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MOROCCO

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Panelists for this year's MSI observed a marked decline in Morocco's overall media sustainability, with each indicator falling significantly from its 2009 level. While Morocco made notable progress in political freedoms and constitutional protections after the Arab Spring arrived, paradoxically, media sustainability suffered as a result of the movement and the government's response. Overall, the country's MSI score fell 0.4 points, from 1.78 to 1.38, indicating an unsustainable, mixed system headed in the wrong direction.

Large demonstrations calling for an end to corruption and authoritarianism in more than fifty Moroccan cities on February 20, 2011, led King Mohamed IV to issue a decree calling for the redistribution of power between the monarchy and the elected parliament and government. The decree also aimed to enhance judicial independence, litigants' rights, and strengthen human rights protections. Such changes would constitute a significant break from the king's effectively absolute rule.

Moroccan media commendably welcomed diverse opinions in the months leading up to the referendum. The country's three state television channels hosted young representatives of the February 20th Movement, as well as those opposed to their agenda.

The proposals ignited a rich discussion involving civil society, political parties, and the king's constitutional committee, which culminated in a referendum on a new constitution on July 1, 2011. The document represented significant progress from the 1996 constitution it would replace, but ironically the poll was undermined by the efforts of state institutions to encourage voter support for the referendum and the state media, which became increasingly uniform in its support for the referendum as well. As such, citizens came to believe that the new constitution would bring little real change.

As one MSI panelist and journalist for Channel 1 public television summarized, "Despite these updates to the law, traditions have remained the same and have even become a burden. It is as if there is some fear, particularly among the public media, that the new constitution defends these traditions, despite the fact that we were hoping for a media 'spring.'" "We have protection in practice, but the news broadcasts show an obvious regression," he concluded.

Some hopeful signs have resulted from recent political changes. For example, the minister of communications for the newly-elected government of the Islamic Reference Party has conducted consultations with journalists on press law reforms and access to information. However, limits on press freedoms and the halting pace of reforms overall, encouraged by elites that benefit from the status quo, will present ongoing risks for the media sector.

# MOROCCO AT A GLANCE

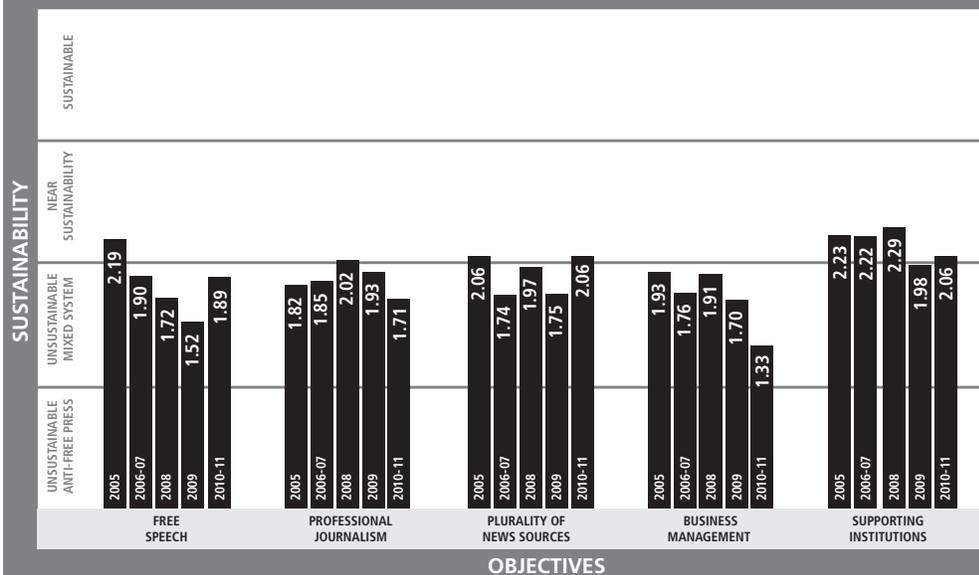
## GENERAL

- > **Population:** 32,309,239 (July 2012 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Rabat
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Arab-Berber 99%, other 1% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 99% (official), Christian 1%, Jewish < 0.1% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages:** Arabic (official), Berber dialects, French often the language of business, government, and diplomacy
- > **GNI (2011-Atlas):** \$97.62 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2012)
- > **GNI per capita (2011-PPP):** \$4,910 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2012)
- > **Literacy rate:** 56.1% (male: 68.9%, female: 43.9%) (2009 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** King Mohammed VI (since July 30, 1999)

