

MEDIA

SUSTAINABILITY

INDEX

2005



IREX

THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN BROUGHT MEDIA RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER SCRUTINY. PRESIDENT ILHAM ALIYEV, ELECTED TO FOLLOW HIS FATHER IN 2003, ATTEMPTED TO BRING A SEMBLANCE OF DEMOCRACY TO HIS COUNTRY WITH A MAY 2005 DECREE THAT ALL CANDIDATES WOULD HAVE EQUAL ACCESS TO THE AIRWAVES.

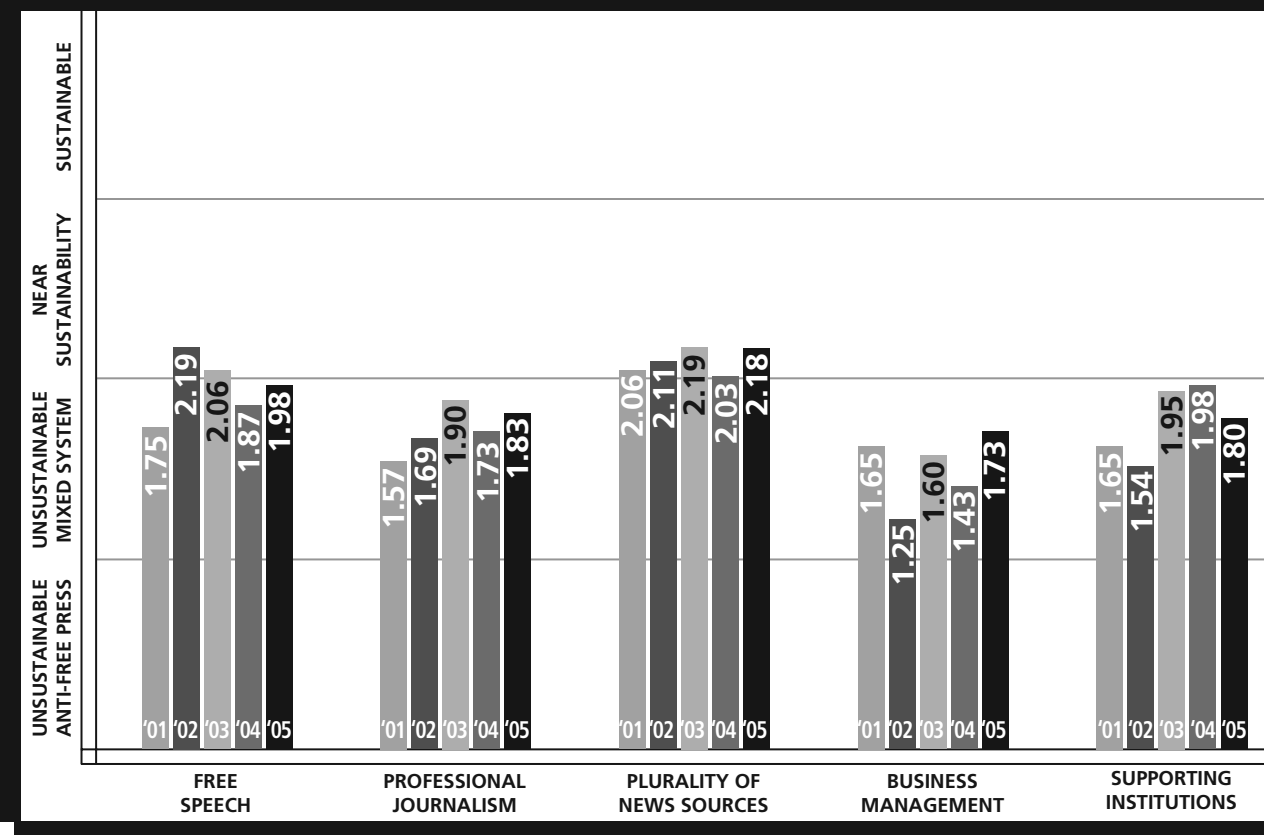


The year 2005 was a most unusual one in Azerbaijan. Parliamentary elections held in November 2005 were the first in which the electorate voted for candidates as individuals instead of for a party. The results appeared to give the ruling New Azerbaijan Party a sizeable victory, but international monitors alleged significant anomalies in the process. Also during the year, new laws were introduced that seemingly relaxed the iron-fisted hold of the former leader, Heydar Aliyev, and new technology emerged in the field of broadcast media. The March assassination of Elmar Huseynov, editor of *Monitor Magazine* and one of Azerbaijan's most outspoken and best-known journalists, shocked the country and the international community and drew further attention to free-press issues in the country.

