

Journalists & Feminists:

how better information
serves democracy





Equipop is a feminist organisation committed to fighting for gender equality and sexual and reproductive rights. Alongside partners and feminist networks in France, West Africa and across the globe, Equipop combines social and political action, with financial and technical support to partner organisations and feminist activists. As an organisation, it regularly publishes analyses and resources to shed light on the issues of equality, document anti-rights strategies, and fuel public debate.



Prenons La Une is an association of journalists who campaign for the fair representation of women in the media, and equality in newsrooms.



Founded in 2019 by journalists Marine Forestier and Aliénor Carrière, **La Fronde** is a feminist training agency for media outlets, businesses, non-profits, communications professionals, higher education institutions, and those working in the cultural and political spheres.



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Our duty is to inform

Diversity, equality, discrimination, gender, feminism, women, intersectionality, LGBTQ, transgender, and racism are just some of the terms banned by the Trump administration upon its return to the White House in January 2025. Since then, the rights of women and minority groups have been rolled back in the United States, with restrictions on access to abortion services and mounting attacks targeting transgender communities and people in exile.

In Europe, illiberal governments, led by far-right figures, are using the same methods. In Hungary, Victor Orbán's government passed a law banning any mention or portrayal of same-sex couples. In Italy, Giorgia Meloni's government has stepped up libel action against journalists, and tightened its grip on public broadcasting.

France has not been spared these attacks on democracy. An investigation published by *Arrêt sur Images* in July 2024 revealed that reactionary editorial directives had been issued by the new owners of *La Manche Libre* newspaper, the conservative, Catholic, Leclerc family. These included the instruction 'to refrain from any LGBT references'. At a conference organised by traditionalist Catholics, the billionaire Pierre-Édouard Stérin urged his followers to evangelise the French population by 'gaining a foothold in journalism schools, becoming journalists, joining existing media outlets'.

One of our missions is to uphold a fair representation of women in the media. This includes offering training to journalism students, and developing tools (for example, to report on violence against women better). This mission has never been more relevant, given the 'fight to control the narrative', to quote Marie-Cécile Naves, sociologist and Director of the Gender and Geopolitics Observatory at IRIS.

Indeed, in its annual Media Freedom Report covering 21 EU countries, the NGO Liberties sounds the alarm on the excessive concentration of media ownership 'in the hands of a small number of very wealthy individuals', particularly in France and other European countries. Liberties also raises concern over the growing number of SLAPP suits and the increasingly frequent physical and verbal attacks on journalists. 'This isn't a surprise. Governments' efforts to weaken the rule of law and democratic institutions almost always start by seeking to control their country's media landscape,' analyses Jonathan Day, lead editor of the report, quoted by the daily newspaper *L'Humanité*.

Words therefore matter more than ever if we are to continue reporting on threats to the rights of women and all other minority groups. We are duty-bound to uphold them, to expose the reality undermining our freedoms, while remaining true to the principles of journalistic ethics.

Championing collective action by journalists and feminist activists

Equipop is a feminist organisation. We take action in France and throughout Europe in response to the rise in anti-rights movements, exemplified by the far-right. We also work with partners in other parts of the world where women face various forms of authoritarianism and repression: such as Burkina Faso, Senegal, Lebanon, Tunisia...

We stand for a society in which everyone's human rights are upheld. A model in which public policy serves the common good. We are aware that in this struggle, **women's rights and press freedom are both vital and intrinsically linked.**

Opponents of women's rights inevitably end up lashing out at press freedom and media pluralism, and vice-versa. Sometimes these attacks against women's rights can be quite spectacular, like the blatantly misogynistic remarks by some political leaders such as Donald Trump, Javier Milei and Eric Zemmour. However, they can also unfold slowly and insidiously. As our societies generally give little consideration to women's rights, we tend to turn a collective blind eye to their gradual erosion... **until one day, all the pillars of democracy come under attack, including the right to information.**

We have been witness to this in the United States: crusading conservatives opposing abortion rights have been joined by those attacking access to knowledge (book bans and cuts in research funding), and the right to information. This is coupled with a policy to marginalise and denigrate traditional media outlets in favour of pro-Trump influencers. Similar dynamics can be seen in France, where far-right political leaders - taking inspiration from the US President -

have been calling for an end to France's international aid policy, and can count on an ever-growing number of media outlets willing to amplify racist disinformation.

Just as we face the same adversaries as champions of press freedom, we also share the same means of collective action to push back against this reactionary onslaught.

On the one hand, feminists act as precious whistle blowers. They understand the anti-rights and anti-democratic movements well, as they have been fighting against them for years. We need to have faith in them, and give them a platform. On the other hand, journalists open up space to express views, provide vital analysis, and a powerful investigative force in the fight against violence and impunity, as shown by the many independent investigations that supported the #MeToo movement.

That is one of the many reasons why we decided to co-host an event at ESEC on 25 February with Prenons La Une! and La Fronde, in partnership with Ouest France newspaper and Reporters without Borders. What emerged from the day was above all a shared desire - and, we hope, a moral commitment - to strengthen our collaboration and work together more effectively.

Today, we are past the stage of saying 'Let's wake up, open our eyes'. What we need now is a rallying cry! As Salomé Saqué said, we need to move from outrage to resistance.

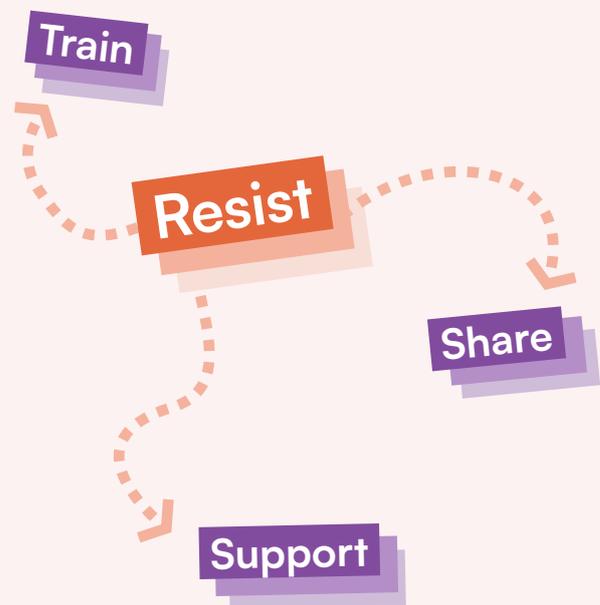
Resisting means rethinking how we educate and inform

As the far right gains ground across Europe, as the rights of women, LGBTQIA+ people, journalists, and minority groups are being rolled back, and hate speech is becoming entrenched in the public arena, we believe it is more urgent than ever to engage more fully in the editorial battles ahead.

La Fronde is a feminist training organisation. It bears the name of the first newspaper in France to be entirely designed, written, run, produced and distributed by women. We are trainers, journalists and filmmakers. Our guide is equality, our method is education, and our driving force is resistance. As gender editors, we examine the words, images, headlines, and interview choices made by an editorial team. We put forward solutions and suggest changes to achieve more balanced and more inclusive coverage in our media. Trained in forum theatre, our resistance takes the form of short performances where each participant can quite literally step into the shoes of people facing oppression, and who have quietly faded from view in our daily lives. We also explain the legal context and laws - a useful reminder for journalists and citizens alike. This is how we seek to fight back in our own way against the spread of violence, the silencing of marginalised voices, and prevailing cynicism. **Resistance through training, sharing, and support.**

That is why we joined forces with Equipop on 25 February for ESEC's Equality Forum on Women, Media and Democracy in Paris. This publication is one of its outcomes. It aims to inform and collate practices, ideas, and resources for people seeking to pursue more ethical, feminist, and human journalism.

Because informing, investigating, editing, and writing also mean choosing a standpoint - one that both now and in the future must be as fiercely committed as possible.



Looking back at 'Women & Media' day

When words become weapons: journalists and experts respond to the anti-feminist backlash

Faced with a far right advancing, fuelled in part by a war of words and control of the media, journalists, researchers, and campaigners met on 25 February 2025 to share their insights and resistance strategies. This morning of frank and fiery exchanges was organised by Equipop, Prenons La Une, and La Fronde.

The far right has been able to gain ground partly by imposing its own narrative. This was one of the key observations shared during the discussions on 25 February in Paris. Two panel discussions set out to analyse the strategies used to normalise ultra-conservative ideologies, and how best to counter them:

A far right in the west that is closing ranks

Beyond our national borders, an overarching international strategy is unfolding, as attacks against the rights of women and minority groups follow the same pattern everywhere. From Hungary to Poland, from Italy to Slovakia, illiberal governments have declared war on sexual and reproductive rights, criminalised LGBTQIA+ activism, restricted the independence of institutions, and legitimised hate speech in the public arena. This reactionary approach is coupled with the systematic use of state institutions to silence checks and balances. Oppressive laws are forced through, budgets slashed in the public sector, NGOs attacked, and the judiciary destabilised.

In the United States, sociologist Marie-Cécile Naves (IRIS) describes how the pro-Trump far right is leading a genuine 'cultural war' on anything resembling equality: women, minority groups, researchers, artists. **This war is waged first through words - some now banned**, like 'gender', 'women', 'gay', and others brandished like weapons, such as 'wokism', 'cancel culture', and 'gender theory', in order to caricature and discredit social movements. They are used to sow division rather than foster debate, to the point of swaying public opinion. European far-right groups have been observing closely, and are ready to replicate this model methodically.

Weakening of official development assistance (ODA)

Trump's mighty America is powered by the fantasy of a new type of society: one with closed borders, isolationist policies, where solidarity is seen as weakness, and where scapegoats are sought out for political gain.

For Marie-Cécile Naves, this isolationism is illustrated by the withdrawal of international aid, especially that

provided by USAID, which was set up in 1961 for both strategic and ethical reasons. Not only does the halting of aid contravene the commitments made by the United States to the UN, it also jeopardises global security. Poverty creates conditions that allow mafia and terrorist groups to thrive, causes forced displacement, and fuels instability across entire countries. The withdrawal of aid also affects independent journalism, especially in Central Europe and Asia, where it was used to fund investigations into corruption and disinformation.

The press under pressure

The far right is winning the war on words because it also undermines those upholding alternative, progressive narratives that run counter to its own. In France, working conditions in newsrooms are deteriorating. Christelle Murhula and Estelle Ndjandjo, from AJAR (Association of Anti-Racist and Racialised Journalists), refer to the growing instability faced by racialised and feminist journalists, who come up against 'a militant glass ceiling'. Daphné Deschamps, journalist at *StreetPress*, observes a decline in investigative journalism, to the benefit of sensationalist formats that continue to raise the far right's profile. In addition, the takeover of media outlets by billionaires like Vincent Bolloré and Pierre-Edouard Stérin further erodes the freedom of journalists working for these groups.

This imbalance has not appeared out of nowhere. Journalist Francesca De Benedetti (*Domeni*) observes that across several European countries, illiberal governments are orchestrating the systematic dismantling of independent media. Tactics often draw on the same playbook: erode public broadcasters, take the helm of major private outlets,

discredit opposing journalists through harassment and trumped-up legal proceedings. In Italy, Slovakia, and Hungary, the same scenario is being played out, and causing concern as far as French newsrooms.

How to make a stand

Alliances are being formed in response to this backlash. Virginie Menvielle (SNJ-CGT) emphasises the important part played by trade unions in protecting journalists, while Coline Folliot (AJL) points out how words can be weaponised: 'Misnaming a situation can help obscure truth about it'. Daphné Deschamps has demonstrated the important role investigative journalism plays in slowing down the rise of the far right. Carolina Pecharroman, Gender Editor at RTVE (Spanish Public Broadcaster), has shown that action can be driven from within: institutionalising her position embeds core progress on representations. Finally, Sarra El Massaoudi points out that since the implementation of a media *cordon sanitaire* in Wallonia, the far right has failed to make inroads. **We are therefore also fighting a battle over language, solidarity and the structural framework.** Feminist and anti-racist collectives can truly shift the balance - provided their voices are heard.



Salomé Saqué:

‘The notion of neutrality in journalism is a myth.’

*Salomé Saqué is a French journalist. She works for independent media outlet Blast and often appears on television (on Arte, France 5, LCP). She has written two works of non-fiction: *Sois jeune et tais-toi* (Be young and keep quiet, 2023) *Résister* (Resist, 2024), both available in French.*

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In your opinion, why is the notion of neutrality in journalism an illusion? And why is it often instrumentalised?

