

Linking Elite Measures of Media Freedom and Public Opinion Data: A Validation Exercise

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ABSTRACT

Governments, nongovernmental organizations, and, increasingly, scholars, rely heavily on the ratings of a small number of organizations to gauge media freedom and independence. Earlier work has shown that these established systemic measures of media characteristics are internally consistent, highly intercorrelated, and reflect known changes in media systems across time. Preliminary research also now shows that these measures of media freedom, based on the assessments of elites within the societies and external experts, also are correlated with measures of public opinion. This has been the first test of the expectation that the citizenry views media freedom in a similar way to how elite organizations do. This paper provides further evidence that public opinion and elite evaluations are correlated. It also shows considerable consistency in evaluation of media systems regardless of the geographic origins of the evaluators.

Governments, nongovernmental organizations, and, increasingly, scholars, rely heavily on the ratings of a small number of organizations to gauge media freedom and independence. The measures by Freedom House, Reporters without Borders and the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) are used most extensively.

Earlier work has shown that these established systemic measures of media characteristics are internally consistent, highly intercorrelated, and reflect known changes in media systems across time. Preliminary research also now shows that these measures of media freedom, based on the assessments of elites within the societies and external experts, also are correlated with measures of public opinion. This has been the first test of the expectation that the citizenry views media freedom in a similar way to how elite organizations do.

This paper extends that earlier work in two ways. First, it looks at previously unused public opinion data to examine the relationship between citizen assessments of press freedom and elite evaluations of a country's media system. Second, it examines the relationship between measures of the media in a select number of African countries by African specialists with how those same media were evaluated by European and American evaluation teams.

The data show further evidence that public opinion and elite evaluations are correlated. They also show considerable consistency in evaluation of media systems regardless of the geographic origins of the evaluators.

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, p. 1) 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 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 the 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 is a "strand" that argues that the media should seek to redress the imbalances in society.

According to McQuail (2005), 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. Price (2002, p. 54) 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. She argued that there must be a diffusion of control and access supported by a nation's legal, institutional, economic and social-cultural systems. 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" (Rozumilowicz, 2002, p. 14).

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 that meaningful decisions can be made to guarantee access to the less privileged in society, giving them voice.

It is clear from these conceptualizations that media freedom includes both a sense of lack of constraint and a sense of performance consistent with that independence. The performance should be defined at least in part by the needs of society and the view that the media play a role in creating an informed citizenry that can contribute to a functioning democracy.

Correlates of Press Freedom

Researchers have been creating measures of press freedom and linking those measures to both antecedents and consequences of that freedom since at least the 1960s. Nixon (1960) demonstrated a positive relationship between press freedom as measured by International Press Institute (IPI) classifications of media systems around the world and per capita 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. In a later study, Nixon (1965) employed a panel (rather than the IPI ratings) to rank press freedom in countries around the world 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 closely matched 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 this measure correlated highly with the Polity III measure of democracy. Democracy is one of the two measures of regime type in Polity III. (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 demonstrate a relationship between the two concepts. Carrington and Nelson (2002) used the Money Matters Institute 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 press freedom and political participation, as measured by voter turnout at national elections, and found that 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 said, 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 almost exclusively on freedom from government. 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 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.

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.

Finkel, Perez-Liñam, Siligson and Azpuru (2008) have compared countries where USAID provided democracy assistance from 1990 to 2003 with those that did not and used the Freedom House press freedom measures to show that USAID media assistance produced effects on the media sectors. The team also concluded that media freedom led to development of civil society and democratization. Norris and Inglehart (2009) used the Freedom House measures in their examination of the effects of global media on cultural convergence around the world. They concluded that these effects are greatest in what they call cosmopolitan societies and use the Freedom House measures to index cosmopolitanism. Both Finkel et al. and Norris and Inglehart combined the Freedom House measure of press freedom with other measures of media to create a new index for their analysis. Norris and Inglehart (2010) used the Freedom House measures to examine the relationship between press freedom and confidence in government. They found that confidence in government was higher when press freedom was lower.

