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Namibia

Country:

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Year:

2015

Press Freedom Status:

PF

PFS Score:

33

Legal Environment:

9

Political Environment:

14

Economic Environment:

10

Legal Environment

Namibia's constitution guarantees freedom of the press, and the media enjoy a relatively open environment. However, constitutional protections for national security, public order, and public morality provide legal grounds for restricting media freedom.

Defamation can be prosecuted as a criminal or civil offense. In January 2014, Minister of Works and Transport Erkki Nghimtina won a defamation case against the *Informanté* newspaper, and was awarded N\$60,000 (US\$5,500) in damages. The judge criticized the newspaper for not having made reasonable efforts to verify claims from an anonymous source that Nghimtina had used his position to illegally redirect electricity to his mother-in-law's home. However, the judge awarded significantly less than the N\$500,000 (US\$46,000) Nghimtina had claimed. A separate defamation case was settled in February when the weekly *Confidenté* agreed to print a front-page apology to former president Sam Nujoma, who had sued *Confidenté* editor Max Hamata as well as the paper's owner and one of its reporters, over a story claiming that Nujoma abused his authority to graze his cattle on state-owned land. It had soon emerged that the claim was incorrect, prompting an initial apology in the paper, but Nujoma still moved forward with a defamation case. As part of the settlement, *Confidenté* also agreed to donate an undisclosed sum of money to charitable projects selected by Nujoma.

There is no law to ensure access to information, and the 1982 Protection of Information Act limits what can be disclosed by government officials. The government in 2014 was reportedly developing a public information policy that could eventually lead to a draft access bill.

Self-regulation of the media sector has developed slowly. The Editors' Forum of Namibia was created in 2007 and abides by an internal code of ethics. A media ombudsman, established by the forum in 2009 to hear complaints against media practitioners, acts independently of the government as an element of the Namibian media's self-regulatory framework.

Political Environment

Some journalists and editors, especially at state-run media, practice a degree of self-censorship. Because there are no restrictions on internet content, many publications and organizations voice criticism of the government online. However, the 2009 Communication Act includes a section that allows for the interception of e-mail, text messages, internet banking transactions, and telephone calls, and provides few oversight mechanisms to prevent abuse.

The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), a local research group, found that the state-run Namibian Broadcasting Corporation's preelection coverage of the ruling South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) and opposition parties was more equitable in 2014 than it had been in 2009. However, as in 2009, it still dedicated most of its coverage to SWAPO.

Namibian journalists risk harassment and physical attacks. In the days before the 2014 election, opposition party officials unhappy with the balance of coverage at NBC threatened and verbally attacked NBC journalists. Earlier, in August, a senior SWAPO party official entered an NBC radio studio and assaulted a journalist he accused of promoting an opposition party; according to the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), the journalist declined to press charges because she feared for her safety. Several other physical attacks against journalists were reported in 2014.

Economic Environment

Namibia is home to five daily national newspapers, including the state-owned *New Era*, as well as five independent weeklies, one biweekly, and about a dozen monthly magazines. There are more than 20 private and community radio stations and three television stations. Private broadcasters and independent newspapers usually operate without official interference. The majority of print publications are either controlled by the state or owned by businesspeople closely connected to SWAPO. The state-owned NBC is the dominant player in the broadcast sector and has come under increasing political pressure in recent years. The director general of NBC, Albertus Aochamub, is a close ally of newly elected president Hage Geingob and is reportedly in line to be one of Geingob's eight appointees to parliament. The appointees are expected to be announced in early 2015.

Community radio remains underdeveloped, while the high cost of television licenses limit the expansion of that medium. NBC's dominance and reach hinders the further expansion of community broadcasting. Printing and distribution costs for print publications also remain relatively high. The newspaper *Confidante* has increased its circulation by reaching a deal with a courier service that distributes the newspaper in exchange for advertising. Approximately 15 percent of the population accessed the internet in 2014.

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