

By Marius Dragomir

The Architecture of Media Capture

Typologies, Global Patterns, and the Tech Threat

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Abstract

Media capture, the systematic subordination of news media to the political and commercial interests of ruling elites, has become one of the defining governance crises of the 21st century. Where the 20th century's threats to press freedom were primarily those of outright censorship and state-controlled monopoly, the contemporary landscape presents a more insidious set of arrangements: governments, oligarchic families, intelligence services, and now technology billionaires deploying overlapping financial, regulatory, and ownership instruments to shape what citizens see, hear, and ultimately believe. This paper applies the four-component analytical framework that I developed in a 2019 study, referred to here as the Capture Typology Framework (CTF), to a comparative survey of media capture models across Europe, the Middle East, and the United States.^[1] Drawing on findings from the IPI/MJRC Media Capture Monitoring research program, the State Media Monitor project, and primary case research, at least six distinct typological models are identified: the "textbook" state-restructuring model pioneered in Hungary, the family-business model of Turkey, the intelligence-services model developed in Egypt, the proto-authoritarian prototype institutionalized in Russia, the billionaire-patron model illustrated by Israel's case, which bridges private and political capture in a democracy, and the tech-oligarchic model crystallizing in the United States. The paper traces how these models have been exported, imitated, and hybridized across different political contexts, and assesses the aggregate impact of capture on journalism, democratic accountability, and civil society. It concludes with reflections on what these convergent trends mean for the future of independent media and the prospects for regulatory and political remedies.

[1] Dragomir, M. (2019). Media capture in Europe. Media Development Investment Fund. <https://www.mdif.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/MDIF-Report-Media-Capture-in-Europe.pdf>

The Concept of Capture: Where Are We Now?

The word “capture,” in its technical sense, did not originate in media studies. It comes from regulatory economics, where it describes a process by which the agencies created to regulate industries in the public interest come instead to serve the interests of the industries they are expected to regulate. The concept’s migration into media analysis is recent but has been rapid and consequential. It marks a conceptual break: a move away from explaining press repression primarily through censorship laws and direct state ownership, and toward understanding subtler, more durable forms of subordination.

The intellectual genealogy of the concept in its media application runs through a relatively compact body of scholarship. Captured media systems are not overtly dictatorial. They maintain the formal appearance of pluralism, often sustaining dozens or even hundreds of outlets. What they eliminate is not media in the quantitative sense but the possibility of journalism that meaningfully challenges power.

Anya Schiffrin, in her foundational work on media capture[2], drew attention to a feature that distinguishes capture from older forms of press repression: the involvement of the private sector. A government can silence a newspaper by banning it; capture operates differently, through the corruption of ownership, through the creation of financial dependencies, and through the use of legal and regulatory instruments that technically remain within the domain of the law. The newspaper continues to publish, and the TV channel continues to broadcast, but the journalism they produce has been instrumentalized, bent toward the protection of the interests that control their survival.

Building on this foundation through years of empirical research at the Center for Media, Data and Society at Central European University (later at the Media and Journalism Research Center), I gave the concept an operational form. In the 2019 report “Media Capture in Europe,” published by the Media Development Investment Fund (MDIF),[3] I defined media capture as “a situation where most or all of the news media institutions are operating as part of a government-business cartel that controls and manipulates the flow of information with the aim of protecting their unrestricted and exclusive access to public resources.” This definition foregrounds the cartel-like quality of captured systems, the fusion of political and economic interests, the shared extraction of public goods, and the deliberate management of information as an instrument of that extraction.

[2] Schiffrin, A. (Ed.). (2017). In the service of power: Media capture and the threat to democracy (pp. 1-8). Washington, DC: Center for International Media Assistance.
https://www.cima.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/CIMA_MediaCaptureBook_FI.pdf. This volume gathers foundational empirical and normative work on the conditions under which public support for journalism can strengthen rather than undermine editorial independence.

[3] Dragomir (2019), cit.

By 2019, the concept had moved well beyond academic discussion. A decade of democratic backsliding across Central and Eastern Europe had provided an empirical laboratory that made capture visible in ways that earlier scholars had only theorized. Hungary, under Viktor Orbán's Fidesz government since 2010, had produced what scholars began calling a "textbook case," a comprehensive, systematic reorganization of the entire media system in the service of ruling party interests. Poland, under the Law and Justice (PiS) party from 2015 to 2023, had replicated significant elements of the Hungarian playbook. Slovakia, Czechia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Romania each displayed partial or accelerating features of the phenomenon. Beyond Europe, Turkey had constructed a distinct variant through the systematic leveraging of business dependencies rather than direct legal machinery. Egypt had taken the process further still, placing the intelligence services themselves in the role of media owners. Russia, the original template for so many subsequent innovations in authoritarian information control, had completed its transition from a chaotic post-Soviet media pluralism to near-total Kremlin dominance in the first decade of the century, providing a living model for aspiring autocrats elsewhere. And since 2025, the United States, long assumed to be inoculated against systemic media capture by the First Amendment, the strength of its commercial media, and the tradition of its fourth estate, has been exhibiting, through the concentrated acquisitions and platform domination of technology oligarchs, the early architecture of a form of capture that had no clear predecessor.

The Media Capture Monitoring Report, a joint initiative of the International Press Institute and the Media and Journalism Research Center, has since 2024 produced annual country-level assessments of media capture in EU member states, framed around the provisions of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA), which entered into force in May 2024 and became fully applicable in August 2025.[4] The 2025 Overview Report, covering Bulgaria, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain, found that public service media remain structurally vulnerable across most assessed countries despite formal legal safeguards; that effective independence of media regulators is largely absent in all cases except Finland; that state advertising remains a key instrument of capture nowhere adequately regulated; and that media ownership transparency and pluralism safeguards are incomplete across the entire sample.[5] These findings document capture not as an exceptional phenomenon in the weakest democracies at the European periphery, but as a pervasive, structurally embedded feature of media systems across the continent, including those within the European Union's regulatory framework.

This paper takes these findings as a starting point for a comparative typological analysis. Its aim is not simply to catalog cases of capture but to understand the distinct mechanisms, logics, and political economies of different capture models, and to ask what the convergence of these models, and the emergence of new ones, tells us about the future of journalism, democracy, and the information commons.

[4] European Media Freedom Act, Regulation (EU) 2024/1083. (2024, April 11). Entered into force May 7, 2024; most provisions applicable from August 8, 2025. Official Journal of the European Union. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:L_202401083

[5] Dragomir, M., Detrekoi, Z., Money-Kyrle, O., & Wiseman, J. (2025). Media capture monitoring report: 2025 overview. Media and Journalism Research Center; International Press Institute. <https://journalismresearch.org/media-capture-monitoring-report-overview-2025/>

The Four Components of Media Capture: The Capture Typology Framework

My four-component model, introduced in 2019 and referred to here as the Capture Typology Framework (CTF), emerged from sustained empirical research across more than 30 countries. The CTF identifies the four primary mechanisms through which political and economic interests displace editorial independence and instrumentalize media systems.[6] Each component can operate independently, but their combination produces the most severe and durable forms of capture. Crucially, the components tend to accumulate sequentially, with earlier interventions making later ones more feasible, creating a capture playbook: a step-by-step progression from isolated regulatory interventions to comprehensive system control.[7]

The first component is regulatory capture. Media regulators, the bodies charged with licensing broadcasters, enforcing content rules, managing spectrum allocation, and overseeing the overall framework of media law, are designed to be independent arbiters of the public interest. They derive their legitimacy from precisely this independence: their ability to apply consistent, politically neutral standards to all actors in the media system. Regulatory capture occurs when the appointment processes, legal mandates, budget controls, or informal political relationships of these bodies are reorganized so that their decisions serve the interests of governing parties rather than the public. The captured regulator becomes an instrument for rewarding politically aligned outlets through favorable licensing decisions, the allocation of lucrative broadcast frequencies, or the selective enforcement of content rules against critical media, while penalizing independent or opposition-aligned outlets. In the most advanced cases of capture, a new “super-regulator” is created, consolidating powers previously distributed across multiple independent bodies and concentrating them under governing-party control.

The second component is control of public service media. Public service broadcasters represent a critical institutional heritage of post-war European democracy. Their founding logic, media organizations funded by the public and serving the public interest, providing universal access to accurate information free from the influence of either government or commercial pressure, gives them both cultural centrality and structural vulnerability. Where audiences trust public service media as authoritative, their editorial orientation has outsized political significance.

[6] Dragomir (2019), cit.

[7] Green, S. (2021, June 28). First steps in media capture: Capturing the regulator and public service broadcaster. Media Development Investment Fund. <https://www.mdif.org/news/media-capture-i-the-first-steps-capturing-the-regulator-and-public-service-broadcaster/>

Capture of public service media therefore offers governing parties a platform for propaganda with the credibility of public institutions. The mechanism typically involves changes to the governance structures and appointment procedures of public broadcasters, replacing independent supervisory boards with politically loyal ones, and thereby ensuring that editorial decisions align with ruling party interests. Funding mechanisms may also be manipulated, starving independent governance structures of resources while channeling funds to captured ones.

