



WORLD AFFAIRS COUNCIL
of Philadelphia

South Africa

Republic of South Africa



Key Facts



World Freedom Press Global Index Ranking (Overall) Ranked 31 (22.19)

Head of State / Head of Government: President Matamela Cyril RAMAPHOSA (since 15 February 2018); Deputy President David MABUZA (26 February 2018); note - the president is both chief of state and head of government

Capital city: Pretoria (administrative capital); Cape Town (legislative capital);

Bloemfontein (judicial capital)

Population: 55,380,210 (July 2018 est.)

Official Language(s): isiZulu 24.7%, isiXhosa 15.6%, Afrikaans 12.1%, Sepedi 9.8%, Setswana 8.9%, English 8.4%, Sesotho 8%, Xitsonga 4%, siSwati 2.6%, Tshivenda 2.5%, isiNdebele 1.6%

Ethnic Groups: black African 80.9%, colored 8.8%, white 7.8%, Indian/Asian 2.5% (2018 est.)

Currency: South African rand

Gross domestic product (PPP): 349.4 billion USD (2017)

Internet penetration: 54%

Most trusted medium of information: N/A

Political System: parliamentary republic

Legal System: mixed legal system of Roman-Dutch civil law, English common law, and customary law

Journalists Killed/Imprisoned 2019: 0

Media Environment: the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) operates 4 TV stations, 3 are free-to-air and 1 is pay TV; e.tv, a private station, is accessible to more than half the population; multiple subscription TV services provide a mix of local and international channels; well-developed mix of public and private radio stations at the national, regional, and local levels; the SABC radio network, state-owned and controlled but nominally independent, operates 18 stations, one for each of the 11 official languages, 4 community stations, and 3 commercial stations; more than 100 community-based stations extend coverage to rural areas. South Africa scores highly on the press freedom index, and largely enjoys a strong and ethical news environment. This is reflected in a 49% trust in media, one of the highest, perhaps bolstered by the media's recent role in exposing political support at the highest levels. News24, The Daily Maverick, and the AmaBhungane Center for Investigative Journalism were three outlets that helped uncover the corrupt relationship between former president Jacob Zuma and the Guptas, a family implicated in the process that South Africans are terming 'state capture'. In the wake of the scandal, two major news outlets that were owned by the Guptas, The New Age newspaper and the 24hr TV news station Afrotone (formerly ANN7), were forced to close for political and economic reasons.

Media Issues: South Africa's 1996 constitution protects the freedom of its very diverse media, but apartheid-era legislation and the 2004 terrorism laws are used to limit coverage of governments institutions when "national interest" is supposedly at stake. The state security agency spies on some journalists and taps their phones. Others are harassed and subjected to intimidation campaigns if they try to cover certain subjects involving the ruling ANC party, government finances, the redistribution of land to the black population or corruption. An increase in abusive language and hate speech against journalists by an opposition leader in 2018 confirmed that press freedom has yet to be consolidated in South Africa.

Popular Forms of Media Consumption

Social Networks: misinformation on social media exploded, with news brands becoming both targets as well as sometimes unwitting amplifiers. There has been a surge in organizations training media and civil society to combat misinformation, and platforms such as Google and Twitter also allocated resources to help. Meanwhile the Independent Electoral Commission partnered with the NGO Media Monitoring Africa to produce a system for reporting misinformation. The battle against misinformation is made more difficult by South Africans' high usage of WhatsApp (88% for general purposes, and a high 49% for news among our online sample).

Digital Media: Revenue for news media has been plummeting for several years now, with a 12% drop in ad spend last year for television, 5.6% for radio, and 7.7% for print.⁴ Despite 16% of respondents claiming they pay for online news, this figure will not be representative of South Africans as a whole given our urban and highly educated online sample. Indeed, most of the local news organizations with subscription paywalls decline to release their figures, suggesting the number of paying subscribers is still low.

Radio: Radio has always been South Africa's biggest broadcast medium; since the 1960s, South Africa was a world leader in FM radio technology. The majority of radio stations broadcast in English, although the other official languages of South Africa are represented on the airwaves as well. The industry is regulated by ICASA.

Print: The current newspaper industry is in a fairly healthy state. According to a South African Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) survey in 1996, there were 36 daily and weekly urban newspapers in the country — 29 in English, four in Afrikaans, two in Zulu and one in Xhosa. The dichotomy between demographics and publishing languages can be explained by different literacy levels, the widespread popular use of the

English language, as well as South Africa's history of censorship, which curbed the development of a culture of newspaper readership.

Television: Television is the most tightly regulated media sector in South Africa and is (along with radio) regulated by the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA).