



NEWSPAPERS
THAT NEVER
ARRIVE

REPORTERS
WITHOUT BORDERS
FOR FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

CONTENTS

Foreword	4
Print media distribution's three main stages	5
1 - Readers with no newspapers to buy	6
▼ Removing newspapers from newsstands	7
The cost of concealing the truth in Madagascar	7
Confiscation in Togo, threats in Congo-Brazzaville	7
Equatorial Guinea: an issue goes up in smoke	8
▼ Very selective display	9
The art of choosing shop displays in Poland	9
Independent press banned from Serbian airports	10
▼ Threats and violence used to remove unwanted content	11
Poster that enraged the Turkish president's supporters in France	11
A French press freedom symbol in flames	12
News vendor – a dangerous trade in Mexico	13
▼ Obstruction of print media distribution in figures	14
2 - The many pitfalls of print media delivery	16
▼ Transportation and obstacles to distribution	17
Nigerian newspapers seized at army roadblocks	17
Travails of a delivery truck driver in Kashmir	18
Difficulties distributing Pakistan's oldest English-language newspaper	19
Unprecedented seizure at Brazilian depot	20
▼ Delivery limited by postal charges or taxes	21
Russian postal subscriptions under threat	21
Kosovo's customs duty weapon	22
▼ Borders that cannot be crossed	23
<i>Jeune Afrique</i> – not welcome in Algeria	23
<i>Rafiki</i> issue disappears at the DRC border	25
<i>Charlie Hebdo</i> – distribution ban for blasphemy	26
▼ Distribution's "serial censors"	28

3 - Printing – A fragile stage in the process 30

▼ Printing presses exposed to every kind of danger 31

Sudan, number 1 in seizing papers as they come off the press 31

Egypt's state printing company censors *Al Ahaly* 32

Gabonese newspaper's contents substituted at the printer 33

French printing presses blocked by striking workers... and by protesters 34

▼ Newsprint worth its weight in gold 35

Venezuela's opposition papers hit hardest by newsprint shortages 35

Three Nicaraguan newspapers deprived of newsprint and ink 36

A solution for the Maltese press 37

A distribution expert's take / Interview with Carine Nevejans 38

▼ State and private-sector monopolies that restrict printing and distribution 40

Bulgarian businessman with total control 40

A multimedia conglomerate's grip on Argentina 41

State monopolies throttle Azerbaijan's last opposition paper / 42

Three questions for *Azadlig* editor Ganimat Zahid 42

4 - RSF recommendations 44

FOREWORD

OBSTRUCTING PRINT MEDIA DISTRIBUTION

A newspaper's printers, transporters, distributors and retailers are rarely named in its masthead or credits, but they are all essential links in the long and complex press distribution chain. Without them, readers would not be able to access news each day, week or month and they would be denied access to diverse sources of information, essential nourishment needed to feed minds in a democratic society.

Press freedom is based not only on the ability of journalists and their news organizations to work without constraint or fear, but also on the freedom to circulate the product of their work. A publisher's financial health must be preserved, printers must be free to print whatever newspapers they want, and finally, whether state-owned, privately-owned or cooperative, distributors must distribute all print media, regardless of their nature, with the same diligence and impartiality throughout the country. Any interference or any impediment in to this process limits the public's access to information.

According to a survey by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) in more than 90 countries, 68% of cases of obstruction in the circulation of newspapers are attributable to governments and state authorities, while 41% of cases of newspaper censorship take place at the point of sale. Until it reaches the hands of its readers, a newspaper continues to be vulnerable, and the predators of press freedom are infinitely imaginative.

Entire newspaper issues are confiscated as they come off the press or are bought up from newsstands, content is surreptitiously substituted, crippling import duties are introduced and orchestrated shortages in essential raw material such as newsprint all take place. Using these methods, if the individual, group or government hasn't prevented a journalistic investigation or silenced the journalist, they still have many ways to block information during the dissemination process.

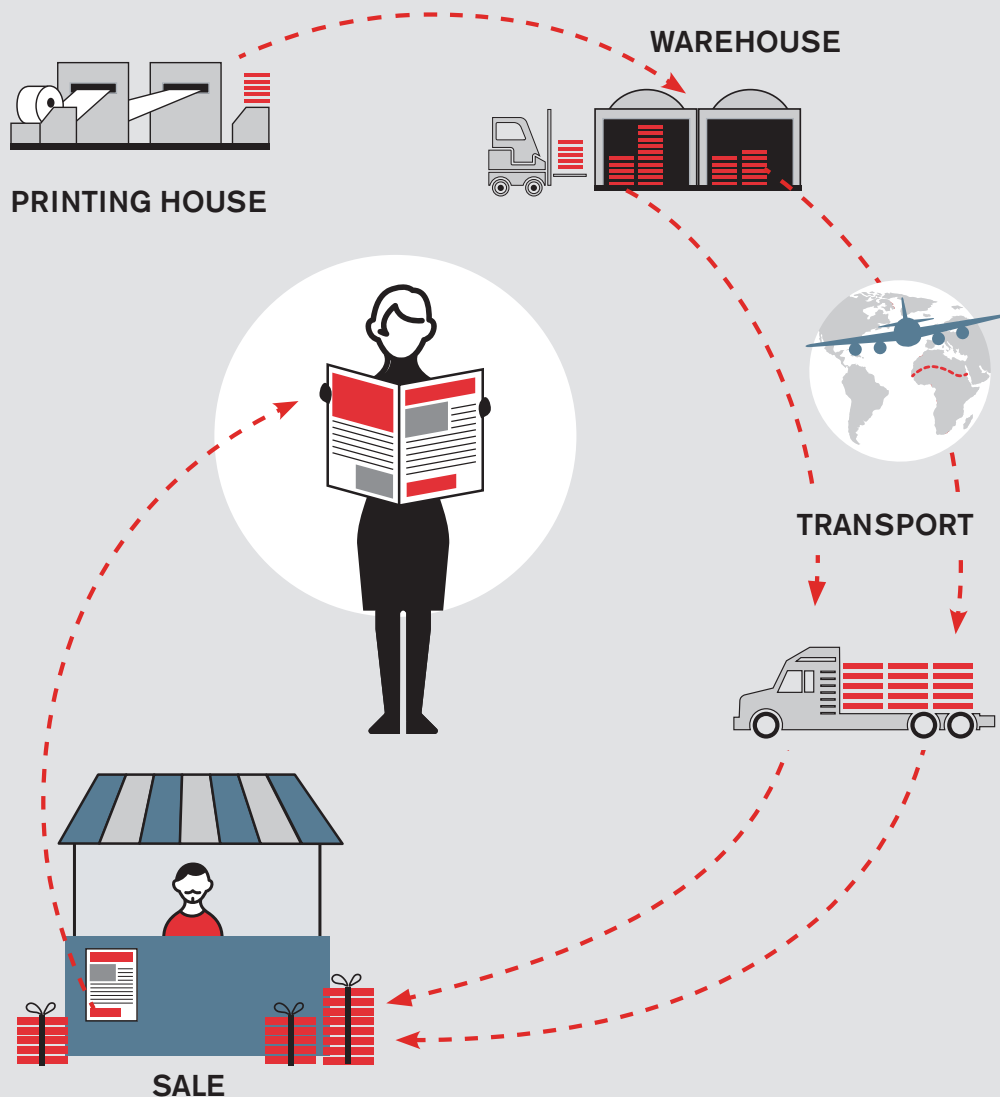
The methods of censorship range from the most obvious and brutal – for example, killing a newspaper seller who is shouting out a headline – to the most insidious. It sometimes takes time, but the control that an oligarch or government exercises over the print or distribution sector may allow them to get rid of an unwanted publication discreetly and definitively.

In an increasingly digital world where the print media is in continual decline – it lost an average of 10% of its readers and advertising income in 2017-2018 – newspaper printing and distribution sectors are more and more vulnerable to pressure. Because of this, it is imperative to expose and make public the practices that threaten our fundamental freedom to be informed.



[PRINT MEDIA DISTRIBUTION'S THREE MAIN STAGES]

THE OFTEN-DANGEROUS DISTRIBUTION CIRCUIT



1 READERS WITH NO NEWSPAPERS TO BUY

They are the last link in the print media distribution chain. Whether it is street vendors in Mexico, kiosk managers on Paris's biggest avenue, or retailers in Polish service stations, Serbian airports or on the streets of Madagascar or Congo-Brazzaville, news vendors play a vital role in the dissemination of news and information.

→
Newspaper kiosk
in Antananarivo on
22 October 2013,
before presidential
election day in 2013.
© Stéphane de Sakutin / AFP



The last intermediary between the newspaper and its readers, the news vendor also represents the last opportunity to restrict access to information. According to an RSF survey (see page 15), 41% of cases of newspaper censorship take place at the point of sale. An entity or individual can prevent the dissemination of a news story discreetly and without financial impact on the publication by buying up all available copies from newsstands. Obstruction is more visible in the many cases where entire issues are confiscated. And it is even more insidious when news vendors have no choice but to exclusively promote pro-government publications to the detriment of independent ones, which then end up having to stop publication. And finally, the censorship can be radical and brutal, as when news vendors are directly threatened, or even murdered. Regardless of the ways and means, the goal is always the same – to prevent a newspaper from being read.



A range of methods may be used to prevent a newspaper from being read – from confiscating the entire issue to buying up all available copies from newsstands, and even murdering newspaper sellers.

© Pixabay

REMOVING NEWSPAPERS FROM NEWSSTANDS

The cost of concealing the truth in Madagascar

The Madagascar bi-weekly *Telonohorefy* expected to sell out quickly on 18 September 2018 because its front page featured photos of the First Lady and an adviser to then President Rajaonarimampianina and a headline claiming they'd had an affair. The issue did indeed quickly disappear from newsstands, but it was not bought by the usual readers. All available copies were bought "as discreetly as possible by government representatives," a member of the newspaper's staff recalls.

Telonohorefy tried to cover the story again a few days later. And again the issue disappeared from circulation. As a result, the story never received wide circulation. "As it was a delicate subject, no other newspaper dared cover it," a local journalist said. But six months later, when the president's adviser was arrested on charges of embezzlement and corruption, *Telonohorefy* republished a photograph of him alongside one of the First Lady, and said he had been arrested for leading the president's wife "astray". This issue sold normally.



