

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.

In many ways, moderate and reformist Iranians' fears of a conservative clampdown on civil society and press freedom following President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's election in June 2005 have materialized. But even some moderates point out that US-driven sanctions and threats of military action against Iran have helped solidify the current government, serving as justification for its encroachments on Iranians' freedoms.



IRAN

In Iran, the battlegrounds for media plurality are the pages of the press and the Internet. By law, only Iranian print media have the right of independence, while all broadcasting—television and radio—is state-owned and operated. Internet journalism, so far, is independent by default, although the government is increasingly trying to regulate it as well. Hence, for the past years, newspapers have not only reflected the degree of freedom accorded to the press but also, by extension, provided a measure of the powers of the various arms of government, a scale that increasingly leaves the future of Iran’s independent media hanging in the balance.

In many ways, moderate and reformist Iranians’ fears of a conservative clampdown on civil society and press freedom following President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s election in June 2005 have materialized. But even some moderates point out that US-driven sanctions and threats of military action against Iran have helped solidify the current government, serving as justification for its encroachments on Iranians’ freedoms.

Although the press already had suffered heavy blows during the reformist President Mohammad Khatami’s tenure, there were still government bodies, such as the presidency, parliament (*Majles*), and the Press Supervisory Board, that allowed the press to develop, though at a slow pace. At that time, the press could count on the elected bodies for support, struggling against the judiciary and Tehran prosecutor Said Mortazavi—both backed by the Supreme Leader—for survival. With conservatives taking over the *Majles* (in 2004), the presidency, and nearly all other government posts, Iran’s previously budding media outlets now seem largely orphaned, bereft of moral and material support.

The year 2006 saw the closure of more than 40 newspapers, the filtering of hundreds of Internet sites, the arrests of dozens of journalists and civil-society activists, many of whom keep blogs, as well as much greater pressures exerted on Iran’s ethnic minority publications. Leading into 2007, Iran’s two most prominent reformist newspapers, *Shargh* and *Ham-Mihan*, were shut down, and one of Iran’s main independent news agencies, the Iran Labor News Agency (ILNA), was suspended. Even the conservative newspaper *Siasat-e Rooz* and the popular conservative news website *Baztab* were banned for diverging from the views of the ruling powers. In early 2008, the government closed *Zanan*, Iran’s leading women’s magazine, which had been published for 16 years.

The MSI panel’s overall score for Iran was 1.56, with most progress made toward Objective 5, supporting institutions, which was ranked at 2.05, almost unchanged from 2.04 reported by the last MSI. The panelists found the greatest weakness in the areas represented by Objective 1, freedom of speech, which they was ranked at 1.05, down from 1.20 during the previous period. The other objectives were largely unchanged and fell fairly close to the overall score.

IRAN AT A GLANCE

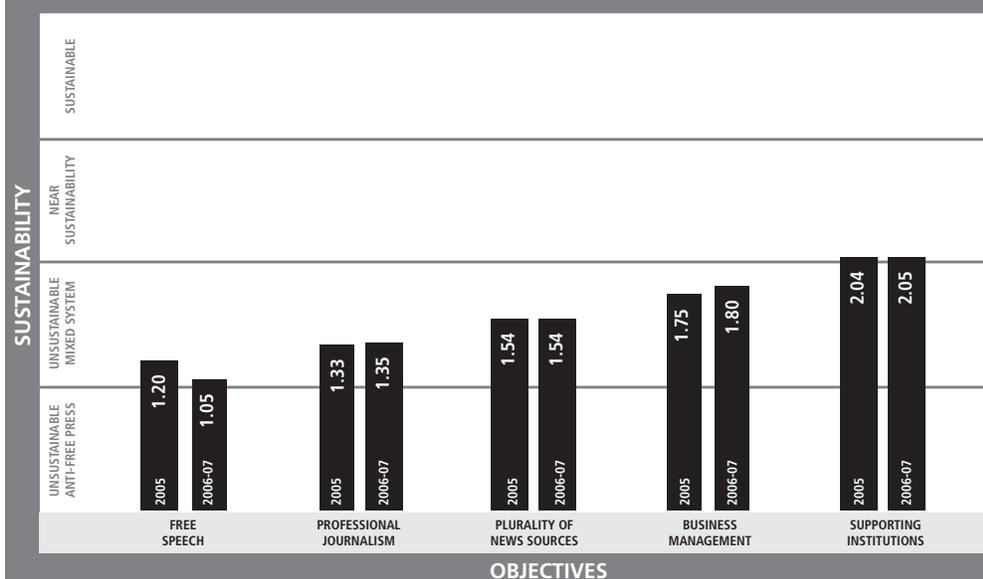
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 65,397,521 (July 2007 est., 2007 est.)
- > **Capital city:** Tehran
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Persian 51%, Azeri 24%, Gilaki and Mazandarani 8%, Kurd 7%, Arab 3%, Lur 2%, Baloch 2%, Turkmen 2%, other 1% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 98% (Shi'a 89%, Sunni 9%), other (includes Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian, and Baha'i) 2% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Persian and Persian dialects 58%, Turkic and Turkic dialects 26%, Kurdish 9%, Luri 2%, Balochi 1%, Arabic 1%, Turkish 1%, other 2% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2006-Atlas):** \$207.6 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **GNI per capita (2006-PPP):** \$8,490 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **Literacy rate:** 77% (male 83.5%, female 70.4%) (2002 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** Supreme Leader Ali Hoseini-Khamenei (since June 4, 1989)
- > **Next scheduled elections:** Parliamentary elections 2008

