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## Freedom of the Press 2011 - Zimbabwe

**Status:** Not Free

**Legal Environment:** 25

**Political Environment:** 29

**Economic Environment:** 27

**Total Score:** 81

Despite several positive developments in the media sector in 2010, press freedom in Zimbabwe remained tightly restricted. Promised reforms to liberalize the legal and regulatory environment after years of authoritarian abuse were stalled by President Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party, which was still entrenched in the executive branch and exercised control over the nominally inclusive government of national unity formed in 2009. Legal and physical harassment of journalists, which increased toward the end of the year as the country prepared for possible early elections in 2011, also remained a concern.

Even with constitutional provisions for freedom of expression, a draconian legal framework continues to inhibit the activities of journalists and media outlets. The 2002 Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) required all journalists and media companies to register, and gave the information minister sweeping powers to decide which publications could 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 Official Secrets Act, 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. Authorities continued to exploit these laws to harass and punish journalists in 2010, relying less on AIPPA and POSA and more on the Criminal Law Act. In December, First Lady Grace Mugabe brought a US\$15 million libel suit against the *Standard* newspaper for an article quoting part of a leaked U.S. diplomatic cable about her. Several weeks earlier, the paper's editor, Nevanji Madanhire, had been arrested and charged with breaching a section of the Criminal Law Act that deals with revealing state secrets; Nqobani Ndlovu, a journalist with the same publication who wrote the article in question, faced similar charges. The Bulawayo bureau chief of *NewsDay* was also briefly detained in connection with the case. In November, police issued an arrest warrant for the London-based editor of the *Zimbabwean* newspaper in connection with a 2008 article. In October, members of ZANU-PF introduced the General Law Amendment Bill, which would hamper journalists' ability to access government information, including judicial decisions and public records, and require permission from authorities before the publication of government documents.

The 2008 power-sharing agreement between ZANU-PF and the two factions of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), the longtime opposition party, mandated the creation of a new, independent Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC) to replace the state-controlled Media and Information Commission (MIC), which formerly was in charge of licensing publications and journalists. After delays in 2009, the ZMC was finally formed in February 2010; the inclusion of several well-respected industry representatives as commissioners raised hopes that the new body would be somewhat more independent than its predecessor. In a positive step, in May the ZMC proceeded to license five new publications, including the *Daily News*, Zimbabwe's only independent daily until it was shuttered in 2003, and the new private daily *NewsDay*. The latter commenced publication within weeks, the *Daily News* restarted its operations but had not begun printing, and the other three licensees had yet to begin operations by the end of the year. By contrast, broadcasting licenses continue to be consistently denied to independent radio stations, despite calls by a parliamentary committee for liberalization. In 2009, former MIC head and Mugabe ally Tafataona Mahoso was appointed chairman of the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ), which is responsible for granting radio and television licenses.

Journalists faced verbal intimidation, physical attacks, arbitrary arrest and detention, interception of communications, and financial pressure at the hands of the police, government officials, and supporters of the ruling party during the year. Many were harassed while attempting to cover news events or sensitive political issues such as the constitutional reform process or the ongoing investigation into abuses at diamond mines. Andriison Shadreck Manyere, a freelance photojournalist, suffered repeated instances of harassment in 2010. Freelance journalist Stanley Kwenda briefly fled the country after receiving death threats in January. Professional and media-monitoring organizations such as the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists, the Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe, and the local chapter of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) are also subject to official harassment. Faced with legal restrictions as well as the threat of extralegal intimidation, many journalists practice self-censorship.

Foreign journalists can encounter restrictions on residing full-time in the country and are sometimes denied visas to file stories from Zimbabwe, though an outright ban on two major international news organizations, the British Broadcasting Corporation and the U.S.-based Cable News Network, was lifted in 2009. Locally based correspondents for foreign publications, particularly those whose reporting has portrayed the regime in an unfavorable light, have been refused accreditation or threatened with lawsuits and deportation. In May 2010, the government significantly lowered the accreditation fees for foreign journalists, foreign outlets, and local reporters working for foreign outlets. During the past several years, dozens of Zimbabwean journalists have fled the country, mostly to South Africa and Britain; according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Zimbabwe has one of the largest numbers of exiled journalists in the world.

The government, through the Mass Media Trust holding company, controls the two main daily newspapers, the *Chronicle* and the *Herald*. After undergoing a modest shift toward more politically balanced coverage in 2009, state media returned to slavishly supporting Mugabe and ZANU-PF while attacking the MDC in 2010, amid increased jockeying for power ahead of possible elections in 2011. The private Alpha Media Holdings group publishes a number of the country's independent papers, including *NewsDay*, the *Standard*, and the *Zimbabwe Independent*, though many of their journalists practice extensive self-censorship, particularly regarding stories on corruption or factional fighting within ZANU-PF. The *Zimbabwean* is produced in South Africa for the Zimbabwean market, and some foreign newspapers, most of them also from South Africa, are available. Distributors of the *Zimbabwean* were arrested in February 2010 and briefly faced legal charges despite the fact that they have no control over the paper's content. Newspapers typically have poor distribution networks outside urban areas, and they have been buffeted by soaring prices for newsprint. According to MISA's African Media Barometer, state-run companies do not advertise in private papers, and state-run media outlets do not accept advertising from companies thought to be aligned with the opposition. Owing to poor economic conditions and salaries that do not keep pace with inflation, journalistic corruption and cash incentives for coverage have become rampant.

The state-controlled Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) runs all broadcast media, which are subject to overt political interference and censorship. ZBC coverage, particularly before and during elections, overwhelmingly favors ZANU-PF. In 2009, retired military and intelligence officers loyal to Mugabe were appointed to the boards of state-owned newspapers, the ZBC, and the NewZiana news agency. The Broadcasting Services Act bans foreign funding and investment in this capital-intensive sector, making it very difficult for private players to enter the market. Radio broadcasts are currently the predominant source of information in rural areas. However, access to broadcast media in such areas is hampered by deteriorating equipment and a lack of transmission sites. According to MISA, only 30 percent of the country enjoys radio and television reception, but the government has reached an agreement with China to help upgrade transmission infrastructure. Meanwhile, officials have used Chinese technology to jam the signals of increasingly popular foreign-based radio stations that broadcast into Zimbabwe, including SW Radio Africa, a station run by exiled Zimbabwean journalists in London; the Voice of America's Studio 7 service; and the Voice of the People. After a lull in 2009, such signal jamming appeared to occur more regularly in 2010. In December, nongovernmental organizations reported that authorities were raiding homes in rural areas and confiscating the shortwave radios used to access these broadcasts. Although satellite television services that provide international news programming remain largely uncensored, their cost places them out of reach for most of the population.

Access to the internet is limited by the high costs at internet cafés and service disruptions caused by frequent power outages. Nonetheless, Zimbabwe has a relatively high rate of internet penetration for Africa, at 11.5 percent of the population. Online newspapers, news portals, and blogs run by Zimbabweans living abroad are popular among those with internet access. The 2007 Interception of Communications Act allows officials to intercept telephonic and electronic communications and to monitor content to prevent a "serious offense" or a "threat to national security." According to CPJ, journalists and opposition activists are regularly subject to such surveillance.

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