

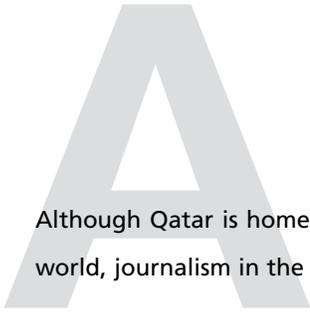
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QATAR



Although Qatar is home to Al Jazeera, one of the most respected and popular news stations in the Arab world, journalism in the country still has hurdles to overcome.

Qatar has an old and outdated press law on the books that is not enforced. However, self-censorship runs high in media companies, which hire many foreign workers who are often afraid of losing their jobs or being deported if they step on the wrong toes. Pay scales are low in journalism, a major reason why few Qatari nationals enter the profession.

The state owns all the radio and television stations in the country, which are heavily focused on entertainment.

Recent efforts to address issues facing the media in the Arab world, such as those undertaken by the Doha Media Freedom Center, are still in their early stages. Local media experts believe these institutions focus more on regional media than on local trends and problems.

Qatar's scores fell significantly this year as panelists returned more pessimistic assessments of several objectives. In particular, they took a different view than past panels on Objective 1, Freedom of Speech. Their score this year of 2.37, compared to 2.97 last year, reflects a more concentrated focus on the freedom of speech atmosphere as it relates to media focusing on issues in Qatar, rather than allowing more credit for the freedom given to regional media based in Qatar such as Al Jazeera.

# QATAR AT A GLANCE

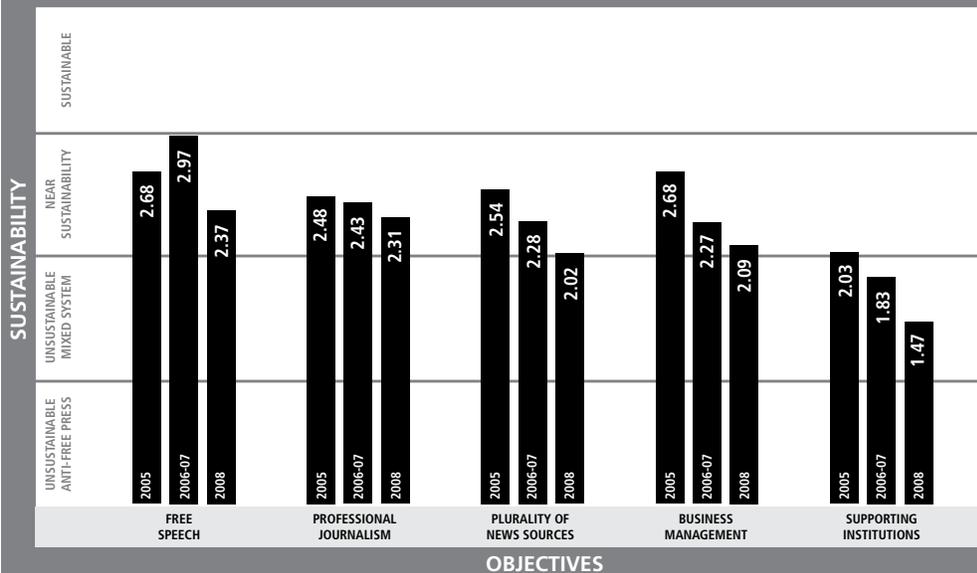
## GENERAL

- > **Population:** 833,285 (July 2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Doha
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Arab 40%, Indian 18%, Pakistani 18%, Iranian 10%, other 14%
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 77.5%, Christian 8.5%, other 14% (2004 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages:** Arabic (official), English commonly used as a second language
- > **GDP (2007-Atlas):** \$63.87 billion (*World Statistics Pocketbook*, United Nations Statistics Division)
- > **GNI per capita (2007):** \$72,794 (*World Statistics Pocketbook*, United Nations Statistics Division)
- > **Literacy rate:** 89% (male: 89.1%, female: 88.6% (2004 est., *CIA World Factbook*))
- > **President or top authority:** Amir Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani (since June 27, 1995)

## MEDIA SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 15 (6 newspapers, 9 magazines; Radio: 1 main station; Television: 3 main stations)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** The total circulation of the main five daily newspapers is about 100,000 copies per day; top 3 by circulation: *Al Raya* (private, 18,000 daily), privately owned *Al Sharq* (15,000 daily), and privately owned *Al Watan* (15,000 daily). The two largest English newspapers are *Gulf Times* (18,000 daily) and *The Peninsula* (Arab Press Network & Carnegie Endowment).
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** State-owned Qatar News Agency (QNA)

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: QATAR



### 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

### Qatar Objective Score: 2.37

The presence of Al Jazeera in Qatar has mitigated the government's interference with freedom of the press even though the country has a press law on the books. MSI panelists said the outdated 1979 Press and Publishing Law is in contradiction with modern media projects, such as the government's launch of Al Jazeera and the Doha Media Freedom Center. In addition, panelist Ahmed Abdul Malik, a writer and former editor-in-chief, pointed out that in stark contrast to the press law, Article 47 of Qatar's constitution guarantees freedom of expression.

