



The Hague International Model United Nations

Forum: Human Rights Commission 1

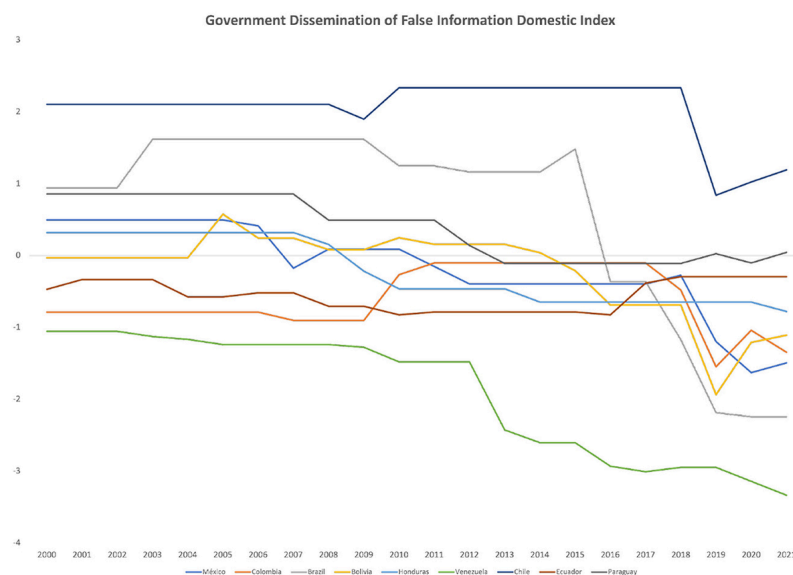
Issue: Protecting journalists and media workers' freedom of expression in time of disinformation.

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Introduction

Amidst an era of global political turmoil and ever-stricter coercive regulation, journalists are threatened by unprecedented pressures to report freely and independently. As time progresses, media workers face more physical, verbal, and digital attacks, a direct consequence of their professional obligations. Disinformation has ramped up in the last decade and has been used as a weapon by governments, political leaders, extremist organisations, corporations and foreign state actors to influence public opinion, erode institutional credibility, and manipulate media coverage.



The information environment thus becomes a much more tumultuous battlefield than ever before, and journalists' conduct is increasingly a target of scrutiny and hostility. Reporters covering scandalous subjects, from human rights violations and corruption and government scandals to political abuse, are repeatedly targeted with public outcry and clear threats in an effort to keep them from exposing their truthfulness.

Graph of Government Dissemination of False Information on a Domestic Scale¹

As advancement of digital technology progresses, threats have also taken on modern-day forms, including IP phishing, doxxing and the sort of intimate monitoring of personal communications. The

context of this climate requires journalists to handle threats from both the dangers they face on the ground and threats to which they are subject from an increasingly weaponized digital realm.

By using the power of the law as a tool, seizing control of digital platforms and planting a suspicion of the press, these governments erode the line between the real and the false.

Definition of Key Terms

Zero-Click Surveillance

Unauthorized access to journalists' data, conversations, and sources is made possible by spyware (like Pegasus) that infects devices without user intervention.

Algorithmic Amplification

The process where social media or other browsers increase the visibility of certain content in order to increase engagement, disregarding the spread of disinformation.

Bot Networks

Automated accounts programmed to simulate human behavior including comments, posts, and other relative social behaviour used to falsely target the public.

Deepfakes

Artificial Intelligence (AI) generates media that can create images, videos, or audio to depict events or actions that never occurred, usually used to mimic a certain peoples expressions.

Doxxing

The illegitimate and unpermitted release of private information about someone with the intention of harassment, intimidation, or coercion.

Digital Forensics

Methods for identifying altered media, tracking down the sources of misinformation operations, and confirming the legitimacy of digital content.

Background Information

The evershifting global media landscape

The past few decades have seen extensive rates of international media coverage undergo a profound turn, especially during times of political crises, marked by disinformation attacks, rising tensions

over political disputes, and unprecedented technology developments that only serve to magnify media scandals. Amid escalating tensions worldwide and increasing pressure from both state and non-state actors, journalists are under unprecedented stress to report candidly, independently, and securely. The amount of disinformation has skyrocketed throughout the last decade and has been weaponized by governments, politicians, radical organizations, businesses, and foreign state entities to manipulate popular opinion, undermine judicial independence, and corrupt media coverage.

