Despite the rapid rise of the Internet and social media, governments in places as diverse as China, Russia, Azerbaijan, Vietnam, Zimbabwe, Iran, and countries throughout the Middle East and North Africa are finding stubbornly effective ways to use state-run media to help themselves stay in power. They are achieving this feat through a combination of selective censorship of political expression and by using state media control to influence crucial audiences. Authoritarian rulers know that they need state-controlled media to survive; therefore real liberalization of such media is unlikely. The state’s grip on the media, once tightened, cannot readily be loosened without opening the floodgates and risking the regime itself. Mikhail Gorbachev, the last top official of the USSR, discovered this with his policy of glasnost (openness). Today, authoritarian governments are willfully depriving hundreds of millions of people of authentically plural and independent information and analysis with profound implications for these countries’ ability to reform and prosper. The event, which features experts on China, Russia, and Iran, is organized around the ideas in the January 2014 Journal of Democracy article, “Breaking the News: The Role of State-Run Media,” authored by Walker and Orttung.

The Journal of Democracy article can be found at http://go.gwu.edu/jod and the Washington Post op-ed at http://go.gwu.edu/orttungwalkerwp.