

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

Namibia

Namibia | [Freedom of the Press 2012](#) |

The constitution guarantees freedom of the media, and Namibia's press has generally enjoyed a relatively open environment. However, constitutional provisions relating to the protection of national security, public order, and public morality provide legal mechanisms for restricting media freedom. There is no access to information law, and the 1982 Protection of Information Act serves to limit the information that can be disclosed by government officials.

Defamation is a criminal offense under common law. A defamation suit brought against the leading independent daily, the *Namibian*, by a former municipal official remained ongoing at the year's end. In June, a journalist for the government-run Namibian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) was "fined" by a traditional authority for biased reporting, marking the first time a reporter was charged for such a violation. The journalist, who refused to pay the fine, garnered the attention and subsequent support of the Media Institute for Southern Africa (MISA) advocacy group, which condemned the decision, noting that the ruling went against "existing democratic principles as enshrined in the Namibian Constitution." Self-regulation of the media sector has developed slowly, with a media ombudsman established in 2009 to hear complaints against media practitioners.

In previous years, government and party leaders have issued harsh criticism and even threats against the independent press, and called for the establishment of a media council to regulate the activities and operations of the media. No such incidents were reported in 2011. Nevertheless, the head of Namibia's football association assaulted a journalist at a media event in May. Another journalist at the weekly tabloid *Informante* was suspended, and a sub-editor was fired, after the newspaper published an unflattering story about its parent company. The trial of four men accused of a violent attack in 2010 against investigative journalist John Grobler, including three prominent businessmen (and a son-in-law of former president Sam Nujoma) with close ties to the ruling South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) party, was ongoing as of the end of 2011. Some journalists and editors practice a degree of self-censorship.

Namibia features four daily newspapers, as well as five weeklies, one biweekly, and about a dozen monthly magazines. There are 25 radio stations and three television stations. Private broadcasters and independent newspapers usually operate without official interference. The NBC is the dominant player in the broadcast sector, and has come under increasing political pressure in recent years. In 2009, a high-ranking director was dismissed amid allegations that he backed the opposition, and the NBC canceled popular phone-in radio programs due to alleged insults against current president Hifikepunye Pohamba and Nujoma. In addition, opposition parties and press freedom organizations accused the NBC of heavily pro-SWAPO coverage during the 2009 election campaign. In 2011, the NBC was accused of inappropriately censoring the comments of one journalist who was critical of its management. Community radio remains underdeveloped, and high costs for television licenses limit the reach of that medium. Meanwhile,

2012 SCORES

PRESS STATUS

Partly Free

PRESS FREEDOM SCORE

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LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

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POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

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printing and distribution costs for print media also remain relatively high. In a positive development, in 2011 the government lifted its 10-year ban on advertising in the *Namibian*.

Approximately 12 percent of the population accessed the internet in 2011. There are no restrictions on internet sites, and many publications and organizations have websites that are critical of the government. However, the 2009 Communication Act includes a clause that allows for the interception of e-mails, short-messaging services (SMS), internet banking transactions, and telephone calls without a warrant.

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