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UZBEKISTAN

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Despite continuous calls from Uzbekistan President Islam Karimov for journalists to be more courageous and critical and for government to pass media reforms, in practice the government works to stifle independent journalists. Uzbekistan has no media plurality, due to unceasing pressure on freedom of speech and expression and the escalation of restrictions since the tragic events in Andijan city in 2005, when the Uzbek government open fire and killed several hundred demonstrators. Media organizations in Uzbekistan are completely under governmental control, and subject to self-censorship in covering a broad range of topics deemed sensitive. A striking example of such selectivity is the Uzbek media's silence on the upheaval in spring of 2011 in the Arab world.

Uzbekistan banished official censorship in 2002, and today a set of legal documents, purportedly aimed at protecting media and the freedom of speech, guides the country's media. However, the laws contain articles that are used often against independent journalists.

For the past several years, international human rights watchdogs have criticized the Uzbek government severely for its tightening grip on independent journalists, activists, and opposition members. The year 2011 brought more official pressure on the media and the freedom of expression in the country. In one particularly critical blow in 2011, the government shut down the Tashkent office of Human Rights Watch (HRW), which had been the only remaining major international human rights group and supporter of freedom of speech in Uzbekistan.

In 2011, Jamshid Karimov, independent journalist and nephew of President Karimov, was discharged from the psychiatric facility where he was forced to stay for six years for criticizing his uncle's government. His release coincided with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's visit to Uzbekistan, and few hold much hope that this is a positive signal, as many political prisoners still remain in Uzbekistan. According to human rights organizations, at least 10 journalists are currently being held behind bars as a result of their professional work.

Prior to 2011, the Internet was the least-controlled media domain, enjoying a little more breathing room compared with print or broadcast media. However, the government took notice in 2011, and began exerting more control over websites, blocking dozens of online media. In January, Uzbek authorities arrested several users of www.arbuz.com, an online platform popular among educated youth; the government alleged that they conducted political, financial, and religious activities online. Social networks such as Facebook and Twitter are open, but they are not popular among Uzbek netizens. Even so, the government-supported Uzbektelecom launched an alternative Uzbek social network, muloqot.uz ("Dialogue"), in an apparent bid by the government to counter any influence of Facebook.

Note: Due to the repressive environment in Uzbekistan, IREX did not conduct an in-country panel. This chapter represents desk research conducted on the situation, interviews, and the results of questionnaires filled out by several people familiar with the state of media in the country.

UZBEKISTAN AT A GLANCE

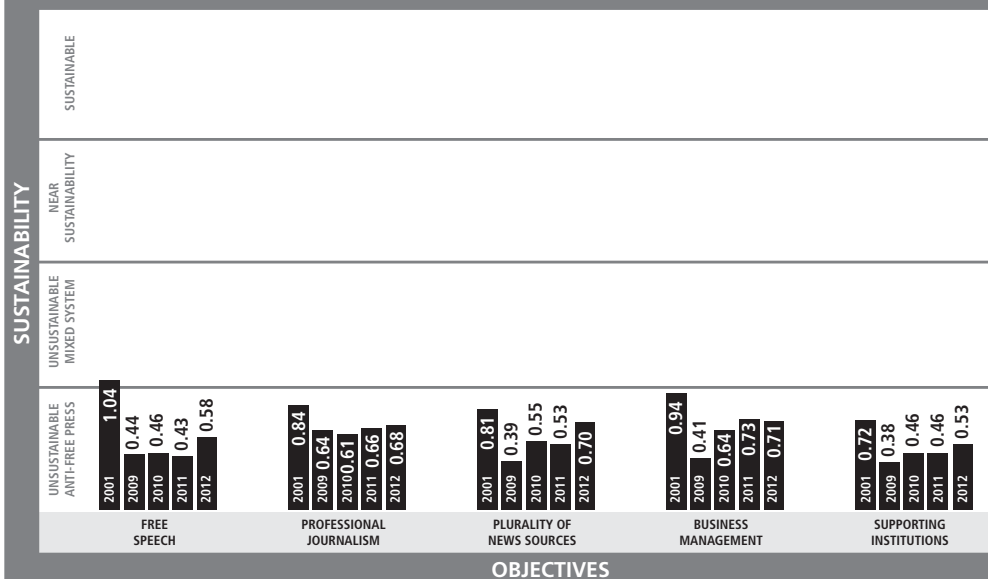
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 28,394,180 (July 2011 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 Sunnis), 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 (2010-Atlas):** \$36.09 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2011)
- > **GNI per capita (2009-PPP):** \$3,090 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **Literacy rate:** 99.3% (male 99.6%, female 99%) (2003 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Islom 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 Stations: 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), *Narodnye 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:** 4.689 million (2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: UZBEKISTAN



