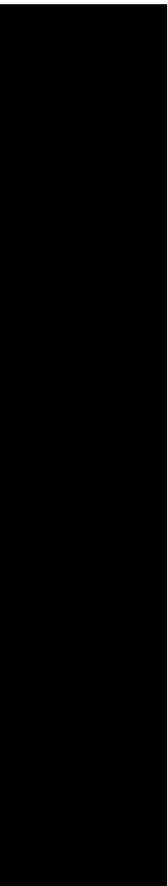

The country's overall economic progress did not improve the outlook for journalists, either. They continue to draw low salaries and suffer from poor economic security—in a country that is faring better overall as a result of the improving security situation and the rising price of oil, which provides more than 97 percent of the state budget revenue.



ALGERIA

D

During 2009, Algeria's presidential election lacked any semblance of suspense. Algerians expected all along that President Bouteflika would win another term after 10 years in office (1999–2009). President Bouteflika prepared for this third term by ensuring that the constitution was amended to allow him to nominate himself for a third term; previously, the limit had been two terms.

Unlike the political situation, characterized by total inertia, the economic and social situation underwent many changes—including some improvements. Official data from the National Office of Statistics indicated that the economic growth rate went up a few percentage points compared to 2008, and the unemployment rate dropped slightly. Yet, improvement in the economic indicators did not prevent many protests and demonstrations over social issues, such as housing crises and unemployment in some parts of the country.

The country's overall economic progress did not improve the outlook for journalists, either. They continue to draw low salaries and suffer from poor economic security—in a country that is faring better overall as a result of the improving security situation and the rising price of oil, which provides more than 97 percent of the state budget revenue. In other respects as well, the media landscape changed little during 2009, the 20th anniversary of the opening of the print media sector—but not in television and radio, as the government continues to refuse to allow competition in the broadcast sector. The government now exerts far more overt control over broadcast media than in the early 1990s, when the sector had at least a degree of openness.

The scores awarded by the MSI panelists express the state of media and political stagnation that has characterized Algeria for years. The panelists criticized not only the public media, but also the private printed press, which has not shown any improvement over the past few years despite the large number of titles. Advertising now represents the bulk of the media outlets' income, and the private press has started to come under pressure from advertisers and advertising agencies.

As in the 2008 study, the 2009 panelists focused on what they view as the dichotomy between theoretical freedoms and professional obligations stipulated by Algeria's legal and constitutional framework and the realities of an adverse environment and poor professional practice. This year, the overall MSI score fell noticeably, as only Objective 1, Freedom of Speech, managed a slight increase. All other objectives remained static or lost ground; Objective 3, Plurality of News, suffered the most dramatic drop, losing nearly half a point.

ALGERIA AT A GLANCE

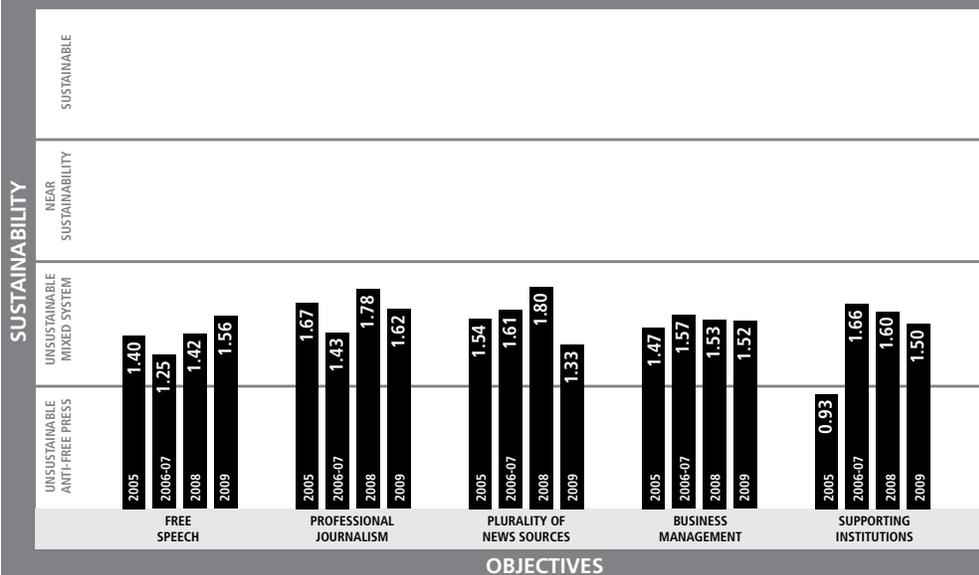
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 34,586,184 (July 2010 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Algiers
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Arab-Berber 99%, European, less than 1% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Sunni Muslim (state religion) 99%, Christian and Jewish 1% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** The overwhelming majority of Algerians speak Arabic and Amazighi, the two national languages according to the 2002 Constitutional Amendment. French is widespread and used in major cities and in administrative and economic management.
- > **GNI (2009-Atlas):** \$154.2 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **GNI per capita (2009-PPP):** \$8,110 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **Literacy rate:** 69.9% (male 79.6%, female 60.1% (2002 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Abdelaziz Bouteflika (since 28 April 1999, *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:**
Print: 65 daily newspapers and dozens of weeklies; Radio Stations: 3 national Radio Algeria channels and 2 specialized channels (cultural and Radio Koran), and 43 local radio stations, most in Algeria's provinces.
Television Stations: 5 state-owned channels including a religious channel and an Amazighi language channel.
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** 364 million (www.pressreference.com)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Algerian News Agency (state-owned)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 4.7 million (2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: ALGERIA



