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# TAJIKISTAN

A key event in Tajikistan in 2016 was a May constitutional referendum that, among other things, eliminated presidential term limits, lowered to 30 the minimum age to run for the presidency or parliament, and prohibited foreign financing of political parties and the creation of parties based on religion. The amendments came in a package that voters could only accept or reject as a whole.

The term limit amendment applies only to Emomali Rahmon, who has led Tajikistan since 1992 and can now run for re-election in 2020. The other amendments render Rahmon's son, Rustam, eligible to run for president that year—when he turns 32—and bar the re-formation of the opposition Islamic Renaissance Party, which was outlawed in 2015. Ominously for media freedom, another amendment made insulting Rahmon a criminal offense punishable by up to five years in prison.

Citing the threat of terrorism, the National Security Committee began the mandatory re-registering of all subscriber identity module (SIM) cards in the country. The committee has said that SIM cards from Tajikistan are used by Taliban fighters across the border in Afghanistan. David Kaye, the UN special rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, said in March that he had recommended the authorities "define terrorism and extremism more clearly, since the absence of a clear definition provides too much power to the judicial organs."

In July, two deputy leaders of the Islamic Renaissance Party, Saidumar Husaini and Mahmadaia Hayit, were sentenced to life imprisonment, and another 12 members received terms of two to 28 years for what prosecutors said was an attempted armed revolt led by General Abduhalim Nazarzoda, a former deputy defense minister. The European Union and the UN criticized the trial as non-transparent and violating the rights of the accused.

With the death of Islam Karimov, Uzbekistan's longtime leader, in September, a thaw in relations between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, which had been frosty since 1992 took place. The first results were a protocol on renewed air traffic, lowered tariffs on rail traffic, and the mutual delivery of products between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Also on the table is easing or removing visa requirements between the two countries.

Tajikistan's economy remains stalled, and 42 percent of the population lives in poverty. About 850,000 to 900,000 citizens work abroad, providing the basic source of income for most people in rural areas. According to the National Bank of Tajikistan, labor emigrants transferred about \$2 billion in remittances to the country from January to November 2016, \$200 million less than for the same period in 2015.

# TAJIKISTAN at a glance

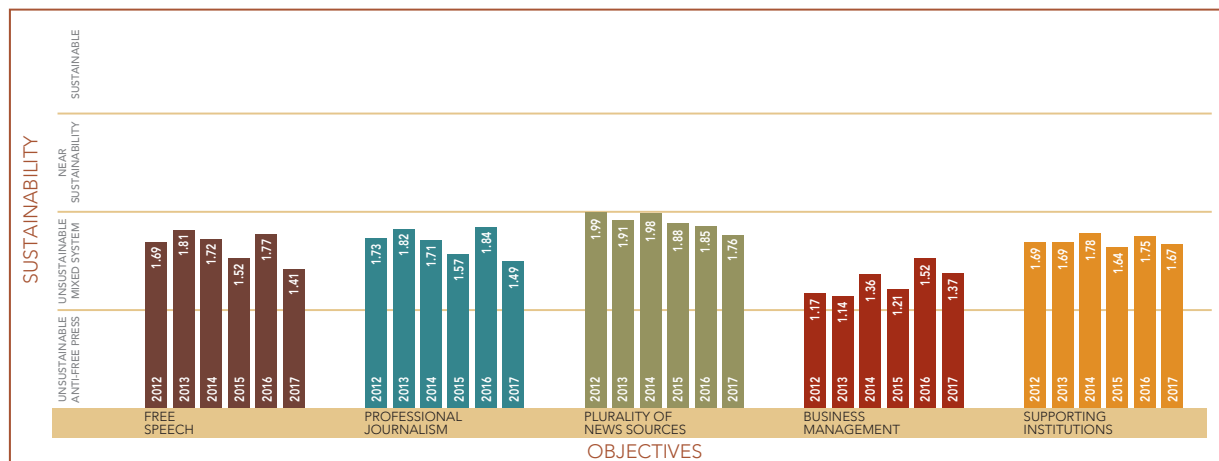
## GENERAL

- > **Population:** 8,330,946 (July 2016 est., CIA World Factbook)
- > **Capital:** Dushanbe
- > **Ethnic group (% of population):** Tajik 84.3%, Uzbek 13.8% (includes Lakai, Kongrat, Katagan, Barlos, Yuz), other 2% (includes Kyrgyz, Russian, Turkmen, Tatar, Arab) (2010 est., CIA World Factbook)
- > **Religion (% of population):** Sunni Muslim 85%, Shia Muslim 5%, other 10% (2003 est., CIA World Factbook)
- > **Language:** Tajik (official), Russian widely used in government and business, different ethnic groups speak Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Pashto (CIA World Factbook)
- > **GNI (2015-Atlas):** \$10.84 billion (World Bank Development Indicators 2017)
- > **GNI per capita (2015-PPP):** \$3,460 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2017)
- > **Literacy Rate:** 99.8%; male 99.8%, female 99.7% (2015 est., CIA World Factbook)
- > **President and Head of the Government:** Emomali Rahmon (since November 6, 1994)

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active media outlets:** 360 newspapers, 232 magazines (Ministry of Culture); Television Stations: 35 (19 non-state); Radio Stations: 24 (16 non-state)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** The largest (in terms of circulation) private newspapers are *Asia-Plus*, *Farazh*, *SSSR* and *Samak*; the largest state-run are *Dzhumkhuriyat*, *Sadoi Mardum*, and *Minbari Khalk*
- > **Broadcasting ratings:** Top television channels are: Batan, Imruz, Asia-Plus and Khovar in Dushanbe; Tiroz, SM-1 and Diyor in Sogdi
- > **New Agencies:** 11 information agencies are registered, one governmental and ten nongovernmental
- > **Internet usage:** 1.55 million (July 2015 est., CIA World Factbook)

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: TAJIKISTAN



## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2017: OVERALL AVERAGE SCORES



### CHANGE SINCE 2016

▲ (increase greater than .10) □ (little or no change) ▼ (decrease greater than .10)

**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.

Scores for all years may be found online at <https://www.irex.org/msi>

## OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

### Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.41

Tajikistan's constitution guarantees freedom of speech, while other laws on the media supposedly protect a free press and citizens' access to public information. At the same time, laws prohibit insulting the president or government representatives, libel remains a criminal offense, and journalists are subjected to prosecutions, lawsuits, surveillance, and physical and online harassment, while the general public seems indifferent.

All panelists said enforcement of the laws is lax and that law enforcement agencies and the courts carry out the political will of the authorities.

"The progressive part of society long ago lost faith that freedom of speech in the media would come into being in the near future," said panelist Negmatullo Mirsaidov, editor of the *Varorud* newspaper in Khujand.

In 2016, the National Association of Independent Media recorded 160 complaints or comments about situations involving free speech or affecting the activities of the media and journalists. Forty report direct violations of journalists' rights, and 20 relate to disputes and charges made against journalists and the media.

In the years 2015-2016, the association reported that 14 civil and administrative suits and one criminal prosecution were brought against the media and journalists, creating an atmosphere of intimidation. Penalties can sometimes be crippling fines.