While the press law is not enforced, government censors do hold journalists accountable for observing certain titles and the size of certain pictures.

Panelists said the print media seems to enjoy a wider margin of freedom than the official news media. However, panelists have been surprised that the radio program *Good Morning, My Beloved Country* was given a broad margin—with on-air telephone calls—in criticizing government institutions without any censorship. Panelists said they believe Qatar's officials listen to this program on a daily basis. Radio programs cannot, however, criticize the emir or the royal family.

Quality Internet access is easily available to all citizens. However, web sites that contain nudity or other socially offensive content are blocked by QTel's filtering software, which holds exclusive telecommunications rights in Qatar.

As far as who can receive a license for and own a media outlet, panelist Nasser Hussain from the Gulf Organization for Industrial Consulting believes media projects are similar to other start-up projects—they need an influential connection in the government to move the project through an array of government red tape. But there are no tax restrictions in the media market. Imports of paper, ink, and printing presses for printing houses are tax exempt, in addition to the absence of a value-added tax.

Panelists said crimes against journalists are rare. However, journalists have been dismissed by their newspapers because the newspaper believed they did something wrong. And the government has suspended newspapers. *Al-Sharq* newspaper was suspended when it published, without obtaining prior authorization, an extra issue the day Iraq occupied Kuwait. The managing editor of an English-language newspaper was dismissed after the paper published a caricature concerning God.

The government's public media agencies, such as the Qatar News Agency and Qatar Radio and Television, generally receive preferential treatment for news access. These agencies often send delegations to accompany state officials on trips abroad.

Libel is a crime under the Penal Code in Qatar and more than 10 cases are pending. Criminal cases involving journalists are rare in Qatar's court system. However, an editor may be called to the police station for the simplest of reasons. Issues are usually settled either through a fine or by publishing an apology in the form of praise for the entity previously criticized.

Hussain said few journalists go to trial because there are very few Qataris who work in the media. Foreigners, who make up the bulk of the journalists in Qatar, are often dealt with by deportation, as was the case with a Palestinian-Jordanian journalist who worked as a translator at the Gulf Consulting Organization. Qatar's Interior Ministry requested he leave the country even though no direct charges had been made against him. Some media observers attributed his expulsion to the tense Jordanian-Qatari political relations at the time. There has been another instance where a foreign editor was expelled without trial or direct charges.

Panelists said the trend in other countries to have a media spokesperson in every government department does not exist in Qatar. There is total media reliance on the Qatar News Agency with relation to the release of political news and information. There is no reference in the constitution or the press law to the right to access information, making it

#### 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.

possible for officials to reject calls for interviews and deprive the press from accessing specific documents and information.

There are no laws that restrict journalists from seeking news from global sources. Newspapers' sources include international news agencies, the Internet, and satellite channels.

As reported last year, anyone who is at least 21 years old is allowed to enter the media profession and, in fact, Qatari nationals are often encouraged to do so. This is the case despite article 10 of the 1979 press law stipulating that a license must be issued by the Ministry of Information before entering the profession. Given that this ministry was dissolved years ago, this article remains inapplicable.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

### Qatar Objective Score: 2.31

Panelists agreed that the skills of journalists in Qatar are not as good as those in neighboring Gulf States. Qatar allows non-nationals to work in the mass media, and expatriates hold many journalism jobs, including senior administrative positions. These foreign journalists exhibit varying levels of professionalism, with some more qualified than others. Some journalists come to the country with the objective to deliver aggressive reporting, but they become more conservative over time for fear of losing their jobs.

Panelists said they believe professionalism in the media will remain unchanged until Qatari journalists take the initiative to enter the media world and dedicate themselves to real change. They said it is unreasonable to expect expatriate journalists to be enthusiastic about change in a foreign

#### 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).

country. This is particularly true in light of the risk they face from agitating for change.

Some businesses and institutions, such as the *Al-Sharq* newspaper, are trying to introduce Qatari journalists to training and professional development, as well as offering special awards in the training courses, but few Qatari journalists have applied to attend the classes.

