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UZBEKISTAN

Despite the government's alleged attempts to reform the media sector, there is little evidence of improvement in the freedom of speech in Uzbekistan over the past year. Given the repressive political environment, the mass media is heavily self-censored and there are many taboo subjects journalists dare not cover. The government continues to block access to Internet websites and blogs that offer opinions contrary to those held by official Tashkent. Independent-minded journalists are still harassed and arrested.

President Islam Karimov, who has continuously ignored or revised limits on presidential terms and has been de-facto ruling the country since 1989, exercises total control on mass media, both state and independent. Uzbekistan was one of the last countries of the former Soviet bloc to ban censorship, doing so in 2002. However, a revised media law introduced in 2007, two years after bloody events in the eastern city Andijan, assigns a higher level of responsibility to media outlets to ensure the "objectivity" of the content produced, which has led to editorial self-censorship. Today, despite the government's populist calls for openness, media outlets still refrain from publishing information that is critical of any political, social, or economic policies of the state.

President Karimov and his family are considered a taboo subject. In 2013, while international media actively discussed dissent within that family—which was constantly leaked by the president's eldest daughter, Gulnara Karimova, through social networks—no media in Uzbekistan covered the subject. Neither did Uzbek media discuss the liquidation of several television channels reportedly under her control, nor the closure of the most circulated newspaper, *Darakchi*, which belonged to her closest ally.

Independent journalists critical of the government's policies are subject to persecution by police and the National Security Service (NSS). In July 2013, journalist Vladimir Ahunov was interrogated by NSS and fired from *Ferganskaya Pravda* for covering a dispute over property between the Artists Union and an entrepreneur. In September 2013, independent journalist Sergey Naumov was sentenced to 12 days of administrative arrest for covering forced labor at state cotton plantations. At least four journalists were in prison in 2013, including Muhammad Bekjanov and Yusuf Ruzimuradov, both reporters of opposition newspaper *Erk*, which is no longer published. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, since being jailed in 1999, the two have been imprisoned longer than any other reporters in the world.

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

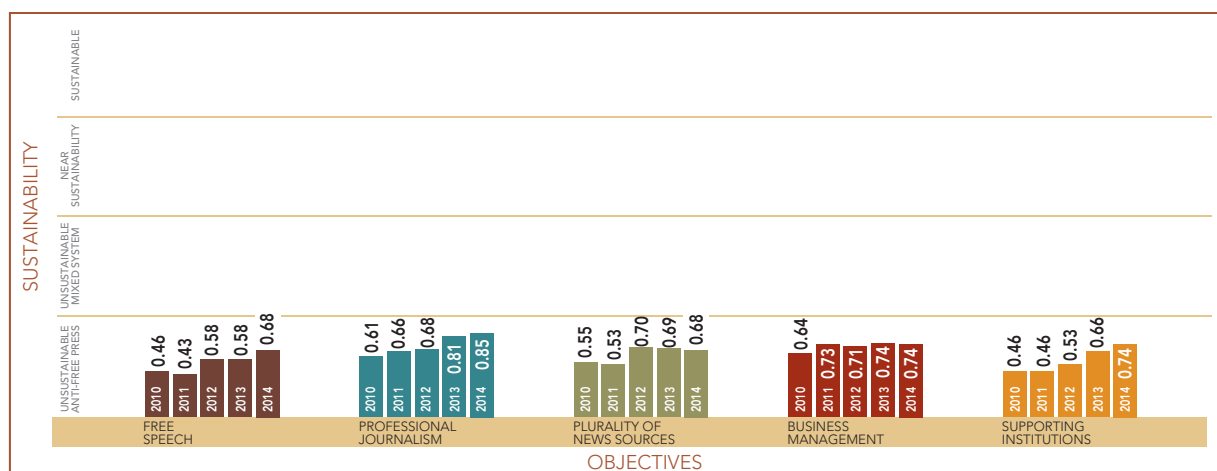
GENERAL

- > Population: 28,929,716 (July 2014 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: Uzbek (official) 74.3%, Russian 14.2%, Tajik 4.4%, other 7.1% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > GNI (2012-Atlas): \$51.16 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2013)
- > GNI per capita (2012-PPP): \$3,670 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2013)
- > Literacy rate: 99.4%; male 99.6%, female 99.2% (2011 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, and Internet portals: Print media: 1,015; Radio Stations: 35; Television Stations: 63; Internet: 300 websites registered as media (Uzbek government)
- > Newspaper circulation statistics: Total newspaper readership is estimated at 500,000; top publications include *Khalk Sozi* (state-run daily, reached 130,000 circulation in 2013), *Narodnye Slovo* (state-run, Russian-language version of *Khalk Sozi*), *O'zbekiston 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, Uzbekistan Today
- > Annual advertising revenue in media sector: N/A
- > Internet usage: 4.689 million (2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: UZBEKISTAN



MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2014: OVERALL AVERAGE SCORES



CHANGE SINCE 2013

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

Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1): Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2): Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

Near Sustainability (2-3): Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media. Advances have survived changes in government and have been codified in law and practice. However, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism and the media business environment are sustainable.

