

A Case Study Analysis of Freedom of Press in Western Countries

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Abstract: *Purpose:* Freedom of press serves a useful rationale in advancing public interest through publishing facts as well as opinions without which a democratic electorate cannot make accountable judgments. It is an integral part of the inner strength and dynamism of democracy. Therefore, the focal aim of this paper is to examine the role of the freedom of the press on government effectiveness using case studies from Western countries. *Methodology:* The study uses a case study approach to analyze the role of the freedom of the press on government effectiveness. The paper uses secondary data from peer-reviewed journals, newspapers, books, among others. Also, the study sourced information from the Pew Research Center. *Findings of Study:* The paper found that press freedom had a positive effect on government effectiveness drawing from case studies of press freedom in Western countries. Additionally, the study realized that institutions and political characteristics are some of the factors that determine the level of government effectiveness. *Implications:* The results of the study indicate that for freedom of the press to be effective, there is a need for regulatory laws to govern the operations of media in Western countries.

Keywords: Press Freedom, Media, Government Effectiveness, Soviet theory, Libertarian Theory, Censorship

1. Introduction

Freedom of Press improves citizens' information accessibility. However, it tends to expose the unethical and illegal activities of politicians and public servants making it virtually impossible to cover up or get away with corrupt behaviour, thus, affecting the reputation of the government (Chowdhury, 2004). Dan (2004) also stipulates that earlier, media newspapers had a direct link with the conventional freedom of speech and press freedom. Nevertheless, over the last decade, press freedom has taken a taciturn all over the globe today. Additionally, Lai (2007) found a direct link between the government and the emergence of popular media. Besides, the relationship between the media and the government has radically changed since the advent of popular media. Moreover, Lee (2004) accentuates that social roles and professional orientation which the popular press have pursued and boosted encompass; maintenance of political neutrality, representation of the public opinion, and monitoring the government. Apart from that, Dan (2004) opines that there has been the implementation of public opinion theories and the restriction orders against civil rights by public opinion in political science, which contributes to the Press Freedom. Dan further noted that the implementation of the theories have also been a root-source of the theoretical basis for the new roles that specific popular press are recently engaged in since it transpired in the 1920s. Thus the effect shows that news gathering and releasing has renowned between the government and the media.

Also, freedom of the Press has established a legal barrier for media dissemination of some information. Besides, when the press became the "fourth estate", freedom of the media naturally became the press freedom which is a kind of freedom of social organization and institution (Dan, 2004). It is therefore ubiquitous that press freedom is the fourth estate of government; but faces much ridicule from several state agencies, institutions and politicians, although it has played a significant role in the development of countries.

Accordingly, the main aim of this paper is to examine the contribution of the freedom of the press on government effectiveness using case studies from Western countries. The study organizes this paper as follows: literature review, followed by the methodology, discussion of findings and conclusions.

2. Literature Review

Jayapalan, (2001: p. 208) ascertains that "struggle for freedom of the press at the international level started in 1893 in Chicago by way of press congress". In July 1893, there was the establishment of the International Union of Press Associations stemming from the international meeting of journalists in Antwerp (Belgium). The Union aimed to "organize collective action between associations of journalists and newspaper in all countries concerning professional matters of common interest. It also aimed to address international conventions and agreements concerning journalism and literary rights and properties. Moreover, during the next forty years after establishment, the Union frequently organized congress to discuss questions like false news and the right of reply to mitigate false news. However, the Union became inactive after 1935. At the second conference of Governmental Press Bureaus and Representatives of the Press discussed the problems of fake news and ways of combatting its spread again. Hence, the resolutions emphasized two main themes; *freedom of the press and need for prompt circulation of adequate and accurate information* (Jayapalan 2001).

