

## Statement from Richard Gunther,

19-Sep-2025

Last night's cancellation of the Jimmy Kimmel comedy show is another troubling sign of Trump's authoritarian ambitions.

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There are differences that preclude a direct comparison with the Franco regime. Most importantly, following the liberalizing Press Law the pro-democratic segments of the Spanish population (about 30%, vs. 15% who were pro-Franco, with the rest passive and apathetic) and their allies in the media were struggling to *break free* of the constraints of the authoritarian regime. In contrast, Trump is trying to *establish* authoritarian control over the press.

A second major difference is that press freedom was crushed out under Franco by military force and the repressive institutions of the state, while Trump appears to be improvising a coordinated attack on press freedom through a variety of techniques including a heavy reliance on questionable lawsuits and threats by his MAGA supporters. Apparently frivolous lawsuits have been a frequent and apparently successful tactic. But however they got there, the goal was the same—to delegitimize the opposition and systematically distort the truth, creating a fact-free variety of politics.

This was Trump's goal from the very first press conference in his first term in office, in which he urged his supporters to ignore "the mainstream media" and rely on news sources sympathetic to him, as absurd as his version of the truth may be (remember the conflict with the press over Trump's claims of crowd size for his inauguration?) . He has consistently relied on that strategy.

The most important point is that it is now clear that Trump is no ordinary democratic politician. Everything he has done is consistent with the interpretation that he is an authoritarian despot who is fully engaged in the creation of an authoritarian state.

For much more information about Franco and his regime's use of the press see Gunther, Montero and Wert, cited earlier. And for another authoritarian of that era who skillfully used the means of communication to establish and consolidate his regime, see Mussolini and the brilliant analysis of the relationship between media strategies and authoritarianism by Antonio Gramsci.