The third component is the use of state financing as a control tool. Governments dispose of substantial flows of money that reach media outlets through channels that are difficult to regulate: state advertising from government agencies, state-owned enterprises, and public utilities; subsidies and license fees; printing contracts; and infrastructure support. Where these funds are allocated transparently and on the basis of objective criteria, they can represent legitimate support for a pluralistic media ecosystem. Where they are allocated selectively, rewarding politically aligned media and withdrawing from critical ones, they become a powerful instrument of discipline. The mechanism does not require explicit threats: editors learn, through the experience of their peers, that critical coverage loses state advertising while supportive coverage retains it. The result is an implicit system of incentives that shapes editorial decisions without any direct editorial intervention. In the most developed versions of this mechanism, state enterprises with large advertising budgets, including utilities, banks, and telecommunications companies under government influence, function as shadow instruments of state media funding policy.

The fourth component is ownership takeover. The most direct form of capture involves the acquisition of media companies by owners, individual oligarchs, business conglomerates, or front companies, whose editorial decisions are determined by political rather than commercial considerations. Where traditional media ownership involved owners whose primary relationship to their investment was commercial, capture-oriented ownership involves owners whose primary goal is political: the ability to control narrative, suppress criticism, and advance the interests of a political patron. The financial losses that such ownership structures may entail are acceptable because the political dividends, be they regulatory favors, state contracts, or legal protection, more than compensate. Ownership capture typically involves the exit of foreign or independent owners and their replacement by domestically embedded business elites whose survival depends on maintaining good relations with the ruling political apparatus.

These four components constitute the analytical architecture of the CTF. They can be operationalized as measurable indicators, as the IPI/MJRC Media Capture Monitoring project does, following the structure of the European Media Freedom Act's regulatory framework, and applied comparatively across different national contexts.[8] They can also be used to identify the sequence and intensity of capture in individual cases, tracking how capture begins at the regulatory level and progresses through public media governance, state financing manipulation, and ultimately ownership restructuring.

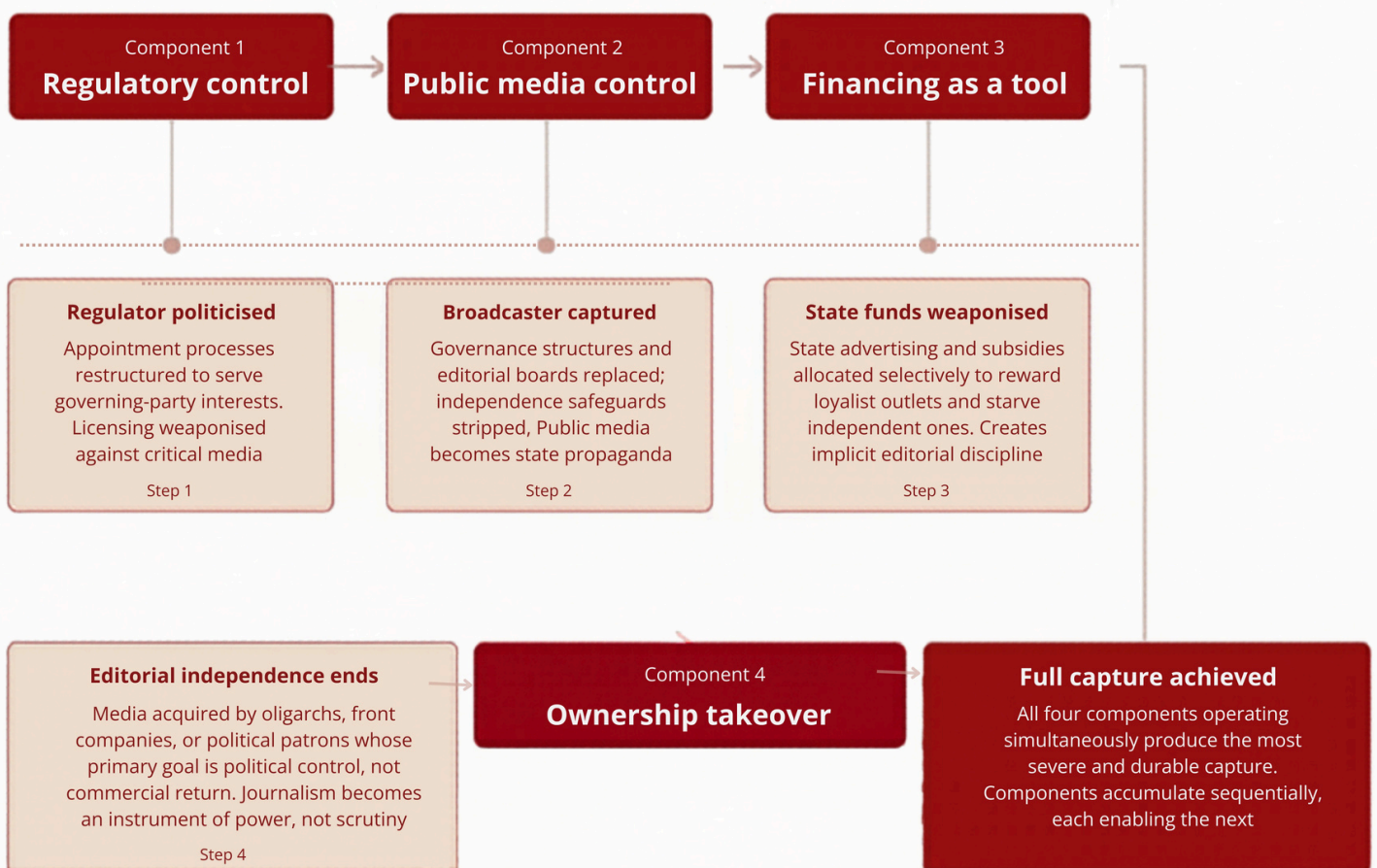
[8] Dragomir, M. (2024). The capture effect: How media capture affects journalists, markets and audiences. *Central European Journal of Communication*, 17(36), 162-184.

What the model does not claim is that capture always follows the same path or produces the same result. The political economies, historical legacies, and institutional structures that shape media systems vary enormously across contexts. The same regulatory instrument might produce capture in one context and be successfully resisted in another. The same ownership change might represent capture in one political environment and merely a commercial transaction in another. The CTF is best understood not as a deterministic mechanism but as an analytical map: a set of categories that allow researchers and practitioners to identify where capture is occurring, what stage it has reached, and which components are most acutely at risk. With this map in hand, we can turn to the distinct national and regional models that have emerged from the application, and, often, the export, of capture strategies across the contemporary world.

The Capture Typology Framework

Four-component capture progression • CTF • Dragomir, 2019

Each step raises the next more feasible



Media and Journalism Research Center (MIRC) – Capture Typology Framework (CTF) • Dragomir, M. (2015). Media Capture in Europe. MDIF

The Main Typologies with Examples

The Prototype: Russia

Before examining the European and other capture variants, we must understand the model from which most of them derive, directly or indirectly, their logic and their playbook: Putin's Russia.

When Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000, Russia possessed a chaotic and contested but genuinely pluralistic media system. The privatizations of the Yeltsin years had produced a landscape of oligarchic media barons ranging from Vladimir Gusinsky at Media-Most to Boris Berezovsky at ORT, who used their outlets aggressively as instruments of political war, but whose mutual competition meant that no single political narrative dominated. Within two years of Putin's ascension, that landscape had been systematically dismantled. NTV, Gusinsky's flagship independent television network, was seized by Gazprom in 2001 following tax investigations and the forced exile of its owner.[9] ORT was brought under Kremlin control.[10] The major national television channels became what researchers would later describe as "invaluable political resources," tools for shaping public opinion through a managed combination of entertainment, selective news, and systematic exclusion of political voices unfavorable to the Kremlin.[11]

The Russian model operates through what scholars Sergei Guriev and Daniel Treisman have called a "spin dictatorship," a regime that relies on manipulation and propaganda rather than mass repression, using control of the information environment to manufacture the appearance of popular legitimacy while destroying the conditions under which genuine political accountability could operate.[12] The media system's daily management is handled not through visible censorship orders but through the weekly kreml'yovka, informal meetings between presidential administration officials and senior editors at which the themes and framings of the coming week's coverage are effectively established. The result, as Russian journalism scholar Ilya Yablokov describes it, is a form of self-censorship that becomes second nature: editors and journalists internalize what is permissible, what is "adequate" (adekvatny), and adjust their coverage accordingly without waiting for explicit instruction.[13]

[9] Traynor, I. (2001, April 4). Kremlin silences its main media critic. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/apr/04/russia.iantraynor>.

