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qatar
yemen

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

2010/ 2011

DEVELOPMENT
OF SUSTAINABLE
INDEPENDENT
MEDIA IN
LEBANON

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

2010/2011

**The Development
of Sustainable
Independent Media
in Lebanon**



MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2010/2011

The Development of Sustainable Independent Media in Lebanon

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Hugh Macleod, journalist, *The Guardian* (objectives 1 – 5)

Maharat Foundation <http://maharatfoundation.org/> (objective 6)



LEBANON

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LEBANON

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Perhaps the sight of a pro-Syrian party member picking up his studio chair and wildly attempting to swing it at the anti-Syrian politician he was supposed to be debating on a new television show called *Objectivity* best sums up the continuing deterioration of Lebanon's media. Falling 0.12 from its overall score in 2009, the combined MSI score for 2010-2011 showed a continuing trend that threatens to take the country's overall score into the unsustainable, mixed system range.

Reverberations from the unprecedented challenge to the Assad family's 41-year dictatorship in neighboring Syria deepened Lebanon's profound political division between Lebanese parties supporting and supported by Syria and Iran in rejection of Western influence in the region, and those backed by Western governments and their regional allies, such as Saudi Arabia.

Hezbollah, the Iranian-financed Shia political and militant organization that has twice forced the resignation of Western-backed elected governments since its self-declared victory over Israel in the 2006 July War, came out in full support of the Assad regime.

Hezbollah and its allies, now leading the government, used the media they control to repeat the Syrian regime's claims to be fighting Sunni fundamentalists, dropping any pretense to objective reporting in favor of attacking its political and sectarian rivals in the Sunni-led opposition bloc. On the opposing side, the media of deposed Prime Minister Saad Hariri, whose multi-billionaire father was assassinated in 2005 (in a crime originally linked to Syria, but which a Hague Special Tribunal has now indicted Hezbollah members over), began to simply refuse to broadcast speeches by Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah.

An MSI panelist familiar with the MSI since 2005 declared 2011 the worst year for press freedom in Lebanon, with unprecedented attempts by the army to block reporting by both local and foreign press on stories apparently sensitive to Syria. That said, the bedrock of Lebanon's adherence to the values of free speech remains solid, with Lebanese enjoying almost unrestricted access to regional and international media.

Scores for the majority of objectives were strikingly similar to 2009, perhaps reflecting a general state of political paralysis with rival blocs firmly entrenched in their positions, parliament largely unable to pass reforms, and the politically-controlled media settled into the deadlock. However, Objective 5, scoring the strength of supporting institutions such as journalism associations, training programs, and associated media infrastructure, showed a significant fall of about a third of a point compared to last year. Lack of progress in the development of inclusive trade and professional associations, dwindling training opportunities for practicing journalists, and lingering problems with the infrastructure that supports media distribution were all cited as reasons for this decline.

LEBANON AT A GLANCE

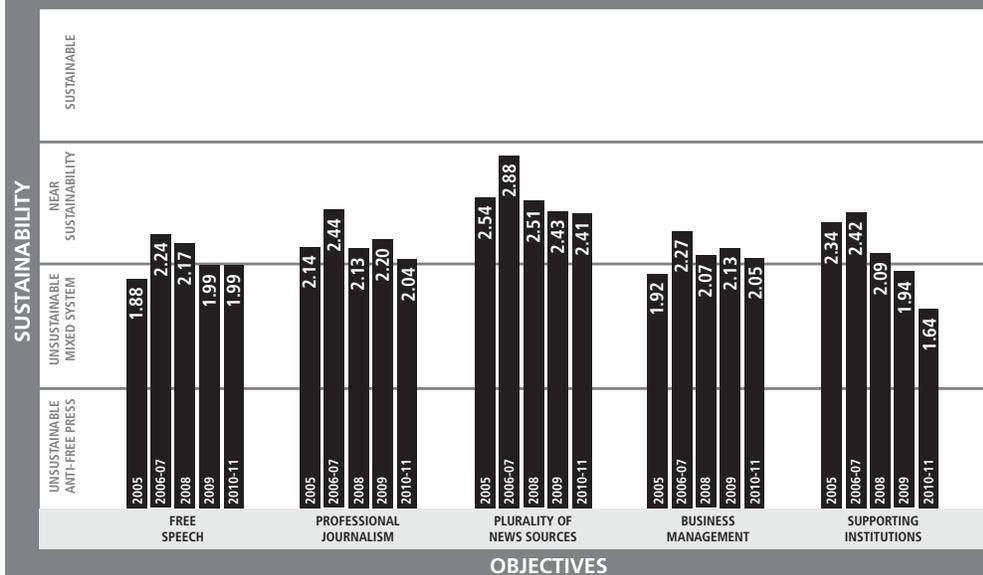
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 4,143,101 (July 2011 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Beirut
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Arab 95%, Armenian 4%, other 1% (2011 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 59.7% (Shia, Sunni, Druze, Isma'iliite, 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 (2010-Atlas):** \$38.37 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2011)
- > **GNI per capita (2010-PPP):** \$14,170 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2011)
- > **Literacy rate:** 87.4% (2003 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Michel Suleiman (since May 25, 2008)

MEDIA SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 11 leading Arabic daily newspapers, 3 French-language dailies, and 1 each in Armenian and English; Radio Stations: 1 state-owned and 27 private; Television Stations: 1 state-owned and 7 private (Future TV, Al Manar, MTV, 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, but media watchers put the figure no higher than 10,000), *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:** 1.3 million (2010 est., ITU)

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

Guarantees for the freedom of the press, in Article 13 of the Lebanese Constitution, are not always upheld in practice. To illustrate, the panelists pointed to an increase in interrogations of journalists through 2010 and 2011, as well as efforts to restrict media access, particularly to stories deemed sensitive to neighboring Syria.

Stuck within the unsustainable, mixed-systems range of the MSI, as in previous MSI studies, panelists generally found Lebanon's free speech indicators as both fundamentally encouraging and at the same time deeply flawed.

"Yes, society does place a high value on freedom of speech," said Michael Young, the opinion editor for the English-language *Daily Star*. "It's inherent in Lebanese society, which feels a deep discomfort if the media is silenced."

Reforming Lebanon's chaotic media laws became a matter of hot debate in 2011, particularly the proposed introduction of a law to regulate online media for the first time. The Maharat Foundation, a Lebanese media watchdog, is collaborating with journalists and legal experts and MP Ghassan Moukheiber to draft a new law proposal under

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 or registration of media protects a public interest and is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- > Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- > Crimes against media professionals, citizen reporters, and media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- > The law protects the editorial independence of state or public media.
- > Libel is a civil law issue, public officials are held to higher standards, offended party must prove falsity and malice.
- > Public information is easily available; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media, journalists, and citizens.
- > Media outlets' access to and use of local and international news and news sources is not restricted by law.
- > Entry into the journalism profession is free and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

"The media law has not been developed since the 1940s," said panelist Yacoub Alawiya, a reporter at the pro-March 8 NBN TV. "In reality, journalists are protected by the station they belong to and the political party that funds that station."

which journalists in different media will be treated equally under law. "Under the current laws, a print journalist could be arrested for repeating on television something he had published," Layal Bahnam, of Maharat, told the *Daily Star*.

"The media law has not been developed since the 1940s," said panelist Yacoub Alawiya, a reporter at the pro-March 8 NBN TV. "In reality, journalists are protected by the station they belong to and the political party that funds that station."

The announcement by the semi-governmental National Audiovisual Media Council in November 2011 that it would begin registering details of news websites, despite the government having yet to agree a law to govern online media, was met with criticism by several MPs and media groups, calling it "harmful to freedom of expression in Lebanon."

In June 2011, newly appointed Information Minister Walid Daouk stressed that media freedom and objectivity were part of the new Cabinet's policies. Young, a firm supporter of the movement that swept Syrian forces out of Lebanon in 2005 in the wake of Hariri's assassination, said he initially viewed with trepidation the formation of a Hezbollah-controlled government, but said that Prime Minister Najib Miqati has proven, so far, reluctant to "fight with the media."

Panelists concluded that reform of Lebanon's ossified licensing laws will be crucial to any meaningful opening up of the sector to competition from non-partisan players. Panelists saw media owners and politicians colluding to prevent any new licenses from being issued, best illustrated by the launch of Lebanese Forces TV online rather than over air.

After a six-year court case, Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea lost his battle for control of LBC television, which he claimed had been stolen from him by Pierre Daher after Geagea was arrested in the wake of the 15-year Civil War, which ended in 1990.

Having lost the case over LBC, Geagea's Lebanese Forces launched their own television station online, apparently unable to secure a license for broadcast.

Samir Kassir Eyes foundation, a local media watchdog, recorded 50 cases of legal action against journalists in 2010, mainly for cases of libel and slander, but according to panelist Mohammed Najem, co-founder of Beirut's Social Media Exchange, most cases are settled out of court with cash payments.

In a regional context, although Lebanon remains renowned for having one of the freest press environments in the Middle East, the country dropped some 17 places in the 2010 Reporters Without Borders World Press Index, ranking 78th out of the 178 countries. By comparison, Syria, its immediate neighbor, ranked 173rd. Yet with the Syrian-backed March 8 coalition now in power, led by Shia militant and political group Hezbollah—which since 2008 has twice toppled the elected pro-West government led by the Sunni Future Movement—the popular uprising and brutal crackdown across the border increasingly defines Lebanon's media landscape.

With the arrival of thousands of Syrian refugees to North Lebanon, the army, for the first time, began assigning members of Military Intelligence to escort journalists, local and foreign, during reporting trips to meet Syrians who had fled the Assad regime's onslaught.

