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FREE, ACCESSIBLE MEDIA AND QUALITY OF GOVERNMENT

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ABSTRACT

In contrary to what might be expected from the results of previous research conducted on media freedom, there is a variation in both perceived corruption and quality of government (QoG) among countries with free media. This paper suggests that there is a need for complementary and more precise measures of media system characteristics in order to understand the role of the media in the fight against corruption and in promoting QoG. The purpose of this study is therefore to develop and use alternative media system measures to empirically test the relationship between media system characteristics and QoG and in what way media system characteristics can explain variations in QoG across 36 European countries. The results show that media freedom is a basic condition that is essential for media to play any role in promoting QoG. However, the results of this study also imply that accessibility and citizens' ability to obtain information delivered by the free media are at least as important.

Keywords

Media freedom, media accessibility, quality of government, media systems, political empowerment

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Introduction

According to a large number of studies, there is a robust positive relationship between a free media and democracy (see e.g., Adserà, Boix, & Payne, 2003; Becker, Vlad, & Nusser, 2007; Norris, 2004; Pasek, 2006; Prior, 2007), economic development (see e.g., Besley & Prat, 2006; Coyne & Leeson, 2004; Djankov, McLiesh, Nenova, & Shleifer, 2003; Norris, 2008), and lower levels of corruption (see e.g., Ahrend, 2002; Brunetti & Weder, 2003; Camaj, 2012; Charron, 2009; Chowdhury, 2004; Freille, Haque, & Kneller, 2007; Färdigh, Andersson, & Oscarsson, 2012; Lessmann & Markwart, 2010; Lindstedt & Naurin, 2010; Macdonell & Pesic, 2006). However, contrary to what might be expected from previous research on the relationship between a free media and corruption, there is a significant variation in outcomes among countries, despite the fact that they have equivalent levels of free media. Moreover, despite the coherent empirical results provided by previous studies, pinpointing what sorts of mechanisms within media freedom actually lead to lower levels of corruption is an intricate matter and more research is needed in this area.

This study proposes two possible processes which could contribute to understanding of the roles that a free media fulfills in establishing and maintaining well-functioning governmental institutions, and why a free media sometimes leads to higher “quality of government” (QoG) and sometimes not. First, this paper suggests a need for complementary and more precise measures of countries’ media systems in order to move beyond the conclusion that a free media is a “quick fix”. Second, this paper suggests that the dependent variable of interest needs to be specified further. A free media is essential for democracy and therefore there is a risk of spurious correlations. Moreover, democracies can have low QoG and authoritarian states high QoG (Charron & Lapuente, 2010). The concept of democracy only captures the *access* to public authority and misses the way in which public authority is *exercised*. This study aims to shed light on this by incorporating other dimensions of media systems and by using the concept of QoG which here refers to *the ability a regime has to perform its activities in an efficient, impartial way and without corruption* (see Charron & Lapuente, 2010; Linde, 2012; Rothstein & Teorell, 2008). The QoG concept captures the output side of public authority (the “*quality*”, not “*quantity*” of the policies delivered by a government).

The media systems of Europe are a particularly interesting field of study as Europe is the only region that has undergone extensive democratic transitions and processes of democratization in the last few decades due to the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe (Nagle & Mahr, 1999). In 20

years, the former communist states have transformed their command economies and centralized political systems into capitalist liberal democracies, a process which also has implications for the European countries' media systems. The purpose of this study is thus to develop and use complements to media freedom measures and to test their impact empirically on the variation in QoG across 36 European countries (see Table A1, Appendix).

This paper proceeds as follows. In section two, the complementary characteristics used to conceptualize and compare countries' media systems are discussed and operationalized. In this section the results of previous research and theories of what determines QoG are also outlined. The third section introduces the data and sample, the results are presented in the section four and the fifth section concludes.

The role of a free media in promoting QoG

A large body of cross-country evidence suggests the importance of *media freedom* (Ahrend, 2002; Brunetti & Weder, 2003; Camaj, 2012; Charron, 2009; Chowdhury, 2004; Freille et al., 2007; Fär-digh, Andersson, & Oscarsson, 2012; Lessmann & Markwart, 2010; Macdonell & Pesic, 2006; Norris, 2004; Olken & Barron, 2009; Stapenhurst, 2004). By highlighting policy failures and corruption in the judiciary, and exposing maladministration by public officials, free media fulfills a “watchdog” role and can thus function to promote government transparency, accountability, and public scrutiny of those in power (see e.g., Norris, 2008). Brunetti and Weder (2003) found that there was less corruption in countries with free media. Furthermore, Salbu (2001) suggests that the Internet offers people unprecedented access to information, resulting in a more knowledgeable society, or as stated by Norris and Zinnbauer (2002), free media and widespread Internet access are often associated with nations that experience greater administrative efficiency, improved social and economic conditions, and lower levels of corruption.

