

Côte d'Ivoire

Status: Not Free

Legal Environment: 17

Political Environment: 25

Economic Environment: 19

Total Score: 61

Survey Edition	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Total Score, Status	66,NF	67,NF	66,NF	68,NF	70,NF

The media environment in Côte d'Ivoire showed marked improvements in 2012 as the country continued to recover from the previous year's violence in the wake of a disputed presidential election. During new president Alassane Ouattara's first full year in office, the press enjoyed a generally less restrictive legal and political environment, including a decrease in harassment and attacks on foreign and local journalists, more space for critical reporting, and the opening up of radio and television airwaves to private broadcasters.

Freedoms of speech and of the press are protected in the constitution and the country's laws, although there are prohibitions on speech that incites violence, ethnic hatred, or rebellion. Imprisonment for defamation was abolished in 2004, but the offense carries a fine of up to 15 million CFA francs (\$30,000), and libel of the head of state or other state institutions is punishable by fines of up to 20 million CFA francs (\$40,000). Côte d'Ivoire does not have a freedom of information law.

While the number of journalists arrested and imprisoned decreased markedly in 2012, two journalists with the progovernment daily *Le Patriote*, including the managing editor, were detained by security forces in February on the grounds that they had published confidential information and refused to reveal their sources for a story about the Constitutional Council's decision to annul the results of the December 2011 parliamentary elections in 11 districts. However, the detention lasted less than a day, and the journalists were released without charge. Separately, the chief executive of Cyclone Media Group—the parent company of many newspapers that supported former president Laurent Gbagbo, including *Le Temps*—was arrested upon his return to Côte d'Ivoire in March on accusations of endangering state security. He remained in prison awaiting trial at year's end.

Under Gbagbo, media regulatory bodies such as the National Press Council (CNP) were frequently used to control critical journalism. The pattern persisted under Ouattara in 2011, with the CNP largely working on behalf of the government and targeting *Le Temps* in particular for inciting hatred. Pro-Gbagbo papers continued to face regulatory pressure in 2012, though it was somewhat less aggressive. In August, the CNP suspended *Le Temps* for 20 editions due to an article published in July that allegedly defamed Ouattara. The paper's editor in chief, Simplicie Allard, was suspended for one month. Also that month, the CNP suspended a satirical paper, *Bôl' Kotch*, for eight editions after it published cartoons and articles that allegedly defamed Ouattara and promoted tribalism. In September, the CNP suspended *Notre Voie*, a pro-Gbagbo paper, for publishing articles and photo captions that continued to refer to former members of Gbagbo's government as "minister." When five other pro-Gbagbo papers reprinted the articles following *Notre Voie*'s suspension, the CNP suspended them as well, for at least six editions each. Less than two weeks later, however, the CNP lifted all six suspensions after the papers

threatened to take their case to the Supreme Court. While the authorities continued to monitor the pro-Gbagbo press and other critical outlets, the retraction suggested that the government was becoming more tolerant of unfavorable reporting.

One particularly important legal improvement in 2012 was the government's decision to open up the television and radio sectors to private broadcasters after more than two decades of unfulfilled promises to liberalize the airwaves. On February 29, two decrees formally allowing applications for private audiovisual licenses were signed by Ouattara, approved by the parliament, and presented to the public. The licenses will permit private radio and television broadcasters to air political news content for the first time. Under the previous 2004 law, the few private radio stations that existed were limited to entertainment and cultural programming, and no private television stations were permitted. A nine-member panel to review applications for these new licenses was formed in July under the auspices of the High Commission for Audiovisual Communication (HACA), the broadcast regulator, and it soon began reviewing applications. However, the fees remained high—up to about \$2 million for commercial television stations—and the number of private television licenses to be issued was capped at five. The commission had not released a list of new licensees by year's end.

There were indications during the year that press freedom organizations and journalists' unions were increasingly able to operate effectively and without intimidation. Ivoirian journalists, in collaboration with the regional press freedom group Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), adopted a new code of ethics in February. This step was not taken under pressure from the government, but was instead a journalist-led endeavor intended to support ethical standards and encourage reporting that would bolster the fragile peace in the country.

The severe restrictions on access to news seen during the postelection crisis were largely lifted in 2012. International media—including Radio France Internationale and the UN radio station Onuci FM, both of which were banned by Gbagbo—operated freely during the year, and the local press resumed its critical vibrancy amid a reduction in acts of intimidation. In December, the Senegal-based African Press Agency opened its first office in Côte d'Ivoire, with vocal support from the Ouattara administration. Also that month, the government announced that it would give approximately \$740,000 to press organizations to support the development of independent newspapers. However, while conditions improved in the south, particularly in Abidjan, reports from the north indicated that access to news and information remained very limited in districts now largely controlled by local warlords.

In a departure from the widespread and sometimes deadly violence against journalists in early 2011, there were only a few reports of physical attacks on journalists in 2012, none of which were fatal. In the most grievous of these incidents, armed men attacked and set fire to the headquarters of Cyclone Media Group in August, stealing or destroying much of the equipment. The police immediately began an investigation, but no perpetrators had been brought to trial by year's end. Separately, reporter Anderson Diédri of the private daily *Le Nouveau Courrier* was assaulted by a government security detail in September while he was covering the eviction of a woman and her children from their home in Abidjan; the woman was reportedly the estranged wife of a government minister. In November, the Abidjan head office of progovernment media group Nord Sud, which published the daily *Nord-Sud*, was raided by armed men. The attackers took a hard drive that belonged to a journalist specializing in security and defense issues.

The state controls the largest radio stations—including the only one with national reach and political content—as well as *Fraternité Matin*, the largest-circulation daily newspaper; a news agency; and the national television broadcaster, Radiodiffusion Télévision Ivoirienne

(RTI). During the 2011 crisis, the United Nations and other international organizations had heavily criticized the Gbagbo government for its use of RTI and *Fraternité Matin* in a calculated campaign of disinformation about the opposition and the UN-led peacekeeping force. Pro-Ouattara forces' eventual success in blocking the dissemination of pro-Gbagbo media represented a significant turning point in the conflict. However, since Ouattara took office, the state media have continued to show a largely progovernment slant. Most private media outlets are openly aligned with the government or the opposition.

Approximately 2.2 percent of Ivoirians accessed the internet in 2011. Blogs and the online versions of major newspapers are increasingly popular.