising is an issue. The GBC receives inadequate funding from the government and must sell airtime in order to remain afloat, making it dependent on the income generated by advertisements. Thus, it has little control over its clients, who are often large corporations, as small businesses are unable to afford the high advertising rates.

Use of the internet is growing and remains unrestricted; however, the access rate remained low, at 14 percent of the population in 2011. In March 2010, several groups, led by the Alliance for Accountable Governance (AFAG), sued the government to prevent it from installing a monitoring device on the international gateways of mobile telephone providers, who also opposed the initiative. The government argues the device will help minimize loss of revenue from international calls, but the plaintiffs claim it could be used to tap into text messages and internet communications. In early 2011, the *Ghanaian Chronicle* reported that the minister of communications, Haruna Iddrisu, said the project for the monitoring of international inbound calls had come to a standstill as a result of the court action.

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