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LEBANON

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Parliamentary elections underscored many of the weaknesses of Lebanon's media sector. Journalists from both sides of Lebanon's political fault line were pessimistic generally, given the disregard of journalism standards driven by the biases of a largely politicized ownership structure. Both sides concur that rival politicians use their ownership of newspapers and television stations to shape content in order to inflict damage on their rivals or bolster their own bases of support.

Lebanon's media sector, like much of the nation, remains something of a paradox. At once more free than any other in the Arab world, producing work to a higher standard than most, and engaging its audience thoroughly in the contest of ideas, the media is also a slave to its own dynamism. Its power to sway public opinion is used and abused by the politicians whose money has fueled its vibrancy and diversity.

The parliamentary elections in June dominated the year and pitched a Sunni-led coalition backed by the West and Saudi Arabia against an opposition led by Hezbollah, the Iranian-financed, Syrian-allied Shia political party and militant group. The two sides have been struggling for power and control in Lebanon since the February 2005 assassination of Rafik Hariri, a five-time prime minister. Initially a majority of Lebanese blamed his killing on the government of Syria, whose troops and intelligence agents in Lebanon had controlled the country's politics and security for nearly three decades.

With media, particularly television, playing a direct role in increasing political tensions, a new electoral law promulgated in 2009 required equal, unbiased coverage of all candidates and equal advertising access, while prohibiting political broadcasts overtly in favor of one side. The law was flouted widely. The partisan nature of media during the elections was a significant factor in the MSI panelists scoring both objectives 1 and 2 as unsustainable for the first time.

In the wake of the firings of dozens of journalists from some of the country's leading media organizations, without any collective reaction from the press community, panelists gave a lower score of 1.94 (down from 2.09 in 2008) to Objective 5, supporting institutions. Objective 1 fell, by a similar amount, reflecting the government's inability to enforce laws on the books that protect free speech.

Scores under Objective 2, professional journalism, Objective 3, plurality of news, and Objective 4, business management, more or less held steady, reflecting the continuing open and accessible nature of Lebanon's media and continued political patronage that support media operations. Panelists were quick to point out that if any of Lebanon's relatively cash-rich media were to lose the finances of political patrons, they would find themselves unable to generate enough revenue through advertising and sales alone.

LEBANON AT A GLANCE

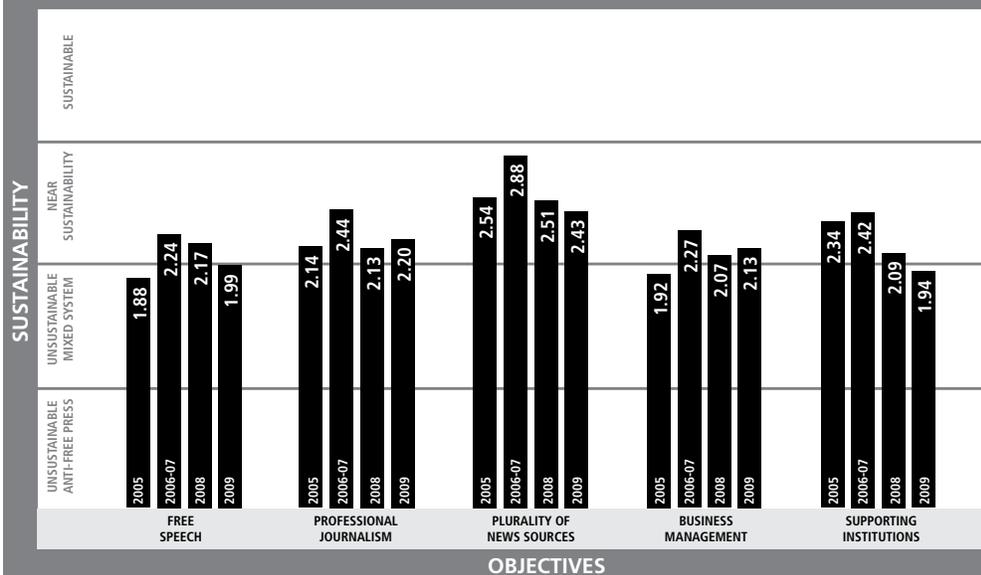
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 4,125,247 (July 2010 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Beirut
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Arab 95%, Armenian 4%, other 1% (2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 59.7% (Shia, Sunni, Druze, Isma'elite, Alawite or Nusayri), Christian 39% (Maronite Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Melkite Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Syrian Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Syrian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Chaldean, Assyrian, Copt, Protestant), other 1.3% (2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages:** Arabic, official language and universally spoken. Also French and English, with small minorities speaking Armenian and Kurdish
- > **GNI (2009-Atlas):** \$34.05 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **GNI per capita (2009-PPP):** \$13,400 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **Literacy rate:** 87.4% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Michel Suleiman

