United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development

REGIONAL OVERVIEW OF **AFRICA** 2017/2018

Published in 2018 by the United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization
7, place de Fontenoy, 7523 Paris 07 SP, France

ISBN: 978-92-3-100291-5

Title: *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: Regional Overview Africa 2017/2018*

This complete *World Trends Report* (and executive summary in six languages) can be found at
en.unesco.org/world-media-trends-2017

The complete study should be cited as follows: UNESCO. 2018. *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: 2017/2018 Global Report*, Paris

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Printed in UNESCO printshop, Paris, France.

This publication was supported by Sweden.

World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development

REGIONAL OVERVIEW 2017/2018

AFRICA

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Introduction

Introduction

This regional report discusses media trends regarding freedom, pluralism, independence and the safety of journalists in Member States in the UNESCO Africa region. It covers the years from the start of 2012 to the start of 2017, with the five year period referred to in these pages as 2012-2017. As a regional study, this is one of six subsections of the wider report, with the global analysis published separately as "World Trends on Freedom of Expression and Media Development 2017/2018", and which can be found at https://en.unesco.org/world-media-trends-2017.

All the reports follow the template of four trends: Media Freedom, Media Pluralism, Media Independence and the Safety of Journalism. The background to these reports, as well as the elaboration of these categories as essential components of press freedom, can be found in the global study cited above.

For more about UNESCO's mandate and role in promoting freedom of expression and media development, readers are encouraged to visit https://en.unesco.org/themes/fostering-freedom-expression and sign up to our weekly newsletter at: https://en.unesco.org/themes/fostering-freedom-expression/news.

Significant disparity exists across the region, where some states struggle to overcome protracted violent conflict, while others experience high rates of economic growth over a sustained period. The increases in internet connectivity and mobile phone access have had a positive impact on access to independent news and media pluralism. This expansion is set to continue as both companies and governments make investments to expand connectivity in line with the UN's 2020 goals to enable universal internet access. At the same time, there has been an increase in complete internet shutdowns on the part of governments. In some cases this has been justified as promoting national security or even preventing exam cheating among scholars. The effects of increasing access are uneven: as more citizens gain online access this is coupled with a rising trend of internet censorship. Additionally, as urban and wealthier communities are increasingly connected, major barriers still remain for rural communities, and internet access also mirrors economic inequalities.

Positive trends emerged in terms of improvements in media legislation and an increase in adoption of freedom of information laws, but the implementation of such laws remains inadequate, both in terms of government capacity and political will. A continued and increasing use of controversial cybercrime and anti-terrorism regulations had a negative effect on media independence and freedom. In many countries across the region, practicing journalism is dangerous; the killing of journalists has continued and increased, and imprisonment or harassment of journalists remains common. Women journalists continue to experience physical assault and sexual harassment, but are also increasingly subjected to online abuse.

Trends in Media Freedom

Overview

A great disparity of media freedom is reflected across the sub-Saharan African.. A small number of countries have both vibrant and diverse media outlets and governments that respect their right to report freely. Conversely, some countries are affected by persistent violence or highly restrictive regimes, which severely impedes journalistic freedom. The majority of countries in the region lie somewhere in the middle, in situations in which freedom of the press is enshrined in law but where its implementation is problematic or absent in practice.

Trends in media freedom in Africa include the following:

- Gradual improvements in the legal environment for media freedom have occurred in the region since 2014, with four countries decriminalizing defamation and seven countries adopting legal protections for freedom of information (FOI). Domestic advocacy groups, international pressure, and regional courts have all played an important role in this process;
- Despite the passage of FOI laws, a culture of secrecy still characterizes much of the region, inhibiting investigative reporting and media freedom;
- A number of laws pertaining to anti-terrorism and cybercrime have resulted in restrictions in media freedom, though civil society groups in various countries have successfully challenged these laws in court;
- Indirect censorship, particularly through the manipulation of the allocation of advertising, is on the rise, leading to self-censorship among even major news outlets. This trend is more pronounced in public media organizations in which management is appointed by the state;
- Advances in internet and mobile phone usage across the continent have seen increased access to online media, but also a rise in online censorship;
- Over the last few years, targeted internet and mobile services shutdowns have become far more common across the region. These practices have impacted negatively on internet freedom in some countries.

Limitations on media freedom

The national constitutions of all countries surveyed in the region contain guarantees of the right to freedom of expression. Sub-clauses or other pieces of legislation, however, often-stipulate limitations to freedom of expression based on concepts such as national security, public order, public morality, and increasingly, cyber-security and anti-terrorism. In the digital age, cyber-security and anti-terrorism issues are being strategically deployed by some African governments in ways which violate international standards for legitimate restrictions on freedom of expression and access to the internet.

The ratification of international treaties that guarantee freedom of expression as an indication of the commitments of governments to basic media freedom, as of 2014, is mixed. All countries in the region have ratified the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (1981). An additional country ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), meaning that only one country has yet to ratify this treaty. Both of these instruments serve to guarantee freedom of expression. The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, which was adopted by the AU in 2007 and seeks, among other things, to promote freedom of the press, has been signed by 36 of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa but only ratified by 10 so far; there were no new signatories or ratifications between 2012 and 2017.[1] Governmental unresponsiveness to the ratification of regional treaties generally remains, despite attempts by supra-national bodies to promote media and digital freedom.

The AU also frequently passes a number of softer non-legally binding instruments to serve as guidance for the region on issues pertaining to press freedom and other human rights. Since its adoption in 2002 by the ACHPR, the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa has continued to be a lobbying tool and a strong norm-setter even though it is not legally binding. Between 2012 and 2017, the ACHPR adopted a number of other principles and guidelines that pertain to media freedom, including the Guidelines on the Conditions of Arrest, Police Custody and Pre-Trial Detention in Africa[2] and the Principles and Guidelines on Human and Peoples' Rights while Countering Terrorism in Africa.[3] As in the past, domestic implementation of such treaties has often revealed inadequate efficacy. Many international observers speculate that some countries have adopted such international treaties due to international pressure, without the genuine will to implement similar policies domestically.[4] Without localization of international treaties, these pieces of legislation have no legal binding force.

DEFAMATION AND OTHER LEGAL RESTRICTIONS ON JOURNALISTS

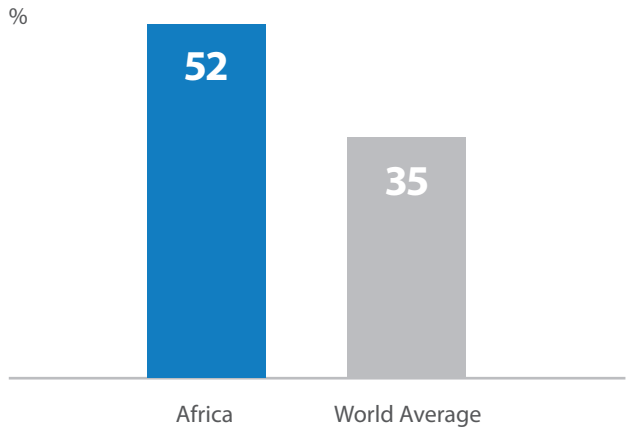
The general level of media freedom in Africa has not markedly improved nor deteriorated between 2012 and 2017, but the continent has reflected a persistently low level of overall press freedom.

Both direct and indirect forms of censorship occurred in many countries between 2012 and 2017. However, when online censorship is taken into account, overall censorship is revealed to have worsened. A survey of African journalists suggest that those sampled are not only significantly affected by censorship, but face this challenge more than other regions (see figure 1-1).[5]

[1] ACHPR 2018
[2] ACHPR 2014
[3] ACHPR 2016
[4] ISHR 2016
[5] worldsofjournalism.org 2016.

Recently censorship efforts have typically targeted reporting that contains criticism of public authorities, support for opposition politicians, exposes corruption, or which employs satire. In addition to physical intimidation and arrests (as discussed later), this has included forcibly closing broadcast outlets, suspending print outlets and blogs, and complete internet shutdowns.[6] Complete and often nationwide internet shutdowns have been a particular problem in the last few years as both the number of incidents and their durations have increased. In 2016 and 2017, Access Now recorded a total of 14 confirmed incidents of internet shutdown in 9 different Sub-Saharan African countries, lasting anywhere from a few days to a few months in duration. All but two affected internet access nationwide.[7]

Figure 1-1: Perceived influences: censorship



Source: Worlds of Journalism Study 2016

Censorship has also been implemented through the suspension of broadcasters and newspapers, as well as through the suspension of journalists and editors. Such suspensions are often exercised through official media regulators with the power to withhold or rescind media licenses and to apply sanctions or punishments for alleged transgressions of media ethics.[8] While the independence of these regulatory bodies is crucial for ensuring media freedom, many are seen to act as government censorship arms, which is addressed under independence in this study. This approach has increased in recent years as a number of governments attempt to avoid the international repercussions of extra-judicial intimidation. In most cases, media outlets are suspended after publishing reports critical of the government or other political elites based on vaguely worded defamation or libel laws.[9] Media outlets have been suspended under new anti-terror and cybercrime legislation, or for violating journalist ethics. Charges against journalists include participating in corruption and publishing inaccurate reports: in some cases, these charges are false.[10]

Governments' editorial control over public service broadcasters, often amounting to direct censorship, continues to bear a significant impact for media freedom in the region. While the trend in recent years towards greater privatization of media outlets is a notable improvement facilitating a reduction in direct censorship[11], it has not entirely eradicated government control over content. Instead of direct censorship, soft censorship is increasingly used, particularly through the withholding of advertising or subsidies from outlets critical of the authorities.[12] This has resulted in self-censorship in even some of the most prominent private news outlets in recent years.[13] In addition to government pressure, journalists' salaries are generally extremely low, making them also susceptible to self-censorship and capture as a result of corruption and bribery.[14] While such self-censorship poses a significant problem for media freedom it is more difficult to track than overt censorship. Nonetheless, there are many journalists and media outlets throughout the region who continue to broadcast and publish independent and often critical content in environments with hostile governments and in conflict zones.

[6] Cross and The Open University 2017.
[7] AccessNow 2017.
[8] Dos Santos and Maka Angola 2016.
[9] CPJ, 2017b; Freedom House 2017.
[10] CPJ 2017a.
[11] Myers 2014.
[12] WAN-IFRA and CIMA 2014.
[13] Namwaya 2016.
[14] Bemma 2014; Gade, Nduka, and Dastgeer 2017.

Controversial new cybercrime and anti-terror policies (see below) authorizing government surveillance contribute to citizen self-censorship both in public media as well as in private messaging communications platforms, pose a threat to information pluralism and freedom of expression. The regulation or censoring of hate speech by authorities often gains momentum during election periods. In some politically-charged contexts, the proliferation of hate speech on social media has generated discussions on whether it is both feasible and prudent to introduce regulation to prevent and combat hate speech (and if so, how and by whom).[15]

Between 2012 and 2017, regional courts began to play a more active role in pressuring countries in the region to decriminalize defamation. On two occasions, the Economic Community of Western African States (ECOWAS) Court of Justice, which has had jurisdiction over cases pertaining to human rights violations since 2005, set a precedent by ruling in favour of cases that challenged the criminalization of defamation.[16] And at the end of 2014, the African Court on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) ruled in favour of a journalist who had been the subject of censorship, excessive fines, and a lengthy imprisonment for defamation.[17] Following this legally binding decision, the country in question proceeded to amend its laws and pay the journalist compensation.[18]

Civil society and press freedom organizations across the continent have proactively used the law to lobby for changes to the penal codes in their respective countries, sometimes successfully. In total, between 2014 and 2017, four countries removed defamation from the penal code,[19] while in others, national courts resisted the decision, defending criminal defamation's place in their constitution.[20] However, even in countries where libel or defamation have been explicitly decriminalized, there are often other laws whose broad provisions allow governments to imprison journalists for a wide range of reasons. These include new laws like cybercrime or anti-terror laws, or existing legislation such as laws that criminalize incitement to violence or which are used to invoke charges of jeopardizing national security.

[15] Bowman and Bowman 2016; Gagliardone et al. 2016; Gagliardone, Gal, Alves, and Martinez 2015; Gustafsson 2016.
[16] Odinkalu 2015; OSI 2014.
[17] IPI 2014.
[18] Human Rights Watch 2014.
[19] Article 19 2017; Mhofu 2016.
[20] CPJ 2014.

INTERNET CURBS, CUT-OFFS AND CONTENT REMOVAL

Online news content was increasingly subject to government censorship between 2012 and 2017. In some countries where governments possess the technological capabilities or have authority over service providers, access to the internet or to mobile phone service was shut down completely.[17]Frequently, governments have issued orders for third party internet service providers (ISPs) and mobile phone companies to block sites, users, or particular kinds of content themselves.[18] Such orders usually target the dissemination of dissenting political views particularly during election periods.[19] Such orders are to date absolute; there has yet to be a single example of an internet service provider in sub-Saharan Africa refusing to comply although their transparency reports are bringing the pressures to light.[20] Some governments have stepped up arbitrary communications surveillance[21] and most have implemented mandatory SIM-card registration further enabling monitoring of citizens.[22]

Access to social media platforms, particularly Facebook and WhatsApp, has been increasingly restricted. In some instances, social media platforms have been blocked for more than a month[23], and one country in the region has set up its own domestic social media network[24], while another has proposed following suit, developments which may curtail critical foreign content.[25] The majority of instances when online media were targeted occurred around tense political periods such as elections and periods of protest.[26]

Third-party platforms are now playing an important role in influencing the state of media freedom in the region. Most social media platforms, like Facebook and Twitter for example, are based in North America and Europe and engage in their own non-transparent procedures for content moderation, removing content typically in keeping with the cultural norms of their base countries. Yet, like African-based telecommunications companies, they also acquiesce when African governments issue take down orders[27] and there is little space for redress for African content creators vis-a-vis these global technology companies.

[17] Article 19 2016c; Chen 2017.
[18] BBC 2016a.
[19] Cross and The Open University 2017.
[20] BBC 2016a.
[21] Parks and Mukherjee 2017.
[22] Donovan and Martin 2014.
[23] Al Jazeera 2017; RSF 2016.
[24] AllAfrica 2015.
[25] Itimu 2018.
[26] Cross and The Open University 2017.
[27] BusinessWorld 2017.

However, technological advances have also provided the media and citizens with additional means to circumvent government censorship tactics; many on the continent often employ virtual private networks (VPNs) to circumvent restrictions. Many bloggers in countries with strict controls also ensure that they host their sites on servers outside of their home country in an effort to circumvent government control.[28] Online content produced by individuals based abroad, most notably diaspora content, is used to circumvent censorship, as those abroad are not subject to the same intimidation tactics as their domestic counterparts.[29] The issue of foreign-based online content has also become an increasingly discussed topic among African governments in the last few years, and many have sought to restrict foreign content, like Netflix, for violating their cultural norms relating to issues such as blasphemy, homosexuality, and pornography.[30]

Across the region, internet access and service providers are governed by a combination of statutory and self-regulatory mechanisms. Statutory telecommunication regulatory authorities in some countries have been responsible for effecting internet shutdowns during protests and elections. Many Internet Service Providers are now acting as internet chokepoints by being compelled to implement restrictive Terms of Service and take down notices that impede the freedom of online media outlets to independently determine what content to provide to their audience.