#### LEGAL AND SOCIAL NORMS PROTECT AND PROMOTE FREE SPEECH AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION.

##### FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

- > Legal and 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 offended parties 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.

In addition to the new law protecting the president's honor, the noose has tightened in other ways: stepped-up cooperation with the Collective Security Treaty Organization on exchanging information about online activity means that even those with online accounts established outside Tajikistan could face increased scrutiny.

Also, regulators ignored objections from the media to establish the Unified Switching Center, through which online traffic must pass. "The speed of the Internet and the transmission of communications got very slow with the creation of the center in early November, since this is another gateway that permits government agencies, in particular the special services and the law enforcement agencies, to control all possible forms of information exchange over the Internet and the telephone network," said Nuriddin Karshiboyev, president of the National Association of Independent Media.

A government order ostensibly meant to improve the content of broadcast and print media was originally to apply only to state media but was broadened to include independent outlets as well. It is widely blamed for the closure of the respected *Nigokh* newspaper and the Tochnyus news service. Authorities cited a typo on the front page of *Nigokh*, in which "president" was misspelled. The Culture Ministry and the Media Council, a self-regulatory body, concluded it was a technical mistake, but *Nigokh's* management shut down the newspaper after being summoned to the prosecutor's office.

"Our colleagues in these media acted correctly to close down themselves and not allow the law enforcement agencies to do so," Karshiboyev said.

In a rare bright spot, a proposal to allow the prosecutor general to suspend the activity of the media was defeated at the insistence of journalists. The panelists said public hearings should be held when bills affecting the media are considered, as legislative committee hearings are now closed to the public.

"The president constantly talks about development of the media, its free development, insisting on objective coverage of events, but no media are free of the authorities," said panelist Zebo Tajibayeva, editor-in-chief of the Asia-Plus news agency. She said Tajikistani authorities constantly blame the media for subversive activities and for trying to discredit the government.

Tajikistan's special services conduct extensive surveillance of almost all journalists in private media, especially those working for opposition print outlets, who are frequently called in by the special services or the public prosecutor and told what to write. "For example, they told us that now we can't write negative articles about Uzbekistan, since after the death of Islam Karimov, relations have begun to be established between our countries," Tajibayeva said.



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Tajibayeva said the country's anti-extremism law allows media one reprimand for what it considers promoting extremism and terrorism. A second offense can result in closure without warning. She said officers of the State Committee for National Security review each issue of a newspaper before it is distributed.

According to the National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan, the threat of persecution has led to increased self-censorship, an assessment echoed by the UN special rapporteur on freedom of expression after a visit to Tajikistan.

The panelists praised a law passed in 2016 that aimed to streamline access to public information but said it had changed nothing. They said a 2015 decree that official information be released only to the government news service, Khovar, has cut off independent media's access to official sources. "Now journalists will just waste their time getting information secondhand, and that will have a great impact on their efficiency," said panelist Nazarali Pirnazarov, a correspondent for Radio Svoboda-Ozodi.

Mirsaidov said two newspapers closed under pressure from security services in the northwestern city of Khujand because they printed frequent articles on the activities of the Iranian Information and Analysis Center, which the government regarded as propaganda for a regime with which it has fallen out.

"In the regions, they don't operate on the basis of the law but on instructions and regulations, and the local officials interpret the laws according to their own interests, most often on the basis of instructions within the ministry that journalists have no access to," said Turko Dikayev, a correspondent for Asia-Plus in Kulyab.

Officials often threaten not to cooperate with journalists who write critical articles. Shonavruz Afzalshoyev, who edits the independent newspaper of the Kalam Center for the Support of Civil Society in Khorog, said he was summoned by the leader of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region to explain who had ordered certain critical articles. "For some reason, they assume that criticism is material written to order and directed against them, although PR materials are often brought to our offices that we would never print," he said.

Officials continue to threaten and otherwise pressure journalists to reveal their sources. Journalists do not have to disclose that information except under court order, although a law requiring that subpoenaed witnesses testify contradicts this protection. Almost all panelists said they had been subject to such pressure in 2016. "For this reason, both journalists and experts resort to the use of pseudonyms in critical articles," said freelance journalist Mukhaye Nozimova.

The panelists said the public raises no objection to these violations of free speech. "Colleagues are also afraid to stick up for colleagues, expressing their support only behind the scenes or supporting the statements of media associations," Pirnazarov said.

Part of the public believes that free media are of great benefit, while others believe the media themselves divide society. Authorities try to exploit that split by hacking into journalists' Facebook pages and writing offensive or nationalistic comments in the journalists' names, Karshiboyev said. Government media use anonymous letters from presumed readers and experts to leak damaging information about opposition politicians, analysts, and political scientists.

Recent summonses of journalists also show that hacking of the email and social network accounts of journalists and civil society activists, phone tapping, and other forms of cyber-crime are becoming routine. The danger also appears in the form of thefts of personal data of users of digital technology and physical detection of persons through access to geolocation data, IP addresses, and other means. The National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan said 10 journalists and civil society activists were targeted via some combination of these methods in 2016.

Broadcast media are licensed by a council that is controlled by the Committee on Television and Radio, whose members are not identified, in a process that is opaque and unpredictable. The committee blocks without explanation licenses for independent media. Zinatullo Ismoilzoda, director of the government's Media Academy, said some production studios and television stations operate without licenses and are therefore vulnerable to being shut down by the authorities. Further, he said, "Bids and competitions take place and grants are awarded, but in order to participate in them, you need a license, which is often delayed." The panelists cited several license applications that had been rejected, including from stations that for security reasons wanted to operate near the borders with Uzbekistan and Afghanistan to replace broadcasts from those countries.

The licensing process is a catch-22 for some media. "In order to receive a license, you have to register with the Ministry of Justice as a limited liability company, but that ministry requires a written confirmation from the regulator that a license has been issued," Ismoilzoda said.

Ismoilzoda said 35 television channels are in operation, of which 10 are government-owned, 20 are independent, and five are cable. In addition, 28 audio and video production studios operate.

The panelists noted that Tajikistan has yet to create an independent telecommunications regulator, a requirement of its 2013 accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO).

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Conditions for entering the media market can be more complicated than for other industries. A media organization must present the necessary equipment to function in order to receive registration, said panelist Nabi Yusupov, director of the Media Consulting NGO. "Even to renew an existing registration, the requirements are the same as for the initial registration. In addition, the State Standardization Committee requires all the certificates for computers, transmitters, and other equipment," Ismoilzoda said.

The Culture Ministry has assumed the responsibility of censoring and overseeing print media, although by law it is only supposed to register the organizations. Murod Sotiyev said that when he tried to re-register the *Novyy Khatlon* newspaper, which he edits in the city of Qurghontepa (Kurgan-Tube), the State Standardization Committee required a license for the printing equipment.

The panelists said media pay the same taxes as other businesses, which they consider too high. "An 18-percent value-added tax and a 25-percent income tax are a heavy burden even for media holding companies," Tajibayeva said. "For this reason, various means of avoiding paying taxes have to be sought. Otherwise, the return on investment of the print publications is sharply curtailed."

