

“Strengthening Journalism is the Only Way To Tackle Fake News” says RSF to Taiwan’s Presidential Candidates

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) calls on Taiwan’s presidential candidates and political parties to make a firm, non-partisan commitment to strengthening public media and independent journalism to protect Taiwan from disinformation.

On Sept. 4, 2018, a powerful typhoon forced Japan to close Kansai International Airport for two days. Reports circulated that the Chinese embassy took measures to rescue Taiwanese travellers abandoned by their representative office. In Taiwan, the news sparked heavy online criticism of Taiwan’s representative in Osaka, veteran diplomat Su Chii-cherng, 61, who regrettably committed suicide 10 days later. The original [report](#), a hoax from China, could not have gone viral without the inadvertent assistance of several Taiwanese [media outlets](#) and political commentators that failed their fact-checking duties and made the “fake news” look genuine.

Similar to a virus taking advantage of a body’s weakness, such disinformation attacks finds fertile ground where journalistic standards and ethics are not properly respected, as is unfortunately too often the case in Taiwan. It is no secret that the Taiwanese media sector is plagued by sensationalism, undeclared advertising, and an unhealthy “Blue-Green” political polarization that hinders journalism in its role as a balancing power, stirring public distrust. It is not that Taiwan lacks competent journalists, but most of them have to work under undue pressure and cannot count on an effective legal protection against requests from their management that would go against journalistic ethics.

Law of the Jungle is not Press Freedom

Despite having long recognized the media sector’s structural problem, successive governments haven’t properly addressed it for fear of being accused of authoritarianism. Nonetheless, press freedom should not be misinterpreted as the law of the jungle. Like any other freedom, it requires proper regulations and democratic control to be fully effective and deter abuse. The purpose of a free press is not to let stakeholders freely disseminate contents that suit their interests but to empower citizens through the provision of unbiased information. Left without proper safeguards, the Taiwanese media sector could become a threat to the very democratic institutions it should seek to protect.

Taiwanese public media outlets, whose purpose is not financial profit, could further elevate the quality of the public discourse, but were never provided with sufficient financial resource to achieve this goal. For example, the annual [budget](#) of Public Television Service (PTS) this year hardly represented 2% of the resource of its South Korean counterpart KBS and 0.4% of those of the British BBC and Japanese NHK! For similar budgetary reasons and despite their efforts, Central News Agency (CNA) and Radio Taiwan International (RTI) never managed to establish a convincing presence in the international [Chinese-language news market](#), giving in without a fight to the Chinese Communist Party’s propaganda outlets. In a democracy, the underfunding of the public media incurs a hidden cost that far exceeds the apparent financial saving.

Palliative Responses Are No Answer

It is widely agreed that a weak media sector poses a serious threat to the Taiwanese [national security](#) as it may allow foreign powers and especially the Chinese regime to influence the

election's outcome. Official [responses](#) so far, however, have been limited to palliative measures that do not tackle the roots of the problem. It is indeed necessary to take action against media that neglect fact checking or intentionally spread harmful contents. But these actions take place long after the damage is done, and will not discourage offenders who believe that the benefits of spreading disinformation far outweigh the consequences. Moreover, suggestions to address false narratives by "blocking" or "correcting" erroneous reporting are also inappropriate; in a democracy, the public cannot accept that government, even with the best of intentions, would grant itself the right to decide which information is true or false.

Commendable civil society fact-checking initiatives such as [CoFacts](#) and [Taiwan FactCheck Center](#), that have emerged to curb the influence of a "fake news" on social media, provide a very useful safety net but cannot replace the fact-checking efforts made within the media themselves prior to publication. In fact, the best solution for Taiwan to protect itself against the virus of disinformation is to strengthen the journalism sector, so that it naturally develops an immunity to the attacks and provides a trustworthy alternative to biased contents. This strengthening necessitates measures to effectively guarantee editorial independence and tackle conflicts of interest within the media.

Media Reform Must Stand Above Politics

Reporters Without Borders (RSF), an international non-governmental, non-profit organization that defends journalism and freedom of information, urges Taiwan's presidential candidates and political parties to adopt five measures that would greatly improve the media sector's resilience to disinformation should they be implemented promptly after the election (see details below). When journalists are given sufficient time and resources to adhere to the highest ethical standards and when editorial departments have the ability to reject commercial and political pressure, public trust in journalism will soon improve, and manipulated content will fall on deaf ears.

