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# MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2014

DEVELOPMENT  
OF SUSTAINABLE  
INDEPENDENT  
MEDIA IN  
**LEBANON**



# MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

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2014

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



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## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2014

The Development of Sustainable Independent Media in Lebanon

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**Timothy K. Maloy**, Lebanon correspondent, Marcolpolis Business News Service; freelance reporter, Beirut (objectives 1–5)

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



**LEBANON**

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*However, since the 2006/2007 study Lebanon has been losing ground consistently. The pluralism in the Lebanese media does not equate to professionalism; neither does it indicate a high level of media freedom.*



Lebanon had just passed a turbulent 2005 when IREX first used the Media Sustainability Index (MSI) to assess the health of its media sector. Car bombings had not only killed Rafiq Hariri, but also two of its leading journalists—Samir Kassir and Gebran Tueni—while leaving a third, May Chidiac, severely injured. All four were critics of Syria's influence over Lebanon. In April, Syrian army units withdrew from the country in the face of Lebanese protests and external pressure. While this development paved the way for a more open media environment and better media content for a short time, since 2006/2007 Lebanon's media scene has deteriorated consistently to a point where it is worse off than in 2005, according to the study's results.

Lebanon has been included in the MSI seven times since 2005. It is now possible to look at longer-term developments and trends within the media there. Year-to-year changes are not often indicative of sustainable improvement or fundamental weakening; one of the MSI's strength as an evaluation tool is to chart longer term trends. In the case of Lebanon, the seven years of data have established a slow negative trend in terms of how well the media serve as the "fourth estate." An additional strength of the MSI is to put those trends into a larger context. In this case, Lebanon's decline is consistent with a larger trend observed in Eastern Europe.

To measure how well a media sector performs its role as the "fourth estate," the MSI assesses five "objectives" that shape a media system: freedom of speech, professional journalism, plurality of news, business management, and supporting institutions. Over the years, Lebanese journalists, bloggers, editors, and professionals related to the media industry have assessed these objectives by scoring the several indicators that define each and then participating in a one-day discussion to share their opinions on the state of each with their colleagues.

In 2011, USAID asked IREX to include a parallel study using a similar methodology to gauge the public's perception of how well the media serve their information needs. IREX developed a separate set of indicators and over three years has convened a group of civil society representatives, students, academics, trade unionists, and others to assess how well the media support their information needs as citizens, consumers, etc. For this study, scores over three years (2010/2011 – 2014) have remained consistently poor, with a high of 1.59 and a low of 1.23 on a scale of 0 to 4.

Below, IREX presents trends observed from each of the studies, in terms of both qualitative and quantitative findings. To provide context for the qualitative findings, quotes from panelists in earlier studies are put side-by-side with those from 2014.

