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Safeguarding the press freedom in the media

SPC2

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Introduction

Freedom of the press is a fundamental human right that controls democratic societies, ensuring transparency, accountability, and the flow of information. This essential right is important for every democratic country around the world and serves as a fundamental in society. This freedom of the press allows journalists to investigate, critique, and analyze situations from across the globe. In many regions around the globe, journalists face censorship, harassment, imprisonment, and even violence for simply reporting the truth, while in other regions, news outlets are often subjected to state control or corporate influence, which further undermines the unbiased opinion that the press is supposed to have.

The corruption of press freedom has explicit consequences, including the potential to weaken the democratic situation in different countries and further encourage an authoritarian regime. However, the importance of press freedom in the media cannot be emphasized enough, with press freedom being stated as a global principle according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, which explicitly states that “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”(United Nations) With this being one of the articles present in the Universal Declaration, it further highlights its importance on a global scale, with press freedom having specific benefits to society, such as its role in empowering citizens through access to information, along with combating disinformation and fostering a more informed and participatory public.

Definition of Key Terms

Censorship

Censorship is the changing the suppression or prohibition of speech or writing that is deemed subversive of the common good. (Anastaplo)

Disinformation

False information is deliberately and often covertly spread (as by the planting of rumors) in order to influence public opinion. (“Disinformation”)

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

This treaty, adopted in 1966, establishes protection for the freedom of expression, which further includes freedom of the press. It is a cornerstone document for human rights advocacy.

Media Pluralism

Media pluralism is a method that provides choices to the public; this is made possible by a mix of public, private, and community media to avoid media concentration, which could limit the diversity of opinions and viewpoints about a certain issue. (UNESCO)

Press Freedom

Press freedom (or freedom of the press) gives individuals and organizations the right to express, publish, and share information, ideas, and opinions without fear of censorship or government interference. (Soken-Huberty)

Propaganda

Propaganda is the dissemination of information – facts, arguments, rumors, half-truths, or lies to influence public opinion, often converted through mass media. A systematic effort to manipulate people's beliefs, attitudes, or actions by means of symbols. (Smith)

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a milestone document in the history of human rights that aims to set standard achievements for all peoples and nations, first adopted in Paris in 1948. (United Nations)

General Overview

Press freedom has played an essential part in the developing world, the idea of press freedom reinforces the powerful and essential part of democratic nations: the freedom of expression. Firstly, let's go through its history.

Historical Context

The concept of press freedom has deep historical roots, with the first officially recognized law supporting the freedom of the press and freedom of information being passed on December 2, 1766, in the Swedish parliament (Cunningham). This Freedom of the Press Act abolished the censorship of all printed publications, including those imported from abroad, but excluded those on academic and theological subjects (Weibull). With this being one of the first major laws that highlighted the importance of press freedom in a democratic nation, Sweden set an example for other countries to follow, but there still remained a major limitation that there were strong

punishments for writing against the state or king were kept, preventing true freedom of press from being created. Following the Swedes, the adaptation of the Declaration of the Rights of Man in France further stated in article 11, “The free communication of ideas and of opinions is one of the most precious rights of man. Any citizen may, therefore, speak, write, and publish freely, except what is tantamount to the abuse of this liberty in the cases determined by Law.” (“The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen”). This article presents the declaration of the rights of man and further re-stated this idea of “Press freedom” in its earliest forms as the article further states that “Any citizen may therefore speak, write and publish freely.” One of the more notable examples of the adaptation of press freedom is in the United States of America, in 1791, the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights stated that there should be no law that overrules the freedom of speech or of the press. This statement emphasizes how the original Bill of Rights recognizes the importance of safeguarding press freedom and stands as an essential part of the Bill of Rights that is recognized across the globe.

Following the 19th Century, the 20th Century marked a more unified globe with the creation of the United Nations. In 1948 the universalization of rights came with the adoption of the UDHR in 1948. With which it contained an article that explicitly stated that “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression. This right emphasized the fact that everyone has the right to have an opinion without interference and have the ability to express this opinion through media regardless of the frontiers. After which, in the later years, international frameworks such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) reinforced this principle, setting global benchmarks for the protection of press freedom. With the 20th century being one where nations began to develop solid democratic nations, the idea of press freedom was further nurtured and grew into an important part of society, with major importance in large nations with unstable political situations.