↑ The 18 September 2018 issue of the Madagascar newspaper *TeloNohorefy*, claiming that the First Lady and a presidential adviser were having an affair, was bought up en masse from newsstands by the government.

© DR

Confiscation in Togo, threats in Congo-Brazzaville

The most discreet method of suppressing an unwanted newspaper issue is to buy it up before it reaches the newsstands, or confiscate it. This is what happened in September 2017 in Togo. Issue No. 2958 of the Paris-based pan-African weekly *Jeune Afrique*, which featured President Faure Gnassingbé on its cover, was nowhere to be found in the Togolese capital, Lomé. In an editorial headlined "Togolese truths" in the following week's issue, then editor François Soudan wrote: "After landing at Lomé-Tokoin international airport on 18 September, all *Jeune Afrique* copies were seized by customs officials, as in the good old days of one-party rule (...) Before giving our distributor the brush-off, the customs officers made sure to pocket the customs clearance fees."

When an entire issue is bought up after distribution, retailers may be at risk. News vendors in Congo-Brazzaville still recall an episode from 2016. "Newsstand owners called us at 8 a.m. to say that all copies of our latest issue had been sold," said Rufin Mahinga, the publisher of the Congolese newspaper *Polele Polele*, which he founded



↑ The Congolese newspaper *Polele Polele* often has front-page stories that are very critical of the government. This is the 12 May 2015 issue.

© DR

in 2009. “Men who were not identified by the news vendors but who were recognised as police officers had spread all over the city and bought up all the copies.”

The staff of *Polele Polele* decided to dispatch more copies to the newsstands but the vendors refused to take delivery because “the police had threatened to arrest them if they sold this issue,” Mahinga added. One of the issue’s front-page headlines read: “How do we make him leave?” Although the newspaper had refrained from placing a photograph of the president beside the headline, it was clear to whom they were alluding.

Equatorial Guinea: an issue goes up in smoke

In Equatorial Guinea, the authorities don’t worry about being discreet when removing newspaper issues they dislike from newsstands. According to Samuel Obiang Mbana, the only journalist working for international media outlets in Equatorial Guinea, it is a country “where the environment for journalism is poisonous, where the national press is imprisoned and where a journalist who tries to do his job is automatically declared to be an enemy or opponent of the regime”.



↑ Equatorial Guinea’s information minister was very annoyed by an August 2017 interview in which journalist Samuel Obiang Mbana criticized censorship and the lack of protection for journalists. .

© Samuel Obiang Mbana

On 1 August 2017, all copies of the pro-government weekly *Ebano* were withdrawn from sale and burned because it made the mistake of publishing an interview with Mbana, who reports for *Agence France-Presse*, *Africa No. 1*, *AfricaNews* and the German public broadcaster *Deutsche Welle*. In the interview, Mbana criticized the regime’s harassment of the media and, in particular, the lack of respect that the police show towards journalists, and called on the government to give the police training on the role of the media and the need to let journalists do their job.



↑ Samuel Obiang Mbana, a freelance journalist in Equatorial Guinea who strings for various international media outlets, including *AFP* and *Deutsche Welle*.

© DR

VERY SELECTIVE DISPLAY

The art of choosing shop displays in Poland

In order to be bought, a newspaper must be spotted by potential readers among the dozens of other publications displayed by news vendors. Poland's ultra-conservative ruling party, Law and Justice (PiS), exploits this basic principle to undermine the opposition press. By forcing news vendors to display pro-government publications in an "aesthetic" and "visible" manner, it has found a very effective way to make independent newspapers invisible at the point of sale.

On the pretext of better accommodating the tastes of its clients, in January 2017, Lotos Paliwa, a state-owned company that manages a network of 480 service stations throughout Poland, ordered its managers to change the way they displayed newspapers and magazines. In particular, they were told to give prominent position to five right-wing, pro-government publications – *Nasz Dziennik*, which is published six days a week, and the weeklies *Do Rzeczy*, *Sieci*, *Wprost* and *Gazeta Polska*.

The company said the decision was taken after a management survey and that the aim was to better respond to the "consumer habits of the clients of our service stations". However, according to similar analyses by the private-sector distributor Kolporter, which runs Poland's biggest press distribution network, service station clients prefer women's magazines and celebrity magazines above all and, at retail points near motorways, erotic magazines. Second to these preferences are publications about social issues, politics and cars.

Lotos is not the only company to influence its clients' choices. The state-owned company Orlen carried out a similar reorganisation in its 1,700 service stations in 2016 and, to this end, terminated a retail display agreement with Agora, the publisher of the opposition newspapers *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Newsweek Poland*.



↑ Strict regulations determine how Polish news vendors arrange their displays. Pro-government newspapers have to be displayed more prominently than independent and opposition ones, and therefore sell better.

© Janek Skarzynski / AFP



↑ At the government's request, several independent publications were withdrawn from Air Serbia's departure lounges at Belgrade airport.

© Alexa Stankovic / AFP

Independent press banned from Serbian airports

In an attempt to recover a presence and visibility at Belgrade's Nikola Tesla's airport, Serbia's few remaining opposition publications staged a charm operation on 27 December 2018, in which journalists and members of the non-governmental organization (NGO) Civic Initiative gave away copies of the weeklies *NIN*, *Vreme* and *Nedeljnik* and the daily newspaper *Danas* to people travelling with the national airline Air Serbia and to the airline's employees.

The operation was organised a few days after these four opposition publications vanished from Air Serbia's departure lounges and aircraft in response to instructions to staff from the airline's management to remove certain newspapers and magazines that had previously been offered to passengers. The directive said: "Pay particular attention to *NIN*, *Vreme* and *Nedeljnik*, and newspapers with similar content."

Questioned by the Serbian TV channel N1, Air Serbia said these publications did not have distribution contracts, unlike *News*, *Blic*, *Alo* and *Serbian Telegraph*. But the publishers of these newspapers insisted that they had submitted contract offers to the airline.

"The administration did not give its permission for our demonstration and employees said it could not be filmed, but the newspapers we distributed were received with enthusiasm by the passengers," *Vreme* journalist Jovana Gligorijevic said, adding that press freedom in Serbia is being restricted by the high level of media ownership concentration. In the five years that Aleksandar Vucic has established a tight grip on Serbia, first as prime minister and then as president, journalism has ceased to be safe and is no longer encouraged by the authorities.

“

Air Serbia said these publications did not have distribution contracts.

”

THREATS AND VIOLENCE IN ORDER TO REMOVE UNWANTED CONTENT

Poster that enraged the Turkish president's supporters in France

A publication's need for newsstand visibility can, paradoxically, make it more vulnerable. Publishers of the French newsweekly *Le Point* discovered this when they decided to run a photo of Turkey's President Erdoğan on the cover of its 24 May 2018 issue alongside the words: *"The dictator: how far will Erdoğan go? An investigation into the Turkish president, his delusions of grandeur, his networks in France, his Algeria offensive and his crimes."* The headline so enraged Erdoğan's supporters in a suburb of Avignon in southern France that they demanded a poster featuring the cover be removed from a newsstand.

The newsstand's manager, Sylvain Ali, said: *"I tried using press freedom as an argument but they did not want to listen."* As the hours passed, the crowd grew around the newsstand and its youngest members threatened to set fire to it. Fearing that the protest could get out of hand, Ali's wife finally persuaded the company that owns the newsstand to remove the poster.

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“I tried using press freedom as an argument but they did not want to listen.”

Sylvain Ali,
kiosk manager

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↑ The cover of the French newsweekly *Le Point* referred to Turkey's President Erdoğan as a *"dictator"* on 24 May 2018, enraging his supporters to the point that posters advertising the issue were destroyed or had to be removed from kiosks in Avignon and Valence.

© Philippe Desmazes / AFP

After Erdoğan supporters destroyed the same poster that was being displayed at a newsstand in Valence, a city in the southeastern department of Drôme, *Le Point* condemned the *"attacks on symbols of freedom of expression and press diversity"* and called for the posters to be replaced at the newsstands in both cities. *"This was done within two hours,"* under the protection of the municipal police and a dozen gendarmes.

The week prior to the controversial issue, *Le Point* had been the target of *"insults, intimidation, antisemitic insults and threats"* on social networks.

A French press freedom symbol in flames

The images of burning newspaper kiosks along Paris's famous Champs-Élysées avenue on 16 March 2019 went around the world, triggering outrage.



↑ The 18th day of protests by “gilets jaunes” (yellow vest) demonstrators, on 16 March 2019, was marked by the torching of seven newspaper kiosks on the Champs-Élysées in Paris.

© Zakaria Abdelkafi / AFP

Seven kiosks were set on fire and five of them were completely destroyed. In the course of the violence that marked this, the 18th week of “gilets jaunes” (yellow vest) protests, 15 other kiosks were damaged in various ways, including by means of “graffiti, smashed windows and shutters being ripped off,” according to Jean-Paul Abonnenc, the CEO of MédiaKiosk, the company that has managed the French capital's newspaper kiosks since 2012.

Ever since the weekly “gilets jaunes” protests began in France in November 2018, they have been accompanied by acts of ransacking and looting on the fringes by supposedly radicalised protesters, by people bent on violence taking advantage of the protests, or by individuals linked to the small but extremely violent group known as the “Black Blocs”.

No one claimed responsibility for the torching of the newspaper kiosks in Paris but these acts of vandalism, public attacks on symbols of press freedom and free speech, came at a time when an anti-media climate had taken hold in France and the “gilets jaunes” were condemning “the disinformation system of the French media, 90% of which are owned by billionaire businessmen from the construction, armaments, luxury goods and telecom sectors who are close to the government.”

The newspaper kiosk managers have meanwhile been unable to understand why the protesters have vented their anger on them. “Why target a news vendor who works 70 hours a week without making a decent living?” one asked. Nelly Todde, who has managed a kiosk for the past 30 years and is vice president of the Union of Kiosk Managers, said: “Those who attack the kiosks must be unaware that the kiosk managers are self-employed workers who have to sweat blood and who are the last links in a press distribution chain.”

