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Measures of Press Freedom

and Media Contributions

to Development

EVALUATING THE EVALUATORS

Press Freedom Measures:
An Introduction

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The essays in this book seek to make even more transparent and more understandable major efforts at monitoring and evaluation in the media assistance field, especially by the most well-known ranking systems. The subject—how to evaluate and how and whether to rank—becomes an increasingly important one as donors (government and non-government) become persistent in requiring accountability with understandable metrics.[1] Issues of monitoring and evaluation also gain significance as policy choices become affected by the modes of assessment. The authors write in a constructive spirit: are there ways in which methodologies can be improved to explain changes that have taken place and, to some extent, what is responsible for those changes? At another level, the authors seek to assess connections and

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1. In 2010, President Obama signed the Daniel Pearl Freedom of the Press Act, which provides a federal impetus to evaluation efforts. Under the law, the State Department is directed to expand its scrutiny of news media restrictions and intimidation as part of its annual review of human rights around the world. The Department must undertake: "An identification of countries where there are violations of freedom of the press, including direct physical attacks, imprisonment, indirect sources of pressure, and censorship by governments, military, intelligence, or police forces, criminal groups, or armed extremist or rebel groups." In addition, in countries where there are found to be particularly severe freedom of the press violations, the Department should indicate "Whether government authorities in each such country participate in, facilitate, or condone such violations of the freedom of the press;" and "what steps the government of each such country has taken to preserve the safety and independence of the media, and to ensure the prosecution of those individuals who attack or murder journalists." (HR 3714, 2010)

correlations. Does monitoring and evaluating help us understand the linkages, say, between media assistance (in terms of building certain kinds of media institutions) and improved or democratic governance or between media institutions and poverty reduction?

Related here is another need—raised in several of the chapters—namely trying to determine whether the questions being asked, those parameters being measured, are, in fact, the objects of concern that are or should be of the most interest to the organizations who are the principal consumers of evaluation (which would include, among others, donors, government in general, NGOs and citizenry). Of course, the issue of what should be measured has no single answer (nor are such simplified and single answers being proposed). Partly there is no single answer because the stakes for those who read the kinds of indices that Freedom House and others provide are quite varied.

It is perfectly suitable, for example, that an international organization of journalists would have as a major burden of inquiry the health and safety of journalists. And that would be significant no matter how this issue is related, say, to good governance or an informed citizenry (though the connections are clearly made). It is easy to make the ladder of assumptions that, just as a healthy press is significant for a healthy polity, a journalism profession that is under physical and psychological attack cannot serve as the basis for a sufficient profession. Similarly, there could be groups that are most concerned about the extent and quality of international coverage, or coverage of climate control questions, or the extent to which a media system undergirds economic and social development. One might want to read press and media freedom evaluations to make predictions about country stability or fragility. The point is that to evaluate the evaluators, a major question is evaluating what it is that is measured.

Several of the authors, including Becker and Vlad, provide a confirmation that the principal measuring regimes are in some sort of synch, that the ranking of states in terms of all the various principal modes (such as IREX, Freedom House, and Reporters Without Borders) are generally consistent. But notwithstanding this current harmony, I suggest that there are different things that different donor or other organizations (or the parliament or congress or any accountability body) might want to know. One can see this in the increasingly diverse output of Freedom House (measuring press freedom and internet freedom, preparing country or regional special studies, etc.).

One of the efforts of these entities is to enable comparisons over time—to have a series—and to be able to engage in broad comparisons among countries and circumstances. There are questions that require further attention. These could include: whether what is measured should be more output-oriented rather than structure-oriented (should we ask about an informed public, for example); should countries be ranked on the extent of meaningful citizen engagement, rather than the formal aspects of government intervention; how should new media be taken into account in considering freedom of the press; and how the contribution of government-supported international broadcasters and NGOs should be factored into assessment and monitoring measures.

