

MEDIA

SUSTAINABILITY

INDEX

2005



IREX

AND OVERALL, THE MEDIA INDUSTRY REMAINS IN THE DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE IN TAJIKISTAN, HELD BACK BY THE PROTRACTED ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CRISIS THAT HAS LED TO AN EXTREMELY WEAK ADVERTISING MARKET.



As Tajikistan's February 2005 parliamentary elections approached, national and international observers noted a serious deterioration in media freedom. The National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan (NANSMIT) and its partner organization Adil Soz issued repeated alerts about the hundreds of recorded violations against journalists and media outlets.

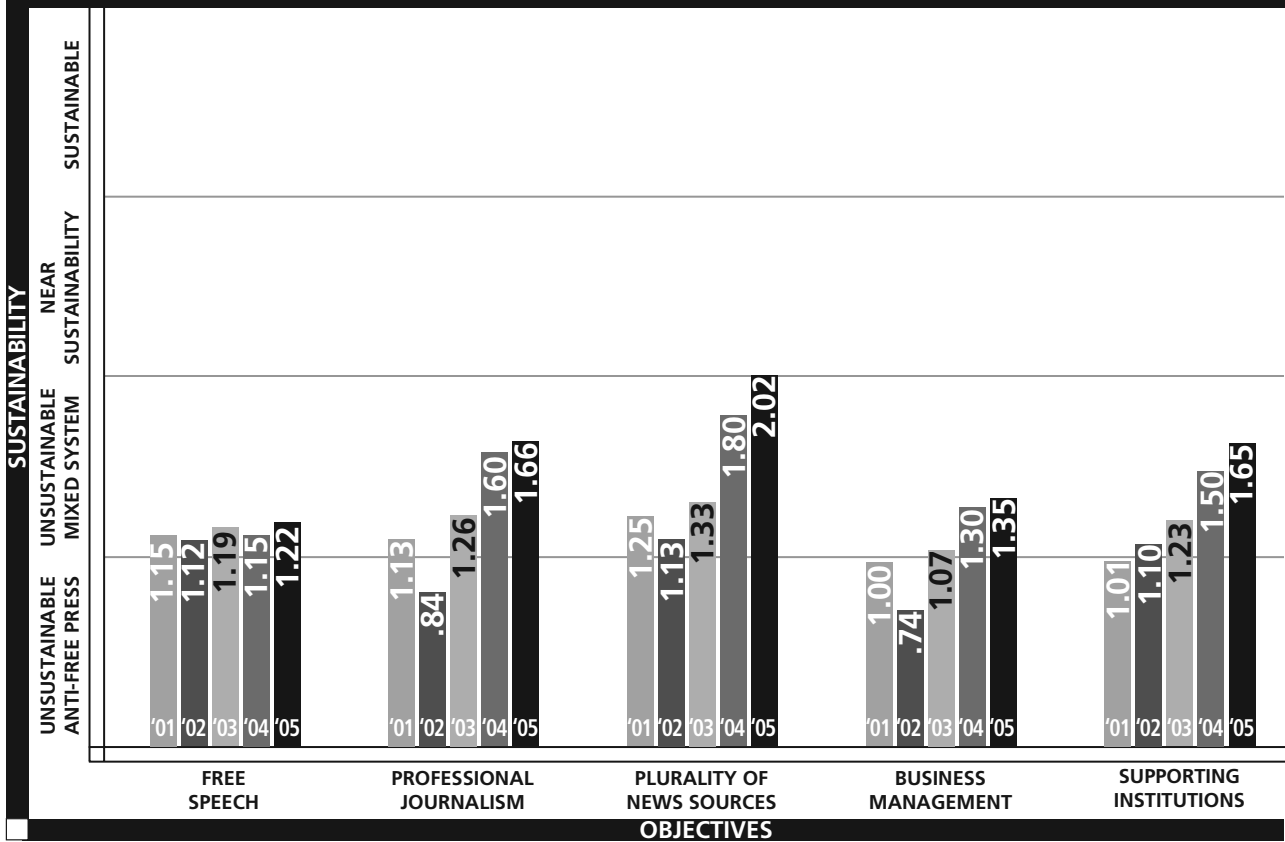
Overall, the elections, in which the ruling party of President Emomali Rakhmonov secured 49 of the 63 seats, were viewed as flawed as measured by key Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) standards, although some improvements over previous elections also were noted.

According to the 2005 Media Sustainability Index (MSI) panel, the authorities in Tajikistan continue to employ diverse means to prevent journalists from gaining access to information that might be of interest to the public, despite the Constitution and other laws on the media that guarantee the right to obtain and disseminate such information. For example, cases were recorded in which journalists for certain media outlets, mainly independent ones, were refused accreditation to cover specific events, or only media outlets under government control were authorized to gain access to official information. In another example, the offices of one private newspaper, *Nerui Sukhan*, were sealed in January 2005, with authorities claiming it was because the newspapers had failed to pay taxes and engaged in publishing without the required permit.

In the opinion of Human Rights Watch, freedom of speech remains under threat in Tajikistan, and that is despite the growing popularity of the independent newspapers. Although the existence of non-state newspapers and magazines is legal, the printing presses under government control often refuse to print them, either complicating publication or making it impossible altogether.

Both the print and the electronic media encounter a number of additional obstacles, in the view of the 2005 MSI panel. These include obtaining

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: TAJIKISTAN



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.

licenses, developing professionalism, improving available technology and equipment, and interference by the authorities in editorial policy. The media distribution system continues to be poorly organized, and the lack of specialized organizations for conducting market research makes it impossible to determine media ratings and demand with readership or audiences. Most media outlets are short of professional journalists due to factors including the weak training programs at universities and the low salaries offered in the media sector. And overall, the media industry remains in the developmental stage in Tajikistan, held back by the protracted economic and social crisis that has led to an extremely weak advertising market. The MSI panel saw essentially a stagnant situation in Tajikistan's media sector during 2005, barely advancing its MSI ranking to 1.58 from 1.47 in 2004. Slight improvements were noted in the availability of news sources and support organizations' work on behalf of the media industry.

OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.22 / 4.00

The basic legal foundations for the media in Tajikistan appear to guarantee freedom of speech, access to information, and entry of new media outlets into the market. In practice, however, the laws often do not function, the MSI panelists concluded. One shortcoming in the area of legislation is the procedure for licensing television and radio stations, whereby the right to issue licenses to private outlets belongs to state television and radio. Independent and government media continue to be divided into "ours" and "outsiders," and cases in which journalists are taken to court have become more frequent.

Freedom of speech is guaranteed by the Constitution, the Law on the Mass Media, and a number of specialized acts. According to the MSI panel, most of these laws were adopted in 1994, when a civil war was in progress and certain restrictions seemed necessary. As Lidiya Isamova, director of the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) in Dushanbe, noted: "The law on freedom of speech does not meet international standards fully, which is something that has been talked about for more than four years now by both local and foreign organizations concerned with the issue of freedom of speech." A draft for a revised law exists, incorporating amendments submitted by local and international lawyers and legal experts, but Tajikistan's parliament has still not considered it. Panelists also noted that the laws guaranteeing freedom of speech

are violated, especially by officials of government agencies, but it is often only the journalists themselves who get angry about this.

Broadcast media licensing is subject to a long-awaited statute adopted in September 2005. The law has fundamentally new elements, requiring any electronic media outlet to obtain a license not just to broadcast but also to produce its programming. The MSI panel saw this two-tier system as creating further obstacles for entering the market, as well as additional pressure on producers to control content so that it is acceptable. Furthermore, the process is virtually at a halt, inaction that panelists linked to the approach of the scheduled November 2006 presidential elections. Lidiya Isamova said the special licensing commission of the Tajik government's Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting has not functioned since December 2003, and about 15 television networks and radio stations have applications for licenses waiting. In Sughd Province, Rano Bobodzhanova, an independent journalist with the Tajik Association of Independent Media (TadzhANESMI), said: "The cost of obtaining a

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

FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

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

license has dropped to the equivalent of 10 minimum monthly wages (approximately US\$30), but that does not mean that the situation has improved. From October 2004 through May 2005, not a single media outlet obtained a license to operate."

In theory, independent media outlets have the same conditions for entering the market as companies in other sectors. However, panelists said newspapers are subject to value-added taxes (VAT), leading some to conceal their circulations. In addition, the panelists said, for 2004 and 2005, not a single new independent media outlet has been able to obtain registration, without which it is impossible to print a newspaper. Free entry into the market is also made more difficult by the fact that the main printing press, Sharki Ozod, belongs to the government and, therefore, can regulate the conditions under which newspapers are produced.

"The law on freedom of speech does not meet international standards fully, which is something that has been talked about for more than four years now by both local and foreign organizations concerned with the issue of freedom of speech," said Lidiya Isamova.

Journalists feel themselves to be unprotected, panelists said. Moreover, crimes against journalists rarely arouse much public response beyond criticism from international organizations. "Lately

journalists have frequently been subjected to persecution by the authorities—that means trials, arrests, detentions. There have been cases of physical reprisals, open threats, and threats over the telephone," said Lidiya Isamova. "In all cases, the lawbreakers have escaped without punishment." In one case, a correspondent for the BBC's Persian service was attacked by a local official from the ruling People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan while attempting to cover a campaign event. According to witnesses, the correspondent was waiting for colleagues at the entrance to the building when the man approached screaming, "Why are you recording me?" slapped him, wrenched away his microphone and tape recorder, and threw the equipment to the ground. Later, the man told the correspondent he was not concerned if a complaint was filed about the attack, which took place in front of dozens of politicians, voters, and journalists. In another case from 2005, an editor at the weekly *Krim-Info* complained to police that she had received threats

from a local attorney at a notary bureau after reporting on bureaucratic abuses of pensioners.

Contrary to the Law on the Mass Media, which guarantees all media outlets equal access to information, the authorities sometimes deliberately put the government media in privileged positions, refuse to respond to private outlets altogether, or treat electronic and print media unequally. Rano Bobodzhanova said the government regularly declines to provide information to the independent television program "Open Asia." Kurbon Alamshoyev in Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province said that only television journalists are invited to many official activities. And Rustam Buriyev, with Mavdzhhi Ozod TV, related that "there have been cases in which journalists were chased right out of the meeting room during conferences conducted by local authorities."

There also are cases when officials provide information but deny they have done so once it is published. "On the basis of information provided by the personnel of a disease-control station, I wrote an article about an outbreak of typhoid fever," Lidiya Isamova said. "But when the article was published, I was immediately asked to retract it. My colleagues stood up for me. The truthfulness of my article was also confirmed by the fact that 500 doses of a French typhoid vaccine were delivered to a government clinic, which became public knowledge."

Government officials are required as part of their official duties to provide information, but journalists themselves do not know where they can appeal when they are refused. Lidiya Alamshoyev recalled trying to write about demarcation of the Tajik-Chinese border: "I asked 10 different government offices to provide me with information, but to no avail," he said. In these cases, panelists said, independent journalists do not fight through administrative or legal channels but get access to what information they can through personal acquaintance with individual employees of government agencies.

A March 2005 presidential decree on the holding of monthly press conferences by agencies and ministries was intended to facilitate access to information. Journalists initially were encouraged by this development but soon encountered a flaw: In response to requests for timely information, officials would procrastinate, saying answers to all questions would be provided at an upcoming press conference. Sometimes material is unnecessarily elevated to the level of state secrets to keep it off-limits, panelists said.

The difficulty of obtaining information and the fear of retaliation result in very limited investigative reporting

in the Tajik media. The panel said that some outlets, such as *Asia Plus*, undertake investigations of past events because they cannot investigate current ones.

The criminal code includes an article on defamation of character, and sometimes journalists are prosecuted under this article. The panelists said cases of corruption among judges and prosecutors are common enough to add to the vulnerability of the media.

Some political parties have their own publications. For example, the Islamic Renaissance Party has three publications—the magazines *Raskhat* and *Ikbol* and the newspaper *Nadzhot*. The ruling People’s Democratic Party also has its own publication, *Varikhab*, as does the Communist Party. However, the panel said that political viewpoints that do not have their own media may find it difficult to be granted air time or space in publications.