[10] Gentleman, A. (2000, July 18). Tycoon resigns from duma as relations with Kremlin cool. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2000/jul/18/russia.ameliagentleman>.

[11] Baker, P., & Glasser, S. (2005). *Kremlin rising: Vladimir Putin's Russia and the end of revolution* (pp. 138-153). Simon and Schuster.

[12] Guriev, S., & Treisman, D. (2022). *Spin dictators: The changing face of tyranny in the 21st century* (pp. 3-24). Princeton University Press.

[13] Yablokov, I. (2024, June). How the Kremlin's propaganda machine works. *Russiapost.info*.

https://russiapost.info/politics/propaganda_machine; Lipman, M. (2009, February 3). Media manipulation and political control in Russia. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

<https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2009/02/media-manipulation-and-political-control-in-russia>.

What makes the Russian model foundational is its comprehensiveness and its early completion. By the mid-2000s, Russia had implemented all four CTF components at maximal intensity: the broadcasting regulator was under Kremlin control; national public broadcasting had been converted into state propaganda; state advertising and the advertising budgets of state-controlled enterprises had been systematically deployed to discipline the remaining private media; and ownership of major outlets had been transferred to loyalists, front companies, and state-adjacent entities. The remaining independent voices, *Novaya Gazeta*, *Echo of Moscow*, and a handful of specialist publications, were tolerated on the margins as evidence of nominal pluralism but had no audience capable of threatening the dominant narrative. The invasion of Ukraine in 2022 removed even this residual tolerance, prompting a final wave of closures, designation of foreign agent status for remaining independent journalists, and the flight into exile of Russia's last functioning independent editorial teams.[14]

Russia's international significance for media capture is twofold. First, the Russian model was observed and studied by aspiring autocrats across the post-communist world, who identified its instruments and adapted them to their own institutional environments. Second, Russia actively exported media capture as an instrument of foreign policy, funding and amplifying pro-Kremlin media in the Balkans and across Eastern Europe, establishing local-language editions of RT and Sputnik, exploiting the financial vulnerability of local media markets through advertising and content partnerships, and using social media to flood information environments with disinformation.[15] The Center for the Study of Democracy documented this pattern of "cognitive capture" across Southeast Europe, finding that Russian-owned outlets produce on average four times more articles per month on topics important to the Kremlin than locally owned outlets.[16] Russia's information apparatus thus operates simultaneously as a model of domestic capture and as an instrument of transnational capture, subordinating media in other countries to Kremlin narrative objectives.

[14] CPJ Europe and Central Asia Program. (2026, February 17). Russia's repression record. CPJ. <https://cpj.org/2026/02/russias-repression-record/>.

[15] Reporters Without Borders. (2025, September). The propaganda monitor: The geopolitics of Kremlin propaganda. RSF. <https://rsf.org/en/propaganda-monitor-rsf-releases-new-report-geopolitics-kremlin-propaganda>

[16] Filipova, R., Gerganov, A., & Vladimirov, M. (2021). Tackling Kremlin's media capture in Southeast Europe (pp. 11-15). Center for the Study of Democracy. https://csd.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/publications_library/files/2021_03/KP5_ENG_WEB.pdf

The Textbook Model: Hungary and Its European Progeny

If Russia provided the inspiration and the proof of concept, Hungary under Viktor Orbán from 2010 onward provided the textbook. Hungary is described in the academic literature, including my own work, as a “textbook case” of media capture precisely because it executed all four CTF components with a methodical efficiency that has been widely studied, documented, and imitated.

Orbán’s Fidesz party won a two-thirds parliamentary majority in 2010, giving it the constitutional power to reshape Hungary’s institutional architecture without negotiation or compromise. Within months, new media legislation created a super-regulator, the National Media and Infocommunications Authority (NMHH), whose president was a political appointee who had significant powers, for nine years, over licensing, staffing, financing, and content regulation.^[17] The NMHH’s Media Council, nominally an independent governance body, was structured so that all its members could be nominated by governing-party votes, eliminating any meaningful independence. In a single legislative act, the regulatory component of capture was substantially complete.^[18]

The public service broadcaster, MTVA, was reorganized along lines that gave governing-party loyalists control over governance and editorial policy. Appointment procedures for senior editors were redesigned to remove independence safeguards. News coverage of the Hungarian government’s activities became indistinguishable, in tone and framing, from official government communications. Meanwhile, state advertising, including that of state-owned enterprises and of commercial companies dependent on government contracts, was systematically redirected toward pro-government media and withdrawn from critical or independent outlets. The IPI/MJRC Media Capture Monitoring project’s Hungary 2025 report confirms that this remains the most extreme case in its sample, with public media functioning as de facto state media, regulatory independence absent, and state advertising allocation thoroughly opaque and discriminatory.^[19]

The ownership dimension of Hungarian capture was completed through the creation of the Central European Press and Media Foundation (KESMA) in 2018, a conglomerate that united nearly 500 previously independent or semi-independent media outlets under a single politically aligned umbrella, established through a mechanism that bypassed Hungary’s competition law. KESMA represents the most ambitious single act of ownership consolidation in the history of democratic media capture, concentrating a previously diverse media market into a monolithic instrument of governing-party communication. The IPI/MJRC’s assessment is that ruling party cooperation with business interests has captured all four CTF categories simultaneously in Hungary, creating a media system without meaningful pluralism.^[20]

[17] BBC. (2010, December 21). Hungary to create new media watchdog. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-12051665>.

[18] Act CLXXV of 2010 on Media Services and Mass Communication (Hungary). For analysis, see Dragomir (2019), cit., pp. 14–16.

[19] Dragomir, M., Detrekoi, Z., Money-Kyrle, O., & Wiseman, J. (2025), cit.

[20] IPI, Article 19, CPJ, ECPMF, EFJ, Free Press Unlimited, & RSF. (2019, December). New report: Hungary dismantles media freedom and pluralism [Joint mission report]. International Press Institute. <https://ipi.media/new-report-hungary-dismantles-media-freedom-and-pluralism>

The Hungarian playbook has been explicitly studied and partially replicated across Central and Eastern Europe. Poland under the Law and Justice party from 2015 to 2023 represents the most complete attempt at imitation. PiS created a new media regulator that replicated Hungary's strategy of gaining control of public broadcaster governance without explicitly violating existing constitutional safeguards. Polish public television (TVP) was converted during the PiS years into a partisan propaganda instrument of remarkable crudity, producing content that compared opposition politicians to Nazi collaborators and systematically omitted or distorted coverage of government scandals. The 2023 elections that returned a coalition government to power triggered a crisis of deinstitutionalization: the new government's attempts to restore editorial independence at TVP produced months of legal confrontation as PiS-appointed governance structures refused to yield, illustrating how deeply capture can entrench itself even within democratic systems that have not been formally restructured.[21]

Slovakia, under Prime Minister Robert Fico's return to power in 2023, represents a more recent and still-evolving version of the Hungarian model. Most dramatically, the dissolution of the public broadcaster RTVS and its replacement by a new entity, STVR, gave the Fico government the opportunity to replace the management directly, a step that the IPI/MJRC 2025 report identifies as in direct conflict with EMFA requirements. Slovakia's trajectory illustrates the learning effect: Fico, a close observer of both the Hungarian and Polish experiences, has moved quickly to implement regulatory and public media capture while the European regulatory framework is still being established and while the courts have not yet developed robust counter-mechanisms. [22]

Bulgaria occupies a distinct position in the European typology, a country with deep, systemic capture driven not by a single governing party's methodical program but by what the IPI/MJRC Bulgaria 2025 report describes as entrenched corruption and significant levels of media concentration embedded in a context of prolonged political instability. Bulgaria's media capture has been driven by oligarchic networks linked to successive governments of varying political orientations, deployed through state advertising manipulation and the funding of pro-government outlets, rather than through the comprehensive institutional restructuring that characterizes the Hungarian case. Multiple ownership structures serve as conduits for state and EU funds to pro-government media, while independent journalism operates under constant financial threat. Bulgaria's case illustrates that capture does not require a dominant political force with a coherent program: a sufficiently corrupted environment of competitive patronage networks can produce functional capture without ideological unity.[23]

[21] Glowacki, M. (2025, December). Media capture monitoring report: Poland 2025. Media and Journalism Research Center; International Press Institute. <https://journalismresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/POLAND-Media-Capture-Monitoring-Report-2025.pdf>.

