

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

2006/2007

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



MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2006/2007

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

www.irex.org/msi

Copyright © 2008 by IREX

IREX

2121 K Street, NW, Suite 700

Washington, DC 20037

E-mail: msi@irex.org

Phone: (202) 628-8188

Fax: (202) 628-8189

www.irex.org

Project manager: Leon Morse

IREX Project and Editorial Support: Blake Saville, Mark Whitehouse, Christine Prince

Copyeditors: Carolyn Feola de Rugamas, Carolyn.Ink; Kelly Kramer, WORDtoWORD Editorial Services

Design and layout: OmniStudio

Printer: Kirby Lithographic Company, Inc.

Notice of Rights: Permission is granted to display, copy, and distribute the MSI in whole or in part, provided that: (a) the materials are used with the acknowledgement "The Media Sustainability Index (MSI) is a product of IREX with funding from USAID and the US State Department's Middle East Partnership Initiative, and the Iraq study was produced with the support and funding of UNESCO."; (b) the MSI is used solely for personal, noncommercial, or informational use; and (c) no modifications of the MSI are made.

Acknowledgment: This publication was made possible through support provided by the United States Department of State's Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under Cooperative Agreement No. #DFD-A-00-05-00243 (MSI-MENA) via a Task Order by the Academy for Educational Development. Additional support for the Iraq study was provided by UNESCO.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed herein are those of the panelists and other project researchers and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID, MEPI, UNESCO, or IREX.

ISSN 1546-0878

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.

Often cited as the region's closest example to an established democracy, Lebanon's relatively free and business savvy media continues to be a source of pride to the country. However, deeply entrenched political divisions and the persistence of political money in the media continue to produce biased reporting and unsustainable management practices.



Photo by Hugh Macleod

LEBANON

Lebanon, a tiny sliver of land on the eastern Mediterranean coastline, once again found itself caught in a tug of war between foreign powers competing for influence in the Middle East. The July War between the Syrian- and Iranian-backed Hezbollah and a U.S.-backed Israel severely damaged infrastructure and homes, resulting in \$15 billion of losses, according to the United Nations Development Programme. The vital tourism sector, which accounts for a quarter of GDP, was decimated, and growth previously forecast at six percent for 2006 slumped to almost zero. At the same time, Lebanon's public debt burden, one of the highest in the world, swelled to around \$40 billion, or 209 percent of GDP.

The war exacerbated political divisions opened up after the February 2005 assassination of former prime minister and billionaire tycoon Rafik Hariri, which swept a Western-backed anti-Syrian government into power. The Sunni-dominated government coalition including Druze and Christians, known as March 14, garnered significant public support by blaming Hariri's murder on Damascus, once the power broker in Lebanese affairs.

Shia movements Amal and Hezbollah, longstanding allies of the Syrian regime, forged an unlikely opposition alliance with the Christians under former army commander Michel Aoun, once a stalwart opponent of Syria. In November 2006, Hezbollah and its allies withdrew their ministers from the cabinet and began an ongoing protest in central Beirut demanding the collapse of a government it said was unconstitutional.

The government's majority shrank to just three when two March 14 MPs were assassinated prior to elections replacing the Syrian-supported president Emile Lahoud. With Lahoud stepping down in November 2007 and the opposition boycotting elections until a candidate acceptable to them could be agreed upon, Lebanon once again stood on the verge of constitutional collapse.

Amid this upheaval the media played a key role in Lebanese life, seen by most as the fourth pillar of society. With Lebanon often cited as the region's closest example to an established democracy, the country's relatively free and business savvy media continues to be a source of pride. However, deeply entrenched political divisions and the persistence of political money in the media continue to produce biased reporting and unsustainable management practices.

The MSI panel scored Lebanon's media sector at 2.45, putting it squarely in the "near sustainability" bracket. All five objectives scored similarly, with Objective 3, plurality of news sources, scoring highest at 2.88. Objective 1, free speech, and Objective 4, business management, trailed the other objectives by a small margin.

