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MEDIA CENSORSHIP'S DEVELOPMENT IN THE INFORMATION AGE:  
AUTHORITARIAN CASE STUDIES IN EUROPE DURING THE 20<sup>th</sup> AND 21<sup>st</sup>  
CENTURIES

By  
Carter Linke

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the  
University Honors Program

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Departments of Political Science & Media and Journalism

The University of South Dakota

May 2024

The members of the Honors Thesis Committee appointed  
to examine the thesis of Carter Linke  
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## ABSTRACT

Media censorship's development in the Information Age: Authoritarian Case Studies in Europe during the 20th and 21st centuries

Carter Linke

Director: Timothy Schorn, Ph.D.

The Information Age has dramatically changed how people consume information. With the availability of smart devices and the Internet greater than ever before, a population's ability to receive multiple news reports and instant messaging has continued to prove beneficial to democratic societies. With these same technology improvements, authoritarian governments have been forced to adapt censorship policies to eliminate the Information Age's push towards the free press. Since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, authoritarian countries have introduced policy solutions to the growing connectivity across the globe. From the German Holocaust to Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, censorship has aimed to control their population's thoughts, speech, and actions. Much has changed since the Germans began using censorship policy as a strategic arm of their government. Today, parallels are seen in Russia beginning with Vladimir Putin's reelection in 2011. This paper will provide a review these two countries' censorship policies, and an analysis of civil societies' success adapting to these policies to promote democratic ideals. By looking at available media technology with the corresponding censorship policy, results will exemplify the strategic policy used to hinder civil societies' capacities. These results will provide better insight on civil societies' ability to evade censorship policies and explain their role in advancing democratic principles.

Keywords: Press freedom, media censorship, Russia, Ukraine, democracy

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
II.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
III.	METHODOLOGY.....	2
IV.	LITERATURE REVIEW.....	7
V.	CASE STUDIES	
	a. GERMANY (1933-1945).....	9
	b. RUSSIA (2011-2023).....	19
VI.	DISCUSSION.....	28
	a. Similarities.....	32
	b. Differences.....	33
VII.	CONCLUSION.....	42
VIII.	BIBLIOGRAPHY	

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When I began writing my undergraduate thesis, I was initially inspired by the opportunities granted to me by Gallagher International Office and the USD Political Science Department. With their support, I was able to study abroad twice, learning from real people about issues that matter to them. In the Spring of 2022, I was studying media politics in Berlin when Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine began. My thesis is a product of many conversations held in response to the war still happening today. Then, and still today, my education was flexible thanks to many great professors, including Till Büser, Jan Köhler, and Dr. Timothy Schorn. These three sparked my initial interest in other cultures into a passion for foreign policy. I'm very grateful to studied beneath them as an undergraduate.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to Ilmira Dulyanova and Dr. Janet Davison. Their feedback, along with Dr. Schorn's, helped make this final product what it is today. As an undergraduate honors student at USD, some of my favorite memories in the classroom come back to these three. My first journalism course that connected it all was with Dr. Davison. Ilmira's encouragement for all of her students made our trip to the Republic of Georgia one of my absolute favorite memories yet. And Dr. Schorn's ability to connect with his students and make learning fun helped me tackle this lengthy thesis as if it were light work.

I would also like to extend thank yous to Melissa Berninger with the Honors Program for her continued support shown to me throughout my time at USD, and to the Political Science and Media & Journalism Departments for their advice and mentorship.

## INTRODUCTION

Today, the world is as connected as ever largely credited to the Information Age's transformation of media technology and consumption. I'm sitting in Vermillion, South Dakota, sharing important news updates with friends in Manchester and Munich with a simple click of the button. They are able to respond in seconds, sharing feedback and consuming the media I shared at record speeds. Social media travels as fast as light, with little delay between channels. However, not all communication still relies on global reach to impact communities. Facebook, Twitter, and other mainstream social media platforms are proven connectors between neighbors and social groups. In the same way we share pictures of our coffee, kids, or dogs, we're able to connect with social movements with more people than ever.

In the United States, social movements have been promoted online now. #BlackLivesMatter sparked a hashtag, and then a network of grassroots collectives protesting the murder of George Floyd<sup>1</sup>. Internationally, the horrific murder of Floyd was shared on social media platforms and supporters of the BLM movement took to streets in London, Berlin, and more. This is just one of many social justice movements that have ignited primarily through online activism. Intimidated by the power of social connectedness, the Information Age has forced politicians to reimagine how they'll get ahead of their constituents. In this thesis, I'll introduce two authoritarian case studies with similar regime styles, in very different media landscapes to understand the Information Age's role in new censorship practices.

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<sup>1</sup> Maqbool, A. (2020, July 9). *Black lives matter: From Social Media Post to Global Movement*. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-53273381>

## METHODOLOGY

This thesis investigates the similarities and differences of attempts to censor populations during the Information Age in Europe. The research design investigates why authoritarian governments are prompted to further establish these policies, and how they accomplish their goals to censor their intended audience. To best accomplish this investigation, an empirical study of contemporary and historic events in Russia and Germany was conducted. The case study research method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events, most predominately used in political science research<sup>2</sup>. The design of this particular case study analysis aims to draw parallels between two authoritarian governments between a twelve-year window, beginning with a major historic event in the country's history that shifted political behaviors in the country. The two chosen case studies – Russia (2011-2023) and Germany (1933-1945) – exemplify dramatic, yet similar parallels while defining media censorship in authoritarian regimes due to the striking changes to media environments during the two periods. The changing media environments reflect the dramatic changes media technology had on censorship policy throughout the Information Age. In both case studies, particular interest was given to censorship administered by their respective government and their intended consequence.

This thesis is composed of two case studies, with the intent to compare similarities and draw differences among strategic policy goals despite the changing media landscape during the two time periods. A case study is a common methodology in the

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<sup>2</sup> Yin, Robert K. "Introduction." Essay. In *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. Sage Publication, 2014.



social sciences used to analyze a social period in history<sup>3</sup>. These cases will provide a greater awareness to draw a comparative analysis between the regimes' censorship policies. Social scientists have relied on comparative case study analysis to study revolutionary periods throughout history<sup>4</sup>. Researchers studying state building, democratization, development, and revolution continue to integrate comparative case studies as the primary research method in their analyses. This thesis expands upon primary research methods used by political scientists to analyze two cases in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

To begin, the Information Age is defined as the modern age regarded as a time in which information has become a commodity that is quickly and widely disseminated and easily available especially through the use of computer technology<sup>5</sup>. Many scholars have widely argued the relationship between democracy and technology would accelerate the spread of democratic ideals globally<sup>6</sup>. The invention of the internet is a defining principle of the Information Age, and democratic principles followed this innovation. For the purpose of this study, the Information Age is defined as the period following the invention of the internet and the further commercialization of this technology. Despite the advancements towards democratic principles in the Information Age, authoritarian states have continued to use political power to disrupt the flow of information. Authoritarian

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<sup>3</sup> Dumez, Hervé. "What Is a Case, and What Is a Case Study?" *BMS: Bulletin of Sociological Methodology / Bulletin de Méthodologie Sociologique*, no. 127 (2015): 43–57. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43761847>.

<sup>4</sup> Beck, Colin J. "The Comparative Method in Practice: Case Selection and the Social Science of Revolution." *Social Science History* 41, no. 3 (2017): 533–54. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/90017924>.

<sup>5</sup> "Information Age Definition & Meaning." Merriam-Webster. Accessed December 29, 2023. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Information%20Age>.

<sup>6</sup> Rosenbach, Eric, Katherine Mansted, Joseph S. Nye, Condoleezza Rice, Nicholas Burns, Edward Alden, Ash Carter, et al. "Can Democracy Survive the Information Age?" Edited by Leah Bitounis and Jonathon Price. *TECHNOLOGY AND NATIONAL SECURITY: MAINTAINING AMERICA'S EDGE*. Aspen Institute, 2019. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep43158.10>.

states often control the media, censor the internet, and shield their nations from outside information through national firewalls. For the purpose of this study, any attempt to disrupt the free flow of information by state-sponsored bodies is considered censorship.

As this information flow became more widely available, authoritarian states were challenged with producing policies that met their strategic political objectives. States often administer policies to reflect the changes in media technology in attempts to censor information flow. To best understand the holistic consequence of these policies, a case study analysis best examined contemporary events as relevant behaviors could not be manipulated. The case studies are confined to a twelve-year period following a major historic event and is limited to actions taken by state-sponsored powers. The scope of the analysis is further limited to actions taken by or suspected to be taken by government officials. Furthermore, each respective case study concludes with a brief reflection on the shortcomings of these policies either through policy miscalculation or civil society's intervention.

To define these practices, an appropriate analysis of the existing media that opposes the respective country's messaging was conducted. For the sake of this thesis, Nazi Germany and Putin's Russia have done extensive work defining these opposing views. The work defined in opposition of these relied on the definition provided by each regime. Appropriate notice was provided for each technology available, including those not initially provided in the case study such as virtual private networks (VPNs). This analysis provides insight on civil society's capacity during each respective time period and provides an introduction to technology's potential to aid resistance movements in authoritarian societies.

