MASS MEDIA

NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN CENTRAL ASIAN MASS MEDIA RESEARCH

Eric FREEDMAN

J.D., Associate Professor of Journalism and Associate Dean of International Studies & Programs, Michigan State University (East Lansing, U.S.)

Richard SHAFER

Ph.D. Professor of Journalism, Department of English, University of North Dakota (Grand Forks, U.S.)

Introduction

The end of the Cold War represented an apparent victory for NATO, capitalism, free enterprise, and democracy over the Warsaw Pact, Marxism-Leninist communism, and the Russian-Soviet empire. In 1991, five newly independent republics of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) emerged from the wreckage of that watershed event. Each new government proclaimed its commitment to free enterprise economic systems and democratic governance. Western democracies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and human rights groups lauded that commitment to democratic mass media systems as stabilizing, modernizing, and nation-building tools. Unfortunately, significant obstacles remain to functional and effective press systems able to maintain economic, editorial, and political autonomy.

Because Russian and Soviet-era press conventions still strongly influence the press in Cen-

tral Asia, this article begins with a brief overview of the Russian colonial and czarist press system from the 1860s to the Russian Revolution of 1917. It then presents a brief history of press controls under the Soviet Union. Thus, forms of Russian domination of Central Asian journalism persisted for almost 130 years, leaving deeply entrenched czarist-Soviet press methods, controls, and traditions.

The study then summarizes significant arenas of contemporary research on Central Asian mass media, including detailed evidence of the complexity, diversity, and depth of barriers to free and effective press systems. It establishes that imposed Soviet-era journalism philosophy and practices remain much of the foundation for current professional ideology. Although there were some positive aspects to the Soviet press system, inherited professional habits, conventions, ideology, and socialist economics still obstruct adoption of aspects of Western models hallmarked by independent journalism and advocacy of a more operative form of social responsibility to audiences.

The article then outlines the conflict between external and internal pressures to establish free and democratic press systems where regimes actively resist such efforts. That resistance includes formal and informal policies of censorship and repression that restrain journalists and the mass media they serve.

Despite outside efforts to promote democratization of the press, these repressitarian governments remain highly authoritarian and exert varying but high degrees of direct and indirect censorship and content control. Among them are onerous libel laws, fabricated criminal charges against journalists, unfair tax audits, license terminations, and pressure on advertisers and printing houses when media content is deemed overly critical and adversarial. Recent murders of journalists further chill independent reporting.

This synthesized examination of recent mass media research makes clear that five separate systems have replaced the unitary Soviet one, but with such shared attributes as official or quasi-official censorship; self-censorship; lack of free-market sustainability; constraints on independence and professionalism; and a press ideology that values service to the state above independence, fairness, balance, and accuracy. Distinctions among the systems include the presence or absence of independent and opposition media outlets; degrees of public access to the Internet and foreign media; and availability of university and professional education and training.

Collectively, this research illustrates the limited success of external forces in furthering media pluralism. Those forces are foreign governments and multi-governmental entities, international media-building and civil society-building NGOs, Western journalism trainers and professors, and foreign media outlets that disseminate print, broadcast, and Internet content. In addition, these studies summarized demonstrate how regimes and elites use—and abuse—the law to control news and information about public affairs, controversy, and public issues and how they disregard constitutional and statutory assurances of press freedom. Democratization of the press will also require changing journalists' widely accepted role as acquiescent or reluctant—let alone enthusiastic—apparatuses of the state.

The impetus and energy for developing free press systems in Central Asia are primarily external. Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, the region has been under pressure, mostly from the United States and Western Europe, to create and sustain "free press» systems essential to civil society. To a great extent, such external advocacy manifested the neo-conservative U.S. foreign policy ideology promulgated by former President George W. Bush and his advisors. Their interest was to democratize authoritarian nations when politically and economically expedient, as in oil- and mineral-rich Central Asia. Intensive Western efforts to encourage market- or advertising-supported media in former communist nations generally succeeded in Eastern and Central Europe. Such efforts failed in Central Asia, where media generally lack mass audiences and economic resources to attract advertisers and support the free market concept of news as a commodity.

Supporters and funders of democratic press projects in the region include the Council for the International Exchange of Scholars; British Broadcasting Corporation; Organization for Se-

curity and Cooperation in Europe; Civic Education Project (Soros Foundation); International Research and Exchanges Board; Cable News Network; Freedom House; Internews; and the International Center for Journalists. Other NGOs, such as the Committee to Protect Journalists, Amnesty International, International PEN, Reporters Sans Frontières, and Human Rights Watch do not directly engage in journalism education and training but monitor press freedom and advocate against harsh restraints.

Some regimes recognize advantages of modernizing media content, even while controlling it, by allowing journalists to learn Western news writing and reporting styles and conventions. Professional writing and reporting skills are useful to journalists, even if they are not permitted to report in an unfettered manner, and to propagandists. Western educators have taught in otherwise tightly controlled newsrooms and universities because of donor nation and funder pressure; allowing democratic journalism trainings to take place presents at least a façade of a commitment to free press systems.

Yet it remains relatively easy for authorities to censor media content that is too reflective of Western news values and reporting conventions. That is particularly true if content criticizes the regime or other powerful interests. Journalists are often punished for stories they print or broadcast. Not surprisingly, self-censorship remains a domineering force, even in the absence of official censorship.[1]

We now discuss the Soviet colonial period and its influence on contemporary Central Asian media.