In that sense, I want to raise a fairly basic question—what is it that groups are seeking to measure and why, and what are things that should be measured that are not? In a sense, this essay will be more about donor goals that might reflect differences among donors than it is about differences among the entities, such as Freedom House, engaged in the evaluative process. The question is not fully about goals from a putatively neutral perspective—a perspective embedded in a uniform vision of an appropriate political system. Less and less might be taken for granted. For example, while hewing to a liberal model of speech and society, a donor or interested party might want to rank countries on the way a system contributes to or detracts from particular views of identity (enhancing diversity or celebrating some sort of favored historical qualities). There were once Four Theories (as Siebert et al. put it) or three models (as more recently put forward by Hallin and Mancini). Of course, each of the Four Theories might have an internal evaluative point of view (too disparate for the purposes of this essay), but so might Hallin and Mancini's Polarized Pluralist, Democratic Corporatist and Liberal Models.

The point of view for measurement might be further diversified if it asks how significant outcomes are affected by the information system as a whole (including all forms of media and other forms of persuasion) rather than the "media" as traditionally defined. It is fairly easy to measure and evaluate the number of television and radio stations or the number of newspapers in a state, and it is increasingly possible to find data on the number of internet users, both in terms of reach and actual use. There is experience in evaluating formal legal structures. What remains more difficult is to assess what technologies, old and very old, as well as new and experimental, actually have a

major impact on persuasion (assuming that is a goal) in some of the societies that are of keenest interest to those who commission or conduct evaluations.

One additional introductory point: let us assume that those involved with citizens in society wish to know how informed the public is on relevant matters of public importance. Existing evaluative measures hardly touch this issue. To be sure, this is a complicated question that turns on particular political structures and assumptions. Those evaluating the system in the United States might measure how informed a public is concerning issues, for example, that arise before state and local governments, before the U.S. Supreme Court and before Congress, each for different reasons. But the nature of what citizens need to know to be effective citizens may be very different in different political systems. In some states, decisions are made centrally, not locally; in some contexts it is the transnational that has produced facts that have consequences. The locus and scope of elections is a factor in evaluating the degree of information that is available and to whom. That is hardly to say that an authoritarian government does not require a press and a theory of how it should operate to produce the government's desired results, but rather that different models of democratic achievement call for different architectures of an evolved media system.

With this as preface, let me address several specific questions that might be asked as part of an evaluative exercise:

One could put a question this way: *Is the system of media which is functioning and in place matched in some way with the political advancement of the society in question?* To translate this question into an operative evaluation would require a dynamic sense of transitions and the relationship between media institutions and political institutions. Beata Rozumilowicz sought to address this problem in an essay called "Democratic Change: A Theoretical Perspective." (Price, Rozumilowicz, & Verhulst, 2002, p. 9) She suggested specific modes of media assistance dependent on the nature of transition or change in the target society. The model involved—stages of transition—may be subject to question, but the larger point is the need for a stronger sense of the pace and direction of change, the ideologies involved and the history of the state, to understand the media interventions that are warranted and suitable.

Press freedom measures are useful in what they indicate, but may disguise the significant information necessary for an intelligent decision by a donor. For example, as I seek to show below, the *partly free/not free* designations might mask societies where individuals and large swaths of society

may be substantially informed—indeed perhaps more informed—on issues of public moment than their counterparts in those societies categorized as "Free," though at higher cost to the individual.

This relates, in some way, to the Hallin and Mancini formulation of comparing media systems. If a society meets its approach to democratic practice through polarized pluralism, then the media that help fulfills the promise of that system should have a complementary profile in the society's media institutions. This might involve, for example, increased government intervention and subsidy. The old Netherlands system of pillarization was a media strategy aimed at supplementing a very special view of what constitutes a democratic polity, but it involved heavy state intervention, subsidy and public ownership. The Netherlands model might be suitable in many contexts where there is a need for power sharing or different definition of the nature of the state. A society where such a system fulfills political and social goals ought to be ranked as high or higher than one where a traditionally "free media" is matched to a liberal political system. France has a corporatist, statist tradition and one in which there is a heavy emphasis on centralism, but it is a strong democracy. An evaluation system that asked about media freedom in France from inside a French model would be less universal, less useful in many ways, across time and across states. But it would have compensating advantages for understanding the interplay between media institutions and political institutions.