This thesis explores Nazi Germany beginning with the Reichstag Fire of 1933, and Russia beginning with the Duma elections of 2011. The case studies extend twelve years following these events, exploring the consequential policies and behaviors as a result of these major historic events. Both events signify a turning point in political behaviors in the country where the general public exhibited protest towards the authoritarian government. Despite the lapse in time between the two periods, both Russian and German media censorship were directed to control messaging and produce favorable attitudes towards their regime. The Information Age signified a crucial development period for media technology. Today, news is delivered to our phones and our neighbors just one click away. The media landscape is much different than it was 80 years ago. Furthermore, information consumption at these points were defined further by the available media technology resulting in vastly different media profiles and censorship policy. As a result, the countries' policies that follow reflect the role media technology has on authoritarian policy formulation. In the following years, both Germany and Russia began shifting more political power towards the governing party and the party began instituting more control over the available media sources to the public.

Case selection is imperative to a successful comparative analysis. This thesis argues the chosen cases illustrate the development, or lack thereof, of media censorship policy in a quickly developing media space. The chosen cases were selected to define similar and different practices throughout two historical time periods<sup>7</sup>. This case study analysis is an exploratory method, representing general cases with similar components.

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<sup>7</sup> Seawright, Jason, and John Gerring. "Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options." *Political Research Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (2008): 294–308. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20299733>.

Scholars use this method to compare cases that are mostly similar on some dimension. In this thesis, the consistent dimension revolves around overreach related to free speech in authoritarian governments in Europe. By comparing two similar political landscapes in two time periods with varying media technology, this thesis defines the role between media technology and censorship in Europe.

Nearly all relevant media technologies were considered during the analysis, with particular interest given to the newest media technology at a given period to best evaluate the case's significance in adapting to new critical and emerging technology. Russians consume information on the Internet most frequently; however, this is only one of many available media technologies across the country. In 2023, 85% Russians reported they also consumed information on the television<sup>8</sup>. Although interest was given to all media technology, the scope of the analysis was limited to the most critical technologies, such as the Internet, radio, and press.

Despite the different media technologies, the immediate response to the shifting attitudes in each country resulted in sharp attacks at channels where criticism of the government was available. The thesis starts by presenting an overview of democratic theory, laying the groundwork for subsequent discussions on the motivation behind policies implemented in an attempt to reinforce authoritarian ideologies. The literature review first defines narratives in the media space during the Information Age, setting the directive for authoritarian media during the Information Age. As the literature review

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<sup>8</sup> Published by Statista Research Department, & 1, M. (2023, March 1). *Russia: Television viewing frequency 2023*. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1094478/russia-television-viewing-frequency/#:~:text=According%20to%20a%20survey%20conducted,watch%20TV%20programs%20at%20all.>

conceptualizes the goals intended by these policies, the case study examines how these policies were implemented concerning media representations and contemporaneous events during their initiation. In complementation, the literature review and case study serve in capacities to prompt democratic values and investigate the policies implemented to attack those same values.

## DEMOCRACY & THE INFORMATION AGE

The Information Age has critically evolved transparency among government systems in the past few decades alone<sup>9</sup>. Technologies now offer unprecedented opportunities for the direct and secure communication of information. Mass media technology is now a valid tool to organize protest and civil engagement<sup>10</sup>. This organizing tool is still connecting friends, family, and strangers across the globe, where they can share news and updates with anyone with a reliable internet access. This is all possible thanks to social media sites, such as Facebook and Telegram, where virtual groups provide collective voices to influence larger groups. These simple-to-use sites are now warranting government censorship, especially in authoritarian regimes. Previous models of censorship policy to deter civic engagement are being challenged across nations. Specifically, in Europe, Moscow's most influential leaders are coming together to respond to the Information Age's influence on news systems.

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<sup>9</sup> Wanna, John. "Opening Government: Transparency and Engagement in the Information Age." In *Opening Government: Transparency and Engagement in the Information Age*, edited by JOHN WANNA and SAM VINCENT, 3–24. ANU Press, 2018. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1rmjnjq.5>.

<sup>10</sup> LETCHER, DIANA. "ONLINE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION, COLLECTIVE ACTION EVENTS, AND MEANINGFUL CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT: SOCIAL MEDIA USE DURING MASS PROTESTS." *Geopolitics, History, and International Relations* 10, no. 2 (2018): 70–75. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26802342>.

The largest social media companies tote over two billion active users daily<sup>11</sup>. These platforms generally comply with the laws of countries where they operate, allowing authoritarian systems to censor new media previously unavailable prior to the introduction of the Internet. Companies, such as Google and Meta, establish their own layers of censorship for users active on their platforms. Where today's Google doesn't meet an authoritarian regimes' expectation, they step in to influence media technology's presence in their country. Freedom House<sup>12</sup> has documented 14 consecutive years of decline in political rights and civil liberties over the last 15 years<sup>13</sup>. More than 2.4 billion people lived in a country that can be described as authoritarian in 2019. Authoritarianism's rise can be accredited to the digitalization of their country. Authoritarian control and power have increasingly shifted to digital channels where governments use new technology for surveillance and propaganda.

Digital technology is a threat to democratic societies. Authoritarian regimes use technologies to prevent the spread of critical information on the internet, enabling censorship to thrive. Although information can be spread more quickly today, civil society now has barriers preventing this dissemination that has never been experienced before. When civil society does succeed, they must also be careful of prosecution as well. Truly, the Information Age is reimagining democracy today.

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<sup>11</sup> Council on Foreign Relations. (n.d.-b). *How countries regulate online speech*. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/social-media-and-online-speech-how-should-countries-regulate-tech-giants>

<sup>12</sup> *About Us*. Freedom House. (n.d.). <https://freedomhouse.org/about-us>

<sup>13</sup> Herasimenka, Aliksandr. "Adjusting Democracy Assistance to the Age of Digital Dissidents." German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep26756>.

## GERMAN CASE STUDY (1933-1945)

Monday, February 27<sup>th</sup>, 1933, Berlin's skies were set ablaze after the German parliament building burned down due to arson<sup>14</sup>. The attack on the Reichstag was speculated to come from communists angered by the country's politics. However, the Reichstag Fire of 1933 would later be seen as a vehicle to exert full control under martial law by the Nazi party and their leader, Adolf Hitler. Under Hitler's leadership, the Nazi party would deploy a series of fascist changes to the country's government and initiate World War II. These changes were ignited by the Reichstag Fire Decree, a decree made possible by Article 48 of the German Constitution that attempted to weed out communists from German society. The decree abolished freedom of speech, assembly, privacy, and the press; legalized phone tapping and the interception of correspondence; and suspended the autonomy of federated states<sup>15</sup>.

The Reichstag Decree of 1933 was a product of the Nazi party's efforts to consolidate power for many years prior. Adolf Hitler's political presence in Germany had long been accompanied by propaganda<sup>16</sup>. The Nazi party attempted to increase their membership through propaganda and succeeded. Joseph Goebbels was instrumental to the Nazi party's rise to power, as he designed much of the Nazi party's propaganda distributed to the German public. Goebbels succeeded by using a combination of modern media, such as films and radio, and traditional media, such as posters and newspapers.

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<sup>14</sup> T., S. (1933). Fire destroys german reichstag building. *Delphos Daily Herald*, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Magazine, S. (2017, February 21). *The true story of the reichstag fire and the Nazi rise to power*. Smithsonian.com. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/true-story-reichstag-fire-and-nazis-rise-power-180962240/>

<sup>16</sup> *The Nazi rise to power*. The Nazi rise to power – The Holocaust Explained: Designed for schools. (n.d.). <https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/the-nazi-rise-to-power/the-nazi-rise-to-power/>

Goebbels deployed creative measures to reach audiences that were previously immobilized by their daily news consumptions. Goebbels reimagined the German news as an arm of Hitler's political agenda. Messaging was consolidated from ranking members of the RMVP and sent down to the average German news consumer. If a German was unable to consume the news provided by Goebbels and the Nazi party, the RMVP mobilized production models to improve access to the media where possible. As part of Goebbels' propaganda machine, he managed the media profile of the average German to further empower all efforts from the RMVP.

Goebbels would prove to be an influential piece of the Nazi's rise to power. The Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda (RMVP) was created in part by President Paul von Hindenburg's presidential decree on March 12<sup>th</sup>, 1933<sup>17</sup>. On March 12<sup>th</sup>, Hitler appointed Joseph Goebbels to head the newly curated ministry. Goebbels' vision for the ministry was clear and driven by multimedia strategy. He defined the Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda as the new ministry for the dissemination of "enlightenment and propaganda within the population concerning the policy of Reich Government and the national reconstruction of the German fatherland." In June 1933, Hitler further defined the scope of the RMVP as the "spiritual guide of the nation." This motivated Goebbels' strategy for the ministry, and he defined this perspective by stating, "We cannot be satisfied with just telling the people what we want and enlightening them as to how we are doing it. We must replace this enlightenment with an active government propaganda that aims at winning people over."

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<sup>17</sup> Welch, David (1993): *The Third Reich, Politics and Propaganda*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. New York: Knowledge, pp. 17-39.



When Goebbels became Minister for Propaganda in 1933, the newspaper and film industries were privately owned; the broadcasting system had remained state-regulated since 1925 by the Reich Radio Company (Reichsrundfunkgesellschaft – RRG). In March 1933, Goebbels announced the radio would have “the responsibility of bringing the people closer to the National Socialist State.” Goebbels envisioned the radio as an instrument to create uniformity and guide public opinion towards the Nazi concept of “national community.” To achieve his goal, Goebbels convinced Hitler to transfer radio responsibilities from the RRG to the RMVP. Hitler outlined the regulations for radio broadcast in a speech by stating, “The Reich Minister for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda is responsible for all influences on the intellectual life of the nation; public relations for the State, culture, and the economy, for instructing the domestic and foreign public about them and for the administration of all the institutions serving these purposes.” Membership of the RRG now became compulsory for everyone connected with broadcasting, to ensure uniformity in messaging.

