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JORDAN

In 2008, King Abdullah II pledged to newspaper editors to halt the detention of any journalist on press-related cases, reaffirming the importance of freedom of speech and altering the press landscape in Jordan. According to this year's MSI panelists, apparently the promise has yet to exactly match reality on the ground and in words in the law.

Although only two journalists have received prison sentences since the introduction of the press and publication law in 1953, many journalists still fear the detention "sword" wielded by the State Security Court, a joint military/civic tribunal formed by the prime minister to look into cases threatening the "security of the state." However, since the parliament barred the detention of journalists in an April 2007 amendment to the press law, the judiciary has refrained from detaining journalists in press-related cases.

Changes in the political structure of the information offices may also influence the media climate in coming years. In 2008, five years after Jordan abolished the Ministry of Information, the ministry was reintroduced in Nader Thahabi's first cabinet shuffle since he formed his government in the fall of 2007.

Finally, slower growth in the advertising market in 2008 began to alarm some in the media sector. Although most media remained operating as profitable businesses, Jordanian media have limited growth potential and are subject to what panelists described as an adverse tax regime.

JORDAN AT A GLANCE

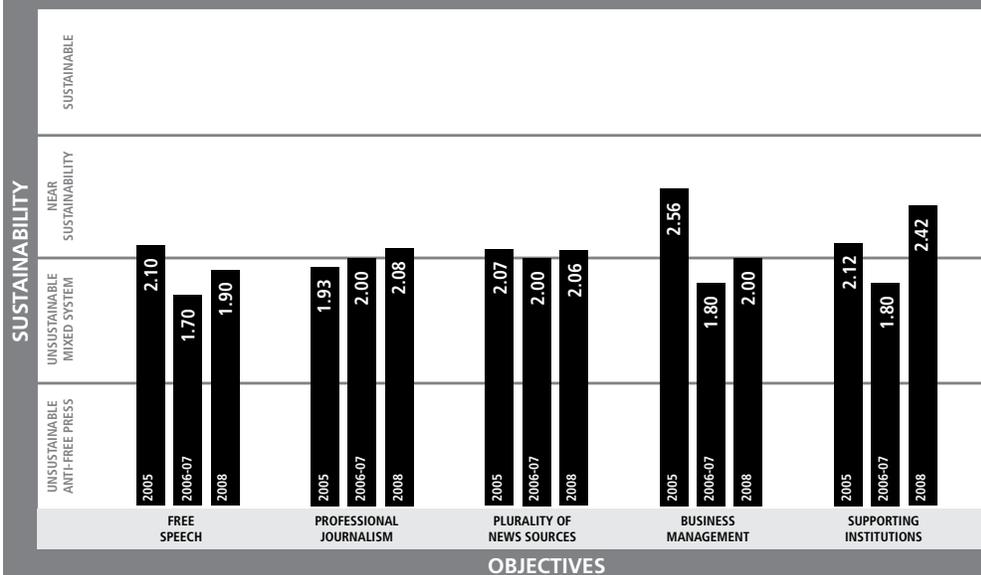
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 6,342,948 (July 2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Amman
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Arab 98%, Circassian 1%, Armenian (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Sunni Muslim 92%, Christian 6% (majority Greek Orthodox, but some Greek and Roman Catholics, Syrian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, and Protestant denominations), other 2% (several small Shia Muslim and Druze populations) (2001 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages:** Arabic (official), English widely understood among upper and middle classes (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2008-Atlas):** \$19.53 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2009)
- > **GNI per capita (2008-PPP):** \$5,530 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2009)
- > **Literacy rate:** 89.9% (male: 95.1%, female: 84.7% (2003 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** King Abdallah II (since February 7, 1999)

MEDIA SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 7 Arabic daily newspapers, 1 English daily newspaper, 25 weekly, 10 magazines; Radio: 19; Television Stations: 1 public and 3 private
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top 3 by circulation: *Al Rai* (50,000); *Al Ghad* (45,000-50,000), *Ad-Dustour* (30,000)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Jordan News Agency/PETRA
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 1.5 million (2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: JORDAN



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

Jordan Objective Score: 1.90

Twenty-four statutes regulate the media in Jordan, chief among them the penal code and the press and publication law of 1953. Amendments to the press and publications law adopted in 2007 eliminated imprisonment as a punishment for violations—but replaced it with heavy fines of up to \$40,000.