Admission to journalism departments and entry to the profession are not controlled by the state.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.66 / 4.00

Tajik journalism is still far from being sufficiently professional. There is generalized public distrust of the media, and a gulf between the content of government and independent media. Kurbon Alamshoyev observed: “In the nongovernmental media, journalists usually cite several sources of information, while in the government media all journalists, as a rule, present material through the prism of their own opinions. And that material is emotional and tendentious.”

The MSI panel said there are cases of lack of professionalism in private media as well, and this failure to verify information too frequently becomes the reason for court trials. “Tajikistan’s media have a lot of enthusiasts who lack sufficient experience, and there are not enough journalism schools to provide advanced training to journalists,” Rano Bobodzhanova said.

There are no commonly accepted ethical standards among the media Tajikistan. An attempt was made by National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan (NANSMIT) to adopt a code of ethics building on examples from other countries, but it was not completed. A few organizations, such as the Asia Plus company, have their own ethics codes, and there are also donor-based media organizations, such as the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), that apply international ethical standards.

Part of the reason for the frequency of ethical lapses is the poor salaries at media outlets, the panelists said. Journalists’ pay levels are uneven but very low on the whole, especially at regional outlets. Private media offer higher salaries, ranging from \$50 to \$300 monthly, than the government organs, where pay may be as low as \$15 to \$20 monthly. Government media lose staff as a result of this, and many journalists work for several publications at once and earn extra money by contributing to Internet publications. Among the media, the lowest pay is in radio. Journalists may augment their income by taking fees from the subjects of their coverage, and some articles clearly betray that they were written to order. Tuhva Akhmadova, a newspaper journalist and staff member of the Press Center nongovernmental organization (NGO), said there are cases in which journalists accept gifts for covering events or doing PR for certain individuals. Rano Bobodzhanova said, “Many journalists with those (government) media outlets have farms paid for by enterprises.”

Self-censorship remains common among editors and reporters. The journalists’ internal censors gets turned on when writing, the MSI panelists said, and then the editor or publisher may pull a piece that might, at the given moment, damage the newspaper’s standing or financial status. The panelists said everyone has gotten so used to this that no one even notes that they are regulating themselves. There is also the influence

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).

of the information and analysis department in the Tajikistan government, which carefully follows, every day, all information that comes out in the media.

“Although officially there is no government censorship in Tajikistan, all publications are watched closely in the republic Ministry of Security, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Prosecutor General’s Office,” Lidiya Isamova said.

The self-censorship results first and foremost from the fear of incurring the authorities’ anger, the panelists agreed. This can have economic implications, such as being refused printing services, or becoming the target of tax inspections. At the same time, there have been more frequent court cases targeting media outlets, the panelists said. Self-censorship also is to a degree a legacy of the 1990s civil war, seen as fomented in part by media partisanship and still resonant as a reason not to accent dissenting views.

“In the nongovernmental media, journalists usually cite several sources of information, while in the government media all journalists, as a rule, present material through the prism of their own opinions,” said Kurbon Alamshoyev.

There are a number of topics that media outlets are particularly wary of covering, including poverty, terrorist acts, corruption, court trials of political opponents of the government,

public health, and cases of soldiers deserting from the army. As examples, Lidiya Isamova said: “Coverage of the problem of people being resettled in regions that were unfit for human habitation, and of the subject of the burial of radioactive waste in Sughd Province aroused great anger on the part of the authorities.” Criticism of President Emomali Rahmonov and his activities is also off-limits, the panelists agreed.

Although the government media have greater access to information, their audiences don’t benefit. Masrur Abdulloev, program director with the Internews Network in Dushanbe, observed: “Even such serious matters as our citizens getting blown up on mines, they either do not speak about at all, or report on it only after a delay and then cite independent media as their sources.” Rano Bobodzhanova said readers put greater trust in the Russian-language press, such as the newspapers *Asia Plus* and *Vecherniy Dushanbe*.

In the opinion of most of the panelists, entertainment predominates over news programs on television. A

great deal of space in the print media also is devoted to advertising and entertaining material, which publishers believe is preferred by their readers.

Many journalists use the Internet, although not all outlets provide it to their employees. Access is available not only in the capital but also increasingly in provincial cities. The situation is more difficult in remote areas, such as Khorog, where Kurbon Alamshoyev said journalists had access to the Internet so long as an international project was in place, but once it was completed, Internet access was also ended.

The availability of equipment in the Tajik media made modest gains in 2005, panelists said. Almost all journalists have voice recorders and camera, but by no means can all media outlets boast of having computers, scanners, printers, and Internet access. With respect to the production and distribution of news, many media outlets need more sophisticated digital cameras, DVCAM and mini-DV-format video cameras, editing stations, and monitors. With the exception of Sughd Province, the situation is especially grave at regional media outlets, where there are acute shortages of equipment for the collection, production, and dissemination of news. In some regions, there are no technical facilities for the production of news at all. Rano Bobodzhanova noted: “In the Rashtskaya Valley, there is neither a district newspaper, nor local television and radio.” During the winter, when electricity shortages get worse in all regions, electronic media are affected, as is the Internet. Poor telephone connections and the lack of full coverage by cellular and satellite telephone services create even more problems for journalists.

The many challenges faced by journalists lead to a lack of quality coverage of economics, health, sciences, and other specialized subjects. Lidiya Isamova said “the problem lies in many journalists lacking professional training. At present, economists, teachers, and former military personnel are working in the media.”

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

Tajikistan Objective Score: 2.02 / 4.00

Mountainous Tajikistan has many outlying regions that have great problems with the accessibility of news sources. “Because of the electric power shortage in Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province, local newspapers do not come out on time, there are big interruptions in television and radio transmission, and the print media published in the capital arrive extremely late,” said Kurbon Alamshoyev. “The Internet is also inaccessible to ordinary citizens because of its expense.

In the regions, one hour of time online costs about \$2.”

Newspapers posted on boards set up on village streets through the efforts of the OSCE are partly filling the information vacuum in outlying regions. But as Rano Bobodzhanova noted: “Such information displays get more attention from men. It is extremely rare to find women reading these displays.” Overall, according to the MSI panelists, no more than 50 percent of the population purchase print media regularly.

Access to international media is not restricted by law, but by economics, with the most accessible format being the Russian networks RTR and ORT. Cable television, which has operated in the big cities since the mid 1990s, is gaining popularity. According to Lidiya Isamova, “More than 70 percent of urban residents have installed cable television and antennas that pick up European and Russian TV channels.”

