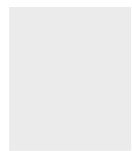


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ISSUE DESCRIPTION



COMMITTEE Human Rights Council
ISSUE Limiting Censorship over Printed Press
SUBMITTED BY Eszter Zajácz, President of the Human Rights Council
APPROVED BY Vilmos Eiben, President of the General Assembly

Introduction

The information available to people shapes their perception of the world and their actions. This is why freedom of expression in the Press is an essential right. Moreover, the unrestricted exchange of ideas plays a crucial role in fostering dynamic societies and advancing human progress. Freedom of speech is vital for democracy, transparency, and accountability.

However, censorship has been around since the Greco-Roman era, limiting people's rights to freedom of expression. Censors in ancient Rome were tasked with supervising the morals of the public as well as the financial matters of the nobility. Other than restricting spoken words, it now also concludes the suppression of those images, music, books, journals, articles, films, art, and every form of media that are considered "offensive". It can be executed by any individual or group and can reach such measures when an individual's human rights are being harmed. In many parts of the world censorship over Printed Press remains a pervasive issue, often governments trying to control narratives and suppress dissent.

Censorship can still have a positive outcome in some cases. It can significantly reduce the spread of hate speech in society and protect children from consuming unhealthy and harmful content. It may also be important in military affairs to protect a society's security and the people's data and identity from enemy governments and cyber-terrorist attacks. Striking a balance between freedom of expression and addressing legitimate concerns, such as misinformation, national security, or hate speech, is a global challenge.

Definition of key terms

Censorship - The suppression or restriction of content deemed objectionable, harmful, or sensitive by governing authorities, institutions, or organizations.

Printed Press - Media published in physical formats such as; newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, and journals. All of these serve as primary tools for disseminating information.

Freedom of the Press - The right of media organizations and journalists to operate independently without interference, restrictions, or fear of reprisal.

Defamation - False, misleading, or damaging statements about individuals, which some governments cite to justify censorship laws.

National Security - The protection of a nation from threats, often used as a justification for Press censorship to prevent the dissemination of sensitive information.

Moral Censorship - The removal of materials that are obscene or otherwise considered morally questionable.

Military Censorship - The process of keeping military intelligence and tactics confidential and away from the enemy.

Political Censorship - The decision by governments to withhold information from their citizens.

Religious Censorship - The means by which any material considered objectionable by a religious group or organization is removed.

Corporate Censorship - The process by which editors in corporate media outlets intervene to disrupt the publishing of information that portrays their business or business partners in a negative light.

MIL - Media and Information Literacy movement, created by UNESCO, which empowers individuals to critically evaluate information, understand media systems, and participate in informed public discourse.

General Overview

Censorship in the Printed Press manifests in various ways, including content bans, religious censorship, military censorship, political censorship, moral censorship, corporate censorship, government control over licensing, intimidation of journalists, and criminalization of dissenting views.

It all started to evolve with the appearance of the printing press, in 1439. With the help of this new invention, information flowed rapidly, reaching more people than ever before. After the machine was created, control of the press had to be implemented since ruling powers did not appreciate that people could print any document they wanted. These restrictions were needed to keep people's privacy and tackle the spread of misinformation. By the 15th and 16th centuries, pre-authorization of texts was ordered all over Europe by a papal bull. This was a manifestation of religious control by the Church, forcing their theological ideas into everyday matters. This religious control was in practice dating back to the 7th century BCE when a part of the Hebrew Bible was burned by King Jehoiakim of Judah. The burning of texts was also seen throughout history from 210 BCE China to 2006 when in the USA copies of "Harry Potter" books were burned by churches in Alamogordo, New Mexico, and Charleston, South Carolina claiming that they promoted the use of witchcraft.

Secular censorship of printed documents was carried out first by governments and rulers for dissatisfaction with the subject of documents. If regulations were imposed, they resulted in punishment. These punishments included execution, not just in Ancient Greece for spreading rumours about people in charge, but also in the 18th century for challenging political views. These severe measures of punishment are still in use today, in 2024 at least 104 journalists were killed with more than half taking place in Palestine, often without a fair trial.

Governments often justify these actions by claiming they protect national security, combat misinformation, or maintain public order. However, such censorship stifles investigative journalism, limits public access to diverse perspectives, retains the public from knowledge of government information, and erodes democratic principles. With all of the revolutions and civil wars around the world, the situation was constantly changing. For instance, the French Revolution seemed to awaken hope in many parts of Europe. It seemed like overall progress had been made, however, in the 20th century with the movements following the First World War it significantly relapsed. An example of brutal censoring during the 20th century occurred in Germany, in 1933. Over 25,000 books that were claimed to be "un-German" were publicly burned by university students. This was one of the many efforts made to synchronize German arts and culture with the Nazi ideology.