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

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

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2): Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

Near Sustainability (2-3): Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media. Advances have survived changes in government and have been codified in law and practice. However, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism and the media business environment are sustainable.

Sustainable (3-4): Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives. Systems supporting independent media have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Algeria Objective Score: 1.56

Panelists expressed plenty of concerns surrounding the legal climate for the media, although the score showed minor improvement compared with last year. Within this objective, panelists delivered the lowest scores to indicator 2, which assesses the fairness of the broadcast licensing process. Indicator 7 (access to public information) also scored low; both indicators fell within the unsustainable, anti-free-press category (under a 1.00). On the other hand, indicators 8 (media access and use of international and domestic news sources) and 9 (free access to the journalism profession) both scored noticeably higher than the objective score, by a point and three-quarters of a point respectively.

Kamel Amarni, journalist at *Le Soir d'Algérie* French-language daily newspaper and secretary-general of the National Union of Algerian Journalists (SNJ), said that although Algeria's legal framework has protected the freedom of the press since April 1990, the law is not always effective and is sometimes violated. As evidence of this, he pointed to questions about the allocation of advertising, the handling of applications for licenses for new newspapers, the failure to open up the broadcast sector, and the failure to establish a high media council with qualified members. A professional high media council is needed, he said, to issue press cards to journalists and establish a functional, professional ethics council.

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.

Mohamed Laageb, professor of communication at University of Algiers, added that although journalists are prosecuted occasionally, the sentences are usually light, and in his view are designed mainly to restrain and intimidate the press.

Samia Belkadi, a journalist at *Djazair* ("Algeria"), shared Amarni's view that Algeria's media sector displays many contradictions. Although it has an outward appearance of freedom of speech, the reality does not match—and the private press, which might be described as independent, is in fact in thrall to advertisers. The press cannot carry out any reporting that does not appeal to advertisers. As a result, understandably, the press has set its own tripwires that it rarely crosses, in the form of self-censorship.

According to Mustapha Bouchachi, a lawyer and professor at the Faculty of Law at the University of Algiers and chair of the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights, legal and social norms in Algeria generally do protect and promote free speech—with the exception of certain extremist groups. Mohamed Laageb, professor of communication at University of Algiers, added that although journalists are prosecuted occasionally, the sentences are usually light, and in his view are designed mainly to restrain and intimidate the press. However, Bouchachi said that Algeria's political institutions act outside the framework of the law and obstruct the freedom of expression, thus freedom of speech is not guaranteed.

The watchdog organization Freedom House agreed, as expressed in its 2010 report on press freedom in Algeria. It noted that a state of emergency established in 1992 remained in place throughout 2009, "...allowing the government to legally penalize any speech deemed threatening to the state or public order. A 2001 amendment to the Press Law further restricts press freedom by criminalizing writings, cartoons, and speech that insults or offends the president, the parliament, the judiciary, or the armed forces."

The government subjects the Internet to only very limited censorship—applied mainly to the websites of certain religious extremists advocating or justifying violence.

There was broad consensus among the panelists that indicator 2 (broadcast licensing) deserves low scores, given the government's ongoing monopoly over the broadcast sector. Furthermore, while the print sector enjoys greater openness,

Algerian law does require a license granted by the Ministry of Justice to establish a newspaper—and last year’s panelists said that the granting of these licenses also is politicized. As Laageb explained, authorities grant licenses to applicants illegally, as the applicable law stipulates “notification” to open a print outlet rather than “application for a license” issued under political direction.