"At a time when all Arab countries are moving toward democracy, we in Lebanon have a pro-Syrian government in power, and democracy is declining," said Rami Aysha, a reporter for *Time* and an independent television producer. "The year 2011 was one of worst in terms of freedom of the media, because many journalists were interrogated by the security forces." For example, Lebanon's public prosecutor, Saed Mirza, questioned Aysha over an interview that appeared in *Time* with one of the Hezbollah members indicted by an international tribunal investigating the assassination of former prime minister and Future Movement leader Rafik Hariri.

Security forces interrogated former MSI panelist Radwan Mortada, as well, over an article that appeared in a Saudi newspaper profiling the Free Syrian Army, which consists of defected soldiers leading an armed rebellion against the Assad regime, and some of its members who had found sanctuary in North Lebanon. And, in June 2010, security forces questioned Hassan Alliq, a reporter for the generally pro-Hezbollah *Al Akhbar*, over an article concerning the flight of a retired army general accused of spying for Israel. Soon

after, Defense Minister Elias Murr, allied to the president, convened a press conference to deny *Al Akhbar's* allegations and warn journalists they would be arrested and questioned if they reported information seen as defaming the army.

Threats to the freedom of expression extend beyond the press, as well. Lebanese authorities arrested Zeid Hamdan, one of Lebanon's best-known singers, over lyrics in one of his songs urging President Michel Suleiman, former head of the army, to "go home." Under the constitution, it is a crime to insult the president or military—punishable by a sentence of years in prison. Authorities cited the same law to arrest four people for criticizing Suleiman on Facebook, as well. In both cases, the defendants were released without charge.

Yet despite these collisions between free speech and the authorities, no journalists were imprisoned over their reporting, as far the panelists know. And despite soaring tensions over Syria, there was no return to the dark days of 2005 when a string of Lebanese journalists and other public figures vocal in their criticism of Syria were assassinated with impunity.

However, on January 25, when Najib Mikati was appointed prime minister following the toppling of Saad Hariri's government, several news outlets deemed sympathetic to the Hezbollah-led March 8 coalition suffered attacks, including an Al Jazeera van that was set alight in Hariri's stronghold of Tripoli. In another incident, a journalist from *Future* suffered broken ribs in a beating by supporters of the Syrian regime while covering a protest outside the Syrian embassy in Beirut. Panelists noted the Lebanese security personnel on the scene did nothing to stop the assault.

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Even cases that make it to court almost always end in settlement with a fine or simply fizzle out. For example, New TV's *Corruption* show continued to rile politicians and those in the public sector, with program director Mariam Bassam ordered to pay financial compensation of \$4,000. A similar fine was issued in a libel case against *Al Bayrak*.

There remains no freedom of information law in Lebanon, despite the efforts of the National Network for the Right of Access to Information, a grouping of professional syndicates, politicians and civil society representatives. Like so many laws vital to the progress of Lebanon, the draft law presented to parliament by the group has yet to be passed. Still, overall panelists praised Lebanon's access to information, scoring it inside the sustainable bracket on the MSI scale.

Lebanon's small size and tight knit communities, according to Alawiya, mean that accessing information, particularly from those allied to the media in question, is relatively easy. "Lots of documents are smuggled to journalists from people in the security forces or from politicians with a particular interest. You can cross Lebanon in four hours; people know each other by name."

As noted in last year's MSI, the government generally does not restrict the media's access to international or domestic news or news sources. Sami Hamad, of the Lebanese Media Information Services Office (Misof) news agency, noted that despite existing in a state of war with Israel almost all Israeli websites are available for Lebanese journalists to read. "The problem comes with the banning of some media stations from broadcasting in certain areas," said Hamad. "Al Manar is not broadcast in the North, while Future TV is not shown in the [Hezbollah-controlled] southern suburbs. This deprives the public from hearing different points of view."

As for entry into the profession, access to journalism remains open to all, although political and sectarian interests often shape the hiring of journalists. As some panelists noted, a little *wasta*, or political influence with the right contacts, certainly helps—but also leads to unqualified people working as journalists while those with degrees struggle to find work.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Lebanon Objective Score: 2.04

Objective 2, measuring professional standards, scored just inside the near sustainability bracket with a combined score for 2010/2011 that is slightly less than the 2009 average.

Six years into a political and sectarian split that pits the Shia Hezbollah-led coalition, backed by Iran and Syria, against the Sunni Future-led opposition, backed by Saudi Arabia and the West—with Christians divided between them—the uprising and crackdown in neighboring Syria crystallized ever sharper differences between the two sides, with profoundly negative consequences for journalism standards.

Long accustomed to the deployment of politically owned media to attack political rivals, panelists noted that the situation has declined to such a degree that now neither side would even broadcast a speech by a rival political leader. "Future TV now completely ignores Nasrallah's speeches," said Aysha, referring to the leader of Hezbollah. "Instead of broadcasting the speech, they host someone to attack what he said in it."

The media's selective use of diplomatic cables, made public by Wikileaks in 2010, sharply illustrated this trend. Those media owned or allied to Hariri's Future Movement, such as his Future TV and Future, made much of comments by Hezbollah's Christian ally Michel Aoun that Hezbollah should be stripped of its weapons.

Outgoing Information Minister Tarek Mitri officially acknowledged the decline of professional standards of journalism in April 2011. Criticizing the "redundant language" used in some media broadcasts, the minister attributed the decaying "morals and ethics" of the media to the poor access to information, and commented, "This is something new in Lebanese history."

The media's selective use of diplomatic cables, made public by Wikileaks in 2010, sharply illustrated this trend. Those media owned or allied to Hariri's Future Movement, such as his Future TV and *Future*, made much of comments by Hezbollah's Christian ally Michel Aoun that Hezbollah should be stripped of its weapons.

Likewise, pro-Hezbollah *Al Akhbar*, which claimed to be a partner to Wikileaks, ran a series of articles exposing what it claimed was Saad Hariri's complicity in falsifying evidence

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 and retain qualified personnel within the media profession.
- > Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming.
- > Facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- > Quality niche reporting and programming exist (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

“None of the Lebanese media did anything special on Syria. They talked about Syria like they talk about Iraq or Afghanistan [as somewhere far away],” said Rita Sayah, a senior researcher for Lebanese American University.

against Hezbollah members eventually indicted over the murder of his father.

Journalists in both broadcast and print continue to face obstacles to achieving professional standards, which most panelists agreed many fail to overcome. Aysha said journalistic bias is built into a system in which media are owned by politicians: “Journalists are forced to walk in the direction of the general policy of the media they work for, which in turn marches to the will of the political donors.”

Indeed, the political affiliations of Lebanon’s major television stations are so well known they have even made it into the acronyms. The National Broadcasting Network (NBN), for example, is known locally as Nabih Berry News, being majority owned by the Shia Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berry—whose Amal party is a core Hezbollah ally.

Al Manar is financed by Hezbollah and its content is overtly propagandist, with regular segments glorifying the militant group’s successful struggle to free South Lebanon from Israeli occupation and its resilience in the July War of 2006. In 2011, the station dropped any pretense toward objective reporting of the killing of protesters in Syria by its allies in the Assad regime, repeating the regime’s mantra that the Syrian uprising was driven by Salafists, or Sunni fundamentalists.

The crisis in Syria posed a profound challenge to Lebanese journalistic standards of objectivity and professional reporting, which, by and large, panelists found their colleagues had failed. Despite close ties of geography, history, and culture, reporting by Lebanese journalists of the momentous events taking place in Syria was notable for its absence of hard hitting investigations or breaking news.

“None of the Lebanese media did anything special on Syria. They talked about Syria like they talk about Iraq or Afghanistan [as somewhere far away],” said Rita Sayah, a senior researcher for Lebanese American University. “Syria is a difficult subject for Lebanese journalists, because some Lebanese are really supporting the Syrian regime and others totally oppose it. I think because there are always fears about stability in Lebanon, journalists do not feel encouraged to work on Syria.”

Sami Hamad, of the Misof news agency, picked out New TV as one channel that appears to enjoy a wider margin of freedom than most. “There are some margins of freedom for reporters, in spite of the political money that is being channeled into media,” he said. “NTV has long criticized Syria despite its commitment to the resistance line that is allied with Syria.”

Several panelists noted that the effect of political money on media coverage is not limited to domestic powerbrokers. When Qatar publicly denounced the Assad crackdown in Syria and withdrew its funding from the generally pro-Syrian *Al Akhbar*, the newspaper promptly began to run pieces criticizing the Gulf kingdom, previously a subject off limits to its journalists.

Those who stood against the political direction of *Al Akhbar*, a paper often praised for its investigative domestic reporting, found themselves literally out on a limb. Khaled Saghiyeh, deputy editor of *Al Akhbar*, resigned in September in protest over the paper’s bias towards supporting the Syrian regime.

“In Lebanon, you have small dictatorships all around,” said Social Media Exchange’s Mohammed Najem, relating a story of how *Al Akhbar* editor-in-chief Ibrahim Amin had written with a mildly critically tone about the Amal party and Hezbollah, the paper’s chief backers. “Nasrallah then said in a speech that *Al Akhbar* is independent, and does not represent [Hezbollah]. But you can’t be outside the flock. Amin’s a Shia, and they would kill his business in the end by not giving him funding for the newspaper.”

As well as the political direction of their paymasters, panelists said the professionalism of Lebanese journalists also suffers from a lack of basic standards in reporting. “Journalists in general don’t know their duties or their rights,” said Sarah el Shal, of pro-March 14 *Future*. The political context produces basic failures and prevents journalists from living up to internationally recognized standards of reporting, according to Young.

