

Understanding the Link
Between Public Confidence in the Media and Media Freedom

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the relationship between elites and public assessments of the media using a unique data source, the Gallup World Poll. The Gallup World Poll is conducted in more than 150 countries worldwide, representing more than 99% of the world's population. In 2010, Gallup asked adults in 111 countries if the media in their country had a lot of freedom, or not, and whether they had confidence in the quality and integrity of the media in their country. The media freedom was new to the 2010 surveys, while the confidence measure has been used back through 2005. The data show that elites and the public largely agree on their assessment of media freedom. Further analysis shows that public assessment of media freedom is different from the public's sense of confidence in the media.

Keywords: Press Freedom, Media Freedom, Confidence in the Media

Recent research has explored the relationship between elite assessments of media freedom at the level of the nation state and citizen assessments of the media as reflected in public opinion polls. The research has found general correspondence between the elite and citizen assessments, but with some important caveats.

The elite evaluations are conducted by organizations such as Freedom House in the U.S. and Reporters Without Borders in France, both of which use their assessments of media systems to support their advocacy work on behalf of the media. Increasingly, media scholars have used these measures as indicants of characteristics of media system.

Two related but separable reasons exist for examining the relationship between the elite assessments of the media and what the public at large believes to be true about those media. The first is to question whether the elite evaluators might have gotten it wrong when they classified the media of a given country, at least from the perspective of the citizenry. The second is that, even if the elite evaluators have gotten it right and have correctly identified the level of constraints on the press in a country, measures of public confidence and trust in the media might be important additional characteristics that should be reflected in a measure of media system characteristics. A measure that includes both elite and public assessments might be better than one measure based on either alone.

This paper examines the relationship between elites and public assessments of the media using a unique data source, the Gallup World Poll. The Gallup World Poll is conducted in more than 150 countries worldwide, representing more than 99% of the world's population. In 2010, Gallup asked adults in 111 countries if the media in their country had a lot of freedom, or not,

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and whether they had confidence in the quality and integrity of the media in their country. The media freedom was new to the 2010 surveys, while the confidence measure has been used back through 2005.

Preliminary analysis using Gallup data from a nonprobabilistic subsample of 48 countries revealed modest correlations of the citizen measure of media freedom- with press freedom measures from Reports Without Borders and Freedom House. Confidence in the media, however, showed little-to-no relationship with elite assessments of media freedom.

Analysis of data from the Gallup World Poll in 2007 through 2009, however, showed that confidence in the media is negatively correlated with the elite measures of media freedom in those countries when citizens report little fear of political expression but positively correlated with the elite measures of media freedom in those countries where citizens are highly fearful of expressing their political views.

This paper extends that earlier work by looking within the 2010 dataset at the relationship between elite assessments of the media and public assessments of both media freedom and public confidence in the media. The analysis also explores further the role of fear of political expression in explaining these relationships.

Media Freedom

The concept of media freedom has a long history both in the political science and in 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

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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) and 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

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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.

Empirical Links for Media 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. Research in this early tradition is reviewed elsewhere (Becker, English & Vlad, 2010).

Much of the more recent research has relied on measures of press freedom created by Freedom House, a nongovernmental organization based in Washington and New York.

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Gunaratne (2002) 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.

Leeson (2008) used data from candidate states for the European Union from eastern and central Europe to examine the relationship between the media system and political knowledge. They found that countries with higher levels of press freedom had higher levels of political

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knowledge among its citizens, higher rates of political participation, and higher voter turnout.

They used the Freedom House measures to in their analysis.

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 had governance problems. Press freedom also was positively correlated with low levels of military expenditures.

Finkel, Perez-Liñam, Seligson 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.

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Whitten-Woodring (2009), using the Van Belle (1997) measures, found that media freedom was associated negatively with government respect for human rights in the most autocratic states while media freedom is positively related to respect for human rights only in the most democratic regimes.

Dutta and Roy (2009) used the Freedom House press freedom measures from 1994 to 2003 as a dependent variable to test whether a higher inflow of foreign direct investment in a country has an effect on its media sector. They found that foreign direct investment strengthens a large number of institutions, including the media.