However, this major evolution of press freedom has been extremely uneven across the globe, especially in authoritarian regimes such as DPRK press freedom has been mentioned in their legal framework, such as article 67, which states, “Citizens are guaranteed freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, demonstration and association.” (*Korea (Democratic People’s Republic of) 1972 (Rev. 1998) Constitution - Constitute*). While the article is present in the constitution, the authoritarian regime systematically tramples over this principle of Press freedom. With the state of DPRK having tight control over Radio and TV, the NGO Reporters Without Borders often cites Kim Jong-il (The prior leader of DRPK) as a “Predator of press freedom” (BBC News). This further

emphasizes how the situation for press freedom in DPRK is slowly worsening. Even in established democracies, economic and political factors continue to challenge the true realization of a free and impartial press.

Current Challenges to Press Freedom

With the world constantly changing and moving forward, the threats that press freedom faces are constantly changing. Especially after the creation of the internet, the world of communication has evolved at an exponential rate, changing the way media is conveyed to the entire world. A major problem that is faced in multiple nations in the current day is Censorship. Governments often utilize censorship to suppress opposition, control narratives, and prevent exposure of corruption or human rights abuses, with a very prominent example of Censorship being in a country with one of the largest economies, China. Internet censorship in the People's Republic of China is overseen technically by the Ministry of Information Industry. Policies about what substantive content is to be censored are largely directed by the State Council Information Office and the Chinese Communist Party's Propaganda Department (*"How Censorship Works in China: A Brief Overview."*). This allows the Chinese Government to control what information can be accessed by the Chinese Internet Users, further censoring information from foreign websites.

Other challenges include the concentration of media ownership in the hands of larger corporations, which has created a new challenge to press freedom, even in democratic societies. With large corporations owning strong press outlets, these corporations have the ability to influence the editorial decisions made by the outlet. With these decisions being based on what can most benefit the corporation, this further compromises the objectivity of news reporting and introduces a bias in the information they convey. This further raises questions about the ability of such outlets to act as neutral watchdogs of government or industry malpractice.

Violence and Harassment of Journalists pose a current-day issue, with journalists often operating in dangerous environments, especially those in conflict zones or oppressive regimes. With 2024 seeing at least 68 deaths in the line of Journalism according to UNESCO (*"At Least 68 Journalist Killings in 2024, UNESCO Reports"*), this journalistic work in conflict zones is beginning to become an extremely dangerous job that could potentially lead to death. Along with this, the trends indicate that a rapid increase in deaths of journalists not only in conflict zones but also journalists reporting on environmental issues have seen rapid increase of 42% from 2019-2024 (*"At Least 68 Journalist Killings in 2024, UNESCO Reports"*). Along with this, journalists receive threats that include online

harassment and cyber-attacks, which have especially escalated in this rapidly developing digital era.

Especially when talking about the digital era, Disinformation has become a major problem. Governments and other organizations often use fake news to spread propaganda and influence public opinion. Especially with the use of social media platforms, the speed at which disinformation can spread has reached an all-time high. This has led to people often questioning whether the information that they have received is credible or misinformation to influence their opinion, the digital revolution is only acting as a catalyst of this large problem of disinformation.

Global Trends

As stated before, the state of press freedom varies largely across the globe. Further, when looking at trends presented by the Reporters Without Borders (RSF), we can start to analyze some trends. Scandinavian nations such as Norway and Finland consistently rank the highest in terms of the press freedom index due to their legal protections and respect for journalistic independence. In contrast, developing nations, especially present in the Middle East and North Africa, suffer from restrictions that are driven by authoritarian governance, Conflict, and instability. Other trends, such as an increase in Disinformation, have been seen in recent years, especially since the creation of artificial intelligence and the use of “deepfakes.” the spread of disinformation has hit an all-time high in a number of years. Along with this, due to large conflict zones such as the Isreal-Palestine conflict and the Russia-Ukraine conflict (The most recognized ones), the large number of dangers that journalists face has been highlighted through these conflicts and their consequences.

Impact on society

The corruption of press freedom has clear consequences that could threaten entire democratic nations. Without a free press, the public will not be able to hold governments accountable. This simple expulsion of press freedom prevents a country from truly being democratic, without people knowing different factors about their own government, including the wrong and right actions they take, it can threaten our current day societies. Along with this, generally, the suppression of media is often accompanied by larger human rights abuses withholding information from the public, and in the long run, this could potentially lead to corruption and economic mismanagement. Which thrive in an environment where the press is silenced and censored according to the government’s needs. Finally, this lack of press freedom will eventually lead to a large amount of polarization. With a lack of reliable information, societies will begin to divide, and

this could potentially lead to a world led by factions, where information is withheld and censored upon will.