Although most agree that free media plays a role in detecting corruption, there is reason to suggest that the positive net effect of free media may be overstated (see e.g., Graber, 1986; Vaidya, 2005). Corruption also exists within the structure of media organizations: journalists and the media may themselves be corrupted. Alternatively, there is also the possibility of a backward causation, i.e., higher QoG leads to freer media. However, theoretical and empirical arguments suggest that a free

media is more likely to reinforce QoG than vice versa. The notion of reversed causality does not appear to be entirely misguided, but very little attention has been paid to it in the literature thus far (see e.g., Brunetti & Weder, 2003; Norris, 2004).

To find an answer to the question of *how* and *when* a free media is likely to play a significant role in the fight against corruption and in promoting QoG, there is a need to incorporate complements to “overused” press freedom indices and to flesh out the concept of media freedom. In the economics literature, media freedom indicators are often used as proxies for citizens’ accessibility to information but there is a lack of reliable data measuring the information that is actually available to citizens, and the costs involved in obtaining information and citizens’ motivations and abilities to process the information are not explored (Lindstedt & Naurin, 2010; see also Delli Caprini & Keeter, 1996; Luskin, 1990). Democratic processes and participation depend on a well-informed citizenry and therefore represent a crucial element in enabling media to strengthen democratization, human development and QoG. A free media provides citizens with the information they need in order to be free and self-governing, but also provides the government with the information it needs in order to rule in the interests of the people. As Norris (2008) puts it, a free media has several roles, namely “... as a watch-dog over the abuse of power (promoting accountability and transparency), as a civic forum for political debate (facilitating informed electoral choices), and as an agenda-setter for policymakers (strengthening government responsiveness to social problems)” (p. 70). In turn, a complete realization of the right to a free flow of information cannot take place without a free media.

Early definitions of media freedom have predominantly focused on freedom vis-à-vis the state and from governmental control, and explanations of the variation in media freedom across countries has been found in the historical dimensions of these countries’ media systems (see e.g., Altschull, 1984; Hachten, 1981; Martin & Chaudhary, 1983; Merrill & Lowenstein, 1979; Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956; Williams, 1962).

However, media freedom does not necessarily equal media accessibility or that citizens have access to the information conveyed to them by the free media. The point of departure in this study is that accessibility is a “triggering” factor that affects the relationship between media freedom and QoG: i) accessibility triggers media freedom; ii) accessibility, on the other hand, is determined by specific characteristics within the media system; and iii) the media system in turn is determined by specific

national characteristics such as the relationship between economic and political interests, and historical and cultural circumstances. Hallin and Mancini (2004) studied how countries' political and economic systems influence the media system; their view is that media institutions both affect and are affected by the society in which they operate (cf., Siebert et al., 1956). Their comparative analysis of media systems results in four dimensions along which the relationship between political and economic systems and the media system is most evident. The first dimension is *how the media market in different countries has evolved over time*, with an emphasis on a strong or weak mass distributed press. The second dimension is *political parallelism*, i.e. the link between the media system and political power, and the reflection of political power and the political system in the media system. The third dimension examines *the development of a journalistic profession and the scope of journalistic professionalism*. Finally, Hallin and Mancini (2004, 2012) investigate *the prevalence and manifestations of political power, and the influence and impact of political power on the media system*.

Inspired by Hallin and Mancini (2004, 2012), this study focuses on two different characteristics of European countries' media systems that are potential explanatory factors of the variation in QoG. The first captures three aspects of media freedom (economic, political and judicial control over media content). In addition, this paper proposes that there is a need for complementary media system indicators and for investigation of the ability to obtain the information disseminated by the free media. Therefore, the second set of media system characteristics captures citizens' access to media, which this paper argues can provide more information about the relationship between media freedom and QoG.

Media freedom

The first set of characteristics captures three aspects of *media freedom*. The first aspect evaluates "the economic considerations that can influence the media's activities" (Freedom House, 2010), and the structure and concentration of media ownership, the extent of sponsorship, subsidization and advertising and their effect on media coverage and content. For example, privately-owned media or media owned or controlled by the government could influence the diversity of views in the same way as geography or poor infrastructure could limit dissemination of print, broadcast, or internet-based sources of information. The second aspect evaluates "the degree of political control over the content of news media" (Freedom House, 2010), and the editorial independence of the media, in-

timidation of and threats to journalists, and access to informational sources. For example, the government, particular partisan interests, or unspoken “rules” and agreements between journalists and officials could prevent journalists from pursuing certain stories and thus determine the information content. Finally, the third aspect encompasses “both an examination of the laws and regulations that could influence media content, as well as the government's inclination to use these laws and legal institutions in order to restrict the media’s ability to operate” (Freedom House, 2010). Insult laws could routinely be used to shield officials’ conduct from public scrutiny in the same way as restrictions to the right of access information could expressly and narrowly be defined.

