

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

2006/2007

**The Development
of Sustainable
Independent Media
in the Middle East
and North Africa**



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The Development of Sustainable Independent Media in the Middle East and North Africa

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USAID

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is an independent agency that provides economic, development, and humanitarian assistance around the world in support of the foreign policy goals of the United States. The agency works to support long-term and sustainable economic growth and advances US foreign policy objectives by supporting economic growth, agriculture, and trade; global health; and democracy, conflict prevention, and humanitarian assistance.

USAID provides assistance in four regions of the world: Sub-Saharan Africa; Asia and the Near East; Latin America and the Caribbean; and Europe and Eurasia.

With headquarters in Washington, DC, USAID's strength is its field offices around the world. They work in close partnership with private voluntary organizations, indigenous organizations, universities, American businesses, international agencies, other governments, and other US government agencies. USAID has working relationships with more than 3,500 American companies and over 300 US-based private voluntary organizations.

MEPI

The United States Department of State's Middle East Partnership Initiative provides tangible support to reformers in the Middle East and North Africa so democracy can spread, education can thrive, economies can grow, and women can be empowered. In four years, this presidential initiative has devoted \$293 million to more than 350 programs in 15 countries and the Palestinian territories to support the aspirations of those working to build a more peaceful and prosperous Middle East. Examples of the initiative's work includes campaign schools, independent media training, civic education, entrepreneurship skill building, youth leadership development, trade transparency promotion, business hubs for women, and judicial and legal reform training.

UNESCO

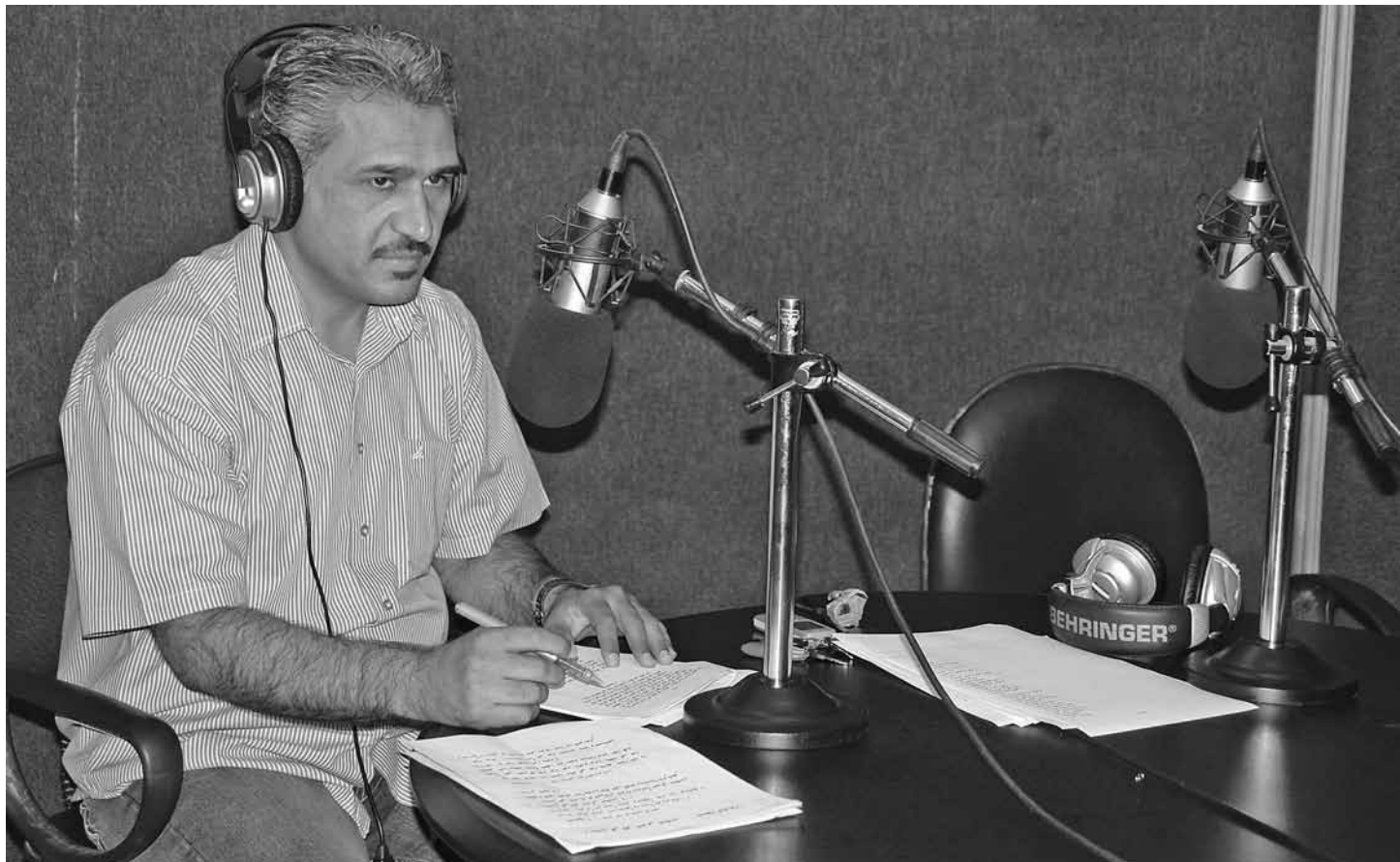
UNESCO, the United Nations' Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, maintains a Communication and Information (CI) sector that is guided by the principles of freedom of expression and freedom of the press as basic human rights. Since 2003, the CI sector has supported the Iraqi people in their transition to democracy. Among other projects, UNESCO facilitated initiatives to develop a national media policy and provided practical guidance for journalists and civil society prior to the elections. Training and networking opportunities were made available to more than 550 media workers and professionals.

