

2. RESEARCH DESIGN¹

In 1974, when Richard Nixon resigned from office, no election, no revolution or war forced him to go. Nixon's resignation was the result of media coverage. Two journalists, Robert Woodward and Karl Bernstein, were responsible for the resignation of the mightiest man in the world. From that moment even the lowliest politician knew about the power and influence of the media. It proved once again the theory that the press are the 'fourth power'. Neither a provincial governor in a South American transition state nor the most powerful man of the world can hold out against a free media.²

Mass democracy cannot work without a mass media. Press, radio and TV are the central mediators between the state and its citizens. The media provide citizens with an opportunity to evaluate the efforts of their government, express their needs and wishes and, last but not least, set the political agenda. Restrictions on the media conflict with basic human rights and consequently contradict a core value of democracy. Without a free press, few other human rights are attainable. Politicians in democracies cannot break the law or the rules of society without worrying about negative media coverage. Therefore, democratic governance is impossible without a free press – which demonstrates the importance of media freedom for the development of democracy. The transition from autocracy to democracy often begins with the liberalisation of press laws. When a government gives up its monopoly on information, freedom of speech and freedom of opinion usually follow.

Free media do not only keep watch over state authorities, they also observe non-officials. All civil society actors fear negative media

¹ The KAF gratefully acknowledges the research and editing assistance for the following chapters provided by Shereen Karmali, Claudia Kuhn and Christian E. Rieck.

² For further information on the importance of media and the development of political culture, see: Korte, Karl-Rudolf / Fröhlich, Manuel: *Politik und Regieren in Deutschland. Strukturen, Prozesse, Entscheidungen*, Paderborn 2004.

coverage if they contravene laws and ethics. As a result in many countries it is not the state but civil actors that pose a greater danger to press freedom. The number of journalists murdered in regions where drug cartels or human trafficking are prevalent has increased dramatically in the last decade, particularly in South America and the CIS states.

However, an unstable democratic government generally leads to restrictions on the press. Even before Watergate, politicians knew that control of the media was a means of gaining, maintaining or losing power. State propaganda is an essential part of leadership in non-democratic countries, controlling the media a basic tool of authority. As a result governments – even in democratic states – try their best to exert control over media coverage. The more governments struggle with domestic and economic problems the more they try and control the media.

According to *A Global Survey of Media Independence* carried out by Freedom House in 2004, press freedom suffered a setback worldwide.³ Legal harassment, intimidation, political pressure, violence, all contributed to the worsening of the conditions under which journalists work throughout the world. Journalists are still the victims of state and non-state repression. Every year dozens of journalists are imprisoned or even killed. However, despite horrendous violations of human rights in recent years, a higher norm for treatment of the press is becoming the standard. To be recognised as a genuine democracy, a country must remove the barriers to media freedom. At the same time, the press is expected to fulfil its responsibilities as an essential part of a free society. The French NGO Reporters without Borders reports on the sacrifices journalists make to provide a free and high quality media coverage.⁴ Furthermore, it publishes an annual freedom of the press index, which clearly shows that even democratic countries have not all achieved complete freedom of the media without any kind of repression.

In summary, a democratic transformation is impossible without free media coverage, so the Konrad Adenauer Foundation decided to make freedom of the media the research subject for its first annual democracy report. It focuses on freedom of the media as one of the three cornerstones of democracy, in addition to the rule of law and opportunities for democratic participation.

The KAF, with more than 60 offices and over 200 projects in over 100 countries, has a worldwide network which provides a broad expertise

³ Freedom House: *Freedom of the Press 2004: A Global Survey of Media Independence*, New York / Washington D.C. 2004.

