

26th ISOJ Doing Journalism in Countries with Democracies on the Decline

- Chair: Ann Marie Lipinski, curator, Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University
 - Carlos Dada, co-founder and director, El Faro (El Salvador)
 - Gülsin Harman, journalist (Turkey)
 - Arfa Khanum, senior editor, The Wire (India)
 - András Pethő, co-founder, editor and executive director, Direkt36 (Hungary)
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Summer Harlow Our next panel is continuing with the theme, Doing Journalism in Countries with Democracies on the Decline, and it is chaired by Ann Marie Lipinski, who is the curator for the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University. So let us introduce our next panelist, who are making their way to the stage as we speak.

Ann Marie Lipinski American colleagues, prepare for the worst. If it doesn't happen, you'll be happy to be proven wrong. If it happens, it could happen fast. That was written by Glenda Gloria, editor of The Rappler, the news site in the Philippines whose staff and founder, Maria Ressa, endured years of personal attack and legal torment from the corrupt Duterte administration. Glenda's was one of nine essays we commissioned at Neiman Reports from journalists around the world in the days following Donald Trump's second election. In 14 years running the Neiman Foundation, I've worked with journalists from dozens of countries who came to the U.S. seeking respite, inspiration, and a path out of repressive conditions. But when the new American president sued a television network, threatened to revoke broadcast licenses, and escalated cries of fake news to violent provocations, we turned with great humility to those same journalists in search of counsel for their American colleagues. Dear America, they wrote, offering not so much prediction as cautionary tales and a plea to take heed. It is death by a thousand cuts of press freedom that I would advise my American journalist colleagues to watch out for, wrote a Turkish journalist. That journalist was Gulsin Harman, who is with us today, one of four journalists working in countries with democracies in decline, and warning of a characteristic of the U.S. and wounded democracies everywhere and endangered free press. We're so fortunate to have these courageous journalists with us today to tell us what's happening in their countries and to give us some idea, the American journalists in the room, of what we might expect and how to respond to that. We'll hear brief presentations from each of the four of them and then have a conversation with them as a group. We will start with András Pethő, who is co-founder and executive director of Direkt36 in Hungary, and he'll talk to us about life in the years under the Viktor Orbán administration. András?

András Pethő Thank you. Thank you for having me here. Sometimes I feel that I should, the Hungarian journalist, should be grateful for Viktor Orbán because he has really put us on the map. I don't think I would be here if it wasn't for him. And it's true that he's a fascinating character, and he gives us a lot of work to do. Understanding him, the key, the one of the keys to understanding him is actually his relationship with the media. In the mid-90s, he gave an interview in which he said that one of most dangerous things in the world is the media, then he corrected himself and he said, maybe the most dangerous thing in the word is the media. I think that explains a lot of what happened later. But why did he say that? I think he was talking about his experience in the early 90s. First, he was very popular among journalists. He was young. He was a liberal. He seemed like a clean

actor in politics. But then when his politics started to change and his party started to do some, you know, murky, shadowy businesses, then the news media, journalists, became more critical with him. And then his popularity declined, and then he blamed the media for that.

So when he rose to power, first in 98, that was the first time he was elected to be Prime Minister, one of his priorities was to crack down on the media. When he returned to power in 2010, he immediately started a crackdown on the independent press. He did two things simultaneously. One was to, through his allies, through his friends, he shut down, they shut down independent media outlets, or his friends took them over and transformed them into propaganda outlets. And then, so this was the second thing, he built a really powerful, robust propaganda machinery. It's something that I think is unlike anything that you can see in the, at least in the western, or so-called democratic world. This propaganda machinery has hundreds of outlets, newspapers, digital news sites, television channels, and practically all local newspapers in Hungary. And it's important to understand it's not only the size. It's not only that there are many of them. It's the nature of this machine is, and the purpose of this machine is, to serve the government. That's it. They are not doing journalism. There are no independent voices. There is no autonomy in the system. It's not even like, I know, I follow more or less what's going on here in the U.S., but even when I hear, you know, about the bad influence or the influence of Fox News, you know even at Fox News you still have, as far as I understand, professional anchors and reporters alongside the MAGA, pro-Trump people. In the Hungarian propaganda machine, there are no independent voices. There are no professional journalists. And Orbán has been quite open about this when he gave a speech a couple of years ago to a CPAC conference for American conservatives that was held in Budapest for some reason, and he said that the key to power is that we should have our own media. So that's what he did. That's what he built in Hungary.

The good news is that you can still survive, and you can still do independent journalism even in an environment like that. Direkt36, the investigative reporting center that I co-founded 10 years ago with a few of my colleagues, is only one example. There are several other outlets that do independent work and important good journalism. But we are mostly confined to the digital space. It's hard for us to reach people who still depend on traditional broadcast media or print. And I think we'll talk about the similarities between, and even the differences between, what's going on in a place like Hungary and what's happening here in the U.S., but to give you some optimism, or a cause for optimism, is that just a few weeks ago, we published our latest documentary, which was about the Orbán family and about the Orbán family's controversial businesses, and that documentary, which was released on YouTube, it has more than 3.5 million views already. In a country of less than 10 million, that's pretty big. It's by far the most watched, not only documentary, but any kind of journalistic content that was ever published by Hungarians on YouTube at least. And it's a very old fashioned documentary, even has talking heads. We have some cool undercover footage as well. But what this taught me, this experience, was that if you have a powerful story, and if you tell it in a compelling way, then you can still make an impact, and you can still have your stories resonate with people, even outside your bubbles, as we have experienced. So I really look forward to this conversation, and thank you so much for having me.

