

TOPIC 9: NEWS MEDIA AND THEIR PLACE IN A WORKING DEMOCRACY

PART I: Introduction and overview

Democracies that work well rely on the free flow of information.

The ways of gathering, organising and sending information to help political choices are called the news media. Or simply, 'the media'.

When citizens know enough about the policies of politicians, and what actions they will take to make them happen, they can make informed choices about them.

[An independent news media is therefore essential in a working democracy.](#) For such a media can shine a light on what actions and laws are planned – and on the ways they are carried out.

Free news media as the 'fourth estate'

An essential skill in a democratic society, therefore, is the ability to explain what citizens need and want for their lives, what is involved in policies and laws, and how citizens can influence them.

According to UNESCO research findings, [a free media always has a positive influence on the economy and on governance.](#)¹ A free news media:

- increases participation in political decision making beyond a small inner circle
- [holds governments accountable](#)
- makes transparent all government actions.

One of the older names for news media is the fourth estate.² How news media can be an organised source of power or 'estate' requires an understanding of how democracies' checks and balances work to keep a check on power.

When the power of public opinion is expressed at election time, leaders are rewarded by being voted into political power. And if these leaders are responsible in government, the people they serve are rewarded by effective politicians.

However, when information is missing, is biased or is merely propaganda, a leader may be chosen not on merit but by manipulation. This manipulation may be of the minds of voters' or of the voting process, or both.

Today's 'fifth estate'

Today there are many sources of information and ways of accessing it. To ensure it is reliable, balanced, and easily accessible to citizens, news organisations have arisen to gather and spread it.

In the last 20 years, however, computer technology and access to the Internet have made educated citizens into amateur journalists with [blogs and social media sometimes referred to as the fifth estate.](#)³

Mass media reach masses of citizens

Since high-speed printing presses and electronic media able to reach masses of people, news services have also been called the mass media.

Today, the dominant medium is still television but other forms are print media (mainly newspapers), radio and the internet.

Radio and mobile phones in low income countries

In low-income countries, newspapers are often a much smaller influence – or are absent. However radio and smart phones are popular means to send out and receive information.

There are governments, including democracies, in which rulers control, block or suppress information.⁴ These are called authoritarian governments or states. Or if they allow some freedoms, they are called competitive authoritarian or hybrid governments.

Although not a necessary feature of low-income countries, it is a fact that authoritarian states are most often found in these countries.

Information can be controlled or restricted

There are many ways governments can control or limit the flow of information needed for good decision-making. Before reforms of the 1990s [most sub-Saharan countries controlled information](#) by one or more of these methods⁵:

- declaring lengthy states of emergency which formally limited media freedom
- passing broad libel laws that can be selectively applied
- threatening the withdrawal of government advertising
- selectively restricting access to newsprint
- requiring journalists and publications to be licensed
- taxing printing equipment at a high rate
- requiring a bond to be deposited with the government before new publications can launch.

[Reasons for the vulnerability of low-income countries](#)

The reasons low-income countries are particularly vulnerable to information blockage and censorship include:

- limited resources limits professionalism – either through inadequate training and/or salaries
- restricted means (for organisations or individuals) means reduced initiative and vulnerability to pressure
- the increased likelihood of impoverished journalists to publish favourable stories – or not write critical ones (self-censorship)
- 'Big Man-Little Boy' clientelism reduces the felt freedom to report anything seen to undermine traditional ways or values.

In Islamic-majority states, or post-communist ones in central Asia, there may be quite different ideas about the role of the press, or of the media in general.

Approaches to media here are closer to models where 'social stability' is defined by governments and limits are imposed accordingly.

In these states the media may be expected to play the role of upholding social or religious values, or both.

Free flow of information seen as a threat

In such countries the free flow of information is often seen as a threat to state stability or personal morality – or both – and is controlled by:

- Blocking social media (The 'Great Firewall of China', for example, can still block any information on the Tiananmen Square massacre, or on Tibet)
- use of tax laws which put financial pressure on media organisations
- compulsory registration of media

- [use of laws forbidding insults to those in high places](#) (For instance, Russia has more than 100 laws governing media conduct) or bringing the country or authorities within it into disrepute (North Korea, UAE)
- placing supreme value on unchallengeable social goods such as ‘nation building’, ‘economic development’ and ‘social stability.’⁶
- emphasising that a free press gives licence for disharmony or disunity
- the domination of broadcast coverage by leading political forces
- social values that favour populist or ‘strong’ leaders (dominant media coverage encourages poor and illiterate people to seek political salvation through ‘their leader’)
- [intimidating journalists with strict use of libel laws and jail sentences \(Egypt\)](#)
- giving privileged access to television in particular
- the dominance of TV as a medium
- internal censorship

1 <http://www.theafricareport.com/Columns/what-is-the-link-between-press-freedom-and-development.html>

2 Originally there were three estates: the first estate was the clergy, the second estate the nobility, and the third estate the commoners or ordinary people. The fourth estate is the mainstream press, and was coined in 1837, reflecting their increasing prominence and power. William Dutton argues that the Fifth Estate is the blogging community, as well as all ‘networked individuals’ enabled by the Internet in ways that can hold the other estates accountable. Dutton, W. H. (2009), ‘The Fifth Estate Emerging through the Network of Networks’, Prometheus, Vol. 27, No. 1, March: pp. 1-15.

3 Dutton, W. H. (2009), ‘The Fifth Estate Emerging through the Network of Networks’, Prometheus, Vol. 27, No. 1, March: pp. 1-15.

4 The word ‘liberal’ is now used before democracy to describe governments that do have this ‘free flow of info’.

5 Bourgault (1995) *Mass Media in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press; p. 180).

6 Egypt’s government pre-2013 expected the press to ‘uphold the security of the country, promote economic development, support approved social norms’ – Lesch (2004, p. 610)

PART II: Media reflects changing values

Free media – within a cultural context

The role of the media can in many ways be decided by a political culture – or lack of it. For example, scholars suggest Russia's authoritarian culture traditionally centres on security and order. Thus it has only limited support for democratic principles.

In non-democratic Islamic cultures a free media can be presented as an alien Western idea that leads to licence and the pursuit of self-interest rather than social harmony.⁷ [In some cases, so-called authoritarian rule is seen more as an expression of a home-grown cultural tradition inherently opposed to Western liberalism or permissiveness.](#)

Limits to freedom reflects history of type of governance

An opposing view puts the actual situation as happening the other way around: culture reflects rather than promotes the basic nature of a regime. Using Russia as an example, this view sees lack of political trust as “reflecting the country's non-democratic history – as well as the corrupt nature of its contemporary governance.”⁸

That is, rather than Russian government reflecting the longer term political culture, the political culture in Russia reflects the long-term history of top-down governance there.⁹

Politics and the development of ways of communicating are closely connected. The development of newspapers and the broadcast media of radio and television in the 19th and 20th centuries have had the biggest impact.

'Political technology' neutralises free expression

As in other competitive authoritarian regimes, Russia's dark arts of neutralising potential threats in the media, and in business, have over time become recognised by citizens. Aware ordinary Russians sometimes call these 'arts' political technology.

This produces the necessary silence by removing from office a few media opponents. Such technology¹⁰ only happens where there are weaknesses in the rule of law, the market economy and civil society generally. But it contributes to a winning electoral strategy.

For it can cripple independence within media ranks well before votes are actually cast. If these technologists have done their jobs, the result of the election is over by election day. Accompanied by media dominance typical of such regimes, these are also outside the usual terms of reference of 'free and fair' election monitoring.¹¹

Social media as a catalyst for change

Clever, devious and sometimes ruthless ways of blocking information are used. However, increasingly aware citizens – especially urban ones – are beginning to use new social media to protest and push for change.

Even when authoritarian governments win elections in these ways, this awareness often leads to widespread loss of legitimacy. And group awareness of this can be a catalyst for future change.¹²

In low-income and divided countries, modern forms of communication are having a revolutionary effect. However the continuing effect of television, because it is a widespread and largely free medium, cannot be underestimated.

Authoritarian regimes dominate the major broadcasting channels. This can not only crowd out communication from potential challengers but also shut out all dissent.

Communications revolutions in low-income countries

In low income countries, both radio and TV have two major advantages over print media:

- they are accessible on simple devices without need for any paper distribution
- they do not require literacy.

TIMELINE OF MEDIA DEVELOPMENT

THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATION MEDIA IN THE TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURIES	
Later 19 th and early 20 th century	Popular newspapers emerge, often with mass circulation. New railway networks allow national distribution.
1930s	Radios golden age, For the first time, politicians broadcast directly into electors' homes.
1950s–1960s	Television becomes the most popular, and usually the most trusted, medium in Western countries. By regulation or state ownership, politicians secure access to the medium. Entertainment programmes from the USA are widely exported, diffusing American values
1970s–1980s	The television audience begins to fragment, with an increase in the number of channels, distribution by cable and satellite, and widespread use of video.
1990s	Internet access reaches more affluent and educated groups in Western democracies, representing a further expansion of international communication. Mobile telephony emerges.
2000s	Mobile telephone access becomes standard, bringing telephony to many low-income countries for the first time. The Internet reaches the mass population in Western societies. Sharp decline in readership of printed newspapers.
2010s	Continued expansion of digital social media, further extending horizontal communication among citizens, In 2012, Facebook claims a billion users per month. The Internet is increasingly accessed via smartphones.

