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iraq-kurdistan  
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tunisia  
qatar  
yemen

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البحرين  
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فلسطين  
الإمارات  
السعودية  
سوريا  
عراق-كردستان  
قطر  
ايران

تنمية إعلام  
مستقل ومستدام  
في لبنان

مؤشر  
استدامة  
الإعلام

MEDIA  
SUSTAINABILITY  
INDEX

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2013

DEVELOPMENT  
OF SUSTAINABLE  
INDEPENDENT  
MEDIA IN  
LEBANON

# MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

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## 2013

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



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## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2013

The Development of Sustainable Independent Media in Lebanon

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**Printer:** IPEX PRINTING PRESS

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**Acknowledgment:** This publication was made possible through support provided by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under 1) Cooperative Agreement No. #DFD-A-00-05-00243 (MSI-MENA) via a task order by FHI360 and 2) Cooperative Agreement No. #AID-268-LA-11-00001 (Promoting Active Citizen Engagement) via a subgrant from Counterpart International.

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ISSN 1546-0878

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The United States has a long history of extending a helping hand to people overseas struggling to make a better life. It is a history that both reflects the American people's compassion and support of human dignity as well as advances U.S. foreign policy interests.

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## Implementing Partners

IREX wishes to thank the following for coordinating the fieldwork for and authoring the studies herein:

**Hugh Macleod**, journalist, *The Sunday Times*; director, SkyeBoat Films (objectives 1–5)

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



**LEBANON**

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*Barbar recognized failings by both sides of the media. “Just because you oppose Assad doesn’t mean you have to do propaganda,” he said.*



# LEBANON

As throughout so much of its recent history, it was Syria that pushed Lebanon closest to the edge. “The Syria story was a trap for everyone. It uncovered and magnified the weaknesses of each media,” said Roland Barbar, executive producer for Future TV.

From a high of 2.45 in the chaotic aftermath of the 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel, Lebanon’s overall media score has declined consistently as the religious and political rivalry between the Shia-led March 8 movement, backed by Iran and Syria, and the Sunni-led March 14 movement, opposed to Syria and backed by Saudi Arabia, has deepened into a seemingly existential struggle. The decline this year, from 2.03 to 2.01, may be tiny, but confirms the trend that is taking the Lebanese media sector toward an “unsustainable, mixed system,” according to the MSI score definitions.

With Syria now in a state of civil war, a crisis which decimated Lebanon for 15 years and laid the foundations of the country’s turbulent sectarian power sharing system, journalists found themselves working in a political and social environment increasingly unwilling to see beyond black and white. “The state is so weak compared to religious groups. The Shia refuse to listen to anything that criticizes them and so do the Sunni,” said panelist Fidaa Itani, a senior *Al Akhbar* correspondent who resigned after his editor censored his work and began writing editorials in praise of Syrian President Bashar al Assad’s military campaign against other Syrians.

As Syria’s once peaceful protest movement morphed into a violent sectarian struggle, Lebanese media affiliated with March 8 parties, such as Hezbollah and Amal, descended into parroting reports by Syria’s state news agency SANA and publishing content from international agencies with references to Syria’s “rebels” replaced with “terrorists,” as per the official line of the Assad regime. On the other side, March 14 media, such as Future TV, established partnerships with Syrian activist groups such as Sham Press, even as scrutiny on the authenticity of work produced by such groups grew sharper. Barbar recognized failings by both sides of the media. “Just because you oppose Assad doesn’t mean you have to do propaganda,” he said.

“Lebanon has become a case of a decentralized dictatorship,” said Khodr Salame, blogger and editor of Jou3an. “Under the umbrella of a big democracy there’re lots of dictatorships between sects and within sects, in every house and every street, controlling what you can say.”

Three of five objectives—Freedom of Speech, Professional Journalism, and Plurality of News—remained nearly unchanged. Only Objective 5, Supporting Institutions, saw a modest rise in score, due to the election of a new head of the Journalists Union and admission of new members for the first time in half a century. Objective 4, Business Management, fell back into the “unsustainable, mixed system” range for the first time since the debut 2005 study. That year it scored 1.92; this year it received a score of 1.75.

# LEBANON at a glance

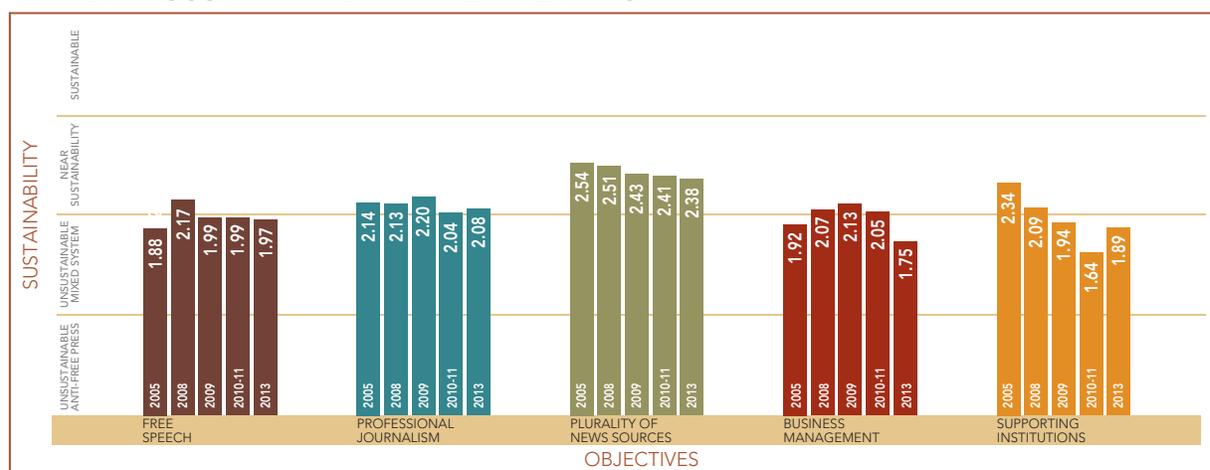
## GENERAL

- > Population: 4,140,289 (July 2012 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > Capital city: Beirut
- > Ethnic groups (% of population): Arab 95%, Armenian 4%, other 1% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > Religions (% of population): Muslim 59.7% (Shia, Sunni, Druze, Isma'elite, Alawite or Nusayri), Christian 39% (Maronite Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Melkite Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Syrian Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Syrian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Chaldean, Assyrian, Copt, Protestant), other 1.3% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > Languages: Arabic, official language and universally spoken. Also French and English, with small minorities speaking Armenian and Kurdish
- > GNI (2011-Atlas): \$38.95 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2012)
- > GNI per capita (2011-PPP): \$14,470 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2012)
- > 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: \$145 million (est., Deloitte & Touche)
- > Internet usage: 2.15 million (2012 est., Internet World Stats)

## 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.

Scores for all years may be found online at [http://irex.org/system/files/u105/MENA\\_MSI\\_Score\\_Compilation.xls](http://irex.org/system/files/u105/MENA_MSI_Score_Compilation.xls)

## OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Lebanon Objective Score: 1.97

Lebanon's Freedom of Speech objective scored again inside the "unsustainable, mixed system" category, heading back toward the low of 1.88 scored in 2005, the tumultuous year of assassinations and divisions between opposing religious and political movements, which have endured and worsened.

