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CONSEQUENCES OF LAX MEDIA OWNERSHIP REGULATION ON FREEDOM AND PLURALITY OF THE UK'S FOURTH ESTATE

Mina Khan



The British media landscape faces a ubiquitous threat, one of both lack of regulation and excessive freedom in terms of concentration and ownership. This article examines the potential effects of unregulated media concentration on political relationships between prominent media owners and the UK government as well as its overall effect on UK citizens' quality and perception of news.

Introduction

Press freedom in the UK, in reference to both freedom of expression as well as freedom of media ownership and concentration, is an issue of increasing concern due to the rising popularity of media practices such as misinformation and post-reality politics. Historically, threats to press freedom have been concentrated in parts of the world in which democratic presence was weak, but pressures of a different nature have begun to appear in UK's fourth estate (Willems and Puddington). In the past five years, the UK has fallen 12 ranks in the World Press Freedom Index as a result of new regulatory measures, a dip in rankings that does not yet even account for concerns of decreasing plurality and increasing cross-media ownership (Gayle).

The UK has one of the most heavily concentrated media landscapes globally. Lax media regulation over time has led to privatization of media and the formation of

giant media conglomerates presenting sizeable threats to freedom of the overall press ("Who Owns the UK Media?"). According to the *Harvard Business Review* this may be beneficial in some respects, as privatization of British media companies has dramatically improved the economy and generated an estimated £34 billion in additional GDP annually since the sale of the British Telecom by the Thatcher government in 1984, the largest public flotation at that time. Privatization has reversed losses of state-owned industries and improved British citizens' perceptions of free enterprise (Moore). However, despite the clear economic benefits from privatization, its influence on the media industry has arguably been divisive. The rise of media giants headed by some of the wealthiest in the UK, including Rupert Murdoch, Lord Rothermere, and Sirs David and Frederick Barclay, has had major political consequences, most recently culminating in the Brexit vote. Too much freedom of expression paralleled by lack of regulation in

regard to media concentration has become a substantial threat to the UK press's freedom as a whole due to its consequence on plurality, throttling the diversity of viewpoints. Although some corporations, such as those of the aforementioned men, have substantial freedom, this comes at the direct cost of representation of local news and other smaller outlets and mediums. Journalistic integrity, including public trust in it, is threatened in the UK by concentrated ownership. Freedom of the press is under siege, counterintuitively, because of too much freedom; that is, regulations are too lax in terms of press ownership and market concentration.

Measuring Freedom of the Press in the UK

According to two widely regarded press freedom monitoring groups, Reporters Without Borders (which publishes the World Press Freedom Index) and Freedom House (which publishes Freedom of the Press annual reports), the UK press ranks as “free.” The 2017 World Press Freedom Index ranks the UK as 78% higher in press freedom than the world average. This analysis uses seven qualitative criteria categories and indicators, including pluralism, media independence, and self-censorship, together with quantitative analysis of crimes committed against persons of the media, weighed for violence (“United Kingdom: A Worrying Trend”).

Pluralism, in the context of the World Press Freedom Index, refers to the representation of diverse opinions in the media. It is typically high in regions of the world with media freedom, such as Great Britain, but threatened by densely concentrated media ownership in the press and in television. Concentration of media ownership is conducive to the biased treatment of news and opinions, driven by the political and economic agendas of wealthy media owners. As detailed later, the British media is increasingly concentrated.

Self-censorship, in the World Press Freedom Index methodology, refers to the ability of the press to publish freely, given the environment in which the media platform is operating, without having to censor for fear of punishment. High self-censorship is indicative

of less freedom and vice versa. Tabloid media has the least amount of self-censorship in all forms of British media. The tabloids' ability and willingness to publish whatever they want can be directly seen in the notorious phone-hacking scandal—a controversial issue regarding collusion between British police and journalists employed at newspapers published by News International, including *News of the World*, which was shut down as a result (“Press ‘Need to Act’ After Leveson”). News International is a subsidiary of News Corporation, owned by Murdoch, whose reach, chronicled later, is one of the greatest in present-day privatized British media. A second ranking system, the Freedom of the Press 2017 report, similarly gives the UK a press freedom status of “free” (“United Kingdom Profile”). The UK scores 25 out of 100 (with 0 “most free”), which is the sum of its performance in the legal environment (9 out of 30), political environment (9 out of 40), and economic environment (7 out of 30). In the legal realm, like the 2017 World Press Freedom Index, the Freedom of the Press report notes that the key development contributing to a status of “less free” recently in the UK is legislation concerning national security, such as the Investigatory Powers Act, which discourages investigative journalism.

