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EGYPT

Egypt experienced many events in 2009 that affected the freedom of expression and freedom of the media. The political situation in Egypt, along with the Israeli military action in Gaza, heavily shaped the experience of journalists, bloggers, and media specialists.

Although serious attacks on journalists were rare, court cases against journalists and cases related to violations of publishing bans drew concern from the media and the public. Several bloggers received particular attention from the state security and judiciary and were detained or handed jail sentences; some claimed to have been beaten by police. Regarding the legal framework, journalists point to the lack of an access-to-information law as a persistent roadblock to progress.

In other respects, the press enjoys unprecedented freedom. MSI panelist Fatmah Samir Rizk, an Egyptian Television News reporter, said that there has been a major shift in the media field in the past 10 years, with the emerging satellite networks, independent newspapers, and news websites compromising the regime's control over the media and causing the state-owned media to retreat. Space has opened for the independent media and the satellite channels to attract readers, listeners, and viewers. Some of these media report critically from different viewpoints, demonstrating the obvious momentum for change generated by modern and advanced technologies. The Internet provides Egyptians with greater, more affordable access to news, with about 63 newspapers and magazines online.

Egyptian media were not immune to economic concerns in 2009. The third edition of the Dubai Press Club's Arab Media Outlook: 2009–2013<sup>1</sup> pointed to an increasing number of Arab-language newspapers but falling sales in the four most important media markets in the region—including Egypt. The report noted that the international economic crisis has dampened Arab economies, including the media industry, leading to a fall in advertising revenues of around 14 percent in 2009, and the closure of a number of newspapers, including the Egyptian *El Badeel*, just launched in 2006. Still, from a regional perspective, Egyptians bought with the highest frequency—with 93 percent buying newspapers more than once a week, 33 percent buying daily, and 12 percent buying from four to six times a week. The report highlighted Egypt's thriving newspaper industry, with some of the oldest newspapers in the world, and several independent newcomers that launched following the success of *Al-Masry Al-Youm*.

Egypt's overall score suffered a setback of three-tenths of a point, compared with 2008. While Objectives 1 (freedom of speech) and 2 (professional journalism) remained roughly unchanged, Objectives 3 (plurality of news), 4 (business management), and 5 (supporting institutions) all lost significant ground. On balance, the Egyptian media sector is one of the most pluralistic and sophisticated in the Middle East; at the same time it is often subjected to the side effects of—or actively participates in—partisan bickering. Media that are willing to push the envelope of objective or critical coverage often walk a fine line.

<sup>1</sup> "Arabic Media Outlook: 2009-2013." Dubai Press Club, 2009. available in English at <http://www.fas.org/irp/eprint/arabmedia.pdf>

# EGYPT AT A GLANCE

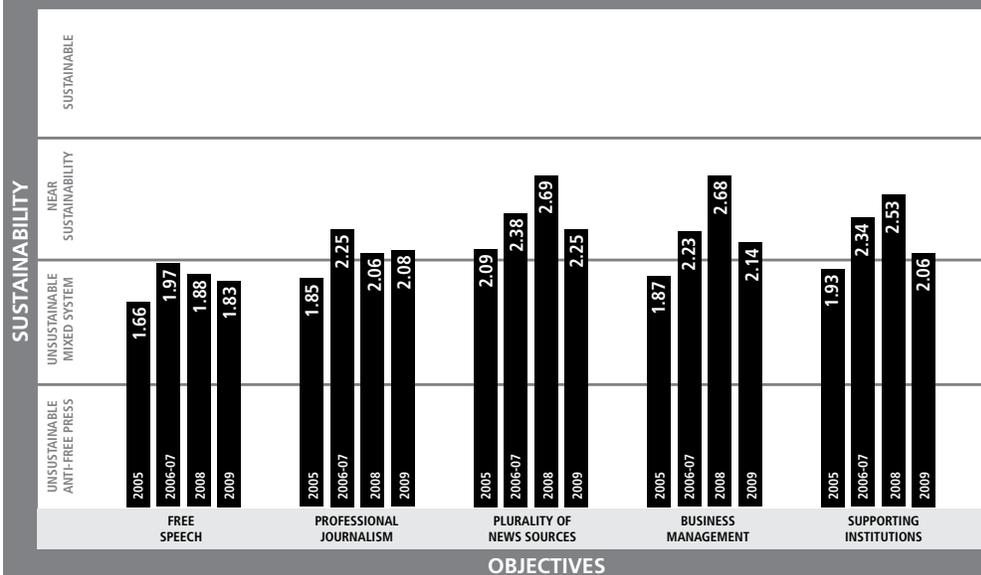
## GENERAL

- > **Population:** 80,471,869 (July 2010 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Cairo
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Egyptian 99.6%, other 0.4% (2006 census)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim (mostly Sunni) 90%, Coptic 9%, other Christian 1% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages:** Arabic (official), English and French widely understood by educated classes (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2009-Atlas)** \$172 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **GNI per capita (2009-PPP):** \$5,680 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **Literacy rate:** 71.4% (male 83% female 59.4%) (2005 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak (since October 14, 1981)

