

## FORUM REPORT 013

## Mass Media in Japan, Fake News in the World

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## The Japanese Media in flux: Watchdog or Fake News?

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The Japanese media are diverse, vibrant, and trusted by the public. In recent years, however, this trust has declined, although it is unclear to what extent. Foreign and domestic critics, including within the Japanese media, have expressed concern, with some claiming that press freedom is in decline.

Japanese newspapers have been feeling the effects of the Internet, as in other countries. Although circulation and advertising revenue are down, Japan still enjoys a large media presence. As of April 2017, the Japan Newspaper Publishers & Editors Association's membership consisted of 104 newspapers, 4 wire services, and 22 television stations, for a total of 130 companies. Many other magazines and Internet-based publications do not belong to the Association but are widely read and influential.

Although the level of public trust in the media has dropped over the last 10 years, it remains high. In a 2017 Japan Press Research Institute study, 70.0 percent of the public answered that they trust the National Broadcaster NHK, and 68.7 percent indicated that they trust newspapers. In a 2016 poll conducted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIAC), 70.1 percent of respondents answered that they "always" or "mostly" trusted newspapers, with 65.5 percent saying so about television, compared to 33.8 percent for the Internet and 20.5 percent for magazines.

On the other hand, in a study by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, only 44 percent of the Japanese public answered that "most of the time I trust the news

that I use." This placed Japan 28th out of 36 countries. In the Japan Press Research Institute study, only 28.9 percent answered that newspapers served as a watchdog against the government, with 42.4 percent thinking that "newspapers do not report on all they know about politicians." In the MIAC poll, while 73.5% trusted newspapers for politics and economics, only 51.2% did so for "the safety of nuclear energy" and 56.9% for "diplomatic issues in East Asia." Various studies also show that younger people tend to trust the media less.

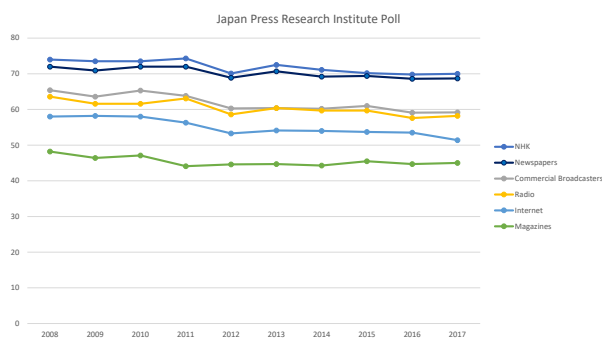
Many critics raise the "Kisha (press) clubs" as a symbol of both the closed nature of the press and the close relationship between reporters and the people they cover. However, the nature and tone of this criticism seems to be changing, especially following the Fukushima nuclear accident in 2011 and the Liberal Democratic Party's return to power in 2012. In a media context where reporters are closely linked to the establishment, observers—including foreign journalists within and outside of Japan, as well as David Kaye, the UN's Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression—have expressed growing concern about the viability of watchdog reporting and the freedom of the press in Japan.

These concerns are given credence by Japan's falling rank in the World Press Freedom Index compiled by Reporters Without Borders (Reporters Sans Frontières, or RSF). Japan's position has dropped steadily from 11th place in 2010 to 72nd place in 2016 and 2017. In its latest report, RSF states that "Media freedom in Japan has been declining ever since Shinzo Abe became Prime Minister again in 2012. What

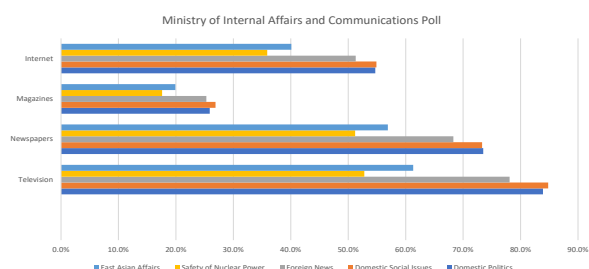
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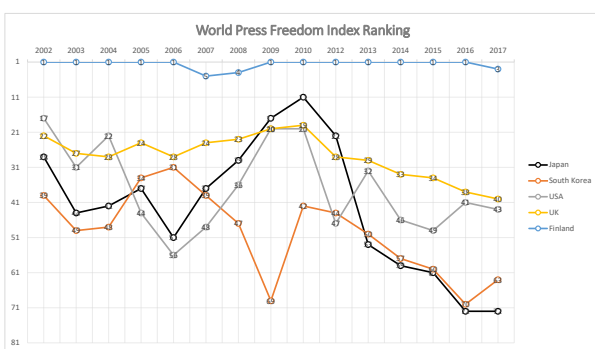
## Trust in Japanese Media