This set of questions also problematizes the function of the measures in crisis and fragile states. Particular donors may be more concerned with stabilization, with strengthening a fragile state, than with achieving a more favorable Freedom House score. This is hardly to criticize Freedom House or its evaluating cohort. They properly measure and evaluate what they have set out to assess. The burden falls on the reader—government agencies, foundations, citizens, the target society itself—what to do with the assessment or evaluation. The evaluative texts often and properly lament when states descend in the rankings or show movements from greater press freedom (according to their measures) rather than less. Even as this volume is being completed, there are debates about "engaging with authoritarian governments" as compared to more single-mindedly and assertively pursuing an agenda of democratization and progress toward press freedoms. Because Freedom House is such a clear and certain measuring regime, and because it is so associated with a generally conceived positivist outcome, the evaluation

mechanism itself puts a (frequently benign) thumb on the scale of deciding which direction to pursue.

The easiest instance to understand the problem is in the study of Occupations. In the wake of World War II, in Germany and Japan, the U.S. government as Occupying Power controlled the press, though it exercised that control to put in place a set of institutions that would serve as the bedrock for a more democratic future. Occupation is the maximum in government control. And censorship, as in de-Nazification in the German case, was a fundamental aspect of the project. It was the kind of state intervention and control that would yield an unfavorable Freedom House ranking, but the need to impose a system would be justified by the process of yielding, in the long run, a more democratic society.

What are the appropriate moments for such a strong hand in shaping a democratic-causing media as part of a general political transformation? And under what circumstances can or should a state be able to impose a similar set of mechanisms as part of its internally-driven transitions? The Freedom House measures and the dialogue that produces them can be helpful (as can the somewhat more multi-faceted IREX evaluations). But they may not address the questions that are at the heart of making a decision in the most complicated situations, although they provide the illusion that they can.

These questions are particularly significant at the very negative ends of the evaluative spectrum. This sector represents some of the countries where media assistance and policy is most significant and problematic and will be so during the next decade. Palestine, Cuba, China and Iran are excellent examples. And the questions are relevant higher in the rankings as well. How Singapore is labeled will make very little difference because there is not much impetus to change or intervene to change its press-related structures and policies.

The interplay between models of democracy and theories of media reform were richly discussed in the somewhat forgotten, but once much-praised report of the 1947 Hutchins Commission "A Free and Responsible Press." (Leigh, 1974)[2] The report identified five functional descriptions of the press as indicators of whether the engines of information were performing

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2. The report was an ornament of a different era. It was funded by grants from Time, Inc., and Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc. The Commission on Freedom of the Press was established in 1943 to determine whether freedom of the press was in danger in the United States. See Leigh (1947); Dennis (1995); and Bollinger (1993).

the task for which they were socially required:[3] (1) to provide "a truthful, comprehensive, and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning," a commitment evidenced in part by objective reporting; (2) to serve as "a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism," meaning in part that papers should be "common carriers" of public discussion, at least in the limited sense of carrying views contrary to their own; (3) to project "a representative picture of the constituent groups in the society;" (4) to "present and clarify… the goals and values of the society"; and (5) to furnish "full access to the day's intelligence," thereby serving the public's right to be informed. (Leigh, 1974, pp. 21, 23, 26-28)[4] These functions, representation of pluralism aside, can be telescoped into three summary tasks now seen as central to the political role of the media: to provide information, to enlighten the public so that it is capable of self-government, and to serve as a watchdog or check on government.

Each of these responsibilities and functions reflects varying aspects of democratic practice. Visions of a democratic society that emphasize citizen participation, for example, would underscore the need for media that, as the late C. Edwin Baker put it, "aid groups in pursuing their agendas and mobilizing for struggle and bargaining."(Baker, 2002, p. 157) Baker was interested in understanding how different media structures match or contribute to particular perceptions of democratic governance. For example, what has been called an elitist version of democracy requires principally that media provide information to key sectors of the population—those who are themselves the audit mechanism in the localized version of democratization. For Baker, a version of a democratic society that emphasizes pluralism would value more greatly the function of the press that sought to ensure that all groups felt represented or were in fact represented. The architecture of the press, the role of new technology, ownership patterns, and, of course, the demand patterns and behavior of readers also are significant factors that respond to different versions of democracy.