In my view, it's a myth. No journalist can possibly be completely neutral. Any individual, and any perspective on the world, comes from a social, emotional, and cultural standpoint. All the decisions made, from the topics covered and the words used, to the people interviewed, and the images projected, are a succession of subjective choices. This isn't a problem *per se*. The problem lies in making people believe that a particular perspective, often that of a dominant group, is 'neutral' and that any other point of view is 'militant'. Some journalists are thereby 'activist', while the rest have voices that carry more weight. In practice, some positions are clearly considered neutral simply because they align with the dominant ideology. For example, there is generally no objection in newsrooms to an enthusiastic report on economic growth. By contrast, pointing out the limits of economic growth and its link to the environmental crisis is quickly dismissed as advocacy journalism. Yet both versions offer a different perspective of the world.

Neither one is more neutral than the other.

How does this demand for neutrality impact the way journalists and media outlets work?

It creates a climate of implicit, and sometimes explicit censorship. Many young journalists I have met hold themselves back in their editorial choices, because they know that certain topics are frowned upon by newsrooms. In my book, *Resist*, I talk about how difficult it has become to cover certain events without being pigeonholed. Merely reporting on a demonstration can expose journalists to physical or reputational risks, while other, much more ideologically biased narratives are considered 'serious' journalism.

What are the consequences of covering subjects such as the rights of women, minorities and the environment?

They are tragic. These subjects are routinely filed away in the 'activist' box, implying that they are less credible, and less 'professional'. Yet it is not a question of opinion, these are facts. Women are

still the biggest victims of gender-based violence, minority groups face discrimination, and the IPCC scientists have relentlessly warned about the impending environmental crisis. And it's this reality that sometimes gets masked or delegitimised in the name of so-called neutrality.

People also get worn down. When every day you have to justify why talking about social justice, feminism and the climate is not taking a stance, but simply doing your job, it's exhausting. This leads to self-censorship and thereby the narrowing of public debate.

Is there a link between the priority brandished by some for neutrality in journalism, and the rise or success of the far right in France and around the world?

Yes, there is a clear connection. The normalisation of the far right stems in part from this so-called neutrality. In the name of 'balanced reporting', racist, sexist and authoritarian discourse is put on an equal footing with positions based on facts, rights and freedoms. This leads to blurred boundaries, a contaminated debate, and part of public opinion is no longer able to see the dangers posed by far-right ideology, for example.

In *Resist*, I show how the media, when under the influence or controlled by billionaires such as Vincent Bolloré, shift the Overton window towards the far right. Concepts hitherto deemed unthinkable then become tolerated, accepted and even mainstream. And this is achieved through the passive or active involvement of some parts of the mediasphere.

This so-called neutrality also prevents journalists from naming dangers. By refusing to label certain ideas or facts for what they are: violations of basic rights, systemic violence, hate speech, this leaves the field open for the far right to impose its own issues and language.

In an interview, journalist Alice Coffin said 'neutrality is simply the subjective view of those who hold power'. What do you think of this statement?

I think it is very true. It neatly captures the unspoken assumptions underlying much of the media discourse. What is referred to as 'neutrality' is in actual fact the situated perspective of people who have no experience of threats, discrimination, or invisibility. Those for whom the system works. And because this point of view is mainstream, it has become the benchmark. It is deeply biased, yet this bias is disguised as rationality. What Alice Coffin explains is that 15 years ago in France, a homosexual person reporting on issues facing the LGBTQIA+ community would be accused of 'bias', whereas a heterosexual male's perspective would be deemed neutral. The situation is the same today for a woman documenting gender-based violence, or a racialised person reporting on racist violence. We are always suspected of 'taking sides', of not having the necessary perspective, and therefore the required professionalism. The ultimate outcome is that the dominant viewpoint remains overvalued, and journalism ends up being the product of strong social endogamy.

If journalists cannot be 'neutral', how can we make sure they are professional?

It is vital to dispel a persisting, long-standing confusion: professionalism in journalism does not lie in supposed moral or political neutrality. Rather, it is based on methodology, rigour, and ethics, such as those set out in the [Munich Charter](#), signed in 1971 by the European Federation of Journalists. Personally, this charter is what guides my work. It sets forth the ten responsibilities of journalists, which include: respect the truth, check facts, correct any inaccuracies, protect

sources, and above all never confuse journalism with advertising or propaganda. According to this charter, it is these commitments, rather than a supposedly 'above the fray' stance, that ensure integrity in journalism.

In my view, professionalism means first and foremost being able to select subjects of public interest, to conduct rigorous investigations, to put facts into context, to help readers/viewers better understand a situation, all of which while trying to counter one's own arguments. It is not about giving 50% of airtime to oppressors and 50% to the oppressed. It is not about remaining silent in response to injustice, or toning down language so as not to lay yourself open to accusations of bias. Once you

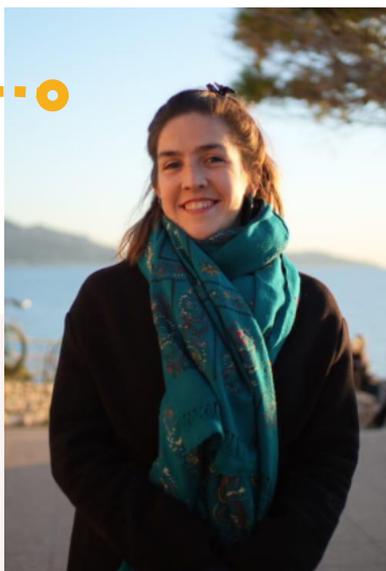
start disrupting the status quo, and embodying what is often referred to as the fourth estate, you will inevitably be subject to attacks, insults, aspersions, and all kinds of accusations. In my view, the only way to respond is through rigorous facts, not neutrality. Finally, professionalism also means recognising your own mistakes, which is never an easy thing to do.

In a world flooded with disinformation, where far-right narratives have appropriated the concept of 'free speech' to spread discriminatory and authoritarian ideas, journalism cannot, in my view, treat fundamental rights, and those seeking to trample on them, as equally valid.



Deciphering the global reactionary onslaught

**Who is driving the backlash against women's rights, the media and solidarity?
How do they operate?**



Interview with
Anissa Daboussi,

Manager of AWID's Advancing Universal Rights and Justice programme.

'Fascists have always been the enemy of women and queer people.'

AWID (Association for Women's Rights in Development), is an international, feminist, NGO that supports movements fighting for gender justice and women's human rights worldwide. This feminist network boasts over 9,000 members from more than 180 countries.

In 2025, AWID launched the #FreezeFascisms campaign. Why do fascist and fundamentalist movements particularly target women's rights, especially in multi-lateral and UN forums? What is behind these attacks?

The ideological foundation of fascism is based on rigid hierarchies and the exercise of total control, making diversity and pluralism existential threats to the unity and 'purity' of the nation. Religious fundamentalists rely on similar reasoning. Women, girls and people who are gender-nonconforming and/or

of diverse sexual orientations are often first in the firing line.

Fascists have always been the enemy of women and queer people, regardless of whatever new way they are attempting to push fascism these days. Take femonationalist and homonationalist trends in the global North, for example, which attempt to harness women's and LGBTQI+ rights to legitimise far-right agendas. The reality is that their ideology and societal vision are founded on inequality among people.

Our observations show that the international human rights system, once one of the few spaces to which feminist campaigners could turn to bring about normative change, has been significantly infiltrated by fascist and fundamentalist groups. This trend has become more pronounced over the years, as far-right governments have come to the helm in an increasing number of countries, including those that carry considerable geopolitical weight and wield strong influence within the multilateral system.

These fascist and fundamentalist movements, whether governmental or not, devote considerable time and effort to undermining the relevance of the multilateral system. By fighting within UN bodies against any attempt to make progress on human rights, by cutting funding, and by dismantling existing UN mechanisms, like UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East), their aim is to evade any obligation to be held accountable for human rights violations. Although issues related to gender and sexuality are particularly targeted, human rights as a whole are under attack.

What have your work and analyses established about the links between attacks on women's rights and those on press freedom?

The far right has undergone a radical reversal of values, which began a few years ago with allegations that it was being 'censored', that its freedom of expression was being violated by so-called feminist / woke / LGBT lobbies, and that it was in fact the true champion of free speech. Posing as a victim is an age-old strategy used by anti-rights groups. Of course, under international human rights law, freedom of expression must not cross the red line of disseminating, promoting or inciting hatred. Over time, international law has made it possible to restrict their incitement of hate speech.

Although it has long proclaimed itself the champion of free speech, we see that as soon as the far right comes to power, it wages war not only on freedom of expression but also on freedom of the press. Recent examples include the systematic killing of Palestinian journalists in Gaza by Israel, and the latter's complete denial of access to international media outlets. We could also point to the killing of Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in the West Bank in 2022 as a dangerous 'model' for silencing the media and eliminating journalists with total impunity.

Even when the far right is not in power, it launches attacks on independent and investigative journalism for fulfilling its role as a counterweight and a dissenting voice. For far-right supporters, the role of the media must shift from that of independent whistle-blower to government spokesperson and propagandist. And all other types of reporting are likewise stripped of their legitimacy, labelled as betraying the 'national interest', and potentially criminalised.

Ultimately, attacks against press freedom must be analysed within the context of the economic system, of 'who owns what', and of news production, all

of which are intrinsically linked to power dynamics, and to inequalities based on gender, race and colonialism. While examining violations of women's rights and how they manifest across other areas (media, multilateralism, etc.) we must also question the structures and systems in place that enable these breaches to occur.

AWID is an international feminist network. How do you support feminist collective action in response to the backlash? And how could feminists and journalists forge stronger ties?

In the fight against anti-rights movements, independent feminist investigative journalism has played a fundamental role in exposing the true intentions of these people, their connections, the money trail, etc. By combining this kind of journalism with grassroots analysis by feminist movements, and the mobilising capacity

of organisations like AWID, we can forge very powerful alliances.

Our approach to collective action is founded on solidarity and networking, which requires time and trust. A few years ago, AWID began working with feminist journalists, not only to give the media and the public access to feminist narratives, but also because feminist journalists are an important part of the feminist movement.

We need to recognise that journalists, especially those who strive to report on marginalised communities and social movements, are themselves in vulnerable situations, and often face real threats owing to their work. By taking the time to truly understand each other's realities, and how we can support one another as individuals and organisations, we can forge long-term collaboration and political alliances.



BACKLASH

The term ‘backlash’, first coined by American journalist Susan Faludi, is commonly used to describe the violent opposition of conservative and masculinist movements to progress in women’s rights. These movements act not only to thwart this progress, but also to roll back women’s rights generally.

Source: *Women’s rights: fighting the backlash*. Equipop & Jean Jaurès Foundation. 2023.

The danger **Giorgia Meloni** poses to the Italian media landscape

Giorgia Meloni’s rise to power in Italy, in October 2022, has signalled a troubling curtailment of press freedom.

This began with growing political interference within public media outlets, including RAI (the Italian public broadcaster). Official reports and accounts describe how the broadcaster’s management was sidelined to bring in supporters of the governing party. They also condemn the growing censorship, such as the cancellation of an appearance by the author Antonio Scurati in April 2024 to discuss the rise of fascism. ‘While political interference within RAI has always existed, it has reached an unprecedented level under Meloni’, says Francesca De Benedetti, Head of the Europe desk at the investigative newspaper, *Domani*.

She refers to the ‘Meloni method’, or how the Prime Minister and her close

associates go about attacking any media outlets with which they disagree. The first step is to take legal action against journalists, for example libel suits designed to intimidate, which **have become increasingly common** in Italy over recent years. *Domani*, an independent newspaper specialising in investigative journalism, is regularly targeted, as Francesca De Benedetti describes: ‘In March 2023, police raided our newsroom to seize an article, following a complaint filed by a government official who was targeted by one of our investigations. It came as a real shock to see the police attempting to seize an article (...) Meloni and her inner circle are using the legal system as a means of exerting pressure’.

The Prime Minister regularly lashes out at the media, and portrays journalists as a threat. 'After a visit to Italy by the European Federation of Journalists, during which we were interviewed, my name, and those of several colleagues, were published in the far-right media, accusing us of being "anti-Meloni". The tables are being turned to blame the victims instead', relates Francesca De Benedetti. She adds, with concern: 'Things are getting

worse. Recent revelations have pointed to cases of targeted surveillance of journalists, NGO workers, and even priests on board humanitarian vessels assisting migrants. This is a sweeping assault on civil society'.

