

The Unsleping Guardian: Press Freedom, Regime Type, and Political Stability in Latin America

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Abstract

This research set out to explore the relationship between regime type, political stability, and press freedom in Latin American nations. The study of press freedom is and has always been an important concept to understand. Press freedom is linked to almost every facet of governance. It was theorized that nations that are democratic are also often more transparent and open, allowing the press to report on government interactions and happenings of the nation. Furthermore, nations that are politically stable are often less violent and foster an environment in which a free press corps can thrive without fear of repercussions for reporting the news about the government as truthfully and accurately as possible. Employing data from Freedom House's 2015 "Freedom in the Press" study and data from the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators 2014 annual study, various statistical tests were performed to determine the size and significance of the relationship between variables in the way predicted by the research hypotheses. Quantitative results revealed that regime type and political stability both had a significant impact on press freedom. Two brief case studies of Columbia and Uruguay were also presented as a means to better understand the causal relationships between the variables.

Hypotheses

H1: Nations that are more democratic in regime type will have more freedom of the press.

H2: Nations that are more politically stable will have more freedom of the press.

Methods: Quantitative Data

Concept	Indicator	Variable
DV: Press Freedom	Freedom House:	Variable with ordinal measurement:
	Indexed set of questions in which answers were assigned a numerical value. Composite scores from the set of questions determined press freedom.	0 means completely free press, 100 means not at all free press
IV 1: Regime Type	Freedom House:	Binary variable:
	Indexed set of questions in which answers were assigned a numerical value. Composite scores from the set of questions determined regime type.	1: more democratic (1-2.5) 2: less democratic (3-7)
IV 2: Political Stability	Worldwide Governance Indicators: Aggregate data compiled from various sources were manipulated to fit WGI scale.	Variable with ordinal measurement: -2.5: Less political stability +2.5: More political stability

Nations included in the study were Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Ordinary least squares regression analysis was used to determine relative significance of each variable.

Methods: Qualitative Data

After performing all statistical tests and transformations, two nations were selected to confirm the research hypotheses using process tracing. With a press freedom score of 24, a democratic regime type, and a political stability score of +1.00, Uruguay is a perfect model for the hypothesis that more democratic and more politically stable nations will have more press freedom. Conversely, Colombia is a model for the reverse with a more autocratic regime, a political stability score of -1.12, and a press freedom score of 55. Research was gathered from the individual country reports of Freedom House's studies and news outlets such as the BBC and analyzed for evidence of causal relationships.

Descriptive Statistics

	Minimum value	Maximum value	Mean	Std. deviation		
Dependent Variable						
Freedom of the Press	17: Free	91: Not free	51.75	17.52		
Independent variables						
Nominal measurement						
Regime Type					More Democ ratic: 45%	Less Democ ratic: 55%
Ordinal measurement						
Political Stability	-1.12: Less stable	1.00: More stable	-.1340	.54860		

Data Analysis

Ordinary Least Squares Regression for Press Freedom

Independent Variable	Model 1 β (St. Error)	Model 2 β (St. Error)	Model 3 β (St. Error)
Regime Type	24.394* (.000)		22.939* (.005)
Political Stability		-14.487* (.045)	-2.388 (.722)
Constant	13.939	49.809	15.875
N	20	20	20
Adj. R ²	.477	.162	.451

* Denotes significance at $p < 0.05$

Discussion

In the quantitative data, the variables both achieved significance in single linear regression. However, only regime type achieved significance in multi-variable regression, signaling that it has more explanatory power over press freedom than political stability. Theoretically speaking, regime type drives many factors in governance including press freedom whereas political stability is more abstract in its effects, therefore explaining the higher significance of regime type. This could also be explained by invalid indicators in the aggregate data used by Worldwide Governance Indicators. However, the research hypotheses were confirmed in the quantitative testing. This result is only generalizable to the countries of Latin America and perhaps those with similar regime type and political conditions. This fact is due to the most similar system design. Nevertheless, this study has revealed some interesting facts about Latin American governance that can be used to further explore the aspects of press freedom there and around the globe.

Qualitative Case Studies



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Uruguay

- Constitutionally protected rights to free expression and press
- Affluent
- Liberal laws
- Racial and economic divisions prompted 19th century civil war spanning into the 20th century
- Stabilization post-civil war in 1967
- Democratic regime
- Politically stable

Colombia



Photo courtesy of operationworld.com

- Region plagued by violence and cartel activity
- Colombian government "synonymous" with human rights crimes
- Society is very class-based and unequal
- Though is a republican form of government, there is no true civil liberty or democracy
- Not at all politically stable as the region has succumbed to violence and upheaval

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