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| Tallwood High SChool: Global Studies and World Langauges Academy |
| The Impact of Political Systems on the Global Media |
| Senior Project Proposal |
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| **Andrew Haveles** |
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**Introduction**

 The topic of the global media is one of great interest in the modern world. As technology continues to develop, the media will develop along with it. With more and more issues becoming of utmost importance in today’s society, the media will begin to have a larger influence over what it reported, and how the story is told. But what influences media in the modern world? Certainly one of the major influences on the media is the political system of a country. Today, the world has many different political systems that anywhere from anarchy to totalitaristic regimes on the political spectrum. So this poses the question, “in what ways do the political systems of a country influence the media?” For the purposes of this explanation, this paper will focus on three specific countries, The United States of America (US), The People’s Republic of China (China), and the Islamic Federation of Iran (Iran). These three countries were chosen as they all have widely different political systems that affect their country’s media in different ways.

 This question is very important today because people need to know the influences behind the media and what is actually presented to them. For example if an event such as a jail breakout occurred at a prison in Cuba, what the people in Cuba read might not exactly be the truth as not only the media will try to dance around the truth, but more than likely the Cuban government will have something to do with the end product that people read in the newspaper or see on television. People need to know if their political system influences the media and how the “invisible hand of government” plays a role in the media and how this is carried over to what we see on television or in the newspaper, and even on social media and networking sites.

**Literature Review**

 In “Understanding China’s Political System”, Michael F. Martin summarizes the key components of China’s political system. The underlying concept of the article is, ever since the victory of Mao Tse Tung in 1949, “the Chinese mainland has been a communist state ruled by the Chinese Communist Party”. In China, other smaller political parties exist but they are authorized by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and are essentially powerless in a political sense. In regards to policy making, the CCP is almost powerless as the laws in China are made by other governing bodies, such as the Peoples’ Congress, and other bureaucratic, non-government officials. The other key part of Chinese politics is the Peoples’ Liberation Army (PLA). In regards to policy making, the Chinese political bureau (politburo) makes all policy decisions. This bureau is divided into many smaller branches, each with at least three full party members. These branches are the branches that make and enforce policies in China, including control over the media.[[1]](#endnote-1)

 In “Who’s Who in Iran’s Political System”, Scott Macleod gives a brief overview of the current political structure of Iran. The primary factor in Iran’s political system is that after the Islamic revolution of 1979 led by Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran is currently ruled by a hybrid government system. The result of the revolution was, “a regime comprising competing factions and personalities, achieving its own version of checks and balances by distributing power across a variety of different institutions, from structures of government to unelected councils of clerics.”

This combination is that the power of electing democratic officials was taken away from the people and put in the hands of the clergy. In the current regime, all elected officials in Iran’s theocratic government are either elected or appointed by the fundamentalist Islamic clergy. In this system, the clergy that appoints or elects these officials also has the power to remove them if they are unsatisfied with what they have done.[[2]](#endnote-2)

 In “A Short Guide to the American Political System”, Roger Darlington briefly outlines the political system currently in place in America. The point that Darlington makes is that the United States (US) political system is different from others because of its basic documents. Documents such as the Constitution, which give us basic freedoms such as press, religion, and speech, make America’s political system what it is. The US also has the principle of checks and balances which allows each of the three branches of government to enforce acts that they make but also to check and balance the other two branches in order to ensure that personal liberties are maintained.[[3]](#endnote-3)

In, “China Radio International in the Digital Age: Propagating China on the Global Scenario”, Cinzia Colapinto explains recent trends in China’s media. Her main point is that China’s media is shifting from a purely propaganda which was essentially trying to brainwash the people to one that focuses on realm of global popular culture. China is using its “soft power” with its Chinese Radio International (CRI) in order to help provide a more mainstream media to its people as a result of the 2008 Olympics which forced China to relax its rules a little bit. Colapinto stated that China is attempting to make its media more visible internationally as well as the language and culture. Another very interesting point of this article is that China is trying to employ social media networks within its media in order to increase its rate of development in the modern world. The article states that China, unlike other Western counterparts, uses many different national languages in its broadcasts in order to help bring local cultures to light that help build the national Chinese culture.[[4]](#endnote-4)

 In, “Iran and the Political Clout of Social Media”, Behzad Khoshondam discusses the implications of the new introductions of social media into Iran. The key point is that Iran has been a society that has traditionally outlawed sites such as Facebook and other forms of social media as those are seen as being too Western. There is also much speculation that these social media sites might continue the Arab Spring as being the forerunners of conspiracies within the country and out of the country. Another issue that emerged from the article is the complexity of the social media. With Iran being a traditional society, the new social media could bring a force or medium that the government might not be able to control. Current leaders fear that social media sites could inspire fundamental and social change that the government might not be able to control.[[5]](#endnote-5)

 In, “After the Internet, Before Democracy: Competing Norms in Chinese Media and Society”, Johan Lagerkvist discusses the decisions that China has made in allowing internet within its border and how the CCP has tried to control it. In 1978, the Chinese began a “technocratic” state when they allowed internet in China. One main point of the article is the infusing of media into Chinese culture. The party wants to protect cultural norms and is using their power to not only stay in power, but also to protect the Chinese culture and not to let too much of worldwide popular cultures infuse into daily life. These new forms of media bring hope that maybe a change from an autocratic to a democratic state may occur. However the article does state that these are only hopes and that the political system of China has enough control over the media that this might not happen.[[6]](#endnote-6)