Villagers can gather round a shared radio set to hear the local news or tune in on their phones.

Many low-income countries developed broadcasting networks (TV and radio) without passing through the stage of mass circulation newspapers. [And have widespread microwave networks which do not require fixed wired infrastructure.](#)

It is now possible for politicians in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America countries to reach rural, and even nomadic populations, via mobile telephony and TV.

In higher income countries: greater choice and 'fragmentation'

In higher income countries the 21st century has, on the contrary, led to greater fragmentation. [This means citizens can choose their own political programming. Or none.](#)

National audiences reached by leaders' televised 'fireside chats' are no longer possible. More channels and on-demand choice has meant the world is more a global village.

But it has also led to the decline of public broadcasting and traditional forms of participation in politics.

A connected global village – accessing different media

Newer cable, satellite, internet and mobile broadcasting services have meant there is now a more splintered or fragmented audience.

Single national broadcasters are rarer and the viewer has become less a citizen and more a 'consumer'. Younger people now rely less on television as they can access a range of media.¹³ Political programmes are still available for the interested. But are no longer the only choice for those who are not.

As the timeline above shows, the global dominance of transnational broadcasting networks owned by 'media moguls' grew out of the 'newspaper barons' whose influence held such sway over nations in the nineteenth century.

7 *The Prime Minister of Malaysia Mahathir Mohamad (1981-2003) condemned so called Western democracies (Australia, Malaysia's south eastern neighbour, is one such example) where "political leaders are afraid to do what is right, where the people live in fear of the free media which they so loudly proclaim as inviolable"*.

8 *"The authoritarian traditions of Russia mean that people are not used to democratic behaviours and values, such as welcoming pluralism in thinking and behaving, tolerating dissent and supporting seemingly less efficient methods of democratic decision-making. They do not easily see the advantages of debate, discussion and non-conformity, and not deferring to a class of superiors."* Gitelman, Z. (2005) *The Democratization of Russia in Comparative Perspective*, in *Developments in Russian Politics* 6, ed. S. White, Z. Gitelman and R. Sakwa (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan) pp 241-56.

9 Gitelman (2005)

10 McFaul, M. (2005) *'The Electoral System'*, in *Developments in Russian Politics* 6, ed. S. White, Z. Gitelman and R. Sakwa (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan)

11 McFaul (2005) pp. 61- 79: *"At the same time the state's larger role gave incumbents enormous advantages, be it national television coverage, massive administrative support from regional executives or enormous financial resources from companies like Gazprom."* (McFaul, 2005, p. 77)

12 Hague, R., Harrop, M. (2013). *Comparative government and politics: An introduction. 9th edn*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.

13 *Young Americans are more likely now to use the Internet rather than TV*: Murrie, M. (2006) *'Broadcasters Getting Online, Staying On Air'*, *ejournal USA* (11), <http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itqic/0306/ijqe/ijqe0306.htm> , accessed 28 April 2006.

PART III: Facts, impacts, and context of news media Knowledge of media impacts reveals importance of context

These four types of media impacts are a reminder that information always comes with a context.

Probes into inconvenient truths frequently trigger pushback from the guilty and implicated innocent alike¹⁴. Both can feel that their perspective has been mis- or under-represented.

The prime responsibility of the media in liberal democracies is to the public interest in, and need for, trustworthy information. However, any information can be misused or misinterpreted.¹⁵ Although libel and defamation laws apply, there is [always a tension between these and freedom of speech laws](#).¹⁶

The priming impact of television

A common response to the impact of television is that it primes voters to base decisions more on personalities than policies. Research has certainly shown that party leaders are increasingly important in the visual media-based campaigns that feature strongly in countries where television or devices are in most homes.

Despite this, there is little evidence that images of leaders, or their personalities, are the key influence on winning elections.

However, if the broadcasting studio is now the main site of the battle for the mind and hearts of voters¹⁷, television does confirm status and recognition on candidates. Also, where the primacy of television has been established, dominance of the media is a major factor in return of incumbent leaders.

Significantly, in countries where there have been limited TV channels, the resulting balanced treatment of politics by aware programmers has contributed to a weakening of party loyalties.

This partisan de-alignment is stronger if there are few channel choices. This effect was demonstrated in 1950s Europe when it was discovered that television provided a new common ground for Dutch citizens.¹⁸

Newspapers still better for context

While visual media can tell viewers what happened, newspapers (print or electronic text in 'online papers') are still better able to put events in context. For this reason even low circulation newspapers can be influential.

Responsible politicians monitor quality newspapers both for a survey of current events and for background on topical issues. 'Doing the papers' gives feedback from the articulate and socially motivated. This includes critique of policies and performance by way of editorials, articles by columnists and opinion pages. Letters to the editor function not just as a safety valve for disaffection and concerns, but also as a channel for any citizen's suggestions or ideas.¹⁹

Internet AND newspapers

Amongst younger people in particular there has been a widespread shift to the internet. News is available from newspapers own sites, from news agencies, or globally from sites dedicated to news from many sources.

Paywalls restricting news to paid subscribers has happened only with quality newspapers. Even here there is a mix of paid and free articles as only the best papers can afford the risk of readers shifting to free sites.

FURTHER READING:

Parts IV and V are readings on the impacts of technology changes on the media and democratic practices. To keep lessons user-friendly they are here as hypertexts.

They give examples of how parties can organise themselves, how they can adapt to local conditions, and how they can be regulated and/or restricted.

[PART IV: In politics the internet is a game changer too](#)

[PART V: More choice, less profit, less analysis?](#)

14 *'Incrimination by insinuation' is an expression for statements that destroy reputations ('oft got without merit and lost without deserving') by smearing by association. These can be used by irresponsible politicians, commentators or even journalists. Often it is a form of 'blame-sharing' through unproved (and/or unprovable) accusations designed to deflect heat from the guilty, retaliate for stinging truths or even provide smokescreen cover, consciously or unconsciously, for exposed ignorance.*

15 *'Ambiguity, like humility, is endless.'* – Nelson Mandela

16 *Defamation laws may come into tension with freedom of speech, leading to censorship or chilling effects where publishers fear lawsuits. Cultural differences exist in definitions of both offence and actions bringing others 'into disrepute.' The power of the internet to disseminate comment, which may include malicious comment, has brought a new focus to the issue. Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights permits restrictions on freedom of speech when necessary to protect the reputation or rights of others. Jurisdictions resolve this tension in different ways, in particular in determining where the burden of proof lies when unfounded allegations are made.*

17 *'The empires of the future will be the empires of the mind.'* Winston Churchill (1943)

18 *Catholics saw that Socialists were not the dangerous atheists they had been warned about. And Liberals found orthodox Protestants were not the bigots they were supposed to be. Wigbold (1979) Television and Political Life, ed. A. Smith; London: Macmillan) p. 201.*

19 *Some newspapers have a 'Rants and Raves' column that allows citizen-readers a few sentences to vent displeasure or express gratitude or appreciation for something done well ('Bricks and Bouquets' is older language for this in English.)*

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12 African Countries That Score Highest For Freedom Of Press

By [Dana Sanchez AFKI Original](#) Published: December 28, 2015

A free press always has a positive influence on the economy and on governance, according to findings in a UNESCO report.¹ It expands participation in political decision making beyond a small inner circle, holds government accountable, and makes their actions transparent.

It was a horrible year in 2014 for freedom of information with deterioration of press freedom worldwide, and 2015 is shaping up to be worse.

The 2015 World Press Freedom Index, produced by [Reporters Without Borders](#), ranked the performance of 180 countries according media independence, respect for the safety and freedom of journalists, pluralism, and the legislative, institutional and infrastructural environment in which the media operate.

Influences such as censorship, armed conflict, surveillance and national security were taken into account.

Here are some of the findings by Reporters Without Borders:

- More countries are using prohibitions on blasphemy and sacrilege to censor political criticism.
- 2014 saw increased violence against news providers covering protests.
- Governments most often cite security as the grounds for trampling on fundamental freedoms and gagging the media.
- Many governments and non-state players used control and manipulation of media coverage as a weapon of war in 2014.
- Journalists faced violent threats from non-state groups in 2014. The world's most repressive countries found ways to reinforce and improve methods of censorship and repression.

Finland has ranked No. 1 on the index out of 180 countries for five years in a row, followed by Norway and Denmark. At the other end of the scale, Turkmenistan, North Korea and Eritrea performed worst.

France ranked No. 38 (moving up one place), while the U. S. ranked 49th (down three places). Russia went down four places to No. 152. China, at 176th place, went down one place. Japan ranked 61st (down two places), Brazil ranked 99th (up 12 places), and Iran, at 173rd place, remained unchanged.

In the Americas, the U.S. is down three places and continues to decline. Contributing to this decline in 2014 was the Obama administration's war on information in WikiLeaks, and New York Times journalist James Risen coming under government pressure to reveal his sources, according to Reporters Without Borders

Wars, violence during demonstrations, economic crises, the growing threat from non-state operatives — all resulted in media freedom declining on all five continents.