## MEDIA SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 18 primary newspapers and periodicals; Radio: 59; Television Stations: 98 ([www.pressreference.com](http://www.pressreference.com))
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** 5.3% of households subscribe (2004 *Egypt Human Development Report*, UNDP 2008)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Middle East News Agency (state-owned)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 20 million (2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: EGYPT



**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

### Egypt Objective Score: 1.83

The score for this indicator remained almost identical to last year. Only one indicator showed much change: indicator 9 (free access to the media profession) suffered a lower evaluation from the panelists. Further, all of the indicators received scores quite close to the objective score; only indicator 8 (media use of foreign news reports) showed any deviation with a score about three-quarters of a point higher.

While many aspects of media law in Egypt are harmonized with international human-rights standards, obstacles to freedom of expression remain in Egypt, with deep-rooted restrictions both inside and outside press establishments. Article 47 of Egypt's constitution guarantees the freedom of expression, granting all individuals the right to express their opinions verbally, in writing, by photography, or by any other means within the limits of the law—upholding self-criticism and constructive criticism as guarantees of the security of the nation's structure. Furthermore, Article 48 guarantees the freedom of the press, printing, publication, and the mass media and prohibits censorship or the use of administrative means to warn, suspend, or ban newspapers. Limited censorship may, however, be imposed in accordance with the law on newspapers, other publications, and mass media if the authorities deem public safety or national security threatened.

#### 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.

*Ismail Al-Eskandrany, a reporter and blogger for the Al-Sharq Al-Awsat news website, echoed these concerns, noting that in practice no newspaper, printing facility, or media outlet could be licensed without security approval.*

Mervat Ezzat, a journalist with *Al-Ahram*, agreed that the Egyptian constitution ensures the freedom of expression and opinion. Moreover, the articles of the law on intellectual property and copyright are in keeping with international law, in particular the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. According to Hanan Fekry, assistant editor-in-chief of *Watani*, the degree of freedom in the expression of opinion has expanded. Rizk agreed that the law does ensure enough freedom for journalists to perform their jobs but said that such freedoms are not unlimited. In her view, the press impacts the individual, society, and the regime, and therefore, unlimited freedom could lead to chaos.

Hany Farouk, a journalist for *Nesf El-Donya*, said that although the law supports the freedom of expression for journalists, his professional experience in the Egyptian press sector has taught him to interpret the meaning of freedom of expression as a code of ethics to prevent libel and conflicts of interest, and also not to allow advertisements in the guise of news. According to Farouk, all press organizations, whether governmental, private, or party-related, should consider the meaning of freedom of expression carefully to reach a point of agreement regarding the desired degree and nature of freedom of expression. Nevertheless, panelists observed expanding freedom in the print media, compared with state-owned radio and television outlets. Asmaa Esmat, a journalist for the opposition daily *Al-Ahram*, expressed her belief that government and civil-society organizations have already adopted and provided the appropriate atmosphere for freedom of expression.

Abd-Allah Abu El-Hamad, manager of the department of special programs at Radio Aswan Ganoub El Sa'eed and editorial director of Aswan's *Al-Manar El-Araby*, said that the state issues licenses for print media as well as radio and television stations, despite the relative freedom of expression that could be used for critical news at newly licensed outlets. The Supreme Press Council issues print media licenses, while the Egyptian Radio and Television Union grants television and radio broadcast licenses. According to some panelists, the Supreme Press Council licensing procedures are fair and competitive. Adly said that the Ministry of Information

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grants licenses according to the laws in force, and in his view licensing procedures are fair in view of the freedom granted the private media in Egypt, and to private satellite channels in particular. He expressed the belief that some legal requirements should be met before licenses were granted, in order to prevent manipulation.

However, other panelists disagreed with this assessment. According to Shady Abd Al-Kareem, executive manager and specialist in freedom of expression at the El-Hak Center for Democracy and Human Rights, despite the constitution's assurances of a free press, in fact it is extremely difficult to obtain licenses—and additional financial restraints hamper newspaper publishing. Currently, the retained capital qualification for producing a daily newspaper is EGP 1 million (\$175,000), and the minimum for other regular periodicals is EGP 250,000 (\$45,000).

El-Hamad said that some journalists have found that they can obtain newspaper licenses from other countries, but not from Egypt. Ismail Al-Eskandrany, a reporter and blogger for the Al-Sharq Al-Awsat news website, echoed these concerns, noting that in practice no newspaper, printing facility, or media outlet could be licensed without security approval. Indeed, some sources said that even talk shows had to be approved by security organizations.

