Guidelines for using the Global Media Freedom Dataset

When using this dataset and the guidelines below, please cite the following book:

Whitten-Woodring, Jenifer and Douglas A. Van Belle. 2014. *Historical Guide to World Media Freedom: A Country-by-Country Analysis*. Sage/CQ Press.

Data-gathering methods are outlined in Appendix B of the book and are available upon request via email (jenifer_whittenwoodring@uml.edu).

Please let me know if you use this dataset in published paper or book so that we can add it to our list!

From 1948 to 2001, the media environments around the world are sorted into three basic categories:

1—Free—Countries where criticism of government and government officials is a common and normal part of the political dialogue in the mediated public sphere.

2—Imperfectly Free—Countries where social, legal, or economic costs related to the criticism of government or government officials limits public criticism, but investigative journalism and criticism of major policy failings can and does occur.

3/4—Not Free—Countries where it is not possible to safely criticize government or government officials. In the original dataset gathered by Van Belle, there were four categories and category 4 met government directly controlled all news media, whereas category 3 met government exerted indirect control. With the end of the cold war and the massive growth in information technology, distinguishing between state-operated news media and media that are controlled by other means has become something of a pointless exercise. Therefore

while we still have some countries coded as 4, it is better to consider

these in the same category as those coded as 3.

In the dataset, additional codes are used for identifying states that for one reason or another

cannot be effectively coded.

0—No Media—Countries where there is no effective national media.

8—Missing Data—Countries where political or social disruption makes it

impossible to code for the year.

To identify the countries in the dataset, we use the country codes (ccode) from the

Correlates of War project (http://www.correlatesofwar.org/).

Suggestions for using these data: Because both free media and imperfectly free media are

able function freely, the difference between these categories is much smaller than the

difference between imperfectly free media and not free media. Simply put, not free media

cannot function freely. Therefore in studies where media freedom is an independent

variable, where the effects of media freedom are what matters, we recommend using a

dichotomous version of the variable where the categories of free media and imperfectly free

media are collapsed into functionally free media vs. not free media. In studies where media

freedom is a dependent variable, where the causes of media freedom are what matters, we

recommend using the trichotomous version of the variable (free media, imperfectly free

media and not free media) in order to explain these important variations. However, because

the differences between these categories are not equal, it is important to use a model which

accounts for this (ordered logistic regression or multinomial logistic regression are both

possibilities).

Merging the Global Media Freedom Data with the Freedom House Data: We gathered data for all available countries from 1948 to 2001. We stopped at 2001 because this is the point where the Freedom House adopted a far more detailed and transparent process of gathering its data for its Freedom of the Press reports. Freedom House's Freedom of the Press reports assign each country/year a code that theoretically ranges 0 to 100, with 100 being the most restricted. Freedom House also categorizes each media environment as "Free" (for those with a score of 0 to 30), "Partly Free" (for those with a score of 31 to 60) or "Not Free" (for those with a score of 61 to 100). While these categories for the most part correspond with our "Free," "Imperfectly Free," and "Not Free" categories, the borders between the Freedom House categories are less distinct than ours. In the Freedom House, the difference between countries with a score of 60 and 61 is slight, but with our data set the difference between countries that are "imperfectly free" and "not free" is the difference between being able to criticize the government and not being able to criticize the government. Consequently, in some cases the categories do not correspond, and this is usually the case where the Freedom House categories are closest to the scoring borders. In the country profiles and our updated dataset, we have used the Freedom House Freedom of the Press data as a guide, but have also relied on historic accounts and our own coding criteria. Thus our dataset extends through 2012. For future updates, we advise using the Freedom House Freedom of the Press data and categorization as a guide, but suggest careful consideration of countries that are on the borders. According to our coding guidelines, country-years in which the media are not free to criticize the government should be coded as "not free," and country-years where the media are somewhat restricted but are for the most part able to criticize government should be coded as "imperfectly free" and country-years where the media are clearly able to criticize government should be coded as "free."