Currently, the World Press (2020) indicates that the World Press Freedom Index is an essential advocacy tool appertaining to the principle of emulation between states. The Index ranks 180 countries and regions accordingly with their level of freedom available to journalists. It is a portrayal of the media freedom state of affairs based on the quality of legislative framework and safety of journalists and evaluation of; pluralism, independence of the media, in every country and region. In

180 countries, the degree of freedom available to journalists and regions is examined by Reporters Sans frontiers (RSF) through pooling the responses of experts to a questionnaire. The qualitative analysis is employed together with quantitative data. The evaluation is basically on *abuses and acts of violence against journalists* during the period of conducting the research. The criteria utilized in the questionnaire entail pluralism, media independence, media environment and self-censorship. According to Sanchez, Ballesteros, and Aceituno (2016), legislative framework, transparency and the quality of infrastructure support news production and information.

2.1 The Provision of Equal Rights- a Decisive Indicator of Press Freedom in the Media

Press Freedom involves control or extension of peoples' rights and groups tied to the principle of the public. Press freedom relates to the establishment of a democratic public sphere, which allows citizens to communicate freely and without censorship. In a study conducted by Splichal (2002) on *'The Principles of Publicity and Press Freedom'*, he accentuates that freedom of the press initially was conceived as an extension of two critical principles "*Freedom of thought and Freedom of expression*". These principles were both directed against the secrecy prevailing in feudal society publicly.

Further, in the concluding part of his study, he suggested offering a hand fulfilling Kant's goal of achieving the common good by allowing for common reasoning. These ideas enlightened and shaped the European nation-states and also played a decisive role in enacting principles of the European Union (Klaus, 2009). The notions evolve from freedom of the press, which played a massive role in the development of Western Countries seemed to be deteriorating. For instance, the World Press Index (2019) report ranked the United States of America 48 out of 179 countries in the World. The report also informed that Press Freedom in the United States was deteriorating as compared to Canada. Besides, according to the Washington Post News Agency, it had reported how the President of the US: Donald Trump had slammed CNN and mocked its reporter. Scott (2020) of Washington Post said that "President Trump has long argued that CNN's coverage of him is negative because the organization thinks little of him and his supporters".

2.2 Stages in Press Freedom

There are four stages of reform. The first stage; '*pre-transition stage*', lays the groundwork for subsequent change, meaning it frees previous constrained evolution. The government also signals a greater willingness to tolerate criticism and expressions of an alternative point of view. In the second stage, the '*primary transition stage*' reveals a systematic change within the formally authoritarian regime. Also, it lays statutes on information access, defamation, and ownership. Thus it tends to disrupt the culture of censorship. The next stage is the '*secondary stage*'. During this period, both politicians and journalists participate in training seminars explaining and clarifying the new institutional and legal order. Also, media professionals' development transpires at this stage. Besides, Journalists receive training

in new skills of investigative and responsible journalism. The final stage is the '*late or mature stage*'. This stage resolves legal and institutional questions and establishes educational opportunities for journalists.

2.3 Impact of Press Freedom on Government Effectiveness

The core link amid media freedom and government effectiveness is the governments' fear of being voted out of office. Nevertheless, at times the media wield high power in authoritarian regimes; the media pressure can even be so high that citizens are left supporting political incorporation. Prince and Rozumilowicz (2003) ascertain that the ideal media environment incorporates two media sectors: a *market-led media sector* and a *nonmarket sector*. In the market sector, advertisers are free to present their goods and to target audiences through programs that use fees provided by the promoters (Prince & Rozumilowicz, 2003). Spectators and viewers are also informed and entertained through market time-line.

On the contrary, the *nonmarket sector* provides stability by meeting the needs of non-dominant groups. It also creates a forum in which an everyday discourse emerges, and people are allowed to participate in society actively. These two sectors exist through *legal, institutional, and socio-cultural support*. Thus, the market sector can exist, only if the laws are in place to protect media from government interference.

2.4 Threats to Press Freedom

Factors such as *Countries Political system, Stability, economic development and culture* are threats to the Freedom of Press

Censorship in Press: According to Hasan (2013) censorship is the suppression of citizens' speech. In such instances, the government thoroughly edits and previews contents before publishing. Furthermore, the government also appoints senior editors and the news director to supervise on media content and eliminate materials that are critical of the political leadership. For instance, reportage showed that Physician Li hinted on a possible emergence of COVID-19, but the government censored the information as mere rumours and forced to retract them.

