

## A few useful expressions and references

The First Amendment to the US Constitution

The Fourth Estate / The Fourth Power

Quality papers vs the gutter press

Mainstream media / “legacy media” / alternative media sources

Tabloids / popular press ≠ quality papers / dailies

Holding accountable

Whistleblowers

The Pentagon Papers / The Watergate Scandal

Edward Snowden / Chelsea Manning / Julian Assange / Wikileaks / “The Fifth Estate” (film)

Reporters Without Borders / Press Freedom Index / World Press Freedom Day (May 3)

Investigative journalism

News deserts

Fact-checking / Fake news / Conspiracy theories

Post-truth / Confirmation bias / echo chambers / Siloing

SLAPPs

NPR / PBS

U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM) / Voice of America / [Kari Lake](#)

What has happened at [CBS](#) (Barri Weiss) / at [the Washington Post](#) (owned by Jeff Bezos) / at the [BBC](#) (Panorama)



# A transformative President

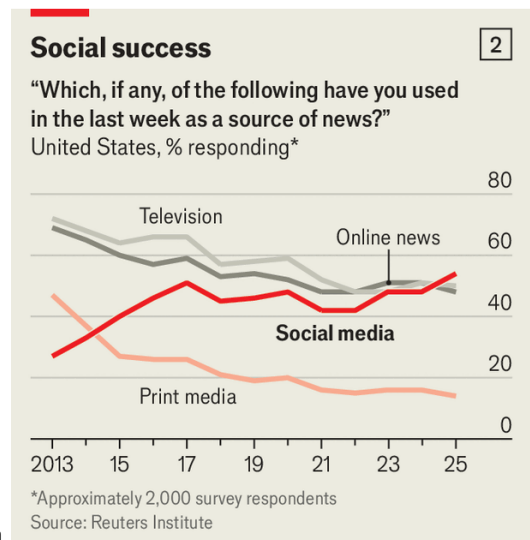
## Document 1 - Donald Trump is trying to silence his critics. He will fail

But the country could still lose

Leader - *The Economist*, September 25 2026



Illustration Doug Chayka



DONALD TRUMP hates being the butt of jokes; so his henchman seized on a slender pretext to get Jimmy Kimmel off late-night TV. The president is fed up with being criticised when he should be feted; so his lawyers 5 sued the *New York Times* for \$15bn. He sees everything as a fight; so his team want wealthy allies to buy control of the American arm of TikTok from its Chinese parent. These alarming skirmishes are part of a war against the American media. Yet Mr Trump has hardly enjoyed a 10 resounding success. Mr Kimmel is back on air; a federal judge laughed the lawsuit out of court; and who knows how obedient those multibillionaire tycoons will be.

It should not need saying in the home of the First Amendment, but a craven press leads inexorably to 15 rampant corruption, poor government and cynical, disaffected voters. In a country where elections are won by small margins, even a partially cowed or captured media could tip the scales. Yet wanting something is not the same as getting it. As Mr Kimmel and the rest show, 20 dominating America’s sprawling, unruly media and opinionated citizens will be hard.

Mr Trump’s desire to control what people see and read about him is obvious. He seems less motivated by the—once justified—conservative gripe that much of the 25 American media had a built-in soft-left bias than by the fact that he craves attention, and that he increasingly expects attention to mean adulation. His people prove their loyalty by striving to ensure he gets it.

They have some formidable weapons. One is a Trump 30 speciality: bullying and threats. The *Wall Street*

*Journal* has been sued too, for a scoop about Mr Trump and a dead sex-criminal, Jeffrey Epstein. So has the *Des Moines Register*, for a poll just before the 2024 election that had Mr Trump losing the vote in Iowa. The 35 Pentagon is curbing the freedom of correspondents to report, on pain of losing their credentials. Disney was attacked by Brendan Carr, the boss of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Liking what he saw, Mr Trump then suggested that television networks 40 which criticise him should lose their licences.

These cases are feeble in law, but they can have a chilling effect, as they are expensive to defend against. In 2008, 92% of America’s 100 largest newspapers by circulation endorsed a presidential candidate. Last year 45 three-quarters did not.

Another weapon is ownership. Mr Trump is the first American president to have his personal news service, Truth Social. Hungary under Viktor Orbán shows how friendly businessmen can bolster “official” news, either 50 out of conviction or a desire to trade favourable coverage for commercial advantage. X is owned by Elon Musk, who campaigned for Mr Trump. TikTok looks likely to come under the control of other allies, including the Ellisons and the Murdochs. David 55 Ellison’s purchase of Paramount and, potentially, Warner Bros Discovery would also give him control over CBS and CNN.

And a last weapon is the use of pressure points. Two networks, ABC and CBS, settled winnable multi- 60 million-dollar lawsuits with Mr Trump, because they

feared regulators' retribution that could cost them billions of dollars. Imagine that Alphabet and Meta were induced by a promise or threat to their artificial-intelligence businesses to ensure that YouTube and Instagram leaned towards MAGA. With the fate of the company at stake, wouldn't their duty to their shareholders be to fall into line?

All this is worrying, but Mr Trump is not as strong as he appears. Television news obsesses the elderly man with the remote in the White House, but it is vulnerable mostly because it is a declining industry. Outside debate season, CBS is a main source of political news for just 3% of Americans. The media conglomerates are focused instead on the streaming wars—one reason Disney reinstated Mr Kimmel was pressure from outraged "talent" in Hollywood. For newspapers, news and opinion is their main business. If they tough it out, they will win in court, and each time Mr Trump brings a nuisance libel case he will be further exposed as a vain bully.

America's media market is also hard to control because it is fragmented. In the Italy of Silvio Berlusconi only a few channels mattered and he owned nearly half of them. A market of 9.5m Hungarian-speakers is small enough to be captured. America is different. Moreover, each social-media network is itself a fragmented universe of individual content-providers. Unlike William Randolph Hearst, their proprietors cannot call

editors and tell them what to print—and the FCC has no jurisdiction. Algorithms can steer users, but to kill news one story at a time requires a Chinese-style army of censors. The Biden administration tried to get social networks to mute vaccine scepticism. It seems to have had the opposite effect.

Free speech in America is protected by a constitutional guarantee, a vast media market and the appetites of the half of the country that does not vote Trump. A captured media, if it were possible, would be a huge business opportunity for the other side. America has deep capital markets and lots of risk-takers. It has never been easier to start a video show or a podcast or publish words. Building new networks is hard, but look at Threads and TikTok as alternatives to X, or how the pecking order of social networks has changed in the past. As so often with Mr Trump, his great asset is speed. The courts follow procedure; businesses have to work out how to fight back; new ventures need time to get off the ground.

### Lights, camera, legal action

MAGA is unlikely to dominate America's media. Yet even if Mr Trump does not win his battle, America could still lose. In a fragmented attention economy the best way to break through is to call everything an apocalypse, urge revolution or denounce fascism. If all the rewards go to divisive political entertainment, then founding good government on a common understanding of facts becomes ever harder. America survived a partisan press in the 19th century; it will probably do so in the 21st. But the vaudevillianisation of the public square is a heavy burden on an overburdened democracy. ■

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## The Long Read - Can Donald Trump muzzle America's press? See LONG FILE

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He has bullied some outlets, but intimidating them all is a daunting task

*The Economist*, Sep 25th 2025

*Editor's note: On September 25th Donald Trump signed an executive order approving a deal that would allow TikTok to continue operating in America.*

In ONE RESPECT the 170m Americans who use TikTok can breathe a sigh of relief: they should soon be able to scroll freely without any risk that the Chinese government meddles with what they see. On September 19th President Donald Trump said that he and his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, had agreed in principle for a group of American investors to buy a controlling stake in the video app's US operations. The deal fulfils the requirements of a law passed last year to protect Americans from "foreign adversary controlled applications". To shield TikTok from government interference, it is to be put in American hands.

Some may detect an irony in that. In the very week that Mr Trump delivered TikTok from the threat of manipulation by the Chinese government, he intensified his own government's efforts to control America's media. "They give me only bad publicity...I would think maybe their licence should be taken

away," he said of America's broadcast television networks. It was not idle talk. The previous day the Trump-appointed head of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which issues such licences, had threatened to investigate Jimmy Kimmel, a chat-show host, for making "truly sick" remarks about the murder of Charlie Kirk, a pro-Trump activist. Shortly afterwards Disney, Mr Kimmel's employer, took him off air.

Print media are also under fire. The president is suing three newspapers for their coverage of him (one dared to publish an opinion poll suggesting that he might lose a state in last year's elections). On September 20th the Department of Defence said reporters must sign a pledge not to obtain or use unauthorised material, on pain of having their press credentials revoked. It is not quite the Chinese Communist Party. Nor, however, is it the vibrant free press that once thrilled European observers like Alexis de Tocqueville. In a

recent press-freedom ranking by Reporters Without Borders, a pressure group, America came 57th, below most of Europe. Worse, the structure of the media happens to be shifting just as Mr Trump attempts to impose his will, giving him added opportunity to bully and cajole. As Americans' viewing, listening and reading habits change, the firms that provide them with news and entertainment are restructuring and consolidating in response. Since government officials have to approve many of the resulting transactions, Mr Trump finds himself with extra leverage. And yet in the long run, the rapid evolution of the media, and especially the rise of social-media platforms, with their profusion of ideas and opinions, makes America's media dauntingly hard to control.

### **Sharp suits**

Mr Trump's relationship with the press has long been turbulent. In the past decade he or his businesses have been involved in at least 34 media or defamation lawsuits, according to a tally by Axios, a news organisation (and one of many defendants). Nor is his threatening language new: during his previous term as president and during last year's election campaign he often threatened reprisals for unflattering coverage and encouraged supporters to hector reporters at his events.

Yet a few things make his attacks more effective now than in the past. One is a shift in public attitudes. Polls show that Americans' faith in journalists has eroded. In 2016, when Mr Trump was first elected president, 76% of Americans said they trusted national news organisations, according to the Pew Research Centre. Today the figure is 67%; among conservative Republicans it has fallen below half. This means not only that there is less public opposition to Mr Trump's broadsides against the media (a recent poll found that Mr Kimmel, for example, is trusted by only 52% of Americans). It also suggests that his speculative lawsuits, designed mainly to harass critics, have more bite than they used to. (...)

The crisis of trust is also dissuading some newspapers from criticising politicians. Citing polarisation among their readers, McClatchy, Gannett and Alden Global Capital—three of the biggest newspaper chains—have reduced or removed political editorials from their titles. In 2008 all but eight of America's 100 highest-circulation newspapers endorsed a presidential candidate, according to Harvard University's Nieman Journalism Lab. Last year around three-quarters stayed quiet.

Mr Trump is also being empowered by changes in media ownership. Hollywood media firms are rapidly pairing up in order to achieve the scale needed to survive the so-called streaming wars. Disney bought most of 21st Century Fox in 2019. Amazon swallowed Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in 2022. In August Paramount Global merged with Skydance, a company controlled by the Ellison family. The Ellisons are now said to be preparing a bid for Warner Bros Discovery, which would create one of the largest companies in Hollywood.

