

Press freedom in South Africa and why self-regulation is best

 By [Dr Julie Reid](#)

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Forget all the emotive arguments for and against self-regulation of the media. The numbers alone paint a clear picture: 70% of the top 50 countries in the Reporters Without Borders and Freedom House [press-freedom rankings](#) practice self-regulation.

Almost a year after the [Press Council of South Africa](#) held hearings around the country to hear what the public had to say about the system of self-regulation of the press, the newly established Press Freedom Commission is [doing something similar](#) in January [and February] 2012. Akin to what happened during the Press Council's process of review, the Press Freedom Commission asked for written applications to be submitted by interested parties prior to the public hearings. The main difference between these two processes, however, is crucial.

While the Press Council asked citizens to provide opinion on the system of press regulation in South Africa (self-regulation), the Press Freedom Commission asked for comments on all four of the main types of press regulation, which include independent regulation, co-regulation and most significantly, statutory regulation. People then had to consider whether they were satisfied with allowing the press to regulate itself, or whether other parties should be brought into the process, particularly whether government should have a hand in keeping an eye on the press.

...A research team from the University of South Africa's department of communication science considered the relationship between the system of media accountability practised within a country, and the knock-on effect this had on the country's press freedom. The premise of this [study](#) was that concerns of press accountability in South Africa should not be viewed outside of the wider political context in which the state of press freedom is currently setting off loud alarm bells.

Continue reading the [full opinion piece](#) on www.dailymaverick.co.za.

ABOUT DR JULIE REID

Dr Julie Reid is an academic at the Department of Communication Science at UNSA, and the head of the research team which compiled the report prepared by UNSA for the Press Freedom Commission. She tweets about media issues regularly at [@bjreid](#).

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