Ann Marie Lipinski Now we'll hear from Gülsin Harman from Istanbul.

Gülsin Harman Well, thank you so much for having me. You know, when Ann Marie suggested that we write pieces for Nieman Reports, like playing a role of a Cassandra for

our American colleagues, like what went wrong in our respective countries and what can be any advice that we can share with you. I mean, writing the piece was very emotional and tough for me. But in the months that followed, there was one particular event that happened here in the U.S. that sent me down the memory lane. In February, last February, when the White House break the century of tradition of having the White House press pool being selected by independent news organizations, and when they announced that from now on the journalists will be selected by the White House itself, again, it sent me down a memory lane because the exact thing happened in Turkey in 2008. And at the time, in the prime minister's office in Turkey, all the reporters who had the credentials to report, they were selected by their own news organizations, and that privilege had been revoked by the office itself. And that year, 2008, happened to be the year that I started journalism. So you might ask very wisely, like, didn't you notice? Didn't you notice that things are not going well, and things are shifting? So my answer to you would be, no, I didn't. Of course, I noticed the event, but I was far busy being too excited and happy to finally become a journalist, to meet the greatest profession in the world for a curious person. So fast forward to 17 years later, I'm standing in front of you from a country where the media capture by pro-government cronies, and the media crackdown has reached unprecedented levels.

You know, again, Turkey is quite different than the US, right? But one thing that I would really like to tell you is that maybe from an American perspective, it might be too easy to think that, well, the Turkish democracy to begin with, it was not very strong already. You didn't have the American standards. But I can assure you that we took things for granted, and now in hindsight, I can very clearly see that in Turkey we had things in order. And what we had, of course, with its shortcomings and some historical wrongdoings, the Turkish democracy was far more advanced than the Western counterparts would think. And what spelled doom for the Turkish media, who was thriving at the time when I started journalism? I would say that what spelled doom for the Turkish media was not necessarily and solely the government pressure. What really changed the nature of Turkish media is when the owners of legacy media decided that there is a new boss in town, and I might get along with him, otherwise, I might be gone, myself too. So one thing that I would really like to warn you about that, I really hope that it won't happen to you, but you will be surprised, or you may be surprised, to see that the former benevolent and generous donors of your independent media might stop answering your emails. The colleagues that you thought that they were committed, as you are, to the journalistic integrity and standards might decide that there might be another path for me, and another path that might lead me to earn much more money. And you might be also seeing that again, your editor-in-chief that you trusted so much may decide also like, "I will not be rocking the boat. Let's try to keep things business as usual."

From 2008 until the end of 2015, I was a foreign news reporter for many Turkish legacy media organizations. At the end of 2015, amid the increasing censorship, I resigned in protest and promised myself that unless things have changed, I will not be returning to working for the national media. But again, the media capture in Turkey, the very much hostile takeover, has affected the line that we've been working and the line we've been trying to hold. Again, a very personal moment from my history, the anchorman, the prominent news anchor of my childhood that I used to watch every night on public broadcaster, I met him again, but this time years later in a room where he was a government official, spinning lies and falsehoods with his deep, confident tone that I used to listen as a child again, believing him to be the beacon of the authoritative voice in journalism. Again, you may ask that how come that all these years you witnessed as the journalistic community in Turkey this decline and could not stop it. I think that we hoped, which is a very human thing, that things cannot go much more wrong, and it has to stop at

some point, right? In hindsight, one of the things that I deeply regret, that as journalists in Turkey, we did not make a case for ourselves. We could not persuade our audiences and the public that our very existence is for their own sake. And we could not assure and rally the public for us in a manner that we journalists are not mere observers, we are participants in your life. And this participation, of course, we will be impartial and fair in our reporting, but there are things that we stand for.

After I resigned from the Turkish media and my newspaper, it is still open, but only the name stands, it's completely voided after the media capture, I started to freelance for the New York Times Istanbul bureau in 2017. For the first four years, my name did not appear on the newspaper. My byline was concealed for the security reasons. But nevertheless, I kept doing journalism. It was, I would say that it was, very tough for me to not see my name on the stories that I pitched, I reported and wrote. And there's one thing that also, I would really tell you today, that staying, resisting, you know, trying to protect yourself under such a crackdown, it's a very tough thing, indeed. But another thing that is really insidiously occupying your mind is that how to remain professional. Yesterday and today, some speakers were mentioning that how it is becoming hard to have the opinion, to include the opinion of the, let's say, other side, or the pro-government voices, or conservative voices. Of course, in Turkey, we still try to include the government authorities and the pundits who hold pro-government views. But again, for me, in my experience also, how many times you can pick up the phone to have an opinion of them, let's say, of the other side, and being threatened in return, insulted. And after a while, it's very, very challenging to remain professional. And because the other side when they come at you, and once you realize that what they want is not to make their voice heard, but to destroy you, and to deny your very existence, and uproot every principle that you hold dear. I'm known for my happy warrior attitude, but I must tell you that persistence and resilience come at a mental and physical cost. Here, I want to, I think there are many times, but here I want to use this opportunity to genuinely, heartfelt thanks to Ann Marie again, because once I got the Harvard-Nieman Fellowship, that during the fellowship year in 2019, I realized that how much I was exhausted and drained. And I will tell you very frankly that if I hadn't had that chance of a year to have some respite, I don't think that I would be able to continue doing journalism. After Nieman year, I decided to, in addition to my work for the New York Times, to give back to my journalistic community in Turkey, whom I deeply admired for their resilience and stubbornness. I've been consulting for independent Turkish Media. I'm a consultant for the Turkish independent media on diversifying revenue streams, impact strategies, and editorial planning. But I must tell you that this insistence of doing good journalism comes at a cost too. There are sometimes meetings that we schedule, and the person that I'm supposed to talk with from the independent news organization, they don't appear without emailing me first. Instantly, I think, oh, it's rude. But then I realized that actually he had to appear in court today. So there is this insistence that we, again, as Turkish journalists, very much committed to do, but when everything else comes at you, it's very hard to concentrate on doing things that the trade of journalism, the craft itself, demands.

