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# EQUATORIAL GUINEA

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For the second time in a row, the MSI panelists for Equatorial Guinea could not convene in the capital of Malabo as planned. Not only was it difficult to obtain the required permit for a meeting, but also journalists and other civil-society members were afraid to take part in an activity that the authorities might view unfavorably. The suspicion and fear are signs of a striking deficit of democratic values in this small, oil-rich country with a little more than a million people, wedged between Cameroon and Gabon on its continental side and sharing a long maritime border with Nigeria.

In Equatorial Guinea, a closed police state, 2008 was a year of legislative and municipal elections on May 4. The Parti démocratique de Guinée équatoriale<sup>1</sup> (PDGE), led by President Teodoro Obiang Nguema and his allies, won without encountering any problems, as has happened every time since the advent of the multiparty regime in 1991. The PDGE obtained 89 out of 100 parliament seats, while its “electoral coalition” alliance, made up of nine small parties from the “democratic” opposition, took only 10. The Convergence pour la démocratie sociale<sup>2</sup> (CPDS), the main opposition party, took only one seat, compared to two held previously. The PDGE also garnered an overwhelming majority in the municipal elections (305 councilors), while the “electoral coalition” won 14 and CPDS took 12 out of 331 seats.

The foreign media were not allowed to cover any of these elections, which has raised questions about their legality. On May 2, 2008, *El Pais*, *La Vanguardia*, *El Periodico De Catalulinya*, *EFE*, and *TVE*—which are Spanish independent daily newspapers, an official press agency, and public television, respectively—were denied visas to enter Equatorial Guinea to cover the elections.

In Equatorial Guinea, the lack of violations of freedom of the press does not imply a democratic opening. On the contrary, President Obiang has ruled the country with an iron hand since 1979, when he overthrew his uncle, Francisco Macias Nguema. Members of the presidential family either directly or indirectly control the main media. Most journalists are public servants and must obtain authorization from the minister of communication when they want to meet. Information leaks out of this country only with difficulty.

<sup>1</sup> Democratic Party of Equatorial Guinea

<sup>2</sup> Convergence for Social Democracy

# EQUATORIAL GUINEA AT A GLANCE

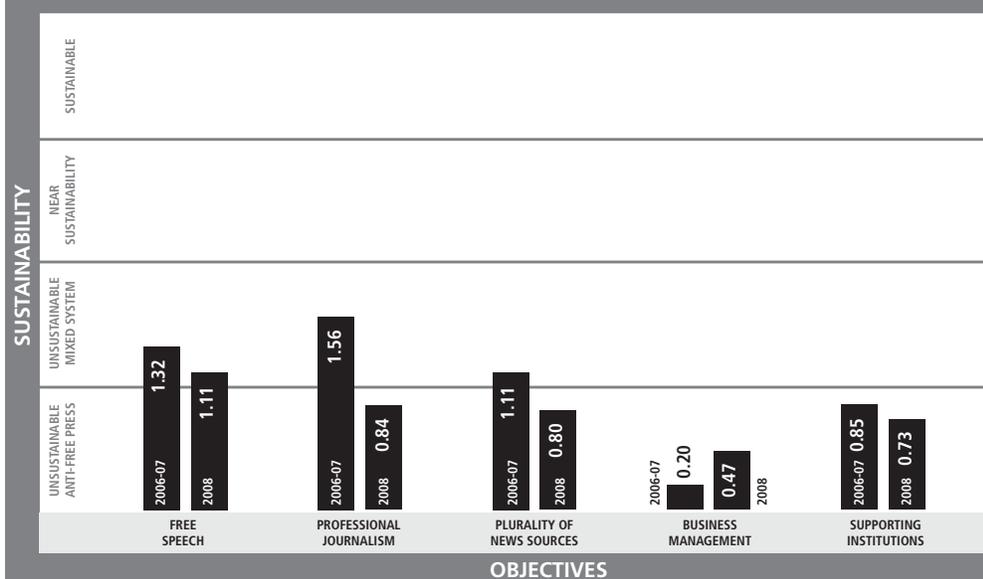
## GENERAL

- > **Population:** 633,441 (July 2009 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 (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Spanish 67.6% (official), other 32.4% (includes French (official), Fang, Bubi) (1994 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2007-Atlas):** \$6.527 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2008)
- > **GNI per capita (2007-PPP):** \$21,230 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2008)
- > **Literacy rate:** 87.0% (male 93.4%, female 80.5%) (2000 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: 1.11

The constitution of January 1992, amended by Constitutional Law number 1/1995 does guarantee in article 13, paragraph 6 “the freedom of speech, thought, ideas, and opinions.” But in reality the press is in the hands of the authorities, who use the press to serve their own interests.