Panelist Hekmat Momani, vice president of the Jordan Press Association (JPA) and senior editor at the government-run news agency Petra, said that he is skeptical of the amendments. The press and publications law still does not bar imprisonment of a journalist found guilty of certain violations, including any form of defamation, vilification, or abuse of any religion protected under the constitution, he said. (Islam is the state religion, and about 4 percent of Jordanians are Christians with full religious rights.) The law's second article includes any "defamation of prophets, whether in writings, illustrations, pictures, symbolism, or any other means." Any action that can be interpreted as an insult to people's religious sentiment or beliefs, or instigates sectarianism or racism, constitutes a third violation; and a fourth covers slander or libel against individuals or their personal freedoms, as well as spreading false information or rumors about them. The articles are ambiguous, and magistrates can interpret their contents at will.

In late 2007, King Abdullah II declared that "no journalist should be imprisoned," but journalists still face the risk of preliminary detention under the penal code. Provisions in the code allow authorities to detain, prosecute, and imprison journalists for endangering the state's internal or external security. Possible violations include publishing material that damages national unity, harms Jordan's relations with other states, instigates sectarianism or racism, insults religions, or undermines confidence in the national currency. Revealing information classified as a state secret is punishable similarly.

Panelists agreed that the penal code still restricts the freedom of speech, albeit indirectly. They argued that the authorities can always use any of Jordan's 24 media laws to detain any journalist. Instead of referring press-related cases to civil or military courts, panelists suggested, the government should create an independent specialized commission to regulate the industry. Jordan still lacks an independent common media regulator to supervise and control the flow of news from the 15-plus websites and newspapers across the country. The lower house of parliament, whose relations with the media have soured to the point of confrontation, has not acted on a draft law designed to control news sites.

Panelist Jihad Mansi, a reporter at *Al Ghad* newspaper, said that the constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech and the press need to be translated into laws. Existing laws hamper the freedom of expression and stem the development of a free press, said Mansi, who covers parliament.

"The publications law prevents the imprisonment of journalists, but when he or she is imprisoned, other laws are implemented," Momani said. An example occurred on February 4, when a civic prosecutor ordered the detention of two journalists: Jihad Momani, editor-in-chief of *Shihan*; and Hashem Khaldi, editor-in-chief of *Al Mehwar*. They were detained after their weeklies reprinted the much-criticized Danish caricatures depicting the Prophet Mohammad.

Panelists pointed out that a 20 percent tax and customs fee imposed on newsprint continues to burden the industry and squeeze profits. Outlets pay 16 percent tax on advertising sales, with an additional 1 percent paid to the JPA.

In 2008, the parliament endorsed an amendment to the culture law that imposes a 5 percent tax on revenues from advertisements placed in media. Media representatives protested this tax, claiming that House Speaker Abdul Hadi Majali pledged to push for its annulment. But when the government proposed a law annulling the tax, lawmakers rejected the amendment, and four major dailies decided to boycott coverage of the lower house.

Panelists said that physical attacks on journalists are rare in Jordan. However, they noted an incident involving *Al*

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.

Ghad columnist Jamil Nimri in January 2008, in which the outspoken Nimri was slashed in the face on his doorstep by “unknown assailants.” The government acted swiftly to investigate the case, apprehending several suspects amid rumors that a former government official was behind the attack. The official immediately denied any involvement, and the detainees were sent to trial.

The panelists agreed that the public media—radio and television stations, as well as Petra—are not supposed to receive preferential treatment under the law. In practice, however, they do receive preferential treatment, compromising the editorial independence of government-owned media.

Panelists said that they believe that not all journalists or media outlets have the same access to public information. Despite the introduction of an access-to-information law, authorities still enforce a 1971 martial law that bans dissemination of any news deemed “classified and/or harmful to the state.” Furthermore, panelists noted, media close to or owned by the government receive preferential access to breaking stories and information. In a bid to improve their ability to gain information, reporters launched a campaign called Faze’tko (“Support Us”), backed by civil society institutions across the country—but the barriers remain.

Entry into the journalism profession is unhindered in most cases. Entry into the JPA can be restricted, despite recent efforts to open up membership. Under the press association law, media outlets are forbidden from hiring journalists who are not members of the JPA, and people are not allowed to refer to themselves as journalists unless they are JPA members.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Jordan Objective Score: 2.08

Panelists agreed that reporting in Jordan still lacks professionalism and is mostly biased, particularly with regard to sourcing and accuracy. Panelists mentioned some exceptions, highlighting *Al Ghad's* comprehensive reporting. They also praised *Al Arab Al Yawm's* standards, but charged that it still tends to ignore competing opinions, especially when reporting government decisions.

“Sometimes journalists try to highlight specific people [i.e., promote their sources] in their articles,” which affects “the level of professionalism of journalists,” said Hassan Haidar, Amman bureau manager of the London-based *Al Quds*, an Islamic-leaning press agency.

Unqualified editors are a particular obstacle to quality reporting. At almost all newspapers, unprofessional editors publish pieces without proper editing. The lack of qualified editors hampers the development of high-caliber reporters, Haidar said. Other participants said that the lack of professionalism is due to media outlets employing unqualified and untrained journalists, driven by favoritism rather than merit. “People are joining this profession without training, and this affects the quality of reporting,” said Suzanne Shraideh, business news reporter at Jordan Television (JTV).