Several panelists noted overt editorializing in evening news broadcasts. “The news starts at 8 pm, but they start with analysis, not news. It’s like they tell you, ‘Just open your mouth and swallow,’” said Najem. Young estimated “sixty to seventy percent of news broadcast is statements from the news reader and analysts.”

In addition, “Sourcing is a traditional problem in Lebanese journalism. The idea of a reporter getting two or three corroborating sources is largely absent. I wish things were getting better, but because the media is partisan it does not encourage young journalists to be fair,” Young said.

Indeed, journalists attempting to present both sides of the story can often find their work edited to a point of censorship by their bosses. "Many journalists get embarrassed after their whole article gets re-edited and they lose good contacts because of this," said Aysha.

Both overt censorship and self-censorship come into play in Lebanon. With some of the most liberal media laws in the region, Lebanese authorities often face sharp criticism over the arbitrary and legally dubious censorship system applied by the state's General Security branch, which campaigners say is not based on any legal text.

High profile censorship cases in 2010 and 2011 included the banning of *Green Days*, a film about the uprising in Iran over the disputed re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, which was due to have been screened at a local film festival but which was pulled, most presumed, on the orders of Hezbollah, which is armed and financed by Iran.

A longstanding security agreement with Syria also draws red lines for films that can be shown in Lebanon. The producers of *Huvelin Street*, filmed in 2009 and telling the story of students rising up in 2005 against the presence of Syrian forces in Lebanon, said General Security demanded the removal of a whole scene showing students burning the Syrian flag.

Activists blamed social conservatism for the banning of Danielle Arbid's latest film, *Beirut Hotel*, which General Security's censorship committee argued "would endanger Lebanon's security" over its portrayal of life in the wake of Hariri's assassination. Activists suggest the explicit sex scene between a Lebanese woman and a foreign man may have been a leading cause for the film's banning from screening. General Security also banned the latest album by U.S. pop artist Lady Gaga, at least initially, after pressure from a Catholic group.

Even if a journalist clears hurdles of censorship and political influence on reporting, low pay and the ever-increasing cost of living, in Beirut particularly, make Lebanon's well-established system of political bribes too tempting for many journalists to resist. Panelists said journalists four years into their careers might earn between \$600 to \$1,200 per month, barely enough to cover rent in a modern, two bedroom flat in central Beirut. With budgets dedicated to bribing, or "gifting" journalists as it is known locally, panelists said it is well known which politicians make a habit of paying cash sums to journalists before they leave their office, with sums ranging from \$200 to \$1,000. As a result, few journalists stay with news outlets. "Most journalism graduates end up working in Arab entertainment television stations. Due to low

However, the Telecoms Ministry and the semi-independent telecoms company Ogero did attempt to block Skype calls for a month in June 2010, fearing a loss of profits as users went online to make previously expensive international calls. The ban was quickly lifted when they faced mounting pressure from civil society and the media.

salaries, most journalists are waiting for their chance to travel abroad and I am one of them," said Alawiya.

However, panelists maintained that entertainment programs by no means eclipse news programming. Indeed, some panelists find entertainment shows to be rife with political messaging. But LBC's decision to focus mainly on entertainment and curtail news programs was perhaps indicative of a slowdown in demand for political talk shows, which mushroomed in the wake of the Syrian military withdrawal in 2005, when red lines long imposed by the Assad regime vanished overnight and everyone with an opinion took to the airwaves to share it loudly.

By 2011 a newly launched political talk show on MTV, ironically entitled *Objectivity*, produced a YouTube sensation and an icon for Lebanese fatigue with their political conversation. Future Movement's Mustafa Aloush squared off in debate against the SSNP's staunchly pro-Assad Fayez Shukr, with the two men escalating their curses on each other, before Shukr threw his glass of water across the table, picked up his chair and had to be restrained from beating his debate opponent.

As noted in last year's MSI, Lebanese media leads regionally in the use of up-to-date technical facilities for producing and distributing news.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Lebanon Objective Score: 2.41

As in previous MSI studies, panelists rated the indicator measuring plurality of news highest, noting Lebanese enjoy multiple news sources that are generally accessible and affordable—leaving the score solidly within the near sustainability range of the MSI. However, panelists agreed that although the media presents many different points

Most panelists agreed that state media in Lebanon in general is non-partisan, but does not draw large audiences. "State media does not reflect any political line and is very weak," said Yacoub Alawiya of Amal Movement's NBN channel.

of view, few, if any, individual media outlets could be considered objective.

As the political situation in neighboring Syria intensifies, so the political divide in Lebanon widens between the Syrian and Iranian-allied March 8 bloc and the generally pro-West, Saudi-backed March 14 bloc. While newspapers remain cheap (\$0.33 to \$1.33), and widely available throughout the country, their political ideology broadly falls into one of the two opposing blocs.

Of the eleven leading papers, *Al Anwar*, *Al Bayrak*, *Al Hayat*, *Al Liwaa*, *Mustaqbal*, *An Nahar*, and *As Shark* are considered pro-March 14. *Al Akhbar*, *Ad Diyyar*, and *As Safir* broadly support the March 8 coalition, while daily *Al Balad* and weekly *Al Kalimat* are considered less partisan.

Two French-language dailies, *L'Orient du Jour* and *Action*, are published in Lebanon as well as one English-language paper, *The Daily Star*, and two Armenian-language dailies,

Aztag and *Ararat*. In 2010, *Al Balad* also began publishing a French edition.

Overall, there are 110 publications licensed to report on political news. The Lebanese also have ready access to broadcast news, as the law mandates that private radio and television channels cover all of Lebanon. This includes 16 national radio stations broadcasting in Arabic, English, French, and Armenian, and 11 regional radio stations, as well as one state-owned radio station, Radio Lebanon.

The country has one state television channel and seven privately owned channels. Much more so than newspapers, television channels are owned by politicians and tend to serve their political agenda in a more direct way.

Sunni March 14 leader Saad Hariri owns Future TV, while Shia Hezbollah, which leads the March 8 bloc, pays for its most direct rival, Al Manar. Also supporting March 8 is Orange TV, owned by Free Patriotic Movement Christian leader Michel Aoun and family, and NBN, owned by Shia Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri.

LBC, founded by the Christian Lebanese Forces during the Civil War, now focuses on entertainment but is generally allied to the March 14 movement, as is MTV (owned by Gabriel Murr, brother of the former Defense Minister Elias Murr). The station reopened in 2009 after spending seven years shuttered over charges of campaigning for Gabriel Murr's election. New TV is generally seen as non-allied, but tilts towards the March 8 bloc.

Hundreds of Arabic and international satellite broadcasters are widely available via pirate subscriptions for around \$20 per month. Internet is also available throughout the country, although broadband does not yet reach more remote areas, and prices remained prohibitively high until summer 2011. The state makes little effort to censor websites, even those originating in Israel, with whom Lebanon is still technically at war.

However, the Telecoms Ministry and the semi-independent telecoms company Ogero did attempt to block Skype calls for a month in June 2010, fearing a loss of profits as users went online to make previously expensive international calls. The ban was quickly lifted when they faced mounting pressure from civil society and the media.

While most political and sectarian views are available, many consumers choose to get their news from within the confines of their own political and sectarian media. "The Shias mostly watch Al Manar or NBN, while the Sunnis watch Future TV," said *Al Balad's* Ali Dahe.

MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE, OBJECTIVE NEWS.

PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

- > Plurality of public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, internet, mobile) exists and offer multiple viewpoints.
- > Citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted by law, economics, or other means.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the political spectrum, are non-partisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for media outlets.
- > Private media produce their own news.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge the 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.
- > The media provide news coverage and information about local, national, and international issues.

The rise of professional political blogs, such as Qifa Nabki or Beirut Spring, has given Lebanese a welcome alternative source of political news and analysis, while Mohammed Najem of Beirut's Social Media Exchange said social media is beginning to widen the conversation over Lebanon's future. "Social media is giving a medium for anyone to say anything, and people are starting to use it more and more. It still needs some time to get in shape and get more into the ecosystem," he said.

Both Saad Hariri, the former prime minister, and Najib Mikati, the man who replaced him, now use Twitter to engage with supporters and answer questions, but compared with the pivotal role played by social media in the transformative uprisings that took place in Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria, Lebanon's social media community struggled to convert online presence into offline activism.

Sayah concluded that while there are many news sources in Lebanon, they are owned by major Lebanese political or religious personalities, and therefore reflect their views. "A Lebanese citizen can rely on all of them to get news, but each one will offer him news based on its political view," she said.

Most panelists agreed that state media in Lebanon in general is non-partisan, but does not draw large audiences. "State media does not reflect any political line and is very weak," said Yacoub Alawiya of Amal Movement's NBN channel. "Except for its coverage of Army Day." According to Young, the state media tends to be used by the president. "But since everyone else has outlets, this tends to balance it out," he said. However, panelists last year were generally critical of the situation of state-owned television station TeleLiban and Radio Lebanon, saying that they live to serve the government, and lamenting a bygone era in which Lebanese public broadcasting had been a regional pioneer in arts and culture coverage.

International news agencies such as AP, Reuters, and AFP have offices in Lebanon, and their material is widely circulated. There are several Lebanese news agencies, including An Nashra, Lebanon file, Now Lebanon, Misof News Agency, Wafa news agency (Palestinian), and two state owned agencies: National News Agency and Central News Agency.

While it is understood that political supporters are often behind media outlets, ownership is not always transparent. However, in September 2011, the announcement that left-leaning *As Safir* had found a new investor was welcomed by media watchers, less for the fact that a businessman was investing in a paper—itsself nothing new—but for the fact that it was announced publicly.

