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By John C. Merrill

## Inclination of Nations to Control Press And Attitudes on Professionalization

*Region most inclined to control press is Middle East, while least inclined are Western Europe and North America.*

► This study, consisting of interviews with official representatives of 58 countries of the world, was made to investigate the "inclination to control" the press by various national governments. It is a project which basically deals with the concept of freedom as it relates to professionalization, with tangential concern with other topics such as press ethics, and the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO).

Prompting this study was the question: What is the inclination of governments to have a restricted or disciplined press? Professionalization relates to such a question in that characteristics of a "profession" (such as licensing, codes of ethics, and minimum educational requirements) are considered "restrictive factors" or press control factors. Therefore, in the development of a Control Inclination Index (CII) for each country, these aspects of professionalization were used as indicators of a propensity to control.

It should be noted that the purpose of this study was not to specify the actual procedures used in various countries to control the press — laws, overt censorship, force, threats, etc.; rather it was to attempt to elicit more subtle attitudes toward press control having to do with professionalizing journalism. The basic assumption of the study was, then, that the six factors studied (having to do with professionalization) were indeed potential restrictors or inhibitors of free journalism.

Although this may be considered a debatable premise, it is interesting that in every case, the national spokespersons interviewed said that they saw these six factors as actual or potential mechanisms of press control. Therefore, the interviewers were not forcing a culture-bound or biased premise on the spokespersons.

Information/press officers at the UN missions in New York City and embassy press attaches in Washington, D.C. were interviewed from January through May, 1987 as to their views on such factors as licensing of journalists, journalism education, accreditation, and codes of ethics. "Freedom of the press" was not mentioned explicitly in the questions; rather, the intent was to elicit reactions to certain factors related to press restraint which would help in determining an "inclination to control" on the part of a particular government.

More than 60 interviews were conducted during the first five months of 1987 — about half in New York City and half in Washington, D.C. Eight interviews were obtained from Africa, 8 from the Middle East (counting Egypt, Tunisia, and Turkey), 7 from Eastern Europe, 12 from Latin America, 12 from Western Europe/North America and 11 from Asia.

In addition to interviewing a spokesperson of each of the 58 countries one time, we conducted a second interview with spokespersons of six of the countries. The

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► The author, professor emeritus at the University of Missouri, has been teaching at Louisiana State University since 1980. He gratefully acknowledges the support of the Gannett Center for Media Studies at Columbia University in the conduct of this study. The extensive commentary of the spokespersons of the 58 countries and a report of the entire study may be obtained from the Gannett Center.

purpose was to check on consistency of opinion. Two methods were used in this consistency check: (1) different interviewers interviewed the same person at different times, and (2) different interviewers talked with two spokesmen of the same country (one at the U.N. and one at the Washington embassy). In this way, and using the six test countries, we could learn if any serious interviewer or interviewee discrepancies existed. There were none. The six test countries were Costa Rica, Denmark, Finland, Greece, India and Malaysia.

### *Basic Format of Study*

The interview schedules concentrated on six main factors believed important in determining the potential for subtle "control" in a press system: (1) in-country licensing, (2) international licensing, (3) identification cards or accreditation, (4) university education, (5) in-country codes of ethics, and (6) international codes of ethics.

Each factor was given a score reflecting the strength of attitude of that factor (e.g., very much in favor=4; in favor=3; neutral=2; against=1; very much against=0. Thus, if a nation's spokesperson said (or implied) that he or she was very much in favor of in-country licensing of journalists, the country would get a top score of 4 on that factor. This score would be added to the scores on the five other factors to result in the Control-Inclination Index (CII) — with higher scores evidencing a greater inclination on the part of the government to see the press controlled.

The investigators considered using different weighting for the factors, but abandoned the idea, deciding that each of the factors (when related to attitude toward professionalization) represents essentially equal concerns.

The study's primary aim was to determine the basic "inclination to control" the press on the part of governments of various ideologies in all parts of the world. This, of course, is a difficult task and relies for success on the investigator's subjective appraisal of statements and answers to

questions. Naturally, such a reliance opens the study to the charge that it is "subjective" and not really scientific. This is a perfectly reasonable charge, but it does not entirely obviate fundamental findings of the research. For, it must be noted, the same "subjective analysis" of statements and answers was applied to data obtained from *all* interviewees, and the subjective judgments of three persons (the principal investigator and his two assistants) were in agreement.