And just to finish. If you have been tuned in what's happening in Turkey in the last week, you may be thinking that actually the title of this panel, democracies in decline, in the last week in Turkey, very sadly the democracy appears to hit the rock bottom. So these years, these long years of decline, I'm afraid maybe have reached an end. But again, I really want to finish by quoting Antonio Gramsci, the Italian philosopher, a vocal critic of fascism who perished in a Mussolini jail after 11 years of detention. "I will say that I'm a pessimist because of intelligence, but I'm an optimist because of will." Thank you so much.

Ann Marie Lipinski Thank you, Gülsin. Please welcome, Arfa Khanum, the senior editor at The Wire in India.

Arfa Khanum Thank you very much. It is an honor to be here as an Indian journalist and also as a JSK Fellow. 1.45 billion people. This year we became the most populous country on earth, and by default, of course, the largest democracy of the world. So I feel like the global battle of democracy is being fought in India. And this also kind of exemplifies the global democratic recession. Although I was talking to Ann Marie, and I was saying that America is actually giving us tough competition in terms of the democratic recession and the decline of democracy. This is the 11th year of Narendra Modi in power, and I was telling her we are actually in a position to now teach a thing or two to America and to other countries who are facing a similar situation. And I wanted to tell her that it doesn't get any better. So I'm not promising that it will get better with time or the dictators, the authoritarian regimes will actually do anything better or learn their lessons. It's just that you learn new tools, you get yourself better equipped to fight authoritarianism, to fight dictatorship.

So this is exactly what's happening in India. So in the last three days, I'll tell you what happened. So you keep hearing stories about attack on journalism in India, attack on the free press in India. In the last three days, there is a famous and a very brave comedian called Kunal Kamra. He cracked a joke. He not just cracked a joke, he did a 45-minute long kind of a presentation, a comedy show, where he actually did the job of journalists. He shed a light on the state of affairs in India, the social, the political, the economic, he basically mocked the dictator. And so just for cracking, and of course in his own, you know, comic style. Now, the supporters of the BJP and the supporters of the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, one of the states which is ruled by the BJPs, they're coming after him, threatening him with violent actions, and he is being investigated by the police. Now, if this was not enough, now for cracking a joke, you will be investigated by the police, he lives in one of the southern states now. He said he's not going to apologize. So the resistance can also come, not just from journalists, not just from activists, not just from politicians, but also from comedians. So this is how the state of affairs changes. Now the second thing is that there is an arrest and re-arrest of a journalist in the northeastern state of Assam called Dilwar Hussain Mazumdar, and he is associated with a Guwahati-based news portal. He was just covering a protest, and he was arrested. Then he was given bail by the court, and the court order reached the police officials late. Now he's been re-arrested. So this has just happened in the last three days.

Now, before we try to understand what's happening in India, and if we are going survive for the next four-plus years of Mr. Modi or not, we need to understand the media landscape in India. So it has about 140,000 registered newspapers. It has 22,000 daily publications. And the stories, the news stories, are told in 189 languages and dialects. And if you talk about TV, then it's equally sprawling with over 900 channels in total, and 350 of which are dedicated to just news, and many of them, they broadcast around the clock. And by 2026, India is projected to be the world's fifth largest media market, both in print and broadcast television. Now, if I give you these details, you will wonder that this actually kind of tells us the story of how vibrant and healthy the media atmosphere is. That's not correct. Now, most of these journalists, working in over 300 channels and all these newspapers, they are working overtime to spread misinformation, disinformation, to suppress information. So the job of the journalists, the challenges that we faced in the last 100 years, was that we were struggling with technology and with trying to reach people with information. So the crisis of information was that we wanted to reach as many people as we can. Now in India, what's happening is that journalists are being paid to suppress news so that no information reaches the people. That's the irony. So in India, the largest democracy of the world, I told

you by 2026, it'll be the world's fifth largest media market, we have an information crisis. There is a lot of information, but most of it is disinformation and misinformation, and what media essentially is trying to do is that it is helping Narendra Modi, and his party, and his mother organization called the RSS, to kind of stroke religious divisions. And you know, it is actively inciting hatred and violence against the 200 million Muslims. I mean not that they love Christians, who are less than 2% of the population of 1.45 billion any more, but it is just that right now, the clear enemy is the Indian Muslim.