The panelists also described how, in the summer of 2011, the editor of pro-March 8 *Ad Diyar*, Charles Ayoub, wrote an editorial openly acknowledging that his newspaper receives

"The Lebanese market is very narrow, so the advertising industry is very limited. Media cannot rely on advertising only," said LAU media expert Sayah.

funding from political sources. Ayoub even laid out specific dollar amounts that he said he receives from different political sources, including those related to former Prime Minister Saad Hariri, Hezbollah and Syria.

Minority interest media is largely ignored. There is one Armenian-language radio station, while only Future TV broadcasts a one-hour news bulletin in Armenian, English, and French. While Kurds are free to associate and publish newsletters, so far no stations broadcast in Kurdish.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Lebanon Objective Score: 2.05

The tribulations of running media companies as self-sustaining, profit-generating businesses in Lebanon was perhaps most symbolically illustrated in June 2010 when leading local daily *An Nahar* was forced to cancel its planned hosting of the 63rd World Newspaper Congress.

Set to bring around 1,500 newspaper publishers and senior newspaper executives to Beirut for a congress themed "In

MEDIA ARE WELL-MANAGED ENTERPRISES, ALLOWING EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

- > Media outlets operate as efficient and self-sustaining enterprises.
- > 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.
- > Government subsidies and advertising are distributed fairly, governed by law, and neither subvert editorial independence nor distort the market.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor the product to the needs and interests of the audience.
- > Broadcast ratings, circulation figures, and internet statistics are reliably and independently produced.

Accurate circulation figures remain impossible to come by, as papers are loathe to share the information, and the Audit Bureau of Circulation long since closed down.

search of the new business model," organizers were forced to re-schedule the event for Germany after *An Nahar* said it could no longer meet the €1.6 million cost of hosting the event.

Panelists agreed the fortunes of Lebanese media remain largely at the whim of the political money on which their business models stand. To illustrate, "Future TV had to sack a couple of hundred employees and cancel some television shows," said Aysha. "When staff asked what was going on they were told, 'Saad is facing a crisis and we don't have money,'" he said, referring to billionaire Saad Hariri, political heir to his five-time prime minister father, Rafik Hariri. After several months, staff at Future TV were paid, but only after Hariri was forced into selling his lucrative Oger Telecom to Saudi Telecom Company to pay off spiraling debts.

Layoffs at major papers continued in 2010 and 2011. In May 2011, *Al Akhbar* laid off 20 employees, while a month later publisher Thaer Karam closed three of his long-running publications: *Monday Morning*, *Al-Bayraq*, and *La Revue du Liban*.

Other media seek new investors to help survive: *As Safir* publisher and editor-in-chief Talal Salman, heading the paper since its founding in 1974, said his deal to sell a 20 percent stake in *As Safir* to Jamal Daniel would mean the paper would no longer be "haunted with the concern of securing the needs of [financial] survival."

Young shared his firsthand experience of the precarious economic tightrope most Lebanese media walk. In January 2009, a court order shut down the generally pro-March 14 English-language *Daily Star*, where he is the opinion editor, after publisher Jamil Mroue was unable to re-finance loans owed to a local bank. "Advertising revenue had gone down in the aftermath of the 2006 war and we were closed for two weeks," said Young. "After a long negotiation, Hariri ended up buying the paper. It serves as a lesson for how hard it is to run an independently owned paper here."

The injection of cash has created "a better paper," said Young, whose initial fears of political intervention by the paper's new owner have not, as yet, been realized. "I haven't really felt intervention on my page," said Young. "Political intervention in Lebanon is never black or white. These are

houses of many mansions. I may own a newspaper, but it doesn't mean I sit there. Papers are complex entities. Politicians may buy a favorable portrait of themselves, but not every story."

Panelists pointed to the relatively small advertising market as a key cause of the struggling finances of most local media. "The Lebanese market is very narrow, so the advertising industry is very limited. Media cannot rely on advertising only," said LAU media expert Sayah.

And what market there is has long been dominated by the Choueiri Group, founded by media mogul Antoine Choueiri, who died in March 2010, passing the baton on to his son Pierre. According to its website, the Choueiri Group today markets and manages the advertising space of 25 satellite and one international television stations, 15 print titles, 10 radio stations, and web portals, along with cinema and billboard advertising.

Widely credited with laying the foundations for the Middle East's advertising industry, at the height of his powers Antoine Choueiri controlled the flow of advertising to most of the top free-to-air television stations in the region, including MBC, LBC, Al Jazeera, and Dubai Media Incorporated. Despite the loss of its founder, media watchers did not expect the Choueiri Group to give much ground to competitors. Local business magazine *Executive* estimates the Choueiri Group controls some 70 percent of Lebanon's ad-spend.

"I would say ads don't exceed 10 percent of income for most media," said Aysha. "As well as this, the centralization of the ad market in a cartel leaves media at the mercy of the advertisers. If they fight the cartel, they will be punished by not receiving any ads."

Despite LBC's economic and legal woes, described in detail in last year's MSI, several panelists agreed that only LBC manages to generate significant revenue from advertising. It consistently tops the rankings as Lebanon's most successful commercial media enterprise. The success has come at a cost, however. On November 23, the LBC Satellite Channel news team was sacked, according to local watchdog Samir Kassir Eyes, on the grounds that LBC Satellite Channel would only broadcast entertainment, and no longer broadcast news, which is expensive to make.¹

Accurate circulation figures remain impossible to come by, as papers are loathe to share the information, and the Audit Bureau of Circulation long since closed down. Most media

¹ "LBC Satellite Channel News Team Dismissed," on Samir Kassir Eyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom website. <http://www.skeyesmedia.org/en/News/Lebanon/LBC-Satellite-Channel-News-Team-Dismissed>.

experts believe the highest selling Lebanese newspaper sells no more than 10,000 copies on its best day, with an average of 7,000 to 8,000 per day.

Before the 1975-1990 Civil War, Nabil Dajani, a professor of media studies at the American University of Beirut, told the *Daily Star* that a single paper could easily sell 60,000 to 70,000 copies in a day. He blamed the parochial coverage of Lebanese papers, which had once sold more in the Gulf than at home, but which now focus mostly on domestic politics.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Lebanon Objective Score: 1.64

Finding any Lebanese journalist with something positive to say about the official supporting institutions in their country remains a thankless task. Scoring lowest of all objectives in this year's MSI, Objective 5 continued its slide towards unsustainability. Panelists unanimously derided Lebanon's performance in key indicators in Objective 5.

As noted in last year's MSI, there is only one media owners' association, the Press Federation, representing owners, publishers, and organizations in print media. There is no such equivalent in broadcast media.

The Journalists Union, or Press Syndicate, represents working journalists, but panelists largely dismissed it as the personal fiefdom of its long serving head, Melhem Karam, who died of

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a heart attack in May 2010 after a staggering 44 years in the top job. Panelists said he had closed the Union to working media professionals, failed to hold elections for years, and had done little to defend the rights of journalists.

In the wake of his death, the Syndicate's council met to discuss modernizing its bylaws. At the beginning of 2011, the council handed the Ministry of Information a copy of its new laws. However, by late 2011, panelists unanimously felt no real changes had been implemented.

"It's still closed to new members," said el Shal. "The driver of the head of the Press Syndicate is a member, while hundreds of journalists are not."

This bizarre membership policy is not an isolated incident. "After the death of the Syndicate's representative in the North, his son, an engineer, took his place," said Omar Ibrahim, Tripoli correspondent for left-leaning *As Safir* newspaper. "In North Lebanon, there are 90 members in the Syndicate, but only three of them are journalists."

NBN's Yacoub Alawiya added that he knows of taxi drivers who are members of the Syndicate: "It's monopolized by one family, and no one gets anything good out of it."

Speaking in June 2011, Abdel Hadi Mahfouz, president of the National Audiovisual Media Council—a quasi-independent body working under the Information Ministry to license and regulate television and radio stations—acknowledged the need for media membership of the Syndicate, and for photographers and those working in television and radio to be granted their own unions. Currently, both groups lack official representation.

In addition to its failure to grant membership to journalists, the Press Syndicate did not defend journalists amid the significant number of interrogations of journalists by Lebanon's security forces through 2011. Aysha criticized the Press Syndicate for failing to speak up on behalf of journalists, citing a "Catch 22" at work. "By law, journalists must be registered in the Syndicate. But it is closed to journalists, so when a journalist is arrested the Syndicate does

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- > Trade associations represent the interests of media owners and managers and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights and promote quality journalism.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs exist providing substantial practical experience.
- > Short-term training and in-service training institutions and programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of media equipment, newsprint, and printing facilities are apolitical, not monopolized, and not restricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (e.g., kiosks, transmitters, cable, internet, mobile) are apolitical, not monopolized, and not restricted.
- > Information and communication technology infrastructure sufficiently meets the needs of media and citizens.

“Universities offer journalism degrees, but most graduates lack practical work experience, and thus hit an obstacle when they enter the job market,” said Aysha. “An Nahar opened a training center but it was hit by the paper’s financial crisis from 2007.”

not release a statement because he or she is not a member,” Aysha explained.

In place of union support, the panelists agreed, political parties provide legal cover to the journalists working for the media they own. “Most journalists seek protection from local politicians,” said el Shal. “When Hassan Allaiq, a journalist in [pro-March 8] *Al Akhbar* was questioned by Lebanese intelligence, Hezbollah protected him.” In North Lebanon, said Ibrahim, local politicians even paid for journalists to found their own press club. But when the political money dried up, so did the fledgling club.