The indicators compiled by Reporters Without Borders show that two thirds of the 180 countries surveyed for the 2015 World Press Freedom Index performed worse in 2014 than in 2013. Violations of freedom of information in 180 countries increased 8 percent in 2014 to 3,719 violations, and almost 10 percent compared with 2013, according to the annual global indicator.

The following 12 African countries score highest for freedom of press. They are listed below with their ranking out of 180 countries, and with their overall score. This list shows African countries starting with lowest scores for press freedom and ending with highest.

The score alongside each country reflects the level intimidation experienced by journalists, media representatives and those focused on information exchange. With an overall score of 7.52, Finland ranked highest for freedom of press. With an overall score of 84.86, Eritrea ranked lowest for press freedom.

12th (In Africa) No. 71 (In world) Senegal – Score: 27.77

11th No. 68 Mauritius – Score: 27.69

10th No. 64 Madagascar – Score: 27.43

9th No. 59 Malawi – Score: 26.41

8th No. 50 Comoros – Score: 24.52

7th No. 47 Niger – Score: 23.85

6th No. 46 Burkina Faso – Score: 23.79

5th No. 42 Botswana – Score: 22.91

4th No. 39 South Africa – Score: 22.06

3rd No. 36 Cape Verde – Score: 20.69

2nd No. 22 Ghana – Score: 15.5

1st No. 17 Namibia – Score: 12.5

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Welfare economist and Nobel prize winner Amartya Sen has observed that there has not been a famine in a democratic society.

What then is the link between a free press and the world's poorest region? The 2008 Press Freedom and Development UNESCO report concludes "all the findings confirm the importance of press freedom for development".

Role of free press in ridding Africa of poverty

African nations are usually placed at the bottom of any list measuring economic activity and human development. But a free press has been shown always to have a positive influence on poverty and on governance. For it holds government accountable, makes their actions transparent and expands participation in political decision making beyond a small inner circle.

Lack of democracy and rampant corruption are still major obstacles to progress. It is not by chance that the continent, except very few exceptions, is still ruled by authoritarian and hybrid regimes that place serious restrictions on information available to their citizens and the free operation of the press. And despite a lack of basic social services, military forces are often well financed.

Poverty is man-made and some people bear responsibility for this human tragedy that continues to ravage lives in the 21st century. In this region, a big percentage of the population cannot safeguard even the most basic human needs. As James K Boyce and Léonce Ndikumana put it: "In most financial scams, the victims simply lose their money. In Africa, some lose their lives".

However, a free press can promote democratisation and economic development on the African continent. It can be a crucial instrument for socio-economic development in the same way that investment, infrastructure and education are.

Freedom of expression is basic

Philosopher Emmanuel Kant concluded that an enlightened and developed society of free and independent individuals cannot be created unless all its members have their freedom of expression.

Specific findings from UNESCO's 2008 report note that no country in the world has a free press and a high percentage of its population living below the poverty line. And that the weaker the constraints on the press the more developed the country will be.

It goes on to say no country has a low GDP or High Inequalities and a free press. Free press has a positive influence on the provisions of social services for the public.

'No country has a free press and a very high percentage of people with no access to safe water or a high percentage suffering from malnutrition. Improvement in press freedom is associated with a drop in infant mortality and an increase in life expectancy at birth as well as general increase on the health status of the population. By allowing debate and different opinions to be heard the country becomes more stable, less violent and more democratic.'

Flawed democracies serving mostly elites

The African continent has been undergoing the process of democratisation for about 20 years now. This process has been imposed from abroad and it is not sound. It has resulted in electoral democracies, whereby authoritarian regimes hold fake elections and create political parties that only serve the interest of the dictator.

According to Democracy index: 29 out of 52 countries on the continent (including North Africa) live under authoritarian regimes, 14 countries live under hybrid regimes and 8 countries live in flawed democracies, and only the citizens of one country, Mauritius a small island, live in a full democracy. One can conclude that meaningful democracies are seriously lacking in the continent.

External debt versus capital flight

In most financial scams, the victims simply lose their money. In Africa, some lose their lives. It is high time more emphasis is placed on the links between extreme poverty, authoritarianism and corruption on the continent. The local media should emphasise who is gaining and who is losing from the effects of globalisation and liberalisation on the continent.

Although Africa has witnessed some growth in the last few years, the economic growth was not being distributed along all segments of the population. Very high rates of unemployment and inflation make everyday life extremely difficult for slum dwellers in big cities and lack of investment on infrastructure, irrigation and agriculture makes survival a dodgy business in many rural remote areas.

Some people gain, especially the ones close to ruling regimes, at the expense of others. Whilst much has been written for the huge unpayable debt of African nations, there has been little discussion in local newspapers about capital flight out of Africa.

Need for justice, not charity

Sub Saharan Africa has experienced an exodus of more than \$ 760 billion in capital flight since the 1970's, a sum that surpasses the region's external debt of \$ 175 billion. More should be done to identify looters and accomplices and to repatriate stolen funds. The region needs justice and not charity. Money sent to the continent as aid is misused by leaders who spend it on weapons, enrich themselves or invest on few prestigious projects in the capital city.

Little is being spent on social services such as education, health care and pensions. The region remains among the top for on-going conflicts, and a vast percentage of the population dies yearly from preventable, most of the time water-borne, diseases.

Blame it on something

Despite all the malfunctions of several African governments the press has remained silent. I have worked in three different countries in Sub Saharan Africa, where I tried to follow the news as much as possible via local newspapers and the radio, as a teacher. But I found it sad that most journalists preferred to play the government's game and blame outsiders.

Sometimes these outside factors included past events like colonialism, which is being blamed for most misfortunes on the continent. I am the last person not to agree that colonialism was wrong and brutal but that does not explain the current situation on the continent. Lebanon, Greece, Vietnam, India, Libya, Philippines, Bolivia and Argentina, as well as many other countries in Asia and Latin America, have being colonised in the past and are doing relatively well.

Another popular blame among journalists is climate change. In recent times, the list is being enlarged by including China and 'global terrorism.

Lack of analysis of policies means no force for change

Sometimes, it is a cruel bad war leader such as Kony, Bemba, Shankow or Taylor. In some cases it is a foreign or neighbouring government. I remember long discussions on Sierra Leonean radio about the negative influence played

by the Liberian government and Nigerian troops during the local civil war. There was no analysis of the Sierra Leonean government's policies since the 70's, and there was no serious criticism about the lack of democracy in West Africa.

It is not by chance that the poorest region of the world is also the most authoritarian region. The government has an interest in remaining strict and brutal since it can only remain in power by so doing.

Press freedom in Africa is blocked as a result of a general lack of democracy. The 2010 "Press Freedom in Africa" report published by the Federation of African Journalists (FAJ) focused on the control of the African media by the state. It concludes that for the year 2010 "12 journalist have been assassinated, five killed accidentally, 34 jailed and hundreds continued to be threatened, intimidated, attacked, wounded, and forced to into exile".

Free communication of thoughts and opinions is among the most precious of the rights of man. It is essential to examine closer what exactly happens to those who criticised their government for the misfortunes of their societies and were not comfortable in blaming colonialism, the Chinese or Islamists.

Journalists require popular support even more than courage

In Somalia three journalists lost their lives in criminal conditions and Eritrea remains, globally, the biggest prison for journalists. Currently the Eritrean state holds more than 20 journalists in prison, some of them having been in jail for close to 10 years. In Rwanda, Jean Leonard Rugambage was shot as he was preparing to publish a critical article on the government.

In Angola Alberto Cravus Chakussanga was shot down by unidentified individuals. Chakussanga's radio had been very critical of the regime. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where a journalist is killed every year, Patient Vhebey Bankome was brutally murdered by assassins in military uniform.

In Nigeria three journalists were murdered in cold blood and in Burundi one journalist faces life imprisonment for expressing his views about the dangers of Al-Shabaab to Burundi, after the deadly terrorist attacks in Kampala, Uganda. Both Uganda and Burundi sent troops to Somalia in support of the transitional government, which Al-Shabaab has been fighting tooth and nail to overthrow.

Only popular movement can overcome climate of fear

Most local newspapers and radio stations on the continent have failed to report on corruption and abuses perpetrated by the government because they are afraid for their lives.

I don't think that the ills of the continent will be overcome without a strong indigenous movement that will demand democracy on the continent similar to the one that currently shapes the future of the Middle East. With current upheavals in the Arab Countries, southern Europe and in some areas of the United States, it is time for Sub Saharan Africa to demand more.

Parents, bosses and children: growing up means speaking out

Currently, however, democratic values are not so strong among African populations. A research conducted by Afrobarometer in 2009 that tried to find if democrats were emerging in Africa. It found that "a solid majority (60 percent) see their government more like a parent and their own role as children rather than bosses" and less than half believe that citizens should be held responsible their governments.

Afrobarometer's report concludes that the development of democratic citizenship among Africans is still relatively weak. Nonetheless, it should not be taken in its pessimistic approach that nothing can be changed in the region,

although, after living for so long under authoritarian states, most people have become apathetic and afraid of politics.

Additionally political knowledge is not widespread among the population. And for their survival many rural residents depend more on family members or on International non-governmental organisations, which tend to depoliticise their poverty and precarious situations, rather than their own governments.

