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# Freedom of Expression Across Regimes: Historical Shifts in Media–State Relations

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## Abstract

Freedom of speech, a cornerstone of democratic societies, intersects with national authority in certain systems. This study uses a comparative analysis of classical liberal democracies, authoritarian regimes, socialist states, and new digital regimes to examine evolving dynamics between media institutions and the manipulation of the nation. Historically, classical liberalism promoted media autonomy through marketplace mechanisms and minimal state intervention, promoted citizens' responsibility by protecting expression imposed strict censorship through legal frameworks authoritarian and socialist regimes and monopolized registration channels Enforced constitutional guarantees through continuous multiple market system, pressures that prevent authentic media diversity The digital generation introduces new challenges, including surveillance technologies and content content constraints produce paradox, where the international internet gains access to catalyze every increased openness in closed societies and a nominal de-limitation of society. The paper concludes that the type of regime fundamentally affects the mechanisms used to control expression, and that while technological progress changes tools of control, the local authority of states still loosely mediates expression in all traditional and digital contexts.

**Keywords:** Freedom of Expression, Historical Shifts, Media State Relations

## 1. Introduction

Freedom of expression encompasses the rights of individuals to seek, receive, and impart information freely without hindrance from external authorities. A vital component of public life, it enables citizens to articulate beliefs, concerns, and preferences, enhancing the possibility of accountability and good governance. Freedom of expression also includes the right to hold unpopular or unconventional opinions without fear of repression, as well as the protection of non-verbal forms such as art and symbols. Freedom of expression is closely intertwined with the emergence of media that are necessary to disseminate information and opinions among the public. A more encompassing term that encompasses individuals' capacity to use mass sending technologies and to engage in public deliberation is "media freedom" (Meyen, 2018).

Media freedom entails widespread access to channels of mass communication, but the factor that has attracted most scholarly attention refers to media restrictions imposed by the

state through legal, administrative, and other means. An analytic lens that focuses on the interaction between freedom of expression and state authority highlights important historical cases, the mechanisms through which authoritative control is exercised, and the justifications offered for imposing controls (Schimpfössl, Yablokov, Fedirko, Zeveleva, & Bajomi-Lazar, 2020).

Media are understood as mass communication technologies that enable the supply of information and opinions and state as the political and administrative institutions that assert sovereignty over a defined geographical territory through mechanisms such as coercion, taxation, and legal financing. (Rothe, Boas, Farbotko, & Kitara, 2024).

A regime consists of the durable configurations of offices that define decision-making procedures over how the collective interests of a state are articulated and serves as intermediary structure between state and society. Censorship denotes authoritative interventions in the public expression of information or opinions, pluralism points to the state's arrangement of competing individuals and organizations, and surveillance is defined as an observation mechanism affecting in particular activities of individuals and organizations involved in the supply of information and opinions. (Yang, 2025).

### 1.1 Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative historical-comparative inquiry design to observe the evolution of free speech and members of the media-state family in specific political regimes. The study aims to analyze how different forms of governance have encouraged the regulation, manipulation, and development of media institutions from classical liberal technologies to the contemporary virtual era.

The study usually looks at secondary materials, such as scholarly books, peer-reviewed journals, older information, authoritative documents, constitutional texts, media laws, and reviews published by international organizations related to freedom of expression and media governance. These assets provide both historical and contemporary evidence of the relationship between political authority and communication systems. A comparative approach is used to examine 4 major categories of regimes: classical liberal democracies, dictatorships, socialist states, and leading digital regimes. Analysis with key parameters such as criminal protection of free speech, censorship practices, national ownership and control of media, media technology, and

The overview further uses historical institutional assessment to signal key changes in media-state members of the family at particular times. Special interest is given to important political and technological variations, including the emergence of liberal constitutionalism, reform of state-controlled media systems, democratization strategies, market liberalization, and the upward push of virtual oral exchange platforms. Data will be analyzed through thematic content analysis. Relevant literature and coverage documents are examined to detect common themes related to freedom of expression, state intervention, media autonomy, censorship, fact monopoly, crime control, and digital governance, and then the findings are

synthesized to explain how adjustments in policy arrangements have transformed the nation's justice and freedom of speech. By combining historical assessment with Go-governance assessment, the overview seeks to provide a complete understanding of the evolving marriage between free speech, media institutions, and political energy in specific organizational contexts.