As noted in last year’s MSI, the media are not subject to any special tax rules—media enterprises are treated in the same way as any other business.

Crimes against journalists have almost ceased following the improvement in security in Algeria since 2000. No journalists have been reported killed in the course of conducting their work since 2001; prior to then, Algeria regularly topped the list for incidents of violence against journalists. However, some intimidation of journalists persists. For example, CPJ reported that two Moroccan journalists were harassed and detained for four days in September 2010 because of their attempts to cover the refugee crisis related to the disputed Western Sahara territory. Additionally, Freedom House’s “Freedom of the Press 2010-Algeria” report noted that authorities banned three French-language publications the day before the April 9 presidential election.

Considering whether state or public media receive preferential legal treatment, the panelists agreed that public newspapers are clearly treated preferentially—as are certain private newspapers that the regime favors. They receive licenses quickly, benefit from public advertising, and are granted facilities by the government printing houses. They also receive preferential distribution through public companies.

Journalists are often prosecuted for libel, as reported by last year’s MSI panelists, and libel is punishable with imprisonment. Although prison sentences against journalists are not carried out in many cases, Freedom House reported that “a number of sentences for defamation were handed down during the year, involving both fines and prison time.”

On access to public information, the panel generally agreed that some public information is available, but several topics are off limits. Journalists do not have access to information related to the security situation, for example. Hacene Ouali, a journalist at the French-language daily *El Watan*, said that the public authorities refuse to give media professionals comprehensive information about their activities.

Souad Mekacher, journalist and correspondent at *Sawt Al-Ahrar*, added that some journalists face additional technological difficulties in accessing public information if they work away from their newspapers’ headquarters, because regional working conditions are comparatively poor.

Relatively high scores for indicator 8 (media outlets have unrestricted access to international news and news sources) reflected the panelists’ strong agreement that the availability of Internet access, the easy access to international news from Europe, and the prevalence of a foreign language (French) allow media rely on international news sources in their reporting. Still, media exercise a certain amount of caution before citing international reports that might be seen as overly critical of the Algerian government.

Panelists also gave relatively high scores to the indicator measuring the ease of entry into the journalism profession. The law does not require journalists to obtain licenses to practice journalism, although they are required to have a permit to cover government events. In the Algerian case, in light of the deteriorating social and symbolic value of the journalism profession in Algeria, the high score awarded by the panel carries a negative connotation, actually—it is too easy to become a journalist, many panelists expressed. As the journalism profession is experiencing functional instability and a deterioration of working conditions, it is not a preferred profession, and veteran media professionals are jumping ship into other professions—harming media development in the long term.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Algeria Objective Score: 1.62

This objective’s score fell slightly this year, mostly due to lower scores in indicators 1 (objective and well-sourced journalism), 2 (ethics), and 5 (pay levels for media professionals). Most indicators scored relatively close to the objective score;

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).

however indicator 5 lagged behind by about three-quarters of a point while indicator 7 (modern facilities and equipment) exceeded the objective score by about the same amount.

According to Mohamed Bouazdia, a journalist and editorial secretary for *El Khabar's* daily edition, the Algerian press is experiencing a real and unprecedented disaster in terms of respect for professional ethics and technical standards. However, Kamal Zait, a journalist and the editorial director of *El Khabar's* weekly edition, disagreed; he expressed the belief that the Algerian media are moving closer towards professionalism, although they lack experience. Panelists also traced low-quality, unprofessional journalism to poor salaries and working conditions for journalists—a point that found consensus among the panel members.

Bouchachi concurred that most journalists do not comply with professional standards, and some newspapers provide only shallow events coverage. Also, some political, security, and financial powers use newspapers to mislead the public or to embarrass others in the regime and in political and economic decision-making centers, forcing journalists to transgress professional standards. Further, according to Bouchachi, some journalists have ideological tendencies that put them beyond the pale of professional ethics and standards.

The 2008 panelists noted that a council of ethics is in place, organized by the SNJ, but agreed that journalists largely ignore the council's decisions.

Amarni commented on violations of professional and ethical standards in light of changes experienced in the media landscape in recent years. Over the past decade, the number of newspapers and magazines—dailies, weeklies, or other periodicals—have increased exponentially. Mostly, he said, the aim of the new titles is to make a quick dinar for zero investment. Predictably, this draws in increasing numbers of inexperienced journalists that fail to meet standards of professionalism, lack the required level of training, and compromise the standards of journalism in the Algerian media.

