CHAPTER 3

Media Democracy in Action

Contributions by Rachael Jolley (Index on Censorship), Chase Palmieri (Tribeworthy), Mahsood Ebrahim and Julianne Rodriguez (Citrus College), Kevin Gosztola and Rania Khalek (Unauthorized Disclosure), and Gennie Gebhart (Electronic Frontier Foundation); introduction by Andy Lee Roth

Changes in consciousness take place beneath the surface of action. And so they’re hard to measure. But every once in a while they break out, they break through to the surface. And only then do you realize that a change in consciousness has taken place.

—Howard Zinn

The late historian Howard Zinn’s basic concern, he once explained, was to document “the countless small actions of unknown people” that lie at the roots of history’s “great moments.” His People’s History of the United States—first published in 1980 and now available in multiple editions and translations—epitomized that insight and provided substantial documentary evidence for it, leading Noam Chomsky to observe that Zinn’s book “literally changed the consciousness of a generation.”

First appearing in Project Censored’s 2004 yearbook, the annual Media Democracy in Action chapter can be read as an ongoing effort to document the kind of breakthroughs described by Zinn in the epigraph above, with a special focus on “the surface of action” where independent journalism and social activism intersect.

Whether it is voiced by pundits and scholars or reflected in polls of public opinion, concern for the content and quality of news reporting tends to focus on news that is broadcast or published by journalism’s
corporate giants. The result of this narrow focus is a perspective on news media that mirrors the “great man” theory of history, which achieved prominence in the nineteenth century. Thus, applied to news and journalism, the decisive players are an increasingly concentrated group of for-profit businesses, such as ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC in broadcasting; and the New York Times, Washington Post, and USA Today, among others, in print.

Just as Howard Zinn’s People’s History sought to show the centrality of otherwise “unknown people” and their “countless small actions” in the making of human history, we understand that there is more to the news of the world than the reporting of establishment journalism. Progressive scholars have identified and analyzed how an increasingly robust “networked fourth estate” provides both an alternative and a challenge to “legacy” media. That understanding informs Project Censored’s conception of “media democracy in action”—a vision of journalism as a progressive social movement, not limited to professional reporters or bound by establishment conventions of depersonalization and balance.

Leading off this year’s chapter is Rachael Jolley of the Index on Censorship. Established in 1972, the Index has been an inspiration, a source of crucial information, and a valued ally for Project Censored. In the first issue of the Index on Censorship, published in March 1972, Stephen Spender acknowledged the possibility that a publication of this sort might become “a bulletin of frustration.” By contrast, he asserted, “the material by writers which is censored in Eastern Europe, Greece, South Africa and other countries is among the most exciting that is being written today.” That assessment applies equally to the diversity and scope of the Index’s programs today, as Jolley, the journal’s current editor, succinctly shows. For instance, she describes how the Index’s Turkey Uncensored program is using digital technology and social networks to allow Turkish writers, artists, cartoonists, and photographers to share stories that cannot be told inside their country, and to extend the reach of these stories to a wider, global audience.

Similarly, Chase Palmieri of Tribeworthy describes how that California-based startup is harnessing the technological power of social media (and its popularity) in order to develop new ways of vetting
news stories. As he describes, “crowd contested media” provide a means for members of the public to organize and identify potential problems in the news coverage of any given topic. In turn, this serves as a way to counter the top-down relationship between producers and consumers that was characteristic of legacy mass media. As an innovative social media platform, Tribeworthy provides new ways for the public to engage in meaningful dialogue, with one another and with news workers.

The need to hold news organizations accountable—whether they are corporate-owned or independent—is likely self-evident to anyone reading this book. What’s less clear is how to do so with limited time and resources, as a grassroots “citizen journalist.” In their article on newspaper coverage of police use of body cameras, Citrus College students Mahsood Ebrahim and Julianne Rodriguez demonstrate one simple but effective method of analyzing news sources, providing a critical understanding of the ways that “spin” can be used to shape public opinion. Their research investigates how four major national newspapers’ decisions about who to feature as newsworthy sources of information and opinion provide a consequential but typically unseen frame for the public’s understanding of this controversial topic. Although many of us consume news on a daily basis, as Ebrahim and Rodriguez show, we are more likely to recognize important patterns in news coverage when we engage in systematic inquiry. Notably, though, neither their research methods (content analysis) nor their data (newspaper articles) require graduate-level training or big university research grants in order to generate meaningful findings.

