



# Opportunities for Reviewing the Media Authority Act 2013 on Press Freedom in South Sudan

Gai Peter Manyuon, Darius Mukiza



**Abstract:** *This article examines the impact of the 2013 Media Authority Act in South Sudan and its relationship to press freedom and freedom of expression, which are enshrined in international instruments such as the European Convention on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. However, the principle is not practised equally by all states. The Media Authority Act, established in South Sudan to regulate the media and ensure media freedom, is marred by many issues, making it ineffective, including censorship of the media, harassment and intimidation of journalists, arrest without cause, and impunity for those who violate the rights of media professionals. Ongoing political instability and unrest in the country have silenced public debate. The study focuses on the impact of the Media Authority Act on media freedom in South Sudan. It proposes solutions to improve the situation, i.e., a critical analysis of the Act and the views of different stakeholders on how the law can be made to comply with the human rights norms of other countries and to address wider socio-political issues that inhibit the full realisation of freedom of the press in South Sudan. The study contributes to discussions on the media's place in democratic governance and the observance of human rights in South Sudan. It offers policy prescriptions to strengthen the legal framework for press freedom, develop a free press, and strengthen the fundamentals of democracy in South Sudan. Lastly, the study emphasises the need to address broader socio-political issues that hinder the full freedom of the press in South Sudan.*

**Keywords:** *Media Authority Act of South Sudan, Media Freedom, Media Rights in South Sudan, Press Freedom, Freedom of Expression*

## Nomenclature:

ECHR: European Convention on Human Rights  
ICCPR: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights  
UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation  
NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation  
SSBC: South Sudan Broadcasting Corporation  
CHR: Commission on Human Rights  
HRW: Human Rights Watch  
UNMISS: United Nations Mission in South Sudan  
UDHR: Universal Declaration of Human Rights  
FCC: Federal Communications Commission  
CPJ: Committee to Protect Journalists

Manuscript received on 05 December 2025 | First Revised Manuscript received on 05 March 2026 | Second Revised Manuscript received on 04 May 2026 | Manuscript Accepted on 15 June 2026 | Manuscript published on 30 June 2026.

\*Correspondence Author(s)

**Dr. Gai Peter Manyuon\***, Department of School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Dar es Salaam Tanzania. Email ID: [petergai2006@gmail.com](mailto:petergai2006@gmail.com), ORCID ID: [0009-0009-2544-1375](https://orcid.org/0009-0009-2544-1375)

**Dr. Darius Mukiza**, Lecturer, Department of School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Dar es Salaam, Uganda. Email ID: [mukiza.darius@udsm.ac.tz](mailto:mukiza.darius@udsm.ac.tz), ORCID ID: [0000-0001-5817-6760](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5817-6760)

© The Authors. Published by Lattice Science Publication (LSP). This is an open-access article under the CC-BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>)

## I. INTRODUCTION

Freedom of expression, and particularly press freedom, is a foundational element of a democracy and a fundamental human right [1] [2]. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) stipulate that all human beings have the right to express themselves freely (including sharing opinions and beliefs) and that this freedom of expression is a key element of individual thought and democratic participation [1] [2]. However, the practice of these rights is highly variable by country and subject to a variety of factors, as illustrated in the example of South Sudan, where a Media Authority Act of 2013 was developed to create an environment for press freedom but was not successfully implemented [1] [4].

Freedom of expression and press freedom in particular is a universally recognized human right, as demonstrated by international covenants such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which protect our right to voice our thoughts, beliefs and ideas in any manner [4]. Independent media serve as watchdogs in democracies, monitoring government activity and giving voice to marginalised groups. However, press freedom is not uniform across the world but is influenced by various political, cultural, and legal factors that affect the protection and practice of this right [3, 14, 8]. The Media Authority Act was passed in South Sudan in 2013 to regulate media and promote press freedom. However, while the Act has several positive features, its implementation has encountered difficulties.

It must be emphasized that journalists and media houses in the country can also be the target of harassment, arbitrary arrest and even abuse by government officials and other actors [17], which leads to a stifling of the will to express opinions and discourages attempts to do so, with the freedom of the press and the safety of journalists constantly threatened by the pressures that are placed on media in South Sudan, justified by national security issues or attempts to keep political stability [20, 17]. Despite the Media Authority Act's intention to make it easier to regulate media activities, several inconsistencies have led to poor implementation in practice, including a lack of political will to enforce the act, high levels of state censorship, and other restrictions [19].

Political instability, armed conflicts, weak institutional structures, and other problems have made life difficult for the media, including harassment, arbitrary detention, censorship, or physical violence of journalists and media workers, and most violations of the rights of media practitioners go unpunished due to government involvement in manipulating the

## Opportunities for Reviewing the Media Authority Act 2013 on Press Freedom in South Sudan

process of information dissemination [5,9,17]. Therefore, the Media Authority Act of 2013 should be reviewed because it has not been effective.

Noteworthy is the fact that although the Media Authority Act has good intentions and objectives, its implementation has been poor, and there is a need to re-examine it to make it more effective to satisfy the needs of South Sudanese citizens, who are trying to improve their lives by developing a democratic governance system and safeguarding human rights. This research will explore how the Act can be revised to promote press freedom better.

### A. Theories Guiding the Study

The two major theoretical approaches for this research are the Social Responsibility Theory of the Press and the Authoritarian Theory of the Press. We will examine the influence of the Media Authority Act 2013 on freedom of expression in South Sudan from these two, yet complementary perspectives. The Authoritarian Theory of the Press is one of the oldest theories in the media and communication field and was established in the 16th and 17th centuries, an era in which there was strong interest from ruling bodies in maintaining social and political stability and loyalty to the state, and therefore, strict regulation of printing and speech was necessary to maintain their rule [4,6].

