



**The Influence of Access to Information on Ghanaians' Perception on Government
Accountability**

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Abstract

In recent years, demand for government accountability has seen a steady rise in Ghana with the parliament passing a right to information bill in March 2019. Previous research has established an association between freedom of information (FOI) laws and government accountability, with others asserting that FOI laws result in public programme success. This research uses data from Afrobarometer's round 7 survey dataset and the chi-square test for independence to study the relationship between access to information and Ghanaians' perceived access to information before the enactment of the FOI bill in Ghana. Contrary to what has often been assumed, my research found that the accessibility of government information did not influence Ghanaians' perception of government accountability. In future research, an association between access to information and government accountability could be tested to ascertain the impact of Ghana's right to information bill in enhancing government accountability and transparency.

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Introduction and Background

Introduction

Do Ghanaians' access to information promote government transparency and influence their perception of government accountability? Why should a democratic Ghana be concerned about press freedom? While there is much anecdotal evidence to show that press freedom is fundamental to democracy as it helps promote freedom of expression, there lacks empirical evidence on its effects on people's access to information and, consequently, transparency. Research by the United Nations suggests that the right to information is intertwined with the right to free speech and the associated Press freedom (UNESCO, 2009). More specifically, press freedom is argued to support participatory democracy and empower people by granting them access to information (UNESCO, 2009). Press freedom is crucial to democracies worldwide, with the UN recognising May 3rd as a World Press Freedom Day in an attempt to bolster press freedom.

In recent years, Ghanaians' demand for government accountability has seen a steady increase, with the parliament of Ghana passing the Right to Information (RTI) ACT in March 2019 (Ministry of Finance, 2019b). Ghana's RTI ACT 989 aims to promote transparency and accountability by promoting Ghanaians' access to central and local government information. This right was enacted to improve the implementation of Article 21 (f) of the 1992 constitution that grants Ghanaians the right to public sector and governance information (MoF, 2019b). Nonetheless, press freedom in Ghana is experiencing a downturn, with the press facing stiff opposition from the government. In 2022, Ghana dropped thirty places on the World Press Freedom Index, ranking 60th out of 180 countries (Asante, 2022). According to the RSF report, "one-third of media outlets are owned by politicians or by people tied to the top political parties" (Ghartey, 2022). The report further accuses the government of being

intolerant to criticism and influencing journalists to self-censorship for security and employment-related reasons.

Amid an increasing decline in press freedom in Ghana, studies regarding the role of press freedom in Ghanaians' access to information have become even more paramount. Ghana still experiences rife corruption, with a corruption score of 43/100 (Transparency International, 2019). Given that anecdotal evidence supports the role of press freedom in ensuring transparency and, consequently, a reduction in perceived corruption, more empirical evidence needs to be established. This research seeks to identify the role of press freedom in Ghanaians' access to information and whether or not Ghanaians' access to information influences their perception of government accountability. This is significant as it will influence policies aimed at promoting a more transparent and less corrupt Ghana.

Background

An important strand in the literature on right to information laws and people's perceived government accountability suggests an association between Freedom of Information (FOI) laws and access to information. According to Vadlamannati and Cooray (2017), "the legislation of FOI laws is associated with an increase in government corruption" (p. 134) in the short run as it results in increased reporting and more observed corruption. Lamer (2016) suggests that press freedom secures freedom of information laws and enhances people's access to government information. The merit of Lamer's suggestion is press freedom's promotion of press investigative and publish activities, resulting in increased awareness of government activities. Promoting these suggestions by Vadlamannati and Lamer is Harris's research that supports the role of people's access to information on the success of public programmes. Harris et al. argue with empirical data that "collaboration with society has the most consistent positive effects on public programme success" (Harris et al., 2020, p. 607). According to them, even though bureaucrats are known to resist accountability interventions,

they unequivocally perceive information sharing as a contributing factor to public programme success.

Materials and Methods

Materials

According to Oxford Bibliographies, press freedom constitutes “the freedom to criticise the government without suffering any official punishment, before or after publication” (Teeter, 2011). Thus, the question guiding my research is whether or not Ghanaians’ access to government information influences their perception of government accountability. The research considers the lurking variable in the freedom of the press as it is believed to influence people’s access to information.

Research Question: Are Ghanaians’ perceived government accountability influenced by their access to government information?

