

Why South Africa's media fight matters to Botswana

For Botswana journalists, news that their South African colleagues are busy warding off a proposed statutory media tribunal from the ruling African National Congress sounds all too familiar. For more than a decade, the government of Botswana has been trying to push a media law that would effectively shift the whole media under state control.

By [Thapelo Ndlou](#) 16 Sep 2010



This was eventually achieved as in December 2008, the Media Practitioners Act came to being after being pushed through parliament by the dominant ruling Botswana Democratic party. The implementation of the act has however been frustrated by fierce advocacy by Botswana media groups, with the key assistance of the Law Society of Botswana, which also refused to participate in the implementation as required.

Wrapped in a sheep's skin of general principles guaranteeing the operational independence of the media and the creation of a statutory press council that "shall be wholly independent and separate from the government, any political party or any other body," the act reveals in its fine print to have glaring contradictions. It calls for the creation of a new Media Council, whose key committees would operate under the exclusive control of the minister of communication, a political appointee.

The latter has wide discretion to handpick the members of the complaints and appeals committees and can dismiss the members of the executive branch. Also problematic is a draconian registration and accreditation regime reminiscent of the one enforced in Zimbabwe until recently, as any publisher not registered by the Media Council could be fined as much as P5,000 (US\$781) or face up to three months in jail.

Read the [full blog](http://CPJ.org) on <http://CPJ.org>.

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