## Lebanon's Media Development, 2005–2014: An Assessment by Media Professionals

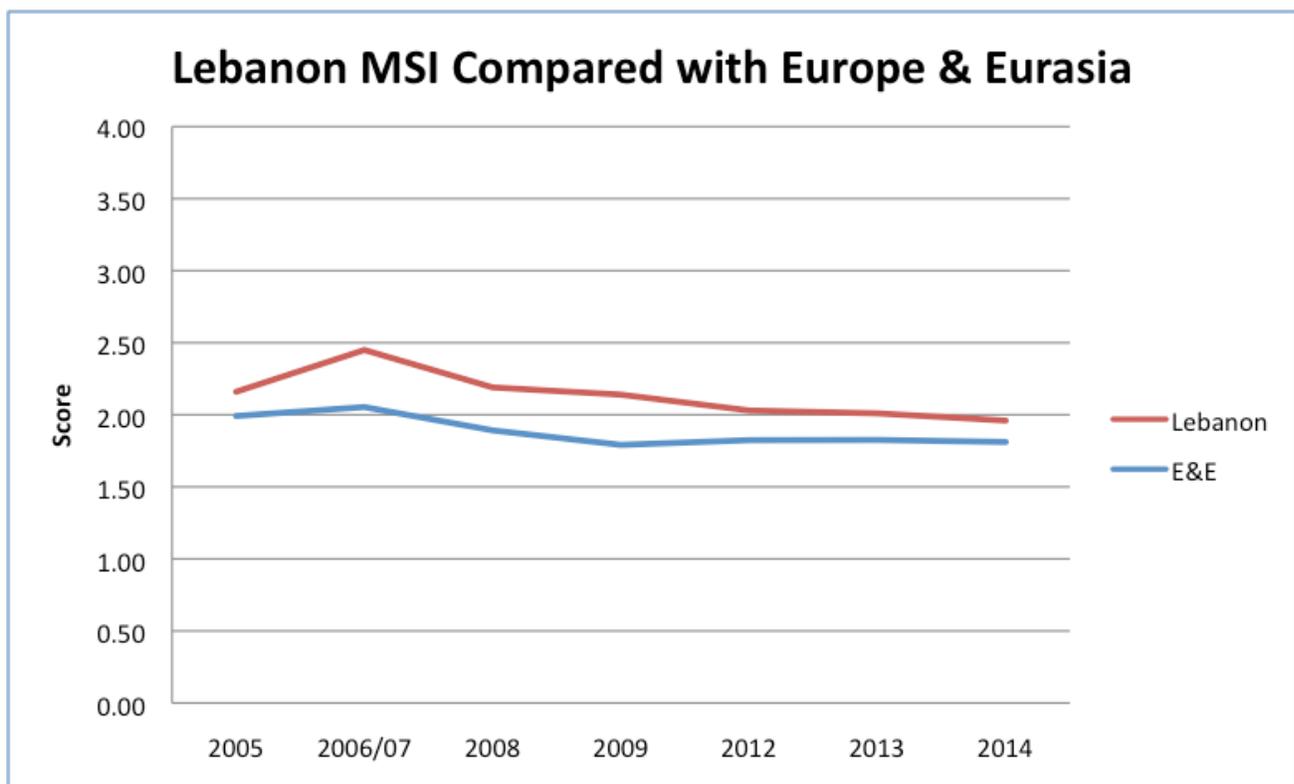
Lebanon has always been among the best scoring countries in the Middle East edition of the MSI. It has a long history of a relatively professional and vibrant media. Until the emergence of Al Jazeera and other regional satellite providers, its media were leaders in providing news to Arabic-speaking countries and the diaspora. Many media there, while indeed receiving large amounts of political money, also have applied a business-like approach to their operations. Lebanon today still has one of the most pluralistic—and commercial—media sectors, certainly in the Middle East, but also beyond. All major political factions are represented in the media; the many confessions and ethnic groups such as Armenians can find media that cater to them. This is relatively uncommon in the Middle East and not something to take for granted in Africa or Eastern Europe where the MSI is also conducted.

However, since the 2006/2007 study Lebanon has been losing ground consistently. The pluralism in the Lebanese media does not equate to professionalism; neither does it indicate a high level of media freedom. While the ability of media sponsored by the many competing political parties to represent the views of their sponsors has not changed, the already-tenuous nature of independent media willing to offer across-the-board criticism or, for example, uncover real

corruption has become direr. Finding consistent examples of professional journalism in mainstream media is now more difficult. Plurality of media has suffered; likewise, as even more political money has entered the arena, media hoping to remain above the fray are having a harder time keeping going. The institutions supporting Lebanese media are also increasingly unable to assist the media effectively.

Viewing Lebanon's score trends beside those of an aggregate of Eastern Europe (*figure 1*) scores shows that this trend is mirrored in that region. One explanation for this is that new digital media got out ahead of the efforts of governments and others who were trying to suppress information. Beginning in 2008, reports of bloggers in jail or more restrictive laws governing online or mobile-platform media began to make their way into the MSI. At the same time, consolidation in ownership and more overt control by political owners is another factor leading to a worldwide decline in scores. Finally, the world financial crisis that began in 2008, coupled with new competition from inexpensive online advertising, have put all media that rely on advertising revenue to enter into a painful adjustment period; this adjustment has in its worst cases caused some respected media to shutter their operations or be subsumed into the portfolios of politicized conglomerates.

Lebanon's trends by objective are explained below.



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## Objective 1: Legal and social norms protect and promote free speech and access to public information

Score History (range: 0–4): 2005 baseline: 1.88; high: 2.24 (2006/07); low: 1.77 (2014)

After reaching a high of 2.24, or in the “near sustainability” scoring range, Lebanon’s freedom of speech score has fallen consistently and this year is slightly lower than its 2005 baseline score. Ground gained between the first and second study was, as it turned out, hard to hold for the media. By the time the 2009 study was conducted, the score had fallen below 2.00 and has stayed there since.

