

Faculty Mentor: Kathy Kiely, Journalism

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How American companies benefit from countries that suppress journalism and free speech

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In October 2018, U.S.-based journalist Jamal Khashoggi was murdered under the orders of Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, a CIA report concluded. In the Philippines, President Rodrigo Duterte's administration has repeatedly arrested journalist Maria Ressa on charges of cyber libel, threatening her with as much as 100 years in prison.

Meanwhile, lobbyists in the U.S. continue to represent Saudi Arabia and the Philippines, collecting millions of dollars in payments as journalists continue to suffer.

I am doing this work because I think it is important for the public to know that corporate citizens who benefit from the rights of free speech are profiting from work for those who oppress it.

For more than a year, I've monitored the activity of lobbying firms and compiled research into comprehensive records of certain lobbying firms' payments, contracts and other clients.

I scrutinize the lobbying firms' mandatory filing statements on the Foreign Agents Registration Act database, and aggregate news articles and company information on the firms' leadership and other prominent clients.

Using the research I've gathered, my faculty mentor Kathy Kiely will reach out to the lobbying firms, and, depending on their response, may launch a public campaign making an issue of their relations to countries that oppress freedom of speech. We hope this pressure of a negative public spotlight will urge the firms to enact positive changes in those countries, or cut ties with their foreign agents.