

Education

Censorship in education is a hot button issue considering the prevalence of legislation dictating curricula. For example, Texas's State Board of Education passed a new optional curriculum which would emphasize biblical teachings in school in November 2024. Although it isn't mandated, schools who choose to teach it are rewarded with higher funding, incentivizing religiosity in schools. The Parental Rights in Education Act, known colloquially as the "Don't Say Gay" law, is a 2022 Florida statute that prohibits the discussion of sexual orientation or gender identity in educational settings. Another Florida law passed in 2022, the Stop WOKE Act, or the Stop Wrongs to Our Kids and Employees Act, prohibits teaching about racism, gender, privilege and similar social issues in schools and businesses.

Besides curricula, schools have also historically served as a domain for protest. In the case of West Virginia v. Barnette in 1943, the Supreme Court decided that it was okay for students to refuse things like saluting the American flag or reciting the Pledge of Allegiance in schools as part of their right to free speech. The Supreme Court decided in favor of students in 1969, when they decided in the case of Tinker v. Des Moines that schools were not allowed to punish students for protesting without evidence that it was substantially disrupting or interfering with the rights of other students.

Recently, the 2024 pro-Palestinian protests at Columbia University garnered attention for their response from administration. Columbia students set up tents and occupied a building to send a pro-Palestine message. Columbia's president allowed the police to raid and arrest protesters on campus, which led to controversy — some, including Joe Biden and Donald Trump, said it was Columbia's responsibility to end possibly disruptive protest. Others, like U.S. representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, condemned Columbia for violating students' right to protest.

Aragon also has a history of protest, with recent walk-outs in 2018 against gun violence and 2016 to promote acceptance.



Russia stands at 162 out of 180* countries when it comes to press freedom. Many independent media and organizations have been banned from the country, like BBC and France 24. Additionally, there are currently 33 cases of journalists who are detained and six of media workers.

China earns its place at 172 out of 180 countries* when it comes to press freedom by controlling the country's news, banning websites like Google and detaining the most journalists in the world.

"[There's] social media platforms where many people don't deal with that [censorship], they just use [a] VPN," said sophomore Russian immigrant Lila Kuznetsova. "The idea is to not take content from countries you're on bad terms with and to not speak badly about the government."

Even when living in the U.S., people feel wary communicating with people in China.

Placed at 159th place out of 180 countries*, Venezuela has had a history of suspending social media apps like X and Reddit. During rising political instability in the 2024 election, the president Nicolas Maduro to issue allegations of electoral fraud pushed an investigation on the creators of ResultadosCorVzla, a website that reported that he did not actually win.

Eritrea is ranked as the country with the worst press freedom out of 180 countries.* It has no independent media outlets and dissidents are often arrested or exiled. One of the cases include Dawit Isaak, who was detained in 2001 without any official charges after his independent newspaper, also the first independent newspaper in the country, Setit, published letters that demanded democratic changes to be made in Eritrea. Since then, he has been detained for 23 years, making Eritrea famous for detaining journalists longest in the world.

[REDACTED!]

1984 by George Orwell, ironically the most banned book in history, imagines a world rampant with thought-policing and propaganda, a dystopia ravaged by censorship. While reality may not be quite as extreme, censorship continues to be a very real threat to liberty around the world.

* Data from Reporters Without Borders, as of 2024
** Names have been changed to protect source privacy.

CENSORSHIP IN JOURNALISM!

December 12, 2024

In America, we preserve the freedom of press under the 1st Amendment, but this right isn't cut and dry. Individual journalists and publications can be prone to self-censorship, limiting their own expression to avoid negative consequences. The Pew Research Center reported that 41% of journalists say they've either avoided newsworthy subjects or changed the tone of their writing to favor the interests of their employers. In a recent example of self-censorship in journalism, both the Washington Post and L.A. Times refrained from endorsing a presidential candidate in the 2024 election.

In the Washington Post's case, an editorial endorsement for Kamala Harris was drafted, but then vetoed by publication owner and Amazon CEO, Jeff Bezos. Criticism came about, speculating that Bezos was preemptively trying to curry favor with Donald Trump in case he won. The L.A. Times is similarly owned by billionaire Patrick Soon-Shiong who may have a vested interest in Donald Trump's favor. The non-endorsements resulted in subscription cancellations, numbering ~1,000 for the L.A. Times and ~250,000 for the Washington Post.

Some governments restrict freedom of press, serving as an indicator of general freedom, across both time and the globe. In totalitarian regimes, journalists have historically been targeted, especially those who voice criticism against the government. Corrupt countries in the past and present tend to make laws restricting news publications in an attempt to inhibit one of journalism's most vital purposes — holding the government accountable by reporting on its actions. These regimes often eliminate oppositional publications or manipulate their content, rendering them a vessel for propaganda.

MEDIA

Copy: Alexa Sterry, Meilin Rife, Eva Ludwig, Angela Nguyen
Graphics: Alexa Sterry
Layout: Alexa Sterry

From deleting scenes to banning books, the entertainment industry has a long history of censorship. A notable example is the Hayes Code, a set of guidelines during the early 1930s to late 1960s used to regulate the film industry. The Hayes Code addressed concerns of the era about the entertainment becoming too violent, sexual or profane by prohibiting scenes that featured sex, drugs, crime, homosexuality, etc.

In 1968, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Ginsberg v. New York that it is lawful to censor pornographic content. The Motion Picture Association of America created its own standards going from G, suitable for children, to NC-17, suitable only for adults.

Censorship has blocked marginalized groups from being represented. Over time, though, diversity has become more commonplace, like in the 1968 "Star Trek" episode "Plato's Stepchildren," where the first interracial kiss was broadcast. The episode helped bring acceptance to interracial love. While filming, the production company proposed doing different takes to please Southern audiences by just implying the kiss; however, it was ultimately shut down by the actors who wanted to show the kiss nationwide. Similarly, in 2019's "Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker," they broke from the norm by introducing their franchise's first same sex kiss. Previously, television shows attempted to avoid censorship with "queer coded" characters, hinting at LGBTQ+ representation without doing it canonically. Representation within the media makes people feel seen.

"As an Asian woman ... [it] means a lot [to see Michelle Yeoh win an Oscar]," said junior Charlotte Wang. "It's just really amazing to see the other people spearheading something that maybe not directly impacts you, but is about you."

Social Media!!

The First Amendment protects social media platforms' right to moderate. According to the Code of Federal Regulations, social media platforms are not liable for users' actions and have no obligation to remove or keep harmful content. They also have freedom to control what users see.

For example, tech billionaire Elon Musk changed the algorithm behind X, previously Twitter, significantly upon purchasing it in 2022. A paper at the Queensland Institute of Technology found that after Musk endorsed Trump on July 13, the amount of times people saw his posts increased an average of 6.4 million views per day, proving that X promoted Musk's page. Following the endorsement, X suppressed Democrat accounts in favor of Republican accounts, suggesting manipulation.

TikTok also has a history of censorship. In 2021, influencer Ziggi Tyler found that when he entered phrases like "Black lives matter" in his bio, they were flagged as inappropriate, but he could write "I am a neo nazi" without repercussion. Research also suggests that TikTok pushes pro-Chinese government ideas while suppressing anti-Chinese government content. A report by the Network Contagion Research Institute found that the ratio of posts referencing Hong Kong protests was 181:1 when comparing Instagram to TikTok.

Social media platforms have considerable power to control what their users see, so it's important to be aware of bias, misinformation and censorship when using social media.