Panelists described an environment of increased pressure, not only from politicians, but also the wider population, on media to play the role of mouthpiece for rival political and sectarian movements. "My experience this year has been the military authority prosecuting me for freedom of speech, hassles socially because I criticize militia parties and lots of problems personally with my family who would prefer me to blend into the political atmosphere of our sect and area," said panelist Salame, a blogger and editor of Jou3an.

Salame was arrested by the army in April after being caught spray-painting graffiti in support of the Syrian revolution. Salame was also threatened by members of Amal, a Shia militia that grew into a political party after the end of Lebanon's civil war and whose leader is speaker of parliament, after joking about a poster promoting their leader.

Though Lebanon's constitution guarantees freedom of the press, "practically no one protects journalists when doing

Aysha was beaten and his camera destroyed before being turned over to the military police, who also beat him. "The people who kidnapped me were never prosecuted but I'm facing a court accusing me of arms dealing," said Aysha.

their work," said LBC producer Nancy Razzouk. "Many journalists are being harassed while working in the field."

On the ground reporters suffered increasing numbers of attacks, particularly when covering news about supporters or opponents of the Syrian regime, a political issue that is also a sectarian one, pitting Sunni versus Shia. In one month alone, July, the SKEyes media watchdog, named after assassinated journalist Samir Kassir, documented eight separate attacks on journalists. A month earlier, the Committee to Protect Journalists reported nine journalists attacked in four separate incidents.

High profile attacks included the beating of former MSI panelist Ghadi Francis by a member of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party as she covered party elections for New TV. Just weeks later the station's head office was attacked by masked men after hosting an outspoken Sunni cleric who criticized Shia Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah.

Panelist Rami Aysha, a reporter for *Time* and freelance television producer, was seized by members of Hezbollah in the southern suburbs of Beirut while working on a story about arms dealing. Aysha was beaten and his camera destroyed before being turned over to the military police, who also beat him. "The people who kidnapped me were never prosecuted but I'm facing a court accusing me of arms dealing," said Aysha.

The northern city of Tripoli, Sunni-majority but with an Alawite community, became a focus for armed conflict between supporters and opponents of the Syrian regime, sparking several attacks on journalists, including the beating of a New TV film crew and the destruction of camera equipment belonging to Russia Today by armed men accusing the journalists of being "spies of Bashar al Assad."

"It was a bad year," said Fares Ahmad, a specialist in Palestinian affairs who writes for local news website Ya Sour, based in Tyre. "It was either, 'you're with us or against us.' The country is divided so the first question anyone asks is 'what is the political affiliation of your media?' Perhaps the most important obstacle to information now is that people

## 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.

**“State media is funded by the people, but it’s not for the people, it’s for officials. At the same time they don’t have a political color, they just go with what the government is,” said Thebian.**

do not speak openly, they are not honest. I’m not prevented from working, but I feel there are eyes on me all the time.”

Panelists recalled a reporter for New TV being attacked by thugs in the impoverished Sunni stronghold of Akkar, in North Lebanon, who was forced to shout, “My name is Omar!” a typically Sunni name, in order to avoid a beating.

In April, journalist Moustafa Geha narrowly survived an assassination attempt, four months after he re-opened the judicial case into the assassination of his father, also a journalist, who was killed in 1992.

Impunity for attacks on journalists, as well as the cross-border killing of New TV cameraman Ali Shaaban by Syrian troops in April, pushed Lebanon eight places further down Reporters Without Borders’ annual Press Freedom Index, ranking 101st out of 179 countries, a precipitous fall since its high of 66th place in 2009.

Several cases of overt state censorship of films deemed harmful to religious groups and calls by the semi-governmental Audio Visual Council, which works with the Ministry of Information on regulating and licensing media, for tighter restrictions and more powers also contributed to a general decline in press freedoms. In December, the army asked media to refrain from quoting any defense sources except the head of the army himself.

“People are more afraid and we’ve seen a surge in the religious authorities,” said Future TV’s Roland Barbar. “What before was ok is now not ok. Censorship in Lebanon has become more obvious.”

Restrictions on the number of licensed political newspapers dating from 1952 remain in force, constituting what media researcher Rita Sayah called “a basic violation of press freedom.” Only through purchase of an old, existing license can new publications come into being, such as the 2011 resurrection of *Al Jumhuriya*, which first began publishing in 1924. Political blogger Assaad Thebian estimated the minimum cost to purchase an existing newspaper license at \$200,000, making it prohibitively expensive for all but the wealthiest political businessmen.

In aftermath of the 15-year Civil War, during which each major militia started broadcasting with its own television station, the 1994 Audio Visual Media Law established the government’s control over licenses for broadcasters. Under Lebanon’s confessional state system, however this merely formalized the existing status quo. “There is no way for new local TV stations to establish nowadays,” said Sayah.

Blogging and reporting news online is thus Lebanon’s major media growth sector and there was some relief for website owners this year as, after seven years of discussions, a bill intended to regulate online media was effectively scrapped by the Information Minister after an outpouring of criticism from bloggers and civil liberty campaigners. “The Internet allows other opinions to be heard, it connects people who are divided politically. That’s why the security bodies are trying to control it,” said blogger Salame.

Taxes for media are not restrictive, but Ahmad from local website Ya Sour, which was founded on the principles of not accepting political money, said that a \$1,000 tax bill swelled to \$3,000 because of the bribes needed to get the paperwork done independent of political backing.

State media was characterized by panelists as balanced, in the sense of covering all activities of the Christian president, the Shia speaker of parliament, and the Sunni prime minister, but in no way independent. “State media is funded by the people, but it’s not for the people, it’s for officials. At the same time they don’t have a political color, they just go with what the government is,” said Thebian. Panelist Ahmad put it succinctly: “It’s a photocopy machine for the three presidencies: No analysis, and no criticism.”

Notable media libel cases from the year included lawsuits between members of parliament Saad Hariri and Oqab Saqr (a former journalist), both members of the March 14 alliance, and OTV and *Al Akhbar* newspaper, both supporters of March 8, over rival recordings they claim prove Saqr was either arms dealing with Syria’s rebels, or providing humanitarian aid.

