

Taiwan's media environment is one of the freest in Asia, and the vigorous and diverse press reports aggressively on government policies and alleged official wrongdoing. However, political polarization, self-censorship, and indirect Chinese influence somewhat limit the diversity of opinions represented in mainstream media. In 2014, Taiwan's vulnerabilities were highlighted by rare violence against journalists covering protests and cyberattacks against an important media outlet that has been critical of Beijing. The authorities launched investigations in response to the incidents.

### Legal Environment

The constitution provides for freedoms of speech and of the press, and the government and independent courts generally respect these rights in practice. Publication of defamatory words or pictures can be punished with a maximum of two years in prison. Media freedom advocates have urged the government to decriminalize defamation.

Taiwan's Freedom of Government Information Law, enacted in 2005, enables public access to information held by government agencies, including financial audit reports and documents about administrative guidance.

Print media are free of state regulation, and following reforms in recent years, broadcast media are no longer subject to licensing and programming reviews by the Government Information Office (GIO), which was formally dissolved in 2012. The National Communications Commission (NCC) is Taiwan's main regulatory body tasked with awarding licenses and enforcing broadcasting guidelines. It is generally regarded as independent, though it has faced criticism for some licensing decisions in recent years, and contentious cases draw public and political pressure.

### Political Environment

Media coverage is often critical of the government, though the sector is politically polarized. Most outlets are sympathetic to either the governing Kuomintang party or the opposition Democratic Progressive Party. In the run-up to municipal elections in November 2014, local journalists told the Committee to Protect Journalists that their news outlets were pressuring them to take sides in national political controversies.

Journalists also occasionally face pressure to self-censor on topics of importance to the Chinese government. Many Taiwanese media owners have business interests in China or draw advertising revenue from Chinese companies, making them wary of upsetting Beijing.

Physical violence against journalists is rare, and both local and foreign reporters are generally able to cover the news freely. However, several journalists encountered violence

during student-led demonstrations, known as the Sunflower Movement, in the spring of 2014. Reporters covering the student occupation of Taiwan's executive building, the Executive Yuan, accused police of pushing, dragging, and attacking them as the officers evicted demonstrators from the building in March.

In April, Taipei police officers beat two journalists and dragged them away from the scene of an antinuclear protest, allegedly to prevent them from taking pictures of police as they moved to disperse demonstrators occupying an area near the city's main train station. The police department subsequently issued an apology, promised to compensate the journalists for damaged property, and launched an investigation into the incident. Another journalist was jostled by police and threatened with arrest during a June protest against a Chinese official's visit to New Taipei City. At year's end the Taipei police were reportedly considering a policy under which journalists would be asked to remain inside designated "press zones" to avoid clashes with officers during protests.

Cyberattacks pose a significant threat to press freedom in Taiwan. In August 2014, the minister of science and technology warned that the country was under constant attack by Chinese cyberwarfare units. Two months later, Prime Minister Jiang Yi-huah said Chinese cyberattacks against government and civilian websites were increasing. These warnings followed major attacks on the Hong Kong and Taiwan websites of *Apple Daily*, a popular tabloid newspaper that is often critical of the Chinese government. In February, *Apple Daily's* parent company, Next Media, reported that a distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attack had effectively shut down its Hong Kong and Taiwan websites for several hours. Then, during an unofficial referendum on election reform organized by Hong Kong prodemocracy activists in June, the media outlet suffered the largest DDoS attack in history, leading to a "total collapse" of its websites on June 18. The effects of the attack reportedly lasted for several weeks, with some overseas readers unable to access *Apple Daily's* Taiwan site. The computer systems of *Apple Daily* and Next Media sustained further attacks during Hong Kong prodemocracy protests that began in September, as did the e-mail accounts of Next Media executives. On June 20, prosecutors in Taipei launched an investigation into the attacks on Next Media.

## **Economic Environment**

Taiwan is home to more than 360 privately owned newspapers and numerous radio stations. Satellite television systems carry more than 280 channels. Legislation approved in 2003 barred the government and political party officials from holding positions in broadcast media companies, and required government entities and political parties to divest themselves of all broadcasting assets. The internet is not restricted by the government; about 76 percent of the population accessed the medium as of 2013.

Despite public support, efforts to pass an anti-media monopoly act stalled in the legislature in 2013. Lawmakers were unable to reach consensus on the scope of the restrictions, and companies complained that the bill would only target those with significant business activities in China. No substantial progress on the proposed law was reported in 2014.

In August 2014, the Korean private equity firm MBK Partners agreed to sell its majority stake in China Network Systems (CNS), one of Taiwan's largest cable television operators, to Ting Hsin International Group, a Taiwanese-owned conglomerate. In 2013, the NCC had blocked an attempt by MBK to sell its CNS shares to a company owned by Tsai Eng-meng, a pro-Beijing businessman who already owned several Taiwanese media enterprises. Though there was no reason for authorities to block the new MBK–Ting Hsin deal on similar competition-related grounds, opponents of the sale argued that it was not in the public interest due to Ting Hsin's substantial investments in China and the company's alleged involvement in three major food-safety scandals in 2014. Among other concerns, some feared that Ting Hsin's control of CNS might discourage Taiwanese news media from reporting on future food-safety scandals. As of the end of 2014, the proposed deal was on hold.