Law number 13/1992 concerning “the press and printing,” passed on October 1, 1992, is the only law that regulates all aspects of the practice of journalism in Equatorial Guinea. This law is an exact replica of the Spanish press law issued in the 1960s under the dictator Francisco Franco and is not fit for a democracy. The text includes a deontology, ethics, and moral code for the professions of journalist, publisher, managing editor, publication manager, and general manager.

At the same time, neither the authorities nor the journalists enforce the law. No measures are taken against its offenders, which are often the authorities themselves. Sometimes the law is used only to punish journalists or to ban a newspaper or broadcast media outlet attached to some opposition party.

Last year’s panelists said 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.

According to one panelist, 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. Year after year, statistics from organizations defending freedom of the press indicate very few cases, including arrests of journalists or direct attacks against the media.

In September 2008, the radio station belonging to the CPDS, the only true opposition party, was declared “illegal” and was banned by a judge who referred to this particular law in order to “confiscate all the equipment of the radio station.”

In this context, broadcast licensing and market entry are severely curtailed. While private media, including radio, do exist, nearly all of what is left of it is aligned with the ruling party. State media, including some print outlets, have no guarantee—or illusions—of editorial independence. They serve the interests of the state and in practice receive favorable treatment by the government in terms of both resource allocation and access to government officials; in the latter case, however, it should be noted that state media are typically fed information by the government as opposed to seeking it out at their own initiative.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

### Equatorial Guinea Objective Score: 0.84

#### 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.

Most journalists and technicians in Equatorial Guinea are qualified. The older ones were trained in Spain more than 30 years ago, while the next generation is being trained in Cuba or China. All journalists in Equatorial Guinea are public servants and governed by the so-called public servant and state administration agent law.

Thus, they are paid according to the regime of public service. For example, this ranges from XAF 100,000 to XAF 250,000 (\$225 to \$560) monthly for a manager. According to the public servant law, public servants cannot commit crimes. The only crime punishable by prison is publication of news concerning attempted coups.

As civil servants, journalists working in the official media are appointed by the president. Any small infringement of the internal regulations set up by media managers may lead to suspensions of up to 30 days, temporary layoffs, salary

cuts, or disciplinary transfers. These measures abide by the public servant law but such actions are sometimes arbitrary; a journalist's direct superior can suspend him or her for several days, and there is no way to appeal. The victimized journalists, out of fear that they might worsen their situation, also conceal such cases.

The PDGE's editorial policy also applies to the public media. There are practically no cases of violations, since the only media products are summaries of the president's activities presented according to the PDGE's editorial policy. Other key events or issues are not covered, particularly if the government does not want them to be. For example, the bread shortage that affected nearly everyone in Malabo for two months at the end of the year was not reported by any of the state-run or private media.

Because the regime has appointed people from the ruling party as editorial managers, they enforce the party guidelines literally and often overzealously.

There is no media regulating body in Equatorial Guinea. This is the job of the minister of information, who is also a member of the executive committee of the PDGE and the government's spokesperson. The minister of information decides who is fit to practice journalism, given that the number of media in the country is very low.

As reported last year, foreign press correspondents and the few independent journalists face many annoyances: access is denied to official news sources, and bans exist on reporting events involving the president and other members of the government. As a result, coverage of key events suffers.

The hostile attitude toward 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.

Given that the predominance of media are either state-run or pro-state, reporting on specialized topics is extremely thin and investigative reporting non-existent.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

#### Equatorial Guinea Objective Score: 0.80

All of the observers recognized that there is no true press in Equatorial Guinea. The only "press" to speak of in this small state is the state-run press, the Radio télévision de Guinée équatoriale (RTVGE). RTVGE consists of a television and radio station in the capital of Malabo and another television and radio station in Bata, the second-largest city and economic capital in the country's continental region.

These official media are accompanied by Asonga radio-television, which is made up of a "private" television station and two radio stations broadcasting in Malabo and Bata. They are owned by Teodoro Nguema Obiang, the eldest son of President Teodoro Obiang Nguema. While Asonga does include news programming, it can hardly be said to be independent.