It is unrealistic to argue for a press that must perform all these functions. U.S. foreign policy cannot easily advocate a regulatory regime that fully requires newspapers and broadcasters to be comprehensive, intelligent, truth-

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3. One attempt to clarify the link between mass media and the political society was introduced by Frederick S. Siebert in 1956, and presented in Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm (1956). The purpose of the work was to establish and explain four normative theories: the authoritarian, the libertarian, the Soviet, and the social responsibility models.

4. See also Peterson (1956).

ful, and objective—though these objectives might be desirable—since this involves a degree of regulation and monitoring that is inconsistent with its own domestic law. Whether newspapers or broadcast media within a society carry sets of differing opinions or opinions that are different from their own also does not automatically define whether a society is democratic. It is plausible to have a society of opinion, of diverse views, in which each particular instrument of the press is highly partisan. That is not within the model of a free press ordinarily exported, as it were, by the United States, but it is a model that exists and is growing, particularly within the United States. In the long term, having a press that is representative of various constituent groups in the society may contribute to a stable and plural democracy, but, again, an industry that has those qualities has only seldom and grudgingly been a legal requirement of a "free and independent press." Indeed, in the United States any government requirements that a newspaper be "representative" in the sense that the content reflects specific concerns or specific groups have themselves been considered coercive and violative of free speech principles.

The Hutchins Commission wrote in the context of an already old and stable democratic society in which there were solid institutions, a rule of law, and a plenitude of means of communication, yet one could still debate about the conception of society that the Commission was furthering and the nature of the democracy that prevailed in the United States or Western Europe. It would be far more complex to transfer its logic to states in various degrees of transition. Traditions of a legal environment protecting the exercise of speech freedoms, the existence of a journalistic tradition of professionalism, the economic underpinnings for the assertion of integrity, and the potential to finance the mechanisms of media—all of these are in dynamic evolution or subject to question in most transitions. Perhaps a smaller claim is warranted: that a society that seeks to be and remain democratic can only be so if it has some engine that performs these tasks of providing information, exchanging comment, and serving and sustaining diverse constituent groups.

A related question is this: *Do the media in a particular society actually produce an informed citizenry* (with the question of what constitutes an informed citizenry itself subject to interpretation and adjustment from state to state)?

Measures of press freedom are, for the most part, input, rather than output, driven. Most evaluative efforts define the circumstances in which the media are produced, not the content of what is provided or how that content is received and integrated into the lives of citizens. To the extent these ele-

ments receive attention, they may not be weighed so significantly as aspects of production. In a way this bias is understandable. It is far harder to evaluate output than it is to assess the context of production—or at least that has historically been the case. And the assumption, at least in the heartland of press freedom, is that a free press will produce the information that is needed while a controlled press will not. This is the essence of the concept of negative freedoms: to be free of government regulation, government oppression, even government subsidy, is an achievement in itself and productive of a superior media system.

From an evaluative and donor standpoint the situation becomes somewhat more complex). There are those significant actors who are dedicated to the principle of a free and independent media and its particular style of embodiment; for others, the commitment to this structure is not for its own sake—not for the sake of the press—but for the role that media can and should play in producing an informed citizenry. If democratization (or other forms of accountability) is the goal, then (according to themes of democratic theory), fulfillment depends upon a citizenry that can intelligently and in an informed way perform its function. That raises the question whether one could rank states in terms of the extent to which their citizens are informed (or, a separate question, informed and involved). And would that ranking comport with or differ (sharply) from existing rankings that turn on press freedom (i.e. do press freedom rankings function as a useful correlated substitute for measuring extent to which citizens are informed)? I would hypothesize that, increasingly, especially given vast changes in media technology, the correlation between press freedom (as formally evaluated) and citizen information is getting less positive, if press freedom is defined in the existing way with an emphasis on legacy media.