[1] See: O. Allison, "Selective Enforcement and Irresponsibility: Central Asia's Shrinking Space for Independent Media," *Central Asian Survey*, No. 25 (1—2), 2006, pp. 93-114.

Soviet-Era Influences on the Contemporary Press in Central Asia

Current press systems evolved from the Soviet-era system, but Russian colonial expansion into the region dates to the mid-19th century with the conquest and settlement of what was then called Turkestan. The commercial press system that flourished in Russia and, to a limited extent in parts of its Central Asian acquisitions, before World War I and the Russian Revolution deviated greatly from Western models, as Richard Shafer of the University of North Dakota, U.S., explains. Even so, many elements contributed to the mission of the press as a tool for democracy. One study of pre-revolutionary Russian newspapers[2] found the press generally supported equal rights, extension of civil rights, and the public's role in political decision-making. Even pro-czarist newspapers carried content inherently subversive to absolutism by advocating empowerment of common citizens and extension of individual rights. Also in the pre-revolutionary period, journalism was modernized with more concise writing and reporting conventions. A brief period of enlightenment began in 1914 and ended with the Bolsheviks' coming to power. It did not re-emerge until the "golden age" of democratic journalism during Glasnost and extended into the early 1990s, immediately after dissolution of the Soviet Union; during this time, the press still benefited from state economic support, but censorship and most other press controls eased.

Hopkins offers an opposing view about the degree of democratic progress in the Russian empire before World War I, identifying a great divide within the press system between the small governing privileged class and masses of peasants and workers.[3] Because the press lacked a tradition of advo-

[2] See: L. McReynolds, *The News under Russia's Old Regime: The Development of a Mass-Circulation Press*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1991, pp. 6-9.

[3] See: M.W. Hopkins, *Mass Media in the Soviet Union*, Pegasus, New York, 1970, pp. 117-119.

cating for democracy and individual empowerment, there was little media criticism of government. There was even less criticism in military outposts that became government centers and major cities of Central Asia.

As Russian political philosophy evolved from the early 1900s, there was no popular support compelling the press to assume an adversarial role. The state assumed control of the press, just as it assumed central economic control.

After the Revolution, the Moscow Institute of Journalism, where many Central Asian journalists were educated, emerged as one of the country's most prestigious training programs. It was proletarian in design when established to produce worker-peasant correspondents for community newspapers and periodicals. In the early 1920s, Moscow University began training students in editing, publishing, and literary criticism. In Central Asia and throughout the U.S.S.R., the primary objective of training programs became building the Communist Party while promoting socialism. Provincial universities, newspapers, and journalism organizations also provided training that Hopkins says was often "short on journalism and long on politics."[4]

Central Asian journalists who graduated from high-status and competitive Soviet academic programs, schools, and press institutes were expected to apply the Marxist-Leninist theoretical and Russian journalistic professional skills acquired in the classroom. They were inculcated with a responsibility to serve the working class and use the press to build and sustain a socialist utopia[5]. Thus they were likely to find it professionally repugnant to produce sensationalistic and often shallow journalistic content common in many newly independent countries experimenting with commercial forms of mass media and with marketing news as a commodity to generate profits in the capitalist or Western tradition.

Throughout Soviet times, dissatisfaction and social discontent were primarily confined to quiet grumbling on the street and "intellectual criticism" at home, according to Kulikova and Ibraeva, whose research focused on Kyrgyzstan's mass media.[6] Official channels conveyed optimism and attempted to thwart discontent. Outright disinformation and lies destructively affected the general population and the journalists charged with informing them, corroding the collective psyche. Since the press was officially an agent and advocate of Marxist-Leninist thought, journalists were rewarded principally for supporting the party.

After the Revolution when the Soviet government carefully controlled the press and demanded full, uncritical support for the regime and party, some journalists—often party members—developed creative ways to express self-determination in their writing and reporting. Educators and enlightened party officials recognized that journalists acting as party apparatchiks—while exhibiting dogmatic adherence to authority—generally produced poorly crafted stories and opinion pieces that highlighted their incompetence. Such articles did little to inform or motivate the public. Citizens ridiculed or ignored such embarrassingly ineffective and counter-productive pro-Soviet propaganda. However, journalists who maintained their self-identity as professionals and eschewed working merely as crude propagandists and hacks refused to be wholly compliant. Thus, Soviet-era journalists did not work under an effective central authority as monolithic and successfully repressive of the press, as Westerners generally assume.

Even in the most repressive days under the Soviets, some journalists demonstrated elements of independent thinking and practices. Those in Central Asia were probably less compliant than Russian peers, whom Moscow could more closely monitor. Unfortunately, the Soviet empire's collapse was

[4] Ibid., p. 81.

[5] See: J. H. Altschull, *Agents of Power: The Media and Public Policy,* Longman, White Plains, NY, 1995, p. 195.

[6] See: S.V. Kulikova, G. Ibraeva, *The Historical Development and Current Situation of the Mass Media in Kyrgyzstan,* Occasional Papers 1, Cimera Foundation, Geneva, Switzerland, 2001, pp. 20-21.

followed in Central Asia by the establishment of repressive new governments headed by former Communist Party leaders. These leaders imposed onerous press constraints to solidify repressitarianism and used the media to further nation-building predicated to a great extent on their self-glorification and consolidating power.