Sustainable (3-4): Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives. Systems supporting independent media have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.

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

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Uzbekistan Objective Score: 0.68

The year 2013 did not bring significant changes in the legal framework governing media or ensuring its freedom. There is a solid legal framework that guarantees the freedom of speech and other rights of the media in Uzbekistan, but it is almost never enforced. In fact, rather than applying the laws, instead the most serious obstacles for free speech come from government officials and agencies.

According to a March 20, 2013 decree by President Islam Karimov, the government started testing the draft law “On the openness of public authorities and governance” in Bukhara and Samarkand regions. The bill, according to Article 1 of the document, is aimed at “ensuring broad access for businesses and individuals to information about the activities of public authorities and governance; broadening of forms of realization of the constitutional right of citizens to information; designation of procedures for informing the public about the activities of public authorities and governance; increasing the responsibility of state bodies and governance for their decisions.”

However, the articles of the draft law, highly praised by the president and government media, mostly duplicate provisions of the existing laws regulating the release of information. These include: “On mass media,” “On

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 December 11, the government suspended for an unknown period of time the licenses of the country’s best selling tabloid *Darakchi* (circulating 40,000 copies in Russian and 120,000 copies in Uzbek) and a smaller newspaper targeting women, *Sogdiana*.

protection of journalists’ professional activities,” “On the principles and guarantees of freedom of information” and “On citizens’ appeals.” So far, therefore, the experiment has not produced any significant results.

Government violations of media laws are often justified with references to vaguely defined provisions and decrees, which can be interpreted conveniently to obstruct free speech and access to information.

All media establishments are required to register with the Uzbekistan Press and Information Agency (UPIA), which falls under the jurisdiction of the Cabinet of Ministers. Online versions of newspapers also fall within the law’s scope and as such are subject to registration if their content differs from their printed publication.

The procedure for obtaining a license is set by the Cabinet of Ministers’ decree “On Further Development of the Procedure for State Registration of the Mass Media” and a number of other departmental documents, some of which are not available for public access.

In addition to a number of documents required to register a media outlet, the founder must also provide information on the proposed editor-in-chief. The panel deciding whether to grant the license includes several officials from UPIA and may arbitrarily approve or reject the candidacy of an editor-in-chief. If the candidate is rejected, the media may possibly not get a license. According to independent journalists working in Uzbekistan, candidates for editor-in-chief usually are vetted by the state security services.

As noted in previous MSI studies, the Internet remains the least-controlled media format in Uzbekistan. Nonetheless, as the Law on Mass Media clearly indicates, all Internet websites with the .uz domain, or websites of organizations registered in Uzbekistan, are all still subject to tight government regulations.

Termination of licenses remains a serious threat to media, forcing them to be extremely cautious in publishing

news and presenting analysis. Currently, the only way for revocation of a media license is by a court's decision. Nevertheless, given the dependence of courts on the government, UPIA still plays a significant role in terminating the media license.

In 2012, the media in general—print media in particular—received fairly significant tax benefits. As a result, distributors of media products such as books are exempt from VAT and social taxes. For small media firms, publishing and printing have been reduced by 1 percent. Social and political news media, as well as literature for children and persons with disabilities, are exempt from income taxes for five years. In addition, starting in November of 2012, the government halved the registration fee for all media outlets. However, despite tax privileges, a lack of economic barriers to entering the market, and the simplification of the registration process, the procedure for obtaining a media license remains murky and officials can arbitrarily refuse to register virtually any media outlet they choose.

Despite the alleged attempts of the government to diversify the media landscape, numerous media institutions were closed in 2013. As an example of how the government can close media outlets capriciously, the closures included several newspapers and television channels allegedly controlled by the president's eldest daughter, Gulnara Karimova, and her partners. On October 21, popular television channels Forum TV and TV Markaz went off air. The former was engaged mainly in promoting the Forum for Culture and Arts of Uzbekistan, a charity run by Karimova. The latter was solely a commercial enterprise—an entertainment station broadcasting popular films, youth programs, and music by Uzbek pop stars.