Despite the highly charged political basis of many media libel cases, however, both media experts Sayah and Ayman Mhanna, executive director of the SKEyes media watchdog, said the Press and Publications Court, which last year dealt with around 20 cases of libel and slander, was relatively resistant to corruption by powerful figures. “Some of the Court’s decisions are based on Article 387 of the Penal Code, which states that defamation of a public official is justified as long as the defamation is proven to be true,” said Sayah. “However, the Court had overridden the article several times in cases involving defamation of the president or the army.” The Court has not imposed very heavy fines, said Mhanna, rising to a maximum of \$13,000.

Panelists unanimously criticized the absence of a right to access public information, noting leaks are common, but only those that serve the political interests of the party owning the media company. "You'll go to a ministry and say, 'It's my right to see this information.' They'll laugh at you and reply, 'Seriously, in Lebanon?'" said Thebian.

There remained no formal restrictions on media's access to local or international news, except for media originating in Israel. Entry to the profession of journalism was unrestricted for citizens.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Lebanon Objective Score: 2.08

With the civil war in Syria exacerbating already violent political and religious fault lines in Lebanon, panelists were unanimous that, as in previous years, little or no political reporting can be considered fair and objective. "Journalism meets no professional standards because the content of each media station is subjected to the donor's political party," said Time reporter Rami Aysha. "That's why most journalists practice self-censorship."

The case of panelist Fidaa Itani well illustrates the limits of professional journalism and the rise of censorship through 2012. Itani was a senior correspondent for *Al Akhbar*, long considered a newspaper supportive of leftist politics and Arab resistance against Israeli occupation.

After the political divide of 2005 between the pro-West, Sunni-led March 14 movement, opposed to the Assad regime, and the pro-Iran, Shia-led March 8 movement,

### 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).

Panelist Assaad Thebian pointed out that because of increased competition between television stations, journalists are fighting to get to stories first. In the case of the Lebanese hostages, however, this led to several media stations broadcasting a video claiming the hostages were dead, when in fact they were not.

backers of Assad, *Al Akhbar* was seen as generally pro-March 8. "Akhbar changed from a leftist, liberal, pro-resistance against Israel newspaper into a pro-Shiite, pro-Assad paper," said Itani. "You can't criticize the Syrian regime, you can only criticize March 14."

After seeing his editor perform a U-turn, from writing articles critical of the Assad regime's killing of tens of thousands of civilians to praising Damascus' honorable "resistance" and having his own editorial headlines directly censored, Itani quit the paper in May. "It was a joke: the paper would use SANA as a source (Syria's state news agency) and AFP, but would change the AFP term from 'rebels' to 'terrorists.' Syria was a hard test."

Such were the tensions in 2012 that three reporters from Hezbollah's *Al Manar* TV were briefly detained on suspicion of spying for the militant group while filming near the home of pro-March 14 Christian leader, Samir Geagea. The *Al Manar* journalists insisted they were only filming the sea.

The case of a dozen Lebanese kidnapped in Syria by rebels also graphically illustrated the limits of professional journalism in Lebanon. Panelist Assaad Thebian pointed out that because of increased competition between television stations, journalists are fighting to get to stories first. In the case of the Lebanese hostages, however, this led to several media stations broadcasting a video claiming the hostages were dead, when in fact they were not.

The lack of professionalism by journalists was further underlined by the imposition of a ban in June by the Lebanese Order of Physicians preventing doctors giving interviews to the media. The ban was prompted by the arrest of a doctor after media reports he was to blame for the death of a pregnant woman from a rare embolism; this triggered solidarity strikes by other doctors. The Order of Physicians said the ban followed a number of other misrepresentations in the media.

**“More than any other country, Lebanon is a place where it’s a must to use more than one news source in order to get the bigger picture,” said Future TV’s Roland Barbar. “The story is available in all its details but not through one single media.”**

The full convergence between journalists and politicians was well illustrated during the funeral of Wissam Hassan, Lebanon’s spy chief who was killed in a car bomb in October. A leading Sunni figure, Hassan’s funeral became a rally for the March 14 movement, led by Saad Hariri, the Sunni former prime minister and opponent of Syria. Addressing the funeral crowd of thousands, former MSI panelist Nadim Koteich, a senior anchor at Hariri’s Future TV, called for a march on the government offices in a bid to topple the March 8 government. Koteich was subsequently investigated for allegedly inciting violence.

In May, the UN backed a conference on objectivity and standards of reporting but little concrete action emerged.

Pay levels for journalists scored lowest in Objective 2, consistent with previous years’ scoring. “In my experience working for a local paper my pay for each article didn’t exceed \$50 and my monthly salary was never more than \$1,000, in the best case. That’s what caused me to leave print journalism,” said blogger Salame.

Several panelists noted that higher wages were paid to journalists on the basis of loyalty to the political and sectarian position of their paymasters and this in turn encouraged self-censorship. “Most media avoid covering the news of political parties they oppose and will avoid mentioning news that might damage the political party they are affiliated with,” said LBC’s Nancy Razzouk.

Ayman Mhanna of the SKEyes media watchdog said journalists often resorted to “rumors’ or ‘influential circles’ and the passive tense instead of clearly stating their sources and or methodology.”

Panelists were generally more positive about the emergence of investigative reporting which, while still unable to challenge the big political powers, has grown into a force to be reckoned with on local corruption and social issues.

Panelist Riad Kobaissi heads the investigations unit at New TV, a station generally considered less partisan than most. “The concept in the Arab world is usually ‘Disappear

for one hour and bring me rushes for one month.’ Investigations are about disappearing for one month and bringing rushes for one hour,” said Kobaissi, explaining the general reluctance of editors to spend time and money on investigative journalism.

Since his five-person unit was launched in June, Kobaissi said they had produced pieces on racism at an upmarket beach club which refused entry to a foreign maid, a fake university certificate scam, fraud by valet parking attendants, the failure of the smoking ban on campuses and, most seriously, high-level corruption in Beirut’s port, a massive source of revenue, both legal and illegal.

“When we went with our hidden camera to the port mafia we had two bodyguards, walkie-talkies, and an escape plan,” said Kobaissi. “The guy offered \$1 million to New TV not to broadcast the material and when that failed they sent three guys over to our office. Finally they bribed a judge who said I couldn’t broadcast the footage because I had manipulated it.” The piece was broadcast in October and prompted raids by customs officers on several shipping clearance offices.