#### 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).

#### 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.

In general, these media faithfully reflect the activities of President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo; his wife, Constanca Mangué Nsue Okomo; their son, Teodoro Nguema Obiang; and others from the ruling PDGE. These activities—and hymns dedicated to the glory of the “PDGE founding chairman”—are the main news on the national radio and television station, as well as the “private” press. None or few social facts are ever reported. As a result, state media can be characterized as serving the interests of the state and not the public interest.

There are no domestic news agencies operating in the country.

There is no independent print press. With the advent of “democracy” in the 1990s, a few titles appeared, such as *El sol*, *La opinion*, *El Tiempo*, *La nacion*. But there have been none in the past decade due to insufficient resources and the authorities’ hostility toward views that contradict the official policy of the ruling party and its chairperson. On the other hand, *Ebano*, the official biweekly newspaper published and distributed by the Ministry of Information for XAF 500 (\$1), is still active and appears intermittently.

#### OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

### Equatorial Guinea Objective Score: 0.47

Aside from the official press, which essentially survives on subsidies from the Ministry of Information, some Spanish-owned journals exist. These include *La Gaceta de Guinea ecuatorial* and *El Correo Guineoecuadoriano de deportes*, which are published in Spain and sold in Equatorial

#### 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. La Gaceta, for example, often publishes two to 10 advertising pages out of a total of 30 pages in one edition.*

Guinea for XAF 800 and XAF 500 (\$1.75 and \$1), respectively. Their pages are mostly covered by advertising, particularly for American oil companies and public companies.

*La Gaceta and Ceiba have a monopoly, granted by the Ministry of Information, on print media advertising. La Gaceta, for example, often publishes two to 10 advertising pages out of a total of 30 pages in one edition. Ceiba is a sort of People Magazine clone and advertising magazine with an annual budget of more than XAF 100 million (\$225,000).*

These “independent” media, which are heavily supported politically and financially by both the regime and locally based companies, are the only ones that appear regularly. The private media have ceased to appear because of a lack of resources and because the state has provided no subsidies. Regulatory burdens and economic hardships mean that a truly independent media outlet would be unlikely to survive.

As reported last year, 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: 0.73

There are two press associations—the Association de la presse de Guinée équatoriale<sup>3</sup> (ASOPGE), created in 2000, and the Association des journalistes professionnels de Guinée équatoriale<sup>4</sup> (APPGE), created in 2007 and chaired by one of the PDGE secretary-generals, Santiago Ngua Nfumu. They accept as members only “graduates of journalism” in Equatorial Guinea. 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.

When it was created in 2000, the ASOPGE operated as a true association for the protection of journalists and media

<sup>3</sup> Press Association of Equatorial Guinea

<sup>4</sup> Professional Journalist Association of Equatorial Guinea

*When it was created in 2000, the ASOPGE operated as a true association for the protection of journalists and media professionals of all constituencies. After two years, the government declared that the association “behaved like a parallel government” (in the words of Alfonso Nsue Mokuy, vice-minister of information at the time).*

professionals of all constituencies. After two years, the government declared that the association “behaved like a parallel government” (in the words of Alfonso Nsue Mokuy, vice-minister of information at the time). Pedro Nolasco Ndong Obama Nkara, chairman of the ASOPGE, left the country in 2005 and took refuge in Spain after being the victim of numerous threats that he never stopped denouncing.

The ASOPGE is charged with the mission of controlling the professionals of the official press. Recently, it was entrusted by the minister of information to Roberto Martin Prieto, a Spaniard who came to Equatorial Guinea to enter the trade business. In the media vacuum he found there, he created *La Gaceta* and *El Correo*, which are published in Spain. He is also the secretary-general of the association.

The ASOPGE gathers all official and “private” media professionals in the country who are exhorted not to be members of another association “of the same kind, existing or to be created” according to current statutes.

#### 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.

Otherwise, those who become members of another association will lose their membership and consequently their job. That is why journalists cannot openly take part in any activity concerning the press unless it is organized or approved by the Ministry of Information.

### List of Panel Participants

**Tomas Esono**, journalist, Radio Bata, Bata

**Jose Antonio Ndong**, journalist, *El Tiempo*, Malabo

**Maria Teresa Nkara**, journalist, National Television, Malabo

**Honorio Obiang Obana**, journalist, National Radio, Malabo

**Samuel Obiang**, journalist, correspondent for Africa No. 1, Malabo

**Nlavo Nande**, journalist, National Television, Malabo

**Martial Abaga Barril**, journalist, *The Verdao*, Malabo

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

### Moderator

**Rodrigo Angue Nguema**, journalist, correspondent for *Journaliste en Danger*, Malabo

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