On the same day, two other television channels, NTT and SOFTS, were also taken off air. NTT mainly broadcast the shows produced by other non-government television channels that are members of the National Association of Electronic Mass Media (NAESMI), which is headed by Firdavs Abduhalikov, a known public relations and media advisor to Karimova.

Within a short period of time following these closures, several regional television channels—Samarkand TV, owned by Anduhalikov, and five others that were NAESMI members (Margilon TV, Mulokot TV in Kokand, Qarshi TV, Istiklol TV in Bukhara, and Tortkol TV—were also closed.

Later, in November and December, The state-run National Television and Radio Company of Uzbekistan started piloting four new television channels that air mostly entertainment shows. The move is seen as an attempt to replace the closed channels.

Along with the television channels, three radio stations, Terra, Zamin, and Alo FM, all owned by Terra Group, were

closed in late October. Terra Group is reported to have close ties with Karimova.

On December 11, the government suspended for an unknown period of time the licenses of the country's best selling tabloid *Darakchi* (circulating 40,000 copies in Russian and 120,000 copies in Uzbek) and a smaller newspaper targeting women, *Sogdiana*. Both newspapers were published by Darakchi Matbuot Uyi, which belongs to Abduhalikov. *Darakchi's* website also went offline. Reportedly, the government is investigating Darakchi Matbuot Uyi for financial abuses.

Darakchi mainly reprinted articles from Russian tabloids, covered Uzbek pop-culture, and published celebrity gossip. In the news section it republished reports by UzA, the state news agency. It also promoted the work of Karimova's Forum of Culture and Arts of Uzbekistan and other organizations affiliated with Abduhalikov and Karimova.

Amid the ongoing internal conflict in President Islam Karimov's family, which went public due to Gulnara Karimova's, and her younger sister Lola Karimova-Tillayeva's, interviews with international media, closing down media under the control of the president's eldest daughter and her partners is seen as a political move to decrease her influence. According to Gulnara Karimova, this campaign is run by NSS and her father is not aware of it.

On November 8, a Tashkent court decided to revoke the license of the non-government weekly newspaper *Novosti Uzbekistana (News of Uzbekistan)* for "promoting terrorism." In one of its last issues the newspaper published, mistakenly, it claimed, an old article from 2011 about a meeting of local activists in the Andijan region. The article included a photo of Andijan city administration building taken during the bloody events of May 2005, when forces of the Karimov government shot dead hundreds of demonstrators.

In the past, the newspaper experienced problems with the authorities because of articles deemed critical of the government and individual officials. In 2012, the newspaper was found guilty by the Tashkent Commercial Court for "damaging the image" of the Ecological Movement of Uzbekistan (EMU) political party, which holds 15 seats in the national parliament. The newspaper questioned the movement's professionalism in tackling ecological problems. The court ordered *Novosti Uzbekistana* to pay EMU's legal fees and publish a retraction.

In 2013, at least two popular websites, Olam.uz and Mezon.uz, were closed by the authorities. One of the top visited news websites in Uzbekistan, Olam.uz, has been working actively with its audiences by crowd-sourcing and working interactively to engage readers. They often criticized Tashkent

municipal services. Their project “Interactive Power” allowed readers to ask questions to certain government institutions. According to Radio Ozodlik, the Uzbek service of RFE/RL, the website may have been closed as the authorities opened criminal cases against its publishers.

Mezon.uz, launched in 2012 allegedly with UN grant funds, became quite popular in a short period of time as it often covered vital social problems. Motives behind closing the website are still unknown. According to independent reports, the website is being investigated by tax authorities.

2013 was not marked by crimes against journalists in Uzbekistan. However, the state itself pressures journalists and forces them to remain silent. In July, journalist Vladimir Ahunov was fired from the newspaper *Ferganskaya Pravda* for covering a dispute over property between the Artists Union and an entrepreneur. Ahunov investigated the illegal appropriation of the building built by the Artists Union. After the article was published, the journalist was interrogated by an NSS officer, who ordered him to stop the investigation.

On September 21, independent journalist Sergey Naumov was detained by police in Urgench, in Khorezm region. The journalist was accused of hooliganism, and on the same day was sentenced to 12 days of administrative detainment. Naumov reported on the use of forced labor of adults and minors at state cotton plantations.

