

# HOW TO CHECK MEDIA RELIABILITY

At the start of every UNDERSTANDING MEDIA seminar at Witten/Herdecke University, students often ask, "How can I know if I can trust a media outlet? How can I tell if I live in a free and functioning media ecosystem where journalists report independently?" Our response is clear: It is anything but easy. You need to think and research like a journalist. This is especially crucial if you live in a country where political or other interest groups try to influence the media to secure re-election, advance their agendas, or prioritize their interests over the common good—without you knowing. Controlling the media is a key tactic for these forces. Here are some steps you can take:



## EXAMINE OWNERSHIP AND FUNDING SOURCES

- Identify who owns the media outlet and how it is funded.
- Check for any government funding or affiliations with political parties.

## EVALUATE EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE

- Determine if the outlet is free to make editorial decisions without external pressure.
- Look for any policies or guidelines that restrict editorial freedom.

## ANALYZE REGULATORY CONTROL

- Research who appoints the media regulators and their relationship with political entities.
- Verify if the regulatory body is independent or politically influenced.

## ASSESS TRANSPARENCY OF INFORMATION SOURCES

- Ensure that sources of information are clearly cited and credible.
- Be wary of outlets that frequently use anonymous or unverified sources.

## REVIEW COVERAGE AND BIAS

- Check for balanced reporting and the inclusion of multiple perspectives.
- Be cautious of media that consistently supports a single viewpoint or discredits critics without evidence.

## INVESTIGATE THE USE OF STATE ADVERTISING

- Determine if the outlet relies heavily on state advertising.
- Assess whether state advertising is used to influence media coverage.

## CHECK FOR OWNERSHIP CONSOLIDATION

- Identify if the media outlet is part of a larger conglomerate with business interests tied to the government.
- Consider how ownership concentration might impact editorial independence.

## LOOK FOR SIGNS OF SELF-CENSORSHIP

- Be aware of journalists resigning or citing censorship pressures.
- Note any changes in editorial stance that coincide with political events or pressures.

## MONITOR FOR PROPAGANDA

- Evaluate if the outlet's content aligns closely with government propaganda.
- Check for frequent use of government press releases without additional analysis or critique.

## COMPARE WITH OTHER INDEPENDENT SOURCES

- Cross-check information with other reputable and independent media sources.
- Use fact-checking websites to verify the accuracy of reported information.

## RESEARCH THE MEDIUM'S HISTORY

- Look into the media outlet's history of ownership, funding, and editorial changes.
- Understand the context of how the outlet has evolved and its current standing in the media landscape.

## EVALUATE THE IMPACT OF MEDIA CAPTURE

- Be aware of the broader context of media capture in the region or country.
- Recognize the potential influence of media capture on the outlet's reporting and editorial decisions.