The normative work of Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956) on media systems generally and press freedom specifically spurred Hallin and Mancini (2004) to attempt an empirical classification of media systems today. 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 examination of 18 European and North American states, they found evidence of three different types of media systems, even though all of the countries examined were considered to have a free media. They called the models the Mediterranean or Polarized Pluralist Model, the North/Central European or Democratic Corporatist Model, and the North Atlantic or Liberal Model. Hallin and Mancini's central argument is that media freedom is part of a broader set of political, social and even geographic characteristics of nations.

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 Sub-Saharan 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

Reporters without Borders, 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.

African Media Barometer

The Media Institute of Southern Africa in Windhoek, Namibia, and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's African Media Project, decided in 2005 to develop an assessment system for the continent's media that would use African criteria and be undertaken by African's (FES, 2010). The criteria used were drawn from the African Commission for Human and People's Rights Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa, which was adopted in 2002. This document, in turn, drew on the 1991 Windhoek Declaration on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press and the 2001 African Charter on Broadcasting.

A panel of experts made up of an equal number of representatives of the media and of civil society at large is formed in each country to be evaluated. The panel, usually consisting of 10 persons,

meets for two days in retreats to discuss the indicators to be used. The meeting is chaired by an independent consultant.

Panel members assess performance of the media in four broad sectors. Sector 1 covers freedom of express, including freedom of the media, and asked if they are effectively protected and promoted. In its current form, 12 subitems are included. Sector 2 looks at the media landscape, including the new media, and asked if they are characterized by diversity, independence and sustainability. In the current version, 11 items are included. Sector 3 looks at broadcasting regulation and asks if it is transparent and independent. It further asks if the state broadcaster has been transformed into a truly public broadcaster. The section now has 12 items. The final section asks if the media practice high levels of professional standards and contains 10 items. For each item, evaluators use a 5-point scale, with 1 indicating that the country does not meet the indicator and a 5 meaning the country meets all aspects of the indicator and has been doing so over time.

Beginning in 2007, the MIS revisited the countries first evaluated in 2005, providing for the first time data on change. By early 2010, AMB evaluations had produced 46 reports from 25 different countries. The AMB is unique in that the actual raw data are released publicly as well as average scores for each item and an overall sector score.

Citizen Measures of Characteristics of Media Systems

The Freedom House, IREX, Reporters without Borders and African Media Barometer 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.

In 2007, The BBC World Service Poll included five questions, one with two parts, dealing with the media in a survey conducted in 14 countries (BBC World Service Poll, 2007). Included was a question that asked respondents to use a 5-point scale to indicate how free they thought the media in their country was to report the news accurately, truthfully and without bias. This is a simple measure of public assessment

of press freedom. The other questions dealt with similar topics but did not directly assess press freedom. The surveys were conducted by GlobeScan Incorporated and Synovate, with fieldwork taking place in October and November of 2007. Samples were national in nine of the 14 countries and urban in the remaining five. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in eight of the countries and by telephone in the remaining six. Sample sizes ranged from 500 to 1,500.

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.

The precise questions used in the surveys by the BBC World Service Poll and WorldPublicOpinion.Org are shown in the Appendix.

Analytic Goals and Methods

The goal of the analysis to be reported here was to extend the earlier work in two ways. The first was by examining the relationship between public assessments of press freedom as measured in public opinion surveys and elite assessments of press freedom as measured by the professional evaluators. The second was by examining the relationship between the African Media Barometer measures and those of African countries conducted by non-African evaluators.

Findings

The relationship between the measure of public perceptions of press freedom and the Freedom House measure of press freedom for the 14 countries included in the 2007 BBC World Service Poll is shown in Chart 1. The Freedom House measure was chosen for presentation because, as the review above shows, it is used most widely. The 2008 measure is presented because Freedom House measures

are released to reflect the situation a year earlier. As the chart shows, there is a slight relationship at best. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient is $-.31$, while the Spearman rho is $-.23$. The Freedom House measure is reverse coded, producing the slight negative relationship, which really is a positive. The correlations between the BBC World Service Poll measures and the Reporters Without Borders are similar, with a $-.37$ Pearson r and a $-.25$ Spearman rho. The Reporters Without Borders measures also are reverse scored.