For her, these are 'the first signs of an authoritarian shift'. In reference to Hungary, Francesca De Benedetti calls it the 'Orbánisation of Italy'.

How **Viktor Orbán** has stifled the fourth estate

Since returning to power in 2010, Viktor Orbán has pursued a relentless campaign against press freedom in Hungary.

In the space of 15 years, the country has plummeted from 23rd to 68th position in Reporters Without Borders' press freedom index. The Hungarian Prime Minister started by merging all public broadcasting under one pro-government entity, MTVA. He then set up a media oversight body, controlled by party loyalists, which has clamped down on dissident media outlets by imposing heavy fines, or revoking their broadcasting licences. This reining in of the media has gone hand in hand with Orbán's wealthy business allies taking over or setting up private media outlets.

Despite everything, a handful of independent media outlets persist and resist. One of them, [444.hu](https://www.444.hu), sent shock waves through the ruling party in February 2024, after publishing an investigation into a child sexual abuse scandal, which toppled the President

and a parliamentarian from Viktor Orbán's party. However, new threats are currently hanging over the fragile free press ecosystem in Hungary. In 2025, the government is preparing a draft bill to ban independent media outlets from receiving funding from abroad, which acts as a lifeline for many of them.

Branded 'Trump before Trump', by Steve Bannon, former White House chief strategist, Viktor Orbán makes no secret of it: controlling the media has been central to the way he has wielded power.

In Hungary, overhauling the media landscape into a propaganda tool has gone hand in hand with rolling back the rights of women and sexual minorities.

Trump's anti-media strategy: a model going global?

Since the start of his second term in office, Donald Trump has waged war on the media, targeting their credibility, their independence, and their continued existence, both in the US and internationally.

His administration has unleashed a whole arsenal of tactics:

- 'Lawfare', or abusive lawsuits used to intimidate critical media outlets, as illustrated by his 15-billion-dollar complaint filed against the *New York Times*;
- Indirect takeovers of private media groups, by putting Trump loyalists at the helm;
- Dismantling of public media outlets by slashing budgets and putting pressure on the US Agency for Global Media (USAGM).

In April 2025, Reporters without Borders (RSF) published ten key figures to illustrate this 'alarming deterioration' in press freedom in the United States, after barely 100 days under Donald Trump II. These included 180 public radio stations in danger of closing down, and 13 people who received a presidential pardon from Trump having been convicted or charged with assaults against journalists on 6 January 2021. Over 8,000 US government web pages have been taken down, depriving journalists, and by extension citizens, of useful public data on health and crime.

More recently, in October 2025, the Pentagon crossed **another red line**, by requiring journalists to submit any information they intend to release for pre-publication review. Around one hundred journalists, including some from pro-Trump news channels like Fox News, refused to comply with these latest restrictions, at the risk of losing their accreditations.

While 'the daily chaos of American politics can make it hard to fully grasp the current sea change', Clayton Weimers, Executive Director of RSF's North America office, believes that there is a clear trend towards a crackdown on press freedom.

Donald Trump's strategy illustrates a broader global phenomenon, and in some cases, even serves as inspiration for other populist, far-right leaders. In a series of articles, *Le Monde* newspaper analyses how reactionary journalism supports and strengthens populist movements in Europe, which are becoming increasingly established in the political arena in places such as France, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Sweden, Poland, Spain, the UK, and the Netherlands.

Find out more:

[How to build a feminist Europe?. Equipop. 2024.](#)

Big Tech in support of anti-feminist narratives and far-right ideology

None of the Big Tech giants like Amazon, Meta, and Apple invented masculinist discourses or hate speech. However, they bear varying degrees of responsibility for the growth of these narratives online, and the impunity enjoyed by perpetrators.

Firstly, their business model is based on making content go viral and generating 'buzz'. **Studies** have shown that hateful content tends to generate more reactions, and therefore go more viral, than non-hateful content. The far right and masculinist influencers have understood and harnessed this dynamic well, producing polarising, violent and sometimes deliberately outrageous content.

Secondly, the algorithms that generate and direct content, recommendations, and online moderation are embedded with gender-based bias that favours anti-feminist content. Indeed, **technology is not neutral**. It reflects the social hierarchies, gender stereotypes, and racist bias within our societies. Words like 'abortion' are censored as 'sensitive', which limits the reach of feminist accounts and information on access to terminations and sexual health. At the same time, masculinist

influencers thrive freely, and even generate income through sexist videos. This is combined with a lack of political willingness on the part of platforms to support victims of cyberbullying and online violence, who are predominantly women and people from minority groups.

Finally, the leaders of the major Big Tech firms also bear some responsibility. When billionaire Elon Musk took over Twitter, one of his first acts was to fire the platform's moderation teams. In the name of a misguided definition of 'free speech' he reinstated the accounts of personalities previously banned from using the platform, starting with Donald Trump and Andrew Tate, figureheads of British-American masculinism. Then, he put the social network at the disposal of several populist, anti-feminist politicians: Donald Trump for example, contributing greatly to the success of his presidential campaign; Giorgia Meloni, whose anti-

immigration policies in Italy he frequently praises; and Alice Weidel, to whom he granted a live broadcast in the middle of the German election campaign without any open debate.

Elon Musk's ideological agenda became even more apparent once he became Donald Trump's right-hand man. Taking direct inspiration from the Argentine populist leader, Javier Milei, who was invited to Donald Trump's inauguration, the billionaire made an appearance wielding a chainsaw before dismantling the US public administration departments, starting with the US Agency for International Development (USAID). CEO of Meta, Mark Zuckerberg's sudden U-turn in support of Donald Trump serves to confirm this trend by the Big Tech firms.

So much so that recent analyses have pointed to **the emergence of a form of 'techno-fascism'**, as referenced by

journalists Olivier Tesquet and Nastasia Hadjadj, who co-wrote *Apocalypse Nerds*, published by Divergences. In an interview for the media outlet, *L'Onde Porteuse*, Olivier Tesquet explains: 'What we see happening in the US in particular, echoes the constants underlying historical fascist movements: a form of anti-modern counter-revolution, not in the technological sense, but rather the political one, directed against political modernity itself, while mobilising the tools of technological modernity. The second development we are observing with the renewed prominence of religion - and these two factors (religion and technology) run in parallel - is a drive to restore purity to the national body, leading to the identification of enemies'.

Find out more:

[*Pushing back against masculinist discourse online. Equipop and the Gender in Geopolitics Institute, 2023*](#)

Official development assistance under threat: 3 key takeaways about the international aid crisis

While there had previously been relative cross-party consensus on the matter, and little media coverage, international aid is currently going through an unprecedented crisis. Here are three key takeaways to help understand the issues involved and bolster media coverage.

1. International aid is falling apart

Following an upward trend over several years, official development assistance is now collapsing. The whole of the international aid sector is in crisis, and there are several different contributing factors. First, the Trump effect. The Trump administration's decision to close down the US Agency for International Development (USAID) in 2025 set off an international shock wave. We should bear in mind that **70% of the funding to fight HIV worldwide comes from the US**. The US was also one of the leading contributors to key UN agencies such as WHO (global health), UNFPA (sexual and reproductive health, access to family planning, and action against maternal mortality), as well as multilateral funds like the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. This global shift has been exacerbated by budget cuts in European countries that were long-standing supporters of international aid, such as France, Germany, the UK, and the Netherlands. For example, if the latest cuts go ahead, France's ODA budget will have been slashed by half between 2024 and 2026. One of the three government budgets to suffer the most cuts in terms of volume and proportion.

2. Women and girls: the primary victims

These budget cuts, which have predominantly targeted gender equality,



climate justice and health programmes, hit women, girls and organisations fighting to uphold their rights the hardest. A UN Women global survey, conducted with 428 feminist organisations and published in October 2025, reveals the scale of the crisis: over one third (34%) have had to suspend or shut down programmes fighting violence against women and girls, and over 40% have reduced or closed vital services such as emergency accommodation, legal aid, psychosocial support and access to healthcare. 59% report growing impunity and the spread of

violence. Worse still, only 5% of the organisations believe they can continue their work for at least two years at the current rate of budget cuts. These figures speak to millions of women deprived of essential services, exposed to growing violence, and years of progress on women's rights now under threat.

3. It reflects an ideological agenda

The attacks on international aid are part of an ideological agenda. Political specialist Marie-Cécile Naves has identified several factors to explain Donald Trump's violent onslaught against international aid. Firstly, 'nationalist, isolationist dreams of closing borders, which are in fact contradictory to the formation of international far-right networks such as CPAC (Conservative Political Action Conference), the major annual gathering of conservative and far-right movements in the US.' There is also

the highly aggressive approach to international relations, where 'domination is treated as a virtue and solidarity as a weakness'. Finally, the aim is to 'thrive at the ballot box on global turmoil by sowing fear (...) and by identifying enemies', including within national borders, as evidenced by attacks on social welfare, and on the recognition of specific marriages involving refugees and asylum seekers.

In France, ODA cuts have been treated as a budgetary adjustment measure. But they also stem from political decision making. These cuts were carried out amid relative indifference. They were scarcely brought to public attention, were even spurred on by some media outlets (see below), and also shaped by pressure from the far right and some on the right.

Case study: when media outlets amplify a controversy entirely fabricated by the far right

February 2025. During an interview on the Cnews channel, Sarah Knafo MEP (Reconquête party) spoke out against 'French taxpayers' money being sent all over the world'. Among other falsehoods, she went on to maintain that France 'sends €130 million to China every year'. Her statements were soon picked up by *Valeurs Actuelles* magazine, then *Le Journal du dimanche* weekly, owned by the Vincent Bolloré group, which spoke of 'shocking revelations' about the French Development Agency (AFD).

It's a well-oiled machine: a loosely framed remark gets aired on a Cnews set, then blown up across opinion-led

outlets in the Bolloré media sphere, until it takes root as a national controversy. Within a few days, official development assistance (ODA) became the subject of a biased public debate, and portrayed as a wasteful use of public funds. This strategy is directly inspired by Trumpism. In the US, Donald Trump justified dismantling USAID with statements couched in so-called budgetary 'common sense'. In reality, it was driven by an ideological agenda targeting human rights, and women's rights in particular. In France, Sarah Knafo echoed this rhetorical line: if Trump can dismantle the American development agency, why not do the same with AFD?

In this case, the arguments put forward by the far right, and relayed by certain media outlets, were problematic across the board. Firstly, because they were untrue. **The figures** tell a completely different story. AFD is a public institution that operates like a development bank: 85% of its funding comes from borrowing on financial markets. Only 15% is directly funded by the government and the European Union. And China? It receives no grants. It has however taken out loans at market rates, which AFD charges with interest.

Secondly, all these projects are public, documented on AFD's website, and audited by independent bodies. Yet, in *Le JDD* weekly, they are depicted as absurd handouts decided behind closed doors. Journalist Charlotte d'Ornellas, close to far-right nationalist circles, describes 'projects that are unclear and impossible to monitor', promoting a rhetoric of sweeping suspicion. When interviewed on the same topic, National Rally (Rassemblement national) MP Guillaume Bigot drives the point home: 'Even the Court of Auditors struggles to make sense of it', he claims, denouncing a supposed 'global ideology'. This is a familiar part of the far-right playbook: deliberately muddying the facts, and portraying any initiative supporting gender equality or human rights as 'ideological'.

By brandishing an ideological accusation, the far right seeks to delegitimise a political agenda grounded in values of equality and commitments to the UN, in order to impose its own: a reactionary agenda based on retreating into nationalist ideas of identity, and eroding the rights of women and minority groups.

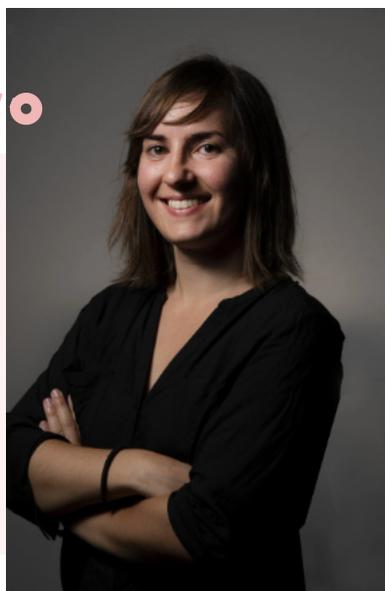
The outcome is partial, biased reporting that grants disproportionate airtime to disinformation campaigns. Four months later, in June 2025, the French government announced a two-billion-euro cut to the ODA budget.