A free press can re-politicise poverty: know what they do with your money

With more people having access to one kind of a media or another, the press can play an active role in re-politicising poverty among locals. Instead of searching for white heroes in NGOs and demons of the past the press should spread political knowledge.

The press should be active in the struggle against corruption, nepotism, tribalism and it should promote democratic values in any way it can. It should report human rights abuses perpetrated by the state against civilians, corruption, misuse of aid and criminal links between governments and international multinationals that are grabbing anything they can from the continent.

The press should report on how well the political and economic elite live in the capital city at the expense of the majority. It should highlight where the elite send their children for studies and how they spend their weekends. By so doing Africans will understand the injustices and the cruelty of the elite. More access to information is more likely to make them want to change the political situation rather than hoping for more charity.

Freedom of the press and access to information is a human right. Article II of the Universal Declaration of Human and Citizens right stipulates that "the free communication of thoughts and opinions is among the most precious of the rights of man, every citizen, may speak write and print freely".

Freedom of the press is linked with all aspects of development in a positive way. A free press is related to higher GDP; higher human development measured by the Human Development Index (HDI) and a more equal and fair society.

Brave African journalist need support

International conferences and donor–recipient meetings should pay more attention to the precarious situations brave African journalists face. Any progressive human being who understands poverty to be a human crime should emphasize, with all his or her strength, the need for more freedom of press in Sub Saharan Africa. This will eventually lead to a more democratic and more economically prosperous region.

[Edited version of a 2012 article by Menelaos Agaloglou]

Menelaos Agaloglou is the Head of Geography and Economics Department in the International Division of the Greek Community School in Addis Ababa. He is a researcher of the Center of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (CEMMIS), part of the University of Peloponnese in Greece. He has taught Conflict Resolution and English in the University of Hargeisa in Somalia and Social Studies at the Ahmadiyya elementary school in Sierra Leone. He has travelled throughout western, central and eastern Africa and carried out a research for a British NGO in Sila Village, Mauritania. He completed his Bachelor degree at Queen Mary, University of London on Politics with Business. His MSc Degree on Globalization and Development was completed at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. He speaks English, French and Greek. Posted on Tuesday, 02 October 2012 12:41 Retrieved 20May, 2016



Blogs and social media as a Fifth Estate

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Blogs have potential and real influence on contemporary policymaking, especially in the context of elections, reporting from conflict zones, and raising dissent over corporate or congressional policies.

Based on these observations, Al-Rodhan suggests moving beyond traditional thinking that limits the “estates of the realm” to governmental action and proposes a broader perspective in which civilians or anyone with access to a computer and the Internet can contribute to the global political change and security.

Of all the blogs on the Internet, continues Al-Rodhan, only a few have a real power to influence the [policy-making process](#), specifically political and current affairs blogs with large and involved audiences. These blogs can help organize the public to take a stance on an issue, be used in political campaigns, help cultivate [grassroots movements](#), and assist in fundraising.

Furthermore, blogs have several unique features that give them potential influence in policymaking: a lack of editorial supervision, low barriers to entry, difficulty for governments to censor or control content, and the ease of responding to events in real time.

Blogs can affect policy-making by providing insider information, facilitating [communication](#) between experts, promoting grassroots efforts, discrediting political figures, and setting policy agendas.

Blogs as "the fifth estate" are also influencing [global security](#). They can contribute to [terrorist](#) plots by facilitating cross-border communication and by connecting people whose ideas are outside of the mainstream, by propagating hateful or violent messages, or by encouraging [organized crime](#).

Advocates for social justice, like the [Code Pink](#) movement argue that this is an unfair characterisation, since the [Executive Branch](#) wages current existing war at a significant cost of loss to society- and routinely without being charged with the same accusation.

Despite of evidence of multiple war fronts appearing to support this claim in the early 21st century, Al-Rodhan concludes, governments must increase surveillance of blogs and develop legal, administrative, and technological tools to dissuade bloggers from posting potentially harmful information, such as calls to incite terrorism. On a more positive note, blogs have also the potential to prevent governments from adopting hasty and misjudged decisions.

Building on this work, Wallsten empirically assessed the impact of political bloggers as a "fifth estate" during the [2004 presidential campaign](#). Specifically, he used [time-series analysis](#) to determine the extent to which political bloggers followed the mainstream media's agenda or set the mainstream media's agenda.

Wallsten found that there was a complex, bidirectional relationship between mainstream media coverage and blog discussion rather than a unidirectional media or blog [agenda setting](#) effect.

Al-Rodhan, Nayef R.F., The Emergence of Blogs as a Fifth Estate and Their Security Implications, Geneva, [Slatkine](#), 2007

Wallsten, Kevin (2007). [Agenda setting and the blogosphere: An analysis of the relationship between mainstream media and political blogs, Review of Policy Research.](#)

Press freedom in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Source: [2015 World Press Freedom Index](#), [AllAfricaReport](#)

This article first appeared Feb. 19, 2015. [Retrieved 10 May, 2016]

See more at: <http://afkinsider.com/88990/12-african-countries-that-score-highest-for-freedom-of-press/#sthash.T72KAXQi.dpuf>

DW: Can you briefly tell us about the current situation of press freedom in sub-Saharan Africa?

Cléa Kahn-Sriber: The observation of [Reporters Without Borders](#) on the situation of press freedom in sub-Saharan Africa is a grim one. Several countries have lapsed into conflict or have continued to be in a conflict situation. I am thinking of course of Central African Republic, Nigeria, South Sudan. In those countries freedom of information has gone down a lot, with journalists prevented from being able to do their jobs and to have free access to sources of information, sometimes due to explicit government interdiction to cover issues of public interest such as security and combat.

In this regard, the situation has not improved. And over the whole continent we see that the issue of security and the fight against terrorism is often an argument that is being used by governments to justify a crackdown on the press.

It's the case in Ethiopia, where six bloggers and three journalists have been in prison for over a year, charged with terrorism without any concrete element brought against them. Or in the case of Cameroon, for instance, where anti-terrorism laws now allow journalists to be tried under military jurisdiction.

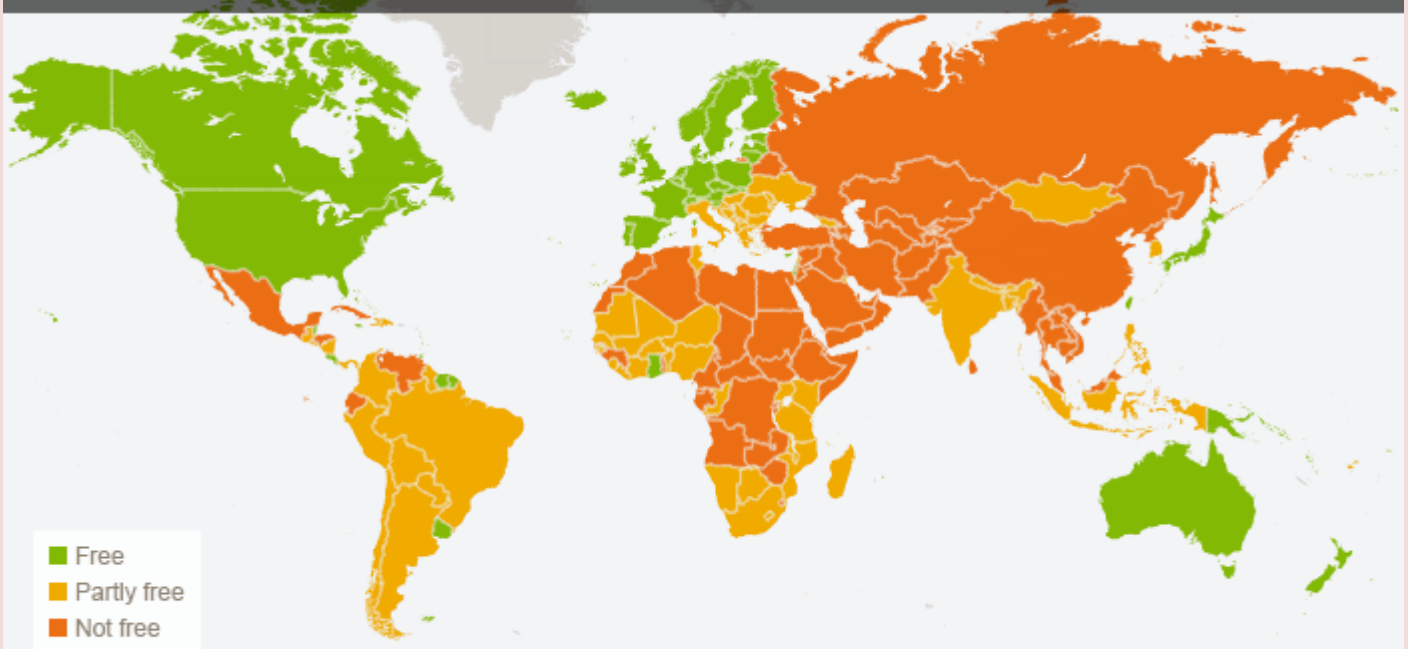
DW: In what ways do governments in Africa infringe on media freedoms?

The way governments infringe on media freedoms takes many different shapes depending on the country because we are speaking of a continent, so it's hard to give a blanket answer.