The panelists said officials and broadcasters have tried to make the transition to digital broadcasting as painless as possible and to ensure citizens have opportunities to weigh in on the process. Many outside the major cities have begun to complain that even though they have a satellite antenna, they do not have clear reception or cannot get the Tajik television channels at all.

No civil society groups come to the defense of journalists in trouble, the panelists said. Khurshed Niyezov, director of the Media Council and editor-in-chief of the *Faraj* newspaper, said 10 journalists have been killed since 2003, but none of the cases has been solved. In a recent attack, Doro Makhkamov, of the independent Ozodagon news service, was beaten in November. Niyezov said the investigation is dragging because the police officer who beat the journalist has a highly placed father. Karshiboyev said the advocacy group Coalition Against Torture has taken up the case but has done nothing but report the facts of the attack. "Now they'll write statements about their participation in the matter, and that's all. They get big grants and occupy themselves with evasive statements and reports, but so far not one case they have taken up has been resolved in favor of the victim," he said.

"Only our media colleagues themselves, and sometimes social media users and a very small segment of the population, support us or protest violations of freedom speech," Nozimova said.

In 2016, the Communications Service, which regulates telecommunications, repeatedly blocked Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Odnoklassniki, and VKontakte, which have become the main platforms for the free expression of opinion and for statements from opposition politicians, groups, and bloggers.

In addition to being blocked, websites that run afoul of the authorities will become difficult to load or will be subjected to a DDoS attack. Asia-Plus's Tajibayeva said when that site was blocked in May 2016, the telecommunications regulator blamed the site's own technical difficulties. Six days later, during the constitutional referendum, she said, "There was a strong DDoS attack carried out from Russian cities." Since then, Asia-Plus has secured a third domain outside the .tj area.

Karshiboyev said, "There were instances of psychological pressure on four journalists," but not all journalists who flee abroad do so because of persecution. "In 2016, 15 journalists left Tajikistan, and of these only five did so because of persecution or because it was impossible for them to work in the local media," he said, cautioning that a distinction needs to be made between them and other journalists who leave for economic reasons.

Despite the fact that the law prohibits monopolization of the media, 92 percent of Tajikistan's electronic media are state-owned.

The media law provides for editorial independence, but none of the government-owned or funded newspapers or broadcasters have editorial independence. "None of the editors of the government media are appointed on a fair basis, but rather because they have covered correctly the policies of the government and the state," Yusupov said. The economic crisis has also led some publications to lower their standards. "For the sake of profits, editorial offices are making sacrifices, publishing knowingly weak or compromising articles in their dependence on advertisers," Karshiboyev said. Mirsaidov, of the *Vararud* newspaper, said the founders of the media constantly interfere in editorial policy.

Some panelists said a journalist's chances of getting information rely on his or her professionalism and links to those inside the organs of power. Nosirjon Mamurzoda, who teaches journalism at Qurghontepa State University, said authorities in the Khatlon oblast provide information only upon written request and after clearance from a superior. He said state media always receive information first from the security and law enforcement agencies.

Makhmujon Dodobayev, director of the main press department in Sughd Oblast, said the leadership of the oblast does not distinguish between "our and their" journalists. All the media that request information receive it. He said local officials give

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annual awards to “the region’s best journalists,” including from independent and foreign media.

“The authorities conceal operational information on extremism and terrorism,” Mirsaidov said. “No matter how professional a journalist you are and what ties you have to the security agencies, it’s practically impossible to get information. Information is provided late, when you don’t need it anymore.”

Within the president’s circle, access by foreign journalists accredited in Tajikistan has tightened. Beginning in 2012, some of them stopped receiving invitations to the president’s meetings with foreign delegations. Foreign media are rarely invited to formal photo sessions.

Free discussions and political debate take place in the Tajik segment of Facebook, where provocative and insulting posts and caricatures of the president, his family, and high-ranking government officials appear. Dikayev said such posts are usually the work of government opponents who live abroad.

Access to information has been eased somewhat by the fact that all ministries and agencies have their own websites, where material interesting to journalists can sometimes be found. The panelists noted, though, that not all of ministries update the information on their sites and some links do not work.

The panelists said all the domestic media regularly use information from domestic news services and newspapers. Information from foreign news services is also used, sometimes without attribution. Ismoilzoda said television stations show programs without the proper rights, another violation of Tajikistan’s WTO commitments.

Local television increasingly provides current information on Tajikistan, particularly from the regions, but the state channels use information only from the government news agency, Khovar.

News is accessible in Tajikistan thanks to the many television and radio stations and websites, although daily wintertime power outages and the relatively high cost of Internet service are impediments. Satellite and cable television are widely used to receive alternative information from abroad. “Almost all the country’s residents, regardless of their income level, have a satellite antenna or receive cable television,” Mamurzoda said.

The panelists said Tajikistan urgently needs a law distinguishing between press treatment of public figures and private individuals because, for instance, famous people often complain about the use of open-source photographs of them in the media.

Journalists do not need a license to practice, but it helps to have professional training in order to get a job. The new media law defines a journalist as an employee of a media organization

and a member of the country’s Union of Journalists. It can be difficult for journalists to receive the accreditation they need to cover certain events.

The new media law for the first time allows non-media organizations, such as NGOs, to operate their own outlets without requiring those outlets to be registered as separate legal entities. For example, the Faraj (Center for Journalistic Investigations) NGO publishes three newspapers.

The National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan reported more than 80 violations of the rights of journalists and media, along with 50 disputes and charges made against media and journalists in 2016. Also last year, the Interior Ministry withdrew the accreditation of six journalists from Radio Svoboda-Ozodi, without explanation. After protests by human rights organizations, the ministry returned the accreditation cards after 15 days. The Sputnik hub of the Russian agency Russia Today has been unable to obtain accreditation with the Foreign Ministry and registration with the Justice Ministry for two and a half years, with no reasons given.

The special services and the prosecutor’s office continue to pressure independent journalists. For 2016, at least three cases were recorded of violations of the rights of four journalists by Tajikistan’s law enforcement authorities (unlawful summonses and violation of procedural rules in the course of an investigation, attempts to unlawfully obtain testimony against suspects, and persecution and intimidation of journalists).

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.49

Much journalism in Tajikistan is woefully unprofessional. Reporters and editors avoid certain topics, produce slanted coverage, run advertorials disguised as news, use others’ work without attribution, have trouble getting information, and choose their facts selectively, the panelists said.

Many sources will not talk to journalists, either out of fear of the authorities or doubt that the reporter will relay the information accurately.

“In Tajikistan last year, the number of information sources was severely reduced, and not all experts would give commentaries, fearing both pressure and the consequences that would befall them,” Karshiboyev said.

As a result, Ismoilzoda said, “Journalists have begun to get comments and interviews from one another.”

“We have a list of people who must under no circumstances be criticized—the president and his family, security personnel, and our shareholders and advertisers,” Tajibayeva said, adding that

Asia-Plus has begun to focus more on social issues and culture to avoid trouble with the authorities.