Scores for all years may be found online at http://www.irex.org/system/files/EE_msiscorers.xls

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: 0.58

On June 27, 2001, Media Workers' Day in Uzbekistan, President Karimov shared these words in a congratulatory letter to media professionals: "I want to reiterate: we absolutely do not accept the establishment of any walls, limitations in the information world, leading to isolation."

Even though the president's annual speeches addressed to media continue to tout freedom of speech and the importance of free media for the country, the on-the-ground reality remains quite opposite. As noted in previous MSI studies, legal and social protections of free speech exist in the abstract, but rarely are enforced in Uzbekistan's authoritarian political climate.

In the Constitution of Uzbekistan, Article 67 has enshrined the inadmissibility of censorship since 2002, guaranteeing equal access to information for all citizens. In addition, Uzbekistan's legislative framework contains a set of regulations (the Law on the Media, the Law on Protection of the Professional Activities of Journalists, and the Law on Principles and Guarantees of Freedom of Information) aimed at protecting the freedom of speech, media, and journalists. The third law, which replaced the Law on Guarantees and

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 or registration of media protects a public interest and is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- > Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- > Crimes against media professionals, citizen reporters, and media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- > The law protects the editorial independence of state of public media.
- > 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 available; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media, journalists, and citizens.
- > Media outlets' access to and use of local and international news and news sources is not restricted by law.
- > Entry into the journalism profession is free and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

On paper, the procedure is fairly straightforward and impartial, and the law does not impose serious restrictions on media registration or licensing. But in practice, only trusted people close to the inner circle of the government receive licenses; other applicants and opposition interests may find their applications denied unjustifiably.

Freedom of Access to Information, was adopted in the same year that censorship was banned.

However, these laws contain many loopholes that often lead to the imposition of significant restrictions on the freedom of information. Provisions with vague definitions and referential laws are twisted into tools to impede free speech and access to information. As a result, these laws are never enforced with the intent to protect media and journalists in Uzbekistan, but rather create practical grounds for the authorities to exert rigid control over the editorial policies of mass media and to censor any information interpreted as critical of the regime.

The Law on Principles and Guarantees of Freedom of Information is tricky. Along with articles that guarantee the freedom of information, this law introduces the concept of "security of person, society, and state," which is used widely in legal cases against independent journalists. The law's Article 14, "Information Security of the Society," uses blurry phrasing to address the potential for information to influence or manipulate the public consciousness, and create an opposition system that could damage national self-identity, detach society from its historical and national traditions and customs, destabilize the social and political situation, or lead to discord between ethnic or religious groups.

Furthermore, Article 15, "Informational Security of the State," speaks against "threats to security in the information sphere." Legal scholars describe this section of the law as a legacy of the Soviet era, reminiscent of the Cold War legal system and the struggle against unknown forces abroad. Moreover, both Article 14 and Article 15 contain unclear terms and phrases that are not explained in any supporting legislation.

When Oliy Majlis (the Uzbekistan parliament) passed the Law on Principles and Guarantees of Freedom of Information in 2002, international media and human rights watchdogs reacted critically, viewing it as the Uzbek government's expression of will to keep tight control on the media.

However, an Uzbek social network, muloqot.uz (“dialogue”) was launched with support from Uzbektelecom. Some experts speculate that the government launched the network to counter any influence of Facebook.

As noted in last year’s MSI, Karimov, who exercises total control over the government despite constitutional division of powers, has ruled the ostensibly democratic Uzbekistan country since the fall of the Soviet Union by continuously ignoring or revising the constitutional limits on presidential terms. On paper, private as well as state media are editorially independent, but in practice, all media in the country—especially the government media—are subject to editorial influence and direct regulation by the administration. As a result, Uzbek media are viewed as government propaganda tools. Any media or independent journalists that dare to speak out against the government are taken to court, usually for slander or for threatening the regime and public order.