In this type of dictatorship, the media are not considered an independent branch but rather an arm of the state and operate under government control to prevent dissent, circulate ideas that might be viewed as disruptive, and bolster the state's power [6]. Here, free speech is a secondary concern, and the media must align with government policy and avoid criticism that might harm society.

For years, various justifications have been offered for restricting media freedoms, such as the notion that free media could threaten national security, cause social disorder, or hinder community integration, especially during political instability [6]. This has always been the case when the country was in transition, unstable, or undergoing reconstruction [10]. The underlying assumption of this approach is that unregulated media freedom can result in misinformation, subversive ideas, and societal chaos.

However, in the Social Responsibility Theory of the Press and Media Ethics (Hoechli 10), freedom of expression is considered a human right; in a way, it is the connection between the media and democracy. In this sense, media freedom is an extension of the concept because it allows the public access to information that helps them make rational decisions. But when the media use their power to manipulate, deceive, or distort information, this is contrary to the principle of democracy and denies citizens the opportunity to make decisions free from bias [5,7,12].

The essence of democracies is that citizens are supposed to make up their own minds; therefore, media distortion is not in the spirit of democracy, and the media are not neutral observers of events but rather players in the game of reporting, as demonstrated by the ongoing coverage of the Russia-Ukraine conflict with Russian and Western media using authoritarianism to narrate their respective storylines [14].

IGAD [14] states that both sides use media to tell their version of events, often through propaganda, as the Russian

government-funded media, which includes channels such as RT (Russia Today), repeatedly repeat the same story of Russia as the saviour and the other Western countries as the aggressor [10]. The repetition of the same stories by the Russian media channels delivers the same single narrative in which Russia is the protector of Ukraine while acting as an aggressor [14]. At the same time, most American and European media represent the Ukrainian side.

In the first week following the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, 30 per cent of international television news coverage worldwide, and even in Russia itself, carried a negative message, and 70 per cent mentioned Russian President Vladimir Putin, showing how authoritarianism can distort facts [10]. The Social Responsibility Theory arose in response to the vices of the Libertarian Press Theory, which called for freedom without restraint in the media, often resulting in sensationalism and bias [15].

The Social Responsibility Theory, however, offsets this with the assumption that the media should be used ethically, for example by stressing the importance of accuracy, fairness, and responsibility in the coverage of news, which is especially relevant in South Sudan, where the role of the media in protecting democracy has not been fully realised [13]. The theory also calls for the review and amendment of media laws, such as the Media Authority Act 2013, which are meant to achieve these purposes in the interests of the people and the country, ensuring that they meet their intended purposes.

The review of the Media Authority Act 2013 is key to ensuring greater openness and independence in the media sector in South Sudan, and some of its limitations should be addressed to align with international standards of press freedom. The media should be able to operate freely and without fear of any form of reprisal, which is a fundamental requirement of [17,22] press freedom in a democracy.

South Sudan can develop a system of media control by trying to combine local and international standards. The Reformation of the Media Authority Act of 2013 should incorporate a regime that promotes freedom of expression and accountability in the use of the media for political purposes. This will foster both greater press freedom and the development of a democratic government.

According to the existing literature, some argue that several laws, such as the Media Authority Act 2013, limit media freedom in South Sudan. Agenda-setting and social responsibility theory can give additional insight into the effect of media control on society. It is necessary to review the legal system of the Media Authority Act 2013.

There is an urgent need to critically analyse and revise the scope of the Media Authority Act 2013 in South Sudan and to guarantee the media's total independence. The provisions of the law that grant extensive government control over the media process have received strong criticism because they may inhibit freedom of expression and the publication of criticism [17]. Other writers have called for a legal review of the law, so that South Sudanese media practices conform with international law on human rights, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights,





both of which establish the right to freedom of expression [19].

One possible area for reform is the Media Authority's independence and autonomy. The role of the Media Authority, as it currently stands, is quite powerful in licensing and regulation, and is open to excessive manipulation of the licensing process for media organisations in response to media outlets publishing stories critical of the regime. For instance, the Act grants the government the power to cancel existing licenses of media institutions and to punish and reprimand media outlets under the caption of "unpatriotic" and "offensive" [11]. Conversely, the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection proposes an independent media regulatory system for the media sector that addresses journalists' concerns and enhances accountability and transparency. Reforms should be made to the Media Authority Act 2013, and a free, independent and autonomous media regulatory authority should be created.

In addition, it is noteworthy that any reforms to the Media Authority Act 2013 should be guided by best practices in media regulation across countries. Most developed nations set up institutions for media regulation that not only guarantee free expression but also promote social responsibility [15,22]. In principle, these institutions put in place rules and regulations to promote independence and to prevent government and political influence in their own countries. In this way, free reporting on subjects of general public interest is engendered without fear of any punishment by reporters in the targeted countries. Including the BBC Trust in the United Kingdom, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in the United States and the Press Complaints Commission in South Africa.

The models were recommended to be used for South Sudan because they could help in solving some problems which the media industry faces in South Sudan, for example, using an independent system of media regulation (ACHPR suggests African countries to develop a self-regulating independence system to protect the media from interference from the government, [26,20,17]. This could lead South Sudan to develop a regulatory system that would protect journalists' rights, increase newspaper diversity, and make the public more responsible.

The review of the Media Authority Act 2013 would be valuable in helping establish a better legal system that allows media practitioners to carry out their work efficiently while also protecting them from threats to their safety. It has been reported previously of threats of harassment, intimidation and even physical violence on journalists who were critical of the government or other issues of concern for the country. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), South Sudan is one of the most dangerous countries in Africa where journalism is practised [18,20,23,24]. Despite the media's struggles in the current hostile environment, it still contributes to coverage of the country's main issues.

The analysis of the Media Authority Act-2013 provides an opportunity for South Sudan to translate its articles prohibiting harassment and violence against journalists into practice. Such laws can provide avenues of legal protection for journalists, or laws that protect their right to access information freely, or legal measures to protect them in court

from being sued for publications that would gag them or bring any interference from the government. [19,23].