The relationship between the WorldPublicOpinion.Org measure of press freedom from the point of view of the citizens and the Freedom House measure is shown in Chart 2. Here the relationship is considerably stronger, a $-.81$ with Pearson r and a $-.76$ with Spearman rho. Clearly for the 20 countries included in the analysis, those countries that the elite evaluators found to have a free press are those where the citizens also feel the press is free. The Reporters Without Borders evaluations produce a similar $-.70$ (Pearson) and $-.71$ (Spearman).

The discrepancy between the two sets of findings is surprising. In Chart 3, the correlation between the public opinion measures for the eight countries that were included in the two surveys is examined. There is no relationship, largely because the U.S. and the U.K, which showed high levels of perceived press freedom in the WorldPublicOpinion.Org measure show low levels of correlation in the BBC World Service Poll.

The surveys used two different measures, with the BBC World Service Poll having an anchored scale and the WorldPublicOpinion.Org measure simply verbal descriptions. The BBC question is unusual in that it is reverse coded, that is, respondents were asked to go from 5 to 1 rather than the reverse, which is more common.

Chart 4 shows the relationship between the African Media Barometer measure of press freedom and performance for 2006 and 2007 and the Reporters Without Borders measures for 2007. The two years of AMB data were combined to provide more cases for the analysis. The relationship is a quite strong $-.72$ (Pearson) and $-.81$ (Spearman). The AMB measures are positively scored, so the negative relationship is really a positive one.

Chart 5 shows this same relationship using the Freedom House measures from 2008, which is really for press freedom in 2007. Again, the correlation is quite strong. It is $-.69$ (Pearson) and $-.78$ (Spearman).

Finally, Chart 6 shows the relationship between the AMB measures for 2006 and 2007 and the IREX measures for those same two years. The correlation is weaker, with a $.57$ (Pearson) and a $.31$ (Spearman). Clearly, however, there is a correspondence between the measures. The score here is positive because both the AMB and IREX are positively scored. The IREX measures were mostly from 2007 but included some for 2006, as was the case for the AMB measures.

Conclusions

The findings from these analyses are necessarily tentative. Only a small number of countries was available for the examination of the relationship between public assessments of press freedom and the elite evaluations of press freedom. When the WorldPublicOpinion.Org data are used, however, that relationship is rather strong. Given that a diverse set of countries is included, the findings are certainly encouraging.

This positive conclusion is certainly undercut by the very weak relationship between the public opinion data and the elite evaluations using the BBC World Service Poll. A small number of countries is involved, but the lack of a clear relationship is surprising and disappointing. The lack of correspondence between the BBC World Service Poll data and those from the WorldPublicOpinion.Org survey also is confusing, suggesting that something is not right with one or the other of the two measures. Given the compelling logic for a relationship between public and elite assessments of press freedom, the weight seems to the side of the WorldPublicOpinion.Org measure. But the discrepancy is troubling.

The findings of a correspondence between the measures of press freedom and performance by the three non-African organizations and the measures of the African Media Barometer suggests considerable agreement exists about what are free and professional media. The weakest relationship is for the IREX measures, which, ironically, are based on a similar panel of experts in country. Certainly this relationship needs to be reexamined as more data from AMB become available and with new releases of data from IREX.

The paper advances the argument that press freedom can be reliably and validly measured by elite panels. Given the importance of these measures to a broad range of users, from those in government to those in advocacy organizations and to scholars, the findings are particularly encouraging. Challenges remain, as the media environment is changing dramatically, putting new pressure on the evaluators to measure new freedoms and new kinds of journalistic performance. In addition, markets within countries fragment at the same time that markets are created that cut across national borders. This will require continued assessment of the measures in the future.