News vendor - a dangerous trade in Mexico

In Mexico, news vendors are called *voceadores* – a reference to the fact that they use their voices to announce the headlines of the newspapers they sell. Roaming the streets on foot, on bicycles or in vans, practising a trade passed from one generation to the next within the same family, they are part of Mexico's culture. They wake at 3 a.m. in order to shout the day's news to hundreds of thousands of people, often in the remotest corners of Mexico, and play a vital role in informing countless communities. But it is a risky business in a country that is one of the most dangerous in the world for the media.

Every year, *voceadores* are robbed of their newspapers, attacked, threatened and even killed. Victims have included Meréndez “Mere” Hernández Tiul, who used to drive a pickup truck with a loudspeaker on the roof selling the newspapers *El Choco* and *Novedades de Tabasco* in Francisco Rueda, a small town in a dangerous part of Tabasco state that has a great deal of organised crime. On the morning of 24 January 2018, he was announcing the arrest of a group of alleged motorcycle thieves in Francisco Rueda when he was approached by two men who were related to one of the detainees mentioned in the articles. One of these two men “fired two shots at ‘Mere’ because he didn’t like the article,” *El Choco* deputy editor Sergio Díaz Sosa said. With a gunshot wound to the head, the vendor drove to the nearest hospital but died before he could receive treatment.

A few days earlier, the killer had avoided arrest in connection with the theft of motorcycles. After the murder of Hernández Tiul, he managed to flee yet again, this time to the neighbouring state of Veracruz. This murder, like almost all murders of journalists in Mexico, remains unpunished.

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“**Voceadores are part of Mexico’s culture.**”



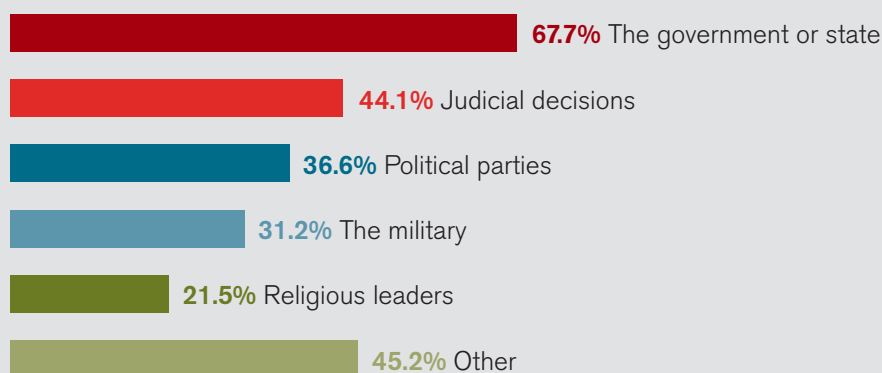
← Meréndez Hernández Tiul, a Mexican newspaper vendor who sold the *El Chico* and *Novedades de Tabasco* papers, was gunned down in January 2018 in a dangerous part of Francisco Rueda, a town in Tabasco state.

© Novedades de Tabasco

[FIGURES FOR OBSTRUCTION OF PRINT MEDIA DISTRIBUTION]

As part of the research for this report, RSF questioned journalists and print media distributors in more than 90 countries in order to better gauge and quantify the use of censorship in the print media distribution chain.**

Who is responsible for obstructing the distribution chain?

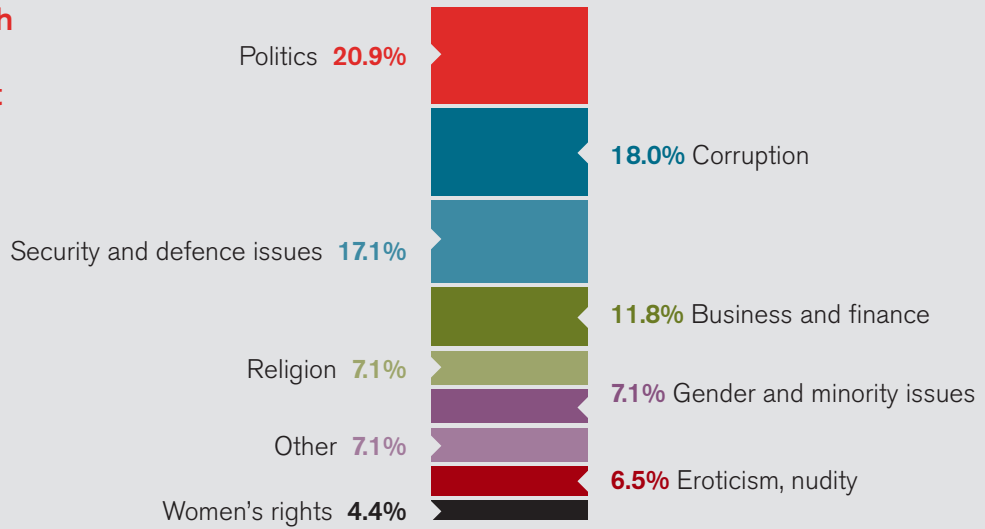


Nearly 68% of those polled thought that governments and state authorities were involved in acts of obstruction that delay or block the dissemination of news and information via the print media. State interference may be exercised via judicial institutions (44%), the military (31%) and religious leaders (21.5%). More than 45% of those surveyed also blamed organised crime, especially in Italy, Albania, Mexico and Bangladesh, oligarchs in Azerbaijan, intelligence agencies in Iraq, and angry citizens in Burundi and France.

*List of countries surveyed:

Albania, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin, Burma, Botswana, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, China, Cyprus, Northern Cyprus, Comoros, Congo, Costa Rica, Croatia, Czech Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Ecuador, Equatorial Guinea, Finland, France, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Greece, Guinea, Hong Kong, Hungary, India, Iraq, Iceland, Israel, Italy, Ivory Coast, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Liberia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Madagascar, Mali, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Montenegro, Mozambique, Netherlands, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Rwanda, Senegal, Serbia, Slovakia, Somalia, South Africa, South Korea, South Sudan, Spain, Sudan, Sri Lanka, Syria, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States, Venezuela, Zimbabwe.

Coverage of which subjects trigger the most frequent blocking of distribution?



The subjects that are censored most during distribution are politics (20.9%) and business stories, especially those involving corruption (18%). Nudity and erotic content trigger 6.5% of dissemination restrictions or bans. In 7.1% of the cases, the sensitive stories that are off limits are linked to regional issues: poverty in Equatorial Guinea; issues linked to Tibet and Taiwan in China; environmental issues in the Philippines; minorities in Sri Lanka; and in Turkey, anything that can be regarded as “propaganda” in favour of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK).

At what point in a newspaper’s production does the censorship take place?



Censorship of newspapers prior to printing is the most common form of censorship, according to more than 60% of those polled. This does not include the many cases of self-censorship cited in the “other” answers. The risk of censorship during distribution is nonetheless significant: more than 22% of answers also cited censorship while newspapers are being delivered, after leaving the printing presses. And newspapers continue to be vulnerable until they are actually in the readers’ hands: censorship at the point of sale was mentioned by 41% of the respondents.

**More than one answer could be given to each question, so the percentages add up to more than 100%.

2 THE MANY PITFALLS OF PRINT MEDIA DELIVERY

Disseminating the news properly means retail outlets must receive their deliveries on time and subscribers must receive their publications at the scheduled time or day. Transporting and distributing the print media is complex and so vital that that in many countries, such as France, it is regarded as a public service.

But in other countries, this crucial stage in the distribution chain offers an additional opportunity to restrict the circulation of independent or opposition print media. According to our survey (see page 14), 22% of cases of censorship take place while publications are being transported from the printing press to the point of sale. When the point of sale is in another country, the obstruction possibilities increase.



While some borders cannot be crossed because the country's authorities have banned the import of a foreign publication for religious or political reasons, governments and armies may also deploy significant resources to intercept delivery trucks. This has happened, for example, in Nigeria, in Indian-administered Kashmir and in Pakistan. Under a recent, unprecedented judicial decision in Brazil, the authorities were able to legally search a depot and confiscate newspapers with content that supposedly defamed the future president, and thereby prevent their circulation.

In other cases, economic measures have served as the censorship tool. As examples from Russia and Kosovo show, a government decision to impose an import tax or to scrap a state postage subsidy may threaten a publication's distribution or even the entire publishing sector.

←
22% of cases of censorship take place when newspapers are being transported from the printer to the point of sale.

© Stephan Agostini / AFP



← Many newspapers were seized at Nigerian army roadblocks while being delivered in June 2014.
© Cristina Aldehuela / AFP

TRANSPORTATION AND OBSTACLES TO DISTRIBUTION

Nigerian newspapers seized at army roadblocks

The Nigerian army carried out what it called “*routine security action*” during the first few days of June 2014, at a time when the country was on a maximum security alert in response to a surge in armed attacks by the Salafist militant group Boko Haram. The purpose of the army roadblocks was to search vehicles bringing newspapers to the capital, Abuja, and to ensure that no material threatening Nigerians’ security was being transported, army spokesman Chris Olukolade said.

But for the next four days, the army did not limit itself to checking the contents of newspaper distribution trucks. Issues of five daily newspapers, *Leadership*, *The Nation*, *The Punch*, *Vanguard* and *Daily Trust*, were seized and destroyed. At Lagos international airport, a distributor reported that “*a group of heavily-armed soldiers stormed the freight area and confiscated all newspaper issues waiting to be dispatched*”.

In the capital, soldiers stormed distribution centres, threatened distributors and prevented newspapers from being unloaded from trucks. Ten soldiers took control of the Minna distribution point and, after scrutinising the contents of all the newspaper issues there, allowed seven to be distributed, but banned distribution of the latest issues of three dailies: *The Nation*, *Leadership* and *Daily Trust*. The soldiers stayed at the distribution point until mid-afternoon to ensure that the three newspapers were not distributed.

“
Issues of five daily newspapers, were seized and destroyed.
”

→ The mayor of Chibok, the Nigerian town from which the jihadi terrorist group Boko Haram kidnapped hundreds of schoolgirls in 2014, holds an issue of the Nigerian newspaper *Leadership*, which reported that army officers colluded with Boko Haram.

