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SUFFOCATE AND SILENCE

**Mapping threats to the
media in Mozambique**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines the escalating threats to media freedom in Mozambique, revealing a systematic state strategy to silence independent journalism and control public discourse. It traces the historical roots of press repression, analyses current legal, political, economic, and digital mechanisms of control, and documents the severe risks journalists face, including arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, and murder.

By mapping these interconnected threats, the report demonstrates how closing civic space undermines democratic governance and human rights. It also evaluates the impact on public trust and accountability and offers actionable recommendations to reverse the authoritarian trajectory and safeguard press freedom.

The Mozambican government has over the years sought to control the media as part of a campaign to control the media and suppress opposition voices. Through this campaign, the government has established a climate of fear which undermines democratic principles and human rights. Mozambican journalists face multiple threats among them legal restrictions, political pressure, economic intimidation, digital monitoring, and physical attacks. The governing FRELIMO party uses these attacks against the press as part of a deliberate plan to gain control over public discussions while eliminating media oversight functions.

The research established that Mozambique is “closing civic space” as governments actively limit essential civic rights.¹ This is characterised by the state’s use of its legislative, executive, and security apparatus to silence critical voices.² The tabled Social Communication and Broadcasting bills currently under public

review, threaten to destroy media freedom through harsh legislative measures. The first bill, the Proposta de Lei da Comunicação Social (Draft Law on Social Communication), seeks to regulate journalism and press activities, including print, digital, and online media. If passed, it will introduce mandatory journalist accreditation and creates a regulatory body, ARCOS (Autoridade Reguladora da Comunicação Social). The second bill is the Proposta de Lei da Radiodifusão (Draft Law on Broadcasting) which seeks to regulate radio and television broadcasting, including public, private, and community broadcasters. It will impose licensing requirements and national content quotas (e.g., 80% local programming).

If enacted into law, (ARCOS)³ will be established as a powerful state-controlled regulator, with sweeping authority over Mozambique’s entire media ecosystem. Its core functions will include licensing all media outlets (print, broadcast, and digital) and issuing mandatory professional press cards to journalists. These licenses can be suspended or revoked at ARCOS’ discretion, effectively granting the state veto power over who may practice journalism. The entity will also supervise and sanction media content, enforce compliance with vaguely defined

1 Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, ‘Closing Civic Space in the United States: Connecting the Dots, Changing the Trajectory’, March 2024, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/03/closing-civic-space-in-the-united-states-connecting-the-dots-changing-the-trajectory?lang=en> 1; OECD, ‘Civic Space’, <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/open-government-and-citizen-participation/civic-space.html>.

2 MISA, Relatório Sobre o Estado da Liberdade de Imprensa e da Desinformação em Moçambique (2024), (Maputo, MISA-Moçambique, 2025).

3 Regulatory Authority for Social Communication.

standards such as “public interest” and “social harmony,” and impose penalties ranging from fines to closure of media outlets. ARCOS will have inspection powers, enabling intrusive audits of editorial operations, and may acquire shares in private media companies under the guise of public interest, thus enabling and formalising state capture of independent outlets. Foreign media will face strict accreditation limits, reducing international scrutiny. By concentrating regulatory, supervisory, and punitive powers in a single government-controlled body, ARCOS institutionalises censorship and transforms press freedom into a conditional privilege. Its creation marks the most significant rollback of media rights since Mozambique’s democratic opening in the 1990s.

In Mozambique, a journalist’s card serves as a professional identification document that provides protection, credibility, and respect to its holders, in addition to helping organise the profession and combat the illegal or abusive practice of journalism. However, if this document is issued by the government, it implies that the government could also arbitrarily revoke the card from journalists. This also refers to the licenses that each news organisation has for this practice, as well as its legal existence.⁴ This legislative strategy is designed to formalise state control, with one analyst warning it is “an attempt to formalise what is already happening on the ground,” where the state buys out critical media to silence them.⁵ This strategy is rooted in a postcolonial logic of power that views an independent press as an existential threat to the regime, rather than a pillar of democracy.

Furthermore, the ongoing conflict in Cabo Delgado province has been instrumentalised by the state to curtail critical journalism under the guise of maintaining order, creating a near-total information incognito zone in the region. Journalists attempting to cover the conflict and associated human rights abuses have faced arbitrary detention, torture, and enforced disappearance at the hands of state security forces.⁶ The enforced disappearances of journalists Ibrahimo Mbaruco in April 2020 and Arlindo Chissale in January 2025, and the killing of others, are symptomatic of extreme structural violence for which there has been no accountability, fostering a deep-rooted culture of impunity.⁷ Mbaruco’s case sent a chilling warning to the entire media community, for without resolution, the prosecutors archived the case, despite his final text message stating he was “surrounded by soldiers” before vanishing.⁸

State-sponsored and directed violence against journalists function as a sophisticated mechanism of ‘governmentality’, operating to regulate professional conduct and cultivate internalised restraint within the journalistic community. The systematic absence of meaningful investigation into such offenses cannot be dismissed as mere administrative failure; rather, it represents a constitutive element of the government’s broader strategy of command and control, generating pervasive anticipatory effects that radiate well beyond those directly targeted. The institutionalised climate of non-accountability effectively undermines the media’s critical oversight capacity. Through the suppression of investigative journalism

4 AIM, ‘GABINFO calls for “vote of confidence” on media bills, but others are sceptical’, 15 September 2025, <https://aimnews.org/2025/09/15/gabinfo-calls-for-vote-of-confidence-on-media-bills-but-others-are-sceptical>.

5 Interview with Alexandre Chiúri, Journalist and Analyst, Maputo, 2025.

6 International Press Institute, ‘IPI Africa Monitoring: 2024 Annual Round-Up’, 2024, <https://ipi.media/2024-ipi-africa-monitoring-annual-round-up>.

7 Committee to Protect Journalists, ‘#MissingNotForgotten: CPJ, MISA Mozambique call for investigation into 2 journalist disappearances’, 27 August 2025, <https://cpj.org/africa/mozambique>.

8 Human Rights Watch, ‘Mozambique: Journalist Feared “Disappeared”’, 17 April 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/17/mozambique-journalist-feared-disappeared>; MISA Mozambique, ‘Ninety days of journalist Ibraimo Mbaruco’s disappearance: situation point’, 7 July 2020, <https://misa.org/mz/ninety-days-of-journalist-ibrahimo-mbaruco-s-disappearance-situation-point>.

examining systemic corruption, violations of fundamental rights, and the evolving armed conflict in Cabo Delgado, the FRELIMO administration reproduces established patterns of postcolonial governance wherein the circulation of information in the public sphere is construed not as a democratic entitlement, but rather as a potential challenge to centralised authority.

Economic pressures, including the partisan allocation of state advertising and the concentration of media ownership in the hands of the political elite, have hollowed the financial sustainability of independent outlets, forcing them into a state of precarity.⁹ This is compounded by digital threats, including pervasive state surveillance—which journalists believe is constant—and orchestrated online harassment campaigns, which extend the state’s disciplinary reach into the virtual sphere.¹⁰

The combined impact of these threats creates a deeply disturbing environment of widespread self-censorship and destroys public confidence in media outlets and government institutions. This suffocating silence deprives citizens of the information necessary for democratic participation and enables corruption and human rights abuses to flourish unchecked.

This report puts forward the following key recommendations:

- To the Government of Mozambique: The proposed restrictive media legislation must be withdrawn immediately while a new transparent drafting process should begin with meaningful media stakeholder consultation that aligns with all regional and international human rights standards. An independent, internationally supported commission of inquiry must be established to investigate all cases of killings, disappearances, and attacks on journalists, to end the cycle of impunity.
- To Mozambique’s International Partners: Publicly and privately condemn the attacks on media freedom and condition non-humanitarian development assistance on tangible improvements, including bringing to justice the perpetrators of violence against journalists and the withdrawal of the repressive media bills. Donors should increase direct financial and technical support to independent media outlets, investigative journalism centres, and legal defence funds.
- To Civil Society and Media Organisations: Strengthen collaborative networks for advocacy, legal defence, and emergency support, with efforts focusing on building a united front to challenge the status quo, enhance digital and physical security training for journalists, and deploy regional and international legal mechanisms to seek justice.

9 Freedom House, ‘Beijing’s Global Media Influence 2022: Mozambique’, 2022, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/mozambique/beijings-global-media-influence/2022>.

10 Interview with Amade Abubacar, Journalist, Jornal Zitamar, Pemba, 20 June 2025.

INTRODUCTION

This report examines how Mozambique's post-independence state has systematically undermined the media, particularly the independent media that emerged in the 1990s.¹¹ The current situation makes this research urgent.

With new repressive media laws under consideration and journalists continuing to be murdered, arrested and subjected to enforced disappearances, the window for reversing Mozambique's authoritarian trajectory is closing. Free press, the backbone of democracy, is being dismantled. When media outlets cannot operate independently and diverse voices and perspectives are shut as is the case in Mozambique, citizens are denied the information they need to participate meaningfully in public life as well as to question those in power, and demand accountability and transparency from their governments.

The essential role of media in democracies is protected under international human rights law. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights guarantee the right to seek, receive, and share information and ideas through any media, across all borders.¹² Mozambique has signed and ratified these agreements, making them legal obligations, not just aspirations. These instruments guarantee the

right to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media, regardless of frontiers.¹³

Despite constitutional guarantees under Article 48 and Mozambique's binding obligations as a party to the ICCPR and the African Charter, these fundamental freedoms are under severe and sustained attack. The state has weaponised law, economic pressure, and coercion to silence independent journalism, while proposed media bills threaten to institutionalise censorship through a government-controlled regulator. Arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, and violence against journalists persist with impunity, creating a climate of fear and self-censorship. This systematic rollback of rights undermines democratic governance and erodes public trust. The country is experiencing what experts call "closing civic space", the deliberate and systematic shutdown of basic freedoms, including freedom of expression, freedom of association, and the right to peaceful assembly. Governments frame these crackdowns as necessary for national security, public order, and increasingly,

11 In Mozambique, independent media refers to media outlets that operate free from direct government or FRELIMO (ruling party) control, making editorial decisions without state interference or reliance on state funding. They include privately owned commercial newspapers, non-profit journalism centres, and community-based platforms committed to fact-based reporting and accountability. This view of independent media is consistent with international human rights standards wherein media outlets and journalists have the right to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any platform, whether it is print, broadcast, or online, without interference, censorship, or fear of reprisal. States have the obligation to guarantee that journalists operate free from government or political control, ensuring editorial autonomy and protection of sources, mirroring the guarantee under Article 19 of the ICCPR and Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

12 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), Art. 19 10; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), Art. 19 13; African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981), Art. 9.

13 OHCHR, General Comment No. 34 on Article 19: Freedoms of opinion and expression, 29 July 2011, CCPR/C/GC/34.

as counter-terrorism measures. In reality, however, these tactics aim to silence dissent and tighten the ruling elite's grip on power. Attacks on journalists serve as early warning signs of broader democratic collapse. When reporters are silenced, other human rights violations inevitably follow. The crisis is particularly acute in Cabo Delgado, where an ongoing conflict has become a pretext for severe repression, as well as in Nampula, Zambézia, and the capital Maputo, all major centres for independent journalism.¹⁴

This report documents and analyses a comprehensive spectrum of threats confronting Mozambique's journalists, from restrictive legislation to enforced disappearances. It examines the legal, political, economic, digital, and physical dimensions of this crisis through detailed documentation and firsthand accounts from journalists working in dangerous conditions. While the report focuses on Mozambique as a whole, it concentrates on the period of sharp democratic decline from 2015 to the present, with special attention to Cabo Delgado, where conflict has provided cover for brutal repression, as well as Nampula, Zambézia, and Maputo, which remain vital hubs for journalistic activity. Centring Cabo Delgado is methodologically appropriate, as access to information is extraordinarily difficult

in the province, particularly in the heart of the insurgency. Journalists face kidnapping, murder, arrest, and constant threats. Their equipment is confiscated, sometimes with direct government authorisation. A concrete example is Estacio Valoi, one of the report's authors, who was arrested and detained three times in Cabo Delgado. On 7 April 2017, Valoi was detained by Mozambican security forces in Pemba, Cabo Delgado, while reporting; his equipment was seized before he was released without charge. On 17 December 2018, both Valoi and David Matsinhe, the co-author, and their driver were arrested and detained, with all their work equipment confiscated and never returned.¹⁵ In 24 July 2021, Valoi was arrested in Montepuez, another Cabo Delgado's district, accused of terrorist activities while covering OIKOS' humanitarian operations, a stark illustration of the escalating risks faced by journalists. As journalist Carlos Mhula explains:

“Cabo Delgado is a difficult province for journalism, especially in the Northern Operational Theatre where the press is banned. Journalists are threatened, detained, their equipment confiscated, killed, or disappeared. It's a daily risk to exercise the profession in Cabo Delgado.”

Similar restrictions plague Nampula, Zambézia, and the southern provinces of

14 This report challenges the idea that a Western-style public sphere, as an open forum for rational debate, can simply be transplanted to Mozambique. That European model doesn't capture the reality of a postcolonial nation where media operates in a contested landscape, shaped by extreme power imbalances and systematic exclusion. Since independence, the ruling FRELIMO party has worked to establish and maintain ideological control by managing both public support and opposition. State-run media manufactures consent among citizens, while government forces crack down on critical independent voices. This pattern has roots in colonialism: Mozambique's post-independence government inherited the surveillance systems and control tactics of its colonial rulers. Under colonial rule, the state didn't see itself as responsible for protecting human rights. Instead, it functioned as a surveillance apparatus that controlled people through what historians call “decentralized despotism”—using local authorities to enforce a colonial version of traditional law. That legacy of command-and-control, of arbitrary and violent rule, persists today. The government still views independent journalism not as a democratic asset but as a threat to state power and stability. Mozambique's relationship with the press must be understood within this historical continuum, where authoritarian instincts remain deeply embedded in political culture.

15 ZAM, On Monday 17 December, 2018, our colleague Estacio Valoi and his team were arrested by the Mozambican army, 20 December 2018, <https://www.zammagazine.com/politics-opinion/1057-estacio-valoi-arrested>. Geoffrey York, Canadian scholar freed after military detention in Mozambique, *Globe & Mail*, 19 December 2018, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-canadian-scholar-freed-after-military-detention-in-mozambique>.

Maputo and Gaza, though with varying intensity. Five media outlets interviewed described a frightening squeeze on press freedom. Speaking with journalists from nearly every province revealed the full scope of the crisis facing Mozambican media.

The report combines extensive desk research with semi-structured interviews with 15 journalists from across the country, conducted between June and July 2025. Their direct accounts provide powerful testimony to the real dangers they face daily. The journalists were selected based on rigorous criteria including their regional representation, prominence in investigative journalism and their years of professional experience. They are recognised by peers and the public for their influence and relevance in the field, and they have demonstrated sustained commitment to in-depth, fact-based reporting over time. Their careers offer a window into how the profession of journalism has evolved and how reporters navigate the changing political landscape.

Furthermore, it reviews Mozambique's Constitution and its domestic laws, including the 1991 Press Law, and critically analyses proposed new media legislation. The new laws represent a deliberate rollback of the democratic progress achieved in 1991, when landmark legislation broke the single-party state's monopoly on information. These are not simple amendments. They are a fundamental restructuring of the media landscape designed to place it under executive control. The proposed laws function as sophisticated tools of government power, aimed at disciplining the press and controlling public discourse. They represent a calculated attempt to dismantle journalism's watchdog

role and consolidate the state's grip on what information reaches the public.

Moreover, the report draws on findings from national, regional, and international human rights organizations, including MISA Mozambique, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the Committee to Protect Journalists.

FOR THIS REPORT, KEY TERMS ARE DEFINED AS FOLLOWS:

- **Media Freedom:** Journalists and news outlets have the right to seek, receive and share information through any platform, whether in print, broadcast, or online, and across any border. Crucially, they must do so without fear of censorship, legal punishment, or physical attack. This includes the right of journalists to make their own editorial decisions, protect their sources, and access government information.¹⁶
- **Journalism:** Gathering and verifying facts, and presenting news and information to the public. Journalists include full-time reporters and analysts, bloggers, citizen journalists, and others who publish or broadcast their work, whether in print, online, or on air.
- **Independent Media:** Media outlets that operate free from direct government or FRELIMO (ruling party) control, making editorial decisions without state interference or reliance on state funding. They include privately owned commercial newspapers, non-profit journalism centres, and community-based platforms committed to fact-based reporting and accountability.¹⁷

16 Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa (2019), Principle 1.

17 This view of independent media is consistent with international human rights standards wherein media outlets and journalists have the right to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any platform, whether it is print, broadcast, or online, without interference, censorship, or fear of reprisal. States have the obligation to guarantee that journalists operate free from government or political control, ensuring editorial autonomy and protection of sources, mirroring the guarantee under Article 19 of the ICCPR and Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Mozambique's media crisis has deep roots. To understand today's attacks on journalists, we must trace the line from Portuguese colonial censorship through FRELIMO's post-independence monopoly to the fragile liberalisation of the 1990s — and its current collapse.

The roots of this crisis run through a complex historical weight of colonialism, the single-party socialist state, the devastating civil war, and the treacherous road to the multi-party-political system. Understanding this historical trajectory is essential to grasping the deeply entrenched political culture that underpins the contemporary assault on the press.

