
The MSI panelists bemoaned the political climate and its distortion of Lebanese media—normally a source of great pride in a region where the majority of media is controlled by one-party states or monarchies.



LEBANON

M

May 2008 will be remembered in Lebanon as the month that one of the nation's leading broadcasters was forced off the air by gunmen and flames, briefly succumbing to the struggle between opposition and government supporters.

The violence graphically illustrates the political nature of media in Lebanon, a country both blessed and cursed by its diversity. Seventeen officially recognized sects share power and vie for influence in Lebanon, and sectarian identity almost always trumps nationality. The MSI panelists bemoaned the political climate and its distortion of Lebanese media—normally a source of great pride in a region where the majority of media is controlled by one-party states or monarchies.

The events of May 2008 were the culmination of an 18-month standoff between the Western-backed government and the Syrian and Iranian-backed opposition, loyal to Shia Muslim movement Hezbollah. The opposition launched an armed takeover of swaths of Beirut traditionally under the control of the Sunni Muslim parliamentary leader Saad Hariri. (Hariri is the son of five-time Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, whose assassination in February 2005 triggered a prolonged period of instability.)

The media sector, long politicized within the country, faced a multitude of attacks based on party affiliation. Television and newspaper offices belonging to Hariri's Future Movement were attacked with rockets and gunfire before being overrun, looted, and burned. Opposition fighters, including fellow Shias from Amal and the secular Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP), threatened staff at Future News, cutting cables and forcing the station off the air for four days. Hezbollah and its allies accused the Saudi-backed Hariri of stoking sectarian tension, primarily against Shias, using his media company, which includes a newspaper, two radio stations, and entertainment and news channels. Pro-government loyalists pointed to the hundreds of millions of dollars a year that Hezbollah receives from Iran, and questioned the objectivity of the Hezbollah-run Al Manar television, whose programming, they assert, often degenerates into propaganda.

The effect of the global economic downturn also weighed heavily on the panelists, with some reporting severe losses in advertising revenue. As an example of the financial challenges facing media, they pointed to the brief closure in January 2009 of Lebanon's veteran English-language newspaper, the *Daily Star*.

Lebanon's overall MSI score declined moderately from the 2006/2007 score of 2.45 to 2.19, pushing Lebanon closer to a rating of "unsustainable, mixed system." This reflects a deepening pessimism among journalists and belief that the political upheaval begun in 2005 and continuing into the June 2009 general election is adversely affecting media objectivity and financial independence.