Self-censorship: It occurs when journalists or media organizations make decisions not to investigate specific issues nor to publish or air stories resulting from those investigations. It can happen due to retaliation from political leadership or losing a vital advertiser to situations where the programming and the content are driven entirely by ratings. In the latter case, media organizations may decide to eliminate unpopular, though accurate and essential materials.

Political Instability: Journalists and media organizations either take sides and lose their neutrality or avoid reporting for fear of potentially dangerous political developments.

Economic Harassment: Government officials or big companies manipulate the advertising of state-owned and private organizations to either reward or penalize media

outlets for their favourable or critical attitudes. Manipulation occurs in emerging democracies, where the advertising market is not strong enough to support the increasing number of media outlets.

Media Concentration: It also affects media freedom. Business people who have amassed fortunes during the transition from a state economy to a market-oriented economy have created media groups by establishing or purchasing existing media organizations. In many cases, the media reflect the economic and political agendas of the market-oriented rather than addressing relevant issues for the general public.

Legal Systems: Specific government also uses the legal system to restrict media freedom. These strategies include *defamation and libel suits and jail terms* for media organizations or journalists who publish or broadcast 'inaccurate information' stories that insult the country or put it in risk.

Violence: Violence against journalists has also negatively affected press freedom. Journalists are victims of attacks orchestrated by business people and corrupt government officials as well as drug lords.

2.4.1 Monitoring Press Freedom

In the findings of Repucci (2019), she indicated that press freedom all over the world has sharply declined of which Western countries are no exception. Besides, following the various threats as stipulated above earlier, The Freedom House recommended *four ways* of monitoring press freedom all over the world Repucci (2019):

- 1) Promoting free and independent media through activism
- 2) Monitoring media freedom violations
- 3) Evaluating media systems through index and written reports
- 4) Defending and protecting journalists who work in conflict zones and under a repressive government

2.4.2 Antecedents and Consequences of Press Freedom

Following U.S Agency for International Development report (USAID, 1999) free access to uncensored information is a vital democratic system for *three reasons*:

- 1) It helps citizens to make responsible choices.
- 2) The information ensures that elected officials uphold their oaths and strengthen the rule of law.
- 3) Press freedom contributes to transparent elections, giving access to all candidates.

2.5 Theoretical Types of Media

Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1963) identified *four theoretical types of media*. Historically, the first theory was *authoritarian*, which focused on government control on the press through prior censorship and punishment after publication. The printing press was born in this type of society, and the government sought to create constraints to manage it. The modern variant of the authoritarian model according to Siebert and his colleagues was the *Soviet Communist* type. States following this model also controlled the media and assigned them the responsibility of building a classless, Marxist society. Scholars see the *libertarian*

model as a counterpoint to the authoritarian model. Its primary feature is the absence of government's role, stated in the First Amendment to the U.S Constitution was an embodiment of the *libertarian model*. The fourth model, *social responsibility* holds that the media have obligations to society that accompany their freedom. One of these obligations is to provide meaningful information to members of the community. Given the theoretical types of media, the study uses the Liberal Model to explain press freedom on government effectiveness in Western countries.

Liberal Model

Changes in Europe increase the commercialization of the media system. It also emphasizes information-oriented as opposed to opinion-based content, and the professionalism of journalists' action towards it. Moreover, the change in Europe towards a commercially supported broadcasting system, often at the expense of the public broadcasting system, has been particularly definite. Many countries have lacked the political will to provide the needed support for the non-commercial systems in a world where commercially supported broadcasters deliver a variety of programming. Curran (2005) presents a similar and even more complex picture of media freedom. He distinguishes between a classically liberal perspective of media freedom and the radical democratic view. Curran imposes that the *classical* focus on the freedom of the media to publish or broadcast. In contrast, the *fundamental* focus on how mass communication can mediate in an equitable way, conflict and competition between social groups in society.

