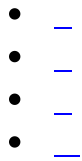


Posted on

03.05.2018

Share on



World Press Freedom Day: “Press Freedom as an International Human Right”



Press freedom around the world has increasingly come under attack over the last decade and a half. In 2016, the proportion of the global population that enjoys a free press fell to its lowest level in 13 years, and

only 13 percent of the world's population now live in countries with a press that earns the [Freedom House](#) status 'Free.' The [2018 World Press Freedom Index](#), compiled by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) paints an equally worrying picture: Hostility towards journalists is increasing across the globe, even in democracies in Europe and the US that have traditionally respected press freedom most.

Despite these ongoing negative trends that increasingly threaten **the work of journalists and media personnel**, press freedom has received only limited attention in the context of international human rights for a long time. The benefits of a free press for economic and political development have been documented. But coverage of press freedom as a human right *per se* is largely absent from the academic literature. The recently published book "[Press Freedom as an International Human Right](#)", written by Wiebke Lamer, Teaching Fellow at our [Global Campus Europe Master's Programme](#), aims to fill this gap by examining why press freedom has not become part of the established international human rights discourse, despite its centrality to democratic theory.

The author argues that an unrestricted press is not just an important economic actor, but also an influential power in the political process, a status that interferes with the interests of governments in sustaining their own power and influence. Consequently, states undermine press freedom at home or its promotion on the international stage. Despite the popularity of ideational explanations in the field of human rights studies, in the case of promoting press freedom, considerations of power and strategic interests rather than ideas dominate state behaviour. Wiebke Lamer makes the case that the current place of press freedom in the human rights debate needs to be rethought not only in developing countries, but in liberal democracies as well.

The book is available for purchase in hard copy and as e-book on the publisher website at [springer.com](https://www.springer.com).

More information about the book

The book consists of seven chapters. The first one introduces the reader to the subject of press freedom in the context of human rights. It discusses current press freedom trends, particularly in Western societies, and provides an overview of the status of press freedom in the UN human rights debate and in the academic literature.

In chapter 2, the relationship between press freedom and freedom of expression is addressed. The author makes the case that press freedom matters as a right in itself due to its government oversight capacity, and that the right to freedom of expression is in fact meaningless without a free press, or the Fourth Estate. Since the free press fulfils several vital political and social functions, while also having access to a mass audience, it has a powerful influence on the government-citizen relationship. The chapter also highlights the importance of press freedom for promoting and protecting human rights.

Chapter 3 provides a case study of the treatment of press freedom within the UN framework since 2006,

highlighting in particular the absence of press freedom in the UN human rights debate. The chapter also examines indicators for the state driven nature of the UN discourse and actions on press freedom, such as the funding of UN bodies like UNESCO and initiatives that deal with press freedom and media development.

Chapter 4 examines the politics of press freedom, arguing that when it comes to promoting press freedom, power and state interests carry more weight than ideas and norms. The emphasis here is on Western states in particular. To prove the point that strategic interests, rather than ideas, determine Western state action on the issue of press freedom, the chapter also examines the historical trajectory of press freedom at the UN.

Chapter 5 looks at non-state actors and the promotion of press freedom. In particular, it examines the efforts of NGOs that work on behalf of press freedom issues, but also looks at what role the media itself play with regard to the press freedom debate. The chapter also makes the case that anti-press freedom measures are indirectly supported by Western publics that seem to have lost their trust in the press as an independent political institution aimed at representing the voice of the people.

Chapter 6 examines press freedom in the context of increased political activity by new media. The focus here is on the future of press freedom in the age of the Internet, as this medium has become central to the global communication rights debate, particularly since the Arab Spring and more recent developments in the context of misinformation and fake news. Such discussions highlight the new challenges the world faces with regard to the state-society balance in the 21st century. This chapter contends that promoting and protecting press freedom is of vital importance in the digital age.

Chapter 7 provides a summary of the book's findings and discusses their implications for press freedom, human rights, international relations and the future of the Western liberal order. It argues that press freedom and other communication rights are at the forefront of the global struggle between democracy and authoritarian counternorms. It also offers suggestions on how to elevate press freedom to a more prominent place in the current human rights debate.

- [International](#)

, nbsp;