© Pius Utomi Ekpei / AFP



Three days before these arbitrary seizures, *Leadership*, one of the worst-hit dailies, had reported that 10 army generals and five non-commissioned officers had been tried by court martial and convicted of colluding with Boko Haram militants. The army had denied the report, accusing the newspaper of trying to defame the army and “publishing and selling falsehoods”.

FOCUS

Travails of a delivery truck driver in Kashmir

Kashmiri separatist leader Burhan Muzaffar Wani’s death in Indian-administered Kashmir in July 2016 set off extremely violent protests, which many Kashmiri media outlets covered. But for three days in a row, the print media were subjected to draconian censorship “to ensure peace”. As well as raiding newspapers and printing presses, the police also targeted newspaper delivery trucks and their drivers, including Irshad Khan, who was transporting copies of *Rising Kashmir*, one of this mountainous region’s most influential dailies.



↑ The death of Kashmiri armed separatist leader Burhan Muzaffar Wani in July 2016 triggered violent protests in the Kashmir Valley. Local newspapers were censored for several days in a row, preventing them from covering the events.

© Tauseef Mustafa / AFP

Khan no longer remembers what day it was, but he hasn't forgotten the time. It was 3 a.m. when he left *Rising Kashmir's* headquarters to begin distributing that day's issue. He also clearly remembers that a police car followed him for nearly 10 km before stopping him. In his 10 years as a newspaper delivery truck driver, it was the first time a cargo had been intercepted. There were five policemen in the car. “They transferred all the newspapers from the truck to their car,” he said. “I tried to find out why they were doing this, but they just kept repeating that they had orders to seize all local newspapers.” Khan never found out what happened to his cargo. Unlike many of his colleagues, he was not arrested or directly threatened, and he says the incident did not affect how he distributes newspapers. It just left him “mentally prepared for such situations in the future”.

Difficulties distributing Pakistan's oldest English-language newspaper

***Dawn*, Pakistan's oldest independent English-language daily newspaper, has been subject to confiscation throughout the country for years, but harassment by the military has increased since the spring of 2018. Editor-in-chief Zaffar Abbas explains.**

Dawn's distribution is disrupted constantly, almost daily, in extensive areas directly or indirectly controlled or managed by the military via an entity known as the Defence Housing Authority (DHA), or in other. The same is true in other areas with military garrisons, especially in the provinces of Balochistan, Sindh and Punjab, which constitute 80% of the country. "Security guards based at entry points to these areas have unofficially told distribution agents and newspaper sellers that if they tried to distribute *Dawn*, their entry would be banned," Abbas said. They have harassed, questioned and sometimes physically attacked truck drivers to ensure that they don't distribute the newspaper, and they have threatened them with reprisals if they disobey.

The harassment became even more heavy-handed after *Dawn* published an interview on 12 May 2018 with former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, the army's bugbear, who was deposed by the supreme court for alleged corruption and is now in prison. In the interview, Sharif wondered whether "people from Pakistan" might have been involved in the terror attack in the Indian city of Mumbai in 2008 that left 150 dead. The Press Council told *Dawn's* editor that it had breached the press code by publishing content that "may bring into contempt Pakistan or its people or tends to undermine its sovereignty or integrity as an independent country".

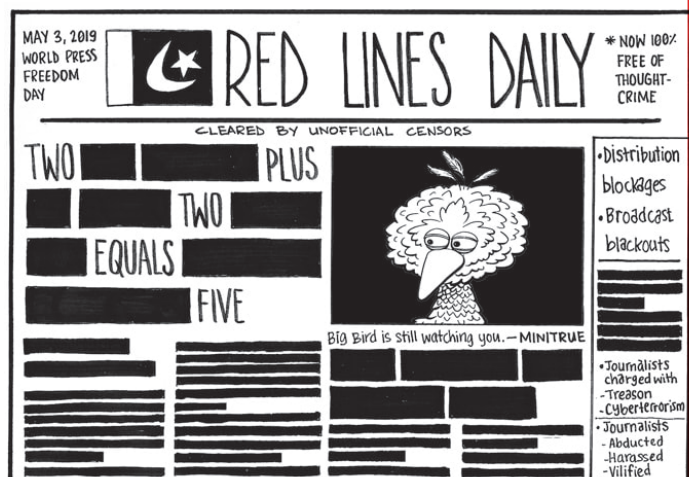
"While there was a ban on distributing *Dawn*, a salesman tried to carry copies of the newspaper in his van, hidden under other editions," Abbas said. "Controlled at the entrance to Larkana City, the vehicle was searched and the illegal copies found and confiscated. The next day, the salesman, like many of his colleagues – concerned about protecting their lives and incomes – stopped selling *Dawn* for several months." The newspaper's sales began to fall and were down by 10,000 copies a day at the worst period of the ban.

"We tried to explain it to the authorities, and the Press Council, that by publishing the interview of a three-time elected prime minister, we at *Dawn* had just done our job of disseminating information, but they were not impressed," Abbas added.

Because it couldn't be distributed properly, *Dawn* lost many advertising contracts, which contributed to the fall in its revenue. Nowadays, the situation is less critical, but there are still large swathes of Balochistan and Punjab where *Dawn* cannot be distributed or sold and so far it has recovered only 50% of the readership it lost in mid-2018.

→
Founded in 1941 by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the father of the Pakistani nation, *Dawn* is the country's oldest and most prestigious newspaper. This cartoon, which *Dawn* published on 3 May 2019 (World Press Freedom Day), summarises what happens to media outlets that dare to cross the army's "red lines".

© RK / Daw.



Unprecedented seizure at Brazilian depot

On 20 October 2018, a Saturday, no one was working at the headquarters of the North Fluminense Petroleum Workers Union (SyndipetroNF) in Macaé in Rio de Janeiro state when police arrived with a search and seizure warrant issued by a judge with the regional electoral tribunal. After threatening to shoot the doorman, the police entered and confiscated 30,000 copies of a special election issue of the alternative weekly *Brasil de Fato*, which were being stored there prior to being distributed to the workers.



←
On 20 October 2018, the Brazilian police confiscated 30,000 copies of the weekly *Brasil de Fato* on the grounds that it contained articles defaming Jair Bolsonaro.

© @caikemuller / Twitter

Running the headline “*You decide Brazil’s future*” alongside photographs of the two second-round presidential election candidates on the cover, the issue contained “*articles that defame the candidate Jair Bolsonaro*,” according to Judge Sandro de Araújo Lontra, who accused the weekly of “*abuse of authority*”.

The newspaper, which was established by unions and civil society groups during the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in 2003, issued a statement rejecting the judge’s claims: “*The newspaper’s content was entirely and strictly professional. All the information it contained was the subject of professional investigative reporting and had even been reported by the mainstream media.*”

The newspaper also accused the judge of “*an evident attempt to censor and constrain an alternative media outlet*”. The Brazilian Association of Investigative Journalism (ABRAJI) said it regarded the seizure as an “*act of censorship (...) incompatible with our country’s democracy*”.



←
Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro is well known for his fraught relations with the press.

© AFP

DELIVERY LIMITED BY POSTAL CHARGES OR TAXES

Russian postal subscriptions under threat

“Delivering newspapers imposes a heavy burden on the Pochta Rossli [Russian Post] because of the country’s enormous distances,” Alexander Oskin, the vice-president of the Union of Printing Presses (GIPP), said in April 2019. He was not exaggerating. Transporting newspapers and magazines by post to subscribers in this transcontinental country of 17 million sq km generates heavy costs which, until 2014, were offset by an annual state subsidy of 3.5 billion roubles (50 million euros).



The elimination of the subsidy, which was enough to cover the postal service’s losses resulting from print media postal subscriptions, forced the post office to drastically hike prices. In just four years, the postal tariffs almost tripled. The additional 10% increase planned for 2020 could lead to a 20% hike in newspaper and magazine subscriptions, fuelled in part by the constant increases in the price of newsprint.

In the last four years, *“the volume of newspaper subscription sales has plummeted by an average of 35.8%,”* according to Oskin, who calls it a *“tough blow to publishers, for whom subscriptions represent between 30 and 70% of their revenue, and (...) a threat to the security of information throughout the country”*. If the state subsidy is not restored, subscriptions will continue to fall and *“may well be doomed,”* Oskin adds. The problem is compounded by the fact that in some regions the income available for subscribing to one’s favourite magazine is very limited, while part of the population, especially civil servants, are automatically provided with subscriptions to publications produced by the local authorities.

“Delivering newspapers imposes a heavy burden on the Russian Post because of the country’s enormous distances. Subscriptions will continue to fall and, if the state subsidy is not restored, may well be doomed” according to Alexander Oskin, vice-president of the Union of Printing Presses (GIPP).

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Part of the population ... are automatically provided with subscriptions to publications produced by the local authorities.

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↑ Newspapers only reach their readers by post in some parts of Russia and delivering papers throughout the whole of Russia’s 17 million square kilometres is an almost impossible challenge.

© Yuri Yuriev / AFP



↑ Serbian newspapers disappeared from newsstands in Kosovo in November 2018 after a drastic hike in import duty on all products from neighbouring Serbia, including print media.

© Andrej Isakovic / AFP

Kosovo's customs duty weapon

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No imported publications were available at Kosovar newsstands.

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The Russian subscription press is slowly dying because of the lack of a postal subsidy, but Kosovo eliminated its Serbian press in one fell swoop in November 2018 by suddenly increasing the import duty on all Serbian products, including newspapers, by 100%. The measure was a reprisal for neighbouring Serbia's determined and ultimately successful efforts to prevent Kosovo from joining Interpol.

The impact on the availability of Serbian print media in Kosovo was immediate. No Serbian-language newspapers and magazines are printed in Kosovo and within a week no imported publications were available at Kosovar newsstands. This means that northern Kosovo's Serb community have been deprived of news and information in their own language since November 2018, a situation that violates international law. As Harlem Désir, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's representative for media freedom said, *"the right of all citizens to access information in their own language must be preserved, and access to newspapers, including Serbian newspapers, must be guaranteed for all local communities at all times"*.

Kosovo, which declared independence from Serbia in 2008, has so far rejected the international community's appeals to rescind the import duty hike and insists that it will remain in effect until Serbia recognises its former province's independence.