IREX

IREX is an international nonprofit organization providing leadership and innovative programs to improve the quality of education, strengthen independent media, and foster pluralistic civil society development.

Founded in 1968, IREX has an annual portfolio of \$50 million and a staff of over 500 professionals worldwide. IREX and its partner IREX Europe deliver cross-cutting programs and consulting expertise in more than 50 countries.

Whether in printed media, broadcast outlets, or online, any casual observer will notice topics and issues being discussed that were off-limits a decade ago. However, as the MSI panel noted, this newfound media freedom could be easily restrained at any moment due to unenforced journalist protection laws and media regulations.



SAUDI ARABIA

Since King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz ascended to the throne in 2005, Saudi Arabia has made progress in a number of areas. Its political relationships internationally have taken on an added weight through diplomatic engagement on Middle East issues. Economically, the country is enjoying a boom due to high oil prices, using the revenue to diversify income sources, privatize many sectors, liberalize markets, and attract foreign investment. Socially, the king launched a series of national dialogues on issues that included educational reform, women's rights, and unemployment, which opened the door for more discussions on problems in society and encouraged the private sector and civil society to take an active role. The government also pursued terrorists and dealt with security issues inside and outside its borders.

Naturally, these developments are creating a fertile ground for a more vibrant and competitive media. Whether in printed media, broadcast outlets, or online, any casual observer will notice topics and issues being discussed that were off-limits a decade ago. However, as the MSI panel noted, this newfound media freedom could be easily restrained at any moment due to unenforced journalist protection laws and media regulations.

Nevertheless, journalists and the general public feel encouraged by the trend of more and more issues being openly discussed, albeit with some self-censorship out of concern for social/tribal traditions, influential religious elements, or other considerations. Meanwhile, the public is finding ways to access and share information using modern communication technology. The panel described the current stage as the "spring of Saudi media," but to flourish the media require enforceable laws and professional standards.

Saudi Arabia's scores fell significantly compared to last year, but panelists cautioned that this should not be interpreted as a slide backward in Saudi media. On the contrary, they said, with the noted positive developments, media professionals are simply asking for more and are able to express their wishes more freely. Relatively, the objectives finished similar to last year. The panelists ranked Objective 4, business management, the highest at 1.67. The weakest by far was Objective 5, supporting institutions, which finished at 1.07.

