

# Conceptualizing and Measuring Characteristics of Media Systems

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## ABSTRACT

Press freedom has been viewed as a characteristic of the nation state, linked in much of the western literature to other state characteristics such as level of democratization, extent of civil liberties, government transparency and even economic liberalization. Researchers and governmental and nongovernmental organizations rely heavily on the ratings of press freedom compiled by Freedom House, Reporters without Borders and the International Research and Exchange Board (IREX). This paper extends earlier work looking at the reliability and validity of these measures. For the first time, public opinion data are used in that analysis. The paper presents evidence of the reliability and validity of the measures, including evidence that those countries rated by expert panels as having press freedom also are considered by their citizens to have media freedom.

Press freedom has been viewed in its simplest terms as a characteristic of the nation state, linked in much of the western literature at least implicitly to other state characteristics such as level of democratization, extent of civil liberties, government transparency and even economic liberalization.

On close examination, however, press freedom—or, more appropriately—media freedom has revealed itself to be a rather complex and even contentious concept. From what are the media free? Who is served by that freedom? What rights and advantages do individual citizens gain from the freedom? How does that freedom serve the diverse interests of a society? These are but a few of the questions surrounding the concept.

The debate about the possible different meanings of media freedom has been particularly heated in academic circles and the scholarly literature those circles produce. In the world of media freedom advocacy and in government policy circles, the conceptual explication of media freedom has taken a back seat to problems of its measurement. Never mind the obvious point that it is hard to measure something if you do not know exactly what it is.

Academic researchers confront the world of the media freedom advocates when the former use the data of the latter to study such things as the relationship between media freedom and the level of democratization. Lacking resources and measures of their own, the academics largely rely on the ratings and rankings of press freedom gathered by the likes of Freedom House, Reporters without Borders (RWB) and the International Research and Exchange Board (IREX).

IREX has incorporated media freedom into a larger concept of Media Sustainability, raising questions about the need to examine characteristics of media systems other than media freedom. Recent academic work has underscored the importance of developing new concepts about media systems.

This chapter will examine both the academic literature on such characteristics of media systems as media freedom and the ways in which these characteristics are measured by advocacy organizations such as Freedom House, RWB and IREX. We expand on our earlier work evaluating these measures by using new data not previously available, including data on public evaluation of the media (Becker, Vlad & Nusser, 2007). These new data allow for a novel analysis of the relationship between media freedom as

measured by external evaluators and related concepts of media freedom and performance as evaluated by the individual members of society.

### **The Concept of Media Freedom**

Discussions of media freedom are deeply rooted in both the political science and the mass communication literature. Linz (1975), for example, listed freedoms of association, information, and communication as essential components of democracy. Gunther and Mughan (2000) called mass media the “connective tissue of democracy.” O’Neil (1998) wrote that without the freedom of communication mass media provide, the foundation of democratic rule is undermined.

Early definitions of the press freedom focus primarily on freedom from government control. In their classic work, *Four Theories of the Press*, Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956) identified four models or theoretical types of media. The first, historically, was the authoritarian type, where the government controlled the press through prior censorship and through punishment after publication. They labeled a more current variant of the authoritarian model Soviet Communist type. The libertarian model was seen as the counterpoint to the authoritarian model. The primary feature is the absence of government control. The fourth model, social responsibility, holds that the media have obligations to society that accompany their freedom. According to Lowenstein (1970), “A completely free press is one in which newspapers, periodicals, news agencies, books, radio and television have absolute independence and critical ability, except for minimal libel and obscenity laws. The press has no concentrated ownership, marginal economic units or organized self-regulation.”

Weaver (1977) distinguished three components of press freedom: the relative absence of government restraints on the media, the relative absence of nongovernmental restraints, and the existence of conditions to insure the dissemination of diverse ideas and opinions to large audiences. Piccard (1985) distinguished between negative press freedom (the absence of legal controls, such as censorship) and positive press freedom (the ability of individuals to use the media).

Some have argued that definitions of media freedom should include other concepts, such as the role of media in nation building, economic development, overcoming illiteracy and poverty, and building political consciousness (Hachten, 1987). Hagen (1992) focused on media democratization and proposed

altering the top-down, “one-way flow” of messages from contemporary mass media to the public by increasing citizen participation. Breunig (1994) called press freedom one type of freedom of communication. Others were freedom of speech, freedom of opinion and information freedom.

Curran (1996) has distinguished between the classic liberal perspective on media freedom and the radical democratic perspective. The classic liberal perspective focuses on the freedom of the media to publish or broadcast. The radical democratic perspective focuses on how mass communications can “mediate in an equitable way conflict and competition between social groups in society.” Within the classical liberal perspective, according to Curran, is a “strand” arguing that the media should serve to protect the individual from the abuses of the state. Within the radical democratic perspective, he continued, is a “strand” that argues that the media should seek to redress the imbalances in society.

According to McQuail (2000), the concept of media freedom includes both the degree of freedom enjoyed by the media and the degree of freedom and access of citizens to media content. “The essential norm is that media should have certain independence, sufficient to protect free and open public expression of ideas and information. The second part of the issue raises the question of diversity, a norm that opposes concentration of ownership and monopoly of control, whether on the part of the state or private media industries.”

Price (2002) has argued that the “foundation requirement” for media freedom is that government does not have a monopoly on information. For Rozumilowicz (2002), the question of who controls the media is critical to consideration of whether it is free and independent. There must be a diffusion of control and access supported by a nation’s legal, institutional, economic and social-cultural systems, she argued. Thus, free and independent media “exist within a structure which is effectively demonopolized of the control of any concentrated social groups or forces and in which access is both equally and effectively guaranteed.”

