
The government remains openly hostile to any form of independent media, and any journalist reporting on government abuses is thrown in prison. The government continues to claim that the human rights situation is improving, but the on-the-ground reality clearly refutes this.



UZBEKISTAN

The past year witnessed a further deterioration of conditions for independent media within Uzbekistan. The government crackdown on foreign media and local journalists, which began in earnest after the suppressed uprising in 2005 in Andijan, worsened. The government remains openly hostile to any form of independent media, and any journalist reporting on government abuses is thrown in prison. The government continues to claim that the human rights situation is improving, but the on-the-ground reality clearly refutes this.

Three major media events occurred in Uzbekistan in 2008. The first was on June 7 when independent journalist Salidzhon Abdurakhmanov was arrested on drug charges. After clearing his name through a blood test, authorities charged him with drug possession with intent to sell. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison. Days later, the government sponsored a prime-time television program accusing independent journalists of violating journalistic ethics and carrying out anti-state activities. The program provided personal contact information for prominent independent journalists, including their addresses and places of work.

On the same day this program aired, the government held a forum on independent media in order to placate the EU. This meeting was called a farce by many as no independent human rights and press freedom groups were allowed to attend. Later in October, the government hosted another conference on media reform. As a result of this conference, the EU lifted the travel ban on Uzbek officials even though the original condition for lifting the ban, an independent inquiry into the Andijan incident in 2005, never occurred.

Due to the repressive environment in Uzbekistan, IREX did not convene a panel. This chapter represents research conducted on the situation and discussions with various professionals knowledgeable about the situation in Uzbekistan. The names of those contacted will not be published to protect their safety. This chapter, therefore, provides a summary of the state of media in Uzbekistan.

UZBEKISTAN AT A GLANCE

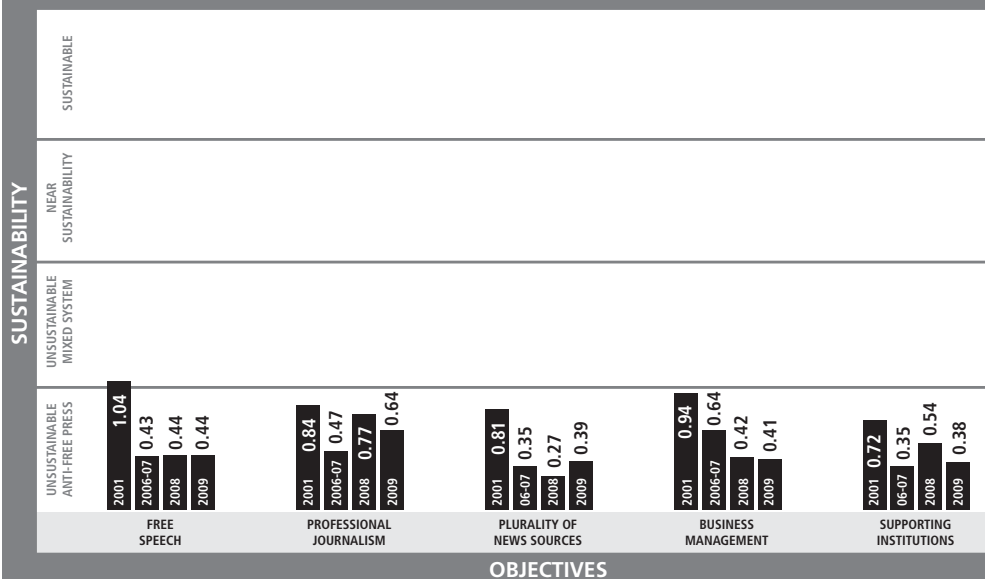
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 27,345,026 (July 2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Tashkent
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Uzbek 80%, Russian 5.5%, Tajik 5%, Kazakh 3%, Karakalpak 2.5%, Tatar 1.5%, other 2.5% (1996 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 88% (mostly Sunni), Eastern Orthodox 9%, other 3% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Uzbek 74.3%, Russian 14.2%, Tajik 4.4%, other 7.1% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2007-Atlas):** \$19.72 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2008)
- > **GNI per capita (2007-PPP):** \$2,430 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2008)
- > **Literacy rate:** 99.3% (male 99.6%, female 99.0%) (2003 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Islam Karimov (since March 24, 1990)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 663 newspapers, 195 magazines, 13 periodical bulletins; Radio: 35; Television Stations: 53 (Uzbek government)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Total newspaper readership is estimated at only 50,000; top publications include *Khalq Sozi* (state-run daily), *Narodnoye Slovo* (state-run, Russian-language daily), *Ozbekistan Ozovi* (published by ruling party) (Library of Congress, Federal Research Division)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Uzbekistan National News Agency (state-owned), Jahon, Turkiston Press
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 2,100,000 (2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: UZBEKISTAN