Azerbaijan's natural resources continue to be exploited, a process that picked up speed with the completion of the Baku-Tblisi-Ceyhan pipeline carrying oil from the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean. While the country's wealthy power brokers profited from the energy sector, many people in the provinces of Azerbaijan remain in need of basic necessities such as gas and electricity and the rich-poor gap showed no signs of narrowing.

The parliamentary electoral campaign brought media rights and responsibilities under scrutiny. President Ilham Aliyev, elected to follow his father in 2003, attempted to bring a semblance of democracy to his country with a May 2005 decree that all candidates would have equal access to the airwaves. The decree was not received well by the powerful elites. The local authorities—Executive Committees that are appointed by the central government and wield the greatest control in Azerbaijan—openly opposed the order by placing restrictions on independent broadcasters. They closed stations (ANS Radio in Sheki, for example); cut off media outlets' electrical supplies (at SMTV in Tovuz); demanded that only certain candidates of their choosing be allowed to participate in programming (Khaxhmaz TV in Khaxhmaz); and shut facilities where open forums might be held (LTV in Lenkeran).

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: AZERBAIJAN



Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1): Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2): Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

Near Sustainability (2-3): Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media. Advances have survived changes in government and have been codified in law and practice. However, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism and the media business environment are sustainable.

Sustainable (3-4): Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives. Systems supporting independent media have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.

But the situation in the media sector was not entirely dismal. Privately owned ANS-TV became a voice of opposition in contrast to the pro-government broadcasters in the capital, Baku. The new public television broadcaster, Ictimai Televiziya (ITV), promised that it would adhere to the edicts of the Council of Europe, the president, and the Central Election Committee regarding fairness and balance, and had largely fulfilled its promise as the election approached. The director of the subway system in Baku rescinded his order that opposition newspapers could not be sold in the kiosks that fill the stations.

The Media Sustainability Index (MSI) panelists registered the modest improvements in the country's media sector. Overall, Azerbaijan's ranking was relatively static, moving only to 1.87 in 2005 from 1.81 in 2004. However, four out of five objectives showed improvement, with the only exception being the institutions supporting the media sector. In that sphere, several key organizations closed or became dormant during 2005.

The electronic media still remain largely under the control of the ruling party, and the election campaign proved to be an example of how effective this control is. Despite the order that all candidates would have equal access to the airwaves, several broadcasters, both in Baku and in the regions, decided that they would determine their own programming. For example, AzTV, the state broadcaster, offered four minutes of airtime per day to each political party, including YAP (the ruling party), YES (a moderate opponent), and Azadliq (a coalition of the Musavat Party, the Popular Front, the Azerbaijan Democrat Party, and the Liberal Party, all extremely opposed to the current administration). But only the Azadliq organization was told to provide its information on tape before it was aired, while the others could broadcast live.

ANS-TV became regarded as more centrist, apparently aligned with the relatively progressive minister of economic development, Farhad Aliyev, who was imprisoned prior to the elections after being accused of financing several opposition candidates. Also, when support organizations planned to assist regional broadcasters with providing equal access to local candidates, an interpretation of the electoral code led the government to decide that no outside support could be provided by foreigners.

The Media Sustainability Index panel participants in Azerbaijan requested not to be quoted by name due to concerns about their security.

OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH

Azerbaijan Objective Score: 1.98 / 4.00

A myriad of Azerbaijani laws include references to freedom of speech. In years past, however, these laws have been manipulated by the government and the court system to quiet any opposing voices. For example, the opposition newspaper *Yeni Musavat* was once fined \$160,000 for, according to its editor, quoting the Azeri ambassador to Turkey who said that former President Heydar Aliyev had indeed died while in a Turkish hospital. The total fine included penalties for other "misquotes" and "insults," but the majority of the fine was levied because it is against the law to criticize the president. If a minister or other high official files a complaint against a media outlet, it is very likely the courts will rule against the outlet regardless of the case's logic.

