

STATE OF MEDIA  
**ETHICS AND  
PROFESSIONALISM**  
2023





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**AND PROFESSIONALISM**  
**2022-2023**

Research on the State of Media Ethics and Professionalism  
in Zimbabwe

A Study Commissioned by the VMCZ

Researchers:  
Mlondolozzi Ndlovu  
Lazarus Sauti

Edited by:  
Loughy Dube  
Caroline Kuhudzai

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## The research seeks to highlight the state of media ethics and professionalism in Zimbabwe.”

It further gives a myriad of ethical challenges facing the media, the root cause of the problems, and expose the current state of journalism in Zimbabwe. It focuses on the interplays between accountability, ethical journalism, independence, and media freedom in Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwean media landscape has increasingly become a challenging and contested territory owing to political, socio-economic, and professional lapses that continuously undermine media professionalism and affect media ethics in the country. Challenges that relate to the economic crisis bedevelling the country, interference and control by media owners, laws that induce fear and self-censorship among journalists, political and media polarisation, and poor remuneration all add to a conundrum and a cesspit that holistically affects and compromises ethical and professional journalism. While some journalists have adjusted

their professional roles to embrace the hostile and polarised environment that hinders the growth of independent, pluralistic, and free media, others have resisted and developed sophisticated ways of dealing with the pressures exerted on them by the above-highlighted pressures. This detailed research is based on a multi-pronged analysis of secondary sources and accounts by broader media players and captains of the industry in Zimbabwe, to give an insider perspective of the state of journalism ethics and professionalism in Zimbabwe. The diagnosis will be reviewed and analysed with input from key stakeholders on how to ameliorate and mitigate identified challenges so as to strengthen ethical conduct and revitalize professional journalism in Zimbabwe.

*The discourse around professionalism and ethics has become topical in contemporary conversations on Zimbabwean journalism.*

## Context; Aims and Scope

Many contextual factors have contributed to the growing concern about the ethical conduct of journalists in Zimbabwe. The COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2021) introduced new challenges for traditional methods and means of news-gathering and fact-checking. Internet-based mobile phone technologies took centre stage and with their use also came increasing incidents of unethical practices such as voyeurism, plagiarism, surveillance, and intrusion into grief and invasion of personal privacy. The underlying assumption that good journalism supports democracy is the basis for society's interest. The study explores how journalists conduct themselves in the processes of producing and distributing news. Media plays a key role as an enabler of democratic deliberation but can also aid and entrench authoritarian rule and dictatorship. Finding informed citizens is almost impossible in the absence of access to quality and truthful information that the media provides.

Citizens are capable of holding power holders to account for their fiduciary role to the extent that the media uphold the watchdog function and hold themselves to the highest standards of ethical journalism. Both government-owned and controlled media and privately-owned media subscribe to a common set of standards concerning what is and what is not acceptable in the process of producing the news. Most newsrooms have either customised or simply adopted the Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe (VMCZ) Code of Conduct for Zimbabwean media practitioners.

This study aims to undertake an environmental scan of the legal, political, economic, and post-COVID-19 status and its impact on media ethics and professionalism. Its scope covers aspects such as laws passed by parliament and those still being considered to regulate the media and journalists. The research also investigates the role of media owners in determining adherence to ethical and professional standards in media houses they control, both private and public. Media plurality is also evaluated to the extent that it has resulted in diverse voices and opinions getting expression in media reportage. The ever-deepening financial and economic crisis, which has often led to greater news source dependence of journalists in the discharge of their duties is also interrogated. These are just some of the contextual factors, aims, and scope that makes it necessary for this research that explores the state of ethics and media professionalism in Zimbabwe.

*The study used qualitative methodology. It relied on in-depth interviews with journalists and other key media stakeholders.*

## Methodology

Thus, the research presents a broad understanding of the Zimbabwean journalism industry's ethical position in the last twelve months. Secondary data on the political economy of journalism practice in Zimbabwe are also examined to provide nuanced data on factors affecting ethics and professionalism in the sector. In addition, the study also examined the Media Complaints Report for 2022, published by the Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe (VMCZ), and other related reports, to ascertain the level of media professionalism and the media's operating environment in Zimbabwe.

Primary data was collected using key informant interviews (KIIs) through in-depth interviews. Secondary data was obtained through a desk study of literature and reports on media in Zimbabwe produced at different intervals by independent researchers and media civil society organisations such as Media Monitors, Gender Media Connect (GMC), Media Alliance of Zimbabwe (MAZ), Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), the Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe, and Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ). In-depth interviews were conducted through face-to-face interviews, WhatsApp calls, and telephone calls with media practitioners and journalists from different media platforms. A total of 34 key informant interviewees were purposively sampled from across the different media spectrum to obtain a broader and more nuanced perspective on the state of ethical journalism in Zimbabwe.

Table 1. Sampling frame of interviewees categorized by media type, gender, and professional role

NEWS ORGANISATION	PLATFORM TYPE	GENDER OF RESPONDENTS	PROFESSIONAL ROLE	NO. OF RESPONDENTS
Public Media	Print	M&F	Journalist	4
Private Media	Print	M &F	Journalist	4
Broadcasting	Radio/TV	M&F	Journalist	4
Internet Platforms	Online News	M&F	Journalist	4
Freelance	Freelance	M&F	Journalist	4
Media support organisations	ZUJ/MISA/ZINEF/IMS/GMC/ Media Monitors	M&F	Media support	6
Academic	UZ/MSU/CCOSA/Harare Poly	M&F	Academic	4
Govt/ZMC/BAZ/ZGC	Policy and Advocacy	M&F	Policy	4

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Journalists worldwide follow a code of conduct in doing their work and Zimbabwean journalists or journalists operating in Zimbabwe are no exception.

Journalistic ethics are the common values that guide reporters. They lay out both the aspirations and obligations that journalists, editors, and others working in the field should follow in order to execute their work responsibly. Journalism ethics have evolved over time. The rapid advancements in digital technology have significantly transformed the landscape of journalism, presenting both opportunities and challenges to journalistic practices and ethical standards. Nonetheless, adherence to journalism ethics ensure integrity and credibility of the profession. If a profession has no code of conduct it then is not regarded as a profession.

Most news organizations have their own written codes of ethics, as do professional membership bodies such as the Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe (VMCZ). VMCZ has a Code of Conduct for Zimbabwean Media Practitioners that was developed by media players themselves. This Code serves to provide a set of common reporting standards for media practitioners and media institutions in the print, broadcast, television and new media sector in Zimbabwe, to ensure professional coverage of news and ethical conduct of journalists. Media practitioners and media institutions should abide by these standards and the public is entitled to expect that they do so.

The VMCZ code of conduct provides journalists with the following ethical guidelines: accuracy and fairness, truthfulness, balance, minimising harm, independence, accountability, avoiding plagiarism and bribes; avoiding intrusion of person's privacy or grief, no interviewing or photographing of children without consent from adults and not instigating hatred or violence. If a professional journalist or news organization transgresses these ethical standards, they lose credibility in the eyes of the public.

## 2. Presentation of Key Findings

This section presents key findings from interviews and qualitative content analysis done with key stakeholders and media players in Zimbabwe. Key results and findings indicate that there is still a significant ethical and credibility deficiency in the Zimbabwean media industry and the practice of individual journalists that needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency and should involve all stakeholders. Below are the key findings of the study.

### 2.1 State of Media Ethics and Professionalism in Zimbabwe

This study examined the level of media ethics and professionalism in Zimbabwe using the VMCZ Code of Conduct, the VMCZ Complaints Report of 2022, observer mission reports, regional and international media analysis reports as key reference points.