With press freedom being linked to increasing publication, I hypothesised that the freedom of Ghana's press influences Ghanaians' access to information. This hypothesis led to my first association; is press freedom associated with Ghanaians' access to government information? Here, press freedom is the explanatory variable, with Ghanaians' access to information being the response variable.

HI: Ghanaians’ access to information is influenced by the freedom of Ghana’s press.

AI: Is press freedom associated with Ghanaians’ access to information?

Moreover, as suggested by Vadlamannati and Cooray, FOI laws increase transparency and observed corruption; I hypothesise that Ghanaians’ access to information will influence their perception of government accountability. This hypothesis led to my second association, where I tested if there exists an association between Ghanaians’ access to information and their perceived government accountability. The explanatory variable here is Ghanaians’

access to information and their perception of government accountability, the response variable.

H2: Ghanaians' perceived government accountability is influenced by their access to government information.

A2: Is there an association between Ghanaians' access to information and their perception of government accountability?

Finally, I hypothesised that the freedom of Ghana's press influences Ghanaians' perception of government accountability according to hypothetical syllogism. From hypothetical syllogism, if proposition p implies proposition q and proposition q implies another proposition r , proposition p is said to imply proposition r by inference rules (). As such, if my first hypothesis that press freedom (say p) implies Ghanaians' access to information (say q), and my second hypothesis suggests that Ghanaians' access to information (q) implies their perceived government accountability (say r), then by hypothetical syllogism, press freedom (p) can be said to imply Ghanaians' perceived government accountability (r). Here, the explanatory variables are press freedom and Ghanaians' perceived government accountability, the response variable. Refer to *Figure 1* below for the third hypothesis.

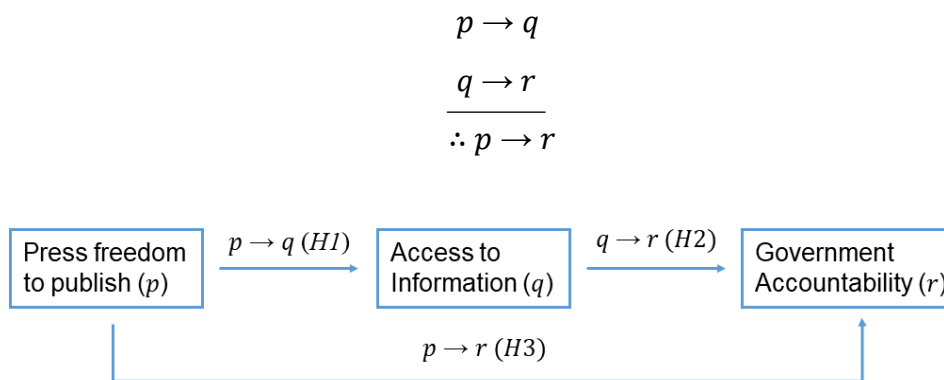


Figure 1 shows the third hypothesis based on hypothetical syllogism on the first and second hypothesis

H3: Ghanaians' perceived government accountability is influenced by Ghana's press freedom.

A3: Is there an association between Ghana's press freedom and Ghanaians perceived government accountability?

The research uses data collated by Afrobarometer from their round 7 surveys, which lasted from late 2016 to late 2018 and covered thirty-four African countries. The sampling type used was the multi-stage, clustered and stratified random sample design, with the respondents aged 18 and above. The variables in this dataset relating to my research included;

- Q17 - Press freedom: measured by the respondents' view on whether the media should have the right to publish views without government control or the government should have the right to prevent the media from publishing things it considers harmful.
- Q29 - Government Accountability: this was measured on the respondent's view on whether the government should get things done even if the citizens have no influence whatsoever or the government should be accountable to the people even if that means slower decision-making processes.
- 38G - Access to government information: measured on the respondent's view on whether information held by public authorities was only for use by government officials or whether it should be shared with the public.
- COUNTRY - Respondent's country of residence: measured by the location where the interview took place.

After sub-setting the Afrobarometer dataset using the press freedom, government accountability, access to government information and the respondent's country of residence variables, my sample size was 2,400.

Methods

In sub-setting, I created secondary variables for the selected variables on only Ghanaian respondents. The responses for the press freedom to publish variables included: “Agree very strongly with statement 1”, “Agree with statement 1”, “Agree with statement 2”, “Missing”, “Refused to answer”, among others.