Over the past few years, the government has also used the pretense of combating Islamic extremism to crack down on any opposition and repress freedom of speech. Karimov’s speeches, official publications, and the website www.press.uz.info (widely believed to be under the control of the president’s Security Council) all mention Islamic extremism and international terrorism periodically, and the Interior Ministry keeps close watch over human rights defenders. However, the pretense of combating Islamic terrorism is not openly used to crack down on media specifically, with the exception of justifying the events in Andijan in May 2005.

Although human rights activists abroad demonstrated in response to violations of rights in Uzbekistan, the country is too closed to permit any outward signs of dissent within its borders.

The Law on Mass Media sets terms for the compulsory procedure to register and license all media in Uzbekistan. On paper, the procedure is fairly straightforward and impartial, and the law does not impose serious restrictions on media registration or licensing. But in practice, only trusted people close to the inner circle of the government receive licenses; other applicants and opposition interests may find their applications denied unjustifiably. The State Inspection of Communication, the agency in charge of mail and telecommunications systems, manages licensing of broadcast media. The Uzbekistan Agency for Press and Information is tasked with registering other media entities,

including advertising agencies. Occasionally, during sensitive political events such as presidential elections, the government imposes unofficial bans on registration of new broadcast and print media.

The respondents to the MSI survey were unaware of any media that had attempted and failed to secure licenses in 2011; apparently, no media outlets were denied registration of media on political or ideological grounds. Applications are rejected, ostensibly at least, for failures in preparing the registration documents.

From an economic standpoint, mass media in Uzbekistan face no major barriers to competing in the media market. Once a print or broadcast outlet launches, it has every opportunity to access media consumers. However, political motives severely limit their chances to enter the market in the first place.

In December 2011, Karimov signed a decree extending additional tax benefits and preferences to the media. The changes took effect on January 1, 2012, and exempt media services from VAT and lift limits on staff members from 50 to 100 for small editorial, publishing, and printing enterprises. Purportedly, the decree is aimed at developing the country’s media; however, independent experts have said that without political will, the decree will not have much effect on freedom of speech or pluralism.

International human rights organizations report that in Uzbekistan, at least 10 journalists sit in prison for their professional work. Although outright crimes against media and journalists in Uzbekistan are rare, journalists are under strict control and severe pressure, which serve as deterrents from publishing critical materials or materials that diverge from the official stance.

This year saw several pivotal moments concerning freedom of speech and expression in Uzbekistan. In March 2011, a decision of the Supreme Court of Uzbekistan closed the Tashkent office of HRW. Uzbek authorities failed to provide any information about the alleged grounds for its decision. Kenneth Roth, HRW executive director, expressed the belief that “with the expulsion of Human Rights Watch, the Uzbek government sends a clear message that it isn’t willing to tolerate critical scrutiny of its human rights records.”¹ HRW had been operating in Uzbekistan since 1996, continuously reporting about the violation of human rights, and particularly the routine clampdowns on freedom of speech and expression. The organization was among the first to call

¹“Uzbekistan: Government Shuts Down Human Rights Watch Office.” Human Rights Watch website, March 16, 2011. Available at: <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/03/15/uzbekistan-government-shuts-down-human-rights-watch-office> (Accessed March 2, 2012.)

for an independent investigation of the events in Andijan in 2005.

Last year's MSI highlighted the cases of Saodat Omonova and Malohat Eshankulova to illustrate that some journalists still dare to speak out publicly against censorship and corruption in the mass media of Uzbekistan. In December 2010, Omonova and Eshankulova, journalists from public television station Yoshlar, demonstrated against corruption and censorship at a square in the center of Tashkent. Three days later, they were dismissed from work. The journalists filed a case against the management of public television for what they said is an unlawful dismissal. On May 31, 2011, a district court for civil cases made a decision in favor of the public television station, upholding the dismissal of the two journalists as legal.

Nevertheless, Omonova and Eshankulova continued their struggle. As Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) reported, from May to July of 2011, the two journalists sent more than 50 letters to Karimov, detailing examples of censorship at Yoshlar and requesting a meeting with him. Karimov's administration did not respond. On June 27, Media Workers' Day in Uzbekistan, Omonova and Eshankulova tried to launch a hunger strike in front of president's palace in Tashkent. The police quickly detained them and arraigned them in district court, which fined them UZS 2.94 million (approx. \$1,600) for holding an unauthorized protest.

