

Government Censorship Obligations in the Media

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Background & History

- Censorship is the suppression, or hiding, of information, opinion, or expression by a government or other authority in order to control circulation
- Origins in the first civilizations
- Occurred to prevent situations seen as offensive, obscene, or blasphemous from being leaked to the public
- The United States has established the First Amendment to the Constitution
- Rupert Murdoch became one of the first newspaper publishers to venture online with a plan to display it with his newspaper and TV content. He wants to eliminate online news as it imposes copyrights.

THE FIRST AMENDMENT
CONGRESS SHALL MAKE NO LAW RESPECT-
ING AN ESTABLISHMENT OF RELIGION, OR
PROHIBITING THE FREE EXERCISE THEREOF;
OR ABRIDGING THE FREEDOM OF SPEECH, OR
OF THE PRESS; OR THE RIGHT OF THE PEOPLE
PEACEABLY TO ASSEMBLE, AND TO PETITION THE
GOVERNMENT FOR A REDRESS OF GRIEVANCES.
PROTECT THE FIRST AMENDMENT. SUPPORT THE GBLDF

Arguments For Censorship

- In times of war high priority on national security results in policies that limit public access to information that is deemed too sensitive or inappropriate.
- If the government does not censor certain information from the public, national security will be threatened.*

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- Therefore, it is necessary for the government to censor information pertaining to war in order to preserve national security

*Kostyu, P. E. (2004). The First Amendment in theory and practice. In W.W. Hopkins (Ed.), *Communication and the law* (pp. 25–44). Northport, AL: Vision Press.

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- Censorship is more for protection than a restriction of information
- Lack of censorship would inform the public with things that could be frightening
- Filters out misleading and biased information

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- Therefore, censorship protects certain information from being misleading or biased.

- Media's constant echoing of the government "guarantees" information to be true (if it is repeated enough, then people will believe it to be true).
- People want to live a life which is comfy and quiet as a measure of security.

- Is censorship necessary or unnecessary in our open society? Why? What should/shouldn't be censored?
- Does the media in the United States release too much or too little government information?

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11432849>

- Advantage always on terrorist (offense); target (defense)
- Defense wants to be in control but it is easier for offense to take control
- Want to turn intelligence picture from different sources into evidence to stop plot & prosecute those behind plan
- But, advantage has been taken away from authorities because of leak; harder to be sneaky when they know that you know plan
- Now they have to map out afterwards (aftermath of attack)
- Mapping after attack will probably not include arresting or charging the guilty
- Might this situation be different if the plot hadn't been leaked into the U.S.? Did we have the right to publicly announce it?

Arguments Against Censorship

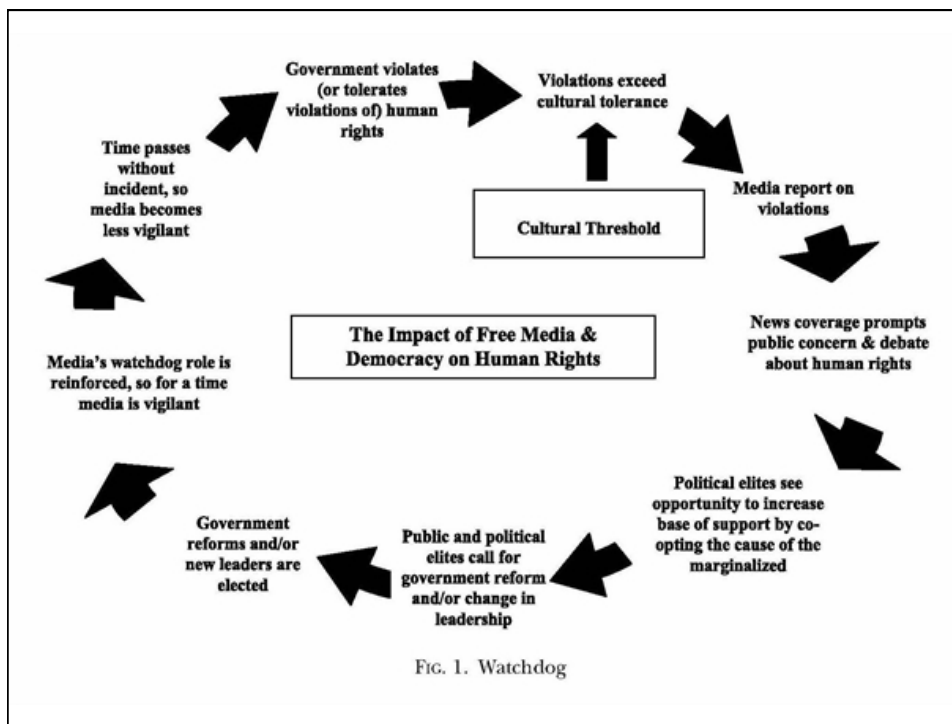
- Censorship in media distorts the truth.
 - The distortion of the truth misleads people into believing the untruth.
 - This constitutes a form of lying.
 - Lying is morally impermissible
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- Therefore, censorship in the news media is morally impermissible.

- Media censorship is used to manipulate information in order to favor particular views or beliefs.
 - This manipulation creates biases.
 - Biases restrict the full truth.
 - The media has an ethical obligation to present unbiased information.
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- Therefore, censorship manipulates information causing biases which is unethical in the media.

- In a democracy the government is accountable to the people and what they know about government issues.
 - Censorship allows the government to hide information that may be relevant to the citizens' ability to fairly judge how the government has fulfilled its duties to the people.
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- Therefore, censorship violates the trust that people have placed in the government.

- Is it better to be protected from the truth, or to be told that truth, no matter how unsettling it may be?
- To what extent should the media try to influence our beliefs?



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