As a matter of national security, this reform should be placed above partisan disputes and involve the media themselves as well as representatives of civil society. Taiwan cannot afford to wait any longer to restore trust in the media and effectively protect its institutions against disinformation attacks. Bringing such improvements to the media ecosystem, far from being an authoritarian measure, will actually strengthen Taiwanese democracy by providing citizens with the tools to better understand and participate in public affairs.

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Five Measures to Reinforce Taiwan's Media

- **Enforce Full Editorial Independence.** Establish regulations that effectively protect the independence of editorial departments from their employers and boards of directors; oppose all forms of conflicts of interest and push for restructuring where necessary; strengthen the National Communications Commission's independence, increase its resources and extend its mandate to all media; establish a mechanism allowing journalists to file complaints to the regulator or the judiciary in case of interference; impose full transparency of direct and indirect media ownership.
- **Create a Due Process Against Disinformation.** Create in law a "duty of care" that would oblige online platforms to protect both users' freedom of speech and safety in regards to

hate speech and manipulation; establish regulations against disinformation in line with international standards of freedom of expression; create a process that includes judicial review when government authorities or online platforms deem appropriate to block or delete content; open any decision taken in emergency to further judicial review.

- **Strengthen Public Media Outlets.** Upscale the amount of financial resources allocated to public media outlets; reinforce the guarantees of their editorial independence so that they cannot be suspect of political bias; support better cooperation and integration between public media; support their international expansion.
- **Support Ethical Journalism.** Support the emergence of new media outlets that aim to uphold journalistic ethics, through economic and fiscal incentives following a similar model to startup development; support independent fact checking initiatives as well as institutions, groups and researchers that are dedicated to journalism and the betterment of media; support the media in their attempts to develop self-regulation mechanisms; encourage the media to join independent certification projects such as the Journalism Trust Initiative (JTI), a program initiated by RSF which aims to promote and reward media outlets that comply with professional norms and ethics.
- **Strengthening Media Literacy in Textbooks and Public Education.** Emphasize critical thinking and media literacy in academic curricula and public education actions; ensure that school children are being taught from a young age to discern fact from fiction; develop specific campaigns targeting vulnerable social media user categories such as teenagers and the elderly.

無國界記者呼籲台灣總統候選人：唯有強化新聞業體質才能解決假新聞問題

無國界記者組織呼籲台灣各政黨和總統候選人：懇請各位不分黨派，一同努力強化公共媒體和獨立新聞報導，別讓不實資訊在台灣肆虐。

2018年9月4日，強颱「燕子」直撲日本，關西國際機場因此被迫關閉兩天。當時有報導指出，台灣台灣旅客向代表處求助無門，反而是中國大使館伸出援手救人。消息傳開後，台灣網民群情激憤，紛紛將矛頭指向61歲的大阪辦事處處長蘇啟誠。十天後，蘇處長輕生離世。最初的報導是來自中國的假消息，當初要不是各家台灣媒體和名嘴未查證就加以報導，還把「假新聞」做得幾可亂真，無意間推波助瀾，這則消息也不會如此迅速廣傳。

病毒會在人體抵抗力差時趁虛而入，不實資訊也是；如果一個地方新聞報導的標準和道德規範沒有得到適當的尊重，就會成為不實資訊的溫床，可惜這正是台灣的常態。大家心知肚明，台灣媒體長期受腥羶色和假新聞真廣告的汙染，政治上也呈現非藍即綠的兩極化現象，在在都阻礙新聞業發揮原本應有的制衡力量，導致大眾對新聞業產生不信任。台灣不是沒有稱職的新聞工作者，但他們大多必須在過度高壓的環境下工作，長官下達違反新聞道德的命令時，他們也不能指望法律會提供有效保護。

叢林法則不等於新聞自由

儘管歷屆政府一直都意識到媒體界存在著結構性問題，但都因怕被指控為威權主義而未適時處理問題。儘管如此，新聞自由不應被錯誤解讀成叢林法則。新聞自由和其他類型的自由一樣，需要搭配適當的法規和民主控制才能充分生效，避免遭到濫用。新聞自由的目的不在於讓利益相關者任意散佈符合自身利益的內容，而是透過提供公正資訊的方式，賦權予民。在缺乏適當保護措施的情況下，原本應該保護民主制度的台灣媒體，反而會變成對民主的威脅。