MEDIA SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:**
Print: 11 leading Arabic daily newspapers, 2 French-language dailies, and 1 each in Armenian and English; Radio Stations: 1 state-owned and 27 private; Television Stations: 1 state-owned and 6 private (Future TV, Al Manar, NBN, Orange TV, New TV and LBC)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** There is no central source for newspaper circulation; top dailies include *An Nahar*, *As Safir* (both report 45,000 daily), *Al Balad*, and *Al Hayat*
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News Agencies:** National News Agency, Central News Agency (both state-owned)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** Estimates range from 1 million (2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: LEBANON



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

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

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

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

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

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Lebanon Objective Score: 1.99

A score of 1.99 brought free speech and its associated indicators just inside the “unsustainable, mixed system” level, a small but significant fall from 2008.

Though its media sector is more open than those of its Arab neighbors, Lebanon’s deep political and religious divides and partisan ownership of media translate into a chronic lack of editorial independence. The country’s 18 officially recognized religious sects provide for a vibrant mix of opinions. But public discourse has been almost entirely polarized between the Sunni-led parliamentary majority, backed by Western powers; and the Shia-led opposition, backed by Iran and Syria. These two major political alliances have shaped Lebanon’s turbulent past for years.

The score was brought down further by panelists’ perception that licensing rules are biased heavily, that regular minor (and occasional deadly serious) crimes continue with impunity, and that public figures receive preferential legal treatment in media-related cases.

Freedom of expression is guaranteed under the Lebanese constitution and enshrined in law. Press Law article 9 states that journalism is “the free profession of publishing news publications.” However, this law, which dates to 1962, also forbids publishing material deemed dangerous to national

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.

“We saw that no one respected the law, so we went ahead and campaigned—we were dragged into this,” said Barbar. He also criticized media watchdogs for failing to condemn violators of the new law. “Their reports were very timid,” he said. “They never named networks that were in violation of the law.”

security or insulting to high-ranking Lebanese officials. An additional statute, the Audiovisual Media Law of 1994, forbids an individual or family from owning more than 10 percent in a television company. “The law was designed to prevent political parties from having TV networks,” said Roland Barbar, a senior producer at Future News, part of the media group owned by the Sunni Prime Minister and parliamentary majority leader Saad Hariri.

But Barbar went on to list Lebanon’s major television stations, all of which are owned by or affiliated with a particular party or politician: Al Manar, which is part of Hezbollah, the Shia militant group that leads the opposition; OTV (Orange TV), whose name and shareholders come from former General Michel Aoun’s Free Patriotic Movement, allied to the opposition; NBN, nicknamed Nabi Berri News by Lebanese in reference to the Shia speaker of parliament and leader of the opposition Amal party who owns a majority stake; MTV, owned by Lebanese politician Gabriel Murr, who is allied to Saad Hariri’s March 14 movement; and Lebanese Broadcasting Company (LBC), begun by the Lebanese Forces, a party also allied to March 14.

“So what kind of law is this?” asked Barbar. “Almost every network is owned by a political party.”

The already polarized media reached fever pitch during June’s parliamentary elections. In a new electoral law implemented for the first time in 2009, the Ministry of the Interior decreed that media outlets must allow all candidates advertising space for a standard rate and offer all candidates equal access to airtime and print whilst also banning broadcast media from supporting any one candidate.

In 2002, MTV was closed down after being charged in court with promoting parliamentary candidate Gabriel Murr in a 2001 by-election. The station reopened in March 2009, ready for the election.