Although one could assume that these three aspects might run in different directions, the main theoretical argument in this study is that access to information should provide ordinary citizens with knowledge; citizens can only act on malfeasance if they know about it. A politically, economically or judicially “free” media creates opportunities for citizens to learn of malfeasance and provides them with ways of knowing about it. Consequently, a free media leads to better QoG in that openness in public and private institutional operations should enhance the ability of – in this case – governments to perform its activities in an efficient, impartial way without corruption. Better information flows and a free media enhance government efficiency and responsiveness, while strengthening citizens’ trust in those who govern them. Thus, QoG is more likely to be higher in countries where media systems are characterized by: (a) fewer economic considerations that can influence media activities; (b) less political control over the news media content; (c) fewer laws and regulations that restrict media content and less inclination on the part of government to use these laws and legal institutions in a negative manner.

Media accessibility

The second set of complementary media system characteristics, *media accessibility* is examined in relation to three different aspects and evaluates the extent to which citizens have access to information through: a) newspapers; b) television; c) digital media. Media circulation has been recognized as an important favorable condition for accountability (see e.g., Besley & Burgess, 2001). Lindstedt and Naurin (2010) confirm this and state that just making information available will not prevent corruption or help countries develop higher QoG. Other scholars have demonstrated that accessibility to information is a crucial determinant of bureaucratic efficiency and corruption in that

well-informed citizens can act upon the information they receive from the media (see e.g., Besley & Prat, 2006); this is even more common in countries with widespread access to digital media and high Internet penetration (Best & Wade, 2009; Groshek, 2009; Nisbet, Stoycheff, & Pearce, 2012).

Putnam (2000) demonstrates that newspaper readership creates well-informed citizens with both the interest and capacity to hold politicians accountable for their actions. However, the presence of a strong mass-distributed press is not a guarantee of diversity of information. Rather, some scholars argue that there is a risk of institutionalized particularism and that a strong press will either promote their own interests or those of elites (see e.g., Mungiu-Pippidi, 2013). However, Hallin and Mancini (2004) show that there is a geographical distribution of newspaper-centric media systems (mainly in northern Europe) and television-centric media systems (mainly in southern Europe) and that the development of a strong mass-distributed press is accompanied by differences in the related roles of print and online media where citizens in countries without a strong mass-distributed press rely heavily on online media for information (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 24; see also Norris, 2002; Shehata & Strömbäck, 2011). Moreover, Mungiu-Pippidi (2013) showed most recently that Internet access is closely associated with control of corruption and argues that there is huge potential in using online media and blogs to build control of corruption.

Applied to this study, this means that the lack of a free and accessible media makes it difficult for information about the exercise of public authority to have any major impact. Moreover, this is not just about access to information in its core sense but also access to diverse independent sources of information. Thus, QoG is likely to be higher in countries where media systems are characterized by: (a) high accessibility to information through newspapers; (b) high accessibility to information through television; (c) high accessibility to information through the Internet. Consequently, QoG is likely to be higher in countries where media systems are characterized by *both* a free media and high accessibility to a range of sources of information and media content.

Other determinants of QoG

What explains cross-country differences in QoG besides a free media? Needless to say, there are factors other than media system characteristics that matter. There is a growing body of literature that considers historical factors as major determinants of present governmental performance (Ac-

emoglu, Johnson, & Robinson, 2001; Tabellini, 2008). La Porta, Lopez-de-Silanes, Shleifer, & Vishny (1999) argue that the theories of determinants of QoG and government performance can be distinguished between three broad categories: political, economic, and cultural. Political theories hold that policies and institutions are shaped by those in power to stay in power and to transfer resources to themselves. Thus, government policies are inefficient not because they are expensive to fix, but because their creators want them so (see e.g., Marx, 1872; North, 1990; Olson, 1993). Economic theories, in contrast, focus on efficiency rather than redistribution and hold that government institutions are created when it is beneficial and efficient to create them (see e.g., Demsetz, 1967; North, 1981). In conclusion, according to cultural theories, societies hold beliefs that shape collective action and government (see e.g., Banfield, 1958; Landes, 1998; Putnam, 1993; Weber, 1958). In the wording of La Porta et al. (1999), “some societies are so intolerant or distrustful that their governments simply cannot function effectively” (p. 223).

La Porta et al. (1999) emphasize the need to find reasonably exogenous sources of variation in the political, economic and cultural characteristics of countries to be able to explain the variation in QoG across countries. They also present clear evidence of the systematic influence of historical circumstances, as captured by ethnolinguistic heterogeneity, legal origins and religion, on the variation in QoG across countries. QoG is in part determined by economic development, but is also shaped by systematic variation in the histories of individual countries. Ethnolinguistically homogeneous countries have governments with higher QoG than heterogeneous ones. Common law countries have higher QoG than French civil law and socialist law countries. Predominantly Protestant countries have higher QoG than either predominantly Catholic or predominantly Muslim countries (La Porta et al., 1999, pp. 265-266).

