

Guidelines for using the Global Media Freedom Dataset

Citation information: when using this dataset and the guidelines below, please cite the following article:

Whitten-Woodring, Jenifer and Douglas A. Van Belle. 2015. "The Correlates of Media Freedom: An Introduction of the Global Media Freedom Dataset." *Political Science Research and Methods*, FirstView Article/December 2015. DOI 10.1017/psrm.2015.68, Published online: 02 December 2015.

For more information about the evolution and devolution of media freedom in individual countries from 1948 to 2012, see this book:

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

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

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

- 1—Free—Countries where criticism of government and government officials is a common and normal part of the political dialogue in the mediated public sphere.
- 2—Imperfectly Free—Countries where social, legal, or economic costs related to the criticism of government or government officials limits public criticism, but investigative journalism and criticism of major policy failings can and does occur.
- 3—Not Free—Countries where it is not possible to safely criticize government or government officials. In the original dataset gathered by Van Belle, there were four categories and category 4 met government directly controlled all news media, whereas category 3 met government exerted indirect control. With the end of the cold war and the massive growth in information technology, distinguishing between state-operated news media and media that are controlled by other means has become something of a pointless exercise.

In the dataset, additional codes are used for identifying states that for one reason or another cannot be effectively coded.

- 0—No Media—Countries where there is no effective national media.
- 8—Missing Data—Countries where political or social disruption makes it impossible to code for the year.

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

from the Correlates of War project (<http://www.correlatesofwar.org/>).

Suggestions for using these data: Because both free media and imperfectly free media are able function freely, the difference between these categories is much smaller than the difference between imperfectly free media and not free media. Simply put, not free media cannot function freely. Therefore in studies where media freedom is an independent variable, where the effects of media freedom are what matters, we recommend using a dichotomous version of the variable where the categories of free media and imperfectly free media are collapsed into functionally free media vs. not free media. In studies where media freedom is a dependent variable, where the causes of media freedom are what matters, we recommend using the trichotomous version of the variable (free media, imperfectly free media and not free media) in order to explain these important variations. However, because the differences between these categories are not equal, it is important to use a model which accounts for this (ordered logistic regression or multinomial logistic regression are both possibilities).

Merging the Global Media Freedom Data with the Freedom House Data: We gathered data for all available countries from 1948 to 2001. We stopped at 2001 because this is the point where the Freedom House adopted a far more detailed and transparent process of gathering its data for its Freedom of the Press reports. Freedom House's Freedom of the Press reports assign each country/year a code that theoretically ranges 0 to 100, with 100 being the most restricted. Freedom House also categorizes each media environment as "Free" (for those with a score of 0 to 30), "Partly Free" (for those with a score of 31 to 60) or "Not Free" (for those with a score of 61 to 100). While these categories for the most part correspond with our "Free," "Imperfectly Free," and "Not Free" categories, the borders between the Freedom House categories are less distinct than ours. In the Freedom House, the difference between countries with a score of 60 and 61 is slight, but with our data set the difference between countries that are "imperfectly free" and "not free" is the difference between being able to criticize the government and not being able to criticize the government. Consequently, in some cases the categories do not correspond, and this is usually the case where the Freedom House categories are closest to the scoring borders.

In the country profiles of the *Historical Guide to World Media Freedom: A Country-by-Country Analysis* and our updated dataset, we have used the Freedom House Freedom of the Press data as a guide, but have also relied on historic accounts and our own coding criteria (see discrepancies with Freedom House below). Thus our dataset extends through 2014. For future updates, we advise using the Freedom House Freedom of the Press data and categorization as a guide, but suggest careful consideration of countries that are on the borders. According to our coding guidelines, country---years in which the media are not free to criticize the government should be coded as "not free," and country---years where the media are somewhat restricted but are for the most part able to criticize government should be coded as "imperfectly free" and country--- years where the media are clearly able to criticize government should be coded as "free."

UPDATE NOTES: The GMFD_V2 dataset includes data for all available countries from 1948 to 2014.

Discrepancies with Freedom House

- Mauritius: 2013-2014 “Imperfectly free” as per USDS Report for 2013 & 2014
- Israel 2012-2014 “Imperfectly free” as per FH reports about gag orders etc.
- Samoa 2012-2014 “Imperfectly free” as per USDS report about Censorship and Content Restrictions that are in place
- FH consistently codes Kuwait as “Partly free” ranging from upper 50s to 60, even though the reports indicate that problem here is that they are comparing Kuwait to other countries in the region, but media here are not able to criticize government, so “Not free” by GMFD standards
- Fiji for 2012-2013 was not a place where journalists were free to criticize the government. FH codes as “Partly free,” but for these years, Fiji is “Not free” based on GMFD standards
- FH codes some islands as “Free” that GMFD originally coded as “Imperfectly free” because of limited media, but now with internet availability they are “Free” by GMFD standards