## Trust in Media over different subjects



## Japan Dropping in Press Freedom Index



with controversial dismissals and resignations, growing self-censorship within the leading media groups and a system of “kisha clubs” (reporters’ clubs) that discriminate against freelancers and foreign reporters, journalists have difficulty serving the public interest and fulfilling their role as democracy’s watchdogs.” The report also mentions harassment by nationalist groups against reporters who cover certain subjects, and a law passed by the Abe Administration concerning the classification of “Specially Designated Secrets.” RSF has also

repeatedly raised issues concerning Fukushima, citing a “climate of censorship and self-censorship” and the lack of access to the accident site by freelance and foreign journalists.

Much of this criticism mentions the *Asahi Shimbun*, one of Japan’s major daily newspapers. In 2014, the paper retracted parts of its past reporting on the “comfort women” issue and also retracted a major story about the Fukushima accident, leading to the resignation of the president of the company and a large drop in circulation and trust.

Domestic criticism against the media has also been on the rise. The term “fake news” has entered the Japanese lexicon, not only in the sense of fabricated news, but also in the sense that U.S. President Donald Trump uses it: to denigrate and dismiss news that he does not admit is true or is not to his liking. Two stories connected with the Abe Administration, involving Moritomo Gakuen and Kake Gakuen, illustrate this trend.

Moritomo Gakuen is a private school in Osaka that was running a kindergarten emphasizing conservative education. It was planning to open an elementary school, and Ms. Akie Abe, Prime Minister Abe’s wife, agreed to be the “honorary principal.” The school hoped to obtain a parcel of government-owned real estate, and after negotiations with the Ministry of Finance and the Kinki Financial Bureau, they arranged to buy it for a heavily discounted price. After the land deal became apparent in February 2017, the circumstances surrounding it, and whether the school’s ties to Ms. Abe had any effect, developed into a major story. However, Mr. Abe has denied that either he or his wife were involved with the land purchase.

Kake Gakuen is another private school, whose chairman is an old friend of Mr. Abe. The school had long been trying to obtain a license to open a veterinary school but had not been successful because of restrictions on the number of veterinarians in Japan. In 2015, the Abe Administration decided to make an exception for new veterinary schools if they met certain criteria, and Imabari city in Ehime Prefecture, where Kake Gakuen had planned its school, applied and was approved. In May of 2017, it emerged that the Ministry of Education had kept documents that said that officials had been told that the veterinary school was “the Prime Ministers’ will.” Again, Mr. Abe has denied any involvement, but the two stories dominated political coverage in 2017.

At the same time, the two stories have been taken as symbols of “slanted reporting” by groups and individuals supportive of Mr. Abe. One LDP politician said in the National Diet that “The Moritomo story is not a scandal but rather news where the facts are not being reported properly. If you asked Mr. Trump he would call it fake news.” A different politician called the reporting of “the prime minister’s will” a “fabrication.” A conservative commentator, Eitaro Ogawa, published a book on the *Asahi*’s reporting of the two stories, calling it “the worst crime by reporting in postwar Japan.”

It has also become more common for mainstream media organizations to criticize each other. For example, the Sanki group set up a website, “Japan Forward,” which “aims to present the true face of Japan.” The site includes commentary such as “Ugly Truth: Is the Japanese Media Bent on Criticizing Abe at All Costs?” and “Slanted, Sensationalized News: How Some Japanese Media Have Gone Into Slow Suicide.” The latter article claimed that the coverage of Moritomo and Kake was “embarrassing and a disgrace to the profession.”

Is the situation in Japan so dire? To be certain, the media in Japan could do much to improve their reputation. Fierce competition between various organizations, while positive in some respects, often leads to a pack mentality in which people worry more about matching the competition’s reporting than producing original stories. The reliance on press clubs contributes to this, and also to the prominence of reporting on various ministries and government policies. The press clubs do have a long history of being closed to freelancers and foreign news organizations, and although this originated as a way to make sure that only “proper news organizations” were members, it has not kept up with the changing media environment. Although some progress has been made in this regard, there are still cases where the clubs are closed, and the authorities will not easily give out information to non-members.

Other problems include the tendency to merge opinion and news, and heavy reliance on anonymous sources. Reporting on subjects such as national security and the constitution tends to match each organization’s editorial stance, and reporters too frequently agree to sources’ requests to speak off the record.” Too many stories cite “high ranking officials” and “government sources.” without trying to identify the source for the readers.