In recent years there is a growing body of literature studying the influence of legal traditions, arguing that the legal traditions established in Europe centuries ago are the key factor in explaining current cross-country differences in institutions and socio-economic outcomes (see e.g., La Porta et al., 2008; Levine, 2005). The main theoretical argument is that countries with common law and civil law have distinct routines of governmental control of the economy and different institutions supporting these routines. In contrast, however, other scholars contend that the development of a certain kind of state infrastructure is the essential feature explaining institutional, economic and social development. They argue that the state formation process precedes legal traditions in that the characteristics of the state infrastructure constrain or enable subsequent rulers' capacity to imple-

ment their will and should be seen as an outcome of the ruler vs. administrators' power balance rather than of legal traditions (see e.g., Charron, Dahlström, & Lapuente, 2012). Moreover, numerous studies have analyzed the impact of different types of political regimes and institutions on QoG (see e.g., Bäck & Hadenius, 2008; Clauge, Keefer, Knack, & Olson, 1996; Keefer, 2007; Monitola & Jackman, 2002; Persson & Tabellini, 2003) and Charron and Lapuente (2010), for example, suggest a non-linear relationship in that "poorer countries seem to have higher quality of government under authoritarian rule while moderate-to-wealthier countries perform better under democratic rule" (p. 445).

Finally, several scholars have found that a greater number of women in positions of political power lead to lower levels of corruption (Dollar, Fisman, & Gatti, 2001; Swamy, Knack, Lee, & Azfar, 2001). The causal direction of the relationship has been questioned (see e.g., Bjarnegård, 2006; Goetz, 2007; Sung, 2003), but there is consensus on the fact that the number of women in leading political and bureaucratic positions within a society is a useful "proxy" for good governance (see e.g., Wängnerud, 2008).

Following the results of previous empirical work, this study considers five general determinants among those likely to affect QoG. The first determinant is the ethnic heterogeneity in a country. This determinant has been identified by previous research as an important measure of redistributive tendencies (see e.g., Alesina, Devleeschauwer, Easterly, Kurlat, & Wacziarg, 2003; Easterly & Levine, 1997). The prediction of political theories is that governments become more interventionist and less efficient as ethnic heterogeneity increases. La Porta et al. (1999) show that ethnolinguistic fractionalization (as a proxy for political influence) has a highly consistent adverse effect on QoG. Hence, the independent effect of media systems on QoG will be stronger in less ethnolinguistically fractionalized countries.

The second determinant is the countries' legal systems as an indicator of the relative power of the state vis-à-vis property owners. For example, La Porta et al. (1999) show that legal origins, particularly socialist and French, exert a significant adverse influence on QoG. Governments in countries of socialist legal origin are more interventionist across the board (have worse protection of property rights, more intrusive regulation and higher tax rates), as well as being less efficient (lower scores on bureaucratic delays and tax compliance, although not on corruption) compared to common law countries, in part because the extreme power of the state corrupts the bureaucracies (La Porta et al.,

1999, p. 231). Hence, the independent effect of media systems on QoG will be stronger in countries with non-socialist legal origins.

The third determinant is the religious affiliation of the population. La Porta et al. (1999) focus in particular on the Catholic and Muslim religions, which have been singled out as hostile to institutional development (p. 224). Compared to Protestant countries, both Catholic and Muslim countries are associated with lower QoG. Catholic countries are generally more interventionist and pay relatively higher government wages than Protestant countries, but with bureaucracies that are still less efficient, more corrupt and significantly less democratic (La Porta et al., 1999, pp. 262-267). Hence, the independent effect of media systems on QoG will be stronger in countries with a Protestant religious affiliation.

As the fourth determinant of QoG, this study considers per capita income. La Porta et al. (1999) ultimately focused on other determinants due to problems with endogeneity, but per capita income is potentially an important determinant nonetheless. Although it is likely that good institutions themselves will improve economic conditions, there is still strong evidence that economically free and open nations tend to have lower levels of corruption (see e.g., Ades & Di Tella, 1999; Treisman, 2000). Hence, the independent effect of media systems on QoG will be stronger in more economically developed countries.

Finally, the fifth determinant of QoG is political empowerment. Several findings point to a negative relationship between political empowerment and the level of corruption. Moreover, the findings also highlight that the casual mechanism seems to be that corruption causes particular harm to poor sections of the population and that women are generally more affected by dysfunctional governments. Wängnerud (2010, p. 19), for example, concludes that both the number of women in parliament and the level of equality seem to have a positive effect on QoG. Hence, the independent effect of media systems on QoG will be stronger in countries with high political empowerment.

Data

The analysis is based on a dataset of measures of QoG and media system variables which are likely to be potential determinants of QoG in 36 European countries. The data were gathered from a

variety of sources and typically also come from different years although the independent variables and control variables were gathered no later than 2010.

The European countries' QoG is measured using the International Country Risk Guide's annual QoG index from 2012, which evaluates corruption within the political system, the strength and impartiality of the legal system, the observance of the law, and the institutional strength and quality of the bureaucracy. This index is similar to that used by Hall and Jones (1999) as a measure of the quality of "the institutions and government policies that determine the economic environment" (p. 97). The components of this index have also been used in the political economics literature as measures of government efficiency (Knack & Keefer, 1995; La Porta et al., 1999).