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Appendix

BBC World Service Poll 2007

Media Freedom

On a scale of 5 to 1, where 5 means “very free” and 1 means “not at all free”, how free do you think the press and media is in your country to be able to report the news accurately, truthfully and without undue bias?

Press Freedom vs. Social Harmony

Which of the following statements on the freedom of the press is closest to your own view?

Freedom of the press to report the news truthfully is very important to ensure we live in a fair society, even if it sometimes leads to unpleasant debates or social unrest. While freedom of the press to report news truthfully is important, social harmony and peace are more important which sometimes means controlling what is reported for the greater good.

Honest and Accurate Reporting: Public Media

On a scale of 5 to 1, where 5 means “very good job” and 1 means “very poor job”, to what extent is the performance of government or publicly funded news organizations in reporting the news honestly and accurately?

Honest and Accurate Reporting: Private Media

On a scale of 5 to 1, where 5 means “very good job” and 1 means “very poor job”, to what extent is the performance of private, for-profit news organizations in reporting the news honestly and accurately?

Ownership Concentration Is Problem

As you may know, ownership of private news organisations is increasingly concentrated in the hands of fewer large companies. Which of the following statements on media ownership is closest to your own view? Ownership is not an issue because media owners do not interfere with the news content. Ownership is a major issue because you often see owners’ political views emerge in the news.

News Decision-Making Best Left to Professionals

Which of the following statements on how best to decide on what news stories are reported is closest to your own view? I think it is important that people like me have a say in what gets reported in the news. I think that decisions as to which stories get reported in the news are best left to news organisations.

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?

