

Will limits on free expression prevent terrorism?

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A free media is a key component of democracy given its role in sharing information, yet it is often criticised for its coverage of terrorism, which some regard as facilitating the spread of extremist ideologies. Similarly, as extremists have taken to social media, debates around trade-offs between freedom of expression and security have resurfaced. This report examines the relationships between the traditional media, social media and violent extremism to argue that responses limiting freedom of expression are ineffective in combatting violent extremism.

Recommendations

- ▶ In conjunction with technology companies, democratic governments should work towards the development of international principles, norms and rules to govern the Internet and address the misuse of Internet technologies.
- ▶ Governments should develop policy to increase oversight, and limit the use of surveillance technology to only serious security threats.
- ▶ Governments and the international community should develop regulations to control the export of surveillance tools, similar to arms control mechanisms.
- ▶ Governments should encourage media houses to adopt good practices to responsibly report on terrorist incidents, to avoid perpetuating fear through unfounded speculation and sensational reporting.
- ▶ Governments should build resilience in communities to counter the impact of extremist messaging and should shift efforts towards addressing the underlying drivers of violent extremism.

Since the 18th century the media has been regarded as the ‘fourth estate’ in democracies, owing to its core role in keeping citizens informed and thus holding the institutions of government accountable to the public. The importance of an informed citizenry in democracy means that politics is conducted in the public sphere to ensure that the information that voters need to make informed decisions is readily available. This can only be achieved through upholding freedom of expression, which allows individuals to share their opinions and receive information without undue restriction.

With the evolution of the ways in which information can be disseminated, from the printing press to television and the Internet, the role of the media in shaping public opinion has grown, and has changed the ways in which political discussions occur. With the emergence of the Internet and social media, the traditional media – which includes television, radio and print media – faces a range of daunting challenges in maintaining relevance in terms of sharing and framing current events.

In democratic societies, complex debates have arisen around how to balance security imperatives and democratic freedoms

The emergence of social media has resulted in a significant shift in how the public engages with politics and interacts with information. The effects of these new platforms have been particularly pronounced in countries where strict control of the traditional media was previously used to limit access to information. These technologies have become central to social mobilisation and near indispensable for social organisation. While these innovations have been used for positive social change, including the exercise of democratic freedoms, they have also been abused by those with harmful intent, such as extremists.

Depending on the lens through which it is viewed, social media’s potential for connecting like-minded people and sharing information and ideas can be regarded either as a vital tool for enhancing democratic processes or as a threat to security and stability. These innovations, and their subsequent abuse by extremists, have created new debates around the governance of the Internet in democracies and authoritarian states alike. In democratic societies, as efforts to respond effectively to violent extremism have intensified, complex debates have arisen around how to balance security imperatives and democratic freedoms such as free speech, expression, privacy and pluralism that form the foundation of a functioning democracy.

This report will examine the relationship between the media and violent extremism in the context of democracies. The discussion begins by establishing the contemporary context, examining the changing nature of media consumption with the emergence of the Internet and social media.

This is followed by a discussion on the traditional media's historical coverage of violent extremism and terrorism, and the debates that have emerged from this coverage. The report then examines contemporary challenges posed by social media and the Internet, and analyses the response of states to the perceived threats posed by violent extremists' use of these technologies and the effects of this state response on democratic values. This is followed by a discussion on why a free media and freedom of expression are vital for democracy, and why suppressing these values will fail to prevent, and likely exacerbate, the emergence of violent extremism. Finally, recommendations are provided on ways to address the emerging phenomenon of extremists' use of Internet technologies within a framework of democratic values.

Use of terminology

Several terms used here are contested, without generally accepted definitions. In this report terms are used as follows:

Violent extremism indicates 'a willingness to use or support the use of violence to further particular beliefs, including those of a political, social or ideological nature and may include acts of terrorism'.¹

Terrorism denotes the use or threat of violence for the purpose of intimidation or coercion for political, religious or ideological ends.²

Radicalisation is the process through which individuals or groups become susceptible to extremist ideologies, and may be a precursor to extremist activities and violence.³

Traditionally, the media is understood as the grouping of mass communications encompassing the press, radio and television aimed at reaching large audiences.⁴ In this report, *traditional media* refers to these established industries and their coverage and framing of news events. This would, for example, include broadcasters such as CNN and members of the print media such as the New York Times.