Whether mass media lead or follow change, whether they mirror or mold society, and whether they should be conceptualized as agents of change or of the status quo are questions that permeate the discussion of media freedom (Jakubowicz, 2002). Gunther, Montero, and Wert (2000) found evidence in their research in Spain that media aided in the transition to a consolidated democracy by helping to

legitimate the new regime and by contributing to the socialization of the public in ways of democratic behavior. Ette (2000), based on research in Nigeria, argued that media can undermine democracy and that it is not even clear the press has a common understanding of how it should serve the cause of democracy.

In the view of Downing (1996), the media are pivotal in the determination of power in both nondemocratic and democratic regimes. He argued that in the process of change from authoritarian to nonauthoritarian regimes, the media are integral in the struggle that emerges between political movements and the authoritarian state. The media continue to play a role through the transition stage into the consolidation stage. Gunther and Mughan (2000) argued that political elites in various types of regimes believe the media are important in shaping the views of the public and they attempt to develop policies according to their economic, social, and political purposes.

Rozumilowicz (2002) argued that a media structure that is free of interference from government, business or dominant social groups is better able to maintain and support the competitive and participative elements that define democracy and to contribute to the process of democratization. According to her argument, free and independent media also buttress the societal objectives of democracy, help create a complementary economic structure, foster greater cultural understanding and provide for general human development. In this view, independent media also allow individuals to find a public forum in which to express opinions, beliefs and viewpoints to their fellow citizens and they inform, entertain and enrich the lives of the citizen through the profusion of ideas, opinions and visions. Free and independent media also provide for an expression of options so meaningful decisions can be made guarantee access to the less privileged in society, giving them voice.

### **Empirical Analysis of Press Freedom**

Researchers have been creating and using measures of press freedom in their analysis since at least the 1960s. Nixon (1960) demonstrated a positive relationship between press freedom as measured by International Press Institute classifications of media systems around the world and per capital income, proportion of adults that are literate, and level of daily newspaper circulation. Gillmor (1962) used the same IPI and found little evidence that the religious tradition of a country was associated with press

freedom. Nixon (1965) employed a panel to rank press freedom in countries around the world rather than the IPI ratings and replicated his earlier findings of the importance of economic development, literacy, and growth of the mass media. Farace and Donohew (1965) used the Nixon press freedom measures to show that life expectancy, population, and education also were related to press freedom.

Lowenstein (1970) empaneled judges around the world to rate Press Independence and Critical Ability based on 23 separate indicators, including restraints on media through legal and extra-legal controls, ownership of news agencies or their resources, self-censorship, and economic hardship that could extinguish some voices. He found that the resultant classification of the media matched closely that of Nixon. Kent (1972) examined the Lowenstein measures and found them to measure a single dimension of press freedom. Nam and Oh (1973) used Nixon's press freedom measure to show that political systems in which the various players have freedom of activity also have a free press. Weaver (1977) used the Lowenstein (1970) and Kent (1972) classification of press freedom and showed that increases in economic productivity lead to less stress in the political system. Weaver also showed that decreased political stress leads to increased press freedom. Weaver, Buddenbaum and Fair (1985) attempted to replicate these findings but concluded instead that increases in economic productivity in developing countries may have negative effects on press freedom rather than positive ones. For the 1985 analyses, Weaver and his colleagues used the measures of press freedom developed by Freedom House, a nongovernmental organization based in Washington, D.C.

Breunig (1994) gathered data on offenses against communication freedom through a content analysis of the Bulletins of the International Journalism Institute in Prague between January 1, 1988, and October 9, 1991. He also examined the legal protection of communication freedom as written into the constitutions and related documents of nations of the world and another measure of press freedom, namely offenses against communication freedom. He found that states that guarantee communication freedom in their legal documents did not necessarily provide for more freedom. Van Belle (1997, 2000) developed a measure of press freedom by coding the International Press Institute's annual reports and historical documents and showed that it correlated highly with the Polity III measure of democracy (Jagers & Gurr, 1995). Van Belle next showed that the free press measure was a better predictor than

the Polity III democracy measure of conflict between countries. The data show that countries that have a free press do not go to war with each other. Van Belle (1997, 2000) found that his measures of press freedom correlated highly with those of Freedom House.

Using the Freedom House measures of press freedom, Besley and Prat (2001) found that press freedom was negatively related to corruption and to political longevity of office holders. Using these same measures, Brunetti and Weder (2003) replicated the finding of a negative relationship between press freedom and corruption in a cross sectional study. They also used panel data to show that the direction of the relationship was from press freedom to decreases in corruption. Jacobsson and Jacobsson (2004) used the Freedom House index of press freedom to show that press freedom is the outcome of economic wealth and of low market concentration in the consumer goods industries. Islam (2002) used both the Freedom House measures of Press Freedom and its measures of democracy to demonstrated a relationship between the two concepts. Carrington and Nelson (2002) used the Wealth of Nations Triangle Index to empirically link media “strength” and “strength” of the local economy.

Gunaratne (2002) also used the Freedom House measures of press freedom in an examination of the relationship between that concept and political participation, as measured by voter turnout at national elections. No such relationship existed. Gunaratne did find evidence of a relationship between the Freedom House measures of press freedom and the UNDP Human Development Index, which measures a country's achievements in health, knowledge and standard of living. Gunaratne argued that the failure of the Freedom House measures to show a relationship with citizen participation indicates that the measures are faulty. First, he says, the measures are of nation-states, rather than the global communication system. Second, the measures focus too heavily on traditional print and broadcast media. Third, they focus on freedom from government almost exclusively. Fourth, the freedom should be viewed as an individual, rather than an organizational, right.