### 1.2 Literature Review

Most studies reveal how media-nation-family members and freedom of expression were reshaped by regime imperatives, liberalization processes, postcolonial dynamics, and regime-specific political reforms among regimes That is

**Key insights drawn from the literature review include:**

- Media governance as a two-way, commitment-strengthening mechanism: Policy discourse emphasizes dialogue between citizens and authorities as the basis for transparent governance, legitimacy and better public services, suggesting that statistical freedom is of maximum importance when combined with participatory interaction (Mcloughlin & Scott, 2010).
- Liberalization and obstacles to governance: Analysis of the liberalization trajectory in Turkey tracks how national governance, elite integration, media guidelines, and institutional credibility build media substantive autonomy regardless of formal reforms, revealing and managing ongoing tensions between open players in the contemporary context.
- Postcolonial infrastructures and global–proximal dynamics: The postcolonial review foregrounds how colonial legacies and transnational media structures currently situate governance, development issues, and dissent regulation, underscoring that media flows operate within complex, stratified networks across a Western hemisphere (Aouragh & Chakravartty, 2016).
- Variation in autonomy across systems: A typology of forty-six media systems shows that formal freedom guarantees do not guarantee independence Ownership, licensing, funding, training and security-compliant practices combine to distance journalism from autonomy, with regional characteristics (May. 2018).
- Case-title nuances and regional specificities: The 2011 uprising in Jordan demonstrate how political upheavals interact with press freedom constraints, highlighting the variable and contextually situated nature of liberalization and the way civil society and state strategies recalibrate when various crises threaten the media (Bætur, 2019).

Overall, across regimes, freedom of speech emerges as a feature of regime structures, economic and political incentives, and historical trajectories, now not just the presence or absence of sanctions. and how regulatory reforms translate into measurable adjustments in media independence and governance outcomes.

## 2. Conceptual Framework: Freedom of Expression and Media–State Dynamics

Freedom of expression, a fundamental human right and an indispensable condition for

democracy, can be understood through the lens of historical changes in media-state relations. This perspective illuminates the interplay between expression and power over time while examining media as a crucial channel of expression and the state as a powerful social institution. Such an exploration highlights the mechanisms by which regimes either constrain or direct expression, revealing distinctive causal pathways that shape liberalizing or repressive trajectories and underscoring the importance of regime type in understanding freedom of expression across diverse media landscapes. (Nurullayevich, 2025).

Freedom of expression encompasses the individual and collective right to disseminate or receive information and ideas without interference, as well as the right to seek such information (Meyen, 2018). The mass media refers to technically mediated forms of communication employing one-to-many dissemination on a large scale, including newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and the Internet. The state denotes a social institution wielding a monopoly on the legitimate use of force over a specific territory. A regime represents the set of formal and informal rules governing the exercise of state power, with the prevalent type of regime dictating how states fulfil their primary functions, including the buttressing of freedom of expression.

Censorship constitutes any act that curbs the free flow of information or impedes the dissemination of ideas. Pluralism indicates the degree of competition between media outlets and the variety of content they provide, thereby shaping the potential diversity of viewpoints that citizens may access. Surveillance refers to the systematic monitoring of human behaviour and communication for the purpose of information-gathering. Censorship and pluralism flow from the manner in which states use their coercive power to influence media—via technical, economic, or legal channels. Surveillance connects to the shaping of state-citizen relations, serving as a means of social control that establishes incentives for citizens to alter their public communication or information-seeking behaviour. (Gosztonyi, 2023)

## 3. Classical Liberalism and Early Media Institutions

As freedom of expression emerged as a distinct concept in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, early media institutions embedded this principle into practices of printing and newspaper publication. The spread of printing technology permitted wider communication beyond the sole authority of the monarchy, stimulating the establishment of a vibrant public sphere. Classical liberal thinkers argued that the media ought to act independently from state oversight and suggested that market incentives alone could remove the need for censorship (Coe, 2018).

