

# Watchdog or Lapdog? Media Freedom, Regime Type, and Government Respect for Human Rights

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A main justification for press freedom is that free media will act as a watchdog over the government. While we would expect democracies to have free media and autocracies to have government-controlled media, some democracies have government-controlled media, and some autocracies have free media. How this mismatch between regime type and media system influences government behavior is a puzzle worth exploring. One of the most widely criticized government behaviors is the violation of physical integrity rights. The question posed here is, how does media freedom affect government respect for these rights? In this article, I theorize that the relationship between media freedom and government respect for human rights differs, depending on the presence of democratic institutions. The findings support my premise. Specifically, *the influence of media freedom on government respect for human rights is negative for the most autocratic regimes and positive for only the most democratic regimes.*

Human rights non-governmental organizations have argued that free news media will help to improve government respect for human rights (Amnesty International 2006). Indeed, one of the main justifications for freedom of the news media is that a lack of censorship will enable the news media to act as a watchdog over the government and thereby render the government more responsible and responsive (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2001). Freedom of expression in general, and freedom of the press in particular, has long been considered crucial to democracy because the news media provide a fundamental informational linkage between mass publics, elites, and governments. Indeed, some have argued that freedom of speech and the ability to petition the government is more important to democracy than democratic institutions (Mueller 1992). de Tocqueville ([1840] 1990) proposed that the press was “the chief democratic instrument of freedom,” in protecting Americans from the dangers of bureaucratic despotism. Yet, not all democracies have free media and sometimes media are free in countries that lack other democratic characteristics (Freedom House 2005; Lawrence 2000; Van Belle 1997). Therefore, the focus of this study is not just on how free

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media affects government behavior, and in particular government respect for human rights, but also how free media influences government respect for human rights across a range of regime types.

Little is known about the effect of media freedom on government behavior in either democracies or autocracies. So far this regime characteristic has been explored in terms of conflict by researchers investigating possible causes for democratic peace. While there are strong findings that democratic dyads are far less likely to engage in war than mixed and non-democratic dyads, several studies indicate that media freedom may be a stronger predictor of whether a dyad will enter into military conflict (Choi and James 2006; Van Belle 1997, 2000). Van Belle (1997) suggested that the reason why two countries with free media are less likely to go to war is that the legitimacy of the media in each country facilitates an exchange of trusted information that is disseminated by the media in both countries. If media freedom promotes peace between countries, it follows that media freedom, or the lack thereof, could also influence governments in other ways. Yet, the relationship between media freedom and how governments treat their own citizens remains under-explored.

In this article, I theorize that the relationship between media freedom and government behavior, in particular government respect for human rights, differs, depending on the level of authoritarianism or democratization. Indeed, the results of this study suggest that while media freedom is associated with higher government respect for human rights in countries that are most democratic, in countries that are autocratic, or not fully democratic, media freedom is related to lower government respect for human rights. The first section reviews existing literature on human rights, democracy, and free media. In the second section, I theorize how the effect of free media on government respect for human rights depends on the level of autocracy/democracy. The research design, methods, and operationalization of the variables are discussed in the third section. I present the findings in the fourth section. Section five focuses on two interesting cases: Mexico and Uganda. In conclusion, I consider the implications of this research and possibilities for further research.

### **Human Rights, Democracy, and Free Media**

Some of the most widely criticized forms of government behavior are political imprisonment, murder, disappearance, and torture. The right to be free from these violations is termed the human right to physical integrity (Cingranelli and Richards 2006; Poe and Tate 1994). Human rights research has consistently found that democracy plays a key role in improving government respect for these rights (McCormick and Mitchell 1997; Poe and Tate 1994; Poe, Tate, and Keith 1999), but recent studies indicate that this is not a linear effect (Bueno de Mesquita, Downs, Smith and Cherif 2005; Davenport and Armstrong 2004). Davenport and Armstrong (2004) identified a "threshold of domestic democratic peace," above which democracy improves government respect for human rights and below which democracy has no effect. Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2005, 439) analyzed the effects of different dimensions of democracy and thresholds of democracy and concluded that only democracy at the highest level is associated with improved physical integrity rights, and that accountability as indicated by political competition is "the critical feature that makes full-fledged democracies respect human rights; limited accountability generally retards improvement in human rights." I argue that free media play a crucial role in providing information that facilitates political competition and accountability, but that the effects of free media vary depending on the level of democracy/autocracy.

In considering the relationship between democracy/autocracy and media freedom, it is first important to identify the characteristics of each. In his

review of different conceptualizations of democracy, Keech (Forthcoming) contrasts the minimal definitions of democracy put forth by Schumpeter (1950) and Riker (1982). Schumpeter (1950) characterized a democracy as an “institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote,” whereas Riker viewed democracy as providing the electorate with the opportunity to reject public officials (Qtd. in Keech Forthcoming; 24–25). Elections are central to both of these definitions, but the presence of elections alone does not ensure democracy; therefore, democracy is generally conceptualized as multidimensional (Dahl 1998; Freedom House 2007a; Marshall, Jaggers, and Gurr 2003). For example, Dahl (1998, 85–86) identified the following requirements for democracy: elected officials, elections that are “free, fair, and frequent,” freedom of expression, accessible alternative sources of information, the right to form and participate in independent associations, and the inclusion of all adult citizens in the preceding institutions. While Dahl emphasized the importance of a responsive government, other conceptualizations have focused on checks and balances on government power (Keech Forthcoming). For instance, the Freedom House index of political rights looks at anticorruption measures, political pluralism, and participation and minority protections in addition to the electoral process (Freedom House 2007a). In contrast to the Freedom House index and Dahl’s criteria, the Polity index (Marshall, Jaggers, and Gurr 2003) focuses on authority patterns and considers the “closedness” as well as the “openness” of political institutions, thereby incorporating measures for autocracy as well as measures for democracy (Keech Forthcoming; Marshall, Jaggers, and Gurr 2003). Additionally, the Polity series democracy indicator is minimalist in that it focuses primarily on executive constraints and political competition.

The challenge in conceptualizing democracy comes in determining which criteria are necessary to establish a minimum level of democracy. A consolidated or deep democracy would meet all of the above standards. Indeed, an argument could be made that a consolidated democracy would include both free media and complete government respect for human rights (Linz and Stepan 1996). The problem with this maximalist definition is that it would be tautological to use it to explain outcomes like human rights (Munck and Verkuilen 2002). Moreover, “[t]o have ‘democracy’ mean, subjectively, ‘a good government’ makes it analytically useless” (Zakaria 2003). Thus, if the goal of an analysis is to sort out the characteristics that yield greater government respect for human rights, it is important to use a minimal definition of democracy that focuses on elections and the characteristics that make elections free and fair, such as political competition, participation, and executive constraints.

Zakaria (1997) argued that democracy, narrowly defined as free and fair elections, without “constitutional liberalism” is “dangerous, bringing with it the erosion of liberty, the abuse of power, ethnic division, and even war.” He defined constitutional liberalism as protections of “the individual’s right to life and property, and freedom of religion and speech” (Zakaria 1997). I argue that freedom of speech, particularly when manifested as freedom of the press without democracy is also dangerous because it provides information and a platform for expressing dissent without any other institutional outlets for dissent, such as political competition, political participation, and executive constraints.<sup>1</sup> It follows that in the absence of these institutional outlets, a cycle of protest and repression is likely to evolve.

<sup>1</sup> I am not making a normative argument against free speech, rather I am arguing that it is important to consider how the effects of free speech vary across regime types.

### What Makes Media Free?

Although many have touted the value of free, or independent, media, there is much debate as to what makes media free from government control.<sup>2</sup> Certainly, it is important to look beyond the issues of law and ownership and instead consider the function and practices of the media. In its index of press freedom, Freedom House (2007b) takes into account the legal, political, and economic environments in which media operate. It includes the following criteria for free media: constitutional provisions to protect press freedom and freedom of information; enforcement of these provisions; an absence of laws restricting reporting; freedom of media outlets to determine content; free access to official and unofficial sources; a lack of official censorship and journalist self censorship; freedom of media outlets from intimidation and violence; freedom from economic control on the part of both government and private media ownership; freedom from economic manipulations through “allocation of advertising or subsidies” and bribery of journalists; and a transparency of ownership which allows “consumers to judge the impartiality of the news.” While Freedom House focuses on the environment or the structure within which the media function, it fails to consider the professional norms which shape the agency that drives journalistic practices. In his study of Mexican media, Lawson (2002, 189) found that this agency was crucial as journalists “driven by a new vision of their place in society” brought about the emergence of independent media. In Western news media, professionalism is generally associated with the cultivation of the professional values of objectivity, fairness, independence, and a sense of responsibility to serve the news audience (Gurevitch and Blumler 1990). Yet, in the 19th century, most newspapers were tied to political parties (Hamilton 2004), and in many parts of the world, independent media remain closely connected to competing political parties and are transparently partisan (McQuail, Graber, and Norris 2008). In both the objective model and the partisan model, covering politics and serving as a watchdog over government behavior are critical aspects of journalism. Thus, taking into consideration the role of the professional environment as well as those of the legal, political, and economic environments in allowing news media to control the agenda and framing of news, I propose that at its deepest level, free media:

1. Operate in a legal environment that:
  - a. provides and enforces constitutional protection of media freedom
  - b. is free from laws which restrict reporting
2. Operate in a political environment that:
  - a. is free from government censorship
  - b. allows open access to multiple competing sources
  - c. is free from intimidation and physical violence against journalists
3. Operate in an economic environment that
  - a. is free from financial manipulation by government or other actors (including restrictions on production and/or distribution and reliance on advertising and/or subsidies)
  - b. encourages a plurality of ownership that facilitates competition among media outlets
  - c. facilitates the dissemination of information to citizens
4. Operate in a professional environment that
  - a. encourages journalists to serve as watchdogs, monitoring and reporting on government
  - b. encourages the coverage of contentious stories
  - c. encourages news media to serve as a voice for the marginalized
  - d. discourages self-censorship

<sup>2</sup> I am using the terms “free media” and “independent media” interchangeably here.