Radio propaganda was a new tool in the 1930s, and Germans were ahead of every other European nation thanks to the RMVP’s strategic disinformation campaigns. The Germans had a propaganda organization before the war which worked to present the German view wherever German consuls and interests were<sup>18</sup>. The Germans weaponized the radio to systematically present the German view across the continent prior to World War II. This revolutionized the prior methods of propaganda in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, presenting propaganda as a strategic tool to influence public opinion prior to any major decision exhibited by the Nazi party. Goebbels maintained it was imperative that the

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<sup>18</sup> Pricelondon, C. (1936, May 3). Propaganda pink elephants and purple mice haunt the old world’s listeners. *New York Times*.

radio serve as the “spiritual weapon of the totalitarian State” and declared, “we have destroyed the spirit of rebellion.” The content following the induction of Goebbels and the RMVP proved the radio’s purpose was successful. Prior, the radio produced no Nazi broadcasts, and later began airing pro-Nazi propaganda regularly<sup>19</sup>. The radio waves swiftly turned into both persuasion and coordination mechanisms for the Nazi party, leaving the country’s poorest most susceptible to the malicious propaganda.

To expand the newly regulated broadcasting system’s audience, Goebbels distributed cheap radio sets and encouraged organized listening to Nazi events. In addition, radio systems were heavily subsidized so that it would be affordable to all workers. Germany’s technical mobilization of German radio aided the censorship efforts produced behind the RMVP. The Volksempfänger radio marked the beginning of Goebbels’ radio propaganda ascension<sup>20</sup>. At the German Radio Exhibition in Berlin on August 18, 1933, 100,000 VE301 (Volksempfänger) radios were sold.<sup>21</sup> The VE301 was priced at just 76 Reichsmarks, making it affordable for most households. The subsidies of the radio quadrupled the number of households paying the public media license fee, dramatically changing the media profile of Nazi Germany. As production grew, Goebbels and the RMVP radicalized the German population in attempts to recruit them for Nazi war efforts. By 1938, 65 percent of German households owned a radio set, placed strategically to reach the maximum number of potential listeners. These affordable radio

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<sup>19</sup> Adena, Maja, Ruben Enikolopov, Maria Petrova, Veronica Santarosa, and Ekaterina Zhuravskaya. “RADIO AND THE RISE OF THE NAZIS IN PREWAR GERMANY.” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 130, no. 4 (2015): 1885–1940. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26372641>.

<sup>20</sup> *Television and radio in the Second World War*. National Science and Media Museum. (n.d.). <https://www.scienceandmediamuseum.org.uk/objects-and-stories/tv-radio-second-world-war>

<sup>21</sup> Hasselbach, C. (2023, August 18). *Nazi germany: Radio propaganda turns 90 – DW – 08/18/2023*. dw.com. <https://www.dw.com/en/nazi-germany--propaganda-turns-90/a-66551137>

systems were distributed to the country's least educated, further aiding the influence the broadcasts had on the general public.

On the contrary, the Germans deliberately cut Jews and Poles off from the broadcast waves. From as early as October 1939, it was forbidden to own a radio and all such devices were confiscated<sup>22</sup>. The Germans monitored the radio waves even after the confiscation of the radio systems, closing examining messaging provided by the BBC's multilingual service in London and Radio Moscow. The day war was declared, the Germans made listening to the BBC a crime punishable by death<sup>23</sup>. The Germans wanted to benefit from radio production by controlling the message broadcast across these systems. The mass production of radios, confiscation of radios owned by Jewish citizens, and the severe punishment given to those listening to foreign broadcasting showcases the Nazi's attempt to control airwaves.

Former independent broadcasters were combined under a synchronization policy, further bringing institutions in line with official policy points. Following the synchronization of the radio, only two programs remained – national and local news. With the start of World War II, military marches replaced dance music, bad news turned to entertainment, and airtime was often dedicated to Hitler's addresses to the nation. On September 1, 1939, German citizens tuned into the radio to hear a report about a Polish attack. Although this report was fake, it allowed Hitler to take to the airwaves to

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<sup>22</sup> The use of radio in the Warsaw Ghetto as a source ... (n.d.-b).  
[https://www.iwm.org.uk/sites/default/files/the\\_use\\_of\\_radio\\_in\\_the\\_warsaw\\_ghetto\\_as\\_a\\_source\\_for\\_the\\_progress\\_of\\_the\\_war.pdf](https://www.iwm.org.uk/sites/default/files/the_use_of_radio_in_the_warsaw_ghetto_as_a_source_for_the_progress_of_the_war.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> BBC. (n.d.). *Overseas programming*. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/research/bbc-at-war/overseas-programming/#:~:text=It%20certainly%20made%20the%20BBC,ranking%20officer%20missing%20in%20action.>

announce that fighting was underway. Radio propaganda proved to be a serious ignitor for war in Nazi Germany.

Arguably, daily newspapers reached the largest audiences. Prior to the RMVP's founding, Germany boasted more daily newspapers than the combined total of Britain, France, and Italy. The RMVP adopted a three-pronged approach to the control of the press: regulation of journalists working in the press, the acquisition of most of the German press, and content control of the press produced under State-controlled press agencies. Members of the press deemed politically 'unacceptable' were replaced by Max Amann – the new chairman for the 'Association of German Newspaper Publishers.' On April 30, 1933, the Association announced membership would be compulsory and all members of the Association would be screened for their 'racial and political reliability.' Following the Reichstag Fire of 1933, an emergency decree allowed the Nazi regime to suspend publication and include the spreading of rumors and false news as treasonable offenses. At the time of the decree, the Nazis owned 59 daily newspapers. By 1939, the Nazis owned two-thirds of the German press. Newspapers that promoted communist or liberal political ideals were suppressed and consolidated swiftly, sometimes within a matter of just days<sup>24</sup>.

Messaging was controlled by the *Schriftleitergesetz*, or the Editorial Act passed on October 4, 1933<sup>25</sup>. The law restructured not only who could write for the German press, but also required those writing to present an "Aryan certificate." Journalists who

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<sup>24</sup> Larson, Cedric. "The German Press Chamber." *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (1937): 53–70. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2745175>.

<sup>25</sup> Hardt, H. (1982). Journalism in Exile: An Introduction. In J. M. SPALEK & R. F. BELL (Eds.), *Exile: The Writer's Experience* (Vol. 99, pp. 68–81). University of North Carolina Press. [http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469658421\\_spalek.9](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469658421_spalek.9)

did not meet the requirements of the Editorial Act were required to leave the profession, thus cementing Aryan German citizens as the only journalists in the country. Many respected newspapers lost a majority of their staff. Notably, the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, one of Germany's most established newspapers, lost thirty-one staff members. The law specified editors "were bound to keep anything out of the newspapers which tends to weaken the strength of the German Reich, the common will of the German people, the German defense ability culture, or economy, or offends the religious sentiments of others."

Following the strict press regulations introduced by the Nazi party in 1933, experts claimed these regulations led to a decline in readership and to a loss of trust in the information reported. Despite this, a study completed in Hamburg found the first two to three years of Nazi rule resulted in a slight decline, then rose so that by 1938-39 almost all of Hamburg's households subscribed to one of the three big, coordinated dailies – one of which was the official Nazi Party paper<sup>26</sup>. Readers were not discouraged by the lack of credible journalists, even as newspapers struggled to staff their office. Those who remained in the profession were tied to rules and regulations set by the Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda. The RMVP set strict guidelines for nearly all news. The press designed uniform answers to critics, antisemitism, and Aryan propaganda. The journalists followed guidance set across by propagandists in the ministry, often established on a national stage disseminated through press organizations.

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<sup>26</sup>K. C. Führer, "Die Tageszeitung als wichtigstes Massenmedium der nationalsozialistischen Gesellschaft," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 55 (2007): 323-441. David Bankier assigns the press "a vital role as an agent of political socialization." D. Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion under Nazism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 20.

Under those guidelines, those consuming news through the press relied on news produced by Nazi propagandists.

This controlled message extended to popular literature, as the German censorship arm inspired thousands of young people to take to their universities to destroy blacklisted literature. The Nazi regime began compiling a blacklists of journalists and writers and published secret guides domestically and abroad following the creation of the RMVP. These guides proved to be consequential as German students took to their university to enforce the blacklist. On May 10, 1933, thousands of books across German universities were burned<sup>27</sup>. Student groups in 34 university towns set 25,000 books ablaze. These books reflected the works of Jewish authors, such as Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud, alongside blacklisted American authors, such as Ernest Hemingway and Helen Keller<sup>28</sup>. Following, 40,000 people in Berlin gathered to hear Goebbels give a speech declaring “the era of extreme Jewish intellectualism is now at an end. The future German man will not be a man of books, but a man of character.” Although the speech by Goebbels reinforced the decision by young German Nazis, there was no official guidance to act accordingly. Goebbels and the RMVP continued to provoke further book burning through a series of propagandic messages.

Beginning in 1938, the Nazis began burning the Hebrew Bible in thousands. The reach of this antisemitism spread from cities to villages alike, from Berlin to Vienna<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> J. M. Ritchie. “The Nazi Book-Burning.” *The Modern Language Review* 83, no. 3 (1988): 627–43. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3731288>.

<sup>28</sup> Public Broadcasting Service. (n.d.). *Book burnings in Germany, 1933*. PBS.

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/goebbels-burnings/>

<sup>29</sup> Confino, Alon. “Why Did the Nazis Burn the Hebrew Bible? Nazi Germany, Representations of the Past, and the Holocaust.” *The Journal of Modern History* 84, no. 2 (2012): 369–400. <https://doi.org/10.1086/664662>.