If Ebrahim and Rodriguez’s findings serve to confirm what previous media scholars have documented about the narrow range of sources that form the basis for most establishment news reports, then Kevin Gosztola and Rania Khalek’s article on their new podcast, Unauthorized Disclosure, epitomizes how truly independent media provide a genuine alternative. As Gosztola and Khalek describe, Unauthorized Disclosure originated with the goal of providing a platform for those “who speak up about corruption without asking for permission and without regard for whether it fits the script of what is acceptable to debate.” With a public hungry for news that reflects a broader range of perspectives than are typically provided by establishment media,
crowdfunded news, like Unauthorized Disclosure and MintPress News (which we featured in the Media Democracy in Action chapter of Censored 2017), is central to the emerging networked fourth estate and its financial sustainability.

A free press, Cory Doctorow has written, “requires access to the full range of press technologies, and that includes the Internet.”\textsuperscript{8} Few if any organizations have done more than the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) to enhance and protect civil liberties as the use of digital technology grows. In the final article of this chapter, Gennie Gebhart describes a trio of online tools—Privacy Badger, HTTPS Everywhere, and Certbot—that EFF has developed, not only to empower the public to protect their privacy when they use the Internet, but also to provide people with a practical way to “join the movement toward a more private, secure Internet.”

Taken together, the contributions to this year’s Media Democracy in Action chapter provide a snapshot of a resurgence in journalism and media criticism that independent organizations and individuals are leading. This resurgence promises to counteract the scourge of “fake news,” and to refresh the public’s faith in the power of journalism to inform us about what matters and how we can organize to make a difference—in our communities, online, and around the world.

**INDEX ON CENSORSHIP: “A BEACON FOR PRESENT AND FUTURE STRUGGLES”**

Rachael Jolley

Index on Censorship was created in 1972 at the request of Pavel Litvinov and other dissident writers who sought a way to publish work that had been banned in their home nations. Established by a group of leading thinkers which included the poet Stephen Spender, Writers and Scholars International, the parent organization of Index, swiftly began publishing the magazine *Index on Censorship*. From the start, the magazine has provided a place to publish work that had been banned or censored, and for journalism to expose how regimes are trying to keep their citizens from being informed, from protesting, or even from discussing the past.
Index on Censorship has published the words of the famous and celebrated, from Václav Havel to Arthur Miller, as well as unsung journalists and whistleblowers. It publishes on issues as varied as propaganda and film, playwriting, rapping and homophobia, and football chants. Meanwhile, Index as an organization continues to campaign and advocate for change, working with writers, activists, and artists around the world. Through social media, letter-writing campaigns, protests, media appearances, and internationally-acclaimed awards, Index on Censorship brings global attention to any attempts at repression of the freedom of expression.

Mapping Media Freedom

Mapping Media Freedom is a crowd-sourced, Index-led project that collects data on attacks against members of the media in forty-two countries in and around Europe. The attacks documented include threats of physical violence, threats of job loss, censorship, legal action, and attacks on property. Reports are identified and submitted by staff writers, independent journalists, and members of the public. All reports are fact-checked and edited by a core team of investigators prior to publication and mapping online.

Index on Censorship operates this project—which is co-funded by the European Commission—in partnership with the European Federation of Journalists and Reporters Without Borders.

Quarterly reports compile a snapshot of the latest trends in the data. For instance, during the third quarter of 2016, MMF documented that four journalists were killed; 54 incidents of physical assault were reported; 107 media professionals were arrested; 150 were detained and released; 112 reports of intimidation, which includes psychological abuse, sexual harassment, trolling/cyberbullying, and defamation, were confirmed; journalistic work was censored or altered 29 times; and media professionals were blocked from covering a story in 89 cases.

The MMF project collates data that helps to identify trends across the region. The case studies provide examples, enabling Index and other organizations to make a stronger argument about the seriousness of media attacks. While it cannot claim to be comprehensive, the
MMF project does quickly pick up changes in patterns of behavior by governments and others who are attempting to silence the media.