In addition, the media bear a heavier tax burden than other businesses. As a public service, newspapers used to be tax-exempt, but recently the authorities have begun to treat private newspapers as businesses—subjecting them to an expensive 20 percent tax. Previously, advertising—the financial mainstay of the newspapers—had been taxed at 36 percent, but a few years ago the rate was reduced to 15 percent. However, no further tax reductions are in sight. The taxes imposed on media outlets differ according to the medium; newspapers pay lower taxes than Internet service providers, while broadcast media pay the highest taxes in the media sector.

Regarding crimes against journalists, Al-Kareem said that attacks on media professionals declined in 2009. The attacks mostly targeted bloggers and were connected to their political work rather than their press work, in his view.

In several ways, the state-owned public media outlets enjoy preferential treatment under the media legislation. In practical terms, government media personnel face far greater ease than their counterparts in private media organizations, whether in terms of accessing information, meeting sources, or gaining access to significant receptions, conferences, and meetings. In addition, private and party-owned newspapers do not benefit from any tax breaks, while the state-owned public media outlets do.

Libel remains a criminal offense, and journalists bear the burden of proof. Although prison remains a legal option in defamation cases, no prison sentences have been handed down recently—a fact attributed to the strength of media and rights-based lobbies. Still, Fekry called for imprisonment in libel cases to be abolished and replaced with fines. There were many examples of the growing degree of freedom afforded the press and journalists recently, such as a case brought against Ibrahim Eissa for writing about the president's health. The case had been brought by the State Security Police on September 28, 2008, and originally, Eissa received a six-month sentence. The criminal court later amended the sentence to two months, and ultimately the president pardoned Eissa in October 2008.

Again this year, many of the panelists expressed deep concern over the ongoing lack of a freedom-of-information law and the practical barriers to access to information for Egyptian journalists. A bill drafted to address the problem has not been passed. Journalists face serious difficulties obtaining information from the state, and even civil-society organizations, in a transparent manner.

Fekry said journalists' access to information is not sufficiently supported even though Egypt had signed the international conventions in that regard. Nagwah Ali Ibrahim, a media specialist with the Horticultural Export Improvement Association, said that some public figures used their influence to block the release of information of public interest. According to Hussam El-Din El-Amir, head of the civil-society section for *Nahdet Misr*, the constitution may ensure the freedom of the press and expression in accordance with the relevant international conventions—but the lack of access to information is the major problem facing journalists in Egypt, leading to unnecessary mistakes. Mohamed Ref'at Al-Yemeny, administrator of online news website MenGate.TV and a reporter for the website BoswTol, added that for private or party-owned newspapers, accessing some information is as difficult as accessing military secrets—a problem that is

undermining the careers of many journalists. Meanwhile, the state-owned public media can far more easily tap public information, meet with relevant officials, or gain rapid access to news. Readers can see clearly that information is more available to journalists from government newspapers.

The Internet, however, is helping to equalize the field. Panelists reported no restrictions on accessing world news, thanks to the Internet. Some newspapers provide Internet service at special prices, and no laws govern access to publications in foreign languages. Still, although the Internet improved access to news for journalists, legal procedures ban publishing reports on some of those issues.

Panelists reported no specific restrictions on journalists covering any events in 2009, or on joining journalism schools and colleges. Political interests and the government do not interfere in the recruitment of journalists. However, the Egyptian Union of Journalists imposed a number of constraints on the registration of new members, and members enjoy numerous financial and legal privileges relative to their unregistered colleagues.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

### Egypt Objective Score: 2.08

Principal concerns that dominated the panel's discussion of Objective 2 included the media community's ongoing failure to actively observe the journalists' Code of Ethics, the effect of the absence of legislation ensuring the right of the journalist to access information on professional standards, and low salaries.

The degree of adherence to professional standards varies depending on the type of newspaper, whether government-owned, independent, party-owned, or online. Generally speaking, while the panelists expressed a range of views on the topic, they believe that most journalists are trying to abide by professional quality standards, but face many obstacles in the process—and as a result, standards are slipping. For example, some journalists backed away from in-depth reporting on certain issues for fear of legal action and the resulting risk of imprisonment or fines, while some editors allowed businesspeople the freedom to control the editorial policy of their newspapers.

Rizk agreed that Egyptian journalism does not meet professional standards in the editorial process; she pointed to coverage of the murder of Heba Al-Aqaad and Nadine Khalid Gamal as a glaring example. In that criminal case, Rizk said, every newspaper reported the facts differently and without proper attribution.

*According to one panelist, errors have become so prevalent among radio and television presenters and reporters that correct language is becoming the exception rather than the rule.*

Other problems the panelists underlined include the frequent failure to conduct adequate background research or check facts, a tendency to present just one point of view, and serious deterioration in the use of language. According to one panelist, errors have become so prevalent among radio and television presenters and reporters that correct language is becoming the exception rather than the rule. Subeditors and proofreaders often do not have the computer skills to deal with texts rapidly enough to meet strict deadlines for going to print or on the air. Ezzat pointed out that there are journalists in Egypt who meet professional standards of quality in terms of their writing, but they are defeated by the challenges of finding accurate sources and information.