SAUDI ARABIA AT A GLANCE

GENERAL

Population: 28,161,417 (July 2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

Capital city: Riyadh

Ethnic groups (% of population): Arab 90%, Afro-Asian 10% (*CIA World Factbook*)

Religions (% of population): Muslim 100% (*CIA World Factbook*)

Languages (% of population): Arabic (*CIA World Factbook*)

GNI (2006-Atlas): \$331.0 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)

GNI per capita (2006-PPP): \$22,300 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)

Literacy rate: 78.8% (male 84.7%, female 70.8%) (2003 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

President or top authority: King and Prime Minister Abdallah bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud (since August 1, 2005)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations: Print: 10 daily newspapers; Radio: 4; Television Stations: 117

Newspaper circulation statistics: Total daily circulation is 763,000

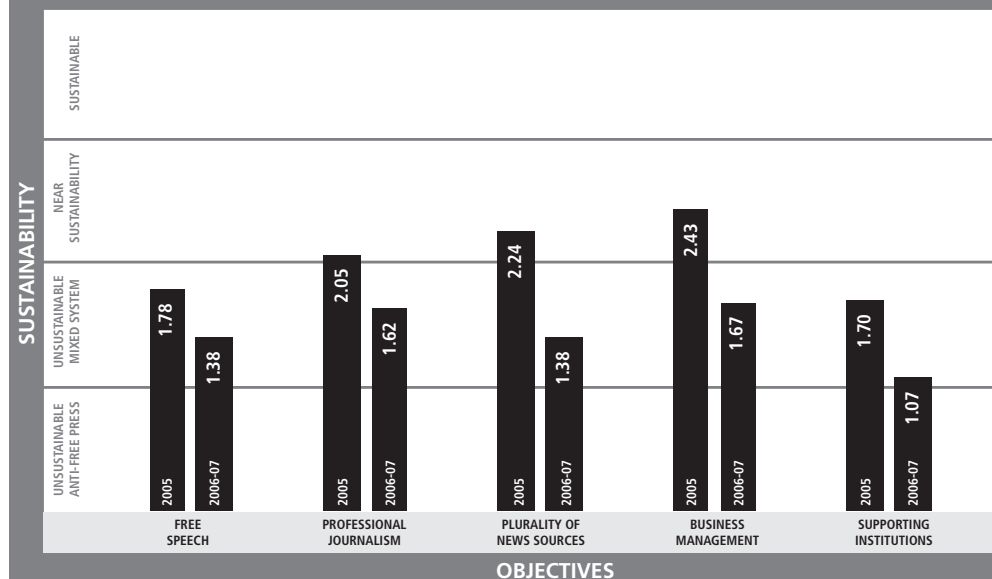
Broadcast ratings: Top 3: MBC, Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabiya

News agencies: Saudi Press Agency (state-owned)

Annual advertising revenue in media sector: N/A

Internet usage: 4,700,000 (2006 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: SAUDI ARABIA



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.

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Saudi Arabia Objective Score: 1.38

Only a few indicators in this objective scored close to the average. The first three indicators, covering legal and social protections for free speech, broadcast licensing, and market entry all scored rather poorly. There are policies in the Basic Rules for Governance and the Print and Publishing Regulations that guarantee free speech rights, but they are not implemented, according to the MSI panelists. Panelists also agreed that licensing and market entry for the media is not easily attainable. Each indicator was at least a half point lower than the average, with Indicator 3, market entry, scoring more than a point lower. However, Indicators 4, 8, and 9, crimes against journalists, media access and use of foreign news sources, and free entry into the journalism profession, all scored a 2 or higher.

The Media Policy in Saudi Arabia provides the principles and goals for the media. These principles are based on Islam and aim at strengthening belief in God; raising the intellectual, cultural, and spiritual standards of the people; solving social and non-social problems; deepening the idea of submission to God, the Prophet Muhammad, and the guardian (king), and; advocating respect of the system and implementing it with conviction. It contains 30 articles that address various aspects of the media's goals, programs and, employees, but includes general statements that "free speech is guaranteed" and "the rights of individuals and groups are respected."