**Turkey Uncensored**

In 2016, at a time when Turkish newspapers, magazines, and broadcasters were coming under government pressure, and many were closing, the Turkey Uncensored project was created as a platform to publish the work of writers, artists, cartoonists, and photographers who were experiencing extremely difficult working conditions. It was launched in a period when leading journalists were being arrested and forced to flee the country. By September 30, 2016, 98 journalists were arrested and charged, 133 media professionals were detained, 160 media outlets were shut down, and approximately 2,500 journalists lost their jobs, according to Al Jazeera, which collated numbers from Turkish journalism sources.9

The project publishes stories that are not being told inside Turkey, but also gives those under threat a chance to talk about the working and political conditions inside the country. Index’s Turkey Uncensored team, led by its editor Sean Gallagher, works with Turkish translators to publish stories in English so they can reach a much wider audience globally. In its first quarter, stories from the Turkey Uncensored mini site saw 1,111,748 Twitter impressions and 45,000 page views in six months, showing an enormous interest in the stories. Index also heard from a mother of an imprisoned photojournalist who wanted to thank the organization for keeping what was happening in Turkey in the public eye.

Index is regularly approached by broadcasters to comment on the political situation in Turkey, and we have been able to highlight individual cases and personal stories to document the current state of affairs and to illustrate its personal impacts on specific members of the Turkish media. International media attention can have a significant impact on governments, and it is important to make sure that the attacks on those working in the Turkish media are not ignored internationally.
Magazine Issue: Staging Shakespearean Dissent

The spring 2016 issue of Index on Censorship magazine featured a themed report on plays that protest, provoke, and slip by the censors, using the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare’s death to begin the discussion.

Articles were commissioned from Brazil, India, South Africa, Turkey, Hungary, the USA, and the UK. Authors were asked to look at how Shakespeare rattles and toys with audiences, confronts and provokes, and sometimes squeezes controversial subjects past authorities without their noticing. Actor and author Simon Callow wrote about how Shakespeare was banned by Stalin and (partly) embraced by the Nazis. Academic Preti Taneja looked at how theater makers in Kosovo and Serbia had put together a dual-language production of Romeo and Juliet, the first production to be sponsored by both governments. Playwright Elizabeth Zaza Muchemwa wrote about how Shakespeare slips by the limits of the censors in Zimbabwe.

The magazine provoked a themed debate at the prestigious Hay Festival in May 2016, and a second set of events in the USA are due this spring, in Washington, DC, and New York City. The issue’s innovative cover design, which combined the Anonymous mask with a portrait of Shakespeare, was also adapted into masks on sticks which have been used as a way of engaging debate at various Index events.

This theme has proved successful at engaging a wide audience in discussions and raising awareness of censorship.

As the Times Literary Supplement wrote about Index on Censorship magazine in 2016: “When one considers the publication’s back catalogue as a corpus, seen in historical context, its worth is hard to deny. It constitutes an archive of past battles won, and a beacon for present and future struggles.”

RACHAEL JOLLEY is the editor of Index on Censorship magazine. She was awarded specialist editor of the year in the British Society of Magazine Editors awards in 2016.
TRIBEWORTHY: CROWD CONTESTED MEDIA

Chase Palmieri

We often hear the term “media ethics,” but what we see in action looks more like “media metrics.” A focus on metrics is understandable since the news media is largely a for-profit industry, so its organizations need a way to measure their success. This would not be a problem if some of the metrics guiding media behavior were in the public’s best interest. Unfortunately, metrics such as Likes, Shares, Clicks, Views, and advertising revenues do nothing to measure the quality of journalism or the public’s trust in it.

It’s clear that one way to reform news media is by introducing a new metric that aligns the interests of news consumers and news producers. This new metric would be the people’s measure of media success, and would therefore require input from the public. News-gathering would become more interactive as users hold journalists and news outlets accountable for bias, logical fallacies, and mistakes. We at Tribeworthy call this new approach “Crowd Contested Media.”

Before explaining how Crowd Contested Media can solve the problem of news source accountability, it’s important to understand a few of the other proposed solutions. Platforms such as Google and Facebook are considering the use of algorithms to decide what is true or false in journalism, and therefore what you will or will not see. This inherently leads to some form of censorship.

Facebook also recently partnered with third-party fact-checking organizations in an effort to attach disclaimers to contested articles in users’ News Feeds, which is useful only when the organizations agree on an unreliable article before it spreads everywhere. But what about all the other articles they don’t get to review? What about articles riddled with logical fallacies, biases, or mistakes, even if those do not amount to “fake” news? Websites such as Snopes and PolitiFact can’t scale to meet the challenge because fact-checkers in their organization simply can’t read and evaluate the never-ending stream of new information fast enough. Perhaps fact-checking organizations’ greatest challenge is winning the public’s trust amidst questions of their own bias, political agendas, and corporate ownership. Fact-
checking the world’s news is a nearly impossible feat to expect from any single organization, and a task we at Tribeworthy don’t feel comfortable outsourcing to an algorithm.