According to Al-Eskandrany, the major problem in improving professional standards is twofold: the poor practical training opportunities for journalists and media specialists, and the failure to provide the right atmosphere to maintain professionalism. In terms of training and qualifications, there is a mismatch between the academic qualification and professional practical reality, not only because most journalism and media students gravitate toward other fields after graduation, but also because media organizations do not require new recruits to have the proper qualifications.

#### 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).

*Self-censorship is not only a political phenomenon; it is also associated with organizational and individual financial interests.*

Consequently, the theoretical qualifications become useless when graduates join more profitable sectors, and at the same time many press outlets hire unqualified personnel—and do not invest in training them up. Mohammed Saeid, an economic reporter with the Saudi News Channel, also expressed concern that given the absence of training departments at media outlets, the journalism profession includes many people with no academic or practical training.

Al-Kareem noted some additional problems: political biases, a lack of observational and field research skills, and the challenge of tapping relevant sources absent access-to-information legislation. Still, he has observed improvements among independent newspapers in the past several years and hopes to see the trend extend to other newspapers. Rania Salem, a journalist with *Al-Musawar*, pointed to the emergence of private print and radio outlets that compete for readers and listeners to support her argument that press establishments meet professional standards of quality to a great extent. The publication of *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, *El Badeel*, *Al-Sherouq*, and *Al-Dustour* created momentum that impacted positively on the journalistic development of most other daily newspapers.

Fekry also praised some of these independent newspapers for providing a degree of impartiality, and she observed that in the past couple of years, the satellite news channels and other programs, such as *Al-Aashera Masaan*, *Al-Tabaa Al-Oula*, and *90 minutes*, have reported critically from different viewpoints, demonstrating the obvious momentum for change generated by modern and advanced technologies. However, overall, she said that journalism does not meet professional quality standards, and she believes that poor editorial policy and a lack of resources among newspapers are the major reasons for the failure.

In terms of press ethics, the panelists noted that journalists must refrain from libel and from contempt for any religions, races, nationalities, sects, and ideologies, or for the advocates thereof. Journalists must not be subject to political, business, or other lobbies, and they must be able to openly differentiate between proper press material and paid advertorials. Some panelists shared their view that newspapers should respect the privacy of individuals and refrain from discussing personal matters. However, according to the panelists, most Egyptian newspapers do not abide

by the Egyptian journalists' Code of Ethics. Esmat cited the example of a businessman who provided a newspaper with funding through an annual advertising contract in exchange for not talking about him or his problems with the government. The panelists observed that many reports seem designed to either stir up or marginalize public opinion.

Self-censorship is pervasive; the panelists believe that it is a common practice by journalists and editors-in-chief. Self-censorship is not only a political phenomenon; it is also associated with organizational and individual financial interests. Many editors practice self-censorship, either out of fear or in pursuit of their personal interests. Additionally, press establishments in Egypt and in many Arab states have adopted a number of policies and restrictions in accordance with the political and economic interests of the state, which essentially constitute censorship.

Some panelists, though, view self-censorship in a positive light when it pertains to refraining from reporting on sensationalist topics—noting that there are matters recognized to be off-limits and red lines that should not be stepped over. However, recently, they perceive that fewer things are off-limits and there are fewer red lines.

Egyptian journalists consider low salaries one of the biggest problems facing journalists in Egypt even though the Union of Journalists provides them with financial allowances. Salaries for print journalists are much lower than the salaries of television and radio professionals. The problem bleeds into many other indicators. It affects ethics, as many journalists say they are forced to write to order for politicians and businessmen to get money to raise their social standing. It also impacts professional standards, as many of the most experienced journalists are compelled to take on second jobs, diluting their focus. Although poor salaries are not usually taken as a reason to abandon the journalism profession, it has long been a reality of the field. However, with modern advances in the media and the increasing number of satellite channels and programs, many newspaper journalists are trying to enhance their incomes by making programs for the satellite channels, writing for other Arab newspapers, or serving as program presenters.

El-Amir noted that the council of the Union of Journalists tried to establish standards for journalists' salaries by setting up a committee on the issue. The union attempted to set a minimum wage appropriate for the profession. Still, journalists' salaries remain poor, and many journalists suffer, especially those working for the opposition-party newspapers and some private newspapers. As a result, consumed by financial stress, many journalists resort to taking on advertising or commercial work—sacrificing their impartiality and professionalism.

On the other hand, Adly said that there had been an obvious rise in the salaries of journalists and other media professionals working on the most popular programs. He attributed the increase to the number and length of advertisements, as many journalists and media specialists could be paid high salaries if program ratings went up.