LEBANON AT A GLANCE

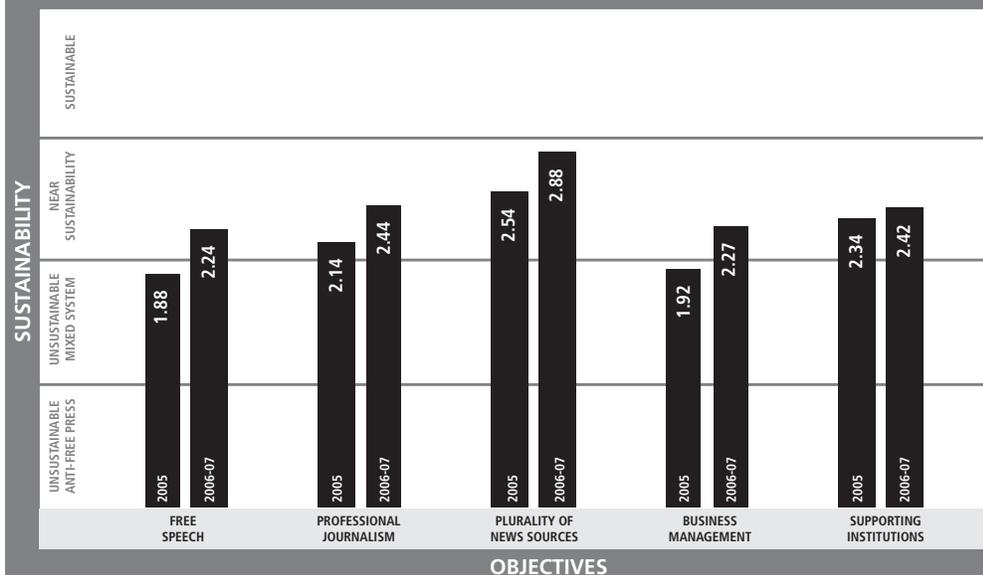
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 3,971,941 (July 2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Beirut
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Arab 95%, Armenian 4%, other 1% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 59.7%, Christian 39%, other 1.3% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Arabic (official), French, English, Armenian (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2006-Atlas):** \$22.64 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **GNI per capita (2006-PPP):** \$9,600 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **Literacy rate:** 97.4% (male 93.1%, female 82.2%) (2003 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** Vacant as of November 24, 2007

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 13 dailies (9 Arabic, 2 Armenian, 1 English, 1 French); Radio: 33 (1 public, 32 private); Television Stations: 9 (1 public, 8 private)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top three by circulation: *An-Nahar* (daily circulation approx. 45,000), *As-Safir* (daily circulation approx. 45,000), *Al-Balad*
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** National News Agency (state-owned)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 950,000 (2006 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: LEBANON



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

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

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):

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

Near Sustainability (2-3):

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

Sustainable (3-4):

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

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Lebanon Objective Score: 2.24

While 2007 saw no repeat of the assassinations of journalists that followed the Hariri murder, MSI panelists agreed that the political fissures emerging after the Israel-Hezbollah war have damaged press freedom and solidified political biases in reporting. Journalists continue to work in a climate of fear, with several senior editors at pro-government media traveling in convoys protected by armed guards. One of them, Fares Khashan, a talk show host on Hariri-owned Future TV, travels into work escorted by half a dozen state security officers.

The overall average was pulled up by solid marks in several indicators, including a score more than a point higher for Indicator 8, media access to foreign news sources. However, a few key indicators received much lower scores, including Indicator 2, broadcast licensing; Indicator 4, attacks on journalists; and Indicator 7, freedom of information. Such factors remain key obstacles to strengthening press freedom in Lebanon.

The constitution protects free speech and a free media remains, in the public's mind, a pillar of Lebanese society. However, panelists agreed freedom of speech could be narrowed according to the government, which most panelists believed exercised unhealthy control over the judiciary.

"We cannot judge now if freedom of speech exists or is protected," said panelist Shirine Abdallah, a longtime employee at *An-Nahar* newspaper who assisted former editor Gebran Tuani until his death by a car bomb in December 2005. He now heads the paper's public relations office. *An-Nahar* is the largest newspaper in Lebanon and has firmly opposed Syrian control of Lebanon following Hariri's assassination. "The status of the country changed two years ago and it is still too early to judge. Now our internal problems are very acute. It's almost impossible to have a civilized conversation about politics," said Abdallah.

Lebanese media law, amended in 1994, limits the types of materials that can be censored to pornography, political opinion, religion and threats to national security. Panelist Moussa Assi, a producer for opposition-leaning New TV, noted that media laws were written to cover only print journalism yet are also being applied to broadcasters, raising some difficulties.