The two journalists then took their hunger strike home, actively using a Twitter account to inform the public about the progress of their protest. The Uzbek authorities remained silent on the journalists' appeal, and the journalists stopped their hunger strike after 19 days due to health problems.

In August, independent journalist Yelena Bondar, upon her return from a journalism training at the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, was detained in the Tashkent airport and interrogated for several hours. Bondar was accused of breaching customs regulations for not declaring CDs and flash drives in the customs office. She was released with instructions to not leave the country. International media and human rights watchdogs criticized the Uzbek government for pressuring Bondar, and soon enough, interrogators returned Bondar's electronic media devices, stating they "did not find any illegal information," but gave her a verbal warning.

Jamshid Karimov, President Karimov's nephew and an independent journalist and a member of Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan, had been hospitalized at a psychiatric facility after publishing articles criticizing the actions of the government. Although his release from forced treatment raised hopes briefly that the Uzbek government's policy toward freedom of speech and human rights might ease,

other media observers were skeptical and said that they viewed the release as a political gesture timed to coincide with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's visit to Uzbekistan in October 2011.

As noted in last year's MSI, Uzbek authorities often use the criminal code's Article 139, on libel, in cases against independent journalists that report on forbidden social issues or criticize the government. The 2010 case of Abdumalik Boboyev, a stringer for the US-funded Voice of America, clearly illustrates the Uzbek government's efforts to keep tight control on independent journalists. Charged with defaming and insulting the Uzbek people and threatening public order (a charge used widely against independent journalists), the court found Boboyev guilty and fined him \$10,000.

Even though his politicized trial wrapped up in 2010, the government continued to pressure Boboyev in 2011. In March, Boboyev won a scholarship from the Hamburg Foundation for the Politically Persecuted, and was set to travel to Germany for a year-long program, but the Uzbek government barred him from traveling abroad, refusing him an exit visa. After an outcry from international organizations, such as HRW and the Committee to Protect Journalists, the Uzbek government caved finally and granted Boboyev the visa in May 2011. Uzbekistan is the only government among the former Soviet states to require exit visas for its citizens.

The government controls access to state information, as well. In rare cases, with requests involving less risky stories that are not overly political or critical of the government, lower or mid-level officials can communicate with the media without prior approval from supervisors. However, generally officials prefer to shift the burden of responsibility to higher authorities when asked to release information to the media. Typically, journalists need to provide questions in written form, on official letterhead from their editorial office, and in most cases, replies are sent in writing.

As noted in earlier MSI studies, the Internet is the least-controlled media format in Uzbekistan. Nevertheless, as the Law on Mass Media indicates clearly, all mass media websites, Internet websites in the .uz zone, or websites of organizations registered in Uzbekistan are still subject to tight governmental control. The Uzbek government goes to complex lengths to patrol online information, and blocks websites of independent mass media organizations providing what it considers "undesirable information." The Centre for Monitoring Mass Communications (CMMC) is responsible for monitoring the content of Internet websites. It reports its findings to the Communications and Information Agency of Uzbekistan (UzACI), which is authorized to block the IP addresses of sites or articles. The government has blocked

Ferghana News Agency (www.ferghana.ru), the Uzbek service of RFE/RL (www.ozodlik.org), the BBC's Uzbek service (bbc.co.uk/uzbek), and www.uznews.net. Websites such as www.centasia.ru and www.ca-news.org are blocked partially. Articles containing critical information about Uzbek authorities are inaccessible from within Uzbekistan. The blog platform wordpress.com is also not available for Internet users in the country.

Social networks such as Facebook and Twitter are open, but have not gained popularity. Last year's MSI reported that Facebook has been blocked temporarily on occasion, but in 2011 the Uzbek authorities did not block social networks. However, an Uzbek social network, muloqot.uz ("dialogue") was launched with support from Uzbektelecom. Some experts speculate that the government launched the network to counter any influence of Facebook.

