

**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

[www.irex.org/msi](http://www.irex.org/msi)

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## **USAID**

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is an independent agency that provides economic, development, and humanitarian assistance around the world in support of the foreign-policy goals of the United States. The agency works to support long-term and sustainable economic growth and advances US foreign-policy objectives by supporting economic growth, agriculture, and trade; global health; and democracy, conflict prevention, and humanitarian assistance.

USAID provides assistance in four regions of the world: Sub-Saharan Africa; Asia and the Near East; Latin America and the Caribbean; and Europe and Eurasia.

With headquarters in Washington, DC, USAID's strength is its field offices around the world. They work in close partnership with private voluntary organizations, indigenous organizations, universities, American businesses, international agencies, other governments, and other US government agencies. USAID has working relationships with more than 3,500 American companies and over 300 US-based private voluntary organizations.

## **MEPI**

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.



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THE FIRST MSI FOR THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA SHOWS A REGION NOT YET ADVANCED TOWARD A ROBUST, INDEPENDENT MEDIA SECTOR, BUT IT CLEARLY DETECTED THE SIGNALS OF CHANGE. THE ROADBLOCKS ARE PAINFULLY EVIDENT IN, AS AN EXAMPLE, THE REBUILDING OF THE IRAQI MEDIA. ALTHOUGH THE ABSOLUTE CONTROLS OF THE PREVIOUS REGIME ARE GONE, THE MSI PANELISTS SAID, NOT ONLY DO POLITICAL



LEADERS NOT UNDERSTAND THE PRINCIPLES OF MEDIA FREEDOMS BUT CITIZENS ALSO DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF MEDIA INDEPENDENCE OR ACT TO DEFEND IT.

**D**rawing on its unique experience in developing a successful Media Sustainability Index (MSI) for Europe and Eurasia over the past five years, IREX is now expanding its in-depth analysis of the conditions for independent media to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. With the generous support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the first MENA MSI provides critical benchmark data and probing analysis of evolving media systems in the 18 countries of the region.

Policymakers, development specialists, and civil-society leaders and professionals in transitioning countries increasingly recognize the state of media as a key element of the development agenda, not only in the democracy and governance sectors but also in such fields as economic growth, poverty reduction, health, youth, and gender. The MSI is designed to assist in advancing development in all these areas by analyzing the elements of each country's media system and highlighting where intervention can be most effective in promoting a sustainable and professional media system.

The debut MSI for the MENA region provides a starting point for an ongoing assessment. For most of the media professionals who participated in their country panels, this was their first opportunity to evaluate the complex array of elements that comprise a media sector. In some countries, direct or more subtle pressures on moderators and panelists required that the process be conducted "virtually" rather than through an actual, on-the-ground panel. Given the eclectic blend of media in the MENA region, the differing pace of media development, and the novelty of the process, we believe that with each subsequent publication of the MSI we will gain valuable, comparative data within each country and across the region as a whole.

IREX would like to thank all those who contributed to the publication of the Middle East North Africa Media Sustainability Index 2005. Participants and moderators for each country, listed after each chapter, provided the primary observations and analysis for this project. In many cases, their involvement represented a public commitment to press freedom and a stronger media sector. At IREX, Theo Dolan, Drusilla Menaker, and Mark Whitehouse provided analytical and editorial support to the project. IREX field staff and partners in the region provided either logistical support or participated in panels as members or moderators. Theo Dolan managed the overall implementation of the project.

Mark Koenig at USAID and Jacquelyn Johnstone at the US Department of State provided important assistance for the study. Both individuals and their organizations are essential supporters of independent media and advocates for the MSI as an analytical tool for development professionals.

Additionally, UNESCO provided support for implementing the MSI in Iraq on both the national and regional levels (see <http://www.europe.irex.org/msi/iraq-intro.asp>).

We hope you will find this report useful, and we welcome any feedback.

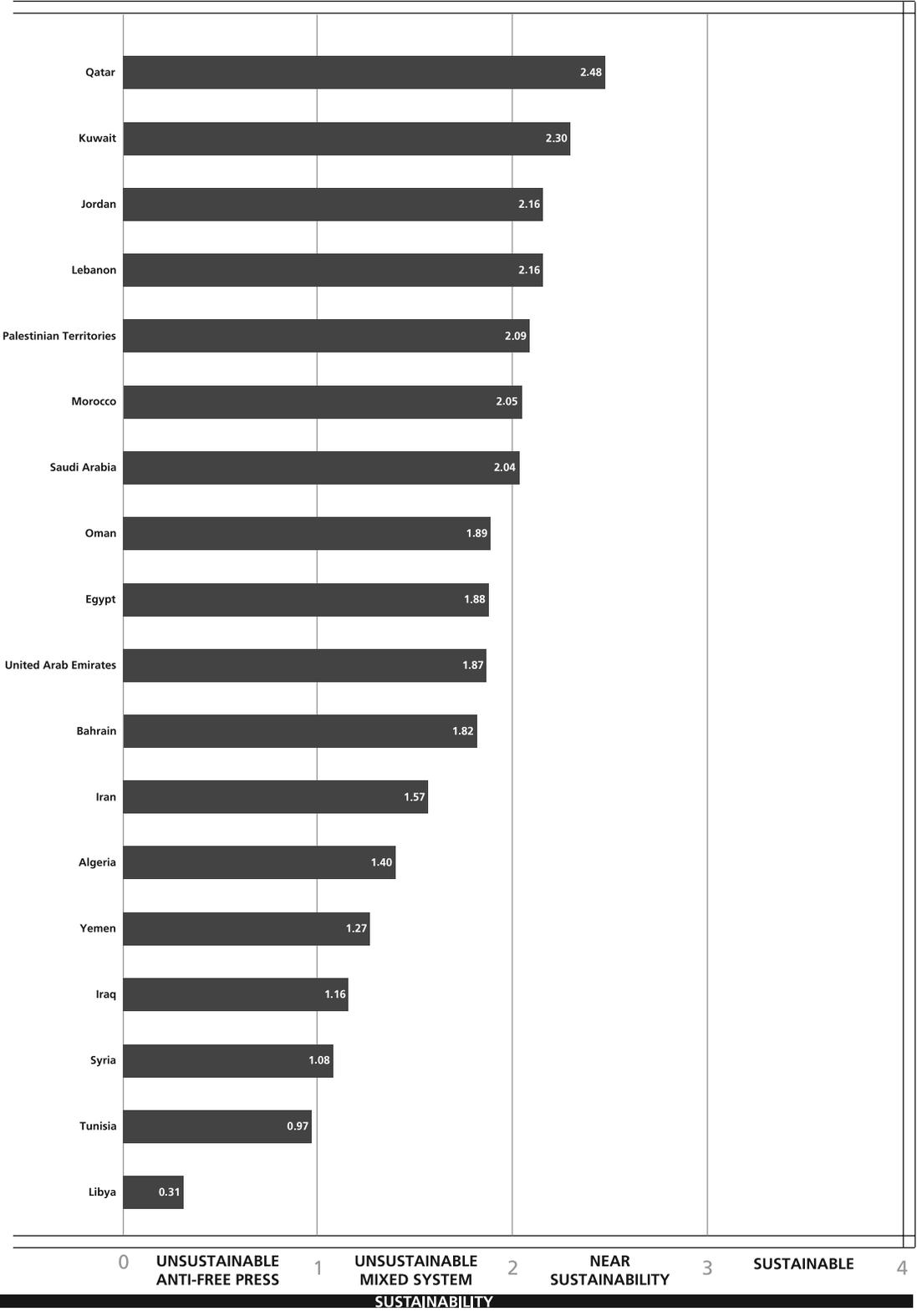
Sincerely,



Mark G. Pomar  
President, IREX

# AVERAGE SCORING FOR ALL OBJECTIVES, 2005

COUNTRY



0 UNSUSTAINABLE ANTI-FREE PRESS 1 UNSUSTAINABLE MIXED SYSTEM 2 NEAR SUSTAINABILITY 3 SUSTAINABLE 4  
SUSTAINABILITY

The first Media Sustainability Index for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) demonstrates several weaknesses—in particular, free-press protections in the law that are not upheld in practice, and pervasive self-censorship—that are common not only among the countries of the region but also in other parts of the world where media sectors are in transition. The assessment reveals another characteristic of MENA-region media systems, however, that is largely absent elsewhere: Money available for media business investment has allowed outlets to better professionalize and access new technologies, providing more sophisticated media products and a relatively higher degree of plurality of news sources, despite the other constraints.

The Media Sustainability Index (MSI), conducted by panels of media professionals in each of the 18 countries of the MENA region, showed profound underlying contradictions involving media law, journalism professionalism, and business management. These opposing trends are rooted partly in political cultures where many media professionals and some citizens look to global trends, new technologies, and the latest professional practices, while others lack much knowledge of what it means to live and work in a world of free speech and independent media and where governments only grudgingly begin to loosen their controls over information sources. At the same time, the development of satellite television and the increasing use of the Internet to disseminate news mean citizens in some of the most closed societies in the region increasingly are able to access information their governments may be seeking to limit. This struggle over control of the information space, as reflected in the progress of media sectors to be measured through successive applications of the MSI, will be a major factor determining how the countries of the region develop both politically and economically.

In many of the MENA nations assessed using the MSI, legal provisions protecting free speech and media exist in Constitutions and legislation but lack effective implementation. Other countries have adopted constitutional guarantees for freedom of speech but also have promulgated other laws that directly contradict these guarantees. As noted by a lawyer on the MSI panel in Morocco, one of the more progressive countries in the region in terms of media legislation, “the essential factor in assessing the validity of this legal setting remains the manner in which the government and the justice system apply the laws.”

Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Jordan, and Syria are among the countries with contradictory laws regarding media and free speech. Tunisia, for example, has constitutional protections for free speech and media freedoms, but the 1975 press code and the 1993 law guarding against terrorism constrain the broader constitutional provisions. In Jordan, the penal code allows authorities wide berth in prosecuting journalists for a variety of infractions despite Article 15 of the country’s Constitution, and Egypt has limitations due to an emergency law in force since 1981. In Bahrain, the new Constitution supported in a 2002 referendum mentions freedom of speech, but is contravened by the press law No. 47. And in Syria, the article noting free-

speech rights is superseded by the 1963 Emergency Laws that permit the jailing—without trial—of anyone deemed an enemy of the state. “Syria’s Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, but the state doesn’t practice it,” said a reporter for a major state-run newspaper. “It is obvious to everyone that the political and security authorities are above the Constitution. We’ve had instances where journalists have filed cases against the security authorities, and they’ve been banned from writing. In this climate it’s not really possible to talk about freedom of expression in Syria.”

This combination of relatively progressive laws but poor implementation by the government and the courts was found to be typical in both the MENA region and the countries of Europe and Eurasia, where the MSI has been conducted for five years. Constitutions in the latter region also routinely promote freedom of expression and the rights of media to disseminate, but either the enabling legislation has not been enacted that would fully uphold the constitutional guarantees for broadcast and print media, or judicial systems are not independent and bend to interpretations that allow governments or special interests to control the media.

This lack of true freedom-of-speech protections throughout the MENA region is also damaging to media professionalism, according to the MSI panelists. Particularly evident is the high level of self-censorship that exists even in the more progressive media environments. For example, Qatar, home to satellite television’s Al Jazeera, has emerged as one of the most forward-looking Arab nations in terms of freedom of expression and quality media. Nevertheless, the MSI assessment found that significant numbers of editors and journalists—particularly the many who are expatriates—are reluctant to report critically for fear of losing the relatively highly paid jobs that brought them there. The unwritten “red lines” understood to circumscribe coverage apart from any legal process, the vulnerability felt by expatriate editors and reporters, and, in some countries, the fear of violence against journalists combine to limit the assertiveness of the media—far overshadowing traditional government censorship as a concern for the MSI panelists. According to a Lebanese MSI participant, journalists “live in total paranoia, and they fear losing their jobs and their lives.” Variations of this viewpoint were echoed by panel participants from Libya to Iran to Syria and Oman who used terms such as “endemic” and “infused” to describe self-censorship’s place in all layers of the media. Religion, terrorism, and the probity of the ruler and his family were among the topics considered taboo. And pressure from political and business interests, as well as the desire for self-preservation,

led many media professionals to find the limits within which they could operate and hold to them.

Self-censorship is not an issue facing the Middle East alone, however. As the Europe and Eurasia MSI demonstrates, editors and journalists exercise restraint even after the regulatory environment and the political climate loosen. Habit and fear linger to taint the media culture, MSI panelists say, and editors and owners continue to feel pressure from the government or the inclination to curry favor with those in power. This problem is seen worldwide—in Africa, Asia, and Latin America—and it is not unknown in Western Europe and North America, generally seen to have the highest levels of press freedoms.

Setting the media sector in the MENA region apart from others in transition, however, is the relative success of media businesses and the embrace of new technologies. Despite limits on media freedom and professionalism, domestic media in the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Bahrain generally are doing well economically. A range of factors, including media “free zones,” the popularity of satellite channels growing from Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya, rapidly increasing advertising revenues, and the ability of citizens to consume media in quantity, contribute to this. The wealth in the Gulf region also has allowed heavily subsidized media, such as some of the satellite channels, to play vital roles in the region.

This juxtaposition of political limits on free speech with significant financial investment in regional media and a successful domestic media business environment is clearly visible in Saudi Arabia. Despite rigid oversight of editors and media managers, news outlets in the kingdom are selling more advertising space than ever before, newspapers post healthy circulation rates, and international investment continues in the media market, MSI panelists report. Another example is the United Arab Emirates, home to both the rapidly expanding Dubai Media City, which boasts multiple local and international news outlets, and one of the most stringent media laws in the Arab world, the 1980 Printing and Publishing Law.

These oil-rich countries and their neighbors have demonstrated the ability to develop a media industry without loosening press freedoms beyond points that threaten the governing monarchies and regimes of the region. Whether they can maintain this balance remains to be seen, especially as the strong economies allow ever broader access to new technologies, such as Internet-based media, that can serve to counteract government restrictions on information. The satellite channels continue to open the Middle East media space

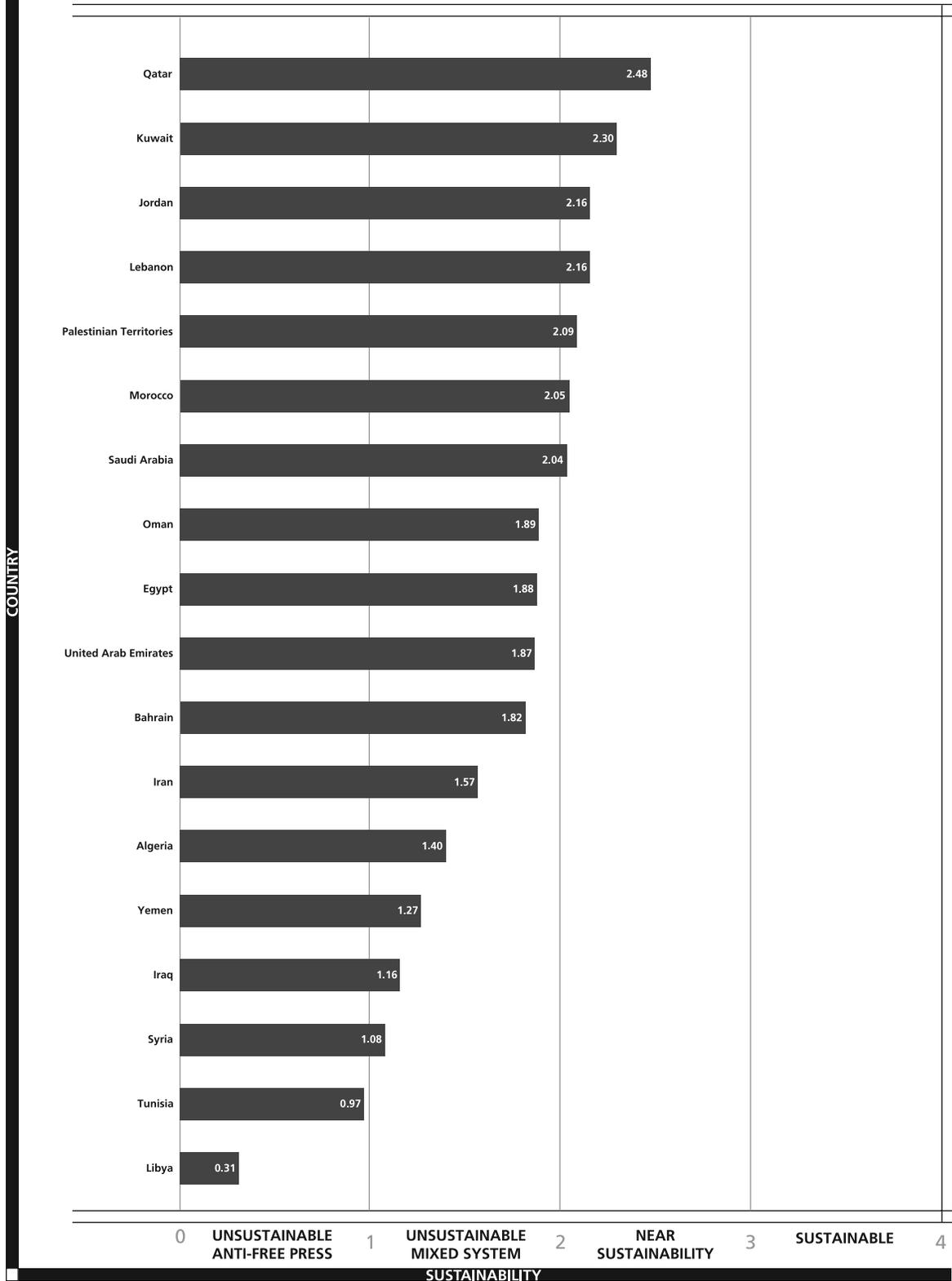
to differing opinions and information not vetted by viewers' governments. Increasingly receiving new notice is the impact of the Internet. In Iran, for example, print and broadcast media remain subject to control by the authorities, but MSI participants report that 63,000 weblogs are providing an expanding forum for information and discussion. In particular, these weblogs in Iran and elsewhere fill a need for local news unmet by satellite broadcasters or controlled indigenous media. Al Jazeera, for example, offers little programming focused on Qatar, the country where it is based, although MSI panelists agree that it has raised the bar generally for media there. Al Arabiya, based in the UAE, likewise offers little information on events in that country that is controversial or alternative to official viewpoints. Nevertheless, the MSI assessments found, satellite channels, weblogs, and Internet publications have expanded significantly the plurality of information sources for citizens throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

This success of media as businesses in parts of the Middle East and the emergence and rapid acceptance of new technologies against the backdrop of only gradually loosening restrictions on information and state-linked media is for the most part not mirrored elsewhere in the world. The wealth of the Gulf countries and the unifying language of Arabic contribute to this phenomenon. Without both there would have been no Al Jazeera, LBC, or Al Arabiya, and other regions have not shared in this trend due to lack of one or both of these elements. Latin America, the most homogenous region in terms of language, lacks

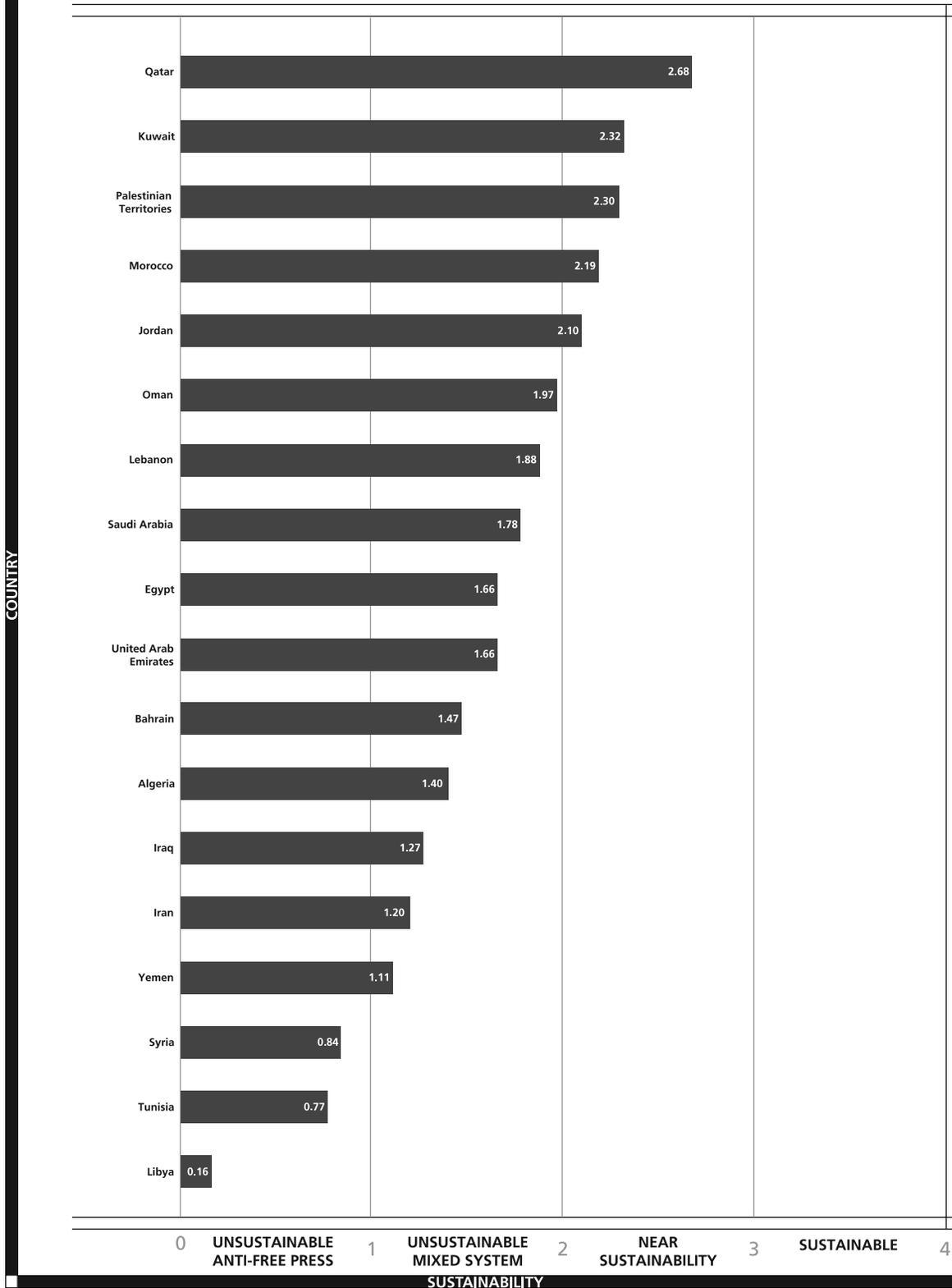
a comparison to the Arabic satellite channels. Asia is without any real unifying language, and Europe and Eurasia, large parts of which had Russian in common, have not had the resources to develop such media.

The first MSI for the Middle East and North Africa shows a region not yet advanced toward a robust, independent media sector, but it clearly detected the signals of change. The roadblocks are painfully evident in, as an example, the rebuilding of the Iraqi media. Although the absolute controls of the previous regime are gone, the MSI panelists said, not only do political leaders not understand the principles of media freedoms but citizens also do not understand the importance of media independence or act to defend it. In Libya, MSI participants said, ethical standards for journalists and supporting institutions are simply not part of the culture. However, in Egypt, panelists pointed to a degree of raised awareness of press freedom issues during the 2005 presidential and parliamentary elections, when abuses led to largely unprecedented public protests. Elsewhere, such as Kuwait and Morocco, previously off-limits topics are beginning to get coverage, and journalists have an increasingly broader range of information sources from which to choose. Governments, too, are reacting as competition from more open and professional trans-national media leave their own controlled outlets less and less relevant, and in Jordan and Oman, for example, are beginning to open the regulatory process to private ownership. This debut MSI for the region, the first time media professionals in each country assessed their own media sectors across such a wide range of criteria, represents a starting point for charting this evolution.

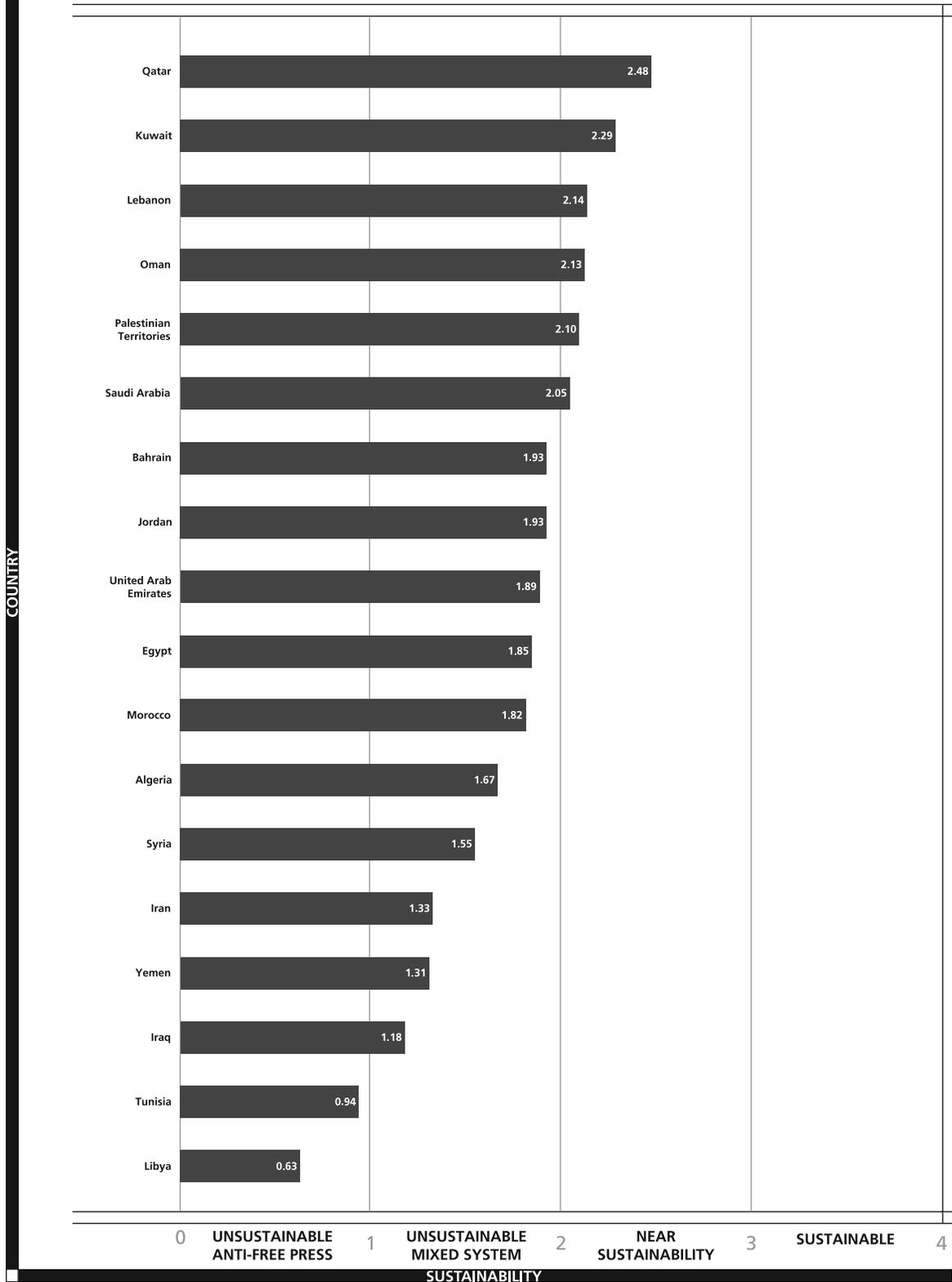
# AVERAGE SCORING FOR ALL OBJECTIVES, 2005



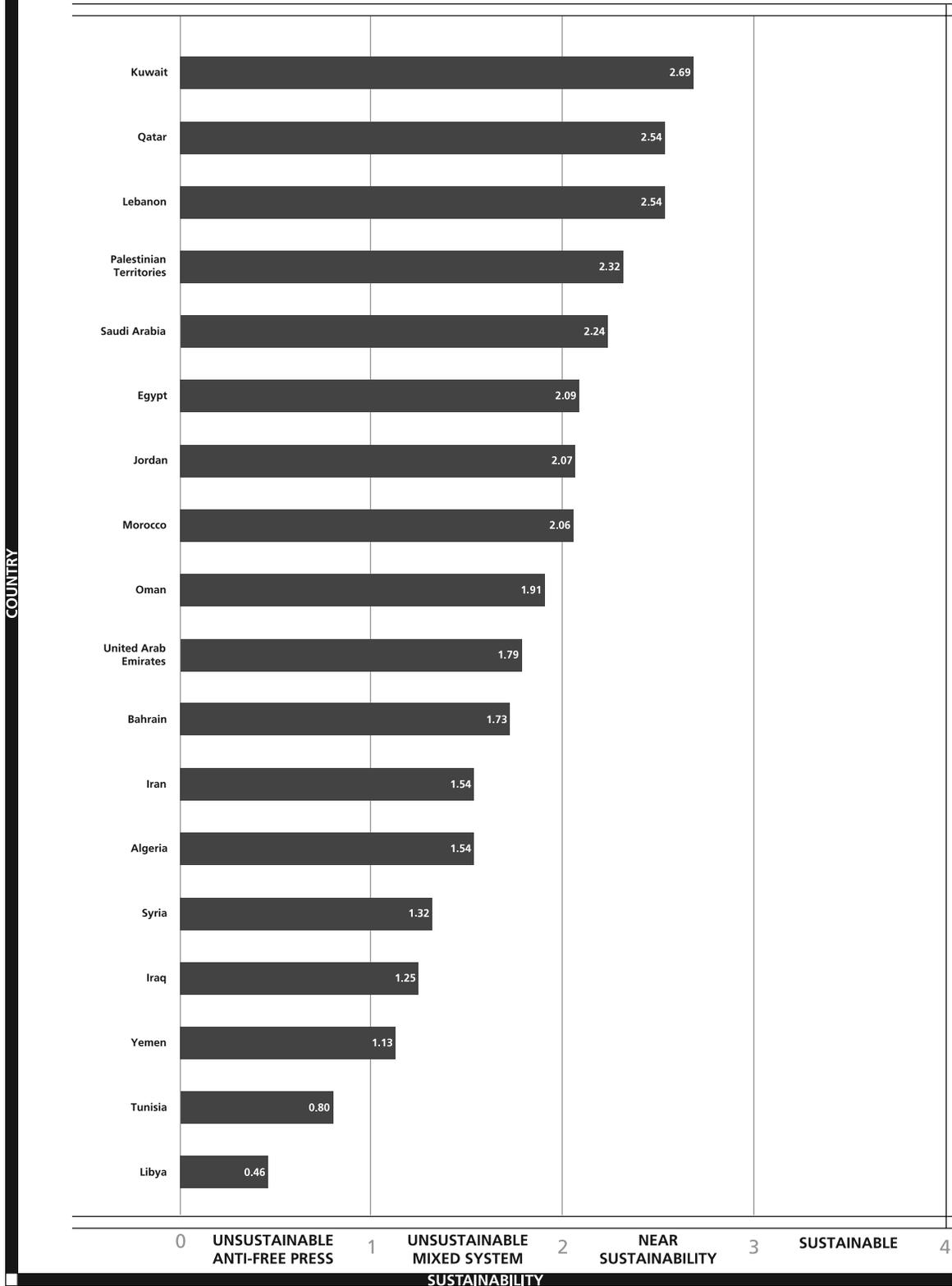
## OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH, 2005



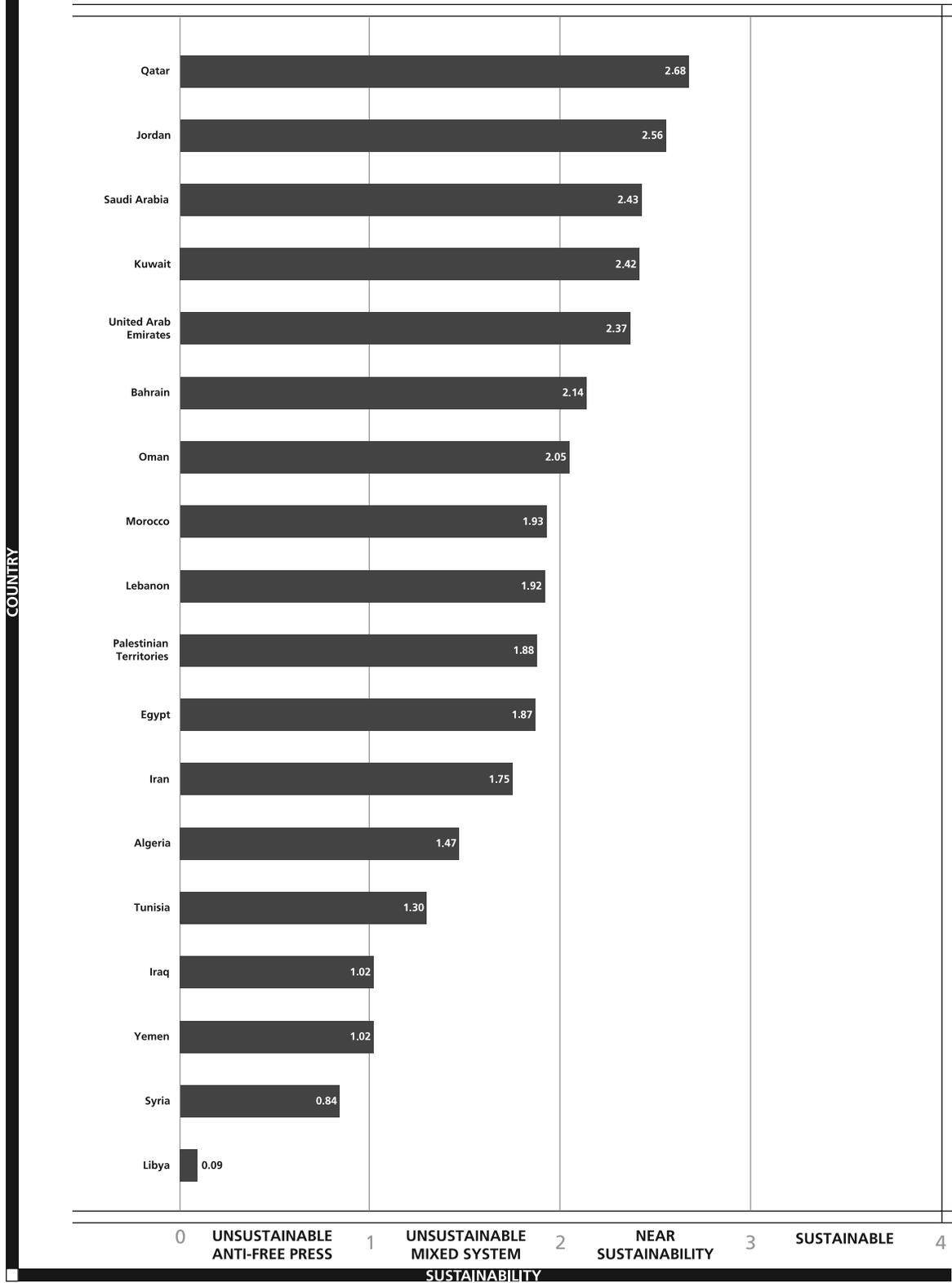
## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM, 2005



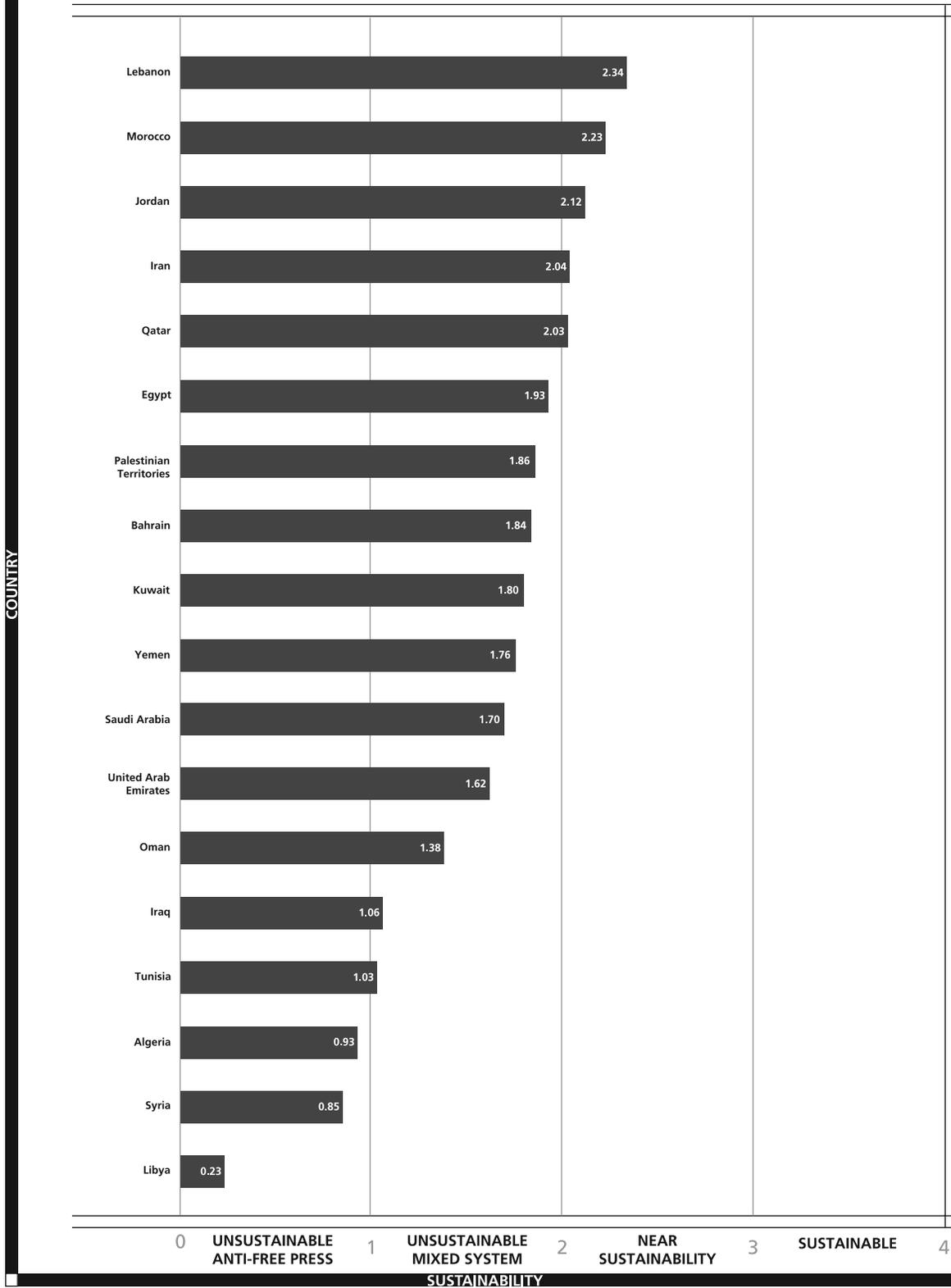
## OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES, 2005



# OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT, 2005

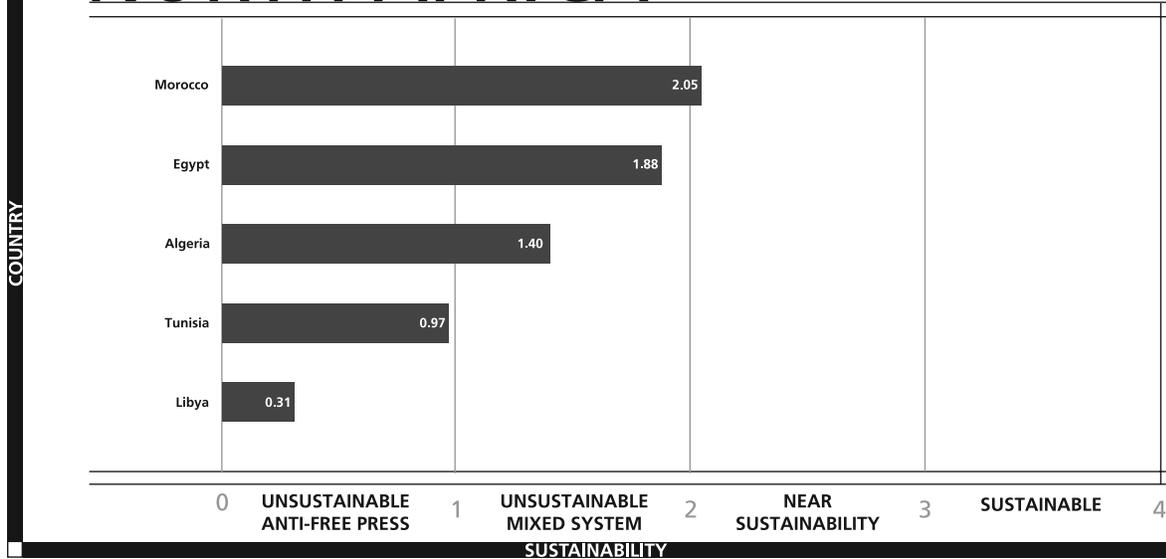


## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS, 2005



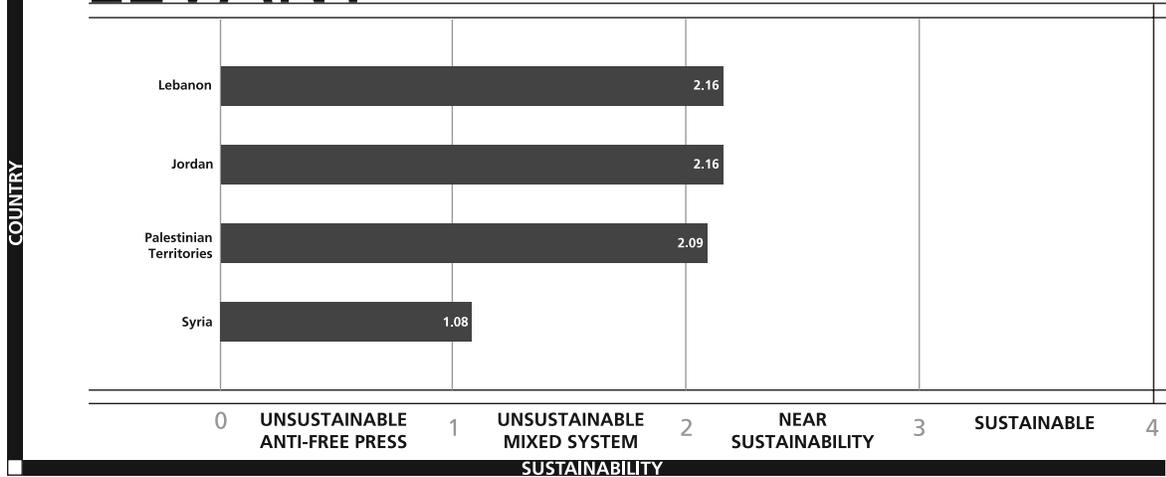
**AVERAGE OBJECTIVE SCORES, 2005**

# NORTH AFRICA



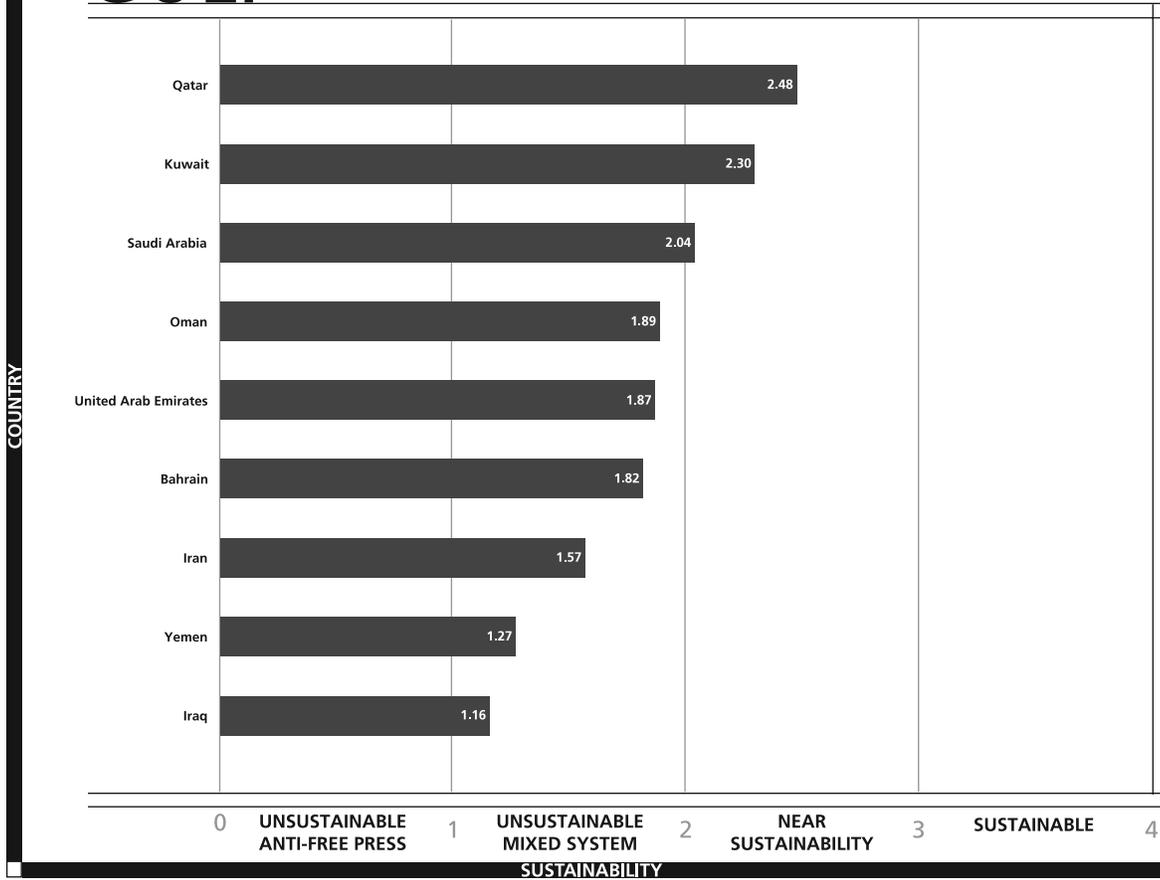
**AVERAGE OBJECTIVE SCORES, 2005**

# LEVANT



## AVERAGE OBJECTIVE SCORES, 2005

# GULF



THE MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX (MSI), CONDUCTED BY PANELS OF MEDIA PROFESSIONALS IN EACH OF THE 18 COUNTRIES OF THE MENA REGION, SHOWED PROFOUND UNDERLYING CONTRADICTIONS INVOLVING MEDIA LAW, JOURNALISM PROFESSIONALISM, AND BUSINESS MANAGEMENT.



**I**REX prepared the Media Sustainability Index (MSI) in cooperation with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) as a tool to assess the development of independent media systems over time and across countries. IREX staff, USAID, and other media development professionals contributed to the development of this assessment tool.

The MSI assesses five “objectives” in shaping a successful media system:

1. Legal and social norms protect and promote free speech and access to public information.
2. Journalism meets professional standards of quality.
3. Multiple news sources provide citizens with reliable and objective news.
4. Independent media are well-managed businesses, allowing editorial independence.
5. Supporting institutions function in the professional interests of independent media.

These objectives were judged to be the most important aspects of a sustainable and professional independent media system and served as the criteria against which countries were rated. A score was attained for each objective by rating seven to nine indicators, which determine how well a country meets that objective. The objectives, indicators, and scoring system are presented below.

The scoring is done in two parts. First, a panel of experts is assembled in each country, drawn from representatives of local media, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), professional associations, international donors, and media-development implementers. Each country’s panel has a slightly different composition, but in most cases, the same panelists from this year’s MSI will be invited to return for the 2006 study in order to maintain an element of consistency.

Panel participants are provided with the objectives and indicators and an explanation of the scoring system. Each panelist individually reviewed the information and scored each objective. The panelists then assembled to discuss the objectives and indicators, and to devise combined scores and analyses. The panel moderator, in most cases a host-country media or NGO representative, prepared a written analysis of the discussion, which was subsequently edited by IREX representatives.

The panelists’ scores are reviewed by IREX in-country staff and Washington, DC, media staff, which then score the countries independently of the MSI panel. Using the combination of scores, the final scores are determined. This method allowed the MSI scores to reflect both local media insiders’ views and the views of international media-development professionals.

## I. Objectives and Indicators

### OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH

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.

### OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

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).

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

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.

### OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

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.

### OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

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.

## II. Scoring System

### A. Indicator Scoring

Each indicator is scored using the following system:

**0** = Country does not meet the indicator; government or social forces may actively oppose its implementation.

**1** = Country minimally meets aspects of the indicator; forces may not actively oppose its implementation, but business environment may not support it and government or profession do not fully and actively support change.

**2** = Country has begun to meet many aspects of the indicator, but progress may be too recent to judge or still dependent on current government or political forces.

**3** = Country meets most aspects of the indicator; implementation of the indicator has occurred over several years and/or through changes in government, indicating likely sustainability.

**4** = Country meets the aspects of the indicator; implementation has remained intact over multiple changes in government, economic fluctuations, changes in public opinion, and/or changing social conventions.

### B. Objective and Overall Scoring

The averages of all the indicators are then averaged to obtain a single, overall score for each objective. Objective scores are averaged to provide an overall

score for the country. IREX interprets the overall scores as follows:

**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.

# NORTH AFRICA



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.



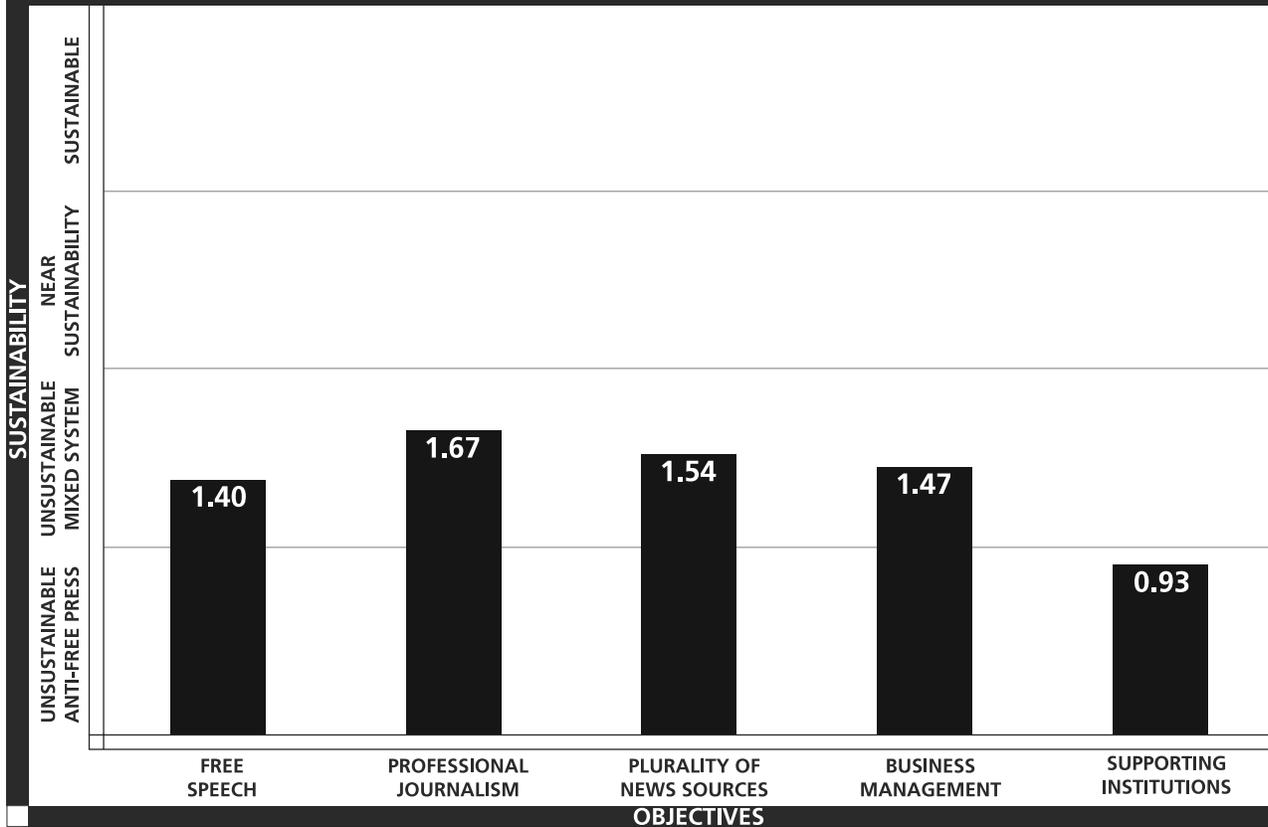


**A**lgeria's media are no longer in the middle of the country's political struggles, nor so much in the public eye. This shift came as the three-party alliance of the Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN), the Rassemblement National Démocratique (RND), and the Mouvement de la Société pour la Paix (MSP) 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 Djjerri 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 Djjerri. "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.

***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.***

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

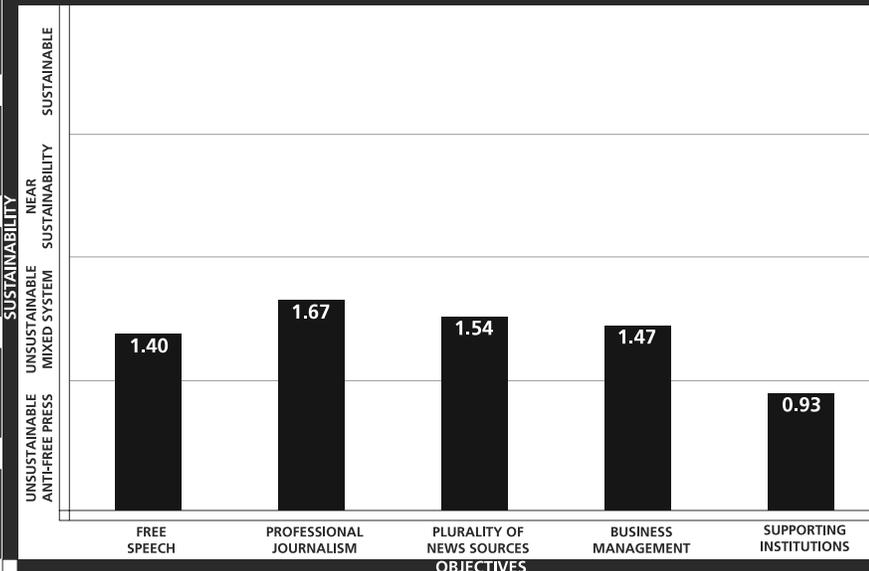
## GENERAL

- **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



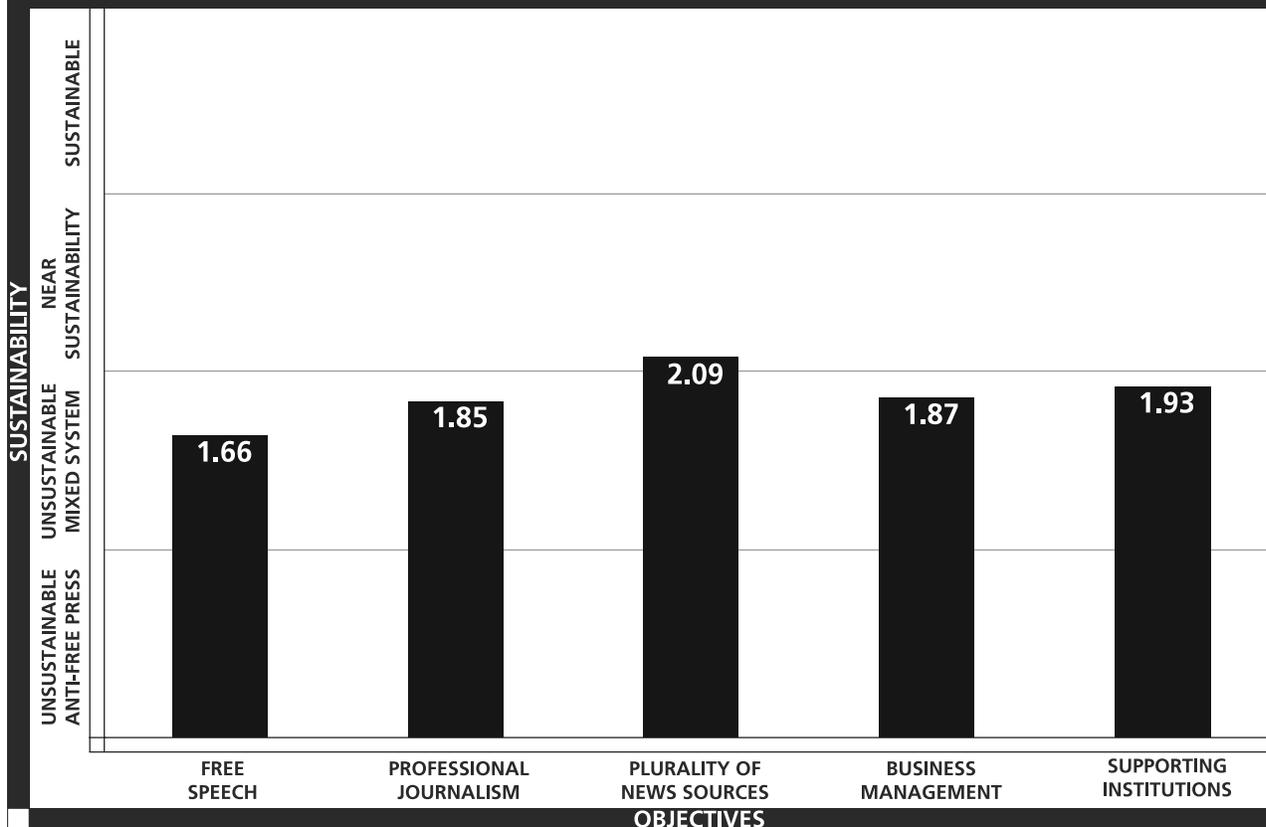


Egypt has one of the more developed media sectors in the Middle East and North Africa region, and its cultural influence has reached many Arab countries. It is also one of the more tightly controlled, despite the emergence of a handful of privately owned broadcasters and newspapers. The government is under increasing pressure domestically from opposition political forces and to a degree internationally from the United States and other governments to loosen restrictions on freedom of expression and the media. The presidential and parliamentary elections held during 2005 provided focal points around which a new popular movement called “Kifaya” (“Enough”) could mobilize increasing support for reform not only from among opposition groupings but also professional associations and students.

For the first time in Egyptian history, the presidential election held in September 2005 was contested by several candidates. Hosni Mubarak won a fifth consecutive six-year term with 88.6 percent of the votes. Opposition candidate Ayman Nour of the Al-Ghad party received 7.6 percent, and Numan Gumaa of the Wafd party received 2.9 percent. Parliamentary elections in November and December resulted in the ruling party holding its majority with 324 seats, 73 percent of elected members, but the Muslim Brotherhood won 88 seats, or 20 percent. The remaining seats went to other opposition-party and independent candidates.

Human-rights groups monitoring news coverage of the elections reported a bias in the state media toward President Mubarak and candidates of the ruling party, while the few independent media outlets were complimented for their balanced coverage. Many irregularities that occurred during the voting were noted by the 2005 Media Sustainability Index (MSI) panel for Egypt, but the members agreed that the most important outcome was the confidence the public and the media gained in their right to exercise freedom of expression. The panelists said many political taboos fell, and journalists, human-rights advocates, and opposition groups have turned to challenging the restrictions imposed by the state of emergency imposed continuously since 1981 as well as the legal potential to imprison journalists, which President Mubarak promised in 2004 to see eliminated.

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: EGYPT



**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.

Overall, the MSI panel assessed Egypt’s media sector as 1.88. It considered the legal protections for press freedom to be the weakest area, with the multiple available news and information sources the strongest relatively.

**OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH**  
**Egypt Objective Score: 1.66 / 4.00**

Article 47 of the Egyptian Constitution provides: “Freedom of expression is guaranteed. Every individual has the right to express his opinion and to publicize it verbally or in writing or by photography or other means within the limits of the law. Self-criticism and constructive criticism guarantee the safety of the national structure.” Article 48 of the Constitution states further: “Freedom of the press, printing, publication and mass media shall be guaranteed. Censorship on newspapers is forbidden, as is notifying, suspending or cancelling them by administrative means.” However, this article also reads: “In a state of emergency or during a time of war limited censorship may be imposed on newspapers, publications and mass media in matters related to public safety or natural security in accordance with the law.”

The Constitution also contains a chapter on the press (Chapter Seven, Part Two) that provides in its Article 208: “The freedom of the press is guaranteed and press censorship is forbidden. It is also forbidden to threaten, confiscate or cancel a newspaper through administrative measures, as stipulated in the Constitution and defined by the law.” The Constitution adds in Article 210: “Journalists have the right to obtain news and information according to the regulations set by law. Their activities are not subject to any authority other than the law.”

However, according to MSI panelist Negad El Borai, a media law specialist, “These constitutional rights have lost their protective force because of an array of laws and regulations which infringe on freedom of expression and the journalists rights to access information.”

Indeed, the Emergency Law in force since 1981, the 1996 Press Law, the Penal Law, the 1971 Law on the Protection of National Unity, the 1977 Law on the Security of the Nation and the Citizen, the Publications Law, and the Parties Law have been used extensively to limit the rights to publish, according to MSI panelists. These statues also have served to protect the government against media scrutiny as well as prosecute journalists who overstep unwritten red lines that govern what can be reported on, they said.

The Emergency Law 158 of 1958 contains provisions that

give broad, almost absolute, powers to the President “to order censorship on correspondence of all kinds, as well as on newspapers, publications, drawings and all means of expression and advertising before they are published; order their confiscation or suspension or shut down printing houses provided that the censorship is applied to matters related to public peace or national security.”

The Emergency Law allows also the Ministry of Defense to ban publications it deems to involve sensitive security issues, and gives the Public Prosecutor authority to issue a temporary ban on the publication of news pertaining to cases involving national security. It allows the Council of Ministers to ban publications that seem to be offensive to public morals, detrimental to religion, or likely to cause a breach of peace. The law gives the Ministry of the Interior the authority to prevent specific issues of foreign newspapers from entering the country if necessary to protect public order. Finally, the law allows authorities to prosecute alleged violations and obtain criminal penalties in state security courts and military-style tribunals where defendants have limited rights to appeal.

**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.

***The election period and the mobilization of various civil-society organizations, especially those in the Kifaya movement, raised awareness of free-speech issues during 2005, especially in cities and among professionals and students, MSI panelists said. Violations of press freedoms caused a degree of outrage among journalists, lawyers, students, and others staging street protests and letter-writing campaigns.***

The Press Law 96 of 1996 prohibits censorship in Article 3, but in Article 4 allows it during states of emergency in cases involving national security or public order. The law also prohibits administrative bans or seizure of publications in Article 5, and forbids harming journalists because of opinions they present or truthful information they

expression trials, said Negad El Borai. He cited the continuing of the Emergency Law as an example of international human-rights standards not being applied.

The election period and the mobilization of various civil-society organizations, especially those in the Kifaya movement, raised awareness of free-speech issues during 2005, especially in cities and among professionals and students, MSI panelists said. Violations of press freedoms caused a degree of outrage among journalists, lawyers, students, and others staging street protests and letter-writing campaigns. However, many citizens still do not recognize individual rights as fundamental, and, Negad El Borai said, Egyptian society in general “does not yet accept the value of freedom of expression.”

In 2005, human-rights groups recorded 34 cases of journalists who were sentenced to imprisonment or fines, 28 cases of journalists who appeared before a judge, and 21 cases of journalists investigated by the public prosecutors. The majority of these cases concerned defamation of public officials and insult of private individuals.

publish or forcing them to reveal their sources unless required by the courts within the law—as in cases touching on national security (Article 7).

On April 13, 2005, Cairo Criminal Court sentenced journalists Abdel Nasser Ali, Youssef el-Aoumi, and Alaa Yaha Mohamed el-Ghatrify from *El-Masry El-Youm* newspaper to one year of imprisonment and a \$1,750 fine for libeling Housing Minister Mohamed Ibrahim Soliman in a report in August 2004 stating that the police had searched the offices of the minister. On May 13, 2005, security forces arrested nine members of an Al Jazeera TV news crew and detained them in a state security office for seven hours after the journalists attempted to cover a general meeting of the Cairo Judges’ Club. On November 9, 2005, Al Jazeera correspondent Ahmed Mansour was assaulted and beaten by two unidentified men as he prepared to interview an opposition politician.

The Press Law does contain several provisions allowing for imprisonment of journalists for various offenses, including defamation, insult, and false information. Under Article 185, insulting a public official in relation to the conduct of the official’s duty or service can be punished with a maximum of one-year imprisonment. Article 303 stipulates imprisonment of up to two years for defamation of a public official in relation to the conduct of the official’s duty or service. Article 307 states that sentences should be doubled in cases where insult or defamation occur in printed material.

Another notable case in June 2005 involved female demonstrators and reporters—some of them foreign—who were attacked by supporters of the ruling National Democratic Party at the entrance of the Egyptian Press Syndicate. Female journalists had their clothes torn and were groped. Complaints about the assault were lodged with the police, and the Public Prosecutor was called on to investigate. However, the case was frozen when the prosecutor said there was not enough evidence, an assessment disputed by witnesses who said there were photographs and video footage that captured the attacks.

Act 20 of 1936 concerning publications provides that foreign publications may be banned from entering or being distributed in the country under the terms of a decree issued by the Council of Ministers for the purpose of maintaining public order. The Act also provides that publications published in Egypt that contain material considered of pornographic nature or to ridicule religions in such a way as to jeopardize public security may be banned.

Although Egypt has signed and ratified many international conventions and treaties, including the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights, it has not incorporated them in the legislative systems and the courts reference national legislation in freedom of

No advance was made during 2005 on President Mubarak’s declared intention to draft a new press law that would eliminate prison sentences for journalists.

The announcement, made in 2004, had been greeted with optimism by the Egyptian Press Syndicate, which had fought to establish the right to express opinions concerning the efficacy of government officials without fear of imprisonment. The Press Syndicate prepared a draft amendment endorsed by the governmental Egyptian Human Rights Council. (In July 2006, Parliament passed a controversial revision of the press law that did eliminate prison sentences in some cases, including libel, but retained them in others and was criticized by press-freedom advocates.)

All licensed private broadcasters in Egypt are based in the Media Free Zone in 6th of October City, a district being built on desert at the edge of Cairo, and operate under a February 2000 decree that was issued by the Information Ministry to regulate the licensing and operations of private televisions and radios. The General Authority for Free Zones is the body responsible for issuing licenses. However, the decree did not cancel the Law 13 of 1979, modified by Law 223 of 1989, which gives the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU) a monopoly over terrestrial broadcasting. Four private satellite televisions received licenses in 2001: Dream 1 and Dream 2, owned 90 percent by Egyptian businessman Ahmed Bahgat and 10 percent by the ERTU; Al-Mehwar TV, a joint stock company owned by Egyptian businessmen and headed by Hassan Rateb, an investor in Sinai Cement, with a 10 percent stake held by the government; a shopping station, Tamima; and a tourism promotion station that has gone off the air since. In 2003, licenses were given to two music radio stations, Nile FM in English and Nogoom FM in Arabic, owned by media mogul Emad Adib's Nile Radio Productions. The MSI panel agreed that the licensing system is not fully fair, as it is controlled by the state and not by an independent commission, and also that it is opaque, as the conditions of operation for these broadcasters are not known to the public.

The regulations governing licensing of broadcasting in the Media Free Zone exclude "channels of a religious, factional, and partisan nature or involving sex or violence" and set the capital for private projects to not less than \$3.47 million. Aghapy (Love) TV, the first minority broadcaster, belongs to the Coptic Christian Church. It broadcasts in Arabic using the US satellite Telstar 12 and was founded in 2005 by the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria. Aghapy did not receive a license from the Egyptian authorities because of its religious character. However, it has managed to produce its programs from different convents and private locations and hand them over to Telstar 12 for broadcast.

MSI panelist Sayyed Ali, assistant editor at the state *Al-Ahram* newspaper and a teacher at the Faculty of Mass

Communication at Cairo University, said "there are 312 demands for authorization to establish FM radios that have not been satisfied or are waiting answers from the government. But it is the president who intervenes directly on this question."

Among those who were denied license for FM radios are the Al Ghad party, which launched its own online radio station in June 2005, and the Muslim Brotherhood, which started its online radio in October 2005. Several other private online radios were also begun during the year, and the government's permissive stance toward the Internet has allowed these stations to be established outside the current legal constraints on the media, which do not cover the Internet, the MSI panelists said. The low cost of setting up and running Internet radio also encouraged their development. Although the audience is restricted by the low rate of Internet penetration in Egypt—estimated at fewer than 3 million users, or around 4 percent of the population—the relatively low cost of Internet access has made these stations increasingly available to a fast-growing number of young, urban, middle-class Egyptians.

State broadcasting is run by the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU), a government body that is controlled by the Minister of Information and managed by a board whose chair is appointed by the President. The ERTU board members are selected by the Minister of Information and drawn from various state institutions. The Council of Ministers also appoints some members who are not civil servants but generally lawyers, artists, judges, or politicians. However, these "public figures" must remain in a minority and, the MSI panel said, generally are supportive of government policy.

The Supreme Press Council, which supervises the government-owned print media, including *Al-Ahram* and *Al-Akhbar*, is chaired by the Shura Council speaker and includes as members the chairmen and editors-in-chief of Egyptian media outlets, the head of the Egyptian Press Syndicate, mass communications and law professors, and other public figures.

The licensing system for newspapers is controversial. Negad El Borai said, "You have to be a political party approved by the Shura Council, which is dominated by the ruling party, or to set up a company with huge capital and apply to the Supreme Press Council, whose members are also linked to the regime." For this reason, said panelist Tarek Abdel Jabar, manager of the online radio station Egypt Today, "most of the private publications are licensed abroad and must get two authorizations from the Ministry of Information, one to print in the free zone and one to distribute in Cairo,

but before distribution these publications must submit to the censor.”

According to Article 13 of the Press Law, “freedom for political parties and public and private corporate bodies to issue newspapers” is guaranteed by law. However, under Law 96 of 1996, individuals are denied the right to own or publish newspapers. Only corporate entities may do so, subject to a licensing system. This, in turn, requires aspiring publishing companies to furnish proof that they have deposited the sum of \$43,000 or \$173,000, depending on whether the paper is to be weekly or daily, in an Egyptian bank, along with full details of the planned editorial policy and administrative framework. Those individuals who are denied licenses or cannot afford the deposit may start their publications abroad, perhaps in Lebanon or Britain, and register in Egypt as foreign publications. “While the state can launch new publications and broadcast stations without any restrictions and at any moment it wants, private investors in media enterprises are subjected to tough financial conditions or are simply denied the right to operate,” said Hussam Al Sayed, deputy editor-in-chief of the Islam Online news website.

The law does not favor state-owned media outright. But in practice, the panel agreed, state-owned media benefit from getting public resources for needed investment in new equipment. Panelists said editors and managers of the state media are appointed by the government and are considered to be under the direct influence of the government and the ruling party. They also said that major businesses interfere in the coverage of their activities by the state media.

There is no specific law that guarantees access to state-held information. However, the Press Law guarantees the right of journalists to obtain only allowed news, statistics, and information and to publish them according to the law. It also prohibits imposition of restrictions on the flow of information or on the equal access to information of newspapers in ways that would infringe on the rights of citizens to such information. Restrictions on the free flow of information can only be justified, according to Article 9 of Law 96 of 1996, for the protection of national security and defense of the nation and its higher interests. According to Article 10, journalists have the right to receive responses to requests for information unless the information is classified as secret. These provisions, the panel agreed, have no effect in practice. They mentioned several other statutes that prohibit disclosure of information, such as the state security law and the police law. Several panelists recalled that attempts by a group of journalists and lawyers to campaign for adoption of a

law that protects official documents and reorganizes the state archives failed quickly.

Butaina Kamel, a presenter at Egyptian television, said that “journalists rely on their personal contacts within the informal networks of the government administration to get information. However, journalists working in the state media sector have better access than their colleagues in the private or partisan media.” Tarek Abdel Jabar added, “The three state-owned dailies and the national news agency are the first to be served with news by officials, and journalists of the independent media often complain about the lack of information to the Supreme Press Council but they don’t get any response.”

The government does not restrict access to international news and news sources. However, “the use of the information gathered from online media and news agencies varies depending on the degree of self-censorship practiced, especially at state media,” said Hussam Al Sayed. He noted that due to the lack of responsiveness by Egyptian officials to media inquiries, Internet-based media have become a major source of information for other journalists, especially when Egypt is confronted with a major crisis, such as a boat sinking or a terrorist act or when world leaders meet in Egypt.

Egyptian journalists require special authorization from the Ministry of Information to cover directly some events such as terrorist acts and activities of the president and his ministers. Foreign journalists must apply for a permanent accreditation to work in Egypt or a temporary license. Visiting reporters need to apply to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, specifying the subject to be covered, and various documents must be submitted. Most visiting journalists do not apply for an authorization unless they have to interview officials or cover major official events.

The government does not control entrance to journalism schools, and the process of hiring entry-level journalists is also free from state interference. The possession of a press card is not a requirement to work, but it is necessary to join the Press Syndicate, which provides benefits including social security, medical insurance, and pension schemes, as well as monthly financial support of \$45. Traditionally, said Tarek Abdel Jabar, “accreditation is routine for journalism graduates, who normally spend one year as a trainee—or two, in the case of those with no academic journalism qualifications—and then editors register then with the Press Syndicate. But in recent years, many media outlets have refused to register their employees in the Syndicate so their period as trainees can be prolonged, and in some cases it has reached 10 years.”

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Egypt Objective Score: 1.85 / 4.00

The MSI panel agreed that the majority of Egyptian journalists rarely check facts or seek out multiple points of view, and often perceive one source of information to be enough. This practice is endemic at the state-owned media, which give prominence to government sources of information, and at political party media, which report from their own partisan sources, said Hamdy Hassan, head of the Al-Ahram Training Institute. The private press, however, "has improved reporting on diverse political views and opened pages to civil-society groups," according to Negad El Borai.

The Journalists Code of Ethics, approved by the Supreme Press Council and adopted by the Egyptian Press Syndicate in 1998, contains references to general universal standards on freedom of expression, such as Article 19 of the 1948 UN Declaration on Human Rights. The code also lists obligations for journalists, such as to not promote racism, distort facts, accept gifts, or plagiarize. The Press Law mentions ethics, with Article 20 prohibiting incitement to religious hatred and racism and Article 21 barring violations of individuals' private lives, including of those holding public posts, unless the subject is in relation to their work and is in the public interest. Journalists who contravene these two articles can be sentenced to a maximum of one-year imprisonment and a fine of between \$870 and \$1,750. However, according to the MSI panel members, the code of ethics is rarely upheld. They pointed in particular to corruption among journalists working for the so-called yellow weeklies registered abroad and for publications of certain fringe political parties.

The Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU) has its own ethics code. It prohibits criticism of the national system, national heroism, nationalism, officers of the military, the security services and the courts, as well as religious leaders and state officials. The code also prohibits the broadcast of any confidential information and any scientific, technical, professional, or religious advice or commentary unless it has been reviewed by the editors. Criticism of other programs broadcast within the ERTU also is prohibited by the code of ethics. Most panelists characterized these prohibitions as contrary to international standards and representing, in effect, a penal law.

Managers of the state-owned media practice self-censorship, especially regarding news critical to the regime, while private and partisan media are increasingly publishing critical assessments of the

President, his family, and the government, said Hamdy Hassan.

The panel agreed that the period of the presidential and legislative elections in 2005, combined with international pressure, has allowed the private and partisan press to break many political taboos. However, self-censorship, the panel said, is still broadly applicable to internal security issues due to laws prohibiting the publication of any unauthorized information related to anti-terrorism efforts, radical Islamist groups, or Egyptian relations with Israel, except when the Israeli government is criticized.

The panel agreed that state and private broadcast media give more time to entertainment than news. "Music, serialization of films, games, etc. are made to attract advertisers, and for the hard news, people

*The panel agreed that state and private broadcast media give more time to entertainment than news. "Music, serialization of films, games, etc. are made to attract advertisers, and for the hard news, people usually watch Al Jazeera or Al Arabiya satellite channels," said Negad El Borai.*

### 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).

usually watch Al Jazeera or Al Arabiya satellite channels,” said Negad El Borai. The panel agreed that there are still subjects that need to be dealt with by probing, ongoing reporting, such as social problems, economic issues, the environment, and relations between the Muslim and Coptic communities, but that tackling these issues requires both training and courage on the part of the journalists’ community.

Journalists’ salaries are low and below the scale of other private-sector professionals. According to panelists, salaries at the state newspaper company *Al-Ahram* are the highest, with a new journalist receiving \$80 to \$90 a month. Some private media also pay relatively higher salaries, such as *Al Misr Al-Youm* and *Nahdath Misr*, which start journalists at up to \$120 a month. “But they tend to use many freelancers who work also with the state press and who are paid an average of \$30 per article,” said Ashraf Shehab, a journalist with *Al-Ahali* newspaper. Salaries for broadcast journalists are the lowest, as they are indexed on the public-service scale, he added. “A new journalist at state radio or television may start at \$35 per month. However, top editors and media managers are much more highly paid, although it is not possible to know the full salary, bonus, and other benefits those at the major state publications earn. At *Al-Ahram*, said Hamdy Hassan, the editor-in-chief receives a percentage of the advertising revenue, according to internal rules.

Low salaries contribute to corruption across the media, Ashraf Shehab said, but those receiving higher salaries are not exempted. Panelists discussed the case of Ibrahim Nafei, a former chairman of *Al-Ahram*, ex-secretary general of the Press Syndicate, and confidant of President Mubarak, who has been publicly accused of profiting from the newspaper group’s budget and public funds. The allegations, which are the subject of a Shura Council proceeding, include millions in profits from buying agricultural land, awarding contracts to family firms without competitive bidding, and selling of newspaper assets, according to reports in *Al Ahram Weekly*. Nafei, who was replaced at the newspaper in July 2005, has said he is the victim of a smear campaign that also seeks to tarnish the state media.

The MSI panel also discussed corruption linked to private businesses that seek to buy positive news coverage of their products in some private or partisan press. “Many journalists have become advertising agents to make ends meet,” said Ashraf Shehab. He explained that “the general practice is that journalists, instead of receiving money or gifts from companies, get an ad, which they place in their newspapers for a commission or in other small papers where the

commission is higher—sometimes up to 50 percent of the value of the ad.”

Many of the partisan media use obsolete equipment, panelists said, but technical facilities and equipment at the state-owned and private press are relatively modern. However, they said, lack of training for journalists and technical staff leaves them unable to maximize the use of technology.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

**Egypt Objective Score: 2.09 / 4.00**

The Egyptian public can receive news and information from state radio and television and private satellite broadcasters and from newspapers locally produced and imported. The MSI panel considered the Egyptian media sector to be closest to sustainability in the multiple news sources available, giving this objective a score of 2.09.

The state owns and manages two national television stations, Channel 1 and Channel 2, and six regional channels, each of which covers a group of governorates. It also has two satellite television channels, the Egyptian Satellite Channel and Nile TV and its 12 thematic channels, which broadcast through the Egyptian satellite NileSat. The massive state system—ERTU employs about 37,000 people—also includes six major state radio networks. The general network includes four stations, one for general programming, one religious, one emphasizing sports and youth, and one for the Middle East. The Voice of the Arab network includes Voice of the Arab, Palestine, and Nile radios. A regional network includes 10 local stations located in different governorates and a culture network that includes European, Cultural, and Music radio stations. An external radio network has 48 programs in 35 languages directed at Africa, the Americas, Europe, Asia/Middle East, and Israel.

According to panelist Hamdy Hassan, the state television channels have lost appeal and audience to Arab satellite competitors, including Al Jazeera, MBC, Al Arabiya, and LBC, which offer more diverse news and information programming and more attractive entertainment shows. He added that the state broadcasters in the governorates also have lost audience, and their news programs offer mainly a repetition of the national news.

Egypt also has several private satellite televisions, including Dream 1 and Dream 2, in which ERTU has a 10 percent stake. The tax on advertisements has been reduced from 36 to 15 percent. The official press

has been embroiled in a big scandal since it came to light that for years it didn't pass on the tax to the tax authorities but kept it as additional income. BTW, the Press Syndicate, gets a percentage of advertising income from newspapers, providing for one-third of its budget share, and Al-Mihwar TV, in which the government has a 10 percent stake. Its public-affairs broadcasting is mainly in the talk-show format, alongside entertainment shows and films. Two private music channels, Nile FM in English and Nogoom in Arabic, transmit to greater Cairo but offer no news coverage. Aghapy TV, belonging to Egypt's Coptic Christian Church, is the first minority broadcaster. Located in Cairo, it was founded in 2005 and broadcasts through the US satellite Telstar 12 because it is not allowed to use state monopoly transmitters.

The print media sector is composed of state-owned, partisan, and private newspapers. The state owns three media corporations. The first is Al-Ahram, which publishes the daily *Al-Ahram* and edits 12 other publications, including the English-language *Al-Ahram Weekly*, the French-language *Al-Ahram Hebdo*, *Al-Massa'*, and *Al-Shabab*. The foundation also owns a printing press, a distribution network, a marketing and advertising company, a press service agency, the Al-Ahram Center for Strategic Studies, a journalism training

center, and other enterprises. A second state media organization is Dar al-Tahrir for Publication and Printing, which owns three daily newspapers, *Al-Gomhouriya* in Arabic, the *Egyptian Gazette* in English, and *Progres Egyptian* in French. Dar al-Tahrir also owns seven weeklies and two monthlies as well as four supplements that cover sports, religion, and music. The third state media entity is the Akhbar al-Youm Foundation, which owns the daily *Al-Akhbar*, the weeklies *Akhbar Al-Youm*, *Akhbar al-Hawadeth*, *Akhbar Al-Adab*, and *Akhbar Al-Riyada*, and several others thematic publications. The foundation runs a media training center and a public-opinion-poll institute.

***The print media are largely a Cairo phenomenon, said Hamdy Hassan. "People living in other cities have a relative low access to state press due to their own distribution network, and because of the widespread use of dishes, satellite television, including state broadcasts, is becoming more and more accessible," he said.***

State media support, in one way or another, policy of the government through the government-appointed editors-in-chief, the MSI panelists said. However, the panel agreed that the broadcast media are, in some cases, open to social issues. The panel mentioned examples of programs, such as "Al-Thel Al-Ahmar" (the Red Shadow) of the second national television channel, "Qadiyya wa Mafihha" (What Is in the Issue?), and "Fi al-Umq" (Indepth), that they believe tackle issues such as those concerning youth, women's rights, and corruption from an analytical point of view with guests from the opposition or government representatives. However, the panelists said other critical issues, such as the situation of the Coptic Christian minority, are still marginalized or treated from the state's propaganda point of view.

The print media are largely a Cairo phenomenon, said Hamdy Hassan. "People living in other cities have a relative low access to state press due to their own distribution network, and because of the widespread use of dishes, satellite television, including state broadcasts, is becoming more and more accessible," he said. Ashraf Shehab added, "With the exception of glossy magazines, the press is affordable for the majority of the population, but for unknown reasons, people tend to watch televisions rather than purchase newspapers." Hamdy Hassan agreed that the Egyptian public now has "a variety of sources of information,

**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.

satellite televisions and radios, the Internet, and publications representing all kind of political backgrounds and ownership, but major factors still hamper the democratic access to media, such as low incomes—people cannot buy newspapers everyday—and the concentration of media in Cairo.”

The state-owned Middle East News Agency (MENA) is the sole national agency that operates in Egypt, and is considered the largest news agency in Africa and the Arab world. Launched in 1955 as a private company owned by a consortium of private newspapers, it was nationalized in 1960 by the government of Jamal Abdel Nasser. The agency has 400 working journalists in its Cairo headquarters and offices in the governorates and abroad. The agency produces 16 news bulletins and other publications in Arabic, English, and French and reaches clients through the Internet, e-mail, text messages, and desktop services for news, reports, and photos.

Political parties in Egypt also own newspapers. The most noticeable are the daily *Al-Wafd* of the Al-Wafd (Liberal) party, and the *Al-Shaab* daily, which is currently banned but continues to be published online by the Labour Party, which has an Islamist tendency. The *Al-Ahaly* daily is published by the Tagammu Party, the *Al-Arabi* weekly is published by the Nasserist Arab Socialist Party, and the *Al-Gad* weekly represents the newly established Al-Gad party. *Al-Karama* is owned by the party of the same name but awaits official recognition. “The role of the partisan press has diminished drastically,” said Hamdy Hassan, “essentially because of the weakness of the officially sanctioned political parties and also because of the poor economic state of the newspapers. They rarely receive advertising, and their quality is rejected by the public.”

There are also several private newspapers, including the dailies *Al Misri Al-Youm*, *Nahdat Misr*, the *Daily Star Egypt* in English, *Al-Fagr*, and *Ad-Dustour*. The only minority publication is the privately weekly newspaper *Watani*, which caters to the Coptic community. There are also multiple publications registered abroad owned by Egyptians who were denied license and mainly printed in the Media Free Zone. The Internet also has facilitated the launching of several news websites, blogs, and online radio stations.

The private press “has grown rapidly in number and impact,” said Hamdy Hassan. “They can be divided in three categories: the nationalist press represented by the weekly *Al-Ousboa* that confronts the government on all issues, the popular commercial publications such as *Al-Fagr*, *ad-Dustour*, and *Sawt al-Oumah*, and those that promote a liberal approach, such as *Al Misri Al-Youm* and *Nahdat Misr*.” He added that “this private print media

has introduced the public to issues that were impossible to discuss in the past, such as whether President Mubarak’s son should inherit the presidency, corruption in various forms, the religious institutions in the country, and many other social and cultural issues.” The panel agreed that the private press has also indirectly opened up the government press, which started to engage critically in its approach of sensitive subjects.

Private broadcasters are not allowed to produce their own newscasts, but they circumvent this limitation to a degree by offering talk shows in which they address subjects in the news and sometimes controversial political and social issues. The discussion includes guests belonging to varied political and ideological positions as well as the participation of the public by phone, Internet, or text messaging. These programs are better than the state newscasts because they allow time for the news to be understood from different points of views, said Tarek Abdel Jabar. The government has interfered in the past by criticizing some talk shows, produced by the private broadcasters for the choice of guests or subjects, said Butaina Kamel. However, because the stations’ owners are close to the regime, they balance between respecting the red lines and trying to attract viewers for their advertisers through interesting new styles of broadcasting, she added.

In general, information on media ownership in Egypt is not a major criterion for news consumers, panelists said. However, the ownership of media outlets is generally understood for the media registered in Egypt, either with the ERTU or the Supreme Press Council. There is less transparency for the privately owned newspapers that acquired their licenses from abroad and those that have bought or rented a license from a political party. Political parties, said Negad El Borai, used to have the right to get licenses for any number of publications they wanted to issue, and some started to rent or sell these licenses to individuals not known to the public. This was despite Article 49 of the Press Law, which prohibits these practices, and the punishment is fines or revocation of the license. In July 2005, an amendment to the political parties’ law limited to two the number of newspaper licenses a party could have and specified that these newspapers must reflect primarily the party’s ideology, policies, and activities. Negad El Borai also said it is believed these new restrictions were imposed to prevent selling or renting licenses to outlawed organizations, such as the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Press Law requires that the names of the owners of publications be provided and that no one partner can have more than 10 percent of the capital so that

monopolies are discouraged and the state print empire is not challenged. But Negad El Borai said that in practice this provision is not respected and that many individual media owners exceed this limitation.

**OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT**  
**Egypt Objective Score: 1.87 / 4.00**

The MSI panel ranked the state outlets as the least effective in business management in the Egyptian media sector. The managers of the state newspapers and broadcasting outlets are for the most part more concerned with satisfying the political aspirations of the regime than developing profitable businesses, said Hamdy Hassan. The state media system developed during the socialist period still constitutes a huge burden on Egypt economy, he added, and all the state press companies have huge debts because their managers did not see their role in the growing private market. The state media economy is so huge that there may be no other government today owning as many publications and broadcasters, he said. And the sheer number of outlets, each with their own management structures and sizable staffs, has served to disperse what resources and business skills exist.

The state broadcaster ERTU has debts from banks and the state estimated at \$435 million and the massive salary burden represented by 37,000 staff, the MSI panelists said. The other state press companies are in similar situations. "Some observers have concluded that Egypt must privatize publications that are losing money and encourage the rest to introduce modern management policy in line with the international practices," Hamdy Hassan said.

Private media, especially the satellite television channels, also are losing money despite being staffed by professional managers, panelists said. They suggested this was because of limited resources developed from advertising.

