

MEDIA

SUSTAINABILITY INDEX—

MIDDLE EAST AND

NORTH AFRICA



MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2005

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

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USAID

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.

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.



Years 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.

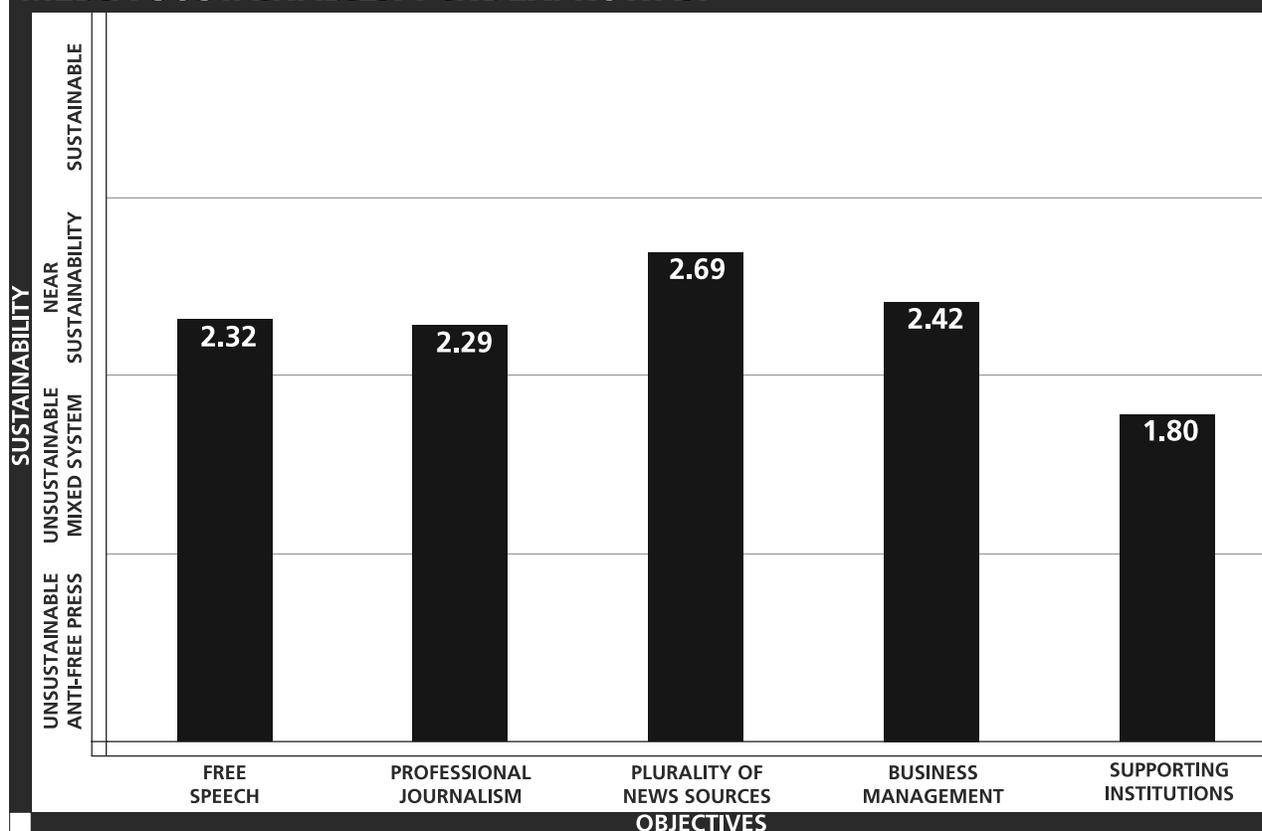
Some participants in Kuwait's Media Sustainability Index (MSI) panel saw the new law as a step toward easing the monopoly held by existing daily newspapers. There are five published in Arabic and two in English, but no new licenses were issued for nearly three decades. Other panelists, however, considered 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

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.

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."

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.

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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

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.

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

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

