

## **China: The Commercialization of Censorship**

As part of its ongoing experiment in authoritarian capitalism, the Chinese Communist Party has developed a 21st-century media model that is proving to be both resilient and repressive. It includes a form of “market-based censorship,” in which the authorities have reinvigorated control over old and new media alike by threatening outlets with economic repercussions—in addition to the traditional political and legal penalties—if they stray from the party line. Editors and reporters in China have long risked demotion, dismissal, or more serious punishment by the state when they push the limits of permissible coverage. However, now that the Chinese media industry has been commercialized, relying on advertisers for revenue rather than on government subsidies alone, publications must also consider the financial danger of displeasing powerful business interests with close official ties. Similarly, with the internet emerging as the main challenge to state media hegemony in China, the authorities have been quick to implement market-based strategies for suppressing news and information of political consequence online. The older tools of police action and prison sentences are regularly used to silence internet activists, and—as described in *Freedom on the Net*, Freedom House’s new index of internet freedom—the state’s technical capacity to censor and control online content is unmatched in the world. But China has also been at the forefront of a growing trend toward “outsourcing” censorship and monitoring to private companies. Internet portals, blog-hosting services, and other enterprises are required to maintain in-house staff to handle these tasks, and they risk losing their business licenses if they do not comply with government censorship directives. China’s development of this modern authoritarian media model has attracted the attention of other governments with ambitions to control news and information. Countries such as Cambodia and Vietnam are considering measures based on those being pioneered in China, and the Chinese authorities are already believed to share censorship technology and expertise with other governments in the region.