The Maharat Foundation, an NGO focused on media in Lebanon, conducted a study of the media’s election coverage

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and found that despite the new law, news content across different media was neither objective nor balanced. “Political side-taking weakened media institutions and transformed them into mere tools,” the foundation concluded.

Barbar said that he and other managers instructed their journalists to adhere to the Ministry of the Interior directive. “We had to strike a balance between [the] March 8 and March 14 [political factions],” he said. “We were afraid of lawsuits against Future News. If there was a statement by a politician, we put it on air.”

However, as the elections drew near, the new rules quickly went out the window. “We saw that no one respected the law, so we went ahead and campaigned—we were dragged into this,” said Barbar. He also criticized media watchdogs for failing to condemn violators of the new law. “Their reports were very timid,” he said. “They never named networks that were in violation of the law.”

Several panelists pointed to the unethical behavior of the country’s politicians during the elections. Ghadi Francis, a journalist with opposition-leaning *As Safir* newspaper, put it bluntly, “During the elections, guests paid by the minute to appear on air and also paid for newspapers and magazines to do interviews with them.”

Magda Abu Fadil, director of the journalism training program at the American University of Beirut, highlighted this use of media in political campaigning. “Politicians used the media as a weapon to lash out at each other, rather than to inform the public,” she said.

Most panelists agreed that the government selectively enforces laws protecting freedom of speech. “Freedom of speech is valued but legal protection is haphazard—or lacking at best—when free speech is violated,” said Abu Fadil. “It is debatable whether the judiciary acts independently in dealing with free speech issues.”

Licensing laws date back to the 1962 Press Law requiring any newspaper or periodical seeking to publish news on political events to first obtain a legislative decree granting it a Category 1 license. Other newspapers and periodicals

receive a Category 2 license. The Audiovisual Media Law of 1994 divides television and radio stations into categories related to whether or not they are licensed to broadcast news and/or political coverage or only entertainment or general interest content.

David Munir Nabti, founder of the NGO Root Space, spoke from direct experience in launching *Hibr*, a youth-driven newspaper and website, during the elections. He said that obtaining the hoped-for license to cover politics as well as social and economic concerns had been all but impossible. “Legal obstructions to registration represent an incredibly high barrier to entry,” Nabti said. “We had wanted to register as political media, but that was incredibly difficult and incredibly expensive. The only license available must be bought from other people for a couple hundred thousand dollars, and even then you can’t change the name unless you buy two licenses and merge them.”

During the year, several journalists privately reported harassment from political parties, politicians, fellow journalists, and opposition militia figures. They generally threatened violence against the journalists and their families if they did not cease writing articles on sensitive political issues, according to the United States Department of State’s *2009 Human Rights Report*.

Assassinations of print journalists (including Gibran Tueni, editor of pro-March 14 newspaper *An Nahar*; and Samir Kassir, a columnist at *An Nahar*, in 2005) remain unprosecuted. So too does the assassination attempt on LBC anchorwoman May Chidiac in 2005.

The UN Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) is currently prosecuting those accused of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri’s assassination. STL is tasked with bringing indictments for prior and subsequent assassinations—which may well include attacks on prominent journalists—if they are found to be linked to Hariri’s killing.

“No one is prosecuted for killing journalists; it’s a non-starter, either because they are not identified or no one is brought to court,” Abu Fadil said. “The legal system is hamstrung and is not operating as it should. There’s impunity if journalists are harassed. If the people doing it belong to a certain affiliation or are backed by an organization, they will never be taken to task.”

Barbar echoed this view. “There is no progress, only regression in cases of harassment of journalists, and letting it go only encourages people to do it,” he said.

Suing for libel remains a civil law issue, and 2009 saw officials leveling a string of high-profile lawsuits against the press. Opposition-leaning New TV’s investigative show, *Corruption*,

was taken to court four times in 2009. In June, two guests of the talk show were sued by Member of Parliament Ibrahim Kanaan of Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement, a key member of the opposition, on charges of libel, slander, and spreading false news after they claimed that Kanaan had been involved in buying votes. The case was settled out of court, with New TV paying Kanaan LBP 5,000,000 (\$3,300).