Regarding the legal environment, constitutional protection of media freedom is important, but it can also be misleading. For example, Turkey has constitutional provisions for media freedom, but it also has laws that criminalize reporting on some politically sensitive issues including depicting as genocide the killing of one and a half million Armenians in 1915 (Freedom House 2007b; Van Belle 2000). Likewise, it is important to consider how practices shape the political environment. Even if the news media are free from overt government censorship, some would argue that the news media are subject to government control because of their reliance on official sources. This “indexing hypothesis” stipulates that the news media are merely a megaphone for elites, especially government elites, and that any debate presented in the news simply reflects the disagreement between these official sources (Bennett 1990). The problem with this hypothesis is that it fails to explain how indexing actually occurs in journalistic practice and it fails to take into account the “sense of professional responsibility” that pressures journalists to seek out alternative views (Althaus 2003). Although professional environments and professional norms vary across countries, the ethics codes of many news organizations indicate that journalists pride themselves on giving a voice to the voiceless (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2001). While it makes sense that official voices are given a priority in news coverage because they are more prominent and the issues they discuss tend to be highly salient to the news audience, the argument that officials and officials alone shape the news agenda remains unconvincing. Still, the political environment can have a chilling effect on the media. In times of war in particular, news media face strong pressure to refrain from news coverage that is critical of the government. For example, CNN correspondent Christiane Amanpour said the media was intimidated by the Bush administration and consequently “self-muzzled” at the beginning of the Iraq war (Johnson 2003).

In addition to the political and legal environments, the economic environment can greatly affect media freedom. First and foremost, media ownership is often perceived as constraining reporting. It is important to note here that government ownership or funding of media does not necessarily equate to government control of media. For example, while the British Broadcasting Corporation is dependent on government funding, it remains “editorially independent” (Freedom House 2007b). Similarly, private ownership does not guarantee media freedom. With ownership becoming increasingly concentrated and media conglomerates becoming vertically integrated, many news critics have raised concerns that the push to make news more profitable will result in poor news coverage that leaves many voices unheard (Bagdikian 1987; Gans 1979; Parenti 1986). While few have argued that media owners would act as censors, there are legitimate concerns that journalists might engage in self censorship when selecting stories in order to please their editors and publishers and avoid problems (Gans 1979; Parenti 1986). Indeed, according to a survey of journalists, self censorship is prevalent in newsrooms (Pew Research Center 2000).<sup>3</sup> Another concern regarding ownership is that as news media come increasingly under the ownership of multinational conglomerates, the focus will be more on profit-making and less on high quality journalism (Bagdikian 1987). Hamilton (2004) argued that market forces have driven news media coverage in the United States since the Penny Press Revolution in the 1830s.<sup>4</sup>

While there is compelling evidence that the media are subject to economic pressures, these same pressures can serve to keep media free from complete elite

<sup>3</sup> A 2005 survey found that editors and reporters did censor their reports on the Iraq war in particular to remove graphic images (Hall and Bear 2005).

<sup>4</sup> The Penny Press Revolution brought about the transformation of the newspaper industry in the United States. Before the revolution, newspapers were partisan and funded by subscribers. During the 1830s newspapers began to drop subscription prices and became primarily funded by advertising. In order to appeal to more advertisers by increasing their readership, newspapers became less partisan and more objective.

control, provided there is sufficient plurality of ownership to allow for competition. There is a tremendous demand on news organizations to make a profit. The only way they can accomplish this is to sell their audience to advertisers; therefore mainstream large market news organizations must cater to the masses and compete against each other to gain a larger share of the audience (Hamilton 2004). If they fail to do so, they will not survive. In addition, smaller news organizations that target niche markets will strive to provide alternative information to audiences that are dissatisfied with what they find in the mainstream media. Thus, although journalists in the mainstream media may be inclined initially to self-censor to avoid some controversial or unpopular stories, journalists in niche media often have incentive to tackle these stories. It follows that once the niche media pave the way, the mainstream media will follow, especially in the case of stories about human rights violations. Lawson (2002, 139) found that in Mexico, media openness led to increased coverage, first by the niche media and then by more mainstream media, of government corruption and state-sponsored repression:

The discovery that Mexican audiences devoured scandalous information only encouraged greater reporting of incendiary and shocking events. For media owners, scandals sold newspapers and boosted ratings; for reporters, they helped make careers and satisfied personal desires to participate in a new kind of journalistic enterprise that would expose the failings of authoritarian rule. Market forces and journalistic norms thus encouraged Mexico's media to expose spectacular instances of government abuse.

Therefore based on economic issues, while elites certainly exert significant pressure on the news media, they do not enjoy exclusive control over them.

One of the most overlooked aspects of media is the role of the professional environment. Indeed, Lawson (2002, 191) attributed much of the opening of the Mexican media to a strengthening of professional journalistic norms inspired by "disaffection with the political system and exposure to foreign models." Similarly, in looking at the relationship between the news media and government in Uganda, Ocitti (2005, 101) found that government efforts to stifle the press with legal restrictions failed because "many (journalists) had long since decided to risk arrests rather than sacrifice their journalistic freedom and ethics. It was almost as if the more the government harassed them the more they attacked the government's policies and exposed indiscretions among the governing officials." These cases illustrate the importance of professional norms in free media, particularly in transitional governments. In both, the media persisted in critical reporting in spite of government efforts to muzzle the negative coverage.

In particular, professional norms will influence whether or not journalists engage in self-censorship. This is one of the most problematic aspects of media freedom. Even media that appear free according to their legal, political, and economic environments, can be quite vulnerable to self-censorship unless there are strong professional norms which dictate otherwise. Regardless of the legal, political, and economic environment, it is the professional environment that determines whether media will act freely.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Of course the presence of strong professional norms is no guarantee that the media will serve as a watchdog or as a voice for the voiceless, especially in cases involving groups that are cultural outcasts like the Roma. According to the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), not only does the media often fail to address the plight of the Roma, but in some instances it actually promotes anti-Romani sentiment. For example, according to the ERRC, the Italian newspaper "Corriere della Sera" failed to provide editorial comment when it printed anti-Romani statements made by Gianfranco Fini, the leader of National Alliance party, and thereby "contributed to an escalation of anti-Romani hostility" (European Roma Rights Centre 2007).



Finally, as with democracy, while it is important to consider the multiple dimensions of media freedom, a minimal definition of media freedom is more useful analytically. While the above listed criteria are necessary for the deepest level of media freedom, if we want media freedom to mean more than "good media," we need to identify the minimal requirement for free media. In studying the relationship between media and government, the most important role of the media is its ability to perform a watchdog role, monitoring and criticizing government behavior because when the media performs this function it is able to act as a forum for political debate regardless of other limitations on its freedom. In his press freedom index, Van Belle (2000) focuses on the ability of the news media to criticize the government and thereby serve as an arena for political competition. This more narrow definition of media independence is aimed more at the function and practices of the media. While the political, legal, economic, and professional environments each play a role in the capability of the media to serve as a watchdog and an arena for political competition, I propose that it is the professional environment that is most important in determining whether or not the media actually perform this function.

In both Mexico and Uganda, in spite of unfriendly legal, political, and economic environments, the media did in fact act independently, largely because of the professional environments. This begs the question as to why an autocratic government would tolerate free media. I posit that independent media is sometimes permitted in autocratic settings for the same reason that one-party regimes like Mexico's PRI hold elections: because holding elections and allowing some media freedom lends legitimacy to the government. In the case of Mexico, the government exerted economic control over the media in the form of lucrative government advertising and the subsidizing of newspaper production (Lawson 2002). While government officials did at times resort to intimidation and harassment of critical journalists, they also sought to maintain a façade of a free press; thus, this relatively loose form of control facilitated the emergence of independent media (Lawson 2002). In Uganda, Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Movement relied on the news media to improve and maintain its image when it seized control of the country in 1986 (Ocitti 2005). In order to use the media in this fashion, the government "had to demonstrate a noticeable tolerance of the press" (Ocitti 2005, 93). In each case, the government sought to gain legitimacy by maintaining the illusion of a free press, unlocking the door for independent media. Moreover, as journalistic norms gained strength, in the form of professional values in Mexico and in the form of intense partisanship in Uganda, journalists pushed that door wide open.

### **The Interaction of Free Media and Autocracy/Democracy**

Some scholars have argued that freedom of speech is more important to a democracy than the right to vote, that "if citizens have the right to complain, to petition, to organize, to protest, to demonstrate, to strike, to threaten to emigrate, to shout, to publish," government will be more responsible and more responsive (Mueller 1992, 984). Yet, few have considered the effects of free media in states that lack democratic characteristics. Because free media itself could be considered an essential component of democracy, we would expect to find most free media in democratic states and most controlled media in autocratic states, but this is not always the case.