Odugbemi and Norris (2010) find that the relationship between press freedom as measured by Freedom House and good governance is dependent on the type of political regime, measured by the separate Freedom House measure of Freedom in the World. In free countries, press freedom is positively correlated with good governance, but in party free countries it is not, and press freedom and good governance are only slightly correlated in nondemocratic states. Press freedom and spending on public health are slightly positively correlated in free states and uncorrelated in others.

Sobel, Dutta and Roy (2010) used the Freedom House Press Freedom measures from 1995 to 2003 examine whether press freedom spreads across borders. They conclude that press freedom does, in fact, have significant spillover effects on media reform in neighboring countries.

Van de Vliert (2011) created an index of cultural press repression using the Freedom House and similar measures by nongovernmental organization Reporters without Borders measures in combination with a fear of censorship item from a survey of national partner

organizations of the World Economic Forum. He found that press freedom is most prevalent in rich countries, while repression is most common in poor countries.

Tran, Mahmood, Du and Khrapavitski (2011), use both the Freedom House and Reporters without Borders measures of press freedom to examine the relationship between media freedom and development among 65 countries. They find contradictory results in some of their analyses, but both indices show a positive relationship between press freedom and good governance.

Confidence in the Institutions

Public support for political institutions has been a central concern in the political science literature. Listhaug and Wiberg (1995) took the position that confidence in institutions is a middle-range indicator of support for or acceptance of the legitimacy of the political system. Norris (1999) saw confidence in institutions as one of the dimensions of a broader concept of political support. Norris and Inglehart (2010) talked of confidence in political institutions as an indicator of regime support.

Listhaug and Wiberg (1995) differentiate between confidence in government institutions and confidence in private institutions. Examples of the former are the armed forces, the educational system, the legal system, the police, parliament and the civil service. Examples of non-governmental institutions are the church, trade unions, major companies and the press. Using survey data from the European Value Systems Study Group, which included measures of each of these institutions, they found empirical support via factor analysis for this distinction.

Elite Measures of Media Freedom

As this review indicates, the best known and most widely used measure of the press freedom is that of Freedom House (Becker, Vlad & Nusser, 2007). 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 194 countries and 14 related or disputed territories (Freedom House, 2011). 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 2010 covered 196 countries and territories (Freedom House, 2010).

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 2010, the research and ratings process involved several hundred analysts and senior-level advisers (Freedom House, 2010). 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 meetings 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.

Reporters without Borders (RWB) has released annually since 2002 a Worldwide Press Freedom (RWB, 2002) report and ranking of individual nations. Based in Paris, RWB 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 (2008) bases the score for each country on responses of its selected panelists 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

Becker and Vlad (2010) used two different surveys to look at the relationship between press freedom as measured by the elite evaluators and press freedom as measured by survey respondents. 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. 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. 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 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 slight at best. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was .31, while the Spearman rho was .23. 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 relationship between the WorldPublicOpinion.Org measure of press freedom from the point of view of the citizens and the Freedom House measure 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 produced a similar .70 (Pearson) and .71 (Spearman).

Becker and Vlad (2010) speculated that the different findings were the result of different measurement of public assessments of press freedom. The BBC World Service Poll used an anchored scale and the WorldPublicOpinion.Org measure used simple verbal descriptions. The BBC question also was 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.

English (2007), Becker and Vlad (2009), and Becker, Vlad and English (2010) have examined the relationship between confidence in the media and press freedom using data from the Gallup World Poll. At the zero-order, the researchers found that there is no relationship between the two concepts. Based on analyses of surveys conducted in approximately 100 countries in each of three years, however, the research found that public beliefs about the openness of the society mask a real relationship between confidence in the media and press freedom. In 2007, 2008 and 2009, confidence in the media relative to confidence in other

institutions in society was found to be negatively associated with press freedom when the society is open. When the society is closed, however, confidence in the media relative to confidence in other institutions actually is positively related to press freedom.

