

**MEDIA**

**SUSTAINABILITY INDEX—**

**MIDDLE EAST AND**

**NORTH AFRICA**



## **MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2005**

The Development of Sustainable Independent Media in the Middle East and North Africa

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## **USAID**

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The United States Department of State's Middle East Partnership Initiative provides tangible support to reformers in the Middle East and North Africa so democracy can spread, education can thrive, economies can grow, and women can be empowered. In four years, this presidential initiative has devoted \$293 million to more than 350 programs in 15 countries and the Palestinian territories to support the aspirations of those working to build a more peaceful and prosperous Middle East. Examples of the initiative's work includes campaign schools, independent media training, civic education, entrepreneurship skill building, youth leadership development, trade transparency promotion, business hubs for women, and judicial and legal reform training.

## **UNESCO**

UNESCO, the United Nations' Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, maintains a Communication and Information (CI) sector that is guided by the principles of freedom of expression and freedom of the press as basic human rights. Since 2003, the CI sector has supported the Iraqi people in their transition to democracy. Among other projects, UNESCO facilitated initiatives to develop a national media policy and provided practical guidance for journalists and civil society prior to the elections. Training and networking opportunities were made available to more than 550 media workers and professionals.

## **IREX**

IREX is an international nonprofit organization providing leadership and innovative programs to improve the quality of education, strengthen independent media, and foster pluralistic civil society development.

Founded in 1968, IREX has an annual portfolio of \$50 million and a staff of over 500 professionals worldwide. IREX and its partner IREX Europe deliver cross-cutting programs and consulting expertise in more than 50 countries.

UNDER THESE CONDITIONS, ALGERIA HAS BEEN WITNESSING THE BEGINNING OF REAL CHANGE IN THE PRIVATE PRESS, CONSIDERED ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL AGENTS FOR THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF A SOCIETY FACED WITH A CLOSED POLITICAL SYSTEM.