The quality of media facilities continues to rank among the highest of all indicators, while Lebanon’s addiction to news, particularly political talk shows, ensures entertainment was in no danger of eclipsing information programming.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Lebanon Objective Score: 2.38

As in all MSI studies since 2005, Lebanon’s access to multiple sources of news remains the country’s strongest scoring objective, reflecting its multi-sectarian, multi-polar divisions of power, which prevent any one voice drowning out all others. The score of 2.38 maintains the objective solidly inside the “near sustainability” category, making it the most consistent scoring of all five objectives.

“More than any other country, Lebanon is a place where it’s a *must* to use more than one news source in order to get the bigger picture,” said Future TV’s Roland Barbar. “The story is available in all its details but not through one single media.” Blogger Salame said when reading the news, “I find myself forced to read it from several sources and to make my own judgment after I compare between them.”

As Fares Ahmed of Ya Sour put it succinctly, “There are multiple sources of news, but most media stations have one line. There are no media in Lebanon with multiple news.”

Sayah pointed out that though citizens have unrestricted access to divergent viewpoints, in Lebanon's toxic political atmosphere, consumers may "on purpose choose to only read one newspaper or watch one TV station that fits their political beliefs."

Panelist Rami Aysha noted the political skewering of coverage by rival media could extend to a blanket blackout on some stories. Channels supportive of the Sunni-led March 14 movement broadcast no news about the revolution in Bahrain, which is led by Shias against a Sunni monarchy. On the other side, Al Manar, affiliated with Hezbollah, the Shia political and militia group, initially entirely ignored the uprising in Syria, where the Sunni majority rebels are battling a regime dominated by Alawites, a Shia offshoot.

As well as access to multiple domestic news media, panelists agreed there are no restrictions on access to international media except cost, which for satellite television, much of it pirated, remains very low.

A number of media demonstrated adaption to the era of digital content with two newspapers, *An Nahar* and *As Safir*, launching iPad editions.

Internet services remain relatively expensive, at around \$50 a month for an average connection, though speeds improved in 2012 with the emergence of private competitors to the lumbering state-run telecom provider Ogero.

Though the law mandates broadcast media cover the entire country, Lebanon's chronic power shortages serve as an effective barrier to the flow of information, with blackouts ranging in duration from three hours a day in the best served neighborhoods of Beirut to 12 hours or more in rural, remote parts of the country.

## 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.

Though all major political parties express their views *ad nauseum* on air, online, and in print, Ayman Mhanna of the Samir Kassir Foundation noted one particular absence: "The sectarian tone is present in most media discourse. Most media fail to represent the point of view of independent, civic, non-sectarian, liberal citizens." Several panelists agreed. "The media do not represent political factions that work outside the sectarian framework," said Kobaissi.

Generally less socially conservative, religiously divided, or politically entrenched than their parents' generation, young Lebanese are increasingly searching for an alternative discourse through a proliferation of online blogs. In July, in direct response to what it called the "propaganda" of media, youth activists launched Khabrieh, a two-day test of the concept of "crowd sourced social media," with young Lebanese producing their own media stories.

By the end of 2012, the Lebanon Aggregator, which lists all blogs written about Lebanon, said it totaled 788 blogs, of which 172 were new and added during the year. The growing power of social media continued to make itself felt through 2012. More than 20 Lebanese politicians now use Twitter regularly and digital media experts said tweets by concerned citizens often find their way into cabinet meetings. New TV now runs a three-minute segment at the end of its news bulletin to present material posted on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and blogs.

As noted in Objective 1, state media are relatively non-partisan within the bounds of the powers that run the government. It is not particularly open to views that deviate from those groups and does not provide critical analysis of any of their activities or policies.

Panelists had some praise for the efforts of the two state news agencies, National News Agency and Central News Agency. "But most journalists still depend on foreign news agencies like Reuters, AP and AFP, because they are more trustworthy," said New TV's Radwan Mortada.

Panelists assessed positively the ability of non-state media to produce their own news, noting that most of these non-state media are nonetheless politically affiliated.

Scoring lowest in the Objective was transparency of media ownership. Although all Lebanese know unofficially which politician or party funds each newspaper or television channel, there are no official routes to determine exact shareholdings.

Online and social media continued to grow into the leading space for both journalists and citizens to challenge Lebanon's mainstream political status quo. Several panelists, however, noted the limits of social media, yet,

“Media should rely on advertising for profit, but since the Lebanese market is narrow, media are relying on financial support from politicians or foreign businessmen,” said Sayah, giving the example of Saudi Prince Waleed Bin Talal, who since 2004 has acquired an 85 percent stake in the parent company of LBC, Lebanon’s oldest private television station.

to bring about fundamental social or political change, as demonstrated by the relatively small turnout for rallies against sectarian personal status laws in favor of civil marriage. “You can speak as much as you want, as long as you do not change the system,” noted Thebian.

As a county of competing minorities, panelists found Lebanon’s media generally attentive to smaller communities such as Armenians or Ismailis, but less so to those who do not hold Lebanese citizenship and so cannot vote, such as the roughly half million Palestinian refugees and Kurdish and Bedouin nomads.

Lebanon being a tiny nation of turf wars, coverage of local news, from the Christian mountain villages of Keserwan to the Sunni urban stronghold of Tripoli, is perhaps unparalleled in the Arab world, while national and international issues are reported and debated relentlessly.

#### OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Lebanon Objective Score: 1.75

As in previous years, panelists remained unanimous that most media businesses in Lebanon are not self-sustaining but rather subsidized to a large degree by the political party whose message they convey. Diverse scoring by panelists appeared to reflect the global recession finally biting at Lebanon’s economy and the highly politicized nature of media management in the face of the civil war in neighboring Syria.

The average score of 1.75 was the lowest of all objectives in this year’s MSI and pushed Lebanon’s media businesses into the “unsustainable, mixed system” category for the first time since 2005.

“Lebanese media as a business is going backwards,” said Itani. “The more money comes in, the more professional standards decrease.” Some panelists made a distinction between the professionalism of management and the politicization of owners. “International managerial standards are well known and mostly applied in the media,” said Roland Barbar, senior executive producer at Future TV. “Editorial independence, however, is not guaranteed.” Mhanna criticized media as “campaign tools” that “do not have to make money or follow the same managerial standards of private enterprises.”

Barbar’s station is owned by Saad Hariri, former prime minister, who inherited his political position and vast wealth from his tycoon father, but whose finances have been struggling since the 2009 parliamentary elections, leading to unpaid salaries and layoffs at Future.

“Media should rely on advertising for profit, but since the Lebanese market is narrow, media are relying on financial support from politicians or foreign businessmen,” said Sayah, giving the example of Saudi Prince Waleed Bin Talal, who since 2004 has acquired an 85 percent stake in the parent company of LBC, Lebanon’s oldest private television station.