[22] Hanak, P. (2025, December). Media capture monitoring report: Slovakia 2025. Media and Journalism Research Center; International Press Institute. <https://journalismresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Slovakia-2025-V2.pdf>

[23] Dzhambazova, B. (2025, December). Media capture monitoring report: Bulgaria 2025. Media and Journalism Research Center; International Press Institute. <https://journalismresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Bulgaria-2025.pdf>

Romania similarly illustrates a hybrid form in which capture mechanisms are deployed by competing political interests rather than a single dominant force. The IPI/MJRC Romania 2025 report documents ongoing problems with regulatory independence, state advertising manipulation, and ownership concentration among politically connected business elites, set against a background of recurring government instability that prevents the kind of comprehensive capture achieved in Hungary but sustains a persistent condition of partial capture across the media system.[24]

Greece presents yet another variant. The IPI/MJRC Greece 2025 report describes a private media landscape heavily concentrated among wealthy families and shipowners, often with political ties to the New Democracy party. This form of capture through elite family ownership, where media holdings are embedded in broader business conglomerates that depend on government relationships for contracts, licenses, and regulatory treatment, is closer to the Turkish model examined below than to the Hungarian state-restructuring model, though elements of regulatory and public media capture are also present.[25]

[24] Ganea, L., & Martin, R. (2025, November). Media capture monitoring report: Romania 2025. Media and Journalism Research Center; International Press Institute. <https://journalismresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/ROMANIA-Media-Capture-Monitoring-Report-Overview-5.pdf>

[25] Maragoudaki, D. (2025, November). Media capture monitoring report: Greece 2025. Media and Journalism Research Center; International Press Institute. <https://journalismresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Greece-2025.pdf>

The Family-Business Model: Turkey

Turkey under President Erdoğan offers the most developed example of a capture model that operates primarily through the business dependency of media ownership rather than through legislative restructuring of the regulatory framework. Where Hungary reorganized institutions and changed laws, Turkey used the leverage that flows from the concentration of state economic power in a patronage economy to produce equivalent results without requiring new legal instruments.

The mechanism is elegantly simple in its design: media owners in Turkey are, without exception, conglomerates with major business interests in construction, energy, infrastructure, and telecommunications, sectors in which government contracts are the primary source of revenue and profit. Reporters Without Borders documented the structure with striking precision: of the ten most important owners in Turkish television, seven were politically affiliated with the ruling AKP. “It is very difficult,” as the RSF report put it, “to find any family of a Turkish media tycoon in which President Erdoğan has not attended a wedding or served as a marriage witness.”[26] The personalized, familial character of these business relationships, reinforced by actual family connections, including Erdoğan’s son-in-law as a major media figure, gives the model its character.

The instrument of transition was the Savings Deposit Insurance Fund (TMSF), a body originally created to manage bankrupt bank assets during Turkey’s 2001 financial crisis.[27] Beginning in the AKP era, the TMSF was repurposed as a mechanism for transferring media ownership from independent or opposition-aligned owners to pro-government ones: outlets were seized on grounds of alleged unpaid debts or tax violations, placed under TMSF administration, and then sold to politically aligned buyers at favorable prices.[28] The 2018 acquisition of the Doğan Group, which had included Hürriyet, once Turkey’s equivalent of the New York Times, by the Demiroren Group, widely regarded as close to Erdoğan, was described by Turkish journalists as the end of media pluralism. It was the culmination of a decade-long process in which financially vulnerable media groups had been progressively transferred to owners whose dependence on government contracts precluded editorial independence.[29]

[26] Reporters Without Borders. (2016, October 27). Media ownership monitor: Government control over Turkish media almost complete. RSF. <https://rsf.org/en/media-ownership-monitor-government-control-over-turkish-media-almost-complete>

[27] Yanatma, S. (2021). Advertising and media capture in Turkey: How does the state emerge as the largest advertiser with the rise of competitive authoritarianism? *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 26(4), 797–821. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612211018610>

[28] SCF. (2025, September 30). Company takeovers turn TMSF into one of Turkey’s largest conglomerates. Stockholm Center for Freedom. <https://stockholmcf.org/company-takeovers-turn-tmsf-into-one-of-turkeys-largest-conglomerates/>.

[29] Hansen, S. (2019, June 21). What Remains of the Turkish Press. *Columbia Journalism Review*. https://www.cjr.org/special_report/turkish-press.php

The Turkish model is a family-business model because it operates through the interlocking of family networks, business dependencies, and political loyalties rather than through bureaucratic restructuring. It produces capture that is, in some ways, harder to challenge through legal and regulatory means than the Hungarian model, because it leaves fewer formal fingerprints: no new media law is passed, no new regulator is created, no explicit appointment procedure is violated. The discipline is economic and social rather than legal, and it operates through the same channels, advertising, contracts, licensing, and regulatory treatment, that normally regulate commercial media systems. The result is a media landscape that is numerically diverse but editorially homogeneous, where self-censorship operates as efficiently as any external control.

State advertising in Turkey is similarly opaque and politically managed. Research has documented how advertising from state-owned enterprises is systematically distributed to reward pro-government newspapers and withdrawn from critical ones, with the distribution data itself classified as a commercial secret. When outlets change hands from independent to pro-government ownership, their state advertising receipts increase sharply, demonstrating the financial logic that makes the model self-reinforcing.[30]

[30] Yanatma (2021), cit.

The Intelligence–Services Model: Egypt

Egypt under President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi represents a capture model that is qualitatively distinct from the European and Turkish variants: a model in which the intelligence services themselves have become direct media owners, operating a media empire through front companies that systematically acquired the remaining independent private media in the years following the 2013 military coup. The General Intelligence Service (GIS), Egypt's primary intelligence agency, built its media presence through the Egyptian Media Group (EMG) and its holding vehicle, Eagle Capital for Financial Investments, managed by a former Investment Minister.[31] Beginning around 2016, EMG conducted a vast campaign to acquire shares in each media sector, concluding over a dozen deals that brought major satellite television channels, digital news portals, newspapers, production companies, and advertising agencies under GIS control. The Military Intelligence Service operated its own parallel media acquisition program through the Falcon Group security company, according to data from the RSF. [32]

By the time the RSF's Egypt investigation was published, the intelligence services were linked to 12 of the surveyed media entities. Combined with the state media under the National Media Authority and the National Press Authority, more than half of Egypt's surveyed media landscape was concentrated in either state or intelligence hands.[33] The GIS also directed the editorial line of nominally independent outlets through instructions conveyed by its appointed personnel, including, according to the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, explicit lists of red lines for election coverage distributed to channels it controls through United Media Services.[34]

What distinguishes the Egyptian model is the complete absence of the mediating layer of politically dependent businesspeople that characterizes the Turkish approach. In Turkey, the intelligence services influence media through the business interests of allied conglomerates. In Egypt, the intelligence services are themselves the beneficial owner.

[31] Mada Masr. (2017, December 21). Looking into the latest acquisition of Egyptian media companies by General Intelligence. <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2017/12/21/feature/politics/looking-into-the-latest-acquisition-of-egyptian-media-companies-by-general-intelligence/>; Middle East Eye. (2017). Egyptian intelligence services front acquires leading media houses: Reports <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/egyptian-intelligence-services-front-acquires-leading-media-houses-reports>.

[32] Reporters Without Borders & Global Media Registry. (2019). Media ownership monitor: Egypt. RSF. <https://egypt.mom-rsf.org>.

[33] Reporters Without Borders. (2019, January 25). Sisification of the Media: A Hostile Takeover. RSF. <https://rsf.org/en/sisification-media-hostile-takeover>.

[34] Al-Asar, M. (2024, March 28). Via Samsung: Journalists trapped in Egypt's security machine. Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy. <https://timep.org/2024/03/28/via-samsung-journalists-trapped-in-egypts-security-machine/>.

The use of front companies and nominees, businessmen like Ahmed Abu Hashima, who served as the public face of GIS-controlled entities before the intelligence service's ownership became public, maintained a formal fiction of private ownership, but investigations by Mada Masr revealed that these nominees held minimal equity while the GIS controlled governing stakes. The opacity of the arrangement was reinforced by Egypt's practical inaccessibility of corporate records, with the company registry effectively blocking access to ownership information through illegally imposed fees.

El-Sisi's 2018 media laws completed the legal architecture of capture by concentrating the appointment power over the new Supreme Council for Media Regulation and the National Media Authority directly in the presidency, formally encoding the subordination of regulatory oversight to executive power.[35] The Egyptian model thus represents capture at its most complete: all four CTF components are fully deployed, with intelligence services serving simultaneously as owner, funder, and informal regulator. The model has attracted attention as a potential template for other authoritarian states seeking to weaponize intelligence assets for media control without the complications of ideologically distinctive political parties.

[35] Law 180/2018 on the Organization of Press, Media and the Supreme Council for Media Regulation (Egypt); Law 178/2018 on the National Media Authority (Egypt). See Reporters Without Borders. (2019, January 25), cit.

The Billionaire-Patron Model: Israel

Israel occupies a distinctive position in any comparative typology of media capture: a functioning democracy with genuine judicial independence, competitive elections, and a tradition of combative journalism, in which one form of private capture has nevertheless substantially restructured the information environment. The Israeli case is significant because it demonstrates how a single politically motivated billionaire, operating outside any formal capture playbook, can produce outcomes, in terms of media concentration, editorial homogenization, and political influence, comparable to those achieved through more systematic governmental programs.