Annual scores for 2002 through 2005 are available online at http://www.irex.org/programs/MSI_EUR/archive.asp

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

Uzbekistan Objective Score: 0.44

There continues to be very little freedom of speech within Uzbekistan as demonstrated by the score of 0.44, the same as last year. All of the indicators remained essentially unchanged from last year, and all scored close to the overall objective score.

The government crackdown on foreign media and local journalists that began after the 2005 events in Andijan has tightened. The government restricts all forms of independent media within the country; foreign media are not allowed accreditation. Journalists and civil rights activists are constantly harassed and those critical of the government are arrested. The International Press Institute's 2008 *World Press Freedom Review* reported that the government maintains a list of topics that the media must not cover critically, and that the National Security Service provides the list to editors. The list reportedly includes the Andijan incident, human rights abuses, the president and his family, opposition party activities, and socio-economic troubles. These restrictions have effectively eliminated the country's independent press corps.

In 2008 there was an attempt by the government of Uzbekistan to show a commitment to human rights reform so that relations with the West would improve and the EU would lift sanctions imposed three years earlier. As part of this initiative, the government pardoned independent journalist Umida Niyazova, who was serving a suspended sentence for smuggling subversive literature, distributing anti-state material, and crossing a border illegally. International human rights organizations such as the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reported that these charges were bogus and a reprisal for her continued reporting on the Andijan incident. Nonetheless, Uzbek representatives to the EU Council of Ministers used the pardon as part of their lobbying efforts and the EU temporarily ended the travel ban targeting senior Uzbek officials in April. However, the EU established benchmarks that needed to be met in order to remove an arms embargo.

One of the benchmarks included a suggestion to hold a human rights conference that would include international organizations. According to CPJ, however, the June conference did not include the international organizations the EU had suggested, and human rights organizations considered it a "sham."

As a result, another conference was held in October on "The Liberalization of Mass Media." Several of the attending international organizations, such as Amnesty International,

the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, and Open Society Institute, issued a joint press release about the conference, stating "Our organisations, which took part in the seminar, can attest first-hand that nothing new was heard from the representatives of the government and the state-controlled media who were present. There was no hint of acknowledgement from the Uzbek side that the country's media are neither free nor independent, that journalists and others are regularly imprisoned for expressing their opinions, that access to critical external internet sites is blocked, and that foreign journalists are not allowed accreditation to cover the country from within." The press release also noted that foreign journalists and independent Uzbek journalists were not allowed to cover the conference. It recommended that the EU acknowledge that "there have been no positive changes in the area of media freedom in Uzbekistan and [the EU should] insist that the authorities demonstrate a real commitment to freedom of expression through concrete actions."

Nonetheless, the EU Council of Ministers declared that "the Uzbek government had made progress on benchmarks, most notably in releasing jailed human rights activists, holding the media conference, abolishing the death penalty, and granting the International Red Cross access to prisons." In October, the EU permanently lifted the ban on ministers thought to be responsible for the Andijan massacre despite both a lack of real progress and the called-for independent inquiry into the Andijan incident.

Subsequently, in December, the EU noted its concerns over a 10-year jail sentence given to a journalist and a rights activist. It called on the Uzbek authorities to shed light on the charges and "to respect the obligation to protect the prisoners against ill treatment." Clearly, for all practical purposes, nothing has changed in Uzbekistan and the government efforts were simply pandering.

