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1997	Dr. Virginia Epstein		



Dr. Meghan Sobel Cohen
recipient of the
2024 Faculty Lecturer Award

Media and Democracy:
What role do journalists
play in authoritarian contexts?

REGIS UNIVERSITY
NOVEMBER 8, 2024





Faculty Lecture
Dr. Meghan Sobel Cohen

Media and Democracy:
What role do journalists play
in authoritarian contexts?

In the United States, journalism has long been thought of as the Fourth Estate in American democracy – a mechanism that informs and educates the public while serving as a watchdog to hold power to account. The rise of social media, politicians vilifying the press, 24/7 cable news, a polarized electorate and declining public trust in the media have all forced the journalism industry to change its ways, for both the good and the bad. The relationships that journalists have with the government and the public are complex and evolving, but what do those relationships look like in countries that don't have a legal guarantee of free speech? In Rwanda, for example, despite a constitutional promise of free expression, rigid government censorship exists. But in 1994 news media played a role in perpetuating the genocide against the Tutsi, so is the censorship justified to prevent another genocide? Dr. Cohen explores the role that journalists play in non-democratic nations and emerging democracies in East Africa.

Meghan Sobel Cohen is an Associate Professor in the Department of Communication at Regis. Her research focuses on global journalism and the role of news media in combating human rights abuses and humanitarian crises around the world, particularly in East Africa. Dr. Cohen has published dozens of academic journal articles and chapters and has given a TEDx talk that has been viewed more than 1.5 million times. She regularly contributes to popular press outlets such as *The Conversation* and *Columbia Journalism Review*, and her work has been utilized by organizations such as the U.S. Department of State. Dr. Cohen has published two books, including her most recent, *Press Freedom and the (Crooked) Path Toward Democracy: Lessons from journalists in East Africa*, which was published in 2023 with Oxford University Press. She has a Ph.D. in journalism and mass communication from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, an M.A. in international communication from the University of Denver and a B.A. in journalism from the University of Colorado at Boulder.



Welcome
to the fifty-sixth annual
Faculty Lecture of the Year

Introduction

DR. ERIN WINTERROWD
ACADEMIC DEAN
REGIS COLLEGE

Lecture

DR. MEGHAN SOBEL COHEN
MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY:
WHAT ROLE DO JOURNALISTS PLAY
IN AUTHORITARIAN CONTEXTS?

Following the Lecture

**PLEASE JOIN US FOR A RECEPTION
OUTSIDE THE AMPHITHEATER**