

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

2006/2007

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



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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.

Unlike many other countries in the region, most opposition political parties have their own newspapers that vie for readership alongside state-run papers, ruling party papers, and private independent papers. However, there is still a strong proclivity by the state for control over news and information. This keeps Egypt from being a serious contender for regional news and information leader, a distinction currently held by Lebanon and a few of the Gulf countries.



EGYPT

Egypt's media are among the most established in the Middle East, and there is a tradition of media consumption, particularly of newspapers, by a large segment of society. Unlike many other countries in the region, most opposition political parties have their own newspapers that vie for readership alongside state-run papers, ruling party papers, and private independent papers. However, there is still a strong proclivity by the state for control over news and information. This keeps Egypt from being a serious contender for regional news and information leader, a distinction currently held by Lebanon and a few of the Gulf countries. Ibrahim Saleh, professor of journalism and mass communications at the American University in Cairo, explained: "The status of journalism in Egypt reflects the value of its troubled society, especially with regard to its political environment. So perhaps it is not surprising that journalism in Egypt is at very low ebb after decades of trying to find its niche since the 'Open Door Policy' that was initiated by the late President Sadat in the 1970s."

Rasha Abdulla, assistant professor of journalism and mass communication at the American University, pointed to a recent legal development that underscores ongoing government efforts to obstruct a truly free press. "The government also passed new press laws in 2006 that were deemed another blow to press freedom," explained Abdulla. "The frustration came particularly in reaction to promises by President Mubarak and the government to increase the margin of freedom of expression and abolish any and all potential prison sentences for journalists, charges that are made possible by the 1996 press laws. However, the 2006 laws failed to abolish prison sentences for journalists who 'insult' heads of states. The law initially had an article, which President Mubarak himself intervened to strike out, which stated that reporting on the financial dealings of a public figure was punishable by up to three years in prison. However, even after deleting this particular article, the law was considered by most journalists to be another blow to press freedom since it sharply increased fines for libel and defamation charges, which are loosely defined under Egyptian press laws."

Egypt's scores place it in the early stages of "near sustainability." All objectives scored within this category (ranging from 2.23 for business management to 2.38 for plurality of news sources) with the exception of Objective 1, Free Speech. Although not far behind at 1.97, this score stands out because it reflects a legal framework and a government attitude that impede better performance by the media as a whole.

EGYPT AT A GLANCE

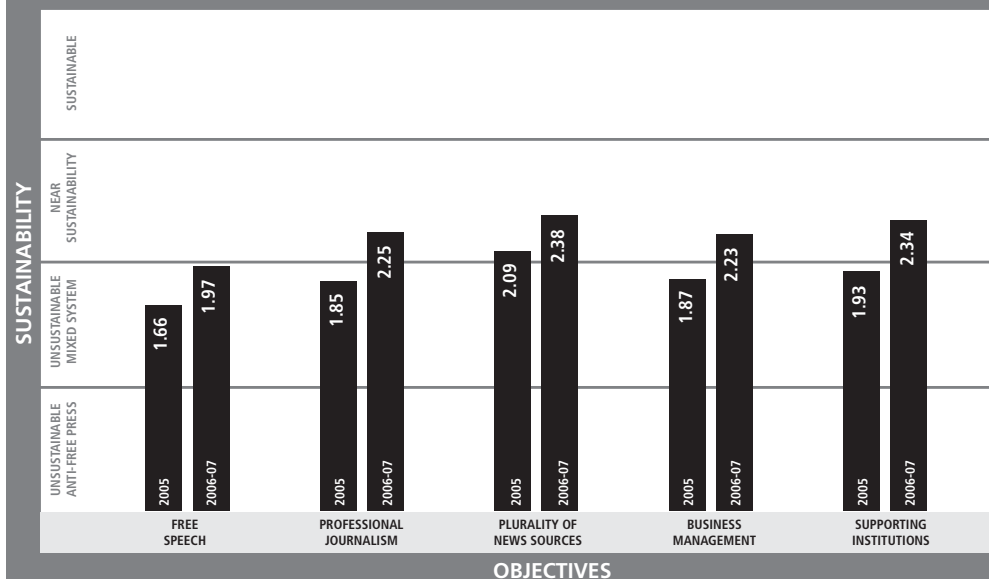
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 81,713,517 (July 2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Cairo
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Egyptian 98%, Berber, Nubian, Bedouin, and Beja 1%, Greek, Armenian, other European (primarily Italian and French) 1% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim (mostly Sunni) 90%, Coptic 9%, other Christian 1% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Arabic (official), English and French widely understood by educated classes (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2006-Atlas):** \$100.9 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **GNI per capita (2006-PPP):** \$4,940 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **Literacy rate:** 71.4% (male 83.0%, female 59.4%) (2005 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak (since Oct. 14, 1981)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:**
Print: 544 newspapers and magazines, 21 daily, 114 weekly, and 409 monthly; Radio: 7 main stations, 2 other large private stations, 40+ others; Television Stations: 8 state owned, 6 local, 24 satellite channels
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** 53.9% of households subscribe (*2004 Egypt Human Development Report, UNDP 2008*)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Middle East News Agency
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 6,000,000 (2006 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

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.

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Egypt Objective Score: 1.97

Panelists' scores for this objective, as well as their comments, show that the Egyptian media face a legal environment that has improved markedly in the past 20 years or so but still contains significant hurdles. The score of 1.97—although approaching “near sustainability”—places Egypt in the “unsustainable, mixed system” category as regards the legal framework and interaction with the government. Most individual indicator scores fell close to the overall objective score, although there were a handful of outliers. Indicators 5 and 7, legal guarantees of editorial independence and access to information, both scored more than a half point below. On the other hand, Indicators 8 and 9, media access to international news reports and free entry into the journalism profession, scored well above the overall objective score.

Egypt is party to international agreements that guarantee the freedoms of speech, expression, and the media. Egypt voted to adopt the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and signed the related International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1982. According to Ashraf Shehab El Din, journalist with *al-Ahaly*, “Article 19 [of the Universal Declaration, which protects freedom of expression] shall be binding as are all other law articles in Egypt.”

Many Egyptian laws are written to protect these freedoms. Shehab said: “Article 47 [of the Constitution] stipulates that ‘Every individual has the right to express his/her opinion and to publicize it verbally or in writing or by photography or by other means within the limits of the law. Self-criticism and constructive criticism are the guarantee for the safety of the national structure.’ Article 48 stipulates that ‘Freedom of the press, printing, publication, and mass media shall be guaranteed. Censorship of newspapers is forbidden as well as notifying, suspending, or canceling them by administrative methods. In a state of emergency or in time of war, a limited censorship may be imposed on the newspapers, publications, and mass media in matters related to public safety or purposes of national security in accordance with the law.’”

Freedom of speech has improved over the years. “Without a doubt, some taboos, such as those which concern the president and his family, which were untouchable before, can be criticized now,” according to Hossam Abdel Kader, a journalist with *October* magazine. “For example, in the past it was impossible to criticize the president, but now it is possible, although it is only done in independent newspapers, yet it is widely occurring. *Al-Ghad* newspaper, voice of the Al-Ghad party, which was chaired by Ayman Nour, who is currently imprisoned, attacked the president and his

sons in headlines on the first issues. Before that, the Arab Nasserite party's newspaper, *Al-Araby*, had done the same. Then *Al-Dostour* took the same approach, and then other newspapers started to criticize the president.”

However, as the last part of Article 48 implies, it and other laws appear to encroach upon relevant freedoms. Abdulla argued that “press laws in Egypt constitute an interesting legal game.” He continued: “While the Constitution includes several articles that specify that ‘freedom of expression is guaranteed,’ and that seemingly protect freedom of the mass media in general as well as the journalists' right to report and publish freely, other sections of the Constitution and alternative laws basically negate these rights.” He noted that “foremost among these laws is the Emergency Law, which has been in effect for 27 years, and which has just been extended again this year. This law deems all press laws basically useless since it gives the president and the ministers of defense and interior the right to close down any media outlet or detain any journalist (or citizen for that matter) if they deem that person dangerous to ‘national security’ in any way, shape, or form. These legal sections are often times used to ‘punish’ any individual or institution that dares to cross certain unspoken—but widely known—red lines.”