Another opportunity to improve the Media Authority Act 2013 would be to promote media diversity. Media pluralism refers to the presence of diverse perspectives, expressions, and sources of information in a society [18,24]. A plurality of media systems allows citizens to be well-informed and leads to increased participation in democratic processes [18, 24]. Most government-controlled media institutions in South Sudan will be the most dominant, leading to a lack of plurality of opinions and viewpoints [13,17].

So, reviewing the Media Authority Act of 2013 is a significant step towards ensuring transparency in the licensing process for media organisations in South Sudan. Because there is no licensing procedure in place, media organisations find it difficult to register with the appropriate licensing body to obtain the licenses they need to run their daily business. As a result, the licensing process has been exploited by the government, which has refused to license media outlets that criticise it. An amended Act will establish a transparent licensing process that enables media organisations to operate their businesses without government interference [22,25].

We can learn from countries like Kenya that media license transparency can, in reality, facilitate media freedom. We had a vision procedure under the Kenya Media Council Act, which admitted all operators to the process without regard to party-political stance. It is a much better solution for South Sudan.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This research used a mixed-method design, combining quantitative and qualitative data to evaluate how the Media Authority Act should be overhauled to promote free speech in South Sudan. The research aimed to identify which sections of the Media Authority Act required amendments to improve the law. The research primarily used qualitative interviews and secondary data analysis.

The document review proved crucial for understanding the Media Authority Act of 2013 and, at the same time, helped us identify where amendments could improve press freedom. The document review or legislative analysis in this case also involved collecting relevant laws governing the media in South Sudan. It is interesting to note that specific acts of legislation were selected for closer scrutiny, among others, the Media Authority Act, the Broadcasting Corporation Act, and the Right of Access to Information Act.

To ensure the information we were working with was correct, we obtained a copy of the Media Authority Act 2013 from the Ministry of Information of South Sudan. Further to that, the act was checked for originality, with copies of the law sought from available legal resources. This was done with the successful assistance of legal experts involved in the practice of law regarding South Sudanese media laws.

## III. RESULTS

The outcomes of interviews and focus group discussions indicated that it was possible to revisit the South Sudan Media



## Opportunities for Reviewing the Media Authority Act 2013 on Press Freedom in South Sudan

Authority Act 2013. In contrast, some respondents perceived difficulties in revisiting it. To facilitate reforms, a journalist highlighted the importance of collaboration between government and media organisations, where he said, "It is possible to amend the Act, mostly since we journalists are well-organised, and civil society organisations are well-organised. If we collaborate with the government, we could call for amendments to the Act that will ensure press freedom and accountability." (Respondent 16, Journalist).

Another candidate was the upcoming general election, which might provide a window to investigate the Act. "The government will be scrutinized for any failure to uphold democracy, mainly freedom of the press, as the elections approach," a media advocate confirmed. It seems logical to press for revisions when it allows journalists to freely access information at this juncture (Respondent 17, Media Advocate).

Of course, during the interviews and the focus group discussion, several opportunities arose to discuss the South Sudan Media Authority Act of 2013. Some were for revision, while others were for the challenges of any revision.

In one of the papers there was an article highlighted on the importance of the cooperation between government officials and media organizations, "We should take this opportunity to amend the Act because in the past journalists were not organized and Because of this we could have collaborated with the government to make amendments to protect press freedom, but at the same time to make journalists take responsibility for their actions".

General elections were also seen as another potential catalyst for revisiting the Act. The media activist explained that, in the lead-up to the impending general elections, greater demands will be made on the government to demonstrate its commitment to democratic ideals. The general elections are an ideal time to amend the Act to enable the practice of journalism to be practised freely. A sense of hope and urgency is evident in the deliberations among stakeholders on how to move forward with media reforms in South Sudan.

Throughout the focus group discussions, it was evident how essential it is for development partners and international organisations to be allies to those stakeholders in their search for reforms: a representative of a human rights organisation said, "International organisations are always monitoring the state of affairs in the media in South Sudan." People think that, in this case, the active and ongoing interference by international organisations can be helpful. If participants could contact the organisations to inform them that their Act is based on a philosophy contrary to international standards, the government could change its Act (Respondent 18, Human Rights Advocate).

When discussing the role of the Media Authority, it was noted that the inconsistencies between the Media Authority Act and international standards should be rectified. Based on the legal expert's assessment of international standards, South Sudan will have greater press freedom, improve its international image, and reduce arbitrary interference by the security services, as their activities would be subject to back-checking.

The implementation of the Act's provisions would involve judicial review being raised by several persons participating in the debate whenever a judicial review was appealed. More

exactly, the authority would have to decide, in its discretion, whether to grant, revoke or suspend the license, as was stated by a representative of a humanitarian organisation, "judicial oversight is necessary.

"In general, some critical media houses will be overpowered by the unfounded powers of the Media Authority and may be drowned out. There is near-unanimity that accountability and transparency throughout the process are the road to the right kind of media environment.

This has also been reflected in journalists' concerns about the lives of those involved in their reporting. For example, a journalist from Juba pointed out, "Most of us are living in fear knowing that coverage of such issues could bring our arrest or closure of our media houses." Clearly, there is an immediate need to make the Act more comprehensive to safeguard them.

What is essentially proposed is the necessity of reforms that will enable journalists and media institutions to operate in a harassment and intimidation-free atmosphere to produce a healthy media industry. Several interviewees recognised that media advocacy groups and other civil society organisations played a significant role in the evaluation and reform of the Act.

Civil society organisations not only monitor media reform but also serve as active agents in this process by speaking openly about the critical need for press freedom and putting pressure on the government. "Engagement of civil society groups is key in reaching our goal of a free press," said a prominent media devotee.