These mergers give Mr Trump a powerful lever. Big acquisitions need the blessing of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), an antitrust regulator whose boss is appointed by the president. Deals involving broadcast TV also need permission from the FCC. The federal government thus has a veto over big media mergers, which seems to be helping Mr Trump win editorial concessions. Skydance's merger with Paramount was delayed until Paramount paid Mr Trump \$16m to settle his complaint

about an episode of CBS News's "60 Minutes", which he argued (preposterously) had been edited in a biased way. Disney took Mr Kimmel's show off the air after Nexstar and Sinclair, two of its affiliate networks, said they would not broadcast the show. Nexstar is seeking the FCC's approval to buy Tegna, a rival; Sinclair is said to be exploring mergers that would also require the FCC's permission.

Media firms are walking a tightrope between provoking Mr Trump and angering the liberal-leaning "talent" on whom they depend. Mr Kimmel's suspension proved a step too far for Disney: after hundreds of celebrities signed a letter of protest and Bob Iger, Disney's boss, faced sudden hostility in liberal Hollywood ("Neville Chamberlain in a cashmere sweater" was one of the more polite insults), Mr Kimmel was reinstated on September 22nd. Others are trying to pre-empt trouble. Paramount is said to be considering Bari Weiss\*, an opinionated journalist with no television experience, for a big role at CBS (and perhaps CNN, which the firm would also own if the Warner acquisition goes ahead). (...)

Mr Trump's molestation of the media follows a well-established pattern. Other democratically elected leaders with authoritarian instincts have used similar methods to cow critical outlets in recent years, with great success. In India, for instance, Narendra Modi, the prime minister, has harnessed government advertising, bureaucratic harassment and mob pressure to subdue a previously fissionary press. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey's president, has wielded spurious prosecutions to much the same end.

Perhaps the paragon of this strategy is Viktor Orban, the prime minister of Hungary. He has encouraged friendly moguls to buy up some unfriendly media firms, initiated investigations or prosecutions of others and personally sued still more. The country's last independent radio station, Klubradio, had its broadcast licence revoked in 2021 for such grave transgressions as filing some paperwork late and playing slightly less than the required amount of Hungarian music one day.

### **Shard truths**

Clearly, Mr Trump's tactics owe something to these pioneers. Yet taming America's media is an especially tricky task. The current consolidation notwithstanding, American media ownership is more dispersed than in most countries, according to the Global Media and Internet Concentration Project, a Canadian research organisation. It rates ownership of media brands in America as less than half as concentrated as in France and Italy, and a third as much as in Canada (see chart 1).



Chart: The Economist

The same changes in the industry that are giving Mr Trump more influence are also making it harder for him—or anyone—to control the media. The news is fast moving online, where keeping a lid on speech is like “trying to nail jello to the wall”, in the words of Bill Clinton, a former president. Social media have overtaken television and the web as Americans’ main source of news, according to Oxford University’s Reuters Institute (see chart 2). In the past four years the share who get news from YouTube has risen from under a quarter to a third. Even on conventional television sets, YouTube is the main channel, accounting for 13.4% of Americans’ viewing hours, ahead of Disney’s 9.4%, according to Nielsen, which measures such things.

Online media are harder to control in two ways. One constraint is legal: the FCC has little authority in cyberspace. The other is practical: whereas it may be possible to keep half a dozen TV news networks in line, no one can silence the billions of people posting on social networks. Claiming a scalp like Mr Kimmel’s is less valuable now that he has thousands of imitators on YouTube. (Indeed, one reason Disney was willing to suspend him may be that chat shows like his are losing audience to online alternatives like “Hot Ones” and “Chicken Shop Date”.) Stars who are cancelled by their employers can set up shop online, as Tucker Carlson did on X after being dropped by Fox, and as Ms Weiss did on Substack after quitting the *New York Times*. It has never been easier to publish or broadcast—and thus never harder to silence an idea.

This swelling army of amateur anchormen and women has no firm political allegiance. An analysis last year by Pew of “news influencers”—defined as people with 100,000 or more followers who talk about current affairs—found that 21% were leftish and 27% were rightish but almost half had no clear leanings. Joe Rogan, the most popular podcaster, is a case in point. Although he endorsed Mr Trump last year, he also once voiced support for Bernie Sanders, an ardent left-winger.

### Algorithm and blues

Even so, the rise of new media channels will give only limited comfort to those who worry about the freedom of the press. Viewers may treat YouTube and TikTok as substitutes for old-school television, but they provide quite different things. A study by Pew during the 2020 election campaign found that Americans who got their news mainly from cable TV were twice as likely to be politically well-informed as those who got it from social media (those who mainly read news sites were the most clued-up of all). Social networks have learned that users prefer a feed that is rich in entertainment. A study of Facebook users in 2020 found that those whose newsfeed was algorithmically sorted—with content selected by Facebook—saw 13% less political material than those who had a straightforward chronological feed.

What is more, the owners of digital media may be no harder to manipulate than their analogue counterparts. The new media moguls of Silicon Valley seem more eager to please Mr Trump than the high-ups of Hollywood. Tech’s high command, from Jeff Bezos of Amazon to Elon Musk of X, flanked Mr Trump at his inauguration in January, with some letting it be known that they had made personal donations to the festivities. Apple has even presented Mr Trump with a little gold trophy for his contribution to American manufacturing.



Illustration: Doug Chayka

Some of Mr Trump’s support in Silicon Valley comes from conviction. Many tech types complain that Democrats suffocate innovation through overregulation. But the friendly reception from new media owners also reflects the fact that they have a lot to lose from Mr Trump. Fast-growing tech companies frequently attract the attention of antitrust regulators: Meta and Google are both in the middle of trials regarding their social media and advertising businesses. AI may provoke more regulatory intervention, on everything from copyright to national security. Tariffs on imported components, or restrictions on exports, can make or break gadget-makers.

Added to this, tech firms’ media interests are in most cases small parts of their overall business. Mr Musk bought Twitter, as it was then known, for \$44bn. That is about a tenth of the present value of his rocket firm, SpaceX, which relies on launch permits from the Federal Aviation Administration and radio bandwidth permissions from the FCC, and about 3% of the value of Tesla, his carmaker, whose fortunes depend in large part on Mr Trump’s relationship with Mr Xi. Amazon Prime Video and Apple TV+ are tiny units of giant owners. Even mighty YouTube accounted for only about 15% of the revenue last year of its parent company, Alphabet.

The disparity in value means that these new media owners have even less reason to stand up to presidential pressure.

Paramount may have agonised over whether to sell out journalists at “60 Minutes” in order to complete its \$8bn merger with Skydance. Apple probably did not need to think very hard about whether to part company two years ago with Jon Stewart, a politically provocative comedian, in order not to threaten its \$400bn-a-year tech empire. For leaders of publicly traded companies, folding to Mr Trump is more or less a fiduciary duty. Many bosses privately lament that sucking up to the president is the single most useful thing an executive in America today can do.

Owners of social networks have less direct control over content than old-media companies. Whereas Disney or Paramount can fire their stars or cancel shows, Mark Zuckerberg has limited sway over what Facebook’s 3bn users post. Yet the algorithmic promotion of content gives platforms’ owners influence. Perhaps the clearest example is how Twitter has changed since Mr Musk bought it and renamed it X. X’s algorithm seems less likely to promote links to mainstream media than in the past. A study by Burak Özturan of Northeastern University and colleagues found that the average quality of news sources shared on the platform—as defined by Newsguard, which rates the reliability of online sources—fell during Mr Musk’s first six months in charge. X’s audience has also changed under Mr Musk. When he \* Barri Weiss has since been appointed at CBS

bought Twitter, in October 2022, it was used by 38% of Democrats and 26% of Republicans. Today it is used by 26% of Democrats and 32% of Republicans, according to the Civic Health and Institutions Project, a joint initiative of Harvard, Northeastern, Rochester and Rutgers universities.

That is why much could depend on who owns America’s version of TikTok. Details of the deal had not yet been announced and may not even have been finalised with China, when this article was published. The White House has said that 80% of the new company will be held by a group of American investors. The group is said to include Oracle, controlled by the Ellisons, and Fox, controlled by the Murdoch family. TikTok’s new owners would reportedly copy the app’s recommendation algorithm from ByteDance, its Chinese owner, and retrain it under the supervision of America’s government.

At the moment, TikTok is the only large social network where left-wing “news influencers” outnumber right-wing ones, according to Pew. Mr Musk’s stewardship of X shows how that could change. As part of their deal, TikTok’s new owners are said to be paying a multibillion-dollar fee to the government for arranging the sale. It remains to be seen what else they may feel they owe to Mr Trump. ■

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## Document 2 - World Press Freedom Index 2025 by

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[Reporters sans frontières](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZFZ_QiXqWQ&ab_channel=Reporterssansfronti%C3%A8res)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZFZ\\_QiXqWQ&ab\\_channel=Reporterssansfronti%C3%A8res](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZFZ_QiXqWQ&ab_channel=Reporterssansfronti%C3%A8res)

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## Document 1 b- Europe leads world in media freedom rankings — but Greece trails again

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[www.politico.eu](http://www.politico.eu), May 2, 2025

Europe has the freest media in the world according to Reporters Without Borders’ annual press freedom ranking — though Southern and Eastern Europe are lagging behind the rest of the continent and the world overall is struggling.

The RSF World Press Freedom Index released its yearly report and map on Friday, and it’s particularly good news 5 for journalists in the Nordics and Baltics.

The top 15 countries were all in Europe, with Norway scoring the highest, followed by Estonia, the Netherlands, Sweden, Finland and Denmark. Norway frequently tops press freedom rankings, with robust legal protections and a thriving media market.

France (25) and Italy (49) both dropped several places compared to 2024, while the United Kingdom (20) improved 10 slightly and Poland (31) leaped more than a dozen spots.

Greece recorded the worst result in the European Union for the fourth year in a row, coming in at 89. The main reasons for its lackluster score include wiretapping of journalists by intelligence agencies using Predator spyware, government interference, intimidatory lawsuits and inadequate legal guardrails.

Its Balkan neighbors also fared poorly, with Croatia (60), Bosnia (86), Serbia (96) and Kosovo (99) all among the 15 worst in Europe.

For the first time since the index’s inception in 2002, the average score out of 100 fell below 55, with journalism conditions classified as “difficult” or “very serious” in more than half of all countries assessed. RSF cited economic instability and media concentration as factors contributing to a worsening press freedom climate.

In the Middle East, dozens of reporters have been killed during Israel’s military assault in Gaza, the organization 20 said. Iran, Syria, China, North Korea and Eritrea were ranked the five worst countries in the world to be a journalist, with non-existent press freedom.

The United States fell two places to 57. President Donald Trump’s administration is bringing about a “troubling deterioration” through funding cuts to public media and foreign aid, RSF added.

