

[JOIN OUR MAILING LIST](#)
[About Us](#) | [DONATE](#) | [Blog](#) | [Contact Us](#)
[REGIONS](#) [ISSUES](#)

[Reports](#) [Programs](#) [Initiatives](#) [News](#) [Experts](#) [Events](#) [Donate](#)

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

Japan

[Japan](#) | [Freedom of the Press 2013](#) | [- Select year -](#)

Press freedom in Japan is constitutionally guaranteed and generally respected in practice. However, in December 2010, 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 authorizes the government to regulate images that are "considered to be excessively disrupting of social order." Japan has a freedom of information law, but it does not apply to the parliament or the judiciary.

Some weaknesses in the country's media environment have been highlighted in the aftermath of the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami, which caused serious damage and radiation leaks at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant north of Tokyo. In an unusual use of Japan's defamation laws, nuclear industry entrepreneur Shiro Shirakawa filed a libel suit in May 2012 against a freelance investigative journalist, Minoru Tanaka, for an article in the weekly magazine *Shukan Kinyobi* on alleged connections between Shirakawa, nuclear plant construction companies, and the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO), which runs the Fukushima Daiichi plant. Shirakawa demanded 67 million yen (\$840,000) in damages and attorney fees from Tanaka. The case, which was ongoing at year's end, marked the first time that a journalist, rather than the publisher, has been sued over an article. Despite its landmark status, the Tanaka case received little coverage or support from major media outlets, which critics have attributed to the strength of the *kisha kurabu* (press clubs) system.

The role of the *kisha kurabu*, combined with the financial clout of the power-supply industry, has greatly discouraged investigative reporting on the nuclear disaster. The press clubs have long been at the center of concerns regarding the lack of diversity and independence in Japanese news media, as they foster cozy relationships with bureaucrats and politicians in which journalists are granted access in exchange for refraining from writing critical stories. Meanwhile, freelance and foreign journalists face routine discrimination. Following the 2011 catastrophe, a group of independent journalists who were fed up with the system launched the Free Press Association of Japan. It remains to be seen whether this group will have any influence.

Members of *kisha kurabu* were among the few journalists admitted to official press conferences in the wake of the 2011 tsunami, and they often avoided tough questions regarding the situation at the crippled power plant. Freelance journalists and foreign and online media were excluded from reporting on the nuclear threat and were not allowed into official press conferences. Only two independent reporters from Japan were included among the 40 journalists invited on the third media visit to the Fukushima Daiichi plant in May 2012, and they were not allowed to use still cameras or video equipment. In October, three freelance journalists—Yu Terasawa, Michiyoshi Hatakeyama, and Yuichi Sato—filed a legal complaint stating that they had been trying unsuccessfully to enter the building of the parliamentary press club since June. Separately, in

2013 SCORES

PRESS STATUS

Free

PRESS FREEDOM SCORE

24

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

4

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

14

ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

6

August 2012, Japanese authorities briefly detained two Chinese journalists from Hong Kong-based Phoenix TV who were reporting on a bid by protesters to reach the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands, which are claimed by both Japan and China.

There were accusations of official censorship in the aftermath of the 2011 disaster, but the Japanese government denied that it had attempted to withhold negative information. In March 2012, a year after the tsunami, Fukushima residents still lacked basic data and clear answers regarding the level of radiation in their food and environment. Human Rights Watch reported that residents did not know whether their food was safe or their children had been exposed to dangerous levels of radiation. In addition, mainstream media outlets have greatly misrepresented disaster clean-up expenses, reporting figures that underestimated the actual costs.

Japan has one of the highest print readerships in the world. Print outlets were hurt in the immediate aftermath of the disaster, but the major news outlets recovered quickly. More than half of the national newspaper market is controlled by three major papers: 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 273 community radio stations. The internet remained a major source of news, and around 79 percent of the population accessed the medium in 2012.

The 2011 disaster highlighted the influence of TEPCO on Japan's advertising industry. The company reportedly spends 24.4 billion yen (\$306 million) a year on advertising, a factor that likely contributed to the media's conservative reporting on its handling of the nuclear crisis. In May 2012, the Japanese government approved plans to take a controlling stake in TEPCO as part of a 1 trillion yen (\$12.5 billion) taxpayer bailout. Moreover, many journalists have economic links to the nuclear industry. Reporters with the *Nikkei* and *Mainichi Shimbun* newspapers have reportedly gone on to work for pro-nuclear organizations and publications.

[About us](#)
[Careers](#)
[Contact Us](#)
[Privacy Policy](#)
[Credits](#)
[Subscribe](#)

Related websites:
[Democracy Web](#) | [Derecho a Voz](#) | [Family Law - Khaleej](#) |
[Freedom House Kyrgyzstan](#) | [Peace in the Caucasus](#) |
[Undermining Democracy](#) | [Voice of Freedom](#)