Regarding the balance between news and entertainment programming, news programs, such as *Al-Aashera Masaan*, *90 Minutes*, and *Misr Elnaharda*, remain very popular in Egypt. However, overall, sports programs get more airtime than political programs, and entertainment programming eclipsed all—in both television and radio. According to some panelists, the media have become a means to make money for many journalists and editors-in-chief as well as newspaper owners, with an increased focus on commercial and entertainment media and advertising, rather than on issues of vital importance that deserve coverage and discussion.

In terms of journalists' access to modern facilities and equipment, the capabilities of media establishments, especially their production capacities, differ from one outlet to the next, depending on their budgets. Some newspapers have superb facilities with modern, high-tech equipment, while others have headquarters based in apartments and offices, with little more than computers, printers, and paper to work with. Yet, Ibrahim said that journalists must be educated in order to get the most out of the technology, improve their efficiency, and develop and maintain a competitive edge.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

#### Egypt Objective Score: 2.25

Egyptians have an ever-growing selection of media to choose from. Media consumers are more capable now of following societal issues than in the past; they might even find out the truth by comparing the many media outlets, especially with the growth of the Internet and satellite media. Egypt is currently witnessing an unprecedented breakthrough in presenting social problems, particularly through satellite, as citizens eagerly await certain programs on Egyptian satellite channels, such as *Al-Aashera*, *Masaan*, or *90 minutes*.

The latest Arabic Network for Human Rights Information report on the press, issued in 2009, estimated that nearly 5,500 journalists are registered with the Union of Journalists, and licensed newspapers and magazines totaled about 160 toward the end of the year. In 2009, the Internet provided Egyptians with greater, more affordable access to news, with about 63 newspapers and magazines online. By the end of

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2009, eight radio stations broadcast across Egypt on medium and short wave as well as FM. An "external" radio station, Radio Cairo International, broadcasts on short wave in 33 languages, and Sout Al-Arab (Voice of the Arabs) broadcasts in Arabic to Europe and the Middle East. In addition, there is Nile FM, a private radio station broadcasting Western pop music; Nogoom FM, also private, broadcasting Arabic pop; and Radio Misr, part-owned by the Egyptian Radio and Television Union, which broadcasts news and music. Radio stations dedicated to covering local communities are largely absent from the Egyptian media landscape.

The panelists said that it is extremely difficult to list Egypt's various media outlets accurately, given the pace of growth in plurality. Nevertheless, clearly, the majority of such outlets are concentrated in greater Cairo and a few other cities. Even though broadcast and print media cover broad geographic areas, the way media outlets are fed with news and information content needs improvement.

#### 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.

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*However, most of the official media—state-owned television, radio, and newspapers—take the side of the regime, but at the same time they offer opportunities for other political forces.*

Salem said that the diversity of media outlets meets the interests of most of the public. Other panelists expressed concern that the plurality comes at the expense of quality. Al-Kareem also noted an imbalance in coverage of local governments; the centralized media, produced in the capital, Cairo, cover the news of the state and public policy, with large numbers of reporters working in the various governorates. However, their news coverage of local communities is limited, except in the event of serious accidents or issues of obvious general public interest, while the local media, in the districts and governorates, are left to cover local news but lack the staff and resources to do so well.

People in rural areas have far less choice of print media, compared with their urban counterparts; furthermore, their incomes are too low to buy newspapers regularly. Before the emergence of open media, the Internet, and the various satellite channels, smaller cities and villages were deprived of news and information, whether domestic or international. Media and their sources were not independent of Egyptian state policy, with the exception of the opposition press. This has changed. Fekry commented that the Internet breakthrough is impacting the demand for printed newspapers as well; many people unfamiliar with printed newspapers use the Internet. She also suggested that rural and underprivileged areas, and Upper Egypt, could benefit from something she has seen in other countries: public screens providing news in squares and parks. She added that it would help prevent people from circumventing the law and hooking up illegal satellite connections.

Although the Egyptian authorities do not restrict access to Arab, foreign, and international media outlets, the impact of such media outlets on the development of Egyptian media content is still limited. On the use of the Internet as a news source, generally speaking, there are no restrictions anywhere in Egypt, and costs are affordable. Adly noted that no websites have been banned or blocked to date, indicative of the degree of freedom of expression in Egypt. Furthermore, panelists cited no affordability or other restrictions on television or satellite channel subscriptions. Subscription costs are low, and the government does not block any foreign media stations.

The rise of talk shows also dominated the Egyptian media landscape. By presenting important topics and encouraging direct audience interaction, this format helps viewers exercise their freedom of expression. In both print and broadcast media, Egyptians enjoy great openness in the extent of audience outreach.