Chart 1. BBC World Service Poll and Freedom House

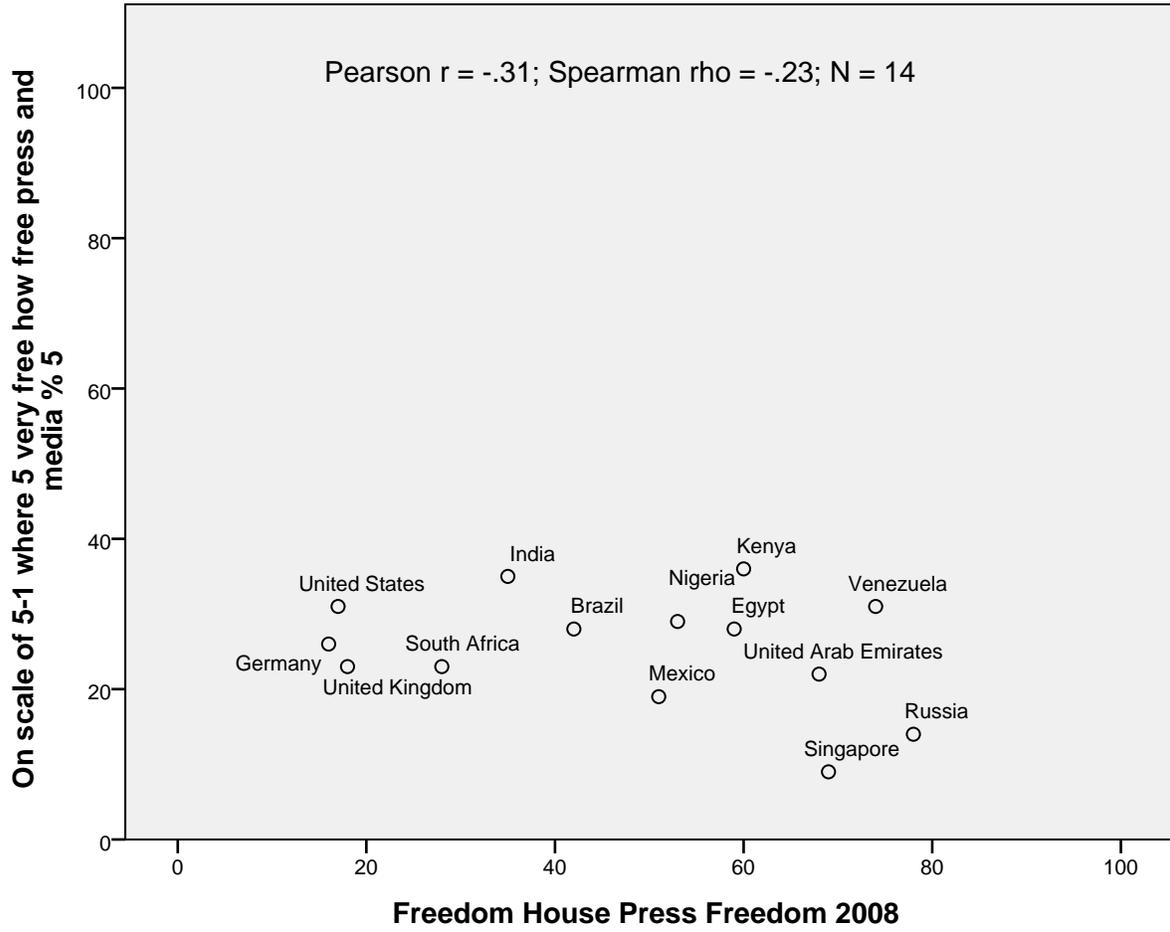


Chart 2. WorldPublicOpinion.Org and Freedom House House