Newspaper printing houses and distribution networks are owned by the state through the media companies. Most have introduced more modern technologies for printing. Due to the limited private newspaper market, their revenues are generated from other printing activities, including books and brochures, with the budget of the state covering salaries and other operational costs. Distribution networks also are managed by the state newspapers, with the most important one belonging to Al-Ahram. There are some private printing houses operated by political parties or individual businesses, but turnover is limited because most of the work is monopolized by the state presses.

The state-owned publications operate a variety of activities from which they receive revenue. For example, Al-Ahram owns, in addition to its press and distribution companies, an advertising agency and research and training centers. It also holds shares in several companies and banks in Egypt and overseas. The ERTU network gets its revenues from advertising and also from the sale of programming to other Arab countries. It also produces, through its Voice of Cairo, documentaries for special events. In 2003, the network sold its programs to 48 Arab and foreign television stations and to 12 Arab radio stations, collecting revenue of about \$18 million.

The private media receive revenues mainly from sales, sponsorship, and advertising. The private television companies Dream and Al-Mihwar get most of their revenues from advertising, especially placed by the other businesses of their owners, and sponsorship of certain programs.

*"Some observers have concluded that Egypt must privatize publications that are losing money and encourage the rest to introduce modern management policy in line with the international practices," Hamdy Hassan said.*

**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 state dailies have their own advertising agencies. *Al-Ahram's* is the most prominent, operating a department that procures ads for all the publications of the group, offers design ideas and prepares them for its clients, plans and evaluates advertising campaigns, and publishes special advertising supplements for government ministries, companies, and foreign governments celebrating national days. The latest available data shows that *Al-Ahram* received 1999 advertising revenue of about \$94 million. "*Al-Ahram* is the only newspaper that has its own professional advertising team," Hamdy Hassan said, "and most of the private and partisan publications use the services of advertising agencies."

Spending on advertising does not exceed \$6 per person in Egypt. Many international firms are present in the

***Negad El Borai said that overall "students complain about the dominance of theoretical subjects and the lack of practice." There are also concerns voiced about huge classes and professors who have had little opportunity to update their skills. Panelists who have been trained at Egyptian universities agreed that many new journalists are ill-equipped to work professionally.***

market, such as Coca-Cola, Nestlé, Procter and Gamble and Unilever, and they constitute the major investors in advertising. The total spending for 2004 in all sectors was put at \$427 million, with the print media receiving 62 percent of the revenue, television 31 percent, radio 6 percent, and cinema 1 percent. By sectors,

telecommunications companies were first with \$70.9 million, or 16.6 percent of the total expenditure. Egypt offers good infrastructure and services for the production of ads, MSI panelists said. There are about 100 advertising agencies, but Tarek Nour, Lookliwatas, and about 10 other major agencies account for between 80 and 90 percent of the ad spending.

The MSI panel agreed that advertisers focus more on state media. According to a September 2005 report by the Economic Mission of the French Embassy in Cairo, "The lack of transparency in the price of the ads, and concessions that the state provide, such as reduction in the 36 percent tax on advertising or the scheduling of the tax payment, punish the private sector." (The tax on advertising subsequently was reduced to 15 percent.)

The state press has become embroiled in a scandal since it came to light that for years the organizations were not passing on the tax to the tax authorities but keeping it as additional income. The Egyptian Press Syndicate gets a percentage of newspapers' advertising income, providing for a third of its budget.

Market research or broadcast ratings have not yet been introduced in the Egyptian media market. The ERTU and *Al-Ahram* have their own research departments but rarely engage in serious market research, MSI panelists said. The Faculty of Mass Communication at Cairo University also has a department specializing in media research and opinion surveys. According to the department website, three studies have been conducted—on opinions about ERTU programming, the readership of *Akhbar Al-Youm* newspaper, and the future of *Al-Ahram* newspapers. These studies, according to the panel, were not publicly discussed and had no apparent impact on the outlets' products. The MSI participants did consider serious research conducted in January 2005 by the Amman-based Arab Advisory Group. The "Cairo Households Media Survey 2005" interviewed face-to-face 562 people across the city, showing that 91 percent of Cairo households were still tuning in to state-owned terrestrial television channels. It also showed that of the satellite television viewers, 68.3 percent tuned in to news channels, with Al Jazeera the most widely watched (88.4 percent), followed by Al Arabiya (35.1 percent), Nile News (3.9 percent), CNN (6.6 percent), and Al Hurra (4.6 percent).

There are no credible figures for newspaper circulation in Egypt and no institution responsible for auditing circulation. UNESCO data cited by the panel indicated that there are 31 editions for every 1,000 inhabitants and that the most four widely read newspapers are the state *Al-Ahram*, *Al-Gomhouriyya*, and *Al-Akhbar*, followed by the privately owned *Al Misry Al-Youm*. The panel agreed that newspaper readership is declining in Egypt because of the competition from broadcasting.

#### OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

**Egypt Objective Score: 1.93 / 4.00**

The main media-sector supporting institution in Egypt is the Press Syndicate, which is open both to editors of all ranks and journalists—except those working for the state broadcaster, who constitute the majority of working journalists in the country. ERTU employees are considered public servants, and the MSI panelists said the prohibition on their membership in the Syndicate is necessary to prevent the state from controlling the

organization any more than it currently does. For more than two decades, a government candidate did monopolize the post of chairman of the union, which has more than 4,000 members. But during the 2003 election, Galal Aref, a journalist from *Akhbar Al-Youm* considered to be Nasserist, won after a fierce battle.

The union provides members with financial subsidies of \$45 to \$50 and some health insurance and pension benefits. It also has become more active in defending the rights of its membership and campaigning for press law reforms, including the abolition of provisions allowing for imprisonment of journalists.

In June 2005, a new group was launched within the Syndicate called Journalists for Change. Numbering about 50 journalists, the group campaigned against jail sentences for journalists and for the right of anyone to establish newspapers. It also advocates for the chairmen of the state newspapers to be elected by their constituencies instead of being appointed by the government.

Several nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) intervene actively to defend journalists and campaign for press law reform. The most prominent is the Egyptian Human Rights Organization. Human-rights groups are today a force with the potential to influence the government and the Parliament, said panelist Negad El Borai. They have developed their advocacy skills somewhat and have advanced from simply writing letters of protest or press releases to proposing comprehensive drafts of proposed reforms and organizing meetings, public demonstrations, and seminars, he said.

The Faculty of Mass Communication at the University of Cairo, the Adham Center for Broadcast Journalism and the mass communications department at the American University in Cairo, and the Al-Ahram Regional Press Institute are among the more prominent training organizations in Egypt. They also have a regional presence, attracting some students and participants from elsewhere in the Middle East.

However, Negad El Borai said, overall “students complain about the dominance of theoretical subjects and the lack of practice.” There are also concerns voiced about huge classes and professors who have had little opportunity to update their skills. Panelists who have been trained at Egyptian universities agreed that many new journalists are ill-equipped to work professionally.

Panelists noted that the Adham Center provides higher-quality training and receives many applications because of the growing market for television journalists due to the expansion of the Arab satellite channels. But they

also said it is too expensive for most Egyptians, who must opt for state institutions.

There are more than a dozen journalism and communication faculties around the country. The most important is the Faculty of Mass Communication of the University of Cairo, which has graduated most of Egypt’s professionals in the field.

The faculty has three branches—press, television and radio; public relations; and advertising—and offers bachelor’s and master’s degrees and doctorates. The faculty also has four centers, including ones conducting public-opinion surveys and researching women in the media.

***Distribution networks of print media are in the hands of the main state-owned newspaper companies. The most important one, Al-Ahram Distribution Company, owns shops in airports, clubs, underground stations, and summer resorts, as well as outlets and bookstores exceeding 2,700 in number. Tarek Abdel Jabar said that “most of the distribution networks are concentrated in Cairo and vast areas do not receive newspapers.”***

**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.

Short-term training is a big issue for the journalism community in Egypt, according to panelists. They said there are many international and local institutions offering programs, but that many lack a clear strategy. UNESCO, USAID, and the German Friedrich Ebert Foundation are among the donors supporting journalism training. The BBC World Service Trust and Internews, among other international organizations, have been implementing projects, along with local institutions such as the state newspaper companies' training centers, the Press Syndicate, and some human-rights groups. Most of the training is free but basic, panelists said.

Negad El Borai noted that most newspapers do not have internal training programs that are part of staff development policy and that some even do not support their journalists' participation in external training opportunities. The panel listed as the most needed training areas the use of the new communications technologies and their integration into the work of journalists, the techniques of investigative journalism, developing ethics codes and practices, and the modern management of media.

Printing houses are in the hands of the largest state publications and also are used by private and partisan publications. Newsprint is also a state monopoly and is imported from Canada, Russia, the United States, and Finland. According to panelist Hussam Al Sayyed, the state monopoly affects the independent press by limiting the press run and therefore circulation, and also by delays in printing.

Broadcasting transmitters are state-owned. They are rented to private broadcasters operating from the Media Free Zone. Distribution networks of print media are in the hands of the main state-owned newspaper companies. The most important one, Al-Ahram Distribution Company, owns shops in airports, clubs, underground stations, and summer resorts, as well as outlets and bookstores exceeding 2,700 in number. Tarek Abdel Jabar said that "most of the distribution networks are concentrated in Cairo and vast areas do not receive newspapers."

This state distribution monopoly has created a number of problems for the private press, according to some panelists. These include imposing a quota on the number of distributed copies, the disappearance of copies in the distribution network, and restrictions at kiosks. The authorities have been allowed by the distributors to intervene to stop dissemination of newspapers, including in the case of the first edition of *Al-Ghad* party newspaper, which did not arrive in the kiosks on March 7, 2005. The headline of the newspaper announced that the chairman of the party,

Ayman Nour, would run for president. According to media reports, the paper was delayed one day while officials demanded some changes. The only private daily newspaper, *Al Misry al-Youm*, was pulled off the stands when it reported an allegation of corruption during the parliamentary elections in 2005. The papers had to republish the story the next day.

The Internet is free in Egypt, but its use is constrained by cost, language, literacy, inadequate infrastructure, and skills shortages, panelists said. However, with strong support from the government, Egypt is witnessing something of an Internet boom. There were an estimated 8.5 million Internet users in 2005, up from 535,000 in 2000. In January 2002, the government launched free Internet service, meaning consumers no longer paid fees to Internet service providers (ISPs) but only the price of a regular telephone call—extremely cheap by international standards. ISPs lease access ports from the state fixed-line monopoly and buy a dial-up number, which they then market to consumers. In return, the ISPs are paid 70 percent of the revenue from connections made through their phone number. However, the measure is controversial because ISPs complain of high leasing rates and say their profit margins are low. Many of the smaller ISPs, among the 64 in operation when the system was introduced, have since closed.

## MSI Participants

**Negad El Borai**, lawyer and head, Democracy Group

**Dr. Hamdy Hassan**, head, Al-Ahram Training Centre

**Ashraf Shehab**, journalist, *al-Ahaly* newspaper

**Tarek Abdel Jabar**, director, Misr Al Youm Online Radio

**Butaina Kamel**, journalist, Egypt Television

**Hussam Al Sayyed**, deputy editor, Islam Online news website

**Abdel Bassir Hassan**, correspondent, BBC Cairo

**Tarek Tuhami**, journalist, *Al Wafd* newspaper

**Imad Sayyed Ahmed**, political editor, *Rose Al Youssef* newspaper

**Dr. Laila Abdel Majid**, professor of journalism, University of Cairo

## Moderator

**Said Essoulami**, executive director, CMF MENA, Morocco

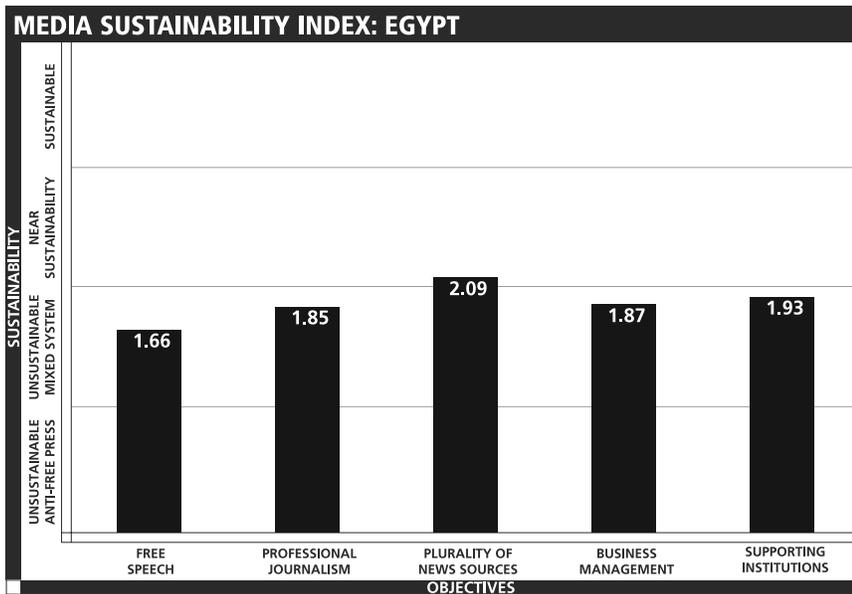
# EGYPT AT A GLANCE

## GENERAL

- **Population:** 68.7 million (2004 est., World Bank)
- **Capital city:** Cairo
- **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Eastern Hamitic stock (Egyptians, Bedouins, and Berbers) 99%, Greek, Nubian, Armenian, other European 1% (www.nationsencyclopedia.com, 2006)
- **Religions (% of population):** Muslim (mostly Sunni) 90%, Coptic Christian and other 10% (www.nationsencyclopedia.com, 2006)
- **Languages (% of population):** Arabic (official), English and French understood by educated groups (www.nationsencyclopedia.com, 2006)
- **GDP (purchasing power parity):** \$75.1 billion (2004 est., World Bank)
- **GNI per capita (purchasing power parity):** \$1,310 (2004 est., World Bank)
- **Literacy rate (% of population):** male 67.2%, female 43.6% (2004 est., UNICEF)
- **President or top authority:** Prime Minister Ahmed NAZIF (since July 9, 2004)
- **Next scheduled elections:** Presidential, to be held in 2011

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Total Circulation: 3,585,453 (includes daily and non-daily) (UNDP-POGAR, 2000) Largest Paper: *Al-Ahram* (Arabic) 900,000 (largest paper in the Middle East) (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004)
- **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- **Number of print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** 453
- **Newspapers:** 296 (16 dailies, 45 non-dailies, 235 periodicals) (UNDP-POGAR, 2000)
- **TV stations:** 98, Radio stations: 59 (www.pressreference.com, 2002)
- **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- **Number of Internet users:** 1.9 million est. (UNDP-POGAR, 2002)



DESPITE NEW INTERNATIONAL LINKS, WITHIN LIBYA THE MEDIA SECTOR REMAINS COMPLETELY CONTROLLED BY THE STATE. MEDIA OUTLETS ARE OWNED AND RIGIDLY SUPERVISED BY THE GOVERNMENT, AND THERE ARE NO PRIVATE RADIO OR TELEVISION STATIONS. FREEDOM OF SPEECH IS PRACTICALLY NON-EXISTENT, AS AUTHORITIES PRACTICE CENSORSHIP WITH IMPUNITY.



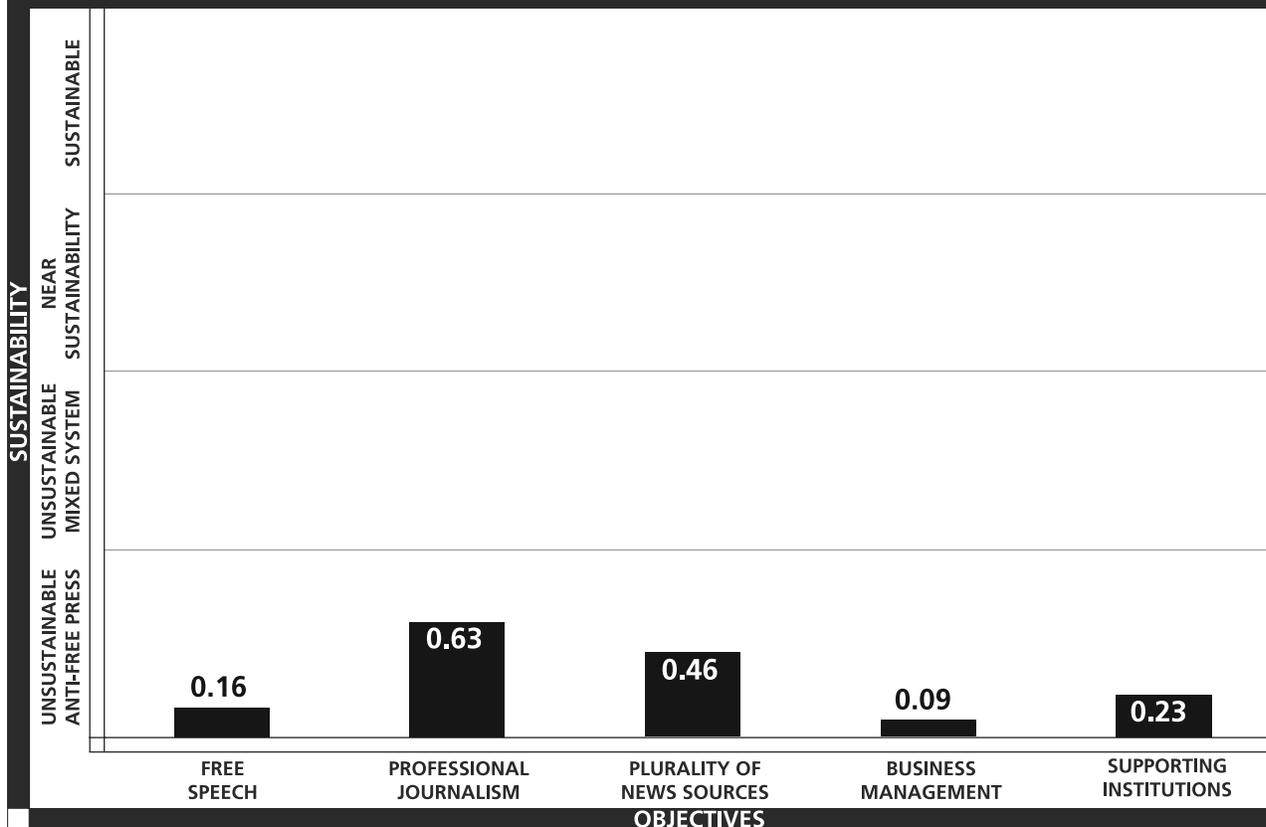
**A**lthough long viewed as a pariah state by Western countries, Libya now shows signs of reintegrating itself into the international arena. In 2003, the North African country accepted responsibility for the 1989 bombing of a Pan Am flight over Lockerbie, Scotland. Colonel Moammar Qadhafi's regime announced it was abandoning its secret program of developing weapons of mass destruction. Since then, diplomatic relations with the United States have been re-established and the ban on US citizens traveling to Libya lifted. American oil companies now are clamoring to tap Libya's oil reserves, estimated to be as large as Nigeria's.

Despite these new international links, within Libya the media sector remains completely controlled by the state. Media outlets are owned and rigidly supervised by the government, and there are no private radio or television stations. Freedom of speech is practically non-existent, as authorities practice censorship with impunity. The only access Libyans have to international news and information is via satellite and the Internet—and despite attempts at government screening of these media, they are used by an increasing number of Libyans who have the means for such technology.

Libyan legislation that deals with media issues, such as the Constitution and the Green Charter for Human Rights, all allow for freedom of speech within certain vaguely defined limits. These limits are enforced by the government to support the Jamahiriya—Qadhafi's proclaimed "third-way" of government that allows citizens to express themselves in People's Congresses, even though all decision-making authority ultimately rests with Qadhafi himself. In this context, Libyan media are portrayed as not truly state-run outlets; rather, they are voices of the people of the Jamahiriya.

In addition to censorship, journalists whose reporting touches on taboo topics are subject to harassment and attacks. The 2005 death of Dhaif Al Ghazal, a former journalist at *Al-Zahf Al-Akhdhar* newspaper, was reported by Human Rights Watch as due to anti-government articles he wrote for a website based in the United Kingdom. Another journalist, 'Abd Al Raziq

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: LIBYA



**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.

Al Mansuri, was imprisoned for writing online articles critical of the government. The penal code includes imprisonment and the death penalty as punishment for spreading information that damages Libya's "fundamental social structures."

As there are no private media in Libya, the sector is supported by government sponsorship and advertising. Organized civil society is virtually non-existent, although there are government entities such as the Qadhafi Foundation that operate to support Jamahiriya initiatives.

The Libyan media professionals who participated in the Media Sustainability Index (MSI) assessment rated Libya very poorly with an overall score of 0.31. The worst rankings related to the limits on freedom of speech and the lack of private media businesses. The highest-rated objective was professionalism with a score of 0.63, although this was not a substantial improvement over other categories.

**OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH**

**Libya Objective Score: 0.16 / 4.00**

Freedom of speech in Libya is defined according to the Libyan Constitutional Declaration of December 11, 1969. Article 13 states that "freedom of opinion is guaranteed within the limits of public interest and the principles of the Revolution." Meanwhile, the Declaration of the People's Authority (adopted on March 2, 1977), the Green Charter for Human Rights of the Jamahiriya Era (adopted in June 1988), and Law 20 On Enhancing Freedom (adopted in 1991) all have constitutional status in relation to freedom of expression. Article 8 of Law 20 On Enhancing Freedom stipulates that "every citizen has the right to openly express his thoughts and opinions in the People's Congresses and in the Jamahiriya media," unless "he uses [that right] in violation of the people's authority or for personal motives."

However, the Constitution and the Great Green Charter effectively limit the freedom of expression in Libya. The Charter guarantees freedom of expression only within the system of the People's Congresses and "within the limits of public interest and the principles of the revolution." This provision allows wide latitude for the courts and the government to rule against media and citizens seeking to voice their opinions.

Similarly, Article 8 of Law 20 also qualifies the right to free expression. According to this article, "Every citizen has the right to express and publicly proclaim his opinions and ideas to the people's congresses and the information media of the Jamahiriya. No citizen shall be answerable for his exercise of this right unless

he exploits it with a view to detracting from the people's authority or for personal ends."

This law also fails to meet international legal standards for freedom of expression. Furthermore, according to a Human Rights Watch report from January 2006, Libya

contradicts a number of international conventions regarding free speech, including the African Charter on Human and People's Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Libya had previously signed on to both accords.

***According to Mohamed Eljahmi, "There are no judicial checks and balances. The judiciary is ill-defined, allowing regime elites to use multiple security forces to harass ordinary Libyan citizens." Journalists, and citizens in general, live in fear that anything they say or write could be construed as treason.***

**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.

Regardless of vaguely defined legal provisions dealing with freedom of expression, the Libyan regime does not tolerate dissenting views. MSI participants noted that many journalists have disappeared over the years for reporting that criticized the government. Two incidents in 2005 underscored the lack of opportunity for media freedom. In one case, 'Abd Al Raziq Al Mansuri was imprisoned by the Libyan authorities, reportedly for contributing articles to a website based in the United Kingdom ([www.akhbar-libya.com](http://www.akhbar-libya.com)). According to the Human Rights Watch report, 'Abd Al Raziq Al Mansuri maintains he was arrested for the content of these articles, although the government denies his detention was due to his journalism. Instead, he was sentenced to an 18-month term for possession of an illegal firearm that was found during a search of his home.

In a separate incident, Dhaif Al Ghazal, a journalist for the *al-Zahf al-Akhdar* newspaper, was found dead on June 2 near the city of Benghazi. His body showed signs of torture, according to Reporters Without Borders. Outside of his work for the Revolutionary Committee newspaper, Dhaif Al Ghazal began writing articles that focused on corruption within the Jamahiriya for another UK Web publication—Libya al-Youm ([www.libya-alyoum.com](http://www.libya-alyoum.com)). While the authorities have denied any involvement in Dhaif Al Ghazal's death, an investigation has not resulted in any arrests or prosecutions. In June 2006, the Libyan League for Human Rights issued a statement calling for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to provide assistance in moving the investigation forward, saying there is "no indication that the Government plans to investigate, properly, the case or to bring its perpetrators to justice."

MSI participants also pointed to the case of dissident Fathi Eljahmi, who was released from jail in 2004 after serving an 18-month sentence for promoting free speech. Shortly after his initial release, he was jailed again after advocating reform during an interview with the US government-funded Al-Hurra television network. Fathi Eljahmi remains imprisoned at an undisclosed location. MSI participants cited this case in pointing out that the level of government control over free speech in Libya extends beyond simply preventing journalists and intellectuals from advocating for reform but also encompasses shaping and solidifying the image of Qadhafi and his regime. Mohamed Eljahmi, the brother of the jailed Fathi Eljahmi, said, "Criticizing the Leader or his family is forbidden and can result in imprisonment or death. There are indications that the regime is allowing criticism against some vulnerable government officials. It is a clever tactic which aims to

strengthen the elite's rule and reflects their monopoly over the all levers of power in the country. The Libyan government is using the media to propagate the message that the flaw is not in the Leader but in those who implement his thought."

The government runs and strictly controls all media in Libya, including the licensing process. The Law on Publications No. 76, promulgated in 1972 and modified by Law 120 in 1972 and Law 75 in 1973, governs the press and restricts publishing rights to two state-run entities: Al-Dar Al-Jamahiriya and the General Corporation of Press, Professional Unions, and Syndicates. The Libyan Jamahiriya Broadcasting Corporation is the only national broadcaster, and no private radio or television stations are allowed.

MSI participants agreed that the legal system does little other than support the will of the Jamahiriya. According to Mohamed Eljahmi, "There are no judicial checks and balances. The judiciary is ill-defined, allowing regime elites to use multiple security forces to harass ordinary Libyan citizens." Journalists, and citizens in general, live in fear that anything they say or write could be construed as treason. Peaceful assembly and the formation of a political party or association are crimes punishable by death. Furthermore, a law on collective punishment allows entire families, towns, or districts to be punished for the transgressions of an individual.

Libel is not a civil-law issue in Libya. Instead, a body called the General Committee of Journalists Responsibility, composed of lawyers and journalists and led by the deputy director of the state-run Libyan Journalists Union, processes the libel charges. The committee adjudicates the complaints that are infrequently filed by private citizens and businesses. According to the Human Rights Watch report, editors indicated that libel charges did not affect their daily operations or their editorial decision-making.

Although Libyan citizens and media professionals generally have more access to information via satellite and the Internet than before, access to information is not guaranteed by law. In fact, MSI participants agreed, information obtained from international sources is restricted. Also, obtaining information from government offices is difficult, if not impossible. In addition to that, explained journalist Noman Benotman, "Journalists have to go to certain offices to ask for information, but this was not part of our culture until today. Journalists usually wait until someone gives them the information." Media outlets and journalists get the majority of their information from the official news agency, the Jamahiriya News Agency (JANA).

MSI participants agreed that journalists are not allowed to enter the profession or practice their craft unless they are willing to work entirely within the framework established by the government. This means completely avoiding criticism of the regime, government branches, and individuals in the regime. Employees of media outlets are viewed as government employees and are expected to conduct themselves accordingly. "Of course, journalists are not allowed to practice journalism in the country unless they are hand-chosen and appointed to work in the government's media outlets," said Fadeel Al Ameen. "Some Libyan journalists started their careers working for non-Libyan media outlets, and were being harassed, threatened, and sometimes killed."

Foreign media have a very limited presence in Libya. Only Al Jazeera, The Associated Press, BBC, Agence France-Presse, and a handful of other major news companies have offices in Tripoli. These are required to register with the Foreign Press Office, and their coverage is closely scrutinized. Foreign journalists have difficulty obtaining visas to travel to Libya.

**OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM**

**Libya Objective Score: 0.63 / 4.00**

The media professionals contributing to the MSI assessment considered journalism professionalism essentially non-existent because the media are completely controlled by the government and exist primarily as a propaganda mechanism to promote the viewpoints of the Qadhafi regime. "There is no professional journalism," said Noman Benotman. "For people to produce professional news and information about our day-to-day lives they need at least a margin of freedom to do this—but this margin does not exist."

In the same way, the only professional standards practiced by Libyan journalists are those that demonstrate their loyalty to the government. One MSI participant noted that this is one of the main causes of self-censorship in the Libyan media sector. Another stated that even though censorship is a common practice at media outlets, self-censorship is a far more powerful force. Salem Al Hasi explained that "journalists not only fear losing their jobs but losing their lives, as in the case of Dhaif Al Ghazal."

Media cover key events and issues only to the extent that they reflect the government's viewpoint. These events primarily are speeches, ceremonies, and some social events. Salem Al Hasi noted, "Even international events are covered within the views of the regime as sometimes anti-West, pan-Arab, pan-Islamist, pan-African, or as of late, anti-terrorism—whatever the

regime's current whim is. In other words, whatever the regime's current national or international agenda is, international events are broadcast within that view."

Noman Benotman said every article

published on the multi-billion-dollar government project to build a man-made river in Libya has praised the efforts of the regime in the construction process. "How come Libyan journalists have not generated a single article judging the project? This project affects the whole nation. There are no articles after more than 10 years of debate. Journalists are itching to do an analysis of the project—especially regarding how it affects the environment of the area. But no one can write about it. For 15 years, Libyans have been taxed for it. No one can ask where their tax money is going and how it is being spent."

Pay levels for journalists are fairly low, and many struggle to make ends meet. However, corruption is not a threat in the traditional sense since media are all completely under government control.

***"There is no professional journalism," said Noman Benotman. "For people to produce professional news and information about our day-to-day lives they need at least a margin of freedom to do this—but this margin does not exist."***

**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).

**However, one MSI participant explained that the Internet is not free: “Although Internet cafés are everywhere, security agencies do keep close surveillance on them. Therefore, surfing the Internet is not free of fear of repercussions for visiting sites the regime does not approve of.”**

MSI participants described entertainment programming as limited, of poor quality, and used to bolster government propaganda. Most Libyan media outlets do not have adequate or up-to-date technical facilities for producing and distributing news. Fadeel Al

Ameen explained, “Even though we are talking about government-owned and -operated media, and even though Libyan government is not poor, the quality of the finished product tends to be bad, be it broadcast programs or print media. The layout and design of newspapers are all substandard. Lack of equipment and training has impacted everything from the gathering and production to the distribution of information.”

Specialized reporting in Libya is extremely limited in scope and again focused on the perceived successes of the regime. Each region of Libya has a newspaper for that district, but that does not mean that local news is any different in theme from national news coverage. While some MSI participants indicated that investigative journalism does not exist in Libya, another mentioned one program called “For Your Information” that is broadcast via a government-run satellite station. The show tackles corruption and discusses news but is hosted by a member of the Revolutionary Committee, said the MSI participant. Otherwise, the *Kol Al-Fonun* newspaper focuses on sports and arts, *Al-Biyt* covers family issues, and *Al-Amal* is a monthly magazine for children. All three publications are issued by the state-run Libyan Press Corporation.

**OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES**

**Libya Objective Score: 0.46 / 4.00**

Libya features four main daily newspapers—*Al-Shames*, *Al-Jamahiriya*, *Al-Fajr Al-Jadid*, and *Al-Zahf Al-Akhdar*. The first three publications are produced by the Libyan Press Corporation (LPC), and the fourth is generated by the Revolutionary Committees Movement, the ideological group in charge of promoting and maintaining the tenets of the Qadhafi regime. *Al-Jamihiriya Al-Yom* is

an exclusively Web-based paper, while all 26 districts (sha’biyyat) produce a newspaper or magazine. *The Tripoli Post* is an English-language weekly publication. There are assorted other newspapers and magazines, including some generated by professional associations, research facilities, and larger companies.

MSI participants noted that because the LPC and the Revolutionary Committees produce virtually all print publications in Libya and no private media are allowed, people have access to only one type of news and information, and therefore there is no plurality of news media. This is similar for the broadcast market, totally dominated by the Libyan Jamahiriya Broadcasting Corporation, which tightly controls content by limiting programming to praise of the government.

All participants agreed that Libyans are increasingly accessing news and information via satellite broadcasts and the Internet. Pan-Arab satellite stations, such as Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya, are very popular. Internet cafés have proliferated in major cities, and despite government efforts to block certain websites, citizens do have access to an increasingly broad array of information sources.

However, one MSI participant explained that the Internet is not free: “Although Internet cafés are everywhere, security agencies do keep close surveillance

**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.

on them. Therefore, surfing the Internet is not free of fear of repercussions for visiting sites the regime does not approve of.” Arab Press Freedom Watch issued a statement in 2005 condemning the Libyan government for blocking a London-based website called Libya Al-Youm (Libya Today). According to the international organization, the website was also hacked and forced to shut down for several days. It is this combination of internal and external controls that creates serious difficulties for Libyan citizens to inform themselves.

MSI members did mention that Saif Al Islam Qadhafi, the son of Colonel Qadhafi, has expressed a desire to create new independent, private media and allow more foreign media access to the Libyan market. However, participants also expressed skepticism, saying promises have been made before with no progress to date. Nevertheless, Qadhafi’s son has pushed for the formation of a new media company called September 1 that would launch a new satellite channel in 2007. The company would also reportedly build a printing house that would allow uncensored Western publications to be produced.

The only news agency in Libya is the government-run Jamahiriya News Agency (JANA). According to its own website, the agency was founded in 1964, has a staff of 300, and features 10 overseas offices. It is also linked to local offices in the various sha’biyyat. Furthermore, as part of Qadhafi’s plan to become a major actor on the African continent, JANA indicates it is tied to a number of pan-African news organizations, such as the Pan-African News Agency. There are no independent news agencies in Libya.

No independent media within Libya exist to produce their own news programs. However, MSI participants indicated that non-Libyan media are accessed whenever possible for news and information. According to Fadeel Al Ameen, “The Libyan people depend on non-Libyan news sources, such as Arabic newspapers and satellite channels, as well as non-Arabic media like BBC, Radio Monaco, and German radio. Of course, the Libyan government censors all incoming media as much as it can. Some Arabic newspapers have been banned altogether. Others are dealt with on an issue-by-issue basis depending on their content.” Despite attempts at blocking foreign media from broadcasting into Libya, interested citizens do try to find the means to listen to the BBC Arabic Service or watch the US-funded Al-Hurra channel, interviewees said. During the Benghazi riots in early 2006, when a number of demonstrators were killed, Al-Hurra was an important source of information, noted Mohamed Eljahmi.

Media are all owned by the Libyan state, and Libyans are well aware of this fact. Comparing various Libyan news sources will not result in a comprehensive or objective view of events. Salem Al Hasi noted, “If transparency means that people can judge the objectivity of the news, there is no transparency in Libya. The media presents the views of the regime and even covers social events within the ideology of the regime, specifically Qadhafi’s green book.”

The Libyan regime does not recognize minority or religious groups, so minority-language information sources do not exist. In fact, Libyans are referred to in most media as simply “citizens,” thereby allowing any social diversity to be completely avoided.

**OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT**  
**Libya Objective Score: 0.09 / 4.00**

Since media outlets are government-run, they are not operated as professional or profit-generating businesses, according to the MSI participants. In other words, as long as they are reliable mouthpieces of the Qadhafi regime, they do not need to generate revenue since they are owned and operated by the state. The Libyan Press Corporation (LPC) is the state-run company that publishes most of the periodicals in Libya. The LPC is managed by a board of directors and is directly answerable to the Public Institute for Jamahiriya Media.

**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.

***Salem Al Hasi noted, "In Libya, it is known that there is no such thing as fair reporting or free speech if it does not support the revolution. Individuals entering the field of journalism understand that if they are not willing to support the regime in their journalistic endeavors, they will not have employment opportunities."***

All newspaper managers within the LPC group of publications are hand-picked, and editorial content is strictly controlled, the participants agreed.

According to the Human Rights Watch report for Libya, LPC managers and editors stated that a large portion of their company's income comes

from advertising—with only a small portion coming from government support. However, MSI interviewees disputed these claims. Noman Benotman said, "Media get subsidized by the government. They are controlled by the ministry of culture and media. All of them are part of the ministry. Advertising began three years ago through television ads. From time to time there are some ads, but it is insignificant—peanuts."

The report also indicated that due to a shortage of paper supply, the print runs of the major state-funded newspapers, such as *Al-Shames* and *Al-Jamahiriya*, were down to 4,000 and 5,000 copies per day, respectively. But this was contradicted by an MSI participant, "Here's the problem. *Al-Fajr al-Jadid* had a 70,000–80,000 circulation in 1975, but now it is 2,000. Journalists have said the circulation dropped due to the low quality of the articles. Nobody cares, reads, or gives a damn. These papers do not have the professional workforce needed. There is no training. People do you a favor to get you a job at a paper."

With the advertising market still nascent and circulation levels low, government financing keeps media outlets in operation. At the same time, market research is nonexistent in Libya, as the interests of the audiences are completely secondary to the interests of the regime. Broadcast ratings and circulation figures are not produced by any independent organization. Such data is not made regularly available by the LPC periodicals or by the Libyan Jamahiriya Broadcasting Corporation.

**OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS**

**Libya Objective Score: 0.23 / 4.00**

There are no Libyan trade associations that operate outside of the framework of the Jamahiriya. The Libyan Journalists Union is a government-supported group, as is the Writers Union. The heads of both organizations serve as directors on the board of the LPC. MSI participants indicate that neither union provides services to journalists and media professionals. In fact, Noman Benotman explained, "The problem is that the Revolutionary Committees run the unions. Most journalists are not members because if you are a member 'they have you.' The unions are more than just useless; they cause you harm."

There are no local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that support free speech or media, interviewees said. However, Arab Press Freedom Watch did note that the Libyan Forum for Culture and Arts was active in conducting events, such as a 2005 conference on freedom of expression. But APFW also described government attempts to shut down this organization. MSI interviewees did not hesitate to point out that forming or belonging to an independent union or political party is a crime punishable by death. Ostensibly, this sentence could be extended to those who founded local grassroots organizations. The only

**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.

NGO-style groups are run by the government. For example, the Qadhafi Foundation is an organization run by Saif Al Islam Qadhafi that has previously advocated for changes to the media laws.

Journalism degree programs are offered at Libyan universities. Traditional curricula are available, and classes can feature the basics of ethical reporting. However, journalism graduates are faced with a difficult reality. Salem Al Hasi noted, "In Libya, it is known that there is no such thing as fair reporting or free speech if it does not support the revolution. Individuals entering the field of journalism understand that if they are not willing to support the regime in their journalistic endeavors, they will not have employment opportunities." Students seeking graduate degrees in journalism may study abroad in countries such as Egypt. But many of these students have no desire to return to Libya to practice journalism, and the only other option is an academic position.

Short-term training options are extremely limited in Libya. One MSI participant said that the first such training program took place only in 2005 in Benghazi. The session covered news and information-gathering, technology, and other key issues.

Currently, all printing houses in Libya are run by the government. However, Qadhafi's son has been expressing interest in privatizing part of the media sector, including the printing facilities. This privatization process has yet to begin, however.

Some progress has been made in terms of establishing private distribution channels. In May 2005, the state-run Ad-dar Al-Jamahiriya for Publishing, Distribution and Advertising company closed down. It had previously handled all the distribution for Libyan newspapers and magazines. In its place, newspapers have been trying to build out their own distribution networks.

## **MSI Participants**

*Due to the closed media environment in Libya, information for this chapter was collected from media professionals outside of Libya through an e-mail survey, interviews, and extensive research. This chapter therefore provides a summary of the state of media in Libya.*

**Mohamed Eljahmi**, Libyan-American democracy activist, USA

**Salem A. Salem Al Hasi**, writer and human-rights activist, USA

**Fadeel Al Ameen**, editor-in-chief, *Hi Magazine*, USA

**Noman Benotman**, writer, UK

**Mohamed Buisier**, journalist, USA

# LIBYA AT A GLANCE

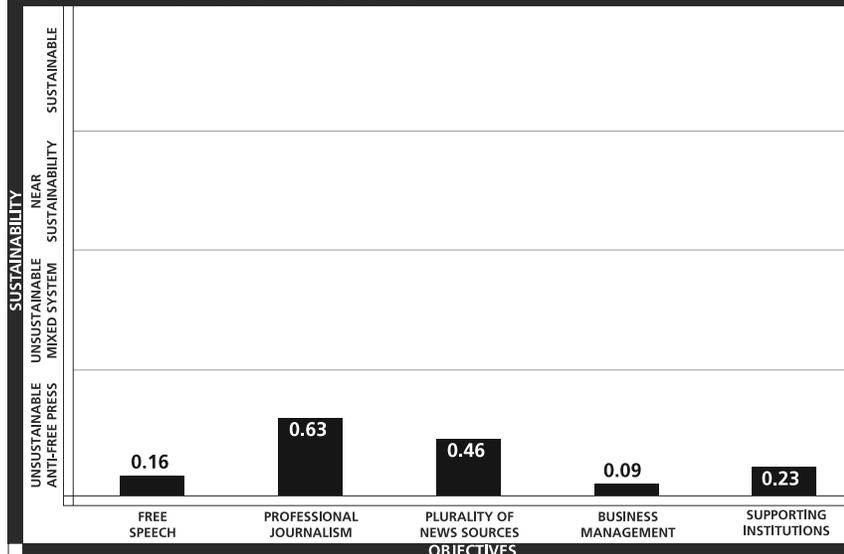
## GENERAL

- **Population:** 5.7 million (2004 est., World Bank)
- **Capital city:** Tripoli
- **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Berber and Arab 97%; Greek, Maltese, Italian, Egyptian, Pakistani, Turk, Indian, Tunisian 3% (www.nationsencyclopedia.com, 2006)
- **Religions (% of population):** Sunni Muslim 97% (www.nationsencyclopedia.com, 2006)
- **Languages (% of population):** Arabic (official), Italian, English; all are widely understood in the major cities (www.nationsencyclopedia.com, 2006)
- **GDP (purchasing power parity):** \$29.1 billion (2004 est., World Bank)
- **GNI per capita (purchasing power parity):** \$4,450 (2004 est., World Bank)
- **Literacy rate (% of population):** male 91.8%, female 70.7% (2004 est., UNICEF)
- **President or top authority:** Revolutionary Leader Col. Muammar Abu Minyar Al Qadhafi (since September 1, 1969)
- **Next scheduled elections:** N/A

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Total: Approx. 68,128 (pressreference.com) Largest paper: *Al-Fajr Al-Jadid* (The New Dawn): 40,000 circulation
- **Number of print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** six dailies, handful of other print media (Human Rights Watch, No. 18)
- **Radio stations:** 24; television stations: 12 (pressreference.com)
- **Broadcast ratings:** Al-Jamahiriyah TV (highest-rated)
- **Internet users:** 7,500 (2004 est., Internet Arab World)
- **News agency:** Jamahiriya News Agency (JANA)
- **Advertising revenue:** N/A

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: LIBYA



IN MARCH 2005 THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATION ORGANIZED A NATIONAL FORUM THAT ALLOWED MOROCCAN JOURNALISTS AN UNUSUAL OPPORTUNITY TO DEBATE PROBLEMS FACING THE PRINT MEDIA. THE COMMUNICATIONS MINISTRY AND THE FEDERATION OF NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS SIGNED A CONTRACT AIMED AT ASSISTING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MEDIA THROUGH FUNDING, TRAINING, AND MANAGEMENT SUPPORT.

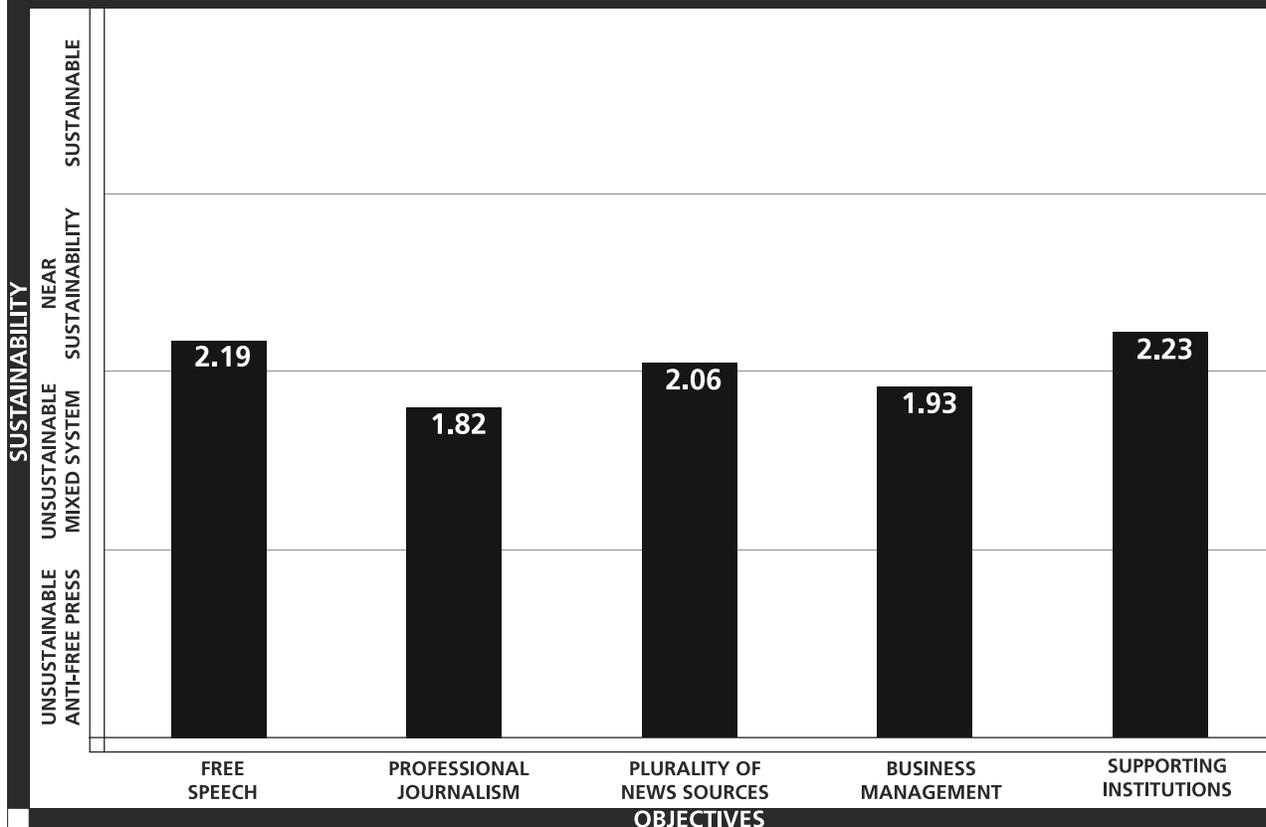


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roccan media-sector development in 2005 was highlighted by the promulgation of a new law liberalizing broadcasting. This law aimed to turn state broadcasting into a public service and allow the licensing of new private radio and television stations. The Higher Broadcasting Authority (HACA, la Haute Autorité de la Communication Audiovisuelle), set up by a royal decree in 2002, launched a call for tenders to obtain private broadcasting licenses. HACA also worked on the transition of the state television station into a public-service broadcaster and intervened in several conflicts between broadcasters and political parties, associations, and private companies.

On the print media front, in March 2005 the Ministry of Communication organized a national forum that allowed Moroccan journalists an unusual opportunity to debate problems facing the print media. The Communications Ministry and the Federation of Newspaper Publishers signed a contract aimed at assisting in the development of the media through funding, training, and management support. The forum was also an opportunity for the National Press Syndicate to win the endorsement of the Ministry of Communication and the Federation of Newspaper Publishers for its collective-bargaining convention, which defines obligations for publishers vis-à-vis their staff and sets certain rights for journalists such as a minimum salary, holidays, health insurance, and further training. The Ministry, the Association of Advertisers, and the Federation of Newspaper Publishers approved an accord establishing the first office responsible for measuring the circulation of newspapers (OJD, Office de Justification de la Diffusion). The year also witnessed a series of consultations by the Ministry of Communication with political parties and media professionals regarding the reform of the 2002 Press Law, especially relating to the provisions on defamation and prison sentences for press infractions.

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: MOROCCO



**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.

Paralleling these positive developments, 2005 was also a record year for the number of cases brought to court by individuals or the public prosecutor against journalists and media outlets. Citizens and the public prosecutor filed 31 complaints against 17 different publications, charging them with defamation, insulting a foreign head of state, undermining public order, or publishing false information and photographs of the royal family without authorization. Despite these cases, the Media Sustainability Index (MSI) panel viewed 2005 as a year when many free-speech taboos were broken—provoking new calls from the government for respecting journalism ethics. For their part, media professionals sought adoption by the government of a law that guarantees the right to access public information and the abolition of prison sentences for defamation.

The MSI panel assessed the Moroccan media sector as approaching the first stages of sustainability, rating it at 2.05 overall. The panel considered the supporting institutions to be the strongest aspect of the sector at 2.23, and the professionalism of journalists the weakest at 1.82.

is government interference in due process and the lack of independence for courts. Driss El Ouali, journalist and publisher of the regional newspaper *Sadae Taounate*, noted that freedom of the press in Morocco is variable according to the geographic location of the newspapers. “Greater freedom is available in the cities than elsewhere in the country,” he said. The panel agreed that the absence of specialized press magistrates is

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## OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH

**Morocco Objective Score: 2.19 / 4.00**

Article 9 of the 1996 Moroccan Constitution provides that “the Constitution shall guarantee all citizens the following: (b) freedom of opinion, expression in all its forms, and public gathering.” The same article adds, however: “No limitation, except by law, shall be put to the exercise of such freedoms.” It is this exception that allowed the Moroccan legislature to adopt an array of laws limiting freedom of expression. The 2002 press code, the penal code, the anti-terrorism law, and the public-service code contain provisions that limit free speech or prohibit access to public information. Despite the liberal licensing system in the Press Law, the MSI panel agreed that it provides sanctions against any criticism of “sacred” issues such as the monarchy, Islam, and territorial integrity. The Press Law also protects various public institutions and foreign heads of state against defamation and restricts reporting on cases under judicial deliberation.

According to lawyer Mohamed Karam, “Morocco is endowed with relatively valid laws on press issues in comparison with other countries, but the essential factor in assessing the validity of this legal setting remains the manner in which the government and the justice system apply the laws.” The panel agreed that the main problem during the trials of journalists

### 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.

a problem in that press trials are handled by judges who also deal with criminal cases. Mohamed Karam noted that “it is necessary to create a specialized chamber for media mainly at the level of the courts in Casablanca and Rabat, where most media cases are currently judged.” Criminalization of free speech and the high awards granted by the courts to plaintiffs in defamation cases were cited by multiple panelists as urgent issues that the government should address in

**“The Internet has become a major source of information on Moroccan issues that journalists reprint, even on subjects for which information is rarely available inside the country—like the army, for example,” said Omar Lebchiret.**

the new press law that is being drafted.

The panelists also criticized the secrecy that surrounds public documentation and information. In all Moroccan legislation, the right to access information is

mentioned only in Article 1 of the Press Law, which states, “Citizens have the right to information. All media have the right to access information from different sources, except if the information is confidential by virtue of law.” However, in practice, the panel agreed that the implementation of this provision is stymied by other statutes. Indeed, the penal code and the General Statute of Public Servants (GSPS) contain provisions prohibiting the circulation of public information. Article 18 of the GSPS requires civil servants to adhere to professional discretion regarding facts and information related to their jobs. The provision also prohibits transfer of any documents to a third party without the authorization of the minister in charge of the department that holds the information. Article 187 of the penal code bans the publication of a long list of military, diplomatic, economic, and industrial documents and information, while classifying them as national security secrets. The code includes potential sentences of five to 30 years of imprisonment if information is leaked during wartime, and one to five years with a fine between \$1,000 and \$10,000 MAD (\$116–\$1,162) during times of peace.

There were a record number of trials of journalists and media during 2005, with 31 cases put to trial for defamation of public institutions and individuals as well as for the publication of false information.

In one case, *Le Journal Hebdomadaire* was sued by the Brussels-based European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center for defamation after the magazine

published a critical article about a study published by the Center on the Polisario Front, which is in conflict with the Moroccan government over sovereignty in the Sahara. *Le Journal* claimed that the study favored the official Moroccan line and suggested that it could have been paid for by the Moroccan government. Claude Moniquet, president of the Center, demanded 5 million MAD in damages to his reputation, and the state prosecutor sought the same amount for the plaintiff.

The Casablanca Appeals Court ordered *Tel Quel* magazine to pay 500,000 MAD (\$58,055) to the president of the Moroccan Association for Children in Dangerous Situations for reporting inaccurately that she was under police investigation for misappropriating funds.

The same magazine was fined 800,000 MAD (\$92,888) in damages to a parliament member for labeling her with a pejorative term given to traditional female singers and dancers, and two-month suspended sentences were issued against two staff members.

In April, Ali Lamrabet, correspondent for *El Mundo*, was banned by a court from exercising journalism in any Moroccan publication for 10 years for defamation after he wrote an article arguing that the Saharawi people in the Algerian city of Tindouf are refugees, and not prisoners of Polisario, as the Moroccan government claims.

In June, Abdelaziz Koukas, editor of the Arabic-language weekly *Al-Ousbouia Al-Jadida* was charged with insulting the monarchy after the weekly ran a front-page interview with Nadia Yassine, the daughter of Abdelsalam Yassine, who is the spiritual leader of the banned Islamist group Al-Adl Wal Ihsan. Nadia Yassine stated in the interview that the monarchy model of government was wrong for Morocco and that she would prefer a republic regime. It is believed that the authorities stopped pursuing the case in order to avoid bad publicity abroad and conflict with the Islamist group.

On November 24, the judicial police in Casablanca summoned Nouredine Miftah, director of the weekly magazine *Al-Ayyam*, and the reporter Moukrim for questioning on an article the magazine published entitled “Secrets of the Palace Harem among Three Kings,” based on an interview with a French national who was the personal physician of the late King Mohamed V. The journalists were also questioned by the Public Prosecutor for photographs they published of the royal family without authorization, according to a 1956 law that had never been applied. On the basis of the questioning, the prosecutor charged the journalists under Article 42 of the press code with “disturbing the public order” by publishing, “in bad

faith," "false information." This offense is punishable by a prison term of between one and 12 months and a fine of between \$140 and \$11,600. The case was still pending in 2005.

These and others cases prompted a lively debate among journalists, writers, politicians, and leaders of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) about journalism ethics and free speech. "Some called for more restrictions, believing that freedom of expression is misused, and others wanted journalists to uphold high standards of ethics. Others criticized the interference of the government in court proceedings and called for the independence of the justice system and reform of the press law," said Bachir Znagui, a media consultant. However, this debate "was limited to the elite, and society as a whole does not yet appreciate the value and importance of the media in the democratic process," said Malika Malak, a freelance journalist.

The HACA is the authority with the legal power to license new private radio and television stations. The organization's tender for those seeking new licenses received dozens of bids for radio stations and a few for television, but it had not decided on any by the end of 2005. HACA is run by a nine-member council, five of whom are appointed by the king, including the president. The prime minister appoints two, and the last two are named by presidents of the two chambers of the parliament. Several issues were raised by the MSI panelists concerning this system. "The appointments were made without consulting the representatives of the media, and the members of the council are largely non-experts in media issues," said Omar Lebchirit, a journalist at the Arabic weekly *As-Sahifa*. Panelist Driss El Ouali also stated that the nomination of the council members reflects a political choice by the government—not a positive development. However, HACA published on its website the required documents and the conditions that candidates must meet in order for their projects to be considered. One important aspect of the law is the exclusion of associations and political parties from ownership. "But, this has not provoked any reaction from those excluded, especially the association community, which at the time the law was drafted did not intervene to ensure recognition by the state for the fundamental right of community radio stations," said Salah Sbyea, editor-in-chief of *Sawt An-Nass*.

The print media market is open to any Moroccan investor, but foreigners are barred by law from investing in publications registered in Morocco. Foreign investors can set up their own publications under different regulations, one of which requires prior authorization of the Ministry of Communication and

the publication of a decree in the official bulletin.

The conditions imposed on the Moroccan publications are liberal, and rarely is a registration request denied. Mohamed Karam believes that due to the political liberalization in Morocco, a simple request from the district attorney, who authenticates the application documents, is needed for a publisher to start activity. Driss El Ouali noted that "since anybody can create a newspaper, the state deals with publications as it deals with any other kind of companies—without distinction. In addition, the regional press has to pay all kinds of taxes, such as 20 percent VAT [value-added tax], patent fees, the tax on revenue, etc."

However, there are some instances of discrimination between the press and other businesses regarding their capacity to generate loans from financial institutions. Abdelmouneim Dilami, president of the Federation of Newspaper Publishers, said, "Financing the press is an issue that we have discussed with the authorities who have come up with subsidies, but the banks' requirements are different. They give loans to profitable and solvent enterprises, and unfortunately the majority of the press in Morocco are not." He also said that fiscal regulations for start-up ventures are not the same. Other businesses enjoy reductions in the VAT and other taxes as part of national development programs, and the panelists agreed that the press should have the same benefits. Bachir Znagui pointed out that contrary to other businesses, "Moroccan and foreign publishers cannot launch joint press ventures because the law does not authorize this kind of ownership unless the publication is registered according to the foreign publication code." He added that "the Moroccan press cannot by law receive foreign financial assistance, but other businesses can without problems."

Regarding broadcasting, the panelists agreed that the US-funded Radio Sawa received an exceptional authorization from the government to broadcast in Morocco. Otherwise, no laws allow the station to enter the Moroccan market. However, negotiations between Radio Sawa and HACA are underway to regularize the station's legal situation according to the broadcasting law.

The public broadcast sector does not receive any legal preferential treatment, and the new broadcasting law guarantees in theory its editorial independence. Article 4 of the broadcasting law provides that, "subject to the preservation of the pluralist character of expression, the broadcasting companies freely conceive their programs and assume responsibility for them." "Although the law obliges the public broadcasters to open up to all political and ideological voices in the country, the programs give priority to the activities and speeches

of the king as well as the activities of the government. Excluded are those socio-political forces and individuals who are challenging the regime,” said Omar Lebchirit, a journalist with *As-Sahifa* weekly. Malika Malak added that “political parties and businesses do not interfere in public broadcasting. They know that is a domain reserved for the state, but the independence of journalists working at the public broadcaster is a myth. No one can work without the influence of the broadcasting administration, which dictates the content of the reports.” She informed the panel that she left 2M because of the lack of freedom at the station.

Journalists who request public information through official channels are often disillusioned, said Omar Lachhab. Often written requests for information remain unanswered, he added. Another problem is that public administrations and ministries do not have any spokespersons. Professional journalists rely on their personal contacts who pass them information on the condition of anonymity. “There are several levels of discriminatory access to public information,” said Omar Lachhab. Ahmed Ifzaren, a journalist and editor of *Al-Khadra Al-Jadida* in Tangiers added, “The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for example, delivers first-hand information to a foreign Arab publication, *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, because the minister has a friend in that newspaper. The foreign press also receives information first in cases like the Sahara dispute. The king, for example, never gave interviews to the Moroccan media. The palace often responds to requests by the foreign press, especially from France.”

The king’s official trips abroad are covered exclusively by the public television stations and the national news agency, and occasionally by foreign journalists working with friendly foreign media. The local activities of the king are covered by Moroccan journalists who are known to the palace. “Moroccan journalists do, through the SNPM [a publishers’ group], express their concern about the lack of access to public information.... Some newspapers also publish editorials about the subject or mention difficulties they have faced when writing their reports,” said Bachir Znagui, former editor-in-chief of *Liberation*. The public authorities, noted Omar Lachhab, “do not perceive the information they hold as belonging to the public. They treat it as their own property that can only be distributed with prior authorization from the high-ranking officials.”

Regarding international news and news sources, however, Moroccan journalists do not face any restrictions except for access to the websites belonging to the separatist movement Polisario, the group that disputes Moroccan

sovereignty in the Sahara. “The Internet has become a major source of information on Moroccan issues that journalists reprint, even on subjects for which information is rarely available inside the country—like the army, for example,” said Omar Lebchiret. The use of the Internet applies to media like any other business, and it is now very affordable in Morocco.

Entry into the journalism profession does not require any specific certifications. The profession is free, and the government does not influence the hiring of journalists, except for the appointments of key positions at the public media, the panelists agreed. However, a press card is required to attend official events. It is issued by a special committee within the Ministry of Communication, on which sit representatives of the Press Syndicate and the Federation of Publishers. Directors of publications submit names of the journalists to be licensed by the Commission, and the last word in the decision process is that of the Minister of Communication, explained Bachir Znagui.

Foreign journalists based in Morocco must also be accredited by the Ministry of Communication in order to be able to practice their craft. Even the press card does not guarantee its holder access to information. For coverage of special events, such as royal activities or visits by foreign dignitaries, only a few designated journalists can get access. But, in general, the press card is the sole document by which the government defines the journalism profession. The law on the Statute of Journalists defines a journalist as one who works full-time for one or several media outlets. However, there are many people who write regular opinion pieces or articles on certain issues like the economy and education for the press while practicing other functions, such as teaching or law.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

**Morocco Objective Score: 1.82 / 4.00**

The MSI panelists noted room for improvement in the quality of Moroccan journalism, the objective that received the lowest score from the assessment. Focus on accuracy and multiple sourcing are not common, and political bias affects nearly all media organizations. Bachir Znagui noted three styles: “The journalism that challenges everything and anything until it falls into slander, the populist journalism that capitalizes on the misery of people, and finally the journalism that serves the interests of the most powerful among the political and economic powers.” Omar Lachhab, editor-in-chief of state news agency MAP’s Arabic service, said, “Journalism in Morocco does not yet satisfy the criteria

of quality that are required by the profession, despite progress achieved during the last few years.”

A collective of the major Moroccan NGOs, including the publishers’ group SNPM, adopted a code of ethics for journalists in 2002 inspired by international standards, but most Moroccan journalists do not even know it exists.

The most common unethical journalism practices are accepting payments and gifts from private companies, individuals, and even public officials. Some journalists have reported about people who have tried to bribe them for articles and others who have been fired by their editors for taking money from individuals for coverage. “The sport press, journalists believe, is the one area where corruption is widespread,” said Omar Lebchirit.

Journalists practice self-censorship on issues concerning the monarchy and big companies that provide advertising, panelists said. The partisan press is known for practicing self-censorship on issues in relation to their parties’ leaders, and Bachir Znagui said private media owners also “impose limits or constraints on their staff.” There are cases when editors of certain newspapers prevent their journalists from covering certain events, such as meeting opposition parties, or problems regarding certain companies, such as strikes.

The panelists described many topics that are difficult to find sources for, such as the Sahara conflict,

unemployment, security, and subjects related to the monarchy. One of the panelists declared that there is absolutely no freedom in covering topics regarding internal and external security in Morocco. But on these issues, Omar Lebchirit said, “We always look for published reports and information on the Internet on Morocco, and if we find it, we publish it.”

Many issues that were considered taboo in the past are now treated without fear, such as the need for constitutional reform, the powers of the monarchy, the Sahara conflict, corruption, prostitution, pedophilia, and public mismanagement, the panel agreed. Journalists are

***However, low income in the journalism profession has triggered three phenomena, noted Malika Malak: “The first is the movement of journalists between newspapers, the second between newspapers and the broadcast media, and the third, and most damaging to media professionalism, is the migration of very qualified journalists to the Gulf satellite media, such as Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, and Dubai.”***

even starting to take the risk of covering national security issues, such as interviewing leaders of the Polisario movement. However, coverage of anti-terrorist activities and leaders of extremists groups is rare. In August 2003, two journalists from the Oujda-based weeklies *Al-Sharq* and *Al-Hayat Al-Maghribiya* had their papers suspended for their coverage of underground Islamist militants that was judged to contravene the anti-terrorism law. The king issued a pardon for the journalists in January 2004, but a year later, the Ministry of Justice suspended the publication for three months on the grounds that the king’s pardon did not cover the newspapers. Bachir Znagui stated, “This case warned journalists that any coverage of militant Islam in Morocco can be interpreted as publicity and can therefore be sanctioned.”

The average salary for print media journalists varies among newspapers and within the public media. At some dailies, journalists earn very low wages, around \$150 per month. At other more established newspapers, the average can reach \$500 per month.

Salaries for journalists at the public media are comparable to wages for administration officials,

### 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).

with certain bonuses for journalists. The second public television channel, 2M, offers the best wages for its journalists, a practice inherited from when the station was a private company. These journalists receive an average minimum of \$800 per month, and an internal collective-bargaining agreement governs the wages. This agreement inspired journalists of TVM to negotiate their salaries, and a new scale was organized for 2006. Meanwhile, a collective agreement was signed in December 2005 after protracted negotiations between the Journalists Syndicate and the Federation of Newspaper Publishers. The accord foresees a minimum wage of \$580 per month.

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is the movement of journalists between newspapers, the second between newspapers and the broadcast media, and the third, and most damaging to media professionalism, is the migration of very qualified journalists to the Gulf satellite media, such as Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, and Dubai.”

News programs at both public channels have fixed schedules, and the entertainment programming varies from one day to another. Nevertheless, entertainment dominates the programming, as it is a source of advertising and sponsorship. Moreover, as advertising is getting more competitive, the percentage of entertainment programs is increasing. Chakib Ben Omar, a producer with TVM, concluded that the public is generally inclined to watch entertainment rather than news and any increase in the news will push the audience to satellite television.

Not all publications are equipped with modern equipment. Some journalists, especially those working at the regional press, use their own mobile phones and do not have PCs or tape recorders.

While some panelists criticized the lack of multiple points of view and sources of information in public broadcasting, they commended it for opening up to many social and political issues and starting to produce some good investigative reporting. 2M and the public national radio station have taken the lead in covering and debating socio-economic issues live. A few newspapers have invested in investigative journalism, such as the Arabic daily *Al-Ahdath Al-Maghribiyya* and the weeklies *Al-Ayyam*, *As-Sahifa*, *Le Journal*

*Hebdomadiare*, and *Tel Quel*. Business reporting is also covered by the daily *l’Économiste*, *Finance-News*, *Maroc Aujourd’hui*, and some monthly economic publications, as well as by the two public channels.

However, the majority of newspapers cannot afford to engage in investigative journalism because of the cost and lack of qualified staff. Niches such as rural issues, poverty, Islamic militancy, and the condition of women and children are largely unexplored.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

**Morocco Objective Score: 2.06 / 4.00**

Morocco’s print media are largely private, and the new broadcasting law that liberalized the airways will allow for more private television and radio stations in 2006. According to the Ministry of Communication, the Moroccan media sector comprised 438 publications in 2005—280 in Arabic, 151 in French, six in Tamazight, and one in Spanish. The private press constitutes 85 percent of all publications, with the “partisan” or political party press, trade unions, NGOs, and state institutions making up the rest. Casablanca and Rabat have the highest concentration of print media, but the regional press has increased, as have publications dealing with human rights, immigration, and social issues, the panelists said.

The broadcasting sector in 2005 was made up of two public broadcasters, the Société Nationale de Radio Television (SNRT) and 2M-Soread. SNRT is composed of a national terrestrial channel, TVM, and three satellite television stations: the educational channel al-Rabi’a (the Fourth), al-Maghribiyya (the Moroccan), a joint venture with 2M catering to Moroccans living abroad, and as-Sadissa (the Sixth), a religious television station. There is one regional station in the city of Laayoun in the Sahara area. The public radio network is made up of one national and 10 regional stations. Medi 1, located in Tangiers, is the sole private station, and US-funded Radio Sawa is also active.

“Roughly five million Moroccans can afford to buy newspapers with prices fixed at around 30 cents,” said Mohamed Berrada, president of the distribution company Sapress. “But only 300,000 copies are sold every day, which puts Morocco among the lowest Arab countries in terms of newspaper circulation per 1,000 inhabitants.” According to UNESCO data, there are 13 newspapers for each 100,000 people. The panel agreed that newspaper distribution to rural areas is sluggish due to the poor state of the infrastructure and very low income of the population. Villagers and townspeople

have access to radio and television, and the use of satellite dishes is increasing. "People in the major cities are better served, but limited income is still a major factor that determines the level and quality of access to media," added Mohamed Berrada. The government does not restrict citizens' access to media such as foreign radio stations or satellite television, but literacy does, panelists said.

Foreign publications are available but are only purchased by the elite. People also have access to the Internet, through direct subscriptions or in some of the thousands of private Internet cafés spread around the country. Those who are interested in online media can access it freely. The only sites that are inaccessible from Morocco, even via proxy, are those belonging to the Polisario separatist movement, such as www.arso.org, www.cahiersdusahara.com, www.sahara.net, and www.spsrasd.info.

Although the broadcasting law requires public broadcasters to offer objective and pluralistic information without any bias toward a political party, interest group, or association (Article 8), it also requires these broadcasters to cover the speeches and the activities of the king, debates in parliament, and other government activities as a priority. In addition, public

**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.

broadcasters must produce programs that respect the religious values, public order, and the good behavior and the preservation of national security (Article 3).

Panelists said state broadcasting does not reflect the views of the entire Moroccan political spectrum. Some political movements and NGOs, despite their strong presence in society, are still not visible in the public media because they have

challenged the monarchy. These groups include the Islamist movement al-Adl wal Ihsan. But public media have extended their coverage to many political currents and interests, especially through talk shows. Although there is still criticism of the news programs that devote most of their time to the

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official perspective on events, cultural and educational programs have been increasing, and there is a balanced view of the traditional and modern cultures of the country, with an emphasis on regional culture.

According to Ministry of Communication data for 2005, there are 18 foreign news agencies represented in Morocco, five of which specialize in photojournalism. The one state news agency, Maghreb Arab Press (MAP), has its headquarters in the capital (Rabat), 12 regional bureaus, and offices in 18 countries. It distributes news in Arabic, French, English, and Spanish, and Moroccan newspapers can get a 30 percent discount for the agency's services.

The only existing private broadcaster in Morocco is the Medi 1 radio station located in Tangiers. It covers Morocco and all of North Africa and can be accessed through the Internet and satellite. Medi 1 is owned by French and Moroccan interests, 51 percent to 49 percent. It produces its own news programs in Arabic and French. These programs differ from public radio programming because Medi 1 includes news about different North African countries. The news is not influenced by political or business interests, panelists said.

The opacity of media ownership concerns the private publications. Most publications do not reveal

their ownership, despite a law that specifies that the majority owner should be the director of the publication. People know that banks, insurance firms, and companies operating in other sectors own shares in many publications, but the publications do not publish this information, with the exception of l'Économiste Group, which publishes the names of its shareholders in its online version, and the *Al-Ahdath* daily paper. Transparency of ownership is also an issue with partisan publications. The public knows only that these publications are owned by political parties, but in fact, they are either registered in the name of a party, the secretary general of the party, or a limited company,

***Villagers and townspeople have access to radio and television, and the use of satellite dishes is increasing. "People in the major cities are better served, but limited income is still a major factor that determines the level and quality of access to media," added Mohamed Berrada.***

noted Bachir Znagui.

There is no resistance for the inclusion of different social issues in most media. However, partisan newspapers often play down the social impact of the policies of their leaders represented in the government.

Private newspapers owned by businesses also ignore the social implications of the policies of the companies owned by their shareholders and their partners, said Mustapha Laraki, editor-in-chief of the daily *Al-Ittihad Al-Ichtiraki*.

The panel agreed that minority issues are not perceived as such in the Moroccan media. Tamazight, spoken by nearly half of the Moroccan population, has been recognized by the state media, which now broadcasts programs in that language. There are also six publications that cater to the Berber population. The Jewish community does not have its own broadcasting or publications.

**OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT**

**Morocco Objective Score: 1.93 / 4.00**

Most of the private print media sector is made up of small companies that are managed by informal or traditional methods. Often the director controls all the operations, including editorial, human resources, and financial management. Very few of these publications generate significant profit; they survive thanks to good

contacts the owners have with advertisers, the MSI panel agreed.

The agreement signed between the Ministry of Communication and the Federation of Editors in 2005 strives to modernize the management of these outlets. But owners of these small companies, which constitute the majority of the print press, perceive this as interference and resist calls for reforms. "They are scared of transparency, especially of their finances, because this may reveal lots of wrong doings," said Malika Malak.

Two major distribution companies dominate the market. Société Arabe et Africaine de l'Édition et de la Diffusion de la Presse (Sapress) is owned by a private company and a number of political parties, like Istiqlal, USFP, and PPS. La Société Chérifienne de Distribution et de Presse (Sochepress) is a private company owned by the French group NMPP (Nouvelles Messageries de la Presse Parisienne) and a Moroccan family.

Sapress director general Mohamed Berrada mentioned that his company "distributes 21 dailies, 72 weeklies, and 320 magazines. Sapress uses modern technologies that enable it to know exactly the volume and the distribution points for each publication. It has 8,000 points of distribution around the country." Sochepress distributes mainly imported newspapers, magazines, and books and has 3,600 distribution points. The sales

**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.

points are made up of newsstands, kiosks, terrassiers (sales stands on the café terraces), small bookshops, grocery stores, bakeries, tobacco shops, street vendors, and seasonal salesmen.

Although these two distribution companies are well-managed, they face some external factors that limit their profitability. As examples, the panelists pointed to several obstacles: the limited skills of vendors, low readership of newspapers in Morocco, the poor state of the infrastructure, and the cost of transporting products to isolated geographic areas. Also, vendors pocket proceeds by renting newspapers to customers for a few hours at a fraction of the newsstand price, and it is estimated that 30 percent of newspaper revenues are lost through this system, said Abdelmouneim Dilami. Also, kids sell photocopied crossword puzzles and horse-racing information in the popular cafés for small sums.

Media draw their revenue mainly from three sources: sales, advertizing, and state subsidies. According to Ministry of Communication information, the financial resources of the SNRT are composed of a subsidy from the state, television license fees collected as an indirect tax added to the public electricity bill, excess revenue from the public advertising company SAP, and from other sources generated by services rendered to diverse clients. The state has granted the station 2.5 billion MAD (\$290 million) for 2006–2008, divided into 1,170 million MAD (\$135,445) from the state general budget, 556 million MAD (about \$64 million) from the fund for promoting broadcasting production, and 820 million MAD (about \$95 million) from the television license collected from the public. For 2M, revenue collected in 2005 was 391 million MAD (about \$45 million), an increase of 130 percent compared with 2004. The revenue from advertising and sponsorship reached 550 million MAD (about \$64 million) in 2005. In the same year, the channel made a net profit of 75 million MAD (\$8.7 million), an increase of 14 percent in comparison with 2004 and a 60 percent jump in comparison with 2003. The state gave the channel a financial subsidy amounting to 133 million MAD (\$15.4 million) in 2005.

Newspapers generate a large portion of their revenues from advertising. For some newspapers, advertising represents up to 90 percent of their overall revenue. For these outlets, many are actively using the services of private agencies. A few private publications, like the daily *Al-Ahdath Al-Maghribia* and *As-Sabah*, report substantial revenue from sales. However, there are several publications, like the weeklies *Le Journal Hebdomadaire* and *As-Sahifa*, which lost a huge amount of revenue from advertisers because of

their outspoken and critical editorial line vis-à-vis the government and the monarchy. These papers struggle to make ends meet with the support of their owners and some foreign advertisers.

State subsidies were granted in 2005 to 35 private and partisan publications—18 dailies, 19 weeklies, and five monthlies—and

amounted to around \$4 million. The amount disbursed for each publication is determined by a 12-member committee made up of six government representatives and six representatives from the Federation of Editors. The state subsidies contribute to the lower cost of newsprint; telephone, fax, and Internet operations;

and reductions in the transportation of journalists and publications inside Morocco. The cost of subscription for the state news agency MAP is also reduced by 30 percent. Public administrative, judicial, and legal announcements also constitute a source of revenue for more than 20 publications (private and partisan). In 2005, these announcements generated \$620,000, the majority of which went to partisan publications that receive little advertising.

The advertising sector in Morocco is underdeveloped. According to available data, small- and medium-size companies that constitute 92 percent of the Moroccan economy do not advertise their products. Foreign corporations and 10 national companies monopolize 60 percent of the advertising at the two public broadcasters. Maroc Telecom, Med Telecom, Unilever Maghreb, Coca-Cola, and Nestlé Maroc are among the top advertisers in the country. According to the Ministry of Communication, the overall spending on advertising for all media sectors was \$262 million in 2005. Of this, 56.9 percent went to the two public channels; the press attracted 20 percent, radio 7.5 percent, and the

***The agreement signed between the Ministry of Communication and the Federation of Editors in 2005 strives to modernize the management of these outlets. But owners of these small companies, which constitute the majority of the print press, perceive this as interference and resist calls for reforms. "They are scared of transparency, especially of their finances, because this may reveal lots of wrong doings," said Malika Malak.***

rest was divided between the cinema and billboards, according to published data.

A few advertising agencies dominate the market. The leading agency is Regie 3, which attracts more than 50 percent of the advertising accounts in Morocco and is the exclusive ad provider for the second public channel, 2M, and private radio station Medi 1. Regie 3 controls 76 percent of television advertising and 95.5 percent of radio ads, but only 9 percent for the print media. SAP is a second agency that controls 24 percent of advertising in television broadcasting. It mainly serves the first public channel, TVM.

***Advertisers now recognize the OJD as a reliable source for circulation statistics. However, many publications have yet to accept the control of the OJD. "Perhaps their managers do not want to reveal to the public their poor circulation figures," noted Bachir Znagui.***

To monitor circulation data, the Office of Justification de Distribution (OJD) was created in 2004 by the association of advertisers, l'Union des Agences Conseil, and the Federation of Editors. In 2005, with assistance

of the French OJD group, OJD Morocco certified the circulation of nine dailies, 12 weeklies, and nine monthlies or bi-monthlies. Advertisers now recognize the OJD as a reliable source for circulation statistics. However, many publications have yet to accept the control of the OJD. "Perhaps their managers do not want to reveal to the public their poor circulation figures," noted Bachir Znagui. In addition, the panelists noted, advertisers seem guided by other criteria, often political, rather than results of audience or readership research. For example, the results of the OJD newspaper circulation process in 2005 did not result in any significant adjustments in advertising distribution in newspapers.

For broadcast ratings, a number of organizations operate in Morocco. The most important of them are Creargie, Mediascan, and Sigma Conseil. However, media ratings are still a controversial issue in Morocco. The results are rarely published, as studies are often compiled for specific clients who prefer to keep information out of the view of their competitors. Even when some results are published, media outlets often reject them for their lack of objectivity. In 2005, HACA launched a call for an international tender to establish a unified system of audience rating for broadcasting.

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

**Morocco Objective Score: 2.23 / 4.00**

The Federation of Newspaper Publishers is the only association representing editors and directors of private as well as partisan press. It is managed by an elected board and is the sole interlocutor vis-à-vis the Ministry of Communication with regard to the interests of newspaper owners. In 2005, the Federation signed a "convention" with the government that aims to modernize the press sector. In addition to state subsidies, the convention contains proposals for management training. The Federation organized training for commercial managers at newspapers aimed at introducing new methods to increase readership.

The SNPM is the major trade union of professional journalists in public and private media. It is managed by an elected national bureau that elects a national committee, and the union has elected branches in several Moroccan cities. The SNPM is represented in the executive committees of the International Federation of Journalists and the Arab Federation of Journalists. In recent years, it lobbied the government and the parliament to reform the press code, and has campaigned for collective bargaining. This agreement was adopted in 2005 by the government and many private media, ensuring a minimum salary for

### 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.

journalists, a pension scheme, and other economic and social rights. The SNPM also intervenes when freedom of expression and press freedoms are violated. It organizes seminars and workshops to raise awareness about freedom-of-expression issues and to train journalists. The SNPM has released public statements calling on media professionals to adhere to the principles of professional journalists.

A number of NGOs are active in defending freedom of expression, including the Moroccan Organization for Human Rights, the Moroccan Association for Human Rights, and the Lawyers Association. The Moroccan branch of Transparency International is also engaged in advocating for a law on access to information. A number of national coalitions were formed in 2005 to defend freedom of expression and support journalists. Among these are the Collective for the Defense and Promotion of the Public Service Broadcast and the Committee for the Support of Prosecuted Journalists. These coalitions are not well structured and intervene occasionally on press-freedom issues. However, NGOs also participate in reviewing media legislative frameworks and proposing alternative laws and regulations to the government and parliament. The promotion of media freedoms in Morocco is still not structured around full-time advocacy. Most people involved are volunteers and in Casablanca and Rabat, and there is sometimes resistance to dialogue from government and parliament.

The High Institute for Information and Communication (ISIC) is one public institution that provides training for journalists. It accepts students on a competitive basis, and the students then spend four years learning journalism and communication in theory and practice. Fourth-year students are required to spend two days per week at a media outlet as trainees. Three private institutes of journalism are concentrated in Casablanca, but media managers have mentioned the poor language abilities and lack of practical skills of these graduates.

One of the problems facing the professional development of journalists in Morocco is the lack of professional training that would allow journalists to upgrade their skills. Most print media do not have any training programs for their staff and are reluctant to allow their journalists to take advantage of the rare training opportunities even when free. Public broadcasters and the national news agency, MAP, have their own internal training programs, but they are basic and target entry-level journalists. Training for career journalists or managers is rare, although there are many small training centers that provide courses on

human-resources management, marketing, accounting, technology, and so on.

Newsprint is imported and is in the hands of the private sector. However, some panel members said the newsprint market is opaque, as some newspapers are allowed to import more than what they need so that they can resell it on the black market or to other printers. This practice was endemic in the past with the partisan press and has extended to some private media. According to the press law, a unit inside the Ministry of Communication should normally control the use of newsprint by newspapers, but this unit has never been activated.

Printing is a free enterprise in Morocco. In 2005, there were 200 private printing houses and several state-owned and semi-public printing houses. Only a dozen printing houses specialize in printing newspapers. Some political parties have their own printing houses where they print their publications, such

as the Istiqlal party and the Socialite Union of Popular Forces. Some private newspapers also operate their own presses, like *Le Matin* and *l'Économiste*. Printers are not allowed by law to print banned publications, and some have come under pressure to cease printing publications that oppose the authorities. For example, *Le Journal Hebdomadaire* was obliged a few years ago to print in France. The regional press suffers from the lack of printing outside of urban areas.

The Internet providers are privately owned. The main Internet provider is Maroc Telecom, owned by the French company Vivendi Universal (51 percent), the Moroccan state (34.4 percent), and private shareholders. In December 2004, Maroc Telecom had 104,800 Internet subscribers, of which 57 percent used broadband. The second, much smaller provider is Wanadoo (Maroc-Connect), owned by Miditel.

***One of the problems facing the professional development of journalists in Morocco is the lack of professional training that would allow journalists to upgrade their skills. Most print media do not have any training programs for their staff and are reluctant to allow their journalists to take advantage of the rare training opportunities even when free.***

## MSI Participants

**Salah Sbyea**, editor-in-chief, *Sawt An-Nass* daily newspaper

**Mustapha Laraki**, editor-in-chief, *Al-Ittihad Al-Ichtiraki* daily newspaper

**Chakib Ben Omar**, producer, national public television TVM

**Bachir Znagui**, member, National Committee of the National Press Syndicate

**Ahmad Ifzaren**, director, *Al-Khadra Al-Jadida* regional weekly (Tangiers)

**Driss El Ouali**, director, *Sadae Taounate* regional weekly

**Mohamed Berrada**, president and director general, Sapress Distribution Company

**Mohamed Sabri**, newspaper distribution expert

**Malika Malak**, journalist, Al-Houra Television

**Noouaydi Abdelaziz**, lawyer and human-rights activist

**Omar Lachhab**, Arabic-language editor, Maghreb Arab Press

**Omar Lebchirit**, journalist, *As-Sahifa* weekly

**Abdelmouneim Dilami**, president and director general, l'Économiste Group; president, Publishers Federation

## Moderator

**Bachir Znagui**, CMF MENA

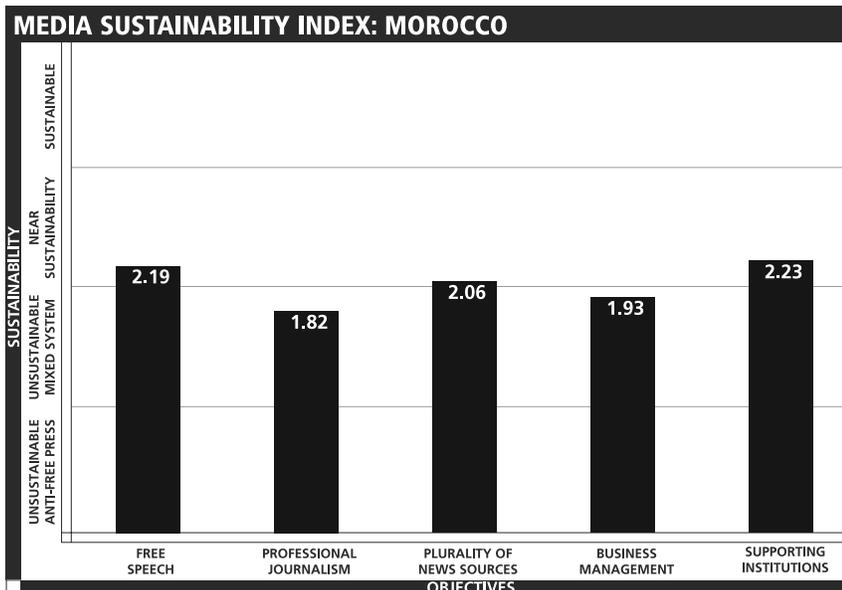
# MOROCCO AT A GLANCE

## GENERAL

- **Population:** 30.6 million (2004 est., World Bank)
- **Capital city:** Rabat
- **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Arab-Berber 99.1%, other 0.7%, Jewish 0.2% (www.nationsencyclopedia.com, 2006)
- **Religions (% of population):** Sunni Muslim 99% (www.nationsencyclopedia.com, 2006)
- **Languages (% of population):** Arabic (official), Maghribi Arabic dialects, Berber dialects, French (often the language of business, government, and diplomacy) (www.nationsencyclopedia.com, 2006)
- **GDP (purchasing power parity):** \$50.1 billion (2004 est., World Bank)
- **GNI per capita (purchasing power parity):** \$1,520 (2004 est., World Bank)
- **Literacy rate (% of population):** male 63.3%, female 38.3% (2004 est., UNICEF)
- **President or top authority:** King Mohamed VI (since July 30, 1999)
- **Next scheduled elections:** 2007 parliamentary elections (Chamber of Representatives)

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- **Number of publications:** 438 publications—280 in Arabic, 151 in French, six in Tamazight, and one in Spanish (Ministry of Communication, 2005)
  - **Newspaper circulation statistics:** 300,000 total (Sapress)
- Arabic dailies *As-Sbah* (60,595) and *Al-Ahdath* (48,250) (Office of Justification of Diffusion, 2005)
- **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
  - **Number of broadcast outlets:** SNRT is composed of TVM terrestrial, the educational channel Al-Rabi'a (the Fourth), Al-Maghribiyya (the Moroccan), a joint venture with 2M catering to Moroccans living abroad, and As-Sadissa (the Sixth), a religious television station. 2M is a regional station based in the city of Laayoun in the Sahara area. The public radio network is made up of one national and 10 regional stations. Medi 1 (in Tangiers) and Radio Sawa are private broadcasters.
  - **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** \$262,444,482.90 (Ministry of Communication, 2005)
  - **Number of Internet users:** 3,500,000 (www.internetworldstats.com, 2005)
  - **News agencies:** MAP (Maghreb Arab Press)



CRITICISM OF THE TUNISIAN GOVERNMENT'S HUMAN-RIGHTS RECORDS FOCUSES IN PARTICULAR ON THE CONTROL OF THE FLOW OF INFORMATION THROUGH THE INTERNET AND THE CONTINUING IMPRISONMENT OF A NUMBER OF YOUNG PEOPLE SENTENCED IN DECEMBER 2004 TO 13 YEARS' IMPRISONMENT FOR "FORMING A GANG WITH THE OBJECTIVE OF PLANNING BOMBINGS, THEFT, AND STOCKING EXPLOSIVES."



The World Summit on Information Society (WSIS), held in Tunisia in November 2005, put on display the poor state of freedom of expression in the country and the fragility of Tunisian media in the face of a government that controls all channels of information.