Local media watchdog organizations exist, however, most notably the Samir Kassir Eyes foundation, established after the 2005 assassination of the prominent Franco-Lebanese historian and columnist for *An Nahar*. The Maharat Foundation is a local partner with the International Freedom of Expression Exchange, and comprises a team of Lebanese journalists who report on violations of media freedom and work to promote legal safeguards.

In terms of formal education for journalists, last year’s MSI noted that state-run Lebanese University offers a four-year journalism major, and Arab University recently began offering a major in journalism (in 2007). Additionally, 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, meanwhile, offers a degree in communications with a specialty in journalism, and offers journalism training courses. Still, panelists this year agreed with last year’s assessment that journalism training focuses too heavily on theory, rather than practical skills. “Universities offer journalism degrees, but most graduates lack practical work experience, and thus hit an obstacle when they enter the job market,” said Aysha. “*An Nahar* opened a training center but it was hit by the paper’s financial crisis from 2007.”

Several panelists echoed this assessment, reporting that the poor finances at most media companies led to a further decline in budgets for journalism training. “Budget shortfalls don’t allow media companies to train their journalists, so most of them wait for foreign organizations to come and train,” said Hassan Bakir, of Wafa news agency.

In April 2011, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) teamed up with France’s Canal and AFP news agency to offer nearly 40 journalists and editors training in an effort to improve media standards, linking a strong media directly to development.

Sayah described most local training programs as “merely existing,” though she said LBC, where she used to work, had made strides in training their staff “to broadcast objective news with distance between all political parties.” LBC, she said, recruited foreign experts for the purpose. However, LBC has since closed down its newsgathering unit due to financial problems.

Young said his paper had made attempts to train young journalists in-house. As noted in last year’s MSI, other organizations that offer training to Lebanese journalists include the Thomson 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.

The politicization of channels of media distribution remains a complex issue in Lebanon. On the one hand, the country enjoys a tradition of free printing presses, which once made it the literary capital of the Arab world.

In the contemporary setting, however, political rivalry, incompetence, and greed pose a long-term threat to Lebanon’s media development. Chronic electricity shortages continued throughout 2010 and 2011, severely hampering many media companies and driving up costs. A \$4.8 billion plan to upgrade capacity to give Lebanon 24/7 power by 2014, announced by Minister Gibran Bassil in July 2010, has yet to make an impact.

The Telecoms Ministry, meanwhile, remained at the center of political and personal power struggles. Hezbollah fought hard to secure the ministry in the hands of its allies, accusing the pro-West government it twice deposed of falsifying phone records as part of the “American / Israeli plot,” which saw four of its members indicted in the assassination of former prime minister Rafik Hariri, largely based on records of mobile phone calls.

The political tug of war over Telecoms was most graphically illustrated in May 2011, when members of the Internal Security Forces (ISF) commanded by a fiercely loyal March 14

general surrounded a Telecoms Ministry building to block the March 8 Telecoms Minister from having workers remove Chinese equipment that was, reportedly, due to be used to open a third mobile phone operator.

Political and ideological rivalries aside, many sanguine Lebanese see incidents such as the ISF stand off as ultimately driven by money: The privatization of the telecommunications sector, under the control of the Telecoms Ministry, is expected to generate up to \$6 billion.

Concerning whether information and communication technology infrastructure sufficiently meets the needs of media and citizens, panelists noted that the arrival in summer 2011 of the long awaited India to France broadband Internet cable, delayed by more than a year by disputes between the Telecoms Ministry and OGERO, the semi-autonomous company responsible for administering telecoms, finally brought some relief to Lebanese struggling to create a knowledge economy in a country rated by Speedtest.net as having the worst Internet in the world.

Activists from pressure groups Fast Lebanon and Flip the Switch, whose campaigning helped pressure politicians to end their turf wars, welcomed the increased capacity, which brought with it 3G mobile phone data services for the first time. "Lebanese are now able to get information on their mobiles and laptops very quickly and efficiently," said Sayah. Mohammed Najem, co-founder of Social Media Exchange, was less convinced. "Can I put minus four?" he asked when contemplating a score for indicator 8. "It's better, but there are still a lot of needs and problems with infrastructure."

List of Panel Participants

Ali Dahe, reporter, *Al Balad*, Beirut

Hassan Bakir, journalist, Wafa news agency, Beirut

Mohammed Barakat, reporter, Future TV, Beirut

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

Sami Hamad, editor, Lebanese Media Information Services (Misof), Beirut

Sarah el Shal, youth page editor, *Future*, Beirut

Wadih Haddad, assistant general manager, Voice du Liban, public radio, Beirut

Mohammed Najem, co-founder, Social Media Exchange, Beirut

Rita Sayah, senior researcher, Lebanese American University, Beirut

Rami Aysha, reporter, *Time*; freelance television producer, Beirut

Yacoub Alawiya, reporter, NBN TV, Beirut

Michael Young, opinion editor, *Daily Star*, Beirut

Moderator and Author

Hugh Macleod, journalist, *The Guardian*, Beirut

With the near-absence of independent media outlets, Lebanese citizens find themselves forced to engage in “zapping,” or reading more than one newspaper in order to get comprehensive information.



LEBANON

The relatively poor score of 1.28 for Objective 6 is not surprising, in light of the overall negative air of the MSI panelists' discussion of current media performance from the perspective of media consumers. The feeling was reflected right at the outset, with the arrival of women's rights activist Joumana Merhi. Prior to the official opening of the session, she said, "I am concerned, as I do not want to influence the other panelists. I am very pessimistic." However, as panelists gathered and as the session began, Merhi became more relaxed and said, "Upon listening to the other views on media, I think I am more optimistic than the others!"

The panelist's discussion of the indicators revealed a consensus: consumers perceive media to be politicized, biased, and mouthpieces for politicians and religious sects. With the near-absence of independent media outlets, Lebanese citizens find themselves forced to engage in "zapping," or reading more than one newspaper in order to get comprehensive information. As for Lebanese who are affiliated with certain political parties, typically they limit themselves to media outlets aligned with their points of view.

The panelist discussion indicated that news coverage is not comprehensive—rather, it is limited to news about politicians. Unless a politician or official is connected to a story, news media do not give priority to the everyday concerns of Lebanese people: housing, food safety, infrastructure, public transportation, tuition fees, and medical bills. Furthermore, journalists do not conduct investigative reports or follow up on corruption cases; most news reporting ignores long-term considerations and fails to follow developments after the story breaks.

The panelists expressed the belief that media outlets comply with politicians' wishes regarding stories to be covered, and as a result, often the media do not hold responsible people accountable. Moreover, media promote sectarian and racial divisions, and political forces use the provocations to spread propaganda. According to the panelists, media workers are now falling in line with the political views of their outlets—few of which are truly independent. Media outlets are part of the political game, thus when they report on corruption, consumer protection, policymaking, or the rule of the law, their intent is not to serve the public interest—they are attempting to show their opposing political parties in a negative light.

Consequently, the Lebanese media sector is a reflection of the charged political situation and does not allow for independent voices calling for change. The result is that citizens resort to alternative and new media sources to publicize their causes and to follow the developments taking place in their country.

Objective 6 is a separate study from objectives 1 through 5 of the Media Sustainability Index. This objective is measured using a separate group of panelists (listed at the end of this section) and unique indicators (described at the end of this section).

OBJECTIVE 6: SERVING PUBLIC NEEDS

Lebanon Objective Score: 1.28

Media in Lebanon enjoy a margin of freedom, but the same space that allows for inclusive discussions also serves media outlets' political agendas most of the time. But because of the media's relative freedom, indicator 1 was the highest scoring of the seven indicators, exceeding the overall objective score by slightly more than half a point.

According to Roy Jreijiri, a media professor at Université Saint-Esprit De Kaslik, "Some debatable issues that are important to citizens—such as social or educational issues, or problems related to fundamental concerns of some segments of the community, like the disabled or the foreign workers—are not initiated by media."

At the expense of all these topics, the media cover the same political debate they have for years. The discourse revolves around two factions: the March 8 alliance, backed by Syria; and the March 14 pro-western alliance, supported by Saudi Arabia. Their discussions are initiated to serve the same political agendas as media institution owners, who manage the content of news reports. Journalists working in these outlets must show the same affiliation, and therefore exhibit a lack of independent thinking and objectivity. "It is true that the media in Lebanon, except the official institutions, are

THE MEDIA SERVE CITIZENS BY PROVIDING USEFUL AND RELEVANT NEWS AND INFORMATION AND FACILITATING PUBLIC DEBATE

- > The media promote and facilitate inclusive discussions about local, national, and international issues (social, political, economic, etc.) that are important to citizens.
- > Reporting and discussion in the media support democratic policymaking, government transparency, equitable regulatory enforcement, and consumer protection.
- > News and information provided by the media is relevant to, and informs, the choices and decisions (social, political, economic, etc.) made by citizens.
- > Citizens trust that news and information reported by the media accurately reflects reality.
- > It is possible for citizens to recognize partisan, editorial, or advertorial content as such.
- > Editorial and partisan media content is a constructive part of national dialogue; media refrain from including "hate speech" content.
- > The media expose citizens to multiple viewpoints and experiences of citizens from various social, political, regional, gender, ethnic, religious, confessional, etc., groups.

owned by the private sector, but this does not reflect [media] freedom," said Fahmieh Sharafeddine, a sociologist.

Civil society activist Nabil Hassan had a more positive view. "The Lebanese media institutions have started to increasingly tackle the social and economic issues (*Kalam Annas* on LBC, *Tehkik* on MTV) and allow people to interact through phone calls [and] complain and discuss," he said. However, he added that "those shows are still subject to lots of interference and cannot be considered sustainable." He pointed to an instance during Mohammad Jawad Khalife's tenure as Minister of Health, when authorities discovered counterfeit pharmaceuticals at eight major pharmacies. The pharmacies were closed for just for one day, and the media neither named these pharmacies nor investigated whether people were harmed as a result. Speculation is that the lack of reporting and the light punishment resulted from political pressure.