Norris and Zinnbauer (2002) used the Freedom House measures of press freedom from 2000 and a World Bank measures of development and found that press freedom is associated with good governance and human development. Nations with high scores on the Freedom House measures of press freedom were found to have less corruption, greater administrative efficiency, higher political stability, and

more effective rule of law. The countries with a free press also had better development outcomes such as higher per capita income, greater literacy, less economic inequality, lower infant mortality rates, and greater public spending on health.

Hallin and Mancini (2004) anchored their influential analysis of media systems in the classic work of Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956) and, in that sense, concern themselves indirectly with issues of press freedom. They argued, however, the narrow focus on that classic work limits its utility. They also noted that there has been very little empirical evidence to support it. Their analysis goes far beyond that earlier framework and compares media systems in terms of the development of media markets, the extent to which the media system reflects the major political divisions in society, the development of journalistic professionalism, and the degree and nature of state intervention in the media system. In their analysis of 18 European and North American states, they found evidence of three different types of media systems. All of these countries would be considered to have a free press or media.

Guseva, Nakaa, Novel, Pekkala, Souberou and Stouli (2008) built on the earlier work of Norris and Zinnbauer (2002). They produced a comprehensive overview of correlations between “indicators of environments conducive to media freedom and independence” and indicators of human development, human security, stability, poverty reduction, good governance and peace. The analysis again used the Freedom House measures of press freedom and World Bank statistics on governance for 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002 and 2004. The team concluded that press freedom is strongly associated with both the degree of development and the level of poverty in a country. Press freedom also was found to be positively correlated with governance; countries without press freedom have governance problems. Press freedom also was positively correlated with low levels of military expenditures.

### **Measuring Characteristics of Media Systems: Media Freedom and Independence**

As the review above indicates, the most widely measure of media systems is of media freedom and independence. Three organizations currently are producing quantitative measures of these concepts.

#### ***Freedom House***

The best known and most widely used measure of the press freedom is that of Freedom House. A non-governmental organization based in Washington, D.C., Freedom House was founded in 1941 to



promote democracy globally. Since 1978, Freedom House has published a global survey of freedom, known as *Freedom in the World*, now covering 193 countries and 15 related or disputed territories (Freedom House, 2008a) . This indicator is widely used by policy makers, academics, and journalists. In 1980, as a separate undertaking, Freedom House began conducting its media freedom survey—*Freedom of the Press: A Global Survey of Media Independence*—which in 2008 covered 195 countries and territories (Freedom House, 2008b).

For Freedom House, the concept of interest is press freedom, which it links to Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 19 holds that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, including freedom to hold opinions and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media. (Freedom House, 2008b). Freedom House says it seeks to provide a picture of the entire “enabling environment” in which the media in each country operate and to assess the degree of news and information diversity available to the public in any given country, from either local or transnational sources.

To measure the press freedom concept, Freedom House attempts to assess the political, legal, and economic environments of each country and evaluate whether the countries promote and do not restrict the free flow of information. In 2008, the research and ratings process involved 38 analysts and 11 senior-level advisers (Freedom House, 2008b). These analysts and advisers gather information from professional contacts, staff and consultant travel, international visitors, the findings of human rights and press freedom organizations, specialists in geographic and geopolitical areas, the reports of governments and multilateral bodies, and a variety of domestic and international news media. The ratings are reviewed individually and on a comparative basis in a series of six regional meeting with the analysts, ratings advisers with expertise in each region, other invited participants and Freedom House staff. Freedom House then compares the ratings with the previous year’s findings. Major proposed numerical shifts or category changes are subjected to more intensive scrutiny. These reviews are followed by cross-regional assessments in which efforts are made to ensure comparability and consistency in the findings. Freedom House asks the raters to use 23 questions divided into three broad categories covering the legal

environment, the political environment and the economic environment. Each country is rated in these three categories and assigned a value, with the higher numbers indicating less freedom.

***International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX)***

IREX was founded in 1968 by U.S. universities to promote exchanges with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. A non-profit organization based in Washington, D.C., IREX focuses on higher education, independent media, Internet development, and civil society in the United States and internationally. In 2001, IREX, in cooperation with USAID, prepared its first Media Sustainability Index (MSI) to evaluate the global development of independent media (IREX, 2001). The report rated independent media sustainability in 20 states in four regions: Southeast Europe, Russia and Western Eurasia, Caucasus, and Central Asia.

IREX (2008) says its Sustainability Index assesses the development of independent media systems over time and across countries. In other words, a highly sustainable system would be one that is independent. Sustainability is operationalized as the extent to which political, legal, social, and economic circumstances and institutions, as well as professional standards within independent media, promote and/or permit independent media to survive over time.

IREX says its MSI measures five criteria of a successful, independent media system. First, IREX measures the extent to which legal and social norms protect and promote free speech and access to public information. Second, IREX measures whether the journalism in the media system meets professional standards of quality. Third, the MSI determines whether the system has multiple news sources that provide citizens with reliable and objective news. The fourth criterion is whether the media are well-managed businesses, allowing editorial independence. Finally, MSI examines the supporting institutions in society to determine if they function in the professional interests of independent media.

Media systems are scored in two steps. First, IREX assembles a panel of experts in each country, drawn from representatives of local media, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), professional associations and media-development implementers. Each panelist individually reviews the criteria and scoring scheme and creates an individual score. The panelists then meet with a moderator and create combined scores and analyses. The panel moderator prepares a written analysis of the discussion, which

is subsequently edited by IREX representatives. The panelists' scores are reviewed by IREX, in-country staff and/or Washington, DC, media staff, which then score the countries independently of the MSI panel. IREX says that the final scores are a combination of these two scores. According to IREX (2008) this method allows the MSI scores to reflect both local media insiders' views and the views of international media-development professionals.