In 1982, the Council of Ministers and a Royal Decree approved the new Print and Publishing Regulations to replace the one issued in 1959. The new regulations cover licensing, publishing, copyrights, responsibilities, violations, and penalties. They also include an article guaranteeing free speech within the framework of Islamic and regulatory laws, and a statement that "local newspapers are not subject to censorship unless in exceptional circumstances determined by the Council of Ministers."

In 2001, the Council of Ministers replaced the 1964 System for Private Press Institutions that applies to independent private newspapers and magazines. This new system provides for and regulates the process for establishing, licensing, operating, and dissolving press institutions. All publications, whether state or private, have to be licensed by the Ministry of Culture and Information except those published by universities, academies, or schools, which still require Ministry approval. Ministry involvement extends to media leadership: the system clearly states in Article 11(e) that the nomination and dismissal of the editor-in-chief by the board of directors of the press institution requires the approval of the Ministry.

"There is no law that specifically protects or encourages freedom of speech, and there are no clearly and officially stated red lines," said Rania Salamah, founder and editor-in-chief of the Internet publication Arabiyat.com. The MSI panelists agreed that the recent surge in press freedom is mainly due to personal efforts.

The decision to publish a story belongs to the editor-in-chief who must weigh the risks of provoking the government with a report that "pushed the envelope." The editor would be held responsible and could be "relieved" of his or her duties by the Ministry of Culture and Information, which acts in response to complaints by government agencies, depending on who it is and how serious the offense is. In addition, the journalist or columnist would be suspended from writing in any local publication until further notice.

There are no taxes in Saudi Arabia, and licensing and market entry seem straightforward, according to the Print and Publishing Regulations, but in reality it is much more complicated. "The laws and regulations are so old and the process is slow with discrepancies in implementing the rules depending on the clerk processing the papers," said Salamah. The regulations seem to be particularly disadvantageous to women. She noted, for example, that some licensing laws require the applicant to be a mass communications college professor, and there is no mass communications college for women in the Kingdom (men and women have segregated educational and work facilities); or that the applicant has worked for a local publication more than 10 years when

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.

few newspapers have had women's sections for that long. Meanwhile, she said electronic publications are not licensed and not regulated by the Ministry of Information, the Communication and Information Technology Commission, or the Ministry of Commerce (her site is registered in the United States). However, sites are monitored and sometimes blocked by the King Abdul Aziz City for Science and Technology if a government agency requests the site or certain pages be censored.

It is generally understood that it is very difficult to start a newspaper without the backing of a prominent person with significant financial resources, preferably a high member of the royal family. Two new newspapers, *Al-Sabah* and *Al-Arabiya*, were licensed over a year ago. All local radio and television broadcasting is state-owned and operated, although the Minister of Culture and Information Iyad Madani announced that private radio stations would be allowed soon. All fully or partially owned Saudi satellite channels and private radio stations are based outside Saudi Arabia but have local offices, and there are also Saudi-owned publications that are sold locally but published abroad because of simpler licensing procedures.

Crimes and threats against journalists or media outlets are rare. If there is any complaint about a report, the editor-in-chief usually questions the journalist about sources and proof, but some editors might allow the complaining agency to question the journalist.

The Ministry of Culture and Information is supposed to be the ultimate recourse for disputes or complaints within the media as well as for libel cases against any journalist or writer. But some cases have been filed directly with the court, such as that against university professor and columnist Hamzah Al-Muzeini who was sentenced to four months in jail and 200 lashes in 2005 for allegedly offending an Islamist professor.

The court should not have accepted the case because, according to a 2001 regulation by the Council of Ministers, all issues concerning the media are the prerogative of the Ministry of Culture and Information, which, the panelists say, poses a conflict of interest. Dealing with the Ministry, however, is preferable to going to court, they say. Eventually in the case of Al-Muzeini, then-Crown Prince Abdullah overturned the ruling and redirected the case to the Ministry. Meanwhile, newspapers protect themselves from libel cases—or more importantly the withdrawal of advertisements—by not naming the person or institution referred to in the story.