To this, Saleh added other old laws still in effect, including “oppressive laws such as the Riotous Assembly Law 15 (1914), the Meetings and Demonstrations Law 14 (1923), the Emergency Law (1958), and the Police Organization Law 109 (1971) of the Egyptian Constitution.” He explained: “Many

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

FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

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

journalists and editors have since been interrogated, charged, and sometimes sentenced by lower courts.”

Schizophrenic laws muddy the protection of press freedoms. “At this point we need to conclude that a game of intelligence is being played between the president and the government on one side and the media professionals on the other side,” said journalist Abdel Kader. “Freedom is ensured and laws are wonderful, yet the intelligent side is the one that can use the laws and finish the game at the right time.” By way of example, he mentioned the current imprisonment of Ayman Nour, the possible imprisonment of Ibrahim Eissa and threatened actions against other journalists. “Yet, I think that the laws don’t include any threat to free speech as Ayman Nour is not legally in prison for his criticism of the president but for forging power of attorney documents, which is proven in the lawsuit,” he said. “I consider it a type of revenge, but at the legal procedural level. Ayman Nour was not charged with any accusation pertaining to his criticism of the president.”

According to Tarek Tohamy, a journalist for *Al Wafd* newspaper: “There is no real freedom of opinion or speech in Egypt. Taboos related to the ruling figures and sovereign institutions are still in place and enforced. Some journalists of independent or opposition press face extreme difficulties in overcoming such taboos as a result of articles of law that pursue journalists if they stand up to people favored by the regime. Journalists do not enjoy enough legal protection if they fight corruption, as the regime is coupled with corruption in all agencies through the laws and institutions.” Saleh added: “A new press law was introduced in 1996 stating that ‘journalists are independent and not under the authority of anyone.’ But this did not change the situation.”

Panelists also did not believe the judicial branch fully capable of protecting freedom of speech from government encroachment. Saleh, however, identified some positive trends. “The Egyptian presidents have always manipulated the judiciary system since judicial appointments are a presidential prerogative. Judges were considered functionaries of the Ministry of Justice, which administered and financed the court system. . . . But the rule of law, relatively, expanded in the post-Nasser era, and judges became a vigorous force defending the legal rights of citizens against the state.”

New technology’s effect on freedom of speech and public discourse drew varying opinions. “Without a doubt, the wide increase of satellites, satellite channels, Internet, and blogs in the Arab world in general—and in Egypt in particular—have promoted free speech, especially with the private ownership of satellite channels which, in my opinion, has promoted the outbreak of private newspapers, owned

by individuals or companies,” said Essam Al-Amir Ismail, head of Channel 8-Egyptian Television. “These media express their own opinions and ideas as well as peoples’ problems and concerns with more freedom [and] without the control of governmental media, which has been in control for too long. Accordingly, I think that the social norms that have emerged as a result of the media advancement protect and promote free speech. The legal norms that were in place for a long time only provided a limited space for free speech.”

Still, some panelists pointed to alarming trends that jeopardize media using new technology. “The question of whether online journalists are subject to the same protections as print journalists has yet to be tested in an Egyptian court,” Saleh pointed out. “The reluctance of the Press Syndicate to admit online journalists to its ranks reflects uncertainty on this issue.”

Abdulla went further. “Egypt also took a severe turn for the worse in terms of freedom of expression when it issued its first official jail sentence against a blogger. Abdel Kareem Nabil Suleiman, also known as Kareem Amer, was a student at Al Azhar University. He was sentenced to four years in prison for his blog entries, three for ‘inciting hatred of Islam,’ and one for defaming the president. Several other bloggers have been detained during the year without formal charges. I have written two books on the Internet in the Arab world. When my first book came out in 2005, I had placed Egypt and Jordan at the forefront of the Arab countries allowing maximum freedom of expression on the Internet. By the time the second book came out in 2007, Egypt had deteriorated severely in terms of online freedom. I expressed my deep concerns in the book about the detaining of Egyptian bloggers. Two weeks later, Egypt was listed as one of the ‘enemies of the Internet’ by Reporters Without Borders. Most recently, Egypt detained a number of Internet activists after they promoted a general boycott online that was scheduled for April 6, 2008. The group they initiated on the popular social networking site, Facebook, attracted more than 72,000 members. Shortly after, Israa Abdel Fattah, the group’s creator, was detained for 20 days. Several of those who actively promoted the strike online were also detained.”

In Egypt, print and broadcast media must be licensed. “The state has the authority to restrain newspaper licenses by virtue of the Press and Publications Law No. 96 of 1996,” Saleh said. Abdel Kader outlined in writing the process for print media licensing:

I. An Egyptian newspaper must establish an Egyptian joint stock company with capital no less than EGP 1 million. It must be submit an application to the Supreme Press Council, the officially authorized licensing body in Egypt. All state-owned and party-owned newspapers are subordinated to the

Supreme Press Council, which is affiliated with the El-Shura Assembly and chaired by the El-Shura Assembly president.

II. In order to receive a license from London or Greece to issue a newspaper, a newspaper license shall be issued but it shall be treated as a foreign newspaper that must be censored by the newspapers and publications censorship of the Ministry of Information. Moreover, it shall not be affiliated with the Supreme Press Council. Accordingly, journalists working in the newspapers cannot join the Press Syndicate.

III. A newspaper may also be issued through an association or an institution registered in the Ministry of Social Affairs [if], among the objectives of the association, are newspapers and publications. In this case, the association must receive Supreme Press Council permission to issue the newspaper and it shall be affiliated with the council.

Saleh also noted that, "In the first and third cases it takes from one to three years to receive a license...."

Mahmed Habeb, news department head at *Nahdet Misr* newspaper, said that while licensing is not required in many other countries, it is not an absolute block on an independent press. "The Supreme Press Council has licensed five new independent or private newspapers, including *Al-Youm*, *Al-Sabea*, and *Al-Shorouk*," Habeb said. But *Al Wafd's* Tohamy countered: "Journalists and common people face extreme difficulties in obtaining licensing for newspapers or media outlets due to the requirements of establishing a company as a business agency to issue a newspaper. Moreover, the law stipulates that founders must deposit EGP 1 million in the bank as an insurance deposit for a daily newspaper and EGP 250,000 for a weekly newspaper. The founders are not allowed to spend from this sum, which represents a significant obstacle in issuing newspapers. Some people manage to collect the money, yet political considerations intervene in the licensing. Opposition causes disruptions in licensing, for example in the case of the *Al-Badeel* newspaper, which is owned by leftists, and the *Al-Dostour* newspaper whose owner, Esam Ismail, was pressured to fire Ibrahim Eissa, an editor by the regime, as a requirement of licensing."

Saleh also said the role of the Supreme Press Council did not end with issuance of a license. "In case newspapers are licensed, the Supreme Press Council supervises and evaluates the journalists and press institutions and has the right to determine the paper quotas designated for the newspapers as well as newspaper prices," he said.

Broadcast licensing is overseen by the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU). "Broadcasting has always been in the hand of the patron state in Egypt, which made a political instrument [of it] from the start of the republic in 1952,

through Law 13 of 1979 and Law 223 of 1989 that give ERTU a complete monopoly over broadcasting in Egypt. ...The ERTU executive director reports to the minister of information, who a presidential appointee, not an elected member of parliament," explained Saleh.