Destroying the Hebrew Bible in communities was hosted as an open event that no one could ignore. In villages, key players were often children. This reinforced the Nazi's cultural norms and behaviors. Cultural norms and behaviors were often influenced by the RMVP's propaganda machine. The central goal of Nazi propaganda was to radically restructure German society so that the prevailing class, religious and sectional loyalties would be replaced by a new heightened national awareness. This heightened nationalism was fueled by ethnonationalist remarks, complemented by racist and antisemitic rhetoric.

What was once a national attempt to alienate Germans at home grew into an international scheme to influence people across the globe when Berlin hosted the Summer Olympic Games in 1936. The Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda was tasked with constructing a stadium and structures that complemented the growing nationalist movement in Germany during the games. The Nazi influence over the 1936 Olympic Games highlighted the bounds of propaganda and censorship essential to their regime. Large statues, banners, and even the game's structures followed strict guidelines produced by Goebbels and the RMVP with the hopes to use the games as a tool for international propaganda<sup>30</sup>. Televised across the globe, German athletes gave stiff-armed Nazi salutes on medal stands. The Olympic five rings now incorporated a symbol of the Nazi swastika. Jewish athletes were barred from competing, even with the adoption of anti-discrimination protections for Jewish people just weeks before the games. Internationally, anti-Semitism was at an all-time high.

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<sup>30</sup> Berkes, H. (2008, June 7). *Nazi Olympics Tangled Politics and Sport*. NPR.  
<https://www.npr.org/2008/06/07/91246674/nazi-olympics-tangled-politics-and-sport>

This was the normal in Nazi Germany following the 1936 Olympic Games. For the Nazi regime, the primary purpose of German culture was collective<sup>31</sup>. Following the Nazi invasion of Poland in 1939, Goebbels and the RMVP's priority shifted to watch the public frame of mind and influence war scenarios in the German household. Although the outbreak of war was not popular with the German people, the people were quickly calmed by a streak of military successes. Or a streak of successful propaganda. The initial invasion of Poland was justified by brutal propaganda produced by Reinhard Heydrich. Soldiers dressed Polish-speaking concentration camp inmates in Polish army uniforms, killed them, and laid them out in such a fashion as to make them appear to be Polish attackers. The public believed "Polish aggression" and overwhelmingly supported Hitler's first victories. This aggressive propaganda followed closely with the Nazi invasion of Norway, Denmark, and France. Every channel of German media was controlled by Goebbels and his ministry. Where there were successes, they were broadcast in cinemas and across radio waves.

A relatively new means of propaganda, the cinema industry was quickly adapted to complement any Nazi attempt to influence the German people. The new purpose now was to condition the people to endure war and war-related experiences. Movie theaters became increasingly popular as films were developed to showcase Nazi "successes." Films were presented as a product of war, showing the RMVP's heroic soldiers – even in scenes where soldiers were lost<sup>32</sup>. The documentaries and newsreels made in Nazi Germany embodied the RMVO's strategic portrayal of drama and excitement to engage

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<sup>31</sup> Kater, Michael H. "War and Public Opinion, Propaganda, and Culture." In *Culture in Nazi Germany*, 172–247. Yale University Press, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvfc542q.9>.

<sup>32</sup> Rentschler, Eric. "German Feature Films 1933-1945." *Monatshefte* 82, no. 3 (1990): 257–66. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30155280>.



Nazi Germany's population. Film played a central role in the RMVP, mobilizing the Nazi ideology. In the cinema, films shown romanticized horrific acts against Nazi adversaries and indoctrinated all attendees.

In all channels, the average German news consumer was presented with Goebbels' propaganda. The reader was consumed by news produced through the Nazi ministry's control, and it greatly influenced public opinion during World War II. Civil society most often complemented the RMVP's attempts to censor the general public, notably mentioned the mass book burning across German universities. Resistance to the Nazi party was hard to produce, as credible news was pushed out of the country, often by force or into the country's concentration camps for those opposed to the inhumane treatment of Nazi adversaries. Civil society risked similar treatment to Jewish or political prisoners in Nazi concentration camps<sup>33</sup>. Even then, resistance was hard to come by. Simply put, Germans were unable to process news that opposed the RMVP's produced media. Little framework existed to share news from foreign outlets. Journalists who had opposed the war were swiftly censored. Authors who shared perspectives opposing Nazi aggression were blacklisted, their books burned. Civil society was unable to produce strong resistance movement because their ability to share information was limited.

### **RUSSIAN CASE STUDY (2011-2023)**

Saturday, December 24<sup>th</sup>, 2011, tens of thousands of citizens took to the street in Moscow for the second huge antigovernment protest in the month<sup>34</sup>. The protests were

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<sup>33</sup> Henry, Frances. "HEROES AND HELPERS IN NAZI GERMANY: WHO AIDED JEWS?" *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* 13, no. 1/2 (1986): 306–19. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23262671>.

<sup>34</sup> Barry, E., & Schwirtz, M. (2011, December 24). *Vast rally in Moscow is a challenge to Putin's power*. The New York Times. Retrieved November 30, 2022, from

uncommon for the Kremlin as it has not encountered widespread political resistance for a decade. The protests follow the December 4<sup>th</sup> parliamentary elections for the Duma, the lower house of the Russian parliament<sup>35</sup>. Protests began Monday following the elections on Sunday and continued for several weeks. Protestors took to the streets to contest the outcome of Sunday's elections with the largest attendance for antigovernment demonstration since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991<sup>36</sup>. For years, Russians did not believe they could influence the political process. The protests of December 2011 showed Russians otherwise.

The protests would continue, growing larger by the day. The Russian middle class is widely regarded as responsible for the country's shift in political participation and activism. Russians utilized Facebook in preparation for the Moscow demonstration scheduled for Saturday, December 24<sup>th</sup>, and Yandex, the Russian search engine, to share maps, addresses, and times of protests scheduled all over Russia. Young, educated, urban, middle-class Russians organized these protests nearly entirely on Twitter and Facebook. Just a year prior, Facebook partnered with the leading Russian wireless carriers, Beeline and Mobile TeleSystems, to expand language translation features to Russians<sup>37</sup>. The advanced language translation services resulted in a 376 percent increase in member enrollment for Facebook in Russia, totaling 4.5 million users within the country. The

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<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/25/world/europe/tens-of-thousands-of-protesters-gather-in-moscow-russia.html>

<sup>35</sup> Russia's Duma elections - carnegie endowment for international peace. (n.d.).

<https://carnegieendowment.org/2011/12/02/russia-s-duma-elections-pub-46128>

<sup>36</sup> Alissa De Carbonnel, "Insight: Social Media Makes Anti-Putin Protests Snowball," Reuters, December 7, 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/12/07/us-russia-protests-socialmedia-idUSTRE7B60R720111207>.

<sup>37</sup> *Facebook's russian campaign*. Bloomberg.com. (2010, December 29). Retrieved November 30, 2022, from <https://web.archive.org/web/20160422080547/http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2010-12-29/facebooks-russian-campaign>

introduction of the translation campaign proved to be critical in the development of political participation in the country during the 2011 parliamentary election protests. Engagement through social networking proved to be pivotal in recruiting attendance for the demonstrations, with several Facebook groups driving participation throughout the entire country like never before.

Social media proved to be integral in the protests' success and added continued fuel to the movement. Social media allowed the Russian population to see electoral fraud and manipulation firsthand<sup>38</sup>. Dozens of user-generated videos captured electoral violations. Videos depicted carousel voting, an act in which individuals voted between many polling places to cast votes under different names. Other videos showed individuals stuffing ballots with votes for United Russia into ballot boxes. All evidence suggested the electoral violations were orchestrated by the ruling party, United Russia.

As the protests grew more popular among the middle class, former political elites became more encouraged to participate in the anti-Kremlin demonstrations. For the first time, two high-level figures connected to the Kremlin were at the demonstration asking for similar demands as the protesters at the demonstration. Former Finance Minister Aleksei L. Kudrin spoke to the crowd to express his support for the protesters' demands. Kudrin would also publish an article the following Saturday in *Kommersant*, noting that many state employees were participating in the demonstrations. Among those in attendance was Mikhail Prokhorov, a billionaire with the intent to run against Russian president Vladimir Putin in the coming presidential election in March.

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<sup>38</sup> Duffy, Natalie. "Internet Freedom in Vladimir Putin's Russia: The Noose Tightens." American Enterprise Institute, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep03199>.

The protestors demanded the dismissal of the head of the Central Election Commission, Vladimir Y. Churov; the dissolution of Parliament and new elections; and changes in the election code to allow for free competition. Many of these demands and demonstrations were organized by Alexey Navalny, an anti-corruption activist and civil society leader throughout Russia<sup>39</sup>. Navalny spoke to the crowd, “We are a peaceful force and will not [seize the Kremlin] now. But if these crooks and thieves try to go on cheating us, if they continue telling lies and stealing from us, we will take what belongs to us with our own hands.” Following the protest, nearly 1,000 people were arrested – including Alexey Navalny<sup>40</sup>. Navalny is the epitome of Russian opposition to the Kremlin. In 2023, a Russian court convicted already imprisoned Navalny on charges of extremism – charges which Navalny claimed were politically motivated<sup>41</sup>.