The Saudi Press Agency (SPA) distributes all official news and announcements, which cannot be published by newspapers until SPA releases them, even if the newspaper had the information. Saudi television channels (there are four) usually

have better access to officials and information. The panelists complained about the difficulty in accessing information, which usually depends on personal contacts with officials. "It is possible to get the information but it will take long because it is not readily available. Some officials refuse to mention their name and therefore the story does not get published," said Manal Alsharif, head of the women's section at the *Al-Madinah* newspaper.

There are no restrictions on local media accessing international news sources, but using the accessed information is a different matter. Entry into the journalism profession is also unrestricted. Anyone can be a journalist without licensing, special identification card, or even an aptitude test or training; all they need is a business card.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Saudi Arabia Objective Score: 1.62

Most of the indicators in this objective scored relatively near the overall average. The two exceptions were Indicator 5, pay levels for journalists, which scored about three-quarters of a point lower, and Indicator 7, modern facilities and equipment, which scored about three-quarters of a point higher.

The panelists criticized the general standards of journalism, training, salaries, and facilities, but commended some individual efforts for improvement. Reporting is not always fair, objective, and well-sourced; some journalists are neither well-trained nor follow ethical standards. "There is no professionalism in reporting. I started working in the media in 1982, first in newspapers and then broadcast, and

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).

I didn't take a single training course. I learned on the job," said Kamal Abdelqader, a former journalist and current host of *From the Inside* on the Ein satellite channel (part of ART Company channels). Most journalists do not have the qualifications or training to be in the field, especially part-time journalists who sometimes have another job and might even use a pseudonym. Few press institutions offer training courses for their employees either in Saudi Arabia or abroad.

It is very common for a sponsor of an event to distribute inexpensive gifts to the journalists after covering a press conference. The panelists did not see a problem with gifts, although some individuals distribute cash after an interview or after a favorable piece is published, which they considered problematic. "Our social system is paternal and that has many downsides. It might be acceptable to receive cash awards from the king or crown prince but they should be refused from any other person. These matters have to be completely clarified," said Badr Al-Motawa, deputy managing editor of *Al-Hayat* newspaper's Saudi Arabia office.

Panelists felt that the main problem in the Saudi media is self-censorship practiced by journalists and editors practice, generally for fear of losing their jobs. The degree of self-censorship differs from one publication to another depending on the publication's general policy and affiliations. Nevertheless, during the past two years all local newspapers have addressed previously unreported controversial issues in their own way, such as religious issues, permitting women to drive, child abuse in all its forms, and runaway girls. The case of the forced divorce of Fatima and Mansour Al-Timani, which was pressed by her half-brothers through the court because of "incompatible lineage," and other similar forced divorce cases, were followed up on for more than a year by the press.

Recently, two government agencies that were previously untouchable by the press have been getting top headlines. One is the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (the "morality police") for its sometimes-unacceptable rude behavior and overstepping of authority, especially after causing the death of two men in its custody. The other agency is the country's justice system, which has been criticized for its inefficiency and discrepancies. Saudi-owned or influenced satellite channels have also been discussing controversial issues more aggressively. The panelists are optimistic that this trend of opening discussion, including in the state-controlled media outlets such as Al-Ekhabariya news channel, will continue slowly.

The level of pay for journalists is a major issue. Although more and more young people are entering the field because of the demand for talented and qualified staff, the same high

demand means that most of these young applicants are hired despite their lack of qualifications and are often exploited by employers. Salaries for full-time journalists start at around \$1,300 per month and for part-time journalists at \$300 per month. This makes continuing in the field unappealing if a better job opportunity comes along. Many part-time journalists are merely supplementing their main income from another job. Editors-in-chief, on the other hand, get a monthly salary starting near \$19,000, and they are eager not to lose their jobs.