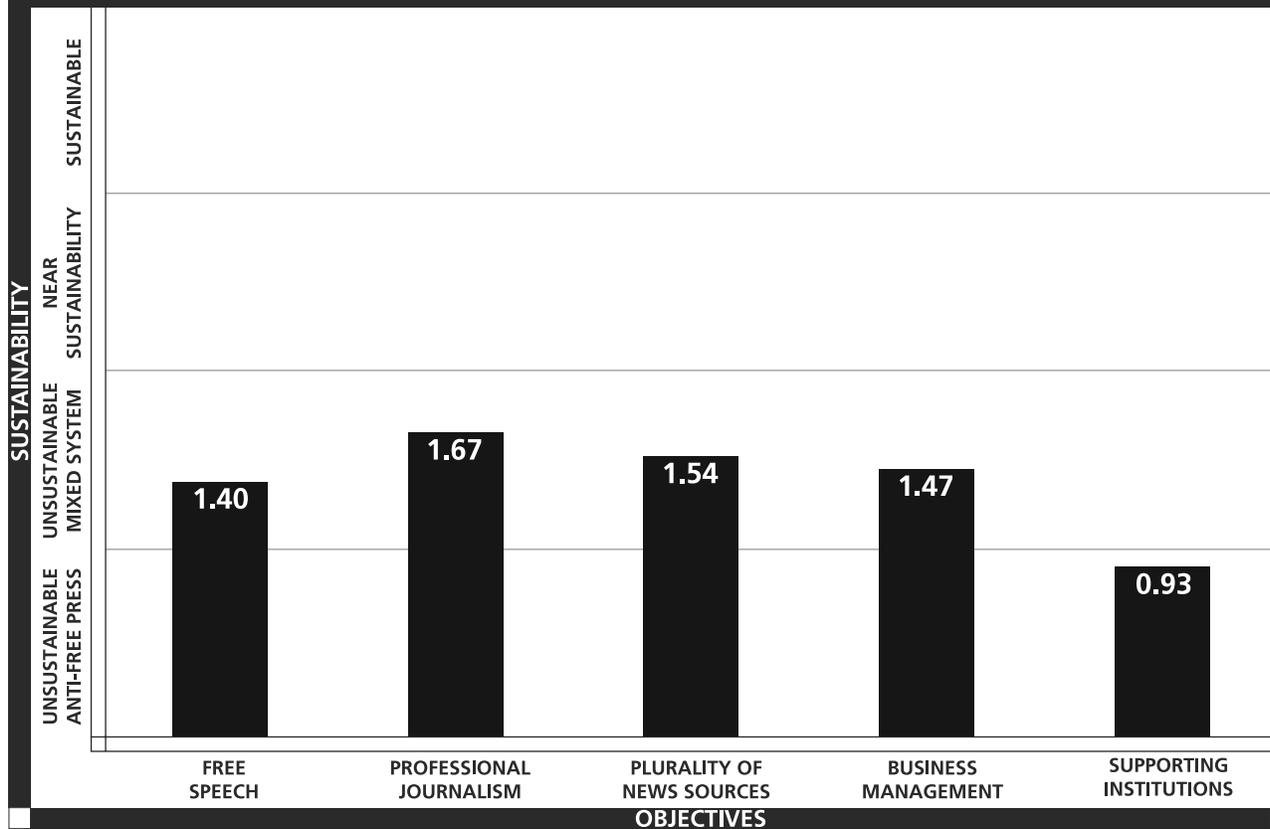


**A**lgeria's media are no longer in the middle of the country's political struggles, nor so much in the public eye. This shift came as the three-party alliance of the Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN), the Rassemblement National Démocratique (RND), and the Mouvement de la Société pour la Paix (MSP) supporting President Bouteflika dominated all state institutions and, to varying degrees, monopolized the government's print and audiovisual media.

The promised media reforms, such as to the 1990 Information Code, the Advertising Law, the regulations on state financial assistance to the press, and the media ethics code, were largely forgotten by parliament and the government during 2005, and authorities questioned the sincerity and patriotism of the private press on a regular basis. The penal code was regularly used in multiple defamation actions against journalists and media outlets.

For the profession, the move from center stage led to a degree of stagnation, the 2005 Media Sustainability Index (MSI) assessment for Algeria concluded. The publishers' association was frozen. The council on ethics and professional conduct was disarmed by its inability to enforce its decisions, and also unable to replace its management body after its term ended. The national journalists' union found it difficult to gain dynamism or hold elections for its leadership, and the government took steps to destabilize it further by creating a new journalists' union within the press outlets it owns. This government union had one single public activity: to unanimously vote on motions to support the president of the republic. The efforts of international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the European Union (EU) to assist the media have been slow in coming, and there have been deadlocks, the most notorious involving a €3 million training program for journalists initiated by the EU but brought to a standstill.

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: ALGERIA



**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.

However, the MSI panel stressed that this seemingly static—even regressive—situation should not hide very significant structural changes in the media sector. The government media may be sticking to their well-defined positions, but the situation for television and radio and the private press has changed significantly. Real press groups are emerging, and there is vertical and horizontal integration. The *El Watan* and *El Khabar* newspaper partnership, based on printing and distribution activities, has become more powerful and has gone from one to five printing plants either in the process of being purchased or in operation. The newspaper *Liberté* has been incorporated into Cevital, the powerful agro-industrial group, through the buying back of shares that belonged to journalist shareholders. *Quotidien d’Oran*, a relatively new publication, has its own printing plant. All of these trends have freed the private press from the “printing blackmail” exercised by the political authorities for years.

Still largely absent from this picture are the partisan and regional press, currently almost nonexistent with the noteworthy exception of the FLN with its organ, *Saout El Ahrar*, and its 9,500 copies per day.

Advertising continues to be problematic and can influence media trends in Algeria. There is a considerable increase in the volume of commercials on television, and the government is continuing to require government-owned companies and the public advertisers to channel all of their advertising through the ANEP, the government-owned advertising agency.

The advent of the large private advertisers, primarily automobile retailers and mobile-phone networks, is taking place in a climate in which there is no transparency about the media market. There is real financial gain being meted out to the various private publications, even those that print a mere 3,000 copies. There are public-relations practices that look very much like corruption when an item that is given away amounts to the equivalent of three months of a journalist’s wages. The absence of a body that oversees advertising, an ethics council for advertisers and journalists, and an advertising law are also factors, especially because advertising sales are reaching a critical threshold that will turn advertisers into power bases. Thus, a new threat may hover over the media, and police pressure and government censorship could add to the financial pressure and the oligarchic interests in place.

Under these conditions, Algeria has been witnessing the beginning of real change in the private press, considered one of the principal agents for the democratization of a society faced with a closed political system. The political and socioeconomic

changes occurring in the private press are helping to sort things out between journalists and publishers, and questions are being raised about working conditions, training for journalists, and their social responsibility. While the authorities are largely rejecting pluralism, the media sector understands it is no longer a monolithic whole, but rather a patchwork of varied and sometimes contradictory interests.

The MSI panel ranked four of the five objectives for the Algerian media sector as about the same, just above or just under the 1.5 mark, meaning the sector has not yet made significant progress on the route to meeting the criteria of an independent media. The supporting institutions for the media, the fifth objective, were considered weaker than the others.

### OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH

**Algeria Objective Score: 1.40 / 4.00**

The Algerian February 1989 constitution guarantees freedom of expression through no fewer than five articles, noted panelist Lazhari Labter, a writer

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

#### FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

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

and editor. Article 31 guarantees the fundamental human and citizens' rights and liberties, and Article 32 says that individual or associative defense of the fundamental human rights and individual and collective liberties is guaranteed. Article 35 states that freedom of creed and opinion are inviolable, and that citizens are guaranteed freedom of intellectual, artistic, and scientific innovation. It also says that copyrights are protected by the law and that any publication, recording, or any other means of communication and information can be seized only with a warrant. Article 39 states that citizens are guaranteed freedom of expression, association, and meeting.