Libel and insult are not decriminalized in Uzbekistan, and existing criminal responsibility for these acts still remains a potential threat to journalists. The Criminal Code’s article 139 on libel is often used by the Uzbek authorities against independent journalists who report on taboo social issues or criticize the government. In past few years, several journalists were charged with libel and slander: Vladimir Berezovsky from Russia’s *Parliamentskaya Gazeta*, Abdumalik Boboyev, stringer for Voice of America, photojournalist Umida Akhmedova, and freelance journalists Yelena Bondar and Viktor Krymzalov. Later, Boboyev and Bondar, like many of their colleagues, rights activists, and opposition members before them, had to leave Uzbekistan due to the persecution by the authorities.

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) again included Uzbekistan in the list of top 10 worst jailers of journalists in the world. At least four journalists were in Uzbek prisons in 2013, including Muhammad Bekjanov and Yusuf Ruzimuradov, whose plight was described above.

Media outlets are not free to republish or broadcast information from other news sources if that information is deemed critical of the government. For instance, an August 2013 shoot-out in front of opposition leader Muhammad

Editors are responsible for produced content and, therefore, they often restrict the ability of journalists to report openly. Restrictions are very rigid in state media organizations, especially television, since their audience is very big.

Salih’s house in Istanbul, Turkey, was reported only by international mass media banned in Uzbekistan.

Regarding entry into the journalism profession, Uzbek journalists must obtain one-time accreditation to cover sessions of the parliament. Generally, entering government buildings requires 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.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Uzbekistan Objective Score: 0.85

In his December 2013 speech to honor the 21st anniversary of Uzbekistan’s Constitution, President Karimov again called media workers to be more professional and brave when covering the problems of society, while condemning journalists who fear and refrain from reporting on vital issues. However, according to Tashkent-based journalists

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).

interviewed for this report, journalists in Uzbekistan still regularly censor themselves in order to prevent problems with the government, and choose to cover officially acceptable topics rather than events or issues of interest or importance to the public.

Journalists, especially in state media, do not use sources of information and expert opinions that are contrary to the official view. In 2013, neither state nor private media organizations covered activities of human rights activists and opposition parties. Even those few foreign correspondents who manage to get accreditation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to work in Uzbekistan refrain from making any critical remarks on the government's policies in order to avoid termination of their accreditation.

Generally accepted ethical standards are followed mostly in reporting on social issues. Articles covering the country's economy and government policy remain the same as before: one-sided, reflecting only the official point of view. Some media associations, such as NAESMI, have developed their own code of ethics for journalists, but there are no mechanisms to enforce its application in practice.

Despite the official ban of censorship in 2002, self-censorship is still widely practiced by mass media. Editors are responsible for produced content and, therefore, they often restrict the ability of journalists to report openly. Restrictions are very rigid in state media organizations, especially television, since their audience is very big.

In 2013, online media, unlike print or broadcast outlets, more than ever raised sensitive issues, especially the problems related to the work of local administrations. However, still, media's criticism does not go beyond the level of city administrations. In such articles, usually on local social issues, journalists try to represent various parties to the conflict.

Taboos include independent coverage of the president's family. This was very clearly manifested in the second half of 2013 amid the conflict in the Karimov family. The conflict, described above, was not reported in a single media outlet in Uzbekistan. Further, exiled Uzbek opposition groups claim that 75-year-old President Karimov suffered a heart attack in March 2013; while widely discussed by international media this was not reflected in Uzbek media.

At the same time, media corruption is still widespread in the country. Due to low wages prevalent at almost all media organizations, journalists continue accepting gifts or bribes in exchange for positive coverage in their materials. Relatively higher salaries are offered at print media sponsored by the cabinet and the parliament, the state-run

"Uzbekistan" channel, and several non-governmental online media. Non-government Internet publications that offer competitive salaries were launched during the past two years and receive grants from the government and public organizations (controlled by legislative branch).

Entertainment content still makes up most of the content for both state and private television channels. However, in 2013, the main state television channel "Uzbekistan" reduced its entertainment shows and replaced them with educational programs. Airing time for news and analytical programs remain the same: news programs at private television channels do not exceed one hour per day, and they are usually limited to airing self-produced, non-critical reports and reading official press releases. In print and Internet media, there is a clear division between entertainment and "serious" journalism: news and information media rarely publish entertainment content, entertainment media are not engaged in the news. At the same time, according to independent journalists, there is a growing need for locally produced quality news.

Only large state-owned media organizations and non-government media receiving grants from state and public organizations are able to improve their technical equipment. Regional media, especially newspapers in rural areas, are badly equipped. Most of their equipment is often technically obsolete. Until recently, technical equipment was available for regional television and radio stations, which were part of NAESMI, but its initiative has been discontinued.

