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ALGERIA

The past year was a relatively calm one for Algerian media, confirming the stability that has come to characterize the political and information scene. Clashes between the independent media and the government have decreased, leading to a decline in the number of legal cases brought against journalists.¹ In addition, the dangers that Algerian journalists experienced in previous years—57 journalists were killed during the bloody civil war of the 1990s—have largely passed. The media sector itself did not undergo any fundamental changes, as the country remained under a state of emergency law and the government maintained its legal monopoly over broadcast media.

On the political front, two important events took place that directly affected Algerian media. First, in November 2008, the constitution was amended to remove the two-term limit for the office of president. This allowed President Abdelaziz Bouteflika to seek reelection in April 2009, which he won handily. Secondly, the effects of the international financial crisis began to be felt during the last quarter of 2008 and could adversely affect Algeria's economic situation, given the significant declines in the prices of oil and gas—the country's primary sources of income.

Panelists' scores mirrored the relative stability, with the overall score improving slightly from 1.50 last year to 1.63 this year. Individually, most objectives showed no change or slight improvements, although Objective 2, professional journalism, increased modestly by 0.35.

¹ During the reporting period, the judicial authorities imposed a jail sentence of three months and a fine of DZD 50,000 (\$800) on the director of the daily newspaper *El Watan (The Nation)* and one of its female journalists following a defamation lawsuit.

ALGERIA AT A GLANCE

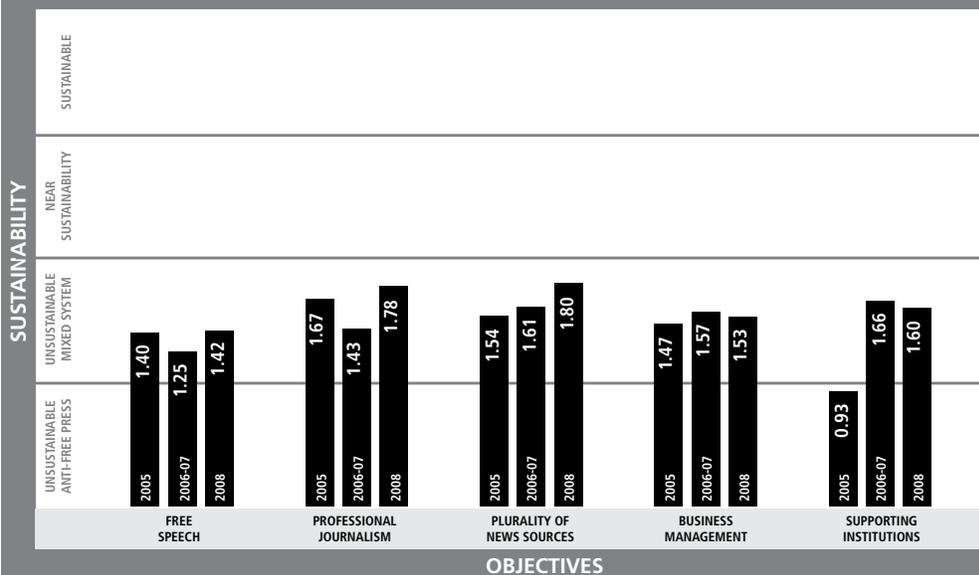
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 34,178,188 (July 2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Algiers
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Arab-Berber 99%, European, less than 1% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Sunni Muslim (state religion) 99%, Christian and Jewish 1% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** The overwhelming majority of Algerians speak Arabic and Amazighi, the two national languages according to the 2002 Constitutional Amendment. The French language is widespread and used in major cities and in administrative and economic management.
- > **GNI (2008-Atlas):** \$146.4 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2009)
- > **GNI per capita (2008-PPP):** \$7,940 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2009)
- > **Literacy rate:** 69.9% (male 79.6%, female 60.1% (2002 est., *CIA World Factbook*))
- > **President or top authority:** President Abdelaziz Bouteflika (since 28 April 1999, *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 34 daily newspapers and dozens of weeklies; Radio: 3 national Radio Algeria channels and 2 specialized channels (cultural and Radio Koran), and 32 local radio stations in most of Algeria's provinces. Television: 3 state-owned channels, 1 terrestrial channel; channel 3, also in Arabic and broadcast to the Arab world, and another, French-language, satellite channel broadcast to Europe; a religious channel is to be launched in late 2009.
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** 364 million (www.pressreference.com)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Algerian News Agency (state-owned)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 323,000 (2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: ALGERIA