BORDERS THAT CANNOT BE CROSSED

Jeune Afrique – not welcome in Algeria

French publications, including *Jeune Afrique*, suddenly disappeared from Algeria's newsstands in April 2018. Algeria was in the midst of an economic crisis and, as part of the government's efforts to rein in a foreign currency exodus, the communication minister imposed restrictions on foreign print media imports. *Jeune Afrique*, which until then had been shipping an average of 2,500 copies a week to Algeria, now had to be content with sending 350 copies. The same restrictions initially applied to all other French newsweeklies, while entertainment magazines were hit even harder by the austerity measures. They were not allowed to ship any copies.

During the following months, the situation gradually returned to normal for all the foreign press except *Jeune Afrique*, which continued to be restricted to 350 copies a week. These copies were reserved for “senior officials” in the government, the president's office and state institutions. In an editorial published on 2 June 2019, *Jeune Afrique* editor Marwane Ben Yahmed complained that the restriction was “dragging on and on” and claimed to have discovered the unofficial reason: “*Jeune Afrique is said to be too negative about Algeria and about its leaders in particular.*”



← A May 2019 issue of *Jeune Afrique* was banned in Algeria after it reported that the head of the army, General Salah, was under investigation.

© Jeune Afrique



↑ Clashes between *Jeune Afrique* and the Algerian authorities are not new. The weekly was banned in Algeria for 22 years, until 1998.

© Jeune Afrique

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**The newsweekly
was banned
in Algeria
for 22 years.**

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Instead of receiving an explanation as the magazine had requested, *Jeune Afrique* marketing director Grégoire Cusin Berche received a “*very terse*” letter from its Algerian distributor announcing that, rather than sending 350 copies, it would be restricted to 90 copies a week from 18 June onwards, and the copies would be reserved for the president’s office, the prime minister’s office and members of the government. The letter offered no explanation but the marketing director acknowledged it as a “*reprisal*”.

The dispute between *Jeune Afrique* and the Algerian authorities has been long-running. The newsweekly was banned in Algeria for 22 years, until 1998. Some 10 issues have been banned for various reasons since then. The latest was issue No. 3045 (19-25 May 2019), which reported that army chief General Ahmed Gaïd Salah was under investigation on its cover, along with the headline: “*The man who threatens the revolution.*” This time, instead of coming from the communications ministry, the ban was issued directly by the defence ministry, from “*the summit of the security services*,” RSF was told. A member of the security staff at the capital’s Houari Boumédiène international airport said: “*This is not about quotas or distributors. When a magazine has a cover or an article that causes displeasure, it will not enter the country. That’s all there is to it.*”



Rafiki issue disappears at the Democratic Republic of Congo border

The mystery lasted a week. Issue No. 27 of the bimonthly *Rafiki* (which means “Friend” in Kiswahili) disappeared in mid-June 2018 somewhere between Mpondwe on the Ugandan border and its final destination, Butembo, one of the three main cities in North Kivu province in the northeast of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). After being printed in Uganda (because eastern DRC has no printing presses), the issue was stolen while on its way to its readers. “No member of our staff knew where the copies were nor why this issue had vanished,” said *Rafiki* editor Christian Muke, who fled to Uganda in 2017 to escape an arrest warrant from a military court in the North Kivu city of Beni. A week after the issue disappeared, 500 copies turned up “when an unidentified driver left them at a bakery in Butembo,” Muke added.

The issue's cover story was about the massacres that have taken place in the Beni region since 2014. It argued that all of these deaths could not have been carried out solely by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), an Islamist rebel group, and that the Congolese army must also have been involved. Muke said he did not know whether the article had annoyed military intelligence or whether they had tried to locate the issue “by tracking its course from printing to delivery”. In the end, Muke had the issue reprinted in Uganda, changing the cover headline to ensure that the magazine did not go missing again.

Among sub-Saharan African countries, RSF registers the most press freedom violations in the DRC.



↑ The editor of the Congolese bimonthly *Rafiki*, Christian Kahindo Muke, reprinted an issue in June 2018 after it disappeared while being transported from Uganda to its destination in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo.

© DR

↑ The missing issue of *Rafiki* ran a cover story about massacres in the Beni region of northeastern DRC.

© DR

Charlie Hebdo – distribution ban for blasphemy

A week after the January 2015 attack on the satirical cartoon weekly *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris that took 12 lives, the publication set two records. It printed 8 million copies instead of the usual 30,000, and outsold every other publication in France. But it also became the world's most banned magazine.

The issue prior to the murders had featured cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed, and the following issue featured a cartoon of the Prophet too. Issue No. 1178, also known as the “*Survivors' issue*,” was sought out in countries where *Charlie Hebdo* had not traditionally circulated. For the first time, it was exported to the United States and the United Kingdom. Borders opened but many others closed. Deemed to be blasphemous against Islam, this issue's distribution was blocked in the Muslim world.

Senegal issued orders for its distribution to be prevented “*by all means*”. In Pakistan, the world's second most populous Muslim country, federal religious affairs minister Sardar Yousaf said media that published these cartoons would be banned, and that all copies would be confiscated and burned.

The publication of another cartoon of the Prophet on the cover was regarded as a “*provocation*” throughout the Maghreb. Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria permitted its distribution. Since then, *Charlie Hebdo* has not been officially banned in the Maghreb, but it cannot be found on newsstands. Nowadays it is said there is no longer any need to ban *Charlie Hebdo* in the Maghreb because it no longer has any readers. “*The region's distributors no longer place any orders because, according to them, readers are not interested,*” the magazine said.



↑ A week after the deadly attack on the Paris headquarters of the satirical weekly *Charlie Hebdo*, issue No. 1178 was banned in many countries, including Senegal, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Pakistan, because its cover was deemed to be blasphemous.

© Joël Saget / AFP

In Rabat, the Moroccan capital, news vendors confirmed to RSF that, before it stopped being distributed, *Charlie Hebdo* sold poorly and unsold copies had to be returned to distributors – a fate experienced by other French magazines. Throughout the Maghreb, traditional readers are turning away from French print media and towards Arabic-language and online publications. RSF was told that this trend is compounded by an additional phenomenon in Morocco, in which “everyone knows that newspaper sellers receive frequent visits from intelligence agents monitoring who reads what,” and that this suffices to deter anyone from buying a publication such as *Charlie Hebdo*. Ever since the conservative-Muslim Justice and Development Party (PJD) took office in Morocco in 2017, it is considered bad form, even in circles that are not very religious, to read a publication regarded as anti-Muslim.

In Tunisia, *Charlie Hebdo*'s absence from newsstands does not mean that censorship is back, said Mohamed Sellami, the CEO of Sotupresse, the company in charge of importing and distributing foreign newspapers. The time when the information ministry's permission was needed “before putting newspapers on the plane to Tunis” is long past, he said. Since the 2011 revolution, there has no longer been any political interference and nothing is off limits. “Now our only arbiter is our conscience,” Sellami said.

“You can write anything, even about the Prophet, as long as it stays within the domain of thought,” he said. The red lines that cannot be crossed are visual representation of persons or things considered sacred and nudity. “In such cases, we operate on the principle that it is contrary to the culture of the majority of the population and therefore preferable not to import the newspaper or issue to avoid causing shock and provoking serious incidents,” Sellami added. It was on this principle that the 6 July 2019 issue of the French daily *Libération* was not imported to Tunisia. In honour of the 50th annual Rencontres d'Arles photography festival, *Libération* had dedicated the entire front page to a photo of a naked man doing a handstand.

→ The 6 July 2019 issue of the French daily *Libération* was not distributed in Tunisia because it was deemed to be “contrary to the culture of the majority of the population”.

© Libération



[DISTRIBUTION'S “SERIAL CENSORS”]

A number of countries are champions in obstructing the dissemination of newspapers and magazines. They don't intervene at just one point in the distribution chain but do so at multiple stages in order to secure complete control over what can and cannot be read.



MEXICO

In Mexico, Latin America's deadliest country for the media, the vicious cycle of violence and impunity occurs at all levels in the distribution chain. Street vendors are murdered (see page 13), kiosk managers are threatened, newspaper issues are arbitrarily seized, and content is rewritten at the printing press. Collusion between organised crime and officials (political and administrative) poses a grave threat to all those involved in the production and distribution of news and information, and many publications end up deciding to close.

144th/180

WORLD PRESS FREEDOM INDEX 2019



RWANDA

Rwanda's only newspaper printing press is controlled by the government, which banned publishers from continuing to print their newspapers abroad, especially in Uganda, where it was much cheaper. As regards distribution, retail points are now almost non-existent. Newspapers used to be sold from kiosks, on the street and in stations and car parks, but independent newspapers no longer circulate. Only two pro-government newspapers, *The New Times* and *ImvahoNshya*, are printed and distributed in state offices and in some supermarkets. Only one newspaper, *The EastAfrican*, which is a regional, English-language newspaper, can be bought on supermarket shelves, but its readership is very limited because most Rwandans only read Kinyarwanda.

155th/180

WORLD PRESS FREEDOM INDEX 2019





RUSSIA

Russia has not just eliminated state subsidies for the postal service, triggering a dramatic fall in the number of newspaper and magazine subscriptions since 2014 (see page 20). It has also subjected the privately-owned media to unfair competition from local government publications, and it has been “actively demolishing” newspaper kiosks in most regions on the grounds that they “disfigure the cities”. Of the 29,000 kiosks that existed in 2014, just 14,900 were left in 2018. This “renovation campaign” has also led to increases in the rent charged for the land on which the kiosks are located, and in some cases to the land being auctioned off, as in Bryansk. In Barnaul in western Siberia, 150 of 160 kiosks have been destroyed. At the same time, one of the leading suppliers of print media to supermarkets, Media Distribution (MD), which represented 15% of the market, stopped operating in April 2019 because it was no longer able to pay its debts.

149th/180

WORLD PRESS FREEDOM INDEX 2019



BELARUS

In Belarus, both the print media distribution network, Sazyuzdruk, and the post office, Belposhta, which handles newspaper and magazine subscriptions, are state monopolies. From 2006 to 2017, leading independent newspapers were barred from using their services, leading to a string of bankruptcies. Some of them survive but their circulation has plummeted. Others have been forced to stop producing a print version. The bar on their use of these state services was finally lifted in 2017 during a rapprochement between Belarus and the European Union. But newspapers are no longer seen as the main threat and the authorities are now stepping up their harassment of the main independent news websites and TV stations run by Belarusian journalists based abroad.