Table 1 illustrates the distribution of democracies and autocracies with free media and government-controlled media for all available countries from 1948

TABLE 1. Media and Regime Types, 1948–1995,\* N = 5,575

	<i>Free Media</i>	<i>Government-Controlled Media</i>
Democracy	1,463 (26%)	313 (6%)
Autocracy	423 (8%)	3,376 (60%)

\*This table was constructed using the Van Belle (1997, 2000) Global Press Freedom Dataset in which media for each country are coded free or not free based on their ability to criticize the government and the Polity IV dataset's combined Autocracy/Democracy score which ranges from –10 (most autocratic) to 10 (most democratic) (Marshall, Jaggers, and Gurr 2003). I use the standard threshold where countries scoring 6 and above are labeled “democracies” and those with scores below 6 are labeled “autocracies.”

to 1995.<sup>6</sup> Media freedom is measured using the Van Belle (1997) Global Press Freedom Data. This dataset includes media freedom measurements for states for the years 1948 through 1995. Media for each state/year are coded as free, partly free, partly controlled, or completely controlled based on their ability to serve as an “arena for political competition” (Van Belle 2000).<sup>7</sup> Autocracy/democracy is measured using the Polity IV Data combined Polity score which is coded for each state using a 21-point scale (–10 being the most autocratic and 10 being the most democratic) (Marshall and Jaggers 2002); I have used the standard threshold in which states scoring 6 and above are categorized as democracies, and those scoring 5 and below are categorized as autocracies. As expected, the most common combinations of media and regime type are government-controlled media in autocratic countries (60 percent) and free media in democratic countries (26 percent), but there are exceptions. For example, from 1981 to 1995, both Greece and Portugal were coded as highly democratic (Marshall, Jaggers, and Gurr 2003), yet their media were coded as being “restricted” or “somewhat controlled,” meaning that the media in these countries were unable to function freely because they were not allowed to criticize the government (Van Belle 2000). During the same time frame, both Uganda and Mexico were coded as autocracies (Marshall, Jaggers, and Gurr 2003), yet during the same years, both of these countries had media coded as “partly free,” meaning that the news media were able to function as free presses because they could criticize the government (Van Belle 2000).

The primary objective of this study is to ascertain how the effect of free media on government respect for human rights varies across regime types. The “marketplace of ideas” concept holds promise for explaining the variation in the effectiveness of free media across regime types. The idea is that a marketplace of ideas, facilitated by freedom of expression and freedom of the press, will provide a forum in which elites compete for political support and debate the merits of different policies if, and only if, the right combination of institutions is in place (Snyder and Ballentine 1996). Snyder and Ballentine (1996) suggest that just as economic competition requires well-developed institutions to produce favorable results, a competitive marketplace of ideas also depends on the presence of certain institutions if it is to benefit society. Thus, I propose that the impact of free media on government respect for human rights will depend on the presence of democratic characteristics, in particular political competition, political participation, and executive constraints. While free media are able to report government violations of human rights, in the absence of political participation, and competition and executive constraints, government is less

<sup>6</sup> Tables A1 and A2 in the appendix give the breakdown of states with free media and controlled media by each level of autocracy/democracy from 1948 to 1995 and from 1981 to 1995 (the years included in the main analysis), respectively. To see the dispersion of government-controlled media and free media across the full range of regime types see Figure A1, a kernel density plot, available in the appendix.

<sup>7</sup> More details about this dataset can be found in the Research Design, Methods, and Operationalization section.



vulnerable to public opinion and there are no institutional mechanisms with which to hold the government accountable and push it to be more responsive and respectful of human rights.

In addition to the presence of democratic characteristics, the ability of free news media to affect government respect for human rights depends on the nature of the media, in particular on the presence of the journalistic norm of objectivity (Snyder and Ballentine 1996); if the media are politically independent and objective, so that they can provide a forum for public debate, they should have the credibility to serve as a check on government behavior and therefore be linked to improved government respect for physical integrity rights. While partisan media can also provide a forum for political debate, partisan media controlled by competing political elites could actually serve to provoke the government and thereby decrease government respect for human rights in general.

If the news media are independent, it follows that they would be likely to report on government violations (or toleration of violations) of human rights. How the media frame the stories about the violations will also influence how the mass public reacts to the violations. I posit that in any given state, there is a level of cultural tolerance for human rights violations which is based on public expectations regarding human rights. Additionally, there is likely to be more cultural tolerance for abuse of some groups than others.<sup>8</sup> If this cultural threshold is breeched, it increases the likelihood that the news media will cover the violation and frame it in a manner that generates public outrage. It is at this point that there is a difference in the effect of free media depending on the level of autocracy/democracy.

My theoretical thinking is illustrated in Figure 1 which depicts the cycle of the relationship between news media coverage and government respect for human rights in a democracy. A driving force in this cycle is that there are executive constraints, political competition and participation, and free and fair elections, all of which serve to keep the government responsive and vulnerable to public opinion. In this scenario, government violations (or toleration of violations) of physical integrity rights that breach cultural tolerance would result in significant news media coverage that would likely prompt public outcry. In addition, the presence of political competition and popular elections would provide incentives for political elites to co-opt marginalized groups in order to increase the elites' base of political support. This in turn would pressure the government to reform or lead to the election of new leaders with a platform promising more respect for human rights. It should be noted that the country will not necessarily be completely free from government violations of human rights; over time the media may become less vigilant and the government may once again violate physical integrity rights, but in general, free media would discourage such behavior. Therefore, I propose that *in a democracy where news media are free from government censorship and able to act as a watchdog over the government and where there are executive constraints, political competition and participation, there is higher government respect for physical integrity rights because of an interaction between the free media which are likely to cover violations of human rights and the presence of vibrant institutions with which to hold the government accountable.*

An example of how this cycle works can be found in the Rodney King case. In 1991 in Los Angeles, the videotaped beating of Rodney King garnered much attention from the media. The coverage of this case drew attention to the problem of police brutality and racism (Jacobs 1996). News of the subsequent acquittal in 1992 of the police officers involved in the incident spawned riots

<sup>8</sup> As previously noted, sometimes there is a culture of tolerance for the abuse of some marginalized groups like the Roma.

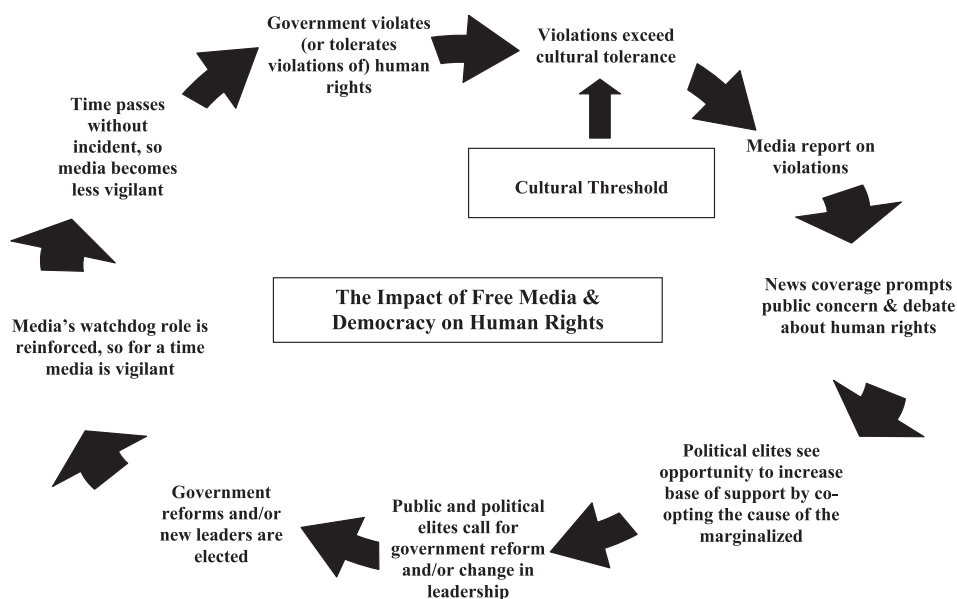


FIG. 1. Watchdog

in which 54 people were killed, more than 2,300 injured, and more than 13,200 arrested (Human Rights Watch 1998). The media, at both the local and national level continued to cover this story. Although the officers were acquitted in state court, the case did bring about change. In local government, Los Angeles Police Chief Daryl Gates stepped down and Mayor Tom Bradley, who had been in office since 1973, decided not to run again in 1993 (Jacobs 1996). According to Human Rights Watch, the report of the Christopher Commission which was formed by Mayor Bradley to investigate the incident, created a “blueprint” for reforming the Los Angeles police department which Human Rights Watch predicted would help “to create and maintain a culture of accountability” in departments across the country (Human Rights Watch 1998). At the federal level, the officers involved in the King beating were tried on civil rights violations; two were convicted, and two were acquitted. While Human Rights Watch found that abuse by police “remains one of the most serious and divisive human rights violations in the United States,” it also found the “pattern or practice” statute of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 to be a positive development because it called for the Justice Department to take action against police departments that fail to address police misconduct (Human Rights Watch 1998). This case shows how news coverage of government abuse combined with democratic characteristics that make government vulnerable to public opinion like elections, political competition, and executive constraints serve to make government more responsive and respectful of human rights.