When it comes to professional ethics, panelists said many institutions give gifts to journalists, and some are accepted. Panelists said they know of cases where journalists obtain rewards from government agencies in exchange for not criticizing an agency or agreeing to focus on their achievements.

Abir Jaber, who came to Qatar in 2006 to head *Al-Arab* newspaper's entertainment department, said that while the press law is not enforced, self-censorship is alive and well. Abdul Malik agreed, adding that it is very easy for editors to reject an article without giving the writer any specific justification. And, since the majority of journalists in Qatar are foreign nationals, many feel they will lose their jobs, or be expelled from the country, if they do not censor themselves.

Key events are covered in general, but key local events receive coverage that is circumspect so that elements that might be seen as critical are muted. Newspapers focus on many social issues in a clear and extensive way. However, the media refrains from addressing some issues, such as the Al-Murrah tribes that were expelled to Saudi Arabia after having problems with the state. Another issue ignored by the media is problems suffered by religious minorities. Even Al Jazeera, which addresses minority issues such as Copts in Egypt, ignores the problems suffered by Shiites in Qatar, the panelists said.

Panelists said that issues of professionalism are intertwined with salary. Before the issue of professionalism can be tackled, the persistent issue of low journalism salaries must be addressed. Qatari graduates prefer government jobs because journalism salaries are low and unattractive. Young professionals also do not accept journalism jobs because they do not have the same perks as government jobs, such as government-sponsored loans and land to build a family home, in addition to promotions and other allowances.

On the other hand, panelists said Al Jazeera has a highly professional workforce and that its journalists are highly skilled. Al Jazeera owners offered high salaries to attract and retain qualified personnel from BBC Arabic after it closed down. Panelists agreed that Al Jazeera gave more weight to high-quality work and efficiency rather than the nationality of its employees. It also established training and continuing-education programs at the Al Jazeera Journalism Training Center as a way to retain and enhance the skills of its workforce.

In terms of balancing news and entertainment in the local media, panelists said Qatar Broadcasting Service radio and Qatar TV fall short of what they could be. They said entertainment is emphasized over serious programming, adding that most spending is earmarked for entertainment programming.

Technologically, Qatar's news collection, production, and dissemination facilities and equipment are state-of-the-art. Moreover, print media production has evolved thanks to the introduction of computers, thus eliminating the old cut-and-paste production technique.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

#### Qatar Objective Score: 2.02

Some panelists believe the absence of political parties in Qatar ensures all media outlets share similar viewpoints. The same goes for radio and television political reports that only present the government's position, they said. Panelists believe Al Jazeera refrains from presenting political or even local reports related to Qatar, thus eliminating what could be a different perspective for Qatar residents.

Readers find the content of most newspapers to be fairly similar, but there are differences related to staff nationalities. Because expatriates constitute a major proportion of media workers in Qatar, news coverage of each country differs from one newspaper to another based on the number of newspaper workers and executives working at the paper from particular countries.

#### 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.

Abdul Malik believes all of Qatar's residents can access press publications due to their high income. Residents of small villages can also access media sources fairly easily because the country is so small.

Foreign media is available and subject to very little control. Subscriptions to television channels are mostly free with the purchase of receivers that cost no more than \$200, and different types of satellite dishes available in the market. Public use of the Internet is still relatively limited compared to radio and television.

Panelists believe the media's insistence on continuing its role of preserving values and traditions in Qatari society reduces exposures to various points of view. Existing state-owned media, such as the Qatari News Agency and the radio and television stations, do not offer discussion or opinion programs that might criticize the government. As mentioned above, *Good Morning, My Beloved Country* is a rare exception.

State and private media outlets use news services such as Reuters, Associated Press, Agency France Press, ArabSat news, and Gulf news agencies. There are no independent local news agencies.

Radio mostly produces its own programs while importing a small percentage of foreign Arab programming. Local programming in television is limited. However, these channels are not independent of the government, and their points of view are, as mentioned above, hardly divergent from government policies.

As reported last year, it is relatively easy to access information about the shareholders of the private publishing companies operating in the country. Ownership is largely limited to a small group of individuals, some of whom are closely affiliated to the royal family and have significant influence in the country.

Columns and editorials in newspapers reflect the nationalities represented on the newspaper staff. Newspapers also cover the activities of communities to which a majority of their workers belong—sometimes even more than Qatari activities. Panelist Mohamed Saleh Mohamed Al-Rabia said this also helps increase newspaper sales among various non-Qatari Arab communities.