There is a complete absence of quality investigative journalism. Television programs presented as "investigative reporting" are often one-sided and target opponents of president Karimov's regime. For example, in August 2013, Fergana region's Ruhsor TV, member of NAESMI, aired a show two days in a row that criticized journalist Faruh Yusupov, the Prague-based editor of RFE/RL's Uzbek service, who was born in Fergana and still has many relatives there.

There are not many specialized publications in Uzbekistan, and most of them are of fairly poor quality. The magazine *Economic Review* stands out among them, as it is relatively flexible when choosing expert opinions—largely because of its UNDP affiliation. In 2013, Internet publication *Sreda.uz*, dedicated to environmental and water issues in Central Asia, was launched to gather the work of veteran journalists specializing in this topic. Some of the authors are professional environmentalists and the content is often of high quality.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Uzbekistan Objective Score: 0.68

According to official statistics, there are 1,367 registered mass media outlets operating in Uzbekistan, and more than half of them are newspapers—three times more than in 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed. In every single event dedicated to media, Uzbek authorities boast of developments using bold statistics. However, the quantity of media is not indicative of the quality of content it produces.

Despite the appearance of media diversity, information provided by the Uzbek media relays the viewpoint of official Tashkent. The difference between state and independent media lies only in style of production: state media, for example newspapers such as *Xalq so'zi*, still keep the old Soviet propagandist way of writing, while independent media, writing on the same topic from the same sources, imitate the modern Western media. But the information is, in the end, the same.

In fact, the closure of several television channels, detailed above, did not have any significant impact on information diversity in Uzbekistan, since almost all of the closed stations duplicated information from state media institutions. Closure of *Novosti Uzbekistana* could have had a noticeable effect if it had a higher circulation, but it never exceeded 5,000.

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.

Online media keep gaining popularity despite Uzbekistan having one of the slowest connections in the region. Official figures show that by the end of 2013 the number of registered online media reached 300.

As noted above, in late 2013 in the wake of the closure of several television stations affiliated with Gulnara Karimova and her allies, the state-owned National Television and Radio Company of Uzbekistan launched four new digital television channels: Navo (Melody), Kinoteatr (Cinema), Diyor (Motherland), and Oilaviy (Family). According to the state broadcaster, the channels were formed in accordance with a 2012 decree by president Karimov on development of digital television throughout the country. Uzdigital, a leading digital television company with more than 1 million viewers, included the new channels in its package.

Online media keep gaining popularity despite Uzbekistan having one of the slowest connections in the region. Official figures show that by the end of 2013 the number of registered online media reached 300. New non-governmental Internet publications, offering competitive salaries, were launched during the past two years thanks in part to grants from the government and public organizations controlled by parliament. Experts believe that these media organizations are supported to create visibility of media diversity and control information during the upcoming presidential elections in 2015.

Yet again, as with the seeming plurality of traditional media outlets, due to total control by authorities and self-censorship websites in Uzbekistan are also very cautious about publishing critical information. However, unlike print media, some Internet news websites, such as *Gazeta.uz* and *Kun.uz*, have online multimedia resources available to diversify their content, which makes them more interesting to readers. Still, the most popular websites in Uzbekistan are generally entertainment-oriented.

According to official statistics, Internet users in Uzbekistan exceeded 10 million people in 2013. Mobile Internet is becoming hugely popular in country's remote regions, where landline communication infrastructure is not well developed. According to President Karimov, today there are more than 18 million mobile users in Uzbekistan out of a population of 30 million.

Despite the popularity of social networks, generally speaking the public does not rely on them as news sources. However, independent news websites blocked by the authorities have been extensively using popular social networks to reach their audience. The most popular social networks in the country are Russian services Odnoklassniki (Classmates) and Moy Mir (My World). Social networks such as Facebook and Twitter are open, but not widely used as their Russian counterparts. The Uzbek social network Muloqot (Dialogue), launched in 2011 with support from Uzbektelecom, has not gained popularity; many observers believe its purpose is to counter the influence of foreign social networks.

The Uzbek blogosphere is still in the early stages of its development and is more entertainment-focused rather than serving as a source of news. Bloggers, mostly based in Tashkent, can write on a variety of topics but refrain from criticizing the government's policies. The issue of fuel shortages plaguing the country in fall 2013 was widely discussed by Twitter users. However, discussions were more about the facts of the fuel shortage, not the reasons behind it.