Reading panelists’ comments from discussions of indicator 1, which covers the constitutional and legal frameworks for the freedoms of speech and the media, in the 2006/2007 report side-by-side with the 2014 report a reader can see how the hopes for an improved legal environment have been shelved.

From 2006/07:

“We cannot judge now if freedom of speech exists or is protected,” said panelist Shirine Abdallah, a longtime employee at An-Nahar newspaper who assisted former editor Gebran Tueni until his death by a car bomb in December 2005. He now heads the paper’s public relations office. An-Nahar is the largest newspaper in Lebanon and has firmly opposed Syrian control of Lebanon following Hariri’s assassination. “The status of the country changed two years ago and it is still too early to judge. Now our internal problems are very acute. It’s almost impossible to have a civilized conversation about politics,” said Abdallah.”

From 2014:

“The consensus opinion among the panel was that there is ‘free speech in the media, until there isn’t,’ meaning that despite a framework of legal protections, the feeling is that the rug can be pulled out from under the exercise of free speech depending on the circumstances.

“This need not come in the form of government censorship, but instead can be the result of sectarian assaults, threats, and political/private economic pressure to silence a media organization. Pressure is not so ham-handed at this point that news in the larger sense is stopped, but rather that individual correspondents and organizations find their exercise of free speech challenged by inside and outside pressures.”

A few indicators in particular have remained sticking points, identified each year by panelists as a challenge to achieving a freer media environment. One is indicator 2, which assesses

media licensing. In particular the licensing of print media has created an odd secondary market for print media licenses and forced a consolidation that make newspapers the realm of the rich: unused newspaper licenses are a valuable commodity and a new newspaper must acquire two old licenses.

Access to public information, covered by indicator 7, is another perennial challenge to practicing journalism, and over time its scores have deteriorated.

As reported in 2005 by ANB-TV’s Ghayath Yazbeck, “The access to public information, as in state information, is difficult—especially when we compare the local situation with the ability of journalists in France or Britain to get what is considered public information, especially when it comes to political or corruption issues.” His hope that there might change with the Syrian withdrawal turned out to be unfounded, as one 2014 panelist characterized the situation:

“There is no Freedom of Information Act, though there are some NGOs working on that. Secondly to contact a ministry requires an official fax, and I am sorry, but as a freelancer working out of my apartment I don’t have a fax with a stack of various media outlet letterhead lying around... It is also very difficult to find contact numbers, and even if you are lucky enough to find one, getting someone to answer the phone is the next step before the whole fax debacle ensues. To my knowledge I don’t think the government works hard to thwart media, it’s just that they don’t do anything in the least to help it.”

Although an unsafe working environment for journalists, which is assessed with indicator 4, has plagued Lebanon for decades, the situation has at least not become worse. In 2005, one panelist described the situation as follows:

“Most journalists working on internal political issues are feeling threatened,” said MSI panelist Tania Mehanna, senior correspondent for the Lebanese Broadcasting Company (LBC). “After this year and all the assassinations, everybody is taking extra precautions. If you cannot park in a secured place, you cannot leave your car. We have to change our habits, change the places where we live.”

In 2014, one panelist’s comments showed that the situation is roughly the same, saying:

“The number of violations targeting journalists by mainly non-state-actors is particularly high and met with total impunity. Without a strong and assertive judiciary, protection of journalists—media professionals—working for traditional media outlets will never be able to exercise their profession independently and according to top international standards.”

Indicator 8 looks at the ability of media to use sources of news and any restrictions on international sources, in particular. In Lebanon's case, this is a relative strength and has been since the MSI began studying the country. There has even been some improvement, as one panelist in 2005 noted, "Any foreign production or media related to Israel also will not be allowed entry." In 2014, however, one panelist said "Sometimes Lebanese newspapers (such as *Al Balad*) have sections that contain articles from Israeli newspapers such as *Haaretz* and the *Jerusalem Post*."

More broadly, information reported by the MSI shows clearly that the situation with media freedom in Lebanon, like so many other things, is entangled with the country's political divisions. Changes to the laws (and additions such as Freedom of Information) that underpin media freedom, realizing effective law enforcement that protects journalists, and creating a judiciary to uphold the law—among others—all depend upon a reasonably strong central government that still eludes Lebanon.