The European countries' media freedom is measured using Freedom House's sub-indices which examine economic influences, political pressures and controls, and laws and regulations that influence media content. Media accessibility is measured through three different variables: the accessibility to information through newspapers is operationalized by newspaper circulation, accessibility to information through television is operationalized by viewing time per individual, and accessibility to information through the Internet is operationalized by the level of Internet access via broadband for each European country.

To capture the historical determinants of QoG, the study uses variables derived from La Porta et al. (1999) and the variables which proved to be most influential on government performance and QoG in their study. *Ethnolinguistic fractionalization* captures five different component indices of ethnic diversity, originally developed by Easterly and Levine (1997) and extended with data from Alesina et al. (2003). Countries' *legal origin* is captured by a dummy variable that indicates whether a country has a socialist legal origin or not. A variable that captures the percentage of each country's population reported to be Protestants is used to measuring *religious affiliation*. To measure *economic development*, data on gross domestic product (GDP) per capita based on purchasing power parity (PPP) were retrieved from the World Bank. Finally, the *political empowerment* measure is one of the sub-indices used to construct the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index. The variable is a combination of i) the ratio of female to male members in the parliament, ii) the ratio of women to men in ministerial level positions, and iii) the ratio of women to men in positions of head of state or head of government in the last 50 years (Hausmann, Tyson, & Zahidi, 2010, p. 4). The sources and definitions of all the variables used in this article are summarized in Table A2 (see Appendix).

Table 1 presents the correlations between the independent variables and reveals a number of interesting patterns. First, there are strong positive correlations between the media freedom variables. It is primarily political pressures and judicial influences that show positive correlations with countries' newspaper markets and the negative correlations are to be found between laws and regulations and the part of accessibility to information captured by the Internet access variable. It is also interesting to note the positive correlations between the media freedom variables and the media accessibility indicator of newspaper circulation. Second, European countries where television can be considered to have a strong and prominent position seem less likely to have a strong mass-distributed press. Countries in which television plays a prominent role in the media system have less access to the Internet via broadband, are more ethnolinguistically fractionalized, and typically have a socialist legal origin and lower percentages of Protestants. The media accessibility variables confirm these patterns. European countries with a socialist legal origin and lower percentages of Protestants are more likely to have lower levels of newspaper circulation and higher viewing time per individual.

TABLE 1. CORRELATIONS OF INDEPENDENT VARIABLES (PEARSON'S R)

	Media Freedom			Media Accessibility			Control Variables			
	Economic influences	Political pressures and controls	Laws and regulations	Newspaper circulation	Viewing time per individual	Internet access	GDP per capita (PPP)	Political empowerment	Ethnolinguistic fractionalization	Legal origin (Socialist)
Political pressures and controls	.915**									
Laws and regulations	.882**	.931**								
Newspaper circulation	.525*	.571**	.472*							
Viewing time per individual	-.208	-.324	-.252	.468*						
Internet access	.475*	.561**	-.584**	-.629**	.462*					
GDP per capita (PPP)	.060	-.010	.042	-.116	-.216	-.077				
Political empowerment	.423	.474*	.486*	-.601**	.529*	-.718**	-.088			
Ethnolinguistic fractionalization	-.286	-.258	-.279	.365	-.174	.215	.323	.193		
Legal origin (Socialist)	-.491*	-.391	-.419	.448*	-.280	.448*	.361**	.361	-.411	
Religious affiliation (Protestant)	.420	.487*	.413	-.670**	.414	-.743**	.015	-.740**	.243	.289

Notes: ** Correlation is significant at the 1% level. * Correlation is significant at the 5% level.

Results

The regression results are presented in two different tables and even though neither of the tests used for detecting heteroscedasticity (Breusch-Pagan and White) showed any indication of improper model specifications, robust standard errors are used for more efficient estimates and more accurate p values. In Table 2, the variables used for measuring each of the two different media system characteristics are included stepwise. Table 3 includes the media system characteristics as construct-

ed indices separately (Model 1 and Model 2) and together (Model 3). By controlling for GDP per capita, historical factors and political empowerment, the explanatory power of the media system characteristics on the variation in QoG is tested.

TABLE 2. MEDIA SYSTEM CHARACTERISTICS AND QUALITY OF GOVERNMENT

Media Freedom	Step I	Step II	Step III			
Economic influences (fh_econ)	-.026*** (.002)	-.006 (.004)	-.006 (.009)			
Political pressures and controls (fh_pol)		-.016*** (.003)	-.011** (.004)			
Laws and regulations (fh_law)			-.007 (.004)			
Media Accessibility			Step I	Step II	Step III	
Newspaper circulation (wan_cpa)			.001*** (.0002)	.001*** (.0002)	.001** (.0002)	
Viewing time per individual (imc_vtpi)				-.001 (.001)	-.001 (.001)	
Internet access (eu_ia)					.005*** (.001)	
Constant	.945*** (.024)	.924*** (.022)	.924*** (.022)	.491*** (.045)	.741*** (.211)	.556** (.188)
N countries	36	36	36	36	36	36
Mean VIF	1.00	6.17	8.32	1.00	1.28	1.62
Adjusted R ²	0.48	0.58	0.59	0.52	0.55	0.70

Notes: * $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$. Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients, with robust standard errors within parentheses.