At the same time, observes Rano Bobodzhanova, “In Tajikistan Internet providers do not offer opposition Internet publications.” The site www.tajikistantimes.ru, founded by exiled journalist Dododzhon Atovulloev to include presentation of opposition views, was blocked by the authorities, panelists noted.

The government media do not reflect the entire

political spectrum, and the activities of the government dominate coverage in both private and state media, according to most MSI panelists. “In contrast to the ruling party, the other political parties are represented in the government media in very limited fashion, and even that is only during an election campaign,” according to Masrur Abdulloyev. However, Tukhva Akhmadova disagreed, saying that “government and nongovernmental media reflect opinions across the entire political spectrum ... Most editors and journalists see their role as serving the public interest.”

Tajikistan has six news agencies. In the panelists’ view, the most successful is the independent Avesta News Agency, whose services are used by many print media outlets. The independent Asia Plus News Agency also is popular. However, Kurbon Alamshoyev said the news agencies cannot be full-service, covering all news nationwide, due to shortages of staff and capacity. Not all media outlets use news agencies due to the cost, about \$30 monthly. The Asia Plus News Agency provides television with news tapes for free under a grant provided by an international organization. When news agency information is used, attribution is not always evident, a practice that leads to conflicts between the news agencies and media outlets.

About a half-dozen non-state outlets in Tajikistan produce their own news broadcasts

including both national and local news, but with preference given to local news. “The programs of independent broadcast media outlets differ from analogous government media programs in content. They are more timely and objective,” said Tukhva Akhmadova. Overall, however, panelists felt the quality of news programs was lacking.

Information concerning the owners of media outlets in Tajikistan is not hidden, although the people and political forces behind the owners may stay in the shadows.

Publications come out in the Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Turkmen languages, in addition to Tajik. Russian is not considered the language of an ethnic minority but in practice is a second language, and Russian-language media are popular. There is no obvious resistance to the coverage of diverse social subjects, although some editors may be reluctant to raise topics they view as potentially controversial or likely to displease authorities.

According to Lidiya Isamova, “More than 70 percent of urban residents have installed cable television and antennas that pick up European and Russian TV channels.”

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.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.35 / 4.00

Tajikistan's economy experienced a lengthy crisis—the president has acknowledged that 64 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, but unofficial data put the number substantially higher—and is only now beginning to recover. The revenue earned by the media cannot yet provide for the dynamic development of the media as a business, the MSI panelists said. There are examples of relatively successful media holding companies, such as Asia Plus, which includes a news agency, newspaper, and radio outlets, and an advertising agency. But as Umed Babakhanov, director of Asia Plus in Dushanbe, noted: "Even it experiences such problems as the lack of a capable manager, the lack of development of a local advertising market, and low personal incomes among the public."

Distribution networks for the print media are not well-developed, and the government subsidizes the presses it owns. "So far, there is a sufficient number of them, but because of government control they operate selectively, refusing their services to overly bold media outlets," said Lidiya Isamova. "The speed and quality of their work also leaves something to be desired." Ordinary private printers do not always accept

orders from newspapers for fear of political retribution through economic pressure on the part of the tax authorities and others, the panelists said. That gives the government leverage through ownership of the dominant printing press company, Sharki Ozod.

The cost of newsprint rose nearly 80 percent with the September 2005 closing of the factory with which the main supplier of paper had a contract, panelists said. Newsprint delivered from Russia was priced much higher, a severe blow to the newspaper companies' budgets.

The main source of revenue for the independent media is advertising, but as Umed Babakhanov noted, "Most advertising revenue comes from announcements of international organizations." Mamadat Bakhtiyerov, deputy editor of the newspaper *Paizomi Rushan* in Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province, said state-owned media are supported by subscriptions and funding by local governments but independent media also cooperate with local governments to produce specific editions and programs. Lidiya Isamova said that virtually all private medias outlets have become commercially viable, while Kurbon Alamshoyev said "the operations of media agencies are not sufficiently transparent that one can know about their revenues."

The principal revenue sources for private television companies in provincial centers are advertising and special congratulatory programs. Advertising agencies are just starting to develop in Tajikistan, and examples include Total Advertising Group and the agency of the Asia Plus holding. According to Rano Bobodzhanova, "For the most part, these are advertising departments of independent electronic media outlets. But they have not yet formed an advertising market that could compete with foreign advertisers." Kurbon Alamshoyev said regional outlets have great problems attracting advertising because there are no regular advertisers and those that might become potential advertisers are afraid of drawing the attention of the tax authorities.

Management skills among media company owners are lacking. Many do not know how to put together a business plan, instead running companies "by trial and error," as one panelist described it.

Marketing and ratings research is very limited, although sometimes attempted by local media. Professional research is conducted by a single agency, Zerkalo, but its work is not regular and depends on its having a grant or a specific order. Furthermore, according to the panelists, media outlets do not always agree with the results of the research.

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.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.65 / 4.00

There are six professional associations in Tajikistan, including the National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan (NANSMIT) and the Tajik Association of Independent Media (TadzhANESMI). However, the MSI panelists said these groups are not yet able consistently to protect journalists or lobby for their interests. The Union of Journalists of Tajikistan has not adjusted to the needs of members in current media market conditions and is barely visible, panelists said.

NANSMIT, which monitors the infringement of journalists' rights nationwide and provides legal aid and consultations, was considered the strongest of the group by the panel. Its membership is open, and it takes part in the defense of journalists in court as well as providing financial and moral support to journalists who must travel from the provinces to the capital to attend court sessions. TadzhANESMI also is involved in supporting several television stations in court cases, and the panelists noted that cooperation among these organizations increased during 2005.

Supporting institutions function in the professional interests of independent media.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

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

There are about a dozen local and internationally affiliated NGOs focused on free expression and developing the media in Dushanbe and regional centers. To the degree that donor support is available, they conduct advocacy, provide professional development workshops, operate computer centers for journalists to use, and supply financial support for covering certain socially important topics. However, dependence on donors means these services can be interrupted when funding ends, as was the case regarding Internet availability at the Pamir Mass Media Center in Khorog, Kurbon Alamshoyev said.