Panelist Rabia noted that *Al-Sharq* newspaper, which also publishes the Al Jazeera English newspaper, as well as publishing newspapers in other languages, including a Nepalese and a Malay newspaper, has financially and commercially benefited from its special attention to non-Arab communities.

## OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

### Qatar Objective Score: 2.09

Abdul Malik believes most private media are commercially profitable, although newspapers do not have to disclose their financial positions. These companies appear to make large annual profits, develop their buildings, and are able to diversify their publications. Hussain said Qatar is witnessing unprecedented economic growth that is boosting media revenue. Abdul Malik said *Al-Sharq* newspaper distributed one month's salary in profits to workers for the first time in its history, an action unprecedented in Qatari press.

Yet other panelists questioned how profitable newspapers really are. They pointed out that *Al-Arab* has reported that it suffers financially and may reduce salaries. State-run media outlets reportedly were not able to earn high profits, because, panelists believe, they were not seriously searching for outside funding.

In broadcasting, Al Jazeera's management is viewed as more efficient compared with the operation of Qatari television and radio stations. However, panelists believe income at Al Jazeera lags behind other local media. Hussain said that Al Jazeera depends on state funding for about half its budget.

The bulk of the media's funding now comes from advertising; the government does not provide private outlets with any subsidies as it did 10 years ago. Some government ministries and state institutions provide advertising for commercial bids and receive positive coverage of their news, as well as privileged positioning in some newspapers, in exchange for the advertising.

#### 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.

Panelists believe the press needs to diversify its sources of income, since subscription and newsstand sales are small due to the country's small population. Panelists pointed out that three magazines have halted publication during the past few years because of their inability to attract enough advertising. They pointed to a positive model in the newspaper *Al-Sharq*, which has started exploring new sources of income by diversifying into commercial printing and training journalists for a fee.

There are three advertising agencies in Qatar that belong to influential figures in the country. Major Qatari companies, such as banks and oil companies, actively sponsor television and radio programs. Advertising agencies like the print media because the agencies believe it is more effective than outdoor or broadcast advertising. With a literacy rate of nearly 90 percent, the printed word can potentially reach a large audience. Many advertising sheets are distributed for free with newspapers or in distribution centers in malls.

State-run and private media do not rely heavily on market research. Circulation is measured through a French company based in Dubai, which collects information from distribution outlets and print operations. Advertisers, however, do not seem to be influenced by this research, although research results are published without censorship.

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

### Qatar Objective Score: 1.47

Qatar has not given any consideration to creating a journalist syndicate or writers union. Journalists have no protections if they face problems with the newspaper they work for or if they were to be taken to court. There are professional associations for physicians, engineers, and lawyers, but they are new and Qatari society is not used to these kinds of organizations.

A request was submitted six years ago to establish a journalists' association, but panelists did not know exactly why the government did not allow its formation. Some believe it was because a new press law was being considered at the time. Hussain attributed the delay to the fact that most of Qatar's media personnel are expatriate Arabs who are members of their countries' journalist unions.

Panelists said that the National Commission for Human Rights might be the only relevant body to back freedom of the press. It is a government-funded, quasi-independent organization. Hussain said that the commission tries to support human rights issues, including freedom of the press. The Doha Center for Freedom of the Media and the Arab Association for Democracy were established in 2008 and, according to the panelists, are still unproven. Those two groups focus more on

violations of freedoms abroad and monitoring the conditions of journalists subjected to harassment.

Hussain summed up the matter by saying that most press problems in Qatar can be solved if there were an increase in the number of Qatari nationals in the profession. "I think the biggest challenge is the lack of national cadres, without whom conditions of the press will not improve in Qatar," he said.

Outside of the Al Jazeera Journalism Training Center, journalism education is limited, and many of those who have studied journalism do not end up working as journalists. Qatar University Media Department graduates usually go into government jobs; no more than 25 percent work in the media field.

#### 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.

## List of Panel Participants

**Kamal Ali Zein**, general manager of information center and journalist, Doha

**Ahmed Abdul Malik**, writer and former editor-in-chief, Doha

**Mohamed Saleh Mohamed Al Rabia**, writer and journalist, *Al Watan*, Doha

**Abir Jaber**, head, *Al Arab*, Doha

**Nasser Hussain**, networking and institutional chair, Gulf Organization for Industrial Consulting, Doha

**Abdul Jabbar Hays**, writer, *Al Watan*, Doha

## Moderator and Author

**Abdul Wahab Aloraid**, journalist, media consultant, Gulf Forum for Citizenship, Riyadh

*The Qatar study was coordinated by, and conducted in partnership with, Gulf Forum for Citizenship, Muscat, Oman.*