Expectations

The research on the relationships between elite measures of media freedom and public assessments as reflected in public opinion has been conducted with limited samples. The need for a more robust test of this relationship is obvious. The expectation is that the relationship from the small samples will replicate with a larger one.

In addition, nothing is known about how public assessments of media freedom correlate with other assessments, such as confidence in the media. The expectation is of a positive relationship, though the existing work showing a complex relationship between media freedom as measured by elites assessments and public confidence in the media suggests that these two public opinion measures also might not be simply correlated.

Methodology

Gallup regularly surveys adult residents in more than 150 countries and areas, representing more than 98% of the world's adult population. In most cases, randomly selected, nationally representative samples of the entire civilian, non-institutionalized, age 15 and older population of each country are used. Exceptions include areas where the safety of interviewing staff is threatened, scarcely populated islands in some countries, and areas that interviewers can reach only by foot, animal, or small boat. Gallup typically surveys 1,000 individuals in each country, with at least 2,000 surveys being conducted in large countries like China, India and Russia.

Telephone surveys are used in countries where telephone coverage represents at least 80% of the population or is the customary survey methodology. In Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in the developing world, including much of Latin America, the former Soviet Union countries, nearly all of Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, an area frame design is used for face-to-face interviewing.

Once collected, the data set goes through a rigorous quality assurance process before being publicly released. After review by the regional directors, Gallup scientists perform additional validity reviews. The data are centrally aggregated and cleaned, ensuring correct variable codes and labels are applied. The data are then reviewed in detail for logical consistency and trends over time. Once the data are cleaned, weighted, and vetted, the final step is to calculate approximate study design effect and margin of error.

Gallup is entirely responsible for the management, design, and control of the Gallup World Poll (GWP) and is not associated with any political orientation, party, or advocacy group and does not accept partisan entities as clients. Any individual, institution, or governmental agency may access the Gallup World Poll regardless of nationality.

In each country, a standard set of core questions is fielded in each of the major languages of the respective country. In 2010 a new idea was added to the Core: “Do the media in this country have a lot of freedom, or not?” Data from 111 countries are available and used in this analysis. Unfortunately, this item was not approved for fielding in four countries where Gallup interviewed in 2010: Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

Findings

As a first step in the analysis, an aggregate data file was created for the 111 countries from the Gallup World Poll where responses to the media freedom were collected and for which press freedom scores either by Freedom House or Reporters without Borders existed. The countries were scored according to the percentage of respondents who indicated that the media in their country were free. The Freedom House and Reporters without Borders scores were next added to this data file.

The Freedom House and Reporters without Borders measures for 2008 through 2010 were used to examine the possibility of a lag between the elite measure and public assessment. These data are shown in Table 1. The Freedom House and Reporter Without Borders measures are reverse coded. The simple correlation (Pearson) between press freedom as measured by Freedom House in 2010 and the aggregated public opinion data for the 111 countries for whom the citizen evaluation was available was .74. The lagged data for one and two years earlier are nearly the same. The correlation between the Reporters Without Borders measure in 2010 of press freedom and the public opinion measure was .59. The lagged data are fundamentally the same.

These two relationships are shown in the scatterplots in Charts 1 and 2, beginning with the weaker relationship for the Reporters Without Borders measures. The data points are labeled. The plots give a clear picture of stronger relationship for the Freedom House measures.

Across the whole sample of countries, the belief that the media have a lot of freedom is correlated only mildly with confidence in the media, as Table 2 shows. The correlation coefficient is .21. The belief that the media are free is correlated slightly more strongly with

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confidence in other institutions, but in no case is the correlation strong. The belief that the media are free is unrelated to a measure of approval of the national leadership.

Confidence in the media, in contrast, is more strongly correlated with confidence in the national government, financial institutions and religious organizations, as shown in Table 3. The weakest correlation is with confidence in the judiciary.

As in the past, the elite evaluations of media freedom are only slightly correlated with confidence in the media in 2010 (not shown in the tables). The relationship, however, is negative rather than positive. The correlation between confidence in the media and the Freedom House measure of press freedom is $-.18$, while the correlation between confidence in the media and the Reporters Without Borders measure of press freedom is $-.17$.

