

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS



Swaziland

Swaziland | [Freedom of the Press 2012](#) | [- Select year -](#)

Swaziland's absolute monarchy continued to exert strict control over the media in 2011. King Mswati III has the power to suspend the constitutional rights to freedom of expression and freedom of the press at his discretion, and these rights are severely restricted in practice, especially with respect to speech on political issues or the royal family. Of six media bills proposed along with a new constitution in 2007—including a Public Broadcasting Corporation Bill, a general Broadcasting Bill, and an Information and Privacy Bill—none had been enacted by the end of 2011, while only the press-regulating Media Commission Bill has been opened to parliamentary debate. According to the African Media Barometer, there are approximately 30 laws that restrict media freedom in Swaziland, including harsh defamation laws and a Suppression of Terrorism Act that the government has threatened to apply to critical journalists. On a positive note, the Swaziland Media Complaints Commission, a self-regulatory body of journalists and other media workers, was officially registered in June 2011 following a 14-year effort by local media organizations. In recent years the courts have dismissed a number of defamation cases and overturned attempts to limit media coverage of political or culturally sensitive issues. Swaziland does not have a freedom of information law, and accessing government information is difficult. Nevertheless, in February the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) reported that Health Minister Benedict Xaba had ordered ministry staff to cooperate with journalists and give them access to requested information.

Swazi media content is marked by a high level of both official censorship and self-censorship on political and royal matters. In 2010, Prime Minister Barnabas Sibusiso Dlamini announced his intention to require columnists to seek state permission before criticizing the government. The prime minister also accused critical journalists of being paid by foreigners to tarnish the country's image. In March 2011, the state-run Swaziland Broadcast and Information Services (SBIS) radio station was banned from covering a wide-ranging teachers' strike. Also that month, the government banned state radio from airing the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) program *Focus on Africa* after it carried criticism of the government. In July, police delivered a court order to the *Times of Swaziland* to stop reporting on Chief Justice Michael Ramodibedi, who had suspended Justice Thomas Masuku for insulting the king. The suspension was condemned by the Swaziland Law Society as unjustified and political. The *Times* ignored the court order, noting that it had no case number.

The government routinely warns against negative news coverage, and journalists are subject to harassment and assault by both state and nonstate actors, though there were fewer such incidents in 2011 than in previous years. In April, security forces confiscated the equipment of several journalists covering antigovernment protests, while in May gospel singer Mzwakhe Myeni assaulted a *Times of Swaziland* journalist over critical stories written about him in the paper.

The country's two newspapers—the independent *Times of Swaziland* and the

2012 SCORES

PRESS STATUS

Not Free

PRESS FREEDOM SCORE

76

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

24

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

27

ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

25

state-run *Swazi Observer*—are consumed almost exclusively in urban areas. Despite restrictions on political reporting, both newspapers do criticize government corruption and inefficiency. The Swaziland Television Authority dominates the airwaves and generally favors the government in its coverage. There is one government-owned radio station and one independent radio station, Voice of the Church, which focuses on religious programming. Advertisers, including the government, regularly dissuade negative coverage by employing financial pressure, and their influence is significant in Swaziland's relatively small economy. Low pay and insufficient journalist training at times affect the quality of reporting. Many journalists have left the industry to work for the government or elsewhere in the private sector. However, journalists and media houses are not considered prone to corruption. Swazis with sufficient funds can freely purchase and use satellite dishes to receive signals from independent South African and international news media.

The government does not restrict internet-based media, but few Swazis can afford access; only 18 percent of the population accessed the internet in 2011.

[About us](#)

[Careers](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Credits](#)

[Subscribe](#)

Related websites:

[Democracy Web](#) | [Derecho a Voz](#) | [Family Law - Khaleej](#) |

[Peace in the Caucasus](#) | [Undermining Democracy](#) |

[Voice of Freedom](#)