Among the variables that indicate the media freedom characteristics of the media systems, economic influences show a significant negative effect in the first step but become insignificant and much weaker when the variables that measure political influences and laws and regulations are included. This confirms previous results that suggest that it is primarily the political environment that drives the strong relationship between press freedom and corruption and that it also applies to variations

in QoG across countries (see e.g., Freille et al., 2007). If the media fail to stay independent of political influences, this is likely to lead to negative consequences for countries' QoG in that agreements and unspoken "rules" between journalists and officials, for example, seem to impede the flow of information and prevent stories of misconduct and malfeasance reaching the citizens.

Finally, only two of the three variables in the media accessibility dimension show significant effects on QoG. There is no significant effect of television viewing time per individual, which indicates that television viewership and newspaper readership seem to be interrelated. The results instead suggest that countries with more newspaper-centric media systems and high accessibility to information also tend to have higher QoG.

Thus, when the effects of the European countries' media system characteristics on QoG are examined separately, it is clear that several factors play a crucial role. The results in Table 2 show that in countries where the media is predominantly able to maintain its freedom vis-a-vis the political environment, this leads to higher QoG. Similarly, the results also show that countries with high newspaper circulation also benefit from higher QoG. Finally, the results in Table 2 show that media accessibility is an important determinant of QoG. In European countries with high newspaper circulation and where citizens are able to easily gain access to media content and information through the Internet, QoG also tends to be higher.

The following paragraphs examines which of the two media system characteristics have the strongest effect on the variation in QoG across the European countries and whether the effects of the two media system characteristics remain significant when GDP per capita, political empowerment and the historical determinants of QoG are brought into the regression models.

In Table 3 the eight media system variables are re-constructed into two different indices (one for each media system characteristic). The main reason for doing this is to overcome the problems associated with over-specified models. Although the core concepts of this study have been differentiated analytically, the European countries' media system characteristics are likely to be interrelated with variations in QoG. Nevertheless, the analysis involving calculating the variance inflation factor shows that multicollinearity does not seem to be a critical issue here. The index variables have been reversed and standardized so that they all range between 0 and 1.

The results in Table 3 show that there is a significant effect of media freedom on the variation in QoG across the 36 European countries – the greater the media freedom the higher the QoG. Thus, the results in Table 2, showing that it is the political environment that primarily drives the relationship between media freedom and QoG, are confirmed and the significant effect of media freedom remains strong even after the control variables are included in the regression model.

TABLE 3. MEDIA FREEDOM, MEDIA ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF GOVERNMENT.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constructed Index			
Media Freedom (fh_econ+fh_pol+fh_law)	.144*** (.029)		.132*** (.019)
Media Accessibility (wan_cpa+imc_vtppi+eu_ia)		.179*** (.037)	.151*** (.022)
Control Variables			
Ethnolinguistic fractionalization	-.094 (.121)	-.095 (.112)	-.051 (.073)
Legal origin (Socialist)	-.127** (.042)	-.113* (.049)	-.089** (.036)
Religious affiliation (Protestant)	.0004 (.0006)	-.0002 (.0008)	-.0003 (.0005)
GDP per capita (PPP)	.000001 (.00002)	.00002 (.00001)	.00002 (.00001)
Political Empowerment	.925** (.324)	.302 (.647)	.024 (.355)
Constant	-.239 (.205)	.320 (.455)	.228 (.248)
N countries	36	36	36
Mean VIF	1.80	2.28	2.19
Adjusted R ²	0.81	0.74	0.89

Notes: * $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$. Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients, with robust standard errors within parentheses. Some of the variables are reversed and all index variables are standardized and range between 0 and 1. On the reliability test (Cronbach's alpha): the Media Freedom Index = .966 and the Media Accessibility Index = .751.

In Model 2 the independent variable is replaced by the media accessibility index, which shows the greatest explanatory power of the two indices and a significant effect on the variation in QoG. The results indicate that accessibility to information is a crucial determinant of QoG and thus also confirm the results of previous research suggesting its importance for the level of bureaucratic efficiency and corruption, in that well-informed citizens are more likely to hold officials accountable for their actions if they can easily obtain and pass on the information. That media accessibility is of great importance is also confirmed when both the media freedom and media accessibility characteristics are included in Model 3. To begin with, there are still significant effects for the index measuring the three media freedom aspects that are commonly used by scholars to examine media freedom empirically. However, it is interesting to note that the effects of the media accessibility characteristics of the European countries' media systems are yet stronger and remain significant even when controlled for GDP per capita, political empowerment and the historical determinants of QoG.