LEBANON AT A GLANCE

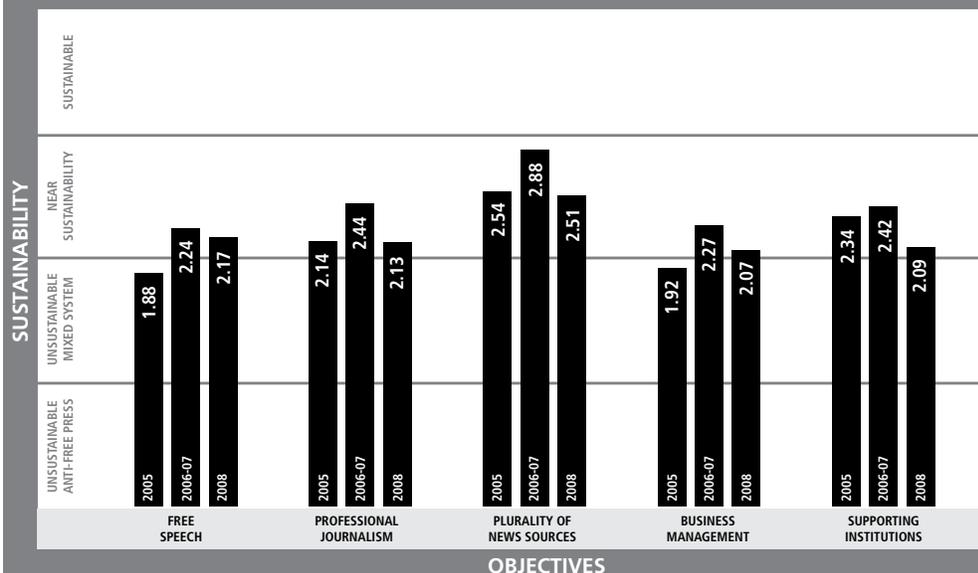
GENERAL

- > **Population:** Estimates range from 3,971,941 (July 2008 est., CIA World Factbook) to 4.6 million (Bank Audi, 2007)
- > **Capital city:** Beirut
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Arab 95%, Armenian 4%, other 1% (est., CIA World Factbook 2008)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 59.7% (Shia, Sunni, Druze, Isma'elite, Alawite or Nusayri), Christian 39% (Maronite Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Melkite Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Syrian Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Syrian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Chaldean, Assyrian, Copt, Protestant), other 1.3% (est., CIA World Factbook 2008)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Arabic official language and universally spoken. Also French and English, with small minorities speaking Armenian and Kurdish
- > **GNI (2008-Atlas):** \$26.30 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2009)
- > **GNI per capita (2008-PPP):** \$10,880 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2009)
- > **Literacy rate:** 87% (UNDP 2005)
- > **President or top authority:** President Michel Suleiman

MEDIA SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 11 leading Arabic daily newspapers, 2 French-language dailies, and 1 each in Armenian and English; Radio: 1 state-owned and 27 private; Television Stations: 1 state-owned and 6 private (Future TV, Al Manar, NBN, Orange TV, New TV and LBC)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** There is no central source for newspaper circulation; top dailies include *An Nahar*, *As Safir* (both report 45,000 daily), *Al Balad*, and *Al Hayat*
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News Agencies:** National News Agency, Central News Agency (both state-owned)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** Estimates range from 950,000 (CIA World Factbook, 2008) to 1.2 million (Bank Audi, 2007)

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: 2.17

Though guaranteed under the constitution, panelists found freedom of speech to be undermined by the chronic influence of political money and the accompanying agenda in the media. This year's score for free speech was brought down by the panel's negative impression of the condition of legal support for the media. Access to international news was the bright spot for Objective 1 this year.

Lebanese society greatly values free speech; political discussions are a source of national pride and obsession. In fact, the speak-your-mind culture may actually hinder objective media, said panelist Nadim Koteich, an executive producer for Future News television, part of the media group owned by Sunni parliamentary majority leader Saad Hariri. "The problem in Lebanon is we have an excess of free speech. Opinions are not supported by facts," he said.

Sawssan Abu Zahr, a journalist at Lebanon's leading daily newspaper *An Nahar*, said that the media is bending to political will. "The more the political tension intensifies, the more the media, especially television, tends to lose objectivity."

The application of the law to defend free speech is patchy at best, a number of panelists agreed.

"There is no First Amendment [as found in the U.S. constitution], but a modicum of freedom exists within the law. Laws and regulations are sometimes selectively enforced," said Magda Abu Fadil, director of journalism training at the American University of Beirut.

Lebanese media laws remain obsolete, imprecise, and lacking teeth. The print law originated in Ottoman times and was last amended in 1960. "You can't update a document that dates back 150 years," said Wadih Haddad, assistant general manager for Voice of Lebanon radio.

As an example of outdated policy, Haddad cited that fines of LBP 400 are being incurred based on the old print law, which predates the civil war and the hyperinflation of Lebanese currency. Today that amount is around \$0.30.

A distinct broadcast law, separate from print law, first came into force in 1994. The law mandates that broadcasting licenses be controlled by the government-appointed National Council for Audiovisual Media and that broadcast media should not be majority-owned or run by any single religious group, sect, or individual. However, panelists agreed that licensing of broadcast media is steeped in political and sectarian cronyism. The example cited most often is Prime

Minister Rafik Hariri's granting of a license to Future TV, majority owned by himself.

Broadcast law prohibits attacks on the character of the head of state or a foreign leader—though it is ineffectual in the latter case—while a 1991 security agreement between the government and Syria, still in effect, prohibits the publication of any information deemed harmful to the security of either state.

Broadcast licenses are divided between those airing only entertainment programming and those airing both entertainment and news. No new newspaper licenses are issued in Lebanon, due to the law that limits the number of legal newspaper and magazines in the market to 100. *Al Akhbar* newspaper, which printed its first edition in August 2006, purchased an existing but unused license in order to begin legal operation. Otherwise, market entry and taxes are generally fair in Lebanon.