Once detained, numerous reports of malpractice followed. The censorship and surveillance apparatus extended protocol beyond searching for anti-government comments to actively search for any mention of Alexey Navalny - a Russian civil society leader and political opposition leader to the United Russian Party. Navalny was influential in the 2011 election protests in Moscow, and an active member of Russian civil society producing and distributing anti-government content until his ultimate arrest. Civil society leaders and journalists who opposed the Kremlin were often threatened, punished unfairly, and intimidated by Russian police. Navalny is not the only Russian

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<sup>39</sup> Boom, L. (2023, November 28). *Alexei Navalny*. POLITICO. <https://www.politico.eu/list/politico-28-class-of-2024/alexei-navalny/>

<sup>40</sup> Heintz, J., Litvinova, D., & Burrows, E. (2024, February 17). *Alexei Navalny, galvanizing opposition leader and Putin’s fiercest foe, died in prison, Russia says*. AP News. <https://apnews.com/article/russia-navalny-dead-opposition-leader-2d11644f7ae5332587b39150f1fd1738>

<sup>41</sup> AP News. (2023, August 4). *Kremlin critic Navalny convicted of extremism and sentenced to 19 years in prison*. AP News. <https://apnews.com/article/russia-navalny-opposition-crackdown-prison-term-b42769d2ba1beb99954279fbb93815d4>

activist who had faced intimidation since the illegal invasion of Ukraine in 2022. In 2022, Ukraine recorded the largest increase in violence targeting journalists, which included direct attacks against journalists covering the war, mostly by the occupying Russian forces<sup>42</sup>. In addition to the 35 reported violent attacks against journalists in Ukraine, Russian forces also routinely abducted journalists in Southern Ukraine.

Following the election protests, Putin increased the Russian government's control on the Internet through legislation. The laws began with the implementation of Federal Law No. 89417-6, titled "On the Protection of Children from Information Harmful to their Health and Development" but commonly known as the "Blacklist Bill."<sup>43</sup> The law was signed on July 28, 2012, just months following the election protests of 2011. The law's stated purpose is to block sites related to child pornography, materials on drug abuse or production, and suicide; however, the law grants the Roskomnadzor the power to censor websites that would encourage "mass riots" or "participation in unsanctioned events." The Blacklist Bill also grants the Roskomnadzor to censor individual URLs, domain names, and IP addresses. By February 2013, the Blacklist Bill had banned 4,000 websites<sup>44</sup>.

These laws marked the first of many in Russia's turn to internet censorship prompted by the election protests of 2011. This was amplified by *Freedom House* in a 2011 report listing Russia as "partly free" but states plainly there is no substantial

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<sup>42</sup> Christian Jaffe, Ciro Murillo. "Infographic: Journalists under Attack." ACLED, July 13, 2023. <https://acleddata.com/2023/07/11/infographic-journalists-under-attack/>.

<sup>43</sup> President of Russia, "Amendments to the Law on Protecting Children from Information Harmful to Their Health and Development," news release, July 31, 2012, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/4246>.

<sup>44</sup> Miriam Elder, "Censorship Row over Russian Internet Blacklist," *Guardian*, November 12, 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/nov/12/censorship-row-russian-internet-blacklist>; "Registry Monitoring: State Agencies Shocked on February 23<sup>rd</sup> (and Banned 92 IP [Addresses])," Rublacklist.net, February 27, 2013, <http://rublacklist.net/4445/>.

political censorship<sup>45</sup>. However, many strategies to censor the media has come through the means of information channels attempting to frame the ways Russians receive their news. In the 2012 report, *Freedom House* reported:

*“Russia remained a danger place to work as a journalist in 2011. Businessmen close to Putin are increasingly buying up key media assets to ensure ultimate regime control over mainstream news and information. During the year, there were several demonstrated cases of censorship in the national media. While internet discussion is still largely free, the authorities are developing additional tools to monitor and influence online activity as the number of Russians getting their information from new media continues to grow<sup>46</sup>.”*

Media censorship continued to progress under Putin’s administration. In 2014, Russian president Vladimir Putin signed into law amendments limiting the ownership of Russian media by foreign investors to 20 percent<sup>47</sup>. Human Rights Watch researcher Tanya Cooper argued, “This law will cut foreign investment and threaten diversity and competition in Russia’s media market.” The law would ban a foreign state, international organization, a foreign legal entity, Russian legal entity with foreign participation, a foreign national, a stateless person, or a Russian citizen with another state’s citizenship from owning more than 20 percent of a media outlet in Russia. This legislation intended to increase domestic control, most notably providing the framework to prevent attempts at foreign influence on Russian society and politics. The Russian surveillance branch, Roskomnadzor, began enforcing the foreign agent law on January 1, 2016.

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<sup>45</sup> Meredith, Kristen. “Social Media and Cyber Utopianism: Civil Society versus the Russian State during the ‘White Revolution,’ 2011-2012.” *St Antony’s International Review* 8, no. 2 (2013): 89–105. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26228740>.

<sup>46</sup> Russia - freedom house. Accessed January 2, 2024. [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/NIT2012Russia\\_final.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/NIT2012Russia_final.pdf).

<sup>47</sup> “Russia: Drop New Media Law.” Human Rights Watch, October 28, 2020. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/10/01/russia-drop-new-media-law>.

Established in 2008, the Roskomnadzor was initially started with only a few dozen employees who regulated radio signals, telecom, and postal delivery<sup>48</sup>. The agency was prompted to further develop their intended purpose beyond its initial bounds after the protests in Moscow showcased the internet's ability to increase political participation in Russia. In November 2012, the Russian Internet Restriction Bill instituted a blacklist for illegal content – child pornography, extremist and drug-related material, information on suicide, and information prohibited by the courts<sup>49</sup>. This new law provided the Roskomnadzor the vehicle necessary to set up a website blacklist with the power to take down websites in violation of this law and those that follow. The government tries to block websites entirely, although if the state is unable to enforce this censure, it forces Russian internet service providers to block access to the chosen websites.

The intended purpose behind the 2014 Russian foreign agent law has since extended to individual persons to be included in the list of media organizations acting as foreign agents beginning in 2019. In December, Russian president Vladimir Putin signed new legislation expanding the foreign agent law to include any private individual or group who receives any amount of foreign funding – foreign governments, organizations, or citizens – and publishes “printed, audio, audio visual or other reports and materials.”<sup>50</sup> Following the execution of the updated 2019 foreign agent law, all individuals reporting in Russia were required to submit their financial records to the Roskomnadzor. Once

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<sup>48</sup> Mozur, Paul, Adam Satariano, Aaron Krolik, and Aliza Aufrechtig. “‘They Are Watching’: Inside Russia’s Vast Surveillance State.” *The New York Times*, September 22, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/09/22/technology/russia-putin-surveillance-spying.html>.

<sup>49</sup> Bildt, H.E. Carl, William E. Kennard, Frances G. Burwell, and Tyson Barker. “Leading in Global Internet Governance.” *Building a Transatlantic Digital Marketplace: Twenty Steps Toward 2020*. Atlantic Council, 2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep03652.12>.

<sup>50</sup> Phalnikar, Sonia. “Russia’s Sweeping Foreign Agent Law – DW – 02/03/2022.” *dw.com*, February 4, 2022. <https://www.dw.com/en/what-is-russias-foreign-agent-law/a-60652752>.

flagged, authorities required foreign agents to label anything they publish with a disclaimer. The identification as a “foreign agent,” has long been connected to negative Soviet-era connotations in Russia. In a survey published by Tufts University<sup>51</sup>, 62 percent of Russians responded that they held a generally negative perception of the phrase “foreign agent.” Thirty-nine percent believed it referred to a “spy.” Since the creation of the 2012 foreign agent law, the subsequent media groups and persons labeled as foreign agents immediately encountered barriers to agency cooperation and public reception.

Following the illegal invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russian authorities used the legislation as a tool for suppressing anti-war protests in Russian public spaces. Many prominent Russian figures who expressed anti-war positions were included in the register of foreign agents<sup>52</sup>. The administration of the 2019 revision was used as a vehicle to suppress musicians, actors, journalists, and lawyers. In December, the law was once again revisited by the Kremlin and modified to provide more power to the Russian authorities. The new law gave authorities the opportunity to label any citizen, media outlet, or organization as a foreign agent, solely on the grounds that they are under foreign influence. In the law, foreign influence was defined as “the provision of support and/or influence on the person by a foreign source, including coercion, persuasion and/or other means.” Furthermore, “support” was defined as “the provision of money and/or other

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<sup>51</sup> Subhashree, Padmini. “The Impact of Russia’s ‘Foreign Agents’ Legislation on Civil Society.” Fletcher Russia and Eurasia Program, September 30, 2023. <https://sites.tufts.edu/flecherrussia/the-impact-of-russias-foreign-agents-legislation-on-civil-society/>.

<sup>52</sup> E.g. “The Ministry of Justice Recognized Six People and an NGO as ‘Foreign Agents,’” *Foreign Agents (blog)*, *OVD-News*, April 8, 2022, <https://ovd.news/express-news/2022/04/08/minyust-priznal-inoagentami-shest-chelovek-i-odnu-nko> and “The Ministry of Justice Recognized Mikhail Khodorkovsky and Garry Kasparov as ‘Foreign Agents,’” *Foreign Agents (blog)*, *OVD-News*, March 20, 2022, <https://ovd.news/express-news/2022/05/20/minyust-priznal-mihaila-hodorkovskogo-i-garri-kasparova-inoagentami>.



property, as well as provision of organizational and methodological scientific and technical assistance, and assistance in other forms by a foreign source to the person<sup>53</sup>.”

