The Freedom of Truth: The Impact of a free press on the quality of life.  
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        The Bill of Rights of the United States Constitution was created to protect Americans from a corrupt and unjust federal government. Perhaps, the most well known of all the amendments is the first amendment which allows for free speech, press, religion, and assembly. No doubt Americans place a lot of value in this Amendment for their individual rights, but it may also hold a strong significance for a countries success. I believe, that a country cannot achieve success, without having a free media available to the citizens of that country.

I believe that whether or not a country has a free press could greatly influence the development of a country. Certainly a country, whose press has the ability to report freely on issues in and outside the country, should yield more informative citizens. Even if it was the case that citizens in a country with free press paid little attention to the news, the media’s influence in everyday life is not avoidable. For that reason it is nearly impossible for the government to keep secrets from citizens, which allows for more transparency and hopefully more honesty. Also the citizens in a country with free press would have unbiased facts available to them, and even if it were the case that all the media outlets spun the facts in some sort of way to benefit their agenda, citizens would still have the ability and privilege to read between the lines. In a country without a free press, the information those citizens are given from the government may be so biased that they would not even be able to try to uncover any truth from that government propaganda. With a government not as readily able to spread lies, citizens in a country with free press have the ability to see what their government is doing and respond if those actions do not seem to be in their best interest. Arguably some of the most important concerns to citizens are the economy, health, and education. With these concerns at the forefront of the media, citizens are able to keep a close eye over the status of each. Certainly citizens would not allow a country’s education, health, or economy to fail without voicing their opinion. That opinion could be given in the most powerful form to a politician, a vote. Even if citizens lose attention at some points and let the economy, health systems, or education slip, once the voters become aware, they will respond back with their votes. The power of an informed public vote would surely keep legislatures on their toes when making decisions that the public will see and feel strongly about. This is a privilege of being able to govern the government, and without it the government is free to make decisions best for its leaders rather than the nation as a whole.

A large amount of the world lives without free media, while another large part of the world lives with free media right at their fingertips. The French media watchdog group, Reporters Suns Frontiers, summed up in their report that more than 2 billion lived in countries with no freedom at all, while 2 billion more lived in countries where the media was able to freely criticize the government (Edwards 7). In non-authoritarian countries the media serves the public and the government criticism is inevitable, making the media a watchdog fourth branch of government (Graber 19). In authoritarian regimes the media is nearly forced to take positions to further the goals of government, leaving no room for government surveillance. In many of those communist countries media is a socially useful propaganda tool used to persuade people to adhere to that government system (Graber 18). Even entertainment programs must serve political purposes, causing political life to circulate throughout the different parts and demographics of an authoritarian nation. Most of the world does, however, live somewhere between complete freedom and no freedom at all.

        According to freedom house, the United States has a fairly high level of free press, Argentina has a partly free press, and North Korea has nearly no press freedom at all. WorldAudit.org has the United States ranked 14th, Argentina ranked 66th, and North Korea ranked 150th out of 150 countries evaluated on their press freedom (World Audit). I will examine the United States, Argentina, and North Korea and look at what I will call the development of those countries. I will measure the development of the countries by looking at such conditions as their economy, education, health, and social issues statuses when those statistics are available. Of course, freedom of press is only one factor influencing a country’s success, but it is an important one that governments can control.

The analysis can begin by looking at what could possibly be the poster child for freedom, The United States of America. “The founders of the American Republic had a classical concept of democracy based on the notion that the power to govern and to decide is rested in the people” (Edwards 23). To ensure that the people would be able to speak up to the government they created the First Amendment. Included in the First Amendment of the Constitution was the unprecedented pledge: “Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press,” which made the American media the freest in the world (Edwards 23). The founding fathers saw a free press as being vital to a countries success. Thomas Jefferson said, “a free and unfettered press is necessary to keep democratic institutions alive and functioning” (Serfaty 9). Thomas Jefferson said that our liberty depends on freedom of the press and that cannot be limited without being lost (Serfaty 9). Perhaps some of the reason for founding fathers thinking in this way was because Colonial newspapers were in the front lines of the Revolution. During the Revolution, the press helped by producing the radical change in the principles and opinions of the people. John Adams called those changes in thought were called "the real American Revolution" (Edwards 19). It was not long that citizens were able to see the significance of the press with America’s first political scientist, fiery Samuel Adams, saying "There is nothing so fretting and vexatious, nothing so justly terrible to tyrants, and their tools and abettors, as a free press” (Edwards 19).   Over the years the press in the United States has been seen as a major force that influences both the substance and process of forming and implementing national policy (Serfaty 6). This influence helped bring the civil rights issue to the forefront of the nation’s consciousness and forced an end to some controversial matters like the Vietnam War and Watergate (Serfaty 6).  Certainly today Americans could not imagine our lives without a free press, and also without many of the other great success and conveniences that our country has developed.