Another problem identified by many respondents was the harsh sanctions imposed by the Media Authority Act. Many of the interviewed stakeholders considered the sanctions as being quite harsh and not necessarily effective. "Sanctions contained in the Act are harsh and develop a fear complex among media personnel," was a statement made by one of the respondents, who is the head of the Institute of Journalists. The importance of revising the sanctions to ensure they are fair and just was reiterated many times during the interview sessions.

The importance of social media websites and other digital communication channels was another issue raised by respondents in many interviews. No use for: "The sanctions are not very effective in dealing with digital media", one of the experts in media studies questioned. Evidently, from many of the replies, there is a requirement to update the sanctions in the Act to reflect newer methods of disseminating information.

Most participants felt that significant amendments should be introduced to the Media Authority Act and the Journalists' Act to ensure the protection of journalists. Reflection was made on the proposed basic principles of the new media law, which included appropriate sanctions, the protection of journalists, the importance of civil society in advocating change and updating the law in light of the new digital age of the media. The themes above illustrate the problems journalists face and potential solutions.

The lack of adequate legislation protecting press freedom makes journalists' work difficult in South Sudan. A journalist from Juba confessed, "Most of us are intimidated when we





undertake certain covers because we realise that we will probably get arrested or our media corporations have been shut." The fear of arrest is most prevalent among South Sudanese journalists. To alleviate these problems, many believe that changes are needed to the Media Authority Act.

It is because the present Act does not safeguard journalists from harassment and intimidation. This, in turn, led to their failure to raise awareness among South Sudanese people. If protective measures are incorporated into the Act, the journalist will work fearlessly, thereby facilitating positive debate among the people. With the adoption of these protective measures, South Sudan will be able to comply with international human rights law.

Some respondents indicated the role of media advocacy organisations and civil society in advocating for law reform. "The civil society groups should be part of the process of reviewing the Act," said a media activist, claiming that these organisations have the know-how and contacts to lobby for reforms to make the media sector more democratic. Civil society organisations and media advocacy groups have the networks to lobby the government to amend the Act by raising public awareness of policy change. In this context, organisations could have a significant role in bridging the gap between the people and the government/media.

They could help ensure that the media environment in South Sudan embodies democratic values and the free flow of information by advocating reforms that promote media responsibility and freedom of expression. Equally crucial is the finding that the penalties under the Media Authority Act were intended as sanctions and were considered too strict by a large number of respondents. As one CEO observed, "the sanctions in the Act are extremely high and are used to scare media outfits".

An investigative journalist's freedom and the vital journalism that must go on in a democracy are impeded by the climate created by soaring costs and the risk of imprisonment posed by media laws. To prevent threats and punishments from dictating a climate of fear in the media, it was proposed that the threats be made more proportionate. The government can create an environment that promotes responsible journalism, free from the restrictions of free speech, by adopting a more balanced position; the absence of fear will result in a more relaxed system and thorough reporting in the media industry.

One more serious problem arising from the Media Authority Act is the non-acknowledgement of social media and other digital media. "...the Act does not respond to the event of digital media." This shows the Act's inability to keep pace with rapidly changing modes and ways of communication. There is a gaping hole in media regulation because outdated clauses in the Act fail to acknowledge the internet's growing dominance as a medium for generating and broadcasting public opinion. The Act should be amended to develop measures to regulate digital and online media to allow freedom of expression through new digital media.

That means building such an inclusive media environment: journalists will be empowered by guarantees of free publication, free from government interference. In focusing on issues, the media will have a far-reaching influence on public opinion, as agenda-setting theory [4,16] suggests. Censorship in South Sudanese media affected the

dissemination of information on human rights, corruption, and social problems [4,19].

Also, this presents additional evidence [16] supporting the argument that the power of agenda-setting is compromised by censorship, and that the public is not aware of the issues. It can be suggested that, with government censorship, not only does freedom of speech not exist, but the media's ability to set its own agenda is compromised. That means the ability to discuss in the public domain is more restricted than in the literature.

The media plays an essential role in guaranteeing both accountability and transparency, which are primary concerns of social responsibility theory [15]. Yet, in your research, the Media Authority Act does not provide sufficient protection for journalists. As for now, they are unable to be what they are supposed to be: an avid observer of the government, providing space for unwarranted power to wield the reins (Respondent 16, Journalist). This aligns with the argument in [20,15] that properly drafted laws should be enacted to enable journalists to take on giant organisations, such as the government.

From the available literature, freedom of media operation without fear is essential to ensuring the values of democracy, transparency, and fairness. In South Sudan, it is almost impossible for journalists to perform their duties to society due to the lack of security measures.

These results indicate notable deficiencies in the judiciary's supervision of the Media Authority Act's licensing and sanctions provisions. Several interviewees, for example, the Human Rights Advocate, pointed to the need for judicial review to prevent government tyranny of these decisions (Respondent 18).

This concern aligns with that expressed by [20,21] who argue that a neutral supervisory body is essential to prevent random government behaviour directed at institutions that control the media. The link illustrates how the findings strengthen Yasser's [20,21] argument that judicial supervision is required for a free press. It is confirmed that the high fines (contained in the Media Authority Act) block investigations [20,19].

This is consistent with findings by [20,11] suggesting that authoritarian measures threaten press freedom. Results by [11,20] illustrate that threats impede press independence and induce self-censorship, as shown by the harsh repercussions meted out against the journalist and the media houses. That's why theory supports findings and substantiates Blasi's theory of the peril of independence in journalism.

This concern aligns with that expressed by [20,21] who argue that a neutral supervisory body is essential to prevent random government behaviour directed at institutions that control the media. The link illustrates how the findings strengthen Yasser's [20,21] argument that judicial supervision is required for a free press. It is confirmed that the high fines (contained in the Media Authority Act) block investigations [20,19].