It ranges, as I said, from laws that prevent media freedom - either under the guise of preserving security or just plainly in the law - to the restriction of freedom of information. There is the possibility of going to jail for what you have written or published in news broadcasts.

There is also physical intimidation. You've seen what is happening in Burundi over the past few days, where the radio station Radio Publique Africaine, or African Public Radio, which is one of the most listened to - well, the most listened to radio in the country, has been physically closed down by the police to prevent them from covering the demonstrations. Anti-terrorism laws in Cameroon, for instance, "now allow journalists to be tried under military jurisdiction"

Freedom of the Press 2015



Source: Freedom House | 199 countries and territories were rated

© DW

What is the trend? Is it getting better for journalists in Africa or is it getting worse?

I would say the trend is evolving. This is a crackdown on the media and the argument of security is often used. But on the other hand you also see development through social media of another type of circulation of information, perhaps not with traditional journalists but with citizen journalists and bloggers, who are endorsing a new type of journalism on the continent.

You mentioned Ethiopia, which has been criticized by Western countries for suppressing dissent, including the arbitrary arrests of journalists. Do you see any change in the near future?

Elections in Ethiopia are scheduled for the end of May, so we strongly hope and call on the government-elect to relax their policies regarding the media towards more openness and more tolerance. Media are essential tools in the democratic debate. It's all the more relevant when elections are about to happen, and we really hope that it changes toward an improvement.

Reporters Without Borders - Press freedom in Africa 'grim'

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As the world commemorates Press Freedom Day, journalists and media critics in Africa continue to face increasing detention in the name of fighting against terrorism, media watchdog Reporters Without Borders tells DW.



Since the United Nations proclaimed World Press Freedom Day in 1993, the day is commemorated every year to celebrate the principles of press freedom and assess the state of press freedom throughout the world.

[The theme for 2015 is to let journalism thrive towards better reporting, gender equality and media safety in the digital age.](#)

DW spoke to Cléa Kahn-Sriber, who works with the Paris-based media watchdog Reporters Without Borders.

DW: Can you briefly tell us about the current situation of press freedom in sub-Saharan Africa?

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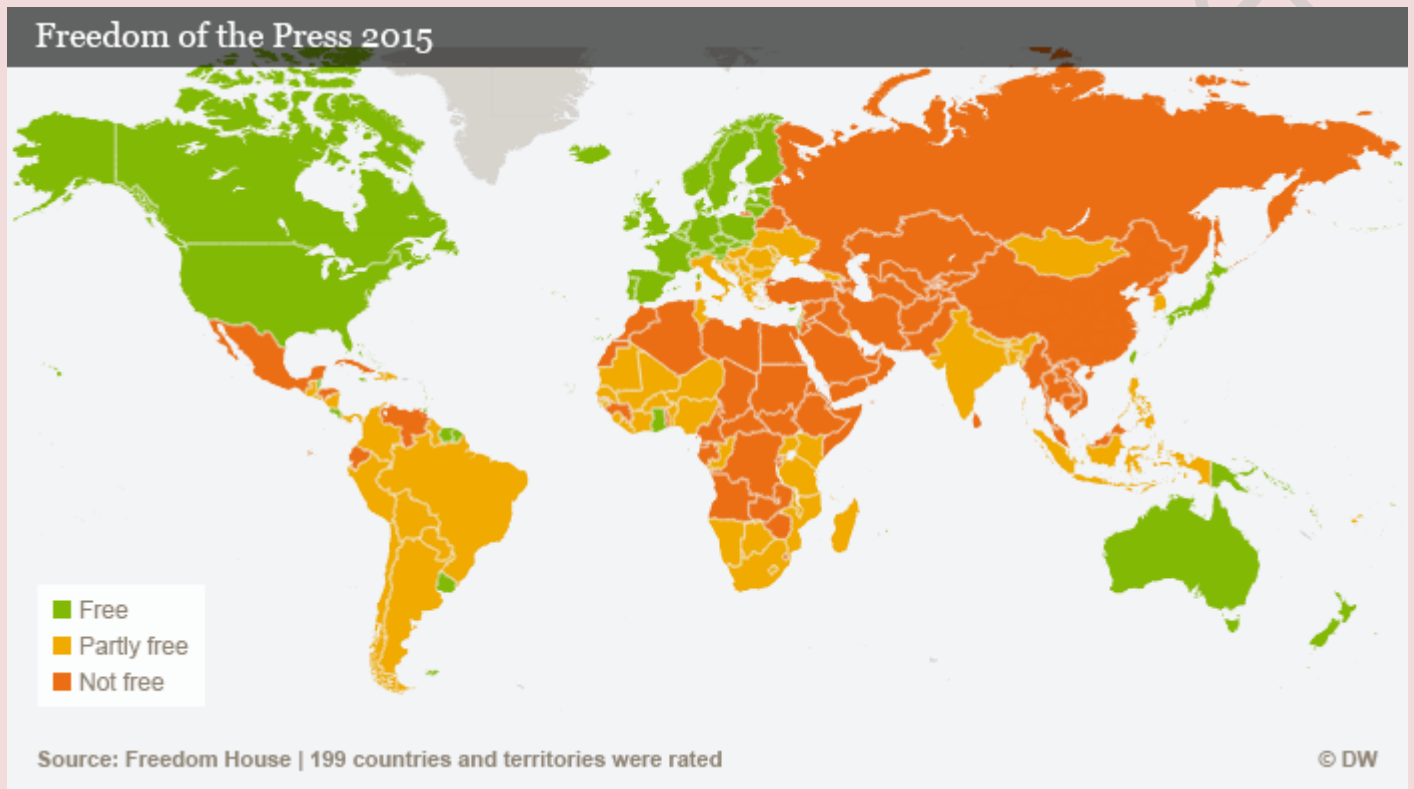
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How does your organization, Reporters Without Borders, help journalists in trouble with their governments?

We have different levels of assistance. One of the most public ones is maybe the advocacy that we do on a daily basis through the media, but also towards the United Nations and other international institutions. And also, we do more discrete diplomacy with heads of states or other key actors. And, concretely, we also provide assistance to journalists who might be in need of temporary support - whether they are in exile or displaced inside their own countries or in need of maybe medical attention after they've been treated violently. We also provide legal assistance or support legal assistance to journalists in some cases. There is a wide array of different responses that Reporters Without Borders can provide to assist journalists. But a lot still remains to be done, of course.

How do you intend to commemorate World Press Freedom Day?

Here in Paris, where Reporters Without Borders is based, we've produced a report that goes back thirty years since Reporters Without Borders was created. This year is our 30th birthday. There is a report which I hope will help raise awareness on the issue of how journalists are prevented from doing their work on a daily basis. And we are organizing a concert in Place de la République on Sunday (03.05.2015), where we hope the event will be an opportunity to talk about journalists, who are being threatened, be it in China or in Pakistan, Russia, Latin America and, of course, in Africa.

This article first appeared Feb. 19, 2015.

More stories at: <http://afkinsider.com/88990/12-african-countries-that-score-highest-for-freedom-of-press/#sthash.T72KAXQi>

- [Zimbabwe like the rest of the world will commemorate global press freedom day. As Privilege Musvanhiri writes, the government's progress in upholding that freedom leaves much to be desired. \(30.04.2015\)](#)
- [Burundi gags independent media amid protests](#)
- [In reaction to protests against President Pierre Nkurunziza's bid to secure a third term in office, Burundian authorities have restricted the work of independent radio stations and blocked access to social media. \(03.05.2015\)](#)
- [In honor of Press Freedom Day, May 3: DW offers a press freedom navigator](#)
- [To mark World Press Freedom Day on May 3, the DW Akademie is presenting its Media Freedom Navigator. The interactive website provides extensive information on the state of press freedom around the world. \(30.04.2015\)](#)
- [Freedom House reports increasing pressure on journalists](#)
- [Worldwide freedom of the press has declined sharply in the past decade, a human rights watchdog group warns. The annual report of Freedom House says a driving factor is new, restrictive laws against the media. \(29.04.2015\)](#)
- [Fighting for Press Freedom](#)
- [DW asks bloggers and journalists around the world to describe what press freedom means to them.](#)

Cléa Kahn-Sriber is head of the Africa desk at Reporters Without Borders

Interview: Abu-Bakarr Jalloh Source: [2015 World Press Freedom Index](#), [AllAfricaReport](#)

Criticism of government restricted by law

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Egypt's Interior Ministry, in Error, Releases Memos on Restricting News Med

By [DECLAN WALSH](#) and NOUR YOUSSEF MAY 3, 2016



Journalists observed World Press Freedom Day outside the Press Syndicate in Cairo on Tuesday. Credit Nariman El-Mofty/Associated Press

CAIRO — Egypt's Interior Ministry, already under fire over accusations of police brutality and other abuses, heaped new woes onto itself on Tuesday when its press office published, apparently by accident, confidential guidelines that aim to counter a growing tide of news media criticism.

Memos sent to journalists from the ministry's official email account contained suggestions about how to counter a "vicious" news media campaign that were triggered by the arrest of two reporters at the journalists' union headquarters in downtown Cairo late Sunday. One document proposed a rule to stop all coverage related to Giulio Regeni, the Italian graduate student whose brutalized body was found on a Cairo roadside in February.