As a visual aid, the relationship between press freedom as measured by Freedom House and public opinion regarding press freedom is replotted in Chart 3, with lines drawn to isolate extreme cases. Thirteen countries fall above the line. These are countries, such as China and Vietnam, in which the public believes the media are considerably more free than do the elite evaluators. Seven cases fall below the line. These are countries, such as Lithuania, where the public believes the media are less free than do the evaluators.

In Table 4, these two clusters of countries are compared in terms of the actual Freedom House score in 2010. As the chart itself indicated, the scores are quite variable. Some of the countries in the top group have relatively high (negative) Press Freedom scores, and some have considerably lower (better) scores. And the same is true in the bottom cluster.

Next, the mean scores for the Freedom House measure across the 1998-2010 period was calculated, as well as the standard deviations. Again, there is little that differentiates the

countries in the top cluster from those in the bottom. And the same is true in terms of minimum and maximum scores during the period. Finally, the range of scores is shown, again without any evidence of differences.

In sum, the countries where the public deviates from the elite evaluators in terms of either higher or lower public ratings are not different from one another in terms of characteristics of the elite press freedom measures. The clusters do not differ in terms of final scores or variability in scores.

In Table 5, these two clusters of countries are compared again, this time in terms of the confidence measures. It is clear that those countries in which the public overestimates the level of press freedom relative to what the professional evaluators say is the case are those with higher levels of confidence in the media. Conversely, those countries in which the public underestimates the level of press freedom, according to the evaluators, are those in which there is low levels of confidence in the media.

But it also is the case that these countries differ in terms of confidence measures for other institutions in society. Across the board, those countries in which the public is more positive about media freedom than are the elite evaluators are those in which public institutions are evaluated highly, and those countries in which the public is deviant low relative to the elite evaluators are countries in which confidence in key institutions is low.

The public, it seems, lumps institutions together. And this lumping extends to the sense that the media are free. The data suggest there is an overall confidence assessment that people bring to the questions posed, and this has great impact on how all the measures behave.

Conclusions

Critics have raised doubts in the past about the reliability and validity of the press freedom produced by Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders. Becker, Vlad & Nusser, (2007) demonstrated the across time reliability of these measures, the internal consistency of the components of the Freedom House measure, and the relationship between the Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders measures. They also showed 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.

One additional way to validate these experts evaluations is to compare them with citizen assessments of their media systems. The findings of this paper show that the elite evaluations of press freedom are correlated with the evaluations of the media system by the general public, as reflected in the public opinion data. The relationship is stronger for the Freedom House measure than for the Reporters without Borders measure. If the standard is the public opinion data, the Freedom House measure is superior.

The deviant cases here are informative. They suggest that evaluations of media freedom by the public are greatly influenced by an overall mood in the country or an overall assessment of institutional performance. This is something in need of further exploration.

The suggestion at present, however, is that something is gained both by knowing what the elite evaluators think of the media and what the general public believes. A country like Vietnam, for example, which gets low scores from evaluators but not from the general public, might rightly be considered to have a more free media system than a country, such as Russia, that scores poorly on both. At least that is a possibility worth considering.

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The measure of the public view of press freedom is not the same as a measure of confidence in the media. The two are only slightly correlated. Public assessment of press freedom also is only slightly related to confidence in other institutions. In contrast, confidence in the media is moderately correlated with confidence in other institutions and with approval of the country's leadership. If the elite measures of press freedom are used rather than the public assessments, the relationship between confidence and press freedom is slight and negative.

The simplest conclusion is that the public assessment of media freedom is not the same as the public statement of confidence in the media.

