

ABSTRACTS

Whitten-Woodring, Jenifer (2009) “Watchdog or Lapdog? Media Freedom, Regime Type and Government Respect for Human Rights” *International Studies Quarterly*.

A main justification for press freedom is that free media will act as a watchdog over the government. While we would expect democracies to have free media and autocracies to have government-controlled media, some democracies have government-controlled media, and some autocracies have free media. How this mismatch between regime type and media system influences government behavior is a puzzle worth exploring. One of the most widely criticized government behaviors is the violation of physical integrity rights. The question posed here is, how does media freedom affect government respect for these rights? In this paper, I theorize that the relationship between media freedom and government respect for human rights differs, depending on the presence of democratic institutions. The paper’s findings support my premise. Specifically, *the influence of media freedom on government respect for human rights is negative for the most autocratic regimes and positive for only the most democratic regimes.*

Does Promoting Media Freedom Promote Human Security for Women? Rethinking the Assumptions of USAID

For more than 200 years we have assumed that independent media will benefit society. Evidence of this assumption can be found in United States foreign policy: the promotion of media freedom in fragile and developing countries remains one of the primary goals of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The rationale is that if people have access to more information, especially information about the government, they will be able to hold government accountable and this in turn will promote peace, stability and human security. Yet, there is evidence that in an autocracy, media freedom is associated with lower government respect for

some human rights. This study focuses on the effect of independent media on women's human security, particularly social, political and economic rights. If independent news media are truly able and willing to provide a voice to the voiceless, it stands to reason that by drawing attention to the plight of marginalized women, the media might be able to make a difference. I posit that the effect of media freedom on government respect for women's social, economic and political rights varies depending on the presence or absence of democratic characteristics which make government vulnerable to public opinion. I test my hypotheses across countries and over time and then consider specific cases where USAID has promoted media freedom.

A Formal Model of the Relationship among Media, Regime Type and Government Respect for Physical Integrity Rights (with Patrick James)

As we explore the past and anticipate the future in regards to human rights, it is important to consider the momentous changes in communication in general and the media in particular. The advent of new media has dramatically increased citizens' access to information and decreased governments' ability to control the flow of communication. Although human rights NGOs have advocated that access to free news media would improve government respect for human rights, recent empirical studies have shown that this is not always the case. This model includes five equations and focuses on the impact of interaction between the news media and the government on government respect for physical integrity rights. The first equation specifies the influences on the news media's coverage of government respect for physical integrity rights. The second equation represents the public reaction to such coverage. Here access to news media via traditional and new media is an important factor. The third equation represents the government's reaction, whether to reform or not reform. The fourth equation specifies what influences the likelihood that the media will play a watchdog role over government respect for physical

integrity rights. The fifth equation represents government respect for physical integrity rights.

We posit that the ability of the government to control access to information and the level of political competition have substantial effects on government respect for physical integrity rights because these factors determine the degree to which the government is vulnerable to public pressures.

Global Warming Heats Up: Climate Change in the News Media and U.S. Environmental Foreign Policy (with Amy Below)

Many scholars agree that domestic factors affect a nation's foreign policy. What about the particular role of media in shaping foreign policy? This paper considers the effect that news coverage of environmental issues has on U.S. environmental foreign policy, specifically, global climate change. It is hypothesized that news coverage of environmental issues has an indirect affect, via its role in shaping public opinion. We further hypothesize that general coverage of environmental issues is not sufficient because, by themselves, general environmental news stories are often interpreted as abstract and distant and thus less likely to noticeably affect public concern for specific environmental issues. However, when the media covers extreme weather events and draws a connection to climate change for the public, the issue gains the salience necessary to raise public concern about the issue which in turn encourages, and often pressures, the government to address the problem. We test these hypotheses with a case study of global warming coverage in the New York Times and two statistical analyses of the effect of news coverage and extreme weather events on congressional attention to global warming, the first a broad analysis for the years 1980 to 2007 and the second a more detailed analysis for the years 1975 to 1989.

Holding the Sacred Accountable: the Effect of Government Involvement in Religion on Media Freedom (with Nukhet Sandal)

One of the primary roles of an independent news media is to hold government accountable, but what if government is accountable to a higher authority? How does government involvement in religion affect media freedom? This study investigates the effect of official state support for religious ideology on media freedom. Previous empirical studies have shown authoritarian regimes may tolerate free media in order to remain informed about lower level bureaucratic performance and potential rebellion, but we hypothesize that states with greater involvement in religion are more likely to control news media because freedom of expression may be seen as a threat to the sacred status of religion. We test this hypothesis across countries from 1990 to 2004.

The Fabled Fourth Estate: Media Freedom, Democracy and Human Rights

For more than a century philosophers, politicians, human rights advocates and ordinary people have called for media freedom. Indeed, spreading media freedom is widely seen as a key to promoting development, democracy and human rights. In 2006 alone, an estimated \$242 million was spent on media assistance programs (CIMA 2008). The idea is that independent media will keep government in line and make life better for citizens. These are grand expectations. Many journalists have risked their lives and some have died striving to fulfill them. Yet, really, little is known as to whether free media are up to the task. That then is the focus of this study: under what conditions are the media able to improve human rights?

Chapter One: Introduction--The Call for Media Freedom around the World

This introductory chapter provides an overview of the state of media freedom around the world, how media freedom has become an increasingly popular cause, and why those working to promote democracy, development and human rights believe there is much to gain in spreading media freedom.