At the same time, the proliferation of false information and inflammatory rhetoric in Printed Media has raised questions about responsible journalism. This creates a need for frameworks that protect Press freedom while preventing the misuse of Media platforms. Publishers are

protected from their work being sold as someone else's by including the date of the publication and the name of the publisher. With the use of limited censorship spread of misinformation can be stopped as well as protecting the security and personal information of people. The right to privacy is protected under Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). These provisions safeguard individuals from arbitrary interference with their privacy, family, home, or correspondence. The protection of children was a strong cause for restrictions especially concerning adult content such as pornographic materials or content including violent scenes and gruesome details. Most parents have advocated for these measures and in the USA the use of vulgar speech is not allowed on public radio and TV. In the UK under the Obscene Publications Act (1964), material containing immoral sexual content, violence and profanity can be prohibited. This can be seen in practice in school libraries, where books with explicit content are not available. In Hungary, under Act LXXIX (2021), in the protection of children, books containing LGBTQ+ content are either wrapped up and cannot be sold to minors or they are completely banned from certain libraries and institutions. The supervision of information can also be beneficial in averting a crisis during a natural disaster or epidemic. With the limit of Press access to sensitive information governments can prevent panic caused by speculative or unverified reporting by maintaining control and reducing chaos.

Censorship in the 21st century is way more difficult to execute than it was before, as a result of the new technologies and inventions such as the internet, which can provide unlimited access to anyone about anything, and reaches almost the entirety of the world, making it almost impossible to make restrictions. Printed books and documents are often digitalized and digital versions can be downloaded and printed out. Authors often refuse to work with traditional publishing agencies, and self-publish their own books, reducing the control of publishers over their books. The case is similar in independent Press organizations, who publish their blogs, journals, and news in a non-censored way. Also, the fact that different countries have varying laws about censorship makes restrictions inconsistent, and readers might be able to buy a book, which is banned in their country, in neighbouring countries. Still, in some countries, the actions of the government are what define how and by whom information can be produced or consumed.

These restrictions lead to very drastic consequences in many parts of the World. Even though the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to freedom of expression, and opinion and to seek and receive information, journalists are harassed, and are under the threat of kidnap, murder, hostage-taking, being punished with imprisonment and

much more. Challenges include the lack of international consensus on acceptable limitations to Press freedom, enforcement of regulations, and differences in cultural and political contexts.

The ones coloured red have little to no freedom of speech, and the opposition of the Press is a huge issue throughout the country. Almost all public documents are censored, and governments do not share their work with the people. Massive surveillance allows people in charge to collect public data and puts people at risk of their identities being stolen.



Countries and regions with the least and most press freedom according to the World Press Freedom Index.

The ones coloured green have almost no censorship, freedom of expression is essential for the people of these countries, however, the censorship of the Press is minimal making it another controversial topic. The spread of misinformation and private information of people is not regulated well, and explicit content is available for people with little to no restrictions.

As of 2024, Eritrea, Syria, North Korea, and Iran are at the bottom of the Freedom Index, they go against international standards by banning independent media as a whole or critically restricting it with different underhand tactics. They ignore the 10th and 19th articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, however, they make a strong case for not letting foreign governments take control over their media outlets. Countries like Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands are at the top making them liberally free countries, while risking the spread of all information and sensitive topics.

Major Parties Involved

GOVERNMENTS AND REGULATORS

Countries with strict censorship laws, such as China, Russia, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea regulate Press freedom to control political narratives.

China: China's regulation of media and public narrative is a combination of legal frameworks, technological controls, and party propaganda. The government blocks or removes content deemed politically sensitive through the Great Firewall. Topics like the Tiananmen Square massacre, criticism of the Communist Party (CCP), or advocacy for democracy are heavily censored. Major media outlets, such as Xinhua News Agency and CCTV, are state-owned. Private media is allowed but operates under strict government licensing. Journalists are required to hold government-issued press credentials, training sessions reinforce CCP narratives. State secrets laws prohibit the unauthorized release of government documents or data, even economic statistics can be classified as state secrets. Movies, TV shows, and books must align with socialist values and party ideologies.