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

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

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):

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

Near Sustainability (2-3):

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

Sustainable (3-4):

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

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Algeria Objective Score: 1.42

Enormous differences exist between constitutional and legislative guarantees of media and political freedoms and actual day-to-day practice. Kamal Zayit, editor-in-chief of the *Weekly News*, said that the legal guarantees exist, since the constitution recognizes the right to freedom of expression and the public media law spells it out, but application is problematic. Hamida Ayyashi, owner and manager of the daily newspapers *News* and *Algeria News*, added that the legal framework is good on the whole, but laws are simply not applied when media practice comes into conflict with the political interests of the dominant power groups in society. In addition, said Gheshir Boudjema, a lawyer and the chairperson of the Algerian League of Human Rights, cultural norms that stand in opposition to the concept of individual opinion comprise a fundamental barrier to the application of legislation.

Regarding the issuance of broadcast licenses, all panel members agreed that the government's monopoly over radio and television is one of the most defining characteristics of Algerian media. The sector remains closed, and many applications remain frozen. Fatima Rahmani, a correspondent for *El-Shurouq* newspaper, said that there is no transparency or justice in the granting of licenses and that the matter is linked to the political objectives of the authorities.

According to Zayit, the Ministry of Information and Ministry of Justice grant licenses to establish newspapers, but for undisclosed reasons, some applicants have been unable to obtain a license. Mohamed al-Uqab, professor of media at the University of Algeria, said that Algerian law is very good in terms of licensing for press publications, requiring only that a newspaper notify the administrative authorities to be published. But in practice, al-Uqab said, no public or private entity can print a newspaper without a license from the Ministry of Justice, even with the aid of informal interventions. He said that the granting of such licenses is not transparent, clear, or fair. Granting licenses to new newspapers is subject to purely political considerations, in clear opposition to the laws that organized the profession, said Kamal Amarni, a journalist with *Le Soir d'Algérie* newspaper and secretary general of the National Union of Journalists.

The media are not subject to any special tax rules. Media enterprises are treated in the same way as any other business.

Crimes against journalists are often not taken seriously, Boudjema said, because Algerian society does not demand

freedom of expression. In recent years, serious cases of violence against journalists have been rare; however, media professionals are subject to official harassment as a means of pressure.

For example, journalists are often prosecuted for libel. Amarni said that the penal code, as amended in 2001, allows journalists to be imprisoned for libel, but Zayit said that sentences against them are often not carried out. Abdul Qader Zaigham, Djelfa Province correspondent for *El-Watan* newspaper, suggested that such non-application of sentences is related to political events, such as the run-up to the presidential elections. Those in power then draw attention to the subsequent amnesty given to journalists or the suspension of the sanctions imposed on them, as a way of appearing to be liberal and in support of civil liberties.

Al-Uqab said that it is important to note that while journalists involved in reporting on the political and security situation are frequently prosecuted, those covering the arts and sports sometimes go unpunished. This, he said, shows that prosecution of journalists is aimed more at reining them in than actually punishing them. Boualam Ziani, editor-in-chief of Algerian Television, said that journalists from independent newspapers in particular are subjected to frequent legal harassment by local authorities with the aim of increasing the intimidation of journalists in general. Journalists come under intense pressure from local mafias also, he said.