As for the British political environment (i.e., interactions between politicians, the government, and other sectors of the economy), it is not considered a threat to British journalists. A separation between the press and political environment is necessary for media freedom of expression, and the UK media is generally independent from political influence (“United Kingdom Profile”). The political environment does not appear to directly pressure the press.

However, the reverse—press pressuring politicians—has become a significant question of influence in the UK that can be traced as far back as the Thatcher government's assistance in the acquisition, outlined later, of a popular and fairly unbiased newspaper, *The Times*, by Murdoch's News Corporation (Evans). The blackmail of politicians by the press, primarily the privately owned sector, has social and economic ramifications, as reflected in policy, laws, and favoritism, such

Table 1
Weekly (Daily plus Sunday) Market Share of National Newspaper Circulation

Publisher	Circulation	Market Share (%)	Cumulative Share (%)
News Corp UK & Ireland Limited	15,818,965	33.6	33.6
Associated Newspapers (now DMG Media)	11,372,076	24.1	57.7
Mirror Group Newspapers	6,395,622	13.6	71.3
Express Newspapers	5,691,767	12.1	83.3
Telegraph Media Group	3,309,100	7.0	90.4
Independent Print Limited	2,102,236	4.5	94.8
The Financial Times Ltd	1,243,074	2.6	97.5
Guardian News and Media Ltd	1,198,526	2.5	100.0
Total	47,131,366	100.0	—

Source: "Who Owns the UK Media?"

as exemptions from requirements and limits on media concentration. As discussed in the case study later, press barons, like Murdoch, are able to manipulate politics to further their political, personal, and business agendas, using the threat of defamation.

In this analysis, the pluralism and self-censorship measures from the Freedom of the Press report and the political environment criteria from the Reporters Without Borders index help illustrate the counterintuitive effect that the lack of ownership regulation has on limiting media freedom of expression. The increasingly concentrated media ownership threatens the ultimate voice of independent media as political ambitions and vested interests become involved.

British Media Ownership

Three companies controlled an estimated cumulative 70% of national British newspaper circulation in 2015: Murdoch's News Corp UK & Ireland Limited, Rothermere's DMG Media (formerly Associated Newspapers) group of papers, and the Mirror Group Newspapers (Table 1). Two titles alone, Murdoch's *Sun* and Rothermere's *Daily Mail*, accounted for a combined 50% share of national newspaper circulation. Similarly, the *Sun on Sunday* and

Mail on Sunday accounted for roughly 50% of the shares of circulation of national Sunday papers ("Who Owns the UK Media?"). In terms of revenue of the various companies (Table 2), Murdoch-owned News Corp UK & Ireland Limited and Rothermere's DMG Media had a cumulative 57.7% market share ("Who Owns the UK Media?").

The same issue repeats in television broadcasting. In fact, already high concentration is likely to increase soon. Sky TV and Sky Broadband (Sky plc) lead in terms of revenue (Figure 1), followed by British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), which is the largest public service broadcaster ("Who Owns the UK Media?"). Although most broadcasters are controlled by UK-based companies or the public (Table 3), a US-based corporation, 21st Century Fox, is steadily expanding its television ownership. Murdoch's 21st Century Fox has a 39.1% share of Sky plc, and despite its initial failed bid, the corporation is vying for full ownership ("Who Owns the UK Media?"). The impending sale of Channel 5 to US-owned Viacom and the expected privatization of Channel 4 are further pluralism concerns (Sweney, "UK Media..."). So too, BBC's new license-fee cuts hinder its ability to compete with privatized media. Notably, 21st Century Fox's last bid for Sky plc, had it succeeded,

Table 2
Average Daily Circulation, National Newspapers (July 2015)