In September, Judge Shaheed Salameh sued *Corruption* host Ghada Eid for libel. She was sentenced to pay LBP 1,000,000 (\$660) in bail and \$3,300 in compensation to the judge. Eid was sued again in October by another judge, Shukri Sader, after accusing him of using his post to undermine other judges and to secure a lucrative and powerful position as a judge on the Hariri tribunal. Eid had to pay \$13,300 in compensation to Sader. Finally, Eid was made to pay another \$13,300 to Judge Afif Shams el Dine after calling him the most corrupt judge in Lebanon. Despite the turbulent year, she remains the head of the show.

"I believe in the last two years, political parties have understood the importance of using libel and the courts to defend their political views against allegations," said Barbar. "This is because allegations are a political weapon used in Lebanon during the last five years."

Lebanon does not have an access to information law. The Maharat Foundation and Member of Parliament Ghassan Mukhyber have been working to create one, so far with little progress.

"Access to information depends on the newspaper," said Francis. "The Interior Ministry would not even answer my calls unless someone else calls for me. If you know people in political parties on a personal basis, they give you information for free."

However, the Lebanon government is becoming increasingly proactive in making information available online. Panelists agreed that government officials in Lebanon are using the Internet to a greater degree to publish information. "The different ministries have understood the importance of putting documents online," said Barbar.

The government does not restrict media's access to international news or news sources and media freely use these in their reporting.

Entrance into journalism as a profession, while officially open to all, remains shaped by the same forces that control the media's editorial line. As Abu Fadil noted, "Hiring of journalists is often influenced by political and sectarian interests."

"People asked me, 'Who do you represent and where are you from?'" said Julnar Doueik, a journalist with Hibr. "I told them that I'm a citizen journalist. They said, 'What is that?' People are not used to this kind of media," she said.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Lebanon Objective Score: 2.20

With journalists caught up in the high-stakes games of political poker played out by politicians who use their ownership of media as a tool against rivals, standards of professional journalism in Lebanon continued to be flouted through 2009. The score remained more or less the same as last year, with the same deficiencies as past years being experienced, but in greater number due to the nature of election coverage.

Panelists agreed that the primary obstacle to the development of professional journalism is the politicization of the media sector. "Media ownership tops the list of factors affecting the objectivity of news in the country," said Root Space's Nabti. "Media is serving the interests of political parties. Each newspaper, radio, or television is the spokesperson of a specific party and reflects exclusively its opinions, beliefs, and values."

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).

Expensive watches are a common form of bribery, and Lebanese television audiences often joke about the silver Rolexes they see dangling from the wrists of evening talk show hosts.

Several panelists called for more transparency in political funding to media outlets. “We need a system of subsidies for political parties in Lebanon so we know who’s paying how much and they all have equal opportunities [for media access],” said Barbar.

In this divided nation, politically owned media have been unable to maintain standards of objectivity or even a separation between news and editorial desks, according to the panelists. “There has been a degradation of standards over the last two years. There is no adequate fact-checking and no balance,” said Abu Fadil. “Hard news and editorial is muddled. There are an awful lot of opinions and not a lot of hard news reporting.”

A code of journalism ethics, devised by the Press Federation and dating back to 1974, was described as “flimsy” and “woefully outdated” by Abu Fadil, while Barbar dismissed the concept as having little bearing on media in Lebanon.

“The word ‘ethics’ is totally absent from the Lebanese media landscape,” Barbar said. “There are principles, but ethics is something that is very hard to translate.”

While self-censorship has decreased significantly since 2005, after Syria withdrew its military and much of its intelligence services from Lebanon, panelists said that it is still practiced, particularly in cases in which foreign patrons pressure their domestic clients.

Panelists agreed that journalists cover key events in Lebanon, and few subjects are off-limits, but often a journalist’s physical access to news events can be restricted according to the political leaning of a particular media outlet.