Some panelists said that the programs offered by state-owned television differ from those broadcast by private media structures, but nevertheless, the Egyptian state media fail to present all points of view. There have been serious attempts in that direction—opposition programs are aired through the Egyptian satellite channels, and national television does air segments that criticize the government and present the viewpoints of various parties and the opposition. However, most of the official media—state-owned television, radio, and newspapers—take the side of the regime, but at the same time they offer opportunities for other political forces.

Adly disagreed; in his opinion, the government-owned media outlets try to maintain a social-interest dimension, in contrast to the private media—which he considers driven by commercial and financial interests and focused on rapid financial returns. He believes that the state-owned media offer more educational programming. According to Rizk, though, the official media focus on the government's activities and swings between flattery and criticism, sending viewers to privately owned Egyptian and Arab channels, such as Al-Mehwar, Al-Hayat, and Dream.

There are no independent news agencies. According to Adly, the news agency provides news in a fair, unbiased, and apolitical manner. Pointing out that just one agency, the state-run Middle East News Agency, exists to supply newspapers, El-Amir said that the Egyptian media are not completely independent of the regime. However, Egyptian media outlets also report news from global news agencies that freely circulate news.

According to the panelists, there are many television outlets capable of producing their own news programs. Al-Yemeny said that the private media often produce their own programs with content that differs from that of the programs presented by the government. For example, recently he prepared a morning radio program that included a news brief and spoke in opposition to some of the government's policies. The Egyptian media mostly produce their own programs and do not rely on buying outside material or reports, with few exceptions. Currently, channels may produce any programs they desire. At the local level, although the panelists pointed to abundant production of local news reports, the quality does not match programs created by the larger, central media outlets.

For the most part, private media owners are unknown to citizens. There are no laws or regulations governing such ownership or obliging owners to reveal their names or identities. Although private media outlets do not exactly refrain from disclosing their ownership structures, their agendas still dominate the editorial policy of the media outlets they own.

Regarding coverage of minority issues, minority newspapers are available to all in Egypt and are on sale in the streets. Nevertheless, certain social issues are not addressed by the media outlets in general, because they violate social traditions and norms. As for minority languages, the panelists acknowledged that it is difficult to dedicate programs and segments to them because they are all languages without a standard written form—unlike minority languages in other Arab states, such as Tamazight (Berber). Most important, however, the cultural issues of the minorities are marginalized, with insufficient coverage of topics of importance to minorities. Furthermore, there are no talk shows in minority languages, and minority speakers are rarely cited as sources, except in the event of disasters.

#### **OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT**

### **Egypt Objective Score: 2.14**

After the media market had been restricted to government newspapers and media outlets for many years, the independent press and private networks have recently started to prove their capability as successful profit-generating businesses. Salem said that it became evident that the private media outlets supported themselves without government assistance when many newspapers went out of business in the aftermath of the economic crisis. According to Al-Kareem, the management strength of media outlets varies, depending on how they are governed: the state-owned media are managed as governmental organizations, while private organizations, often managed in a similar fashion by their owners, are not always so different. Al-Yemeny shared his view that many private media work hard to make a profit and show a high level of professionalism in their business management.

Salem added that their very survival proves that some media outlets are well-managed. Editorial independence, she commented, is harder to confirm, because in all media outlets worldwide, the degree of separation among owners, managers, and editors varies from one outlet to the next. Al-Eskandrany noted that it is common in the small and medium-sized television channels, and also in the non-daily newspapers, for the commercial and political interests of the owners to be directly linked to the editorial side, where

*Al-Ahram, majority owned by the Egyptian government, is the strongest newspaper in terms of advertising. With a structure in place for identifying market needs continuously, the organization boasts the largest circulation and demands the highest advertising rates.*

professional standards are often lacking. Indeed, many such outlets were established precisely to serve such commercial and political interests directly. The television networks, major channels, and the private daily newspapers reveal a more indirect association between content and the interests of their owners and media personalities, according to the panelists.

Farouk noted that the independent media outlets have become successful businesses, as reflected in the broad expansion in, and plurality of, such outlets.

Private media—print, radio, and television—rely on financing from their owners as the principal source of funding. Advertising revenue is the second most important funding source, followed by copy sales for the print media; subscription revenue is shrinking, while advertising and sponsorship show the biggest gains. None of these sources provide a guaranteed funding stream, however, and they have proved insufficient at keeping some private newspapers alive. Also, the law prohibits joint-stock companies, which is

#### **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.

*Furthermore, advertising departments in media houses generally lack the required awareness of the benefits of market research and proper techniques in conducting surveys.*

how most big newspapers are incorporated, to accept grants, donations, or sponsorship. That gives advertisers leverage to affect editorial policies.

Some media outlets, especially newspapers, are creating websites to reach the constantly expanding pool of Internet users.

Esmat noted that advertising has become the cornerstone of any press establishment's sustainability. *Al-Ahram*, majority owned by the Egyptian government, is the strongest newspaper in terms of advertising. With a structure in place for identifying market needs continuously, the organization boasts the largest circulation and demands the highest advertising rates.