Actual control of the press in these countries was not the focus of this study. Rather, the aim was to ascertain the tendency or "inclination" on the part of the government (and total press system) to control the media. Seeking to discover an inclination-to-control on the part of governments is certainly a large order with many inherent problems, but it is a project of considerably smaller magnitude and complexity than would be descriptive studies of control mechanisms in each of the countries. So the basic questions asked the government spokespersons were of this kind: "What do you think about . . . ?" "What is your opinion of . . . ?" "Is your government inclined to support . . . ?"

Most of the interviewees volunteered statements which went beyond the basic questions dealing with licensing, accreditation, education, and ethics. The control factor most often suggested (and approved of) was "legal provisions" which restricted the press.

One potential weakness of this kind of study, of course, is that one person (or two) cannot really speak for the government. This is so, even if the spokesperson is in a position of responsibility and presumably knowledgeable about the subject dealt with. For example, we interviewed mainly information attaches (and a few ambassadors) of various countries. But someone could object that even they are not "true" spokespersons of the government in its entirety. Obviously this is true, but somebody must speak for the government. The persons represented in this study were willing to do so, and therefore they are considered as evidencing government sentiment.

It was surprising, but heartening, that almost all government interviewees were quite willing to speak for the record. Of the governments approached, only four spokespersons would not agree to be interviewed. They represented Kenya, Libya, and Zambia (in Africa), and Albania (in Eastern Europe).

### *Semantic Problems*

An attitudinal study such as this faces numerous semantic problems. This is especially true with cross-national and cross-cultural studies. In this particular case, the chief problems centered on the concept of "freedom of the press" and "journalism as a profession." Almost without exception, interviewees insisted that their governments valued "press freedom" and wanted as little government intervention in press matters as possible. The "as possible," of course, is the key modifier here, and one of the purposes of this study was to throw some light on just what this "as possible" might entail.

This study had little interest in the various protestations of press freedom made by interviewees; nobody doubts that governments everywhere claim some kind of love for this value concept. Rather, we were interested in getting insight into government attitudes toward some specific factors which might shed light on a general "inclination" or underlying desire to — in some way — discipline, restrain, restrict or control the press.

We believe that the six factors on which the study focused (discussed in the next section) help to eliminate semantic problems arising when "freedom of the press" is used. As to journalism "as a profession," again — almost without exception — every national spokesperson said that journalism in his or her country was a "profession." However, it was clear that the term was used basically as a synonym for "occupation" or "vocation" and, with only a few exceptions, was not given any kind of discrete or sophisticated meaning.

Although we asked respondents if journalism was a "profession" in their countries, we did not factor in the responses when trying to determine a Control-

Inclination Index (CII) for each country. However, if professionalization (from a Western perspective) were an important part of this study, we would have to hypothesize that countries with the highest CII scores are furthest on the road to having journalism as a true profession. Therefore, one might say that Iraq (CII=24; a very high inclination to control) is more professionalized than West Germany (CII=10); a very low inclination to control) — at least, in the opinion of the Government.

(1) *In-Country Licensing.* More than twice as many countries favored in-country licensing of journalists as did not. And several were neutral on the issue. By and large, interviewees said that licensing was a good thing if done by the journalistic associations (guilds, unions, societies, "colegios," et al.) themselves. A few were even in favor of governmental licensing. Reasons for the heavy pro-licensing feeling: incompetent, unskilled, irresponsible and otherwise unsatisfactory journalists could be kept out of journalism or could be eliminated from the profession for lack of ability or for using this ability in irresponsible ways.

Countries most in favor of in-country licensing were Angola and the Central African Republic (CII=4), followed closely by Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, USSR, Yugoslavia, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Syria, Tunisia, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru and the People's Republic of China (all with CII=3).

Country most opposed to in-country licensing was the United States (with the lowest CII score of 0); also against such licensing were South Africa, the Sudan, Turkey, Mexico, Greece, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, U.K., West Germany, Australia, Bangladesh, India, Japan, New Zealand, Canada and the Philippines.