Statement 1: Media free to publish

Statement 2: Government control

Here, I decided to collapse “Agree very strongly with statement 1” and “Agree with statement 1” as “Agree”. Consequently, I collapsed “Agree with statement 2” and “Agree very strongly with statement 2” as “Disagree” to press freedom to publish.

The responses for government accountability included “Agree very strongly with statement 1”, “Agree with statement 2”, “Missing”, “Refused to answer”, among others.

Statement 1: Gov’t get things done

Statement 2: Gov’t accountable to citizens

Again, I collapsed the responses, “Agree strongly with statement 1” and “Agree with statement 1” as “Agree”. The responses, “Agree with statement 2” and “Agree very strongly with statement 2” were also collapsed as “Disagree”, with the rest being coded as error code.

Finally, the responses for access to government information included strongly “Disagree”, “Agree”, “Neither agree nor disagree”, “Don’t know”, “Refused to answer”, among others.

Statement: Government information for official use only

Given that I was only interested in access to government information, the strongly disagree and disagree responses were coded as “Yes”. The agree and strongly agree responses were coded as “No”.

In analysing the data, the chi-squared test for inference was used. This was because all the explanatory and response variables (press freedom, access to government information and

government accountability) were categorical, $C \rightarrow C$. As such, I will be using the table of proportions (contingency table) and the bar plot to visualise and examine the relationships. The underlying assumptions necessary for performing a chi-square test include a random sample, and all frequencies for the expected counts of the various categories should be greater than 5 (McHugh, 2013). These conditions were met as the Afrobarometer study used a random sample; hence the sample is random. Secondly, the expected counts for all the categories were greater than 5.

Analysis and Results

Univariate Graphs

From the univariate graph on Ghana's press freedom, the majority of Ghanaians (61.79%) responded "No," with 38.21% responding "Yes" from *Figure 2*. This implies that most Ghanaians perceive that the press freedom in Ghana is relatively low. Also, from *Figure 3*, most Ghanaian respondents (62.56%) disagreed with their access to government information, with only 37.44% agreeing. Consequently, from *Figure 4*, most Ghanaians agreed that the government should be accountable to citizens even if it results in slower decision-making processes, with 77.53% agreeing to government accountability and only 22.47% of the respondents disagreeing.

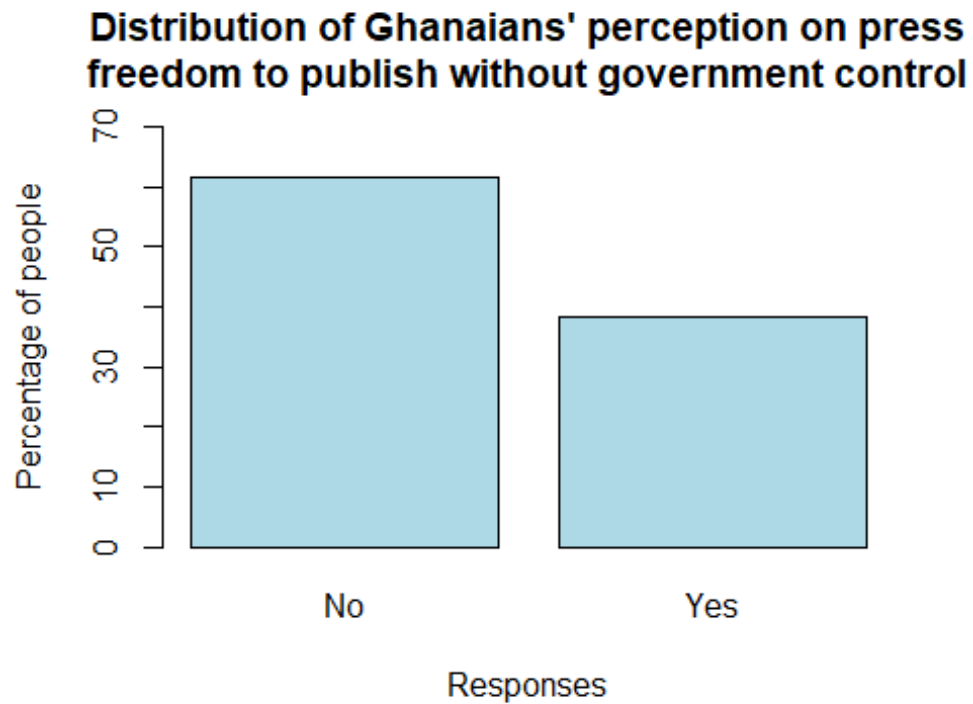


Figure 2 shows the univariate graph for the distribution of press freedom to publish without government control in Ghana