In contrast, in an autocratic setting, even with free media, the absence of democratic pressures reverses the cycle. In fact, the very existence of free media indicates that the autocracy, whether by design or by accident, does not exercise complete control over its citizens, but the ability of the free media to influence the government is also limited because the absence of political competition and political participation make the government less vulnerable to public opinion. I suggest that *in the absence of democratic characteristics, independent media will serve to lower government respect for human rights because the interaction of free media, which are*

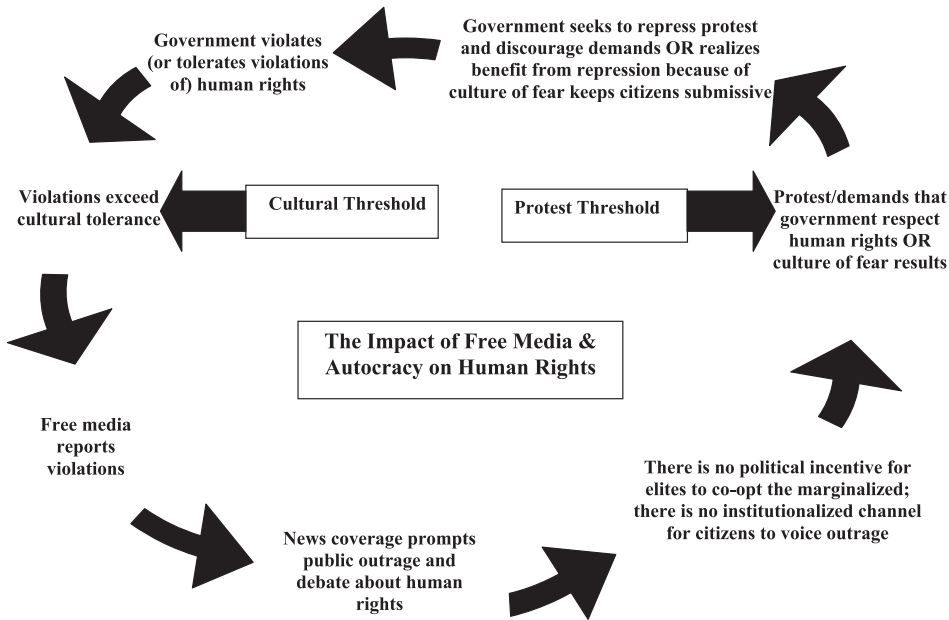


FIG. 2. Watchdog Barking Up the Wrong Tree

likely to cover violations and a lack of government vulnerability to public opinion, leave citizens with few means, other than protest, with which to hold the government accountable and push it to be responsive. As Figure 2 illustrates, provided they exceed cultural tolerance, violations of human rights will likely prompt considerable news coverage and place human rights at the forefront of the public agenda. This would inspire both debate and concern in citizens, but in an autocracy there are no institutional outlets to push for government reform, and little or no incentive for political elites to co-opt the marginalized citizenry. In this case, there are two possible outcomes. The media framing will influence public perceptions about the costs of protesting (the expected reaction from the government) and the costs of not protesting (the expected benefits from protesting and the likelihood that the protest will succeed). If there are no institutional outlets to push for government reform, and the repression is so bad that people feel they have nothing to lose, then the costs of not protesting may well exceed the costs of protesting. This is the protest threshold. If this protest threshold is not breached, however, the result could be a culture of fear in which people are aware of the violations, afraid of their government, and consequently more submissive. In either case, I predict that the outcome would be further violations of human rights. A case in point is Iran in the late 1990s. In 1997, President Khatami pushed for greater press freedom. Consequently, the press became "the major mobilizing tool for reformists seeking greater respect for rights" (Hicks 1999). Although newspapers reported on the widespread cases of political murder, torture, and imprisonment, protests and calls for reform were met with further repression (Human Rights Watch 1999b). This case illustrates that while independent media in an autocracy can lead to antigovernment protests, an autocratic government, being less vulnerable to public opinion, is likely to suppress dissent with repression.

When the media are government-controlled, it follows that they will have little or no impact on government respect for physical integrity rights because censorship constrains the news media to a lapdog role. In this scenario, government violation of physical integrity rights would either not be covered at all or would be framed as

justifiable punishment, perhaps necessary for security purposes. In the mismatch of a democracy and government-controlled media, democratic pressures would still constrain government behavior. While the presence of democratic institutions would provide some incentive for competing political elites to co-opt marginalized groups, government control of information would likely stifle the flow of communication. Thus, framing or a lack of coverage might promote distrust of both the media and the government, but probably not to such a degree as to encourage or discourage further violation of physical integrity rights. Therefore, I propose that *in democracies with controlled media, the interaction between the government and the media will have little or no effect on government respect for human rights.*<sup>9</sup>

My fourth proposal is that autocracies with government-controlled media will have less respect for physical integrity rights than democracies, but more respect for these rights than autocracies with free media. With this combination of government and media, government violations of physical integrity rights will likely result in no news coverage or news coverage that is framed by the government in a manner that promotes fear and keeps the public submissive. The government, having experienced a benefit from controlling the media and from violating human rights, would likely continue to engage in both behaviors.<sup>10</sup>

### Hypotheses

Based on the propositions outlined above, this study will test the following hypotheses:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** *Free media is positively related to government respect for physical integrity rights.*

**H<sub>2</sub>:** *Government-controlled media has little or no effect on government respect for physical integrity rights.*

**H<sub>3</sub>:** *The effect of media freedom on government respect for physical integrity rights depends on the level of autocracy/democracy as follows:*

**H<sub>3a</sub>:** *If the regime is democratic and media is free, the government will have increased respect for physical integrity rights.*

**H<sub>3b</sub>:** *If the regime is democratic and the media is government-controlled, the government will have less respect for physical integrity rights than democratic regimes with free media, but more respect than autocratic regimes in general.*

**H<sub>3c</sub>:** *If the regime is autocratic and media is government-controlled, the government will have less respect for physical integrity rights than democratic regimes, but more respect than autocratic regimes with free media.*

**H<sub>3d</sub>:** *If the regime is autocratic and the media is free, the government will have less respect for physical integrity rights than autocratic governments with government-controlled media and democratic regimes in general.*

### Research Design, Methods and Operationalization

In order to test my hypotheses, I need a systematic analysis which can control for multiple causal factors; therefore, I have selected a multiple regression analysis

<sup>9</sup> In the Appendix, Figure A2 illustrates this cycle.

<sup>10</sup> In the Appendix, Figure A3 illustrates this cycle.

with the dependent variable of government respect for physical integrity rights, and the independent variables of media openness (free or government-controlled), the level of autocracy-democracy, and various control variables (as outlined below). The multiple regression analysis includes data for 93 countries from 1981 to 1995. This time span was selected because of data availability, but it also provides a wide range of levels of autocracy/democracy with and without free media.

The dependent variable is defined as government respect for the human right of physical integrity, meaning the right to be free from political imprisonment, murder, disappearance, and torture. Although freedom of expression is considered by many to be a basic human right, it is important to clarify here that physical integrity rights are distinct from the right to free speech. This study employs the Physical Integrity Index from The Cingranelli-Richards (CIRI) Human Rights Dataset (Cingranelli and Richards 2006), which is constructed from indicators of Torture, Extrajudicial Killing, Political Imprisonment, and Disappearance (Cingranelli and Richards 1999). It ranges from 0 (no government respect for these four rights) to 8 (full government respect for these four rights). This additive index was constructed from indicators on torture, extrajudicial killing, political imprisonment, and disappearance, using Mokken Scaling Analysis (MSA),<sup>11</sup> to provide information regarding the “pattern and sequence” of government respect for specific physical integrity rights as well as an overall level of government respect for these rights (Cingranelli and Richards 1999).

Recent studies on the impact of media freedom have used Van Belle’s global press freedom data collection, which includes media freedom measurements for states for the years 1948 through 1995 (Choi and James 2006; Van Belle 1997). Van Belle (1997) used the following five-point coding scheme:

- 0 – “Press non-existent or too limited to code”
- 1 – “Press is clearly free and the news media are capable of functioning as an arena of political competition”
- 2 – “Press freedom is compromised by corruption or unofficial influence, but the news media are still capable of functioning as an arena of political competition”
- 3 – “Press is not directly controlled by the government, but it is not capable of functioning as an arena of political competition or debate”
- 4 – “Press is directly controlled by the government or strictly censored”

This is a categorical coding rather than interval scale; the difference between media coded 2 and media coded 3 is far more substantial than the differences between those coded 3 and 4 and those coded 1 and 2 (Van Belle 2000). Therefore, I have recoded categories 1 and 2 as 1 for “free media” and categories 3 and 4 as 0 for “government-controlled media.” The category 0 is treated as missing data.

As mentioned earlier, in measuring autocracy/democracy, it is critical to restrict the measurement to institutional democracy because other measurements of democracy that incorporate civil liberties might also include measurements of media openness and human rights violations. In order to avoid a tautology, to test my hypotheses, and account for the variation of media openness across regime types, it is important to keep these measurements discrete. Fortunately, the Polity IV dataset does not incorporate media freedom (Choi and James 2006; Marshall

<sup>11</sup> Specifically Cingranelli and Richards (1999) employed a polychotomous MSA, which is a cumulative scaling technique to create a unidimensional measurement.

and Jagers 2002). For the measure of the level of democracy/autocracy, I use the Polity IV dataset's combined Polity score (which ranges from -10 to 10, with 10 being the most democratic and -10 being the most autocratic), which is obtained by subtracting the country's autocracy score (which ranges from 0 = low to 10 = high) from the country's democracy score (which ranges from 0 = low to 10 = high) (Marshall and Jagers 2002). Specifically, I use Polity2, a version of the Polity variable that has been adapted for time series analysis (Marshall and Jagers 2002). Following Davenport and Armstrong (2004), I started with this scale and then conducted an exploratory analysis to identify threshold effects. Davenport and Armstrong (2004) found that the relationship between democracy and government respect for human rights is not linear and conducted a binary decomposition of the Polity democracy measure (in which a dichotomous variable is created for each value of the scale) to identify a threshold of domestic democratic peace above which democracy does have a positive and significant influence, but below which it does not. Because I am looking at the interaction of free media with autocracies as well as democracies, I also used binary decomposition to come up with an improved measure of the effects of the level of autocracy/democracy and its interaction with media freedom.<sup>12</sup> Using this information and the threshold effects identified by Davenport and Armstrong (2004), I have recoded the Polity2 variable to create a five-part measure for autocracy/democracy (-10 to -4 = 0; -3 to 0 = 1; 1-7 = 2; 8-9 = 4; 10 = 5). To thoroughly test my hypotheses, I will include models with both the Polity2 variable and the five-part variable.