Targeting journalists and the escalation of digital threats

Threatening operations to limit candor often target journalists covering topics such as human rights violations, political malfeasance, and security scandals. In several reported incidents, journalists have been attacked during protests, held illegally, or charged under vague national security and terrorism laws. IP phishing, illegal spying, and doxxing have become increasingly common as technology advances in the digital age. Vast-scale online attacks such as bot networks, trolling on popular online platforms, misguidance and false accusations, as well as AI-generated deepfakes have become frequent with these types of attacks seriously endangering the privacy and personal security of users.

Especially when these attacks evolve, digital networks themselves appear increasingly complicit, usually without meaning to, or only to help compound the damage. Algorithmic amplification on popular social media sites typically boosts the spread of sensational, divisive, or deceptive information, in order to encourage social interaction and bolster revenue.

At the same time, new techniques for synthetic manipulation have emerged through improvements in AI, such as deepfakes with the potential to harm credibility, provoke popular outrage, or provoke government retaliation before they are unmasked. When you combine all of this modified content with doxxing, the deliberate sharing of sensitive information about journalists in order to facilitate harassment, privacy violation, or physical intimidation, the risk grows significantly.

Platform governance and uneven legal proceedings

Journalists are frequently left susceptible by weak or inconsistent governance frameworks. Digital forensics has become essential in the fight against digital manipulation. These days, legal expert's findings are critical for legal procedures designed to hold people responsible for cyberattacks as well as to raise public awareness.

However, even with progress in technology, laws protecting journalists are implemented differently in different parts of the world. Due to many of them not providing legally enforceable mechanisms, violations carry on largely unpunished, particularly in regimes where independent journalism has been perceived as a threat to the stability.

Zero-click monitoring, a type of covert eavesdropping, breaches mobile devices when users don't intervene. This threatens the basis of source security and empowers authoritarian entities to proactively stifle critical reporting.

The weaponization of “fake news” as an authoritarian strategy

In this process, describing critical reporting as “fake news” has evolved as an indispensable element of authoritarian information management.

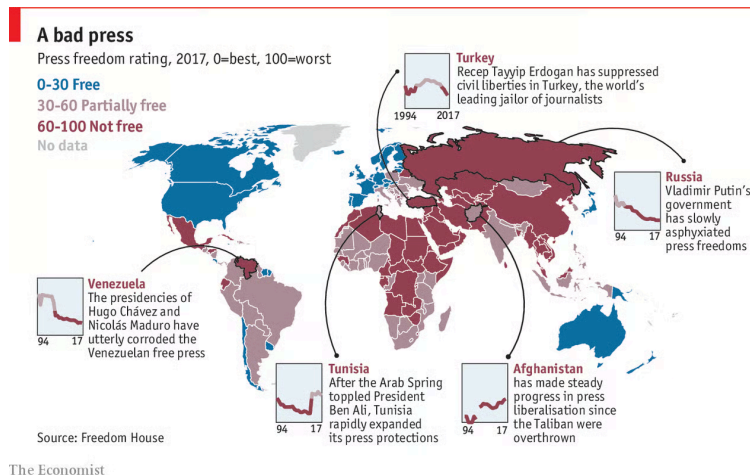
Governments can turn that picture around: They can present bad media reports as part of a coordinated disinformation operation and present themselves as the victims of misinformation, rather than as the truth’s creators.

This reversal, with a twist in language, helps consolidate their assertion of moral authority as well as provides a convenient pretext for suppressing criticism. By channeling public focus toward ostensible conspiracies, foreign meddling or media bias, it allows authorities to erode journalists’ credibility while sidestepping direct interaction with investigation findings. It accomplishes several political goals, including attacking independent media, rationalizing more severe laws, and cultivating ecosystems of knowing where only state-approved narratives resonate.



Graph of Types of Mis- AND -Disinformation²

After public trust in the press has been eroded to a certain point, governments allow more freedom to impose censorship, limit digital platforms and punish journalists with vague, general laws.



Due to this, governments pursuing a perception of legitimacy can rely on the confusion of the public over what is true and false, to a significant extent at least to stay in power and consolidate power, by wielding the ambiguity. A strong reminder of the powerful use of the word “fake news” as a weapon to reinforce authoritarianism in the region can be seen in nations like Russia, China, Hungary, Türkiye, Egypt, and the Philippines.