Social media refers to the collection of Internet platforms that allow users to interact through creating and sharing content.⁵ Examples include Facebook and Twitter. While information produced by the traditional media can be accessed through social media platforms, the distinction

between the two forms of media lies in the means of production and the ability to interact with content.

The changing nature of media production and consumption

The nature of media production and consumption has evolved from the days of the printing press to 24-hour news channels, and more recently to the emergence of the Internet and social media.⁶ Where mass media has traditionally flowed in a single direction – from the information producer to the consumer – the Internet and social media have significantly changed how content is produced and used and the traditional distinction between producers and consumers of content is disappearing.⁷ This interactivity on social media allows consumers to engage with the traditional media in new ways, with political discussions on current affairs taking place online in a mass setting, such as in comment sections, without geographical limitations.

This global democratisation of information has immensely increased the flow of information and the ability to create and share information, providing access to information and expression previously denied to many.⁸

These technologies have become central to social mobilisation and near indispensable for social organisation

The effects of this information revolution have been particularly pronounced in authoritarian states, where governments have sought to act as the gatekeeper of information, with social media posing a significant threat to their ability to control information and the media.⁹ This was illustrated during the 'Arab Spring' in places such as Tunisia, where bloggers and activists used social media to share news, such as footage of police brutality,¹⁰ and engage in discussions on democratic ideals,¹¹ which would ordinarily not be possible owing to the government's manipulation of traditional media.¹²

The ease of publishing provided by the Internet and social media has significantly increased the number of participants in the information production and interpretation process. This has also posed challenges

to established traditional media outlets, which must now compete with new actors on social media that do not necessarily conform to established standards relating to traditional journalism such as journalistic ethics and pay little attention to the validity of claims, fact-checking or the quality of journalism.

This is a consequence of the changing nature of generating advertising revenue, with social media incentivising media outlets to chase page views – something more easily obtained through sensationalised reporting and favouring quantity over quality.¹³ Consequently, many traditional media outlets struggle to adapt to the changing nature of media consumption and have had difficulty transferring their offline presence to online platforms.

Extremist groups have used social media to reach out to supporters to fuel grievances, promote extremist ideologies and incite violent action

The expansion of actors in the news industry has also meant that users have a greater choice in what they consume, but instead unwittingly or actively gravitate to news agencies that align with their political views.¹⁴ Rather than creating the open global community initially envisioned by social media companies such as Facebook, these platforms have been used to seek out and connect with like-minded individuals, creating so-called ‘filter bubbles’ where users are rarely exposed to views opposing their own. Consequently, social media arguably serves to confirm or exacerbate existing biases.¹⁵

This ability to connect with like-minded individuals is a particular concern in the context of violent extremism, where extremist groups have used social media to reach out to supporters to fuel grievances, promote extremist ideologies and incite violent action. The emerging nature of these technologies also means that there is little established practice for governing their use. Governments have also been slow to implement appropriate regulations on these emergent technologies, with the result that commercial entities are compelled to govern their networks themselves.



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The traditional media’s coverage of terrorist acts

Prior to the broad adoption of the Internet and social media, traditional media agencies were the primary means of communicating to a mass audience. Burke argues that the emergence of modern terrorism seen with groups such as al-Qaeda is a result of innovations in mass communication that provided extremist groups with the means to reach a large audience through their terrorism.¹⁶ Only through using the spectacle of terror attacks could they attract media attention to their cause. For this reason, some regard the traditional media as complicit in the spread of terrorism and violent extremism.