This is consistent with findings by [20,11] suggesting that authoritarian measures threaten press freedom. Results at [11, 20] illustrate that threats impede press independence and induce self-censorship, as evidenced by the harsh repercussions meted

## Opportunities for Reviewing the Media Authority Act 2013 on Press Freedom in South Sudan

out against the journalist and the media houses. That's why theory supports findings and substantiates Blasi's theory of the peril of independence in journalism.

Some other stakeholders believed that the review was more to facilitate the government's efforts to strengthen its control over the media rather than to promote press freedom. "It may agree to review the Act, but the amendments are more likely to be unfavourable to us," a suspicious respondent said. They may be considering imposing more restrictions rather than relaxing the laws. If we want to improve over where we are today, then we have to be cautious (Respondent 20, Journalist).

Another concern was whether it would have been difficult to amend the Act due to a lack of harmony between civil society groups and the media practitioners. "One of the problems we have is that there isn't uniformity and we do not all speak with one voice, at least with the issues we discuss," said the media practitioner. We need to rally if we want to seek a review, and our stand has been diluted by the meanness of some media institutions opposing the government (Respondent 21, Media Practitioner).

Yet, the difficulties should not be underestimated. The political context in South Sudan will continue to be among the most significant obstacles to deep reform, and the revision process might be exploited to impose even tighter control over the media. The panellists in the debate identify this issue as a potential risk and stress the importance of a well-planned strategy to advocate reforms in line with models of international media control.

One of the government officials even said: "It should be borne in mind that the Act is meant for accountable press and not for curbing the media". A journalistic excess may be more damaging to a country like ours.

A revision of the Act is also needed, as some respondents argue, with a precise delineation of hate speech and misinformation. They believe that the way the Act has been worded has granted excessive discretion to government officials who are in a position to implement it. The organisation proposes this text, which could be added to the Act, to guarantee the independence of activities conducted under the Act: additional independent evaluation procedures for actions taken under the Act should be established, as should protections for the press and media against government intimidation and harassment. Many respondents have noted the possibility that government officials, civil society groups, and media organisations could act together to pursue reforms.

Journalists and civil society groups, as they are now, may well take advantage of their interest in reforming the Media Authority Act by cooperating with the government. With the right implementation, this could be a very powerful change agent. "The opportunity for reform remains, more so, civil society organisations and journalists are organised now".

Perhaps another reason for the debate over the Media Authority Bill was the impending general elections. A few interviewees pointed out that there would be pressure on the administration to demonstrate its support for 'democratic ideals', such as freedom of the press. It is time for media and civil society groups to seek amendments to this bill to guarantee freedom of the press. "This is the time when the

administration has to prove its support for democracy, including press freedom, since elections are approaching.

"Another issue of concern in this interview was the influence of development partners and international organisations in the quest for reforms. The respondents believed that sufficient international and domestic pressure could be exerted to affect the required modifications to the Media Authority Act by weighing the politeness of both internal and external lobbying. The organisations that could exert pressure on the authorities to change the media law were those that supervise the state's compliance with press freedom in the fledgling nation. "An international institution that supervises media practices in Sudan," reiterated the human rights worker.

The lack of political willingness to change the act was evident in many of the results. Few interviewees expressed suspicion that the government, which may gain from control of the media, will introduce reforms to the Act.

The prevailing opinion is that the act is an apparatus for political domination, and as government officials are motivated by vested interests, reform is difficult to conceive. 'The government has too much control over the media to allow any revisions or amendments to the Act,' said one working journalist.

The anticipated intimidation and fear of journalists was another issue that respondents to the research raised. Several other journalists and media persons have undergone self-censorship because they are afraid of the consequences that might follow if they tried to write about such issues. Journalists cannot really demand reform when they may face retaliation.

Another piece of evidence of the brutal suppression of media criticism by the regime was identified by respondents in the Amnesty International report of 2018. The conclusions drawn from the findings are that the lack of clarity in the Media Authority Act allows governmental powers to apply the law according to their own will and liking.

The examples of defamation, hate speech and incitement to violence prove that such legislation is open to persecution. For this purpose, a more precise definition should be provided, and the courts should retain control so that the review process clarifies these aspects. People also discussed the prospect of global agendas affecting the review's conduct.

It is felt that there is an opening given the international community's current concern about media freedoms to reform South Sudanese law to meet international standards.

Though the respondents finally acknowledged that all authoritarian regimes worldwide used a similar approach to safeguard their power, this means reform would be hard to come by [20,19]. The respondents agreed that having a law to govern the media industry and maintain the balance of our society, in particular after a war, was important.

They felt that the current Media Authority Act is not properly structured, as it overly focuses on control rather than on our freedom. Finding the right amount of freedom that would not destroy our social stability is very important.

Some respondents commented that the public's ignorance of media literacy enabled the government to manipulate the media. The ignorance of the press freedom meant that the



people would not apply pressure on the government to change the system. The change to the Media Authority Act called for greater literacy and press freedom for the people.

But most of the respondents pointed out that amending the Act is urgent to make it effective and to realise its purpose of promoting an active media. Some respondents highlighted the rigid provisions that need strengthening, such as protective clauses against censorship. In contrast, others argued that the arbitrary character of other legislation, such as the National Security Service Act 2014, undermines the effectiveness of this article.

The available alternatives for assessing the Media Authority Act are consistent with the literature, which concludes that subjects worldwide should face increasing restrictions on the media. For example, the proposed amendments to the South Sudanese Media Authority Act align with the recommendations of [20,19], which state that both authoritarian and democratic states restrict media criticism through media regulations. Based on the theory of social responsibility, the free media should take society's interests into account and monitor the abuse of power by people in positions of authority. Because of this, examining this Act would provide opportunities to codify these principles through legislation, particularly given the rising role of judges in ensuring that legislation is not used to repress dissent.