Sheldon Adelson, the American casino magnate and major Republican Party donor, launched Israel Hayom (Israel Today) in 2007 as a free daily newspaper with a single-minded purpose: to advance the political career of Benjamin Netanyahu and the electoral interests of the Likud party.[36] Over the following decade, absorbing losses estimated at well over \$200 million, Israel Hayom became the most widely read newspaper in Israel, a feat achieved through a business model with no commercial logic, sustained entirely by Adelson's political commitment. The paper's distribution for free systematically undermined the advertising revenue of competing publications, driving competitors toward insolvency and forcing them to cut staff and reduce coverage quality. By the time Freedom House downgraded Israel's press freedom status from "Free" to "Partly Free" in 2016, it cited Israel Hayom's owner-subsidized business model as the primary factor, a designation that persists under the Adelson family's continued ownership after Adelson's death in 2021.[37]

Academic research has confirmed what Israeli media observers long suspected: Israel Hayom exerted significant electoral influence, measurably increasing support for Netanyahu and Likud in the constituencies where its readership was highest.[38] The newspaper's editor, Amos Regev, was documented as directly connected to the prime minister's office, with one of Israel's major television investigations reporting that a columnist was simultaneously on Netanyahu's payroll. The description of the paper as the "Bibiton," a combination of Netanyahu's nickname "Bibi" and "iton" (newspaper), became standard in Israeli political discourse.[39]

[36] Grossman, G., Margalit, Y., & Mitts, T. (2020). Media Ownership as Political Investment: The Case of Israel Hayom.

[37] Freedom House. (2016). Freedom of the press 2016: Israel country report. Freedom House. <https://www.refworld.org/reference/annualreport/freehou/2016/en/109971>; Blau, U. (2017, January 9). Adelson's pro-Netanyahu free daily newspaper lost \$190 million in seven years. Haaretz. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2017-01-09/ty-article/adelsons-pro-netanyahu-daily-lost-millions/0000017f-ef49-d0f7-a9ff-efcd81580000>.

[38] Grossman, G., Margalit, Y., & Mitts, T. (2022). How the ultrarich use media ownership as a political investment. *The Journal of Politics*, 84(4), 1913-1931. <https://doi.org/10.1086/719415>.

[39] PBS NewsHour. (2013, February 4). Sheldon Adelson winning Israel's newspaper war. PBS. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/when-fair-and-balanced-came-to-israel>. On the documented connection between editor Amos Regev and the prime minister's office: phone logs released under a Supreme Court order showed Netanyahu held 223 calls with Regev between 2012 and 2015, often correlated with Israel Hayom front pages the next morning; see Wootliff, R. (2017, September 3). Before elections, Netanyahu held up to five daily calls with Israel Hayom editor. *The Times of Israel*. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/before-elections-netanyahu-held-up-to-five-daily-calls-with-israel-hayom-editor/>. On the columnist payroll: Ravid, B. (2012, February 8). Senior Israel Hayom columnist on Netanyahu's office payroll. Haaretz. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/senior-israel-hayom-columnist-on-netanyahu-s-office-payroll-1.411798>.

The Israeli case reveals an important international dimension of media capture. Adelson was an American citizen whose political investments spanned both the Republican Party in the United States and Netanyahu's Likud in Israel. His ownership of Israel Hayom was the prototype for a pattern that would become more visible in subsequent years: transnational billionaires using media ownership in democracies outside their primary national context as instruments of aligned political projects, operating without the democratic accountability constraints that apply to domestic political actors. After Adelson's death, the Netanyahu government subsequently sanctioned the independent newspaper Haaretz, directing all government-funded institutions to cease communications with it, bringing state mechanisms to bear in direct coordination with private capture dynamics. The Israeli model thus illustrates how private and governmental capture can operate in complementary rather than alternative modes.[40]

Netanyahu's own corruption trial, in which one of the charges involves his alleged agreement to arrange regulatory favors for the news site Walla in exchange for favorable coverage, further illustrates the transactional character of media-political relationships in Israel, demonstrating that even in a context where capture has not been institutionally systematized in the Hungarian manner, the underlying logic of trading political power for editorial control operates through interpersonal transactions that parallel the formal mechanisms of other capture models.[41]

[40] Lis, J. (2024, November 24). Israeli government imposes sanctions on Haaretz, cuts all ties and pulls advertising. Haaretz. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2024-11-24/ty-article/.premium/israeli-govt-to-cut-ties-with-haaretz-over-publishers-remarks-on-freedom-fighters/00000193-5e5c-d68e-a1db-fe5c54cf0000>.

[41] Wootliff, R. (2020, January 28). Netanyahu indicted for corruption in three cases, in first for a sitting PM. The Times of Israel. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-indicted-for-corruption-in-three-cases-in-first-for-a-sitting-pm/>. The Walla/Elovitch matter is Case 4000, in which Netanyahu is charged with bribery, fraud, and breach of trust for allegedly advancing regulatory decisions benefiting Elovitch's Bezeq telecom business in exchange for favorable coverage on the Elovitch-owned Walla news site. Case 2000, a separate charge, involves an alleged quid pro quo with Yedioth Ahronoth publisher Arnon Mozes.

The Tech-Oligarchic Model: The United States

The United States represents the newest and, in some respects, the most consequential variant of media capture, a model still in formation, whose characteristics are visible in the data, but whose ultimate shape remains contested. It shares elements with earlier typologies, particularly the ownership and financial dependency components of the CTF, but deploys them through mechanisms that have no clear precedent in media history.[42]

The foundational difference from European capture models is that the actors driving American media capture are not politicians seeking to instrumentalize existing media systems, but technology billionaires whose primary business interests lie in data infrastructure, artificial intelligence, surveillance, and cloud computing, and who are now extending those interests into media ownership, media financing, and media distribution simultaneously. Larry Ellison financed the Paramount-Skydance transaction with \$6 billion of his own money[43]; his son David Ellison, as CEO of the merged company, subsequently appointed Bari Weiss as editor-in-chief of CBS News[44] and committed to the FCC to reshape the network's coverage. Larry Ellison also backed a \$108 billion hostile bid for Warner Bros. Discovery that would add CNN and HBO to the Ellison portfolio, while Oracle holds a 15 percent stake in the TikTok USDS Joint Venture LLC, serving as designated security and data partner with board representation in a structure that gives the joint venture authority over algorithm governance for 170 million American users.[45] Jeff Bezos's ownership of the Washington Post, accompanied by the suppression of a presidential endorsement of Kamala Harris, the hiring of conservative columnists, and the subsequent layoff of over 300 journalists, roughly 30 percent of the newsroom, represents a parallel trajectory. [46]

[42] A parallel investigation by MediaJustice, published simultaneously, documents the same dynamics from a racial justice and community organizing perspective, focusing on the disproportionate impact on communities of color. See Renderos, S. (2026). Media capture: Who controls the story controls the future. MediaJustice.

<https://mediajustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/MediaJustice-Media-Capture-Report.pdf>.

[43] Stelter, B. (2025, July 24). FCC approves Skydance merger with Paramount, ending a yearlong saga of uncertainty. CNN. <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/07/24/media/fcc-skydance-paramount-merger-approved>

[44] Paramount. (2025, October 6). Bari Weiss named editor-in-chief of CBS News as Paramount acquires The Free Press [Press release]. CBS News. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/bari-weiss-editor-in-chief-cbs-news-paramount-the-free-press/>; Folkenflik, D. (2025, October 6). Bari Weiss joins CBS News as Skydance buys The Free Press. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2025/10/06/nx-s1-5561116/bari-weiss-cbs-skydance-free-press>.

[45] Folkenflik, D. (2026, January 22). TikTok finalizes deal to form new American entity. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2026/01/22/nx-s1-5685456/tiktok-finalizes-deal-to-form-new-american-entity>; Liedtke, M., & Megerian, C. (2025, December 18). TikTok signs deal to sell US unit to American investors, including Oracle and Silver Lake. Associated Press via PBS NewsHour. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/economy/tiktok-signs-deal-to-sell-u-s-unit-to-american-investors-including-oracle-and-silver-lake>. Oracle holds a 15% equity stake and serves as the designated security and data partner; the joint venture, not Oracle alone, holds authority over algorithm governance.

[46] PBS NewsHour. (2026, February 5). Sweeping layoffs at The Washington Post will do "enormous damage," former editor says. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/sweeping-layoffs-at-the-washington-post-will-do-enormous-damage-former-editor-says>.

Elon Musk's \$44 billion acquisition of Twitter/X in 2022 extended the pattern into platform ownership itself: within months, Musk had suspended journalists critical of him, labelled NPR and the BBC as "state-affiliated media," and dismantled the platform's content moderation infrastructure, demonstrating how tech-billionaire platform ownership translates directly into editorial control over the information environment at a scale no traditional media proprietor could match, a dynamic examined further in the platform dimension below.[47]

What makes the American tech-oligarchic model analytically significant is that it combines all four CTF components in a single integrated system, though the mechanisms differ markedly from those seen in Europe, particularly in the regulatory dimension.