My third hypothesis, that the effect of media freedom depends on the level of autocracy/democracy is interactive and leads directly to a multiplicative interactive specification. Therefore, the interaction between media freedom and the level of democracy/autocracy is measured by multiplying the media freedom score for each country/year by its level of autocracy/democracy.

Of course there are variables other than media freedom and the level of democracy/autocracy that may increase or decrease government respect for physical integrity rights. Researchers looking into causes of government violation of human rights have identified several independent variables including the country's population, its level of economic development, and its involvement in international or civil war (McCormick and Mitchell 1997; Poe and Tate 1994; Poe, Tate, and Keith 1999).

Poe and Tate (1994) proposed that such violations would be more likely when a government is facing a threat and has a need for greater control over its citizens. It follows then that involvement in war, both international and civil, has been linked with increased government violations of the human right to physical integrity (Poe and Tate 1994; Poe, Tate, and Keith 1999). The threshold for war is generally accepted to be 1,000 battle-related deaths (Small and Singer 1982), but I suspected that the threats that might lead to government violation of human rights probably exist at a much lower threshold. Preliminary analyses supported this hypothesis, so I look at the impact of armed conflict, which has a threshold of 25 battle-related deaths per year. A country's involvement in international conflict and/or internal conflict is measured using the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict dataset (Gleditsch et al. 2002; Strand et al. 2005). This dataset includes variables measuring the lower threshold of armed conflict, 25 battle-related deaths, in addition to variables measuring the standard criteria of 1,000 or more battle deaths used by Small and Singer (1982) to define war. These include interstate armed conflict (type-2 conflict) between two or more states resulting in at least 25 battle-related deaths, internal armed conflict (type-3 conflict) between the government of a state and internal opposition groups without

<sup>12</sup> The results of the binary decomposition can be seen in Table A3 in the appendix.



intervention from other states, and internationalized internal armed conflict (type-4 conflict) between the government of a state and internal opposition groups with intervention from other states.<sup>13</sup> Because preliminary results indicated that internal armed conflict and internationalized internal armed conflict have similar effects on government respect for physical integrity rights, these variables were collapsed into one measure for internal armed conflict.

Regarding the influence of the level of economic development, researchers have found that countries that are more economically developed will have increased government respect for physical integrity rights (Poe and Tate 1994; Poe, Tate, and Keith 1999). The rationale here is that governments with strong economies enjoy more security from the threat of domestic rebellion; therefore, the healthier the economy, the less likely a government will feel the need to engage in repression (Poe, Tate, and Keith 1999). The economic development of each country is measured using the country's real Gross Domestic Product per capita chain index (RGDPCH) from Penn World Tables (Heston, Summers, and Aten 2002). I have selected the GDP rather than the Gross National Product (GNP) because the GDP includes all economic activity that occurs within the borders of the given country. Previous studies have found that population is negatively related to government respect for human rights because the larger the population the greater the opportunity for rebellion and repression (Poe and Tate 1994; Poe, Tate, and Keith 1999). Therefore, I include a log of population for each country/year from Penn World Tables (Heston, Summers, and Aten 2002).

Finally, it is standard practice to include a lag of government respect for human rights (Davenport and Armstrong 2004; Poe and Tate 1994; Poe, Tate, and Keith 1999). The theoretical reason for doing so is that previous respect for physical integrity rights may reflect the cultural tolerance for such violations and also account for persistence in government behavior regarding human rights. Methodologically this models any autoregression in the series. However, because the time span covered is brief (15 years) compared to the number of countries (93), including a lag of the dependent variable in the right side will likely mask the effects of the independent variables (Achen 2000); therefore, I also include a model without the lag.

Using these measurements for the dependent and independent variables, I designed a model for a multiple regression analysis using a pooled cross-sectional time-series to test my hypotheses both across countries and across time. As mentioned above, the dependent variable for this model is the 9-point CIRI Physical Integrity Index (Cingranelli and Richards 1999). With a dependent variable of this type, I faced a choice between OLS or either ordered logit or ordered probit. I chose to estimate an OLS model first because of the ease with which it can be interpreted.<sup>14</sup> For the model with the lagged dependent variable, I use the panel corrected standard errors procedure to adjust for heteroscedasticity as suggested in Beck and Katz (1995). Because tests indicated autocorrelation even with the inclusion of the lagged dependent variable, I allow for a first-order autocorrelation. For the model without the lag, I also use the panel corrected standard errors method and allow for a first-order autocorrelation.

The model for the multiple regression is:

<sup>13</sup> UCDP/PRIO also includes a variable for extrasystemic armed conflict (type-1 conflict) and war which takes place between a state and a non-state group outside its own territory. This variable was not used because there was a lack of this type of conflict in the observed states during the observed time period.

<sup>14</sup> It is worth noting that when I estimated the model as an ordered logit, the main results were not substantively different. These results can be found in Table A4 of the appendix.

$$\begin{aligned}
& \text{Government Respect for Physical Integrity Rights}_{it} \\
&= \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Media Freedom}_{it} + \beta_2 \text{Autocracy/Democracy}_{it} \\
&\quad + \beta_3 (\text{Media Freedom}_{it} \times \text{Autocracy/Democracy}_{it}) \\
&\quad + \beta_4 \text{Government Respect for Physical Integrity Rights}_{it-1} \\
&\quad + \beta_5 \ln(\text{GDP/Capita})_{it} + \beta_6 \ln(\text{Population})_{it} \\
&\quad + \beta_7 \text{International Conflict}_{it} + \beta_8 \text{Interstate Conflict}_{it} + \varepsilon_{it}
\end{aligned}$$

I ran four sets of analyses using STATA 9.2 (2005), one with and one without the interaction between media freedom and the level of democracy/autocracy and one with and without the lag of the dependent variable.<sup>15</sup>

### Findings

The results shown in Table 2 indicate that media freedom does not have a significant effect on government respect for physical integrity rights once I control for autocracy/democracy. However the addition of the interaction between media freedom and the level of democracy/autocracy (shown in Table 3) reveals that there is an effect of media freedom that varies depending on the level of democracy/autocracy. These results are best interpreted graphically (Brambor, Clark, and Golder 2006). Figure 3 shows the marginal effects of media freedom on human rights across a range of regimes. As regime type changes from most autocratic (0) to most democratic (4), the influence of media freedom changes from negative and statistically significant for the most autocratic regimes to positive and statistically significant for only the most democratic regimes.<sup>16</sup> This supports the theoretical arguments presented in Figures 1 and 2. Regardless of the value of media freedom, the impact of a one unit increase in the five-part autocracy/democracy score on government respect for physical integrity rights is positive and statistically significant.

In order to see how these two variables work together to influence a country's score on the CIRI Physical Integrity Rights Index, I used Clarify Software (King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000; Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2003). Figure 4 shows that free media is predicted to have a detrimental effect on human rights in extreme autocracies and a positive effect on human rights in consolidated democracies. This figure (from Model 6 in Table 3) depicts the predicted values of government respect for physical integrity rights from a simulation in which media freedom and regime type are varied while all other variables are held constant at their mean or modal values. Figure 4 illustrates that in an autocracy, having media that serve as a watchdog over government behavior could actually result in worse government behavior; whereas media that are government-controlled and play more of a lapdog role will have little effect on government respect for human rights. This finding supports the hypothesis that the potential for free news media to have a positive effect on government respect for human rights depends on the presence of democratic institutions (H<sub>3</sub>). Thus, the impact of media openness on government respect for the human right of physical integrity appears more complicated than the simple positive or negative relationships proposed in hypotheses H<sub>1</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>. In fact, the findings here do not support these hypotheses. Instead, consistent with the cycle depicted in Figure 2, media freedom appears to have a *negative impact* on government respect for human rights in autocracies (states with a Polity score between -10 and 0 or categories 0 and 1 of the five-part autocracy/democracy measure). In countries that have some

<sup>15</sup> A technical report with more details on the preliminary analyses is available in the appendix.

<sup>16</sup> The nature of the effect is the same, but the magnitude is greater when the lagged dependent variable is removed from the model. Figures A4 and A5 in the appendix show this result.

TABLE 2. Watchdog or Lapdog? The Effect of Media Freedom and Democracy on Physical Integrity Rights, 1981–1995,  $N = 1,395$

	Model A	Model B	Model C	Model D	Model E	Model F	Model G
Lag physical integrity rights	.848*** (.034)	.832*** (.036)	.826*** (.037)	.787*** (.041)	.671*** (.048)	.680*** (.048)	—
Free media	.249*** (.089)	-.031 (.091)	-.013 (.09)	-.005 (.091)	-.026 (.088)	.041 (.088)	.169(.172)
Autocracy/Democracy (five-part)	—	.126*** (.033)	.08* (.033)	.085* (.034)	.129*** (.033)	—	.351*** (.062)
Autocracy/Democracy (Polity2)	—	—	—	—	—	.018** (.007)	—
GDP (logged)	—	—	.1** (.038)	.138*** (.042)	.153*** (.04)	.188*** (.042)	.450*** (.089)
Population (logged)	—	—	—	-.115*** (.028)	-.103*** (.025)	-.102*** (.025)	-.399*** (.041)
Interstate armed conflict	—	—	—	—	.128 (.164)	.147 (.167)	.047 (.22)
Internal armed conflict	—	—	—	—	-1.086*** (.166)	-1.072*** (.167)	-1.856*** (.202)
Constant	.637*** (.165)	.607*** (.156)	-.119 (.264)	.819** (.345)	1.304*** (.349)	1.127*** (.352)	4.718*** (.735)
$R^2$	.76	.77	.77	.76	.77	.77	.38