As an example, panelists said that journalists working for Hezbollah’s Al Manar TV station do not report from the Tarek al Jdede neighborhood of Beirut, a Sunni-dominated area controlled by supporters of the March 14 movement and where supporters of the rival groups engage in deadly clashes. Conversely, Al Manar enjoys almost exclusive access to the Hezbollah-controlled southern suburbs of Beirut.

According to the panelists, media are so polarized that when reporters from *Hibr*, the youth-driven newspaper, went to report on the election, they found voters suspicious of their non-partisan position. “People asked me, ‘Who do you

represent and where are you from?’” said Julnar Doueik, a journalist with *Hibr*. “I told them that I’m a citizen journalist. They said, ‘What is that?’ People are not used to this kind of media,” she said.

The most blatant manifestation of skewed media ethics in Lebanon is the widely practiced system of bribes—some Lebanese journalists prefer to call them “gifts”—by which politicians and powerful figures buy loyalty and positive coverage. The payment and acceptance of bribes to media professionals is so prolific that several panelists said that refusing bribes could often lead to a journalist being denied access to sources. Expensive watches are a common form of bribery, and Lebanese television audiences often joke about the silver Rolexes they see dangling from the wrists of evening talk show hosts.

At a basic level, bribes augment a low salary for some journalists, according to panelists. Though journalists are paid better than most civil servants and teachers, the panelists decried their low wages, which average \$700 to \$800 per month.

“If you work for a successful newspaper, you can earn around \$2,000 a month,” said Francis, noting that freelancing for *Safir’s* youth section barely covers her phone bill. By comparison, Francis said, a female reporter that she knows crashed her car but the next day drove to work in a brand-new one—a gift from a politician close to the journalist and her media outlet.

An average reporter at Future News might earn a base salary of \$1,000 a month, said Barbar, but the station has a system of incentives whereby work on additional programs can earn the employee in the range of an additional \$800 a month.

Lebanon remains a regional leader in using up-to-date technical facilities for producing and distributing news. Political talk shows tend to eclipse entertainment, particularly in times of tension. “When a political crisis arises, entertainment stops and gives way to back-to-back news,” said Radwan Mortada, a journalist for opposition-aligned *Al Akhbar* newspaper.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Lebanon Objective Score: 2.43

The panelist agreed that, taken as a whole, Lebanese media is pluralistic, affordable, and accessible, and they scored Objective 3 well inside the “near sustainable” bracket.

Because the law requires private radio and television to cover all Lebanese territory, in theory media should be accessible,

even in remote areas. In practice, a number of radio stations broadcast only locally. Lebanon has 11 regional radio stations, along with 16 national radio stations broadcasting in Arabic, French, English, or all three. Some national broadcasts are in Armenian.

Newspapers are affordable, costing between LBP 500 (\$0.33) and LBP 2,000 (\$1.33). Dozens of local newspapers and hundreds of periodicals publish throughout the country, and are financed by and reflect the views of a broad spectrum of political and religious groups.

Lebanon has some of the most prolific and influential newspapers in the region, but like television channels, they fall clearly into political camps. Of the 11 leading Lebanese-run Arabic daily newspapers, *An Nahar*, *Mustaqbal*, *Al Liwaa*, *Al Hayat*, *Al Bayrak*, *Al Anwar*, and *Al Shark* are considered as supporting the March 14 alliance. *Al Akhbar*, *As Safir*, and *Ad Diyyar* support the March 8 opposition, while *Al Balad* is seen as non-partisan. *Al Kalima* is the country's leading non-partisan political weekly newspaper.

Lebanon also has two French-language dailies, *L'Orient du Jour* and *Action*; one Armenian-language newspaper, *Souryakan Mamoul*; and the English-language *Daily Star*. Several leading Lebanese economic and political magazines are published in English; they include *Lebanon Opportunities*, *Monday Morning*, and *Executive*.

As well as the domestic television stations already described, Lebanon hosts several foreign Arab satellite channels broadcasting under international license. They include the Iraqi-owned ANB, Al Sumariyeh, and Al Baghdadiyeh;

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.

Wireless access is still spreading through the suburbs of Beirut and out to the surrounding mountains, though it has yet to extend south of Sidon.

US-government-funded Al Hurra; Iranian-owned Al Alam; and Palestinian Al Aqsa.