⁴ Reporters without Borders: *The 2003 Global Press Freedom World Tour*, Paris 2004.

in political cooperation. The main objective of this study was to combine the Foundation's knowledge of media freedom with the scientific expertise of one of Europe's most renowned chairs of political science. The KAF, in cooperation with the Governance Research Group of the University of Duisburg-Essen, developed a detailed questionnaire on press freedom and distributed it to the KAF offices in 14 countries. The questionnaire not only asked about the legal framework in which the media operate, but also about the economic situation in each of the countries, state and non-state repression and local political conditions. The results of this survey are meant to bring together the experience available on the ground with the skills of a political consultant in order to develop improved strategies for political development cooperation. It was therefore necessary to identify the general trends in media freedom. At the same time, those trends had to be evaluated according to the political, cultural and regional characteristics of each country.

There are two particular features to be mentioned in this research. First, data was gathered about the changes that might have occurred over the past five years. This made it possible to assess both the significance and the reach of the single indicators. In addition, this meant that trends occurring in more than one country could be recorded. Secondly, this survey allowed KAF to specify its assistance to journalists provided through various programmes. The benefits this study brings to KAF's international activities result from the connection between the data about the restrictions on media freedom and the various kinds of support provided by the Foundation.

2.1. Method and sampling

Measuring and analysing media freedom is a complex challenge. Every international comparative study has to deal with the conflict between range (i.e. the generalisation of results) and empirical accuracy. The range of scientific statements increases with the number of objects under scrutiny. The indices provided by Freedom House and the Bertelsmann Foundation are examples of how democracy can be measured.⁵ The data these studies are based on were collected in well over 100 countries. The wide range of hypotheses and ratings generated by these studies, however, is achieved by considerably reducing their complexity. This holds especially true for their statements about freedom of the media – which is just one indicator among many. Given that one of the goals of these studies is to record and measure all categories of democracy, the restriction to only basic

⁵ Freedom House: *Freedom in the World 2005*, New York / Washington D.C. 2005; Bertelsmann Foundation: *Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2003, Politische Gestaltung im internationalen Vergleich*, Gütersloh 2004.

categories for media freedom is totally legitimate. But the low degree of empirical precision can only produce data on phenomena which are hostile to the media. The analysis is unable to take into account the interdependence of repressive factors and their causes.

The same holds true for *A Global Survey of Media Independence*, edited by Freedom House. Again, causes which are specific to each country are not fully taken into account so that a wide range can be achieved. The studies mentioned provide important data on the global development of democracy. However, because they have a different objective, they deliver little information about the characteristics of each country that are responsible for a friendly or hostile media climate. Thus, studies with a wide range of indices are of limited use for practical work in political consulting, unless they can also verify elaborate theories and precise hypotheses. So far they have been unable to satisfactorily explain different levels of media freedom.

An international comparative study covering a few countries or individual case studies has the advantage of realistically describing and analysing the diverse and complex types of repression against the media. The national and regional studies of Reporters without Borders provide good examples of this.⁶ To have a small number of cases, however, is also a disadvantage because comparisons cannot be made and the range of generated hypotheses is too low.

This study has steered a middle course. On the basis of 14 selected case studies, hypotheses were generated about the trends in media freedom in transformation states and developing countries. According to the main objective of this study the selection of case studies was determined by where the KAF has offices and has provided political development cooperation for many years. A broad cross-section of transformation states and developing countries was chosen, with different economic, cultural, political and geographical backgrounds. The broad scattering of these countries across the United Nations' Human Development Index⁷ illustrates the maximum variation achieved by the selected case studies.

The theoretical sampling to produce maximum variation and the large number of precise case studies guaranteed strong evidence for the hypotheses that were being tested. However, they cannot claim to be globally representative. Nevertheless the hypotheses constitute a solid basis for deductive analysis.⁸

⁶ Reporters without Borders country and regional studies: www.rsf.org .

⁷ UNDP: *Human Development Report 2005 – International cooperation at a crossroads*, New York 2005.

⁸ For a detailed statistical and comparative analysis of the data see: Dittrich, Daniel: *Media freedom – a measure for democracy?* Duisburg 2006 (forthcoming).