Panelists noted differences in the ability to obtain certain kinds of licenses. According to Hossam El-Din El-Sayed of Ana TV: "Media broadcasting channels are available and widespread and have many forms. However, the ruling regime feels it can control, so sometimes it obstructs them. For example, the state does not allow any entity to broadcast through FM. [Only] one station for music is available. Media authorities within the Ministry of Information deliberately tried to control satellite channels broadcast through the introduction of the Satellite Broadcast Document, which is full of indefinite and vague language that can be used by the regime at any time to influence the activity of satellite channels. It also contains outrageous penalties—such as the confiscation of equipment without prior notice—if the channels violate broadcasting conditions."

However, Al-Amir Ismail noted that "establishing a satellite channel and licensing is simple and unrestricted in Egypt." He acknowledged that it would be impossible to license a channel that promotes freedom of sexual or homosexual activities or a channel that promotes a certain religion. Still, he added: "In most cases, independent newspapers do not face any restrictions in establishing offices in all areas and appointing reporters."

Panelists identified extralegal difficulties that can hinder licensing. El-Din El-Sayed wrote: "Media licensing goes through channels not stipulated by the law as security approval is a conclusive requirement, although it is not required by the law. Dozens of newspapers and television stations have been denied licensing although all the legal procedures are met with no clear grounds except for the security requirement. On the other hand, the Internet and Web sites are not subject to any law. This matter is subject to the preferences of the political authority and several security entities whose decisions are sometimes contradictory, which increases the confusion."

In addition to the obstacles for market entry, some panelists pointed to the tax structure. "Taxes are used to exert political pressure on opposition newspapers such as *Al-Dostour*, which is accused of tax evasion," according to El-Din El-Sayed. "On the other hand, state-owned newspapers fail to pay taxes due, estimated at \$1 billion, with no sign of government intervention to collect them." Tohamy added: "Opposition and independent newspapers are discriminated against in terms of taxes as the state forces them to pay the full taxes due and insurance fees on employees and employers, whereas

the state-owned newspapers do not pay those taxes or insurance fees and no one dares to claim them. For example, the well-established Al-Ahram Foundation is indebted to the social insurance agency for EGP 2 billion and no one dares to claim this sum."

Panelists offered different assessments on crimes committed against journalists. "Many crimes are committed against journalists, such as kidnappings and assaults, as with the incident of Abdel Halim Kandil, editor of the *Al-Karama Al-Mostakela* newspaper; Reda Helal, an *Al-Ahram* journalist who was kidnapped and never returned to date; Amr Adeeb, an Al-Qahera Al-Youm presenter; and, Moataz Al-Demerdash, a *90 Minutes* presenter whose car crashed. Unfortunately, the offenders were not identified through investigations, and to date they have not been prosecuted," Habeb wrote. El-Din El-Sayed added to this list. "Many foreign journalists and reporters were physically assaulted, such as reporters for Reuters, the BBC, and Islam Online, during the coverage of conferences, demonstrations, and events," he said. "A press photographer received an eye injury after the police attacked him while performing his duty. An *Al-Araby* editor was beaten and stripped for his articles that attacked the president. A number of female journalists have been violated and their clothes torn apart in public in front of the Press Syndicate. The incident was witnessed by press photographers who gave the prosecutor photos showing the police officers who did such actions, yet they were not interrogated."

Abdel Kader acknowledged that incidents have taken place, but wrote: "With respect to the crimes committed against journalists, there are no direct crimes against journalists except in a few cases. . . . These cases are acts of revenge for uncovering certain corruption. However, such cases cannot be generalized. On the other hand, some lawsuits are filed by officials against the journalists for their opinions, and they often end by exonerating the journalists or just paying fines which are usually paid by newspapers."

Although no specific laws favor state media outright, "opposition and independent newspapers encounter favoritism for state-owned newspapers in access to news and advertisements related to the government," according to Tohamy. "Access to information is not equally provided for all."

There is also no law guaranteeing independence for state media. In fact, Habeb wrote: "As for state-owned media, their content is subject to government censorship, direct or self-censorship, since the editors and boards of those newspapers are appointed by the state. The same applies to the state-owned television where the heads of channels are appointed by the minister of information. Accordingly, all content is censored and it is difficult to see reports or programs criticizing the state except for some programs

such as *El-Beit Beita*, which is presented by Mahmoud Saad and Tamer Amin, and *Etkalem*, which is presented by Lamees El-Hadidi. There is a general agreement between all the programs to exclude the Muslim Brotherhood, despite the fact that they are represented in the parliament by 88 members and have powerful influence as a political movement in the Egypt."

Shehab noted that "the Penal Law includes more than 30 articles that prescribe imprisonment for press crimes related to free speech." In 1993, the government amended the Journalist Syndicate Law in order, according to one panelist, to limit the ability of the syndicate to lobby for reform. Saleh wrote that the law made the employees of the Ministry of Information, who far outnumber professional journalists, members of the Journalists Syndicate. "Two years later, the Press Law was passed to impose heavy sentences on publication crimes such as printing misleading information, false rumors, or defamation, in particular if these were directed against the state, its representatives, or its economic interests, or endangering public order," Saleh said. "The penalties were increased to five years of imprisonment and payment of exceedingly high fines."

Not everyone agreed with Shehab's assessment of the role of the Press Syndicate. Abdel Kader wrote: "I recall when the Peoples' Assembly wanted to pass an article regarding contempt in the press by means of law No. 93 of 1995. When the Press Syndicate united against this law, demonstrations were organized and all writers of all affiliations united against this law. Ibrahim Nafea was the head of the Press Syndicate and *Al-Ahram* chairman and editor at this time. Although he was the government representative, he supported the journalists and managed to suspend and modify the law using his contacts and supported the journalist's consensus. 'Contempt' meant that any official, of high or low rank, could sue and imprison any journalist if there is contempt [criticism] against him/her based on true or false grounds."

Egyptian legislative changes in 2006 maintained criminal penalties for many press offenses, even as it eliminated others. Such provisions are frequently used, according to the panelists.

"This past year, several journalists have been detained or faced jail sentences in Egypt," Abdulla wrote. "Al Jazeera's Howaida Taha and her cameraman were both detained and jailed while working on a documentary on detainee torture in Egyptian prisons. Ibrahim Eissa, editor-in-chief of *Al Dostour* newspaper, faces a jail sentence for allegedly spreading rumors about the health of the president. He was charged with 'publishing false information' that might be 'liable to harm the general interest and the country's stability.' Eissa was involved in at least eight other court cases this past

year alone. Several other journalists were also involved in other court cases, some of them high profile. Wael Al Ibrashi, former editor-in-chief of *Sowt al Omma*, has said in a television interview that he was involved in 64 court cases." Abdel Kader provided additional information about the Eissa case: "The lawsuit was filed against him for publishing rumors about the president that he could not prove correct. Accordingly, he is compromising state interests. Moreover, the lawsuit was not filed by the president, but by a lawyer who is a follower of the ruling National Democratic Party."

Habeb added, "We cannot forget the cases pending prosecution, such as the prosecution of four editors of independent newspapers who are accused of disseminating rumors that compromised the stock exchange. . . . Many lawsuits have been filed against journalists, with sentences that have ranged from imprisonments, such as in the case of the journalist Ahmed Ezz El-Din, to fines."

Abdel Kader said such cases mostly impact private media. "At this point I would like to note that the law doesn't discriminate between the state-owned media and private media," he wrote. "However, 80 percent of the lawsuits are filed against private journalists because the state-owned newspapers do not publish corruption cases, except in very limited circumstances and under impossible conditions, due to the lack of information."

Panelists made several comments about the difficulty media professionals have defending themselves in court. "If the journalist then managed to substantiate his/her statements with documents then he/she shall be immediately exonerated, otherwise he/she shall be fined," wrote Abdel Kader. El-Din El-Sayed added: "However, it is not easy to get access to information from official authorities and there is no law that makes the officials bound to provide information transparently to the media. In many cases, the journalist has the burden of substantiating information and some sources even deny the information after stating it."

Mahmoud Moselm, head of parliamentary coverage for *El Masry El-Youm* newspaper, that some journalists are indeed culpable. "Another problem facing the 'press market' is the press syndicate's negligence in punishing its members in cases of violations that makes them liable in courts," he wrote.