Title	Average Daily Circulation	Year over Year Change (%)	Share of Circulation (%)
<i>Sun</i>	1,856,790	-9.75	27.2
<i>Daily Mail</i>	1,657,706	-2.82	24.3
<i>Daily Mirror</i>	878,527	-10.49	12.9
<i>Daily Telegraph</i>	489,459	-4.75	7.2
<i>Daily Express</i>	429,810	-10.58	6.3
<i>Daily Star</i>	411,725	-11.69	6.0
<i>The Times</i>	394,910	-0.93	5.8
<i>i</i>	276,137	-0.42	4.0
<i>Financial Times</i>	207,179	-2.90	3.0
<i>Guardian</i>	168,369	-7.07	2.5
<i>Independent</i>	57,930	-8.24	0.8
Total	6,828,542	Average: -6.60	100.0

Source: "Who Owns the UK Media?"

would have granted Murdoch's various companies a cumulative 52% reach of the adult UK population across various mediums. Such extraordinary potential control warrants a deeper look into Murdoch's empire building, the history of which illuminates most of the key challenges of the fourth estate in the UK today.

Case Study: Rupert Murdoch

The career and extent of media ownership by Rupert Murdoch are the prime illustration of the larger effects of British media concentration. Murdoch is unique in his holdings across various platforms, including print, broadcast, and digital media.

Background

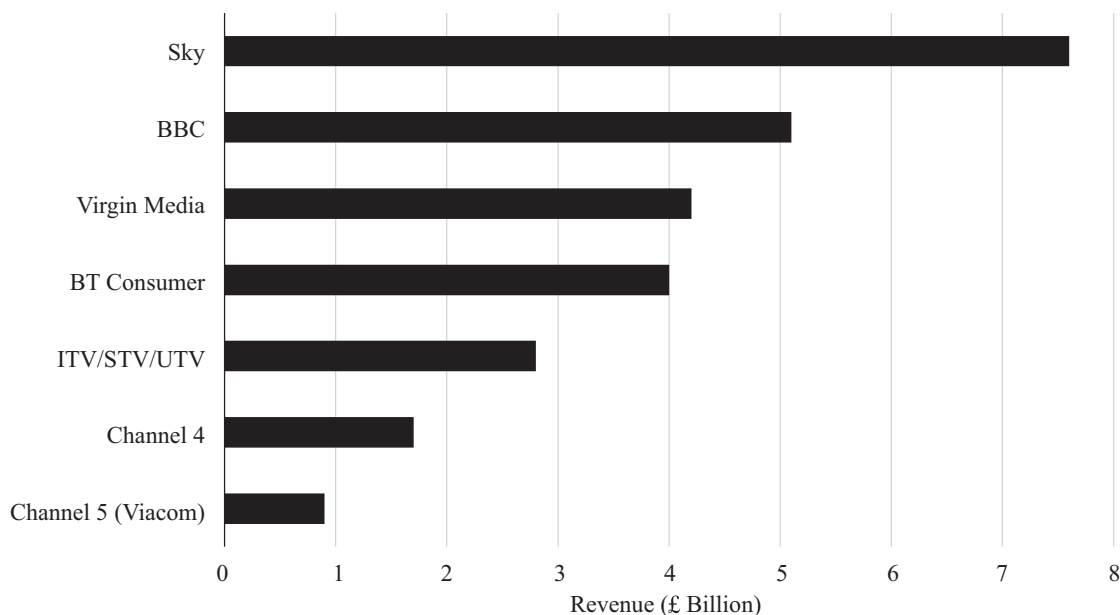
Born in Melbourne, Australia, in 1931, Murdoch went on to Oxford University. After graduation, at age 22, he inherited his father's newspapers, *News* and *Sunday Mail* ("Rupert Murdoch"). Murdoch is credited by many as the "proprietor of the modern tabloid." By adding eye-catching headlines and emphasizing scandal and crime, he thus

redefined the tabloid medium, in the process enveloping his publications in controversy ("Rupert Murdoch"). The highly successful transformations of the *News* and *Sunday Mail* under Murdoch's leadership created the financial means for his expansion into Perth and Sydney, where he purchased several more newspapers and rejuvenated them. Murdoch's first major breakthrough was his turnaround of the previously struggling *Mirror*. It later became the best-selling afternoon paper in Sydney ("Rupert Murdoch").

By 1965, Murdoch launched the *Australian*, Australia's first national daily paper. The *Australian* solidified Murdoch's reputation in the publishing world, and, by 1968, his net worth was an estimated \$50 million ("Rupert Murdoch"). With these funds at his disposal, Murdoch relocated to London, where he continued to add to his media empire, purchasing a ubiquitous tabloid, *News of the World*, and shortly thereafter the *Sun* ("Rupert Murdoch").