On self-censorship, Sebti Ouali, a journalist at *Liberté*, agreed that the degree of control that advertisers hold frequently forces journalists to censor their own work. Algerian journalists are therefore under pressure from two sides: first, the public authorities, which control the sources of advertising together with politicians and the judiciary; and second, the domestic and international private-interest owners, who also provide advertising and might object to unflattering coverage of their activities.

Hacene Ouali said that in light of the political climate against freedom of expression, journalists often practice self-censorship—which he said is attributable to the poor

Bouchachi concurred that most journalists do not comply with professional standards, and some newspapers provide only shallow events coverage.

financial and economic situation of many newspapers. The panelists agreed generally that self-censorship in Algeria is associated with journalists' economic situation—including their poor salaries, and the poor financial condition of media institutions—but some pointed out that self-censorship is a result of poor training and education as well.

Regarding coverage of key events and issues, panelists agreed that "security news" is still inaccessible to Algerian journalists, despite the improved overall security situation. The journalists noted also that it is sometimes difficult to present any news about certain officials and public figures. The situation differs among various institutions and legal sectors, however. At least some independent newspapers have relatively broad freedom in addressing many topics, compared to journalism in the public sector. This is true with public television in particular, and to a lesser degree in public radio.

Belkadi expressed the view that within the radio community, freedom to address different issues varies among stations. French-language Channel 3 usually displays more freedom and delves into greater detail on the issues it raises, compared to the more formal Arabic-language Channel 1. She attributed the difference to the economic situation of the journalists themselves rather than that of their employers. It is difficult to talk about professionalism in journalism in Algeria, she remarked, when journalists receive such poor remuneration that their economic and social status—or lack of it—puts them at the mercy of whoever pays more than \$500 a month.

Among the panel's media professionals, there was a clear consensus on the topic of salaries for journalists. Ouahiba Ammari, speaking as an Algerian public television journalist, said that salaries are humiliatingly low. Zait, however, speaking as an editorial director, said that although journalists' salaries are indeed still so low as to force some journalists into taking bribes and writing articles to order, such cases remain the exception, not the rule.

Many journalists and the academics on the panel disagreed; Laageb commented that Algerian journalists lack professionalism and fail to comply with the professional and broader societal rules in their media work. The social and professional conditions of journalists are not

Hacene Ouali commented that while some print outlets try to provide readers with an objective and credible medium, the leading media institutions—television in particular—only broadcast programs about the government’s activities, without giving the opposition or civil society organizations equal column inches or airtime.

encouraging, and even push them in the direction of even less professional conduct.

In terms of the balance between news and entertainment, the panelists stated clearly that the amount and quality of news programming is poor compared to the entertainment programs offered.

The indicator assessing the strength of facilities and equipment received the highest score under this objective. During the discussion, Leila Gueloula, an Algerian public radio journalist, and Ammari expressed their view that equipment is of reasonable quality. Mekacher, speaking as a print media journalist and correspondent, countered that the same is not true in her area. Journalists lack the necessary conditions and facilities to conduct their work, she said, and highlighted in particular that many media outlets need proper regional offices. The opinions expressed by these panelists reflect the significant difference between the resources made available to the leading public media outlets, and even some private media, and other outlets with much weaker standing.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Algeria Objective Score: 1.33

The government’s direct control of broadcast media stifles plurality of news, and this is reinforced by indirect control over many print media. This year’s score dropped, and all indicators received lower evaluations by the panelists except for indicator 2 (citizen access to media). None of the indicators scored particularly well. Indicator 1 (plurality of sources and viewpoints) scored relatively high, but less than a 2.00. Indicator 2 (citizen access to news) was the only indicator to score higher than a 2.00, and exceeded the objective score by more than a point. Indicators 3 (objectivity of state media) and 5 (private media produce their own

news) both scored three-quarters of a point lower than the objective score.

While the government’s control over the broadcast sector affects MSI plurality scores, news sources are numerous and diverse—largely because of the rich options in print. Amarni said, however, that the radio and television media field is closed to newcomers, so plurality and diversity of news sources is not guaranteed within Algeria.

Most of the panelists agreed that citizens have free access to media, and panelists provided high scores for the indicator measuring that principle. Distribution of foreign print publications is permitted with very few isolated exceptions, and in any case, usually such publications can be accessed on the Internet. Amarni noted that Algerians have growing options in new media platforms as well, as Internet access is almost unrestricted—and the same applies to foreign television channels.