For journalists secretly supporting national independence based on ethnic identity and aspirations, it was probably easier to transition from commitment to Soviet and party ideals to advancing post-independence nation-building. Since such a commitment entailed serving as propagandists and advocates for young authoritarian regimes, journalism professionalism and independence failed to evolve in a democratic direction, as recent mass media studies demonstrate.

Exemplars of Contemporary Mass Media Research in Central Asia

How have journalists in Central Asia emerged from the constrained and narrowly ideological Soviet press system, and how have they dealt with post-independence obstacles to democratic nation-building? Have they been able to contribute to launching effective press models, perhaps remaining authoritarian but better suited to today's political, economic, cultural, and societal realities?[7] The following summaries of recent studies address these and related questions. They are adapted from the above-mentioned book. Scholars who contributed to the book incorporate analysis and commentary from their own research, as well as their extensive journalism and mass media teaching and training experiences in the region.

National Perspectives: Realities and Challenges

Oligarchs and Media Ownership in Kazakhstan *(Barbara Junisbai)*

"Print," Josef Stalin said, "is the sharpest and the strongest weapon of our party." Barbara Junisbai of Pitzer College in the United States recasts Stalin's statement in the context of contemporary Kazakhstan as she examines how corporate-government interests rather than political parties use media ownership as a strong, sharp weapon to gain and maintain wealth and power. "Financial-industrial groups" with close ties to President Nursultan Nazarbaev have purchased or gained control of much of the country's print and electronic media. Led by wealthy business and political elites akin to oligarchs, these groups lead, control, or own industrial, financial, retail, media, and other businesses. They wield media holdings as weapons against rival groups and attempt to shape public opinion in their favor, according to Junisbai.

Her research concludes that press coverage of politically sensitive issues and events appears driven in large part by conflict within Kazakhstan's elite. That elite is divided into financial-industrial groups

[7] Scholars from four continents explore these and related questions in the forthcoming book, *After the Czars and Commissars: Journalism in Authoritarian Post-Soviet Central Asia*, edited by Eric Freedman and Richard Shafer, to be published by Michigan State University Press.

vying for preferential access to lucrative political and economic goods, including the president's favor. The process began in 1997 with the government's first tender to reallocate private television and radio frequencies. The cost of obtaining rights to electronic media became prohibitive; most broadcast companies lost their licenses, a situation that some observers interpreted as an effort to silence President Nazarbaev's critics. Junisbai describes how rival groups ripped apart Rakhat Aliev, Nazarbaev's former son-in-law, who had commanded a media empire with the president's daughter, when he fell from presidential favor, lost his official titles, was divorced and criminally investigated, and went into exile. At that point, the rivals found it no longer dangerous to broadcast or print material critical of Aliev.

What explains the dominance of financial-industrial groups in media ownership? In Junisbai's assessment, print and electronic media are desirable—not necessarily because of profitability, but as potential instruments to sway public opinion and attack rival elites in a legal and seemingly neutral form. For example, 120 applicants competed for rights to about fifteen radio frequencies in a 2007 tender; only three companies owned by pro-Nazarbaev financial industrial groups were successful bidders: the Irbis television group, the Astana channel, and Ria-Arna. While avoiding direct monopolization of the media—and therefore outwardly meeting certain democratic standards—the government remains positioned to ensure media conformity and regulate information to its citizens.

Turkmenistan's Press: The Most Controlled in Central Asia
(Luca Anceschi)

While Junisbai's work on Kazakhstan shows how an authoritarian government uses nominally "independent" media to retain power, Luca Anceschi of La Trobe University in Australia shows how the media in Turkmenistan fails at even a pretense of independence from government control. None of the other four Central Asian nations has been as consistently authoritarian and nondemocratic as Turkmenistan has, and Anceschi's research explores how post-independence media policy significantly strengthened its authoritarianism before and since the death of President-for-Life Saparmurat Niyazov in 2006.

Anceschi explains the progression to near-absolute control of mass media by following the development of two major policy prongs: repression and propaganda. Repression helped maximize control over political life by silencing dissent and obliterating independent voices. Meanwhile, an intensive propaganda campaign indelibly marked the public's political behavior through a window-dressing ideology engineered to legitimize the regime and build a perverse nationalism resting on Niyazov's cult of personality. To different degrees and through different approaches, repression and propaganda established a media policy that abetted the regime in consolidating dictatorial, all-pervasive powers.

Only Turkmenistan has used the media to cultivate such a wholly totalitarian government based on a brutal campaign of nation-building grounded in cults of personality. That strategy differs strikingly from choices by the other Central Asian nations that opted instead to use their media to foster statehood and nationhood within less harsh authoritarian frameworks.

The media landscape remains rigidly state-controlled with government the sole legal editor, broadcaster, and publisher. Propaganda has played a substantial role in the process of regime consolidation and enhanced public compliance with rules promoted by Niyazov, his successor, Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov, and their associates. The main attributes remain regulation, rigid restraints over content—only an estimated 1.6 percent of the population has Internet access—and brutal suppression of dissent. Berdymukhammedov continued systemic harassment of journalists. In 2008, for example, an unpaid contributor to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty was beaten, tortured, and detained in a

psychiatric clinic. In 2009, Berdymukhammedov removed the most prominent censor of the Niyazov era as chief editor of *Turkmenistan*, the principal Turkmen-language newspaper; that merely symbolic action did not lead to a relaxation of media constraints, however.