***Ali Djerri provided a more qualified viewpoint, saying that "a generation of Algerians has not experienced the mode of thought induced by the single party, and this generation feels strongly about freedom of expression."***

However, MSI panelist Kamal Sadou, a journalism professor at the University of Algiers, noted that "these freedoms are exercised within the restrictive framework of the political and religious values that are the

founding principles of the State of Algeria as defined by the Constitution. These freedoms are not reinforced by laws, and there is a set of regulatory provisions and procedures that make inoperable the constitutional guarantees and the international charters and conventions to which Algeria has subscribed." Panelist Ali Djerri, president and director general of *El Khabar*, noted that "the information code passed in 1990 is essentially frozen, and the higher information council created pursuant to this law was frozen in 1993."

Instead, in practice, the penal code is the statutory reference for the management of information. Mahmoud Belhimer, editor-in-chief of the *El Khabar* daily, pointed to the content of Articles 144 and 144 of the penal code on defamation. He said that "according to both articles, only journalists are required to prove the veracity of the facts reported in their articles. Regardless of the gravity of the issue, the courts never take it upon themselves to investigate." These practices, he adds, "are in conflict with the international standards to which Algeria has subscribed."

Panelist Faïza Benmici, director of the KDP distribution company in Constantine, said that "in accordance with Article 144 of the penal code, the offense of insulting

the head of state and defaming state institutions, principally the army and justice, may render the perpetrator liable to a prison term of three to 12 months that cannot be suspended, and a fine ranging from \$700 to \$3,500."

In the past few years, the justice system has often been used for defamation complaints, but newspapers were not given the right to respond. Ali Djerri mentioned that often plaintiffs are not required to appear in court and often do not show up, depriving the journalist and justice of a debate during which both sides could state their case. The journalist does not enjoy a presumption of innocence and is left to his own devices in proceedings that may sometimes drag on for several years, the panel members said.

According to data recorded by international and local groups, 2005 was a record year for press freedom violations in Algeria, Kamal Sadou said. "More than 100 cases of defamation were brought to court, resulting in fines or prison sentences, some of them suspended. A few cases were dismissed, and some are still going on," Kamal Sadou said. Among the notable cases was that of the former editor of the daily *Liberté*, Farid Alilat, who was sentenced in May 2005 to one year in prison for defamation. His colleague, cartoonist Ali Dilem, was fined about \$700. They were charged with "offenses against the head of state" for cartoons "insulting" the president. During the same month, the editor of the daily *Le Soir d'Algérie*, Fouad Bughanem, and the cartoonist Hakim Laâlam were also sentenced by a court in Algiers to two months in prison and fined \$3,500 for defamation of the president. In April 2005, four journalists at the daily *Le Matin* were sentenced to terms of two to three months on the same charge. In March 2005, the *Soir d'Algérie* newspaper was found guilty by a court for libeling an executive of the Banque de Développement Local in coverage of alleged corruption. Fouad Boughanem, the managing editor of the newspaper, received a two-month suspended prison sentence and the paper a fine of about \$14,000. The panel also discussed the continuing detention of Mohamed Benchicou, managing editor of the daily *Le Matin*. He was sentenced in 2004 to two years of imprisonment for defaming the president in a book he published called "*Bouteflika, an Algerian Sham*."

The inclination toward centralized control on the part of the state, the power of the security apparatus, and the submission of justice to the executive branch have made it difficult, and even impossible, to fight violations of freedom-of-expression rights, some on the MSI panel felt. Moreover, there is no solid social consensus on freedom of expression, with the dominant

values tending to promote the group and community values over individual values and freedom of thought.

Ali Djjerri provided a more qualified viewpoint, saying that “a generation of Algerians has not experienced the mode of thought induced by the single party, and this generation feels strongly about freedom of expression.” The private press is seen as the last resort for expressing social distress, he added, and many examples prove these citizens’ attachment to this press on a daily basis.

As for the audiovisual media, all panelists noted that the refusal to open broadcasting to the private sector is a political decision made at the highest levels. Lazhari Labter argued that “this refusal is in conflict with progress made in economic liberalization in Algeria, and worldwide.” Kamal Sadou added, “This results in two problems: It prevents privatization, and it eliminates the concept of public service with rules that guarantee pluralistic expression.”

The statutory and tax provisions regarding the press do not stem from ordinary law, but rather permission to publish is subject to filing an application with a judge. Lazhari Labter noted that it has become almost impossible to create new publications, and Mahmoud Belhimer stated that “the procedure for controlling the press has been aggravated by the requirement of obtaining a different permit from the Ministry of Information.” Over the past few years, the few newspapers that have gotten permits received them on the basis of nepotism or politics, not the validity of their proposal, MSI panelists said.