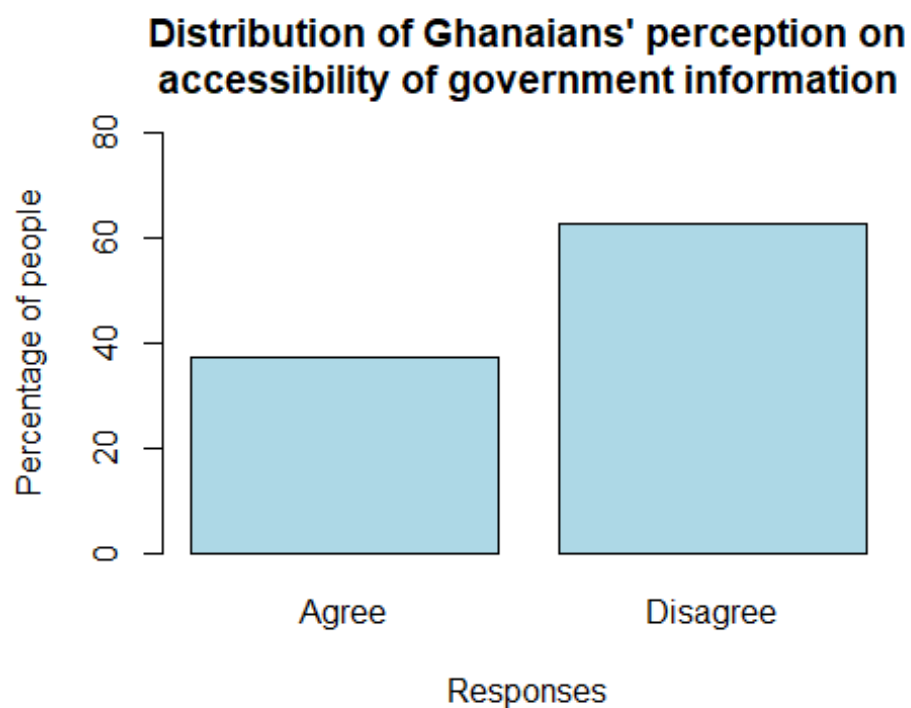


Figure 3 shows the univariate distribution of Ghanaians' access to government information

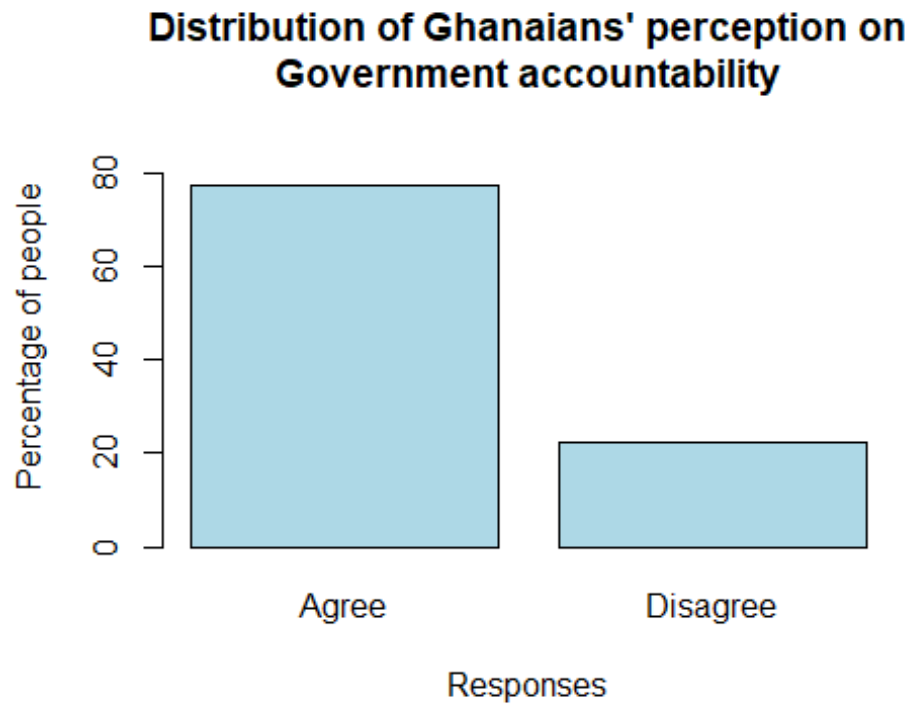


Figure 4 shows the univariate graph on Ghanaians' perception on government accountability