Despite the unclear legal status of blogging in Uzbekistan, to date there have been no legal cases brought against bloggers. According to journalists in Tashkent, NSS closely watches bloggers and in case they notice any "harmful" information, the blogger is invited to "preventive" talks.

Twitter's audience in Uzbekistan continued growing in 2013. The most famous Twitter user in the country still is Gulnara Karimova. Having more than 50,000 followers, she has been using her account to leak information about NSS pressure against her and her partners.

There is an official limit on relaying foreign television channels, including popular Russian ones, by cable companies. But the owners of satellite dishes can enjoy watching and listening to any openly available television and radio channel.

Websites of independent media organizations that provide what is considered "undesirable information" and are not registered in the .uz domain are either completely blocked or partially censored. Yet, some media organizations, whose websites are blocked in Uzbekistan, have been actively cross-posting the materials on social media platforms. For instance, Radio Ozodlik's group on the Russia-based Odnoklassniki, the most popular social network in Uzbekistan and many other former Soviet countries, has more than 100,000 members. The group cross-publishes articles and multimedia materials from Radio Ozodlik's website, which was blocked by the Uzbek authorities after 2005 events in Andijan. However, experts

say that the Russian social network is not the safest way for communicating, as it is politically biased. In February 2013, administration of Odnoklassniki.ru terminated the group created by The People's Movement of Uzbekistan (PMU), the united opposition group headed by Muhammad Salih. The group was rapidly growing and had about 30,000 members at the time of closing. PMU accused Odnoklassniki of cooperating with Karimov's regime.

Internet service providers still receive Internet through Uzbektelecom, a state communication company that has a monopoly on Internet provision in the country. Therefore, government still easily blocks access to a wide range of international news websites that offer critical information. Because of this, every year global media watchdogs name Uzbekistan an "enemy of the Internet" alongside the likes of China and Iran. Nonetheless, given the rapid development of new media tools widely available online, today more and more Uzbek netizens are using anonymizers and proxy servers to receive the censored content via the Internet.

The fact that social networking sites are becoming a source for alternative information may be a reason why state-run television channels are airing talk-shows discussing the supposed negative effects of social networking platforms on Uzbek youth. On talk-show *Munosabat (Attitude)* in July 2013, Member-of-Parliament Shuhrat Dehqonov argued that young people using social networks are also surfing websites that "deprive people of their historical memory." Amid these discussions, that same month UPIA drafted a law "On the protection of minors from information harmful to their physical and spiritual development." According to UPIA, the bill will prevent the distribution of print, audio, and video material, as well as computer games, that "promote violence, cruelty, drugs, pornography, and other harmful information." However, it is seen by some experts as yet another move by the Uzbek authorities to create a legal basis for filtering information online.

Regarding indicator 3, state media reflect the political spectrum and are non-partisan, Uzbek media (state and private) fall far short. Stories about the opposition rarely appear in the local media, only doing so when coverage is critical in nature and often biased. Likewise, there are no independent news agencies. The government controls the gathering and dissemination of news through three main agencies: Uzbekistan National News Agency (UzA, state-run), Jahon (run by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), and the Russian-language news agency Turkiston-Press. Foreign embassies and offices of international non-governmental organizations get information from Turkiston-Press—mainly because it contains economic information that is not provided by state news agencies or other media.

As stated in previous MSI reports, media organizations, flexible in covering social matters, usually do not produce their own news on economic and political issues—they merely republish such information prepared by UZA state news agency. Using officially sanctioned news items rather than producing original content is another form of self-censorship and allows media to avoid possible punishment.

Some private print and online media produce their own news content, but it rarely differs from the state news media—lesser formal language, but the general angle is the same. Many Uzbek journalists complain that they are not allowed to diversify their sources; almost all news media are provided with a list of approved experts by the authorities.

Ownership of private media outlets is not transparent. Prior to his arrest, most people did not know, for example, that Fridavs Abduholikov owned newspaper *Darakchi*, the largest print media outlet in Uzbekistan. Generally, however, the majority Uzbeks believe that all media outlets in the country are owned by a certain group of people close to the president's family.

In Uzbekistan, there are newspapers published in the languages of ethnic minorities. The Russian language still plays a significant role in Uzbek society, and therefore ethnic Russians in Uzbekistan enjoy great media diversity in their native language. Observers say that the number of Tajik-language media in Uzbekistan is decreasing from year to year, as the Tajik language, mostly spoken by ethnic Tajiks in Samarkand and Bukhara, is getting less and less support from the government. Like other media, all minority press is controlled by the government. Therefore, none of them can raise problems of their respective ethnic groups, such as ethnic discrimination or the decreasing number of schools teaching in minority languages.