“At present, the news services cover events more objectively than the newspapers,” Pirnazarov said. The panelists said some newspapers seem to be getting information from social media, even though the sources are unreliable.

Niyezov said many journalists are themselves to blame for their problems with the authorities, since they frequently ignore specific facts and do not maintain a balance of opinions. “Some media, in their quest for popularity and readers, are transformed into a ‘yellow’ press, frequently misleading readers with unsubstantiated information,” he said.

Yusupov said news reports are frequently opinionated and self-contradictory, and sometimes violate other ethical norms, including against plagiarism. He cited specifically the popular *Tajikistan* and *Ozodagon* magazines. In addition, some critical articles, including investigations, are not properly vetted by lawyers before publication.

Ismoilzoda said that for journalists of the state television channels, there is no such concept as a balance of opinion, reporting is in the first person, and the main content is the opinion of an official.

Most journalism organizations—with the notable exceptions of the major opposition newspapers *Millat* and *SSSR* and the media group Oila—adopted an ethical code in 2009 based on international standards and national norms. The Media Council, with 87 organization members, acts as a self-policing body for the industry. In 2016, it received 14 complaints and submissions concerning ethical issues, objectivity of publications, respect for privacy, and plagiarism, as well as complaints from government

agencies about specific articles or inaccurate reporting, council director Niyezov said.

The panelists said print media often blur the line between information and advertising. “Because of the reduction in the advertising market, many media, in order to survive in the conditions of the economic crisis, have begun to print advertising and PR materials without identifying them as such,” Dodobayev said. The panelists said glossy magazines have become cash cows for their owners: Subjects pay to appear in them, with a cover story fetching at least \$2,000.

Further, Mirsaidov said, “There are subjects of a commercial nature on independent television channels where payment is made by a price list.” Many journalists, both government and independent, accept fees and payment for their work. “In all the regions of the Khatlon oblast, journalists require a fee from their clients for photography or reporting, in the form of either money or food products,” Sotiyev said.

The panelists said that since the revolt by Nazarzoda, the former deputy defense minister, and the trial of the Islamic Renaissance Party members, self-censorship has greatly increased. Journalists are shying away from subjects of security or extremism, or are careful what sources they consult. After the coup attempt, some journalists were questioned about articles they had written about the party’s leader or about Nazarzoda’s tenure at the Defense Ministry, Karshiboyev said.

According to the panelists, it is impossible to cover national security effectively, as the special services parcel out information stingily, based on what they think will benefit them.

“Unfortunately, our special services, unlike those of neighboring countries, don’t want to contact the press and provide information, even though the media can act as partners in the fight against threats and challenges to security,” Karshiboyev said.

In any event, Tajibayeva said national security problems are of little interest to readers. “We publish articles on everyday social problems, transport, health care, and the readers actively discuss and repost them. If we write about national security problems or the problems of journalists, no one is interested,” she said.

Pay rates that have not kept up with the cost of living and the drop in the value of the somoni are also a drag on professionalism in journalism.

“The salaries of editors and journalists are low and are not enough for a full life. For this reason, many journalists work for more than one media organization or undertake additional work,” Niyezov said. Journalists for state television frequently work part-time on projects for private production studios, or they shoot weddings, anniversaries, concerts, and other events.

## 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).



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The work of freelance journalists is almost unpaid, except in the state media. Recently, pay for those in state media has overtaken that of reporters in independent media.

The panelists reported a range of media employees' salaries, from \$40 to \$65 per month for correspondents for the government newspapers in the Khatlon, Gorno-Badakhshan, and Kulyab regions to more than \$250 for employees of state-run Channel One TV and \$350 to \$400 for workers at Asia-Plus. Employees of the government media also receive bonuses and expense reimbursements, and in 2016, 72 of them received free apartments or building lots, Ismoilzoda said.

The panelists said 70–75 percent of state television programming is entertainment, while the share is 60 percent on government radio and more than 80 percent on privately owned FM radio stations. News and information programs constitute the remainder of air time.

A viewer in Tajikistan can choose among “hundreds of different channels, but if the only thing he sees when he tunes in to the local TV is concerts, he'll simply stop watching,” Ismoilzoda said. Young people in Tajikistan prefer sports, entertainment, and talk shows to news and analysis, according to the panel.

Many media in Tajikistan, especially outside the major cities, lack up-to-date equipment, although the state television and radio channels modernize their technical equipment every year.

International donors have provided some journalists with Dictaphones, smart phones, cameras, and tablets instead of money.

Dodobayev said independent television stations in the Sughd oblast have begun investing in better equipment, and Afzalshoyev said journalists in Khorog have technology to some extent, but suffer from expensive and slow Internet connections.

“The newspaper *Novyy Khatlon* has two old computers issued by the Ministry of Culture six years ago, and they're used to design the newspaper, but only with difficulty, because of their poor core memory. The editorial staff has one camera, and it is of an amateur level. The correspondents buy their cell phones out of their own pockets,” Mamurzoda said.

Tajibayeva said the offices of Asia-Plus were extensively refurbished in 2016 thanks to the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency.

The country has no quality specialized media, which they said is not in demand, despite the debut last year of two glossy magazines dealing with advertising and business.

The panelists said it would be inadvisable and dangerous to start any politically oriented media.

In 2016, 12 investigations were published, on social issues and the economy. “There are groups of investigative journalists, but

it's practically impossible to carry out investigations without funding. The editorial offices can't pay for quality investigative journalism since the donors have quit financing this type of journalism,” Nozimova said.

The number of all-purpose journalists in Tajikistan increased over the past year. At press conferences, many take pictures themselves on their smart phones and tablets and attempt to record video content. “Many journalists are forced to become all-purpose journalists because of the cutback in staff at almost all the print media and press services,” Pirnazarov said.

The panelists said employers now make journalists work in multimedia but do not pay extra for their skills and often do not provide the necessary technology.

Employees of state media are well behind their independent colleagues in professionalism, ethics, diversity of opinion, and timeliness, for which the panelists blamed the state media's management system. Dikayev said the state media and the concept of modern journalism are incompatible. “These are the organs of government agencies and bureaucrats who are engaged in propaganda for the authorities,” he said.

Plagiarism continues to be widespread in print and electronic media, a violation of ethics as well as Tajikistan's media law.

Tajikistan's lack of a truly independent printing press—although some are privately owned—presents problems. “Dushanbe has 70 printing houses, but not one will print a newspaper whose material does not suit the authorities,” Tajibayeva said. The panelists called for an independent printer to be established with donor funds.

The trade in newsprint and other materials for printing a newspaper are in the hands of only three or four businessmen, including Sharif Khamdampur, the owner of the Oila media holding company.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.76

Tajikistan's media scene is expanding, with many new radio stations and newspapers, as well as websites and mobile phone apps linked to existing outlets. Use of social media as an information source is also on the rise. Within limits, this all translates into a diversity of viewpoints, but the audience for some media is shrinking, and some of these sources are notoriously unreliable.