## Objective 2: Journalism meets professional standards of quality

Score History (range: 0–4): 2005 baseline: 2.14; high: 2.44 (2006/07); low: 1.82 (2014)

Panelists over time have decried what they perceive as poor performance overall by the country's journalists. Lebanon has long had, and still has, examples of excellent journalism. This includes insightful investigative reporting, political analysis, and informative business reporting. The problem is not that this level of professionalism has deteriorated; the problem, according to a reading of successive panel discussions, is that this journalism is increasingly marginalized and lost in a sea of biased or sensationalist reporting. Further, higher levels of self-censorship have exacerbated the problem.

The 2006/2007 study demonstrated the split personality—between professionalism and overt bias—within the media:

*An-Nahar's* Shirine Abdallah suggested that, "80 percent of journalists are fair and objective, presenting both sides of the story." While New TV's Firas Hatoum agreed that most journalists sought to present a balanced view, he noted, "In the end they submit to the editorial policy of their media stations. It's almost impossible to find reports criticizing the opposition in the opposition media stations, and vice versa." For *Ad-Diyyar's* Kamal Zeibyan, Lebanon has no truly objective journalists. "All journalists are being influenced by politics and sectarianism," he said.

In 2014, the situation had changed to reflect a tougher reality for those wishing to practice objective journalism:

"Nowadays, media in Lebanon is a media of war. No rules, everything is acceptable to make their parties win the war—war for politics and ratings. Journalists working in media have become soldiers that need to obey their leaders," said Revenue Watch's Laury Haytayan.

However, one feature of Lebanese media is that little is left ignored by all media. Usually Lebanese have access to at least one source of news covering a story that might be unflattering to one or more parties. This has not changed over time, and is summed up nicely in the 2014 chapter:

Salahni wrote, "Overall every issue gets covered, however it depends on the papers. Some media don't report certain stories, others downplay them. It depends on the media outlet and who is backing them. Sometimes you will switch on a channel and they will just ignore an issue altogether. But sometimes too you notice people [local residents] will expel certain media. I can't imagine Al Manar being allowed in Bab al Tabbaneh and we saw the reaction of one of the Azaz hostages when he was handed a microphone from Future TV after his release."

Investigative reporting has drawn criticism over the years from panelists, although there are examples in Lebanon that have impact and are well done. This is not the case in many other countries. Nonetheless, the 2006/2007 study had this to say:

For May Elian, it remained questionable whether Lebanon really has investigative reporters. "I don't think we even know what it means," she said. "On television you see no investigative reporting. There have been some reports into issues like Hezbollah's weapons, or the Palestinian situation, but they are too superficial to be called investigations."

The 2014 study noted the following:

Mhanna asked rhetorically if there are too many editorials, and if investigative journalists and their stories simply have receded into the background in comparison. While investigative journalism does exist—and as shown in Objective 1, above, it can be a dangerous undertaking—it is relatively rare.

## Objective 3: Multiple news sources provide citizens with reliable, objective news

Score History (range: 0–4): 2005 baseline: 2.54; high: 2.88 (2006/07); low: 2.38 (2013); 2014: 2.44

Plurality of news sources remains one of Lebanon's strengths, even if this objective scores some less well than it did in 2005. However, one thing that has not changed is the nature of this plurality, and its limitations. It is a plurality driven by political deadlock, where no one side can silence all the rest and where no faction is willing to be the

first to give up its mouthpiece in the hopes of allowing an independent media to take over.

Additionally, much of the Lebanese populace is tuned into the political ownership and leanings, and they know what to expect from each media outlet as a result. The 2005 study put it this way:

Lebanon has many sources of news, both at home and from abroad. The catch is in how they are used, given the partisan ownership of much of the media, the MSI panelists said. Readers and viewers know which politicians or political blocs own or bankroll specific media outlets, although official records may list someone more obscure as the titular owner. But the Lebanese are long accustomed to checking a variety of news sources if they want to learn what is happening on their country's assorted geographical and political turfs.

The 2014 study's introduction showed that nothing has changed in this regard:

Lebanese readers are information junkies and each party and sect provides several different media outlets to fulfill this taste for news. Even if an example of a pluralistic media outlet is hard to find, overall the media in Lebanon can be described as supporting pluralism.

