

# The Value of Freedom of the Press Throughout the World

By Marcos Martinez

“The current era is the worst time for countries to be ruled under democratic systems of government.” The first time I heard this statement I was on a trip to China that took place one month after Donald Trump’s election victory. After hearing this statement from a major Chinese leader it became clear to me that the effects of the nationalist rhetoric in the United States were already being strongly felt by elites and government officials in China. It is well known that China restricts freedom of the press and has imposed bans on the use of several social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, among other repressive actions against dissidents and activists.

Conversations I had during the trip alongside a group of students from the University of California made me realize the impact that U.S. nationalistic and isolationist sentiments were having in China and that in fact these shockwaves were spanning the globe and would deeply reshape the current world order. For example, while we were visiting the cities of Shanghai, Beijing and Kunming, the incoming U.S. administration made comments that questioned the One China Policy, breaking with decades of diplomatic precedent.

Most of the leaders we met with in China spoke openly and without any noticeable regret about the lack of press freedom and the bans imposed on Twitter and Facebook. For them, those measures were intended to maintain order and stability in the country. One of the entrepreneurs that we spoke with even said that the current era is the worst time for countries to be ruled under democratic systems of government. It was troubling that most of them referred to the recent democratic elections in the U.S. as a reason why democracy is not the ideal model of government for modern times. I strongly disagree with that view.

Now more than ever, it is clear to me that the advantages of democracy shine more amidst political and economic turmoil; that is when achieving consensus proves to be democracy’s greatest asset. It is the freedom that democracy brings what allows citizens to protest and express dissent.

I was born and raised in a county where freedom of the press is often attacked by governments and criminals alike. Mexico has become one of the deadliest places to practice journalism with more than 38 journalists murdered due to their profession since 1992, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. I decided to become a reporter while living in northern Mexico because, despite the risks, I strongly believe in the power of the press and that independent and honest journalism is needed to shed light on the darkest places of society and government. As a reporter in Mexico I learned about the

importance of holding the powerful accountable through honest and thorough reporting.

The changing international political climate and increasingly commonplace suppression of the free press have intensified the need for international media to serve as watchdogs of repressive regimes and reveal the darkest places of governments across the globe. In an era when facts are consistently disparaged by the powerful, it is with honest, accurate and factual reporting that the international media can effectively serve as a counterbalance of power and fight against repression.

Humanitarian crises caused by political and religious conflicts throughout the world can be adequately covered and exposed to the world with thorough reporting on these burning issues and even contribute to its resolution.

The Syrian crisis has led to the displacement of 4.8 million people, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The U.S. State Department reports that between 600,000 to 800,000 people are victims of human trafficking each year, of whom 80% are female and half are children. Such deplorable and urgent crises around the globe must be addressed and investigated by a strong international media.

Authoritarian regimes around the world will not stop suppressing the rights of expressing dissent and holding free and fair electoral processes; but it is also evident that societies, without hesitation, will keep organizing and mobilizing against threats to their liberties. The most recent example of this reaction is the rise in grassroots activism in the United States spurred by President Trump's election victory.

The global news media has begun strengthening its own actions to increase the international coverage of corruption through collaborative projects such as the coverage and investigation of the Panama Papers and the Swiss Leaks. In-depth reporting is one of the most effective tools society has to effectively fight for its own advancement and now more than ever it must be applied.