Only one daily newspaper, the privately owned *Imruz-nyus*, is published in Tajikistan. Two state newspapers, *Sadoi madrum* and *Jumkhuriyat*, are published twice a week, as is the privately held, Russian-language *Asia-Plus*, whose circulation fell from

15,000 in 2015 to 7,000 or 8,000 in 2016. All other papers are weeklies. The total circulation of all newspapers published in Tajikistan in 2016 did not exceed 35,000, which is less than in the previous year.

According to the Culture Ministry's press office, circulation for each of the roughly 60 state newspapers published in the regional districts does not exceed 700 to 1,000 copies each. Most appear sporadically because of technical or financial difficulties, as they rely entirely on local government budgets that are suffering because of the financial crisis. Of state newspapers published in regional centers, the profitable ones are *Dieri Tursunzoda* in the city of Tursunzoda, which receives financial support from the Talko aluminum plant and has a circulation of 3,500, *Khakikati Sughd* in the Sughd oblast, with a circulation of 3,000, and *Novyi Khaton*, with a circulation of 4,500.

The panelists blamed the economic crisis and newspaper price hikes for a decline in readership. Particularly in remote areas, people cannot afford to buy newspapers, whose prices rose by 20 percent in 2016. On average, the price per copy is 45 cents (at the exchange rate of \$1=TJS 7.9). Poor people tend to buy one newspaper for several families and pass it around.

Twenty-seven radio stations—17 independent and 10 government-owned—operate in Tajikistan. The country has 30 television stations, 20 of which are privately owned.

*Asia-Plus*, Radio Svoboda-Ozodi, and the *Ozodagon* newspaper have mobile apps, but phones are not yet a major means of transmitting news, "since this requires the creation of a special server, having a short telephone number for transmission, and paying a satellite communications operator," Tajibayeva said.

Government-held media wield major influence through a large network of broadcast outlets, and Mirsaidov said some privately owned publications have become meeker than government ones, since they have stopped writing critical articles on important subjects and events.

"The state media write about achievements while they pass over problems and shortcomings, while the private media attempt to sidestep politically sensitive subjects in order not to hurt themselves," Nozimova said.

"The editorial policy of the state media is fully dependent on the directives and guidance of the country's leadership," according to Niyezov. The panelists noted that Tajikistan missed the 2015 deadline to create publicly held media, walled off from government interference, as required by membership in the WTO, Karshiboyev said.

The panelists said the division of the media into state and independent leads to polarization of opinion and antagonism among journalists.

## 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.

Private publications are more diverse than state publications, but they must compete with social media, where it is easier to find opposition viewpoints. In response, state and independent media have begun to promptly post their stories on their social media pages. Tajikistanis actively use Odnoklassniki, Facebook, VKontakte, and Twitter. According to recent data, more than 100,000 users from Tajikistan are registered on Facebook, and more than 150,000 users access the site per day, while around 1 million Tajikistanis are registered on various worldwide social networks.

The information on these sites can be unreliable, and they are regularly blocked or slowed down, even though authorities are supposed to get a court order to bring down a website.

In 2016, Facebook, Odnoklassniki, VKontakte, and YouTube were blocked at least six times, and the sites of some local opposition media—*Asia-Plus*, *Ozodagon*, *Tojnews.tj*, *Faraj*, and *Avesta*—also went dark, Pirnazarov said. "The restriction usually is carried out through SMS messages from the government regulator, the Communication Service," he said. "Those Internet providers that do not immediately close down the critical sites or portals begin to experience technical problems."

Many fake pages on social media that mirror pages of political figures are actually the work of radical Islamists and members of the Islamic State.

Nozimova said the fact that the country's special services could block these fake pages does not suggest they are of some use to the authorities. She also noted the presence of minivans with tinted windows and several antennas that show up for important protests. "They completely monitor the Internet space and people's telephone conversations," Khalikjanova said.

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The law does not prohibit people's access to foreign websites, except for those operated by what the government considers terrorist groups.

Any citizen with means can access the Internet in the major cities. In the regions, the situation is complicated by regular power outages during the winter and the slow speed of the Internet. Monthly tariffs to get online have risen since the introduction of a 3-percent value-added tax in 2014. They range from \$50 to \$200, which is out of reach for most people. According to the Internet Service Providers Association of Tajikistan, 3.75 million of the country's more than 8 million people were using the Internet as of December 1, 2016, more than double the *CIA World Factbook* estimates for the previous year.

Tajikistan has 10 mobile telecommunications companies and 10 Internet service providers. The mobile operators have 6.4 million subscribers, and 25–30 percent use mobile Internet.

In rural areas, users generally use radio as their information source.

Of the 11 news services registered in Tajikistan, only eight actually operate: Asia-Plus, Avesta, press.tj, ozodagon.com, tojnews.tj, faraj.tj, tajikta.tj, and the government-run Khovar. The most popular is Asia-Plus. Last year, financial and management problems forced the Varorud, Khatlon-Press, Payyem, and Pamir-Media regional news services out of business.

Tajibayeva said the Asia-Plus service depends heavily on grants and the help of its partners, including large advertisers and corporate subscribers. "If it weren't for them, we would hardly be able to survive in the media market given the difficult economic situation," she said.

All the press services are part of media holding companies: Asia-Plus of the holding company of the same name, press.tj of the Oila holding company, Ozodagon of the newspaper of the same name, and Avesta and tajikta.tj of the *Biznes i politika* newspaper. To survive, the news services have increasingly begun publishing advertising and press releases. "As before, we provide our news gratis to the local newspapers. There are paid subscriptions, but not many. [Subscribers] receive bonuses in the form of news announcements and multimedia content and are able to place PR materials and press releases at no charge," Tajibayeva said.

In preparing foreign news, the state television channels use snippets from Russian television channels, Euronews, BBC, CNN, and Al-Jazeera. Almost all the newspapers reprint news from the leading worldwide services without paying for it, as well as news from local news services, also without payment.

Private media produce their own news and differ from the state media in providing alternative opinions. With the help of Internews, independent television and radio stations have created their own television bridge, an exchange of news from around the country via electronic media. They also exchange their programs with one another. Dodobayev said in the Sughd oblast, the independent media produce their own news, which in some ways exceeds the government channels' productions. In Khujand, two new channels are also attempting to produce their own news, basically on cultural subjects. Three regional television companies and five regional radio companies produce their own news. "The news broadcasts of the independent channels differ from the state channels in format, form of transmission, and their balance and high-quality approach to preparing their materials," he said.

The panelists said the public has little interest in who owns the media, details of which are not a state secret and are generally available on a registry maintained by the Culture Ministry.

A law limiting foreign investment in media companies to 25 percent of capital limits where outlets can seek backers, but grants and technical assistance from international donors still flow in.

The panel said the declining number of news consumers are more interested in domestic and social problems than in politics and state security. Media avoid covering the president's family and private life, corruption in the top ranks of government, and the activities of the special services, tax agencies, and their business partners. The state media rarely report on emergency situations, armed clashes, terrorist acts, and natural disasters. The panel said media give little coverage to the problem of HIV/AIDS, marginal or youth groups, and sexual and religious minorities.

