

Global Q&A: Changes you want in the media this year

Epoch Times Staff

Media plays an important role in people's lives. However, around the world people seem to wish that their media was more truthful and less sensational.

This is what our Epoch Times reporters from Athens to Beirut found when, in honor of World Press Freedom Day, May 3, they asked: "What changes would you like to see in the media in your country in the coming year?"

Brno, Czech Republic
Zuzana Csonotosova, 32, Publicist

I would appreciate if the media would strive to serve more objective information. I can feel one-sidedness and bias quite often, even in the serious media, which usually offer quality material. I would also welcome more decency and civility when criticizing various figures, like politicians, etc.

Another positive thing would be if the main TV news offered more important information and reduced the number of pointless sensational and negative events.

Kingscliff, NSW, Australia
Vanette McLennan, 28, Rehabilitation Counselor

I'd like more amalgamation of mainstream media with Indigenous media. It annoys me that the Indigenous media like "Message Stick" is quite segregated still. I'd like to see more of that amalgamated into mainstream media. Message Stick is an Indigenous affairs news hour; I think that's on the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation], and there is another one on SBS [Special Broadcasting Service], "Living Black." They're really great programs. It would be great if, in the mainstream, we saw more of what they deliver and more representation of Indigenous people in media roles in mainstream commercial television.

Timisoara, Romania
Ivasca Flavius, 23, Software Engineer

The media is a very powerful tool used by the ruling elite to brainwash and keep the majority of the population obedient and in control. It subconsciously tells you what to do, what to buy, what to wear, who to vote for and so forth.

I believe that media should become a tool that tells people the truth, which informs and educates them as opposed to brainwashing them. This



Tom Brandstetter—Milwaukee, WI, USA. THE EPOCHTIMES

change should apply worldwide, not just in my country.

Presov, Slovakia
Magdalena Sendekova, over 50, Factory Worker

To be truthful. Nothing else. Writing the truth is perfectly sufficient, because that includes everything. I think that our press is on a high level when we talk about its form or appearance. But it happens quite often, that radio, television or foreign mass media present different information about the same topic. That is why I believe that the most important thing is not to lie, not to cheat people; that is essential.

Beirut, Lebanon
Donia El Hajj, 28, Interior Architect

I would like to change two things: First, the billboards on the streets are ruining the natural scenes we have. People no longer look at the greenery or the sea as these billboards keep popping up; there is one every 20 meters. The other thing is the use of "women" to market all kinds of prod-

ucts. Be it her voice or her body, she has become a marketing tool. This has caused serious moral damage to the women in society. They no longer focus on educating themselves or improving their skills. They just want to imitate the women they see on TV.

Nes Ziona, Israel
Rami Ben Zion, 54, Salesman

I would like to see the press less dependent of tycoons, that is, because of them the press in this country is not completely free and is restricted by people in high positions. If there is corruption, they will not necessarily expose it or fully report about it.

Utah, USA
Sadas Batboa, 25, Law Office Intern

I would like to see more international news, news about Asia, the Middle East, and not so much about Europe; there's too much opinion and not enough facts, real coverage; less about the [Obama] administration, it's overwhelming. I would like less Rush Limbaugh [confrontational theatrics] in the news and more information.



Donia El Hajj—Beirut, Lebanon. THE EPOCHTIMES

I received a summer internship with a local TV station last summer and I got a good taste of what the news was really like. I did the city column; it was brutal: deadlines, having a good viewpoint, but I didn't need one—I want the facts; that's why I'm not reporting anymore.

Milwaukee, WI, USA
Tom Brandstetter, Pharmacist

I would like to see our media be less beholden to corporate interests and less reactionary, with more in-depth reporting; more investigative reporting instead of just pulling things off the Associated Press [news wire]; not just doing crisis management that sells advertising, because crisis and fear sell advertising; not trying to be just pure Pollyannaish and positive, but being a

little more fair and balanced.

Athens, Greece
Theodora Vourgoutzi, 58, Local Government Registry Manager

I would like our local media to say the truth to the people instead of being instigated by their own agendas. People in Greece have other necessities and they have to see reports that fulfill those necessities. I would like our local Greek media to speak out for those necessities and not the necessities that media publish out of self-interest.