> The extent to which citizens are actually informed turns on a number of factors: their literacy level, their access to information, their passion for obtaining it, their habits of public and private discourse. Societies may have a free press and a passive and disinterested citizenry. Societies may have a free press and a citizenry that turns to the banal, trivial and apolitical. Conversely, there are societies that have a highly controlled press, but the structure of information diffusion on issues of public importance is robust and communities turn what is available into tools of information and mobilization. Leakage in the global transmission of information is a vital factor in this process. As Becker and Vlad report, "Gunaratne (2002) also used the Freedom House measures of press freedom in an examination of the relationship between…[press freedom] and political participation, as measured by voter turnout at national elec-

tions. No such relationship existed. Gunaratne did find evidence of a relationship between the Freedom House measures of press freedom and the UNDP Human Development Index, which measures a country's achievements in health, knowledge and standard of living. (Becker & Vlad, 2009, p. 6)

Increasingly, we have seen the growth of societies—Singapore is an example—that stakes its economic future on having a highly literate, highly educated, and highly informed citizenry, but which discriminates in such a way that certain information, certain viewpoints, are sharply controlled. The vast growth and intensity of use of the internet has changed the profile of how and whether citizens are informed. In China, despite thorough controls, despite filters and active and robust censorship, there is a vibrant and pervasive use of the internet, described in the 2009 Freedom House study as follows:

> Despite the multiple layers of control, the internet has emerged in recent years as a primary source of news and a forum for discussion for many Chinese, particularly among the younger generation. Indeed, a recent academic study estimated that there were approximately 72 million blogs in China at the end of 2007, along with nearly 17 million "active" bloggers updating their websites a minimum of one time per month. Through this and other avenues, Chinese cyberspace has grown into a dynamic environment, replete with online auctions, social networks, homemade music videos, a large virtual gaming population, and spirited discussion of some social and political issues. … Many well-educated and web-savvy Chinese are able to bypass the government's control using a variety of technical circumvention tools. These individuals can thus obtain more information from overseas sources than the average citizen, and can act as opinion leaders in online discussions, particularly if they have knowledge of a foreign language. (Freedom House, 2009, pp. 40-41)

Public opinion on some issues flares, wanes and is shaped on the internet, with the state media often following, sometimes leading. Guobin Yang's chapter in this book illuminates this question of intense citizen mobilization and use of information.

In various societies, the existence of unblocked, unfiltered satellite signals from abroad alters wholly the nature of the information pattern of a state's population. In Jordan, for example, or other parts of the Middle East, the existence of Al Jazeera substantially affects the information ecology. Citizens undoubtedly read, watch or listen to their more controlled domestic press differently given the ready availability of the transnational alternative. And the controls themselves may be implemented in a different fashion be-

cause of the competitive context of information diffusion. Marc Lynch's work is largely dedicated to exploration of this question—how the new technology alters the sense of the public sphere. (Lynch, 2006)

Of course, the contention that the structure of a free and independent media is not in itself an almost sufficient indicator of information use is in need of corroboration and opens other areas for discussion. Perhaps a "free and independent media," or a traditional media in democratic society, informs citizens in a way different from (and perhaps superior to) new and additional modes. What people learn and how people feel they can use the information may change with technology. The society that reads newspapers may interact with information in a different manner from one that gains its sense of the world from radio or television or the internet. And there is a different point: the extent to which a society is informed and how it processes that information is different if the public has no means of changing government or altering power in a peaceful and ordered way.

How would one measure the difference among societies in terms of whether the citizenry or subjects have sufficient and ready availability of the complexity of public and private reporting and information that can make a citizenry effective? Here, one could sink into the difficult question of what a society considers important in terms of necessary and desirable information. One society may think familiarity with the Bible is a prerequisite for what constitutes being an informed citizen; another may have very high literacy demands in international affairs or economics. If what is important is the legitimacy of political competition, a relevant supply of information is a necessary but not sufficient condition. One could seek to develop a template to determine, comparatively, how informed publics are; but given the connection to specific and widely varying decision-processes (both as to form and to content), so simple an approach would not be adequate. What Pakistanis should know to be informed participants in decision-making (whether it is participation in an election or in another mode of seeking accountability) is far different from what a public in Ethiopia or Somalia or Vietnam must know for counterpart activities. In a sense, this potential variation underscores the difficulty of assessing whether citizens are informed and to what extent. Indeed, it is because of the difficulty of making such choices that it is so convenient to resort to a more single-minded, clearer test, such as that of freedom of the press, as a unifying measure. On the other hand, however, the possible variation also demonstrates the ironies in current evaluation

schemes and the ways in which the results may not help interested parties, to the extent that that is a goal.

