

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

2008

**The Development
of Sustainable
Independent Media
in Europe and Eurasia**



MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2008

The Development of Sustainable Independent Media in Europe and Eurasia

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USAID

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IREX is an international nonprofit organization specializing in education, independent media, Internet development, and civil society programs. Through training, partnerships, education, research, and grant programs, IREX develops the capacity of individuals and institutions to contribute to their societies.

Since its founding in 1968, IREX has supported over 20,000 students, scholars, policymakers, business leaders, journalists, and other professionals. Currently, IREX is implementing 40 programs in more than 50 countries with offices in 17 countries across Europe, Eurasia, the Middle East and North Africa, and the United States. IREX serves as a major resource for universities, governments, and the corporate sector in understanding international political, social, economic, and business developments.

After a truncated campaign with limited media coverage of three of the four presidential candidates, Islam Karimov was elected to a third term as president of the republic of Uzbekistan in December 2007, beating his three pro-government (and pro-Karimov) opponents with 88 percent of the vote. Based on this example alone, one can rightly draw the conclusion that independent and professional media effectively do not exist in Uzbekistan.



UZBEKISTAN

The past year witnessed little change politically or economically in Uzbekistan as the country remained under the leadership of President Islam Karimov, who continued to maintain tight control over the economy, politics, and civil society. By law, Karimov's second seven-year term as president of the republic of Uzbekistan expired in January 2007. The quiet speculation among the population about who would succeed Karimov, since the constitution limits a president to two terms in office, and when the next presidential elections would be held did not carry over into the Uzbekistani media, and a public discussion of the situation was categorically avoided.

The Central Election Commission's announcement on November 19, 2007, that Karimov would be allowed to run for a third term also went unquestioned in the country's print and broadcast media. After a truncated campaign period with limited media coverage of three of the four presidential candidates, Karimov was elected to a third term as president of the republic of Uzbekistan in December 2007, beating his three pro-government (and pro-Karimov) opponents with 88 percent of the vote. Based on this example alone, one can get an accurate sense of the current political conditions in the country and can rightly draw the conclusion that independent and professional media effectively do not exist in Uzbekistan.

The MSI scores reflect this reality as the overall country average for Uzbekistan for the 2008 MSI was 0.49, effectively unchanged from the 2006-2007 edition of the MSI. This overall score indicates an anti-free press system. Objective 2, professional journalism, scored the highest at 0.77, a modest increase over last year's 0.47. Objective 3, plurality of news, returned the lowest score, 0.27, down slightly from last year. The other three objectives fell close to the overall average.

UZBEKISTAN AT A GLANCE

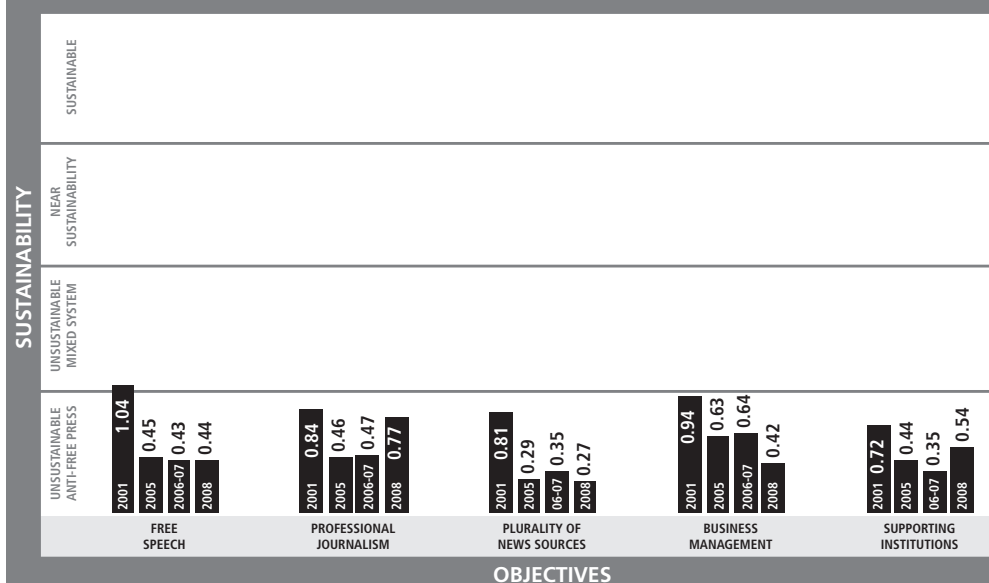
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 27,780,059 (July 2007 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 (2006-Atlas):** \$16.18 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **GNI per capita (2006-PPP):** \$2,250 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **Literacy rate:** 99.3% (male 99.6%, female 99.0%) (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: 35, of which 16 private; television: 53, of which 29 private (Uzbek government)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Total newspaper readership is estimated at only 50,000; top publications include *Khalq So'zi* (state-run daily), *Narodnoye Slovo* (state-run, Russian-language daily), *Ozbekistan Ozovi* (published by ruling party) (Library of Congress, Federal Research Division)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Uzbekistan National News Agency (state-owned), Jahon (run by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Turkiston Press
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 1,700,000 (2006 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: UZBEKISTAN



