

Chapter 8

The Fourth Estate

What is the role of the free press in strengthening democracy, good governance, and human development?¹ Liberal theorists have long argued that the existence of a unfettered and independent press within each nation is essential in the process of democratization, by contributing towards the right of freedom of expression, thought and conscience, strengthening the responsiveness and accountability of governments to all citizens, and providing a pluralist platform and channel of political expression for a multiplicity of groups and interests.² The guarantee of freedom of expression and information is recognized as a basic human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN in 1948, the European Convention on Human Rights, the American Convention on Human Rights, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. In particular, Article 19 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: *"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."* The positive relationship between the growth of the free press and the process of democratization is thought to be reciprocal. The core claim is that, in the first stage, the initial transition from autocracy opens up the state control of the media to private ownership, diffuses access, and reduces official censorship and government control of information. The public thereby receives greater exposure to a wider variety of cultural products and ideas through access to multiple radio and TV channels, as well as the diffusion of new technologies such as the Internet and mobile telephones. Once media liberalization has commenced, in the second stage democratic consolidation is strengthened where journalists in independent newspapers, radio and television stations facilitate greater transparency and accountability in governance, by serving in their watch-dog roles to deter corruption and malfeasance, as well as providing a civic forum for multiple voices in public debate, and highlighting problems to inform the policy agenda.³

Through this process, numerous observers have emphasized that a free press is valuable for democracy, for good governance, and for human development. This perspective is exemplified by Amartya Sen's famous argument that in independent and democratic countries, the free press encourages government responsiveness to public concerns, by highlighting cases of famine and natural disasters. *"...in the terrible history of famines in the world, no substantial famine has ever occurred in any independent and democratic country with a relatively free press."*⁴ The independent media, Sen suggests, enhances the voice of poor people and generates more informed choices about economic needs and priorities.⁵ James D. Wolfensohn echoed these sentiments when he was the president of the World Bank: *"A free press is not a luxury. A free press is at the absolute core of equitable development, because if you cannot*

enfranchise poor people, if they do not have a right to expression, if there is no searchlight on corruption and inequitable practices, you cannot build the public consensus needed to bring about change."⁶ Systematic evidence supporting these claims has been reported by Besley and Burgess, who found that Indian state governments proved more responsive to external shocks, such as falls in crop production and crop flood damage, by expanding local public relief in places where newspaper circulation was higher and electoral accountability greater.⁷ Similarly, greater transparency and more open information is thought to be particularly important for stamping out malfeasance and misappropriations by public officials, for example, economic studies have reported that places with widespread newspaper circulation, and the existence of Freedom of Information laws, have less corruption.⁸ Many case studies also emphasize the vital role of the mass media in transitions from autocracy, for instance in Georgia's 'Rose' revolution.⁹ Likewise in Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine, McFaul argues that the presence of the independent media was one of the key components of successful transitions from post-communist states, for instance their role in highlighting news about rigged votes and publicizing popular protests and dissent expressed against the authorities, encouraging opposition movements onto the streets.¹⁰

More liberal media landscapes are therefore widely regarded among popular commentators, donor agencies, and the international community as strengthening democratization processes. But what systematic comparative evidence supports these claims? Much existing research has focused on assessing the impact of media structures and access, such as the diffusion of independent newspapers or the existence of private television channels or radio stations, rather than comparing press freedom per se.¹¹ Cross-national work on democratic institutions has usually emphasized the classic constitutional arrangements analyzed in earlier chapters, including the impact of electoral and party systems, federal or unitary states, and parliamentary or presidential executives, while neglecting to analyze comparable evidence about the institutional role and function of the news media as an integral part of power-sharing arrangements.¹² Yet many constitutions contain general provisions respecting rights to freedom of speech and the press, and more detailed Freedom of Information and data protection laws implementing these rights have been passed in more than six dozen nations worldwide, often a fairly recent development, as part of the anti-corruption drive to promote transparency and open government.¹³ Many other statutory provisions can limit or promote media independence, including requirements for registration or licenses for journalists or newspapers, broadcasting regulations and the degree of public and commercial ownership of radio and television stations, as well as laws governing broadcasting contents, concentration of ownership, official secrecy, intellectual property, libel, and taxation.¹⁴ Levels of access to radio, television, newspapers and the internet also vary substantially around the globe, affecting patterns of information reach and availability.¹⁵

To explore the role of the independent media in the democratization process, the first section outlines the analytical framework and summarizes the previous research on this topic. The second outlines the comparative evidence where Freedom House provides the principle measure of Press Freedom, with annual data available from 1992 to 2007. This indicator is strongly correlated with the independently developed Press Freedom Index created by Reporter's Without Borders, increasing confidence in the reliability of the Freedom House measure. The next sections describe the distribution and trends in press freedom. The analytical models using time-series cross-national regression present the results after controlling for many factors commonly associated with processes of democratization, as observed earlier, including levels of economic development, colonial origins, population size, and regional effects, as well as other institutional arrangements. Two paired cases drawn from Eurasia are then compared, in Ukraine and Uzbekistan, to illustrate the underlying processes at work and the role of the media in regime change. The study confirms that, even with prior controls, freedom of the press contributes towards democratic governance, with important consequences as another check and balance on government.

The roles of the news media as watch-dog, civic forum, and agenda-setter

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, early modernization theories assumed a fairly simple and unproblematic relationship between the spread of access to modern forms of mass communications, economic development, and the process of democratization. Accounts offered by Lerner, Lipset, Pye, Cutright and others, suggested that the diffusion of mass communications represented one sequential step in the development process. In this view, urbanization and the spread of literacy lead to growing access to modern technologies such as telephones, newspapers, radios and television, all of which laid the basis for an informed citizenry able to participate effectively in political affairs.¹⁶ Hence, based on a strong connection between the spread of communications and political development, Daniel Lerner theorized: *"The capacity to read, at first acquired by relatively few people, equips them to perform the varied tasks required in the modernizing society. Not until the third stage, when the elaborate technology of industrial development is fairly well advanced, does a society begin to produce newspapers, radio networks, and motion pictures on a massive scale. This, in turn, accelerates the spread of literacy. Out of this interaction develop those institutions of participation (e.g. voting) which we find in all advanced modern societies."*¹⁷

By the late-1960s and early-1970s, however, the assumption that the modernization process involved a series of sequential steps gradually fell out of fashion. Skepticism grew, faced with the complexities of human development evident in different parts of the world, and the major setbacks for democracy with the 'second reverse wave' experienced in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia.¹⁸ There was growing recognition that widening public access to

newspapers, radio and television was insufficient by itself to promote democracy and development, as these media could be used to maintain autocracies, to reinforce crony capitalism, and to consolidate the power of media oligopolies, as much as to provide a democratic channel for the disadvantaged.¹⁹ Access remains important, but this study theorizes that the news media is most effective in strengthening the process of democratization, good governance, and human development where journalists function as *watch-dog* over the abuse of power (promoting accountability and transparency), as a *civic forum* for political debate (facilitating informed electoral choices), and as an *agenda-setter* for policymakers (strengthening government responsiveness to social problems).²⁰