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** 2,857 publications; of those more than 500 are believed to be daily outlets, with the remaining publications constituting specialist periodicals; 9 national radio stations, and more than 100 local stations, all state-owned; 5 national TV stations in Persian, 1 station in Arabic, 1 news network in English
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Largest paper in terms of circulation is the governmental *Hamshahri*, followed by the governmental *Iran* and *Jame-Jam*; published circulation numbers are not available, though it has been estimated that daily circulation of newspapers lies around three million
- > **Broadcast ratings:** *Payam Radio* is generally believed to be the most popular radio station, followed by *Javan Radio* (Youth Radio); overall broadcast ratings are not available
- > **News agencies:** IRNA, ISNA, IRIBNEWS, ITNA, ISCA, IPNA, IANA, SNN, Advar, Aftab, Fars, Mehr, Raja, Rasa, Alborz, Press TV News, and most major foreign news agencies
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 18 million (2006 est., *CIA World Factbook*); 7-8 million (Iran IT industry)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: IRAN



Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1):

Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):

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

Near Sustainability (2-3):

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

Sustainable (3-4):

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

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

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Iran Objective Score: 1.05

Iran's constitution is based on Islamic as well as republican principles. It was adopted following the highly ideological revolution of 1979, which at the outset sought to correct the wrongs of the Shah's regime and create an ideal Islamic society based on justice. The document guarantees press freedom in Article 24: "Publications and the press have freedom of expression except when it is detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam or the rights of the public." It does not provide more generally for the right to freedom of expression, and panelists have noted that the conditional phrase in the article is often used to limit the media. In its Article 168 regarding political and press offenses, the constitution commands: "Political and press offenses will be tried openly and in the presence of a jury, in courts of justice." Here, too, it is stipulated, "The manner of the selection of the jury, its powers, and the definition of political offenses, will be determined by law in accordance with Islamic criteria."

But more so than the actual constitution, it is the Iranian Press Law, ratified in 1986, that sets the legal framework for media activity in Iran. In it the press are obligated by law to work "while duly observing the Islamic teachings and the best interest of the community." Journalists say they are often tried on charges of violating Article VI of the Press Law, which holds among other clauses that "to act against the security, dignity, and interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran within or outside the country" and "insulting Islam and its sanctities, or, offending the Leader of the Revolution and recognized religious authorities (senior Islamic jurists)" are illegal.

While the Press Law was already viewed as giving conservatives the necessary legal grounds to charge reporters with violations based on arbitrary or interpreted grounds, a set of amendments to the Press Law in the year 2000 were seen as a serious blow to journalists' rights. One panelist described those amendments as the outgoing conservative *Majles'* revenge against the victory of reformists in the parliamentary elections that year, which was emblematic of reformist victories in national and local elections across

the board in the years 1997 to 2001. The 1986 version already stipulated the creation of a Press Supervisory Board, consisting of five members who were given the powers to issue licenses, "examine violations of the press," and arrange for legal prosecution by court if deemed necessary. The Press Law specified that those five members should consist of a judiciary chief representative, the minister of culture and Islamic guidance, a member of parliament chosen by parliament, a university professor chosen by the minister of education, and a managing director chosen by Iran's press managing directors. The 2000 amendment added two more members to this board, in effect guaranteeing that its composition would be tipped in favor of a conservative one. The two new members must be a seminary professor from the religious city of Qom and a member of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, a body responsible for promoting the role of Islam in the cultural field.

Other additions to the Press Law further tightened controls on the press. Among them was a clause stipulating that any publisher or editor applying for clearance from the Press Supervisory Board also had to seek clearance from the Ministry of Intelligence, the Ministry of Justice, and the police. Furthermore, the new version mandated that not only the editor-in-chief but also the writer were responsible for articles. However, the acting authorities only interpret the editor-in-chief to be—in theory at least—benefiting from the law's provision for jury trials, whereas the writer is held to be responsible for his own act of writing and can be punished according to the Islamic penal code (Article 697), essentially

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.

like a criminal. Other unfavorable amendments were that journalists were legally obliged to reveal their sources and couldn't criticize the constitution. But the biggest blow to journalists came in the form and powers of the Supervisory Board. Not only were its members now guaranteed to be overwhelmingly conservative, but also they had the power to stop a publication before its case had even been heard by a court. Although editors are to be tried in a jury trial, the jury is selected by members of the Press Supervisory Board, which means that prosecutor and jury are like-minded—if not, in effect, the same.

The judiciary already had raised pressures significantly on independent media during reformist President Khatami's tenure. In fact, what was termed a "press spring" lasted not much longer than an actual season, spanning 1999 to 2000. Soon after the outgoing conservative *Majles* voted in restrictive amendments to the Press Law, close to 100 publications, among them more than a dozen prominent reformist newspapers, were shut down. One panelist said that some 300 journalists at the time lost their jobs. One of the panelists described this period in April 2000 as a "national day of mourning for the independent Iranian press." The incoming majority reformist sixth *Majles* then declared that reversing those measures would be at the top of its priorities. It approved an emergency bill three weeks into its term but was forced to withdraw its bill when then-*Majles* speaker Mahdi Karroubi received a handwritten letter from the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei effectively prohibiting a reversal of the 2000 amendments.

From a legal perspective, press freedoms were considerably diminished during reformist Mohammad Khatami's presidency. But panelists noted that with the election of conservative President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005, the press were restricted from all fronts. "Khatami and his circles believed in freedom of expression and sponsoring free media so they never hindered the publication of any paper," said one panelist. "It was the conservative judiciary that was closing down papers." Now, all panelists said, the situation is entirely different. "It is not just the country's laws and the judiciary apparatus that limit press freedom: the government itself is independent media's biggest enemy," noted one participant.

Even with the 2000 amendments, the scale in the Supervisory Press Board had been tipped four to three in favor of reformists. The culture minister, the MP, the university professor chosen by the culture minister, and the managing director elected by his colleagues were all reformists in support of independent media. Now all of those, including even the managing director, are conservatives. "The conservatives occupy even that post in the Board, even though their election is seen as illegitimate by many in the independent press,"

said one panelist. The panelist explained, "It is only because of the crackdown on reformist papers and the flourishing of pro-government ones that they were able to get more votes than the reformist candidate and that, only by a few votes." The conservative managing director elected to the board is Hossein Entezami, spokesman of the Supreme Council for National Security as well as the managing director of the governmental newspaper *Hamshahri* and previously managing director of another government newspaper, *Jaam-e-Jam*.