Kiev, Ukraine
Natalija Volkova, 46, Head of Construction Contract Department, National Nuclear Energy Company

I would like to find out credible

facts of events taking place in Ukraine. People must receive true information without any overstatements and misrepresentations. Journalists need to be brave, keeping and following their conscience to be accepted by society.

Bangalore, India
Dr. Deepak Patil, 53, MD and Software Company CEO

Basically what is happening in India, especially, [is that] TV channels tend to sensationalize the issues. Instead of guiding society properly, they end up confusing society. Their sole aim, the way I see it, is to increase the TRP ["ratings"]. They focus on crime rates and politicians and various other things, instead of focusing on the social issues.

Sometimes the minor issues are blown up. They run the issue 24/7... The passion is missing for betterment and improvement of society or the country. For example, "Prince Harry Buys a Villa for His Girlfriend" comes as headlines in our country's national newspaper, which is ridiculous. They also follow yellow journalism with pictures of young ladies clad in a certain way.

During the time of Indian Independence, newspapers ran even though they were bankrupt, they were so dedicated to the cause of independence.

Linköping, Sweden
Nicko Kotsamboukidis, 53, Restaurant Owner

I would like the media to be more objective and be less elective, that is, they should not only choose to publish what they want to publish to support their own viewpoint; and stop demonizing the cultures that do not follow the Western way of thinking regarding politics and the economy. I think this is the biggest problem today in media, that we demonize what is foreign to us, to separate us from it, making the gap even bigger.

Look for the Global Q&A column every week, when Epoch Times correspondents interview people around the world to learn about their lives and perspective on local and global realities.

Hate and terror groups spreading online: report

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"The internet allows anyone, anywhere to post and say anything," Cooper said. "The problem with the internet is that it doesn't lend itself to debate."

"There are places online where people try to turn history on its head," said Cooper.

An ongoing battle

The report found that 30 percent of the new postings from extremist groups are made on Facebook and most of them are posted from Europe and the Middle East.

Facebook officials have met with the SWC to address this issue, yet the site of more than 200 million users has been overwhelmed by a massive stream of daily postings and uploads.

A statement was released by Facebook on May 12, saying that many of the pages shown to them by the SWC have already been removed. "We are committed to continuing this practice, and to working with those who fight hate like

the Simon Wiesenthal Center," the statement says.

Some of the groups continue to re-post their messages again and again after being removed. Other groups have gone so far as starting their own social networking sites. Some have even worked around the 'terms of use' agreement, post only basic information about their groups, and include a link to their website.

Tailored for today's generation

The center releases a report each year on internet extremist groups. The findings this year were particularly startling as hate and terror groups continue to change their image to better appeal to youth.

"There are professional bigots out there who say, 'how can we best promote hatred online?'" Cooper said. "They're going to use anything they can to suck you into their ideology."

Cooper showed online video games made by white supremacist groups. One was a gory cartoon

game where users can shoot Mexican men, women, and children crossing the border into the United States. Another was a professional-looking shooting game.

"Games like these are being copied, pasted, and reviewed on mainstream game sites," Cooper said.

A recent jihad recruiting video featuring a rap soundtrack can also now be found on the web. It is from an Al Qaeda-backed terrorist organization in Somalia.

Mark Weitzman said that in addition to this, "one thing we found was that there are a lot of sites that try to present themselves as authoritative figures," and present information in ways that make them appear to have a clear understanding of the facts.

Among the students who came to the presentation was Leena Shehader, 17, who said that much of the modern generation is disconnected from the realities of hate crime.

"The way kids are nowadays, we take it as a joke until something happens," Shehader said.

By **RONNY DORY**
Epoch Times Staff

WASHINGTON, D.C.—An innocent woman is arrested, charged, and imprisoned for drug trafficking in the opening scenes of American Violet, a film based on the life of Regina Kelly, a 24-year-old mother of four arrested in Herne, Texas. The film recounts Ms. Kelly's story and the class action lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) on behalf of 15 African Americans, who were indicted in November 2000 on drug charges.