The rise of new means of mass communication provided by 24-hour news channels such as CNN and Al Jazeera in the 1980s and 1990s significantly

changed the way in which the public engaged with current affairs, and coincided with the new era of terrorism ushered in by groups such as al-Qaeda. With these innovations, terrorists could gain near instantaneous publicity globally through their actions.¹⁷

For years prior to the September 11 attacks, extremist leaders such as Osama bin Laden sought to exploit the networks of mass communication created by these news agencies, attempting to communicate extremist messages to mass audiences through video-recorded statements sent to news agencies.¹⁸

His statements and lectures generally failed to gain traction among Western media outlets and the group failed to achieve its desired impact of attracting attention and influencing global politics. This, however, changed with the events of September 11, where Bin Laden succeeded in capturing the immediate attention of the entire world, allowing him to significantly shape the global agenda for years to come. Through the traditional media's coverage of violent acts, these groups have been able to forcibly inject themselves into the global collective consciousness.¹⁹

Terrorism is only successful if the terrorist act is widely communicated.²⁰ Without coverage, the audience for a terrorist act would be confined to those impacted by the attack. Media coverage therefore serves as the conduit through which terrorists communicate to a broad international audience.²¹

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A terrorist act is committed with the intention of communicating various messages to the defined enemies and supporters of the group.²² Extremists use terrorism to undermine trust in an 'enemy' state's capabilities, demoralise, and create fear and chaos. This same act demonstrates the group's power to its supporters or potential supporters, and brings attention to a cause with the hope of gaining public sympathy. As a result, the media has been criticised for providing terrorists with a channel to publicise extremist-related issues.

Despite concerns that the media's coverage of terrorism is spreading extremist ideology, the intentions and results of communication do not always necessarily align.²³ As the messages that extremist groups attempt to communicate are filtered through the traditional media, they are altered. In the context of terrorism, the violence of the act is the focus of the traditional media and not the motives. Accordingly, void of political or ideological context, the majority of the public see the perpetrator/s of a terrorist act as mentally unstable and their actions inexplicable, undermining the perpetrators' ability to convey their ideological message.²⁴



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Traditional media coverage of terrorism thus does not confer legitimacy on the cause of the terrorist and most often undermines claims to legitimacy.²⁵ Yet while the traditional media's coverage of terrorism fails to effectively communicate the nuances of extremist ideology, other aspects of the communication found in a terrorist act can be transmitted.

The objective of spreading fear is primarily achieved once a terrorist act has been widely communicated through media coverage. Through this, acts of terror can succeed in undermining the public's perception of the state's capacity to keep them safe, as terror attacks against civilians are part of a broader strategy of attrition intended to create the perception that a state is unable to perform its function of maintaining security.²⁶ This perception is, however, generally false and intentionally crafted through terrorists' manipulation of the traditional media to portray themselves as stronger and more capable than they in fact are.

Groups such as Islamic State, for example, have used the public's captivation with violence and extremism, and the media's indulgence of this fascination, to their advantage by making graphic videos of people killed in elaborate ways to attract attention to their cause and instil fear.²⁷

The traditional media plays a prominent role in the securitisation of terrorism responses, by shaping public opinion in a way that pressures governments into knee-jerk and overly aggressive responses

Attracting large amounts of media attention raises the profile of terrorists and makes them appear more powerful. This is achieved where the traditional media profiles violence and terrorism to increase viewership and ratings for commercial gain.²⁸ This can be seen, for example, in the detailed, minute-to-minute coverage of terrorist and even suspected terrorist incidents despite the lack of immediate information. There is round-the-clock speculation as to the motives of the perpetrators, with little tangible evidence available, alongside speculative debates on when, how and where the next terrorist attack is likely to occur.

As a result of the phenomenon of 'availability heuristics' (in which individuals base judgements of event frequency on how easily examples come to mind), citizens overestimate the likelihood of terrorist incidents and the threat posed by extremist groups.²⁹ This is a consequence of both the dramatic nature of terrorist attacks and the disproportionate amount of media coverage given to these events. This amplifies fear and heightens the apparent power of terrorist groups, making their ability to carry out indiscriminate attacks appear greater than their true capabilities.