        Not only does the United States set the example for freedom in the world, but also for its well-known success. Although the United States does not necessarily rank first in any one category, the US is still the most powerful nation, economically, militarily and politically in the world (Edwards 4).  The United States average life expectancy is 74.24 years, high among many other countries. Although there has been much debate about reforming our current system, The US still ranks 37th in the world in health care systems (The New England Journal of Medicine). Along with healthcare, another not so bright spot for the United States is the current education system. Although secondary education is still among the best in the world, the US grade schools have been seeing some problems. The United States is overall rated “average”, while ranking 14th in reading, 17th in science, and 25th in Math (Huffington Post). Although The US is not perfect, it does have the largest and most technologically powerful economy in the world, with a per capita GDP of $47,400 (CIA). The United States is also by far, the most influential country in the world. Wall Street determines economic trends, the Pentagon dictates military decisions, Washington approves or disapproves political solutions around the world, and American TV networks and major publications influence the flow of news and information on every continent (Edwards 4). The United States has had monstrous success as a free country, but success could also be seen in countries with partly free press.

        Next, a country that has had interesting struggles with maintaining a free press, Argentina. “In general, Latin American governments have ranged from mild and harsh right wing dictatorships to authoritarian reformer regimes to communist rule” (Alisky 2).  Many Latin American nations have for years relied on censorship to diminish political opponents and help boost the administration in power (Alisky 2). Argentina was no exception and one leader, Juan Peron, left a negative imprint upon the political and social life of Argentina (Alisky 166). Argentina from the 1880's to 1940's prided itself on being one of Latin America’s most literate nations with a 90% adult literacy rate and had enjoyed press and broadcasting freedom and the luster of two of the world's outstanding daily newspapers, La Prensa and La Nacion (Alisky 166). Argentina also had Latin Americas best ratios of radio and television receivers and daily newspapers sales, per 1000 population (Alisky 167). The reign of Argentina’s media would soon turn into the reign of Argentina over the media.

The reign began in the middle of the 1900s which were dominated by Peron’s presidency, and which although was on and off, his policies remained stagnate. In 1946 and 1947 President Peron ordered the closing of dailies that editorially criticized his government actions and programs (Alisky 169). The new Penal Code of 1949 became an effective control over press and there were several incidents such as when the socialist newspaper La LaGuardia published critical cartoons against the government, its newsprint supply was impounded (Alisky 170). As a result of that article, the only Argentine newspapers initiating any contact with the US Embassy were La Prensa and La Nacion (Alisky 171). When one paper published stories not favorable to the government their rolls of newspaper were impounded at warehouse docks for what was called improper payment of import taxes (Alisky 172). The Buenos Aires daily La Prensa managed to operate independently for a time after most of the Argentine mass media had come under peronista control but news stories about Argentine government policies were never more than mildly critical (Alisky 172). Juan Peron had developed a power-direct censorship, but for outstanding holdout newspaper, La Prensa, which didn’t publish under censors, he utilized less direct methods of harassment (Alisky 172). La Prensa would not go without conflict however, after one day when their workers were locked out of their factory, the employees began to rebel and were beaten (Alisky 173). It would not be long before La Prensa would cease publishing and have formal possession of their papers, buildings, and other properties taken over by the government (Alisky 173). Peron’s wife took power for some time before the armed forces junta removed her from power and designated General Jorge Videla as President (Alisky 173). Videla held the same beliefs as his predecessors and even in 1981 after General Roberto Viola took the presidency from Videla, many of the same media policies were still held in place (Alisky 170).  One standard set up for the press was 50% of news published any given day had to have been about Argentina, although it was impossible for news outlets to find that many Argentinean stories (Alisky 179).  From ouster of Peron to military leaders taking over, Argentina experimented almost 11 years of political and journalistic freedom made perplexing by a weak economy (Alisky 173). The 1990’s saw many great reforms for Argentina and freedom of expression of its citizens. Article 14 of their constitution stated that all inhabitants of the Argentine Republic have the right to “publish their ideas in the press without prior censorship.” Today Argentineans have the highest newsprint consumption in Latin America according to UNESCO.

         The interesting history of Argentina’s fight for media freedom seems to mirror their countries fight for a successful county. Argentina’s GDP per capita is $14,700 which ranks 76th in the world. Argentina has an interesting health system, ranked 75th in the world (The Patient Factor). The current health care system is different from both socialized and capitalist healthcare, containing three sectors of public, private, and social security type systems (HealhtGov.net). This system is confusing to most citizens and many people are not receiving the best treatment that they could get (HealthGov.net). Argentina does, however, have a fairly high-ranking life expectancy at 76.76 years old (CIA). Although Argentina does not have a ranking education system, they do have free public schooling available to all citizens (Embassy of Argentina). Among Latin American countries Argentina does have some of the highest levels of education and literacy (Embassy of Argentina). On the world level compared to the United States Argentina would rank very low, but Argentina does not seem to have a sense of urgency about their education system. Instead of urgency, Argentina shows pride and optimism in their education because of the vast strides they have made, especially when compared to other Latin American countries. Even the Argentine military, which once ruled the country, is now a fully volunteer force that is subordinate to civilian authority (US State Department).