NATIONAL SECURITY AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

The African Union (AU) has, on more than one occasion, tried to address concerns of terrorism on the continent and to outline mechanisms for appropriately countering "violent extremism", including, for example, the adoption of the Convention on the Prevention and Combatting of Terrorism in 2004. But anti-terrorism policies have, in many African countries, been used as an instrument for imprisoning journalists and censoring content.[31] In the wake of 11 September 2001, some countries in Africa introduced their own anti-terrorism laws with vague definitions of 'terrorism': for example, in one country terrorism is simply defined as a 'serious interference or disruption of any public service.' In recent years, some countries in the region have had to grapple with domestic terrorist threats and as a result have adopted new anti-terrorism laws or have begun implementing existing legislation more liberally.[32] Recently, these laws have been used to censor critical reporting and to jail journalists, including online journalists and bloggers.[33] Since the adoption of such laws some countries with independent judiciaries have been able to strike down particularly egregious provisions, such as those that prohibit the publication of pictures of terrorist attacks.[34] In at least one case, constitutional protections for media freedom were cited as the reason for ruling against the restrictive clauses.[35]

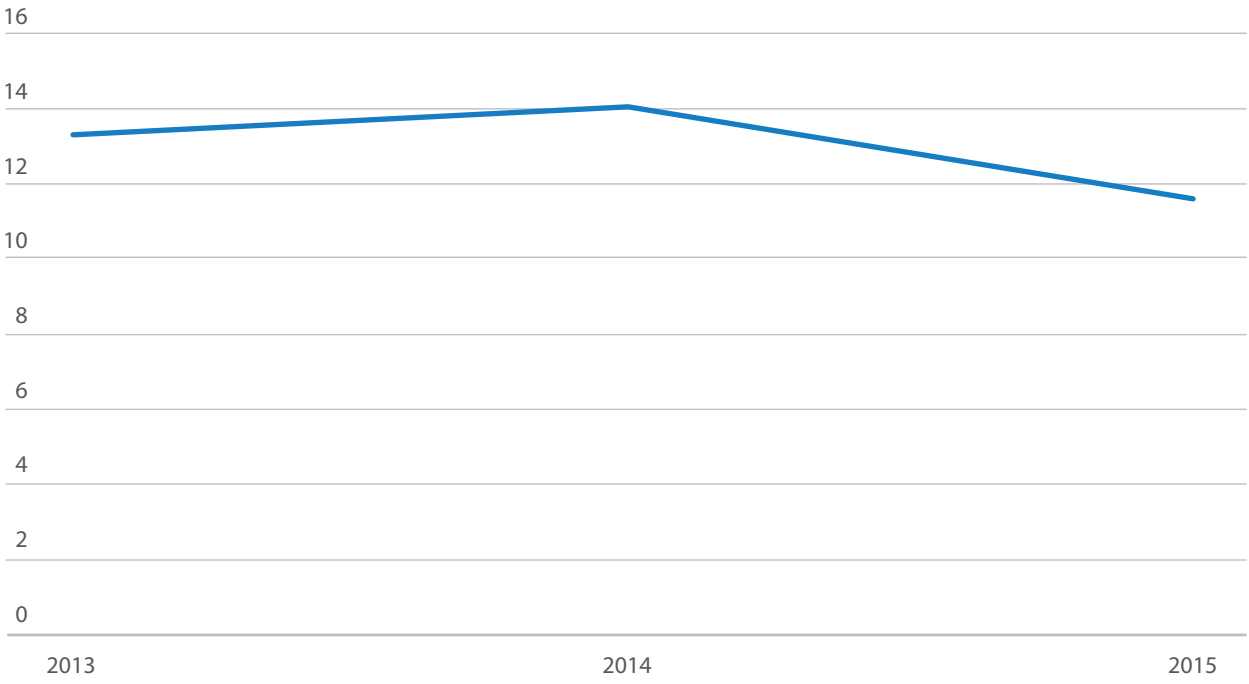
[28] Grinberg 2017.
[29] Gagliardone and Stremlau 2012; BBC 2016b
[30] Barnes and agencies 2016; Reid 2015.
[31] Matfess 2015.
[32] Johnson 2014; Obiukwu 2015.
[33] MLDI 2015.
[34] Keita 2015.
[35] Honan 2015

Access to information and privacy protections

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

In 2013, the ACHPR adopted the Model Law on Access to information intended to assist member states in realising their own protections for freedom of information.[40] Though not necessarily a causal factor, the adoption of the model law preceded a spate of domestic freedom of information laws being instituted within the region. While in 2014, there were 10 countries in the region with specific freedom of information (FOI) laws, since then, that number has significantly increased with seven new countries adopting FOI laws in the ensuing years, bringing the total to 17.[41] This trend is positive, but the adequate implementation of such laws remains regionaly problematic. For example, the Global Open Data Index Survey, analysing government open data practices and illustrated in Figure 1-2, shows an improved ranking for the Africa region from 2013 to 2014, but it is followed be a decline in 2015. The decline may be attributed to implementation difficulties, as a culture of secrecy lingers over many governments in the region and has proven difficult to change.

Figure 1-2: Open data index for Africa



Source: Global Open Data Index Survey

[40] ACHPR 2013.
[41] Africa Free Press 2018; freedominfo.org 2016.

Furthermore, public information continues to be arduous to access even in countries with new FOI laws due to weak protections for whistle blowers and journalists' sources. This is coupled with a number of out-dated official secrecy acts that remain in statute, all of which weakens the state of investigative journalism. Other factors such as a climate of fear amidst ongoing conflict and the threat of murder or imprisonment, limited financial and equipment resources, direct and indirect censorship regimes, the erosion of traditional advertisement revenue streams, and underinvestment in editorial departments by most African media organizations, additionally compound the state of investigative journalism. Some of the most repressive media environments on the continent have FOI laws, indicating that the presence of a FOI law does not necessarily mean that citizens and journalists will feel either empowered or safe to use it.

PRIVACY, SURVEILLANCE AND ENCRYPTION

Technological advances have also had an impact on access to information and protection of journalists' sources. In the last seven years, some governments on the continent where the internet was gaining popularity, launched open data portals to provide easier access to government data (e.g. Centre for Public Impact, 2016). However, while some technology ministries championed these portals, government agencies were often reluctant to contribute data and keep it up to date and most have lapsed into disuse.[42] A variety of factors have rendered open data portals obsolete. These include: a lack of content development capacity, reluctance on the part of authorities to broaden access to information, a lack of financial resources, and the pervasiveness of a culture of government secrecy.

Provisions pertaining to freedom of speech online have been an area where many sub-Saharan African countries have seen significant legislative turnover between 2012 and 2017. In 2014, the AU attempted to address the legislative framework for freedom in the virtual world and adopted the Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection, in a process that was open to and informed by online public discussion forums. The Convention was intended to address three areas where existing laws were insufficient: electronic transactions, personal data protection, and cyber security and cybercrime. While nine countries have so far signed it, only one has ratified it[43], and some observers are concerned about the vagueness of some of its provisions leaving it open to government 'misuse'[44] including exceptions that protect 'public interest'.[45] Over the last several years, some countries have passed, or are discussing, their own data protection, cybercrime, and cyber security bills. Some of these make advances towards protecting freedom of speech online.[46] Best practices include: the introduction of data protection authorities, user notification requirements, and reasonable data retention periods. But the majority contain provisions which could be used to curtail media freedom with severe punishments, including imprisonment for vague transgressions such as 'misuse of licensed telecommunications equipment'[47] or for defamation online.[48] In the few countries where such bills have been passed into laws, they have been vocally, and at times in the last few years successfully, fought in the courts, for their violation of constitutional protections of media freedom.

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[42] A Brown 2013.
[43] African Union 2017b.
[44] Jackson 2015.
[45] Segal 2015.
[46] Terebey 2016.
[47] Freedom House 2016d.
[48] Article 19 2016a; CIPESA 2016; RSF 2016a.

PROTECTION OF CONFIDENTIAL SOURCES AND WHISTLE-BLOWING

In 2002 the ACHPR adopted the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa, which included provisions for the protection of the confidentiality of journalists' sources.[49] It also recommends secrecy laws be repealed but is non-binding for the organization's member states. However, in 2003 the AU adopted the Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption,[50] which is binding and requires member countries to take legislative measures to protect whistle-blowers. Two new countries, Botswana and Chad, ratified this convention during the reporting period, bringing the total number of Sub-Saharan countries that have ratified it to 34.[51] Domestic courts have also sometimes played a central role in combatting government secrecy and protecting whistle-blowers. For example, in one country the High Court ordered that cases pertaining to whistle-blowers be open to the public,[52] and in another country the High Court struck down an official secrets provision that criminalized reporting on Cabinet meetings.[53] In general, Official Secrets Acts, typically colonial-era laws, make it difficult for public servants to speak to the media. Some of the new cybersecurity bills mentioned above also raise concerns about the protection of journalists' data and sources when they include provisions giving governments the right to intercept all online communication in the interest of national security.[54] In addition, some governments on the continent now have the will and the means toconduct surveillance of journalists, greatly restricting media freedom and jeopardizing source confidentiality.[55]

The rights for journalists and sources are safeguarded by national constitutional provisions and continental binding agreements in most African countries. However, there are cases over the last few years where journalists were harassed, intimidated and threatened for publishing certain issues in some African countries despite these constitutional provisions. Another trend has been the arraigning of news sources before courts of law for whistle-blowing. Despite the existence of laws which protect whistle-blowers, research shows that news sources are being harassed for leaking information[56]. Most countries in the region have no laws protecting whistle-blowers.[57] Even with codification of access to information laws in many sub-Saharan African countries, media practitioners are still being brought before courts of law, harassed, intimidated and arrested for carrying out their duties.[58] In some instances, journalists have been forced to divulge their sources despite legal provisions protecting them from doing so.[59]

Internet governance and media freedom

There have been a few innovative multi-stakeholder mechanisms for internet governance in sub-Saharan Africa in recent years that help to inform and enhance the independence of internet governance policymaking. The most notable example of these is the Kenya ICT Action Network (KICTANet), a multi-stakeholder platform arount ICT policy connecting government officials and the public. There are also domestic and regional Intenet Governance Forums (IGFs) in most African countries: collaborative efforts between public, private and civil society organisation. Africa has had a continent-wide IGF since 2012 and sub-regional forums in East, Central, Southern, and West Africa for at least as long. But over the reporting period there has been a notable increase in the number of national-level IGFs, rising from five in 2013 to 18 in 2017, with five new forums being added in 2017 alone.[60] However, political and economic interference tends to impact negatively on the independence of these forums, and their ability to influence policy is reliant on genuine participation from government officials.[61]

[49] ACHPR 2002.
[50] African Union 2003.
[51] African Union 2017a.
[52] MLDI 2014.
[53] Mhofu 2016.
[54] Article 19 2016b, 19.
[55] Grinberg 2017; Horne and Wong 2015.
[56] RSF 2016.
[57] PPLAAF 2016a, 2016b.
[58] RSF 2016; CPJ 2016.
[59] Chama 2017.
[60] Internet Governance Forum 2018.
[61] Munyua 2016.

Gender equality and media freedom

Across Africa, women's experience of media freedom varies from country to country. In a few countries female journalists outnumber male journalists. However women are routinely proportionally under-represented.[62] Such discrepancies are often related to the lack of progressive legislation. All but one country in Sub-Saharan Africa has signed the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women, with one new signatory since 2013.[63] This Protocol prohibits gender discrimination and mandates the elimination of gender-based stereotypes that "perpetuate such discrimination" in the media.[64]

Nonetheless, several structural impediments remain which continue to mitigate women's enjoyment of media freedom. Women make up the majority of the population in Africa, yet are far less cited as news sources than men. Gender ceilings also make it difficult for talented female journalists to experience career advancement, while the most prominent editorial positions are still the preserve of men. In the last 5 years, a number of interventions such as the Women In News Initiative (WIN)[65], an editorial leadership programme, have trained hundreds of female journalists in Africa. The WIN aims to close the gender gap in the newsroom by helping women with strong leadership skills for the news industry to reach the top positions in news media houses.

Yet, because of patriarchal and religious backlash, some female journalists continue to be subjected to discrimination and threats when exercising their freedom of expression as news sources, news producers, and citizen journalists in some African countries. For example, in 1 country, female journalists reported much lower levels of job satisfaction "mainly due to 'unfair' treatment by management",[66] than their male counterparts. As a result, some women resort to pursuing alternative careers in public relations, or in information and marketing departments. Additionally, female journalists are still often assigned to 'softer' beats like feature writing, copy editing, and writing press releases, while male journalists are assigned the 'harder' beats like hard news, investigative journalism, and interviewing prominent newsmakers.

[62] Byerly 2011.
[63] African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights 2003.
[64] African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights 2003.
[65] Women in the News
[66] A Somali Women Journalists 2017.

This practice of assigning female journalists to less prominent journalistic work continues despite the promulgation of gender sensitive newsroom policies. Through the work of organisations like GenderLinks, International Media Support and WAN-IFRA, several media organisations have formulated gender and sexual harassment policies, but implementation and the prosecution of alleged perpetrators remains a challenge. More than 100 media houses in the Southern Africa region have committed to mainstreaming gender in their institutions, but conversely, several thousand other media institutions have not heeded the call for inclusion and full participation by all of society.[67] Systems of redress are lacking, and most cases of harassment allegations are dismissed or ignored by media managers. Politically and economically connected individuals are often shielded from prosecution despite evidence against them. Because of these unfair practices, the harassment of women continues with impunity in most African media organisations.

The growth of alternative news dissemination platforms like blogs and social media platforms has opened spaces for women to more freely express themselves; there are now a number of blogs, like Her Zimbabwe and Tech Women, provide a platform for women. While mainstream media outlets often take ques from online content, this has additionally diversified the content on mainstream media platforms. Nonetheless, the online harassment and trolling of women bloggers and citizen journalists has forced some to conceal their gender identity. The use of pseudonyms and other identity masking tactics have become a common way of ensuring the safer participation of women in highly masculinised online spaces. Like their male counterparts, women journalists in Africa also face challenges related to self-censorship, especially those working in environments characterised by legal repression, conflict and systematic intimidation. The chilling effect associated with the introduction of internet shutdowns, cybercrime bills and other internet related pieces of legislation has also created an unfavourable working environment for female bloggers and citizen journalists across the continent.

[67] GenderLinks 2015.

Trends in Media Pluralism

Overview

In the five years up tp 2012, the most visible trend within the sub-Sahara African region for media pluralism was the exponential growth in mobile telephone penetration and mobile internet access. In 2017, the dominant trends largely follow from the complicated and often uneven effects of this growth.