## MEDIA SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 285 Arabic, 90 French, and 9 Amazigh publications; Radio Stations: 13; Television Stations: 35
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** 400,000 daily (*pressreference.com*)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Maghreb Arabe Presse Agency (state-owned)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** \$262 million (Ministry of Information website, 2005)
- > **Internet usage:** 13.213 million (2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: MOROCCO



**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

### Morocco Objective Score: 1.10

Morocco's freedom of speech score has fallen sharply since the MSI's first report on the country in 2005. The panel's score this year reflects a new campaign of pressure and abuse against Moroccan journalists, which has converted what was once a brighter aspect of the country's media scene into its most troubled.

The panelists' assessment largely concurs with the report of the National Moroccan Press Union for 2011-2012, which recorded ongoing efforts to "establish repressive and controlling practices towards the written press, mass media, [and] all electronic publications."<sup>1</sup>

Some participants attributed this deterioration to the rise in legal action taken against journalists, in some cases leading to imprisonment. They criticized power centers within the government, particularly the intelligence agencies, for not honoring judicial independence. Particularly indicative of this trend was the case of daily newspaper *Al Massae* editor Al Sayed Rachid Nini, who was convicted of on June 9, 2011, of "disinformation" after *Al Massae* published an article charging high ranking officials of corruption and calling for the repeal of the anti-terrorism law. The conviction was upheld in appellate court on October 24, as was his sentence of one year in prison.

<sup>1</sup> National Moroccan Press Union Report. May 2012, p. 4.

#### LEGAL AND SOCIAL NORMS PROTECT AND PROMOTE FREE SPEECH AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION.

##### FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

- > Legal and social protections of free speech exist and are enforced.
- > Licensing of broadcast media is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- > Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- > Crimes against journalists or media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- > State or public media do not receive preferential legal treatment, and law guarantees editorial independence.
- > Libel is a civil law issue; public officials are held to higher standards, and offended parties must prove falsity and malice.
- > Public information is easily accessible; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Media outlets have unrestricted access to information; this is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Entry into the journalism profession is free, and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

*Chawki recalled another incident where an official directly pressured him to change Lakome.com's coverage of the public killing of Kamal al Amary, a February 20th Movement activist and member of the banned Justice and Spirituality Movement. "Why did you publish that? Why did you use the word 'martyr?'" an Interior Ministry official asked Chawki.*

Physical assaults against journalists by both security forces and criminals have also risen. While police violence against journalists appears to have risen in step with political uncertainty, attacks against journalists who publish articles on drug trafficking and corruption have also risen, suggesting entrenched interests outside the government may fear losing out in the course of the reshuffle. Video evidence of police abusing journalists and photographers has substantiated these claims in some cases.

The panel noted a decline in the number of independent newspapers, as well as attempts to pressure those remaining by financial and legal authorities, most notably *Le Journal* that closed due to heavy fines resulting from politically motivated cases. Individual journalists saw their personal lives assaulted online, likely by government agents, for their participation in the February 20th Movement. Some were dismissed from their outlets for critical work, as well.

"We Moroccans, as of May 26, 2012, still live a life deprived of the freedom of expression," said Mohamed Hafid, manager of the *Al Hayat al Jadeeda* weekly. He raised the case of Mo'ad Al Haqed, a hip-hop artist sentenced to a one-year prison term just two weeks earlier for insulting the police in his lyrics, and for the arrest and detention of his supporters, including Yousef Bilkhadem and Miryia Kareem.

Ahmed al Bouz, a journalist and media researcher, noted that Article 29 of the current Law on the Press allows the government to prevent foreign journalists from entering the country. This provision was applied many times in late 2011 and early 2012. Independent journalist Jalal al Makhfi added that accreditation for international press is issued by the Intelligence Agency and not the Ministry of Communications. "Even tourism programs have their permission to broadcast pulled without any good reasons offered," he lamented.

While the new constitution provides for the right to access information, Morocco has not passed any laws formalizing

*“News now prioritizes the affairs of the king, his son, brother and princes, and then any other issues. No disasters, big events... or anything else concerning the interests of Moroccans... receives such a high priority,” the panelist noted.*

this provision. In that regard, panelist and media lawyer Abdelwahed Benmasoud recited a test of the new provision that failed. “We wrote to the Moroccan Central Bank for information on an account number of a certain entity in order to file a civil suit. The bank declined. We then referred the issue to the administrative courts, but they dismissed the suit,” he said.

