

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

Mozambique

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Mozambique's revised 2004 constitution guarantees freedom of the press, and explicitly protects journalists and grants them the right not to reveal their sources. Despite these protections, the 1991 Press Law contains some limitations on these rights, particularly on national security grounds. In addition, defamation of the president or other high-ranking officials is illegal, and general criminal libel and defamation laws—under which cases are regularly brought and media workers and outlets can be subject to fines, prison terms of up to two years, and suspension of the publication—deter journalists from writing freely.

Journalists face difficulties accessing public information and official documents. Despite signs of progress in 2010, with a move to hold a parliamentary debate on a freedom of information bill based on a draft that the local chapter of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) presented to parliament in 2005, no further action was taken in 2011. In May, MISA condemned the inaction on the issue by both political parties and the relevant parliamentary committees. The current media regulatory framework, administered by the Government Information Bureau (GABINFO), is in need of updating and potentially subject to political influence. According to MISA, radio broadcast outlets were subjected to overly bureaucratic procedures to obtain operating licenses.

There were no reports of physical attacks against the press in 2011, although there were several cases of threats and intimidation. In February, Victor Muvale, a correspondent for the daily *Diário de Moçambique*, received death threats from three police officers following a story he had written about their behavior during an arrest that had led to disciplinary action against them. Other journalists were harassed while attempting to cover news stories, as was the case in April when reporters attempting to cover a student strike were threatened by the vice chancellor of Mussa Bin Bique University in northern Nampula province. Self-censorship by journalists is common, especially in rural areas outside the capital, Maputo. Independent media often release potentially sensitive stories simultaneously, in an effort to decrease this self-censorship and the negative backlash from the government. This strategy was successful during the corruption case against the president of the constitutional court, Luis Mondlane, who later resigned because of the wide-ranging coverage of his case.

Although progress has been made in the development of a strong and free press in Mozambique, the country continues to be dominated by state-controlled media outlets. Independent media are often underfunded and are generally found only in major cities. The state-run television station, Televisão de Moçambique (TVM), continues to be the only domestic television channel with national reach and has by far the largest audience of any broadcasting station. News reporting from TVM is often biased in favor of the government and offers little opportunity for the political opposition to voice opinions. Private channel Soico TV, Portuguese state television's African service RTP Africa, and Brazilian-owned TV Miramar also have wide audiences.

Radio continues to be a key source of information for the majority of

2012 SCORES

PRESS STATUS

Partly Free

PRESS FREEDOM SCORE

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Mozambicans. Compared to television, there is far more opportunity for private radio stations to open and operate. There are numerous private FM stations that generally operate in rural areas and broadcast to small audiences. Many of the 70 community stations currently operating were started by and receive their funding from UNESCO or other international aid organizations, but face serious problems of management and sustainability, as they rely on volunteers. Despite the prevalence of privately owned radio stations, state-run Rádio Moçambique has the largest audience and is by far the most influential media outlet in the country. Rádio Moçambique generally receives 60 percent of its operating budget from the federal government. While the station is known for presenting critical political debates and policy issues on its broadcasts, it most frequently invites guests who are sympathetic to the government.

Newspapers and print media in general have a far smaller audience—an estimated 1 million of Mozambique's 22.4 million inhabitants—than both radio and television. This is mainly because the print media is published only in Portuguese, which is only spoken by about 11% of the population. The high cost of newspapers relative to total income, as well as poor distribution networks and a 44 percent illiteracy rate, also contribute to low readership. The government has a majority stake in *Notícias*, the most-read daily newspaper in the country, which rarely prints stories critical of the government, while *O País* is the leading privately owned daily. Import taxes on newsprint remain high, leading to high production costs for newspapers. The largest source of advertising revenue for local media comes from government ministries and businesses under state control, and some journalists have accused the government and ruling party of allocating advertising according to political concerns and of favoring pro-state outlets.

Internet access is unrestricted, but penetration is extremely low. Only about 4 percent of the population had access to the internet in 2011, and most usage is confined to major cities. A number of sites posted criticisms of the government and remained untouched. However, there were reports of government intelligence agents monitoring the e-mails of members of opposition political parties.

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