IREX tracked development of independent media in Europe and Eurasia in 2001 through 2004. IREX rated 19 countries from 2001 to 2003. That year, Serbia and Montenegro were split, making the number of rated countries 20 in 2004. In 2005, 18 Middle Eastern and North African countries were added, making the total that year 38. In 2006, 37 Subsaharan African countries were added, making the total 75. In 2007, Turkmenistan was added to the original Europe and Eurasia set, making the total 21. In 2005, IREX expanded the data gathering from its original base in Europe and Eurasia to include 18 countries in the Middle East and North Africa (IREX 2006 MENA). In 2006 and 2007, the procedure was expanded to include 37 countries in Sub-Sahara Africa (IREX, 2008 AFRICA) in addition to Europe and Eurasia and Middle East and North Africa. In 2007, data also were gathered for the original 20 countries in Europe and Eurasia (IREX, 2008 EUROPE). Since Serbia and Montenegro had split into separate countries, the study covered 21 European and Eurasian countries that year.

### ***Reporters without Borders (RWB)***

Reporters without Borders (RWB), based in Paris, defends journalists and media outlets by condemning attacks on press freedom worldwide, by publishing a variety of annual and special reports on media freedom, and by appealing to governments and international organizations on behalf of journalists and media organizations. RWB since 2002 has released annually a Worldwide Press Freedom (RWB, 2002) report and ranking of individual nations.

RWB (2008) says its index measures the state of press freedom and reflects the degree of freedom that journalists and news organizations enjoy in each country and the efforts made by the authorities to respect and ensure respect for this freedom.

RWB bases the score on responses to a questionnaire with 49 criteria. Included are measures of actions directly affecting journalists, such as murders, imprisonment, physical attacks and threats, and

activities affecting news media, such as censorship, confiscation of newspaper issues, searches and harassment. The questionnaire also measures the extent to which those who commit acts against the journalists and the media organizations are prosecuted, the amount of self-censorship, and the ability of the media to investigate and criticize. It also assesses financial pressure imposed on journalists and the news media. It examines the legal framework for the media, including penalties for press offences, the existence of a state monopoly for certain kinds of media and how the media are regulated, and the level of independence of the public media. It also examines violations of the free flow of information on the Internet.

In 2008, the questionnaire was sent to 18 freedom of expression groups, to its network of 130 correspondents around the world, and to journalists, researchers, jurists and human rights activists. In 2008, RWB received completed questionnaires from a number of independent sources for 173 countries. RWB said some countries were not included because of a lack of reliable, confirmed data.

#### **Citizen Measures of Characteristics of Media Systems**

The Freedom House, IREX and Reporters without Borders measures of press freedom and independence are designed to measure characteristics of media systems from the point of view of external evaluators. These are individuals with knowledge of the operation of the media and the ability to assess it based on established standards. A potentially different perspective is that of the citizen, who may have less knowledge of the operation of the media but more of an understanding of its role in their daily lives.

As part of the Gallup World Report, the Gallup organization in 2005 and 2006 conducted surveys in 126 countries that included a measure of public confidence in the media (English, 2007). As part of a question about confidence in institutions, Gallup asked: "In this country, do you have confidence in each of the following or not? How about quality and integrity of the media?" This question was posed in telephone and face-to-face interviews with roughly 1,000 adults aged 15 and older in all of the countries.

In 2008, WorldPublicOpinion.Org (2008), based at the University of Maryland, included a series of questions dealing with the media on surveys conducted in 28 countries and territories around the world. Not all questions were asked in all countries, but in a majority of countries those interviewed were asked

how much freedom the media in their country have. This, then, is a simple measure of press freedom from the point of view of the citizens. In addition, respondents in the surveys were asked other questions, such as how important it is for the media to be free to publish news without government control, whether the media should have more or less freedom, and whether people should have the right to read whatever they want on the Internet. Sample sizes varied from a low of 597 to a high of 2,699. Surveys were conducted via telephone, face-to-face interviews, and the Internet.

### **Analytic Goals and Methods**

In our earlier work we focused on the internal and across time reliability of the Freedom House, Reporters without Borders and IREX measures, on the internal consistency of the components of the Freedom House and IREX measures, on the relationships among those three measures, and on the ability of the Freedom House measures to identify dramatic changes across time (Becker, Vlad & Nusser, 2007). We found that the measures were reliable across time, that they were internally consistent, that they largely measure the same concept, and that the Freedom House measures reflected the major changes in the media environment associated with the collapse of communism in eastern and central Europe in the last decade of the last century. Those analyses largely ended with data collected in 2003.

Here we extend those analysis to data collected and reported as late as the end of 2008. We focus again on reliability across time and on the interrelationships among the Freedom House, Reporters without Borders and IREX measures. We also examine the relationship between the measures of media systems prepared by these three organizations and the measures reflected in the public opinion surveys of Gallup and WorldPublicOpinion.Org.

Table 1 shows the measures available for these analyses. The dates are those of the fieldwork, not of the publication of the reports. The precise questions used in the surveys by Gallup and WorldPublicOpinion.Org are shown in the Appendix.

### **Findings**

The Freedom House measures of Press Freedom stretch across 28 years. The measure should be relatively consistent year-to-year, when changes are expected to be slight, and less consistent across time, when changes are expected to accumulate. In other words, the measure should be reliable (not

reflect random error), but valid (reflect real change). The average correlation year-to-year for the Freedom House measures is .97 (Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient). Freedom House switched from a three-point scale to a 100-point scale in 1993, but the change made little difference in terms of reliability. By tracking the score for an individual year across time, however, it is possible to see that the Freedom House measures are not static. The correlation between the measure of Press Freedom in 1980, when numeric scores were first used, with 1981, was .92. The correlation between the 1981 measure and the 2007 measure, however, was .57. This is true across time. The 1993 measure correlates .94 with the 1994 measure, but it correlates .84 with the 2007 measure. In sum, the data are consistent with the argument that the measure is reliable and valid.