As for the state media’s reflection of the political spectrum, the panelists agreed largely that Algerian public radio and television serve only the interests of the political powers in government and exclude almost all other opposing opinions, except during the official election campaigns that occur every five years. Hacene Ouali commented that while some print outlets try to provide readers with an objective and credible medium, the leading media institutions—television in particular—only broadcast programs about the government’s activities, without giving the opposition or civil society organizations equal column inches or airtime. Laageb concurred that the public media do not reflect the social and political spectrum.

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.

Laageb also underlined the total absence of independent news agencies as well (although Zait noted that Algeria has one small agency specializing in economic matters). Hacene Ouali agreed that the official news agency remains under the total control of the government, and Bouchachi went further, saying that the news monopoly practiced by the official news agency and state television obstructs journalists' right to access information. On the other hand, the state's monopoly has helped render private newspapers more credible than the public press, which settles for official sources of news. Radio and television serve up the news in the same way—that which serves the regime best.

The sheer absence of private radio and television stations left panelists with no choice but to give a low score under the indicator assessing the in-house production of news by private media, as the broadcast sector is effectively a closed shop to independent broadcast media.

Laageb said that ownership of private print media outlets lacks transparency completely. With the emergence of so many private newspapers over the past few years, concerns about the transparency of media ownership are growing. According to some panelists, the ownership and funding sources of private newspapers are not transparent at all; especially as often these outlets are founded by businesspeople from outside the media sector. Today's opacity stands in contrast to the experience of independent journalism that emerged in the early 1970s, when media figures that had built solid reputations in the media sector were behind the growth.

Zait, however, disagreed: he said that ownership is transparent to some extent because all newspapers are owned by individuals, except for some new newspapers owned by companies, and the facts of ownership are not a secret.

Minority languages are represented somewhat in the media. Algeria has several radio stations broadcasting in various Tamazight languages—including Bejaya and Tamanrasset radio—and the newly established Tamazight-language television channel, which went on the air in 2009. However, Zait expressed disappointment that on the whole, most media outlets adopt a national approach in terms of their coverage, given the lack of regional media.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Algeria Objective Score: 1.52

The score for objective 4 remained unchanged this year, and all indicators scored close to the objective score.

According to Amarni, only four or five newspapers in Algeria are managed well, with the rest dependent on public advertising that is granted to them depending on their editorial lines.

Hacene Ouali expressed the general view among the panelists: Since the experience of Algerian independent media is still thin, spanning just 20 years, most media outlets have not yet managed to achieve stability and success in economic and financial terms. The reality is that only a few media outlets enjoy any kind of independence, he said. Bouchachi was more positive, saying that some media outlets, such as *El Watan* and *El Khabar*, are indeed independent, and over time could become what would be considered sound businesses able to withstand outside shocks. These publications own their own printing houses, and have managed to establish successful distribution companies that deliver many Algerian dailies.

According to Amarni, only four or five newspapers in Algeria are managed well, with the rest dependent on public advertising that is granted to them depending on their editorial lines. But Zait, for his part, disagreed. He said that most media outlets are well-managed businesses that generate enough profit to allow editorial independence; however, he conceded that some outlets are influenced heavily by advertisers that often interfere with editorial policy.

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.

Most of the panelists reaffirmed that the government still holds sway over the printing houses. However, they described a relatively recent, timid emergence in the private sector: printing houses owned by the independent El Khabar and El Watan.

Advertising remains newspapers' key source of income, with a significant increase in advertising from both the international sector and the domestic private sector. Advertisers include the automobile industry, telecommunications companies, and a number of food production companies.

However, the state remains in control of more than a third of media advertising, and governmental publicity and advertising is a major component of advertising overall. The government still allocates advertisements to newspapers based on their loyalty. The National Institute of Advertising dominates the distribution of government-sponsored advertisements, without answering the calls from journalists and media owners alike for greater transparency. Government advertising generates significant income for selected media outlets, and panelists noted that income could affect their orientation, editorial lines, and independence. Bouazdia concluded that the advertising market in Algeria is driven by political considerations: quite simply, only those who support the regime get the advertising.

Government advertising, as currently allocated, is the key source of indirect subsidy to private as well as public media outlets. The government provides another type of subsidy through its printing houses. Out of political considerations, print companies can be lenient towards some newspapers and not to others in terms of payment.