Trends in media pluralism in the African region include the following:

- The economic state of journalism on the continent has undergone a number of changes in recent years that have affected media pluralism, including media privatization, digitalisation, and concentration, as well the proliferation of internet-based media content.
- The trend seen in UNESCO's 2014 report towards the privatization of the media and the lessening, to some extent, of state dominance over media content, has continued and potentially bodes well for the future plurality of content available. Yet, even in countries where media privatization is widespread, governments continue to exert pressure on private media outlets through their control of advertising markets and licensing procedures.
- A widening divide is evident between the plurality of content available to citizens in affluent neighbourhoods or urban centres, and those in more remote rural populations. Illiteracy, poverty, infrastructure limitations, and other socioeconomic and political disparities shape both the quantity and quality of access, leading to widely varied experiences regarding the consumption of diverse media content.
- Urban and more affluent populations, whose online media access is on par with global standards, are becoming more active in media content production, particularly on platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp.
- There is an increase in the dissemination of diverse perspectives online that differ from those presented in traditional media outlets or that may have been more easily censored, particularly through the popularity of blogging, social media, and diaspora media content.
- The proliferation of internet-based newspapers, television, radio stations, and alternative online news sources has led to the shake-up of existing traditional media business models in some African countries. In some cases, this has led to the closure or shrinking of traditional media outlets; in others, traditional media outlets have been able to resist or adapt to the pressures from the internet, frequently forming hybrid online and off-line media outlets.

While technological advance enhanced media engagement for more affluent citizens, it has not had the same effect on the rural poor. Crucially, the cost of data leaves the majority of poorer citizens with little to no internet access.[68] Furthermore, the vast majority of online content is written in historically colonial languages like English and French, with less written in dominant local languages like Kiswahili and Yoruba, and even less written in other local languages. As a result, the majority of sub-Saharan Africans' media choices are limited. Radio remains the principal medium in poorer rural areas. Similarly, in rural communities, the underfunding, collapse, and political ownership of community radio and newspapers has curtailed the pluralism of available content.

In keeping with broader global trends, Africa has undergone the digitalisation of television and radio communication platforms. Although most countries on the continent missed the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) 2015 deadline for the digital switchover in terrestrial television transmission, most commercial and community radio and television stations have acquired digital production equipment. However, some state and public-owned television and radio stations still lag behind in this area.

Trends in media content in Africa have been mixed. On one hand, there is a trend towards increased concentration in the media industry, with larger conglomerates owning content across newspaper, radio and television industries, and, though to a lesser extent, across borders. This poses a threat to the diversity of media content available. A decline in investigative reporting and the hiring of more senior and expensive journalists, both deemed too costly for struggling media companies,[69] further threatens the quality of media content. And the mainstream media in Africa continues to under-report and under-represent minority groups, including women, children, older people, and people living with disabilities. Conversely, the expansion of the availability of digital content and the means of its production has led to gradual improvements in the diversity of content available, although non-journalistic and indeed unverified content represents the lion's share.

Access

INTERNET AND MOBILE

As of 2017, there were 420 million unique mobile subscribers in Africa[70], with 15 million new subscribers in 2016[71] and 14 million in 2017.[72] Across the continent, an average of 25% of people had access to the internet in 2016.[73] This steady increase over the last few years can be seen in Figure 2-1 below. Several key factors have contributed to this increase, including telecoms deregulation in many countries; the enabling of private sector involvement in the construction of information communication technology (ICT) infrastructure; the licensing of 'private' mobile service operators[74]; the construction of undersea fibre cables; and the expansion of terrestrial broadband.[75] Fibre optic internet is now widely available in most major cities and towns. By contrast, in rural areas, internet penetration continues to be severely limited due to factors such as the underdeveloped state of telecommunication infrastructure, high levels of poverty and unemployment, and low levels of digital literacy.[76] Divisions between the quantity and quality of internet access largely parallel socio-economic disparities according to income, gender, geography, race and ethnicity. Internet users in poor communities adopt a 'dip and sip' usage pattern for the internet, rather than browsing freely, due to the constraints of their pre-pay plans.[77]

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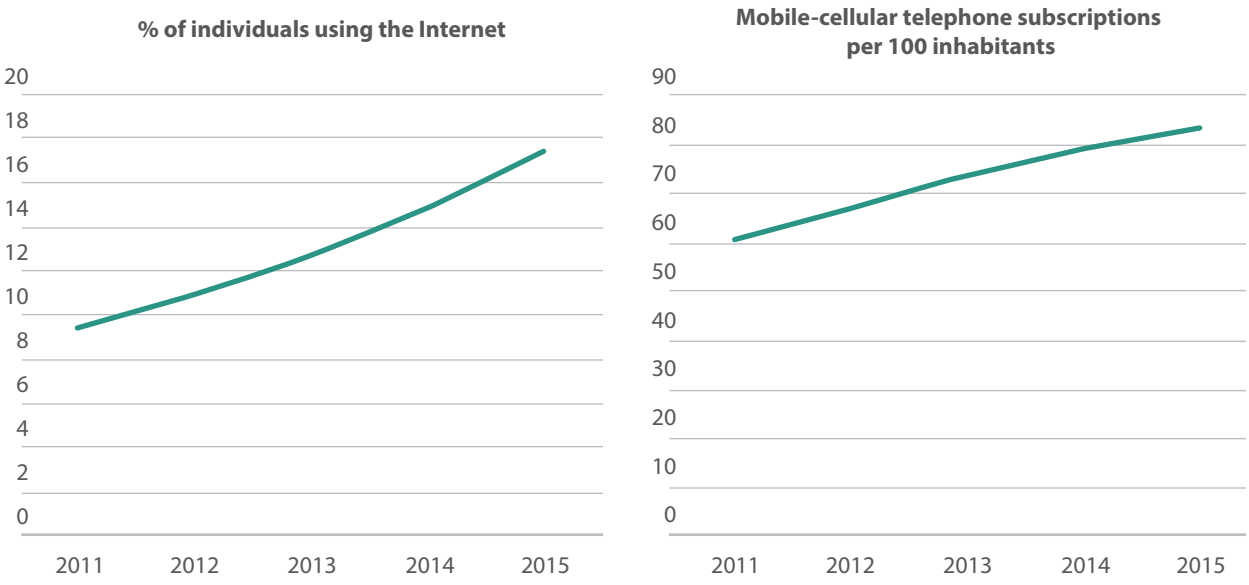
[68] ITU 2016.
[69] IREX 2012; African Media Barometer 2016.
[70] GSMA 2017.
[71] Erisson 2016.
[72] Erisson 2017.
[73] ITU 2017.
[74] GSMA 2016.
[75] Research ICT Africa 2016; Association of Progressive Communication 2016; CIPESA 2016.
[76] GSMA 2017.
[77] Donner 2014.

Figure 2-1: Percentage of individuals using the Internet and cellular telephone subscription per 100 inhabitants



Source: ICT database

At the end of 2016, sub-Saharan Africa had a mobile phone penetration rate of 43%, a rate that is growing faster than any other region, and reaching even rural villages. Most internet access on the continent takes place via mobile devices and social media platforms. In most countries, SIM card penetration rates have surpassed the national population total, which can be partly due to dual SIM card ownership and attempts by ordinary people to take advantage of promotions by mobile service providers[78], though it is difficult to confirm due to the lack of disaggregated user data about the identity of mobile subscribers in the region. However, there are a reported 731 million active SIM cards in all of sub-Saharan Africa representing in theory 74% of the total population.[79] Urban residents in most countries have access to cheaper smartphone phones from Asia, though most people still rely on more affordable feature phones.

As part of mobile internet data bundles, some mobile network operators in Africa sell packages with subsidised or 'zero rated' access to social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Twitter, and Facebook. In Southern Africa, foreign internet intermediaries have launched ambitious projects to roll out public Wi-Fi hotspots.[80] And in a number of countries throughout the region, Facebook has also experimented with a simpler version of its platform allowing access on lower bandwidth. These initiatives typically target those in the poorest communities who cannot afford, or for other reasons access, a more unrestricted internet. Although these initiatives are aimed at addressing the digital divide, they also potentially violate net neutrality norms and principles, and enable a foreign company to influence the degree of plurality of content made available to the poorest users in the region.[81] Unlike some countries in Europe, South and North America that have passed net neutrality rules, almost all African countries have yet to do so. Furthermore, no African country has rejected zero-rated services. The issue poses an ethical dilemma for media pluralism: while Facebook is the self-interrested gatekeeper controlling the outlets users have access to, its services also provide internet access to many who would not be able to afford internet access otherwise.

[78] Bresson and Bisson 2011.
[79] GSMA 2017.
[80] Kelly 2015; Nti-Osei 2016; Tshabalala 2015.
[81] Marsden 2016.

Unlike previous generations, sub-Saharan African urban youths are now mostly accessing news and information from online sources.[82] By contrast, rural youths continue to rely extensively on radio stations although the situation is changing with the mass adoption of mobile and social media internet. Overall however, and despite technological advancements, traditional media platforms continue to be the primary sources of news content.

Government censorship also severely restricts access to media content. While mobile and online content can help to circumvent censorship of the mainstream media, some governments have begun blocking the internet and social media platforms during periods of elections or protests, frequently citing concerns over national security, as addressed earlier in this study[83] .

BROADCAST MEDIA

Television remains very popular across the continent with several hundred stations, including some community stations, catering to a limited number of rural and poorer communities. Urban populations have historically had the most extensive access to television programming while access for their rural counterparts has tended to be limited due to the high costs of television sets, lack of electricity, and weak coverage. This is improving in some areas due to the implementation of rural electrification programmes, the uptake of solar power in rural Africa, and the adoption of pay-as-you go access to power.[84] However, the cost of data continues to be a barrier to access for streaming or on-demand television content.

Over the last decade, sub-Saharan Africa has seen a boom in broadcast television accompanied by a shift away from state monopolies to market-based media systems. This has been spurred on by the deregulation of media ownership, economic growth, technological advancements, donor aid, and other socio-political factors.[85] Even so, state-owned broadcasting stations for television and radio continue to dominate the landscape in terms of number of outlets and audience reach in some countries,[86] and governments often maintain editorial control over their content.[87] A continuing lack of progress in support for truly independent public service broadcasters generally persists. Nonetheless, the majority of African countries allow the operation of independent media, especially commercial television.[88] In some countries, private television has begun to dominate the media market rendering public service or state broadcasting increasingly less dominant.

Technical innovations have ushered in both the growth of satellite-enabled broadcast communication platforms and the convergence of traditional broadcasting with telecommunications.[89] Satellite technology as well as the advent of the internet, have resulted in new possibilities for freedom of expression, and lower prices for hardware have made entry into the broadcast media world significantly more affordable.[90] Lower barriers to entry into the broadcast media were followed by a huge demand for television licences.[91] Television ownership and viewership figures have significantly increased. In the last four years there has also been a significant trend in the emergence of internet-based pay-per-view television stations, such as Kwesé TV, which focuses on premium content and entertainment. This company was launched in 2016 and is currently accessible in various forms in more than a dozen countries.[92] There are also a variety of other internet television stations mostly based in the diaspora that broadcast into the region.[93]

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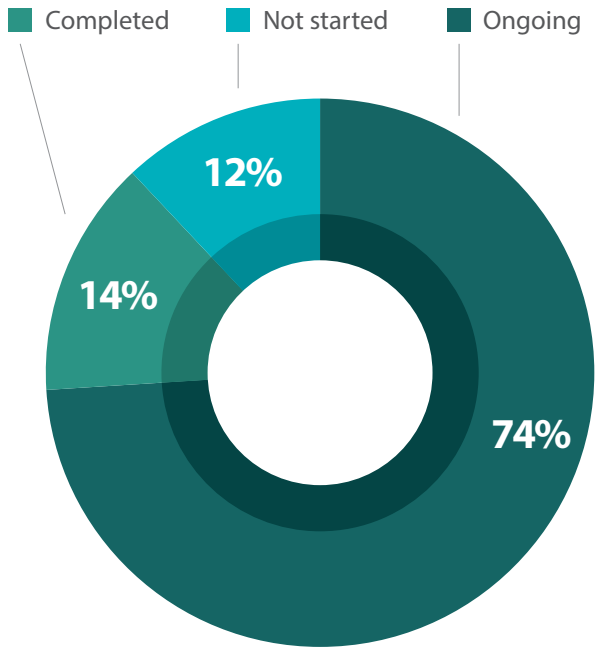
[82] Malila et al 2013; Malila Oelofsen 2016.
[83] CIPESA 2016; Willems 2016.
[84] Barrett, Christiaensen, Sheahan, and Shimeles 2017; Ouma, Ondraczek, Ronoh, Batte, and Da Silva 2015.
[85] Myers 2014.
[86] African Free Press 2016.
[87] Ciaglia 2015.
[88] Willems and Mano 2016.
[89] Ndlela 2010.
[90] Myers 2014.
[91] ITU News 2015.
[92] Kwese 2018.
[93] BBC 2016b; EnovativeTV 2018.

Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) migration allows for new TV channels to be carried, but only 14 per cent of African countries met the June 2015 ITU deadline, while 74 per cent are still designated as 'on-going' in their efforts to transition from analogue to DTT as shown in Figure 2-2 below.[94]

Despite its potential to increase the numbers of broadcast companies on the airwaves, the digital switchover has in some cases reinforced concentration of ownership of media channels, rather than promoting a pluralism of actors[95] with some countries experiencing only an increase in channels from the same broadcasters.[96] This is in part because larger outlets are better able to acquire new licenses and because in many countries the equipment necessary to broadcast digital television after the switchover is expensive or difficult to acquire.[97] At the same time, costs associated with accessing digital content can be prohibitively expensive for consumers, largely owing to the often expensive digital set top boxes required by viewers to access digital television broadcasting.[98] Whilst some governments in Africa have committed to subsidising the price of digital set top boxes, very few have fulfilled their promises.[99] Furthermore, DTT, whilst allowing for the freeing up of most broadcast platforms and licences, often leads to the overemphasis on commercial content at the expense of public service content.

Figure 2-2: Share of Digital Terrestrial Television Switch over in Africa



Source: ITU

There are now more than 2,000 private and community radio stations in sub-Saharan Africa, making radio the most abundant medium on the continent.[100] Yet, the airwaves continue to be a contested terrain with an ever-growing reluctance to open up to alternative voices and players. Community and vernacular radio is particularly important for the plurality of media accessible to historically disenfranchised groups such as linguistic minorities, marginal geographic areas, and older listeners.

As in other regions, mobile phones have spawned the growth of FM and digital radio in sub-Saharan Africa. New media technologies have been incorporated by many radio stations in the region to improve their newsgathering, interaction with audiences, and distribution.[101] Mobile phones not only act as receivers of FM radio signals but also as avenues through which listeners download radio applications.[102]

Some FM radio stations have joined the satellite broadcasting 'bandwagon' in order to tap into transnational audiences. There are thousands of radio stations on satellite television broadcasting across the region. However, digital and satellite radio cater predominantly for urban and middle class audiences. African radio stations are also broadcasting through the internet reaching urban audiences throughout the region and beyond.