Websites registered in Uzbekistan tend to self-censor in order to avoid possible pressure from state agencies. One exception was arbuz.com, which had been the only online platform for many intelligent Uzbek youth to discuss sensitive topics such as politics and religion. The Uzbek service of RFE/RL reported that in January 2011, several arbuz.com users were arrested in Tashkent, allegedly on charges that they conducted political, financial, and religious activities online. Following these arrests, in February, site administrators announced the closure of three threads: "Uzbekistan: Problems and Solutions," "Religion," and "Tragic Events in Kyrgyzstan." In December 2011, its administration totally shut down arbuz.com.

On March 5, 2011, the Uzbek authorities officially banned Internet providers in Uzbekistan from connecting to the Internet via satellite technology, thus leaving only one option: accessing the Internet through the government-controlled Uzbektelecom, which now holds a firm monopoly.

On August 5, 2011, the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan adopted a resolution, "On additional measures to improve monitoring systems in the field of mass communications."² The document mandates creation of an expert committee that will work on implementing "effective monitoring and improvement of the formation and dissemination of information by the media, and information security of individuals, society, and state." The expert committee is responsible for monitoring all mass media, including satellite systems and the Internet, and it will report any violations to government agencies for further action.

Five days after the resolution was adopted, on August 10, dozens of websites in the .ru domain zone (including the websites of Russian newspapers like *Pravda*, *Izvestiya*,

² http://lex.uz/Pages/GetAct.aspx?lact_id=1847332&search_text=i (in Russian)

Kommersant, and *Parlamentskaya gazeta*) became inaccessible for Uzbek netizens. Most of the blocked Russian websites became accessible again within several days. Due to continuous control over the Internet and attempts to block critical information online, Uzbekistan regularly appears in the annual report, "Enemies of Internet," by Reporters Without Borders.

Regarding entry into the journalism profession, Uzbek journalists must obtain one-time accreditation to cover plenary sessions of the Senate (the upper house of Oliy Majlis). Long-term accreditation is required to cover the plenary sessions of the Oliy Majlis legislative chamber. Generally, to enter parliamentary buildings (as well as most executive and judicial buildings), authorities require a pass, which only government-friendly journalists tend to obtain.

One-time accreditation is required also for any event involving the president, prime minister, or officials with the rank of minister or deputy minister. Journalists must also obtain accreditation (one-time or continuous) to cover the activities of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the National Security service, the Ministry of Defense, or the Ministry of Emergency Situations.

The trend in recent years is that journalists need accreditation for more and more events—even, for example, the opening of international exhibitions or engineering presentations—perhaps because officials such as deputy prime ministers are involved in such ceremonies.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Uzbekistan Objective Score: 0.68

Most often, Uzbekistan's media report from the standpoint of official Tashkent. Heightened over the last year, control and pressure have almost completely deprived the media of any independence in assessing the truth behind events or choosing topics to cover. Information presented by print media, news websites, radio stations, and television stations closely resembles official government reports.

One of the most striking examples of poor professionalism in the past year was a controversy surrounding a Tajik aluminum plant and the construction of the Rogun hydropower plant. Coverage presented only one perspective—that of the Uzbek government—although the issue cried out for another side to be heard.

The National Association of Electronic Mass Media (NAESMI) has its own code of ethics, which basically echoes international professional standards. However, no one is

tasked with the practical implementation of the code. The respondents to the MSI questionnaire were unaware of a similar code of ethics for print media.

Corruption is a common ethical violation. In most cases, editorial offices and individual journalists accept gifts freely from various parties in exchange for favorable coverage. Often, journalists—particularly from the main state television channel “Uzbekistan”—accept bribes to report the work of an organization or business in a positive light.

Another frequent ethical violation is plagiarism. Although generally bloggers respect intellectual property rights, the same cannot be said about many journalists (both in public and private media).

By necessity, self-censorship is deeply ingrained in absolutely all media in Uzbekistan. Prior to 2011, online media enjoyed less pressure to self-censor than print or broadcast media. However, as the government is exerting more control over websites, online media are suddenly worrying about keeping their licenses, and now are subject to self-censorship on almost the same level as other media. The magazine *Economic Review*, published by the UNDP in Uzbekistan, is still considered the least self-censoring outlet in Uzbekistan.

