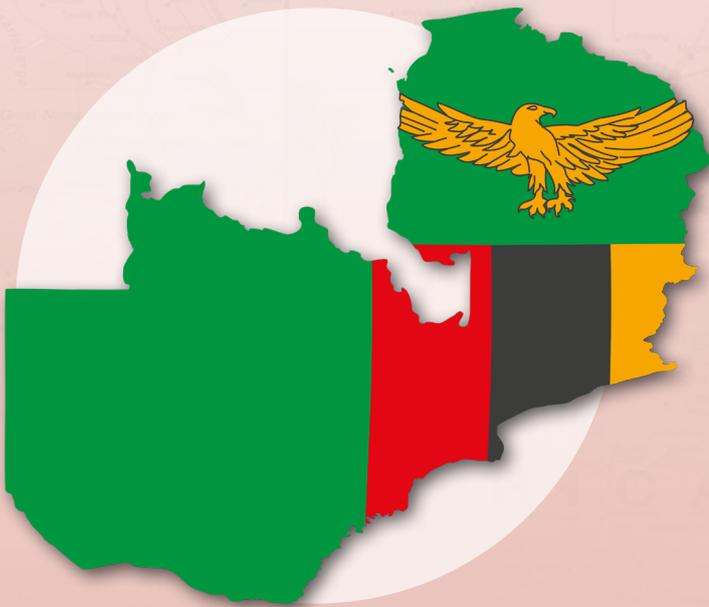




ZAMBIA 2021

The African Media Barometer (AMB) is an in-depth and comprehensive homegrown description and measurement system for national media environments in Sub-Saharan Africa.



Zambia's freedom of expression, media freedom and citizens' right to privacy have suffered heavy blows in the past few years. The government enacted a controversial digital security law, the Cyber Security and Cyber Crimes Act of 2021, which some saw as a means to control online spaces before elections. An informal police force (consisting primarily of unemployed youths) tyrannise citizens who do not toe the line or identify with the wishes of those with political influence. Zambia's flourishing media sector was brought to its knees by COVID-19.

POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS



The emergence of community radio and television stations has led to a rise in freedom of expression.



The emergence of social media platforms allows citizens to express themselves.



Moves towards self-regulation. Proposals are still being discussed and are not yet tabled in parliament.

NEGATIVE DEVELOPMENTS



Radio stations are invaded by political party cadres, especially those critical of the ruling party or in rural areas.



Covid-19 has impacted the financial sustainability of most media houses, which has affected media freedom.



The average journalist's salary is between ZMK1,000 and ZMK3,500. The living wage in Zambia is ZMK8,000 (US\$440) a month for a family of five.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE REPORT

- The government enacted a controversial digital security law, the Cyber Security and Cyber Crimes Act of 2021, ostensibly to promote the 'responsible use of social media platforms'. Some saw it as a means to control the online space before elections.
- An informal police force consisting mainly of desperate and unemployed youths tyrannise citizens who do not toe the line or identify with the wishes of those with political influence. The youths beat, verbally abuse and destroy media property as a form of intimidation and censorship of divergent voices. Cadres operate on both sides of the spectrum: ruling and opposition parties.
- Zambia, in general, and the media specifically, was not spared the wide-reaching impact of COVID-19. A flourishing media sector was brought to its knees; like elsewhere in the world, newsrooms shrunk, and print circulation dropped.
- On 9 April 2020, Zambia's broadcasting regulator, the Independent Broadcasting Authority, cancelled the broadcasting licence of Lusaka-based television station Prime TV. According to a statement by the authority, its decision was "in the interest of public safety, security, peace, welfare or good order". Panellists, however, believed that the decision was prompted by Prime TV's critical reporting of government, particularly on Bill 10. In 2019, the Zambian government introduced the Constitution of Zambia (Amendment) Bill No. 10 of 2019, otherwise known as Bill 10.
- A survey conducted by MISA Zambia established the average salary range of journalists as being between ZMK1,000 and ZMK3,500. As a comparison, the living wage in Zambia is ZMK8,000 (US\$440) a month for a family of five.
- The closure of Prime TV has created a 'culture of fear'. If a licence is revoked, is it legitimate to then invade the operations of the station? "It sends a cold shiver down the spine of many in the media, including public media. It was a huge blow to the country." When you need balanced information, you could watch both ZNBC news and Prime TV news to get a rich cocktail of information. Closing the station was inimitable to the public interest.
- There seems to be a need by the government to control the social media space. They control print and broadcasting but have struggled to stake a claim in the social media space. This informs the new Cyber Security and Cyber Crimes Acts. In the social media landscape, there is a polarisation of media houses on social media. The government's stated ambition is to control the social media space, especially Facebook. Efforts are being made to obliterate dissenting voices on social media.
- There is 'fatigue' on lobbying around the Access to Information legislation which started before 2002. Now things have also changed, and emerging issues need to be adopted. Cabinet has approved the bill, but it is unclear now where the bill is, and there has been inertia on the part of the government to have it enacted.
- Regional and continental co-operation and mobilisation need to be strengthened.

THE WAY FORWARD

Recommendations for over the next three/four years?

- Laws that infringe freedom of expression should be repealed, and alternatives developed using regional and international best practices. Regional and international instruments should be incorporated and domesticated into laws.
- Media owners should value the media product and profession of journalism. Advertising should be given its actual value with revised rates. This would lead to better salaries and will help alleviate political pressure and increase professional standards.
- A review of the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) Act so that the IBA becomes more autonomous, without the dominating power being given to the Minister. All media houses should be treated equally and fairly.
- Unions should operate in both the public and private media spheres.
- Media houses and media personalities should upgrade in terms of safety online.