Sexual minorities are still a taboo subject, and the media do not cover the issue. Moreover, Uzbekistan is one of the two countries of the former Soviet Union that where homosexuality still is a criminal offence (the other country is Turkmenistan). Article 120 of the country's Criminal Code provides for up to three years in prison for those found guilty of sodomy.

In 2013, the Uzbek media, especially the Internet publications, began to pay more attention to international news, including some publications reporting on conflict situations. Website *Gazeta.uz*, for example, covered the situation in Syria. But generally, media in Uzbekistan take a very selective approach when covering international events. Anti-government demonstrations in Turkey and Ukraine are not fully covered by Uzbek media. When Uzbek political refugee Safar Bekjan illegally entered Gulnara Karimova's

home in Geneva in December 2013 together with four fellow dissidents, it was a top subject in all independent media covering Uzbekistan, yet the media within the country were silent about it. Even when the dissident found old paintings in Karimova's house illegally taken from museums in Uzbekistan, domestic media did not cover the story.

Regarding coverage of regional affairs within Uzbekistan, central newspapers and television channels mostly report about events across the whole country, but the regional news reports are usually of official nature and mostly about achievements of local authorities. Yet, regional media organizations are mostly focused within the same region. Therefore, it is difficult for regional news consumers to learn about life in other parts of the country.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Uzbekistan Objective Score: 0.74

For the past several years in a row Transparency International has ranked Uzbekistan as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Due to heavy control and censorship, media management in Uzbekistan is poor and depends on the government. A struggling economy and lack of healthy competition make it nearly impossible for media outlets to run efficiently or profitably.

Self-sufficiency remains a big problem for all kinds of Uzbek media. State newspapers *Xalq So'zi / Narodnoe slovo* and *Pravda Vostoka* traditionally enjoy extraordinary administrative support from the state. Profits from high circulations and government funding enable them to pay

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.

their employees competitive salaries, and periodically update equipment. In Uzbekistan, employees of most government institutions must purchase state owned publications; therefore these outlets are popular among advertisers due to their large, guaranteed circulation.

Other print media, including the ones established by regional authorities, are in much worse condition. Often private newspapers struggle to cover their operational costs. Therefore, non-state media have to rely on state grants, and by receiving them they become more dependent on government.

An even more acute problem of self-sufficiency faces the online media, as online advertising is still not as popular, yet remains expensive, in Uzbekistan. In 2013, there was a slight growth in online advertisement. If earlier banner advertisements took no more than 10 percent of the websites, today this indicator increased to about 15 to 20 percent. Blogging is not widely popular, and, therefore, not yet monetized.

According to journalists who participated in the MSI survey, Uzbek media organizations usually do not hire professionals separately from editors and journalists to manage marketing and human resource functions.

An advertising market in Uzbekistan is actively developing. Official numbers show that there are about 500 advertising agencies in the country, half of which are based in capital city Tashkent. Television is still the leading source of advertising—it takes up 52 percent of the total market. Print, radio, and outdoor advertising receive 19 percent, 14 percent and 12 percent of the market, respectively. In the capital, which has a great diversity of advertising agencies, the market share of television is comparatively weaker (35 percent), with print media getting 23 percent and radio 24 percent. In the regions, the advertising market is not as developed as in the capital because advertisers seek to advertise in the central press and on national television channels, which have much bigger audiences than regional media.

Advertising on cellular networks is very poorly developed. Mobile networks are used for advertising exclusively by the mobile operators themselves. Media organizations do not make use of mass SMS alerts.

Financial incentives are not the main way authorities exert pressure on media in Uzbekistan; the authorities control the media by means of administrative measures. That said, government funding is not distributed fairly—the lion's share of subsidies allocated by state and public organizations is given to children's media, regional media organizations, broadcast media, newspapers, and news websites selected

by the government to carry out information campaigns on their behalf. Thus, in 1996-1997 the main grantee was a weekly, *Uzbekistan Today*, which provided information support during the 1997 presidential campaign. In 2013, before the upcoming 2015 presidential elections, the "chosen" media is news website uz24.uz.