Lebanese audiences indeed value reports on topics relevant to them, as evidenced when the producers of the famous *Kalam el Nas* program, broadcast by the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation (LBC), sought to gain back its audience by covering food safety issues.

When the media do cover major issues—such as the constant electricity cuts that have remained a problem for years—the coverage does not include any deep analysis or historical background with scientific justification. Rather, it exposes the relevant minister and his/her political affiliation in order to direct a campaign either against or in support of him/her. Citizens have never learned why the country does not have reliable electricity despite the large amounts of money earmarked for this purpose.

The media have shown the same disinterest in the issue of wages. This topic was the center of much debate in 2011, yet the media did not cover significantly labor's interests or how the high cost of living affects purchasing power. The only debates in media outlets focused on the minister of labor and devolved into political polemics. Highlighting this lack of depth in reporting, American University of Beirut professor Jad Melki said, "The coverage of news does not introduce experts for the purpose of instructing people." Hassan agreed and said, "The media outlets tend to host politicians from opposing sides, rather than hosting experts versus politicians, leaving minimal impact on policy development and accountability." Thus, the media have become tools in the hands of politicians instead of serving as tools to hold politicians accountable, Hassan commented. Such an approach has convinced most citizens that the media are not willing or able to serve as conduit between the public and government to promote accountability and reform.

Even when information is available, the media do not go beyond basic news. *An Nahar* newspaper wrote stories on school buildings on the verge of collapse, but no other media outlet picked up this story or promoted debate about it until the Fassouh building in Achrafieh collapsed and caused about 50 deaths. Even then, the coverage focused on the politicians who visited the building. Citizens did not see any follow-up stories regarding the victims or the displaced families.

Jrejiri gave another example of selective media coverage: during Minister of Interior Ziad Baroud's tenure, the media heavily featured discussions of traffic laws, but the issue was seemingly forgotten when he left office.

However, the panelists noticed some evident progress with the emergence of social media, where Lebanese discuss social and economic topics freely. This pushes the traditional media to get in line with electronic media platforms, and in some cases, to tackle the same issues debated. Nahla el Munir, a media officer with Safadi Cultural Center in Tripoli, commented that the new players in the public debate have "started to impose themselves on the media, since social media and civil society organizations started to initiate debates seriously." Munir el Khatib, an activist, also agreed that social media are helping traditional media. "Journalists can now find justifications for their stories based on what is happening on social media platforms," he said.

According to the panelists, media are not being reformist or supporting discussions leading to reform; they only wait to see what politicians say in order to identify their reporting angle. Merhi gave the example of the media's coverage of Lebanon's electoral approach to voting. "The media did not clarify for citizens the methods of the proportional electoral system, because politicians were against it." As a result, citizens were convinced that the proportional system is very complicated and almost irrelevant to them. All the corruption scandals, violations highlighting traffic issues, poor food safety standards, or problems with prisons also are discussed from a political perspective and lack specific data. These stories are never followed by judicial investigation, according to Rodolphe Haddad, an architect.

The media do not serve as a public voice on policymaking and legislative processes. Rather, each outlet has its own reporter in parliament who covers only committee meetings and the quarrels within the committees. These journalists do not have the necessary skills to identify laws and regulations or provide analysis in their coverage, even if their outlets were interested in such reporting. Parliamentary committee members participate actively in meetings only when politically debatable issues are on the table, and do not show up otherwise—and reporters take that lead, disregarding the issues that politicians do. El Munir said, "This situation does

not help citizens to form a critical opinion regarding political choices and participation, especially with this vertical division we are living."

Sharafeddine said that Lebanese media do not meet their social responsibility. Often citizens are not aware of their legal rights and cannot turn to the media as a resource. For example, some news stories and media programs report medical mistakes without informing people what to do if they are victims of such a mistake and what kind of documentation they should prepare to file a lawsuit. "The main problem in media is that media workers are either not aware of the laws and policies, or they ignore them," Eddine said. "Journalists do not provide such information."

Some politicians and decision makers use the media to protest problems related to their administrations, as if they were ordinary citizens. One example is the minister of health, who complained more than once about the complicity between doctors and the drug companies, yet did not use his authority as a minister to address the issue. The media, in turn, do not point out these hypocrisies and do not hold officials accountable in their duties to protect the public.

Even with the abundance of media in circulation, the news related to political issues does not have great influence on citizens' opinions, panelists said. Most Lebanese are set in their political stances already. The political information presented also is not in-depth and it lacks research, analysis, and background, Melki said. "If I miss the news for 10 days, I won't be able to read a newspaper [to catch up], as it will not be linked to any of the background," he said.

In regard to the balance of news reporting with other subjects, El Munir said, "The majority of the programs in prime time are political or entertainment programs." American University of Beirut student Dalia al Mukdad agreed that the priority in media coverage is political issues, and the media allocate time to other topics such as health and education only when there is stability on political and security levels.

Current topics such as alternative energy, organic agriculture, and the high costs of hospitalization are not tackled deeply in the media. However, media can be influential in non-political issues when they choose to cover them. Fahed Akroush, a university student, gave an example: "When media informed us of the disadvantages of paraffin, we all started asking before buying a medicine whether it contains paraffin or not." In another example, the *Kalam el Nas* program once broadcasted from the Burj Hammoud dump and had a strong influence on public discourse, as it addressed the public's concerns. However, Nasr said that the program was overly slanted. "The problem is that the

citizens were directed towards solutions provided by the program that are not necessarily the best," he said. "Would the citizens have agreed to such high costs if they were not influenced by the program?"

In their discussion of the indicator assessing citizen trust of the veracity of news media, panelists agreed that media in Lebanon cannot be considered entirely trustworthy. They pointed specifically to the political positioning and affiliation of each media outlet as the underlying reason. Citizens belonging to a certain political party or sect follow news from media outlets of the same affiliation, without taking into consideration the objectivity or neutrality of the news reported. "Each TV station reflects completely its supporters' political choice and what they would like to hear," Hassan said. Hachem Adnan, an activist and theater worker, expressed concern over the growing disregard for truth. "This situation is causing an alteration to the public opinion, and the most serious problem is that the politically affiliated citizen accepts the information even when he knows that it is false news."

On the other hand, citizens who are not affiliated with one political side must collect information from different sources in order to piece together an approximation of the true story, especially when the matter is related to controversial issues such as the United Nations' Special Tribunal for Lebanon, the Syrian revolution, etc. This process has become easier with the emergence of online news and social media platforms, according to several panelists. "Whenever I need information, I refer to the social media platforms as a first source," El Munir commented. Nasr agreed that the Internet is filling a needed role. "The information provided by news websites is more accurate than the traditional media; at least we can identify some independent websites we can rely on," he said.

On the indicator assessing clear separation of news and editorial content, Sharafeddine's comment set the tone for the discussion: "I give zero to score this indicator, as the combination of opinion and hard news is deliberate in our intentionally biased media." Indeed, this indicator scored the lowest of the seven, although it remained within a half a point of the overall objective average.

Most citizens are aware of the political affiliations of media outlets; however, these outlets commingle the news with opinions and analysis in a decidedly non-transparent manner. Nasr said, "We should look at how the incidents in Syria are reported in both Future TV and Manar TV, and how opinion is disguised by each media to be presented as hard news." Nasr was referring to how Manar TV favorably covers pro-Assad demonstrations while depicting those who have risen against the Baathist government as terrorists killing Syrian soldiers and civilians. Future TV typically leads its

newscasts and devotes the bulk of its time to events in Syria, definitively describing them as a "revolution" and explicitly characterizing the Assad regime as murderous.

Another element of bias seamlessly added into the news is the lead-in segments that aim to introduce the political agenda of the outlet and orient public opinion in the same direction. The segments have become a common feature of television news programs, and can exceed four minutes in some cases. These segments, along with loud newspaper headlines, make it difficult for consumers to differentiate between news and opinion unless they refer to other news sources.

Additionally, Haddad commented, "We should not ignore the suspicious relationships that media executives have with intelligence agencies, which are able to pass along information that serves them."

Panelists said that most newsrooms have become experts at disguising advertising as hard news. Jreijiri stressed, "Media are carrying out undercover marketing by hiding advertising material within news content. However, they are not held accountable."

Moreover, there is no transparency in media institutions regarding funding sources. "The funding of media outlets is still a mystery," said el Khatib. "Only during elections do some media outlets declare that some of their programs are paid." Dalia Mukdad said that despite the formal lack of transparency, most audience members are aware of where funding originates. "They trust [these sources] because they align with their political beliefs," he said.

Citizens can assess how bad a particular situation is according to either the calls for peace or the incitements to action through news broadcasts and newspaper headlines. Media play a role in mobilizing people whenever politicians require, and when politicians call for calm, they start with the media before they engage in national dialogue. "Even when media are promoting peace, they are doing so because a political decision has been made to stop incitement," said al Mukdad.

Many media outlets serve as platforms for mutual accusations, trading messages of provocation and urging mistrust of opponents of their political agenda. Media outlets affiliated with the March 8 movement, for example, accuse those parties seeking disarmament of Hezbollah to be serving American and Israeli agendas; and in turn, media outlets affiliated with the March 14 movement accuse the other side of serving Iran. In both cases, these media rely on all the sectarian goading and other sources of mistrust they can muster to attract people to their cause.