Here is *The Guardian*’s series of report published on World Press Freedom Day  
<https://www.theguardian.com/media/world-press-freedom-day-2025>

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**DOCUMENT 3 · NBC, “NPR CEO warns public broadcasting cuts will cause ‘stations to go dark’ as soon as next quarter”, July 17, 2025.**

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<https://youtu.be/ygsljPr9fmQ> (8 minutes)

*N.B.: The House of Representatives voted in favour of the rescission bill on 18 July. It became law following the President’s signature on 24 July.*

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**DOCUMENT 4 · PBS, “CBS says Colbert cancelation was financial decision”, July 19, 2025.**

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<https://youtu.be/J5dkwpS0QHo> (9 minutes)

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**DOCUMENT 5 · PBS, “Political cartoonists on navigating a changing media landscape”, April 26, 2025.**

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[https://youtu.be/36\\_y5p2-J3M](https://youtu.be/36_y5p2-J3M) (8 minutes)

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**Document 6 - As U.S. Dismantles Voice of America, Rival Powers Hope to Fill the Void**

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Tiffany Hsu, *The New York Times*, June 27, 2025 (abridged)

America’s rivals celebrated as the Trump administration set out to dismantle its global influence and information infrastructure, including the media outlets that had helped market the United States as the world’s moral and cultural authority.

5 The editor in chief of RT, the Kremlin-backed news network, crowed about President Trump’s “awesome decision” to shut down Voice of America, the federally funded network that reports in countries with limited press freedom. “Today is a holiday for me and my colleagues!”

10 Hu Xijin, a former editor in chief of China’s state-run outlet Global Times, wrote that the paralysis of Voice of America and Radio Free Asia was “really gratifying” and, he hoped, “irreversible.” A top aide to Prime Minister Viktor Orban of Hungary posted that he “couldn’t be happier” about the administration’s move in February to gut the agency that distributed foreign media funding. Officials in Cambodia and Cuba also welcomed the cuts.

15 In the months since, China, Russia and other U.S. rivals have moved to commandeer the communications space abandoned by the Americans. They have pumped more money into their own global media endeavors, expanded social outreach programs abroad and cranked up the volume when publicizing popular cultural exports. Foreign policy experts say the Trump administration is not just losing its grip on the global megaphone but handing it off to its eager adversaries. In doing so, they said, the United States is relinquishing its primacy as a global influencer and neglecting its defenses against the damaging narratives and disinformation that could fill the vacuum.

“What we’re doing, in a sense, is playing into their hands,” said Catherine Luther, a professor at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, who has studied Russian influence. “These states tend to be the leaders in creating the playbook for other countries to use.”

20 The White House did not respond to a request for comment.

The United States was a pioneer of global message management, carefully cultivating its international reputation using movies, music, news, and other totems of culture and media to project aspirational American appeal. Supporting communications — through programs like Voice of America and grants for local independent outlets — has always been a key component of that so-called soft power.

25 But since January, the Trump administration has shut down a foreign influence task force at the Federal Bureau of Investigation, closed a State Department office that tracked and countered global disinformation, and crippled other teams that helped safeguard the American brand from overseas falsehoods and malign propaganda campaigns. A former

Trump speechwriter who is currently acting as the under secretary for public diplomacy, a role intended to engage and understand foreign audiences, once posted that “competent white men must be in charge if you want things to work.”

30 The agency overseeing government-funded media outlets like the Radio Free stations and Voice of America, which reached hundreds of millions of people internationally each week, was gutted. A White House press officer reacted on X with a post listing “goodbye” in 20 languages. (A federal appeals court in Washington ruled last month that the Trump administration could continue for now to withhold funding from the stations, which have scaled back their operations. Instead, experts said, the Trump administration is focusing on other expressions of might, such as economic pressure and military force.)

35 “The soft power suicide of the U.S. will be incomprehensible to future historians who will be dumbfounded in their attempts to explain why the global leader voluntarily wrecked one of its greatest national assets,” wrote Jamie Shea, a British former official at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and current senior fellow at Friends of Europe, a research institution. [...]

40 For decades, the United States telegraphed its influence and values abroad using an older communications infrastructure built on radio and text, and was slow to embrace the digital platforms that now connect much of the world. Voice of America has 727,000 followers on Instagram, where its last post is from 14 weeks ago, and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty’s English language account has 44,500 (although there are 17.4 million total followers across the network’s various language services). One of the accounts for China’s Xinhua News has 1.6 million followers, and BBC News has 29.2 million.

45 “When you declare ‘America First’ and you start berating your allies and friendly countries, you lose trust and you lose attraction,” Joseph S. Nye Jr., the American political scientist who coined the term “soft power,” said in an online briefing in March. (Mr. Nye died in May.) [...]

●You can also listen to this show on France Culture

**Soft power : la fin du rêve américain ?** <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/serie-soft-power-la-fin-du-reve-americain>

Alors qu’elles garantissent l’attractivité et le rayonnement de la nation états-unienne, les institutions du “soft power” sont désormais systématiquement attaquées et affaiblies par le gouvernement de Donald Trump.

**Episode ¼ Médias : Les Etats-Unis perdent leur voix**

## **Document 7 - Les insoutenables images des crimes à Minneapolis sont au cœur d’une guerre visuelle entre Trump et ses opposants »**

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**Chronique** Michel Guerrin, Rédacteur en chef au « Monde »

**Le Monde**, 6 février 2026

*En manipulant les photos et vidéos de la mort de Renee Good et d’Alex Pretti, en janvier dans le Minnesota, pour dédouaner les agents fédéraux qui les ont tués, le président américain et son entourage cherchent à légitimer leur action. Dans le camp opposé, pour les citoyens qui filment ces exactions, il s’agit de défendre la démocratie, observe Michel Guerrin, rédacteur en chef au « Monde » dans sa chronique.*

« Nous sommes tous de grands photographes », écrivions-nous en 2005, constatant que nombre d’événements dramatiques étaient captés ou filmés par des témoins au téléphone portable : attentats du 11 septembre 2001 aux Etats-Unis, capture de Saddam Hussein en 2003 en Irak, tsunami en Asie en 2004... Le phénomène est devenu exponentiel. Il prend une tournure citoyenne à Minneapolis (Minnesota), où des hommes et des femmes brandissent leur téléphone pour enregistrer la façon dont les agents fédéraux de la police de l’immigration (ICE)

arrêtent des migrants. Ou tuent une mère de famille et un infirmier.

Renee Good et Alex Pretti étaient des « ICE Watchers » (des « observateurs de l’ICE »). Leur mort, en janvier, a été enregistrée par d’autres citoyens, prenant des risques comme le reporter à la guerre. Les documents visuels sont diffusés dans le monde entier mais surtout, et comme jamais, ils sont épluchés, décryptés, affirmés, contestés, manipulés. Le phénomène est tel qu’il n’est pas illégitime de dire que les insoutenables images des crimes à Minneapolis sont au cœur d’une guerre visuelle entre le président américain, Donald Trump, et ses opposants. Une guerre où tous les coups sont permis, avec la vérité pour enjeu.

Un gros enjeu. Ce sont les images de la mort de Renee Good et d’Alex Pretti qui ont provoqué une indignation américaine et mondiale, jusqu’à ébranler des élus républicains. Sans elles, que se serait-il passé ? Le

gouverneur du Minnesota, le démocrate Tim Walz, a répondu à sa façon : « *Thank God, we have video.* » Dieu merci, nous avons la vidéo.

### Débat brouillé

Mais voilà, les images sont chaotiques, parfois lointaines ou lacunaires. De quoi infuser le doute, ce qui renvoie à une riche littérature depuis les années 1980, portée par le philosophe Jean Baudrillard ou l'essayiste Susan Sontag, pour qui une image n'est la preuve de rien, tout juste une pièce à conviction parmi d'autres, un langage de signes et d'émotion dont il faut se méfier, qui en dit souvent plus sur celui ou celle qui regarde que sur le motif représenté. On pense encore à une boutade de Jean-Luc Godard, pour qui une photo est si incertaine qu'elle compte moins que la légende qu'on lui colle.



Des agents de l'ICE, filmés par des riverains, établissent un périmètre de sécurité après la crevaison d'un pneu de leur véhicule, à Minneapolis (Minnesota), le 5 février 2026. STEPHEN MATUREN/GETTY IMAGES/AFP

C'était il y a quarante ans. Alors aujourd'hui... Le débat est désormais intensément brouillé par les réseaux sociaux et l'intelligence artificielle (IA). Les images de la mort d'Alex Pretti ont été manipulées, certaines pour dénoncer un infirmier dangereux, d'autres pour s'indigner de son exécution. Les traficotages ont jeté la suspicion sur les images authentiques, jusqu'à celles où l'infirmier, une semaine avant sa mort, donne des coups de pied dans une voiture de l'ICE. Ce tohu-bohu visuel est du pain béni pour Trump et ses lieutenants, invitant à ne plus rien regarder, estimant que le contexte l'emporte sur les faits, et donc que Renee Good et Alex Pretti sont des terroristes. Pour que ce récit vole en éclats, il faut des images ultra-crédibles. Ce fut le job de l'équipe des enquêtes visuelles du *New York Times* (avec plusieurs articles entre le 24 et le 26 janvier), d'autres médias aussi, que de reconstituer la mort d'Alex Pretti à partir de six vidéos de la fusillade et d'une douzaine d'autres juste avant et après : images assemblées et synchronisées, détails visuels et sonores décryptés – mouvements des mains, paroles, gestes, postures, positions du corps, orientation des armes –, dizaines de témoignages recueillis.

Conclusion ? Le récit de Trump est « *tout simplement invraisemblable* », a reconnu le *Wall Street Journal*, proche des républicains. Même l'opinion américaine, qui nage en plein marigot d'images fausses, croit qu'Alex

Pretti tient un smartphone et non une arme lorsqu'il est tué de dix balles dans le dos et que Renee Good est exécutée au volant de sa voiture sans menacer personne. C'est un petit miracle au moment où Alon Yamin, PDG de Copyleaks, qui propose des outils permettant de détecter la présence d'IA dans les contenus, constate, dans le *New York Times* du 4 février, un « *effondrement de l'authenticité* ».

### Film d'action

Il est vrai que des millions de gens ont vu d'autres images tout aussi accablantes, devenues des emblèmes de la violence d'Etat : le petit Liam Conejo Ramos, 5 ans, pris en main par l'ICE à la sortie de l'école avec son bonnet bleu, le regard vide, servant d'appât pour arrêter son père, le 20 janvier ; ou ce manifestant tenu violemment au sol par deux agents, le 21 janvier à Minneapolis, quand un troisième lui asperge le visage de gaz poivre.

L'avenir dira si le président américain a perdu cette guerre visuelle alors qu'il vient de demander à 700 agents de l'ICE de quitter la ville et d'accepter que les 2 000 restant sur place soient bientôt équipés de caméras corporelles. Ce qui est sûr, c'est que Trump s'évertue à donner une image forte aux expulsions, persuadé que le peuple américain y est favorable à condition que le récit ne finisse pas par la mort.