On the other hand, some of the criticisms of the Japanese media are based upon important misconceptions. The existence of press clubs, for example, does not necessarily result in kid-glove treatment of the government. Media organizations often fail to recognize the merits of certain policies. While reporting on the Fukushima accident had problems and the Japanese press was late in trying to enter the accident zone and the surrounding areas, the popular suggestion that the media “only told the official version of events” is highly misleading; the meltdown and its aftermath were covered exhaustively. Foreign criticisms that the Japanese media are too obedient and domestic criticisms that they are too reflexively critical cannot both be true.

One interesting recent development is that the Abe Administration is reportedly considering changes to Japan’s Broadcast Act to be “politically fair.” According to both the *Yomiuri Shimbun* and the *Mainichi Shimbun*, irritation over critical reporting has figured in this consideration, with the idea that it could lead to a more conservative broadcasting station. Conservative groups have also argued that “deregula-

tion is necessary to get rid of fake news.”

One also hears a great deal of concern about “access journalism.” This is a curious phrase. Access to authority is critical for informed reporting, whether in Japan or overseas. In the United States, the White House Correspondents Association takes pride in its access to the White House. In presidential campaigns, “embedded journalists” follow candidates for months on end. How is that different from Japan?

While some members of the Abe Administration may be more combative with the press than was the case with past governments, the change has not been so great as to warrant Japan’s drop in the RSF rankings. Indeed, Cedric Aliviani, the Taipei Bureau Director for RSF, says that “the rankings are not scientific but rather an editorial decision.” Although RSF receives input based on a detailed questionnaire, Mr. Aliviani explains that they have high expectations for democratic countries such as Japan, and therefore judge them on higher standards than more authoritarian countries, which leads to lower rankings when there are issues. The Abe Administration’s attitude towards advocacy groups such as RSF is also one reason that the rankings are dropping, with Mr. Aliviani saying that their non-response to questions, and their failure to meet with fact finding missions, have led to an impression that “they do not want to recognize the existence of problems.”

The reporting coming out of Japan does not seem to be as bad as its reputation, either. For instance, NHK has been much derided for “following the will of the government” both inside and outside of Japan, but in 2016 it was the organization that first reported that Emperor Akihito was considering abdication, something that the Abe Administration at first strenuously denied, and then tried to play down. In 2017 NHK also was the first organization to report that while the Ministry of Defense was claiming that government records concerning a peacekeeping mission in South Sudan had been destroyed, electronic copies actually existed within the Ministry, which was one factor leading to Minister Tomomi Inada’s resignation. NHK has also been participating in the reporting done by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, which was responsible for the Panama Papers and Paradise Papers investigations.

*Asahi Shimbun* must also be mentioned. Although criticized for giving up investigative reporting, it has been the leading media organization on both the Moritomo and Kake stories, with much of the coverage coming from investigative reporting. Concerning the Moritomo story, in March 2018 the *Asahi* reported that there was a possibility that the Ministry of Finance had manipulated records about the land transaction, and after a few days the Ministry admitted to doing so, including erasing Ms. Abe’s name. Although the Abe Administration has denied that any politicians were involved in the manipulation, it has raised anew questions about what happened and why the Ministry felt it needed to

falsify public records.

Regarding the events of 2014, the retraction of the reporting on both comfort women and the Fukushima incident was a major embarrassment and blow to the paper's trust. However, the retractions were not the result of bowing to pressure from the government, as has been suggested. The Press and Human Rights Committee of the *Asahi*, made up of outside experts, came to the conclusion after looking into the reporting on Fukushima that "contents of the coverage had serious errors and the articles lacked a fair and accurate reporting stance." Facing the facts like this is necessary and could lead to a renewal of trust.



Following the presentation, the first commenter observed that the ongoing discussions around broadcasting laws are contentious. For example, the Abe administration has been considering abolishing Article 4 of the Broadcast Act, which requires the holders of broadcast licenses to maintain political fairness and give viewers a diversity of viewpoints. In the United States, the abolition of an equivalent fairness doctrine has increased political polarization, and while Article 4 has been criticized by both the right and the left, abolishing it might have a similar effect in Japan, thereby decreasing public trust in the media. Moreover, Article 4 functions as a double-edged sword: it gives the government a legal basis for media control, but also provides broadcasters with a shield when they need to stand up to the government.

The next commenter asked about portrayals in the New York Times and other Western media outlets that the relationship between politicians and the media is especially problematic in Japan. Is this relationship not always contentious? Politicians everywhere want good press. Mr. Nakai responded that the relationship is not necessarily quintessentially Japanese. However, it is difficult to do on-the-record individual interviews with the prime minister, since there is a mutual agreement between the prime minister and the press not to do so. This began as an undertaking to prevent arbitrariness in which paper the prime minister granted interviews to, but this gentleman's agreement does not serve readers. Police, prosecutors, and the courts are even more closed to the foreign press. The media could do a better job of encouraging these to open up to foreign media, but fear of jeopardizing access may be an impediment.