Old curricula from the Soviet perspective continue to be used in journalism departments, and the panelists, for the most part, felt that the instructors themselves are not prepared to teach students to work at current international standards. Opportunities to obtain an education in journalism abroad are very few and, according to the panelists, such students rarely return to the country. The existing media are able to absorb graduates of journalism departments into jobs, but managers are generally dissatisfied with the quality of the graduates' training and experience.

Many talented young people, however, do collaborate with various media organizations while they are still students. For example, the Internews Network journalism school, which combines practice and theory and trains professional journalists, and the Institute for War and Peace Reporting serve as springboards for young journalists. Donor-sponsored professional development opportunities are free, but not all outlets allow their staff to participate due chiefly to chronic personnel shortages. Also, regional media capacity remains low because few trainings are conducted in provincial areas and not all journalists are able to travel to the capital to participate in events there.

The panelists said it is possible for the authorities to exercise political influence on the print media via control over access to the state-owned presses and the inefficient government newspaper distribution system. Government and private newspapers are sold through kiosks and street vendors because the postal service is too inefficient to make mail subscriptions feasible, according to the panel. Distribution of newspapers from the capital to regional centers, or vice versa, is very limited. The Ministry of Communications controls broadcast frequencies and transmitters. The state tries to exercise control of the Internet. There has been only one Internet service provider, but a second one, Telecom Technologies, began to operate during 2005.

Panel Participants

Lidiya Isamova, Director, Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), Dushanbe

Saidumron Saidov, Director of Television and Radio Programs, Sughd Province Television and Radio Company, Khudzhand

Rano Bobodzhanova, Independent Journalist, TadzANESMI (Tajik Association of Independent Media), Sughd Province

Tukhva Akhmadova, Staff Member, Press Center NGO; Staff Correspondent *Tamkhori* newspaper, Khatlon Province

Mamadat Bakhtiyerov, Deputy Editor, *Paizomi Rushan* regional newspaper, Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province

Masrur Abdulloyev, Program Director, Internews Network, Dushanbe

Rustam Buriyev, Mavdzhiz Ozod TV

Umed Babakhanov, Director, Asia Plus, Dushanbe

Kurbon Alamshoyev, Chairman, Pamir Public Foundation NGO; Director, Pamir Mass Media Center, Khorog, Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province

Moderator

Yelena Buldakova, Kyrgyzstan

Observers

Robert Cronin, Regional Director, IREX Civil Society Program, Tajikistan

Guzeliya Nasyrova, Information Coordinator, IREX Civil Society Center, Tajikistan

TAJIKISTAN AT A GLANCE

GENERAL

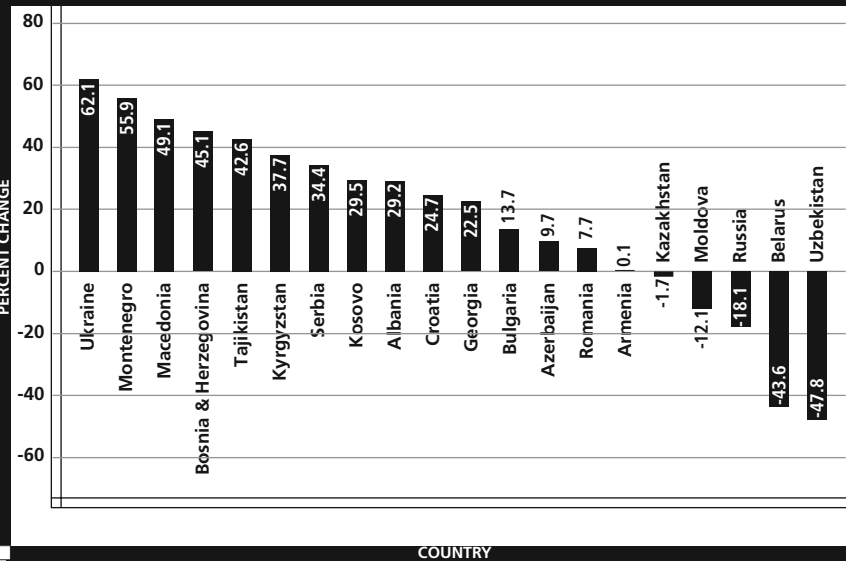
(source: CIA World Factbook)

- **Population:** 7,163,506 (July 2005 est.)
- **Capital city:** Dushanbe
- **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Tajik 79.9%, Uzbek 15.3%, Russian 1.1%, Kyrgyz 1.1%, other 2.6% (2000 census)
- **Religions (% of population):** Sunni Muslim 85%, Shi'a Muslim 5%, other 10% (2003 est.)
- **Languages:** Tajik (official); Russian widely used in government and business.
- **GDP:** \$7.95 billion (2004 est., ppp)
- **Literacy rate (% of population):** 99.4%
- **President or top authority:** President Emomali Rakhmonov
- **Next scheduled elections:** Presidential, November 2006

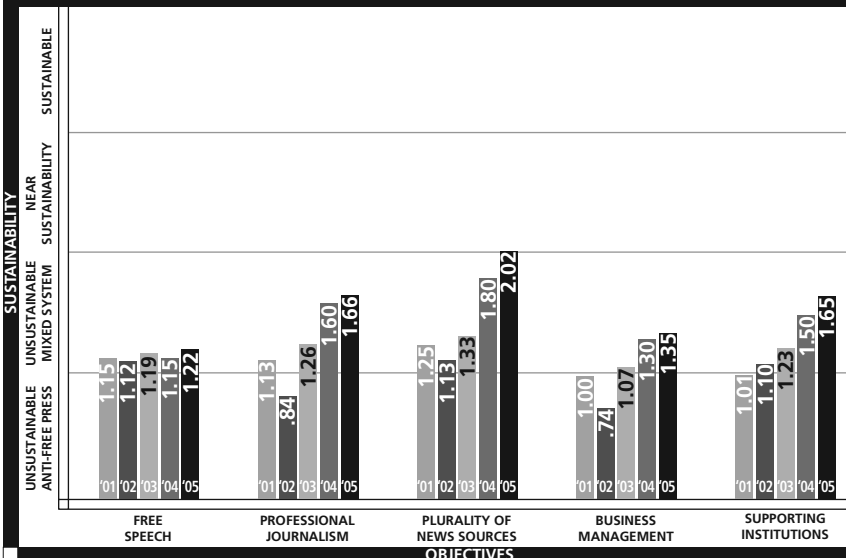
MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- **Existing newspapers:** There are approximately 265 registered print publications in Tajikistan. The largest ones are *Asia Plus*, *Tochikiston*, *Nerui Sukhan*, and *Vecherniy Dushanbe*.
- **Broadcast ratings (top ranked stations):** Dushanbe: Radio Vatan, Asia Plus, SM-1; Khudzhande: Tiroz
- **Number of print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Approximately 20 printing houses, over 20 television stations, 7 radio stations
- **Number of Internet users:** 4,100 (2003 est.); but recent estimates put the number closer to 11,000.
- **News agencies:** Asia Plus, Mison, State Information Agency Hobar, Varorud, Avesta