Self-censorship has decreased significantly since the withdrawal of Syria's military from Lebanon in 2005, a number of panelists agreed. And the series of assassinations of journalists opposing Syria's control of Lebanese politics had ceased by 2008. In fact, since May, when Syria's Lebanese allies gained extra cabinet seats and thus veto power, assassinations of prominent Lebanese figures have nearly stopped. The exception is the killing of Saleh Aridi, a top advisor to Syrian-backed Druze opposition leader Talal Arslan.

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.

In fact, the speak-your-mind culture may actually hinder objective media, said panelist Nadim Koteich, an executive producer for Future News television, part of the media group owned by Sunni parliamentary majority leader Saad Hariri. "The problem in Lebanon is we have an excess of free speech. Opinions are not supported by facts," he said.

However, impunity for crimes against journalists continues to be the norm. Previous assassinations of journalists, including *An Nahar* editor Gibran Tueni and columnist Samir Kassir, remain unprosecuted, though they form part of an ongoing UN inquiry into Rafik Hariri's assassination.

"Culprits have gone unpunished, and while crimes against journalists cause outcries, there is no effective deterrent," said Abu Fadil. Or as Abu Zahr put it: "In other countries, journalists might be killed by the mob, the mafia, or the drug cartels. In Lebanon, it is politics that kills them."

Omar Ibrahim, Tripoli correspondent for the leading leftist *As Safir* newspaper and an experienced reporter in Lebanon's tense security environment, recalled an occasion five years ago in which a colleague had been beaten by an army officer and decided to sue.

"After the investigations were complete and the witnesses gave their testimonies, no one charged the officer because he was very high ranking and knows some politicians," Ibrahim said. "Law enforcement is proportional, and most of the time is subject to politics."

Political divisions even provoke citizens into committing violence against journalists. Kamal Zeibyan, editor of the pro-opposition *Ad Diyyar* newspaper, said that in May, several of his reporters were beaten as they went to report on the opposition-led clashes taking place near Tarik al Jdeide, a Sunni-majority neighborhood loyal to Saad Hariri. The largely Sunni crowd identified reporters from *Ad Diyyar* as their political and sectarian enemies because the newspaper identifies editorially with the Shia-led opposition. A number of Western journalists were also mobbed by Sunni youth in Tarik al-Jdeide while covering the funeral of a Sunni killed in the May clashes.

The panelists named one case in which authorities responded to a crime against a journalist. In November 2008, opposition members of the SSNP attacked Future News correspondent

Omar Harqous as he covered municipal workers taking down party political posters on a Beirut thoroughfare. Harqous, who had previously agreed to participate in this year's MSI, was left hospitalized. The army later arrested three men accused of the beating.

The state media does not receive preferential legal treatment, but Haddad noted that the management of public media "being appointed by politicians negatively backfires on its objectivity."

Suing for libel remains a civil law issue, but the courts can be subverted by political heavyweights. "Everyone knows someone, and so cases are mediated outside court rather than having a clear-cut decision," said Koteich. "The majority end up with a consensus."

One notable exception in which the media suffered an unequivocal defeat was the case of former justice minister Charles Rizk, who had been accused of embezzling state funds by the opposition-leaning New TV. "Despite the fact that we included in our show 'corruption' documents which show the corruption of this minister...the judiciary accused New TV of defamation and the ISF [Internal Security Forces] implemented the charges very fast," said panelist and New TV producer Moussa Assi. New TV was forced to pay damages to the minister of LBP 50 million (\$33,000), he said.

Access to international media is unrestricted and affordable, with the exception of media originating in Israel. However, public information is not readily available to all. "There is no FOIA [Freedom of Information Act] in Lebanon [and] journalists don't always know how to get public information," Abu Fadil said. "The government has come under foreign pressure to make its information public, but implementation has not been consistent."

Media law limits materials that can be censored to pornography, political opinion, religion, and threats to national security. The General Security service retains the right to censor newspapers, magazines, and other media entering or leaving the country and to approve all plays and films. The banning in March 2008 of *Persepolis*, the animated film of a young girl growing up in the early days of the Iranian revolution on grounds that it could offend the country's Shia Muslims, was reversed within a day, following public outcry. However, Israeli-made *Waltz With Bashir*, an animated film documenting an Israeli soldier's experience of the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, remained banned from general release in 2009, though a number of Lebanon residents claim to have obtained DVD copies.

