



FREEDOM OF THE PRESS 2010

Draft Report—Embargoed for April 29, 2010

Zimbabwe

Status: Not Free

Legal Environment: 27

Political Environment: 30

Economic Environment: 27

Total Score: 84

Survey Edition	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Total Score, Status	89,NF	90,NF	89,NF	89,NF	88,NF

Despite an environment of greater openness following the advent of a national-unity government in February, press freedom in Zimbabwe remained tightly restricted in 2009. Proposed reforms to liberalize the media sector after years of authoritarian abuse were stalled by elements from President Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF party still entrenched in the executive branch.

Despite 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) requires all journalists and media companies to register with the government-controlled Media and Information Commission (MIC) and gives the information minister sweeping powers to decide which publications can operate legally and who is able to work as a journalist. 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. While the AIPPA and POSA were amended in January 2008 (in advance of March elections), most restrictive aspects of the law remained in force. The Global Political Agreement (GPA) between ZANU-PF and two factions of the longtime opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) mandated the creation of a new, independent Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC) to replace the state-controlled MIC. By year's end, however, the ZMC had not been formed, preventing a number of publications—including the *Daily News*, Zimbabwe's only independent daily shuttered since 2003, and a new private daily

NewsDay—from receiving the requisite licenses to operate legally. In September 2009, however, a new state-run daily *H-Metro* was launched in Harare. In July 2009, a special government committee approved the granting of licenses for the *Daily News* and the *Daily News on Sunday* (both operated Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe), and in August parliament submitted to the presidency a short-list of 12 applicants to the ZMC. Both were pending at year's end. Importantly, a case brought by four journalists barred from covering a regional summit in Harare saw government lawyers concede that the MIC no longer has accreditation powers.

Though to a lesser extent than in previous years, authorities continued to exploit Zimbabwe's repressive laws to harass and punish journalists—relying less on AIPPA and POSA and more on the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act. In March, three journalists from the *Bulawayo Chronicle* were charged with criminal defamation and breaching the Criminal Law Act for an article exposing corruption at the state-run Grain Marketing Board. In June, a similar fate befell two journalists from the *Zimbabwe Independent* for a report criticizing law enforcement agencies that arrested and abused a group of opposition and civic activists in 2008, including Jestina Mukoko and photojournalist Shadreck Manyere. Journalists continued to face verbal intimidation, physical attacks, arrest and detention, interception of communications, and financial pressure at the hands of the police, government officials, and supporters of the ruling party. In May, Manyere was re-arrested and denied bail after being released from the high-security Chikarubi Prison in April. Manyere told the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) that he had been beaten, repeatedly blindfolded, and kept in iron shackles in prison.

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.

In general, foreign journalists are not allowed to reside full-time in the country and are regularly denied visas to file stories from Zimbabwe. 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. During the past several years, dozens of Zimbabwean journalists have fled the country, mostly to South Africa and the United Kingdom; according to a report by CPJ, Zimbabwe has one of the highest numbers of exiled journalists in the world. In January, the MIC (citing AIPPA) significantly raised the accreditation fees for local journalists working for foreign media outlets, those media outlets themselves, and foreign journalists. By contrast, in July the government lifted its ban on two major international news organizations, the BBC and CNN.

The government, through the Mass Media Trust holding company, controls the two main daily newspapers, the *Chronicle* and the *Herald*. Coverage in these papers consists of favorable portrayals of Mugabe and the ruling party and attacks on perceived critics of the regime. Several independent weeklies such as the *Standard* and the *Zimbabwe Independent* continue to publish, although many of their journalists practice extensive self-censorship. The *Zimbabwean* is produced in South Africa for the Zimbabwean market, and some foreign newspapers, most of them also from South Africa, are available. In general, newspapers have poor distribution networks outside urban areas, and they have been buffeted by soaring prices for newsprint and paper. In a

positive development, July saw the government eliminate its 40 percent “luxury” import tax on foreign newspaper. 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, corruption and cash incentives for coverage have become rampant.

The state-controlled ZBC runs all broadcast media, which are subject to overt political interference and censorship. Coverage during elections overwhelmingly favors ZANU-PF. In 2009, retired military and intelligence officers loyal to Mugabe were appointed to sit on the board of state-owned newspapers, the state-controlled Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (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. Broadcasting licenses have been consistently denied to independently owned radio stations, despite calls by a parliamentary committee for the broadcast sector to be opened up; in 2009, former MIC head (and Mugabe ally) Tafataona Mahoso was appointed chairman of the country’s broadcasting Authority, which is responsible for granting radio and television licenses. Access to broadcast media in rural 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, although the government has reached an agreement with China to help upgrade this infrastructure. Meanwhile, officials have used Chinese technology to jam the signals of the increasingly popular foreign-based radio stations that broadcast into Zimbabwe, including SW Radio Africa, a London-based station run by exiled Zimbabwean journalists; the Voice of America’s Studio 7 service; and the Voice of the People; such signal jamming was reduced in 2009. 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 cafes and service disruptions caused by frequent power outages. Nonetheless, Zimbabwe has a relatively high rate of internet access for Africa, at almost 12 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 oppositionists are regularly subject to such interceptions.