The government retained the right to censor foreign newspapers and magazines before they enter the country, and to approve all plays and films. In practice, however, there was little or no such censorship.

The law prohibits attacks on the dignity of the head of state or foreign leaders—although in these tumultuous times it is not always applied—while a still-functioning 1991 security agreement with Syria prohibits the publication of any information deemed harmful to the security of either state. With the withdrawal of the Syrian military, the climate of intimidation was eased and many Lebanese journalists openly criticized Syrian and Lebanese authorities alike.

Prosecution of crimes against journalists remains lax, panelists agreed. No one has yet been arrested for the assassination of Gibran Tuani or columnist Samir Kassir, or in the failed assassination of May Chidiac, a popular presenter on the Christian-owned, pro-government LBC channel.

Lesser crimes regularly go unpunished as well. Panelists reported journalists from *An-Nahar* were beaten at a rally held by Hezbollah. And after a bombing in the predominantly Druze town of Aley, whose sectarian leader Waleed Jumblatt is a fierce critic of Damascus, journalists from New TV were beaten by angry crowds who blamed Syria for the bombing. Journalists from Hezbollah's Al Manar TV regularly do not report from Druze or Christian areas for fear of attack, and several reported being beaten after reporting from Sunni-dominated areas of Beirut. No reported arrests were made following any of the incidents.

The state media does not receive preferential legal treatment, but panelists noted that its pro-government, quietist editorial policy means it hardly ever challenges the ruling authority.

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.

Though the media enjoys unhindered access to international news outlets, political and sectarian divisions can sometimes impinge on access to local sources. New TV's Assi said his station does not receive media statements from the press office of government majority leader Saad Hariri, a fact he attributed squarely to politics.

May Elian, a media consultant at the Forum for Dialogue, Culture and Development (FDCD) noted that Lebanon has no freedom of information act. "It is hard for journalists to access some areas so they must rely on leaks," she said.

It was just such a leak that led to perhaps the year's biggest story on corruption, prompting a case of libel, which remains a civil law issue. On May 29, New TV aired documents on its weekly show *Corruption* that appeared to show Justice Minister Charles Rizk had been embezzling state funds. A furious Rizk was shown on television vowing to "crush" the station and later opened a legal case, accusing New TV of libel and slander and of publishing false information.

Lebanese media law states that broadcast media should not be majority-owned and run by any single religious group, sect or individual. However, panelists agreed that licensing of broadcast media is not fair, and is steeped in political and sectarian cronyism. The 1994 law mandates that broadcasting licenses be controlled by the government-appointed National Council for Audiovisual Media (NCA).

However, noted veteran journalist Wadih Haddad, assistant general manager at the popular radio station Voice of Lebanon, "With the situation currently prevailing in Lebanon, the NCA has rather become inexistent. Licenses to audiovisual media are delivered on a political basis." New TV's Moussa recalled the five-year process it took his station to receive a license to broadcast "because we had no political backup." Kamal Zeibyan, editor of the opposition-leaning daily *Ad-Diyyar* noted that "former Prime Minister Hariri abused his own laws when he awarded Future TV a license when he was prime minister. The majority of the station is owned by his family."

Prior to the 1994 law, anyone could begin broadcasting without a license, and the number of television stations in Lebanon exceeded 54. The imposition of a license fee and the requirement of broadcast media to cover all Lebanese territory—though not fully implemented—put dozens of stations out of business.

Most panelists found media taxes to be too high, threatening the viability of even the largest of television stations. "The burden is getting very heavy," said Haddad.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Lebanon Objective Score: 2.44

Most journalists are capable of producing objective, well-sourced journalism, but almost all practice self-censorship and most are poorly paid and susceptible to political money, the MSI panel concluded. Low payment rates and the politics of media owners were cited as primary factors threatening media professionalism in Lebanon. Panelists refused to label accepting political money a "bribe," with some calling it instead "assistance."

While half of the indicators scored relatively close to the objective average score, the other half split between keeping the score down and lifting it. Indicators 2 and 5, journalism ethics and pay levels for journalists, scored well below the average. Indicators 6 and 8, news-entertainment balance and niche reporting, scored significantly above, however.