2) *International Licensing.* The countries were about evenly divided between being in favor and being against international licensing of journalists. Others were "neutral" on this matter which has been suggested and pushed by parts of the Third World and certain organizations like the International Organization of

Journalists (Prague), making it an agenda item at many UNESCO conferences.

Countries most in favor of international licensing (at least in principle) were Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Bulgaria, East Germany, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia, Cuba, Ecuador, Peru, and China (CIIs=4); other countries also in favor—but not quite so strongly—were Angola, C.A.R., Czechoslovakia, Hungary, the U.S.S.R., Kuwait, Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, Panama, Bangladesh and Malaysia, all with CIIs=3.

Countries most against any form of international licensing were Chile, Greece, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, West Germany, Japan, the U.K., the U.S., and New Zealand (CIIs=0). Also opposed to such journalistic licensing were the Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Sudan, Costa Rica, Mexico, Denmark, Finland, Spain, India, Indonesia and the Philippines (all with CIIs=1).

If any pattern emerges here it is that supporters appear rather equally scattered throughout the Middle East, Latin America, Africa, and Eastern Europe, with opponents of international licensing found mainly in Western Europe and North America.

3) *ID's and Accreditation.* As regards some type of journalistic identification or accreditation (of a non-licensing type), there was almost consensus that this was necessary and worthwhile. Many interviewees admitted that, in some cases, accreditation/identification could be used restrictively by government and police, but that generally it was for identification purposes only.

All but two countries indicated they were in favor of identification cards or papers. The two not being specifically "in favor" were the United States and Mexico, both of which were "neutral," having no real feeling one way or the other.

4) *University Education.* No country was really against journalists having a university education, as might be expected. In fact, almost all of them felt that journalists in their country should have a university degree—either in journalism or in some other "helpful" specialty. But only a

very few would say that journalists should be required to have such a degree in order to practice; many, however, in subtle ways indicated that they felt journalism would be served if this were the case.

Countries most in favor of requiring university degrees for journalists were Ivory Coast, Bulgaria, G.D.R., Hungary, U.S.S.R., Yugoslavia, Iraq, Syria, Tunisia, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Guatemala, Paraguay, Panama, Peru, Denmark, Portugal, Spain and China (all CII=4). Almost all the other countries were also in favor of university education (but less so). The countries which were "neutral" (had no real opinion one way or the other) were the Central African Republic, Kuwait, Guyana, Mexico, Greece, and Australia.

The geographical pattern emerging here shows that the U.S.S.R. and the Eastern bloc countries and countries of Latin America believe most strongly in the need for journalism education for the practice of journalism.

5) *In-country Codes of Ethics.* Very few nations evidenced opposition to in-country codes of ethics for journalists. Those most opposed to codes were the U.S., the U.K., West Germany, the Netherlands, and Greece. In principle, they saw no need for ethical codes, believing that such codes pose some kind of restriction on independent journalism and make journalism less pluralistic.

Countries most in favor of in-country ethical codes for journalists were Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, Cuba, Paraguay, Panama, Peru, Norway, Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, and South Korea. It would seem that the Middle East, Latin America and Asia tend to have positive feelings toward codes of ethics.

6) *International Codes of Ethics.* Nearly twice as many countries in the study favored an international code of ethics as were opposed. Countries most in favor of such a code (as has been proposed in UNESCO conferences) were Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Bulgaria, G.D.R., U.S.S.R., Yugoslavia, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Syria,

TABLE I

Rank Order of Countries by C.I.I. Score

German Democratic Republic	24	Portugal	18
People's Republic of China	24	Bangladesh	18
Iraq	24	Indonesia	18
Syria	24	South Korea	18
Tunisia	24	Austria	17
Cuba	24	Denmark	16
Peru	24	Turkey	16
Bulgaria	23	Chile	16
Jordan	23	Costa Rica	16
Paraguay	23	Guatemala	16
Ethiopia	22	The Sudan	15
USSR	22	Finland	15
Lebanon	22	Spain	15
Angola	21	South Africa	14
Czechoslovakia	21	Philippines	14
Yugoslavia	21	New Zealand	13
Egypt	21	Norway	12
Panama	21	India	12
Central African Republic	20	Sweden	11
Zimbabwe	20	Australia	11
Malaysia	20	Japan	11
Kuwait	20	Netherlands	10
Bolivia	20	United Kingdom	10
Ivory Coast	19	Federal Republic of Germany	10
Hungary	19	Mexico	10
Pakistan	19	Greece	9
Argentina	19	*Canada (questionnaire)	9
Ecuador	19	United States of America	8
Guyana	19		
Nigeria	18		
Poland	18		

Note: The higher the score the greater the inclination toward press control.