By providing such extensive coverage to terrorist groups, the traditional media effectively allows itself to be used by extremist groups to project



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power that they very likely do not possess. This has led to some arguing that the effects of the widespread coverage of terrorism encourages similar acts, as terrorism becomes a successful tactic.³⁰

This false projection of power, and the consequent fear of it, has occurred to the extent that terrorism is now a leading concern for ordinary citizens in various democracies, despite comparatively few incidents.³¹ Overexposure to terrorism through the media exaggerates public perceptions of the threat and the state's inability to address that threat. This has fostered an environment of fear in which popular demand for government action has led to the shrinking of civil liberties as government powers expand, supposedly in exchange for more security.

Sensational reporting inadvertently undermines democracy by assisting terrorist actors in spreading fear, thus creating an environment in which individuals are willing to surrender rights – to their own detriment. Extraordinary powers have been granted to government and law enforcement agencies. In the US, for example, the effects of this climate of fear can be seen in the widespread militarisation of police post-9/11, which in turn has created new problems in the relationship between the government and its people.³²

In this way, the traditional media plays a prominent role in the securitisation of terrorism responses, by shaping public opinion in a way that pressures governments into knee-jerk and overly aggressive responses. This public pressure, built on exaggerated perceptions, can in turn lead to counterproductive short-term responses, as it encourages the use of force and the restriction of human rights.³³

At times such responses have exacerbated the problem, where governments have employed tactics such as racial profiling or torture to respond to the threat, undermining the principles of human rights and rule of law upon which democracy is based. These undemocratic responses are also precisely the type of responses that extremists seek to evoke in their efforts to undermine the legitimacy of democratic institutions. They deliberately try to elicit securitised responses to expose the dissonance between supposed democratic values and the realities of how governments

treat individuals, particularly communities that may be regarded as the source of extremism.³⁴

While media coverage of terrorism does not spread extremist ideology, it does spread fear, and sensationalism fuels the erosion of democratic freedoms. Accordingly, more critical and responsible reporting is required on the part of the traditional media in its framing of terrorist incidents. This should be done with a critical understanding of the intent behind a terrorist act, and media companies should accordingly guard against being manipulated by these groups. This kind of reporting should better contextualise terrorist acts as sporadic events and abstain from reporting in ways that perpetuate fear through unfounded speculation.

While media coverage of terrorism does not spread extremist ideology, it does spread fear

Groups such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization have already released guidelines on how to responsibly report on terrorism,³⁵ but these can only be effective if media organisations adopt them. This primarily requires a change in media culture to entrench norms on how terrorist incidents should be covered. This can be achieved through establishing good practices and shared journalistic standards on reporting terrorist incidents, and ensuring that they are followed, to avoid sensationalising terrorism and extremism.³⁶

Where extremist groups were previously largely limited to reaching a mass audience through exploiting the traditional media, the changing nature of media production has allowed them to take advantage of social media to gain greater control of the messages conveyed to the public. By bypassing established traditional media networks, extremist groups can directly communicate with their supporters or sympathisers without the traditional media altering the messages that these groups are trying to communicate to their supporters. Where traditional media previously received most of the criticism for the spread of extremist ideology, the focus has now turned to social media and the Internet.

Social media, the Internet and state responses in the era of violent extremism

Extremist groups use social media and the Internet to better control the message that they communicate to their supporters. While the general public associates groups such as Islamic State with graphic violence and brutality, a significant proportion of its online recruitment campaign has focused on its 'governance' in the 'state' and its utopian vision of building a caliphate for all Muslims.³⁷ This dissonance is a result of the differing messages it seeks to send to its opponents (graphic violence) and to its supporters (justice and legitimacy).

The Internet and social media have become an area of particular concern in terms of radicalisation. Those harbouring extremist views are easily able to seek out extremist groups or extremist material. Once online, these individuals can become targets of social media users affiliated with extremist groups. In this online context, individuals are socialised into extremist thinking through a process of 'grooming' that shapes the thinking of the target, ultimately seeking to direct their behaviour.³⁸

While the Internet can be used to reinforce extremist views and promote violent actions, the existence of extremist beliefs is not dependent on the Internet

As a result, some have come to see the Internet itself as the cause of radicalisation. However, as illustrated in a study conducted by Gill et al., which examines the profiles of 223 convicted terrorists from the United Kingdom (UK), many of the extremists 'went online not to have their beliefs changed but rather to have them reinforced'.³⁹ This research suggests that the Internet is not the source of their ideological convictions, but that it is their pre-existing beliefs that lead them to seek out propaganda material online.