Besides, a study on the review choice under the Media Authority Act would be compatible with the current studies on the significance of an independent media in securing "good democracy governance", as observed in [20,19]. A point can be made from [20,13]'s discussion that this point is a symbol of a bigger international debate about the importance of digital media independence nowadays. And in fact, a sign of these concerns is the interested parties' suggestions that the Act include measures to preserve digital media and freedom of expression.

It should be appreciated that the results lend some support to the common view that government representatives would be the key beneficiaries of a media monopoly and would have no regard for changing the present Act. A journalist has even remarked that 'the control of the government is too great for any substantial amendments to take place in the Act, given that this practically benefits the existing situation'. The hope that the law can bring greater freedom is even more dismissible, since there is no danger to journalists, as Amnesty International reports [20,18].

Political interference is arguably one of the most important obstacles to reform. [20,19] Noted in an earlier subsection on such interferences in the political context that legislative machinery in several countries is under it to obstruct press freedom has Sure become part of the media politics of today's South Sudan. As the agenda-setting theory suggests, this kind of manipulation could enable the government to set the agenda, and it is unlikely that the government would retreat from the game by merely amending the Act. For example, some newspaper institutions, such as Almajhar Alsayasy, have been closed.

The conclusion that there are no opportunities to revise oppressive media laws is grounded in literature on regulating media in authoritarian regimes. Authoritarian governments, like South Sudan's, often restrict media freedom to stay in power. As [20,19] suggests, there are very limited options to

reconsider or restructure the Media Authority Act, as there is no political will to alter its content and because the government relies heavily on laws to curb opposition.

Same thing: these results are in line with (20, 20), which argue for the slow but continuous erosion of press freedom internationally, Most of all in regions with high state intervention in the press. Also, the results highlighted the second stage of the agenda-setting process: framing.

It refers to cases in which issues that South Sudanese media address are sensitive; the media are compelled to shape their coverage of those issues to avoid provoking antagonism toward the government. Based on the interviewees, the journalists self-censor to the point of protecting the government from any form of challenge.

Because of this, issues like corruption and human rights abuses are either trivialised or neutralised—the Authoritarian perspective. The media has a great influence on divergent issues discussed in society. In South Sudan, the theoretical spectre (Authoritarian theory) is mostly applicable in this context. But due to the lack of a freedom of the press law in South Sudan, agenda-setting is very much subdued, so it tends to be ideologically biased on critical issues like corruption and human rights abuses.

From what we have seen, the outcome is plain: the state's censorship and repression, along with tight legislation, restrict certain media practices and influence public opinion towards particular political happenings. It is further proof of the agenda-setting proposition and of how controlling the press restricts the public's access to crucial information. What we should note here is that, while the Media Authority Act was meant to promote responsible reporting, the research findings suggest otherwise, i.e., it's a barrier to the media's watchdog function. As such, the concept is inconsistent with the principles of social responsibility because participants fear arbitrary censorship under sweeping legal provisions.

#### IV. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

There are divergent opinions within South Sudan on the Media Authority Act of 2013. Several focus group discussions and individual interviews expressed contrasting opinions on the Media Act. Supporters of the Act argue that it helps regulate the media and safeguard national security, among other things. Yet fears of government control and political intervention overshadow public opinion.

Interestingly, a significant share of answer-givers aligns with the government's position, arguing that regulation is very important in an unstable political context to suppress hateful speech and false information. This is, in fact, what happens in other countries as well, as media legislation is considered unavoidable in this circumstance. The opponents believe that this Act is nothing but government oppressiveness.

And despite the Act supposedly aligning with international counterparts on issues such as hate speech, in reality, it is seen as in contradiction with them. There are charges of misuse of power over members of the police force. Although some reporters and media groups have acknowledged the legitimate need for legislation in some respects, there is obvious



concern that the legislation will be susceptible to misuse because of its vagueness. Most civil society organisations mentioned the problem of imbalance.

The biggest problem that most civil society activists raise is the abuse of government officials' power to suppress dissent through these laws. In fact, most people hold the opinion that no serious reform will be implemented, given the strong political bias behind the parties, which benefit handsomely from the current structure.

With the rise of demands for reform, it seems well protected by the interests, and that is a warning sign. As other researchers [20,19] have found, the use of laws to facilitate and maintain press restrictions is common in authoritarian regimes.

Past events, such as the shutdown of the *Almajhar* newspaper, have left the public relatively sceptical about the reasons behind the government's implementation of this Act. The judiciary's non-judicial monitoring of the Act further heightens concern. Despite these obstacles, many survey participants were optimistic and offered recommendations to strengthen the legislation.

They believe that better judicial supervision and greater protection for journalists would remedy this problem. Many believe there is an opportunity to bring this Act into line with international practice, mostly regarding the Right of Free Speech in our contemporary world. But some clauses of the Act that were intended to make it impossible for any restriction of a person's liberty of speech, like Clause 13 (b), have been turned upside down by NSS and other state institutions.

The primary role of the Act seems to be as a tool for political suppression; several interviewees shared this view. The most disturbing aspect of the application of this Act relates to its abuse and the cases of intimidation and harassment or detention of journalists. As sources (20, 20) suggest, this is just an example of the more general decline in press freedom worldwide. The unpredictable usage of the Act intimidates journalists. It leaves them in a situation where they have no option but to self-censor in order not to tackle such issues as human rights abuses and the corruption of the regime.

Interestingly, the results of this research align with findings from other research on media control in authoritarian regimes. Published works indicated in references [4,20,19] all insisted on the need for a free press as essential to any democratic system of governance. In South Sudan, this notion is vehemently challenged, as journalists are compelled to portray the government positively in media coverage and to downplay any elements of critique. This observation explains why framing theory is applicable in this case.