Le *Washington Post* du 23 décembre 2025 le confirme dans un article édifiant titré « *C'est une guerre* ». A l'automne 2025, la Maison Blanche a diffusé des vidéos dignes d'un film d'action, réalisées par des vidéastes rompus à l'exercice, montrant des arrestations – en escamotant les femmes – menées par les agences ICE et DHS (le département de la sécurité intérieure) sur de la musique rap. Une photo totalisant plus de 45 millions de vues, diffusée sur le compte TikTok de la Maison Blanche (et depuis supprimée sans explication) représentait une personne arrêtée et en pleurs avec cette légende : « *Ah, ce sentiment d'expulsion...* »

Bouclons la boucle. Lors des attentats du 11 septembre 2001, quand des avions ont détruit les tours jumelles du World Trade Center, à New York, tuant près de 3 000 personnes, des milliers de photos et de vidéos, prises essentiellement par des amateurs, ont été réunies dans une exposition fleuve et un livre, *Here Is New York. A Democracy of Photographs* (Scalo, 2002, non traduit). L'événement s'apparentait à un mémorial de la douleur américaine, sans montrer les morts, plutôt les ruines monumentales en symbole d'une nation soudée. L'ICE, créée à la suite de cet attentat, est confrontée également à la diffusion de photos et de vidéos d'amateurs. Mais l'objectif de ces dernières images, tout aussi existentiel, n'a plus rien à voir : défendre la démocratie en montrant les morts d'un pays fracturé.

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**Document 8 - Trump just got much closer to bringing CNN to heel**


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With David Ellison's Paramount Skydance poised to buy Warner Bros Discovery, the president is tightening his grip on the US media

Margaret Sullivan, *The Guardian*, Sat 28 Feb 2026

For many years, Donald Trump has trashed CNN and has taught his loyal followers to do the same.

During the 2016 presidential campaign, angry chants of “CNN sucks!” reverberated at his campaign rallies, and he still jumps at every opportunity to disparage star CNN journalists such as Kaitlan Collins.

He charges that the cable network is dishonest and biased against him, although in truth, the network goes out of its way to give voice to his lies with pro-Trump pundits like Scott Jennings.

But now, for Trump, a greater relief may be within his grasp. On Thursday, his rich and powerful friends at Paramount Skydance moved closer to acquiring CNN's parent company, Warner Bros Discovery.

It's not yet a done deal and there are regulatory battles ahead, especially as state attorneys general get involved, but, for Trump and his allies, the signs are encouraging.

In simplest terms, Paramount managed to send another suitor packing. Netflix already had the approval of the Warner Bros board, and it looked for a while as if the entertainment giant would withstand a renewed bidding war.

But on Thursday, Netflix dropped its bid. The decision-makers walked away, saying it would have been nice to make the deal but not an absolute necessity.

We don't know exactly what went on behind the scenes, but it certainly appears that Trump had a hand in the way this has played out so far.

Netflix CEO, Ted Sarandos, went to the White House just days ago to meet with top Trump aides. It's hard to know to what extent influence was exerted, but something changed.

Meanwhile, Trump remains chummy with those who control Paramount Skydance – its CEO, David Ellison, and his father, Larry, the Oracle co-founder and one of the richest people on earth, sometimes described as a “centibillionaire”.

These involvements are troubling, said Courtney Radsch, who directs the Center for Journalism and Liberty at the Open Markets Institute, a non-profit that advocates for democratic governance and commercial competition.

“There certainly appears to be an unprecedented level of politically motivated involvement as Trump seeks to defang major news networks,” Radsch told me in an interview on Friday.

That defanging was under way long before this development. Trump has been busy suing news organizations, including Disney-owned ABC News, and happily taking their settlements as he crows about his victories. His mutually beneficial relationships with billionaires, including the Washington Post owner, Jeff Bezos, have chipped away at editorial independence, as when Bezos spiked a Post

editorial endorsement of Kamala Harris just days before the 2024 presidential election.

And consider what has happened at CBS, whose parent company is none other than Paramount Skydance. The network's storied news division – once home to icons of integrity such as Walter Cronkite and Edward R Murrow – is newly run by Bari Weiss, a broadcasting neophyte who has earned Trump's praise.

*What's the ultimate goal here? Nothing less than control of the news media for partisan political purposes*

Under her direction, CBS News has taken a rightward turn, becoming something of a Fox News Lite.

Trump probably would like nothing more than to see Weiss – or someone just as pliant – expand her empire, thus bringing CNN to heel.

What's the ultimate goal here? Nothing less than control of the news media for partisan political purposes, much in the manner of authoritarian governments around the world and throughout history.

A case in point: Viktor Orbán, the Hungarian prime minister, who undermined independent journalism as he moved the country away from democracy and toward its current state of authoritarian rule.

“Trump wants to control the news and his justice department has been largely purged of anyone who might ask too many questions of a deal like this,” said Craig Aaron, the co-CEO of Free Press, a media-reform organization that has published the “media capitulation index” which ranks the independence, or lack thereof, of media organizations (not to be confused with the Weiss-founded publication the Free Press).

That index, notably, gave Netflix high grades for relative independence, and Paramount very low grades.

Those who oppose media consolidation didn't like either the Netflix or the Paramount acquisition of Warner Bros Discovery, since it undercuts competition and puts more power in fewer (richer) hands.

But at least in the Netflix plan, CNN would have been spun off into a separate organization, a preferable outcome for editorial independence.

The Ellisons already have shown what their control of a news organization yields – a Trump-friendlier, more political CBS News. One journalist who recently left the network lamented in her farewell note to colleagues that editorial decisions increasingly are based on a “shifting set of ideological expectations” that cause self-censorship.

In the not-so-distant past, a monster deal like this one could easily get tripped up over antitrust concerns and regulatory roadblocks. That's still possible.

But given the political forces at play – included a weaponized and corrupted justice department – Paramount Skydance is likely to prevail.

In an America that looks ever more like an oligarchy, that means Trump will, too.

## About the Washington Post

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### Document 9 - Jeff Bezos gutted the Washington Post. Can he revive it?

*Billionaire hopes that culling hundreds of journalists will stem heavy losses and refocus the struggling newspaper*  
*The Financial Times*, FEB 6 2026

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As rumours of job cuts swirled at the Washington Post in recent weeks, critics of Jeff Bezos zeroed in on the newspaper's owner as the archetype of a disconnected billionaire.

While staff pleaded online for him to "Save the Post", posting photos from war zones, he was photographed at Paris Fashion Week parties with his wife, former journalist Lauren Sánchez.

The tension crystallised this week when the newspaper fired about 300 of its roughly 800 journalists, one of the largest single-day cullings at a US news organisation in recent memory.

It was a hammer-blow moment for a newspaper steeped in history but imperilled by financial losses and, staff argue, strategic failures by Bezos and chief executive Will Lewis. Marty Baron, editor-in-chief when Bezos bought the Post for \$250mn in 2013, blamed the Amazon founder for much of the paper's recent trouble.

Bezos's behaviour and "cosying up to Trump" had "damaged the brand of the Washington Post", Baron said in an interview.

Bezos had a prime seat at Donald Trump's swearing-in last year, while Amazon gave \$1mn to the president's inauguration fund and paid \$40mn for a film about Melania Trump.

"People are disgusted by it," Baron said. "No matter how great the reporting is, when people see [Bezos] up there with Trump, when they see Amazon paying a ridiculous price for a ridiculous documentary by Melania Trump, no matter what you're doing, a lot of readers are going to say: 'I don't trust this guy'."

A person close to Bezos said he remained committed to the Post and had no plans to sell it. The person did not respond to criticism that Bezos's decisions had contributed to the paper's losses, or questions about his involvement in strategic decisions.

People familiar with the thinking of the paper's leadership said that even a billionaire owner had grown weary of absorbing losses at the Post. "They want to stop losing money and everything they have tried has failed," one person said, arguing that drastic cuts were unavoidable as audiences for some parts of the paper continued to shrink.

The newspaper's management found areas such as its well-regarded sports desk, enterprise journalism and the paper's extensive foreign bureaus were not being well read, another added. "Long form, 2,000-word sports reports on a local basketball team are not wanted any more."

The Post does not disclose financial figures. People familiar with the matter said it was losing about \$100mn a year.

People close to management said the newspaper was aiming to break even by the end of the year, which could then unlock fresh funding from Bezos, who would be more willing to back a self-sustaining business. "It's a clear path now to break even this year and to get fresh capital to grow," one person said.

Baron said he had heard Bezos had received multiple overtures from potential buyers for the Post in recent years but had rejected them.

A protester outside the Washington Post's offices after the job cuts were announced © Ken Cedeno/Reuters

Another person close to management described the challenge more bluntly: costs were "out of control", adding that both staff productivity and audiences had halved over the past five years — an unsustainable combination.

Former and current staff dispute that diagnosis, arguing that management decisions have deepened the paper's woes and questioning the need and wisdom of the latest in a series of newsroom overhauls since Lewis took over in 2023.

A day after the Washington Post Guild accused Bezos of abandoning the mission that had defined the paper "for generations", protesters rallied outside the newspaper's downtown Washington headquarters, one holding a sign that said: "What the F Jeff?!"

When journalists, including correspondents in Ukraine and Pulitzer Prize winners with decades-long tenures, received news of their firing by email, many turned to social media to describe the impact of the job losses.

Caroline O'Donovan, a technology reporter, noted the irony of being laid off after years of covering Amazon for a newspaper owned by its founder. Lizzie Johnson, a Kyiv-based correspondent, said she was dismissed while reporting from a war zone.

When Bezos acquired the Post from its previous owners, the Graham family, who oversaw the outlet when it published its Watergate investigation in the 1970s, he said “the paper’s duty will remain to its readers and not to the private interests of its owners”.

But after a renaissance period during the first Trump administration, the Post struggled to keep up momentum. The paper has been hit hard by industry headwinds, such as declining web traffic as social media platforms pulled back from news and Google introduced AI summaries. Executive editor Matt Murray said search traffic had nearly halved over the past three years.

Bezos faced a torrent of criticism in late 2024, after the newspaper pulled its endorsement for a presidential candidate just days before the US election. A reported 250,000 subscribers cancelled their subscriptions in the days after the decision. “It’s really hard to get hundreds of thousands to subscribe in the first place, and to lose them overnight was devastating to the Post,” Baron said.

The next year, Bezos came under fire again when he intervened in the newspaper’s opinion section to focus it on two topics: “personal liberties and free markets”.

Baron said he believed that Bezos had “alienated loyal readers” and brought them to “abandon” the paper.

The tumult at the Post has raised questions about billionaire ownership of news organisations — a practice that has become increasingly common in the US over the

past decade and a half. Over that period, billionaires have bought the newspapers of US cities, including Los Angeles, Boston, Salt Lake City and Minneapolis.