All panelists agreed that the current atmosphere made existence close to impossible for reformist publications. In 2006, the Tehran prosecutor, seen as a major foe of press plurality, appointed as his deputy Hassan Haddad, a judge with a track record of banning reformist publications. "At least during Khatami's time we were comforted by the fact that the president and elected powers weren't against us; it was the appointed conservative powers that would give us a hard time, but then Khatami would come out and say something in our defense and give us some hope," one panel member said. "And even when publications were shut down, there was hope that the Supervisory Board would give out new permits. Now they ban papers, and they won't give out new permits, either."

By law, the Board is supposed to order the closure of a publication based only on the recommendation of the Ministry of Culture following proof of violations of the Press Law. But one panelist said the Board is supposed to forward the proof on to the Judiciary within a week's time. "The second time they closed down *Shargh*," the panelist continued, "it took them close to three months to forward the file to the judiciary. They said they didn't have the documents and the evidence ready yet. First they close the publications, and *then* they go looking for evidence."

Shargh, considered Iran's highest-quality independent reformist newspaper, was first shut down in the lead-up to the 2004 parliamentary elections when it, along with another reformist newspaper, *Yas-e No*, published an angry letter by the reformists to the Supreme Leader in which they decried the disqualification of reformists to the elections of the 7th *Majles*. It was allowed to resume but was shut down again in September 2006, based on various charges, including the publication of a cartoon that showed a haloed donkey on a chessboard facing a horse. Many interpreted the donkey to represent Ahmadinejad because he had spoken of a halo representing him at his speech at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2006. The judiciary allowed *Shargh* to resume again in May 2007, but the Board ordered its closure again only three months later, citing an interview with the Iranian expatriate poet in Canada, Shadi Ghahreman. The press watchdog accused *Shargh* of providing a forum for an

"immoral and counterrevolutionary" person who promotes homosexuality. *Shargh's* lawyer charged that the choice of an interviewee cannot serve a legal basis for closure and called the act unlawful. One participant believed the Board was looking for an excuse and that it was only a matter of time until *Shargh* would be shut down. Another panelist noted that the day after *Shargh's* closure, the independent conservative Fars News Agency published a series of articles about her, her biography and activities, which in the eyes of the participant provided more grounds for accusations of "propagation of obscenity" according to Clause 2 of Article 6 in the Press Law, based on which *Shargh* was closed. "Of course, Fars News Agency didn't even have to fear any repercussions," the participant added.

The closure of another reformist newspaper, *Ham-Mihan*, even more starkly represented the arbitrary way in which publications can be ordered shut. *Ham-Mihan* had been banned in 2000 following the publication of an article that called for better ties with the United States. Seven years later, the judiciary decided that the closure was not permanent and allowed *Ham-Mihan* to resume publication. After less than two months of publication and 42 issues, the paper was banned without any clear legal accusations. One participant, familiar with *Ham-Mihan* said the order came directly from Tehran Prosecutor Mortazavi, bypassing any legal rules and regulations. "It's gotten to a point that they close us down without even needing to give a reason," the same participant added.

Reporters Without Borders reported that in 2006 alone, 38 reporters were arrested and at least a dozen media outlets were shut down. Other prominent media that have been banned in the span of 2006 and into 2007 have been the independent ILNA, the *Siasat-e Rooz* daily, and the conservative *Baztab* website. Several other papers, including the influential daily *Mosharekat*, which had been suspended, received judicial verdicts of permanent closure. The government also tightened its grip on civil-society activists, labor union activists, teachers, and women, many of whom are either journalists for paper publications or run their own weblogs and Internet sites.

In November 2006, the government cabinet issued a new ruling according to which all websites dealing with Iran have to register with the Ministry of Culture. One panelist said the purpose of this rule was to provide the government with yet another illegitimate cloak of legitimacy in shutting down websites, since it could not really regulate the registration of all sites about Iran. The new decree also created an "Internet Surveillance Body" under the control of the Ministry of Culture, which oversees websites and recommends censorship and closures. Many consider the closure of *Baztab*, one of the

most-read news sites, which is allied to a rival conservative faction, to be the first victim of the new Internet regulations.

Other victims of increased repression in Iran are reporters for ethnic-minority publications. Several Kurdish and Azeri publications have been shut down and their reporters arrested and held without trial in 2006 and 2007. But it is not only ethnic-minority journalists accused of "spreading separatist ideas" who are under greater pressure. Iran's mainstream Persian publications are under equal pressure to refrain from the publications of any material that could insult Iran's ethnic minorities. The governmental *Iran* newspaper was shut down in May 2006 after publishing a cartoon with a cockroach that spoke Azari, which led to protests and demonstrations in Tabriz and other Azari towns. In February 2007, the conservative daily *Siasat-e Rooz* was suspended by the Supervisory Board for publishing an article that was deemed offensive to Iran's Sunni minority.

Under threat from the US government and fearing separatist movements and other sources of instability, the Iranian government has tried increasingly to control media content. Participants said the government has issued an increasing number of circulars in recent months banning the publication of certain subjects and instructing them on *how* to cover others (effectively banning particular angles or perspectives on certain subjects), including the nuclear issue, labor union and teachers' protests, and gas rationing.

The volume of these circulars and the pressures from the government, the judiciary, and the Press Supervisory Board reached such an extent that in September 2007, Iran's Association of Iranian Journalists issued a statement urging all those organs and officials responsible for neglecting Articles 4 and 5 of the Press Law (which prohibit government from meddling in or censoring media content, unless they violate Article 6 clauses, and give media the right to inform the public) to stop their unlawful acts. This statement implies that censorship no longer follows the law but is political, at worst, or random, at best. The statement also urges editors not to cave in to such illegal pressures too readily.

