



FREEDOM HOUSE

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Freedom Of The Press - Japan (2011)

Status: Free
Legal Environment: 2
Political Environment: 13
Economic Environment: 6
Total Score: 21

Japan's prolific media garner one of the largest print readerships in the world. Press freedom is constitutionally guaranteed and generally respected in practice. However, in December 2010, the general affairs committee of the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly approved Bill 156 to amend the Youth Healthy Development Ordinance, which authors and fans of Japan's popular *manga* (comic books) criticized for limiting freedom of expression. Originally passed in 1964, the ordinance aims to promote the healthy development of minors by restricting their access to harmful published material. The amendment allows for the expansion of the definition of "harmful publications" and allows the government to regulate images if the depictions are "considered to be excessively disrupting of social order."

Concerns remain regarding the lack of diversity and independence in reporting, especially in political news. The problem is perpetuated in part by a system of *kisha kurabu*, or journalist clubs, through which major media outlets maintain cozy relationships with bureaucrats and politicians. Exposés by media outlets that belong to such clubs are frowned upon and can result in the banning of members from press club briefings. Most of Japan's investigative journalism is conducted by reporters working outside the press club system. Foreign journalists with press cards from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are guaranteed access to most official press conferences. Although intimidation of the media is rare, politically motivated censorship occasionally blocks the dissemination of information. In November 2010, the KK Kyodo News Agency refused to distribute a press release announcing protests against Japan's alleged persecution of Unification Church members.

Many national dailies have circulations topping one million and often produce both afternoon and evening editions. More than half of the national newspaper market share is controlled by "the big three": the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, the *Asahi Shimbun*, and the *Mainichi Shimbun*. There is considerable homogeneity in reports, which relate the news in a factual and neutral manner. Television news content, once dominated by the public broadcaster NHK, has diversified considerably with the rising popularity of TV Asahi, Fuji TV, the Tokyo Broadcasting System, and satellite television. Japan also has roughly 228 community radio stations. In recent years, the internet has become an increasingly important source of news and revenue, with online advertising sales overtaking newspaper ads for the first time in 2009. No government restrictions on access to the internet, used by 80 percent of the population, were reported in 2010.