The next commenter asked whether the business side of the media is important in shaping the relationship between journalists and politicians. Mr. Nakai responded that Japan has been less eager to go digital than other countries, which means that the newspapers still enjoy robust circulation, but also that the younger generation has less interest. We still tell the news in a print-oriented way and do not take advantage of as many digital tools as we could.

The next commenter agreed that RSF's rankings are not

scientific and that Japan's press club system has analogues in the United States and elsewhere, and noted also that, while the United States abandoned a fairness doctrine, other countries have not. Japan's situation is neither unusual nor unique.

The next commenter asked a series of questions about newspapers. Does Japan have a newspaper of record? Do newspapers make an effort to offer diversity of opinion? What is the role of wire services? In other countries, over-reliance on wire services is often thought to lie behind journalistic homogeneity. Mr. Nakai responded that *The Asahi Shimbun* and several other papers might qualify as a paper of record. After 2014, *The Asahi Shimbun* made a concerted effort to have more opinion writers, including conservative ones. However, the newspaper's liberal readers have not been pleased. We have seen similar trends in the United States; there is a tendency by both readers and newspapers to compartmentalize themselves. However, it is healthier to have a diversity of opinions. As for the wire services, they give content to our local newspapers and are very influential regionally. However, there has not been a local or regional paper that has been particularly innovative, perhaps partly because of reliance on wire services.

The next commenter asked about the ranking in the Freedom Index. Are freelance journalists not more critical of organized systems? The Washington and UN press clubs, for example, restrict access to bloggers and freelancers. From the point of view of RSF, should this not mean that the UN does not support freedom of the press? In Japan, things have actually opened up over the years. Foreign journalists cannot be everywhere; perhaps if there were more of them in Japan, they might be able to get better access by working day and night to build relationships with officials as Japanese journalists do. In this sense, why should we take Japan's RSF ranking at face value, since it does not take such factors into account? Mr. Nakai reiterated that RSF is an advocacy group; they do not do scientific rankings. They do research and surveys, but ultimately rankings are editorial decisions. Since Japan is a democracy with an open press, it is judged more harshly because it is thought that Japan could do better.

The next commenter observed that Japanese newspapers interfere less in elections than do newspapers in many countries, since they do not make endorsements. Of course, it is possible that they do not have the freedom to do so. Would Japan rise in the press freedom rankings if newspapers suddenly decided to endorse a particular candidate or party? Mr. Nakai responded that the Japanese public is vocally opposed to having their media organizations endorsing politicians and parties, so it is hard to imagine this happening.

The same commenter pointed out that in the U.S. media, it is often said that there is a strict distinction between ordinary articles and editorials. This might be true, but there can be a strong editorial spin in so-called "ordinary" articles.

This is true in Japan as well. Then there is the section called “Shakai-bu [City News]” which has a dubious interview standard—e.g., interviewing non-specialists such as poets or celebrities about topics such as national security. These interviewees often express alarmist views, which then also make headlines. Mr. Nakai replied that City News departments tend to take a “man-in-the-street” approach in order to show the public the news in a more relatable way. We see this in the United States as well. It is supposed to be a friendlier way to access the news, but it can lead to oversimplification.

The next commenter noted that when we talk about Japan’s press freedom, we often refer to global rankings, but as we have discussed, these can be problematic. What about other sources, such as UN special rapporteurs? Mr. Nakai replied that these rapporteurs speak as individuals, so their reports vary in their standards of accuracy. At the same time, Japan and the Japanese media pay a great deal of attention to the UN, so when a special rapporteur’s report is released it tends to gather more attention than might be the case in a country such as the United States.

The next commenter observed that the presumption today is that the quality of a democracy is somehow a direct function of the quality of the media, but this may not be strictly true. There are multiple dimensions the quality of democracy, including the trust and the judgement of readers.

Next, a commenter drew attention to curated sites that mix real articles with fake news. For example, the site “Hoshu Sokuho [Conservative Breaking News]” always supports Mr. Abe and attacks other media, but uses the term “fake news.” The fake news generated by these sites is shared and amplified via Twitter and Facebook. Worryingly, these sites are often the first point of contact for many young people seeking news. How can we deal with this kind of fake news and its

spread? Mr. Nakai responded that there is no easy answer. Curated sites can be useful, but they do tend to have a political slant. Young people tend to get information or even just an impression through the Internet, without necessarily reading the articles. We also have paywalls that restrict access, but young people are not going to pay without knowing what they are getting. This is a global dilemma: how do we convince people that paying for journalism is important?