Finally, Shehab addressed one of the unintended consequences of libel cases. He said they have "given fanatic religious scholars the opportunity to spread fanaticism among the people and fear among writers and journalists who are concerned about being pursued by those fanatics with hundreds of lawsuits against them, regardless of the outcome. Lawsuits make those fanatics famous and heroes when they become regular guests on the satellite channels."

"Freedom of access to information and transparency of the government and public agencies do not exist in Egypt and no laws oblige these agencies to provide information. Some bills have been discussed recently by civil society organizations. However, they were not officially adopted by the government as to date. The free access to news sources is met to some extent via the Internet or international news agencies," wrote Habeb. Abdel Kader added: "This problem opens windows for rumors in the absence of facts."

Shehab cited restrictive provisions in the law. "For example, Article 77 (a) of clause 7, concerning state service employees, bans any employee from giving any statements regarding his/her duties to the newspapers or other broadcasting channels without written authorization from a qualified superior. Clause 8 stipulates that all employees are forbidden from disclosing any information he/she has access to through the job. Such a ban is also enforced after retirement," he wrote.

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 the defense of the nation and its higher interests. Article 10 specifies that journalists have the right to receive responses to requests for information unless the information is classified as secret. But panelists cited problems. "The law enables journalists' access to information, yet the enforcement mechanism is still missing. Furthermore, the government officials' culture does not understand this issue," said Moselm. According to Mustafa Abdouh, a reporter for *El-Gomhoria*: ". . . the Ministry of Health has appointed a spokesman who has instructed the affiliated directorates not to deal with the press except through him. Some other ministries have followed the same approach in appointing spokesmen, but the journalists have managed to pass through this barrier that hinders them from obtaining news."

Actually obtaining information can also lead a journalist into trouble. "In March 2008, an Egyptian court threw out a sentence of six months in prison against the journalist Howayda Taha, an Al-Jazeera reporter, for possessing videotapes about torture in Egyptian police stations. The Heliopolis Court of Appeal rejected the new charge against the journalist of impairing state interests and canceled the fine of EGP 10,000, which was enforced by a lower court in May 2007. However, the court upheld another ruling against Taha and a fine of EGP 20,000 for 'shooting and possessing false tapes that could impair Egypt's reputation,'" Shehab wrote.

Panelists did not experience difficulties obtaining foreign news reports for use in local media. "With respect to international news, it is widely available and there are many ways that provide information for journalists," Abdel Kader wrote. However, last year's MSI report noted that there is significant

self-censorship regarding the reprinting or rebroadcast of foreign news reports, especially by state media.

Egyptian journalists require special authorization from the Ministry of Information to cover events such as terrorist acts and activities of the president or government ministers. Foreign journalists posted to Egypt must apply for permanent accreditation to work in Egypt. 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.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Egypt Objective Score: 2.25

Panelists scored most of the indicators close to the objective score. However, Indicator 4, journalists cover key events, scored nearly a point higher and Indicator 5, pay levels for journalists, scored nearly a point lower.

Habeb's characterization of the practice of journalism reflected many of the other panelists' comments. "Unfortunately, reporting in most newspapers is not objective and does not use different and multiple sources," he wrote. "There are two trends in reporting. One is adopted by the state-owned press, which embraces the single viewpoint of the state policy and tries to justify state decisions. The other lies with the opposition or independent press, which embraces a viewpoint totally opposed to state decisions. Each trend depends on the sources that support its viewpoint and objectivity is not applied. When you read the state-owned newspapers *Al-Gomhureya* or *Al-Ahram* and independent newspapers *Al-Dostour* and *Al-Badeel* at the same time, you will find events or decisions interpreted in totally different ways. For example, if we review coverage of the constitutional amendments that were passed by the government, the state-owned newspapers characterize them as a huge step toward reform and democracy while the opposition newspapers consider them a move toward a police state and a setback for democracy, as well as a consolidation of a dictatorship."

Abdel Kader also referred to what he called a "rumor press." Moselm added that "private newspapers are connected in one way or another with their business owners, and there are specific examples of this connection."

Not all news outlets have a one-sided editorial policy. Many panelists had comments similar to those of Abdel Kader, who wrote: "It is worth noting that *Al-Masry Al-Youm* is the best private newspaper in Egypt today. It managed to gain popularity in a few months and to gain readers' respect as it

addresses news objectively and reports all news undistorted. *Al-Masry Al-Youm* provides its editors with adequate journalism training, unlike other newspapers."

In addition to willfully biased editorial policies, Moselm said "few journalists are capable of preparing reports and programs in a professional and neutral manner." Abdulla added: "Reporting standards vary depending on the publication or media outlet although, in general, most journalists in Egypt do not receive formal training in terms of being journalism graduates. Instead, a lot of them get the job first and get their training on the go. This is a huge problem in my opinion, being a journalism educator, because the general attitude is a belief that you don't have to go to journalism school to become a journalist. You can just write."

One panelist was optimistic that the situation would improve. "I think that the numerous media faculties and institutes and the promising beginnings of free speech in Egypt will produce new graduates who can properly apply and practice professional-quality standards," wrote Al-Amir Ismail.

Panelists did not believe journalistic ethics are properly followed in Egypt. Tohamy wrote: "The Press Syndicate has failed to enforce the press code of ethics, which is specified in the syndicate law. The syndicate has attempted to make active decisions in this regard but failed for reasons pertaining to elections. The syndicate board members, elected to four-year terms, counted on the votes of some journalists and their followers who do not respect the code. Observing ethical standards in journalism has become an individual commitment by some journalists. It is a common phenomenon that journalists receive gifts during news coverage of ministries and businesses...."

Abdel Kader wrote in-depth about serious ethics abuses. "Some editors who cover news pertaining to a certain ministry become its representatives at the newspaper instead of the newspaper's representatives at the ministry. Some ministries pay editors' monthly salaries for publishing the ministry news. Editors accompany those ministers on all their journeys. Accordingly, editors receive privileges, including travel allowances. In this case, the journalist has become his or her own supervisor—contrary to the normal situation where the editor is supposed to observe the journalist—and cannot write anything critical of the ministry that pays his or her salary and travel expenses. This issue is not limited to the state-owned press editors but includes the opposition and independent press as well."

Shehab examined the legal troubles that media face by not following ethical guidelines. "Some newspapers don't respect the professional principles in news publishing as they seek to achieve a scoop without documentation or verification

of information. Newspapers that commit such violations are strongly dealt with. For example, on Nov. 27, 2007, the criminal court of Dokki sentenced Hatem Mahran, an *El-Nabaa* editor, to imprisonment with labor for one year and a fine of EGP 20,000, as well as a bail of EGP 5,000, for libeling actress Hala Sedki. He had published her picture on the front page in January of 2007 under the headline 'The Story of the Scandalous Comeback of Hala Sedki' and another headline, 'Hala Sedki's Sexy Pose in Her Latest Movie.' There are many examples on such violations and calls for the syndicate to take strong actions against offending newspapers and to punish them for violating the press code of ethics."

Abdoun said the Supreme Press Council documents ethics violations in the press and publishes statistics on a quarterly basis. Violations include publishing unattributed news, combining advertising with editorial content, incorrectly reporting on criminal cases, and unethical use of photos. Shehab reported on some recent findings, and noted that state-run and pro-government newspapers "topped the list" of violations. "In a clear violation of the information documentation principle, *Al-Ahram* on Dec. 10 published a page 22 newflash with the headline 'Arresting the Manager of a Famous Restaurant Chain for Possessing Spoiled Meat.' On Dec. 28, 2007, the same newspaper carried a page 12 story headlined 'Arresting the Youngest Drug Dealer in Egypt' and published the name of the minor girl who was arrested, in violation of publishing ethics. State-owned newspaper *El-Messa* published a Dec. 10, 2007, newflash on page 15 with the headline 'El-Mounira Haunted House,' which promotes fraud and superstition."