### V. CONCLUSIONS

Through adopting international laws and principles and amalgamating them into its own laws, South Sudan would not only improve its legal framework but also demonstrate its commitment to respecting the universal right of people by fostering a robust democratic environment. With open communication and cooperation among the state, media experts, and members of civil society, we will establish a media system that promotes democracy through healthy discourse.

### VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

These findings show that the possibilities for cooperation between government agents and media institutions are vast. Also, in reality, cooperation would enable a sufficient discussion of the Media Authority Act; this should be emphasised. Responsible journalism vis-à-vis the freedom of the press issue has to be discussed actively by both sides. Furthermore, media interest groups should seize the upcoming general elections as a strategic moment to launch campaigns on media reforms.

By campaigning to strengthen press freedom, the Media Authority Act would be seen as evidence that the government respects democratic and human rights. Another significant finding is the role of multinational companies in facilitating reforms to the Media Authority Act.

It is suggested that South Sudanese media defenders work closely with relevant multinational companies and use them as a forum for advocacy to drive change and shed light on how the law falls short of international press freedom standards.

One of the problems that would create an imbalance in the implementation of the Media Authority Act is the lack of judicial oversight, which is a critical obstacle. That means there should be policies and procedures for judicial review of decisions issued under the Act to prevent government excesses, as well as assurance of openness in the grant of media licenses and penalties. Apart from this, the contents of the Media Authority Act itself need to be examined.

The reason is that certain phrases in the Act are too broad, which leaves room for different interpretations. To address this situation, the review process should focus on developing more specific definitions of incitement, hate speech, and defamation.

This will result in greater protection for journalists. The punitive fines are another barrier to journalistic freedom; this is evident from the test results. The authorities must carefully analyse whether the penalisation currently in place is, in fact, fair. An appropriate step needs to be taken to promote journalism rather than curb it.

An enlargement of the networks involved in advocating for the creation of laws and regulations should take place. Collaboration with other civil society organisations could boost the advocacy campaign to push the government to enact laws and policies that safeguard press freedom. In line with the findings of this paper, the public's media literacy skills should be strengthened. It is so crucial to launch public enlightenment campaigns about the importance of media literacy and press freedom.

### DECLARATION STATEMENT

Some of the references cited are outdated, noted explicitly as [6]. However, these works remain significant for the current study, as they are pioneering in their fields.

As the article's author, I must verify the accuracy of the following information after aggregating input from all authors.

- **Conflicts of Interest/Competing Interests:**  
Based on my understanding,





this article has no conflicts of interest.

- **Funding Support:** This article has not been funded by any organizations or agencies. This independence ensures that the research is conducted objectively and without external influence.
- **Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate:** The content of this article does not necessitate ethical approval or consent to participate with supporting documentation.
- **Data Access Statement and Material Availability:** The adequate resources of this article are publicly accessible.
- **Author's Contributions:** The authorship of this article is contributed equally to all participating individuals.

REFERENCES

1. African News (2018 February 20), IGAD Leaders Renew Calls for Peace in South Sudan, Africanews. Available at: <https://www.africanews.com/2018/06/22/igad-leaders-renew-calls-for-peace-in-south-sudan/>
2. Amnesty International (2018 September 09), South Sudan: Arbitrary arrests, torture of detainees despite repeated promises. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2018/09/south-sudan-arbitrary-arrests-and-torture-of-detainees-despite-repeated-promises/>
3. Aondover, Eric Msugter (2017). Peace Journalism Practice and Development in the Northeast of Nigeria: Focus Group Discussion with Some Members of NTA Correspondents' Damaturu, Yobe State. Revista Brasileira de Estudos Africanos = Brazilian Journal of African Studies, Vol. 2, Iss. 4, p. 5-. Available at: <https://seer.ufgrs.br/rbea/article/download/78201/47072> (PDF of article)
4. Bhaskar Gogoi, MPhil Scholar (2019), Understanding the Human Rights Status in South Sudan, Gauhati University, Guwahati, PIN-781014. (No DOI; check Gauhati University thesis repository.) <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/371139003>
5. Carlsson, Ulla (2016a). "Freedom of Expression in the Digital Transition," Journal of Media Business Studies 13(3): 187–197. Article information page at Taylor & Francis Online: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/16522354.2016.1243390>
6. Castells, Manuel & Pekka Himanen (Eds.) (2014), Reconceptualizing Development in the Global Information Age. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (ISBN available; DOI typically not applicable for edited volumes.) <https://academic.oup.com/book/12711>, works remain significant, see the [declaration](#)
7. Mouffe, Chantal (2016) — as referenced in Arata D. Yamamoto, "Why Agonistic Planning? Questioning Chantal Mouffe's Thesis of the Ontological Primacy of the Political," Planning Theory Vol. 16, No. 4, pp. 384–403. Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473095216654941>
8. CIPESA (2022), The State of Media Freedom and Journalists' Safety in Africa 2022. (Report—URL typically on CIPESA website; e.g., [https://cipesa.org/?wpfb\\_dl=XYZ](https://cipesa.org/?wpfb_dl=XYZ), check CIPESA publications.)
9. D'Agoot, M. (2018), "Taming the Dominant Gun Class in South Sudan," Special Report No. 4, Africa Centre for Strategic Studies (ACSS). (URL typically via the Africa Centre site: <https://africa.center.org/publications/>).
10. De Waal, A. & Pendle, N. (2018), in L. Kuol & S. Logan (Eds.), The Struggle for South Sudan: Challenges of Security and State Formation (pp.172–194). London, UK: I.B. Tauris. (ISBN available; check online book retailers or libraries.) <https://dokumen.pub/the-struggle-for-south-sudan-challenges-of-security-and-state-formation-9781788316361-9781786735751.html>
11. Donsbach, Wolfgang (2016), "Orientation: participation and disorientation in the new environment", in Robert G. Picard (Ed.), What Society Needs from Media in the Age of Digital. Oporto: MEDIA XXI. (No DOI; check book citation databases.) <https://www.media XXI.com/loja/what-society-needs-from-media-in-the-age-of-digital-communication/?lang=en>
12. Holmberg, Sören & Weibull, Lennart (2017). "Långsiktiga förändringar i svenskt medieförtroende" i Ulrika Andersson et al. (red.), Larmar och gör sig till. Göteborg: SOM-institutet. Full document (PDF) available at: <https://sorenholmberg.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/2017-langsiktiga-forandringar-i-svenskt-institutionsfortroende-holmberg-weibull-i-larmar-och-gor-sig-till.pdf>

