



Challenges and opportunities: media independence and press freedom in Zimbabwe

ABOVE: Protestors hold up placards against the government of Zimbabwe's alleged state corruption, interference in media freedom and the deteriorating economy outside the Zimbabwean Embassy in Pretoria on August 7, 2020.

Phill Magakoe / AFP

By Sikhululekile Mashingaidze & Stephen Buchanan-Clarke

October 2021

Challenges and opportunities: media independence and press freedom in Zimbabwe

By Sikhululekile Mashingaidze & Stephen Buchanan-Clarke

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE ZIMBABWEAN GOVERNMENT:

- Realign Zimbabwe's legal framework with the 2013 Constitution's provisions for freedom of expression and freedom of the media. This must include commitment to liberalising media registration/licencing and certification of legitimate independent players to promote media plurality.
- Restore legitimate independence of the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC) in alignment with the 2013 Constitution. Appointments must be transparent, merit-based and non-partisan.
- Create an enabling operational environment for a robust, state-owned and independent media that is protected from capture, arbitrary arrests, impunity and violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CIVIL SOCIETY AND INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISTS:

- Foster broad-based, multi-stakeholder partnerships to support Zimbabwe's legitimate independent media through funding, capacity building, networking and resource sharing that also targets women in journalism.
- Uphold ethical standards in the utilisation of the opportunities enabled by new media in exposing and fighting corruption as well as advancing the broader democratisation agenda.

Introduction

The 2013 Zimbabwean Constitution's¹ well-articulated provisions for media freedom are in stark contrast to the fragility of the country's current media landscape, 41 years after the attainment of independence.

The Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC)² is a constitutional body mandated with functions that include the duty to uphold, promote and develop media freedom, enforce good practices and ethics, as well as fair competition and diversity.³ However, that the ZMC chairperson and its eight other members are presidential appointees⁴ poses a challenge for ZMC's operational independence. The 2013 Constitution's Part 5. Section 248. Part 1a) notes that a chairperson is '...appointed by the President after consultation with the Committee on Standing rules and orders;' and Part b cites eight other members appointed by the President from a list of 12 nominees submitted by the same committee.

This is a structural problem within the Constitution itself, as it enables disproportionate executive influence and curtails the commission's independence in its primary mandate to uphold, promote and develop freedom of the media.⁵

Sections 61 and 62 of the Constitution, however, outline ordinary citizens' and journalists' rights to freedom of expression, freedom of the media and the right of access to information.⁶ Although subject to restrictions in contexts of defence, public security, or professional confidentiality,⁷ these freedoms include citizens' right of access to information for public accountability and stipulate journalists' right to protection of the confidentiality of their sources of information. The Constitution further specifies the freedom of all state-owned media to independently determine the editorial content of its broadcasts, be impartial and afford fair opportunity for the representation of divergent views and dissenting opinions.⁸

Contrary to these well laid out freedoms, with only one television station and a largely state controlled radio licencing system designed to give a veneer of plurality, Zimbabwe's media landscape is fraught with contradictions. The Zimbabwe

1 The Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20). Act, 2013.Chapter 4. Part 2. Section 61 and 62.

2 The Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20). Act, 2013.Chapter 12. Part 5.

3 The Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20). Act, 2013.Chapter 12. Part 5. Section 249.Part (a)

4 The Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20). Act, 2013.Part 5. Section 248.Part 1 (a) and (b).

5 The Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20). Act, 2013.Chapter 12. Part 5. Section 249.Part 1 (a)

6 The Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20). Act, 2013.Chapter 4. Part 2. Section 61 and 62.

7 The Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20). Act, 2013.Chapter 4. Part 2. Section 62. Part (4)

8 The Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20). Act, 2013.Chapter 4. Part 2. Section 61. Part (a) &Part(c).