The tax provisions are selectively enforced based on factors such as contacts between the publication and the political authorities. In the past few years, there has been increasing use of the tax regime as a means of putting pressure on certain publications, panelists said. Ali Djjerri notes that the 1993 decree on benefits granted to investors in other economic sectors excludes the media and the press entirely. As a result, the newspapers that do invest in building their corporate capabilities are sanctioned *de facto* because they are not receiving the benefits being granted to other new investments.

Youcef Aggoune, director of Media and Marketing, an Algiers media research firm, mentioned the death rate for new media companies. Before the media field was opened up under Law 90-07 of April 3, 1990, there were 14 newspapers. This number rose at one point to 891. In September 2003, however, there were only 167 publications left and just 126 in 2005. Ali Djjerri reported two statistics: Out of 1,400,000 copies printed

daily (for the daily press), the six publications of the government press amounted to only 47,000 copies. And among the private press, five publications (*El Khabar, El Watan, Al Chourouk, Le Quotidien d’Oran, and Liberté*) total 70 percent of all the copies printed in the private daily press; the remaining 30 percent are shared among the other 38 publications.

“It should be noted that some publications are still being published even though they are unprofitable, with the number of copies printed per day ranging from 2,000 to 5,000 for some and 8,000 to 12,000 for others,” said Kamal Sadou.

Mahmoud Belhimer noted that in 1997 the governmental newspapers were assisted financially by having their debts canceled. They were recapitalized and again began to lose money after two years of operations.

***Mahmoud Belhimer said that “according to both articles, only journalists are required to prove the veracity of the facts reported in their articles. Regardless of the gravity of the issue, the courts never take it upon themselves to investigate.”***

Lazhari Labter considered keeping a public press alive anachronistic, with few countries maintaining governmental newspapers generally and especially in comparison with state broadcasting.

As for the treatment of the private and public newspapers, the panel agreed that there is nothing in the laws that gives preference to any one publication. However, the panel believes that in practice, and for official activities and certain major events, the state print and broadcast outlets are given preferential treatment. Nonetheless, political officials have to face the reality that the private media have large readership and must be dealt with to communicate with the public.

Algerian officials and civil servants are not required to keep the press informed of their activities, nor are they required to answer journalists’ questions. This is despite a now-forgotten presidential order issued during the 1970s, a period of single-party rule, that requires officials and financial managers to disclose information to the press, panelists noted.

The panel agreed that access to sources of information, especially over the Internet and from international television stations, is completely unrestricted. The foreign press is not authorized

to print local editions in Algeria, however. For that reason it has not been possible to implement *El Khabar's* plan to publish an Arabic translation of *Le Monde Diplomatique* from France.

Access to the different journalism institutes is unrestricted and conforms with the general requirements for admittance to university studies. In journalistic practice, a permit is required at all governmental institutions and agencies. In the cities and in the provinces, different types of "supervision" of journalists are put in place, ranging from financial support to direct pressure.

**OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM**  
**Algeria Objective Score: 1.67 / 4.00**

The press has a long-standing habit of bias, and accessing information is extremely difficult. These two factors, in a context of the hyper-politicization of the press that often comes as it is being liberalized, generated obligations toward certain interests among some editorial staffs, the MSI panelists concluded.

***But Mahmoud Belhimer said that "the over-politicization of journalism is due to lack of professionalism, with the overwhelming majority of journalists knowing little about techniques for searching for information, and then checking and cross-checking it."***

Mahmoud Belhimer stated that "the security conditions that have prevailed since 1992, when the private publications were created, have forced journalists to accept 'office' journalism, with the telephone as their main working instrument."

They have had to be satisfied, he added, "with single sources of information that could not be verified in the field, and are often anonymous because civil servants are reticent to deliver information for fear of being sanctioned by supervisors."

Ali Djerri said politicization of the press appears to be "a result of the ongoing state of siege, the lack of pluralism on state TV, and the limits on public meetings, all of which have contributed to making the press the single forum for expression—but not one outside the political debates." But Mahmoud Belhimer said that "the over-politicization of journalism is due to lack of professionalism, with the overwhelming

majority of journalists knowing little about techniques for searching for information, and then checking and cross-checking it." Kamal Sadou said that "it is difficult for journalists to avoid falling into the mentality of a vigilante and righter of wrongs when they are being solicited constantly as the last resort by a public that has few alternatives to standing by powerlessly and watching corrupt practices."

For the management of ethical standards, a council of ethics and professional conduct was formed about six years ago. However, MSI panelists said, there has been no effect in the field because the council's recommendations and decisions are not enforced. Due to the lack of industry associations, ethics issues have not been widely debated. Ali Djerri said that the Ministry of Communication attempted to have a law on ethics and professional conduct passed in 2004. In late 2005, the FLN, the majority party in parliament, established a professional-conduct council for the press based on recruiting of individual journalists. However, there has never been a broad public and democratic debate about this council within the profession, some panelists said. Lazhari Labter, a member of the council's executive committee, said the charter was ahead of its time. However, the council has been accepted at the highest level of the state, and it was asked to participate when the high advisory council on human rights was set up. Panelists also noted that some outlets, including the

**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).

daily *El Khabar*, have a code of ethics and professional conduct that is specific to their editorial staffs.