The accidental leaks provide a rare glimpse into the mind-set and internal working of the notoriously opaque Egyptian government at a time when President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi is under intense scrutiny at home and abroad. The Regeni killing has plunged relations with Italy into crisis, while the police arrested dozens of people on April 25 [during a rare public protest](#) over the transfer of two Egyptian islands to Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Sisi hopes to counter the country's continuing economic crisis, which has seen a sharp decline in the value of the Egyptian currency, with large cash infusions from allied countries in the Persian Gulf like the United Arab Emirates. Yet hardly a week goes by when his once-unchallenged popularity is not tested by a new crisis.

This week, it is the country's journalists, who have engaged in an open-ended sit-in at the headquarters of the journalists' union where Sunday's arrests took place. One reporter who witnessed Sunday's raid said that plainclothes police officers "barged into the building and beat up one of the guards."

Journalists have called for the dismissal of the interior minister, Maj. Gen. Magdi Abdel-Ghaffar, who insists he has done nothing wrong. But judging by the leaked media guidance, his ministry believes it needs to show a strong hand to stop the protests from growing.

The ministry “cannot backtrack”, one of two memos says. “Backtracking means a mistake was made.” Instead, it says, the police should seek to undermine the credibility of the journalists’ union by deploying retired police generals to the country’s influential, and mostly pro-Sisi, television programs, to “explain the ministry’s point of view.”

The memos proposed assigning more staff members to monitor news websites around the clock.

“The leak shows how they deal with problems, and that they don’t want to be held accountable,” said Mahmoud Elmamlouk, editor in chief of Innfrad, a local news website. He said the raid on Sunday represented a “dangerous escalation from the interior, a new way of dealing with journalists.”

Interior Ministry officials blamed a “technical malfunction” for the leak and said that they would be setting up a new email address. They refused to comment on the contents of the leak.

The two journalists who were arrested work for a website that has covered police actions against activists and journalists. The two men were accused of illegal possession of weapons, and they are being held for questioning for 15 days.

Correction: May 5, 2016

Because of an editing error, an article in some editions on Wednesday about an accidental leak of confidential memos meant to temper news media criticism of the Egyptian government misstated the surname of a journalist who said the memos suggested that the government did not want to be held accountable. He is Mahmoud Elmamlouk, not Mahmoud El Mamluk Heba Habib. The article also misidentified Mr. Elmamlouk’s employer and his job title. He is the editor in chief of Innfrad, not a reporter for Youm7.

Correction: May 5, 2016

An earlier version of this article misidentified one of the Persian Gulf countries that is giving Egypt a large cash infusion. It is the United Arab Emirates, not Qatar.

Structure & Role of Media – Cultural Differences or Censorship?

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Case Study: USA – Tension between responsibility to publish and an emphasis on ‘prior restraints’ on grounds of security or obscenity.

Generally, the First Amendment in the United States of America prohibits ‘prior restraint’ - that is, restraint on a publication before it is published.

For instance, in a landmark decision in *Near v. Minnesota*, 283 U.S. 697, 51 S. Ct. 625, 75 L. Ed. 1357 (1931), the Court held that the government could not prohibit the publication of a newspaper for carrying stories that were scandalous or scurrilous. However, the Court identified three types of publications against which a prior restraint might be valid:

- those that pose a threat to national security
- those that contain obscene materials
- those that advocate violence or the overthrow of the government.

The government argued that publication of certain material posed a threat to national security in the so-called Pentagon Papers case, *New York Times Co. v. United States*, 403 U.S. 713, 91 S. Ct. 2140, 29 L. Ed. 2d 822 (1971).

There, the government sought an injunction against newspapers that were planning to publish classified material concerning U.S. policy in Vietnam.

The Court found that the government had not proved an overriding government interest, or an extreme danger to national security if the material were to be published. The justices reiterated their position that a request for a prior restraint must overcome a heavy presumption of unconstitutionality.

Why are ‘prior restraints’ regarded as the most serious infringement on US constitutional freedoms

The short answer is because of the importance put on justice for all. The Court is steadfast in its holding that prior restraints are among the most serious infringements on First Amendment freedoms and that attempts to impose them must be strictly scrutinized.

In *Nebraska Press Ass'n v. Stuart*, 427 U.S. 539, 96 S. Ct. 2791, 49 L. Ed. 2d 683 (1976), the Court overturned a state court's attempt to ban the press from a criminal trial. The Court held that gag orders, although not per se invalid, are allowable only when there is a clear and present danger to the administration of justice.

Powers and responsibilities of the Press

Freedom of the press, like freedom of speech, is not absolute however. Notwithstanding the limitations placed on it, the press exercises enormous power and influence, and is burdened with commensurate responsibility.

Because journalists generally have access to more information than does the average individual, they serve as the eyes, ears, and voice of the public. Some legal scholars even argue that the press is an important force in the democratic system of checks and balances.

Government Pressure on media in name of patriotism and national security

In the wake of the September 11th attacks in 2001, the White House placed pressure on the five major television networks not to broadcast videotaped statements by terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden and his associates. The networks had shown a videotape of bin Laden, and this angered the White House. In early October 2001, the networks agreed not to show such statements again without reviewing them first. The decision came after a

conference call among U.S. national security adviser Condoleezza Rice and the heads of the networks. The White House feared that broadcasts from suspected terrorists could contain anything from incitement to coded messages.

This agreement aroused concerns that the press was forfeiting its responsibility to report all of the news. Commentators noted that the rest of the world would see the bin Laden tapes via television and the internet, and that the security concerns raised by the U.S. government thus would have little impact.

Balance between restraint and responsibility

The balance between restraint and responsibility continued to be tested during the war against terrorism and the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

In contrast to the 1991 Gulf War, where the press was kept away from the battlefield, the war in Iraq featured "embedded" journalists, who travelled and reported in real time among the U.S. forces. However, the press was restricted to disclosing only certain types of information due to security concerns. Also close contact with their own forces contributed to reporters' self-censorship either through empathy or lack of objectivity.

<https://freedom.press/>

<https://freedomhouse.org/report-types/freedom-press>

<http://www.wifp.org/>

Use of internet in North Africa the Middle East

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Table 7.1 Internet use in selected countries in the Middle East and North Africa, 2000-09

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, Internet use expanded rapidly across the Middle East and North Africa, from a low base. The growth of social media surely contributed to the political awareness movement in 2011 which became known in many parts of the world as ‘the ‘Arab Spring.’

	Internet users		Population using Internet (%)2009	Regime overthrown in 2011?
	2000	2009		
Iran	250,000	32,200,000	48	No
Morocco	100,000	10,300,000	33	No
Saudi Arabia	200,000	7,700,000	27	No
Tunisia	100,000	2,800,000	27	Yes
Egypt	450,000	12,000,000	16	Yes
Algeria	50,000	4,100,000	12	No
Libya	10,000	323,000	5	Yes
Yemen	15,000	370,000	2	Yes

Source: Adapted from Wheeler and Mintz (2012), table 10.1

Social media & its narrowing influence on political discussions

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Facebook's 'echo chamber' really can make you narrow minded



People use the site to seek out opinions that confirm what they already believe

- Facebook users commonly create 'echo chambers' across social media
- In this effect, like-minded network will spread common ideas and sources
- World Economic Forum listed digital misinformation as a threat to society

By Cheyenne Macdonald

Published: 10:36 EST, 6 January 2016

When a big news story breaks, social networks are often awash with misleading information as people either inadvertently, or deliberately, share the story.

This creates what is known as an 'echo chamber'.

Researchers from Italy and the US found that people have the tendency to look for news that confirms what they already believe. And this in turn creates a network of like-minded people who will spread these common sources and accept them as truth.

Researchers from Italy and the US found that people have the tendency to look for news on Facebook that confirms what they already believe. This in turn creates a network of like-minded people who will spread these common sources and accept them as truth and what's known as an 'echo chamber'

Facebook users were found to gather news selectively, limiting exposure to information that goes against their ways of thought.

Consumers of both scientific and conspiracy information engage in this type of behaviour, but the spread of unproven rumours can lead to naïve social responses.

Once an idea has been accepted as truth by an individual, it will spread rapidly throughout the 'community of interest'.

The research, published in the [Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences](#), analysed publicly available data from Facebook's Graph interface between 2010 and 2014.

Information was categorized into three distinct groups: science news, conspiracy rumours, and trolling.

Facebook users were found to gather their news selectively, limiting exposure to information that goes against their ways of thought.

Consumers of both scientific and conspiracy information engage in this type of behaviour, but the spread of unproven rumours can lead to naïve social responses, the authors write.

'Massive digital misinformation is becoming pervasive in online social media to the extent that it has been listed by the World Economic Forum (WEF) as one of the main threats to our society,' the paper says.

'Whether a news item, either substantiated or not, is accepted as true by a user may be strongly affected by social norms or by how much it coheres with the user's system of beliefs.'

In the paper, they point out that the main distinction between scientific news and conspiracy is the ability to verify of the content.

Scientific information can often be traced, with data and methods readily available, while the origins of conspiracy theories, like the belief that vaccines cause autism, are difficult to identify.