A similar study conducted by the RAND Corporation suggests that while the Internet affords more opportunities for radicalisation, it is 'not a substitute for in-person meetings but, rather, complements in-person communication'.⁴⁰ The study finds that the radicalisation process is still heavily reliant on interactions with others.

Therefore, while the Internet can be used to reinforce extremist views and promote violent actions, the existence of extremist beliefs is not dependent on the Internet. Both studies show that significant radicalisation takes place offline or exists prior to seeking out extremist material online, meaning that policies overly focused on preventing the dissemination of extremist content online would have a limited impact in eradicating extremist ideologies as these ideologies exist independently of the Internet. Policies to counter violent extremism should recognise that the source of radicalisation lies deeper, in issues of marginalisation and oppression.⁴¹



MANY EXTREMISTS GO ONLINE NOT TO HAVE THEIR BELIEFS CHANGED BUT RATHER TO HAVE THEM REINFORCED

Despite this, concerns around extremists using the Internet and social media to further their agendas have led to many governments introducing laws to restrict free speech and privacy, and expand surveillance powers. However, the distinction between legitimate dissent and extremism is also at times blurred for the purpose of maintaining control in oppressive regimes. In some states, such as Russia and Turkey, restrictions have been implemented under the guise of combatting extremist messaging, but with the intent of curbing opposition to government.⁴² For example, Egypt's 2015 anti-terror law expands the definition of terrorism, authorising the state to limit journalists' freedom and preventing the publication of news on terrorism.⁴³

Further, under the guise of preventing terrorism, the surveillance powers of security agencies have been significantly expanded. In democratic states the expansion of surveillance powers and their potential abuse have created concerns around the effects on democratic values – such as freedom of thought and free speech – as the expansion of these surveillance powers makes it possible to track an individual's communications and movement on an unprecedented level.⁴⁴

As illustrated in the case of Canadian journalist Patrick Lagacé, where police officers misused their surveillance powers in an attempt to uncover sources who had shared unflattering information about strife in the police force,⁴⁵ these powers can be abused to undermine the watchdog function of the media. Additionally, as seen in Mexico,⁴⁶ these types of surveillance tools can also be used to spy on opposition parties to manipulate the electoral process.

These surveillance tools are created in developed democracies and exported to oppressive regimes with little regard for the way in which they are used

The Mexican government also used surveillance tools bought from a foreign arms manufacturer to spy on officials investigating the 2014 high-profile disappearance of 43 students.⁴⁷ Such invasions of privacy blatantly undermine accountability mechanisms. In many cases these tools are created in developed democracies and exported to oppressive regimes with little regard for the way in which they are used or to whom they are sold. This lack of oversight has allowed oppressive governments to suppress opposition⁴⁸ and undermine democratic institutions.⁴⁹

If developed democratic states wish to preserve democratic values in emerging democracies and the global community, control must be established over the export of surveillance tools to prevent them from being used to suppress democracy, just as arms manufacturers are prevented from exporting weapons to rights-violating regimes.

As surveillance technologies and powers are frequently acquired and used in secret, it is difficult for the public to ensure oversight. For example, in the



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case of the United States (US) National Security Agency's (NSA) bulk data collection system, parts of the programme were found to be illegal years after implementation – and only after being made public by a whistle-blower.⁵⁰ Worryingly, the use of surveillance technologies has gone beyond fighting terrorism, and they are increasingly being used for policing ordinary crimes in which extraordinary powers are unjustified.⁵¹

Examples include the use of surveillance technology to track peaceful Black Lives Matter protesters in the US⁵² and the use of surveillance powers by local government in the UK to monitor trivial violations such as dog barking or illegal garbage dumping.⁵³ This raises questions as to whether sufficient checks are in place to prevent the abuse of power, particularly with regard to judicial oversight⁵⁴ and written policy stipulating fair practice.⁵⁵ Both of these have been found to be limited or lacking in many democracies.