The differences between the laws on paper and in practice concerned the MSI panel, especially as related to judicial practices. "I believe the constitution of

Legal and social norms protect and promote free speech and access to public information.

FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

- > Legal/social protections of free speech exist and are enforced.
- > Licensing of broadcast media is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- > Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- > Crimes against journalists or media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- > State or public media do not receive preferential legal treatment, and law guarantees editorial independence.
- > Libel is a civil law issue; public officials are held to higher standards, and the offended party must prove falsity and malice.
- > Public information is easily accessible; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Media outlets have unrestricted access to information; this is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Entry into the journalism profession is free, and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

Azerbaijan contains provisions on free speech, and I can state the same about other supplementary laws in the matter of granting the freedom of speech," said one panelist. "However, there is only a weak—or maybe even no—mechanism for implementing these laws. This is due to the lack of a strong court system, which automatically gives rise to other problems."

A licensing procedure for the electronic media was established during 2005. The chairman of the National Radio and Television Council (NCRT), Nushivaran Maharramov, and his staff presented the licensing mechanism to the Council of Ministers, but said that the NCRT would go through with the plan even if the council did not approve it. By law, it is the responsibility of the Council of Ministers to set the guidelines for all fee and licensing procedures. However, the Council of Ministers had not acted for three years, following the odd omission of broadcasters from the government's revised list of businesses needing licenses. As a result, no official licensing procedure had been in place, and Maharramov took the opportunity to fill this void.

"I believe the constitution of Azerbaijan contains provisions on free speech, and I can state the same about other supplementary laws in the matter of granting the freedom of speech," said one panelist.

The shocking March 2 assassination of Elmar Huseynov, shot in the chest as he entered the building where he lived, remained unresolved more than a half year later.

The 37-year-old editor and his weekly magazine were widely known for their independence from both the government and the opposition. Huseynov had been fined, had his publications closed by the government, and received numerous threats and warnings over the years. The Azeri police received investigative assistance from both the United States and Turkey but came under criticism for not resolving the case.

There are reported instances of journalists being harassed, beaten, interrogated, and forced to recant articles that reflected poorly on the government. MSI panelists said that the courts have viewed such assaults on journalists as stemming from opposition politics and not as violations of free-expression laws. In one case, 14 journalists were beaten by police in October while covering a banned demonstration by the Azadlig opposition group in Baku, according to Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF) monitoring. Two were seriously hurt, including one who was wearing the blue jacket

distributed by a national media group to identify journalists amid protesters, RSF said. In another 2005 case, the chief editor of the *Azadliq* newspaper and his deputy were caught in a compromising situation with underage girls in a restaurant in Baku. In what dubious observers described as a surprising coincidence, the police were on hand and able to videotape the episode after both men had been invited to the restaurant by an unknown host. *Azadliq* is one of the leading opposition newspapers, and the "dinner" was seen by some as a means to discredit the publication and its staff.

The pro-government media have a clear business advantage over other outlets, but it is not a legally established one, the MSI panelists said. Officials in the ruling party control many companies and enterprises, and they tend to direct their advertising dollars to the media that support the party and the government. Also, as one panelist said, "The law reflects perfect conditions for the mass media, and the printed media is free from VAT [value-added tax] taxation. However, the government can close a newspaper, stop its printing or sale of copies without being questioned why."

It is virtually impossible for a nonsupporter of the government to obtain permission to broadcast television in Baku. The procedure involves applying to the Ministry of Justice for certification as an entity entitled to receive a license. Should that status be granted, the applicant can seek the actual broadcast license. The Ministry of Justice is considered the primary obstacle, however. The media-support organization Internews, for example, has been denied approval on several occasions with no explanation from the ministry.

