

SOUTH AFRICA

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Year of Fellowship: 2010

1) What is the basic political system in your country (e.g. democratic, semi-authoritarian, authoritarian or other type of hybrid regime)?

Constitutional democracy

2) What are the main features of your media landscape? (private/public, print/broadcast/internet usage, ownership concentration, government control, etc.)

Television and radio are dominated by the public service broadcaster, SABC, which has three television channels and 18 radio stations, broadcasts in 13 languages and gets most of its revenue from advertising. There is one private free-to-air television station (eTV) and two pay-TV providers offering a wide range of local and international channels. There are a number of private and community radio stations.

Print media is entirely private, with four conglomerates dominating the industry: the giant Naspers/Media24 and three smaller companies – Independent News and Media, Avusa and Caxton. The Mail & Guardian is a smaller, stand-alone operation, and a new newspaper allied to the ruling party, called New Age, was due to be launched in 2010.

Internet usage is limited to about 9% of the population, though it is believed that there is significant and growing – but unmeasured – mobile cellphone internet usage.

Government influence over the SABC is contested and controversial, and it has proved to be close to the ruling party in recent years. Print media plays a strong watchdog role, but the government is investigating the introduction of a statutory media tribunal. The media is free, but threatened.

3) Where does your country come in the rankings of Freedom House (on freedom of the press) and Reporters Without Borders?

<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=251&year=2009>

<http://www.rsf.org/en-classement1003-2009.html>

Freedom House: 32 Free
RSF: 38

4) Would you broadly agree with their characterisation of your situation?

In relation to other African countries, it should be higher – probably the highest on the continent. While there are threats to media freedom, at the moment there is almost untrammelled freedom.

5) a) what are the main challenges facing the media in your country in the next five years (economic, political, technological etc)?

Political threats from an increasing media-hostile government.

Lack of diversity: many South Africans do not have voice since media is clustered in the middle of the political spectrum in a country with a divergent range of views.

b) what are the main limits on the practice of a free press in your country, based on your own practical experience of working there?

Political hostility.

Lack of implementation of the constitutional commitment to access to information.

Government influence over the public broadcaster, compromising its independence

6) What are the main roles that new media play in your country?

In a country with one, strong, dominant party and weak political opposition, the private media plays a strong watchdog role and acts as a restraint on the exercise and abuse of power.