153rd/180

WORLD PRESS FREEDOM INDEX 2019



INDIA

In India, it is still very difficult to cover regions regarded by the authorities as sensitive, such as the Kashmir Valley. When local journalists are not jailed or subjected to violence, their reporting is censored at all stages, including during distribution. When the death of Burhan Muzaffar Wani, the commander of the Kashmiri separatist militant group Hizbul Mujahedeen, triggered a wave of extremely violent protests in July 2016, the police raided news organizations, arrested journalists and blocked the printing of several Kashmiri newspapers, including the *Kashmir Times*, *Greater Kashmir*, *Kashmir Observer* and *Rising Kashmir*. They also intercepted trucks carrying newspapers, arrested drivers and threatened newspaper sellers.

140th/180

WORLD PRESS FREEDOM INDEX 2019

3

PRINTING – A FRAGILE STAGE IN THE PROCESS

Media digitalisation, declines in the number of readers and reductions in the size of newspapers and their publication frequency are impacting the media printing industry more and more all over the world. Weakened by economic difficulties, newspaper and magazine printing is all the more vulnerable to pressure.

Censorship attempts often take place just before newspapers and magazines are printed. It may be direct, as in Egypt, or more surreptitious, as in Gabon, where the content of entire issues was replaced without the publishers' knowledge just before they were printed. And when it is too late to change content before printing, it is easy to confiscate entire issues afterwards if an oligarch or an intelligence agency is all powerful, as in Bulgaria or Sudan.

If governments or powerful press groups dominate printing and distribution, they can exercise an insidious control over the print media by imposing laws or prices, or by choosing which publications are able to receive the precious raw material that is essential for all newspapers and magazines – newsprint.

↓ Last-minute
censorship attempts
often take place just
prior to printing.

© Stéphane de Sakutin/ AFP



PRINTING PRESSES EXPOSED TO EVERY KIND OF DANGER

Sudan, No. 1 in seizing papers as they come off the press

Over the last 30 years the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) has seized hundreds of Sudanese newspaper issues as they came off the press, all under the orders of former dictator Omar al-Bashir.

Since the start of a wave of demonstrations against rises in the price of staple goods in December 2018, which quickly turned into anti-government protests and led to Bashir's removal the following April, the regime stepped up its efforts to control news production and printing. On 20 December 2018, Sudan's printing presses received orders to print nothing without first obtaining the NISS's permission. This was tantamount to "direct and methodical financial liquidation with the aim of killing off the independent press," said Ashraf Abdelaziz, the editor of the daily newspaper *Al-Jareeda*.

31



← Soon after a wave of anti-government protests began in Sudan in December 2018, the authorities tightened their grip on the media and gave orders for no newspapers to be printed without prior permission. Many independent newspapers, including *Al-Jareeda*, were repeatedly censored.

© DR

By January 2019, confiscations of newspaper issues as they came off the press were taking place almost every day. The leading targets included *Al-Jareeda*, which refused to comply with censorship policies and ended up "appearing less than one day in two for four months," said Hassan Ahmed Berkia, a journalist who had to flee the country and who works for the Sudanese Journalists Network, an NGO.

The persecution of the media peaked in April 2019, during the days running up to Bashir's removal by the army. *Al-Watan*, *Al-Youm Al-Tali*, *Al-Jareeda* and *Al-Baath* were particular targets. After the 75-year-old dictator's ouster, "the situation improved for a few days" but thereafter "the harassment resumed as before," Berkia said.



← President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's Egypt has become one of the world's biggest prisons for journalists.

© Freeimages



↑ The newspaper *Al-Ahaly* was banned from being printed because of a story that embarrassed the government. *Al-Ahaly* was only able to publish the story online.

© DR

Egypt's state printing company censors *Al Ahaly*

In President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's Egypt, one of the world's biggest prisons for journalists, the state-controlled printing company Al Ahram helps the government to censor. In mid-May 2019, it told *Al Ahaly*, a weekly published by the National Progressive Unionist Party, Egypt's biggest and oldest legal opposition party, that it would not print that week's issue unless it dropped its front-page story, *Al Ahaly* editor Amina al-Nakash said. The story was about "serious violations by a former minister and wife of a current official" with the aim of personal enrichment. The current official was none other than Tariq Amer, Egypt's central bank governor.

The pressure was such that *Al Ahaly's* editorial board agreed to drop the story from the newspaper's print version so that it could be printed. But the story was posted on the newspaper's website and circulated on social networks. It was "read more than 50,000 times," Al-Nakash said.

The following week, the printer told *Al Ahaly* to remove a story about a potential cabinet reshuffle from the 22 May issue. This time the editorial board refused to comply, with the result being that the issue was not printed. The next issue, which contained a detailed story about convicted prisoners who had been pardoned by the president, was not printed either.

"These methods recall the dark years of totalitarian regimes that banned the public from access to certain information," Al-Nakash said, adding that such methods have become "pointless in the modern era." Thanks in particular to social networks, the story about the central bank governor's wife caused such a stir in Egypt that his contract was not renewed.

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This time the editorial board refused to comply, with the result being that the issue was not printed.

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Like most other party publications, the newspaper *Al Ahaly* is collapsing under the weight of its debts to the printing company Al Ahram, which has been imposing big increases in its tariffs that it cannot absorb. These hikes are linked to the November 2016 decision to float Egypt's currency. The latest increase, in the summer of 2018, was a hike of 30%. Former *Al Ahaly* CEO Nabil Zaki said: *"The future of partisan newspapers in Egypt is uncertain unless the state intervenes to support them (...) by restructuring their debt and reducing printing costs."* The same also applies to Egypt's non-partisan national newspapers.

Gabonese newspaper's contents substituted at the printer

33

The staff and readers of *La Loupe*, a Gabonese weekly critical of President Ali Bongo's government, discovered a highly unusual issue on the morning of 2 September 2014. Its contents praised the president and his aides to the skies. *"Issue No 193 had been changed completely and replaced by a parallel one, from the front to the back pages, with an editorial line that was the complete opposite of the newspaper's,"* the appalled editor, Alphonse Ongou, said.

The newspaper's management demanded the issue's withdrawal from newsstands and began an investigation, which was redoubled after another bogus issue came off the printing presses the next day. This one had a story about Ongou, calling him an *"imposter"*.

The people responsible for the bogus issues were quickly identified. *"After writing the articles and completing the issue except for its layout, we handed it over on a USB stick to our two layout technicians, one of one whom was a new hire; the other was standing in for an employee on leave,"* the editor said. These two *"infiltrators,"* who initially pretended they were *"unfamiliar with the new software,"* turned out to have been *"sent by the presidential palace (...) in order to silence critical thinking"*.

A few days later, *L'Aube*, another weekly published by the same company, decided to publish a story about how the bogus issues had been produced. It accused President Bongo's chief of staff of being responsible and headlined its story, *"The president's office pirates La Loupe. May you be cursed for life!!!!"* But *L'Aube's* readers never saw this issue. *"We handed in the PDF file of L'Aube issue No. 43 at the specified time to Multipress,"* Ongou said, referring to the printing press, which happens to be owned by Bongo allies. *"We didn't know that someone from the president's office was going to prevent it being printed and forcibly get 20,000 copies of a completely re-written issue printed, of which 8,000 copies were handed to [the distributor] Sogapresse and 12,000 copies were given away on the streets of Libreville."*

Oloumane, the company that publishes both *La Loupe* and *L'Aube*, issued a statement announcing that it was suspending publication of both newspapers and accused the government of being behind the bogus issues. The next day, another fake issue of *La Loupe* appeared on newsstands, while the government roundly denied the accusations: *"The president's office has never pirated a newspaper, regardless of the virulence of its articles"*.

The two newspapers' problems did not stop there. A year later, there was a break-in at their headquarters. And in April 2019, *L'Aube* was suspended for six months for *"disturbing public peace and inciting hatred, murder and civil disobedience"*.



© DR

French printing presses blocked by striking workers



← Strikes called by the union that represents newspaper printing and distribution workers in France have had a visible impact on kiosk displays.

© Emmanuel Glachant / AFP

It's a distinctive feature of France. A single union, the General Syndicate for Books and Written Communication (SGLCE), represents all those who work in the printing and distribution of France's national daily newspapers. The union's statutes and the way it operates gives its 1,200 unionised employees a great deal of power. At any time, they can decide to go on strike, halting printing presses and preventing newspapers from being printed, and therefore from appearing on the streets the next day. This union has a de facto monopoly of national newspaper printing and has often moved forcefully against publishers that tried to circumvent it.

Of all the recent cases of printing presses being paralysed by the SGLCE, one in particular, on 26 May 2016, will not be forgotten. The union decided to prevent the publication of all national dailies, except the French Communist Party daily *L'Humanité*, because they refused to publish an opinion piece by Philippe Martinez, the president of the *Confédération générale du travail* (CGT) one of France's biggest labour confederations, which criticised a controversial proposed labour law reform.

Since the start of 2019, the SGLCE has been focusing its attention, and its repeated strikes, on a government proposal to overhaul the Bichet Law, which has regulated print media distribution since 1947. The proposal has come at a time when Presstalis, France's biggest newspaper and magazine distributor, is in serious financial difficulties. The government wants to open up the sector to competition by 2023. Protesting outside the senate in May 2019, the SGLCE said it feared "*the return of monopolies, this time private-sector ones*". The proposed reform poses a "*danger*" to democracy and news media pluralism, SGLCE general secretary Lourdez said.

... and by protesters

During the "gilets jaunes" (yellow vest) protests that began in France in November 2018, protesters repeatedly targeted the printing presses of newspapers accused of "*collaborating*" with the government. By blocking the entrance to a printing press near the western city of Nantes on 26 December, yellow vest protesters prevented the distribution of 180,000 copies of newspapers owned by the *Ouest-France* group. On 10 January, around 50 protesters, "*some of them hooded,*" blocked delivery trucks and set fire to pallets at the entrance to a printing press in the central city of Auxerre where the *L'Yonne Républicaine*, *Journal du Centre* and *La République du Centre* newspapers are printed. And on the night of 10 February 2019, between 40 and 50 protesters blocked a printing press in the northwestern city of Angers, preventing the distribution of 75,000 copies of *Courrier de l'Ouest*, *Maine Libre* and *Ouest-France*. Marc Dejean, the CEO of the newspaper publisher *Journaux de Loire*, condemned this "*obstruction of press freedom*" and announced that he would file a complaint.