Some hope stems from the newly formed Ictimai Televiziya (ITV), a public broadcaster that went on the air in August in part as a result of Azerbaijan's efforts to meet Council of Europe standards. The general director of the station, Ismail Omarov, pledged that he would present news and information in a fair and balanced manner and held to his word for the first months of operation. Omarov provided airtime for opposition candidates, and he has proven open to consultations and training to improve the capacity of his broadcasting staff. At the same time, he has made efforts to meet guidelines of Council of Europe and international organizations that make public television a key benchmark of Azerbaijan's implementation of democratic reforms.

Libel remains a criminal offense, but prosecutions involving allegations of both slander and libel appeared to decrease in number in 2005. This most likely occurred not because journalists have stopped reporting on politicians, but because the courts have become

hardened to the constant barrage of complaints from the parliament, MSI panelists concluded. Earlier in 2005, *Hesabat*, a weekly magazine considered to be under the editorial control of the former minister of economic development who became the subject of criminal investigation by the government, printed an article listing the wealthiest men in Azerbaijan. Heading the list was the parliament member Jalal Aliyev, who is the brother of the former president and uncle to the current leader. *Hesabat* did not link any monetary figure to Jalal Aliyev's wealth but did imply that it was accumulated through his family and the influence it wielded. The MP went on a rampage in the parliament and demanded that the editor of the magazine be shot, along with the owners of the parent organization, the Azerbaijan News Service, which also operates ANS-TV.

Late in 2005, the parliament approved a new law on freedom of information. Media lawyer Alesgar Mammadli, who works for the media-development organization IREX, was active in drafting the law and ensuring it furthered the interests of journalists in gathering information. President Aliyev has demanded that government institutions develop mechanisms for ensuring transparency and decreed that each ministry must provide information when it is requested. But the willingness of the government officials to implement these orders and the effectiveness of the new law in dealing with their refusal are both yet to be tested.

There are, however, many opportunities to gather information from sources such as the international news distributors, satellite television, VOA, and the BBC, all of which have unrestricted presence in the country. There also are no restrictions on entering the journalism profession.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Azerbaijan Objective Score: 1.83 / 4.00

Professionalism in journalism remained elusive in Azerbaijan during 2005, although there were isolated cases of improvement, the MSI panel concluded. Aside from a select few newspapers, almost all of the 1,734 publications officially listed as being available in the country reflect one side of the political spectrum or the other. It is estimated that the government ministries themselves print 320 different mastheads, all of them glorifying their particular sector and the ruling party in general. These publications are a "must purchase" for those who are employed by the government, thereby artificially inflating their circulations, if not their actual readers.

Journalism meets professional standards of quality.

PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

- > Reporting is fair, objective, and well sourced.
- > Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards.
- > Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.
- > Journalists cover key events and issues.
- > Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption.
- > Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming.
- > Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- > Quality niche reporting and programming exists (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

The opposition is responsible for about 35 newspapers. Two of them, *Azadliq* and *Yeni Musavat*, are the first and second most popular, respectively, among all the country's newspapers, but they cannot be regarded as objective. The more balanced publications include *Gun*, *Zerkalo*, *Ayna*, and *Echo*. Other publications, such as *525*, attempt to appear balanced but tend to backslide toward support of the government. The lack of balance can be attributed primarily the influence of the editors, according to one of the panelists.

The electronic media also have an agenda implemented by the managers that for the most part does not reflect broadcast professionalism, the MSI panel said. In the prelude to parliamentary elections, the Baku stations largely reinforced the government's right to continue its mandate by denying access to opposition candidates and spreading rumors about them. Meanwhile, the broadcasters' coverage cast the ruling party as the savior of the Azerbaijani citizens. The government fully controls AzTV1, the state broadcaster and the only station that reaches the entire country. President Ilham Aliyev is the "star of the show," no matter what the program might be. On the other hand, ITV, the new public broadcaster also currently financed by the Azeri government, is more moderate in both its newscasts and programming. The station does present the opposition perspective, and the president appears more in proportion with the news value of his activities, panelists noted.