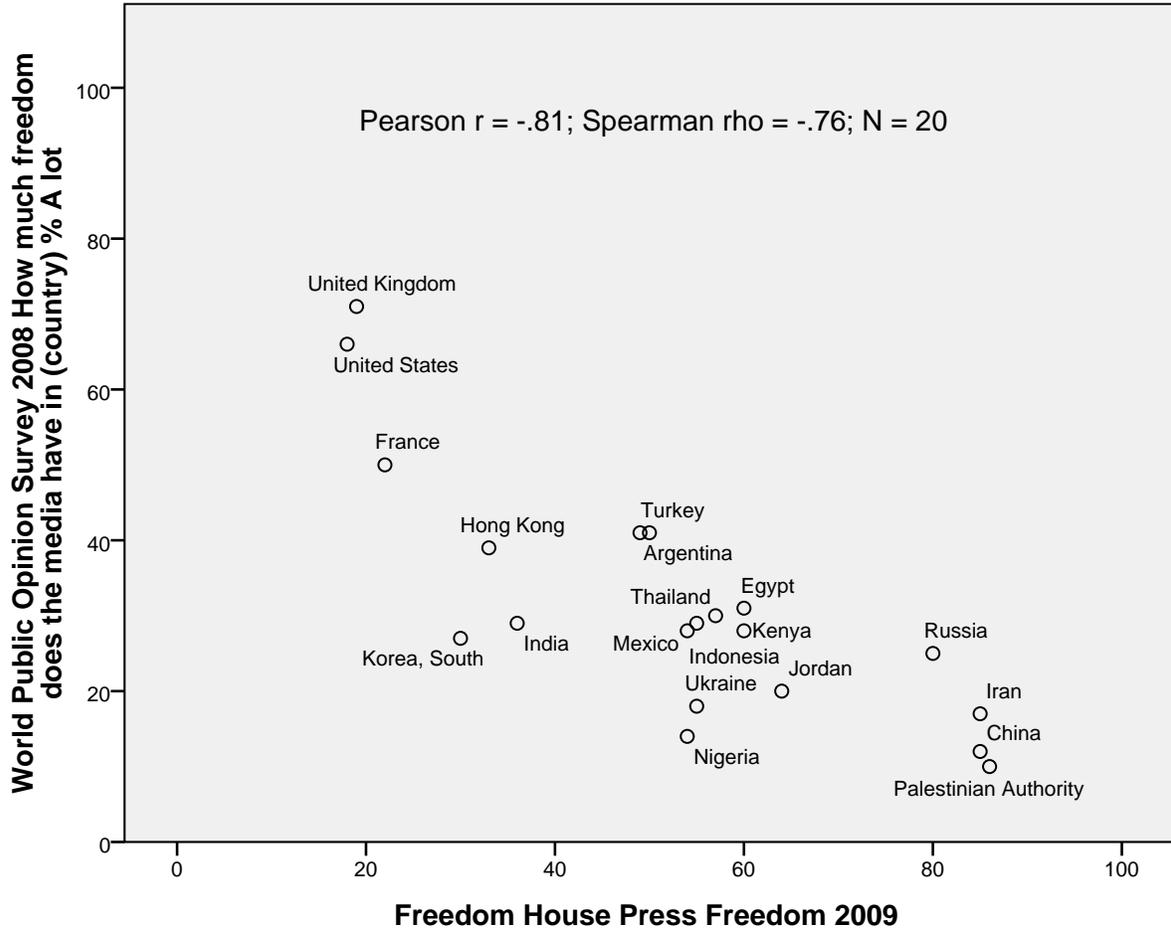


Chart 3. BBC World Service Poll and WorldPublicOpinion.Org