Legal guarantees of access to information exist, said Rabeh Halis of Algerian Radio. But in practice, journalists cannot gain

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.

access to information, and if they do access it, they will be punished for being in possession of such information, he said.

Finally, as reported last year, no license is needed to practice general journalism but correspondents must obtain a permit to attend government events.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Algeria Objective Score: 1.78

Professional standards and the quality of coverage vary widely in Algeria, where the state-owned radio and television sector is run in a rather formal manner, while the printed media are more dynamic and free. Samia Balqadi, editor-in-chief of the weekly *Cristal* magazine, said neither sector performs up to accepted standards: state television does not show anything except what those with influence want to be shown, and the printed media are under the control of political and/or financial pressure groups.

The lack of professionalism is attributable to a number of factors, Amarni said, including the poor quality of training at colleges and academies, the issuance of newspaper licenses to non-professionals, and the government's practice of allotting advertising on the basis of political considerations. Halis expressed the view that Algerian journalism does not meet recognized standards because political power is the dominant factor in every journalist's career. There are no controls on the profession otherwise and political pressure is the only determinant of what approach to take in coverage, typically in accordance with the dominant political agenda.

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).

Al-Uqab said that the media are in the grip of Algerians who largely are not members of the profession, but who are first and foremost "contractors." Consequently, he said, journalists find themselves subject to the views of media owners, who are swayed by political and commercial considerations. The result is that the real victim is the profession. He cited the example of published articles that contain unverified information, particularly articles related to security matters.

Ayyashi took a different view: In general, journalism has progressed to an acceptable extent, enabling it to embrace the recognized norms of international media practice. Journalism has made significant positive developments in the fields of writing, investigation, and interviewing, she said.

Rahmani said that local correspondents like her are exposed to greater pressure from their immediate social surroundings and local administrations than journalists working in central newsrooms, which are mostly in the capital, Algiers. Zaigham, another correspondent, concurred. Sometimes sources have reservations about expressing an opinion because of pressures from the local administration, he said, and even legal and economic experts, when called upon, sometimes "go into hiding" or fail to show up for interviews.

On the initiative of the National Union of Journalists, a council of ethics has been elected, but no one pays any attention to the council's decisions, panelists agreed.

Regarding self-censorship, Zaigham expressed the belief that junior reporters focus on particular themes as a result of financial pressure. In fact, he said, it might be argued that their work does observe professional standards, if judged in light of the obstacles and pressures they face. Balqadi said that the importance of advertising to the private employers in control of newspapers prevents journalists from carrying out investigations that might have an adverse effect on the companies buying advertising space.

Panelists agreed that journalists' salaries are too low, do not meet the needs of professional journalists, and can easily lead them to take hush money or be bribed. Zayani said that Algerian journalists' salaries are below those in other countries, at only DZD 30,000 (\$375) a month on average, and that most journalists do not qualify for social security benefits. Al-Uqab said that journalists cannot afford decent houses on their salaries. Ziani said journalists in state television look for better pay outside their profession, accept bribes, or leave Algerian Television to go and work with Persian Gulf television channels, which pay perhaps 10 times what Algerian Television pays. Rahmani said that salaries have improved slightly, but confirmed that many journalists move into other professions that pay more.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Algeria Objective Score: 1.80

Panelists agreed that news sources remain numerous and varied, providing the Algerian public with rich material, both local and international. Although radio and television are still public-sector monopolies, panelists praised the large number of print media, which are published in Arabic and French. The price of a daily newspaper—DZD 10, or less than \$.15—is within the reach of all social groups, and the only impediment to accessibility is the delay in delivering newspapers to some remote areas.

Although Algeria has 34 daily newspapers and dozens of weeklies, Al-Uqab said, they do not seem to have a plurality of approaches. The newspapers all depend on the Internet and the same press conferences, and given the ceiling on permissible topics, the lack of choice in selecting news agencies, and an absence of press agencies in particular, newspapers have become copies of each other. In the morning, all the newspapers come out with the same headlines.