The regional broadcasters operate in different conditions. They work under the watchful eye of the local Executive Committee, which maintains strict adherence to the ruling party. The Executive Committees have been known to order cuts in power to stations broadcasting political debates, to close down venues where debates have been scheduled, and to “suggest” to station owners not to air certain programming such as debates. In one case, an Executive Committee sought to decide who the debaters would be.

“When journalists come to work for (us), they know where they are coming,” meaning that they know their coverage will be shaped to fit the views of the publisher.

The MSI panelists were critical of the standard of journalism ethics among the media in Azerbaijan and noted that no ethics codes had been generally accepted by the

country’s journalistic community. One panelist said: “When journalists come to work for (us), they know where they are coming,” meaning that they know their coverage will be shaped to fit the views of the publisher. Some owners have demanded that specific words not be used, while others put entire subjects on their banned list. Many journalists accept following the editorial line of the owners as the cost of keeping their jobs, the panel said. There are other forms of journalistic corruption, including selling coverage or turning “negative” articles into “positive” ones for a price, the panelists said. Pay scales are higher at television stations in Baku relative to regional outlets and newspapers in general.

Coverage is focused largely on political leaders, especially the president. The official papers tend not to cover opposition events—except, perhaps, to note that there was an unruly crowd, the MSI panelists said. They felt, however, that the broadcasters deserved a better-than-average rating for their efforts in specialized reporting.

The technical capabilities of the broadcasters have progressed well beyond their ability to provide a professional news program in terms of content, panelists noted. As the cost of new equipment decreases, the station owners have upgraded their technology from VHS to mini-DV, improving the quality of the picture even though the coverage remains pretty much the same. The broadcasters in Baku have invested in advertising revenues in the equipment, although not necessarily ensuring the purchases correlate with what

is necessary to expand the capacity of the stations. Regional stations have been assisted in purchasing the equipment they use in part by international donors.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

Azerbaijan Objective Score: 2.18 / 4.00

Access to news sources is based on geography, according to the MSI panelists. The citizens of the major cities, including Baku and Ganja, have the opportunity to view multiple stations through their local broadcaster and by means of either satellite or regular television transmission networked by the Baku-based broadcasters. Satellite penetration is estimated by ABG/Nielsen to be about 10 percent of the households. Cable television systems remain restricted to Baku and the Absheron Peninsula. Radio reception mirrors that for television, and the state broadcaster in Baku is received nationwide.

National distribution of newspapers printed in Baku is haphazard, at best, the panelists reported. The primary printing facility is located in the capital city, but the distribution network is controlled completely by the government and is both inefficient and selective in terms of the newspapers it distributes. As part of a

Multiple news sources provide citizens with reliable and objective news.

PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

- > A plurality of affordable public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet) exists.
- > Citizens’ access to domestic or international media is not restricted.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media.
- > Independent broadcast media produce their own news programs.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.
- > A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources.

broader media-development program, IREX is working with an independent newspaper distributor, Gaya News Distribution Company, to help that organization establish an alternative regional distribution system for all publications.

To increase citizen access to broadcast news sources, a project has been launched to network seven regional broadcasters who have signed agreements to participate. The member stations are to broadcast simultaneously the same signal produced by studios located in Baku under the networking project, organized through IREX. The network plans to provide a daily half-hour newscast, including “packages” produced in the regions, news gathered in Baku, and international news that affects the people of Azerbaijan. However, the government must agree to register the network as a commercial entity, which panelists said would only occur if it decides the initiative does not represent a threat to the pro-government stations in Baku.

No law restricts access to news in Azerbaijan. International news is, for the most part, presented unedited when it is pirated from the satellite channels of BBC, CNN, and EuroNews. Considering the strong imprint of the government and media outlet owners on the domestic news produced by Azerbaijani outlets, the panelists said, citizens may have a more insightful understanding of what is going on in the world than they do of what is happening in their own neighborhoods.

Azerbaijan has the unusual situation of having both a state broadcasting television station, AzTV1, and a public broadcaster, Ictimai Televiziya (ITV). Both are funded primarily by the state, at least until 2010. But while AzTV1 makes no secret of its allegiance to the ruling party, ITV does provide a modicum of impartiality. Since its August debut, ITV has provided the opposing parliamentary parties with a forum for their views. ITV came in for criticism when Ismayil Omarov, who had been a political analyst for AzTV1, was chosen as its general director by the parliament. Omarov has proven his mettle by having open discussions on the station and its performance, including inviting his critics on air with him to offer their assessments and then soliciting help in responding to their concerns, panelists said. The station also has a steering committee.

