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Freedom of the Press 2014 - Zimbabwe

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2014 Scores

Press Status: Not Free

Press Freedom Score: (0 = best, 100 = worst) 73

Legal Environment: (0 = best, 30 = worst) 24

Political Environment: (0 = best, 40 = worst) 25

Economic Environment: (0 = best, 30 = worst) 24

Press freedom in Zimbabwe remained restricted in 2013, although improvements in the media environment as a result of previous reforms, as well as a more relaxed attitude by officials toward year's end, contributed to overall gains during the year. Access to information continued to be tightly controlled and journalists faced pressure and a spate of physical attacks in the run-up to national elections held in July, in which President Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party won a majority in polls widely regarded as unfair. Legal harassment and a continued lack of movement to enact regulatory reforms, particularly in the broadcast sector, remained primary concerns. Nevertheless, a new constitution provided formal protection for media freedom, and an October decision by the Constitutional Court ruled that certain provisions of the penal code did not comply with the constitution. The media landscape continued to diversify, and more critical coverage on a range of sensitive issues was apparent in 2013.

The new constitution, signed into law in May 2013, provides for freedom of expression and access to information, subject to some limitations, and was seen as an improvement on its predecessor. However, an otherwise draconian legal framework continues to inhibit the activities of journalists and media outlets. The 2002 Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) requires all journalists and media companies to register, and gives the information minister sweeping powers to decide which publications can operate legally and who is able to work as a journalist. Unlicensed journalists can face criminal charges and a sentence of up to two years in prison. In addition, the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act severely limit what journalists may publish and mandate harsh penalties – including long prison sentences – for violators. The 2007 Interception of Communications Act allows officials to intercept telephonic and electronic communications and to monitor their content to prevent a "serious offense" or a "threat to national security."