However, participants also stressed that although the Press Law gave them certain rights, such as the ones mentioned above, Article 6 of this law was abused to limit media freedom. Among the most cited clauses used by government to charge publications in court are 1, 2, 4, and 7, which condemn atheistic and anti-Islamic content, immoral or obscene material, any content that may cause conflict between Iran's ethnic populations, and insult to Islam and the Supreme leader and other Islamic sources, respectively. Also cited are articles in Iran's public penal code against acts that threaten the interests and security of the Islamic Republic.

There is little public outcry about violations of journalists' rights. Four years after an Iranian-Canadian photojournalist was killed at the hands of Iranian authorities following arrest for taking pictures outside of Iran's notorious Evin prison, her case still remains unresolved. After prison officials acknowledged that she was beaten during interrogation, prosecutors named an intelligence official as the person responsible for her death. He was later acquitted by a court. Lawyers are still trying to pursue the case through the appeals court.

All panelists totally condemned the killing and decried it as absolutely deplorable but said that part of the repression on media was being justified as due to increased foreign threats against Iran's national security. One panelist said she felt like she had been intimidated to such a degree that she was dutifully acting out the role of a censor on herself. "Before writing any piece," she said, "I have to consider what all the likely censors—you know, the Press Supervisory Board, the judiciary, or the Tehran public prosecutor—may object to. In the process, I have become my own strongest censor."

These developments, especially the closures of *Shargh*, *Ham-Mihan*, and ILNA, have led to the unemployment of hundreds of journalists as well as to an exodus of young Iranian reporters from the country. However, despite this bleak picture, most MSI participants believed that Iranian journalism's struggle would eventually leave it stronger, more mature, and more professional. One panelist disagreed, saying she and her colleagues had lost all hope. Participants expressed frustration at the linkage between the future of Iranian journalism and US foreign policy: the greater the threats of a military strike, the greater the repression at home. Still, most agreed that through the years, the sustainability of independent journalism had increased, with better professional development possibilities and business acumen.

Although access of information is not a right established in the constitution or the Press Law, most panelists felt that the more important issue was their right to actually publish what they believe to be information that is in the interest of the public. "If you are prohibited from publishing certain information, or if you know your paper will be closed because of the publication of that information, what good is a legal right to access of information?" asked one panelist. Another panelist added that there was a general recognition that elected government officials had to be responsive to the public, though this did not apply to appointed officials, who make some of the most important decisions affecting the lives of Iranians.

Publications and Internet sites are the only independent media in Iran. Radio and television are state-owned, as

they were before the 1979 revolution. There is no tradition of independent broadcast media in Iran. The constitution stipulates that the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), which has seven television stations and dozens of radio stations, must be appointed by the Supreme Leader. After the 2005 presidential elections, Mehdi Karroubi, former parliament speaker and contender to the presidency, started an initiative to launch Iran's first independent television station to be produced from inside Iran but broadcast per satellite from the United Arab Emirates. There are no laws directly prohibiting independent broadcast media, but when the station was ready to launch its first batch of programs, its tapes were confiscated by Islamic Republic officials upon arrival in Dubai and the station never managed to take off.

Among the news agencies and print publications, there are some that are government-owned and controlled but there are also dozens that are independent. The Press Law sets forth guidelines for publishers that are rather liberal, requiring the person to be Iranian, at least 25 years of age, have a bachelor's degree, and be without a criminal record. However, as panelists pointed out, the Press Supervisory Board rarely issues permits to persons known to have reformist political leanings. As a general rule, especially since the ascendancy to power of the current conservative government, government media are much better funded and supported. Journalists working for those outlets have much better access to information than those working for private outlets.

Libel is punished under Iran's Press Law, though the writer of the piece can be punished under Iran's penal code as opposed to the Press Law, which guarantees—in theory—a jury trial. But past panelists with experience of libel suits have criticized that even the plaintiff's failure to prove a charge or claim may have no effect on the verdict. Essentially, journalists feel they are at the mercy of the sitting judge.

Government filters both the Internet as well as satellite television stations. Reporters Without Borders estimates that Iran filters some 10 million Internet sites that it considers "immoral and against the national security interests of the country." One panelist who is well-informed about the management of Iran's Internet Service Providers (ISPs) believed that 95 percent of the sites that are blocked by government are pornographic sites and that only a minority are actually political sites. The panelist also believed that some 30 percent of the sites were a casualty of mistaken filtering. In November 2006, the government adopted a policy that allows it even greater censorship of Internet content. That regulation was followed by a bill in the *Majles* that aims to control the Internet like all other conventional

media. Panelists said filtering had increased in 2006 and 2007 considerably, not even sparing the sites of rival conservative factions, such as the *Baztab* news website.

The panelist familiar with ISPs estimated Iran to have about 7 million Internet users today. For the first time this past year, their access to sites such as Google and Flickr was blocked, but only for a few days. "The public outcry following the closure of Google was simply too much," the panelist said, adding, "but it's also possible that they banned Google by mistake." Although many sites are filtered, the government doesn't block foreign sites as a rule. People inside Iran have access to foreign news sites, such as the BBC and the Guardian Unlimited, two of the most popular news websites in the western world.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Iran Objective Score: 1.35

Media are highly political in Iran, and hence, for some panelists, the question of "objectivity" is a troubling one. One panelist noted that the media have always been political in Iran, leaving little room for the development of objective and independent thinking among journalists. In governmental news outlets, journalists are trained and conditioned to represent the government perspective. The vast majority understand that not toeing the government line could cost them their jobs. In the independent media, on the other hand, journalists find themselves usually captive to the viewpoint of the publication at hand, whether conservative or liberal. Panelists described this as similar to the political differences that one finds at the *Guardian*, for example, versus the *Daily Telegraph*, to take an example from England, or ABC News versus Fox News, to take an example from the US television market. That is to say, a journalist who has liberal leanings may be less inclined to take up employment with the Fox News Network. The same is the case in Iran, with the important difference that the majority of government media support a conservative viewpoint; hence, employment options for journalists of differing views to those of the government are limited.