One panelist noted that there are frequently links between advertisers and journalists, and that journalists can be corrupted for various reasons, including their low income—which, like that of the middle classes more broadly, has dropped considerably. The wage issue is of great concern in the profession, the panel said. The difference in wages between the private and state sector, and between print and broadcast outlets, is not very great, with wages in the state sector marginally higher. The average wage is believed to be about \$210 monthly, but one panelist said that a good number of journalists in the private press are satisfied with a wage of \$110. Ali Djerri cited the example of the newspaper *El Khabar*, where a journalist earns a minimum of about \$250 to \$270. The panelists noted that there are no real standards for human resources management in the private newspapers, especially the most prosperous among them, and there are considerable wage disparities. Kamal Sadou noted that low wages and disparities “cause us to be discouraged.” There also are the “protracted internships with no compensation” in some newspapers, to the detriment of novice journalists. Newcomers are subjected to poverty and danger, without wages or contracts, in the hopes of being hired. These low incomes are the reason for substantial turnover among editorial staff, and they promote hit-or-miss journalism with inappropriate “accommodation” to special interests. Mahmoud Belhimer added that the lack of employment contracts is a practice that is not exclusive to the private press. In the public media, many journalists are employed for years on end without an employment contract.

The panelists agreed that the journalists in the public media are never parties to defamation lawsuits simply because the levels of censorship and self-censorship are such that all sensitive issues are painstakingly avoided. Information programming on television is primarily dedicated to the president’s and the government’s activities.

Kamal Sadou considers that the practice of journalism is confronted with a series of political, moral, social, and religious taboos. Even though the press has won freedoms, investigations of certain business networks, government agencies, and well-known politicians require taking undue risks. Consider the case of the late Abdelhaï Beliardouh, a local correspondent for the newspaper *El Watan*. After publication of an article in 2003 in which he accused a local businessman of funding armed Islamists groups, he was beaten and threatened by individuals allegedly paid by the businessman. A

few days later Abdelhaï Balardiouh committed suicide. Likewise, panelists commented, the weight of the community and inertia make it impossible to broach certain issues that touch the nation’s founding myths, or certain “sacred” values, since society is not ready to separate “blasphemy,” which is about freedom of thought and expression, from “profanation,” or attacking the beliefs of others.

***Ali Djerri said that “the poor data transmission network throughout the country is a handicap for journalists, especially those who work outside the major cities in the north of the country.”***

There is no balance of programming in the public audiovisual media. Faïza Benmici noted that for the terrestrial television channel, about 44 percent of the programs are entertainment, 20 percent are information, and 32 percent are education and culture. In the print media, information and current events dominate, and advertising accounts for 30 to 40 percent of editorial space in dailies.

The panelists unanimously agreed on how mediocre the cultural and entertainment programs are on television. The few cultural programs that exist, such as literary criticism and musical programming that are of an acceptable level, are drowned in the mediocrity of television, devoid of personality, they said.

The use of information technology has spread in terms of the technical quality of the media. However, Ali Djerri said that “the poor data transmission network throughout the country is a handicap for journalists, especially those who work outside the major cities in the north of the country.” The other constraint, he believes, is “the lack of Internet portals regularly updated with new data in the organizations, including the important ministries.”

The panelists agreed that the work of the state’s regional printing plants in the east and west of the country, the only ones currently operating, is mediocre, and available printing capacity is low. They believe this creates pressure on deadlines, with a negative impact on the quality of the journalists’ work, they said. Few journalists have laptops. No one has a satellite telephone. Specialist technology such as miniaturized digital cameras and long-range microphones do not exist, but some panelists said acquisition by journalists of miniaturized instruments for collecting and transmitting data would be one way to ensure freedom of speech.

Quality specialized journalism is emerging gradually, panelists said. Journalists increasingly are signing their articles when they address topics as diverse as health, schools, ecology, economics, fighting corruption, and security. "These people are often experts who have dedicated themselves to journalism, and these quality niches are visible mainly in the private press," Kamal Sadou said.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

**Algeria Objective Score: 1.54 / 4.00**

Distribution figures indicate that the print media are primarily an urban phenomenon, while radio and television are the media with the most impact in rural areas. There has been no price increase for newspapers in the past 10 years, remaining at about \$0.15 for dailies and \$0.20 for weeklies. The people who buy newspapers have regular incomes and are employees, civil servants, business owners, and the like. MSI panelist Brahim Brahim said that of the 44 daily

*The practice of the government-owned media is based mainly on work habits inherited from the single-party period. For Mahmoud Belhimer, the manner in which these media operate, especially audiovisual, "is based on the practices of totalitarian regimes." Some publications in the private press appear independent, yet in reality, they are sponsored by people in power so that they can take part in campaigns, especially in electoral periods or crises, panelists said.*

publications, only a dozen or so are based in regional areas, with two in Constantine, two in Annaba, and six in Oran; all have relatively low circulations.