The next commenter observed that in his experience, when writing or commenting in North America, media outlets tend not to care what he says as long as he says it well, but that when commenting in the Japanese media, editors can seem eager to micro-manage the content. What explains this difference? Nakai-san replied that this may be partly a distinct characteristic of the Japanese media, but may also reflect greater sensitivity following the 2014 retractions. Another distinct characteristic is that Japanese papers tend to have less analysis by experts than in North America. One reason is that articles tend to be shorter. Another is that Japanese newspapers tend to move their staff around every few years in order to get fresh people on the beat, so you do not get the same degree of continuity.

A final commenter observed that the bureaucratic way that Japanese society is organized means that there is a large need to rely on informal institutions. Journalists have to get close to their sources, otherwise they will not get stories. Such close and informal relationships are assets for journalists everywhere, but the downside is that if you get too close, you can be manipulated. The fact that Japanese society is organized around stable bureaucratic organizations could shape the reporter-source relationship to a degree, but this may look collusive, especially to non-Japanese and freelancers who are outside the network.

## The War on Truth in Donald Trump's America—and Beyond

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It is obvious that things have changed in journalism over the years. Producers and consumers of news are living in different world of values, principles, and beliefs than in earlier eras of journalism. “Truth” and “facts” have become elusive, slippery, and politicized. For some politicians and their supporters, they do not seem to matter at all. This poses new challenges for journalists seeking to find the facts, present the truth, and report on and analyze the news. How are journalists to find and verify facts and tell stories with credibility, clarity, and authority? What is the role of technology in all this, and what is our moral responsibility to society in the age of “fake news”?

It is a stark truth that current trends are not only different, but also dangerous to journalism as an institution and to the people who work within it. But that does not mean that journalists or the societies they serve are helpless or incapable of telling the truth in an increasingly truthless world. We must adapt. We can do so by committing ourselves to rigorous, imaginative journalism.

We can learn a lot about the prevalence and dangerous consequences of “fake news” by the attack carried out at a Washington, D.C. pizza restaurant called Comet Ping Pong in December, 2016. A theory had been circulating on Internet message boards, right-wing podcasts, and social media that the Clintons and various Democratic Party operatives were involved in kidnapping and sexually exploiting children. The alleged headquarters for this alleged conspiracy was supposed to be in the basement of this D.C. pizza parlour. Self-appointed Internet sleuths pored over photos of the restaurant, looking for clues and symbols in the artwork and in descriptions of pizza orders, certain that they were on the trail of the darkest criminality and rot. They were aided by the more cynical, opportunistic, and credulous elements of the right wing media and political landscape. For example, President Trump's former national security advisor, Michael Flynn, and his son Michael Flynn Jr., both tweeted about the Clintons' alleged ties to child sex trafficking. Then, in December, 2016, a man drove from North Carolina to Comet Ping Pong, walked in with an assault rifle, and fired shots into the ceiling, determined to “investigate” the crimes he was sure were taking place in the parlour's non-existent basement. After his arrest, some of #pizzagate's faithful believers pivoted, claiming that the shooter was an actor who had been paid to stage the shooting as part of a plot to delegitimize gun ownership rights. Despite being obviously and verifiably false, the #pizzagate narrative has evolved and con-

tinues to live on.

The Comet Pizza story is a dark manifestation of fake news—where it starts, how it can spread, and the damage it can cause. Fake news can kill people, as it nearly did here. It can also damage democracy. Timothy Snyder, a professor of history at Yale University who has chronicled the Holocaust and the rise of fascism, says this of the danger of fake news: “To abandon facts is to abandon freedom. If nothing is true, then no one can criticize power, because there is no basis on which to do so. If nothing is true, then all is spectacle.” This summarizes much of what is happening today in Donald Trump's America.

“Fake news” is not new. It is as American as Hollywood and Broadway. The United States has long been obsessed with conspiracy, and this thinking has long produced “fake news” about major events, from Roswell to the moon landing to 9/11. There is a “paranoid style” to American politics, as the esteemed historian Richard Hofstadter said in 1964. That was long before the Internet; today, with its considerable help, public paranoia is in full, unbridled flight.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a celebrated scholar before he became a U.S. Senator, famously observed that “Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not to his own facts.” In the post-truth media landscape, people routinely mobilize their own untrue “facts” to promote and defend the narratives in which they are invested. Having your own facts means that there are other versions of the “truth” that have nothing to do with objective reality. These versions of the “truth” acquire their own perverse credibility in some circles.