Coverage of Extremism by a Kyrgyzstan Newspaper
(Irina Wolf)

In contrast to Turkmenistan, independent and opposition media outlets continue to operate in Kyrgyzstan. In her research into coverage of Muslim extremism there, Irina Wolf of the University of Konstanz in Germany content-analyzes how Kyrgyzstan's largest national newspaper, *Vechernii Bishkek*, reported on Hizb ut-Tahrir, an international extremist political party with Islam as its ideological foundation. *Vechernii Bishkek* printed considerably more stories about the group than any other quality newspaper.

Her study begins in 2001—the year of al-Qa'eda attacks in the U.S.—and concludes on 31 December, 2005, the year of the Tulip Revolution. It assesses the quantity and kinds of information presented about Hizb ut-Tahrir, then looks at how coverage of the party changed over those years, including the fact that the number of articles about the arrests of party members grew significantly after 2001. Finally, the study addresses the extent to which terminology (rhetoric) and information Kyrgyz journalists used reflected their personal opinions and state policies.

During the study period, she finds a lack of journalistic neutrality regarding dissemination of information about Hizb ut-Tahrir based on interviews with four journalists who wrote the majority of relevant articles. The study also discovers that the overwhelming majority of articles were written in very negative tones, for example referring to members as extremists, terrorists, radicals, and/or religious fanatics. No articles were found about positive aspects of Hizb ut-Tahrir's activities, such as charitable work. Wolf notes that the law prohibits the mass media from providing a forum for extremists but the newspaper at times provided a platform for the organization, such as interviews with its press attaché and an imprisoned member.

Wolf attributes the expanded number of articles with neutral references to Hizb ut-Tahrir—including calling it a Muslim religious political organization aimed at building a caliphate—to changes in the government and in *Vechernii Bishkek's* directorship in 2005. Although journalists' personal views about religion and combating extremism influenced coverage, Wolf cautions against underestimating the government's role in setting the agenda for privately owned *Vechernii Bishkek* and, in this case, determining the tone of news and information about oppositionist political groups that may be deemed as posing a threat.

Internet Control in Uzbekistan
(Zhanna Hordegen)

Anceschi's study of national press policy in Turkmenistan addresses a traditional form of media, newspapers, while Zhanna Hordegen of the University of Zurich, Switzerland, studies a much newer form of media, the adoption, use and control of the Internet in Uzbekistan.

Internet connectivity has improved, and the regime has pursued infrastructure development, but rigid state controls impede wider access and use. The government maintains the most extensive and intrusive state-mandated filtering system in Central Asia. Websites operated by international and

domestic human rights organizations and opposition-in-exile political parties are permanently filtered and blocked. Regime hostility to the medium has reinvigorated debate about the significance of a state's coercive power to control information flow within its borders.

Although censorship was officially abolished in 2002, the government systematically monitors mass communications by collecting information products that individuals and legal entities disseminate, analyzing their content and sending warnings to the media. Hordegen observes that the country's regulatory framework no longer distinguishes between Web and traditional print forms of content distribution; the legal framework requires websites to officially register as mass media. That regulatory structure is reminiscent of Soviet laws that regarded every computer or word processor connected to a printer as a potential printing press that could be used as a subversive tool against government. On a practical level, it means registered websites may be closed without written notice of alleged violations of the regulatory framework and without opportunities to correct any purported violations.

Regulation of access to information is more sweeping in implication. In Uzbekistan, information security goes beyond a general understanding of "computer security" or "network security." Rather, it is considered integral to national security. That means perceived threats against territorial integrity and state secrets automatically become threats to information security. In addition, speech banned by the Criminal Code is deemed a threat to information security. Uzbekistan's information security rules and their practical implementation rest on a formally constructed national ideology called the "idea of national independence." Under that ideology, government legislates rules that control Internet use. Thus the concept of information security is corrupted by contradictions, she notes, undermining interests in open access to information, democratic civic discourse, and press freedom.

Censorship and Self-Censorship in Tajikistan
(Peter Gross and Timothy Kenny)

Beyond formal and quasi-formal systems of media control such as those studied by Junisbai, Hordegen, and Anceschi, Central Asian regimes encourage and sustain informal systems of media control, as Peter Gross of the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, U.S., and Timothy Kenny of the University of Connecticut, U.S., explain in their survey-based study of professional journalists in Tajikistan. Censorship—although officially but not *de facto* discontinued—coupled with self-censorship by news organizations are two of seven paralyzing obstacles faced by Tajik media and society.

They identify other major obstacles as: absence of independent news distribution; poor financial market conditions, including low salaries; high taxes; lack of journalism professionalism; and journalists' unwillingness to produce stories based on fact and supported by truth.