The new 2022 law updated prohibited activities by a foreign agent beyond the previous scope limited to media outlets. Once labeled as a foreign agent by the Roskomnadzor, individuals are prohibited from engaging in educational activities in state universities, organizing public events, and producing and distributing materials to minors. Furthermore, it also provides the Kremlin with the authority to cancel programs and activities hosted by organizations inside Russia even if they do not violate the law. Those who fail to comply and who are labeled as a foreign agent are at risk of administrative liability and may be punished fines of up to half a million rubles and a jail sentence of up to five years. As more information becomes available online, the Russian censorship agency records this data and increases their surveillance capacity towards individual users. This digital footprint compromises users’ abilities to support anti-Kremlin sentiments online, and forces Russians to choose between speech and imprisonment.

The evolution of the Russian foreign agent legislation continued to regress legal certainty surrounding the definition of what and who were defined as a “foreign agent.” The original law passed in 2012 only defined non-governmental organizations engaging in “political activity,” requiring organizations to register with the Justice Ministry and to file a report to officials every quarter<sup>54</sup>. The 2022 rendition broadened the definition of foreign agents to cover any person – Russia, foreign or stateless; any legal entity, domestic or international; or any group without official registration, if they are considered

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<sup>53</sup> 22 Federal Law No. 255-FZ on the Control of Activities of Persons under Foreign Influence, Art. 2

<sup>54</sup> Ostroukh, Andrey. Russia’s Putin signs NGO “foreign agents” law. Accessed January 3, 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSBRE86K05M/>.

to have received foreign support and/or are considered be “under foreign influence” and engaged in activities that Russian authorities would deem to be “political.”<sup>55</sup> The implementation of the 2022 law with said vague definitions provided Russian courts and police with the authority to abuse their powers. The vagueness of the newest rendition of the legislation was intentional. One of the bill’s authors in the State Duma, Oleg Matveichev, stated in an interview, “the law is written in such a way that it cannot be circumvented. For the law to be effective, it is made in such a way that we can always declare a ‘foreign agent’ whoever we deem necessary.”<sup>56</sup>

A report leaked to the New York Times by the Bashkortostan office of the Roskomnadzor provided a glimpse of the long-reaching arm of Russia’s powerful internet regulator. Nearly 160,000 records showed the true potential of the agency’s surveillance and censorship potential. Just days after Russia’s illegal invasion of Ukraine, the agency began monitoring websites, social media, and news outlets and labeling them as “pro-government,” “anti-government,” or “apolitical.” Then, the Roskomnadzor worked to unmask and surveil people behind anti-government accounts and provided detailed information on critics’ online activities to local security. Combined, the surveillance efforts by the Roskomnadzor and the newly instituted 2022 version of the Russian

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<sup>55</sup> “Russia: New Restrictions for ‘Foreign Agents.’” Human Rights Watch, December 7, 2022.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/12/01/russia-new-restrictions-foreign-agents>.

<sup>56</sup> “You, Foreign Agent, are a dog: Deputies explain the new law to us. We yell and call a lawyer,” July 4, 2022, *Hello, you are a foreign agent*, produced by Sonya Groysman, podcast, MP3 audio, 16:00 – 23:20, [https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/%D1%82%D1%8B-%D0%B6-%D1%81%D0%BE%D0%B1%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B0-%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B0%D0%B3%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%82-%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%BF%D1%83%D1%82-%D0%B0%D1%82%D1%8B-%D0%BE%D0%B1%D1%8A%D1%8F%D1%81%D0%BD%D1%8F%D1%8E%D1%82-%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BC-%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B2%D1%8B%D0%B9-%D0%B7%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BD/ id1579350554?i=1000568744078](https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/%D1%82%D1%8B-%D0%B6-%D1%81%D0%BE%D0%B1%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B0-%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B0%D0%B3%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%82-%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%BF%D1%83%D1%82-%D0%B0%D1%82%D1%8B-%D0%BE%D0%B1%D1%8A%D1%8F%D1%81%D0%BD%D1%8F%D1%8E%D1%82-%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BC-%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B2%D1%8B%D0%B9-%D0%B7%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BD/).

foreign agent law provided local authorities with the vehicle to detain whoever the Roskomnadzor deemed necessary.

The intimidation and abuse of power coupled with extreme censorship policy set the scene for the most authoritarian press environment in Europe since the Cold War. Following Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, Russian authorities fast-tracked two laws – Federal Law No. 32-FZ and Federal Law No. 31-FZ<sup>57</sup> – that criminalized independent war reporting and protesting the war. The use of any information sources other than official state sources was prohibited whilst reporting on the war, and the decree designated required language journalists must consider while reporting. Further bans were added, targeting journalists reporting on the war in Ukraine with possible punishments ranging up to 15 years in Russian prisons<sup>58</sup>. The intimidation tactics and extreme anti-press policy proved to be damning to the media landscape in Russia. The Russian government liberally assigned agencies as foreign agents, halting any press officer from performing their job regularly.

Labeled foreign agents were assigned liberally by the Russian government. With this association, Russian journalists were unable to rely on their regular channels to produce news in the country. Platforms running articles or news stories from these foreign agents risked censorship of their entire network and a maximum prison sentence of six years. News outlets have resorted to fleeing Russia entirely to produce their

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<sup>57</sup> *Introducing criminal liability for public dissemination of deliberately misleading information under the guise of credible reports on the use of Russia's Armed Forces*. President of Russia. (2022, March 4). <http://en.kremlin.ru/acts/news/67908>

<sup>58</sup> War in Europe and the fight for the right to report - rm.coe.int. Accessed January 9, 2024. <https://rm.coe.int/prems-050623-gbr-2519-annual-report-partner-organisations-to-the-safet/1680aace4d>.

content<sup>59</sup>. Reporters have begun covering the war remotely from Latvia, Estonia, and other neighboring countries. But, without the availability of print or television to air their content, outlets are turning to social media. The Kremlin responded by banning Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter early in the war<sup>60</sup>. YouTube remains available and is one of the few platforms from which Russians can get uncensored information. Independent outlets, such as Meduza and TV Rain, have released a series of independent coverage on these outlets. Although, the wake of Russian's invasion of Ukraine resulted in prominent tech companies, such as Google and Meta, restricting or blocking digital ads in Russia. The removal of digital advertisements in Russia consequentially blocked users from using key monetization tools<sup>61</sup>.

The suspension of monetization tools has dealt massive blows to humanitarian and civil society groups operating in Russia and Ukraine who rely on digital platforms to help fundraise and increase their bandwidth. YouTube had more than 85 million unique monthly viewers in Russia in June 2022, making it the second most popular social media platform in the country today<sup>62</sup>. With such popularity, the removal of digital ads is crippling to Russian civil society. Many Russian independent news outlets are turning to digital fundraisers to continue operations. TV Rain, one of the independent news outlets

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<sup>59</sup> Shut down by the Kremlin, independent Russian media regroup abroad ... (n.d.).  
<https://www.wsj.com/articles/shut-down-by-the-kremlin-independent-russian-media-regroup-abroad-11659010603>

<sup>60</sup> Russian court bans Facebook, Instagram after Meta found 'extremist'- ... (n.d.-a).  
<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russian-court-bans-facebook-instagram-after-meta-found-extremist-tass-2022-03-21/>

<sup>61</sup> Liam-Strong, C. (n.d.). Humanitarian groups feeling the impact of digital ad halts in Russia, ...  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/03/14/humanitarian-groups-feeling-impact-digital-ad-halts-russia-ukraine/>

<sup>62</sup> Schechner, S., Kruppa, M., & Gershkovich, E. (2022, August 8). How youtube keeps broadcasting inside Russia's digital Iron Curtain ... <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-youtube-keeps-broadcasting-inside-russias-digital-iron-curtain-11659951003>

that has relocated outside of Russia to continue operations, has turned to GoFundMe to remain in operation<sup>63</sup>. Although the fundraiser can be spread globally, global finance has stopped working with Russian banks. Unable to support TV Rain locally, Russians now rely on independent donors from across the globe to meet TV Rain's fundraising goal. Today, Russians are unable to access reliable news domestically, independent news outlets must relocate outside of the country or face prosecution, and these outlets are unable to operate without generous support from private donors who reside outside of their target market.

## DISCUSSION

Although both cases represent a dramatically different time period in history, where media profiles differed greatly, the censorship policies enacted ushered in nationalist values presumptuously focused on who shared authoritarian values of their regimes. Both Nazi Germany's and Putin's Russia's censorship apparatus limited who could produce the news, and then later who could receive it. As both regimes grew, they soon began to uniquely address their nation's viewership. The Nazi regime turned to the manufacturing industry to change their media landscape, coining radio propaganda as a national aid to their strategic war goals. Putin's Russia adapted to the existing media space in the country, launching new media platforms in reaction to the country's ban of Meta platforms. The new media platforms proved easier to monitor, significantly aiding Russian surveillance on their own civilians. Nonetheless, both Russian and German media censorship during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries proved authoritarian regimes can

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<sup>63</sup> *Help TV rain (Dozhd TV) survive the freeze, organized by Natalia Sindeeva.* gofundme.com. (n.d). <https://www.gofundme.com/f/help-tv-rain>

accomplish their strategic censorship objectives with similar frameworks despite the vastly different media technology available during the periods.

### **Similarities**

Nazi Germany and Putin's Russia share many similarities, especially as we continue to see oppressive action taken to suppress the media and opposition to both regimes. Media technology may have changed the medium we receive our information through; however, it has not changed the oppressive intent of authoritarian regimes or their playbook to initially accomplish their strategic goals. Both regimes have manipulated the producers of important media in their country, implementing laws and regulations that intended to contain authorship to citizens that met the regimes' criteria. This was an initial phase of both regimes' attack on media freedom, setting up the framework for a horrific campaign against free speech and expression. Notably, both regimes attempted to control media, not just messaging. Special attention was provided to new industries - the radio for the Nazis and the digital space for the Kremlin. The cases highlighted dictators have initial interest in journalism and a plan to extend media censorship for the foreseeable future.