So this, I wanted to show you. So this is a picture, it is a Hindi channel, and it is talking about a Muslim ruler, who died 300 years ago, that the atrocities he committed on the people of India during that time, they say the Hindus of India, during that time, the answerability, the accountability of that ruler should lie on the 21st century Muslims in India right now. So the debate is going on about that, but you see a mosque and a temple. So the guy in the green on your left is a Congress party member from the opposition, and the guy who has a temple as his background, is the BJP. So which means the Congress Party represents the Muslims, and the BJP represents the temple. So this is in how many ways they are trying to tell people that the opposition is standing behind the Muslims, which means not just to demonize the opposition as a representative of Indian Muslims, but also, you know, kind of showing them in a poor light that they are anti-Hindu. They only represent the mosque and the BJP represents the temple.

Now another thing is that how they're trying to spread this misinformation and also actively helping and colluding with the government of the day is that they are not only trying to kind of tell history in ways that is false, and it's not correct, but also every single occasion, whether it is a Hindu festival or a Muslim festival, it becomes a flash point for the division between Muslims and Hindus. This article that you see right now, so there was a senior police official in the state of Uttar Pradesh, which is the largest state in India, he said that there are 52 Fridays in a year, and the Holi comes only once a year. So 52 Fridays as in 52 occasions of a Friday prayer, and the Holi incidentally, it fell on the same day as the Friday prayer time. So Holi is a festival where people put colors on each other, they come out on streets, and they will dance. Now the new trend is that these over-enthusiastic Hindu youths, they will come in front of the mosque, and they will play anti-Muslim songs, which are outrightly contemptuous to not just Muslims in general, but abusive and slurs for Indian Muslim women, and they will dance in front the mosque. So basically what they're saying is that while all this is being played, Muslims should remain indoors so Hindus are allowed to play Holi. Now the channels are not asking questions, or asking for accountability, or doing debates on why should this gentleman, this police officer, should have the audacity to actually pass such an order or issue such a statement. They are actually debating that why Muslims can't remain indoors for a day. Why they can't remain indoors for a day and let Hindus play Holi. So here are the screenshots that you see. So these are some of the Hindi TV debates that you see, and in the last one month, there have been hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of such TV debates on more than these 350 channels that I told you that how diverse and vibrant this media has been. So this media, which has been captured by the corporate powers, which are best friends with Mr. Modi, the corporate owners, they are spreading communal divisions.

So when you have the mainstream media, which, as I said, either is suppressing news, spreading misinformation and disinformation, or what they try to do is they actively incite hatred and violence against the Muslims, against the lower caste groups, the backward communities, the farmers, the laborers, women, youths, basically anybody and everybody, whoever puts any even a little bit of challenge for Mr. Modi. Then comes the free press.

So I have to say here that one of the happy, you know, byproducts of the suppression of the free-press and this collusion of the big media with the authoritarian regime in India has been the emergence of the free media. So The Wire has been, you now, always in the last almost decade of its existence under scanner. There are police cases on our editors, on our reporters, there was a raid on The Wire. And then even people like me, for example, on a daily basis, you know, because then there is, on one hand you have the mainstream media, on the other hand, there are a few journalists, the last few men and women who are still standing up to power, they get threatened by the government, the government's machinery, which includes the police. There are cases and then there are threats and intimidations, which people like me day in and day out receive, which is death threats, rape threats. You know, there are people who send me videos on with graphic details on what they plan to do with me. Even with me coming here and speaking in front of you, it has some risks, and they will you know kind of blame me for defaming India on an international platform, not really educating the international community on what's happening in the largest democracy of the world, but anything you say against the government these days is considered anti-national. It's considered anti-Hindu. It's considered anti-Modi, and my unpopular religious identity doesn't really help in that way. That when they are demonizing 200 Indian Muslims, I happen to be a Muslim woman, so, this kind of just adds to kind of, I would say, insult to the injury. I just make for this perfect case for them, where they tell me that I represent the attackers who came from the Muslim world and occupied India. So if they can actually kind of revive Muslim and Mughal emperors who died three, four hundred years ago. I am somebody who is a living, breathing person, and I perfectly fit into the kind of box they have created for me.

So I think the times are really difficult. It's just like I said, it doesn't get any better. It's that you learn how to fight with these forces. The last election, the 2024 election which happened last year, it also tells the dictators that there is a limitation to them, that they can be defeated. They are not invincible. Mr. Modi and his party did not get the majority. Right now, what we have is a coalition government. But, you know, the ways and means in the way he is functioning, his actions, they are no less than the authoritarian, otherwise authoritarian regimes. And I think for rest I will leave for the discussion. Thank you very much.

Ann Marie Lipinski Thank you. Now, please welcome Carlos Dada, who's director of the Salvadoran investigative news site, El Faro.

Carlos Dada Hi. It's been many years since the last time I was here, and I have to say that I'm really impressed about how this conference has grown. Congratulations, Rosental, Summer, and all your team. It's amazing what you're doing, and I think that particularly this year is more important than ever. I can't recall a time in my lifetime when journalism was at such a critical crossroads. So this meeting, this gathering is very important. I was thinking right now when I was listening to my colleagues, just look at this panel. Let me remind you the persons that govern each of the countries represented in this stage: Mr. Trump, Mr. Orbán, Mr. Erdogan, Mr. Modi, and Mr. Bukele. It's not hard to realize what they have in common. I think it's very important to say, to begin with, that none of them define who we are. None of them define who we are. And that's precisely why they don't like us, because we are not allowing them to define who we are.