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Event
December 2 nd , 1766	The first globally recognized adaptation of Press freedom in Sweden.
1789	The French establishment of speech and press freedom
1791	The First amendment of the U.S constitution guarantees press freedom
1948	Adaptation of UDHR, specifies the safeguarding of freedom of expression
1966	The Internation Covenant on Civil and Political Rights is adopted, reinforces press freedom globally.
1980	UNESCO declares May 3 rd as World Press Day emphasizing the promotion of media rights
2002	Reporters without Borders publishes the World Press Freedom Index, assessing global press freedom
2024	550 Journalists currently imprisoned worldwide, highlighting the dangers of being a conflict journalist. (Reporter Without Borders)

Major Parties Involved

China

One of the largest countries in the world, China is a prime example of extensive state-controlled media and censorship practices. With being labeled as one of the world's most restrictive media environments, the Chinese government often uses lawsuits, arrests, and other means to force Chinese journalists and media organizations to censor themselves. With China blocking multiple Google services and U.S. websites, the Chinese media is extremely restrictive and well thought out.

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)

This independent, non-profit organization aims to promote press freedom worldwide. Based on research, CPJ gathers data about attacks on the press each year and documents them for further use. While continuously looking out for ways to combat this major issue of harassment against journalists. They aim to defend the right of journalists to report the news safely without fear of reprisal (Committee to Protect Journalists).

Mexico

With the trends increasing with the number of journalistic deaths, Mexico has been reported as one of the most dangerous countries for journalists. With extremely high levels of violence against reporters in the country due to internal conflicts and dangerous situations, Mexico can be used as a prime example to display the large number of dangers that come with becoming a conflict journalist.

Norway

With Norway being ranked 1/180 on the Press Freedom Index, Norway's legal framework is robust in making sure that press freedom is safeguarded. With strong public service broadcasters and a diversified private sector with publishing companies, Norway is ensuring that media pluralism is present throughout the country. Making sure all their citizens are kept well informed at all times with no censorship being involved.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF)

This international NGO advocates for press freedom, first assessing the press freedom index globally in 2002. The NGO aims to defend the right of every human being to have access to free and reliable information (Reporters without Borders). With principles such as mutual respect and transparency of decision-making, the RSF not only aims to inform the public but also monitors violations of different countries and informs the public about these violations.

UNESCO

UNESCO, or United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, promotes media development and safety for journalists. UNESCO has a specific mandate to promote "the free flow of ideas by word and image" and sees freedom of expression as an inalienable human right set down in Article 19 of the UDHR (Mfc).

Russia

Since the Russia-Ukraine war, Russia has almost blocked or banned all independent media organizations and has effectively declared them as "foreign agents." While all other media outlets still present in the country have been censored by the military. For example, western media outlets like BBC and Euronews are no longer accessible in the country to prevent Western influence in the Russian media. (RSF)

Possible Solutions

Strengthening Legal frameworks

Further advocating for more universal and global frameworks that explicitly aim to protect press freedom. The use and adaptation of prior frameworks, such as the Geneva Convention and the UDHR, should be emphasized in domestic legislation.

Combatting Impunity

Establishing independent judicial mechanisms that are specific to investigate and prosecute crimes against journalists to further help deter future violations. Potential consequences for countries that fail to protect journalists.

Protecting Journalists in conflict zones

With an alarming trend of an increasing number of journalists dying in areas of conflict, collaborating with international organizations, further establishing safe corridors, and providing resources for journalists working in high-risk environments.

Promoting Media pluralism

By further promoting media pluralism, governments can ensure that their citizens receive information from varying viewpoints and perspectives. By making it a mandate that there is a minimal number of new outlets or sources for a country, it can further ensure that all the news is not biased in a specific perspective and will remain objective in society.

Further Reading

1. [Why Is Freedom of The Press Important in a Democracy?](#)

While there are multiple dynamics to this topic, it is important to first understand the role of Press freedom in our current day society. To further help in this topic, a recommendation would be to read up on why press freedom is important in a democracy. This can significantly help in understanding the importance of debating this topic in the committee.

2. [Reporters without Borders](#)

Further reading up about RSF can emphasize how different nations combat the problem of press freedom, along with understanding how different political situations in different

countries can further affect this essential right. Understanding differences between countries like DPRK and the USA

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