Broadcasting Corporation's Zimbabwe Television (ZBC TV) has been reduced to a partisan pro-establishment propaganda machine in service to deepening autocratic legitimation.⁹

Media and communications scholar Sebastian Stier¹⁰ observes how governments maintain their grip on power by influencing news coverage through both illegitimate and formal democratic institutions. Hopewell Chin'ono, a Zimbabwean investigative journalist recently imprisoned for exposing corruption, concurs that this desire to control the media in Zimbabwe has been achieved through selective licencing designed to ensure a single governing party narrative, something that has reduced Zimbabwe to 'an African backwater of broadcasting and news technology'.¹¹ Concomitantly, the operational environment for investigative journalism is dangerous terrain littered with arbitrary arrests and gross human rights violations. The period from the Willowgate scandal in 1988¹² to the Covidgate scandal in 2020¹³ marks at least three decades consistently characterised by the arrest and intimidation of investigative journalists who embark on exposing and fighting malfeasance, advancing multi-partyism by giving coverage to opposition parties, or demanding transparency and accountability from government officials. A joint¹⁴ advocacy letter to the Special Rapporteurs at the United Nations and African Commission on Human and People's Rights highlights the continuation of these arrests. It also notes their politically motivated nature, citing high profile arrests of journalist Hopewell Chin'ono¹⁵ and New York Times correspondent Jeffery Moyo¹⁶ in the first half of 2021.

Appropriate implementation of the 2013 Constitution could have wrought significant gains in terms of renewing media freedom. It was unlikely, though, under a post-2013 return to arbitrary autocratic rule by the late Robert Mugabe. Under the post-2017 coup government, any potential gains have been rapidly aborted, especially against the backdrop of the intensifying Covid-19 pandemic. Faced with a legitimacy

crisis, the government's Covid-19 control measures have proven a convenient smokescreen for further restricting the media space.¹⁷

Over the last year, Good Governance Africa (GGA) has held a series of thematic discussions on the political and economic crisis facing Zimbabwe. The crisis negatively affects not just the nation's citizens but the wider southern Africa region. This policy briefing presents some of the key lessons from engagements with a range of stakeholders from Zimbabwe's government, civil society, and academia pertaining to media freedom and the information landscape. Its objectives are to:

- i. Provide an overview of the major changes in Zimbabwe's media landscape over the past 21 years;
- ii. Highlight the key tools used by the Zimbabwean government to restrict freedom of expression and the independence of the media;
- iii. Provide recommendations on how the independent media can be supported and important media freedoms restored. This with a particular focus on addressing challenges faced by women media practitioners.

Media Freedom: Entangled in political contestations

Stakeholder engagements focused on Zimbabwe's media landscape revealed a multiplicity of challenges. These include a prohibitive operational environment due to restrictive legislation, economic hardship as well as specifically women-unfriendly, gender-insensitive workspaces.¹⁸

1.1 Restrictive legislation: The Robert Mugabe years

"Jonathan Moyo was known as 'The Minister carrying a stick' and used law enforcement to curtail journalists" - Lenox Mhlanga - Zimbabwean Media Consultant.

Media scholar and political scientist Konroy-Krutz notes that the greatest threat to media freedom in Africa today is the set

9 Mashingaidze S, 'Zimbabwe's autocratic legitimation and the citizen struggle in safeguarding the constitution', *Good Governance Africa*, 27 November 2020, <https://gga.org/zimbabwe-autocratic-legitimation-and-the-citizen-struggle-in-safeguarding-the-constitution/>. Accessed 23 June 2021.

10 Sebastian S, (2015) 'Democracy, autocracy and the news: the impact of regime type on media freedom', *Democratization*, 22:7, 1273-1295, DOI: 10.1080/13510347.2014.964643 Accessed 23 June 2021.

11 Chin'ono H, 'Liberating the media space'. *Africa In Fact: Constitution and Constitutionality. The Journal of Good Governance Africa* (1).19 July 2020 <https://gga.org/liberating-the-media-space/>. Accessed 27 September 2021.

12 Maier K, '3 Cabinet Ministers quit in Zimbabwe as corruption report is published', 15 April 1989 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1989/04/15/3-cabinet-ministers-quit-in-zimbabwe-as-corruption-report-is-published/31e0f5ce-269d-49b3-832c-230129281606/>. Accessed 23 June 2021.

13 Mashingaidze S, (2019, September 22), 'Lack of political will entrenches Zimbabwe's culture of malfeasance', *Business Live*, <https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/opinion/2020-09-22-lack-of-political-will-entrenches-zimbabwes-culture-of-malfeasance/>. Accessed 27 September 2021.