On paper, however, there is a legal framework that purports to guarantee freedom of speech. State officials often cite these rights as a foundation of Uzbek society. The legislation includes laws on mass media, access to information, protection of journalists' professional activities, copyright, advertising, and the principles and guarantees of information freedom. The Uzbek Press and Information Agency is the state-controlled entity designed to enforce these rights. It is intended to "monitor over the complete realization of the constitutional rights in the field of independent mass media, and guarantee press freedom." But, a January 2007 revision of the 1991 mass media law now holds media owners, editors, and media staff responsible for the "objectivity" of published materials. A recent law also forbids entities with 30 percent or more foreign ownership to establish media outlets in the country.

The government controls all media, including the Internet, through the information law, which states that freedom to inform the public can be restricted to “protect the moral values of society, national security, and the country’s spiritual, cultural and scientific potential.”

The media licensing process in Uzbekistan remains completely controlled by the state without transparency or fair and consistent standards. All media outlets must register or re-register every year to obtain a license. The criteria and standards for receiving a license are not always explicitly stated. The Law on the Mass Media states that initial registration and re-registration fees are levied “in the order and size established by the government of the Republic of Uzbekistan.” The private media outlets that do exist, including both television and radio, tend to be operated by persons favored by the government or by those who do not challenge the government.

The Uzbekistan Agency for Press and Information is responsible for registering “publishing and polygraphic activity, as well as mass media, information, and advertising agencies; conducting control over observance of the legislation of the Republic of

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.

Uzbekistan, registration and licensing requirements, issuing notices and warnings; suspending or invalidation of certificates of registration and licenses;” licensing publishing activity; monitoring all print and electronic media’s compliance with current legislation; and suspending or invalidating certificates of registration and licenses.

The overall freedom to start and operate a business is relatively well protected by Uzbekistan’s regulatory environment, and the top corporate tax rate is fairly low. However, obtaining a business license is often a long and arduous process, and media companies, in particular, face additional hurdles entering and operating in the market. For example, independent and foreign media, including online publishers, need to register with the Cabinet of Ministers in Uzbekistan. The government has stated that subsequent regulations will specify the type of Web sites that need to be registered.

As reported last year, journalists in Uzbekistan are frequently threatened, harassed, and beaten, but these crimes are rarely investigated in a thorough manner and are almost never prosecuted. Journalism is one of the most dangerous professions in the country. As a result, fear is prevalent among many journalists, and colleagues and family members encourage journalists to maintain silence. Furthermore, journalism is not seen as a respectful profession. At the end of December 2008, there were six journalists in jail within Uzbekistan, the most in the region.

One of these journalists is Solijon Abdurakhmanov, an independent journalist and contributor to Uznews, Institute for War and Peace Reporting, and other independent news outlets. CPJ reported that on June 7, 2008, he was stopped by traffic police and his car was searched. The police claimed they discovered drugs in the search, which Abdurakhmanov denied and he demanded a drug test to prove his innocence. When tests came back clean police then charged him with possession with intent to distribute. In October he received a 10-year prison sentence.

Access to information is tightly controlled by the state. The government controls all media, including the Internet, through the information law, which states that freedom to inform the public can be restricted to “protect the moral values of society, national security, and the country’s spiritual, cultural and scientific potential.” This is used as a guise to strictly control the flow of public information. Although Internet access is relatively widespread, particularly in the bigger cities, many international news sites are deliberately blocked by Internet service providers (ISPs) and at Internet cafés at the instruction of the Uzbek government. Outside coverage of pivotal news developments in Uzbekistan is blocked. Filtering is pervasive and comprehensive although, until 2006, the government denied engaging in such practices.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Uzbekistan Objective Score: 0.64

The quality of professional journalism is one of the worst in the entire region, as the low score of 0.64 in Objective 2 would indicate. Most indicators remained the same as last year, although Indicator 4, journalists cover key events, suffered a notable drop. Individually, the indicators all scored in line with the overall objective score. However, Indicator 3, self-censorship, scored very low, more than half a point lower than the score. Indicator 7, modern equipment, did score almost a point higher than the objective score.

Most of the highly professional journalists have either fled the country in fear or have been thrown in prison. The ones that remain are too scared of the repercussions to practice fair and balanced reporting. Self-censorship is prevalent. Controversial topics and critical coverage of the government are avoided at all costs. Journalists in Uzbekistan have few opportunities to receive quality training or improve basic skills and are unable to use internationally accepted standards in their day-to-day reporting. There is very little niche reporting since most forms of investigative journalism would be deemed a threat to the government.