MEDIA UNDER THE COLONIAL RULE

During Portuguese colonial rule, journalism and media served as both tools of imperial control and sites of resistance. Political debate marked the press in Mozambique, where journalism was always tied to the social and political causes of the colony and empire, despite censorship and repression of titles that opposed the colonial project.¹⁸

Early titles such as *The Delagoa Gazette of Shipping and Commercial Intelligence* (1903-1904) and the bilingual *Lourenço Marques Guardian* (1905-1951) served settler and commercial interests, while African-led

initiatives, such as *O Africano* and *O Brado Africano*, founded by the Albasini brothers, articulated counterclaims to authority and nascent nationalist discourse. These ventures faced structural fragility and recurrent suppression, revealing the colonial state's intolerance of autonomous public spheres. Political papers like *O Português* and *O Progresso* were curtailed for republican sympathies. Broadcasting followed the same logic: Rádio Clube de Moçambique (1934) institutionalised propaganda, embedding Salazar's *Estado Novo* ideology in everyday life. Thus, media functioned less as a forum of rational debate than as an instrument of bureaucratic control, punctuated by fragile spaces of resistance.¹⁹

Under António de Oliveira Salazar's *Estado Novo* ("New State") dictatorship (1933-1974), the colonial government established strict censorship through the *Regulamento dos Serviços de Censura* (Regulation of the Censorship Services) adopted in 1936, requiring permits to establish newspapers and forcing complete page reorganisation

18 Grupo Internacional de Estudos da Imprensa Periódica Colonial do Império Português, *Jornalismo de causas em Moçambique* <https://expoimprensacolonial.fcsh.unl.pt/moc.html>. J.L.L. Garcia, *Ideologia e Propaganda Colonial no Estado Novo*. PhD thesis, Universidade de Coimbra, 2011.

19 Thiago Henrique Sampaio, *Rindo à nossa moda: censura e dilemas nas páginas de O Africano durante a Primeira Guerra Mundial (1914-1918)*, *Clio: Revista de Pesquisa Histórica*, vol. 40, n° 1, pp. 182–208, Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, 2022. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22264/cliio.issn2525-5649.2022.40.1.10>; Jeanne Marie Penvenne, João dos Santos Albasini (1876–1922): The Contradictions of Politics and Identity in Colonial Mozambique, *The Journal of African History*, vol. 37, n° 3, pp. 419–464, Cambridge University Press, 1996. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-african-history/article/abs/joao-dos-santos-albasini-18761922-the-contradictions-of-politics-and-identity-in-colonial-mozambique/98A9F79E788D6BDF651432E2C98367B5>; Marco Freitas, *Rádio Clube de Moçambique: História económica e cultural de uma empresa radiofónica num contexto colonial (1932-1974)*, *Revista de História da Sociedade e da Cultura*, vol. 21, pp. 97–120, Coimbra University Press, 2021. DOI: https://doi.org/10.14195/1645-2259_21_4.

before printing to hide any traces of censorship.²⁰ Salazar (1889–1970) was Portugal's authoritarian leader who created the Estado Novo, Europe's longest-lasting dictatorship. Established in 1933 after years of political chaos, the regime combined conservative Catholic values, nationalism, and corporatism. It promised stability but enforced strict censorship, banned opposition, and relied on secret police (PIDE) to silence dissent through surveillance, torture, and exile. Salazar ruled as Prime Minister until 1968, shaping policy without a mass movement or cult of personality. His Estado Novo endured until the Carnation Revolution of 1974, leaving a legacy of repression, colonial wars, and economic stagnation despite fiscal discipline.

The political police PIDE (*Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado*, i.e., International and State Defense Police) had power to detain anyone suspected of plotting against the state, while censorship controlled newspapers, books, music, and art. With its power to detain, torture, and murder suspected dissidents, PIDE institutionalised violence and created a climate of fear where “the walls have ears”.²¹

In Mozambique, the governors repeatedly suspended influential newspapers like *Diário de Moçambique* in 1964, 1965, and 1968 for criticising the Portuguese colonial system, and in 1971, both *Diário de Moçambique* and

Voz Africana were permanently shut down.²² The regime promoted “luso-tropicalism” propaganda in the 1950s, presenting Portugal as a multi-racial, non-violent coloniser, while suppressing the realities of racism and colonialism through state propaganda in monuments and history books.²³ This systematic silencing of critical voices reveals colonialism's fundamental dependence on information control. Unable to justify its exploitation through reason, the regime relied on fear and censorship to maintain power. The Portuguese colonial administration never countenanced a free press; media served as an instrument for projecting colonial authority and managing the indigenous population. Colonial Mozambique's press illustrates the rationalisation of domination through control of communication.²⁴ fragile spaces of resistance.

Rádio Clube de Moçambique, founded in 1934, exemplified the colonial state's rationalisation of communicative power. Far from a neutral broadcaster, it functioned as an institutional instrument for embedding Salazar's *Estado Novo* ideology within everyday life. Its editorial line was not merely aligned with Portuguese imperial ideals; it actively disseminated propaganda through music, news, and cultural programming designed to exalt the empire and naturalise domination. Under these conditions, broadcasting ceased to be a sphere of autonomous discourse and became a bureaucratically organised mechanism

20 Daniel Melo, *Imperial Taboos: Salazarist Censorship in the Portuguese Colonial, in Media and the Portuguese Empire (161-178)*, 2017, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321674134_Imperial_Taboos_Salazarist_Censorship_in_the_Portuguese_Colonies.

21 Lara Silva, *Portugal's Dictatorship: Salazar's Estado Novo*, [Portugal.com](https://www.portugal.com/history-and-culture/portugals-dictatorship-salazars-estado-novo), 26 January 2023, <https://www.portugal.com/history-and-culture/portugals-dictatorship-salazars-estado-novo>;

22 Daniel Melo, *Imperial Taboos*. Sandra da Cunha Pires, *Imprensa Periódica Missionária no Período do Estado Novo (1926–1974)*, Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, 2010.

23 Civic Media Observatory, *Undertones: Portugal and the Myth of the Good Colonizer*, *Global Voices*, 31 October 2023, <https://globalvoices.org/2023/10/31/undertones-portugal-and-the-myth-of-the-good-colonizer>. Capela, J. “A Imprensa de Moçambique até à Independência”. Zamparoni, V. *Entre Narros & Mulungos: Colonialismo e paisagem social em Lourenço Marques*. Springer (2017). *Media and the Portuguese Empire*. Allina, E. *Slavery by Any Other Name: African Life under Company Rule in Colonial Mozambique*

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of control, an “organ of authority” whose purpose was to reproduce the normative order of colonial rule.

THE MEDIA UNDER FRELIMO’S ONE PARTY STATE

Upon achieving independence in 1975 after a decade-long liberation war, FRELIMO inherited this centralised and coercive state apparatus²⁵ quickly establishing a one-party Marxist state and outlawing rival political activity. This inheritance encompassed the approach to information. FRELIMO’s single-party socialist state repurposed the media through a similarly instrumentalist lens as a key instrument for nation-building and ideological consolidation.²⁶ The media came under state control as an instrument for the dissemination of a new political narrative, one to “safeguard the revolution” and mobilise the “New Man”.²⁷

The transition from colonial to post-independence Mozambique illustrates a paradigmatic shift in the rationalisation of communicative power. Under Portuguese rule, media ownership was concentrated in the colonial state, supplemented by private outlets operating under strict censorship and ideological alignment. Newspapers such as *Notícias* and broadcasters like *Televisão de Moçambique* and *Rádio Moçambique* functioned as instruments of imperial authority, reproducing the normative order of the Estado Novo. Independence in 1975 did not dismantle this logic but

reconfigured it. FRELIMO appropriated all media, transforming them into organs of the socialist project. Their function ceased to be informational and became programmatic, mobilising the masses, promoting national unity, and legitimising revolutionary ideals. Even during the liberation struggle, FRELIMO’s own press served as a communicative weapon, embedding ideology and sustaining the movement’s claim to authority. In both regimes, media operated not as autonomous spheres of discourse but as bureaucratically organised instruments of domination, oscillating between colonial and postcolonial rationalities.²⁸

In a seminal 1977 speech, President Samora Machel articulated this vision, declaring that a journalist “*must assume the consciousness that he occupies a combat post on the ideological front*” and that his duties “*correspond to those of the Party members.*”²⁹ For Machel,

“The fundamental task that Information faces today in the People’s Republic of Mozambique is to complete the rupture with bourgeois capitalist information... Information must serve the people. It must be at the service of the working classes. It must be an instrument of the worker-peasant alliance and of its vanguard party. It must be an instrument of the worker and peasant State. It must be a weapon against capitalism and Imperialism for the construction of the bases of socialist society.”³⁰

25 Dependency, ‘Side A / Side B: How Mozambican Oral History Archives Expand Our Understanding of Legal History’, <https://dependency.blog/side-a-side-b-how-mozambican-oral-history-archives-expand-our-understanding-of-legal-history>.

26 FRELIMO, Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Frelimo>.

27 Tavares Cebola, Music Media in Mozambique, *Music In Africa*, 12 August 2020, <https://www.musicinafrica.net/magazine/music-media-mozambique>.

28 Robert T. Huffman, Colonialism, Socialism and Destabilization in Mozambique, *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (1990), pp. 1-26; Golaleh Pashmforoosh, Historical Failure or Short-Term Success? Revisiting Post-Colonial Socialism and the Mozambican “Project”, 1975–1994, Master’s Thesis, University of Manitoba, 2014; Sérgio Jeremias Langa, Media and Cultural Hegemony in Mozambique: A Look Focused on the Influence of Television Content on Local Axiology, *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 29, Issue 10 (2024), pp. 45–52.

29 Samora Machel, Speech, 1977. Emphasis added.

30 Ibid.

Machel framed information not as a public good, a right, or a means of discovery, but as a partisan “instrumento” (instrument) and, explicitly, an “arma” (weapon). The call for a “ruptura” (rupture) was absolute, positing a binary worldview in which no neutral ground existed. Information was either “burguês capitalista” or “socialista.” This formulation was a direct refutation of the journalists who had, in that same month, argued for an independent press. He was also clear about role of journalists and information:

“[The journalist must] fight on one of the essential fronts of the revolution, the ideological front, in the trench of information and propaganda. He must make Information an advanced detachment of the class struggle and the Revolution.... [he must be a] combatant on the ideological front of the struggle of the working masses. He must fully assume the interests and aspirations of the workers and peasants.... His duties correspond to those of Party members.”³¹

These declarations betray Machel’s “politico-military” strategic mindset. FRELIMO’s entire identity had been forged in a decade-long armed struggle. In 1977, Machel did not believe the “luta” (struggle) had ended; it had merely transformed. The enemy was now “economic sabotage, inefficiency, corruption, and other abuses”, and the “internal bourgeoisie”. His language was not metaphorical; it was a literal transference of military discipline to a civilian sector. He assigned the journalist to the “frente ideológica” (ideological front). Their place of work was not a newsroom, but a “trincheira” (trench). Their organisation was not a press corps, but a “destacamento avançado” (advanced detachment). A soldier in a trench

on an active front was not expected to be objective, to question orders, or to entertain the enemy’s perspective. Their role was to fight and to win. This, in Machel’s view, was the new role of the journalist.

The radical power of Machel’s declarations was the dissolution of any and all distinction between the journalist and the party cadre, between the media (a state apparatus) and FRELIMO (the Party apparatus). This institutionalised the “ambiguous relationship between ruling party and state apparatus” that would come to define the Mozambican state.³² It made Party loyalty the primary, non-negotiable qualification for journalism

For FRELIMO, independence meant distorting objective reality to serve power, killing the nurseries of civic space before they grew, where journalists might have practised their profession freely. Dissent became dangerous and scrutiny criminal. The media’s role was to transmit the party-state’s narrative, not to question it. The media was the state-party’s instrument deployed to fashion the “New Man”, a universal subject embodying the emerging Mozambican personality, to break decisively with feudal, colonial and bourgeois identities.³³ State media served this ideological project, manufacturing consent for FRELIMO’s socialist policies whilst suppressing alternative voices. As veteran journalist Carlos Mhula recalls, this was a period of “directed, controlled, censored journalism, even if not officially, but in practice, by the FRELIMO Central Committee through the Ideological Department.”³⁴ He described the approach as “very violent,” instilling in all Mozambican journalists a sense of oppression and self-censorship that persisted long after.³⁵

31 Ibid.

32 Giovanni Carbone, *Emerging Pluralist Politics in Mozambique: The Frelimo-Renamo Party System*, Working Paper no. 23, LSE, 2003.

33 Ibid.

34 Interview with Carlos Mhula, *Journalist and Human Rights Defendan apparenter*, Gaza, 2025.

35 Media Freedom and the ‘Transition’ Era in Mozambique: 1990-2000,” in *Media Freedom and Right to Information in Africa*, ed. Centro de Estudos Internacionais (OpenEdition Books, 2017), <https://books.openedition.org/cei/164?lang=en>.

The consolidation of the post-colonial state apparatus required the systematic subordination of the means of communication to the central authority. This centralisation was not merely an administrative maneuver but a fundamental strategy for legitimising the new political order. As Chichava observes, “This control not only aimed to defend the interests of the newly constituted Republic, but also aimed to facilitate the propagation of the regime’s ideals and, through this means, consolidate national unity.”³⁶

Within this framework, the press was not viewed as an autonomous entity but as a functional instrument of the state’s charismatic authority. Machel codified this instrumental role through a specific programmatic vision: beyond the foundational triad of “Decolonise, Democratise, and Develop,” he established a functional tetrad—to inform, educate, mobilise, and organise the populace—as the guiding pillars of journalistic vocation.³⁷

The imperative to regulate the press was structurally rooted in FRELIMO’s adherence to the orthodoxy of Marxism-Leninism. Consequently, the media apparatus was directed toward the negation of capitalist imperialism and the sociopsychological construction of the “New Man.” The bureaucratic management of this ideological machinery was initially vested in Jorge Rebelo. Acting in his capacity as Minister of Information, Rebelo was tasked with the rationalisation of the media landscape, a duty exemplified by his 1977 mandate to create the necessary conditions for a “national seminar of all information bodies.”³⁸

Media outlets were nationalised, and journalism was framed as a revolutionary duty.³⁹ After independence, the Mozambican government nationalised the main media outlets, such as the Mozambique Information Agency (AIM) and the National Press of Mozambique, to control the dissemination of information and break with the colonial past. This nationalisation occurred in line with the country’s socialist orientation and aimed to create a state-run communication system. The FRELIMO government, from a socialist perspective, took control of outlets such as the Mozambique Radio and Television Station (RTDM), which became the state’s information arm. Nationalisation was an important step in establishing the new regime and breaking with the colonial past.

The state was declared subordinate to the party.⁴⁰ The nationalisation of existing outlets, such as the transformation of Rádio Clube de Moçambique into the state-run Rádio Moçambique, was not merely an economic act but a strategic appropriation of the primary means of ideological production. This move was central to FRELIMO’s project of constructing a new national consciousness and securing hegemony over a society fractured by war and colonial legacies. Therefore a state media hegemony within the Marxist-Leninist political system was established.⁴¹

THE SHORT-LIVED ERA OF FREE PRESS

A significant rupture occurred with the end of the Cold War and the conclusion of the civil war. The Cold war was a standoff between

36 Sergio Chichava, *Uma Breve Análise da Imprensa Moçambicana*, p. 127, 2010, https://www.iese.ac.mz/lib/publication/livros/des2010/IESE_Des2010_5.ImpMoc.pdf.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 ResearchGate, ‘Communicating Politics and National Identity: The Case of Mozambique’, (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323421171_Communicating_Politics_and_National_Identity_The_Case_of_Mozambique).

40 Strong Party, Weak State? Frelimo and State Survival Through the Mozambican Civil War, Working Paper No. 23, Crisis States Research Centre, LSE (2006), <https://www.lse.ac.uk/international-development/Assets/Documents/PDFs/cscc-working-papers-phase-two/wp23.2-strong-party-weak-state.pdf>.

41 Ibid.

the United States and the Soviet Union that dominated global politics from the end of the World War II in 1945 until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Mozambique was among the various countries in the world that were the sites of this ideological struggle between western-backed the two world superpowers. In Mozambique, the Cold War took the form of a civil war pitting the rebel Resistência Nacional de Moçambique (RENAMO) and FRELIMO which was backed by the Eastern Block. The Civil War began in 1976, right after independence, and ended in 1992. The ensuing conflict was total in its devastation, systematically dismantling the economic and social infrastructure necessary for state cohesion. The General Peace Agreement marked a transition from mono-party hegemony to a pluralistic democracy, a move essential to re-establishing the state's internal validity and reintegrating the fragmented populace into a unified, albeit fragile, national framework.

The adoption of a new Constitution in 1990 and the enactment of the landmark Press Law (Law no. 18/91) in 1991 ushered in an era of political and media liberalisation.⁴² Article 48 of the Constitution enshrined the rights to freedom of expression and the press, explicitly prohibiting censorship.⁴³ The Press Law created a legal framework for a pluralistic media landscape, leading to the emergence of Mozambique's first independent newspapers, such as *MediaFax* in 1992 and *Savana* in 1994.⁴⁴ This period saw the rise of a courageous and combative investigative press, epitomised by Carlos Cardoso's work. His journalism embodied the media's normative watchdog function, relentlessly

exposing high-level corruption and abuse of power, and for a time, helping to construct a nascent public sphere where critical debate was possible.⁴⁵

The liberalisation of the early 1990s, therefore, constituted more than a juridical reform; it represented a profound ideological rupture. For all its subsequent limitations, the 1991 Press Law established the conditions for a public sphere that was not merely an extension of the party-state. For the first time, a counter-hegemonic press could emerge, one that defined its function not as a 'combatant on the ideological front' but as a critical oversight mechanism. This nascent public sphere, however, immediately became a site of intensive contestation. The independent journalists of this period were not simply documenting events; they were contesting the very foundations of FRELIMO's claim to be the sole legitimate narrator of the nation's reality.