There are 15 news agencies in Azerbaijan. The oldest is AzerTag, a holdover from the Soviet days that has come under the control of the Azeri government. It is the voice of the ruling party and the main source of information for the governmental newspapers

and AzTV1. Turan, established in 1990 as the first independent news agency, is regarded as the main source of unbiased news but is closely rivaled by the Trend Agency. The other agencies are much smaller, have fewer resources, and generally duplicate the three primary services.

Each of the television channels produces news broadcasts, which range from 10 to 30 minutes in length. Quality varies, the panelists said, and it appears that in some cases the managers of Baku-based television stations care more about their sets than they do about content or presentation. ANS-TV, probably the most

watched television news program, attempts to match style with content. At times, the panel said, the ANS-TV perspective swings from balanced reporting to government support, especially in the run-up to the election. Lider, another Baku television station, clearly supports the government, often including rumor about the opposition in its newscasts.

Lider television is an example of a media outlet with ownership that the panel could not fully name. Transparency in ownership is limited, with registration papers not necessarily reflecting the controlling interests. The broadcasters in Baku operate with the approval of the ruling party, meaning that the owners must be suitably in favor. In 2005, one of the stations in Guba changed hands when the local authority suggested that the owner pass control to a local businessman who was originally from the Autonomous Republic of Nakhchivan, the home of the ruling elite. That suggestion could not be ignored or rejected. Immediately after that “transfer,” the focus of that station’s news changed.

There are two primary languages in Azerbaijan, Azeri and Russian. Newspapers are available in both languages. The electronic media is required to have 70 percent of its content in Azeri. There are other minorities within the country, Talish, Lesghi, Avar, Kurds, and Mesheti Turks among them, and their

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needs are addressed on a region-by-region basis. ITV, in its role as the public broadcaster, is proposing programming for the various minorities but has not yet produced any.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Azerbaijan Objective Score: 1.73 / 4.00

The panelists did not feel that most media outlets operate efficiently or professionally or were profitable. The newspaper industry is falling on hard times: There are too many publications, distribution is inefficient, and the quality of journalism is generally poor. Aside from the papers produced by the government, which are mandatory purchases for government institutions and employees, other papers are purchased mainly because they reinforce the buyers' beliefs. Azeri readers are not accustomed to buying more than one paper to gain a broader range of views and instead purchase either the government or opposition papers. Meanwhile, the publications that present a more balanced view, such as *Zerkalo/Ayna*, *Echo*, and *Gun*, suffer from a declining distribution.

While the broadcasters in Baku are profitable, aside from ANS-TV, they are not efficient or particularly professionally managed. The state broadcaster, AzTV1, stands above all others when it comes to inefficiency

resulting from a bloated workforce. It is estimated that more than 3,000 people receive compensation at the station. The broadcaster owns no fewer than 10 trucks for mobile transmission, each on 15-minute call to follow the president in his travels in order to transmit his speeches.

Baku is the focal point for the country's advertising industry. Television advertising revenues in the capital city approaches \$16 million annually, with less than 1 percent of that amount earned by the regional stations. Print advertising is estimated at less than \$4 million per year, and radio at less than \$2 million annually.

With the value of television advertising increasing, the ad agencies have been able to demand that verified television ratings be provided and have been instrumental in bringing AGB/Nielsen and its people-meter services to Azerbaijan. The claims of the broadcasters that they are "No. 1" based on their telephone interviews are now no longer relevant to the major international advertisers, who account for more than 90 percent of the advertising revenue. AGB/Nielsen entered the market in late 2004 and has since metered the cities of Baku, Sumgayit, and Ganja. The company plans to cover the major cities and reach farther into the regions. All of the Baku television stations subscribe to the research, with the exception of Space TV, which continues to reject the ratings that show its falls far short of its competitors, trailed only by AzTV1.

