

## What was lost with the end of US foreign aid to independent media?

An independent media is a cornerstone of democracy. It offers a source of objective information for a voting public; it shines a light on both achievements and failings; and it helps to hold power to account. As A.G. Sulzberger succinctly entitled a recent opinion piece, “[A free people need a free press.](#)” While the US government has traditionally supported independent media as a key component of its overseas democracy, human rights, and governance (DRG) promotion efforts, support for both media and DRG came to a sudden end under the Trump administration. If a free people needs a free press, what are the impacts and implications of terminating support for independent media?

Even with US support, independent media in many countries confronted several challenges, including:

1. A constricting political environment involving censorship, lawsuits, and tax investigations
2. Threats to the safety and security of journalists
3. Untrustworthy information environments replete with misinformation
4. Limitations in media coverage, including a lack of investigative or data-driven journalism and limited capacity of some journalists
5. Unsustainable business models
6. Insufficient reach to many populations (e.g., rural communities)



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Through interviews, surveys, and a review of journalistic output, this research examines these six challenge areas for independent media across a sample of USAID’s 50 terminated media support projects. The study explores what advances US support was making across these areas, how formerly supported media organizations and journalists are responding to the termination of funding, and what the implications are for the health of a free press, democracy, and accountability.

The research is being carried out by [Daniel Sabet](#) and [Susan Abbott](#). Daniel is a former academic and PhD political scientist who most recently served on the Evidence and Learning Team at USAID’s DRG Bureau. Susan, who holds a PhD in communications, also served in USAID’s DRG Bureau and is one of the preeminent experts on support for independent media. The research is funded and will be published by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.