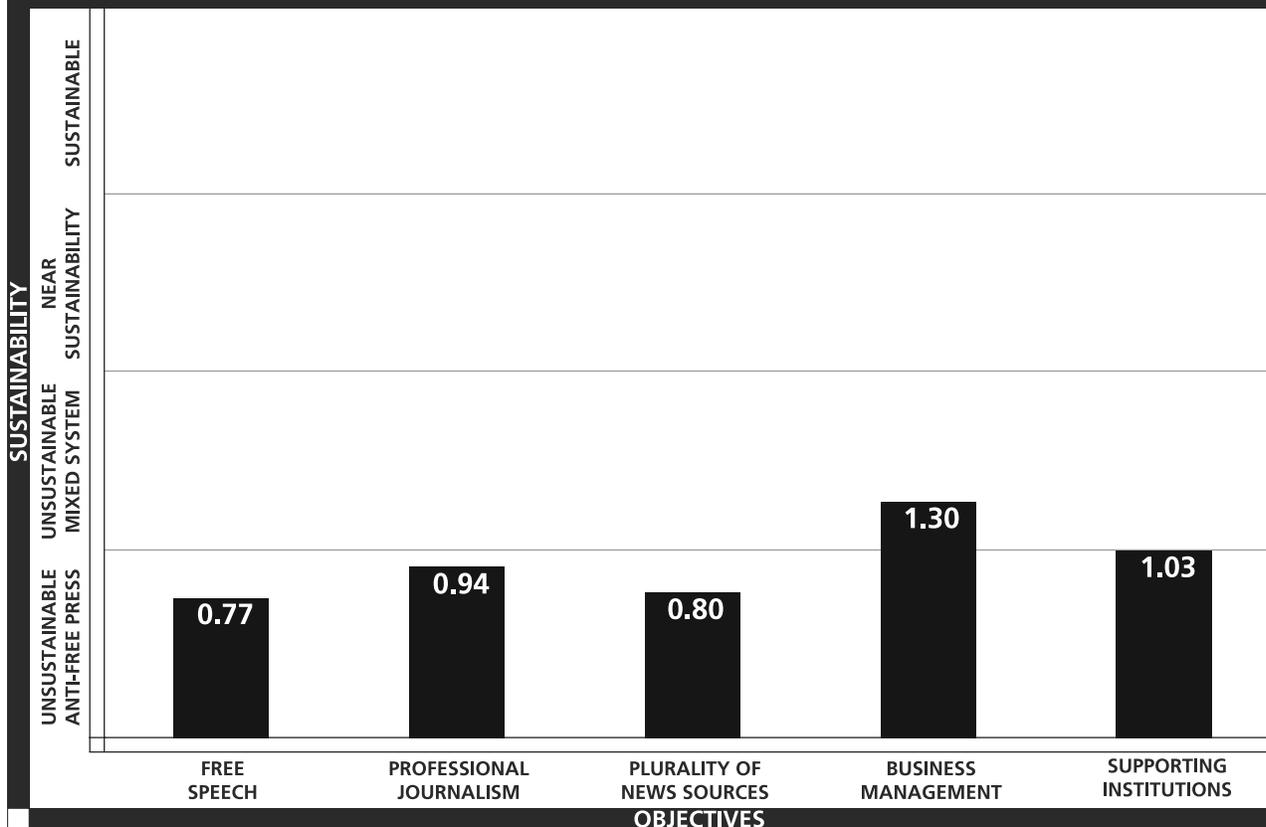
Despite opposition from a large number of international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to the holding of the summit in Tunis, the United Nations went ahead with its plans. In September 2005, the European Union and 11 other governments attending a preparatory meeting for the WSIS issued a joint statement calling on Tunisia to uphold freedom of opinion, expression, and information.

Criticism of the Tunisian government's human-rights records focuses in particular on the control of the flow of information through the Internet and the continuing imprisonment of a number of young people sentenced in December 2004 to 13 years' imprisonment for "forming a gang with the objective of planning bombings, theft, and stocking explosives."

Ahead of the summit, seven leading Tunisian opposition and civil society figures went on a hunger strike for 32 days, demanding respect for freedom of expression and association and the release of all political prisoners. This action attracted international support and exposed the contradictions between the official rhetoric on freedom of expression propagated by most state and private media under government control and the reality for the media and journalists in the country.

Tunisia's media landscape includes two state-owned and managed terrestrial television stations, Tunis 7 and Canal 21, and eight radio stations, including National Radio, Radio Tunis International, Youth Radio, and five regional outlets. In 2003 and 2005, the government authorized two private FM radio stations, Mosaïque and Al-Jawhara, and a satellite television station, Hannibal TV. There are 250 publications, the most important of which are owned by the ruling Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD): the French-language daily *La Presse*, and *Al-Sahafa*, *Al-Hurriya*, and *Le Renouveau*. There are two privately owned Arabic-language dailies, *Al-Sabah* and *Al-Shrouq*, both supporting the government. There also are two small partisan publications, the monthly *Al-Tariq Al-Jadid* published by the Renewal Movement and the weekly *Al-Mawkif* of the Progressive Socialist Rally.

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: TUNISIA



**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.

The 2005 Media Sustainability Index (MSI) panel gave Tunisia's media sector a score of 0.97, with the government hindering free media development. The panel found the laws protecting media freedom particularly weak at 0.77 and also noted negative trends in the licensing of print and broadcast media, the various pressures and censorship that journalists and media are subjected to, and the lack of multiple news sources.

**OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH**

**Tunisia Objective Score: 0.77 / 4.00**

Although the Tunisian Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, laws, regulations, and policies exist to severely limit its realization, the MSI panel concluded. These also contravene international human-rights treaties and conventions to which Tunisia is a party, such as the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights. Under Article 32 of the Tunisian Constitution, international conventions ratified by Tunisia are granted legal primacy over

**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.

domestic legislation. But in reality, an array of laws and practices continue to restrict media freedom and censor journalists, the MSI panelists said. The 1975 press code, the December 1993 "anti-terrorism" law, and the penal code contain provisions that criminalize free speech. Journalists have been prosecuted and publications have been banned on the grounds of defamation of official institutions or the dissemination of so-called false news. Other legislation restricts the right to publish or broadcast, such as Article 13 of the press code, which requires authorization from the Ministry of the Interior for issuing publications. Would-be investors in the press have been denied the right to own publications, and the January 2004 Telecommunication Code, which regulates the licensing of radio and television, was criticized by the panel as discriminatory and opaque.

The panel agreed that the main obstacle to the enforcement of laws is government policy and the judiciary. "Although the Constitution provides for an independent judiciary, in reality judges are heavily

***"Although the Constitution provides for an independent judiciary, in reality judges are heavily influenced in their decisions on free-speech cases," said Lotfi Hajji, president of the National Syndicate of Tunisian Journalists.***

influenced in their decisions on free-speech cases," said Lotfi Hajji, president of the National Syndicate of Tunisian Journalists. The panel also agreed that lawyers who defend journalists are subjected to harassment by the security services. In some cases, they have been physically attacked in the street and their offices searched in an effort to stop them from preparing cases or as a reaction to their statements published in the foreign press. The panelists mentioned the cases of lawyers Abdelraouf Ayyadi, Radia Nassraoui, Mokhtar Triffi, and Ayachi Hmami, whom they said have been targeted by the authorities on many occasions in recent years.

The panelists said the official practices that affect media freedom include arrests, detentions, searches, interrogations, administrative harassment, dismissal, confiscations of passports and professional identification, and denial of access to press conferences. Also, several private newspapers have come under pressure from the authorities to dismiss their journalists, either for writing critical articles or being active in the defense of human rights.

During the November 2005 WSIS, several foreign journalists came under attack. They included Christophe Boltanski, a correspondent for the Paris daily newspaper *Libération*, who was beaten and stabbed by four men while police ignored his calls for help, and a Belgian RTBF TV crew that was attacked and had film

confiscated.

Two TV5 World journalists, harassed after they arrived in Tunis, were asked by their manager to leave the country for their safety and in protest against the restrictions.

***“Journalists and editors working in the public and most private media do not dare to criticize these achievements; they work as loudspeakers of the government,” said Om Zied.***

The authorities also deported from the airport Robert Menard, secretary general of Reporters Without Borders, although he was accredited by the United Nations to participate in the summit. The authorities have also banned meetings and gatherings by local and international NGOs.

In March 2005, lawyer Mohamed Abbou was sentenced to three-and-a-half years in prison for an August 2004 posting to a discussion forum of the website [www.tunisnews.com](http://www.tunisnews.com), based in France, that criticized Tunisian prisons and compared them with Iraq’s Abu Ghraib jail. In May 2005, Lotfi Hajji, president of the newly established but not legally recognized Syndicate of Tunisian Journalists, reported that he was summoned by police, detained, subject to confiscation of his books at Tunis airport, and threatened with prosecution after the authorities found out that he planned to publish the syndicate report on Tunisian media repression. He was released after four hours and urged to stop issuing press releases in the name of the press syndicate. Hajji was also denied Tunisian accreditation as correspondent of the Qatar-based satellite channel Al Jazeera in 2004. Similarly, Neji Bghouri, a member of the management committee of the Association of Tunisian Journalists (AJT), was summoned to the local station by police in Tunis on May 7, 2005, following the publication of a report by his organization on media freedom in the country.

Also in May 2005, Sihem Bensedrine, a human-rights activist and editor of the online magazine *Kalima*, was the subject of a smear campaign by several pro-government newspapers, including *Al-Chourouk*, *Al-Hadath*, and *As-Sarih*, accusing her of prostitution. “These crimes,” said the panelist Anouar Malla, “are committed by people who are under the orders of the government and have never been investigated by the authorities.”

The violations of free speech, the panel agreed, do not receive any coverage in the media controlled by the government, public or private. Only the few existing opposition outlets and the communiqués of human-rights groups highlight these violations. Panelist Neziha Rejiba, known as Om Zied, who edits the online weekly *Kalima*, said that “persecuted journalists do not find any real support in the Tunisian society, except from some limited circles of people concerned with public issues. The majority of Tunisians are disappointed with freedom, which they consider as an intellectual luxury.” Moncef Mahroug, correspondent for the Paris-based *Arabies* magazine, said, “Journalists do not feel safe in their work. They have to self-censor themselves in order to avoid the wrath of the authorities or the sanctions of their editors.”

The January 2004 telecommunication code regulates the licensing of radio and television. The Agence National des Frequences (National Agency for Frequencies) under the control of the Ministry of Telecommunications has the legal authority to issue licenses for public and private broadcasts. The licensing system, the panel agreed, is politicized. Larbi Chouikha, a journalism professor, said two FM radios (Mosaïque and Al-Jawhara) and a satellite television station (Hannibal) were authorized to broadcast without any initial public call for tender, competition, or schedule of conditions. This failure contradicts Article 20 of the Tunisian telecommunication code, which requires informing the public by publishing in the press calls for tenders, he said. The panel agreed that the system is unfair and that those who were granted licenses are close to the family of Tunisian President Zine El Abeddine Ben Ali. “The granting of the authorization to broadcast is neither fair nor competitive. It obeys purely political considerations and is done in the most total opacity,” said Warda Bechir, Chef de Service at *Tunis Afrique Press*. The panel mentioned several cases of individuals who have applied for radio licenses but still await responses from the relevant authorities. Some of them have filed complaints against the Higher Communications Council, including Zied El Heni for Radio Carthage and Rachid Khechana for Radio Shira’a, but they have not received responses.

Broadcasting transmitters are under state control and managed by the Office National de la Telediffusion (National Broadcasting Corporation of Tunisia, ONT). The ONT has responsibility for broadcasting the programs of all public and private televisions and radios, in addition to parts of the programs of the Italian public channel RAI-UNO.

For a publication to enter the Tunisian market, it must abide by the provision of Article 13 of the press code, according to which a declaration must be lodged by applying to the Ministry in exchange for a “*récépissé*,” proof that all required data and supporting documents have been submitted. However, this receipt, the panel said, is often denied to people considered by the government to lack loyalty and adherence to its policy. The panel cited several cases of people who were denied the receipt, including Sihem Ben Sedrine of *Kalima*, Mohamed Talbi for his review *Maqassed*, Nadia Omrane for *Alternative Citoyenne*, Noura Boursali for *Maghrebine*, and Abdellatif Fourati for *Al-Adib*. “The *récépissé*,” said Larbi Chouikha, “is the key to the existence of any independent print media enterprise, and it has been often denied to investors who the government does not approve of.”

The Ministry of the Interior also has the power, according to Article 14 of the press code, to decide which licensed publication can be authorized to print and distribute. Printing houses are prohibited from printing publications that are not licensed, as well as those with a license that cannot show the authorization to print and distribute. “This unfair mechanism applies only to the opposition press,” said Rachid Khechana.

The Minister of the Interior also regulates entry of the foreign press to the Tunisian market. His authorization can be denied under the press code for publications that contain articles critical of the government. This is often the case of French newspapers, like *Le Monde* and *Liberation*, and the London-based Arabic daily publications *Al-Qods Al-Arabi* and *Al-Hayat*. The latter decided in 1999 to cease distributing in Tunisia after repeated seizures.

In May 2005, the president of the republic declared his intent to abolish in January 2006 the “*dépôt légal*,” a procedure that obliges editors to deposit a number of copies of their newspapers with the Ministry of the Interior before an authorization is delivered for distribution. The MSI panel agreed that this administrative procedure, which was designed to develop national archives, was abused and has become a system of prior restraint. The panel said the opposition press was the most affected by this procedure, which delayed or banned distribution or required that articles be removed and the publication reprinted.

The panel agreed that the press law does not discriminate between state-owned media and private or partisan media. In practice, they said, all the privileges are afforded to both the state media and

the private outlets that support the government policies. These privileges include higher salaries for journalists and editors, higher volume of advertising, facilities of distribution, and better access to government news and information.

The ruling party and big businesses close to the president interfere in the editorial content of the public and the private media, the MSI panelists said. Moreover, editors, managers, and journalists at public media organizations are appointed by the government. This alliance between the ruling party, which occupies all ministerial posts and dominates the functioning of the state, and the public and private media results in the shielding of public figures from criticism and accountability, according to the panel. This protection is reinforced by the absence of any law that guarantees to citizens and journalists the right to access public information that would allow scrutiny of the performance of the government and the administration.

Public officials are rarely accessible to journalists. The news about the activities of the president circulates through a special broadcast unit and the national news agency, the Tunis Afrique Press (TAP). Ministers hold a monthly press conference with selected journalists to show their programs, which are rarely challenged. Information gathered by journalists through the official channels is disseminated without any questions asked, and moreover, it is always praise for achievements, according to the MSI panel. “Journalists and editors working in the public and most private media do not dare to criticize these achievements; they work as loudspeakers of the government,” said Om Zied. The international news, easily accessible through the Internet, is filtered, and what is well matched with the government guidelines is published, she added.

Journalists who work for foreign media may be denied press accreditations by the government agency for external communication, ATCE, and the panel said there have been such cases involving Abdellatif Fourati, Salaheddine Jourshi, Hamida Habshi, and Lotfi Hajji. Accreditation of Tunisian journalists is determined by a commission within the Ministry of Communication. On this commission sit representatives of the Association of Tunisian Journalists and the editors’ association. Some journalists, the panelists said, have been denied press cards on the grounds of their political opinions, and the former editor of *Réalités*, Salaheddine Jourshi, was offered as an example.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Tunisia Objective Score: 0.94 / 4.00

A code of ethics was adopted by the Association of Tunisian Journalists (ATJ) in 1975. The code requires journalists to, among other things, defend the freedom of the press, refuse any assignment contrary to the honor of the profession, and refrain from writing

***“The Tunisian political context is discouraging good journalism practice,” said Larbi Chouikha. “The professional standards of quality journalism are not honored, as they are mixed up with the obligation to follow guidelines imposed by the government.”***

advertising articles in the form of news information. In addition, journalists should not accept gifts or special favors when on professional assignment and, most important, they should respect the views of their

colleagues and refrain from slandering them. However, this code, the MSI panel agreed, has no practical use because there is no mechanism to enforce it and the association itself disregarded it when it ceased

### 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).

defending journalists and instead supported the president and the government. The ATJ honored President Zine El Abeddine Ben Ali with a press-freedom prize during the celebration of World Press Freedom Day in May 2004.

The panel agreed that journalism in Tunisia generally is not well sourced as it depends on a single source: the government view transmitted by the state news agency and the presidential broadcast unit. Panel members said the media also are unfair in their treatment of the opposition and certain civil-society groups. Other journalistic practices also were criticized, such as the mixing of advertising and news, the accepting of gifts from officials and private business, and the launching of slander campaigns against opposition journalists and human-rights activists. “The Tunisian political context is discouraging good journalism practice,” said Larbi Chouikha. “The professional standards of quality journalism are not honored, as they are mixed up with the obligation to follow guidelines imposed by the government.”

Salaries of journalists are low compared with those of other professions, and the turnover rate within the media sector is high. For journalists working at private print media, the average salary is \$250 monthly, while at the ruling party–owned press the average salary is \$280. At the partisan opposition press, the average salary is \$200 monthly for the few permanent staff, as this kind of outlet relies mainly on volunteers. At the public and private broadcasters, salaries average \$300 monthly for journalists. For professionals in other sectors, such as banking and insurance, the average salary is comparatively higher at \$400 per month.

Editors and journalists, fearful of losing their jobs, practice self-censorship. “The imposition of red lines, coupled with low salaries, has created the conditions for the propagation of self-censorship and corruption within the journalist profession,” said Rachid Khechana. Daily media content is largely limited to the activities of the president and the government and some international, cultural, and sports news, panelists said. Among the topics not covered are corruption investigations of government figures, demonstrations and strikes by workers, civil-society activism, political Islam, and allegations of human-rights violations. National security, including anti-terrorism activities, and the work of the secret services, constitute the ultimate red lines.

Because of these restrictions, the panel agreed, entertainment tends to eclipse news content. Ridha Kefi suggested that 70 percent of television and radio programming is entertainment, with an overabundance of music, games, and sport programs. The Tunisian public apparently “requests this kind of material

to escape the official political propaganda, and the media are safe in the entertainment department," said Larbi Chouikha. "This trend will continue as long as the information programs are biased towards the government. The only source of information that the public listens to when they want serious information are the satellite televisions, like Al Jazeera or TV5."

**OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES**

**Tunisia Objective Score: 0.80 / 4.00**

Because of their need to be near the center of power, the national media are concentrated in the capital and the major cities. The concerns of outlying areas may be limited to broadcasts about rural issues for a few hours a week. However, 99 percent of the population is covered by the public broadcasters, while the newly established private broadcasters each cover different parts of the country. Radio Mosaïque, an FM station owned by MED TELECOM and launched in November 2003, covers greater Tunis and the North of the Cap Bon for 18 hours per day. Al-Jawhara FM radio began broadcasting in July 2005 and covers the region of the Sahel. Private television station Hannibal, which started in February 2005, can be watched through Arabsat and Nilesat.

Tunisians have access to international radio broadcasts and satellite television in cities as well as rural areas, and this access compensates for the lack of international news in the national media. The private tabloid newspapers such as *Al-Bayane*, which puts out 140,000 copies per week, are popular because of their sensational and sports news, panelists said. Partisan opposition newspapers such as *Al-Mawkif*, which provide alternative news, can only reach the small urban elite.

The government puts the number of foreign publications and newspapers distributed in Tunisia at 865. In most cases, these are entertainment and general

***"Editors and journalists of the public media obey guidelines that marginalized anything that contradicts government policies. They do not perceive their role as serving the public interest," said Moncef Mahroug.***

information publications. Foreign newspapers are distributed in the market on the condition that they do not contain information critical of the government. However, only a limited segment of the public can afford to buy them, or the national publications.

Internet use is expanding, mainly in the urban areas, but sites presenting varied views on events in Tunisia may be blocked. A study published in 2005 on Internet filtering ([www.opennetinitiative.net/tunisia](http://www.opennetinitiative.net/tunisia)) found that the state used special software "to target and prevent access to four types of material in particular: political opposition to the ruling government, sites on human rights in Tunisia, tools that enable users to circumvent these controls, and pages containing pornography or other sexually explicit content." The government also endeavors to block access to sites developed by human-rights NGOs and some opposition parties as well as discussion forums and news sites such as [www.tunisnews.com](http://www.tunisnews.com) and [www.reveiltunisien.org](http://www.reveiltunisien.org). Also, online Tunisian publications such as *Kalima* and websites of international NGOs such as Reporters Without Borders, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch are filtered, the MSI panelists said. There are many Internet cafés, Publinets, in the cities, but they also are controlled. Their owners are required to keep a register containing information about their customers, and to monitor their activities online.

Public media are biased toward government news, and the opinions of the opposition figures are not broadcast, even during election campaigns, the panel said. Private broadcasters are limited under Article 62

**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 Law No. 2003-58 of August 2003, which amended the electoral code. It says that during elections, it is not permitted “for any person to use a private radio or television (national or foreign) or broadcast from abroad with the aim of inciting to vote for a candidate or for a list of candidates.” This provision, said Lotfi

***“Controversial social issues like unemployment, marginalization and poverty, and clandestine immigration are covered in a way to show that government is working to solve them, but diversity of opinions in the society about their causes or the way to solve them are not covered,” said Bechir Warda. It would appear, she added, that “there are no social problems in relation to minorities.”***

Hajji, “further limits the editorial independence of private broadcasters and gives the government the power to control and manipulate election campaigns of the opposition parties through media that the government designates.”

“Editors and journalists of the public media obey guidelines that marginalize

anything that contradicts government policies. They do not perceive their role as serving the public interest,” said Moncef Mahroug.

“This also can be said for the only national news agency, TAP, which produces and disseminates official news, and the media are obliged to reproduce it to the letter and mention the source,” said Larbi Chouikha. TAP distributes news to all print and broadcast media that subscribe to its services. Only a few international news agencies are present in Tunisia; AFP has a bureau in Tunis, and Reuters and AP have correspondents, but the news reports from these agencies are disseminated by TAP.

The newly established radio and satellite television broadcasts produce their own programs, but mainly in the area of entertainment, including music and talk shows with artists. The private television station Hannibal heavily taps the archives of the national channel TV7. It does not broadcast news bulletins. Public television produces a variety of programs in the domain of culture, art, nature, economy, and tourism as well as children and youth entertainment. “Controversial social issues like unemployment, marginalization and poverty, and clandestine immigration are covered in a way to show that government is working to solve them, but diversity of

opinions in the society about their causes or the way to solve them are not covered,” said Bechir Warda. It would appear, she added, that “there are no social problems in relation to minorities.”

Media concentration, the panelists agreed, is not an issue in Tunisia. They mentioned Article 15 of the press code, which limits ownership to two publications of the same frequency that should not exceed 30 percent of the overall newspaper distribution in the country. “The public knows that the owner of the public media or those of the ruling party, but the privately owned ones do not disclose the names of their owners or all their sources of finance,” said Rachid Khechana. “The law requires that they publish their annual accounts, but they rarely do so.”

#### OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

**Tunisia Objective Score: 1.30 / 4.00**

Printing and distribution activities are managed by the private sector and generate profit for their owners who have invested in other activities outside the media sector, such as construction or tourism. Some companies working in this sector have received subsidies from the state in various forms. The most important distribution company is the Société Tunisienne de

#### 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.

Presse (SOTUPRESS), partially owned by the French group Hachette and managed by “people close to the government and who receive directives directly, concerning in particular the censorship of certain foreign publications or the seizure from the market of some opposition newspapers which contain criticism of the government,” said Salah Attia, a journalist with the *Al-Sabah* daily.

The panel agreed that advertising is a flourishing sector. They said it is controlled by the powerful state organ responsible for external communications, Agence Tunisienne de Communication Externe (ATCE), which uses it as a means of pressure against critical media. They also believe that the public and private media supporting the government receive the lion’s share of the advertising while the opposition press receives little so that the state can hold back its growth. According to available data by the media market research group SIGMA, the advertising revenue for 2005 amounted to \$75 million. Of that total, \$30 million went for television, \$20 million for the press, and \$5 million for radio. Ten of the top companies operating in Tunisia spent \$15.6 million advertising; Tunis Telecom came in first, spending \$2.21 million, and the Société Frigorifique et Brasserie de Tunis (S.F.B.T.), a beverage company, came in second.

The panel agreed that the absence of published annual accounts by the newspapers makes it impossible to evaluate the proportion of advertising in their revenues. However, it is believed that with an average 70 percent of the space of most newspapers dedicated to advertising messages, the revenue could be substantial. Some of the tabloid press, the panel agreed, ensured significant revenue from circulation, as well.

In addition to public advertising, the state grants subsidies to private media to cover some of the cost of the purchase of newsprint and the training of their journalists. Newspapers of the political parties represented in the parliament receive 60 percent of the cost of their newsprint from the government.

Four private firms, SIGMA Conseil, MediaScan, MedNews, and Tunisiemétrie, which is owned by the French firm Metric Line and its Tunisian partner Prodata, produce audience surveys and market research. According to SIGMA, the Tunisian television channels have 46 percent of the audience, the Pan-Arab satellite television has 45 percent, and the French television channels have 5 percent. Among the top 10 television channels mostly watched by Tunisians in 2005, SIGMA recorded Tunis7 (41.1 percent); Rotana Cinema, which is owned and chaired by Saudi Prince Alwaleed bin Talal (15.4 percent); the Tunisian private

television station Hannibal (10.2 percent); and Al Jazeera (8.8 percent). For radio audiences, research revealed that in the capital Tunis, the private Radio Mosaïque had 60.3 percent of listeners, followed by the two state radio stations, Radio Tunis (13 percent) and Radio Youth (5.1 percent). For the press, SIGMA found that the private newspaper *Al-Chourouk* registered a penetration of 16 percent

of the readership market, followed by *La Presse*, the newspaper of the ruling party, with 11.6 percent. The panel agreed, however, that the reliability of all the surveys remain arguable.

***The most important distribution company is the Société Tunisienne de Presse (SOTUPRESS), partially owned by the French group Hachette and managed by “people close to the government and who receive directives directly, concerning in particular the censorship of certain foreign publications or the seizure from the market of some opposition newspapers which contain criticism of the government,” said Salah Attia, a journalist with the Al-Sabah daily.***

#### OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

**Tunisia Objective Score: 1.03 / 4.00**

There is an association of newspaper editors, the Association Tunisienne des Directeurs des Journaux (Tunisian Association of Newspapers Editors, TDJ), which defends the interests of newspaper owners and editors, but it is under government control. Because of its support to the government, it was expelled from the World Association of Newspapers (WAN).

There are two associations of journalists. One, the Association of Tunisian Journalists (AJT), is legal and the oldest. The other, the Syndicate of Tunisian Journalists (STJ), was created in April 2004, but the authorities have refused to recognize it or to allow it to hold its first general assembly. “The STJ was launched as an alternative to the AJT, which lost its independence, and afterward its membership in the International Federation of Journalists (FIJ) was suspended,” said Lotfi Hajji, president of the STJ.

Four Tunisian NGOs exist to defend freedom of expression and the media. Only one among them is legal, the Tunisian League for the Defense of Human Rights (LTDH), and its activities are regularly banned. The LTDH publishes statements denouncing violations of freedom of expression and an annual report on freedom of the press in Tunisia. There are also the

***“The STJ was launched as an alternative to the AJT, which lost its independence, and afterward its membership in the International Federation of Journalists (FIJ) was suspended,” said Lotfi Hajji, president of the STJ.***

National Council for Freedoms in Tunisia, the Union of the Free Writers, and the Observatoire Pour la Presse, l’Édition et la Création (OPELC). None are legal, but all are active in advocacy, panelists said, despite repression

that targets their leadership, such as prohibition of peaceful gatherings and demonstrations, phone tapping, Internet interruption, and e-mail control.

Journalism training is carried out by the Institute of Press and the Information Sciences (IPIS) in Tunis. It is a public institution, which depends on the Ministry of Education. It provides students with four years of theoretical and practical training with specialization in journalism or

communications. Most graduates get their first jobs in the public media, but some enter the private sector. However, because of the problems of employment in the Tunisian economy, the panel agreed that more and more graduates are forced to take up other activities. For Larbi Chouikha, professor of journalism at IPIS, “journalism education faces three major challenges. First, the increasing numbers of students that enroll every year in journalism and communication education and the lack of job opportunities in the market; so more and more graduates convert to other professions. Second, the means allocated to training are limited in comparison with the number of students. Third, the current situation of freedom of expression in the country is far from motivating.” The panel also agreed that the refusal of the government to authorize the establishment of new publications and broadcast media reduce job opportunities for the journalism graduates.

There is also a public institute for further training, the Centre Africain pour le Perfectionnement des Journalistes et des Communicateurs (African Center for the Improvement of Journalists and Communicators, CPJC). It was established in 1986 and operates under the guidance of the prime minister. It is financed by the state, European and foreign donors, and by a tax collected from the private media. The Center organizes short-term training with a focus on the technical aspects of media activities. However, according to Bechir Warda, the media do not often use the services of the Center, as “their managers are in general reluctant to send their journalists to training courses despite that they get government financial support to do so. In addition, one has to ask questions about the utility of the training when many of those journalists who terminate their training found themselves powerless to implement their new expertise, especially in the public media.”

There is also some limited training supported by international institutions like UNESCO and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, but “their impact on the quality of journalism is insignificant,” said Rachid Khechana. Some students continue their higher journalism education abroad, mainly in France. However, when they return to Tunisia, the panel agreed, they tend to take jobs in public relations or teaching, rather than journalism.

Private companies operate the supply of newsprint, printing facilities, and distribution activities and are, according to the panel, well-managed and profitable. However, they are subject to the rules of the press code, which prohibits the printing or distribution of unauthorized publications. State-owned media and private media that support the government are

**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.

always first to be serviced, said the panel, and partisan opposition newspapers are sometimes pressured by delays in their printing or distribution. Kiosks are also privately owned and run by the same distribution companies. Their policy is that government newspapers should be better exposed to the public, said Rachid Khechana.

## **MSI Participants**

**Larbi Chouikha**, journalism professor, National Press Institute

**Ridha Kefi**, correspondent, *Jeune Afrique* magazine

**Souhir Belhassen**, director, *7/7* magazine, and vice president, Tunisian League for Human Rights

**Anouar Malla**, freelance journalist

**Lotfi Hajji**, president, Tunisian National Press Syndicate

**Moncef Mahroug**, correspondent, *Arabies* magazine, and former editor-in-chief, *Le Temps* newspaper and *Réalités* magazine

**Rachid Khechana**, editor-in-chief, *Al-Mawkif* weekly, and correspondent, *Swissinfo* and *Al-Hayat* newspaper

**Hamida ben Salah**, AFP correspondent

**Bechir Warda**, department head, Tunis Afrique Presse (TAP) national news agency

**Salah Attia**, journalist, *Al-Sabah* newspaper, and correspondent, *Al-Sharq* newspaper in Qatar

**Neziha Rejiba (Om Zied)**, editor-in-chief, online *Kalima* magazine

## **Moderator**

**Said Essoulami**, executive director, CMF MENA, Morocco

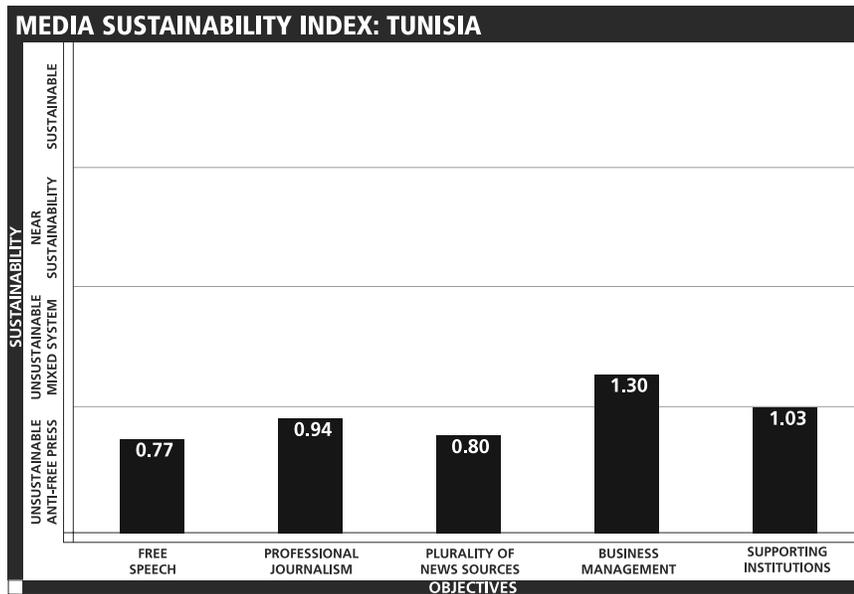
# TUNISIA AT A GLANCE

## GENERAL

- **Population:** 9,932,400 (National Institute of Statistics, Government of Tunisia, 2004)
- **Capital city:** Tunis
- **Ethnic groups:** Arab and Berber 98%, European 1%, Jewish and other 1% (www.nationsencyclopedia.com, 2006)
- **Religions:** Muslim 98%, Christian, Jewish, and other very small percentage (www.nationsencyclopedia.com, 2006)
- **Languages:** Arabic (official and one of the languages of commerce), French (commerce) (www.nationsencyclopedia.com, 2006)
- **GDP:** \$28.2 billion (2004 est., World Bank)
- **GNI per capita:** \$2,630 (2004 est., World Bank)
- **Literacy rate:** male 83.4%, female 65.3% (2004 est., UNICEF)
- **President or top authority:** President Zine El Abeddine Ben Ali
- **Next scheduled elections:** Presidential October 2009

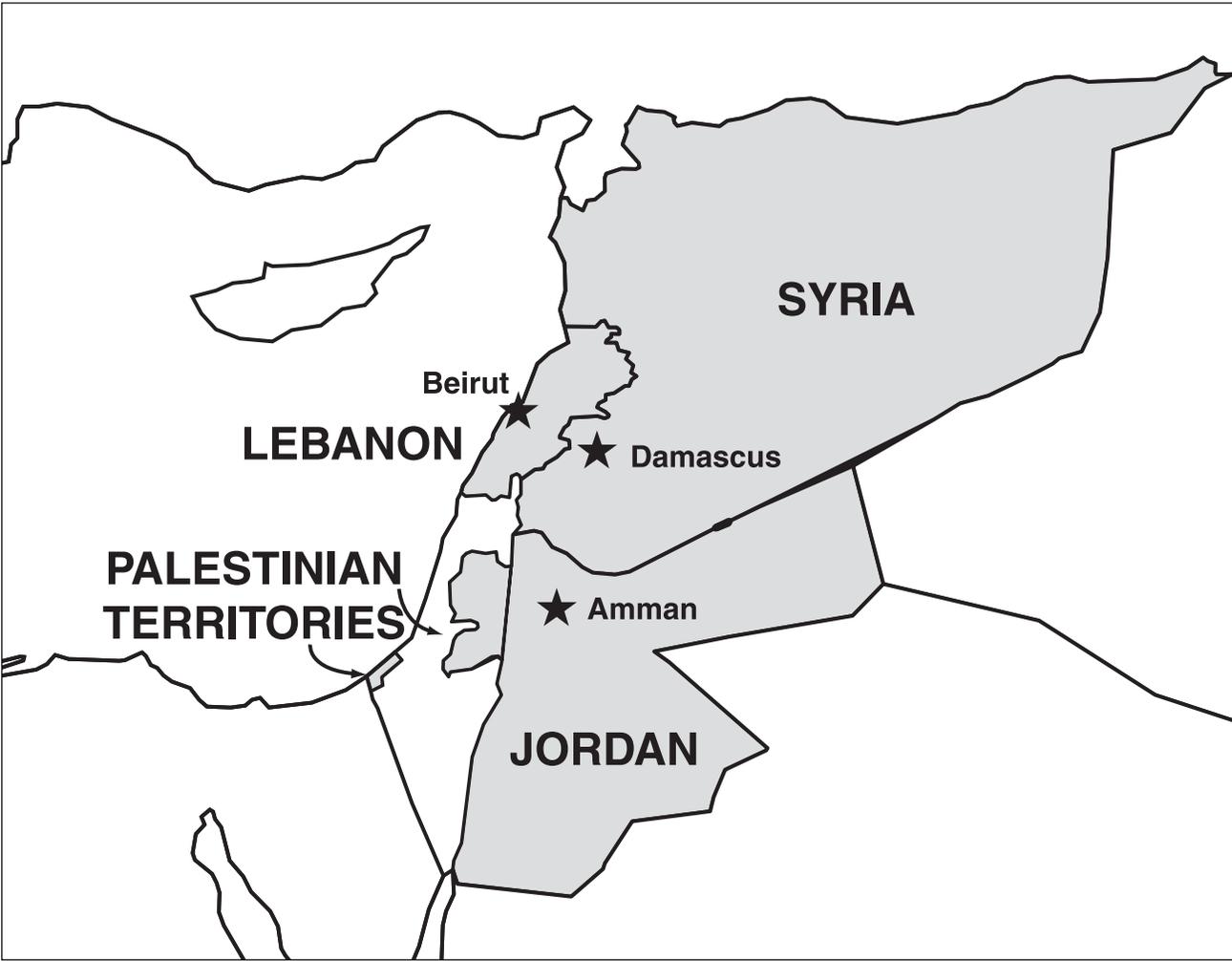
## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- **Newspaper circulation statistics:** 480,000 per 1,000 inhabitants (UNESCO, 2004). The largest papers in terms of circulation are *Achourouk* (60,000) and *La Presse* (50,000).
- **Broadcast ratings (top ranked stations):** TV7, Rotanna Cinema (Saudi Sat. TV), Hannibal and Al Jazeera (SIGMA Agency, 2005)
- **Number of print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** There are 245 newspapers and magazines (Tunisian government); television stations include Tunis 7, Canal 21, and Hannibal (private); there are eight radio stations, including National Radio, Radio Tunis International, Youth Radio, Mosaïque (private), and five regional outlets.
- **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** \$75 million (SIGMA Agency, 2005)
- **Number of Internet users:** 1 million (July 2005). There are 12 ISPs, five of which are privately owned. There were 310 public Internet service centers at the end of 2004.
- **News agencies:** Tunis Afrique Presse (TAP)





# LEVANT



OVERALL, 2005 WAS A MIX OF ADVANCES AND SETBACKS FOR THE MEDIA. ON THE POSITIVE SIDE, THE GENERAL INTELLIGENCE DEPARTMENT PROMISED TO ELIMINATE PRE-CENSORSHIP, AND A GOVERNMENT DRAFT LAW ON ACCESS TO INFORMATION WAS PRESENTED TO PARLIAMENT.



Jordan's leadership continues to struggle with balancing calls for democratic reform against what it sees as the conflicting need for security in an unstable region. A small country with limited natural resources, Jordan is keenly aware of Iraq on its eastern border, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to its western side.

In 2005, King Abdullah II commissioned a royal committee to draw up a National Agenda, the country's 10-year blueprint for reform. The National Agenda was presented as a process to guide the country to greater press freedom, judicial independence, political pluralism, and a modernized society. Of particular interest to proponents of a liberalized media sector was a recommendation to end mandatory membership in the Jordanian Press Association for journalists and editors. However, the proposal infuriated the syndicate leadership, which waged a newspaper and television campaign against it as a threat to the sovereignty of Jordan and its media. By most accounts, the suggestion was put on hold.

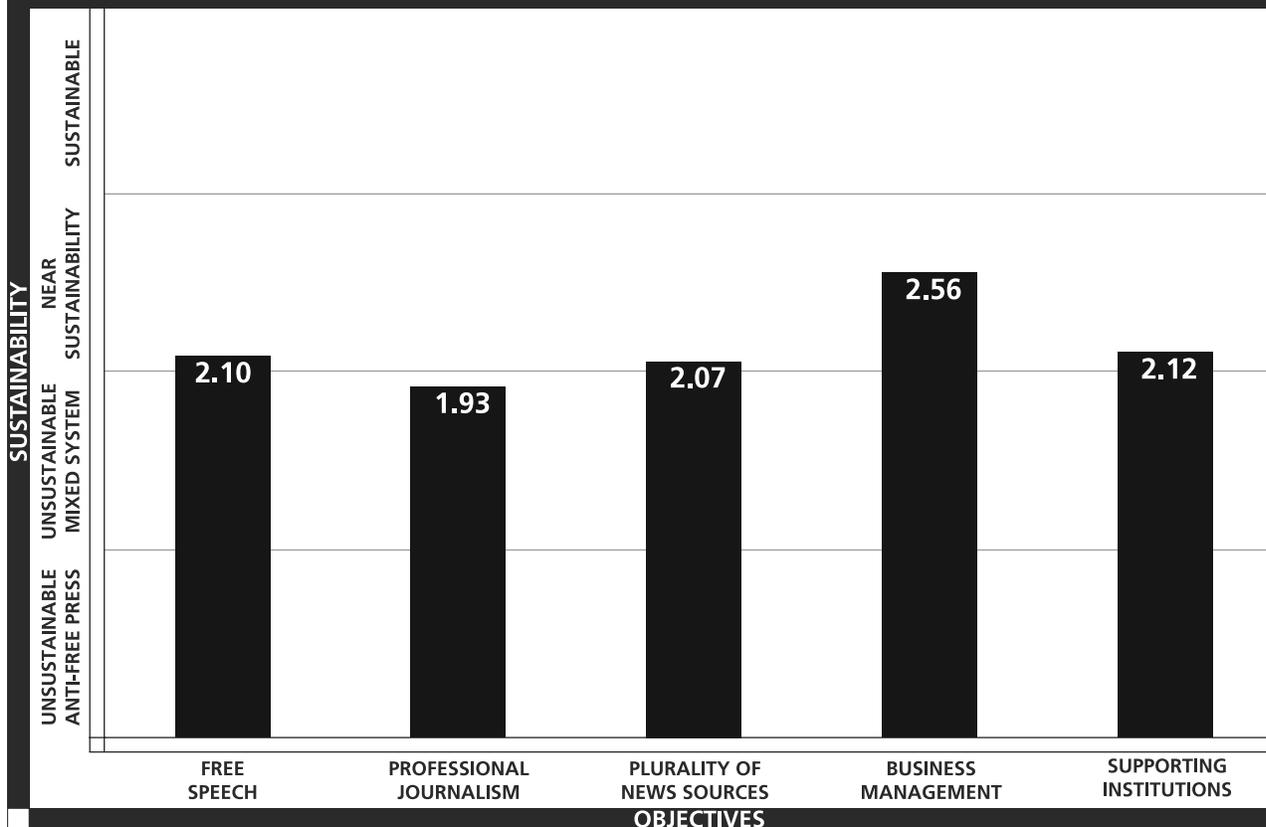
The entire National Agenda reform process itself appeared to be fading. Jordan's sense of being one of the safest countries in the region was shattered by three hotel bombings on November 9, 2005, after which the king appointed Marouf Al Bakheet as prime minister and gave him the green light to adopt tougher security policies. There was fear in some quarters that a crackdown on freedoms would come under the pretext of a war against Muslim militancy.

Overall, 2005 was a mix of advances and setbacks for the media. On the positive side, the General Intelligence Department promised to eliminate pre-censorship, and a government draft law on access to information was presented to parliament.

Participants in the Media Sustainability Index (MSI) assessment noted that the media outlets generally are equipped with modern technology and have unrestricted access to international news and varied information sources, including the Internet.

However, as most MSI panelists agreed, self-censorship prevails. Proposed amendments to the Press and Publications Law presented to parliament in 2004 were not discussed during 2005, and panelists said a number of media-related laws continue to restrict press freedom.

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: JORDAN



**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.

It was a particularly difficult year for Jordan's weekly newspapers. King Abdullah II criticized their performance in August, saying they published rumors and lies at the expense of national interests. The Jordanian Press Association denounced them as outsiders to the profession. The situation worsened when then-Prime Minister Adnan Badran announced that government advertising and subscriptions would be authorized only through him personally. Some of the weeklies suffered financially, including *Al Mihwar* weekly, which lost about \$25,000 (or 60 percent of its profits), according to its editor-in-chief.

While the state's monopoly on broadcast media was lifted in 2002, most MSI participants said that the regulatory Audiovisual Commission does not encourage news-oriented radio stations to start up, requiring 50 percent more in license fees than for entertainment-only outlets.

Journalists' pay continued to be another obstacle for the media. Participants estimated the average income in the print media at \$500 monthly, and perhaps 20 percent more at the most profitable paper, the pro-government *Al Rai*. At the state-run radio and television, the average salary is between \$350 and \$500 monthly. As a result of these low wages, panelists said, talented journalists tend to leave Jordan to work with regional satellite channels or join foreign media outlets.

The MSI panelists gave Jordan's media sector an overall score of 2.16, considering it at the first stages of moving toward sustainability through law reform and business development. The panel ranked all objectives above the 2.0 threshold except the professionalism of the media, which lagged with a score of 1.93.

#### OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH

**Jordan Objective Score: 2.10 / 4.00**

The Jordanian Constitution declares freedom of expression and the press through Article 15: "The State shall guarantee freedom of opinion. Every Jordanian is entitled to freely express his or her opinion in words, writing, drawing, and other means of expression, within the mandate of the law. Also, the press and publications are free within the law." The key impediments to practicing freedom of speech arise from articles in other media-related laws, most MSI panelists agreed. Yahya Shukkeir, consultant to the Higher Media Council and an editor at the independent *Arab Alyawm* daily, said these other laws "do not reflect or guarantee the freedom provided by the Constitution."

There are nearly 20 statutes in Jordan that are related to the media, chief among them the Press and Publications Law and the penal code. Provisions in the penal code

allow authorities to detain, prosecute, and imprison journalists if they commit crimes against the internal or external security of the state. This includes publishing state secrets or material that damages national unity, harms Jordan's relations with other states, instigates sectarianism or racism, insults religions, or lowers confidence in the national currency. The Press and Publications Law prohibits journalists from publishing any material that contradicts principles of freedom and national responsibility or the values of the Arab and Islamic nation, or disparages the king or royal family, or relates in any way to the Armed Forces or security forces unless permission has been obtained

***"The laws are politicized and controlled by the government, which has a strong relation with parliament, the latter representing a conservative power," Nidal Mansour said.***

#### 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.

***“Public access is very restricted,” said Daoud Kuttab. “Census information, especially dealing with the origin of citizens, is a state secret. Confusion also has been felt with the issue of unemployment figures.”***

from those forces. It also requires journalists to become members of the Jordanian Press Association in order to practice the profession.

The government reviewed amendments to the Press and

Publications Law in 2004, the seventh time this had been done since 1993. The proposed changes could be expected to raise the ceiling of freedom by easing content restrictions and providing journalists with legal access to information, but no action was taken on them during 2005. A draft law on freedom of information, also with parliament, would grant the public access to public documents and records unless they are classified as state secrets, and allow journalists to appeal to the Higher Court of Justice if their requests were turned down.

Some MSI participants were skeptical that these key legislative initiatives for press freedom would be ratified in the wake of the November bombings in Amman or the controversy that erupted over the cartoons depicting the Prophet, particularly because two Jordanian weeklies published them. “These incidents could be used as a pretext to restrict press freedoms,” said Jihad Al Mansi, senior reporter at *Al Ghad*, an independent daily that entered the market in 2004. Panelist Nidal Mansour, director of the Center for Defending the Freedom of Journalists, a nongovernmental advocacy group set up in 1999, said that societal norms in Jordan are governed by tribalism, Islamists, and a security mindset that do not embrace press freedom. “The laws are politicized and controlled by the government, which has a strong relation with parliament, the latter representing a conservative power,” he said.

Others, including Yarmouk University journalism professor Mahmoud Shalabiyyeh, disagreed. He said, “The law allows for freedom of expression within limitations, (and) applying the law is necessary when it comes to issues pertaining to defamation and instigating discord. This would prevent harm, and ensure that people’s feelings are respected.”

A poll carried out by the Center for Defending the Freedom of Journalists conducted in May 2005 showed that of the 100 journalists representing daily and weekly newspapers and the state-run Petra news agency polled, 37.5 percent of the participating journalists believe that

laws restrict freedom of the press, 33.3 percent believe that they have no influence, and 26 percent believe that they enhance press freedom.

Jordanian journalists do not feel the threat of physical crimes against them. What really intimidates journalists, some MSI participants noted, is when violations of the penal code law are handled by the State Security Court. Punishments range from three- to six-month jail terms and/or a fine of about \$7,000.

Libel and defamation are criminal-code cases, and prison terms of up to three months or fines are possible. In 2005, seven such cases were reported in the press, according to the government’s Press and Publications Department. Of these, five were filed by the Press and Publications Department, one by the Ministry of Environment, and one by a citizen. Lawyer Mohammad Quteishat, a consultant at the Center for Defending the Freedom of Journalists, said such cases are more frequent than those listed officially. Most of the cases were resolved with findings in favor of the journalists, but at least one weekly was fined \$10,000 and one journalist was sentenced to up to two months in prison, according to editors and media lawyers.

Broadcast licenses are issued by the Audiovisual Commission, a government body set up in 2002 with administrative and financial independence. Its director is appointed by the Council of Ministers. According to the commission’s bylaws, the council may refuse to grant broadcasting licenses to any entity without stating the reasons for such rejection. In the view of MSI panelist Daoud Kuttab, director of Internet and radio broadcaster AmmanNet, this means “the commission’s procedures are not independent or transparent.”

Fees for licensing entertainment-only radio stations range between about \$21,000 and \$28,000, depending on the location. The commission asks an additional 50 percent in licensing fees for stations seeking to offer news. By the end of 2005, 14 independent FM radio stations had been licensed, most providing light music, advertising, and entertainment. AmmanNet Radio was the only one offering some news and public-affairs programming. There were recommendations among the panelists that the commission include independent members so that its decisions will not be influenced by the government. Other panelists called for stations that meet the public needs instead of focusing on entertainment. Mohamed Alayyan, the CEO of *Al Ghad* whose company also established ATV as Jordan’s first independent terrestrial and satellite station during 2005, recommended that there be regular broadcasting market research “in order to fill the gaps and help the market mature in a balanced way.”

Market entry for media outlets is governed by the financial conditions stipulated in the Press and Publications Law. The minimum capital requirements are \$700,000 for daily publications, \$70,000 for non-dailies, and \$7,000 for specialized publications such as monthly magazines or advertising weeklies.

Panel members also noted that there are custom duties levied on equipment, and 16 percent sales tax on all printing services.

Panelist Amjad Kadi, a professor of journalism at the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at Yarmouk University, argued “that some papers are purely investments and have nothing to offer for the freedom of expression, so it is not suitable for them to ask for exemptions.”

Jordan TV, Jordan Radio, and the Petra news agency are run by the government, which also owns 55 percent in the *Al Rai* daily and 30 percent in *Ad-Dustour*, another daily. Government ownership influences the editorial line as well as the appointment of the editors-in-chief, according to panel members. The state supports these papers by placing advertisements, in what Yahya Shukkeir compared to a “carrot-and-stick policy.”

“There is no equality between the private sector and government sectors in the media business,” added Hala Zureiqat, assistant director-general for training and development at the Jordan Radio & Television Corporation. “Only the Jordan TV took live footage from the scene of the bombings during the November attacks, and satellite channels used the same footage from Jordan TV. And only JTV was allowed to take footage of the would-be suicide bomber...while in state custody.”

MSI participants concluded that public information is not readily available. Access is restricted by articles of the State Security Court Law (1959), Contempt of Court Law (1960), Protection of State Secrets Law (1971), Elections Law of 2001, Environmental Protection Law (2003), Health Law of 2002, Misdemeanors Law (1968), and the Temporary Military Code Law (2002). “Public access is very restricted,” said Daoud Kuttub. “Census information, especially dealing with the origin of citizens, is a state secret. Confusion also has been felt with the issue of unemployment figures.”

Access to international media is not restricted, as most Jordanians have satellite dishes and the prices are within reach.

Article 16 of the current Press Association Law prohibits any news or media organization in the kingdom from employing a journalist who is not registered with the Jordanian Press Association (JPA). The 1999 Press and

Publications Law defines a journalist in Article 2 as a member of the JPA, and in Article 10 explicitly prevents people from practicing journalism or calling themselves journalists if they are not JPA members. However, there are an estimated 150 people practicing as journalists in Jordan who are not JPA members.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

**Jordan Objective Score: 1.93 / 4.00**

MSI participants agreed that quality reporting is lacking and serious investigative reporting hardly exists. Apart from the laws that restrict the freedom of the press, they cited several reasons for unprofessional journalism: a prevailing culture of self-censorship, unskilled editors, government encouragement of obedient journalism, and low wages. This objective received the lowest score among the five MSI measures of the media sector.

Jordan’s weekly newspapers attempt to push the envelope further than other media organizations but generally lack credibility, according to panel members. Journalists often quote anonymous sources, and many cannot draw the line between news and views. Panelist Yahya Shukkeir said, “Quality reporting is rare. Objective reporting and providing the opposing views are not valuable principles among the majority of reporters. Sometimes objectivity is influenced by 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).

journalists' own desire to become close to officials or it is subject to advertisers' pressures."

Journalists' pay poses another obstacle. There is no data available on media-sector incomes, but participants estimated that the average at the print outlets is \$500

**Panelist Yahya Shukkeir said, "Quality reporting is rare. Objective reporting and providing the opposing views are not valuable principles among the majority of reporters. Sometimes objectivity is influenced by the journalists' own desire to become close to officials or it is subject to advertisers' pressures."**

monthly, and 20 percent more at the most profitable newspaper, the pro-government *Al Rai*. At the state-run radio and television, the average monthly income stands between \$350 and \$500. The low wages promote a talent drain, encouraging top journalists to seek better opportunities at regional Arab

satellite channels such as Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya. At the same time, said panelist Nidal Mansour, "it makes journalists prone to corruption, publishing materials, and accepting gifts in return."

The Jordanian Press Association, set up in accordance with a 1953 law, introduced a code of ethics in 2003. It prohibits journalists from accepting presents, financial

**"Entertainment programming has more space than news coverage in radio outlets because of government restrictions on licensing," said Aktham Eltall, senior news editor at the government's Radio Francophone Jordanienne.**

or material donations, or any aid of any kind without previous approval of its council. It also states that the journalist "should be committed in his professional behavior to the principles of honor, fairness, and honesty."

Journalists are prohibited from using "the profession for illegal personal gains." Nonetheless, panelists cited lapses. "Obviously we do have a serious problem in Jordan in adhering to internationally accepted ethical standards," said Osama Sharif, editor-in-chief of *Ad-Dustour*, one of the top three Arabic dailies. "Some in the media have committed serious violations by

accepting payments for articles they have printed. The government at one point encouraged such practice and patronized it." Panelists noted that obedient journalists are rewarded by becoming media consultants for ministers, with some maintaining their jobs as reporters or columnists and creating a conflict of interest that compromises their work.

Censorship of the media is allowed under the Martial Law of 1967 or during a state of national emergency. The government had for years tried to keep the media in check, but in 2005 the country's security apparatus set a precedent when then-chief of intelligence Samih Asfourah promised to eliminate pre-censorship. While most MSI participants agreed that state censorship has eased, they said journalists still exercise self-censorship. Journalists who fear upsetting officials, losing their jobs, or incurring the penalties possible under media-related laws simply edit themselves. "Self-censorship is by far worse than the state censorship," said Haitham Atoom, director of the foreign services at state radio. "It is exacerbated by the vaguely defined content restrictions in the media laws that hinder journalists from covering simple things. Writing about the Jordanian currency could be explained as harming the national interest; writing about the influx of Iraqis in the advent of the war could be explained as sparking sectarian strife."

Key editors closely affiliated with the government often act as unofficial censors as well, some panelists noted. "Even if journalists try to be objective, the restrictions and taboos discourage them from doing so," said Daoud Kuttab, director of AmmanNet. Due to self-censorship, said Tarek Mousa Al Khoury, assistant director at the state Petra news agency, "At times, we, the state agency, even get calls from newspapers who want to double-check if Petra was serious about a certain news item."

Panelists gave mixed responses about journalists covering key issues. "When you try to cover sensitive issues related to corruption, the information is withheld deliberately, and when you try, you find all the doors closed," said Jihad Al Mansi, senior reporter at *Al Ghad* newspaper. However, Mohamed Alayyan, the newspaper's publisher, said it covers sensitive issues. He mentioned as an example a front-page feature on the contamination of the Al Zarqa stream, considered an important irrigation source for crops in the country's main agricultural valley. Panelists also noted that investigative reporting requires financial support and training for journalists.

Most participants concluded that entertainment programming eclipses news and information. "Entertainment programming has more space than

news coverage in radio outlets because of government restrictions on licensing,” said Aktham Eltall, senior news editor at the government’s Radio Francophone Jordanienne. However, there are eight newscasts aired on Jordan state television between 7 am and 11 pm.

Technical facilities are available, but not for all the media outlets. Only four daily papers have their own printing press. All newspapers are equipped with computers, but the ratio varies from one paper to another, with *Al Ghad* having one computer for each journalist. The state radio’s Arabic, English, and French sections started modernizing equipment during the past four years.

Many specialised magazines, mainly English-language, have sprouted in Jordan recently, including *Business Today* and *Jo*, which offers an array of features. *Sharqiyyate* is an Arabic magazine dealing with women’s issues. Most Jordanian papers have a features department, and pages dedicated to the economy, local and political news, sports, culture, and lifestyle.

**OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES**

**Jordan Objective Score: 2.07 / 4.00**

Most MSI panelists agreed that there are regional Arab and Western news outlets that guarantee Jordanians the plurality of public and private sources of information in print and broadcast. Yet the content of domestic media and the issue of affordability were raised.

There are six Arabic newspapers and one English daily newspaper. There are 21 weeklies and two biweeklies, and that category includes an English weekly and two political party newspapers. The government owns shares in two dailies through the Social Security Corporation—55 percent in *Al Rai* and 30 percent in *Ad-Dustour*. Newspapers are distributed across Jordan, including rural and urban areas. They are sold at slightly over 30 US cents each.

Pan-Arab papers such as *Al Hayat*, *Al Sharq Al Awsat*, and *A Quds Al Arabi* are also sold in Jordan at nearly 45 US cents for each edition. Foreign international publications also exist, but their reach is limited to English-speaking Jordanians and the prices are a barrier.

Panelists noted declining readership amid rising competition from satellite channels and the pricing implications of the high cost of newsprint due to sales taxes. “Those who used to buy three newspapers before cannot do it anymore with the decline in the purchasing power,” said Mohamed Alayyan. University Professor Amjad Kadi disagreed, saying, “The prices are

not the problem, but the content of the papers is very similar and they do not have much to offer, and that is why people don’t buy papers.”

Some panelists said many Jordanians lost faith in the local press due to the perception that the government retains control, turning instead to regional satellite and foreign channels such as Al Arabiya and Al Jazeera, CNN, and BBC to get their news. As panelist Aktham Eltall put it, “The Jordanian media

**University Professor Amjad Kadi disagreed, saying, “The prices are not the problem, but the content of the papers is very similar and they do not have much to offer, and that is why people don’t buy papers.”**

has lost its lustre, and that is why it is losing readership, and the same applies to the local (state) TV station. People are heading towards other satellite stations, where they can find news and enjoy programs that our local channel does not offer.”

A survey conducted by Ipsos-Stat in 2005 showed that 67 percent of Jordanians have satellite dishes, which

**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.

cost an average of \$100 and are affordable to many. Internet is available, although the price is considered a barrier. Ipsos-Stat's 2005 survey of 2,400 Jordanians over the age of 15 showed that 25.5 percent use the Internet; of those, only 8.3 percent are subscribers.

***When it comes to investigative reporting, however, one editor said, "We are in the infancy stage."***

Internet Service Providers in Jordan pass through a state company. Despite Jordan's liberal take on the Internet,

authorities install firewalls and censor sites considered linked to terrorism or extreme fundamentalism. In 2005, the state security court handled an unprecedented "electronic Jihad" case in which a man was convicted of threatening the intelligence through the Internet.

Discussants said that the state and the public media reflect government views extensively, and that alternative perspectives are marginalized. Also, there are no independent news agencies. A study conducted by the Higher Media Council between June and September 2005 showed that opposition views in Petra, the official news agency, stood at 0.44 percent. For its part, however, state television introduced in 2004 a daily program that offered a venue for criticism of the government. During the hour-long show, called "Happening Today," the presenter takes on the views of citizens and questions ministers and senior officials about pressing issues.

Panelist Jihad Al Mansi said that the "the papers and state TV do not give the opposition space to express their views. Alternative views are often attacked by the government. The security does not want the opposition to express its opinion. When it comes to major issues like increasing the fuel prices, most papers—private and public—have similar headlines, stories, and opinion pieces that justify the government's measures." It is even difficult to talk about independent media when the private papers are even becoming more conservative than government papers, he added.

From the establishment of the Audiovisual Commission in 2002 until the end of 2005, 14 private FM radio stations licensed. However, only one, AmmanNet, provides its own news and public-affairs programming. The rest offer mainly entertainment music, save for one broadcast that presents Islamic teachings. One community radio station, sponsored by the British Council, was licensed in Ma'an, 220 kilometers south

of the capital. Jordanians also tune in to international radio stations such as the BBC, Radio Monte Carlo, and MBC for news, which is rebroadcast locally.

State-run radio has five FM bands, including medium and short waves. The French and English FM and the Arabic AM bands provide news in addition to talk shows and entertainment. The news bulletins cover government activities extensively.

While the state monopoly on the broadcast media has been lifted, panelist Daoud Kuttub believes that the government does not encourage private news-oriented radio. "It seems that the government prefers media as a way of bringing investments to the country and not as a message of political and social development. There are obstacles for the radio stations that have political programs that lie in the licensing fee. The commission charges 50 percent more than the fee required for licensing entertainment," he said.

No Jordanian laws ask media outlets to disclose their ownership. But such information can be obtained easily from the Companies Controller at the Ministry of Industry and Trade. Article 22 of the Press and Publications Law stipulates that the name of the publisher and editor-in-chief be listed in newspapers.

Panelists were divided on the issue of whether media cover a broad spectrum of social interests. Some said there are reports on issues once considered taboo, such as honor killings, domestic violence, and prisons. When it comes to investigative reporting, however, one editor said, "We are in the infancy stage." Some referred to the Press and Publications Law that has vaguely outlined content limitations, while others pointed out that issues relating to sex and religion are taboo due to social and religious customs rather than media restrictions.

A study on media content conducted by the Higher Media Council, a government body that monitors the print media, showed domestic political issues had less coverage in comparison with regional and international political issues. The study, which examined seven daily papers between June and September 2005, revealed that domestic political coverage stood at 24 percent of the content, regional political issues at 39 percent, and international political issues at 37 percent. But domestic economic issues had ample coverage, with 58 percent of the economic news content. Regional and international economic coverage stood at 17 percent and 25 percent, respectively. Social issues had the biggest share of coverage in the local media, with 64 percent, and the cultural issues at 37 percent.

#### OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

**Jordan Objective Score: 2.56 / 4.00**

Of 23 weeklies and seven dailies, only four daily newspapers have their own presses. *Al Ghad*, which entered the market in 2004, has state-of-the-art equipment. Smaller papers such as *Al Anbat*, which started publishing in 2005, print on the *Al Ghad* press. *Ad-Dustour* uses its equipment to print another daily, *Addiyar*, and a number of weeklies.

The MSI panelists agreed that the 20 percent tax and custom fee levied on newsprint is a burden for the industry. There is a 16 percent tax on ad sales, in addition to 1 percent paid to the Jordanian Press Association from advertising revenues. There is no state monopoly on distribution. Most papers, including weeklies, distribute through Aramex, a provider of transportation services in the Middle East and Indian subcontinent that acquired the Jordan Distribution Agency, a private company that used to distribute over 4,000 publications, including newspapers. Some papers, including *Ad-Dustour* and *Arab Alyawm*, an independent Arabic newspaper, have their own in-house distribution systems.

Advertising is the primary source of income for newspapers, and it remains closely linked with the papers' circulations. There is no law in Jordan that

specifies the ratio of advertising to other content, and not all follow the customary 40 percent advertising consistent with international standards. Some panelists said media outlets cannot necessarily depend on ads, as the government at times pressures ministries not to advertise in media outlets they dislike. In the largest pro-government paper, *Al Rai*, and at *Al Ghad*, advertising constituted about 70 percent of the paper's revenues in 2005. Other sources of income for the print media

come from sales, subscriptions, and printing. Ads in *Ad-Dustour*, one of the three main papers, constitute 35 percent of the revenue with the main source of revenue coming from printing other papers, weeklies, and school curricula.

Advertising is a key revenue source for

private broadcasters, but not so much for state radio and television. Some panelists suggested that the state broadcasting system, now facing tough competition from private broadcasters and regional satellite channels, did not develop quickly enough with regard to the ad market. In private broadcast, advertising and sponsorship cover 100 percent of the revenue, and the portion of broadcast programming time for ads is in line with international standards, the MSI panel agreed.

The advertising sector in Jordan has witnessed five consecutive years of significant growth, driven by liberalization of key industrial sectors such as telecommunications in addition to the launch of new private newspapers, magazines, and broadcasters. According to the Jordan Chapter of the International Advertising Association (IAA), the year 2005 registered a record high in advertising expenditure of \$162 million, up from \$121 million in 2004.

The print media, and the dailies in particular, claimed the biggest share of ads, based on figures compiled by Ipsos-Stat. In 2005, \$129.5 million was spent on press advertising, amounting to 80 percent of the total advertising expenditure. Between 2004 and 2005, print advertising expenditure grew by 31 percent. Radio witnessed the highest increase—130 percent—totaling

***“At Al Ghad, we built a strategy which consisted of having distribution as the main factor to be able to get advertisements and make more profit. For the media companies to become independent, they need to be able to survive without the help of the government,” said Mohamed Alayyan.***

#### 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.

\$8.2 million in ads during 2005 as new radio stations entered the market. State television recorded a rise in advertising, which reached \$11.1 million in 2005, up from \$8 million the previous year. However, state television used to attract a much greater share—28 percent of the total advertising expenditure in 2001, compared with 7 to 8 percent now.

**Panelist Nidal Mansour noted that the weeklies cannot survive on ads, and referred to a circular issued during 2005 by the then–prime minister asking ministries and semi-governmental agencies not to advertise in the weekly newspapers or subscribe to private papers unless authorized by him personally.**

The government does not provide subsidies for private media, but it owns shares in *Al Rai* and *Ad-Dustour*. MSI participants differed as to whether the media can survive without the help of the government and can rely on good management and ads. Some participants contended they could, including

the publisher of *Al Ghad*, who said his newspaper receives the least number of advertisements from the government. “We do not need the government to make money,” said Mohamed Alayyan. “At *Al Ghad*, we built a strategy which consisted of having distribution as the main factor to be able to get advertisements and make more profit. For the media companies to become independent, they need to be able to survive without the help of the government. In fact, *Al Ghad*, which is relatively new, has more subscriptions than the three dailies with 34,000.”

Other panelists disagreed. Haitham Atoom said only the papers with which the government is satisfied receive an indirect push through subscriptions and ads. Panelist Nidal Mansour noted that the weeklies cannot survive on ads, and referred to a circular issued during 2005 by the then–prime minister asking ministries and semi-governmental agencies not to advertise in the weekly newspapers or subscribe to private papers unless authorized by him personally.

A few media outlets that conduct market research hire Ipsos-Stat as an independent third party to enhance their advertising revenue and formulate strategic plans. Ipsos-Stat is an independent company focusing on survey-based research, and its main headquarters is in Paris. It

specializes in advertising, customer loyalty, marketing, media, and public-affairs, opinion, and social research. “Ipsos works for the advertisers’ interest and they provide the best figures, and we do not have any other choice in Jordan,” said Osama Sharif of *Ad-Dustour*. State television conducts market research using Middle East Marketing and Research Consultancy in cooperation with the Strategic Center at Jordan University.

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

**Jordan Objective Score: 2.12 / 4.00**

The MSI panelists were mainly agreed that there are no fully mature and effective supporting institutions that function in the professional interests of the media, and those that exist have a mainly symbolic role.

There is an announcers’ union that was set up in 2002. The association groups 80 members, the vast majority from state media, and provides some services and training to members. It was registered in accordance with a Ministry of Interior law, and it does not have the authority to defend journalists. Another group, Media Without Borders–Jordan, was set up in 2005 as a nonprofit organization to foster a culture of dialogue and freedom of expression, but its performance has not been tested.

### 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.

The Jordanian Press Association was established in 1953 and has nearly 650 members from the private and state sectors. It represents media professionals, including journalists, editors, employees at the state-run news agency and Jordan TV, and newspaper owners. The 1998 Jordan Press Association Law stipulates mandatory membership for those seeking to practice the profession, and a journalist who is not a member and practices journalism is subject to penalties and punishment. It is estimated that about 150 journalists in Jordan are not JPA members.

While the association offers privileges for its members, such as scholarships, loans, and special discounts, in the view of some panelists the JPA has distanced itself from defending press freedoms, particularly when the issue contradicts the position of the government. Nidal Mansour argued that several articles in the association's code of ethics restrict free speech by journalists. Yahya Shukkeir said that mandatory membership in the JPA contravenes international standards of freedom, especially Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. "Due to the mandatory membership and JPA fears of losing its clout, the association fights other NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] that work on protecting or training journalists," he said. However, MSI participant Tarek Mousa Al Khoury said the JPA role is essential because it defends journalists who were sacked from their papers and works to get their jobs back.

There should be an association representing private radio and television to help these outlets overcome expected challenges from the government, panelist Daoud Kuttab said.

There are several NGOs working in Jordan that support the freedom of speech and media. They also provide short-term training programs for journalists to improve their skills. These include the Center for Defending the Freedom of Journalists, Arab Women Media Center, and AmmanNet. They are independent of the government, and their activities are funded in part by international donors and NGOs. The Center for Defending the Freedom of Journalists acts a media watchdog, issues an annual report on media freedoms, lobbies for media law reform, conducts workshops for members of parliament, legal experts, and journalists, and provides volunteer lawyers to represent journalists.

An evaluation prepared during 2005 by the Higher Media Council, a government press monitoring body,

showed that training for journalists in Jordan is not systematic or continuous. Some newspapers have in-house training, but generally it is not part of the strategies and there is no budget earmarked for the purpose. Others said that while there are ample training programs, the restrictions imposed on papers by editors discourage journalists from applying what they learn. Panelist Hala Zureiqat of state television said this creates frustration. Another problem is the lack of adequate salaries, which means that journalists who get good training tend to leave for better stations abroad. The Higher Media Council has started training programs, mostly on legal protection and basic media skills.

Panelists gave mixed views on the quality journalism degree programs. In Jordan, there are two universities that offer degrees in journalism, the public Yarmouk University and the private Petra University. There is a gap between the theoretical and practical aspects of the program, and while students are

prepared from an academic point of view, they do not have practical experience. Professor Amjad Kadi at Yarmouk noted that the curricula is revised regularly every four years, but the challenges include a shortage of professors, as they either leave on sabbaticals or for better opportunities. Professor Mahmoud Shalabiyyeh said there are no real training programs for students at media outlets, with opportunities available more through personal contacts than institutionalized arrangements. "Fresh graduates rarely have the opportunity to get on-the-job training," he said. "They are usually not welcomed in the newspapers and TVs. Older journalists already established in their papers with minimal educational degrees feel threatened by younger enthusiastic journalists, and stand in their way."

***"Fresh graduates rarely have the opportunity to get on-the-job training," Professor Mahmoud Shalabiyyeh said. "They are usually not welcomed in the newspapers and TVs. Older journalists already established in their papers with minimal educational degrees feel threatened by younger enthusiastic journalists, and stand in their way."***

## MSI Participants

**Mahmoud Shalabiyeh**, associate professor,  
Department of Journalism & Mass Communication,  
Yarmouk University, Irbid

**Osama Sharif**, chief editor, *Ad-Dustour* newspaper,  
Amman

**Daoud Kuttab**, director, AmmanNet, Amman

**Mohamed Alayyan**, CEO and publisher, *Al Ghad*  
newspaper and ATV, Amman

**Aktham Eltall**, senior news editor–French news,  
Radio Francophone Jordanienne, Amman

**Yahya Shukkeir**, consultant, Higher Media Council, and  
local affairs editor, *Arab Alyawm* newspaper, Amman

**Nidal Mansour**, president, Center for Defending the  
Freedom of Journalists, Amman

**Haitham Atoom**, director of the foreign services,  
Jordan Radio, Amman

**Hala Zureiqat**, assistant director-general for training  
and development and director of International  
Relations Department, Jordan Radio & Television  
Corporation, Amman

**Dr. Amjad Kadi**, professor of journalism, Department  
of Journalism and Mass Communication, Yarmouk  
University, Irbid

**Tarek Mousa Al Khoury**, assistant director, Petra news  
agency, Amman

**Jihad Al Mansi**, senior reporter, *Al Ghad* newspaper,  
Amman

## Moderators

**Sa'ad Hattar**, BBC correspondent, Amman

**Suha Ma'ayeh**, media consultant, Amman

# JORDAN AT A GLANCE

## GENERAL

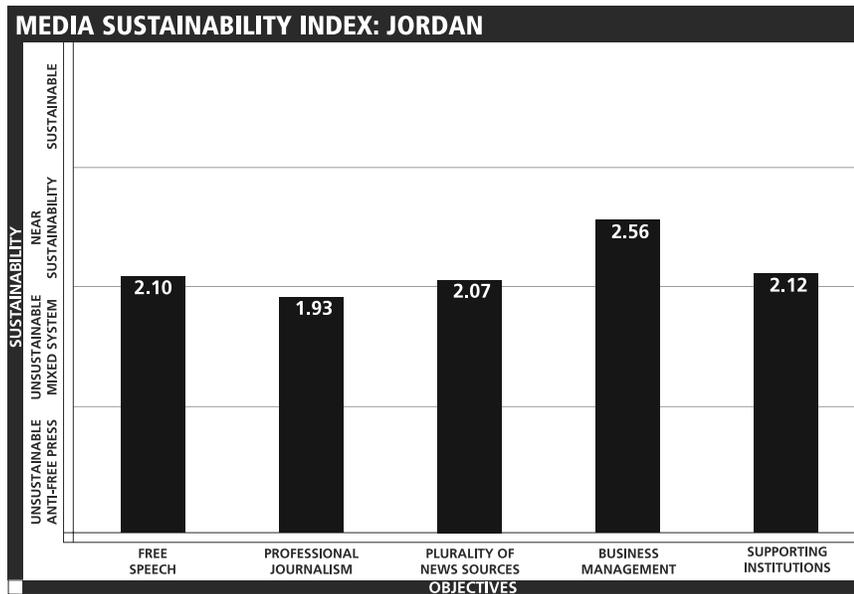
- **Population:** 5.473 million (Department of Statistics, 2005 census)
- **Capital city:** Amman
- **Ethnic groups:** N/A
- **Religions:** Islam; Christianity makes up over 200,000 (Selim Sayegh, Auxiliary Bishop and Latin Vicar General for Jordan)
- **Languages:** Arabic, English (widely used by middle to upper class)
- **GDP (ppp):** \$11.2 billion (World Bank Statistics)
- **GDP per capita (ppp):** \$2,140.00 (Department of Statistics until the end of 2004)
- **GNI:** \$11.6 billion (World Bank Statistics, 2004)
- **GNI per capita:** \$2,140.00 (World Bank Statistics, 2004)
- **Literacy rate:** 90% (Department of Statistics, 2005)
- **President or top authority:** King Abdullah II
- **Next scheduled elections:** Parliamentary 2007

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- **Newspaper circulation statistics:** N/A
- **Active print outlets:** Seven daily papers, 22 weeklies, one bimonthly (Higher Media Council, a government body that monitors the print media)
- **The three largest papers (not in order):** *Al Rai*, *Alghad*, and independent daily *Ad-Dustour*. (Ipsos-Stat)
- **Broadcast ratings:** Top three (not in order) are Al Quaran Alkarim, Jordan FM 99 Arabic service, fann FM (an entertainment, Arabic social station). (Ipsos-Stat)
- **Radio stations:** One government, nine active private broadcast, 14 licensed (Audiovisual Commission)
- **Television stations:** Jordan State TV; privately owned ATV is expected to start broadcasting in 2006.
- **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** \$129.5 million was spent on advertising, amounting to 80 percent of the total advertising expenditure in 2005. Between 2004 and 2005, the print advertising expenditure grew by 31 percent. Radio witnessed the highest

increase—130 percent—totaling \$8.2 million in ads in 2005 as three radio stations entered the market. (Ipsos-Stat); state television has recorded a rise in advertising expenditure, which reached \$11.1 million in 2005, up from \$8 million the previous year.

- **Number of Internet users:** A survey of 2,400 Jordanians over age 15 revealed that 25.5 percent use the Internet. Of these, only 8.3 percent are subscribers. (Ipsos-Stat, 2005)
- **News agencies:** Government-owned Petra news agency
- **Significant foreign investment in the media:** N/A



THE NEWS MEDIA, BOTH NEWSPAPER AND BROADCAST, PRESENT A BROAD RANGE OF POLITICAL VIEWS, BUT IN MOST CASES THOSE VIEWS ARE THE ONES ESPOUSED BY FORCES, BOTH DOMESTIC AND EXTERNAL, THAT OWN OR HELP BANKROLL THEM. MEDIA TECHNOLOGY IS ADVANCED, OFTEN STATE-OF-THE-ART, BUT MEDIA MANAGEMENT IS DICTATED BY POLITICAL AND FAMILY TIES.



**I**n deadly and dramatic replays of some of the worst days of Lebanon's 1975–1990 civil war, 2005 saw the car-bomb assassinations of two of the country's most prominent newspaper journalists and the maiming of a popular television newscaster.

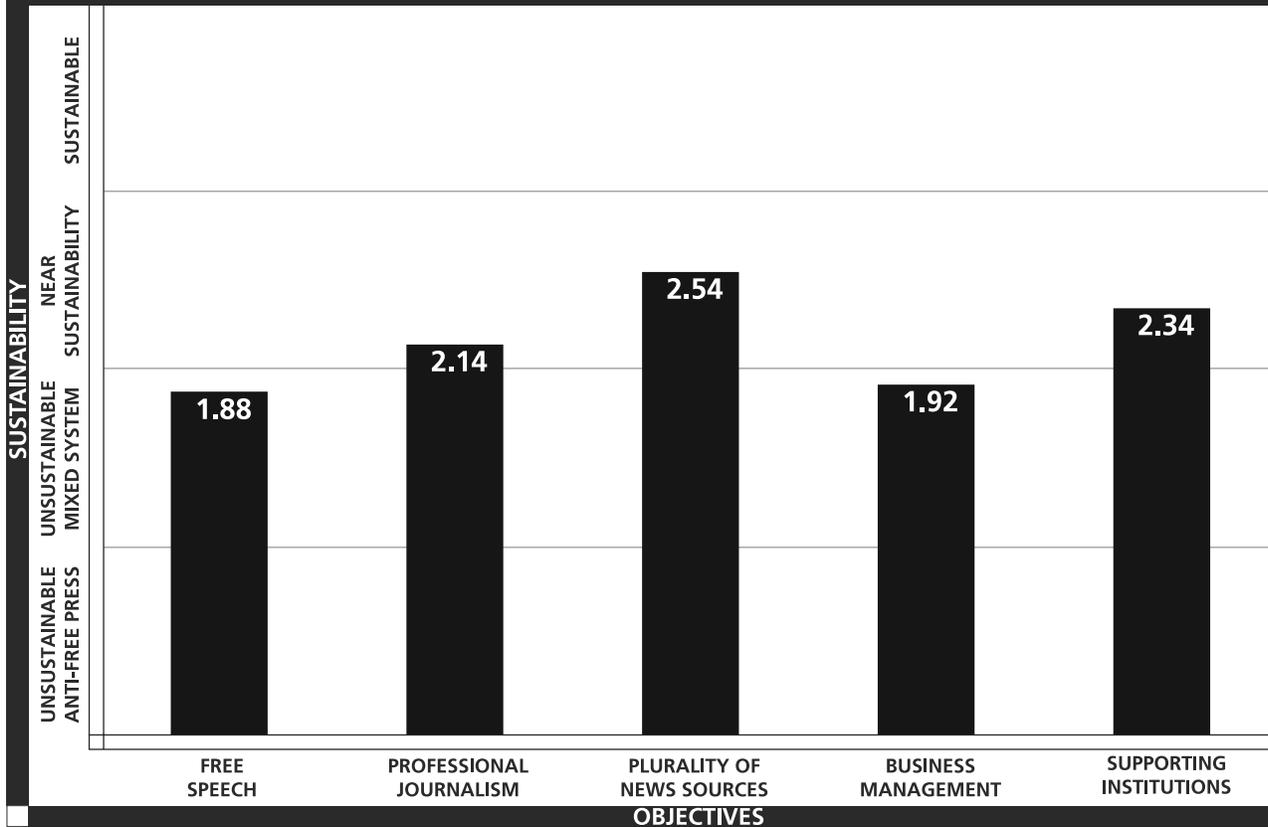
The attacks—which followed the car-bomb assassination of a former prime minister early in the year—spread fear among other journalists and served as a lethal reminder of the dangers that many had hoped had been consigned to history as the country plowed ahead with postwar reconstruction.

The common thread in the killings was that the victims were outspoken critics of neighboring Syria's heavy-handed political influence over its smaller neighbor. A number of arrests were made in the death of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, but a year later no one had been brought to trial. There was even less progress apparent in the investigation into the attacks on the journalists.

The deaths underscored the dichotomies in Lebanese journalism. The news media, both newspaper and broadcast, present a broad range of political views, but in most cases those views are the ones espoused by forces, both domestic and external, that own or help bankroll them. Media technology is advanced, often state-of-the-art, but media management is dictated by political and family ties. Lebanese universities teach students how to perform accurate and objective journalism, but the media they wind up working for often dictate the opposite.

The Media Sustainability Index (MSI) panel scored Lebanon's media sector at 2.16, just barely nearing sustainability. The strongest showing came in the availability of multiple sources of news, and the weakest was in the freedom to use that information. The panelists stressed the handicaps that politicized influences imposed on almost every indicator in the MSI survey, from licensing of media to editorial content.

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: LEBANON



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

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

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

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

## OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH

Lebanon Objective Score: 1.88 / 4.00

In 2005, Lebanon once again became a dramatic—and sometimes lethal—battleground for freedom of expression. The right to free speech is guaranteed by the Lebanese Constitution, and MSI panelists agreed that the laws pertaining to freedom of expression tend to be pretty good. But what about enforcement? The MSI panel, which included representatives from across Lebanon’s political and religious spectrum, was fully agreed that journalists are not protected when they exercise their constitutional right to free speech.

Chilling evidence came with the twin assassinations, which targeted two of the country’s best-known journalists, both staunch critics of Syria. The first, in June, killed Samir Kassir, a columnist for *An-Nahar*, for decades the biggest and most respected Lebanese daily newspaper. In December, *An-Nahar* general manager Gebran Tueni, who regularly denounced Syria in his editorial columns and from his seat in parliament,

was killed, along with his bodyguard and driver. In between, in September, LBC-TV newscaster and popular talk-show host May Chidiac, another longtime critic of Syria, lost half her left arm and half her left leg to another car bomb.

“Most journalists working on internal political issues are feeling threatened,” said MSI panelist Tania Mehanna, senior correspondent for the Lebanese Broadcasting Company (LBC). “After this year and all the assassinations, everybody is taking extra precautions. If

***“Most journalists working on internal political issues are feeling threatened,” said MSI panelist Tania Mehanna “After this year and all the assassinations, everybody is taking extra precautions. If you cannot park in a secured place, you cannot leave your car. We have to change our habits, change the places where we live.”***

you cannot park in a secured place, you cannot leave your car. We have to change our habits, change the places where we live.”

Though mainly known for his leadership of Lebanon’s out-of-the-ashes renaissance after the civil war, the most famous of 2005’s car-bombing victims, former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, was a billionaire businessman who founded and owned Lebanon’s Future television station and *Al-Mustaqbal* newspaper. Hariri, too, was a longtime opponent of Syrian influence in Lebanon. Massive demonstrations following his February murder spurred withdrawal of the Syrian military, which had maintained an uninterrupted presence since initial deployment in 1976, ostensibly as a deterrent to civil war.

With arrests but no convictions in the Hariri assassination, and no arrests at all in the attacks on the journalists, the MSI panelists were skeptical about government willingness to protect the media. “At least 50 percent of ordinary crimes committed during the past 15 years have been solved, while justice is not even trying to pursue the murderers of journalists and media professionals,” said panelist Naji Tueni, deputy general manager of *An-Nahar* and a first cousin of the slain Gebran Tueni.

Freedom-of-expression issues permeate coverage, too. Several panelists cited a 1962 law banning publication of material that endangers national security, national unity, or international borders or insults high-level Lebanese officials or foreign heads of state. “We are

### 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.

allowed to criticize but not to insult," said Imad El Kadi, president of the Media Association for Democracy Awareness (MADA). However, Imad El Kadi and other panelists said that the interpretations of the difference between "criticism" and "insult" fluctuate according to who is in power. At least two cases recently have come before the special Press Tribunal that handles alleged violations of the Press Code, which contains the ban on "insults." One case was filed in mid-2005 and the other early in 2006. Defendants in both cases are from *Al-Mustaqbal*, the Hariri-owned newspaper, and the charges involve insulting and defaming President Emile Lahoud by name or by inference.

***"At least 50 percent of ordinary crimes committed during the past 15 years have been solved, while justice is not even trying to pursue the murderers of journalists and media professionals," said panelist Naji Tueni.***

"We have laws, but they are not adapted to the reality of today's media," said Ghayath Yazbeck, general manager of Arabic News Broadcast (ANB-TV). "If they were accurately and evenly applied by the judiciary,

the law would provide the minimum required in terms of justice. But in Lebanon, justice is politicized and corrupt. Through a corrupted judiciary, the Lebanese government has repeatedly violated media freedom."

Tony Francis, columnist for the new, youth-oriented *Al-Balad* newspaper and a veteran of both newspaper and broadcast journalism, noted that "Lebanese laws guarantee freedom of speech. However, media's private ownership puts limits on this freedom."

The vast majority of Lebanese media is in private hands. The government has a small national news agency, a television channel, and radio station. In both news and entertainment, they are eclipsed by the half-dozen privately owned television stations and more than a dozen private radio stations. With few exceptions, privately owned media reflect the views of individual politicians or their political blocs and receive direct or indirect financial aid from internal and external powers. Some strive for acceptance as impartial sources of news, while others unabashedly serve as their masters' mouthpieces.

The distribution of television licenses is frequently cited—by politicians, civil society advocates, and the general public, as well as by the MSI panel—as one of the most blatant abuses of political power. "The

licenses are given on a sectarian basis," said Wadih E. Haddad, assistant general manager of the Voice of Lebanon, a radio station born in the Christian heartland in the early years of the civil war but listened to across Lebanon's religious sects and political blocs.

The sectarian distribution has to do with the power and influence of various groups, panelists said. Within Lebanon's Shiite community, for example, there is a split between Hezbollah, which has its own television station, and the more secular and older Amal party, whose leader, parliament speaker Nabih Berri, has NBN-TV.

"To open a TV station or any of the media, you have to have a balance between the board directors, based on religious affiliation," added Tania Mehanna of LBC-TV, which also has grown from its Christian-sector roots to become a national station.

"The problem is that the cabinet is the one distributing the licenses in Lebanon. This is a mistake. It should be the National Audio-Visual Media Council," said Ibrahim Farhat, public relations manager for Al-Manar TV, an affiliate of Hezbollah, the Shiite Muslim militia that became a political party with a key bloc in parliament. Ibrahim Farhat referred to a 1994 law mandating that the government-appointed media council handle license applications and submit its decisions to the cabinet for final approval.

In the print sector, it is almost impossible to obtain a brand-new license, so anyone seeking to start a new newspaper must dig around for unused licenses originally awarded to newspapers that have stopped publishing. A 1953 law limits the number of daily newspapers in Lebanon to 25, of which a maximum of 15 can be in the Arabic language. Currently, newspapers also are published in English, French, and Armenian.

MSI panelists also considered the taxation situation unfair. Naji Tueni noted that newsprint is exempt from customs duties, but newspapers must pay their full electricity bills while industrialists are given rebates as high as 50 percent.

Radio and television stations are subject to taxes according to how much time they spend on the air. "We are paying exorbitant taxes, like airtime tax, and we're paying full rate for electricity, and, to be honest, I don't think advertising will be able to cover such expenses," Wadih E. Haddad said. Tania Mehanna explained the airtime tax: "Taxes are estimated according to the loss of profit of state-run TeleLiban, which has lost its monopoly. Therefore, huge taxes are imposed on all the broadcasters—who are trying to find means not to pay them."

Panelists showed less concern over laws regarding libel, which is a criminal offense though handled by the Press Tribunal applying the penal code, and access to information, which is hindered mainly by incompetence. Both print and broadcast media have unhindered access to international news services; most restrictions on use lie with the politics and policies of the individual outlets.

However, ANB-TV’s Ghayath Yazbeck noted: “The access to public information, as in state information, is difficult—especially when we compare the local situation with the ability of journalists in France or Britain to get what is considered public information, especially when it comes to political or corruption issues.” He suggested that there might be change with the Syrian withdrawal. “We need to wait and see what will happen. But there are sensitive issues—religious ones—that cannot be tackled, such as an article or video attacking or targeting a specific religious community.... Any foreign production or media related to Israel also will not be allowed entry.”

Journalists do not need licenses to work. The government imposes no restrictions and does not influence hiring, the panel concurred.

**OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM**

**Lebanon Objective Score: 2.14 / 4.00**

Many Lebanese journalists are capable of meeting high standards of professionalism, but their reports are often biased to reflect the politics of media owners and advertisers, the MSI panel agreed.

