

MEDIA BIAS IN THE COVERAGE OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IN  
GUINEA

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## **ABSTRACT**

Public opinions are channeled by the media. The media serve as watchdog to reveal and disclose non-transparent governmental activities. The media disseminate diverse opinions and, therefore, help to further public debate on social issues. In order to play this role in a semi-dictatorial country, like Guinea, the media need to be protected by established rules and regulations that guarantee freedom of expression but also conform to the journalistic ethic to allow the public to get unbiased information.

These requirements are not subject to contest in most democratic societies. However, there are many regimes, particularly in Africa, which see the media as an obstacle to the government absolute control of institutions and power. Therefore, for those regimes (i.e. Guinea, Tunisia, Zimbabwe, etc.), the media has to be limited to a marginal role. To do so, governments enact rules and regulations that limit the media's freedom of expression. When it is necessary, those regimes do not hesitate to arrest, seize and jail reporters for attempting to make public governments' wrongdoings. Journalists who are living in those countries are constantly exposed to physical threats. These journalists have to struggle daily against not only governmental officials but also bureaucrats and powerful elites that have a stake in maintaining obscure and corrupt institutions to do their jobs. Despite all these difficulties, there are journalists who accomplish their jobs with pride and honesty. Yet, other greedy journalists do not hesitate to sell their services to the highest bidder and, therefore, compromise the image of their profession. These kinds of practices have caused the public to have a negative perception of news media in certain African countries, including Guinea.

It is in this context that elections are organized and conducted in most of the African countries today. Guinea is not an exception to this trend. This paper will explore these different issues of freedom of expression and news media's bias in the Guinean context. It will do so by examining newspapers and Internet news media content to find out the extent to which there are media biases in the coverage of the electoral process in Guinea and then evaluate the influence of that media bias during the electoral process. It will

determine how the enforcement of the Press Law influences the coverage of the electoral process by the press -- whether it improves or harms the way the elections are organized.<sup>1</sup> This study is the first one conducted about media bias in Guinea. Therefore, I hope that it will provide some insight about the role of the media in the electoral process in Guinea.

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<sup>1</sup> The Press Law is the legislation that applies to all press activities in Guinea. It was passed in 1991 and is often used to prosecute journalists for alleged defamation even if the Constitution provides for freedom of expression. This Press Law can be found at the following link:

<http://droit.francophonie.org/doc/html/gn/loi/fr/1991/index.html>.

Chapter three, section II (B) of this paper lists some cases of journalists' arrests.