Then in the early 1970s, roughly 30 years after first gaining ownership of his father's newspaper, Murdoch relocated again to the

Figure 1
Revenues of Television Broadcasters and Carriers, Digital and Satellite, 2014



Source: Who Owns the UK Media?”

Table 3
Ownership of UK TV Broadcasters and Carriers

Company	Parent Company (Largest shareholder)	Location of Owner
Sky	Sky plc (21st Century Fox—39.1% share)	UK/USA
BBC	Publicly owned	UK
Virgin Media	Liberty Global	USA
BT Consumer	BT Group	UK
ITV	ITV plc and STV Group	UK
Channel 4	Channel Four Television Corporation (publicly owned)	UK
Channel 5	Viacom International	USA

Source: “Who Owns the UK Media?”

US. He bought the *San Antonio News* and began expanding to the east coast, purchasing the *New York Post*. Murdoch’s global holding company, News Corporation, came to include several other newspapers in Australia, the UK, and the US, including the *Chicago Sun-Times*, *New York* magazine, and *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* of London (“Rupert Murdoch”). He also diversified his media empire to

television and entertainment, notably through his 1985 purchase of Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation (now 21st Century Fox) and other smaller independent television outlets, which he consolidated under the Fox name (“Rupert Murdoch”). Moving into Asia, he established STAR TV in 1990, soon broadcasting to 320 million viewers. By 1990 too, Murdoch had consolidated various reputable academic

and literary publishers in the US and UK into HarperCollins (“Rupert Murdoch”). Murdoch’s investments in sports include part ownership in the Los Angeles Kings NHL franchise, Los Angeles Lakers NBA franchise, Staples Center, Fox Sports 1, and Fox Sports website. In the 2000s, Murdoch purchased Intermix Media, the parent company of MySpace.com, and Dow Jones, the owner of the *Wall Street Journal* (“Rupert Murdoch”).

Murdoch’s Political Reach

Murdoch has attained a reputation as a political kingmaker due to his ability to persuade high-ranking politicians in both the Labour and Conservative parties to pass measures that, according to former deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg (2010–2015), grant the media “an institutionalized immunity from the basic standards that govern the rest of society” (Mulholland). Thanks to the high levels of media freedom and low levels of regulation present in the UK (especially for print media), Murdoch has—with limited repercussion—been able to coerce British politicians through private agreements for favorable press coverage in exchange for political favors.

Murdoch’s signature method of political exploitation, which he has carried from Australia to the UK and most recently to the US, is character defamation through pointed and heavily biased tabloid headlines and stories. Through a barrage of eye-catching and often fictitious headlines, Murdoch is able to control enough of the general public’s opinion regarding prominent politicians to sway votes in or out of their favors (“Rupert Murdoch”). This modus has spawned various agreements between Murdoch and some of the most powerful men and women of the British government.

In 1981, for instance, Margaret Thatcher became an influential facilitator of Murdoch’s ambitions for upending the relations between British politics and media. Thatcher was approaching the 1981 election behind in the polls and Murdoch’s use of press presented an option for positive publicity (Evans). Their collusion, detailed in documents released by the Thatcher Archive Trust and in a now public personal note sent from Murdoch to Thatcher,

demonstrated Murdoch’s ability to influence regulation and law: measures enacted under Thatcher exempted News Corporation from the scrutiny of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, greatly aiding his acquisition of 40% of the British press. In return for constant positive coverage from his media platforms of her political decisions, Thatcher helped Murdoch gain control of *The Times*, despite several better-suited bids, by moving the responsibility for scrutinizing the sale to a minister who would favor Murdoch as well as by omitting him from laws that prohibited ownership of both print and broadcast media (Evans). As Judge Brian Leveson later sternly denounced, “That there was a confidential meeting between the then prime minister and Mr. Murdoch, the fact of which did not emerge into the public domain for more than 30 years, is troubling in its lack of transparency. It serves as a reminder of the importance of contemporary practice to make public the fact of such meetings. The perceptions at the time and since of collusive arrangements between the prime minister and the preferred bidder are corrosive of public confidence...” (Evans). It speaks volumes that the meeting was not publicized despite the importance of the subject matter discussed; as a result, there were implications for decades to come.