Although the press appears on quick examination to function effectively, Gross and Kenny conclude that it avoids gathering and disseminating potentially controversial news and information that would benefit society and serve as a check on government. According to their study, self-censorship—"soft censorship"—lies at the core of the country's press problems. It is circumscribed by a political system controlled by President Imomali Rakhmon and his People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan and undermined by economic conditions promulgated by a quasi-feudal financial system. Indirect pressure on the media comes from abuse of public funds and monopolies, abuse of regulatory and inspection powers; and extra-legal pressures. Thus journalists who stray too far from the dictates of self-censorship risk loss of government financial support or other income from related work, such as public relations.

Violence, intimidation, regulations, and lawsuits encourage self-censorship too. Those factors are reflected in the murders of at least twenty-seven journalists during the 1992-1997 civil war, defamation laws, licensing for broadcast stations, and a history of media closures.

The government has been loath to end censorship of print, broadcast, and Internet media, while politicians capitalize on traditions and norms that quash initiative and foster self-censorship. The press is also hindered by a culture that puts a premium on familial ties, friendships, and personal contacts, which together are the social glue that encourages journalism to maintain society's status quo. Thus self-censorship serves as an important social control mechanism. The study finds that establishing independent media and protecting journalistic freedom are proving daunting, although some impediments may be resolved over time if the yoke of self-censorship is lifted.

Trans-Regional Perspectives

Journalists' Rights and Duties under Media Law
(Olivia Allison)

Olivia Allison of the global intelligence firm Stirling Assynt in the United Kingdom evaluates how media laws in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan remain influenced by the juxtaposition of "rights" and "duties." Her analysis asks whether the principle of loyalty remains central in media law and its enforcement, and it identifies the most important categories for assessing the role of loyalty in governmental restrictions on press freedom.

Her hypothesis is that media laws and enforcement remain framed by the expectation of loyalty under statutes that target "disloyal" media rather than encouraging pluralism. Because journalistic "duties"—which include the ill-defined duty of responsibility—form the basis of journalistic rights, disloyal media have fewer rights than pro-governmental media. Indeed, the goal of such laws is not to sustain a vibrant press, but one that is uncritical of the regime.

The interview-based study addresses multiple categories of law—media registration; frequency licensing; access to information; libel and defamation; finance and tax; and censorship.

It suggests it is insufficient merely to look at the language of such statutes because libel awards for moral damages are often alarmingly high in lawsuits brought by judges and other public officials against financially vulnerable press outlets. At best, media registration agencies move slowly. At worst, they intentionally work against opposition and independent media, often taking longer than the mandated period without explanation or accountability. In addition, enforcement of those laws is uneven and frequently discriminatory. In Kyrgyzstan, for example, Allison says tax inspectors interfere in media businesses' activities, arbitrarily reviewing their books and ignoring tax-code violations in exchange for bribes unless instructed to act otherwise.

In addition, the study looks at journalism practices, including how some professionals manifest "disloyalty" or opposition through technically illegal activities, such as printing "state secrets." Such materials often fall short of ethical standards; journalists' outputs are often factually unsupported and libelous even by Western standards. Some media evade taxes; ironically, that conduct helps authorities because charging a disloyal media outlet with hefty back taxes can quickly shut it down without litigation. When both pro-government and oppositionist media outlets violate the law, only opposition media that are penalized. The study faults journalists themselves for remaining uncommitted to, or equivocal about, professional ethics and corrupt business and public practices, saying such misbehavior weakens attempts to expose official corruption.

Ethnic Minorities and the Media
(Olivier Ferrando)

Following independence, the language of each country's largest ethnic group became the *lingua* of the mainstream media, often displacing the dominant Russian language, according to Olivier Ferrando of Sciences Po in France. Examining state-owned media for native minorities in the Ferghana Valley of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan, he explores the role of such media in a multiethnic society and considers how the press may encourage audiences to retain ethnic values and promote a common civic identity. In a diverse region transected by political borders that ignore ethnicity, how do media navigate among specific aims—such as community-based expectations—and universal appeals, market imperatives, and systems of patronage? Addressing those questions, he notes that ethnic media help authorities reach citizens who lack functional bilingualism or fluency in the official state language. For instance, the official newspaper of Tajikistan's Sughd province has been edited in three language versions since 1930: *Khakikati Leninobod* in Tajik, *Leninabadskaia pravda* in Russian, and *Leninobod Khakikati* in Uzbek (Truth of Leninabad). Certainly state-owned minority language media serve the interests of their editors, who are state administrations; their editorial leaning favors the authorities. However, their impact is questionable because of low public interest in reading government decisions and official chronicles. Thus their circulation has dropped, and most copies circulate to the subscribing state administrations. Other minority media are edited by ethnic associations and sometimes by private interests.

His study also looks at the education of minority journalists. It finds that universities and foreign trainers generally offer courses only in the state language or Russian, so journalists for Uzbek-language media in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, or Tajik-language media in Uzbekistan, receive no such training in the language they write or broadcast in.

Ferrando finds that the minority press shows vitality but cautions that ethnic specialization in multiethnic societies may lead to the "ghettoization" of minority newspapers and marginalization of their audiences. The research concludes that a highly differentiated public sphere—where minorities talk to and among themselves in their native languages amid a deaf mainstream culture—does not promote shared space and values. The republics' borders in Soviet times were insignificant, so minority media circulated freely within their respective language groups; today, each nation-state enforces strict border controls. Finding cross-cutting cleavages is a more creative solution than restricting mainstream and minority cultures and their media channels.