It is often impossible to verify information and provide a balanced story. Typically, the only available sources are activists, human rights defenders, or sources outside the country. When off-the-record, local journalists can be very critical of the current situation. But on the record they praise the government and talk about the Uzbek mentality, about being thoughtful, polite, and discreet. Some say that there are a few skilled and independent reporters in Uzbekistan,

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).

Most of the highly professional journalists have either fled the country in fear or have been thrown in prison. The ones that remain are too scared of the repercussions to practice fair and balanced reporting.

but the local media refuse to publish or broadcast their stories out of fear of government repercussions.

State censorship of the media was eliminated in 2002, but self-censorship is so rife that the net result is the same. In recent years, increasingly complex laws and regulations have resulted in self-censorship by everyone, especially online publishers, independent journalists, and bloggers. The government has used a number of means to force this self-censorship. The National Security Service, monitors Uzbek web sites, thereby compelling ISPs, including cybercafés, to self-censor. ISPs risk revocation of their licenses if their customers post “inappropriate” information. It has reached a point where the Uzbek authorities do not have to do anything. People are too scared to speak up.

In an apparent attempt to silence other independent voices, three government-controlled television stations in the eastern cities of Ferghana and Namangan smeared RFE/RL contributors in prime-time programs aired on June 9 and June 10, 2008. The two-hour programs accused reporters of shoddy ethical practices and carrying out anti-state activities. According to RFE, the program broadcast detailed personal information on several journalists and their family members, such as address, affiliation, and where their children attended school. The broadcast was aired to an estimated audience of 11 million. With a touch of irony, the program was broadcast on the same days that the Uzbek government hosted a conference on media freedom in Tashkent.

Media coverage of key events and issues is glaringly absent in Uzbekistan. When key events are covered, it is usually with a heavy government bias. An example was media coverage of the two “Liberalization of Mass Media” conferences held in Tashkent this past year. Although highly criticized by human rights organizations outside of the country, the local media covered the conferences in a positive light and used them to explain the EU’s lifting of economic sanctions.

As we reported last year, entertainment programming clearly dominates news and information programming. According to local editors and journalists, it is safer to write celebrity gossip, reprint and rebroadcast foreign

State-run media are seen as an efficient arm of the state propaganda machine, as they are heavily censored and reflect only the government view. Uzbek leaders receive disproportionately generous coverage, as there is no legal opposition inside the country.

non-political human interest and general interest stories from the Internet, or broadcast acceptable Russian or other foreign entertainment programs.

The National Television and Radio Company of Uzbekistan owns advanced equipment and is capable of producing a polished product. Most local print media are ill-equipped, however, and most journalists are not trained in how to use new equipment. Many journalists still lack basic computer skills and are unaware of the resources available via the Internet.

There is very little niche reporting, especially as regards anything that might be deemed threatening to the government. This includes investigative and political reporting. However, a few media outlets that focus on business reporting have appeared in recent years. The newspaper *Biznes Vestnik Vostoka* and the electronic *UzReport Business Information Portal* are two of them.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Uzbekistan Objective Score: 0.39

The score for plurality of news increased slightly this year, thanks to a slightly higher assessment of some indicators. The analysis of the overall situation is essentially the same as last year, however, and Uzbekistan remains in the bottom half of “unsustainable” when it comes to plurality of news sources. All indicators scored close to the overall objective score of 0.39.

A first glance, the growing number of news sources available in Uzbekistan in recent years would appear to indicate a greater plurality of news. As of 2008, Uzbekistan had more than 900 registered media outlets. But these numbers do not reflect the reality of the situation. After the 2005 events in Andijan, the government closed all independent-minded private print and broadcast media in the country. That remains the current situation.

The government has had much success in limiting television media. Freedom House reports that government cable

providers control all cable television programming. When a state declared emergency arises or it is otherwise expedient, the government can and does block foreign news channels. The BBC and CNN remain inaccessible, and even programs by Russian NTV have been blocked.

One area where the government has had trouble controlling access to information is the Internet. The OpenNet Initiative reports that better-quality Internet access and communications services in general have been rapidly improving: the number of ISPs has increased from 25 in 1999 to 539 in 2005. In the early part of the decade, the Internet remained open and free from filtering and Uzbekistan was a regional leader in Internet development. Citizens use these Internet-based resources for objective news coverage of both domestic and international events, and the Internet is often the only way to maintain communications with Uzbek dissidents who were forced to leave the country. Uzbek women use the Internet at an almost equal rate as men.