There was a 100% increase in media complaints recorded in 2022 as compared to 2021, which among other things is reflective of the continued violation of media ethics by media practitioners. Thirty complaints were received by the Media Complaints Committee in 2022 alone. This was a 100 percent increase from the 15 complaints lodged with the Media Complaints Committee in 2021. This increase can be attributed to several factors but key among them is the decline of adherence to media ethics by media practitioners.

## Nature of violations

An overwhelming majority of violations to the code was on the section dealing with “Accuracy and Fairness.” Seventy percent of all complaints received from members of the public on media violation of code of conduct were over this section. Forty eight percent of the violations of this code were as a result of media houses failing to adequately verify pieces of information received from an independent source, resulting in stories being totally false. In a few other cases, the failure to give a right of reply, writing incomplete reports, or making subjective statements as in the case with court reports, resulted in complaints raised on incompleteness, unfairness, inaccuracy and defamation. In one case an update on a court case was not published resulting in a complaint from a disgruntled news subject who felt their side of the story was not captured, and therefore the story was not only unfair but also inaccurate. In another recorded case, a subjective statement by a media house, making a claim against the news subject not substantiated by facts resulted in a complaint of defamation against the media house.

Ten percent of case recorded were on plagiarism by media houses and this was the second highest violation of the media code of conduct. Of interest is that accusations on plagiarism were made across platforms (print, radio and online) and for content from photographs, whole news articles, and on radio where material was used without acknowledgement, consent or payment. Media institutions and journalists are not immune from copyright infringement, therefore care needs to be taken when using content generated by other practitioners.

Violation on all other media ethics was recorded at 3 percent for each of the ethics in the code. Other violated sections of the code include issues of hatred and violence, privacy, right of reply, protection of sources and interviewing of children.

## 2.2 Observer Missions analysis of media conduct during elections

Various observer missions took part in the 2023 harmonised elections in Zimbabwe where they observed different facets of the elections including observing media conduct during the electoral cycle. Key observer missions that were accredited to cover the 2023 elections were the SADC Electoral Observation Mission (SEOM), the Commonwealth, the Carter Institute, the European Union Observer Mission, the African Union among others. The SEOM Election report generated a lot of interest due to its key findings. SEOM said the general elections in the Republic of Zimbabwe held on 23rd August 2023, revealed that the media did not carry out its mandate effectively with key recommendations outlining issues of capacity, bias and unprofessional journalism being highlighted. Election reporting in Zimbabwe has always been a challenge mainly due to the high staff turnover in most newsrooms, biased reportage, polarisation, media ownership, undue pressures and safety and security challenges for media personnel. The Mission advised the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) and the Media Commission to ensure that the Constitution and Electoral Law are enforced with respect to the conduct of the media.

The EU, the Commonwealth, the Carter Institute all indicated that the media in Zimbabwe was polarised either in favour of the ruling party or the opposition. The reports however picked out the role of the public broadcaster and said the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) was biased in favour of the ruling party. The missions said ZBC should stick to the constitutional mandates that dictates that the public broadcaster should be impartial in their reportage and covering of contesting political parties.

Such polarisation, according to respondents, compromised the impartial role and fair coverage of political parties in Zimbabwe and compromised the integrity of the public broadcaster and the role they should play in giving equal coverage to all Zimbabweans.

The above analysis of the state of media ethics and professionalism can only be understood when put into context. Media organisations and commentators note that Zimbabwe’s media landscape is polarised and this often adversely impacts on adherence to ethical and professional conduct. The study therefore further identifies and critically interrogates factors that promote or impede media ethical conduct and professionalism in Zimbabwe, by analysing and engaging media stakeholders on thematic areas such as political interference, proprietary and shareholder interference in editorial decisions, media ownership patterns, media sustainability, state of journalism training, development of media personnel and low salaries in the media sector.



## 3. THE OPERATING ENVIRONMENT VIS-À-VIS MEDIA ETHICS AND PROFESSIONALISM

### 3.1 Legal or Regulatory Framework

While most respondents commended the government for repealing bad media laws and reforming some of the laws, there is concern on claw back clauses in some of the reformed laws, and most respondents felt that the legal framework in Zimbabwe still has repressive media laws designed to suppress access to information, freedom of expression, and freedom of the media.

During the period of this research the government, through the Ministry of Information, Media and Broadcasting Services, instituted several legislative reforms to align media laws, with the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act, 2013. This process resulted in some laws being amended while others were repealed and replaced with new legislation. The infamous Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), is one such draconian law struck off the statute books on July 2020 and replaced by three new laws namely the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC) Act of 2020, the Cyber and Data Protection Act of 2021, and the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act of 2021.

While these new laws can be heralded as bringing a new and positive outlook to media regulation, respondents said certain claw back clauses in the new laws are retrogressive and will bring a nought effect on the new amended laws.

The Cyber and Data Protection Act of 2021 has had a significant impact on ethics and professionalism because it regulates online media content and reportage. The majority of respondents in this research stated that the law is draconian and is bound to be abused by authorities to persecute journalists. One of the respondents, NewZimbabwe.com acting editor, Leopold Munhende, said clauses in the the law that threatens arrest for those publishing on social media is a direct threat to the practice of journalism in Zimbabwe. He added that the law sends a chilling effect on the spine for media practitioners. Munhende added:

*“We are already witnessing threats of arrests based on social media activity by journalists or media companies; this law is a threat to freedom of media and our work as journalists.”*

And true to the script, on August 3, 2022, the Cyber and Data Protection Act claimed its first scalps, when Alpha Media Holdings (AMH) editor-in-chief, Wisdom Mdzungairi, and senior reporter Desmond Chingarande were arrested and charged for allegedly publishing falsehoods over a story on Glenforest Memorial Park ownership wrangle. In an alert by MISA-Zimbabwe titled, “AMH journalists charged with publishing false data messages”, Mdzungairi and Chingarande were accused of contravening Section 164C of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act, as amended through the Cyber and Data Protection Act, which criminalises publishing false data with “intent to cause harm<sup>1</sup>.”

<sup>1</sup> MISA, August 3, 2022

The second arrest under this law was of Zimbabwean journalist, Hope Chizuzu, on September 29, 2022, on allegations of publishing falsehoods online, over an alleged corruption scandal at Dynamos Football Club. While the journalist was subsequently released after a warned and cautioned statement, his mobile phone and iPad remained with the police “for further investigations”, yet these were the journalist’s tools of the trade. MISA Regional Director, Dr. Tabani Moyo, expressed concern at the resuscitation of previously vanquished draconian laws.

*“These are some of the challenges which we will continue having in Zimbabwe, wherein we make progress in repealing Acts such as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, then the government claw(s) back using other pieces of legislation to retain elements that will further target journalists. To have penal or sedition provisions in our statute books that target journalists [is] so out of sync with the global trends toward promotion and protection of media and journalistic expression.”*

Dr. Moyo’s assertions are corroborated by an academic journal article titled, “Policy change or tactical retreat? Media policy reform in Zimbabwe’s ‘new dispensation’”, which notes that the Freedom of Information Act is a betrayal of the aspirations of the people of Zimbabwe and the international community” (Mututwa, Mututwa & Ndlovu, 2021) who for two decades, pushed for the repeal of AIPPA and the Public Order and Security Act (POSA).

Rashwead Mukundu, Senior Africa Programmes Officer for the International Media Support (IMS) said the Data Protection Act poses the biggest threat to freedom of the media and freedom of expression.