Shehab continued: "The report of December 2007 noted the combination of editorial and advertising content in dozens

of newspapers. Independent newspapers with Egyptian licenses and independent newspapers with overseas licenses had an estimated 286 violations in December alone. *Al-Alam Al-Youm*, an independent newspaper, topped the list with 49 violations regarding advertising content. For example, on Dec. 3, *Al-Alam Al-Youm* published a press release under the headline 'National Société Générale Bank Official Sponsor of the Banking Exhibition.'"

According to Shehab: "Some of the Press Syndicate council members and human rights organizations' personnel are skeptical as to the reports released from the Supreme Press Council since it is a governmental authority which supervises, monitors, and observes press violations. They call for establishing an independent agency to perform observation and monitoring functions."

Panelists concurred that self-censorship is widespread in the Egyptian media. Particularly in state-run media, Abdulla wrote, "journalists know that there are certain red lines beyond which their pieces won't be published or broadcast, and so, for the most part, they don't bother going there to begin with. Others are restrained from fear of possible consequences if they cross the red lines." El-Din El-Sayed said the practice is not limited to state media, but that owners of private media exert pressure on their staffs to protect advertising when deciding what issues to cover and how they are covered.

Habeb listed some of the off-limit topics. "Journalists are banned from addressing issues such as the problems of Copts in Egypt and issues related to the armed forces, under the excuse of protecting national security and inhibiting sedition."

Panelists agreed that most key events receive adequate coverage. Given the polarized nature of the media, if those favoring the government do not cover a story, the pro-opposition media will. However, Abdulla noted that some topics fall through the cracks. "There was a case of public female harassment in downtown Cairo that bloggers managed to bring to the attention of the media and the public. Once the story was broken by bloggers, the media could no longer ignore it," he wrote.

All the panelists wrote prolifically on the topic of journalists' salaries, uniformly concluding that pay levels are inadequate, pay is often delayed, and journalists often resort to unethical practices to supplement their pay. Saleh described the way pay is determined: "Salaries of journalists are very low. The scale consists of a base, which is the same for all within a rank, plus additional increments that vary depending on the number of years of experience and on the extra tasks undertaken. However, the 'experience' has to do with years on the job, not academic excellence and expertise." Tohamy noted that journalists who have better relationships with

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).

their supervisor may receive a higher salary than others in their cohort. Moselm pointed out that television personnel are paid higher salaries than print journalists.

"To date, the Press Syndicate has failed to adjust the low payroll of journalists, especially in the printed press," wrote El-Din El-Sayed. "Further, the standard employment contract that binds the newspapers to a minimum wage for journalists has not been approved yet, which compromises their work and makes some journalists vulnerable to extortion and bribery."

Shehab detailed some of the abuses related to journalists' pay. "*Shabab Misr* newspaper, voice of the Shabab Misr party, is the best example," he wrote. "Fifteen journalists have worked for this newspaper for more than 12 months for free. In fact, some of them contributed with their own money to found the newspaper, hoping it would rise up to the competition and would then hire them and accordingly make them members of the Press Syndicate. However, the president of the party and newspaper editor, who is favored by the ruling National Democratic Party, did not keep promises to the journalists and they did not receive any salaries and were discharged afterward." Further, Shehab wrote, "Doctor Fathy Sorour, president of the Peoples' Assembly, said, 'I am surprised by the journalists' low salary, which should amount to EGP 3000. Those who call for freedom of the press should first look at the financial situation of journalists.'"

Abdulla explained how low salaries affect the quality of reporting. "Journalists try to compensate through a weird practice of seeking advertising from the entities they cover and receiving a commission for the ads they bring to the paper. This is a highly dangerous practice in my opinion, and constitutes an obvious conflict of interest. If you are reporting on a company that you know has questionable practices but that is giving you thousands of pounds in ad commissions—when your salary is a few hundred – how likely are you to put the public interest over your own personal interests and report on the questionable practices? The ad commission system reportedly covers the top officials of some newspapers, whose salaries can, therefore, reach incredible amounts." El-Din El-Sayed noted that the Press Syndicate bans such practices but does not enforce the ban due to its acknowledgment that salaries are low. He also pointed out that journalists may simultaneously work for more than one newspaper, another banned practice that is not enforced.

"In terms of programming, entertainment still occupies most of the air time in broadcast media outlets, although the evening talk shows are becoming popular sources of news for a broad section of the population," wrote Abdulla. Panelists agreed that domestic broadcasting fails to offer enough news content and many Egyptians turn to international or regional satellite channels for news.

There was disagreement regarding the state of technical equipment used by the media. El-Din El-Sayed said most media have modern equipment that meets international standards. However, Abdel Kader said this was only the case at "certain rich institutions, whereas other journalists depend on their own efforts to buy laptops, for example, and to learn computer programs to upgrade their professional level." Tohamy said Egypt's journalism profession "is technologically underdeveloped in most institutions. Journalists still use pens and papers to write news and look for fax machines to send news to their newspapers if they are mobile. A few institutions have managed to develop their technology. *Al-Masry Al-Youm* is the only newspaper that provides its journalists with laptops and mobile Internet connections, in addition to language training programs." Tohamy also decried the dearth of high-quality printing facilities, noting that state-run papers are the only ones with access to them.

Abdouh discussed some of the specialty reporting found in the Egyptian press. For example, he said the *Al-Gomhureya* newspaper had introduced several weekly sections. "'White and Black' presents a successful sector and failing sector and draws a comparison between them. The 'Hard Work' section addresses the labor force in various labor unions. The third section is 'Who We Are,' which presents citizens' complaints. Another section in the paper addresses major cases and criminal rulings," Abdouh noted.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

Egypt Objective Score: 2.38

Most of the indicators in this objective received scores close to the overall result. However, Indicators 3 and 4, objectivity of state media and independent news agencies, both scored a point or more lower. On the other hand, panelists gave Indicator 2, citizen access to media, a score more than a point higher.

Panelists gave differing accounts of the plurality of news sources in Egypt. Some focused on the existence of a large number of available media outlets as a positive thing, while others felt that plurality suffers at the hands of state policies designed to maintain a tight rein on information.

"Multiple news sources do in fact exist in Egypt," Abdulla wrote. "There is a multitude of newspapers (national or government-controlled, party, opposition, and independent), terrestrial and satellite channels (national, private, and foreign), and Internet sources." Al-Amir Ismail pointed to the availability of "more than 460 Arabic-speaking satellite channels," saying that such a large number of unencrypted channels offers a

range of opinions and addresses a multitude of concerns. He also noted: "In Egypt some independent newspapers have become popular, such as *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, *Al-Fagr*, *Sout Al-Oma*, and *Al-Dostour*, as well as some important party-owned newspapers such as *El-Wafd* and *El-Ahali*."

Abdel Kader described trends in media development. "The news satellite channels and news Web sites have caused a shift in media, changed the activity in the traditional mass media and forced some newspapers to cover issues that were not allowed before." However, he said, Egypt has not developed a dedicated news Web site beyond posting newspaper content online.

Saleh lamented that there is no solid research on the state of journalism in Egypt. "There is a clear absence of any clear data or literature about journalism, except the press releases of the government, which are obviously more of a public relations handout, or official statements by the Ministry of Information that say nothing about journalism, only information that magnifies the achievements of the state. Otherwise, the ministry considers such information a top secret."

Shehab wrote: "The Egyptian government limits freedom of the press and the diversity of news sources that provide people with information. The *Al-Shaab* opposition newspaper is still banned for the eighth consecutive year. The government decided to shut down the *Al-Shaab* newspaper's Web site. The government has also banned the *Afaq Arabia* newspaper." Saleh added that whenever liberalization of media law results in an increase of opposition voices, the government reverses itself to protect its overall hold over the media.

MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE AND OBJECTIVE NEWS.

PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

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

"The government does not restrict people's access to local and international media except for some foreign newspapers and magazines that have been confiscated for political and mostly religious reasons," wrote Moselm. Panelists also agreed that access is not restricted for financial reasons. "Foreign media in the form of foreign newspapers or channels are available to everyone through the Internet, local markets, and satellite," Habeb wrote. According to El-Din El-Sayed: "Mass media are available, widespread, and more or less at reasonable prices. However, local media are too poor and people [in rural areas] usually resort to the state media."

Abdel Kader listed other problems with local media. Local newspapers are published irregularly and are not taken seriously by local officials. Therefore, information about local issues is poor and dialogue between local government and local residents impaired.

Abdel Kader also discussed a phenomenon that has increased access to satellite television. "Recently, a new method called 'the cable' has become widespread in Egypt to transmit all the satellite channels at cheap prices. One person buys a dish to receive the channels and a receiver device for each channel then links them and extends cables to each house at monthly fees of EGP 20. People can watch about 40 channels through this cable. The same technique is used to provide Internet access, yet it is not as widely used as the satellite cable. Although illegal, it has helped to raise access to satellite channels to an extraordinary level and has promoted the channels and opened media access to people otherwise shut out without 'the cable.'"

"Although Internet penetration is still relatively very low (about 8 percent), people with access to the Internet make good use of it in terms of finding information and alternative sources of news," wrote Abdulla. He noted that dial-up Internet service is free, except for the cost of the call, but illiteracy and language barriers (since much of Internet content is in English) continue to hinder Internet usage. Abdel Kader reported that a DSL line costs about EGP 95 per month. El-Din El-Sayed wrote that there is almost no filtering of the Internet, except for the Web site of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Panelists characterized state media as serving the interests of the government and ruling party, explaining that significant pressure is placed on staff to do so. El-Din El-Sayed wrote: "Under such conditions, the state-owned media only reflect the view of the ruling regime. Public television rarely hosts opposition figures in its programs. A long list of public figures is prohibited from appearing in the official media and the minister of information oversees this. During parliamentary and presidential elections and public occasions, the television and official newspapers present songs and official rallying that represent the ruling party without any consideration

to other political and social movements.” Tohamy said state media attacks on the opposition and opposition press give them the appearance of being ruling-party-owned, rather than government run.

Habeb gave examples of state media purposely ignoring political opposition. “*Akhbar Al-Youm* interviewed Mohamed Mahdi Akef, a leader of the Muslim Brotherhood. When the interview was brought to the political leadership’s attention, it was canceled and the journalist who conducted it was punished. Furthermore, the *Al-Karama*, *Al-Wafd*, and *Al-Tagamo* parties rarely appear in the state-owned newspapers except in reports that support the government or attack the Muslim Brotherhood. Certain topics are not discussed on government television, otherwise the presenter, programmer, or reporter are punished.”

Abdel Kader discussed news agencies. “In Egypt there are no Egyptian news agencies except for the Middle East News Agency (MENA), which is affiliated with the government. International news agencies have offices in Egypt and their coverage is cited in news reports. Yet, reporters for the international news agencies face difficulties covering some hot events.” El-Din El-Sayed wrote that international news agency reports are widely used and affordable.

As reported last year, private broadcasters are not allowed to produce their own newscasts. However, they circumvent this limitation to a degree by offering talk shows in which they address subjects in the news, including sometimes controversial political and social issues. The discussions include guests representing a range of political and ideological positions, as well as participation of the public—via phone, Internet, or text messaging.

When it came to media ownership, panelist comments pointed to superficial transparency that belies a more complicated reality. “The ambiguity of media ownership and domination of the regime and leading businessmen cause confusion and compromise the credibility of media messages,” wrote El-Din El-Sayed. “The real media owners and financial statements of media companies are rarely declared. Deals and alliances between the media owners and between them and the regime compromise the validity and professionalism of news reports by such media.” Saleh referred to this as “crony capitalism.” Habeb pointed to the private newspapers *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, *Al-Youm Al-Sabe*, and *Al-Tareek*. He said they do not reveal their funding sources and provide only positive coverage of those sources.

“Ownership of media outlets is, by and large, public information, although few people care to investigate media-ownership patterns,” wrote Abdulla. “A study I conducted this year on the four major Egyptian talk

shows—*Al Beit Beita*, *90 Minutes*, *10 PM*, and *Al Qahira Al Youm*—showed that about 70 percent of the survey population did not know who owns the channel that broadcasts their favorite talk show. The study recommends educating the public about the importance of media ownership and its potential effect on the editorial policies of the media outlet.”

Media coverage of a wide range of social and minority affairs is thin. “The state-owned newspapers await instructions with respect to covering news of minorities,” Tohamy wrote. He said coverage of minority affairs is better among private and opposition media.

Abdel Kader wrote extensively on regional coverage. “News coverage in Egypt is centralized to a great extent. News always focuses on Cairo because it is the capital and the center of all ministries, authorities, and the president. Alexandria comes in second place, especially in the summer, because the Council of Ministers often moves there in the summer. Governorate news coverage is infrequent. For example, Upper Egyptian news is published, at most, in a quarter column in the daily or weekly newspapers. This is due to many reasons, including the lack of interest, the shortage of professional journalists in different governorates, and journalists who do not wish to travel to remote areas to cover news that is not a major crisis or accident.”

He did note one exception: “*Al-Ahram* has massive resources enabling it to put reporters in remote governorates. As a result, it managed to publish an incident of corruption that took place in El-Menya when [Ministry of Education] personnel leaked the general secondary exams to some of the governorate high-ranking officials. An *Al-Ahram* reporter in El-Menya, Haggag El-Hosseiny, uncovered this incident, which caused public outcry and the results for those students were canceled. But this example is an exception that does not occur in other newspapers.”

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Egypt Objective Score: 2.23

Indicator scores in this objective varied widely. Indicators 3 and 4, the advertising industry and balance of advertising revenue compared to other revenue sources, both scored relatively well, about a point higher. Indicators 6 and 7, which cover market research and audience measurement, both scored about a point lower. The other three indicators received scores nearly identical to the objective score.

Panelists provided a comprehensive picture of the business practices of Egyptian media. They offered differing assessments of the profitability and business practices of

private media and the motivations of private media owners. Several maintained that private media are well managed and generate profits. Al-Amir Ismail wrote that independent media “appoint qualified personnel, avoiding bureaucracy in management and employment that is adopted by the state-owned mass media.” Tohamy provided a successful example: “Independent and party-owned newspapers work on their own to continue, succeed, and make profits. *Al-Wafd*, the first daily non-governmental newspaper that was released by the Al-Wafd opposition party, started in 1984 with little capital and a few journalists. Today, it has capital assets and a bank balance estimated at EGP 100 million and makes half a million pounds as a monthly profit after deducting printing costs and salaries.”

El-Din El-Sayed had a very different view of the business side of journalism. “Due to the high cost of media as a business, compared to other investment opportunities, it is not a profitable business—except for the entertainment industry. Accordingly, this influences the media operation and credibility. For example, a daily non-governmental newspaper managed to get a three-year, \$10 million advertising contract with an agency. The deal has affected the newspaper’s performance and the type of news covered—in order to maintain the interests of its owners and the deal, in addition to other political pressures,” he wrote.

Abdel Kader suggested that influence—not profit—is the main motivation for owning a newspaper. “Today, a businessman does not launch advertising campaigns in the newspapers. Rather, he starts a private newspaper after depositing millions of pounds in the bank for the newspaper’s expenses and salaries of editors and administration staff. He usually uses the newspaper to promote some type of

viewpoint,” he said. Saleh pointed to the underdeveloped advertising market as proof that profit is not the chief reason for owning a newspaper.