The role of journalists as watchdogs of the powerful

In their 'watchdog' role, the channels of the news media can function to promote government transparency, accountability, and public scrutiny of decision-makers in power, by highlighting policy failures, maladministration by public officials, corruption in the judiciary, and scandals in the corporate sector.²¹ Since Edmund Burke, the 'fourth estate' has traditionally been regarded as one of the classic checks and balances in the division of powers.²² Investigative journalism can open the government's record to external scrutiny and critical evaluation, and hold authorities accountable for their actions, whether public sector institutions, non-profit organizations, or private companies. Comparative econometric studies, and historical case studies of developments within particular countries such as Taiwan, have explored evidence for the impact of the news media upon corruption. Brunetti and Weder, amongst others, found that there was less corruption in nations with a free press. The reason, they argue, is that journalist's roles as watchdogs promote the transparency of government decision-making process, and thereby expose and hinder misuse of public office, malfeasance, and financial scandals.²³ In competitive multiparty democracies, voters can use information provided by the media to hold parties and leaders to account by 'kicking the rascals out'.

By contrast, control of the news media is used to reinforce the power of autocratic regimes and to deter criticism of the government by independent journalists, though official government censorship, state ownership of the main radio and television channels, legal restrictions on freedom of expression and publication (such as stringent libel laws and restrictive official secrets acts), limited competition through oligopolies in commercial ownership, and the use of outright violence and intimidation against journalists and broadcasters.²⁴ In Malaysia, for example, human rights observers report that the state has manipulated the media to stifle internal dissent and forced journalists employed by the international press to modify or suppress news stories unflattering to the regime.²⁵ Elsewhere governments in Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Saudi Arabia, among others, commonly place serious restrictions on press freedom to criticize government rulers through official regulations, legal restrictions and state censorship.²⁶ It remains

more difficult for governments to censor online communications, but nevertheless in nations such as China and Cuba, state-controlled monopolies provide the only Internet service and thereby filter both access and content.²⁷ Media freedom organizations demonstrate that each year dozens of media professionals are killed or injured in the course of their work. In Colombia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Zimbabwe and Egypt, for example, many journalists, broadcasters and editors have experienced intimidation or harassment, while journalists in many parts of the world face the daily threat of personal danger from wars or imprisonment by the security services.²⁸

The role of the news media as civic forum

Equally vital, in their civic forum role, the free press can strengthen the public sphere, by mediating between citizens and the state, facilitating debate about the major issues of the day, and informing the public about party leadership, political issues, and government actions.²⁹ If the channels of communication reflect the social and cultural pluralism within each society, in a fair and impartial balance, then multiple interests and voices are heard in public deliberation. On the other hand, if the airwaves and press overwhelmingly favor the government, this can drown out credible opponents. The role of the media is particularly important during election campaigns, as balanced and open access to the airwaves by opposition parties, candidates and groups is critical for competitive and fair multiparty contests. During campaigns, the media provides citizens with information to compare and evaluate the retrospective record, prospective policies, and leadership characteristics of parties and candidates, providing the essential conditions for informed voting choices.³⁰ The role of the news media as a civic forum remain deeply flawed where major newspapers and television stations heavily favor the governing party, in the total balance or else the tone of coverage, rather than being open to a plurality of political viewpoints and parties during campaigns. This principle has been recognized in jurisprudence from countries as varied as Ghana, Sri Lanka, Belize, India, Trinidad and Tobago, and Zambia.³¹ There are many cases where electoral observers have reported that bias on television and radio towards the party or leader in government has failed to provide a level playing field for all contenders, exemplified by election campaigns in Russia, Belarus, and Mozambique.³² As observed earlier, in Benin and Mali the process of liberalization and privatization has undermined the older state-controlled media which once consolidated the grip of autocrats, facilitating competitive multiparty electoral democracies.³³

By contrast, where the media fails to act as an effective civic forum, this can hinder democratic consolidation, as observed earlier in Togo. State ownership and control of the primary broadcasting channels is one important issue, but threats to media pluralism are also raised by over-concentration of private ownership of the media, whether in the hands of broadcasting oligopolies within each nation, or of major multinational corporations with multimedia empires.³⁴ It is feared that the process of media mergers may have concentrated excessive control in the

hands of a few multinational corporations, which remain unaccountable to the public, reducing the diversity of news media outlets.³⁵ Contemporary observers caution that the quality of democracy still remains limited where state ownership of television has been replaced by private oligopolies and crony capitalism, for example in nations such as Russia, Brazil and Peru which have failed to create fully-independent and pluralistic media systems. Broadcasting cartels, coupled with the failure of regulatory reform, legal policies which restrict critical reporting, and uneven journalistic standards, can all limit the role of the media in its civic forum or watch-dog roles.³⁶

Speaking truth to power

Lastly, the news media also functions as an agenda-setter, providing information about urgent social problems and thereby channeling citizens' concerns to decision-makers in government. Particularly in cases of natural disaster, public officials often suffer from a breakdown in the usual channels of communication. Poor internal communications among official agencies can hinder the delivery of effective emergency relief, so that timely and accurate information about the scope and nature of any disaster is vital as the first step in any effective official response. Similar observations can be made concerning reporting about social issues such as the extent of any food shortages, the spread of diseases such as HIV-AIDS, or problems of crime and violence. In these situations, independent journalists can act as a vital conduit for decision-makers, helping to make governments more responsive to the needs of the people. For example, Besley and Burgess examined the Indian case, and established that regions with higher levels of newspaper circulation proved more active during an emergency in responding to food-shortages.³⁷ The reason, they suggest, is that political leaders learn about local problems more accurately and in a timely fashion when journalists function as an intermediary by reporting living conditions at the grassroots, and the role of news headlines as an agenda-setter can also pressure officials to respond to local problems and report cases of corruption and misuse of public monies.