Chapter Two: Conceptualizing Media Freedom and Democracy

It is impossible to analyze the effect of media freedom without at first defining it. In Chapter 2, I consider the legal, economic, and political impediments to media independence and then propose a minimum definition of media freedom, similar to that developed by Van Belle (1997), in which free media is viewed as media that exists within a structural environment that allows journalists to criticize the government about issues that could turn the people against the government. I argue that in addition to the legal, economic and political environments, it is also important to

consider the professional environment, because it is the professional environment that shapes journalistic agency and this is what largely determines whether journalists perform a watchdog role. There are countries like the United States, which are comparatively free, where the journalists often fail to act independently, and then there are countries like Sri Lanka, which in recent years has certainly not been free, where journalists repeatedly risk their lives to bring their audience critical information about the government. Journalistic agency matters.

Chapter Three: A Conditional Theory of the Effect of Media Freedom on Protest and Government Respect for Human Rights

Regime type matters too. In Chapter 3, I present a conditional theory of the effect of media freedom on protest and government respect for human rights. Specifically, I hypothesize that the effect of media freedom varies depending on the presence or absence of democratic characteristics because these determine the vulnerability of government to public opinion. Much of what we know about the effect of free media comes from studies of how they function in democracies. Certainly, leaders who are constrained by political competition, political participation and whose decision making power is limited are more likely to react benevolently to media criticism. I argue that leaders who are not restrained by these democratic characteristics are likely to respond quite differently. Similarly, citizens who live in democracies have many institutional outlets with which to push for government reform; those who live in autocracies do not. Therefore, I propose that critical news coverage is likely to promote protest in non-democracies and that leaders in these settings are likely to use repression to stifle dissent. In this chapter I also outline the research design and data used for this study.

Chapter Four: The Role of Media in the Repression-Protest Nexus

This chapter focuses on the role of the media in the repression-protest nexus. Here I test the hypothesis that the effect of media freedom on protest varies, depending on autocracy/democracy. Both the statistical analyses (which include 121 countries from 1981 to 1995) and the brief case study of Uruguay from 1980-1984, provide some support for this hypothesis. In particular, the results of the statistical analyses indicate that media freedom was associated with an increased predicted probability of a general strike in autocracies, but not in democracies. The exploration of the events in Uruguay during the first half of the 1980s puts these findings in context. During this time the military junta first relaxed its control of the media, then as the opposition gained momentum, the generals sought to reign in the media as a cycle of protest and repression ensued. However, in the long term, Uruguay was able to break free from this cycle as it democratized.

Chapter Five: Media Freedom, Autocracy/Democracy and Government Respect for Physical Integrity Rights

In Chapter 5, I present a study of the conditional effect of media freedom on physical integrity rights, the rights to be free from political murder, torture, disappearance and imprisonment. This study tests the hypothesis that the effect of media freedom on physical integrity rights depends on autocracy/democracy using statistical analyses of data from 93 countries from 1981 to 1995, and review events in Mexico and Uganda during the same time period. Overall the findings provide support for the hypothesis of the conditional effect of media freedom. In particular, in

the statistical analyses media freedom has a positive effect only in the most consolidated democracies, it has no significant effect on countries in the middle, and it has a negative effect in the most autocratic countries. Both the cases of Mexico and Uruguay suggest that at least in the short term, media watchdogging can promote dissent which in turn often leads to repression. The long term effects remain unclear. While Mexico became more democratic, Uganda did not.

Chapter Six: Media Freedom, Autocracy/Democracy and Women's Rights

I consider whether the effect of media freedom on physical integrity rights extends to other human rights, specifically women's political, economic and social rights in Chapter 6. To test the hypothesis that the effect of media freedom on women's rights depends on autocracy/democracy, I conducted statistical analyses using data from 67 countries for 1981-1995 and a case study of Burkina Faso for the same time period. Here again, the findings from the statistical analysis indicate that, for the most part, media freedom had a negative effect on women's rights in autocracies and sometimes had a positive effect, but only in the most consolidated democracies. The case of Burkina Faso suggests that improvements in women's economic and social rights tend to lag behind improvements in women's political rights. Interestingly, increased media freedom and political liberalization were associated with improvements in women's political rights and declines in women's social and economic rights. In particular, the initial failure and recent progress in the campaign to eradicate female genital mutilation in Burkina Faso indicates that persistent media exposure can help to change public opinion, but only if there is some element in society that is amenable to that change.

Chapter Seven: Will New Media Make a Difference?

This chapter focuses on the years since the emergence of new media, 1995 to 2009. As use of the Internet, social networks, satellite television and mobile phones become more common, are these new media able to make a difference in how governments treat citizens? Or are bloggers, citizen journalists and mobile phone users subject to the same old tactics of intimidation and threats? The cases of Iran and China suggest that although it is not always possible to silence new media, the same technologies that facilitate new media facilitate their censorship.

Chapter Eight: Journalists on the Frontline without Weapons

In Chapter 8, I review the findings of this study and identify opportunities for future research. Altogether, there is support here for the hypotheses that the effect of media freedom on protest and government respect for human rights depends on autocracy/democracy. In particular these results indicate that while media freedom is associated with improved physical integrity rights in consolidated democracies, it has quite the opposite effect on both physical integrity rights and women's rights in autocracies, and does not have an effect on countries in the middle. Thus, these findings show that media freedom does not have a desirable effect on human rights in exactly the kind of countries that are targeted by many media assistance programs. In fact, foisting media freedom on an autocratic state is like putting journalists on the frontline without weapons. They are trained to report critically about government behavior, but if government is not vulnerable to public opinion, their criticism is far more likely to draw retaliation than it is to bring about reform. Instead, the results of this study suggest that media freedom needs to be

introduced in conjunction with democratic institutions, especially the establishment of laws regarding political participation.