The panelists noted that the procedures for advertising on local radio and television are complicated: advertisers must go to Cairo to sign contracts because the local stations have no capacity to handle financial matters locally. That drives away small local advertisers and has led to sole reliance on centralized commercials that are distributed to local stations to be broadcast.

Media directors depend heavily on advertising; Ezzat observed that it is a key source of revenue in the budget of any media establishment, print or broadcast. Some companies have even dedicated special channels to advertising.

The government subsidizes state-owned newspapers, but other than providing benefits in the form of advertising or grants in the form of tax breaks, it does not give subsidies to national press establishments. Adly shared his opinion that because the owners of the independent networks are businesspeople, they do not need government or other subsidies. Ezzat said that media outlets do receive subsidies—whether internal or external, government or foreign—and are strictly censored, especially the opposition newspapers.

For the most part, the media community has not invested in market research and opinion polls. Only a few businesspeople, with businesses not concentrated in the media field, have ventured into market research and feasibility studies. Small and medium-sized media businesses often believe they cannot risk laying out the cost of such studies, for fear of losing their investments if the survey

results fail to support their planned projects. Furthermore, advertising departments in media houses generally lack the required awareness of the benefits of market research and proper techniques in conducting surveys. Within very tight limits, a few media outlets have conducted market research and have used it to formulate strategic plans. However, most of the people conducting market research lack the necessary skills or experience, leading to distorted, unreliable results about the needs of listeners and viewers, and failing to meet the unique cultural needs of the people in each district.

El-Hamad commented that the state-owned media also do not conduct market research on audience needs—a decision that ultimately, he believes, negatively affects its message and consequently the financial value of its product. El-Amir commented that in addition to the failure to use market research in their strategic planning, most newspapers, especially the state-owned outlets, lack the technical staff to formulate marketing strategies.

Egypt does not have an official organization that produces circulation figures or broadcast ratings, and the numbers provided by the media outlets themselves are often viewed with suspicion. Major companies collect broadcast ratings figures, but the Egyptian market holds a dim view of their value for three reasons. First, the widespread use of illegal satellite hook-ups leads to inaccurate electronic readings, with a limited number of receivers working around the clock to serve entire residential areas. Second, field surveys do not necessarily cover all the geographic areas actually covered by a particular broadcast. Third, the major advertising companies preferred to hold on to their money, relying on marketing slickness to court advertisers rather than spending their money on surveys. Furthermore, managers at such channels tend to ignore the results of ratings and circulation figures.

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

### Egypt Objective Score: 2.06

Al-Eskandrany said that it is quite controversial and surprising indeed that although publishers' associations exist, they do not conduct any institutional lobbying with the government. So far, he added, no such association exists for the private television channels.

Similarly, several panelists described the services provided for journalists as limited and ineffective. El-Amir said that the Union of Journalists is the only entity responsible for advocacy on behalf of journalists, but Al-Kareem noted that not even 20 percent of those working in the journalism and media field are registered members of the Union. Other

panelists criticized the fact that the Union of Journalists stipulates that a newspaper's management must give its approval before accepting journalists as union members—in other words, acknowledging that the interests of the press establishment come before the interests of the journalist.

On the other hand, the Union has provided some training programs to improve professional standards among its members. Further, Ezzat said that the Union of Journalists is one of the most important unions in Egypt after the lawyers' union and indeed involves itself in professional, legal, and other matters affecting journalists.

Ezzat stressed that other associations advocate for journalists in Egypt, especially for journalists from the print media. But apart from the Union of Journalists, such other unions and professional associations are rare. Some of them, such as the Arab Union for Young Journalists, play leading roles in training and in defining less abusive conditions for registering new members. Fekry conceded that there are some other organizations that provide technical and legal support for journalists but stated that most are largely ineffective.

The panelists agreed that there are many NGOs that support the freedom of expression and opinion, and lend physical, technical, and legal support to journalists facing trouble. NGOs also focus on improving the standards of journalists.

In Fekry's view, there are no quality journalism degree programs, as the courses are unrealistically difficult and the training is both excessively theoretical and insufficient.

Short-term training programs aimed at supporting journalists and giving them fresh perspective are generally offered only to young media professionals. Other programs target the capabilities of senior media specialists. Farouk noted that

#### 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.

*Farouk noted that civil-society organizations provide substantial support to independent media outlets by organizing training courses for journalists to improve their professional standards. However, their courses are often dictated by the agendas of the organizations delivering the training.*

civil-society organizations provide substantial support to independent media outlets by organizing training courses for journalists to improve their professional standards. However, their courses are often dictated by the agendas of the organizations delivering the training. Al-Eskandrany criticized the trainings as either group-oriented, requiring proficiency in foreign languages, or costing thousands of pounds or dollars for training at international specialized centers. Alternatives are either meaningless or run poorly, he said.

