

Media Control in the 20th Century

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Although the control of the mass media is as old as the production of such media it became even stronger in the 20th century. This has different reasons.

1. Political reasons

The early European states established legal norms for such a control, but these states were relatively weak in realizing these norms. This is particularly true for non-central states as the Old German Empire with its federalistic structure. In the 20th century the totalitarian states were much more effective in media control.

2. Reasons of media structure and distribution

For several centuries the printed press was the only medium of mass communication. And it took long time until it reached a distribution throughout society. Since the end of the 19th Century new media emerged: Film, Radio, Television and in recent years further “New media”. This confronted modern states with new problems of control.

Nevertheless it became difficult to control the media by classical preventive censorship. This was difficult to legitimize and to organize and provoked resistance. Therefore the states developed other means, i.e. control of the profession, journalistic education or ordering press instructions.

Technical reasons forced even liberal democracies to develop means of media control in the 20th century. That is particularly true for broadcasting that was organized in forms of public service (with societal control). Particularly at the end of the 20th century it seems that it has become nearly impossible to control the net media. We can assume that the breakdown of totalitarian states was caused to a certain degree by this impossibility.