An-Nahar's Shirine Abdallah suggested that, "80 percent of journalists are fair and objective, presenting both sides of the story." While New TV's Firas Hatoum agreed that most journalists sought to present a balanced view, he noted, "In the end they submit to the editorial policy of their media stations. It's almost impossible to find reports criticizing the opposition in the opposition media stations, and vice versa." For *Ad-Diyyar's* Kamal Zeibyan, Lebanon has no truly objective journalists. "All journalists are being influenced by politics and sectarianism," he said. May Elian of the FDCD argued that newspapers are more balanced than television.

Self-censorship remained a widespread practice, the panel agreed, citing security concerns arising from the string of

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).

assassinations over the past three years of journalists and politicians who opposed Syria's role in Lebanon. Internal Lebanese politics also encourages self-censorship. "Three quarters of journalists censor themselves out of fear," said Zeibyan. "There are certain issues they would not even dare to touch. Because each media station belongs to a political party, reporters never report on corruption in their own party."

Highly charged security issues, such as allegations that the Sunni-led government coalition was sponsoring the emergence of radical Sunni militia groups, were cited as an example of when most journalists would rather keep quiet.

Younger journalists are less susceptible to self-censorship than older generations who worked through the Civil War, said Elian, citing the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon as a watershed moment for greater media freedom.

In terms of coverage, the panel agreed that all major events and issues are covered reasonably well and with very few restrictions, even when related to security affairs. New TV's Moussa Assi noted wryly that while all media cover all events, "If they have an interest with a politician, they will cover his activities more."

The ratio of news programming to entertainment remained healthy, with panelists noting that Lebanese channels were required by law to broadcast locally produced content over half the time, which meant, overwhelmingly, political talk shows. Despite laws restricting political shows to three a week, most television stations broadcast eight or more such shows per week.

Panelists agreed that Lebanon remained a regional leader when it came to use of up-to-date technical facilities for producing and distributing media. The launch in July of OTV, owned by Christian opposition leader Michel Aoun, has been much discussed in Lebanon both for its politics and high production values.

The panel unanimously agreed that low pay for journalists is a leading contributor to the continuing political corruption in Lebanon's media. "Journalism ethics, self-censorship and objectivity are all linked to the income of the journalist and the income of the media company," said Assi. "If the media and its journalists depend on the support of political money, they will lose a lot of their objectivity."

Al-Balad newspaper's Tripoli correspondent, Abdel Salam Turkmani, has worked for the paper for four years and gets a monthly salary of \$600, three times Lebanon's official minimum wage. "I'm not satisfied," he said. "I am always looking for ways to supplement my income and if I can find a job outside Lebanon I would not hesitate to leave." Panelists

noted that even at the best newspapers in Lebanon a reporter with eight years experience may be paid only around \$600. "A decent independent reporter may need to have two or three incomes to live at a good standard," said Elian. "But young journalists are so obsessed with their careers they tend to be silent about money."

Panelists were split over what constitutes investigative journalism in Lebanon and on the risks involved. Panel member Firas Hatoum focused international attention on press freedom in Lebanon after he was detained for 45 days in 2006 for breaking into the flat of a key witness in the Rafik Hariri murder investigation.

Citing his attempt to collect witness documents in the course of his investigative reporting, Hatoum said the major hindrance to such work was the lack of accreditation for most journalists. "We don't have any proof we are journalists because we cannot register with the press syndicate, so the authorities insisted I was only working for the TV station, but not as a journalist. Therefore I was not treated as a journalist when it came to the law."

For May Elian, it remained questionable whether Lebanon really has investigative reporters. "I don't think we even know what it means," she said. "On television you see no investigative reporting. There have been some reports into issues like Hezbollah's weapons, or the Palestinian situation, but they are too superficial to be called investigations."

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

Lebanon Objective Score: 2.88

Many indicators received strong scores in this objective, with Indicators 2 and 5, citizen access to media and private broadcasters producing their own news, receiving scores more than a half-point higher than the average. However, two indicators scored almost a point lower than the average: Indicator 3, state media reflect the political spectrum, and Indicator 6, transparency of media ownership.

Lebanese citizens have almost entirely unrestricted access to all sources of news, from home and abroad. Even with the single official restriction on the sale of Israeli newspapers or broadcast of Israeli television channels into Lebanon, citizens can access Israeli websites online.