Lucie Daniel, Advocacy and Research manager at Equipop, believes 'this case is worth highlighting because it is likely to happen again. The Bolloré media sphere seized on the issue and misrepresented it. Their reframing of international aid succeeded in part due to the fact that other media outlets hadn't reported sufficiently on these issues, or had done so too late, after the far-right controversy and ensuing budget cuts. It is crucial to counter far right narratives that are factually incorrect, and to remind the public that this disinformation is driven by a clear ideological agenda'.

Guarding against threats to press freedom

Accusations of political bias, harassment, and the takeover of journalism schools... how can journalists push back?

Are governments seeking to monitor and sanction reporters?



© Roger Anis

How to fight back: Ariane Lavrilleux's experience

Prosecuted over a public-interest investigation, Disclose journalist Ariane Lavrilleux warns of the legal arsenal threatening press freedom in France and in Europe, and calls for journalists to unite. She was short-listed for the 2025 Albert-Londres Prize for her investigative reporting.

You are known for your investigative work into misconduct within government agencies, and more recently for having had your home searched and been remanded in custody following the investigation published in *Disclose* on

Operation Sirli. Where do the proceedings against you stand today?

After three years of legal proceedings, the court has dismissed the case against me. Not only has my name been cleared, but the investigating magistrate in charge of the

case finally acknowledged that our investigation was in the public interest. In hindsight, what matters to me is that thanks to my case, individuals and organisations have now understood how serious the situation is in France. This is not an isolated incident: it is a political struggle to ensure we all have access to reliable information and media free from any form of pressure. The public prosecutor's office has appealed, arguing that the balance between national security and press freedom was not upheld. In other words, it is seeking to place me under formal investigation and bring me to trial. If the court of appeal rules in favour of the prosecution, it would essentially put the press itself on trial, forcing the court to decide which truths may be published in a democracy. It would be unprecedented, and a real crash test for our already fragile democracy.

What does this case reveal about the state of press freedom in France?

It highlights the risks inherent in the 4 January 2010 Law on the Protection of Journalistic Sources, which is meant to safeguard journalists' work, but which in practice paves the way for the monitoring, detention, and even prosecution of journalists. It also makes it easier to intimidate them. Since it was enacted, over 30 journalists have been summoned or questioned by the police for the sole purpose of attempting to identify their sources, even though it is illegal! This is a stark indication of the erosion of press freedom in France.

What did the media coverage of your case achieve?

Several journalists confided that they had been subject to surveillance before me, but they did not dare to speak out, for fear of shame, lack of support, or because they were told to keep a low profile. The French Observatory on Violations of Press Freedom (Ofalp) - of which I am a member - has helped break this silence, and create a space where journalists, who often work alone and face obstruction at a local level, can finally be heard, especially when they are subject to defamation or insults from local officials. It's a first step: connecting

with peers to form a supportive community network. And Ofalp is currently working on a report to document all these violations, which should be completed by the end of 2025.

The European Union has passed the Media Freedom Act, designed to ensure editorial independence, but which **could have the opposite effect. Does this mean that there are other threats to press freedom looming over France and Europe?**

Yes. This European law was meant to establish safeguards against the surveillance of journalists, but in fact, it has paved the way for the use of spyware across a wide range of cases. If the courts decide to place a journalist under surveillance, the latter may be informed about this. Yet when the intelligence services do so, it is classified as a matter of national security, and no-one ever finds out. So, a law purporting to safeguard is in fact making surveillance mainstream.

In your view, are these attacks on press freedom an integral part of the current wave of reactionary onslaught?

Yes and no. My next piece of research will examine this question. In reality, the downward spiral in the security situation began long before the rise of the far right. In the 2010s, Sarkozy and Hollande waged an anti-terrorist war, building an exceptional legal arsenal by passing surveillance laws, and giving greater power to the intelligence services. When introduced, these laws were not perceived as authoritarian, but in fact they are. And they are now ready and waiting to be used by a far-right government. The groundwork has been laid. And the entire political class has had a hand in it.

What would you say to a budding investigative journalist who feels like everything is set against them?

Investigative journalists are continuing their work in Gaza, Egypt, and Yemen, in infinitely more challenging conditions. We must not give up. On the contrary, we are duty-bound here in France to fix our democracy.

We cannot stop a genocide, but we can document the complicity, the silence, and the diplomatic support that enable it. We still have means to stand up for ourselves, so we must put them to use.

How can journalists protect themselves from surveillance, and guard against threats?

We must stand united. This means being a member of Ofalp, for sure, but also joining professional networks like Prenons La Une, AJAR, AJL and Profession Pigiste. Above all, we must not underestimate the power of unions, which can provide precious financial and legal resources. The most important thing is to connect with peers, and to stop

believing that if you do a good job, everything will be fine. It's not enough. In my case, I had the support of *Disclose*, but it was also thanks to my connections across different networks that this police custody became a public event. Other journalists have been held in custody since, but their cases have gone unnoticed. We must widen our circles, broaden our support networks, and deepen our connections. That is the best form of defence. We also need to develop our digital safety practices, just as you would prepare to report on a demonstration, or from a war zone. Our computers and phones are battlefields for enemies of journalism, and we need to be aware of the risks to mitigate harm.

Eight years on from #MeToo, women in journalism still face pressure

Journalists around the world face intimidation and attacks. Women journalists, and women who play a part in public life in general, are doubly targeted: due to their professional status, and because they are women.

According to a 2021 **UNESCO survey** conducted in 15 countries with 901 journalists, 'online violence has become the new front line for journalists' safety, putting women journalists in particular at great risk'. They are subject to insults and threats, as well as disinformation campaigns, operations to try to disclose their personal information, and even physical attacks. When digital violence targets women in particular, it is also considered gender-based violence. From revenge porn and the non-consensual posting of photos, to rape threats, and sexually explicit deepfakes, there are many tools used to cement male dominance across social media and online platforms.

According to the International Centre for Journalists, almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of women journalists have experienced online abuse, and the NGO European Women's Lobby estimates that they are 27 times more likely than their male counterparts to be victims of cyberbullying.

Many studies, like this one by **RSF**, have evidenced the extent of this violence as well as its gender-based nature. The most common response to online abuse, and one that the perpetrators specifically seek, is self-censorship: women journalists avoid reporting on certain topics, or withdraw from online areas, to the detriment of media pluralism, and therefore **democracy**.

'Partisan media':

the label used to discredit independent journalism

'An independent media outlet that is openly hostile to the National Rally.' That is how a national radio station labelled *Streetpress*, when it published an investigation into parliamentary assistants to the far-right party with 'anti-abortion profiles and close ties to institutes that uphold racist ideas and spread conspiracy theories', reports Daphné Deschamps, far-right political expert at *Streetpress*. For her, there is an agenda behind this label: **to discredit the media by accusing it of being militant, paying no heed to the years of investigative work on the subject.**

Streetpress is not the only victim of this deliberate undermining of trust, especially when investigations focus on far-right political parties or leaders. Founder of *Mediapart*, Edwy Plenel and journalist at *Blast*, Salomé Saqué, to name but a few, have been subject to the same treatment by figures on the right of the political, journalistic and activism divide.

These accusations of activism serve **to fuel mistrust of the journalism profession.** According to the 38th *La Croix - Veroa - La Poste* report published in January 2024, the French public's trust in the media has been deteriorating for several years. 62% of those surveyed (up 8 percentage points on the previous year) said it was important to be wary of what the media reports about major news stories. The silver lining? Trust in social media influencers remains low (despite being on the rise). Finally, 36% of under 35s (compared to 48% of all respondents) said that it is 'a good thing that some media outlets and journalists choose to state and uphold their opinions when covering current affairs.'

The far-right takeover of ESJ (Paris Graduate School of Journalism)

'A strike against the profession, at its very foundation.' The acute concern of more than 650 students is palpable in an opinion piece published by *Le Nouvel Obs* in January 2025, in response to the takeover of the Paris Graduate School of Journalism (ESJ Paris, which is not affiliated with ESJ Lille). On 15 November 2024, the establishment, whose diploma is not recognised by the profession, passed into the hands of a group of highly influential investors in the media and political spheres. Transaction amount: €2.6 million, according to *L'Informé*.

Two billionaires and owners of major media outlets, Vincent Bolloré and Bernard Arnault, are behind this operation, with a 15% share, while the rest has been divided up between business leaders. In total, these executives own, among other things, around 15 media outlets and groups. **What do they have in common? An affiliation to right-wing, and far-right ideology,** and some have close ties with billionaire Pierre-Édouard Stérin, whose 2027 objective is clear: to ensure the National Rally wins the French Presidential Elections.

Who has been placed at the helm? Entrepreneur Vianney d'Alançon, Chair of Rocher Mistral historical theme park (think open-air museum meets live-action show), and founder of Maison Laudate, which specialises in jewellery for births, christenings, weddings, and signet rings. He was appointed President of ESJ Paris in November 2024 despite no mention of any media or news experience on his résumé. Journalist Emmanuel Ostian, formerly of the LCI news channel, has taken over the Institute's management. He explained to *Challenges* magazine, that he wanted to represent 'the whole spectrum', within his institute, which will nevertheless benefit from privileged partnerships with

the media outlets represented by its shareholders, including *Crayon*, Canal+, Europe 1 and *Le Figaro*.

Within its walls, students and teachers are concerned over a series of staff dismissals and disciplinary hearings, mainly directed at racialised students, according to a *Streetpress* investigation. Speaking on France Culture radio, Sociologist Jean-Marie Charon raises the question about a possible 'way of putting pressure on the entire journalism training system'. The signatories of the op-ed published in *L'Obs* raise their own concerns. 'This intrusion into newsrooms is not motivated by profit. It's about **harnessing the media to advance a conservative, reactionary political agenda.** France's already troubling level of media concentration, is worsening.'

In an interview by *Le Point* magazine, Emmanuel Ostian defends his seat at the helm of Bolloré's institution. 'It's utter nonsense to say that. It's not possible to politicise a journalism school in France.' Yet, at a conference on 11 June 2025 entitled 'Christian action for the common good', organised by the Bon Pasteur Institute, a group of conservative Catholics with links to the far-right, Pierre-Édouard Stérin stated: 'When it comes to evangelism, there are countless things we can all do, from connecting with our neighbours, to developing more significant initiatives in the media sector, in order to spread the Christian message. It is up to us to take action, to enrol in schools to become journalists, to join existing media outlets, to subscribe to friendly media outlets so as to share the Gospel more broadly, starting now'. The ideology and political agenda can hence be seen more clearly.

Countering anti-feminism in the media

Shining a spotlight on mechanisms used to erase, attack, and instrumentalise women's rights

How the far right has become acceptable, and even **glamorous**?

The far right has traded in its provocative slogans for a formidable online charm offensive including concerts and bite-sized TikTok clips, often slickly edited to rap music. In France as in Germany, their aim is the same: to win over young people not through ideas, but rather emotions.

In Eastern Germany, Junge Alternative (JA), the AfD's youth wing, has been playing the radical, macho camaraderie card, and it's working. Although listed as a far-right organisation by Germany's Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, it has been garnering support from teenage city-dwellers through public meetings featuring AfD leaders, free concerts with local bands, theme nights, and for older supporters, highly publicised motorbike trips with Björn Höcke, the party's Thuringia leader, whom many young men revere. As such, JA has been surfing on the

feeling of political abandonment that is still strong in this part of Germany. However, TikTok is where AfD and JA have become a major force. **Divisive videos, simple slogans, provocative humour: they have mastered the formula for maximum virality.** Disinformation isn't seen as a problem, far from it, the more shocking it is, the more it goes viral. Form takes precedence over substance. So does buy-in.

In France, the National Rally party has opted for a less explicit strategy. Jordan

Bardella, with 2.2 million followers on TikTok, presents a clean-cut image of youth, and carefully calibrated messages. **No drama, no sweat, just a pop-style narrative**, cute dog pictures, and footage of him eating sweets before a political interview. This platform uses short, personalised messages to avoid contradiction and substantive issues. The hardline surfaces elsewhere, in more ambiguous remarks, or in the rejection of court rulings, blamed on a system accused of persecution.