The prevailing atmosphere of intimidation served as the principal structural impediment to the journalistic vocation under the single-party apparatus. Prominent practitioners such as Henrique Jorge, Machado da Graça, and Lina Magia frequently found their professional output subjected to the strictures of state censorship across both television and print media. Even Carlos Cardoso, a figure of significant stature, was not immune; the suppression of his work in the newspaper *Domingo* exemplifies the reach of this bureaucratic control. These episodes precipitated a profound sense of alienation within the professional class, culminating in Cardoso's temporary withdrawal from the field in 1990—an act emblematic of the

42 Lei de Imprensa, Lei n° 18/91 3; Norad, 'Case Report Mozambique', <https://www.norad.no/contentassets/3de288810c88409fb4c8e3ff519ee240/case-report-moz.pdf>.

43 Constitution of the Republic of Mozambique (1990), Art. 48.

44 Sérgio Chichava and Jonas Pohlmann, 'Uma breve análise da imprensa moçambicana', in *Desafios para Moçambique 2010* (Maputo, IESE, 2009).

45 Ibid.

tension between individual agency and institutional rigidity.⁴⁶

However, the subsequent era witnessed a radical reconfiguration of the media landscape: the liberalisation of the public sphere. For nearly a decade, the monopoly of the state yielded to a nascent pluralism, wherein independent newspapers began to interrogate official narratives, scrutinise corruption, and establish a rational-legal framework for public debate. In this context, Carlos Cardoso's *Metical* emerged as the paragon of fearless investigative enquiry.

In the period subsequent to 2000, this diversification accelerated, resulting in a proliferation of private publications such as *Verdade*, *Savana*, *O País*, *Fim de Semana*, *Público*, *Zambeze*, and *Canal de Moçambique*. This expansion was not limited to print; as Miguel notes, the broadcast sector evolved to include approximately eleven free-to-air television operators, seven of which—including STV, TV-Miramar, and TIM—are privately held.⁴⁷ Concurrently, the radio sector saw the rise of stations such as SFM and INDICO, while the digital and civil society space was fortified by entities like the Centre for Public Integrity (CIP) and the Mozambique Investigative Journalism Centre.

It is within this dichotomy—between the dominance of the monolithic one-party state and the heterogeneous complexity of the multi-party system—that the trajectory of investigative journalism must be analysed. This article, therefore, seeks to examine the shifting landscape of research within Mozambican journalism as it transitioned from an instrument of state consolidation to a function of democratic accountability.

The brutal assassination of Carlos Cardoso in November 2000, gunned down in central Maputo while investigating a massive bank fraud, was a watershed moment that exposed the fragility of this liberal interlude.⁴⁷ His assassination marked the beginning of the end of Mozambique's media freedom and sent an unmistakable message: journalists who dig too deep would pay with their lives. The subsequent trial exposed deep connections between organised crime and political power but failed to deliver real accountability. More importantly, it failed to protect Mozambique's remaining investigative journalists.⁴⁸ As Carlos Mhula reflects:

“The death of doyens like Carlos Cardoso and Leite Vasconcelos weakened journalistic militancy, and the risks of practising journalism in Mozambique have increased since 1990, following the new constitution. At present, journalists are neurotic people; a rat moving through a window easily startles them.”⁴⁹

The assassination of Carlos Cardoso must be understood not merely as a murder of an individual journalist but a violent, extra-legal disciplining of the entire emergent independent media project. It represented a brutal reassertion of the boundaries of permissible discourse, demonstrating that the postcolonial state, when its core economic and political interests are threatened, reverts to the logic of violent coercion that Mbembe identifies as a defining characteristic of the postcolony. The murder signalled that whilst the formal legal structures had been transformed, the underlying culture of power, one that construed scrutiny as subversion, remained lethally intact.

46 Sergio Chichava & J. Pohlmann, *Uma Breve Análise da Imprensa Moçambicana: Desafios para Moçambique*, 2010; Paul Fauvet & Marcelo Mosse, *Carlos Cardoso: É proibido pôr algemas nas palavras*, *MediaFax*, 2002.

47 T. Queface, 'Assassinato de jornalista reacende debate sobre liberdade de expressão em Moçambique', *Global Voices*, 31 August 2015.

48 E. Kavanagh, 'Organised Crime in Southern Africa: First-line responses in Mozambique', DFID, 2011.

49 Interview with Carlos Mhula, Journalist and Human Rights Defender, Gaza, 2025.

In the two decades since Cardoso's death, the gains of the 1990s have been systematically eroded. The regression has accelerated over the last decade, marking a resurgence of the state's authoritarian impulses. This dynamic reflects what Achille Mbembe describes as the logic of the postcolony, where the formal institutions of democracy often coexist with informal, violent, and arbitrary modes of rule (command and control).⁵⁰ The state has regressed in its treatment of the press by replicating the pre-1990 period when independent journalism was viewed as subversion to be subdued, seduced, and silenced. The response from authorities reveals a fundamental problem that extends to three distinct fears: fear of truth, fear of free thought, and fear of matching democratic values with implementation. These threats are not sudden storms. They are the old machinery grinding back to life. It was never broken but only buried. Mozambican journalism faces the hand of history, clenched and overreaching. Carlos Mhula, a veteran journalist, is perceptive in his observation that after fighting for Mozambique's liberation, FRELIMO built a regime that now "looks at investigative journalists... as its enemies to be eliminated, not as adversaries who adhere to

the same national rules in the pursuit of the country's development."⁵¹

Recent attacks on journalists, exemplified by the disappearances of Ibrahimo Mbaruco 7 April 2020 and Arlindo Chissale 7 January 2025, represent not a break from the past but its culmination. Mbaruco, a journalist for Palma Community Radio, disappeared in the Cabo Delgado province. He sent a final text message to a colleague stating, "*I am surrounded by soldiers,*" shortly before going missing. He has not been seen since, and human rights organisations classify this as an enforced disappearance. Chissale, the editor of the online outlet *Pinnacle News*, disappeared while travelling in the Silva Macua area (bordering Cabo Delgado and Nampula). According to witness reports cited by his family, he was removed from a public minibus by armed men. Before the abduction, Chissale had been detained and released in August and October 2022. He has not been seen since the abduction. In July 2025, his family revealed they had received information indicating he had been killed shortly after his abduction.⁵² FRELIMO has returned to its pre-1990 instinct: treat independent journalism as subversion, not service.

50 Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*.

51 Interview with Carlos Mhula, Journalist and Human Rights Defender, Gaza, 2025.

52 Zenaida Machado, Mozambican Journalist Feared Forcibly Disappeared in Cabo Delgado, Human Rights Watch, November 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/11/02/mozambican-journalist-feared-forcibly-disappeared-cabo-delgado>; Paul Fauvet, CPJ and MISA demand information about missing journalists, AIM, 29 August 2025. Amnesty International, Mozambique: Journalist's disappearance must be investigated: Arlindo Chissale, 17 March 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr41/9125/2025/en/#:~:text=Mozambican%20journalist%20and%20politician%20Arlindo,been%20seen%20since%207%20January.>

CURRENT LANDSCAPE OF THREATS

Mozambican journalists face threats from five interconnected sources: restrictive laws that criminalise reporting; political institutions that deploy violence with impunity; economic pressures that starve independent outlets; digital surveillance that tracks their every move; and societal harassment that makes their work life-threatening.

These are not random acts but components of a coordinated system designed to eliminate independent journalism. This section documents each threat domain in detail.

LEGAL AND REGULATORY THREATS

Mozambique is weaponising law against journalists. The proposed new media laws, namely *Proposta de Lei da Comunicação Social* (Social Communication Bill) and *Proposta de Lei da Radiodifusão* (Broadcasting Bill), would grant the state unprecedented control over who can practice journalism.

These Bills represents a paradigmatic shift from the relatively liberal ethos of the 1991 Press Law towards a centralised, bureaucratic rationalisation of the public sphere. No longer content with informal mechanisms of influence, the government seeks to codify its authority through a rigid legalistic framework. These bills do not merely update technical standards; they fundamentally alter the structural relationship between the media and the state.

The Social Communication Bill

The Social Communication Bill represents a calculated expansion of the state's bureaucratic machine, seeking to enclose the previously fluid domain of digital expression within a rigid "iron cage" of rational-legal control. This legislative instrument does not merely regulate; it fundamentally redefines the relationship between the citizen and the public sphere.

The Bill's most pernicious element lies in Articles 2 and 3 which introduce an expansive redefinition of "media activity". By themselves, these articles constitute the enclosure of the digital space. Through them, the Bill collapses the distinction between institutional journalism and individual digital expression, and imposes a crushing administrative burden upon the atomised social media user. The requirement for registration and licensing transforms freedom of speech from an inherent right into a revocable state concession, dependent upon bureaucratic benevolence. Furthermore, the codification of vague prohibitions, such as the duty to respect "public order" and "national symbols", grants the government unlimited discretionary power. Without precise legal definitions, these clauses function as trapdoors, allowing the authorities to classify valid political critique as administrative non-compliance or "disinformation."

The implications for social media cannot be overstated, because this legislation effectively extends the state's monopoly on violence to the monopoly on truth. By threatening severe criminal and financial sanctions for content deemed "inconvenient," the Bill injects a paralysing culture of self-censorship. The vibrant, chaotic marketplace of ideas characteristic of the digital age is thus sterilised, replaced by a disciplined, cowed, homogenous echo chamber where the individual, fearing the heavy hand of the regulator, voluntarily silences their own voice to ensure survival within the new patrimonial order.

Article 23 of the Bill represents patrimonial capture. Perhaps the most brazen assertion of

state primacy, this article empowers the State to acquire shares in private media bodies based on vague criteria of “public interest.” This effectively erases the separation between the public and private spheres, allowing the State to economically cannibalise its critics under the guise of “support” or “interest,” a classic feature of patrimonial authority.

The Broadcasting Bill

Simultaneously, the Broadcasting Bill asserts state sovereignty over the electromagnetic spectrum, not merely as a technical resource, but as a domain of political exclusion. It represents a shift from a regulatory framework designed for technical coordination to one of ideological containment, where the airwaves are treated not as a public commons, but as a domain of government exclusivity.

The Broadcasting Bill weaponises administrative procedure. The most coercive provision is the imposition of mandatory rebroadcasting of official state addresses and the strict quotas for “national content.” This way, the Bill conscripts private capital for the maintenance of the government legitimacy. Private broadcasters will effectively be transformed into reluctant subsidiaries of the central propaganda machine, compelled to disseminate the regime’s narrative under the threat of licence revocation. Furthermore, the restriction on foreign investment and content serves to insulate the domestic population from external “rationalities” that might challenge local orthodoxy.

In addition, Article 28 of the Bill mandates that 80% of programming must consist of national content. While ostensibly a measure to promote culture, functionally it creates a content vacuum that can only be filled by cheap, state-aligned productions or repetitive official propaganda. Small, independent

broadcasters, lacking the capital to produce high-quality local content, will be forced to shut down or rely on government-supplied material. Thus culture is propagandised by decree, forcing a homogenous national narrative that suffocates the cosmopolitan diversity inherent in a pluralistic society.

The implications for social media are severe. By employing elastic definitions of “broadcasting” that fail to distinguish between industrial telecommunications and digital streaming, the government seeks to enclose the podcast and live-stream spaces within the same proverbial Weberian “iron cage” of bureaucracy that governs television networks. This imposes an insurmountable barrier to entry for the independent digital creator. Unable to bear the administrative and financial costs of compliance, the agile social media voice is silenced, leaving the digital sphere dominated by those institutional actors sufficiently capitalised to navigate the state’s labyrinthine regulatory demands.

Journalists and legal bodies believe the Bills represent the most serious legislative threat to press freedom since independence. With an opaque legal apparatus, the state shapes the conditions under which the media must operate. The complex and intimidating legal architecture installs a more insidious process of guidance and constraint. Through the Bills, the state does not merely impose control from above, but cultivates a climate in which conformity becomes a precondition for survival while the media’s critical function is tamed in service of the government’s broader objectives.⁵³

The Bills aim to replace the 1991 Press Law which protects free press rights. As such, these new Bills represent a major legal threat to free press.⁵⁴ A critical analysis of the draft proposals, supported by legal bodies such as the Mozambican Bar Association (OAM),

53 The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon, ‘Technology (of Discipline, Governmentality, and Ethics)’, Cambridge University Press, (<https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/cambridge-foucault-lexicon/technology-of-discipline-governmentality-and-ethics/5A45AE006CBDC9D38FEA01644F356313>).

54 AIM, ‘Public consultation on media and broadcasting laws launched’, 19 August 2025, <https://aimnews.org/2025/08/19/public-consultation-on-media-and-broadcasting-laws-launched>.

reveals several deeply problematic provisions that would drastically curtail media freedom.⁵⁵

- **A New State-Controlled Regulator:** At the heart of this legislative overhaul lies Article 7 of the Social Communication Bill, which establishes a new supreme authority: ARCOS. By design, this body effectively usurps the role of the Higher Council for Social Communication (CSCS), replacing a constitutionally mandated guardian of press freedom with a bureaucratic enforcer. The true nature of this shift is laid bare in Article 8. Unlike the CSCS, which operates with a constitutional shield of independence, ARCOS is constructed as a direct administrative arm of the executive. This structural subordination validates the industry's deepest fears of regulatory capture; the watchdog has been replaced by an attack dog. The regulator's teeth are sharpened in Article 12 of the Social Communication Bill and Article 17 of the Broadcasting Bill. These provisions invest ARCOS with the unilateral power to silence dissent. With the stroke of a pen, it can suspend or revoke operating licences for "non-compliance" with vague administrative norms, a discretionary weapon that leaves media outlets vulnerable to arbitrary closure. Perhaps most chilling is Article 67 of the Broadcasting Bill, which subjects broadcasters to a rigid regime of "supervision and inspection." This clause empowers ARCOS inspectors to bypass the judiciary entirely, granting them the authority to raid newsrooms, seize equipment, and cut transmission signals without a court order, effectively placing the survival of independent media in the hands of government inspectors rather than the law.
- **State Ownership in Private Media:** Article 23 of the Social Communication Bill states that "The State may participate in the share capital of private media bodies." This provision provides the legal cover for the "formalisation" of state interference. It transforms the relationship between the State and the media from one of external regulation to internal management. By invoking the nebulous concept of "public interest" (a term left legally undefined), the State can leverage this article to place its proxies on the boards of critical newspapers such as *Savana* or *Canal de Moçambique*, thereby dismantling investigative units from within.⁵⁶ As journalist and analyst Alexandre Chiúri warns, this is "an attempt to formalise what is already happening on the ground," where the state or its proxies buy out critical media to silence them". This legislation would formalise a mechanism for direct editorial interference, compromising the independence of the private press.⁵⁷ Once the state controls the shares, the editor who brakes major corruption stories can be replaced, critical journalists can be reassigned to lifestyle sections, and the paper's investigative unit may be disbanded.
- **Mandatory Licensing of Journalists:** For the first time, the new laws would introduce a compulsory licence for journalists, to be issued and potentially revoked by the new state-controlled regulator.⁵⁸ Article 46 of the Social Communication Bills provides mandatory issuance of a professional journalist's card, aiming to dignify the profession, organise the sector, and protect professionals. This card will supposedly lend credibility to the profession and ensure that journalists work with rigour and ethics. In practice, however, this provision will transform journalism from a profession

55 360 Mozambique, 'Bar Association Warns of "Risks to Freedom of Expression" in Proposed Media Laws', 5 September 2025, <https://360mozambique.com/development/bar-association-warns-of-risks-to-freedom-of-expression-in-proposed-media-laws>.

56 Ibid.

57 Interview with Alexandre Chiúri, Journalist and Analyst, Maputo, 2025.

58 AIM, 'Public consultation on media and broadcasting laws launched'.

to a state-conceded privilege. This law-making creates a powerful tool to exclude critical or investigative journalists from the profession, effectively giving the state a veto over who may practice journalism. As Article 52 of the Social Communication Bill provides, this could mean that a reporter who exposes a major banking scandal has their journalist licence “suspended pending investigation” after officials claim they violated professional conduct rules by protecting her sources. It could mean they cannot work whilst the investigation drags on for years. Young journalists covering protests against government policies might find their licence applications rejected for “insufficient professional experience” or vague “character concerns.” Editors might self-censor, knowing that publishing certain stories could cost their staff their livelihoods. For instance, freelance journalists working on sensitive investigations in Cabo Delgado could be denied licences altogether, leaving only state-friendly reporters to cover the insurgency

- Restrictions on Foreign Media: The Social Communication Bill, through Article 34, seeks to limit the number of accredited correspondents for any foreign media outlet to a maximum of two. This is a direct reading of Article 34(3), which explicitly stipulates: “*Each foreign media outlet may accredit a maximum of two correspondents.*” This provision attempts to curtail international scrutiny and control the narrative reaching global audiences, particularly concerning sensitive issues like the Cabo Delgado conflict and human rights abuses. The BBC, Reuters, and The New York Times each have multiple correspondents covering Mozambique’s gas discoveries and Cabo Delgado conflict. Under the new law, each outlet may be ordered to reduce to just two accredited journalists, severely limiting their ability to cover a country the size of France and Turkey combined. When Al Jazeera’s accredited correspondents are in Maputo covering elections, the government may deny accreditation to their colleague attempting to report from Cabo Delgado, claiming the quota is full. International

news agencies may have to choose between covering political developments in the capital or humanitarian crises in the north because doing both is prohibited. Foreign journalists’ accreditation renewals could be delayed during sensitive periods, preventing them from reporting on protests, violence, or contentious court cases. Article 32 injects the fear of delayed accreditation by granting the government broad discretion in the accreditation process, allowing bureaucratic inertia to function as a tool of censorship during sensitive periods.