Dozens of newspapers and hundreds of periodicals are published throughout the country and are financed by and reflect the views of various local, sectarian and foreign interest groups. In addition to nine leading Arabic daily newspapers, there are two Armenian-language dailies and

one each in English and French. Total circulation of all the top dailies is estimated at a maximum of 150,000, with *An-Nahar* and *As-Safir* leading at around 45,000 copies distributed daily within Lebanon. *Al-Balad* and *Ad-Diyyar* are considered the next largest papers. However, two panelists argued that those figures were inflated, saying the total circulation of all newspapers in Lebanon did not top 40,000.

Newspapers cost between LBP 2,000 (\$1.33) for *An-Nahar* down to LBP 400 (\$0.26) for *Al-Balad*, which is sold to subscribers only. Most international newspapers and news magazines are sold, usually a day or two after their publication date, and largely available only in Beirut.

There are 33 radio stations throughout the country and eight television stations: Future TV, Al Manar, NBN, Orange TV, New TV, LBC, ANB and TeleLiban. The government owns one television station (TeleLiban), one radio station (Radio Lebanon) and a national news service. All remaining stations are owned privately.

Private television stations continue to produce an ever increasing number of news programs, with panelist Abdel Salam Turkmani noting that Future TV and NBN have plans to launch dedicated news channels in the near future.

Major international news agencies such as Reuters, AP and AFP have bureaus in Lebanon, and their material is widely circulated.

Panelists agreed that access to international satellite television was inexpensive at \$10 to \$20 per month, as was Internet access at between \$20 and \$30 for basic service.

Private radio and television are by law compelled to cover all Lebanese territory and should therefore be accessible to even remote areas, noted Voice of Lebanon's Wadih Haddad. However, in practice, a number of radio stations only broadcast regionally.

In terms of regional news coverage, though most media companies have a correspondent in each governorate of this small country, at least one panelist found the media too city-centric. "The media in the cities do not talk about the villages unless there is a security breakdown or something like a forest fire. In a whole newspaper, news not about Beirut is probably no more than one page," said Turkmani.

Panelists criticized the public media, both for its political bias and lack of audience. "Public radio and TV are practically non-existent," said Haddad. "They have almost no audience because they re-broadcast old programs and their news coverage is of poor quality and always follows the government."

Opinions on media ownership transparency were divided, interestingly. For FDCD's May Elian, there was no officially required transparency for media ownership, she said, giving the examples of *Al-Balad* and *Al-Akhbar*, both of whose funding and ownership are unknown to the general public. Even Abdel Salam Turkmani did not know who owned the paper he worked for.

But, as noted previously, the owners of the major television stations and newspapers are well known to the public, as many of them are the heads of political parties or powerful business figures. "The country is too small to keep media ownership hidden," noted Haddad. "Almost every Lebanese knows to whom belongs each radio or TV or newspaper."

The fact that media ownership is so well known was a serious problem, in the opinion of *An-Nahar's* Shirine Abdallah. "Because there is such transparency there is no judgment on the part of the audience, who become plain, stupid followers," she said.

The media cover a wide range of social issues, including minority rights, sexuality, women's rights, labor issues and so on. Sensitivities in a country of 17 religious confessions, however, remain a barrier to reporting on religion.

There is at least one Armenian-language radio station, while Future TV broadcasts a news hour in Armenian, English and French. Kurds can freely associate and publish their own newsletters in Kurdish, but as yet no stations broadcast in Kurdish.

Yet, as May Elias noted, in this time of political upheaval "social issues are not top of the agenda." "We are a racist people by education," was Shirine Abdallah's frank

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.

assessment of Lebanese multiculturalism. "We do write about how foreigners are treated but we don't let them write for themselves."

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Lebanon Objective Score: 2.27

Most indicators scored within a half-point of the overall objective average. Scoring slightly better was Indicator 3, advertising agencies. However, Indicator 7, broadcast and circulation figures, scored about three-quarters of a point lower than the average.

Lebanese media struggle to make ends meet through advertising and sales revenue alone, and while they are well managed compared to most media across the region, political money remains the backbone of the business model. Advertising, once a strong market driver, has witnessed a downturn since Hariri's assassination. "The advertising cake has shrunk unbelievably since the July 2006 war," said Voice of Lebanon's Wadih Haddad. "The economic situation started deteriorating from the assassination of Hariri and became worse in 2007 with the political divisions. Many media are experiencing financial difficulties because of lack of advertising."

