



Botswana

Republic of Botswana



Key Facts



World Freedom Press Global Index Ranking (Overall) Ranked 44 (25.09)

Head of State / Head of Government: President Mokgweetsa Eric MASISI (since 1 April 2018)

Capital city: Gaborone

Population: 2,249,104 (July 2018 est.)

Official Language(s): English

Ethnic Groups: Tswana (or Setswana) 79%, Kalanga 11%, Basarwa 3%, other, including Kgalagadi and white 7%

Currency: Botswana pula

Gross domestic product (PPP): 17.41 billion USD (2017)

Internet penetration: 39.4% (July 2016 est.)

Most trusted medium of information: N/A

Legal System: mixed legal system of civil law influenced by the Roman-Dutch model and also customary and common law

Political System: parliamentary republic

Journalists Killed/Imprisoned: 0

Media Environment: 2 TV stations - 1 state-owned and 1 privately owned; privately owned satellite TV subscription service is available; 2 state-owned national radio stations; 3 privately owned radio stations broadcast locally as of 2019. Botswana's media environment continued to deteriorate in 2015. A number of legal cases were initiated against journalists during the year, while in January, a cyberattack against an

independent newspaper destroyed more than a decade's worth of its archived data. Botswana remains without an access to information law. State-owned outlets dominate the broadcast media, which reach far more residents than the print media but provide inadequate access to the opposition and government critics. The private Gaborone Broadcasting Corporation television system and two private radio stations have limited reach. Botswana easily receives broadcasts from neighboring South Africa. Internet access is rare outside cities. Defamation is both a civil and criminal offense. In past years civil defamation suits by public officials and others have been a problem for journalists, and although some cases are eventually dropped or dismissed, the lengthy trials and associated legal costs pose a threat to journalism. In March 2015, tabloid journalist Daniel Kenosi was arrested and charged with defamation and the unlawful distribution of obscene material under Section 16 of the Cybercrime and Related Crimes Act, in connection with social media posts implicating a government minister in a sex scandal. He is reportedly the first person to be charged under the cybercrime law. The Botswana chapter of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) urged the prosecution to withdraw the charges against Kenosi, saying the cybercrime law's provisions violate freedom of expression as guaranteed in the constitution. Separately, in November, three journalists from the Sunday Mail were arrested for "communicating false statements prejudicial to the state" for a story that linked police and park officials to the poisoning of dozens of elephants.

Media Issues: Under the previous president, Ian Khama, press freedom declined alarmingly, investigative journalists were arrested, a news website was subjected to a massive cyber-attack, and between 2013 and 2018 Botswana fell eight places in the World Press Freedom Index. So hopes have been pinned on his successor, Mokgweetsi Masisi, who has at least given frequent press conferences since taking office in April, unlike Khama, who gave none during his ten years as president. But there is still no law on access to information, which journalists have long been demanding. All the main print, radio and TV media continue to be owned by the state and are controlled by the government, while the few privately-owned newspapers depend on advertising that they may or may not receive from the state. And journalists say their freedom to inform is restricted by the 2008 Media Practitioners Act and many other laws. In May 2015, three journalists were arrested and charged with the unlawful disclosure of information in connection with a story linking government officials to illegal oil and diamond deals. In March 2015, lawmakers voted to reject a freedom of information bill that had been introduced to the parliament. The same month, the independent newspaper Mmegi reported that a presidential aide had confirmed a long-suspected government policy of not advertising with various private media outlets. The official described the policy as a cost-cutting measure, though Mmegi noted that the outlets in question tended to report critically on the government. In January, a cyberattack against Mmegi destroyed 12 years' worth of its archived data. Its editor alleged that the attack had been perpetrated by the security services in retaliation for a story unflattering to the security service's director.

Popular Forms of Media Consumption

Print: A range of independent newspapers and magazines espousing a variety of views are published in the capital. The widest-circulating newspaper, the state-owned Daily News, is free to readers and is generally the only newspaper available in rural areas. High printing costs and limited distribution networks mean that independent papers usually have modest pressruns.

Digital Media: Internet access is rare outside cities. An estimated 28 percent of the population used the medium in 2015, and the government does not restrict access.

Television/Radio: In 2003, there were an estimated 150 radios and 44 television sets for every 1,000 people. The same year, there were 40.7 personal computers for every 1,000 people and 35 of every 1,000 people had access to the Internet. There was one secure Internet server in the country in 2004.