To address any skepticism about a crowdsourced solution, consider the online platforms Rotten Tomatoes and Yelp. Rotten Tomatoes’s rating does not mean someone will enjoy 89 percent of a given movie, but this serves as a benchmark that can be compared with other rated movies. The consumer can decide his or her own cut-off point. For example, perhaps a person won’t spend time on a movie rated less than 75 percent unless it comes recommended from a trusted source or friend. The same applies to Yelp. Yelp is not saying people will have a five-star experience at a restaurant with that rating, it’s simply showing the general experience of those who came before. Although it’s not a perfect system, because everyone has his or her own tastes and preferences, we still find it useful when deciding where to eat. Believe it or not, there was a time when people would watch movies and eat at restaurants without leaving their feedback. That’s where we are today with online news. When people come across an article they don’t trust, often the first thing they do is exit the page. The next reader is just as vulnerable because the previous visitor did nothing to warn them. What if the previous person could have helped by alerting subsequent readers to potential problems? People tend to build trust online by seeing the un-incentivized feedback of their peers, yet no organization is currently using this phenomenon to tackle one of today’s most distrusted industries—the news media.

So why is Crowd Contested Media the answer? Just as Rotten Tomatoes and Yelp serve as a feedback loop to improve their respective industries, we at Tribeworthy believe online news is the next industry in need of mass accountability. We are not a fact-checking organization, but a platform for news consumers to organize together and identify potential problems within any given article. The reviews create a trust rating for each article, author, and news outlet. By aggregating user reviews, we’re able to create a rating page that serves as consumer protection for those gathering information online. The rating page shows how people have rated the article’s significance as well as the top three most reviewed problems found within the article (e.g., red herring fallacy, religious bias, and misused terminology),
and user explanations for each problem identified. This is a different approach to critiquing the news, and it’s based upon our belief that all information should be made available and that sunlight is the best disinfectant.

More than just protecting each other as news consumers, authors and news outlets need a proper feedback mechanism to improve the quality of their work. Some authors read the comments section of their articles, but comments are usually lacking in constructive criticism. In fact, many websites are getting rid of their comments sections altogether, which means they’re relying even more on the traffic metrics discussed earlier.

Until recently, the media has always been a one-way conversation. The mass media talked at us and we complained when they made mistakes. That’s been the way it’s worked for a long time, but the Internet has given each of us a voice. With social media, we can talk back in a dialogue with a news media that has reached record levels of distrust. When the media is unable to hold the powerful accountable, the public must hold the media accountable. Stated another way, we cannot have a reliable media until we have a liable media.

As with any crowdsourcing platform, Tribeworthy and Crowd Contested Media will live or die based on people’s willingness to contribute. It’s our job to arm society with the most effective and easy-to-use tool, and to make sure this tool is ready when the people decide they have had enough.

CHASE PALMIERI is a self-described news junkie who serves as CEO and cofounder of Tribeworthy.com, the home of Crowd Contested Media. Chase and his team are building trust among online news consumers by holding authors and news outlets accountable with a review system similar to Yelp and Rotten Tomatoes.

NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF POLICE BODY-WORN CAMERAS

Mahsood Ebrahim and Julianne Rodriguez

Police use of body-worn cameras (BWCs) is on the rise. With the safety of police officers and civilians constantly in question, police departments and the public alike have turned to this new technology
in hopes of minimizing police use of force, reducing citizens’ complaints, and increasing police accountability and legitimacy.\textsuperscript{11} In this article, we report the main findings from research conducted at Citrus College in Fall 2016 on news coverage of police use of BWCs. Stories on the topic were prominent in the news during this time. These stories reflected a range of official perspectives on police use of BWCs; simultaneously, this news coverage helped set an agenda for public debate about the pros and cons of BWCs.\textsuperscript{12}

We looked at news coverage to determine how the officials, experts, and advocates who were quoted in these reports justified support for, or opposition to, police BWCs. We identified recurring arguments made by both supporters and opponents of BWCs. We also analyzed one significant aspect of the debate that most news coverage failed to emphasize—the economic interests shaping the increasing prevalence of BWCs in daily police department operations across the US. Who benefits financially as departments adopt this new technology? And why was this aspect of the issue so marginal in corporate news coverage?