The Reporters without Borders measures of Press Freedom also are consistent year to year. The average correlation is .94. The Reporters without Borders measures are available only across seven years, but they, too, show evidence of decreasing correlations across time. The 2002 measure of Press Freedom correlates .94 with the 2003 measure but only .83 with the 2008 measure.

The IREX measures of Media Sustainability, or independence, are harder to assess in this way, since IREX has added new countries over time. From 1991 to 1993, the same countries were being measured, and the average correlation year-to-year was .91. The 2001 to 2007 correlation for the same group of countries was .76.

Freedom House and Reporters without Borders independently measured Press Freedom from 2002 to 2007. The results are shown in Table 2. In general, the two organizations reach much the same conclusion over the years about the media systems they evaluate. Across the six years, the average correlation is .84. This means that roughly 70 percent of the variance in one measure is explained by knowing the other. That, of course, means there are cases of disagreement as well.

Freedom House and IREX do not claim they are measuring the same concept. Press Freedom is a part of what IREX says it assesses in its Media Sustainability index. As noted above, the concept behind the MSI is really media independence. Table 3 shows the correlations between the Freedom House and MSI index across seven years. The actual countries measured changed significantly across time, making comparisons a little difficult to evaluate. The correlations do vary, but overall they are high. The average

across the seven years is .87. Across the five years in which the countries evaluated were roughly the same (2001 to 2003 and 2007), that correlation was .90. Despite the different names, the measures seem to pick up much the same phenomenon. Either Press Freedom is conceptually distinct but empirically highly correlated with Media Sustainability or media independence, or it is, in fact, roughly the same concept as press freedom.

Reporters without Borders measured Press Freedom six years during which IREX also measured Media Sustainability. IREX, of course, has a smaller number of countries covered by its work, and, as noted, that number varied. As Table 4 shows, the measures are correlated across time, but, overall, the correlation is lower between the Reporters Without Borders measures of Press Freedom and the IREX MSI measures than between the Freedom House measures of Press Freedom and the IREX Sustainability measures. The average correlation for the Reporters without Borders and the IREX measures was .78, compared with the .87 for the Freedom House and IREX measures. The difference is not immense, but it is consistent across the years.

At this point, the three measures—by Freedom House, Reporters Without Borders and IREX—appear to be more similar than dissimilar. There is a slight suggestion of an “American” bias linking the Freedom House and IREX measures. Overall, however, there is not much evidence that any one of these measures more closely reflects the concept of press freedom than the other.

Table 5 compares the measure of Press Freedom and Media Sustainability (Independence) with public opinion about confidence in the media. The confidence measure reflects not the “expert” assessment, but a lay assessment of the media. The Gallup measure of confidence in the media taps performance, and it clearly is unrelated to press freedom as measured by Freedom House and by Reporters without Borders. If media systems evaluated as free were judged to be performing at a higher level—and consequently worth of a vote of confidence—the relationship would be positive, and it is ever so slightly negative based on the measures of Freedom House and Reporters without Borders. Both the 2007 and 2006 correlations are shown, since some of the Gallup surveys were in each of these two years.

The correlations for the IREX measures are based on a much smaller number of countries—29 for the 2006 measure and 54 for the 2007 measure—but they are in the direction of expectation. The IREX

measure of Media Sustainability (Independence) contains as one of its five components a measure of journalistic performance. In the final two columns in Table 5 this component score alone is correlated with the Gallup measure of confidence. The correlations increase slightly, suggesting that there is at least some slight link between press performance as measured by IREX and confidence in the press as measured by Gallup. The media systems with more professionally solid performance garner more confidence from their citizens. This component of the IREX measure also has been used in two studies of the relationship between media competition and press performance and produced relationships roughly consistent with the expectation, providing further evidence of the validity of the measure (Becker, et al. 2009; Jacobsson, Becker, Hollifield, Jacobsson & Vlad, 2008).

The WorldPublicOpinion.Org measure of Press Freedom from the point of view of the citizens is exactly parallel in language to what the expert evaluations of Freedom House and Reporters without Borders are evaluating, so the correlations in Table 6 of .81 between the Freedom House measure and the WPO audience measure is striking. While the number of countries involved is small (only 20), it is quite diverse, ranging from Argentina to the United States with Azerbaijan, Nigeria, India and Indonesia included. The relationship indicates that in those countries evaluated by Freedom House as free, the citizens also judge the media to be free, and in those countries judged by Freedom House to be low in terms of press freedom, the citizens agree. The Reporters without Borders measure of Press Freedom is correlated a bit less well, at .70.

Data not tabled show that those who assign a high level of importance to press freedom are slightly more likely to be in countries with press freedom, and that there is a negative relationship between wanting more press freedom and being in a country with press freedom. In other words, if the system isn't free, the people are more likely to want more freedom than if it is already free. Citizens are more likely to support the right to publish without government control in free societies and somewhat more likely to support the right to read whatever the citizens want and the right to free access to information on the Internet. Freedom House measures and Reporters without Borders measures show the same relationships with the former showing just slightly stronger relationships overall.



## **Measures of Media System Characteristics and Media Assistance Assessment**

Elsewhere we have argued that media assistance programs around the world have been predicated on the assumption that they can bring about changes in the characteristics of the media systems in which the investment is made (Becker & Vlad, forthcoming). We have offered a simple model to summarize the series of assumptions that are made leading up to the view that media systems can be altered. That model is shown in Figure 1.