In Europe, regulatory capture is achieved through legislation that explicitly restructures media regulators and their appointment processes. In the United States, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the principal broadcast regulator, has undergone a more rapid and overt form of politicization. President Donald Trump appointed Brendan Carr, who authored the FCC chapter of the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025 document, as FCC chairman on his first day back in office.[48] In December 2025, Carr testified before a Senate committee that the FCC is not formally an independent agency, a remarkable public assertion that directly contradicted the agency's own previous self-description, which had prominently featured the word "independent" on its website until that very day.[49] Under Carr, the FCC has opened investigations into NBC, ABC, CBS, PBS, and NPR, targeting broadcasters that have covered the Trump administration unfavorably while conspicuously exempting Fox News from scrutiny. Carr revived a previously dismissed complaint against CBS over its 2024 "60 Minutes" interview with Kamala Harris, an investigation that proved decisive leverage in the \$16 million settlement Trump extracted from Paramount as a condition of FCC approval for the Skydance merger.[50] The FCC subsequently approved the Paramount-Skydance deal only after the incoming Skydance CEO met personally with Carr and assured him of a "commitment to unbiased journalism." The sequence, investigation, settlement, editorial appointment, regulatory approval, traces a line of dependency between political authority and media ownership that closely mirrors the CTF's first and fourth components in more advanced capture environments.[51]

[47] Alba, D., & Abdelmohammed, O. (2024, January 9). X's fresh temporary ban of several prominent journalists raises alarm. NBC News. <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/social-media/x-temporary-ban-journalist-accounts-raises-alarm-rcna133084>; The Drum. (2024, January 9). X is (once again) suspending accounts of journalists who have been critical of Musk. <https://www.thedrum.com/news/2024/01/09/x-once-again-suspending-accounts-journalists-who-have-been-critical-musk>.

[48] Lebowitz, M. (2024, November 18). Trump picks Brendan Carr to lead the Federal Communications Commission. NBC News. <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/trump-brendan-carr-federal-communications-commission-rcna180567>; Venable LLP. (2025, January 23). Expectations for a Chairman Carr led Federal Communications Commission. <https://www.venable.com/insights/publications/2025/01/expectations-for-a-chairman-carr-led-federal>.

[49] Mak, T. (2025, December 17). In Senate testimony, FCC chairman says his agency isn't independent. NBC News. <https://www.nbcnews.com/business/media/senate-testimony-fcc-chairman-says-agency-isnt-independent-rcna249724>.

[50] U.S. Press Freedom Tracker. (2025). Brendan Carr targets news outlets as chair of the FCC [Continuously updated]. <https://pressfreedomtracker.us/all-incidents/brendan-carr-targets-news-outlets-as-chair-of-the-fcc/>; Folkenflik, D. (2025, August 25). Trump again suggests the FCC revoke the broadcast licenses of ABC and NBC. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2025/08/25/nx-sl-5515480/fcc-abc-nbc-reviews>.

[51] NPR. (2025, August 25), cit.

Beyond the regulatory dimension, American tech capture advances through financial dependency that functions as the CTF's third component by other means. The dynamic is structurally analogous to the pharmaceutical advertising dependency documented in American journalism in the 1990s and 2000s, when newsrooms whose revenues depended heavily on drug-company advertising were shown to systematically underreport adverse effects and avoid investigative coverage of the industry financing their operations.[52] The dynamic created by tech funding of newsrooms operates on the same structural principle.

Google funds over 450 newsrooms worldwide through its News Equity Fund; Meta distributed a confirmed \$30 million to 559 newsrooms between 2018 and 2022. When California tried to replace this voluntary funding with a mandatory tax on tech companies to support local journalism, Google responded by blocking California news sites from its search engine and threatening to withdraw its direct grants, forcing the bill's withdrawal.[53] The outcome illustrated the asymmetry of power: tech platforms could present themselves as patrons of journalism while simultaneously blocking the regulatory mechanism that would have made that patronage mandatory and accountable.[54]

The AI dimension of American media capture has no clear parallel in earlier models. Nearly every significant American news publisher has now entered into content licensing arrangements with AI companies, receiving fees in exchange for journalism used to train models that then divert audience traffic away from their own sites. The same publishers that had initiated copyright litigation against AI companies subsequently signed licensing agreements with them: the Times sued OpenAI and then licensed its archive to Amazon[55], News Corp sued Perplexity and then signed a \$250 million deal with OpenAI.[56] These deals tie newsroom revenue directly to the growth of the AI industry, the same industry these outlets are expected to scrutinize, creating a structural conflict of interest. Meanwhile, Google's AI-generated overviews reduced referral traffic to publisher websites by an estimated 38 percent since 2025, forcing those same publishers to sign further deals with the tech companies responsible for their revenue losses.[57]

[52] Angell, M., & Reading, K. (2005). *The truth about the drug companies: How they deceive us and what to do about it* (p. 9). New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks.

[53] Allyn, B. (2024, April 12). Google blocks California news in response to bill that would force tech giant to pay. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2024/04/12/1244416887/google-blocks-california-news-payments-bill>; Yu, Y. S. (2026, January 15). Newsom plans no new journalism funding despite \$175 million funding deal with Google. CalMatters. <https://calmatters.org/politics/2026/01/gavin-newsom-google-journalism-funding-deal/>.

[54] Renderos (2026), cit., pp. 13-14; Miller, G. (2023, February 27). Where did Facebook's funding for journalism really go? Columbia Journalism Review. https://www.cjr.org/tow_center/how-meta-funded-journalism.php

[55] Mastrangelo, D. (2025, July 30). Amazon to pay New York Times \$20 million to feed company's AI. The Hill. <https://thehill.com/homenews/media/5427612-amazon-new-york-times-ai-feed>.

[56] OpenAI. (2024, May 22). A landmark multi-year global partnership with News Corp [Press release]. <https://openai.com/index/news-corp-and-openai-sign-landmark-multi-year-global-partnership/>.

[57] Scire, S. (2026, January 12). Publishers prepare to be "squeezed" by AI and creators in 2026. Nieman Journalism Lab. <https://www.niemanlab.org/2026/01/publishers-prepare-to-be-squeezed-by-ai-and-creators-in-2026/>; Pew Research Center. (2025, July 22). Google users are less likely to click on links when an AI summary appears in the results. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/07/22/google-users-are-less-likely-to-click-on-links-when-an-ai-summary-appears-in-the-results/>.

The platform dimension extends the capture to distribution itself. Facebook's monthly user base dwarfs the combined readership of every major news website by an order of magnitude[58], and digital platforms have become the dominant infrastructure through which Americans access news.[59]

The editorial decisions made by the owners of these platforms, Mark Zuckerberg's decision to end fact-checking on Meta's platforms[60] or Elon Musk's restructuring of X's content moderation and amplification architecture[61], represent forms of editorial control over the information environment that dwarf anything achievable through traditional media ownership. These decisions are made by individuals, without democratic accountability, in a regulatory environment that has increasingly been shaped by the very interests it is supposed to govern.

The American tech-oligarchic model diverges from its European counterparts in one further critical dimension: its ideological framing. The European models operate in contexts where the capture of media is explicitly contrary to constitutional values, even if those values are being systematically violated. The American model is being constructed in a context where its key actors profess commitment to free expression, indeed, where the elimination of fact-checking is presented as a restoration of free speech, and where regulatory pressure on critical broadcasters is framed as combating bias. This ideological inversion makes the American model more difficult to contest within existing normative frameworks, even as its structural effects on editorial independence, narrative homogeneity, and the financial viability of critical journalism are comparably severe.

[58] Renderos (2026), cit., p. 21.

[59] Pew Research Center. (2025, September 25). News platform fact sheet. <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/fact-sheet/news-platform-fact-sheet/>. In 2025, 86% of American adults access news from digital devices at least sometimes, with social media accounting for 21% of regular news consumption.

[60] Zahn, M. (2025, January 7). Here's why Meta ended fact-checking, according to experts. ABC News. <https://abcnews.go.com/US/why-did-meta-remove-fact-checkers-experts-explain/story?id=117417445>

[61] The Drum. (2024, January 9), cit.

Key Trends: What All This Tells Us About the Impact of Capture

Capture Is Increasingly Systemic and Exportable

The most significant trend visible across the case studies presented here is that media capture has become systemic, not merely an incident of particular political contexts but a replicable strategic program that travels between contexts, adapted by aspiring autocrats and oligarchs who observe its success elsewhere. The Hungarian model was explicitly studied by Poland's PiS party and Slovakia's Fico. The Turkish model has influenced tactics in Southeast European and post-Soviet states.[62] The Russian model serves as both template and active instrument for countries within its sphere of influence. And the American tech-oligarchic model is emerging at a moment when its key actors have extensive relationships with authoritarian-leaning governments worldwide, raising the prospect of further cross-contamination between domestic and transnational capture strategies.