Less catchy, but every bit as normalised, Marine Le Pen has recast herself as a mainstream republican figure. The Holocaust-denying references of her

father's day are over; she herself has condemned the Occupation, and shown signs of being in favour of abortion. While smooth on the surface, the underlying message remains conservative, but wraps its xenophobia up in 'respectable' packaging. A sign of the National Rally's normalisation lies in a semi-glamorous feature in *M Magazine* in November 2024 on the far-right collective, Nemesis. Amid widespread mistrust in democracy, the far right no longer inspires fear. It holds appeal, and sometimes even fascination.

When **racist** language creeps into **public debate**

Far-right vocabulary has become embedded in the French media debate. Fuelled by a culture-war strategy, this racist and reactionary language has moved from the margins to the mainstream, and is helping deliver political victories.

Although demographically disproven, the narrative remains powerful, and feeds on fears of invasion: according to the 'Great Replacement' theory, Western, white Christians are supposedly 'replaced' by black, Arab and Muslim populations. Writer Renaud Camus came up with this racialist myth in 2010, which served as ideological justification for several supremacist attacks, having been referenced by a number of major political leaders and too rarely challenged.

Other terms have also slipped from far-right rhetoric to mainstream messages: **'Ensaucement'** (portraying a descent into lawlessness, and

racialised youth as 'savage'), for example, used by Éric Zemmour back in 2010, and later picked up by Marine Le Pen in 2013, then Gérald Darmanin, and Emmanuel Macron in 2020-2021. Originally borrowed from the social sciences where it refers to the process of marginalisation, the word was distorted to stigmatise racialised young men and working-class neighbourhoods.

Then there's, **'culture war'**, a concept inherited from Antonio Gramsci and later appropriated by the American far right, which has muscled in to be used as a framework for interpreting debates on gender, race and equality. It now

shapes the interventions of leading editorialists. Universities are accused of Islamo-leftism, NGOs of belonging to the so-called 'human-rights crowd', and environmental or feminist activists of being on the side of 'the good guys'. **In a barely disguised shift, figures in the media debate now speak of 'cancel culture' and 'wokeness'.** These expressions have been imported directly from the Trumpist and Anglo-American lexicon and repurposed in France into a

reactionary world view that pits society into two opposing camps.

The rise of this rhetoric has been boosted by the growing influence of the Bolloré group's television channels. The daily platform offered to these radical right-wing ideologies has blurred the lines: a language once banished to the margins now has a voice, and has even become mainstream. What if, by constantly repeating racist rhetoric, we were paving the way for racist laws?

What is femonationalism?

Femonationalism refers to the instrumentalisation of women's rights for nationalist, xenophobic or racist purposes. It highlights the alliance between certain far-right parties, governments, and institutions that distort feminist narratives in order to legitimise anti-immigration policies.

In an issue of *La Déferlante* magazine, researcher Sara R. Farris explains how femonationalism promotes the mistaken notion that 'sexism, and LGBT-phobias are supposedly the doing of Muslim men alone'. This vision poses dangers at several levels. Firstly, it is factually incorrect: the vast majority of victims of abuse know their perpetrator personally. Secondly, it masks a broader reality: there is not a typical perpetrator profile. Sexual and gender-based violence is systemic, almost exclusively perpetrated by men, from every walk of life, and across the social spectrum. A comprehensive response led by the authorities is needed to put a stop to it.

In France, this tendency to instrumentalise women's rights was particularly striking during the 2024 European and parliamentary election debates. Not only were women's rights **virtually absent** from the media coverage of the elections. But what's more, on the rare occasions when gender inequality was broached, it was brought up by far-right candidates, who related the issue of violence against women with their own anti-immigration agenda.

As Lucie Daniel, Advocacy and Research manager at Equipop, summarises in an interview with *Slate* magazine in July 2025: **'Women's rights always lose out with the far right.** They are disregarded, challenged and even openly attacked. And in other cases, they are instrumentalised'.

Find out more:

[How to build a feminist Europe?. Equipop. 2024.](#)

Fascinated and ill-equipped: how journalists report on the far right



Through carefully crafted portraits and articles that relay arguments without contradicting them, part of the French press is unintentionally helping to glamorise the far right. ‘The latest example can be seen in *Le Monde*’s portrait of the Nemesis collective’, which is one of ‘a whole series of articles reporting on Nemesis as well as all the female far-right figures’, recalls Daphné Deschamps, journalist covering far-right movements at *Streetpress*.

This type of portrait exists ‘because among our profession there is **a kind of fascination for female figures and for the far right** in general’. The consequence? ‘The vast majority of journalists who write these portraits are unfamiliar with the far right’, warns Daphné Deschamps, who also laments how journalism is ‘very disconnected

from a large part of French society in general, and from the reality and direct consequences of the far right on people’s lives’.

Media outlets and journalists specialising in the far right remain **essential in light of the growing prominence in fascist rhetoric** in France and across Europe. ‘Unfortunately, there aren’t many of us left,’ in fact, ‘less than 15 investigative journalists specialising in the far-right in France,’ says Daphné Deschamps. They represent 0.04% of journalists holding press cards (out of a total of 34,519 in 2024 according to the French commission for journalist accreditation). In addition to her work, it is also worth mentioning the contributions of Camille Vigogne Le Coat, reporter at *Nouvel Obs* and author of *Les Rapaces*, (the Predators) published by Les Arènes.

So how can we make sense of this 'highly interconnected, wide-reaching, multifaceted ecosystem', to quote Daphné Deschamps once again? The answer is also related to **financial means**. For example, *Streetpress* is an independent media outlet, whose funding relies on donations. It has 19 staff members, points out the far-right expert. 'If we had greater means, we could hire more journalists.'

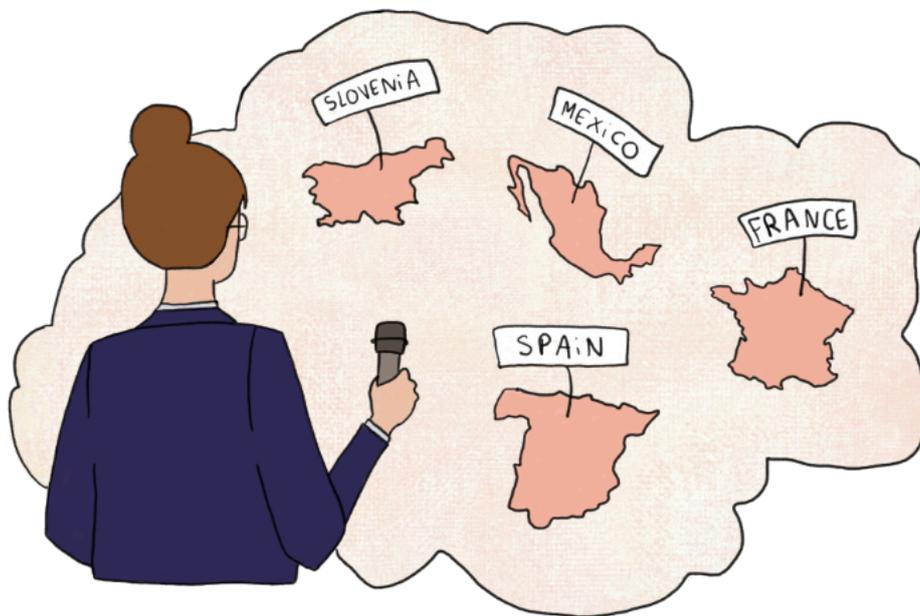
This could even be made a priority in response to the methods used by the opposition. In Spain, the far right doesn't hold back from investing in media outlets. The latter send journalist-influencers to press conferences at the Congress of parliamentarians to stir

things up with their questions laced with fake news. 'The aim of these journalists is not to get answers to their questions, but rather to clash directly with a left-leaning politician by launching attacks on corruption, immigration, feminism and so on. Enough to create viral content lasting just a few seconds (rarely minutes) that they then share on their social media accounts with comments', analyses Sandrine Morel, *Le Monde's* Madrid correspondent. Faced with the political ambitions of businessmen like Vincent Bolloré and Pierre-Édouard Stérin, the French media landscape could very well encounter the same issues, blurring further still the boundary between information and disinformation.

Building resistance: avenues to explore and tools to enact change

Developing initiatives, professional practices, and joining forces: how to regain control of the narrative?

Understanding and covering feminist foreign policy



The concept of Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) started emerging in the 2010s. Swedish Foreign Secretary, Margöt Wallström, ensured her country was the first to officially adopt feminist foreign policy. At the time, the approach was

based on the **'three Rs': Rights, Resources, Representation.**

- **Rights**, meaning that FFP should be guided by human rights-based approaches, which supersede a

country's economic, military, or geopolitical interests.

- **Resources**, referring to the need to allocate the required means to these policies, and to support feminist movements and organisations.

- **Representation**, committing governments to work in an intentional and proactive way to boost female representation in diplomatic corps and international processes.

The Swedish approach inspired other governments to follow suit, including Canada, France (in 2019), Spain, Germany and Chile. For several years, the list of countries initiating this process grew longer, before the Netherlands and even Sweden itself did a U-turn following elections which placed the far right in a position of power, or as part of a coalition.

France's 2025-2030 International Strategy for Feminist Foreign Policy, instigated in March 2025, sets forth that: 'By promoting a feminist foreign

policy, France places the rights of women and girls and gender equality at the centre of its diplomatic action. France makes this a priority in every field of its European and international action, such as peace and security, climate and the environment, development, democratic governance, human rights, humanitarian action, economic, financial and trade issues, digital technology, culture, education, health and food security.'

In response to the global reactionary onslaught, feminist foreign policy proves more necessary than ever. The fact that France has embarked on this path also makes it an important subject for analysis and political monitoring. Indeed, France hosted the 4th Ministerial Conference on Feminist Foreign Policy in Paris on 22 and 23 October 2025, which led to 31 governments adopting a political declaration confirming their commitment to women's rights.

Find out more:

TILT. Feminist diplomacy: a bulwark against backlash? [online video, subtitles available]. October 2025.



The scourge of transphobia in the media with Celine Folliot

Celine Folliot is co-President of AJL (Association of LGBTQI+ Journalists).

How is it that transphobic narratives circulate within the mediasphere, sometimes even within so-called 'progressive' media outlets?

Newsrooms nowadays may appear to be more diverse than they once were, yet in some respects, they are even less so, especially when it comes to social diversity. As for racialised or LGBTQIA+ people, there has been progress but it is slow.

At AJL, we believe that journalists' personal experiences also add to their skills. Ensuring greater diversity across editorial teams is our way of making a collective commitment to better journalism. It's easy to overlook certain subjects if no-one has been through that experience personally, or known someone who has.

To make better journalists, we need to bring more diversity into media outlets. This diversity is increasingly hard to achieve nowadays within a highly competitive job market, where recruiters favour journalists with similar backgrounds, trained in the same elite schools, which apply very selective recruitment processes themselves.

Transphobic narratives and actions reported in the media predominately

target trans women. What does this indicate?

An analysis of Donald Trump's rhetoric reveals that his transphobic remarks serve as a Trojan horse for a broader, anti-feminist, reactionary and authoritarian agenda. This reality is not always obvious due to the lack of people inclined to pick up the nature of this transphobia. Something which wouldn't happen if there were more queer, or - let's go all out - trans people in newsrooms.

In your view, what changes should be prioritised in media practices in order to ensure dignified, respectful, non-pathologising reporting on trans people?

To lessen this effect, we have set up training courses in journalism schools, to explain the importance of these topics and the types of sources to seek out. We emphasise the importance of using accurate language, like saying 'trans' or 'transgender', instead of 'transsexual'. Misnaming things can either negate them, or, alternatively, legitimise language that is ideologically and politically loaded. There is always significance in choosing one word over another. In terms of trans identities, for example, using the word 'transactivism'

is an example of transphobic language. It is important to clarify the origin of expressions and concepts, to trace back their genealogy in order to understand any underlying meanings. This applies across the board: from the rights of LGBTQIA+ people to environmental issues. These practices should be taught in journalism schools, alongside core

subject areas. Why? Because we are living in a time of communications war that those involved are waging wisely. How? By setting up fake observatories and fake experts, and by funding biased studies and surveys that lend their claims an air of respectability.

Gender editors: a key role reshaping newsrooms

Although still relatively uncommon, gender editors have been making their way into international newsrooms over the past decade. Their role is to mainstream gender issues across all content, and to engage even the most reluctant colleagues internally.