In the 'echo chamber effect' Facebook users were found to gather their news selectively, limiting exposure to information that goes against their ways of thought

But, once an idea has been accepted as truth by an individual, it will spread rapidly throughout the 'community of interest.'

'Our findings show that users mostly tend to select and share content related to a specific narrative and to ignore the rest,' the paper says.

The researchers write that this effect may explain how certain phenomena become widespread, like the rejection of global warming evidence, or the Jade Helm 15 conspiracy, in which alarmists spread panic about a false impending civil war in the U.S.

In these like-minded communities, the researchers write that common ideas are shared and reinforced, fostering confirmation bias.

'This comes at the expense of the quality of the information and leads to proliferation of biased narratives fomented by unsubstantiated rumours, mistrust, and paranoia,' the authors write.

This behaviour can create diverging communities, as people across social media surround themselves with information that confirms their preconceptions on a subject, while rejecting other viewpoints.

To break an echo chamber, the research suggests it would be more useful to project to a larger audience, in lieu of infiltrating small subgroups with truthful information.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-3386052/Facebook-really-DOES-make-narrow-minded-Researchers-warn-echo-chamber-effect.html#ixzz47ShT2apq>

PART IV: In politics the internet is a game changer too

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The modern world is a village – within a TV screen

As Hague and Harrop say in their classic text comparing political systems “in the global village the world has been compressed into a television screen.”¹ This is no comfort for isolated citizens whose job or life is necessarily nomadic, or for those not linked by mobile phone tower or satellite.

Yet in the space of one century the speed of news transmission has gone from weeks to days to split seconds. This makes it harder for governments to block information though electronic walls can still be erected.²

Hearing each other talk is important in political meetings

Successful political life, especially policy formation, relies on discussion with up- to-date information and research. Political meetings, even of highly engaged voters, often deny attendees the opportunity to put their concerns, to hear each other talk.

Radio phone-ins, however, can allow discussion without mediation by politicians. Internet blogs have the same function in electronic space. Also modern social media and message systems allow groups – as well as millions of people who may be linked up – to talk about issues among themselves.

Rapid responses are now possible through new forms of media

One consequence of these new forms of media, or online platforms, is that peer- to-peer communication does make possible speedy consensus of opinion. And speedy organisation of political action.³

The explosion of internet users in the Middle East and North Africa in the first decade of this century had explosive political effects.⁴ Egypt and Tunisia are case- studies of how online communication enabled mass citizen mobilisations by rapidly spreading news about protest venues.

A new kind of public sphere enables a more active citizenry

It is impossible to understand the dramatic overthrows of government in Tunisia and Egypt without examining the role of social media.⁵ When people can express dissent online, as well as swop ideas about how to solve their mutual problems and better their lives, a democratic space is possible even in repressive dictatorships.

The freedom space or forum created by these new media tools defies the censorship technology by authoritarian regimes of the past. During the 70 years of communism in Eastern Europe a police state was sustained by suppression of broadcast information, paid informers and the consequent climate of fear.

Social media enables a new politics

One of the transformative changes brought about by social media is its effect on communication from politicians to voters.

Interactive media that allow peer-to-peer or ordinary citizens’ horizontal communication is weakening typical top-down forms of communication in many authoritarian regimes.

Exchanges of ideas and ways of tackling social problems made possible by interactive media have given rise to a new kind of public sphere or space. These are challenging top-down only systems, wherever they are.

Changes in higher income countries have lessons too

In high-income states the four major trends in political communication are:

- commercialisation
- fragmentation
- globalisation
- interaction.

Commercialisation, while providing a basis for useful competition, can also shrink the public space in which political issues are discussed.

Different media, different politics: softer news, harder sell

Media which made shared country-wide experiences possible have given way to global and 'on-demand' media. And the latter have contributed to the decline of traditional ways of participating in formal politics.

Increased commercialisation and greater choice have meant less formal opportunities to participate in political debate. Public media previously catered for an informed citizenry who consequently turned out in high numbers. Now less time is devoted to serious politics and more to soft news.⁶

Because all media content can be accessed on demand through a range of media, there is much less reliance on traditional media and their set programming.

Television networks in Europe and the US have had audience drops of around 25 to 30 percent while newspapers have declined by around 15 percent.

Profit plus an informed, high-turnout public?

Profit-seeking media, therefore, have little incentive to supply the traditional public goods of an informed citizenry plus high electoral turnout. At least there is no necessary incentive to offer opportunities for collective debate.

The argument put by these media owners is serious news and specialist political programmes can still be aimed at 'political junkies' but commercial broadcasting caters for the majority.

Where responsibilities to shareholders dominate, the argument is that providing soft news – 'news you can use' – reaches a mass audience which needs a more stimulating and popular approach.

Greater choice = less income for providers = less quality?

In higher income countries, as well as in others with access to technology, the political market is fragmented. If there is distribution by cable, satellite, the Internet and mobile devices, citizens can now receive a greater range of content: national, local and international.

Revenues are fragmenting also. Since the last decades of last century newspapers have closed as circulations dropped by up to twenty percent – or gave way to usually less political, free newspapers.

Television revenues too have dropped, by a third or more. Advertising revenues therefore have had to be shared with more channels, including online provision.

From a party logic to a media logic

These changes in user preferences and habits have meant politicians are increasingly using higher-rated talk shows to try to appeal to more citizens. They also use Facebook and Twitter to invite feedback, promote ideas, and give themselves a greater profile.

The media industry has moved from public service to private profit. Significantly for politicians keen to gather support for their policies, the balance of power between parties and media has changed from a 'party logic' to a 'media logic'.⁷

Changes in technology have made it easier to organise secret opposition to oppressive regimes. Although these same changes have enabled countries to suppress information, committed individuals with internet access can still alert the world to political abuses. Also to good ideas.

New vocabulary: whistle-blowers, echo-chambers, electronic ghettos

Iran and Saudi Arabia have been exposed, by both amateur and professional journalists, but countries can still suppress information and discredit whistle-blowers.

Reaching mass audiences is more difficult in today's user-driven Internet world. Groups who can support each other in all sorts of political and extremist views are encouraged in 'the echo chamber' effect of the internet.

[These electronic ghettos operate where Facebook users gather their news selectively](#), limiting exposure to information that goes against their way of thought. This creates networks of like-minded people in communities of interest who spread common sources all come to regard as truth.

This fosters confirmation bias. That is, members of these social media networks "surround themselves with information that confirms their preconceptions on a subject."⁸ Researchers suggest that to break an echo chamber, politicians should project to larger audiences.

Close connection between development of states and the media

An understanding of the close connection between mass media and the state requires an understanding of the history of how the press and broadcasting emerged.

Broadcasting, whether radio or television, was central to the communications revolution of the 20th century. Use of radio in technological countries (1920s), and then television (1950s), changed mass media completely.

Before these the main means of gathering and gaining information about political matters were daily newspapers (later 1800s but earlier in many countries) and then news reels⁹ in cinemas (1911 to 1967).

From radio balconies and TV firesides

After 1920 in industrialised countries the spread of political information and ideas could be heard not only by crowds below balconies, but also by whole nations at home.

After both world wars European societies still largely divided by class and religion 'could gather as one man'¹⁰ around the new media.

The art of oral communication became important again. Political speech-making now involved talking to unseen millions. But in a new way. Rather than dramatically to a live and visible audience gathered in one place, leaders now needed to talk to citizens as though they were individuals.¹¹

Different models of the role and responsibilities of media

Not all governments share the same ideas about the role of the media. These different ideas are called the structure of the media. Using examples from the 'old world,' scholars have categorised three different structures or models: 1) the Anglo-American 2) the northern European and 3) the southern European.

The watchdog journalist in the Anglo-American structure is regarded to be in permanent opposition to the governing parties in power on behalf of the people. Here, the role of journalists is to be news gathering professionals who consider their primary duty as truth-tellers for the public good.

Each significant social group has its own media

The second model or tradition is the northern European structure (in Scandinavia, Belgium, Germany and Holland) where the media and political worlds are not so separate. Newspapers and even television represent particular groups such as trade unions, religions, and political parties.

The role of the journalist here is less adversarial. Their role includes being more sensitive to political stability, their newspaper's outlook and the social group the paper serves.

In the southern European structure or model (Greece, Portugal, Spain), public broadcasting, newspapers and non-government television is subject to party political influence. Journalists in a subdued media traditionally see themselves providing ideologically loaded commentary rather than hard news.

Variations of [these models are also present in African states – and operate within varying degrees of freedom.](#)

1 Hague, R., Harrop, M. (2013). *Comparative government and politics: An introduction. 9th edn, Basingstoke: Macmillan.*

2 China is the prime example of a government that effectively blocks its search engines and shuts down social media sites that share or promote 'anti-government propaganda'. Their 'Firewall' or 'Golden Shield Project' prevents its 'netizens' from accessing so-called anti-social information that could harm national stability. <https://cs.stanford.edu/people/eroberts/cs181/projects/2010-11/FreedomOfInformationChina/the-great-firewall-of-china-background/index.html>

3 Follow-up may be less successful because such 'horizontal organisation' makes sustained leadership less effective than flexible hierarchies. And while governments can no longer easily censor information many still can and do control free speech that criticises policy or its view of the past.