The ACLU held a screening of American Violet at the U.S. Capitol Building on May 5, followed by a discussion on reforming the U.S. criminal justice system and the crack/cocaine disparity.

Disproportionately targeting African Americans, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 established the crack/powder cocaine disparity by which a person found with 5 grams of crack cocaine, an amount equal to roughly 5 packets of artificial sweetener, is subject to minimum felony sentence of five years in prison without parole. However, for the distribution of 500 grams of powder cocaine, the offender receives the same five-year sentence. This disparity is known as the "100:1 ratio."

In the film, Dee Roberts (Nicole Beharie) was arrested and imprisoned for 21 months. Roberts had no prior drug history and no drugs on her possession at the time of her arrest. She was offered a plea bargain that would allow her to go home, yet would require her to plead guilty, becoming a convicted felon. Her other option was to go to prison, jeopardize the custody of her children, and face longer jail time.

With the help of the ACLU, Roberts elected to fight the system, which pinned her up against the county's district attorney with a history of conducting racially motivated drug raids to increase convictions and secure federal funding for the county's drug task force.

Ms. Kelly was present at the Congressional screening of the film. "Where I get the strength through all of this, is [from] my faith in God, and [from] my four girls who I have to set an example for, to show them that we are not limited to the things that people try to dish out to us in life," said Ms. Kelly.

"Racial targeting is happening nationwide," said Graham Boyd, director of the ACLU Drug Law Reform Project.

"Federal money was funding a task force that was set up by the district attorney. That task force was set up explicitly to arrest black people. Now that's not what they wrote in

their charter, they said specifically to go after crack cases, but they understood full well in the county that was about half African-American, that was going to result in the overwhelming arrest and prosecution of African Americans," said Mr. Boyd.

American Violet was directed by Tim Disney and written by Bill Haney, and stars Alfre Woodard, Nicole Beharie, Will Patton and Tim Blake Nelson. American Violet is currently in area theaters.

America's punitive prison system

According to the Department of Justice, at the end of 2007, federal and state prisons and local jails held just under 2.3 million prisoners, by far the largest prison population of any country in the world.

"Americans are locked up for crimes—from writing bad checks to using drugs—that would rarely produce prison sentences in other countries. And in particular they are kept incarcerated far longer than prisoners in other nations," wrote Adam Liptak ("Inmate Count in U.S. Dwarfs Other Nations," NY Times, April 23, 2008).

The FBI's 2007 Uniform Crime Report (UCR) estimated that there were 1.8 million state and local drug abuse violation arrests in the United States. According to the most recent National Corrections Reporting Program of new prison admissions from 2003, African Americans constituted 53.5 percent of all persons who entered prison for drug convictions.

The Drug Policy Alliance is a non-profit organization which advocates for U.S. drug policies that "no longer arrest, incarcerate, disenfranchise and otherwise harm millions of non-violent people." The Alliance asserts: "There is a self-perpetuating, cyclical quality to the treatment of Blacks and Latinos in the U.S. criminal justice system. Much of the discrimination visited upon these groups stems from the perceptions of criminal justice decision-makers that most crimes are committed by minorities, and most minorities commit crimes. Although empirically false, these perceptions cause a disproportionate share of law enforcement attention to be directed at minorities, which in turn leads to more arrests of blacks and Latinos."

Since the Reagan administration launched the war on drugs in the 1980s, federal and state measures have emphasized law enforcement arrest and incarceration rather than prevention and treatment. The current \$14.1 billion 2009 federal drug control budget has allocated two-thirds for interdiction, law enforcement and supply reduction, and one-third to prevention, treatment and demand reduction.

The current White House civil

rights agenda includes drug policy initiatives and the need to eliminate the crack/powder cocaine disparity.

The United States Sentencing Commission created by Congress to develop fair federal sentencing guidelines, has since concluded that crack cocaine is not appreciably much different from powder cocaine in its chemical composition and physical reactions of its users. The U.S. Sentencing Commission has urged Congress to reconsider the statutory penalties for crack cocaine.