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

TABLE 3. It Depends on Democracy. The Effect of the Interaction of Media Freedom with the Level of Democracy/Autocracy on Physical Integrity Rights, 1981–1995,  $N = 1,395$

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Lag physical integrity rights	.848*** (.034)	.832*** (.036)	.819*** (.038)	.816*** (.038)	.774*** (.043)	.650*** (.05)	.665*** (.049)	—
Free media	.249*** (.089)	-.031 (.091)	-.357* (.176)	-.275 (.178)	-.316 (.181)	-.478*** (.178)	-.180 (.129)	-.828*** (.319)
Autocracy/Democracy (five-part)	—	.126*** (.033)	.079* (.035)	.05** (.036)	.05 (.036)	.08* (.034)	—	.187*** (.067)
Autocracy/Democracy (Polity2)	—	—	—	—	—	—	.012 (.007)	—
Free media * Auto/Dem	—	—	.142* (.064)	.113 (.065)	.135* (.066)	.195*** (.066)	.041* (.018)	.481*** (.121)
GDP (logged)	—	—	—	.084* (.038)	.12*** (.041)	.126*** (.039)	.166*** (.041)	.355*** (.092)
Population (logged)	—	—	—	—	-.119*** (.028)	-.106*** (.026)	-.101*** (.026)	-.389*** (.04)
Interstate armed conflict	—	—	—	—	—	.097 (.167)	.12 (.171)	.022 (.219)
Internal armed conflict	—	—	—	—	—	-1.122*** (.167)	-1.107*** (.168)	-1.869*** (.195)
Constant	.637*** (.165)	.607*** (.156)	.705*** (.176)	.077 (.297)	1.084*** (.399)	1.69*** (.402)	1.352*** (.377)	5.471*** (.733)
$R^2$	.76	.77	.76	.76	.76	.77	.77	.40

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

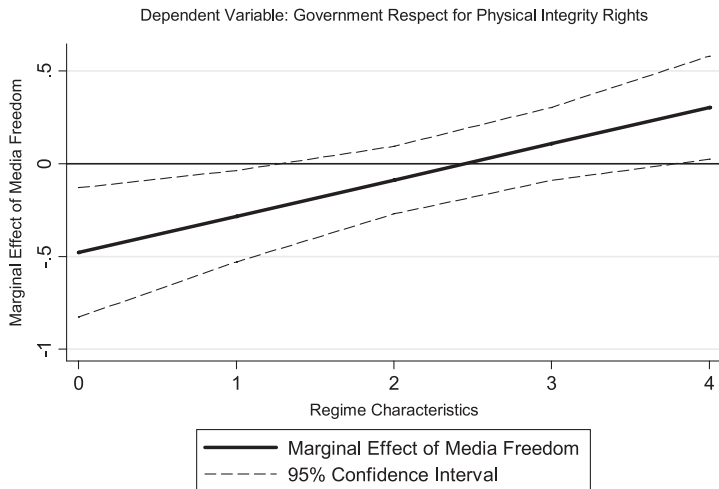


FIG. 3. Marginal Effect of Media Freedom on Human Rights as Regime Characteristics Change

democratic institutions, those with a combined Polity score of 1 to 7 (category 2 of the five-part autocracy/democracy measure), the effect of free media does not appear to be different from that of government-controlled media. Only in states that are fully democratized, those with Polity scores of 8 and above (categories 3 and 4 of the five-part measure), does the effect of free media appear to have a statistically significant positive effect on government respect for human rights and the effect is more pronounced in states with the highest Polity score of 10 (category 4 of the five-part measure).

As expected, the level of development (GDP per capita) has a statistically significant and positive effect, and population has a statistically significant and negative effect on government respect for physical integrity rights. Interstate armed conflict does not have a statistically significant effect, but internal armed conflict has a powerful negative and statistically significant effect on government respect for physical integrity rights.

### The Varying Effects of Free Media

Clearly, the presence or lack of media freedom has a different impact on government respect for human rights in democracies than in autocracies. Certainly, some of the findings here are counterintuitive. It is expected that free media in a democracy would serve to promote higher government respect for physical integrity rights, and indeed, this is usually the case. For example, both the Netherlands and New Zealand had free media, the highest possible Polity democracy score of 10 and complete government respect for physical integrity rights (the highest possible score of 8 on the CIRI Physical Integrity Rights Scale) during the time span of this study. Yet, it is somewhat surprising that free media in an autocracy would be associated with lower respect for physical integrity rights. Still, it is important to consider that leaders in autocratic regimes are less vulnerable to criticism than their counterparts in democratic regimes because they do not have to worry about being voted out of office. There is little or no incentive for elites in these countries to co-opt those who are marginalized. It follows too that media publicity of human rights violations in autocracies might serve to keep citizens fearful and submissive or might prompt protests which in turn could lead to further repression.

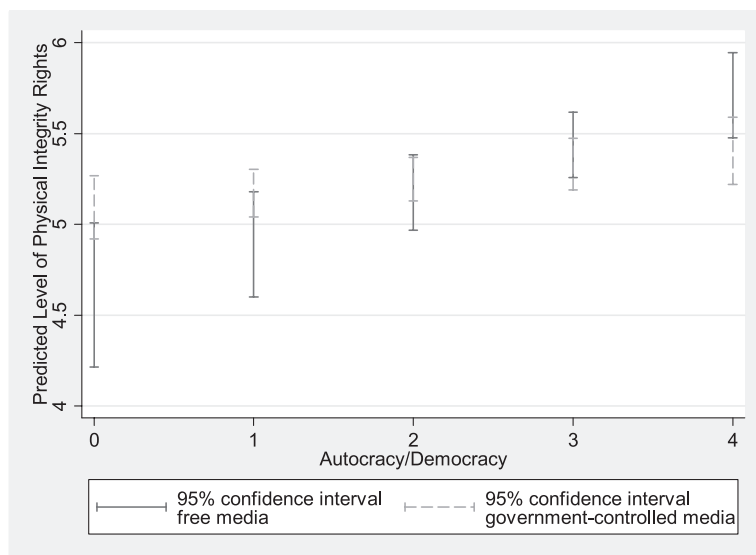


FIG. 4. The Predicted Effect of the Interaction Between Regime Characteristics and Media Freedom on Government Respect for Physical Integrity Rights<sup>17</sup>

Two cases in point are Mexico and Uganda. Both fell into the category of autocracies with free media for the years 1981 to 1995 and both had scores on the lower end of the CIRI Physical Integrity Rights Scale for the same time period (Mexico's scores range from 0 to 4, with an average score of 2.2; Uganda's CIRI scores range from 0 to 5, with an average score of 2.4). These cases provide interesting views of the effect of media that are free, or at least somewhat free, on an autocratic regime's respect for human rights. In each case, both the media and the regime were undergoing transitions.

In the 1990s the Mexican media, led by newspapers, became increasingly independent and critical of the government. In particular the media began to aggressively expose government abuse (Lawson 2002). One of the most dramatic was the 1995 massacre at Aguas Blancas when members of the state judicial police gunned down 17 unarmed peasants (Amnesty International 1996; Lawson 2002). "Many of Mexico's media pursued the affair with assertiveness and vigor with newspapers like *La Jornada* and *Reforma* giving saturation coverage to the massacre and subsequent cover-up" (Lawson 2002, 150). Yet, government violations of human rights persisted. News of the attacks fueled public outrage. At a service commemorating the 1-year anniversary of the killings, a group of armed rebels appeared and vowed to overthrow the "illegitimate government" (Fineman 1996a). This threat prompted the government to send in the Mexican army to establish a counterinsurgency base in Aguas Blancas, and while many residents reportedly welcomed the security provided by the army, peasant-activists claimed that the army served as a cover for state police to illegally detain and torture activists (Fineman 1996b). In addition, as the media became more aggressive in reporting government abuses, journalists and human rights defenders were targeted (Amnesty International 1996). According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (Simon 1997), in general as the Mexican media became more independent and professional journalistic norms evolved, journalism became a more

<sup>17</sup> This graph was produced using the Clarify software (King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000; Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2003). Thanks to Williams and Whitten (2009) for providing the code for adapting Clarify for the panel corrected standard errors model.



hazardous occupation as “powerful figures, unaccustomed to public scrutiny, have lashed out violently.” In the Mexican case, there is some indication that in the long run, media freedom can have a positive impact. Lawson (2002) attributed persistent coverage of government scandals as ultimately having a “delegitimizing effect” on Mexico’s one-party regime which ultimately facilitated democratization. He found that the media was able to accomplish this in spite of government efforts to restrict press freedom. “Independent publications were typically met with official resistance and repression, establishing themselves only after repeated struggles against the government” (Lawson 2002, 183).

In Uganda, after the fall of Idi Amin’s regime in 1979, the independent press returned, but according to Ocitti (2005, 73), most of the newspapers were “outrageously partisan” to the degree that “it spawned a near media war especially between those supporting the government on the one hand and those aligned to the various opposing political groups, on the other.” In this environment, Ugandan journalists sometimes fabricated stories or failed to verify information from their sources (Ocitti 2005). The government responded by arresting many journalists and expelling some foreign reporters (Ocitti 2005). As the media war continued, opposition groups continued to fight against the government and human rights organizations joined the media in accusing the government of “massive human rights violations” (Ocitti 2005, 86). When Yoweri Museveni’s National Resistance Army seized control of Uganda in 1986, the press was mostly supportive of the new government (Ocitti 2005). However, when the press began to report on human rights violations and rebellion in Northern Uganda, Museveni’s government responded by clamping down on journalists (Ocitti 2005). Yet, the news media remained “vocal and independent” in spite of the government’s persistence in arresting and charging journalists who publish negative information (Human Rights Watch 1999a). At the same time, human rights organizations reported that both the government and armed opposition groups were responsible for violating physical integrity rights, especially in Northern Uganda (Amnesty International 1995; Human Rights Watch 1999a). In 1995, the Press and Journalists Law went into effect. Among other restrictions, this measure required that journalists be registered and licensed. Yet this new law appeared to have little impact on journalistic practice because most independent news organizations simply ignored it (Ocitti 2005).