**Data and Methods**

Our data consist of 111 news stories about police use of BWCs, published by the *Chicago Tribune, Los Angeles Times, New York Times*, and the *Washington Post* between May and August 2016.\textsuperscript{13} Following work by sociologist William Gamson on *media standing*, our analysis focused on sources quoted directly by journalists.\textsuperscript{14} With the help of classmates, we coded a total of 1,143 direct quotations. The coding procedure consisted of reading the articles and coding the quoted sources by type and by their positions on BWCs.

**Findings**

Two hundred and thirty-two quotations from the full data collection dealt specifically with police use of cameras or recordings, and these became the focus of our analysis. Of these quotes, one hundred and twenty-three expressed clear views in support of police use of cameras. By contrast, only twenty-one quotes clearly opposed their use.
(The additional eighty-eight quotations that focused on police use of cameras were either neutral or could not be coded with certainty.) The significant prevalence of quotations in support of BWCs is noteworthy: As prior research documents extensively, professional journalists tend to balance pro- and con-positions on controversial issues as one way of displaying objectivity.\textsuperscript{15} We will return to discuss the significance of the unusual lack of balance in quoted sources, below.

Our findings are consistent with prior research that has established journalists’ overwhelming preference for news sources with official, bureaucratic statuses.\textsuperscript{16} In our data, 44 percent of those quoted directly were law enforcement officials; 17 percent were other government officials (e.g., city council members or mayors); 17 percent were attorneys; 7 percent were identified as experts (e.g., professors or researchers); and 4 percent were civil liberties advocates (including, for example, spokespersons for the American Civil Liberties Union). Fewer than 10 percent of those quoted were community members, relatives of a victim or suspect, or sources with other, unofficial statuses.

Qualitative content analysis of the data led us to identify recurring arguments for and against BWCs. Supporters of BWCs consistently argued that this new technology promotes transparency. Supporters argued that, with video recordings, nothing that happened could be hidden or denied. In this view, BWCs alter behavior. Being observed deters bad behavior.\textsuperscript{17}

By contrast, opponents of BWCs consistently articulated one (or a combination) of five main frames: Cameras malfunction, they can be incorrectly operated, camera footage can be manipulated, BWCs lead to controversy over making footage public, and BWCs are a waste of money. A full discussion of these themes goes beyond the limits of this brief report. Here, by way of example, we emphasize how opponents of BWCs countered the pro-argument of transparency by emphasizing that video footage is subject to manipulation. For instance, as researchers have documented, the speed of video replay affects viewers’ judgments.\textsuperscript{18} Thus, opponents of BWCs argued that slow-motion replay gives viewers a false impression that the actor had more time to premeditate before acting.

Overall, our content analysis of who’s quoted and the positions they articulated shows how news coverage serves both to reflect the
spectrum of official views on the issue and, consequently, to frame the agenda for public debate about it.

What Newspaper Coverage Omitted

BWCs are touted as tools of accountability, but they are also big business. In December 2014, after the shooting death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, President Obama pledged $75 million to help police departments across the nation purchase BWCs and train officers in their use. Taser International is best known as a manufacturer of electroshock weapons used by police departments across the US, but it is increasingly investing in and profiting from police demand for BWCs. In the first quarter of 2015, Taser, the leading US manufacturer of body cameras, announced earnings of $6.4 million—up 73 percent from its revenues of $3.7 million in the first quarter of 2014.\

In 2016, its body-camera revenues increased another 50 percent, to $9.7 million.\

In April 2017, Taser rebranded itself as Axon and, at the same time, announced a program to provide free BWCs to every US police officer. As industry analysts have noted, the cameras themselves are just one revenue source. Axon also profits from its proprietary digital storage service, Evidence.com, which allows police departments to host and manage body camera video. As the Atlantic reported in April 2015, “The appeal of its business model is that money will come from selling an ongoing subscription service (like Netflix or Spotify) rather than one-time sales of technology made of plastic and glass.”

Just one of the 111 newspaper articles in our data set addressed these economic interests. On July 14, 2016, David Gelles of the New York Times published a story titled “Company Known for Its Stun Guns Corners the Market for Police Body Cameras.” Gelles quoted Taser’s chief executive, Patrick W. Smith, on the utility of the company’s cameras in terms of transparency: “It’s in everyone’s interest to know what happened.” Noting that demand for BWCs had increased significantly since Michael Brown was shot dead by an officer, Gelles also reported that “analysts now estimate that the market will soon be worth $1 billion a year.”