Today, Washington swims in a sea of falsehood and innuendo. Accuracy matters less than immediacy, impact, and engagement. Errors are the rule and corrections the exception. Facts have become passé, a kind of inconvenience for the political operatives and partisan loyalists, impatient to defend their agenda and worldview. In this, Trump is a master.

Today, denying the truth means that the Russians did not influence the election (despite strong evidence to the contrary) and that Donald Trump won in a “massive landslide,” rather than with only 56.8 percent of the Electoral College, and 2.8 million votes fewer than Hillary Clinton. Trump claimed that he would have won the popular vote but for illegal voting by undocumented immigrants. He set up a commission to investigate this alleged voting, but abandoned it when it could not find evidence to support his story.

For journalists who have spent their careers in Washing-

ton, this new political landscape is surreal. Governments have long dealt in falsehood to advance their agendas and interests. We have known this previously as political propaganda. Vietnam, Watergate, and Iraq all changed how Americans see things. Public trust in institutions such as journalism and the presidency have declined sharply. After eight years of George W. Bush and the manipulative falsehoods of the Iraq invasion, few people believe the government as they once did.

The difference today is that we have a president who lies all the time, without regret or remorse, about easily verifiable things. He lies so much that his lies have lost the capacity to shock, surprise, or shame. Still, because these lies flow from the mouth of the president, whose words can move markets and start wars, the press think they have to treat them seriously, with customary deference and respect. Yet truth and Trump are incompatible. His statements are so grand, and his assertions so false and brazen, that we can barely keep up.

Trump's communications are like his own Fake News Network, broadcasting 24/7, launched via tweet and amplified through inevitable coverage and repetition in the press and on the Internet. During the 2016 presidential campaign, one study found that 78 percent of his claims were false. Trump and his cadre are perpetuating a completely fictional universe of "alternative facts" in which to live with their supporters. But this rejection of objective reality and the construction of an alternative, fictional reality is unfamiliar to America. We have seen it elsewhere, of course, under authoritarian regimes and in the dystopian fiction of Nineteen Eighty-Four. There is nothing today that would startle George Orwell, or even Joseph Goebbels. Trump's is a crude yet masterful propaganda that is encouraged, amplified, and transformed through new technology platforms such as social media as well as older platforms such as cable news. "Fake news" is no longer limited to the leaflets and radio broadcasts once favoured by revolutionaries and reactionaries alike. The new army of "truth tellers," for whom truth is a matter of tribal opinion, consists of millions of people with their own righteous views, facts, and smartphones with which to share them. As we saw at Comet Ping Pong, sometimes they also have their own guns.

Donald Trump may be the face of falsehood, but he cannot manage or curate the culture of fakery alone. For that, he needs the help that technology offers. Social media are havens for the purveyors of distortion and misstatement. Technology trends do not necessarily offer much hope. Artificial intelligence and data analytics, together with the vast quantity of digital image and video content online, already allow for convincing constructions of completely false statements and events. Fake news is particularly insidious because it is inexpensive to produce, unlike real news. In the face of aggressive mobilization by racists, nativists, and foreign powers, democracy must defend itself.

We thus face a reality in which the head of the world's

most powerful country, until recently viewed as a stable democracy, is now also a relentless purveyor of shameless falsehood. Journalists must ask how they can defend democracy against such a man and the forces that brought him to power.

There are a few places that we might start.

First, we need better journalism: more vigorous and substantial reporting, editing, and analysis that is relentless in the pursuit of the truth and "getting it right." This will be difficult. Journalism is expensive. The old model has broken, and the profession is struggling in the digital world to find the revenues it used to be able to count on. In Canada and elsewhere, community newspapers are failing and disappearing. Big newspapers are close to failing, and some, such as The Toronto Star, are in crisis. Papers are operating with fewer staff and less money. In Canada, serious features magazines have disappeared and there is less demand for long-form political journalism. Books are not reviewed as they once were; many serious subjects are barely discussed.

But better journalism requires a return to quality. It means finding the resources to cover local and provincial governments and the issues that are not obvious. It means requiring drawing clear lines for consumers between opinion and investigative reporting. Better journalism is broader and requires understanding that people do not get their news where they used to get it. Many people get their news from social media. Many more simply rely on word of mouth.

Better journalism also requires a commitment to calling out falsehood, flatly and unapologetically. Journalism cannot be restrained by politesse or deference; it must point out lies and falsehoods for what they are wherever it finds them.

Journalists too, must do better. They require better and broader training, not just in writing, but in statistical analysis, literature, economics, history, government, and ethics. Too many journalists have a shallow understanding of the past and are biased towards a decontextualized present.