[94] ITU 2015.
[95] Berger 2011.
[96] MISA 2016.
[97] Wanjau, Kitisha, Mwangi, and Ndung'u 2016.
[98] Rukanda and Buckley, 2016; Wanjau et al. 2016.
[99] Ndonye, Khaemba, and Bartoo 2015; New24Wire 2016; Omale, Ekhaerafo, and Essien 2016.
[100] Myers 2014.
[101] Ogola 2014; Avle 2017; Frere 2017.
[102] Vokes and Pype 2018.

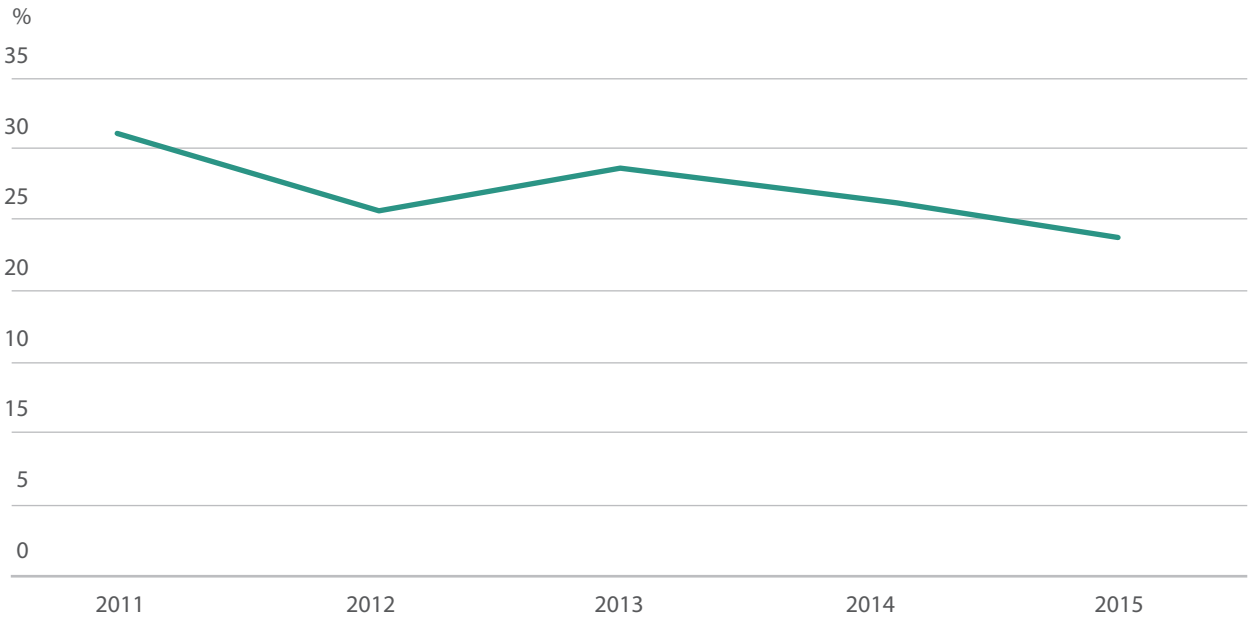
Improvements in ICTs also mean that significant radio content is now produced and distributed through multiple platforms, including the mobile phone, websites and customised applications. This kind of media convergence has had a discernible impact on news production processes and has also allowed diasporic radio content to compete with radio broadcasts produced by traditional broadcasters in some countries. There is, however, often significant overlap in terms of radio content across stations in a particular country including content such as current affairs, news and Western music, which diminishes content diversity. International broadcasting content has long been available, through broadcasters such as BBC radio, Voice of America (VOA) and Radio France International, and more recently China's CCTV Africa, but in recent years there has been an increase in the spread of popularity of local African broadcasters regionally, as in the case of RTI from Côte d'Ivoire.

NEWSPAPER INDUSTRY

In recent history, print media outlets have played an agenda-setting role in many sub-Saharan African countries, often catering to elite urban publics with the power to influence politics. Figure 2-3 below shows recent trends in adult readership for the print media. While a significant percentage of African adults are consuming print media, there was a slight declining trend in readership in 2014 and 2015. Declines have been particularly pronounced in Eastern and Western parts of Africa.[103]

By contrast, circulation and readership for tabloid newspapers in Southern Africa are on the rise, though such outlets do not necessarily represent a diversity of content.[104] In fact, they often rely on 'churnalism', or recycling content culled from mainstream newspapers, radio and television, thereby also jeopardizing the sustainability of media doing investigative journalism and hard news coverage.[105]

Figure 2-3: Newspaper reach, readership and media consumption



Source: World Press Trends database

[103] Article 19 2015.
[104] Wasserman 2010; Mare 2016.
[105] Wasserman and Mbatha 2017.

Mainstream print news outlets in Africa have gradually embraced the digital media over the last few years, making use of mobile phones, Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp to disseminate content.[106] And because of the growing affordability of smartphones and data, most newspapers and magazines in Africa are breaking news on their websites before posting news snippets on their Twitter and Facebook pages. There has also been a rise in the last few years in online-only news sites like the Daily Maverick, Huffington Post South Africa, New Zimbabwe.com and Pindula.com.

Economic models

PLURALISM AND MEDIA OWNERSHIP

Despite the pluralism-threatening trend in media ownership concentration across the continent, most African countries have historically lacked anti-trust laws or cross-media ownership policies that limit the number and type of media outlets that one company can own in a local market. By 2017, however, a number of countries have begun to introduce such laws, though the efficacy of implementation remains to be seen.[107]

The trend seen in 2014 towards the privatization of the media and the lessening, to some extent, of state dominance over media content, has continued in the last few years. This has had a mixed impact on media pluralism, offering greater diversity of perspectives in some countries, while leading to concentration of media ownership, along horizontal, vertical, and even cross-media lines, in others. The effects of this concentration are being felt across the entire media value chain, publishing, printing, distribution, circulation, research and advertising[108], with cases of anti-competitive behaviour being reported throughout the region. In Eastern and Southern Africa, the larger private media companies often operate as monopolies,[109] representing the interests of the middle class and the wealthy, while giving insufficient representation to the interests of the poor. Growing concentration of ownership therefore work against diversity of content or of audiences and their interests. Struggling business models and ownership concentration have been argued to be the two most significant challenges to media pluralism in Africa, ahead of even violence against journalists, abuse of libel laws and government censorship.[110]

There are efforts in some sub-Saharan African countries to remove barriers to entry in the media sector. In most parts of the continent, governments and international donors have been at the forefront of providing incentives for content producers. For example, international donors have set up and financed technology hubs for content producers and app developers across the region.[111] In some countries, governments have used universal funds[112] to support young media technology entrepreneurs. In Southern Africa, some governments have built multimedia studios and acquired digital cameras and booths to provide for content developers, including the digital equipment necessary to produce content after the digital television switchover. In other parts of the region, such support is unavailable and fledgling content developers must rely on their own savings and/or fundraising.

[106] Jordaan 2013; Wamunyu 2017.
[107] Clifford Chance 2017.
[108] Ogola 2015.
[109] Myers 2014.
[110] Wasserman and Benequista 2017.
[111] Bright 2016.
[112] This refers to the taxes which are collected from telecommunication companies. This income is put into a universal fund for the purposes of infrastructure development, supporting applications development and start-ups in some African countries.

ADVERTISING AND FINANCIAL PRESSURES

High taxes on newsprint and broadcasting equipment as well as a poor distribution infrastructure especially to rural areas, constitute limits on owning and operating a media outlet. In many countries, governments have long monopolized the best distribution equipment, such as radio transmitters.

In most sub-Saharan African countries, advertising markets are small and insufficient to counter political influence over media content. Many advertising sources are either foreign NGOs or come from within the government itself, addressed leter in this study. This applies equally to online media content where online advertising as a percentage of total advertising spend is in the single digits in most sub-Saharan African countries.[113]

As in other regions, technological advances also threaten the viability of traditional media business models. Research in Southern and Eastern Africa indicates that print media organizations have resorted to retrenching editorial staff in order to remain financially viable.[114] Some countries have also witnessed the emergence of 'entrepreneurial journalists' (news gatherers, content aggregators and "content vultures") who are taking advantage of new media technologies to produce and distribute their own content. In some countries, social media platforms, especially Twitter and WhatsApp,[115] have even assumed the role of primary sources of breaking news while the mainstream media have been relegated to channels of commentary and detailed analysis, particularly with regard to political news.

NEW PLATFORMS AND BUSINESS MODELS

Similar to other regions, content creators and aggregators in sub-Saharan Africa are experimenting with business models such as 'clickbait' headlines and charging advertising clients for creating content tailored to a client's customer base. Most digital journalism in the region also deploys "native advertising", making paid advertising more difficult to discern from authentic content. New business models built around digital advertising, branded content, social media consulting and sponsorships are also emerging in most parts of the region.[116] For digital editions of print media outlets, advertising is the main source of revenue. Google Ads/ AdWords are major players in the online advertising sector and a 'middle-man' for most online news services. In Southern Africa, newspapers like the *Mail and Guardian Online* have introduced a 'paid-for' content model in the form of paywalls for premium content. However, there are several challenges facing 'paid-for' online content in Africa, which include the lack of convenient and secure payment systems for transferring small payment amounts instantly in many parts of the region.[117] With the exception of countries like Kenya, where technologies like M-Pesa have made online payments easy, in many parts of the region only those with credit cards, or time and access to make an electronic payment, can access digital news content.[118]

[113] Balancing Act 2016.
[114] Danies 2014; MMPZ 2015.
[115] Mabweazara and Mare 2017; Mudhai 2011; Scott 2016.
[116] Mabweazara and Mavhungu 2014.
[117] Reaves, Scaife, Bates, Traynor, and Butler 2015.
[118] Mabweazara and Mavhungu 2014.

Content

Legislation that can impact on a country's media content in relation to diversity has been adopted throughout the region. Many countries, particularly in Southern Africa, have passed indigenization laws[119] aimed at empowering previously disadvantaged groups, and others have broadcast laws that set out particular content quotas.[120] However, such laws are often implemented in such a way as to benefit the politically and economically connected at the expense of ordinary people and media audiences.[121]

In keeping with the African Charter on Broadcasting (1991), most African countries have broadcasting laws which explicitly outline freedom of expression on the airwaves and include provisions for local content regulation. Such regulation, including the 'must carry rules', is important for promoting pluralism and content diversity. Yet, some countries, particularly in Southern and Eastern Africa, have enacted policies that threaten the rights of ordinary citizens to produce and distribute media content of any kind.[122]

USER-GENERATED CONTENT

Taking advantage of mobile and social media, a new sector of user-generated content producers has grown, often distributing content ignored by the mainstream media. This has in many cases greatly improved access to diverse media content representing a diversity of perspectives that have had a difficult time penetrating traditional media outlets in the past.

Since 2012, mobile phones have continued to play an important role in the production of news and the dissemination of diverse information in Africa while the role of social media and the internet more broadly has expanded. This has greatly improved access to diverse content overlooked by traditional media outlets, or censored by governments as discussed in Chapter 1. The prominence of blogger and social media platforms has contributed to a growth in user-generated media and furthered the diversification of content.[123]

The mass permeation of new media technologies has resulted in the entrance of tech savvy, and often privileged, youth as content producers and entrepreneurial journalists[124], as well as content producers from marginalised groups, like minority ethnic groups, gays and lesbians or the LGBTQI community.[125] The adoption of new media has allowed these groups to carve alternative spaces of information, debate, and discussion.[126] However, with the exception of urban and young internet users, most people in sub-Saharan Africa find it difficult to circulate user-generated content.[127] Many cannot afford to have individual connections, because the costs are too high, and content production is more cumbersome on readily available mobile phones than on more expensive computers.[128]

New technologies have also brought changes in the patterns and trajectories of the media-audience relationship.[129] Among other things, they have enhanced participatory programming, enabling audiences to be actively involved in both content consumption and creation, thereby gaining more leverage in their relationship with the media.[130] For newspapers, new technologies have led many to

[119] Mhofu, S. 2017.
[120] Murugi 2015.
[121] Fourie, Mentz, Mokhele, Lloyd, and Martinis 2014.
[122] CIPESA 2016.
[123] Otlhabanye 2017.
[124] Otlhabanye 2017.
[125] Moyo, 2010; Mhiripiri and Moyo 2016.
[126] Mhiripiri and Moyo 2016.
[127] Walton 2015.
[128] Napoli and Obar 2014.
[129] Moyo, 2014; Willems 2013.
[130] Abubakar 2017, 157.

launch online platforms and interactive 'online forum' pages where readers respond to and contribute their own views on news articles.[131] These spaces have opened opportunities for content creators and citizen journalists to find representation in the mainstream media. For radio stations, mobile phones enable listeners to get in touch by sending text messages and or calling in during live broadcasts.[132] While this ostensibly improves pluralism of content by allowing audience voices to be heard, rural and female listeners are generally underrepresented in participation in call-ins to live broadcasts.[133]

ALGORITHMS, ECHO CHAMBERS AND POLARIZATION

Similar to most mainstream and online media companies across the globe, media organizations in sub-Saharan Africa generally rely on global corporate social media companies like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp for news distribution.[134] Consequently, their content has not been immune to the gatekeeping role of algorithms in prioritising content and formats such as news-related videos, live streams, and visual content. Most online content is increasingly influenced by the use of analytics and algorithms in terms of whether it appears in an alert, a feed, or aggregated homepage. The algorithms that determine these factors are predominantly controlled by foreign companies.

Global social media companies like Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp are increasingly taking over the control over the dissemination of news, information and public knowledge.[135] This means that users, including news aggregators, have less independence in deciding what is posted on these platforms, as global social media companies rely on their unilaterally decided community standards and undisclosed algorithms.

The development of decentralized, personalized media facilitated by advances in new technologies broadens pluralism by allowing easy access for new players to an extended media market. However, the plurality of media sources online may not translate into pluralistic consumption practices and may, in fact, counter the consumption of pluralism. Social media and algorithmic personalization often bundle audiences with similar interests into information cocoons, where there is little variety of news or views, but rather a steady repetition of the same information diet.

'FAKE NEWS' AND TRUST IN THE MEDIA

Sub-Saharan African media organisations have also not escaped the global rise of 'fake news'. Some Southern and Western African countries have reported cases of 'fake news' that are widely circulated through social media platforms.[136] Media credibility and trustworthiness has declined significantly over the last couple of years.[137] Fact-checking organizations like Africa Check have been established with the explicit role of ensuring verification and accuracy of news at least mainly from mainstream media sources. Currently with offices in Kenya and South Africa, Africa Check is one of the most influential fact-checking organizations in the region.[138] Another strategy for combatting the rise of fake news has been initiatives supporting the growth of Media and Information Literacy, so that media consumers are better able to differentiate real news from "fake news" (see below).