The New York Times reported that Taser was “under fire for ques-
tionable business practices,” including paying police chiefs to travel to Taser conferences, hiring retired police chiefs who bought Taser products to join the company as consultants, and negotiating contracts with cities without competitive bidding. In brief, Taser/Axon has parlayed its longstanding relationships with police departments who already used its stun guns into cornering the lucrative market for BWCs and video hosting services. As much as the newspaper articles that we examined conveyed a fairly robust debate on the pros and cons of police BWCs, the issue of who profits from their use was almost entirely absent from this news coverage. Readers of the Chicago Tribune, Los Angeles Times, and Washington Post would have had to look to other, independent sources to understand the economic interests at stake, while careful followers of the New York Times might have been fortunate enough to see David Gelles’s excellent report.

Conclusion

A 2016 Pew Research poll indicated that 66 percent of police officers and 93 percent of the general public favor police BWCs. Similarly, in our data, we found that 85 percent of the directly-quoted sources favored the new technology. Qualitative content analysis of the pro-and con-arguments in the newspaper coverage that we studied shows how advocates focused on one primary frame—transparency—while skeptics deployed a wider variety of arguments to warrant their opposition. Although some opponents argued that police BWCs were a waste of money—because officers might fail to use them correctly or video footage could be manipulated, for example—this is different from addressing BWC programs as lucrative business ventures.

Until news coverage expands to include the economic interests at stake when police departments decide whether or not to use body-worn cameras, the public will remain incompletely informed while Axon and its investors will continue to profit.

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THE UNAUTHORIZED DISCLOSURE PODCAST: EXPANDING THE BOUNDARIES OF ACCEPTABLE DEBATE

Kevin Gosztola and Rania Khalek

Neither of us had any experience producing podcasts or radio shows. However, we had experience in independent journalism and recognized the potential for a weekly show, which we could co-host, to provide platforms to people who are typically overlooked or ignored by the corporate press.

We called the show “Unauthorized Disclosure” to reclaim a phrase used by the national security agencies and political elites to suppress those who speak up about corruption without asking for permission and without regard for whether it fits the script of what is acceptable to debate.

Our first show featured Paula Swearingen, a mother in West Virginia who was involved in relief efforts after a devastating chemical spill further polluted water in and around the Elk River. Only a few dozen people listened to it when it was posted in January 2014, but it officially marked the launch of our show.

Since then, Unauthorized Disclosure has grown tremendously. We have had listeners inform us that our show opened their “small southern US mind up to the misinformation,” that it has taught them about “socialism and left politics.” We have also had people from out-

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side the US tell us they see our show as a part of the resistance to the malignant presidency of Donald Trump that threatens people all over the globe.

We established ourselves on Patreon and now average two to three thousand downloads per episode. We engage our listeners regularly, giving them opportunities to recommend guests and to influence how we produce the show. Our listeners show us appreciation by pledging to support us on a monthly basis, and we return the appreciation by making sure that each episode delivers sharp insights and a dash of humor, to acknowledge the absurdity of our collective moment.

In an economy with fewer and fewer stable jobs in journalism, the podcast is more than just an opportunity to elevate activists, independent journalists, and citizens with stories to tell and work that deserves greater attention. It also helps to deflect smear campaigns against our work and the work of others.

For example, Rania Khalek has traveled to the Middle East to report on conflicts in Syria, Libya, and Yemen. She traveled to Syria in 2016 with a delegation of Western journalists to attend a conference in Damascus convened by a nongovernmental organization known as the British Syrian Society, which was co-founded by Bashar al-Assad’s father-in-law. Her name was added to a program as a speaker without her consent. This happened to multiple journalists, yet after the program circulated she was the only one targeted by a faction of overzealous pro-Syrian rebel advocates.

Their campaign forced Khalek to resign from the editorial board of the Electronic Intifada. She had to leave Damascus and never attended the conference. A prominent progressive media publication refused to publish her reporting. In February 2017, this faction scored another victory by having her speaking event at the University of North Carolina, which was to be hosted by Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), canceled.

Multiple individuals, from a Turkish state media journalist to a San Francisco politics and international studies professor, endorsed a campaign to destroy a journalist’s livelihood. Unauthorized Disclosure immediately became a valuable means for beating back this insidious campaign.