Market research in mass media is not conducted in the country. Big state-funded media are more oriented to serve the interests of the government rather than meet needs and interests of the audience. Private media also do not conduct audience research, as their editorial policy mostly repeats government media policy. The last media analysis conducted by professional research organizations dates back to 2009, when SIAR-Uzbekistan, a research and consulting group, won a tender from the Tashkent Advertising Association to undertake the country's first significant media marketing research project.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Uzbekistan Objective Score: 0.74

Since the violent events in Andijan in 2005, after which all independent media organizations and foreign media assisting NGOs had been kicked out of the country, the government of Uzbekistan has not eased the control over indigenous organizations that support mass media.

In November 2013, the government liquidated NAESMI. Founded as part of a government initiative in 2004 as a

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- > Trade associations represent the interests of media owners and managers and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights and promote quality journalism.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs exist providing substantial practical experience.
- > Short-term training and in-service training institutions and programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of media equipment, newsprint, and printing facilities are apolitical, not monopolized, and not restricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, cable, Internet, mobile) are apolitical, not monopolized, and not restricted.
- > Information and communication technology infrastructure sufficiently meets the needs of media and citizens.

professional association of private Uzbek broadcasters, representing both television and radio outlets, NAESMI purportedly aimed to establish an equal market for broadcasters, encourage broadcasters' active participation in building civil society, represent common interests, and protect the rights of association members. However, according to Uzbek journalists and media experts, NAESMI's true goal was to control the activities and content of broadcast media. Observers believe that NAESMI was closed due to the close relationship between Firdavs Abduholikov, its director, and Gulnara Karimov.

After NAESMI's liquidation, today there is only one organization, which in a sense supports media in Uzbekistan: the Public Fund for Support and Development of Print Media and News Agencies. Journalists participating in the MSI survey state that the only form of support given by this organization is financial grants. As it is tightly controlled by the government, the organization's support is mainly given to loyal state media organizations.

The Journalist's union, Uzbekistan's only professional association of journalists, does not provide support to its members in disputes with state authorities. The Union's *Oltin Kalam* (Golden Pen) Award, annually given to the best journalists in the country, also does not promote independent and critically minded journalism—the awards are given to journalists and media that are extremely loyal to the current government.

The only NGO in the field of journalism in Uzbekistan, the International In-Service Journalists Training Center, virtually stopped working. Today it only republishes on its website announcements about foreign media organizations' courses and grants for journalists. In May 2013, in conjunction with World Press Freedom Day, the UNESCO office in Tashkent, in cooperation with the Public Fund for Support and Development of Independent Print Media and News Agencies of Uzbekistan and the International In-service Journalists Training Center, organized a roundtable discussion entitled "Improving the Professional Ethics and Responsibility of Journalists." The event was attended by journalists and representatives of international organizations. However, participants of the roundtable did not discuss the state of media and freedom of speech, but mainly focused on the responsibilities of journalists to provide information to the public.

Journalism programs offered at the Uzbek State World Languages University and the National University of Uzbekistan are outdated and follow Soviet-era practices by providing theoretical courses rather than practical journalism training. Graduates are not equipped with modern skills and

techniques. Students' practical trainings are often limited to university newspapers.

Usually, media organizations do not hire student interns, because of financial reasons, poor (limited to the theoretical) knowledge of students and their inability to adequately prepare editorial assignments.

With the termination of NAESMI and freezing of the International In-Service Journalists Training Center, the number of short-term courses for professional journalists decreased sharply. The Public Fund for Support and Development of Print Media and News Agencies does not focus its work on improving the professional skills of journalists. International organizations, such as Internews in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, often organize journalism courses for the few independent journalists still remaining in Uzbekistan. Journalists participating in these courses are often subject to harassment and are closely watched by the government. Therefore, Uzbek journalists working for media registered in Uzbekistan, fearing persecuting and problems at work, usually do not attend such courses.

In 2013, the price of newsprint increased significantly. The market is controlled by a handful of organizations that set prices using their monopoly position. According to local journalists, the cost of paper rose after the state publishing and printing company stopped supplying paper.

The transmission and distribution systems for all broadcast media are still controlled by the state. Print media are distributed through companies loyal to the government, such as Matbuot Tarqatuvchi and Matbuot Uyushmasi via subscriptions or kiosks. Internet service providers have no other alternative but to get Internet from the state-owned communications company Uzbektelecom, which has blocked dozens of websites critical of the government. Observers believe that the slow Internet speed in Uzbekistan may be a result of government's filtering and monitoring of Internet traffic. In 2013, a leading broadband testing company, Ookla, ranked Uzbekistan 167th in download speed (165th in 2012). This again places Uzbekistan behind all Central Asian countries (with the probable exception of Turkmenistan, which has no data available at all).

List of Panel Participants

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.