14 The letter was a joint advocacy initiative of the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights, the Committee to Protect Journalists, Southern Africa Human Rights Defenders, and Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights. <https://rfkhumanrights.org/assets/documents/Zimbabwe-Joint-Advocacy-Letter-on-Journalists-and-HRDs.pdf> Accessed 27 September 2021

15 Hopewell Chin'ono is a Zimbabwean journalist and human rights defender arrested in 2020 for exposing COVID 19 supplies related corruption. <https://cpj.org/2020/07/journalist-hopewell-chinono-arrested-charged-with-incitement-in-zimbabwe/>. Accessed 28 September 2021.

16 Jeffrey Moyo is a Zimbabwean, New York Times Freelance Journalist arrested early this year as part of the ongoing government attacks on media practitioners. He was charged for alleged accreditation misrepresentation. <https://cpj.org/2021/05/zimbabwe-detains-ny-times-freelancer-jeffrey-moyo-over-alleged-accreditation-misrepresentation/>. Accessed 28 September 2021.

17 Buchanan-Clarke S, & Mashingaidze S, (2020, July 24), 'Zimbabwe uses lockdown to undermine rule of law', *Business Day*, <https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/opinion/2020-07-24-zimbabwe-uses-lockdown-to-undermine-rule-of-law/>. Accessed 23 June 2021.

18 GGA Media Freedom Roundtable discussion.

of legal regimes that evoke “national security or public order as grounds for media control...”¹⁹ Restrictive legislation has indeed been the leading weapon against media freedom in Zimbabwe, perpetuating the “rule by law” cancer as noted in GGA’s Policy Briefing on Rebuilding Constitutionalism and the Rule of Law in Zimbabwe.²⁰ The colonial Law and Order Maintenance Act of 1960²¹ (LOMA), for example, remained in force for two decades following the country’s independence, only being revoked in 2002 upon the passing of an equally repressive Public Order and Security Act 1 of 2002.²² After LOMA, through²³ the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) of 2002,²⁴ the then Minister of State for Publicity and Information in the President’s office, Professor Jonathan Moyo ensured firm state control of the media. AIPPA was one of the primary legislative tools used at the time to stem the rise of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC)²⁵ and undermine all other efforts to strengthen democracy. It was part of the multiplicity of tools effectively adopted and applied to halt ZANU-PF’s and Robert Mugabe’s slipping hold on power.²⁶ The Media Institute of Southern Africa²⁷ notes that upon its enactment, AIPPA became:

...the leading weapon...to stifle independent media reporting in Zimbabwe...the plethora of arrests, intimidation, harassment and measures of control...directed at media workers of all sorts-journalists, photographers, vendors and even drivers-as well as media outlets and, in particular, the independent print media.

Professor Jonathan Moyo presided over an era whose media repression tactics included widespread intimidation of

independent media practitioners by a state-sponsored youth militia.²⁸ This intimidation was enabled and complemented by repressive legislation in the form of the Broadcasting Services Act (2001)²⁹ and the Public Order and Security Act-POSA (2002).³⁰ Professor Jonathan Moyo, the former Minister of State for Publicity and Information in the President’s Office is on record labelling journalists as “terrorists of the pen”³¹ and threatening them with imprisonment stating that: “the position on how to deal with terrorists is to subject them to the laws of Zimbabwe.”³²

These verbal attacks during his reign fuelled physical assaults, culminating in the bombing and eventual closure of the Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe (ANZ).³³ State-owned media was equally threatened and functionally rendered without content or editorial independence. Practitioners were, furthermore, subject to arbitrary dismissals.

1.2 Restrictive legislation: The Emmerson Mnangagwa years

President Emmerson Mnangagwa, upon his coup-facilitated rise to power in 2017, articulated ‘a new destiny’ for Zimbabwe in which he promised to “work towards ensuring that the pillars of the state assuring democracy in our land are strengthened and respected...”. His inaugural speech spelt some hope, even for media freedom.³⁴ Four years later, among other deviations from the provisions of the 2013 Constitution, the legislative measures ostensibly enacted to support media freedom have been cosmetic at best and the media landscape has become functionally more restrictive.

In 2019, Mnangagwa assented to the Maintenance of Peace and Order Act (MOPA)³⁵ to replace POSA. In April 2012, the

19 Conroy-Krutz J, ‘The Squeeze On African Media Freedom.’ Journal of Democracy, vol. 31 no. 2, 2020, p. 96-109. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/jod.2020.0024. Accessed 23 June 2021.