The IPI/MJRC Media Capture Monitoring project's 2025 Overview Report documents the degree to which even EU member states, subject to EMFA's explicit regulatory requirements, have failed to establish fully compliant frameworks. If EMFA cannot reliably constrain capture in democracies that have committed to its implementation, the prospects for international regulatory solutions to capture beyond the European context are considerably more challenging.[63]

The Financial Vulnerability of Journalism Is Capture's Enabling Condition

Across every case study, a single underlying condition has made capture possible at the scales documented here: the financial vulnerability of journalism as an industry. Traditional media business models, based on print advertising, mass broadcast audiences, and subscription revenues, have been systematically undermined by digital disruption, with revenue migrating to the platform layer. This financial pressure has made editorial operations dependent on alternative revenue sources: state advertising, political ownership, tech grants, and AI licensing deals. Each of these alternatives creates the dependencies that capture exploits.

[62] Freedom House. (2024). Freedom in the World 2024: The mounting damage of flawed elections and armed conflict. Freedom House. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2024/mounting-damage-flawed-elections-and-armed-conflict>; Reporters Without Borders. (2024). Georgia. RSF Press Freedom Index. <https://rsf.org/en/country/georgia>.

[63] Dragomir, M., Detrekoi, Z., Money-Kyrle, O., & Wiseman, J. (2025), cit.

The CTF's third component, the use of state financing as a control tool, is enabled by the disappearance of independent commercial revenue that could give editorial operations financial autonomy. Where media companies can sustain themselves on advertising revenues from competitive markets, their vulnerability to state capture is limited. Where advertising has migrated to platforms, media companies become simultaneously more economically fragile and more politically accessible. Research on state media funding in Europe has shown that the problem is not the volume of public support available but the opacity and political management of its allocation, the same mechanism that transforms legitimate financial assistance into a vector of capture.[64] The irony of the American case is that the platforms that have captured global advertising revenues are now also the entities making grants to the newsrooms whose revenues they have destroyed, and using those grants to build the dependencies that constitute the capture.

Capture Operates Along a Spectrum from Visible to Invisible

One of the most analytically important distinctions between capture models is the degree of their visibility. The Russian and Egyptian models operate through mechanisms that are relatively visible, at least to informed observers, and produce forms of editorial homogenization that are recognizable as propaganda by international audiences, even if they are effective with domestic ones. The Hungarian model operates through legal and institutional mechanisms that are formally documented in legislation, regulatory decisions, and ownership records, making it tractable to monitoring frameworks like EMFA and the IPI/MJRC project, even if its correction remains politically contested.

The Turkish and American models operate through more diffuse mechanisms, business dependencies, informal relationships, financial incentives, that are harder to identify and map, and that the actors involved consistently characterize as market transactions rather than political interventions. The Washington Post's rightward editorial shift is presented as editorial judgment; Bezos's attendance at Trump's inauguration events is characterized as personal choice; the Google News Initiative is presented as philanthropic commitment to journalism. The Israeli case similarly presents itself through the language of editorial independence and market competition, with Israel Hayom characterized as providing "balance" against a supposedly left-wing press.

This spectrum of visibility matters for what kinds of remedies might be effective. Visible capture can, in principle, be addressed through enforcement of existing legal frameworks, public accountability, and democratic change, as the partial reversal of TVP's capture in Poland following the 2023 elections illustrates. Invisible capture, embedded in financial dependencies, algorithmic control, and the quiet exercise of ownership power, is harder to identify, harder to contest in courts and regulatory proceedings, and harder to reverse even through democratic change.

[64] Dragomir, M. (2018). Control the money, control the media: How government uses funding to keep media in line. *Journalism*, 19(8), 1131-1148. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884917724621>

Communities of Color, Local Journalism, and Marginalized Voices Bear Disproportionate Costs

A critical dimension of the impact analysis is the distributional character of capture's consequences. In every model examined here, the news coverage and editorial attention most likely to be eliminated or distorted under capture is precisely the coverage most needed by communities most exposed to political and economic marginalization: reporting on policing, immigration, racial discrimination, environmental justice, labor conditions, and local governance.[65]

In Hungary, KESMA's consolidation eliminated the regional and local press that had been the primary vehicle for accountability journalism in communities outside Budapest.[66] In Turkey, the transfer of major outlets to AKP-aligned ownership resulted in the systematic disappearance of critical coverage of Kurdish communities, labor rights, and environmental destruction.[67] In Egypt, the intelligence services' media empire produces content that consistently suppresses human rights concerns and vilifies civil society.[68] In the United States, the Washington Post's elimination of its Middle East correspondents during an active military conflict, the gutting of its local coverage section, and the broader collapse of local newsrooms, losing an estimated \$1.87 billion annually to platform-driven traffic losses, fall disproportionately on communities of color, which had relied on local journalism as one of the few accountability mechanisms available.[69]

This distributional dimension is not incidental to media capture but structural. Capture works by reorganizing media systems around the interests of those who are most powerful; it therefore necessarily de-organizes the media's relationship to those who are least powerful. The communities with the least voice in the captured information ecosystem are those whose interests most sharply conflict with the interests of the capturing actors. The central argument of the media justice movement, as articulated by MediaJustice and allied organizations, is that media consolidation is at its core a racial justice issue, and this argument applies with equal force to capture in all its forms: what is being captured is not just editorial space but the possibility of political representation and accountability for those who most need it.

[65] MediaJustice's parallel investigation of American tech-oligarchic capture, published in early 2026, documents this structural pattern in granular empirical detail, showing how the same mechanisms of ownership consolidation, platform dependency, and algorithmic control fall disproportionately on Black, Latine, and Indigenous communities whose local news infrastructure has been most severely eroded. See Renderos (2026), cit.

[66] IPI et al. (2019), cit.; Reporters Without Borders. (2024). Hungary. RSF Press Freedom Index. <https://rsf.org/en/country/hungary>.

[67] Committee to Protect Journalists. (2024). Turkey. CPJ. <https://cpj.org/europe/turkey/>; Freedom House. (2024). Freedom in the world 2024: Turkey. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/turkey/freedom-world/2024>.

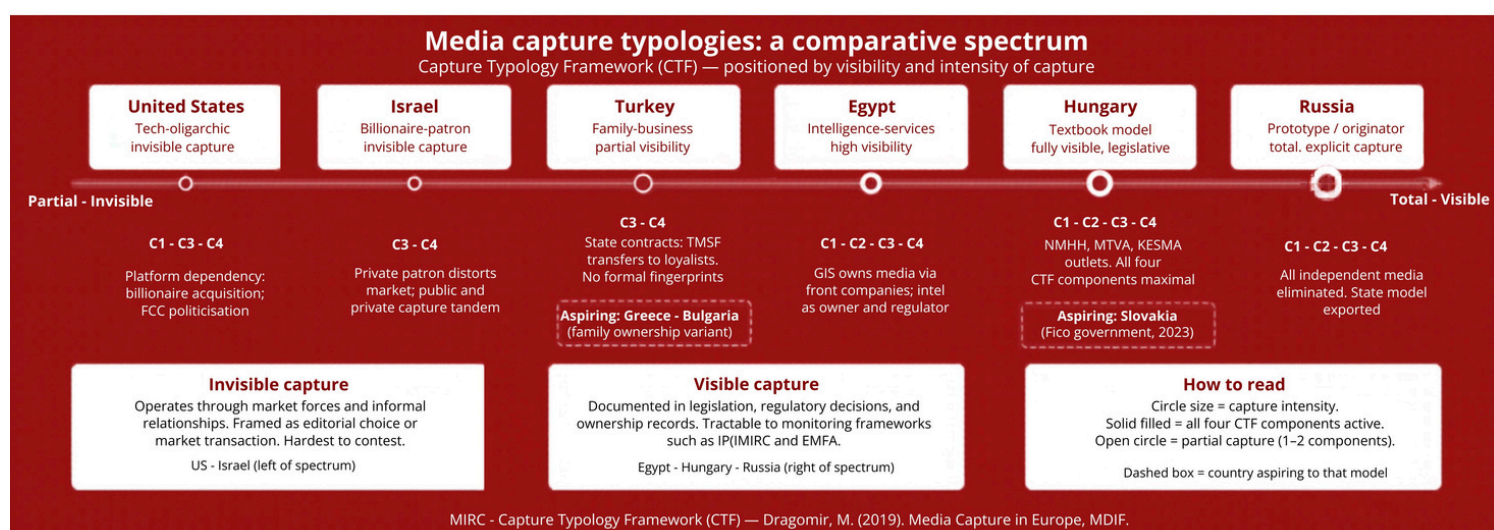
[68] Human Rights Watch. (2023, December 18). Egypt: Violations, repression upstage presidential vote. Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/12/18/egypt-violations-repression-upstage-presidential-vote>; Al-Asar (2024), cit.