I'm going to talk to you about Mr. Bukele. Just let me start with something. Because on my way here on the airplane, I was reading Salman Rushdie's book, Knife, his account of the assassination attempt he suffered. And while I was reading, I read this phrase that he wrote. "If you are afraid of the consequences of what you say, you are not free." And I

thought, what a powerful phrase. I mean, think about the elements in this phrase. I'm going to say the phrase again. "If you were afraid of the consequences of what you say you are not free." Fear, consequences, what you say, freedom. It's a very powerful phrase, and I've been thinking about this, and then I arrived here, and I met one of my colleagues whose name or origin I will not disclose. But this colleague told me, this colleague is here, exiled. And this colleague told me, I can't say anything about my country because my family may pay the consequences, and I can't say anything about this country because they may deny me my residence permit. Fear, consequences, what you say, freedom. Freedom used to be a condition to do what we do. It's become an aim. We aim to be free. We aim to practice journalism in a free way, because that's the only way that we know how to practice journalism.

Let me tell you a little bit about our own story in El Salvador. El Faro started in 1998, that was the outset of our democracy. Our democracy was born in 1992 out of the peace agreements that put an end to the civil war. By the way, our war was covered among others by Rosental himself. It ended in 1992, and El Faro was born in 1998. And what I'm trying to say is that El Faro was born in democracy as a media to cover a country living in democracy, starting to live in democracy, with all the rules of democracy. That is gone. I am now one of the oldest in my newsroom, working with a generation, with generations of people, that don't know how to practice journalism but in democracy, under the rules of democracy. When Mr. Bukele came to power in 2019, we thought we had strong institutions. I know this sounds familiar to some of you. We thought we had strong institutions. None of them resisted five minutes. They all came tumbling down. And suddenly, there is this guy or this group of people concentrating a lot of power, and suddenly we become their enemies. Because we keep practicing journalism for a country and a society that they are trying to destroy. They are trying to dismantle the rules of democracy, the checks and balances, so they start threatening us. In our case, a lot of surveillance, a lot of death threats, a lot of public insults of these accreditations, a lot of attacks. 22 out of 30 members of El Faro had our phones infected with Pegasus for more than a year and a half. We're actually suing the Israeli company, NSO, in California Federal Tribunal as responsible, as co-responsible for targeting, for infecting our phones with their malware. Drones entering through our windows, legal cases against us, they are still there. We've been accused of money laundering, of tax evasion, et cetera, you name it.

The price to pay to do journalism has become much higher. That's what I'm trying to say. None of us who started doing this under democracy accepted to pay this price, because there was not this price to pay. There were other prices, much lower prices, to pay to do journalism. Now the price has become much higher. So how do we do journalism in these conditions? We thought about this. We had a very deep reflection, I guess, about the role of journalism under these new conditions. How do you do journalism after a dictatorship or an autocratic regime? Which is not an exception in the world. More and more countries are falling into this category every day. What is our role as journalists? We did a really deep reflection on this, and we came up with one word: Resistance. We declared El Faro in resistance. In resistance against what? Against censorship, against those people that refuse to be accountable, against those who are attacking the plurality of voices because they need, they not only want, they need that the only voice heard in that territory is their own voice. They want to suppress a plurality of voices. So we need to resist against this. That is what sustains this word, resistance. And we declared ourselves in resistance last year.

And we are changing all our editorial way of thinking right now just to have more clarity of mind. Because even if the price has become higher, there's something good in this. At least for us. I think we have more clarity about what's our mission these days, what are our challenges. We need to understand and to explain how the machine of power is working, how it is suppressing people's rights. We need to understand it, and we need to explain it. At least we have that clarity. And we need to expose the lies of the propaganda machine. That's at least partially one of our answers in this new process of reflection that we're having about our role in these times. So these are our new challenges. Of course, a lot of, not a lot, of course some people have left the newsroom, and I fully understand, and I tell them, every single one of them, I tell them very frequently, maybe the healthiest thing to do is just to leave this job. If we are under this condition, it's because we have decided we want to keep doing this. But it's a very individual decision, and maybe some of you are completely entitled to not be willing to pay the new price to do journalism. But if you decide to stay, you can't be silent. If you decide to stay, you need to do the work. You need to do the work. I mean, the good news, to end in a high point, is that this is a lesson of history. This shall pass, too. And maybe our biggest challenge is to still be here when this period of our history is over. And if we do that, it will be us who defined these guys. Thank you.

Ann Marie Lipinski Thank you all, really, for those very powerful, for that very powerful testimony to what it's like doing journalism in your countries. András, one of the things that I've really learned from you is the importance of your audience to your survival and just to the very existence of your publication. You've said, "Our only source of power is our audience." And I think in this country, we talk a lot about engagement, but not toward survival as a kind of political act, toward economic survival or content survival. And I'm wondering if you and each of you can actually share with us how do you capture the support of your audience? I imagine that is much more difficult in the circumstances you're working in because of the very dangers we just heard Carlos describe. And yet, it seems fundamental to what you do. So starting with you, András, but I'd really like to hear from each of you how you manage that piece of the work.

