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Freedom Of The Press - North Korea (2011)

Status: Not Free
Legal Environment: 30
Political Environment: 38
Economic Environment: 29
Total Score: 97

North Korea remained the most repressive media environment in the world in 2010. The one-party regime owns all media, attempts to regulate all communication, and rigorously limits the ability of North Koreans to access information. Although the constitution theoretically guarantees freedom of speech, constitutional provisions calling for adherence to a "collective spirit" restrict all reporting that is not sanctioned by the government in practice. All journalists are members of the ruling party, and all media outlets are mouthpieces for the regime. Under the penal code, listening to foreign broadcasts and possessing dissident publications are "crimes against the state" that carry grave punishments, including hard labor, prison sentences, and the death penalty. In 2010 alone, over 1,000 people were arrested for possessing or watching foreign films and television programs that they had acquired on the black market through smugglers from China. However, citizens are allowed to watch foreign films that are selected by and broadcast through a state-owned station. In a rare turn of events in December, a state-owned station broadcast the British soccer film *Bend It Like Beckham*.

North Korean media portray all dissidents and foreign journalists as liars attempting to destabilize the government, and authorities sharply curtail the ability of foreign journalists to gather information by seizing their mobile telephones upon arrival, preventing them from talking to people on the street, and constantly monitoring their movements. In March 2009, two U.S. journalists, Euna Lee and Laura Ling, were arrested at the Chinese border and incarcerated in North Korea for committing "hostile acts," and were sentenced in June to 12 years in a labor camp. They were freed in early August 2009 after former U.S. president Bill Clinton traveled to Pyongyang to negotiate their release. The dictatorial regime does on occasion invite the foreign press to cover events such as parades and festivals that shed a favorable light on the state. In October 2010, foreign correspondents were invited to the 65th anniversary of the ruling Korean Workers' Party, during which Kim Jong Il formally presented his son Kim Jong Un as his successor.

In 2007, a Japanese journalist and several North Korean refugees launched *Rimjinkang*, the first newsmagazine to be based on independent reporting from inside the country. The reporting is conducted by specially trained North Koreans—most of them refugees along the country's border with China—who have agreed to go back into North Korea and operate as undercover journalists using hidden cameras. Although reports from *Rimjinkang* are easily accessible for people outside North Korea, within the country, most citizens still rely primarily on state-owned broadcasting agencies for news.

North Korea made its first full connection to the internet in 2010 in time for the national anniversary. A group of 1,024 internet addresses had been reserved for North Korea but until recently had never been used. The first website to appear from among this group belonged to the country's official news agency, the Korea Central News Agency. During the Workers' Party's anniversary celebrations, foreign correspondents were given access to a press room at the Koryo Hotel where they had full and unprecedented access to the internet. Typically, visitors are only able to make telephone calls or send e-mails through designated computers. New connections in North Korea, however, have little significance for average citizens. Internet access is still restricted to a handful of high-level officials who have received state approval, and to foreigners living in the capital, Pyongyang. For average citizens, web access is available only to a nationwide intranet that does not link to foreign sites. As personal computers are highly uncommon in homes, most access the intranet via terminals in libraries. There are currently no accurate statistics measuring the rate of internet penetration in the country.