Saleh also offered an alternative view of management practices and professional management. “With respect to advertising, I would like to confirm that newspapers do not often adopt systematic marketing plans. Rather, advertisements are distributed in a random manner that depends on the public relations of the advertisers or on the tactics that ‘attack is the best way to bring advertisements.’ All terminologies of marketing, strategic plans, systematic research, and others are merely theoretical terms that have not been realized except in some limited cases. *Al-Masry Al-Youm* is the only exception in this regard as it was founded on principles of marketing methodology that were conducted by Rami Boutros, a marketing expert who has discussed his experience with *Al-Masry Al-Youm* in many symposiums and meetings.”

Saleh also described systemic problems that hurt businesses in general. “The formal bureaucratic procedures are so cumbersome that most economic activity depends on political patronage, or it is simply driven underground.” He said the state ignores irregular business practices “as long as it has control over media content in its favor.”

Panelists consistently said state-run media were not managed according to sound business principles and relied on heavy financial support from the state. “In terms of business management, again the performance of the national or government-owned media outlets is very different from that of the private outlets,” Abdulla wrote. “The government-owned outlets are run mostly as a mouthpiece for the government, so their No. 1 objective is not sustainability or financial independence or profits, but rather to spread the news and opinions that the government deems necessary to influence public opinion. Still, there is no lack of advertising in these outlets, for several reasons. For the print publications, the strange system of advertising commissions that most reporters are promised for bringing in advertising money works well. Advertisers are also promised a free news spot or more coverage of their events. While in most free press systems, such coverage or news would clearly be labeled ‘advertising’ or ‘advertorial,’ this is not the case in Egypt. The advertising news spot is published in the newspaper as regular news, which is an obvious ethical conflict. Some publications are now so filled with advertising that readers have to go through the pages looking for the news items. This is particularly true of weekend or weekly editions.”

Habeb described media funding sources. “Private or independent media in Egypt are usually funded by the proceeds from advertisements and circulation, in addition to the contributions of financiers—usually businessmen with

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.

interests in maintaining the newspapers so as to advocate their rights, as with the example of *Al-Masry Al-Youm* and *Al-Badeel*. Revenue sources of state-owned newspapers are advertisements, in addition to direct and indirect support from the state, including uncollected taxes and fees for electricity, telephone, and other utilities.”

But diverse revenue sources are not enough to secure editorial independence. According to Abdulla: “Private media outlets care about advertisers for survival reasons. However... allegations have surfaced on more than one occasion that the government pressures advertisers not to buy time on a particular channel or publication if these outlets have aggravated the government.” Shehab concurred: “Advertising in Egyptian newspapers represents an issue of reward and punishment. The company rewards with advertisements to the newspaper if it is satisfied with its editorial line. On the other hand, if the editorial line is opposed to the government, the newspaper does not receive any advertisements because companies do not want to irritate the government by supporting independent or opposition newspapers such as *Al-Dostour*, *Sout Al-Oma*, *Al-Fagr*, *Al-Arabi*, and others.”

Abdoun said *Al-Masry Al-Youm* “has followed a general orientation since its inception to provide excellent press without any pressures and has used pictures and headlines according to the best practices of journalism. However, today it has started to give in to the pressures of leading mobile companies, tourism companies, and real estate companies for the sake of advertisements.”

Panelists felt the ratio of advertising revenue compared to other revenue sources is in line with international norms. “The funding of newspapers basically relies on advertisements rather than distribution,” Tohamy wrote.

Private independent media do not receive direct government subsidies. But Moselm said there is an annual subsidy of EGP 100,000 for political parties which, in turn, often use it to support their newspapers. Abdel Kader said “private newspapers sometimes receive subsidies from the government in the form of advertisements, but only newspapers that appeal to the government.”

According to Habeb: “Market research is rarely conducted by all the state-owned and private media institutions. Some people are still not fully aware of it and others do not believe in it. Furthermore, the institutions lack marketing personnel who can conduct neutral studies to tailor the media product to the needs of the audience.” El-Din El-Sayed added: “Most mass media do not pay the research fees for [research] institutions, and media institutions do not have market research departments. Such factors increase reliance on networks of contacts, rather than the real advertising market.” Abdulla

said some government-owned media outlets have research departments but do not produce credible research. “The little research available is conducted by university professors such as myself and is mostly for academic publication purposes and rarely taken seriously by the media outlets,” he said. Unlike print media, Moselm asserted, television uses market research.

Panelists said circulation and audience information are either unreliable or guarded as proprietary information. Others agreed with Habeb’s explanation: “The real circulation figures and broadcast ratings are undisclosed and there is no neutral authority to handle them. Every newspaper claims it has the highest distribution figures and the state-owned newspapers are competing to prove this. *Al-Gomhureya* as well as *Al-Ahram* and *Al-Akhbar* claim they achieve the highest distribution figures. On the other side, independent newspapers such as *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, *Al-Badeel*, *Al-Dostour*, and *Al-Fagr* say they have the highest distribution figures because state-owned newspapers such as *Al-Ahram*, *Al-Akhbar*, and *Al-Gomhureya* lost their appeal when people learned of their misleading practices.”

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Egypt Objective Score: 2.34

Panelists provided diverse scores for the indicators. Performing strongly were Indicators 2 and 3, professional associations and the advocacy work of NGOs. However, Indicators 1 and 6, trade associations and access to printing facilities and newsprint lagged far behind. The other indicators received scores close to the overall objective average.

Saleh provided background on difficulties facing all associations and other NGOs. “In May 1999, the Egyptian parliament passed a law encroaching upon the NGOs’ freedom to organize and act. The new law banned private groups from working to influence government policy or union activity. It gave the Ministry of Social Affairs power to disband boards of directors. NGOs must seek permission from the government before accepting foreign donations. The new law set prison terms of up to two years for violations of vaguely formulated offences such as ‘threatening law, public morality, and order and national unity.’

“Following a wave of protests by both Egyptian and international NGOs, the law was found unconstitutional on procedural grounds and suspended by the Constitutional Court,” Saleh continued. “The country’s older law on NGOs (Law 32 of 1964), which is seen as equally repressive, remains in force.”

Panelists said there is no trade association to represent media outlets or the interests of owners. Given the government’s previous monopoly on broadcasting, Moselm said, there was

no need for such an organization and one has not developed in the meantime.

"The Press Syndicate is the official body serving journalists in Egypt. With very rare exceptions, the head of the syndicate is considered to be the government's man," Abdulla said. "Before the most recent elections in November 2007, journalists urged their colleague, veteran journalist and poet Farouk Goweida, to run for the office. After giving it some thought, Goweida refused to run, saying he would be not be able to serve his colleagues well in having to deal with the government's pressures."

Abdel Kader said that the syndicate protects journalists' rights, works to win them privileges, and lobbies the government for those privileges. The privileges include pensions, health insurance benefits, and a small stipend to support their work.

Saleh elaborated on the syndicate's advocacy work. "The Press Syndicate, for example, lobbied to restrain the indiscriminate expansion of professional school enrollments, which it said was producing a surplus of under-trained graduates. Besides, it long fought to expand press freedom. While [President Anwar] Sadat tried unsuccessfully to abolish the union, the Mubarak regime, however, managed to reassert its control." However, El-Din El-Sayed, wrote: "Notwithstanding its independence from the ruling regime, the Press Syndicate faces many obstacles making it incapable of maintaining the interests of its members when such interests conflict with the regime."

Several panelists cited the Press Syndicate's limited membership. Members must be appointed by a newspaper. "Obtaining press syndicate membership is very difficult and is granted only to printed press professionals," wrote El-Din El-Sayed. "There are fewer than 7,000 syndicate members,

whereas the number of different media professionals unprotected by any union is more than 70,000."

Abdel Kader recalled that broadcast journalists tried to join the Press Syndicate but were rebuffed. Members feared that admitting a large number of broadcast journalists, almost all of whom were from state broadcasting, would tip the balance of membership in favor of those representing the government.

Abdel Kader continued: "Many journalist-advocating associations have been established. There are specific associations and unions such as the Association of Economic Editors, for editors working in the economic area, and so on. Such associations do not play a significant role other than organizing seminars and conferences that might be useful for media professionals or journalists."

