

**Bad news for democracy?**  
**An analysis of news as an informing tool of democracy**

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**For my Coimbra family**

Eva, Liene and Jaime

\* \* \*

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## **ABSTRACT**

According to traditional liberal approaches to the role of the press, its main task in society is to act as a check on the state as a fourth branch of government. The press exists to scrutinise actions and inertia and expose abuses of power to the public.

Furthermore, by providing the public with a free flow of pluralistic information enables them to make informed judgements as citizens. It is for this purpose that the press is considered the oxygen which democracy breathes and why it receives extensive legal protection under the right to freedom of expression.

The press has often been criticised for failing to serve the needs of informed political participation by trivialising the content of news. Internal restraint that is intrinsically part of the nature of news as well as external restraints occur on a daily basis.

Commodification of news and concentrated ownership pose serious threats to the role of the press. Indeed Western policy-makers in particular have been struggling with the fact that the news content that a free market actually produces can differ greatly from what its proponents would prefer.

This work addresses the question whether the news, in the face of all these pressures, is an adequate means to fulfilling the needs of the public in a modern democracy

It will finally discuss various policy suggestions and provide some recommendations on how to make the press more accountable to the public needs to ensure a well-functioning democratic society.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- ACHR : – American Convention on Human Rights
- ECHR : – European Convention on Human Rights
- ICCPR : – International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- ICHRP : – International Council of Human Rights Policy
- IACHR : – Inter-American Court of Human Rights
- IFJ : – International federation of Journalists
- OAS : – Organization of American States
- OHCHR : – The Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights
- OSCE : – The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
- UDHR : – Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- UNHRC : – United Nations Human Rights Committee

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