András Pethő Thank you, I mean, just adding to what Carlos said about the price that you have to pay, I mean even in Hungary, even though I think, especially after listening to what you all said, I think Hungary is still probably the best place to do journalism on these countries represented here. I mean we don't face physical threats, and journalists don't get jailed. But we still have a price to pay. You know, we still have a price pay. We had to start our own news organization on our own because we had to leave our previous job 10 years ago because that outlet came under pressure. We routinely get attacked by the government propaganda or government politicians. Just recently, Viktor Orbán called journalists, and judges, and activists stinkbugs that should be eliminated. So that's something, a new level.

But I think, I really believe, and that's what I always tell my colleagues that if we are attacked, actually it's not about us. Even if we like to feel like the victim, or the hero, or both. It's about the stories that we are telling. They are attacking us because they don't want the people, the public, to learn the stories that we're telling, and this is how we should respond to these attacks. So when there is a propaganda person or a government official attacking us, when we respond, it's not that we are entering into a fight with them. I think that's the wrong approach, even if it's tempting and even if it pays off on social media. But what we do is that we turn not to the attacker, but to the audience, to the public. And we are telling them, listen, we are being attacked because they don't want you to hear these stories. They don't want to hear the stories about how Orbán's family is getting rich through state funds. They don't want you to know how bad healthcare is in Hungary, how

bad the education is in Hungary, all these stories. I think this sounds like a small difference, but I think it's a big difference.

When I followed, under the first Trump administration, when I saw that some journalists in the US, the way they responded, like grandstanding and picking fights with government officials, I was like, when you watch a horror movie and you know what's going to happen, and you are like, don't do this, don't do this. Because I know how it's going to end. Basically, you will assume the role that those in power want you to assume. That you're the, you know, the opposition. So, I believe in a different approach. And yeah, the audience, at the end of the day, that's what matters. I mean, we learned, you now, I mean, you can't count on the billionaires. You can count on, I think now, you will learn this, but even lawyers or law firms. Maybe you can count on philanthropy for a while, but that can also change. They shift their priorities, or they just get scared and they leave. That's what happened in Hungary and in our region. So the only people that will help you is your audience. And actually I think that's a pretty lucky coincidence because you already are doing this job for them, so we just need to figure out a way, okay, what is it that they need from us, and how we can serve them the best. And then we can talk about monetization or whatever, because in the case of Direkt36, our most important revenue stream is a membership program, and that's how we survive in a hostile environment.

Gülsin Harman Very similar to András's example with the digital independent media that I've been working with in Turkey. You know, one thing that is very crucial, we can talk all day long about the reader revenue models, but also to make a case for yourself, again, to render your, to transform your news organization into an indispensable entity for your readers and your audience is crucial. In a sense that your audience must be convinced, and must be very much convinced, that I'm coming to, I'm checking, I'm reading this news organization not because I want to have news, but also supporting this news organization is what I stand for. So it has to be a very much aligned principles with your audiences and your readers. And one other thing that I would really like to say that yesterday one of the panelists, or I cannot remember her name, she said that as journalists, we are really good at telling stories, but we are always telling the stories of others. So, actually now, at this crossroads that's sadly around the world, we are seeing that as journalists, I know that by profession and by trade, we are, myself also, like I always shirk at the idea. Like, I'm a journalist, I just tell the story. Why should I tell my story? Which I just did. So I think that as journalists we should use all the narrative and storytelling skills that we have to convey to the public that what is the true mission that we have, what is the vision that we have for them, and how our very existence is crucial, not because of being journalists, being egocentric people, or seeking personal fame, or just out of vanity. No, we are part of your life, and we are essential for you to live under certain principles. I think that making this connection is very crucial and really contributes to the long-term financial survival also.

Arfa Khanum Thank you very much. I think it's a great question. I just talked about this comedian who was being hounded by the government and its supporters. And what I didn't tell you was that his video has been watched by millions of people, and there are about more than 80,000 comments I saw like 24 hours ago. And there are people who are donating hundreds and thousands of rupees and dollars, not just from India, but from all around the world. So when you stand up for democracy for free speech, people stand up for you. And there are some people who are saying, don't even take my name, I don't want to be seen here. So this is to encourage people.

So in the last five years, despite all kind of control, corporate control, over media, India saw two mass movements, which is very unique in its history. One movement was by

Muslim women who fought against an anti-Muslim citizenship law that the Modi government had brought. And second was brought by the farmers, who were protesting on the three borders of India, Delhi, for over a year. More than 700 farmers, they died, were killed, during that time. Two protests, despite total capture and control over media, which means information has its way. It's reaching people, and that's precisely the fact why the governments hate the free press, in whatever capacity, whatever small resource-crunched organizations that we are working with and working for.