Intransigence is widespread in situations where journalists seek information or services from their public officials. When al Makhfi asked the Ministry of Communications to provide his website with contact information for government offices for comments on government events and policies, he received no reply. “A month and a half passed... Officials didn’t answer when they knew we were calling,” he said.

Najib Chawki, a blogger for Lakome.com and February 20th Movement member, described the negative developments for free speech on the Moroccan Internet. “Websites tried to circumvent taboos, but the repressive Moroccan regime intervened. They established a group of websites and online journals including Agora-presse.com, Telexpresse.com, and Hibapress.com, which published information against the Justice and Spirituality Movement with backing from police forces.” Chawki asserted that anonymous authors on Telexpresse.com attack him and his colleagues for criticizing Royal Holdings, and have claimed him to be a homosexual and an atheist, and that the editor of his site, Ali Anozala, works for Algerian intelligence and is the son of a prostitute. He noted that libelous comments posted on highly-trafficked sites against independent journalists are rarely removed or challenged by the courts.

Fellow panelist and February 20th Movement member al Makhfi recalled his similar experience. “My personal life was attacked. I was accused of secret communications with Iranian intelligence. Dubai Television was pressured to dismiss me and the manager even apologized” for succumbing to state pressure to do so.

Meanwhile, the authorities tried a young man for publishing on Facebook a caricature of King Mohammed IV, and blocked the image as a “threat to people’s lives and freedom.”

Chawki recalled another incident where an official directly pressured him to change Lakome.com’s coverage of the public killing of Kamal al Amary, a February 20th Movement activist and member of the banned Justice and Spirituality Movement. “Why did you publish that? Why did you use the word ‘martyr?’” an Interior Ministry official asked Chawki. “He told me that Kamal died in a motorcycle accident,” and refused to give his name.

In a separate interview, a photographer for the Medi1 television channel told the MSI moderator that authorities in Rabat had instructed him to shoot the February 20th demonstrations from angles that appeared to show very few participants.

Mohamed al Awny summarized the “remarkable paradox” of the Arab Spring in Morocco. “[It] exists in the streets but it is still autumn in the public media, even print media only selectively covered the February 20th Movement and its reasons for being... What [the authorities] cannot repress violently is repressed, in part, by their media.”

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

### Morocco Objective Score: 1.54

Professionalism continues to deteriorate in the Moroccan media scene, as the quality of coverage in general, and investigative reporting in particular, remains weak. Self-censorship prevails at state broadcasters and most newspapers. The panelists observed an increase in overt government control in the editorial policies of the state

#### JOURNALISM MEETS PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF QUALITY.

##### PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

- > Reporting is fair, objective, and well sourced.
- > Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards.
- > Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.
- > Journalists cover key events and issues.
- > Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption.
- > Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming.
- > Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- > Quality niche reporting and programming exists (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

television channels, which no longer cover the country's ongoing protests.

Hafid of *Al Hayat al Jadeeda* said that the absence of coverage of the book *Le Roi Prédateur (King Predator)*, which details the king's wealth and the financial advantages his companies enjoy, as clear evidence of self-censorship. "Just one newspaper discussed the book, while all other coverage was online, where it is more difficult for the state to dictate coverage," he said.

A panelist and Channel 1 journalist decried that the king's chief advisor, Al Taib al Fasi al Fahry, refused to participate in a talk show forum with journalists. Instead, the former foreign minister requested a special program be staged for his appearance, complete with hand-picked journalists, guests, and questions.

"News now prioritizes the affairs of the king, his son, brother and princes, and then any other issues. No disasters, big events...or anything else concerning the interests of Moroccans...receives such a high priority," the panelist noted.

Chawki asserted that some of the newly created news websites are funded by corrupt businessmen and politicians, and one is headed by a journalist dismissed from the *Al Ma'sa* and *Al Sabah* newspapers for his unethical journalistic practices. These sites publish claims designed to silence the critics of their sponsors, Chawki believes, though they also tend to degrade the profession as a whole. Newspapers increasingly run articles on the personal lives of February 20th Movement activists, complete with claims about their sexual and religious deviance.