The problem of assessing what information is available and why relates to another issue—one that is not transparently part of most existing assessments: *Do the media provide citizens with "voice" or some notion of adequate participation?* (Buckley, et al., 2008; March, 2010.) Here we turn to questions of citizen engagement, a subject amply treated in the chapter of this book by Jacobson, Pan and Jun. Why should we care about "voice," and exactly what does it mean? A media system can be exemplary—free and full of information—but not provide to segments, perhaps even large segments of the citizenry, a sense that, through it, the public is able to make its position heard and felt in official quarters. "Voice" —something like a participatory stake in decision-making—is a complex objective to reach. Even a media system that is diverse and pluralistic may not achieve the goals of "voice." Citizens may gain voice through alternative means—through public demonstrations, through messages scrawled on walls, through blogging and other uses of new technologies. Voice or the idea of voice denotes a structure of communication in which there is expression that cumulates to have public impact. A media system that satisfies "voice" requirements often requires the kind of intervention and attention to architecture that implicates state action. The somewhat discredited "fairness doctrine" in the United States was a pale manifestation of voice, as was an also-abandoned practice that required licensees of broadcasting stations to ascertain consumer needs as a condition of obtaining a license renewal. A good newspaper begins to manifest voice by understanding and drawing on the viewpoints of a wide cross-section of the populace. Public opinion polling and articulating and publicizing the results can be a step toward increased voice.

It is difficult to evaluate and grade states on the extent to which voice is a significant feature of their media systems. The formal regulatory system is not sufficient; even the structure of the media is not wholly revealing. There are some indicators of effort—*i.e.* evidence that the system was intentionally or by practice seeking to produce voice. Voice may come because it is technologically enabled, not because a set of publishers or editors made it possible. On the other hand, voice can be engineered, as by establishing an active system of community broadcasting. An active blogosphere which had extensive content related to public matters of the day would be one indicator. Evidence that newspapers and broadcasters opened their doors, through letters

to the editors or *vox populi* segments, would also be helpful. Community broadcasters are often emblems of effort at gaining citizen participation in political dialogue. Whether correctly or not, one justification for RFE-RL and other international broadcasters was that it was a "surrogate," fulfilling for repressed voices within a society the need for a radio station that aired its views. Some public perception that the citizenry's various views are being effectively sought out and represented would be useful as well.

In Albert O. Hirschman's book, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty*, the development economist defined voice (and exit) as public responses to systems that were inadequately performing. (Hirschman, 1970) Just as stockholders in a firm, unsatisfied with its performance, can exit by selling their shares, individuals in underperforming societies try to exit: migrating, becoming refugees, or failing to undertake their civic responsibilities. Exit is countermanded by voice, the perception by citizens that they can improve a situation by expressing their political opinions and holding some hope for change. Whether voice exists and exists sufficiently in a society is a complex question and media are part, but only part of the answer.

The Australian scholar Terry Flew has written persuasively about reconceptualizing Hirschman's notion of voice in the internet era. Flew has pointed out the high hopes for the internet as a means of revitalizing politics through its impact on the public sphere. He highlights the combination of factors that have been commonly identified, including: the scope for horizontal or peer-to-peer communication; the capacity to access, share and independently verify information from a diverse range of global sources; the comparative lack of government controls over the internet as compared to other media; the ability to form social networks based around interest and affinity and unconstrained by geography; the capacity to disseminate, debate and deliberate on current issues, and to challenge professional opinions and official positions; and the potential for political disintermediation, or communication not filtered by political organizations, 'spin doctors' or the established news media. (Flew & Young, 2004)

As Flew puts it, somewhat optimistically, "Stephen Coleman argues that 'an atmosphere of crisis surrounds virtual deliberation and indirect representation in the early 21st century,' characterized by distrust of political representation, disenchantment with mainstream media coverage of politics, and 'a post-deferential desire by citizens to be heard and respected more.' [2005a, p. 195] If 'the framing of 20th century politics by broadcast media led to a

sense that democracy amounted to the public watching and listening to the political elite thinking aloud on its behalf,' the rise of interactive online and networked media 'opens up unprecedented opportunities for more inclusive public engagement in the deliberation of policy issues.' [Coleman, 2005b, p. 209] (Flew & Wilson, 2008, p. 24)

