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Research Paper
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Functioning of Government and Freedom of the Press

The effectiveness of government is key to the success of any nation, and so it is important to study what level governments are actually functioning to. Governments which operate openly and are held accountable for their actions are more likely to implement effective policy than governments that are closed and corrupt. In today's world, governments should be held to high standards, and they should be kept in-check by the citizens living within their borders.

Does freedom of the press of the press help increase the functioning of government? By having a more inclusive and open press, governments may be held accountable to actions which are either corrupt or ineffective. Likewise, it's possible that having less freedom of the press may lead to a poorly functioning government—one that takes kickbacks from corrupt individuals or corporations. With no press to monitor them, there is no one checking to make sure they're doing a good job.

In the Journal of Public Economics, Aymo Brunetti and Beatrice Weder examine the relationship between a free media and corruption. In their research, corruption is the dependent variable while the independent variable is freedom of the press. They determine corruption through various factors, including incentives offered by the government to stop corruption, the establishment of a judicial body to review cases, and indirect determinants such as culture (Brunetti and Weder 1803). They measure press freedom using the Freedom House dataset, which indexes and ranks a number of countries based on how free their press is using a

number of factors, such as laws and regulations over the press and economic influences (Brunetti and Weder 1806)

In their introduction, they state, “freedom of speech and a free press are generally considered important human rights and powerful controls against government malfeasance” (Brunetti and Weder 1801). This stresses the relationship between an open and effective government and freedom of the press, and is relevant to my research because functioning of government takes corruption into account. Their findings show that more freedom of the press seems to correlate with less corruption. They state in their conclusion that, “an independent press may represent an important check against corruption” (Brunetti and Weder 1820). This could indicate a direct link between press freedom and the functioning of government.

In the European Journal of Political Economy Sebastian Freille, M. Emranul Haque, and Richard Kneller also examine the relationship between corruption and free press. Their research was conducted in a similar fashion to Brunetti and Weder, in that they also measured corruption as the dependent variable, factoring in a few different causes of corruption, and press freedom as the independent variable, as measured by Freedom House (Freille, Haque, and Kneller 842).

They also found a correlation between freedom of the press and less corruption. In examining their data, they state, “higher levels of press freedom are associated with lower levels of corruption” (Freille, Haque, and Kneller 848). Specifically, their findings suggest that there is a connection between press freedom and *bureaucratic* corruption. Some restrictions on the press, they found, are more likely to lead to higher levels of corruption than others. Specifically, political and economic pressures lead to a higher level of corruption than laws and regulations do (Freille, Haque, and Kneller 848). This data also suggests that there may be a relationship

between functioning of government, which takes corruption into account, and press freedom.

Finally, the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) conducted a study specifically examining the correlation between the effectiveness of government and free press. In their findings, they found a strong correlation between the two variables. However, their findings also found that, “a free press is not systematically associated with a satisfactory perception of State services” (Guseva et al. 81). There were several States which had a free press and an unsatisfactory government, specifically island States. Overall, they find that governments cannot have a good governance rating if they “muzzle” the press, however a free press does not necessarily correlate with good governing (Guseva et al. 89).

I hypothesize that countries with more freedom of the press are more likely to have a higher functioning government. Considering the previous research I’ve examined, which shows high correlation between free press and lower levels of corruption, as well as free press and higher levels of government effectiveness, I believe the data will support my hypothesis. To test this hypothesis, I examined Freedom House’s rankings for both freedom of the press (*fh_press*) and functioning of government (*fh_fog*) compiled in the the Quality of Government Institute’s (QoG) standard dataset. In my analysis, freedom of the press will act as independent variable and functioning of government will act as the dependent variable

Freedom House’s press freedom index is compiled by factoring in various different factors which may influence the level of freedom enjoyed by the press in a State. This includes laws and regulations, political pressures and controls, economic influences, and repressive actions (Teorell 44). By calculating these factors, they are able to determine the relative press freedom that media enjoys in a State. Freedom House’s ranking for the functioning of

government also takes a variety of factors into account in order to calculate a score. Specifically, they examine to what extent the head of a government and the legislative body determine policies of the government, to what extent governments are affected by corruption, if the government is held accountable for its actions, and whether it operates with transparency (Teorell 44).

In order to test my hypothesis, I compiled data from the QoG standard dataset which included 194 countries with both Freedom House ratings for press freedom and government functionality. I then calculated the mean and the average for both set of numbers, as you can see in Appendix A. Using the mean and average, I calculated each variable on a 0 to 1 scale; 0 representing less freedom of the press and worst functioning of government, and 1 representing more freedom of the press and best functioning of government.

For freedom of the press, Freedom House scores countries on a 0-96 scale, with 0 being more freedom. So, if the score was between 43-96, I made it a 0, meaning it had a poor press freedom index. If the score was between 0-42, I ranked it as a 1, meaning the State had more press freedom. These calculations are presented in Appendices B and D as *fh_press_2*. For functioning of the government, Freedom House scores countries on a 0-12 scale, with 0 being the worst functioning of government. If the score was between 0-7, I ranked it as a 0, meaning the government was poorly functioning. If a State was ranked between 8-12, I calculated it as a 1, meaning it had a properly functioning government. These calculations are presented in Appendices B and D as *fh_fog_2*.

I then mapped 194 countries based on the 0 or 1 scale that I created using Freedom House's numbers. You can see my complete results in Appendix D, however I've created a small

chart which helps breakdown the results compiled. Ultimately, the data that I compiled does not support my hypothesis.

		IV: Freedom of the Press		
		Less (0)	More (1)	Total
DV: Functioning of Government	Worst (0)	59	51	110
	%	63%	50%	
	Best (1)	34	50	84
	%	37%	50%	
Total		93	101	194

As you can see, there is no clear correlation between having a free press and having a high functioning of government. In fact, 50% of of the states which enjoy freedom of the press also have a poorly functioning government. This does not support my hypothesis, in which I stated that there was a connection between having a free press and a better functioning government.

Although this data does not support my hypothesis, it seems to indicate a relationship between having less freedom of the press and a poorly functioning government. My calculations show that 63% of States which have less freedom of the press also have a poorly functioning government. So, while having a free press does not guarantee a better functioning government, it does seem to have somewhat of a relationship overall.

In the previous literature that I reviewed, there seems to be a clear correlation between lower levels of corruption and more freedom of the press. So how did I get a different result? The Freedom House index of the functionality of government only partially considers corruption in their computation of overall ranking. They also include what extent the “freely elected head of government” and national legislature determine policies, and whether the government operates openly and is held accountable by the electorate between elections (Teorell 44). My data,

therefore, has more factors than just corruption when considering how effective government is operating. This may account for the variations in my results compared to previous research.

There does not seem to be a correlation between having more freedom of the press and a highly functioning government. Previous research indicates a relationship between high levels of corruption and a “muzzled” press, however the Freedom House index which I used included more variables than just corruption. Although I was unable to support my hypothesis, my data does seem to show some relationship between having less freedom of the press and a poorly functioning government.