Indicators of press freedom

For all of these reasons, where the press is effective in these roles, greater media freedom and journalistic independence can be expected to promote and sustain democracy, as well as to improve broader indicators of good governance, such as limiting corruption. To explore some of the evidence, the annual Freedom House index of Press Freedom was used as the standard cross-national indicator.³⁸ Press freedom is measured by this index according to how much the diversity of news content is influenced by the structure of the news industry, by legal and administrative decisions, the degree of political influence or control, the economic influences exerted by the government or private entrepreneurs, and actual incidents violating press autonomy, including censorship, harassment and physical threats to journalists. The *legal environment* category examines the laws and regulations that could influence media content, as

well as the government's inclination to use these laws and legal institutions to restrict the media's ability to operate. The organization assesses the positive impact of legal and constitutional guarantees for freedom of expression; the potentially negative aspects of security legislation, the penal code, and other criminal statutes; penalties for libel and defamation; the existence of and ability to use freedom of information legislation; the independence of the judiciary and of official media regulatory bodies; registration requirements for both media outlets and journalists; and the ability of journalists' groups to operate freely. Under the *political environment* category, Freedom House evaluates the degree of political control over the content of news media. Issues examined here include the editorial independence of both state-owned and privately owned media; access to information and sources; official censorship and self-censorship; the vibrancy of the media; the ability of both foreign and local reporters to cover the news freely and without harassment; and the intimidation of journalists by the state or other actors, including arbitrary detention and imprisonment, violent assaults, and other threats. The last category examines the *economic environment* for the media. This includes the structure of media ownership; transparency and concentration of ownership; the costs of establishing media as well as of production and distribution; the selective withholding of advertising or subsidies by the state or other actors; the impact of corruption and bribery on content; and the extent to which the economic situation in a country impacts the development of the media. The assessment of press freedom distinguishes between the broadcast and print media, and the resulting ratings are expressed as a 100-point scale for each country under comparison. Evaluations of press freedom in 191 contemporary nations were available in the Freedom House annual index from 1992 to 2007.

As with any such indicators, however, it is important to check whether the results of this measure proved reliable or biased. To do this, the Freedom House index was compared against the Worldwide Press Freedom Index, which is independently produced by Reporters without Borders. The Worldwide Press Freedom Index is constructed to reflect the degree of freedom journalists and news organizations enjoy in each country, and the efforts made by the state to respect and ensure respect for this freedom. The organization compiled a questionnaire with 52 criteria for assessing the state of press freedom in each country. It includes every kind of violation directly affecting journalists (such as murders, imprisonment, physical attacks and threats) and news media (censorship, confiscation of issues, searches and harassment). It registers the degree of impunity enjoyed by those responsible for such violations. It also takes account of the legal situation affecting the news media (such as penalties for press offences, the existence of a state monopoly in certain areas and the existence of a regulatory body), the behavior of the authorities towards the state-owned news media and the foreign press, and the main obstacles to the free flow of information on the Internet. The Worldwide Press Freedom Index reflects not only abuses attributable to the state, but also those by armed militias, clandestine organizations, or pressure groups that can pose a real threat to press freedom.

[Figure 8.2 about here]

The results of the comparison of these two indices in the 160 nations where there are data, illustrated in Figure 8.2, shows a strong correlation across both these measures, ($R=.755$, sig .001), with just a few outliers such as Sao Tome & Principe where the organizations disagree in their rankings. Both indices differ in their construction, data sources, and conceptualization. Despite this, these organizations largely report similar judgments, a process which increases confidence in the reliability of the measures. The Freedom House measure was selected for the analysis since it provides the longer time-series, with data available since 1994, compared with the start of the Reporters without Borders index in 2002. Nevertheless replication of the basic models in this study suggests that the results remain robust irrespective of the particular measure used for analysis, which is hardly surprising given their inter-correlation. Many countries scoring most highly on press freedom by both these indicators are highly developed nations, such as New Zealand, the Netherlands, and Sweden, as expected given the strong linkage established earlier between affluence and democracy. But other countries with high press freedom are classified by the UNDP as having only moderate or even low development, as Mali and Benin, Jamaica, Nicaragua and El Salvador, as well as Burkina Fasa and Senegal. The countries ranked as having the minimal freedom of the press by both organizations include Cuba, Eritrea, China, and Turkmenistan. Alternative indicators which are available for comparison include whether countries recognize rights to freedom of expression in their written constitutions, or whether they have passed a Freedom of Information Act.³⁹ These measures were not used in this study, however, because what matters is the implementation of such rights or legislation; after all the Kyrgyz republic, Russia and Colombia have such Freedom of Information laws on their books, while Uzbekistan's constitution has a nominal guarantee protecting freedom of speech and the press, but this does not mean that journalists are safe in these countries or that such regulations have proved effective in promoting freedom of the press.

The Distribution of the Free Press

What do these indices show about the contemporary distribution of press freedom? The pattern shows considerable variations around the world. As illustrated in figure 8.2, as expected, the most liberal media were usually found in industrialized nations, including the most affluent economies and longest-standing democracies. Latin America and South-East Asia proved the regions which also scored relatively highly in freedom of the press, with the Arab states proving the least free. Despite the growing audience for the more independent and aggressive style of journalism found in *Al Jazeera*, and moves to liberalize the press in other nations in the region, this region lagged behind others to a marked extent. Nevertheless important contrasts can be found within regions, for example some relatively affluent nations have serious restrictions on an independent press, notably Saudi Arabia, Singapore, and Malaysia. In Singapore, as observed

earlier, the People's Action Party (PAP), founded and originally led by Lee Kuan Yew, has maintained its unbroken rule in government since 1959, despite a regular series of multiparty contests challenging their hegemonic status. One reason contributing to the ruling party's predominance is their strong control of the press and news media, for example the leading newspaper of Singapore, the *Straits Times*, is often perceived as a propaganda newspaper because it rarely criticizes government policy, and it covers little about the opposition. The owners of the paper, Singapore Press Holdings, have close links to the ruling party and the corporation has a virtual monopoly of the newspaper industry. Government censorship of journalism is common, using the threat or imposition of heavy fines or distribution bans imposed by the Media Development Authority, with these techniques also used against articles seen to be critical of the government published in the international press, including *The Economist* and *International Times Herald Tribune*. Internet access is regulated in Singapore, and private ownership of satellite dishes is not allowed. Due to this record, the Reporters Without Borders assessment of Press Freedom Worldwide in 2005 ranked Singapore 140th out of 167 nations.

[Figure 8.3 about here]

By contrast, some poorer developing nations, such as Bolivia, Mali, Benin, and South Africa, also scored well on journalistic freedom. As discussed earlier, Benin is widely regarded as a successful African democracy with constitutional checks and balances, multiple parties, a high degree of judicial independence, and a lively partisan press which is often critical of the government. Benin ranks 161st lowest out of 177 states in the 2003 UNDP Human Development Index, with a per capita GDP (in Purchasing Power Parity) of \$1,115. One third of the population lives with incomes below the poverty level and two-thirds of the adult population is illiterate. Despite this, the country is categorized as 66th out of 195 nations in the 2007 Freedom House Global Press Freedom Index, comparable to Italy, Israel, and Chile in its record.

The impact of the free press on democracy

The key question is whether press freedom is related to democracy, even using multivariate regression models controlling for many other institutions and control variables which previous chapters established are commonly associated with political development.