4 During the 'Arab Spring' Iran's Blogistan was an example of how alienated urban youth found a way not only to express their frustrations and anger but also to channel it into political action. (Srebeny and Khiabany, 2010)

5 'The word on the tweet proved harder to censor than the word on the street.' (Hague and Harrop, 2013)

6 McChesney, R. (1999) *Rich Media, Poor Democracies* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press).

7 Mazzoleni, G (1987) 'Media Logic and Party Logic in Campaign Coverage: The Italian General Election of 1983', *European Journal of Communication* (2) 81-103.

8 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-3386052/Facebook-really-DOES-make-narrow-minded-Researchers-warn-echo-chamber-effect.html>

9 A newsreel is a form of short documentary film prevalent in the first half of the twentieth century and ending in 1967, regularly released in a public presentation place and containing filmed news stories and items of topical interest.

10 Reith, J. (1949) *Into the Wind* (London: Hodder & Stoughton).

11 President Roosevelt was said to personify this new approach. His radio fireside chats in 19302 won his country's trust by talking 'not so much to the citizens but as a citizen.' (Hague & Harrop, 2013 p. 113)

PART V - More choice, less profit, less analysis?

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Following politics shapes participation

The media is the structure within which many people live their lives. Just following politics in the media is itself a form of political behaviour.

As the media are now most people's point of access to politics, all political encounters people have via the media also shape their later bodily participation in politics.¹ If they participate at all.

However, even watching movie dramas about political events can be as much a form of political participation as helping in an election campaign, or donating to an interest group.

'Narrowcasting' realities demand tailored techniques

With the shift to narrowcasting, the mass media have become user- driven and overall exposure to politics has fallen. Consequently electorates, and young people in particular, have become harder to reach.

So to bridge the gaps caused by this media fragmentation new techniques have been developed. Personalised direct mail, email, social networks and telephone campaigning are now all part of modern elections.²

'Comment-rich, fact-poor, analysis-thin'

As readership of newspapers decline there is a rise in low-cost media, with amateur bloggers posting entries or blogs that are 'comment-rich, fact-poor and analysis-thin'.

Many of these are simply reacting to stories created elsewhere and lack informed analysis. Or they lack the kind of editing process that demands writer accountability and accuracy.

Consequently, there have been calls for professional news gathering and interpretation to be seen as a public good to bolster access to quality analysis. As such, it would require professional conditions guaranteeing independence and educated critique.

Impact or effects of the media

Any analysis of the impacts of the media needs to examine the ways it influences citizens and potential voters. These four mechanisms are:

- reinforcement
- agenda-setting
- framing
- priming

Knowledge of how these mechanisms operate can help citizens and politicians go beyond blanket generalisations about media impacts to make finer judgements about its role in political life.

Impacts of the media: reinforcement

The reinforcement model of media effects says the media strengthens already existing opinions.

Surveys that reveal stable party loyalties within families, and even extended families, can be explained by the fact voters are reinforced in their views by their choice of news media. And tend to exclude any contrary views.

Loyalties learned through family upbringing or socialisation act as a filter: voters see and remember what they want to. In countries with partisan newspapers, citizens mostly chose those agreeing with them, reflecting reader self-selection. For example, people who already are racist tend to use racist media or websites.

These media then tend to 'preach to the converted' by angling their stories to such readers or viewers.

Self-selection makes reinforcement easier but limits conversion

Other terms useful to make sense of studies which shows this are: selective interpretation: interpreting new information to make it fit prior opinions such as racial superiority); and selective recall: forgetting information that runs counter to existing beliefs.

Except for the few who wish to know or anticipate the opposing views of other parties, web-users will still search for, and be reinforced by, opinions they already sympathise with.

Information silos are not the typical experience

However, scholars say the reinforcement model is now not the full story. Today typical voters are seldom dominated by one political outlook. This is because:

- party loyalties in established democracies have weakened
- the press has declined in influence (in some areas it never existed)
- TV news is on the whole more neutral than other partisan media

Other ways of looking at the effects of the media are now needed to explain how people are influenced by advances in media technology.

Impacts of the media: agenda-setting

From the 1970s onwards television began to have a greater impact on how citizens' opinions were formed.

Surveys reported minor candidates were often left out of 'exposure.' And agenda-setting by television programmers became more important: not only for what was included but also for what was not covered.

News broadcasts became on average 30 minutes so editors set the agenda. The prioritising of the stories chosen was also significant. The world-view projected onto screens invariably focused on the exceptional, the fresh, and what could be simplified.

Creating opinions or circulating them?

The agenda-setting impact helps voters and politicians become aware of bias by exclusion. It also helps explain the powerful impact of editors as gate-keepers to a powerful projected reality.

For example, in cultures where corruption is just regarded as the cost of doing business, stories about its practices could be edited out. Or integrity stories could be neglected by shock-jock comperes or media catering for the sensational ('if it bleeds it leads').

Such distortions can be checked by editors and programmers with experienced news sense – plus an awareness of their role to balance as well as reflect.

As the electronic era advanced into the 1990s, any agenda control has become more difficult. An explosion of available channels has meant news consumers can shape their own agendas through some media outlet somewhere. They can search for like-minded political views, for specialist ones or find contrary ones if open-minded.

Impacts of the media: framing

As knowledge has grown about how agenda-setting can become agenda-bending – how it can affect voters world-view – so too has the knowledge of how stories can be framed. This framing, or arrangement of the images and words of the story, helps not just in the interpretation of a story, but can also encourage a particular reaction to it by viewers.

Immigrants, for example, can be presented as a threat to the unity of a society or as a much-needed help to the economy of societies with below-replacement birth-rates.³

The shorter the news report the more the narrative of a reported story must rely on consensus frames or what is already known. This often limits the ability to include a story's full complexity.

Awareness of media impacts improves political judgements

Any awareness of these impacts of the media, therefore, can help viewers and listeners judge the truth of stories and political actions. Also it can help to know what further questions to ask. Do I believe this story, does it affect me, should I – and can I – take any action about it?

Major impacts of news media are in the form of:

- the way citizens select and exclude stories
- the way stories are presented
- their placement among other news items
- their framing by reporters and editors.

Awareness of these influences helps explain how media can still polarise or neutralise opinion. It also helps citizens avoid being manipulated by biased media – and prevents the blaming of media ('shooting the messenger') for doing its job in exposing the misuse of political powers.

History shows us scapegoating the messengers is a common reaction to the sting of a true message. It is also an ancient human tendency.

Impacts of the media: priming

An important impact of news media that is often not obvious is its priming effect. Media coverage can have this indirect cueing effect on how viewers or listeners judge or act later on.

For example, positively, the more television focuses on the effects of corruption the more likely voters will be primed to judge parties on their policies to do with this problem.

Negatively, coverage of racist attacks can prompt later 'copycat' attacks, if the opportunity arises.

As an extreme example, in Rwanda in 1994 the influence of radio in priming hatred for the Tutsis (by smearing them as 'cockroaches' to be eliminated in revenge for past power abuses) was a prime trigger in the killing of 800,000 in the 100-day genocide.⁴

Knowledge of priming effects prevents wrong judgments

Neither primers nor triggers are causes. However, knowledge of the impacts of mass media on a collective mind-set does help in countering its effects. It also helps to prevent blaming media for behaviour which has complex causes or whose roots lie elsewhere.

Knowledge of how content and tone of media coverage can impinge on an audience can prevent simplistic analysis seeking single causation.

New funding models for a new democratic age

Various funding models are being tried around the world to try to restore independent journalism to its role as the fourth estate checking the other three.

Given the importance of political communication to democracy, many analysts argue this public good may need to be at least partially public funded.

Accordingly initiatives are being considered –some have already been introduced – in democracies that value a free flow of information.

1 Peoples' encounters with the media provide 'mental maps of the political world outside our direct experience (providing) a reservoir of images and voices, heroes and villains, sayings and slogans, facts and ideas that we draw on in making sense of politics.' Jones, J. (2005) *Entertaining Politics: New Political Television and Civic Culture* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield).

2 The Democratic party in the US used these methods in the 2008 and 2012 elections in successful attempts to attract donations and volunteers. And raise awareness. Kreiss, D. (2012) *Taking Our Country Back: The Crafting of Net worked Politics from Howard Dean to Barack Obama* (New York: Oxford University Press)

3 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_sovereign_states_and_dependent_territories_by_fertility_rate

4 Led by popular comperes or DJs , such radio propaganda demeaned Tutsis as cockroaches who wanted to eliminate all Hutus in payback for past or perceived injustices. By being repeated so often, these messages wound Hutus up. They also broke down inhibitions and dulled consciences enough to trigger killing sprees when authority figures later gave the word. For a fuller analysis of further triggers and complex causes:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3257748.stm>;

http://www.rwandanstories.org/genocide/hate_radio.html;

http://www.rwandanstories.org/origins/hutu_and_tutsi.html.

"As a rule, the populations of African states are multi-tribal (Congo is inhabited by 300 tribes, Nigeria by 250), whereas only one group inhabits Rwanda, the Banyarwanda, a single nation divided into three castes: the Tutsi cattle owners (14 percent of the population), the Hutu farmers (85 percent), and the Twa labourers and servants (1 percent).