The murky intersection between politics, business, and media was well illustrated through 2012 by the fate of LBC. Originally established as a mouthpiece for the Lebanese Forces militia during Lebanon’s Civil War, the station was transformed over the past 20 years into what panelists unanimously spoke of as the only local media company approaching profitability through advertising alone. Embroiled in a five-year legal battle for control of LBC with

#### 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.

Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea, LBC's CEO Pierre Daher turned to Bin Talal for much needed cash.

The move had an almost immediate impact on LBC's local advertising revenue, explained Sayah. "Antoine Choueiri Group, a leading advertising agency in Lebanon, was owned by the late Lebanese businessman Antoine Choueiri, who was a supporter of the Lebanese Forces," she said. "When LBC was considered affiliated to the Lebanese Forces, Choueiri used to place his ads on air. Once LBC was no longer recognized as a media that supports the Lebanese Forces, Choueiri moved his ads to MTV, a well-known supporter of the March 14 movement, to which the Lebanese Forces belong."

Daher lost local revenue, but with a line-up of slick, locally produced entertainment programs such as *Star Academy*, *Celebrity Duet*, and *Top Chef* and a merger with Bin Talal's Rotana Group, LBC was reaping big money from regional advertisers. "Not all media can cover their expenses, that's why they depend on donors, but LBC has lots of ads and so it can," said Fares Ahmad.

However, by the end of 2012, even the financially viable LBC was facing mass layoffs, as the Saudi prince's relationship with Daher soured and Bin Talal moved to liquidate the production arm of LBC. Around 400 employees lost their jobs. Most were re-hired by LBC International, which Daher still controls.

Most other stations, such as Future, NBN, Manar, and Orange TV—all owned by members of rival political parties—struggle to earn more than 30 percent of their revenues from advertising, said Mortada. "The owner of New TV says he's paying from his own pocket, while our enemies say we are paid for by Qatar," said New TV investigative reporter Kobaissi.

Some recent online news outlets claim to shun political money, such as Ya Sour, started in 2005 by volunteers to cover local news and issues in Tyre, in South Lebanon. The site now boasts a readership of up to 35,000, putting it ahead of individual print newspaper circulation, and it employs a professional staff paid for, apparently, by advertising alone.

Given the clear subsidies paid by serving cabinet ministers to their own media stations, as well as the concentration of advertising revenue in one large family-owned company, panelists scored the impact of government subsidies extremely negatively.

Market research and broadcast ratings remain a fledgling industry among Lebanese media, except the more commercially orientated LBC and MTV. "There is still no market analysis of the media which we can trust," said

"There have been some major changes and many journalists were able to join the [union]," said Mortada. "But the support of foreign organizations remains the most important for journalists."

Razzouk of LBC. New TV's Mortada blamed statistics companies for pandering to the wishes of media tycoons: "The same statistics company gives different results to different media stations."

Both Kobaissi and Thebian questioned the reliability of media statistics compiled by IPSOS: "IPSOS Lebanon is not the IPSOS of the world," said Thebian.

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Lebanon Objective Score: 1.89

Despite some relatively momentous changes to Lebanon's media supporting institutions this year—the election of a new head of the Journalists Union and admission of new members after half a century of stagnation—panelists continued to score the Objective inside the "unsustainable, mixed system" category.

The year witnessed an unusually active public stance taken by heads of Lebanon's television networks, who issued a rare unified statement to push back against criticism of broadcast media in the wake of false reporting on the fate of 11 Lebanese pilgrims held in Syria. This followed a meeting

### 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.

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held between the Information Ministry and the National Audiovisual Media Council, a quasi-independent body working to license and regulate television and radio stations. The council threatened to suspend stations because of their coverage of the story, but it was forced to back down by the unified action of the broadcasters. This underlines both the limits of state control on media in Lebanon and the power of collective action by media owners.

In May, exactly two years after the death of Melhem Karam who had led the organization since 1961, the Journalists Union elected a new 12-member council with Elias Aoun as its head. By the end of the year, Aoun had successfully reversed Karam's long-standing coupling of the Union to the Press Federation of Newspaper Owners (a conflict of interest between journalists and their editors), had removed around 300 names of deceased or non-active Union members, and had granted 230 new memberships to journalists.

"There have been some major changes and many journalists were able to join the [union]," said Mortada. "But the support of foreign organizations remains the most important for journalists." Razzouk agreed that foreign media watchdogs still provide the backstop for local journalists in trouble and said that despite the opening of the union to new members, entrance still depends on a "political quota." "The membership base of professional unions is very narrow and they don't represent more than 10 to 15 percent of media professionals," said Mhanna. "The unions adopt a very conciliatory attitude and provide very weak support to persecuted journalists or to journalists facing professional or financial disputes with their employers."

There was general agreement between panelists that local media NGOs, most prominently SKEyes, named after the assassinated *An Nahar* journalist Samir Kassir, were growing in strength. Other local media NGOs include the Maharat Foundation and Media Against Violence, which regularly

criticizes journalists it accuses of being mouthpieces for political parties attempting to stir sectarian strife.

Improvements were also made this year to journalism degree and training programs, with the American University of Beirut launching a two-year Media Studies master's degree, focused particularly on digital media skills. The new course builds on existing undergraduate degree courses offered by several leading universities.

"What's still missing is focus on the practical side of journalism, the most important side," said Lebanese American University's Sayah. "We need more workshops and seminars, more in-field work during courses, for students to be better oriented to their future jobs."

Several foreign media groups, including Thompson Reuters Foundation, conduct occasional media training sessions in Lebanon, but Kobaissi said there is no permanent professional training center. "The best two training sessions I had were with the BBC in London and [Denmark Radio] in Copenhagen," said Kobaissi. Aysha pointed out, "There are many NGOs working to improve the skills of journalists, but these newfound skills can be blocked by the media company if the reporting doesn't meet the editorial line."

Panelists Ahmad and Sayah both found the telecommunications systems in Lebanon to meet the needs of media, but overall the panel scored infrastructure poorly, reflecting chronic power cuts and relatively slow but expensive Internet compared to other middle income countries. "Despite the high-tech services, Internet and telecoms are still poor because they are subject to the will of the politicians and the money tycoons," said blogger Salame.