As in previous chapters, in the multivariate models the dependent variables are two indicators of levels of democracy: the Polity IV project's measure of constitutional democracy and Vanhanen's indicator of participatory democracy. Freedom House's index of liberal democracy was not employed in this chapter as the measure contains freedom of the press as one of its core components. By contrast, the other two indicators do not suffer from this problem as neither contains data on freedom of the press. As discussed in chapter 3, Polity IV excludes civil liberties in its measure of constitutional democracy, focusing instead on constructing a measure based on the competitiveness and openness of executive recruitment, constraints on the chief executive,

and the competitiveness of political participation. Vanhanen's Participatory Democracy also excludes any classification of freedom of the press as it is based on the degree of electoral competition and the level of electoral participation. The most prudent strategy, as adopted by earlier chapters, is to compare the results of analytical models using alternative indicators, to see if the findings remain robust and consistent irrespective of the specific measures of democracy which are employed for analysis. If so, as Collier and Adcock suggest, this procedure generates greater confidence in the reliability of the results and we can conclude that the main generalizations hold irrespective of the particular measures which are used.⁴⁰

As noted in chapter 4, the relationship between *wealth* and democracy is a long-standing observation which has withstood repeated tests in the social sciences and accordingly the models were initially tested controlling for levels of economic development (measured by logged per capita GDP in Purchasing Power Parity) but this variable was dropped from the final model, after checking for tolerance, due to problems of collinearity with the strength of the free press. The models control for the effects of the *historical pattern of colonial legacies*. An association between the past type of colonial rule and contemporary patterns of democracy has been noted by several observers; for example Clague, Gleason and Knack report that lasting democracies (characterized by contestation for government office) are most likely to emerge and persist among poor nations in ex-British colonies, even controlling for levels of economic development, ethnic diversity, and the size of the population.⁴¹ The *Middle East* is also entered into the analysis, since many observers have pointed out that this region has been least affected by the trends in democratization since the start of the third wave, and indeed to be the least democratic region worldwide. The degree of *ethnic heterogeneity* is also entered, on the grounds that deeply-divided societies are widely assumed to experience greater problems of democratic consolidation. Nations were classified according to the degree of ethnic fractionalization, based on a global dataset created by Alesina and his colleagues.⁴² The models also control for the impact of the *size of the population* and the *geographic size* of each country. Ever since Dahl and Tufte, the idea that size matters for democracy has been widely assumed, and Alesina and Spolaore have provided the most detailed recent examination of this proposition.⁴³ Smaller nations are expected to be easier to govern democratically, for example the smaller the population, the greater the potential for citizen participation in key decisions. Lastly, the institutions already observed as linked to patterns of democracy are added, namely proportional representation electoral systems, parliamentary monarchies as a type of executive, and federal constitutions. The number of cases used for analysis dropped substantially, compared with previous chapters, given the shorter time-period available for the data on freedom of the press.

[Table 8.1 and Figure 8.3 about here]

The results of the multivariate analysis in Table 8.1 confirm that the free press is significantly associated with levels of democracy, even after employing the battery of controls. The impact of the free press appears to be robust irrespective of the particular indicator of democracy which is selected, despite major differences in the conceptualization and measurement processes used by Polity IV and by Vanhanen. Indeed the impact of media liberalization was one of the most consistent predictor of democracy out of any of the factors under comparison. The institutions of the type of electoral system (proportional representation) and the type of executive (parliamentary monarchies) also remained significantly associated with levels of democracy, although the measure of federalism dropped out of the analysis in one model. The results of the overall models explained in total between 55-62 percent of the variance in the Polity IV and the Vanhanen measures of democracy. The contemporary pattern was inspected visually in figure 8.3, using the Polity IV measure of democracy, to examine the goodness of fit and to identify any obvious outliers. As the scatter-plot shows, a few countries fall quite far below the line, such as Russia, Guatemala and Bangladesh, suggesting that limits on independent journalism in these nations may be more severe than might be expected from other indicators of democracy, such as holding free and fair elections for the major government offices. And there are other countries well above the line where the free press is particularly strong, given their overall level of democratization.

[Table 8.2 about here]

Case studies: Ukraine and Uzbekistan

To understand the underlying processes at work in this relationship, cases examining the role of the independent media in regime transitions and in multiethnic societies were selected from post-Soviet Eurasia. Significant and sustained progress towards democracy has transformed the political landscape in Central Eastern Europe following the fall of the Berlin Wall in the late 1980s and early-1990s, including the enlargement of the 27-member European Union to the borders of the Black Sea. This was followed in a second stage by the 'color revolutions' in the mid-1990s signifying a radical transition in the political leadership in Georgia (the 2003 Rose Revolution), Ukraine (the 2004 Orange Revolution), and Kyrgyzstan (the 2005 Tulip Revolution).⁴⁴ Each time massive street protests followed disputed elections and led to the resignation or overthrow of unpopular authoritarian leaders. As Hale point out, these dramatic events all occurred when countries were entering a period of succession, with the previous leader either too old, too unpopular, or too afraid of legal term limits to continue.⁴⁵ Although triggering processes of regime change, it remains unclear at this stage whether the dramatic events in Ukraine will lead towards the transition and consolidation of a stable democratic state. Instead of a smoothly sequential process, some observers interpret the process of regime change as cyclical, with incremental steps ebbing and flowing, and with omissions and deviations, rather

than a steady march towards democracy.⁴⁶ At the same time, other Eurasian states such as Belarus, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, which also gained independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, have failed to make any consistent transition from authoritarian rule. These states have not witnessed a peaceful handover of power from the governing leader to opposition parties following elections, or any substantial gains in human rights. Presidents in these nations continue to exert rigid control, through a series of manipulated elections. Their power is bolstered through restricting the independent media, intimidating government critics and crushing dissent, persecuting journalists, and limiting reporting about unrest or public discontent.

The striking contrasts which are apparent between Uzbekistan and Ukraine today illustrate the role of the mass media in the process of regime transitions. Both countries were selected for comparison as they shared common political histories for more than a century under the dominance of the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union, attaining roughly similar levels of human development, poverty, education and literacy today, although Ukraine is considerably more affluent in per capita GDP (see Table 8.3). Both are presidential republics, with few significant checks on the powers of the presidency in Uzbekistan, although parliament provides more effective checks and balances in the Ukrainian constitution, particularly after recent amendment. Both states are multiethnic societies; significant proportion of those living in Ukraine are Russians or Russian-speaking (24%), and the country also contains other sizeable Romanian, Polish and Hungarian linguistic minorities. This is comparable to Uzbekistan, located in Central Asia, where about three-quarters of the population speaks Uzbek, as well as containing Russian, Tajik and other linguistic groups. By religion, Ukraine is divided among Orthodox churches, although with high levels of secularization, while Uzbekistan is predominately Muslim with Orthodox minorities. Uzbekistan is the most populous Central Asian country and has the largest armed forces.

