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Why is it important that we have news media that are independent from the government?

"Any dictator would admire the uniformity and obedience of the [U.S.] media."

--Noam Chomsky

As members of a democracy, residents in a country that prides itself on its educational prowess and freedom of speech, we are exponentially more susceptible to propaganda because we believe it doesn't exist for us. We believe that America has evolved beyond biased news coverage and that, if it did appear, we as a people are too intelligent to be duped. Therefore, we've become complacent, injudiciously absorbing everything modern media serves us.

The rise of globalization through social media has increased political and social awareness, but it has also prompted partisanship: professional unbiased news sources must compete with amateur pundits who now have a captive audience for their analyses, which while valid opinions, are not evenhanded accounts of current events. Their sensationalized style has created a market for partisan news coverage, resulting in once-objective sources catering to specific demographics of news consumers.

Additionally, when government gains that control over the media, the market become flooded with misinformation. News outlets distribute biased or incomplete information that supports their political proclivities; therefore, the general public loses the perspective that accurate facts provide, in turn contributing to growing disinterest in global and domestic affairs.

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One of many examples is the recent confusion over the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare. CNBC polled 812 Americans about the law: twelve percent of responders didn't know what Obamacare was, while 30 percent didn't know what ACA was. Additionally, the percentages for the law's support and opposition varied with the name given; Obamacare provoked a vehement reaction, positive from Democrats and negative from Republicans, while ACA was met with more neutrality. The disparity between those numbers—and the fact that many people appear not to know that the two laws are *the same thing*—suggests a bottleneck of information being released for public consumption. Americans are becoming increasingly content for the media to spoon feed the public it's opinions, and with so many of those opinions handed down by government influence, our democracy loses its credibility as a counterbalance to autocracy.

Unfortunately, consumers only choose to consume those products they already like. This means that, as official news media is influenced more by political interests, audiences gravitate toward the station that best exemplifies the values they already hold, limiting their capacity for open-mindedness and exchange of ideas. That the name attached to Obamacare elicits noticeably more opposition than the Affordable Care Act reveals the division in the general populace, which parallels the schism growing between parties in our government. The bias that continues to spread through our news media perpetuates bipartisan gridlock across the country, preventing action on any of the national and global issues plaguing society.

We need an independent news media as a check against political totalitarianism. The news acts as a platform for government transparency, which allows our country

to function as a democracy. Freedom of the press is fundamental to foundations of this country.

Works Cited

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