*“The Data Protection Act threatens not only journalistic work but also the rights of citizens to freely express themselves because it creates a new set of restrictions to online expression. Journalist Hopewell Chin’ono was arrested under this law, and citizens have been arrested for what they post on WhatsApp. This law is the biggest threat that journalists and other citizens in society face; it is dangerous to freedom of expression and freedom of the media”.*

While the Data Protection Act has been used to arrest journalists, another respondent said there are double standards in its implementation, as certain political parties are being allowed access to solicit for votes through sending messages on people’s mobile phones without their prior consent. A media academic and lecturer at the University of Zimbabwe, Dr. Stanely Tsarwe said of the actions:

*“While the law has not shown any meaningful positive impact on data protection, Zimbabweans have recently been receiving unsolicited text messages from a presidential candidate seeking electoral support. Up to now, it is not clear how private data; that is, citizens’ private numbers got into the hands of the campaign team of a political party. Even though MISA Zimbabwe has written to POTRAZ to investigate this, we are yet to see if this will indeed take place. This case could be seminal in terms of gauging levels of data security and the state’s commitment to respecting the law.”*

Other journalists interviewed said the new laws have not in any way enabled media professionalism, but act as a sinister shadow in the background, and have led to journalists resorting to self-censorship, which affects objectivity, accuracy, and truthfulness as journalists fear for their own lives.

In the conduct of this research, respondents also noted that the Private Voluntary Organisations (PVO) Amendment Bill, currently awaiting Presidential assent, will impact the work of media organisations registered as Trusts. The majority of respondents said the PVO Bill will hurt media professionalism in Zimbabwe because media-related Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) such as MAZ, MISA, ZUJ, and IMS will be affected by the proposed law. Malvern Mkudu, a programmes officer at MISA Zimbabwe said,

*“This law will impact the registration status of civil society organisations working in the media sector and affect how we can monitor and report on the conduct of journalists and media companies through the stiff demands on compliance and regulations.”*

These findings reflect the contestations on media regulations in Zimbabwe. While media stakeholders were critical of provisions of the law that restricted media operations there was however a consensus that the government did not intend to open up and democratise the media regulatory framework in the country.

Respondents also indicated that the multiple laws regulating the media were cumbersome and said self-regulation mechanisms needed to be strengthened to allow the media to self-regulate. Noting government’s resistance to media self-regulation the majority of respondents said a hybrid form of regulation such as co-regulation should be given a chance.

Stakeholders shared a common position that co-regulation can work better in Zimbabwe where both statutory regulation and self-regulation worked side by side. This they said would be a framework where the media organisations and journalists self-regulate while also submitting to set legal requirements. Indications from this research clearly show that the majority of journalists and independent media houses prefer self-regulation over state control, while public media house editors and senior reporters preferred co-regulation proposed by the government while the younger reporters within state media groups indicated they supported self-regulation unreservedly but dreaded coming out in the open for fear of reprisals from their bosses.

### 3.2 Media Ownership, Pluralism, Diversity and Undue Pressures

The research noted how Zimbabwe’s media ownership and control patterns impact heavily on ethical and professional journalism. The situation was made worse by news room editorial policies and charters which limited what journalists can cover. Political influence on the state media was also identified as a hindrance that inhibited and limited journalists freedom to cover any issues without fear and favour. This research established that media owners with certain interests elsewhere influence journalists to publish news tilted towards their preferences. As a coping mechanism journalists knowing the preference of the owner or majority shareholders tend to self-censor and avoid what can put them on a collision course with the media owners and shareholders.

Respondents said mainstream media is guilty of spreading falsehoods, especially during election periods. A respondent at ZBC said at times journalists have no control over stories and information brought in by politicians.

*“We have instances where a story from high offices comes with your by-line, there is nothing one can do and such stories in most cases are scandalous and have a bearing on the integrity of an organisation and the journalist whose by-line is used for the story. These stories are many during elections and they impact heavily on journalism ethics.”*

In the period under review, the Zimbabwe government issued licenses for print, broadcast, and community media to operate. While on paper, this is a good move towards promoting media pluralism and diversity, the majority of respondents said the majority of media institutions licensed are linked to the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (Zanu-PF) party or State entities. However some respondents said the licensing of new media players alone is a positive move and should be celebrated. Zinef’s Njabulo Ncube said:

*“The fact that the government licensed 14 community radio stations, almost 42 years after independence, is commendable, this would have never happened under former President Robert Mugabe, and this is a development that should be celebrated issues of diversity will be dealt with later at least for now we have pluralism in the media which is a good building step towards media diversity.”*

Respondents also said from the twelve television stations that have been licensed by the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ) so far, six licenses were awarded to the state-owned and controlled ZBC Holdings, while the other six were awarded to individuals and/or groups some respondents said had leanings towards Zanu-PF. Among the twelve TV license awardees are Jester Media Services, trading as 3Ktv, state-controlled Zimbabwe Newspapers (1980), trading as Zimbabwe Television Network (ZTN), Zimbabwe National Army controlled-Rusununguko Media, trading as NRTV, Fairtalk Communications, trading as Ke Yona TV, partly owned by Rusununguko Media, Acacia Media Group, trading as Kumba TV is fronted by former Zanu-PF aspiring Member of Parliament, Sharon Mugabe. Lastly, there is Channel Dzimbahwe, trading as Channel D and fronted by war veteran and former Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Happison Mucchetere.



The majority of respondents said that even though there is plurality of media outlets licensed, there was no diversity because all the new TV licenses were awarded to individuals and media firms with traceable links to Zanu-PF. However, despite the licensing of the above, there are also challenges posed by the incomplete digitalisation of broadcasting in Zimbabwe. 3Ktv, NRTV and ZTN Prime are broadcasting via the digital platform, DSTV, which limits access to those who do not own satellite dishes.

Respondents however highlighted that community radio stations licensed offered diversity as they do not broadcast politics and their work was only focused towards development issues only.

In some instances, this research unearthed that some licensed media entities lack the financial capacity to operate. So while there has been an increase in media houses operating and the increased number of journalists getting employed most respondents interviewed said in reality there has been very little movement in terms of substantive media pluralism and diversity.

### 3.3 Remuneration and Welfare of Journalists/ Media

Findings from this research indicate that the living standards, salaries, and socio-economic conditions of journalists in Zimbabwe have declined significantly since the turn of the century and respondents attributed bribe taking, corruption in the media circles and brown envelopes to being the result of the above cited factors. As a result it compromises on media ethics and professionalism as journalists strive to balance between being balanced, fair, accurate, truthful and not hurting those that are “giving them bribes.”

A journalist from a private media house, speaking on condition of anonymity, said reporters were getting salaries of around USD150 per month and said this amount is way below what the lowest-paid civil servant is earning. The situation was not even better for public media who are earning in Zimbabwean currency. A reporter from public media said salaries for junior and senior reporters ranged from US \$ 200 to US \$ 250 per month when converted on the parallel black market rate. In comparison this amount was far lower compared to South Africa, where the entry point salary for a junior journalist is around 7000 Rands-8000 Rands per month (USD 500).

Another freelance journalist, also speaking on condition of anonymity, said the situation was dire for freelancers writing for local publications. The journalist added that those who are lucky to correspond with regional and international news outlets were making between USD 350 and USD 500 per month depending on the publication they were writing or broadcasting for but for local freelance journalists taking home US \$ 200 will be a bonus.

Sharing the same sentiments, the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ) Secretary General, Perfect Hlongwane, added that the entry-level salary for a local journalist falls way below the poverty datum line, leaving young journalists living in poverty prone to manipulation and temptation. Hlongwane indicated that most newsrooms were still paying local currency salaries whilst prices of basic commodities are currently pegged in foreign currency. Rising inflationary pressures have continued to erode the purchasing power of goods and the low salaries paid by media houses are far below the poverty datum .

Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) Media Studies lecturer, Joice Svatwa, said journalists are demanding bribes from sources because of the unstable economic conditions and poor salaries paid by media houses in the country. She said:

*“Journalists are obliged to use responsible sources while gathering information for articles as well as when reporting on it. They are trusted to tell the truth by their audiences. Brown-envelope journalism, however, presents a challenge. Zimbabwean journalists are paid less than the lowest-paid civil servant, which encourages the practice of brown envelope journalism in the country.”*

Conversely, Zim Seen Features Editor, Tendai Makaripe, said poor remuneration should not be an excuse for demanding bribes. He explained:

*“Vanhu vanofunga kuti civil servants havana mari asi vanotambirisa journalists (Zimbabweans think that civil servants are receiving low salaries but they can pay most journalists from their salaries). Remuneration for journalists is poor in Zimbabwe; however, this is not a passport for them to demand brown envelopes from politicians, businessmen, and other ‘connections’”.*

In April of 2023, Simbarashe Sithole, a freelance journalist who writes for Bulawayo24 News, was trapped by the police after he demanded a US\$400 bribe from a source to kill a story involving property firm West Properties. He was released on Z\$50, 000 bail and will be back in court to answer to bribery-taking allegations. In a related case, prominent journalist, Tendai Munengwa was reportedly arrested, tried, and convicted in court for extorting money from a potential source in exchange for ensuring that evidence for a potentially damaging story was destroyed<sup>2</sup>.

In a different but equally damaging reputation for journalism, Wisdom Mdzungairi editor in chief for Alpha Media Holdings resigned from his position after he was allegedly involved in moonlighting. He was accused of moonlighting for the Ministry of Local Government where he was allegedly employed as the deputy director while keeping his job as editor in chief at AMH. Issues of undeclared or concealed and unethical conduct arise in cases where journalists are involved in side hustles/moonlighting to make ends meet thereby becoming conflicted in the process.

The issue of brown envelopes and bribe-taking in journalism has been topical since time immemorial globally and more pronounced in Africa, and Zimbabwe is no exception to this worrying scourge. The question though is how pronounced is this cancer in Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe National Editors Forum (ZiNEF) national coordinator, Njabulo Ncube, said the problems of brown envelopes and bribes is being escalated by poor salaries. As such, he avers that a National Employment Council for the media industry would solve the salaries issue.

<sup>2</sup> NewsDay, 14 February, 2023

*“Zimbabwe media urgently needs to establish a Media National Employment Council to address salaries and working conditions of the media professionals. This will go a long way in addressing the professional rot in the sector, including the issue of soliciting for bribes”.*

Ncube said editors in Zimbabwe were earning between US \$ 100 and US \$ 600 per month. A source within AMH said both editors and journalists were still earning in Zimbabwean currency/bond notes. He said reporters were the most hard hit as their salaries were far below those of editors and all civil servants.

“The salaries are pathetic to say the least, they are very low, you have journalists earning between US \$ 60 and US \$ 150 and that is if they are lucky that the salaries have been paid or are paid on time in the first place.”

The Deputy Minister of Information, Media and Broadcasting Services, Honourable Kindness Paradza reiterated the consideration of the importance of journalists’ economic welfare issues for ethical journalism in its proper context when he was questioned on corruption taking place within the media sector.

While ZUJ should be leading the process of establishing an NEC for the media industry, nonetheless, there are concerns that the Ministry of Information, Media and Broadcasting Services, should be coordinating the formation of the NEC, is dragging its feet on the matter because the ministry was also underpaying workers at state-owned ZBC which the ministry controls . On May 24, 2023, journalists from Chronicle, Sunday News, uMthunywa, and B-Metro filed a petition with their employer citing incapacitation. They indicated in the petition that they were being only paid in local currency, yet prices of basic commodities in the country were pegged in US Dollars.

Editors and reporters from both the public and the private media were engaged under this research on the salary issue, and the story was the same across all newsrooms. The situation according to respondents was even worse for freelancers and correspondents who were disengaged by most mainstream media due to lack of resources.

*“For freelancers its worse, most are getting almost nothing for the stories they submit and that explains the worrying trend where freelance journalists are following private events in search of food and beer and this is embarrassing and denigrating for the profession.*

The salaries for the broadcasting sector were also in line with those in the print media and respondents said journalists across the country do not enjoy benefits enjoyed by editors. According to one respondents , some editors have perks that include school fees being paid for their children, housing allowances, data costs, entertainment allowances, fuel allocations, full rentals paid for them, cellphone allowances among other benefits.

With the ongoing deteriorating economic environment the issue of the welfare of journalists looks far from being solved and problems associated with the deteriorating economic environment will continue to persist and afflict the profession of journalism in Zimbabwe.

### 3.4 Media Polarisation, Self-Censorship and Its Impact on Ethical Journalism

The Media Monitors Report on the March 2022 by-elections indicated that Zimbabwe’s media system remains bifurcated along political party lines. Respondents highlighted that both the public-owned media and the private owned media took sides in reporting of issues. The public media unapologetically led the way in publishing one-sided reports patently in favour of the ruling party while the private media to a large extent backed the opposition. A public media editor, who preferred to speak on condition of anonymity, however, defended this practise arguing that the state media supported the government of the day irrespective of which political party controlled government.

*“This is not about supporting Zanu PF, the editorial stance of ZBC and Zimpapers is to support the government of the day and we positively report on the good works that the government of the day led by President Emmerson Mnangagwa does. We have no choice but to propagating the development policies of the government and we will do the same without apology.”*

The Media Monitors report on the March 2022 by-elections however clearly showed the public media bias towards Zanu PF, while independent media coverage of the same by-elections leaned towards the opposition. However, the Media Monitors report as highlighted in the graph (Figure 1) below, shows that while the private press was partisan towards the opposition political parties combined, however, there was greater diversity in their coverage as they also gave the ruling party ample coverage.

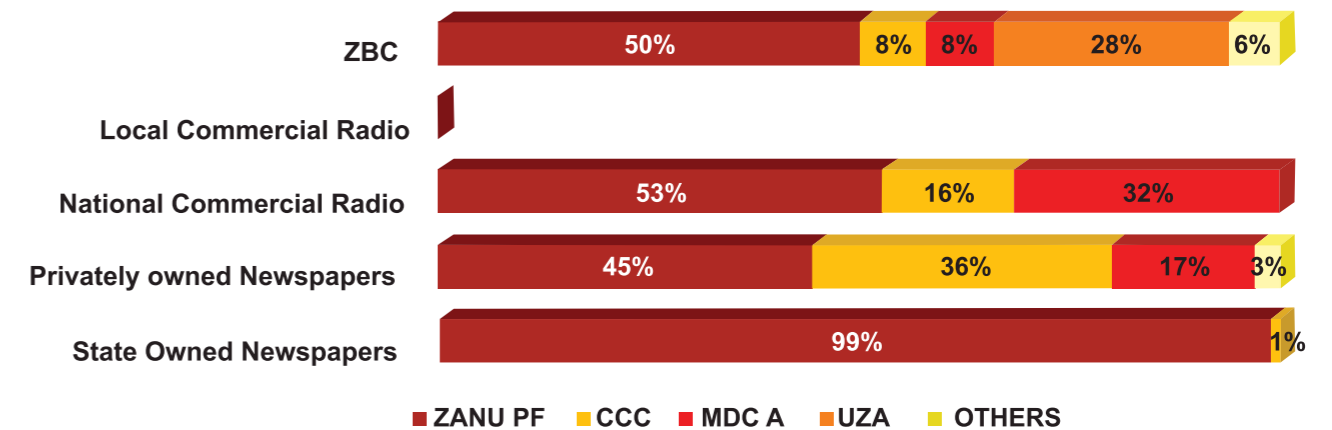


Figure 1. Space and time allocated to National Assembly candidates by platform and by party (Source MMZ Report 2022)

According to Amanda Jojo and Mutare-based freelance journalist Farai Matiashe, political party polarisation in Zimbabwe’s media sector is distinct. Jojo said journalists in both state and independently-owned newsrooms were embarrassingly aligned along political lines. Matiashe asserts that imbedded journalism is becoming paramount in Zimbabwe and reporters are now permanently assigned to certain politicians while some of the journalists in both public and private media have taken it upon themselves to be permanent correspondents of certain politicians and prominent public figures. Matiashe added that there is now a worrying trend where reporters faithfully

follow politicians to each and every official and unofficial engagement they partake. He cited the case of Zimbabwe's First Lady, Auxillia Mnangagwa, who has dedicated public media reporters that cover all of her events. The reporters are always the same and have no other beats that they cover apart from covering the First Lady.