The KAF Democracy Report is characterised by a qualitative research design. The data was collected by interviewing local experts in the chosen countries using a 'half-open questionnaire'. This choice of experts proved to be advantageous because they were able to combine their detailed knowledge of the political and social situation in each country with an objective standard of measurement. KAF's activities are based on support for multi-party democracy, a social market economy and the rule of law in all the countries where the KAF works. Regardless of the debate on relativism and the global validity of western standards of democracy, a fundamental precondition for achieving comparability of the data was the common convictions held by all the KAF offices. KAF country representatives were asked to deliver the reports in the form of the coherent expert reports which constitute the main part of this book. The half-open questionnaire made it possible to categorise the indicators against the political, economic and cultural background of each case study.

The set of indicators used was based on the analysis of single case as well as regional studies provided by Freedom House, Reporters without Borders and the KAF.⁹ These studies focused on the influence of state authorities on media coverage. Media freedom, however, is also threatened by non-state repression. Organised crime, political extremism, religious fundamentalism, economic cartels and economic underdevelopment are as likely to have a negative impact on media freedom as is state repression. In contrast to these earlier studies, therefore, this one pays special attention to economic and non-state repression.

2.2. Main indicators

The level of media freedom is measured by five main indicators. These constitute the most important factors in successfully establishing a democratic media sector:

- *General conditions:* general structure of the media scene
- *Legal environment:* institutional and legal conditions
- *Political conditions:* censorship and political influence over the media by state authorities
- *Economic pressures:* economic conditions and restrictions
- *Non-state repression:* media freedom endangered by non-state actors.

⁹ Country and regional surveys: www.freedom-house.org, www.rsf.org, www.kas.de.

2.2.1. General conditions

This indicator focuses on the general elements of the media scene. It deals with the structural frameworks for publishing and using media coverage to elucidate the challenges the citizens of each country have to face in order to be fully informed. This indicator also covers the preconditions, such as the literacy rate, which have to be met if the media are to reach a broad audience. On a larger scale the indicator draws a general picture of state–media relationships in order to provide a base for the evaluation of the next four indicators. The ‘general conditions’ section of the questionnaire was developed to cover the following areas:

- Literacy rate
- Free access to all media formats
- The influence of state authorities on publicly run media
- The proportions of state-run and private-run media (demand and supply)
- The ownership of media companies
- The prevailing use, and influence, of different media formats on public opinion.

The literacy rate and access to media formats sub-indicators aim to measure the outreach of the media. The rate of media use and the influence of different media formats on public opinion are also highlighted. Looking at media formats provides useful information for weighting state influence on media freedom. The evaluation of the print media – which by and large are undisturbed by state interference – needs to be combined with the electronic media whenever, first, the print media are hardly used (e.g. because of a high level of illiteracy) and second, popular radio and television channels are subject to state repression.

2.2.2. Legal environment

An effective legal environment is an essential precondition for media freedom. The importance of the reliability of the rule of law for journalists and media houses cannot be overestimated, although there has to be a clear differentiation between the written law and what happens in practice. In addition, not only is state interference examined but also what the law has to say about the formation of monopolies and cartels. The ‘legal environment’ section of the questionnaire covers the following six areas:

- Freedom of expression
- Regulation of media coverage
- Censorship under the law
- Media licences
- Journalists' status
- Monopolies and cartels.

These single sub-indicators look at different dimensions of the problems that the free media have to face.

'Freedom of expression' concerns the constitutional and legislative background to media freedom. Unfortunately, a legal framework that safeguards media freedom often does not work in practice.

'Regulation of media coverage' suffers from the same problem as the first sub-indicator. Nearly every country in the world has laws against defamation and sedition. Governments and courts are responsible if the legal framework is used to guarantee freedom of the media or to gain control of media coverage. As a result generally only obvious problems, like shortcomings in the legal framework, were taken into account in the evaluation.

The sub-indicator 'censorship under the law' is the most important. Countries with censorship endorsed by the law cannot be considered to be free of any restrictions. But illegal censorship and – as a result of fear of repression – the rising importance of self-censorship threatens media freedom and have to be taken into consideration.

The status of journalists deals not just with the legal framework, but also with how courts protect them against state repression. This sub-indicator is therefore also of the highest importance. Governments which use the law to control journalists or their coverage are a major threat to press freedom.