Meager salaries, as elsewhere in the region, perpetuate Moroccan journalists' tendency to generate low-quality reporting. A panelist and journalist from state television described the situation: "Journalists' salaries in public media are stable, and in general better than in the written press, though they are not enough to ensure professional work," such as providing for sufficient per diems to cover demonstrations in faraway regions.

"Journalists try to get some considerations from the hosts, for example for lodging and meals during a music festival. But in such cases, independence ends, and how can I say that the festival was a failure?" concluded the journalist.

Al Makhfi noted that favoritism in releasing government adversely affects the quality of reporting at private media who might be objective or critical of the government. Hafid confirmed this opinion with the following example: "Reports emerged that a high-ranking government official discussed matters pertaining a provincial governor with the king. Everyone wondered about the identity of that governor.

His name only appeared in *Al Ma'sa* and *Akhbar al Youm*, newspapers that are friendly to the prime minister."

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

#### Morocco Objective Score: 1.40

Important sources of independent media have been disappearing from Morocco's media scene for several years. *Le Journal Hebdomadaire* closed in 2009 after it criticized the monarchy's monopoly on power. *Al Jarida al Ohkra* and *Al Hayat al Gadeeda* shut down in 2010 and 2011 due to financial troubles. Furthermore, certain business elites attempted to block entry by new independent outlets. As a result, most Moroccans have access to a narrowing array of news sources, reflected in this year's modest fall in the country's Objective 3 score.

Still, increasing access to the Internet and the clamor for change in society has kept the country's Objective 3 score from falling further. Thousands of citizens took to the Internet to create and share YouTube videos asking the king to end his monopoly on power.<sup>2</sup> Royal sympathizers responded with their own campaign, following the same strategy of the activists they were attacking.

Elites close to the royal family have pushed into the media sector, buying up newspapers and their distribution networks. The panelists also believed that the security agencies have

<sup>2</sup> An example can be found at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U11Puh6mb8>.

### MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE AND OBJECTIVE NEWS.

#### PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

- > A plurality of affordable public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet) exists.
- > Citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media.
- > Independent broadcast media produce their own news programs.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.
- > A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources.

*Morocco achieved no progress licensing new television channels, as the Higher Authority for Broadcast Communications has not issued a new license since 2003.*

supported this consolidation by quietly funding certain favored outlets to attack opposition activists.

Journalists turned out of the newspapers closed in recent years have migrated online, where they have somewhat more freedom to criticize the regime, but face harsher retribution from their tormenters.

Morocco achieved no progress licensing new television channels, as the Higher Authority for Broadcast Communications has not issued a new license since 2003. The panel saw little evidence that the state was interested in diversifying voices on the airways. Quite the opposite: in 2008, the state nationalized Midi1 television and its website after privatizing the outlet just two years earlier. A colleague of al Makhfi recalled a friend whose attempt to found an independent news agency was stifled by the licensing authorities.

The paucity of media choices allows dominant state outlets to choose which voices are most widely heard, without resorting to obvious censorship. MSI panelist and professor Mohamed al Sassi wondered why Natia Yaseem, daughter of the general mentor of the Justice and Spirituality Movement, fails to get any air time. "She represents an ideological movement, a political association and a remarkable force in society, but she does not have the right to appear on television," he said. The same can be said for Prince Moulay Hicham, which al Sassi recalled the newspaper *Al Nahar al Maghrebyia* describing as a "despicable criminal."

Even on general social issues, one panelist who works as a journalist for state television admitted that coverage is selective. "Prostitution is covered, as it is considered a state issue, but not incest, which is considered a family issue." The journalist also noted that editors censor aspects of investigative reports that contradict an official narrative of events or issues.

Meanwhile, the state television aired the party congress for the *Parti Socialiste Unifié* (Unified Socialist Party), but edited out its slogan, which called for an immediate transition to a parliamentary monarchy.

After the government's interests, those of the business community influence much of media content. Advertisers

dictate many of the broadcasters' programming decisions, as entertainment programs targeting women and youth that garner the most revenue are prioritized over news and information programming.

Online outlets face the lowest regulatory and financial barriers to entry into the Moroccan media market, though even their prospects for short-term growth are dim. Chawki, the blogger, noted that while Morocco has some voices representing the interests of the government, the security services, and the business community, the Internet is the one true home for independent journalists. But the efforts of his website, Lakome.com, to secure financing for its operations through Crédit Agricole Bank were unsuccessful, and ultimately, he charges, thwarted by Inwi, a telecoms giant, which funds the rival Hespress.com website. "They accused us of being financed by Prince Moulay Hicham, Polisario, and Algeria," he claimed, naming several of the government's usual scapegoats.

#### OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

### Morocco Objective Score: 1.35

The panelists agreed that Morocco's media business management environment has worsened significantly, falling from 1.75 to 1.35 this year. State subsidies to media outlets, already a major distortion to the sector, became further contorted as major changes to the program invariably favored entrenched, pro-government outlets and well-connected individuals over genuine independent voices. Advertising continues to be insufficient to support informative journalism.

#### INDEPENDENT MEDIA ARE WELL-MANAGED BUSINESSES, ALLOWING EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE.

##### BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

- > Media outlets and supporting firms operate as efficient, professional, and profit-generating businesses.
- > Media receive revenue from a multitude of sources.
- > Advertising agencies and related industries support an advertising market.
- > Advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue is in line with accepted standards at commercial outlets.
- > Independent media do not receive government subsidies.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor products to the needs and interests of audiences.
- > Broadcast ratings and circulation figures are reliably and independently produced.

And while public media has found new revenue streams, these outlets produce programming that is of little civic value.

Moroccan newspapers generally derive their revenues from four sources: advertising, sales, private contributions, and public subsidies. Advertising and sales usually fail to cover operating costs, which results in outlets resorting to less sustainable alternatives.

Government subsidies for public and private newspaper publishers have become particularly troubling. A deal reached between the government, the Press Union, and the Moroccan Federation of Newspapers in 2005 introduced subsidies with the intention of raising professional qualifications, updating equipment and practices, enable international distribution, and even covering some basic expenses. The program required that the newspaper be in good legal standing, meet certain basic quality and financial standards, and sell at price points accessible to most Moroccans. Expenses were detailed and published openly. The program subsidized thirty-five newspapers in 2005, and fifty in 2006, with a budget of €4.8 million.

Since 2007, however, the Ministry of Communications has not published any detailed financial or programmatic data related to the subsidy program.

Panelist and newspaper manager Hafid said, "Government subsidies for newspapers are distributed unfairly, supporting the rich and powerful media outlets, while not diversifying opinion." He noted that those outlets receiving the most advertising revenue also receive the highest subsidies.

"Now every month or two, a newspaper, likely an independent one, disappears, while those closest to the authorities survive," he said.

In some cases, subsidies to small and disreputable outlets pique suspicions. Chawki noted, "*Al Nahar al Maghrebyia* sells just 900 copies, has no editorial board, and mostly republishes articles [from other sources], yet it receives subsidies."

Even worse, official party newspapers receive subsidies. As do two outlets, *Al Sahara'a al Maghrebyia* and *Maroc Soir*, which are registered abroad and primarily owned by a Saudi national, Othman al Umair, according to panelist al Bouz.

Private sponsors also fund certain broadcasts on public television. Some such contributions are made with good intentions, though the panel noted that some are made under government instructions.

Public broadcasters receive general funds via a fee added to electrical bills. The panel argued that these subsidies aim to insulate its broadcasters from competition from foreign

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satellite channels. In the process, these outlets receive significant funds that they spend, in the panel's judgment, poorly. Public broadcasters supplement public funds with traditional advertising. Quizzes targeting youth and women trolling for paid SMS responses have become a significant revenue-generator as well.

Panelist al Awny from Moroccan Public Television and Radio lamented the bureaucratic nature of his organization. "Major departments use up large budgets, such as the Department of Human and Financial Resources," he said. "Journalists and technicians are beginning to serve their departments, not vice versa."

The public channels devote most of their budgets to producing entertainment programs, which are more attractive to advertisers and less politically sensitive.

Politics infects the business decisions of public organizations like utilities in their dealings with media outlets. "*Al Jareeda al Oula* was already in difficult financial straits when Maroc Telecom, the country's biggest advertiser, pulled its advertisements after the newspaper published an article on the king's illness," recalled Chawki. As a result, the newspaper was forced to close. Chawki also noted that Internet service providers such as Miditel-Inwi and Maroc Telecom break contracts and assess arbitrary penalties against clients.

The presence of royal favorites among advertising agencies distorts the market. For example, Munir al Magedy, financial advisor to the king, runs a company that produces Internet advertising.

One bright spot under Objective 4 has been the introduction of a database on newspaper circulation and distribution, which helps advertisers and brokers make better informed value judgments. However, the panel doubted the extent to which this information drove better business decisions, as personal and political considerations take precedent over data and sound business practices.