To safeguard this autonomy, the state first recognized the institution of freedom of the press. The highly regulated printing press at the turn of the modern era yielded to a more autonomous newspaper institution thanks to the progressive liberalization of press laws in European countries. Even though censorship practices persisted, self-regulation and independent state oversight institutions furthered the establishment of a free media system. A fundamental characteristic of early liberalism was the expectation that citizens themselves would take responsibility for their countries. Accordingly, a strong case was made for voluntary, self-regulation by the media, enhanced by the very existence of the freedom of the

press principle on which the citizens themselves had placed their own imprint. (Gilbertson, n.d)

## 4. State-Centric Regimes and Information Control

Freedom of expression is subordinate to centralized political control in state-centric regimes, including authoritarian and socialist models. These regimes directly determine permissible expressions and routinely impose formal restrictions on media institutions. In authoritarian contexts, legally enshrined censorship mechanisms serve as the primary means for stifling dissent. Controls often invoke state security justifications and encompass a broad array of actions extending beyond outright prohibitions. Where a core state ideology persists, socialist regimes actively cultivate a monopoly over information channels as a means to justify interventions across diverse topics and media types (Meyen, 2018). The ruling party retains exclusive legal rights to publish in state-owned outlets, while unions, ministries, and other organizations subordinate outputs to the party line. Even through nominally independent joint-stock companies, media organizations remain integrated into state party structures and must seek approval prior to releasing significant articles c (Beiter, 2019).

### 4.1. Authoritarian States and Censorship Mechanisms

Empirical evidence from various societies suggests that authoritarian regimes have constructed legal frameworks to control freedom of expression under the rubric of information security. To sustain public legitimacy, they position such legal instruments under the pretext of protecting national security and the safety of society and individuals from harmful information (Al-Saqaf, 2016). Most of the measures hence adopted seek to limit or eliminate views critical of those in power. These regimes impose strict restrictions on public expression and deploy extensive censorship mechanisms against traditional media, including prohibitions on opposition views and limits on access to foreign sources (Schimpfössl, Yablokov, Fedirko, Zeveleva, & Bajomi-Lazar, 2020). Resilience to criticism, self-justification, and rejection of the notion of a right to receive uncensored information represent additional control dimensions systematically apparent in contemporary authoritarian systems.

### 4.2. Socialist States and Information Monopolies

In one-party systems, state power monopolizes information channels via formal mechanisms such as ownership or regulation (De Smaele, 2015). Socialist regimes adhere to one-party rule, installing state ownership over media outlets and promoting coordinated distribution of information uniquely shaped by an ideological doctrine.

While the state retains extensive authority over information channels, dynamic ideological shifts condition mass media distribution and framing. A domestic media apparatus controlled by the ruling party indicates the absence of pluralism and fundamental constraints on free (De Smaele, 2015)dom of expression. Socialist regimes uphold formalised information guidance for media alongside state ownership, relying on party frameworks or documents to inform distribution. Integration of media channels facilitates co-ordination of mass communication and enforcement of ideological direction across diverse domains—news, literature, or entertainment. Emergence of pluralism in the information sphere ultimately entails significant

changes to existing frameworks governing channels and modes of mass communication. (Kies & Lukasik, 2023).

## 5. Transitions to Multiparty Democracies and Media Liberalization

In a pivotal moment of political transformation, numerous countries have initiated processes to establish multiparty democracies, culminating in historical elections with the emergence of diverse media systems. The adoption of constitutional safeguards representing the cornerstone of these transitions has stirred hope for enhanced freedom of expression and communication. However, many regimes continue to control and manipulate the expanded media landscape. These regimes often engage in legal reforms, constitutional litheness, market-oriented adjustments, and privatization; yet, selected others restrict simple print or broadcast channels through uneconomical pluralism combined with enlarging ownership in fully privatized media (Burrett, 2017). Three distinctive trajectories emerge concerning freedom of expression, media pluralism, and market liberalization after reform under privatization—pure constitution, monopolized pseudo-pluralism, and simple market access, respectively. In countries like Lebanon, judicial guardianship and intensive observance also persist and rid of the arduous necessity controlling these marked interest (Christensen, 2014).