“This is not a strategy for news, it’s more like a dying prayer,” said Gabriel Kahn, a journalism professor at the University of Southern California Annenberg and former Wall Street Journal bureau chief.

“People initially embraced billionaires because they thought they could withstand financial and political pressures,” Kahn added. “That turned out to be wrong on both counts. We’ve seen billionaires being the first to cave.”

Not all American newspapers are struggling. On the same day the Post announced its lay-offs, the New York Times reported a 10 per cent rise in revenue and 450,000 new digital subscribers to 12.2mn in its latest quarter, underscoring their diverging fortunes.

Bezos and Lewis are betting that refocusing the newspaper on core reporting around national politics and security, while building out its digital and video platforms, will bring in new readers.

One person close to the management pointed to the popularity of its personalised, AI-generated news podcast as an example — a characterisation disputed by some reporters. But the person added: “The scale of the challenge is significant.”

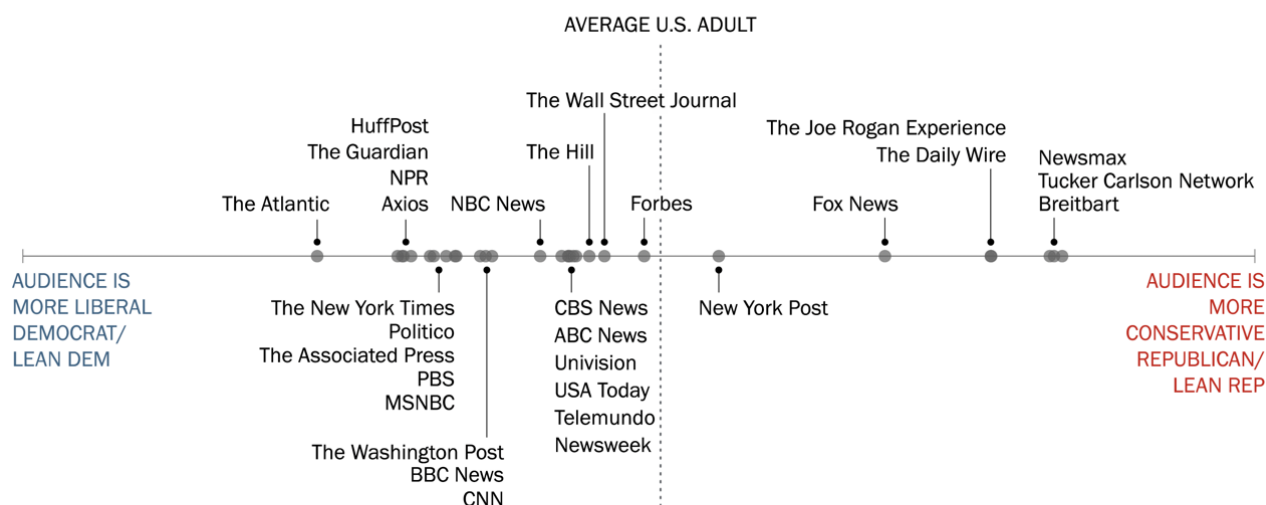
## News Sources – Media Neutrality

### DOCUMENT 10

Pew Research Center, “The Political Gap in Americans’ News Sources”, June 10, 2025

### Where regular users of 30 news sources place themselves by party, ideology

Average party and ideological self-placement of U.S. adults who regularly get news from each source



Note: This study analyzes the audience of each source, but not its content. Lists labeling multiple points are ordered from sources with more liberal Democratic/Democratic-leaning audiences on top to those with more conservative Republican/Republican-leaning audiences on the bottom. Order of sources does not necessarily indicate statistically significant differences. Refer to the methodology for details.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted March 10-16, 2025.

“The Political Gap in Americans’ News Sources”

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**DOCUMENT 11 - Young UK journalists lean towards activist roles, away from objectivity – new survey**

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Imke Henkel, *The Conversation*, 23 April 2025 (abridged)

The role of journalists has been changing for some time now. Due to the rise of social media, journalists no longer hold the monopoly on informing the public and holding the powerful to account. Nor do they keep their role as exclusive gatekeepers for news. And many readers find that algorithms do a better job of selecting news than human editors.

For a new report on the state of the journalism profession in the UK in the 2020s, my colleagues and I asked journalists what they think their role in society should be today. Facing a world of rising authoritarianism, war in Europe and catastrophic climate change, a younger generation of UK journalists increasingly believe they should occupy a more activist role in society.

We asked a representative sample of 1,130 UK journalists how important a selection of 24 roles were to them. These included informer roles such as “being a detached observer”, to advocating roles such as “promote peace and tolerance” and audience-oriented roles such as “provide entertainment and relaxation”. We measured their answers on a scale from “not at all important” to “extremely important”.

These questions were part of a wider survey my colleagues Neil Thurman, Sina Thäsler-Kordonouri and I conducted at the end of 2023. Our survey is the UK leg of the third wave of the Worlds of Journalism Study, a global project researching the state of journalism across 75 countries.

The survey follows a similar one conducted eight years earlier. Comparing journalists’ answers to both allows us to understand how their professional attitudes have changed.

Then and now, the roles journalists hold to be most important are those considered to be the traditional purpose of journalism: being a detached observer (linked to objectivity), providing analysis of current affairs, and – the classic watchdog role – monitoring and scrutinising those in power. More than half of our respondents thought that these roles were “extremely” or “very important”.

However, we found a notable shift in which roles journalists emphasise over others. While they still consider their traditional roles to be essential, many appear to be leaning more towards activist roles, and away from roles linked to objectivity.

In 2015, 77% of respondents thought that “being a detached observer” was “extremely” or “very important”. In 2023, it was 69%. Tellingly, there is also a generational shift. While 74% of respondents over 40 rate their role as

detached observers as very or extremely important, just 60% of those under 40 do.

UK journalists’ interest in the more activist watchdog role has risen between 2015 and 2023. It should be noted that the question was asked slightly differently in 2015. Then, 48% found it very or extremely important to monitor and scrutinise political leaders, and 59% thought the same about business. In 2023, 65% considered monitoring and scrutinising those in power very or extremely important.

In general, we found that as younger journalists are turning away from roles that can be considered more neutral, such as “providing analysis of current affairs”, they are becoming more interested in more activist roles. [...]

Recent political and social upheavals have raised confronting questions about journalists’ role in society.

In the aftermath of Brexit, journalists were accused of failing their democratic role. So-called mainstream media have been criticised by alternative media for supposedly reinforcing the establishment’s agenda. And journalists’ traditionally most treasured value – objectivity – has been questioned in the face of the war in Ukraine, social movements such as Black Lives Matter and existential threats like climate change. It’s no wonder that many journalists themselves are perturbed by what is happening to their profession.

Our survey points to a notable shift in journalists’ professional attitudes. UK journalists, especially the younger generation, seem to respond more to the pressures that challenge their traditional roles. Meanwhile, local news outlets and legacy media emerge as the most determined advocates for journalism’s democratic role.

The dispute about the contested value of journalistic objectivity has become a bellwether for journalists’ changing professional culture. Our survey shows that, while still important for UK journalists, it is indeed eroding.

## Document 12 - America's News Influencers

*The creators and consumers in the world of news and information on social media* Pew Research Center, November 2024

In the heat of the 2024 election, news influencers seemed to be everywhere. Both Republicans and Democrats credentialed content creators to cover their conventions – and encouraged influencers to share their political messages. Influencers also interviewed the candidates and held fundraisers for them.

### What is a news influencer?

In this study, we use the term “news influencers” to refer to individuals who regularly post about current events and civic issues on social media and have at least 100,000 followers on any of Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter) or YouTube. News influencers can be journalists who are or were affiliated with a news organization or independent content creators, but they must be *people* and not organizations.

Refer to the methodology for more about how we identified news influencers.

But up until now, it has been difficult to get a sense of the size and characteristics of this new wave of news providers.

A unique Pew Research Center study provides a deeper understanding of both the makeup of the news influencer universe and its audience. The project includes an **in-depth examination of a sample of 500 popular news influencers** and the content they produce, derived from a review of more than 28,000 social media accounts. We also conducted a **nationally representative survey of Americans** to better understand who regularly gets news from news influencers.

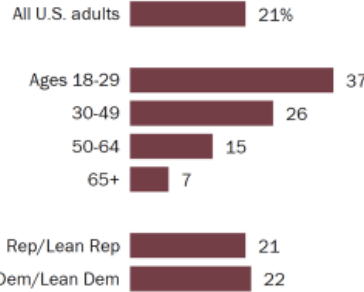
### Key findings about news influencers

- About one-in-five Americans – including a much higher share of adults under 30 (37%) – say they regularly get news from influencers on social media.
- News influencers are most likely to be found on the social media site X, where 85% have a presence. But many also are on other social media sites, such as Instagram (where 50% have an account) and YouTube (44%).
- Slightly more news influencers explicitly identify as Republican, conservative or pro-Donald Trump (27% of news influencers) than Democratic, liberal or pro-Kamala Harris (21%).
- A clear majority of news influencers are men (63%).
- Most (77%) have no affiliation or background with a news organization.

**How many Americans get news from influencers, and what is their experience?**

### Almost 4 in 10 U.S. adults under 30 get news from news influencers

% of U.S. adults who regularly get news from news influencers on social media



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 15-Aug. 4, 2024. "America's News Influencers"

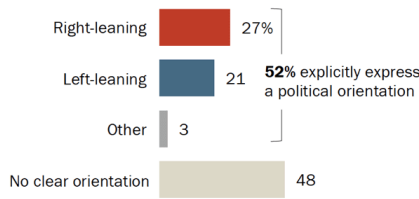
PEW-KNIGHT INITIATIVE

- **About one-in-five U.S. adults (21%) say they regularly get news from news influencers on social media**, according to a survey of 10,658 Americans conducted in summer 2024. This is especially common among younger adults: 37% of those ages 18 to 29 say they regularly get news from influencers. But there are **minimal differences between Republicans and Democrats on this question**.
- Among Americans who get news from news influencers on social media, most (65%) say news influencers have **helped them better understand current events and civic issues**. And seven-in-ten say the news they get from news influencers is **at least somewhat different from the news they get from other sources**. Far fewer (31%) say they feel a personal connection to a news influencer.
- These Americans also say they get a variety of different types of information, from **basic facts and opinions to funny posts and breaking news**. When it comes to opinions, most who see them say they are an even mix of opinions they agree and disagree with (61%), but **far more say they mostly agree with what they see (30%) than mostly disagree (2%)**.

**News influencers are mostly men; more explicitly identify as right-leaning than left-leaning**

**More news influencers explicitly identify as right-leaning than left-leaning**

% of news influencers who explicitly identify as ...