On social media platforms, it is far too easy to act as a demagogue,
exaggerating and misrepresenting an issue in ways that whip one’s followers into a frenzy. Many are comfortable with shaming people, by accusing them of sympathy for war criminals or support for dictators, without citing any proof—often with the intent of damaging their target’s professional reputation. When asked to produce proof, they ignore requests or claim they do not need to show evidence because the so-called record is well known. This is much harder to get away with on a podcast or radio show.

Rather than make futile attempts at debate with smear artists or ideological opponents, we use the show to address baseless allegations. We explore what is at the core of these allegations. If there is a kernel of truth to any of the criticism, that kernel is confronted. We are able to deconstruct arguments, positions, and statements that people typically make from the comfort of their computer chair without ever considering whether they should be held responsible.

For example, when there are claims of Russian hacking and hysterical conspiracy theories spread by liberal pundits and Democratic Party operatives, we pause to assess what the truth is, dismissing those who allege we are trolls of the Kremlin. We brush off claims of being pro-Assad because it is far more important to question whether what is unfolding in Syria is well understood, as public understanding could prevent rash escalations of US military intervention. We laugh at those who reflexively label people “Bernie Bros” simply because they engage in principled politics against Democrats. We question campus and university culture and challenge movements not to play into the hands of Far Right forces that wish to fraudulently parade through our country as if they are heroes of free speech.

These kinds of conversations would be nearly impossible in corporate or establishment media. And that is the power of Unauthorized Disclosure. It makes it possible for us to defend those unfairly treated as pariahs, to offer a space for a fresh and perceptive conversation in celebration of dissent, and to fearlessly interrogate social and political norms as they are reinforced by both the right and left wing as well as the squishy mealy-mouthed center.

Kevin Gosztola is cohost of the Unauthorized Disclosure podcast and managing editor of Shadowproof.com. He was previously a staff columnist and reporter for
HOW WE ARE BUILDING THE INTERNET: TOOLS FOR USERS FROM THE ELECTRONIC FRONTIER FOUNDATION

Gennie Gebhart

The Internet is what we make it, and we are facing an increasingly critical crossroads as we decide how to shape its business models and security standards. In response, the Electronic Frontier Foundation is empowering users with tools to protect themselves and join the movement toward a more private, secure Internet.

An Internet Built on Our Decisions

“The Internet commons.” “Information wants to be free.” “Net neutrality.” The terms we use to talk about the Internet can be misleading. Make no mistake, the concepts behind these terms are all worth fighting for—but the way we talk about them is confusing at best. Unlike an ecological commons, the net is not an organic entity. Arguably, the information disseminated online is not capable of “wanting” anything in most senses of the word. And, contrary to the vision of a “neutral” net, the Internet has no natural state to which it must return.

Instead, the Internet is built on decisions—our decisions. There is nothing inevitable about the Internet we have today, or the Internet we could have tomorrow. Today, we inhabit a World Wide Web built with privacy-invasive business models that give users free content in return for surrendering their privacy to large companies and third-party trackers. And even when third parties aren’t following us across the web, we often browse on unencrypted connections that make our...
activity available to anyone snooping on our connection, from government agencies to our Internet service providers (ISPs) to the people we share wireless connections with at Internet cafes or on airplanes.

In response, the Electronic Frontier Foundation is working toward a more responsible advertising economy and a fully encrypted web. The EFF is a member-supported nonprofit that advocates for privacy, security, and freedom of expression online. EFF’s solutions to the related-but-separate problems of online tracking and unencrypted web traffic share a core value in common: they both work to increase users’ security on the Internet, with the implicit assertion that personal privacy is at the foundation of that security.

**Pushing for Responsible Advertising**

Nonconsensual third-party tracking is perhaps the greatest threat to privacy and anonymity online. Unfortunately, it is also one of the Internet’s bread-and-butter business models. EFF’s Privacy Badger is designed to address this.

Third-party tracking—that is, when advertisers and websites track your browsing activity across the web without your knowledge, control, or consent—is an alarmingly widespread practice in online advertising. Privacy Badger is a browser extension for Chrome, Firefox, and Opera that spots and then blocks third-party domains that appear to be tracking a user and spying on their browsing habits.