A respondent working in the public media also cited other prominent people such as prominent businessmen Kuda Tagwirei and Scott Sakupwanya who have specific journalists permanently reporting on them.

*“In the case of Sakupwanya and Tagwirei , its all about the money my brother but with the first Lady its about the allowances that are accrued on the road and the fact that the journalists covering the First Lady are a law unto themselves and they decide how the stories are written, editors have no control and it's a must that the first Lady stories are on page two of public media newspapers even stories that are not newsworthy.*”

A respondent from state broadcaster- ZBC said the scenario was even eye catching in provinces whenever the identified individuals have functions.

*“Political bigwigs such as Zanu PF Secretary Obert Mpofu, who is known as the Matabeleland Godfather, and the First Lady, Mai Auxillia Mnangagwa, have their special crew from ZBC Headquarters (HQ) and Zimpapers Harare who form part of their permanent news crew wherever they go. What happens is that when The First Lady has an itinerary to visit Matabeleland North, for example, he brings along a media crew from Harare, and yet there will be a ZBC and Zimpapers Bureau Chief resident in Matabeleland North. The Provincial Bureau Chief may also attend the function to cover the event but it is the story filed by the crew from HQ which makes the news bulletin ahead of that filed by the Bureau Chief (Interview with ZBC Journalist)”.*

Zinef national coordinator, Njabulo Ncube, explains how strange bed-fellows – politics and business – have all contributed towards the demise of media ethics. In his words, Ncube said:

*“The economy and politics are major obstacles. The media is singing for its supper to pay the bills. The media's fixation with paying the bills has resulted in the total collapse of ethics. There have been incidents where the political elite and big businesses are paying journalists and their media content is published and broadcast without adherence to the basic tenets of journalism of what is written is public relations and stories to bolster the profiles of the politicians and business people.”*

Ncube said such practices have a serious impact on journalism ethics. The above findings are an indication that competition to curry favour with political benefactors is rife in Zimbabwean newsrooms and this has a serious impact on ethics and media impartiality. This move reduces the media to lapdogs of politicians. This according to the respondents compromises the media's watchdog role and reduces them to praise singers and such practices have a dent in the whole journalism profession. However, a senior journalist at Zimpapers, found no fault with the happenings and says there is truth to the saying, “muvhimi anovhima nembwa dzake” (a hunter hunts with his or her loyal dogs).

Polarisation has also a huge influence on media self-censorship as the media fear publishing stories that will put them in trouble with authorities and their bosses. Matiashe says the polarisation of the media in Zimbabwe is so distinct and none complying journalists can be dismissed from an organisation for writing stories out of sync with the editorial policy of the media institution. Matiashe said polarisation was mostly along political lines. For instance, Matiashe said:

*“The media landscape in Zimbabwe is highly polarised. The state media supports Zanu-PF. It is supposed to serve the interest of the public – the taxpayer; but instead, it is acting as the mouthpiece of the ruling party. On the other hand, we have private media aligned with the opposition. When it comes to covering public affairs, this polarisation compels journalists to practice self-censorship.”*

Amanda Jojo, a reporter for Billions Business Magazine, added that self-censorship by journalists kills media freedom. In addition, she noted that self-censorship poses a serious threat to democracy as it stifles the free flow of information and limits knowledge and comprehension. It leaves a space that the government or its allies can fill with propaganda and spin to re-interpret reality and sway people with cheap propaganda.

This research also noted the chilling threats issued to journalists to stop producing news reports quoting the Al Jazeera “Gold Mafia” documentary, early this year. The threat was issued through a Twitter handle by @Tinoedzazvimwe1, believed to be the Twitter handle for George Charamba, the Deputy Chief Secretary in the President's Office.

In the tweet, @Tinoedzazvimwe1 wrote: *“Friendly advice to all reckless journalists: Al Jazeera is not a court of law before whose claims impart privileges to defamatory utterances. It is merely some weaponised channel. If you are reckless enough to repeat what its phony documentary defamatorily says, hoping to plead: I heard/ saw it on Al Jazeera, you will be sorry for yourself. Do not for once think there is no grit to act against reckless, defamatory, and politically motivated journalism. Faceless Twitter names egging you on will not be a factor when brickbats come. Be warned!”*

Immediately after this tweet, prominent journalist, Hopewell Chin'ono, tweeted that he would stop posting anything related to the documentary for fear of arrest. Other investigative media organisations such as NewsHawks and Zimlive were also targeted and threatened by the same Twitter account, and all this points



to challenges and threats to journalists' safety in Zimbabwe. The likely outcome of all this is the media then self-censors for fear of harm and reprisals.

Thelma Mukonza said editorial policies are to blame as they are used as a tool to whip journalists in line when it comes to covering social, economic, political, and other issues. She posits:

*“Zimbabwean media outlets have editorial policies that forbid journalists from publishing anything critical of their owners, sponsors, or advertisers. This makes journalists censor themselves. You ought to be aware of where your bread is buttered, surely.”*

A journalist with the state media said as long as the editorial policy at his workplace bars him from writing anything positive there is nothing he can do but to self-censor.

*“ The rules at my organisation are clear, you conform or you go home, there's nothing one can do, the rules are clear and everyone know what happens when you are caught off side of the rules, so self-censorship is the way to go.”*

### 3.5 Internet Access and High Data Costs

The research established that high data costs have a huge impact on ethical conduct and professionalism of journalists. Without data, journalists do short cuts to their work as they will not be able to research or verify their stories.

With mainstream media organisations migrating online, some publications are exclusively publishing online and data costs have become a serious cause for concern, from both the business and the human rights perspectives. Between 2020 and 2022, MISA Zimbabwe and other actors held the #DataMustFall campaign to challenge and protest high data prices. Rashweat Mukundu, an International Media Support (IMS) specialist said data costs have a huge bearing on the operation of journalism. He stated:

*“The cost of data affects the work of journalism. Essentially, there is a two-way challenge with the high cost of data from the journalistic practice and content creation and also from the audience's reception process and access to information. What we then see is the limitation to the right to access information and freedom of expression”.*

Abel Dzobo, a media scholar, from the Midlands State University (MSU), emphasized how the rise of fake news is influenced by data costs. He argued that:

*“High data costs have a huge impact on journalists. Without data, journalists will not be able to research their stories. They are also not able to verify false claims made online and that poses a huge ethical challenge”.*

According to the research, Botswana had the highest average cost per gigabyte of data in the region at US\$15.55. The cost of 1GB of data in Namibia costs US\$10.52 whereas it cost US\$12.66 in the Seychelles. In Zimbabwe, the average cost of 1GB of data is US\$4.92, ranging from US\$1.73 for the cheapest plan to \$12.92 for the most expensive. Tanzania had the lowest data costs in the region, with an average cost of US\$0.71 for 1GB. In Eswatini (US\$0.84), Mozambique (US\$1.33), Zambia (US\$1.36), South Africa (US\$2.04), Lesotho (US\$2.20), Angola (US\$2.33), and Malawi (US\$2.42), among other nations in the region.