The fear of surveillance is stifling free speech, free thought and individuals' ability to organise without fear of persecution

The expansion of surveillance powers has also created an industry of companies specialising in developing powerful surveillance tools and collecting data on individuals. This industry lacks oversight and is not accountable to the public.⁵⁶ Such companies should equally be regulated to limit their use and develop democratic oversight.

The efficacy of such mass data collection strategies to combat terrorism is also questionable, as those who use online platforms to organise terrorist attacks are likely to use encryption or other tools to mask their communications, meaning that the vast majority of surveillance data captured is not related to illegal activity.

Calls for weakening encryption are equally unrealistic, as extremists will always be capable of developing their own encryption (as they have already done)⁵⁷ or use code words, while weakening encryption will only expose individuals to cybercriminals.⁵⁸ A significant part of cybersecurity is in essence based on encryption, and undermining this foundation will only create new insecurities that threaten the basis of numerous industries dependent on being able to protect their information from nefarious actors.

Further, the constant fear of surveillance can in itself lead to self-censorship.⁵⁹ Studies indicate that, following the Snowden revelations, Internet users have changed their online behaviour, with sudden declines in Wikipedia page views⁶⁰ and Google searches⁶¹ on topics such as terrorism that users fear may rouse suspicion. Similarly, it has meant that individuals have become less likely to disclose political opinions⁶² or minority views⁶³ online. This has even



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affected journalism, with studies showing that journalists are engaging in self-censorship over fears of surveillance.⁶⁴

Considering that social media and the Internet have become some of the primary forms through which individuals obtain information and engage with political discussion, the effects of this type of self-censorship on democratic discourse are clear. Through discouraging minority views and political discussion online, as well as deterring citizens from learning more about controversial or difficult political questions, the fear of surveillance is stifling free speech, free thought and individuals' ability to organise without fear of persecution. Without privacy, individuals cannot effectively exercise their right to freedom of expression.

Given that research on radicalisation indicates that being prevented from participating in politics is a significant driver of radicalisation,⁶⁵ the suppression of free speech will likely lead to further radicalisation. Stifling dissent, rather than resolving issues peacefully through democratic dialogue, also likely increases the chances that the politically repressed may resort to violent tactics to make themselves heard.

The importance of media in democracy

While the misuse of social media and the Internet by extremists makes it clear that there is a need for Internet governance, and that the online realm cannot be left to exist in a state of nature, freedom of expression must be maintained for a well-functioning democracy. For a democracy to function, an informed and knowledgeable electorate is vital, meaning that the information upon which voters base their decisions must be freely available.⁶⁶

For many, the media is their primary or only interaction with politics, and much of their political decisions, thinking and voting are based on the information obtained from media sources.⁶⁷ From this, the public is able to hold elected officials accountable for their actions. Investigative journalism that reveals rights violations or the misdeeds of government plays a prominent role in accomplishing this. The media also serves to bring issues to the attention of policymakers and to represent the views of the public.⁶⁸ In this way, the media links citizens to the political process

and allows their political views to be expressed within the bounds of the law.

The traditional media can also play an important role in countering the narratives extremist groups build for their recruitment campaigns. Violent extremist groups often attempt to frame themselves as the defenders of the oppressed. By exposing their hypocrisy through accounts of their cruelty and their betrayal of the values that they claim to hold, the traditional media can undermine the false narratives built by these groups.⁶⁹ A free media not only forms the foundation of a democratic society but can also serve to counter violent extremism. Free speech and the free flow of information promote understanding and create the opportunity for dialogue and through dialogue, provides a means for settling disagreements peacefully.

A report by the European Broadcasting Union, for example, found that countries that have well-funded public service broadcasters and high levels of press freedom experience less public interest in right-wing extremism.⁷⁰ Similarly, a study in Argentina in which 12–13-year-old students were given newspapers to read and discuss in class once a week, showed that engagement with the media fostered more tolerant attitudes among students in line with democratic principles.⁷¹ Such a programme teaches students that it is acceptable to have different opinions, which makes them more tolerant of differing viewpoints and open to political discussion. Thus they are less susceptible to extremist views.