Most panelists agreed that there are only a few newspapers still on the market that air somewhat critical stances toward the government. The only moderate papers with higher circulation numbers are *Etemad-e Melli*, *Etemad*, and *Sarmayeh*. Among these three, *Etemad-e Melli* is affiliated with the party of former *Majles* speaker and presidential candidate Mehdi Karroubi and takes its name from the party. *Sarmayeh*, meaning "capital," has an economic news focus. Of the three, only *Etemaad* is a political paper without

affiliation to a political party. This has made it difficult for young reporters, as one panelist pointed out, to find employment with independent papers. Several reformist as well as conservative professional news websites do offer an alternative to papers.

Although newspapers usually have a political affiliation or clear leaning, panelists agreed that reporters had become better at seeking to represent both or various sides on an issue. One participant argued that due to government pressure as well as libel suits filed from all sides, reporters had become much more careful and hence comprehensive in their reporting. All but one participant agreed. The dissenting voice argued that journalists in Iran were too busy censoring themselves and had little time or motivation to try to do better journalism.

The ethical standards of fairness, objectivity, accuracy, and refusing to offer or accept payment for information are learned during education or on the job. However, panelists agreed that there is still a need to reinforce these standards among journalists. One panelist thought it worth mentioning that some journalists working for lower-quality or highly biased publications may not even be fully aware of those journalistic standards because many among Iran's journalists haven't actually studied journalism. The same panelist said journalists often felt compelled to slightly distort or write in favor of a certain viewpoint in order to maintain relations with their sources within the government. In general, the panelists added, journalists at independent media are more committed to ethical standards than their colleagues at government media because they operate in settings driven to a greater extent by a commitment to 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).

There have been initiatives from members within the Ministry of Culture to produce two documents to strengthen ethical standards and labor conventions in the field of journalism. A research group headed by Dr. Kazem Mo'tamedinejad produced a document titled "Convention on the Ethical Principles of Professional Journalism," which sets out standardized ethical guidelines for journalists. Although it was difficult to obtain precise information about the standing of this document, it appears that for now it is unpublished.

Some panelists said government restrictions make it sometimes impossible to work ethically. For example, circulars handed down from the government often force editors to ask their reporters not to cover certain issues or to omit certain aspects of the story and highlight others. One panelist said this kind of government pressure led to readers' mistrusting newspapers: they would learn from the Internet or the foreign media that a certain event has taken place but find no mention of it when they checked domestic papers. "This seriously harms our credibility," the panelist added.

The panelists argued that due to the low salaries among Iranian journalists and the high level of inflation, some may be prone to accepting gifts. They said this happens almost exclusively among economic reporters, where gifts may be offered for presentations of certain information that serves the business interests of the subject. Panelists said they were not aware of widespread financial corruption among journalists in general, adding that lack of job security rather than modest salaries is the more daunting problem for journalists. This discourages young people from entering the field. "The media are hostage to politics in Iran," said one panelist, "which means that anyone with any inclination to join the field thinks about all the ensuing implications before taking that step." As a result, one panelist said, employers have raised the salaries somewhat. A panelist who is a senior newspaper editor claimed to receive a salary comparable, in real terms, to that of colleagues who worked for the BBC's Persian Service in London. "But still no matter how many connections your publication has, it may be shut down," the panelist said. "That became clear to us all when they banned *Salam* newspaper in 1999, despite the high-level revolutionary credentials of its editor, Mohammad Mousavi-Khoeiniha." There is not a stark pay difference between independent versus government media, but those working for television generally make considerably more than those in radio or print.

Entrance into the field of journalism is less difficult than entering other fields, such as medicine or politics. But whereas entry into independent media is open, jobs at governmental outlets are strictly controlled by government and entry is often aided by relations. Applicants to state television and radio often undergo religious tests and pass

background checks. This does not apply to subcontractors who work as freelancers for the state broadcaster IRIB.

Lack of job security has led a sizeable number of Iran's younger and more mobile journalists to leave the country. One panelist said that most journalists these days were studying other subjects, chief among them English, so that they could have the option of starting other careers or emigrating. Another panelist said the closure of *Shargh* and *Ham-Mihan* left some 200 journalists unemployed. The panelist expressed regret that this led bright young people to emigrate and that many then joined the voices raised against the Islamic Republic.

A new development among the media, some panelists found, was an increased reliance on entertainment and "softer" pieces to fill the void left by the censorship of more serious stories. Although state television isn't subjected to the same degree of censorship by virtue of being itself the mouthpiece of the government, there was also a trend there toward filling airtime with entertainment programming, particularly television serials. Generally though, people felt that they were able to get the information they needed, if not from state television and other government media, then from the Internet and satellite television channels.

One panelist with experience inside Iran's state television network said there was up-to-date equipment but not enough skilled employees to take full advantage of the technology. At independent newspapers, however, lack of government support and funding as well as investor trust often means a smaller staff, as well as a lack of computers, recorders, and company mobile phones. Also, in terms of printing presses, one panelist said that 80 percent, if not more, were in the service of government papers, which left other smaller independent newspapers with lower-quality paper and ink.

