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## Brand South Africa

### Research - Internal Analysis The 2021 World Press Freedom Index

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#### Contents

- I. Background of World Press Freedom Index
- II. About the World Press Freedom Index
- III. South Africa and the African continent in the 2021 World Press Freedom Index

#### I. Background of World Press Freedom Index

The 2021 World Press Freedom Index, compiled by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) shows that journalism, which is arguably the best vaccine against the virus of disinformation, is totally or partially blocked in 73% of the 180 countries ranked by the organisation.

In the 2020 report, themed- “Entering a decisive decade for journalism, exacerbated by coronavirus”, the RSF General Secretary, Christophe Deloire stated “we are entering a decisive decade for journalism linked to crises that affect its future”, alluding to a prediction of how press freedom will be negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in the next decade. Hence the results we are seeing in the 2021 Press Freedom Index.

South Africa’s ranking in 2021 drops with one point to 32/180 from 31/180 in 2020, securing a score of 21.59 in 2021 from 22.41 in 2020. This year, like last year, South Africa along with five other African countries including, Namibia, Cabo Verde, Ghana, Burkina Faso and Botswana were ranked higher than the United States of America (44/180) and four of the six countries ranking higher than the United Kingdom (33/180). The rankings of these African countries will be unpacked in the next section.

In addition, the 2021 Index data reflects a notable decline in people’s access to information and a substantial increase in impediment to news coverage. Therefore, the

findings indicate that journalists are finding it increasingly difficult to investigate and report sensitive stories, especially in the regions of Asia, Middle East and Europe.

## **II. About the World Press Freedom Index**

- The Index ranks 180 countries according to the level of freedom available to journalists.
- It is based on an evaluation of pluralism, independence of the media, quality of legislative framework and safety of journalists in each country and region.

The following indicators form the basis of the over-all score and country ranking calculation:

1. Pluralism  
Measures the degree to which opinions are represented in the media.
2. Media independence  
Measures the degree to which the media are able to function independently of sources of political, governmental, business and religious power and influence.
3. Environment and self-censorship  
Analyses the environment in which news and information providers operate.
4. Legislative framework  
Measures the impact of the legislative framework governing news and information activities.
5. Transparency  
Measures the transparency of the institutions and procedures that affect the production of news and information.
6. Infrastructure  
Measures the quality of the infrastructure that supports the production of news and information.
7. Abuses  
A seventh indicator based on data gathered about abuses and acts of violence against journalists and media during the period evaluated is also factored into the calculation.

Each indicator is given a score between 0 and 100.

### III. South Africa and the African continent in the 2021 World Press Freedom Index

South Africa ranks 32/180 countries in the 2021 WPI, dropping with one point from 31/180 countries and securing a global score of 21.59, a slight increase from 22,41 in 2020. Therefore, while the overall findings of the report indicate that access to press freedom is compromised due to the COVID-19 pandemic and lack of trust in journalists, South Africa's ranking and global score keeps the country within the "satisfactory" category. In the African continent, South Africa is ranked fourth after Namibia, Cabo Verde and Ghana.

As Africa's best performing country since 2019, Namibia has managed to secure its place due to the constitutional and judicial safety nets that ensure the independence of the media, even when faced with attacks from other quarters within the state or various elites. While in second place Cabo Verde's distinguishing feature is the absence of attacks on journalists and the exceptional media freedom, which is also guaranteed by the constitution. Cabo Verde's progress in the index can be attributed to the new laws that removed governments authority to appoint media executives. Since being implemented in 2019, the media's increased independence has directly translated into the country securing its current rating as well being further improved by the appointment of new independent board of governors that has ensured that the media has greater autonomy and independence.

Ghana secures the third position in media performance amongst all Africa countries. The country's constitution guarantees media pluralism and independence. However, investigative journalists in Ghana seem to have limited freedom considering that it has been reported that a group of investigative journalists had to spend a part of 2018 in hiding after producing a documentary relating to the corruption in Ghanainan soccer. A ruling party parliamentarian who had been named in the documentary publicly threatened one of the journalists without ever being arrested or questioned. The journalist was shot dead in the street a few months later.