“Since licenses to broadcast were given mainly to political personalities or parties, media cannot avoid subjectivity and are subject to political interferences. While journalists do cover key events, they are not sufficiently paid to avoid corruption, and, very often, they have to occupy several jobs in order to survive,” said Voice of Lebanon’s assistant general manager, Wadih E. Haddad.

The MSI panel’s consensus was that reporting ranges from excellent to terrible when it comes to accuracy and objectivity, depending upon the individual journalists and the politics of their employers. Most journalists are grossly underpaid, forcing them to take second jobs or making them vulnerable to accepting gifts, favors, and sometimes outright cash from the people they’re covering, several panelists said. This “makes the journalist a mere writer who does exactly what he is told,” MADA President Imad El Kadi said.

Lebanon has no industry-wide code of ethics for journalists. Over the years, attempts to instate one have run into opposition from the newspaper publishers’ syndicate and the journalists’ syndicate. MSI panelists and other media specialists said syndicate leaders had portrayed such codes as attempts to limit press freedom, but their real motive was seen as their efforts to preserve their own power.

MSI panelists said some journalists routinely reject presents from newsmakers, while others take whatever they can get.

***Tania Mehanna, LBC-TV senior correspondent, said: “Many journalists will have to deal with two or three jobs to make ends meet.”***

“Many journalists are involved,” said Naji Tueni, *An-Nahar’s* deputy general manager. “One can call it a connection.... It is a way of give and take. It is giving something (in exchange for) something: a gift, important information, or money.”

Self-censorship is widespread, instigated by the politics of media owners or by journalists’ fear for their lives—a fear that accelerated after the attacks on journalists in 2005. Several senior editors were assassinated during the early years of the 1975–1990 civil war, but the targets later were primarily politicians and militia leaders. “Journalists do practice self-censorship.

**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).

They live in total paranoia, and they fear losing their jobs and their lives,” said Ghayath Yazbeck, general manager of ANB-TV.

Lebanese are generally aware of the slant of a media outlet, saying they read certain newspapers to see what the Syrian line is on a particular issue or what message they think Damascus wants to send. Similarly, people may switch to a television station identified with a faction because they think the station will be better informed on a specific event or issue because of its access to the geographical area or to the key players.

***“In flat periods when nothing is happening, people will go to entertainment and will be sick and tired of listening to political talk shows and political issues,” Tania Mehanna said. “But when there is an assassination, the population switches to news 100 percent.”***

In general, however, the panel said that journalists cover key events and issues, including security matters.

Salary levels for journalists generally are too low, a complaint also heard in other occupations in a country where

the official minimum wage is \$200 a month. Ghayath Yazbeck said \$500 or \$600 is considered a good monthly salary for journalists. Tania Mehanna, LBC-TV senior correspondent, said: “Many journalists will have to deal with two or three jobs to make ends meet.”

Imad El Kadi, who has worked for LBC-TV and other news media in Lebanon and abroad, said there was a big disparity between pay levels for internationally broadcast satellite channels and local channels, even if both are based in Lebanon. “Whoever works in pan-Arab media...in Beirut is better paid than the person who has the same job for local media,” Imad El Kadi said. “At LBC at the satellite department, we were paid three times what others were paid at (the local channel of) LBC for the very same job.”

The MSI panel considered the balance between television news and entertainment to be good. “In flat periods when nothing is happening, people will go to entertainment and will be sick and tired of listening to political talk shows and political issues,” Tania Mehanna said. “But when there is an assassination, the population switches to news 100 percent.”

Technology for both print and broadcast journalism is up-to-date. Distribution is more old-fashioned but still

efficient. Since Lebanon is a small country, it is relatively easy to reach everyone.

“Lebanese media are considered modern, with few exceptions. They follow new technology and keep track of developments and improvements in the Arab and European countries,” said Kamal Zebian, managing editor of *Ad-Diyyar* daily newspaper.

Ibrahim Farhat, public relations manager for Al-Manar TV, noted: “The Lebanese economy is built on a free market and not on a planned economy. Therefore, there are no restrictions on importing the equipment required for journalism.”

The panel split on the quality of niche reporting and investigative journalism, with some declaring Lebanon to have a high level of specialized news reporting and others saying there was a major lack of it. The critics said that what is considered “investigative journalism” in Lebanon often is little more than feature stories.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

**Lebanon Objective Score: 2.54 / 4.00**

Lebanon has many sources of news, both at home and from abroad. The catch is in how they are used, given the partisan ownership of much of the media, the MSI panelists said. Readers and viewers know which politicians or political blocs own or bankroll specific media outlets, although official records may list someone more obscure as the titular owner. But the Lebanese are long accustomed to checking a variety of news sources if they want to learn what is happening on their country’s assorted geographical and political turfs.

In addition to nine Arabic daily newspapers, there are two Armenian-language dailies and one each in English and French. The total circulation of all the dailies is estimated at under 150,000 daily. *An-Nahar*, considered the largest daily, says it distributes 45,000 copies a day within Lebanon and 5,000 abroad. *As-Safir*, *Al-Balad*, and *Ad-Diyyar* are considered the next largest papers.

Newspaper prices are supposed to be regulated by the publishers’ syndicate, which also dictates such matters as whether newspapers can publish on certain holidays. The syndicate was roundly attacked by several MSI panelists. “If a newspaper wants to start printing and wants to sell copies at 500 pounds (33 U.S. cents), they will have problems with the syndicate,” said Imad El Kadi, president of MADA. “This should be the law of the market, to regulate itself. Why should the syndicate intervene in the pricing of copies?”

Naji Tuani, deputy general manager of *An-Nahar* newspaper, said: “We (*An-Nahar*) are far more expensive than other standards around the world. We...ask the readership to be stakeholders in one way or another. By buying the newspaper for 2,000 pounds (\$1.33) instead of 1,000 pounds (67 cents), they are participating in the freedom of press of *An-Nahar*.” He added: “The syndicate, in a way, is trying to say ‘for this number of pages, you should put this cost.’ This is something not very intelligent. We should let the market put the price.”

There is one government television station, TeleLiban, and the privately owned stations include LBC, Future, NTV, ANB, NBN, Al-Manar, and Tele-Lumiere. There is one government radio station, Radio Beirut. Voice of Lebanon is considered the most-listened-to of the 14 privately owned radio stations with newscasts.

Internet access is unrestricted, with no blocking of sites by the government. Many of Lebanon’s 13 daily newspapers are available for free online. But this is an expensive option for many people. A recent university graduate is considered lucky to find a job for \$500 a month, and the government’s monthly minimum wage is \$200. High-end Internet service costs about \$50 a

**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.

month, while Internet cafés typically charge \$1 per hour. The government does not block sites.

The MSI panel agreed that a broad spectrum of political views is available in Lebanon’s media—because ownership is extremely partisan. “Local TV channels are controlled by political parties....This is where money plays a major role, as it hampers reliable and objective news transmission,” said Kamal Zebian, managing editor of *Ad-Diyyar*, a daily newspaper widely seen as sympathetic to Syria.

Ghayath Yazbeck said the state media do not present the full spectrum of opinion: “State or public media are partisan, do not serve the public interest, and are biased. There is no equivalent here to the [French broadcasting regulatory body] CSA that would control broadcasts and has norms that require space for educational, cultural, and awareness programs. The [Lebanese Audio-Visual Media] Council here has a repressive role only.”

Lebanon has two small national news agencies, and panelists described them as affordable and useful but not independent. They said the government agency simply adjusts to power changes, while the privately owned one tends to be biased.

A wide variety of social issues is tackled, but some topics—notably involving sex and religion—remain taboo. Several MSI panelists noted that the most controversial issues remain the almost exclusive domain of the French- and English-language magazines and newspapers, because their audiences are limited.

“When tackling homosexuality, the articles are mainly preaching.... We don’t trust our audience but [instead]

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give them ready-made things to think. Why don't we give them information and let them make their own opinions?" Imad El Kadi asked.

"Issues like cohabitation or single mothers cannot be tackled," Ghayath Yazbeck said. "Even if I decided as a journalist to tackle these issues, I will not find anyone from the public to talk about them. The issue now is who is going to dare first: the society that will then be followed by the media, or the opposite? And can the media take the responsibility for such an initiative?"

**OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT**

**Lebanon Objective Score: 1.92 / 4.00**

The MSI panel spent little time discussing the business capacity of the Lebanese media sector after making clear a consensus that politically inspired funds—not

***"Everything goes back to the political belonging (allegiance) of the media. All these questions are answered by saying that each media has a political obedience," said Wadih E. Haddad, assistant general manager of Voice of Lebanon.***

the results of good management or strategic planning—formed the primary revenue pillar of most media outlets in Lebanon. The main goal of many backers, panelists concurred, is not so much to run a profitable

business as to ensure a forum for their views and reporting of their activities and, in some cases, prevent the coverage of certain rivals.

"Everything goes back to the political belonging (allegiance) of the media. All these questions are answered by saying that each media has a political obedience," said Wadih E. Haddad, assistant general manager of Voice of Lebanon.

Kamal Zebian, managing editor of *Ad-Diyyar* daily newspaper, said journalism in Lebanon "relies on the financial support provided by local, Arab, or non-Arab businessmen. Historically, this has been a feature of Lebanese media. It was used by Arab parties on the one hand and international parties on the other hand to transmit their policies and activities."

However, advertising also is a strong source of revenue, primarily for the largest newspapers and the most popular broadcast stations, and—like politics—can

influence editorial content. Some panelists noted that anti-smoking campaigns are rare because tobacco companies are heavy advertisers. Panelists also said that much of the advertising placement was controlled by one media representation company—engaged by individual and often head-to-head rival media outlets—to negotiate with the ad agencies.

Haddad said there was "a profusion of ads...in an effort to cover the exorbitant taxes" levied by the government. The government provides no subsidies for privately owned media.

Market research exists but can easily be manipulated, the panel agreed. "The results are rarely trusted, as they usually reflect the interests of the party that initiated them," said Tony Francis, columnist for *Al-Balad* daily newspaper.

There is no centralized source for newspaper circulation figures. Some newspapers offer numbers for their own print runs, but there is no independent verification. The three or four dailies that are considered the largest claim daily circulations ranging from 30,000 to 45,000, but some media observers consider those numbers inflated. Informal estimates for the rest drop off sharply to as low as a couple thousand per newspaper.

Private research firms have conducted surveys on television viewership, but the panel—and other media

**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.

observers—tended to distrust them. “In Lebanon, there are no guidelines. You don’t know what brings in an audience and what [repels] them,” said MADA president Imad El Kadi.

“What is badly needed is to build a business model,” Imad El Kadi said. “As long as this does not exist, we will always be considered as employees in media outlets. (Journalists) should be recognized in society legally and financially.”

**OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS**

**Lebanon Objective Score: 2.34 / 4.00**

Lebanon badly needs professional institutions to support journalists and the media sector, but journalism education generally is good and there are opportunities for training and professional development, the MSI panel concluded.

Panelists were highly critical of the newspaper publishers’ syndicate and the journalists’ syndicate, echoing sentiments often heard in media circles in Lebanon. They accused the syndicates of hindering journalists and of taking the government’s side against media professionals. They noted that the presidents of both syndicates had held their posts for more than three decades and accused them of being more

concerned with preserving their own power than with helping journalists. In addition, broadcast journalists are not eligible for syndicate membership and have no national organization of their own.

“The journalists’ syndicate ought to defend the journalists’ rights, but this is a total fiasco,” said ANB-TV general manager Ghayath Yazbeck. “Today, we have something like 10,000 journalists in Lebanon. Only 100 are members of the syndicate.... They (syndicates) are the government’s closest allies.”

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So far, there are few alternative organizations. Panelist Imad El Kadi, president of MADA, noted that his organization is a very young one, still in a formative stage. Its goals include setting up a legal defense organization for journalists and offering health insurance.

Several civil-society advocacy groups and local nongovernmental organizations include a free press among their areas of interest, but the panelists said their engagement and impact on media have been low-key so far.

The government’s Lebanese University offers an extensive journalism program, as does Lebanese-American University. Several other private colleges have one or more journalism courses. Several panelists considered journalism education in Lebanon to be quite good, although

***“Not all media institutions meet the educational norms or have the latest technology,” Ghayath Yazbeck said.***

some disagreed. “Not all media institutions meet the educational norms or have the latest technology,” Ghayath Yazbeck said.

Some short-term, post-graduate training programs exist, and several foreign governments and organizations

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

<p><b>SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Trade associations represent the interests of private media owners and provide member services.</li> <li>&gt; Professional associations work to protect journalists’ rights.</li> <li>&gt; NGOs support free speech and independent media.</li> <li>&gt; Quality journalism degree programs that provide substantial practical experience exist.</li> <li>&gt; Short-term training and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.</li> <li>&gt; Sources of newsprint and printing facilities are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.</li> <li>&gt; Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.</li> </ul>
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offer fellowships or other training opportunities for Lebanese journalists.

But media management remains an unfilled hole in the educational and training process, MSI panelists said. Existing courses concentrate on the “how to” aspects of practicing journalism and on technical procedures.

Newsprint and printing presses operate on a commercial basis, free of government restrictions, as do the distribution systems for print media and transmission facilities for radio and television channels.

## **MSI Participants**

**Najat Charafeddine**, journalist, Future TV, Beirut

**Ibrahim Farhat**, public relations manager, Al-Manar TV, Beirut

**Tony Francis**, columnist, *Al-Balad* newspaper, Beirut

**Wadih E. Haddad**, assistant general manager, Voice of Lebanon radio, Beirut

**Imad El Kadi**, president, Media Association for Democracy Awareness, Beirut

**Tania Mehanna**, senior correspondent, LBC-TV, Beirut

**Naji Tuani**, deputy general manager, *An-Nahar* newspaper, Beirut

**Ghayath Yazbeck**, general manager, ANB-TV, Beirut

**Kamal Zebian**, managing editor, *Ad-Diyyar* newspaper, Beirut

## **Moderator**

**Earleen Fisher**, MENA MEDIA project director, IREX, Beirut

# LEBANON AT A GLANCE

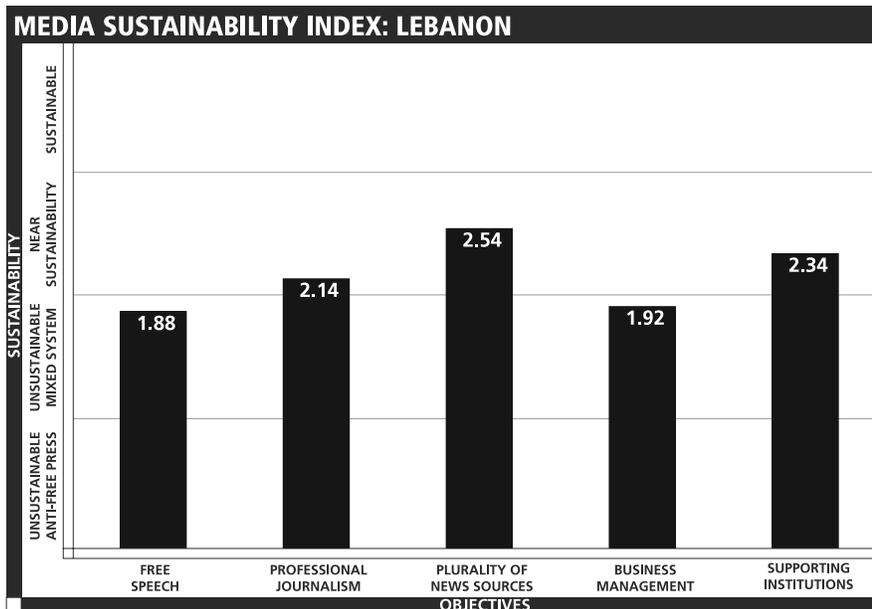
## GENERAL

- **Population:** Estimates range from 3.5 million (United Nations Development Program, 2003) to 4.6 million (World Bank, 2004)
- **Capital city:** Beirut (est. 1 million, unofficial sources)
- **Ethnic groups:** Arab 95%, Armenian 4%, other 1% (est., unofficial sources)
- **Religions:** Muslim about 60%, Christian about 40%, spread over 17 officially recognized sects, with Shiites considered the largest Muslim sect and Maronite Catholics considered the largest Christian sect. (est., unofficial sources; absence of census makes the figures impossible to verify)
- **Languages:** Arabic universally spoken. Also French and English, with small minorities speaking Armenian and Kurdish. (no statistics)
- **GDP (ppp):** \$24.2 billion (World Bank)
- **GDP per capita (ppp):** \$5,074 (UNDP, 2003)
- **Literacy rate:** 80.3% (UNDP)
- **President or top authority:** President Emile Lahoud, Prime Minister Fouad Siniora
- **Next scheduled elections:** Parliamentary June 2009

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- **Newspaper circulation statistics:** There are no verified figures on total circulation, but estimates range from 100,000 to about 130,000 for all 13 dailies. Numbers provided by executives at the top four newspapers put their total between 100,000 and 125,000 a day. Using this as a base, an extrapolated estimate of the total circulation of all 13 dailies is under 150,000.  
*An-Nahar*, which is considered the largest, says it distributes 45,000 copies a day within Lebanon and 5,000 abroad.  
*As-Safir*, *Al-Balad*, and *Ad-Diyyar* are widely considered the next largest papers.  
There are nine daily Arabic newspapers, two in Armenian and one each in French and English.
- **Broadcast networks:** There is no universally accepted rating system.  
There is one government television station, TeleLiban.  
Privately owned television stations include LBC, Future, NTV, ANB, NBN, Al-Manar, and Tele-Lumiere.  
There is one government radio station, Radio Beirut.  
*Voice of Lebanon* is considered the most-listened-to of the 14 privately owned radio stations with newscasts.  
There are 17 non-news radio stations.

- **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** No reliable statistics.
- **Number of Internet users:** 300,000 to 400,000 (est., private industry sources)
- **News agencies:** National News Agency (government), Markazia (private)
- **Significant foreign investment in the media:** Widely assumed, from various political and financial powers in the region, but no reliable figures.



FOR PALESTINIAN JOURNALISTS, DEBATE FOCUSED ON THE BEST METHODS FOR BUILDING MEDIA DEMOCRACY DESPITE THE LACK OF FREEDOM AT THE POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND SOCIAL LEVELS, THE MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX (MSI) PANEL FOUND. DISCUSSIONS REVOLVED AROUND ESTABLISHMENT OF A HIGHER MEDIA COUNCIL PROPOSED BY THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION.

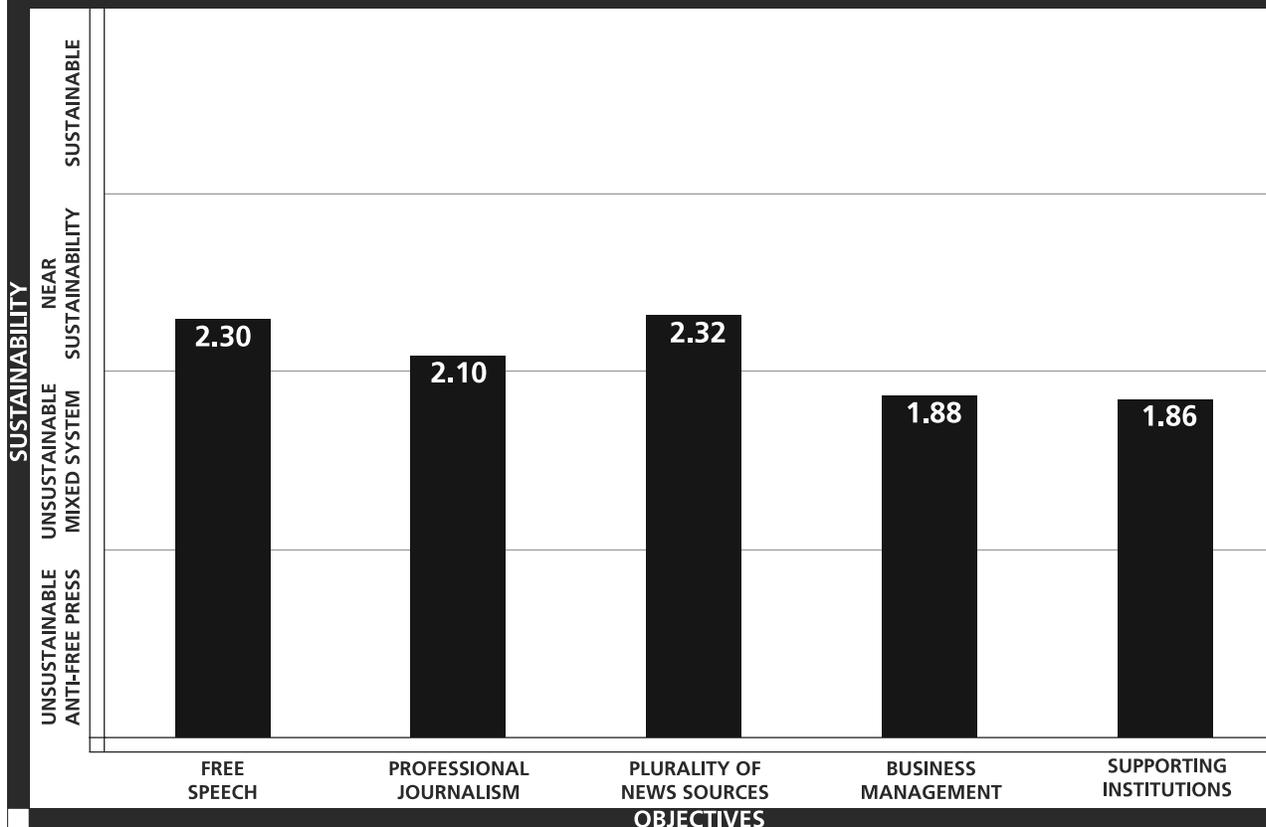


**F**or Palestinians, 2005 began as a test of how well they could manage the transfer of power after the death of President Yasser Arafat, who had long been in charge of the most important decisions at the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) as well in the Palestine Liberation Organization. Arafat had resisted any effort to appoint a vice president or a prime minister, which created fear of a vacuum following his death. Mahmoud Abbas was dually elected as his successor, and the transition was effected. The year continued to be volatile, however, culminating with the Hamas victory in the January 2006 legislative elections.

The Palestinian media followed all of these developments—public reaction to the death of the historic leader, only the second presidential elections in the 10 years since the establishment of the PNA, and the first local elections since 1976. The results of the local elections clearly illustrated the support for the Islamic movements represented by Hamas, and also showed a drop in backing for the traditional single ruling party, Fatah, which projected a secular perspective. Palestinian society also faced a profound lack of security, with arms use widespread. Israeli-Palestinian negotiations came to an impasse, with the Israelis proceeding unilaterally to build their separation wall, set up more checkpoints, and withdraw from Gaza, which for Palestinians turned it into a closed canton.

For Palestinian journalists, debate focused on the best methods for building media democracy despite the lack of freedom at the political, economic, and social levels, the Media Sustainability Index (MSI) panel found. Discussions revolved around establishment of a higher media council proposed by the Ministry of Information. Views varied on the form, role, and responsibilities of the new council, with independent media outlets and professionals wanting to ensure that the council would not interfere in their work or become a monitoring tool. The discussion also included the effect of the escalating chaos on freedom of speech and the ability of journalists to work professionally.

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES



**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.

The MSI panel described the Palestinian media as a model for journalists and news outlets working under pressure, but one that remains lacking vis-à-vis internationally recognized standards in some areas. It is a media in progress amid a society in transition from a state of national liberation to one of independence, panelists said.

Palestinian media experts expressed hope that they would benefit from any reform process that reinforces democracy and plurality, and fights corruption in Palestinian society—all necessary for media development, with or without an occupation. However, they said success is linked to the ability of those in the media field to defend and build a free-media model during the national liberation phase prior to achieving statehood. This model should avoid centralization of public media, imposing of restrictions through monitoring, and other interference with the private media, the panelists said.

The MSI panel noted that there would be no real media pluralism in a society that lacks political pluralism, or if public media is in reality government controlled—including the appointment of employees whose affiliation will be to the authorities and who will submit to the government’s political line even if it is not directly requested of them. Also of concern to the Palestinian media, given the lack of security, is their ability to take on important issues without being subject to assaults from armed groups, especially in the Gaza Strip.

The MSI panelists said they viewed the greatest impediment to development in the media sector to be the Israeli occupation, as it obstructs freedom in general for Palestinians. Journalists are subjected to daily violations, the panelists said, and 12 journalists—two foreigners and the rest Palestinian—have been killed since the onset of the second Palestinian Intifada.

The MSI panel assessed the Palestinian media sector to be at the first stages of sustainability, with an overall score of 2.09. The most progress had been made toward the objective of media plurality, at 2.32, closely followed by the media law environment, according to the panel. The business management and supporting organizations for the media were considered to be weakest.

## OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH

**Palestinian Territories Objective Score: 2.30 / 4.00**

The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) adopted the universal declaration of Human Rights in its Independence Declaration Document in 1988, which

says, “The State of Palestine proclaims its commitment to the principles and purposes of the United Nations and to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” Moreover, after the Oslo Agreement of 1993, the Palestinian

Authority confirmed its commitment to the different international treaties and declarations in its Basic Law—the temporary Constitution—published in 2003. Freedom of speech in Palestine is set out in Article 19 of the Basic Law, which states that “every citizen in Palestine has the right to freely publish material that complies with the principles established in the Law.”

***“Journalists are at the opposite spectrum of what the law states: They are subjected to censorship and criticism by the authorities, influential people, society, and publishers, in addition to their self-censorship,” said panelist Talal Okal, a daily newspaper columnist and 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.

Article 27 establishes the fundamental principle that all citizens have the right to establish a newspaper or broadcaster on the basis that “freedom to print, publish, transmit, together with the freedom of individuals working in this field, is guaranteed.” The article also provides that there should be no censorship of the media in Palestine.

***Editor Hasan Al Kashef of the weekly newspaper Al-Daar, whose offices were ransacked in 2004... said journalists feel that people of influence in the government, security services, and business “collaborate to suppress and intimidate journalists and their institutions.”***

The Press Law of 1995, a presidential decree issued by Yasser Arafat, governs all media in Palestine. Its Article 2 contains a guarantee that citizens have access to free and independent media. But the law has been broadly criticized by

local organizations, journalists, and international professionals. The media freedom groups Article19 and CMF-MENA said a review showed reason to be “gravely concerned about certain provisions in this law which impose extensive restrictions and conditions on freedom of the press and which, if implemented, would seriously impede the free flow of information with and to Palestine.”

Although the technical groundwork for free and independent media is established in the Press Law, it is generally too vague to regulate the principles that underpin an independent media system, the panel said. It also is unclear to what extent the Press Law encompasses the audiovisual sector, and there is confusion about whether there is any law regulating broadcast media. In addition, prison terms can be imposed for breach of certain provisions of the law.

Beyond the inadequacies of the Press Law, which “takes on a negative and restrictive role against journalism,” panelist Ali Khashan, a constitutional law expert, noted that no freedom-of-information guarantees have been adopted to date. “The fact is that this law was issued with the inception of the PNA, which was influenced by laws and policies followed in other Arab countries—laws that are based on appeasing and glorifying heads of state.”

The MSI panelists identified several contradictions in the Press Law. For example, while Article 4 speaks of freedom of the press and publishing, Article 7

forbids publishing anything that might conflict with the “public interest.” Therefore, the door remains open for the PNA to define what “public interest” is and to take steps it sees fit. As panelist Andaleeb Shehadeh, director of the media department of a women’s nongovernmental organization (NGO) in Gaza, said, “This law guaranteed freedom of expression in a lax way with contradictions stipulated in other items within it that have different meanings, such as...warnings against publishing certain texts, especially those relating to the security apparatus.”

The Palestinian Cabinet issued a September 2005 resolution concerning the drafting of new laws to organize the media sector. In its Article 1-1, there is a decision to transform the Palestinian official television and radio into a public institution that is financially and administratively independent but headed by a minister who is accountable to the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) and Palestinian Cabinet. Article 1-2 is a decision to draft a law that regulates the Palestinian Official News Agency (WAFA), in theory guaranteeing the agency’s financial, professional, and administrative independence but with a board led by the specialized minister. Article 1-3 is a decision to draft a law for establishing a national media council where the private sector, civil society, and professionals play the main role and the basic vision of the media includes both official and nonstate outlets. Article 1-4 is about modifying the 1995 Press Law or drafting a new media law that includes regulations of broadcast and print media and a code of ethics.

After the resolution was issued, a media lawyer was hired to draft the statutes, starting with the national media council. Media NGOs, journalists, and media managers were consulted in the process, which was led by panelist Ali Khashan, and a draft was submitted to the Ministry of Information for review.

Although the draft law is not public, the discussion surrounding media law indicates that the government is inclined toward centralized decision-making and a role observing and deciding policy for both state and private media, the MSI panelists said. For example, the proposed national media council would seem to be envisioned as part of the executive framework under the Council of Ministers and to have as its head the Information Minister or his deputy. The private media are represented at some level within the council, but their status is only consultative even at the level of issues, laws, and procedures that concern it directly. This means that if the national media council materializes, it will eliminate any opportunity for Palestinian media to form a separate Fourth Estate.

"Journalists are at the opposite spectrum of what the law states: They are subjected to censorship and criticism by the authorities, influential people, society, and publishers, in addition to their self-censorship," said panelist Talal Okal, a daily newspaper columnist and writer. Walid Batrawi, a journalist with an international media outlet, said: "It is strange, but actually most of the violations which journalists are subjected to do not come from the PNA, but rather from armed groups, political factions, social organizations such as family and religious organizations, not to mention the violations all journalists are subjected to by the Israeli occupation," including Palestinian, Israeli, and other foreign journalists.

Israeli soldiers have shot and killed 12 journalists since the onset of the second Intifada in 2000, including two Italian and one British journalist, according to international monitors. The Israeli military also shelled media centers, such as the Palestine Radio and Television Headquarters and transmitting towers in Ramallah, and there have been air strikes on Al-Aqsa radio station, Al-Shabab radio station, and the office of Al-Jeel Lilsahafeh in Gaza, according to panelists. Soldiers also physically beat reporters and photographers and destroyed their equipment, arrested a number of them, and denied them freedom of movement.

According to the International Press Institute report on "Press Freedom Violations in Israel and Palestine: September 29, 2000–September 28, 2004," of 562 press freedom violations recorded during the period, 478 (88.4 percent) were carried out by Israeli military, officials, or civilians, and 52 (9.3 percent) by Palestinian authorities, militants, or civilians. Another report, issued by the Palestinian National Center for Information, said 753 violations were recorded by national and international observers against Palestinian journalists for the period 2000 to 2005. There are also a number of journalists who are still in prison.

Security concerns have become a major preoccupation for journalists. Panel member Mahmoud Khalifa, director general of the Ministry of Information in Gaza, said, "There is no need to talk about freedom of expression ... due to the fear which may take over the individual journalist or institution as a result of repeated attacks during the past few years." He and other panelists cited multiple cases that have not been resolved: The death of journalist Khalil Az-Zebin, a key media advisor to Yasser Arafat and magazine publisher, who was assassinated by armed men who invaded his newspaper office in March 2004; the 2004 destruction of the Gaza office of German broadcaster ZDF in an assault by a militant group; the ransacking of the Gaza office of the *Al-Daar* weekly magazine

during the Eid festival in February 2004 that editor-in-chief Hasan Al Kashef believes was a warning from the PNA after reporting on corruption; the January 2004 assault on *Al-Arabiya* correspondent Saifeddin Shahin, who was beaten by five men when his car was stopped at a major Gaza city intersection while he was reporting on Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement; and the assault on photographer Jamal Al Arouri of the French news agency Agence France-Presse, who was attacked by masked men in the West Bank city of Ramallah. Furthermore, there were attacks on offices of local television stations such as Al-Ru'ah in Bethlehem in March 2006.

Panelist Khalil Shahin from *Ayyam* newspaper said that whatever legal protections exist for journalists are rarely enforced: "The authorities have not shown any real efforts in implementing the law or respect for court orders. Therefore, legal protection holds little or no meaning when chaos prevails, and the three authorities—the executive, legislative, and judicial powers—take no steps to protect freedom of expression despite the fact that it enjoys a lot of respect by the people."

Editor Hasan Al Kashef of the weekly newspaper *Al-Daar*, whose offices were ransacked in 2004, agreed: "Realistically speaking, journalists have no legal protection, freedom, or rights in the absence of an effective judicial system and the absence of any will or desire by those in power to implement the law. Journalists do not feel safe as a result of being subjected to threats, attacks, destruction of institutions, and even death without having those who committed the crimes punished even when the perpetrators and those who support them are known." He said journalists feel that people of influence in the government, security services, and business "collaborate to suppress and intimidate journalists and their institutions."

Panelist Hani Al Masri, a writer, political analyst, and former Director General for Publications and Distribution at the Ministry of Information, said few media cases are ever looked into "except basically those regarding ownership rights or connected to slander and humiliation." Wafa' Abdel Rahman, head of the media NGO Filastiniyat, said some "social protection for journalists is provided by the tribe or by factional affiliation." But she noted that this protection is "distorted." "On the one hand, it supports the right of the media to have access to the political and/or economic news items and to publish them in detail. On the other hand, it prefers that the media stay out of social issues, specifically those relating to violence against women."

Overall, panelists agreed, despite the measures practiced by the Israelis regarding journalists working in the PNA areas and the chaotic situation and lawlessness, Palestinian media have a relatively wide margin for free expression. In the view of Fayed Abu-Shammaleh from Ramatan News Agency, “The community in general preserves and protects freedom of expression in most cases.” However, he acknowledged that “there are a few exceptions regarding certain issues where there is partial agreement that they are taboo and should not be approached in a negative fashion.” These might include confrontations between Hamas and Fatah or the coverage of women slain in “honor” killings.

The Ministry of Information is the only source of licenses for media outlets. All print, television, and radio outlets need licenses to operate, but they are generally not difficult to obtain. However, panelists said licensing procedures allow some individuals from the security services to interfere and affect the outcome of the process. Hani Al Masri, the former official in the ministry, said, “There is a gap that hinders licensing—a condition that requires the applicant to obtain a certificate of “good conduct” prior to being granted a license, which is against the law.” He said that these certificates are rarely denied, but the procedure is usually time-consuming. The requirement is not included in the 1995 Press Law, but was created and is firmly followed by the security apparatus. The law established criteria for who can own or run a media outlet as follows in Article 11: an editor-in-chief of a newspaper must be a journalist, have a good command of the language, not accept any other job in the media field, live in Palestine, and not have been convicted of an immoral crime, felony, or misdemeanor. Directors of publication houses, research centers, libraries, advertising agencies, and other related bodies must be Palestinians or have served with the PLO and not be convicted of an immoral crime, felony, or misdemeanor. Directors must also hold either a university degree or a high school diploma, as well as have appropriate experience. Finally, newspaper owners must be Palestinians and reside in Palestine or otherwise have the consent of the Minister of the Interior and should not have been convicted of a felony or misdemeanor related to immorality or dishonesty.

The law stipulates that journalists should have freedom of access to information to facilitate their work. Unfortunately, this is not mandatory, and it has yet to become part of the consciousness of those in charge in the public or private sectors. Journalists find themselves in need of permission at times in order to obtain information. For example, the Interior Ministry issued instructions in July 2005 forbidding taking photos or publishing news in print or electronic media about the

national security apparatus or the police without prior permission from the ministry’s information office. In addition, local journalists have discovered that even when there is no reluctance to give out information, officials often would prefer to first relay news items to journalists who work with foreign agencies. Often-important official news frequently is first heard via foreign news agencies and then repeated by local agencies, giving credit to the foreign agency, panelists said.

There is no definition of who is the journalist. Theoretically, the journalists’ syndicate should give accreditation to journalists but the majority of journalists do not recognize it as representing them.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

### Palestinian Territories Objective Score: 2.10 / 4.00

The MSI panel agreed that Palestinian journalists suffer from inadequate professional capacity as well as the inability to access information sources because of obstacles caused by the Israeli occupation, which hinders the objective relay of facts. This becomes very apparent during coverage of news events by local media, when information gaps appear, panelists said. The information is neither comprehensive nor precise, nor are sources of information provided. In addition,

### 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).

there is prevailing self-censorship among Palestinian journalists and their institutions. This is not restricted to issues related to the Palestinian-Israeli struggle, but it also includes social issues. Panelists said political issues tend to overshadow social issues and are often used to promote the image of a closely knit community in the face of the occupation. This is achieved by concealing social problems among Palestinians, such as family violence, sexual harassment, the concerns of youth, and religious issues that are considered taboo.

Panelists noted in particular the impact of the Israeli presence on the ability of Palestinian journalists to work professionally. Israeli forces forbid journalists from reaching news locations or covering activities that involve military actions by declaring a closed military area. These acts deny Palestinian journalists the ability to relay accurate stories as they happen, and leave them to rely on reports by the Israeli army spokesperson as the only version of events available.

Hasan Al Kashef said Palestinian journalists lack academic and mid-career training opportunities and therefore are not able to keep up with technical and other developments in print and broadcast media. Second, journalists earn low salaries at local media outlets when compared with counterparts who work with Arab or foreign organizations. The journalists' syndicate is weak in terms of labor negotiations and the provision of training and building a consensus on ethical standards, panelists said.

In part, said Wafa' Abdel Rahman, Palestinian journalists do not adhere to international journalism standards despite their knowledge of them "because of the political situation and specifically the Israeli occupation. It becomes part of the journalists' duty not to be objective towards the occupation." Another reason, she said, "is the prevailing social culture, which denies them from being professional when dealing with, for example, women's issues, or sensitive religious subjects. Add to that an authoritative political system that imposes red lines when it comes to corruption such as monopolizing partnerships with the private sector...and the corruption found among ministers and the security services, etc."

Walid Batrawi said that most "red lines" understood by journalists and editors result from economic, religious, and factional institutions and not the Palestinian Authority. "Private enterprises such as the Palestine Telecommunication Company are a source of income for media institutions, especially newspapers," he said. "Therefore, criticizing such a company would be crossing a red line. If for any reason a journalist decides to cross those lines, the key is in the hands of the editor, who is the guard."

The press law and the PNA's interpretation of its articles are holding back professional standards within the Palestinian media, panelists said. According to legal expert Ali Khashan, a rewriting of that law is required "to be current and based on international standards and not Arab or Palestinian reality." Ministry of Information licensing should not be required for opening a print media outlet. "Also, journalists should not be treated like criminals with penalties that deny them their freedom. Such penalties should be eliminated with new well-directed legislation to replace them—first and foremost, regulations regarding the banning of publications." Although there are no specific regulations on banning certain publications, the limits on who can open them and punishment of journalists regarding content of their publications can serve this role. For example, the Press Law's Article 37 includes a number of broad content restrictions, such as material harmful to religious doctrines and national unity, which shakes belief in the national currency or which is inconsistent with morals.

An environment needs to be created to allow journalists to perform their role in monitoring PNA institutions as well as institutions within the society, panel members said. This involves enshrining access to information using international models, other modifications to statutes, and reactivation of an ethics code, which was written by the journalists syndicate but never implemented. Panelist Nasser Al-Lahham said, "Palestinian journalism succumbs to provocation and lack of candidness...in the absence of a specific law and a moral code. For this reason, chief editors and writers resort to counting on self-monitoring, which is more difficult than obeying a law."

Salaries of those who work in public and private local media are low relative to the cost of living and to those who work with international or Arab media agencies in the Palestinian areas. For example, the salary of a new media graduate working with an Arab or international agency might be \$1,500 to \$2,500 monthly, while those

***Panelist Nasser Al Lahham said, "Palestinian journalism succumbs to provocation and lack of candidness...in the absence of a specific law and a moral code. For this reason, chief editors and writers resort to counting on self-monitoring, which is more difficult than obeying a law."***

working for local press would be \$500. This is a major issue for Palestinian journalists working with local agencies, and many are forced to look for additional part-time jobs, adding pressure to their daily lives that sometimes is at the expense of the quality of work produced. Despite that, journalist Khalil Shahin says, “it is not possible to say that there is a phenomena of corruption or that journalists are receiving bribes or rewards since it is not easily recorded.”

***Journalist Andaleeb Shehadeh warned that “the intermixing of interests of being for profit but having an obligation towards the society and the mixing of being private or nongovernmental though controlled by a branch of a government directly contradicts quality and professional standards and criteria.”***

Journalist Nasser Al Lahham said “independent journalism is a frightened journalism with no job security, and living in a dream world without any financial stability and with administrative provocation. Public and governmental media institutions, on the other hand, do suffer from

laziness and lack of motivation, but enjoy job stability and the protection of the state. The private media industry, on the other hand, is either supported by an international funder...or is affiliated to a political or economic group.”

Journalist Andaleeb Shehadeh warned that “the intermixing of interests of being for profit but having an obligation towards the society and the mixing of being private or nongovernmental though controlled by a branch of a government directly contradicts quality and professional standards and criteria.” This type of interrelation is made possible through personal connections with key officials within PNA institutions. For example, a news agency, which calls itself independent, employs a group of media graduates under the anti-unemployment program, which allows payment of their salaries from the Ministry of Labor. Generally, panelists said, there is a phenomenon where different media outlets are registered as independent bodies, whether as private business or nongovernmental. But the truth is, they are tools of the government security apparatus or investments for influential PNA figures.

Every media outlet has Internet service, but some lack up-to-date equipment, including cameras and efficient transmitters that cover wide areas, and know-how, which hinders the development of local production for news and entertainment programs, panelists said. Pre-recorded programs from foreign or Arab television stations consume most airtime, and this applies as well, although to a lesser degree, to newspapers. Newspapers usually allocate large amounts of space for political articles. They use a lot of light features copied or translated from Arabic or Israeli newspapers, sometimes neglecting to give credit to the original source, a panelist said.

Each newspaper has specialized pages daily or weekly on local affairs, entertainment, sports, economics, religion, and significant numbers of articles translated from the main Israeli newspapers. An important new trend is inserts fully produced by civil-society organizations and printed at the newspapers’ presses. They are attached to the newspapers during production and thus get the same distribution. *Al-Ayyam*, for example, has eight regular monthly inserts produced by different NGOs and groups ranging from women’s groups to the Palestinian Center for Israeli Studies.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

**Palestinian Territories Objective**  
**Score: 2.32 / 4.00**

Palestinians have the appearance of an independent media in the daily and weekly newspapers, the Ramatan and Ma’an news agencies, the official Wafa News Agency, and the tens of television and radio stations, even if some have frequencies with very limited range. However, MSI panelists said, this democratic image may reflect the quantity of media outlets rather than their quality.

Surveys regarding private radio and television stations indicate the lack of capital available as well as the limited experience of the staff. This not only limits the possibilities for developing the outlets, but also encourages neglect of professional standards for the sake of revenue. Broadcasters may try to attract audiences by showing entertainment programs, game shows, and some religious and political programs that mostly likely have been videotaped without permission from Arab or foreign stations. Palestinian media experts are trying to find a way to have these channels and stations reorganize, commit to the conditions set by the Ministry of Information, and realize the need for improving their performance.

The three daily newspapers are the privately owned *Al-Quds* and *Al-Ayyam* as well as *Al-Hayat Al-Jadeeda*, which receives partial support from the PNA and is categorized as semi-official. While *Al-Quds* is issued in Jerusalem and is subject to Israeli censorship, *Al-Ayyam* and *Al-Hayat Al-Jadeeda* are published in Ramallah in accordance with the Palestinian laws that forbid official censorship on media. None of the newspapers release circulation figures, but estimates by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and opinion poll centers indicate that the total number of deliveries for all three papers does not exceed 50,000 copies daily. Israeli closures affect the distribution process by not allowing the papers to reach Gaza and other cities when under closure orders.

According to local statistics, there are 33 privately owned television stations and 35 private radio stations in the West Bank. In Gaza, there are seven private radio stations. All of these stations have limited transmitting spheres that cover only the districts or cities where they are located. There are 68 private radio and television stations that represent a larger variety and more freedom of expression despite the fact that they are not all independent. Some of these stations are affiliated with political factions, and others are tied to the PNA via the security apparatus.

**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 Palestine Radio and Television Network's building, equipment, and transmitters were destroyed by Israeli forces in 2002. The attack affected an already poor infrastructure, but there was a lot of reconstruction during 2005.

Efforts were made to upgrade terrestrial and satellite transmission, develop local programs, and provide new equipment.

The official media are run by members of the ruling

party, Fatah, and answer to the executive authority. Locally, they are the dominant media. In 2005, the Minister of Information, with approval from the prime minister, took steps to consolidate all official media institutions—Voice of Palestine Radio, Palestinian Broadcast Corporation, the Wafa news agency, and the State Information Service—to work directly under the responsibility of the Minister of Information. This move was perceived by many as a step toward turning these media outlets from public to governmental, positioning them to cover more of the ruling party news at the expense of other points of view, especially those of the opposition. "Since Fatah is the ruling party [until the end of 2005], and it is a large and diverse party in ideology and references, and also undisciplined, it allowed official media only a small margin of freedom," said Hani Al Masri. "However, under the circumstances where there are no clear references, no one to answer to, and no transparency, official media is in a really bad situation to the point it makes it the last resource in the country when seeking information or opinions."

"Even private media sources, especially daily newspapers, are tied to the authority's viewpoint and policy," said Hani Al Masri. "This is because they either receive financial support from the PA, or are affected by governmental announcements, or they fear punishment and would want to please, or they are affiliated to Fatah, or all of the above."

In addition, Palestinians also have access to a large number of channels through satellite that give tremendous coverage to Palestinian issues and employ local Palestinians. The key ones are Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya.

An opinion poll conducted by the official State Information Service in July 2005 showed that 54

***"Since Fatah is the ruling party [until the end of 2005], and it is a large and diverse party in ideology and references, and also undisciplined, it allowed official media only a small margin of freedom," said Hani Al Masri.***

percent of those questioned watched Palestine Television (Falasteen Television network). A third of those in the West Bank said they have no reception in their area, but the station covers all Gaza districts. Nearly 57 percent of those surveyed thought that the network did not cover national news objectively. About 51 percent said they consider Palestine television

***“Even private media sources, especially daily newspapers, are tied to the authority’s viewpoint and policy,” said Hani Al Masri. “This is because they either receive financial support from the PA, or are affected by governmental announcements, or they fear punishment and would want to please, or they are affiliated to Fatah, or all of the above.”***

a dependable source for political news only “sometimes”; 38 percent said they “sometimes” listen to Palestine television when there is breaking news only; and 49 percent of the sample evaluated Palestine television against Israeli media as poor.

The poll also illustrated that 66.1 percent of those surveyed

said that Al-Jazeera is the best channel for news and that nearly 54 percent felt that Al Jazeera is best for news about Palestinian issues.

The PNA does not impose restrictions on accessing news from the various sources, MSI panelists said. “The Palestinian society actually has full access to a variety of sources and can access news through satellite and Internet connections. Palestinians do utilize these means since the local media lacks the ability to compete,” said Khalil Shahin. However, he noted that unemployment and poverty deny access to a significant segment of the population, especially in rural areas.

Journalist Andaleeb Shehadeh pointed out that Gaza does not enjoy the same variety of sources of accessing news due to Israeli control over its borders. According to her, “the Gaza Strip is not allowed to have any publication in any foreign language. Furthermore, publications in Arabic that are allowed reach either late or are far too expensive for the average person to buy.” Writer Talal Okal noted that imported foreign publications are scarce and require licensing by the Information Ministry.

#### OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

##### Palestinian Territories Objective Score: 1.88 / 4.00

Private media outlets are profit-seeking, but suffer from weak institutional structures, lack of freedom of movement between the West Bank and Gaza and within the West Bank, a decrease in investment in general, and the region’s poverty, MSI panelists said. These factors make it difficult to administer the outlets properly, develop employees’ professional skills, or update equipment.

Many media outlets faced bankruptcy prior to the presidential elections. The period that followed the elections witnessed a slight improvement in their financial situations, according to the MSI panel, because of interest in the coverage of the transfer of power after the death of President Arafat and political developments such as the local elections and preparations for the 2006 legislative polling.

Also challenging for Palestinian media is the small size of the market. According to Hani Al Masri, “The Palestinian market is too small and faces lots of competition from Arab and foreign media sources, especially under such a precarious political situation. Investors become reluctant to invest in the media sector.” He added that “advertising alone does not

#### 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.

bring in enough profit to cover costs.... For this reason, all media sources are faced with the possibility of closing completely."

Private media traditionally have received direct and indirect financial support from the PNA, especially while President Arafat was alive. "There was a set budget allocated for newspapers and media institutions, even though some of these institutions were not in need of this support. However, this method of support allows the political leadership to dictate what gets published."

Currently, the two daily newspapers *Al-Quds* and *Al-Ayyam* deny receiving any cash support, although they do not deny great support from the PNA's advertisements. *Al-Hayat al-Jadeeda* newspaper receives the greater financial support through various means, including staff paid from the government budget as employees at the Ministry of Information and of Culture. The status of this outlet has been problematic from the start, as the PNA owns almost half of its original capital.

Donor support also is important for some outlets. Journalist Fayed Abu-Shammaleh said private news agencies cannot survive without outside funding—meaning donor money—because the local media cannot afford their services. Journalist Walid Batrawi added, "Private media institutions are relatively poor and cannot be compared with other countries." He said many radio and television stations are individual initiatives with minimal capital. Moreover, there are very few investors in this field due in part to the fact that the PNA was unable to reach an agreement with Israel to have access to its own frequencies, a step necessary for proper broadcasting. Also, these stations do not have permits from the Ministry of Information, only certificates allowing them to work. This means they can shut down at any time, which makes them a risky investment.

For these reasons, these media outlets depend largely on income from advertising, which is a large market but with low prices. The biggest ad budgets are at the major companies, such as the telecommunications company Pal-Tel and the mobile phone operator Jawwal. Some outlets use advertising agencies, or market ad space to international organizations that pay far more for their announcements than local organizations. However, according to Khalil Shahin, "The instability in the area plays a role in the instability of income for media institutions. It also limits their ability to plan ahead for expansion, or develop their capacities and update their equipment, or increase salaries of their employees."

Most media institutions do not depend on scientific studies for marketing, and hence they are unable to

put into place a strategic plan based on known market needs. In addition, Walid Batrawi said, "there are no specific criteria for advertising cost, whether in the newspapers or on television." He said media outlets do not have set rate sheets, and one advertiser may pay \$1 for one minute on a television station while another might pay \$10 or more.

Panelist Na'ila Khalil said private media companies are not strong administratively. "There is usually an excess of employees, most likely chosen as a result of personal connections. Furthermore, these institutions are too centralized and depend on one individual for decision-making. This is tangible anytime this individual leaves the office, where work comes to a stop until his or her return."

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The newspapers *Al-Ayyam* and *Al-Quds* own their presses, which operate as commercial printers to bring in additional income. The three daily newspapers are all issued in the West Bank and consume a large part of the market for printing and distribution, leaving Gaza with no print shops at all.

Panelists noted that circulation data are not available for the print media, and there is no audit bureau. Newspaper companies consider the information confidential and do not even share it with staff. Information submitted to the Ministry of Information and researchers is not considered accurate.

An October 2004 survey conducted by the Central Bureau of Statistics, which is widely respected, found that 29.3 percent of the Palestinian households who have television view Palestine TV on a daily basis, 21.6 percent in the West Bank, and 45.1 percent in the Gaza Strip. Also, 21.4 percent of the Palestinian households who have television do not view Palestine TV, 68.7 percent of them because they cannot receive the transmission signal.

**OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS**

**Palestinian Territories Objective  
Score: 1.86 / 4.00**

The Palestinian journalists' syndicate is weak and does not provide useful services, especially for the West Bank, according to panelist Khalil Shahin. The head of the syndicate is not a journalist but rather a Fatah affiliate whose current full-time job is being the head of the syndicate, and neither are some members, he said. In addition, press cards are given to individuals to facilitate crossing Israeli blockades, journalists who are members do not have a role in setting the organization's priorities or budget, and the syndicate does not provide training or assist with legal cases. The last syndicate elections were held in 1990, and since then the secretary-general has refused to hold another vote unless guaranteed re-election, panelists said.

"Journalists are not allowed to establish other union organizations as long as this one exists which claims to embody journalists," Khalil Shahin said. "Therefore, journalists are denied from having an entity that would defend their rights and provide them with services."

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"The only body that is responsible for defending journalists is the journalists' union; unfortunately, the most well-known journalists refuse to join this union, since it is inadequate and unable to provide any protection for them," Wafa' Abdel Rahman said. Walid Batrawi said he received no help in his successful case against a foreign news organization that he alleged had fired him unfairly.

In view of this vacuum created by the absence of a union, Palestinian NGOs such as the Palestinian Commission for Citizens' rights, the Palestinian Center for Human Rights in Gaza, and Al-Haq find themselves supporting and reinforcing freedom of expression as well as the status of independent journalism in the community. Some NGOs even go as far as documenting violations of this freedom and speak publicly against these violations.

There are newly established organizations, Ma'an Network and Palestine News Network, for private radio and television stations. Although they do not serve as an alternative to the syndicate, they do mobilize training programs and other resources for their members.

Training is on offer, but some panelists were skeptical. Hani Al Masri said, "There are also an endless number of training programs that do not serve the purpose intended. Participants of those programs are generally unsuitable, or they have participated in an endless number of training programs previously. In addition, the choice of subjects given usually does not deal with priority issues that meet the need of Palestinian journalists." What journalists lack and need are training programs that are designed and implemented by their institutions, panelists said. "Participating in a media training program usually depends on the relationship between the journalist and the institution that may nominate him or her; the media institution does not object to that, except it does not desire it either," Na'ila Khalil said.

The PNA does not restrict study of journalism. Majoring in media is now possible at almost all Palestinian universities, including Birzeit University, Bethlehem University, Al-Quds University, and Al-Najah University in the West Bank and two universities in Gaza, the Islamic University and Al-Azhar University. The program is based on criteria set by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. Panelists said there is a lack of coordination

**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.

between universities and media institutions. Also, there are no scientific studies that indicate market needs of specializations in media, which results in having a larger number of graduates in certain specializations than needed in a media sector that is small to begin with.

The PNA does not own any print shops that it administers. Presses that do exist are the property of the private sector with no restrictions imposed by the PNA.

## MSI Participants

The MSI panel was unable to have a meeting of all participants due to Israeli restrictions on Palestinians traveling between Gaza and the West Bank and within the West Bank. Videoconferencing was used to overcome this constraint.

### West Bank

**Wafa' Abdel Rahman**, head of media, Filastiniyat NGO

**Na'ila Khalil**, reporter, *Al-Ayyam* daily newspaper

**Hani Al Masri**, media analyst, columnist, *Al-Ayyam* daily newspaper

**Dr. Ali Khashan**, legal professional

**Khalil Shahin**, media analyst, news editor, *Al-Ayyam* newspaper

**Ibrahim Abu Kamesh**, journalist, editor, *Al-Hayat* daily newspaper

**Nasser Al Lahham**, chief editor, Ma'an News Agency (private)

**Walid Batrawi**, journalist (freelance journalist mainly at BBC Arabic section)

### Gaza Strip

**Andaleeb Shehadeh**, women's rights activist, Women Affairs Center

**Hasan Al Kashef**, chief editor, *Al-Daar* weekly magazine

**Talal Okal**, academic, columnist, media analyst

**Mahmoud Khalifa**, current general director of the publication department, Ministry of Information

**Fayed Abu-Shammaleh**, journalist, Ramatan News Agency (private)

### Moderators

**Khalil Shahin**, **Hasan Al Kashef**, and **Wafa' Abdel Rahman**, Filastiniyat NGO

# PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES AT A GLANCE

## GENERAL

■ **Population:** Total: 3,512,822 (West Bank: 2,123,033; Gaza Strip: 1,389,789) (Central Elections Committee, 2005)

■ **Religions (% of population):** Islam 97%, Christian 3% (2002 est., PASSIA)

■ **Languages (% of population):** N/A

■ **GDP (ppp):** \$2.3 billion (2002 est., PASSIA)

■ **GDP per capita (ppp):** \$671 (2002 est., PASSIA)

■ **Literacy rate (% of population):** male 95.7%, female 86.4% (2002 est., PASSIA)

■ **President or top authority:** President Mahmoud Abbas

■ **Next scheduled elections:** Parliamentary January 25, 2006

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

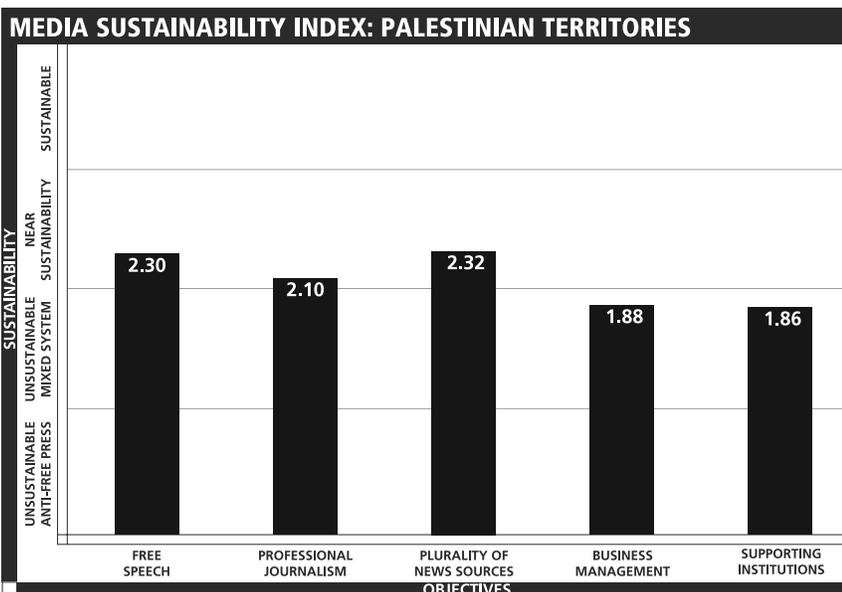
■ **Newspapers:** The three daily newspapers are: *Al-Quds*, *Al-Ayyam* (two privately owned newspapers) and *Al-Hayat Al-Jadeeda*, which receives partial support from the PNA; it is categorized as semi-official. An estimate by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and opinion poll centers indicate that the total number of deliveries for all three papers does not exceed 50,000 copies daily.

■ **Broadcast sector:** According to the information available for 2004, which include reports by MIFTAH, there are 45 privately owned television stations and 28 private radio stations in the West Bank. In Gaza, there are seven private radio stations. All of these stations have a limited transmitting sphere that covers only the districts or cities where they are located.

According to a survey conducted by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 29.3% of Palestinian families that own television sets watch the Palestine Television station on a daily basis (21.6% in the West Bank, 45.1% in Gaza).

■ **Number of Internet users:** 160,000 in the West Bank ([www.internetworldstats.com](http://www.internetworldstats.com), 2006)

■ **News agencies:** Wafa (public news agency), and Ramattan and Ma'an (private news agencies)



DESPITE IMPROVEMENTS IN PRESS FREEDOM SINCE 2000, WHEN BASHAR AL ASSAD ASSUMED SYRIA'S PRESIDENCY FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF HIS FATHER, HAFEZ, 2005 WAS A TIME OF INCREASING SCRUTINY OF SYRIANS WORKING IN MEDIA. SEVERAL PRIVATE MAGAZINES WERE SHUT DOWN BY SYRIAN POLICE, AND A NUMBER OF JOURNALISTS WERE DETAINED OR THREATENED.



The year 2005 was a period of upheaval for Syria's Ba'athist regime. After the assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafik Al Hariri in February 2005, much of the international community, led by the United States and France, pointed the finger at Syria, which had had a military presence in neighboring Lebanon since the end of the civil war there.

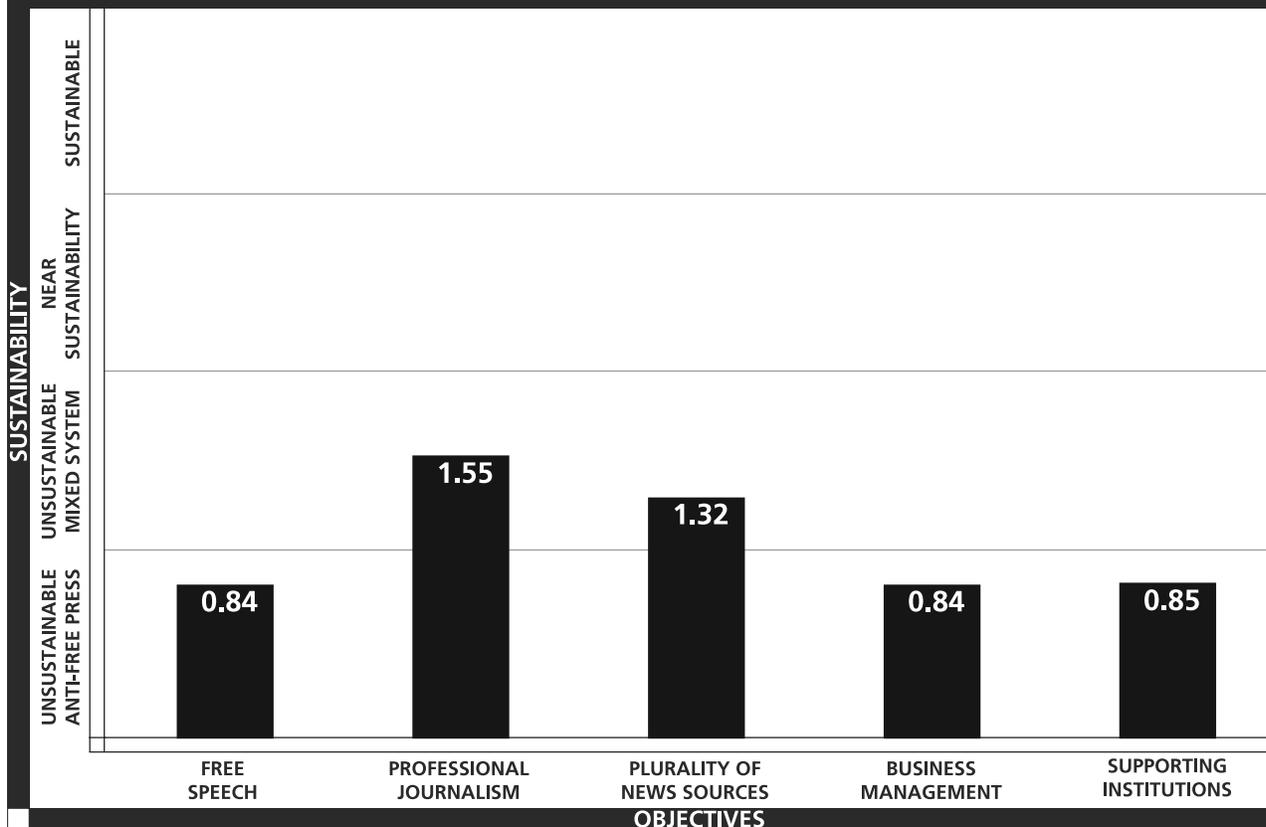
Under pressure from U.N. Security Council Resolution 1559, which demanded that Syria end its occupation of Lebanon, Syria completed the withdrawal of its military and intelligence personnel by mid-April. Shortly thereafter, the U.N. sent a special research team, led by German prosecutor Detlev Mehlis, to Lebanon to investigate the Hariri killing. At first, Syria seemed reluctant to cooperate with the U.N. investigation. But as international demands increased and the U.N. Security Council began to consider a sanctions resolution, Syria established its own probe into the Hariri assassination in October 2005 and formalized cooperation with the U.N.

Pressure from the investigation has affected many aspects of Syrian life, pushing the government to close ranks and leading to crackdowns on opposition figures, academics, and journalists. Despite improvements in press freedom since 2000, when Bashar Al Assad assumed Syria's presidency following the death of his father, Hafez, 2005 was a time of increasing scrutiny of Syrians working in media. Several private magazines were shut down by Syrian police, and a number of journalists were detained or threatened.

Due to Syria's oil reserves, the economic impact of increasing isolation was not felt immediately. However, journalists say that their work is affected by a siege mentality in which even relatively minor expressions of dissent are seen as treasonous. Toward the end of 2005, pro-government protests—supporting Syrian national unity in the face of the U.N. investigation—became more and more frequent. An anti-US, anti-U.N. play was performed for packed audiences in Damascus, and a catchy anti-Mehlis song played on pop radio stations.

The Media Sustainability Index (MSI) panel scored Syria's media sector at a weak 1.08 overall, with the media law environment, supporting institutions, and business management particularly poorly developed. Though no objectives reached the early stages of sustainability, panelists gave the highest scores to indicators of professionalism in journalism at 1.55 and the presence of multiple news sources at 1.32.

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: SYRIA



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

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

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

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

## OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH

Syria Objective Score: 0.84 / 4.00

Syria's press is still a mouthpiece for its Ba'athist regime, MSI panelists found. Though Article 38 of the Constitution guarantees "the freedom of the press, of printing, and publication in accordance with the law," and states that "every citizen has the right to freely and openly express his views in words, in writing, and through all other means of expression," there are effectively no legal and social protections of free speech in Syria. Syria's Emergency Laws, enacted in 1963 when the Ba'ath party seized power in a military coup, permit the detention without trial of anyone—whether a journalist or a private citizen—who is believed to be acting "against the national unity," a broad term used to define enemies of the state.

"Syria's Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, but the state doesn't practice it," said a reporter for a major state-run newspaper. "It is obvious to everyone that the political and security authorities are above the

Constitution. We've had instances where journalists have filed cases against the security authorities, and they've been banned from writing. In this climate it's not really possible to talk about freedom of expression in Syria."

Major media outlets, whether print or broadcast, are either outright state-owned, or they are owned by political parties that are, in turn, licensed by the government. However, the Printing Law, enacted in 2001, has permitted the establishment of several small-circulation private magazines, although these independent media outlets in Syria are extremely new and licensing processes are slow.

"Syria is slowly diversifying its media," said a writer for a state-run daily newspaper. "The government is worried about doing this too quickly. Care must be taken.

But a conditional opening is taking place."

***"Syria is slowly diversifying its media," said a writer for a state-run daily newspaper. "The government is worried about doing this too quickly. Care must be taken. But a conditional opening is taking place."***

### 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.

Journalists in Syria feel that they are threatened most by their own government, panelists said. At any moment they may be called into an office belonging to one of the branches of Syria's secret police and be questioned about an article or a broadcast. In most cases, they are simply asked to avoid reporting on a particular topic, but in some recent cases they have been detained or imprisoned for longer periods. For example, Ibrahim Hamidi, the Damascus correspondent for *Al Hayat*, was detained for five months beginning in December 2002 after his reporting on Iraqi refugees arriving in Syria angered Syrian officials. Shaaban Abboud, a Damascus-based reporter for *An Nahar*, a Lebanese newspaper, was detained on March 2, 2006, for five days after writing a controversial article about transfers within the Syrian military.

Syrian journalists frequently speak about "red lines," or no-go areas. These "red lines" are rules, always unwritten, about what may or may not be said or written in Syria. Red lines may shift; for many years, they have included such topics as the president's authority, political Islam, and minority issues, but after 2005, journalists were speaking about new red lines, including such topics as the military and intelligence services. Red lines are never announced; journalists simply learn, through hard experience or that of their

colleagues, that they will be arrested if they speak or write about certain topics. At least five Syrian journalists and writers were arrested in February and March 2006 after these new red lines went into practice.

One panelist, who was arrested and detained for several days, spoke of being taken from prison to prison while stuffed into the back of a van in a pile of about 50 prisoners, chained together in groups of 10, and then heaped on top of each other.

***“The Printing Law isn’t clear,” said a Syrian correspondent for a major pan-Arab satellite channel. “There is an article that says that journalists who write or say things that could affect Syria’s relations with other countries may be punished. What are we to make of this? Theoretically, almost anything could be said to affect Syria’s relationship with another country.”***

“We were stuffed together so tightly, on top of each other,” the former detainee said. “There was just a small grate for air, and it was hard to breathe. We didn’t know how long we’d be inside the truck like this.”

Editorial independence is not guaranteed by law. Though Syrian media are markedly more free than they

were under President Hafez Al Assad, the country’s emergency laws allow any publication or broadcast outlet to be shut down at any time, almost without explanation, if it is believed to be publishing articles that run against the interests of the state.

Libel cases are dealt with under the Printing Law. A journalist convicted of libel may be sentenced to up to three years in prison and a fine of 1 million Syrian pounds, or nearly \$20,000.

“The Printing Law isn’t clear,” said a Syrian correspondent for a major pan-Arab satellite channel. “There is an article that says that journalists who write or say things that could affect Syria’s relations with other countries may be punished. What are we to make of this? Theoretically, almost anything could be said to affect Syria’s relationship with another country.”

Public information is not readily available. Journalists cultivate sources within government, not just to leak big stories but to have a source of basic information. Journalists frequently complain that the public-relations

offices of Syrian government ministries will only deal with certain journalists whom they trust to publicize the views of the state.

During the past six years, international news sources have become far more widely available in Syria, through satellite television channels and through the Internet, which until 2000 was forbidden to all except a few high officials. Some websites—especially those with information about Israel, with links to expatriate opposition groups, or containing material critical of the Syrian regime—are blocked, but many Syrians use proxy servers available on sites such as [www.pureprivacy.com](http://www.pureprivacy.com) to access the banned material.

There is no licensing process or other legal bars to entering the journalism profession, but those without government connections often find that it is difficult to get a job.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

**Syria Objective Score: 1.55 / 4.00**

In the state-controlled media, government ministries and other official channels are usually the sole source of information. In the private media, reporters do make an effort to consult a range of local and international sources, but there is still an atmosphere

### 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).

of intimidation that inhibits true objectivity, some MSI panelists said. Several journalists on the panel reported having been called in for interviews with Syria's secret police within the past six months. In the friendliest of these interviews, appeals were made to the reporters' patriotism, asking the journalist in question to avoid a certain line of reporting that could damage Syria's image during a time of trial; in other interviews, reporters were simply ordered to stop reporting on a certain sensitive subject, such as military affairs.

The journalists on the panel all indicated that they'd been disappointed by the ethical standards of their colleagues, and said that journalists with high ethical standards were often penalized by their employers. If, for example, a journalist ran into trouble with the government for reporting a certain subject thoroughly and honestly, the journalist risked being fired because the media outlet he or she worked for could not take the chance of standing behind a single employee. This is even the case for Syrian journalists who are the employees of international news organizations, panelists said.

A Syrian radio journalist described the experience of a friend who had been hired as a stringer for an international broadcaster's office in Damascus: "My friend was detained by the police for a report she had made," the radio journalist said, but her organization did not protest. "She was so frightened that she couldn't do her work for a few days," the journalist said, so the news bureau "immediately found someone new. They told her they needed someone who had better relations with the government. It's like this everywhere here. You try to make your reporting as fair and balanced as you can, but you know that if the government threatens you, your editors will just find someone new."

As a result of experiences like this, the radio journalist said, Syrian journalists generally practice a large degree of self-censorship. "At times, people are so frightened that their work becomes more like PR than journalism," she said. "There is a policeman inside every Syrian journalist."

Syrian journalists do generally cover key events, but panelists said they often felt that they had to avoid reporting angles that would be controversial or could create problems with the government.

Pay levels for journalists vary widely between the state-owned media and the private media. In the state-owned media, journalists are considered government officials. As such, they receive a base salary per month, and then receive a bonus for each article written or televised news

segment produced. Since state employees cannot be fired, several panelists recounted stories of journalists for state news organizations who rarely or never produced work. Pay levels in the private media (including work as correspondents or stringers for international and other Arab media outlets) are somewhat better, panelists said, but they are still not high enough to effectively discourage corruption, and "selling" favorable articles to augment income is not uncommon.

A reporter for a state-owned newspaper said he believed that journalists for private publications were often more corrupt because they didn't have a guaranteed state salary to fall back on, and because they didn't have guaranteed access to official news channels. "I think that private media must use different tools, other than the official ones, to do their work," said the reporter. "In some cases, this seems to push them to adapt their ethical criteria according to their circumstances."

In general, there is a balance between news and entertainment programming in the Syrian state media. The private media, in general, have a higher proportion of entertainment and cultural programs.

Facilities for news gathering and production are not especially modern by international standards, but are improving, panelists say. Although according to most estimates only about 1 percent of Syrians have home Internet access, generally speaking even reporters for state media outlets have Internet now. Panelists could not offer specific examples of the types of reporting that seemed to be improving—on the contrary, they all mentioned new "red lines," or sensitive areas, that seemed to be appearing. Nonetheless, new private

***"At times, people are so frightened that their work becomes more like PR than journalism," [a Syrian radio journalist] said. "There is a policeman inside every Syrian journalist."***

***"I think that private media must use different tools, other than the official ones, to do their work," said [a reporter for a state-owned newspaper]. "In some cases, this seems to push them to adapt their ethical criteria according to their circumstances."***

magazines, television stations, and websites are offering more varied work opportunities for journalists and better working conditions, and gradually broadening the media environment.

**OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES**

**Syria Objective Score: 1.32 / 4.00**

MSI panelists gave the highest scores to indicators of free access to domestic and international media. Thanks largely to the reach of satellite television, now affordable even to the middle classes in rural areas, a large number of public and private news sources, both national and international, are available.

*“Even if the government tries to block certain sources of information, there is still a diversity of sources which offer the same information,” said a reporter for a state-run daily newspaper. “The influence of these bans is lessening. Some foreign newspapers and websites are still banned, but this fact doesn’t have a big influence on people anymore.”*

But a producer for Syrian State TV pointed out that although Syrians are, broadly speaking, better informed as a result of the rise of satellite television, the satellite channels do a far better job of informing them about international affairs than about local issues.

“Since we have satellite channels,

access to information is no longer restricted to the privileged class,” said the producer. “But what I would like to see is more local and national coverage on the satellite channels. Syrians now know a lot about international news, but we should know about local news first, and then regional and international.”

The Internet is now widely used by middle-class urbanites, but many websites—such as the controversial news site [www.elaph.com](http://www.elaph.com) and [www.transparentysyria.com](http://www.transparentysyria.com)—are blocked by the government. Panelists pointed out, however, that there is such a plurality of news sources now that it is impossible for the censors to keep up. A few blocked sites, they said, do not really inhibit Syrian Internet users’ ability to get the news.

“Even if the government tries to block certain sources of information, there is still a diversity of sources which offer the same information,” said a reporter for a state-

run daily newspaper. “The influence of these bans is lessening. Some foreign newspapers and websites are still banned, but this fact doesn’t have a big influence on people anymore.”

Syria’s domestic newspaper market is dominated by three state-run dailies: *Al Baath*, *Tishreen*, and *Al-Thawra*. Since Syria’s printing laws were revised in 2001, a number of private magazines have been licensed, *Abyad wa Aswad (Black and White)* and *Al Iqtissad (Economy)* being among the best-known. State-run Syrian TV was the only television channel that operated in Syria. In late summer 2005, Syrian businessman and parliamentarian Akram Al Jindi received government approval to run Syria’s first private channel, Sham TV. A competing private channel, Sama al-Sham, received government approval in January 2006. Several private radio stations exist but without the right to cover news.

A variety of national and international publications are sold at newsstands in Damascus, but the international publications are also subject to government censorship and are not widely available outside Damascus. In small towns and rural areas, state-run publications are generally the only ones available.

State and public media reflect the interests of the state; little or no effort is made to present other

**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.

viewpoints. Typical front-page stories are reports on the latest speeches and public appearances of President Assad, the first lady, and important government ministers, and reports on the visits of official delegations from foreign countries.

“In local publications and programming, there is no effort to present opposing points of view,” a reporter for a major state-run newspaper said. “A handful of private radio stations have been licensed recently, but they are commercial stations and the conditions under which they were licensed ban them from talking about politics or news.”

Aside from the official Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), there are no legal news agencies operating in Syria. A new Syrian news agency, Sada Soria, was founded in early 2006 by the Syrian Public Relations Association and operates solely on the Internet, which provides a legal loophole.

Independent broadcast media are beginning to produce their own programming, but to date the news programming does not seem to push any of the boundaries observed by state-run broadcast media. So far, Sham TV’s planned presentation of programs by moderate non-state Muslim cleric Muhammed Al Habash has been the most talked-about and controversial aspect of the broadcast agenda for the station, the first private licensed outlet.

Syrians are generally well aware of who owns their news media organizations. In the case of the state-run media, it is clear to all consumers that these media organizations are presenting the views of the state.

Minority-language information sources are banned, and minority issues are rarely discussed in the mainstream media. “Correspondents may talk about minorities, but we are forbidden to talk about political issues involving minorities,” said a Syrian correspondent for a major pan-Arab satellite channel. “This is extremely sensitive.”

**OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT**

**Syria Objective Score: 0.84 / 4.00**

MSI panelists viewed the business management of Syrian media outlets as weak overall, with private, independent media just beginning to emerge. Panelists gave relatively higher marks to indicators reflecting the efficiency and professionalism of operations and the multiple revenue sources but noted the lack of market research and circulation and audience data.

All media outlets, including the private ones, receive some form of state financial support. A reporter for a state-run daily newspaper explained that state financial support hampers objective reporting. A reporter for another state-run daily newspaper said that because the private media receive so much financial support from Syria’s government, there is little to choose from between the public and private media in Syria.

***“The private media face many financial problems,” the reporter said. “The government support they get is connected to how much these organizations are committed to government policy.”***

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According to the Middle East Media Guide 2006, there are six full-service advertising agencies operating in Syria. State-run newspapers do not, in general, contain advertising, and in a country where there is no media

**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.

business tradition, even private publications lack adequately professional ad-sales departments. Syrian and international companies do frequently place ads in private media, but two publishers of Syrian private magazines said that advertising was generally placed through individual arrangements with companies, rather than through advertising agencies.

“The independent media is just beginning to get its footing in Syria,” said an employee of a state-run

***“The independent media is just beginning to get its footing in Syria,” said an employee of a state-run newspaper. “It takes time, but at this point, it seems that these new magazines aim only to sell advertising.”***

newspaper. “It takes time, but at this point, it seems that these new magazines aim only to sell advertising.”

The Syrian Public Relations Association (SPRA) was founded in 2005

to begin to develop the field of marketing, public relations, and market research in Syria. The SPRA is run and staffed by people who are also employees of Syria’s Ministry of Information, and among its first activities was the organization of mass political rallies in support of President Assad. However, its directors insisted that it runs without government interference.

The SPRA’s market-research arm began to conduct Syria’s first media market studies during 2005, but the project has not been completed. No reliable formal figures exist yet, SPRA directors said, for the size of Syria’s advertising market, or its needs and interests.

**OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS**

**Syria Objective Score: 0.85 / 4.00**

Syria has a state-run journalists’ union, but panelists said the union only really exists to institutionalize state control over journalists. The union does not support journalists who are involved in libel cases or who have been detained, for example.

“We have a journalists’ union, but they couldn’t even write a statement on behalf of someone who was arrested,” said a Damascus-based correspondent for a pan-Arab satellite channel.

Rather, informal groups of journalists will often lobby the Syrian courts, or retain a lawyer, on behalf of a colleague or friend who has been detained.

“The members of the journalists’ union are all Ba’athists, highly placed editors,” said a journalist who was imprisoned recently. “The union showed no sympathy for my case. My friends, other reporters, weren’t sure what to do. They didn’t know if they would make my case more problematic if they lobbied. My wife thought so, too. But eventually my journalist friends got my wife’s permission to get a lawyer.”

In 2005, a group of Syrian magazine publishers founded the so-called Syrian Private Press Team to support the interests of Syria’s fledgling private media. The SPPT, as they are known, was formally recognized in a meeting with Syria’s Minister of Information in March 2006. Two members of the SPPT who attended the meeting reported that the information minister spoke to the group of independent publishers about the need to unify behind Syria’s international interests, and that as private publishers, they were either “with Syria, or against her.”

Foreign embassies do operate small-scale training programs for Syrian journalists, bringing in expert journalism trainers from abroad and running classes in radio reporting, for example. But these efforts are short-term, and usually only available to journalists who are fluent in foreign languages.

“There are some attempts to form media NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] and start training

**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.

programs, but their agendas are not clear yet," said a presenter for Syrian state television. "It's not clear yet whether the government will accept them and allow them to operate without interference."

It is possible to earn an undergraduate degree in journalism from the University of Damascus, but a panelist who is a professor of journalism at the university said that most textbooks are Soviet-era journalism textbooks, imported during the years when the Soviet Union was Syria's chief patron, and translated into Arabic.

All channels of media distribution are controlled and restricted by the state.

## **MSI Participants**

The 12 members of the MSI panel for Syria represented state and private print and broadcast outlets, and included publishers, editors, producers, journalists, and journalism educators. The panelists requested anonymity so that they could reflect more freely on the status of the Syrian media sector.

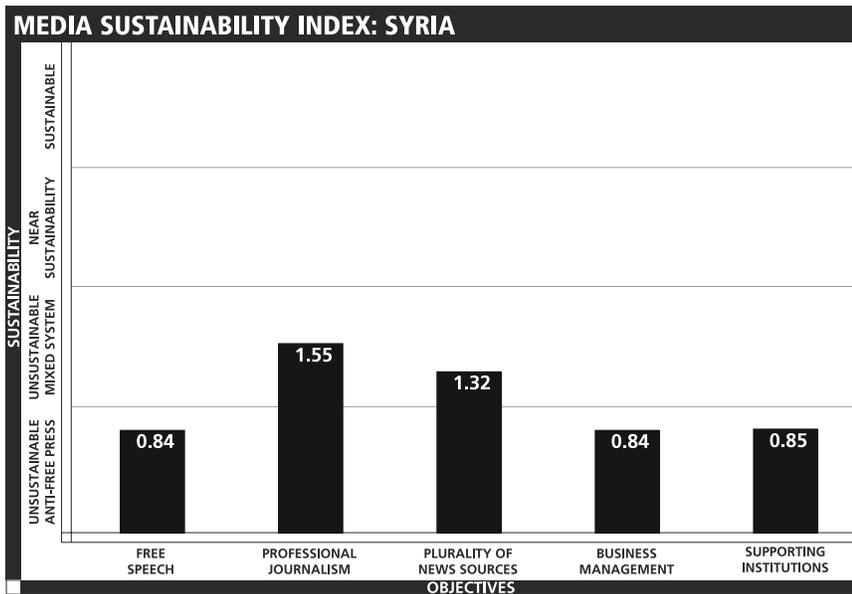
# SYRIA AT A GLANCE

## GENERAL

- **Population:** 17.8 million (2004 est., World Bank)
- **Capital city:** Damascus
- **Ethnic groups:** Arab 90.3%, Kurd, Armenian, and other 9.7%
- **Religions:** Sunni Muslim 74%, Alawite, Druze, and other Muslim sects 16%, Christian (various sects) 10%, Jewish (minimal)
- **Languages:** Arabic (official); Kurdish, Armenian, Aramaic, Circassian widely understood; French, English somewhat understood
- **GDP (ppp):** \$23.1 billion (2004 est., World Bank)
- **GNI per capita (ppp):** \$1,190 (2004 est., World Bank)
- **Literacy rate:** male 91%, female 74.2% (2004 est., UNICEF)
- **President or top authority:** President Bashar Al Assad
- **Next scheduled elections:** Parliamentary 2007

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Syria's largest daily newspaper, *al-Thawra*, publishes 60,000 copies per day (Reuters Foundation's IRIN news service).
- **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** 146 private magazines are licensed to publish in Syria. Syrian Television and Radio, a state-owned company, runs two terrestrial television channels and a radio station. Sham TV is Syria's first independent private satellite channel (Reuters Foundation's IRIN news service).
- **Annual advertising revenue in the media sector:** N/A
- **Number of Internet users:** Approximately 800,000
- **Names of news agencies:** SANA (Syrian Arab News Agency) is the only legal domestic news agency; the Syrian Public Relations Association founded a new Internet-only news agency in early 2006.
- **Significant foreign investment in the media:** N/A



# GULF



THE PANEL CONCLUDED THAT BAHRAIN SEEMED TO BE STRIVING TO LEAD REFORM EFFORTS IN THE GULF, BUT WAS LAGGING IN ACHIEVING ASPECTS OF ITS OBJECTIVE.

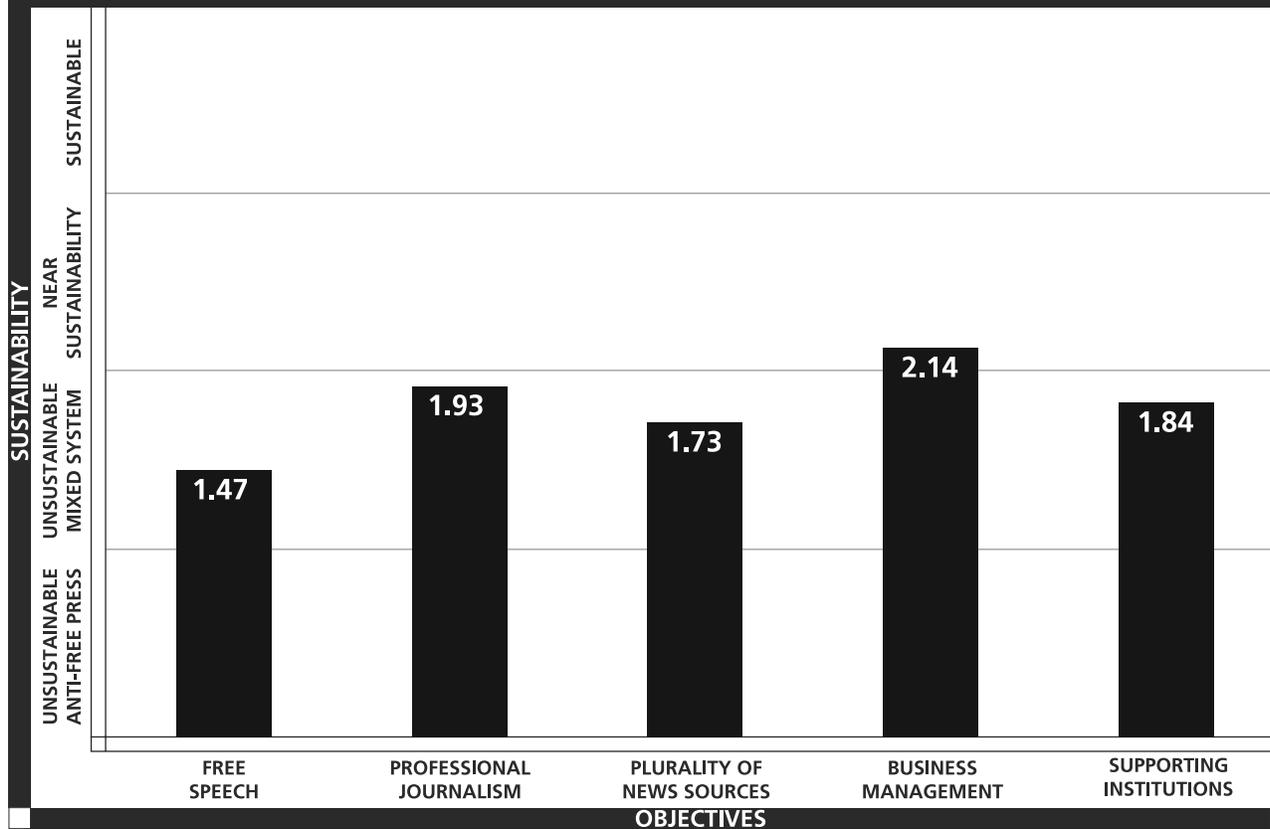


**A**lthough Bahrain is the smallest Arab country in size, it is one of the most active in terms of the media. Reform of Bahrain's media laws continued during 2005, part of the democratization efforts that started with the adoption of a new Constitution in 2002 reinstating a legislative body with one elected chamber. There were setbacks to press freedom in 2005 as well, however. Three moderators of online media outlets were detained for two weeks in March, part of a broader crackdown on the online sector. Cases of revoking licenses, pressure on correspondents, and interference with editorial policy were also reported, raising questions among some members of the Media Sustainability Index (MSI) panel about whether the government was seriously committed to progressive reforms in the media sector.

The panel concluded that Bahrain seemed to be striving to lead reform efforts in the Gulf, but was lagging in achieving aspects of its objective. There was consensus about the need to move forward along the path laid out by King Sheikh Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa but concerns that some conservative elements in the country are holding back these reforms. Panelists noted that Bahrain is unique among its Gulf neighbors in having a diverse community with varied sectarian and religious affiliations, making its reform efforts even more challenging compared with other Arab countries. Some panelists suggested that the conflicting interests of various political groups constituted a serious hurdle because the media increasingly have been manipulated by different parties for political goals.

The MSI panelists gave Bahrain's media sector an overall ranking of 1.82, indicating it was approaching the first stages of sustainability. Its strongest feature, in the view of the panel, is the management of its media businesses, and the professionalism of journalists also was considered relatively strong. The weakest aspect was the country's media law and its overall free-speech environment, according to the assessment.