### 5.1. Legal Reforms and Freedom of Expression

Legislative reforms, determining the role of the media vis-à-vis state authority, are consequential for the evolution of a democratic society. Legal guarantees of freedom of expression, alongside judicial protection and a conceptual framing that enables articulation of rights, constitute a foundation for, yet do not automatically ensure, liberal media policy. Freedoms are regularly curtailed through constitutional amendments, restrictive interpretations, new statutes, and state utilization or circumvention of formal law; media legislation remains among the first to suffer in an environment of political retrenchment (Meyen, 2018).

The consequences of freedom-of-expression guarantees depend upon pre-existing arrangements and reform trajectories, including market liberalization. Determining whether the term ‘freedom of expression’ designates an imperative toward lack of restraints on media, or instead an expectation of broader societal discourse, substantially frames applicable rights. Further, an overlapping relationship between freedom of expression guarantees and the legal status of public-service media is sometimes present. Legislation complementary to constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression has materialized and additional provisions sought in many instances. (Ragnarsson, 2022).

### 5.2. Market Reforms, Media Pluralism, and Technological Change

Across Eastern and Central Europe, market reforms initially aimed to preserve state status in the audiovisual sector while permitting private ownership of print media (Price, 2009). Yet historical norms persisted, guiding privatization forms and influencing new entrants. Widespread de-licensing, however, fostered the emergence of diverse audiovisual actors. Formal media deregulation accompanied by cross-ownership and broadcast convergence produced oligopolistic systems with limited media plurality (Meyen, 2018).

Jailing of economically precarious journalists did not signify high owner influence but indicated problematic access to advertising funds. Market relations and diversification thus yielded contradictory effects on access and diversity.

## 6. Regimes of Digital Communication: Surveillance, Content Moderation, and Online Expression

The governance of digital communication has led to new forms of censorship and control that disrupt freedom of expression [and] reshape the agency of state and non-state actors. States regard the Internet as a medium for disinformation while adopting surveillance architectures characterized by the ubiquitous collection of data, private-sector storage of this data, and a search for warranties against the erosion of trust between state and citizen. Surveillance readily enables the identification of opposition figures, intensifying the chilling effect on dissent and the potential for regime change. (Gohdes, 2023)

Governments enact and enforce content moderation policies, while private-sector platforms retain the capacity to shape content through their own terms-of-service arrangements. These structural arrangements spur calls for greater transparency concerning moderation and the algorithms that calibrate the prioritization of content. The buoyancy of online expression hinges on anonymity—particularly critical to effectively organize collective action—which is regularly undermined by state legislation and private-sector market strategies. Misinformation circulates continuously, with its content and form determined by audience participation and algorithmic selection, raising questions about institutional credibility across media. (Gorwa, 2024)

The rise of global digital networks permits the simultaneous broadcast of mass communication in multiple jurisdictions, generating friction that tests state sovereignty and opens possibilities. Pressure arises for the resecuritization of freedom of expression via access to the global Internet in closed societies, presenting challenges when the platforms of that very Internet restrict activities and communications in open societies (Hintz, 2016).

## 7. Conclusion

State–media relations have shifted across regimes, influencing freedom of expression through different mechanisms and narratives. Authoritarian and socialist regimes used coercion to contain expression without undermining legitimacy; exposure to alternative viewpoints could threaten power and cohesion. Between these poles, regimes pursued state direction and support for media that nonetheless maintained limited pluralism. Transitions to pluralist systems involved further opening of state media or privatization alongside judicial strengthening to enforce rights against potential abuse. The entry of conduits that aggregate and disseminate rapidly evolving digital expressions complicated and accelerated the evolution of regimes' responses. Of the lessons learned from these historical shifts, three stand out. Regime configurations affect the mechanisms and narratives deployed to shape expression. The key role of media in enhancing status and legitimacy prompts agents to engage in censorial actions against oppositional content, securing openness that permits state credibility. Advances in human communication have triggered shifts in governance tools,

though the territorial basis of authority continues to mediate freedom of expression across digital networks.

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