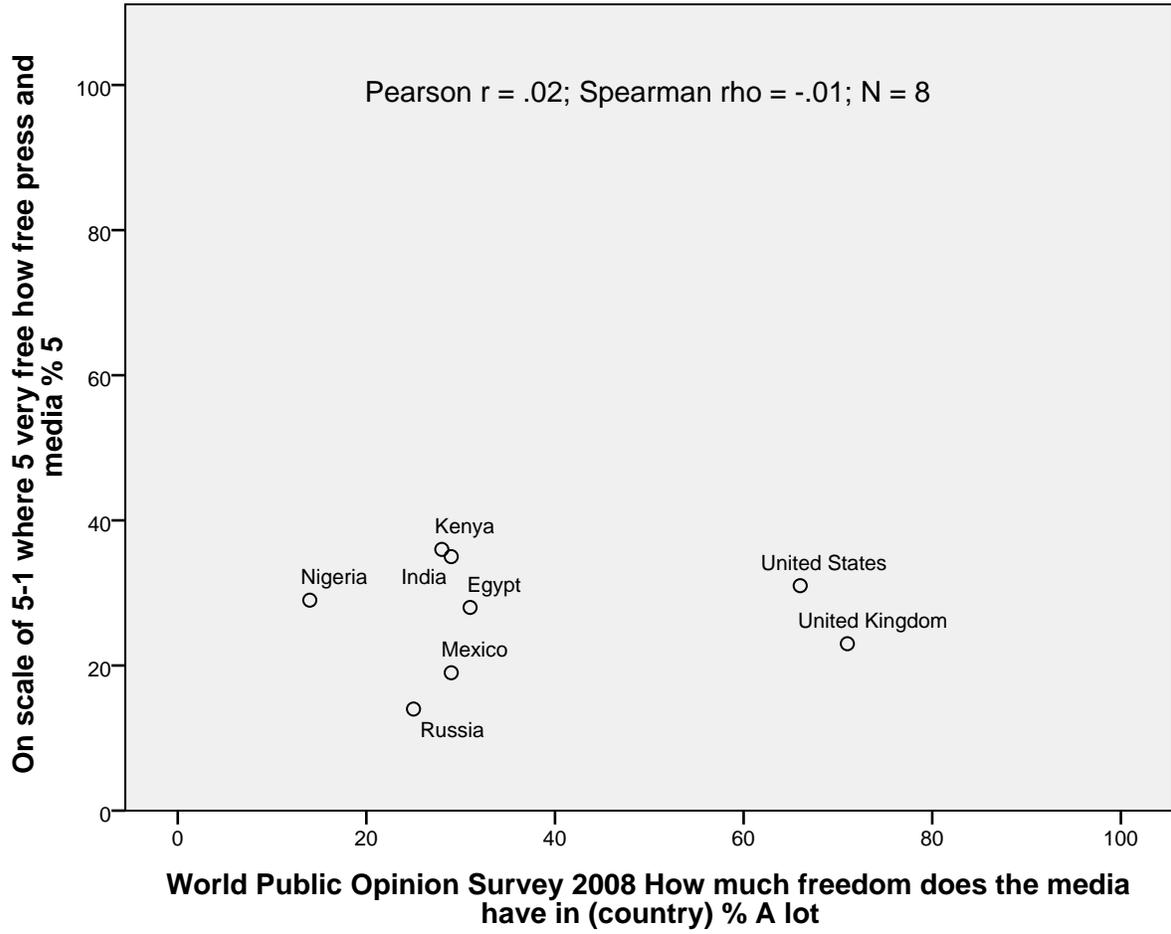


Chart 4. African Media Barometer and Reporters Without Borders

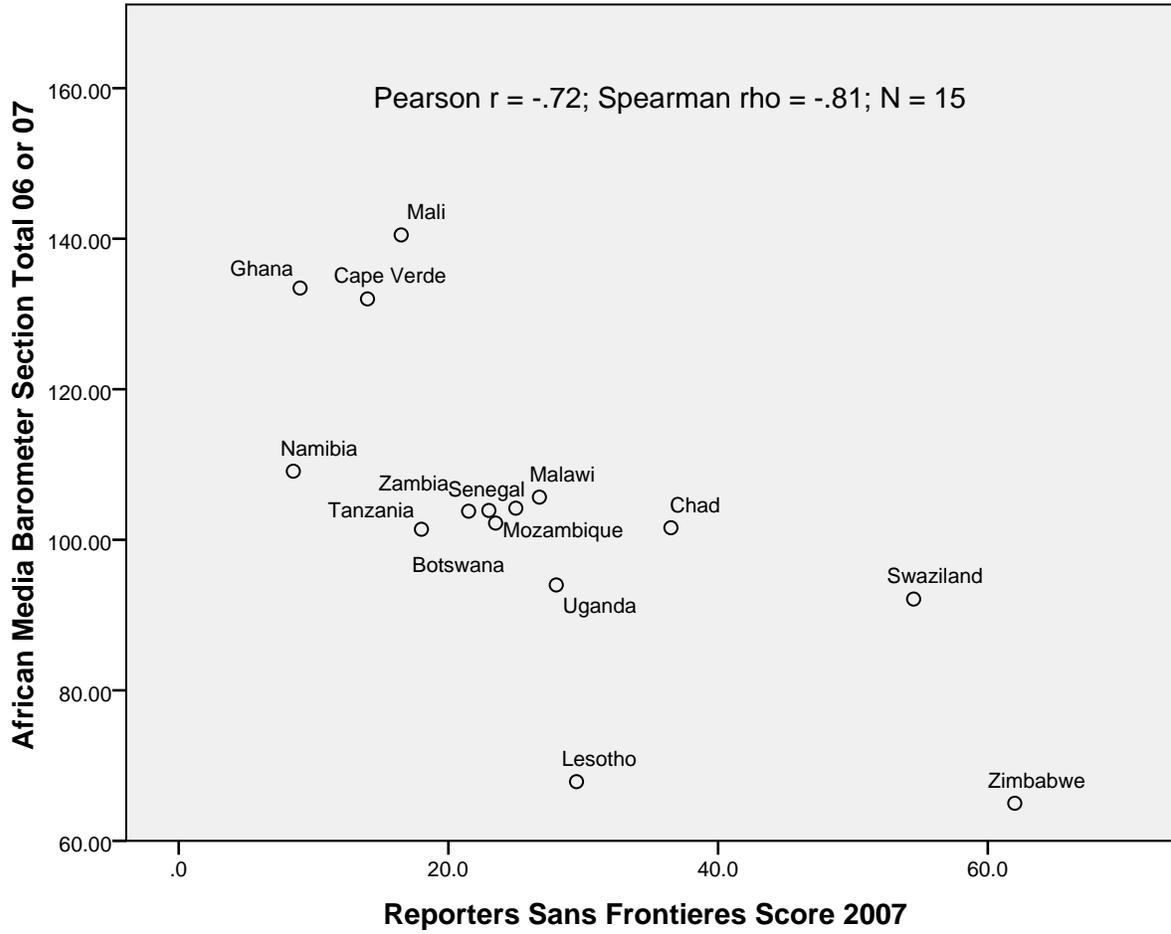