Independent media are well-managed businesses, allowing editorial independence.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

- > Media outlets and supporting firms operate as efficient, professional, and profit-generating businesses.
- > Media receive revenue from a multitude of sources.
- > Advertising agencies and related industries support an advertising market.
- > Advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue is in line with accepted standards at commercial outlets.
- > Independent media do not receive government subsidies.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor products to the needs and interests of audiences.
- > Broadcast ratings and circulation figures are reliably and independently produced.

The media do rely upon the largesse of the government to survive. Many of the television stations in the regions are housed in buildings supplied by the local authorities. The majority of "independent" broadcasters are owned either by members of the family of the president or his parties' supporters. Businessmen often find it beneficial to advertise with those outlets that are agreeable to the present administration. One member of the MSI panel, a representative of the opposition press, commented that if it were not for the occasional "endowment," as he called it, received from the government, it is doubtful if the outlet would survive. As president, Heydar Aliyev would forgive the debts newspapers accumulated at the government-controlled printer and would often do the same with fines levied against the opposition press. His son has not been as forgiving, and the debts continue to mount. The opposition *Yeni Musavat* owes close to \$70,000, managers there have said. The private Chap Evi printing house, the owner of which backs an out-of-power party, subsidizes the opposition media, but the state printing house demands payment up front.

International development organizations supply a fairly substantial portion of the support required to keep media outlets operating by commissioning television programs, inserting ads in the newspapers, or making donations.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Azerbaijan Objective Score: 1.80 / 4.00

Media unions and associations are not yet unified or effective in Azerbaijan, the MSI panelists reported. The murder of Elmar Huysenov plunged the journalism community into mourning, but this consensus soon broke down into polarized conflict between the government and the opposition media when the government's representative at the funeral was pelted with debris.

There are trade organizations in place, but their management is poor and unmotivated, according to the MSI assessment. Yeni Nesil, a journalists' association, is led by the prominent journalist Arif Aliyev, but since early 2005 he has been more involved in developing his newspaper, *Gun Sahar*. The Media Rights Institute has reduced its media law activities for personnel reasons. And the Press Council continues to be an enigma in the sector. It was chartered to champion the rights of the media. However, it was founded by a member of the government who has since vowed to remove

the membership that supports the opposition. The council's ruling body is made up of representatives from each publication, with the governmental newspapers outnumbering the independent editions.

Nongovernmental organization (NGO) support to the media is limited and unable to address all the challenges facing the sector with the available funds. Another factor is that those in the media are so cowed by the power of the administration and their representatives in the regions that they will not oppose it too assertively.

Training for journalists is garnered mainly through the state university system. Most of the journalists employed in the sector are graduates of what the MSI panelists characterized as a bloated and poorly funded Soviet-era relic. Instructors are largely theorists, as few have actually practiced journalism. Two international organizations, Internews and IREX, offer mid-career training for journalists on specific subjects, and such workshops always are well attended.

There are trade organizations in place, but their management is poor and unmotivated, according to the MSI assessment. Yeni Nesil, a journalists' association, is led by the prominent journalist Arif Aliyev, but since early 2005 he has been more involved in developing his newspaper, Gun Sahar.

The Minister of Customs keeps a very tight reign on newsprint, and circumventing it to buy directly from a mill would be very difficult. In past years, as political campaigns approached, the newsprint disappeared, especially for those papers that supported the opposition. In 2005, perhaps under the direct orders of the president, the supply met demand. The state owns the main printing press. There are smaller printing houses, but they do not have the necessary capacity or up-to-date capacity to provide a serious alternative. The two main distributors of print materials, Qasid and Azermetbuatyayimi, remain under government control. The most prominent of the relatively smaller private distributors, Gaya News Distributing Company, is being developed through a support program.

Supporting institutions function in the professional interests of independent media.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- > Trade associations represent the interests of private media owners and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs that provide substantial practical experience exist.
- > Short-term training and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of newsprint and printing facilities are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.