Although Privacy Badger blocks many ads in practice, it is more a privacy tool than a strict ad blocker. Privacy Badger encourages advertisers to treat users respectfully and anonymously rather than engage in the industry status quo of online tracking. It does this by unblocking content from domains that respect EFF’s Do Not Track policy, which states that the participating site will not retain personally identifiable information about users who have expressed that they do not want to be tracked.

Using Privacy Badger is a simple but robust way for individuals to promote responsible advertising—that is, advertising that does not track users without their consent—as a viable model for free web content. As of this writing, more than one million users have downloaded Privacy Badger and joined the call.
Encrypting the Web

Web pages get to your browser in one of two ways: via non-secure HTTP, or via secure HTTPS. The former has serious problems that make it vulnerable to eavesdropping, content hijacking, ad injection, and targeted censorship. On the other hand, HTTPS—which stands for Hypertext Transfer Protocol Secure—fixes most of these problems by encrypting web traffic between webservers and your browser.

A collaboration between EFF and the Tor Project, HTTPS Everywhere makes sure your browser uses HTTPS wherever possible. Some websites offer inconsistent support for HTTPS, use unencrypted HTTP as a default, or link from secure HTTPS pages to unencrypted HTTP pages. HTTPS Everywhere fixes these problems by rewriting requests to these sites to use HTTPS, automatically activating encryption and HTTPS protection that might otherwise slip through the cracks.

As of early 2017, half of all website traffic was encrypted with HTTPS. This means we are halfway to EFF’s goal to encrypt the entire web—a web that is consistently safer from the security and privacy threats that HTTPS can protect against. To make it to an entirely encrypted web, we need help from every website owner and administrator, including those from small, independent sites.

While HTTPS Everywhere makes encrypted browsing more consistently available to users, EFF’s Certbot makes moving to HTTPS easy and free for all website owners and administrators. This is particularly good news for advocacy groups, nonprofits, newspapers, and other organizations that want to resist censorship of their websites and surveillance of their users. Certbot is a client for the Let’s Encrypt certificate authority (CA). CAs play a crucial identification and verification role in the web encryption ecosystem—and Let’s Encrypt is one of the world’s largest, having issued nearly forty million certificates as of this writing. Certbot fetches and deploys Let’s Encrypt certificates with easy-to-follow, interactive instructions.

More Work to Do

Beyond fending off cookies or encrypting web traffic, these tools from EFF will let you raise your voice in protest. When you join virtually
with other people in using these tools, you are taking a stand against how those in power are building the Internet, and you’re doing something active to resist the state of web surveillance.

These tools work to put themselves out of the job. Ideally, advertising economies will one day shift away from nonconsensual third-party tracking so as to render Privacy Badger redundant. Similarly, as we move toward the goal of encrypting the entire web, users will hopefully no longer need HTTPS Everywhere to navigate inconsistent encryption. Until then, using Privacy Badger, downloading HTTPS Everywhere, or encrypting one’s own website with Certbot are all ways of working toward a collective vision of how we want the web to function by default.

To download Privacy Badger, go to https://www.eff.org/privacybadger.

To learn more about EFF’s Do Not Track policy, go to https://www.eff.org/issues/do-not-track.

To download HTTPS Everywhere, go to https://www.eff.org/https-everywhere.

To use Certbot, go to https://certbot.eff.org/.

Gennie Gebhart is a researcher at the Electronic Frontier Foundation. Her work revolves around the conviction that, as access to information and communication technologies expands and becomes more complex, so too do threats to user security and privacy. She focuses primarily on consumer privacy, secure messaging, and international censorship.

Notes

1. Project Censored The Movie: Ending the Reign of Junk Food News, directed by Christopher Oscar and Doug Hecker (Hole in the Media Productions, 2013), DVD.
4. In this view, a few highly influential individuals have decisively shaped human history through their personal charisma, intelligence, or skills. “The History of the world is but the Biography


13. We collected these stories using ProQuest’s National Newspapers Expanded database.

14. As Gamson wrote, journalists grant media standing to individuals and organizations who are understood to “speak as or for serious players in any given policy domain: individuals or groups who have enough political power to make a potential difference in what happens.” William Gamson, “Media and Social Movements,” in International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences, eds. Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes (Amsterdam: Elsevier Science, 2001), 9468–72, quotes at 9471.


17. As Ariel, et al. write, “The entire premise of BWCs in police operations is to cause a change in behavior through the deterrent effect of being observed,” “Contagious Accountability,” 308.


21. Ibid.