2017. American journalist Jessica Bennett, known for her book *Feminist Fight Club*, is hired as gender editor at the *New York Times*. The wording catches on, and takes off, travelling to Argentina at *Clarín*, to France, at *Mediapart*, to Switzerland at *Le Temps*, and to Spain, at *El Diario*. Women are appointed each time. **Their mission involves reviewing content through a gender lens, watching out for inappropriate adjectives, superfluous descriptions, and sexist illustrations.** Although not all content can be reviewed before publication, **they raise awareness among colleagues**, and often receive the backing of editorial teams keen to avoid negative publicity.

It's also about transforming habits and practice by drawing on more women experts, ensuring gender-parity among guests, and bringing overlooked perspectives to the fore. In Spain, around ten journalists have been appointed to this role. In France, though

formal appointments remain uncommon, many women in the profession have effectively assumed these duties. This was the case for Aurélie End and Pauline Talagrand in 2018, when they produced a report for AFP analysing gender bias in news reports. The work was commissioned by the director at the time and led to a series of recommendations from the agency to all its journalists.

While the term gender editor may still cause some discomfort, it is primarily about **ensuring standards across the profession** to make it aware of its own blind spots. At *Mediapart*, Lenaïg Bredoux still holds this role, despite since being appointed Co-editor-in-chief, 'it's still needed', she points out. Meanwhile, Jessica Bennett is back to reporting, and now devotes most of her time to telling women's stories, because doing so is also integral to what it means to uphold the values of a gender editor.



Estelle Ndjandjo: French media's denial of racism



Estelle Ndjandjo is a journalist working across podcasts, radio, and the written press, including RFI, Arrêts sur images, Médiapart, La Déferlante, Radio France, Louie Média, Radio Canada, and Slate. She previously worked as an audiovisual producer at Reuters in Dakar. She is a member of AJAR (Association of Anti-Racist and Racialised Journalists).

Why is it vital to have an organisation like AJAR (Association of Anti-Racist and Racialised Journalists) in the media landscape?

At AJAR, our members make up the minority of every cohort of journalism students. We set the organisation up in March 2023 to take action together, alongside those people most affected. It is especially challenging to be a racial minority in predominantly white newsrooms, across the political spectrum. Some editorial teams claim to be allies, yet still fail to hire more racialised and minoritised staff. In a survey conducted in 2023 by SNJ-CGT, 24% of journalists surveyed reported having been victims of racism, while half stated they had been witness to racism. Meanwhile, 9% of those appearing on screen in news broadcasts, and 8% in rolling news programmes, are perceived as non white, **according to Arcom**. Racialised people are therefore under-represented on television, while it is the most privileged social groups who are given the most airtime.

What are the signs of racism denial in the French media today, and what are

the most common mechanisms behind it?

When a racialised person joins an editorial team, they often feel out of place and unfamiliar with the unwritten rules. They may be the target of racist remarks and subject to intersectional discrimination such as sexism or homophobia. Some editorial boards hire a lot of racialised journalists on work-study placements, or as freelancers, but don't offer them permanent contracts. This means that we are not part of the decision-making circles.

We provide training in journalism schools, yet we still don't have a foot in the newsroom door. There are many who feel they don't want 'racialised thirtysomethings' explaining their job to them. At the same time, we urgently need to combat racism when a news channel like France Info rolls out the red carpet for a so-called expert claiming that the Gaza Strip could be the next Côte d'Azur. Established journalists and their superiors are blind to the urgency of the situation, and even seem to revel in it.

Many journalism schools still refuse to open their doors to us, despite requests from their students.

Have you noticed any positive developments, or notable media resistance over recent years?

I was very surprised to see an increasing number of articles, from *Marie France* to *Radio France*, referring to ‘mysogynoir’. This included a contestant on the French reality TV show, *Star Academy*, called *Ebony*, who was the victim of hate speech, as reported by the TV channel TF1, without actually referring directly to ‘racism’. Pop culture shines a light on

both what captivates us, and what we fixate on. This incident brought the term ‘misogynoir’ to people’s attention, and raised awareness of the hypersexualisation of black women, which also affects artists like Aya Nakamura. She was the only performer whose name was unveiled in advance of the Paris Olympic Games opening ceremony. Emmanuel Macron fed it to journalists, knowing full well what would follow. Rather than reporting on the current issues at the time around retirement age and social welfare, rolling news channels talked about Aya Nakamura. Racism is the ultimate distraction.

Race editors: a matter of urgency across French media

‘The role of gender editor now exists, and we’re striving to introduce race editors too,’ says Estelle Ndjandjo, journalist and member of AJAR, the Association of Anti-Racist and Racialised Journalists. AJAR believes this role serves to **observe and make suggestions**, and ensure consistent coverage of race-related issues in the media, so that they are properly covered across all publications.’

In an interview with *Médianes*, Khedidja Zerouali, Journalist at *Mediapart* and co-founder of AJAR, explains the importance of introducing race editors across all French newsrooms: ‘We are fighting for more journalists specialised in race-related issues because there are so few. Those that are in post are somehow meant to cover the whole spectrum of discrimination, i.e. ableism, racism (including anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and anti-Black racism), sexism, LGBTphobia ... It’s a colossal task. We believe that **this is not enough**

given the state of French society, a colonial power shaped by deep-seated racist ideas. It is a major societal issue that requires at least one full-time position, if not several.’

In 2020, *Washington Post* publisher and CEO, Fred Ryan, **announced** the creation of ‘more than 12 new positions as part of a plan to lead a national conversation on race and diversity issues, while shining a light on current-day inequalities.’ However, this plan, and the job openings it created, did not prevent several racialised journalists leaving the *Washington Post*’s editorial team, as reported two years later by the ***Columbia Journalism Review***. Interviews conducted with over 30 current and former staff members at the time of the investigation showed how ‘Black journalists were underpaid, undervalued, faced a glass ceiling, and encountered indifference or even hostility when pushing for better

coverage of racialised communities and for greater diversity within the organisation.’ Hence why Estelle Ndjandjo believes it is important to talk about ‘structural racism’, rather than ‘combating stereotypes’.

In an interview with *Médianes*, co-founder of AJAR, Khedidja Zerouali, hammered the point home: ‘When we talk about greater diversity in recruitment, we mean across the whole of the editorial team, and all specialities. We don’t want Arabs, Black people, Asians and Jews to be limited to covering issues from working-class neighbourhoods, rap music, urban culture, etc. We advocate for more racialised people to be hired across the board, and at senior management level. We also argue that every member of the editorial team, including white

employees, should receive anti-racism training.’

Mediapart is currently the only investigative newspaper to have taken steps, by appointing journalist and editor Sabrina Kassa as ‘Editorial lead on race issues’ in September 2024, four years after the first gender editor position was created. ‘The role’s aim is to monitor our content and practices for any racist bias, and to expand our coverage of these issues’, wrote Sabrina Kassa in a column published in *Le Club de Mediapart*, recalling also how important it is **to identify, quantify, measure and assess racism-related bias in France and elsewhere**. This nevertheless remains a challenging task: in France so-called ethnicity-based statistics are generally not permitted.

The emergence of innovative funding mechanisms to support independent journalism

In response to the alarming observation that nine billionaires own over 80% of media outlets in France, two innovative initiatives have chosen to back independent media through financial support:

The free press fund,

established in 2019 by *Mediapart*. This endowment fund supports media projects which 'are independent of private interests or government authorities'. Based on a corporate sponsorship model, the fund collects donations from private individuals or foundations, and redistributes them in the form of grants or subsidised loans.

Between 2019 and 2024, 37 media outlets including *Streetpress*, *Disclose*, and *Basta!* received nearly €686,000 in financial support.

Coop-médias,

was set up in October 2024. It is a community-interest cooperative that raises funds from the public, as well as from public and private institutions. The money is then allocated in the form of repayable advances, a type of low-interest loan (3-6%), to support projects that aim to develop media activities or strengthen their long-term sustainability. For example, a major investigation likely to attract new subscribers, or the creation of a more effective subscription tool.

The primary goal is to help them stabilise their business model. €850,000 has already been secured following an initial round of fundraising, and the aim is to reach €2 million by the end of 2025. For its first call for proposals, Coop-médias invested in five independent media outlets: *Basta!* (€50,000), *Fracas* (€55,000), *Marsactu* (€30,000), *Streetpress* (€50,000), and *Vert* (€50,000).



© Louise Quignon for La Déferlante

Emmanuelle Josse: La Déferlante: a successful feminist magazine in France

Emmanuelle Josse is the co-founder of La Déferlante, a feminist independent media outlet established in France in 2021 by Marie Barbier, Lucie Geffroy, and Marion Pillas.

Why did you decide to set up La Déferlante? And how would you describe its editorial stance?

Our magazine came into being in March 2021, in a very specific context. It was just a few years after the media revelations about Harvey Weinstein and what became the #MeToo movement. At that time, podcasts on feminism in France were skyrocketing, with examples such as La Poudre, Les Couilles sur la table, Un podcast à soi. In bookshops everywhere, Mona Chollet's best seller, *In Defence of Witches*, was impossible to miss. Ideas were circulating online and in the media, yet there was a clear absence of print magazines. This format keeps pace with current events, while also anchoring them within a specific, dated object, straddling the fast pace of the media and the slower timeframe of books. Our idea was to document what was happening at the time, to see what feminist voices, and an intersectional lens more generally, could offer journalism. We wanted to produce grounded journalism, without it being overly bleak, within a diversity of formats. Knowledge and narratives can be disseminated in different forms - press articles, literature, comic strips, and through different voices -

journalists, academics, and campaigners. All in one beautifully designed object.

What do you think has made the magazine so successful, in a context of backlash and an increasingly polarised society?

With almost 14,000 subscribers, and healthy sales figures in bookshops, the magazine's success shows that things are more complex than that.

It has come about at a time when gender is becoming a core issue in the media landscape. We are seeing a backlash in political circles, among the wealthy elite and within the upper classes. Gender has also become a consciously acknowledged and openly articulated geopolitical factor. For example, I think it may be the first time we have seen an openly transphobic stance on the part of authoritarian governments.

In light of this, people feel the need to share their understanding of events, what excites them, but also what makes them angry. This worldview shapes our editorial stance: taking into consideration all forms of inequality, not only class-based ones, but also those

related to disability, fatphobia, and other issues gaining traction in public debate, such as adultism. We draw on all these threads in our magazine, which also supports people's desire to address these issues as a community.

You published a special edition entitled *A Feminist Approach to Staying Informed*. What motivated that choice? And what key findings emerged from that issue?

A year on from the publication of our *Resisting the far-right* issue, at the time of the killing of Nahel Marzouk in Nanterre, we found ourselves caught up in the political news surrounding the snap parliamentary elections [held in France in June 2024 following Emmanuel Macron's dissolution of the National Assembly]. We wondered how to find the right words at a time when our usual truth frameworks seemed to be falling apart.

We were faced with a paradox: dictatorships were taking root at a time when sources of information were vast, from climate change to sexual and gender-based violence. Media and technology are only ever what we choose to make of them. You can see as much in our issue on social media and the way gender-based disinformation circulates, especially regarding transphobia. Social media also produced #MeToo.

Silicon Valley may head down the road of techno-fascism, while communities of geeks bring back independence by creating areas of techno-resistance.

In this issue we also remind readers that there have always been feminist media outlets, like *La Fronde*, established a century ago by Marguerite Durand.

Feminists have always understood the importance of having a media presence.

Finally, this issue also explains how sexual and gender-based violence has become a legitimate topic for journalism. I may be mistaken, but it seems hard to turn back the clock on this now. In current-day newsrooms there are now young women who grew up with this type of journalism, as well as a female readership interested in these topics. The #MeToo movement may have enabled this victory, and it's important to recognise that we can in fact shift boundaries.

In this issue, you display a 'resistance world map'. How can we design collective action in response to the reactionary onslaught affecting all our countries?

During darker times, I see the diverse range of media outlets worldwide and that gives me hope.

Following the shocking dissolution of the National Assembly in summer 2024, France's independent media outlets came together to forge joint projects and take collective action. We also saw the power of certain independent media outlets like *Streetpress*, and its articles on the anti-Semitic and xenophobic past of the National Rally candidates in the early parliamentary elections. So yes, there has been a backlash, but not everyone supports it.

The strength of these media outlets, like *La Déferlante*, lies in their ability to maintain a fairly uninhibited relationship with activist practices, and therefore to implement such practices themselves.

A user guide to resistance: case study of journalists from the Bayard group

In response to the appointment of a former close associate of the ultraconservative billionaire Pierre-Édouard Stérin, and to a controversial share acquisition in ESJ Paris, the Bayard Presse group's editorial teams have mobilised en masse. An unprecedented pushback that forced management to back down.