In addition to the political agendas of the media, another form of hate speech has arisen since the assassination of

Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005. Frequently, media use stereotypes to demonize foreign workers or refugees from nearby conflicts in Palestinian lands or Iraq, with no backlash in public opinion. "Despite the mounting speeches that incite violence, such as the reports on foreigners in Burj Hammoud broadcast on MTV, the Sahel Alma rape, the Palestinian refugees, and homosexuals, civil society is still not showing any reaction to stop this provocative speech," Jreijiri said.

Panelists expressed the belief that many media outlets select the news they want to cover according to how much they can fuel sectarianism and conflicts, and at the expense of other stories. "They even deliberately bring together opposing guests and provoke incitant discussions," Adnan said. "Some guests are made especially for such roles, like Wiam Wahhab [head of the Arab Tawhid party], who has such a negative reputation, [yet] citizens trust what he says when he is threatening."

Panelists observed that positive stories of sectarian harmony exist, but Lebanese media will forego them in favor of inflammatory reporting. El Munir said, "Whenever clashes start between Tebbane and Jabal Mohsen in Tripoli, media coverage is always available. But this is not the case if a cultural event were showing the solidarity between people in Tripoli, like the 'Live Christmas' festival that was not highlighted by the media."

Panelists were skeptical about the media's representation of multiple social backgrounds. Even when media include guests with different points of view, it is more of a ruse to tout objectivity, not a real commitment to pluralism, panelists said. Thus, any debate is stuck within the limits of political divide; only the two poles can deliver their messages, while civil society and minority groups, such as homosexuals and foreign workers, stay marginalized and cannot raise their voices. Melki commented, "The groups that are not politically backed up are not heard or highlighted in the media." Jreijiri added, "Large groups are not represented in the media scene, even though they are not considered minorities." He gave the example of the wage issue and said, "The media focused on negotiators, disregarding the workers themselves; we did not see any portrait on the daily life of a farmer and his expenses, for example."

Moreover, even on talk shows that invite guests with different viewpoints, the political angle of the show host prevails. El Munir said that such false pretenses were the reason "why a guest from the Future movement left a program on Manar TV that hosted a guest [Ghaleb Kandil] who is affiliated with March 8."

The panelists agreed that national media coverage excludes community issues and does not pick up stories from local

media. According to El Munir, "There are exceptions in a limited number of programs such as *Maraya el Chimal* on Tele Liban, *Akhbar al Manatek* on NBN, in addition to some newspapers, but the approach is still not attractive." He gave an example of the disparity: "Buildings collapse on a daily basis in Tebbane, and this is not reported. If media covered events in the regions, it would be the result of personal efforts and relations of the [event] organizer with the press." Akroush added that journalists have little choice in whether they can represent their communities. "The reporters in the regions cannot impose certain news; only the editorial boards have the choice of selecting and editing information," he said.

Adnan observed that beyond the preferences of editors, the lack of cultural and specialized programs is exacerbated by most media professionals' poor understanding of such topics. "When I am interviewed about my theater work, I feel that my host doesn't know anything related to theater, and this annoys me," he said.

List of Panel Participants

Jad Melki, media professor, American University of Beirut, Beirut

Roy Jreijiri, media professor, Université Saint-Esprit De Kaslik, Jounieh

Dalia al Mukdad, university student, Beirut Arab University, Jbeil

Fahed Akroush, university student, Lebanese University, Bekaa

Joumana Merhi, activist, Mar Elias

Hachem Adnan, activist and theater worker, Beirut

Nahla el Munir, activist, Safadi Cultural Center, Tripoli

Fahmieh Sharafeddine, sociologist, Hazmieh

Roger Nasr, documentary producer, Barti, Saida

Nabil Hassan, activist, Shouf

Rodolphe Haddad, architect, Baskinta

Munir el Khatib, activist, Chemlan

Moderator and Author

Loyal Bahnam, program officer, Maharat Foundation, Beirut

The Lebanon "Objective 6" study was coordinated by, and conducted in partnership with, Maharat Foundation, Beirut. The panel discussion convened on January 26, 2012.

However, media can be influential in non-political issues when they choose to cover them. Fahed Akroush, a university student, gave an example: “When media informed us of the disadvantages of paraffin, we all started asking before buying a medicine whether it contains paraffin or not.”



To complete both studies, IREX used closely related, albeit slightly different methodologies. The Methodology for Objective 1 through 5 are explained in detail, followed by a summary of modifications made for the Objective 6 study.

Methodology for Objectives 1 through 5

IREX prepared the MSI in cooperation with USAID as a tool to assess the development of media systems over time and across countries. IREX staff, USAID, and other media-development professionals contributed to the development of this assessment tool.

The MSI assesses five “objectives” in shaping a successful media system:

1. Legal and social norms protect and promote free speech and access to public information.
2. Journalism meets professional standards of quality.
3. Multiple news sources provide citizens with reliable, objective news.
4. Media are well-managed enterprises, allowing editorial independence.
5. Supporting institutions function in the professional interests of independent media.

These objectives were judged to be the most important aspects of a sustainable and professional independent media system, and serve as the criteria against which countries are rated. A score is attained for each objective by rating between seven and nine indicators, which determine how well a country meets that objective. The objectives, indicators, and scoring system are presented below.

Scoring: A Local Perspective

The primary source of information is a panel of local experts that IREX assembles in each country to serve as panelists. These experts are drawn from the country’s media outlets, NGOs, professional associations, and academic institutions. Panelists may be editors, reporters, media managers or owners, advertising and marketing specialists, lawyers, professors or teachers, or human rights observers. Additionally, panels comprise the various types of media represented in a country. The panels also include representatives from the capital city and other geographic regions, and they reflect gender, ethnic, and religious diversity as appropriate. For consistency from year to year, at least half of the previous year’s participants are included on the following year’s panel. IREX identifies and works with a local or regional organization or individual to oversee the process.

The scoring is completed in two parts. First, panel participants are provided with a questionnaire and explanations of the indicators and scoring system. Descriptions of each indicator clarify their meanings and help organize the panelist's thoughts. For example, the questionnaire asks the panelist to consider not only the letter of the legal framework, but its practical implementation, too. A country without a formal freedom-of-information law that enjoys customary government openness may well outperform a country that has a strong law on the books that is frequently ignored. Furthermore, the questionnaire does not single out any one type of media as more important than another; rather it directs the panelist to consider the salient types of media and to determine if an underrepresentation, if applicable, of one media type impacts the sustainability of the media sector as a whole. In this way, we capture the influence of public, private, national, local, community, and new media. Each panelist reviews the questionnaire individually and scores each indicator.

The panelists then assemble to analyze and discuss the objectives and indicators. While panelists may choose to change their scores based upon discussions, IREX does not promote consensus on scores among panelists. The panel moderator (in most cases a representative of the host-country institutional partner or a local individual) prepares a written analysis of the discussion, which IREX staff members edit subsequently. Names of the individual panelists and the partner organization or individual appear at the end of each country chapter.

IREX editorial staff members review the panelists' scores, and then provide a set of scores for the country, independently of the panel. This score carries the same weight as an individual panelist. The average of all individual indicator scores within the objective determines the objective score. The overall country score is an average of all five objectives.

In some cases where conditions on the ground are such that panelists might suffer legal retribution or physical threats as a result of their participation, IREX will opt to allow some or all of the panelists and the moderator/author to remain anonymous. In severe situations, IREX does not engage panelists as such; rather the study is conducted through research and interviews with those knowledgeable of the media situation in that country. Such cases are appropriately noted in relevant chapters.

Changes and Additions Made in 2011

Between 2001 and 2010 IREX used the same objectives and indicators without any changes. In the MSI's tenth year, IREX drew on our experience using this methodology in three

regions, Africa, Europe and Eurasia, and the Middle East, to refine the methodology. Based upon the comments from our panelists during panel discussions, IREX felt that certain concepts required clarification and amplification. Changes in technology over time required more direct language to show that our studies have captured its impact on the media sector and ensure that panelists continue to consider this in their deliberations. Finally, IREX intended from the beginning that the MSI not discriminate in favor of a country with a preponderance of public media or private media; regardless of ownership, the underpinnings of an effective media system are the same. Therefore, IREX clarified some language to ensure our intentions are clear in that regard.

Highlights of the Changes

Close inspection of the new objectives and indicators will reveal some subtle changes, and we invite users of the MSI to review these at their convenience. However, below is a summary of the key amendments and additions, with a short explanation.

- Objective 1, indicator 2: Although international norms of media freedom frown upon licensing and/or registration of print media or online media, this nonetheless occurs in many countries. The original wording of this indicator singled out broadcast media to reflect IREX's belief that only media making use of a public good—the broadcast frequency spectrum—should be subject to licensing. The changed wording broadens the scope, yet the guiding questions in the questionnaire ask panelists to consider if any licensing or registration serves to protect a compelling public interest.
- Objective 3, indicators 1 and 2: Changes made to these two indicators are intended to clarify the meaning of each and make each more distinctive. Indicator 1 covers the availability of different sources of news on different platforms and the diversity of viewpoints represented therein. Indicator 2 assesses any obstacles faced by citizens when trying to access domestic and foreign media, be those obstacles legal, socioeconomic, and/or infrastructural (e.g., inconsistent electrical supplies) in nature.
- Objective 3, indicator 8: Ideally, citizens have access to news about their immediate area, neighboring communities, national developments, and international events. Further, such reporting should be contextualized: the media should analyze the impact of such developments for their audience in a way, for example, that an international satellite news channel cannot do. IREX felt that this concept was not receiving adequate consideration in panel discussions and added an indicator dedicated to it.