Opinions differed on whether there is a balance between entertainment programming and news and information programming. Some panelists thought the programs were balanced and that there is an effort toward having an even greater balance. Others said that there was more entertainment than information programming. Still others said there were no entertainment pages or programming in the cultural sense and sports is the only entertainment there is.

Technical facilities and equipment at newspapers are generally modern and efficient, although journalists sometimes have to buy their own equipment such as cameras or tape recorders. The facilities and equipment in the radio and television stations in some locations are very old and inefficient, but the Minister of Culture and Information, Iyad Madani, said that there is a plan to renovate facilities and upgrade equipment.

There is some quality niche reporting and programming of various degrees, less so in state media, but it is mostly due to individual efforts and not necessarily an executive editorial mission to raise the standard of reporting.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

Saudi Arabia Objective Score: 1.38

There is plurality of news sources, but the diversity and spectrum of news and views that reach the audience is limited due to filtering. It is up to the audience to seek and circumvent the restrictions, which is getting easier with the advances in communication technology. Local media consumers have become adept at getting information from different sources. Because of this, panelists rated Indicator 1, plurality of news sources, a full point higher than the overall average. The rest of the indicators fell within a half point or less of the overall average. It should be noted, however, that Indicators 4 and 7, independent news agencies and coverage of broad social and minority affairs, both received scores below 1.

Satellite dishes are relatively inexpensive, even for limited-income households. Internet access is also affordable but the connection is slow, and web sites deemed immoral, sexually indecent, anti-government, or offensive to Islam are blocked by the King Abdul Aziz City for Science and Technology, which monitors all sites. The Council of Ministers issued a resolution in 2001 on the guidelines, restrictions, and mechanisms for Internet use. Internet use seems to be most popular among youth, who represent over 60 percent of the population. For additional fees, a wider range of satellite channels, including foreign channels, can be received, and accessing blocked or restricted Internet sites can be done through satellite Internet services.

There are only 10 daily newspapers, which the panelists consider not enough for a country the size and population of Saudi Arabia (another two have been licensed and are gearing up for publication). Some provinces and small communities outside the main cities are underserved by the current print and broadcast outlets, except, perhaps, by radio. Foreign publications are scanned for revealing pictures of women, which get blackened or torn out, before becoming available for sale in major bookstores. Arabic versions of some foreign publications such as *Newsweek*, *Forbes*, and *Foreign Policy* are also available.

There are no political parties in Saudi Arabia, but the views expressed in the local papers and in satellite channels reflect relatively diverse opinions. Not all government policies or actions can be criticized or analyzed objectively, but it might

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.

be possible to do so indirectly depending on the vocabulary used. The reader and audience can find a wide range of views and opinions but within certain and known boundaries. However, people have found an outlet for expressing their opinions in blogs, web sites, and forums, but these get monitored and blocked when they go too far.

"Professional journalists have to realize that they have to censor themselves to avoid being not published or face the influential powers in the country. There are two main influential power groups in the country: members of the royal family and the religious scholars and their students. They are followed by the influence of tribal traditions and then the businessmen who control the large companies," said Badr Al-Motawa. Nevertheless, he said that there is broader interest to have the press play a bolder role in addressing issues, especially corruption and holding officials accountable, but that would depend on professional training and ethics and a greater social awareness of rights and responsibilities.

There are no independent news agencies. The only news agency is the Saudi Press Agency, which gathers and distributes official news and features for print and broadcast media. There is also the Islamic Press Agency, but it focuses only on Islamic events and issues. International journalists and wire service reporters are allowed to cover press conferences and file any stories they want without censorship. Local publications have access to international press agencies and use them as sources of information.

There are no independent broadcasters within the kingdom, but independent broadcast media based outside Saudi Arabia produce their own programs abroad. Competition pushes them to produce professional quality programs.

Media ownership is transparent but it is concentrated in a few companies, most of them headed by members of the royal family. "Media outlets are owned one way or another by members of the royal family; that's why a large sector of the community does not trust the media," said Ebtihal Mubarak, a journalist at *Arab News*. Media ownership and the licensing process, regulations, and management affect perceptions of an outlet's credibility, objectivity and independence.