Note: Right-leaning includes people who explicitly identify as conservative, Republican or express support for Donald Trump. Left-leaning includes liberals, Democrats and people who have explicitly expressed support for Joe Biden or Kamala Harris. "Other" includes independent or moderate, libertarian, or other ideologies. Political orientation could be expressed in account bios, recent social media posts, personal and professional websites and news coverage.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 500 influencers with over 100,000 followers who regularly posted about news on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X or YouTube in early 2024. Refer to methodology for details.

"America's News Influencers"

PEW-KNIGHT INITIATIVE

- Among the news influencers in our sample, **men outnumber women by a roughly two-to-one margin**: 63% of influencers are men, compared

with 30% who are women. (The remainder either are nonbinary or their gender could not be determined by researchers.)

- Many Republicans have long believed that social media sites censor conservative viewpoints. But overall, **more news influencers explicitly present a politically right-leaning orientation than a left-leaning one** (27% vs. 21%) in their account bios, posts, websites or media coverage. About half of influencers do not express any clear political orientation. Influencers on Facebook are particularly likely to prominently express right-leaning views: There are three times as many explicitly conservative news influencers (39%) as liberal ones (13%) on the site.
- **Nearly one-in-five news influencers (18%) share part of their identity or beliefs beyond their political orientation**, such as expressing support for a specific political cause or value through words, images or emojis on their account page. Among the most common expressions are LGBTQ+ identity or support (6%) or being pro-Palestinian (5%).

**Document 13 -AI chatbots and TikTok reshape how young people get their daily news**

RFI, Issued on: 22/06/2025

The findings come from the Reuters Institute’s annual Digital News Report, released this week. The Oxford University-affiliated study surveyed nearly 97,000 people across 48 countries to track how global news habits are shifting.

5 The study found that a notable number of people are using AI chatbots to read headlines and get news updates – a shift described by the institute’s director Mitali Mukherjee as a “new chapter” in the way audiences consume information.

10 While only 7 percent overall say they use AI chatbots to find news, that number rises among younger audiences – 12 percent of under-35s and 15 percent of under-25s now rely on tools such as OpenAI’s ChatGPT, Google’s Gemini or Meta’s Llama for their news. “Personalised, bite-sized and quick – that’s how younger audiences want their news, and AI tools are stepping in to deliver exactly that,” Mukherjee noted.

Beyond reading headlines, many readers are turning to AI for more complex tasks: 27 percent use it to summarise news articles, 24 percent for translations, and 21 percent for recommendations on what to read next. Nearly one in five have quizzed AI directly about current events.

**AI 'hallucinations'**

15 However, trust remains a sticking point. Many respondents to the survey said they worry AI could make news reporting less transparent and more prone to errors.

The technology’s so-called "hallucinations" – when a chatbot fabricates information – continue to worry both readers and journalists.

20 Despite these risks some news organisations see opportunities within AI usage. In France, the news agency Agence France-Presse (AFP) has signed a deal with French AI firm Mistral, giving its AI models access to AFP’s news archive.

However, other global media outlets, such as the *New York Times*, have taken a more combative stance, launching copyright lawsuits against AI developers including OpenAI for allegedly misusing their content without permission.

25 **TikTok dominance**

The report also highlighted how traditional media – TV, radio, newspapers and even conventional news websites – is losing ground to social networks and video-sharing platforms.

- Almost half of 18 to 24-year-olds now say they get most of their news via social media – particularly TikTok, which dominates among young audiences in countries such as India, Brazil, Indonesia and Thailand.
- 30 Despite the upheaval since Elon Musk’s takeover and rebranding of Twitter, the social media platform X remains a go-to for many seeking news. “Many more right-leaning users, especially young men, have flocked to X, while some progressive users have drifted away,” the report noted.
- In the United States, 23 percent of people said they use X for news – up eight percentage points from last year – with a similar trend observed in Australia and Poland.
- 35 In contrast, alternatives to X such as Threads, Bluesky and Mastodon have yet to gain significant traction for news, with each capturing just 2 percent or less of the market.

### See The Digital News Report for yourself

Interactive <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2025/interactive>

The Summary of the report is [HERE](#)

## More about the media around the world

[Leaders](#) | Nothing to see here

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### Document 14- 🗣️ As global press freedom dwindles, corrupt politicians rejoice

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Less scrutiny, more booty

*The Economist*, Feb 5th 2026

Journalists can be infuriating. They simplify. They exaggerate. They sometimes get things wrong. They are disproportionately university-educated, middle-class and a bit left-wing, so their attitudes often jar with the rest of the population. When they act unethically—for example, when the BBC’s Panorama programme aired clips of President Donald Trump that had been spliced together in a misleading manner—people are rightly outraged. Trust in the news media has declined across the rich world, especially since the advent of social media allowed errors in reporting to be more widely reviled. So some people may not care much when they hear that journalism is in trouble. Yet it is in their interest to care.

Press freedom is in retreat worldwide. Since 2014 the global score on an index devised by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), a watchdog, has deteriorated from no worse than it is in America today to as grim as it is in Serbia, where journalists covering anti-corruption protests are routinely beaten by police.

This matters for several reasons. It is not just that free speech is the bedrock liberty on which other liberties depend. It is also because critical journalism is an essential check on state power. If the mighty know that abuses will be neither exposed nor publicised, they are likely to commit more of them.

*The Economist* analysed data from about 180 countries over the past 80 years collected by V-Dem, a Swedish research project. We found a [feedback loop](#) between

muzzling the media and unleashing corruption. It seems to go something like this. Politicians who want to rob the public have an incentive to gag the press. The tighter they gag it, the easier it grows to steal. And the more guilty secrets politicians accumulate, the greater their incentive to stifle future critical reporting. Our calculations suggest that if press freedom decays from “as good as Canada” to “as bad as Indonesia”, that is a good predictor that graft will rise from “as clean as Ireland” to “as grubby as Latvia”. The process is gradual, metastasising over several years, so voters may not notice until after the next election. It is worse under populist governments, which typically demonise their critics and seek to crush institutions that limit their authority.

#### **Lights, camera, infraction!**

One of the most alarming trends is that governments which claim to be democratic are increasingly using tools pioneered by more authoritarian regimes. Typically, they do not try to silence truth-tellers entirely. Rather, they seek to create a media ecosystem in which voters hear amplified praise of the ruling party and only faint whispers of dissent.

They use taxpayers’ cash to promote fawning coverage: deploying yes-men to run the public broadcaster, directing state advertising budgets towards pliant newspapers and nudging friendly tycoons who rely on public-works contracts to take over independent media firms and neuter them.

At the same time, they make it harder for critical outlets to thrive—or even survive. Those that insist on doing investigative reporting may find that the government not only refuses to advertise with them but leans on private firms to shun them, too. They may face constant tax audits and vexatious lawsuits. Many struggle to stay afloat: in 160 out of 180 countries surveyed by RSF, the news media are financially precarious.

Supposedly democratic governments are going after individual journalists, too. Those who irritate the powerful are often doxxed and harassed, especially if they are women. A UN survey found that 75% of female reporters had endured online abuse and 42% had been harassed or threatened in person. Some reporters are snared by national-security laws banning almost any disclosure of which the government disapproves, or rules against digital “fake news”, meaning almost anything it disputes. The most persistent may be prosecuted for crimes that have nothing to do with journalism. In the Philippines in January, for example, Frenchie-Mae Cumpio, a frequent critic of abuses by the security forces, was sentenced to 12 to 18 years in prison for “financing terrorism”. Ms Cumpio says the security forces burst into her flat, forced her to the floor, and planted guns and contraband on her bed.

Technology has changed what it means to be a journalist and opened new avenues for free expression. Anyone with a phone can film a cop punching a protester and post it on social media, which is a useful check on brutal policing. But overall, the digital revolution has not been as liberating as many people once hoped. Dictatorships

can shut off the internet when their subjects are angry (as Iran and Uganda did last month). Flawed democracies use more subtle methods. Laws to protect digital privacy are used to shield politicians from scrutiny. Meanwhile, government snoops hack journalists’ phones to identify their sources, scaring off future whistleblowers. And if the reporters happen to have embarrassing photos on their devices, these may mysteriously find their way into the public domain.

A final shift is America’s government, which used to stand up for press freedom around the world and no longer does. The Trump administration has scrapped subsidies to independent foreign media and shut public outlets such as Radio Free Asia, which used to broadcast to news-starved Tibetans and North Koreans. Worse, Mr Trump has made clear that he won’t press foreign governments over free speech—unless they are woke Europeans, that is. From Azerbaijan to El Salvador, strongmen have jumped at the chance to lock up or intimidate more pesky reporters without diplomatic blowback.

Apologists for crackdowns often argue that news outlets, too, should be accountable. But they understate the degree to which they already are. Readers can stop subscribing; subjects who are libelled can sue; the head of the BBC resigned over the Panorama scandal. Journalists have plenty of faults, but preventing them from doing their jobs will have dire consequences. A vigorous newsgathering ecosystem, once destroyed, is hard to rebuild. And a world with less press freedom will be dirtier and worse-governed. ■

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### The Editorial Board - Politicians Are Trying to Control the News

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*The New York Times*, March 5, 2026



Credit...Illustration by Rebecca Chew/The New York Times

*The editorial board is a group of opinion journalists whose views are informed by expertise, research, debate and certain longstanding values. It is separate from the newsroom.*

The shadow of press repression is spreading around the world. In the past decade, the number of journalists detained and imprisoned has soared as governments seek tighter control over the media. What started as a crackdown first by dictatorships and then by illiberal democracies is expanding to onetime bastions of civil liberties.

A recent high-profile case is Jimmy Lai, whom authorities in Hong Kong sentenced to 20 years in prison last month. He had campaigned against China's choking of the territory's freedoms. Mr. Lai, 78, has already spent five years in a dark cell and is ailing. The sentence effectively condemns him to dying in prison. Mr. Lai has denied all the charges against him.

His plight is increasingly common. At least 330 journalists worldwide were in prison at the end of 2025, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, up from fewer than 200 a decade ago. More than a third of them were serving sentences of five years or more. Nearly half remained behind bars despite never having been formally sentenced. One-fifth say they were tortured or beaten. An additional 129 members of the press died while doing their jobs or because of them, the highest number since records began in 1992. Among the worst offenders against press freedom have been China, Russia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Israel, Myanmar, Sudan and Turkey.

These courageous journalists have sought to shine a light on the world around them. They ask questions that political leaders do not want to answer and publish information that leaders do not want the public to know. For their efforts, they have been falsely accused of being enemies of the state, terrorists, foreign agents or spies.

In February alone, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists:

- Cambodia sentenced two journalists, Pheap Phara and Phon Sopheap, to 14-year terms each. They were reporting on a Cambodia-Thailand border dispute, and the government claimed their work damaged national security. Cambodia also charged Luot Sophal with demoralizing the armed forces after reporting on an alleged water shortage for Cambodian soldiers.
- In Senegal, Abdou Nguer, a news commentator, was arrested for reporting that questioned a public prosecutor's statement about the cause of a student's death in a crackdown on university protests.
- In Ethiopia, the government revoked the license of Addis Standard, an independent outlet known for incisive reporting. The government also refused to renew the accreditation of three Reuters journalists after the outlet reported that Ethiopia hosted a secret camp to train fighters for a Sudanese paramilitary group accused of war crimes.