[Table 8.3 about here]

Uzbekistan

In 1991 Uzbekistan emerged as a sovereign country after more than a century of Russian rule - first as part of the Russian empire and then as a component of the Soviet Union. The country continues to be governed by a Soviet-style autocrat, President Islam Karimov, who has dominated the leadership since 1989, when he rose to be Communist Party leader in the Soviet era. The following year he became Uzbek president and he has continued to rule ever since. A referendum held in 1995 extended his term until 2000, when he won the presidential elections with a reported 91.9% of the vote. A further referendum in 2002 extended the presidential term from five to seven years and there are no constitutional term limits on the presidency. President Karimov has sweeping powers as he appoints the prime minister and cabinet. The 100 seat upper house in the bicameral parliament contains 84 members indirectly-elected by regional

governing councils and the remainder appointed by the president. The lower house contains 120 members popularly elected by a majoritarian electoral system. The few OSCE international observers who monitored parliamentary elections at the end of 2004 condemned them as having failed to meet international standards, noting that although there were competing parties, all the candidates supported President Karimov.⁴⁷ There are also a dozen provinces functioning as administrative divisions, and the president selects and replaces provincial governors.

In this context, the state maintains tight control of the media, through owning or running most major national newspapers. Despite a formal constitutional ban on censorship, the media rights body *Reporters Without Borders* said in 2005 that the use of violence against journalists and disinformation by the authorities were commonplace. According to the *Committee to Protect Journalists*, in 2006 Uzbekistan was in the top ten countries for censorship of the media, ahead of Syria, Belarus, China and Russia.⁴⁸ Uzbekistan saw an unsuccessful imitation of the color revolutions, with violence on both sides, at and around Andijan, on 13th May 2005. In this case, the events were triggered by the trial of 23 local businessmen, who were subsequently imprisoned. Several hundred demonstrators stormed the jail to release the businessmen and other prisoners. The military swiftly intervened to stamp out anti-government protest by firing into the crowd of demonstrators.⁴⁹ Dispute continues to surround the number of fatalities, ranging from 173 in official figures given by the authorities to an estimated 750 by human rights groups. In the aftermath of the deadly unrest, activists were arrested, journalists were expelled from the area, Russian websites were blocked, and foreign TV news broadcasts by Russian broadcasters, CNN, BBC and others were restricted, replaced by music videos on cable TV. Amnesty International reports that restrictions on press reporting worsened in the year following these events, along with the imprisonment, ill-treatment and torture of human rights activists.⁵⁰ Indeed two years later an Uzbek journalist was imprisoned for seven years for seeking to investigate events at Andijan. Pre-publication state censorship of the press was officially abolished in 2002, but nevertheless OSCE observers report that many techniques used to stifle investigation of controversial subjects remain widespread, including tough regulations of the press, prosecution through strict libel or defamation laws, limits on newspaper licenses, intimidation or harassment of reporters, visa restrictions on entry for foreign journalists, restrictions on bloggers and websites, and self-censorship by journalists.⁵¹

The government in Uzbekistan controls much of the printing and distribution infrastructure, although private TV and radio stations operate alongside state-run broadcasters. There are no private publishing houses or printing presses, and the establishment of a new newspaper is subject to political approval. Foreign channels are carried via cable TV, which is widely available. The *Committee to Protect Journalists* notes that many Uzbeks rely on foreign sources - including Russian TV and other broadcasters - as a counterpoint to the stifled domestic news media.⁵² The law limits criticism of the president, and public insults are a crime punishable

by up to five years in prison. The law also specifically prohibits articles that incite religious confrontation and ethnic discord or which advocate subverting or overthrowing the constitutional order. In short, the post-Communist authoritarianism exercised by Karimov has not yet been successfully challenged by other elites, opposition parties, or reform movements in part because of the severe repressions of critical coverage. In ranking press freedom worldwide, Uzbekistan was rated in 2007 as 189th out of 195 nations by Freedom House, and it was ranked 158th out of 164 countries by the Reporters Without Border's World Press Freedom Index. Indeed, far from any improvement, the last decade has seen as glacial erosion in freedom of the press Uzbekistan, according to the Freedom House index.

Ukraine

Ukraine also gained independence as a presidential republic after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. After independence, former Communist Party official Leonid Kravchuk gained almost two-thirds of the popular vote in the 1991 presidential elections. His support was slashed in the 1994 elections, however, following a period of economic decline and runaway inflation. The contest was won by the former prime minister, Leonid Kuchma. The new constitution adopted in June 1996 specified popular elections for the president for a five-year term (limited to two successive terms) using a 2nd ballot majoritarian system. Under this system, President Kuchma was reelected for a second term in 1999, with 56% of the vote.

The unicameral 450 member parliament (Supreme Council) is directly elected using a system which has been amended on a number of occasions.⁵³ Since Ukrainian independence, parliamentary contests were held in 1994 and 1998 using a combined-independent (mixed parallel) system, where Ukrainian voters could each cast two ballots. Half the deputies (225) were elected by a 2nd ballot majoritarian system in single-member districts and the remainder were elected from nation-wide closed PR party lists, with a 4% national vote threshold. The two electoral systems operated separately, so that many smaller parties were elected from the single-member districts. The 1998 elections were contested by 30 parties and party blocks, although only ten of these groups could be said to have a clear programmatic profile and organizational base. The Ukrainian result in 1998 produced both an extremely fragmented and unstable party system: 8 parties were elected via party lists and 17 won seats via the single-member districts, along with 116 Independents. The election produced one of the highest Effective Number of Parliamentary Parties (5.98) in the region, and it also generated a fairly disproportional votes: seats ratio that benefited the larger parties. Ethnicity was reflected in the appeal of particular parties, including the Russophile Social Liberal Union, the Party of Regional Revival, and the Soyuz (Union) party, and also in the way that ethnic-Russians were twice as likely to support the Communist party as ethnic-Ukrainians.⁵⁴ In turn, the largest parties in Parliament select the prime minister, providing a greater check and balance than the system in Uzbekistan.