Under the proposed legislation, the government would wield sweeping discretionary powers over both local and foreign media, powers so broad and ill-defined that authorities could suppress press freedom in virtually any way they choose. The danger lies in the vagueness. Terms like “public interest,” “national security,” “professional conduct,” and “social harmony” are nowhere clearly defined in the legislation. This deliberate ambiguity transforms these laws into blank cheques, allowing officials to interpret and apply them however suits their political interests at any given moment.

This could have chilling effects on the media. For example, government officials could invoke “national security” considerations to revoke the licence of a journalist for publishing an article criticising the President. If a newspaper exposes corruption in a state-owned company, authorities could claim it violates “public interest” and suspend its operations. If a foreign correspondent reports on military failures in Cabo Delgado, the government might cite threats to “social harmony” to deny accreditation renewal. A radio station interviewing opposition leaders could face sanctions for allegedly breaching vaguely worded “balance” requirements.

The legislation provides no clear standards, no transparent procedures, and no meaningful appeals process. Decisions rest entirely on the whims of government-appointed regulators. One official might approve a story; another might consider the same reporting grounds for prosecution. This unpredictability is itself

a form of censorship; journalists cannot know where the red lines are, so they pull back from all potentially sensitive coverage.

In essence, the law creates a toolkit of pretexts. The legislation provides a legally plausible justification for whatever story the government would want buried, whatever journalist it would want to silence, whatever outlet it would want to shut down. The only limit is how creatively authorities choose to wield these powers. This is governance by arbitrary decree masquerading as media regulation.

Alexandre Chiúri, a journalist, rightly comments that within the proposed legal architecture,

“The state can buy shares... what will happen if this Bill passes is that they will look at successful TV stations, say that they are bringing us down, so we will buy shares to silence the organisations. (sic) They will start interfering in editorial matters. We will lose all those freedoms that television gives people to be able to say what they think independently of politics. In my opinion, it puts the freedom of journalists at risk. And then it's not very clear what they want to see as public interest. They can buy shares, what does “public interest” mean in a case like this?”

Chiúri also takes issue with provisions regarding sponsorships for media outlets. In his view, such provisions will limit and/or take away freedoms:

“Imagine that the state decides to sponsor, for example, TV Sucesso, which is the organisation that is currently causing a lot of trouble for the system because it is open to all opinions. What criteria would they adopt? Why would they sponsor TV Sucesso and not, for example, Miramar or STV? A sponsored organisation will remain silent, because if it criticises the person or institution that sponsors it, they will immediately withdraw the sponsorship, and in this case, the advertising as well.”

In 2005, Chiúri participated in initiatives, processes, and debates held by the National Information Office (GABINFO) alongside other partners to review the law when he was part of the leadership of the National Union of Journalists (SNJ). The work was carried out in all provinces of the country and submitted to the government, but it was ultimately shelved.

Table 4.1 below presents a side-by-side comparative analysis of two interlinked Bills currently under public consultation, both unveiled on 18 August 2025. Together, these Bills seek to establish a comprehensive regulatory framework for the country's media landscape.

The Social Communication Bill targets journalism and the press, encompassing print, digital, and online news outlets, whilst the Broadcasting Bill focuses specifically on radio and television services, including public, private, and community broadcasters. Though distinct in scope, both Bills share a common regulatory philosophy centred on heightened state oversight.

Table 4.1: Mozambique's Proposed Media Laws (2025)

Media Bill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposta de Lei da Comunicação Social (<i>Social Communication Bill</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposta de Lei da Radiodifusão (<i>Broadcasting Bill</i>)
Main Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regulates journalism and the press (print, digital, online) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regulates radio and television broadcasting (public, private, community)
Scope of Regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Print media, digital outlets, online journalism, news agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Radio, television (terrestrial/satellite), audiovisual platforms
Professional Registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mandatory journalist registration Requires a state-issued press card (<i>carteira profissional</i>) Criteria defined and enforced by a regulatory body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not applicable to individuals; focus is on licensing broadcast institutions
Media Licensing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mandatory registration of media outlets Subject to regulatory screening Criteria may limit access for critical or informal media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broadcasters must obtain a state licence Revocable based on vague notions of “public interest”
Regulatory Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposes new centralised Media Regulatory Authority Powers to register, monitor, sanction journalists and outlets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposes a Broadcasting Authority or similar regulatory body Oversees technical and content compliance
Content Regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Journalists/outlets legally liable for published content Limits on defamation, especially regarding the President and foreign officials No clear protections for investigative journalism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regulators may impose local content quotas, national language usage Authority to define and sanction “inappropriate” broadcasts
Sanctions and Enforcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fines, suspension or revocation of press cards Administrative punishments for violations Due process and appeals mechanisms are unclear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Licences can be suspended or revoked Enforcement powers raise risk of political or ideological censorship
Ownership Rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not explicitly address ownership, but regulatory power implies control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows state to acquire shares in private broadcasters under “public interest” grounds Limits foreign ownership
Public Service Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frames public media as instruments for national unity and socialist values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positions state broadcasters as agents of nation-building and development Affirms strong state influence over public content
Status of the Bill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft bill, not yet submitted to Parliament Undergoing public consultation since August 2025 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft bill, also not yet submitted to Parliament Part of same consultation process as the Press Law
Date Tabled	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 18 August 2025 (start of public consultation in Maputo) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 18 August 2025 (tabled alongside the Press Law for public discussion)
Civil Society Concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Could criminalise or restrict critical journalism Creates a state-controlled accreditation system Risks politicising media regulation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Threatens editorial independence “Public interest” clause could be a pretext for state capture of media May marginalise community broadcasters and raise operational barriers

Beyond these new proposals, the state continues to weaponise existing legislation. Vaguely worded provisions in laws on national security, espionage, and counterterrorism are arbitrarily applied to journalists. The Anti-Terrorism Law (Law no. 13/2022), for instance, criminalises the dissemination of information about terrorist acts that is deemed “false or grossly distorted,” carrying a penalty of two to eight years in prison.⁵⁹ Such laws give authorities a pretext to arrest journalists reporting on the Cabo Delgado conflict, as seen in the case of Amade Abubacar, who was detained by the military for months and accused of violating state secrets and inciting disorder simply for interviewing displaced persons.⁶⁰ These legal instruments function as disciplinary tools, creating a chilling effect that deters reporting on matters of significant public interest.

POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL THREATS

The legal framework is reinforced by direct political pressure and institutional coercion, which aim to enforce the ruling FRELIMO party’s hegemonic control over the public narrative. This manifests as a pattern of direct violence and intimidation, for which there is almost total impunity.

A disturbing number of journalists have been subjected to arbitrary arrest, abduction, enforced disappearance, and murder. These attacks, often carried out by or with the complicity of state security forces, serve as the ultimate form of censorship and a

stark warning to others. The following table summarises some of the most egregious recent cases, illustrating a clear pattern of violence and impunity. The year 2024 stood out as one of the most repressive for the Mozambican press, marked by police aggression, digital censorship, and physical violence against journalists. This is revealed in the Report on the State of Press Freedom and Disinformation in Mozambique 2024, released by MISA Mozambique as part of the celebrations of World Press Freedom Day.⁶¹ The tension between the state machine and the independent press is evident in the quantifiable escalation of coercive incidents. According to MISA’s systematic monitoring conducted, the year 2024 witnessed 32 distinct violations against press freedom, a figure that surpasses the 28 infractions recorded in the preceding year of 2023.⁶²

This intensification of control was not arbitrary but was structurally anchored in the crisis of political legitimacy surrounding the general elections of 9 October. Of the total incidents recorded, 22 were directly correlated with the electoral process—a contestation of power that precipitated widespread civil unrest across the national territory.

However, these specific figures represent only the visible strata of a broader trajectory of intimidation. Over the last triennium, the cumulative number of violations has exceeded one hundred cases.⁶³ However, these official statistics likely represent only a fraction of the reality. A vast dark figure of repression looms over the industry, a silent

59 ISHR & RMDDH, ‘Submission to the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights’, June 2024, (https://ishr.ch/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Mozambique-Submission-to-ACHPR_FINAL.pdf).

60 VOA Português, ‘Amnistia Internacional pede libertação de jornalista moçambicano’, January 2019, <https://www.voaportugues.com/a/amnistia-internacional-pede-liberta%C3%A7%C3%A3o-de-jornalista-mo%C3%A7ambicano/4735830.html>.

61 MISA Moçambique, Relatorio Sobre o Estado da Liberdade de Imprensa e da Desinformacao em Mocambique 2004, 2005, <https://misa.org.mz/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Relatorio-do-estado-da-Liberdade-de-Imprensa-e-da-Desinformacao-em-Mocambique-2024.pdf>.

62 MISA Moçambique, MISA denuncia ano de violência e censura contra jornalistas, 2024, Available at: <https://misa.org.mz/misa-denuncia-ano-de-violencia-e-censura-contra-jornalistas>.

63 CPJ & MISA Moçambique, Desaparecidos, não esquecidos: CPJ e MISA Moçambique pedem investigação, 2024. Available at <https://misa.org.mz/desaparecidosnaoesquecidos-cpj-e-misa-mocambique-pedem-investigacao-sobre-o-desaparecimento-de-dois-jornalistas>

accumulation of unreported threats and intimidation that never makes it into the formal record. Consequently, the available data serves as an incomplete, perhaps even sanitised, metric of the true pressure currently bearing down on Mozambique's press corps.

At least 50 journalists have been subjected to arbitrary arrests, abduction, enforced disappearance, and murder from 2010 to date, a disturbing trend highlighting the grave predicament of the media.

Table 4.2 below documents incidents of violence, intimidation, and harassment targeting journalists and media outlets in

Mozambique from 2020 to 2025. These cases represent a disturbing pattern of press freedom violations that create a climate of fear and self-censorship. Each incident not only impacts on the individual journalist but sends a broader message to the media community about the risks of independent reporting, particularly on sensitive topics such as government accountability, corruption, and the conflict in Cabo Delgado. In every case, investigations have stalled or been abandoned. This systematic impunity sends a clear message: journalists who challenge the state will disappear, and no one will be held accountable.

Table 4.2: Documented Attacks on Journalists in Mozambique

Date	Journalist & Outlet	Location	Type of Attack	Alleged Perpetrator	Status of Investigation	Impact on Press Freedom
7 Apr 2020	Ibrahimo Mbaruco	Palma, C. Delgado	Enforced Disappearance	Military personnel	Case archived, unresolved ⁶⁴	Sends strong message that independent reporting on Cabo Delgado conflict carries extreme personal risk; creates fear of similar fate among journalists.
23 Aug 2020	<i>Canal de Moçambique</i>	Maputo	Arson attack on office	Unknown	No accountability ⁶⁵	Demonstrates willingness to use property destruction to intimidate media outlets; raises concerns about journalists' physical safety.
14 Dec 2023	João Chamusse	Maputo	Murder	Unknown	Under investigation ⁶⁶	Unsolved murder amplifies fear that violence against journalists goes unpunished; strong deterrent effect on investigative journalism.

64 HRW, 'Mozambique: Journalist Feared "Disappeared"' 7; Amnesty International, 'Mozambique: Journalist forcibly disappeared: Ibraimo Abú Mbaruco', 16 April 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr41/2138/2020/en/> 50; Amnesty International, Urgent Action, 19 March 2025.

65 Al Jazeera, 'Mozambican journalists' lives are on the line in Cabo Delgado', 7 March 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/3/7/mozambican-journalists-lives-are-on-the-line-in-cabo-delgado>.

66 CPJ, 'CPJ calls for a thorough investigation into killing of Mozambican journalist João Chamusse', 14 December 2023, <https://cpj.org/africa/mozambique/>.

4 Jun 2024	Sheila Wilson	Maputo	Arbitrary Arrest	Police	Released without charge ⁶⁷	Arbitrary arrests demonstrate journalists risk detention for covering political events; chilling effect on protest coverage.
12 Dec 2024	Albino Sibia	Ressano Garcia	Killed (shot by police)	Police	No accountability ⁶⁸	Police killing of journalist creates perception that state security forces pose direct threat to press; particularly chilling for coverage of protests.
7 Jan 2025	Arlindo Chissale	C. Delgado	Enforced Disappearance	Men in military uniform	No investigation announced ⁶⁹	Second enforced disappearance reinforces pattern; creates atmosphere where journalists may 'vanish' without consequences.
Mar 2025	Selma Marivate	Maputo	Suspected Poisoning	Unknown	No investigation in Moz ⁷⁰	Suspected poisoning suggests sophisticated efforts to silence journalists; creates paranoia about personal safety even in everyday activities.
4 Jul 2025	Ângela Fonseca	Nampula	Physical Assault	Employees of state water co.	Case reported ⁷¹	Physical assault by state employees shows journalists face violence from multiple state-linked actors; discourages reporting on government services.

67 CPJ, 'Mozambique journalist arrested, 2 harassed and robbed at protest', 7 June 2024, <https://cpj.org/africa/mozambique/>; HRW, 'Mozambique: Abuses Against Media, Activists Before Elections', 11 September 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/09/11/mozambique-abuses-against-media-activists-elections>.

68 CPJ, 'Blogger killed, editor missing as Mozambique's press freedom crisis deepens', February 2025, <https://cpj.org/africa/mozambique>.

69 Amnesty International, 'Mozambique: Journalist's Disappearance Must Be Investigated', 17 March 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/urgent-actions/journalists-disappearance-must-be-investigated>; CPJ, 'Arlindo Chissale', <https://cpj.org/data/people/arlando-chissale>.

70 Amnesty International, 'Mozambique: Poisoning of journalist must be investigated', 31 July 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/urgent-actions/poisoning-journalist-must-be-investigated> 55; MZNews, 'Jornalista Selma Inocência Marivate denuncia tentativa de assassinato por envenenamento', <https://mznews.co.mz/en/jornalista-selma-inocencia-marivate-denuncia-tentativa-de-assassinato-por-envenenamento>.

71 ISA Mozambique, 'Águas da Região do Norte limitam o trabalho da jornalista do Ikweli em Nampula', 10 July 2025, <https://misa.org.mz/aguas-da-regiao-norte-limitam-o-trabalho-da-jornalista-do-ikweli-em-nampula>.

This pattern of attacks demonstrates a systematic effort to silence critical journalism in Mozambique. The lack of accountability in most cases, combined with the diversity of perpetrators; from military personnel to police to unknown actors; creates a pervasive atmosphere of impunity. The chilling effect is profound: journalists increasingly self-censor on sensitive topics, particularly regarding the insurgency in Cabo Delgado and government corruption. Without meaningful investigations and prosecutions, press freedom in Mozambique remains under severe threat,

undermining democratic accountability and the public's right to information.

Table 4.3 below, while not exhaustive, documents specific, publicly reported instances of threatening or harsh language used by government officials, state institutions, and affiliated political actors against journalists and the media. It chronicles a troubling pattern of intimidation against Mozambican journalists spanning two decades, documenting specific threats and hostile rhetoric between 2004 and 2025.

Table 4.3: Reported Threats by Mozambican Officials and State-Affiliated Actors

Date of Incident/ Statement	Official(s) / Institution	Title/Affiliation	Summary or Direct Quote of Threat / Harsh Language	Context
c. 2004	Mozambican State Media	State-Owned Media	Called opposition activists "enemies' of the state."	During the 2004 parliamentary elections. ⁷²
15 Apr 2018	António Muchanga	Member of Parliament (Renamo)	Publicly threatened on a television programme "to tie up with wire" journalist Marcelo Mosse, whom he accused of libel.	Following the journalist's reporting on the MP. ⁷³
05 Jan 2019	Police / Military Personnel	Security Forces (Police and FADM)	Arbitrarily arrested journalist Amade Abubacar, held him incommunicado in military detention, and subjected him to torture and other ill-treatment.	While journalist was interviewing internally displaced persons in Cabo Delgado. ⁷⁴
18 Feb 2019	Security Forces	Security Forces	Arbitrarily arrested and detained journalist Germano Adriano incommunicado.	Colleague of Amade Abubacar, arrested in Cabo Delgado. ⁷⁵
03 May 2019	Alice Tomás	Member of Parliament (Frelimo)	Agitated on Facebook for a female human rights activist (Fátima Mimbire) "to be raped by 10 strong and energetic men to teach her a lesson."	In response to the activist's public criticism.
07 Apr 2020	Unnamed Military Personnel	Mozambican Defence and Security Forces (FADM)	"surrounded by military" / "the soldiers have surrounded me; they are harassing me." (Final message from journalist Ibraimo Mbaruco before his forced disappearance).	Journalist's work in Palma, Cabo Delgado. ⁷⁶

⁷² Committee to Protect Journalists, "10 Most Censored Countries," 10 May 2006.

⁷³ "Mozambique: Attorney General Defends Her Handling of 'Secret Debts'," Agência de Informação de Moçambique (AIM), 13 November 2023.

⁷⁴ Amnesty International, "Media Freedom in Ashes," 2020; "Mozambique: Submission to the African Commission," ISHR, 2024.

⁷⁵ Amnesty International, "Media Freedom in Ashes," 2020.

⁷⁶ "Mozambican journalists say army more dangerous," Voice of America, 16 August 2021; Amnesty International, "Media Freedom in Ashes," 2020.