The government places no restrictions on Internet use. An attempt to block Israeli Web sites a few years ago caused an outcry and the decision was quickly rescinded. A number of

panelists noted that Lebanon lacks media laws to cover the Internet. "ISPs have yet to be held legally responsible for content on sites," said Abu Fadil. "The laws don't know how to adapt. [Stone-age cartoon character] Fred Flintstone is more advanced."

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Lebanon Objective Score: 2.13

Since the last MSI, professionalism in Lebanese journalism has declined, according to the panelists. They said that all journalism is politically slanted, but so many media sources are available that a consumer can use several to piece together the truth.

"I don't see any objective media in Lebanon," said Koteich. "The benchmark is not objectivity, but to what degree the media is propaganda." He said that sources such as Hezbollah's Al Manar television are pure propaganda, while his own Future News is "highly editorialized."

Several panelists noted that Lebanon's media enjoys a prestigious position in the region. "The Lebanese press is considered the freest among all the Arab press," said Sami Hamad, editor of the Lebanese Media Information Services Office (MISOF) news agency. But Zeibyan warned, "We are facing an objectivity problem and this is due to the political split in the country."

The panelists were divided on whether journalists adhere to a code of ethics. Haddad argued that "reporters usually check the information they present...and abide by recognized ethical standards." Abu Fadil was less convinced: "Sadly,

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).

"Certain politicians have a budget for bribes. Depending on your rank and the media you work for, it could be a car or a laptop," said Haddad.

reporters don't always verify and fact-check adequately. They rely on hearsay and rumor." She also described the code of ethics devised by the Press Federation in 1974 as "flimsy" and "woefully outdated."

Several panelists described how political agendas emerged at the forefront of news reports during the opposition takeover of parts of Beirut and the surrounding mountains. Diala Shehadi criticized her own opposition-leaning *As Safir* newspaper for taking sides during the violence and "shifting from being a biased newspaper to being part of the conflict." She criticized Al Manar's reporting of the takeover of mainly Sunni West Beirut. "How can a correspondent—who should stick to objectivity and the ethics of journalism—describe an invasion against a terrified people as 'liberation?'" she said.

Shehadi said also that journalists at *As Safir* who opposed Hezbollah were prevented from writing their opinions and at least one was fired. Following the events of May, an internal memo was circulated among the senior management admitting that the editorial line had been less than objective and promising a return to more balanced coverage, she said.

Key events are well covered by the media but physical access to the news is being hindered increasingly by the political divide. Al Manar has almost exclusive access to the Hezbollah-controlled southern suburbs of Beirut, for example. Further, sensitivities in a country of 17 religious sects remain a barrier to reporting on religion.

Safir's Ibrahim said that he carries five different press cards in order to operate in generally pro-government Tripoli, showing one to Sunnis in the Bab al-Tabbaneh neighborhood and another to pro-Syrian Allawis in the neighboring Jebel Mohsen. "Is there a campaign against journalists in Tripoli?" asked Ibrahim. "It's personal. I can go to Tabbaneh even when some from Future TV are banned for not doing a good job."

Low and static pay levels continue to provide a market for politicians or powerful figures to bribe journalists in return for favorable coverage. The practice of "gifting" journalists remains widespread also. Ibrahim recalled the example of when his \$12,000 camera was broken during the war of July 2006. He and three other journalists that lost equipment received money from a range of politicians to replace it all. "They gave the money with no conditions," said Ibrahim, saying he believed Hariri's Future Movement members had

paid the largest share. "It was a personal gift; we did not see their faces."

Festivals such as Eid or Christmas also mark times when journalists receive formal gifts from political figures. "Certain politicians have a budget for bribes. Depending on your rank and the media you work for, it could be a car or a laptop," said Haddad.

The acceptance of money and gifts is encouraged—some would say necessitated—by pay levels for journalists that do not meet average living costs. "Journalists are woefully underpaid," said Abu Fadil, though she added that pay scales for journalists tend to be higher than those of teachers and civil servants.