In the case of South Africa being in the fourth position amongst African countries, the WPI has emphasized that South Africa's 1996 Constitution protects the country's press freedom and that the country has a "well-established" investigative journalism culture. Although South Africa ranks in the top five among highest performers in the African continent, the country's ranking can be said to be because of the slight contradictions related to the constitution providing media flexibility, but certain political parties and representatives having intimidated the media as opposed to providing their fullest support to them.

The table below presents the top six African countries ranking in the 2021 WPI report:

Top 6 African Countries in the 2021 WPI	
Country	Ranking
1. Namibia	25/180
2. Cabo Verde	27/180
3. Ghana	30/180
4. South Africa	32/180
5. Bukina Faso	37/180
6. Botswana	38/180

The table above provides the rankings of the top six African countries who have performed better than internationally powerful states like the United States of America and the United Kingdom:

- Namibia leads the African continent at first position with an overall ranking of 25/180 countries;
- Cabo Verde sits in second place with an overall ranking of 27/180;
- At third place, Ghana is ahead of South Africa with an overall ranking of 30/180, while South Africa follows with an overall ranking of 32/180 sitting in the fourth place;
- Burkina Faso occupies the fifth position with an overall score of 37/180; and
- Botswana at sixth place with an overall ranking of 38/180 countries.

However the RSF states that, “With reporters attacked and arrested, their incomes failing and media undermined by disinformation and draconian laws, the coronavirus pandemic has compounded the huge difficulties for journalism in sub-Saharan Africa, where 23 of the 48 countries (two more than in 2020) are now marked as red or black on the World Press Freedom map, meaning the situation is classified as bad or very bad.”

The increase in attacks is reflected in a 13% deterioration in the index’s violations indicator for the sub-Saharan region in the past year and Africa remains “the world’s most dangerous continent for journalists in 2021”, according to RSF data. Reporters Without Borders (RWB) indicate that they recorded a higher number of arrests and attacks on journalists in sub-Saharan Africa between 15 March 2020 and 15 May 2020, as it did in 2019.

The table below presents South Africa’s WPI ranking’s from the year 2013 to 2021:

South Africa		
World Press Freedom Index rankings - 2013-2021		
Year	Ranking	Change
2021	32/180	
2020	31/180	=
2019	31/180	
2018	28/180	
2017	31/180	
2016	39/180	=
2015	39/180	
2014	42/180	
2013	52/180	=

South Africa’s improved ranking since 2013 illustrates a systemic strengthening of press freedom in a democratic society. Although, the country’s slight decrease in rankings can be attributed to the perceived hostility towards journalists. In 2020 Media24 journalist Azarrah Karrim was shot at with rubber bullets by the South African Police Service (SAPS) while covering a protest on COVID-19 lockdown restrictions in Johannesburg. Another example of a recent attack on journalists in the field is when eNCA journalist Monique Mortlock and camera operator Asanda Javu were robbed at gunpoint in Khayelitsha in Cape Town on 7 April 2021. This perception is further intensified by incidents such the one that took place in 2019, where SANEF and five journalists made an application to the High Court against the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) to interdict the party from intimidating, harassing and assaulting journalist. The RWB indicates that the EFF “was given a high court warning because of its hate speech against journalist”, but the High Court dismissed SANEF’s application in the matter of SANEF vs EFF.

Even in the face of growing hostility, harassment and intimidation of journalists were pointed out as concerns by the ruling African National Congress (ANC). As such, in an attempt to re-positioning the image and flexibility of media freedom in South Africa, President Cyril Ramaphosa has appeared as a transformational leader by showing substantial support towards the South African media. On 31 May 2020, President Cryril Ramaphosa held a meeting with the South African National Editors Forum (SANEF) and other media representatives, where journalists had the opportunity to directly engage with him on the pandemic and promised to regularly engage with the media going forward. Although the President has been hard to access by the media for interviews, his media presence and

tolerance shown great leadership in allowing journalists and media platforms to execute their duties as per the constitution of the country.

Again, this year on 26th February 2021, the President engaged with (SANEF) highlighting “I would like to commend the media for the vital role you have been playing in keeping South Africans informed during this crises. This will become increasingly important as we confront disinformation and unsubstantiated rumours around the efficacy and safety of the vaccines.” The notable support of President Cyril Ramaphosa towards the South African media and the provision of South Africa’s Constitution (1996), explains why South Africa’s ranking and global score is part of the reasons why we still see the country being in the report’s “satisfactory” category.

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