The number of media organizations for national minorities stayed constant in 2016. About two dozen newspapers and magazines are published in the Uzbek and Kyrgyz languages, along with several Russian-language publications, many in the northwestern and southwestern regions. Three state television channels offer daily newscasts in Russian and Uzbek, while two broadcast news in English and Arabic daily, and the state-run Obovzi Tochik radio broadcasts once a day for an hour in Uzbek, Russian, and Arabic. The panelists said the media of the national minorities in Tajikistan are free and may operate without limitations.

Issues related to national minorities are rarely covered. Generally, they address the problems of the Lyuli, who live in the west and south, and the Lakai, who live around Dushanbe. Since 2000, there have been no representatives of national minorities in the country's parliament or government.

There remains almost no inter-regional exchange of information. "In the regions of central Tajikistan, there are no correspondents of even one central newspaper or news service. For this reason, information from there arrives rarely and late," said Pirnazarov, of Radio Svoboda-Ozodi.

No government or independent print or electronic media have correspondents abroad or in the central and eastern part of the country, except for Asia-Plus, which has correspondents in Washington and London. The government news service Khovar has special correspondents in Moscow and Ankara.

Given the pressure exerted by the authorities on practically all independent media, the panelists said creation of publicly held print and broadcast media is essential. They also called on state channels to start broadcasting news from the regions since people are very interested in regional and local news.

Delivery of print publications is problematic. Tajibayeva said a centralized distribution system could help expand the *Asia-Plus* newspaper's reach into the Sughd oblast and the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region. "Independent newspapers are often dispatched by vehicles that are going the same way or by the local distributors who come for them," Mamurzoda said. Some editors and deputy editors of state publications often deliver the newspapers and magazines to the regions themselves.

#### OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.37

The media industry in Tajikistan is affected more by the policies of national and local government than by market forces. The panelists said the country's media have stopped making money, as advertising revenues have plunged, circulation of independent newspapers has fallen by 40–60 percent, and outlets have cut staff. Many organizations depend on government funds or payments received for covering—or not covering—some companies. Other revenues come from holding events and being hired for public-relations campaigns.

"Given the effects of the economic crisis, the social and political situation, and the severe censorship and self-censorship of media activities, it's hard to predict the future," Karshiboyev said.

"More than 95 percent of the media were seriously affected by the financial crisis," Yusupov said. He said an analysis by Media Consulting, an NGO, found 20–50 percent declines in advertising and 20–45 percent drops in circulation.

Tajikistan's media were hit by the de facto bankruptcy of the nation's two largest banks, Vneshekonombank and Argonvestbank, which Niyezov said hold accounts for many publications that have now been frozen. In addition, Tajibayeva

said many advertisers are in the same bind and have been forced to break contracts with some print media.

In Tajikistan's corrupt and predatory environment, small and medium-sized businesses entering the market are wary of placing any advertising, lest it invite corporate raids or pressure from the tax department and other regulatory agencies. Further, Yusupov said the cost of advertising in the well-known outlets is too high, so some companies instead do business with smaller outlets. Advertisers have also increasingly begun paying for placements at events instead of in the media.

State media undercut independent media with lower costs for advertising, the Media Academy's Ismoilzoda said, and instead of payment, many print media receive Internet and mobile communication services in trade for advertising.

In the remote regions, advertisers prefer outdoor advertising, and media continue to be financed by regional government and payments for articles or public-relations campaigns. "Four times a year, *Kulyabskaya Pravda* prints announcements of bids and auctions but to a greater and greater extent has no advertising. There's nowhere to get money from," Dikayev said. In the Sughd oblast, many advertising agencies have started up, with very little money going to the media.

The major advertisers are banks, pharmaceutical companies, property developers, satellite communication companies, and Internet service providers. Regionally, "only the banks try to work with the media directly," Dodobayev said.

The business development of the media is hindered by legal and bureaucratic obstacles, high taxes, and excessive scrutiny from tax authorities and others who carry out unauthorized audits, especially after critical articles. In addition, the panelists said many media managers should be replaced and that without

#### 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.

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outside help or government support many print outlets are imperiled.

The success of independent media depends in part on taking advantage of help from international donors. "Almost every week, international organizations announce various bids, but the media editors and managers are simply too lazy to participate in them and obtain revenue in such a way," Yusupov said. The management system of many media usually boils down to the decisions of the managing director or owner of the publication.

Almost all nongovernmental media in Tajikistan lack a business plan, marketing study, or capital investment plan. "A number of television and radio companies in the Sughd oblast draw up business plans, but in the conditions of the financial crisis and sharp drop in the somoni exchange rate, they're not very effective. Only short-term business plans of three to six months are more or less viable," Dodobayev said. Some panelists noted that Internews conducted several helpful onsite residencies on optimizing newsroom spending in 2016.

"In order for the print media to remain afloat and make a profit, their circulation has to be at least 5,000 copies," Mirsaidov said. Few publications, especially independent ones, meet that benchmark. The Tajik-language *Faraj* and *Samak* newspapers, which are in opposition to the government, have a total of 1,500 subscribers out of a circulation of 4,000 to 6,000.

Niyozov said the circulation of his newspaper, *Faraj*, has fallen by 4,300. The newspaper's staff has been cut from eight to three journalists, and the advertising department works on small contracts worth \$300 to \$700. "At present, because of the financial crisis, we don't carry out investigative journalism," he said.

The panelists cited the proliferation of newspaper websites and social media pages amid the sharp decline of interest in newspapers.

By law, advertising from government institutions is placed only in government-owned media, yet privately held media depend more heavily than government outlets on advertising.

Tajikistan's national media work essentially directly with advertisers, and not with advertising agencies. In placing advertising, businesses for the most part use only the best-known media and those that have the greatest circulation. All four state television channels; the holding companies Oila, Charkhi Gardun, and Orien Media; radio stations Asia-Plus, Imruz, Vatan, and Khovar; and the Asia-Plus news agency have their own advertising departments. In deciding ad buys, advertisers consider media ratings, circulation figures, or website visitor numbers.

Advertising in independent media generally occupies 30–40 percent of print space and 10 percent of air time. In the state media, those figures are 20 percent of space and 30 percent of air time. In Dushanbe, the advertising agencies Tak, A-Media, Tamosh, O, Bale and Tayron place ads in major publications.

Most ads in state media are copies from Russian, Turkish, and Iranian spots translated into the Tajik language. A large share of advertising in Tajikistan's independent media is by international organizations and noncommercial organizations.

Internet advertising is developing as crawlers on the websites of newspapers and advertising agencies. SMS advertising is growing rapidly. Well-known foreign brands prefer to advertise on banners and billboards.

Most advertising on state television airs on the Safina channel, which the public has taken to calling the television pharmacy and hardware store for its plethora of spots for pharmacies, pharmaceuticals, personal hygiene products, and household cleaners.