NEWSPRINT WORTH ITS WEIGHT IN GOLD

Venezuela's opposition papers hit hardest by newsprint shortages

"Despite all our efforts to prolong our print version's existence, it is with a heavy heart that we offer the last printed issue of Panorama today," the management of this independent newspaper, founded in 1914, announced on 28 May 2019.



← Because of newsprint shortages, *Panorama*, a Venezuelan newspaper published since 1914, printed its last issue on 28 May 2019.

© DR

35

Six months before that, it was *El Nacional*, the prestigious Caracas daily founded in 1943, that announced that its presses were falling silent. Like *Panorama*, *El Nacional* cited the difficulty of obtaining newsprint and its inability to finance the print version. At one stage, this Venezuelan press veteran was producing a 72-page issue. It cut that back to a 16-page issue published five times a week before giving up on a print version altogether.

These are just two of the latest cases in the mass extinction of the Venezuelan print media, a process that began in 2013. In just six years, a total of 67 newspapers have disappeared from Venezuela's cities, 35 of them in 2018, according to the tally kept by *Instituto Prensa y Sociedad Venezuela* (IPYS), an NGO run by independent journalists. *Panorama* was the last print publication to survive in the western state of Zulia. There is no longer any newspaper in circulation in 10 of Venezuela's 14 states.

The inability to obtain newsprint has been the main cause of this drawn-out extinction process. In 2013, the year that Nicolás Maduro took over as president following Hugo Chávez's death, control of newsprint distribution was handed to the Complejo Editorial Alfredo Maneiro (CAEM), a communications ministry offshoot that now has a de facto monopoly of the importation, transportation and sale of this precious raw material.

"This company allocates resources in a discretionary manner – when it wants, how it wants and to whom it wants – thereby becoming a direct censor of print media publications," a Venezuelan journalist said on condition of anonymity. Newspapers, especially those that are critical or independent, have been dogged by strange newsprint shortages. And as Venezuela produces no domestic newsprint, it all has to be imported and paid for with foreign currency, which is not easy to acquire in a country where strict currency controls force companies to apply to the state for a foreign currency allocation.

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The inability to obtain newsprint has been the main cause of this drawn-out extinction process.

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↑ In the space of six years, a total of 67 Venezuelan newspapers have disappeared because they were unable to obtain newsprint.

© Jean-Philippe Ksiazek / AFP

Three Nicaraguan newspapers deprived of newsprint and ink

The Nicaraguan authorities seem to have followed the Venezuelan method for silencing the independent national print media. In addition to the cases of media persecution and censorship that have intensified since April 2018, it has become virtually impossible for privately-owned publications to obtain newsprint, ink and even rubber – in short, all the products needed to print their newspapers.

The ban on importing these raw materials was issued in September 2018 by the General Directorate for Customs, which simply attributed the decision to “orders from above”. The government has still not given any explanation, despite protests by the Inter American Press Association (IAPA), which has described the import ban as “administrative censorship”.

The ban is tantamount to a slow death sentence for the Nicaraguan print media. Newspapers including *El Nuevo Diario*, *La Prensa* and *Diario Hoy* are sounding the alarm. They could stop circulating “within a matter of weeks,” they warned as this report was being completed.

“We had to reduce the size of our issues from 36 to 24 pages, and now to 12 pages, in order to prolong our printing life with the newsprint still in stock,” *La Prensa* editor Eduardo Enríquez said. Created 93 years ago, *La Prensa* runs Nicaragua’s oldest presses and the newsprint it traditionally used has already run out. “We are currently using semi-sized paper to print our newspaper and then we will turn to our last reserves of glazed paper,” Enríquez added. “We have barely enough to keep printing for two months.”



← On 18 January 2019, Jaime Chamorro Cardenal, the president of Nicaragua’s *La Prensa* newspaper group, holds the front page of his newspaper, which is blank except for a question at the bottom: “Have you imagined life without information?”

© Inti Ocon / AFP

El Nuevo Diario deputy editor Douglas Carcache said his press group had “tried to buy from other companies that import and sell newsprint but all refused,” reporting that they had been “threatened” by the government. His press group has also cut the number of pages and issues, and even shut down its tabloid *Q’Hubo* in order to give priority to *El Nuevo Diario*, Nicaragua’s traditional newspaper of record.

The newspapers are trying to reorganise online but, in a country where only 20% of the population has online access – the lowest rate in Central America – the Internet alone will not enable them to survive.



←
The Nicaraguan daily *El Nuevo Diario* was forced to reduce its size and the number of its pages because of newsprint and ink shortages

© Inti Ocon / AFP

FOCUS

A solution for the Maltese press



© Olivier Laban Mattei / AFP

Malta is a tax haven where financial opaqueness reigns and, three years after the Panama Papers allegations about bribes involving the island's leading daily, *The Times of Malta*, the investigation into this scandal has ground to a halt. One of the persons said to be involved, Keith Schembri, is not just the prime minister's chief of staff but also the owner of Kasco, the island's leading newsprint producer. His business activities allow him to control not only the newsprint market but also, indirectly, the distribution of newspapers, because he supplies all of the island's newspaper publishers with newsprint. Schembri likes to remind journalists of what they owe him. When a *Times of Malta* reporter asked him about his links to offshore companies in 2018, he initially ignored the question and then said: “*Maybe I used [my money] to pay your wages.*”

One solution for Malta's investigative journalists is to create their own media outlet in order to try to circumvent the pressure and the censorship attempts. This is what former *Times of Malta* editor Caroline Muscat decided to do after fellow journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia's murder in October 2017. Despite threats and obstacles, Muscat has created *The Shift News*, an investigative news website that is committed to combatting corruption and defending press freedom, and doesn't need Schembri's expensive newsprint.



← Carine Nevejans, the international director of Presstalis.

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A DISTRIBUTION EXPERT'S TAKE

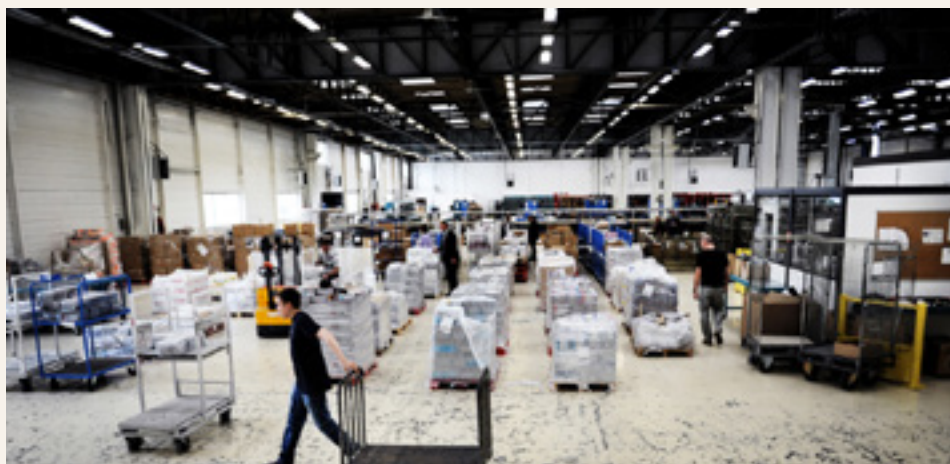
INTERVIEW with **Carine Nevejans**

Carine Nevejans is the international director of Presstalis, the French print media distribution company formerly known as Nouvelles Messageries de la Presse Parisienne (NMPP). It's a commercial company that handles the distribution of newspapers and magazines to their points of sale. In the first half of 2018, it distributed 78% of the French print media, including all the national dailies. Nevejans also heads Distripres, an association created in 1955 that promotes the unrestricted distribution and dissemination of print and digital media content throughout the world.

What is different about the print media distribution sector?

In most countries, the press distribution system functions like any type of private-sector market in which products – in this case, newspapers and magazines – are designed in offices (or newsrooms), produced in factories (or printing presses) and disseminated by distributors, who manage a network of shops or kiosks. Newspaper and magazine sales pay for this distribution chain.

In this system, it's the distributors who determine what will finally be available in the retail outlets, as in any kind of shop, on the basis of a product listing. In the UK, for example, distributors may decide not to list a newspaper or magazine because they don't share



↑ Presstalis, formerly known as Nouvelles Messageries de la Presse Parisienne (NMPP), is France's leading print media distributor.

© Presstalis.

→
According to Carine Nevejans, there is a “downward trend all over the world in the number of publications on sale.”

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its philosophy. This is often the case with “adult” magazines, but also with publications expressing political or religious views. Distributors may also refuse to include a publication because they think the potential sales are not enough to absorb the cost – for example, small independent publications with low circulations. In another example, the Belgian distribution chain Delhaize doesn’t list publications with a turnover below a certain figure.

Is the number of newspapers and magazines on sale worldwide tending to fall?

Unfortunately for press freedom and the public’s right to information, there is clearly a downward trend all over the world in the number of publications being listed for sale. Although this cannot be seen directly, the economic constraints on the print media are having a real impact on the democratic choice available. In all regions of the world except the Asian market, the print media are having major financial difficulties.

On the one hand, revenue is falling as the Internet and TV develop. On the other, fixed production costs keep rising. Newsprint and fuel continue to become more expensive, and wage costs are having more and more of an impact. All these factors are driving up the final price of newspapers and magazines to the point that demand is no longer keeping pace. It’s a vicious cycle that forces distributors to reduce the space dedicated to the press in kiosks and to substitute more profitable products such as drinks and small consumer products, or to eliminate retail outlets altogether. This is the case throughout Europe, where organizations such as the International Publishing Distribution Association (IPDA), News Media Europe and Distripress are lobbying the European Union to support the press by providing financial aid for the modernisation of kiosks by reducing VAT on the print media and by harmonising transport costs.