On a positive note, one panelist said, Iranian magazines and specialized publications are growing, mainly because some of those journalists from banned daily publications are able to start weeklies or monthlies, to which the government censors are less sensitive. Most of those working on the daily *Ham-Mihan*, for example, are now producing the weekly *Shahrvand*, which panelists described as the most high-quality current-affairs magazine to be produced in Iran so far. This should not be taken to mean that magazines have not seen their share of closures. Periodicals with political or intellectual content, or shiny magazines covering popular culture, have been particularly at risk. Because of the hazards of daily political journalism, niche reporting in the fields of sports, economy, cars, family and childcare, and youth and women have benefited. But this is only within parameters acceptable to the government. A big crackdown on the

online publications of women's activists came in 2006, and the women's magazine *Zanan* was closed in early 2008.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

Iran Objective Score: 1.54

The number of publications is generally believed to have grown significantly following the election of President Mohammad Khatami in 1997 and the press freedom that the "Tehran spring" offered for a period after that. But already by 1999, the pioneering reformist newspaper *Salaam* had been banned, leading to the biggest demonstrations Iran had seen since its revolution two decades earlier. Following the new amendments to the Press Law, close to 100 daily publications as well as periodicals were suspended. However, due to the reformist composition of the Supervisory Board, publications were able to receive permits to spring back to life, though with different names and looks.

With victories of conservatives on different electoral levels, the pressures on the media kept increasing, culminating in the closure of dozens of publications. In 2006 and 2007, some 40 outlets were suspended, and about a dozen previously suspended publications had their permits permanently removed. Overall, following Ahmadinejad's election in August 2005, more than 1,400 permits for publishing have been revoked. However, a large portion of the permits were inactive, being obtained but never used to start a publication. Prospective publishers may actually buy the rights of these permits from the owners and start new papers. The authorities intend to prevent this from happening and prefer that those wanting to start new publications actually apply for a new permit, hence the revocations. However, new permits are rarely issued in the current environment. Still, the number of newspapers and periodicals published in Iran stands at 2,857, with about 500 constituting national and Persian-language dailies and the remaining comprising specialist weeklies and monthlies, or regional dailies in non-Persian languages.

People in the larger cities have more access to media sources, but both city-dwellers and villagers can afford the low cost of print publications thanks to large government subsidies to both private as well as government publications. Most national dailies cost only 100 Iranian toman, which is equal to about 10 US cents, and some governmental ones cost even less, such as the largest-circulation daily *Hamshahri* at 50 toman, or five US cents. Panelists pointed out that while government outlets received the larger subsidies, the situation had become worse now because Ahmadinejad's

government was even less keen on subsidizing independent publications.

Panelists noted that the distribution system in Iran is generally not well developed. In contrast with the larger government dailies, such as *Kayhan*, *Hamshahri*, *Jame-Jam*, and *Iran*, which receive strong financial and logistical support, other independent dailies may arrive half or a full day late to the provinces. This does not apply to the larger cities such as Mashhad, Esfahan, Shiraz, and Tabriz. Panelists also noted that since the rationing of gas in June 2007, it had become even more difficult to distribute independent and even government publications to far-off towns and villages.

For people to really benefit from a diversity of information and news, whether they are in the cities or smaller towns, they cannot rely on television and publications alone. Up to about two years ago, it was still possible to receive alternative non-government-sanctioned information from the reformist media. But panelists said that due to the crackdown on media, citizens find it increasingly necessary to supplement the information they're able to receive with information from media abroad.

Either way, most panelists agreed that the majority of Iranians were not readers, and that the whole hype around newspapers really just concerned a very small percentage of city-dwellers. "There was a lot of hope in the first Khatami years, and all of a sudden a large number of people had become interested in the reformist newspapers and sometimes you couldn't even find newspapers because they were sold out. But times have changed," said one panelist. The panelist explained that people became "cold" toward the independent

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.

media when they witnessed the dispiriting setback of the reformist movement. Currently there are about 60 national newspapers to choose from on newsstands in the bigger cities, among them 20 or so that take a more moderate, reformist line. Still, one panelist believed it was no more than 5 percent of the Iranian population that really read newspapers on a daily basis. Others put the number a bit higher, but not much. "The days when newsstands were like beehives are long over," added another panelist.

The panelists agreed that the majority of Iranians received their information from broadcast media, Iranian as well as foreign. Three kinds of television are available to Iranian viewers inside Iran. The first is state television, which consists of five Persian-language channels, one multi-language channel, one Arabic channel called *Al-Alam*, and another channel launched in 2007 as Iran's English-language international news network called *Press TV*. Although all strictly adhere to the government perspective and promote regime interests, there is a perceptible range within that framework. Channel One, for example, is dedicated to political news and roundtables, with the most important news bulletin broadcast at 2 pm. Channel Two and Three broadcast news programming but also have a wider range of current-affairs documentary programming. Channel Five is usually the carrier of the *Sahar TV* network, Iran's foreign-language programming that is broadcast on satellite and distributed in Asia and Europe. *Sahar TV* programs, which range from news to documentary to entertainment, are mostly in English, but some hours are also slotted on a daily basis for programs in other languages, including German and French. Channel Six is a pure news channel, which carries important *Majles* hearings, press conferences by Iranian officials, and national events such as Revolution Day marches live. Such events are also broadcast live on radio. IRIB has nine national radio channels and about 100 local stations, some of which carry programming in Iran's minority languages. Generally speaking, Iran's state television and radio do not represent a variety of viewpoints, although some programs do break the bounds. Some talk-show-style shows on *Radio Javan* (Youth Radio), for example, cross hard regime lines and satirize government hypocrisy and incompetence in a very uncharacteristic fashion. In past years, IRIB has been criticized for showing a strong bias toward filling prime time with addictive television serials, which many say are intended to distract Iranian viewers from political issues.

Although having a satellite dish is theoretically forbidden unless one has a license (given only to hotels, journalists, and a few others), panelists suggested that a minimum of 60 percent of households may have satellite dishes. Neither the dish nor the decoder are too expensive in Iran, and with the purchase of a card one can tune into programming from

around the world. Prices vary depending on the origin and quality of the equipment being purchased, but the whole setup is possible for about \$100. Hence, most Iranians can access Persian-language television programming produced abroad by expatriate Iranian stations broadcasting mostly from Los Angeles. The vast majority of these programs strongly advocate against the Islamic Republic and have in the past even successfully called on Iranians inside Iran to stage demonstrations. In terms of news programming, *Voice of America's* nightly news bulletin is among the most widely watched. The third kind of television available to Iranians is the myriad of other non-Persian channels on satellite, such as BBC and CNN, which Iranians with a command of the English language can consult for news.