The media try to reflect and represent different social interests but they do not purposely advocate a certain policy or stand. There are no minority languages; therefore there are no minority-language media except those for expatriates who speak languages such as Urdu and Tagalog. On the other hand, the media does not address specific issues of minorities such as Shiites.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Saudi Arabia Objective Score: 1.67

Panelists pointed to some relative strengths and weaknesses in the operations of media. On the one hand, they rated Indicator 3, the advertising market, and Indicator 4, proportion of advertising income generated by media outlets, as fairly strong. The former scored three-quarters of a point higher, and the latter more than a point higher, than the overall objective average. However, the use of market research and existence of reliable circulation and audience measurements, Indicators 6 and 7, both scored below a 1.

Private media outlets make money and they are very competitive, but their sources of revenue are mainly from advertisements and sales, which are interlinked. The government stopped subsidizing the newspapers years ago, but a prince or the king might intervene to save a newspaper from closure. King Abdullah recently gave SAR 10 million (\$3.3 million) from his private account to *Al-Nadwah* newspaper, the first Saudi newspaper and the only one published in Makkah, but which has been having financial problems for the past three years and was unable to pay salaries for three months. Successful newspapers seem to be applying good business plans and marketing strategies to generate revenue but they do not publicize any details, so that cannot be verified.

Investment in the media is worthwhile and profitable. The last newspaper to be licensed was *Al-Watan* in 2000; it made a profit and distributed a five percent dividend to its stockholders six years later. The main problem remains

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 unattractive investment laws and regulations that push potential investors to start their media companies abroad, whether a publication, an advertising company, a satellite channel, or a radio station. Some of the social restrictions also add to the expenses and fear of potential problems, especially with regard to employing women, who by law are required to be segregated from men in the workplace.

"Local media outlets depend on limited sources of revenue, mainly through advertisement," said Halima Muzaffar, columnist at *Al-Watan* newspaper and former head of the women's section in Jeddah of *Asharq Al-Awsat* newspaper. This puts pressure on editorial decisions. Although press institutions announce their annual profit, there is no breakdown of their revenues, expenses, or circulation.

Saudi Arabia is a huge advertising market (estimated at around \$2 billion per year), the largest in the region. Both local and international advertising companies operate in the country. Sponsorship of television shows and special events is a major source of revenue for broadcasters as well as partnerships between phone-in contest television shows and cell phone providers. Newspapers also earn extra advertising income during special occasions when members of the royal family, municipalities, chambers of commerce, private institutions, or rich individuals place congratulatory, condolence, or welcoming ads.

Publications have not yet managed to profit from Internet advertisement, although some of them already sell advertising space on their web sites. However, even though more and more readers are going to newspaper web sites, which are all available without subscription, newspaper managers are not focusing on improving their online presence. There is also increasing competition on the Internet for news sources, and the local newspapers are not on par with international standards to compete effectively.

Media management does presumably use in-house market research to enhance sales and advertising revenue because they care about the bottom line, sometimes at the expense of quality journalism and good reporting. A manager or editor is not going to risk losing a big advertising client for the sake of a story, panelists said.

There are no independent ratings or circulation figures that give accurate and reliable information. "Each newspaper claims that it has the highest circulation or readership based on statistics by some research company or another, so we don't know who is telling the truth," said Hasan Baswaid, journalist at *Okaz* newspaper. The same applies for television ratings. Advertisers try to do their own market research on viewers of satellite programs because the only source otherwise is the broadcasters themselves.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Saudi Arabia Objective Score: 1.07

Supporting institutions received the lowest rating by the MSI panel because they have not been present or effective. The concept of free speech, and freedom in general, is misunderstood by many people in society and is absent from their daily lives. The panelists thought that there is “negative freedom,” meaning that people practice the freedom to restrict others or to use their freedom against others. Most of the indicators received scores similarly low as the overall average, and Indicators 1 through 4 received scores below 1. The only strength, according to panelists, is access to printing facilities and newsprint, as Indicator 6 received a score in excess of 2.