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## List of Panel Participants

**Fidaa Itani**, former correspondent, *Al Akhbar*; freelance journalist, Beirut

**Rita Sayah**, senior researcher, Lebanese American University, Byblos

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

**Radwan Mortada**, reporter, New TV, Beirut

**Fares Ahmad**, journalist, Ya Sour, Tyre

**Riad Kobaissi**, investigative journalist, New TV, Beirut

**Assaad Thebian**, digital media strategist, blogger, Beirut

**Khodr Salame**, blogger; editor, Jou3an, Beirut

**Nancy Razzouk**, producer, LBC International, Adma

**Roland Barbar**, senior executive producer, Future TV, Beirut

**Ayman Mhanna**, executive director, Samir Kassir Foundation, Beirut

## Moderator and Author

**Hugh Macleod**, journalist, *The Sunday Times*; director, SkyeBoat Films, Beirut

*The panel discussion was convened on December 6, 2012.*

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*Apart from irresponsible media coverage, the panelists could not but agree on the abundance of information and even the criticism in the media, although with little impact on policy formation, holding politicians accountable, or even mobilizing public opinion.*



# LEBANON

“Long hours of live broadcasting just for excitement;” “competing to get a scoop;” “making media figures and focusing mainly on religious personalities;” “a lot of information with no influence.” This is how the panelists summarized the media scene in 2012: a showoff and scandal-focused media paying attention to what makes the most noise and deficient in investigative journalism that meets citizens’ needs. Thus, “media are just a reflection of a broken system,” according to Khaled Nasser, a communication and media lecturer at Lebanese American University.

The panelists’ agreed that the chief characteristics of Lebanese media are irresponsibility and a lack of ethical and professional standards. Live broadcasting is chaotic and has transformed into a means of making threats. Journalists are a tool of provocation rather than providers of information, always under the pressure to get a scoop and to compete to excite the audience.

The panelists shared the same flagrant examples. In one, LBC and Al Jadeed reporters competed in live coverage to announce the death of four Lebanese hostages who were kidnapped by Syrian rebels in Azaz in May 2012 during a pilgrimage. The reporters did not verify their source before going live and did not consider the consequences what turned out to be an erroneous report; eventually it led to panic and rioting. Another scene enraged the public when a LBC reporter interviewed live a group of hostages kidnapped by the Al Mukdad clan in August 2012 without considering that the hostages could not express themselves freely.

It was evident through the panel discussion that panelists see the media promoting the emergence of armed groups or controversial extremists who would never otherwise become phenomena if the media did not provide coverage.

Apart from irresponsible media coverage, the panelists could not but agree on the abundance of information and even the criticism in the media, although with little impact on policy formation, holding politicians accountable, or even mobilizing public opinion.

Walid Fakhereddine, an academic and a producer, made an important observation before starting the discussions about each indicator. Fakhereddine considered that one should consider the definition of citizenship before settling on scores for each indicator: if citizenship is belonging to certain groups, then the media in Lebanon represent citizens in several communal groups. If one considers the international definition of citizenship, which is defined by belonging to a country as a whole, then the media do not represent citizens.

*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).*

On the other hand, the panelists agreed that one may find more social issues related to people's daily concerns on radio. Fakhereddine said, however, that it is important to consider the impact of the medium in question; radio has far less reach and impact than television.

## OBJECTIVE 6: SERVING PUBLIC NEEDS

Lebanon Objective Score: 1.59

Media in Lebanon definitely tackle various issues that are important to citizens; however no serious discussions that are launched as a result, only a promotion of different political viewpoints. Haramoun Hamiyye, a youth activist, said, "The talk shows that should launch inclusive and deep discussions are turning into battlefields where each politician argues only in the aim of defeating his opponent, and the media is encouraging the aggressive attitudes in the shows in order to get more audience and not to present a deep analysis to the public."

### 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.

Alya Awada, a women's rights activist, agreed with Hamiyye and considered that "most of the talk shows end up with inefficient debate and never lay the ground toward any solutions." Patricia Hakme, a lawyer, said, "The political issues overcome all other important social and economic issues that are only raised after incidents and catastrophes." Rabih Kayss, a civil society activist, agreed that the media focus on political issues since most of the outlets are affiliated with political parties; social issues that are important to citizens are secondary.

Hayat Mershad, a women's rights activist, considered that it might be normal that politics overshadow all other issues, as everything is related to politics including social and economic issues; but she agreed with Hakme that the raising of social issues by the media is always related to covering incidents. It happened, she said, when the brother of the administrative reform minister, Mohammad Fneich, was accused of falsifying the health minister's signature to approve more than 500 medicines. The fake medicine issue was raised only when this was discovered. Likewise, the issue of women giving nationality to their children is only raised when a political decision is taken around this issue. She added that even in covering politics, media rarely interview experts, rather only politicians expounding on their views, which are neither scientific nor accurate.

Georges Azzi, a gender activist, stated, "The discussions that rose in media [this past year] aim only to mark points on the political opponent or to make a scoop." He added, "Al Jadeed runs for scoops without verifying the accuracy of the information, this is obvious on the Al Fassad show, interested in getting attention more than informing."

Alaa Chehayeb, a blogger and graphic designer, cited the few programs that cover the issues that serve citizens' needs; even ones that appear to, such as *Enta Horr* on MTV, are seeking scoops.

According to Nasser, "When it comes to political issues, the media are passive; the journalists take their cues from their managers and channel owners who are partisan and they rarely challenge the agenda of the sectarian party that owns the media outlet. Thus, the media outlet is becoming an important arsenal and platform for Lebanese political leaders who are polarizing and manipulating the public. The superficial and uncritical coverage of public issues is turning politics into a cockfight between politicians. There is more coverage in the news of what politicians say than they do, like giving speeches in press conferences or positions in debates." He added, "We should not just look at TV as representing all media, especially that news bulletin and political talk shows are trash. We can find a lot of health and

education programs in print, radio, and the Internet, which makes the score higher for this indicator.”

Fakhereddine shared that the social impact of television is definitely the highest, reaching 85 percent of Lebanese. He said that in the political talk shows there is a lot of debate and few discussions. He enumerated three shows trying to initiate discussions around issues that are important to citizens. Takhik unfortunately is scheduled up against an entertainment show on LBC that MTV cannot compete with, thus it does not make high audience numbers; lately it became more promotional and commercial. The second show is *Fassad* on Al Jadeed, but it has no credibility, he said. The third is the Zaven Kouyoumjian show *3 al Akid*, which highlights cases where citizens’ ignorance of the laws gets them into trouble. Out of these shows, he said, little useful information reaches Lebanese.

On the other hand, the panelists agreed that one may find more social issues related to people’s daily concerns on radio. Fakhereddine said, however, that it is important to consider the impact of the medium in question; radio has far less reach and impact than television.

Media do not follow up on the issues that they raise, such as when 40 tons of rotten meat was confiscated from a warehouse in Sabra in March 2012 or the fake medicine incident mentioned above. People do not receive any information beyond the current incident.