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: BAHRAIN



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

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

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

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

## OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH

### Bahrain Objective Score: 1.47 / 4.00

Although Bahrain's new Constitution, endorsed in a 2002 referendum, mentioned the right to free speech, the MSI panelists said that the infamous press law, No. 47, of 2002 discouraged this freedom and clearly contradicted the Constitution. Cases of prosecution, detention, expelling of journalists from their posts, and interference with editorial policies all have been linked to this law, and combined to dampen the willingness of journalists to put forward dissenting views regarding the government. However, there are now efforts to reform the law so that it enhances freedom of speech. Private print media can be licensed with relative ease, but broadcast continues in government hands. Because libel remained a criminal offense punishable with imprisonment according to the law, self-censorship was high in 2005.

Some panelists noted preferential treatment in favor of media that are seen as loyal to the regime. Even

though satellite and radio transmission is open to the public, information obtained from the Internet remained relatively restricted, and complicated proxy filtering mechanisms have been applied to block many politically oriented websites. Among the hot issues debated by the MSI panel was the licensing of journalists, particularly correspondents of foreign media. Panelists agreed that the government interferes with the appointment of correspondents. One of the panelists was himself exposed to such treatment when he was removed from his post in 2005 as a Bahrain correspondent for a pan-Arab daily. Overall, the panel was dissatisfied with the degree of free speech possible in Bahrain, and this objective received the lowest MSI score for 2005: 1.47.

Panelists unanimously agreed that the 2002 press law was the biggest obstacle to legal protection. When the law was drafted, it was fiercely rejected by journalists and human-rights activists. Reacting to the strong opposition, the government claimed that it had "frozen" the law. But panelists noted that the government continued to apply it quietly to prosecute journalists and constrain press freedom.

Abdullah A. Yateem, assistant undersecretary for press and publications at the Ministry of Information, acknowledged the growing concern over the 2002 press law and said reform efforts initiated by King Sheikh Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa have set the stage for revisions to remove or change articles that were deemed incompatible with freedom of expression. "After demands were made by the journalism community, a decision was reached to apply changes to the 2002 press law to strengthen press freedom in Bahrain," the official said in an interview. "For example, during his last meeting with journalists, His Majesty the King supported an initiative to abolish the imprisonment sentence against journalists." The official said that consultations on removing some restrictions in the law were held with the Bahrain Journalists Association and newspaper editors-in-chief, and a ministerial committee was formed to discuss the changes before a draft was submitted to the parliament in 2005.

In addition to the government draft law, which remained before the parliament in early 2006, the Shura Council of Bahrain also drafted and presented to the parliament its own version. MSI panelist Ebrahim Bashmi, a Shura Council member who spearheaded the alternative law drafting during 2005, acknowledged that it still did not meet many journalists' aspirations despite extensive consultations and debate. He noted that the Shura Council version replaced prison penalties

### 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.

for libel with fines, with the exception of offenses against religion or the royal family.

Some panelists were skeptical about the new law. Abdulhadi Al Khawaja, a freedom-of-expression activist and the founder and president of the now-dissolved Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, was quite pessimistic about the result from the parliament deliberations. "Because of the overwhelming majority in the parliament, the draft law that is presented by the government will be the one that is passed," Abdulhadi

***"However, one needs to understand that there are strong blocs in the parliament that are conservative and demand limiting the freedom of expression," Abdul Nabi Salman said.***

Al Khawaja said. Panelist Abdul Nabi Salman, a parliament member, said many members of parliament (MPs) were serious about adopting a law that is better for the journalism community, regardless of

whether it came from the government or the Shura Council. "However, one needs to understand that there are strong blocs in the parliament that are conservative and demand limiting the freedom of expression," Abdul Nabi Salman said. "They do not represent the government but are in fact less tolerant to the free press and are not only insisting on keeping the prison sentence, but some are asking for more severe punishments despite the King's vision in abolishing such penalties."

All broadcast media outlets are owned and strictly controlled by the government. However, a special draft law regulating the licensing of private television and radio channels was endorsed by the Shura Council in 2004 and submitted to the parliament for consideration. No timetable was set for consideration, and there were no guarantees that it would be approved. However, in August the government declared it would eliminate the Information Ministry and replace it with the Bahrain Radio and Television Commission, which would be a new regulatory commission for the media. This measure was expected to take effect in 2006. Some viewed this as a step toward the potential introduction of a law allowing establishment of private broadcast media.

Panelists said no profit taxes were imposed on media institutions in Bahrain. There are some nominal fees that are considered insignificant compared with the media's market productivity.

MSI panelists agreed that there were no significant crimes committed against Bahraini journalists in 2005 and therefore no opportunities to measure the reaction of the authorities. Overall, such crimes are extremely rare, and panelists said authorities usually act swiftly to prosecute perpetrators of any that do occur.

Journalists are accountable to their editors, media owners, and to the government, and the fact that the press law penalizes journalists based on 17 categories of offenses makes securing editorial independence virtually impossible in many cases. Based on the 2002 press law, offenses "against the Islamic faith, the unity of the people, and the person of the king" and "inciting division or sectarianism" are punishable by prison sentences of six months to five years.

Although newspapers and magazines have started publishing moderately critical views of government policy, they are far behind the progressive and rapidly expanding online media community. In fact, panelists noted that many of the legal battles in the media scene in 2005 involved online publishing. "Ironically, the old press law did not include electronic media. But when the term 'electronic media' was inserted into the 2002 press law, this gave the authorities capacity to control electronic media without clear constraints," said activist Abdulhadi Al Khawaja. "I believe this is unprecedented and constitutes one of the serious breaches of freedom of expression in Bahrain."

Panelists said online media's influence is growing in Bahrain, where Internet use is relatively high compared with many other Arab countries. The number of Internet users in 2005 was estimated to be more than 150,000, over 20 percent of the population. Panelist Ali Abdulemam, the moderator of the discussion forum [www.bahrainonline.org](http://www.bahrainonline.org), was arrested and held by security services in 2005. He was subject to five charges based on the press law of 2002, including defaming the king, inciting hatred against the regime, publishing information to undermine the country's security, and violating the press and communications laws. Based on those charges, Ali Abdulemam was kept in detention for two weeks with his assistants, Mohammed Almosawi and Hussain Yousif. They eventually were released without bail, but the case was not closed. Furthermore, five websites, some of them run by the opposition, were blocked by the government in early 2005 for allegedly publishing "dubious information, rumors, and lies."

Libel is a criminal offense, panelist Abdulhadi Al Khawaja said. "Those who are found in violation of the press law in defamation or libel for a story they wrote or an opinion they reflected may be exposed

to imprisonment based on the current law," he said. However, defaming the royal family in particular is serious to the degree that even the two revised draft press laws keep the prison punishment against offenders intact while removing it for all other offenses, except those against Islam.

A defamation lawsuit filed in February against www.bahrainonline.org, the largest and most controversial Bahraini forum of its kind, was discussed extensively during the MSI assessment. The website's moderator, Ali Abdulemam, said his site did not allow or encourage defamation against anyone, but the nature of the Internet makes it impossible to monitor data sent live from around the world. "I tried to explain to the court that as a moderate, I cannot control what comes on the website until I access and remove any defamation content. I should not be prosecuted for something submitted by a member online simply because I am the website's moderator," Ali Abdulemam said. "We cannot accept the labeling or insulting of any personality regardless of his or her position. But again, in such live online discussions, this is something that we cannot control, and the government needs to understand this." He complained that the government suspended his Internet Service Provider account, and said: "Whenever I would like to help resolve such issues, I find the government standing in my way and preventing me from accessing the Internet."

Abdulhadi Al Khawaja agreed that based on the current press law, "it is a criminal offense" to allow content considered defamatory to be viewed by Bahraini citizens, adding that journalists were prosecuted for alleged defamation of public figures in 2005. Panelist Ebrahim Bashmi said that there were some cases filed against newspapers and journalists for libel. "It is the citizens' right to refer to the judiciary if their interests were harmed by the media," he said.

Panelist Mohamed Fadhel said that generally most lawsuits filed by the government in recent years dealt with news stories because opinion articles are usually heavily self-censored. He added that some news stories that dealt with facts and were accurate nonetheless were viewed by officials as defamation cases because they exposed their names to the public. He mentioned the trial of Radhi Al Mousawi, editor-in-chief of *The Democrat*, a newsletter published by the National Democratic Action Society, and described it as "a classical example of defamation lawsuits that could be filed against journalists in Bahrain." Mohamed Fadhel said Radhi Al Mousawi wrote a news report accusing an unnamed tourism inspector of corruption and providing evidence to support that in his story. The High Criminal

Court charged Radhi Al Mousawi with defamation in September 2003.

Panelists agreed that public information is mostly not readily available and the right to access information is not guaranteed for journalists in Bahrain. Part of the problem is the degree of secrecy that the government maintains and the lack of transparency regarding governmental activities.

There were no clear restrictions in Bahrain on international news networks and other news sources. But there were cases of censorship

of publications arriving from abroad by post and also by freight, partially due, panelists suggested, to the conservative nature of the society. The Internet has made it possible for journalists to gain the required information directly, although there are a number of politically oriented websites that are being filtered by the government for their potential to damage the country's "national interests."

Although journalists can apply for licenses and practice journalism freely in Bahrain, restrictions start to emerge after they produce their work, which is usually monitored by the authorities. Panelists complained of interference by the authorities, particularly for correspondents of international media working in Bahrain. Panelist Mahdi Rabea, who used to work as a correspondent for London-based pan-Arab *Al-Hayat* newspaper, said he was officially summoned by the Ministry of Information in March 2005 and a short while later had his license revoked. "The official at the Ministry told me that the Minister of Information was upset, and that I was not cooperating with the Ministry and did not implement orders given by the Minister," Mahdi Rabea said. He sent a response saying that he and *Al-Hayat* "are not to be given orders." "The Minister told me in February that *Al-Hayat* continues to write about Sunnis and Shiites in Bahrain, and this apparently was not to his liking. So he requested that we remove those labels from any article on Bahrain." Mahdi Rabea said. "The government then exerted tremendous pressure and succeeded in removing me from my post as the correspondent for *Al-Hayat*," he added, noting that the government wanted a "submissive" person to do the Ministry's bidding. "In April, I got a call from my editor-in-chief saying that the Bahraini authorities requested that I be replaced

***"The challenge is to maintain balance between your role as a journalist and an activist," Ebrahim Bashmi commented.***

and will not give me a working permit. I remain unsure, however, of the real motive.” Mahdi Rabea now works for *Al-Ayam* daily newspaper in Manama.

Panelist and journalist Jawad Abdul Wahab also alleged that he was forcibly removed from his post as correspondent for the pan-Arab *Elaph* news network. He said the authorities directly interfere in the selection process of Bahrain correspondents for foreign media. “In fact, in my case the government invited the publisher of *Elaph* and hosted him in Bahrain, apparently to convince him to replace me with another, more obedient correspondent,” Jawad Abdul Wahab said.

Ebrahim Bashmi said such issues may arise if the journalist in question is affiliated with a political body. “The challenge is to maintain balance between your role as a journalist and an activist,” Ebrahim Bashmi commented. MP Abdul Nabi Salman noted that this may not be a governmental policy but could be an individual decision in the ministry. “The issue with Jawad took place in a time of transition, as a minister left and another came in. Instead of improving on conditions of the press with the new minister, things became worse,” Salman said, noting that this situation should not be generalized.

Activist Abdulhadi Al Khawaja said the government controls the appointment of correspondents of foreign media, adding that the government may go to the level of changing non-Bahraini correspondents. The US Department of State Human Rights report for 2005 mentioned that a correspondent was threatened with the revoking of his license when officials read a draft report about an activity the government deemed illegal. Another foreign correspondent reporting about military service was exposed to similar pressure. Both correspondents had to cancel their stories to remain in their posts, panelists said.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

**Bahrain Objective Score: 1.93 / 4.00**

Panelists agreed that journalism in Bahrain does not meet international professional standards. Within the media establishment, there are constraints that prevent journalists from raising their skills, and one panelist went as far as claiming that the tradition of professional journalism in Bahrain is simply “nonexistent.” There are no standard codes of ethics, and self-censorship was described by a panelist as “routine” in Bahraini media. The low pay for journalists also contributed to corruption, as journalists frequently receive gifts to cover stories. Panelists said that private media have been

giving too much coverage to government propaganda and less to other important issues that relate on the needs of the society. But panelists also agreed that technical capabilities of Bahraini media are high and match international standards.

The issue of professional qualifications and training for Bahraini journalists is quite pressing, panelist Ebrahim Bashmi said. “We have an increasing number of journalists in Bahrain but below professional standards due to the lack of training and development in the media sector,” he said. Financial pressure also affects the editorial independence of some newspapers. An example given by panelist Ali Abdulemam concerned an editor-in-chief who stopped covering a certain story about public education because the then–Minister of Education suspended subscriptions to the newspaper at all educational institutions and hence deprived the newspaper of an essential source of income. “The editor-in-chief had to yield to pressure, demonstrating how vulnerable newspapers may be in Bahrain,” Ali Abdulemam said.

Part of the difficulty in establishing ethical standards stems from the lack of consensus on a central body that journalists would agree on to start the process, panelists said. Ebrahim Bashmi said the Bahrain Journalists Association is not as active as journalists would wish it to be and may be transformed into a syndicate. “The profession of journalism in Bahrain is

### 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).

increasingly viewed as a mere source of income rather than a noble profession to get the truth to the public," he said.

Abdulhadi Al Khawaja noted that journalists usually blame the lack of professional media for the lawsuits filed against newspapers and journalists. "In reality, it is journalists themselves who need to take the initiative and draft their own code of ethics and hence prevent the authorities from using the lack of such a code against them," he argued.

Due to the strict control of the government over media, particularly television and radio, there is a very high level of self-censorship among journalists. The fact that the 2002 press law remains the mechanism to regulate journalism means very few reporters have the courage to cross the red lines. Hence, there are very few lawsuit cases against journalists, especially compared with other Arab countries such as Yemen and Egypt. The case of Radhi Al Mousawi, who found that having documents supporting the validity of his story did not save him from being charged with defamation, served to perpetuate self-censorship by journalists who do not want to find themselves in similar positions, panelists noted.

Bahraini reporters tend to cover issues and events selected based on the policy of their newspapers and have little freedom to report on matters not approved by the top editors. Ali Abdulemam said newspaper publishers or editors-in-chief usually take control of the newspaper's policy and decide for journalists what is news and what is not. "For whatever personal, commercial, or social reasons, editors of newspapers can focus on a narrow story that may not be of interest to the public, and hence turn the whole newspaper to a private tool used to achieve certain goals," he said.

Moreover, the tradition of publishing news relating the formal activities of the government is still widely practiced in all newspapers in Bahrain. Regardless of the worth of such news for the reader, the front page of every Bahraini newspaper needs to have a story sent from the official news agency, panelists said. The reason, according to Ebrahim Bashmi, is to maintain good relations with the authorities. "If you ignore publishing their press releases and photos for some time, they would not cooperate with you and would deprive you from news in the future," he said. "Furthermore, we are a small community, and we do need all the information we could get from the government."

Panelists agreed that corruption was on the rise in the media. "This is a dangerous phenomenon spreading quickly in Bahrain: Never in the past had so many journalists been receiving funds or cash awards

from companies to write about them handsomely in newspapers," a panelist said. There has recently been a rise in salaries due to the emergence of two new dailies, *Al-Watan* and *Al-Waqt*, that offered higher salaries, forcing the rest to raise pay rates to keep staff. However, panelist Mahdi Rabea insisted that corruption of some journalists would continue regardless of the issue of salaries. "One

***"The profession of journalism in Bahrain is increasingly viewed as a mere source of income rather than a noble profession to get the truth to the public," [Ebrahim Bashmi] said.***

could investigate and find out that there are certain individuals in the media that accept such gifts. There are even foreign journalists who do so. But one needs not to generalize," Mahdi Rabea noted.

Entertainment content has become an essential part of newspapers to promote sales and advertising, although the panel agreed that most newspapers do have a reasonable balance with serious news. However, they noted that tense competition in Bahrain for a limited readership results in more entertainment stories because, as one panelist noted, "a newspaper that is too serious would not sell."

Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news through modern means are widely available in media outlets

***"Bahrainis would like to read about local politics and can't care less about specialized programming," [Ali Abdulemam] said.***

in Bahrain, panelists said. The very fact that each daily newspaper has to have capital worth more than \$3 million demonstrates that they are financially fit to purchase and provide all the technical facilities and equipment required for gathering information.

Regarding niche reporting, some panelists said Bahrain is too small to sustain a great deal of specialized reporting, although there are journalists who could produce it for regional or international media. "Specialized high-quality media production is demand-driven. So far, the demand for such material is low, but I believe it could succeed if it targets the region as a whole," Ebrahim Bashmi said.

Bahrainis like political reporting, panelist Ali Abdulemam argued. “Bahrainis would like to read about local politics and can’t care less about specialized programming,” he said. “All they want is politics. They may read political material coming from abroad, but only if it talks about Bahrain.”

In broadcast, Bahrain successfully launched the children’s television channel SpaceToon in 2000. It gained popularity and during 2005 broadcast two separate channels, one in English and the other in Arabic. However, the channel, like all other television and radio stations, remained under state control.

**OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES**

**Bahrain Objective Score: 1.73 / 4.00**

Various local and international media outlets are accessible and affordable in Bahrain, including broadcast, print, and the Internet. However, local news is not reflected widely in those media, and the country suffers from something of an information vacuum in that regard, MSI panelists said. They said many important issues of local concern, such as land distribution and the demographic distribution of Sunnis and Shiites in Bahraini society, are untouchable by the

***“Nowadays, there are conservative groups inspecting newsstands and stores to ensure that pictures on cover pages of imported magazines do not include partial nudity, and if they find such a thing, they report it to the authorities immediately,” panelist Ebrahim Bashmi said. “It is not the government that is doing this; it is the society.”***

media due to government and social restrictions. Even the Internet, thought to be the most open media, is filtered heavily by the authorities. The fact that local media do not reflect the different political and social groups in the country makes access to comprehensive and balanced journalism coverage for regular citizens

difficult. The lack of any private news agencies results in a monopoly for the state-run agency, which usually provides positive coverage approved by the authorities. The sectarian tensions in Bahraini society drive many to seek out articles that consider cultural and religious questions. Panelists said that media are slowly trying to give greater coverage to Shiite festivities and beliefs, something that was rare in the 1990s.

Bahraini citizens are able to find and purchase various types of newspapers and magazines with a variety of political and social affiliations and including a range of opinions and editorial tendencies.

By the end of 2005, there were five Arabic daily newspapers in Bahrain. According to industry estimates, *Al Ayam* had a circulation of 36,000, *Al Meethaq* had 35,000 copies, *Akhbar Al Khaleej* had 32,000 copies, and *Al Wasat* had 9,000 copies. For *Al Watan* daily, which debuted in December, it was too soon to estimate circulation numbers. Two daily newspapers publish in English—*Gulf Daily News*, which prints 11,000 copies, and *Bahrain Tribute*, with a circulation of about 13,000. Another daily, *Al-Waqt*, was expected to enter the market in early 2006.

Bahrain has an Arabic and an English radio station and a television network with five channels, all owned and operated by the Ministry of Information. Spacetoon TV is the largest pan-Arab channel broadcasting from Bahrain, although the private company that owns it, Spacetoon Media Group, is based in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. It transmits to over 130 million viewers in more than 22 countries throughout the Middle East, North Africa, Indonesia, and Korea.

**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 Bahrain media's rather constrained coverage has pushed more people to seek information about the country from online outlets and forums where politically controversial opinions are more openly reflected, panelists said. The public, however, is not free to view all online media outlets and websites. The Bahraini government filters at least five political or religious websites using the legal context of the press law, the panel said. Technically, the government prevents citizens from accessing a website because it controls the single Internet Service Provider and a state-mandated Internet exchange point in the country.

The Open Net Initiative, which tracks filtering procedures of governments around the world, said that tests have shown the Bahraini government filtered at least these political websites: [www.bahrainonline.org](http://www.bahrainonline.org), [www.bahraintimes.org](http://www.bahraintimes.org), [www.bahrain4u.com](http://www.bahrain4u.com), [www.jehad.net](http://www.jehad.net), and [www.thekoran.com](http://www.thekoran.com). The government can easily close down locally produced and hosted websites, and this has happened with several. But panelists noted that there will always be new websites popping up, and citizens find ways to overcome the filtering.

Although international media is accessible, movies imported to the country are usually censored before being approved to be shown. Publications that enter the country are subject to the "society's own censorship," panelists noted. "Nowadays, there are conservative groups inspecting newsstands and stores to ensure that pictures on cover pages of imported magazines do not include partial nudity, and if they find such a thing, they report it to the authorities immediately," panelist Ebrahim Bashmi said. "It is not the government that is doing this; it is the society," he affirmed. The proposed amendments to the 2002 press law include a phrase lifting censorship of such material altogether.

Additionally, although the government lifted its ban on correspondents from the Qatar-based Al Jazeera satellite television channel in 2004, it has maintained control over the selection of its correspondent in Bahrain.

Panelists were firmly agreed that state media do not reflect the views of the entire political spectrum and strictly abide by policies set by the government. When journalists from state media violate those rules, they may be expelled from their post by a governmental order, regardless of their intention. Furthermore, Ali Abdulemam said, the media are unable to serve the public interest fully because they are confined by many restrictions and unable to disclose facts and information that are considered "classified." "An employee at the Ministry of Information was penalized (administratively) because the authorities suspected that he had given

sensitive information to a member of parliament," Ali Abdulemam said.

Other restricted information includes budgets of certain governmental bodies that are not revealed to the public and not included in the yearly fiscal plan. "People want to know about the land ownership in Bahrain and how owners bought and sold to each other. There is a sealed secret chamber at the Supreme Court in Bahrain that contains all the documents concerning this issue," said Ali Abdulemam. "There is a sealed room that includes historic documents related to the heritage of the people that unveil the true origin of the population.... It is even prohibited to know how many Bahraini citizens were naturalized."

***Panelist Abdul Nabi Salman suggested that media targeting the interests of each (ethnic or religious) group could be counterproductive for Bahrain because "a certain newspaper would cover a story from a specific angle and neglect all other parts of the story that do not conform to the newspaper's policy or target readership."***

However, another panelist argued that Bahrain needs time to move gradually to full openness in the media. "If we rush into this now, there would be chaos, conflict, and lawsuits," he said.

So far, there are no independent news agencies that gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media. There were some efforts in 2005 to start small press offices, but they could not compete with the government Bahrain News Agency. "There are no laws that prohibit the establishment of such agencies, but there is also no law to regulate them," a panelist said, adding that establishing a news agency could be viewed as a serious threat to the delicate balance between the different social and religiously diverse groups in the country.

Although there are no private broadcasters, people have a rough understanding of who owns which print media outlets, panelists said. This has added somewhat to citizens' ability to judge the objectivity of news. However, because newspapers in Bahrain are corporations owned by private investors, it remains the task of a researcher to go to the appropriate authorities at the Ministries of Industry and Information

to retrieve the whole list of shareholders. Those who want to go to this effort can know who the owners are, a panelist said, “but they may never know their intentions in establishing those media.” Most dailies in Bahrain are owned by corporations primarily led by independent businessmen who are closely associated with the regime.

With Sunni and Shiite Arabs, Asian expatriates, and naturalized citizens from other countries, Bahrain has a diversified population with varied cultures and ethnic and religious backgrounds. Panelist Abdul Nabi Salman suggested that media targeting the interests of each group could be counterproductive for Bahrain because “a certain newspaper would cover a story from a specific angle and neglect all other parts of the story that do not conform to the newspaper’s policy or target readership.”

Panelists noted a recent trend for Bahraini newspapers to start developing along social, political, or even sectarian lines, with each focusing more on publishing what aligns well with its editorial policy and group of readers. Panelist Ali Abdulemam gave examples: “*Akhbar Al Khaleej* daily considers itself the mouthpiece of the Prime Minister, while *Al-Ayam* and *Al-Wasat* see themselves aligned with the King. A recently established newspaper, *Al-Watan*, is also supported by another supreme official body,” Ali Abdulemam said.

Ali Abdulemam argued that although the government does not have direct control or ownership of any of these influential dailies, it remains involved somewhat in guiding each outlet toward certain goals. Panelists were concerned that sectarianism in the media may have negative long-term implications if outlets are used to foment sensitivity instead of building bridges between the social groups.

**OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT**  
**Bahrain Objective Score: 2.14 / 4.00**

The Bahraini media market is relatively rich compared with other Arab countries, but it falls behind the volume of media business activity compared with Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia. MSI panelists said that Bahrain’s private media in general are doing well economically, but the market is too small to have giant dailies fight over it. Advertising revenues are the major source of income for private media, and ad agencies usually bring budgets from abroad for international brands to be promoted in the local market. Because the government removed

subsidies for the private media, newspapers are working hard to design and use market research to stay ahead of the competition. In a country with a population of fewer than 700,000, newspapers have low circulation figures—but they never reveal them to the public, and panelists said there are no independent bodies to give credible statistics in this regard. The creativity newspaper managers use to run their businesses has resulted in a steadily growing media market with considerable potential, panelists said, giving this objective a score of 2.14, the highest among the five MSI objectives for Bahrain.

The market share of media in Bahrain had witnessed a steady increase in recent years, according to panelist Ebrahim Bashmi, who owns *Al-Waqt* daily, whose license was being reviewed by the Ministry of Information in 2005. Ebrahim Bashmi estimated that spending on media for last year reached about \$300 million, putting Bahrain in the fourth rank among Gulf countries in the volume of media spending. However, this is far less than what other, more developed countries are spending. “On per capita average, an amount of \$20 is allocated per Arab citizen, while an Israeli citizen is allocated about \$200 when it comes to media spending,” Ebrahim Bashmi said.

Because licensing for the establishment of a newspaper or magazine in Bahrain requires a very high deposit compared with other Arab countries, newspapers are

**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.

usually properly managed and generate decent profit. Each daily newspaper needs to establish that it has a capital of about \$3 million to receive a license from the Ministry of Information. This investment needs to be recovered from the operation of the newspaper, which is usually a printing press along with other distribution and advertising services. Understanding their obligation to recover this capital, newspaper managers and owners in Bahrain apply aggressive income-generation techniques. Hence, the industry has grown in Bahrain by leaps and bounds and is considered among the strongest in the Arab world.

Panelist Ebrahim Bashmi, founder of *Al-Waqt* daily, acknowledged that finding multiple revenue sources for his newspaper was a challenge. However, he erected massive street banners and spends handsomely on advertising. “We need to find several other income-generation streams for the survival of the media in Bahrain. This could include revenues from the printing press, from holding conferences and seminars, from organizing book fairs and exhibitions.” Ebrahim Bashmi also said publishers would be well served by investing capital in external operations out of the scope of the media and using revenues from these to support the newspaper.

Ad agencies and related industries grow in the Bahrain media market as more newspapers compete to produce appealing advertising services to an increasing number of companies. “Most of the newspapers in Bahrain have advertising departments working in two levels: locally seeking advertisements directly from clients and externally through advertising agencies,” Ebrahim Bashmi said. Ad agencies usually provide newspapers with clients from other countries, and this is the most significant source of advertising, as newspapers cannot depend on local industries to provide such revenue, panelists said.

In general, newspapers in Bahrain depend heavily on advertising to meet their expenses. However, advertising is supplemented by sales and subscriptions. Panelists agreed that the market is quite competitive and that there is a need to develop more interest in the business community in advertising in the print press rather than having publishers compete for what is already available. “We need to enlarge the cake that we will split,” a panelist said.

In the past, the government paid newspapers sums every December on the occasion of the national anniversary of the country, technically in return for publishing reports on the achievements of the government during the year, panelists said. Now, however, that practice has stopped, and the reports are published for free.

Research and strategic planning are generally done regularly by larger newspapers in Bahrain. It is their policy to market their newspapers’ services aggressively to increase sales and generate revenues. Several newspapers have developed marketing promotions to enhance their income, including producing supplements and sponsoring raffles and other types of contests.

Circulation and distribution numbers in Bahrain are never revealed to the public, panelists said. There is no agency in Bahrain that monitors or reports circulation numbers. Newspaper owners consider such information as business secrets and work hard to maintain confidentiality within the newspaper or between the newspaper and the printing press. “The claims that some newspapers print 30,000 or 40,000 copies per edition, I believe, are not accurate,” Ebrahim Bashmi said. “My estimate of the circulation number of newspapers in Bahrain ranges from 5,000 to 15,000 copies per edition.”

***Panelist Ebrahim Bashmi, founder of Al-Waqt daily, acknowledged that finding multiple revenue sources for his newspaper was a challenge. However, he erected massive street banners and spends handsomely on advertising. “We need to find several other income-generation streams for the survival of the media in Bahrain. This could include revenues from the printing press, from holding conferences and seminars, from organizing book fairs and exhibitions.”***

#### OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

**Bahrain Objective Score: 1.84 / 4.00**

Panelists agreed that institutions to support media in Bahrain are almost nonexistent. No group represents the interests of media owners. The only professional association that defends journalists is the recently established Bahrain Journalists Association (BJA), but panelists said its activities do not yet meet expectations. Academic programs and short-term training activities do exist, but they are below the standards required to develop significantly the media sector’s professionalism. The small geographical area of Bahrain makes newspapers and magazines easy to distribute, reaching the public in the early morning hours. Printing services

**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.

and production materials such as paper and ink are widely available in the market at competitive prices.

There are no associations that promote the private media in Bahrain. All newspapers in the country are by default commercial enterprises, as they have to apply for a license at the Ministry of Industry. Each has its individual concerns and policies and takes its own path toward achieving its goals. Newspapers in Bahrain rarely hold joint activities. "Each newspaper is concerned about itself and no one else," panelist Ebrahim Bashmi said.

***"Each newspaper is concerned about itself and no one else," panelist Ebrahim Bashmi said.***

The only professional association that has anything to do with media is the BJA, which was established in

September 2000. The aim of the association is to ensure journalistic freedom, provide legal protection and consultation to journalists, raise journalistic standards, and supply professional, social, and health services to its members. With about 200 members, the BJA has become a member of the Arab Union of Journalists and the International Federation of Journalists. However, panelists played down the association's role in protecting freedom of expression. They said journalists

are unsatisfied with its performance and want it to be a full-fledged union or syndicate and, barring that, the association would remain in an identity crisis with very little influence. Furthermore, panelists agreed that the association has not been active enough in holding specialized journalism training activities.

Panelists said they urgently need a journalists' syndicate. There were preliminary plans to transform or merge the association into the proposed syndicate or union that would be dealing with media issues in the future. Panelist Abdulhadi Al Khawaja noted that the government has been exerting efforts to prevent the establishment of the syndicate. "Continuous attempts by journalists to have their syndicate have been thwarted again and again to the degree that they have now given up hope," he said. An initiative was taken by some Bahraini journalists to apply for a license to establish the syndicate, but the government kept delaying their case due to the lack of some needed regulations in the country's Syndicates Law. The government had pledged in 2001 to speed up the process in allowing the establishment of the syndicate, but has not yet allowed it to emerge as a licensed entity.

Even though there are more than 400 registered nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), most of them are sports clubs and charitable organizations. There are a few NGOs in Bahrain that deal with human-rights issues. However, there is not a single NGO solely dedicated to the advancement of media and the development and protection of freedom of the press, according to panelists.

In September 2004 and during a symposium on poverty and social rights in Bahrain, the founder of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, Abdulhadi Al Khawaja, was detained for 45 days under the charges of "encouraging hate of the state" and "distributing falseness and rumors" in conformity to Articles 165 and 168 of the Bahraini Penal Code. His NGO was perhaps the strongest defender of press freedom and the human right of freedom of expression, and such actions have discouraged other NGOs from actively promoting free-speech rights.

Bahrain has academic courses related to journalism and media studies at the universities. The strongest and most prestigious specialized program is the state university's Media, Tourism, and Arts Department at the Faculty of Arts, where journalists graduate with a degree in Journalism and Public Relations. The curriculum covers traditional media, new media, and computer-mediated communication, and students have to fulfill a practical training internship in journalism before graduating.

Panelists believe there is a dire need for more short-term professional journalism training programs in Bahrain. They acknowledge that there were a few activities but pressed for more, especially as more newspapers are being established and there may be prospects for allowing the private sector to establish its own broadcast media in the future. A state-of-the-art unit at the University of Bahrain to support practical journalism training for students as well as host activities for mid-career journalists was readied for inauguration in 2006. The unit, built with a contribution from a private local company at a cost approaching \$1 million, is said to be the largest of its kind in the Middle East. Panelists stressed that in order to meet its objectives, training in professional journalism needs to be associated with editorial independence and freedom of expression.

There are no restrictions on newsprint and printing facilities. Three daily newspapers in Bahrain have their own printing presses and face no difficulty in obtaining newsprint and other production materials. Smaller newspapers and magazines are able to print at other commercial presses and have various options to choose from with no regulations or restrictions by the government. There is no censorship in the printing phase of newspapers in Bahrain. However, according to the press law, the Ministry of Information must be notified if a newspaper changes the printing press where it prints its editions.

Kiosks, bookshops, and stores are the main channels of distribution for newspapers in Bahrain. Increasingly, newspapers are also targeting subscribers and delivering newspapers directly to their addresses. The fact that Bahrain is geographically small enables each newspaper to distribute its copies independently in total contrast to a large country such as Saudi Arabia, which has a national distribution company serving many newspapers.

Satellite transmitter services, however, are strictly controlled by the Bahraini authorities, which closely monitor what is being broadcast to the world through correspondents in the country. The

government had revoked licenses of correspondents who sent out material that the government viewed as a violation of its sovereignty or press laws.

Meanwhile, the Internet, which is growing rapidly in Bahrain, remains a guarded media outlet by the government, which practices routine filtering and closure of various websites according to its discretion.

***“Continuous attempts by journalists to have their syndicate have been thwarted again and again to the degree that they have now given up hope,” panelist Abdulhadi Al Khawaja said.***

## **MSI Participants**

**Ebrahim Bashmi**, member, Shura Council, Manama

**Abdul Nabi Salman**, member, Council of Representatives (Parliament), Manama

**Abdulahdi Al Khawaja**, human-rights activist and former director, Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, Manama

**Mohamed Fadhel**, correspondent, Agence France-Presse, Manama

**Ali Abdulemam**, moderator, Bahrain Online ([www.bahrainonline.org](http://www.bahrainonline.org)), Manama

**Mahdi Rabea**, journalist, *Al-Ayam* daily, Manama

**Jawad Abdul Wahab**, freelance reporter, Manama

**Ali Al Jabal**, legal consultant, Manama

**Tamam Abu Safi**, reporter, Radio Sawa, Manama

**Nazeeha Saeed**, reporter, Radio Monte Carlo and *Al-Watan* daily, Manama

## **Moderator**

**Walid Al Saqaf**, media consultant, IREX, Yemen

# BAHRAIN AT A GLANCE

## GENERAL

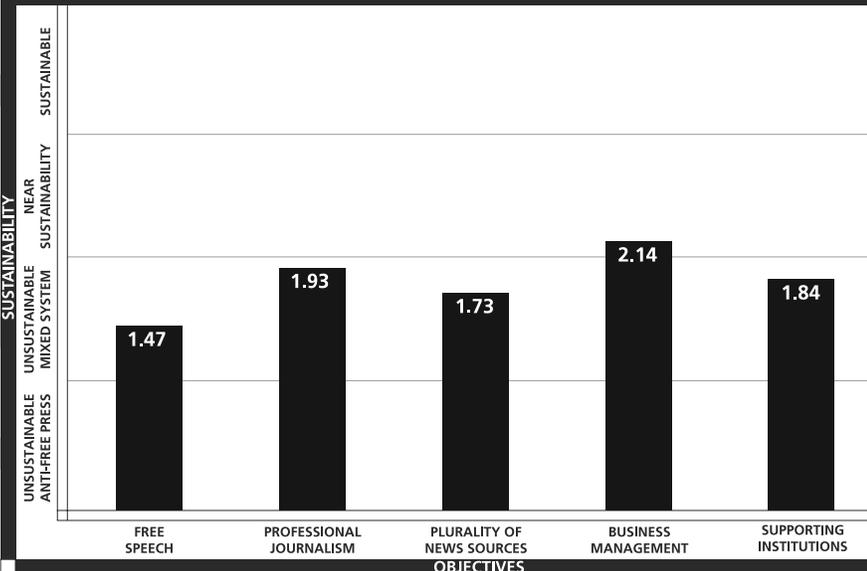
- **Population:** 725,400 (2004 est., World Bank)
- **Capital city:** Manama
- **Ethnic groups:** Bahraini 63%, Asian 19%, other Arab groups 10%, Iranian 8%, other Ethnic groups 6% ([www.nationencyclopedia.com](http://www.nationencyclopedia.com), 2006)
- **Religions:** Muslim (official) 98%, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, other 2% ([www.nationencyclopedia.com](http://www.nationencyclopedia.com), 2006)
- **Languages:** Arabic, English, Farsi, Urdu ([www.nationencyclopedia.com](http://www.nationencyclopedia.com), 2006)
- **GDP (ppp):** \$9.6 billion (2003 est., World Bank)
- **GNI per capita (ppp):** \$2,410 (2003 est., World Bank)
- **Literacy rate:** male 92.5%, female 83% (2004 est., UNICEF)
- **President or top authority:** King Sheikh Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa (since March 6, 1999)
- **Next scheduled elections:** House of Deputies 2006

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Independent *Al-Ayam* (36,000 daily), independent *Al Meethaq* (35,000 daily), independent *Akhbar Al Khaleej* (32,000 daily) (Arab Press Network [arabpressnetwork.org](http://arabpressnetwork.org)), and independent *Al Watan* (no daily circulation figures available)
- **Broadcast networks:** State-owned Bahrain Radio and Television Corporation (BRTC)
- **Television stations:** One television station with five different channels along with the main satellite channel, Bahrain TV, which is viewed throughout the Arab world through Arabsat and Nilesat (BRTC)
- **Radio stations:** One radio station beaming six channels with different programming (BRTC)
- **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- **Number of Internet users:** 150,000 (Bahrain Internet Society)
- **News agencies:** State-owned Bahrain News Agency (BNA)
- **Significant foreign investment in the media:** N/A

[Sources for circulation figures above: Arab Press Network ([arabpressnetwork.org](http://arabpressnetwork.org)), Encyclopedia of the Orient ([lexicorient.co](http://lexicorient.co))]

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: BAHRAIN



ALTHOUGH THE IRANIAN MEDIA SECTOR IS ONCE AGAIN EXPERIENCING ONE OF ITS DARKER PERIODS IN TERMS OF THE LEGAL ENVIRONMENT, THE 2005 MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX (MSI) ASSESSMENT FOUND POSITIVE SIGNS IN THE LARGER PICTURE.

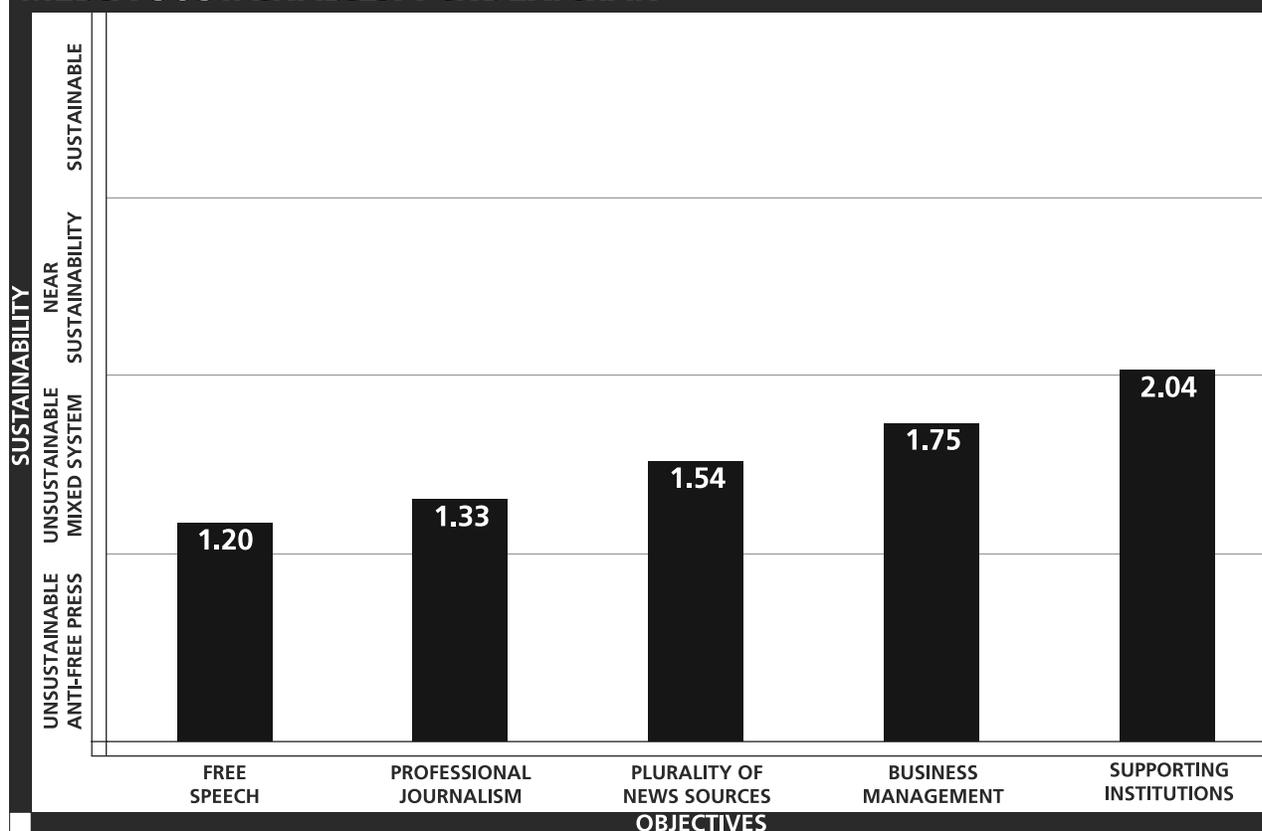


**P**rofessional journalism has a long tradition in Iran, and it has been a contested arena since its inception in the 1850s. The profession itself, its legal framework, its educational and institutional support, and the government's involvement with the media have been in continuous evolution. The Iranian media landscape has been characterized through the decades by stretches of government repression lightened by occasional "press springs."

Although the Iranian media sector is once again experiencing one of its darker periods in terms of the legal environment, the 2005 Media Sustainability Index (MSI) assessment found positive signs in the larger picture. Educational and institutional support for the trade has been strengthened. Multiplicity of news sources is a reality of the digital world that manifests itself despite government efforts at control. Legal protections for the media are at a low, but the closure of more than 100 newspapers in recent years and the high-profile cases of a Canadian photojournalist's death in detention and an Iranian journalist's prison hunger strike have raised public awareness of the media freedom issue. Serious efforts are being undertaken by individuals and associations to improve the legal conditions of journalism in Iran.

The year 2005 was precarious for the Iranian press. The presidential election saw the victory of a hardliner, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, whose conservative stance, many feared, would further reduce the already limited liberties of the press. In addition, the election of a majority conservative Majles in 2004 negated hopes that the parliamentary body might provide a more liberal counterbalance to the new president. The previous president, Mohammad Khatami, was considered a proponent of free speech, albeit a powerless one who had failed to prevent the closure of many newspapers during his tenure.

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: IRAN



**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.

State radio and television are closely controlled by the government. While the government also controls the issuance of permits for newspapers and subsidizes them to varying degrees, newspapers remain the only source of more independent news and views along with Internet sites and weblogs, which also are filtered by the government.

To escape the forced closures that have silenced reformist print media in recent years, all newspapers practice some level of self-censorship, the MSI panel said. But although the major “red lines” are known and taken into consideration by journalists, papers nonetheless are often closed on more general charges of insulting Islam, or threatening the interests and security of the Islamic Republic. Most journalists agree that the main legal impediment to freedom of speech is not the Constitution, which guarantees the freedom of speech within Islamic principles, but the Iranian Press Law. Passed by the Islamic Revolutionary Council in August 1979, even before the Constitution was adopted later that year, it has been revised twice since.

Of particular concern is the amendment to the Press Law ratified in 2000 during the last weeks of that period’s conservative Majles. The amendment was an attempt by Iran’s conservative factions to curb what had been the Islamic Republic’s first true press spring, following President Mohammad Khatami’s election in 1997. Although a reformist Majles followed in 2000, it was not successful in reversing the amendments ratified by the preceding parliament, due to a personal interdiction by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

Following President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s election in June 2005, greater restrictions were imposed on Internet sites and weblogs, and journalists express a general sense that they need to be even more meticulous in their self-censorship. Later in 2005, an initiative by one of the Islamic Republic’s old-guard revolutionaries to launch Iran’s first independent television station failed due to pressures by the Supreme Council for National Security Council. Around the same time, an aging military plane carrying 68 journalists crashed on its way to the Gulf, where military maneuvers were to be held, and killed all aboard. The year ended with the media community apprehensive about more restrictive times to come, due to an already tighter press environment following the election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Akbar Ganji, a former Revolutionary Guard official who became a reformist journalist, was released from prison in June 2005 only to be put back in solitary confinement a week later. Akbar Ganji’s investigative reports had alleged a link between senior Islamic

Republic officials and the murder of several dissidents and intellectuals in the 1990s. (Akbar Ganji was released again in March 2006, after having served almost six years.) The case of Iranian-Canadian photographer Zahra Kazemi, who died in detention, remained unresolved through 2005, and her lawyers called for a reopening of the investigation. One of the more than 20 webloggers arrested in late 2004 was given a two-year sentence in mid-2005, while most of the others were freed after a few months, some after confessions of guilt allegedly extracted under coercion.

Overall, the MSI panel scored the Iranian media sector at 1.57, with some elements strengthening but the media law environment constituting a significant drag on progress. The strongest component, in the view of the panelists, are the professional organizations and other supporting institutions, particularly the Association of Iranian Journalists.

#### OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH

Iran Objective Score: 1.20 / 4.00

Iranian Radio and Television are state-owned, and the head of Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) is appointed by the Supreme Leader, as stipulated by the Constitution.

This means that there are no independent radio or television stations in Iran, and the debate about freedom of speech within the media is limited to print and online publications.

The MSI panelists concluded that although the Iranian

Constitution protects freedom of speech, there are articles that leave room for ambiguities. The panel noted Article 24 of Iran’s Constitution, adopted following the revolution in 1979 and amended in 1989, that states: “Publications and the press have freedom of expression except when it is detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam or the rights of the public.” While the panelists believed that

***The panel noted Article 24 of Iran’s Constitution, adopted following the revolution in 1979 and amended in 1989, that states: “Publications and the press have freedom of expression except when it is detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam or the rights of the public.”***

the Constitution itself defended their right to free expression and speech, the conditional clause “except when it is detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam or the rights of the public” left leeway for the greater restrictions in the Iranian Press Law.

The Iranian Press Law was adopted and ratified by Iran’s first Majles following the revolution in 1979, but was altered and amended significantly in 1986. The Islamic Republic’s second press law stipulated a Press Supervisory Board consisting of the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance or his representative, a Majles deputy selected by the Majles, a university professor chosen by the Minister of Culture and Higher Education, and a newspaper manager elected by the newspaper managers. This board was given the power to issue licenses, and to “examine the violations of the press” and, “if necessary,” arrange for legal prosecution by a court.

While the composition of the Press Supervisory Board outlined in the second press law gave the government decisive powers for revoking press licenses without a court hearing, the panelists unequivocally condemned

the 2000 amendment to the press law for seriously curbing journalists’ legal protection and free speech. Among other additions, the 2000 amendment stipulated that any publisher and editor of a newspaper that applied for a license must seek clearance from the Ministry of Intelligence, the Ministry of Justice, and the police. It also placed religious and conservative officials in charge of selecting the seven-member press jury, the court panel responsible for trying cases involving journalists, and added more conservative elements to the Press Supervisory Board. This gave it the right to stop a publication before its case had been heard by a court and prohibited the replacement of a banned publication with a similar one.

The incoming majority reformist 6th Majles declared that reversing the new restrictive amendments would be one of its top priorities and approved an urgent bill three weeks into office for this purpose. However, the panelists said, then-Majles Speaker Mehdi Karroubi removed the bill from the body’s agenda upon receipt of a handwritten letter from Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei that in effect prohibited the reversal of the 2000 amendments.

**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.

Several panelists also pointed to the practices of the judiciary and the hard-line Tehran prosecutor, Said Mortazavi, concerning prosecutions of individual journalists in criminal courts without a jury. These authorities argue that the press law’s provision for jury trials applies only to managing editors and that writers are responsible for their own act of writing, rather than publishing. Therefore, the judiciary holds, they can be punished according to the Islamic penal code (Article 697), which provides for the punishment of anyone writing anything criminal.

Panelists held that because there were no clear definitions of the concepts of Islam, insult of top clerical officials, or the national security, journalists are highly vulnerable to ambiguous “red lines.” Also, they noted that there are multiple authorities who can close down newspapers, that more often than not motives and charges are not transparent, and that the court cases can be lengthy, even when the outcome is predictable—sentences with heavy bail terms attached.

However, some of these issues are being addressed by a research group connected to the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and headed by Kazem Mo’tamedinejad. It has been working on four documents to be presented to the parliament during 2006 for consideration as legislation with the aim of establishing a comprehensive media system in Iran. One element considers the formation of a Media Council “as an independent, public-service institution aimed

at expanding the public right of access to information, supporting and protecting the independence of the press, establishing and promoting scientific and professional standards for journalism, and adherence to its professional ethical principles." Another document is a draft bill for setting up a legal framework "to help secure professional independence and impartiality for journalists and promote their public service in expanding the right of universal access to information for the purpose of enhancing the quality of public life and the country's social, economic, and cultural progress." This is fundamentally different from a similar clause in the Press Law in that it does not require the press to be at the service of or work in the interest of the Islamic Republic. The other two drafts have to do with journalism ethics and a collective employment contract for media workers.

While the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance issues the actual permits for newspapers, licensing is controlled by the conservative Press Supervisory Board and, since 2000, requires clearance from the Ministries of Intelligence and Justice, as well as the police. Panelists maintained that there was a clear bias against reformist publications when it comes to granting permits. One panelist said, "No person without strong political backing can get a publishing permit." Another added that "getting permits is extremely difficult and time-consuming" and that when he tried to get a permit, three years passed without any progress. Panelists also believed that it was much easier for persons connected to conservative circles, or government-affiliated publications, to get permits. "Using connections within powerful circles certainly plays a great role in the attainment of permits," another panelist said.

Market entry for independent publications is not only made more difficult by issues regarding attaining permits, but the general insecurity within the journalism business extends into financial matters. Panelists argued that due to the lack of stability within the media sector, it is difficult to attract investors and those who do usually invest for political and not economic reasons. One panelist noted that during the mass closures of newspapers in 2000, the offices of some publications were closed down for months, with significant financial investments left suspended.

Panelists considered the question of whether crimes against journalists were thoroughly prosecuted as somewhat ironic in the Iranian case because many of those crimes allegedly were supported by the judiciary, if not perpetrated by elements within it. One panelist mentioned the case of Said Hajjarian, a prominent

reformist and prolific press personality who was shot in the face in 2000. An alleged perpetrator was charged in the attack but remains free, and has even been sighted at other mass attacks on dissidents in recent years, the panelist said. He is believed by some observers to have links to hard-line elements within Iran's judiciary. Panelists held that crimes against journalists are neither thoroughly investigated nor punished, and the public is poorly informed about such cases, since newspapers often refrain from publishing reports on them for fear of losing their permits.

Generally, government media, especially radio and television, have much better access to domestic news sources, whether it is

***"Certainly," one panelist contributed, "access of information does not always solve the problem, since we work in an environment of self-censorship."***

interviews with officials or information from various government sectors. Management of independent media is not appointed by the government, but panelists agreed that due to the nature of Iranian journalism, wealthy and politically powerful editors-in-chief and managing editors often oversee the general editorial line of a paper and set its boundaries. Hence, one panelist argued, independent of whether a publication is governmental or independent, content that is contrary to the interests of the directors would not be printed.

Although there is no direct control of publications' content, panelists said it is not unusual for top managers to be contacted directly by the Tehran prosecutor with threats of closure if certain subjects were covered, or covered from a certain angle. In addition, sometimes the government issues communiqués warning papers of publishing certain material. Panelists cited issues regarding the Supreme Leader and prominent clerics, press and political prisoners, student demonstrations, Iran's nuclear program, and relations with the United States as subjects raised in this context. In June 2005, papers were warned not to publish an angry letter by old-time revolutionary Mehdi Karroubi to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, accusing hard-line elements of rigging the first round of the presidential election. Three papers that intended to publish the text of the letter were closed overnight, including *Aftabe-Yazd*, a daily connected to Mehdi Karroubi, but all were allowed to resume publication after a one-day suspension.

Libel is punished under articles within Iran's Press Law. Managing editors are tried by a press court with an accompanying jury, the members of which, however, are chosen by a conservative body. The writer, by contrast, can be charged like any other criminal based on the penal code. One panelist who had in the past been imprisoned maintained that "the failure of the plaintiff to prove the charge or claim has practically no effect on the verdict."

Open Majles hearings are broadcast live on national radio, and important press conferences are often shown live on television. At some, journalists, especially those working for foreign agencies, may ask rather probing questions, although none are likely to be so confrontational as to risk having their press permits withdrawn. There is no clause within the Constitution or the Press Law guaranteeing access to information to Iranian citizens or journalists, however. The concept that the work product of government, and hence information about it, belongs to citizens is not part of the public consciousness nor is it outlined in the law.

All the MSI panelists believed that government media had better access to information, and that elements within the conservative segments within Iran's government—such as the judiciary, the Revolutionary Guard, and certain ministries—were adverse to giving information to reformist media. In one case mentioned by the panel, a reporter who had published information on parliament members' paychecks, which she had obtained secretly, was banned by hard-line segments within parliament from gaining access to the building in fall 2005. As a gesture of defiance, however, her employer—ILNA, the semigovernmental news agency—promoted her to the position of parliamentary editor and hired another journalist for the onsite reporting.

Independent journalists, said one panelist, were at a disadvantage in terms of access to officials and influential people. Information could be withheld at any time with the justification that its publication would be detrimental to national security. Government bureaucracy is thick, and so even in cases where information could be provided, access to that information can be so time-consuming that attaining it runs counter to the nature of daily journalism.

"Certainly," one panelist contributed, "access of information does not always solve the problem, since we work in an environment of self-censorship." Another problem that panelists raised was the sensitive nature of public-opinion surveys and the lack of accurate surveys in Iran, especially on subjects that are deemed to be within the "national security" umbrella.

Newspapers use the Internet for research and reporting, and many have satellite television through which they receive international news. The use of satellite dishes by private citizens is prohibited, though there are estimates that about half of Iran's population has access because the ban is not really enforced by the government. Internet sites, especially Persian-language ones, are heavily filtered, and the MSI panelists said a stricter filtering regime could be detected since the election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. For the first time, even a conservative news website, [www.baztab.com](http://www.baztab.com) was banned for several days, as was the BBC's Persian-language website, they said.

Entrance into the field of independent journalism is not controlled or restricted by government, nor is entrance to journalism schools. However, journalists do need to obtain press cards from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance to be able to work, for which they need a letter from their employer. Usually, press cards for domestic media are issued without much delay. Journalists working for foreign media have a much more difficult time obtaining press cards, and there have been cases where the ministry has taken up to a year to issue press cards for such work.

While work for independent media is not restricted, employment for government media, especially radio and television, is much stricter and follows bureaucratic procedures because employees are categorized as civil servants. In the case of radio and television, applicants for full-time positions must undergo procedures in which their ideology and religiosity is examined. They also must be approved by a specially assigned unit of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) before employment.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

**Iran Objective Score: 1.33 / 4.00**

Panelists agreed that professional journalism is a fairly new phenomenon in Iran that needs significant improvement. Before the revolution, the Shah's regime restricted journalists under its own set of criteria, and independent journalism could not develop well. Through the first decade of the Islamic Republic, the extremely ideological atmosphere as well as the 1980–1988 war with Iraq meant that there was little space for the growth of professional journalism. But panelists agreed that from the mid-1990s onward, there has been a greater awareness among the public as well as media professionals of the need for balanced reporting. Still, some panelists argued, virtually all journalism in Iran is in some way political, and the political leanings of the

reporter as well as the newspaper seep through most reports. In fact, due to the lack of political neutrality in most newspapers, readers often buy and read several newspapers and are aware of each paper's political slant.

The panelists noted that articles may not be so much the work of reporting as summarized transcripts of press conferences or events. It is not uncommon for sources not to be listed, or for only one side of an argument or story to be presented in an article. One panelist ascribed the abundance of clichés, recourse to a limited set of sources, as well as a lack of coverage of both sides of the issue to time constraints imposed by editors, which prevented them from exploring subjects in-depth.

Panelists also argued that the quality of reporting was much higher in the print media than it was in radio and television, adding that the state broadcaster IRIB, due to its allegiance to conservative elements within the regime, tended to be one-sided not only in its reports, but also in the choice of sources and subjects. For example, the reformists are barely given any platform within television, whether in news stories or in debates and roundtables. One participant with considerable experience in Iran's official state television said that within the IRIB there is very little independence for individual producers and directors, as supervisory boards monitor all programs. Every week, reports are handed to supervisory program units, and based on

those reports, wrongdoings are identified and warnings given, the panelist said. There may be fines subtracted from salaries, or suspension from work.

Panelists generally agreed that Iranian journalists faced considerable hurdles in access to information, as well as confirmation of information. However, they added that the problem was not solely political but also social, in that within society there was still an awareness of risk attached to the provision of information, though to a much lesser extent than in the first postrevolutionary decade.

Many professionals within the field of media have had little education and instruction in the craft and have

learned through experience. One panelist argued that it was the lack of awareness of ethical standards that was the problem. But panelists also added that attention is increasingly paid to ethical standards within journalism by various media organizations as well as educational institutions. In particular, one of the documents being produced by the research group connected to the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and headed by Kazem Mo'tamedinejad was mentioned. The panelists said the draft Convention on the Ethical Principles of Professional Journalism could be a good guide in standardizing ethical and professional principles. Another participant argued that the problem was not one-sided; while many journalists adhered to ethical principles, the government neglected its own responsibility of ethical principles in dealing with journalists.

Selling articles or headlines in political papers is not something that the panelists were aware of occurring. At newspapers specializing in business and the economy, "coordination between the subjects of articles and journalists for pay has been witnessed," a panelist said. One panelist added that younger journalists were wary of bribes, but journalists of older generations are more likely to accept "assistance" for certain coverage. Others added that some of that was to be attributed to low journalist salaries rather than corrupt ethical standards.

Iranian journalists do not have job security due to the frequent closure of newspapers, and they earn low salaries averaging \$150 to \$225 per month, panelists agreed. At independent media outlets not supported

***Iranian journalists consider the work to be highly insecure, the panelists said. Practicing journalism is like "walking a tightrope," explained one, or "taking a walk in a minefield," as another one put it.***

**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).

financially by the government, salaries are often even lower. Online media pay even less and are not seen as primary jobs. Journalists are often forced to work second and third jobs, especially if they are independent and support families.

This is a significant reason for corruption at work, argued one panelist, citing examples of journalists' expectations to benefit from their connections to powerful and wealthy people who tend to be their subjects. Especially at business-focused newspapers, one participant said, journalists may try to become "advisors" to certain projects, losing the ability to cover them objectively if they want to retain their contracts. With media not viewed as financially attractive employment, most journalists work because of their dedication to the profession, a sense of political

***In the sphere of publications, "we see modern technology and equipment," another participant said, "but those are in the service of government media."***

obligation or duty, or a wish to serve society.

Iranian journalists consider the work to be highly insecure, the panelists said. Practicing journalism is like

"walking a tightrope," explained one, or "taking a walk in a minefield," as another one put it. The Constitution and the Press Law prohibit journalists from harming Islam, and that "leaves a lot of room for ambiguity, since the state will easily confront journalists with the justification of defending Islam," said one panelist.

Another of the documents being drafted by the media research group as potential legislation would form a collective employment contract in 42 articles and 25 notes to be signed by media owners and managers and journalists' representatives to govern working conditions of media editorial staffs.

Journalists cover important events and issues. However, in addition to the infused self-censorship about sensitive issues, there are multiple authorities who can have influence in preventing the media from covering certain subjects. The panelists included the Tehran state prosecutor as well as the Supreme Council for National Security, which may contact editors by telephone or in writing.

Entertainment does not eclipse news in most newspapers, and there is a good balance between news and political coverage and reporting on other issues, including health, women's issues, philosophy, science, and sports, panelists said. The ideologically heated

postrevolutionary years and restrictions on political reporting drove many journalists toward specializations in niche-subject and entertainment reporting. Also, one panelist argued, due to a dearth of entertainment programming during the 1980s, the years of the Iran-Iraq war, there now is greater interest in entertainment programming, explaining the popularity of television serials and films with Iranian viewers. This participant believed the shows with the highest viewership in Iran tended to be "light-headed stories with pure entertainment value," and that this phenomenon was actually more significant than it might seem because most Iranians derive most of their news and entertainment from state radio and television.

Iranian state television is home to modern technological equipment, but "there is a lack of a skilled workforce to utilize the equipment fully," one participant pointed out. In the sphere of publications, "we see modern technology and equipment," another participant said, "but those are in the service of government media." Although most of the country's newspapers are in color, 80 percent of color-capable publishing houses are in the service of government publications, giving nongovernmental newspapers less access to the technology, the same participant said. Many reporters still write their articles with pens and are forced to be present in the offices of the publication due to a dearth of personal computers in Iranian homes. Although Internet use is widespread, there is a shortage of computer hardware at independent publications, and there are not enough tape recorders for all reporters. Some reporters do not even have mobile phones, which panelists agreed was the single most important piece of equipment for an Iranian journalist. Many news agencies and publications refuse to pay reporters' mobile-phone bills.

There are a good number of publications that offer specialized reporting, governmental as well as independent. Most tend to be weeklies and monthlies, covering subjects such as youth, women, economy, sports, cars, religion, science, and childcare.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

**Iran Objective Score: 1.54 / 4.00**

After President Mohammad Khatami's election in 1997, society witnessed a comparatively high degree of freedom, and the number of newspapers grew dramatically, to about 850 publications during what became known as the "Tehran spring." During the first years of Mohammad Khatami's presidency, newspaper

kiosks often were crowded with people standing around to read the headlines of dozens of papers. However, with the ratification of new amendments to the Press Law by the conservative 5th Majles, state organs, particularly the judiciary, started an offensive on the media that closed some 100 newspapers within a few years. Although there have been fewer papers since, there is still a variety of views available—more than 250 national dailies in 2005, and more than 750 specialist weekly or monthly publications. Most newspapers are subsidized to various degrees, primarily for newsprint and ink, by the government, and privately funded publications tend to be either provincial, or specialized weeklies or monthlies.

However, government subsidies do not greatly affect the content and perspectives of publications, although those linked to the government receive much larger subsidies, the panelists said. They estimated that some 30 percent of urban dwellers read daily newspapers, though a greater percentage could afford to do so because the cost of newspapers is relatively low.

The government-owned *Hamshahri* and *Iran* newspapers have some of the larger readerships, while *Shargh* has the highest readership among the nonstate papers. Panelists also agreed that most

newspapers could be categorized into liberal/reformist or conservative/hard-line, though since President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's election a greater diversity of views is present within the conservative/hard-line category, providing for a rift between newspapers that during Mohammad Khatami's tenure generally followed a united anti-reformist front.

By the end of 2004, Iran had more than 700 specialist periodicals, amounting to 60 percent of the country's publications. People in large cities have much better access to national print media, as insufficient distribution systems deprive Iranians in smaller towns

***One panelist argued that since the clampdown on reformist newspapers in 2000, Iranian viewers have turned increasingly toward foreign news sources, particularly Persian-language television programs broadcast mainly from Los Angeles, which has a large Iranian expatriate community.***

and villages. Still, numerous local newspapers reflecting the different spoken languages do exist in most towns, although the lifespan of local publications tends to be rather short due to economic problems. In some areas where minorities live, especially in the Iranian provinces of Kurdistan and Azerbaijan, there is greater government repression of the media, according to panelists. During the summer of 2005, two Kurdish newspapers, a daily and a weekly, were closed down, and there were reports of harassment of journalists.

There are six national television stations in Persian, the *Al Alam* station in Arabic, and the *Sahar* network, which broadcasts programs internationally by satellite in Persian and several other languages, including English. All channels are governmental, and the six national television stations offer local programming at certain times. There are nine national radio stations and more than 100 local stations, all state-owned. *Payam Radio* is generally believed to be the most popular radio station, followed by *Javan Radio* (Youth Radio).

Panelists agreed that while there was a plurality of information sources in print, the situation with television and radio is very restricted due to the government monopoly. Hence, news and information offered by television and radio fully reflect the views of the government in Iran and promote regime interests.

**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.

About half of Iran's households are believed to have access to foreign satellite television programs. One panelist argued that since the clampdown on reformist newspapers in 2000, Iranian viewers have turned increasingly toward foreign news sources, particularly Persian-language television programs broadcast mainly from Los Angeles, which has a large Iranian expatriate community. However, the Iranian state uses technological methods to disrupt programming, and this increased toward the end of 2005, MSI panelists reported.

***Since President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's election, panelists said, there has been greater censorship and filtering of sites, including Internet news sites by reformists—one example is [www.iran-emrooz.net](http://www.iran-emrooz.net)—as well as those developed by conservatives of differing strands.***

Generally, foreign newspapers are not available in Iran, though it is possible now and then to spot *The Herald Tribune* or other major Western newspapers in newspaper stores, which are usually brought privately by travelers. Foreign magazines such as *Time*, *Newsweek*,

and *Fortune* are available and enter the country via an agency, Nashravar, associated with the Ministry of Culture. However, these magazines are only available with a five-day delay, as each magazine is first subjected to a review during which thick black markers are used to obscure pictures viewed as indecent before being offered to the public. These magazines are generally very expensive and only affordable by the wealthy.

About 8 million Iranians use the Internet regularly, and some 63,000 Persian-language weblogs provide for a large variety of views on all sorts of subjects. The number of Internet users is believed to have grown by 200 percent over the past year. Internet and computers are still considered luxuries for many families, giving rise to a growth in Internet cafés. In recent years, the government has expanded its censorship of electronic media, and filtering is intended to prevent Internet users from viewing sites that carry content considered against the interests of the Islamic Republic. These include those that are considered morally corrupt, such as pornographic sites, as well as those that are politically problematic, including those of Iranian monarchists, communists, and other political groups abroad. Persian-language sites are at greater peril, but even some English-language sites are filtered, primarily sites used by

Iranian opposition groups abroad. Since President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's election, panelists said, there has been greater censorship and filtering of sites, including Internet news sites by reformists—one example is [www.iran-emrooz.net](http://www.iran-emrooz.net)—as well as those developed by conservatives of differing strands. Since late 2004, when more than 20 bloggers were arrested and detained for several weeks, the state has pursued an aggressive policy toward the blogosphere. Of the webbloggers, Mojtaba Saminejad remains imprisoned and Arash Sigarchi, who was out on bail, had his jail sentence upheld by the Supreme Court in 2006.

Major Western news agencies, such as Reuters, the Associated Press, Agence France-Presse, and Bloomberg, run operations in Iran, and their stories are used by Iranian media, including governmental and independent publications, as well as state radio and television. There are close to a dozen active news agencies, with the governmental Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) as well as the Islamic Students News Agency (ISNA) providing some of the more objective and balanced as well as up-to-the-minute reporting. Iranian news agencies are subjected to similar forms of pressure and censorship as other media, while foreign news agencies experience greater liberties in terms of the content of their reports although their presence and the size of their offices is at government will. In April 2005, the government suspended the operations of the Al Jazeera television network in Tehran, accusing it of inflaming sectarian violence among Iran's Arab minority in the southern province of Khuzestan. The station has not been permitted to take up operations since.

The law requires that the managing director of any publication be identified on each issue, but there is little transparency on the real ownership of publications. There are many rumors on the subject, based on the political line that the outlet follows. For example, *Shargh*, the daily newspaper considered to be of the highest quality, is assumed to be supported financially by the ranking cleric and former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. *Shargh's* coverage of Rafsanjani's candidacy during the June 2005 presidential elections was viewed as positive in tone, and offered as proof of his backing by some observers. By contrast, in some papers, advertising is an important source of revenue, and advertisers can to some extent affect the way in which papers cover certain subjects.

While a broad spectrum of social interests and minority languages are represented in the media, panelists agreed that minority issues remained sensitive in Iran, and that many journalists preferred to refrain from covering minority issues that could lead to their being

charged with inciting unrest and harming national security interests. They referred to issues such as the use of minority languages as official ones in minority-dominated provinces; succession moves by some minority groups especially in the provinces of Kurdistan, Azerbaijan, and Khuzestan; and opposition activity by minority political leaders.

**OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT**

**Iran Objective Score: 1.75 / 4.00**

Most Iranian publications, governmental and private, benefit from varying degrees of government subsidies of their newsprint and ink. This, the MSI panel agreed, was one of the main factors that hampered the development of publications into independent and profitable media businesses. While the government-owned newspapers *Kayhan*, *Ettela'at*, *Hamshahri*, and *Iran* receive the highest subsidies, also including office equipment and funds for higher salaries, private and reformist papers receive subsidies as well, though in much smaller volumes and generally limited to newsprint and ink. The amount of subsidies is decided by the conservative Press Supervisory Board, which allocates much less to reformist papers, making it difficult for them to compete with large state-owned publications.

Figures by the Ministry of Culture showed that

**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.

during 1989–2003, it had given the press a total of \$368.8 million in aid, 77 percent of which had gone to state-owned papers. While government papers tend to be well-funded bureaucracies with roots that reach decades back, many private newspapers have originated out of political dedication and often are lacking in good business management. A study found that very few of the publishers have ever drawn up business plans or conducted audience research to find out what their potential readers wanted.

Most publishing houses are government-owned, and even private ones buy government-subsidized newsprint and ink. The government has subsidized these materials

since 1989 in an effort to keep newspaper prices down. Distribution companies, similarly, are mostly government-run, and private ones have restrictions imposed by the government. These might include limitations on which areas newspapers can be distributed in and how many copies can be sold. Panelists believed the insecurity of independent media contributed to the lacking tendency by directors to develop publications into successful business enterprises.

Most independent publications are able to survive due to a combination of investments, advertising revenues, and government subsidies. Panelists also agreed that the role of advertising in the financial support of newspapers had increased over the past years. They pointed to *Shargh* as an example of a high-quality, successful independent newspaper that appeared to be self-sufficient financially, with ads by major foreign and Iranian companies covering the pages.

There are no available surveys on revenues from advertising for state television and radio, or the print media, but panelists felt that advertising was not taking up too much space in either medium. Some newspapers have difficulties attracting advertisements, especially local ones. The system of subscription is close to nonexistent in Iran, partly due to the underdeveloped distribution system. Those who would like to have papers delivered to their homes or businesses usually pay their local kiosks for the job or, alternatively, motorcyclists who have used this niche to create a profession for themselves.

***Panelists believed the insecurity of independent media contributed to the lacking tendency by directors to develop publications into successful business enterprises.***

Market research as such is rare in Iran, due to the political implications of such statistics, some of which might show public interest in dissident viewpoints, social liberalization, or other topics contrary to the priorities of the government. As a result, as one panelist put it, “editors and managers are pretty much tapping in the

***As one panelist put it, “editors and managers are pretty much tapping in the dark and going with their gut feelings” when it comes to business decisions.***

dark and going with their gut feelings” when it comes to business decisions. Ratings have not been established within the Iranian media business as guides that define content

or publications’ relationships with their readers. The circulation of papers is sometimes exaggerated by managing directors, added one panelist, because higher circulation rates could justify greater government subsidies.

**OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS**

**Iran Objective Score: 2.04 / 4.00**

A Press Syndicate has existed in Iran since 1989 and has provided various publications with vans, motorcycles, and other means to support their publishing and distribution needs. However, the first trade organization to defend journalists’ rights, the Association of Iranian Journalists (AOIJ), was only founded in 1999. The association is registered with the United Nations as a nongovernmental organization (NGO) and is recognized by Iran’s Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. In early 2005, the association had

***Panelists agreed that the activities of the professional organizations played an important role in efforts that led to a directive by President Mohammad Khatami to a group of media professionals in 2003 to set up the research committee to prepare a “comprehensive media system” for the country.***

2,706 members, from an estimated total of 5,000 journalists in Iran.

Panelists agreed that the AOIJ has been very active in protesting the closures of newspapers and the detention of journalists. It has also taken steps to improve journalists’ pay and work

security, set up loan funds to support the families of jailed journalists, and provide for subsidized housing. It started its own college in 2002, called the Centre for Scientific-Applied Training, which provides a B.A. degree in various areas of journalism.

There are at least another 13 journalist trade organizations, some tailored to specialist circles such as sports writers and photographers, crisis photographers, and graphic artists, but also other more encompassing ones such as the Association for the Defense of Press Freedom, the Association of Iranian Women Journalists, and the Association of Young Journalists. All associations provide membership based on profession, and panelists believed they are democratically run and provide beneficial services as well as courses for professional development.

While some of the organizations are connected to government ministries, such as the Association of Muslim Journalists, most are NGOs and act independently from government. The Association for Iranian Journalists, the Association for the Defense of Press Freedom and the Association of Iranian Women Journalists have been especially active in recent years in raising awareness about journalists’ rights and exerting pressure on government in case of violations of journalists’ rights. The building of the AOIJ, which also houses Iran’s chapter of the Committee to Protect Journalists, hosts regular conferences and other

**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.

programs to discuss freedom-of-expression issues and protest repressive measures. Such events were held, for example, following the detention of bloggers in late 2004, on World Press Freedom Day in June 2005, and following the plane crash in December 2005 that killed 68 journalists. In these gatherings, prominent activists speak, and petitions are signed and forwarded to responsible government ministries. However, such NGOs are represented mostly in the larger cities, and their networks are relatively weak in smaller towns and villages.

Panelists agreed that the activities of the professional organizations played an important role in efforts that led to a directive by President Mohammad Khatami to a group of media professionals in 2003 to set up the research committee to prepare a “comprehensive media system” for the country. The resulting four documents, prepared in 2004, include the draft bill for the formation of a Media Council, the ethics convention, the collective labor agreement, and the legal framework. Currently, the drafting group is working with active members of various trade organizations to build widespread approval before the documents are submitted to government for implementation in 2006.

Educational degrees and courses in journalism are available through various universities and institutions, including very competitive ones at Allameh-Tabatabai University and Tehran University. Various other institutions, such as Azad University, the AOIJ, the IRNA news agency, the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), and the Centre for Media Studies and Research (CMSR) connected to the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance offer degrees and short-term courses.

The CMSR, in particular, received positive feedback for its short-term professional development courses. However, panelists criticized the quality of many of these courses, citing teachers who are not practicing journalists themselves, a shortage of equipment for practical work, and the missing link with media organizations for provision of internships that would allow students to gain hands-on experience.

Short-term courses are occasionally offered within news organizations, but workshops are rare due to insufficient funds. One panelist said there were several instances in which international organizations

had expressed interest in running such workshops and courses in Iran, but “due to various reasons, the presence of those organizations has not been approved in Iran.”

There are private as well as governmental publishing houses, and most newspaper kiosks are run privately. Similarly, there are governmental as well as private Internet Service Providers (ISPs), but due to the high profitability of the business as well as its sensitive nature, owners of such ISPs must coordinate critical matters with the government. The government gives directives to ISPs regarding the kinds of sites that they must block, often giving them concrete addresses of sites to filter. Internet cafés are mostly private, although government minders will visit them to ensure that access to “indecent” sites are not permitted by the owners.

***One panelist said there were several instances in which international organizations had expressed interest in running such workshops and courses in Iran, but “due to various reasons, the presence of those organizations has not been approved in Iran.”***

## **MSI Participants**

The members of the MSI panel for Iran represented state and private media outlets and included managers, editors, and journalists from print, broadcast, and online media. IREX has withheld their names to ensure there are no repercussions from their participation.

# IRAN AT A GLANCE

## GENERAL

■ **Population:** 66.9 million (2004 est., World Bank)

■ **Capital city:** Tehran

■ **Ethnic groups:** Persian 51%, Azeri 24%, Gilaki and Mazandarani 8%, Kurd 7%, Arab 3%, Lur 2%, Baloch 2%, Turkmen 2%, other 1% ([www.nationsencyclopedia.com](http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com), 2006)

■ **Religions:** Shi'a Muslim 89%, Sunni Muslim 10%, Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian, Mandeian, and Baha'i 1% ([www.nationsencyclopedia.com](http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com), 2006)

■ **Languages:** Persian and Persian dialects 58%, Turkic and Turkic dialects 26%, Kurdish 9%, Luri 2%, Balochi 1%, Arabic 1%, Turkish 1%, other 2% ([www.nationsencyclopedia.com](http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com), 2006)

■ **GDP (ppp):** \$162.7 billion (2004 est., World Bank)

■ **GNI per capita (ppp):** \$2,300 (2004 est., World Bank)

■ **Literacy rate:** male 83.5%, female 70.4% (2004 est., UNICEF)

■ **President:** Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

■ **Supreme Leader:** Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei

■ **Next scheduled elections:** Parliamentary 2008

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

■ **Newspaper circulation statistics (total circulation and largest paper):**

The largest papers in terms of circulation are the governmental *Hamshahri* and *Iran*; total circulation numbers are not available.

■ **Broadcast ratings (top three ranked stations):** *Payam Radio* is generally believed to be the most popular radio station, followed by *Javan Radio* (Youth Radio); in terms of Iranian television, the station with the most popular television serial is usually the top-ranked station; television serials are usually shown either on channel two or three; overall ratings are not available.

■ **Number of print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** There are over 250 daily newspapers and more than 750 specialist weekly or monthly publications, with the overwhelming majority published in Persian.

There are nine national radio stations and more than 100 local stations, all state-owned.

There are six national television stations in Persian, the *Al Alam* station in Arabic, and the *Sahar* network, which broadcasts programs internationally per satellite, in Persian as well as other languages, including English; all channels are governmental; the six national television stations offer local programming at certain times.

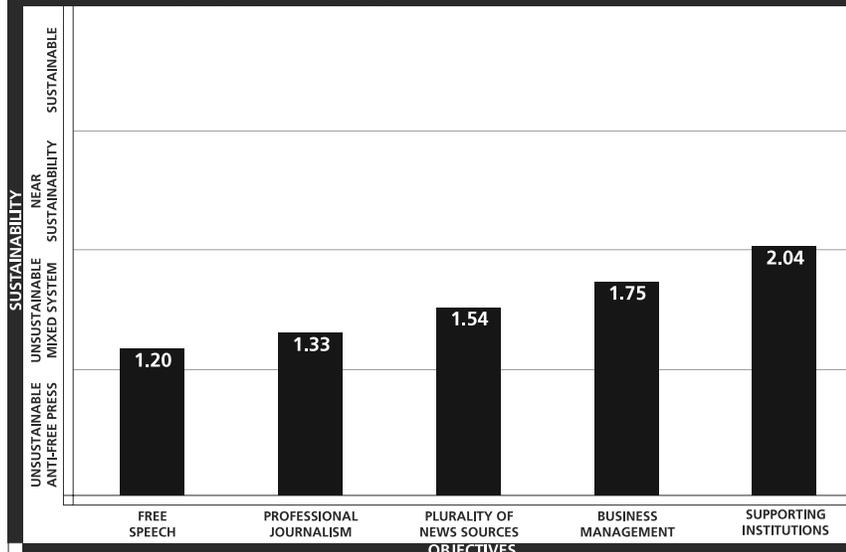
■ **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A

■ **Number of Internet users:** Estimated at 7,500,000–8,000,000

■ **Number of Internet hosts:** 5,246 (2005)

■ **News agencies:** IRNA, ISNA, Fars, Mehr, IRIBNEWS, ITNA, Rasa News, and most major foreign news agencies

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: IRAN



AS SHOWN BY THE MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX (MSI), IRAQ HAS ONLY BEGUN TO DEVELOP THE FREE-SPEECH PROTECTIONS, JOURNALISTIC PROFESSIONALISM, MEDIA MANAGEMENT SKILLS, AND SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS NECESSARY FOR A ROBUST MEDIA SECTOR THAT MEETS THE INFORMATION NEEDS OF CITIZENS AND CONTRIBUTES TO GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY.



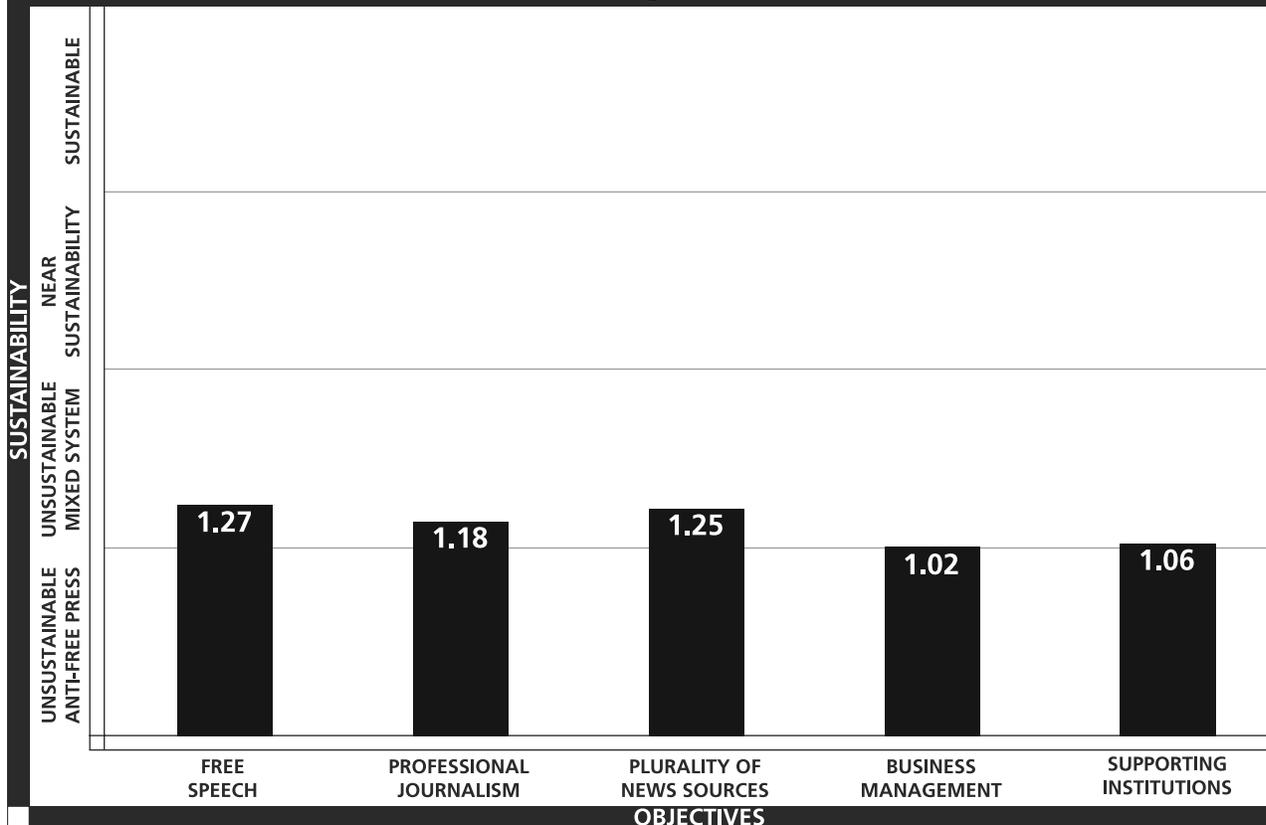
The tightly controlled media system functioning as a propaganda tool to extol the virtues of Saddam Hussein's rule of Iraq has been replaced by a crammed market of newspapers and broadcasters offering a myriad of perspectives. Satellite dishes, printing presses, and foreign news sources are legal for all, the Internet is widely accessed, and media outlets can be privately owned. It is possible for journalists to question officials, publish opposing viewpoints, and pursue topics once utterly off-limits. The Iraqi media industry currently employs some 50,000 people, 10,000 of whom are journalists and other content providers. The independent National Communications and Media Commission (NCMC) estimates that the growth rate of Internet subscriptions in the coming years will exceed 500 percent year to year.

However, as shown by the Media Sustainability Index (MSI), Iraq has only begun to develop the free-speech protections, journalistic professionalism, media management skills, and supporting institutions necessary for a robust media sector that meets the information needs of citizens and contributes to government accountability.

In assessing the Iraqi media sector, the MSI panelists scored the country's overall progress at 1.16, only minimally meeting the conditions required for a strong and professional media system. The assessment found the legal provisions for media freedom and the plurality of available news services to be marginally stronger than the other elements, with the business management of media outlets and supporting organizations particularly weak.

The MSI panel described a fundamental lack of understanding of the principles of media freedom on the part of political leaders, who are proving uncommitted to putting them into practice. More broadly, the panelists said, Iraqi society does not fully understand the importance of media independence or act to defend it. Legal protections for free speech exist in spare terms in the newly approved Constitution but have not been elaborated or tested as the Iraqi political situation evolves, and an Iraqi-backed regulatory framework for broadcasting has not replaced the one introduced by the US-led Coalition Provisional Authority via its Orders 65

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: IRAQ



**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.

and 66. The Iraqi Media Network's transformation from state media to true public-service outlets insulated from political pressure remains incomplete. Al-Iraqiya TV, however, has introduced a number of true public broadcasting programs, including "Our Constitution," a prime-time talk-show series providing a platform for live debate of controversial issues by experts and a 60-member studio audience.

In 2005, there were more than 200 newspapers published regularly in Iraq, and more than 15 satellite television channels and 30 radio stations. Only a few could be rated as independent, including the radio stations Dijla and Al-Yawm in Baghdad, Nawa in Sulaymaniyah, and Al-Mirbad in Basrah; Al-Sharqiyah, Fayha, Ashur, and Bagdhadiya television stations; and the newspapers *Azzaman*, *Addustour*, *Al-Mada* in Baghdad, *Hawlati* in Erbil, and *Al-Manara* in Basrah. The MSI panelists describe a media sector that is pluralistic but partisan, with outlets largely developed and supported to present the views of specific political, economic, and societal forces rather than to communicate a broad spectrum of opinion. Journalists and editors, new to the field or transitioning from the strict limitations of media under the previous regime, are subject to bias, inaccuracy, and sensationalism. The panel reports that resources are available to improve journalists' professionalism, but needs far outstrip the supply. Even with new skills, journalists may be subject to significant pressure from higher-ups whose positions are linked to factional elites. Community and religious pressures also affect coverage.

With many media outlets still perceived mainly as tools serving partisan purposes, little priority is put on management and business development, according to the MSI panel. Some advertising exists, but its pursuit is not considered key and few media managers have the skills to develop their outlets according to a strategic plan. Tools for researching the media market and building audiences are meager and rarely used.

Like all Iraqis, journalists face a disorganized telecommunications system with three competing cell phone companies in different parts of the country, long hours of queuing for petrol, electricity available only a few hours daily, innumerable roadblocks, car use restricted to alternating days for vehicles with odd- and even-number plates, and military and police operations in many neighborhoods after mounting sectarian killings. The darkest shadow cast over Iraq's media is the ongoing insecurity. Journalists have found themselves particularly vulnerable, knowing that any story could offend the wrong person or draw dangerous attention. Some have taken up arms, or

used false names. The toll of journalists killed continues to mount.

Media professionals are beginning to identify the need for professional and industry organizations. The MSI panel identifies the necessity within the sector for training, legal protection, and advocacy for press freedoms and journalists' rights.

## OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH

**Iraq Objective Score: 1.27 / 4.00**

Although the potential for ensuring media independence has expanded enormously since the end of Saddam Hussein's regime, the legal structure to protect and promote free speech, ensure access to public information, and enable effective journalism is not in place. Journalists operate without protection, the regulatory framework is yet to be developed, and society has not grasped fully the importance of media freedom. The 2005 MSI panel scored Iraq at 1.27 for this objective, with the country only minimally meeting the criteria

### 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.

against a backdrop of unresolved insecurity and political turmoil, a new and untested Constitution, and much work remaining to establish regulatory mechanisms.

A key discussion is under way about independence of the Iraqi Media Network (IMN) and in particular the broadcaster Al-Iraqiya, a subject that has moved up the agenda from when IMN was widely seen as a hopeless government mouthpiece irretrievably lost for reform. The advocacy group Iraqis for Independent Public Broadcasting drafted a PBS law that seeks to secure IMN's independence by excluding government from

***“The security condition is imbalanced, the laws are suspended, the Constitution is not executed yet, and the new officials do not understand or do not differentiate between a piece of news and the essay, in addition to their ignorance of the meaning of media freedom,” said Huda Jassim Almaieny, chief Iraq correspondent for the Al-Sharq Al-Awsat newspaper.***

appointing the board members, leaving this task exclusively to parliament. The initiative has been reported on by top Iraqi newspapers and broadcasters and has won backing from significant numbers of parliament deputies and media unions.