The experts said almost the entire advertising market has migrated to state television, where the system for distributing revenues from advertising is opaque. Television advertising revenues in 2015 were around \$18 million. According to official figures, the advertising market plunged in 2016, totaling slightly more than \$11 million.

In Tajikistan, the Oila media holding company owns two newspapers, a news service, three Oila and Mega printing houses, radio Oila in Penjikent in the north, and the Tayron advertising agency. The Charkhi Gardun holding company owns three newspapers and a restaurant. The Asia-Plus holding company owns a newspaper, news service, production studio, radio station, and fashion magazine. The Oriyevo holding company owns a radio station and newspaper. The Faraj holding company owns three newspapers, a news service, and the Center of Journalistic Studies. Ozodagon owns a news service and a newspaper.

Tajikistan's only large financial group with its own media business, Orien International (a subsidiary of Orien Bank), owns two radio stations, a daily newspaper, a monthly financial magazine, and an advertising department.

State media have a guaranteed revenue stream and subscriber base and are preferred by advertisers. Some local state-owned media receive monthly payments from their local governments. State-owned media also benefit from mandatory subscriptions in government offices, government-owned companies, schools, and universities, and advertising and paid announcements from government agencies, banks, and commercial institutions close to the government. For example, the government newspaper *Sadoi Mardum* has about 23,000–25,000 readers, of whom 20,000 are subscribers; the parliamentary newspaper



*Jumkhuriyat* has a circulation of 30,000–32,000 and 30,000 subscribers; and *Bovuvoni Tochikiston* magazine has a circulation of 14,000, of whom 10,000 are subscribers. Independent or private media receive no subsidies from the government, although the law on the press and mass communications does not prohibit them.

“The initiative in this case must come from the government, which is supposed to publish bids, for example, for the preparation and publication of social materials,” said Karshiboyev, of the Independent Media Association.

The print publication of the ruling National Democratic Party, *Minbari Khalk*, has a circulation of 38,000–40,000 and around 35,000 subscribers. It makes 3.2 million somoni (\$406,000) from subscriptions.

State television channels and the Television and Radio Broadcasting Commission are fully funded by the government. In addition, “They have a special account where they receive money from advertising and other commercial activities, and that account is not audited,” Karshiboyev said. He noted that the government-owned Channel 1 and Safina television stations’ websites are not registered in the .tj domain, but in Macao, fueling suspicion that money is laundered there through special accounts.

Most independent media operate on grants, which have significantly declined due to the world financial crisis, or on funding from their founders. The panelists urged international donors to step up aid to help Tajikistan’s media overcome the financial crisis.

Most marketing surveys are hastily done and not always reliable. Survey companies do not pay enough to attract professional analysts and instead use students. In any event, professional market research is too costly for most media.

“There are research centers to determine media ratings and image, which operate on grants and with results tailored for their customers,” Pirnazarov said. Some websites use services such as Google Analytics, Live Internet, and Open Star to measure their audiences.

Tajibayeva said Asia-Plus makes its numbers publicly available upon request and gives clients access to its Google Analytics. The fact that other outlets do not makes it “impossible to conduct studies and compare the ratings of the print media,” she said.

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.67

In recent years, professional associations protecting journalists, ethical standards, and electronic media have been established

in Tajikistan. They provide information and legal assistance and host conferences and trainings. There are no business associations of journalists, but an association of broadcasters, created with help from Internews, includes 19 television and production studios.

“In reality, the association doesn’t function, apart from receiving two grants to study the transition to digital broadcasting,” Karshiboyev said.

Likewise, the Association of Press Distributors, which received a grant of \$100,000 from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), didn’t even get off the ground. “They had four cars and office equipment and furniture, and all of that disappeared along with its president,” Karshiboyev said.

Seventeen NGOs, as well as 13 journalists’ associations and one creative union, work on media-related issues in Tajikistan. By law, all these media associations must work to protect freedom of speech and the independence of the media. “They issue statements on the encroachment of rights of journalists in the country, but no one particularly listens to them in Tajikistan, which raises doubts about the effectiveness of the work of media organizations,” Tajibayeva said. Pirnazarov said many media associations are powerless in the face of government actions.

Sotiyev said the most effective of these groups is the National Association of Independent Media, which includes 36 media organizations and provides certifications that help independent journalists get accredited. Nozimova said the Union of Journalists, with more than 2,200 members, operates more independently of the authorities than it used to, although its president, Ismoilzoda, was appointed from above.

In 2016, as in 2015, the National Association of Independent Media was hit by two DDoS attacks that crashed its website for several days. “Despite the fact that we were not given a grant in 2016 for monitoring violations of journalists’ rights, work in this area continued, although it was not as effective in the absence of funding,” the association’s Karshiboyev said.

In 2016, four legislative acts—two laws and two government decrees—were adopted in Tajikistan that strengthened press freedom and the position of journalists through monitoring, training programs, and legal advice.

Mirsaidov said the Sughd oblast has a functioning journalists’ club, sponsored by the National Association of Independent Media. “Journalists meet there every Friday, discuss current issues and problems, and sometimes, when the problem is serious and requires a prompt solution, invite officials to attend,” she said. Karshiboyev said a professional association of media workers in the Khatlon oblast has 150 members.

## 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 in private hands, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.

According to Karshiboyev, in the Sughd oblast and Dushanbe, the initiative has been stalled because no one is ready to take on the leadership. "We are prepared to accept all journalists working in Tajikistan from both the independent and state media," Karshiboyev said.

The panelists said none of these groups can survive solely on dues but must also look for supporting partners and grants. They said the associations have great potential but tend to deal with free-speech issues only superficially, especially if the matter has political overtones.

Journalism associations would like to partner with human rights organizations, which are often too timid to act. "The human rights NGOs have not reacted much to violations of rights of journalists. They just write reports about their participation based on information from the National Association of Independent Media and newspaper articles and work up grants so they can get more funding," Karshiboyev said. "Last year, human rights NGOs in the Sughd oblast turned into money-making firms and human rights advocacy merged completely with paid lawyers, so you can't even recognize where they are and who they are," Dodobayev said. "In meetings with ombudsmen, they just sit silently and don't ask any questions about monitoring human rights," Karshiboyev said. The panelists said donors should exercise more oversight of grants to these human rights group. Some experts said many international organizations in Tajikistan likely prefer that journalists have little access to information about their projects.

The National Association of Independent Media provides training and conferences on human rights and journalists' security, particularly during states of emergency and border conflicts. It works closely with international watchdogs, such as Article 19, Reporters Without Borders, the Committee to Protect Journalists, Amnesty International, and the office of the OSCE

representative on freedom of speech. Media associations also work with the European Union, the US Embassy, the Conrad Adenauer Fund, the Deutsche Welle Academy, and USAID.

The panelists said journalists also need training to cope with the job's psychological challenges, and that editors and managers could use some professional development as well.

Tajikistan has one journalism school and eight university departments of journalism, but 90 percent of their graduates do not go to work in the profession. Most become labor migrants, or some women get married and stop working. The dean's offices in Tajik National University, Khorog University, and some other state universities do not encourage students in the journalism schools to work in the independent media. There is also still a tendency for students who receive a journalism diploma abroad not to return to the country or, if they do return, not to work in the field.

