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CASE STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF SOCIO-POLITICAL CHANGES ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF FREEDOM OF SPEECH IN UZBEKISTAN

Submission Date: November 30, 2022, Accepted Date: December 05, 2022,

Published Date: December 08, 2022

Crossref doi: <https://doi.org/10.37547/ajsshr/Volume02Issue12-01>

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ABSTRACT

Uzbekistan faces socio-political changes in the last years and the impact of these turnouts are reflected in the media landscape of the country. Several cases show that President Shavkat Mirziyoyev who took the office in 2016, opens a wide range of opportunities for the development of mass media and supporting freedom of speech in the country. The results of these reflections are investigated in the article by several cases which are discussed more and even attractive globally. Both positive and negative effects of political reforms in the county are compared with the similar conditions of other counties such as Turkey, India, the USA, etc.

KEYWORDS

Media landscape, freedom of speech, media freedom, socio-political changes, reforms

INTRODUCTION

According to sociologists, “social change occurs at the root of the renewal of cultures, civil institutions, and functions, and this phenomenon takes place gradually over many years. Comparing any modern society with

its image fifty or one hundred years ago can show the importance of social changes in society's life”. Two centuries ago, the society of Turkestan was surrounded by religious and secular conflicts, far from

enlightenment and development, with the shackles of slavery hanging around its neck, but now the society living in the region is on the path of democratic reforms, striving to strengthen its place in the world community. If the changes in the first society caused the suppression of freedom of speech, and the removal of those who fought for it from the social and political arena, the social changes in the second society created the need to realize its necessity, protect and provide it.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In the second half of the 1990s, the Republic of Turkey began to try to become a member of the European Union. The country, which has been a candidate for membership in the Union since 1999, has implemented various political reforms over the years, including improving the state of freedom of expression in the country. On October 3, 2001, it amended the articles of the Constitution in force since 1982 related to freedom of expression and abolished the death penalty.

Political changes in the country - the desire to enter the European Union, and the legislation related to freedom of speech have also been reformed, and the search for the removal of legal obstacles to its provision is ongoing. While writing about the 10 political reforms the government developed to join the European Union, the Turkish newspaper "Radikal" rated the eighth package - a set of reforms aimed at ensuring

freedom of the press - as the most important and urgent.

In recent years, social and political changes in Uzbekistan are also gaining importance in ensuring freedom of speech and the press. On October 13, 2020, Uzbekistan was elected to the UN Human Rights Council. It shows that our country has assumed great responsibility during its three years of activity within the Council, which currently unites 47 countries of the world. According to the interpretation of the publication "Voice of America", "the name of Uzbekistan in the international arena was seriously damaged in terms of human rights; Mirziyoyev's government is trying to improve this name. For this purpose, political prisoners were released, and cooperation with international organizations was started. Even UN special rapporteurs were allowed to be in Uzbekistan and closely study the situation". The correspondent of the media outlet discussed the opinion that the main purpose of membership in the Council is not to ensure human rights in the country but to improve the political image of the new government in the international arena. But the member of the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis, the chairman of the nationwide movement "Yuksalish", Bobur Bekmurodov spoke to "Voice of America" in Tashkent that the republic declares that it is ready for any tests to ensure human rights and freedom of speech and implement it at international standards.

The impact of political changes in our country on freedom of speech is visible from the first years of the second government. In the March 2, 2018 edition of the "New York Times" newspaper, a news article titled "World's Longest-Imprisoned Journalist is Freed in Uzbekistan" was published. In this material, the changes in the media landscape of our country are analyzed by announcing the release of 64-year-old journalist Yusuf Rozimurodov, who has been in prison since 1999. Even though the author refrained from acknowledging the steps taken to ensure freedom of speech and the press, but rather listed the previous government's obstacles in this regard, he does not deny that due to socio-political changes in the life of society, human rights have started to be looked at differently.

As a result of the leading importer of the Internet segment in the exchange of information, not only our society, but also societies of various positions in the world have faced a huge flow of social changes, and this process is still ongoing. This social phenomenon, which caused changes in the media consumption culture of civil society representatives, created the need to create the issue of freedom of speech in the virtual world and its legal foundations. In addition, he made the development of new indicators of press freedom an issue on the agenda, accelerating the development of citizen journalism. The "statista.com" site, which collects and publishes international

statistical data, announced the number of "digital population" of the world as of January 2021. According to him, there are 4.66 billion active Internet users, 4.32 billion mobile Internet users, and 4.2 billion social network users, and these numbers mean that 59.5 percent of the world's population uses the global network. "Digital" infrastructure is also improving in Uzbekistan, which is implementing many reforms to reduce "digital inequality", meet society's demand for information and ensure freedom of speech.

According to the information published by the Committee on Information Policy and Transparency in State Bodies of the Oliy Majlis Senate, as of February 2022, the most used social network in Uzbekistan is the Telegram messenger, which currently has more than 18 million users. Also, 4.7 million citizens of the country use Facebook, 3.7 million use Instagram, 2.6 million use V-kontakte, 288 thousand use LinkedIn, and more than 51.6 thousand use Twitter constantly. These indicators show the speed of social changes and the growing need to ensure and regulate the right to freedom of speech in a real civil and virtual society.

In recent years, citizen journalism - blogging and vlogging - has become more widespread in Uzbekistan under the influence of socio-political changes, the active layer of the population in social networks has begun to raise issues in society on their pages. While blogs with various entertainment content (music, travel, gastronomy, etc.) are being consumed as a new

trend in Western countries, it can be observed that the blog sphere of Uzbekistan is gaining a socio-political and religious character.