The fact that nearly all of the country has electricity and that direct television broadcasting is widespread makes the use of antennas commonplace in the most remote areas of the country. Conversely, Internet access has been made complicated for

two reasons: the relatively small size of the network and the lack of reliability of connections, the price of which continues to be out of reach for modest budgets. On the other hand, the massive practice of

piracy of access cards for pay satellite platforms has democratized access to quality programs. Mahmoud Belhimer noted that in small inland towns, the twin constraints of low buying power and tradition mean that the people are often content with only one national press publication and fall back on national television as a source of information and as the main reference for forming opinions.

Internet access is not subject to any direct government control. The provider industry has gradually been liberalized after having been a monopoly of the CERIST (Scientific and Technical Information Research and Study Center). Like the Internet, the foreign press is handicapped because prices are high.

Overall, the Algerian press includes 43 dailies that print 1,400,000 copies per day, 60 weeklies that print 1,800,000 copies per week, and 17 monthlies that print 126,700 copies per month. The disproportionately low number of copies in the state-owned press—*An Nasr, Ech Châab, El Massa, and El Djoumhouria* in Arabic and *Horizons and El Moudjahid* in French—totals only 47,000 per day. The six leading publications of the private press—*El Khabar and Echourouk El Youmi* in Arabic and *El Watan, le Soir d'Algerie, le Quotidien d'Oran, and Liberté* in French—have a total print run

### 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.

of 980,000 copies per day out of the total 1,400,000 printed daily.

The practice of the government-owned media is based mainly on work habits inherited from the single-party period. For Mahmoud Belhimer, the manner in which these media operate, especially audiovisual, "is based on the practices of totalitarian regimes." Some publications in the private press appear independent, yet in reality, they are sponsored by people in power so that they can take part in campaigns, especially in electoral periods or crises, panelists said.

The main press agency is the official one, Algérie Presse Service (APS.) There is one private agency, L'Agence Algérienne d'Information (AAI), which specializes in business news but remains weak financially because of the small market. Access to the major international agencies is unrestricted. These agencies provide most of the regional and international news to the Algerian media. After the media in Algeria were liberalized, a large number of new photography and press agencies opened, but all collapsed. Only a few photographers remain, and they work on a freelance basis.

The lack of transparency with regard to the ownership of most of the media is a constant subject of debate and the source of numerous rumors. Few newspapers print the names of the owners or shareholders. However, public opinion has it that the newspaper *Liberté*, which was a partnership of journalist shareholders, came to be owned by the industrial group CEVITAL when it bought the stock. CEVITAL is owned by businessman Issad Rebrab, who also owns the newspaper *El Youm*. Retired General Betchine, former head of the secret service, owns the newspapers *El Acil* and *l'Authentique*. The owners of these newspapers influence the editorial content of their publications, panelists said, and editorial managers are chosen based on how compatible they are with the owners' opinions.

**OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT**

**Algeria Objective Score: 1.47 / 4.00**

Until recently, the private and public distribution networks were a veritable jungle of no benefit to the newspapers. There has been an improvement in the trend with the creation of distribution networks specific to the private newspapers. However, given the lack of an oversight agency certifying circulation, the MSI panelists said it is impossible to speak of transparency. The public distribution networks and businesses work preferentially, based on administrative and political directives, and their performance is mediocre, the panel concluded.

Companies in the media sector include the state Télédiffusion d'Algérie (TDA), founded in 1986. The TDA runs the national microwave transmission terrestrial network, the domestic satellite rebroadcast network DOMSAT, the network of FM transmitters, and the center network for medium- and low-power frequencies.

The state's International Press Center (CIP) was founded in 2002. The CIP is responsible for logistics for the media

coverage of major domestic and international events. The National Press and Information Documentation Center (CNDPI) was founded in 1984. The CNDPI is in charge of collecting, processing, and disseminating written documentary, photographic, and audiovisual information. The Algerian Press Company (ENAP) provides services that precede printing and laboratory work and also provides inputs for printing plants. This

***Panelists said this activity shows that the period when the state used its printing monopoly as a means of pressure is over, and now the printing industry appears to be an economic sector with strong potential and good investment opportunities.***

**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.

company is experiencing serious financial difficulties because its technology is obsolete.

Société d'Impression d'Alger (SIMPRAL) was founded in 1990 following a restructuring of the printing industry. This firm, located in Algiers, claims it has a 45 percent market share. SIA has announced a program to build two printing plants, one in Béchar in the southwest and another in Ouargla in the southeast. SIMPRAL was founded in 1988. Société d'Impression de l'Ouest (SIO) was founded in 1988, with headquarters in Oran. Société d'Impression de l'Est (SIE) was founded in 1988, with headquarters in Constantine.