Through political and financial support, Murdoch likewise exerted pointed influence over the Labour Party’s former Prime Minister Tony Blair, who conveniently decided to omit judicial sentencing requirements for violations of the Data Protection Act from the Criminal Justice and Immigration Bill (Hyland). This lack of punitive teeth became useful for Murdoch during the 2011 scandal, in which a Murdoch tabloid, *News of the World*, was guilty of phone hacking, police bribery, and other unethical measures used to obtain content (Hyland).

Leveson Inquiry and Suggestions for Media Concentration

The Leveson Inquiry, although a direct response to the phone-hacking scandal, took aim at larger issues, such as media concentration, unethical practices by the press, and lack of regulation in the sector overall.

The power of the press, which Conservative leader Stanley Baldwin in 1931 called “power without responsibility”—in reference to press campaigns run by the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express* at the time—has been a consistent issue throughout UK history. As far back as 1695, newspaper regulation by a statutory body was abolished. More recently, moving to self-regulation, in 1990 newspaper publishers formed the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) for enforcement of industry-wide standards. Throughout its existence, the PCC remained a voluntary self-regulation body, as is its successor, the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO), set up in 2014 in response to the Leveson Report. By contrast for broadcasters, the governmental Office of Communications (Ofcom) is an official legal regulator (“Leveson Report...”). Due to the lack of enforcement power by the PCC and IPSO against publishers, corrupt media practices continued to fester, as exposed by the Leveson Inquiry. It remains unclear if the still self-regulatory IPSO will have greater impact.

Prime Minister David Cameron launched the Leveson Inquiry in 2011. Only the sixth public judicial inquiry since 1945, it investigated issues including the specific hacking into the phone of a missing (and later found murdered) child, Milly Dowler, and the ability of *News of the World* to continue its culture of hacking without any thorough inquiry from the government, police, or PCC despite accusations by the *Guardian* in 2009 (Sabbagh). The PCC had publicly claimed that their investigation pinpointed phone hacking to a single reporter, Clive Goodman, only to later admit that News International misinformed them. This tarnished public approval of the PCC and fueled skepticism of self-regulation. The inquiry not only led to closure of *News of the World* but also brought intense public and judicial attention to the influential power of Murdoch’s companies and other media conglomerates (Sabbagh). It also led the industry to replace the PCC with the IPSO, which, although it has more emphasis on external independent board members, remains self-regulated. The launch in 2016 of the first formal statutorily recognized independent regulator, IMPRESS, has so far failed to attract

the participation of any national newspaper.

The argument about whether or not self-regulation is enough in the UK can be traced to the lack of a UK equivalent of the US Constitution’s first amendment, which equates statutory regulation with restriction of free speech. One of Leveson’s suggestions included the introduction of legislation to protect free speech with a contingent type of statutory regulation (Sabbagh). Additional suggestions included a whistle-blowing hotline for journalists as well as an arbitration system in which people under duress by the press can forgo the judicial system and still obtain compensation (“Leveson Report...”).

Further, Leveson urged reforming the ethics and culture of the press, including the formation of a new regulation body with—in stark contrast to the PCC and IPSO—no connections to current editors, government employees, or businesspeople. Leveson warned that political figures and the press were engaging in inappropriately close and unethical relationships (“Leveson Report...”). The proposed independent regulatory body would be supported by legislation requiring routine external assessments of its ability to properly mediate the press. The government would also have a continuous legal obligation to take action to protect freedom of the press. Regulatory oversight of press organizations that refused to participate could potentially pass directly to broadcasting regulator Ofcom (“Leveson Report...”). Note that Ofcom maintains a consistent position regarding media plurality. It is staunchly against a market share cap for media ownership, arguing instead that plurality is the better measure and should be addressed in periodic reviews (Sweney, “Ofcom...”). Indeed, Ofcom has pushed for relaxing cross-media ownership rules. However, such relaxation risks further entrenching the narrow and self-serving agendas of the corporations headed by moguls such as Murdoch, Rothermere, and the Barclay brothers.

The left-leaning Labour and Liberal Democrats parties both came out in support of Leveson’s recommendations. Nonetheless, almost immediately, Cameron rejected the proposals for new legislation in their entirety,

asserting that they were a threat to press freedom. As a result, he was accused of giving into the interests of already increasingly dominant media organizations (O'Carroll). Cameron's actions were also widely perceived as having been influenced by powerful Conservative Party ministers. Overall, Leveson noted that there was "no credible evidence of bias," although as exposed during inquiry hearings, "close ties allowed a perception of favoritism," such as with Murdoch's newspaper executives ("David Cameron...").