Flew's reframing of voice suggests ways of evaluating whether a society has taken steps to encourage or discourage it. The evaluation measures of Freedom House and the others do not directly address "voice." It is often assumed, sometimes correctly, that the existence of an independent media is a marker of "voice" or representation of public views effectively in the political process. But it is frequently the case that even media that are independent from direct government control are tightly controlled and owned, often in concentrated fashion and often by individuals and entities connected to government figures. Most media, their many virtues aside, are sufficiently top-down in structure that their function as a vehicle for voice cannot be easily inferred from criteria of freedom from government authority.

The question of "voice" is related to a more general one: *Are the media part of a process that yields adequate participation in political affairs?* To approach this question requires much more careful understanding of why evaluative questions are asked in the first place. What are actors—those interested in the measures and the rankings—hoping to achieve or hoping to learn? Why is the data that they are requesting relevant for these goals? I start with a point that itself might be subject to question. Free and independent media are not a good in themselves, but only inasmuch as they support other, more intrinsic, values and goals, such as democracy, a particular economic structure, greater cultural understanding, general human development, and so on. Media—free, independent and otherwise—buttress these greater social objectives to a greater or lesser extent. We want to know which media buttress which objectives and how those objectives relate to greater public purposes. This analysis is especially the case when it representatives of external agents are evaluating interventions in target societies. Those representatives (government or private donors) have their own political and strategic objectives, many properly tied to their own national interests.

The general logic has long been that—aside from the larger purpose of spreading universal international norms and values—the West is committed to the idea that the spread of democratic values and the adjustment of non-democratic governments to democratic practices is in the general global, so-

cietal interest. The general premise is that democracies are more stable, work better with one another, generally forbear from conflict with each other; therefore a more democratic world is a better world. The next assumption is that fostering a more democratic media may contribute to the process of gradual or sudden transformation from more authoritarian societies to more democratic ones.

Different donors have different sub-objectives. I have, earlier in this essay, described the varying set of notions of democracy that a donor might consider a useful goal in the societies it seeks to influence. Take, for example, this insight from an essay by Beata Rozumilowicz: "Tatu Vanhanen (1996) has found that it is not so much economic development, per se, which influences the prospects for democracy, but rather the way in which this economic development is distributed. In nations where a variety of social and economic goods were more equitably distributed among a number of social groups or classes, prospects for democracy were greater." (Price, Rozumilowicz & Verhulst, 2002, p. 12) Alternatively, Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1995) argue that democratization is better defined as a strictly political system that meets three essential conditions: a meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and organized groups (e.g. political parties) that excludes the use of force, a highly inclusive level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies, and a level of civil liberties secured under a rule of law that ensures citizens that they can develop and advocate their views and interests autonomously. Robert Dahl's definition (1971) has another turn, namely the continued responsiveness of government to the preferences of its citizens, considered as political equals. Public contestation and the right to participate are integral. (Dahl, 1971, p. 4)

Without going too deeply into the question: those engaged in media assistance need to know as much as possible about the relationship between media (or the information system) in the society to which they are providing aid and the political system itself. One can seek to democratize the media as a way of democratizing the state (if the latter is a goal). If that is the case one must be sure that the particular way selected is not counterproductive—not tied to a model of democratization that is unsuitable for the society in question, not based on a lack of understanding of the interrelationship between modes of assistance and effects on political life. For example, if it is the Vanhanen view that is persuasive, how does media help develop equitable distribution of economic benefits? If it is a Dahlian approach, how can media be

an instrument of government responsiveness? Interventions that depend on the existence of a commercially supported media make less sense in loci where the consumer base is insufficient. Free media may mean over-reliance on foreign media in ways that skew the capacity of local publics to interact with local issues.

All the entities involved in measuring and ranking are involved in the question: *Does the advent of new technologies call for a wholesale switch in approach and methodology to the press freedom evaluative project?* It is hardly the case that the "old media" are being abandoned or are even in significant decline in the societies that are under scrutiny. Yet new technology is on the march and is making a democratizing difference. This is a significant aspect of a real assessment of "media freedom" in China, to be sure, but in many, many other contexts. If it is not the internet, it may be cell phones or other similar devices.