Bivariate Graphs

From the bivariate graph for press freedom to publish and Ghanaians' access to information, I realized that both those who responded either way, "Yes" and "No", to press freedom to publish information, disagreed with access to information with percentages 67.2% and 61.8% respectively. Again, the data suggest evidence against a possible association between press freedom to publish and Ghanaians' access to governmental information. Refer to *Figure 5* below for the bivariate graph between Ghana's press freedom and Ghanaians' access to information.

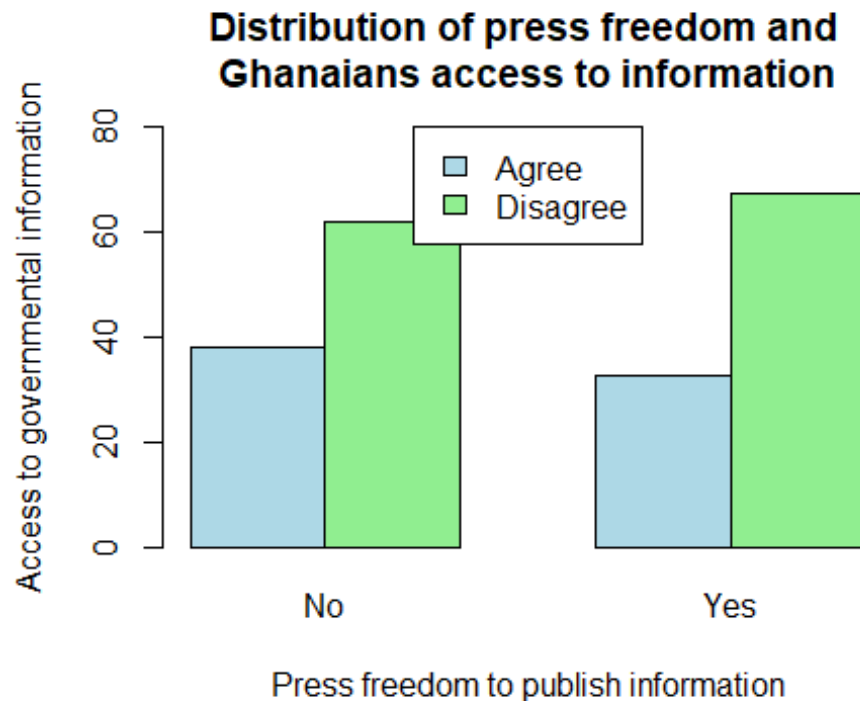


Figure 5 shows the bivariate graph between Ghana's press freedom and Ghanaians' access to information

Moreover, per the bivariate graph for the press' freedom to publish and Ghanaians' perception of government accountability, respondents agreed that the government should be held accountable regardless of their responses to the press' freedom to publish with 75.5 of those who agreed and 79.9 of those who responded "No" agreeing to government accountability. Refer to *Figure 6* below for the bivariate graph on Ghanaians' access to information and perceived government accountability.