MSI AVERAGE SCORES—PERCENT CHANGE 2001–2005



MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: TAJIKISTAN



ON MULTIPLE FRONTS, THE UZBEK GOVERNMENT ATTEMPTED TO SILENCE INDEPENDENT VOICES THAT TRIED TO PROVIDE DETAILS ABOUT THE ANDIJAN EVENTS. IN THIS WAY, WHATEVER MODICUM OF HOPE THE MEDIA SECTOR IN UZBEKISTAN MIGHT HAVE HAD FOR GROWTH LARGELY DISAPPEARED WITH THE EVENTS OF MAY 13.

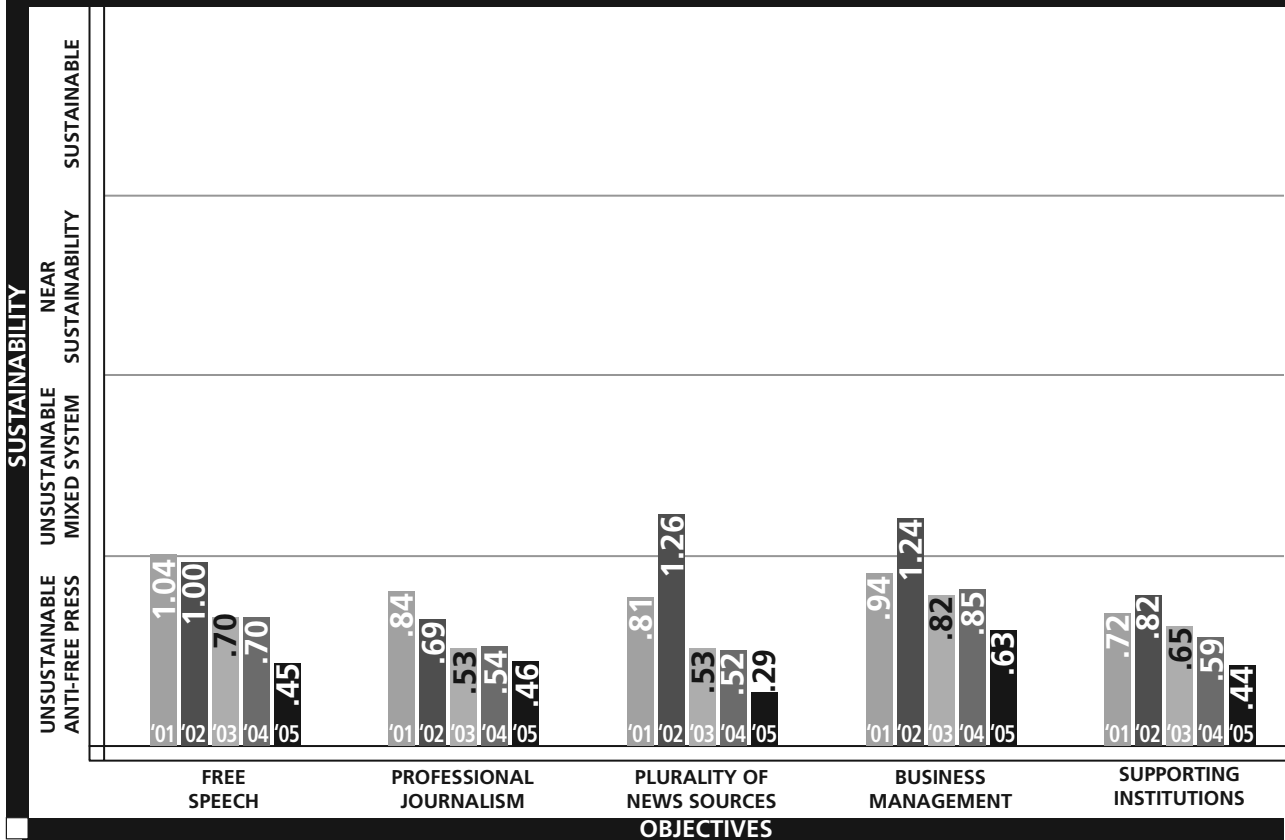


The defining moment for the state of democracy in Uzbekistan during 2005 took place in the city of Andijan on May 13. On that day, Uzbek military and security forces fired on thousands of civilians who had gathered to protest poverty, unemployment, and political repression as well as the trial of 23 local businessmen who had been arrested in 2004 for “religious extremism.” According to government estimates, a maximum of 175 people died. However, other reports from eyewitnesses placed the number at about 750. The incident further isolated the government of President Islam Karimov from the West and further curtailed the already limited freedoms of Uzbek citizens, businesses, and media.

The shootings in Andijan escalated the repression that has characterized Karimov’s consolidation of power for more than a decade. Although Uzbekistan joined international organizations such as the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) following independence in 1991, the Karimov regime began cracking down on civil freedoms in 1992 after a conflict with Tajikistan. The government justified this and subsequent actions as being in the interests of national security. For example, after bombings in 1999 in Tashkent, Karimov’s administration jailed thousands suspected of religious extremism. After September 11, 2001, Karimov gained the favor of the United States by pledging to join the fight against international terrorism and tried to use this relationship to justify his own repressive policies.