 “The First Amendment: An Overview” is a perfect explanation of freedom of the press in the United States. In regards to freedom of the press, the main point of the article is that people in media in the United States, particularly print media such as newspapers and magazines, are free to publish any viewpoint that they wish. Freedom of the press in the United States is guaranteed to citizens in the first amendment of the US Constitution. When this article mentions freedom of the press, the freedom it is talking about is the freedom to publish articles or other forms of media that express disapproval of the current political party that is in power in the United States. This also goes along with the freedom of speech that is also guaranteed in this amendment but it also in a sense states that the government cannot have direct control over the media in this country.[[7]](#endnote-7)

 In “Saudi Arabia and Iran: The Tale of Two Medias”, Anne Hagood discusses the influence of Iran and Saudi Arabia’s political system on the media. The primary point of the article is that the two countries (primarily Iran), “use the media to portray their own distorted reality through the prism of their own agendas; and to compete with each other, they exaggerate this distortion.” The article also states that these countries’ governments have also been using media to stir up and exaggerate troubles and discord between Sunni and Shiite Muslims. Both of these countries are fighting for power in the Middle East and are using their media as tools in order to spread propaganda in their never ending vie for power in this extremely volatile region. One other point that the article offers is that with the media, these countries are using them not only a way to win over the minds of their people, but also to legitimize their actions to the world.[[8]](#endnote-8)

 In “Digital Communication and Political Change in China”, Ashley Esary and Xiao Qiang explain a shift in China from an autocratically controlled media to a more liberal one. One key point of the article is that China is experiencing a, “rapid proliferation of information and communications technology (ICT) that has given rise to new social networks.” Previous pieces of literature have stated that China is seeing a rise in media, in particularly liberal media, but this article discusses the rise in social media. With the control that the Chinese government has over its media, one would not expect that any forms of social media would be on the rise. Although this mass rise in ICT is necessary for economic development, a country steeped in Marxist and Leninist tradition that would normally exert full control over a country’s media now finds itself at a crossroad. China, unlike other communist countries, has created e–business and e–commerce programs that will not only promote economic development, but will also enable the government to regulate control.[[9]](#endnote-9)

 In “All news must be good news, says Chinese government”, Jonathan Watts explains one of the restraints that the Chinese government is putting on its media during a meeting of the 17th Party Congress. The key point of this article is that all of the news that is reported from this meeting must be good news. News reporters are forbidden from publishing anything that shines light on this event in a negative way. The article states that one man, in the course of this meeting of the Congress, was found guilty of, “inciting people to overthrow the government.” This is one big example of how the current political regime in China is using its power to suppress the media to do what it wants.[[10]](#endnote-10)

**Research Design**

 The primary question of this research project is, “in what specific ways do political systems affect the media of the United States, China, and Iran?” My hypothesis is that the impact of the political system is very strong and can be seen in more than one aspect of the media. The key variables in this process are the actual forms of media that can be found and examining the political impact of them or how the country’s political system has had an influence on them.

In my research, I will look for and provide examples of media from the three countries of subject in order to explain the influence that political system has on the media. The three countries of interest are the US, China, and Iran. I will begin each section by giving an overview of the political systems and how each one works. That will lead in to the second part of each section where I will use the literature discussed above as well as new information to discuss the influence of the political system on the media.

 I choose the three countries of subject for distinct reasons based on their political structure. Each of these three countries has a vastly different political structure and each of them has some sort of influence of their countries media. The US is a democratic state where in article one of the Constitution, free speech and free press are given to the people as a personal freedom. This country, a country with free press, was chosen as a baseline for comparison against the two other countries in this study.

 The other two countries are much more authoritarian than the US. I chose China because China is a socialist state where all of the media is controlled by the government. This is obviously a country where there is no free press and unlike the US, the government regulates all aspects of the media. I chose Iran because that political system is much different than the other two. Iran is a fundamentalist Islamic and theocratic state where the leaders of the state are also key clerics in the Islamic faith. The preliminary research has shown that while some of the media is free, what is published or shown on television or the internet must uphold Islamic principles. This section of the paper will seek to determine how the political system controls that media.

 The primary limitation of this study of the impact of political systems on media is the obvious bias. I myself have never been to China or Iran so I have never seen their forms of media directly so that will create a bias within me as I examine some of the forms of media. In addition to that, I do not have direct access to some if not most of the forms of media within these countries so evaluating these forms will present a difficult challenge.

**Action**

 The first portion of my action will involve an internship at WTKR News Channel Three of Hampton Roads and Northeastern North Carolina. I have job shadowed at News Channel Three before but now I plan to go back in order to get an enhanced view of their public relations department as this is my intended plan of study for University. I also want to intern here so I can get an opportunity to see an in depth look at how stories for the news are researched, written, and edited before being presented by the anchors. This will also give me the opportunity to see the influence of a political system at work at the local level of news media. At the end, this will give me a sort of baseline for comparison of media forms from China and Iran.

 The other internship that I plan to obtain is with the *Virginian Pilot*. This is very different from News Channel Three as it is a newspaper which is a form of print journalism. Print journalism is almost a dying art so I would like to see how everything is done from researching a story, writing a story, editing a story, and finally the printing of the finished product for a particular day. This would give me the opportunity to see how the political system of the US would have an impact, if any, on how these people prepare a story in addition how they write it and say it.

**Conclusion**

 In this research of the impact of political systems on global media one question still remains, why is this important? Today, the media is constantly evolving to new forms than before. This gives the media the ability to present news in many different forms and ways. Therefore, we need to know how the political system in a country influences the media to keep us on our toes to be able to examine media about any subject and be able to answer the question, is this what really happened?

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