3. Methodology

The study uses a case study approach to analyze the role of the freedom of the press on government effectiveness. The paper uses secondary data from peer-reviewed journals, newspapers, books, among others. Also, the study sourced information from the Pew Research Center.

4. Discussion of Findings

In this section, the study discusses press freedom in Western countries. From the findings of the Pew Research Centre, it indicated that the perceived state of freedom of press varies considerably around Western countries. The study presents the statistical excerpts of the findings below: *Figure 1.0* shows people's dissatisfaction with democracy in some selected Western countries. From the chart, it portrays that support for free media is highest in Greece, Sweden, the U.S. and Argentina. Nevertheless, as for other countries, less than half of people say that the media must neither operate with the government nor state censorship in their country.

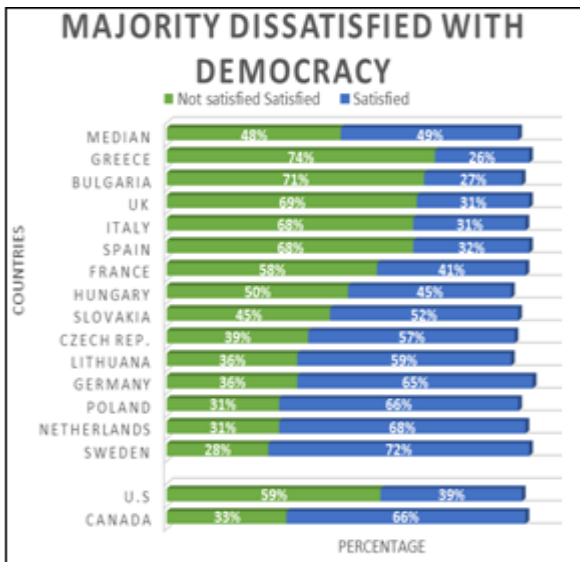


Figure 1: People Dissatisfaction with Democracy

Pew Research Centre (Journalism & Mass Media)

Most studies denote that journalists should be watchdogs, but views on how well they fill this role vary by party, media diet. The chart in the next page illustrates that approximately three out of four U.S. adults (73%) say that journalists must function as watchdogs over elected officials. Nevertheless, the broad consensus shatters when they asked the public how journalists currently perform the role of watchdog. As per the new analysis of data from the Pew Research Centre's election news pathways project, media diet and partisanship strongly factor into these assessments.

Majority of Republicans see today's watchdogs as too aggressive; the implication is that Democrats are far more inclined to approve of their work