Panelists cited LBC television as the most successful profit-generating Lebanese media, noting its reliance on advertising and the sale of its entertainment programs to networks across the region.

However, LBC's performance is not indicative of every other media outlet. *Ad-Diyyar* editor Kamal Zeibyan gave a clear example of the role advertising and political money plays in his newspaper's finances. "We are now facing a money crisis. In the 1990s the business would generate around \$200,000 profit per month. We were paid for by Hariri. Now, with no advertising market, our profit is down to \$75,000 per month, even with political money still trickling in."

There was consensus on the fact that the owners of the big broadcast stations and newspapers put substantial amounts of their own money into their media business. Charles Ayoub, owner of *Ad-Diyyar*, is also facing a financial crisis, having taken on large loans and been sued on a number of occasions, leaving his newspaper threatened with closure, Zeibyan added.

Al-Balad's Abdel Salam Turkmani noted that his newspaper had formulated a new business model, being sold only through subscriptions, thereby minimizing the waste of excess print runs. The company also publishes an advertising

supplement whose profits are channeled directly into *Al-Balad*, and conducts regular market research on readers' opinions. Its relative sustainability without political money has enhanced *Al-Balad's* reputation in Lebanon, being seen generally as more objective.

Beirut was once the heart of the advertising industry in the Middle East, but has lost much of its talent to Dubai. Saudi-owned Rotana has pulled out of the Lebanese market. Nonetheless, the industry remains a strong support to the media.

However, several panelists noted that most sources of advertising are held by the Shwayri family, a powerful Christian clan that could potentially exercise an unhealthy control over the media. Media observers often link the success of LBC, a Christian-owned channel, to its ties to the Shwayri family.

An-Nahar's Shirine Abdallah gave the example of an intellectual magazine, *The Prize*, begun by assassinated journalist Samir Kassir. "The advertisers found it too elitist, so would not advertise with it," she said. "They do call the shots." New TV's Moussa Assi remembers feeling as if he was "in a fight with a cartel" when he worked at Sult as-Shab, a Communist radio station. The Shwayri family, according to Moussa, had attempted to interfere in the editorial direction of the station and refused to sell advertisements when rebuffed, bringing the station to the brink of closure.

The question of whether independent media receive government subsidies raised a wry smile among several panelists who pointed out that when serving as prime minister, Rafik Hariri also owned Future TV and that the current speaker of Parliament and opposition leader, Nabih Berri, owns NBN. While panelists did not accuse government

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.

figures of directly using state wealth to fund their own media organizations, none doubted that political money formed the backbone of private media financing.

The panel agreed that little, if any, objective market research on public opinion takes place. Advertisers were considered more likely to conduct market research than media organizations, which, if they did conduct a survey, would do so only among audiences already favorably disposed to a given issue. For example, said Shirine Abdallah, Future TV might conduct research, but only in Beirut's Tarik al-Jdeide, a predominantly Sunni area loyal to the Sunni Hariri family that owns Future TV.

There remains no central source for newspaper circulation, with some newspapers releasing figures, in the opinion of Abdel Salam Turkmani, "if the statistics are on their side." *Ad-Diyyar* occasionally makes its own estimate of sales by noting returns from newsagents and kiosks. Total circulation of all the top dailies is estimated at a maximum of 150,000, but some media observers argue the figure is inflated, estimating total circulation as low as 40,000.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Lebanon Objective Score: 2.42

This objective's indicator scores varied widely by category. Indicators 1 through 3, which cover supporting organizations and NGOs, all scored between 1 and 2. The next two indicators, covering education and training, scored between 2 and 3. The last two indicators, covering printing and media distribution, scored well above 3.

Both a publishers' syndicate and a journalists' syndicate exist in Lebanon, but panelists criticized the heads of both for being more interested in preserving their decades-old grip on power than in looking after the interests of a free media. Panelists pointed unanimously to one factor preventing journalists receiving proper support in Lebanon: the current head of the Press Syndicate, who has been in place for three decades and effectively limited official media accreditation to the organization's own membership. Though there are more than 10,000 journalists in Lebanon, the Press Syndicate currently has around 1,100 members, with panelists noting the last time a new member was allowed to join was three years ago.