        If the United States is the poster child for freedom, and Argentina is a great example of a fight for free press, then North Korea could be called the poster child for press oppression. Radio and TV sets in North Korea are pre-tuned to government stations that pump out a steady stream of propaganda (BBC). North Korea has been dubbed the world's worst violator of press freedom by the media rights organization, Reporters Without Borders (RSF). If North Koreans get caught listening to foreign broadcasts or news they can have harsh punishments imposed on them, such as forced labor (BBC).

Most of South Korea admits to knowing almost nothing about the North Koreans and their everyday lives. Some say they have difficulty envisioning what the people of North Korea even look like (Grinker 1).

        The citizens’ struggle for free press is only one of the many struggles that North Korea faces.  GDP per capita is 1800, which is ranked 195th in the world. Average life expectancy is only 64.13 years old (CIA). Although North Korea remains highly secretive, the threat of nuclear and long-range missiles from North Korea has caused the rest of the world to keep a watchful eye on their activity. Due to its isolationist nature, North Korea’s human rights record is difficult to evaluate. However, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), think tanks, and defectors continue to report that North Korea maintains a record of consistent, severe human rights violations, stemming from the government’s total control over all activity (US State Department). Many South Koreans regularly view North Koreans quite negatively as people who after years of indoctrination of freedom of thought and behavior, they are represented as uncivilized, inhabiting a time before progress and enlightenment, heathen, backward and blinded by the cult of their government (Grinker 8). Communism has changed much in North Korea, but it has also frozen in time many elements of Korean cultural identity that have been lost in the ever-changing modernized, westernized south (Grinker 12).  Those leaving the country, defectors, cite political reasons as their motivation. Some say that they had violated anti-state laws speaking out against the regime, defacing images of leaders or committing the felony act of fraud or theft. Others say they made an unwitting mistake, accidentally receiving Voice of America broadcasts, had committed an error stated in the constitution, or they had a family member who committed a military crime (Grinker 232). Economic problems are always glooming. They have overproduction in certain areas like heavy machinery and under produce in other areas like valuable minerals (Grinker 296). Popular hunger for more and better consumer goods is forcing the Communist regime to pursue a rapid influx of advanced industrialization, much like China’s style of economic opening to the West (Taylor 29). A sharp drop in their soft currency trade, and the growing global acceptance of South Korea has made them appear even less relevant on a world stage (Taylor 110). The governments best solution to their ailing economy: have the citizens work faster and harder and have their media urge everyone to vigorously press forward and increase production (Taylor 108). The country has faced little to no opposition from their citizens except some brave youths. The government’s antidote to their “perceived problems” with the younger generation is hard work and intense ideological indoctrination, the youth and students work on projects on behalf of the resolution (Taylor 103). An unofficial slogan of North Korea is “to think and act with our wits about us according to the demands thought and to resolve all things by our own efforts” (Taylor 29). Although real perceptions of such a closed country are hard to establish, one could certainly tell that North Korea is not able to resolve all things on their own.

    Media is there to tell us what we can’t but should be able to see. Marshall McLuhan proclaimed that media sense extensions for individuals who cannot directly experience most of the events of interest to them and their communities (Graber 4). A watchdog media is essential, as elected officials do not swear an oath to defend the national intent; they swear to uphold the constitution (Serfaty 122). Through this public surveillance media sets agenda for civic concern and action (Graber 18). Senator John McCain once argued that WWI wouldn’t have lasted three months if people knew what was going on there (Edwards 4). Of course both the government and the press should know their role and stay within their bounds. Everything works best when government and press each attend to their traditional roles. Government oversteps when it seeks to impose a code of conduct on press to contain misleading information and the press fails when it begins to worry about of its impact on policy (Serfaty 12). Authoritarian regimes use tension and sedition laws to control media output, and the best way to avoid the government is by just refraining from using material, which is likely to be objectionable (Graber 4). This severely hinders the democratic system of government and leaves too much room for government abuse.

        Certainly free media alone does not equate to a successful country, however it could be strongly argued that a country without a free media could not be successful. Today no nation can be a major power without the ability to communicate effectively within and without its borders (Edwards 275). Free media means government accountability, availability of knowledge and maybe most importantly just a basic human right. Whether press freedom is a privilege or a right, the success of a county could rest upon their ability to accept media. Media can be a driving force to a county’s development and offer effective government regulation. It is hard for development to come to a country if those country’s leaders cannot come to grips with a simple fact that our founding fathers knew from the beginning: a free press is an essential player in a country’s success.

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