The Human Impact of Press Constraints
(Eric Freedman)

From the perspective of individual journalists and independent or opposition media, the situation in Tajikistan that Gross and Kenny discuss has much in common with the situation elsewhere in Central Asia, as Eric Freedman of Michigan State University, U.S., details. His research into the human impact of press constraints explores dangers for journalists. The reasons include the authoritarian nature of its regimes, lack of a tradition of independent media, inadequate education and training for journalists, pressure on journalists and news organizations to advance the development of national identity and statehood, and fiscal dependence on governments, political parties, oligarchs, business interests, and foreign donors. Yet if a principal role of post-Soviet journalism is building public support for transparent, honest, participatory institutions, individual journalists and their mass media outlets

must be free to report on public affairs and controversial issues in a fair, accurate, balanced, ethical, and professional way.

The study highlights several high-profile incidents of assassination, assault, disappearance, self-exile, and arrest and puts them into a broader context of press constraints: In Kazakhstan, Oralgaisha Omarshanova of the Astana-based independent weekly *Zakon i pravosudiye* (Law and Justice), disappeared on 30 March, 2007. In Kyrgyzstan, Alisher Saipov, a human rights activist, editor of the Uzbek-language newspaper *Siyasot*, and contributor to Voice of America, Institute for War & Peace Reporting, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and independent online outlets Ferghana.ru and Uznews, was murdered on 24 October, 2007. In Turkmenistan, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty contributor Sazak Durdymuradov was arrested by secret police on 24 June, 2008, tortured, and detained in a psychiatric hospital; and in Uzbekistan, independent journalist Solidzhon Abdurakhmonov received a ten-year prison sentence on 10 October, 2008 on fabricated drug charges. Those kinds of incidents deter professionalism and independence and may provoke journalists to go into self-exile, as some did after covering the military's violent suppression of protests in Uzbekistan.

The study identifies the challenge for press rights advocates and defenders to keep the issue fresh and prominent for multiple publics: ordinary citizens and decision-makers inside and outside Central Asia, multinational agencies, and foreign NGOs involved in civil society development and democracy-building. While official reports are one avenue for meeting that challenge, it may be more effective to disseminate personalized accounts of journalists at risk. That strategy may pressure regimes to release imprisoned journalists, punish attackers, rein in abusive officials, and take other action to ameliorate repressive conditions.

Western Broadcasting to Central Asia
(Navbahor Imamova)

An important avenue to diversify news and opinions is for outside news and information sources to circumvent domestic controls and provide content directly to their audiences. International broadcaster Navbahor Imamova of the Voice of America (VOA) Uzbek Service looks at the reach of three Western external news outlets into Uzbekistan: VOA, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL).

International broadcasters have always struggled to maintain audiences within Uzbekistan and have never attracted more than four percent of potential listeners. Reasons include the fact that international shortwave broadcasts are often jammed and the agencies are be short-staffed and underfunded. Despite such obstacles, the quality and reliability of their content provide a competitive edge; they supply informative, critical analysis of current policies, plus accurate news and information that opens a wider window to the outside world.

Despite the struggle to serve audiences in Uzbekistan, Imamova cautions against underestimating the importance of international broadcasting to the development of civil society. BBC, RFE/RL, and VOA enable political opposition forces to have their voices amplified. However, it is also important in developing civil society that international broadcasters not become advocates or mouthpieces for these groups and avoid promoting specific agendas of domestic opposition groups or interests. Instead, they should reflect a balanced approach to issues so audiences receive information to make decisions and form their own opinions. International broadcasters also can help drive the domestic news agenda because journalists, editors, and producers at state broadcast and independent stations use them to inform their own programming.

Imamova's study found a continuing need in Central Asia for improving local and independent media. Respondents and interviewees confirmed that the dearth of non-governmental press and elec-

tronic media remains a major barrier to developing civil society. It concludes that these three international broadcasters often provide the only dependable sources of uncensored news, although they are not immune to criticism as post-Cold War anachronisms and foreign propaganda agents.

Supporters of international broadcasting services argue that the process of change requires nurturing, and that RFE/RL and VOA shortwave radio remains an effective way to reach audiences in closed countries like Uzbekistan. All are available on the Internet, and Imamova documents how the Web's spread expands their reach and programming as vital sources of information unavailable through domestic media.

Journalism Education and Professionalism

Journalism Education in Kazakhstan
(Maureen Nemecek, Stanley Ketterer, Galiya Ibraeva, and Stanislav Los)

In exploring the education and preparation of aspiring journalists, independent scholar Maureen Nemecek, Stanley Ketterer of Oklahoma State University in the U.S., and Galiya Ibrayeva and Stanislav Los of Kazakh National University review journalism education in Kazakhstan in light of the history of the country's mass media. Its first professional journalists were trained in Alma-Ata in 1934 by the Kazakh Communistic Institute of Journalism, forerunner of the faculty of journalism at al-Faraby Kazakh State (now National) University. Teachers considered it a great honor to be a journalism teacher in Soviet times because of the prestige, possibility of wealth and status, and feeling of solidarity with institutions of power.