In both the Mexican and the Ugandan cases, the media acted independently in spite of government efforts to intimidate reporters. In each case, the professional environment of the media played a key role in maintaining the media’s watchdog role. In the case of Uganda, in the years immediately following Idi Amin’s regime, it was the political environment that fueled the partisan nature of the media that prompted critical coverage of the government. In Mexico, the economic environment, in particular the commercial success of covering scandals, reinforced the emerging professionalism in the news media. In both cases, initial government response to the coverage of human rights violations was repressive, and often journalists were the targets of the repression. In the long term though, at least in Mexico, the result may be more positive with independent media facilitating the transition to a less repressive and more democratic regime; in Uganda the struggle between the media and the government persists and human rights violations continue (Human Rights Watch 2007).

In contrast to free media, government-controlled media had little effect on government respect for physical integrity rights. For the most part, democracies with government-controlled media had less respect for physical integrity rights than democracies with free media, but more respect for these rights than autocracies. For example, Greece from 1981 to 1985 had a high level of democracy (8 on the Polity index) and the highest possible level (10 on the Polity index) from 1986 to 1995, but an average score of only 5.67 on the CIRI

Physical Integrity Rights Scale. Another example of a democracy with controlled media is Turkey from 1983 to 1991. During this time Turkey's Polity score stayed in the 7–9 range, but its respect for physical integrity rights as measured by the CIRI index ranged from 5 to 3 and then dropped to 2 in 1991 and 1992 as the conflict with the Kurds escalated to civil war. As the war continued, government respect for physical integrity rights deteriorated further (for a CIRI score of 0 in 1994 and 1 in 1995). Thus, Turkey demonstrates the strong negative effect of internal conflict and war on government respect for human rights. Likewise government-controlled media appeared to have little impact on government respect for physical integrity rights in autocracies. For example, Egypt from 1981 to 1995 had controlled media and a consistent score of –6 on the Polity index. Egypt's average CIRI Physical Integrity Rights Scale score was 4.2, which was below the mean score of 5.12, but higher than those for Mexico and Uganda. Indonesia which had controlled media and a consistent Polity score of –7 from 1981 to 1995, had an average CIRI score of 2.47. This is not surprising given the extreme level of autocracy and the fallout from Indonesia's invasion of East Timor and the conflict with Gerakan Aceh Merdeka in Aceh.

### Conclusion

All in all, these findings suggest that although the free media is able to play a watchdog role over government behavior, this does not always result in improved government treatment of citizens. Indeed, in the absence of political competition and participation, executive restraints and free, fair, and frequent elections, free media, at least in the short term, are associated with decreased government respect for physical integrity rights. Although nongovernmental organizations that defend human rights have suggested that free news media would help to improve government respect for such rights (Amnesty International 2006), this appears to be the case only in highly democratized countries.

The cases of Mexico and Uganda indicate that while in the short term watchdog media in an autocracy trigger a repressive response, the long term results watchdog media merit further study. Additionally, these cases highlight the importance of the professional environment in shaping media freedom and point to the need for further research into the different effects of partisan and objective media on government respect for human rights. Moreover, an emerging area of human rights research looks at international influences, in particular foreign aid and international law (Barratt 2004; Hafner-Burton 2005; Hathaway 2002; Landman 2005), but the results of these studies are mixed (Landman 2006). While this article has focused on the effects of domestic media, it would be worthwhile to look at the effects of international media as well.

Finally, while I am not advocating against free media, it is imperative to understand how the effects of independent media vary and are dependent on democratic characteristics like political competition and executive constraints that make governments more accountable and vulnerable to public opinion.

### Appendix: Technical Report

As the relationship between free media and autocracy/democracy depicted in Table 1 suggests, free media is correlated with democracy. To address concerns regarding multicollinearity, I ran a correlation matrix for the independent variables (shown in Table A5). This shows a correlation of .74 between free media and autocracy/democracy and .70 between GDP/capita and autocracy/democracy. Not surprisingly, the interaction variable is highly correlated

with both free media (.92) and autocracy/democracy (.84). Interestingly, variance inflation factors for the independent variables (shown in Table A6) indicate that there are concerns regarding the GDP/capita and population variables, suggesting that the variance for the parameter estimates for these variables are inflated by multicollinearity. Yet, despite this multicollinearity, the effects of both of these variables are significant. The VIF statistics for the autocracy/democracy, media freedom and interaction variables are below the generally accepted threshold of 4. I then ran a model dropping the GDP/capita variable and found that the effects of the remaining independent variables remained about the same as in the model with the GDP/capita variable. These results (shown in Table A7) show that without GDP/capita, the direction and significance of the parameters for the remaining independent variables remain about the same, with autocracy/democracy becoming more significant. Because there are strong theoretical reasons for including GDP/capita, I have left it in the main findings.

In order to ensure that the results presented here are not driven by a few influential cases, I calculated the DFBETA scores for the independent variable of interest, the interaction between media freedom and autocracy/democracy. Table A8 shows the cases with the highest (absolute value) DFBETA scores. I then ran the model, dropping all 15 of the observations for each of these four countries. The results (shown in Table A9) show that the interaction between free media and autocracy/democracy remains highly significant and the direction and significance of the other effects remain the same with the exception of free media which is no longer significant and autocracy/democracy which becomes highly significant.

TABLE A1. Media Freedom and Levels of Democracy/Autocracy 1948–1995,  $N = 5,575^*$ 

<i>Polity Score</i>	<i>Government-Controlled Media</i>	<i>Free Media</i>	<i>Total</i>
-10	187 (93)	15 (7)	202
-9	588 (99)	8 (1)	596
-8	321 (100)	1 (0)	322
-7	1,220 (96)	48 (4)	1,268
-6	182 (74)	64 (26)	246
-5	145 (90)	17 (10)	162
-4	84 (97)	3 (3)	87
-3	99 (72)	38 (28)	137
-2	66 (87)	10 (13)	76
-1	81 (71)	33 (29)	114
0	117 (82)	26 (18)	143
1	44 (96)	2 (4)	46
2	38 (46)	44 (54)	82
3	35 (78)	10 (22)	45
4	117 (82)	26 (18)	143
5	52 (40)	78 (60)	130
6	76 (61)	49 (39)	125
7	96 (55)	80 (40)	176
8	60 (23)	203 (77)	263
9	41 (20)	161 (80)	202
10	40 (4)	970 (96)	1,010
Total	3,689 (66)	1,886 (34)	5,575

*Note.* Values in parentheses are expressed in percent.

\*This table is based on data from the Van Belle (2000) Global Press Freedom Dataset, and the Polity IV Dataset (Marshall, Jaggers, and Gurr 2003).

TABLE A2. Media Freedom and Levels of Democracy/Autocracy 1981–1995,  $N = 1,395^*$

Polity Score	Government-Controlled Media	Free Media	Total
–10	3 (100)	0 (0)	3
–9	71 (100)	0 (0)	71
–8	69 (100)	0 (0)	69
–7	234 (98)	5 (2)	239
–6	75 (89)	9 (11)	84
–5	33 (79)	9 (21)	42
–4	17 (100)	0 (0)	17
–3	9 (56)	7 (44)	16
–2	27 (75)	9 (25)	36
–1	32 (100)	0 (0)	32
0	3 (33)	6 (67)	9
1	8 (80)	2 (20)	10
2	9 (75)	3 (25)	12
3	14 (100)	0 (0)	14
4	26 (93)	2 (7)	28
5	38 (72)	15 (28)	53
6	47 (71)	19 (29)	66
7	24 (46)	28 (54)	52
8	20 (22)	73 (78)	93
9	12 (12)	90 (88)	102
10	30 (9)	317 (91)	347
Total	801 (57)	594 (43)	1,395

*Note.* Values in parentheses are expressed in percent.

\*This table is based on data from The Van Belle (2000) Global Press Freedom Dataset, and the Polity IV Dataset (Marshall, Jaggers, and Gurr 2003).