Panelists said a few NGOs advocate for freedom of expression issues and will support journalists when they face legal action by the state. Habeb singled out the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights, the Arab Institute for Human Rights, The Hisham Mubarak Law Center, and the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies. El-Din El-Sayed noted that such NGOs work in a difficult environment. "NGOs advocate journalists' rights and provide them with legal support," he said. "However, they face several government obstacles and continuous accusations of adopting a foreign agenda, which often affects their reputation and operations."

Formal journalism education got mixed reviews from the panelists. Habeb criticized the curriculum at public universities. "The faculties of information and media sections focus on the theoretical aspect and ignore practical training," he wrote. "Sometimes, students graduate and then realize that their studies are totally different from the profession's reality." Saleh blamed this on the government successfully "transforming [journalism education] into a public relations curriculum and marginalizing notions of investigative reporting and aggressive journalism." He said no media outlet is happy with the current state of journalism education at most universities and even noted that, at private universities, bribery continues to be a problem.

Abdulla singled out what he believed is an exception, the American University in Cairo (AUC), where he is a professor. "The American University in Cairo's journalism program is well established and has graduated some of Egypt's most prominent journalists, including Mustafa Amin, Louis Greiss, Laila Rostom and, more recently, Lamees el Hadidi, Mona el Shazly, Yosri Fouda, and other," he wrote. "While Egyptian university graduates are usually lacking on the practical front, AUC graduates have to do some practical training, either through an internship or through working on the student newspaper, *The Caravan*, or at the Kamal Adham Center for Journalism 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 in private hands, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.

and Research. AUC students also take courses in research methods, online communication, and online journalism.”

Given the criticisms of academic journalism programs (and, as mentioned in Objective 2, that some journalists have not even studied journalism), panelists agreed on the importance of on-the-job training. Saleh wrote that “what it means to ‘do’ journalism is something that journalists attempt to learn after being hired as an editor, reporter, producer, etc.” But he was optimistic, observing that many journalists realize they need to improve their skills in order to reverse what he characterized as the “current decline” not only in Egypt, but the entire Middle East region.

Several panelists characterized short-term training opportunities as inadequate in number or pointed out other obstacles. Taken together, however, the panelists’ comments indicate that a diverse group of organizations sponsor a number of opportunities.

Saleh underscored the need to train journalists in new information technologies but said there are only a few training centers in the region, in addition to satellite stations that are increasingly able to establish training departments. El-Din El-Sayed noted that the Islam Online Foundation is unique among media associations with its training and research department. He also identified the Heikal Press Institute as “the only body in Egypt that meets some of the training deficiency in Egypt.” Habeb added: “Newspapers and the Press Syndicate rarely provide such training.” He said the work of Heikal “allows about 50 journalists from all newspapers to train in editorial and language skills.” He noted that “*Al-Masry Al-Youm* also provides training to upgrade and develop the skills of its editors.”

“The Syndicate’s resources, which are collected from member subscriptions, are not enough to provide for widespread activities to upgrade the profession or train journalists,” Shehab wrote. However, he said the Press Syndicate does organize trainings that generate revenue. Further, he added, several organizations work in cooperation to support the Press Syndicate’s efforts, including “the Egyptian Foundation for Training and Human Rights, which aims at providing professional training for journalists on editorial principles, how to comply with the press code of ethics, and how to consider human rights through reports and news writing. Many training programs have been completed ... in collaboration with the United Nations Development Program and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Egypt. Some governmental institutions such as the Information Technology Industry Development Agency, affiliated with the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information, cooperate to provide the journalists with training programs on languages. Every member of the Press Syndicate receives a monthly EGP 530 subsidy from the syndicate as a training and equipment allowance.”

Abdel Kader recalled when the Alexandria Today and Tomorrow Association launched a project called “Future Media Professionals” in collaboration with USAID. It aims to train 600 media professionals in journalism skills.

Abdouh acknowledged that many organizations have been active in training but questioned their focus. “The latest training programs were on non-media areas such as ‘legal protection for journalists,’ ‘human rights,’ ‘labor organizations,’ and ‘environment and environmental protection.’ It would have been better to introduce specialized programs on journalist preparation, specialized press, how to become an editorial manager, how to become an editor, and how to become a chairman.”

Finally, El-Din El-Sayed noted: “Journalists’ generally poor facility in the English language limits opportunities with overseas training programs, although they are available and unrestricted, legally and financially. For example, the Islam Online Foundation has sent more than 50 journalists to training programs in Europe and the United States without restrictions.”

Panelists disagreed on the exact nature of newsprint procurement and printing facilities, but none pointed to current politicization and difficulty accessing them. “It is worth noting that the issue of paper and printing facilities in Egypt does not represent a problem,” wrote Abdel Kader. “Most leading newspapers own high-quality printing facilities and the same newspapers procure the paper from the paper traders or import it. Other newspapers print in the printing facilities of major press institutions such as *Al-Ahram*, *Al-Akhbar*, and *Al-Gomhureya*, which bring profits while the owners of other newspapers benefit from the printing capabilities.” However, Tohamy noted that “the leading paper importing companies are state-owned.” Moselm and others pointed out that the newspapers with printing facilities listed by Abdel Kader are under state control.

Several panelists cited problems with newspaper distribution. “Most party-owned and private newspapers complain of the domination by state-owned newspapers of distribution networks, which enables them to control the newspaper and magazine delivery to the readers,” Shehab wrote. Abdel Kader noted that distribution of private newspapers “is delayed until the major press institutions distribute their own copies.” Kiosks, observed Tohamy, are privately owned, however. Shehab also indicated that overseas distribution of Egyptian newspapers and magazines is handled by the National Distribution Company and “is not efficient.”

Private newspapers have tried to get around the National Distribution Company but with limited success. Shehab said the Press Syndicate is “working to establish its own distribution network through a group of kiosks and shops.” Abdel Kader wrote that “some private newspapers use private

printing facilities to print a minimum number of copies then distribute them manually at the kiosks.” But Tohamy concluded that “some of the independent newspapers have tried to handle their own distribution but failed due to the high costs. Accordingly, the public press institutions still control the distribution of competitive newspapers.”

Internet access, however, is not state controlled. According to Abdel Kader: “In Egypt there are two major Internet providers—TE DATA and LINK.NET, which are privately owned—in addition to the Council of Ministers, which provides this service, too.”

List of Panel Participants

Ibrahim Saleh, professor of journalism and mass communications, the American University in Cairo, Cairo

Mahmed Habeb, news department head, *Nahdet Misr* newspaper, lecturer of mass communication, Modern Academy University, Cairo

Ashraf Shehab El Din, journalist, *al-Ahaly* monthly newspaper, deputy editor for *Diwan Al-Arab* electronic magazine, Cairo

Hossam El-Din El-Sayed, programs and production head, Islam on line.net and Ana TV Channel, Cairo

Hossam Abdel Kader, journalist, *October* magazine; editor-in-chief, *Waves of Alexandria* electronic magazine; management editor, *Life Beats* newspaper, Alexandria

Essam Al-Amir Ismail, head, Channel 8-Egyptian Television, Aswan

Mustafa Abdouh, journalist and correspondent, *El-Gomhoria* newspaper; editor-in-chief, *Beni-Suef* newspaper, Beni-Suef

Tarek Tohamy, journalist, *Al Wafd* newspaper, Cairo

Mahmoud Moselm, head of parliament department, *El Masry El-Youm* newspaper; anchor, “All About Politics” at El-Mehwar, Cairo

Rasha A. Abdulla, assistant professor of journalism and mass communication, the American University in Cairo, Cairo

Moderator

Maie Shawky, local media advisor, Partnership Program for Democracy and Governance, Cairo

Conflicting panelist schedules prevented a panel discussion from being held in Cairo. This report reflects the extensive written comments that panelists submitted in their questionnaires.