On December 2, 1766, the Swedish parliament passed legislation that is now recognized as the world’s first law supporting the freedom of the press and freedom of information.

Narrowly, the [Freedom of the Press Act](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Freedom-of-the-Press-Act-of-1766) abolished the Swedish government’s role as a censor of printed matter, and it allowed for the official activities of the government to be made public. More broadly, the law codified the principle—which has since become a cornerstone of democracies throughout the world—that individual citizens of a state should be able to express and disseminate information without fear of reprisal.

The notion that the press should be free could have emerged only after the press itself had become commonplace. The invention of [mechanized printing](https://www.britannica.com/technology/printing-press) in the 15th century led to the proliferation of books, newspapers, and other publications that spread ideas faster and farther than ever before. However, because of the potential for these ideas to challenge official power structures, some political and religious authorities actively suppressed publications that they deemed subversive