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[131] Frere 2014; Mabweazara 2014.
[132] Willems, 2013; Mare, 2014; Mabweazara, 2013.
[133] Stremlau, Fantini, and Gagliardone 2015; Fortune, Chungong, and Kessinger 2011.
[134] Jordaan 2013; Scott 2016.
[135] Jordaan 2013; Scott 2016.
[136] CSIS 2017; Wasserman 2017.
[137] Edelman Trust Barometer 2017.
[138] Funke 2017.

Research suggests that Africans generally express support for an independent media and expect the press to play an active watchdog role by monitoring their governments and reporting on poor performance and corruption, and on average they believe that the media is doing a good job in filling these roles.[139] However, significant proportions, and in some countries the largest majority of citizens, feel that the news media abuses its freedom by publishing false news.[140] Overall, there is a trust deficit in state-owned media in most African countries with many citizens preferring to rely on private and international media (such as Al Jazeera, BBC, CNN, RFI, and the South African based eNCA) for more accurate and balanced news[141], while in other countries international media has been criticized for inaccuracies in its coverage of the continent.[142]

Beyond a lack of credibility, some online media organisations in the region have a reputation for publishing falsehoods, rumours, or reporting soundbites from politicians without verification.[143] The phenomenon of 'clickbaiting' especially amongst online media companies has also contributed to the trust deficit in the media. Online media platforms, including those of the more established media, also display many inaccuracies in reporting, often carrying sensational news to drive traffic and attract advertising.[144] Many media platforms lack fairness, balance, and diversity, with political reporting narrowed to two dominant opinions characterised by accusations and counter accusations between the ruling party and the opposition.[145]

REPORTING ON MARGINALIZED GROUPS

A significant decline in investigative journalism has diminished reporting on marginalized people. Commercial pressures have affected state-owned media in most African countries resulting in a focus on middle-class urban audiences at the expense of public service values and rural, poor or minority audiences. Private media also underplay reporting on marginalized groups including migrants and refugees.

NEW NEWS PLAYERS: THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF NEWS PRODUCTION?

Between 2012 and 2017, a number of freelancers and non-professionals have joined the mainstream and "pure-play" online media sectors in sub-Saharan Africa. This trend is largely driven by high levels of unemployment amongst journalism graduates from colleges and universities, technological developments that have lowered the barrier to entry into the profession, the increased ease of becoming a media content creator with the internet, and mass retrenchments of professional journalists from the mainstream media as companies grapple with the effects of new media technologies on business models and news production.[146] Some of these freelancers and non-professionals have been responsible for setting up online newspapers and creative media hubs across the region.

[139] Afrobarometer 2015.
[140] Afrobarometer 2015.
[141] Afrobarometer 2015.
[142] Cheruiyot 2016; Katiambo 2017.
[143] Wasserman and Benequista 2017.
[144] Wasserman 2017.
[145] Afrobarometer 2015.
[146] African Media Barometer 2016.

MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY

With the rapid changes in news and information available on the continent, including the rise in so-called 'fake news', the ability to critically examine content and their sources, particularly in online environments where stories are posted and reposted repeatedly often obscuring the original source, has become more important than ever. Yet, to date there have been no national-level legislation passed specifically addressing media or information literacy.[147] However, organizations like the African Centre for Media and Information Literacy do provide training that help educate media consumers around the continent in how to consume and interpret media content,[148] and organizations like Africa Check assist consumers in differentiating factual from fictitious content.[149]

Gender equality and media pluralism

GENDER EQUALITY IN THE MEDIA WORKFORCE

While, there has been a steady increase in women employed in the news media over the last few years, a persistent gender imbalance remains. According to a 2015 study produced by the Southern African NGO, Gender Links, in 14 Southern African countries, women make up only 40 per cent of total media employees and just 34 per cent of media managers.[150]

WOMEN AND DECISION-MAKING

The marginalization of women persists in the region, with men still predominantly in control of top management and governance functions of most media organisations across the continent, though there are a few exceptions.[151] Most women are employed as journalists, sub-editors, or desk editors, and often focus on softer news such as cultural issues, with limited influence on final news content.[152]

GENDER AND REPRESENTATION

In traditional media outlets, women are still under-represented in newsrooms and as news sources.[153] Nonetheless, women have remained severely under-represented as sources of information and opinion on a wide range of topics, particularly politics and business.[154] According to the same Gender Links study cited above, women made up just 20 per cent of all news sources in Southern Africa.[155] When they are invited to participate in discussion shows with men they are often pressured to conform to gender norms and are frequently pigeonholed to discuss only women-specific issues like gender and family issues.[156] Overall the coverage of women by most media organisations in Africa remains infrequent, negative, and stereotypical, portraying women as victims, as weak, and rarely outside of the home.[157] Nonetheless, the Global Media Monitoring Project did report a notable increase in the coverage of gender equality and inequality issues in African news from 5 per cent in 2010 to 20 per cent in 2015.[158]

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[147] African Centre for Media and Information Literacy 2015.
[148] African Centre for Media and Information Literacy.
[149] Africa Check.
[150] Gender Links 2015.
[151] Gender Links and African Union 2017.
[152] Gender Links and African Union 2017.
[153] Morna-Lowe 2015.
[154] Joseph 2013.
[155] Gender Links 2015.
[156] Gender Links and African Union 2017.
[157] Daniels 2013; African Media Barometer 2016; Gender Links and African Union 2017.
[158] Global Media Monitoring Project 2015.

CHANGING THE PICTURE FOR WOMEN IN MEDIA

Various pieces of legislation in the region include provisions pertaining to gender parity in media production and content, including the Protocol on Gender and Development passed in February 2013 by the SADC, which required, among other things, equality of gender representation in content by 2015 and the promotion of equal representation of women in media ownership and decision-making structures.[159]

The adoption of ICTs has also led to a gradual increase in the plurality of online content producers, including women, and a rising trend in African women's use of online media. According to the 2015 Global Media Monitoring Project, women in traditional media outlets report more stories online than offline, and cover a greater percentage of stories on issues like politics and the economy than they do offline.[160] Blogging in particular has been embraced by African women as a means to facilitate gender equality and empowerment.[161] Many women, particularly in West and East Africa, have become prominent bloggers using the platforms to circumvent the male gatekeepers of traditional media outlets.[162]

Class, however, presents a barrier in women's ability to create media content online. Middle class women have disproportionately greater access to online content creation than those in other communities. Furthermore, elaborated content creation continues to be more difficult on mobile than on a computer[163]; as a result, the proliferation of mobile phones does not necessarily mean a similar proliferation of gender diverse online content.

[159] Gender Links and African Union 2017.
[160] Global Media Monitoring Project 2015.
[161] Somolu 2007; Ng 2012; Sanya 2013.
[162] Mpofu 2016.
[163] Napoli and Obar 2014.

Trends in Media Independence

Overview

The African region has experienced various regulatory and political changes between 2012 and 2017. Media independence in Africa is under increased pressure, due to complex interconnections between political power and regulatory authorities, attempts to influence or delegitimize media and journalists, and shrinking budgets in news organizations. This deterioration of media independence is reflected in a number of indicators. Public trust in news media reporting is in decline across most of the region. Disruptions in business models have been seen as contributing to increasing dependence on government and corporate subsidies in some circumstances, and thereby raising concerns about potential impacts on editorial independence. In some cases, there has been an increase in highly antagonistic criticism, including from leaders, about media and the practice of journalism.

Trends in media independence in Africa include the following:

- In most cases, regulatory authorities continue to operate as extensions of political regimes, thereby using their powers to award licences to politically and economically connected businesspeople;
- While some countries allow foreign direct investment in the media sector, others have passed stringent laws and regulations which forbid foreign media ownership, especially in the broadcasting and telecommunications sectors;
- In most countries, channels of media distribution like the internet and mobile phone services are private services subjected to regulatory authorities and intermediary liability regimes, and governments retain the ability to filter, censor and block communications;
- While the commercial and community broadcasting (both television and radio) sectors have grown significantly in most African countries, this phenomenon has largely been urban, leaving state-owned broadcasters to dominate in rural areas with vernacular languages;
- The expansion of internet access and online media has contributed significantly to the independence of media content creators. It has increased access to diaspora content, and widened platforms for user-generated content;
- Journalism education and training has expanded over the past five years. Most of the training is done by universities, newsrooms, donor-funded workshops and initiatives by NGOs;
- Media independence in Africa is strained by various forms of cross-media concentration;
- Women in Africa have remained under-represented in regulatory and self-regulatory bodies, professional unions and media governance, although there have been indications of an emerging trend that is focussing more attention on gender dynamics and the adoption of relevant policies.

Trends and transitions in regulation

INDEPENDENCE AND GOVERNMENT REGULATION

Very few countries in sub-Saharan Africa provide data about the allocation of telecommunication, broadcasting, print and online media licences. In many cases, regulatory authorities continue to operate as extensions of political regimes thereby using their powers to award licences to politically and economically connected businesspeople. Where community broadcasting licenses are allocated, some countries do not consider equity issues. Because of these structural issues, the regulation of the television and radio broadcasting institutions and related media technologies is generally not democratic in the sense of defending the public interest. In some countries, partisan regulatory authorities favour government-friendly media companies while denying and threatening to withdraw licences from independent prospective media companies or from those with critical stances on the prevailing political party, political elites or government.

Currently, the practice of impartial, fair, and competitive licensing of media professionals remains generally problematic. Often journalists from the private and community media sectors are denied licences as a form of punishment for critical reporting against the ruling party or government. In recent years, as in the past, a number of media professionals were harassed, intimidated, and arrested on trumped-up charges in some African countries.

There are a few countries that have adopted, or are considering adopting, laws and regulations requiring media professionals to obtain licences from statutory bodies before practicing.[164] This has the net effect of undermining professional autonomy and independence. In these countries, such laws have led to self-censorship rather than fair, factual, and balanced coverage and reporting. Conversely, most African journalists do not require licences to practice the profession, and are free to form unions or professional organisations to protect their rights, although in some cases they do not take full advantage of this freedom.[165]

While the proportion of news and information that Africans consume online has substantially increased in recent years, regulation of online content across the continent has tended to be uneven. For example, there is a lack of regulation pertaining explicitly to the liability of internet intermediaries, which increasingly control the kind of content that citizens have access to but which are not publishers in the traditional sense of the word. Provisions, where they do exist, are often overly broad and addressed only indirectly in legislation around other issues like hate speech, pornography, cybersecurity, and national security. In 2014, the Executive Council of the African Union adopted the Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection, which includes provisions that pertain to the liability of intermediaries for content transmitted on their platform, though the provisions are somewhat vague.[166] For example, intermediaries may be held liable if third parties post content on their platform that is deemed to be illegal, such as, child pornography or insulting someone for reasons such as race, religion or political opinion, [167] but not for content and data that they are only storing "temporarily".[168] The Convention still requires five more countries to sign on before it can enter into force. [169]

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[164] Mickute 2014.
[165] IREX 2016.
[166] African Union 2014.
[167] Accessnow 2014.
[168] World Intermediary Liability Map 2014.
[169] African Union 2014.

SELF-REGULATION

Like elsewhere, some sub-Sahara African countries have transparency and accountability mechanisms for media owners and professionals, though these are mostly underfunded and typically lack the authority to enforce decisions. In some cases, local initiatives supported by international NGOs and institutions have allowed journalists and media owners to establish associations and unions and adopt ethical codes of conduct.[170] Professional ethical boards include statutory, self-regulation, and co-regulation mechanisms (where self-regulatory bodies partner with public regulators). In some countries where the media are treated with mistrust, statutory ethical boards have been imposed by governments, though these are often underfunded. In other countries, the private media have set up professional ethical boards.

In their efforts to self-regulate, internet intermediaries, like internet service providers, telecom operators, and social media platforms, are often problematic in their ability to balance independence with the protection of freedom of speech. According to a recent study conducted by CPIESA, where "states and internet intermediaries" have attempted to respond to issues like the spread of hate speech, fake news, and terrorism online, "they have often undermined citizens' rights to free expression, privacy and the right of access to information.[171] In their terms of service, many such intermediaries describe themselves as *platforms* for publishers, absolving themselves of the responsibility that a publisher has to monitor its content.[172] It is worth noting that while many of the most influential internet intermediaries are not domiciled in Africa, others, particularly many of the mobile telecom operators are and some are majority owned by the government or governmental actors jeopardizing their ability to self-regulate independently.

Political and economic influences in media systems

TRENDS OF DE-LEGITIMIZING MEDIA

By systematically attacking the media, whether through overt physical attacks, through the withholding of financial support or advertising revenue,[173] or by labelling media outlets as the "enemy", governments or other powerful independent actors can do significant damage to the media's legitimacy and its public reputation as independent. While politicized news content has long been a mainstay of many African media landscapes, recent elections on the continent have seen a rise in accusations of "fake news", particularly regarding news disseminated through online platforms. Reports indicate that this may have had a negative effect on the public's perception of the media's credibility and its trustworthiness.[174] While insufficient data exists to confirm the scale of the prevalence of falsified news and misinformation, the willingness of many politicians to make such accusations demonstrates that discrediting news that could damage their own political reputations often takes precedence over the protection of an independent press.

[170] Albany Associates 2017.
[171] CIPESA 2016.
[172] Facebook.
[173] Ogola, 2017b.
[174] Edelman Trust Barometer 2017.

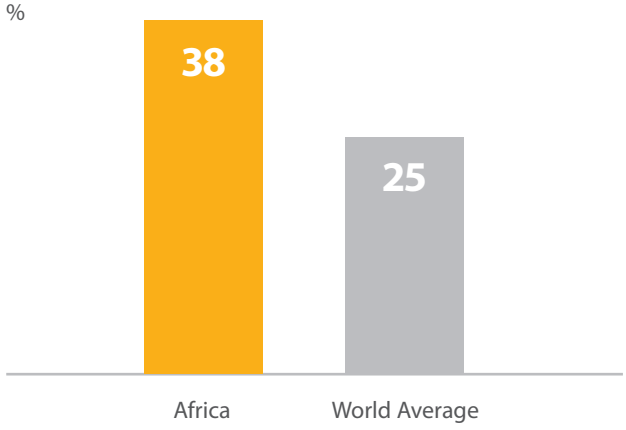
MEDIA CAPTURE

While the media ownership restructuring of the 1990s in the region has been celebrated for the liberalisation of the print, telecommunications, and broadcasting sectors, this has significantly affected media independence in some countries. Media proprietors, advertisers, and government officials all exert significant influence over media content. Such actors have pressured journalists to ignore stories that put the parent company, advertiser, or government officials in a negative light, and many journalists and editors practice self-censorship as a result.[175] Moreover, many private media outlets maintain close ties to the government or individual politicians; media houses owned by politically non-aligned individuals often struggle to survive. Overall, there is very politicized and biased content.[176]

Figure 3-1 below shows journalists' perceptions of government official's influence on journalism.