In recent years, however, the Internet has been increasingly controlled and manipulated by the government, particularly in the wake of several attacks in Tashkent in 2004 that the government blamed on the Hizb-ut-Tahrir and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. During 2005, the number of Internet access centers in Uzbekistan dropped to 344 from 463. Information technology is available but off limits to the general population, and Internet services are not affordable for the majority of people. OpenNet reports that Uzbek law bans Internet filtering but that it is prevalent and on the rise. Until 2006, the government denied that it filtered the Internet, but it now uses sophisticated controls to do so.

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.

As a result, sites with political and human rights content that the government views as sensitive remain inaccessible to Internet users. Freedom House reports that many private citizens have a hard time obtaining independent, objective reporting about events inside Uzbekistan because of its control of domestic media coupled with Internet filtering. Web sites critical of Uzbekistan, such as Ferghana, Uznews, Centrasia, Lenta, and London-based IWPR, are constantly blocked. However, savvy Internet users in Uzbekistan have been able to employ “anonymizers,” paths to the Internet that mask details of a user’s identity such as location, to access government-blocked Web sites. But this is a constant struggle as the government attempts to block the proxy sites.

There are a few Web sites that are not completely controlled by the government. Mostly regional in scope, they provide an independent view of politics and life in Uzbekistan. For example, Registan.net, launched in 2003, covers Eurasian politics and news with original reporting. Coverage focuses on Central Asia and the Caucasus, primarily domestic politics and the region’s relations with the rest of the world. The Ferghana.Ru news agency, started in 1998, is, according to its Web site, “one of the most popular resources dealing with the life of Central Asian countries of the former USSR. With correspondents in every major city of the region, Ferghana. Ru news agency offers its clients the latest information.” NewEurasia.net connects bloggers from around Central Asia and the Caucasus. Its Web site reads, “By serving as a venue for unfiltered reporting, analysis and commentary, we help shed a light on this historically prominent and culturally diverse region whose vast economic potential and growing role in global politics are often underestimated these days.”

State-run media are seen as an efficient arm of the state propaganda machine, as they are heavily censored and reflect only the government view. Uzbek leaders receive disproportionately generous coverage, as there is no legal opposition inside the country. State media also lean strongly toward educational and cultural programming which, by its nature, is independent of political news and analysis.

Official independent news agencies do not exist within Uzbekistan. The three main news agencies through which the government controls the gathering and dissemination of most news are: Uzbekistan National News Agency (state-run), Jahon (run by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), and the Russian-language news agency Turkiston-Press. These news agencies tend to carry the same or similar articles with only slight variations.

There is a very narrow spectrum of social interests reflected and represented in the media. The government will not tolerate reporting on subjects that it deems controversial. According to Ferghana.ru, on July 31, 2007, the government

Uzbekistan is one of the most corrupt countries in the world according to Transparency International. Economic conditions within the country make it nearly impossible for media outlets to run efficiently or profitably.

closed the new weekly newspaper *Odamlar Orasida*, which began publication in February 2007 and quickly increased its print run to 24,000 copies per week. The closure was due to alleged violations of the media law, but the weekly newspaper covered religious issues and other off-limits topics, such as prostitution and homosexuality.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Uzbekistan Objective Score: 0.41

The assessment of the business and management environment facing media is nearly identical to last year. There was no significant change in indicator scores; all indicators scored as poorly as last year or worse.

Uzbekistan is one of the most corrupt countries in the world according to Transparency International. Economic conditions within the country make it nearly impossible for media outlets to run efficiently or profitably. The burdensome regulatory environment hinders dynamic entrepreneurial activity. There is little market research and any advertising market that does

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 government controls much of the country's printing and distribution infrastructure through the Uzbekistan Press and Information Agency, which carries out state policies in the field of publishing activity and the distribution of periodicals.

exist is tightly controlled by the government. The spectrum of revenue sources is severely limited. Most news outlets struggle to cover their operating costs.

Regional and local state media, as well as non-state media, attempt to secure funding or revenue from a variety of sources, including advertising, subscriptions, and limited government subsidies or grants. Personal announcements have been a major source of media revenue for several years. The amounts received from any one source are small and rarely enough in total to cover operations.