Panel Participants

Arif Aliyev, Publisher, *Gun/Sahar* daily; Director, Yeni Nesil Journalist Organization, Baku

Aslan Khalilov, Deputy Chairman, National Council for Radio & Television, Baku

Ilham Safarov, Director, Internews/Azerbaijan, Baku

Ceyhun Nasibov, Deputy Editor-in-Chief, *Zerkalo/Ayna*, Baku

Rovshan Bagirov, Media Director, Open Society Institute, Baku

Ali Rza, Deputy Editor, *Azadliq* newspaper, Baku

Jahangir Mammadli, President, Steering Council for Public TV, Baku

Aynur Akhmedova, News Director, Lenkeran TV, Lenkeran

Sahin Hacıyev, Deputy Director, Turan News Agency, Baku

Khadija Ismayalova, Information Officer, TACIS, Baku

Moderator

Shahin Abassov, Deputy Chief of Party, IREX

Observer

Ulvi Ismayil, Project Management Specialist, USAID/Caucasus

AZERBAIJAN AT A GLANCE

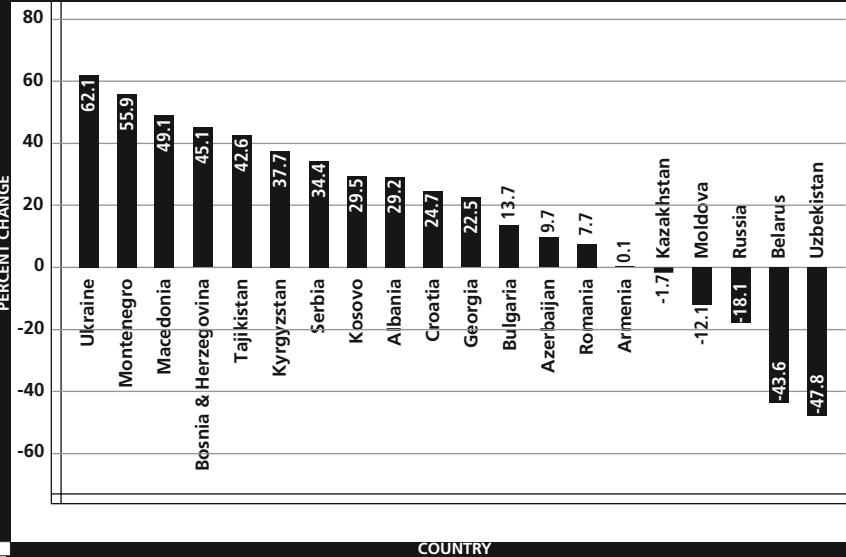
GENERAL

- **Population:** 8,408,000 (October 2005) *State Statistical Committee*
- **Capital city:** Baku
- **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Azeri 90.5%, Dagestani 3.2%, Russian 2%, Armenian 2%, other 2.3% *UNDP*
- **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 93.4%, Russian Orthodox 2.5%, Armenian Orthodox 2.3%, other 1.8% *CIA World Factbook*
- **Languages (% of population):** Azeri 90% (official language), Russian 2%, Armenian 2%, other 6% *CIA World Factbook*
- **GDP:** \$8.265 billion (2004)
- **Literacy rate (% of population):** 97% *UNDP*
- **President or top authority:** President Ilham Aliyev
- **Next scheduled elections:** Presidential October 2008, parliamentary 2010

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- **Newspaper circulation statistics (total circulation and largest paper):** Approximately 4,000,000 copies monthly. *Realny Azerbaijan* is the largest weekly paper with 15,000 copies. *Yeni Musavat* is the largest daily paper with 7,000 to 8,000 copies. *RUH Journalist Organization*

MSI AVERAGE SCORES—PERCENT CHANGE 2001–2005



- **Broadcast ratings (top three ranked stations):** ANS TV, Azad Azerbaijan (ATV), Lider TV
- **Number of print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** More than 140 regularly issued newspapers; 12 radio stations; 17 television stations
- **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** More than \$16 million
- **Number of Internet users:** More than 400,000 *CIA World Factbook*
- **News agencies:** Turan, Trend, AzerTAJ (state-run), APA, Azadinform, Sharg, Interfax-Azerbaijan, Olaylar, MPA

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: AZERBAIJAN