Overall, however, the MSI panel described a political elite

uncommitted to putting free-media principles into practice, widespread dangers for journalists including multiple killings, a state broadcasting system that has not yet transformed into an apolitical role, and politicized limits on access to information.

Iraq's political powers do not differentiate between journalistic reporting of facts and viewpoints and the information and opinions themselves, and the fledgling Iraqi legal system does not protect journalists in this context, the MSI panel said. “We must understand the general political condition,” said Huda Jassim Almaieny, chief Iraq correspondent for the *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* newspaper. “The security condition is imbalanced, the laws are suspended, the Constitution is not executed yet, and the new officials do not understand or do not differentiate between a piece of news and the essay, in addition to their ignorance of the meaning of media freedom.”

As an example, she described what happened after her newspaper published a statement by the American ambassador in which she said he suggested the

Interior Minister was promoting sectarian interests: “Immediately, the minister ordered an investigation opened against the newspaper with the accusation of libel. He should have sued the American ambassador instead because he was the one who had accused him. The newspaper did not commit any crime when it published the statement, but the minister did not comprehend that.” Another panelist, Umar Salahud-Deen, political editor at the *Ash-Shura* weekly newspaper, recalled being summoned by the official responsible for transportation in the Nineveh governorate and being accused of defamation for publishing a citizen's comments about local situation.

Journalists are fearful of official abuse of power, the panel said. A journalist might be called in by the authorities or detained without any reason beyond an official's misinterpretation of a piece of news. Iraqi media professionals are not respected by government officials. By contrast, a panelist noted the public expressions of concern from top Lebanese officials when journalists there were killed or maimed and said no similar response occurs in Iraq when Iraqi journalists are slain. Huda Jassim Almaieny added, “The foreign reporter is preferred to the Iraqi one. If an Iraqi and a foreign journalist go to interview a minister, the minister will prefer the foreign one.”

The media professionals on the MSI panel were particularly concerned about the suspension of laws, in particular elements of the penal code regarding crimes against journalists, in the context of Iraq's tumultuous reshaping of its legal and security systems. The Constitution approved in the Oct. 15, 2005, referendum still requires elaboration through the drafting of regulations, execution of various provisions, or testing of its provisions in courts. Mohammed Sahi Awad, an investigative reporter at *Ad-Dustoor* newspaper, said the new Constitution, in Chapter 2, Article 36, ensures the freedom of journalism, printing, media, and publishing but spends only a few words doing so and conditions this on not contradicting “public morals.”

The panelists concluded that regardless of what protestations are made by government officials speaking of freedom or the provisions of the nascent Constitution, nothing protects the media or prevents abuses of journalists. Notably, the government has banned newsgathering by the satellite broadcaster Al Jazeera since July 2004, claiming it was a mouthpiece for terrorists and contributed to instability. The influential political parties, the United States and other foreign forces, and the Iraqi military and security operations may mistreat or detain journalists virtually without consequences, the panel said, and

offered numerous examples. Nahla Ghazy Al Loza, vice president of the Journalists Union in Babel, described how a journalist working for a human-rights organization was detained after publishing criticism of raids in the Babel area. Zena Al Ubaydy Kadhim, an editor at the *Ishtar* weekly newspaper, said that after writing about a university student and his problems, “a university official called me and told me that I was not allowed to enter the university again.”

The MSI panel members agreed that the laws in force in northern Iraq—including the Law No. 10 of 1993, which regulates the media under the Kurdistan Ministry of Culture and Information—state that there is no prior control on the media and journalists are free to write whatever they like. But the problems start immediately after publication. The panelists said that if the item offends an administrative official or political partisan, the journalist will be exposed to problems: being fired, imprisoned, or even killed for trespassing certain “red lines.” The factional outlets include satellite and terrestrial Kurdistan TV and the *Kabat* daily newspaper of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) from Erbil, and Kurdsat TV and the *Kurdistani Nuwe* daily newspaper of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) from Sulaimaniya.

“There is no freedom in its proper sense,” said journalist Viyan Abdulbaqi Taqyaddin, a supervisor at the radio and television of the Conservative Party of Kurdistan in Sulaimaniya. “I may write about the party I am a member of, but I cannot write about the other parties. I am afraid I might have troubles with them, and then I’ll be fired.” She offered the example of an economics discussion program called “The Two Guests,” broadcast on Kadihi Kurdistan TV, a party-supported outlet in Sulaimaniya, until it was stopped in August 2005 after four episodes. The program’s producers received sharp warnings from the PUK about criticizing government economic policy and stirring up a discontent among citizens, she said.

The MSI panelists reflected on a broad sense of chaos in the country as contributing to the lack of protection for the media. They referred not only to the insecurity but also to the weakness of legal and judicial institutions functioning to enforce laws that exist. “The continuous change in the state policy, instability, and the fact that the Constitution has not been activated have deprived media professionals of freedom of expression and left them open to violations,” said Nahla Ghazy Al Loza.

In addition, the panelists noted the lack of effective professional associations and unions for journalists and the absence of the sense of unity needed to defend themselves and freedom of expression. Many new journalists have entered the profession, and “there is a

disagreement among the journalists who used to work with the former regime, and the ones who work with the new regimes,” said Nahla Ghazy Al Loza.

The broader society also has not come to understand the value of these freedoms and what is needed to protect them, the panel said. There is little public concern about the many media professionals killed, wounded, or detained, even on a human level. A

panelist noted that people are satisfied with silence when a journalist is killed but will go out onto the streets en masse if a religious leader is injured. “Is killing a journalist because of his opinion less important than offending religious leaders or politicians on air on TV,” asked Abdul-Husayn Abdul-Razzaq, head of the Freedoms

***“During the former regime, a journalist used to face one body—the Ba’ath Party,” said Hala Abdul-Hady Sultan, a broadcaster with Karbala FM Radio. “Nowadays, he faces more than one, such as the numerous political parties and fanatic religious currents. As a result, he does not know whom to pay respects to. He may be threatened twice within a week by unknown persons.”***

Committee at the Iraqi Journalists Union. “Killing a human being is the ugliest crime one can imagine.”

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) documented at least 22 journalists and three media workers killed on the job in 2005. That brought the total to 60 journalists and 22 media support staff killed since the US-led invasion began in March 2003, the international organization said. Other organizations list an even higher toll, but all agree that the majority of the victims were Iraqi. Among the many open cases cited by the panel was the assassination of the Kurdish editor Ahmad Sawkat, who was killed in 2003 before he could issue the 12th edition of his independent newspaper *Bila Ittijah*.

Other crimes against journalists, including kidnappings, detentions, blackmail, and threats of various kinds were committed largely with impunity, the panelist said, with few investigations leading to any action against those responsible. Umar Salahud-Deen described cases in which the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of media workers were displayed in public squares and death threats lodged, but the source of the information was never determined. In Kurdistan, panelists

reported, the most common form of aggression against journalists is blackmail. The usual scenario is this: Influential individuals contact the journalists or their editors and question the reason for publishing an article on a particular topic. The threat of a lawsuit, often for defamation, is raised, only to be foregone if there is a retraction or a payment offered.

Also endangering media professionals are elements of the security services, party militias, and military wings. Several journalists have been killed by US forces or have come under attack, including several cases involving military checkpoints, CPJ and other monitoring agencies have reported. In addition, CPJ's annual census of imprisoned journalists conducted Dec. 1, 2005, showed at least four held in US custody in Iraq, and noted that Justice Minister Abdul Hussein Shandal in September criticized the prolonged detentions.

"During the former regime, a journalist used to face one body—the Ba'ath Party," said Hala Abdul-Hady Sultan, a broadcaster with Karbala FM Radio. "Nowadays, he faces more than one, such as the numerous political parties and fanatic religious currents. As a result, he does not know whom to pay respects to. He may be threatened twice within a week by unknown persons." She describes covering a demonstration against the governor in Karbala: "I reported the event as it was. The governor then sent me a reproach in polite language. That reproach, however, soon turned threatening."

The regulatory structure is only now being put into place. The concept of a broadcasting licensing procedure was unknown under the former regime. The National Communications and Media Commission was established by Order 65 of the US-led Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in March 2004 to regulate broadcasting, among other tasks. The commissioners were charged with coordinating use of the radio broadcast spectrum, regulating and licensing broadcast outlets, and developing regulatory policy for the government, although their duties also extended to telecommunications and other areas unrelated to the media.

With the initial intent of opening the airwaves, the commission imposed only a \$500 fee for obtaining a license. The MSI panel said this has proven to provide insufficient regulation of the broadcast sector, and several panelists put forward examples they said showed bias in granting or delaying licenses, or indicated that political goals were at play in the process. A new series of statutes to replace Order 65 and ensure the transparent, impartial development of Iraqi broadcasting has not yet been completed.

In Kurdistan, participants agreed that the law does not pose obstacles for those seeking broadcasting licenses, but the trouble lies in the execution. "In Kurdistan, there are four bodies that issue licenses, the Ministry of Culture in Erbil, Ministry of Culture in Sulaimaniya, and Interior Ministry in each governorate," said Yahya Omer Fatih, editor-in-chief of *Al-Ufuq Al-Jadeed*, a political newspaper published weekly in Erbil.

The Iraqi Media Network (IMN), established with US backing after the 2003 invasion, includes the widely watched Al-Iraqiya satellite channel, *Al-Sabbah* newspaper, and radio stations. Its planned transition to a true public broadcaster run by a board of governors selected for their independence and insulated from the government and its political leaders, envisioned in the CPA's Order 66 of March 2004, dragged on incomplete. The MSI panel said IMN continued to come under criticism during 2005 for succumbing to a role as a mouthpiece for the government and getting caught up in sectarian power struggles. The panelists said this government role is evident in the way the network is provided with news and its reporters are invited to accompany official delegations, which contrast dramatically with how other outlets are treated.

Equal and open access to information is not the norm for Iraqi journalists, especially those outside the state broadcasting system or not aligned with those holding the information. The MSI panel said reporters for private television channels and newspapers may be denied access to officials or to their statements, whereas the Al-Iraqiya representative is treated differently. Certain officials refuse to be interviewed by an independent outlet on the grounds that it is "suspicious" or financed by a foreign body. No legal provisions are enforced to emphasize the right to access official information, panelists said.

Political partisanship in the media also increasingly results in inequality in information access, MSI panelists said. A government minister may provide his own party's newspaper alone with special news items. During the October 2005 constitutional referendum, some panelists said, it was noted that certain journalists presented prepared news pieces reflecting a particular political position. "Freedom to access information has started to decrease gradually," Hala Abdul-Hady Sulatan said. "Narrowing the media freedoms and the hiding of information away from certain journalists gradually increases." She recalled trying to prepare a program on ownership rights and being told by an official that he could not participate because "the party to which he belonged did not authorize him to do so."

Several panelists said important news is reported to Iraqis mainly by foreign channels, citing in particular the Abu Ghraib prison scandal and other cases of torture that were presented by US and European media channels before Iraqis or the Iraqi media heard about them. However, access to foreign news is widely available on the Internet, through foreign newspapers, or on radio and satellite channels. Journalists complain about the high cost of Internet access, especially because the media outlets at which they work do not provide them with this service and they generally have to absorb the cost if they make use of foreign sources.

Iraqi law addresses libel through both criminal and civil codes. As a crime, libel can be punished according to the Penal Code No. 11 of 1969, Article 434, which is still in force. The Civil Law No. 40 of 1950 also includes the possibility of judgments for damages from defamation in the media. MSI panelists noted, however, that the law does not include discussion of journalistic freedom, including the right to commentary and criticism regarding public figures. Additionally, the panel noted, the law considers use of the media in cases of defamation as an aggravating circumstance in response to which the courts should impose the harshest punishment. Overall, the legal system is in flux and cannot be relied upon to enforce existing laws fairly and consistently, panelists said.

The government does not license journalists and does not seek to. Many new people have entered the profession since Saddam Hussein's control over the media ended. International news organizations in particular have recruited entrants from other fields, sometimes simply because they had cars, spoke foreign languages, or were connected to someone who allowed them access to a particular official site or ethnic neighborhood. The panelists differed over whether this phenomenon was harmful to Iraqi journalism.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

**Iraq Objective Score: 1.18 / 4.00**

Iraqi journalists, either making the transition from strictly controlled government media or newly entering the field, have not yet reached a high standard of professionalism, the MSI panel concluded. The number of media outlets has expanded rapidly, but there is virtually no experience in media at international standards among the editors and journalists joining these publications and broadcasters. At the same time, most of the new outlets are backed by political or other interests, and there is substantial pressure on

their staffs to reflect the sponsors' perspectives. The MSI panel scored the professionalism of journalists at 1.18, minimally meeting the objective at the beginning stages of improvement.

Credibility and balance fall victim to the drive to publish sensationalism that it is thought will attract Iraqi readers, the panel said. Ethics codes are not in place or widely agreed, and there are cases of bribery and blackmail. Particularly problematical is the partisanship of the many media

outlets run by the government or political parties, most of which do not follow exacting technical or accuracy standards. As an example of partisanship by a media outlet, MSI panelists cited a report by

***Dhamia Hassen Al Rubaay, correspondent at Al Iraq Al Hur radio in Baghdad, said: "Inside each one of us, there is a policeman who watches our movements and behaviors. Fear has not gone since the change in regime."***

*Al-Sabbah* newspaper, part of the government-backed Iraqi Media Network, that 90 percent of citizens support closing Al Jazeera offices in Iraq.

In Kurdistan, the control of the political parties over the media outlets leaves little space for the journalists

### Journalism meets professional standards of quality.

#### PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

- > Reporting is fair, objective, and well sourced.
- > Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards.
- > Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.
- > Journalists cover key events and issues.
- > Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption.
- > 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).

to check the credibility of the information they get, the MSI panel concluded. “We hear or read about how foreign journalists comply with the professional criteria,” said Faris Khaleel Mohammed, editor of the monthly *Al Hewan* magazine in Mosul. “In order to maintain their credibility, the foreign journalists do with only the smallest signs of cordiality in the offices of the officials in their countries. Contrary to this, we find some of our journalists receive residential lands in return for publishing or broadcasting a program.” Because the influence of the political parties and government on the media outlets is well understood by journalists, there is significant self-censorship, the MSI panelists agreed.

***“We need free and honest media,” said Faris Khaleel Mohammed Ali, chief editor at Al Hewan magazine. “There are media professionals who want to work freely. But the entities that own the media institutions place red lines for the media professionals which they should not trespass.”***

Self-censorship remains commonplace among journalists across Iraq, even after the lifting of the official government controls on the media, the MSI panel said. Dhamia Hassen Al Rubaay, correspondent at Al Iraq Al Hur radio in Baghdad, said: “Inside

each one of us, there is a policeman who watches our movements and behaviors. Fear has not gone since the change in regime.”

Religious and tribal traditions have strong holds, as does the influence of the community in which the journalists live and work. If the journalist writes on a subject that contradicts social, religious, or even partisan traditions, he may expose himself to threats or even death. Another influence is the editorial system inside the media outlet. Journalists may face great pressures from their editors-in-chief or department heads that can be attributed to these managers’ relationships with political officials, allegiances that significantly limit the role of the journalists within their institutions. They may collect the information from their sources and fact-check it but then find it edited or excised in accordance with the viewpoint of the party or the sponsor with which the outlet is aligned. “For this reason, some journalists have resorted to a new style in order to pass on some of the ideas they want: They give headlines that support the sponsor and insert the opposing news within the details or at the

end,” said Huda Jassim Almaieny of Al-Sharq *Al-Awsat*. “We need free and honest media,” said Faris Khaleel Mohammed Ali, chief editor at *Al Hewan* magazine. “There are media professionals who want to work freely. But the entities that own the media institutions place red lines for the media professionals which they should not trespass.”

Ultimately, in Iraq, there is one core reality that all journalists share: They work in unstable security conditions, and a certain article or broadcast may bring the death of its author. Not surprisingly, there is a keenness to prepare material that will be the least offensive to officials or influential political powers.

MSI panelists noted that some journalists cannot cover all the key events—for example, in cases in central and southern areas of the country, where religious parties have greater control. According to a panelist, a Najaf station did not broadcast a presentation on the constitutional referendum because the lecturer wore an ordinary scarf on her head rather than one viewed as more traditionally Islamic. “In Najaf and Karbala governorates, we have this issue, too,” said Hala Abdul-Hady Sultan. “If a woman is sitting in a conference without wearing a scarf, we do not broadcast the conference for religious reasons.” Another concern for journalists is coverage of demonstrations and protests directed at government officials. They fear that police will destroy their equipment or take them into detention. Imad An-Naqshabandy from Radio Dar As-Salam in Mosul said this happened to him when he covered the killing of a member of the governorate council.

Salaries for journalists tend to be low. Newspaper salaries generally do not exceed \$150 monthly; at satellite television channels they may reach \$500. Some panel members reported that they had gone for months without being paid at all due to financial mismanagement at the outlets.

Political news and other public-affairs programming have more prominent status than entertainment shows, MSI panelists said. Some attributed this to the political turmoil in Iraq overshadowing all other concerns of citizens. Breaking news, such as bombings and government developments, is very important to most audiences. Some participants suggested that certain outlets limit their entertainment broadcasts, especially of music and comedies, due to religious requirements.

Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient at some outlets. However, the training of workers may not be sufficient to allow full utilization of the equipment. Broadcast transmission capacity in

some governorates is weak, outmoded, or limited to the Internet. Fearing theft or sabotage amid unstable security conditions, certain media outlets refuse to invest in expensive transmission equipment for fear of theft or sabotage.

Specialized journalism is nearly nonexistent, and not encouraged by media outlets, according to the MSI panel. There are few professional training opportunities for journalists seeking to develop skills in particular reporting niches.

**OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES**

**Iraq Objective Score: 1.25 / 4.00**

The number and variety of media produced in Iraq has expanded enormously since the tight control of Saddam Hussein’s government ended. However, availability varies significantly from one region to another, and reliability and objectivity also fluctuate, the MSI panel said. The new and positive developments are that there are many more local publications in the governorates, and Internet use has expanded rapidly. Additionally, there are no controls on citizen access to news media, both Iraqi and internationally produced. Overall, the MSI panel ranked Iraq’s progress toward this indicator at 1.25.

**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.

Newspaper circulation is primarily an urban phenomenon in Iraq, with rural areas relying more on radio and satellite television, the MSI panelists said. The print-run of key dailies like *Al-Sabbah* and *Azzaman* hardly exceeds 50,000, if that. Reliable figures are unobtainable due to the lack of circulation auditing organizations. Distribution systems for print media are largely limited to Baghdad and other major cities. Newspapers produced in the capital do not have national circulation, reaching only larger cities because no specialized companies are in place to bring publications to more remote areas. Some localized publications are distributed for free in rural communities because there are no outlets for selling them. Ali Mahmood As-Sa’eedy from *Al-Haq*, a newspaper issued there by the Human Rights Organization in Babel, said that in his area, “many people do not buy newspapers because the satellite channels communicate every single piece of news.

*Ali Mahmood As-Sa’eedy from Al-Haq, a newspaper issued there by the Human Rights Organization in Babel, said that in his area, “many people do not buy newspapers because the satellite channels communicate every single piece of news. Moreover, some people’s trust in the newspapers has been shaken by the numerous fabricated news and the refutations.”*

Moreover, some people’s trust in the newspapers has been shaken by the numerous fabricated news and the refutations.”

In addition, given the security situation, people are fearful to be on the street, even to buy a newspaper. A civil-society–backed distribution company worked in cooperation with the Iraqi Newspapers Association to start a pilot project under which 1,000 letter boxes were installed in a Baghdad neighborhood to allow for a more secure home delivery of newspapers. The experiment could foster newspaper subscriptions over retail sales.

The Kurdish region of Iraq, including the three northeastern governorates of Erbil, Sulaimaniya, and Duhok, emerged after the first Gulf War in 1991 semi-autonomous from the central government in Baghdad, and this gave the media sector greater opportunity to develop. However, by far, most outlets were and still are under the control of the administrations dominated

by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The factional outlets include satellite and terrestrial Kurdistan TV and the *Kabat* daily newspaper of the KDP from Erbil, and Kurdsat TV and the *Kurdistani Nuwe* daily newspaper of the PUK from Sulaimaniya. There are some exceptions: *Hawlati*, a weekly founded in 2002, is among the newspapers presenting itself as independent in the north. However, circulations are rather limited. Despite a regional population of about 5 million people, the *Kurdistani Nuwe* of the PUK and *Kabat* of the KDP do not exceed 4,000 copies each a day, according to panelists' estimates.

In Basrah, southern Iraq's main city with about 2 million of the region's 6 million people, there are now more than a dozen daily, weekly, or bimonthly newspapers.

There is access to satellite television and increased

***Added Faris Khaleel Mohammed Ali, "The public media is partisan and misleading the public. It reflects the viewpoints of the parties that share the government."***

terrestrial broadcasting, including Al-Mirbad, an independent outlet with satellite television and radio broadcasts, and Basrah TV, which belongs to the

state Iraqi Media Network. There are more than a dozen FM radio stations, some relatively independent and others belonging to political parties. The Internet is increasingly seen as an important means to access information, and there are perhaps 50 Internet cafés in Basrah alone and 30 in Nasiriyyah.

The government does not impose limits on citizen access to information resources. The only limit is financial, and many people, including journalists, face this. Browsing the Internet in particular is expensive, and the cost may be prohibitive to follow news and cultural reports fully. Another issue is time, with the unstable security situation limiting the hours people can spend at Internet cafés.

MSI panels said there is some partisanship on the part of the state media outlets. Imad An-Naqshabandy contended that the state broadcaster Al-Iraqiya presents people from his city of Mosul as terrorists and exaggerates events there. Nahla Ghazy Al Loza said the governorate of Babel interferes in the details of what is published in media outlets there. Two weekly newspapers, *Sada Babel* and *Babel Al-Yawm*, have been established under the sponsorship of the governorate at a high cost and with no task other than covering activities of the government, she said. Added Faris

Khaleel Mohammed Ali, "The public media is partisan and misleading the public. It reflects the viewpoints of the parties that share the government." In his view, in covering the December 2005 parliament elections, the satellite channels showed the outcome as a victory.

Panelists also noted that the availability of news media does not mean that all events will be covered. Journalists often are selective in the events that they cover due to their own partisanship, or that of their editors, the panelists said. Demonstrations and strikes are not always reported. In a case discussed by the panelists, Iraqi journalists who covered a demonstration in Mosul regarding election results and fuel prices said they filed reports but not all their outlets carried them.

A number of news agencies work in Iraq, including the National Iraqi News Agency (NINA) and Voices of Iraq, but they are new and cannot yet cover all events in the country with limited staff, panelists said.

Transparency of media-outlet ownership is not high, and the financial backers of many are not known to most people—including some who work at them. Some panelists said that not revealing the identities of owners was realistic for security reasons. Others said the secretiveness was due to concern that their audiences would reject the media due to the owners' affiliations. "I have worked in this station for a period of time," said Hala Abdul-Hady Sultan from Karbala radio, "and I know neither its owner, nor its sponsors. I do not know whether this can be attributed to the security conditions or other interests. There are interferences in the work of the staff. When we intend to interview a personality, we have to obtain approval" of a ranking manager.

Most participants emphasized that because the Iraqi media is largely religious and partisan, it cannot cover certain sensitive topics, especially if it concerns minorities or the numerous religious sectarian issues in Iraq. Imad An-Naqshabandy gave as an example the raid on the Kurdish radio station that belongs to the Islamic Union Party in Mosul, an ethnically mixed city contested by Arabs and the large Kurdish minority.

The Internet, severely restricted during Saddam Hussein's regime, has broken the information monopoly and represents a major advance in the availability of multiple news sources. However, with no copyright law enforced and the Internet increasingly available, journalists have begun to plagiarize and newspapers to increasingly depend on the Internet as an information service. This practice has become so extensive that some newspapers have begun to look alike, even leading managers to fire editors to cut costs, panelists said.

**OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT**

**Iraq Objective Score: 1.02 / 4.00**

In Iraq, business at media outlets is unplanned and inefficient. The management and strategic development skills needed to run successful media businesses have not yet developed. The MSI panel considered Iraq to have made the least progress toward this objective among the five assessed, scoring it at 1.02 with virtually no outlets skillfully managed businesses able to support editorial independence.

The Iraqi media market's rapid expansion has resulted in too many media outlets to be sustainable. Major newspapers financed by the state or sponsored by major partisan forces are the only ones able to make money, and they cut the market share of those striving for a degree of independence. There is little use of market research or other planning tools for business development. Most printing facilities are private but rather primitive, with the most modern dating to about 2000.

"In Iraq, there is inefficiency in the printing and distribution," Nahla Ghazy Al Loza says. "There is *Babel*, a newspaper which should be issued on Monday, yet its printing is not finished before Tuesday and it is not distributed until Wednesday."

**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.

Distribution of newspapers in urban areas is developing into a profitable business with the power to promote or retard the circulation of various publications, according to the MSI panelists.

Some newspaper managers have suffered from preferential treatment for other publications by the distributors, the panel said.

"There is a mafia of distribution," Huda Jassim Almaieny said.

"No newspaper should disregard it. The mafia hides newspapers for the benefit of others."

***"In Iraq, there is inefficiency in the printing and distribution," Nahla Ghazy Al Loza says. "There is Babel, a newspaper which should be issued on Monday, yet its printing is not finished before Tuesday and it is not distributed until Wednesday."***

In Baghdad, newspaper distribution occurs through an auction system on a public square. After the 1991 Gulf War weakened the Iraqi economy, the government department that had controlled distribution was forced to give up its fleet and transfer the task to a private-sector agent. The current system is controlled by three companies that sell newspapers to wholesalers who, in turn, distribute them to retailers. The daily auction takes place at dawn, just after the curfew ends, on a garbage-strewn street with folding tables holding the newspapers and personal bodyguards protecting sellers. The print-run from some 20 Baghdad printing presses, including those of major newspapers such as *Al-Sabbah* and *Azzaman*, is offered for sale, and on days when the weeklies and dailies come out, the combined circulation is about 150,000 copies. On days with only dailies on offer, it is about 100,000. *Al-Sabbah's* wholesale price is 150 Iraqi dinars, about 10 cents, and its retail price, printed on the front page, is 250 Iraqi dinars. Most other papers are priced between 120 and 180 dinars, the latter only if a particularly sensational story is on the front page.

In southern Iraq, panelists said, distribution is conducted not by specialized companies but by small shops, and sales techniques are primitive. A panelist said that only 900 newspapers are taken by the local distributor to the city of Imara, which has a population of 800,000. In the governorates, panelists said, there are political forces that interfere in the distribution of newspapers when they feel threatened. They said the *Azzaman* newspaper was banned for a period after printing a headline critical of a particular religious party.

With main sponsorship of most outlets coming from a party, a political body, a religious group, a neighboring state, or an international source, commercial advertising takes less prominence in the financial structure of the media companies. Some managers do not differentiate between ads and political propaganda. MSI panelists said that numerous newspapers published essays and photos calling for support of one or another candidate in the December election under the pretext that these were ads, when in truth they were political propaganda.

Some editors-in-chief intent on bringing in advertising have assigned editors to task, at times putting a condition that each must sell a specified number or face unemployment. It has turned out that some editors

***“I believe advertising is the greatest danger that threatens the Iraqi media,” Abdul-Husayn Abdul-Razzaq said. “Ads participate in destroying the journalist’s honesty.”***

are better selling advertising than doing journalistic work, but the development of specialized advertising staffs clearly differentiated from editorial functions is not well advanced.

There are a few young advertising agencies starting up in Baghdad.

In southern Iraq, advertising agencies are not specialized but are in the main satellite offices linked to the main Baghdad dailies, and advertising is not developing as an important source of media revenue. Some outlets run by powerful groups, including religious sects, are able to pressure companies into advertising with them, according to panel members.

In Kurdistan, MSI panelists said, the political-party leaderships confine their idea of commercial business to trade in goods, which they also dominate, and consider the media as dependent on subsidies. These subsidies can be used to keep the outlets in line, panelists said, whereas private investment in media businesses is seen as a threat that would reduce control of the information sector.

Although the economy of Kurdistan is expanding rapidly, with new businesses opening and a degree of investment returning, the concept of advertising is not well developed, especially in the media. Panelists noted the lack of specialized advertising agencies. Due to limited technical capacity, television commercials are designed and prepared outside of Kurdistan.

The MSI panel concluded that it is unlikely that any newspaper has not received some form of governmental support, whether directly or indirectly. The ads published in newspapers are examples of that support in addition to the donations given every now and then. Nizar Abdul Wahid, an editor at *Al-Sabbah* newspaper’s office in Missan, said that “in supporting the state media, the government destroys the independent media” by distorting the market. *Al-Sabbah*, which is subsidized by the state as part of the Iraqi Media Network, costs 1,200 Iraqi dinars per copy to produce but is sold to the distributor for perhaps a quarter of the price, he said.

Even some MSI panelists were not ready to accept the role of ordinary advertising in media independence, however. “I believe advertising is the greatest danger that threatens the Iraqi media,” Abdul-Husayn Abdul-Razzaq said. “Ads participate in destroying the journalist’s honesty.”

All agreed that there is virtually no use of market research or other strategic planning tools to build audiences or improve business performance. Resources spent in this regard are concentrated on administering the newspaper, the panel said. A few organizations exist for measuring broadcast viewership, including the Iraqi Center for Research and Studies and the Tawasul Company for Research, Publishing and Distribution.

**OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS**

**Iraq Objective Score: 1.06 / 4.00**

Plurality and private ownership in Iraqi media is so new that few industry associations have formed to represent the interests of publishers, owners, and top managers: the Iraqi Publishers Association, the Private Broadcasters Association, and the Association of Publishing Houses. There also are associations for cinema owners and movie importers. Professional associations for journalists exist, but both new and old ones have shown little strength to date. Some training is offered for new and mid-career journalists, but opportunities are not sufficient in number or quality to meet the need. As a result, the MSI panel recorded little progress toward developing the supporting institutions required by a strong media sector, scoring Iraq at 1.06 for this indicator.

The first professional union in Iraq was established 46 years ago, when the Iraqi Journalists Union was formed. In April 2003, the Journalists Union was established. Neither of these organizations has proved

to be a defender of the media professional's rights, in the view of the panelists. The old union is seen as an extension of the previous regime, and the leaderships of both groups have been weak, subject to in-fighting, and more focused on individualized concerns. For example, neither has taken significant action regarding the great threat to the safety of journalists.

The Journalists Union in Kurdistan is the only professional society. The MSI panel reported, however, that the organization is viewed as partisan, and individuals in the governing parties bring in supporters regardless of whether they meet the membership rules. This lack of transparency, the panelists said, has led to rejection of membership applications from some young journalists, even though they are practicing professionals currently employed at functioning newspapers.

The nascent Iraqi nongovernmental organization (NGO) community does not yet include organizations strong enough to offer significant support to independent media or potent advocacy for freedom of expression, the MSI panelists said. Similarly, there remains a need for substantial organizations providing training for young and mid-career journalists. Some Iraqi NGO efforts also are plagued by weak management and allegations of favoritism, partisanship, or corruption.

Journalism faculties exist at Baghdad University and others in the country, including Sulaimaniya and Erbil

in the north, but they have not been significantly updated in terms of curriculum or equipment since the end of government control of the media, panelists said, and are struggling to meet the new needs of students preparing for a rapidly changing media sector.

Some international NGOs, among them IREX, the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, and the BBC World Service Trust, have offered training and development programs in Baghdad, in northern and southern Iraq, and outside the country. IREX, through the Iraqi Civil Society Program, has conducted content

***The nascent Iraqi nongovernmental organization (NGO) community does not yet include organizations strong enough to offer significant support to independent media or potent advocacy for freedom of expression, the MSI panelists said.***

development and media management training across the country. The BBC World Service Trust was funded by the British government to provide training and equipment to support the startup of Al-Mirbad's television and radio operations, including building a 100-meter transmitter. The need, however, far outstrips the number and duration of these programs, and security concerns limit expansion of programming, panelists said.

While printing and distribution are not controlled by the government, they also are run as businesses independent of the media companies themselves. This means that the services they provide are not fine-tuned to meet the specialized development needs of the media industry, the MSI panelists said. For example, Iraq has become freer in allowing the importation of printing equipment without restrictions or taxes. However, the work of these printers does not follow a scientific approach in dealing with the new technologies, the owners have limited experience, and they are not attuned to meeting publishers' needs.

Newspaper distribution services are limited. In Basrah, with a population of more than 2 million, there are only two offices for distributing newspapers, a panelist said. The panel noted that the mechanisms for distributing the newspapers from Baghdad to the other governorates are very deficient. This can be attributed to insecurity as well as the absence of expertise. In cases described by the panel, US soldiers distribute papers,

**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.

editions are photocopied for circulation, or an editor-in-chief takes care of the distribution task himself.

Internet and satellite reception are not controlled by the government. Transmission facilities are both privately and government owned, the latter including substantial infrastructure developed for the Iraqi Media Network by the US-led Coalition Provisional Authority. In Kurdistan, the regional government strictly controls broadcast transmissions as well as the transmitters themselves, panelists said. In one case cited

***While printing and distribution are not controlled by the government, they also are run as businesses independent of the media companies themselves. This means that the services they provide are not fine-tuned to meet the specialized development needs of the media industry, the MSI panelists said.***

by a participant, a broadcasting channel belonging to an Islamic party conducted a campaign to collect donations for the poor on air, but the governor's office called to stop the charitable fundraising. In another case, Radio Nawa finds that its hour-long afternoon broadcast of

a program during which citizens phone in to report administrative corruption is jammed frequently, causing listeners to miss parts. However, the government exerts no control over Internet access.

## MSI Participants

IREX, with the support of UNESCO, conducted three regional MSI panels in addition to the national assessment to produce a more detailed analysis of the media sector in Iraq. Key findings from the regional panels, held for northern and southern Iraq as well as Baghdad, are included in the report.

**Moderator: Dr. Jihad K. Daher**, media analyst, Baghdad

## National Panel

**Huda Jassim Almaieni**, chief Iraq correspondent, *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, Baghdad

**Ala Al Hadad**, editor, *Al Mustaqila* newspaper, Baghdad

**Mohammed Sahi Awad**, investigative reporter, *Ad-Dustoor* newspaper, Baghdad

**Abdul-Husayn Abdul-Razzaq**, chairman, Freedoms Committee, Iraqi Journalists Union, Baghdad

**Reham Majeed**, correspondent, Kurdistan Satellite TV, Basrah

**Haleem Farag Al Abiday**, chief editor, *Al Nada* newspaper, Basrah

**Sadaq Majeed Majed**, editor, *Al Fyha* newspaper, Basrah

**Hala Abdul-Hady Sultan**, broadcaster, Karbala FM Radio, Karbala

**Nizar Abdul Wahid**, editor, *Al-Sabbah* newspaper, Missan

**Nahla Ghazy Al Loza**, media specialist, Iraqi Civil Society Program; vice president, Journalists Union, Babel

**Ali Mahmood As-Sa'eedy**, member, *Al-Haq* newspaper of Human Rights Organization, Babel

**Hasan Zaer**, representative, Iraqi TV and Broadcasters Union, Babel

**Umar Salahud-Deen**, political editor, *Ash-Shura* newspaper, Mosul

**Imad An-Naqshabandy**, director, Radio Dar As-Salam, Mosul

**Faris Khaleel Mohammed Ali**, chief editor, *Al Hewar* magazine, Mosul

**Zena Al Ubaydy Kadhim**, editor, *Ishtar* newspaper, Najaf

## North Panel

**Karwan Mahdi Osman**, assistant to editor-in-chief, *Khwendny Lebral* newspaper, Erbil

**Khalid Ahmed Waly**, media department, Kurdistan Human Rights Institute, Erbil

**Faris Khalel Mohammed**, editor-in-chief, *Al Hewar* magazine, Mosul

**Yahya Omer Fatih**, editor-in-chief, *Al-Ufuq Al-Jadeed* newspaper, Erbil

**Dilzar Hasan**, correspondent, *Kurdistani Nuwe* newspaper, Erbil

**Luqman Sherwany**, Erbil bureau chief, Center of Youth Activities Development, Erbil

**Banaz Rasoo hamad Amin**, editor-in-chief, *Pega* magazine, Sulaimaniya

**Hemn Baqir Abdol**, editor, *Leven* magazine, Sulaimaniya

**Abdulrazzaq Ali Mahmood**, director of political programs, Kurdistan satellite TV, Erbil

**Bashar Hamed Keeky**, editor-in-chief, *Avro* newspaper, Dohuk

**Viyan Abdulbaqi Taqyaddin**, supervisor, TV & Radio of the Kurdish Conservative Party, Sulaimaniya

**Parwin Abdulaziz**, correspondent and editor, Kurdistan TV (local), Dohuk

**Baland Mustafa Omar**, correspondent, Radio Nawa, Erbil

**Kassim Hussain Kassim**, director, UTV, Dohuk

**Hedaya Rahim Karim**, public relations director, Kirkuk TV, Kirkuk

**Harish Yossif Ismael**, manager, Aveline advertising company, Erbil

## Baghdad Panel

**Mohammed Walled Al Saloon**, news editor, *Almashriq* newspaper, Baghdad

**Mohammed Sahi Awad**, reporter, *Ad-Dustoor* newspaper, Baghdad

**Kadhim Nazar Al Rikabi**, deputy director, Iraq Civil Society and Media Support Program, Baghdad

**Salaam Raheem Zanjel**, editor, *Alsiyasawalgarar* newspaper, Baghdad

**Raqad Mahsen Yasser**, editor of women's section, *Al-Sabbah* newspaper, Baghdad

**Kadhim Daaer Al Kuzae**, news editor, *Al Ariba* magazine, Baghdad

**Abid Al Hhussen Razaq**, editor, Al-Hurra TV; member of IFJ Freedom Committee, Baghdad

**Rasha Sahib Mehdi**, editor, *Al Sahafa* newspaper, Baghdad

**Mohammed Abid Alazez Al Ubaydi**, Iraqi Human Rights Organization, Baghdad

**Mayada Muki**, editor, *Dijla* magazine, Baghdad

**Abid Al Kareem Zalan**, presenter, Al Nahreen TV, Baghdad

**Dhamia Hhassen Al Rubaay**, correspondent, *Al Iraq Al Hur* radio, Baghdad

**Humza Ali Al Jazery**, advertising executive, Al Hwar Company, Baghdad

**Amair Abid Aljaleil**, radio director, Baghdad Radio, Baghdad

**Ahmid Abid Almajeed**, editor-in-chief, *Azzaman* newspaper, Baghdad

**Sallah Taieh**, editor, National Iraqi News Agency, Baghdad

## South Panel

**Anwar Mohammed Ridha Al Jabur**, director, Basrah Radio, Basrah

**Yasir Jasim Qasim**, program producer, Basrah Radio, Basrah

**Faris Jameel Jassim**, director, Al-Mirbad TV, Basrah

**Ahmed Zaidan**, representative, Inter SOS human-rights organization, Basrah

**Saad Nadum Jassim**, director, Al-Mirbad Radio, Basrah

**Zaynab Jassim Kassim**, program editor, Al-Mirbad Radio, Basrah

**Ro'ya Mahmood Ghalib**, editor, *Al-Sabbah* newspaper, Basrah

**Kadhim Hassan Saed**, editor, Shnasheel Radio, Basrah

**Majid Mahmood Al Brekan**, correspondent, Basrah TV, Basrah

**Edward George Seral**, director, Al-Fayhaa TV, Basrah

**Salih Badir**, editor, *Sumer* newspaper, Nasiriyah

**Abdul Hussein Dawood Shenawa**, correspondent, *Sumer* newspaper, Nasiriyah

**Ahmed Kareem Ahmad**, correspondent, Al Iraqiya TV, Missan

**Nazar Abdul Wahid**, editor, *Al-Sabbah* newspaper, Missan

**Faris Hamza**, correspondent, Al Iraqiya TV, Samawa

**Arif Shaheed**, correspondent, Al Iraqiya TV, Samawa

# IRAQ AT A GLANCE

## GENERAL

- **Population:** 27.1 million (World Bank, 2004)
- **Capital city:** Baghdad
- **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Arab 75-80%, Kurd 15-20%, other 5% ([www.nationsencyclopedia.com](http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com), 2006)
- **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 97% (60-65% Shi'a, 32-32% Sunni), 3% Christian and other ([www.nationsencyclopedia.com](http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com), 2006)
- **Languages (% of population):** Arabic 79%, Kurdish (official in Kurdish regions), Assyrian, Mandaean, Turkomans, Armenian ([www.nationsencyclopedia.com](http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com), 2006)
- **GDP:** \$25.5 billion (2004 est., World Bank)
- **GNI per capita:** \$942 (2004 est., World Bank)
- **Literacy rate:** 60% of population age 15 and above (World Bank)
- **President or top authority:** Iraqi Transitional Government President Jalal Talabani
- **Next scheduled elections:** N/A

## MEDIA SURVEYS IRAQ, 2006

90% of households (hh) have one television set, half of them more

98% of hh have a radio

20% of hh have cable television

75% of hh have VCRs (video recorders)

41% of hh have a home computer; 23% of hh have Internet access at home

Television sets are turned on for an average of 13 hours each day

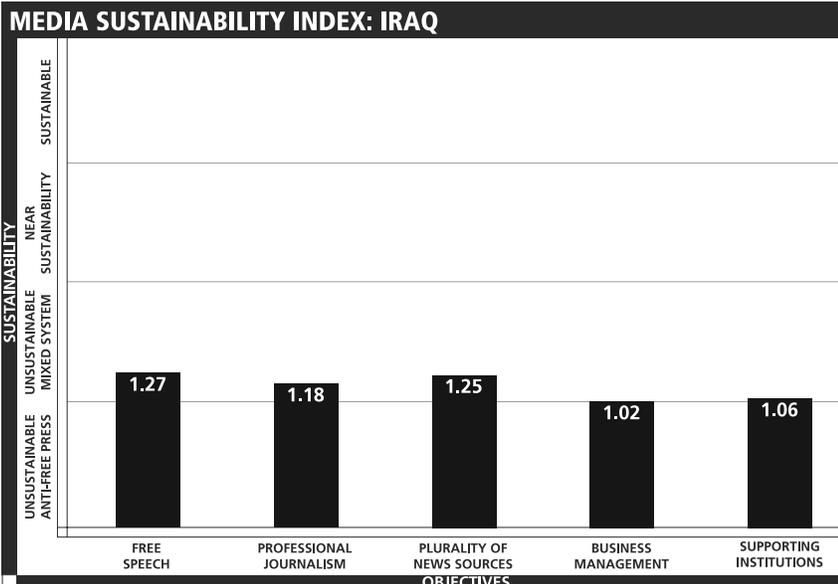
The average Iraqi spends six hours (20%), four hours (51%), three hours (29%) a day in front of a television set

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- **Total number of print publications:** 70
- Number of daily (quality) newspapers: five (circulation: *Al-Sabbah* about 50,000, *Azzaman* about 15,000)
- Weeklies: four
- Monthlies: 0

- **Radio stations:** 24 (including IMN, Dija/Baghdad, Nawa/Sulaimaniya, Mirbad/Basra)
- **Television stations:** 23
- **Iraq mobile telephony:** Three companies (Iraqna, Atheer, and Asia) provide for 3.5 million mobile subscriptions in March 2005, (i.e., mobile penetration is 12.5 percent of the population, which is unprecedented in the MENA countries). (MTC Group-sponsored survey, quoted in *Daily Start*, Beirut, Feb. 16, 2006)

Sources: NCMC, Iraqna, IMN



OVERALL, THE PANEL AGREED THAT KUWAIT REPRESENTED A RELATIVELY ADVANCED MODEL OF MEDIA FREEDOM IN THE REGION, DELIVERING THE SECTOR AN OVERALL SCORE OF 2.34, WITH ALL OBJECTIVES RATED AS NEARING SUSTAINABILITY EXCEPT THE SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS. THE STRONGEST ELEMENT IS THE PLURALITY OF MEDIA SOURCES, THE PANEL SAID.



**Y**ears of inaction and dispute over revising Kuwait's print and publications law, in place since before the country's independence in 1961, ended with the issuance of a new version in March 2006. Executive and legislative authorities had been unable to reach agreement on the reform during the terms of four consecutive information ministers, and when the new legislation finally emerged, the media sector was divided in its evaluation.

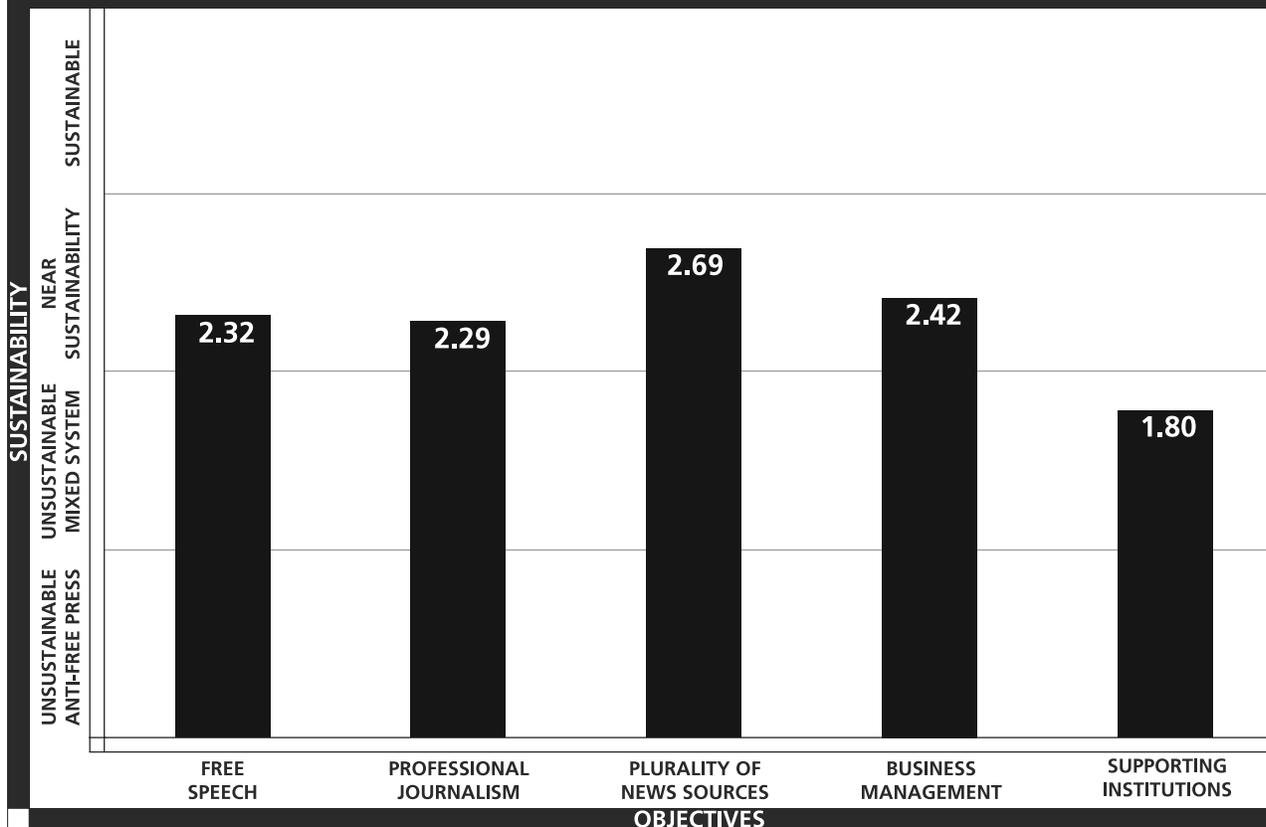
Some participants in Kuwait's Media Sustainability Index (MSI) panel saw the new law as a step toward easing the monopoly held by existing daily newspapers. There are five published in Arabic and two in English, but no new licenses were issued for nearly three decades. Other panelists, however, considered certain articles of the new law as restricting freedom of the press.

The reformed press law comes in the context of other political change in Kuwait. Former Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Jabir Al Sabah became the emir in January, after the death of the long-time emir and the unprecedented parliamentary removal of the crown prince on health grounds. The country's first female cabinet minister was appointed in 2005, a month after women were granted full political rights. They were to vote and run as candidates for the first time in parliamentary elections scheduled for mid-2006.

Overall, the panel agreed that Kuwait represented a relatively advanced model of media freedom in the region, delivering the sector an overall score of 2.30, with all objectives rated as nearing sustainability except the supporting institutions. The strongest element is the plurality of media sources, the panel said.

Nonetheless, panelists expressed some reservations about the media's ability to play its roles in ensuring government accountability and providing a forum for debate. For example, they said, although the government finally has granted licenses to some private television and radio stations, the licensing is still conditional and the news content of the stations is limited.

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: KUWAIT



**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.

The MSI panel expressed varied opinions regarding the professionalism of journalists. Some said most journalists tend to be accurate and their reports well-sourced, and that media provide relatively probing coverage of some important issues. Others expressed the concern that in order to break the news, some journalists do not double-check their information and ensure that all sides of the story have been obtained.

The participants also concluded that access to news and information is not available equally to all media outlets and that there are some differences in the ways in which events are covered that reflect the viewpoints of different media outlets. The participants agreed that the advertising market is growing due to the increase in the number of advertising agencies, although it is still somewhat limited. The participants also pointed out that there is only one journalists' society in Kuwait, and this indicates a shortage in the supporting institutions that protect journalists' rights and provide professional training programs.

**OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH**

**Kuwait Objective Score: 2.32 / 4.00**

The MSI panel agreed that there is a significant margin for press freedom in Kuwait and that passing the new print and publications legislation in March 2006 was a sustainable achievement. However, they disagreed in their evaluation regarding the positive and negative aspects of the new legislation.

The Kuwaiti Constitution guarantees freedom of speech and scientific research (Article 36), as well as freedom of the press, publishing, and printing (Article 37). However, the Constitution restricts such freedoms by requiring that they be exercised in accordance with conditions and manners specified by the law. Article 1 of the print and publications law of 1961 guarantees the freedom of the press, printing, and publishing in accordance with the law. There is no difference in the new press law, where Article 1 guarantees freedom of the press as well as freedom of printing and publishing, still within the limitations of the law.

The new law specifies imprisonment of up to one year and fines up to about \$70,000 in cases of blasphemy relating to God, the Prophet, certain other religious figures, and the "basis of the Islamic faith." The fines for cases of insults to the emir were raised to up to \$70,000, but the possibility of prison terms was removed. Reporting that could harm Kuwait's political or economic standing, or could be viewed as morally offensive, also is prohibited, and calling for

the regime's overthrow is punishable by imprisonment. A key element of the new law prevents detention of journalists without a court ruling.

The MSI panel disagreed on the merits of these provisions. Lawyer Nahez Al Anzy said the new legislation could be considered more detailed and therefore less open to

***Panelist Ahmed Al Dayeen, a writer and publisher, said, "Sometimes the security doesn't allow the photographers to take their pictures, or they just allow them to take pictures from certain places."***

subjective interpretation in that it specifies that any criticism about the emir, God, and certain other religious figures is punishable under the penal code. However, the writer Ahmed Al Dayeen considered that provision dangerous, noting that violations by journalists would be punished not under the print and publication law but through the penal code, which provides harsher penalties.

**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.

To date, imprisonment of journalists has generated little outcry. A regular columnist for the Arabic daily *Al Sayassah*, Ahmed Al Baghdadi, was sentenced to a month in jail in 1999 for blasphemy when he wrote an article on the Prophet Muhammad, but he received limited support from fellow media professionals. He eventually apologized and was pardoned by the emir and freed after two weeks. In January 2005,

***Abdel Mohsen Jomaa said that Kuwait lacks a higher council on media and there is no interest in developing legislation to form one. And, despite several attempts, there is no journalists' syndicate but only the lone society.***

Adel Aidan—a correspondent for the pan-Arabic TV news channel, Al Arabiya—was detained, along with his news sources, after the station broadcast a report on what were said to be clashes between government forces and militants. The

correspondent was released after being held for four days on charges of spreading false reports about the security situation that could harm the country. Although there was little reaction among the public, there was an outcry in media circles.

Crimes against journalists are rare, panelists said. However, there have been some instances when journalists, and especially photographers, have been denied access and harassed when trying to report in places not permitted by security when public officials are involved. Panelist Ahmed Al Dayeen, a writer and publisher, said, "Sometimes the security doesn't allow the photographers to take their pictures, or they just allow them to take pictures from certain places."

The print and publications law contains provisions that limit freedom of expression by giving the government the upper hand in granting media-outlet licenses, which must be approved by the minister of information, MSI panelists said. Moreover, the license process lacks transparency and is still limited and affected by political and economic considerations, they said.

However, the new law does specify that within 90 days of an application, the Ministry of Information must either issue the license or provide an explanation of why it is refusing to do so. The new statute gives those who are denied license the right to appeal to a court.

The panel was concerned about another provision in the new press law which stipulates that for issuing a new daily newspaper, the new company needs \$850,000 in

capital and a \$340,000 deposit, which is not required for any other sector. The last newspaper license was issued to *Al Anbaa'* in 1976. There are reportedly dozens of applicants waiting to ask to open newspapers.

The new law also bars the cancellation of media-outlet licenses without a court order. Licenses can be suspended for a maximum of two weeks during an investigation, but also not without a court order.

Another issue noted by the MSI panel was the law that organizes the establishing of shareholding companies and their listing on the stock exchange. It distinguishes between media companies and other companies, requiring a company applying for a media license to have been on the stock exchange for three to five years. Abdel Mohsen Jomaa, a political journalist at the daily *Al-Qabas* newspaper, said, "The media company should be different from the other companies because this would contradict with competitiveness."

A different type of license is needed for international media outlets operating bureaus in Kuwait. These offices are supervised by the Ministry of Information. However, some of these bureaus, including the US-backed Al Hurra, own satellite dishes through which they report their news directly without consulting with the Ministry of Information. Their number is limited, and they pay a fee in return for the rights to transmit news directly.

The MSI panelists were critical about the lack of other mechanisms to regulate the press. For example, they noted, the statutes of the Kuwaiti Journalists Society—the only licensed public society for journalists—do not define "journalist," and, in fact, the criteria for the society membership allow anyone to become a member. Moreover, there is no press code of ethical conduct. Abdel Mohsen Jomaa said that Kuwait lacks a higher council on media and there is no interest in developing legislation to form one. And, despite several attempts, there is no journalists' syndicate but only the lone society.

State-owned media do not receive any preferential legal treatment, but in practice, government institutions give them better access to information, panelists said. For example, the Kuwaiti cabinet holds meetings every week, and only the state television and news agency are allowed to cover them. However, Waleed Al Saree', director of the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), said the agency does not get the full cooperation of some officials when it does not give them the space they want or deals with the news in a professional, objective way.

For the state-owned media, policies and directions of coverage are determined by the minister of information. However, the government generally does not interfere in the naming of managers of media institutions, the MSI panel said.

Kuwait does not have licensed political parties. Instead, political “trends” are sponsored by private newspapers according to the political orientation and economic interests of each publication. For example, *Al-Qabas* newspaper corresponds with the liberals.

The government does not restrict access to international news. Media are available to everyone, and the Internet is available at a reasonable price. There have been efforts by some more conservative Islamic leaders to get legislation covering the content of radio broadcasting and use of the Internet, although they have not yet succeeded. Some Internet providers have voluntarily blocked access to or censored some sites considered to be immoral and/or politically sensitive, MSI panelists said.

The Kuwaiti government does not supervise media training, admissions, or curricula at the one department of mass communication at the state university.

**OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM**

**Kuwait Objective Score: 2.29 / 4.00**

The MSI panel found it difficult to reach a consensus on the issue of fair and objective reporting. Some members said the majority of journalists tend to be accurate and well-sourced, while others expressed concern that journalists hurrying to break news write information that may be inaccurate or unbalanced.

Panelist Ali Al Rashid, a Kuwaiti parliament member, contended that most journalists need to become more professional and responsible. But journalist Abdel Mohsen Jomaa said the issue of professionalism is relative and depends on the media outlet and the journalist. Each newspaper has its own publishing standards, he said, and in some cases journalists fall victim to sources that give them false information for private reasons or officials who alter the information for personal gain.

Despite several attempts, Kuwait has not adopted a press code of conduct which defines a consensus on ethical standards that journalists need to follow. Adnan Al Rashid, deputy editor-in-chief of *Al-Anbaa'* newspaper, sees such a code as useless because in practice it is difficult to force journalists to respect it. Parliament member Ali Al Rashid said there are cases in

which journalists accept bribes in the form of gifts to shape their coverage in a certain way.

The wage levels for journalists are relatively low, and not enough to discourage corruption, panel members said. The wage level for journalists in the state-controlled media outlets is considered more reasonable at an average of \$1,700 monthly with job security from their status as employees in the state apparatus. But the typical monthly salary for

***Parliament member Ali Al Rashid said there are cases in which journalists accept bribes in the form of gifts to shape their coverage in a certain way.***

other journalists is about \$1,200 per month, and for freelancers \$750 to \$1,350. Moreover, these journalists do not have job security, as they can be fired at any time. Many are part-timers working night shifts.

The low salaries and insecurity mean that careers in journalism do not attract many Kuwaitis, the panelists said. Most journalists are Arabs from other countries, or Bidoon, as longtime residents of Kuwait who do not have nationality are known. The Kuwaiti graduates of the mass communication department at the university tend to choose careers other than journalism.

**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).

The Kuwaiti media generally are more hard-hitting in their reporting on political and government issues than elsewhere in the region, panelists said. Investigative reporting is done, though it is more prevalent in the newspapers than at television stations. Panelists gave as an example an issue that has probed the government's role in the passage of the legislation allowing women to vote. There is some freedom to publish criticism of government policy, but areas concerning state security and religious extremism are extremely sensitive. In February 2005, then-Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Jabir Al Sabah advised that newspapers that published information on the government's fight against religious extremists or the country's security situation could be suspended or shut down, according to international media monitors including the Committee to Protect Journalists and the Index on Censorship.

**Abdul Mohsen Jomaa said: "Kuwait TV doesn't have the ability to produce entertainment programs, and that's why it concentrates on the news programs."**

Generally, journalists do practice a degree of self-censorship when it comes to these sensitive issues and other "red lines" that every journalist is aware of and ready to deal

with. Although there may be some differences at each media outlet, these red lines generally concern topics such as reporting about the royal families of the Gulf region.

However, some journalists pursue specialties in covering issues such as women's rights, unemployment, and the economy. Newspapers published in English, which are bought by foreign workers in Kuwait, pay more attention to minority issues than those published in Arabic, the panel said.

News events are not equally accessible to all journalists. The coverage of the weekly cabinet meetings is granted to public television and KUNA. Other journalists are forced to gather the information from other sources, which could be inaccurate, panel members noted. Parliament member Ali Al Rashid said some members of the cabinet and of parliament release information based on their personal relationships with journalists and the political allegiances of the newspapers. Sometimes journalists are not allowed to cover certain topics that are considered confidential, such as the nation's oil reserves.

The panel was concerned about the balance of entertainment and news on broadcast stations. The

news programs have become more numerous, perhaps 70 percent of the schedule, than entertainment programs, the panelists said, and this leads viewers to switch from Kuwait TV to Pan-Arab and international channels. Abdul Mohsen Jomaa said: "Kuwait TV doesn't have the ability to produce entertainment programs, and that's why it concentrates on the news programs."

Television stations are where up-to-date equipment and adequate facilities for production may be lacking, while the printed media have access to decent-quality equipment, MSI panelists said.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

**Kuwait Objective Score: 2.69 / 4.00**

Kuwait is such a small country that media are equally accessible for all. Kuwaitis can get all publications and follow all channels, Arabic or foreign, without any restrictions. There are seven private daily newspapers, with a total readership of about 120,000 per day. Five are in Arabic—*Al-Rai al-Aam*, with the highest circulation, and *Al-Watan*, *Al-Anba*, *Al-Qabas*, and *Al-Siyassah*—and two are in English, *The Kuwait Times* and *The Arab Times*. There is no state-owned newspaper.

### 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.

There also are some weeklies, most of which take a popular approach to raise circulation in order to make up for their absence in the market during the week, panelists said.

The state owns a radio and television network and also broadcasts satellite television. There is one private satellite station, Al-Rai TV, launched in October 2005. It is primarily an entertainment channel but has a daily newscast and does some political and social programming, with comparatively more latitude to cover controversial issues than the state broadcast network. There also is one private radio station, Marina FM, which offers music and entertainment. Both private broadcasters are local and represent the economic and commercial interests of the private companies that own them.

There are no restrictions regarding connecting to the Internet, although some local providers censor sites that might be seen as immoral, an approach that panel members said is widely accepted among the public. There are 75,000 Internet users, and service is available at a reasonable price.

The state broadcaster represents the official viewpoint of the government and does not present views from the opposition except in a limited way, panelists said, while other viewpoints are better represented in the newspapers. Private print and broadcast outlets produce their own news programming, and it differs from the public media outlets in the degree of freedom available and the presentation style. Mohamed Al Masry of Kuwait Television said, "Private TV has the ability and the freedom to produce more professional programs than the government TV."

There is one official news agency, KUNA, which has an unrestricted free website. KUNA represents the official viewpoint regarding local and international news. It follows events through its 33 bureaus abroad in both Arab and foreign countries. Waleed Al Saree', editorial director at KUNA, said that in order to avoid any discrimination in transmitting its news to different media outlets, KUNA makes its services available online for everyone for free. However, he said that some media outlets do not indicate that KUNA is the source of their information.

The government does not restrict the right of its citizens to access foreign information through printed outlets, radio stations, and television stations. However, the access and circulation of these foreign media outlets are organized by the print and publications law. Article 7 stipulates that "publications coming

from outside of Kuwait may not be circulated before clearance by the respective ministry, and clearance may not be given if these publications contain any material not deemed suitable for circulation by the relevant articles in section three of this law."

The private media in Kuwait have fairly transparent media ownership, giving consumers a base for judging the objectivity of the news. However, independent media owners, as business leaders, try to stir the economic issues in their favor and are very self-serving in reporting on these themes, including, for example, the course of the stock exchange, the MSI panelists said. "Any news that would have a bad influence on the owners of the private media, they will not publish it," said lawyer Nahez Al Anzy.

Social issues are represented in the media, though many journalists prefer not to cover them because of their sensitivity. Whether to cover issues such as the

Bidoon—the more than 100,000 stateless people who have lived in Kuwait for generations but are not citizens due to a nationality test that requires proof of residence prior to 1920—is a matter to be decided by the editor-in-chief of the media institution, the panel concluded.

The coverage of minority issues, such as the situation of foreign workers, is not popular. Mona Al Fazei, a journalist at *The Kuwait Times*, said she was harassed by Kuwaitis who tried to stop her from writing because she covered cases involving minorities, such as when a teacher from another Arab country working in Kuwait was beaten by a Kuwaiti citizen. There are some minority-language newspapers, such as one in Urdu, but they are not very popular although they are free, panel members said.

***However, independent media owners, as business leaders, try to stir the economic issues in their favor and are very self-serving in reporting on these themes, including, for example, the course of the stock exchange, the MSI panelists said. "Any news that would have a bad influence on the owners of the private media, they will not publish it," said lawyer Nahez Al Anzy.***

**OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT**

**Kuwait Objective Score: 2.42 / 4.00**

The MSI panel agreed that the advertising market is growing and the number of advertising companies is increasing, but nevertheless the volume of its business is still small. Panelist Abdel Hamid Al Zaydi,

*Panelist Abdel Hamid Al Zaydi, the manager of Circle Advertising Company, said that the number of advertising companies has reached 1,000, but that they need regulations in order to become effective, well-managed businesses.*

the manager of Circle Advertising Company, said that the number of advertising companies has reached 1,000, but that they need regulations in order to become effective, well-managed businesses.

The International Advertising Association points to the fact that advertising expenditure in the Gulf is growing to exceed \$2 billion dollars. The share that goes to the Kuwaiti market is about 10 percent. The Pan Arab Research Center (PARC) indicates in its statistics that

**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.

advertising expenditure in Kuwait has increased to \$204.25 million in the past year. However, some panelists doubted the accuracy of the advertising expenditure information in the region.

In a recent interview, Mike Gilam, secretary general of the Advertisers' Union for the Gulf region, urged advertisers to boycott publications that were not under the supervision of verification agencies. The Advertisers' Union, based in Dubai and including 20 major advertising companies from the region, aims at spreading transparency, efficiency, and professionalism so that advertisers have accurate information about media.

The private daily newspapers receive about \$140,000 in subsidies annually, half of which is in the form of subscriptions for ministries and government institutions. This amount is considered trivial when compared with the budget of the newspapers and their other revenue sources, such as funding from their investors and advertising revenue. Government subsidies are available to all newspapers regardless of their viewpoints.

The media outlets differ in terms of their ability to attract advertisers and the impact of the advertising business on the editorial line, content, and type of news, the placing, and the size, the panelists said. Journalist Mona Al Fazei said that economic news can be directed according to the interests of advertisers when the managers of the newspapers do not want to publish news that could adversely affect their major advertisers.

Kuwait is considered technologically advanced in the field of advertising. Kuwaiti ad agencies use modern equipment and compete with international agencies, which is beneficial in terms of enhancing revenues and market opportunities, panel members said.

Private media outlets do not announce their advertising revenue, but it was not considered to represent an unreasonable portion of the content by panelists. Advertising is limited in the state media.

Market research is used by some media companies to formulate strategy and to tailor their publications. Some broadcast ratings and circulation figures produced by independent companies and published in free bulletins are accessible to advertisers and the public.

**OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS**

**Kuwait Objective Score: 1.80 / 4.00**

The MSI panel agreed that there is a deficiency in organizations to represent broadcasters and journalists, protect their rights, and provide professional training.

The sole professional association, the Kuwaiti Journalists' Society, was founded in 1964. It has 1,921 members, 1,386 of them Kuwaitis and 535 non-Kuwaitis, who represent 133 different publications. This association plays a role in organizing training programs and courses for broadcasters in addition to participating in international media conferences. The society requires would-be members to submit a recommendation letter from the home publication, four writing samples, and identification papers.

There have been some attempts, including in 2006, to create a journalists' union, but they failed in getting a license from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor on the grounds that it duplicated an existing organization and therefore contradicted the law. Despite that, the unlicensed Journalists and Correspondents Union continues activities, not paying attention to these laws.

There are no associations to represent the interests of private print or broadcast media owners, and the panel stressed the need for more professional and trade associations.

A number of nongovernmental organizations in Kuwait, such as human-rights monitors, could support the media, but so far their role has been limited. The government has taken a generally dim view of these groups'

activities, saying that circulating such information harms national security, according to panelists.

The panel expressed concern that there are not enough programs to evaluate the state of journalism or to encourage youth to choose a career in journalism. Many students who study journalism do not want to work in the small Kuwaiti media industry because of the low pay, or they cannot find any of the limited jobs available. Conversely, some editors, particularly in the state media, do not think that the young journalists are well-trained.

Waleed Al Saree' said KUNA provides training programs for its employees and outside journalists as well. The Ministry of Higher Education plays a role in sending students, including those studying journalism, abroad for higher education. A few media outlets

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give some in-house training or pay for employees to go to programs elsewhere.

There is one government-owned publishing house in Kuwait, and the private newspapers print on their own presses. The private publishing houses are free to set prices and print what they want, but they are partially responsible for the content of published material if it is against the law. Article 6 of the new publication law states that printing, publishing, and circulation are permissible for any publication that is not periodical—that is, not a regularly published newspaper—on the condition that the name of the printer, publisher, author, and printing date must be mentioned on the first or the last page of the publication. The printer must send one copy to the respective ministry and one copy to the Kuwait National Library before circulation in accordance with the law.

Satellite television and the Internet are from the private sector and are not subsidized by the government. Nevertheless, satellite stations are supervised by the Ministry of Information, but there is no prior censorship of broadcast programs before

**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.

they are aired. There are two Internet providers, and they voluntarily censor or block sites that might be considered morally questionable or having the potential to incite violence, hatred, or public disorder. These two Internet providers provide Internet services at reasonable prices.

## **MSI Participants**

**Ali Al Rashid**, Kuwaiti Member of Parliament

**Nahez Al Anzy**, lawyer

**Dr. Ayed Al Manaa'**, consultant, Kuwaiti Journalists' Society

**Waleed Al Saree'**, editorial director, Kuwait News Agency

**Abdel Mohsen Jomaa**, political journalist, *Al-Qabas* daily newspaper

**Ahmed Al Dayeen**, writer and publisher

**Abel Hamid Al Zaydi**, CEO and director, Circle Advertising Company

**Mona Al Fazei**, journalist, *The Kuwait Times* newspaper

**Fahd Seyah**, director, Local Journalism Department, Ministry of Information

**Mohamed Al Masry**, Kuwait Television

**Tareq Al Shamri**, director, Gulf Association for Journalism and Media Freedom

## **Moderator**

**Shoaa' Al Qaty**, editorial secretary, Kuwait News Agency

# KUWAIT AT A GLANCE

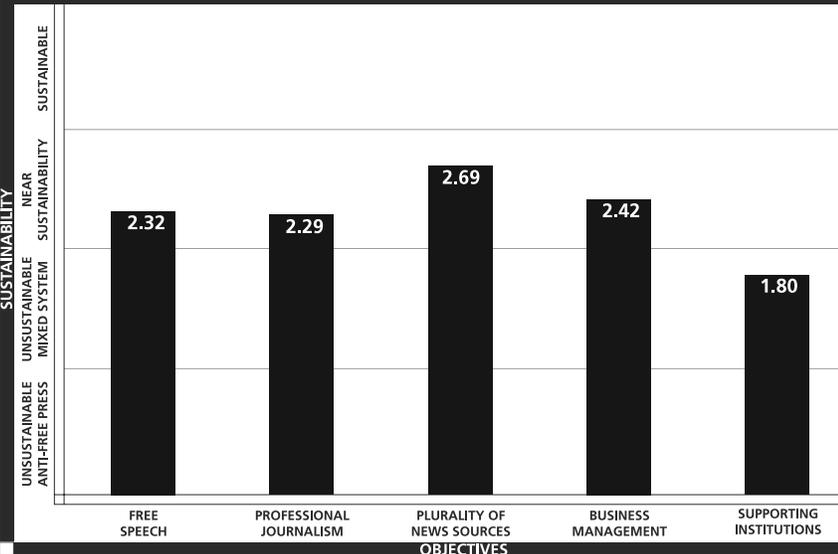
## GENERAL

- **Population:** 2.5 million (2004 est., World Bank)
- **Capital city:** Kuwait City
- **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Kuwaiti 45%, other Arab 35%, South Asian 9%, Iranian 4%, other 7% (www.nationsencyclopedia.com, 2006)
- **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 71% (Sunni 65%, Shi'a 35%), Christian, Hindu, Parsi, and other 15% (www.nationsencyclopedia.com, 2006)
- **Languages (% of population):** Arabic (official), English widely spoken (www.nationsencyclopedia.com, 2006)
- **GDP (purchasing power parity):** \$41.7 billion (2003 est., World Bank)
- **GDP per capita (purchasing power parity):** \$17,970 (2003 est., World Bank)
- **Literacy Rate (% of population):** male 84.7%, female 81% (2004 est., UNICEF)
- **President or top authority:** Amir Jabir Al Ahmad Al Jabir Al Sabah (December 31, 1977)
- **Next scheduled elections:** Parliamentary 2007, in which women will participate for the first time

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- **Number of print outlets:** Kuwait has five Arabic newspapers and two English-language newspapers, in addition to some weekly private newspapers and 70–75 magazines that deal with a variety of topics.
- **Number of readers:** Approx. 120,000 (industry estimate)
- **Number of media outlets:** The state owns a number of television and radio stations that fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Information. There is one private television station (Al-Rai TV), primarily an entertainment station with the freedom to cover controversial topics, compared with the state-owned television station. There is one private (music) radio station (Marina FM).
- **News agencies:** Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), which has an independent budget and 33 bureaus and correspondents outside of Kuwait.
- **Number of Internet users:** 600,000 in Sept. 2005 (www.internetworldstats.com)
- **Advertising expenditure:** \$204.25 million in 2005 (Pan Arab Research Center)

**MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: KUWAIT**



MSI PANELISTS EXPRESSED HOPE FOR BROADER MEDIA FREEDOMS IN THE FUTURE. THEY SAID INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPERS IN OMAN HAVE GRADUALLY INCREASED THEIR RELATIVELY SMALL MARGIN OF FREEDOM TO ASSESS THE PERFORMANCE OF GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS. BUT THEY ALSO EMPHASIZED THE HIGH DEGREE OF SELF-CENSORSHIP AMONG JOURNALISTS WHO WOULD NOT DARE SPEAK OUT ABOUT CORRUPTION CASES AND POLITICALLY SENSITIVE ISSUES.

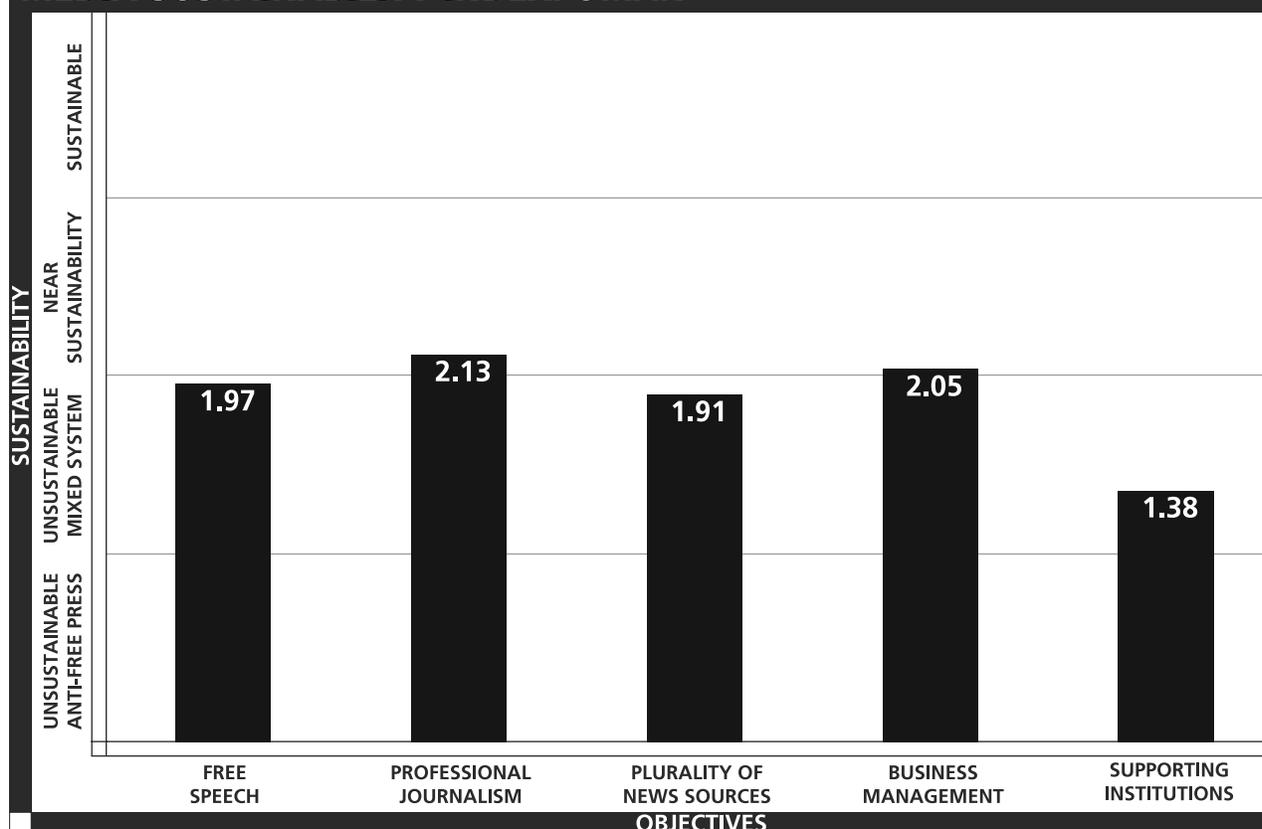


**A**s the desert monarchy of Oman, ruled by Sultan Qaboos Al Bu Sa'id since 1970, moved quietly through a modest series of economic and political reforms in recent years, the media sector remained very much constrained by the government, the society, and sometimes media owners and editors themselves. Oman's 1984 press law, one of the most stringent in the Arab world, was available to suppress anti-government views and criticism of officials. However, this sector began to change, too, during 2004 and 2005, when restrictions on establishing private media were eased.

A few reported cases of press freedom violations surfaced in 2005. In July, poet and journalist Abdallah Al Ryami was detained for alleging human-rights violations in Oman and accused of criticizing the regime in a televised debate. Also in July, former parliamentarian Taybah Al Ma'wali received an 18-month jail sentence for violating the Telecommunication Act and defaming a public official in messages on her cellular phone. In November, the government prevented the media from giving publication space or airtime to Abdallah Al Ryami and the writer Mohammed Al Harthi, who also had publicly expressed negative views of the regime's commitment to democracy. But journalists in Oman said there were other press freedom violations that remain unreported, and such steps by the state foster a high degree of self-censorship in the media community despite the expressed sentiments of Sultan Qaboos for democratic reforms.

The Media Sustainability Index (MSI) panelists noted positive trends as well, however. Among them were the granting of licenses in October 2005 to establish a private television station and three private radio stations. A year earlier, the government had issued the enabling Law on Private Radio and Television Companies. For many journalists, this was considered partial liberation of broadcast from strict state control, but they also noted that the media, and print in particular, remained constrained by the press law. Another positive development was the formation of the Omani Journalists Association, which was launched officially in early 2006.

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: OMAN



**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.

MSI panelists expressed hope for broader media freedoms in the future. They said independent newspapers in Oman have gradually increased their relatively small margin of freedom to assess the performance of government officials. But they also emphasized the high degree of self-censorship among journalists who would not dare speak out about corruption cases and politically sensitive issues.

Oman’s private media continued to flourish as businesses in 2005. The daily newspapers have their own printing plants and publishing houses and use increasingly creative ideas to compete with one another, resulting in a vibrant market with more options offered to readers. International and regional satellite television and radio remained freely accessible by the public, while Internet access was filtered by the state-owned Internet Service Provider, which blocks sites considered to be socially inappropriate or politically sensitive.

The MSI panel’s assessment of Oman’s media sector gave an overall score of 1.89, with weakness in supporting institutions and relative strength in professional journalism.

**OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH**

**Oman Objective Score: 1.97 / 4.00**

Oman’s Constitution allows freedom of opinion and expression as long as it remains “within the limits of the law”—and the 1984 Press and Publication Law defined many limitations as well as giving authorities the right to censor all domestic and imported publications. This has resulted in self-censorship by journalists and media owners fearful of violating any of the prohibitions.

Radio and television was under government control and used to convey officially approved views only until, under a law adopted in 2004, a private television station and three private radio stations were given licenses in 2005. Establishing a newspaper or magazine in Oman is an extremely difficult task involving bureaucracy and substantial capital, limiting ownership to powerful, wealthy investors. Only six dailies have licenses to operate, of which four are privately owned.

Libel is considered a major criminal offense and is punishable by jail and fines. Few crimes are committed against journalists, and authorities usually deal with them swiftly. Information generally is widely available, but print media publications arriving from abroad remain strictly censored. Internet access is guarded

and filtered through a state-controlled gateway. Journalists are given information more openly if they are affiliated with or in favor of the government. Entry into journalism requires licensing, and the licenses can be revoked for press law violations.

MSI panelists agreed that the Constitution does to a certain degree allow free speech. Direct criticism of the Sultan is strictly prohibited, but, according to the panelists, the press is allowed to print “constructive” criticism of government officials and policies. In practice, however, there is no independent body that judges whether an article has violated the press law, which is vaguely worded and open to differing interpretations. Panelist Abdullah Al Kindi, a journalism instructor at Sultan Qaboos University, said there have been no opportunities to probe the limits of press freedom. “Unfortunately, there is not a single case so far that we can use to measure the level of press freedom in Oman.... For more than 35 years, the media has continued to evolve, and we remain in the learning process,” he said.

The government is not necessarily fully responsible for the absence of probing assessments in the media

**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.

because often it is owners and managers who prevent journalists from pursuing investigative stories that may raise sensitive issues. "Journalists say that they tested their limits on what they can report and decided to pursue sensitive stories, but they are stopped by their direct management," Abdullah Al Kindi said. Rafia Al Talei, editor-in-chief of the privately owned *Al-Mara* magazine, which publishes in Arabic and English, said, "In reality, there is no law in Oman to protect press freedom. On the contrary, the freedom of expression is almost dead, not only absent." Omani society is conservative and accepts change very slowly; therefore, panelists said, there should be a gradual process to raise awareness of the importance of free speech. "It cannot happen overnight," explained Abdullah Al Kindi.

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All broadcast media in Oman have been owned by the state, including Oman TV and Radio Oman, which are both operated by the Ministry of Information. However, in October 2005, the government issued one license to an Omani company to establish a private television station and a radio station. It

also issued licenses to another company to establish two radio stations. According to a 2004 law regulating private broadcast media, only corporations owned by nationals are allowed to apply for licenses. Beyond that, there are a number of conditions to be met by the owners, including allowing the authorities to close down the enterprise. All owners of broadcast media must agree to have the stringent Press and Publication Law applied to their staff and the outlet's journalistic work. Rafia Al Talei said these conditions set the stage for making private broadcast media an electronic version of the material published in the heavily self-censored private print media. Panelist Hamoud Al Touqi, editor-in-chief of the *Al-Waha* monthly magazine, said the 2004 law had conditions that are almost impossible to meet. He said the gravest danger could be the sudden unanticipated closure of the whole station. "If and when the government feels

endangered by a private channel, it could easily close it down using the power of this law," Hamoud Al Touqi said. Nevertheless, panelists believe the possibility of private electronic media represents a positive step simply by ending the 35-year government monopoly on broadcasting.

Only wealthy investors or large corporations can afford to start private media outlets. To establish a daily newspaper, for example, the required capital is approximately \$1.25 million, while weekly periodicals require about \$750,000 and monthlies \$390,000. This leaves little opportunity for small or medium-size investors to establish their own stations.

Taxes imposed on media institutions are not as stringent as in other industries. However, based on the 2004 law regulating broadcast media, the government would receive a commission of up to 10 percent from advertising revenues. On the positive side, panelists said there were no specific incidents that they are aware of in which the government declined to evaluate an application to establish a private media outlet merely for political reasons.

Panelists said they are not aware of crimes committed against journalist that were ignored by the authorities. But Rafia Al Talei noted that there are nonviolent offenses committed against journalists, including cases where they were sacked, had their licenses withdrawn, had their rank or salaries lowered, or were threatened by phone. "There are many ways of intimidation, and journalists are aware of possible consequences of their writings," she said. Some harassment cases might be carried out by powerful individuals who may influence law enforcement to escape the consequences, she said.

Panelists did not agree fully on whether there is preferential legal treatment for public officials in media cases. But they did agree that many lawsuits in the past years were triggered by the authorities. Rafia Al Talei said journalists feel helpless when they are confronted with the government on defamation or libel charges because they realize they have little chance to win their case. She said the press law could easily be interpreted to mean any criticism of the government is a violation because it may cause "public discord," which is prohibited. She added that the law is considered outdated and efforts in the Shura Council to introduce fundamental changes "have always fallen on deaf ears."

Libel in the Omani media is considered a criminal offense punishable by imprisonment and fines. The Basic Law of Oman defines the limits of press freedom vaguely by prohibiting the printing or publishing of material that may lead to "public discord," violate the

“security of the State,” or abuse a person’s dignity and rights. Hence, journalists in Oman are constantly worried whether what they write may be interpreted as a violation. In July 2005, poet and journalist Abdallah Al Ryami was detained for criticizing human-rights violations in Oman and accused of criticizing the regime in a televised debate. Also in July, former parliamentarian Taybah Al Ma’wali received an 18-month sentence for allegedly violating the Telecommunication Act through libel against a public official using messages on her cellular phone. Neither person had published or broadcast in conventional media, but the government was able to use the same Press and Publication Law for these cases.

Rafia Al Talei said there are cases of journalists being imprisoned or secretly prosecuted without their cases receiving media coverage. She gave an example of a female journalist, Taiba Al Mawali, who was arrested in June 2005 for comments she made on a foreign satellite TV channel that were critical of the government. She served a six-month prison sentence, reduced from the original 18-month term. “No one ever talked about her in the local media. But when a writer spoke about her briefly, he also was imprisoned for a week and no one ever dared to talk about his case,” she said.

Journalists face difficulties in accessing information. Panelists said this is mainly due to reluctance by sources to give information. Journalists rarely complain about this lack of access, thinking that it is the authorities’ right to deny such access without any justification because journalists are “mere recipients.” Public information is usually made available by official sources via the official Oman News Agency, which in turn distributes it to media outlets.

Panelists agreed that media do have relative freedom to access international sources without restrictions. But imported publications and broadcast material are examined and strictly censored before they reach their target audiences. Furthermore, numerous websites considered to be pornographic, politically sensitive, or competitive with local telecommunications services are restricted by the state-owned Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel), the country’s only Internet Service Provider.

Entry into the field of journalism requires obtaining a license from the Ministry of Information. These are granted with relative ease to Omanis. Panelists said this has resulted in an oversupply of under-qualified journalists. On the other hand, because most media in Oman are state-owned, journalists who may write about sensitive social or political issues have their work closely scrutinized.

Rafia Al Talei said that in 2005 a new procedure was imposed on journalists concerning their journalistic identification cards. In the past, journalists had only to get permission once, and they could work without constraints. But in 2005, the IDs were all cancelled, and each journalist had to apply for a new one, she said. The new ID required renewal by the Ministry of Information every year and had to be carried everywhere by the journalist. Furthermore, the journalist must apply on behalf of a specific media organization and hence cannot work independently. Journalists who leave their jobs must surrender their IDs, she said.

***“Those journalists who try to say something that is different than usual may be sacked,” Rafia Al Talei said. “In Oman, differences in opinion may be viewed as unforgivable crimes.”***

Other panelists said there were cases in which the government cancelled the licenses of journalists viewed by the government to have crossed a red line. At the authorities’ sole discretion, journalists could be prevented from writing either by direct orders or by a court sentence. “Those journalists who try to say something that is different than usual may be sacked,” Rafia Al Talei said. “In Oman, differences in opinion may be viewed as unforgivable crimes.

**OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM**

**Oman Objective Score: 2.13 / 4.00**

Professional journalism in Oman is undermined by self-censorship, coupled with an emphasis on commercial content, according to the MSI assessment. Journalists do not have a professional association working on raising ethical standards, but pay levels are relatively high and journalists do not usually seek gifts or bribes for covering stories. Nonetheless, the conditions in which journalists work are closely controlled by their outlets’ owners and managers, and they are required to cover events to which they are assigned regardless of their newsworthiness. Most material published in the media, whether state-owned or private, is usually in favor of the government, according to the MSI panelists. Entertainment programming is usually in balance with informational programming, although there is a trend toward giving more space to entertainment sections. Like other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, technical capacity is high and most media have advanced equipment, though there may be a lack of

personnel to use it to full effect. There are some efforts to produce quality niche programs in Oman, particularly in the private media, although panelists said legal and social constraints may impinge on the quality.

***“When you grow up and become responsible for a family with a wife and kids, you think twice before pursuing critical stories,” Haider A. Dawood said.***

Panelists complained about the lack of qualified Omani journalists able to do balanced, well-sourced reports. They said many journalists do not have the proper training

or background when they enter the field, reducing Oman’s ability to compete with media in the region and putting its media below the GCC standard. Panelist Haider A. Dawood, editor-in-chief of the *Al-Markazi* business magazine, the publication of the state-owned Central Bank of Oman, said journalists sometimes blame their editors and the media owners for their own shortcomings. “It is a matter of experience—the more you write, the better you get,” Haider A. Dawood said. But he also acknowledged that the risks increase for journalists when they tackle certain issues, adding that the press law and the environment as a whole do not encourage talent and professionalism. “When you

grow up and become responsible for a family with a wife and kids, you think twice before pursuing critical stories,” he said.

Panelist Abdulmoneim Al Hasani, an instructor who specializes in news reporting at Sultan Qaboos University, said he has observed an increasing tendency among current students to practice investigative journalism more aggressively, which could be a major factor in bringing about a turning point in Oman’s media. “I feel that batches that have just graduated in recent years would be able to create better media and bring about phenomenal change in Oman’s media,” Abdulmoneim Al Hasani said.

Panelist Abdullah Al Kindi said Oman’s government realizes that lack of a sufficient margin of press freedom has contributed to lowering the professional standard of journalism. He said the government is now seriously reviewing its press laws and thinking of revitalizing the media by allowing more freedom, adding that journalists need a model to follow to enhance the quality of their work. Haider A. Dawood agreed that journalists are not encouraged to use their talents and potential. “There is the lack of initiative, and sometimes journalists simply don’t try to do something new and hence lose the opportunity of practicing professional journalism as it is supposed to be,” he said.