The agendas and the content of news media are not affected by professional standards and community needs, but by the political considerations of the government. As a result, the political, social, economic, and cultural realities of Algerian society are not reflected adequately in the media.

The panel confirmed that international news is available on the Algerian market without significant limitations, largely because of the extensive freedom of Algerian citizens

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.

to use the Internet. The government does not exercise control over satellite channels or the Internet, although the Internet might suffer outages and not be available on all days by all Algerians. Rahmani said that Internet access is still not affordable for all citizens, despite the significant price reduction announced by the Ministry of Posts and Information and Communication Technologies in July 2008.

Affordability is an issue also with foreign publications, given their high price on the Algerian market. Amarni said that although the government allows importation of the international press, it might prevent entry of a specific issue that criticizes the situation in Algeria, especially if it criticizes the president.

The principal news services available to Algerian media are the state-run Algerian Press Service, Reuters, and Agence France-Presse. As Ayyashi put it, agencies such as those are of great assistance to the media outlets, especially newspapers, that do not have offices or correspondents outside the country.

Most panelists took the view that the official public media do not allow the free expression of opinion or differing points of view. Ziani stressed that while Algerian television covers the whole country, it does not offer programs or news bulletins that reflect the various interests and concerns of its audience. That has forced viewers to look for other Arabic and French television channels.

On the question of whether Algerian media cover minority issues or offer minority language outlets, more than one panelist expressed reservations about the very concept of minorities in Algeria. Some said that there are none, acknowledging that there are radio channels and television programs in the Amazighi language, but refusing to consider it a minority language in Algeria.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Algeria Objective Score: 1.53

On the issue of the management of media businesses in Algeria, Mohamed Bwazdia, editing secretary at *El-Khabar* newspaper, said that managers of media outlets—whether private or government-run—are often subject to non-commercial considerations. The authorities take advantage of the shortcomings in media business management for political ends and to put pressure on independent newspapers.

Halis said that the situation of the independent media embodies the reality of Algeria: They are not run in a modern manner, as their thinking echoes the logic of the state, which

uses advertising as an instrument to control newspapers and other publications. According to Abdul Karim Hammoush, director of the Public Printing Press, most private media businesses are still living from hand to mouth. Rahmani said that newspapers do not have professional staff qualified in management, business administration, or marketing, so they are financially impoverished and needy in other ways. Consequently, they tend to go under, as a number of titles have recently done.

The panel discussion focused on the role of advertising and, in the view of the majority, the unfair and politicized methods of allocating it. Ayyashi, speaking as the owner and director of two daily newspapers, emphasized the importance of advertising in the life of a newspaper: Without it, sales alone cannot provide enough revenue for a paper to survive. Sales are not a major source of income for 90 percent of Algerian newspapers. As a result, advertising has become a major influence on the degree of professionalism and ethics in journalism.

Rahmani said that *El-Khabar* and *El-Watan* newspapers have more stable incomes, but that other papers are dependent on advertising income, which is controlled by the government by virtue of the law on advertising. Amarni concurred, saying that advertising is the determining factor for everything in terms of the Algerian press.

Publicity and advertising is distributed by the National Publishing and Advertising Agency (ANEP). ANEP is subject to political considerations, and so pro-government newspapers receive more advertisements, even if their circulations are low. Al-Uqab said that the distribution of advertising is not subject to any particular logic. It is parceled out in a manner

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.

that is unclear and unfair, and public sector papers receive the lion's share, although their circulations are low, at no more than 5,000 each. Advertising is doled out in a "measured" way so as not to allow the major papers to feel independent of the government or to make the minor papers face the prospect of extinction, as they might at some point become important for the decision-makers.

Al-Uqab suggested that the media in Algeria, especially print outlets, could be described as small businesses, though the country has both major and minor papers.