The BBC and CNN have permanent offices and correspondents in Iran, as do news agencies such as the Associated Press, Reuters, Agence France-Presse, Deutsche Presse Agentur, the Chinese Xinhua, the Japanese Kyodo, and many others. Both governmental and Iranian media use reports by foreign and Iranian news agencies, of which there are more than a dozen governmental and nongovernmental ones. Among the governmental news agencies, the most prominent are Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), Islamic Students News Agency (ISNA, semi-governmental), the IRIB news agency, as well as the Press TV news agency, which launched in 2006 ahead of the television channel. Among the independent news agencies, Fars News Agency, Mehr News Agency, and until recently ILNA, are the most widely used. ILNA, a moderate news agency that had covered protests by the truck drivers' union, teachers, students, and women, was suspended in July 2007. Iranian news agencies are subject to similar forms of repression as other Iranian media, panelists noted. Foreign media outlets enjoyed greater liberties, though not necessarily always greater access.

Another source of information for Iranians is the Internet. Although the Iranian government has stepped up filtering of Internet sites, it is still possible in Iran to access a variety of views. While most blocked sites tend to be either "un-Islamic" or political opposition, they also have included some prominent conservative news websites such *Baztab*, which was suspended several times and then semi-permanently banned in March 2007. In summer 2006, the government cracked down severely on sites dealing with women's-rights activists. The authorities also banned free access to broadband connections, which in effect restricts downloads of larger files, such as films. The crackdown has been accompanied on a parallel track by legal attempts to restrict and more closely control the Internet. In November 2006, the government cabinet passed a law according to which all websites dealing with Iran have to register with the Ministry of Culture. As one panelist explained, this regulation

is difficult to implement and “really just provides an excuse for government to shut down sites more easily, accusing them of violating this ruling.”

The ISP participant said there are approximately 200 ISPs in Iran today and that there are now increasingly stronger filtering regulations imposed by the government. “When we first started, there were no rules, no regulations. For the first three to four years, the law was trying to catch up with us,” the panelist added. Then the government obliged all ISPs to use one of three filtering software companies. “As a result,” the same participant said, “there is now really strong filter-breaking software developed in Iran. If someone is serious about free access to all sites, he won’t have a problem doing it.”

Constrictions on ethnic minority media have always been stronger, and they have only increased in 2006 and 2007, with close to a dozen Kurdish and Azeri journalists arrested and their publications banned. Most of those journalists have been accused of conspiring to threaten Iran’s national security. The Iranian government has become increasingly sensitive to minorities and possible separatist movements, which the government says are supported by US intelligence sources. There has been attention in the out-of-country Iranian media to death sentences handed to two Kurdish journalists, Adnan Hassanpour and Hiva Boutimar. However, the Association of Iranian Journalists (AIJ) says it has investigated their cases with the aid of its experienced lawyer, Saleh Nikbakht, who has defended many press freedom cases in the past, and come to the conclusion that neither of those two men have been arrested on charges related to their media work. AIJ also said that one of them, Boutimar, is not in fact a journalist and, hence, the organization is not taking a position on this issue.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Iran Objective Score: 1.80

The Iranian press has a history reaching back into the mid-1800s and yet has failed to develop into a truly profit-generating industry. The first factor noted by panelists is that although there is a part of the Iranian population that can be described as “avid newspaper readers,” the majority receive their information from television and radio. Panelists agreed that there are ebbs and flows to Iran’s readership population. Two periods of “flow” can be identified since the revolution in 1979: one immediately following the revolution, which may be described as the most free press environment in Iranian history, and another short period following reformist President Khatami’s election in 1997. In these periods,

newspaper readership increased considerably, though there are no published data on the magnitude. Panelists estimated that the total circulation of daily national newspapers in Iran is below 3 million, not too large considering Iran’s highly literate population of more than 70 million.

The second factor, panelists said, is that strong government subsidies have been detrimental to the development of business professionalism because they have softened the impact of factors that usually force businesses to devise innovative and profit-generating routes to survival. Finally, political cycles and insecurities have prevented the independent press from forming strong relationships with commercial sponsors and advertisers. Financial impracticality was cited as the main reason why a moderate newspaper, *Kargozaran*, stopped publication voluntarily.

In general, government-owned, high-circulation papers—such as the conservative *Kayhan* and *Ettela’at*, but also the more moderate *Hamshahri*, *Iran*, and *Jaame-Jam*—receive larger subsidies, including office equipment and funds, allowing for higher salaries. Independent papers also receive subsidies, though in smaller sums, often limited to paper and ink. The government instituted these subsidies in 1989 to allow for lower newspaper prices that would make the publications more readily available to the wider public.

The scale and amount of subsidies are usually determined by the Press Supervisory Board, where the current conservative membership is disadvantageous to reformist media, panelists said. An official at the Ministry of Culture estimated that the government spent approximately \$30 million annually on newspaper subsidies and that independent newspapers benefited from 20 percent of that fund. The overwhelming majority of publishing houses with presses

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.

are government-owned, and panelists said that several are capable of printing state-of-the-art newspapers.

Despite the subsidies, newspapers strive to generate revenue. This is evident in the sizeable number of advertisements in most newspapers. Also, two panelists who had been involved in the production of the highly successful *Shargh* and *Ham-Mihan* newspapers said that both had managed to become fully independent and generate enough profits for their staff to receive comparatively high salaries.