Much of the emphasis of media assistance programs has been placed on the training of the journalists. The training is intended to produce a skilled and motivated workforce whose journalistic activities will help create media organizations that facilitate and distribute their work. In the IREX perspective, such organizations are professional and independent. While much of the media assistance is directed at the level of the journalist, media assistance programs also target these independent media organizations. Some assistance initiatives even create media organizations. These organizations are supposed to help create a competitive media environment. The free media are labeled and viewed in the model as part of an independent media system. Finally, media assistance is directed at the media system itself. Media assistance programs have employed legal experts to draft laws to help create the legal environment in which free media can operate.

The line and arrow at the bottom of the model are particularly important. Media assistance is seen as only a part of a larger initiative usually referred to as development assistance. Development assistance is directed at the legislative bodies that create the laws, the administrative units and the executive branches that administer the laws, and the legal institutions that interpret them. The assistance also is directed at the political bodies that operate in the society and at the society generally with its various civil organizations that make up what is generally referred to as the civil society. The assistance also is directed at the economic institutions thought to be crucial for development of a democratic society. This development assistance is expected to lead to the various institutions of democracy.

Free media are expected to create information that can be used by what we are labeled in the model as the institutions of democracy. The expectation is that the free media produce information that is functional from the point of view of governmental institutions, such as the educational entities, the

judiciary, the legislative bodies, the executive institutions, and the various nongovernmental organizations that make up civic life. These institutions can make use of this functional information to create the democratic society. The media, for example, provide information that informed voters need, and that the schools and other promoters of an informed electorate depend on to carry out their task. The media also provide information about the performance of the various civil society institutions that helps make them transparent and more effective. Lansner (2006) has referred to media acting in this role as “active open media.”

Much development work has focused specifically on the institutions of a civil society—part of what are labeled in the model as the institutions of democracy. Often these programs have included the media as one type of civil society institution. Certainly it is possible to question the ability of media institutions to create other civil society institutions and well as the other institutions of democracy, and the question mark in the model indicates that.

### **Concluding Comments**

Figure 1 helps to focus attention on what is known about media assistance and what still needs to be known.

Based on the existing literature (Becker & Vlad, forthcoming), it seems safe to conclude that media assistance does lead to trained, skilled, motivated journalists. It also seems likely that media assistance leads to the creation of media organizations that facilitate and distribute the work of journalists.

There is almost no systematic evidence at present, however, that media assistance leads to creation of independent media systems of the sort reflected in the IREX Media Sustainability concept. There also is almost no evidence that independent media are more likely to produce the information needed for democracy than media that are not independent. And clearly no one knows if independent media lead to the creation of or otherwise empower and facilitate the institutions of a civil society or the other institutions of democracy. And no one knows if democratic institutions make use of the information provided by independent media to produce a functioning democracy. A global perspective is that there is more evidence that the media are necessary for democratization and sufficient for it. This is a point also made by Norris and Zinnbauer (2002) in their review of the relationship between media and development

generally.

To untangle the web of relations between the media assistance—and media generally—and societal change, it is necessary to be able to conceptualize and measure characteristics of media systems. Strong evidence now exists of the reliability of the most prominent measures of media systems, namely media freedom and media independence. The Freedom House measure and the Reporters without Borders measure are highly correlated. At present there is little to distinguish them. The IREX measure is designed to tap something conceptually distinct. Empirically, however, it too is highly correlated with the Freedom House and Reporters without Borders measures.

Evidence also is beginning to build of the validity of the measures. The measures change over time, and the Freedom House measure in particular has reflected known changes in the media environment. The Freedom House measure has been used in a variety of studies and found to be related as predicted to a whole host of outcomes, including of different types of development. At least one component of the IREX measure has been used successfully in hypothesis testing about the adverse effects of media competition.

The Freedom House and Reporter without Borders measures of press freedom focus mostly on media freedom and independence from government control and are less reflective of the control exercised by commercial and corporate interests. The IREX measures are more sensitive to this issue. The high correlations between the IREX measure and those of Freedom House and Reporters without Borders is reassuring in that regard. Freedom House, Reporters without Borders and IREX have attempted to adapt their measures to reflect the emergence of nontraditional media. That challenge likely will increase in the future.

A criticism of the measures has been that they are not reflective of the concerns of the normal citizens of countries, having been developed by elites from western countries with strong interests in exporting their own views of media freedom. The research reported here is preliminary. It suggests that the concerns about press freedom of those who assigned themselves the tasks of evaluating media systems in terms of freedom are not far from the mark set by the citizens themselves. If this finding can be replicated with data from more countries in the future, it will do much to solidify the notion that media

freedom is a concept with a broad base.

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## **Appendix**

### ***Gallup World View Polls 2005 and 2006***

#### **Confidence in Media**

In this country, do you have confidence in each of the following or not? How about quality and integrity of the media? Responses categories: Yes, no.

### ***WorldPublicOpinion.Org Polls 2008***

#### **Media Freedom**

How much freedom does the media have in (country): a lot, not very much, none at all?

#### **Importance of Media Freedom**

How important is it for the media to be free to publish news and ideas without government control? Response categories: Very important, somewhat important, not very important, not important at all.

#### **Want More Freedom**

Do you think the media in (country) should have more freedom, less freedom, or the same amount of freedom?

