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FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

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Mozambique

[Mozambique](#)[Freedom of the Press 2013](#)

Mozambique's revised 2004 constitution guarantees freedom of the press, explicitly protecting journalists and granting them the right not to reveal their sources. However, 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 deter journalists from writing freely. Libel and defamation cases, which are common, can lead to fines, prison terms of up to two years, and suspension of the media outlet in question. In July 2012, Falume Chabane, a former editor of the online newspaper *O Autarca*, was convicted of libel after a closed-door trial for publishing a series of articles in 2011 on the alleged mistreatment of a disabled student by the Beira International Primary School. Chabane was given a suspended 16-month prison sentence and ordered to pay a fine of 150,000 meticais (\$5,280), though an appeal was pending at year's end. Bloggers and community radio or newspaper journalists, who often work on a voluntary or part-time basis, may not be equally protected under Mozambican press laws, though this has yet to be tested in a court case.

Journalists face difficulties accessing public information and official documents. The local chapter of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) presented a draft freedom of information bill to the parliament in 2005, but despite moves in recent years to debate the measure, no further legislative action was taken in 2012. The current regulatory framework for media, administered by the Government Information Bureau (GABINFO), is in need of updating and vulnerable to political influence. According to MISA, radio stations were subjected to overly bureaucratic procedures to obtain operating licenses. However, there is also an independent media regulatory body, the Supreme Mass Media Council, that is tasked with guaranteeing press freedom and the public's right to information.

A number of websites have posted criticisms of the government without encountering censorship, but there have been reports of government intelligence agents monitoring the e-mail of members of opposition political parties. Self-censorship by journalists is pervasive, especially in rural areas outside the capital. Independent media often release potentially sensitive stories at the same time in an effort to counter self-censorship and deter reprisals from the government. This strategy was successful during a 2011 corruption scandal implicating the president of the constitutional court, Luis Mondlane, who eventually resigned because of wide-ranging media coverage of his case.

There were few reports of physical attacks, harassment, or intimidation of journalists in 2012, an improvement over previous years. In September, a journalist was forced by police officers to delete photographs he took of the attempted lynching of an alleged thief; the reporter was taken to the police station and then released. A police spokesperson later announced that the two officers involved would be subject to disciplinary action.

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), is still the only domestic television channel with national reach and has the largest audience. The state provides about 70 percent of the station's operating budget, and news reporting from TVM is often biased in favor of the government, offering little opportunity for the political opposition to weigh in. The private channel Soico TV, Portuguese state television's African service (RTP Africa), and Brazilian-owned

TV Miramar also have large audiences.

Radio continues to be a key source of information for the majority of Mozambicans. Compared with television, there is far more opportunity for private radio stations to open and operate. Numerous private FM stations are based in rural areas and broadcast to small audiences. Many of the 70 community stations currently operating were started by and receive their funding from the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) or other international aid organizations, but they 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, offering programming in at least 18 languages. Rádio Moçambique receives about 50 percent of its operating budget from the 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. Community radio stations may also be vulnerable to local political pressures. In November 2012, a district administrator and his staff forced Furancungo Plateau Community Radio to shut down due to alleged mismanagement. The station's coordinator refuted the allegations and argued that its critical reporting on the local government had made it a target.

Newspapers and print media in general have a far smaller audience than both radio and television. This is mainly because the print media are published only in Portuguese, which is spoken by about 11 percent 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 friendly outlets.

Internet access is unrestricted, but penetration is extremely low. Less than 5 percent of the population had access to the internet in 2012, and most usage is confined to major cities.

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