Although several advertising agencies operate in Uzbekistan, the advertising market is not well-defined and is still relatively weak, reflecting the overall economy. According to experts, advertising agencies also follow political preferences; there is government pressure against advertising in independent outlets. Also, ad agencies often reflect the interests of their owners and are not representative of the market as a whole.

The government has a broadcast advertising arm in the National Television and Radio Company of Uzbekistan. It directs the activity of television and radio channels, maintains their economic independence, makes them competitive in the market, and attracts investment from domestic and foreign enterprises. This, of course, is driven by propaganda concerns. Profit generation is a secondary consideration.

Media market research is still in the initial development stages and is not yet used to make management decisions at media outlets in Uzbekistan. Broadcast ratings and circulation figures are not readily available, nor are they reliable. However, the market research company SIAR-Uzbekistan is actively implementing a program that is national in scope.

In May 2007 the Tashkent Advertising Association opened bids on the first significant media research in Uzbekistan since 1998. SIAR was selected to conduct the research, which is focusing first on television audiences and will subsequently evaluate the audiences of radio, print media, and outdoor advertisements. The first 180 People Meters were installed and launched in Tashkent at the end of 2007. The project currently comprises 180 households. In 2009, it will include

three large cities in Uzbekistan with a total coverage of between 200,000 and 400,000 people and extend to 300 the total number of participating households. SIAR will transfer information about the ratings of television programs and the size of the audience to Media Sovet, the organization comprising leading media agencies in Uzbekistan.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Uzbekistan Objective Score: 0.38

Objective 5 received the lowest score this year, 0.38, down somewhat from last year's 0.54. All indicators received scores very close to the objective average score, indicating that the government continues to have complete control of the institutions that would normally support independent media.

All trade associations, professional associations, and NGOs that exist within the country are heavily influenced by the government. Outside Uzbekistan, numerous NGOs are constantly pushing for more media freedom. However, none of them are allowed to operate in the country itself and in-country voices for change are silenced out of fear.

There are a few associations claiming to offer public support to journalists and others working in the media. One is the National Association of Electronic Media, founded in 2004. Support comes in the form of grants and training, but these organizations are government sponsored and none advocate for the rights of independent media.

During the 2005 crackdown, almost all local and international NGOs supporting human rights and independent media were expelled from the country and are still unable to return. Many of the organizations continue their work from outside

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.

the country. Other than continuing to call attention to the lack of human rights and the absence of free speech within Uzbekistan, however, their efforts have not had a significant impact on current conditions. NGOs that are still working inside the country are operating in a climate of government harassment and pressure. The government has focused in particular on shuttering NGOs that provide free public Internet access because of the threat the Internet poses to the government hegemony on information.

There are very few training opportunities for journalists in Uzbekistan. The National Television and Radio Company of Uzbekistan offers some technical training. This takes the form of training in computer skills, media technologies, and modern requirements and standards, as well as training in necessary organizational conditions for effective retraining, improvement of professional skills, and increasing creative activity. Yet this is all state sponsored and is unavailable to any independent journalists. There are a few independent organizations outside Uzbekistan that offer training. The Open Society Institute, the US Department of State, and other organizations offer limited opportunities for the study of journalism outside Uzbekistan, but students and media professionals must apply for these competitive programs and go through a fairly rigorous selection process.

The government controls much of the country's printing and distribution infrastructure through the Uzbekistan Press and Information Agency, which carries out state policies in the field of publishing activity and the distribution of periodicals. It monitors compliance with the current legislation by publishing houses, mass media, television, broadcasting, and other parties involved in the information market.

The transmission and distribution systems for all broadcast media are state-controlled, while print media are distributed through private or joint stock companies via subscription or kiosks. Local ISPs are connected to the state-owned Internet operator Uzbektelecom, which gives the government more control over locally based Web sites.

List of Panel Participants

Due to the repressive environment in Uzbekistan, IREX did not convene a panel. This chapter represents research conducted on the situation and discussions with various professionals knowledgeable about the situation in Uzbekistan. The names of those contacted will not be published to protect their safety. This chapter, therefore, provides a summary of the state of media in Uzbekistan.