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

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

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

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

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

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Uzbekistan Objective Score: 0.44

There is little evidence of any improvement in the freedom of speech in Uzbekistan in the past year. The MSI score for free speech reflects this, as the score of 0.44 reflects no substantive change from the previous year's analysis. The government continues to block access to Internet websites and blogs, foreign media are refused accreditation, local journalists must register with the Foreign Ministry, and they are frequently harassed and arrested. A revised media law introduced at the beginning of the year assigns a higher level of responsibility to media outlets to ensure the "objectivity" of the content produced, establishes mandatory registration for Internet websites, and in effect defines blogs as media outlets, all of which must register with the Information and Press Agency and submit work plans and monthly reports.

On paper there actually is a solid legal framework that guarantees the freedom of speech and other rights of the media in Uzbekistan. The legislation includes laws on mass media, access to information, protection of journalists' professional activities, copyright, advertising, and the principles and guarantees of information freedom, as well as several presidential decrees and constitutional provisions. But this part of the legal framework is almost never enforced, particularly with any liberal interpretation of the laws. The most serious obstacles for free speech come from government officials and agencies; freedom of speech is not a valued concept and is viewed with a certain level of suspicion within the repressive political environment.

A revised version of the 1991 mass media law came into effect in January 2007 without any public discussion of the provisions contained in the draft documents. The revised law holds media owners, editors, and staff members responsible for the "objectivity" of published materials, a concept little used in most legal systems for media laws yet intended in Uzbekistan to ensure positive coverage of the ruling regime. Online publishers, along with independent and foreign media, are required to register with the Cabinet of Ministers in Uzbekistan. Online versions of newspapers also fall within

the law's scope and as such are subject to registration if their content differs from the printed publication.

Registration and licensing is required for all media in Uzbekistan and is generally done on an annual basis. The licensing process is completely controlled by the state, and criteria and standards for receiving a license are not always explicitly stated. Initial registration and re-registration fees are levied "in the order and size established by the government of the republic of Uzbekistan."

The Communication and Information Agency of Uzbekistan regulates telecommunication services in Uzbekistan and issues licenses to broadcast media through an application process requiring approval from an Interdepartmental Coordination Commission. The Center for Electromagnetic Compatibility, which is also within the Communication and Information Agency, assigns frequencies to the licensed broadcast media. Preference is generally given to state broadcasters for political reasons, and the private broadcasters that do receive licenses and operate freely often have ties to the government, the president's family, or political parties. Private broadcasters usually keep their political reporting within acceptable parameters, practice self-censorship, and focus on entertainment, social, and cultural news in an effort to keep their licenses.

The Uzbekistan Agency for Press and Information is responsible for registering "publishing and polygraphic activity, as well as mass-media, information, and advertising agencies"; licensing publishing activity; monitoring all print

LEGAL AND SOCIAL NORMS PROTECT AND PROMOTE FREE SPEECH AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION.

FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

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

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and electronic media's observance of current legislation; and suspending or invalidating certificates of registration and licenses. As of January 2007, the amended media law defines Internet websites and blogs as media outlets, which means they must also register with authorities; inform them of the names of the website/blog's founder, chief editor, and staff members; and submit work plans and reports each month.

The overall freedom to start and operate a business is relatively well protected by Uzbekistan's regulatory environment, and the top corporate tax rate is relatively low (10 percent, effective in 2007). However, media businesses face some additional restrictions that make it more difficult to enter and continue operating within the market. For example, entities with foreign ownership of 30 percent or more are not allowed to establish a media outlet in Uzbekistan. Media outlets are also required to pay re-registration fees every year in order to continue operations.

Journalists in Uzbekistan are frequently threatened, harassed, and beaten, but these crimes are rarely investigated in a thorough manner and are almost never prosecuted. Numerous journalists were harassed or "reminded of their obligations under the law" over the course of the year, and one independent journalist was beaten as a result of his reports on bread shortages.

Uzbek journalists have also been jailed for alleged violations of the media law, tax evasion or embezzlement, insulting the president, or other vague charges. Three journalists were still imprisoned in Uzbekistan at the end of December 2007, including the president's nephew, freelance journalist Jamshid Karimov, who has been involuntarily confined to a psychiatric hospital since October 2006. In 2007, at least two journalists were jailed and subsequently released after reading coerced confessions and denouncing their colleagues in court in return for clemency.

In October 2007, journalist Alisher Saipov, ethnically Uzbek but a citizen of Kyrgyzstan, was shot to death in Omsk, a Kyrgyz city just across the border from Andijan. Saipov reported on Uzbekistan's political and social issues for a

variety of media, including Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Voice of America, and the Central Asia news website *Ferghana.ru*, and was presumably killed because of his highly critical reports on the Uzbek government. The Kyrgyz authorities conducted a perfunctory investigation and found nothing conclusive, even though it is widely suspected that Uzbek security services resident in Omsk are responsible for the killing.

There are no laws guaranteeing editorial independence in Uzbekistan. Management of state-run media are directly accountable to political leaders, and powerful business interests can also easily interfere with media content, especially when they have connections to the presidential family. Media outlets are held responsible for the content they publish, particularly articles that could be construed as critical of the government or state and public officials. Libel is still a criminal offense, but very few journalists have been prosecuted for libel recently, as almost all independent journalists have either fled or been forced out of the country, remaining journalists practice self-censorship, and it is rare to see openly critical articles about the president or other high-ranking public officials.

Despite the law on access to information, public information is difficult to obtain. Officials are generally uncooperative, especially the police, special security services, the prosecutor's office, regional administrations, and election officials. They deliberately avoid contact with journalists and limit the release of information to infrequent and concise press releases. An official can easily deflect journalists' requests for information by citing official secrets legislation. As a result, the media tend to use and rely on unofficial channels for obtaining information.

Although availability to the Internet is relatively widespread, particularly in the bigger cities, access to numerous international news sites is deliberately restricted by Internet service providers (ISPs) and at Internet cafés at the instruction of the Uzbek government. Pivotal news developments in Uzbekistan reflected in outside media go unnoticed inside the country, as access is blocked. Reprints and rebroadcasts of international media are not encouraged, unless Uzbekistan and its policies receive praise.

Foreign journalists and locals working for foreign media must undergo an accreditation process, which has been used as a way to drive out unwanted journalists and prevent international media from easily obtaining information from inside the country that could possibly lead to the publication or broadcast of negative coverage of the government and its policies. In addition to receiving accreditation from the Foreign Ministry, Uzbek journalists working for foreign media must also register with the tax authorities and provide details

about their personal finances. It is a punishable offense for any journalist working for foreign media to work without appropriate accreditation.