In the private sector, the only large company is Société ALDP (Algérie Diffusion et Impression de la Presse). Founded in 1995, ALDP is the result of the partnership between the newspapers *El Watan* and *El Khabar*. ALDP prints and distributes the press. ALDP has only one

***Distributors are faced with profitability requirements, and therefore they tend to abandon more remote areas. This quest for profitability seriously impairs the breadth of the press distribution network. One panelist said this means the state does not guarantee citizens' right to information since there is no assistance.***

printing plant, with an hourly capacity of 50,000 copies.

A major change in the printing industry is expected by 2007. Inland, ALDP has plans for two printing plants. The newspaper *El Acil* has finalized the contract to buy a press. The public sector also will have a new printing plant. In western Algeria,

SIO as well as ALDP are in the process of acquiring a plant, and *Le Quotidien d'Oran* has reportedly obtained funds to acquire one. In eastern Algeria, SIE is busy launching another printing plant, while ALDP is in the advanced phase of launching its venture in the east. Panelists said this activity shows that the period when the state used its printing monopoly as a means of pressure is over, and now the printing industry appears to be an economic sector with strong potential and good investment opportunities. Ali Djerrri reported that at his media company, obtaining funds for the first three printing plants necessitated lengthy battles during which bankers acknowledged having been subject to pressure from the authorities.

For distribution, other than the network of the National Publishing and Advertising Agency (ANEP),

which held the monopoly in distribution and in the large publications that are doing well, there are many media distributors that provide distribution services. The distribution issue raises the problem of the public's and the citizens' right to information, panelists noted. Distributors are faced with profitability requirements, and therefore they tend to abandon more remote areas. This quest for profitability seriously impairs the breadth of the press distribution network. One panelist said this means the state does not guarantee citizens' right to information since there is no assistance. Some small towns depend on bus and taxi drivers who buy the most popular newspapers and resell them at twice and even three times the original price. The price of print media often rises 50 percent 100 kilometers from Algiers. The solution under consideration, in both the private and public sectors, is to build printing plants in Ouargla for ALDAP and SIA and in Béchar for SIA.

The private media are financed by a mix of circulation and advertising, but they face serious problems. The price of the newspapers has not changed in 10 years, although costs for the main inputs have increased significantly. "A ton of paper has risen from \$350 to nearly \$700, for example, and energy prices have climbed by 120 percent," said Ali Djerrri. "Newspapers that earned a gross profit of almost 70 centimes per issue sold now lose 3 centimes per issue," he added. The publications with the largest number of copies printed have raised their advertising rates and the amount of space used for advertising. Some publications fall within a range of 35 percent to 55 percent for editorial space.

Publications with lower distribution are required to negotiate their debts to the state printing plants with the authorities. They receive advertising from the ANEP and benevolent treatment from the tax authorities. This largesse leads these editors to have viewpoints and analyses that are quite favorable to the government's policies, according to MSI panel members.

The advertising market is embryonic. Sales figures are constantly rising, but only a handful of advertisers from the automobile, agro-industrial, and mobile-telephone industries are the leading advertisers. The marketing structure for these products is such that most advertising materials are designed as part of national or at least regional strategies and do little to foster the emergence of any local creativity. The main advertisers are served by subsidiaries of brands of large international advertising networks.

Advertising is still a highly localized market. In 2005, the capital city accounted for 25 percent all the nation's automobiles and buys nearly 50 percent of

standard consumer goods, according to the National Statistics Office (ONS). There is no management of the public space, and advertising on billboards and street furniture approaches anarchy. Since there is no advertising law, the newspapers and state television are constantly increasing the proportion of advertising. Ali Djjerri pointed out that an advertising law was enacted in parliament in 1999, but it never made it out of the Senate. Mahmoud Belhimer noted that a circular letter adopted in 1993 gave the monopoly for advertising in the state and institutional sector to the ANEP, which was frozen and then reactivated in 1999. He also said that an \$11.1 million fund to provide assistance to the private press in the form of contribution to newsprint, equipment, and communication costs had not yet been allocated.

Modern management methods are new phenomena in the Algerian media. Some publications have begun a modernization process, but human resource management has been neglected, panel members said.

There are no validated benchmark media measurements or polling institutes that are recognized or accepted by everyone in Algeria. A few private or public institutes deliver studies and conduct opinion polls, but they are regularly the subject of debate.

#### OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

**Algeria Objective Score: 0.93 / 4.00**

All of the MSI panel participants unanimously found that the weakest point in the Algerian media sector lies with its lack of association activities and professional solidarity. The publishers' association, Ali Djjerri said, worked best during the terrorism period. The return to relative calm almost forced it out of existence even if it was never formally dissolved. Mahmoud Belhimer spoke of 1988, when the Algerian Journalists' Movement (MJA) united most of the profession around slogans of democratization and freedom of expression. Since that time, the different acronyms that have come and gone, such as the AJA (Algerian Journalists' Association) and the SNJ (Algerian Journalists' Union), have never succeeded in fully uniting the journalists around their professional concerns.