18 Jun 2020	<i>Procuradoria-Geral da República</i> (PGR)	Public Prosecutor's Office	Charged journalists Matias Cuente and Fernando Veloso with "violation of statesecrecy" and "conspiracy against the state."	Response to an article alleging corruption in a secret military contract in Cabo Delgado. ⁷⁷
14 Aug 2020	President Filipe Nyusi	President of Mozambique	"Disapproved of those who spoke about the armed conflict," targeting those who "in the camouflaged name of human rights, don't respect the sacrifice of those who keep this young homeland standing."	Press conference in Pemba, Cabo Delgado, regarding the conflict. ⁷⁸
16 Aug 2020	Egídio Vaz	Government Affiliate / Frelimo Member	Referred to Bishop Lisboa (a vocal critic of the Cabo Delgado war) as "a criminal [who] should be expelled from Mozambique" on his social media platform.	Part of a social media campaign against critics of the government's war response.
15 Sep 2020	Amade Miquidade	Minister of the Interior	Dismissed video of soldiers executing a naked woman as "propaganda by terrorists" and claimed the perpetrators were terrorists in "identical" uniforms.	Responding to video evidence of extrajudicial killings by FADM in Cabo Delgado. ⁷⁹
c. 2021	President Filipe Nyusi	President of Mozambique	Accused the media of "effectively acting on behalf of 'enemies or terrorists'."	General statements on media coverage of the Cabo Delgado conflict. ⁸⁰
16 Feb 2024	Sidónio José	Administrator, Quissanga District (Cabo Delgado)	Accused unnamed journalists of "fabricating false news about terrorism to traumatize communities."	Radio interview regarding the insurgency in Cabo Delgado. ⁸¹
17 Feb 2024	Valige Tauabo	Governor of Cabo Delgado Province	Accused journalists of striking "deals" with terrorists" and being "in sync with terrorists." Stated media coverage had an "imprint of evil" and views were "formatted by terrorists." Warned media "not to create a situation."	Public address in Pemba, capital of Cabo Delgado.
24 Aug 2024	Unnamed individuals (presumed Police/Security)	Unknown (believed to be state security)	Anonymous call to journalist Rui Minja stating men in an un-plated car "had been sent to kill him" and that "he should abandon his <i>camisola</i> (jersey)."	After journalist reported on police disrupting an opposition campaign event. ⁸²
c. Oct 2024	Egídio Vaz	Member of Parliament (Frelimo)	Alleged Facebook post: "you can talk... Frelimo will hold on for another 50 years. Even if we have to eliminate 50 more Elvinos, we won't hesitate... we won't back down."	Following the murder of lawyer Elvino Dias during post-election tensions. ⁸³

77 Amnesty International, "Media Freedom in Ashes," 2020; Amnesty International, "Mozambique: Unprecedented arson attack on Canal media house," 24 August 2020; Lemos and Rawoot, "Mozambican journalists' lives," Al Jazeera, 7 March 2021.

78 Amnesty International, "Media Freedom in Ashes," 2020.

79 "Amnesty seeks independent probe," AFP, 15 September 2020.

80 "Cabo Ligado: Journalists return," *Zitamar News*, 20 July 2023.

81 Committee to Protect Journalists, "Mozambican authorities accuse journalists," 7 March 2024.

82 Human Rights Watch, "Mozambique: Abuses Against Media," 11 September 2024.

83 "Human Rights Network sues MP Egídio Vaz," *MZ News*, 2 November 2024.

c. Oct 2024	Unnamed Police Officers	Police (PRM)	Blindfolded, questioned, and accused South African journalists Bongani Siziba and Sbonelo Mkhasibe of being “spies who wanted to portray Mozambique in a grim light.”	Journalists were arrested while covering post-election protests in Maputo. ⁸⁴
c. Nov 2024	<i>Instituto Nacional das Comunicações</i> (INCM)	State Communications Regulator	Justified internet shutdown by citing “concern” over “videos and messages that promote and encourage violent demonstrations and other acts of disobedience and social destabilization.” Labelled this “fraudulent traffic” and a “threat to the preservation of national security.”	Justification for internet blackouts during 2024 post-election protests. ⁸⁵
c. Nov 2024	Amilton Alissone	Deputy Minister of Transportation and Communications	Stated internet would only be restored when “the necessary conditions were in place,” refusing to specify the legal basis or conditions.	Justifying internet shutdown during 2024 post-election protests.
22 Oct 2025	Cristóvão Chume	Minister of Defence	“Grumbling that there is too much discussion of insurgent activities,” claiming this “pessimistic media coverage is affecting investment.” Demanded a “positive narrative.”	Speaking to media after a session of parliament about coverage of Cabo Delgado. ⁸⁶

84 Committee to Protect Journalists, “Journalists in the crossfire of Mozambique’s post-election crisis,” 19 November 2024.

85 Human Rights Watch, “Mozambique: Post-Election Internet Restrictions,” 6 November 2024.

86 “Shooting the messenger,” *Zitamar News*, 23 October 2025; “Mozambique Conflict Monitor,” *ACLEDD*, 29 October 2025.

The threats against journalists range from verbal menacing to severe physical repression. Early examples of this repression include state media branding opposition activists as “enemies” during the 2004 elections and a 2018 incident where MP António Muchanga publicly threatened to “tie up with wire” journalist Marcelo Mosse on television. The pattern intensified dramatically around coverage of the Cabo Delgado insurgency from 2019 onwards.

Security forces arrested journalists Amade Abubacar and Germano Adriano incommunicado in 2019, with Abubacar reportedly tortured whilst in military detention.⁸⁷ Most gravely, journalist Ibraimo Mbaruco forcibly disappeared on 7 April 2020 after sending a final message stating soldiers had “surrounded” and were “harassing” him.⁸⁸

High-level officials feature prominently: President Filipe Nyusi repeatedly accused media of serving “enemies or terrorists,”⁸⁹ whilst Interior Minister Amade Miquidade dismissed video evidence of military atrocities as “propaganda by terrorists.”⁹⁰ On 17 February 2024, Cabo Delgado Governor

Valige Tauabo alleged journalists struck “deals with terrorists,” warning them “not to create a situation.”⁹¹

Recent entries document death threats against reporters, arbitrary detention of foreign journalists branded as “spies,” and state justifications for internet shutdowns during 2024’s post-election unrest, citing concerns over content promoting “social destabilisation.”⁹²

ECONOMIC AND OWNERSHIP-RELATED THREATS

Economic pressures are a powerful, but a less visible, tool for controlling the media. The political economy of the Mozambican media is characterised by a high concentration of ownership in the hands of the state and politically connected elites, creating a market that is structurally biased against independent journalism.⁹³

Given their exclusive access to public funds and facilities, state-owned media organizations RM, TVM and *Jornal Notícias* control the media space.⁹⁴ Alongside them

87 OHCHR, Mozambique: UN experts concerned about detention of journalist Amade Abubacar, 25 January 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2019/01/mozambique-un-experts-concerned-about-detention-journalist-amade-abubacar>.

88 Amnesty International, Mozambique: Journalist forcibly disappeared: Ibraimo Abú Mbaruco, 15 April 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr41/2138/2020/en>.

89 Zitamar, Mozambique president warns media over Cabo Delgado coverage, 26 November 2020, <https://www.zitamar.com/mozambique-president-warns-media-over-cabo-delgado-coverage/#:~:text=Nyusi's%20concerns%20that%20Mozambican%20media,the%20press%20in%20Cabo%20Delgado>.

90 Zitamar, Murdered woman further proof of armed forces violations, says Amnesty, 16 September 2020, <https://www.zitamar.com/murdered-woman-further-proof-of-armed-forces-violations-says-amnesty>.

91 AIM, Cabo Delgado governor attacks journalists, 19 February 2019, <https://aimnews.org/2024/02/19/cabo-delgado-governor-attacks-journalists/#:~:text=Alberto%20Massango%202024%2D02%2D19>; CPJ, Mozambican authorities accuse journalists of colluding with ‘terrorists’, 7 March 2024, <https://cpj.org/2024/03/mozambican-authorities-accuse-journalists-of-colluding-with-terrorists>.

92 Amnesty International, 16 April 2025 Human Rights Violations During Mozambique’s Post-2024 Election Crackdown, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2025/04/mozambique-police-protest-crackdown/#:~:text=Evidence%20strongly%20suggests%20that%20internet,ability%20to%20seek%2C%20receive%20and;CPJ,Journalists%20in%20the%20crossfire%20of%20Mozambique's%20post-election%20crisis>, 19 November 2024, <https://cpj.org/2024/11/journalists-in-the-crossfire-of-mozambiques-post-election-crisis>.

93 Freedom House, ‘Beijing’s Global Media Influence 2022: Mozambique’; L. Bussotti, ‘Tendências do jornalismo moçambicano contemporâneo’, 2024, <https://ebooks.uem.mz/index.php/eduem/catalog/view/5/26/217>.

94 Wikipedia, ‘Mass media in Mozambique’, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mass_media_in_Mozambique.

are the majority of powerful private media organisations with close ties to FRELIMO. This concentration ensures that a significant portion of the media ecosystem is aligned with the government's agenda.⁹⁵ The regime's strategy has evolved beyond mere censorship to a more sophisticated form of "patrimonial capture", neutralising critical voices not by banning them, but by buying them. This tactic is nowhere more evident than in the trajectory of the *Notícias* group. As journalist and analyst Alexandre Chiúri observes, the consolidation of ownership has become a primary instrument for eliminating dissent, effectively transforming the country's newspaper of record into what critics now deride as little more than a "bulletin of the FRELIMO party."⁹⁶

The decline of the weekly *Domingo* offers a stark illustration of this editorial asphyxiation. Once a publication with the potential for vibrant cultural and political debate, *Domingo* has been brought firmly to heel under the umbrella of the "Sociedade do Notícias", a conglomerate dominated by state proxies. Its editorial line has been stripped of autonomy, replaced by a rigid adherence to the group's corporate and political imperatives. The paper's coverage, theoretically designed to inform society, is now filtered through a lens that conflates "national unity" with loyalty to the ruling elite.

Crucially, the problem is not public ownership per se; state-funded media can, in theory, operate with the independence of a true public service broadcaster. The tragedy in Mozambique lies in the active weaponisation of that ownership. The state has refused to adopt a "hands-off" approach. Instead, it uses its shareholding power to dictate editorial policy and intimidate staff, ensuring that facts are curated to fit a pre-approved narrative and that the "development agenda"

serves as a convenient pretext for silencing inconvenient truths.

The state further leverages its economic power through strategic advertising allocation. Government and state-owned enterprise advertising, a crucial source of revenue in Mozambique's small market, is overwhelmingly directed to state-owned and pro-government private media.⁹⁷ Critical and independent outlets are systematically starved of this revenue, pushing them into financial ruin. The status quo ensures their inability to invest in quality journalism, in paying adequate salaries, in short, in their suffocation. As Zito Ossumane notes, independent outlets that refuse to bow to pressure face a "very expensive operational and running cost."⁹⁸

Moreover, the prevailing economic precarity constitutes existential threat to every single independent journalist. A series of demotivating and demoralising socioeconomic factors including low wages, unstable employment terms, deplorable working conditions, and reliance on per diems to cover events, creates an environment ripe for self-censorship and co-optation. Journalist Izidine Achar describes the harsh reality: "We work without life insurance, we travel without life insurance... it's difficult not to live in fear because we know that our newsrooms are already controlled by power."⁹⁹

This economic precarity is a fundamental structural weakness that the state exploits to maintain control.

Table 4.4 below maps Mozambique's print media landscape, revealing a stark divide between state-captured and independent outlets. Two major dailies, *Notícias* and its Sunday edition *Domingo*, remain under state control through government entities IGEPE

95 Freedom House, 'Beijing's Global Media Influence 2022: Mozambique'.

96 Interview with Alexandre Chiúri, Journalist and Analyst, Maputo, 2025.

97 Freedom House, 'Beijing's Global Media Influence 2022: Mozambique'; Wikipedia, 'Mass media in Mozambique'.

98 Interview with Zito Ossumane, Journalist and Media Manager, Quelimane, 21 June 2025.

99 Interview with Izidine Achar, Journalist, STV, Pemba, June 2025.

and Petromoc, with circulations of 16,000 and 10,000 respectively, maintaining

pro-government editorial lines.

Table 4.4: Key Print Media Outlets in Mozambique

Outlet Name	Publisher/ Owner	Ownership Model	Business Model	Est. Circulation	Analytical Profile
<i>Notícias</i>	Sociedade de Notícias	State-Captured (IGEPE, Petromoc) ¹⁰⁰	Paid (Ad-supported)	16,000 ¹⁰¹	State-Managed / Pro-Government
<i>Domingo</i>	Sociedade de Notícias	State-Captured ¹⁰²	Paid	10,000 ¹⁰³	State-Managed / Pro-Government
<i>Savana</i>	Mediacoop	Private (Cooperative) ¹⁰⁴	Paid	15,000 ¹⁰⁵	Independent / Critical / Investigative
<i>Canal de Moçambique</i>	N/A (Private)	Private	Paid	N/A	Independent / Highly Critical / High-Risk
<i>O País</i>	SOICO	Private (Commercial) ¹⁰⁶	Paid	N/A	Independent / Commercial
<i>@Verdade</i>	N/A (Private)	Private	Free / Ad-supported ¹⁰⁷	N/A (High circulation) ¹⁰⁸	Independent / Critical / "Social Intervention"
<i>Zambeze</i>	N/A (Private)	Private	Paid	10,000 ¹⁰⁹	Independent
<i>MediaFAX</i>	Mediacoop	Private (Cooperative) ¹¹⁰	Subscription (Digital)	N/A	Independent / Critical

100 Mozambique: New Rotary Press for 'Noticias' - allAfrica.com, accessed on November 5, 2025, <https://allafrica.com/stories/201011010377.html>.

101 Digital 2023: Mozambique, DataReportal, Global Digital Insights, accessed on November 5, 2025, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-mozambique>.

102 Mozambique: New Rotary Press for 'Noticias' - allAfrica.com, accessed on November 5, 2025, <https://allafrica.com/stories/201011010377.html>.

103 Digital 2023: Mozambique, DataReportal, Global Digital Insights, accessed on November 5, 2025, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-mozambique>.

104 accessed on November 5, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Savana_News#:~:text=Savana%20is%20a%20leading%20independent,Mediacoop%20also%20publishes%20mediaFAX.

105 Digital 2023: Mozambique, DataReportal, Global Digital Insights, accessed on November 5, 2025, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-mozambique>.

106 Mozambique: Global Voices and @Verdade Newspaper, accessed on November 5, 2025, <https://globalvoices.org/2011/03/04/mozambique-gv-partnership>.

107 Mozambique's free newspaper becomes a tool for social transformation - The Guardian, accessed on November 5, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2011/jun/01/free-paper-social-transformation-mozambique>.

108 Mozambique's free newspaper becomes a tool for social transformation - The Guardian, accessed on November 5, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2011/jun/01/free-paper-social-transformation-mozambique>

109 Digital 2023: Mozambique, DataReportal, Global Digital Insights, accessed on November 5, 2025, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-mozambique>

110 accessed on November 5, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Savana_News#:~:text=Savana%20is%20a%20leading%20independent,Mediacoop%20also%20publishes%20mediaFAX.

The independent sector comprises several outlets adopting critical or investigative stances. Mediacoop, a private cooperative, publishes the weekly *Savana* (circulation 15,000) and digital subscription service *MediaFAX*. Other independent titles include the highly critical *Canal de Moçambique*, commercial daily *O País*, free newspaper *@Verdade*, which positions itself as a “social intervention” publication, and *Zambeze*. Business models vary between paid subscriptions and advertisement-supported distribution.

The entire print sector is economically “depressed,” suffering from “declining newspaper sales and advertising revenues.”¹¹¹ This has forced some outlets to stop or “significantly cut hard copy printing” and migrate to digital platforms.

This economic precarity is an existential threat to independent media. Lacking access to the state advertising budgets that flow to *Notícias*,¹¹² independent outlets are trapped. The commercial market is small, and as noted, reliable circulation data is non-existent.¹¹³ The available figures (15,000-20,000 copies per week for private media) are low and

concentrated in Maputo, failing to reach the 61.8% of the population living in rural areas.¹¹⁴

This “dilemma on the future of media business models”¹¹⁵ means that independent papers are forced to choose between different survival strategies: the *Savana* model of relying on a paid readership that values its critical integrity, or the *@Verdade* model of relying on a “free” (gratis) distribution to build mass reach, likely supported by donors or a high-volume, low-margin ad model.¹¹⁶

The television market is effectively an oligopoly composed of the state broadcaster and two dominant private players. However, “private” ownership in this sector does not equate to “independent” or “critical” content. As shown on Table 4.5 below, Mozambique’s television landscape is divided between state influence and commercial independence. State broadcaster TVM dominates alongside private channel STV, each commanding an estimated 4.2 million viewers, though TVM maintains an explicitly pro-FRELIMO editorial stance whilst STV operates as an independent commercial entity.

111 Mass media in Mozambique, Wikipedia, accessed on November 5, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mass_media_in_Mozambique.

112 Digital 2023: Mozambique, DataReportal, Global Digital Insights, accessed on November 5, 2025, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-mozambique>.

113 Mass media in Mozambique, Wikipedia, accessed on November 5, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mass_media_in_Mozambique.

114 Ibid.

115 Ibid.

116 Mozambique: New Editor for *Savana*, allAfrica.com, accessed on November 5, 2025, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200207100008.html>.

Table 4.5: Major Television Broadcasters and Political Alignment

Outlet	Owner	Ownership Model	Est. Viewers	Analytical Profile (Political Alignment)
TVM	Government of Mozambique	State-Owned ¹¹⁷	4.2 million ¹¹⁸	State-Controlled / Pro-Frelimo ¹¹⁹
STV	SOICO	Private (Commercial) ¹²⁰	4.2 million ¹²¹	Independent / Commercial
TV Miramar	Grupo Record (UCKG)	Private (Foreign, Religious) ¹²²	1.6 million ¹²³	Private / Pro-Frelimo ¹²⁴
TV Sucesso	N/A (Private)	Private	N/A	Independent / Critical (High-Risk) ¹²⁵

Notably, TV Miramar, owned by Brazilian religious organisation Grupo Record (linked to the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God), reaches 1.6 million viewers. However, the public opinions views it as pro-government despite foreign ownership. This view contrasts sharply with TV Sucesso, a smaller private broadcaster classified as “independent/critical” and designated “high-risk,” suggesting its editorial position carries professional dangers. The table underscores how political alignment, rather than ownership structure alone, defines

Mozambican broadcasters’ operational environments.