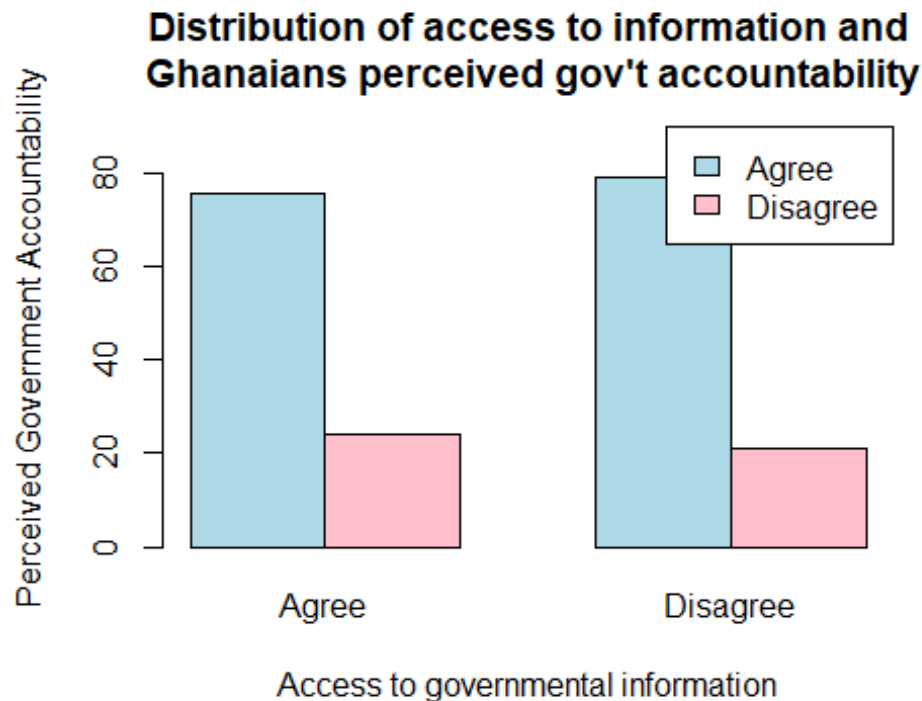


Figure 6 shows the bivariate graph on the distribution of Ghanaians' access to information and perceived government accountability

Finally, according to the bivariate graph for Ghanaians' access to information and their perception of government accountability, I realized that of those who agreed that government information was accessible, a majority of them (75.8%) also agreed that government should be held accountable even if it makes decision making slower. Concurrently, of those who disagreed with access to government information, 79.1% of them agreed that government should be accountable, with only 20.9% disagreeing. In this light, the data seem to provide a strong relationship between Ghanaians' access to information and their perception of government accountability. Refer to *Figure 7* below for the bivariate graph on Ghana's press freedom and Ghanaians' perceived government accountability.

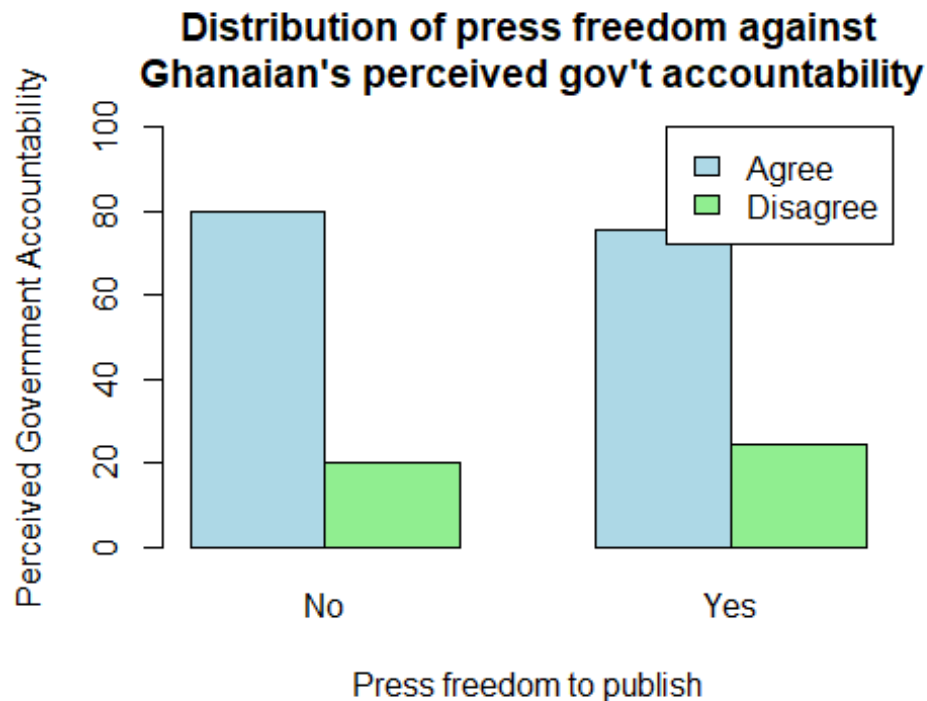


Figure 7 shows the bivariate graph on Ghana's press freedom and Ghanaians' perceived government accountability