The press faces challenges in freer societies, too. Israel's war in Gaza led to the arrest of almost 100 Palestinian journalists, often without charge, and at least twice that number were killed over two years, a toll without modern precedent. In Mexico, the ruling party has tried to intimidate journalists who report inconvenient stories and regularly dismisses even legitimate information as "fake news." In India, a court last month sentenced Ravi Nair to one year in prison related to social media posts that criticized a company run by a billionaire ally of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Even in the United States, home of the First Amendment and a longtime beacon of free speech, the media is being squeezed. Again and again, the Trump administration has tried to intimidate journalists who do not toe its line. It has issued rules requiring journalists covering the Pentagon to report only officially approved information. It has searched the home of a Washington Post reporter and arrested reporters covering an immigration protest in Minnesota. It has used the government's regulatory power in an attempt to chill critical coverage and reward media companies that cozy up to the administration. Mr. Trump has filed dubious lawsuits against The New York Times, ABC News, CNN, The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post and the owner of CBS News.

He has done more to violate the First Amendment and to restrict a free press than any other modern president, even Richard Nixon.

Democrats have rightly criticized the Trump administration's behavior. But standing up for press freedom also means resisting the temptation to adopt similar tactics. We note with concern the tactics of Representative Jasmine Crockett of Texas. Ms. Crockett reportedly ousted a reporter for The Atlantic from a campaign rally last month and then lied about the reporter, saying, "She has a history of being less than truthful." Ms. Crockett also called the Capitol Police on a CNN reporter earlier in February. Ms. Crockett lost the Democratic Senate primary in her state on Tuesday.

**The goal of leaders** who try to muzzle the media is plain enough. They want to snuff out the truth and establish a monopoly on information. They want only news that flatters the government.

Most worrisome, attacks on the media can feed on themselves. When a government jails or harasses some journalists, others may fear the consequences of courageous reporting. The fewer free voices there are to call out tyrants, the easier it is for them to steal and repress. This last point is crucial. The consequences of media suppression are ultimately

tangible. A society without a free press is one in which the government is likely to do a poorer job of providing its citizens with decent lives and instead to become a corrupt self-enrichment machine for elites.

The best protection for the many journalists who continue to report honestly and bravely — as well as for those unfairly imprisoned — is the world’s attention. By trying to silence journalists, autocrats and aspiring autocrats hope to make the world ignore what they are doing. The rest of us should refuse to do so. We stand with Mr. Lai, Mr. Phara, Mr. Sopheap, Mr. Sophal, Mr. Nguer and the many other reporters who fight for the truth around the world, and at home.

See also

[A.G. Sulzberger: A Free People Need a Free Press - \*The New York Times\*, May 13, 2025](#)



## How democracies are using autocratic tools to muzzle journalism SEE LONG FILE

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As scrutiny of government withers, corruption thrives

*The Economist*, Feb 5th 2026 | Delhi, Kuala Lumpur and Washington, DC | 13 min read

In November 2024 a canopy on a Serbian railway station collapsed, killing 16 people. The most likely cause of the shoddy workmanship was corruption. Huge protests erupted, and independent journalists reported on them. Some were then beaten by thugs while cops looked on. Half were beaten by cops. In 2025 there were at least 91 physical attacks on journalists in Serbia, according to the country’s Independent Journalists’ Association. Assailants are seldom punished, which “encourages new crimes against journalists”, says Jelena Petkovic, a local specialist in media safety.

Serbia has all the trappings of a democracy. It does not lock up journalists for what they write. Yet in dozens of ways it makes their jobs and lives difficult, unless they support the government.

KRIK, an investigative outlet that often exposes graft in the Serbian government, has been hit with more than 30 lawsuits in the past few years, of which 17 are current, says Stevan Dojcinovic, the editor. He has to spend up to five days a month in court. Official media accuse him of working for the CIA and for George Soros, a Jewish billionaire. Faked pictures of him with a gang boss have been circulated, as well as real, intimate photos meant to embarrass him. “It has taken a huge, heavy toll,” he says. Meanwhile, all the terrestrial broadcasters are state-controlled or owned by friends of the right-wing populist president, Aleksandar Vucic, so they say what he wants them to. Zoran Kusovac, a media consultant, recounts that a friend divorced her TV editor husband partly because she was sick of Mr Vucic’s nightly calls.

Around the world, media freedom is in retreat. On an index devised by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), a watchdog, the global score has regressed since 2014 from 67 out of 100 (where America is today) to under 55 in 2025 (as bad as Serbia). “For the first time in the history of the Index, the conditions for practising journalism are “difficult” or “very serious” in over half of the world’s countries and

satisfactory in fewer than one in four,” says RSF. Others find a similar trend. Data from V-Dem, a research project based in Sweden, imply that the global average has deteriorated since 2004 from 0.66 (on a scale of 0 to 1) to 0.49, roughly the difference between Mexico and Hindu-nationalist India today.

### None of the news that’s fit to print

The greatest decline is occurring not in dictatorships, where proper journalism has long been almost impossible, but in places that still purport to be democratic. Typically the governments of such places do not try to snuff out criticism entirely. Rather, they skew the incentives for newsgatherers, so that ordinary people hear plenty of praise of the ruling party and only occasional squeaks of dissent. The aim is to keep the powerful in power and reduce scrutiny of how they abuse it.

An analysis by *The Economist* found strong links between media-muzzling and corruption. Looking at 80 years of data from about 180 countries collected by V-Dem, we found that a reduction in media freedom in a given country was a strong predictor that graft in that country would subsequently grow worse (see chart 1). This held true even after correcting for past and current levels of corruption, change in incomes and worldwide trends.

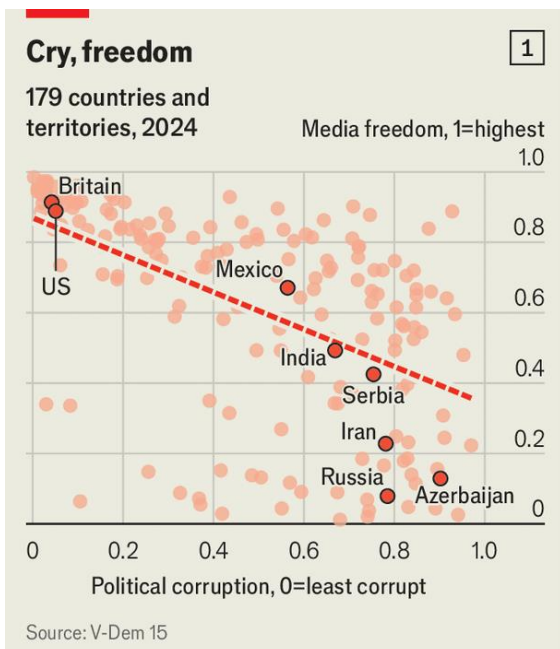


Chart: The Economist

This is more than a case of bad things coinciding. Our analysis is temporal: it tests whether a shift in one variable reliably predicts a future shift in another. In statistical lingo this is called “Granger causality”—and we found plenty of it.

In the absence of a probing press, it is easier for officials to embezzle unobserved or make sweetheart deals without pushback. The statistical relationship is sizeable: all else equal, a country where press freedom degenerates from the level of Canada to that of Indonesia is predicted to see a slide into corruption equivalent to Ireland becoming Latvia.

**With fear and favour**

And there appears to be a feedback loop: a rise in corruption is also a good predictor that media will subsequently grow less free, perhaps because when those in power have plenty to hide, they have extra cause to gag nosy hacks. “If we report on corruption...our journalists are doxxed,” says Wahyu Dhyatmika, the CEO of *Tempo Digital*, an independent news outlet in Indonesia. One was sent a severed pig’s head; others have received dozens of unrequested food deliveries, a reminder that the bigwigs they report on know exactly where to find them.

These feedback loops magnify the damage, meaning the full cost of bad policies is felt only gradually. Institutions have inertia: our model implies that on average it takes roughly four years after media clampdowns for just half the eventual rise in corruption to appear. A leader can muzzle the press today, but voters may not notice the subsequent surge in skulduggery until after the next election.

Chart: The Economist

Another dynamic is that as media freedom diminishes, elites are less likely to offer reasoned justifications for their policies (see chart 2). And this, too, tends to come before an increase in corruption. That fits with the rise of populism around the world, a movement that relies more on emotion than reason. Populist leaders usually try to weaken institutional checks on their own power, including the media; and this opens the door for graft and abuse.

Taken together, our statistical analysis finds that populist politics, corruption and squeezing critical media not only go together, but mutually reinforce each other. Governments that gag the press today will govern worse tomorrow.

Plenty of countries are on this perilous path. A “big shift we’ve seen in recent years is the adoption by supposedly democratic countries of many of the techniques that we have traditionally seen in authoritarian regimes”, says Jodie Ginsberg, the head of the Committee to Protect Journalists, a watchdog. These techniques usually stop short of jailing or killing reporters. Rather, they tend to fall into three main categories: rhetorical, legal and economic. The rhetorical trick is to pretend that critical journalists pose a threat to the nation. Autocratic regimes have long done this; now many elected leaders do, too. Mr Vucic describes uncomplimentary coverage as “pure terrorism”. Argentina’s president, Javier Milei, pushes the catchphrase “We don’t hate journalists enough.” Supporters of India’s ruling party refer to critical reporters as “presstitutes”.

Donald Trump recently posted that it was “seditious, perhaps even treasonous” for the *New York Times* to publish “fake” reports to “libel and demean the president of the United States”. He added: “They are true Enemies of the People, and we should do something about it.” The White House publishes a list of “media offenders”, naming individual reporters it accuses of lying, malpractice or “left-wing lunacy”.

Such unprecedented rhetoric from an American president aggravates an already hostile atmosphere for reporters. Americans' trust in the news media is at an all-time low, according to Gallup. Only 8% of Republicans in America trust them to report fairly or accurately, down from 33% in 2007, the year the iPhone was introduced, ushering in the age of rage bait.

Mr Trump's demonisation of journalists erodes the taboo on other politicians doing the same, says Ms Ginsberg. "The Trump textbook is being picked up by global leaders everywhere," agrees Thibaut Bruttin, the head of RSF.

Fighting talk at the top can spur digital mobs to harass reporters. Female journalists bear the brunt: a global study by UNESCO found that 75% had received online abuse and 42% endured harassment or threats of violence in person. When victims were asked who instigated the abuse, the most common answer, after anonymous culprits, was "political actors".

In nearly every democracy, free expression is enshrined in law. So it ought to be hard for governments to use criminal law as a cudgel against journalists. But they are finding workarounds. One is to use civil law. Recent years have seen a surge in Europe in vexatious lawsuits by plutocrats, intended to bankrupt pesky journalists or hobble media outlets. A report in 2023 counted more than 800, adding that this only "scratch[ed] the surface of the...problem". Mr Trump has embraced the tactic, suing ABC, the BBC, CNN, the *New York Times* and others, sometimes demanding billions of dollars in damages.