Objective 4's lowest rating went to indicator 7 (broadcast ratings, circulation figures, and Internet statistics are reliably and independently produced). The panelists said circulation and audience figures are not transparent, and the numbers that many newspapers and broadcast outlets claim are questionable, especially as no independent polling institutions work in that field in Algeria. Zait confirmed that no reliable data exist to confirm the circulation figures or total readership numbers put out by the print press.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Algeria Objective Score: 1.50

Objective 5 received a slightly lower score this year, mostly due to lower scores in indicator 4 (academic journalism programs) and indicator 6 (unrestricted access to printing facilities). These lower scores were mitigated somewhat by an increased score for indicator 3 (supporting NGOs). All indicators scored close to the objective score, except for indicator 1 (trade associations), which lagged behind by half a point.

Trade associations representing media owners and managers have disappeared largely from the Algerian media scene, barring occasional statements concerning events in the media sector. Such trade associations are compromised by the strong degree of competition between media outlets. The cultural divide between Arabic-language and French-language newspapers hampers solidarity further.

The picture for professional associations is not much brighter. Amarni, speaking as secretary-general of the SNJ (which, he stressed, is an independent organization), said that the state provides no help to the union, and in fact it tries to rein in SNJ's work. However, a union affiliated with the General Union of Algerian Workers emerged recently, and panelists said that the union is trying to address issues on behalf of the profession.

The panelists said that NGOs play a slightly stronger role. Laageb said that several human rights organizations in particular provide services to the journalism profession. Others countered that these NGOs do not provide enough assistance, given their close relationship with the regime.

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.

Bouchachi disagreed, speaking as the chair of the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights. He pointed out that some newspapers in Algeria that have reached a level that could be described as professional and have become financially independent nevertheless receive subsidies from civil society organizations and even political parties.

Concerns about the quality of educational opportunities for journalists generated much discussion among the panelists. Most professed low confidence in the quality of programs available to media students at the government-run University of Algiers and other teaching institutions. The large number of media college graduates whose qualifications on paper exceed their abilities compromises the accomplishments of all. Laageb said that although the university plays a key role in training, its efforts fall short for a number of reasons.

Some panelists raised the issue of the generally poor English and French language skills of Algerian media students, saying that the University of Algiers appears to have stopped producing media students fluent in foreign languages. The problem affects French-language media in particular; increasingly, they are obliged to take on language graduates as journalists. Low scores for the related indicator reflect Mekacher's view that the training that Algerian universities offer to media students is inadequate. She also expressed the belief that media outlets open their doors to students who are still waiting to receive their professional qualifications.

Although panelists assessed the strength of short-term training programs slightly better, this indicator still scored fairly low, in the unsustainable, mixed-system range. Gueloula said that from her own personal experience, the Algerian Radio Institution offers a large number of training courses to improve media personnel's performance levels. Usually, such training courses are delivered in cooperation with European and other international institutions that either take on journalists for training abroad or send trainers to Algerian institutions.

Most of the panelists reaffirmed that the government still holds sway over the printing houses. However, they described a relatively recent, timid emergence in the private sector: printing houses owned by the independent *El Khabar* and *El Watan*. They are dwarfed by the government printing houses but are operating as small businesses. The panelists did point to loosening restrictions on foreign trade, and this is allowing private printing houses to obtain paper on the international market directly, rather than go through public bodies.

Many of the panelists expressed the belief that media distribution in Algeria is mostly apolitical and unrestricted. The private sector has come to play a central role in distribution, at the expense of the previously dominant public sector. Amarni said that media distribution is independent, often subject only to commercial logistical problems.

List of Panel Participants

Samia Belkadi, culture editor, *Djazair News*, Algiers

Kamal Zait, journalist and editorial director, *El Khabar*, Algiers

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

Mohamed Bouazdia, journalist and editing secretary, *El Khabar*, Algiers

Ouahiba Ammari, journalist, Algerian Public Television, Algiers

Leila Gueloula, journalist, Algerian Public Radio, Algiers

Souad Mekacher, journalist, *Sawt Al-Ahrar*, Tizi Ouzou

Mohamed Laageb, professor of communication, University of Algiers, Algiers

Mustapha Bouchachi, lawyer; professor of law, University of Algiers; chair, Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights, Algiers

Hacene Ouali, journalist, *El Watan*, Algiers

Sebti Ouali, section editor, *Liberté*, Algiers

Abdelkrim Hammouche, director, Public Printing Press, Algiers

Moderator and Author

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