20 Buchanan-Clarke S, and Mashingaidze S, ‘Constitutionalism and the Rule of Law in Zimbabwe’, 3 August 2021, <https://gga.org/rebuilding-constitutionalism-and-rule-of-law-in-zimbabwe/>. Accessed 23 June 2021.

21 Law and Order (Maintenance) Act [Chapter 11:07] -LOMA infringed on people’s freedom of association, assembly, movement and expression. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6ad3254.html> Accessed 23 June 2021

22 Public Order and Security Act [Chapter 11:17] <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/research/zimbabwe-POSA.pdf> Accessed 9 July 2021.

23 Firmly under government control, under AIPPA the MIC exercised unbridled regulatory powers over media outlets and journalists regarding their registration/licensing as well as certification of any business disseminating media products. Further to this, it had the power to regulate media content.

24 Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 5/2002 (Chapter 10:27) https://publicofficialsfinancialdisclosure.worldbank.org/sites/fdl/files/assets/law-library-files/Zimbabwe_Access%20to%20Information%20Law_2008_en.pdf Accessed 23 June 2021.

25 ZANU-PFs first ever formidable opposition since PF-ZAPU in the 80s.

26 As noted by MISA-Zimbabwe, there was an urgent need to tighten the hold in the face of ‘an increasingly independent and assertive print media’ amidst a legitimacy crisis prompted by the rejection of the government sponsored draft constitution in the 2000 Constitutional Referendum. This legitimacy crisis was further compounded by the MDCs growing parliamentary influence after winning a significant number of seats in the June parliamentary 2000 elections.

27 Article 19 and Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA)-Zimbabwe, ‘The Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act: Two Years On,’ September 2004, p.4, accessed at: <http://www.article19.org/data/files/pdfs/publications/zimbabwe-aippa-report.pdf> Accessed 23 June 2021.

28 Known as the ‘green bombers’, these youths were an effective tool for ZANU-PF in fighting political dissent. <https://cpi.org/2002/03/attacks-on-the-press-2001-zimbabwe/> Accessed 27 September 2021.

29 Broadcasting Services Act- this legislation enabled the government’s overriding control over future private broadcasters licencing.

30 Public Order and Security Act [Chapter 11:17] (Act 1/2002, 6/2005) enabled content restrictions on the media and limits on demonstrations and public gatherings. For more insights go to <https://www.hrforumzim.org/news/peal-aippa-posa-for-a-free-media/> Accessed 27 September 2021.

31 Media Institute of Southern Africa and International Freedom of Expression Exchange, ‘Local journalists who report for foreign media outlets threatened with arrest,’ 7 May 2004, <https://ifex.org/local-journalists-who-report-for-foreign-media-outlets-threatened-with-arrest/> Accessed 23 June 2021.

32 Melber, H. (2004). *Media, public discourse and political contestation in Zimbabwe*. Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute.

33 Publishers of The Daily News and the Daily News on Sunday. The Daily News printing press was destroyed in bomb attacks in the years 2000 and 2001.

34 ‘Zimbabwe’s President Mnangagwa vows to re-engage with world’, 24 November 2017, British Broadcasting Corporation, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-42115622> Accessed 23 June 2021.

35 Maintenance of Peace and Order Act, 9/2019 (Chapter 11:23), <https://www.herald.co.zw/mopa-2-other-laws-come-into-effect/>

Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC) Act was enacted, constitutionally operationalising the body. Meanwhile, the long-awaited repeal of the controversial Mugabe-era AIPPA³⁶ and its replacement with the Freedom of Information Act³⁷ is a legislative change that ideally should have improved media freedom but, in reality, has limited it. Transitional justice practitioner Sharon Hofisi and political scientist and Principal Investigator of the Afrobarometer project, Eldred Masunungure observe how ‘rule by law’ has displaced ‘rule of law’ in Zimbabwe.³⁸ They lament a culture of ‘State-centred predation, egregious abuse of human rights, politically motivated violence and intimidation, all done with impunity...’. The legislative framework continues to limit media freedom.