In summary, the results in Table 2 show that in countries where the media is predominantly able to maintain its freedom against the political environment, QoG also tends to be higher. When it comes to media accessibility, the results in Table 2 suggest that QoG tends to be higher in countries with newspaper-centric media systems and where citizens are able to easily gain access to online media content and information through the Internet.

When the effects of countries' media system characteristics on the variation in QoG are examined together with the health and well-being of countries' economies and historical circumstances in Table 3, it is clear that several media system characteristics play a crucial role. When the historical determinants are included separately (not reported), the positive effects of the media accessibility variables are stronger in less fractionalized European countries. Similarly, when countries' legal origins and religious affiliations are included separately, there are similar patterns. In socialist origin countries it is media freedom from the political environment and citizens' accessibility to online information that matters most, and in Protestant countries the independent effect of the media freedom characteristics and media accessibility characteristics is even stronger. However, when GDP per capita and the three historical factors are included together, the effect from two of the three historical determinants of QoG disappears. Even more important, the effect of both media freedom and media accessibility on the variation in QoG across the European countries remained significant even after and although the significant effect of countries legal tradition.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to use complementary media system characteristics and to go beyond the results of previous studies that largely conclude that a free media will lead to higher levels of democracy, improved economic development, and lower levels of corruption. A further aim of this study was to test the effect of these alternative media system characteristics empirically in terms of their effects on the variation in QoG across European countries, and finally to examine how these media system characteristics could stand up against economic conditions and some of the historical circumstances that previous research has shown are crucial when it comes to explaining countries' variations in QoG.

The results suggest that the measurements traditionally used to assess countries' media freedom are of importance for the variations in QoG across European countries per se, but only when it comes to the subcategory that examines political pressures and controls. In addition, the results of this study also show that media accessibility is just as important as media freedom in explaining variation in the European countries' QoG. Indeed, the importance of media freedom and media accessibility are so strong that two of the three historical factors completely lose their explanatory power in terms of direct effects.

So why these results and what are the consequences for our understanding of the variations in the European countries' media systems, the role the media plays in society, and more specifically, in terms of promoting high QoG? The results of this study imply that media freedom – more specifically, media freedom vis-a-vis the political environment – is an important explanatory factor for countries' QoG. However, media freedom does not seem to equate to a well-informed citizenry, even if the latter requires the former. Thus, the results of this study pose the question of how well the indices scholars commonly use for the study and comparison of media freedom are in fact successful in capturing relevant aspects of media systems in terms of accessibility to media and online information. In the literature, media freedom indicators are all too often equated with citizens' accessibility to information. This also has implications for the understanding of the role of the media in processes of democratization, economic development, the fight against corruption, and promoting QoG. The overall question that Freedom House uses to examine the aspect of media accessibility is only asked when examining one of the three subcategories – political pressures and controls –

and reads: “Do people have access to media coverage and a range of news and information that is robust and reflects a diversity of viewpoints?” (Freedom House, 2010).

As to whether the results of this study can be generalized to all countries, the purpose of this article is first and foremost to explain the relationship between the media and QoG in fuller terms. The answer to the question of generalizability is, however, both yes and no. There are limitations in trying to generalize the results and to map out broader relationships from 36 cases. It is, for example, likely that the explanatory power of the economic conditions and historical factors will change with a different sample of countries and regions. On the other hand, the answer is also yes, in that citizens’ accessibility to online media information is most likely to be a very important supplementary indicator for citizens who live in countries with reliant media and where mass circulation newspapers are absent, and will therefore be an equally important factor in explaining variations in QoG across countries both within Europe and more widely. In the last few decades, we have witnessed a global change in which digital media have gained impetus. The exponential growth of the Internet has facilitated the creation of various types of digital media sources for information (see e.g., Westlund & Färdigh, 2011). Freedom is a basic condition and essential for media to play any role in promoting QoG, but the results from this study also imply that accessibility and citizens’ ability to obtain information delivered by the free media are at least as important.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: European countries included in the study.

TABLE A1. EUROPEAN COUNTRIES INCLUDED IN THE STUDY.

Austria	Finland	Lithuania	Serbia and Montenegro
Belarus	France	Luxembourg	Slovakia
Belgium	Germany	Malta	Slovenia
Bulgaria	Greece	Netherlands	Spain
Croatia	Hungary	Norway	Sweden
Cyprus	Iceland	Poland	Switzerland
Czech Republic	Ireland	Portugal	Turkey
Denmark	Italy	Romania	Ukraine
Estonia	Latvia	Russian Federation	United Kingdom

Appendix 2: Description of variables

TABLE A2. DESCRIPTION OF VARIABLES.