### 3.6 Proliferation of Online Content Creators

The proliferation of online platforms also created an ethical dilemma that has led to increased fake news, misinformation and disinformation in the country. While some of the sprouting online media platforms are run by professional journalists, the majority are operated by non-professional journalists. Their focus is profit-making and are not motivated by media ethics. Clickbaiting and getting hits becomes the focus of such media. As such, the issue of ethics becomes secondary on these platforms. The online platforms and online content creators are creating a conundrum for news consumers, who face the challenge of how to identify authentic news sites from fake news sites.

Legacy media that earlier lagged behind in migrating to digital platforms is slowly catching up, albeit there are still beaten to breaking news by the non-professional news aggregators that do not have vigorous fact-checking and news verification requirements. A lot of the legacy media organisations, including community newspapers, have introduced online versions of their newspapers. The challenge for most news consumers has been to identify online platforms to visit for fact-checked news. Respondents in this research said while there are a lot of online news platforms that they use to get current and breaking news on Zimbabwe they have found sites such as NewZimbabwe, ZimLive, Pindula, 263 Chat, Zimbabwe Situation, NewsHawks, My Zimbabwe, and Znews to be reliable and authentic news websites that do not peddle fake news and misinformation. The respondents said they took with a pinch of salt news from some websites, based in the diaspora, whose information needs fact-checking first before believing.

### 3.7 Social Media Impact on Ethical Conduct and Media Professionalism

While the internet has overcome the barriers of distance and time, making it possible for journalists to access information, gather, process, and deliver news in real-time, it has also introduced new ethical issues of honesty and integrity. Social media platforms that are popular with journalists include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Tik Tok and WhatsApp.

The advent of various social media networks triggered an information tsunami, according to respondents, whereby citizen journalists gather, package, and share unverified information. ZOU Media Lecturer, Joice Svtwa, said fake news, misinformation, and disinformation are polluting the information ecosystem in Zimbabwe. Svtwa explained:

*“Without a doubt, the use of pseudonyms and false identities on digital platforms is rife in Zimbabwe and this is inflaming fake news, misinformation, and disinformation. The pandemic of fake news, misinformation, and disinformation threatens journalism’s continued existence more than any other law intended to restrict its activity, such as the Cyber and Data Protection Act.”*

Some journalists fall foul when it comes to appropriately attributing information to its rightful sources, hence the high incidences of plagiarism arising from utilizing the above cited social media platforms. From qualitative content analysis, this study deduced that due to social media, journalists also engage in plagiarism and corrupt activities when doing their jobs. This was evidenced in a case involving Khumbulani Mpofu, who launched a complaint with the VMCZ against the online publication NewsHawks over allegations that the publication used his pictures without authorisation.

In the above-cited case, the online publication acknowledged the error in plagiarism, a practice however that is unethical and unprofessional. Community Podium, a Bulawayo based online platform also accused New Ziana of plagiarising one of its stories word for word. Ziana conceded and acknowledged the mistake and apologised to Community Podium.

Commenting on this, Makaripe said such practices are an indictment of senior editors in media organisations. He added that this practice shows a lack of vigilance on the part of editors who are supposed to fact-check information and perform their function of gatekeeping without fear or favour.

However, fake news on social media also makes its way to offline platforms, which include legacy media such as newspapers, radio, and television.<sup>3</sup> Commenting on this, Svatwa said some journalists in Zimbabwe were in the habit of quoting unverified information to push for likes on their online media platforms.

The practice is rife when mainstream media pick stories from online media platforms and this creates problems in the future when the stories are fact-checked. Respondents said there were too many fake accounts on Facebook and on Twitter and mainstream media and journalists tend to be fooled by the fake accounts and they prescribe and attribute comments from these accounts to certain individuals and it becomes a big problem when the accounts are discovered to be fake.

A respondent with ZBC said there are many stories that have been written from fake social media accounts. The respondent however said some politicians have disowned their own Facebook and Twitter accounts after having posted controversial posts.

*“We have seen incidents where a politician after posting on the social media platforms denies ever having a social media account and in those instances the mainstream media would have quoted the politician from the refuted social media handles, and this creates a problem as the media is then accused of peddling fake news and falsehoods.”*

<sup>3</sup> Moyo, Mare, and Mabwezara, 2020; Chibuwe, 2020.

Respondents said fake news and misinformation on social media becomes more paramount during election periods.

### 3.8 Media Sustainability and Dwindling Media Resources

New technologies have created a faster way of sharing and disseminating information challenging legacy media in providing information to audiences. With audiences migrating to online platforms- so did advertisers who have been the lifeline of mainstream and legacy journalism. Without the advertising base mainstream journalism has been struggling for survival. The situation has been compounded by the dire economic situation that is restricting citizens from accessing information due to the high costs of data and rising printing costs.

With digital platforms growing, mainstream media in Zimbabwe is facing a bleak future as the consuming public is getting news instantly in their digital gadgets while the legacy media platforms such as newspapers and radio news bulletins are not instant.

Respondents felt mainstream media has to adapt to new technologies and come up with new and sustainable means of survival. Most media in Zimbabwe have laid off staff to cut costs and are cutting out on critical investigations due to huge costs and dwindling advertising as advertisers are now migrating to digital platforms for advertising.

Also taking a knock is resource provision for journalists on the ground, most newrooms according to respondents have laid off proof readers and other gate keeping personnel, a move that has seen embarrassing boos coming thorough in mainstream media.

PowerFM producer/presenter Judith Tanatswa Katawalyuwa, said dwindling media resources lead reporters to produce sub standard work. She added:

*“Lack of resources, for instance, results in more citizen media quotes appearing in news stories but less time being spent fact-checking those quotes. In light of this, people have begun to lose faith in professional journalism and the crisis in traditional media worsens.”*

Amanda Jojo, a reporter for Billions Business Magazine, in her response concurred with Katawalyuwa and added that media houses are not doing enough when it comes to investing in equipment such as cameras, laptops, recorders, and vehicles to take journalists for assignments. True to Jojo’s assertions, some media organisations have stopped paying out-of-station expenses for reporters on the field and this is having an effect on how journalists perform their functions and all this is crippling the growth of the media sector in Zimbabwe.

Respondents also said the lack of resources has forced independent media to be captured by the state through acquisitions and takeovers by government and Zanu PF linked business people. Respondents cited the case of Alpha Media Holdings (AMH) where the president’s son in law, Gerald Mlotshwa is said to have acquired a huge stake in the conglomerate. The Daily News was cited as another organisation where the coming in of new stakeholders led to an instant change in editorial policy to one favourable to the ruling party.

Another challenge bedeviling media houses, cited by respondents, is the multiple registration requirements for media houses and journalists to cover specific events. Journalists are accredited annually by the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC) and the registration fee is US\$15 annually for those renewing accreditation and

US\$25 for those seeking initial accreditation, while fees are higher for international correspondents. The accredited journalists are also required to be accredited by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) to cover elections, and in the process pay fees again. In an alert titled “Dual accreditation inconvenient, burdensome cost for media practitioners” (MISA, January 25, 2022), the alert states that ZEC set accreditation fees for the March 2022 by-elections at: USD50 for Zimbabwean media practitioners working in Zimbabwe for foreign media houses, while local media practitioners parted with USD10 to cover the by-elections. To exacerbate the situation, advertising revenues have taken a nosedive as companies are struggling to stay afloat.