Panelists agreed that private media reports employ more professional production standards than state-run media reports, because they are less subject to government intervention.

Ethical problems persist as well. The JPA introduced a code of ethics in 2003, prohibiting journalists from accepting presents, financial or material donations, or any aid of any kind without advance approval of its council. “Nevertheless, not all journalists abide by the code, and some of them do accept gifts from different parties,” Momani noted. Panelists said that low wages prod some journalists to violate the JPA code of ethics.

In addition to the problems with ethical standards and professionalism, many of Jordan’s journalists exercise self-censorship or cooperate with what is called a “soft containment” drive, which further undermines the quality of reporting.

When discussing coverage of key events, the panelists agreed that all public and private media cover major development relating to the state and the king. However, Jordan Radio and Television and other pro-government

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).

outlets largely ignore issues such as prisoner abuse and human rights. Other outlets, including the privately-owned dailies *Al Rai* and *Al Dustour*, downplay criticism and exaggerate praise of the government.

Panelists also discussed access to technically upgraded facilities. Shraideh noted that state-owned media institutions buy the most sophisticated technology, but they do not train their employees in how to use the equipment.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Jordan Objective Score: 2.06

Jordan has eight daily newspapers, seven in Arabic and one in English. The newest is *Al Sabeel*, published by the Islamic Action Front; it became a daily in the first quarter of 2009.

Local papers are not restricted specifically from reprinting or using foreign news in preparing their news reports. Broadcast media in Jordan enjoy relatively good access to various regional and international sources, panelists agreed. They provide tickers for almost all international news agencies, as well as access to news websites, Facebook, YouTube, and other digital platforms. Jordanians receive news from a plurality of foreign sources, through regional Arab news networks such as the Doha-based *Al Jazeera* and the Saudi-funded, Dubai-based *Al Arabiyah*; Western news outlets; and the Internet.

For most Jordanians, media is accessible with few obstacles, panelists said. Newspapers are distributed across the country, including rural areas. They are sold at the equivalent of approximately 35 cents each. Pan-Arab papers such as *Al Hayat*, *Al Sharq Al Awsat*, and *Al Quds Al Arabi* are also sold in Jordan at nearly 50 cents per issue. Other foreign publications are available as well, but their audiences are limited to English-speaking Jordanians, and the price is prohibitive for many. According to a 2007 report by the Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists (CDFJ), about 80 percent of Jordanians have satellite dishes at a per-unit cost of 70 Jordanian dinars (\$100).

The 2008 Jordan Media Survey (conducted by the USAID-funded Jordan Media Strengthening Program, in conjunction with IREX) showed that 36 percent of Jordanians use the Internet—an increase of 100 percent from 2007. But only 11 percent of Jordanian homes have an ADSL connection, and high Internet subscription fees are viewed as an obstacle to increased penetration.

Panelists said that the government does not restrict Internet access; but the New York-based *Arab Times*, run by Osama

Fawzi, is blocked. Assaf said that it is the only blocked news website in the kingdom.

Panelists said that locals now tend to trust news websites more than the local media. “Even in villages, people have satellite dishes and access to the Internet, which is becoming the main news source for people,” Moumani said. Omar Assaf, senior editor at *Al Rai* and the Amman correspondent for the Lebanese independent newspaper *An Nahar*, agreed. “After the emergence of online media, people started to depend on them as a main source for news,” he said.

Assaf explained that the credibility of Jordanian daily newspapers eroded in 2008, while the Internet is allowing Jordanians to freely interact and express their viewpoints. Over the past year, private websites and blogs blossomed in Amman. Independent news sites like *Ammannews.net*, *Sarraynews.com*, *Marayanews*, and *Rum Online* attract a large number of Jordanians. Many people post comments on these sites, which often turn into platforms for debate. For example, the latest opinion polls on the performance of the lower house of Parliament have generated discussion. But user comments can sometimes trigger a war of words, especially over differences between Jordanians of local extraction and their compatriots of Palestinian origin.

Authorities require website publishers to filter comments, but the authorities and the press have yet to tailor a regulatory code to provide proper guidance.

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.

Jordan has no independent news agencies; the only agency is the government-run Petra. However, international news agencies are permitted to operate freely in Jordan.

Recent years have seen progress in coverage of a broader spectrum of social issues. For example, topics such as honor killings, child molestation within the family, or domestic violence receive coverage now. Minority issues (religion and ethnic subjects) remain mostly uncovered, and panelists noted that no entity has applied to start a media outlet focused on minority issues or any one minority group. Private clubs run by minorities do issue periodicals covering their activities.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Jordan Objective Score: 2.00

In general, media outlets operate as relatively efficient, profit-making businesses in Jordan. But they still face a number of challenges—notably the taxation issues described earlier.