'We don't want to meet the same fate as *JDD* (*Journal Du Dimanche* weekly), and we'll fight back.' At the end of November, the editorial teams at the Catholic press group Bayard (including *La Croix*, *Le Pèlerin*, *Astrapi*, *Okapi*) were in overdrive. Two decisions made without any consultation triggered an internal crisis: first, the appointment of Alban du Rostu, former director of the Common Good Fund, financed by Pierre-Édouard Stérin (a Catholic billionaire opposed to abortion rights and promoter of the so-called 'Great Replacement' theory); and second, the acquisition of a stake in ESJ Paris, alongside groups like Bolloré, Dassault and Arnault. At the head of ESJ Paris journalism school is Vianney d'Alañon, an entrepreneur with close ties to the radical right-wing.

At Bayard, an organisation with Catholic roots, but historically guided by values of openness, dialogue and humanism, the reaction is one of complete shock.

300 staff members attended the AGM, a record number. A petition gathered over 2,600 signatures in just a few hours. An open letter from children's authors brought together 300 signatories. On 28th November, a walkout drew participation from a large part of the workforce. Unions, readers, and contributors past and present, all warn of the dangers of the far right infiltrating one of the last bastions of independent faith-based media.

The board of directors backed down under pressure. On 2 December, Bayard announced it was withdrawing Alban du Rostu's appointment and scrapping its plan to acquire shares in ESJ Paris. The joint union hailed this 'unprecedented mobilisation' and recalled the editorial team's commitment to 'openness, tolerance and dialogue'. **A rare, collective outcry, and a strong message: editorial teams can also put up resistance.**

Spanish public television leads the way

In Spain, the framework law on gender-based violence encourages the media to play an active part in this fight.

Since 2003, most mainstream media outlets publish the official tally of femicides, and include the dedicated emergency hotline for violence against women. A pioneering and innovative initiative in Europe, given in France the first official counts only appeared in the press in 2016.

Almost all newspapers, radio and television stations have a gender editor. RTVE (the Spanish public broadcaster) went even further by setting up an Equality Observatory in 2017. Its aim is to ensure equality within editorial teams, but also across all content: news, series, films, etc. 'There's no point making sure the evening news coverage is gender-balanced if the film that follows is riddled with gender stereotypes', explains Carolina Pecharroman, Gender Editor in the TV newsroom.

The role assigned to her by the Observatory is to ensure news coverage is gender-balanced, and the non-stereotypical representation of women on screen. **'Our presenters and commentators should represent a range of physiques. We need to see older women, women wearing glasses, larger women, not just pretty, young women.'** she explains.

Every day she analyses reports and stories in the news broadcasts, searching for any potential gender-based bias in the coverage. She also examines the gender balance across programmes and debate panels, and requests changes to be made in the event of an imbalance.

The Belgian *cordon sanitaire*: standing firm against the far right

In French-speaking Belgium, audiovisual media outlets have refused to give live airtime to far-right parties and movements that promote discriminatory or anti-democratic ideas. This media *cordon sanitaire* was adopted in 1991 following the electoral breakthrough of a far-right Flemish party.

Yet, faced with the rise and normalisation of the far right in

neighbouring Flanders and elsewhere in the world, this is coming under growing pressure: for example, when RTBF (the public broadcaster) aired Trump's inauguration speech with a two-minute delay on 20 January 2024. The TV channel considered that there was a risk of broadcasting discriminatory language, given 'on several occasions, Donald Trump had made racist comments (...) and incited hatred'.

Political leaders denounced it as ‘censorship’, and the Minister for Media requested an explanation from RTBF, without actually calling the *cordon sanitaire* into question. Several complaints were even filed with the Conseil Supérieur de l’Audiovisuel (the independent regulator), but all of them were dismissed. **‘What would have been deemed normal a few years back is now criticised, including by journalists,’** laments Belgian journalist Sarra El Massaoudi, member of ADIM (Association for Diversity and Inclusion in the Media).

Recently, the Mouvement Réformateur (MR), the main centre-right liberal party,

opened its doors to former members of far-right parties. These new recruits, some of whose remarks have proved controversial, do not deny their ideological past, and have now slipped through the *cordon sanitaire*.

The *cordon sanitaire* is under attack because it has so far served as a shield around Wallonia, where the far right has not exceeded 5% of the vote. In neighbouring Flanders, where there is no such thing, the main far-right party (Vlaams Belang) won almost 23% of the vote in the 2024 European elections.



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Francesca Festa, co-founder of the Sphera network: **freedom of the press – a collective, European struggle**

Francesca Festa is the network’s co-founder and Development Director at Médiannes.

The pan-European network Sphera was set up in 2021, comprising 12 independent media outlets across nine countries (France, Spain, Italy, Greece, Poland, Hungary, Belgium, Lithuania, and Ukraine). 80% funded by European grants, it is run by Médiannes, a support studio dedicated to independent media outlets.

Sphera’s mission is threefold: to help media outlets incorporate a European perspective into their content, to encourage editorial collaboration across European newsrooms, and to support

their economic growth thanks to Médiannes’ expertise.

What was behind this decision to unite independent media outlets at a European level?

Initially, we wanted to cover societal issues that resonate on a European scale, such as ecology, feminism, poverty and social justice, and to offer new generations the chance to understand Europe differently. Then, we realised that since 2020 the broader context has shifted, and we are now

facing new challenges to press freedom and pluralism, including in our members' own countries. From the outset, we decided to focus on Eastern and Southern Europe, in countries where democratic institutions are under pressure, public media are often under threat, and where independent media outlets remain fragile. That is where Sphera can be the most useful, because we offer a different solution, at a European level. Four years later, Sphera is no longer simply an editorial incubator for rethinking how we cover European stories, but also a place of mutual support and resource-sharing for media organisations across Europe.

You talk about a complicated political context. How has the rise of the far right in Europe impacted the independent media ecosystem?

For several years now conducting independent journalism has been a real challenge in Italy, Greece, Hungary and Poland. Several new media ventures have sprung to life, but struggle to survive, often due to a lack of sustainable funding, of protective legal frameworks, or of a supportive media ecosystem. The political climate is often authoritarian, marked by a concentration of media ownership in the hands of those close to power, the instrumentalisation of public information, and even direct pressure put on journalists. Such contexts mean that independent media outlets are weakened, pushed to the margins, and struggle to assert their place in a tense public sphere.

In Greece, where we support [popanda.fr](#), the situation is problematic: the government has cut all financial support to the press, and information is increasingly controlled by those in power. There have also been cases of the state spying on independent media. In Italy and in Hungary, our members

VDnews and [444.hu](#) have made similar observations: there are almost no independent media outlets left. In these countries, freedom of the press is constantly under threat from administrative, legal, and economic attacks.

It is challenging enough to build a viable business model, and all the more so when facing defamation lawsuits, as is happening in Italy. Such attacks mobilise time and add a mental load to these media outlets. They waste time and money trying to defend their legitimacy. This means less time spent producing high-quality information in line with their editorial standards, which puts a lot of pressure on management and the teams alike. Spending time defending yourself means you don't apply for the latest round of funding, or you miss an important business meeting, because other priorities take precedent. Across several countries we have seen the same techniques used to threaten and pressurise independent media.

How is the Sphera network fighting back?

In Hungary, for example, Viktor Orbán's draft bill to deny foreign funding to independent media outlets had an impact on our member [444.hu](#), and sparked a collective response for the first time in the network's history. We launched a Europe-wide online petition in support of press freedom, and initiated a joint, coordinated communications campaign, involving all the network's members, to support 444, inform the public, and raise awareness.

What is Sphera's impact today?

Press freedom in Europe has become an act of resistance, and at Sphera, we are now striving to develop collective action.

We have all become increasingly aware over the years that this network is precious, and that its role is not only to support editorial collaboration, but also to present a united front, and make a political impact.

In the future, we aim to bring together smaller, more isolated European media outlets with more established ones, not necessarily to work on editorial content together, but rather to share tools, exchange skills, and also exert collective pressure at a European level if any of our members are under attack.

We are the point of contact among all these media outlets, from northern Europe to the Balkans and beyond. We also act as an intermediary between them and the European institutions. We plan to continue our investigations into societal issues such as democracy, social justice, ecology and feminism. The European Commission supports us, however the **network regularly comes under attack from far-right MEPs** trying to discredit us in order to call into question the funding we receive.

Super-size lies: the mechanics behind **climate disinformation**

Disinformation is an integral part of the strategies employed by Donald Trump, and the far right more generally.

Political specialist Marie-Cécile Naves explains: 'The narrative battle is crucial, and it's how Trump wins. His victory strategy could be defined simply as a disinformation bulldozer. This includes spreading lies, sowing confusion, firing insults, and creating background noise. No need to be on social media or listen to podcasts to catch up with the commotion everywhere, which certain media outlets then pick up, and neighbours and family members may echo.'

This disinformation is especially related to climate, immigration, and gender issues. You may remember, for example **Donald Trump's outrageous, racist remarks** about immigrants during the presidential campaign. Shortly after returning to the White House, he also lashed out at research on gender and

climate change, banning certain terms on government websites and documents, and freezing research grants based on key words (around gender, but also climate change and environmental justice). More recently, the president of the United States called climate change 'the greatest con job ever perpetrated', in his address to the United Nations in September 2025.

This disinformation strategy is gaining traction beyond US borders. In France, for example, organisations like Quota Climat regularly analyse journalistic practices in terms of climate information. The collective identifies erroneous or misleading narratives on the topic, that seek to embed spurious claims in the public debate at strategically important political moments, such as during votes on

multi-annual energy programmes, or on low-emission zones. In April 2025, Quota Climat published an initial analysis on the state of climate disinformation in mainstream media. The organisation identified 128 cases of climate disinformation in just three months, making an average of 10 per week. Sud Radio station accounted for 31% of disinformation cases, and over 85% of reported cases came from private media outlets. Over the period studied, 2% of airtime was devoted to environmental issues.

These civil society initiatives help document media coverage of climate issues, raise awareness about examples of disinformation, debunk certain erroneous or misleading narratives, and set climate issues back within a fair, fact-based, public debate that informs citizens and policymakers.

The issue is clearly being taken seriously, as UN Secretary-General, António Guterres called on member states to take action against climate disinformation in the run-up to COP 30.

Find out more:

[Preliminary Results of the Automated Detection of Climate Misinformation in French Television and Radio. Quota Climat. 2025.](#)

Teaching and learning: a democratic duty

‘Doors are closing on us’, ‘journalism schools want nothing to do with us’, ‘journalists don’t want us telling them how to do their job’... Despite the importance of AJAR’s work, the training it offers does not always draw participants, laments Estelle Ndjandjo, member of AJAR.

It’s the same situation for two other organisations, AJL and Prenons La Une, that provide training on gender discrimination and sexual orientation among other things.

La Fronde, run by Aliénor Carrière and Marine Forestier, points out: ‘Some newsrooms now offer in-house training on gender bias, sexual and gender-

based violence, and discrimination, yet **many more are lagging behind because they do not consider the issue a priority.** AFP stands out as a model student, says the journalist, ‘thanks to the work of Jessica Lopez, who took over the reins from Aurélia End and Pauline Talagrand’.

It’s the same story in journalism schools:

some continue to incorporate these subjects into the curriculum as core modules; others leave it to the discretion of teachers and guest lecturers. The danger is that these modules disappear from the curriculum as staff come and go.

Yet, it is the media and journalists' responsibility to make sure they are trained on all these issues. Firstly, in order **to reduce bias and stereotypes** by learning how to identify sexist, racist or ableist language in articles, headlines, and visuals, and to broaden the scope of sources by including more women experts and people from minority groups in our narratives. Secondly, these training courses have a direct impact on the **prevention of harassment and violence within organisations**. 'They help raise awareness about behaviour in the workplace, and on employers' legal obligations. As a journalist, it is useful to know the legal definition of workplace harassment. This general and legal knowledge is vital to our work,' La Fronde continues.

Estelle Ndjandjo recounts discussions with HR departments in media organisations that 'dismiss our arguments out of hand', saying that they already offer courses on stereotypes within their catalogue of compulsory training. The problem lies in the fact that the core issue addressed by AJAR, namely structural racism, isn't part of the package, nor is the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, or equality in production. Yet **all journalists need to know just as much about protecting their sources, looking after their IT equipment, the intricacies of labour law, and how to produce rigorous news coverage**.