Better journalism also requires a strong commitment to ethics. Errors should be avoided; more importantly, they should be acknowledged when they are made. Sources should be identified whenever possible; anonymous sources should be kept to a minimum. Editors should be more demanding and better able to catch and correct sloppy journalistic work. Credibility, perhaps more now than ever before, is the most important asset that a journalist has. It must never be compromised and must be protected.

Social media platforms also have a role to play. They must take greater responsibility for the content that they publish. They should strive to encourage civic value and good honest journalism. They must also take better measures to meaningfully protect privacy. However, social media platforms cannot be left to police themselves. Government regulation is required.



Following the presentation, the first commenter asked Prof. Cohen if he thought people and consumers of news consumers were becoming more gullible and naïve? Prof. Cohen responded that to some extent they are. Comet Ping Pong is truly a cautionary tale—a great number of people believe things that have no factual basis because they get amplified in the alternative media and social media echo chamber.

Next, a participant asked about the “paranoid style” of American politics. Is this a tendency of American society, or a more general characteristic of democracies? Prof. Cohen responded that there is something about the American view of the world and of history that allows Americans to be endlessly skeptical. McCarthyism thrived because the Senator had people believing that there were communists everywhere. Why did this fall on receptive ears? People had never met a communist, but they imagined that they saw them everywhere. We can laugh when people claim that NASA faked the moon landing or that 9/11 was an “inside job,” but there are a lot of people out there who believe these things. It is hard to say where this comes from—perhaps partly from a distrust of government dating back to the Revolution. There is less of this in Canada, but there is a distrust of “elites” that we have also seen in the United States. Both the Iraq War and the global financial crisis discredited elites considerably. On the other hand, this distrust seems to be selectively applied—for example, we have John Bolton, one of the fiercest boosters and defenders of the Iraq invasion, returning to Washington to serve President Trump.

The next commenter asked about the role that language plays in media criticism in the global context. For example, it is harder for foreigners to understand and criticize Japanese media because of language barriers. Prof. Cohen responded that language barriers create a wall between Japan and the rest of the world, meaning that more criticism has to come from within. For Canadian journalists in the United States, we have easier access and can criticize the United States and offer Canadian readers a view of what is happening there. At the same time, the U.S. media can access our readers directly, so we have to be able to offer something different. This makes it difficult to be a foreign correspondent in the English media ecosystem—the access is both a blessing and a curse.

Another commenter pointed out that those interested in foreign news in Japan mostly rely on Japanese broadcasters and newspapers. While more and more Japanese speak English and listen to the BBC, for example, this is still a tiny minority. National newspapers are still a strong institution, largely because the market is secluded and closed. These peculiar conditions bring advantages and disadvantages. Additionally, Japanese journalists are still very much part of the “elite.” People still respect journalists. It is still a popular job for university graduates. In Canada, what kind of people still want to be journalists, despite the dire market conditions?

Prof. Cohen replied that in Canada journalists certainly do not get reverence. If they were lawyers or doctors having the same kind of influence and position in their profession, they would be earning a lot more. But they stay because the work is important. Journalism is a hard career choice in North America. We are long past the golden age of newspapers. It seems as though the situation in Japan is utterly different; a North American journalist could only dream of working for a newspaper with a circulation of 6 million. Journalists in Japan seem to enjoy more public respect than in Canada, which makes it harder to attract good students into journalism programs and makes it more challenging for them to find good jobs at the end (perhaps only a third find careers as journalists).

Another commenter disagreed, suggesting that serious journalists are well-respected in Canada and the United States. Investigative journalism is still alive and well, as is evident in recent reporting on Canada’s arms sales to Saudi Arabia and on the failures of police forces to take accusations of sexual assault seriously. Serious journalists also exhibit a high level of self-respect because the professional ethos is still strong. These people are true believers in the mission and are happy to work despite the poor remuneration. Prof. Cohen agreed that people seem to be doing journalism for the love of it, but reiterated that remuneration and serious, long-form journalism have both declined over his career. But there are other ways to do things, especially through the Internet. People are still adjusting and figuring out how to deliver quality journalism with a sustainable business model in the new media environment. One suggestion might be to make government funding available for local newspapers.

The next participant suggested that one way for the media to do better in this difficult time would be to make greater efforts toward objectivity. Coverage today seems mostly concerned with criticism and makes relatively little effort to be evenhanded. Donald Trump exacerbated this tendency, as the former executive editor of the New York Times recently admitted. Public trust in the mainstream press might be higher today if it had been less dismissive and less disdainful. Prof. Cohen agreed; journalists must continue to innovate and be self-critical. The Columbia School of Journalism has been very critical of the New York Times. We need to understand where the Trump phenomenon came from, what journalists did wrong, and what signals they missed.