Media independence is also affected by systemic factors, like government monopolization of core distribution equipment like radio transmitters, telecommunication infrastructure, and television transmitters. Country-specific annual reports by the African Media Barometer published between 2014 and 2016 show that pieces of legislation in most countries do not provide for sufficient protection of, or safeguards for, the growth of small broadcasters, or from bullying or manipulation by powerful monopolies. Furthermore, most state/public broadcasters are not accountable to the public through an independent board which is representative of society at large and selected in an independent, open, and transparent manner. According to the Afrobarometer Survey (2015), some of the authorities tasked with the financial management of state-owned broadcasters are political deployees, and the entities are also dependent on ruling parties for tenders and other related favours. Between 2012 and 2017, most boards of directors for public broadcasters were chosen by the ruling party or head of government from a pool of political loyalists.

Figure 3-1: Perceived influence on journalism by government officials



Source: Worlds of Journalism 2016

In most countries, at least some editors and journalists are 'in the pockets' of senior politicians and in a number of countries politicians often finance their own media outlets. Furthermore, recent research has shown that politicians or actors from the private sector interfere directly in publications when they learn that negative stories about them are close to publication.[177]

[175] African Media Barometer 2018.
[176] Ali 2015.
[177] Stremlau, Fantini and Osman 2015; Wasserman and Maweu 2016.

In pursuit of financial sustainability, both private and public media are increasingly focusing on crowd-pleasing audience-driven programming like soap operas, talk shows, sports, and reality shows at the expense of investigative and quality public service content.[178] Private television stations and parts of the press have also taken the 'tabloid turn' in their quest for ratings and audience figures.[179] Rather than focus on hard news, the private press is leaning towards commentary and opinion.

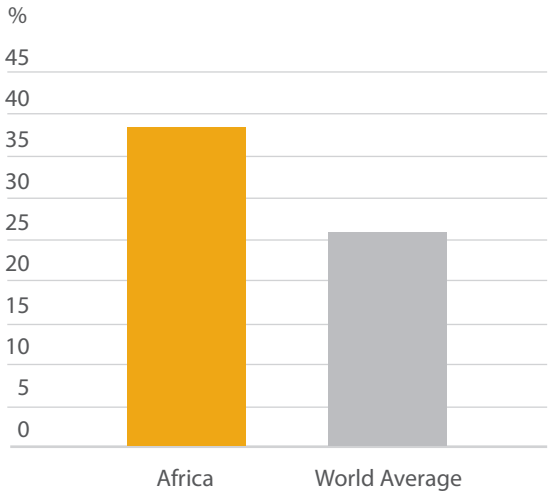
FINANCIAL REGULATIONS AND BUSINESS MODELS

Whilst some countries allow foreign direct investment in the media sector[180], others have passed stringent laws and regulations which forbid or in some way restrict foreign media ownership, especially in the broadcasting and telecommunications sectors.[181] There is often an underlying fear that foreign media ownership may be used to meddle in domestic political and economic issues. In some countries, the license fees for those wanting to start broadcasting and telecommunications operations are very expensive, to the extent that local investors cannot afford licence fees unless they partner with foreign direct investors. Besides exerting steep licence fees, local content quotas are often pegged at high levels which make it difficult for local investors to meet the broadcasting regulations. The situation is compounded by high taxes on broadcasting equipment. This also affects newsprint, which is further limited by a generally poor infrastructure for distribution, especially to rural areas. Generally, newsprint and printing businesses are monopolized by state-owned media companies, creating barriers for private and community newspaper entities.

A trend of underfunding state-owned broadcasters has become common, making these institutions highly susceptible to corporate and political interference. Despite changes to business models of some media companies, most state-owned entities rely on government grants, advertising, dividends, donor grants, and licence fees. Despite the diversity of these sources, they are generally insufficient, further subjecting state broadcasters to political and commercial pressure culminating in editorial interference. Common in many state-owned broadcasters are cases of financial impropriety, mismanagement, and tender deals that benefit those who are politically and economically connected.[182]

Overall, these factors impede media independence in a significant way. Figure 3-2 shows the level of perceived government influence on media in the region compared to the world average influence levels.

Figure 3-2: Level of perceived government influence on media

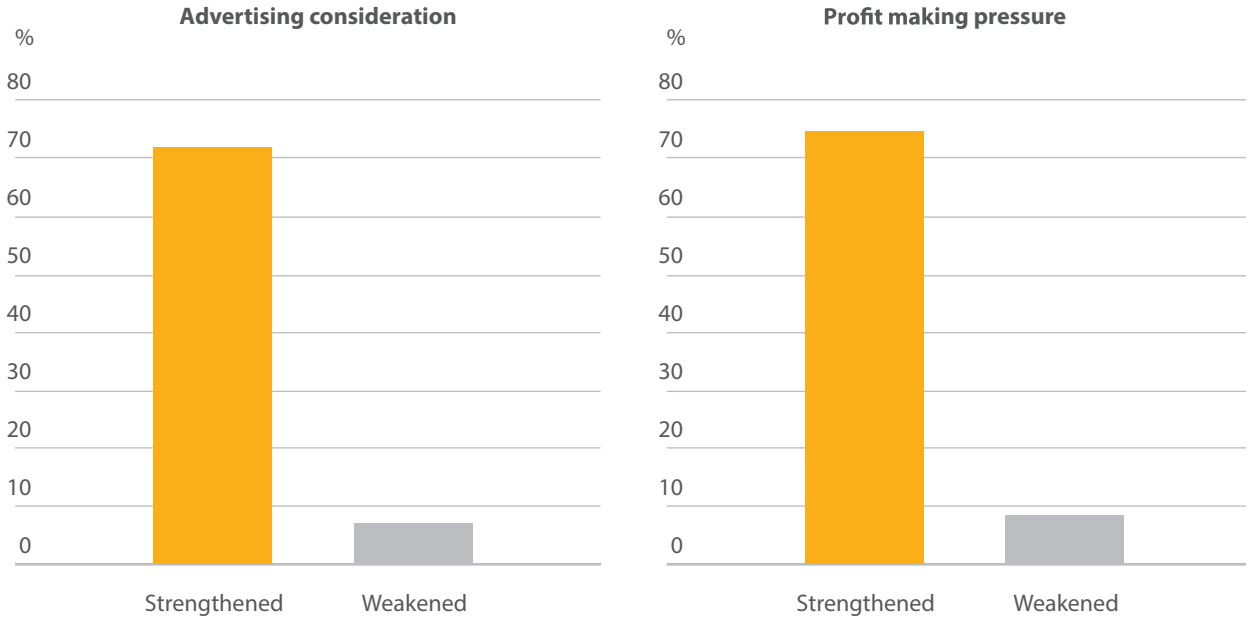


Source: Worlds of Journalism Study, 2016

[178] Wasserman and Mbatha 2016.
[179] Chama, 2017; Wasserman and Mbatha 2016.
[180] Atekebo, Okolo, and Izuogo, 2017; Mawuena Agbo and Adjorkor Kumapley 2017.
[181] Boda, Strachan, and Manyala 2017.
[182] Afrobarometer 2016; Rao and Wasserman 2016.

Government subsidies to state-owed public service broadcasters remain in force despite many cases of financial mismanagement, corrupt tender processes and mismanagement. In some countries, governments also hand out financial subsidies to private media outlets, though the independence and equity employed when distributing such subsidies is lacking. Figure 3-3 below shows the changes perceived by journalists about pressures from profits and advertising for the period of 2012 to 2016.

Figure 3-3: Perceived advertising and profit making pressure



Source: Worlds of Journalism Study 2016

In most countries, government advertising is still not governed by law. As a result, government ministries and departments often withhold advertising from private media companies that are seen as critical of the ruling elite.[183] Many countries in the region have particularly small private advertising sectors (with the exception of NGO advertising in certain countries),[184] often leading to a reliance on revenue stream from government advertising. In at least one country, the government accounts for 85-90 per cent of all advertising revenue available.[185] Governments regularly discriminate against media organisations that carry critical stories or negative reports.[186] For instance, East African governments continue to use their advertising power to influence media content and pressure journalists or prominent news outlets into self-censorship. This trend is not unique to the East African sub-region, though it is more common in countries that have seen an increase in private media or with governments that are inclined to avoid more overt forms of media control.

[183] African Media Barometer 2016.
[184] Balancing Act 2016.
[185] Ogola 2017.
[186] Ogola 2017.

While viewers' and listeners' licence fees are still being collected in most countries, there is a high rate of non-payment as people in urban centres prefer subscriptions-based satellite broadcasting stations which offer diverse and plural content and producers.[187] Some state-owned broadcasters have commercialized some of their television and radio operations in order to gain corporate and donor advertisements.[188] Community media is predominantly sustained by donor funds and licence fees received from regulators.[189] Similar to most parts of the world, the funding is generally unsustainable and as a result some community broadcasters go off-air unannounced.[190]

JOURNALISTS' PERCEPTIONS OF MEDIA INDEPENDENCE AND EMPLOYMENT SECURITY

Economic challenges over the past few years have caused signifi cant job insecurity for professional journalists in sub-Saharan Africa.[191] This is partly due to the increasing popularity of online content among the urban elite leading to many traditional media outlets experiencing economic pressures and the threatening of the traditional business model for media distribution.[192] Similar to other regions, many media companies in sub-Saharan Africa are now resorting to paid or sponsored content, which is often indistinguishable from authentic editorial content.[193] As a result, a weakening culture of collective bargaining, a retreat of unions from work environments, and a growing fear of job losses have led to an erosion of editorial independence. In some countries, this trend has led both professional and non-professional journalists to become more vulnerable than before to 'chequebook journalism' and bribery[194], while journalists' average salaries are low when compared to other regions.

PROFESSIONALISM AND EFFORTS TO MITIGATE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC INTERFERENCE

Although self-enforcing codes of ethics are in operation in most countries, these are generally not well followed or implemented across the continent.[195] Most codes of ethics that exist in the region govern the operations of media practitioners, while some East African countries have made attempts to establish codes of conduct for media owners as well.[196] These associations play a pivotal role in championing the interests of media practitioners. Recently rising attention has been given to cases of ethical transgressions online.[197] Transgressions related to plagiarism, circulation of 'fake news', and 'chequebook journalism' are increasing, despite the adoption of self-enforcing codes of ethics in most countries.[198]

Internet Service Providers and intermediaries in some countries have also developed codes of conduct that include commitments to statutory requirements regarding the protection of children, hate speech, and pornography.[199]

[187] Tech Central 2017.
[188] Phamodi 2016.
[189] Mhagama 2015.
[190] WACC 2016.
[191] Wasserman and Benequista 2017.
[192] Gade et al., 2017; Mabweazara and Mare 2017.
[193] Fairbanks 2013.
[194] Okoro and Chinweobo-Onuoha 2013.
[195] Lohner, Neverla, and Banjac 2017.
[196] Kimumwe, 2014; MediaWise 2011.
[197] AfricaPractice, 2014; Napio 2017.
[198] Changarawe, 2014; Wasserman 2017.
[199] ISPA 2009.

Between 2014 and 2016, journalism education and training expanded significantly in most sub-Saharan African countries.[200] Most of this journalism education and training is currently provided by universities, newsrooms, donor-funded workshops, and initiatives by NGOs.[201] New university programmes focusing on digital, multimedia, and financial journalism have also been launched in some countries.[202] Despite these strides, the quality of some of the programmes have been questioned especially in contexts where quality control assessment mechanisms are lacking,[203] and in some countries, new media courses remain unavailable. Non-governmental organizations continue to play a pivotal role in the provision of refresher courses targeting early and mid-career journalist.[204]

Gender equality and media independence

GENDER EQUALITY IN THE MEDIA WORKPLACE

Women are significantly under-represented in regulatory and self-regulatory bodies, professional unions, and media governance bodies; although this has changed to a small degree in the last few years. While the number of women joining newsrooms and media companies continue to grow in real terms, very few women are in positions where they can influence content and policy direction to ensure editorial independence aligns to gender-sensitive principles (see Chapter 2).

Overall, very few countries in the region have gender policies and/or ministries dealing with issues related to gender equality. In cases where such ministries have been created, they generally receive insignificant financial support from the national budget. Outside of Southern Africa, there are no effective gender policies in most media houses in the other sub-regions of Africa, although a few, such as the Radio Africa Group, have started putting some policies in place.[205] In cases where codes of ethics exist, they are generally gender-blind in their focus. State media are more active than private media in implementing affirmative action policies for women.[206]

Positively, sub-Saharan African women are increasingly receiving advanced degrees and taking on leadership positions. In the Southern sub-region, some tertiary institutions are reporting enrolments at a 60:40 ratio of male / female students.[207] However, because of the structural impediments women face in the media, and continued experiences of discrimination and harassment, many leave the profession to join public relations departments which enable more work-life balance than many newsrooms.

[200] Lohner et al. 2017.
[201] Schiffrin, 2010; Skjerdal 2011.
[202] Aga Khan University 2018.
[203] Gade et al., 2017; Skjerdal 2011.
[204] Drefs and Thomass, 2015; Wotkyns 2015.
[205] African Media Barometer 2016.
[206] African Media Barometer 2016.
[207] IMPI 2014.

MEDIA MONITORING AND ADVOCACY

Regarding gender mainstreaming and advocacy, various regional and international organisations are playing an important role in turning the tide of negative and biased portrayal of women. For instance, in the Southern Africa sub-region, organisations such as Gender Links, the Graça Machel Trust Regional Coordinator Women in Media Network, and the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) have adopted various strategies and initiatives to increase the amount and quality of coverage for gender-related issues, and to advance women's status in newsroom decision-making.

FORMAL AND PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Besides national accountability mechanisms in most countries, transnational initiatives such as the International Federation of Journalists and the World Association of Newspapers continue to play an important role in drawing attention to journalism ethics. Also, besides professional bodies and trade unions, a number of international governmental and non-governmental organizations operate in the region and play an important role in media research, bringing attention to media ethics, providing support and training to journalists and journalism training institutions, and even supporting content production. These include the PANOS Institute, Media Institute Southern Africa, Media Foundation of West Africa, Article 19, the Committee to Protect Journalists, and the African Media Initiative. These organisations produce reports and press briefings on various issues related to journalistic independence. In addition, country-specific NGOs continue to play a pivotal role in training, advocacy, and monitoring of journalism professionalism in a small number of countries.

Trends in Safety of Journalists

Overview

Between the start of 2012 and the start of 2017 a high number of incidents involving the killing of journalists, and other physical assaults occurred, largely with impunity, in the African region. Election periods were particularly dangerous for journalists in many countries. Increasingly, journalists reported receiving threats online, including women journalists, who also experienced harassment and sexual assault, as well as gender-related barriers to professional advancement. The jailing of journalists on anti-state charges, for defamation or without charge have added to the insecurity of the press. Fear of physical or online attacks, imprisonment and social unrest, has led to a prevalent culture of self-censorship among journalists. Some positive trends include the abolishing criminal defamation laws in some countries, and commitments by some African states to introduce mechanisms to promote the safety of journalists and combat impunity.