Without this commitment from media outlets, the fight against discrimination, sexual and gender-based violence, and structural racism, will fall to a handful of dedicated individuals, often women, minorities, or isolated gender editors. This model cannot continue.



Mobilising schools, training future journalists: Pascale Colisson's mission



After 25 years as a journalist working on issues related to social responsibility, gender equality, and diversity, Pascale Colisson joined IPJ - Practical School of Journalism (Université Paris Dauphiné-PSL) in 2012 as Head of Teaching & Learning, with responsibility for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. She lectures on journalism ethics and professional standards, and raises awareness among future journalists on stereotypes in news content.

For 13 years, you have been working tirelessly at IPJ journalism institute, Paris Dauphiné-PSL University, to incorporate the fight against gender bias and discrimination in journalism curricula. How did it all start?

It has been a long journey. I had a lightbulb moment around 36 years old, when I was at a conference by AFJ, the Association of Women Journalists, established in 1981. It had published the figures produced by **GMMP**, the international monitoring project on gender in the world's media. I was astounded by the findings: 80% of women quoted solely as victims or witnesses; 85% of expert commentary allocated to men; women's professions mentioned 14 times less often than men's, their surnames five times less often; 4% of sports coverage devoted to women.

At first, I couldn't believe it. Then, the next day, I was reading an article on geopolitics in *Le Monde* and it hit me: seven experts quoted, all men. And so on and so forth. I eventually realised that this was no coincidence. That's when I

began to see things through a 'gender lens' as they say.

So that's when you joined the fight against this media gender bias?

Yes. I joined AFJ, and subsequently presided the organisation. When economic journalist Claire Alet put forward the idea of setting up a collective: Prenons La Une, I took part in the meetings. I represented the 'older generation' there, before AFJ was shut down, and was glad to see the new generation stepping up.

How did you incorporate these issues into your teaching?

At IPJ, I taught investigative economic reporting. In 2012 the Institute's director invited me to join the teaching team on a permanent basis. He was aware of my position, and gave me free rein to incorporate issues of diversity, equality, and the fight against stereotypes as part of the journalism curriculum. This also included reflecting on any bias in the Institute's admissions exam: the political questions focused almost solely on men;

women's sport and disability sports were nowhere to be seen. We worked on bias in testing and raising awareness among panel members for the oral exams. We also reviewed organisational issues, to counter gender stereotyping: assigning female students as editors-in-chief, raising awareness on unconscious bias among the teaching team. The Institute was audited by Afnor (France's standards body) for this work and was awarded their 'Diversity' label.

You then started working on a broader scope, through the Conference of Journalism Schools (CEJ), which brings together heads of journalism schools running recognised programmes in France?

Yes. In 2018, the National Conference on Journalism Professions (CNMJ) organised a one-day symposium on gender in the media, with researchers and journalism schools. Ahead of the event, Sandy Montañola (Lannion), Denis Ruellan (CELSA) and I conducted a survey in all the recognised journalism schools. The findings: with the exception of two schools, none offered courses on these issues, nor did they have procedures in place to report inappropriate behaviour. At IPJ, we had set up an email account, managed by two people from outside the Institute who were experts in the matter, to avoid any conflict of interest. What really struck me about this survey, was the blind spot: when questioned about raising awareness on these issues among the teaching team, the schools would say: 'No need, we all share the same values'. As if invoking the word 'values' were enough to avoid further reflection. Following this survey, Sandy and I were commissioned by the CEJ to help journalism schools develop equality policies. 1) appoint a contact person, 2) create a reporting system, 3) introduce lessons on bias and stereotypes in our practices, and 4) involve the teaching teams.

Two years on, we conducted a new survey: things had changed significantly. #MeToo had happened. Almost all the journalism schools had implemented measures, though to varying degrees. These ranged from organising a conference or having an outside expert deliver a session, to developing a multi-hour teaching module. While delegating the work ensures the content is delivered by experts, it also limits internal uptake. True change requires everyone involved to take ownership of the issues. When policy implementation relies on a single person, or a limited number of individuals, it is not likely to hold over the long haul.

Is your mission with CEJ finished?

Most of the work is finished. We have produced a wealth of resources, supported the contact points, developed reporting solutions for journalism schools that did not have their own procedures in place, due to their affiliation with a university. The CEJ also funded training through specialised organisations on sexual and gender-based violence, and stereotypes. Our role was to provide tools and to spark ideas and initiatives; then it was over to the journalism schools to take over.

Have you noticed a reactionary shift in journalism schools at your level?

A few years ago, people would joke that what journalism schools really needed was diversity of opinion - students were widely viewed as predominantly left-leaning. Today, there is definitely greater ideological diversity, and some students hold very conservative views. This does not make their remarks punishable by law, but it contributes to the prevailing reactionary climate.

What barriers do you face in your awareness-raising efforts today?

For the past two years I have served as the advisor on equality, the fight against sexual and gender-based violence, discrimination, and hazing at Dauphiné University - an institution with 9,000 students, far beyond IPJ's 48 students per cohort. When I run awareness-raising sessions at the start of the year, I sense that people are at saturation point. What once sparked shock and interest can now lead to comments such as: 'Not this again!' Some, especially male students, switch off from the start, you can see it in their body language. I feel a growing sense of rejection, which could be down to the fact that they feel like they're being blamed. But without resorting to finger-pointing, it is important to talk about the continuum of violence, to understand that laughing at a sexist joke means reinforcing the problem. Today our challenge lies in finding the right way to raise awareness.

How do young journalists feel about newsrooms shifting to the right?

Several students have told me that in certain newsrooms or sections, their

itches on discrimination or gender are routinely written off as activism. That leaves two options: either work with newsrooms as they are, and try through debate to shift positions bit by bit, while waiting to be senior enough to shape editorial choices; or leave and become a freelance journalist, meaning more freedom to choose which newsrooms to work with, but also a lack of job security. A lot of my students are already concerned about the fact there are very few media outlets they would want to work for, and few positions available. 'So, what should we do?' It makes me think of the phenomenon described by sociologist Jean-Marie Charon: a growing number of journalists are leaving the profession in their 20s. The early-career precariousness often described in research projects may be compounded by the ongoing restructuring of the media sector.

Recommendations

1 Provide continuing training

- Train teams (journalists, managers, and human resources staff) not only on gender, race and class biases, and on preventing sexual and gender-based violence, but also on understanding anti-rights movements, disinformation strategies and, reactionary narratives.

2 Create dedicated editorial oversight roles

- Appoint gender editors and race editors, to act as watchdogs and change drivers, able to review, advise and correct content to improve the quality, inclusivity and diversity of media coverage.

3 Bring diversity to newsrooms and leadership

- Ensure women, racialised people, LGBTQIA+ people, people with disabilities and those from working-class backgrounds are fairly represented across editorial teams. Promote more diverse recruitment practices and publicise job offers in journalism to break the culture of closed circles.

4 Give a platform to those concerned

- Feature a greater number of women experts and experts from minority groups.

5 Deconstruct stereotypes and bias

- Pay close attention to wording, images and angles to avoid stigmatising language, or reinforcing gender-based, racist or LGBT-phobic stereotypes.

6 Safeguard democratic space by applying the legal framework

- Understand and recall the legal framework relating to provoking or inciting hatred, discrimination, or violence, including gender-based, racist, anti-Semitic, Islamophobic, homophobic and transphobic content. Ensure that political proposals or remarks that undermine human rights are not presented as mainstream opinions.

7 Embed equality across political and electoral coverage

- Ensure gender-parity among guests, diversify experts, and cover gender-related issues, especially during elections.

8 Safeguard against online violence and harassment

- Establish internal support protocols (technical, legal and, psychosocial), and recognise online harassment as a workplace incident.

9 Acknowledge the seriousness of the backlash

- Document, publish and disseminate analyses and explanations of the rise in the far-right and anti-rights movements more broadly, as well as their influence at national, European, and international levels.

10 Make public funding conditional on exemplary conduct

- Condition public subsidies to the press on compliance with equality standards, and the absence of convictions for discriminatory comments or practices.

11 Support free, independent media

- Increase funding for independent, feminist, and community media outlets, that ensure free, pluralistic information.

Acronyms & abbreviations

AFD - French Development Agency

AFJ - Association of Women Journalists

AFP - French international news agency

AJAR - Association of Anti-Racist and Racialised Journalists

AJL - Association of LGBTQI+ Journalists

AWID - Association for Women's Rights in Development

CEJ - Conference of Journalism Schools

CELSA - Graduate School in Information and Communication Sciences, Sorbonne University

CNJM - National Conference of Journalism Professions

CPAC - Conservative Political Action Conference

ESEC : France's Economic, Social and Environmental Council

ESJ - Graduate School of Journalism - ESJ Lille is among the 14 journalism schools recognised by the profession; ESJ Paris, however is not, and was acquired in 2024 by a consortium of investors including Vincent Bolloré and Bernard Arnault.

FFP - Feminist Foreign Policy

GMMP — Global Media Monitoring Project

IPCC - Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

IPJ - Practical School of Journalism (Université Paris Dauphiné-PSL)

IRIS — French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs

JA — Junge Alternative (youth wing of the German AfD party)

LGBTQIA+ — Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual and other identities

MTVA — Médias Televízió és Vagyonkezelő Alap (Media Television and Asset Management Fund), Hungary

ODA - Official Development Assistance

Ofalp — French Observatory on Violations of Press Freedom

RAI — Radiotelevisione Italiana (Italian public broadcaster)

RSF - Reporters without borders

RTBF - Belgian French Community Radio and Television

RTVE — Radio Televisión Española (Spanish public broadcaster)

SGBV — Sexual and Gender-based Violence

SNJ-CGT — French National Union of Journalists - General Confederation of Labour

UNESCO — United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation

UNFPA - United Nations Population Fund

UNRWA — United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

USAGM — U.S. Agency for Global Media

USAID — United States Agency for International Development

WHO - World Health Organisation

Postface by Agathe Hamel,

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It is possible to forge a media landscape that fosters ethical journalism rather than further entrenching conservatism.

Wherever press freedom is under threat, so is democracy. Like women's rights, freedom of information and press freedom serve as key indicators of a country's democratic health.

In recent years, a sweeping conservative offensive has been unfolding globally, setting women and LGBTQIA+ people squarely in its sights. The media play a pivotal role in shaping public opinion and bringing societal issues to the fore. They can help raise awareness of the ongoing backlash by documenting the phenomenon. Yet, the tools they rely on to inform the public and to uphold democracy remain extremely vulnerable.

The difficulties facing the information sector are part of a broader economic crisis, marked by a shrinking advertising market, heightened competition among media outlets, and growing media concentration. These factors have contributed to the deterioration of working conditions, increased job insecurity for information professionals, and have affected both the quality and production of information.

For many years, ESEC has upheld that access to reliable, independent, pluralistic information is both a prerequisite and a cornerstone of democracy, including in its March 2024 advisory report, which was adopted on the sidelines of the National Information Forum.

Building on this, we wanted to organise an event to draw a clear connection between women's rights, the media, and democracy. In the face of this backlash, journalists need to be able to work freely and independently, without fear or threats. Women journalists in particular face multiple forms of discrimination in the course of their work. Editorial choices about how information is reported also play a major role in shaping the symbolic



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significance of new items. The words we choose are not neutral, nor is the language we use when addressing sexual and gender-based violence, for example.

However, it is possible to forge a media landscape that fosters ethical journalism rather than further entrenching conservatism. ESEC is delighted to have worked alongside Equipop, Prenons La Une, La Fronde and l'Onde porteuse, to challenge and spotlight the connections between women's rights, the media, and democracy. The one-day event we hosted acted as a reminder that information can, and must, serve democracy. It is a tool to help us envision a broader, more inclusive world, just as civil society can help sharpen critical thinking and curb the polarisation of ideas. At a time when attacks on the rule of law are multiplying, it is vital that civil society step forward to document, to sound the alarm, and to create spaces for dialogue and engagement. In short, to resist.

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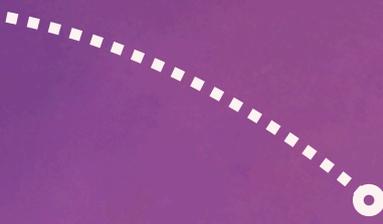
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This publication was developed within the Walking the Talk consortium, a programme advocating for feminist foreign policies and funding that promote gender equality and amplify Majority World feminist voices.



Democracy

Freedom of the press

Human rights