Radio is the most pluralistic and important media sector, but the quantitative data is misleading. While the number of stations is high, a closer look reveals a state-run strategy to co-opt the “community radio” model, competing with and neutralising genuine independent voices. As of 2020, there were 129 radio stations in Mozambique.¹²⁶ As Table 4.6 shows, this breaks down as follows:

117 Televisão Miramar, Wikipedia, accessed on November 5, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Televis%C3%A3o_Miramar.

118 Top radio stations in Mozambique: Listen live & for free, accessed on November 5, 2025, <https://www.radio.net/country/mozambique>.

119 SADC Media Law - Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, accessed on November 5, 2025, https://www.kas.de/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=ca3e5d52-e367-f74d-0a05-193211f54f75&groupId=252038.

120 Mozambique: Global Voices and @Verdade Newspaper, accessed on November 5, 2025, <https://globalvoices.org/2011/03/04/mozambique-gv-partnership>.

121 Top radio stations in Mozambique: Listen live & for free, accessed on November 5, 2025, <https://www.radio.net/country/mozambique>.

122 Social Media Stats Mozambique, accessed on November 5, 2025, <https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/mozambique>.

123 Top radio stations in Mozambique: Listen live & for free, accessed on November 5, 2025, <https://www.radio.net/country/mozambique>.

124 SADC Media Law - Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, accessed on November 5, 2025, https://www.kas.de/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=ca3e5d52-e367-f74d-0a05-193211f54f75&groupId=252038.

125 Mozambique: Free Press Unlimited, accessed on November 5, 2025, <https://www.freepressunlimited.org/en/countries/mozambique-0>.

126 MDIF Ventures makes first investments in Nigeria’s Dataphyte and Mozambique’s Zitamar News, accessed on November 5, 2025, <https://www.mdif.org/news/mdif-ventures-makes-first-investments-in-nigerias-dataphyte-and-mozambiques-zitamar-news/>

Table 4.6: Radio Sector Quantitative Breakdown (c. 2020 Data)

Radio Category	Ownership Model	Est. Number of Stations	% of Total	Key Outlets/ Networks	Analytical Profile
Public Radio	State-Owned	~18 ¹²⁷	14%	Rádio Moçambique (RM)	National reach, state-controlled ¹²⁸
Private Radio	Private (Commercial)	~21 ¹²⁹	16%	R. Miramar, LM Radio	Urban, music-focused, low news content ¹³⁰
Community (ICS)	State-Managed	~49-60 ¹³¹	(Part of 69%)	ICS Network	“Fake” community, government-run, censored ¹³²
Community (FORCOM) ¹³³	Independent (NGO)	~40 ¹³⁴	(Part of 69%)	FORCOM Network	Truly independent, rural focus, high-risk ¹³⁵
Total		129136	100%		

The state’s strategy is clear: to build a well-funded, state-managed “community” radio network that mimics the form of *real* community radio, allowing it to occupy the rural information space and outcompete the financially starved, genuinely independent FORCOM stations.

Table 4.7 maps Mozambique’s digital-native news sector, revealing a clear linguistic

and audience divide. English-language platforms, including *Zitamar News*, *Club of Mozambique*, and *360Mozambique*, primarily target international readers including investors, diplomats, and business communities. *Zitamar* operates behind a paywall, focusing on investigative coverage of politics, extractive industries, and security matters whilst maintaining a “highly critical” stance.

127 MDIF Ventures makes first investments in Nigeria’s Dataphyte and Mozambique’s *Zitamar News*, accessed on November 5, 2025, <https://www.mdif.org/news/mdif-ventures-makes-first-investments-in-nigerias-dataphyte-and-mozambiques-zitamar-news>.

128 Television in Mozambique, Wikipedia, accessed on November 5, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Television_in_Mozambique.

129 MDIF Ventures makes first investments in Nigeria’s Dataphyte and Mozambique’s *Zitamar News*, accessed on November 5, 2025, <https://www.mdif.org/news/mdif-ventures-makes-first-investments-in-nigerias-dataphyte-and-mozambiques-zitamar-news>.

130 Mozambique’s new laws undermine freedom of expression and press - Jamlab Africa, accessed on November 5, 2025, <https://jamlab.africa/mozambiques-new-laws-undermine-freedom-of-expression-and-press>.

131 Mozambique’s new laws undermine freedom of expression and press - Jamlab Africa, accessed on November 5, 2025, <https://jamlab.africa/mozambiques-new-laws-undermine-freedom-of-expression-and-press>.

132 Mozambique’s new laws undermine freedom of expression and press - Jamlab Africa, accessed on November 5, 2025, <https://jamlab.africa/mozambiques-new-laws-undermine-freedom-of-expression-and-press>.

133 The Independent Network: FORCOM (Forum Nacional das Radios Comunitarias) is an NGO umbrella body for approximately 40 independent community stations.

134 Mozambique’s new laws undermine freedom of expression and press - Jamlab Africa, accessed on November 5, 2025, <https://jamlab.africa/mozambiques-new-laws-undermine-freedom-of-expression-and-press>.

135 Mass media in Mozambique - Wikipedia, accessed on November 5, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mass_media_in_Mozambique.

136 MDIF Ventures makes first investments in Nigeria’s Dataphyte and Mozambique’s *Zitamar News*, accessed on November 5, 2025, <https://www.mdif.org/news/mdif-ventures-makes-first-investments-in-nigerias-dataphyte-and-mozambiques-zitamar-news>.

Table 4.7: Key Independent Digital-Native News Outlets

Outlet Name	Language	Primary Focus	Business Model	Target Audience	Analytical Profile
<i>Zitamar News</i>	English	Politics, Extractives, Security	Subscription (Paywall)	International (Investors, Diplomats, NGOs)	Independent/Highly Critical/Investigative
<i>Club of Mozambique</i>	English	Business, Tenders, News	Free (Ad-supported)	International/Business	Independent
<i>360Mozambique</i>	English / Portuguese	Business, Economics	Free (Ad-supported)	Business	Independent
<i>Verdade Online</i>	Portuguese	General News, Politics	Free (Ad-supported) ¹³⁷	National	Independent/Critical Precarious
<i>CanalMoz</i>	Portuguese	General News, Politics	N/A (Online presence of <i>Canal de Moçambique</i>)	National	Independent / Highly Critical / High-Risk

Portuguese-language outlets serve domestic audiences but face greater precarity.

Verdade Online and *CanalMoz* (the digital arm of *Canal de Moçambique*) both adopt critical editorial positions but are classified as “precarious” and “high-risk” respectively, suggesting their investigative work exposes them to significant professional dangers. Most platforms rely on advertising revenue or operate as free services, with only *Zitamar* sustaining a subscription model for its specialised international readership.¹³⁸

DIGITAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL THREATS

The expansion of digital technologies has opened a new front in the state’s efforts to control information. Pervasive surveillance, both real and perceived, acts as a modern form of Foucaultian discipline, where the

constant possibility of being monitored induces conformity.¹³⁹ Journalists widely believe their communications are under surveillance. Amade Abubacar, a journalist previously arrested and detained in Cabo Delgado while covering the effects of the insurgency on 5 January 2019,¹⁴⁰ speaks of the psychological toll: “It is not possible to have total psychological stability.”¹⁴¹ Quinton Nicuete, a Miramar TV journalist based in Pemba, Cabo Delgado, describes his use of a VPN as a necessary defence “to prevent my calls, my location” from being tracked.¹⁴² This digital panopticon forces journalists to resort to clandestine methods just to communicate with sources.

The state also resorts to crude methods of controlling the digital civic space. For instance, during the nationwide protests following the contested October 2024

137 Mass media in Mozambique - Wikipedia, accessed on November 5, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mass_media_in_Mozambique.

138 The terms “precarious” and “high-risk” have become definitive descriptors in documents produced by the Sindicato dos Jornalistas (SJ). These classifications that are increasingly cited by international bodies, such as UNESCO, to underscore the fragility of the profession within the current political climate.

139 The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon, ‘Technology (of Discipline, Governmentality, and Ethics)’.

140 Amnesty International, Mozambique: Detained journalist in critical condition denied medical treatment. 5 March 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/03/mozambique-detained-journalist-in-critical-condition-denied-medical-treatment>.

141 Interview with Amade Abubacar, Journalist, Jornal Zitamar, Pemba, 20 June 2025.

142 Interview with Quinton Nicuete, Journalist, Moz24h, Pemba, 15 June 2025.

elections, the government implemented internet slow- and shut-downs. It also blocked access to social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp.¹⁴³ A blunt instrument, the tactic disrupted the flow of information, created a communication void, and prevented citizens from organising and demonstrating. Thus, FRELIMO's regime demonstrated how far it is prepared to go to cut off the flows of information during times of political crisis.¹⁴⁴

SOCIETAL AND EXTRA-LEGAL THREATS

Beyond direct state action, journalists face threats from a range of other actors, often operating in a grey zone of plausible deniability. The line between state and non-state violence can be blurry, most notably when reporters pursue stories about criminal organisations and businesses connected to political elites. The assassination of Carlos Cardoso for his investigation into a massive bank fraud remains the most prominent example of the fatal risks posed by organised crime.¹⁴⁵ In conflict zones like Cabo Delgado, journalists are at risk not only from state forces but also from armed insurgent groups.¹⁴⁶

Female journalists face a double threat as they are attacked for their journalism and for their gender. Online harassment

against women reporters is explicitly sexual, featuring threats of rape and graphic sexual violence. Ângela Fonseca was physically assaulted by state company employees—an attack that carried both professional and gendered dimensions. Selma Marivate's suspected poisoning, whether motivated by her journalism or her identity as a woman in public life, highlights the particular vulnerabilities women journalists face.¹⁴⁷ The attack on journalist Ângela Fonseca by state-owned company workers together with the alleged poisoning of Selma Marivate during her Maputo work trip expose the particular threats that women endure while working in this field.¹⁴⁸ Sheila Wilson (of the Centre for Democracy and Human Rights in Maputo) was arrested while livestreaming a protest, violently pushed into a police vehicle, suffered head injury. Her equipment and that of others were seized.

It is important to note that even if security forces subject both male and female journalists to the same brute force in equal measure, that in itself is deeply problematic because the physiological impacts can differ significantly due to sex-based biological differences. Research in sports medicine and trauma studies demonstrates that females face heightened vulnerability to certain types of injuries under equivalent force applications. Specifically, studies show that females experience concussions at

143 HRW, 'Mozambique: Post-Election Internet Restrictions Hinder Rights', 6 November 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/11/06/mozambique-post-election-internet-restrictions-hinder-rights>.

144 Amnesty International, *Protest Under Attack: Human Rights Violations During Mozambique's Post-2024 Election Crackdown*, (London, Amnesty International, 2025).

145 E. Kavanagh, 'Organised Crime in Southern Africa'.

146 U.S. Department of State, *2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Mozambique, 2025*, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/mozambique>.

147 L. A. Tshuma, 'Being a Woman-Journalist in a Polarized Context in Mozambique', in *Patterns of Harassment in African Journalism* (2024) 63; UNESCO, 'Safety of Women Journalists', <https://www.unesco.org/en/safety-journalists/safety-women-journalists>.

148 MISA Mozambique, 'Águas da Região do Norte limitam o trabalho da jornalista do Ikweli em Nampula'; Amnesty International, 'Mozambique: Poisoning of journalist must be investigated'.

higher rates than males when exposed to comparable impacts,¹⁴⁹ with contributing factors including differences in neck muscle strength and mass (which provide less stabilisation of the head during sudden movements),¹⁵⁰ baseline differences in cerebral blood flow, and hormonal influences on neurological recovery.¹⁵¹ Additionally, females typically have lower bone mineral density and reduced skeletal muscle mass, making them more susceptible to fractures and soft tissue injuries from blunt force trauma.¹⁵² The biomechanical reality means that the same baton strike, push, or restraint technique that causes bruising in a male journalist may result in more severe injuries—including concussions, fractures, or internal trauma—in a female journalist. Despite these well-documented physiological differences, Mozambican security forces apply force without regard to sex-based vulnerability, employing the same aggressive tactics against female journalists as they do against males. This failure to differentiate use-of-force protocols based on established biological vulnerabilities not only violates international standards on proportionate force but also places female journalists at disproportionate risk of serious injury.

The lack of gender-sensitive and gender-responsive training in crowd control and arrest procedures reflects a broader disregard for the safety of female media workers and compounds the chilling effect on women's participation in journalism, particularly in high-risk reporting contexts.

Finally, the relentless state propaganda and delegitimisation of independent journalism have contributed to a decline in public trust in the media. High-ranking officials who openly label journalists as “terrorists” or “unpatriotic” signal approval for verbal and physical attacks against reporters working in various communities. Such public conduct by senior officials erodes public trust in journalists. It isolates them, rendering their work even more perilous.

In summation, the contemporary threats facing Mozambican journalism constitute what Beck would recognise as a complex risk society, wherein dangers no longer operate discretely but exist within a reflexive, mutually reinforcing matrix. The state's deployment of law as a Foucaultian technology of control, manifest in proposed legislation designed to institutionalise regulatory capture and in the

149 Tracey Covassin, Rosemarie Moran, and R. J. Elbin, “Sex Differences in Reported Concussion Injury Rates and Time Loss From Participation: An Update of the National Collegiate Athletic Association Injury Surveillance Program From 2004-2005 Through 2008-2009,” *Journal of Athletic Training* 51, no. 3 (2016): 189-194, <https://doi.org/10.4085/1062-6050-51.3.05>; R. W. Dick, “Is There a Gender Difference in Concussion Incidence and Outcomes?” *British Journal of Sports Medicine* 43, suppl. 1 (2009): i46-i50, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bjism.2009.058172>.

150 R. T. Tierney et al., “Gender Differences in Head-Neck Segment Dynamic Stabilization During Head Acceleration,” *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise* 37, no. 2 (2005): 272-279, <https://doi.org/10.1249/01.mss.0000152734.47516.aa>; James T. Eckner et al., “Effect of Neck Muscle Strength and Anticipatory Cervical Muscle Activation on the Kinematic Response of the Head to Impulsive Loads,” *The American Journal of Sports Medicine* 42, no. 3 (2014): 566-576, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0363546513517869>; Christy L. Collins et al., “Neck Strength: A Protective Factor Reducing Risk for Concussion in High School Sports,” *The Journal of Primary Prevention* 35, no. 5 (2014): 309-319, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10935-014-0355-2>.

151 Jaclyn Wallace, Tracey Covassin, and Elizabeth Beidler, “Sport-Related Concussion in Female Athletes: A Systematic Review,” *Orthopaedic Journal of Sports Medicine* 8, no. 7 (2020): 2325967120932306, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2325967120932306>; J. Fahr et al., “Concussion in Female Athletes of Contact Sports: A Scoping Review,” *Orthopaedic Journal of Sports Medicine* 12, no. 10 (2024): 23259671241276447, <https://doi.org/10.1177/23259671241276447>.

152 Lanqing Xie et al., “Insights and Implications of Sexual Dimorphism in Osteoporosis,” *Bone Research* 11, no. 1 (2023): 49, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41413-023-00306-4>; Marcus-Xavier Ji and Qing Yu, “Primary Osteoporosis in Postmenopausal Women,” *Chronic Diseases and Translational Medicine* 1, no. 1 (2015): 9-13, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cdtm.2015.02.006>.

weaponisation of security statutes, creates a juridical architecture that simultaneously legitimises and enables overt coercion. This legal framework underpins a brutal political reality characterised by physical violence, enforced disappearances, and near-total impunity, eroding the distinction between state security operations and extra-legal terror.

This political risk is compounded by manufactured economic precarity, in which the partisan allocation of state advertising and the concentration of media ownership within elite networks function as systemic mechanisms of exclusion, starving independent outlets of resources. Into this vulnerability penetrates the

digital panopticon of state surveillance and orchestrated online harassment, extending disciplinary power into the virtual sphere and creating a condition of permanent, individualised risk. The result is not merely censorship, but a pervasive chilling effect born from the rational calculation of risk within an environment where legal, political, economic, and digital threats are inextricably entangled. This systemic assault, which disproportionately targets female journalists through gendered violence, ultimately transforms the practice of journalism from a public service into a high-risk private gamble, compelling a retreat into self-censorship as practitioners navigate a terrain of manufactured uncertainty.

IMPACT ANALYSIS

When journalists disappear and their cases go unsolved, fear spreads. When laws threaten prison for reporting, fear intensifies. When economic pressure destroys outlets, fear becomes financial reality. The result: Mozambican journalism has retreated into self-censorship. Stories that should be told go unreported. Documents that should be investigated stay buried. Officials who should face scrutiny operate without accountability.

This section analyses how threats against journalists ripple outward, damaging not just media freedom but democracy itself.

The most immediate impact is the profound chilling effect on media freedom. The constant risk of arrest, abduction, economic ruin, or physical violence forces journalists and editors into a state of pervasive self-censorship.¹⁵³ As journalist Izidine Acha candidly states, “it is difficult not to live with fear... there are things that we know, we have all the details, but we do not publish because we know that our newsrooms are already controlled by power.”¹⁵⁴ Self-censorship is insidious precisely because it is invisible. Editors kill stories before they are written. Journalists do not pursue certain sources. Investigative leads go unfollowed. Journalists know which subjects are too dangerous. They know which officials cannot be criticised. They tell themselves they are being strategic, picking their battles. However, they have internalised the state’s red lines.