In March 2007, Deutsche Welle correspondent Natalia Bushaeva was the first journalist to be criminally charged under a 2006 decree for operating without a license and was forced to flee the country to avoid arrest. Three other freelance journalists working for the German public broadcaster—Yuri Chernogayev, Sajera Ruzikulova, and Obid Shabanov—were able to avoid similar charges after several months of investigation. The prosecutor’s office announced on June 4, 2007, that they were covered by an amnesty issued for the 14th anniversary of the Uzbek constitution and that no criminal charges were filed against them.

Journalists applying for positions at state-run media undergo intense scrutiny from the presidential administration or other state body and must have spotless records to be hired.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Uzbekistan Objective Score: 0.77

The practice of professional journalism remains extremely low, as the majority of skilled and independent journalists have left the country and those who have replaced them generally have no real journalism training. The MSI score of 0.77 reflects this poor state of journalism, pointing to an unsustainable and anti-free press environment. Journalists in Uzbekistan have fewer opportunities to receive quality training or improve basic skills and are unable to use internationally accepted standards in their day-to-day reporting. Journalists regularly censor themselves in order to prevent problems with their editors or the government and choose to cover officially acceptable topics rather than events or issues of interest or importance to the public.

The bulk of reporting for Uzbek media seems to be inadequate when judged according to stringent tests, and internationally accepted standards are not the norm. Reporters Without Borders monitored several print and broadcast media in Uzbekistan from November 26 through December 22, the month prior to the presidential election, and found that the domestic news in the local media overwhelmingly reflected only positive or neutral events and issues. International coverage in the same local media focused on negative events taking place outside the country. Stories are not well-sourced, and few contain the facts needed to support or back up claims made by journalists.

Key ethical considerations are outlined in laws, included in internal documents of some major media, and posted on the

Although the salaries in the media field are not high, media outlets still tend to have salary arrears, which result in significant staff turnover. One of the reasons most often cited for leaving a journalism/media position was low pay, although both state and non-state media pay equally poorly.

websites of media and journalists’ associations, but there has been no unified attempt to promote a standard code of ethics in order to gain national recognition, acceptance, and adherence to a set of media ethics and standards. Journalists regularly violate or are forced to violate certain standards, most often related to objectivity, unbiased coverage, double-checking sources, and being fair to objects of criticism.

Self-censorship is rampant, as the revised Mass Media Law from January 2007 outlaws censorship, thus making owners, editors, and journalists from both state-supported and private media responsible for the content of what is printed and broadcast in the media. Most, if not all, journalists admit to self-censorship or being subjected to self-censorship policies at their media outlets. The practice is much more widespread at the editorial level, where individual editors assume much greater personal responsibility.

A journalist interviewed for a story on the website *UzNews.net* complained that “in Soviet times, when there was censorship, the circulation of our newspaper exceeded

JOURNALISM MEETS PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF QUALITY.

PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

- > Reporting is fair, objective, and well sourced.
- > Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards.
- > Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.
- > Journalists cover key events and issues.
- > Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption.
- > Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming.
- > Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- > Quality niche reporting and programming exists (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

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30,000 copies, but now censorship has been abolished but its circulation has fallen by 15 times. Why? Because half of the space is filled up with the official UzA news agency's reports now, which no one reads." Using officially sanctioned news items from state-run news agencies rather than producing original content is another form of self-censorship and allows media to avoid possible punishment.

In addition, Uzbekistan's principal intelligence agency, the National Security Service, monitors the Uzbek sector of the Internet and thereby compels ISPs, including cybercafés, to self-censor by choosing to restrict access to many foreign news sites or websites and blogs published by the Uzbek diaspora.

Glaring omissions of key events and issues are visible in the Uzbekistani media as compared with neighboring countries' media scene. Internal events, such as the December 2007/January 2008 protests in various regions over shortages of gas and electricity, frequently do not receive any media coverage at all on a national level, and major economic issues or important developments across the border often go unmentioned. Journalists at the local and regional levels tend to cover routine stories "about farmers' plowing their plots of land or cleaning up their irrigation ditches, or repairing their pumps," stated a journalist to *UzNews.net*.