Media executives also expressed concerns at the annual fees they have to pay to ZMC and said this was arduous as they have to pay other taxes further to what they were paying to ZMC.

Respondents indicated that mainstream media needed to come up with new business models as the current models are not viable and will not sustain the operations of the structures of legacy media. A media executive at AMH said:

*“If the big media organisations like Zimpapers, AMH and ANZ do not change their business models then we will not be talking of them in the coming five years, the media market is being taken over by the new up starts and digital platforms.”*

### 3.9 Media Self-regulation vis-à-vis Media Ethics

While media regulation in Zimbabwe continues to be a contested terrain due to the painful nature of repressive media laws enacted by the government, there is an opportunity for the media to get a consensus on media regulation in the country. While the broader media industry pines for self-regulation like other professional bodies in the country, the government has not relented in its appetite to entrench statutory regulations as a way for controlling the media in the country, a position that has been resisted by the media since the enactment of AIPPA in 2000.

The previous parliament sought to introduce a Media Practitioners Bill that would have seen Co-Regulation of the media introduced into the statutes. There were contestations in the type of Co-Regulation that stakeholders wanted to see carrying the day and that led delays in bringing up the legislation. While the media sector backed self-regulation unconditionally, there was a consensus to adopt co-regulation of the media.

ZINEF in a statement to back self-regulation noted that self-regulation works and builds a case for its success:

*“Zimbabwe needs a genuine self-regulatory mechanism where industry professionals indulge in peer review mechanisms. The current statutory regulation entrenchment plans are again intended to ensure lack of professionalism in the media continues as it benefits the ruling elite and the corrupt (ZINEF, 20 March 2023).”*

The Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe (VMCZ) has a complaints handling mechanism that allows individuals, groups, or various bodies who are aggrieved by media coverage to approach the organisation for arbitration. As

earlier highlighted, the VMCZ is presiding over complaints from members of the public, which shows the organisation’s readiness to administer self-regulation of the media industry, a move corroborated by Muchena et al (2019).

However, the media and government seem to have reached a consensus on co-regulation as the best form of media regulation in Zimbabwe. How the co-regulation will be operationalised will stand to be seen, as a flawed interpretation of co-regulation will bring regression to a promising resolving of a decades-long cat-and-mouse relationship between the media and the government. The government through the Media Practitioners Bill that will seek to operationalise the principle of co-regulation.

### 3.10 Safety and Security of Journalists

The study showed that the media industry in Zimbabwe remains volatile and unsafe for media practitioners, especially journalists belonging to privately-owned media houses. This compromises on media ethical conduct and professionalism as journalists practice self-censorship to avoid being targets of security threats.

From January 2022 to November 2022, according to MISA-Zimbabwe, the country recorded close to 30 cases of journalists that have either been attacked or arrested in the country<sup>4</sup>. These arrests and other safety issues contributed to the decline of media freedom in the country. Zimbabwe’s drop in Reporters Without Borders’ 2022 World Press Freedom Index rankings is a major concern as this undoes progress made after Robert Mugabe was removed as president in 2017. Zimbabwe’s ranking on the World Press Freedom Index initially increased when Mugabe was removed, but during the following two years, it has been declining. Zimbabwe dropped seven spots from its 2021 ranking of 130 to 2022’s position of 137. According to the RSF report, there are still draconian laws in place, and when new laws were passed, their provisions were just as harsh as those of the old laws they replaced.

In August 2022, four journalists, Toneo Rutsito, editor of Technomag; Chelsea Mashayamombe, a Zimbabwe Daily reporter; Pellagia Mpurwa, Technomag reporter and Tongai Mwenje, SportBrief managing editor, were assaulted by Zanu-PF supporters in Gokwe. The reporters had taken video footage and pictures of a convoy of vehicles that was blockading a road ahead of a rally by Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) leader, Nelson Chamisa, in Chitekete business district in Gokwe, where a Parliamentary by-election was due to be held. Approximately ten Zanu-PF supporters, clad in party regalia, assaulted the journalists with booted feet and clenched fists and also ordered them to delete video footage and pictures in their cameras. They further confiscated Rutsito’s two mobile phones, a camera, and car keys.

Journalists’ safety is not only at risk from political actors, but even from the police who harass journalists with impunity. In July 2022, five police officers assaulted 263Chat journalist, Anyway Yotamu, with truncheons all over the body and damaged his phone. The assault came after Yotamu refused to delete footage he had filmed of police having an altercation with taxi drivers in Harare’s Central Business District (CBD), according to a story titled, “Zimbabwean journalist Anyway Yotamu charged after assault by police<sup>5</sup>”. Spectacularly at Harare Central Police Station, Yotamu was then charged with disorderly conduct and undermining the authority of the police, under the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act. This research’s findings are in line with the Reporters Sans Frontiers, an international media organisation, which notes that “the police (in Zimbabwe) often use disproportionate force and confiscate journalistic equipment. Acts of intimidation, verbal attacks, and threats, especially on social media are all still common practices.” Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ) Secretary General, Perfect Hlongwane, said the issue of harassment of journalists is of major concern. He added that journalists should be allowed to do their job without any hindrance. Hlongwane said:

<sup>4</sup> Nauta, 2022

<sup>5</sup> CPJ, July 8, 2022



*“Journalists must be able to operate without fear of harassment, intimidation, or violence. The government should protect journalists’ rights to freedom of expression and information, and investigate and prosecute cases of violence against journalists”.*

However, the government has not operationalised the Zimbabwe Independent Complaints Commission Act (2022), that should deal with complaints against members of the security forces and has not constituted the Board that will evaluate complaints against security forces.

Despite all the above threats journalists in Zimbabwe are not insured against any unforeseen circumstances that can affect their safety and security. Respondents said most newsrooms were now not paying any medical aid for their employees and this also has an effect on journalists in cases where they are injured or maimed. One respondent said.

*“Almost all media houses in the country are not contributing to medical aid for its workers and in the event a journalist is injured or even killed there is no medical aid or insurance to talk of for the journalists, it’s a sad scenario.”*

However, media organisations under the leadership of MISA-Zimbabwe have engaged the police in nationwide engagements to find common ground with members of the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP). MISA-Zimbabwe together with police national commanders led by Assistant Commissioner Paul Nyathi have traversed the country meeting provincial police leaders on journalists’ safety, a move that has seen a reduction of late in police harassment of the media. Misa-Zimbabwe in 2023 said there has been a significant drop in the case of violations against journalists by the police.

The enactment of the Data Protection Act and other internet based laws according to respondents is affecting the media as there are constant fears that the laws are used to snoop on journalists work. Organisations such as MISA-Zimbabwe, Digital Society Africa (DSA) and VMCZ have been calling for the repeal of media laws that hinder freedom of expression in Zimbabwe.