There is a dearth of studies about the operation of media in Iran, but some panelists claimed that most newspapers didn't actually have a business/financial manager. One panelist said that the governmental *Hamshahri* newspaper had a skilled business manager and that this was evident in the large amount of advertising the paper was able to attract. The panelist's own paper did not have a person to strategize and plan for the paper's financial future. "This has to do with the fact that papers are constantly shut down, and so people are hesitant to invest in long-term plans," the panelist said. "*Hamshahri* has the security that it will continue printing and can plan ahead. For us, we can't even plan six months ahead. We can only have short-term visions and plans."

Most distribution companies are also governmental, and panelists noted that even private distribution companies had to follow certain government guidelines. Distribution takes place by air and road, and government papers are available in most major cities. The system of subscription is underdeveloped. A few large newspapers offer subscription, but the majority of subscribers receive their papers from motorcyclists who have created a niche business buying papers en masse and delivering them to people's doors. Most newspaper kiosks are operated privately, and the government does not interfere with their sales.

Iranian television and radio, while receiving large government subsidies, also generate good income because of a well-developed advertising regime. Panelists said television spots during prime time had increased to such an extent that viewers now commonly complained about the disruptive nature of excessive advertising.

It is extremely difficult to get a sense for viewer, listener, and circulation numbers in Iran. It seems that circulation for mid-range papers lies between 50,000 and 75,000, with the bigger papers printing anywhere between 200,000 and 300,000 copies a day. The government does its own market research of television viewers, but this data is not available to the public. Panelists noted that during prime time, when popular television serials are broadcast, the streets of larger crowded cities become noticeably empty.

Most Iranian ISPs are run privately, although the government imposes strict filtering on them. One panelist working in the sector estimated there to be about 200 ISPs and said the level of technology and business development among some of them was highly advanced.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Iran Objective Score: 2.05

Iran's journalism support institutions have developed in recent years, but now, most panelists agreed, educational institutions continue to grow while trade associations are being weakened by the practices of the current government.

Although a semi-governmental Press Syndicate was created in 1989 to provide publications with printing and distribution amenities, it was only in 1999 that Iran's first national journalists' trade association certified by the Labor Ministry was founded. The AIJ is the only recognized Iranian member of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), which represents about half a million journalists in more than 100 countries.

The AIJ is a nongovernmental institution that counts about 3,700 reporters, out of an estimated 5,000, as its members. Its secretary, Badrolsadat Mofidi, says the AIJ is the only organization to represent a wide spectrum of reporters in Iran, from right to left, because of its apolitical nature. AIJ represents journalists' labor rights vis-à-vis their employers, tends to their insurance and housing needs, especially in times of unemployment, and provides them with loan funds to support families of jailed journalists. The AIJ has also been active in holding meetings, issuing statements, and taking stances in regard to journalists' freedom of expression and during periods of press crackdown.

A panelist knowledgeable about AIJ's activities said the association had done its utmost to stay out of politics but that taking a stance on such values as freedom of expression and media independence was politicized by the powers governing the country. Hence, the panelist said, some conservatives viewed the AIJ as a hotbed for reformist journalists, which is why the current government has tried to paralyze the organization's operations. "This government has cut all of its financial support to us, and it's done everything in its power to depict us as a useless organization so that journalists would turn away from us," the panelist said. "They tried to close us down, questioning our constitution and activities, but they have failed so far because we have a strong legal foundation. Our permit was given to us by the Labor Ministry itself. We are a trade union, not a political party," the panelist

added. The panelist also said the current government had announced it would recognize reporters' permits issued only by the Ministry of Culture and none issued by the IFJ, which the AIJ views as another attempt to undermine its authority. The AIJ has now submitted an official complaint against the government to the Supreme Court.

The current pressure and withdrawal of funds have meant that the AIJ has been unable to establish any sort of support network for the more than 200 journalists who have become unemployed as a result of the closures of the ILNA news agency, as well as the *Shargh* and *Ham-Mihan* newspapers. In a gathering held in October 2007, former President Khatami spoke in support of journalists' rights and urged government to be mindful of the consequences of mass unemployment in the sector.

While the AIJ has the largest number of members, there are also other active journalists' associations. Iran's Association of Muslim Journalists (IAMJ) was set up parallel to the AIJ, in effect to counter the influence of the AIJ and to attract those members who work for conservative papers. One panelist said that many journalists working at conservative papers remain AIJ members because they believe in the values that it stands for but hold jobs with the conservative press simply to support themselves; this may be true for IAMJ members, too. Unlike the AIJ, the IAMJ has received its permit from the Interior Ministry. That is because there can be only one national journalists' labor union. Panelists said IAMJ is active, holds elections, and provides benefits to journalists working for government publications and other conservative outlets.

The Association for the Defense of Press Freedom, led by some of the Islamic Republic's strongest critics, regularly holds meetings and protests and issues statements in

support of press freedom and jailed journalists. A semi-active organization is the Association of Iranian Women Journalists. The Association of Young Journalists is connected to the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) and provides educational and training facilities and opportunities for young journalists.

"In reality, there is only one active independent association anyway (the AIJ), and in recent months—unfortunately—it's been us journalists defending and supporting the association, rather than the other way around," one panelist said. "The association's just been busy trying to survive."

Panelists said there are increasing opportunities for young people to learn journalism. In October 2007, the AIJ launched its own college of journalism. The AIJ secretary said beside its obvious educational benefits, the school was part of a profit-generating scheme to allow the AIJ to become financially independent from the government. Various universities, including the Allameh-Tabatabai, as well as Tehran and Azad Universities, offer respected journalism courses. Other institutions, such as the IRNA News Agency, the IRIB, and the Center for Media Studies and Research, which is connected to the Ministry of Culture, offer short courses and workshops.

During 2007, the Iranian government also started a policy of intimidation of dual-nationals, confiscating their passports and preventing them from leaving the country. It has also withheld the passports of Iranian nationals, and hence effectively banned them from participating in conferences and workshops abroad. The panelists expressed dissatisfaction with this state of affairs and said the government is extremely sensitive about any foreign-sponsored programs and that participation in them usually led to problems upon return to Iran.

List of Panel Participants

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

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.