However, the Lebanese media are increasingly investing in investigative reporting programs that deal with social, economic, educational, and cultural issues. Omar Kaboul, a blogger and activist, considered that investigative journalism is not well developed yet, as it is still based on personal initiatives. All investigative reports are raised only for political agendas, like the corruption cases covered by Future TV, which is affiliated with the Future Movement; they once avoided tackling corruption cases involving Hezbollah, but after the collapse of Future Movement leader Saad Hariri’s government, Future TV raised the case of maritime properties involving Hezbollah only for political gain. The same happened when OTV, affiliated with the Free Patriotic Movement, broadcast voice recordings implicating a member of parliament—Okab Sakr, who is very close to ex-prime minister Saad Hariri—in arms trafficking for the Syrian revolution. Later when Sakr revealed another version of the recording, Al Jadeed made an investigative report to analyze both recordings, but their technical expert was not sufficient to come to a clear conclusion and the report ended with accusations more than an experts’ report.

During the discussions, some panelists were more optimistic than others. Carla Eid, a journalism student, agreed that the media promote discussions on various issues but that

Awada added that the media do not provide information related to women issues, for example, unless it is linked to specific events. In addition, one never sees women talking about these issues.

the programs never reach deep understanding of issues or lay the foundation for solutions. However, Eid opined that, at times, media play a positive role like in the collapse of the Fassouh Building and the weather disaster where media stood beside citizens and shared their concerns.

In discussing indicator 2, Fakhereddine said that media in Lebanon have never been able to hold politicians accountable. When the brother of Administrative Reform Minister Mohammad Fneich was accused of falsifying the health minister’s signature—the case described above—the coverage of the issue could not put pressure Fneich to submit his resignation. In addition, he said, the media highlighted this issue for over a week and then did not follow up afterwards; “We never knew if those responsible were held accountable,” he concluded.

Kaboul reminded other panelists that reporting is influenced by editorial policies and he believes that the media do not play the role of holding politicians accountable but they should create a critical mass of public opinion to lobby for accountability.

Nasser agreed with Kaboul and said that he thinks that media are playing their role. In the case of rotten meat previously cited, media did their job but the authorities did not. Further, the investigative reports of corruption are not producing social impact unless they are reported by several news outlets having different political views. In all cases, he continued, one must take into consideration the general public mood of despair and helplessness: such reports serve as proof of political corruption, but no one can do much about them.

Mershad pointed out that the media give space to news having a scandalous nature: the sexual harassment of two girls with special needs was covered as a scandal by Al Jadeed. They interviewed the two girls and their parents but there were no follow-up. As for the print media, she said, they give more space to social issues but they do not aim to hold politicians accountable.

Hakmeh considered that each media outlet highlights the corruption of politicians who are not in its political line or

Fakhereddine stated that all television shows include subtle commercials without pointing them out. The morning show on Future TV, he noted, hosts lots of guests touting their products; even Tahkik, which declares itself as an investigative program, turned in that direction as well for a while.

just to compete with other media outlets. The reports on fake medicines or the traffic department did not have any influence, she said. Awada agreed that the media do not influence decision makers even if they expose corruption, because politicians do not care and neither does the polarized audience of the specific outlet.

Ghinwa Daou, a freelance director, was very pessimist in discussing this indicator. She said the media have an instant and very short-term impact that one can see only on social media platforms; neither people nor media ever follow up. She despaired that all the stories in the media are driven by the political affiliation of each outlet. When the media report on social issues like people dying in front of hospitals, it should pressure politicians to change policies, but nothing happens.

Hamiyye was more sarcastic, saying that the media only manage to change one life on New Year's Eve. He was referring to the custom of television stations using special occasions like New Year's Eve to select one person in the aim of changing his or her life. "Media influence is only negative," he continued. Azzi supported this viewpoint, reminding panelists of the time that MTV led a campaign against foreign workers and the security forces followed up on it. He said that the *Enta Horr* program must be stopped, as it does not respect privacy: they aired the names of the six-year-old girls who were sexually assaulted at the Saint Joseph School in Aintoura. However, he added that when a case is not politicized, like that of the anal examinations on men suspected of homosexuality, the media were able to promote change, with the authorities forbidding these tests.

However, it is noteworthy that rarely does anyone in Lebanon start a protest without coordination by a media outlet.

Kayss and Eid were more positive. Kayss said that media can promote change: when LBC talks about potholes in the street, they get fixed; but in other issues like the fake

medicine, the media may influence but ultimately cannot create change. Eid considered that the media succeeded in putting pressure on the authorities in many cases, like in the rotten meat or the fake medicines. In addition she pointed to a show on MTV, *Al Hal Bi Idak* hosted by Rebecca Abu Nader, where complaints from citizens are received and the show's staff attempt to resolve them. Contradicting Azzi, she felt that *Enta horr* pushed the security forces to act in many cases and that it is a positive attribute.

In discussing indicator 3, there were no arguments between the panelists that information provided by the media is relevant to citizens' choices. However, it only serves the interests of the audience having same political viewpoints as the media outlet. Hakme said that unbiased people do not feel they are represented in the media. Azzi added that, even if the media cover various issues, it is always from a specific political angle. Abdel Rahman Abed al Halim, a journalism student, stated that some television programs cover social issues—and other media too—but they are biased and try to lead the public opinion to their political orientations.

The media try to follow citizen interests, but from a commercial perspective to get more audience share and thus advertisements. Hamiyye felt that this is normal, as most media outlets are commercial companies everywhere: this is why, he said, he does not watch television. Nasser agreed that the television coverage is superficial most of the time, but one can find information more relevant to citizens' choices in radio and print media.

Eid said that on some television programs, like *Ahmar Bel Khat Larid*, only topics relevant to people's thirst for excitement are raised. These are full of debate with no aim of informing people or laying the groundwork for solutions, rather only for excitement, especially on the sexual level.

Awada added that the media do not provide information related to women issues, for example, unless it is linked to specific events. In addition, one never sees women talking about these issues. Women are not guests on talk shows, although the majority of the news presenters are women. She raised as well the importance of personal relations between actors in civil society and journalists, which can play a major role in getting certain events covered.

Kaboul said that even when the media tackle issues that are important to citizens, they are very selective and the coverage is not transparent. He pointed to the coverage of problems with electric service provision as well as the lack of educational and cultural programs. Kayss added another category lacking in the media: legislative changes and government financial transactions receive superficial coverage, if any at all.

Fakhereddine named many talk shows with plenty of information like *Helwe l Hayet* on LBC, *Alam Sabah* on Future TV, and *Alive* on MTV and said that on all these shows the objective is to polarize people and influence their political choices. He categorized this as decidedly negative.