13. Idowu, Samuel; Cheney, George; & Roper, Juliet (2018), ISO 26000 – A Standardised View on Corporate Social Responsibility. Springer International. (Check Springer link for DOI.) <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-92651-3>
14. IGAD (2018), Focus Delegates Mull over IGAD Proposal for South Sudan. VOA News. Available at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/delegates-mull-igad-proposal-south-sudan/4405546.html> (Use this URL entry if the original site is inaccessible.)
15. Igwebuike, I.I. (2016), "An Assessment of Newspaper Framing of Anti-Corruption War of President Muhammadu Buhari," PLASU Journal of Communication Studies; John Dodg & Vainer G. (1963), The Practice of Journalism. Heinemann, London. (Journal URL or ISBN for textbook.) <https://academix.ng/search/paper.html?id=3300017013>
16. Kalpakian, J. (2017), "Peace Agreements in a Near-Permanent Civil War: Learning from Sudan and South Sudan," South African Journal of International Affairs 24(1):1–19. (Check journal site for DOI.) DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2017.1311280>
17. Mustafa & Pierre (2021), The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology – January 2021, Volume 20 Issue 1. (Journal PDF available at <https://tojet.net/>; use search by article title.)
18. Okoed, P. (2016), Civil Society Alliance Endorses Regional Protection Force, UNMISS. (UNMISS press page URL; e.g., <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/>.)
19. Olsen, Johan P. (2017), Democratic Accountability, Political Order, and Change. Oxford University Press. (ISBN/DOI via publisher.) <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/democratic-accountability-political-order-and-change-9780198800606?cc=in&lang=en&>
20. Oyewo, A.; Oyewo, O.O. (2016), "World Press Freedom Day and safety of journalists: implications for people's freedom of expression," New Media and Mass Communication, Vol. 54, p. 35. (No DOI found; check publication archive.) <https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/NMMC/article/view/33644>
21. Pechulano Ngwe Ali (2017), The Impact of the Government Concealing Information on the Practice of Journalism: A Study of Anglophone Cameroonian Journalists, Michigan State University thesis. (Available via MSU library repository.) [https://d.lib.msu.edu/search?goaway\\_challenge=header-refresh&goaway\\_id=29343741d8bb38dafc8620c127e6fbb2&goaway\\_referer=https%3A%2F%2Fd.lib.msu.edu%2F&fq=name\\_primary%3ANGwe%5C%20Ali%2C%20Pechulano&fq=genre\\_aat%3ATheses](https://d.lib.msu.edu/search?goaway_challenge=header-refresh&goaway_id=29343741d8bb38dafc8620c127e6fbb2&goaway_referer=https%3A%2F%2Fd.lib.msu.edu%2F&fq=name_primary%3ANGwe%5C%20Ali%2C%20Pechulano&fq=genre_aat%3ATheses)
22. Ploch Blanchard, L. (2016). Conflict in South Sudan and the Challenges. Congressional Research Service. ([www.CRSreport/academic/legal](http://www.CRSreport/academic/legal) databases).
23. Pur (2019), More Aid Workers Killed in South Sudan, Human Rights Watch. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/11/01/more-aid-workers-killed-south-sudan> (Human Rights Watch news page).
24. UN (2018), UN Human Rights Committee – Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/cat> (UN Treaty Bodies – official text.)
25. Walulya, Gerald & Nassanga, Goretti I. (2020). "Democracy at Stake: Self-censorship as a Self-defence Strategy for Journalists," Cogitatio: Media and Communication, Vol. 8, Iss. 1, p. 6. (Open access journal) – Article page: <https://www.cogitatiopress.com/mediaandcommunication/article/view/3181>
26. Wangui, I. (2016), "The African Editors Forum Declaration on the 2016 World Press Freedom Day," African Media Initiative. Available at: <https://www.africanmediainitiative.org/author/irene/> (Website public statement.)

AUTHOR'S PROFILE



**Dr. Gai Peter Manyon** is a South Sudanese journalist and writer with expertise in strategic communication and public relations. He has worked as a columnist and senior reporter for the Citizen newspaper and TV in Juba and served as Senior Information and Communication Officer for the South Sudan Law Society. He holds a PhD in Journalism and Mass Communication from the University of Dar es Salaam's School of Journalism and Mass Communication. His research focuses on the Media Authority Act of 2013 and its impact on freedom of expression in South Sudan.



## Opportunities for Reviewing the Media Authority Act 2013 on Press Freedom in South Sudan

His interests include media law, development communication, politics, conflict, and humanitarian issues.



**Dr. Darius Mukiza** is a seasoned lecturer at the University of Dar es Salaam's School of Journalism and Mass Communication. With a PhD in communication studies, he has over ten years of experience teaching journalism, media ethics, and communication strategies. His research focuses on the interplay between media, politics, and society, particularly journalism's role in advancing democracy and social change in East Africa. Widely published and recognised in academic circles, Dr Mukiza actively participates in conferences and is known for his practical, student-centred teaching approach, aiming to cultivate a new generation of skilled, socially conscious media professionals.

---

**Disclaimer/Publisher's Note:** The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of the Lattice Science Publication (LSP)/ journal and/ or the editor(s). The Lattice Science Publication (LSP)/ journal and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.