The foreign agent law enacted in Russia today draws distinct parallels with the Nazi's compulsive membership to the German Newspaper Publishers and Editorial Act. As administered today, the Kremlin and the Russian courts have the governing power to censor any journalist receiving foreign support or is of foreign origin. Similarly, Nazi Germany's compulsive membership laws did not grant membership to citizens who were not of German descent or Aryan race. Both are rooted in extremist nationalism and depleted the workforce covering the press immensely. In Germany, this came through the

consolidation of newspapers. In Russia, this came as journalists fled the country to continue to pursue their career. The administration of both policies was intense, and those who didn't oblige were punished severely. This was a common trend in the regimes. As more policies were administered, punishments became more intense, and journalists faced intimidation from the police and public alike.

### **Differences**

The Information Age gave civilians the ability to access news faster in the ease of their home. German civilians once dependent on newspapers began consuming their news in similar fashions once Hitler and Goebbels instructed the RMVP to produce subsidized radios to aid their propaganda machine. As radio production skyrocketed, so did German news consumption. Then, Germans received messaging directly from Goebbels' ministry. The Nazi's goal for these subsidies: revolutionize the media profile of the country. At the time, this was unheard of. The Nazi authoritarian regime instructed private industry to complement their propaganda efforts by launching a series of subsidies. Once produced, the messaging was streamlined through already existing association rules and regulations. Unlike in Putin's Russia, many forms of self-censorship were present during the Nazi's reign of terror. Long before the radio was subsidized and mass produced, the German radio was managed by state agencies. Public broadcasting in the country, although partially funded by civilian funds, was managed by the state. The radio was a product of state broadcasting, further entrenching it in the bounds of state-censorship. The Association of German Newspaper Publishers enacted their own guidelines, with regulation instructed by Goebbels.

When removed from the state, the radio still remained loyal to Nazi propagandists. The association's turn to journalist suppression was self-induced, different than the Russian censorship noted in the damning Foreign Agent law. Although largely indicated consequences were to follow those journalists who did not produce state-backed broadcasts, the media produced during the Nazi regime was largely homogenous by choice. Very few laws were introduced to limit channels available to those producing opposition. Instead, general public sentiment supported Nazi messaging at the time. Readership rose in German cities, despite the consolidation of many German newspapers. More Germans were consuming news than previously before, accredited to Goebbels and the Reich Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda's emphasis on expanding access to the country's poorest readers.

The Nazi's strength in their censorship apparatus accompanied the country's strong industrial partnership. Every facet of German production at the time supported their war efforts, years before the Nazi invasion of Poland in 1939. Journalists and broadcasters alike were instructed to produce homogenous messaging through private associations under the directive of Nazi faithful. This directive was vastly different than Putin's Russia's execution of their censorship goals. Where the Nazi government directed national industries to aid their war goals, Russians avoided this consolidation of power with great restraint. Journalists and news stations have fled the country following the invasion of Ukraine attempting to avoid the Kremlin's severe punishment of the country's civil society leaders. This has been made possible by the Kremlin's innovative surveillance system used to identify public dissent towards the Russian government, their leaders, and civil society's leaders. Surveillance has been made possible by the guiding



Russian agency, the Roskomnadzor. The Roskomnadzor has only evolved following the illegal invasion of Ukraine in 2022, now recording online comments supporting opposition leaders and narratives affirming the possibility of war in Ukraine. Those recorded by the agency are then monitored by the Russian police and tried for treason if escalated.

The necessity for surveillance complementing the Russian censorship apparatus comes as a result of the media landscape in Russia today. The Information age changed how we consume information and the technologies we use to connect with one another. Following the Duma protests of 2011, Russians were connecting with each other on the Internet at a larger rate than any other country on the globe. News of election fraud quickly spread prompting national protests that were unprecedented in Russia. Civil society leaders were able to maximize public dissent on social media platforms, such as Facebook and YouTube. Putin responded with swift digital censorship, setting strict guidelines for the platforms, and eventually banning Meta completely from the country in 2022. The Kremlin opposed any platform that allowed critique of their decisions and policies. However, Putin recognized the necessity for an alternative digital platform to continue to engage Russians on the Internet. In an attempt to “Russify” the digital space, political and business elites invested in Russian alternatives to Facebook and Google. Russian media censorship did not attempt to change how civilians consume news, instead they met readers on similar platforms where they already exist.

The Internet remains vastly different than the radio. Radio waves are not able to be manipulated similarly to the Internet. Censoring the Internet and digital media systems has proved to be more difficult. Today, Russians still access Instagram at a higher rate

than almost every other social media platform in the country, besides VKontakte – a Russian alternative to Facebook<sup>64</sup>. Russians are able to use VPNs to access Russian-blocked content and engage with civil society still in the country. According to a study completed by a London-based research company in July 2022, daily demand for VPNs in Russia is 2000 percent higher than prior to the illegal invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Users find new loopholes, and private industries respond by creating more software to circumvent the Kremlin’s attempt to block popular social media platforms from being accessed in the country<sup>65</sup>. Media analytics in the country support the attempts to control digital media platforms have been mildly successful; however, digital media has been proven more difficult to control than the media technology accessible during the 1930s<sup>66</sup>.

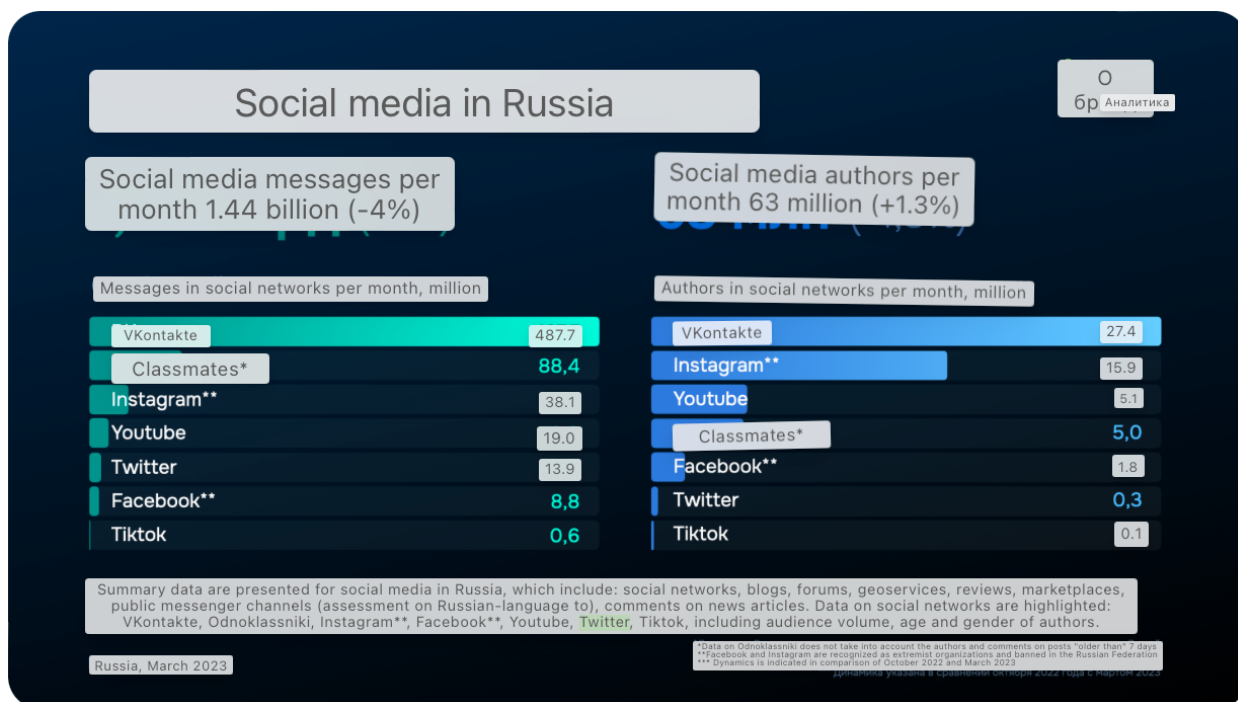
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<sup>64</sup> *How the war reshaped the Russian Social Media Landscape*. The Fix. (2024, February 13).

<https://thefix.media/2024/2/13/how-the-war-reshaped-the-russian-social-media-landscape>

<sup>65</sup> Ольга Мамиконян Редакция Forbes. (2023, December 6). *Количество пользователей VPN в России выросло почти на 40% в 2023 году*. Forbes.ru. <https://www.forbes.ru/tekhnologii/501873-kolicestvo-pol-zovatelej-vpn-v-rossii-vyroslo-pochti-na-40-v-2023-godu>

<sup>66</sup> Социальные сети в России: цифры и тренды, весна 2023. (n.d.-c). <https://brandanalytics.ru/blog/social-media-russia-spring-2023/>



The attached chart provides a brief overview of the current media landscape in Russia. Despite many deterrents in the digital space, Russians continue to engage with banned platforms. VKontakte has proven to be the chosen alternative to many; however, many Russians still have yet to abandon Meta.