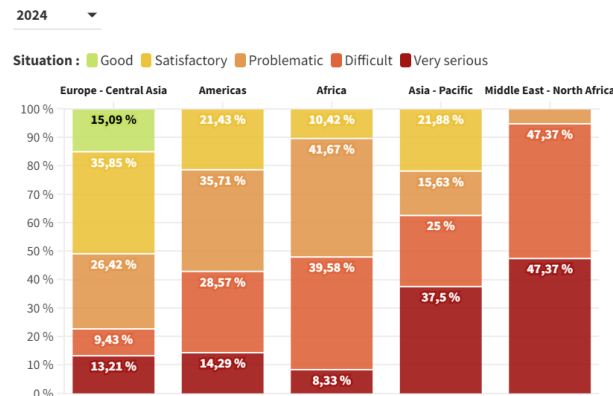
Russian Federation: Russia combines legal restrictions, state-owned media dominance, and disinformation campaigns to control narratives. Major outlets like RT (Russia Today) and Sputnik are state-funded, promoting Kremlin narratives domestically and internationally. Laws criminalize spreading "fake news" or discrediting the Russian military. Investigative journalists face intimidation, imprisonment, or assassination. Examples include Anna Politkovskaya (2006) and the recent clampdown on Novaya Gazeta. Official documents, particularly those related to military or security issues, are classified under state secrecy laws. Historical archives are curated to support nationalistic narratives, often suppressing information about Soviet-era atrocities. Education reforms stress patriotism and Russia's historical greatness, and narratives promoting President Putin's leadership and denouncing Western influence dominate.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK): North Korea exercises the most rigid control over information, ensuring an almost entirely state-driven narrative. The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) and Rodong Sinmun are the only authorized news outlets. Content glorifies the Kim dynasty and demonizes perceived enemies, like the U.S. and South Korea. Foreign news is banned, and even owning unauthorized foreign media, such as South Korean dramas, is punishable by death. Government documents are classified, and only vetted information is released to the public. Economic figures are manipulated

or withheld to obscure the country's dire conditions. Extensive propaganda glorifies Kim Jong Un and his family as divine leaders. The Ministry of State Security monitors citizens' speech and behaviour. Informants report dissent, leading to imprisonment or execution. Criticizing the regime, even in private, can result in entire families being sent to labour camps.

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Press freedom in the world's five regions in 2024



Source: [World Press Freedom Index](#), [Link to share](#)
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UNESCO, UNHRC, and NGOs like Reporters Without Borders (RSF) advocate for Press freedom and publish annual rankings of Media freedom.

Reporters Without Borders: RSF's advocacy efforts are multifaceted, addressing threats to press freedom through direct action, public campaigns, and systemic initiatives. Their website ranks countries annually based on press freedom, assessing pluralism, media independence, legislative environment, transparency, and journalist safety. They conduct in-depth investigations into specific cases of media repression, such as journalist killings, censorship laws, or government control of the press as seen after protests in Iran, in 2022, they reported the suppression of media, spreading awareness on the issue. They try to push back against laws and policies that stifle press freedom, such as anti-defamation laws or internet shutdowns. RSF also provides direct assistance to journalists facing persecution, offering financial aid for legal fees, medical expenses, or relocation for journalists in danger, as seen in 2021 in Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover. RSF actively holds oppressive leaders and entities accountable including figures like North Korea's Kim Jong Un and Saudi Arabia's Mohammed bin Salman.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND ACTIVIST GROUPS

Organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (HRW) work to expose censorship practices and support journalists in danger.

Amnesty International: Amnesty International focuses on advocacy, awareness campaigns, and direct support to individuals facing repression. Investigates and documents cases of censorship, restrictions on press freedom, and harassment of journalists for instance Amnesty's reports on China's censorship of COVID-19 information or Russia's crackdown on media during the Ukraine war. They issue global appeals for journalists at risk, urging governments to release detained journalists or end harassment for example with the advocacy for the release of Egyptian journalist Mahmoud Hussein from prolonged detention.

Human Rights Watch: HRW specializes in investigating abuses and advocating for accountability. It employs rigorous research and high-profile advocacy to support journalists. Documents how governments use tools like spyware (e.g., Pegasus software) or social media manipulation to silence journalists for example they exposed the use of surveillance software to target journalists in Morocco and Mexico. They also advocate for the adoption and enforcement of international protections for journalists, calling on governments to ratify treaties like the Global Media Freedom Declaration.

MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS

Printing and distribution companies may also face restrictions under censorship laws, especially in authoritarian regimes.

RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

Religious organizations, such as the Church, control or limit freedom of speech contradictory to religious teachings. Usually performed on the grounds of blasphemy, heresy, sacrilege, or impiety.

MILITARY AUTHORITY

Used as a counterespionage, especially during wartime, military organizations, such as the Armed Forces, and the US Marshals, keep military intelligence and confidential tactics away from the enemy.

Timeline of events

1439 - The creation of the first mechanized printing press in Strasbourg.

1515 - The use of the printing press was banned for Ottoman Turkish and Arabic scripts.