Another wheeze is to hit media companies with laws that are unrelated to journalism. In September Turkey's government seized control of Can Holding, a conglomerate that includes television stations, accusing it of tax evasion and money-laundering. In Tanzania, where President Samia Suluhu Hassan took over in 2021 promising liberal reforms, journalists have been arrested for "treason" while covering a blatantly rigged election in October.

By accusing journalists of common crimes, governments can spread the idea that they are untrustworthy. They can also intimidate others into self-censorship. "The bit that's always difficult to measure is the stories that don't get written, or the questions that don't get asked because people are fearful," says Ms Ginsberg.

Digital technology has changed what it means to be a journalist, allowing anyone with a phone to disseminate shocking footage to a potentially global audience. Nasty regimes correctly see this as a threat, and have pushed back with broadly worded internet laws that can be weaponised against critics. Several ban the dissemination of "fake news", which in some places means any statement the government denies. A new law in Zambia criminalises the "unauthorised disclosure" of "critical information",

defined as anything that "relates to public safety, public health, economic stability [or] national security".

An index by Freedom House, an American think-tank, finds that internet freedom has declined worldwide for 15 straight years. This is not just a case of autocrats turning off the internet during protests (as in Iran in January) or elections (as in Uganda in the same month). In the past year, half of the 18 countries previously labelled digitally "free" (out of 72 judged) grew less so. Globally the most consistent deterioration in the past 15 years was in a measure of "whether online sources of information are manipulated by the government or other powerful actors". Many use AI to create fake pro-government stories on fake sites that look like familiar news outlets.

The final category of coercion, economic, is especially powerful because governments have lots of money and media firms typically do not. In 160 out of 180 countries surveyed by RSF, news outlets can achieve financial stability "with difficulty" or "not at all".

In Indonesia the quality of journalism has gone downhill in the past five or six years "mostly because of financial pressure", says Mr Dhyatmika of *Tempo Digital*. Government advertising goes to fawning outlets. Big private advertisers shun critical media, for fear of upsetting politicians. They don't "see *Tempo* as a safe brand because we do investigative journalism".

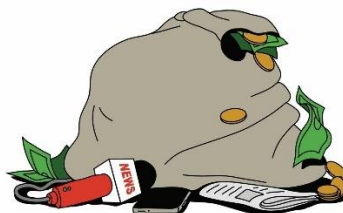


Illustration: Igor

#### Bastidas

When donors or NGOs support independent media, governments pass laws against "foreign agents" to restrict them, a trick mastered by Vladimir Putin. Another ruse is to get friendly tycoons to buy and tame critical media outlets.

When several of these press-gagging techniques are combined, the effect can be overwhelming. In India, the world's largest democracy, journalists are in theory free to report what they like. But those who seek to expose abuses by the ruling Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party face a hailstorm of discouragement. Abhinandan Sekhri, the boss of Newslandry, a digital news group in Delhi, says he has received official notices that he or his firm is suspected of tax evasion about 80 times in the past four years. Pro-government media firms sue Newslandry for "defamation" and "copyright infringement" when it criticises their bias. Tax officials raid its offices. Police pop in to question Mr Sekhri: one time for six hours; another, for 13.

Mr Sekhri is hard to bully. He says he can keep doing his job because there is nothing dodgy in his life, he has no wife or children to worry about, he is a Hindu, and he comes from a privileged background so he knows lawyers who will represent him pro bono. Nonetheless, defending himself is taxing. And most journalists are far more vulnerable to pressure than he is.

Those most at risk are “not the high-profile ones in Delhi”, says Mr Sekhri; they are the ones “uncovering shady activities of some local god-man in a small village”. Some god-men may be vengeful. Jagendra Singh, who wrote about alleged links between a politician in Uttar Pradesh and the “sand mafia”, who steal truckloads of sand from public land and sell it to cement firms, died of burn injuries after a visit from police. The police said it was suicide.

Independent journalism survives in India, in online outlets such as the *Wire* and the *Caravan*, and on social media and YouTube. But every reporter faces a choice: between a life of penny-pinching and peril telling the truth, or one of financial and physical security praising the government.

Nearly everyone interviewed for this article noted the change in attitude to press freedom in the White House. America’s domestic media ecosystem is sophisticated and pluralistic enough to cope, but American policy also affects countries where journalism is more precarious. Orkhan Mammad, the editor of Meydan TV, an independent outlet from Azerbaijan, a corrupt petrostate in the Caucasus, says the president, Ilham Aliyev, used to release political prisoners because of pressure from America. But this year the pressure has ceased, Mr Mammad laments; Mr Trump’s family has business ties with the Azerbaijani elite, and Mr Aliyev has shrewdly endorsed him for a Nobel peace prize.

### **Democracy dies in darkness**

“Once Trump came back to power in 2025, Aliyev shut down everything. Around 100 journalists fled or are in jail. We realised we couldn’t work with anyone inside the country any more. It was too dangerous for them.” Mr Aliyev’s tactics are “horrible”, he says. “Every time someone is arrested, they have to hand over their phone and computer. The government then will release personal photos found on [them].”

America used to fund hundreds of independent media groups in countries with shaky civil liberties. Mr Trump froze that funding, hobbling Meydan, among many other outlets. “We have to figure out how to pay for our colleagues’ legal fees, food, basic necessities inside jail,” Mr Mammad says. In August a man Meydan hired to deliver supplies to jailed journalists was arrested for “smuggling money”.

Life has grown so tough for independent journalists in some countries that many, like Mr Mammad, work from abroad. At a conference of such exiles in Kuala Lumpur, the mood was grim. Those attending fretted about the

difficulty of reporting remotely. Information is hard to gather; phones may not be secure.

Since the Pegasus spyware scandal in 2021, when many reporters’ devices were revealed to be bugged with Israeli software, it has been tough to persuade whistleblowers anywhere to talk to journalists. “One source told me: ‘I now know why my wife lost her government job,’” recalls Nelson Rauda, a journalist from El Salvador whose phone was hacked.

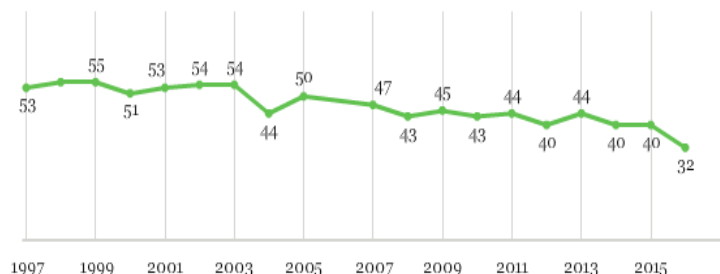
Even exile is not always safe. Several regimes silence critics from afar. Iran hired an assassin in New York to try to kill Masih Alinejad, an Iranian journalist who champions women’s rights. Belarus hijacked a passenger plane to capture Raman Pratasevich, a dissident editor, in 2021. Since then, Mr Mammad says, all exiled journalists worry about their flights being diverted. As for Mr Pratasevich, after two years in custody, he now praises the corrupt dictatorship that kidnapped him. ■

## More Links and resources

### Americans' Trust in the Mass Media

In general, how much trust and confidence do you have in the mass media -- such as newspapers, TV and radio -- when it comes to reporting the news fully, accurately and fairly -- a great deal, a fair amount, not very much or none at all?

■ % Great deal/Fair amount



GALLUP

### ◆ Réseaux sociaux : contrôle politique | L'Essentiel du Dessous des Cartes | ARTE

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UeFoFPCoCt4>

### ● The International consortium of Investigative Journalists

<https://www.icij.org/>

See for instance their page on The Panama Papers investigation

<https://www.icij.org/investigations/panama-papers/>

### ● Interactive briefing *The Economist*

<https://www.economist.com/interactive/briefing/2022/05/03/press-freedom>

### ● Video by *The Economist* on Press Freedom endangered

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ojsUv\\_08Zk&t=2s&ab\\_channel=TheEconomist](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ojsUv_08Zk&t=2s&ab_channel=TheEconomist)

### ● The Reporter Without Borders' Index

<https://rsf.org/en/index>

**Their report on the UK** <https://rsf.org/en/country/united-kingdom>

**Their report on the U.S.** <https://rsf.org/en/country/united-states>

### ● The International Federation of journalists' page on media concentration

<https://www.ifj.org/what/press-freedom/media-concentration>

<https://www.ifj.org/what/press-freedom/media-concentration>

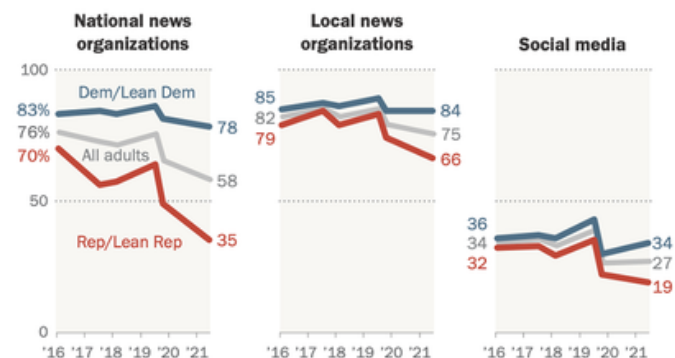
### ● The Freedom House Reports

<https://freedomhouse.org/reports>

On the media : <https://freedomhouse.org/issues/media-freedom>

### Wider partisan gaps emerge in trust of national and local news organizations, social media

% of U.S. adults who say they have a lot or some trust in the information that comes from ...



Note: In 2016, trust of information from social media was only asked of and based on internet-using U.S. adults.  
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 14-27, 2021. For dates of other surveys, see the topline.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

### ● 2025 Digital News Report from the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism

<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2025>

### ● The full report by The Pew Research Center – How Americans View journalists

<https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2025/08/20/how-americans-view-journalists-in-the-digital-age/>

### ● The full report by the Pew Research Center on News Influencers [HERE](#)



### ● Young Adults and the Future of News

December 3, 2025 (extracts)

<https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2025/12/03/young-adults-and-the-future-of-news/#where-young-adults-get-news>

### ● The Political Gap in Americans' News Sources

Exploring use of and trust in 30 sources across U.S. political lines

June 10, 2025

<https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2025/06/10/the-political-gap-in-americans-news-sources/>

### You can also

◆ listen to this

<https://www.npr.org/2025/05/02/nx-s1-5384784/president-trump-orders-end-to-federal-funding-for-npr-and-pbs>

◆ watch this

**Cut in US funding will be 'disastrous': Hundreds of local NPR, PBS affiliates rely on federal grants – France 24 English**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0F0bImQw\\_sY&ab\\_channel=FRANCE24English](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0F0bImQw_sY&ab_channel=FRANCE24English)