There are no trade associations. The National Society for Human Rights, the only related NGO, did point out in a recent report the need to protect freedom of speech and does try to support journalists in their issues. However, advocating freedom of speech and free press issues are not its central function.

The biggest disappointment for journalists is the Saudi Journalists Association (SJA), which was formed in 2003 as an independent association to protect, advance, and support journalists. It held its first election to seat a board of directors in 2004. “Until now it has not done its job as it should. It did not act on implementing the requirements and needs of the journalists or give them job security by guaranteeing them the right to free speech. This led some of its members to refuse renewing their membership,” said Halima Muzaffar.

Ebtihal Mubarak, a journalist at *Arab News*, elaborates further on the inefficiency and ineptness of SJA: “Since its establishment in 2003, the board was unable to articulate a code of ethics for journalists so that both journalists and officials would know their rights and obligations. The board does not issue any letters or statements to officials who do not cooperate with journalists in providing information. Also, the board, since its establishment, has not defended any case filed against a journalist or opinion writer. An example is that of columnist, former editor-in-chief of *Al-Watan*, and SJA board member Qenan Al-Ghamdi, who has been suspended from writing since the end of last year. The SJA board didn’t even issue a statement about that,” she said.

There are journalism and mass communications colleges for men but not for women, which hinders women’s employment and career advancement in the media. Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University in Riyadh launched a post-graduate program in mass communications for

women this year that aims to graduate female teachers. The plan is that once the university opens a department in mass communication for female students, they can teach the classes. King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah announced that it would open a mass communications and journalism department for women next year.

Only a few press institutions offer short-term training and in-service training programs for their journalists to upgrade their skills, and these programs are mostly offered to the men. “Short- and long-term training programs are not available in all local media institutions. They are still limited in few newspapers and not all journalists receive them,” said Halima Muzaffar.

Sources of newsprint and printing facilities are private, apolitical, and unrestricted as long as the publishing company has the proper licensing and paperwork. Printing facilities are required to abide by the rules of the Print and Publishing Regulations on the types of material they can print.

Channels of media distribution are private and apolitical as well. Nonetheless, the Internet is monitored and can be restricted if deemed necessary by the government. Otherwise most restrictions are confined to licensing approvals and having the correct paperwork. As for satellite channels, since they are based outside Saudi Arabia, they are not required to obtain licenses or approvals to transmit their programs. While satellite dishes are “officially” illegal, they are sold publicly all over the kingdom and can be found on the rooftop of almost every building. Reception of satellite channels is not monitored, so Saudis can receive all kinds of channels and unhampered access to information.

There are only two print media distribution companies that cover the entire country. Most publications are unavailable

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.

in the small cities and villages because the only carrier that delivers them is Saudi Airlines and it only travels to 22 domestic destinations. "Media outlets and support firms for printing and distribution are still limited in number," said Muzaffar.

List of Panel Participants

Kamal Abdulqader, host, *From the Inside* satellite television program, Jeddah.

Rania Salamah, founder and editor-in-chief, *Arabiyat.com*; columnist, *Okaz* newspaper, Jeddah.

Badr Al-Motawa, deputy managing editor in Saudi Arabia, *Al-Hayat* newspaper, Jeddah

Manal Al-Sharif, managing editor of the women's section, *Almadinah* newspaper, Jeddah.

Halima Muzaffar, columnist, *Alwatan* newspaper, Jeddah.

Hasan Baswaid, journalist, *Okaz* newspaper, Jeddah.

Ebtihal Mubarak, journalist, *Arab News* newspaper, Jeddah

Participated online:

Abdullah Al-Alami, columnist, *Al-Eqtisadiya* newspaper, Dammam.

Somayya Jabarti, executive editor, *Arab News* newspaper, Jeddah.

Faiza Ambah, Gulf correspondent, *Washington Post*, Jeddah.

Moderator

Maha Akeel, consultant, Gulf Forum for Citizenship, Jeddah

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