#### **Right to Publish**

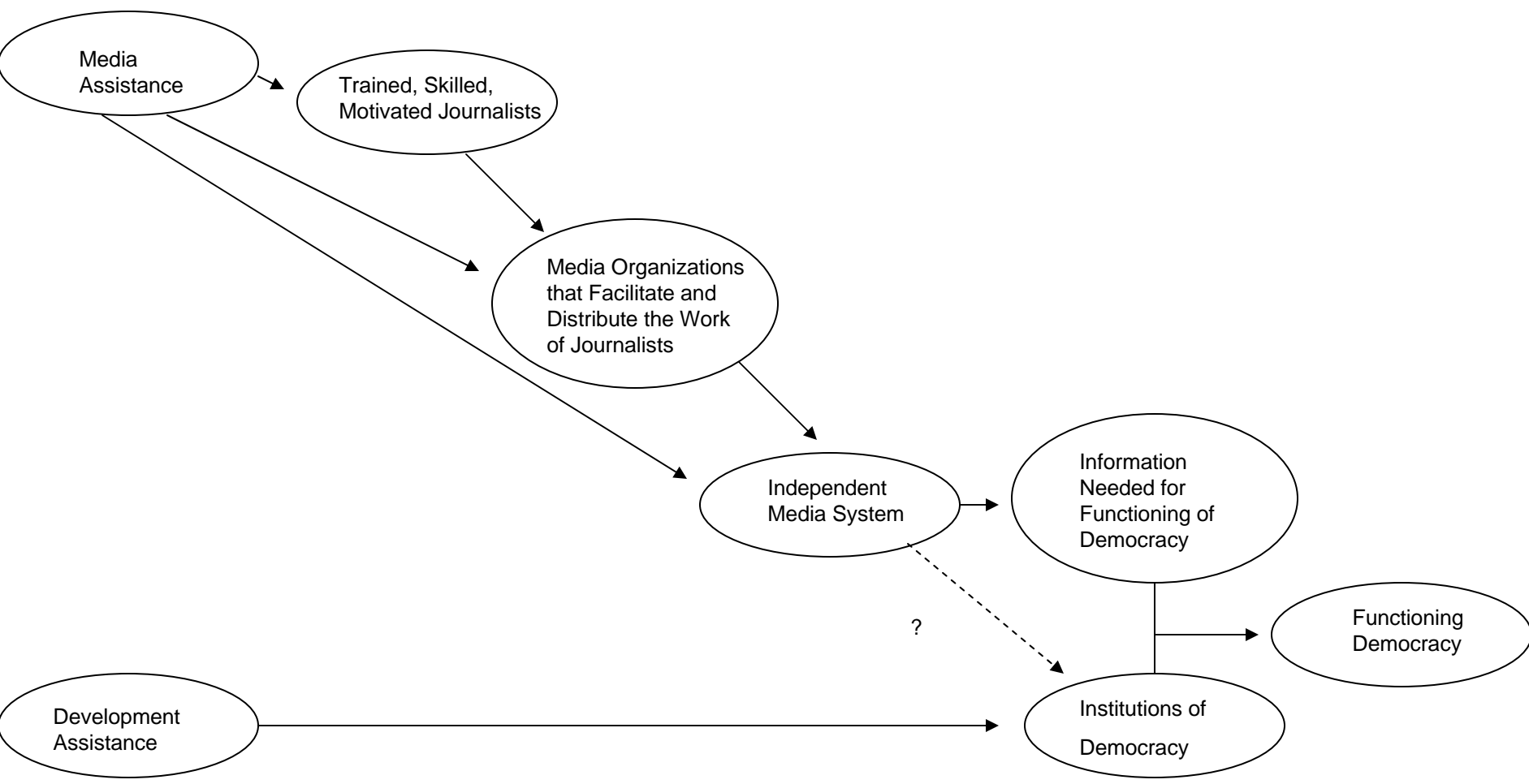
Which view is closer to yours? Do you think: The media should have the right to publish news and ideas without government control or The government should have the right to prevent the media from publishing things that it thinks will be politically destabilizing?

#### **Right to Read**

Do you think people in (country) should or should not have the right to read publications from all other countries, including those that might be considered enemies? Response categories: Should, should not.

#### **Right to Internet**

Do you think people in (country) should have the right to read whatever is on the Internet, or do you think the government should have the right to prevent people from having access to some things on the Internet?



Model of Impact of Media Assistance

Table 1. Summary of Measures

| Measure                                  | Year   | N   |
|--|--------|-----|
| Freedom House Press Freedom              | 1980   | 155 |
| Freedom House Press Freedom              | 1981   | 154 |
| Freedom House Press Freedom              | 1982   | 156 |
| Freedom House Press Freedom              | 1983   | 156 |
| Freedom House Press Freedom              | 1984   | 159 |
| Freedom House Press Freedom              | 1985   | 159 |
| Freedom House Press Freedom              | 1986   | 159 |
| Freedom House Press Freedom              | 1987   | 159 |
| Freedom House Press Freedom              | 1988   | 159 |
| Freedom House Press Freedom              | 1989   | 159 |
| Freedom House Press Freedom              | 1990   | 157 |
| Freedom House Press Freedom              | 1991   | 161 |
| Freedom House Press Freedom              | 1992   | 175 |
| Freedom House Press Freedom              | 1993   | 183 |
| Freedom House Press Freedom              | 1994   | 184 |
| Freedom House Press Freedom              | 1995   | 186 |
| Freedom House Press Freedom              | 1996   | 186 |
| Freedom House Press Freedom              | 1997   | 185 |
| Freedom House Press Freedom              | 1998   | 185 |
| Freedom House Press Freedom              | 1999   | 185 |
| Freedom House Press Freedom              | 2000   | 186 |
| Freedom House Press Freedom              | 2001   | 185 |
| Freedom House Press Freedom              | 2002   | 192 |
| Freedom House Press Freedom              | 2003   | 193 |
| Freedom House Press Freedom              | 2004   | 191 |
| Freedom House Press Freedom              | 2005   | 191 |
| Freedom House Press Freedom              | 2006   | 195 |
| Freedom House Press Freedom              | 2007   | 195 |
| RSF Press Freedom                        | 2002   | 139 |
| RSF Press Freedom                        | 2003   | 164 |
| RSF Press Freedom                        | 2004   | 164 |
| RSF Press Freedom                        | 2005   | 164 |
| RSF Press Freedom                        | 2006   | 164 |
| RSF Press Freedom                        | 2007   | 166 |
| RSF Press Freedom                        | 2008   | 170 |
| IREX Media Sustainability (Independence) | 2001   | 19  |
| IREX Media Sustainability (Independence) | 2002   | 19  |
| IREX Media Sustainability (Independence) | 2003   | 19  |
| IREX Media Sustainability (Independence) | 2004   | 20  |
| IREX Media Sustainability (Independence) | 2005   | 38  |
| IREX Media Sustainability (Independence) | 2006   | 75  |
| IREX Media Sustainability (Independence) | 2007   | 21  |
| Gallup Confidence In Media               | 2005-6 | 126 |
| WPO Importance of Media Freedom          | 2008   | 22  |
| WPO Right to Publish                     | 2008   | 23  |
| WPO Media Freedom                        | 2008   | 20  |
| WPO Want More Freedom                    | 2008   | 22  |
| WPO Right to Read                        | 2008   | 21  |
| WPO Right to Internet                    | 2008   | 21  |