*However, this bright spot is mitigated somewhat by the competition that the panel has observed between NGOs and the independent press. This leads to some unhelpful criticism of the NGOs by their potential media allies, and in turn, a drop in support for those independent press outlets by the NGOs.*

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

### Morocco Objective Score: 1.49

Institutions supporting the Moroccan media suffered from the government's response to the Arab Spring, resulting in a moderate fall for the country's Objective 5 score.

Journalists widely derided the Press Union and the Federation of Publishers for their undemocratic governance and poor services to their constituents and the media profession.

The Press Union, which dates to 1963, has not set guidelines for the presidency, nor has it provided for journalists from the Independence Party and the Unified Socialist Party to enroll, even as those parties have transitioned from opposition to pro-government. The panel also lamented the Union's cooperation with the Federation of Publishers to resist press law reform and the establishment of a national press council to monitor and regulate ethical journalism practices. Both

#### SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

##### SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- > Trade associations represent the interests of private media owners and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs that provide substantial practical experience exist.
- > Short-term training and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of newsprint and printing facilities are in private hands, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.

cooperate with the Ministry of Communications, which is a member of the Federation, on projects and policy.

According to one panelist and public television journalist, "The [television] unions are no longer guarantors of freedom of expression, as they have been bought by management."

Attempts by online journalists and bloggers to form professional associations that would protect their legal rights and help them develop have moved forward since the previous MSI report on Morocco. The Moroccan Bloggers Association, established in 2009, urges all bloggers in the country and abroad to keep abreast of the country's political movements, document transgressions by security forces, expose human rights violations, and debunk biased reporting by mass media. The organization has taken an overt political stance, however, by joining the February 20th Movement.

The Moroccan Association for Electronic Press, also established in 2009 by 64 websites from across the country, continues to work to protect journalists' rights, provide training, and liaise with officials, while seeking to encourage that online journalists follow ethical practices.

Numerous human rights associations continue to support the freedom of expression. However, this bright spot is mitigated somewhat by the competition that the panel has observed between NGOs and the independent press. This leads to some unhelpful criticism of the NGOs by their potential media allies, and in turn, a drop in support for those independent press outlets by the NGOs.

Poor salaries and difficult conditions dissuade Morocco's best and brightest professionals from working in the field of journalism education, as most prefer careers in business or government. The Higher Institute for Media and Communications hosts the country's flagship training program for journalists, a four-year curriculum with internal internship opportunities. The panel noted that, like in many neighboring countries, the state program is long on theory and short on practical learning.

Three private press training institutes in Casablanca prepare additional journalists, though the panelists noted poor written and practical skills among their graduates. The panel also pointed out that some of the private institutes' trainees are exploited as cheap labor by private radio stations or other employers in ways that do not prepare them to practice journalism. According to al Awny, the public radio representative on the panel, the private institutes have no standards. "They are not considered a source of recruitment, as employers view their quality and professionalism poorly," he said.

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The security forces also pressure printing presses for information regarding items they publish that might be critical of the regime. The chilling effect of such visits feeds back into the work of journalists and editors, who abstain from submitting stories that printers will not publish. Hafid, the panelist and newspaper manager, noted that commercial priorities create additional burdens for informative newspapers searching affordable deals with printing presses.

## List of Panel Participants

**Mohamed Hafid**, manager, *Al Hayat al Jadeeda*, Casablanca

**Fatima al Ifriqui**, journalist, National Company for Moroccan Radio and Television, Rabat

**Mohamed al Awni**, journalist, National Company for Moroccan Radio and Television, Rabat

**Mohamed al Sassi**, professor of law, Mohammed V University, Rabat

**Hana Bouchal**, journalist; producer, Casablanca

**Abdul Ghafour Dahchou**, journalist, National Company for Moroccan Radio and Television, Rabat

**Hassan Barhoun**, blogger, Reporters sans Limites, Tangier

**Najib Chawki**, blogger, Lakome.com, Rabat

**Ahmed al Bouz**, freelance journalist; researcher, Casablanca

**Jalal al Makhfi**, journalist, Agence France-Presse, Casablanca

**Abdelwahed Benmasoud**, lawyer, Rabat

## Moderator and Author

**Abdelaziz Nouaydi**, lawyer and professor, Rabat Bar Association, Rabat