Average salaries for journalists are approximately \$100 to \$150 per month, which is relatively low, as many say one needs approximately \$500 a month to live a decent life. Most journalists tend to be young and single or pensioners, and many make ends meet by producing "promotional" pieces or working a second job. Others may generate favors by providing favorable coverage of local officials seeking to improve their image on a national level. At some media outlets, journalists who bring in advertisements receive a percentage of the revenue.

Although the salaries in the media field are not high, media outlets still tend to have salary arrears, which result in significant staff turnover. One of the reasons most often cited for leaving a journalism/media position was low pay, although both state and non-state media pay equally poorly.

Entertainment programming clearly dominates over news and information programming within the Uzbekistan media sector. According to local editors and journalists, it is much safer to write celebrity gossip, reprint/rebroadcast foreign human- and general-interest stories from the Internet on nonpolitical issues, or broadcast acceptable Russian or other foreign entertainment programs.

Uzbekistan State Television and Radio, particularly its *Yoshlar* channel and some of the other local and regional channels, have adequate equipment and are capable of preparing quality programming with good visual attractiveness, well-trained hosts, and good sound. However, newspapers and other print media are technically ill-equipped. Some publications don't have new computers or proper Internet connections, and their staffs are not trained in modern news-gathering techniques. Many journalists still lack basic computer skills and are unaware of the resources available via the Internet.

Uzbekistan media do not have a tradition of specialized reporting, and there has been a lack of training and skill development in the areas of investigative reporting and analysis. While the quantity and quality of niche reporting is substantially limited, there are a few media outlets trying to focus on business and economic issues, such as the newspapers *Biznes Vestnik Vostoka*, *BVV Business Report*, and *Uzbekistan Business Partner (Delavoy Partner)*, as well as the electronic *UzReport Business Information Portal*.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

Uzbekistan Objective Score: 0.27

Despite having over 900 registered media outlets, Uzbekistan's population does not enjoy a plurality of media sources from which to gather information. Even in Tashkent, where there are more channels to view, stations to listen to, and print publications to read, people are unable to escape the government line in any source of news and information. More media are available, but the content in each has become more similar. The score for 2008 reflects this reality.

There are no remaining private print or broadcast media in the country that could be considered independent, as they were all forcibly closed after May 2005. There was a subsequent and significant increase in the number of internally and externally produced Internet websites and blogs focusing on political, economic, and social topics, a trend that continued in 2007. The number of Uzbek journalists abroad establishing critical websites, however, was almost evenly matched by the pro-government online venues popping up.

Citizens use these Internet-based resources for objective news coverage of both domestic and international events, though many websites and blog platforms are routinely blocked by the government and access is not always possible.

Following the forced closure of foreign media offices in Uzbekistan in 2006, Voice of America (VOA) cut its Uzbek programming to four hours per week in 2007. VOA made this decision partly because its broadcasts were reaching only 0.1 percent of the population. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty broadcasts in Uzbek can be heard via short-wave radio. Some Russian print and broadcast media are accessible. However, most international broadcast media are either completely blocked or censored (i.e., video recordings are shown after authorities have reviewed and removed any inappropriate information contained in the original broadcasts), and foreign print media are often simply cost-prohibitive. In late December 2007, the Uzbek government announced the purchase of equipment designed to scramble foreign broadcasts in Ferghana valley, namely Kyrgyz media.

The government regularly blocks the Internet, and access to news websites is artificially restricted. This was especially true during the lead-up to the presidential elections in December 2007. *Lenta.ru* had its two key stories on the election blocked, and according to *Ferghana.ru* and *UzNews.net*, foreign websites reported that articles and information on Saipov's murder were blocked as well.

Savvy Internet users in Uzbekistan have been able to use "anonymizers" to access government-blocked websites. Although the Uzbek government and Internet providers quickly caught on to this trick and began blocking the proxy sites, thousands of anonymisers and proxy servers are available for free on the Internet, with new ones appearing and old ones dying on a regular basis, making it nearly impossible to block access to the Internet news and information websites completely.

