

[Print](#)

## Freedom Of The Press - Bhutan (2011)

**Status: Partly Free**  
**Legal Environment: 18**  
**Political Environment: 20**  
**Economic Environment: 19**  
**Total Score: 57**

The media environment in Bhutan continued to be restricted in 2010, and government influence on private media was evident in many instances. The constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan, adopted in July 2008, guarantees the right to free speech, opinion, and expression. However, the 1992 National Security Act prohibits criticism of the king and the political system. The constitution also guarantees the right to information, but efforts to pass a right to information act, which would put into effect the provisions in the constitution, stalled in 2010. Media workers have expressed concerns that the government is not committed to bringing the act to fruition.

In February 2010, the monarchy announced the establishment of the Bhutan Media Foundation with the aim of supporting the development of mass media through scholarships, training programs, and internships. However, many journalists expressed fears that the foundation would be used by the monarchy to impede the independence of media outlets. Physical attacks on the press in Bhutan are rare. In May 2010, a van belonging to the *Journalist* weekly newspaper was vandalized in Thimphu; however, no journalists were injured in the attack, and no arrests had been made by year's end.

Bhutan's main print publication, the state-owned biweekly *Kuensel*, generally reports news that puts the kingdom in a favorable light, but has increasingly been highlighting societal problems and carrying stories critical of the government. Two new private media outlets were established in August 2010—a private radio channel in Thimphu, and *Druk Neytshuel*, the first private newspaper in Dzongkha, Bhutan's national language. There are no private television broadcasters, but cable television services carry uncensored foreign programming, albeit with bans on channels that provide "controversial content" as well as high sales taxes and regulatory obstacles that render costs prohibitive for many citizens. In November, the government announced that it would conduct a print media circulation audit, in order to ascertain which newspapers had the highest circulation, and accordingly allocate its advertising budget. Many private newspapers, including *Bhutan Times* and the *Journalist*, withdrew from the audit in protest, citing the unfair advantage to the older, more established newspaper *Kuensel* as the main reason. In December, the government finally announced that there would be no change made to the government's advertising policy.

The internet is gaining use in Bhutan, but was accessed by only about 13.6 percent of the population in 2010. The government occasionally restricts certain websites considered to be offensive to the state or pornographic. There were no cases of the government blocking access to

websites with antigovernment content in 2010, although there have been incidents in the past when the websites of news outlets critical of the state have been targeted.