



WORLD AFFAIRS COUNCIL  
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# South Korea

*Republic of Korea*



## Key Facts



**World Freedom Press Global Index Ranking (Overall):** Ranked 41 (24.69)

**Head of State / Head of Government:** President MOON Jae-in (since 10 May 2017) & Prime Minister LEE Nak-yon (since 1 June 2017)

**Capital city:** Seoul

**Population:** 51,418,097 (July 2018 est.)

**Official Language(s):** Korean, but English (widely taught in elementary, junior

high, and high school)

**Ethnic Groups:** Korean

**Currency:** South Korean won

**Gross domestic product (PPP):** 1.531 trillion USD (2017)

**Internet penetration:** 89.9% (July 2016 est.)

**Most trusted medium of information:** N/A

**Legal System:** mixed legal system combining European civil law, Anglo-American law, and Chinese classical thought.

**Political system:** presidential republic

**Journalists Killed/Jailed 2019:** 0

**Media Environment:** multiple national TV networks with 2 of the 3 largest networks publicly operated; the largest privately owned network, Seoul Broadcasting Service (SBS), has ties with other commercial TV networks; cable and satellite TV subscription services available; publicly operated radio broadcast networks and many privately owned radio broadcasting networks, each with multiple affiliates, and independent local stations. The population of Korea shows active participation of both traditional and

new media. The literacy rate is 99%, the educated public supports the freedom of media; however, the system is not entirely democratic, it shows also the signs of censorship and restriction imposed on media outlets. This has to do with the politics and history of the country.

**Media Issues:** The election of Moon Jae-in, a human rights activist and former political prisoner, as president has been a breath of fresh air after a bad decade in which South Korea fell more than 30 places in RSF's World Press Freedom Index. The South Korean media showed their grit in the course of the battle they waged with President Park Geun-hye from 2014 and 2016, and finally won when she was impeached for corruption and removed. The Moon administration managed to end the decade-old conflict at the public broadcasters MBC and KBS, where journalists objected to have bosses foisted on them by the government. Nonetheless, structural problems remain. The system of appointing managers at the public broadcasters needs to be revised in order to guarantee their independence. Defamation is still punishable by seven years in prison and must be decriminalized. South Korea also needs to repeal laws that, on national security grounds, provide for extremely severe penalties for the dissemination of sensitive information, especially if it involves North Korea. Despite of their technological and infrastructural progress of South Korea it still has issues in the media field. Since many large media companies are family owned, they follow certain traditional outlook on the journalistic ethics. The ruling power undermined constitutionally guaranteed freedom of speech. Another ethical issue in South Korean newsroom is corrupting and bribery. The cases when journalists receive gifts for news coverage or keeping certain news secret. Popular television anchors and influential politics editors can abuse their connection and power and turn to politics. But, structurally speaking, South Korea's system of ethical control should be thorough, as it has not just one but two separate institutional devices: the Korea Press Ethics Commission, run as a voluntary press council, and the Press Arbitration Commission.

## **Popular Forms of Media Consumption**

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**Print:** The country has eleven general-interest national newspapers, dominating the print media. They are all published in Seoul. These newspapers offer gifts to potential subscribers and supported by commercials. The Big Three general-interest national newspapers – Chosun Ilbo, Dong-a Ilbo, and Joong-ang Ilbo – sell about 1.5 million to 1.8 million copies each.

**Television:** Every household at least owns one TV set, the market is very saturated and vibrant. The three major networks are KBS (Korean Broadcasting System, public-service television), and MBC (Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation). Cable TV is available in 77% of Korean households, carries around 120 channels.

**Radio:** Radios are available everywhere, and has various programs ranging from general broadcasting, music to religious services.

**Internet:** According to Internet usage, broadband and telecommunications reports South Korea has 48,636,068 Internet users as of June 2010, it is 81.1% of the population, according to ITU. Since the start of commercial services in 1994, the Internet population has been steadily increasing to a point where it is now nears the penetration rate of mobile phones. South Korea is a very innovative and progressive country in terms of technology penetration and availability. Nationally, about 77 percent of the population aged six and over use Internet-related services. By 2009, the Internet-based media, plus cable television, had become an equally ranked competitor in capturing a major share of the national advertising market (27 percent), as against the traditional print media and the broadcast media, which had 28 percent each.