As the press is not a product like any other, do you think there are ways to guarantee media pluralism?

The press is indeed a special cultural resource that is a fundamental part of the life of society and democracy. In France, where the distribution system is unique in the world, newspapers and magazines are distributed [through Presstalis] by cooperatives owned by the publishers. Any publisher can join and, by becoming a shareholder, can be disseminated throughout the entire distribution network without restriction. Created just after the Second World War, this way of operating aims to encourage pluralism and support the more fragile publications. When French people visit newsstands, they see the entire press range, they may discover a completely new publication or, because their attention is caught by a headline, they may buy a magazine they’ve never read before. The French system is nonetheless fragile because it is completely out of balance financially. Currently governed by the 1947 Bichet Law, it is in the process of being reformed and could lose its special characteristics.

STATE AND PRIVATE-SECTOR MONOPOLIES THAT RESTRICT PRINTING AND DISTRIBUTION

Bulgarian businessman with total control



↑ The Bulgarian oligarch Delyan Peevski has built a major media empire. Via his New Bulgarian Media Group, he exercises opaque control over daily newspapers, TV channels and news websites. © Nikolay Doychinov / AFP

For the last two years, three of Bulgaria's best-known and most determined cartoonists have been defying an oligarch's virtual monopoly of press distribution. In 2017, Chavdar Nikolov, Tchavdar Georgiev and Christo Komarnitski launched a new satirical weekly called *Pras-Pres*, which means "Pig Press". Their favourite targets are Prime Minister Boyko Borisov, chief prosecutor Sotir Tsatsarov and Bulgaria's wealthiest politician, Delyan Peevski, who made his money from tobacco and construction and who has built a major media empire. Via his New Bulgarian Media Group, he exercises opaque control over such leading Bulgarian dailies as *The Telegraph* and *Monitor*, as well as TV channels and news websites. And through frontmen, this 39-year-old oligarch also controls the private-sector press distribution company, the National Distribution Agency.



← The cartoonists who founded *Pras-Pres*. From left to right: Chavdar Nikolov, Tchavdar Georgiev and Christo Komarnitski.

© DR



↑ The cover of the first issue of *Pras-Pres*, which was never delivered to retail outlets.

© DR

The cover of *Pras-Pres's* very first issue was a cartoon of Borisov and Socialist Party leader Kornelia Ninova in bed together. A few hours after it left the printing press, its 10,000 copies were said to have been sold out. But many readers told the magazine that they had searched newsstands in vain for the long-awaited first issue. It eventually emerged that it was never delivered to retail outlets. The distributor, a member of the National Distribution Agency, had refused to distribute it and had tried to conceal its existence.

This arbitrary confiscation shocked the Bulgarian media, and even pro-government newspapers backed *Pras-Pres* on free speech grounds. Expressing its support, the newspaper *Sega* said it also suffered "the phenomenon of copies going missing every day". The investigative news website *Bivol* posted a link on its site that could be used to buy the electronic version of *Pras-Pres*. And "when unsold copies were returned to us, we sold them all ourselves on the street," Nikolov said.

Pras-Pres is still only being sold by non-traditional outlets such as cafés, bookshops, art galleries and even hardware stores, and sales are still only about 5,000 a month.

A multimedia conglomerate's grip on Argentina

Instead of a single man, it's a multimedia colossus that reigns supreme over the distribution sector in Argentina and dictates its laws. In the name of “*competition*” and “*necessary adaptation to technological convergence*,” the concentration of media ownership in ever fewer hands has kept accelerating and its main beneficiary is the media conglomerate Clarín.

The region's most powerful media group now owns TV channels, radio stations, newspapers, magazines and websites. It dominates Argentina's print media distribution networks and, together with the state and the newspaper *La Nación*, has jointly owned Argentina's only newsprint company *Papel Prensa* since 1977, which has a de facto national monopoly.

All of the newspapers that survive outside the Clarín universe, such as *Ámbito Financiero*, *Tiempo Argentino*, *Página 12*, *Perfil*, *Crónica* and *Crítica*, constantly complain of distribution problems, arbitrary newsprint price hikes well in excess of inflation, and abuses in the quota system to which they are subjected. In September 2018, *Tiempo Argentino* complained of yet another increase in the cost of the products it needed to print the newspaper, this time by 17.8%. This was the eighth increase since the start of the year, it said. In all, prices had risen 110% in nine months.

The result has been carnage. *The Buenos Aires Herald*, an English-language newspaper that had just celebrated its 140th anniversary, the free dailies *La Razón* and *El Argentino*, the famous sports magazine *El Gráfico* and even the music and cultural affairs magazine *Los Inrockuptibles* (the local version of a French magazine with the same name) have all have been forced to close in recent years.

All these closures have meant that Clarín's dominance has continued to grow. In January 2019, the government promulgated a law repealing the newsprint regulations introduced by the previous administration. Clarín is now free to set newsprint prices as it wishes. The new law also frees *Papel Prensa* from the obligation to guarantee newsprint supplies in Argentina, and to publish its prices.

“

In all, prices had risen 110% in nine months.

”

→ The famous Argentine sports monthly *El Gráfico*, which published its last issue in January 2018
© DR





← Ganimat Zahid, the editor of the newspaper *Azadlig*, which means “Freedom”

© DR

STATE MONOPOLIES THROTTLE AZERBAIJAN'S LAST OPPOSITION PAPER

THREE QUESTIONS for Ganimat Zahid

***Azadlig*, a daily whose name means “Freedom,” was Azerbaijan’s main opposition newspaper and was one of the last survivors of the country’s independent media landscape. Its editor, Ganimat Zahid, who has lived in self-imposed exile in Europe since 2011, describes how the state used its tentacular powers to silence all of Azerbaijan’s independent newspapers, including his own in 2016.**

Could you tell us about Azerbaijan’s independent press?

No independent print media circulate any more in Azerbaijan. The authorities went out of their way to undermine the distribution of newspapers and magazines on the country’s streets. Street vendors were banned from operating in Baku in 2011 “*in order not to hamper traffic*.” In 2012, the newspaper kiosks of the public distribution network Gasid were eliminated or replaced by a new network of shops where everything was sold, from needles to stickers, but hardly ever independent newspapers. Finally, in 2013, a week after President Ilham Aliyev’s reelection, the sale of newspapers was banned in the metro system. The immediate effect was that the income of the few independent newspapers still in existence suffered so much that they closed one after the other.

What levers did the authorities use to throttle your newspaper?

The print version of *Azadlig* finally disappeared in 2016 after many years of different kinds of harassment by a state with many tentacles, a state that not only has a printing monopoly via the company Azerbaijan, but also a distribution network monopoly via the company Gasid. From 2011 onwards, Gasid stopped returning all the money from *Azadlig*’s sales to us, which prevented us from paying the printing company. People close to the government took advantage of this to repeatedly sue us for non-payment of debts. From 2012 until its disappearance in 2016, *Azadlig* was sentenced to pay a series of astronomic fines that resulted in our bank accounts being frozen several times by the courts, leading in turn to our often being unable to print an issue.



© Pixabay

Why did the newspaper finally stop printing for good?

The newspaper was already going from bad to worse when it received the coup de grâce. After the coup attempt in Turkey in July 2016, the Azerbaijani authorities arrested several members of the Azerbaijani opposition, including our financial director, Faiq Amirov. He was the only person able to carry out all banking operations in our name. His signature was the only one recognised by the bank. Shortly after his arrest, the printing company demanded repayment of its debts again, about 6,000 euros. We had enough money in our account but Faiq Amirov couldn't unblock the funds because the prison authorities refused to let him give us a power of attorney. I tried preparing an official statement naming another person as financial director but the bank said it was not valid. I was ready to resign so that the newspaper could elect a new editor, but the justice ministry said it would recognise it only if I returned to Baku to resign. This was out of the question. And so the printer stopped printing *Azadlig* on 6 September 2016. We nonetheless continue to post on the newspaper's website, which will soon have a Russian version as well.

RSF RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that governments implement the following proposals domestically and incorporate them into the positions they defend within all relevant international organizations.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENTS

1/ Respect their international obligations regarding the dissemination of a free, diverse and independent press

These obligations imply the equitable provision of protection to all those involved in the production and dissemination of news and information. These obligations are established under article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) enshrining the right to *“seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers”*.

In accordance with the ICCPR, governments should therefore:

- **Prevent any arbitrary obstruction** of the free circulation of media; that is to say, any restriction that is not provided by law and is not necessary and proportionate to a legitimate objective, namely respect for the rights or reputations of others or protection of national security, public order, or public health or morals.
- **Ensure that state assistance for the press is allocated equitably**, especially as regards access to all necessary means of production and access to all means of printing and dissemination, on the basis of criteria that are reasonable, objective, precise, transparent and non-discriminatory. This should include support for assistance and development projects that aim to guarantee the unrestricted dissemination of the media, including print media.

2/ Ensure effective prevention of any obstruction of the dissemination of a free, diverse and independent press

In the same way as direct abuses against journalists must be combatted, obstruction of the circulation of news and information must also be combatted by determined action:

- **Publicly condemn obstacles to the dissemination of news and information**, especially on the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists (2 November) and World Press Freedom Day (3 May).
- **Guarantee the physical safety of press publishers, printers, distributors and vendors**, including by means of reinforced police protection for those who have been subjected to attacks or threats in connection with their activities.
- **Make it a crime to obstruct the dissemination of the press**, on the basis of the public's right to freedom of opinion, so that any action or attempt to illegitimately prevent the printing or distribution of print media can be prosecuted and punished.

- **Ensure a legislative and economic framework that allows unrestricted, equitable and impartial dissemination** of all newspapers and magazines throughout the country, and ensure that media diversity is not affected by the creation of monopolies.
- **Ensure that those involved in distribution are properly trained in press law** so that they report any obstruction to the authorities.

3/ Reinforce prevention by punishing violations of press dissemination quickly and effectively

- **Conduct investigations systematically and rapidly** so that anyone responsible for harassing or obstructing the printing or distribution of print media is brought to justice.
- **Ensure an effective judicial follow-up** by means of a national observatory of obstacles to press dissemination that reports to parliament on the frequency and gravity of these obstacles and the judicial response.

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