Changes in overall ideology have led to significant changes in the journalism curriculum since independence. Gone are courses on propaganda, demagoguery, Marxism-Leninism, and the theory of communist Soviet journalism; much more attention focuses on practical aspects of journalism, press freedom, and legal protections for the mass media. Leaving the Soviet mentality behind has not been easy. The method for changing or adding to the curriculum remains bureaucratically cumbersome, for example, and some professionals complain that their university training did not provide skills necessary to do their jobs.

The study finds the legacy of Soviet journalism ideology and practice lingers today long and that privatization, the marketplace, competition, and creation of new curricula challenge educators who seek to prepare a new generation of professionals to advance a media system that better serves the public.

The country has twenty faculties (departments or colleges) of journalism, five of them private, and regional universities offer journalism on an as-needed basis. In the authors' survey, journalism instructors said teaching ability has more influence on students than curriculum but favored updates to include new media and student internships. They supported teaching focused on national history and culture, and training students to report the country's accomplishments; some recommended that the curriculum emphasize accomplishments of past Kazakh journalists and writers and the country's traditions.

Asked how to help instructors to teach better job, respondents' main ideas recommendations were higher salaries, less paperwork, and stronger support for scholarship. They said reforms and incentives should assist teachers in improving their qualifications to meet student demands in a changing media technology environment. The study notes instructors' interest in forming an association to advance professionalism through a support network for grant opportunities, syllabi, research ideas, conferences, and academic journals.

Obstacles to Professional Practices and Ethics in Kyrgyzstan
(Gregory Pitts)

While the study of university-level journalism education in Kazakhstan examines questions relevant to the preparation of future journalists, survey research by Gregory Pitts of the University of North Alabama, U.S., shows that Kyrgyzstani professionals value "correct" professional practices, such as applying their training and learning new journalism skills. Professionalism lies at the heart of their support for press freedom. The study notes that failing economic conditions have separated the Kyrgyz population into a small cadre of government supporters with access to wealth and from a much broader impoverished population. Meanwhile, a separate class—journalists—aspires to thrive personally and professionally in a field that offers only limited prospects for financial security.

Thirty-one full-time and sixty part-time journalists, the majority women, participated in the project. Others chose not to take part out of concern about potential intimidation and violence.

Pitts found that journalists significantly value a number of factors, such as the chance to learn new skills, career advancement opportunities, a job that fully uses their professional abilities, and opportunities for originality and initiative. All four of those factors received ratings of extremely important or quite important from more than 95 percent of the respondents. Fewer than half gave similar high ratings to whether the job was essential to their community or whether they could change their workplace.

Aside from elements of professionalism, three other variables ranked high in importance among respondents: personal security—a good salary; job enjoyment; and job security. At the same time, fewer than 75 percent considered it extremely important or quite important to have a job that carries prestige, does not disrupt family life, and provides contact with important people.

As another signal of their commitment to professionalism, more than 70 percent of those surveyed foresaw themselves as pursing some element of media work in the next five years despite uncertainties about the country's media environment.

The study also examined journalism practices. In response to questions about ethics, the survey found that only 30 percent agreed that journalists should be willing to go to jail to protect the identity of confidential sources; 56 percent agreed or strongly agreed that journalists could accept trips paid for by government or business if no "story-specific coverage" is required. Three-quarters felt journalists should periodically take refresher courses, and more than 70 percent favored certification of professional journalists.

New Media, New Frontiers

Internet Libel in Tajikistan
(Kristine Kohlmeier and Navruz Nekbakhtshoev)

While Uzbekistan's strict regulation of the Internet, including access and content, formed the focus of Hordegen's study, Kristine Kohlmeier, an attorney, and Navruz Nekbakhtshoev of Indiana University, U.S., examine the extension of Tajikistan's criminal libel law to the Internet. The context of their research is a country where widespread Internet use is prohibitive due to power shortages, antiquated electrical infrastructure, theft of equipment, lack of skilled computer technicians, poor Internet connections, reliance on slow modems, language limitations regarding Web use, outdated or unavailable software, and obstacles related to government controls. The government has shut Web

sites that "undermined the state's policies," although filtering and blocking sites is generally not official policy lest it jeopardize access to foreign aid.

The country's post-independence civil war remains a pretext for restraints on free expression. The regime proffers several rationales for its criminal libel laws. One is "information security," which is similar to—but broader than—legal provisions guarding state secrets. For example, information security includes limits on distribution of information about pornography, violence, and ethnic and religious hostility, as well as information that tends to "discredit the honor and dignity of the state and the president." Another proffered rationale is to enhance the professionalism of journalists by making reporters and editors "think about the consequences of their actions before they do anything"—an approach that encourages self-censorship.

Journalists were not consulted before the Majlisi Oli, the parliamentary body dominated by the president's party, made the libel law applicable to the Internet in 2007. Online violators face potential heavy fines and jail sentences. In terms of enforcement, distribution through the Internet is hard to track because content can be easily forwarded, reposted, translated, and sent through blogs, chatrooms, social networking sites, and listservs; content also can be hosted on servers in multiple countries. Meanwhile, the law is detrimental to democratization by deterring journalists and lay commentators from writing openly about internal affairs while the regime monopolizes mainstream print and broadcast communications.

Given the trans-border reach of the Internet and Tajikistan's close ties with regional powers Russia and China, extension of national libel law carries international implications. Given that most critical Web sites are hosted outside the country and do not use .tj in their domain names, it remains to be seen whether those countries will help Tajikistan enforce its Internet libel amendments.