In the presidential elections held in October 2004, election observers reported government intimidation of the opposition and of independent media, abuse of state administrative resources, and skewed press coverage. The two major candidates were Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych and opposition leader (and former Prime Minister) Viktor Yushchenko. Outgoing president Leonid Kuchma backed Viktor Yanukovych as his successor, a candidate also supported by Russia. Each candidate garnered between 39% and 40% of the vote and proceeded to a winner-take-all second round ballot. On November 24, 2004, the CEC declared Prime Minister Yanukovych the winner with 49.46% compared to 46.61% for Yushchenko. Observers widely reported that the results were rigged, however, generating the mass protest towards this outcome for 10 days. The November 21 runoff election was marred by credible reports of widespread and significant violations, including illegal expulsion of opposition representatives from election commissions, multiple voting by busloads of people, abuse of absentee ballots, reports of coercion of votes in schools and prisons, and an abnormally high number of (easily manipulated) mobile ballot box votes.⁵⁵ Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets of Kyiv and other cities to protest electoral fraud and express support for Yushchenko, and conducted peaceful demonstrations during what came to be known as the "Orange Revolution." In the turmoil that followed, journalists at the state-run TV rejected the network's usual pro-government line. For the first time in years, opposition views were aired in a balanced way. On December 1, the Rada passed a vote of "no confidence" in the government. On December 3, Ukraine's Supreme Court invalidated the CEC's announced results and mandated a repeat of the second round vote to take place on December 26. The new ballot led to the victory of President Viktor Yushchenko by 51.99% of the votes, compared with 44.20% for Yanukovych. Just two years later, however, following parliamentary elections in 2006, divisions in the pro-presidential Our Ukraine bloc let Viktor Yanukovych make a comeback as prime minister, heading a coalition of the Party of Regions, Our Ukraine, and the Socialist Party.

The history of Ukraine since independence has therefore been characterized by an unstable transition, marked by continued strong clashes for power between the executive and legislative branches, and a lack of consensus about the constitutional rules of the game concerning the powers of the presidency, as well as many modifications to the electoral system used for parliament. A series of multiparty competitive elections have been held since independence, with far more effective legislative and judicial checks and balances on the powers of the executive than exist in Uzbekistan. Nevertheless numerous observers have raised doubts about Ukraine's ability to consolidate democratic institutions.⁵⁶ In this context, one important institutional check on the power of the executive, and a watchdog over corruption and cronyism, lies in the role of the news media. Independent reporting has contributed on certain occasions to decisive events in Ukrainian politics, notably during the "Orange Revolution". Ukraine is characterized by a vibrant and politically diverse newspaper industry and which is largely free

from censorship and government interference, although observers note the continued harassment of journalists for reporting on stories critical of government officials. The decade under President Kuchma's rule saw the closure of a number of opposition papers and a marked deterioration in human rights. Moreover, several journalists investigating high-profile crimes died in mysterious circumstances. The most prominent case was the journalist Georgiy Gongadze who disappeared in September 2000; his body was found two months later.

Today all the main newspaper titles today are privately owned, some by oligarchs and individuals with close ties to the government, and offer a wide range of opinions as well as factual reporting. For example, *Zerkalo Nedeli* is Ukraine's most influential analytical weekly, published in Ukrainian and Russian. Widely read by the Ukrainian elite, the paper is non-partisan. It was highly critical of both major parties in Ukraine. It employs high journalistic standards and offers political analysis, exclusive interviews and opinion. There are hundreds of state and private television and radio stations, and Radio Free Europe has resumed broadcasting after being shut down in 2004. In contrast to Uzbekistan, in the same ratings of press freedom worldwide, Ukraine was rated in 2007 as 112th out of 195 nations by Freedom House, and it was ranked 105th out of 164 countries by the Reporters Without Border's Press Freedom Index. The last few years have also seen resurgence in press freedom according to the Freedom House index (see figure 8.3). The future of democracy in Ukraine remains uncertain but the constitutional reforms brought in under Yushchenko seem likely to strengthen the consensual arrangements, by increasing the proportionality of the electoral system, boosting the power of parliament, and limiting the role of the president. If this lays the foundation for a genuine power-sharing constitutional settlement which is accepted by all parties then in the long-term this should help to promote consolidation, given the evidence presented throughout this study.

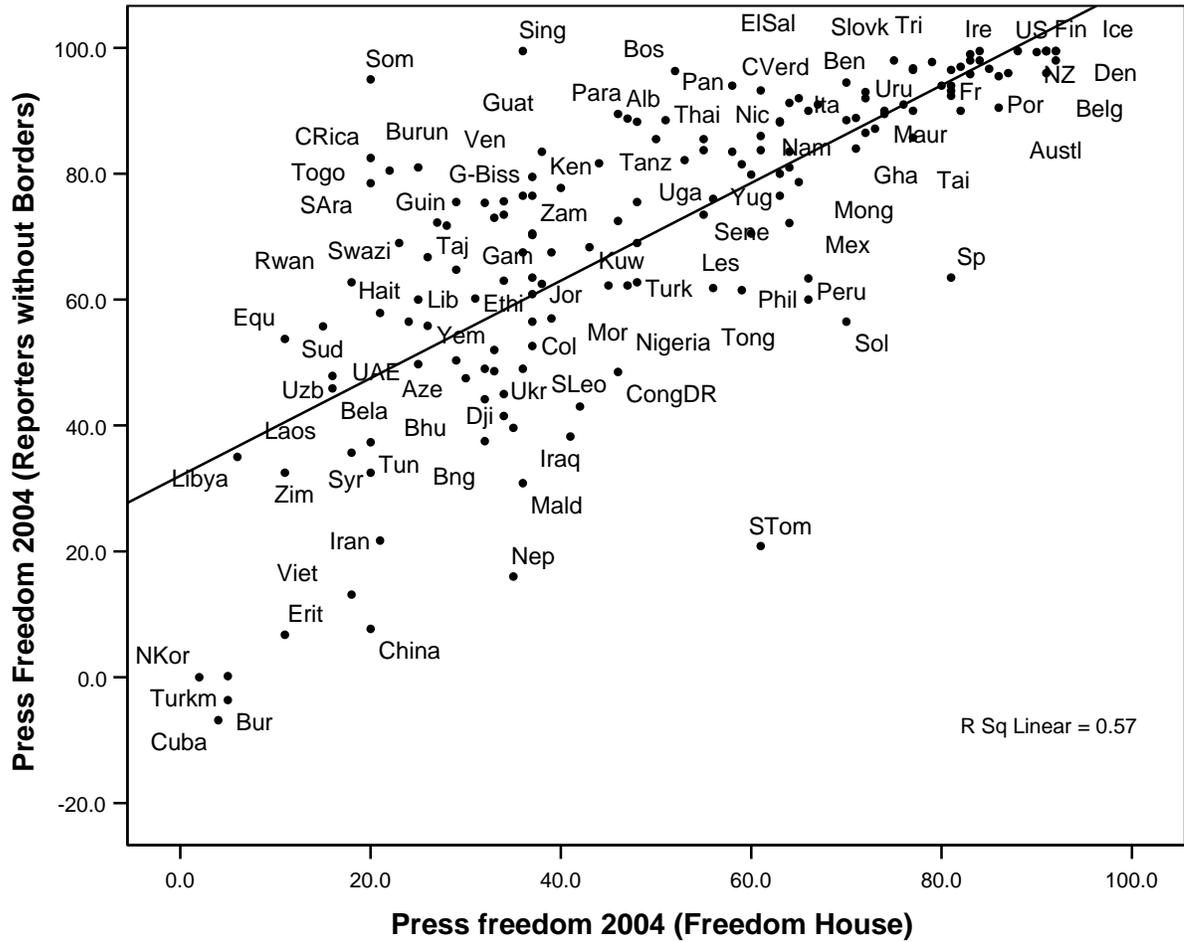
Conclusions

Overall the cross-national analysis lends considerable support to the claims of liberal theorists about the critical role of the free press, as one of the major components buttressing democratic transitions and consolidation. The independent media functions as another check and balance on government although it remains unclear which of the roles of the free press – as watch-dog, as civic forum or as agenda-setter – is most important in this relationship. Plausibly, for example, the effectiveness of the press as watch-dogs should have the greatest impact upon stamping out corruption and promoting transparency and freedom of information, while their function in calling attention to social problems should influence government responsiveness to policy problems.