So I'll give you the example of The Wire, where you can be a member if you pay just 89 rupees, which is exactly \$1 a month. And I know students, I know homemakers, women, I know farmers whose income would be, let's say, \$50 or \$60 a month, and they pay one dollar a month to The Wire to sustain us. There would be, you know, so I get messages on the YouTube comment section where a tribal woman who goes to a school, and she says there is a problem in my school, it has been three days, I pay you 50 rupees a month, which is of course less than a dollar, almost half a dollar. My news, I have not seen it yet on The Wire. So this is the kind of accountability, this is the kind of stakeholders that you have in today's free media space. So I feel like that perhaps could be a revenue model, like for organizations like me. We are a very small organization. We are about 40, 45 people. And we are not paid as per the market value we have. There are passionate individuals who are committed to the cause of free speech and journalism, who have decided to work for The Wire. There is a community of readers and viewers, and there is a community of contributors. So that is kind of a saying that if nobody publishes you in India, The Wire will.

So that kind of trust we still have in the people and especially also as we talk as journalists. You know, so the crisis is not just for the people, that the information is not reaching them, or it's the disinformation and misinformation that reaches them, but also in a country like India where there are hundreds and thousands of journalists, where do they go? If there is a total capture and control over the mainstream media and alternate media doesn't have the capacity to pay them or to hire them, what happens? So the majority of them have become freelancers. They have just become contributors. So somehow they are surviving. So I can't really say that there is a perfect revenue model, or we've kind of cracked the code, but it is that we are surviving, we are floating. And I think it's good for now, at least.

Carlos Dada We used to make a joke with one of my colleagues, and we say to each other, do you remember when we were invited to conferences to speak about investigative journalism? Because now it's only to tell our story. Yes, we need to tell our story, but I think that we are doing this because we are obliged to. I don't feel comfortable. And I do believe that this is a battle they are winning. We have spent so much time and so many resources on telling our story and defending ourselves instead of telling their story, using the resources to tell their story and to have them being accountable, that I think this is a battle they are winning, and we have to accept that. When I have to invest that much time to defend myself, that is a time I am not investing on investigating these people.

There is also a problem, for example, despite the humongous differences in proportions of any kind, if there's something similar between India and El Salvador is that the presidents of both countries rank among the most popular governors in the world. If those people, for example, I don't know, I think Mr. Modi has over 70% of popularity, and it's the same with Mr. Bukele. They dispute the most popular leader of the world. If this person says publicly over and over again that I am a liar, that I am the enemy of the people, then there's a huge percentage of people that believe that. Which implies some kind of identity crisis, right?

We were formed thinking we serve our communities, but what happens when our communities don't believe in us? This is some kind identity crisis. But we have to be clear about something. We are not in a popularity contest. That's the politician's thing. That's not our thing. I don't think we have ever been very popular. Never, and it's almost part of our nature. If a politician is usually elected, except in fraudulent cases, but with more than 50% of the vote, and the first thing we do as soon as they take office is start demanding accountability and investigating them, well, then we're not that popular. And that's okay, that's what we do. That's the nature of what we do. We have to be very clear on this. We are not in a popularity contest.

So that doesn't dispense me for looking for new ways to engage with audiences, to widen the universe of the people that I can reach with our information. Of course, that doesn't dispense, particularly because we are so arrogant as to think that what we say is important, so we want the biggest amount of people to get what we are saying, because what we're saying is important. And we are. We are actively looking for new ways. I have a wonderful team of new generation guys that do things that I was very reluctant to admit in a place like El Faro, like TikTok. And the only thing I told them when they started pushing to have presence in TikTok, I said, look, social networks, and all these platforms are full of noise. I think that the world is a more dangerous place, in part because of the contents that you can find in those platforms. If El Faro is going to be there, you have to come up with a project that guarantees me that we are not being contributing with more noise. That's all I'm asking. And I think they came with a product that is not contributing to more noise, but actually is contributing with information for people. But this is a constant reflection. Yeah.

Ann Marie Lipinski Thank you, I'm conscious of the time, so let me try to get another couple questions. There's a great question from someone in the audience. When we see the signs that those in power are trying to dismantle our democracy, what can we do about it, or is it inevitable? And I guess I'd ask each of you for, if there's sort of one thing that you would tell this person or any of us, and there are many of us concerned about that question. Yeah, what do we do when we see that those in power are trying to dismantle democracy? Or is it inevitable when those in power are trying to dismantle democracy?

András Pethő Yeah, a good question, but a really big one as well. So what I learned in Hungary during 15 years of Orbán is that democracy, I mean the beauty, but also the weakness of democracies is that it's a fantasy. It works only as long as the people who participate in it, especially in powerful positions, believe in those rules. Our constitution also has something like the First Amendment. It doesn't guarantee anything. And if the people in power here will, or in the judiciary who should uphold those ways, I mean, I can just echo what the others, my colleagues, said that things can disappear quite quickly. I think we also, but it's also a mistake to, you know, we are in a business, it's a service business, journalism, public service, good journalism. I think one of the worst things that you can do in a business is oversell and under deliver. So I don't think it's also a good business proposition that okay, we will save democracy for you. We are not going to save democracy for you, no journalist single-handedly can do that. It has to be a joint project. But I also believe that, you know, what we do is, journalism in itself is not going to save democracy, but there is no democracy without independent journalism. So that's the thing. So, and what we do best, what no influencer can do, or no TikTok algorithm can do, is we can find powerful original stories, and we can tell those stories. And so I really believe still in the power of reporting, and that's our added value in this new strange ecosystem. So I would focus every resource on that.

Ann Marie Lipinski Anything to add to that?