The Jordan Media Survey, conducted with 2,912 Jordanians aged 15 and above, revealed that radio has a much higher penetration (46 percent) than any other medium, excluding mobile telephones. On the other hand, readership of daily newspapers appears lower than the accepted industry standard, according to the pollsters. “Measuring ad and brand recall, our results challenge the conventional wisdom that print media in Jordan are by default more efficient than audio-visual media,” commented Muin Khoury, project leader and owner of Strategies-Harris Interactive, which helped carry out the survey. According to project consultant Tony Sabbagh,

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.

“the results confirm that Jordan’s media sector cannot mature and reach its full potential without healthy and competitive audio-visual media.”

Cover prices cannot sustain newspaper operations, and advertising income remains the main source of income for newspapers. However, the pace of advertising growth slowed in 2008, according to the Jordan chapter of the International Advertising Association (IAA). Quoting figures from the media research company Ipsos-Stat, IAA reported that 2008 advertising of all types increased to \$303 million, up 10 percent over 2007. However, that 10 percent was the lowest rate of growth since 2000.

At a July 2008 press conference, IAA Jordan President Mustapha Tabba attributed the deceleration to the instability in consumer expenditure patterns and the country’s high cost of living, both of which affected companies’ marketing strategies and advertising plans. Furthermore, Tabba explained, “The imposing of the 5 percent tax on all advertisement revenues to support culture and arts contributed to this decline.” He stressed the importance of studying the impact of factors that slow advertising industry growth in Jordan as compared with other countries in the region, and addressing the challenges. Jordan ranked sixth in advertising spending in 2008 within the Arab world, according to Tabba.

Once again, the press (including daily and weekly newspapers) took the lead in advertising spending in 2008, with 76 percent of the total share. Television came in second with 9 percent and radio third with 8 percent, while outdoor advertising came in fourth at 6 percent.

The government does not subsidize independent media outlets. Further, outlets cannot depend on the government for advertising, because it sometimes pressures its ministries not to advertise with outlets that it dislikes.

Some media outlets hire firms, such as Ipsos-Stat, to conduct audience measurements or market research, but not in any systematic manner. Such information is used in strategic planning, marketing toolkits, etc., but is viewed skeptically, as advertisers and media outlets do not agree on available measures of circulation or audience. Recognizing that not all media outlets can afford to buy data and studies, the Jordan Media Survey was designed to help fill the gap by providing independent, reliable, updated, and free data to boost competition and the sustainability of media organizations.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Jordan Objective Score: 2.42

Panelists noted that although no trade associations are actively supporting the media in Jordan, the JPA represents media professionals. Established in 1953, it includes about 1,000 members from the private and state media. The 1998 Jordan Press Association Law mandates membership for those who want to practice journalism, and those who practice without joining the JPA are subject to penalties. Still, dozens of Jordanian journalists are not members.

Several NGOs in Jordan work in support of freedom of speech and media. CDFJ, the Arab Women's Media Center, and Amman-Net provide short-term training programs for journalists. These organizations are independent from the government and fund their activities through aid from international donors and other NGOs. CDFJ acts as a media watchdog, issuing an annual report on media freedoms; lobbying for media law reform; conducting workshops for members of parliament, legal experts, and journalists; and providing volunteer lawyers to represent journalists.

Panelists shared a concern that university graduates are not trained to uphold the standards of the profession. Recognizing the need for additional education, the pro-government paper *Al Rai* "has also started to provide in-house training to empower its staff," said Assaf, its senior editor.

In terms of newsprint and printing facilities, the government does not control the printing industry. Four of the six Arabic dailies own their own press and view the presses as profit-generating assets. Jordan has one commercial printing press also.

Finally, the government does not interfere in the distribution of newspapers. The private company Aramex is the country's only distributor of newspapers and magazines. In addition, *Ad Dustour*, *Al Arab Al Yawm*, and other publications have their own distribution systems.

List of Panel Participants

Omar Assaf, senior editor, *Al Rai*, Amman

Suzanne Shraideh, presenter and editor, Jordan Television, Amman

Aktham Tell, former editor, Jordan Television, Amman

Hikmat Moumani, Jordan Press Association (Petra), Amman

Walid Hosni, reporter, *Arab Al Yawm*, Amman

Hassan Haidar, Al Quds Press News Agency, Amman

Mustafa Ryalat, *Addustour*, Amman

Jihad Mansi, *Al Ghad*, Amman

Mohammad Hawamdeh, Khabberni.com, Amman

Moderator and Author

Saad Hatter, correspondent, BBC, Amman

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.