Internet penetration has more than doubled over the past two years to 2.19 million, according to 2008 data quoted in the CIA World Factbook. That equals 52 percent of the population, according to UN data. Coverage now extends to most of the country, except the most remote rural villages of the far north and south. DSL broadband Internet is now available in most areas of Beirut but remains relatively expensive compared to the rest of the region: an 8MB DSL connection costs \$100 in Egypt, while in Lebanon the price of 1MB is \$200.

Wireless access is still spreading through the suburbs of Beirut and out to the surrounding mountains, though it has yet to extend south of Sidon.

Lebanese blogs and news magazines thrive on the Internet. Two of the most prominent are An Nashra, a daily political and economic bulletin produced by the Lebanese Company for Press and Publication; and NOW Lebanon, an online newsletter of features and analysis in English and Arabic.

Future TV producer Barbar pointed out that though political divisions have carved up the Lebanese media landscape, those divisions also ensure that citizens have unlimited access to a lively debate in which all sides participate. "It means that no one can hide or impose something huge on Lebanon, because you always hear from other parties giving some information to counter. In this way, these divisions in Lebanon are still productive," he commented.

Most of Lebanon's media outlets are owned privately, and unlike many countries in the region, state media enjoy no particular privileges. Panelists were generally critical of the situation of state-owned television station TeleLiban and Radio Lebanon. "Public media have largely been abandoned in Lebanon," said Doueik. "The public media are only alive to prove the existence of the government."

Barbar lamented a bygone era in which, he said, Lebanese public broadcasting had been a pioneer for the region. "In the 1960s, TeleLiban used to be highbrow in its coverage of arts and culture. It would introduce arts from Egypt and the Maghreb and experimental movies and series. Private media could not achieve this. Private media always question a

Barbar lamented a bygone era in which, he said, Lebanese public broadcasting had been a pioneer for the region. "In the 1960s, TeleLiban used to be highbrow in its coverage of arts and culture. It would introduce arts from Egypt and the Maghreb and experimental movies and series. Private media could not achieve this."

program's sustainability vis-à-vis advertising. In the absence of a state outlet, we definitely lose something."

Yet the question of whether Lebanese would be prepared to pay a license fee or similar tax to support public media drew a unanimous, vigorous "no" from panelists.

Lebanon has two national news services, National News Agency and the Central News Agency, which, in the words of Abu Fadil, "churn through copy on the comings and goings" of official figures but do little else.

Major international news agencies such as Reuters, AP, and AFP have bureaus in Lebanon and their material is circulated widely. An increasing number of local news agencies report and distribute material through their websites. They include Nashraq ("Bulletin"), aligned with the FPM; Akbar il Yom ("News Today"); and Markazeya.

As a country with a complex sectarian make-up, Lebanon has abundant minority language media outlets, including a licensed Armenian-language radio station. Future TV broadcasts a news hour in Armenian, English, and French. Kurds can associate freely and publish their own newsletters in Kurdish, but as yet, no station broadcasts in Kurdish.

"The Armenians, as a minority, receive better attention, having their news bulletin in their own language," said Nancy Razzouk, a producer for LBC International. "The reason for this is that they are the biggest minority. They play an obvious role in the economy and most crucially, they have voters in the elections, so all parties try to get close to them."

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Lebanon Objective Score: 2.13

Panelists generally disagreed with the idea that media operate as efficient and professionally managed businesses.

They noted that without cash injections from political parties, many media outlets in Lebanon would flounder or fail.

"Advertising is a goal for all media outlets. It's an important factor of financial balance," said Barbar. "But the advertising market in Lebanon is too small for all operating media outlets and cannot exclusively sustain any private media."

LBCI producer Razzouk said that most local newspapers "are not profitable businesses, serving political agendas" while several television stations (NBN, Future TV, and Al Manar) are linked directly to political figures and require political money to keep running.

Panelists noted that a powerful Christian family, the Choueiry, hold a virtual monopoly on sources of advertising in Lebanon through control of the largest media-buying broker in the Middle East.