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Chart 1
Public Assessment of Media Freedom by Reporters Without Borders Assessment

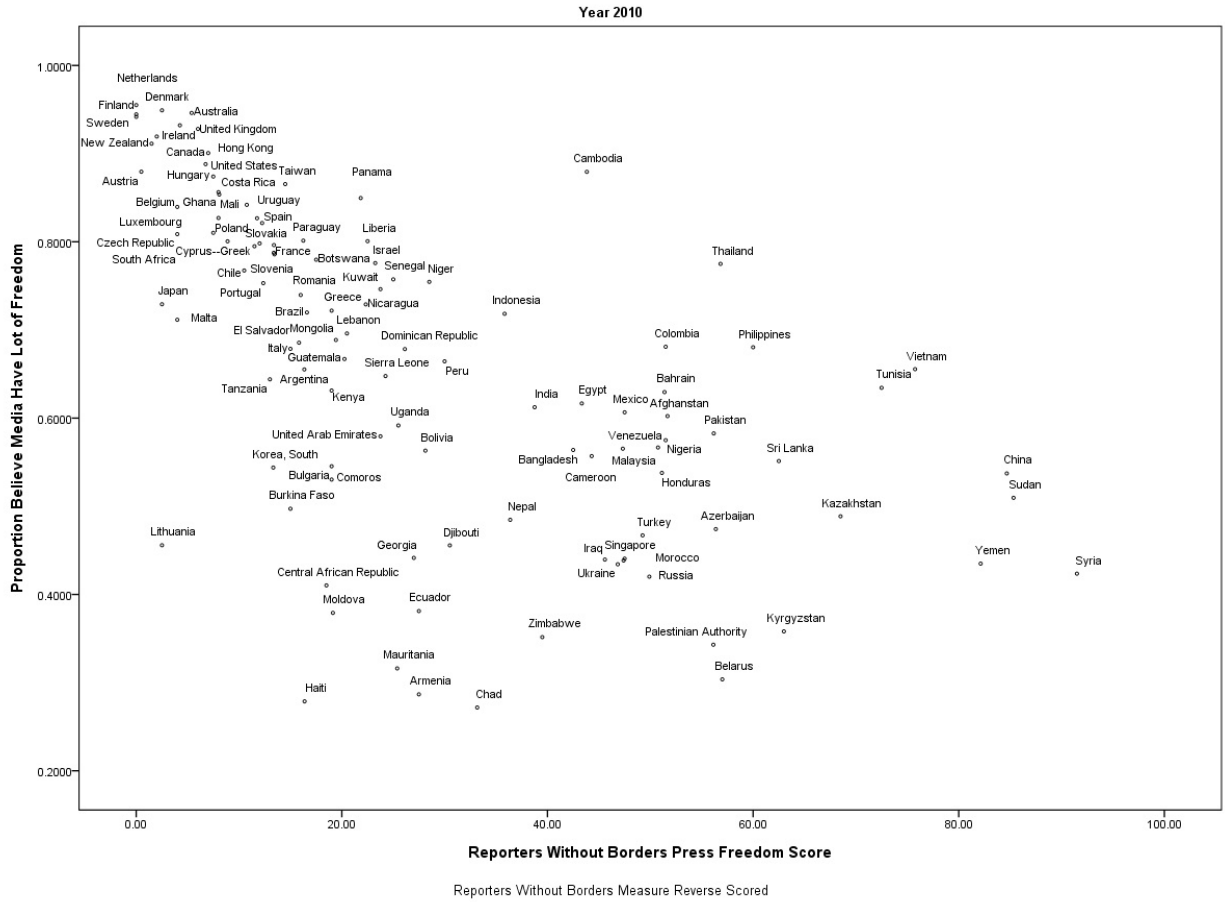


Chart 2
Public Assessment of Media Freedom by Freedom House Assessment

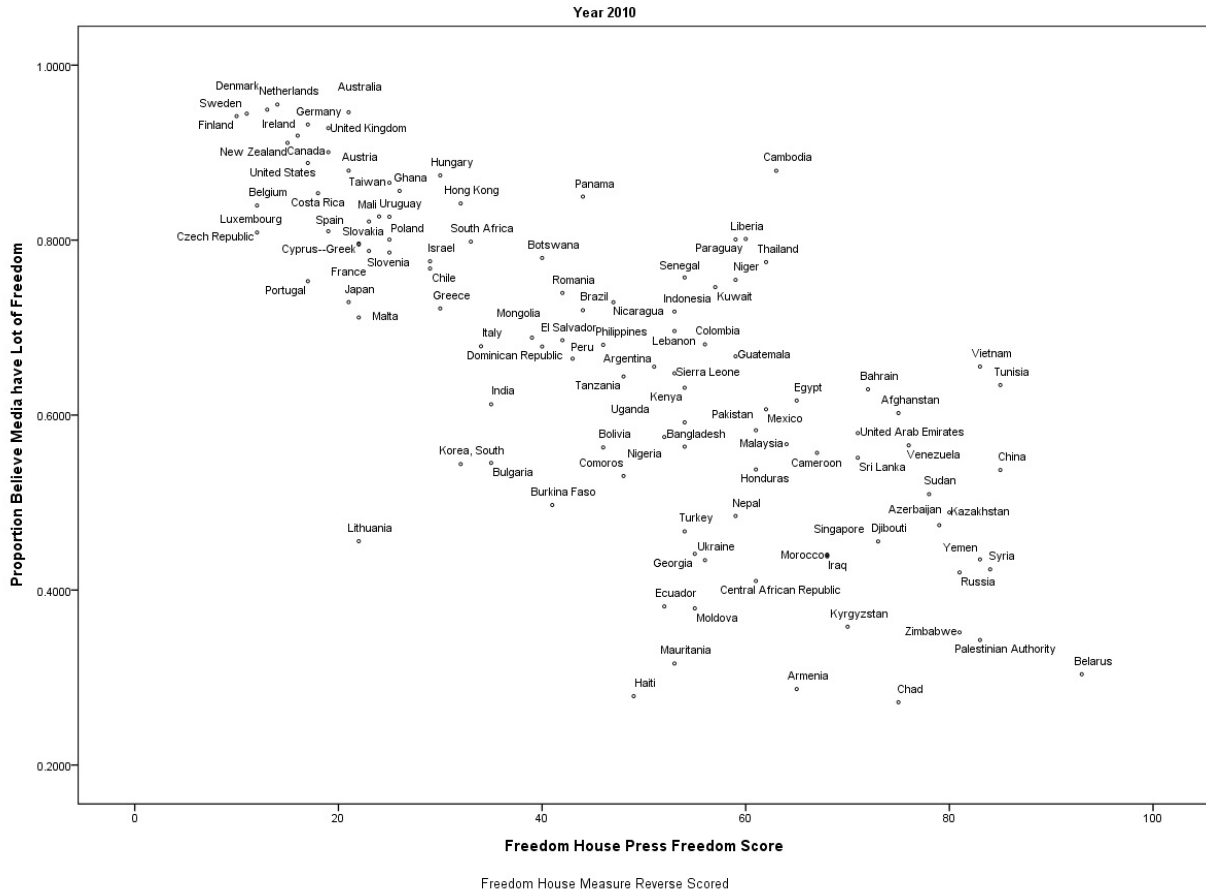


Table 1. Correlations Between Elite and Public Measures of Media Freedom

		Media have a lot of Freedom
Freedom House 2008	Pearson Correlation	-.75**
	N	110
Freedom House 2009	Pearson Correlation	-.74**
	N	110
Freedom House 2010	Pearson Correlation	-.74**
	N	110
Reporters sans Frontieres 2008	Pearson Correlation	-.58**
	N	109
Reporters sans Frontieres Score 2009	Pearson Correlation	-.62**
	N	110
Reporters sans Frontieres Score 2010	Pearson Correlation	-.59**
	N	110

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 2. Correlation of Media Freedom, Confidence Measures, Approval of National Leadership

		Media have a lot of Freedom
Confidence in the Media	Pearson Correlation	0.21
	N	110
Confidence in Military	Pearson Correlation	0.28
	N	103
Confidence in Judicial System	Pearson Correlation	0.3
	N	109
Confidence in National Government	Pearson Correlation	0.11
	N	102
Confidence in Financial Institutions	Pearson Correlation	0.11
	N	111
Confidence in Religious Organizations	Pearson Correlation	-0.31
	N	104
Country's Leadership Approval	Pearson Correlation	0.04
	N	101