The Uzbek government refused an international investigation into the Andijan incident, despite widespread condemnation from Western countries and international organizations. For media, the killings meant a news blockade erected by a government that had accused the foreign media of “informational attacks” against Uzbekistan. Local journalists were threatened and attacked, and foreign correspondents were denied accreditation and forced to leave the country. International news channels were cancelled on cable television, and Internet sites were blocked. On multiple fronts, the Uzbek government attempted to silence independent

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: UZBEKISTAN



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.

voices that tried to provide details about the Andijan events. In this way, whatever modicum of hope the media sector in Uzbekistan might have had for growth largely disappeared with the events of May 13.

Due to the repressive environment created by the Andijan incident, the Media Sustainability Index (MSI) panelists were unable to meet to discuss the state of media in Uzbekistan in 2005. Information for this chapter was collected from media professionals inside and outside of Uzbekistan through an e-mail survey, interviews, and extensive research. The names of those participating will not be published to protect their personal security. This chapter therefore provides a summary of the state of media in Uzbekistan.

OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH

Uzbekistan Objective Score: 0.45 / 4.00

In some respects, legal norms governing the journalism profession in Uzbekistan seem to meet international standards. For example, the constitution guarantees freedom of speech and access to information. Additionally, several articles of the Uzbek Law on Defending the Professional Work of Journalists prohibit censorship, the confiscation of equipment, and the detention of journalists. However, before and after the Andijan incident in mid-2005, these laws were openly violated by the Uzbek government. Implementation of these laws failed at all levels, and the post-Andijan era left even less room for maneuvering for journalists seeking to report independently from the country.

Before May 13, 2005, foreign media such as the BBC and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty were among the few sources of information not controlled by the state. Local media were almost entirely controlled or directly influenced by the government. However, following Andijan, the Karimov administration accused foreign media of “informational attacks” and otherwise inciting the violence that took place. Whereas pressure and intimidation of journalists before the May shootings often went on behind the scenes, the Andijan events brought repressive currents to the surface. The list of freedom-of-speech offenses reads like a catalog of acts against the majority of foreign media operating in Uzbekistan. The OSCE documented many of these offenses, including the cancellation of CNN, BBC, and Deutsche Welle programming on cable television, the detention of Russian television channel REN-TV and Ukraine’s Fifth Channel reporters trying to enter Andijan, and an attack on a cameraman from Russia’s TVT at the Uzbek-Krygyz border, among many others.

The Committee to Protect Journalists noted the assault on Moscow-based Ferghana.ru website journalist Aleksei Volosevich. Volosevich, who witnessed and reported on the Andijan shootings, said he was knocked down and kicked by five men and then doused in paint. Meanwhile, anti-Semitic slogans were written on the walls near his apartment. An Uzbek media professional interviewed for this study described the government reaction as directing blame against the journalist. “The government reacted only to the anti-Semitism and not to the beating of the journalist. They declared that Uzbekistan is an inter-ethnic community and tried to avoid the topic of the beating. They even blamed Volosevich and said nobody beat him.”

Meanwhile, the court system continued to offer no respite for journalists. By law, freedom-of-speech violations can be appealed to the constitutional court, but judges are appointed by the president and corruption hinders appeals procedures. In the case of Nosir Zokirov, an RFE/RL journalist who was sentenced to six months in prison for insulting a representative of the Uzbek security service, the original proceedings

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

FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

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

“The government reacted only to the anti-Semitism and not to the beating of the journalist. They declared that Uzbekistan is an inter-ethnic community and tried to avoid the topic of the beating. They even blamed Volosevich and said nobody beat him,” said an Uzbek media professional.

in August and the subsequent unsuccessful appeal were condemned by the international community as unfair show trials. According to RFE/RL, Zokirov was sentenced under Article 140 of the criminal code that criminalizes the slander of security forces. During the

Zokirov trial, prosecutors also threatened to charge the journalist with “insulting the president,” an offense also punishable under the criminal code in Uzbekistan.

Following the Andijan shootings, the judicial system became a forum for government attempts to brand the incident as an event engineered by the West with the direct assistance of the international media. During the trial of 15 people arrested for allegedly inciting the events that led to the shootings, the prosecutor’s office accused RFE/RL and other foreign media of “continuing (an) information war against Uzbekistan which was launched in connection with the Andijan events.” This announcement was accompanied by many articles in national and local papers that demonized the foreign press.

The media licensing process in Uzbekistan is completely controlled by the state. Beginning in 2004, the government required all media outlets to register or re-register each year to obtain a license. Many failed to gain or renew a license, as the authorities were able to weed out any station or publication that had opposed the state for any reason. Also in 2004, the National Association of Electronic Media (NAESMI) was founded by the government to regulate broadcast media. Membership in the association was required, or the local station risked political pressure and possible closure. The authorities were able to exploit these tactics in controlling the media largely because of the lack of democratic traditions and impulses among the Uzbekistani citizens. There was simply no established civil society that could advocate for free speech and no local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to lobby for such causes, according to those surveyed. In many respects, the leftover Soviet-era ethos of prioritizing the group over the individual continued to hinder effective public mobilization for freedom of speech.

Media continue to have difficulty obtaining information from government sources. According to another Uzbek media professional, “It is very difficult to get information from the authorities. Forget about it. They never respond to your calls. They say it is not their responsibility to talk to media. They don’t know how to work with media.” This interviewee also pointed to a government initiative in which state journalists are presented to the public as “experts” on issues such as US-Uzbekistan relations. In this way, longtime state reporters can represent the interests of the government when other journalists are prevented from obtaining even the most basic information.

For those with access to the Internet, which is not many in Uzbekistan (about 492,000 out of nearly 27 million people), websites such as Arena (www.freeuz.org) and Ferghana.ru are some of the very few nongovernment sources of information. Uzbekistanis are generally aware of their choices regarding these sources. For example, the OSCE noted that Ferghana.ru received about 45,000 hits on its website on May 13 alone. However, this site and other websites were blocked or experienced other technical difficulties following the Andijan incident.