State-run media are seen as an efficient arm of the state propaganda machine, as they are heavily censored and reflect the government view only. Uzbek leaders receive a disproportionately large amount of coverage, as there is no legal opposition inside the country. Illegal émigré opposition sometimes receives negative coverage by the state media for denigrating the president or the government. State media also lean strongly toward educational and cultural programming, which is sterile of independent political news and analysis. There are no true public-service broadcasters in Uzbekistan that serve the public interest.

The Limited Election Observation Mission (LEOM) of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's

Most media are hesitant to cover controversial social issues, such as HIV/AIDS, drug addiction, or trafficking; the government actively discourages discussion on these problems to avoid acknowledging that they exist in Uzbekistan. Sports, culture, and tradition tend to be safe topics.

Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights reported that "the coverage of the [December 2007 presidential election] campaign in the media was very limited, without debates among candidates, direct speeches, or the presentation of alternative views, which could help the electorate to make an informed choice. Despite fairly equal allocation of free airtime to the candidates, the LEOM media monitoring established that state television allotted over 80 percent of their relevant news coverage to President Islam Karimov."

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

MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE AND OBJECTIVE NEWS.

PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

- > A plurality of affordable public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet) exists.
- > Citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media.
- > Independent broadcast media produce their own news programs.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.
- > A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources.

The government regularly blocks the Internet, and access to news websites is artificially restricted. This was especially true during the lead-up to the presidential elections in December 2007.

Approximately 60–70 percent of broadcast media do not produce their own news programs, relying instead on broadcasts from other stations. Most, if not all, local and regional television stations in Uzbekistan are members of the National Association of Electronic Mass Media, which requires its local stations to air pre-packaged programming. This requirement has been in effect for the past few years, effectively reducing the amount of locally produced content. The stations that do produce and broadcast their own programming are not editorially independent, and their programs clearly reflect the government line.

There were just two online news outlets operating more or less independently in 2007, *UzMetronom.com* and *NewsUz.com*. The editors of the Uzbek-language website *NewsUz.com* received threats immediately after they launched the site in 2007, and the website was blocked in early January 2008. The Russian-language website *UzMetronom.com*, which calls itself an “independent Internet-newspaper” on its website, is seen as a media outlet whose operations are tolerated by the government in exchange for allegedly returning favors (e.g., “leaking” misinformation from officials and writing pieces attacking émigré opposition).

Ownership of private media is not completely transparent, and it is not uncommon for government and party officials to establish companies to hide the true ownership of a media outlet. State media, on the other hand, tend to be more transparent, and the general population assumes that the majority of news presented by the state-run media should not be taken even at face value. A journalist interviewed by Reporters Without Borders indicated that “people are well aware that the authorities manipulate them...the government has been using rumor and spin for such a long time that nowadays, when someone is criticized in the official media, we start to think well of them.”

The Russian media conglomerate CTC Media recently announced a deal with the Uzbek media company Terra Group—reportedly controlled by President Karimov’s eldest daughter, Gulnara Karimova—to establish a new broadcasting company divided into 51 percent Russian and 49 percent Uzbek stakes. CTC Media offers a standard entertainment format, and it is assumed that the new

station in Uzbekistan will also air Russian soap operas and other light programming. Little has been said about the revised media law’s ban on foreign companies owning media outlets.