Tunisia, Cuba, Guyana, Paraguay, Panama, Peru, Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, Malaysia and Pakistan (all with C.I.I.s=4). Many other countries favored such a code, but not quite so strongly.

Six countries were very much opposed to global ethical codes: Greece, the Netherlands, the U.K., the U.S., West Germany, and Canada (all C.I.I.s=1). Also opposed to such codes were Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico, Norway, Spain, Sweden, India and Japan (C.I.I.s=1). All the rest were either "neutral" (C.I.I.=2) or were in favor of international codes. So, countries most in favor of such codes were the socialist

countries and the Middle Eastern countries, with some rather heavy representation from Latin America, Asia and Africa. North America and Western Europe were mainly opposed to such codes.

### *Geographical Patterns*

The region of the world most inclined to control the press is the Middle East, with an average total score of 21.7. Seven of the eight countries had scores of 20 or above. The most inclined to control were Iraq, Syria and Tunisia (really outside the region), with scores of 24 each. Least inclined to control was Turkey (16), per-

haps not really in the region. Of the strictly Middle East countries, Kuwait (20) was least inclined to control.

The region next most inclined to control is Latin America, with a score of 19. Five of the countries in this region had scores of 20 or above. Cuba and Peru were the Latin American countries most inclined to control (with scores of 24), followed closely by Paraguay (23), Panama (21) and Bolivia (20).

Eastern Europe and Africa, each with a score of 18.5, tied for the third highest spot in press control inclination. Four of the eight African countries had scores over 19, and in Eastern Europe, four of the eight countries had scores of 20 or above. In Africa the countries most inclined to control were Ethiopia (22) and Angola (21), the Central African Republic (20), and Zimbabwe (20).

The region of the world with the next to lowest inclination to control the press was Asia (CII=16.2). Only two of the 11 countries had scores of 20 or above China (24) and Malaysia (20).

Least-inclined of all the world regions to press control was Western Europe and North America (U.S./Canada), with an average CII score of 12.5. Not a single

country in this pan-Atlantic region had a score as high as 20.

### *Conclusion*

This study suggests the need for follow-ups using the same basic format, but attempting to get at the attitudes of other important groups — such as journalists and journalism educators.

Many may feel the study has a cultural and political bias built into the questions and into the analysis. It is practically impossible to avoid the charge of culture-bound research. The very first assumption (that a trend toward professionalization is an indicator of increased control for somebody or some group over the press) can be challenged. Some might say that this assumption — upon which the CII scores were predicated — itself is a kind of Western (or American) concept which does not take the value systems of other countries into consideration.

This may be true. But common sense (which should be “common” universally) decrees that such professionalizing factors as are dealt with in this study are prone to discipline the press, to keep it in line, to regiment it and ultimately place it under increasing control.

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### *Women Sportswriters Gain Admission*

► An incident at a Vanderbilt University/University of Georgia football game on October 8 in which a female reporter was denied the same access to players given to male reporters has brought about a change in the policies of the Southeastern Conference.

The action followed a protest issued by Jean Otto, editorial page editor of the *Rocky Mountain News* in Denver and chairman of the Press, Bar and Public Affairs Committee of the American Society of Newspaper Editors.

The new Southeastern Conference policy calls for “all reporters to have access to coaches and/or student athletes at the same place at the same time,” according to Conference Commissioner Harvey W. Schiller. In announcing the policy, Mr. Schiller said, “The feeling of our athletic directors was that a reporter should not be penalized simply because she is a woman.”

Brad Davis, assistant commissioner/communications, wrote Ms. Otto: “We feel like we have moved to the forefront in this issue and hope we have successfully addressed what has been a growing problem. There is no question that a woman should not be at a disadvantage because of her gender when performing her job.”