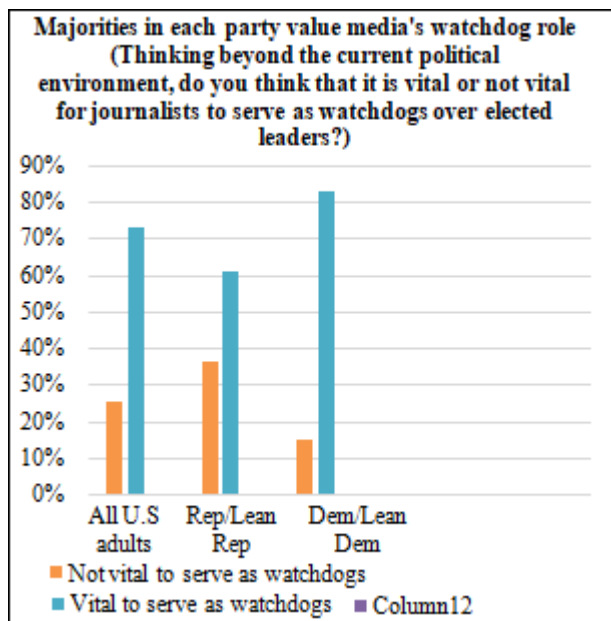


Figure 4: Valuing Media as Watchdogs

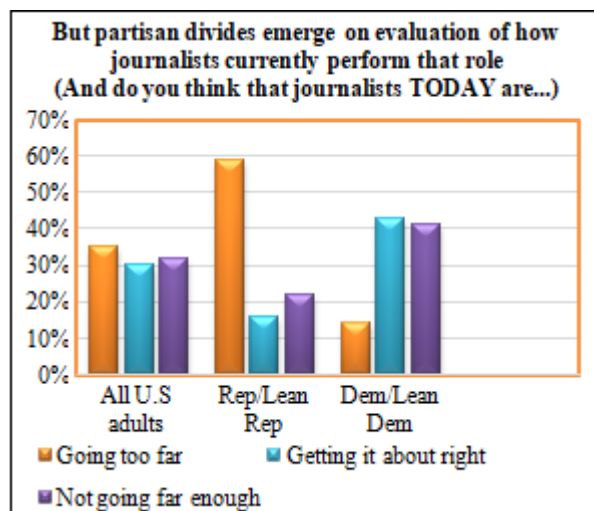


Figure 5: Current Role of Journalists in the US

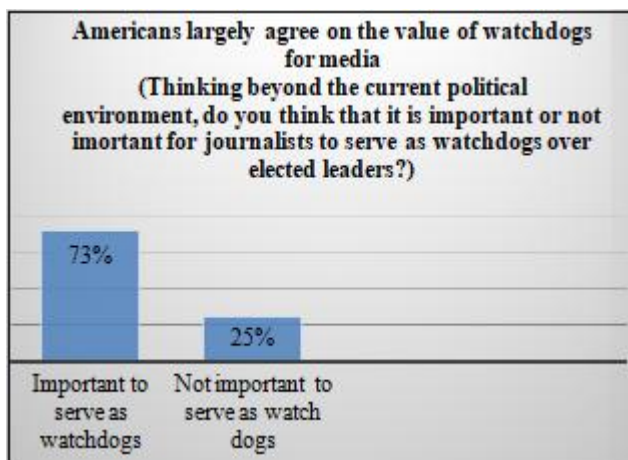


Figure 2: Watchdogs of Media

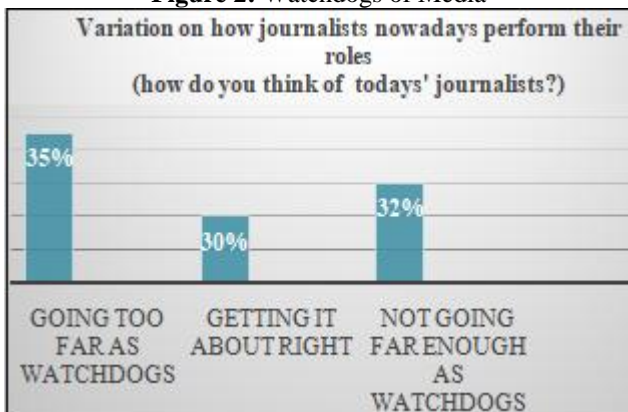


Figure 3: Variations on the roles of Journalists

Majority of both parties support the idea of the watchdog function in this *contextual case study*, but a significant partisan gap exists. According to this analysis grounded on a survey of 12,043 U.S. adults who are members of the Center's American Trends Panel conducted Oct. 29 to Nov. 11, 2019. When being requested to contemplate beyond the present political environment, approximately six-in-ten Republicans and independents that lean to the Republican Party (61%) say journalists must be watchdogs. The comparison is about eight-in-ten Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents (83%). The gap widens further when people have to assess journalists' current performance that transpires throughout the Trump administration. Thus, Republicans are approximately four times as likely as Democrats to declare journalists as going too far in their role as a watchdog (59% vs 14%). Democrats, on the contrary, are more than twice as likely as Republicans to say journalists are getting it about right (43% vs 16%).

Moreover, differences emerged based on the outlets that people name as their primary source for political news. About two-thirds of U.S. adults who cited Fox News as their primary source (66%) said journalists are going too far as watchdogs. However, among those whose fundamental foundation is MSNBC, just 6% said the media is too aggressive.