Variable Name	Description and Source	No. of Obs.	Mean	Std Dev.	Min	Max
Quality of Government						
icrg_qog	Measures the mean value of the ICRG variables "Corruption", "Law and order", and "Bureaucracy quality", scaled 0–1 (higher values indicate higher quality of government). Source: <i>The PRS Group, The International Country Risk Guide 2012</i>	36	0.7164	0.1855	0.42	1.00
Media Freedom						
Economic influences	Examines the economic environment for the media and includes the structure of media ownership, the costs of establishing media, as well as of production and distribution, the selective withholding of advertising or subsidies by the state or other actors, the impact of corruption and bribery on content, and the extent to which the economic situation in a country impacts the development of the media. Scale from 0 to 30 (0 indicates <i>more</i> freedom). Source: <i>Freedom House, 2010</i> .	36	8.97	5.810	4	28
Political pressures and controls	Evaluates the degree of political control over the content of news media. Issues examined include the editorial independence of both state-owned and privately-owned media, access to information and sources, official censorship and self-censorship, the vibrancy of the media, the ability of both foreign and local reporters to cover the news freely and without harassment, and the intimidation of journalists by the state or other actors, including arbitrary detention and imprisonment, violent assaults, and other threats. Scale from 0 to 40 (0 indicates <i>more</i> freedom). Source: <i>Freedom House, 2010</i> .	36	10.58	7.724	3	33

Continued

TABLE A2 (CONTINUED)

Laws and regulations	Examines both the laws and regulations that could influence media content and the government's inclination to use these laws and legal institutions to restrict the media's ability to operate. Freedom House assesses the positive impact of legal and constitutional guarantees for freedom of expression, the potentially negative aspects of security legislation, the penal code, and other criminal statutes, penalties for libel and defamation, the existence of and ability to use freedom of information legislation, the independence of the judiciary and of official media regulatory bodies, registration requirements for both media outlets and journalists, and the ability of journalists' groups to operate freely. Scale from 0 to 30 (0 indicates more freedom). Source: <i>Freedom House, 2010</i> .	36	6.79	5.537	1	27
Media Accessibility						
Newspaper circulation	Measures the average circulation per issue in relation to the countries' adult population. The definition of adulthood is 15 years for most of the countries, 14 years for Spain, 16 years for Croatia, Georgia, Lithuania and Macedonia, and 18 years for Greece, Italy and Portugal. Source: <i>WAN – World Press Trends, 2010</i> and <i>UNESCO, 2011</i> .	36	215.68	130.94	23.8	601.2
Viewing time per individual	Measures the viewing time per individual in minutes (Monday to Sunday). Source: <i>IP International Marketing Committee, 2007</i> and <i>Think TV/OzTam (Australia), 2007</i> .	36	209.94	40.158	154	285
Level of Internet access (broadband)	Measures the total number of households with Internet access in percent. The target population is here considered to be households with at least one member aged 16-74 years. Household refers to one person living alone or a group of people living together in the same dwelling unit with at least one person aged 16-74 years. Permanent members of institutions such as hospitals, prisons, etc., are excluded. Source: <i>Eurostat, 2010</i> .	36	30.22	18.932	4	72

Continued

TABLE A2 (CONTINUED)

Control Variables						
GDP per capita, PPP (constant international \$)	Measures the GDP per capita based on purchasing power parity (PPP) and GDP converted to international dollars using purchasing power over GDP as the U.S. dollar has in the United States. Data are in constant 2005 international dollars. Source: <i>World Bank, World Development Indicators, 2010</i> .	36	25336	12388	6028.9	68678.6
Political empowerment	Measures the mean ratio of female and male members at parliamentary and ministerial level, and heads of state or government in the last 50 years. Source: <i>World Economic Forum, Gender Gap Index, 2010</i> .	36	0.7222	0.0523	0.5876	0.8496
Ethnolinguistic fractionalization	Measures five different indices of ethnolinguistic fractionalization: (1) index of ethnolinguistic fractionalization in 1960, which measures the probability that two randomly selected people from a given country will not belong to the same ethnolinguistic group; (2) the probability of two randomly selected individuals speaking different languages; (3) the probability that two randomly selected individuals do not speak the same language; (4) the percentage of the population not speaking the official language; (5) the percentage of the population not speaking the most widely used language. Scale from 0 to 1 (the higher the number, the more fractionalized the society). Sources: <i>La Porta et al., 1999</i> and extended with data from <i>Alesina et al., 2003</i> (Belarus, Croatia, Czech Rep., Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Ukraine).	36	0.2166	0.1711	0.0025	0.58668

Continued

TABLE A2 (CONTINUED)

Legal origin	Identifies the legal origin of the Company Law or Commercial Code of each country. La Porta et al. (1999) use five different variables to measure possible origins: (1) English Common Law; (2) French Commercial Code; (3) German Commercial Code; (4) Scandinavian Commercial Code; and (5) Socialist/Communist laws. This dummy variable measures Socialist/Communist laws. Source: <i>La Porta et al., 1999</i> , extended with data from <i>Lee, 2005</i> (Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro)	36	0.39	0.495	0	1
Religious affiliation	Identifies the percentage of the population of each country that belonged to Protestantism in 1980. The numbers are in percent (scale from 0 to 100) Source: <i>La Porta et al., 1999</i> , extended with data from the <i>CIA World Factbook, 2001</i> (Lithuania, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro).	36	19.431	32.148	0	97.8