The illustrative case studies from post-Soviet Eurasia reinforce many of the claims about the role of independent journalism which are pervasive in liberal theory, including the core argument that independent journalism matters, both intrinsically and instrumentally. Policies

which eradicate limits on the freedom information and communication, whether due to state censorship, intimidation and harassment of journalists, or due to private media oligopolies, therefore have important consequences for those seeking to strengthen transitions from autocracy, although how far freedom of expression and communication can contribute towards the consolidation of democratic development in the particular cases compared here remains an open question at this stage.

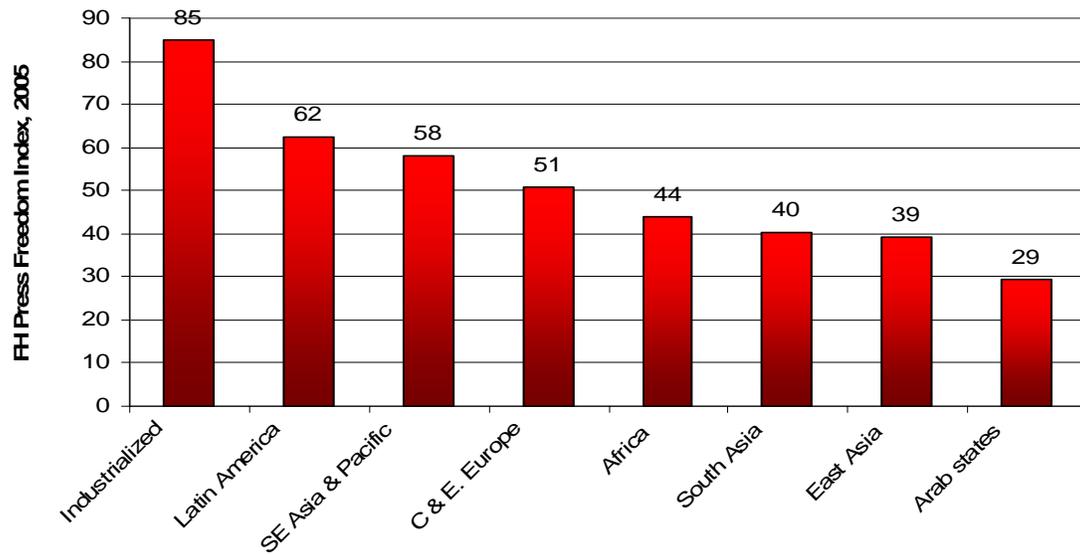
Figure 8.1: Press freedom in 161 nations worldwide, 2004



Note: Freedom House Global press freedom index, 100pts (100=high). Reporters without Borders press freedom index, 100 pts (100=high). See the technical appendix for the construction of each index.

Sources: Freedom House www.freedomhouse.org; Reporters without Borders

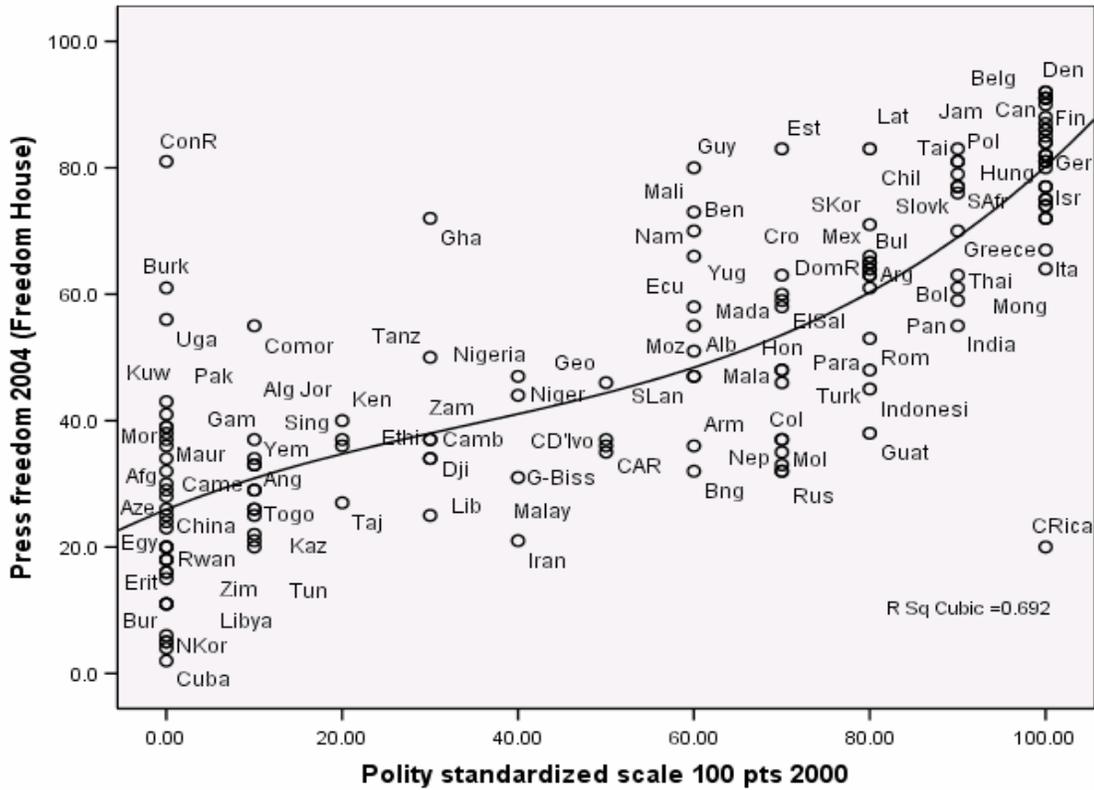
Figure 8.2: Press freedom by global region, 2005



Note: Freedom House press freedom index, 100pts.