Beyond Leveson's recommendations, politicians, various advocates from the media, and the judicial branch similarly proposed assorted other responses to the evident failure of the press to act responsibly. Proposals included not only self-regulation but also independent regulation, judicial regulation, statutory underpinning, and statutory regulation. As shown in Table 4, these alternative regulatory approaches differ mainly in the degrees of independence and legal authority. The proposal that would ensure the highest levels of protection for both the press and public is arguably Leveson's original recommendation—statutory regulation, for the creation of a press regulatory body similar in function and design to Ofcom, which currently operates with editors, politicians, and businesspeople barred from membership ("Leveson Report..."). For comparison, Norway, which ranks first in the World Press Freedom Index, likewise has dealt with plurality and media diversity issues arising from the changing media landscape. Norway updated its 1997 anti-concentration law (which had banned ownership of more than 40% of shares in cross-media, in reference to shares in companies whose platforms cover multiple segments) with a less restrictive media ownership transparency law enforced by the Norwegian independent media authority, Medietilsynet ("Norway: Faultless or Almost"). Exemplary too, the Netherlands ranks third in the World Press Freedom Index and similarly has an independent body, the Dutch Media Authority, responsible for assessing media independence, plurality, and accessibility on an annual basis and for enforcement through fines, revoking media licenses, and imposing limits on broadcast time ("Netherlands Profile"). For

the UK, Leveson suggested that, in parallel with forming an independent regulatory body, new legislation should protect the freedom of the press as well as cap market shares to prevent further concentration ("Leveson Report...").

Implications of Unregulated Media Concentration

Media proprietors and editors, such as Murdoch, serving as political kingmakers has had key negative consequences in the UK. In particular, effects on citizens' trust and on the Brexit vote have been heightened by the failure to implement measures and enforcement mechanisms (e.g., fines) to protect media plurality and diversity.

Trust

The annual trust barometer survey by the public relations firm Edelman has shown the level of trust by UK citizens in institutions across several categories, such as government, business, media, and NGOs, at or near historic lows. Overall only 11% of Britons believe that their current system of government actually works ("Edelman..."). Trust in media, at 28%, is down 8% in the past two years, the lowest since the 2011 phone-hacking trial. Along the same skeptical lines, according to the "Digital News Report 2017" by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (Newman et al.), fewer than half of Britons—41%—believe that media platforms are adequate for helping differentiate facts from disinformation (Harrison). As Dr. Rasmus Kleis Nielsen of the Institute explains, "The danger is that the influential and the upper classes see journalism as too tabloid and populist, while working-class people think it pays little attention to people like themselves and their lives—and no one is happy" (Harrison). Many media commentators believe that mainstream media has undergone a transition, abandoning the basic journalistic principles of fact-checking and of aiming to be objectively and factually correct to the best of their abilities (Harrison).

Brexit Vote

The recent Brexit referendum, in which the UK voted to leave the EU 51.9% to 48.1%,

