



Freedom of Press



Freedom of press is defined as “the right to publish newspapers, magazines, books, etc. without government interference or prior censorship” (US definition). It is seen as a staple right in democratic countries and is often one of the first rights taken away in dictatorships. The 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights 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 regardless of frontiers”.

In America, freedom of press is protected by the constitution as the 1st Amendment. Throughout history, freedom of press has been removed or limited with key examples being Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia and Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. Dictators in the past have tried to abolish it because it gives the public the tools to spread their own opinions, which may differ drastically with the governments.

Recently, there have been many examples of violations such as the recent murder of Jamal Khashoggi, a vocal critic of the Saudi government, and the comments made by US President Donald Trump on the American press.

Since the start of 2017, there have been seven high profile murders of journalists in Europe alone though there are likely many more global incidents that go unaccounted. Murders of journalists are often made to look like suicide or accidents; it is quite common that very little evidence is found, which makes it hard to trace them back to the government, as was the case with Russian journalist Maksim Borodin who died after suspiciously falling out of a window in April 2018.

The murder of journalists is not the only problem as there is also the issue of the censoring of social media sites by governments as is the case in China.

Russia, China and North Korea are listed by Reporters Without Borders’ free press index as some of the worst countries regarding free press on the planet with Norway, Sweden, The Netherlands and Finland as being the top four best countries.

Points to consider:

- What is your country’s record or reputation regarding free press?
- What can be done to encourage or enforce free press?
- How can the UN protect free press without violating a nation’s sovereignty?
- Is there every any reason to take away freedom of press?

Useful links

- Reporters Without Borders: <https://rsf.org/en/ranking>

- UNESCO Freedom of Press: <https://en.unesco.org/themes/press-freedom-all-platforms>