"Since Lebanon is such a small market, there is heavy competition over the limited advertising revenue that exists here," said Nabti. "That gives disproportionate influence over the media to advertising agencies and big Lebanese businesses. Many of those businesses and agencies have strong and clear political ties."

As with media outlets around the world, the financial crisis negatively impacted the Lebanese media in 2009. Facing debts reported at \$5,000,000, Lebanon's oldest newspaper, *An Nahar*, laid off more than 50 editors and employees, including prominent writer Elias Khoury. Gibran Tueni's daughter, Member of Parliament Nayla Tueni, now runs the paper.

Ghassan Hajjar, managing editor, said that the layoffs were part of reforms recommended by Booz Allen Hamilton, which conducted a study on the newspaper's finance, management,

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.

and productivity. Some observers expressed surprise that *An Nahar's* wealthy shareholders, including Prime Minister Saad al Hariri, former Member of Parliament Issam Fares, and Saudi prince and tycoon Waleed bin Talal, failed to step in to bail out the struggling newspaper.

Later in 2009, LBC, the television station often cited as the most commercially viable, fired 140 employees in a fat-trimming exercise, according to CEO Pierre el Daher. According to some observers, LBC was preparing itself for a deal that would see Rupert Murdoch purchase shares in Waleed bin Talal's Rotana Media, including his stake in LBC. LBC's ad revenues took a direct hit following the airing of a controversial prime time show, *Bold Red Line*, which featured a Saudi man boasting on camera of his sexual escapades from ultraconservative Saudi Arabia. While the show's ratings skyrocketed, the man was dragged to court, the show was suspended for four months, and the LBC offices in Saudi Arabia were shut down.

An ongoing saga over control of LBC has also compromised the station's fortunes. LBC was founded during Lebanon's 15-year civil war by the Lebanese Forces, a Christian political and militia group. Samir Geagea, leader of the Lebanese Forces, was imprisoned on criminal charges in 1994 and handed control of LBC to Daher. Following his release in 2005, Geagea, who still heads the Lebanese Forces as a political party, claimed that he has the right to take back ownership of the station and has documents to prove it. Daher said he bought out Geagea for \$5,000,000 and that he has documents to prove his case.

"They're talking about the same facts with different documents to support different claims. It's bizarre," said Barbar. "It tells us interesting things about media laws in Lebanon. Both parties are claiming something that is basically an illegal institution. It belonged to a militia; even its frequency is illegal."

Few see the Lebanese judicial process as able to clear up the LBC case any time soon, if at all. "If they go through the legal system, the case will not be resolved for another decade," said Abu Fadil.

A news reporter at LBC, Denise Rahme Fakhri, has taken her case to court, arguing that she was targeted for layoff because of her historical support for Geagea's Lebanese Forces militia.

MTV also laid off employees. While employees claim that the station laid off about 60 of its staff, Head of News and Political Programs Ghayath Yazbeck said that the number was only eight.

"Since Lebanon is such a small market, there is heavy competition over the limited advertising revenue that exists here," said Nabti. "That gives disproportionate influence over the media to advertising agencies and big Lebanese businesses. Many of those businesses and agencies have strong and clear political ties."

Lebanese media have no accurate statistics on circulation or ratings. "Broadcast ratings, circulation figures, and Internet statistics are not always reliable," said Abu Fadil. "They may be skewed to provide a brighter picture about actual circulation, for example."

Razzouk was blunter: "Statistics in Lebanon are a big lie. They are controlled by groups that make sure the result serves their own profits."

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Lebanon Objective Score: 1.94

The panelists perceive of media-supporting institutions in Lebanon as irrelevant, weak, and self-serving, and this drove down the Objective 5 score to the lowest in this year's MSI.

Two organizations are intended to represent media in Lebanon. The Press Federation represents owners, publishers,

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.

"In general, the organizations that help journalists are not journalism organizations," said Razzouk. "There are some NGOs who take care of journalists after they are sacked. There are other organizations that belong to some politicians. They also support journalists, but for their own benefit."

and organizations in print media. There is no such equivalent for broadcast media. The Journalists' Union represents working journalists. However, membership is difficult to obtain and many journalists perceive the union as ineffectual. "It is accused of being unrepresentative and most journalists are not enrolled because they find it useless," said Nabti.