[69] Ducey, R. (2021, May 11). BIA study: Local broadcasters lose \$1.9 billion annually to Google and Facebook. BIA Advisory Services. <https://www.bia.com/blog/tag/google/>; TV Technology. (2021, May 10). Broadcasters not getting fair compensation from Google, Facebook, study finds. <https://www.tvtechnology.com/news/broadcasters-not-getting-fair-compensation-from-google-facebook-study-finds>; Renderos (2026), cit., p. 22.

Democratic Backsliding and Media Capture Reinforce Each Other

The relationship between media capture and democratic decline is not merely correlational but mutually reinforcing in ways that make reversal increasingly difficult as the process advances. Captured media systems shape the information environments in which elections are conducted, making it harder for opposition parties to communicate with voters, for investigative journalism to surface government misconduct, and for civil society to organize effectively. At the same time, the democratic deficits produced by captured media make it harder to elect governments willing to reverse the capture, creating a recursive trap from which democratic systems find it increasingly difficult to escape.

Poland's 2023 elections represent one of the most significant recent examples of capture reversal, or attempted reversal, and the difficulties they have been encountering. The coalition government that replaced PiS attempted to restore editorial independence at TVP, but the PiS-appointed governance structures initially refused to comply, leading to months of legal confrontation in which the captured institution itself became an instrument of resistance to democratic change. The experience illustrates both that capture can be reversed through democratic means and that the reversal is extremely difficult, precisely because capture has been used to strengthen the position of the capturing party within the institutions that would normally be the agents of accountability.[70]



[70] Glowacki (2025), cit.

Conclusions: What Media Capture Means for the Future of Journalism, Democracy and the Information Commons

Capture as the New Censorship

The contemporary landscape of media capture represents something new in the history of the relationship between power and information: a form of control that achieves the effects of censorship without the vulnerability of censorship. Traditional censorship, the direct prohibition of publication, is visible, contestable, and often counterproductive. Capture is different: it changes not what is explicitly prohibited but what it is in the interests of editors to produce, what journalists find it safe to pursue, what owners find it rewarding to fund. The result is a journalism that is, in the most insidious sense, free, at least from external prohibition, but systematically oriented toward the suppression of inconvenient truths.

Peter Pomerantsev, writing about the Russian model, identified the strategic logic of this approach: the goal is not to make people believe the government's narrative but to prevent them from believing that any coherent alternative narrative is possible.^[71] A journalism that is captured does not need to lie systematically; it simply needs to deprioritize, to omit, to frame, to assign different levels of urgency and credibility to different stories. The cumulative effect of thousands of these micro-decisions, each one plausibly explicable as editorial judgment or commercial necessity, is a public discourse in which power is never seriously challenged, accountability journalism never gains traction, and the information environment within which democratic politics occurs is systematically tilted toward those who control it.

[71] Pomerantsev, P. (2019). *This is not propaganda: Adventures in the war against reality* (pp. 3-19). New York: PublicAffairs.

The Tech-Oligarchic Model and the Future of Independent Media

The emergence of the tech-oligarchic model in the United States raises the prospect of a form of media capture with genuinely global reach, the subordination of the world's most influential media system to the financial and political interests of a handful of technology billionaires who simultaneously control the physical infrastructure of the internet (data centers, cloud services), the platforms through which most people receive information (social media, search, AI chatbots), the financing structures on which newsrooms depend (grants, AI deals, advertising), and now the editorial direction of major news organizations. This goes beyond the capture of a national media system; it is the construction of a global information architecture that reflects the interests of its architects.

The implications for journalism as a profession are severe. Journalists who rely on tech platforms for distribution, on tech grants for revenue, and on tech tools for their daily workflow have a structural conflict of interest in covering tech companies, a conflict that no amount of individual ethical commitment can fully neutralize. The AI licensing deals that tie newsroom revenue to the growth of the AI industry create financial incentives structurally identical to the pharmaceutical advertising dependencies that shaped health journalism in the 1990s, a dynamic in which economic survival and editorial scrutiny of the same industry are placed in direct tension.^[72] And the consolidation of distribution onto platforms controlled by politically aligned actors means that even journalism that is editorially independent may never reach the audiences for which it is intended.

The EMFA Experiment and Its Limits

The European Media Freedom Act represents the most ambitious regulatory attempt yet to address media capture through supranational law. Its four-pillar structure, independence of public service media, independence of media regulators, fair allocation of state funds, and media ownership transparency, maps closely onto the CTF's four-component analytical framework, and its implementation monitoring through the IPI/MJRC Media Capture Monitoring project provides systematic evidence base for assessing progress.

The 2025 findings are sobering. No assessed country fully complies with EMFA provisions across all four dimensions. Hungary, the case that most directly inspired EMFA's design, remains the most egregious example of comprehensive capture, and the political mechanisms of the EU have proven inadequate to force compliance with the fundamental values the EMFA is designed to protect. The prospects for EMFA to meaningfully constrain capture in countries like Slovakia and Bulgaria, where the trajectory is worsening rather than improving, depend on enforcement mechanisms that have not yet demonstrated their effectiveness.^[73]

[72] On structural conflicts of interest between media revenue sources and editorial independence, see also Soley, L. (2002). *Censorship, Inc.: The corporate threat to free speech in the United States*. Monthly Review Press.

[73] Dragomir, M., Detrekoi, Z., Money-Kyrle, O., & Wiseman, J. (2025), cit., pp. 3-6; European Commission. (2024). 2024 rule of law report: Country chapter on the rule of law situation in Hungary.

EMFA also, by design, addresses only EU member states. The tech-oligarchic model emerging in the United States, the Turkish family-business model, the Egyptian intelligence-services model, and the Russian prototype all fall entirely outside its scope. And the transnational character of the tech-oligarchic model, in which American companies simultaneously fund newsrooms, control platforms, and increasingly own outlets across multiple democratic systems, creates regulatory challenges that no single national or regional framework can adequately address.

Political Economy and the Path Forward

The fight against media capture requires interventions across multiple levels simultaneously: legal frameworks that make capture visible and costly, regulatory institutions with the real independence to enforce them, ownership transparency requirements that allow citizens and researchers to identify who controls their information environment, financial mechanisms that reduce newsroom dependence on political or tech-oligarchic funders, and public investment in journalism education and professional standards that build the capacity for resistance.

The structural solution that capture's analysis implies is not the elimination of public support for journalism, but its radical democratization: the replacement of capture-prone, discretionary, politically managed flows of funds with transparent, rule-based, politically independent mechanisms for sustaining the institutional infrastructure of journalism. This is not a novel prescription; the scholarly literature on media capture has consistently identified the conditions under which public support can be organized to strengthen rather than undermine editorial independence.[74]

But frameworks and regulations are insufficient without the political will to enforce them, and political will is precisely what capture is designed to undermine. The recursive trap of capture, where captured media makes it harder to elect governments willing to reverse it, means that the institutions most needed to fight capture are systematically weakened by the process they are needed to resist. Experience across the cases documented here suggests three conditions under which meaningful resistance has succeeded: pre-capture investment in institutional independence; coordinated pressure across courts, journalism associations, international bodies, and civil society when reversal is attempted; and the cultivation by independent media of direct reader relationships and diversified revenue that reduce dependence on any single political or commercial patron.

The communities most affected by capture are also those best positioned to understand its stakes, because they have the most to lose from a media system that does not serve them, and because they have historically found ways to build alternative information infrastructures when the dominant system has failed them.

[74] Schiffrin, A. (2017), cit.

The Battle for the Information Commons

The concept of media capture forces a recognition that what is at stake in the control of media systems is not merely the commercial viability of news organizations or the professional satisfaction of journalists, but something more fundamental: the conditions of possibility for democratic political life. Democracy requires citizens who can form considered judgments about matters of public concern, and those judgments can only be formed on the basis of information that is, to some meaningful degree, reliable, diverse, and not systematically oriented toward the interests of those who control its production and distribution.

The capture models documented in this paper, from Russia's managed media ecosystem to Hungary's KESMA conglomerate, from Egypt's intelligence-owned channels to the tech-oligarchic system taking shape in the United States, represent, in their different ways, the systematic reconstruction of that exclusion at the scale of entire societies.

The fight against capture is therefore not only a fight for press freedom in the conventional sense. It is a fight for the preconditions of democratic self-governance: for the possibility that citizens, all citizens, including those whose interests most sharply conflict with those of the powerful, can have access to the information they need to exercise their political rights. That fight is inseparable from the broader struggles over economic justice, racial equality, and democratic accountability that define the political moment in which we find ourselves. The architecture of capture is the architecture of the future, and controlling information means controlling possibility, which is why the question of who tells the story of media capture itself is one that researchers, journalists, activists, and communities must answer together.

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