Table 3. Correlations Among Confidence Measures

Confidence In		The Media	Military	Judicial System	National Government	Financial Institutions	Religious Organizations
The Media	Pearson r	1					
	N	113					
Military	Pearson r	0.27	1				
	N	104	104				
Judicial System	Pearson r	0.38	0.65	1			
	N	110	103	112			
National Government	Pearson r	0.52	0.54	0.69	1		
	N	102	102	101	102		
Financial Institutions	Pearson r	0.49	0.35	0.55	0.59	1	
	N	113	104	112	102	115	
Religious Organizations	Pearson r	0.49	0.22	0.19	0.37	0.46	1
	N	106	103	105	102	107	107

Table 4. Freedom House Press Freedom Scores for Deviant Countries

<i>Country Above</i>	Freedom House 2010	Freedom House Mean 1998-2010	Freedom House SD 1998-2010	Freedom House MIN 1998-2010	Freedom House MAX 1998-2010	Freedom House Range 1998-2010
Afghanistan	75	77.8	10.9	68	100	32
Bahrain	72	71.6	2.2	68	75	7
Cambodia	63	61.9	2.4	58	68	10
China	85	82.2	2.1	80	85	5
Kuwait	57	53.2	4.2	45	58	13
Liberia	59	68.2	6.3	59	79	20
Niger	59	59.3	5.9	49	68	19
Panama	44	38.8	6.7	30	45	15
Paraguay	60	55.4	4.3	47	60	13
Senegal	54	42.6	8.4	33	57	24
Thailand	62	44.5	12.9	29	62	33
Tunisia	85	79.8	4.1	73	85	12
Vietnam	83	80.0	3.6	71	83	12
<i>Below</i>						
Armenia	65	62.8	3.8	56	68	12
Ecuador	52	42.6	3.5	40	52	12
Haiti	49	61.9	10.1	49	79	30
Lithuania	22	18.9	1.4	18	22	4
Mauritania	53	60.8	5.6	53	71	18
Moldova	55	61.7	4.1	55	67	12
South Korea	32	29.3	1.4	27	32	5

Table 5. Confidence Mean Scores For Deviant Countries

Country	Confidence						National Leadership Approval
	Media	Military	Judiciary	Nat. Govt.	Finance	Religion	
<i>Above</i>							
Afghanistan	0.59	0.55	0.20	0.30	0.55	0.77	0.33
Bahrain	0.61		0.63		0.63		
Cambodia	0.69	0.84	0.54	0.90	0.85	0.47	0.93
China	0.55		0.62		0.69		
Kuwait	0.73		0.77		0.76		
Liberia	0.60	0.65	0.35	0.54	0.67	0.87	0.66
Niger	0.70	0.87	0.73	0.78	0.60	0.95	0.88
Panama	0.59	0.46	0.33	0.54	0.54	0.68	0.59
Paraguay	0.72	0.52	0.32	0.48	0.65	0.81	0.46
Senegal	0.55	0.86	0.53	0.29	0.69	0.95	0.35
Thailand	0.66	0.86	0.77	0.68	0.85	0.90	0.72
Tunisia	0.64	0.88		0.90	0.63	0.86	0.75
Vietnam	0.57	0.86	0.80	0.85	0.70	0.63	0.82
Mean	0.63	0.74	0.46	0.63	0.68	0.79	0.65
<i>Below</i>							
Armenia	0.33	0.82	0.34	0.36	0.49	0.65	0.47
Ecuador	0.37	0.49	0.21	0.41	0.38	0.67	0.49
Haiti	0.25	0.40	0.18	0.16	0.29	0.57	0.11
Lithuania	0.48	0.58	0.16	0.11	0.25	0.56	0.14
Mauritania	0.33	0.56	0.46	0.49	0.57	0.85	0.60
Moldova	0.40	0.45	0.33	0.27	0.43	0.74	0.32
South Korea	0.22	0.53	0.32	0.32	0.64	0.42	0.40
Mean	0.34	0.55	0.29	0.30	0.43	0.64	0.36