
The government of President Ngwema, who is called the “God of Equatorial Guinea” by state radio, allows no independent media until it is made certain the proposed outlet it is not secretly a platform for an opposition party. Criticism of the government in the few independent outlets is strictly prohibited. The very few independent journalists working for the foreign press are watched closely.



EQUATORIAL GUINEA

Ranking after Nigeria and Angola among oil exporters in Sub-Saharan Africa, Equatorial Guinea has greatly increased its national income within the past decade. However, the rate of poverty is still high. Access to basic social services such as housing, water, electricity, and health care are still severely limited for a substantial part of the population.

Equatorial Guinea gained its independence from Spain in 1968, with Francisco Macias Nguema as the first president. A few months later, he instituted a bloody dictatorship, proclaiming himself president for life. In 1979, Vice-Minister of Defense Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo led a revolution against Nguema, his uncle, who was tried and executed. Mbasogo instituted military rule until 1982, when he set up civilian rule with himself as president. He won every presidential election since the first one in 1989, though they have been called “fraudulent” by the local opposition and international observers, including the European Union.

The human rights situation is poor in Equatorial Guinea. Extrajudicial detentions, torture of prisoners, civilians judged by military courts, and other abuses occur with impunity. Freedom House’s 2007 survey Freedom in the World ranked Equatorial Guinea comparable to Eritrea, and the Committee to Protect Journalists ranked it as one of the five “most-censored countries” in 2006.

Mass media outlets are either tightly controlled or financially disabled. The government of President Nguema, who is called the “God of Equatorial Guinea” by state radio, allows no independent media until it is convinced that the proposed outlet is not secretly an opposition platform. Political dissent in the few independent outlets is strictly prohibited, and the small corps of independent foreign journalists is closely watched.

Consequently, panelists gave low scores for each objective. Objective 2, professional journalism, pulled up the average, with a score of 1.56. Panelists rated Objective 4, business management, by far the lowest (0.20), reflecting that most media are simply a mouthpiece for the government and that the poor economy cannot support commercial media.

IREX’s partner implementing the Equatorial Guinea study, Kinshasa-based Journalists in Danger (JED), unsuccessfully sought the Ministry of Information’s permission to hold a panel discussion; such permission is required for any media-related meeting or press conference, and is further indicative of the state of press freedom in Equatorial Guinea. JED therefore distributed and collected questionnaires from panelists and prepared the following chapter based on their responses.

EQUATORIAL GUINEA AT A GLANCE

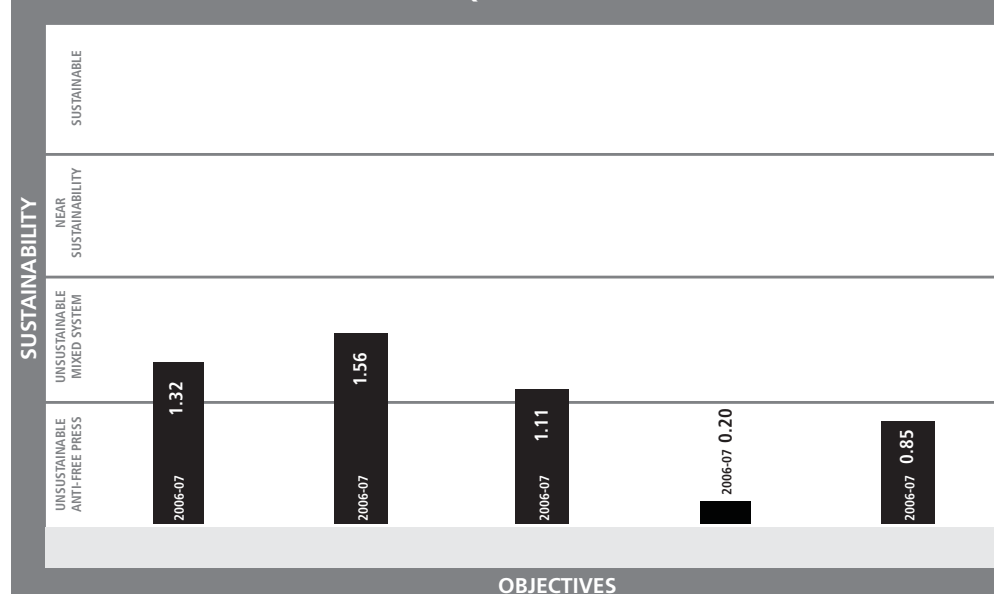
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 616,459 (July 2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Malabo
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Fang 85.7%, Bubi 6.5%, Mdowne 3.6%, Annobon 1.6%, Bujeba 1.1%, other 1.4% (1994 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Roman Catholic, other Christian, other *CIA World Factbook*
- > **Languages (% of population):** Spanish 67.6% (official), other 32.4% (includes French (official), Fang, Bubi) (1994 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2006-Atlas):** \$4.216 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **GNI per capita (2006-PPP):** \$16,620 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **Literacy rate:** 85.7% (male 93.3%, female 78.4%) (2003 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo (since August 3, 1979)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print : 4 daily newspapers; Radio: 2 national stations; Television stations: 1 state run station
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top three by circulation : *Ebano* (state-owned), *La Opinion* (private), *La Nacion* (private)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** Top two radio stations: Radio Nacional de Guinea Ecuatorial (state-run), Radio Asonga (private, owned by the president's son)
- > **News agencies:** None
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 8,000 (2006 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: EQUATORIAL GUINEA



Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1):

Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):

Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

Near Sustainability (2-3):

Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media. Advances have survived changes in government and have been codified in law and practice. However, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism and the media business environment are sustainable.

Sustainable (3-4):

Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives. Systems supporting independent media have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Equatorial Guinea Objective Score: 1.32

Most indicators in this objective were approximately as low as the final average. With a rating about a point more than the average, Indicator 9, restrictions on joining the journalism profession, pulled up the score. Panelists rated Indicator 3, market entry and tax structure, particularly low, at just above 0.

All panelists wrote that even though legal texts protect freedom of expression on paper, they are enforced differently according to whether one works in the private or state press. Private-press journalists are the most punished, and sometimes barred from the profession, whenever they show independence or objectivity in their work by presenting the real events happening in the country. Manuel Nse Nsogo Angue, journalist and trainer, wrote that because of this situation, journalists live in a permanent state of insecurity. They are prosecuted every time they denounce the corruption that pervades the government and economy.

In terms of access to news sources, Angue wrote that the state media enjoy favorable treatment over independent journalists. All public information is strictly reserved for the state-run media, despite the fact that there is no specific regulation excluding the private and international press to access such information.

LEGAL AND SOCIAL NORMS PROTECT AND PROMOTE FREE SPEECH AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION.

FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

- > Legal and social protections of free speech exist and are enforced.
- > Licensing of broadcast media is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- > Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- > Crimes against journalists or media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- > State or public media do not receive preferential legal treatment, and law guarantees editorial independence.
- > Libel is a civil law issue; public officials are held to higher standards, and offended parties must prove falsity and malice.
- > Public information is easily accessible; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Media outlets have unrestricted access to information; this is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Entry into the journalism profession is free, and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

While the 2007 JED report on freedom of the press in Central Africa showed no cases of arrests or imprisonment of journalists, this is due neither to an openness of the current regime nor to any policy respecting freedom of expression or speech. Rather, it is a reflection of fear in the profession and the unwillingness of journalists to speak out and risk perturbing the government. Rodrigo Angwema wrote that journalists seen as critical of the government frequently have their equipment confiscated and are arrested and detained for several months before police release them. He stated that these cases remain unreported. No official media speak of journalists being arrested or of censorship of the press—not even when their own journalists are involved.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Equatorial Guinea Objective Score: 1.56

Panelists rated Indicators 1 and 2 on the high side, above 2, noting that the reporting that does exist is fair and follows ethical standards. However, low scores in Indicators 3 and 8 reflect a sense that reporting is marred by self-censorship and lacks depth and an investigative angle. Furthermore, panelists gave the lowest score to Indicator 5, pay levels for journalists.

There is no self-regulatory authority for the media in Equatorial Guinea. The Ministry of Information decides who is fit to practice journalism, given that the number of media in the country is very low.

Foreign press correspondents and the few independent journalists have to face many annoyances: access is denied to official news sources, and bans exist on reporting

JOURNALISM MEETS PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF QUALITY.

PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

- > Reporting is fair, objective, and well sourced.
- > Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards.
- > Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.
- > Journalists cover key events and issues.
- > Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption.
- > Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming.
- > Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- > Quality niche reporting and programming exists (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

events involving the president and other members of the government. As a result, coverage of key events suffers.

The hostile attitude towards independent media is sometimes adopted even by representatives of organizations within the United Nations' presence in Equatorial Guinea. The UN often avoids inviting the independent press or foreign correspondents to its meetings with the government, its seminars, or other activities that it organizes.