Lazhari Labter said that the SNJ is affiliated with the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and that there have been significant cooperative projects. There is an IFJ office in Algiers. Several international media advocacy and development NGOs are active in Algiers, including Reporters Without Borders, the International Center for Journalists, Internews, and the Friedrich

Ebert Foundation. Projects focus primarily on training, and an academy for journalists is in the preparation phase with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the newspaper *El Khabar*. These organizations also provide support through their watchdog function, which limits repressive measures to a degree. Panelists noted the lack of NGO efforts in the inland cities. Panel members unanimously agreed that local correspondents continue to be isolated and are weak due to pressure from the authorities and local interest groups.

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Journalism studies are taught at universities. However, the poor level of supervision and the lack of modern media programs result in graduates leaving the

#### Supporting institutions function in the professional interests of independent media.

##### SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

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

university with no theory or practice. Kamal Sadou mentioned the poverty of the main institute for training journalists at the University of Algiers, saying it does not have an Internet connection or any television technology or studios. The plan to acquire a mini-printing plant has been periodically mentioned for years without result, the panelist said. The staff in Algiers and Oran are “nomads” and teach courses as guest professors. There are information and communication science programs in Algiers, Oran, Annaba, Constantine, Mostaganem, Médéa, M’sila, and Biskra. Blida is a special case because training

***Journalism studies are taught at universities. However, the poor level of supervision and the lack of modern media programs result in graduates leaving the university with no theory or practice. Kamal Sadou mentioned the poverty of the main institute for training journalists at the University of Algiers, saying it does not have an Internet connection or any television technology or studios.***

there specializes in scientific journalism as part of a specialist postgraduate degree in cooperation with a French journalism school.

The paper issue is a weakness for printing in Algeria. As a country that imports all of its paper, Algeria is subject to the fluctuations of an international market in which there is a growing paper shortage. The largest

newspapers often decrease the number of copies they print because of a lack of paper. The state is still the largest importer of paper and has the largest inventory even if it has relinquished its monopoly. The new presses that are opening probably will change this, however.

All the broadcast media and land and satellite relay networks are owned by the state, but the press distribution networks and the telecommunications providers are an industry in which private companies are becoming deeply rooted. The lack of any standardization, an oversight agency, and a consumers’ association often causes the quality of services to be mediocre, panelists said.

## MSI Participants

**Mahmoud Belhimer**, deputy editor-in-chief, *El Khabar*

**Lazhari Labter**, writer and editor

**Brahim Brahimi**, professor of communications, University of Algiers

**Abdou Benziane**, journalist and former director of the national television station

**Faïza Benmici**, director, KDP distribution company, Constantine

**Baya Gacemi**, director, *L’Époque* satirical newspaper

**Ahmed Ancer**, editor-in-chief, *El Watan*

**Kamal Sadou**, professor of journalism, University of Algiers

**Youcef Aggoune**, director, Media and Marketing Company, Algiers

## Moderator

**Ali Djerri**, president director general, *El Khabar*

# ALGERIA AT A GLANCE

## GENERAL

- **Population:** 32.4 million (2004 est., World Bank)
- **Capital city:** Algiers
- **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Arab-Berber 99%, European less than 1% ([www.nationsencyclopedia.com](http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com), 2006)
- **Religions (% of population):** Muslim (state religion) 99%, Christian and Jewish 1% ([www.nationsencyclopedia.com](http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com), 2006)
- **Languages (% of population):** Arabic (official), French ([www.nationsencyclopedia.com](http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com), 2006)
- **GDP (purchasing power parity):** \$84.6 billion (2004 est., World Bank)
- **GNI per capita (purchasing power parity):** \$2,280 (2004 est., World Bank)
- **Literacy rate (% of population):** male 79.5%, female 60.1% (2004 est., UNICEF)
- **President or top authority:** President Abdelaziz Bouteflika (since April 28, 1999)
- **Next scheduled elections:** Council of Nations (Senate), to be held in 2006

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Total Circulation: 1,890,216 (includes daily and non-daily) (UNDP-POGAR, 2000)
- **Largest papers:** *El Watan* (French) 100,000 ([www.pressreference.com](http://www.pressreference.com), 2002), *Al Khabar* (Arabic) 400,000 (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004)
- **Broadcast ratings:** NA
- **Number of print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** 296
- **Newspapers:** 216 (28 dailies, 82 non-dailies, 106 periodicals) (UNDP-POGAR, 2000)
- **TV stations:** 46, Radio stations: 34 ([www.pressreference.com](http://www.pressreference.com), 2002)
- **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- **Number of Internet users:** 518,400 (UNDP-POGAR, 2002)

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: ALGERIA