The last sub-indicator deals with monopolies and cartels. This indicator examines the existence of media cartels and their influence on media coverage. In many cases monopolies have a negative influence on the quality of media coverage, especially when they are affiliated with the government. As a result the formation of monopolies and cartels can develop into a serious problem for media freedom.

2.2.3. Political conditions

The 'political conditions' section is structured around the following five areas:

- Coverage of marginal groups
- Self-censorship
- Illegal state repression
- Obstacles to Internet access
- Government control over print media.

The sub-indicators cover different aspects of the political situation in each state. 'Coverage of marginal groups' concerns the behaviour of the state towards minorities, whether ethnic, religious or other. The indicator shows if any group is excluded from media coverage or access to information.

The sub-indicator 'self-censorship' reveals the degree to which the media restricts itself. Self-censorship occurs in almost every country but the reason and the extent varies. For example in states with a dominant Muslim population self-censorship is often applied to religious issues. Such censorship is not primarily the result of pressure from the state but more of a social mechanism so it is not given strong weighting. In contrast, if there is self-censorship about government activities and the reason behind this is clearly fear of repression, the indicator is given a stronger weighting. In addition, a distinction has to be made between self-censorship for economic reasons, for example a journalist who does not report critically on the financier of their media house, and self-censorship resulting from a general fear of repression.

'Illegal state repression' is the most important indicator, although it is not always possible to distinguish between state actors and state-friendly actors.

'Obstacles to Internet access' indicates the extent to which people have access to the Internet. A critical point in the evaluation is that while some states do not put up any barriers to the Internet, Internet use in their countries is simply irrelevant because there is no infrastructure supporting its spread. This indicator therefore has to be seen in the context of the spread of technology and obstacles posed by the state so it does not have the same impact in every case.

The last indicator 'government control over print media' looks at the level of state influence in this sector of the media. State ownership of distribution and printing facilities is highlighted and if these facilities

are used to put pressure on the media houses. On the other hand, it has to be said that state ownership does not always mean repression so this indicator has to be carefully considered.

2.2.4. Economic pressures

The indicator 'economic pressures' is rated according to the following sub-indicators:

- State subsidies for the private media
- Further aspects.

The indicator covers the state's financial influence on the media and the media's general economic situation. The indicator shows what parts of the media receive state subsidies and to what degree. But since state subsidies alone do not necessarily mean the state dictates the media agenda the degree of government-friendly coverage by the subsidised media houses is also examined. Overall, the general context of the funding of media houses is most important: does the government subsidise all the media houses and does this give it direct influence over content?

In addition to the overt subsidies from the state, indirect subsidies from advertising are also examined. Government advertising can constitute a large part of a media house's budget. If this is the case, a threat to reduce state advertising can be used to influence content or decisions about staff.

State subsidies alone do not necessarily lead to state influence over media content. Therefore the experts' estimates of how critically or not the subsidised media report on government issues are of great importance.

Additional aspects are covered to complete the picture and to ensure that the evaluation is valid. In almost all of the chosen states, the economic barriers to establishing a new newspaper or TV station are quite high. This combined with a media environment in which all the media houses are state-owned or receive large state subsidies means the chances of successfully establishing a private media house are quite low. Given these facts it has to be said that a purely state-owned media environment does not mean that media freedom is non-existent; the degree of state-friendly coverage provided by the subsidised media houses is important. A side-effect of a state-subsidised private media sector is that in most cases the state favours the media with the highest ratings or circulation, which leads to media houses being more concerned about their ratings than the content of their products.

2.2.5. Non-state repression

This indicator of media freedom focuses on the quality and frequency of non-state repression, whether the government prosecutes non-state repression, and what changes there have been over the last five years. Non-state repression often appears in countries with a weak government and weak state authorities; non-state actors fill the gap which appears when the state leaves the stage. Therefore the degree to which non-state actors repress the media has to be examined. This combined with the distinction between genuine non-state repression and quasi-state repression constitutes an adequate indicator of media freedom.

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