Most media are hesitant to cover controversial social issues, such as HIV/AIDS, drug addiction, or trafficking; the government actively discourages discussion on these problems to avoid acknowledging that they exist in Uzbekistan. Sports, culture, and tradition tend to be safe topics. In July 2007, the Uzbek Press and Information Agency closed the popular weekly *Odamlar Orasida*, which began publication in February 2007 and quickly increased its print run to 24,000 copies per week, due to alleged violations of the media law. The weekly newspaper covered religious issues and other generally discouraged topics, such as prostitution and homosexuality. Another popular publication, the Uzbek-language newspaper *Mustakil Gazeta*, was also closed in 2007 because of “financial difficulties,” despite the fact that the paper had the backing of prominent businessmen and officials.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Uzbekistan Objective Score: 0.42

It is difficult, if not impossible, to run a media outlet as an efficient business in the weak Uzbekistan economy and with the restrictions on content that can attract an audience. The lack of regular and reliable market research makes it impossible to set proper advertising rates, and the advertising market remains underdeveloped. Revenue sources are limited, and most media outlets struggle to cover operational costs. The score for this indicator, as with the others, is well below 1 and represents extremely weak business-management skills in Uzbekistan.

Most media owners and managers have inadequate management skills, and, as a result, media outlets generally are not operated as efficient businesses. Media outlets are not viewed as possible profit-making enterprises, and media owners’ primary objectives lie in other areas.

State-run media are financed directly by the president’s administration or ministerial budgets. Regional/local state media and non-state media outlets have a more difficult time covering their costs and attempt to secure funding or receive revenue from a variety of sources, including advertising (mainly announcements, notices, or calls for tenders from various state agencies), subscriptions, and limited government subsidies or grants. The amounts received from any one source are small and often not enough in total to cover all operational costs.

Although several advertising agencies operate in Uzbekistan, the advertising market is not well-defined and is still relatively weak, reflecting the overall status of the economy. According to the Asia Pulse Data Source, a group of key players with the assistance of the Tashkent Advertising Association created the Media Sovet LLC, which intends to build relations between the advertising agencies and their clients.

According to the Law on Advertising (adopted in 1998), television and radio advertising cannot exceed 10 percent per every hour of broadcasting, while print advertising cannot exceed 40 percent of the volume of one periodical edition. A 30-second video advertisement on television in Uzbekistan currently costs between \$100 and \$500, while the price range in national newspapers is about 20 percent less.

As of January 2008, amended legislation requires private advertising agencies to carry a certain proportion of low-cost (rates have yet to be established) public-service announcements or social advertisements related to healthcare, the environment, public safety, and other noble causes. Commercial and other non-state firms will fall under this law, but companies, institutions, and media funded by the government will not be affected because they are already required to set aside 5 percent of their advertising time/space for free public information or social causes. There is some concern that politicians will exploit the new legislation for self-promotion purposes.

Government subsidies to media are limited and are often funneled to state and non-state media through the National Association of Electronic Mass Media and the Public Fund for Support and Development of Independent

INDEPENDENT MEDIA ARE WELL-MANAGED BUSINESSES, ALLOWING EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

- > Media outlets and supporting firms operate as efficient, professional, and profit-generating businesses.
- > Media receive revenue from a multitude of sources.
- > Advertising agencies and related industries support an advertising market.
- > Advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue is in line with accepted standards at commercial outlets.
- > Independent media do not receive government subsidies.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor products to the needs and interests of audiences.
- > Broadcast ratings and circulation figures are reliably and independently produced.

Most media owners and managers have inadequate management skills, and, as a result, media outlets generally are not operated as efficient businesses. Media outlets are not viewed as possible profit-making enterprises, and media owners' primary objectives lie in other areas.

Print Media and News Agencies in the form of grants or other awards. Local administrations may not have money in their budgets to fund their local media outlets, but they still demand the media broadcast/publish to present their interests to the public.

In at least two regions of Uzbekistan, Karakalpakstan and Andijan, the regional, district, and town administrations have conducted involuntary subscription campaigns to increase the circulation of government-run newspapers and to raise revenue for the publications. The local authorities generally place responsibility for increasing the number of subscriptions to these publications on the enterprises and establishments in the region, which are forced to purchase yearly subscriptions. A local businessman was quoted in a November 2007 article on *UzNews.net* as saying, "I do not have funds to pay wages to my workers, but they demand that we spend millions on subscriptions. But what can we do? We have to fulfill these orders if we want to preserve our jobs; otherwise, we have to resign. If we complain about it, they will send a commission to inspect all our activities."