Broadcast journalist Firas Hatoum echoed the sentiments of several panelists: "There are some undeclared conditions to be a member in the Press Syndicate: mainly, loyalty to the head of the Press Syndicate."

Al-Balad's Abdel Salam Turkmani said that since the outbreak of the Civil War in 1975 the two syndicates have done little

but become divided over political and sectarian differences. In the absence of a functioning support mechanism, leading daily *As-Safir* has established its own internal syndicate that advocates for staff members.

Panelists also noted the continued absence of an organization to protect the rights of broadcast journalists. Media law covers only print journalists, not broadcast.

The author has witnessed firsthand the difficulty several Lebanese journalists continue to encounter trying to obtain an official press card, the absence of which puts them in unnecessary danger with both governmental and non-governmental organizations, particularly when working on security and conflict stories.

Foreign media, ironically, can obtain accreditation in a relatively easy process through the Ministry of Information. There is also an unofficial foreign press syndicate being established through the social networking site Facebook, aiming to give members some lobbying power.

While many NGOs in Lebanon, such as the fledgling Media Association for Democracy Awareness, which aims to offer journalists legal defense and health insurance, count the protection of a free media among their advocacy aims, few panelists saw them making a significant impact. Voice of Lebanon's Wadih Haddad said local NGOs would only step in to defend freedom of expression "when the violation of human rights was striking and then those NGOs were fought by the government and even threatened." FDCC's May Elian noted, "Some NGOs work on reviewing legislation governing the media, but they don't currently offer legal support to journalists." Panelists noted that when Firas Hatoum was detained while investigating evidence in the Hariri inquiry

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.

for New TV (see Objective 2), some of the most vocal support came from foreign NGOs such as Reporters Sans Frontiers.

Lebanon leads the region in journalism education, with a number of quality theoretical courses taught at universities supplemented by an expanding program of internships offered by both broadcast and print media outlets. The state-run Lebanese University (LU) continues to fill places on its journalism program, as does the Lebanese-American University, but several panelists noted the courses remained more theoretical than practical, due largely to an absence of equipment. LU has recently acquired some new equipment and has partnerships with local media to place students in work experience programs.

An-Nahar's Shirine Abdallah noted the introduction in 2004 of a civic education program into Lebanon's standard high school curriculum, which includes a three-month course on journalism and the media. However, the course is relatively expensive and has not run training since February.

Practical journalism training appears to be going from strength to strength. Having begun running in-house training course in 2004, *An-Nahar* now runs twice-annual internships open to journalists from Lebanon and across the region. The American University of Beirut in 2007 launched a Journalism Training Program as part of its Regional External Program, holding a workshop in July on investigative journalism.

New TV's Moussa Assi, himself a graduate of the LU media course, said his station now receives between 15-20 graduates every three months for two weeks of training. Voice of Lebanon is also working on establishing a post-graduate training scheme.

Foreign organizations offer training to Lebanese journalists, including the Thompson Foundation, ICFJ, BBC, and OSI, part of the Soros Foundation, which ran two, week-long photography and feature writing sessions for students of LU in February. However, noted Turkmani, there are few such courses for correspondents in the regions, and expenses for travel and accommodation in Beirut are rarely paid.

Lebanon's printing presses remain a commercial success, drawing business from across the region, and suffer little government restriction. Distribution networks are efficient, reaching even the remote corners of the country, and are little politicized.

List of Panel Participants

Shirine Abdallah, public relations manager, *An-Nahar* newspaper, Beirut

Moussa Assi, producer, New TV, Beirut

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

Abdel Salam Turkmani, Tripoli correspondent, *Al-Balad* newspaper, Tripoli

May Elian, media consultant, The Forum for Dialogue, Culture and Development, Beirut

Firas Hatoum, broadcast journalist, Beirut

Did not attend panel discussion, but completed survey:

Wadiah Haddad, assistant general manager, Voice of Lebanon Radio, Beirut

Iyad Obeid, director, Mass Communications and Journalism Department, Lebanese University, Beirut

Moderator

Hugh Macleod, foreign correspondent, *The Sunday Times* and *The San Francisco Chronicle* newspapers, Beirut