A free media is vital for including citizens in the political process and resolving disputes peacefully

Both studies indicate that freedom of expression and an active media can counter extremist beliefs and create a more tolerant democratic society.

This can, however, only be achieved if expression is truly free. As discussed above, fear of surveillance has led to self-censorship in the media and discouraged the public from seeking out information. Freedom of expression and privacy exist hand-in-hand. Undermining privacy erodes the freedom of expression upon which

democracy relies. For journalists and activists this is even more so, as the confidentiality of sources and their networks is vital to their ability to perform their democratic functions. Mass surveillance only suppresses open discussion – the opposite of the openness required of democratic societies.

Conclusion

A strategy of limiting democratic freedoms with the aim of creating security is likely to be unsuccessful and will only lead to the further radicalisation of the repressed to violent extremist groups. Suppressing free discussion only allows discontent to continue unresolved and foment. A free media is vital for including citizens in the political process and resolving disputes peacefully, as it promotes discussion and has been shown to create mutual understanding and tolerance. Considering that social media and the Internet have become one of the primary forms through which individuals obtain information and engage with political discussion, these channels of communication must be kept open.

The expansion of surveillance powers must be contained within the bounds of a free democratic society

While these tools may be exploited by extremists to promote their agenda, the underlying dynamics that make individuals susceptible to their messages exist independently of the Internet and social media. For efforts to counter violent extremism to be successful, policy must go beyond addressing channels of communication. Counter-terrorism responses that securitise communications through surveillance only suppress freedom of expression – one of the most important components of liberal democracy.

For freedom of expression to exist, privacy must be maintained. Thus the expansion of surveillance powers must be contained within the bounds of a free democratic society. The potential for the abuse of these powers, and the infringement of the civil liberties that allow a democracy to function, has far-reaching consequences for the continuation of a democratic society built on accountability and free expression. Just as policies based purely on combatting violent extremism militarily will not succeed if the underlying drivers of radicalisation are not addressed, the suppression of free speech, which allows for concerns to be raised and resolved, will not defeat violent extremism.



GOVERNMENTS SHOULD ENCOURAGE MEDIA HOUSES TO ADOPT GOOD PRACTICES TO RESPONSIBLY REPORT TERRORIST INCIDENTS

Recommendations

Develop international norms and rules to govern the Internet

The international community should develop shared international principles, norms and rules to govern the Internet, in light of the transnational nature of communications technologies. Companies such as Facebook or Twitter,

which are positioned to regulate their own systems and have the technical knowledge to understand the complexity of these issues, should be included in the governance process. Democratic states should do this with human rights and free speech considerations at the core of their policies.

Increase democratic oversight and limit the use of surveillance

States should introduce policies that increase oversight and limit the use, and misuse, of surveillance powers. These powers should particularly be limited in their application to ordinary policing. Intergovernmental organisations such as the Community of Democracies can play an important role in developing guidelines for addressing security considerations within a democratic framework.

Regulate the export of surveillance tools

States and the international community must develop regulations to control the export of surveillance tools, in line with arms control mechanisms. This should include

oversight to monitor private companies that develop surveillance tools and collect data on individuals.

Develop guidelines for responsible coverage of terrorist incidents

Governments should encourage media houses to adopt good practices to responsibly report terrorist incidents, to avoid perpetuating fear through unfounded speculation and sensational reporting. This should include entrenching norms on how terrorist incidents should be covered, and can be achieved through establishing shared journalistic standards on reporting terrorist incidents and ensuring that they are followed.

Build resilience in communities

There is a need to foster resilience by strengthening the deliberative capacity of citizens to critically analyse information and reject extremist views, as regulators cannot realistically control or censor all communications. This means a focus on education and the development of an inclusive society. Suppressing dissent will not resolve the underlying drivers of violent extremism.

Notes

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