



FREEDOM OF THE PRESS 2010

Draft Report—Embargoed for April 29, 2010

Namibia

Status: Partly Free

Legal Environment: 9

Political Environment: 13

Economic Environment: 12

Total Score: 34

Survey Edition	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Total Score, Status	29,F	30,F	30,F	30,F	30,F

Status change explanation: Namibia declined from Free to Partly Free to reflect increased negative rhetoric towards the press and biased coverage in favor of the ruling party surrounding the elections.

- In 2009, press freedom in Namibia worsened as a result of growing government influence and pressure on the media. The ruling SWAPO party and government officials displayed increased intolerance of media criticism, with adverse consequences for press freedom, including the cancellation and subsequent restriction on popular call-in radio shows. In addition, coverage of November’s presidential and national elections on the national broadcaster was heavily biased toward the ruling party.
- The Namibian constitution guarantees freedom of speech and of the press, and the government generally respects these rights in practice. However, government pressure has led to some self-censorship.
- Through the Communication Act of 2009, the Communication Regulatory Authority of Namibia (CRAN) was established as a regulatory body for the communications sector, though the manner in which CRAN would regulate the media has not been specified. CRAN is tasked with “setting up a licensing framework for both telecommunications and broadcasting, determining interconnection tariffs, allocating radio and telecommunication frequencies, promoting competition in the telecommunications industry, and establishing telecommunications data interception centers,” according to the US Department of State.

- On a positive note, in August, the Editor’s Forum of Namibia created a media ombudsman position headed by Clement Daniels, a human rights lawyer. The ombudsman is to receive and settle complaints made by the public against the media.
- After leading members of the ruling party called for the censoring of chat and call-in radio programs on the national broadcaster (Namibian Broadcast Corporation, or NBC) due to alleged insults against current President Hifikepunye Pohamba and former president Sam Nujoma, NBC banned all the shows in March 2009. The shows were replaced by those with a far more restrictive format, limited to one-hour of airtime a day and featuring stricter pre-air screening of listener phone calls. The government continued to monitor the new program throughout the year.
- Similarly, SWAPO leaders urged the independent daily *The Namibian* to stop printing reader text messages that allegedly insulted party leaders. In October, Justice Minister Pendukeni Iivula-Ithana publicly labeled the paper’s Namibian editor, Gwen Lister, “a big snake.” According to the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), the minister warned that Lister would be held responsible for the wrongdoings of her white ancestors were she not more careful about the paper’s reporting on SWAPO leaders. Since 2001, the government has banned ministries and departments from advertising in the paper or purchasing it with state funds.
- In July 2009, the National Assembly adopted a controversial Information and Communication Bill; the bill must still undergo review by the National Council before becoming law. The bill allows for the interception of e-mails, short messaging services (SMS), Internet banking transactions, and telephone calls. Opposition parties and press freedom advocates argued that the bill did not include adequate oversight mechanisms to prevent abuse by government officials. The government countered that such mechanisms were included and that no “right” to interception was granted.
- There are currently four daily national newspapers, three of which are independent, and four weekly independent newspapers. There are at least 12 private radio stations, 2 community radio stations, and 1 private television station, One Africa TV. The SWAPO party owns 51% of Namibia’s only satellite television provider.
- In November 2009—ahead of presidential and national elections at the end of the month—the NBC cancelled its policy of allocating free airtime to political parties for election broadcasts (40 percent of the airtime had been allocated equally between contestant parties, with the other 60 percent allocated according to previous vote share). The airtime policy was cancelled after two opposition parties appealed for an equal airtime allocation before the High Court. Opposition parties and press freedom organizations accused the NBC of heavily pro-SWAPO coverage during the election campaign.
- A little over 5% of Namibians have access to internet. Though there are no official restrictions to accessing the internet, a bill passed in September allows intelligence services to monitor both emails and internet usage.