Average pay for journalists ranges from \$700 to \$800 per month—sufficient to afford an adequate apartment in central Beirut, but nothing more. Panelist Tracy Shaker Abu Antoun, Beirut correspondent for Iraqi Al Sumariya TV, said in order to earn a livable monthly salary, she works two jobs for Al Sumariya as well writing for magazines in Kuwait and Lebanon. She recalled refusing a politician's offer of money after she had interviewed him.

Ibrahim said that he is paid just \$35 for an article between 500 and 1000 words in *As Safir* and just \$6.50 for a shorter news item. He said he earns between \$300 and \$500 a month with *As Safir* and supplements his income taking photographs for Reuters and AFP.

These financial constraints reduce the ability of journalists to produce longer, exposé pieces. "There's never time to do investigations," said Ibrahim. "If a story takes more than one day, let alone three or four weeks, it will be a loss to me."

Economic pressure also results in the predominance of less expensive content, including political debate and entertainment. Political talk shows remain the fallback for channels on a budget, often eclipsing entertainment programming.

Panelists agreed that Lebanon remains a regional leader in the use of up-to-date technical facilities for producing and distributing media. Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation (LBC) is regarded widely as leading the way in technologically advanced entertainment programming, financed by healthy advertising revenues. Less established channels such as NBN and OTV have limited advertising revenue and resort to buying old foreign-made documentaries.

Niche stories, panelists agreed, are few and far between, though some media have broken taboos with features on abuse of domestic workers, prisoners' rights, and homosexuality. Abu Fadil said that journalists often confuse feature writing with investigative reporting due to a mistranslation of the term in Arabic.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Lebanon Objective Score: 2.51

Plurality of viewpoints is one of Lebanon's strong suits. MSI scores for plurality and access to news sources were in the range of near-sustainability. The output of independent news agencies and broadcasters is also nearing sustainability.

Most panelists agreed that transparency of media ownership is less robust. Though citizens are well aware of the major power holders behind various media, they have little recourse to find out names of shareholders and other investors.

Lebanon enjoys a plethora of different local media, some of it ranking among the best or most influential in the region. There are eleven leading Lebanese-run Arabic daily newspapers: *As Safir*, *An Nahar*, *Al Balad*, *Ad Diyyar*, *Mustaqbal*, *Al Anwar*, *Al Akhbar*, *Al Liwaa*, *Al Shark*, *Al Bayrak* and *Al Hayat*. The last is the leading pan-Arab daily, owned by a Saudi prince but founded by a Lebanese and largely edited by Lebanese. *Al Kalima* is the country's leading nonparty political weekly newspaper.

Lebanon has two French-language dailies in operation: *L'Orient du Jour*, and the newly published *Action*. The Armenian-language newspaper is *Souryakan Mamoul*, while in English there is the *Daily Star*. There are also several leading Lebanese economic and political magazines in English, including *Lebanon Opportunities*, *Monday Morning*, and *Executive*.

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.

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 sold daily within Lebanon. Many media observers believe that those figures are inflated. *Mustaqbal* records the highest circulation, as it is given away free across the country. Newspapers cost between LBP 2,000 (\$1.33) for *An Nahar* down to LBP 500 (\$0.33) for the smaller *Ad Diyyar*.

Lebanon has seven television stations: Future TV, owned by Hariri; Al Manar, run by Hezbollah; NBN, whose news channel is owned by Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri; Orange TV, owned by Christian opposition leader Michel Aoun and family; LBC, a Christian-run channel focusing on entertainment; New TV, considered relatively independent; and TeleLiban, run by the state. Murr TV, owned by Christian MP Gabriel Murr, is due to relaunch in 2009.

Several Arab satellite channels also broadcast from Lebanon under international license, including Iraqi-owned ANB, Al Sumariyeh, and Al Baghdadiyah; U.S. government-funded Al Hurra; Iranian-owned Al Alam; and Palestinian Al Aqsa. Satellite television access usually comes from a single subscriber pirating out access to channels to his neighbors for a fee. In central Beirut that is now \$20 a month.

There are 16 national radio stations broadcasting in Arabic, French, English or all three, and Armenian. Lebanon has 11 regional stations in operation. As well as owning TeleLiban, the government controls one radio station (Radio Lebanon) and two national news services: National News Agency and the Central News Agency.