A code of ethics does not exist in the Omani media because there is no common entity that brings together the journalism community. There are individual efforts by media outlets to promote their own image before their readers, but Abdullah Al Kindi said newspapers should at least start developing their own sets of ethics rules. “If I were an editor-in-chief, I would not accept a ready-made article copied from another source. This is not right! What I must do is have a journalist carry out an exclusive story by contacting sources directly,” Abdullah Al Kindi said. Panelists agreed that the media should not portray coverage as coming from a neutral standpoint when in truth it is merely a copied and pasted press release from an interested party, usually governmental or commercial.

The MSI panelists were unanimous that self-censorship is endemic at all layers of the media from the owner to the editor to the journalist, and sometimes to the source of news. The stringent laws of the country make the print media hesitant to expose any wrongdoings of the authorities or even publish a small article questioning the government’s efficiency in a certain issue. Haider A. Dawood said an example of this self-censorship is the “clear distinction” between Omani Internet news outlets that are not subject to the press

**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).

law and the private daily newspapers. “If you compare news coverage on the Internet of the Muscat Festival, you’d find significant criticism, while when you look at what is published in the press, you’d find pure praise,” he said.

Panelists agreed that journalists are not the ones who usually decide what is a key event or issue and what is not. It is mostly editors and owners who determine what will be covered or written about. This has resulted in a routine work style for journalists: arriving at the office, waiting for instructions from editors on what to write about, going to the field or using the phone to collect information on that issue, and writing the article. There are few journalists in Oman who have developed independent judgment on what to cover, panelists said. Nevertheless, panelist Abdullah Al Kindi said that regardless of the issue or event that a journalist is assigned to cover, a story could still be important for the reader if the journalist knows how to tackle it properly. “A journalist can improve his own abilities and produce professional journalism if he wanted to,” he said.

Pay for journalists in Oman is rather high, according to panelists, so there is relatively little corruption and journalists usually don’t look for bribes or gifts to cover events. However, the higher pay level in itself is a problem because many nationals tend to go into journalism just for the salary. Journalists working for state media may consider themselves to have an ordinary office job simply requiring them to arrive at the office, sign in and wait for duties, do them, and at the end of every month receive salaries. “Journalists consider their post as a governmental duty that requires no creativity, and many journalists lack the spirit of initiative and adventure, which are vital for effective journalism,” Abdullah Al Kindi said.

Increasing competition among private dailies has resulted in more focus on entertainment content seen to be appealing to the younger generation. However, so far, entertainment material in the print media is relatively balanced with other sections and hence remains within acceptable standards, panelists agreed.

Technical facilities for gathering news are widely available. Considering the high capital required for a newspaper license, private media have financial resources for equipment. However, human resources may be missing. “Our main problem is the lack of training to use the equipment, which are already available and in sufficient quality and quantity,” Raifa Al Talei said.

Increasingly, private media in Oman have tried to develop quality niche reports and publications.

However, these initiatives also are limited by the press law and self-censorship, panel members said.

On the other hand, advertising material has become dominant in Omani private media, resulting in commercial interests being given priority over quality reporting. This is particularly evident in commercial supplements that focus on specific topics such as technology or family life. These usually are sponsored by certain companies that pay heavily to advertise their material, and hence the whole objective of those supplements is to make more money rather than producing quality niche reports.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

**Oman Objective Score: 1.91 / 4.00**

In general, media are affordable and accessible in Oman, the MSI panel reported. However, due to censorship of imported publications, some editions of magazines or newspapers that may contain criticism of the state or what the government views as “offensive material” are prevented from reaching the public. Internet access is mainly available in cities and heavily filtered by the state-owned Internet Service Provider, panelists said. The most widely accessible medium

#### 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.

is broadcast, the local television and radio channels, which are owned and operated by the state, along with regional Arab satellite television and radio channels. The panel said state media only reflect official views, generally distributed by the official news agency, which

**Panelist Haider A. Dawood said he wrote an article for *Oman Daily* in 2005 concerning the problems faced by Omani students in Jordan. "I was told the article could not be published because it could jeopardize relations with another Arab country," he said.**

is the only agency in the country. Ownership of media is transparent and well-known: Omani citizens can easily differentiate between private media outlets and those that are state. However, MSI panelists said that due to the

lack of political parties and opposition leaders, private and governmental media are somewhat similar in their scope of coverage. Some social issues are reflected in the Omani media, but certain sensitive issues are ignored rather than having coverage result in "public discord," which is prohibited by the press laws. No media target minority groups in the country.

Media may be affordable and accessible, but the content is not focused on local issues. Due to the fact that most Omani nationals live in rural areas, the most widely accessible medium is broadcast. The most widely watched channels are Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, MBC, and

**"But if they allow even one newspaper in Hindi to be licensed, it will definitely succeed big time," Haider A. Dawood predicted.**

the local Oman TV. According to panelists, there is an evident lack of sufficient reporting on Oman's internal affairs and issues that

concern citizens, such as corruption, unemployment, the national economy and welfare, plus a host of other problems related to minorities and expatriates. The major source for local news is the print media; panelists said the coverage is gradually expanding, but legal and social constraints preclude tackling sensitive issues. Panelist Abdullah Al Kindi said that the private *Al-Shabiba* daily newspaper has looked at a number of social issues, such as women's rights, marriage, the problems of adolescents, illegal drug use, crime, and unemployment, with a degree of professionalism, setting precedent and raising the bar for other newspapers.

The situation is different for access to international news sources. The prior censorship of imported magazines and newspapers can prevent periodicals from reaching potential readers. This is usually the case for editions containing any content that the government views as a violation of the press and publishing law, MSI panelists said. Another limitation is the Internet, which is heavily guarded and filtered by Omantel, the state-owned and only Internet Service Provider in the country.

Satellite television is the only means that is freely accessible by citizens, although the government has exerted some pressure on correspondents of television news networks that operate in the country when covering certain local issues. Panelist Hamoud Al Touqi recalled that when he was the correspondent of the Kuwait News Agency KUNA in 2000, he sent a news item quoting a senior Omani official expressing discontent over the Saudi government's treatment of Omani citizens crossing the border to Saudi Arabia. The report was quickly circulated throughout the Arab world and reached the Omani public through satellite television. "The next day after the news reached the public, I was summoned by the authorities as my source denied what he said in the interview. But luckily, I had recorded all he said in a tape and was able to prove that he did say all what was quoted in the article," Hamoud Al Touqi said. Panelist Haider A. Dawood said he wrote an article for *Oman Daily* in 2005 concerning the problems faced by Omani students in Jordan. "I was told the article could not be published because it could jeopardize relations with another Arab country," he said.

Panelists noted that the Omani government tries to influence correspondents in the country to ensure that no so-called negative reporting reaches the international networks. The Omani government is particularly sensitive regarding reports on Al Jazeera because of the satellite channel's massive reach throughout the world and its impact within Omani borders. However, panelists said, the extremely cautious reporting by Omani media about local issues results in an increasing number of Omanis seeking news about their own country from Arab and international news networks and sometimes from online sources.

The only news agency is the state-owned Oman News Agency. Panelist Haider A. Dawood said there are what he called "media services companies," which specialize in doing reports and gathering information on a fee basis. Apart from that, any journalist communicating with a foreign news service considers himself "a small news agency," a panelist said.

Panelists also noted that there were some efforts to establish news gathering and distributing mechanisms on the Internet. Online forums on Oman thrived in 2005. Among the most prominent is [www.omanforum.com](http://www.omanforum.com), which reflects various opinions more freely and openly than any other medium. However, the sole Internet Service Provider in the country, Omantel—which also monopolizes wireless and landline telephones—has set up conditions to be met by local Internet cafés available to the public. The company requires that all Internet cafés keep a log of every customer’s name and prevent him or her from accessing “Voice over Internet” websites, which are viewed as competitive to Omantel. Internet cafés need to report any user attempting to browse pornographic or other politically or socially improper websites through a proxy tunnel. However, those measures are seldom actually carried out.

There was little to mention when it came to private broadcasting in Oman until the government issued licenses for a private television station and three radio stations, with their launch expected during 2006. However, panelists predicted that the new stations’ news programming would conform to the strict press law, and so not necessarily be an alternative to the regular state television channels.

Ownership of media in Oman is quite transparent, panelists said. The state-run media are well known and their news reporting policy has remained the same for decades. Private newspapers, on the other hand, have a somewhat more independent line, even though they rarely criticize the authorities. The press and publication law obliges newspaper and other periodicals to print the owner’s name clearly in a visible location in the publication.

A significant portion of the population in Oman constitutes non-Arab minority groups, including Iranians, Baluchis, Indians, Pakistanis, and Africans. The print media do have special sections covering news from the home countries of some minorities, particularly Asians. However, panelists said little coverage is given to the communities within Oman’s borders. When it comes to minority-language information sources, panelists said there were no initiatives to establish such media despite the fact that there is a significant Asian population in Oman. The major obstacle, according to a panelist, may be the fact that the law prohibits non-nationals from owning media in the country. “But if they allow even one newspaper in Hindi to be licensed, it will definitely succeed big time,” Haider A. Dawood predicted.

**OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT**

**Oman Objective Score: 2.05 / 4.00**

In business terms, private media are thriving in Oman, panelists said. The two largest private dailies are *Al-Watan* and *Al-Shabiba*, which have their own English-language dailies, *Oman Tribune* and *Times of Oman*, respectively. Those media have proven quite profitable and their managements quite creative, panelists said. The four private dailies compete with the two state-owned

newspapers operated by the Ministry of Information—*Oman Daily* in Arabic and *Oman Observer* in English. Panelists

***“If newspapers depended on sales or subscriptions, they wouldn’t survive for a day without outside support,” Abdullah Al Kindi said.***

agreed that for private newspapers, the main source of income is advertising. But the market share of ads brought by advertising agencies is modest compared with other GCC countries. The amount of advertising in the private press is balanced compared with editorial content. Private media received significant subsidies from the government until 1995, after which they became self-sustaining. Market research and innovative promotion were introduced by private newspapers,

**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.

pushing their circulation and revenues higher. But there is no independent entity that verifies the circulation numbers for private media in Oman.

Despite operating in the poorest GCC country, the

***“There were obvious differences between what this study had concluded and what media owners had mentioned,” [Panelist Abdulmoneim Al Hasani] said. “There are even differences between the numbers provided by the editor-in-chief of a newspaper and those given by the very newspaper’s managing editor.”***

private print media in Oman continued its profitability and growth in 2005. Panelist Saif Al Muzayani, a reporter for the *Al-Shabiba* daily, said the publisher holds regular meetings to ensure the management efficiency of the company. He said the newspapers have expanded over the past few years due to

effective business management focused on increasing circulation by enhancing editorial content and introducing new commercial services and promotions. “In the newspaper I work for, there is a monthly meeting for the managers of the different sections to evaluate progress of the newspaper,” Saif Al Muzayani said. “This meeting is carried out to evaluate the successes and failures of the paper and to develop new means to achieve better progress.”

However, Rafia Al Talei noted that some of the private print media outlets that are owned by prominent businessmen or royal family members are in fact run by expatriates, generally Indians. Therefore, these media outlets are operated as investment companies with the sole aim of earning “profit even through deception and lack of transparency.” She said that most media outlet owners, who must be Omani nationals by law, do nothing but sign on the application to establish the outlet and the annual accounting sheets of the company. “Those media outlets were established only to be among a group of commercial companies that would contribute to increasing the annual profits,” she said.

Apart from advertising, private media in Oman do not have any substantial source of revenue, panelists said. “If newspapers depended on sales or subscriptions, they wouldn’t survive for a day without outside support,” Abdullah Al Kindi said. Advertising remains

relatively low compared with other GCC countries, although international advertising agencies do provide substantial advertising contracts to private media on an annual basis. Panelist Haider A. Dawood recalled that the private *Al-Watan* daily had once tried to generate income from printing textbooks, but failed. The volume of ads compared with editorial content is reasonable in private newspapers and magazines, panelists said, adding that private newspaper owners realize that the better the editorial content, the higher the circulation and the more ads they get.

The government used to give substantial subsidies but stopped in 1995. According to panelist Hamoud Al Touqi, the annual subsidy given to private dailies was about \$312,000, with about \$65,000 going to magazines. According to panelist Hamoud Al Touqi, the government initiated those subsidies decades ago in an attempt to develop the infrastructure of the dailies to compete with other prominent GCC publications. “But newspapers and magazines at the time focused on taking advantage of this subsidy without taking bold steps to develop themselves,” he said, adding that Oman remained behind partially because it had depended on those funds for such a long time.

The decision to lift governmental subsidies seems to have contributed to the development of private media, panelists said. Private newspapers started to apply rigorous and aggressive marketing techniques and carry out market research to enhance their reputation and expand their readership base. They were able to raise income by introducing new advertising opportunities through weekly supplements and other innovative promotions. The limited potential readership in Oman, with its population of 3 million, produced fierce competition among daily newspapers, resulting in a vibrant atmosphere where surprises are introduced every year in the form of raffles and nationwide contests with prizes such as cars and appliances.

Panelists said that each daily has its own printing press and keeps circulation figures highly confidential. There is neither an independent nor a governmental body that monitors circulation data. Even for magazines that print at other publications’ presses, there usually is a contract signed between the printing house and the magazine manager that includes a condition to keep the number of copies strictly confidential between the two parties. “If I, for example, find that the press where I print my own magazine has leaked the true number of printed copies, I can easily file and win a lawsuit against it,” said panelist Hamoud Al Touqi. But he also complained about the limited market, noting that circulation figures could be surprisingly

low compared with other countries in the region. However, for magazines in particular, advertisers are more concerned about the subscriber base and make placements based on factors other than the number of printed copies alone, he added.

Panelist Abdulmoneim Al Hasani said a study was carried out by an international organization using various methodologies to estimate the broadcast ratings and circulation. "There were obvious differences between what this study had concluded and what media owners had mentioned," he said. "There are even differences between the numbers provided by the editor-in-chief of a newspaper and those given by the very newspaper's managing editor."

**OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS**

**Oman Objective Score: 1.38 / 4.00**

Oman has fallen behind other Arab countries in terms of establishing and operating media-support institutions, and the MSI assessment gave the weakest ranking to this objective. There are no independent trade associations that represent the interest of media owners and provide member services. In 2005, formal steps were taken to establish the Omani Journalists Association, the first and only professional association for journalists, but restrictions in its charter mean it falls

short of meeting the full needs of journalists. There are no nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) supporting media in Oman, and in 2005 an application to set up a human-rights NGO was denied. There are academic degrees offered in media studies in Oman. However, media outlets lack human-resource development departments that could ensure a range of on-the-job training opportunities, and there were few workshops for professionals.

Although materials used for printing are mainly in the hands of the private sector, there are certain governmental regulations on their use. The government also applies various restrictions on the way periodicals and newspapers are distributed throughout the country and on transmission of news reports to television networks abroad.

***Panelist Haider A. Dawood said the government allowed the licensing of the OJA only if an article about defending journalists was scrapped. "If we had waited for this article to be part of the charter, the association would not have been established," he said.***

Oman overall is relatively out of date when it comes to unions, trade associations, and other civil society establishments, panelists said. There are no trade associations promoting the media industry, and there are rarely joint activities among private outlets, with each usually acting unilaterally when purchasing goods, setting plans, or conducting other activities.

The only professional association in Oman related to the media is the Omani Journalists Association (OJA), which started accepting members in 2005 but was not formally inaugurated. Its operations were limited to providing members with basic services such as reference materials, and the role of defending media freedoms remained out of its charter. Panelist Haider A. Dawood said the government allowed the licensing of the OJA only if an article about defending journalists was scrapped. "If we had waited for this article to be part of the charter, the association would not have been established," he said. He added that the government objected to this article because "it said there are already courts established to defend any citizen, whether a journalist or not." However, the government was embarrassed when OJA approached the Federation of Arab Journalists to apply for membership on behalf of Oman and was rejected for

**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.

lack of this article, considered a standard for journalists' associations worldwide, Haider A. Dawood said. "Only then did the government say it would consider allowing this article back in the Constitution, (and) we are hopeful that this could happen," he said, adding that setting up such bodies is relatively new in Oman. "We started with a petition signed by 25 journalists, of whom eight or nine said they would be committed to its work on a voluntary basis." The OJA is a nonprofit NGO with donations from local companies as the main source of income, according to Haider A. Dawood, who did not rule out the possibility to receive assistance from donor organizations or embassies after approval from the government.

Panelists said that there are no human-rights NGOs in Oman, and certainly none focused on the media. In January 2005, a request to establish a local human-rights center was turned down by the authorities. Furthermore, there were reports that some activists who were found to be involved in foreign-registered organizations were threatened with arrest or loss of government scholarships or employment.

A popular course in journalism is taught at the College of Arts and Social Sciences at the state-owned Sultan Qaboos University. The university offers Omani nationals the opportunity to acquire an accredited Bachelor in Arts degree in media studies.

There were a few short-term training courses in 2005, but not enough to cover the professional development needs of Omani journalists, panelists said. The OJA will take part of the responsibility for organizing such activities, according to panelist Haider A. Dawood. "The cost of such activities would be partially paid by international organizations, but of course, after consent is given by the authorities," he said.

Panelist Abdullah Al Kindi said that some governmental institutions do hold short-term training programs related to journalism and provide training to public-relations employees to increase their awareness of how to communicate with the media. Oman's Press Club is a governmental body that holds conventions and arranges workshops and training courses. Sultan Qaboos University offers training for journalists who may not be affiliated with the university. Similarly, the Ministry of Information has a budget that it uses to invite Arab and international media experts to provide training for journalists. There were cases of scholarships and grants given to Omani journalists to participate in workshops and training opportunities and sometimes to enroll in long-term academic programs abroad.

Private media are able to purchase directly their newsprint and other printing equipment without

interference by the government, panelists said. However, there are conditions to be met in accordance to the law, which may include prior licensing and registration of all parts imported and quantities of paper purchased. "The government deals with us as any other private business," said panelist Saif Al-Muzayani, who works for the *Al-Shabiba* daily, which owns its own printing press and prints other newspapers and periodicals. The printing market in Oman is competitive, with relatively low prices and easy access for customers. However, publications must show their licenses to the press before being printed.

For the print media, channels of media distribution are mainly kiosks and shops. Each daily distributes on its own and takes care of delivery of newspapers to the selling points as well as subscribers across the country. *Al-Shabiba* and *Times of Oman* went a step forward by signing with an international company to distribute their editions daily via satellite to selected locations in hotels around the world. Smaller and imported publications are usually distributed through one or two private companies that offer competitive rates for the delivery of periodicals and other material nationwide, though these companies require government approval before they distribute any edition. Omani media have used the Internet effectively, and each publication has its own website through which it reaches a growing local and international readership.

## MSI Participants

**Dr. Abdullah Al Kindi**, journalism instructor, Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat

**Hamoud Al Touqi**, editor-in-chief, *Al-Waha* monthly magazine, Muscat

**Haider A. Dawood**, editor-in-chief, *Al-Markazi* business magazine, Muscat

**Saif Al Muzayani**, reporter, *Al-Shabiba* daily, Muscat

**Dr. Abdulmoneim Al Hasani**, journalism instructor, Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat

**Rafia Al Talei**, editor-in-chief, *Al-Mara* magazine, Muscat

**Khalfan Fadhil**, freelancer, Muscat

**Bader Khalfan**, freelancer, Muscat

**Faiza Al Haimli**, journalist, *Al-Watan* daily, Muscat

## Moderator

**Walid Al Saqaf**, media consultant, IREX, Yemen

# OMAN AT A GLANCE

## GENERAL

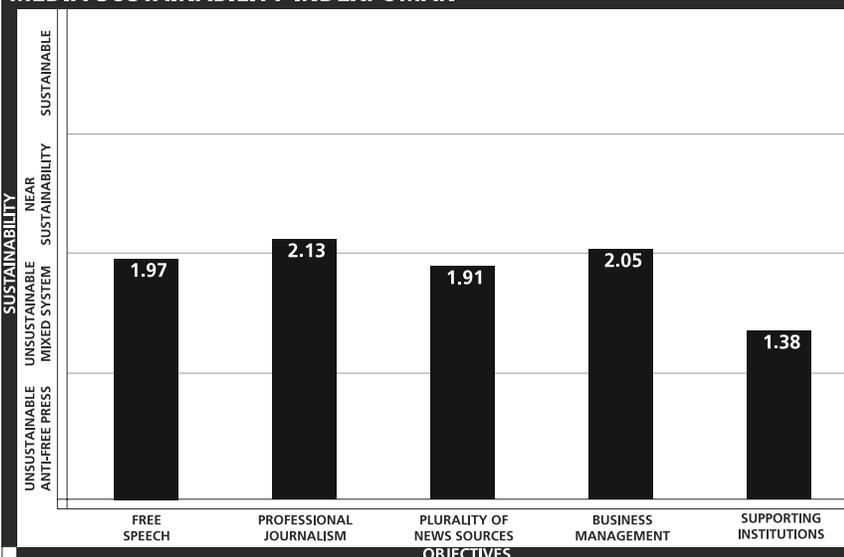
- **Population:** 2.7 million (2004 est., World Bank)
- **Capital city:** Muscat
- **Ethnic groups:** Arab, Baluchi, Iranian, African, Baluchi, Pakistani (www.nationsencyclopedia.com, 2006)
- **Religions:** Ibadhi Muslim 75%, Sunni Muslim, Shi'a Muslim, Hindu, very small number of Christians (www.nationsencyclopedia.com, 2006)
- **Languages:** Arabic (official), English, Baluchi, Urdu, Indian dialects, Swahili
- **GDP (ppp):** \$21.7 billion (2003 est., World Bank)
- **GNI per capita (ppp):** \$7,830 (2004 est., UNICEF)
- **Literacy rate:** male 82%, female 65.4% (2004 est., UNICEF)
- **President or top authority:** Sultan and Prime Minister Qaboos bin Said Al Said (sultan since July 23, 1970, and prime minister since July 23, 1972)
- **Next scheduled elections:** Majlis Al-Shura (Lower Chamber) elections to be held in 2007

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- **Newspaper circulation statistics:** There are six dailies. Three are in Arabic: private *Al-Watan* (34,000), state-owned *Oman Daily* (26,000), and private *Al-Shabiba* (15,000). Four are in English: private *Times of Oman* (34,000), state-owned *Oman Observer* (18,000), and private *Oman Tribune* (N/A). (Arab Press Network arabpressnetwork.org)
- **Broadcast networks:** The only broadcast network is managed by the Ministry of Information and is composed of Oman TV and Oman Radio. (omanet.om)
- **Television stations:** The only terrestrial television broadcaster in the Sultanate of Oman is the state-owned Oman TV, run by the Ministry of Information. Oman TV broadcasts two channels (Arabic and English). Programming from both channels is available via satellite. (arab.net)
- **Radio stations:** Radio Oman, the official state broadcaster, is operated by the Ministry of Information. Radio Oman runs two channels on AM, FM, and short-wave (Arabic and English), and some programs can be heard via the Internet. Broadcasts can be heard in the Sultanate of Oman from UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. (arab.net)

- **Active print outlets:** As of 2004, there were more than 40 registered newspapers and magazines and 13 bulletins. The country has eight media establishments and 70 printing presses.
- **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- **Number of Internet users:** 180,000 (2002 est.)
- **News agencies:** State-owned Oman News Agency (omannews.com) – Muscat
- **Significant foreign investment in the media:** All owners of media in Oman need to be national citizens by law.

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: OMAN



WELL-KNOWN AS THE HOST OF WORLDWIDE FAMOUS AL JAZEERA, QATAR HAS EMERGED AS ONE OF THE MOST FORWARD-LOOKING ARAB NATIONS IN TERMS OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND PROFESSIONAL MEDIA. SHEIKH HAMAD BIN KHALIFA AL THANI, WHO TOOK POWER FROM HIS FATHER IN 1995, HAS ABOLISHED PRE-CENSORSHIP AND OTHER RESTRICTIONS ON MEDIA OF EXPRESSION AND HAS INTRODUCED SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL REFORMS.



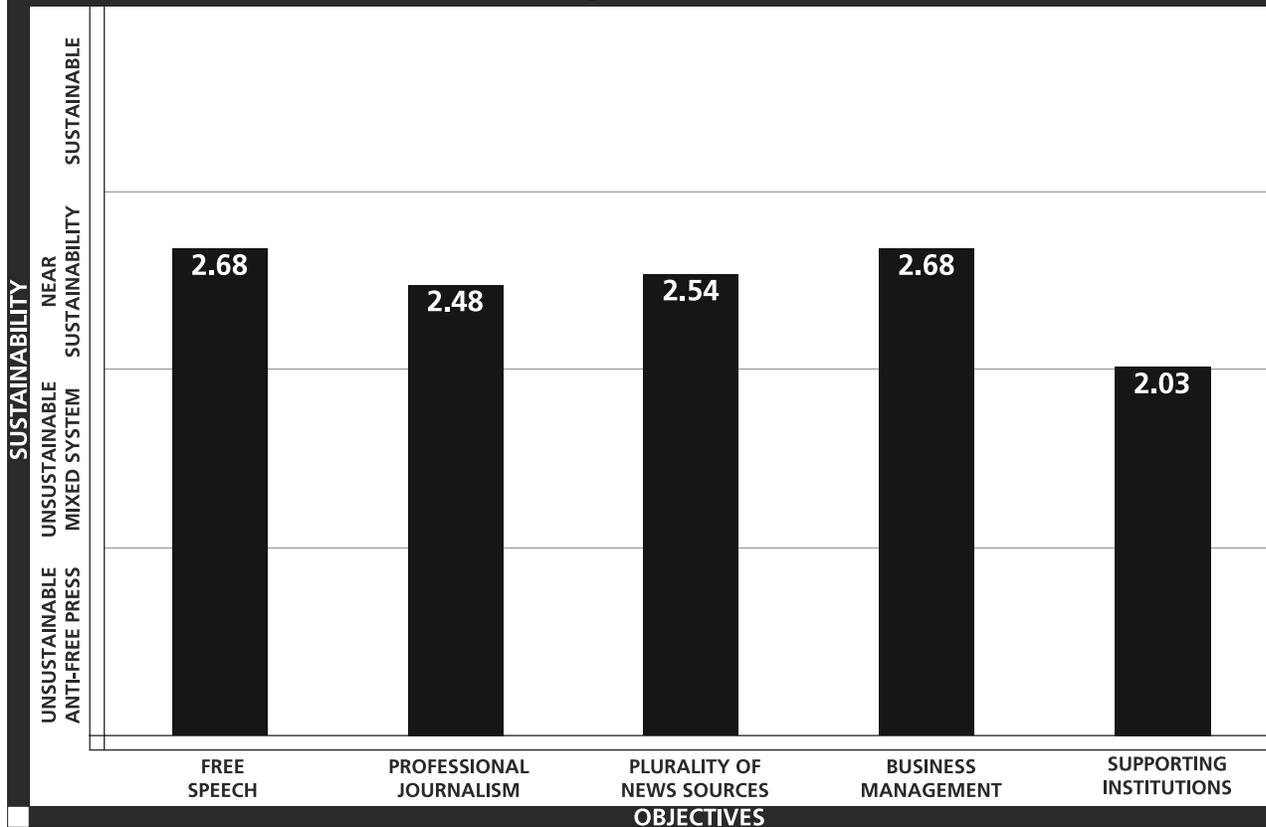
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ell-known as the host of worldwide famous Al Jazeera, Qatar has emerged as one of the most forward-looking Arab nations in terms of freedom of expression and professional media. Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, who took power from his father in 1995, has abolished pre-censorship and other restrictions on media of expression and has introduced significant political reforms.

The emir has indicated a long-term plan to convert the monarchy to a multiparty democratic system, but arguably the most important achievement of the ambitious emir is the introduction of Al Jazeera, the first pan-Arab independent television station. Initially financed with a \$150 million grant, Al Jazeera debuted in 1996. In 2005, the online magazine *Brandchannel* ranked Al Jazeera as the world's fifth most influential brand, giving tiny Qatar a place on the international stage. The emir is credited with protecting the station's editorial independence despite harsh measures imposed against it by some other Middle Eastern states unhappy with its probing and thought-provoking coverage. In April 2005, for example, the Iranian government ordered the closure of the Al Jazeera bureau in Tehran based on charges of "incitement to disorder" after it reported on clashes in Khuzistan in southwest Iran. The emir also has not yielded to pressure from fellow Arab leaders who have demanded he interfere with the station's editorial policy, as they might with their own state-aligned media. The US government has also criticized Al Jazeera since September 11, 2001, particularly for broadcasting taped statements by Osama bin Laden and other Al-Qaeda leaders as well as footage from hostages. At the same time, however, the United States uses Qatar as its Central Command forward base for its military campaign in Iraq.

At the same time, Qatar's own media face some of the same chronic issues as that of the other member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). First on the list for the Media Sustainability Index (MSI) participants is the excessive self-censorship practiced by the expatriate journalist community that makes up more than 90 percent of the staff at Qatar's media outlets. With an annual GDP per capita income of approximately \$27,000, Qatar is

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: QATAR



**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.

one of the richest countries in the world, but Qatari nationals make up only approximately 25 percent of the population of about 885,000, with the rest being largely foreign guest workers. This has made it a magnet for professionally qualified journalists from many Arab countries, particularly Sudan, Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon. Well-paid but dependent on work permits allowing them to stay in Qatar, these journalists are generally afraid to report critically for fear of risking their positions—despite assurances by the authorities that press freedoms would be respected, the MSI panelists said. Also hindering the progress of Qatari media is the lack of appropriate regulations to specify which political, religious, or social subjects might be off limits. Libel and defamation cases involving the media fall under the jurisdiction of the criminal courts, another reason why journalists practice self-censorship to avoid being deported or jailed because of their writings.

However, although Al Jazeera is an outward-oriented media organization that targets Arabic-speaking viewers globally, its impact on local Qatari media organizations has been significant. The introduction of the channel raised the overall standards of journalists working in Qatar and encouraged local media establishments to report more professionally and critically. Furthermore, the exchange of expertise and staff between the channel and local media has also contributed to building bridges between the two sides. Nonetheless, the level of critical reporting in the local media about Qatari affairs remained lower than that in neighboring Kuwait or Bahrain and behind countries such as Egypt, Algeria, and Yemen. Despite the fact that no journalists have been imprisoned since 1995 for their writings, harsh or critical articles against the regime or royal family are almost nonexistent. However, increasingly there are articles and radio programs implicitly criticizing inefficiencies in governmental circles.

One widely covered event in 2005 was a car bomb blast in March at a theater near a British school in Doha. One Briton was killed, and 12 other people were injured. The press was allowed full access to the scene, and local media reported extensively on the incident.

The emir has mentioned plans to drive the political reform program forward. In 2003, the country's new Constitution was approved in a referendum, making freedom of expression a constitutional right. There is interest now in creating a "media city," which for the first time would allow privately owned and operated broadcast media within the country. On the political level, Qatar has an Advisory Council, an appointed body that assists the emir in formulating policy. The state has no electoral system and imposes a ban on

political parties. However, in April 2003, Qatar held its second nationwide elections for a 29-member Central Municipal Council, which has consultative powers aimed at improving the provision of municipal services.

**OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH**

**Qatar Objective Score: 2.68 / 4.00**

Qatar's Constitution assures press freedom within the limits of the law, but there is confusion about what restrictions that implies. The press law is yet to be issued, and journalists and media outlets use their own judgment in assessing what topics can and cannot be covered. The dilemma is particularly acute for non-Arab expatriates working in the media because they are less able to assess the social, religious, and political sensitivities of different issues. The result, according to the MSI participants, is that these editors and journalists avoid using their full potential for probing and wide-ranging reporting. The status of libel as a criminal offense has caused yet more self-censorship. Although Qatar does not allow private broadcast media, there are three major private media

**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.

**MSI interviewees agreed that the environment in Qatar is quite encouraging for private print media. “Judging by the fact that there are three Arabic daily newspapers, I believe the market environment here is competitive and attractive,” Chacko K T said. “Employees in Qatari media do not pay taxes, and media corporations that have a profit exceeding a certain amount need to pay a small tax, which is negligible.”**

corporations that are operating under a flexible tax-friendly environment. News is available from local and international sources, as the regime has opened the country to the flow of information. Publications containing articles critical of the regime are allowed entry to Qatar without restriction, making Qatar the only Gulf Cooperation

The same issue was raised by Abd Al Motalab Seddiq, editorial secretary of the *Al-Sharq* newspaper: “I am mainly concerned about one thing, and that is the law. I worry about the very thin line that separates what is acceptable and what could trigger legal action against the writer.” Other than that, he said, “I can peacefully solve any problem that may occur whether it is related to an opinion piece or a story published.” MSI interviewees stressed that the regime in Qatar seems committed to allowing press freedom as much as possible and noted that there was no governmental interference in the editorial policies of private print media.

Broadcast media remain under the monopoly of the government. However, Yousuf M. Al Ibrahim said there are plans to establish a media city in Qatar, which would allow private broadcast corporations to emerge. MSI interviewees also said Al Jazeera remains totally independent in its editorial content, even though it is almost fully financed by the state. Some interviewees said the government may not be keen to have too many television and radio stations operating in such a small piece of land and targeting the smallest population in the Arabian Peninsula. On the other hand, Babiker Eisa, managing editor of the *Al-Raya* Arabic daily, said there were no reports of any rejection of an initiative to establish private broadcasting companies. “We need to wait for someone to apply for a license and then see the response from the authorities,” Babiker Eisa said. He noted, however, that businessmen may be waiting for the establishment of the media city before applying for licenses.

Meanwhile, Abdulaziz Ibrahim Al Mehmoud, chief editor of Al Jazeera.net, said the society in Qatar remains quite conservative and complaints are received when local events are reported. “We face problems with the community more than those with the government when we report on local events,” Abdulaziz Ibrahim Al Mehmoud said, adding that “if you criticize a minister or an official, do you think he would not mind. Of course he would mind, as we are still unaware of the importance of press freedom.”

MSI interviewees agreed that the environment in Qatar is quite encouraging for private print media. “Judging by the fact that there are three Arabic daily newspapers, I believe the market environment here is competitive and attractive,” Chacko K T said. “Employees in Qatari media do not pay taxes, and media corporations that have a profit exceeding a certain amount need to pay a small tax, which is negligible.” The abolishing of the Ministry of Information in 1995 was another turning point, coinciding with the birth of the third Arabic daily, *Al-*

Council country to do so. Internet access is affordable and based on the latest technology, but the monopolized Internet service applies a proxy to filter some religious, political, and pornographic content containing certain key words and phrases.

Article 47 of the new Constitution endorsed in a referendum in 2003 states that “freedom of expression and scientific research is assured according to the conditions and circumstances to be stipulated by the law.” But MSI interviewees noted that the article in the Constitution is general and more specific laws are required to define the limits of press freedom. According to Yousuf M. Al Ibrahim, a media expert at the Qatar Radio and Television Corporation, discussions are underway to formulate a special press law that could serve as a source of clear guidelines for media professionals. “There is need for such a law, but I’m glad to say that a committee has already been formed, and it has started to look into the means in which such a law could be formulated,” he said. The news editor of English-language daily *Gulf Times*, Chacko K T, complained about the absence of media laws that would allow journalists, particularly those of non-Arab origin, to appreciate the religious, social, and political sensitivities of Qatar. He gave as an example the publishing of the picture of the emir’s wife, Sheikha Moza, which he said raised some complaints even though the picture was distributed by the emir’s office. “It is an Arab society and a Muslim country, and they have the right to portray the pictures in the right perspective,” Chacko K T said.

*Watan*, which has a reputation for a somewhat more critical and investigative reporting style.

There were no reports of crimes against journalists in 2005. However, MSI participants said this was mainly due to the overall safe environment in the well-policed country. They noted that in the cases in which journalists reported to police that they felt intimidated or threatened, they witnessed prompt action. Some panelists also said that self-censorship prevents the publishing of critical articles in the first place.

The participants agreed that there was no evidence of any preferential legal treatment for state or public officials, and that editorial independence is not hindered or affected by the government.

Libel is considered a crime punishable with fines and possible imprisonment. No journalists have been imprisoned since 1995 based on the libel law, but it has been imposed on people who defamed or verbally attacked officials in public. According to Babiker Eisa, anyone who finds his interests or dignity affected by an article has the right to file a libel lawsuit against the writer. But in reality, there are very few cases of libel because there are very few articles that are found to be beyond the normal level of criticism in the national media.

Information accessibility in Qatar was given high marks by participants. The fact that Al Jazeera is based in Qatar makes the flow of information even more seamless. By Arab standards, Qatar is among the leaders in terms of ability to receive and disseminate international and local news. The same applies to media establishments, which are able to access the Internet with little interference and to receive and send information around the clock without any governmental supervision or permission.

But Khusro Parvez, acting managing editor of *The Peninsula* newspaper, said he believes that the anticipated press law is needed to guarantee the right to access of information. He noted that despite the voluntary cooperation of news sources in giving information, those sources may well withhold information, as there is no law that forces them to do otherwise. "When you are interviewing someone for information, you cannot ... explain why he must give you information. Once we have a press law that guarantees the freedom of access to information, then sources will be obliged to react and cooperate with journalists in providing information," Khusro Parvez said.

There are no restrictions or conditions imposed by the government for those seeking to enter media professions. Panelists said the regime believes in the

need to recruit qualified professionals in all fields, including journalism, which suffers from acute shortages in the number of Qatari nationals applying for positions.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

**Qatar Objective Score: 2.48 / 4.00**

The media community, which is mainly expatriate, censors itself, particularly when it comes to investigative reports concerning critical political, social, or religious issues, the MSI panelists agreed. They said this self-censorship, common throughout the GCC, has hindered journalism professionalism in the Qatari media—except at Al Jazeera, which focuses mainly on non-local issues. However, the panelists said that following the establishment of Al Jazeera and the abolition of official press censorship in 1995, the professionalism of the local media has improved significantly, particularly at the Arabic-language daily newspapers.

Although there is no standard ethics code in Qatar, each media organization has written or unwritten principles that journalists usually abide by, the MSI assessment found. With noticeable encouragement from the regime, journalists have started covering more sensitive issues such as inefficiency in governmental services, criminal activities, and other issues of direct concern to readers. Corruption in the journalism

### 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).

***Yahya Alawad A. Adam said journalists in Qatar have gone through a lot since 1995 and have reached an acceptable level of professionalism in their work. “We are trying to encourage journalists to develop innovative and creative means of journalistic reporting, but that requires time and effort,” he said, adding that talented journalists have been given awards and encouraged to write critically and not fear the consequences—although self-censorship remains strong.***

field is almost nonexistent, as pay levels for journalists are quite high compared with other GCC countries. However, journalists receive lower salaries compared with other professions in the financial or oil fields, for example, which has discouraged Qatari nationals from selecting careers in the media. Entertainment programming in Qatari

a lot since 1995 and have reached an acceptable level of professionalism in their work. “We are trying to encourage journalists to develop innovative and creative means of journalistic reporting, but that requires time and effort,” he said, adding that talented journalists have been given awards and encouraged to write critically and not fear the consequences—although self-censorship remains strong.

There are no written ethics code adopted in Qatar, but individual media corporations and sometimes individual writers abide by their own sets of rules, leaving self-censorship as likely the biggest challenge to media professionalism. There are no journalists in Qatar who do not practice self-censorship, but the level is usually highest among the foreigners who constitute the overwhelming majority of journalists, the MSI panelists agreed. The high salaries and living standards and the various privileges that expatriate journalists get in Qatar makes them think twice before publishing a critical report or opinion piece, they acknowledge. “I cannot deny that I practice self-censorship,” said Chacko K T of *Gulf Times*. Abdulaziz Ibrahim Al Mehmoud, who is also the former chief editor of *Al-Sharq* daily, explained that self-censorship is practiced heavily by the newspaper management as well as the journalists. “An editor-in-chief needs to measure the potential backlash a certain story or article may cause in terms of profits, circulation, development of the newspaper, and so on, so he is certainly under lots of pressure,” he said.

Amid increasing competition among private daily newspapers over the past few years, journalists in Qatar were encouraged to report on issues that could raise the popularity of their newspapers. This has resulted in a more vibrant newspaper industry, the MSI panelists said. Aiman Abboushi, the correspondent of the Dubai-based *Al-Bayan* newspaper and US-backed Radio Sawa, said: “You can’t imagine how thoroughly we were able to report on the assassination of former Chechen leader Yandarbiyev in Doha in February 2004.” Aiman Abboushi added that the government had never interfered in his coverage, as the police are aware that journalists need to be allowed to reach the sites where incidents have occurred. He said other issues that might be viewed as critical of the state are being covered, including rent increases, the proposition to charge non-Qataris for electricity services, and rights of immigrant workers.

Although the pay level for journalists in Qatar is much higher compared with other Arab countries, MSI interviewees agreed that it may need to be raised to encourage Qatari nationals to join the field and reduce the self-censorship on the part of the expatriates. But

media does not eclipse news and information programming, and technical facilities and equipment in media establishments are quite advanced, reaching international standards. Quality niche reporting and programming exist but not at a particularly high level, apparently due to the lower demand of the public, which is composed of a majority expatriate community.

Journalists in Qatar were taken by surprise in 1995 when the emir transformed the country from a highly censored, restrictive environment to a situation where freedom of expression is theoretically without bounds. This transformation was a challenge for the journalism community, which had little experience with press freedom and had to adjust to media professionalism. The greatest push to the quality of journalism in Qatar was without doubt the emergence of Al Jazeera. According to Abd Al Motalab Seddiq of the *Al-Sharq* daily, “Al Jazeera resulted in raising the professionalism standards of the broadcast media compared to the print media, which is contrary to all other Arab states where print media was well ahead of broadcast media, which were controlled by the regimes.” He noted that Al Jazeera forced journalists in Qatar to rethink their way of reporting: “For example, renowned Al Jazeera anchor Dr. Faisal Al Qassim also writes for *Al-Sharq* newspaper, and he writes in the same style of Al Jazeera.”

Yahya Alawad A. Adam, the manager of Dar Al-Sharq Center for Information, Studies and Training (DARINFO), said journalists in Qatar have gone through

overall, the pay level remains well beyond the point that could result in corruption. Babiker Eisa noted that demands from journalists to increase salaries yielded results. “We explained to the management that a journalist needs to be in the proper form, with the most appropriate means of communication, cars, and facilities to be active and fully functional in reporting good stories,” he said.

Entertainment material was not found to eclipse news and information in the private newspaper industry. However, Yousuf M. Al Ibrahim expressed hope that the government would impose certain conditions on private broadcast companies willing to establish their own television and radio programming. “The government should not allow private TV and radio to negatively influence our society and hence should avoid replicating the degrading TV channels that we see on Arab satellite networks,” he said.

Among the things that MSI participants agreed upon was that Qatar enjoys a very high standard in technical capabilities of its media corporations, whether in broadcast or print. “Media corporations in Qatar are keen to remain up-to-date in their equipment and technology,” Yahya Alawad A. Adam said, adding that some publishers demand that journalists ask for the most advanced equipment to be ordered and delivered within days.

Quality niche reporting and programming exist in Qatar but are not yet to the standards that publishers and readers seek, MSI interviewees said. The problem is the low circulation and reach, as Qatari newspapers target a very small local readership, considered the smallest in the GCC. However, advertising material is increasingly being given more attention by publishers, and hence various specialized supplements do get printed occasionally. Babiker Eisa said the local press has no choice but to enhance those quality niche reports because “we cannot compete with Al Jazeera or others on news. So we need to focus on local issues that the public is interested in. We must do investigative stories in culture, politics, society, sports, and other fields.” He noted that *Al-Raya* may come with various sections totaling more than 120 pages. “We have also added a special pleasure supplement every Friday to offer a fun side to the newspaper,” he said. Al Jazeera, for its part, has started producing specialized sports, as well as children’s and business programming, giving it an edge in this type of diversity compared with other pan-Arab news networks.

**OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES**

**Qatar Objective Score: 2.54 / 4.00**

Being the smallest Arab country in population, Qatar has, according to MSI interviewees, a sufficient number of news sources. It has three Arabic (*Al-Raya*, *Al-Sharq*, and *Al-Watan*) and two English dailies (*Gulf Times* and *The Peninsula*), along with the local television and radio channels plus Al Jazeera, which is a comprehensive source of news mainly focusing on the broader Middle East. The high income level in the country also allows residents to easily access satellite channels, the Internet, and other sources of news. However, just as the case in other GCC countries, the only local broadcast media (Qatar Radio and Television Corporation) remain under the tight control of the government, while the majority of private print media are linked or associated to powerful individuals with connections to the royal family. Media establishments have the right to approach news sources, but there is no way to guarantee a positive interaction from the sources, MSI interviewees noted. There is full transparency, however, in media ownership, and readers are able to learn about the shareholders easily and hence judge the newspapers’ objectivity. Since 1995, government-owned media have tried to bring more critical reports and views that contradict the government to its programming.

**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 unique thing about Qatar, which may have irritated others, is the fact that the government allows the entry of publications that slander the country or the regime. As far as I can recall, this is a unique case in the Arab world,” said Babiker Eisa of Al-Raya Daily.***

However, it remained below the aspirations of the public. Residents in Qatar are able to access domestic or international media, including newspaper and magazine editions that may harshly criticize the Qatari regime.

But when it comes to accessibility of news sources by journalists, there are some hurdles, says Chacko K T of *Gulf Times*. “Sometimes you need to access the Public Relations officer at a certain authority or company but you realize he is not there or not answering, so this makes it difficult for a journalist to ensure that the story is ready by the time of print,” Chacko said. He noted that the formation of a press law that obliges the sources to reveal information to the media would help overcome this difficulty.

The only state-run media institution is the Public TV and Radio Corporation, which, according to Babiker Eisa, has not been able to raise its professional standards to those of Al Jazeera. “Those running the corporation maintain their old mentality in running things and were not yet infected by the Al Jazeera drive,” Babiker Eisa said. However, Yousuf M. Al Ibrahim, who works for the corporation, complained of the lack of enough local cadres that are able to innovate and change the look and feel of the public corporation’s programming. He hoped that the establishment of the media city would drive competition and help improve the overall quality of public television and radio programs.

The Internet service is monopolized and is only filtered for social and religious reasons; pornographic sites, for instance, are blocked by the state-run Internet Service Provider (ISP). There is only one news agency in Qatar, which is controlled by the state and usually offers material that is strictly official in nature. Because at least 75 percent of the population is non-Qatari, there is a decent representation in the local media of their interests and concerns. There are newspapers in foreign languages, such as Nepalese and English, to reach out to the expatriate community. Coverage of community news in English and Arabic newspapers is also widely evident.

There are no independent news agencies in Qatar. The only news agency in the country is the official Qatar News Agency, which, according to MSI interviewees, remains more of an official media tool that does not have sufficient critical investigative reports that tackle sensitive problems and issues faced in the society and focus on the need for accountability.

Except for the lack of private broadcast networks focusing on domestic news, a plurality of affordable public and private news sources does exist in Qatar. Residents in Qatar are able to access print and broadcast media sources easily. There is no censorship of imported print newspapers and magazines, for instance, based on the political orientation of those publications. However, certain publications may be filtered out in the mail or prevented from entry if they were found to contain content that is not acceptable by the conservative Qatari society (pornography, etc.).

There are no private broadcast media establishments in Qatar. But there was an agreement among MSI interviewees that Al Jazeera is considered an editorially independent broadcast corporation with its own news programming but which is financed by the State of Qatar. The fact that the channel rarely covers local news made judging the channel’s editorial independence quite difficult. Ever since its founding, there seems to have been a tendency to focus more on Arab affairs and less on local issues happening in Qatar. Hence, Al Jazeera has not yet been able to fully test the tolerance level of the Qatari regime.

Domestic and international media are easily accessible with few restrictions in Qatar. The Qatar Public Telecommunications Corporation, which is the sole ISP in the country, blocks through a proxy server some websites that may contain unacceptable religious, political, and pornographic content. But Qatar may be the only Arab state that does not block the entry of publications that may be hostile to the State of Qatar. “The unique thing about Qatar, which may have irritated others, is the fact that the government allows the entry of publications that slander the country or the regime. As far as I can recall, this is a unique case in the Arab world,” said Babiker Eisa of *Al-Raya Daily*.

But according to Aiman Abboushi, who has been working in Qatar for more than 10 years, the regime has a genuine desire to secure editorial independence of Qatari media, including Al Jazeera. “In the last 10 or 11 years, Qatar has gone through a major transformation as it broke several taboos and restrictions,” Aiman Abboushi said, adding that part of the blame should be on the journalists themselves, who need to be “more courageous and forthright in their reports and articles.”

When it comes to ownership of media corporations, there is full transparency, MSI interviewees said. "Anyone can know who the shareholders of *Al-Raya* daily are, for example. But this has negative consequences on us, given the fact that the newspaper was founded and is owned by members of the royal family, as some people view us as an official newspaper, which is not true." Babiker Eisa complained. But as one of the conditions to establish a private media corporation is to be a local national and have a large capital base to start the company inevitably results in the concentration of media company ownership in the hands of a few families or business owners, which is quite similar to the case in other GCC countries.

The fact that 75 percent of the resident population in Qatar is foreign makes coverage of community news and activities a priority for the media. There are English, Nepalese, and Malayalam newspapers that cover news from various parts of the world and focus on countries that have a significant expatriate community in Qatar, including India, Nepal, the Philippines, etc. Furthermore, Arab expatriate workers in Qatar also enjoy reasonably wide coverage in the Arabic press through a variety of sections covering community news, particularly that of Sudan, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and other Arab countries. Issues concerning immigrant rights, working conditions, and cases of detention and deportation have significant coverage in the local press.

#### OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

**Qatar Objective Score: 2.68 / 4.00**

All the major private media corporations are owned mainly by members of the royal family and enjoy a wealth of financial and marketing resources. MSI interviewees strongly agreed that those media establishments enjoy high profit margins and are well-run, with qualified cadres using top-notch technology and equipment. The marketing techniques used in the main three private media enterprises have resulted in an advertising sales boom, with income from advertisements composing the bulk of the private media's income. The fact that purchasing power parity in Qatar is high makes it possible for residents to subscribe to more than one newspaper, helping newspapers to increase circulation amid healthy competition. There are not many streams of income for private media, but the majority of private media apply marketing research to outperform their competitors. However, there are no independently verifiable formal circulation and broadcast ratings systems available.

Being one of the least taxed sovereign states in the world, Qatar has become a haven for media corporations, particularly as the country enjoys a remarkably high GDP per capita income and a purchase power that exceeds most countries of the world. Therefore,

media enterprises were able to gain good profit and run their businesses successfully. The major three private media businesses are Gulf Publishing and Printing Corporation, which issues *Gulf Times* and *Al-Raya* dailies, Dar al Sharq for Printing Publishing and Distribution, which issues *Al-Sharq* and *The Peninsula* dailies, and Dar al Watan for Printing Publishing and Distribution, which publishes *Al-Watan* daily. The high pay in Qatar was enough to attract many highly qualified journalists and media professionals from around the world. Most employees in Arabic-language

***To a lesser degree, major media companies generate income from printing for others and commission-driven marketing services. "Qatar is a small country, and therefore, we have small circulation numbers, which is again why advertisements are the main source of income," said Babiker Eisa of Al-Raya.***

**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.

newspapers come from Sudan, Egypt, Lebanon, and Jordan, while English-language newspapers employ mainly Asian expatriates with competitive salaries. Without doubt, Al Jazeera remains the single biggest employer of media professionals in the GCC. The fact that more foreigners than Arabs reside in Qatar has naturally resulted in higher circulation for English-language newspapers, according to Yahya Alawad A. Adam of DARINFO. "Hence, it is more lucrative to launch and operate an English-language newspaper, as more circulation means more advertisements and more revenue," he said.

Revenues for private media in Qatar are mainly confined to advertising. Circulation numbers are not high, given the small population of Qatar. Readership is estimated at 10 percent of the population. To a lesser degree, major media companies generate income from printing for others and commission-driven marketing services. "Qatar is a small country, and therefore, we have small circulation numbers, which is again why advertisements are the main source of income," said Babiker Eisa of *Al-Raya*.

Advertising agencies are quite active in Qatar, and various international brands seek to have their advertisements published sometimes evenly among the main newspapers. This has been a major boost for the media market and has raised profits considerably. But the same is not necessarily true for the Al Jazeera channel due to the different target group that the global channel focuses on. Nevertheless, governmental bodies and large corporate companies in Qatar remain active in advertising in Al Jazeera. This has been helpful in reducing the cost of operation that the State of Qatar has been incurring since 1995. The main advertisers in Qatar include Qatar Airways, Qatar Petroleum, Qatar Electricity and Water Company, Public Telecommunications Corporation, Qatar Fertilizer Company, and many others. The local media get a smaller share of advertising by public- and private-sector companies, mainly automobile agents and real-estate companies. It is worth noting that advertising in Al Jazeera has been discouraged by neighboring countries that have been annoyed or dismayed by Al Jazeera's open coverage.

The balance between information content and advertising remains respected. "Even if we had to put in 10 more pages of ads for a specific edition, we are also obliged to add another 10 pages of news content," Yahya Alawad A. Adam said.

Among the steps taken by the emir of Qatar after taking over power was the lifting of governmental subsidies to the private media sector, which were

usually given large amounts. This step, according to Aiman Abboushi, broke the state of stagnancy and reliance on government funding and "helped bring more competition to the local media," particularly in more investigative and quality reports and stories that appeal to the readers.

MSI interviewees noted that market research is common among the private media in Qatar. Each corporation has its own advertising and marketing teams that survey the market and explore avenues and potentials for revenue generation from new advertisement campaigns. "In our newspaper, I do know for sure that the advertising department does have regular meetings to explore means to increase advertising revenues and circulation," Chacko K T of *The Peninsula* said. Proper market research has contributed to raising advertising revenues in private media corporations. But it is still an expanding market, Yahya Alawad A. Adam of DARINFO said. "Private newspapers have developed a habit of issuing regular supplements focusing on a specific field, and hence generate a wealth of profit from companies dealing with this field," he said.

There is currently no independent body that could verify circulation or broadcast ratings of Qatari media. The fact that the population and area of Qatar are small makes it less of a concern for newspapers to know about their rivals' circulation, as they can easily monitor distribution points. But the issue is more significant for the local broadcast media, represented in Qatar Radio and Television Corporation, whose expert, Yousuf M. Al Ibrahim, hoped for the revival of a unit that was used to monitor and survey viewers to gain information about the local television channel's appeal. "We used to have a specialized unit that would go to the field and get views and data from viewers about the programming. Such information is useful for us to evaluate whether we are progressing or deteriorating in our outreach," Yousuf M. Al Ibrahim said.

**OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS**

**Qatar Objective Score: 2.03 / 4.00**

Qatar is lagging behind in its civil-society development in comparison with a flourishing and active business market. With the exception of three professional associations (the Qatari Bar Association, the Gulf Studies Center, and the Japan-Qatar Friendship Association), unions, societies, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are nonexistent and the law severely restricts the freedom of association and

assembly. MSI interviewees noted that the country still has a long way to go before this arena is fully exploited and used for the benefit of the private media. There are, however, some discussions and preparations to establish a journalism association or syndicate. While formal associations may not exist, unofficial friendly meetings and gatherings do take place among different expatriate communities to discuss their concerns and plans. There is only one academic program in the field of journalism taught at Qatar University, but there are a few training centers that work in coordination with media companies and the university to help train and qualify journalists (Al Jazeera Media Training and Development Center and Dar Al-Sharq Center for Information, Studies and Training). Entry into the field of journalism is relatively free and flexible. Sources of newsprint and printing facilities are apolitical and do not require prior licensing. However, importing of printing presses and other large-scale printing utilities require prior permission from the Qatar Radio and Television Corporation. Distribution of publications is not monitored by the authorities, and broadcast transmission is unrestricted. Internet access is widely available but is filtered through a proxy set by the only ISP in the country, which the government controls.

Perhaps the main concern for journalists and media professionals in Qatar is the lack of proper representation in civil-society organizations. There are

very rigid laws that regulate the process of establishing or joining any professional society. There are no NGOs or associations in Qatar related to the media. Individuals have

the right to apply for the establishment of professional associations, but among 22 requests submitted so far to the Ministry of Civil Service Affairs and Housing, only three licenses were granted (the Qatari Bar Association, the Gulf Studies Center, and the Japan-Qatar Friendship Association). Some MSI interviewees argued that the lack of enthusiasm among the local Qatari community is the root cause of the lack of NGOs in Qatar. "If Qatari nationals were more into this field, I believe NGOs could flourish in this country, particularly as the emir of Qatar expressed a desire to enhance the level of public participation in various aspects of life," Aiman Abboushi said.

Even though law No. 18 of 2004 provides for and regulates freedom of assembly, a permit is still required for each and every public gathering. This somewhat contradicts the democratic tendency of the regime, and members of the journalism community hope there will be possible amendments to relax those measures.

The fact that the three major private media corporations are owned by members of the ruling family and others associated with them makes communication among them easier. There are times when general managers of those companies meet to share views on the appropriate advertisement prices and means of cooperation. However, there is no official body that represents their interests.

As for professional journalism associations, there are already talks and discussions underway to establish a journalism association. "There has been a request filed to the authorities to establish a professional association for journalists, and we are waiting for the response," Babiker Eisa of *Al-Raya* said. In the meantime, journalists could always meet under the umbrella of their community leaders. As Chacko K T of *Gulf Times* explained, there are gatherings of journalists from different communities, such as the Indian, Sudanese, or other communities, to discuss challenges or plans for

***"There has been a request filed to the authorities to establish a professional association for journalists, and we are waiting for the response," Babiker Eisa of Al-Raya said. In the meantime, journalists could always meet under the umbrella of their community leaders.***

**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.

their common goods. "But those communities are not official entities," he remarked.

Nevertheless, MSI interviewees pointed to the National Human Rights Commission affiliated with the government. Khusro Parvez of *The Peninsula* believes that the commission is "quite independent" and could somewhat compensate for the lack of other associations that could have helped protect journalists' rights.

There is only one academic program in Qatar that offers a BA degree in Mass Communication and Information Science, and it is taught at Qatar University's College of Arts and Sciences. However, Kushru Parvez of *The Peninsula* believes it is still below the required standard and needs "thorough improvement" before graduates could be employed in local newspapers. The academic program is not fully focused on journalism but branches into information science, which is considered a separate field of its own in many academic programs worldwide. However, the university's Mass Communication department had tried to compensate for this by organizing common activities with Qatari newspapers to help students become more acquainted with the newsroom environment.

Yahya Alawad A. Adam of DARINFO, whose center is affiliated with *Al-Sharq* newspaper, said that his center had agreements with Qatar University to train students on the job at *Al-Sharq* newspaper. "We also have short-term training courses to equip trainees with up-to-date and modern editing and news-writing techniques," he said. DARINFO, along with the Al Jazeera Media Training and Development Centre (JMTDC), have contributed positively to enhancing the overall professional standards of journalists in Doha. But the JMTDC has been more involved in training its own cadres and also journalists from other countries, while DARINFO has focused on training journalists in Qatar. "Our programs offer trainees diplomas that are recognized worldwide," Yahya Alawad A. Adam remarked.

Sources of newsprint and printing facilities in Qatar are in private hands and are unrestricted. The business activity in the form of importing newsprint paper, ink, and other material is open and seamless. According to Yousuf M. Al Ibrahim of the Qatar Radio and Television Corporation, importing of printing units and similar machinery require prior approval by the Qatar Radio and Television Corporation, which took this responsibility from the Ministry of Information when it was dissolved in 1995.

Meanwhile, channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are all private, apolitical, and unrestricted. Distribution of daily newspapers is done by the newspapers themselves, which also provide distribution services for smaller magazines. The government does not interfere in the distribution process, and there were no reports of government intervention or withdrawal of any edition already in the market.

## MSI Participants

**Aiman Abboushi**, correspondent, *Al-Bayan* daily and Radio Sawa, Doha

**Yahya Alawad A. Adam**, manager, Dar Al Sharq Centre for Information, Studies and Training, Doha

**Khusro Parvez**, acting managing editor, *The Peninsula*, Doha

**Abd Al Motalab Seddiq**, secretary editor, *Al-Sharq*, Doha

**Chacko K T**, news editor, *Gulf Times*, Doha

**Babiker Eisa**, managing editor, *Al-Raya*, Doha

**Abdulaziz Ibrahim Al Mehmoud**, chief editor, AlJazeera.net, Doha

**Yousuf M. Al Ibrahim**, media expert, Qatar Radio and Television Corporation, Doha

## Moderator

**Walid Al Saqaf**, media consultant, IREX, Yemen

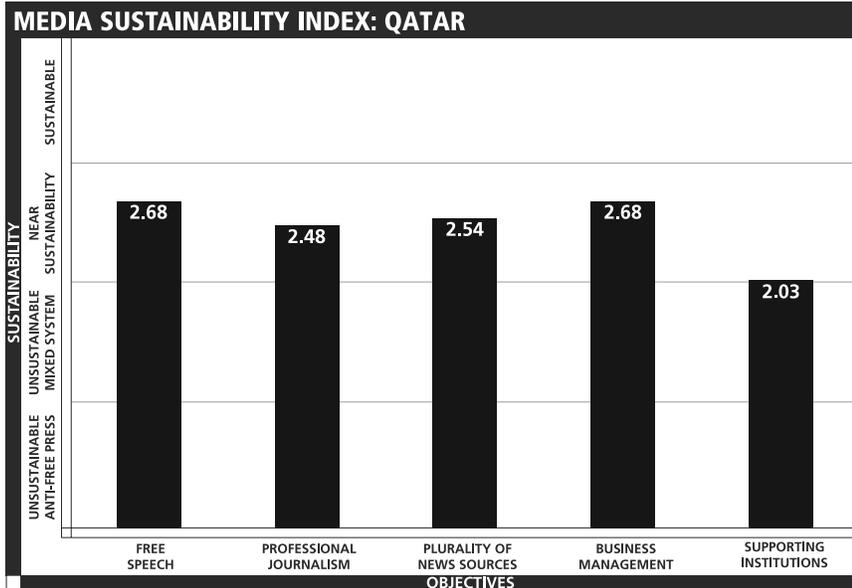
# QATAR AT A GLANCE

## GENERAL

- **Population:** 637,200 (2004 est., World Bank)
- **Capital city:** Doha
- **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Arab 52.5% (of which Palestinian 13.4%, Qatari 13.3%, Lebanese 10.4%, Syrian 9.4%), Indo-Pakistani 15.2%, Iranian 16.5%, black African 9.5%, other 6.3% (<http://www.worldstatesmen.org>, 2000)
- **Religions (% of population):** Muslim (official) 95%, other 5% ([www.nationsencyclopedia.com](http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com), 2006)
- **Languages (% of population):** Arabic (official), English commonly used as a second language
- **GDP (purchasing power parity):** \$20.4 billion (2003 est., World Bank)
- **GDP per capita (purchasing power parity):** \$21,200 ([www.nationsencyclopedia.com](http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com), 2006)
- **Literacy rate (% of population):** 82% age 15 and above (2004, World Bank)
- **President or top authority:** Amir Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani (since June 27, 1995)
- **Next scheduled elections:** The third nationwide elections for the 29-member Central Municipal Council (CMC) are scheduled for 2007.

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- **Newspaper circulation statistics:** The total circulation of the main five daily newspapers is about 100,000 copies per day. The largest circulating Arabic daily newspaper is privately owned *Al-Raya*, published by Gulf Publishing & Printing Corporation (18,000 daily), followed by privately owned *Al-Sharq* (15,000 daily), published by Dar al Sharq for Printing Publishing & Distribution, and privately owned *Al-Watan*, published by Dar al Watan for Printing Publishing & Distribution (15,000 daily). The largest English newspaper is privately owned *Gulf Times* (18,000 daily), published by Gulf Publishing & Printing Corporation, and privately owned *The Peninsula* (18,000 daily), published by Gulf Publishing & Printing Corporation. (Arab Press Network & Carnegie Endowment)
- **Broadcast networks:** There are two broadcast networks, the public Qatar Radio and Television Corporation (QRTC) and the Pan-Arab Al Jazeera, which is financed by the State of Qatar.
- **Television stations:** The main local television channel is Qatar TV and Al-Kass football channel (official channel for the country's football league). Both channels are run by the state's public broadcast network, QRTC. Al Jazeera broadcasts the main news channel, Al Jazeera Children, Al Jazeera Sports (two open-air channels), and Al Jazeera Live.
- **Radio stations:** The main radio station is Qatar Radio (general program), which is in Arabic. But there are also radio programs broadcast on separate waves during specific hours of the day in English, French, and Urdu. ([qatarradio.net](http://qatarradio.net))
- **Active print outlets:** There are about nine magazines and periodicals licensed by the government that focus on society and lifestyle.
- **Number of Internet users:** 165,000 (2005) ([www.internetworldstats.com](http://www.internetworldstats.com))
- **News agencies:** State-owned Qatar News Agency (QNA) – Doha
- **Foreign investment in the media:** Media corporations in Qatar are local businesses with no foreign investment. However, there are plans to establish a media city, which could allow foreign investment in the media.



THIS TRANSITION HAS BROUGHT INCREMENTALLY MORE CHANCES FOR CITIZENS TO VOICE THEIR OPINIONS AND CONCERNS IN WAYS THAT WERE NOT ACCEPTED BEFORE, WHEN THE NORM FORBODE OPEN DISSENT AND MADE CRITIQUE A TABOO. THIS SHIFT IS SUBTLE BUT EVIDENT IN THE PRESS AND AMONG BROADCASTERS, THE MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX (MSI) PANEL AGREED.



Saudi Arabia is in a transitional period that encompasses all aspects of the country. The media not only are undergoing profound change themselves, but also are serving as witnesses and gauges of the country's development.

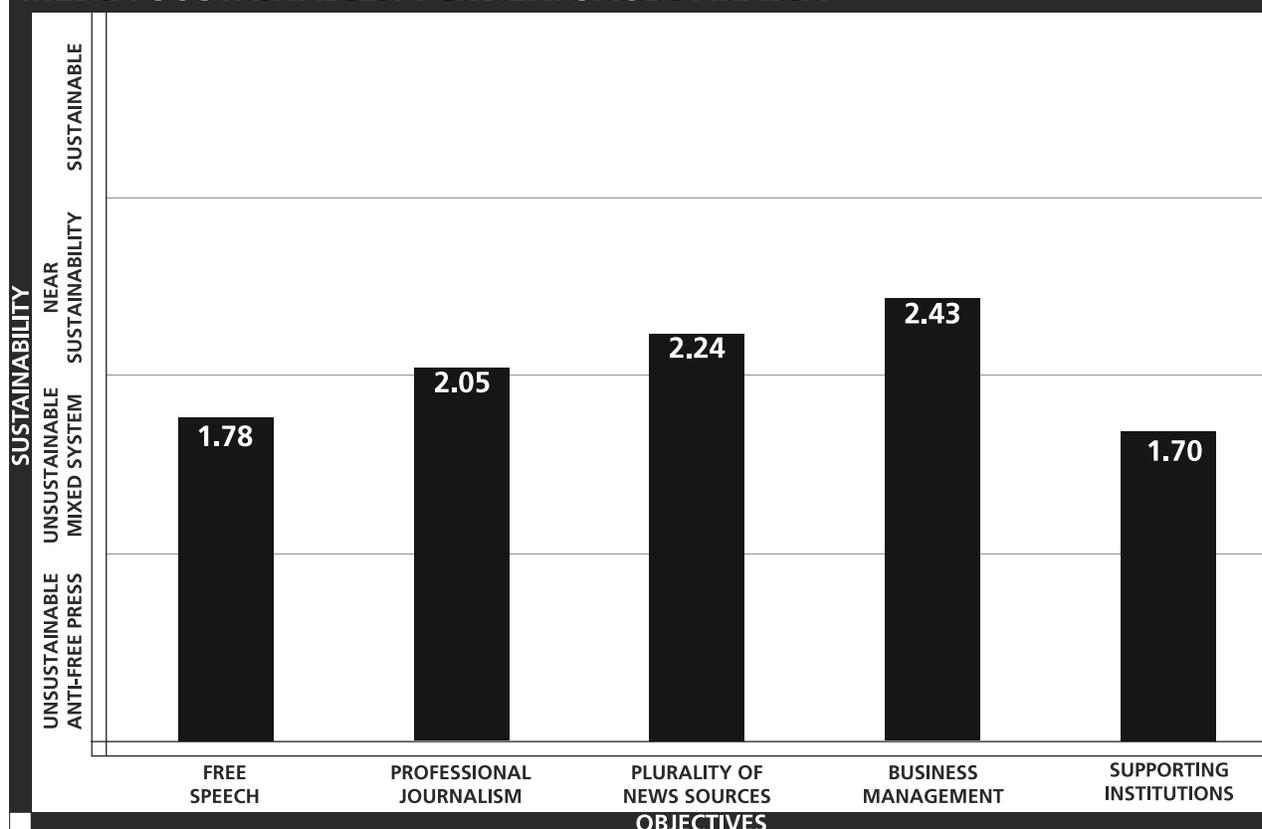
In August 2005, after 10 years of de facto rule, King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz assumed the throne following the death of his long-ailing half-brother, King Fahad. King Abdullah immediately started enacting laws and policies that touched many aspects of Saudi life, generating a general excitement about the country's new directions.

One key factor underpinning the changes is the additional income created by dramatic increases in oil prices. Saudi Arabia exports close to 10 million barrels of oil a day, and, in essence, the country doubled its annual budget when oil prices jumped from about \$30 a barrel to the \$60 range. Another major factor is the campaign against terrorism. The May 12, 2003, bombing of the Muhaia compound in the capital, Riyadh, killed more than two dozen people and was a turning point for many Saudis, exposing the innocent victims of extremism.

This transition has brought incrementally more chances for citizens to voice their opinions and concerns in ways that were not accepted before, when the norm forbade open dissent and made critique a taboo. This shift is subtle but evident in the press and among broadcasters, the Media Sustainability Index (MSI) panel agreed. Television channels deal with once off-limits social problems, public administration issues, and government decisions. Newspapers are presenting sensitive and profound investigative reporting. Opposing viewpoints are included more often.

The new environment makes it possible for citizens to have access to international satellite television channels as well as the Internet for reasonable prices. Although Internet access can be controlled by the state, Saudis are finding ways to bypass these limits, view blocked websites, and gain unfettered access by getting broadband services via satellite links for fees that are higher, but not prohibitive.

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: SAUDI ARABIA



**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.

The MSI panel generally agreed that amid this change, the most negative factor is the still relatively small margin for free speech. They said this margin is governed for the most part by self-censoring, rather than external forces such as the government. Once Saudi media people are able to test their own limits, then they can start with pushing against government control, the panelists said. On the other side, most participants highly rated the business operations of media organizations and their ability to generate revenues.

Overall, the MSI panel ranked the Saudi media sector at 2.04, with the weakest elements supporting institutions and the strongest business management.

OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH
<p><b>Saudi Arabia Objective Score:</b> <b>1.78 / 4.00</b></p>

The laws on the books guarantee free-speech rights for Saudi journalists, and the Print and Publishing Regulation, put forth in 1963 by the Council of Ministers,

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

<p><b>FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Legal/social protections of free speech exist and are enforced.</li> <li>&gt; Licensing of broadcast media is fair, competitive, and apolitical.</li> <li>&gt; Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.</li> <li>&gt; Crimes against journalists or media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.</li> <li>&gt; State or public media do not receive preferential legal treatment, and law guarantees editorial independence.</li> <li>&gt; Libel is a civil law issue; public officials are held to higher standards, and the offended party must prove falsity and malice.</li> <li>&gt; Public information is easily accessible; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media and journalists.</li> <li>&gt; Media outlets have unrestricted access to information; this is equally enforced for all media and journalists.</li> <li>&gt; Entry into the journalism profession is free, and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.</li> </ul>
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dictates that “censoring is not exercised unless there are extraordinary circumstances.” The regulation states that publications are approved as long as they do not contradict Islamic laws, compromise the security of the country, or cause unrest, among other exceptions.

The MSI panelists agreed that there is common understanding of the issues that should not be tackled to keep in compliance with the regulation, even though most journalists are not aware of what it actually says. “I was

***“I was told by my editor when I first started reporting that there are three topics that should not be criticized: the regime, the royal family, and religion,” said Suzan Zawawi, a reporter at the English-language daily newspaper The Saudi Gazette.***

told by my editor when I first started reporting that there are three topics that should not be criticized: the regime, the royal family, and religion,” said Suzan Zawawi, a reporter at the English-language daily newspaper *The Saudi Gazette*.

Saudi Arabia does not have a Constitution but rather the Basic Rules for Governance, which give the Council of Ministers—led by the king, who is the prime minister—the authority to legislate. The executive branch is charged with carrying out the laws while the Basic Rules for Governance state the independence of the judiciary. In reality, it is much harder to define where the lines of these three branches intersect. Asma Al Mohammad, women’s issues editor at *Al-Hayat* newspaper, said, “The problem is not that the regulations exist, but whether those regulations are enforced and by whom. The question here is who will the plaintiff be and who is going to judge?”

The oversight of editors-in-chief is very effective in keeping the media in line with government viewpoints. This is due to the fact that by tradition, the government—or more specifically, unnamed royal family members holding high-profile positions—approves the hiring of editors-in-chief. The “resignations” of editors-in-chief make apparent a cause-and-effect relationship between a newspaper crossing a red line and an editor-in-chief being relieved of his duties. For example, Jamal Khashoggi, the editor-in-chief of *Al-Watan* newspaper at the time of the May 2003 terrorist attacks, is believed to have been “relieved” of his duties shortly after the bombings because of his editorials criticizing the

religious establishment for propagating an extreme interpretation of Islam leading to violent attacks targeting innocent people.

Generally, when editors-in-chief are dismissed, they do not suffer beyond losing that position, and most continue to write in newspapers or appear on television shows. In fact, most would enjoy wider recognition because of being “relieved” of their jobs. On the other hand, Hamzah Al Muzeini, an opinion journalist, was sentenced in a Sharia court on the basis of religious law to four months in prison and 200 lashes. The linguistics

***Suzan Al Zawawi said that “when [a ministry] holds a press conference they are willing to share more information than if you should inquire through their press office,” making most reporters “rely on personal contacts within that ministry” to get information.***

professor was taken to the religious court in 2005 by an Islamist professor who alleged he had been insulted by Hamzah Al Muzeini in his writings about religious radicalism at Saudi universities. The case was unusual because

the Ministry of Culture and Information generally handles complaints about journalists, and the stiff sentence ultimately was overturned by the order of the then-Crown Prince Abdullah bin Adel Aziz.

Libel and slander cases technically are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture and Information, not the Sharia court. However, the lack of a mechanism to enforce the rules and regulations governing the media allows the powerful religious establishment to circumvent these laws and impose its will. The government does not always intervene as it did in the case of Hamzah Al Muzeini.

The Print and Publishing Regulation of 1963 comprises 49 articles that deal with three categories: establishing media organizations, rights and responsibilities of journalists, and penalties.

Market entry appears to be governed by a group’s ability to put together adequate capital. Licensing fees are negligible—anywhere from \$267 to \$535—and do not constitute a hurdle. But starting a newspaper, for example, requires initial capital of at least \$350,000 by some accounts. According to the law, an applicant must apply for a license from the Ministry of Culture and Information, be a Saudi older than age 25, have a good reputation, and hold an adequate degree. The Minister of Culture and Information has the right to suspend

any of the requirements as he sees fit. Regulations can be accommodated for foreign organizations. However, in reality, starting a major newspaper would not be a feasible prospect without a protective connection to a person of importance and significant financial resources, generally a member of the royal family. The last significant newspaper to start up was *Al-Watan*, founded in 2000 with the involvement of two prominent princes, which is considered to be the boldest among Saudi Arabia’s dailies.

Private radio and television do not operate from Saudi Arabia. Saudi media investors would be hard-pressed to see the business advantage in trying to start a television or radio outlet in the country, compared with locating it in Dubai Media City or other countries and using satellite transmission, the MSI panel said. The state controls all broadcasting. The Minister of Culture and Information chairs the body that oversees radio and television operations, and the minister’s office is in the television complex in Riyadh. Journalists and other staff working for Saudi state broadcasting are considered government employees.

The second main issue addressed by the Print and Publishing Regulation concerns the rights and responsibilities of media organizations and journalists. This includes freedom of speech with the following exceptions: that it does not contradict Islamic law; that it does not threaten national security and does not advance foreign interest above national interest; that it does not cause a division in the Saudi social fabric; that it does not insult any person or attack the reputation of a business entity; that it does not prompt or favor violence; that it does not adversely affect the national economy or national health; that it does not publicize legal investigations or court proceedings unless authorized.

The third area in the press regulations deals with penalties, how they are imposed, and by whom. The regulation mandates that a tribunal consisting of three members, one of whom must be a legal advisor, would try, deliberate and render judgment when and if a case is brought to the attention of the Ministry of Culture and Information. It assigns the appellate process to the Grievance Council (Deewan Al Mathalim) which functions as the highest appellate court in the land dealing with commercial disputes, bankruptcy and enforcement of foreign judgments. Maximum penalties are fines up to \$13,333, suspending the organization for two months or suspending the activities of the organization indefinitely.

Internet news sites appear to be governed by the Print and Publishing Regulation, although it was promulgated in 1963. Elaph, at [www.elaph.com](http://www.elaph.com), has

pushed the boundaries successfully so far, growing from a modest start at its Riyadh headquarters to becoming a must-read for anyone interested in knowing more about the world—especially the Arab world and particularly Saudi Arabia—than what mainstream media are willing to include. However, the site has come under criticism from religious leaders and has been occasionally blocked by Saudi authorities.

There are no restrictions on accessing international news sources. Wire services are available to whoever is willing to pay for them. All Saudi newspapers publish stories acquired through international wire and feed services such as the AP, Reuters, and Agence France-Presse.

The panel expressed frustration about obtaining some information from Saudi ministries. Suzan Al Zawawi said that “when [a ministry] holds a press conference they are willing to share more information than if you should inquire through their press office,” making most reporters “rely on personal contacts within that ministry” to get information. The alternative is to wait for a press conference or seminars to be held to try to ask questions and gain information.

**OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM**

**Saudi Arabia Objective Score:**  
**2.05 / 4.00**

Self-censorship is repeatedly cited as the main challenge to professional journalists. This affects the ability of journalists to be balanced, objective, and accurate, the MSI panel found. Some journalists express optimism that the policies of King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz will continue to give them a media environment with a wider margin of freedom, leading to a minimizing of self-censoring. “King Abdullah is in fact raising that invisible ceiling of freedom, and only editors-in-chief working within a false framework are limiting that freedom,” said panelist Asma Al Mohammad.

It is a new phenomenon to read about social inequality when it comes to women’s issues, such as the ideological battle being fought around allowing women to drive between reform elements in Saudi society and the conservative religious forces. Other social issues being covered include child abuse, drugs, prostitution, divorce, and homosexuality. The degree to which these issues are discussed in print is a measure of the balance of power between reformers and conservatives, and some MSI panelists suggested that their appearance leads to the inference that the religious establishment is losing a measure of power. However, some cautioned that freedom of speech

concerning social issues is more a reflection of the power struggle than about the freedom itself.

For now, journalists continue to rely heavily on known but unwritten “red lines” in examining the permissibility of a topic, the panelists said. They attribute their knowledge of those “red lines” to their understanding of social norms. This self-censoring is prevalent among Saudi journalists seeking a final product that will be acceptable to their editors-in-chief, who even at private newspapers are appointed

***“King Abdullah is in fact raising that invisible ceiling of freedom, and only editors-in-chief working within a false framework are limiting that freedom,” said panelist Asma Al Mohammad.***

with the agreement, be it implicit or explicit, of top government officials and can be dismissed by them as well. The MSI panelists said that if journalists should try to push the envelope in a way not yet acceptable, they would not be reprimanded or punished but rather asked to abide by the current standards or have their pieces discarded without comment.

**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).

While actual government censorship generally happens after the fact, such as through the removal of editors-in-chief, the panel mentioned several methods used to censor articles in everyday practice. Asma Al Mohammad said a managing editor might be asked by the editor-in-chief “to go back to the reporter and ask for some word change or suggest sentence modification.” When this happens, she said, “managing editors are consumed with fear of missing the printing deadline, making it hard for any reporter to argue his or her position.” Resisting will mean that the newspaper is going to suffer by missing the deadline to print and distribute that issue. In the current Saudi competitive newspaper market “no

***“Personally, my controversial articles are just not printed without anyone informing me why or instructing me to downplay it, said Suzan Al Zawawi. “So I have learned to carefully choose the vocabulary in order to get some pieces printed.”***

one will sacrifice the reality of business for his principles,” she emphasized.

Furthermore, reporters have a stake in seeing their work published and thus might compromise for the sake of getting at

least part of the story into print. If reporters refuse to cooperate, editors-in-chief can exclude their articles altogether; and if that should happen, the reporter sometimes is not notified. If reporters inquire about the scrapping of articles, they will usually get an answer that blames lack of space, technical difficulty, or any number of excuses.

“Personally, my controversial articles are just not printed without anyone informing me why or instructing me to downplay it, said Suzan Al Zawawi. “So I have learned to carefully choose the vocabulary in order to get some pieces printed.”

Also contributing to the panelists’ concerns about the professionalism of journalism in Saudi Arabia was the fact that many young journalists had their training in other fields of study. Moreover, female Saudi journalists are offered no formal training; their training is conducted on the job because no female educational institutes offer journalism training. Saudi Arabia has a segregated educational system based on gender for the most part—medical school is an exception—and the current transformation in the educational system is incomplete in the journalism and communications field.

Many staff members, including mid-level editors, are not Saudi, but come from elsewhere in the Arab world or Asia. This may affect their willingness to support aggressive reporting as their employment because their ability to stay in Saudi Arabia depends on keeping their jobs. Furthermore, understanding the subtleties of the Saudi culture is a task unto itself, particularly in that Saudi society is very conservative and guarded, panelists noted.

Work in the media is becoming more of an option for Saudis, the panel noted. As the slow but deliberate change from a tribal-based society to one that is more individualistic continues through the enacting of policies aimed at a more effective wealth distribution system, more Saudis can choose a career in media out of an interest in the greater good of society.

However, it remains difficult for media outlets to find professionally skilled staff who see journalism as a full-time, lifelong career. Furthermore, the proliferation of media outlets, including the ever-increasing number of satellite television stations as well as print and Internet publications, has created a new demand for media people in Saudi Arabia to fill vacancies. At times, these media organizations have had to accept candidates with fewer qualifications in order to have enough staff, with the potential to affect the level of professionalism, panelists said. Omar Zobidy, news correspondent for the Al Arabiya satellite channel, asserted that financial compensation in the early stages of a journalist’s career is not rewarding, and this makes it unappealing for many new entrants to tough it out.

Media pay scales in Saudi Arabia start anywhere from \$24,000 to \$36,000 annually for reporters to \$180,000 for managing editors. With the GDP per capita for 2005 estimated at \$12,900, this would appear to be high enough to prevent corruption. Nonetheless, panelists said, it is common for reporters to receive gifts after covering a press conference and getting their piece into print. The panelists were not disturbed by the issue of gifts, however, saying they were a token of appreciation for attending. Suzan Zawawi explained that she understands how this would be perceived in some countries, but said that in Saudi Arabia, those giving the gifts generally were simply “trying to be courteous.”

The journalists among the panelists insisted such gifts would not alter their reporting. Gifts can range from pens to cell phones to checks for 2000 Saudi riyals, or about \$530. But usually they have an average worth of about \$50, which is not that significant, and, Omar Zobidy said, most of the time the gifts are “re-gifted.” Gifts also are sent after a story on the event has been published, and the panelists agreed that if the report did not meet the expectations of the organizers, no gift

would follow. Moreover, reporters might get a phone call of complaint from the organizers.

The panel agreed that it is not surprising to find a single-sourced report or facts repeated without being independently checked. Bias does not seem to be much of an issue, as young journalists believe that they are tuned in to what their editors-in-chief want to see. The panelists also noted that bias may well be inherent in the common notion among some reporters that they “know” what the reader or viewer is looking for in their reports.

Ethical standards are held high for journalistic work, but in the end, “you work with what is available to you and try to make the best judgment possible,” said Rawdha Al Jaizany, a reporter for the daily *Al-Jazirah* newspaper. Other journalists point to the fact that social standards and Islamic law demand ethical conduct, as outlined in the Print and Publishing Regulation bill.

Entertainment programming does not eclipse news because Saudi media consumers exercise active searches for news from multiple sources. The fact that satellite dish receivers are very cheap and that free-to-air television channels are abundant makes it easy for viewers to survey what is available.

The final product produced by media outlets, be it on television or in print, demonstrates active efforts to meet or exceed consumer expectation. Nevertheless, media approach the Saudi market as if it were one entity. For instance, newspapers do not fully fill the function of local newspapers. Saudi minorities are not covered, and it is left to English-language newspapers to cater to the expatriate community in Saudi Arabia. Newspapers do provide specialized coverage in economics, arts and culture, sports, and other topics.

**OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES**

**Saudi Arabia Objective Score:**  
**2.24 / 4.00**

News sources are affordable and numerous in Saudi Arabia. There are dozens of satellite television channels that can be viewed by buying an inexpensive satellite dish receiver, and a small monthly fee buys additional channels. Internet access is inexpensive but controlled by blocking some websites. Those who would like unfettered access can enroll in satellite Internet services for a somewhat higher price, and an increasing number are choosing to do that.

The Saudi government blocks those websites that are viewed as disrespectful to Islam, immoral, sexually

indecent, attacking the country and royal family, or causing social or political unrest. The blocking of unfavorable

sites by the government is not permanent; rather, it is an ongoing process that sometimes results in a sequence of blocking and unblocking access.

Furthermore, some pages are blocked in some websites and not the entire site. When sites are blocked, the user will get a form page that can be filled out to appeal the blockage.

In essence, the efforts of the Saudi government to control what the citizens are allowed or not allowed to see or read is ineffective due to technological advancement. Some Saudi media experts believe that this is one of the reasons why citizens will not much longer be subject to such media controls and oversights by the government.

*These “quasi-state” as well as more fully independent media organizations offer their own news programs. In fact, panelists noted, competition appears to be the governing factor for production and editorial decision-making.*

**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.

In terms of quantity, technology, and design, the Saudi media market is highly developed. There are 10 daily newspapers with a combined circulation of about 763,000. *Al-Riyadh* is the largest, with a circulation of about 170,000, and it is considered to be the leading daily. Although not the official paper—*Um Al-Qura*

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*is—Al-Riyadh* is considered the best source on what is happening in the country, particularly about decisions made by the king and ministers that would affect Saudis' lives. Moreover, it is located in the capital, Riyadh, close to the government. Other newspapers include *Al-Jazirah*, considered to be very conservative

and orientated toward the religious establishment; *Al-Watan*, based in Abha, is considered the forerunner in boldness about tackling controversial topics, standing up to the religious establishment, and dealing with social issues. *Okaz*, from Jeddah, is the mainstream newspaper in the western province of Saudi Arabia and has the history and status to equate it with *Al-Riyadh*. *Shams* is a tabloid launched in 2005 in Riyadh to target a younger audience. There are two English-language daily papers and also sports, business, and other special-interest newspapers.

The state-run Broadcasting Service of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia operates four television networks, including the 24-hour Arabic news channel *Al-Ekhbariya*, opened in 2004, and radio stations. There are no private radio and television stations.

Many of the most prominent pan-Arabic newspapers and satellite broadcasters are backed by Saudi investors, although they do not originate from the country. These include *Al-Hayat* and *Al Sharq Al Awsat* from London, as well as the broadcasters *MBC* from Dubai and *Orbit* from Bahrain.

High-circulation magazines focus on fashion, entertainment, and poetry. International business magazines translated into Arabic are in the

market, including *Newsweek*. International English-language publications are easily purchased in bigger bookstores, such as *Jarir* and *Al-Obaikan*, and in some supermarkets.

The Saudi Press Agency is the government news agency. International journalists, including well-established international wire service reporters, are informed of public news conferences and usually go on to write about them without censoring.

State broadcast media reflect only the views of the Saudi regime, but the private outlets increasingly do provide a forum for debate across the spectrum of opinion. Saudi Arabia does not have political parties, and male Saudis voted for the first time only in 2004, electing half of the members of the regional municipal councils, with the other half appointed by the government. But there are diverse opinions right to left, conservative and liberal, and these views are offered by opinion leaders on the pages of newspapers, magazines, and television shows, although usually not state-owned media. Quasi-state media outlets—ones that are partly owned by royals or political figures—are the forum to carry debate on practical and philosophical issues concerning Saudi Arabia.