The Freedom of Information Act’s³⁹ content is essentially AIPPA by another name. For example, upon a request for information, the decision to grant information is at the discretion of the Information Officer.⁴⁰ Section 8(10) confirms how the process of access to information is strictly controlled and may be arbitrarily withheld if ‘the responsible person or holder of a statutory office does not consider that the information requested reasonably appears to be necessary to safeguard the life or liberty of a person...’. It also infringes on academic freedom⁴¹ by limiting access to information to citizens and permanent residents and not to foreigners in an era of globalization where the country has more to gain from diversifying its research and hence development agenda. In

the same vein, MOPA’s provisions are largely a replication of POSA⁴², restricting citizens’ freedom of movement and association, all to be granted entirely at the regulating authority’s discretion.

Furthermore, the Cybersecurity and Data Protection Bill, gazetted in May 2020, establishes a regulatory framework for the information and communication technology (ICT) sector. It is the most contentious of media legislation gazetted under the Emmerson Mnangagwa administration, designed to entrench surveillance, specifically on the opposition, human rights defenders and anyone critical of the administration.⁴³ In a joint statement to the government of Zimbabwe, PEN International,⁴⁴ as part of its work in advocating for media freedom, noted how the bill falls short of international standards. PEN expressed concern at “how the merging of cybersecurity and data protection into a single piece of legislation will make it challenging to strike a strategic balance between security concerns and digital rights.”⁴⁵

Given the foregoing, Zimbabwe’s media landscape has consistently been shaped by a restrictive legal framework, as highlighted in Figure 1 below:

Towards media freedom and sustainability

“...independent media remains the only all-round roving eye looking out for the public interest...it is the only strong opposition... Zimbabwean people understand the importance of the media

History of media restriction in Zimbabwe

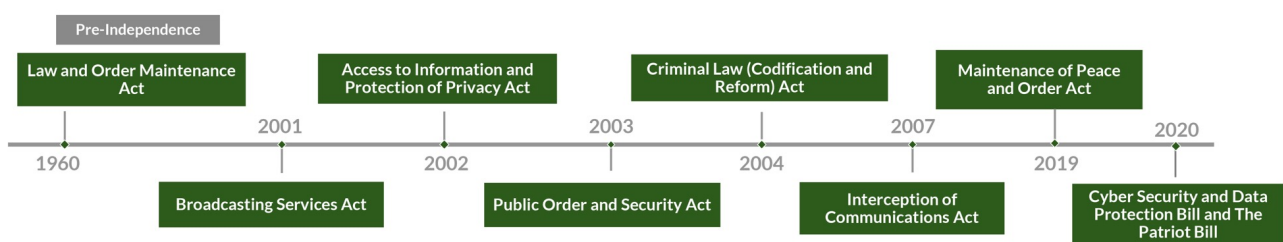


Figure 1: Zimbabwean Media legislative framework

36 Freedom of Information Act , number1/2020,(Chapter10:33) http://www.veritaszim.net/sites/veritas_d/files/Freedom%20of%20Information%2C%20Act%20No.%201%20of%202020.pdf Accessed 23 June 2021

37 Freedom of Information Act , number1/2020, (Chapter10:33) http://www.veritaszim.net/sites/veritas_d/files/Freedom%20of%20Information%2C%20Act%20No.%201%20of%202020.pdf Accessed 23 June 2021

38 Masunungure E, and Hofisi S, 'Rule by law or Rule of Law', <https://gga.org/author/sharon-hofisi-and-elderred-masunungure/>. accessed Accessed 23 June 2021.

39 Freedom of Information Act (Chapter 10:33), <http://www.veritaszim.net/node/4282> . Accessed 9 July 2021.

40 Information Officer means the principal officer of an entity or any such person designated by the principal officer to act on his or her behalf.

41 University World News, 2020, May 19, 'Access to information: A case of Academic xenophobia', (2020, November 19) <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20201118024201270> Accessed 23 June 2021

42 Langa V,(2019,April 26) 'POSA bounces back as MOPA', <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2019/04/posa-bounces-back-as-mopa/> Accessed 23 June 2021

43 Media Institute of Sothern Africa, 2020, May 19, 'Cyber security and data protection bill entrenches surveillance', <https://zimbabwe.misa.org/2020/05/19/cybersecurity-and-data-protection-bill-entrenches-surveillance-an-analysis/> Accessed 23 June 2021

44 PEN International is a worldwide association of writers, founded to promote friendship and international cooperation among writers across the globe and advocates for media freedom.