Voice of Lebanon actively encourages its listeners to engage with foreign media, broadcasting live the Arabic programming of the BBC, Radio Canada International, and Deutsche Welle. International newspapers and news magazines are largely available only in Beirut, and sold usually a day or two after their publication date.

Israeli Web sites can be accessed freely. Internet prices start at just \$20 a month for a basic service and rise to \$100-plus for top ADSL or wireless access. Internet penetration has now topped one million and good coverage extends across the major port cities of the country and into the Palestinian camps. Only the most remote rural villages of the far north and south have yet to be covered.

Wireless access is still spreading through the suburbs of Beirut and out to the surrounding mountains, though it has yet to extend south of Sidon. Some observers say that Hezbollah has restricted the Internet in south Lebanon to cable because the wireless signal interferes with its own communication system.

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

*The launch of *Jasad*, an online and print magazine focusing exclusively on sexual and sensual subjects in Lebanon and the region, caused a stir, challenging deep-seated conservative values, even in Lebanon's outwardly liberal society.*

circulated. An increasing number of local, independent news agencies are distributing material through their Web sites. An Nashra is a daily political and economic bulletin produced by the Lebanese Company for Press and Publication. Blogs such as Felka Israel, Lebanon Files, Yukal, and Leewa serve various political interests and stir lively debate.

NOW Lebanon, an online newsletter of features and analysis in English and Arabic, began publishing in April 2007. Though it claims independent financing, its focus on the West's agenda in Lebanon and severe criticism of Hezbollah and the opposition have led many media professionals in Beirut to question whether it receives support from the U.S. government.

The launch of *Jasad*, an online and print magazine focusing exclusively on sexual and sensual subjects in Lebanon and the region, caused a stir, challenging deep-seated conservative values, even in Lebanon's outwardly liberal society.

There is one licensed 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.

Private radio and television are required by law to cover all Lebanese territory and should therefore be accessible to even remote areas. In practice, a number of radio stations only broadcast locally; for example, a station run by the Islamist Tawheed in Tripoli, which was temporarily shut down for operating without a license.

State media remain as little watched as they are influential, peddling bland fare and, in the words of Abu Fadil, "spending an inordinate amount of time reporting on government leaders."

Dozens of local 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.

“Media stations in Lebanon are not considered as independent economical and profitable projects, because they depend directly on political money. That’s why we cannot consider media content as independent,” Hamad said.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Lebanon Objective Score: 2.07

The media management score for Lebanon has slipped even closer to an “unsustainable, mixed system” rating, with many panelists expressing concerns over advertising revenues. Though panelists agreed generally that Lebanese media are run using professional business standards, the struggle to turn a profit amidst a declining advertising market means that those not supported by money from a political party are especially vulnerable to financial collapse.

In January 2009, the English-language *Daily Star*, founded in 1952, stopped printing for two weeks by court order after failing to pay interest on \$700,000 owed to a Lebanese bank. The paper returned to newsstands on February 2. A number of media observers said they believed the paper had received a cash injection from a Persian Gulf investor, probably from Kuwait, though no details were made public.

By contrast, LBC consolidated its financial base, completing a merger in late 2007 with Saudi-owned Rotana to become the

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.

Arab world’s leading entertainment channel. According to some panelists, the Christian-owned company benefits from close ties to the powerful Christian Shwayri family, who hold a virtual monopoly on sources of advertising in Lebanon.

Koteich mentioned the case of Murr TV, owned by Christian parliamentarian Gabriel Murr and shut down by security forces in 2002 after the station criticized the Lebanese government and its then-patron Syria. Koteich said that the relaunch of Murr TV is an example of the power of contacts. “Murr and Shwayri have a strong connection. It shows the connection between media and advertising in Lebanon,” he said.

Haddad said that his station’s revenues from advertising were down 25 percent in 2008. “With the poor state of Lebanese advertising, everyone’s losing money,” he said. “The cake keeps shrinking.”

Hamad, Shehadi, and Hassan Bakir, a Palestinian journalist for the Beirut bureau of *Wafa* news agency, all echoed the refrain that Lebanese media are not profitable enterprises and rely heavily on money from politicians or rich investors abroad, particularly the Gulf, to stay afloat. “Media stations in Lebanon are not considered as independent economical and profitable projects, because they depend directly on political money. That’s why we cannot consider media content as independent,” Hamad said.