Journalists are not restricted in studying journalism at universities or in applying for media jobs. Whereas accreditation was used as a tool to keep local journalists in line prior to Andijan, the government is currently using the visa accreditation process to prohibit foreign journalists from entering the country. The OSCE noted in its Report of Events in Andijan on June 15, 2005, that more than 30 journalists were waiting for accreditation from the Uzbekistani government.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Uzbekistan Objective Score: 0.46 / 4.00

Even before the events of May 13, 2005, professional journalism in Uzbekistan suffered from the government control of information and the lack of skilled local reporters and managers. As a result, reporting produced by local media outlets regularly lacked balance and proper attributions. Alternative viewpoints were rare, mostly attempted by foreign-based media. Following Andijan, professional reporting practices slid even further as those attempting more professional and probing reporting were harassed, had to engage in self-censorship, or found their reporting hindered by their media outlets. State and local media became increasingly active as mouthpieces for government rhetoric. For example, these media were tools in the Karimov administration’s campaign to blame Western

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).

media for inciting violence and threatening the national security of the country. RFE/RL documents several examples, including UT-1, the main television channel, broadcasting a program blaming foreign media for biased and incomplete coverage of Andijan. Tashkent-based *Hurriyat* newspaper published an article reiterating the “informational attacks” by the international media following the “terrorist acts in Andijan.” Meanwhile, the Uzbek-language *Namangan Haqiqati* paper in Namangan printed articles directly questioning the validity of reporting by the BBC and RFE/RL. Journalists and media outlets were at risk if they did not toe the government line. For example, the OSCE noted that local journalist Dzhamil Karimov was fired for his coverage of Andijan, and local radio station Didor was shut down on the day of the violence.

Ethical codes devised by organizations such as NAESMI and the Samarkand Press Center were largely ignored before and after Andijan. In recent years, many journalists accepted bribes and gifts in exchange for favorable coverage or made-to-order reporting. After the Andijan killings, however, the government exploited such practices to support their campaign. For example, reports indicate that local journalists were offered money to gather information about foreign media correspondents.

Despite the legal prohibition of censorship, it still pervades the media sector in Uzbekistan. In addition

to an unofficial ban on specific topics and words (for example, those relating to corruption and poverty in Uzbekistan), any account of Andijan is closely scrutinized, particularly since no official account of the incident has been published or broadcast. Self-censorship, previously a way of life and means of self-preservation for journalists and editors, manifested itself differently following Andijan. While local media simply avoided all alternative coverage of political issues, even correspondents of international outlets have been cowed by relentless threats, intimidation, and attacks. An Uzbek media professional working for an international media outlet indicated in an interview that she has instructed her correspondents in Uzbekistan to avoid coverage of issues they feel might put them in danger, such as those related to Andijan.

Working under these pressures, journalists frequently do not properly cover key events and issues. In fact, political news that is not entirely flattering or at least nonthreatening to President Karimov is omitted. An interviewee noted that news coverage amounts to “10 minutes every hour that covers social issues, never politics or corruption. News starts with agricultural information or if Karimov is going somewhere. Potatoes are more important than Andijan or actual events.” Similarly, another respondent said that “there is no reporting on poverty because state-controlled media think that it has no news value to Uzbekistanis. They think it’s not important. They find no news value in unemployment, for example. And there has been very little coverage of the Asian bird flu, which is strange for an agrarian republic.”

Entertainment programming largely dominates news and information reporting. For this reason, Russian channels are popular. Other broadcasters focus entirely on sports or on selling airtime for advertising. Print media find it much more comfortable to print gossip about celebrities gathered from the Internet, along with fictional stories and parables. People are not accustomed to getting important information through the mainstream media. This creates a negative cycle that allows increasingly more entertainment programming on the airwaves.

Niche journalism is largely impossible in Uzbekistan, as it would strain already limited resources at outlets, require far more training than the media sector can provide, and risk treading on topics that the regime would oppose. Similarly, the technical facilities at most outlets are sadly outdated and in various stages of disrepair. Even at state media, equipment generally is of poor quality and seemingly ignored when government subsidies are distributed.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

Uzbekistan Objective Score: 0.29 / 4.00

Although the number of “news” sources has increased significantly since independence in 1991, that does not mean that Uzbekistani citizens have access to more and better-quality information. In fact, the combination of government control of information and the overall poverty of the people limit access to even the filtered news offered on state television and radio. Furthermore, with more than 60 percent of the population concentrated in rural areas, distribution does not reach many of those outside of city centers. Most rural Uzbekistanis collect their only information via the radio, and any connection with the international media is attained via shortwave radio.

Even relatively credible news sources such as the Internet and cable television have their limitations. Reputable websites such as Arena and Ferghana.ru are popular among the estimated 2 percent of the population that use the Internet. Yet such sites can be blocked by the telecommunications carriers, as was the case following the Andijan crisis. Meanwhile, cable television is relatively inexpensive for some urban residents and provided by

private companies such as Kamalak. Through cable, people have access to 25 channels, including many Russian channels. Nevertheless, following Andijan, the government was able to pull foreign media such as the BBC off the cable network. In October 2005, after continued harassment by the authorities, the BBC announced the closure of its office in Tashkent and withdrew its staff from the country. This is one example of how citizens’ access to both domestic and international news is clearly more limited than in previous years.

State media are completely partisan and offer no alternative viewpoints. Exiled opposition parties such as Erk do produce their own newspapers abroad but can only smuggle small quantities into the country. Although these papers are not banned by law, people reading them could face punitive measures. One account provided by an Uzbek media professional interviewed for this study reveals how a man who was caught with banned local music and Erk newspapers was thrown in prison by the authorities. Since Andijan, private media outlets have been increasingly co-opted by the government, and if the outlets resist, they risk license suspension or closure.

The four news agencies in Uzbekistan remain under the direct control of the state.

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.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Uzbekistan Objective Score: 0.63 / 4.00

The business environment in Uzbekistan cannot support a private-sector news media, even if the government would allow independent private media. In fact, without government subsidies, most news media in the country would not survive. Even the tabloids, previously the only profitable media, are now falling on hard times. *Darakchi*, for example, was a sensationalist paper that had relatively high circulation numbers in 2004. In 2005, however, the owner was forced to flee to the United States due to government pressure and threats from organized crime groups. Chirchik TV, the leading non-Uzbek-language television station, had its license revoked because the owner refused to join the government-sponsored industry association, NAEMSI.

Some media outlets derive income from international organizations and corporate sponsors as well as advertising. However, the pool of available funds from international donors continued to shrink rapidly as organizations such as Internews were forced to close their Uzbekistan offices. The Institute for War and Peace Reporting also had to withdraw its local representatives.