



[Print](#)

## Freedom Of The Press - Turkmenistan (2011)

**Status: Not Free**  
**Legal Environment: 30**  
**Political Environment: 37**  
**Economic Environment: 29**  
**Total Score: 96**

President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov's government increased already near-total control over the media in 2010, despite nominal constitutional protections for press freedom and freedom of expression as well as frequent pledges to modernize broadcast and print media and increase internet availability. Though libel remains a criminal offense, the law is rarely invoked given the intensity of self-censorship and the extreme scarcity of independent and critical reporting. In September 2010, the president called on the Ministry of National Security to step up its war on extremists and anyone who defamed the state.

Both local and exiled journalists face a range of extralegal threats and harassment. In 2010, Reporters Without Borders reported that the health of two imprisoned journalists, Sapardurdy Khadjiyev and Annakurban Amanklychev, was in jeopardy, and relatives were reportedly not permitted to visit them. They were arrested in 2006 with their colleague, Ogulsapar Muradova, who died several months later as a result of severe beatings in prison. The International Committee of the Red Cross has been denied access to Khadjiyev and Amanklychev, whose family members are all being held within the country. The authorities also harassed local correspondents working for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) during 2010. Allamourad Rakhimov, a Canadian citizen and Prague-based RFE/RL broadcaster, was deported when he attempted to travel to his native Turkmenistan in May 2010. Other reporters for foreign outlets continued to encounter insurmountable obstacles to accreditation, forcing them to work unofficially if at all. Farid Tuhbatullin, head of the Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights and editor of the leading exile news site, Chrono-tm.org, received several death threats in October after he gave an interview to the satellite television channel K+. He was first put under police protection and then forced to move from his home in Austria. Foreign correspondents were often forced to work without accreditation and faced surveillance and severe restrictions on their activities.

The government retained an absolute monopoly on national media in 2010, directly controlling not only all domestic outlets, but also the printing presses, broadcasting facilities, and other infrastructure on which they depended. President Berdymukhamedov repeatedly warned, reprimanded, or fired broadcast executives, usually on the grounds that they had failed to portray his propagandistic "New Revival" campaigns with sufficient enthusiasm, or due to technical problems during coverage of state events. While prior censorship is extensive in broadcast media, some television shows still managed to draw presidential harangues for airing music videos that were deemed inappropriate. In September, the

president announced with much fanfare the opening of the first privately published magazine, *Rysgal*. The periodical was in fact published by the state-controlled Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, and it did not stray from the pro-presidential line. The authorities maintained a ban on almost all foreign newspapers and periodical subscriptions, notably including Russian newspapers, and confiscated publications and computer discs from travelers. Despite an absence of independent domestic media, many citizens had some access to international media through satellite dishes. In 2002 and 2007, the authorities ordered the removal of satellite dishes, but they were forced to back down in the face of popular resistance and international condemnation. Access remains limited due to cost barriers, however.

Continued government restrictions and high costs kept the internet penetration rate extremely low in 2010, with only 2.2 percent of the population using the medium. The government controlled the dominant internet-service provider, TurkmenTeleCom, and restricted access to critical sites including regional news sources located outside Turkmenistan, opposition websites operated by Turkmens living abroad, the video-sharing site YouTube, and foreign outlets like the British Broadcasting Corporation. The website Chrono-tm.org suffered cyberattacks in October 2010 while it attempted to cover Turkmenistan's efforts to block exiled dissidents from speaking at the human rights review meetings of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). In December, the government suddenly shut off mobile-telephone service for 2.4 million people—or 80 percent of the country's users—amid a dispute with MobileTeleSystems (MTS), a Russian provider, depriving many Turkmens of mobile internet access. Most were not accommodated by Altyn Asyr, the sole state provider, which had previously served only 300,000 people.