As civil servants, journalists working in the official media are appointed by the president. They are subjected to arbitrary sanctions; for example, their direct superiors can suspend them for several days and they have no way to appeal. The victimized journalists, out of fear that they might worsen their situation, also conceal such cases.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Equatorial Guinea Objective Score: 1.11

Indicators 3, 4, 5, and 6 scored below 1 in this objective, reflecting the strict pro-government policy of state media, lack of independent news agencies, absence of independent news programming in the few private broadcasters, and lack of transparency in the ownership of private media. Only Indicator 2 scored relatively well (more than a point higher), as citizens have few restrictions on access to media, other than poverty.

Radio-Television of Equatorial Guinea (RTVEG), the state-run public media, has one station in Malabo and another in Bata,

MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE AND OBJECTIVE NEWS.

PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

- > A plurality of affordable public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet) exists.
- > Citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media.
- > Independent broadcast media produce their own news programs.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.
- > A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources.

the country's second largest city and its economic capital, situated on continental Africa. The two official state-owned weekly papers, *Ebano* and *Poto-poto*, come out irregularly. There is also a private radio and television station called Asonga based in Bata, with a subsidiary station in Malabo. Asonga belongs to the oldest son of the president. State media reflect solely the views of the government and do not serve the public interest.

The private press, as such, barely exists; previously independent papers are not currently operational on any regular basis. No independent news agency exists. Two tabloids, *La Gaceta* and *Ceiba*, would like to pass themselves off as independent papers, but are in fact at the disposal of the authorities. They are run by a regime bigwig, Augustin Nze Nfumu, former secretary general of the ruling party and currently the ambassador to Great Britain. Due to this connection, the two magazines' content is limited to articles and photos highlighting the activities of the government.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Equatorial Guinea Objective Score: 0.20

All indicators scored similarly low in this objective. None scored higher than half a point. Media in Equatorial Guinea are simply not businesses. Regulatory burdens and economic hardships mean that a truly independent media outlet would be unlikely to survive.

As state-run media, RTVEG depends on the budget of the Ministry of Information and is not intended to raise revenue; it is managed like an agency of the government.

INDEPENDENT MEDIA ARE WELL-MANAGED BUSINESSES, ALLOWING EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

- > Media outlets and supporting firms operate as efficient, professional, and profit-generating businesses.
- > Media receive revenue from a multitude of sources.
- > Advertising agencies and related industries support an advertising market.
- > Advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue is in line with accepted standards at commercial outlets.
- > Independent media do not receive government subsidies.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor products to the needs and interests of audiences.
- > Broadcast ratings and circulation figures are reliably and independently produced.

La Gaceta and *Ceiba* have a monopoly, granted by the Ministry of Information, on print media advertising. State-owned companies, private companies, and foreign companies, including U.S. oil companies, place advertisements with these papers, and panelists wrote that they both take in substantial revenue in this way. It is not uncommon to find 20 pages of advertisements in a 30-page issue of *La Gaceta*.

For lack of financial means, *El Sol*, *El Tiempo*, and *L'opinion* ceased their activity several years ago. The state provides no subsidy for the private media.

Market research is not used, broadcast ratings are not prepared, and circulation figures are not independently verified.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Equatorial Guinea Objective Score: 0.85

Equatorial Guinea has no truly independent civil society organizations, and panelists' scores reflected a lack of available support from associations and other institutions for the media sector. All indicators scored close to the final average, except for Indicator 1, covering trade associations, that came in at nearly 0.

In theory, a few supporting institutions are charged with protecting the interests of media professionals and providing training opportunities. These include the Association of Press Publishers of Guinea and the Association of Journalists Fighting HIV/AIDS. In reality, these institutions are not operational, for lack of funding and because their activities are under the strict supervision of the government. Any

meeting of the members of these organizations needs preliminary authorization from the Ministry of Information.

The National University of Equatorial Guinea teaches communications in its School for Social Sciences, but in general, the curriculum does not cover what would be considered journalism.

Panelist List

Manuel Nse Nsogo Angue, journalism trainer, Malabo

Ramon Etobori Mba, journalist, *Ebano* Newspaper, Malabo

Carlos Ona Boriesa, journalist, *The Verdao*, Malabo

Tonas Epomo, journalist, Radio Bata, Bata

Martin Ela Quido, journalist, Nacional TV, Malabo

Samuel Obiang, correspondent, Africa 1, Malabo

Gil Obiang Ochaga, journalist, *Ebano* Newspaper, Malabo

Moderator:

Rodrigo Anguan-Nguema, journalist, JED, Malabo

The Equatorial Guinea study was coordinated by, and conducted in partnership with, Journaliste en Danger, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- > Trade associations represent the interests of private media owners and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs that provide substantial practical experience exist.
- > Short-term training and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of newsprint and printing facilities are in private hands, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.