While the the second republic headed by President Mnangagwa, to some extent, has been hailed for repealing draconian legislation, the operating environment for journalists has remained a powder keg. The security and safety of journalists remains a serious cause for concern as they are attacked by state security agents and political party supporters and officials. Freelance journalist, Farai Shawn Matiashe said journalists are still being assaulted and routinely arrested. Sharing the same sentiments, Magamba TV producer, Thelma Mukonza, added that journalistic gadgets such as cameras, smartphones, and computers are always confiscated and or damaged, a situation which she said breeds an atmosphere of fear and self-censorship amongst the journalists

### 3.11 Sexual Harassment in the Media

One of the challenges facing the media in Zimbabwe is on sexual harassment. In recent months they have several cases of sexual harassment recorded involving prominent media personalities. Evidence from this

research shows that cases of sexual harassment recorded were overwhelmingly perpetrated by fellow employees or senior management against junior staffers. The study established from claims that direct supervisors that include senior journalists and editors, as well as and/or higher management are abusing their subordinates, especially young trainee journalists’ from college or those seeking to rise within the ranks of the industry. Those in power and authority abuse the dignity of powerless subordinates, making them feel degraded, humiliated, intimidated and threatened, and most of the abuses go unreported and unpunished. Though less prevalent, men have also not been spared, there were cases from respondents were junior male journalists are experiencing verbal and/or physical harassment from senior female journalists. The study established that the majority of sexual harassment cases go unreported largely due to fear of losing jobs and potential repercussions at the workplace. One Respondent to the study stated that generally, because of history- what has happened in the past is that those that have reported have faced various challenges that include fear of losing jobs, fear not to be believed and fear of retaliation by the perpetrators of the sexual harassment. Further, research respondents said while other big newsrooms have sexual harassment policies, the policies have not been utilised in the face of damning evidence, as such incidents have either been dismissed or swept under the carpet. Some newsrooms do not have explicit sexual harassment policies that provide for the necessary support mechanism to be implemented to deal with such issues. A female respondent said :

*“Management response is weak always. Even when the reported harassment is obvious, the tone, language and action of management in dealing with the reported sexual harassment issues in not encouraging. From the cases that are reported, rarely do you hear of perpetrators being fired. They are usually reassigned (sometimes even given higher posts) or are just given a casual warning.”*

The Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) in September this year suspended its Director of Radio Services, Robson Mhandu, over allegations of sexual harassment<sup>6</sup>. Mhandu is accused of demanding sex from a female presenter in order to approve her transfer request from Bulawayo to Harare. In leaked audios records Mhandu, is recorded telling the alleged victim Farai Juliet Magada, also known as Farie Jules, that she needed her to “motivate me by work and number two, the obvious... it’s a combination of the two... Tell me if you don’t want to do it and you’ll go back to Bulawayo.” Magada asked Mhandu if her transfer was going to depend on sex and he responded by saying, “we don’t separate the two.”

Research respondents stated that this is just a tip of the iceberg. “If a wider inquiry, led by an independent panel, is conducted in different newsrooms, what they will find is a disgusting culture of sexual harassment and sexual abuse in the media sector that has permeated the organisations for many years,” one research respondent said, asking not to be named.

WAN-IFRA Women in News in January 2022 released a Global study analysing sexual harassment in newsrooms in 20 countries where it states in its findings that on average, 4percent of women media professionals have experienced sexual harassment of some kind in the workplace<sup>7</sup>. The WAN-IFRA study reveals that wmen and gender non-conforming media professionals are almost three and a half times more likely to experience harassment than men. Media Alliance of Zimbabwe (MAZ) programmes manager, Nigel Nyamutumbu, says there is a need to take issues of sexual harassment seriously to stop the vice.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> CPJ, July 8, 2022

<sup>7</sup> CPJ, July 8, 2022

<sup>8</sup> CPJ, July 8, 2022

*“Reports of sexual harassment in the media are concerning and there’s need for thorough investigations on all reported cases,” Nyamutumbu said. Studies show that it is rampant yet there seems to be a culture of impunity.”*

*“The media should be a safe space for all and it’s time that perpetrators are held accountable.”*

Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ) secretary-general Perfect Hlongwane says the the ZBC case is a tip of the iceberg<sup>9</sup>. “ZUJ notes with a heavy heart reports alleging sexual harassment at the public broadcaster, ZBC, wherein a senior management official is implicated.” The Gender and Media Connect (GMC) has called on the national broadcaster to conduct thorough investigations into the sexual harassment allegations and says the sexual harassment allegations are not new. “Over the years, we have heard of incidents of abuse and harassment in various newsrooms by senior members of staff who have used their positions and authority to threaten members of staff.”

Sexual harassment in the newsroom is a long standing societal problem that undermines integrity, credibility, and quality of work. In other words, it does not affect ethical conduct and professionalism, but the physical and mental well-being of the victims. Responding to sexual harassment concerns, the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC) recently launched a sexual harassment policy for the media. ZMC Commissioner, Susan Makore, is on record saying that while some big media houses have sexual harassment policies, a majority of these do not have guidelines.<sup>10</sup>

*“Media houses have a great role to play in the same way they have editorial policies. ... A model sexual harassment policy is being worked on and once we do that and its rolled out before the end of the year, we hope the media houses that don’t have sexual harassment policies will pick from there.”*

9 CPJ, July 8, 2022

10 CPJ, July 8, 2022

## 4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As evidenced in this study, media professionalism in Zimbabwe is being throttled by media ownership and control patterns, political interference, publishers’ obsession with economic returns, poor and low salaries, restrictive editorial policies, self-censorship of the media, and a lack of resources for journalists. Accepting bribes is unethical in journalism, but media practitioners in this research indicated that they are being coerced to accept bribes to supplement their poor salaries due to the prevailing economic situation. To improve media professionalism in Zimbabwe, this research makes the following recommendations to the government, academics, and the media.

### Recommendations to the Government

- Should repeal laws (clauses from multiple laws) limiting media freedom and freedom of expression.
- Expedite the Constitution of the board to operationalise the Zimbabwe Independent Complaints Commission Act (2022) so that errant security forces who harass journalists can be prosecuted.
- Agree on codes of conduct with the political parties that expressly prohibit not only violence against each other but also against the media.
- Take swift and legal action against perpetrators responsible for violence against journalists.
- Ensure and support the setting up of a National Employment Council for Journalists whose resolutions should be binding.
- Expedite mutually agreed co-regulation framework for the media industry, where statutory regulation co-exists alongside an independent self-regulatory framework and ensure that the principle is implemented according to the book.

### Academics

- Research towards establishing the level of polarisation in the media and how this can be curbed.
- Initiate comparative studies around new business models, so that media organisations have strategies and sustainability plans.
- Conduct annual research around the state of the media and media professionalism in Zimbabwe
- Should revive the journalism trainers association so that trainers can interact with industry and both co-operate on an evolving curriculum to meet industry expectations

## Journalists

- Should shun corruption and uphold the high ethical standards of the profession.
- Pressure stakeholders such as government, CSOs, and employers for a National Employment Council (NEC) for the media to be set up.
- Invest in training on fact-checking and tools to weed out fake news.
- Through the unions should strive for unity between journalists from both the public and private media.
- Promote unionism to lobby for better work conditions, including better-equipped newsrooms and better remuneration.
- Take up professional training courses and refresher courses to enhance knowledge around ethical conduct.

## VMCZ and Media CSOs

- Should continuously engage stakeholders towards ensuring that the code of conduct is observed by all journalists
- Continue to conduct capacity development programmes for the media
- Continue to lobby for media self regulation and professionalism in the media
- Continuously update the code of conduct in partnership with the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC) to encompass new development trends

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VOLUNTARY MEDIA COUNCIL OF ZIMBABWE

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-  **Telephone:** +263778096
-  **WhatsApp** :+263 772 125 658
-  **Email** :mediacomplaints@gmail.com,  
programmes@vmcz.co.zw
-  **Website:** www.vmcz.co.zw
-  **Facebook:** VMCZimbabwe
-  **Twitter:** @voluntarymedia
-  **LinkedIn:** VMCZ VMCZ
-  **Instagram:** vmcz\_zimbabwe
-  **YouTube:** Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe

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programmes@vmcz.co.zw
- Website:** www.vmcz.co.zw
- Facebook:** VMCZimbabwe
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