This manifestation of fear through silence means that stories of critical public interest, including high-level corruption, human rights violations by security forces, the true extent of the humanitarian crisis in Cabo Delgado, or the failures of major development projects, are often left untold. In effect, the status quo constitutes a de facto censorship hidden in

plain sight that is more insidious and effective than any official censor’s office. It represents a flagrant violation of the rights guaranteed under:

- Article 48 of the Mozambican Constitution: freedom of expression, freedom of the press, right to information, prohibition of censorship, access to state media and right to reply.
- Article 19 of the ICCPR: freedom of opinion, freedom of expression and media neutrality.
- Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights: right to information and freedom of expression.¹⁵⁵

This degradation of the information ecosystem leads directly to a decay in public trust and democratic participation. A populace deprived of reliable, independent information cannot make informed decisions about its leaders or hold them accountable. When state media disseminates propaganda and the independent press is muzzled, the public sphere becomes polluted with disinformation. This condition erodes trust not only in the media but in all public institutions. The nationwide outbreak of protests after the October 2024 general elections revealed deep public distrust in the entire electoral system.¹⁵⁶ When citizens believe that the ruling party has captured both the electoral system and the media, they lose faith in

153 U.S. Department of State, 2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Mozambique.

154 Interview with Izidine Achar, Journalist, STV, Pemba, June 2025.

155 Constitution of the Republic of Mozambique, Art. 48; ICCPR, Art. 19; African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, Art. 9.

156 Amnesty International, Protest Under Attack.

democratic processes, leading to either civic apathy or political instability. Mozambique's steady decline in global democracy indices is a quantifiable reflection of this democratic decay, which is inextricably linked to the decline in press freedom.¹⁵⁷

In the context of the Cabo Delgado conflict, the suppression of media freedom has had catastrophic consequences. The government's effective information blockade has created a vacuum, allowing a severe humanitarian and human rights crisis to unfold, hidden mainly from public and international scrutiny.¹⁵⁸ By barring journalists from the region and attacking those who attempt to report independently, the state prevents accountability for abuses committed by all parties to the conflict, including its own security forces.¹⁵⁹ The lack of transparent information prevents humanitarian aid delivery while making it hard to measure civilian suffering and blocking peace efforts in the conflict. The disappearance of journalists like Ibrahim Mbaruco and Arlindo Chissale for their work in the region serves as a brutal enforcement of this information blackout.¹⁶⁰

The prohibition of media coverage in Cabo Delgado's armed conflict deprives the province's 2.3 million residents of life-saving information. Without independent journalism, communities cannot access timely warnings about insurgent attacks, safe evacuation routes, or humanitarian aid locations. This information blackout transforms press freedom violations into direct threats to civilian survival, leaving populations defenceless against violence they cannot anticipate or escape.

The impact on international development and economic governance is equally severe. When the press becomes captured and intimidated it loses its ability to properly monitor how public funds and international development aid are used. For instance, the government heavily promoted the infamous PROSAVANA¹⁶¹ project, which was initially valued at \$36 million,¹⁶² though the goal was to collect \$2 billion from global investors for the initial phase of developing 356,000 hectares.¹⁶³ More than 560 million Yen was spent just on drafting the Master Plan, and public consultations cost an additional

157 VOA Português, 'Crescente contestação de resultados eleitorais ameaçar credibilidade da democracia', 17 September 2024, <https://www.voaportugues.com/a/crescente-contesta%C3%A7%C3%A3o-de-resultados-eleitorais-amea%C3%A7ar-credibilidade-da-democracia/7787180.html>.

158 HRW, 'Mozambique: Media Barred From Insurgent Region', 21 February 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/02/21/mozambique-media-barred-insurgent-region>.

159 Amnesty International, 'Amnesty condena ataques a jornalistas em Cabo Delgado', 15 April 2020, (<https://www.dw.com/pt-002/amnistia-internacional-ataques-a-jornalistas-em-cabo-delgado-visam-manter-secretismo-de-viola%C3%A7%C3%B5es/a-53139040>).

160 CPJ, '#MissingNotForgotten'.

161 PROSAVANA is a tripartite cooperation program between Mozambique, Brazil, and Japan to develop agriculture in the Nacala Corridor region of northern Mozambique. The objective is to apply technologies developed in Brazil to expand tropical savanna agriculture into Mozambique. For more, see <https://www.agricultura.gov.mz/comunicado-de-imprensa-prosavana>.

162 Japan's ProSavana Land Project in Mozambique Challenged by Peasants, Xinhua, September 17, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-09/17/c_136615575.htm.

163 Japan Pushes Forward with Agricultural Project Despite Continued Embarrassment, CLBrief, January 13, 2020, <https://www.clbrief.com/japan-pushes-forward-with-agricultural-project-prosavana-in-northern-mozambique-despite-continued-embarrassment>

8.7 million yen.¹⁶⁴ The Fundacao Getulio Vargas set up the Nacala Fund hoping to attract \$2 billion from Japanese and Brazilian investors, but there was no interest and the fund was quietly closed.¹⁶⁵

PROSAVANA was planned to involve lands in the Nacala Corridor covering five provinces, displacing half a million people living in the affected areas.¹⁶⁶ Another estimate suggested 500,000 people would be affected, with 100,000 forced from their homes.¹⁶⁷ The Nacala Corridor is the most densely populated region of the country, home to millions of farming families,¹⁶⁸ and the project was expected to indirectly affect 3.6 million people working in agriculture.¹⁶⁹

On the one hand, independent media outlets discovered PROSAVANA's failure through investigations, while the state media, on the other hand, maintained a false narrative of success.¹⁷⁰ The lack of a free press is a barrier to public exposure of corruption, mismanagement and environmental harm which prevents any form of accountability from taking place. This state of affairs not only leads to the squandering of precious resources but also undermines the very goals of sustainable development and poverty reduction that international partners seek to support. The suppression of the media is not merely a violation of a single human right; it is an enabling condition for a cascade of other violations, from the denial of economic and social rights to the subversion of political

rights and the concealment of atrocities in conflict zones.

Overall, the systematic assault on the Mozambican press does not merely suppress information; it manufactures a distinct social risk profile, transforming the public sphere into a zone of calculated silence and manufactured uncertainty. This process precipitates a reflexive crisis of legitimacy, where the state's very mechanisms of control, designed to mitigate the political risk of dissent, engender the far greater, systemic risk of democratic collapse and institutional decay. The resulting information vacuum functions as a sub-political incubator for uninsurable hazards, from the unchecked atrocities in Cabo Delgado to the silent erosion of economic governance, which unfold beyond the purview of public accountability. Consequently, the public is atomised, trust in democratic processes evaporates, and the burden of truth-telling is privatised, becoming a high-stakes gamble borne by the individual journalist. This is not simply a crisis of media freedom but a symptom of a risk society where the institutional capacity to process and respond to its own self-generated crises has been systematically dismantled. The state, in its pursuit of absolute control, has created a condition of manufactured ignorance, where the normalisation of impunity becomes the ultimate, catastrophic risk to the nation's social and political fabric.

164 After Having Wasted More than 560 Million Yen on the Drafting of the ProSavana Master Plan, Governments Resort to Co-opting Civil Society, *farmlandgrab.org*, accessed November 7, 2025, <https://farmlandgrab.org/post/25684>.

165 Comment on ProSavana: What Does a Successful Campaign Do After It Wins?, *Reflectindo sobre Moçambique* (blog), July 2016, http://comunidademocambicana.blogspot.com/2016/07/comment-on-prosavana-what-does_35.html.

166 Japan's ProSavana Land Project.

167 Mozambique Agri. Plan Could Displace 100,000 Farmers, *World Bulletin*, May 25, 2015, <https://www.worldbulletin.net/africa/mozambique-agri-plan-could-displace-100000-farmers-h159661.html>.

168 UNAC, Via Campesina Africa, and GRAIN, Brazilian Megaproject in Mozambique Set to Displace Millions of Peasants, *GRAIN*, November 29, 2012, <https://grain.org/article/entries/4626>.

169 JVC's Approach to the ProSAVANA Project, *Japan International Volunteer Center*, May 6, 2021, <https://www.ngo-jvc.net/en/blogs/2018/08/15/jvcs-approach-to-the-prosavana-project>.

170 N. Issufo, "'Sustenta': Fim de um projeto insustentável e fraudulento?", *DW*, 10 June 2025, <https://www.dw.com/pt-002/sustenta-fim-de-um-projeto-insustent%C3%A1vel-e-fraudulento/a-72831316>.

RESISTANCE UNDER SIEGE: CURRENT RESPONSES AND THEIR LIMITATIONS

Despite the onslaught on the media—the disappearances, the laws, the economic strangulation—Mozambican journalists continue reporting. Civil society organisations continue advocating. International bodies continue monitoring. But these responses, courageous as they are, operate within a system designed to defeat them.

This section assesses current resistance efforts and explains why, without fundamental change, they cannot succeed.

DOMESTIC RESPONSES

At the forefront of the domestic response are Mozambican media civil society organisations, particularly the Mozambican chapter of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA-Moçambique) and the National Union of Journalists (Sindicato Nacional de Jornalistas - SNJ). These organisations play a vital role in monitoring and documenting violations against press freedom. MISA's annual reports on the state of press freedom are an essential source of data and advocacy, systematically tracking incidents of assault, arrest, and intimidation.¹⁷¹ For instance, in 2024, MISA documented 32 violations, of which 22 were directly linked to the general election period, highlighting the heightened risks during political cycles.¹⁷²

Both MISA and the SNJ engage in advocacy and lobbying efforts, challenging repressive legislation and publicly condemning attacks on journalists. They have been vocal critics of the proposed Social Communication and Broadcasting Laws, providing detailed

analyses to parliament and the public on the dangers the bills pose to constitutional freedoms.¹⁷³ MISA also provides crucial legal support to journalists who are arrested or facing prosecution, offering what is often the only available defence mechanism.¹⁷⁴ However, the capacity of these organisations is constrained. As Zito Osumane, the current president of MISA-Moçambique, acknowledges, the institution has “very low resources to effectively protect the journalist,” a reality that is compounded by the political capture of the justice system.¹⁷⁵

MISA-Moçambique functions as both shield and witness. It documents violations, provides legal support, advocates for policy change, and offers a network of solidarity to isolated journalists. Its annual reports have become the authoritative record of attacks on press freedom. But as President Zito Osumane acknowledges, the organization faces a fundamental limitation: it operates within a captured system. MISA can document injustice but cannot compel justice when prosecutors refuse to investigate and courts refuse to convict.

The judiciary, which should serve as the ultimate guarantor of constitutional rights,

171 MISA Mozambique, Strategic Plan 2022-2026, https://misa.org.mz/?sdm_process_download=1&download_id=1520.

172 MISA, 'MISA Denuncia Ano de Violência e Censura Contra Jornalistas', 7 May 2025, <https://misa.org.mz/misa-denuncia-ano-de-violencia-e-censura-conta-jornalistas>.

173 360 Mozambique, 'Bar Association Warns of “Risks to Freedom of Expression”'.

174 MISA Mozambique, Strategic Plan 2022-2026.

175 Interview with Zito Osumane, Journalist and Media Manager, Quelimane, 21 June 2025.

has largely failed in its duty to protect journalists. The system is plagued by political influence, corruption, and a lack of capacity, resulting in a near-perfect record of impunity for perpetrators of crimes against the press. Investigations into high-profile cases, such as the disappearances of Ibrahimo Mbaruco and Arlindo Chissale, have either stalled or been prematurely archived without any resolution, signalling that attacks on journalists carry no legal consequences.¹⁷⁶ This systemic failure of the justice system is perhaps the single greatest obstacle to improving journalist safety.

The failure of institutions has met its strongest counterforce through the unyielding bravery of Mozambican journalists who continue their work. Despite the immense risks, a core group of independent reporters, freelancers, and media outlets continues to pursue critical and investigative work. The non-profit investigative journalism entities such as Centro de Jornalismo de Investigação (CJI) and Mídia Lab emerged as new solutions to counteract the diminishing space for investigative reporting in traditional media outlets. With support from international donors, these centres have become vital hubs for in-depth reporting on corruption and human rights violations. Collaboration with regional and global networks such as the Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN) help amplify their impact while providing some safety through international visibility.¹⁷⁷

The emergence of CJI and Mídia Lab represents an adaptive response to hostile conditions. By existing outside traditional media structures, they gain some protection from economic pressure. By collaborating internationally, they gain visibility that provides limited security. By focusing on

high-impact investigations, they maximize impact despite limited resources. But these centres also face existential vulnerabilities: they depend on donor funding that could disappear, they're staffed by journalists who still face physical threats, and their investigations can still be buried by state-controlled mainstream media.

Beyond formal organisations, journalists have built informal support networks. They share security information, warn each other of threats, provide emergency financial assistance to colleagues under attack, and maintain communication channels when official ones are blocked. These networks are survival mechanisms, but their very necessity indicates system failure. Journalists continue to resist via individual adaptation through digital security tools (e.g. VPNs) to shield their communications from state surveillance. It is worth underscoring that, while imperative, these individual measures remain inadequate, for they place the burden of safety squarely on the individual.¹⁷⁸

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSES

The international community has played an important, albeit limited, role in responding to the crisis. International human rights organisations, including the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch (HRW), are crucial for monitoring the operating environment and bringing global attention to abuses.¹⁷⁹ Their alerts, reports, and advocacy campaigns provide a lifeline of solidarity for targeted journalists and document violations that domestic institutions ignore. For example, joint calls from CPJ and MISA for credible answers on the fate of disappeared journalists help to keep these cases on the

176 CPJ, '#MissingNotForgotten'.

177 Ibid.

178 Interview with Quinton Nicuete, Journalist, Moz24h, Pemba, 15 June 2025.

179 CPJ, 'Mozambique', <https://cpj.org/africa/mozambique/> 6; Amnesty International, 'Mozambique', <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/southern-africa/mozambique/> 68; HRW, 'World Report 2025: Mozambique', <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/mozambique>.

international agenda and exert pressure on the Mozambican government.¹⁸⁰

However, while essential, international reprimands have only a minor effect on the behaviour of the Mozambican authorities, who have become adept at weathering international criticism. But international attention, while crucial, is not sufficient. Mozambique has learned that it can weather international criticism. Press releases from CPJ, reports from RSF, statements from Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch — all generate brief attention, then fade. The government counts on the international community's short attention span and competing priorities.

A more tangible form of support tended to come from international donors and diplomatic missions that fund media development and training programmes. For instance, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) launched, in December 2018, a significant programme to train investigative journalists, partnering with local organisations such as Mídia Lab.¹⁸¹ Such initiatives are vital for building the skills and capacity of the next generation of reporters. Nonetheless, donor support for media development, while valuable, often suffers from fundamental contradictions. Donors fund journalism training while their governments maintain normal diplomatic relations with the regime attacking journalists. They support independent media while continuing budget support to government institutions implementing censorship. They call for press freedom while imposing no meaningful consequences for violations

Nonetheless, diplomatic statements about press freedom support exists independently from the actual political and economic measures which demonstrate solid commitment to this international principle.

Mozambique's main international partners have not made press freedom a fundamental element of their bilateral relations with the regime, nor have they linked non-humanitarian aid to actual human rights progress. The government of Mozambique will maintain its current repressive posture and policies, as it lacks any real motivation to change in the absence of diplomatic relations that yield actual consequences. As one interviewed journalist emphasised, without external pressure and domestic accountability, "things will continue."¹⁸²

The array of responses from Mozambican civil society and international actors represents a form of sub-political engagement within a manufactured risk society, where the state itself has become the primary generator of systemic, incalculable hazards for journalists. These efforts, from MISA's legal advocacy to the digital self-defence of individual reporters, are not proactive reforms but reactive measures to a landscape where the very institutions designed to provide security, namely the judiciary and the legal framework, have been reflexively repurposed into instruments of threat. This institutional failure precipitates a profound individualisation of risk, offloading the burden of navigating this hostile environment onto the lone journalist, who must construct a biography of survival against state-produced dangers.

Consequently, the current responses, while demonstrating resilience, remain trapped in a logic of symptom management rather than risk elimination. For the future, this signifies the institutionalisation of precarity. The domestic and international sub-political actors are engaged in a permanent, and likely unsustainable, mode of crisis administration. Unless they can force a confrontation with the state's foundational role as the central risk-producer, their courageous efforts will not alter the underlying risk society but merely document its casualties, normalising the

180 CPJ, '#MissingNotForgotten'.

181 US Embassy in Mozambique, 'U.S. Government Launches Investigative Journalism Training Program', 17 February 2022.

182 Interview with anonymous journalist, 2025.

endangerment of truth-tellers as a condition of authoritarian modernity's survival.

Current responses to Mozambique's press freedom crisis share a fundamental limitation: they operate within a framework the state has deliberately rigged against them. This is not a failure of courage or commitment. Mozambican journalists and civil society organisations demonstrate extraordinary bravery daily. Rather, it represents a structural impossibility: attempting to achieve accountability through systems designed to prevent it.

Consider the mechanics of this rigged game. MISA-Mozambique meticulously documents violations, compiles evidence, and submits cases to prosecutors who simply decline to investigate. The organisation operates with professional rigour within a justice system constructed to guarantee impunity. Its annual reports become archival records of injustice rather than instruments of accountability. The organisation can name perpetrators but cannot compel consequences. It documents violations in real time whilst the government calculates that documentation without prosecution equals cost-free repression.