TABLE A3. Binary Decomposition Results

Variables	Coefficients
Autocracy/Democracy = –9	–.003
Autocracy/Democracy = –8	–.492
Autocracy/Democracy = –7	–.093
Autocracy/Democracy = –6	–.934
Autocracy/Democracy = –5	–.4644
Autocracy/Democracy = –4	–.322
Autocracy/Democracy = –3	–2.257**
Autocracy/Democracy = –2	.305
Autocracy/Democracy = –1	–.021
Autocracy/Democracy = 0	–2.606**
Autocracy/Democracy = 1	–.964
Autocracy/Democracy = 2	.008
Autocracy/Democracy = 3	–.906
Autocracy/Democracy = 4	–.621
Autocracy/Democracy = 5	–.680
Autocracy/Democracy = 6	–.280
Autocracy/Democracy = 7	.692
Autocracy/Democracy = 8	–.302
Autocracy/Democracy = 9	.174
Autocracy/Democracy = 10	1.909**
Media freedom	.111
GDP/Capita (logged)	.211***
Population (logged)	–.287***
International conflict	–.068
Intrastate conflict	–2.33***
Constant	6.138***

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

TABLE A4. Ordered Logit Analysis of the Effect of Media Freedom and Democracy on Government Respect for Physical Integrity Rights 1981–1995,  $N = 1,395$ 

Lag physical integrity rights	.927***	.901***
Free media	.019	-.969*
Autocracy/Democracy (five-part)	.233***	.13
GDP (logged)	.313***	.423**
Free media * Auto/Dem	–	.252**
Population (logged)	-.186***	-.191***
Interstate armed conflict	.253	.182
Internal armed conflict	-1.604***	-1.632***
Country code robust standard errors	Wald $\chi^2 = 617.08$	Wald $\chi^2 = 653.31$

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

TABLE A5. Correlation Between Independent Variables

	Ciri PIR (lagged)	Free Media	Auto/ Dem	Free Media * Auto/Dem	GDP/Capita (logged)	Pop (logged)	Interstate Conflict
Ciri PIR (lagged)	1.00						
Free media	.36***	1.00					
Auto/Dem	.45***	.74***	1.00				
Free media * Auto/Dem	.47***	.92***	.84***	1.00			
GDP/Capita (logged)	.42***	.48***	.70***	.62***	1.00		
Population (logged)	-.32***	-.02	-.01	-.02	.06*	1.00	
Interstate conflict	-.10***	.02	.03	.03	-.01	.26***	1.00
Internal conflict	-.51	-.11	-.11	-.14	-.12	.26***	.09**

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

TABLE A6. Variance Inflation Factors

Media freedom	2.35
Autocracy/Democracy	1.79
Media freedom * Autocracy/Democracy	3.99
Government respect for physical integrity rights (lagged)	1.54
GDP per capita (logged)	23.93
Population (logged)	6.88
Interstate conflict	1.01
Internal conflict	1.09

TABLE A7. The Effect of Media Freedom and Autocracy/Democracy With and Without Controlling for Development

	Model 6 (from Table 3)	Without GDP
Lag physical integrity rights	.650***	.655***
Free media	-.478**	-.6**
Autocracy/Democracy (five-part)	.08*	.122***
Free media * Auto/Dem	.195**	.239***
GDP (logged)	.126**	–
Population (logged)	-.106***	-.096***
Interstate armed conflict	.097	.062
Internal armed conflict	-1.122***	-1.13***
Constant	1.69***	2.536***
$R^2$	.77	.76

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

TABLE A8. The Four Largest (Absolute Value) DFBETA Scores for Media Freedom \* Autocracy/Democracy

Country/Year	DFBETA
Mozambique/1993	-.3023
Niger/1990	.2587
Kenya/1993	-.2271
Burkina Faso/1993	-.2118

Table A9. The Effect of Media Freedom and Autocracy/Democracy on Government Respect for Human Rights

	With All Cases	Without Influential Cases
Lag physical integrity rights	.642***	.673***
Free media	-.424*	-.0751
Autocracy/Democracy (five-part)	.074*	.137***
Free media * Auto/Dem	.199**	.137***
GDP (logged)	.094**	.175***
Population (logged)	-.106***	-.101***
Interstate armed conflict	.01	.107
Internal armed conflict	-1.119***	-1.095***
Constant	1.974***	1.086**
R <sup>2</sup>	.87	.78

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

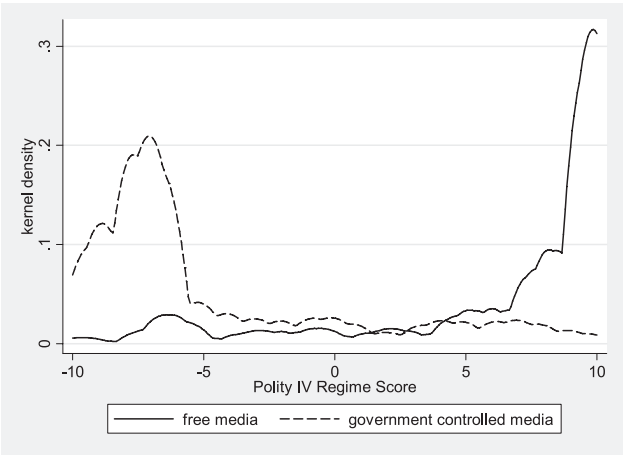


FIG. A1. Media Freedom and Levels of Democracy/Autocracy 1948–1995



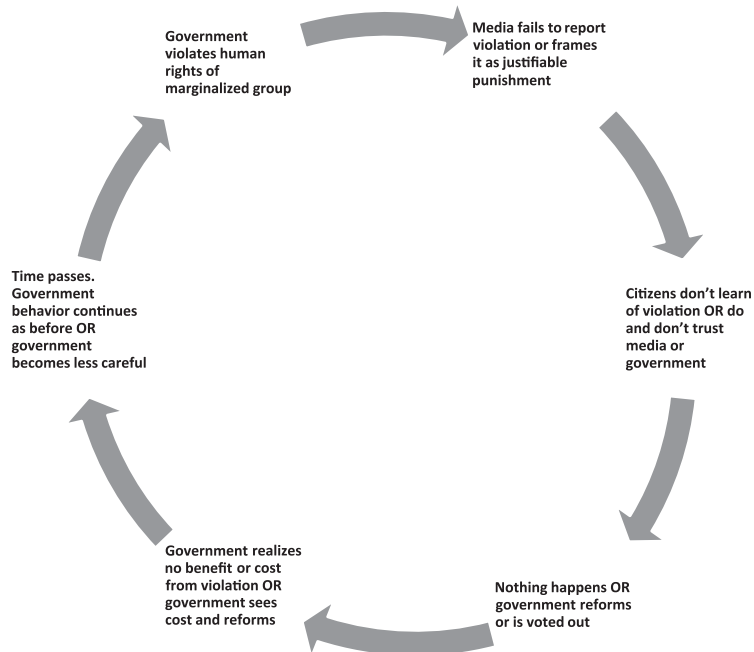


FIG. A2. Lapdog. The Impact of Government Controlled Media on Human Rights in a Democracy

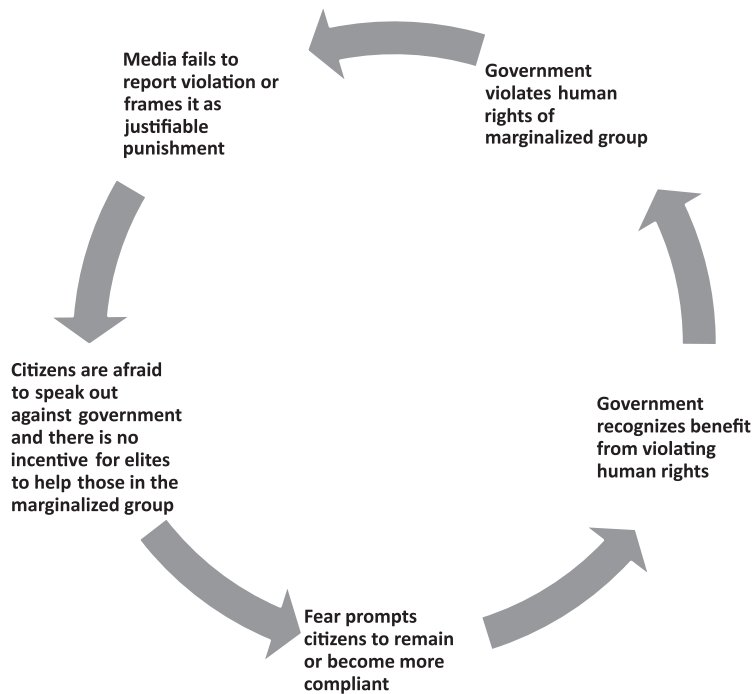


FIG. A3. Lapdog. The Impact of Controlled Media on Government Respect for Human Rights in an Autocracy

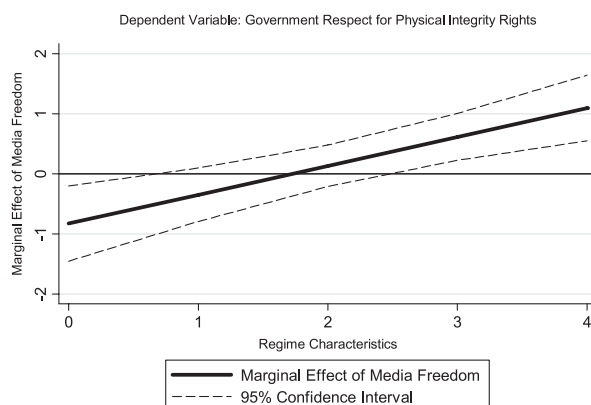


FIG. A4. The Marginal Effects of Media Freedom as the Level of Autocracy/Democracy (Without the Lagged Dependent Variable)

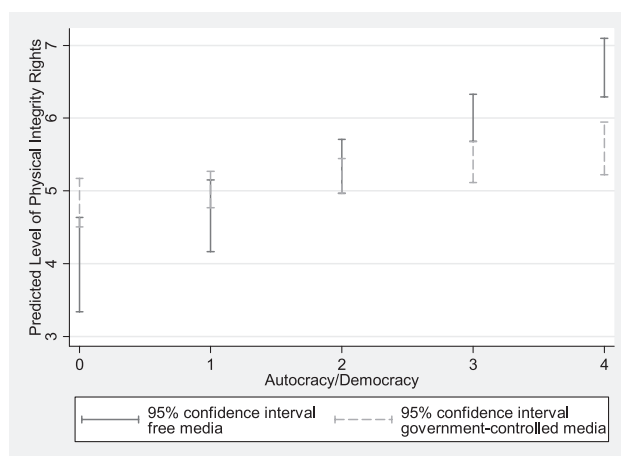


FIG. A5. The Predicted Effect of the Interaction Between Regime Characteristics and Media Freedom on Government Respect for Physical Integrity Rights. (Without the Lagged Dependent Variable)

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