According to the panelists, regarding indicator 3 most people follow news from an outlet in line with their political stances, thus they trust the information reported by that specific outlet. Only non-aligned people or those who possess critical thinking follow more than one outlet. While information is not delivered objectively, it contains some level of analysis most of the time.

Daou said that she mistrusts completely the media, but that the many people around her who are aligned with a political faction do trust their media. She said that the meaning of the core values of journalism—accuracy, diversified sources, ethics, privacy protection—are lost in Lebanon.

Hamiyye said that many examples show that the media is not presenting accurate information. The case described above, when Lebanese pilgrims were kidnapped in Syria and a LBC reporter confirmed their death, led to violence toward Syrian citizens.

Al Halim said that the media do not verify their sources. One example is when media reported information about Chaker Absi being in Saida. Absi is a fugitive who is accused of being responsible for the 2007 clashes at the Naher al Bared Palestinian camp.

Azzi was more positive, saying he considers that the accuracy of information depends on the reporters themselves and not the institution; he feels that some reporters are indeed credible.

Eid had the Lebanese American University elections in mind when citing an example of when media were not objective at all. OTV, owned by the Free Patriotic Movement, declared a victory for the Free Patriotic Movement while MTV, close to the March 14 Alliance, declared victory for the Lebanese Forces. “We never got the accurate information from the media,” she said. Thus the media turned an event like student elections into a political event and a fight over the scoop of declaring victory of a certain political movement.

Nasser concluded that the root cause is that the public in Lebanon do not want objective news. They want to listen to the specific political party opinion in order to follow the same opinion, he claimed.

As regards indicator 5, panelists noted that each media outlet is affiliated with and financed by a political party, thus they spread the ideas of the party through their editorial content. On this point, Kayss distinguished again

that citizens are divided between those who follow the media outlet affiliated with their political choices—thus they do not recognize the partisan content as inherently counterproductive—and those who can analyze and recognize the partisan content. Daou added that the Lebanese television stations use their power and influence to broadcast content in the aim of brainwashing and mobilizing citizens to the cause of their benefactors.

Fakhereddine stated that all television shows include subtle commercials without pointing them out. The morning show on Future TV, he noted, hosts lots of guests touting their products; even *Tahkik*, which declares itself as an investigative program, turned in that direction as well for a while. Awada agreed that media outlets blur the boundaries between editorial and advertorial content. She said the most pointed example is the coverage of Leila Solh Hamade’s activities; the coverage is presented as news while, she said, it is completely an advertisement. Hamade is an ex-minister and she is the president of the Walid bin Talal Foundation; her charity activities are broadcast as news while they are in fact all sponsored by her. Hamiyye reminded the panelists of the *Zein al Atat* program promoting a brand of herbs without it being presented as a commercial.

According to the panelists, the outlook for indicator 6 is bleak. The media, they said, plays the role of provocateur to polarize people and incite them against one another. Hakme said that the news bulletin intros best reflect the partisan nature of the media, as it is only opinion, is usually provocative, and is not constructive most of the time. Fakhereddine added that some guests should not be hosted on talk shows, because their only purpose is to spread hate speech.

Panelists also pointed to examples where organizations or extremists get news coverage when, considering the public good, it would be better to ignore them. They pointed to the example of Sheikh Ahmad al Assir. Al Assir, a Sunni and imam of Rabah Mosque in Saida, started to appear in the media in 2012 as an opponent to Hezbollah. He and his followers intentionally blocked the roads in Saida many times and he backed plainly the Syrian opposition. Al Assir would likely have not received any coverage were it not for the fact that his presence was an embarrassment for Hezbollah.

Discussing indicator 7, panelists concluded that the media expose citizens to varied information but do not delve deeply into them. In addition, citizens must refer to many media outlets to get exposed to many viewpoints.

Fakhereddine went through the morning shows, which contain a lot of information exposing citizens to various viewpoints. However, the media focus on commercial appeal

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rather than informative and educational programming; they can make anything ridiculous to increase their audience, such as a show like *lol* on OTV. He concluded that it is evident that the amount of viewpoints and criticism in the media is big but there is little actual influence on how people think.

Azzi stated that the homosexuals do not have any space in the media. In fact, he said, whenever the media tackle this issue they deal with it as a taboo. He added that the media do not cover diversity except from a perspective of highlighting scandal, including the newspapers. Moreover, media are not held accountable when they offend marginalized people who are not backed by any religious

community, citing examples on MTV that agitated against homosexuals and foreign workers. Nevertheless, he saw that there is some hope now with LBC trying to raise social issues and protect marginalized groups: as noted above, in July 2012 LBC led a campaign against anal examinations on men suspected of homosexuality.

Mershad felt that gender equality on political shows does not exist; Daou noted that there is no coverage for cultural issues that might interest youth.

Kaboul ended the discussion by saying that the media do not cover adequately news from the regions or rural areas; he said that reporting is very centralized.

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## List of Panel Participants

**Walid Fakhereddine**, academic and producer, Beirut

**Alya Awada**, women's issues activist; founder, FE-MALE organization, Jwaya

**Carla Eid**, journalism student, The Lebanese University, Keserwan

**Abdel Rahman Abed al Halim**, university student, Jinan

**Rabih Kayss**, civil society activist, Hasbaya

**Georges Azzi**, gender activist, Achrafieh

**Patricia Hakme**, lawyer, Kobayyat

**Khaled Nasser**, communication and media lecturer, Lebanese American University, Beirut

**Alaa Chehayeb**, activist; blogger; graphic designer, Shouf

**Omar Kaboul**, activist; blogger, Ain Remmaneh

**Hayat Mershad**, feminist activist, Bchemoun

**Ghina Daou**, actress, director, and producer, Kfarshima

**Haramoun Hamiyyeh**, youth activist, Baalbeck

## Moderators

**Roula Mikhael**, executive director, Maharat Foundation, Beirut

**Layal Bahnam**, program officer, Maharat Foundation, Beirut

## Author

**Layal 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 23, 2013.*

*“Lebanon has become a case of a decentralized dictatorship,” said Khodr Salame, blogger and editor of Jou3an. “Under the umbrella of a big democracy there’re lots of dictatorships between sects and within sects, in every house and every street, controlling what you can say.”*



# LEBANON

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.

## I. Objectives and Indicators

### Objective 1

#### 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 of public media.
- > 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 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.

### Objective 2

#### 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.
- > Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- > Quality niche reporting and programming exist (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

### Objective 3

#### 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) exist 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 nonpartisan, 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.

### Objective 4

#### 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.

### Objective 5

#### 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 (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 average scores of all the indicators are 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 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 below.

### Objective 6

#### 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.

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.