As a result of the actions of the current President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, to conduct transparent politics and recognition of the media as a leading force in this regard, the attitude of the representatives of the political circle to the media has changed and this process continues to move in a positive direction. As part of the implementation of the decision of the head of state on June 27, 2019 “On additional measures to ensure the independence of mass media and the development of information services of state bodies and organizations”, information services were established in each state organization, and as a result of this political change, journalists were removed from state organizations. In addition to the increased access to information, organizations have begun to understand their accountability to the people more deeply.

In the early years of the reforms, many leaders who did not want to cooperate with the mass media and could not give up the bureaucratic approach in providing them with information about their activities and organization were criticized by the President. On August 3, 2019, at a meeting chaired by the head of state, a group of regional and district governors was criticized for being indifferent to the requests of journalists and bloggers.

But we should not forget another side of the issue, that is, socio-political changes in society do not always acquire a positive nature, and such negative processes pose a serious threat to freedom of speech and the press. In Israel, one of the few democracies in the Middle East, former Prime Minister Naftali Bennett was accused of corruption after offering regulatory favors to two of the country's largest media firms in exchange for positive coverage of his political image, the BBC reported. Although Naftali Bennett has resisted efforts to formally indict and prosecute him on these charges, evidence suggests that the Prime Minister was willing to sacrifice press freedom to maintain political power. We can observe a similar situation in the case of Israel in many countries of the world, for example, India, which has the largest population, is also one of the democratic countries that often use signals to emphasize that it is not the responsibility of the press to hold the government accountable. According to research by Reporters Without Borders, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party supported campaigns to block “anti-national” speech in 2019, and government-affiliated thugs raided the homes and offices of critical journalists. The media receives constant instructions on how to cover Prime Minister Narendra Modi's activities.

In both of the above examples, we can see that political actions and changes are not always positive and that these situations hurt media activity and

freedom of speech, along with all institutions in society. The desire of both Prime Ministers to maintain political power in an unjust and not democratic way requires the silence of activists and journalists who can properly assess this situation in society. As a result, freedom of speech and the press will be trampled again.

Press freedom in the United States, the world's leading democratic power, has come under unprecedented pressure under President Donald Trump, according to political analysts and many media experts. Although mainstream news organizations have not lost their power and influence and have continued to actively report on political figures, Donald Trump's constant abuse of the press has seriously exacerbated the erosion of trust in the media. Among other steps, the president has repeatedly threatened to tighten defamation laws, revoke the licenses of some broadcasters and harm other business interests of media owners. The US constitution provides strong protections against such actions, but President Trump's outspoken opposition to press freedom has had a significant impact on the global media landscape. Journalists around the world have less and less reason to believe that Washington will come to their aid if their basic rights are violated.

One of the largest publications in the country “The Washington Post” in the issue of March 29, 2022 is entitled “A history of the Trump War on Media — the

obsession not even coronavirus could stop” published a critical-analytical article. The journalistic material states that the 44th President of the United States, during his political career, constantly accused the mass media of spreading fake information, which led to the loss of trust of ordinary people in the media. In addition, the article entitled “The Cost of Trump’s Assault on the Press and the Truth” published by “The New Yorker” on December 7, 2020 (what is the cost of Trump's assault on the press and the truth) also shows the negative impact of political change on freedom of speech and the press. Author - David Remnick begins the article with the following words: “Presidents have always complained about the press”, and Trump has done it so openly that followers of his pages on social networks began to distrust the press. One political figure's attitude towards the press has inspired many to follow him.

Analysis of a few details of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, one of the main political events focused on the world media in 2022, shows that the freedom of the press in both countries was the first casualty of military operations. According to “Time”, the Kremlin before the war in Ukraine already tightly controlled journalism in Russia, but some independent media outlets fought to challenge the state.

The situation changed on March 4, 2022, when President Vladimir Putin passed a law punishing the sharing of “false information” about the war with up

to 15 years in prison, blocking access to Facebook and foreign media in the country. Independent mass media such as “Novaya Gazeta” led by Nobel laureate Dmitry Muratov were forced to stop their activities. The country’s media regulator suspended the Russian analog of “Euro news” on March 22. In April 2022, footage of Margarita Simonyan, editor-in-chief of the Russia Today TV channel, advocating government censorship of the media circulated on social networks. “No great country can live without information control” , it can be understood that the view of freedom of speech and press in the country is already based on the interests of the government.

CONCLUSION

The above examples show that the impact of political changes has a strong impact not only on the freedom of speech and press in countries that are just developing or whose democratic approaches have not yet been firmly established but also in countries that consider themselves to be true defenders of human rights. Even if socio-political changes aim at the development of the country, the situation may take a different shape due to some shortcomings in their implementation or promotion among the society. Analysis can be thought on the example of the events that took place in Nukus, the center of Karakalpakstan on July 1-2, 2022. Irresponsibility in the process of presenting amendments and additions to the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan for public

discussion, and collecting suggestions from citizens for several months before that, caused public unrest in Nukus. Even though the goal of the political reform was to bring our Constitution into line with international standards and edit it based on the requirements of modern legislation, political protest arose after presenting the new version of our Constitution to the people without thoroughly studying the opinions of the population. The head of state, who prioritized the safety of the population, had to introduce some restrictions in the area. The disconnection of the Internet network in Karakalpakstan was assessed not only by local activists but also by foreign mass media as a suppression of freedom of speech and information. The case also shows that freedom of speech and the press can sometimes face even stronger pressures and obstacles due to political changes.

Through our research, we have analyzed the influence of social and political changes on freedom of speech. By comparing the impact of such changes on freedom of speech in the countries of the world and Uzbekistan, we found out that socio-political changes have both positive and negative impacts on the provision of freedom of speech. That is, free reforms in the life of the society increase the value of freedom of speech, but due to political disagreements, it comes under severe pressure.

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