

Argumentative essay on government censorship

[Law](#), [Security](#)



Ever since the media became an important fixture in modern life, there has been a strong debate regarding what the media should be able to cover or discuss. The WikiLeaks scandal of 2010 is a perfect example of the government attempting to stifle a media attempt to release secret documents it did not want revealed - these documents were thought to be potentially embarrassing and incriminating, citing the government's involvement in unsavory acts during the Iraq and Afghan Wars. Many have wondered whether or not things like this are right to release - whether or not the government should censor the material and prevent it from being released. The government should not be able to censor the media, because the government is meant to serve the people and its interests, not hide its own actions from them. Transparency is key to having an effective government, ensuring that it has the best interests of the people at heart. The government is created to organize and take care of the people, and as such accountability must exist to make sure that is happening; the media provides that accountability. Thomas Hobbes, in his book "Leviathan," proposed a means to organize and ensure the success and survival of men as a group. According to Hobbes, "The only way to erect such a common power, as may be able to defend them from the invasion of foreigners, and the injuries of one another, and thereby to secure them in such sort as that by their own industry and by the fruits of the earth they may nourish themselves and live contentedly, is to confer all their power and strength upon one man, or upon one assembly of men, that may reduce all their wills, by plurality of voices, unto one will" (Hobbes, Ch. 13). When the government performs actions that are against the best interests or the desires of the

majority of the people it governs, it is not behaving as a compassionate and benevolent governing body. However, there exists a means by which to keep them in check in the form of the media. By investigating stories on all kinds of subjects including politics and governmental operation, the media performs a vital role by making sure that the government answers to its citizens in all actions. Also, it informs the people about what their sovereign is doing with the power that has been granted by them. Without the people, there is no government; therefore, the government serves and protects them, in order to justify its own existence.

There are those who argue that the media should not be allowed to access classified information that would compromise national security if it were revealed to the common man, as the enemy could also access that information. In this technological age, airing the inner workings of the government and the military would be hazardous to military operations and homeland security; enemies of the state can use that information to harm the citizens of that government. In this respect, there are certain things that should not be disseminated to the public, for fear of enemies hearing about it as well. After all, if the job of a government is to protect the people, then it must sometimes do so by keeping information out of the hands of the enemy. It is nearly impossible anymore, in this age of sleeper cells and the Internet, to disseminate information and perform media investigations without that information getting in the hands of terrorists.

Despite the danger, the people have a right to know what the government is doing to protect them - if censorship occurs in part, it has the potential to be

used to hide actions and initiatives that work against the people in favor of those in power. If the government begins to hide information from its citizens in order to ostensibly protect them, it sets a dangerous precedent that could give the government implicit license to censor whatever they want, as long as they believe it is in the service of the people. The people must be the ones to decide what is good and bad for them; the only way to make that decision is to see the information. Therefore, the media must be allowed to present whatever it wants, even if it potentially embarrasses or reveals the government's plots. Transparency is far too vital an aspect of government to ignore simply because it is inconvenient.

A just government allows the people to be free in their actions and deeds; censorship is an unfair form of control that is not necessary. People are meant to be free to do what they want; the government is meant to organize society to the point where people can do that. The essence of a free country and a just country involves a government that protects and serves the people without diminishing their own individual rights - this includes the right to knowledge and expressing one's opinion. However, that can often come in conflict with the vested interests and desires of the individuals who make up the government, and they wish to see that potentially negative or incendiary information or opinion is suppressed. When the government censors the media, they are stifling freedom of speech, and that can lead eventually to somewhat of a totalitarian state, where only what the government allows you to see and think is allowed to be aired and written. Creativity and objectivity alike are threatened by this possibility and the tenets of censorship, and as such must be rebelled against.

There are those who argue, though, that the government is meant to protect the people, and sometimes that means a small sacrifice of freedom in order to ensure that protection. Hobbes, in "Leviathan," reveals his philosophy of a sovereign who carries total power over the people; he is benevolent and all-powerful. However, the social construct involved between the sovereign and the people is unbreakable, meaning that, whatever the sovereign does, the people have to accept it. This is leavened, however, by the right of the sovereign that states, "because every subject is by this institution author of all the actions and judgements of the sovereign instituted, it follows that whatsoever he doth, can be no injury to any of his subjects; nor ought he to be by any of them accused of injustice." (Hobbes, Ch. 14). In Hobbes' world, a just sovereign (normally an monarchy, but can also be an aristocracy or a democracy) would not do anything to harm the people.

In the end, however, the price of safety must be weighed, and too much censorship or protection can make it not worth it to exist within said government. The extent to which the government can decide to hide information from its citizens can often increase according to their whims, controlling and regulating what the people get to know about those who rule them. This may seem like an advantageous arrangement for the government, but the people lose out on knowing what their protectors are doing to protect them. Also, if the government followed the rights given to sovereigns and thusly protected the people and caused no harm toward them, they would not feel pressure to censor, as they would not be doing anything they need to hide. In the preferences of the people, they would much rather not live in ignorance of their government; they want to know

what is being done to protect them, and not have any secrets held from them.

While the Hobbesian view of a government or commonwealth involves no criticism of the government, he also wishes for the government to wish no harm upon its subjects. However, infringement of people's freedoms is a type of harm; by doing so, it is hurting its people by removing the transparency that permits citizens to trust their government. As a result, the only way to prevent harm to the people is to allow them all of their freedoms, including freedom of speech. If the government truly followed the Hobbesian model, it would have no reason to hide anything from its subjects, and as such no censorship would occur. It would, however, prevent the citizens from raising the kinds of questions modern citizens must ask of their governments; these include what they are doing and why.

The role of the media in a democratic society is to provide transparency and accountability to a government that often has to perform clandestine operations and actions below the radar of public knowledge. When the secrecy of these actions is threatened by the media, censorship is often the first action taken. While the motivation behind this censorship is understandable, it cannot be allowed to happen, as it merely permits the government to hide whatever it likes from the people in the name of national security. There are some who believe that the government's actions should not be questioned (Hobbes included), but the freedom of people to say whatever they please about their government should never be infringed upon. That action creates a slippery slope that can give the government carte blanche to hide anything, and that cannot be tolerated.

In conclusion, the need for freedom and transparency in a government for the people outweighs the security concerns that the government may have in letting the media report on whatever it wants. While there is some merit to the argument that censorship is useful when the government does not want enemies to know too much about what it is doing, it pales in comparison to the right of people to know what their own government is doing. The risks of excluding citizens from their freedom and desire to know about their leadership are far greater than preventing enemies from gaining knowledge through domestic media. As a result, said media must be allowed to operate without censorship, so as to allow citizens of this country to exercise free speech in all its forms. To do otherwise is to stifle the viewpoints and desires of its people, harming them and thus failing in its duties as a sovereign.

Works Cited

Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. Print.