Before the 2016 election, traditional partisan differences widened dramatically. In 2017, a whopping 44 percentage point gap between Democrats said media criticism of political leaders retains them from doing things they should not (82%), and Republicans felt the same way (38%). Additionally, the Election News Pathways also asked people to think outside of the box and specify if, in general, they feel it is essential or not relevant for journalists to serve as watchdogs over elected officials. A notable partisan gap still emerged, though with lesser number of both parties agreeing that role is essential: 83% of Democrats and Democratic leaders and 61% of Republicans and Republican leaders. Finally, the survey asked people to assess how journalists are fulfilling that function today. Furthermore, here, there are widely divergent partisan evaluations. A majority of Republicans and Republican leaders (59%) articulated that currently, journalists are going too far as watchdogs, with 22% commenting they are not going far enough and the smallest percentage (16%) saying they are getting things right.

On the other hand, 43% of Democrats and Democratic learners say journalists are getting things about right. Around as many (41%) say journalists are not going far enough as watchdogs. Moreover, only 14% of Democrats, say journalists are thirds (66%) of those who name Fox News as their primary source of political news (16% of U.S. adults overall) say journalists are going too far in their duty as watchdogs in the course of Trump presidency. Besides, almost two-in-ten (21%) say they are not going far enough, and 9% think journalists are getting it right.

Assessment of Journalists' Performance as Watchdogs variation on Newscast

The news intake of Democrats and Republicans – that is, the sources they turn to for political and election news, tie into views about the news media's watchdog role. In addition to these watchdog questions, they asked respondents regarding their utilization of 30 different news outlets for political and election news for the previous week. Based on this data, researchers analyzed the assortment of sources people turned to for bulletin with the political composition of each source's audience included.

Among Republicans who only receive political news from media outlets with right-leaning audiences, 70% say journalists are going too far in their watchdog's role. The implication leads to a decrease in the share of 61% among Republicans who consume news from an amalgamation of outlet types of right-leaning audiences, mixed and audiences with left-leaning. Apart from that, 47% Republicans who receive news from no outlets with right-leaning audiences say journalists have gone too far.

The variation of Assessments among Democrats based on news diets portrays that 10% of Democrats who obtain political news from outlets with left-leaning audiences say that journalists are going too far. Nonetheless among Democrats who do not get news from any outlets with left-leaning audiences percentage multiplies to 24 percent.

The percentage of Democrats who believe journalists are not going far enough fluctuates via news diet. Whereas half (51%) of Democrats receiving political news only from outlets with left-leaning audiences assert that journalists are not going far as watchdogs. The share falls to 40% among Democrats who get news from a combination of channels with left-leaning and other types of audiences. Hence, only (32%) of Democrats who do not receive any newscast from outlets with left-leaning audiences declare journalists need to be more aggressive watchdogs. The U.S. agency surveyed on 29 November 2019, and according to the source, respondents who did not give answers did not reflect.

5. Conclusion

From the above discoveries, it is vibrant that press freedom has a negative connotation on government effectiveness. It means that press freedom is necessary but not sufficient in government effectiveness in Western countries. Therefore, it is convenient for the government to protect citizens from excessive media abuse through defamation laws. Citizens should be guaranteed the right to information, and the various voices in society should be guaranteed the right to communicate. Freedom of the press is a necessary condition for democracy since it creates democratic consciousness and respect for civil rights. It also generates obligations evidencing deficits of government and politicians. Freedom of the press also plays an essential role in achieving political changes, by publicizing social demands, especially demands of those who are not able to enforce their rights. Therefore, the impact of press freedom is more significant due to their greater freedom to inform citizens about the efficacy of their politicians. Thus, governments are afraid of being voted out of office.

Freedom of the press also means freedom of the people. The future of Democracy in any place is contingent on the performance of the press. Thus, if the newsmen of these days are diligent workers and balanced thinkers on problems of governing the society, then undoubtedly the democracy will flourish and survive around the globe.

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