Graph of the Press Freedom Rating of 2017³

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Russia

Russia continues to enforce restrictions on independent journalism and has often framed the language of “fake news” to justify censorship and criminalizing dissent. The administration has introduced legislation penalizing the dissemination of information deemed inaccurate by authorities, particularly regarding the invasion of Ukraine and domestic political scandals. Russia has consistently voted against UN resolutions addressing the safety of journalists or condemning state repression, arguing that such measures interfere with national sovereignty. The state’s actions, including calling independent media “foreign agents,” reflect more broadly its efforts to delegitimize critics and keep the information environment strictly under control.

China

China has been controlling information in an overly forceful manner; unfavourable reports are often criticized as fabricated or misleading. The Chinese government favours UN language promoting state sovereignty over national information ecosystems and opposes resolutions which call for independent investigations into press freedom violations. State cybersecurity laws and national security have also widened the power of authorities to silence opposition media in the name of fighting misinformation.

Hungary

Despite being an EU member, Hungary has come under growing criticism for limiting press freedom. Independent media outlets are regularly accused of publishing “fabrications” by the government, and it has passed legislation allowing criminal penalties to be applied for sharing information considered misleading. The case of Klubrádió, whose broadcasting license was revoked for alleged administrative irregularities, highlights how Hungary uses regulatory frameworks as tools for silencing critics.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
May 3 rd , 1993	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) established World Press Freedom Day, honoring the freedom of media and journalists all around the globe.
May 4 th , 2007	The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) releases the First Global Study on Impunity, an index that shows the annual record of countries where journalist murders go unpunished
April 12 th , 2012	The United Nations (UN) Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists is finalized in order to prevent violence against journalists and strengthen mechanisms to combat impunity.

December 18 th , 2013	The General Assembly (UNGA) adopts Resolution A/RES/68/163 condemning attacks on journalists and urging member states to protect them.
December 18 th , 2019	UNGA Resolution A/RES/74/157 adopted, establishing the 2nd of November as the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists.
July 18 th , 2021	Pegasus Project Revelations reveal that spyware was used to monitor journalists, activists, and political opponents across multiple countries.
November 6 th , 2023	UNESCO Publishes Global Guidelines for Platform Governance addressing transparency, disinformation, and digital rights for journalists.
2024 (Ongoing)	Global surge in deepfake incidents during election cycles, generating political disinformation, targeting journalists and undermining public trust.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

The United Nations has launched several programs aimed at combating misinformation and improving journalist safety. The primary initiative is the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity (2012), which calls on nations to enhance monitoring of violence against journalists, introduce national safeguards, and improve laws to prevent it. The recommended legislative changes, although far-reaching, have yet to be implemented by most governments and are patchy.

UN General Assembly resolutions such as A/RES/68/163 (2013) and A/RES/74/157 (2019) reaffirm commitment to eliminating impunity, even though those resolutions do not have enforceability in law. Aside from its advisory role, UNESCO has attempted to address this issue through its Media Development Indicators. It established principles for platform management and hosts annual reporting on journalist homicides.

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Reporters Without Borders (RSF), and Article 19 are organizations of civil society that have documented abuses in previous elections, helped determine misinformation campaigns, and government-oriented censorship that are increasing due to the manipulation of legislation.

Even today, most efforts fail to address advanced technologies such as deepfakes and zero-click surveillance. Platform governance remains uneven, and governments often pressure businesses to suppress information that is more politically uncomfortable than harmful. These attempts have not done much to reduce systemic risks to journalists, as algorithms that amplify information that divides people are still in place.

Possible Solutions

We need to press national governments to adopt legally enforceable structures that prohibit the misuse of “fake news” legislation for political repression and prosecution of violence against journalists. This could involve establishing independent judicial review panels that review government allegations of misinformation prior to imposing punishment. States should be encouraged to embody Article 19 of the ICCPR in national laws if there is to be an unambiguous protection of freedom of expression in the digital environment.

Transparency reporting from leading platforms could be monitored by an international regulatory agency with the backing of UNESCO and the UN Human Rights Council. Member countries need to establish individual national units to monitor threats, offer emergency protection, and organize legal support for journalists in danger. Such systems in developing countries may be possible with the support of an international funding pool, possibly supported by the UN and the EU.

Governments, NGOs and UNESCO could be teaming up to implement media literacy into the national curriculum and public education programs, such as how to evaluate sources, to understand algorithms, and to recognize false information and information produced by artificial intelligence. Authoritarians find it harder to control narratives when people are more resistant to misinformation. An updated global database may be created highlighting violations, surveillance incidents, and misinformation-based harassment to ensure openness.

Endnotes

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