Media market research is still in the initial development stages and is not yet used to make management decisions at media outlets in Uzbekistan. Broadcast ratings and circulation figures are not readily available, nor are they reliable. However, in May 2007, the Tashkent Advertising Association announced an open tender for the first significant media research in Uzbekistan since 1998. SIAR, a joint Uzbek-Turkish agency that conducts social and market research, was selected to conduct the research, which will focus first on television audiences and subsequently evaluate the audiences of radio, press, and outdoor advertisements. According to the terms of the contract, the first 180 people-meters were to be installed and launched in Tashkent by the end of 2007. Three more cities are scheduled to join the system in 2008, with expansion to all regions of the country by 2011.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Uzbekistan Objective Score: 0.54

In addition to controlling the media, the government of Uzbekistan also directly influences the institutions that would normally support an independent media. Printing facilities and distribution systems are state-run, and professional associations are de-facto government organizations. Although there is a relatively strong nongovernmental organization (NGO) community outside of Uzbekistan pushing for necessary changes, most in-country supporters of an independent media remain silent out of necessity to protect themselves and their families. The MSI score of 0.54 reflects this situation.

The National Association of Electronic Mass Media and the Public Fund for Support and Development of Print Media and News Agencies claim to offer a range of services to their members, including grants, training, and other activities, but the quality and effectiveness of these services is unclear. Both organizations are government-sponsored, and neither advocates on behalf of private media outlets or speaks out on the rights of independent media.

The professional journalism associations currently operating in Uzbekistan are also government-sponsored and do not work to protect the rights of journalists in the face of strong government interference, nor do they advocate to improve key issues such as low pay, persecution, and other risks of practicing the profession in Uzbekistan. In October 2007, émigré journalists initiated a new association of independent journalists called the Real Union of Journalists of Uzbekistan and selected Galima Bukharbaeva,

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

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

editor-in-chief of *UzNews.net*, as the chairwoman. The association is open to all independent journalists and intends to keep the membership list confidential in order to protect those still residing in Uzbekistan.

Indigenous NGOs supporting free speech and independent media were uniformly pushed out of the country in 2005 along with the international organizations that supported them. These organizations encouraged the development of an independent and professional media sector with internationally accepted standards. Many of the organizations continue their work from outside the country, but other than continuing to call attention to the lack of human rights and the absence of free speech within Uzbekistan, their efforts have not had a significant impact on current conditions. Human-rights activists remaining in Uzbekistan are harassed continuously by the government either directly or indirectly, and current or former NGO representatives have been regularly threatened, beaten, falsely arrested and imprisoned, and forced to denounce colleagues and friends in order to avoid or commute lengthy prison sentences.

There are now several government-organized NGOs that purport to provide the same support previously offered by NGOs and claim to pursue the goals of free speech, independent media, and professional journalists who abide by international standards, but in reality they are fake institutions that cannot really drift away from official Tashkent policy.

Existing journalism programs offered at the National University of Uzbekistan and the Uzbek State World Languages University 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.

Random and scattered attempts to train Uzbek journalists are still made by local and international NGOs and media, but opportunities for journalists to fully implement any acquired knowledge or new skills are practically absent, unless they try to operate in a clandestine mode. The Open Society Institute, the US Department of State (e.g., the Fulbright Program and the Muskie Program), and other organizations offer limited opportunities for the study of journalism outside Uzbekistan, but students and media professionals must apply for these competitive programs and go through a fairly rigorous selection process.

One of the four stated priority objectives of the Public Fund for Support and Development of Independent Print Media and News Agencies of Uzbekistan is to finance "training and retraining of journalists and technical personnel of independent print media and news agencies." However,

the training offered is limited in scope and does not allow practicing journalists to upgrade existing skills or acquire new skills.

The government has a monopoly on printing facilities and publishing houses, and at least one publication, the Russian-language publication *Trud*, was eventually forced out of business because the printing press used to print the paper was “under repair” for a year and a half.

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

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