Gülsin Harman Very quickly, I think that, assuming that the question is coming from a colleague of ours, I would say that, again, in my experience in Turkey, don't expect that the dismantling of democracy would come in the form of big blows. It comes, as you said, as I wrote also, it comes in very tiny bit of attempts to eat away what is existing. So I would say for any journalist, call it as it is. Maybe striking, of course, like within journalistic integrity, we have to always strike an impartial and fair tone, but I think that it's crucial to fully present that what this move can represent in the long term, and always, I would say that in the coverage, one must link that any attempt on democracy would have what kind of long-term implications on the citizen's daily life. For example, very quickly, if a journalist got detained, I think that it must be always connected in the coverage, maybe in an explainer form, maybe in a short form video, like how a journalist being detained. For example if a reporter is detained from your own newsroom, I would say make a very short video or explainer, say these are the stories that this particular reporter did. Currently, him, them, her, sorry, currently, they are being detained, and they cannot report, and this is what you've been missing. If he was out, he would be doing such stories again. I think that it has to be a very simplistic and even basic linking at what would mean.

Arfa Khanum I think the idea is to continue to believe in yourself and continue to believe in what you do. When I do journalism, despite everything, and despite total control, I don't do it because I think I can change things. I do it because I feel the politics shouldn't change me, and shouldn't take away my voice. And when I say my voice, I feel I represent the people who never had a voice in India. People who were traditionally, socially, politically, economically marginalized. When I wake up every day, what I do, I do because I feel there is somebody out there who needs this information, who needs this, right? So as long as I have this trust and faith in my audience that through this information through this, you know, kind of this tool of information, if people believe in it, I think it's enough to survive.

Carlos Dada As we speak, El Salvador is reaching the third year of living under a regime of exceptions, where all civil guarantees has been gone, where you can be arrested by a policeman or an army officer without the need of a judicial order. And still people are cheering. Our first obligation is to understand why. Why are these people supporting this project that is going against their own interests, suppressing their own rights? And the answer is very obvious. Mr. Bukele took the gangs out of their streets. They had a gun pointing to their heads. I need to understand that, because I didn't live in those places. So I can't demand from them to be responsible for the political decisions they did under such a desperate situation. I am responsible, because I've been privileged. And I think that's one of our first obligations. We need to be conscious of our privileges. And we need to understand the people that are living desperate and that are supporting these projects because they have a good reason for that. Because the guys that came before, the guys that promised them that their lives were going to be solved, all their problems were going to be solved through democracy, well, that didn't happen. Well, that didn't happen. So these new populist autocrats are going to the top, mounted on the wave of something that, for a lack of a better word, I call the destructive temperament. Their big promise to their public is, I will destroy everything that came before me because these guys lied to you. They cheated. Your lives are not better because these guys stole the money that was for that. It's a destructive temperament.

I was telling someone yesterday, The most vulgar thing about Mr. Bukele's exercise of power is that there's no political utopia. There's no political utopia. It's just the accumulation of power per se. That is very vulgar, but that's what we have. And he

controls the narrative very well. He controls social networks. He controls the algorithm. This is a guy that in a very poor country without a political party concentrated more votes than all the political parties together, and he never did a public meeting. He did all his campaign on social networks in a poor country like mine, and he won. Because people were already, hartos. How do you say hartos in English? Fed up with the corruption of the past political parties. They gave a chance to the right, they gave a change to the left. And they all proved that corruption has no ideology. So just to finish, sorry Ann Marie, I just want to finish with what András said, we are not going to save democracy. That's not our role. And even if we want it, we can't. We can't! To save democracy, to begin with, goes through letting people know that democracy is useful for their lives. And in some countries like mine, that has not happened.

Arfa Khanum And just to add to this little, that how journalism and democracy can also give hope to people. In the last elections, we had zero hope. Mr. Modi was thinking he's gonna come back not just with 300, but 400 seats out of 500 something. And trust me, when the message reached the masses, which is the so-called lower caste groups, the farmers, the laborers, the formerly untouchables, the women. People did believe in this message that democracy and free speech was under danger, and people of India voted in the last election on the issue of constitutional democracy and saving journalism and journalists. So in a poor country like mine with 4.5, 4.45 billion people, out of that one billion people or more than that are really poor people, extremely poor people. If they can value journalism, if they value the constitution, if they value democracy, there is hope left in the world.

Ann Marie Lipinski I just wanted to say, if I might, that in closing how grateful I and so many of us are to Rosental and his colleagues for hosting this conversation, not just this year but for the last several years. I think if we've learned, if there's one thing that we should all take away from, is that solidarity on these questions. It's not just a matter of in your newsroom, or in your region, or in your country, but that this is an international issue, and that there are parts of the world where journalism is in fact an endangered species. And that the work of all of these journalists here today, and of those out in the audience, it's connected. And that journalism itself, as Carlos said, can actually be an act of resistance. And I'm so grateful for all of them for helping to give us guidance on these questions. We're going to hear from Julie Pace shortly, and I would ask each of us, what are we doing to support the AP at this moment? What does solidarity look like in this country when we're faced with these kinds of questions? In any event, please join me in thanking our colleagues.

Summer Harlow Yes, thank you Ann Marie and all of y'all. This was amazing and gives us hope, maybe lessons learned. We're going to have just quick 10 minutes for a coffee break, so please grab some sustenance and then meet us back here at 11:10 for our next panel, which is a follow up to this one.