Trends in the safety of journalists in the African region include the following:

- While a greater number of journalists were killed in Africa between 2012 and 2017 than during the previous 5-year period, the number of killings has slowed between 2012 and 2017, forming a decreasing trend;
- The rate of impunity for the killing of journalists has increased in Africa, and only 11 per cent of cases related to the killings that took place from 2012 through 2016 have been resolved;
- Physical attacks and threats against journalists continue to be common throughout the region, especially while media workers are reporting on public unrest, politics, conflict and human rights abuses. Such threats and attacks are frequently performed by the police and security forces, and election periods are particularly dangerous for journalists;
- Women journalists continue to experience physical attacks, sexual assaults, and harassment both within media outlets and in the field. Escalating online abuse, as well as increases in the number of killings of women journalists, form two increasing trends;
- Since 2012 a total of 11 resolutions or decisions addressing safety of journalists and combatting impunity have been adopted by UN bodies in support of activities to promote safety of journalists, and 20 African Member States[208] sponsored one or multiple of these.

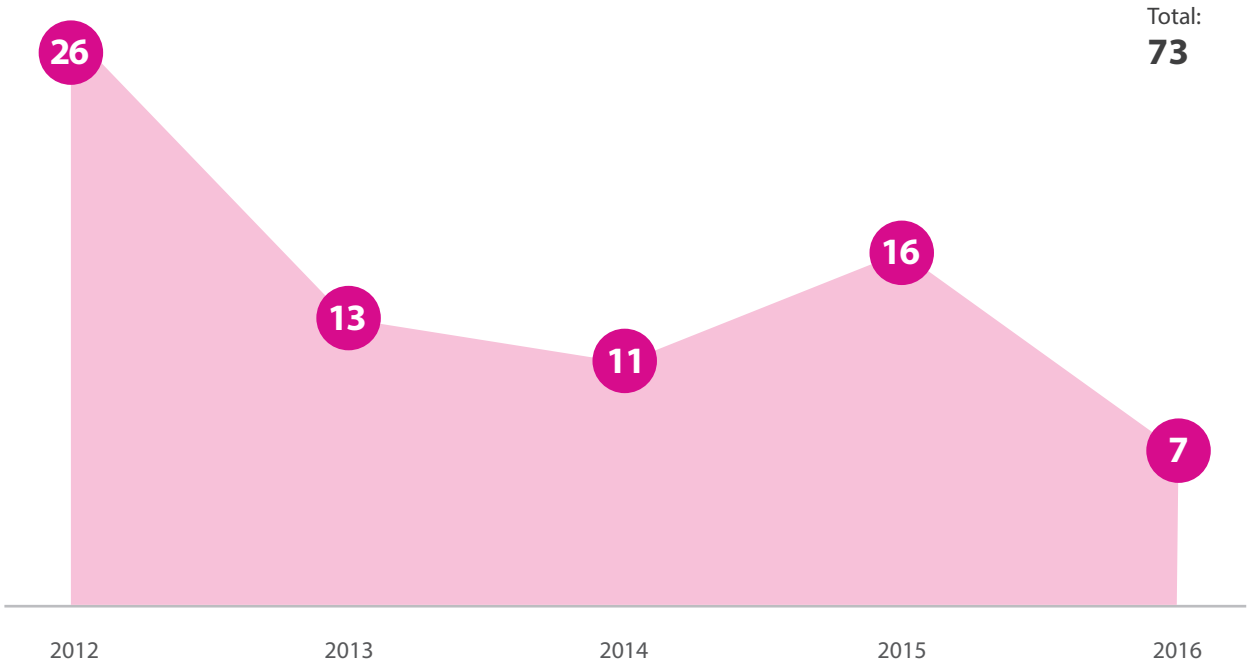
[208] States that sponsored resolutions are: Nigeria, Botswana, Kenya, Ghana, Mali, Benin, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Somalia, Cape Verde, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Angola, Guinea, Senegal, and Burundi.

Physical safety and impunity

Over the last five years (2012-2017) more journalists were killed in Africa than in the previous five-year period, but fatal attacks did begin to decrease in number after 2012. Cases of impunity form an increasing trend, with states reporting a smaller percentage of case resolutions than in the previous five-year period. Contentious and volatile election periods in several countries comprised the context of a wide range of assaults and threats against journalists. As journalists increasingly maintain online professional profiles, threats made through social media have emerged as a new form of intimidation.

From 2012 to 2016, UNESCO's Director-General publicly condemned the killings of a total of 73 journalists and media workers that took place in 15 countries in Africa.[209] This is more than double the number of killings in the previous five-year period from 2007 to 2011. Most of these fatalities were recorded in 2012, when 26 journalists were killed. By 2016, however, the number of journalist killings confirmed by UNESCO dropped by 73 per cent, to 7 for that year. Therefore, while a greater number of journalists were killed in Africa between 2012 and 2017 than during the previous 5-year period, the number of killings has slowed between 2012 and 2017, forming a decreasing trend.

Figure 4-1: Journalists killed in the African region each year between 2012 and 2016

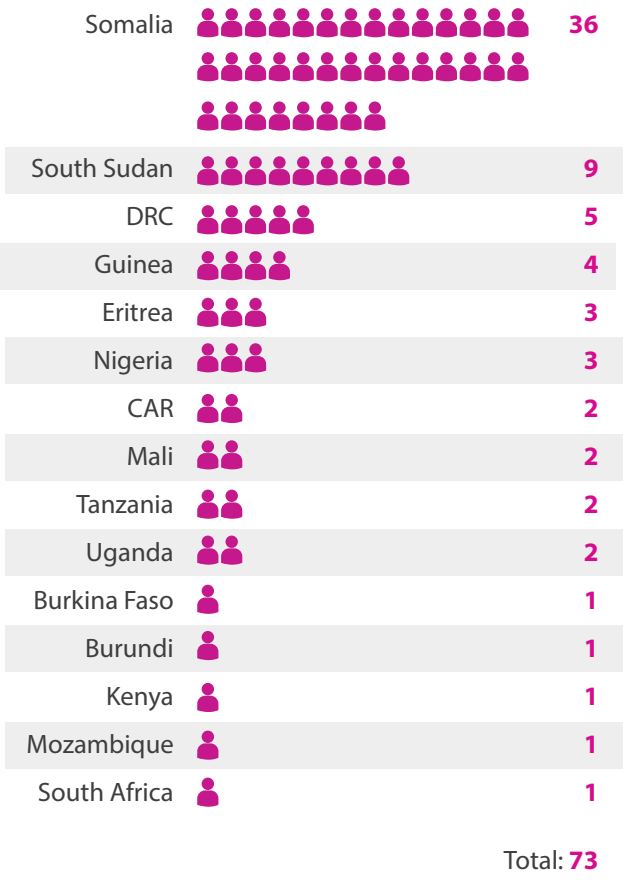


[209] UNESCO's Director-General, is mandated through the IPDC to condemn verified killings of journalists, media workers and those who practice journalism via social media. This part of the study analyses data based on the killings condemned by the UNESCO's Director-General that took place from January 1, 2012-December 31, 2016. Fatalities include journalists targeted and murdered as well as those killed while covering combat or while working under other dangerous circumstances such as a covering public protests.

Countries experiencing ongoing conflicts formed the site of the majority of killings since 2012. More than a third of the killings of journalists (36) in the region took place in one East African country, where journalists have been frequently targeted amidst the ongoing conflict between extremist and militant groups, and the government. Apart from this country, 18 journalists were killed in other countries in the East African region, 7 were killed in Central African states, 10 were killed in the West African region and 2 killings occurred in Southern African countries.

As in previous years, nearly all of the journalists and media workers killed in African countries were locally based. Only four foreign correspondents were among the fatalities[210]. Radio journalists were the most vulnerable with regard to their personal safety. Just over 50 per cent (37 in total) of the victims were journalists or crew affiliated with radio stations. Television journalists suffered the second highest losses, with 14 casualties, or 20 per cent of the total number of killings for the region. While online journalists made up the smallest category, accounting for just over 7 per cent of media killings, this number is considerably higher than the previous five-year period when web-based journalists comprised only 3 per cent of the total.

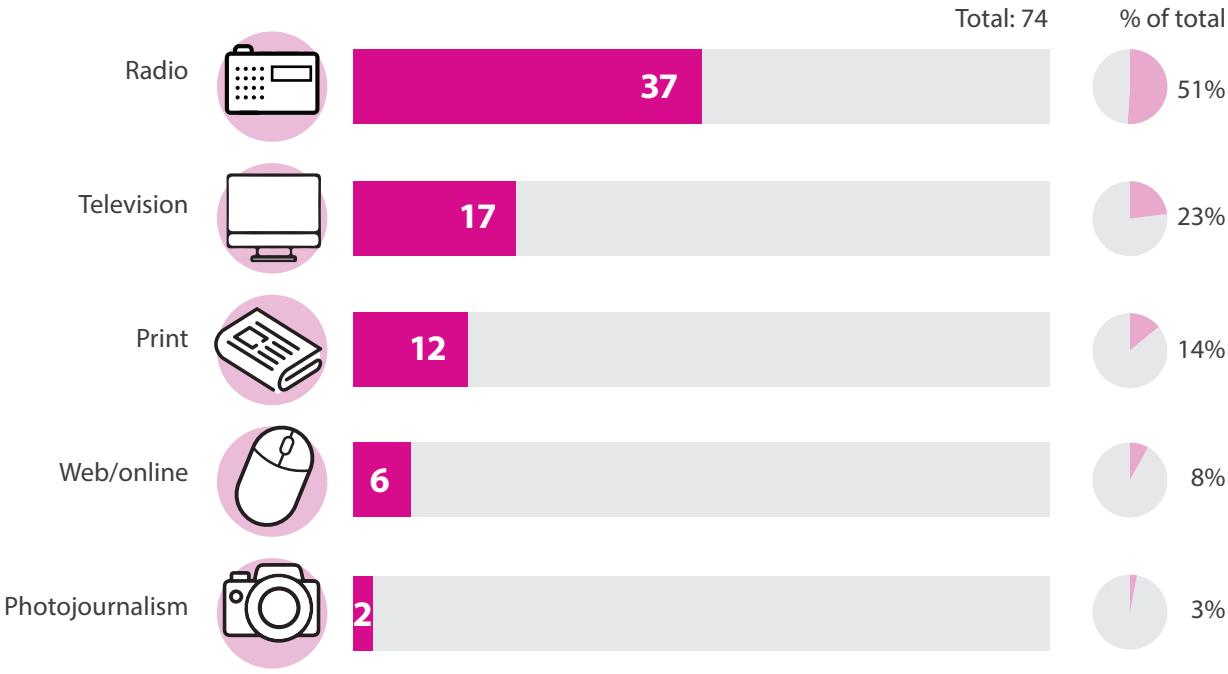
Figure 4-2: Journalists killed in Africa by country



The rate of impunity for the killing of journalists has increased in Africa. According to the voluntary responses provided by Member States[211] to the UNESCO Director General's requests for judicial status of journalist killings, only 8 out of the 73 killings that took place from 2012 through 2016 have been resolved, meaning that perpetrators been identified and held accountable in only 11 per cent of the killings, as of August 2017. In the previous five-year period, 17 per cent of killings were resolved, as as reported by African Member States. Countries where suspects have been sentenced in connection to journalist killings that have taken place in the last five years are Guinea, Somalia and South Africa.

[210] French journalists Claude Verlon and Ghislaine Dupont were killed in Mali in 2013. French photojournalist Camille Lepage was killed in the Central African Republic in 2014, and French-Moroccan journalist Leila Alaoui died in Burkina Faso in 2016.
[211] Status of Judicial Inquiry based on information provided by Member States up to September 2017.

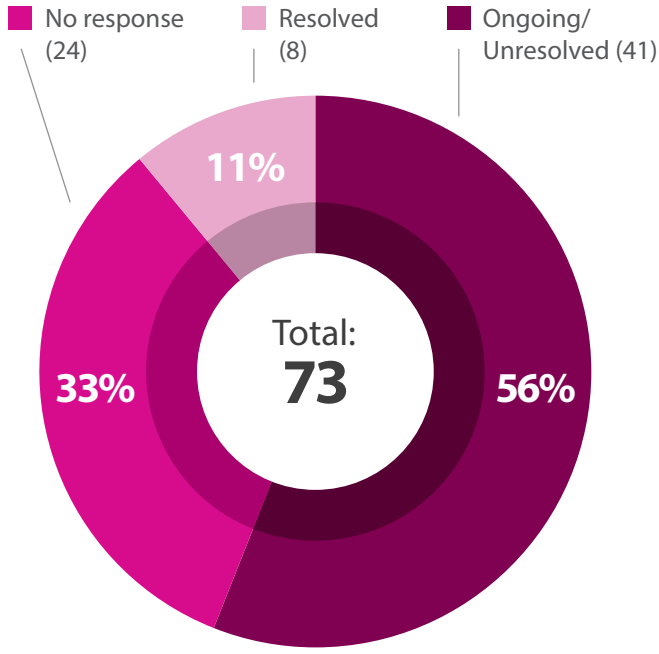
Figure 4-3: Journalists killed in Africa according to news medium



African Member States informed UNESCO that progress in 41 cases, or 56 per cent of the total number of journalists killed, was ongoing. No response was received from Member States on inquiries into a total of 24 cases, or 33 per cent of killings. In total 5 states, or one third of number of Member States to which requests for information were sent, did not respond in regard to of any cases involving the killing of journalists. Nonetheless, this is an improvement from two years ago. By the end of 2015, no information was received in 43 cases, and 7 Member States had not responded.[212]

Several decisions regarding impunity have been issued by African regional courts in recent years. These include the 2013 ruling by the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights which ordered a reopening of the investigation into the 1998 murder of Burkinabe journalist Norbert Zongo and a similar decision in 2014 by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Court of Justice regarding the case of Gambian journalist Deyda Hydara, killed in 2004.

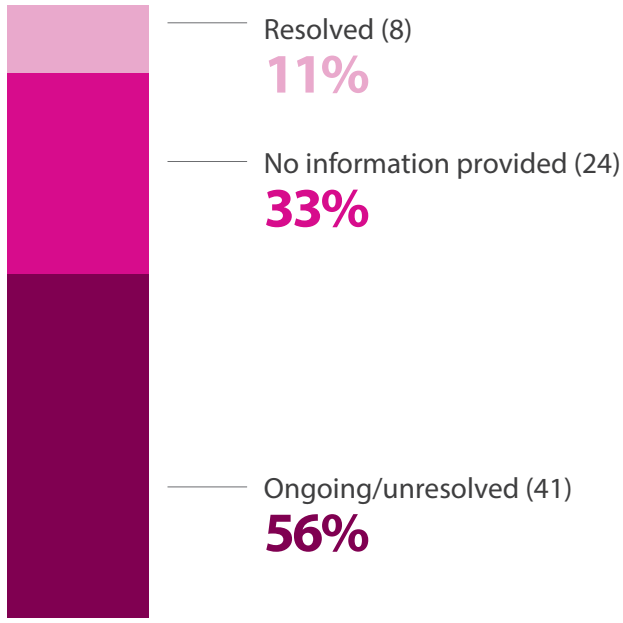
Figure 4-4: Responses provided by African Member States to the UNESCO Director General's requests for judicial status of journalist killings



[212] 7 states that had not responded by December 2015 are: Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan and Uganda.