These “quasi-state” as well as more fully independent media organizations offer their own news programs. In fact, panelists noted, competition appears to be the governing factor for production and editorial decision-making. There is room to develop high-interest television productions while avoiding the most controversial issues, such as dissent within Islam or questioning the royal family. The depth and quality of reporting continues to improve on satellite broadcasts as well as on national newspapers, the panel said.

Minorities do not have media outlets, except for some Internet attempts. Those groups include *Hijazis* in the western part of Saudi Arabia, Saudi Shiites in the eastern part, the southerners close to the Saudi-Yemeni border, and other small regional subgroups that exist around the country. Generally, minority coverage is not considered a major issue, as Saudi minorities tend to have rather subtle differences in dialect or beliefs rather than distinct linguistic, religious, and cultural variations. Furthermore, minorities compensate by utilizing phones, text messaging and emails to convey any worthwhile bits of information and news. It is noteworthy that most Saudis rely heavily on advanced communication technologies to stay informed. Interpersonal communication networks are highly developed, reliable and efficient.

#### OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

**Saudi Arabia Objective Score:**  
**2.43 / 4.00**

Media outlets receive no financial support from the government, and they use business plans, marketing strategies, and management acumen to develop revenue. Most specialists agree that Saudi Arabia is a challenging market, largely saturated for print media with very little consumer need left unfulfilled. Some MSI panelists, however, were positive that changes in Saudi society would open new print media opportunities in the near future. "I see a huge youth and a female market that has just been tapped into," said Suzan Al Zawawi. "There are a lot of news outlets, but they all have the same type of flavor...for the same audience, while Saudi Arabia has more than one [segment of] audience to address."

The year 2005 was a year of increased revenue for most Saudi print publications, panelists said. Newspapers sold more ad space than ever before because of the death of King Fahad and the ascendance of Crown Prince Abdullah bin Adel Aziz to the throne. Two types of ads were noticed during that transitional period—the first type condolence obituaries for King Fahad and the second congratulatory ads for the new King Abdullah.

#### 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.

Revenues are generated from other sources, including sales. Circulation numbers are at healthy levels, allowing newspapers and magazines a viable advertisement structure to offer to potential advertisers, panelists said. Market segmentation and demographic analysis combined with a strong purchasing power in the country make for feasible return-on-investment for buyers of advertising space.

Sponsorship is common in many television shows.

International companies that have a stake in the Saudi market in particular, as well as other Middle Eastern markets, vie to sponsor events such as the coverage of the soccer World Cup, the Olympics, or other international and regional sports. Concerts and some popular television talk shows are usually sponsored as well.

The most interesting new source of revenue is the partnership between some television shows and cell phone providers. Television shows of the "reality" genre rely on interaction between the viewer and the show by voting for their favorite character, contestant, or participant. Each time a viewer texts a vote as a message to the assigned phone number, he pays a fee. The phone provider and the show split the income, adding an extra stream of revenue to the businesses.

Advertising is still the most significant source of revenue for media outlets. Advertising agencies not only act as intermediaries between media outlets and

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***Media outlets largely rely on sound business principles in Saudi Arabia and develop their strategies with the bottom line in mind. Managers are driven to succeed, for the sake of pride and to gain an elevated social status, panelists noted.***

companies but also provide research and consultation to help clients get the most out of their investment. Viewership numbers are usually provided by the broadcasters. The market lacks an independent source that conducts market analysis and announces ratings. Many satellite television channels are transmitted on free-to-air frequencies, making it very challenging to estimate the number of viewers.

Media outlets largely rely on sound business principles in Saudi Arabia and develop their strategies with the bottom line in mind. Managers are driven to succeed, for the sake of pride and to gain an elevated social status, panelists noted. They also suggested that the drive to meet business goals can interfere sometimes with editorial decisions and cause the newspaper or television station to reexamine some reports to preserve the relationship between them and the advertisers.

**OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS**

**Saudi Arabia Objective Score:**  
**1.70 / 4.00**

The MSI panelists expressed disappointment about the newly formed Saudi Journalist Association (SJA). Unique in Saudi Arabia, the association was licensed by the government in 2003 and held its first elections to the board of directors in 2004. There was wide hope that the SJA would be a strong institution advancing journalism and protecting journalists. However, panelists concurred that the final bylaws were rewritten in a way bound to make the organization ineffective, and that there was little evidence it was prepared to stand up for

journalists' rights. Panelist Omar Zobidy said he has a membership card because although he may be one of "its toughest critics," he "must be part of it if [he] wants to change it."

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Rawdah Al Jaizany referred to an incident where she submitted a complaint to the association "but never got a reply back." Suzan Zawawi did not see a point in joining the association.

Journalism degree programs are available for male students. Female students do not have an opportunity as of yet, although a number of programs are being developed for female students in public and private

educational institutes. On-the-job training is the most prevalent system of learning journalism.

Some short-term and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade their skills and acquire new ones, but this appears to be limited to print media organizations. Internship opportunities are another way for up-and-coming journalists to learn the practical side of the trade. Moreover, internships are the main starting point for female journalist to enter the field. Rawdah Al Jaizany said she was sent to Egypt for courses in journalism, for example.

The demand for journalists and media specialists is growing due to the proliferation of satellite television stations and cheap access to the Internet that allow for new ventures in news, commentary, documentary, and blogs. The new Saudi media environment has been developing and expanding exponentially since 1990, at the time of the first Gulf war, when satellite dish receivers became popular. The Internet came into the mix with a big effect on Saudi society around 2000.

The strength of media organizations is growing, in part, due to the sense of change generated in 2005 by the advent of King Abdullah, who is considered to be more progressive than his predecessors. Panelists said some combination of the excitement surrounding his crowning and of interest in his newly enacted policies have given Saudis the sense that there is a wider

**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.

margin of freedom to speak and voice critiques and or concerns. This, then, is contributing to an increasing number of Saudis who are working with the media.

Newsprint sources as well as printing facilities are private and apolitical. The restrictions imposed on printing facilities are the same as those listed in the Print and Publishing Regulation bill, which allows for everything as long as it does not contradict Islamic laws, compromise the security of the country, or cause unrest, among other exceptions. Printing facilities require media organizations to provide the correct paperwork, including licensing, approvals, and authorizations for publication to be able to fulfill a printing order.

Print media distribution channels are private and apolitical as well. Restrictions are confined to licensing approvals and having the correct paperwork. Concerning television channels, there are no restrictions due to the fact that all television transmitters that do not belong to the state broadcaster are located out of Saudi Arabia. Thus, they are not required to obtain any licenses or approvals to transmit their content. Reception of television channels in Saudi Arabia is not monitored, nor is it prohibited by the government. Therefore, Saudis can receive all kinds of television channels without any limitations.

## **MSI Participants**

**Dr. Abdullah Al Jahlan**, editor-in-chief, *Al-Yamamah* magazine; secretary general, Saudi Journalist Association

**Abdul-Wahab Al Faiz**, editor-in-chief, *Al-Iqtisadiyah* newspaper; board member, Saudi Journalist Association

**Nahid Ba-Shatah**, journalist and board member, Saudi Journalist Association

**Nawal Al Rashid**, journalist and board member, Saudi Journalist Association

**Abdullatif Al A'tiq**, deputy editor-in-chief, *Al-Jazirah* newspaper

**Mohammad Al Ameer**, reporter, *Al-Riyadh* newspaper

**Tal'at Wafi**, journalist, former editor-in-chief and advisor to *Al-Riyadh* newspaper

**Suzan Zawawi**, reporter, *Saudi Gazette*

**Rawdha Al Jaizany**, reporter, *Al-Jazirah* journal

**Asma Al Mohammad**, women's page editor, *Al-Hayat* newspaper

**Omar Zobidy**, correspondent, Al Arabiya news channel

## **Moderator**

**Walid Abdul-Jawad**, consultant

# SAUDI ARABIA AT A GLANCE

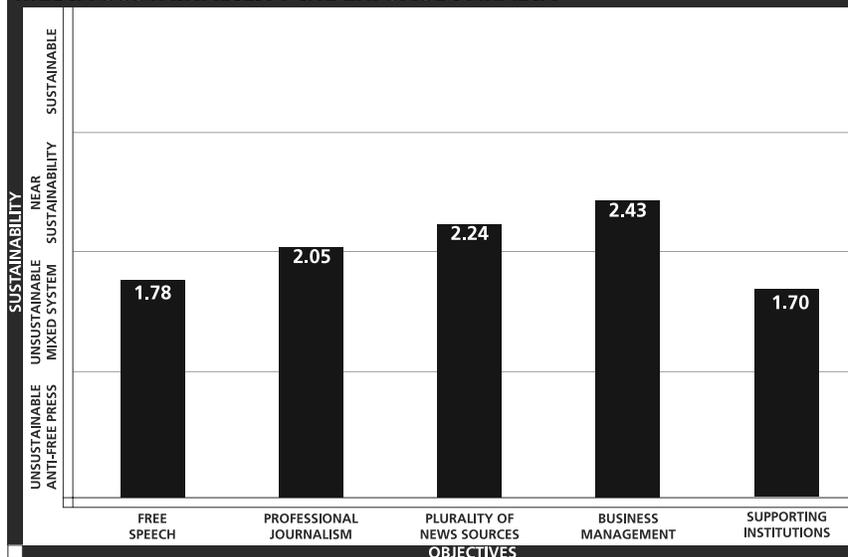
## GENERAL

- **Population:** 22.7 million, of which 6 million are expatriates (SaudiEmbassy.net)
- **Capital city:** Riyadh
- **Ethnic groups:** Arab 90%, Afro-Asian 10%
- **Religions:** Muslim
- **Languages:** Arabic
- **GDP (ppp):** \$250.6 billion (2004 est., World Bank)
- **GNI per capita (ppp):** \$10,430 (2004 est., World Bank)
- **Literacy rate:** male 87.1%, female 69.3% (2004 est., UNICEF)
- **President or top authority:** King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- **Saudi television channels:**
  - Channel One 1963 (Arabic)
  - Channel 2 1983 (English)
  - El-Ekhbaria 2004 (24-hour Arabic news channel)
  - Sports Channel
- **Saudi Publications:**
  - There are 10 daily newspapers with a combined circulation of 763,000. *Al-Riyadh* tops at 170,000. (2003)
  - (Culture and Customs of Saudi Arabia by David E. Long [2005])
  - The Print and Publishing Regulation bill that governs media-related issues was passed in 1963.

**MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: SAUDI ARABIA**



WITH FEW JOURNALISTS PREPARED TO CHALLENGE THE STATUS QUO, THERE WERE RELATIVELY FEW INCIDENTS RELATED TO MEDIA FREEDOM ISSUES RECORDED IN 2005, THE MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX (MSI) PANEL REPORTED.



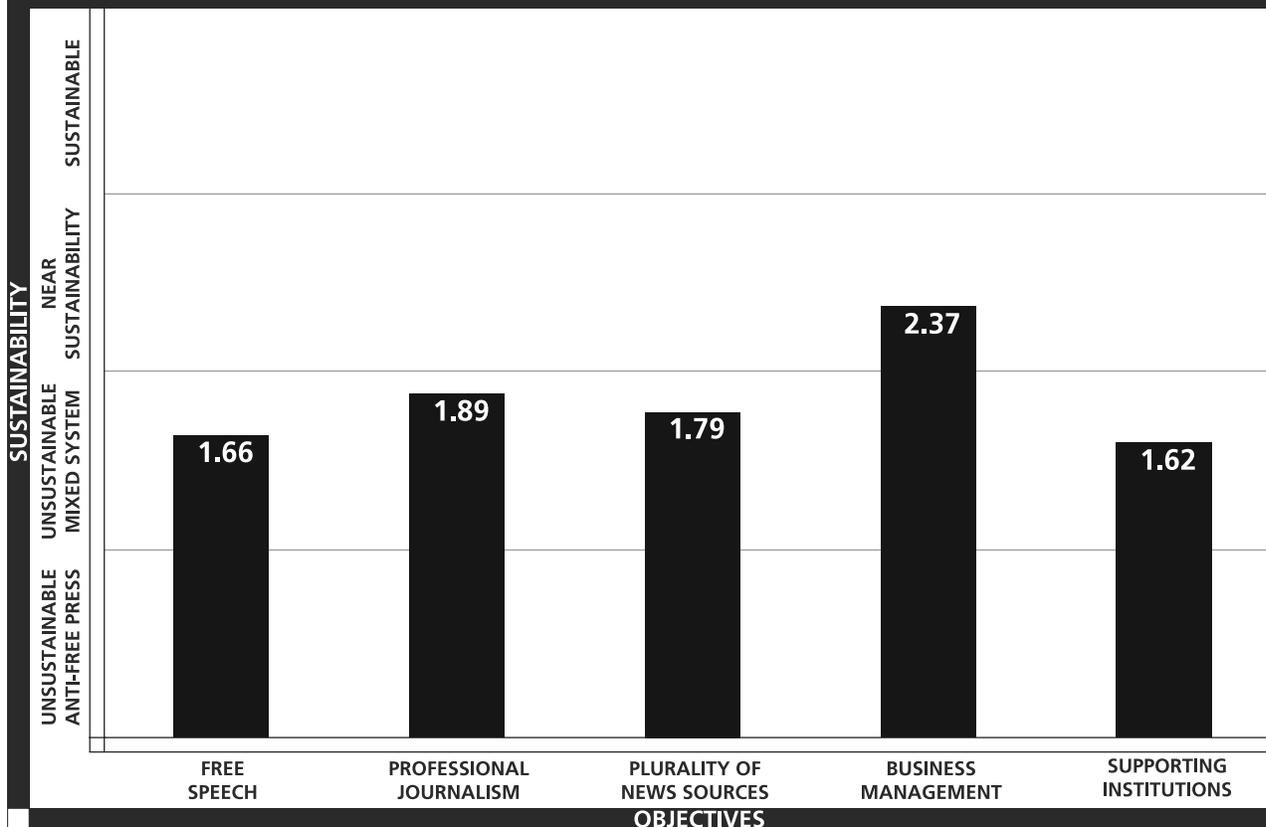
**D**uring the United Arab Emirates' first year under the leadership of Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, there were initial steps toward reform and democratization. Prominent among them was the announcement in December 2005 that half of the nation's 40-member Federal National Council would be elected by specially appointed local councils, although no timeframe was set.

The media sector continued its prosperous growth in the local market, particularly with the rapid expansion of Dubai Media City in Dubai, the largest of the seven emirates forming the UAE. There also was improvement in the media's editorial perspective, with coverage expanding to tackle such sensitive issues as worker rights and freedom of expression.

However, the UAE media's chronic problems persisted as well, particularly the extreme self-censorship among journalists and editors prompted by one of the most stringent media laws in the Arab world, the 1980 Printing and Publishing Law. The many foreign reporters in the country are further limited by the continuous risk that their work permits might be terminated if they are considered to have violated the country's laws.

With few journalists prepared to challenge the status quo, there were relatively few incidents related to media freedom issues recorded in 2005, the Media Sustainability Index (MSI) panel reported. A local newspaper journalist was arrested in June at the Dubai International Airport for allegedly writing a report that alerted a suspect in an investigation, helping him to escape. And in July, two journalists were found guilty of defamation and libel for publishing opinion pieces. In addition, websites viewed as politically sensitive remained inaccessible in 2005 as the only Internet service provider, Etisalat, restricted access, according to MSI panel members.

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: UNITED ARAB EMIRATES



**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.

Several international media companies have established their regional headquarters at Dubai Media City since it was launched in 2001, the most prominent including Reuters, CNBC, and CNN. In 2005 alone, 20 new television channels were introduced, and the number of companies operating there rose to 60, from 40 in 2004. Some local initiatives also were taken during 2005: Two substantial dailies, *Emirates Today* in English and *Al Emarat Al Youm* in Arabic, debuted in November, and their publisher said the newspapers would give readers “something different” from the usual press release–based journalism that makes up most of their competitors’ content.

The year also saw the drafting of a new press law that journalists hope will contribute to ending many of the restrictions imposed by the current statute. The UAE Journalists Association said it drafted the law after consultations with members, the government, and other stakeholders, and hopes the new version will be endorsed by the state in the near future.

Overall, the MSI panelists agreed that there is little sustainable freedom of the press in the UAE, putting the overall ranking for the country at 1.87. However, the panel did not solely blame the government. Members noted that UAE nationals make up only 20 percent of the resident population, and journalists, including those from other Arabic-speaking countries or international news organizations, understand and adhere to a series of unwritten rules governing this complex, conservative society. The MSI panel noted the relative strength of media business management, ranking that objective at 2.37, and expressed optimism that conditions would improve, particularly if changes in the media law move forward and the new national leadership continues to show interest in political reforms.

**OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH**

**UAE Objective Score: 1.66 / 4.00**

The Constitution of the United Arab Emirates is supposed to guarantee press freedom under Article 30, which states: “Freedom of opinion and expressing it verbally, in writing or by other means of expression, shall be guaranteed within the limits of law.” But the reporting and range of views presented in most newspapers remains strictly controlled, with articles critical of the government essentially nonexistent, according to the 2005 MSI panelists. Information is largely sourced to the official news agency, allowing the government to influence what is published. Most print media are owned by the state or by powerful figures well-connected to

it. There are no private broadcasting media licensed in the UAE except in the free zones, which are largely the domain of foreign investors who receive tax incentives. However, the MSI panelists said, access to media outlets is not restricted, except in the case of the Internet, where some websites are blocked at times.

Libel remains a criminal offense under UAE law and carries the potential for prison terms of up to two years, but this route is not taken in practice. There were very few cases of assault

against journalists in 2005, and those that occurred were dealt with firmly by the authorities. Although entry into journalism goes through the Ministry of Information, licenses are usually granted easily to those who seek it.

***One panelist noted, “In the media, you can’t criticize real-estate development, and lots of other things, because the media owners also own those businesses and are closely connected to those in power.”***

**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.

MSI panelists agreed that journalists in the UAE are profoundly constrained by fears of violating the country's exceedingly stringent press law, angering employers who are usually affiliated with the government, or upsetting the conservative Muslim society, which sometimes can be unforgiving. Panelists said this anxiety is multiplied for non-Emirati journalists, who constitute the majority but depend on permits to allow them to work. Violating the press law

***“News media in recent years appear to be persistently pushing the envelope in its critical coverage of events which hitherto were glossed over or ignored,” said Kenneth Starck.***

brings the risk of being jailed or deported. Panelist Lisa Schnellinger, an international media expert based in Dubai, said many expatriates in the media as well as other fields “come to

Dubai to make money,” not to do ground-breaking journalism, and hence, they are disinclined to push the limits of the law.

Nevertheless, there were cases of detentions of journalists in 2005. On June 15, Basma Al Jandaly, a journalist for the *Gulf News*, was arrested at the Dubai airport for writing about a fugitive sought for slashing women with a knife in the Emirate of Sharjah. Police claimed that because of her story, the culprit was alerted and escaped. According to the Inter Press News Agency, intervention by Interior Minister Lt. Gen. Sheikh Saif Bin Zayed Al Nahyan led to the journalist's release. “The minister also issued a subsequent directive that all UAE police departments must draw up a new mechanism to deal with cases against journalists, and said that the freedom of the press would be ‘reserved and protected,’” the agency said. Journalists in the UAE welcomed the minister's subsequent directive to police departments to establish standard procedures for dealing with complaints against journalists that would allow journalists to work without undo interference.

The 15 “shall not” articles in the UAE media law include ambiguous and overly broad statements that are difficult to interpret, the MSI panelists said. They cited as examples “instigation against Islam or the system of ruling” that causes harm to the “interest of the state or the values of society” and “violates public discipline and order, or involves insult to teenagers, or calls for or circulates subversive ideas.”

Libel is a criminal offense, and the law further prohibits the maligning of “a public official” or “anyone

assigned to perform a public job.” Although the law states that the violator may not be penalized if he “proves he did so in good faith,” the panel agreed it clearly provides state and public officials preferential legal treatment, restricting the media's editorial independence.

The law was used to prosecute journalists in 2005. According to the 2005 human-rights report issued by the US State Department, on July 26 two reporters were fined \$5,465 each for defamation and libel. They were found guilty for publishing opinion pieces in the state-owned *Al-Ittihad* newspaper in 2003. One of the journalists was indicted for criticizing the Ministry of Education's decision to modify curricula and terminate certain courses at some private schools midway through the academic year. The other was found guilty as an accomplice for being the managing editor when the story was published.

In another case reported by the international monitoring group Reporters Without Borders, a freelance journalist was detained briefly by police in December 2005 for allegedly libeling a jewelry store chain. In December, the Dubai Public Prosecution interrogated three *Gulf News* journalists after a German citizen of Syrian origin filed a libel case against them. According to the newspaper, the complainant said the journalists published an article on June 21, 2005, about his family problems “that allegedly ruined his reputation among his colleagues, relatives, and friends.” The *Gulf News* noted an increase in the number of cases that “triggered questions about the nature of legal actions taken against journalists.” Prosecutors sometimes use the general penal law and not the press law when prosecuting journalists, allowing journalists to be handcuffed and treated “like criminals,” as one journalist described it.

MSI panelists agreed that a quick look at the prohibitions in the UAE media law turn off any desire by most journalists to pursue investigative reports on local issues. Over time, this has resulted in a “live and let live” media environment where self-censorship and commercial interests take over. Wealthy media owners generally are closely connected to the ruling elite, and most own other businesses as well. One panelist noted, “In the media, you can't criticize real-estate development, and lots of other things, because the media owners also own those businesses and are closely connected to those in power.”

Licensing generally is controlled by the Ministry of Information and is necessary for the owning of a newspaper or a press or to import ink, paper, and other materials used in production. Only nationals are allowed

to publish or broadcast, except in the free zone, where foreigners can also own media.

The broadcast media targeting the UAE audience are owned by the governments and usually offer only official viewpoints on local issues. There currently are no private broadcast companies that target nationals and deal with local issues. Dubai Media City, launched as a free zone in 2001 to attract regional and international media, enjoys relative press freedom and extremely low tax rates. Within this zone, few restrictions are imposed on print and broadcast media meant for foreign audiences. This does not mean they are exempt from the press law, however, and the media companies operating within the more flexible environment of the DMC are well aware that there could be prosecutions. Hence, they tend to focus on international rather than local issues as much as possible.

Panelist Kenneth Starck, the expatriate dean of the College of Communication and Media Sciences at Zayed University, said "the wider impact of the business-driven Media Free Zone, where media operate with little outside interference, is still unclear." There have been some local voices suggesting that less freedom should be allowed in the zone. Panelist Elizabeth Drachman, business editor of *Arabies Trends*, an international magazine on Arab affairs, said there is a possibility that Dubai Media City could be censored. "They are putting forth that idea, and they can do it because it is the federal law," she said.

On the other hand, more encouraging statements concerning press freedom in the UAE came from official circles during 2005, leading some media, particularly private English-language dailies *7Days* and *Gulf News*, to take marginally more risk. "News media in recent years appear to be persistently pushing the envelope in its critical coverage of events which hitherto were glossed over or ignored," said Kenneth Starck. He provided as examples the relatively aggressive coverage of grievances by expatriate workers, especially the lowest-paid domestic servants and laborers, concerning compensation and living conditions and a front-page story published by *7Days* about the tremendous profits gained by the nation's only telecommunications provider, Etisalat. Another panelist noted that prostitution in the UAE, once a taboo subject, now could be found discussed on some front pages. However, panelists suggested that these advances were for the most part in the English-language media, rather than the Arabic press.

Journalists were encouraged by the UAE Journalists Association draft of a revised media law undertaken during 2005 in consultation with media professionals and the government, which has expressed willingness to lift some constraints on the media. The chairman of the journalists' association, Mohammad Yousuf, said an update of the law was overdue: "We objected to the law when it first came out in 1980, so how could we accept it today?"

Even the government is now rethinking the way it runs its media. In September 2005, the *Emirates Today* and *Al Emarat Al Youm* daily newspapers were launched by the Arab Media Group (AMG), which is reported to be the media arm of the government of the Emirate of Dubai. AMG, which had launched two radio networks that displayed a more probing approach to local issues, promised the same for the newspapers, including investigative reporting. However, ownership by the Dubai government, reported by local media agencies, implied that some limits to editorial independence would remain.

The inability to access information that journalists need for investigative reporting remained a serious obstacle faced by the UAE media in 2005. Panelists noted that journalists find difficulty in getting information on some local issues mainly because the society remains conservative in its communication with the press and tends to refrain from providing information.

As for international news and news sources, media outlets do have broad access, panelists said. However, Internet websites may be blocked by the government with the explanation that they contain material that contradicts political, religious, or social values in the country.

There are conditions that must be met before journalists get licenses, although media professionals are widely recruited for UAE outlets. The potential to revoke licenses and terminate job contracts negatively affects the security and professionalism of foreign journalists, panelists said.

Panelists noted that advances in press freedom have lagged behind the enormous commercial expansion in the UAE. However, they also characterized the UAE as among the youngest and most vibrant of the Arab states and said its rapid development since its formation in 1971 continues.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

UAE Objective Score: 1.89 / 4.00

Excessive self-censorship and editorial restrictions set by editors remained a major obstacle in the development of professional journalism in 2005. MSI panelists agreed that fair, objective, and well-sourced reporting was rare as journalists did not work in an

***“The reason why journalists publish wrong information is because they don’t have access to accurate information,” a panelist said.***

environment that allowed them to abide by international standards. There is no uniform ethics code, but some individual efforts

to introduce such standards have been made. The highly commercial nature of Dubai and other emirates tends to produce a business-friendly reporting style that consists largely of press releases and articles of praise. There are not infrequent cases of journalists receiving gifts or money to cover activities that are not necessarily newsworthy, the panelists said. Salaries of journalists seem to have not been enough to stop corruption from sneaking into the media, which enjoy a very solid technical infrastructure with state-of-the-art equipment. Quality niche reporting is

***Panelist Simon Mars, a freelance journalist and filmmaker based in Dubai, said, “Pay is poor, many journalists look for ‘gifts’ to cover stories,” resulting in a mostly pro-government and commercially oriented journalism.***

rare, although there are some targeted publications focusing on certain industries or sectors such as automobiles and sports.

The limited press freedom, the difficulty in accessing information and

lack of transparency, fear of violating the media laws, and the constraints on editorial independence combine to lower the quality of journalism in the UAE, according to the MSI assessment.

The self-censorship practiced by editors and journalists is at times beyond what is required. Panelists recalled that speeches of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, then the Dubai crown prince, urged journalists to pursue stories to reveal the truth with responsibility. They said

such calls motivated journalists to do somewhat more investigative reporting but many still did not want to take the risk. “It is editors making decisions, feeling their way through the fog because nobody knows where the red line is,” said panelist Lisa Schnellinger.

Panelists sensed that rulers of the UAE realize that quality information is key to economic development. But in reality, important debates and decisions are concealed within the Federal National Council or majlis, resulting in media that project a persistently “good news” image of the country. At least partly as a result of the lack of transparency, some journalists end up publishing falsehoods that lower the degree of professionalism. “The reason why journalists publish wrong information is because they don’t have access to accurate information,” a panelist said.

Because many journalists are steered by the editors of the government-controlled media, they are unable to publish stories based on their own judgment of their importance. Hence, many local stories that appear in the media are news items that the government wants to see in the press, while other issues that concern the public, particularly the vulnerable sectors of the community, are to some degree ignored.

Local news is covered superficially, if at all, panelists generally agreed. Crime reporting is limited to summaries from police departments and coverage

### 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).

of court proceedings. What might be presented as investigative work is generally simply good, basic reporting. Panelist Matthew Brown of *7Days*, which pushes the envelope more than other media, said he continued to do probing reporting in 2005 but was aware that he had to avoid criticizing the ruling family and be specially careful about topics dealing with religion. "Democracy is off the agenda, but there's a fair amount of freedom to be critical of institutions in the government," he said.

While there were no uniform ethical standards in the UAE, there was an individual initiative by the country's largest English daily, *Gulf News*, that set out in the form of a charter the newspaper's basic tenets on fairness, accuracy, diversity of opinion, corrections, and other issues, according to panelist Kenneth Starck. Another panelist emphasized violations of copyrights by some journalists in the UAE, particularly in electronic publishing. "This is not because the journalists want to violate copyrights, but it is because of the lack of awareness and training on Internet law," the panelist said.

A concern that has emerged lately among the media community is the effect of low wages for lower-level journalists on professionalism. Panelist Simon Mars, a freelance journalist and filmmaker based in Dubai, said, "Pay is poor, many journalists look for 'gifts' to cover stories," resulting in a mostly pro-government and commercially oriented journalism. One panelist estimated that reporters generally earn less than \$2,200 monthly.

A 2002 "Cash for Editorial" study by the International Public Relations Association quoted by the Arab Press Freedom Watch claimed that "60 percent of the Middle East PR community had altered the editorial judgment of a journalist through influence or direct payment." Panelist Elizabeth Drachman, however, said she had never been offered bribes in the UAE and that the level of corruption among reporters in the country was very low compared to other countries with media sectors in transition.

Although panelists agreed that entertainment programming in UAE media does not eclipse news and information, they said entertainment programming seems to have been allowed to flow without restrictions because of its less threatening nature in the view of the government. However, due to the conservative environment in the UAE, there are strict limits to what entertainment material can be broadcast or published by the local media. International satellite networks, however, such as Orbit and America Plus, seem to be able to show pretty much everything.

Although the UAE leads the Arab world with more than 19 radio stations operating under five networks, all of those solely targeting local audiences are government-controlled and generally entertainment-oriented. Among the stations are five that are exclusively for music and entertainment programming.

One thing that the UAE media sector is not short of in any way is technology, panelists agreed. There is little to complain about when it comes to infrastructure because media companies are powerful businesses with the needed technical capacity.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

**UAE Objective Score: 1.79 / 4.00**

There are a variety of print, broadcast, and online media outlets that are accessible and relatively affordable. However, all broadcast media are owned by the government, and the majority of private print media are linked to the government or powerful families, limiting the diversity of opinion that readers get, the MSI panel concluded. There is no transparency in media ownership, and hence it is difficult for readers to judge outlets' objectivity. Furthermore, government-owned media do not reflect the views of the entire political spectrum

#### 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.

but rather focus on the positive news provided by the authorities, panelists said. Citizens can access domestic or international media except for some online outlets that are blocked by the monopoly Internet Service Provider.

***Newspapers, most likely to offer some degree of UAE coverage, are relatively expensive. One panelist compared the 2-Dirham cost of a daily newspaper to the monthly salary of foreign laborers living on 700 Dirhams a month and paying at least half that for board.***

There is only one news agency in the UAE, which is controlled by the state and offers material of a strictly official nature. Although there are some media outlets publishing news from the home countries of segments of the expatriate

community, which constitutes more than 80 percent of the population, panelists noted very little coverage concerning their working conditions and lives in the UAE.

Generally speaking, UAE residents can access all satellite television and radio media. Publications that pass the scrutiny of the Censorship Department at the Ministry of Information are allowed to enter the UAE for local consumption. But most of the information that residents can access covers international news and not local issues. Newspapers, most likely to offer some degree of UAE coverage, are relatively expensive. One panelist compared the 2-Dirham cost of a daily newspaper to the monthly salary of foreign laborers living on 700 Dirhams a month and paying at least half that for board.

***The fact that there is no formal political opposition in the UAE makes it difficult to find any groups to present opinions counter to governmental views. "There is nothing to cover in that regard," a panelist said.***

The state Internet provider, Etisalat, filters sites using sophisticated proxy technology. A recently published report on Internet filtering in the UAE reflected a contradiction between the

leadership's desire for the UAE to be an active and open economic market and its efforts to restrict access to information. The Open Net Initiative said in its 2004–2005 report that the UAE encourages Internet use "and yet blocks its citizens from accessing a substantial number of websites." The report also noted, however, that these filtering processes "are geared toward

protecting political, moral, and religious values of the UAE and have considerable popular support."

With the very specific population characteristics of the UAE, it is an awkward task for the media to be responsive to the informational needs of residents, MSI panelists noted. Only about 20 percent of the population is national, while the majority of expatriates come from Asian countries, mainly India and Pakistan. Arabs, predominantly Egyptians, make up more than 10 percent of the population, while a small portion comes from locations ranging from Europe to Sudan to the United States.

Almost all media in the UAE have news or community sections covering events outside the UAE that concern the expatriate community and, in particular, Asian readers, who constitute the largest bloc. Three radio stations also target some Asian communities, broadcasting songs and programming in Hindi or Urdu. However, panelists said this does not come close to meeting the information needs of a community of its size.

Having a single governmental news agency, Emirates News Agency (WAM), limits the objectivity of its stories. The agency stories usually are of a positive nature regarding the authorities. The fact that there is no formal political opposition in the UAE makes it difficult to find any groups to present opinions counter to governmental views. "There is nothing to cover in that regard," a panelist said.

Private media outlets operating in the country are registered at the Ministry of Information, and print media are obliged to put the names of publishers in a visible location in those publications. The press law clearly states that "a daily shall not be circulated unless it bears the name of its owner." Arguably, however, this does not provide great insight if the owner is a publishing company with several partners, as is generally the case at UAE newspapers. The law also states that owners must be UAE nationals, meaning at least 51 percent of the shares are to be owned by Emiratis.

There is public uncertainty concerning the ownership of media in the UAE. Panelists said a significant portion of readers are not fully aware whether the publisher of a newspaper is a private company or one owned by the government or the ruling family. This applies to the giant media corporation Arab Media Group (AMG), which publishes two dailies and owns two radio networks. The company is described in the prominent [www.AMEInfo.com](http://www.AMEInfo.com) business news source as owned by the Government of Dubai, and that also was reported in 2005 by prominent daily *7Days*. On the other hand, AMG's chief executive tells the media that it is a private

company with several investors. Another case given by a panelist concerned the Abu Dhabi and Dubai television stations targeting UAE residents, which were transformed from state-run to semi-independent outlets, giving the appearance that they are private businesses. Panelists believe that the majority of shares of the majority of UAE media are likely in the hands of individuals associated with the government.

**OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT**

**UAE Objective Score: 2.37 / 4.00**

Panelists agreed strongly that most media outlets in the UAE have sound business-management strategies and are profitable. With an overall score of 2.37, this objective got the highest ranking among all objectives, and was the only one to surpass the 2.0 level of sustainability. The explosive growth of Dubai Media City accelerated the momentum, particularly for foreign investors in the free zone. UAE dailies are usually large corporations with multiple streams of income. Panelists also agreed that advertising is key to the success of private newspapers and magazines in the UAE, particularly from the booming real-estate and information-technology sectors. Some private media outside the free zone receive government subsidies or backing from members of the ruling families, but the

**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.

major source of income is advertising. Market research is carried out regularly, with promotional plans to increase revenues and readership. However, there are not yet independently verifiable formal circulation and broadcast ratings systems.

The profitability of media corporations continues to attract more investors, particularly after the launch of Dubai Media City, which hosts more than 550

media companies, including global giants such as CNN, Reuters, McGraw Hill Publishing, Bertelsmann, and the satellite broadcasters Al Arabiya and MBC, along with regional companies and start-ups.

All national UAE television stations are owned by the state and strictly adhere to the press law, particularly in covering local news. Eight radio stations are operated by the reportedly Dubai government-owned Arab Media Group (AMG), and, according to AMEinfo.com, one of them, Dubai Eye, was re-launched to the Dubai audience as a news-talk-sports broadcaster in March 2005. There are 10 daily newspapers, one of them an evening edition, sharing the growing market. There also are dozens of magazines and commercial publications that have been established in the past few years.

In November 2005, AMG launched the *Emirates Today* and *Al Emarat Al Youm* daily newspapers in compact format. AMG chief executive Abdullatif Al Sayegh said the two papers would use probing journalism to produce reports in a "different" style from that of other dailies, although it was too soon for panelists to evaluate the results.

Advertising constitutes the major source of income for the private media. Subscription rates are relatively low, and some newspapers, such as the free *7Days*, rely 100 percent on advertising revenues. Panelists agreed that the volume of advertising in the UAE media falls within acceptable margins, although the volume increases substantially during certain seasons and the potential for revenues from advertising continues to grow as more foreign businesses enter the market.

Major media enterprises in the UAE have developed their own advertising agencies and have specialized market-

***Panelist Elizabeth Drachman of Arabies Trends gave the example of the giant ITP magazine publisher, which she said "publishes a new magazine every single month."***

research teams that produce initiatives to promote their media and its services, including, for example, raffles for cars, real estate, and other attractive prizes.

**Overall, the panel concluded, the economic success of UAE media outlets has outpaced their editorial independence. As one panelist put it, “media in the UAE look independent, smell independent, and are well-managed in the sense that they are not failing,” but their content does not yet fully follow international professional journalism standards.**

The press law prohibits media from publishing advertisements containing “texts or pictures which are inconsistent with Islamic values and public ethics, to defame or libel individuals, attack the rights of others, or mislead the public.” The law has been enforced in the past, according to panelists. There were cases in which authorities went after ads

that mentioned alcohol and/or featured photos of scantily clad women, a panelist said. Advertisements for pharmaceutical preparations, beauty aids, or foodstuffs are also prohibited by law, unless there is permission from the Ministry of Information.

The press law allows investors to apply to establish a media outlet. However, only 10 licenses have been given for daily newspapers, six before 1981, none between then and 2000, and four since 2000. A resolution from the Council of Ministers is required for a daily newspaper license, and the application is considered only after submission to the Ministry of Information with a deposit of approximately \$13,000. UAE Journalists Association chairman Mohammad Yousuf said it was unjust for so few dailies to dominate the scene for so long.

The government owns the two dailies *Al-Ittihad* and *Al-Bayan* and subsidizes the country’s largest Arabic-language newspaper, *Al-Khaleej*, which is privately owned but closely connected to the Emirate of Sharjah. Until a few years ago, the government gave subsidies to all privately owned newspapers, including *Gulf News*. But panelists noted that with or without subsidies, the dailies can generate high revenues from their wide advertising base, which expands every year.

Panelist Elizabeth Drachman of *Arabies Trends* gave the example of the giant ITP magazine publisher, which she

said “publishes a new magazine every single month.” ITP is the largest business and consumer magazine publisher in the Middle East, with a wide range of market-leading titles covering almost all major areas of interest. The business environment in the UAE is so lucrative and expansive that magazine publishers do not need to do comprehensive market research before launching.

Overall, the panel concluded, the economic success of UAE media outlets has outpaced their editorial independence. As one panelist put it, “media in the UAE look independent, smell independent, and are well-managed in the sense that they are not failing,” but their content does not yet fully follow international professional journalism standards.

#### OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

**UAE Objective Score: 1.62 / 4.00**

Despite the massive business activity in the UAE, there are so far no trade unions operating in the country because of the lack of a legislation to set up such entities. Panelists said media owners usually form relations with other business leaders on an individual basis. There is only one professional association that includes protecting the freedom of speech in its mission, the UAE Journalists Association, although it receives state subsidies. Furthermore, the 100-plus

#### 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.

nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have few freedoms to associate and organize. All NGOs must register with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and get the ministry's approval before publishing material or even sending delegates to participate in activities abroad. There are several media and communication programs offered at UAE universities, some with highly qualified teachers providing theoretical and practical training to students. There are also mid-career workshops and training sessions offered to media professionals. Sources of newsprint and printing facilities are apolitical but require prior licensing. Distribution of publications is monitored by the authorities, but satellite and broadcast transmission is unrestricted. Internet access remained heavily guarded and filtered through a government company. The MSI panel considered the UAE media sector weakest in meeting this objective, with a score of 1.62, mainly due to the lack of proper institutions to defend and promote professional journalism.

In a country that enjoys free trade, attractive tax incentives, and a flexible business environment, the lack of trade associations is a major issue. However, a news report in 2005 said that the UAE was laying a legal foundation to set up trade unions to protect the rights of citizens and expatriate workers, according to reports in *Gulf News*. In another report, the newspaper quoted the UAE labor minister saying that a new labor law, granting workers the right to peacefully assemble and form trade unions, might be enacted by the end of 2006. Changes to the labor law were introduced initially in 2004 as a precondition for signing a Free Trade Agreement between the UAE and the United States.

The UAE Journalists Association is the most active professional association that strives to protect the rights of journalists to freedom of expression. Even though it is mostly funded by the government, it remains the strongest voice. During 2005, there were several cases in which the UAE Journalists Association provided journalists with legal support and sent a representative to the authorities to challenge violations of journalists' rights. The association's elected chairman, Mohammad Yousuf, said the UAE Journalists Association had stood by journalists when they were subject to injustice, harassment, or threats. "We had about 20 cases in 2005; some of them were serious as there were confrontations with the police twice, with the Ministry of Education once, and with the Ministry of Labor as well," he said. He noted that when a journalist is given legal support, particularly if he is accompanied by a lawyer or association representative, prosecutors tend to suspend legal proceedings. He said journalists have consistently prevailed in conflicts with the authorities,

who are now more aware of the risks if they confront the media.

To better protect journalists, Mohammad Yousuf said, the association is pushing for the approval of the newly drafted press law. "We have realized that there is a problem as journalists have turned to be treated as criminals and not as opinion makers," he said. The new law was in the making for over a year, and expectations were high for its ultimate approval by the Federal National Council.

Although it does not specialize in protecting press freedom, the Human Rights Committee of the Jurists Association, a government-subsidized association of lawyers and judicial personnel, focuses on local and regional human-rights issues through educational means, including seminars and symposia.

There were unsuccessful attempts in 2005 to establish NGOs that would support press freedom as one of the priorities along with other human rights. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs did not grant a license to establish the UAE Human Rights Society as an independent NGO. The ministry also failed to provide a license to the Emirates Association for Human Rights, which was also seeking human-rights NGO status.

When it comes to international media supporting organizations, panelist Lisa Schnellinger said, "media nonprofit organizations have not paid as much attention to the Gulf region as they have to other Arab countries because of the wealth, small size, and relative stability of the GCC countries, as well as the fact that most major grants for journalism training are focused on countries in the Levant." She also noted that local journalists throughout the Middle East are sometimes suspicious of the motives of foreign nonprofit organizations, believing they may have political interests or be attempting to impose their cultural values.

Several journalism and communication programs are offered at UAE universities, including at the American University at Sharjah and at Zayed University. The College of Communication and Media Sciences of Zayed University, an all-women's school, offers students an opportunity to be awarded a Bachelor of Science degree in Communication and Media Sciences. Dean Kenneth Starck said the program teaches "journalism theory and practice as it is taught in respected programs in Western democracies." According to [www.AMEInfo.com](http://www.AMEInfo.com), Zayed University Media Center, which provides training, research, and consultancy to media-related companies, had also signed an alliance agreement with the Dubai Press Club in October

2004 focusing on “enhancing the skill-set of media professionals in the Gulf region.”

A number of short-term workshops and on-the-job training initiatives were organized in 2005, most by local media or institutions, but not enough to meet needs, according to panelists. The Dubai Press Club is among the most active in holding such activities. The club was established in November 1999 “to foster interaction among journalists and media professionals from around the world, to promote exchange of ideas between newsmakers and the news communicators, and to create a world-class facility that fosters pursuit of journalistic excellence.” The club also launched the first journalism awards to recognize journalistic

excellence in the Arab world.

Newsprint and printing facilities are private, apolitical, and unrestricted. There are many printing presses throughout the

***“We have realized that there is a problem as journalists have turned to be treated as criminals and not as opinion makers,”***  
***Mohammad Yousuf said.***

country with state-of-the-art technology. The quality of production is very high, and many dailies print pages in glossy paper, which is not always affordable in other nearby Arab countries. However, printing presses need to be licensed, and each publication—whether periodical or a one-time offering—needs to obtain a license of its own. Owners of the printing presses and the printed publication both must be UAE nationals, according to the law.

The Printing and Publishing Law of 1980 requires that a license be granted for distribution service providers before circulating publications. The authorities then normally review the publication and decide whether it can be circulated or should be edited before being distributed. According to the press law, the authorities may delete from the publication any paragraph that includes material whose circulation is prohibited by the law. “Deletion may be made by cutting out the subject material by scissors, or covering details by a special ink or any other tools deemed effective,” the law says. This measure is rarely implemented. Distribution of imported publications is prohibited by the law unless permission is obtained from the censorship department at the Ministry of Information.

Satellite and broadcast transmission is free. Broadcast media are free to broadcast from Dubai Media City without any restrictions. A special “Code of Guidance” was issued by the media city in an effort to stipulate

what can and cannot be broadcast into the UAE to avoid confrontation with the authorities.

The Internet remains guarded by the only ISP in the country, state-owned Etisalat. Whether users use dial-up or Direct Subscriber Line services, Internet access is filtered, panelists said. There were increasing calls in 2005 to the government to loosen its grip on Internet access. According to the most recent report by Open Net Initiative (ONI), nearly all pornography, gambling, religious conversion, and illegal drugs sites tested were successfully blocked by the proxy. Furthermore, the state also blocks access to all sites in the Israeli top-level domain and sites on the Bahai faith, Middle East-oriented gay and lesbian issues, and English-language (though not Arabic-language) dating sites. The government had prosecuted two individuals who attempted to bypass Etisalat’s exclusive telecommunications access. According to ONI, “Two people who set up a Voice-over Internet Protocol router and transferred calls from the Internet to the UAE telephone system were sentenced to three months in jail plus a substantial fine.”

## **MSI Participants**

**Lisa Schnellinger**, journalist, Dubai

**Simon Mars**, freelance journalist and filmmaker, Dubai

**Helmi Noman**, IT and media specialist, Abu Dhabi

**Elizabeth Drachman**, business editor, *Arabies Trends* magazine, Dubai

**Matthew Brown**, writer, *7Days*, Dubai

**Dr. Kenneth Starck**, dean, College of Communication and Media Sciences, Zayed University, Dubai

**Moza Matar**, editor, Emirates Media Incorporated, Dubai

**Dr. Reem Obeidat**, UNESCO chair, Dubai Women’s College, Dubai

**Ghada Selim**, journalist, *Al-Ittihad Daily*, Dubai

**Iqbal Al Tamimi**, news assistant producer, Al-Arabiya

## **Moderator**

**Walid Al Saqaf**, media consultant, IREX, Yemen

# UNITED ARAB EMIRATES AT A GLANCE

## GENERAL

- **Population:** 4.3 million (UAE census 2005 tedad.ae)
- **Capital city:** Abu Dhabi
- **Ethnic groups:** Emirati 19%, other Arab and Iranian 23%, South Asian 50%, other expatriates (includes Westerners and East Asians) 8% (1982)
- **Religions:** Muslim 96%, Christian, Hindu, and other 4% (The Emirates Network)
- **Languages:** Arabic (official), English, Hindu, Farsi (The Emirates Network)
- **GDP (ppp):** \$74.51 billion
- **GDP per capita (ppp):** \$19,234 (2003 est., UNESCO)
- **Literacy rate:** male 76%, female 81% (2004 est., UNICEF)
- **President or top authority:** Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan (since December 2004)
- **Next scheduled elections:** Plans to hold the first Federal National Council elections for half of the council's seats were announced in November 2005, but no date was set.

daily) and privately owned *Al-Khaleej* (85,000 daily). (Arab Press Network arabpressnetwork.org)

- **Broadcast networks:** There are 10 broadcast television and radio networks. The top three are the Abu Dhabi government-owned Emirates Media Inc., which also runs print media, and the Dubai government-owned Dubai Radio Network and Arabian Radio Network. (indexuae.com)
- **Television stations:** There are more than 40 television channels beaming through digital satellite. However, many of them are based in Dubai Media City (DMC) and don't specifically target UAE residents. The main three television stations target local viewers and are viewable using normal antennas as well as satellite receivers: Abu Dhabi TV (state-owned by government of Abu Dhabi), Dubai TV (state-owned by government of Dubai), Sharjah TV (state-owned by government of Sharjah). (flysat.com)

The DMC hosts over 550 media companies, including global giants such as CNN, Reuters, Sony Broadcast & Professional, McGraw Hill Publishing, Bertelsmann, MBC, and Al Arabiya.

- **Radio stations:** Thirteen AM Stations, seven FM Stations, and two short-wave stations (Radio Abu Dhabi and UAE Radio) are broadcast in the country. Radio programs are aired primarily in Arabic and English; however, there are some broadcasts in other languages. The five primary

radio stations are Capital Radio, Emirates FM, Dubai FM Radio, Ras Al Khaimah Radio, and Umm Al Quwain Radio. (American University)

- **Active print outlets:** There are dozens of magazines and periodicals licensed by the Ministry of Information and printed in the UAE. ITP claims to be the largest business and consumer magazine publisher in the Middle East and is based in Dubai.

- **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A

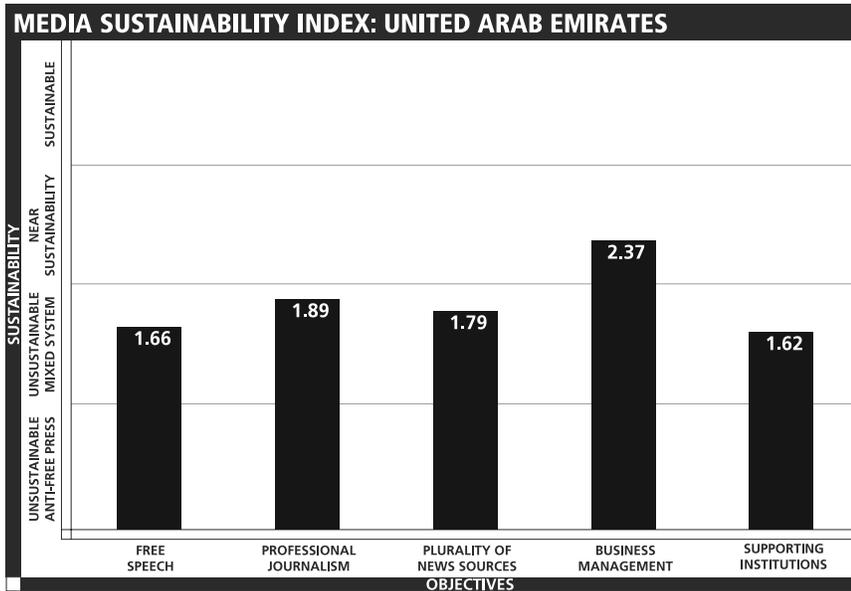
- **Number of Internet users:** 1.25 million (as of 2005, 31% of population has Internet access); by 2008, estimated number would be 2.41 million users. (AMEinfo.com)

- **News agencies:** State-owned Emirates News Agency (WAM) – Abu Dhabi

- **Significant foreign investment in the media:** Most media in Dubai Media City are owned by foreign investors, but statistics are not available. Media that are not in the free zone must be owned by nationals (Printing and Publishing Law).

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- **Newspaper circulation statistics:** There are 10 daily newspapers with a total circulation of about 700,000 copies per day. The largest circulating newspapers are Arab Media Group (Dubai government)-owned *Al Emarat Al Youm* (100,000 daily), followed by privately owned *Gulf News* (91,000



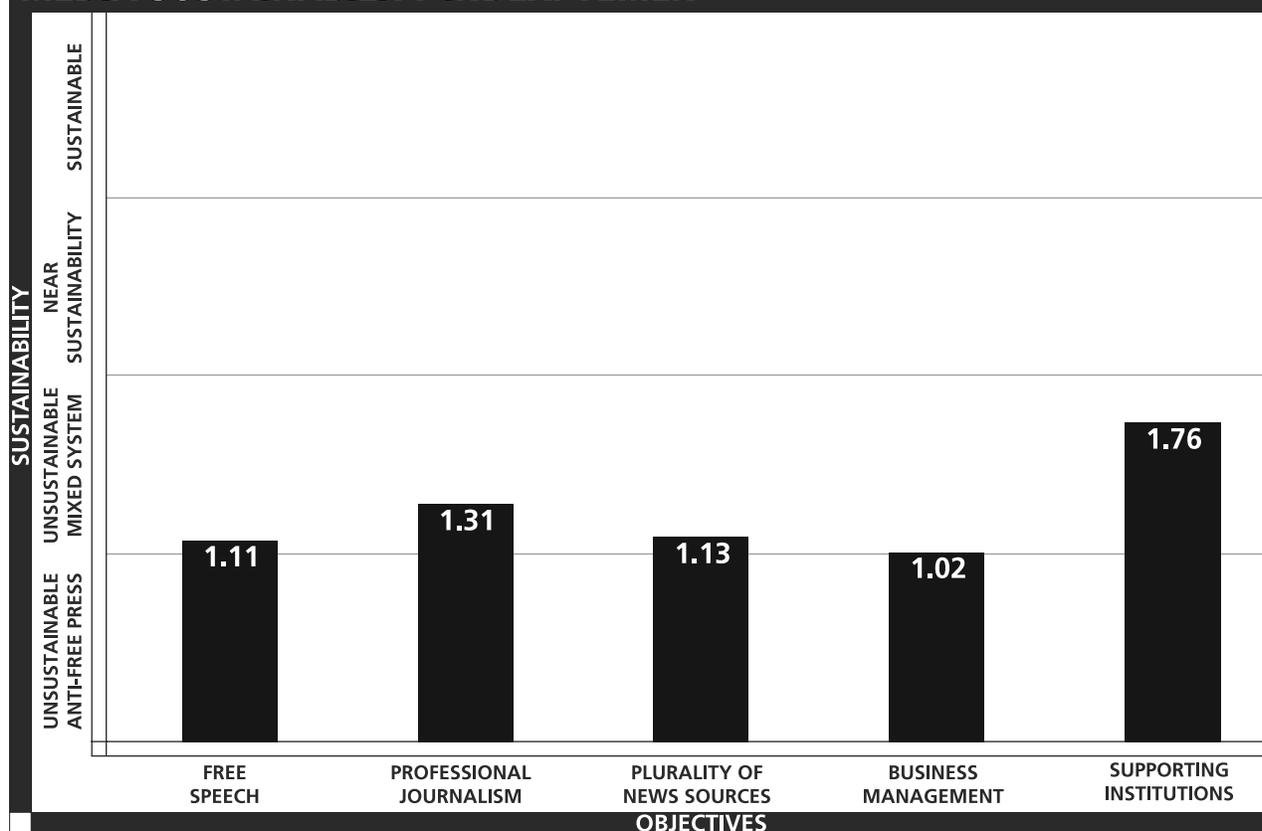
IN THE PANEL'S ASSESSMENT, JOURNALISTIC PROFESSIONALISM WAS ERODED IN 2005 BY A HIGHER DEGREE OF SELF-CENSORSHIP AND FEAR OF INTIMIDATION AND VIOLENCE, PARTICULARLY AS JOURNALISTS HAD LITTLE FAITH IN THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM THAT SENTENCED SEVERAL JOURNALISTS TO PRISON.



**T**he year 2005 was one of the most politically tense in Yemen's modern history. In the northern governorate of Sa'ada, fighting renewed in March between followers of a cleric killed in 2004 by the military and government forces, which view the rebellion movement as a threat to the country's overall stability. Tension mounted in July when demonstrations against sudden gas-price increases turned violent in several cities, resulting in at least 43 deaths and 500 injuries. The discord slowed economic growth, worsening poverty and triggering public anger reflected in increased criticism of the government in the media. The regime responded to the allegations of corruption and mismanagement with attacks on the opposition and independent media, moves that members of the Media Sustainability Index (MSI) panel said contrasted with official pledges to the international community to strengthen democracy and allow greater freedoms. Yemeni journalists were stabbed, shot, arrested, kidnapped, threatened, and prosecuted throughout the year. Court orders sentenced journalists to jail and closed down newspapers, marking a serious deterioration in press freedom in the country that was once viewed as an outpost of democracy in the southern Arabian Peninsula.

In August, Yemeni journalists and media owners represented by the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate unanimously rejected a controversial draft law introduced by the government to replace the 15-year-old press and publications statute. Although the government claimed the law would promote press freedom and serve the media community, Yemeni journalists and local and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) criticized it as a threat to media independence. The government withdrew the draft and instead introduced some amendments to the existing 1990 law for debate in the Shoura Council. The revision of the current Law on Press and Publications was set in motion in 2004, when President Ali Abdullah Saleh called for the abolition of prison sentences for press-related offenses.

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: YEMEN



**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.

The MSI panel scored Yemen's overall media sector at 1.27, not yet meeting minimal criteria for a sustainable and free press. The panel considered media management as particularly weak, with the strongest showing among the media's supporting institutions. Panelists also warned of tough days ahead for Yemeni media, particularly as the scheduled September 2006 presidential election approached. Panelists said efforts needed to be stepped up to prevent endorsement of the proposed media law, which one described as "the straw that would break the camel's back."

In the panel's assessment, journalistic professionalism was eroded in 2005 by a higher degree of self-censorship and fear of intimidation and violence, particularly as journalists had little faith in the judicial system that sentenced several journalists to prison. Panelists agreed that rapidly deteriorating economic conditions negatively affected the operation of independent media and forced journalists to seek multiple jobs. Some newspapers had to reduce staff. The panel said media-support organizations were overwhelmed by the need to react to many violations of press freedom, and that attention to Yemen's media from the international community was overdue.

#### OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH

**Yemen Objective Score: 1.11 / 4.00**

MSI panelists agreed that free speech in Yemen was victimized in various ways during 2005, and gave a score of 1.11 for this objective. They said the wave of violence against journalists demonstrated that there is little legal or social protection. They noted that the government does not allow licensing of private broadcast media that might have significant influence on the population that is 50 percent illiterate, although entry into the market is facilitated for print media. The panelists said crimes against journalists are not dealt with, particularly if the attackers are alleged to be affiliated with the government. Libel cases resulted in criminal charges, and state officials always get preferential judicial treatment, panelists said. Although public information is accessible to a certain degree and entry to the field of journalism is not restricted, panelists complained of lack of responsiveness by the authorities when journalists request information about sensitive issues.

The most significant obstacle to securing free speech in Yemen, according to MSI panelists, is the 15-year-old press and publication law, which they described as "out-of-date" and written with "a totalitarian mentality." They said proposed revisions of the law would create more restrictions, and the constraints in

the press law contradict the Constitution's guarantees of freedom of expression.

Abdulkareem Al Khaiwani, the editor-in-chief of *Al-Shura* newspaper, which was closed by the government in 2004 and remained closed throughout

2005, said there were no guarantees for free speech not because there are no laws but because "the political leadership in Yemen is unwilling to accept the other viewpoint." After serving a six-month jail term as a result of a controversial lawsuit, Abdulkareem Al Khaiwani was released in March 2005 with a

***"For a country suffering from 50 percent illiteracy, it is obvious the regime doesn't want to give nongovernmental entities a voice to millions of Yemenis and so it prohibited the establishment of private electronic media outlets," said panelist Mohamed Sallam.***

#### 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.

presidential pardon. He said judicial authority is abused and “Yemen is unfortunately considered an insecure environment for journalists.”

Former parliament member Mohamed Naji Allaw, who participated in the panel as a lawyer who specializes in defending journalists, said the problem lies in the interpretation of the press law, which has ambiguity and vagueness in many of its articles. “The press law that we are dealing with broadened the prohibitions

***“How could we expect the regime to punish itself?” asked Abdulkareem Al Khaiwani, who was beaten up in jail in 2005. “My experience has been sober and extreme. But for once, we need to speak up and ask why are journalists vulnerable to all sorts of crimes and authorities are not caring less about them?”***

to a degree that made it look like an emergency law,” Mohamed Naji Allaw said. “Even if a journalist wrote about Yemeni cultural heritage, he may well be prosecuted for allegedly ‘harming Yemen’s great national heritage,’” he added. This view was supported by panelist Mansour

Hayel, an editor for *Al-Tajammu* weekly: “It is certain that the current legal and social conditions in the country do not protect free speech.”

Mohamed Al Tayeb, head of the Human Rights and Liberties Committee at the Shura Council, acknowledged the problems that the consultative body faced in coming up with a proper revised press law. “We had a progressive look to the future and wanted to help formulate a law that would maximize the margin of freedom, but we were faced by massive opposition by sides that want more restrictions on the media,” he said, adding that the draft law could turn into “the most dangerous law that was ever issued in the last 15 years” if the views of journalists and other stakeholders are ignored.

The Yemeni regime has imposed a tight monopoly over broadcast media since the country’s unification in 1990. The only broadcast media available in Yemen today is controlled by the state, and no licensing is allowed for private television and radio stations. Applications presented to the Ministry of Information for private broadcasting licenses have all been rejected with the explanation that the area is not regulated by the law. Hussein Al Awadhi, who served as the Minister of Information in 2005, told the media community that a

new law regulating the licensing of television and radio stations would make it possible for him to proceed in giving licenses. However, the recently proposed draft revisions again avoided licensing broadcast media. “For a country suffering from 50 percent illiteracy, it is obvious the regime doesn’t want to give nongovernmental entities a voice to millions of Yemenis and so it prohibited the establishment of private electronic media outlets,” said panelist Mohamed Sallam.

Yemen has a relatively small media market compared with the neighboring region, even though there are no restrictions or tax structures imposed on media businesses. Newspaper owners are exempt from profit and sale taxes, but workers’ income taxes are reported regularly. The market has yet to gain momentum, circulation figures are very low, and most businesses do not care about advertising in the local press, panelists said.

The main free-press issue discussed by the panel concerned crimes committed against journalists and media outlets. There was a clear sense of grief and frustration among panelists. They said the judiciary and law enforcement usually stood by when journalists are attacked and detailed incidents, alleging they were primarily on the part of the authorities and elements loyal to the regime. In August 2005, for example, unidentified armed men kidnapped Jamal Amer, the editor-in-chief of the independent *Al-Wasat* newspaper, harassing and humiliating him. Authorities failed to bring the culprits to justice, giving varying excuses, the panelists said. In November 2005, opposition journalist Nabil Sabaie was stabbed in both shoulders by armed men on one of the busiest streets of the capital, but authorities failed to bring the attacker to justice despite claims that they arrested the attacker. There were at least a dozen similar incidents presented by panelists, who said that crimes against journalists averaged one a week—although representatives of a local NGO such as the National Organization to Defend Rights and Freedoms (NODRF) say the number is probably higher.

NODRF director Khalid Al Anisi, who is also a legal expert in media issues, said that through his public speeches and actions, President Ali Abdullah Saleh has implicitly opened the door for the harassment and humiliation of journalists. He noted that attacks by soldiers and police officers against journalists while on duty taking pictures, interviewing people, and covering demonstrations are frequent and considered the norm. He said not a single officer or soldier was brought to justice for such acts, which he saw as confirming that the regime supports such attacks. “How could we expect the regime to punish itself?”

asked Abdulkareem Al Khaiwani, who was beaten up in jail in 2005. "My experience has been sober and extreme. But for once, we need to speak up and ask why are journalists vulnerable to all sorts of crimes and authorities are not caring less about them?"

Another panelist noted as a free-expression issue the case of cleric Yahya Al Dailami, who was sentenced to death in May 2005 for alleged involvement in destabilizing the country's security. Yahya Al Dailami said his only fault was expressing his opinion in support of a peaceful dissent against government action in Sa'ada.

The majority of panelists agreed that there was preferential legal treatment for state media. Some suggested, however, that since the overwhelming majority of cases are against journalists from anti-government media, such preferential treatment is not usually needed. "But when the moment of truth comes, there is definitely a bias against opposition media," a panelist said.

Panelists agreed that libel is considered a criminal issue and there have been numerous cases when journalists were prosecuted and sentenced. Public officials are almost always the winners in such cases due to preferential judicial treatment. This includes the President of the Republic, who had numerous cases filed on his behalf against journalists, including some that led to journalists being imprisoned.

Abdullah Al Sabiri, the editor-in-chief of *Sawt Al-Shura* newspaper, said he was prosecuted once due to a libel action filed by the Ministry of Information. "I was first acquitted, but the prosecutor was not satisfied and filed the lawsuit again. But even after I was acquitted again, the Ministry kept on filing lawsuits," Abdullah Al Sabiri said. Panelist Mohamed Naji Allaw said the authorities usually capitalize on the fact that the judiciary is corrupt, weak, unqualified, and biased toward the state.

When it comes to access to information, panelists said the regime practices secrecy in most daily operations and rarely provides information to nongovernmental media. It is not only a matter of tradition, but sometimes imposed by strict orders from higher authorities, Mohamed Naji Allaw said. "Not even one single government official, whether in high or low positions, can give a public statement without prior permission. Otherwise, he could be severely punished," Mohamed Naji Allaw added. He referred to a memo issued in 2005 to all employees of the Ministry of Education stating that they could be fired if they ignored instructions not to talk to the press or give any information.

Even though media outlets in Yemen generally have unrestricted access to international news and news sources, there are cases of censorship of publications arriving from abroad. Internet access generally has made it possible for journalists to gain all the required information directly without government involvement, except if they need to access websites that the authorities block for being "offensive" to the cultural values of the public.

Entry into the profession of journalism is relatively free and encouraged by the state. However, one of the gravest concerns of MSI panelists was a proposal embedded in the newly drafted press law to limit the profession to members of the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate. So far, the only license required to practice journalism is for foreign media correspondents.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Yemen Objective Score: 1.31 / 4.00

Panelists agreed that journalists and media outlets in Yemen are behind international standards in terms of professionalism and objectivity. Panelists who were not journalists themselves expressed concern about deterioration in the level of professionalism during 2005, particularly regarding ethical standards. An increase in the level of self-censorship during 2005 also was recognized by panelists, who agreed that journalists

### Journalism meets professional standards of quality.

#### PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

- > Reporting is fair, objective, and well sourced.
- > Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards.
- > Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.
- > Journalists cover key events and issues.
- > Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption.
- > 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).

working for the public media fail to cover important events. There was a clear consensus that Yemen needs time and effort to reach an acceptable standard of media professionalism that could be compared even to neighboring countries. Extremely low salaries have resulted in massive corruption in the media, panelists agreed, and technical equipment and journalism tools are almost nonexistent in the media scene in Yemen. But

***“There are many other more vital things to deal with than ethical standards. We have journalists beaten, imprisoned, and steps to add more standards in such a time do not make sense,” Mohamed Sallam of the Yemen Times newspaper said.***

professional and fair manner due to lack of sufficient professional and academic background and because of what some described as the “journalist-unfriendly” environment in Yemen. Rahma Hujaira, director of the Yemeni Female Journalists Forum, complained of the lack of proper training in the country. “For female journalists, the issue is even more extreme. We know

***“The problem in my opinion is not in salaries because journalists tend to look for other means to make a living and to have some personal connections because they know there is no protection from being fired from work even after working for 15 or more years,” [panelist Nabeel Al Sofee of NewsYemen] said.***

reached. “There are many other more vital things to deal with than ethical standards. We have journalists beaten, imprisoned, and steps to add more standards in such a time do not make sense,” Mohamed Sallam of the *Yemen Times* newspaper said. Panelist Mansour Hayel, editor of *Al-Tajammu* newspaper in Sanaa, added, “Whatever we see in the Yemeni press does not come close to the international journalism standards.”

when it came to niche reporting on specialized subjects, there were some good initiatives, panelists said.

Journalists on the panel acknowledged that they could not do reports in an entirely

that most media outlets in Yemen are run by males, who usually give male journalists a higher chance of getting some training,” she said.

Ethical standards are not generally defined. Attempts by the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate to have a code of ethics failed because no consensus was

The level of self-censorship increased significantly in 2005 due to the unprecedented wave of attacks against journalists, panelists concurred. Abdullah Al Sabiri, editor-in-chief of *Sawt Al-Shura* newspaper in Sanaa, said: “Journalists are nowadays uneasy about writing any critical articles against the state and other powerful entities. There is a lot of stake here, and we know the law cannot protect us.”

Most journalists working for the governmental media focus on stories according to the priorities of the government and not according to their importance to citizens. With the overwhelming majority of Yemeni journalists working for state media, which includes the Saba official news agency, the largest employer of Yemeni journalists, and the three official dailies, most journalists find themselves covering events that don’t necessarily mean a lot to the general public. This includes articles on the president’s activities and visits, agreements signed, guests received, and cables of condolences and greetings. Journalists at opposition and independent newspapers have been able to focus on other more important issues due to less governmental restrictions. However, panelists agreed that with a few exceptions, private Yemeni newspapers also have their own agendas and tend to focus more on what concerns their management.

Corruption is rampant in all walks of life in Yemen, and journalism is no exception. Panelists agreed that contributing factors are widespread poverty and poor pay for journalists, who would be happy receiving as little as \$5 to do complete coverage for an event. “Sometimes a free lunch may suffice,” said Mohamed Sallam. This, according to panelists, is natural in a country where the annual average per-capita income is \$600. “I think we should not blame journalists for this. With an average monthly salary of \$150, it would be almost impossible to make a living without income from other sources,” Mohamed Sallam said.

However, panelist Nabeel Al Sofee of NewsYemen believes that journalism as a profession is more lucrative than others because journalists can try to make connections with businessmen or authorities. “The problem in my opinion is not in salaries because journalists tend to look for other means to make a living and to have some personal connections because they know there is no protection from being fired from work even after working for 15 or more years,” he said.

Panelists said that the balance of news to entertainment in Yemeni newspapers is influenced by news articles written in a sarcastic and unprofessional manner. They said many writers put their opinions or scandalous stories on front pages just to catch attention, while there are no solid news stories inside.

Up-to-date technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are scarce at media outlets around the country. For example, very few newspapers provide open Internet access to journalists. Hence, there is a very large segment of the journalism community without access to e-mail or important Internet resources. Journalists do have traditional cameras and tape recorders, but they are mostly obsolete and need to be replaced. Due to financial limitations, journalists in general are unable to provide technical facilities necessary to achieve the optimum reporting standards.

Rahma Hujaira, herself an active media trainer, complained that workshops and courses on using the Internet cannot achieve their goal. In those courses, journalists are taught to use the Internet, but when the trainees return to their newspapers, they cannot practice most of what they learned because of the lack of access. "Therefore, training journalists without having proper technical facilities and equipment may not always produce the desired results," she said.

When it comes to quality niche reporting, Yemeni journalists strive to do their best but face the tough reality of an environment that does not encourage investigative journalism. Panelists said there should be credit given to some who have managed to produce investigative reporting and interesting stories of high quality. However, poor human resources, lack of funding, lack of institutional infrastructures, low readership, and other factors all limit production of more quality journalism. Such programming on national television and radio are almost nonexistent, due as well to the lack of competition resulting from the government monopoly of the airwaves.

**OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES**

**Yemen Objective Score: 1.13 / 4.00**

Among the countries in its neighborhood, Yemen arguably has the broadest range of locally produced print news outlets with diverse opinions. But panelists agreed that this diversity of news is not accessible by more than 90 percent of the population because of a high illiteracy rate. According to government reports, 49.2 percent of the population ages 10 to 45 is illiterate, with the rate about 30 percent among men and 67 percent for women. This problem is compounded by the fact that most of the population lives in rural areas that have no distribution of newspapers.

Although Yemen enjoys a diversity of information sources that range from government to opposition,

independent and international, the state monopoly over broadcast media limits this diversity. Citizens learn about some local events through pan-Arab satellite news networks, and Internet access is available in cities and affordable. The government, however, remains careful in selectively publishing and broadcasting material that only reflects the official stance, limiting the diversity of opinions in the state print and broadcast media. Furthermore, the fact that there is

only one news agency increases the government monopoly. There is no transparency concerning ownership of private media, particularly as

owners of newspapers are usually families or individuals with certain religious, political, or social affiliations. This makes judgments on their editorial independence quite difficult for readers.

The public enjoys a wealth of diversified sources of news, and citizens are free to purchase and read newspapers that may be extremely harsh about the

***"Journalists working for governmental media suffer from many restrictions and are unable to report freely about the opposition," said Mohamed Sallam.***

**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.

regime. Due to the fact that broadcast media in Yemen are fully in the hands of the government, the public tends to watch international television channels using satellite systems, which are currently popular and affordable. The Internet remains out of reach of more than 99 percent of the public due to the required equipment, illiteracy, and the lack of telephone lines in rural areas, where more than 70 percent of the population lives.

***“This is the best time to allow the private electronic media to emerge, because competition will definitely help raise the standards of the national TV network, which is ranked in the bottom of Arab networks,” panelist Mohamed Sallam of Yemen Times said.***

Associated Press correspondent Ahmed Al Haj complained that many people do not know what is going on in Yemen due to restrictions imposed on sending broadcast material from Yemen for global distribution. “I remember how

the Yemeni authorities prevented us from broadcasting live footage of the demonstrations that broke out in 2005 over a sudden price hike in petroleum commodities,” he said. “Even though there were dozens killed and injured, footage could not be sent to the international community due to such government-imposed restrictions.”

Yemeni citizens can easily access domestic or international media without restrictions, and this is perhaps one of the positive aspects of the country’s media sector. However, newspapers, magazines, books, video material, and other material that come by mail or freight are inspected before being allowed to reach consumers or distributors. Furthermore, the Internet is also filtered as the two service providers (Teleyemen and Yemen.net) impose proxy restrictions to bar users from accessing sites that may contain gambling and pornographic content, the panel said. All other types of websites, including political and social websites, are accessible. The restrictions on political websites were removed in the late 1990s.

Panelists agreed strongly that state media do not reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, and are mostly loyal to the policies of the General People’s Congress ruling party. “Journalists working for governmental media suffer from many restrictions and are unable to report freely about the opposition,” said Mohamed Sallam. The reasons, according to panelists,

were mainly due to governmental policy.

Panelist Sami Ghalib, a prominent writer and senior member of the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate, said the situation of the state media is even worse than the rest because of “issues concerned with professional training and liberties” at those institutions. “It is basically due to the conflict of interest. It is not in the interest of the government to publish in its newspapers criticism of the regime or performance of the Cabinet,” Sami Ghalib explained.

So far, there are no independent news agencies that gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media. However, some private initiatives emerged in 2005 in the form of news content providing websites that operate in a fashion similar to news agencies. Among them is [www.news-yemen.net](http://www.news-yemen.net), whose editor-in-chief, Nabeel Al Sofee, explained its role as “a neutral source of news reporting” and a possible addition to the official news agency, Saba. However, his fear that the proposed revised press law might target such websites and begin applying legal constraints and pressure was also reflected in the panel discussion. “This is partly why we feel the government should come clean and transparent about its intentions of including the electronic media in its draft law,” Nabeel Al Sofee said.

There are no independent broadcast media in Yemen despite many calls by the media community to have the government allow the establishment of such outlets. The government declared its commitment to liberate the electronic media in January 2004 at a conference on democracy and human rights held in Sanaa. However, the proposed media law ignored broadcast media, and President Saleh has said that it is too early for Yemen to allow private broadcast media to emerge.

Lawyer Mohamed Naji Allaw said one of the serious flaws in the media scene in Yemen is the lack of private broadcast media. “The government is currently controlling all effective media organs, and hence depriving other political parties from owning their own TV and radio channels, leaving very little competition in reaching the masses,” he said. He suggested that due to the high level of illiteracy in Yemen, the government seems unwilling to let go of its broadcast media monopoly, which guarantees the regime greater outreach to rural and remote areas throughout the country. Panelists agreed that if the regime is committed to democratization, this could be demonstrated by allowing private media to emerge, as the public is “fed up with the national TV and radio channels” and is diverting its attention to regional

and international networks. "This is the best time to allow the private electronic media to emerge, because competition will definitely help raise the standards of the national TV network, which is ranked in the bottom of Arab networks," panelist Mohamed Sallam of *Yemen Times* said.

Owners of media in Yemen can easily be identified with a quick look at the first few pages of their publications, which usually include the owner's name and address. However, the ideology of the owners and their self-interest may remain a mystery to the readers. Most newspapers in Yemen are owned by families and are much smaller in scale compared with other newspapers in the region. There are no corporate media enterprises in Yemen and hence very little to hide about the partners and shareholders in those companies. The proposed press law could apply certain conditions to ownership, such as having specified minimum capital, which could in turn make establishing a newspaper a privilege limited to the wealthy of Yemen.

Furthermore, the proposed press law mentioned conditions for journalists applying for an "electronic communication network." According to a report by Article 19, an international organization defending freedom of expression, this could be applied to Internet news services, which may eventually have to abide by the same licensing mechanism applied to the print media.

The ability to get licenses for small newspapers with relative ease has contributed to the establishment of local newspapers dealing with a certain social group or region. There are several newspapers concerned with women and family affairs. The coverage of news is concentrated on cities, and little attention is provided to rural areas, where the majority of people live. Due to the fact that the Yemeni society is mostly homogenous, all newspapers are in Arabic except for two that are in English, *Yemen Times* and *Yemen Observer*, and mostly target the elite and expatriate community.

**OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT**

**Yemen Objective Score: 1.02 / 4.00**

When it comes to business management of newspapers, Yemen presents a bleak picture. Panelists agreed that the environment for newspaper businesses in Yemen is highly risky. Many newspapers were suspended and closed in recent years. With the risk of closure and bankruptcy quite high, investors think twice before venturing into this "mine field," as some panelists described it. Although tax laws are not applicable to the private press, the limited revenues from advertising make it difficult for those newspapers to grow and

compete regionally. The fact that advertising agencies focus on a very few newspapers limits the income opportunity of the majority of smaller papers. Most newspapers are owned by individuals who struggle to keep them afloat amid harsh economic conditions. The average \$500 subsidy given by the Ministry of Information to newspapers does not cover producing a single issue in a year. Market research is rare, and statistics about sales and circulation are not verified by any independent or governmental body.

Panelists were very clear in warning that the private media industry in Yemen is collapsing and unable to meet the basic demands of salaries of their employees. Panelist Nabeel Al Sofee, who is the owner of the NewsYemen.net news service, used to manage *Al-Sahwa* newspaper, the mouthpiece of the opposition Islah party. He described managing media institutions in Yemen as "a grave challenge" due to many factors: "Media institutions in Yemen are not economically feasible at all. There are no real investments in newspapers, and all newspapers simply work based on their merits and reputation and not their capital."

Panelists endorsed this view, taking into account the fact that the majority of private newspapers in Yemen are shabby and copies are usually printed in black and white only. They are printed on the cheapest recycled newsprint in tabloid size to cut costs and usually

**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.

come out weekly with an average of eight pages per edition. “This makes the technical capabilities of private newspapers ‘zero’ at this point,” Nabeel Al Sofee added. Furthermore, panelists said private sector investors shy away from media investments because they believe the government views newspapers as a means of propaganda, and for this reason, newspapers have not developed into corporate enterprises.

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Public television and radio and all governmental newspapers—except, perhaps, for the largest daily, *Al-Thowra*—are surviving on subsidies from the government and are not economically independent despite the fact that they generate significant sums from advertisements

usually delivered to them by government offices or businessmen wishing to gain favor.

Yemeni media have few options when it comes to revenue sources. Most newspapers survive on the advertisements provided by companies and some governmental institutions. Due to very low circulation numbers, their income from sales is insignificant and may barely cover the cost of distributing the newspaper. The only way newspapers have survived is to slash costs by minimizing staff, with many having only a handful to run the whole newspaper. Another trick is to cut printing costs by making only a few thousand copies on recycled, low-quality paper.

The problems of newspaper owners increased with the government’s decision in mid-2005 to significantly raise the price of petroleum products, panelists noted. This resulted in an increase in the cost of paper, transportation, and salaries.

The overwhelming majority of newspapers in Yemen do not receive any attention from advertising agencies due to their low quality in terms of appearance and content, panelists said. A few larger newspapers take the majority of the advertising revenue offered by advertising agencies. Among those newspapers are the

governmental newspapers, the daily *Al-Thowra* and *26 September*, along with a few private newspapers that are doing better than the average, including the weekly *Annas*, twice-weekly *Yemen Times*, *Yemen Observer*, the daily *Al-Ayyam*, and a few others.

Abdullah Al Sabiri of *Sawt Al-Shura* newspaper said getting advertisements for opposition newspapers from companies is almost impossible. “We have knocked on every door offering discounted prices and services, but we never got enough advertisements to cover the cost of printing even one single issue,” Abdullah Al Sabiri said, adding that advertisers fear that putting advertisements in opposition newspapers may affect their relations with the authorities.

As for government subsidies, all newspapers in Yemen do receive a nominal yearly support fund that usually does not exceed \$500. However, the government’s commitment to pay it to all newspapers regardless of their political affiliation has been appreciated, particularly by the smaller newspapers that welcome any help they can get. But Nabeel Al Sofee of NewsYemen slammed this subsidy measure, describing it as a “mockery.” “It is absolutely ridiculous to compare the peanuts the government gives to local newspapers yearly with the annual fund of YR 50 million [approximately \$250,000] given to official *Al-Thowra* daily,” he said.

Due to the fact that the business of most Yemeni newspapers is very small in scale, most do not do market research because it would cost them extra money. Panelists thought that even when it would be appropriate for private Yemeni newspapers to do such research, the cost is off-putting.

Circulation figures in Yemen are usually a mystery, panelists agreed. There is no reliable census or data that reports the circulation figures. Newspaper owners and marketers usually exaggerate the figure to convince advertisers that it would be worthwhile to pay several hundred US dollars for a full page. However, panelists agreed that a rough estimate could be between 2,000 copies per edition for small newspapers and 30,000 daily for the largest circulating newspaper, which is the official *Al-Thowra* daily.

**OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS**

**Yemen Objective Score: 1.76 / 4.00**

The MSI panelists agreed fully that the media in Yemen is in dire need of support—financially, legally, even morally. They cited the government for the failure of efforts to establish a Yemeni publishers association, which could have assisted in the development of the

media. They gave some credit to the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate for its efforts to defend journalists, but remained pessimistic about its long-term influence. Academic and short-term education and training are scarce and do not meet international standards, panelists said. But they also hoped that the growing number of NGOs could compensate for that. Distribution channels for newspapers are in private hands, and any newspaper owner can distribute freely without a license, provided that the publication is itself licensed.

There is distrust between trade associations and the private media in Yemen. The trade associations, according to panelists, are usually well-connected to the authorities and regime. Hence, they tend to avoid making solid relations with the private media, particularly with those who are seen to be critical of the state. On the one occasion in early 2005 on which publishers came together to try to form their own association, the government rejected the idea and some officials even accused publishers of working to bring about a sort of coup against the regime. The publishers decided to wait until the national elections conclude to apply again with the hope that the new government could grant the association a license.

The Yemeni Journalists Syndicate is only one professional association in Yemen that promotes press freedom and defends journalists. Despite the fact that the syndicate is funded by the government, it has a

somewhat neutral stance when it comes to defending journalists and was involved in several confrontations with the regime in 2005 over cases of violations against journalists, panelists said. Late in 2005, panelists said, it appeared the authorities were trying to bring about division in the syndicate, leading to the resignation of General Secretary Hafez Al Bukari.

Panelist Hafez Al Bukari, correspondent for the Saudi *Okaz* daily newspaper, complained about restrictions on the syndicate when defending the media: "The government is always on the move to control civil-society organizations that deal with the

media, including the syndicate. It has even prevented the establishment of an association for private newspaper publishers."

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Several NGOs support free speech and independent media in Yemen. However, some have been subject to pressure by the government, unable to renew annual permits, or in some cases being cloned. Women Journalists without Borders was duplicated in mid-2005 as a pro-government NGO with the same name. The original NGO had to change its name later to Women Journalists without Constraints.

Pressure against NGOs has mounted in recent years and constitutes a diversion of the path set by the regime in supporting press freedom, activist Khalid Al Anisi said. The young NGO community has a way to develop before having a significant impact in the society. Khalid Al Anisi said that there seems to be a tactic by the government to weaken any NGO that seems poised to emerge as a forceful entity that promotes freedom of expression. "But again, those NGOs lack the experience, capacity, and protection to thrive," he added.

The media face a lack of qualified human resources. Panelists partially blamed the academic training of journalists in the media colleges across the country, saying that graduates come out with

**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.

almost no practical training because of overcrowded classes, insufficient faculties, and lack of internship opportunities. Khalid Al-Anisi, whose organization is also involved in training professional journalists, said the problem lies in the outdated curriculum at the colleges of information. He said students usually are confronted when they graduate by a media environment much different from the one they were taught about and find that journalism theories are somewhat irrelevant. Hence, they need to learn all over again before they really are ready to apply for a post at a newspaper. Panelists noted that university students studying journalism do not receive practical education but are instead exposed to outdated theoretically-oriented study.

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Short-term and in-service training programs in Yemen have increased in recent years, with some positive results. But overall, these programs remain far below what is required to have a significant impact on the journalism sector. However, due to lack of interest

by donor countries in supporting the independent media, very few free training opportunities were available. Most training is done for a nominal fee by governmental institutes, including the Mass Communication Training and Qualifying Institute, which belongs to the Ministry of Information. A new development was the interest shown by Denmark, which led to creation of the Yemen Joint International Media Development Programme and a December 2005 "training the trainers" workshop.

Although there are no restrictions to sources of newsprint and newspapers can freely print wherever they like, the fact that the largest printing presses in Yemen are under the control of the government makes smaller newspapers vulnerable to pressure. There were several cases reported of printing presses belonging to the government refusing to print opposition newspapers on certain occasions in 2005. Sami Ghalib of the journalists syndicate said the government had circulated a letter to various printing presses throughout the country, holding them responsible

for the content of any newspaper that is printed at their facility. This has caused the private printing-press operators to read the newspaper's content before having it printed. "In 2004 and later in 2005, printing-press operators started refusing the printing of some opposition newspapers out of the fear of being shut down," he said. Mohamed Sallam said *Yemen Times* press facilities were warned in an official memo not to print the *Al-Thowri* opposition newspaper or they would face consequences. *Yemen Times* had to abide accordingly, forcing *Al-Thowri* weekly to be absent from the newsstands for a week.

The main channels of media distribution in Yemen are kiosks and newsstands, which are privately owned and stocked directly by the newspapers without any governmental restrictions. However, transmitter services are strictly monitored by the Information Ministry, which has ultimate control over what is being broadcast to the world. With advancements in technology, panelists predicted, this restriction will be useless as more transmitters are now based on direct satellite communication without the need to be routed through the governmental channels. The Internet has grown rapidly in Yemen, with the number of users increasing exponentially in recent years.

## MSI Participants

**Abdullah Al Sabiri**, editor-in-chief, *Sawt Al-Shura* newspaper, Sanaa

**Khalid Al Anisi**, director, National Organization to Defend Rights and Freedoms, Sanaa

**Mohamed Najj Allaw**, lawyer, Sanaa

**Hafez Al Bukari**, correspondent, *Okaz* daily, Sanaa

**Mohamed Al Tayeb**, member, Shura Council, Sanaa

**Mohamed Sallam**, journalist, *Yemen Times* newspaper, Sanaa

**Rahma Hujaira**, director, Yemeni Female Journalists Forum, Sanaa

**Ahmed Al Haj**, correspondent, Associated Press, Sanaa

**Sami Ghalib**, board member, Yemeni Journalists Syndicate, Sanaa

**Mansour Hayel**, editor, *Al-Tajammu* newspaper, Sanaa

## Moderator

**Walid Al Saqaf**, media consultant, IREX, Yemen

# YEMEN AT A GLANCE

## GENERAL

- **Population:** 19.8 million (2004 est., World Bank)
- **Capital city:** Sanaa
- **Ethnic groups:** Predominantly Arab; but also Afro-Arab, South Asian and European (www.nationsencyclopedia.com, 2006)
- **Religions:** Predominantly Muslim, including Shaf'i (Sunni) and Zaydi (Shi'a), small numbers of Jewish, Christian, and Hindu (www.nationsencyclopedia.com, 2006)
- **Languages:** Arabic (official), English widely understood (www.nationsencyclopedia.com, 2006)
- **GDP (ppp):** \$12.8 billion (2004 est., World Bank)
- **GNI per capita:** \$570 (2004 est., World Bank)
- **Literacy rate:** male 69.5%, female 28.5% (2004 est., UNICEF)
- **President or top authority:** President Ali Abdullah Saleh (President of the Republic of Yemen since 1990)
- **Next scheduled elections:** Presidential and local council, September 2006

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- (Ministry of Information)
- **Newspapers:** The largest three are official daily *Al-Thowra*, independent daily *Al-Ayyam*, and weekly *26 September* (mouthpiece of the Moral Guidance – Ministry of Defense). Circulation statistics unavailable.
  - **Broadcast networks:** State-owned Public Corporation for Radio and Television (PCRT)
  - **Television stations:** Two television stations (Sanaa and 22-May TV) both belong to the PCRT. Sanaa TV Channel also transmits via digital and analog satellite (Arabsat).
  - **Radio stations:** The public broadcast establishment beams 10 radio channels; two are nationwide: Sanaa (General Program) and Aden (Second Program). The remaining eight channels are local and target specific provinces, including Al-Shabab radio (Sanaa), Taiz Radio, Al-Mukallah-Hadramout Radio, Al-Hodeidah Radio, Seyoun Radio, Abyan Radio, Hajja Radio, and Al-Mahara Radio.
  - **Active print outlets:** There are at least 150 newspapers and magazines licensed by the Ministry of Information (statistic until 2003); among them are 54 official publications.
  - **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A

- **Number of Internet users:** 117,000 (March 2005 est.) (Ministry of Telecommunication & Information Technology)
- **News agencies:** State-owned Saba News Agency – Sanaa
- **Significant foreign investment in the media:** N/A

**MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: YEMEN**