Table 2. Correlation of Freedom House Measure of Press Freedom and Reporters without Borders Measure of Press Freedom

|      |      |           |      |
|------|------|-----------|------|
| Year | 2002 | Pearson r | 0.81 |
|      |      | N         | 137  |
|      | 2003 | Pearson r | 0.84 |
|      |      | N         | 163  |
|      | 2004 | Pearson r | 0.83 |
|      |      | N         | 164  |
|      | 2005 | Pearson r | 0.84 |
|      |      | N         | 163  |
|      | 2006 | Pearson r | 0.83 |
|      |      | N         | 162  |
|      | 2007 | Pearson r | 0.86 |
|      |      | N         | 165  |

Table 3. Correlation of Freedom House Measure of Press Freedom and IREX Measure of Media Sustainability (Independence)

|      |      |           |      |
|------|------|-----------|------|
| Year | 2001 | Pearson r | 0.84 |
|      |      | N         | 18   |
|      | 2002 | Pearson r | 0.89 |
|      |      | N         | 18   |
|      | 2003 | Pearson r | 0.91 |
|      |      | N         | 18   |
|      | 2004 | Pearson r | 0.94 |
|      |      | N         | 17   |
|      | 2005 | Pearson r | 0.81 |
|      |      | N         | 35   |
|      | 2006 | Pearson r | 0.78 |
|      |      | N         | 74   |
|      | 2007 | Pearson r | 0.94 |
|      |      | N         | 20   |

Table 4. Correlation of Reporters without Borders Measure of Press Freedom and IREX Measure of Media Sustainability (Independence)

|      |      |           |      |
|------|------|-----------|------|
| Year | 2002 | Pearson r | 0.72 |
|      |      | N         | 13   |
|      | 2003 | Pearson r | 0.82 |
|      |      | N         | 18   |
|      | 2004 | Pearson r | 0.75 |
|      |      | N         | 17   |
|      | 2005 | Pearson r | 0.76 |
|      |      | N         | 35   |
|      | 2006 | Pearson r | 0.74 |
|      |      | N         | 72   |
|      | 2007 | Pearson r | 0.91 |
|      |      | N         | 21   |

Table 5. Correlations Between Evaluator Assessments of Press Performance and Citizen Assessments of Media Systems

|                      |           | Freedom House<br>Press Freedom<br>2005 | Freedom House<br>Press Freedom<br>2006 | Reporters without<br>Borders Press<br>Freedom 2005 | Reporters without<br>Borders Press<br>Freedom 2006 | IREX Sustainability<br>(Independence)<br>2005 | IREX Sustainability<br>(Independence)<br>2006 | IREX Journalism<br>Performance 2005 | IREX Journalism<br>Performance 2006 |
|----------------------|-----------|--|--|--|--|---|---|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Gallup<br>Confidence | Pearson r | -0.09                                  | -0.10                                  | -0.07  | -0.03  | 0.12  | 0.34  | 0.24                                | 0.39                                |
|                      | N         | 124                                    | 126                                    | 124  | 124  | 29  | 54  | 29                                  | 54                                  |



Table 6. Correlations Between Evaluator Assessments of Press Freedom and Citizen Assessments of Media Systems

|  |           | Freedom House<br>Press Freedom<br>2007 | Reporters without<br>Borders Press<br>Freedom 2008 |
|--|-----------|--|--|
| WPO Media Freedom (2008): %A Lot                 | Pearson r | 0.81                                   | 0.70   |
|  | N         | 20                                     | 20   |
| WPO Importance of Media Freedom (2008):<br>%Very | Pearson r | 0.34                                   | 0.29   |
|  | N         | 22                                     | 22   |
| WPO Want More Freedom (2008): %Yes               | Pearson r | -0.40                                  | -0.31  |
|  | N         | 22                                     | 22   |
| WPO Right to Publish (2008): %Yes                | Pearson r | 0.62                                   | 0.57   |
|  | N         | 23                                     | 23   |
| WPO Right to Read (2008): %Yes                   | Pearson r | 0.31                                   | 0.31   |
|  | N         | 21                                     | 21   |
| WPO Right to Internet (2008): %Yes               | Pearson r | 0.28                                   | 0.24   |
|  | N         | 21                                     | 21   |