Assi noted two stations that operate largely without needing to generate advertising revenue. He said that *Al Manar* is financed by Hezbollah, which in turn receives the bulk of its money from Iran; and Future TV is bankrolled by the Saudi-backed Hariri family.

Stations owned by less wealthy patrons, such as NBN (partially owned by Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri) or Christian opposition leader Michel Aoun’s OTV face a greater struggle in the marketplace. Newspapers have even more oblique sources of financing, relying heavily on outside investors rather than sales or advertising in order to stay afloat.

Government subsidies are not paid directly to media companies, but the link between the two is inescapable: several serving members of parliament and key members of the government own television stations and newspapers.

LBC and New TV were held up as examples of channels using primarily advertising for their business models, while *Al Balad* newspaper relies on distributing an advertising supplement to generate revenue. All three are generally considered editorially more independent because of this strong advertising base. As Abu Zahr pointed out, “More revenues from advertising might lessen the dependence on political sponsorship.”

Several panelists named Information International as the leading Lebanese source of market research. The company lists both *An Nahar* and *Al Anwar* newspapers as clients. Advertisers are considered more likely to conduct market research. Television stations might take straw polls, but only in neighborhoods predominantly allied to the owner of the channel. Ipsos and Gallup have conducted polls in Lebanon on behalf of media companies.

Lebanon remains without a central source for broadcast ratings or newspaper circulation figures. Total circulation of all the top dailies is estimated at most at 150,000, with many suspecting that those numbers are inflated. In April 2008, Saudi-owned *Al Arab* newspaper published results of a month-long survey of evening news audiences, finding that LBC attracted 32 percent of the audience, Al Manar took 24 percent, New TV 19 percent, Future News 16 percent, and Orange TV 9 percent. Unfortunately, the survey did not include figures on how many viewers the percentages represent.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Lebanon Objective Score: 2.09

This objective scored the lowest of all in this year's MSI objectives, underscoring the generally weak and ineffectual supporting institutions and the difficulty most journalists face in accessing a support network.

Panelists scored the indicators for trade and professional associations particularly poorly, reflecting the unanimous view that the publishers' syndicate and journalists' syndicate are run for the benefit of their immovable leadership rather than the common good. Abu Fadil spoke for many, describing the syndicates as "closed shops run by dinosaurs."

Panelists aired a range of grievances against both syndicates. Shehadi criticized the lack of opportunity to join, saying that new members are admitted only once every three or four years. Between 2003 and 2007 no new member was admitted to the journalists' union, panelists said. Describing the syndicates as mere "reception halls" rather than active unions, Shehadi said only 1,000 journalists are members, while 10,000 Lebanese journalists remain outside.

Not only are most journalists not members of the syndicate, but some syndicate members are not even journalists, according to Ibrahim. Members of the press syndicate in north Lebanon include engineers, lawyers, and a sweet shop manager, he said.

"Members are those who keep voting for the same presidents, thereby contributing to endless

Between 2003 and 2007 no new member was admitted to the journalists' union, panelists said. Describing the syndicates as mere "reception halls" rather than active unions, Shehadi said only 1,000 journalists are members, while 10,000 Lebanese journalists remain outside.

self-perpetuation," said Abu Fadil. "Occasional changes occur for board members, but the heads have not changed in decades. The heads and boards of these organizations wouldn't know bloggers or investigative journalists if their lives depended on it."

Of all the panelists, only Haddad had anything positive to say about the syndicates. "They do advocate for media independence," he said, but tempered his comments by adding, "being politicized, they are usually hardly efficient."

Foreign media, meanwhile, are becoming increasingly well organized through e-mail groups and regular meetings, even as government ministries tighten restrictions on their presence. Following the May formation of the new cabinet that gave opposition members veto power, the second half of 2008 saw a concerted effort by the Ministry of Labor to organize foreign workers, which includes journalists.

Before the new cabinet formed, journalists were free to remain in Lebanon on a three-month visitor visa, which could then be renewed by traveling out of the country. Foreign correspondents registered at the Ministry of Information are

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.

Of all the panelists, only Haddad had anything positive to say about the syndicates. “They do advocate for media independence,” he said, but tempered his comments by adding, “being politicized, they are usually hardly efficient.”

now required to obtain residency and a work permit through a lengthy and complicated process.