All panelists criticized the two syndicates for being superfluous and outdated. As an example, Doueik noted that every registered print media outlet is required to enlist a "responsible director" who must be registered in either the Press Federation or the Journalists' Union. "According to our experience, and what we've heard from others, this position is usually symbolic and useless," Doueik said. "It seems like a method for the syndicates to ensure enrollment to support their members."

Most journalists have long since given up on finding support from their union. "None of the organizations who are supposed to defend journalists really help journalists," said Razzouk. "No journalists believe they are there to help them, anyway."

With the hefty layoffs at *An Nahar*, LBCI, and MTV, many journalists criticized their union for not defending their rights. Several media observers condemned the layoffs as unjust and in violation of labor rights. At a demonstration arranged by Samir Kassir Eyes Foundation, a media watchdog, a young journalist expressed her outrage at the Journalists' Union to *The Daily Star*, saying that despite the many dismissals, the union had not issued any statement of protest.

Rather than depend on their union for support, most panelists pointed to an increasing number of NGOs supporting free speech and independent media. "In general, the organizations that help journalists are not journalism organizations," said Razzouk. "There are some NGOs who take care of journalists after they are sacked. There are other organizations that belong to some politicians. They also support journalists, but for their own benefit."

The Samir Kassir Eyes Foundation, formed after the assassination of the *An Nahar* columnist and author who had criticized Syria's role in Lebanon, works for press freedom in Lebanon and across the region. The European Commission helps support the annual Samir Kassir Award, open to regional journalists who advocate for freedom, democracy, and the rule of law.

Although a number of local NGOs and think tanks advocate for media freedom, most regular statements on the state of press freedom in Lebanon are issued by foreign observers, such as Reporters Without Borders.

Lebanon boasts a variety of journalism training programs. State-run Lebanese University has offered a four-year journalism major since 1952 and Arab University has offered a major in journalism since 2007. The Journalism Training Program at the American University of Beirut offers a non-academic program directed at professionals already working in the field. The program includes training workshops, and successful participants are awarded a professional journalism certificate. The Lebanese American University offers a degree in communications with a specialty in journalism and offers journalism training courses. May Chidiac, the journalist who survived a car bomb in 2005, now teaches practical writing courses and television news at Notre Dame University.

Still, most panelists agreed that journalism training is still too focused on academics rather than practical skills, making it hard for journalism students to find work. "Most media stations look to where the journalist graduated from, and due to the weakness of the universities, most graduates don't find a media station to work in," said Razzouk.

Other organizations that offer training to Lebanese journalists include the Thompson Foundation; the International Center for Journalists; the Beirut-based Forum for Development, Culture, and Dialogue; Germany's Friedrich Ebert Foundation; and workshops funded by the UNDP and BBC World Service Trust.

Panelists agreed that the media sector does not have enough internships to meet the needs of Lebanon's aspiring journalists. *Safir* takes in four new trainees each month for an eight-month, partially-paid training program. *Nahar's* once ambitious training program to draw journalists from across the region, established by assassinated editor Gibran Tuani, has shrunk to a small program targeting local students. *Hibr's* Doueik went through the two-day program and passed the exam to end up on an internship, where she succeeded in having stories published in the paper, but was critical of the training she received. "It was a typical academic running it, pontificating, very old hat," she said.

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

List of Panel Participants

Roland Barbar, producer, Future TV News, Beirut

Ghadi Francis, journalist, *As Safir*, Beirut

Munir Nabti, founder, Root Space (social media NGO), Beirut

Magda Abu-Fadil, director, Journalism Training Program, American University of Beirut, Beirut

Nancy Razzouk, producer, Lebanese Broadcasting Company International, Adma

Julnar Doueik, journalist, *Hibr*, Beirut

Radwan Mortada, journalist, *Al Akhbar* newspaper, Zahle

Mazen Mjawaz, journalist, *Ad Diyyar*, Beirut

Issa Sleiby, freelance journalist, Beirut

Hussein Kries, reporter, New TV, Beirut

Moderator

Hugh Macleod, journalist, *The Guardian*, Beirut