Zayit said that there are no market research studies or circulation/audience measurements. Newspapers publish their own circulation figures, and their true sales figures are often unknown and non-transparent. Most panelists decried the lack of ratings of media businesses in Algeria, both public and private.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Algeria Objective Score: 1.60

The discussion of the role of trade and professional associations in support of Algerian media was characterized by diverging points of view among the panel members.

Algeria has no organization that represents publishers, Amarni said. There is, however, the National Union of Journalists, of which Amarni is secretary general. He said the union—despite its limited resources, as it has not taken money from the government or any other party—continues to be both strong and effective, with an involved membership of about 1,000 journalists. The work of the union focuses on defense of the freedom of expression; solidarity with journalists who are harassed by the Ministry of Justice; firings of journalists; and support for a number of projects of public interest, such as the Charter of Ethics and the Law Concerning Journalists, which was issued in May 2008.

Other journalists on the panel disagreed that support institutions are having a significant impact. Balqadi said that Algeria has professional organizations, but that their performance remains poor and their lack of credibility has resulted in the vast majority of journalists not getting involved in professional associations and unions. Ziani noted that journalists have made many attempts to form media organizations, but they have been unsuccessful, which has led to a cooling of interest.

Broad concern for press independence is rarely seen in Algeria. Narrowly, some Algerian human rights associations coordinate with the International Freedom of Expression

Exchange, Gheshir said, and monitor every attempt to attack press freedoms. In addition, assistance is given by international non-governmental human rights organizations interested in the defense of freedom of expression, Bwazdia said.

Ayyashi said that supporting institutions are weak, disorganized, and subject to a kind of semi-organized chaos that weakens the effectiveness of the media and assists the monopoly, to the benefit of some businesses and at the expense of expanding or financially weak businesses. In that way, supporting institutions have become a means for exercising indirect control over media businesses that want to stand out, tell a different story, and strive to be free.

University diplomas awarded to journalists recognize the theoretical training that has been given, but that training is not complete in terms of practical knowledge, Gheshir said. Zaigham said that prospective journalists need additional training after graduating from college and before starting work.

Al-Uqab, the University of Algeria professor, said that while there are good graduates from the media departments, many media outlets suffer from a lack of qualitative managerial oversight, which negatively affects the quality of training. In addition, he said, the press sector is open to people who are not graduates of journalism schools, and journalists are not hired on a professional, transparent, or fair basis.

Although only a few journalists have undergone short training programs at the national level, Zayyit said, some have received training abroad. He noted that media institutions encourage such training. Zaigham expressed the view that the level of training received by Algerian journalists is lackluster compared with recognized international standards.

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.

Zayyit noted that printing presses are mostly state-owned and operated in a non-transparent manner. Broadcast transmitters are completely government controlled, although print distribution is private. Print distribution was described as inefficient, however.

List of Panel Participants

Rabeh Halis, editor-in-chief, Radio Algeria, Algiers

Kamal Zayit, editor-in-chief, *Weekly News*, Algiers

Fatima Rahmani, press correspondent, *El Shourouq*, Tibaza

Mohamed Bwazdia, editing secretary, *El Khabar*, Algiers

Kamal Amarni, journalist, *Le Soir d'Algérie*; secretary-general, National Union of Journalists, Algiers

Boualam Ziani, journalist, editor-in-chief, Algerian Television, Algiers

Hamida Ayyashi, acting director and owner, *News and Daily News*, Algiers

Samia Balqadi, journalist, editor-in-chief, *Cristal*, Algiers

Abdul Qader Zaigham, reporter, *El Watan*, Djelfa

Abdul Karim Hammoush, director, Public Printing Press, Algiers

Mohamed Al Uqab, professor, Media Institute, University of Algeria, Algiers

Gheshir Boudjema, lawyer and president, Algerian League of Human Rights, Algiers

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Djabi Abdenasser, professor of political sociology, University of Algeria, Algiers