Finally, those reporting on the platforms has reflected the country’s latest foreign agent law. Although, both Nazi Germany and Putin’s Russia have enacted laws defining who can report responsibly to their civilians, the Kremlin has used policy to drive the initiative. Now, Putin and the Roskomnadzor has the ability to censor foreign agents at their will. The definition has expanded very liberally, to encompass any journalist receiving foreign support or aid. Nazi censorship was backed by private industries, Russian censorship was supported by their control of the Internet. News today has moved digital, granting the government greater ease at blocking the production of news in their state. Russia has targeted open-source information channels, such as Google, to limit the

channels Russians are able to receive news from. This pressure has allotted more control in their media space than before. News companies remaining in the country risk total censorship if they don't obey the law or orders from the Kremlin. Nearly 250,000 web pages were banned in 2022, with many more following suit as the war in Ukraine has intensified<sup>67</sup>.

The German press association controlled messaging through a series of acts and regulations. Private industry dictated the journalists producing their message, following suit with the Nazi party's ideals. Their control was self-imposed, reflecting a series of censorship imposed by the press itself. This is immensely different than Russia's censorship apparatus, where at times censorship was imposed by force through policy, surveillance, and policing.

The Nazi attempt to control messaging and public opinion was much more successful than Russia's. Newspapers were quickly consolidated, viewership increased throughout Nazism, and the most loyal Nazis took to the streets to burn works that opposed the ideology. This faithful nationalism is present in Putin's Russia today, but not to the extreme extent Nazi Germany witnessed. Although German media censorship extended to more forms of media, the success the Nazi party saw as a result of their efforts can be attributed to the available media technology during the 1930s. Where technology wasn't yet available, the Nazis mass produced new technology to meet the new demands of their audience. However, the Internet has established a reliable audience with few barriers to entry. The Internet is a different beast than the radio, making it much

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<sup>67</sup> *Russia: Freedom on the net 2023 country report*. Freedom House. (n.d.-b).  
<https://freedomhouse.org/country/russia/freedom-net/2023>

more difficult to censor and control. As available media technology continues to grow, it can be assumed censorship will continue to try and adapt but without the successes of their predecessors.

### **FUTURE RESEARCH & LIMITATIONS**

The Information Age didn't begin in 2011 following the election protests in Russia. Nor did the change to our daily news consumption. The Information Age began following the creation of the Internet in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, which was accompanied by the rapid evolution of digital technology transforming the way we receive our information and what we do with it. The Internet gave us emails, online messaging, and social media – all bringing new challenges to media landscapes. Although these changes were rapid and often combined with each other domestically in the United States, some of these changes were brought more slowly to countries across the globe. Media technology is a continuously changing medium, and further research would only support the understanding of media censorship in relation to emerging and critical technologies.

#### **1945-2010**

Surely, media censorship has developed across various regimes since the conclusion of World War II and prior to the Duma election protests in Russia. The Cold War was a pivotal time for the Soviet Union to produce propaganda and controlled messaging<sup>68</sup>. The Balkan Wars brought sweeping changes to rhetoric, resulting in new regulations for the press<sup>69</sup>. Scholars have defined the 1999 war in Kosovo as the world's

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<sup>68</sup> Robertson, Emma, and Gordon Johnston. "Mass Media and Propaganda in the Making of Cold War Europe, University College Dublin, 11-13 January 2007." *Social History* 32, no. 4 (2007): 446–49. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25594168>.

<sup>69</sup> Bieber, Florian. "Cyberwar or Sideshow? The Internet and the Balkan Wars." *Current History* 99, no. 635 (2000): 124–28. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45318424>.

first “Internet war.” Responses to media technology are vastly different between countries, and a greater understanding of the changing media space is critical in understanding the strategic objective of each authoritarian regime.

The jump between 1945 to 2010 was monumental. We are now reading fewer newspapers, relying on social posts for news more often, and consuming information in an entirely new fashion. This change didn’t just accompany new technology as it came forth. We adapted gradually, at different rates in different countries. To best understand these changes, an analysis of various countries would be necessary, as time progresses. A brief overview of each case’s media profile was consequential in this thesis’s analysis. As time lapsed, these media profiles have changed and adapted media censorship policy followed.

### **Private Industry**

The Information Age was a swift challenge to our media space, but at times, it wasn’t as swift as we’d imagine. For example, Facebook was introduced the American public in 2004<sup>70</sup>. However, Facebook didn’t expand globally until 2008. The lapse in digital rollouts of these platforms allowed countries to prepare for them differently. Further research would support how private industries influenced the censorship apparatus in authoritarian regimes and evaluate how this delayed rollout contributes to preventative strategies.

This thesis briefly examined private industry’s censorship’s crippling effect on civil society. However, it only revealed the most prevalent effects of these policies. YouTube advanced their directives by censoring Russia state media across the globe as a

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<sup>70</sup> *The rise of facebook - how it's changed over the years*. Shooting Reels. (n.d).  
<https://www.shootingreels.com/blog/the-rise-of-facebook-how-its-changed-over-the-years/>

response to Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. This decision isolated Russian media to just those living within Russia today. The isolation of Russian media has many benefits in blocking attempts to persuade YouTube's viewers, but also isolates the messaging broadcast to Russians, further preventing any attempt to combat the Kremlin's disinformation campaign.

### **The Russian-Ukrainian War is not yet over**

The first case study, delving into Nazi media censorship pre-1945, provided invaluable insights into the successes and failures of such draconian measures. However, in crafting this thesis, the luxury of temporal distance was not afforded, with the ongoing illegal invasion of Ukraine by Russia casting a shadow over the global landscape. As I approach the defense of this work, I am acutely aware of the pressing need to understand the contemporary manifestations of media censorship, particularly in the context of authoritarian regimes like Russia's.

As Russia continues to manipulate public opinion and censor civil society's attempts to educate the Russia public, this thesis takes on renewed significance. With each passing day witnessing atrocities against Ukrainian and Russian civilians, the imperative to continue monitoring monitoring changing media laws and their consequences becomes more pronounced.

### **Nazi Party's Success at Erasing Dissent towards Hitler**

The success of the Nazi party in erasing civil society's work during World War II underscores the magnitude of their control over media and public discourse. However, my research has revealed a notable absence of thorough exploration regarding the role and resilience of German civil society amidst such oppressive conditions. While some

scholarly articles briefly mention German aid to the Nazi opposition, these references lack depth.

To develop a comprehensive thesis and deepen our understanding of media censorship during World War II, it is critical we conduct qualitative research to address this gap. By amplifying the voices and experiences of those who navigated the challenges of Nazi Germany, we can shed light on untold stories of resistance and solidarity. Action must be taken quickly, as the generation of citizens who lived through the Nazi occupation lessens with each day. Efforts must be made to undertake qualitative research, enriching our understanding of history, and honoring the memory of those who resisted their occupation.

## **CONCLUSION**

The comparison between media censorship in Nazi Germany and Putin's Russia reveals both striking similarities and notable differences. Despite distinct historical contexts and technological landscapes, both regimes strategically employed censorship to advance nationalist agendas and maintain authoritarian control over information dissemination. Technology has evolved the ways authoritarian leaders must extend censorship policies in their respective countries; however, the intent remains malicious. Both Nazi Germany and Putin's Russia utilized censorship to restrict who could produce and access news, through a series of different means. While Nazi Germany heavily relied on the manufacturing industry to mass-produce radios for propaganda dissemination and private industries to support these clauses in the film industry, Putin's Russia adapted to the digital age, launching alternative platforms, and enhancing surveillance capabilities to monitor online communication.



However, differences emerge in the response of civil society to censorship. While Nazi Germany saw prevalent self-censorship and limited opposition channels, the Nazi party emphasized a homogenous society through collective radicalism. Putin's Russia witnessed widespread digital activism and evasion tactics. Russia has regularly seen censorship policy but has continued to see a decline in media freedom since the Duma protests in 2011. This was prompted by grassroots activism and civil opposition to the Kremlin. Ultimately, this comparison underscores the ongoing struggle between state censorship and individual freedoms, highlighting the resilience of information dissemination in the face of authoritarian control and the evolving landscape of media and technology.

This comparison is a result of empirical case studies aiming to illustrate why and how authoritarian governments enact censorship policies to control their intended audience. The chosen cases amplify the presence of critical and emerging technology in authoritarian regimes, as authoritarian dictators attempt to meet the challenges of the Information Age. Despite these changes and rapidly evolving media technology, authoritarian states persist in controlling media to maintain power and suppress dissent.

The comprehensive analysis of two cases, both twelve-years in length, casts strong light on these new challenges for democracy globally, most notably in Europe. Over the course of nearly 90 years, we've evolved as humans and media consumers. Facebook, instant messaging, and YouTube now are present in nearly every digital space. Amidst these emerging technologies across the 90 years reflected in this study, radical changes have required each country to reconsider existing policies. Media profiles are no longer as adaptable as they once were. Viewership is not as easily contained as it once

was prior to the invention of the Internet. This may push democracy further towards new capacities than it has ever reached before. Despite this, political scientists are suspicious of authoritarian policies and controlled messaging that may reach larger audiences than ever before.

Media technology has proven to be a relatively great benefit to democratic systems, regardless of size. Civil society is still able to reach Russians today, remotely from surrounding countries with the help of VPNs. Instant messaging is still made possible with these technologies, proven by Instagram's prevalence following the Russian court's decision to bar Meta from the country. As media technology challenges our typical censorship apparatus, civil society challenges these regimes similarly. It's proven civil society is now equipped to meet these challenges more effectively than it was once able to. Questions are still to be answered surrounding what's next as we dive into a new Digital Age. However, we can expect promising reflections as we evolve new media technology alongside democratic systems.

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