45 <https://pen-international.org/news/zimbabwe-government-cybersecurity-bill> Accessed 23 June 2021

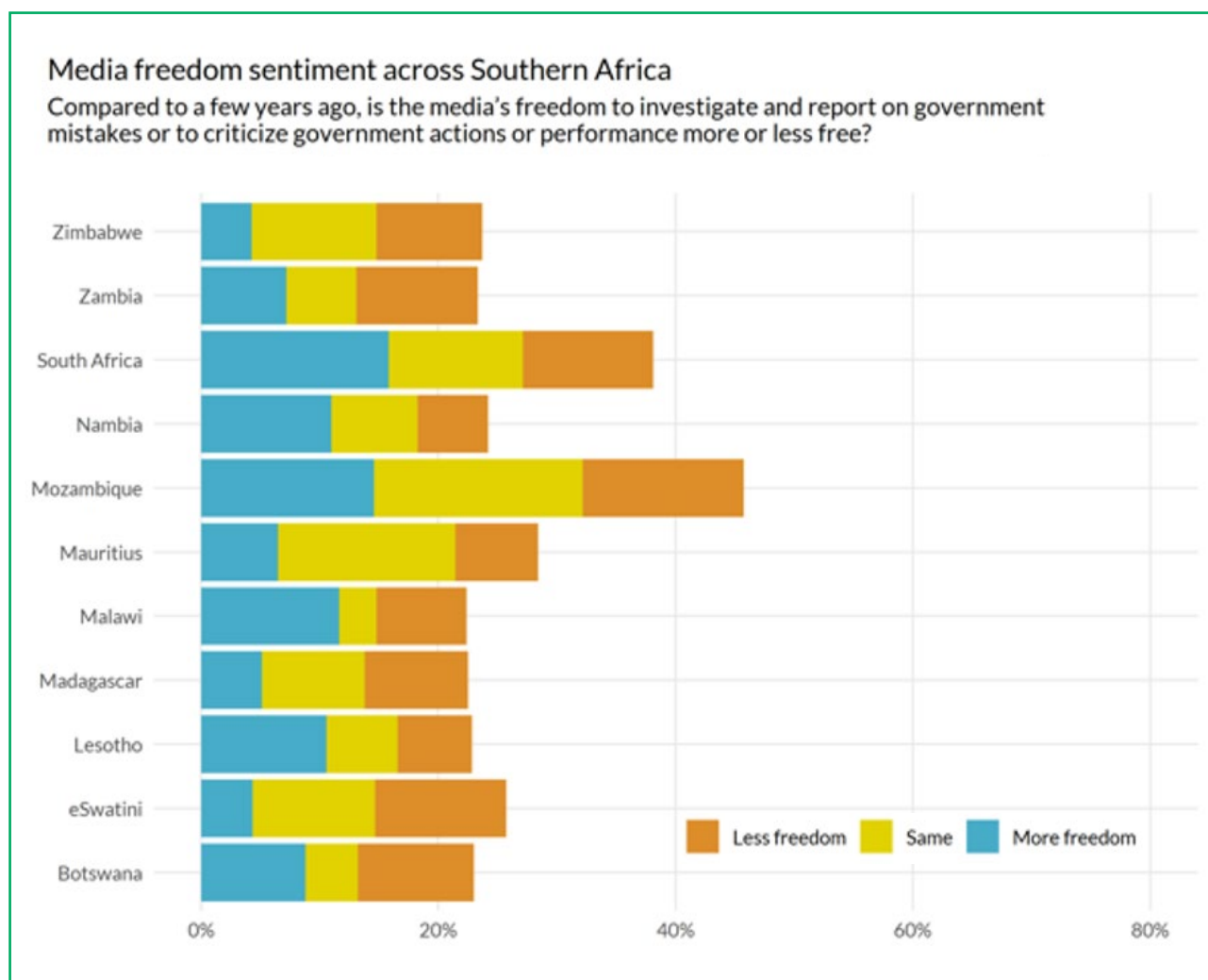


Figure 2: Media freedom sentiment across Southern Africa

Source: Afrobarometer Round 7
Graphic: Monique Bennett

and when you do a good story, they will pursue it." - Sibusisiwe Bhebhe, Director of Amakhosikazi Media.