Many topics, such as mass protests and conflicts, are strongly taboo in Uzbek media. A ban on reporting clashes between the government and the people extends to events in other countries as well. For example, the media almost totally neglected to cover the 2011 uprisings in the Arab world.

Critical information about high-ranking government officials and their families is another sensitive area for

However, as the government is exerting more control over websites, online media are suddenly worrying about keeping their licenses, and now are subject to self-censorship on almost the same level as other media.

media. The president and his family members are always portrayed positively. All Uzbek media were silent when Lola Karimova-Tillayeva, the president’s daughter, lost a libel case against the French newspaper *Rue89* after it described her as the “daughter of a dictator.” Similarly, Uzbek media did not cover the fact that pressure from human rights organizations and the Western media forced organizers of New York’s Fashion Week to drop the fashion show of Gulnara Karimova, the president’s eldest daughter.

Despite legislative assurances that information on environmental conditions or emergency situations should be openly accessible, state agencies hide such information from the media and the public. For example, in July 2011, after a devastating earthquake in the Ferghana region, the Uzbek government temporarily blocked the site of the U.S. Geological Survey (<http://earthquake.usgs.gov/>), which provides timely information about earthquakes around the world.

While the list of topics to avoid is extensive, and self-censorship is widespread, the MSI survey respondents were not aware of any journalists losing their jobs in 2011 for failing to uphold the unofficial list.

Journalist wages are so low that most journalists feel compelled to work on several editorial boards at the same time, and accept gifts from individuals and organizations interested in buying coverage. Only journalists from *Economic Review* and the parliamentary weekly *Narodnoe Slovo/Khalk Suzi* earn relatively high wages.

Despite the fairly clear delineation between news reporting and entertainment media, the popularity of the latter is growing each year. Over the course of 2011, no new major news-oriented media emerged, while the number television stations and private tabloids focused on lightweight publications and broadcasts increased.

Only a few media organizations are equipped with modern facilities. Most print, online, and broadcast media use out-of-date or obsolete equipment. Private broadcast media, under the umbrella of NAESMI, regularly receive modern equipment, but this in turn makes them indebted

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 and retain qualified personnel within the media profession.
- > 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 exist (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

to NAESMI, and pressures them to adhere to its absolutely pro-government orientation.

A few specialized publications exist in Uzbekistan, and most of them are fairly low quality. The genre of investigative journalism simply does not exist in the country. The other specialized publications are sector-specific publications and are produced by relevant ministries and enterprises. They include magazines such as *Krilya Rodiny (Wings of Motherland)*, dedicated to the civil aviation industries. There are magazines dedicated to the mining and oil and gas industries, as well.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Uzbekistan Objective Score: 0.70

Uzbekistan might boast a large number of private (non-governmental) mass media, but plurality of information does not exist, as all media express a single point of view—that of the president. Publications are expected to avoid reporting negatively on Uzbekistan's economy; only *Economic Review* provides information that veers from the official government standpoint. Its independence is due largely to the fact that it consults experts that are exposed to little or no state influence. And because *Economic Review* is under the protection of the UN umbrella, it gets away with a little more. For example, it announced that Uzbekistan's economy loses \$2.115 billion a year because of the low efficiency of

MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE, OBJECTIVE NEWS.

PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

- > Plurality of public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet, mobile) exist and offer multiple viewpoints.
- > Citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted by law, economics, or other means.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for media outlets.
- > Private media produce their own news.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge the 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
- > The media provide news coverage and information about local, national, and international issues.

heating systems and the low energy efficiency of buildings. However, *Economic Review's* audience is relatively confined to a small group knowledgeable on economic issues.

Online media in Uzbekistan are also very cautious about publishing critical information. However, unlike print media, some Internet news websites have online multimedia resources available to diversify their content, which makes them more interesting to readers.

The number of Internet users is rising in Uzbekistan. According to UzACI, the number of Internet users in Uzbekistan was 7.9 million as of October 2011. The most popular websites are mostly entertainment-oriented (uz-kino.uz, mytube.uz, torg.uz, lyrics.uz). The most visited news websites are olam.uz, gazeta.uz, afisha.uz, and mtrk.uz, and all of them are subject to self-censorship. Most Uzbek netizens use online social networks, but not for purposes of information consuming. The most popular social networks are odnoklassniki.ru ("classmates") and Moy Mir ("my world"), which are focused mostly on entertainment features.