Physical attacks and threats against journalists are common throughout the region, especially while reporting on public unrest, politics, conflict and human rights abuses.[213] Oftentimes, such threats and attacks are performed by the police and security forces.[214] In addition to these attacks, at least one journalist went missing from an East African country between 2012 and 2017,[215] while armed groups in a number of countries intimidated journalists.[216] In addition, and according to news reports and one poll by the Fray Inter Media group, most journalists receive threats through social media and other online forums.

Figure 4-5: Judicial status of cases of enquiry into journalist killings in the African region



Elections periods were particularly dangerous for journalists, even in countries that traditionally tolerate a robust media.[217] In several countries, journalists were threatened, assaulted and harassed in connection to election reporting.[218] In the week following one East African country's contested 2017 national election, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) interviewed 10 journalists who reported being assaulted or harassed while reporting.[219] Freedom of expression groups recorded serious attacks against at least 15 journalists in the run up to another East African country's 2016 election polls, including 2 shootings carried out by the police.[220] In another East African country, death threats and media outlet closures amidst a government crackdown on political protests have driven many journalists into hiding or out of the country into exile.[221]

Gender equality and the safety of journalists

Women journalists in Africa encounter an increasingly multifaceted range of threats in connection to their gender or their journalism, or sometimes both. These include physical attacks, sexual assaults, harassment both within media outlets and in the field, and escalating online abuse as well as professional and social challenges.[222] At least 9 women journalists and media support workers were killed over the last 5 years in African countries, which forms an increase from the previous 5-year period when not a single woman journalist was killed. Five of these victims were based in two East African countries which experienced ongoing civil conflict.

[213] See the Defend Defenders 2017, "Journalists as human rights defenders in the East and Horn of Africa," report and MISA Press Freedom Tracker among others for reports documenting specific cases.
[214] According to the Media Institute for Southern Africa's Press Freedom Tracker, 2014 through 2017, 22 journalists have been assaulted in Southern African countries since 2014. The majority of cases are journalists attacked by police at demonstrations and other public events.
[215] SCPJ 2017a.
[216] Reporters without Borders 2017.
[217] See the Defend Defenders' 2017 "Journalists as human rights defenders in the East and Horn of Africa" report.
[218] IFEX 2017a.
[219] IFEX 2017b.
[220] AfricaFex 2016.
[221] Human Rights Watch 2015.
[222] Barton and Storm 2014.

Like their male counterparts, women journalists in Africa have been threatened and attacked for reporting on politics, the military, or armed groups.[223] Reporting on gender specific issues has also been met with reprisals.[224] Women journalists are frequently vulnerable to sexual assault, often in the workplace.[225]

Women journalists in the African region have faced extreme online harassment for their journalism and/or for having a public profile.[226] Digital threats against women journalists involving cyber bullying, trolling, unauthorized use and manipulation of personal information, amongst others, have become widespread particularly through social media platforms. A survey of women journalists in Kenya conducted by the Association of Media Women in Kenya and ARTICLE 19, for example, found that 75 per cent of women journalists have experienced online harassment related to their work.[227] Online attacks have motivated some women journalists to curtail their use of internet, reduce their public profile and in some cases, to exit the profession.[228]

In addition, women journalists are increasingly speaking out about limitations on their professional advancement in media communities due to gender inequality, throughout the region. For example, participants at a breakout session on gender at the National Mechanisms for Safety of Journalists-Eastern Africa Conference held in Nairobi in November 2017, noted that in addition to the problems of sexual harassment and online abuse, few women are appointed to senior positions in the media.[229]

Broader recognition of the need to address gender specific risks and challenges experienced by women in the media in Africa, is growing. In November 2017, representatives from media, civil society, intergovernmental organisations, regional bodies and governments, signed the Nairobi declaration on safety of journalists in the region. The declaration notes concern for the "increased trend in women abuse on social media such as cyber bullying and stalking, sexual harassment, surveillance hacking, trolling/stalking, defamation where the targeted gender is always women."

Other dimensions in the safety of journalists

The imprisonment of journalists remains a threat to the African region's media. The CPJ's annual census of imprisoned journalists found that between 35 and 48 journalists were jailed in connection to their work throughout sub Saharan African nations each year from 2012 to 2016. The most recent census in 2017, counted 40 journalists in prison in African countries[230], while half of these were not charged with any offense. The remaining journalists have been charged with anti-state activities, criminal defamation, spreading false news, apostasy or a combination of those charges.[231]

[223] Some examples include threats against DRC newspaper editor Solange Lusiku Nsimire; Elisabeth Blanche Olofio, who died in 2016 from injuries sustained in an attack by a rebel group in 2014 as reported by Reporters without Borders 2014b; and attacks against female journalists in Uganda as reported by International Federation of Journalists 2016.
[224] See, for example, IFEX 2015; Al Jazeera 2013.
[225] BBC 2013; IFJ 2017.
[226] Barton and Storm 2014.
[227] See AMWIK 2016. Similar trends have been reported in other countries: see for example MFWA 2018.
[228] Ibid.
[229] National Mechanisms for Safety of Journalists- Eastern Africa Conference held in Nairobi in November 2017; See also UNESCO 2017b.
[230] CPJ 2017.
[231] CPJ imprisoned database 2017; Beiser 2017.

While several countries have repealed laws that criminalize defamation in the last 5 years, such laws are still in place in the majority of countries in the region, and are regularly used to charge and imprison journalists.[232] A landmark judgement by the African Court of Human and Peoples' Rights in 2014, Konate vs Burkina Faso[233], which overruled the conviction of a journalist and ordered the state to amend its legislation, motivated the reform of defamation laws in other countries in the region. In 2016, Zimbabwe's Constitutional Court declared its criminal defamation laws unconstitutional [234] and in 2017 Kenya followed suit[235].

Despite these advances, journalists, editors or publishers in many countries have been subject to arrest, detention, lengthy legal processes, and sometimes imprisonment under defamation statutes, according to a recent study of defamation practices in Africa by PEN-International. The report also notes a chilling effect on coverage, particularly on investigative journalists, due to the criminalization of defamation and the imposition of inappropriate fines. [236]

Risks of imprisonment, violence or harassment by authorities, have forced hundreds of journalists working in African countries into exile over the last 5 years, the majority of whom are from East African countries. Journalists in exile often reside in situations of great insecurity and hardship for extended periods,[237] and few find the opportunity to continue in their profession in exile, accounting for a further loss of voices in the media.

Self-censorship is widely practiced, fueled not only by fear of direct reprisals by state or non-state actors[238], but also by pressure from private and public-sector advertisers who use their economic leverage to influence coverage.[239] Political loyalties or affiliations held by media ownership, or the partisanship of journalists themselves, also undermine independent coverage.[240] In some countries, particularly where there is a history of partisan or ethnic violence, journalists steer away from sensitive topics[241] for fear of personal attack or fueling an already volatile climate.

Balancing freedom of expression while also countering hate speech has continued to be a challenge in many countries, particularly in during volatile election periods. Coverage of inflammatory speech by politicians[242], and posts by bloggers and social media commentators, sometimes places mass communication at the center of election related unrest[243] and has motivated calls by politicians and activists for professional and 'responsible' journalism. Some measures taken by incumbent governments such as imposing guidelines[244] for messaging and social media platforms, pressuring media outlets not to air footage of opposition rallies[245], and closures of media outlets for promulgating hate speech, have been met with criticism from free expression groups.[246] Outside of the context of elections, media professionals have been detained for provocative coverage of sensitive social issues. For example, in one East African country, eight staffers were jailed after printing a derogatory headline targeting the LGBTQI community.[247]

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[232] Karikari et al 2017.
[232] In the case of Lohé Issa Konaté vs. The Republic of Burkina Faso it was found that that imprisonment for defamation violates the right to freedom of expression and that criminal defamation laws should only be used in restricted circumstances. Prior to this, Benin, Ghana and Niger had removed defamation statutes. See Global Freedom of Expression 2014.
[232] Global Freedom of Expression 2016.
[232] Kenya's High Court declared Section 194 of the Penal Code, which creates the offence of criminal defamation, unconstitutional. Article 19 2017; Southern Africa Litigation Centre 2017.
[232] Karikari et al 2017.
[232] CPJ 2015;. Rory Peck Trust 2015; Reporters without Border 2014a, Reporters
[238] Internews 2016.
[239] "Rhodes 2014. p
[240] Internews 2016. .
[241] Harbe 2014.
[242] Somerville 2016.
[243] " Human Rights Watch 2015.
[244] CPJ 2017b.
[245] Valentine and Rhodes 2015.
[246] Quintal 2016.
[247] Quintal 2017.

Actions taken to enhance the safety of journalists

Since 2012 a total of eight resolutions addressing safety of journalists and combatting impunity have been adopted by UN bodies, three by the UN Human Rights Council, four by the United Nations General Assembly and one by the UN Security Council. In addition, UNESCO's Executive Board adopted three decisions in support of activities to promote safety of journalists. 20 African member states[248] sponsored one or multiple of these. Nigeria led the region by sponsoring 6 resolutions. Most African countries, or 27 states, did not sponsor any.

Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal are members of the 'Group of Friends on the Safety of Journalists,' at UNESCO in Paris. The 'Group of Friends' is an informal network of states working together to strengthen the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity and its implementation at the national level. In addition to Paris there are similar groups at the UN in New York City and Geneva.

The resolutions and the UN Plan of Action for the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, emphasize national mechanisms and other measures aimed at protecting journalists and combatting impunity which states should undertake. Under these frameworks, African states have engaged in a number of activities. Since 2013, security forces in Burkina Faso, The Gambia, Madagascar, Mali, Rwanda, Senegal, Somalia, South Sudan and Tanzania have participated in training organized by UNESCO to promote respect for the safety of journalists and freedom of expression and judicial actors throughout the region took part in a training program in South Africa in 2017.

Several regional events brought together representatives from governments, the media, civil society, regional bodies and UN agencies, amongst others, to develop responses to the threats facing journalists. In October 2016 the Republic of Tanzania hosted the "Inter-regional dialogue on strengthening judiciary systems and African Courts to protect journalist safety and end impunity". In late 2017, 3 events in East Africa, in Juba, South Sudan, Nairobi, Kenya and Addis Ababa, Ethiopia[249], led to the adoption of the Nairobi Declaration[250], under which stakeholders in seven[251] countries have committed to developing mechanisms to address safety of journalists in coordination with other national and international stakeholders. Following these meetings, the Africa Union agreed to establish a Working Group on Safety of Journalists.[252]

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[248] States that sponsored resolutions are: Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesoto, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Somalia
[249] Association of Media Development in South Sudan 2017.
[250] UNESCO 2017.
[251] Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda and Tanzania.
[252] Federation of African Journalists 2017.

Figure 4-6: African member states sponsoring UN resolutions on the safety of journalists since 2012

Appendices

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Regional Groupings

WESTERN EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA (27)

Andorra	Greece	Norway
Austria	Iceland	Portugal
Belgium	Ireland	San Marino
Canada	Israel	Spain
Cyprus	Italy	Sweden
Denmark	Luxembourg	Switzerland
Finland	Malta	Turkey
France	Monaco	United Kingdom of Great
Germany	Netherlands	Britain and Northern Ireland
		United States of America

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE (25)

Albania	Estonia	Republic of Moldova
Armenia	The Former Yugoslav	Romania
Azerbaijan	Republic of Macedonia	Ukraine
Belarus	Georgia	Uzbekistan
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Hungary	Russian Federation
Bulgaria	Latvia	Serbia
Croatia	Lithuania	Slovakia
Czech Republic	Montenegro	Slovenia
	Poland	Tajikistan

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN (33)

Antigua and Barbuda	Dominican Republic	Paraguay
Argentina	Ecuador	Peru
Bahamas	El Salvador	Saint Kitts and Nevis
Barbados	Grenada	Saint Lucia
Belize	Guatemala	Saint Vincent and the
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Guyana	Grenadines
Brazil	Haiti	Suriname
Chile	Honduras	Trinidad and Tobago
Colombia	Jamaica	Uruguay
Costa Rica	Mexico	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)
Cuba	Nicaragua	
Dominica	Panama	

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC (44)

Afghanistan	Kazakhstan	Timor-Leste
Australia	Kiribati	Malaysia
Bangladesh	Kyrgyzstan	Maldives
Bhutan	Lao People's Democratic	Marshall Islands
Brunei Darussalam	Republic	Micronesia (Federated States of)
Cambodia	Niue	Mongolia
China	Pakistan	Myanmar
Cook Islands	Palau	Nauru
Democratic People's	Papua New Guinea	Nepal
Republic of Korea	Philippines	New Zealand
Fiji	Republic of Korea	Tonga
India	Samoa	Turkmenistan
Indonesia	Singapore	Tuvalu
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	Solomon Islands	Vanuatu
Japan	Sri Lanka	Viet Nam
	Thailand	

AFRICA (47)

Angola	Ethiopia	Nigeria
Benin	Gabon	Rwanda
Botswana	Gambia	Sao Tome and Principe
Burkina Faso	Ghana	Senegal
Burundi	Guinea	Seychelles
Cameroon	Guinea-Bissau	Sierra Leone
Cape Verde	Kenya	Somalia
Central African Republic	Lesotho	South Africa
Chad	Liberia	South Sudan
Comoros	Madagascar	Swaziland
Congo	Malawi	Togo
Côte d'Ivoire	Mali	Uganda
Democratic Republic of	Mauritius	United Republic of Tanzania
the Congo	Mozambique	Zambia
Djibouti	Namibia	Zimbabwe
Equatorial Guinea	Niger	
Eritrea		

ARAB REGION (19)

Algeria	Libya	Saudi Arabia
Bahrain	Mauritania	Sudan
Egypt	Morocco	Syrian Arab Republic
Iraq	Oman	Tunisia
Jordan	Palestine	United Arab Emirates
Kuwait	Qatar	Yemen
Lebanon		

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World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development

REGIONAL OVERVIEW 2017/2018

AFRICA

Across the world, journalism is under fire. While more individuals have access to content than ever before, the combination of political polarization and technological change have facilitated the rapid spread of hate speech, misogyny and unverified 'fake news', often leading to disproportionate restrictions on freedom of expression. In an ever-growing number of countries, journalists face physical and verbal attacks that threaten their ability to report news and information to the public.

In the face of such challenges, this new volume in the World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development series offers a critical analysis of new trends in media freedom, pluralism, independence and the safety of journalists. With a special focus on gender equality in the media, the report provides a global perspective that serves as an essential resource for UNESCO Member States, international organizations, civil society groups, academia and individuals seeking to understand the changing global media landscape.

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