Several panelists noted an increasing number of NGOs supporting free speech and independent media. The Samir Kassir Foundation was formed after the assassination in June 2005 of the *An Nahar* columnist and author who had criticized Syria’s role in Lebanon, and acts as a watchdog for press freedom in Lebanon and across the region. The European Commission backs the annual Samir Kassir Award, open to regional journalists who advocate for freedom, democracy, and the rule of law.

The fledgling Media Association for Democracy Awareness provides some legal assistance to journalists, but overall has had little impact. Although a number of local NGOs and think tanks advocate for media freedom, most regular statements on the state of press freedom in Lebanon are issued by foreign observers, such as Reporters Sans Frontiers.

Colleges such as American University of Beirut (AUB), Lebanese American University, and Lebanese University (LU) offer journalism courses. State-run LU has offered a four-year journalism major since 1952, and Arab University has offered a major in journalism since 2007.

Many panelists said that they have taken some form of media training in Lebanon, which has aided their professional development. Assi participated in training workshops funded by the UNDP. Abu Antoun benefited from the Beirut-based Forum for Development Culture and Dialogue as well as training from Germany’s Friedrich Ebert Foundation. Other foreign organizations, including the Thompson Foundation, International Center for Journalists, and BBC World Service Trust, offer training to Lebanese journalists.

Ibrahim, on the other hand, said he struggled to find any training opportunities in north Lebanon, both as a reporter and a photographer.

“Short-term training programs are on the increase, but, sadly, many are one-offs and there isn’t enough sustainability,” said Abu Fadil, whose own AUB journalism training course launched in 2007 attracts students from across the region. She said that the most useful trainings focus on technical training in new media—an area of expertise that she feels is lacking in the country.

The panelists shared the general criticism that journalism training focuses too heavily on theory rather than practice. A number of media companies have attempted to address the imbalance. *As Safir* admits four new trainees each month for an eight-month, partially-paid training program, which is how panelist Shehadi joined the paper. *An Nahar* has one of the wider-reaching programs, bringing in students from schools and universities to produce youth-oriented supplements. Unfortunately, due to financial struggles, its twice-annual internships open to local and regional journalists stopped soon after the assassination of former editor Gibran Tueni.

Voice of Lebanon’s Haddad said his radio station is working on creating a post-B.A. journalism training school, but to date the station been unable to secure sufficient funding.

Lebanon has a number of outreach programs aimed at Palestinian journalists living inside the 12 Palestinian refugee camps. These professionals struggle to find work in a Lebanese society that refuses to grant them full citizenship rights.

Lebanon’s printing industry remains a regional leader and has largely avoided politicization and government interference. The country’s tiny size allows channels of distribution to reach even the most remote areas.

However, politics do affect some local broadcast distribution. In the Shia-majority, Hezbollah-controlled southern suburbs of Beirut, the owners of cable distribution systems have removed channels carrying Future News, owned by Sunni leader and political rival Saad Hariri. U.S.-financed Al Hurra and Saudi-run Al Ekhbariyeh are also banned. In response to May’s takeover of Sunni strongholds in Beirut, the predominantly Sunni city of Tripoli saw Al Manar and Christian opposition leader Michel Aoun’s Orange TV taken off the airways, a situation that had not changed by early 2009.

List of Panel Participants

Omar Ibrahim, correspondent, *As Safir* newspaper, Tripoli

Wadih Haddad, assistant general manager, Voice of Lebanon radio, Beirut

Magda Abu Fadil, director of journalism training, American University of Beirut, Beirut

Diala Shehadeh, Foreign Desk, *As Safir* newspaper, Beirut

Tracy Shaker Abu Antoun, correspondent for Iraqi Al Sumariya TV, Beirut

The following participants submitted a questionnaire but did not attend the panel discussion:

Moussa Assi, producer, New TV, Beirut

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

Nadim Koteich, executive producer and host, Future News, Beirut

Sawssan Abu Zahr, foreign desk, *An Nahar*, Beirut

Hassan Bakir, journalist for the Palestinian WAFA news agency, Beirut

Sami Hamad, editor, Media Information Services Office news agency, Beirut

Moderator

Hugh Macleod, correspondent, *The Guardian*, Beirut