The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that judges can use their discretion and sentence crack cocaine offenders for less time than required by the Federal Sentencing Guidelines (Kimbrough v. United States (2007)).

Additionally, there have been legislative proposals to reform the crack/powder cocaine disparity, including the Drug Sentencing Reform Act of 2007 (S. 1383) introduced by Senator Sessions (R-AL) and the Drug Sentencing Reform and Kingpin Trafficking Act of 2007 (S. 1711), introduced by then Senator Biden (D-DE). Rep. Sheila Jackson-Lee (D-TX) has also reintroduced a legislative proposal in the House to eliminate the crack/cocaine disparity.

The international community has recognized the inequalities in the U.S. criminal justice system. In a recent UN report released on May 8, UN Special Rapporteur Doudou Dieng urged the U.S. to address racial disparities in the criminal justice system and end the practice of sentencing juveniles to life in prison without the possibility of parole. He also called on Congress to pass the End Racial Profiling Act (ERPA) and create a bipartisan commission to evaluate the on-going fight against racism and the occurrence of re-segregation, especially in housing and education.

Human Rights Watch recommends in its March 2009 Report, "Decades of Disparity," that state, local and federal governments, restructure funding and resource allocation to prioritize substance abuse treatment and outreach; revise drug sentencing laws to increase the use of community based-sanctions for drug offenses; eliminate mandatory minimum sentences; and conduct an analysis of racial disparities in all phases of drug law enforcement to ensure that drug laws do not disproportionately burden black communities.

"This Administration has pledged to renew the U.S. commitment to human rights at home and abroad. Now we must walk the walk and turn words into action by addressing the ongoing discrimination and injustice that exists here at home," said Jamil Dakwar, director of the ACLU Human Rights Program, in a press release.

India's marathon elections end, but winners still unclear

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The election is expected to be dictated by a few swing states, particularly the South-Eastern state of Tamil Nadu, which holds the key to 39 of the 543-seat lower house of parliament. Tamil Nadu voted in the last round of the elections, and the voters in the Dravidian state have almost always given an overwhelming support to one of the two major parties—DMK and the AI-ADMK—in the election.

The final round of votes India, the world's largest democracy, brings to an end a five-step, staggered election process that began on April 16.

Economy and foreign issues

The elections come after five years of relative political stability under a Congress-led alliance, though that stability was briefly rocked in July 2008 when the Communist Party coalition withdrew support from the Congress over the nuclear pact with the United States. The Congress-led coalition survived the vote of no-confidence by brokering a last-minute support

deal with a regional party, the Samajwadi Party, allowing the nuclear pact to be signed with the U.S. administration in October 2008.

These elections come at a critical time for India. Its economy has slightly contracted, with slower growth expected than in the recent past, and it faces a major foreign policy meltdown with neighboring countries Pakistan, Sri Lanka and China.

Meanwhile, neighbor Pakistan grapples with the Taliban and internal security issues, and Indian intelligence agencies and the army are worried that the Taliban already control vast areas of Pakistan.

Towards the South, the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Tiger rebels have a critical face-off in what is described as the Tigers' last stand. The Tigers are classified as a terrorist group by several countries, and while the Sri Lankan war has allowed the government to recapture vast areas once ruled by the Tigers, it has also been a public relations disaster for the government. The Sri Lankan government has been accused of the assassination

of a journalist with critical views, as well as heavy-handed measures with media, NGOs, Tamil refugees and civilians caught in the crossfire.

Meanwhile, China's increasing naval presence and military weight in the Indian Ocean has India and neighboring countries on edge.

The Chinese Communist Party recently started providing military support to the Sri Lankan government, and in exchange has been allowed to build a naval base in a critical location in the island nation. In late April, India's Home Minister P. Chidambaram snapped back at the regime's moves in an interview with the Hindustan Times newspaper, "China is fishing in troubled waters... China is acting with a clear agenda."

The Sri Lanka war has been used as an issue in the electoral campaign in the state of Tamil Nadu by AI-ADMK leader Ms. J. Jayalalitha. But the impact of the Tamil Tigers' fate has not had as much impact in the state as it has around the world, and the elections are still expected to be mostly dominated by internal issues.