

Oral presentation

Topic: Importance of media independence and transparency for democracy

Context

- <https://theconversation.com/why-the-raids-on-australian-media-present-a-clear-threat-to-democracy-118334>
- <https://www.smh.com.au/national/australian-federal-police-raid-abc-headquarters-at-sydney-s-ultimo-20190605-p51uof.html>
- <https://washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/06/10/australia-is-war-with-journalists/>
- <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/doorstop-interview-portsmouth-uk>
- <https://www.afp.gov.au/news-media/media-releases/afp-statement-search-warrant-sydney>

Journalist Information Warrant - allows access to restrained metadata

AFP raid on ABC - June 2019

“alleged publishing of information classified as an official secret”

Articles

Ananian-Welsh. *Why the raids on Australian media present a clear threat to democracy*. <https://theconversation.com/why-the-raids-on-australian-media-present-a-clear-threat-to-democracy-118334>

Ketchell, Misha. *The devil is in the detail of government bill to enable access to communications data*. <https://theconversation.com/the-devil-is-in-the-detail-of-government-bill-to-enable-access-to-communications-data-96909>

UNESCO. *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development*. 2018. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000261065>

Parker, Samuel. *‘Unwanted invaders’: The representation of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK and Australian print media*. March 2016. <http://orca.cf.ac.uk/79108/1/ESharp%20Article%20SP.pdf>

Structure

Introduction

Discuss context and recent developments

- ABC raided on 5 June 2019 for “the Afghan files” report
- Leaked defence documents which revealed corruption, incl. killing of unarmed men and children (murder) - ethical appeal
- Lyons (ABC exec. editor): “we waive no rights, and reserve the right to take injunction against the warrant”
- Secrecy offences punishable by seven years imprisonment
- AFP also searched Annikea Smethurt’s house (not connected) - personal surveillance report

- Morrisson “not troubled” by raids, but said “I believe in freedom of the press”
- Importance & risk of public interest journalism

1. Importance of source confidentiality/protection

- Ethical foundation of journalists
- Enables individuals to share controversial/sensitive information with journalists without fear of persecution
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrc/docs/gc34.pdf>
- Right of access to information: “right of access to information held by public bodies ... [including] records held by a public body, regardless of the form”
- “The right of access to information includes a right whereby the media has access to information on public affairs”
- “Every individual should have the right to ascertain in an intelligible form ... what personal data is stored in automatic data files, and for what purposes”
- Limited aid of encrypted messaging and internal protocols

2. Impact on democracy

- AU has more national security laws than any other nation
- AU is the only liberal democracy without Charter of Human Rights to protect media freedom
- Democracy means everyone has the right to contribute to the choosing of their government. If the government is not portraying themselves honestly, how can we make an accurate decision?
- Analogy to control of media in Ukraine (no English media allowed), other communist states

3. Risk of bias

- Control of media could lead to more drastic censorship
- Society has a right to know the truth about the leadership of their country
- With censorship, journalists cannot do their job - their abilities are being stifled
- Media could slowly become taken over by the government, leading to further corruption (“slippery slope”)
- Surveillance

Conclusion

- Kevin Rudd calls for royal commission for media power abuse and unethical journalism (e.g. Murdoch)
- Decline of public interest journalism
- Sources are less likely to take risks to reveal corruption and misconduct
- Media Freedom Act - recognise and protect freedom of journalists