Source: Freedom House www.freedomhouse.org

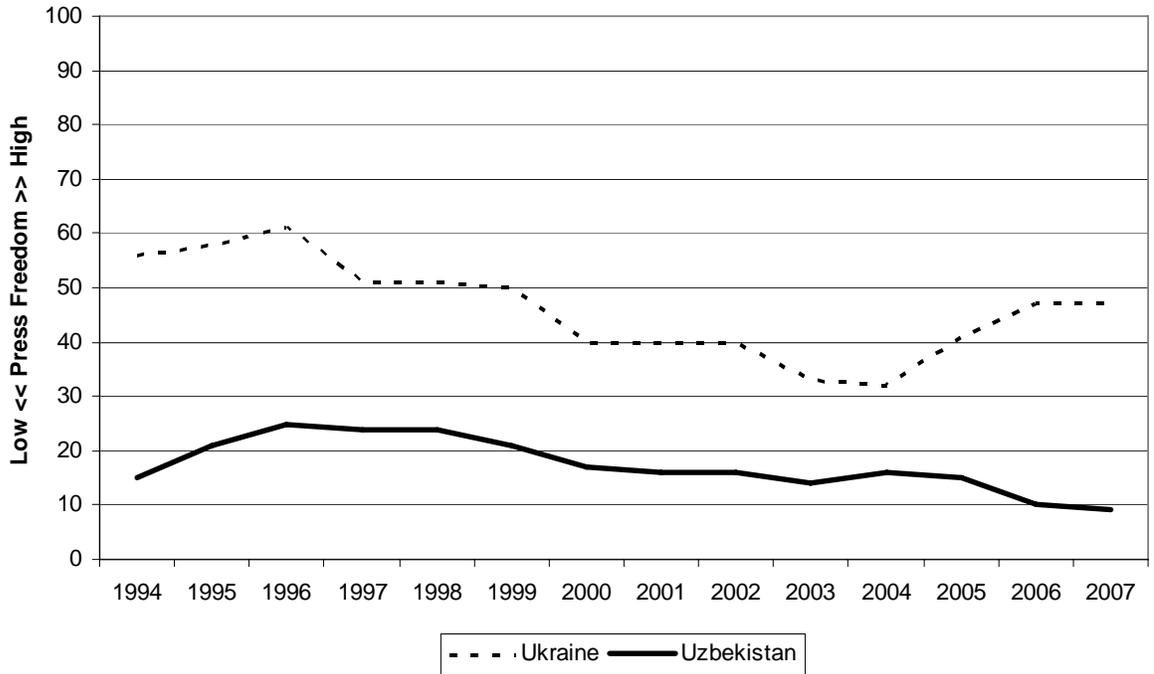
Figure 8.3: Press freedom by level of democratization



Notes: Freedom House press freedom index 2004, 100-pt scale. Polity IV autocracy-democracy scale, standardized to 0-100 points.

Source: Freedom House www.freedomhouse.org; Polity IV

Figure 8.4: Press freedom in Ukraine and Uzbekistan, 1994-2007



Note: Freedom House *Press Freedom Index*, 1994-2007, 100-pt scale (reversed, higher = greater freedom).

Table 8.1: The free press and democracy, all societies worldwide

	Constitutional democracy Polity IV			Participatory democracy Vanhanen		
	b	pcse.	p.	b	pcse	p
INSTITUTIONS						
PR Electoral system	10.88	(.091)	***	6.46	(1.00)	***
Parliamentary monarchy	10.67	(3.13)	***	2.36	(1.13)	*
Federal constitution	1.24	(.926)	N/s	2.79	(.468)	***
Freedom of the press	.501	(.091)	***	.251	(.055)	***
CONTROLS						
Ex-British colony (0/1)	2.22	(2.46)	N/s	-1.56	(.697)	*
Middle East (0/1)	-16.16	(1.58)	***	-.965	(1.12)	N/s
Regional diffusion of democracy	.295	(.058)	***	.654	(.037)	***
Ethnic fractionalization (0-100-pt scale)	-5.67	(4.25)	N/s	-10.30	(2.27)	***
Population size (thou)	-.001	(.001)	N/s	-.001	(.001)	**
Area size (sq.miles)	.001	(.001)	N/s	.001	(.001)	*
Constant	19.7			-7.89		
N. observations	1,495			1,256		
N. of countries	154			181		
Adjusted R²	.616			.554		

Note: Entries for Constitutional Democracy and Participatory Democracy are unstandardized beta OLS regression coefficients (b) with panel corrected standard errors (pcse) and the significance of the coefficients (p) for the pooled time-series cross-national dataset obtained using Stata's xtpcse command. With pcse the disturbances are, by default, assumed to be heteroskedastic (each nation has its own variance) and contemporaneously correlated across nations. Models for Contested democracy were run using logistic regression for the binary dependent variable, with the results summarized by Nagelkerke R square. For the measures of democracy, standardized to 100-point scales and lagged by one year, see Chapter 2. For details of all the variables, see Technical Appendix A. Significant at * the 0.05 level, ** the 0.01 level, and *** the 0.001 level.

Table 8.2 Key indicators in Ukraine and Uzbekistan

Social and economic indicators	Ukraine	Uzbekistan
Area	603,700 sq km	447,400 sq km
Pop., 2007	46.3m	27.8m
Pop below poverty line (%)	29%	33%
GDP per capita (PPP US\$), 2006	\$7,600	\$2,000
Life expectancy at birth, 2003	68 years	65 years
Human Development Index, 2003	.780	.710
Adult literacy (% of pop. 15+), 2003	99.7%	99.3%
Ethnic fractionalization, 2002 (Alesina)	.473	.412
Political indicators		
Year of independence (from)	1991 (Soviet Union)	1991 (Soviet Union)
Liberal Democracy (Freedom House), (USSR) 1973	6 (Not free)	6 (Not free)
Freedom House classification (of USSR) 1973		
Liberal Democracy (Freedom House) Index, 2007	2.5	7
Freedom House classification 2007	Free	Not free
Press Freedom Rank (Freedom House), 2006	113 ^{th/194}	187 ^{th/194}
Press Freedom (Reports without Borders), 2006	105 ^{th/168}	158 ^{th/168}
Control of Corruption (Kaufmann) 2005	35	13
Government effectiveness (Kaufmann) 2005	40	10
Political stability (Kaufmann) 2005	32	3
Rule of Law (Kaufmann) 2005	35	7
Voice and accountability (Kaufmann) 2005	40	4
Regulatory quality (Kaufmann) 2005	47	4

Note: See the appendix for details of these indices and full sources of data. The Kaufmann indices rank each country on 0-100 point scales where high = better governance ratings. Press Freedom is ranked out of 194 nations by Freedom House and 168 nations by Reporters without borders, in both where higher scores=better ranked. Source: Daniel Kaufmann, A. Kraay, and M. Mastruzzi 2006: *Governance Matters V: Governance Indicators for 1996-2005*. www.worldbank.org

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