Blogs as an Alternative to Official Information in Kyrgyzstan
(Svetlana Kulikova and David Perlmutter)

The Hordegen and Kohlmeier-Nekbakhtshoev research examines government constraints on the Internet. Taking a different approach, Svetlana Kulikova of Georgia State University, U.S., and David Perlmutter of the University of Iowa, U.S., address the Web's potential to circumvent government controls and supply non-official information to the public. Their case study about the toppling of autocratic President Askar Akaev assesses the Akaevu.net (Akaevu.net means "down with Akaev" in Russian) blog in the run-up to the Tulip Revolution of 2005 as a temporary vehicle for disseminating news and information regarding the country's volatile political situation. They found no direct link between Akaevu.net and similar advocacy blogs and the downfall of the regime.

Akaevu.net was launched one day before the revolution by the administrators of gazeta.kg, an online opposition newspaper whose own site had been blocked or hacked by the government. Operating for about one month, it was hosted and administered from the United States and positioned itself as "a trumpet of the Kyrgyz revolution." Its predominantly Russian-language content targeted users of the Russian segment of the Internet with a combination of stories from mainstream media and Web sites, material generated by bloggers, and reader comments, some of them anonymous. It included as proprietary material the group created, such as petitions, analyses, and alternative interpretations of other media stories. English-language content came from foreign media.

Akaevu.net could break news—as it did with an exclusive advance announcement that a recently imprisoned opposition leader would make his first television appearance—or make mistakes—as with an erroneous report attributed to another source that Akaev had resigned. And as an advocacy blog its content was understandably imbalanced: Almost half the posted stories that mentioned Akaev

or his family were negative, about the same proportion was neutral, and few were favorable to the president.

The study concludes that such Third World blogs—virtual "samizdat" media in the context of Soviet history—can be significant producers, collectors, distillers, distributors, and exhibitors of information and can serve as either constructive critics that facilitate public debate or lonely opposition voices "cornered" on the Internet for a limited number of users. Their research offers insights into new technologies that may lessen press controls and governmental information management in Central Asia by providing a space where anonymity can shield bloggers with little risk of tracing and where readers can engage in commentary and dialog.

Summary and Conclusions

This wide range of contemporary mass media research illustrates how Central Asia press outlets remain tightly controlled and manipulated, first under the czars, then under the Soviets, and now under authoritarian regimes. Over the past two decades, the press systems have not achieved even minimal democratization and independence by international standards. Perhaps the Internet and other technologies will have a better chance of circumventing censors and the economic obstacles that deny the great mass of Central Asians the ability to participate in a useful dialog leading to more transparent and participatory governance.

Several overarching observations emerge from this synthesized examination of recent research. The five separate press systems that replaced the single Soviet system share many commonalities, although significant differences also exist. These studies indicate varying but not decisive degrees of external influences from multi-governmental entities, media-building foundations, and promoters of civil society; such influences on Central Asian media development originate with mostly Western-based journalism and mass media trainers.

Another observation concerns regimes' use and abuse of laws to control information about public affairs and public issues. That pattern evident from several studies reflects a disconnect between constitutional and statutory guarantees of press freedom on one side and actual threats to those guarantees on the other side due to libel and "honor and dignity" suits, criminal prosecutions, and tightening regulation of the Internet.

Examined collectively, these studies suggest the following obstacles to democratic and independent media development in Central Asia:

- strict governmental and extra-governmental restraints on the press, regardless of the type of medium—print, broadcast, or Internet;
- inadequate professional training, leadership, resources, financial incentives, and ethical standards for journalists and prospective journalists;
- limitations on the ability of domestic and international press and human rights defenders to compel changes in policies and laws;
- insufficient market resources to create and sustain independent news organizations; and
- a resulting lack of credibility and public trust in the press.

Important lessons relevant to the future of Central Asia press systems emerge. First, the virtually complete absence of independent media is a significant barrier to democratic institutions and human rights protections. Press freedom is not an end to itself, but a cornerstone of civil society and the rule of law.

A second lesson is that foreign models of press systems and journalism education and training cannot serve as templates for Central Asia. The structure of news organizations, their operations, and their regulation in any country—developed or lesser-developed, authoritarian or post-authoritarian—must reflect that country's traditions, cultural values, societal standards, and political and economic realities. Journalism models and press conventions cannot be summarily imported and transplanted.

As a cautionary note, we recognize that a country's media environment, like its political environment, is subject to unpredictable change. For example, Kyrgyzstan experienced growing authoritarianism, including tighter constraints on the press, in the five years following the March 2005 Tulip Revolution that ousted President Askar Akaev. An April 2010 coup removed Akaev's successor, raising hopes for a liberalization of media controls. Events intervened again in June 2010 with the outbreak of ethnic violence in the south of the country, raising fears that the interim regime would again suppress press rights and other individual liberties as a means of retaining control.

That said, there is some reason for optimism that these countries will move toward wider adoption of new media technologies and greater participation in the global economy by accelerating press development, including eventual acceptance of international media standards such as a higher degree of media accuracy, fairness, balance, and ethical professional practices. If so, however, they will move at their individual paces, whether voluntarily or under pressure from foreign donors and multinational organizations.