Table 4
Alternative Responses to Lack of Responsible Press

Self-regulation	Self-regulation would expand the lay membership in the PCC, which the IPSO board now does, as well as require participating newspapers to become long-term members. The caveat of this option is that it would give increased power to prominent press individuals, with no guarantee that publishers will sign up. Prominent supporters of this option value freedom of ownership concentration and do not view it as a threat to plurality but rather as an important part of a free press. Proponents included Lord Hunt, former chairman of the PCC; Lord Black, a press lobbyist; editor in chief of the <i>Daily Mail</i> Paul Dacre; and Boris Johnson, a prominent member of the pro-Brexit Leave campaign.
Independent regulation	Independent regulation would create a similarly independent regulatory body but to avoid bias instead include few or no current editors on a regulatory board. This proposal includes voluntary long-term contractual membership but with no legal powers or judicial backing or any guarantee that major publishers will sign up. Supporters were members of the government and press who were not linked to major media scandals and who did not believe increased restriction would limit their freedom of expression. These included the <i>Guardian</i> , the <i>Financial Times</i> , Evgeny Lebedev (owner of the <i>Independent</i> and the <i>Evening Standard</i>), Ed Miliband of the Labour Party, and reportedly the Prime Minister at the time, David Cameron.
Judicial regulation	Judicial regulation would introduce a legal panel, appointed by the Lord Chief Justice. This panel would act as a regulatory enforcement authority and be wholly independent from influence of the press and politicians. A major supporter of this was <i>The Times</i> , owned by Rupert Murdoch. Although Murdoch has not publicly stated the reason for his support, it may be to preempt a legislative approach. A judicial approach might be comparatively less severe in restricting freedom of media concentration.
Statutory underpinning	Statutory underpinning involves the introduction of a legally supported replacement for self-regulatory bodies like the PCC and IPSO, including a tribunal system for examining complaints that previously had been analyzed by the judicial system. Potential risks include abuse by politicians through future amendments, thereby limiting freedom of speech. Well-known supporters, who helped launch IMPRESS in 2016, included those who believe the media should be heavily regulated and that freedom of concentration leads to the abuse of media, such as Hacked Off, a campaign group for free and accountable press, and National Union of Journalists.
Statutory regulation	Statutory regulation, the most formal regulatory structure, would be based on the Ofcom model for broadcasters. It would introduce a licensing system for all forms of media, overseen by an official regulator with full legal powers. Ofcom is the model for this proposal because it possesses a good reputation for its complaint system and is publicly accepted as a fair regulatory body yet still allows broadcasters to remain independent. Possible issues include the potential for inadvertently granting the government the power to remove a license as well as setting a precedent globally for countries where media freedom is threatened by the government. No prominent supporters have come out publicly for this option.

Source: Compiled by the author, consolidated from "Sabbagh."

was won largely thanks to a convincing Leave campaign. The campaign featured highly inaccurate statistics regarding issues such as immigration—a major influence on opinions about leaving the EU (Hunt and Wheeler). The highly partisan nature of editorial control enabled the Leave campaign to dominate a remarkable 82% of media coverage, with views favoring the Remain campaign receiving a mere 18% (Barnett). At least ten major newspaper covers were published with factually incorrect and highly divisive graphics regarding immigration. The *Daily Express* (owned by billionaire Richard Desmond), the *Daily Mail* (owned by Murdoch), and the *Daily Telegraph* (owned by Rothermere) published six. The Murdoch-owned outlets, *The Times* and *Sun*, were both also important in amplifying the Leave message to its target audience (Barnett). In response, the Remain campaign did little to argue about factual inaccuracies, opting instead to promise to reduce immigration. All five of these newspapers were viscerally anti-EU and competed with other tabloids for advertising revenue from a decreasing audience, in a vicious cycle of increasingly polarized publications (Barnett). The owners of these Leave-favoring publications had clear vested interests: in escaping EU oversight, in decreasing regulation and restrictions on concentration of media ownership, and in increasing their capacity for political influence.

Conclusion

The prominent issue regarding freedom of the media in the UK is the concentration and domination of the press by a few rich men. Rupert Murdoch is an undeniably key figure

in the British media landscape. His mastery of monopoly and cross-platform diversification makes him a highly influential figure in Britain, despite a non-Briton himself. Beyond being a media mogul, Murdoch is a political kingmaker, casting a shadow over Britain for decades. A discussion of British media and politics is impossible without inclusion of Murdoch and his strategic dealings, which have shaped modern Britain. Like Murdoch, other press barons, including the Barclay brothers and Rothermere, have stakes in large media conglomerates that come at the cost of plurality and diversity of opinion. This power extends beyond the ability of self-regulation. Furthermore, Prime Minister Cameron's unequivocally dismissive response to the Leveson Inquiry recommendations about the press's unethical relationship with politicians and police serves as a singular reminder of the power of media concentration.

Some media conglomerates intentionally aim to indoctrinate UK citizens and shape their opinions and decisions toward the vested interests of a few powerful owners, a direct threat to overall press freedoms. Various options for press regulation reform emerged after the phone-hacking trial, including self-regulation, independent regulation, judicial regulation, statutory underpinning, and statutory regulation, yet no major changes have yet been successfully implemented. It is imperative that a cap be placed on the concentration of ownership to preserve plurality concomitantly with mandatory oversight by a regulatory body that is independent of vested interests in order to prevent unethical press agendas and threats to freedom of speech of the press.

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