- Objective 4: By changing the wording of this indicator, IREX intended to remove a perception of bias against public or non-profit media. IREX's intention from the beginning was to focus on good management and solid financial sustainability that encourages editorial independence of media outlets.
- Objective 4, indicator 5: By broadening the language of this indicator to specifically include government advertising, which in some countries is the largest source of advertising revenue, IREX aims to more fully assess the government's impact on the media marketplace and how fairly it spreads public funds amongst the media. Previously, guiding language in the questionnaire asked panelists to consider government advertising, but this change makes IREX's intention more explicit.
- Objective 5 indicator 8: Information and communications infrastructure is increasingly important to allow media to reach citizens and for citizens to serve as reporters or otherwise interact with the media. Citizens whose countries have poor resources in this area face disadvantages in this regard. IREX added an indicator to assess how well this infrastructure serves both the media and citizens. Indicator 7 under this objective, which previously also tried to cover this concept, is now solely dedicated to the control of these resources and the ability of media to access them without undue restrictions.

Impact on Scores of the Methodology Changes

In considering changes, IREX wanted to be sure that historic scores would maintain comparability to future scores. IREX did not see the need for radical additions; rather the intention of the changes was to ensure that MSI panelists properly assess the concepts already incorporated. However, adding indicators or changing language has had some minor impact on scores.

For example, adding an additional indicator in Objective 5 (previously seven indicators, now eight) to cover the information and communications infrastructure does allow for a relatively wealthy country with an advanced infrastructure but otherwise lackluster supporting institutions to perform better than in the past without any apparent change. However, the ability of one additional indicator to significantly change the average of seven other indicators is limited. Where the new indicators noticeably impact scores from previous years is noted in the introductory paragraph of the relevant objective in each country chapter.

Further, changes to the wording of the indicators had modest impact. For example, in years past panelists sometimes provided better scores than expected for Objective 4, indicator 5, which covered government subsidies for private media, if the government provided no such subsidies. Guiding text also asked panelists to consider government advertising, but experience showed that they probably did not do so to the extent IREX desired. Changing the wording of the indicator to also specify advertising has had a noticeable impact on the scores for this indicator, although it has not been enough to drastically impact Objective 4 scores.

The changes made to the methodology will result in more accurate reflections of the sustainability of a country's media sector and its ability to function as the "fourth estate." While IREX recognizes that scores are affected by these changes, the magnitude of the impact has been minimal in this first year of using the revised methodology and does not discredit comparisons to scores from past years.

I. Objectives and Indicators

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 or registration of media protects a public interest and is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- > Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- > Crimes against media professionals, citizen reporters, and media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- > The law protects the editorial independence of state or public media.
- > Libel is a civil law issue, public officials are held to higher standards, offended party must prove falsity and malice.
- > Public information is easily available; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media, journalists, and citizens.
- > Media outlets' access to and use of local and international news and news sources is not restricted by law.
- > Entry into the journalism profession is free and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

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 and retain qualified personnel within the media profession.
- > Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming.
- > Facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- > Quality niche reporting and programming exist (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE, OBJECTIVE NEWS.

PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

- > Plurality of public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, internet, mobile) exists and offer multiple viewpoints.
- > Citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted by law, economics, or other means.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the political spectrum, are non-partisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for media outlets.
- > Private media produce their own news.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge the 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.
- > The media provide news coverage and information about local, national, and international issues.

MEDIA ARE WELL-MANAGED ENTERPRISES, ALLOWING EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

- > Media outlets operate as efficient and self-sustaining enterprises.
- > 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.
- > Government subsidies and advertising are distributed fairly, governed by law, and neither subvert editorial independence nor distort the market.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor the product to the needs and interests of the audience.
- > Broadcast ratings, circulation figures, and internet statistics are reliably and independently produced.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- > Trade associations represent the interests of media owners and managers and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights and promote quality journalism.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs exist providing substantial practical experience.
- > Short-term training and in-service training institutions and programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of media equipment, newsprint, and printing facilities are apolitical, not monopolized, and not restricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (e.g., kiosks, transmitters, cable, internet, mobile) are apolitical, not monopolized, and not restricted.
- > Information and communication technology infrastructure sufficiently meets the needs of media and citizens.

II. Scoring System

A. Indicator Scoring

Each indicator is scored using the following system:

0 = Country does not meet the indicator; government or social forces may actively oppose its implementation.

1 = Country minimally meets aspects of the indicator; forces may not actively oppose its implementation, but business environment may not support it and government or profession do not fully and actively support change.

2 = Country has begun to meet many aspects of the indicator, but progress may be too recent to judge or still dependent on current government or political forces.

3 = Country meets most aspects of the indicator; implementation of the indicator has occurred over several years and/or through changes in government, indicating likely sustainability.

4 = Country meets the aspects of the indicator; implementation has remained intact over multiple changes in government, economic fluctuations, changes in public opinion, and/or changing social conventions.

B. Objective and Overall Scoring

The averages of all the indicators are then averaged to obtain a single, overall score for each objective. Objective scores are averaged to provide an overall score for the country. IREX interprets the overall scores as follows:

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.

Methodology for Objective 6

The purpose of this separate but related study is to rate the extent to which the traditional media (such as newspapers and broadcasters) and new media (blogs and other online or mobile formats) capture citizen concerns in a non-partisan manner. The study also assesses the media's ability to serve as a facilitator of public debate and as an outlet for citizen voices. It measures the capacity of media to hold politicians, business, and other actors accountable.

To accomplish this, IREX developed a methodology similar to its original MSI, described above, so that the results can seamlessly accompany the MSI's five objectives, which measure the performance of a country's media sector. This study uses the same process of scoring, enlisting local participants to answer an IREX questionnaire, and holding a panel discussion moderated by a local partner. Hence, we refer to this study as the Media Sustainability Index's "Objective 6."

Like the original five objectives of the MSI, this study relies on a stated objective and several supporting indicators. Objective 6 and its indicators are stated in such a way that panelists can use them as a model against which to evaluate their current

THE MEDIA SERVE CITIZENS BY PROVIDING USEFUL AND RELEVANT NEWS AND INFORMATION AND FACILITATING PUBLIC DEBATE

- > The media promote and facilitate inclusive discussions about local, national, and international issues (social, political, economic, etc.) that are important to citizens.
- > Reporting and discussion in the media support democratic policymaking, government transparency, equitable regulatory enforcement, and consumer protection.
- > News and information provided by the media is relevant to, and informs, the choices and decisions (social, political, economic, etc.) made by citizens.
- > Citizens trust that news and information reported by the media accurately reflects reality.
- > It is possible for citizens to recognize partisan, editorial, or advertorial content as such.
- > Editorial and partisan media content is a constructive part of national dialogue; media refrain from including "hate speech" content.
- > The media expose citizens to multiple viewpoints and experiences of citizens from various social, political, regional, gender, ethnic, religious, confessional, etc., groups.

news and information environment. This allows for meaningful comparisons, as well as setting forth expectations for future development. The objective and indicators are listed in the table on the previous page.

The process of undertaking the study is the same as above, with the following modifications:

- **A distinct set of panelists.** For Objective 6, panelists might be academics, student leaders, bloggers, media analysts, human rights and other NGO leaders, business association leaders/members, or trade union leaders/members. Consistent with the original MSI methodology, panelists represent the diversity within a society, and are selected in terms of gender balance, residence in the capital city and more rural areas, and membership in various political or other factions.
- **Modified score definitions and interpretation of final score.** Guidance on how to score each indicator and definitions of the meaning of scores are unique to this objective. These are detailed below.

As above, panelists are directed to score each indicator from 0 to 4, using whole or half points. They are provided with the following guidance:

- 0 =** No, the media in my country do not meet the provisions of this indicator; it is impossible or exceedingly rare to find content in any media outlet that meets the provisions of this indicator.
- 1 =** The media in my country minimally meet the aspects of this indicator. Occasionally, a media outlet produces content that meets the aspects of this indicator. Or, citizens in my country may sometimes obtain news and information that meet the aspects of this indicator, but only by referring to several sources and comparing reports on their own.
- 2 =** The media in my country have begun to meet many aspects of this indicator. There are at least a few media outlets that frequently produce content that meets the aspects of this indicator. However, progress may still be dependent on current political forces or media ownership/editors.
- 3 =** The media in my country meet most aspects of this indicator. Many media outlets strive to, and regularly produce, content that meet the aspects of this indicator. Adherence to this indicator has occurred over several years and/or changes in government, indicating likely sustainability.

4 = Yes, the media in my country meets the aspects of this indicator. Media outlets and the public expect content to meet the aspects of this indicator. Exceptions to this are recognized as either substandard journalism or non-journalistic content (e.g., labeled and recognized as opinion or advertorial). Adherence to this indicator has remained intact over multiple changes in government, economic fluctuations, changes in public opinion, and/or differing social conventions.

The overall score for the objective is interpreted to mean the following:

Unsustainable (0-1): Country's media sector does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Media content is contrary to citizens' information needs, media seek primarily to serve political or other forces, and professionalism is low.

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2): Country's media sector minimally meets objectives, with significant segments of the media sector beholden to political or other forces. Evident progress developing media that serve citizens information needs and increased professionalism may be too recent to judge sustainability.

Near Sustainability (2-3): Country's media sector has progressed in meeting multiple indicators, and many media outlets consistently strive to and succeed in serving citizens' information needs with objective, timely, and useful content. Achievements have survived changes in government; however, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism is sustainable.

Sustainable (3-4): Country's media sector is considered generally professional; serving citizen information needs with objective, timely, and useful content; and facilitating public debate. A primary goal of most media outlets and media professionals is to serve such ends, and similarly, the public expects this from the media sector. Achievements have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.

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