The next commenter observed that Prof. Cohen’s arguments seem to rely on the assumption that suppliers of information in Trump’s America have supplied false information with malicious intent, and that Trump and many of his supporters do not believe that mainstream news sources are providing accurate information. There is insufficient trust between suppliers and consumers of information. Most of Prof. Cohen’s recommendations put the onus on journalists’ personal efforts, but perhaps there is a third way: in Japan,

for example, the Foreign Press Centre which is independent of the government, helps foreign journalists get correct information by providing access, holding briefings, and so on. Could this model be replicated in North America? Prof. Cohen replied that the value of this for foreign journalists is clear. However, journalists are independent. They tend to dislike intermediaries, except in foreign countries, where this is a necessity due to language and other access barriers. Domestically, journalists like to go right to the source. They can go to the experts and academics anyway, but do not need an intermediary in the same way because they operate in a shared linguistic ecosystem.

The next commenter expressed concern about the way that propaganda has been embraced by authoritarian states such as Russia and China. Is there reason any reason to be opti-

mistic that this will end? Prof. Cohen said that it is hard to be optimistic in many places. Russia, Hungary, and Turkey, for example, have badly regressed. One could argue that there is less freedom of the press in the world than there was 30 years ago. There are many places where journalism is under siege.

The next participant observed that amidst all this “fake news,” we also have “funny news.” Comedians and satirists such as John Stewart and Stephen Colbert seem to be playing a greater role in delivering news to people. Is this a good thing? Prof. Cohen responded that it is good that people are aware of what is happening in the world, but they do not get all of the relevant facts about issues from late night television shows. It is a different model of interaction that puts too much emphasis on entertainment and should be no one’s sole source of information or insight.

## Reexamining Japan in Global Context Mass Media in Japan, Fake New in the World

Monday, April 2, 2018, Josui Hall, Tokyo, Japan

### Keynote Speakers

- Mr. Daisuke NAKAI, *Asahi Shimbun*
- Professor Andrew COHEN, *Carleton University*

### Project Directors

- Professor Masayuki TADOKORO, *Keio University*
- Professor David A. WELCH, *Balsillie School of International Affairs*

### Project Member

- Professor Takehiko KARIYA, *University of Oxford*
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### Guest Members

- Mr. Kiyotaka AKASAKA, *Foreign Press Center Japan*
- Professor Ikuo GONOI, *Takachiho University*
- Professor Tadashi KARUBE, *University of Tokyo*
- Professor Fumiaki KUBO, *University of Tokyo*
- Mr. Takeshi YAMAWAKI, *Asahi Shimbun*

### Observers

- Dr. Masato KIMURA, *Japan Futures Initiative*
- Ms. Kaoru KOBAYASHI, *CCC Media House*

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- Mr. Wataru IMAI, *Executive Director*
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**Daisuke Nakai** is Associate Editor of the City News Department of *The Asahi Shimbun*. He joined the Asahi in 1994 and has worked out of both its Tokyo and Osaka head offices, covering issues such as the courts, education and the media. He has also extensively written about the Aum Shin-rikyo cult and the trials of its former members. From 2012 to 2017, he was a correspondent based in the Asahi's New York Bureau, covering American society in general.



**Andrew Cohen** is an author, a journalist and a professor of journalism in Canada. In a career of 40 years, he has worked in Ottawa, Toronto, Washington, London and Berlin. He has written for *Foreign Affairs*, *The New York Times*, *The Globe and Mail*, *United Press International*, *Time*, *CNN.com*, *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, and *The Financial Times of London*. His books have addressed Canada's constitutional politics, national character, the legacies of Pierre Elliott Trudeau and Lester Pearson, and Arctic exploration. His provocative study of Canadian foreign policy—*While Canada Slept: How We Lost Our Place in the World*—was a finalist for the Governor General's Literary Award for Non-Fiction, Canada's highest literary prize. His last book is *Two Days in June: John F. Kennedy's 48 Hours That Made History*.

Professor Cohen has won two National Newspaper Awards, three National Magazine Awards and twice been awarded the Queen's Jubilee Medal. Since 2001 he has written a syndicated column in Postmedia Newspapers. He also appears as a regular commentator on radio and television.

A native of Montreal, Professor Cohen attended The Choate School in Connecticut, followed by McGill University, Carleton University and the University of Cambridge. He has degrees in political science, journalism and international relations.

Between 1997 and 2001, he was correspondent and columnist for *The Globe and Mail*, based in Washington. More recently, he was a Fulbright Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars in Washington. Since 2001, he has been an associate professor at Carleton University at the School of Journalism and Communication.



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