

World Press freedom in retreat?

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It's [World Press Freedom Day](#) and to celebrate [UNESCO](#) held a debate to decide if media freedoms are in retreat. To someone who has lived and worked through the end of Apartheid, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the growth of digital and internet media the answer is emphatically NO. Unfortunately, my rousing speech about the potential for a new type of journalism that embraces the citizen's part in the editorial process fell on deaf ears. As did [Ian Dale's](#) hymn to digital diversity. As did editorial policy guru [Steve Whittle's](#) careful exposition of how journalism is always under attack but has recently gained more ground than it has lost. The audience was mainly made up of free expression campaigners so not surprisingly they thought that press freedom really is in retreat. I know all about clampdowns in Uganda, assassinations and corruption in Russia, and commercialisation in the US, but I also know that I would rather be a

journalist now in most countries compared to even five years ago. Journalists (and the public) have never had such access to free information and debate. It's never been more efficient, effective and economic to be a journalist. Here at [POLIS](#) we're working hard for free expression because it can never be taken for granted. All people in power want to reduce media oversight. Our conferences looking at [War Reporting](#) and [Media and Africa](#) highlighted problems for the press. There are some places where freedoms are stalled or in retreat. But there is a danger of being too defensive about the media. Instead we should also be looking for new ways to justify journalism and keep the public in support of a healthy press. One way is to encourage diversity and that means accepting that the old ways we did journalism have to change.

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