Hypothesis Testing

For the inferential tests, I first tested for an association between press freedom and Ghanaians' access to information. The null hypothesis stated no association between press freedom and Ghanaians' access to information, with the alternative hypothesis stating otherwise and suggesting an association between the two variables. Using Pearson's chi-square test, I obtained a p-value of 0.016. With a 5% significance level, $\alpha = 0.05$, the p-value is not statistically significant ($0.016 < 0.05$), providing enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis. Thus, I conclude beyond a reasonable doubt, with a margin of 0.05 error, that the variables press freedom and Ghanaians' access to information are associated (dependent), confirming my first hypothesis. The results suggest that Ghanaians' perception of government accountability is not influenced by their access to government information even though they are associated. This can be attributed to the probable lurking variables in the

authenticity of the information accessed. I acknowledge that I could be making a Type I error here since I rejected the H_0 even though it could be true.

Secondly, I tested for an association between Ghanaians' access to information and perceived government accountability. Using the chi-square test for inference, my null hypothesis suggested an association between Ghanaians' access to information and perceived government accountability. The alternative hypothesis stated otherwise that there is an association between the two variables. From Pearson's chi-square test, I obtained a p-value of 0.0918. Using a 5% significance level, the results are not statistically significant ($0.0918 > 0.05$). Thus, I fail to reject the null hypothesis that the two variables, Ghanaians' access to information and their perception of government accountability, are related, with a 5% margin error. These results do not confirm my second hypothesis and imply that the press's freedom to publish does not translate to Ghanaians' access to information, suggesting a possible lurking variable in the means or sources of government information. I could be making a Type II error here since I failed to reject the null hypothesis even though it may be false.

Finally, I tested if there existed an association between press freedom in Ghana and Ghanaians' perception of government accountability. With both the explanatory and response variables being categorical, I used Pearson's chi-square test for independence to test for the probable association. The null hypothesis expressed no association between the variables, with the alternative hypothesis expressing an association. Here, I obtained a p-value of 0.0185 from Pearson's chi-square test. This result is statistically significant when the significance level is 5% ($0.0185 < 0.05$). As such, I reject the null hypothesis and can conclude, with a 5% margin of error, that the two variables, press freedom and Ghanaians' access to information, are associated. Even though I failed to confirm my second hypothesis (H_2), the statistically significant result confirms my third hypothesis (H_3). This abnormality needs to be further researched as there could be possible lurking variables influencing it.

Nonetheless, I could be making a Type I error here since I rejected the null hypothesis even though it could be false as the result could be due to chance or sampling variation.

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendation

Discussion and Conclusion

The primary purpose of the study was to determine whether Ghanaians' access to government information influenced their perception of government accountability while assessing the influence of press freedom in this association. I hypothesized that there existed an association between Ghana's press freedom and Ghanaians' access to government information, influencing perceived government accountability. To test this, the Pearson's chi-square test for inference was used as all explanatory and response variables were categorical. Overall, the results suggest an association between Ghana's press freedom and Ghanaians' access to information and an association between Ghana's press freedom and perceived government accountability, confirming the first and third hypotheses. However, I failed to establish a relationship between Ghanaians' access to information and perceived government accountability (*H2*). Given that the data used for my research was gathered between 2016 and 2018, future research needs to be conducted on Ghanaians' access to information and perceived government accountability after the passing of Ghana's RTI ACT in 2019. This is to determine if there exists a possible association between the two variables and to help explain the anomaly. The limitation of this study lies in the

Recommendation

In relation to policy recommendations, my research suggests that the press' freedom to publish does not influence Ghanaians' access to information by greater margins. Ghana's RTI ACT has not resulted in increased transparency with the RSF report criticising the government of being intolerant to criticism (Ghartey, 2022). As such, government data portals need to be created to support the implementation of the RTI ACT. Government data

should be shared on these platforms and in context, to enhance the accessibility of government information like Bello suggested (Bello et al., 2016). In addition, like Vance and co suggested, accountability should be used to reduce access policy violations on these data portals to enhance the authenticity of accessed information. This is because the authenticity of the accessed information influences Ghanaians' perception on government accountability, transparency and consequently, corruption status.

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Provide a list of all references cited in the work. Use the APA referencing style.

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