Chart 5. African Media Barometer and Freedom House

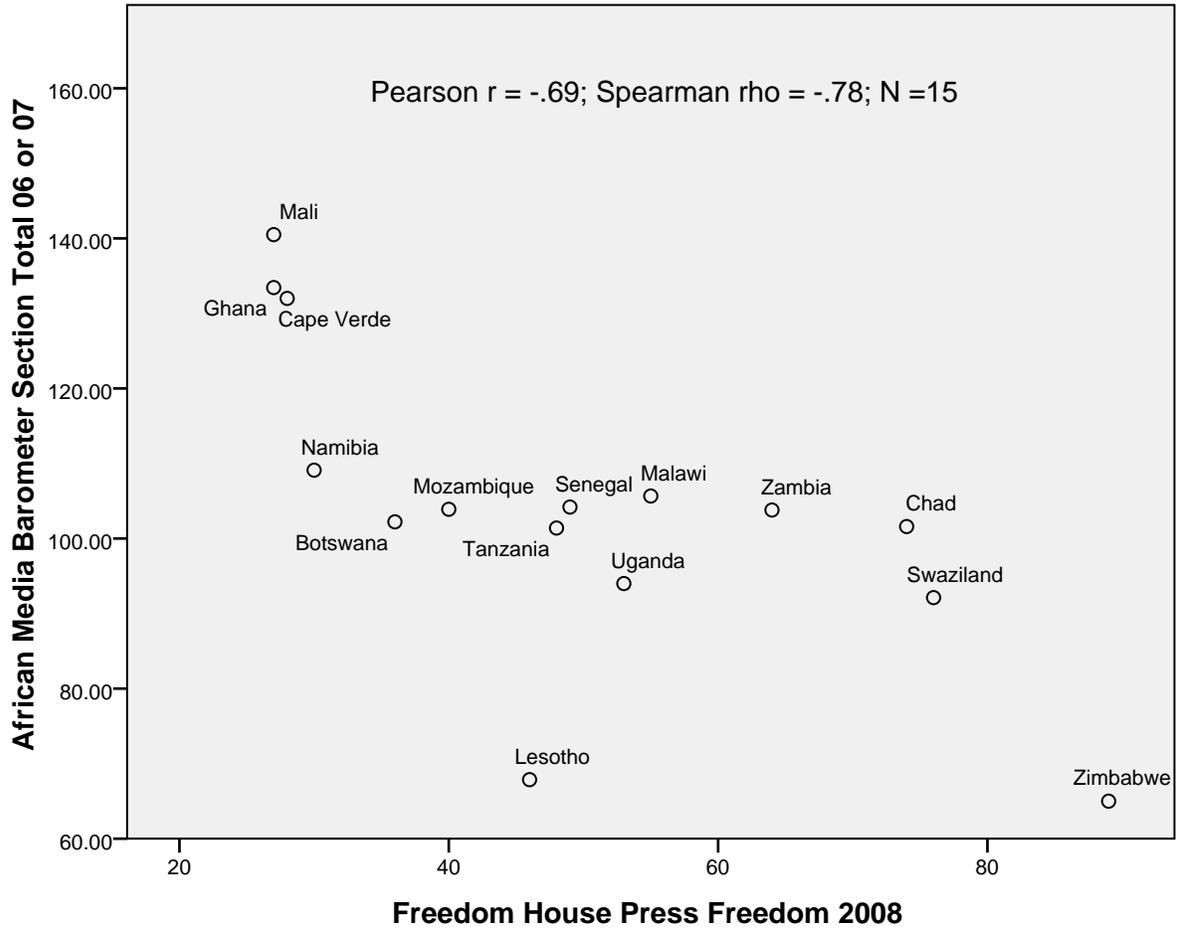


Chart 6. African Media Barometer and IREX