How to deal with new technology in terms of providing significant measures depends very much on context. Obviously, as societies shift from reliance on legacy media to very new (as well as very ancient) forms, existing framing approaches (and existing measuring techniques) may make less sense. We may see a return to the two-track approaches to free expression of Lee Bollinger: when one medium is liberated, another medium may be the subject of greater regulation. (Bollinger, 1986) At some point, states and analysts might take this attitude towards a complex media system. Indeed, in some contexts, the existence of a widely liberated and heavily relied on new technology may justify a medium more specifically addressing national concerns. Calls for a "public channel" or government subsidized news, or a designated channel for Parliament gain currency when government messages have difficulty competing in the marketplace of ideas. Most important, in almost every case the availability of new technologies—satellites, cell phones, the internet—affects media systems in terms of the questions fundamentally put in play through the evaluation tools. Analysts must learn much more, in any specific state, about the availability and uses of new information technologies as instruments of citizenship and participation. Political systems may be altered by radical modes for mobilization made possible by the new information technologies. How a society should be described, evaluated and ranked needs to be more sensitive to these technology shifts.

How can this be done? Already, there is data on cell phone take-up, internet penetration and internet use. Much more could be done by deploying

a data-driven visualization of national blogospheres or other modes of mapping discourse. What would one ask the blogosphere analysis to show? Partly it is the extent to which citizens blog or read blogs. Partly it would be a study of the diversity of discussion in the national blogosphere. Societies that have liberal, much-used blogospheres may reach degrees of freedom even if there are constraints (including severe constraints) on legacy media. Ithiel de Sola Pool wrote four decades ago about "Technologies of Freedom." (de Sola Pool, 1983) We have learned that the adaptation to new modes of communication leave a rather complex picture of what is free and what is not. But technology allows a justification and opportunity for rethinking evaluations and rankings.

The problem, then with rankings, is that it is not wholly clear what should be measured. It is a question of information systems and political systems. There are cases like Jordan where domestic or legacy broadcasting is government owned and controlled, where the press is highly regulated, but where citizens—at least those who are so inclined—have substantial access to the blogosphere and to international media. There are cases like Museveni's Uganda where innovation has led to a government press that is obliged to carry opposition views. This is a time when the very definition of "media" is changing and, simultaneously, shifting currents in terms of democracy and "democracy promotion." As a consequence, the subject of media and democratization—which may have had a fixed content for some decades—is newly fresh. The issue of what to measure or rank and why is tied intensely to this debate over the role an altered system of information delivery plays in relationship to altered expectations of political change. Analyses by Freedom House and its principal counterparts sensibly emphasize what might be called the production side of information—the structure of the press, how is it regulated, and its relationship to the political system. There's less emphasis on how the press is *used*, how it is *read and received*, how it enlivens the society and becomes the basis for more informed activity by individuals who could be part of collective self-determination.

I have tried to provide examples of how these issues arise and become salient. In many advanced democratic countries, there are increased, though episodic, problems with low voter turn out, with a decline in the fortunes of newspapers, with polarization and an emphasis on opinion rather than fact in broadcasting. In Sudan, Afghanistan, Kenya, Iran, and Palestine, elections—while having extraordinary positive elements—also raised questions

about when and how and with what institutional care, broad scale voting should be held. But, as indicated above, elections are a theater of justification for the existence of media and the practice of its effectiveness. It is important to continue to evaluate, but it is important, simultaneously, to debate what it is that lies at the root of the evaluation. Freedom House has become an amazing, professionally tuned machine for evaluation. It has garnered substantial resources. It has become a site for comparison and reference. It has professionalized the process of establishing criteria for evaluating press freedom (its longest-standing undertaking) and has expanded into measuring and ranking state achievements as democracies, on internet freedom, and other matters, etc. It has grown from a complex Cold War beginning to an institution because it has been doing what it has been doing consistently, for a long time and rather well. IREX, its major American competitor, has created a substantial and credible record as well, broadening the set of questions that are asked and answered. Precisely because these are such important institutions, it is desirable to try to shape a critical discourse about their work—and those entities that engage in similar (even if noticeably different) processes.

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