

# The Dangerous Rise of Government Censorship in the Media

By Angie Tonucci

Freedom of the Press is vital in a democratic society that expects to hold its government accountable for its actions. It is so important, in fact, that the framers of the U.S. Constitution placed it in the very first amendment as a fundamental freedom, giving it equal weight with freedom of speech, the freedom to participate in any religion, the right to peaceably assemble, and the right to petition the government.

As it applies to the American public, Freedom of the Press can also be defined as the right to be informed. Freedom of the Press goes hand in hand with the right to petition the government because in order to file grievances, the American people must have access to information about how the U.S. government performs its duties and where it falls short.

In addition to the right to be informed about the inner-workings of the government, Freedom of the Press allows for open criticism of the government and its officials including politicians and lawmakers, police and other law enforcement officers, human services workers, and even school superintendents and teachers through various media outlets. Without transparency and the freedom to investigate evidence of corruption, accountability is impossible. Therefore, Americans should be vigilant about stopping government censorship of the media.

However, it appears that government censorship, especially of the internet, may be on the rise. According to Google's 2012 Transparency Report, there has been an "alarming rise in government censorship requests." While the report contains information about requests from countries all over the world, in the July to December reporting period of that year, "Google received 187 requests from United States law enforcement agencies and courts to remove content

from its Web properties.” This was up 103% from the 92 American requests of the previous reporting period (Sutter, 2012). This trend continued in 2013 when those requests from the U.S. increased by another 70%. “The most worrying thing, Google warns, is that a lot of these takedown requests, which are justified with copyright, privacy or defamation claims, are often aimed at political content — hence why Google defines them as censorship” (Franceschi-Bicchierai, 2013).

Interestingly, there is some support for government censorship of politically damaging news, even in the United States. The 2012 AmericasBarometer survey by the Latin American Public Opinion Project asked 21,622 citizens in 26 nationally representative surveys the following question: “How strongly do you approve or disapprove of the state/government having the right to prohibit newspapers from publishing news that can be politically damaging to it?” While all South and Latin American nations ranked higher on the list, 18% of people surveyed in the US said they support this type of censorship (Rodríguez, 2013).

Because Americans have the right to investigate, distribute, and access government-related and newsworthy information, and because we have the freedom to choose from a large pool of opinions and ideas to form our philosophies, preventing such information from reaching the American people via media censorship is violation of our nation’s very foundation. And while some Americans may not view anti-censorship campaigns as high priority, we should all recognize that, if we are to call ourselves a free people, transparency in government and the free flow of information must not be hindered by censorship.

“The press was to serve the governed, not the governors.” —U.S. Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black in *New York Times Co. v. United States* (1971)

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