April 2021 marks 30 years since the Windhoek Declaration⁴⁶ and its clarion call for a free, independent and pluralistic press as an indispensable factor for economic development. However, despite the emergence of new technologies that have seen the rise of new, flexible and diverse media with a wider reach, the foregoing discussion points to a media landscape in which the Zimbabwean government has consistently sought to restrict access and freedoms. Further to this, media freedom has been eroded by the weaponisation of COVID-19 (C19) control measures, serving as a smokescreen for government’s onslaught against dissenting voices. Zimbabwean journalist Hopewell Chin’ono has borne

the brunt of these measures for effectively engaging in investigative journalism via social media to fight voter apathy (voter registration campaigns⁴⁷), expose governance failures, high-level corruption and human rights abuses.

Investigative journalist Owen Gagare has observed that apart from C19 control measures, arbitrary arrests, abductions, enforced disappearances, assaults and even murders of investigative journalists and activists, are among the plethora of measures the government has applied to curtail media freedom. Zimbabwean⁴⁸ and Ugandan⁴⁹ governments have also applied partial or full internet blackout during key events such as elections and citizen protests to withhold journalists’ and citizens’ right of access to and dissemination of information.

⁴⁶ United Nations Education, Scientific Cultural Organisation, 1991, Declaration of Windhoek on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000090759?posInSet=2&queryId=3aeb3e-fcd3-4925-8e14-af9b9f4ec10d> Accessed 23 June 2021

⁴⁷ Ching’ono C, ‘The youth asked for a Register To Vote Riddim, I will drop it on Sunday!’ (2021) <https://twitter.com/daddyhope/status/1388134915208892418> Accessed 24 June 2021

⁴⁸ ‘Zimbabwe imposes internet shutdown amid crackdown on protests’, (2019, January 18), Al Jazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/1/18/zimbabwe-imposes-internet-shutdown-amid-crackdown-on-protests> Accessed 18 June 2021

⁴⁹ Bhalla N, & Mccool A, (2021, January 21), ‘Internet shutdown for Uganda election’, Business Day, <https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/world/africa/2021-01-21-internet-shutdown-for-uganda-election/> Accessed 18 June 2021

Despite these autocratically imposed restrictions, the digital revolution has transformed news reporting and consumption, widening information sources and media consumers' participation and interaction with content producers. The emergence of online newspapers such as the NewsHawks, ZimLive and NewZimbabwe.com, among others, have bridged the vacuum created, for example, by the bombing and eventual closure of physical entities like the DailyNews. There has also been an increase in citizen journalism and disaggregated social media campaigns that make it increasingly difficult for the government to control the national narrative as it once did. Digital platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have revolutionised and expanded spaces for free expression, helping combat media blackouts that governments could, previously, simply impose through partisan reportage and police or army blockades. Through social media, world attention was drawn to human rights violations in Zimbabwe in July 2020 through the #Zimbabweanlivesmatter campaign.⁵⁰ Civil society activists and citizen journalists have been instrumental in drawing attention to the atrocities in Mozambique's Cabo Del Gado⁵¹ and Ethiopia's Tigray.⁵² These may otherwise have, like Zimbabwe's early 1980s Gukurahundi Genocide⁵³, gone unreported and unknown in many parts of the world, hence autocratic governments' increasing surveillance and regulation of this virtual space while citizens explore subversive alternatives.

However, the digital revolution has also seen a rise in fake news and availed the space for bias and dissemination of hate speech. Although this has placed respect for the Fourth Estate in question, an Afrobarometer survey noted an increase of reliance on the internet and social media for news that places an obligation on producers to uphold professionalism and invest in fact-checking (See Figure 2). Media freedom is critical to the promotion of ethical independent journalism in Zimbabwe, where most entities, including some elements of the media itself, are captured. Therefore, local, regional and international multi-stakeholder partnerships are required to support the sustainability of a legitimately independent and professional media that serves the public interest.

Zimbabwean media practitioner Lenox Mhlanga noted that partnerships with the Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe (VMCZ)⁵⁴ can strengthen the ongoing important work that the body is already advancing in entrenching professional media self-regulation, media freedom, accountability and ethical journalism.

Sibusisiwe Ndlovu, journalist and executive director of Amakhosikazi/Women's Media for Development Foundation (WMDf), called for inclusive support that also promotes sustainability for women in journalism. She observed that although women constitute at least 60% enrolment in journalism schools, far fewer eventually go into the often harsh and woman-unfriendly newsrooms,⁵⁵ preferring alternative career paths like public relations.