Uzbek law officially grants access to any media, local or foreign. However, a large number of foreign media are unofficially banned. In addition, many international and foreign newspapers and magazines are not imported largely due to their high prices in-country. Examples of publications that are available and popular in other Central Asian countries but cannot be found in Uzbekistan include the print editions of Russian newspapers *Kommersant* (especially *Kommersand Dengi*) and *Merchant Vlast, Izvestiya*, and *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*. This is not simply due to the government; some Uzbeks consider such material "too serious" and many are more interested in entertainment media than analytical and news material. Foreign websites that offer critical information about the Uzbek authorities are blocked in-country.

Similarly, the government bans re-transmission of several foreign television channels, mostly Russian. Only the owners of satellite dishes (which are fairly inexpensive and common) can bypass this censorship. For example, Ren TV, TVC, STS, and TNT are available to owners of satellite dishes. However, the resolution "On additional measures to improve monitoring systems in the field of mass communications," adopted in August 2011, empowers the government to control satellite systems, thus satellite dish owners can be forced to take down their equipment.

In November 2011, the National TV and Radio Company of Uzbekistan (NTRC) and the UzACI announced the launch of the first terrestrial television channel in HD format. As reported, the high-definition channel Uz.HD started operating in Tashkent, but its range will widen in the

coming years. NTRC representatives stated that the channel will broadcast 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and include programs based on audience needs. The representatives said it will air mainly educational and entertainment programs prepared by Uzbek television channels, both private and government-owned.

In most cases, public and private media reflect only certain aspects of social and political life of the country, and only from the stance of the government. Public media, as such, do not exist in Uzbekistan. State media air only one educational program, *Zakovat*, which is considered fairly decent in quality—but there are not many programs like this.

Uzbekistan has only one formal independent news agency, Turkistan Press. It focuses mainly on economic issues, and its principal customers are foreign embassies in Tashkent, representatives of international organizations and foreign companies, and a few foreign media. Uzbek media outlets are not Turkistan Press clients, due partly to the high cost of its information products and partly to the lack of interest in such information.

Private media rely almost entirely on information provided by the public media and the press services of state agencies. The one exception is entertainment news: some non-state media (e.g., *gazeta.uz*, *uzdaily.uz*, *podrobno.uz*) provide readers with such news produced in-house, but even these examples are rare.

As media serve exclusively all interests of the executive branch, consumers are not aware of who owns the media in most cases. Public perception is that all media, except for entertainment, are state-owned.

In Uzbekistan, some newspapers publish in the languages of national minorities. For example, newspapers are available in Tajik (*Ovozi Tojik*), Kazakh (*Nurly Jol*), Karakalpak, and Tatar, in addition to Russian media, which are widely available. A Korean newspaper, previously published by the Korean Cultural Center, is now out of print due to financial difficulties. All minority media, however, are subject to governmental control. General news media cover national minorities' stories on a case-by-case basis.

Similarly, the media's approach to foreign and domestic events is highly selective. Newspapers, television and radio channels, and online media cover only events that show the government and the president in a favorable light. Information is often distorted, and negative events are not covered at all. Citizens are able to obtain foreign reports on national and international developments as well as local and regional news, but not news of a critical nature. Generally, international news accessible to Uzbek citizens is screened

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to correspond to the foreign and internal policies of the government.

The media sometimes cover news related to religion—mostly religious extremism and terrorism. Typically, the only social topics covered are minor issues that do not affect high-ranking officials.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Uzbekistan Objective Score: 0.71

Quite often, mass media organizations in Uzbekistan are managed poorly, largely due to the low wages paid. As media enterprises are rarely sustainable in Uzbekistan, most media depend completely on subsidies from either the government or private owners. This, in turn, renders media editorially dependent on the interests of their sponsors.

MEDIA ARE WELL-MANAGED ENTERPRISES, ALLOWING EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

- > Media outlets operate as efficient and self-sustaining enterprises.
- > 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.
- > Government subsidies and advertising are distributed fairly, governed by law, and neither subvert editorial independence nor distort the market.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor the product to the needs and interests of the audience.
- > Broadcast ratings, circulation figures, and Internet statistics are reliably and independently produced.