"Each year, at least 10 students come for internships at Asia-Plus, but in the last three years only three of the graduates have stayed on to work," Tajibayeva said.

The eight universities in Tajikistan graduate 300 journalists per year, and more than 100 have come out of the separate journalism school, all of which the experts said is too many. Students may study abroad only privately in various programs in the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, China, and Turkey. The Ministry of Education and Science offers some scholarships to study in Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine.

Although some panelists said the quality of training is improving, some said schools are not teaching skills, particularly multimedia, that the media need. "We're willing to hire graduates, but they all have to be retrained," Niyezov said. Mamurzoda noted a shortage of professional journalists qualified to teach in universities.

Apart from the Russian-Tajik Slavonic University and Khujand State University, there is no specialization in the training of journalists. Teaching methods are outdated, and universities lack equipment and teaching aids.

People from other professions frequently enter journalism: philologists, orientologists, jurists, and economists. "More than half of the journalists working in both the state and independent media don't have a journalism degree," Karshiboyev said.

"We need more short-term courses for media workers and to attract local and foreign specialists," Ismoilzoda said.

But some panelists said the level of foreign instructors frequently fails to meet international requirements. "We ourselves have here in Tajikistan splendid journalism instructors who are much better than foreign instructors in their level of preparation and knowledge," Karshiboyev said.

The leadership of the universities is unwilling to invite well-known independent journalists to give practical training. In 2016, more than 90 journalists took part in nine such courses by the Media Academy of Tajikistan. The country has solid training programs for journalists conducted by several organizations with the support of international donors. In 2016, classes were held throughout the country and covered journalists' safety in emergency situations, investigative journalism, reporting on extremism, and multimedia reporting on border conflicts. But Nozimova said an essential condition in all the training courses and/or academic programs is knowledge of the English language. "It is very unfortunate that there is a trend in the country for journalists to know only the Tajik language, or to know only Tajik and very poor Russian, because they then miss out on some very important possibilities for studies and courses to improve their qualifications in foreign countries," she said. The panelists said the same 40 to 45 journalists usually participate in training sessions. "Some of them haven't even written a single article after the training session," Yusupov said.

In addition, Yusupov said the Asia-Plus media group, which operates its own Century 21 Independent School of Journalism, and the *Faraj* and *Ozodagon* newspapers offer in-house staff training.

Domestic and international groups also conduct training for student journalists.

The National Association of Independent Media generally asks donors to finance long-term training rather than short-term training, which does not allow enough time to master multimedia skills. Classes in Internet journalism and working in social networks and webinars are popular among journalists. The panelists said media workers also need training from economists, political scientists, and lawyers, along with internships in neighboring countries.

Student radio and television studios that produce their own programs operate in the Khujand State University, the Tajik National University, and the Russian-Tajik Slavonic University in Dushanbe.

The panelists said it remains difficult to get journalists from the state media to attend seminars and training sessions, since the owners and editors of these publications do not yet recognize contemporary journalistic standards.

The experts said the absence of an effective print distribution system impedes access to information in the country's remote regions. Independent print media are forced to distribute their issues through private distributors who are not permanent and depend on seasonal conditions. "Only the state media have a centralized delivery system for their newspapers and magazines," Pirnazarov said. The creation of the OSCE-backed Press Distribution Association in 2012 was an attempt to fix

this problem, but it went bankrupt. Existing channels for distributing the print media are politicized. Issues of the independent opposition newspapers are frequently not sold in the state-owned Tajikmatbuot kiosks, and sometimes an entire issue of a newspaper containing a critical article is seized.

The experts noted that access to printing facilities is limited since such businesses are politicized and depend on the will of the authorities, even though there are many private printing houses. "The practice continues that, if some newspaper does not suit the authorities, not a single printing house will print it," Karshiboyev said. "Several times this year, the newspaper *Nigokh* wasn't published," Yusupov said. All the panelists said Tajikistan will not have a truly free press as long as it lacks printing houses that are willing and able to function independently.

The experts said Tajikistan has decent-quality printing houses, including the state-owned Sharki Ozod, with the private presses being a bit better but also slightly more expensive. Almost all independent magazines and newspapers are printed by the privately owned Oila press.

Tajikistan has 75 printing houses, 57 of them in Dushanbe. The remaining 18 are scattered around the country and generally produce lower-quality work than those in the capital.

Sources of media equipment are not politicized, but import duties for equipment, including transmitters, are "very high for independent broadcasters, while there are no limitations for government broadcasters," Dodobayev said.

Six cable channels, which are subject to licensing, operate in Tajikistan—two in Dushanbe and Khujand and one each in Tursunzade and Kayrakkum.

Tajikistan missed its 2015 deadline for all television broadcasters to switch to digital broadcasting. All seven channels of state television made the transition in 2014, but watching them requires subscription to a multiplex package that costs more than \$150, which is not affordable for all of the country's residents.

Moreover, the state channels moved over to another satellite for digital broadcasting, which made it impossible for more than 25 percent of the country's residents to watch them. All the television and radio towers belong to the Communications Service and TajikteleRadiokom, so even those independent stations with their own transmitters lease a government tower. The government Communications Service and TajikteleRadiokom distribute frequencies and can at any time interrupt transmissions by the private electronic media.

With their expenses taken care of and easier access to equipment and frequencies, Ismoilzoda said state channels have an advantage in the switch to digital. "It is essential to create, through regulation, a legal basis for the new broadcasting

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format, to intensify the information campaign and to activate a joint working group in the regulatory agency," he said.

Fearing competition in the information market from the electronic media, the government is using all means to prevent the creation of a single independent public channel that would broadcast throughout the country.

In November 2016, all Internet and mobile communications started flowing through the Unified Switching Center, which has also used its pricing power to raise tariffs. Consequently, Internet in Tajikistan, already the costliest among the Commonwealth of Independent States, is not becoming more accessible. "The authorities will also gain complete control over Internet traffic," Tajibayeva said. More than 50 websites are blocked in Tajikistan. There are also cases of electronic monitoring, IP address determination, and hacking of the Facebook, Odnoklassniki, Twitter, and VKontakte accounts and tapping of the satellite telephones and Skype and Viber of opposition politicians and journalists.

Mobile telephones are used not only for communication, but also to access the Internet and receive SMS ads and music. During Tajikistan's regular power outages, mobile Internet communications, landline Internet, and 3G and 4G transmitters are cut off.

The government makes constant efforts to limit access to information, particularly over the Internet, by blocking the websites of opposition media. "In the Kulyab region of the Khatlon Oblast, prepayment for Internet access has been introduced, while the speed has remained low and internal websites won't open," Dikayev said. Most people in Tajikistan are not familiar with getting content by SMS, MMS, and video mail.

In conclusion, the experts said that the technical and professional backwardness of Tajikistan's media can be overcome with the strengthening of aid from international donors, namely media associations, the presence of political freedom, and strict enforcement of laws on free expression and media.

## List of Panel Participants

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## Moderator & Author

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