追求財務收益並非公共媒體的宗旨，它們原本肩負著提高台灣公共對話品質的責任，但台灣公共媒體從未得到足夠的財政資源，以達成這些目標。舉例來說，今年公視（PTS）的年度預算幾乎不到韓國公視KBS資源的2%，更不到英國BBC和日本NHK的0.4%！儘管中央社（CNA）和中央廣播電臺（RTI）的努力，兩者也都因類似的預算問題未能在華語新聞市場建立足夠的國際能見度，在未能和中國共產黨的宣傳機構一較高下的情況下就直接放棄該市場。在民主社會裡，公共媒體預算不足問題所付出的隱性代價，遠大於帳面上所省下的財務。

消極回應無濟於事

大部分的人都同意，脆弱的媒體界對台灣的國家安全造成嚴重威脅，極可能會讓外國勢力，特別是中共當局影響選舉結果。然而目前為止，台灣政府的官方回應僅限於各種消極措施，無法解決問題根源。不論是忽略事實查核還是刻意散布有害內容的媒體，相關單位都有必要對其採取行動。但這些行動往往在傷害造成很久之後才發生，也不會讓那些覺得散佈不實資訊利遠大於弊的人因此退縮。而且政府也不適合用「封鎖」或「更正」錯誤報導來解決假消息的問題，因為在民主國家，就算政府的立意再良善，民眾也無法接受政府給自己判定消息真偽的權利。

在公民社會中，真的假的和台灣事實查核中心等事實查核計畫值得讚揚，在遏止「假新聞」影響社群媒體這方面提供了非常有用的安全網，但它們仍無法取代媒體在發布新聞前於內部進行的事實查核工作。如果想保護台灣免於受到不實資訊這種病毒的侵害，最好的解決方法就是強化新聞業體質，讓它自然可以對各種攻擊免疫，並產出不帶偏見的可信內容。想強化新聞業就要有相對的措施，才能有效保障編採的獨立性，並對付媒體內部的利益衝突。

必須超越政治的改革

無國界記者（RSF）是一個非營利的國際非政府組織，旨在捍衛新聞業和資訊自由，我們在此呼籲各政黨和總統候選人採納後列五項措施，各位若能在選後立即執行這些措施，將大幅提升台灣媒體對不實資訊的抵抗力。如果記者擁有足夠時間和資源以堅守最高的道德標準，編輯部門也有能力向商業和政治上的施壓說不，民眾對新聞業的信任就能很快得到改善，受到操控的內容也會被當耳邊風。

由於事關國家安全，這項改革應超越黨派之爭，並讓媒體和公民社會代表一同參與。台灣已經沒有本錢繼續等待，我們必須盡速重建民眾對媒體的信任，並確實保護媒體機構，使其對不實資訊的攻擊免疫。著手改善媒體生態絕對不等於獨裁，唯有如此才能賦予公民更充分了解並參與公共事務的工具，進而強化台灣民主。

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強化台灣媒體的五項措施

- **全面實行編採獨立。**設立規範以有效保護編輯部門，使其獨立於雇主和董事會；反對一切形式的利益衝突，並在必要時推動結構調整；加強國家通訊傳播委員會（NCC）的獨立性，增加其資源並將其授權範圍延伸至所有媒體；建立相關機制，讓記者可以在受到干預時向監管機構或司法機關投訴；強制規定直接與間接的媒體所有權都需透明公開。
- **建立防制不實資訊的正當程序。**立定「謹慎責任」的法律，使網路平台有義務在仇恨言論和資訊操控相關方面保護用戶的言論自由和安全。建立和國際標準同步的法規以保障表達自由；建立適當程序，包括在政府機關或網路平台封鎖或刪除內容時進行司法審查。讓所有在緊急狀況下作出的決定都能公開接受進一步的司法審查。
- **強化公共媒體。**提高分配給公共媒體的財政資源；加強保障其編輯獨立性，使其不會有政治偏見的疑慮；協助公共媒體之間互相合作、整合；支持公共媒體拓展國際市場。
- **支持新聞倫理。**仿效鼓勵新創公司發展的模式，透過經濟和財政獎勵措施，協助以維護新聞倫理為宗旨的新媒體發展茁壯；支持獨立事實查核計畫和致力新聞業發展、改善媒體的機構、團體、研究人員；支持媒體開發自律機制；鼓勵媒體加入獨立的認證計畫，例如無國界記者發起的新聞信任計畫（JTI），該計畫旨在推廣並獎勵符合專業準則和道德規範的媒體。
- **在教科書和公共教育裡加強媒體素養。**在學校課程和公共教育計畫中強調批判性思考和媒體素養。確保學生從小學習分辨事實和虛構內容的差別。針對青少年和老年人等較脆弱的社群媒體用戶群展開宣導活動。