1695 - The people of England achieved success with campaigns against censorship. Newspapers started to focus more on local issues, rather than external ones.

1766 - Sweden enacts the world's first Freedom of the Press Act, abolishing government censorship and allowing public access to official documents.

1848 - The Albertine Statue in Italy grants freedom of the Press, with certain restrictions, laying the groundwork for modern Press liberties in the country.

1948 - The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is adopted by the United Nations, with Article 19 affirming the right to freedom of opinion and expression, including freedom of the Press.

1950: The European Convention on Human Rights comes into force, with Article 10 protecting freedom of expression, contributing to the promotion of Press freedom in Europe.

2000 - The European Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights is proclaimed, reinforcing the right to freedom of expression and information across member states.

2000 - Russia's government begins consolidating control over national networks.

2005 - China implements the "Centralized Propaganda Management System" intensifying state oversight of media content and restricting topics deemed sensitive.

2013 - Global Press freedom reaches its lowest points in over a decade, with significant declines noted in countries like Egypt, highlighting ongoing challenges to Press liberties.

2014 - The United Nations General Assembly designates the 2nd of November as the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, aiming to combat violence against media workers.

2014 - Russia enacts the "Bloggers' Law" requiring online writers with over 3,000 daily readers to register with the government, extending censorship to digital platforms.

2019 - Turkey becomes the world's most prolific incarcerator of journalists, with over 120 journalists imprisoned, underscoring severe restrictions on Press freedom.

2020 - The COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased censorship in various countries, with journalists facing arrests and threats for reporting on the crisis, reflecting a global decline in Press freedom.

2024 - Reporters Without Borders releases the World Press Freedom Index, warning of a decline in the political indicator, signalling increased political pressure on journalism worldwide.

2024 - North Korea ranks among the lowest. All media are state-owned and serve as the mouthpiece for the ruling Worker's Party of Korea. The Korean Central News Agency is the primary source of news, disseminating information that aligns with government propaganda.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

UNESCO's Media Development Initiatives aim to strengthen press freedom, foster media pluralism and diversity, and promote ethical journalism worldwide. These initiatives are grounded in UNESCO's belief that a free, independent, and pluralistic media is essential for democracy, sustainable development, and human rights. Therefore, the UN body organizes training sessions and workshops to equip journalists with the skills they need to report effectively, ethically, and safely. Topics include investigative journalism, conflict-sensitive reporting, environmental journalism, and digital journalism. They also hold special training programs for women journalists to address gender-specific challenges like harassment or underrepresentation. Encouraging minority representation in media, supporting Indigenous and ethnic minority journalists to amplify diverse voices.

UNESCO works with schools, universities, and governments to integrate MIL into education systems. Raising awareness about the dangers of fake news and equipping individuals with tools to identify credible information. What is more, they publish annual reports, including the World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development Report, These are created with the aim of analysing global and regional trends in media freedom.

As previously stated, Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights affirm the right to freedom of expression.

Initiatives like the Media Freedom Coalition aim to protect journalists and advocate for Press freedom on a global scale. This is a formal commitment by member states to protect media freedom, uphold human rights, and ensure the safety of journalists. Signatories pledge to support accountability mechanisms and advocate for freedom of expression globally.

Bodies like the African Union, a continental body made up of 55 member states in Africa, concentrate on addressing political, economic, social, and security challenges and the Organization of American States, is instrumental in promoting and defending human rights in the Americas, including the protection of press freedom, have established charters and declarations to safeguard Press freedom, albeit with varying enforcement levels.

Nonetheless, publications like the Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders increase global awareness about Press censorship.

Possible solutions and approaches

Countries with extreme regulations, and ones that have dire conditions for journalists could be encouraged to adopt and enforce laws that explicitly protect Press freedom while limiting arbitrary censorship. On top of that, providing funding, security, and support for journalists, media outlets, and whistleblowers in countries with repressive regimes might be a sensible approach in numerous countries. Furthermore, international Frameworks could be established as global guidelines, defining acceptable limits to Press freedom in extreme cases like incitement to violence.

Another approach would be advocating for government transparency in handling Media regulations to avoid abuse of censorship powers, including sharing of documents with the public concerning governmental funding, affairs, and federal information, along with developing tools that enable the secure distribution of censored materials, such as encrypted communication channels.

Further solutions would be the education of the public to discern credible information and combat the spread of misinformation. It is key to recognise the need for eradicating the underlying causes, thus finding the root is essential and promoting education on the aforementioned matters would count as a potential solution.

Useful Documents, Websites

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- <https://mediafreedomcoalition.org/>
- <https://www.unesco.org/en>
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