Lastly, the speakers noted that repressive legislation is not the only challenge for the media in Zimbabwe, as some journalists fall prey to corruption by engaging in 'Khakhi envelope' journalism. Zimbabwean media scholar Lyton Ncube expands on this subject of corruption and illicit 'rewards' in the media in his analysis of the Asiagate scandal⁵⁶ where he notes that:

...due to the deteriorating socio-economic environment, some journalists were "seduced" by "brown envelopes" and "recruited" into a "patronage" corrupt network by match fixers. Consequently, "patronised" journalists became pliant tools in hands of match fixers and failed to "bark" at the malpractices masterminded by their "benefactors".⁵⁷

Sustainability in journalism must aim to counter journalists' corruptibility if independent journalists are to shun corruption and serve in the public interest.

50 'Zimbabwe has everything except good leaders' (2020, December 21), The Newshawks, <https://thenewshawks.com/zim-has-everything-except-good-leaders/> Accessed 27th June 2021

51 Matsine S.F., (2021) 'An overview of the conflict in Cabo Delgado: narratives, causes and strategies on the way forward', ACCORD, <https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/an-overview-of-the-conflict-in-cabo-delgado-narratives-causes-and-strategies-on-the-way-forward/> Accessed 27 June 2021

52 'Ethiopia's Tigray war: The short, medium and long story', (2021, June 21), British Broadcasting Corporation, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-54964378> Accessed 27 June 2021.

53 Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace & Legal Resources Foundation, (1997), <http://davidcoltart.com/wp-content/uploads/2006/10/breakingthesilence.pdf> Accessed 27 June 2021

54 VMCZ's mission is to promote a strong and ethical media with the ability to contribute to building a more democratic and just society within policy and legal environments that facilitate growth and development of independent, pluralistic, and free media.

55 Mpofo S., (2019, September 16), 'Zimbabwe media work space still a male domain', ZIMFACT, <https://zimfact.org/analysis-zimbabwe-media-work-space-still-a-male-domain/> 9 July 2021.

56 Marima T., (2018, July 29), 'Asiagate-Zimbabwe's match fixing scandal', Al Jazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2011/7/29/asiagate-zimbabwe-match-fixing-scandal>

57 Ncube L., (2017), 'Sports Journalists and Corruption in Zimbabwean Football: Reflections on the Asiagate Scandal', *Communicatio*, 43:3-4, 19-35.

Conclusion

Despite the 2013 Constitutional provisions and legislation ostensibly enacted and gazetted to enable media freedom, the media landscape under the Mnangagwa regime remains restrictive and incongruent with international best practises. In practice, every move has contradicted Mnangagwa's pronouncements, upon wresting power, that he would ensure greater media freedom.⁵⁸ The legal framework must now go beyond the current patchwork to a total overhaul, where the government exercises the necessary political will to liberalise the Zimbabwean media space. Dr Ibbo Mandaza, a Zimbabwean political analyst, substantiates this in his observation that media reforms are possible only in the context of the overall reform of the state in Zimbabwe.

The proposed Cyber Security and Data Protection Bill⁵⁹ points to this absence of overall reform, threatening the internet and social media-enabled expansion in platforms and avenues for free expression.

Zimbabwe's escalating governance crisis cannot be fully resolved without the government of Zimbabwe wilfully re-establishing media freedom. Realigning the legislative framework with the 2013 Constitution to ensure an independent ZMC; multi-stakeholder support for media sustainability; and promotion of women in journalism, among other significant measures, will be vital to ensure an independent and robust Zimbabwean media. Ongoing training and mentorship, particularly in investigative journalism, will go a long way towards promoting innovation and upholding ethical standards in the utilisation of online spaces to expose and fight corruption, as well as advancing the broader democratisation agenda.

⁵⁸ Nyamukore N, (2018, Dec 21), 'AIPPA, POSA on deathbed', The Herald, <https://www.herald.co.zw/aippa-posa-on-deathbed/> Accessed 23 June 2021.

⁵⁹ Data protection and Cyber Security Bill, 2019, http://veritaszim.net/sites/veritas_d/files/Cyber%20Security%20and%20Data%20Protection%20Bill.pdf Accessed 23 June 2021.

For further information contact our advisory team on info@gga.org

Contact us

Tel: 011 268 0479

Email: info@gga.org

Web: www.gga.org