Control over inputs for, and distribution of, print media was a matter of debate among the panelists, and the lack of consensus over who controls what reveals the complicated nature of a key means to control the media.

Newsprint and ink are imported and subject to high duties for which the government offers no rebates. The Supreme Press Council oversees the distribution of newsprint and ink to printing companies. The largest printing presses are in the hands of state-owned printing companies or operated by newspapers that are state-run or have significant state ownership. In Al-Eskandrany's opinion, this has neither a negative nor positive effect on the operation of print media; he and some other panelists agreed that the newsprint and printing market in Egypt operates as a business-driven operation. Nonetheless, some panelists conceded that the orientation and affiliations of the businesspeople do occasionally have an impact. Other panelists argued that the state owns and/or controls most of the printing houses, and the state-owned printing houses prioritize services to the state-owned newspapers.

There are both public and private sales and distribution outlets for print media, but the key means for distributing print media is operated by the government-controlled *Al-Ahram*. However, most panelists asserted that newspaper vendors display all newspapers and do not conceal some, giving readers the freedom to choose.

Terrestrial radio and television broadcast transmitters are entirely government-owned. Government-owned Telecom

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Egypt also controls much of the Internet service in the country, although panelists said that users can access the Internet freely.

## List of Panel Participants

**Magdy Sanad**, journalist, *Rose Al-Youssef*, Cairo

**Abd-Allah abu el-Hamad**, presenter and manager of special programs department, Radio Ganoub el-Sa'eed; editing director, *Al-Manar El-Araby*, Aswan

**Hany Farouk**, journalist, *Nesf el-Donya*, Cairo

**Hesham Talat**, journalist, *Al-Akhbar al-Masaaya*, Cairo

**Ismail al-Eskandrany**, reporter, *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*; blogger, Eskandarny Masry Blog, Alexandria

**Mohamed Ref'at al-Yemeny**, journalist, BoswTol.com and MenGate.tv, Cairo

**Nagwah Ali Ibrahim**, media specialist, Horticultural Export Improvement Association, Cairo

**Rania Salem**, journalist, *Al-Musawar*, Cairo

**Shady Abd al-Kareem**, executive director, El-Hak Center for Democracy and Human Rights, Cairo

**Hanan Fekry**, journalist and assistant editor-in-chief, *Watani*, Cairo

**Mohammed Saeid**, economics reporter, Saudi News Channel, Cairo

**Ayman Adly**, editor, *EgyNews.net*, Cairo

**Hussam el-Amir**, head of civil society division, *Nahdet Masr*, Cairo

*The following participants attended the panel discussion but did not submit a questionnaire.*

**Gamal Inayet**, presenter, Orbit Channel, Cairo

**Layla Abd-Elmegeid**, former dean, Faculty of Information, Cairo University; member, Supreme Press Council, Cairo

**Afkar el-Kharadly**, editor-in-chief, *Nesf el-Donya*, Cairo

**Howaida Mostafa**, professor, Faculty of Information, Cairo University, Cairo

**Mustafa Elwey**, head of policy section, Faculty of Economics and Political Science, Cairo University; member, Shura Council, Cairo

**Saad Hagrass**, editor-in-chief, *Al-Alam Al-Youm*, Cairo

**Nahed Hamza**, deputy editor, *Al-Akhbar*, Cairo

**Wafaa Zakarya**, presenter, Barnameg 'Aam, General Program Radio, Cairo

**Wael Ali**, journalist, *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, Cairo

**Ra'fat Abd-Elkader**, journalist, *Al-Massayah*, Cairo

**Nesreen Mahran**, journalist, *Al-Ahram*, Cairo

**Eman Aamer**, journalist, *Nahdet Misr*, Cairo

**Toqa Nour-El Dein**, presenter, Wadi el-Nil, Egyptian Radio, Cairo

**Abd al-Nasr al-Banna**, presenter, Nile TV, Cairo

**Atteyat Ghareeb**, presenter, Barnameg 'Aam, General Program Radio, Cairo

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

**Lamis Salama**, presenter, Mehwer Channel, Cairo

**Asmaa Esmat**, journalist, *Al-Ahrar*, Cairo

**Mervat Ezzat**, journalist, *Al-Ahram*, Cairo

**Fatmah Samir Rizk**, reporter, Egyptian Television News, Cairo

**Mohammed Alaa al-Deen Moursy**, chairman of the board of directors, Ahlan al-Arabiya News Website, Cairo

**Marwa Ahmad Fouad**, media specialist, Plan International, Assuit

## Moderator

**Randa Fouad**, president, Arab Media Forum for Environment and Development

## Authors

**Randa Fouad and Hossam El Amir**, journalist, *Nahdet Misr*

*The Egypt study was coordinated by, and conducted in partnership with, Arab Media Forum for Environment and Development, Cairo.*