International organisations follow a similarly circular pattern. The Committee to Protect Journalists issues alerts. Reporters Without Borders publishes condemnations. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch document abuses. These important interventions generate brief international attention, perhaps a diplomatic *démarche*, then fade into the background noise of global human rights discourse. Mozambique's government has learned a crucial lesson: international criticism is survivable. Press releases do not constitute sustained pressure. Mozambican officials can weather a dozen strongly-worded statements from Geneva or New York whilst continuing to disappear journalists in Pemba.

The donor community's approach reveals the most profound contradiction. International development agencies fund journalism training programmes, support independent media outlets, and finance civil society advocacy, all of which are necessary work. Ironically, however, their parent governments simultaneously maintain normal diplomatic relations with the regime attacking journalists, continue development assistance without human rights conditionality, and impose no meaningful consequences for press freedom violations. Western embassies host World Press Freedom Day receptions whilst their capitals approve budget support to ministries implementing censorship. This arrangement allows donors to demonstrate commitment to media freedom without confronting the political reality that their broader policies effectively subsidise repression. This state of affairs evokes Alpha Blondy's "Pompier Pyromane", the firefighter- arsonist who sets blazes then claims heroism for extinguishing them. Western donors fund journalism programmes with one hand whilst financing the regime strangling journalists with the other. They play both arsonist and firefighter, ensuring the fire never truly ends whilst maintaining the performance of concern. The ironic hypocrisy is structural, calculated, and complete. Mozambique and the European Union in October 2025 renewed their partnership for human rights and accountability at the Third Human Rights Dialogue in Maputo, reviewing progress and challenges toward protecting fundamental freedoms.¹⁸³

What unites these responses is the absence of leverage, mechanisms that impose actual costs on government behaviour. The Mozambican ruling elite has accurately calculated that attacking journalists carries no penalties that matter to regime survival. International criticism damages Mozambique's reputation but doesn't threaten its access to loans, aid, or diplomatic

183 Delegation of the EU in Mozambique, European Union and Government of Mozambique hold Third Political Dialogue on Human Rights, 30 October 2025, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/mozambique/european-union-and-government-mozambique-hold-third-political-dialogue-human-rights_en

legitimacy. Domestic documentation exposes abuses but cannot compel prosecution when the judiciary answers to the presidency.

Real accountability would require leverage that the current framework lacks: conditioning International Monetary Fund programmes on measurable press freedom improvements; making European Union development assistance contingent on prosecuting attacks against journalists; imposing targeted sanctions on officials responsible for disappeared reporters; suspending bilateral cooperation agreements until draft media laws are withdrawn. Such measures would transform press freedom violations from cost-free tactics into expensive political liabilities.

Without leverage, resistance merely documents its own defeat. MISA's reports become monuments to futility. International statements become ritual performances of concern without consequence. The brave work of Mozambican journalists continues, but within a system engineered to ensure that courage alone cannot prevail. Until external actors are willing to impose costs that exceed the government's benefits from repression, current responses will continue their necessary but ultimately insufficient labour: bearing witness to injustice in a framework designed to ensure injustice endures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are offered with full knowledge of the challenging political context. The Mozambican government has shown little willingness to accept accountability for attacks on journalists or to withdraw repressive legislation. However, sustained pressure, particularly from international partners who provide financial support, could create openings for change.

These recommendations are organised by priority and feasibility, from most urgent to longer-term structural reforms.

Without urgent, concerted, and sustained action the suppression of freedom of expression and press freedom will not only continue but also escalate in Mozambique. The hope of reversing the trend of closing civic space will remain elusive. Therefore, the following recommendations are designed to be practical and targeted, aiming to dismantle the structures of repression and build a safer, more enabling environment for journalism to thrive.

FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF MOZAMBIQUE

Immediately Introduce Legislative Reform:

- Immediately withdraw the Social Communication Bill and the Broadcasting Bill. Initiate a new, transparent, and genuinely consultative legislative process with the full participation of journalists, media associations, the Higher Council for Social Communication (CSCS), Mozambican citizens and civil society organisations. Any new legislation must fully comply with Mozambique's obligations under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the ICCPR, particularly the principles outlined in the 2019 Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa.¹⁸⁴

- Repeal all criminal defamation, libel, and insult laws, as recommended by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. Civil remedies should be the sole recourse for reputational harm, with safeguards against disproportionate damages designed to bankrupt media outlets.¹⁸⁵
- Review and amend the Anti-Terrorism Law and other national security legislation to include explicit protections for journalistic activity and to remove vague language that can be arbitrarily used to prosecute journalists for their reporting, particularly on conflict and security matters.

Immediately End Impunity:

- Establish an independent, internationally-monitored commission of inquiry to conduct prompt, thorough, and impartial investigations into all unresolved cases of killings (Carlos Cardoso, João Chamusse, Albino Sibia), enforced disappearances (Ibrahim Mbaruco, Arlindo Chissale), and other severe physical attacks against journalists. The commission's findings must be made public, and all those responsible, including those in the chain of command, must be prosecuted.
- Issue a clear and public directive to all branches of the Defence and Security Forces (FDS) that attacks, harassment, and intimidation of journalists are illegal and will be prosecuted.

184 African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa, 2019.

185 ISHR & RMDDH, 'Submission to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights'.

In the Short-Term Promote an Enabling Environment:

- Fully implement the 2014 Access to Information Law and ensure that all government bodies promptly respond to information requests from journalists and citizens. Cease the practice of barring critical journalists from official events and ensure unimpeded access for all media to report from all regions of the country, including Cabo Delgado.
- Establish a transparent, equitable mechanism for allocating state advertising based on objective, non-political criteria, such as audience reach and circulation. This mechanism should be subject to independent audit and public oversight.

FOR CIVIL SOCIETY AND MEDIA ORGANISATIONS

Strengthen Collaboration and Solidarity:

- Create a formalised national coalition to defend press freedom, bringing together MISA, SNJ, media owners, editors' forums, and human rights organisations. This coalition should coordinate advocacy efforts, operate a rapid-response alert system for journalists under threat, and present a unified front in all engagements with the government and international bodies.
- Establish a national fund for the legal defence of journalists to ensure that any journalist facing legal persecution has access to high-quality legal representation.

Enhance Safety and Capacity:

- Intensify and expand access to regular, practical training on physical and digital security, including risk assessment, secure communications, and psychological

support for trauma. This training should be made available to journalists in all provinces, not just the capital.

- Invest in and promote investigative journalism collaborations, both nationally and transnationally. Collaborative projects can provide safety in numbers, pool resources, and increase the impact of investigations into sensitive topics.

FOR TECHNOLOGY COMPANIES

Uphold Human Rights Principles

- **Telecommunications and Internet Service Providers** must resist government demands for network shutdowns or service blockages that violate international human rights law. All such requests should be challenged through legal means, and companies should transparently report any government-mandated disruptions to the public.¹⁸⁶

- *International precedents demonstrate that principled resistance is possible.* In Zimbabwe, telecommunications company Econet Wireless successfully challenged government shutdown orders in court in 2019, establishing legal precedent that similar demands violated constitutional rights.¹⁸⁷ In India, telecom operators collectively resisted blanket shutdown orders in Kashmir by demanding written directives and publishing transparency reports detailing government-mandated disruptions.¹⁸⁸ These cases demonstrate that companies need not be passive executors of censorship orders.

- **Legal frameworks for resistance exist at multiple levels.** Companies can cite the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, which

186 Human Rights Watch, "Mozambique: Post-Election Internet Restrictions Hinder Rights, December 6, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/12/06/mozambique-post-election-internet-restrictions-hinder-rights>.

187 Zimbabwe: Econet Court Victory Sets Precedent Against Internet Shutdowns," Access Now, January 17, 2019, <https://www.accessnow.org/zimbabwe-econet-court-victory-internet-shutdowns>.

188 Nikhil Pahwa, "Indian Telcos Push Back on Kashmir Shutdown Orders with Transparency," Medianama, August 2019.

establish corporate responsibility to respect human rights even when host governments fail to protect them.¹⁸⁹ The Global Network Initiative (GNI) Principles on Freedom of Expression and Privacy provide industry-specific standards that member companies have used to challenge government overreach.¹⁹⁰ Regionally, Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights guarantees freedom of expression and can be invoked in Southern African Development Community (SADC) legal forums.¹⁹¹ At minimum, companies should demand that shutdown orders comply with the "necessity and proportionality" test established by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights' Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information.¹⁹²

- **Local civil society organisations, particularly MISA-Mozambique and the Centro de Integridade Pública (CIP), must play a monitoring role.** These organisations should establish a Technology Accountability Working Group that: (1) maintains public records of all reported service disruptions and their stated justifications; (2) conducts technical analysis to distinguish between infrastructure failures and deliberate shutdowns; (3) publish quarterly scorecards rating telecommunications companies on their transparency and resistance to censorship demands; and (4) engages in shareholder advocacy with international investors in these

companies, particularly targeting pension funds and ethical investment vehicles that have human rights criteria.

- **Social Media Platforms** (e.g., Meta, X, TikTok) must invest in more effective and contextually aware content moderation in Portuguese and local Mozambican languages to combat orchestrated disinformation and harassment campaigns, particularly gender-based violence against female journalists. They should engage directly with Mozambican civil society to develop more effective reporting and response mechanisms.

- *International models provide blueprints for implementation.* Following the 2021 coup in Myanmar, Meta established an expedited escalation pathway for Burmese civil society organisations to flag coordinated harassment campaigns against journalists, resulting in faster takedowns of accounts engaged in gender-based attacks.¹⁹³ In Kenya, Twitter (now X) partnered with local fact-checking organisations during the 2022 elections to create a rapid-response system for flagging election disinformation, significantly reducing viral spread of false content.¹⁹⁴ WhatsApp's work with civil society in Brazil to combat disinformation during elections offers another model: the platform provided training to journalists on identifying coordinated inauthentic behaviour and created dedicated reporting channels.¹⁹⁵

- **Platforms should establish Mozambique-specific protocols**

189 United Nations, "Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights," 2011, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/guidingprinciplesbusinesshr_en.pdf.

190 Global Network Initiative, "GNI Principles on Freedom of Expression and Privacy," <https://globalnetworkinitiative.org/gni-principles>.

191 African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, "African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights," Article 9, <https://www.achpr.org/legalinstruments/detail?id=49>.

192 African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, "Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa," 2019, <https://www.achpr.org/legalinstruments/detail?id=69>.

193 Meta Newsroom, "Our Work to Combat Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior in Myanmar," February 2022.

194 Mozilla Foundation, "Kenyan Fact-Checkers and Social Media: Election 2022 Case Study," September 2022.

195 First Draft, "WhatsApp and Civil Society Collaboration in Brazilian Elections," October 2018.

including: (1) hiring Portuguese and local language moderators with cultural competency in Mozambican political context; (2) creating a verified Mozambican Civil Society Coalition with expedited reporting channels for journalist harassment; (3) implementing algorithmic detection for coordinated campaigns using Mozambican political keywords and harassment patterns identified by local organisations; and (4) publishing quarterly transparency reports specifically addressing takedown requests from Mozambican authorities and enforcement actions against harassment of journalists.

MISA-Mozambique and the Mozambican Forum of Women Journalists should serve as primary civil society partners, with

authority to: (1) audit platform responses to reported harassment campaigns; (2) participate in quarterly review meetings with platform trust and safety teams; (3) co-design culturally appropriate reporting mechanisms with simplified interfaces in local languages; and (4) provide training to journalists on platform safety features and evidence collection for coordinated attacks. These organisations should publish annual “Platform Accountability Reports” assessing each company’s responsiveness to Mozambican press freedom concerns, creating reputational incentives for improved performance.

FOR DONORS AND INTERNATIONAL BODIES (UN, AU, SADC, EU, AND BILATERAL PARTNERS)

Elevate Press Freedom in Diplomatic Engagement:

- Make press freedom and the safety of journalists a central, non-negotiable pillar of all bilateral and multilateral engagements with the Government of Mozambique. Publicly and privately condemn all attacks on journalists and call for accountability.
- The UN Human Rights Council should consider establishing a dedicated monitoring mechanism or mandate to

monitor the human rights situation in Mozambique, with a specific focus on attacks against journalists and on civic space.

- The African Union and SADC should hold Mozambique accountable for its commitments under the African Charter and other regional instruments and conduct a fact-finding mission to investigate the pattern of attacks on the press.

Provide Strategic and Sustainable Support:

- Increase direct, flexible, and long-term financial and technical support to Mozambique’s independent media outlets, non-profit investigative journalism centres, and community radio stations. This support is crucial for their economic sustainability and resilience against state pressure.
- Fund and support the establishment of safe houses and emergency relocation programmes for journalists who face imminent threats to their lives.

Promote Accountability:

Consider implementing targeted sanctions (such as visa bans and asset freezes) against high-level individuals within the Mozambican government and security apparatus who are credibly implicated in ordering or covering up serious human rights violations against journalists.

FOR JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA OUTLETS

While the burden of change should not fall on journalists themselves, practical interim measures include:

Collaborative Reporting on High-Risk Stories:

Investigations into sensitive topics such as corruption, military abuses, electoral fraud, should employ collaborative models where multiple journalists across different outlets share research, sources, and bylines. This distributes risk, complicates government targeting, ensures story continuation if one

journalist is attacked, and provides mutual protection through collective visibility and shared accountability frameworks.

Standardised Security Protocols

Media outlets must implement comprehensive security protocols including pre-assignment risk assessments, secure communication training (encrypted apps, VPNs), physical safety measures (safe houses, emergency contacts), legal preparedness (know-your-rights briefings, pre-arranged legal representation), and regular security audits. Freelancers require equal access to these protections, ensuring no journalist operates without institutional safety infrastructure.

Emergency Response Networks

Establish rapid-response systems coordinating between newsrooms, civil society, and international organisations. When journalists face arrest, disappearance, or threats, networks immediately activate legal representation, notify international monitors, relocate family members if necessary, secure digital evidence, and mobilise public pressure. Response protocols should be tested

quarterly, ensuring functionality during actual crises.

Psychological Support Systems

Covering violence, intimidation, and colleagues' disappearances inflicts severe psychological trauma. Outlets must provide confidential counselling services, peer support groups facilitated by trained professionals, trauma-informed editorial practices allowing journalists to refuse assignments triggering past trauma, and mandatory mental health check-ins. Newsroom culture must destigmatise seeking psychological support as professional necessity.

Succession Planning for Investigations

Every high-risk investigation requires documented succession protocols: encrypted backup systems storing all research materials, clear handover procedures if the lead journalist is incapacitated, designated successor reporters briefed on sources and methodology, and publisher commitments to complete investigations regardless of attacks. This ensures intimidation cannot kill stories—only delay them.

CONCLUSION

This report documents a grim and deteriorating landscape for media freedom in Mozambique. The evidence demonstrates that the threats confronting journalists are not a series of unfortunate, isolated incidents, but rather the components of a coherent and systematic state strategy aimed at silencing dissent, controlling the public narrative, and dismantling independent scrutiny.

Through the weaponisation of laws, economic strangulation, political intimidation, digital surveillance, and brutal physical violence, the Mozambican state is actively engineering a climate of fear. The result is a pervasive self-censorship that suffocates public discourse and stifles the media's ability to perform its essential democratic function.

The findings reveal a regression towards an authoritarian model of governance, one that is fundamentally incompatible with the pluralistic principles enshrined in Mozambique's 1990 Constitution. This process is deeply rooted in the nation's political history, reflecting a postcolonial logic of power in which the ruling elite views the critical press not as a partner in development but as an enemy of the state. The conflict in Cabo Delgado has become a convenient pretext for accelerating this repressive agenda, creating an information black hole where atrocities can occur with impunity. The media Bills threaten to formalise this repression, replacing the liberal framework of the 1990s with a legal architecture of control.

The impact of this suffocating silence is profound. It enables corruption to fester, allows human rights abuses to go unchecked, and deprives citizens of the credible information necessary to hold their government accountable. It erodes public trust, fuels political instability, and ultimately undermines the prospects for sustainable peace and development. The future of Mozambican democracy is inextricably tied to the fate of its free press.

Nonetheless, amidst this bleak environment, there is resilience. The courage of Mozambican journalists who continue to report in the face of grave danger, the tireless advocacy of civil society organisations like MISA-Moçambique, and the emergence of new collaborative investigative platforms are testaments to an enduring commitment to the ideals of truth and accountability. These efforts, however, cannot succeed on their own. They operate against a state apparatus that has, thus far, faced few meaningful consequences for its actions. As one journalist interviewed for this report lamented, when journalists are left to their own devices after being attacked, the lack of support and accountability is devastating:

"In such critical situations, companies typically leave the journalist to his own fate. And journalists, often, do not move forward, not only because of fear, but for lack of technical conditions to follow up."¹⁹⁶

This reality underscores the urgent need for action. The failure to hold the Mozambican government accountable has only emboldened the perpetrators of violence and architects of repression. Another journalist starkly concluded:

"This is a matter of taking concrete actions so that those acts of violence against the journalist, of attempting to oppose freedom of the press, are held accountable, because if there is no accountability for the people who attack press freedom, who violate journalists, things will continue."¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ Interview with anonymous journalist, 2025.

¹⁹⁷ Interview with anonymous journalist, 2025.

This report is therefore a call to action. The Government of Mozambique must reverse its current course, withdraw the repressive media bills, and take immediate and credible steps to end the cycle of impunity. Mozambique's international partners must move beyond rhetorical expressions of concern and leverage their diplomatic and economic influence to demand tangible change. Donors, civil society, and media

support organisations must redouble their efforts to provide the financial, legal, and technical support that independent media need to survive. The defence of Mozambique's journalists is not merely a matter of professional solidarity; it is a fundamental struggle for human rights, the rule of law, and the possibility of a democratic future for all Mozambicans. The silence must be broken.



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