Throughout the years, Lebanese state media have been praised for remaining neutral and above the fray, yet at the expense of being considered irrelevant and even boring. The 2014 study had this conclusion:

News and information programming produced by state media rarely deviate from rather bland coverage of the main political factions. Haber pointed out, "The state media are only restricted by the narrow scope of their mandate and budgets, which are limited." However, this narrow scope means that most Lebanese do not rely on state media as their chief news source.

#### **Objective 4: Media are well-managed enterprises, allowing editorial independence**

Score History (range: 0–4): 2005 baseline: 1.92; high: 2.27 (2006/07); low: 1.75 (2013); 2014: 1.85

While Lebanon has a relatively sophisticated commercial sector, and this includes media enterprises, scores for business management have remained stagnant overall. Although the score in 2006/2007 showed promise, as in the rest of the world the 2008 financial crisis and an uncertain market thanks to the rise of online advertising and digital platforms worked to pull scores back to where they started.

Beyond this, however, political money has been, and still is, the chief way of financing media operations. Advertising

may bring in some revenue, but many media serve simply as an arm of a political machine.

The 2006/2007 study noted:

Lebanese media struggle to make ends meet through advertising and sales revenue alone, and while they are well managed compared to most media across the region, political money remains the backbone of the business model. Advertising, once a strong market driver, has witnessed a downturn since Hariri's assassination. "The advertising cake has shrunk unbelievably since the July 2006 war," said voice of Lebanon's Wadih Haddad. "The economic situation started deteriorating from the assassination of Hariri and became worse in 2007 with the political divisions. Many media are experiencing financial difficulties because of lack of advertising."

A 2014 panelist explained the three models that Lebanese media follow:

One is purely advertising supported. These media outlets have to deal with the current economic situation, which has been rapidly declining the last several years and brought down by the knock-on effect of the raging Syrian civil war. In this context, advertisers are spending less simply as the Lebanese consumer is spending less, as they are worried about the future.

A second model, he noted, is no advertising. Politically-funded media outlets are owned by one party or one person—operating regardless of the media outlets' business balance sheet. The purpose of the outlet is to publish content for which there will be continual funding. This, Mhanna noted, can lead to an eventual decrease in quality.

The third model is being part of a larger media corporation. The Time Out entertainment magazine is part of the worldwide OnTime franchise and also owns the Entrepreneur worldwide name.

#### **Objective 5: Supporting institutions function in the professional interests of independent media**

Score History (range: 0–4): 2005 baseline: 2.34; high: 2.42 (2006/07); low: 1.64 (2012); 2014: 1.90

The professional and trade associations in Lebanon that support the media have always been problematic since the MSI began, and panelists have had little good to say about them. The NGOs that advocate for media rights, however, are appreciated and journalism education and training are generally well received.

The 2005 study explained the problems with trade and professional associations:

Panelists were highly critical of the newspaper publishers' syndicate and the journalists' syndicate, echoing sentiments often heard in media circles in Lebanon. They accused the syndicates of hindering journalists and of taking the government's side against media professionals. They noted that the presidents of both syndicates had held their posts for more than three decades and accused them of being more concerned with preserving their own power than with helping journalists. In addition, broadcast journalists are not eligible for syndicate membership and have no national organization of their own.

The only thing that had really changed by 2014 is that a broadcast journalists association had been formed (only print journalists had been admitted to the journalists association):

On supporting institutions such as trade associations or unions, Mhanna said, "Fewer than five percent of journos are members of syndicates." He noted that in the case of the Broadcast Syndicate—after years of trying to get one—the membership split between the March 8 and the March 14 political movements, with March 8 currently running it. The opinion of most panelists is that the three various syndicates do not really represent the profession.

Finally, past panelists had complained about the quality and price of Internet access in Lebanon, particularly when compared with the average wage levels. By 2014, at least the quality had improved:

Telecommunications infrastructure is a source of frustration and yet also a boon to media. On the one hand, spotty electrical service and relatively high prices for Internet service hold back the potential of media to reach new audiences online or on the latest mobile technologies. However, the potential is clearly there and media are making use, as best the situation allows, of such technology.

## Objective 6: How Lebanese Rate Their Media

Score History (range: 0–4): 2010/2011 baseline: 1.28; 2013: 1.59; 2014: 1.23

Panelists in the Objective 6 study are not the same as the panelists who rate and discuss Objectives 1 through 5. The latter, as noted, are media professionals and associated personnel. Objective 6 panelists are educators, students, trade union members, NGO leaders, and activists, among others. Objective 6 scores and comments have, in the three years the study has been undertaken, been quite harsh although not unrealistically so.

Three years is barely enough time to notice any trends in score or to judge sustainable development or real backsliding. However, Lebanon's media, as judged by its consumers, has received the same comments over the three years of the study. Nothing, it seems, has improved in their collective opinion.

The initial study found the following when discussing how well Lebanese media promote discussions about issues of importance for citizens:

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

In 2014, the tone was quite similar:

Ayoubi said, "The debates in media are oriented depending on events tackled by politicians. The discussions that are important to citizens are not considered a priority and the public discourse goes mainly around politicians' interests. If we look at current headlines, we only see the government issue [the fact that it is a caretaker government] as a priority while others that might be more important to citizens are secondary."

Another 2014 panelist added:

The media are indeed a platform but the public debates are not achieving any goal, concluded el Helou. "We can see only bluster in the talk shows to reach high ratings, nothing leading to change. The information and data provided by media are not accurate and the sources are not clear."

One of the indicators in Objective 6 states: "Citizens trust that news and information reported by the media accurately reflect reality." This has often elicited some of the sharpest criticisms from panelists. In 2010/2011, one panelist noted:

In their discussion of the indicator assessing citizen trust of the veracity of news media, panelists agreed that media in Lebanon cannot be considered entirely trustworthy. They pointed specifically to the political positioning and affiliation of each media outlet as the underlying reason. Citizens belonging to a certain political party or sect follow news from media outlets of the same affiliation, without taking into consideration

the objectivity or neutrality of the news reported. "Each TV station reflects completely its supporters' political choice and what they would like to hear," Hassan said. Hachem Adnan, an activist and theater worker, expressed concern over the growing disregard for truth. "This situation is causing an alteration to the public opinion, and the most serious problem is that the politically affiliated citizen accepts the information even when he knows that it is false news."

The 2014 study echoes this:

Talhok recalled the incident when a Lebanese soldier killed an Israeli soldier: Future and MTV reported the incident saying that the Israeli Army was on alert, as if clashes could occur at any moment. The next day, audiences aligned with the March 14 movement were not convinced by a Lebanese Army press release that said this was not the case. Amiri, who lives in Tarik Jdide in the Bekaa, shared that a lot of rumors circulate about car bombs or armed groups in the streets. In some cases media pass on these rumors, saying that the source is social media. This is a new trend, he noted, allowing the media to disseminate inaccurate information without verifying the source and denying responsibility. "A lot of false information circulates followed by a correction but with no apologies. This is why citizens have more trust in international agencies like Reuters and AFP," concluded Amiri.

Further, the 2014 report also noted instances where journalists are really falling down in their responsibilities:

In fact, [panelists] said, this trend of online journalists/activists has allowed mainstream media to cover issues based solely on social media activity, giving them an excuse for coverage of unverified rumors: the source is simply "this news is circulating in social media."

Finally, indicator 6 of this objective cuts to the heart of the matter: whether partisan and editorial content in the media serves as part of constructive dialogue or as "hate speech." Panelists from each year have come down on the side of this content often promoting divisions rather than healing them. In 2010/2011, the study characterized the situation thusly:

Many media outlets serve as platforms for mutual accusations, trading messages of provocation and urging mistrust of opponents of their political agenda. Media outlets affiliated with the March 8 movement, for example, accuse those parties seeking disarmament of Hezbollah to be serving American and Israeli

agendas; and in turn, media outlets affiliated with the March 14 movement accuse the other side of serving Iran. In both cases, these media rely on all the sectarian goading and other sources of mistrust they can muster to attract people to their cause.

The 2014 study gave this example, as relayed by a panelist:

Ayoubi said, "Hate speech today in media is at its highest levels; even during the civil war, it was not that abundant. Media is dedicating time and space to field commanders like Ziad Allouki and this is insane." Ayoubi reminded panelists of isolated incidents that were turned into communal clashes by the media. He described an incident in Sweiri village in Western Bekaa that started as a traffic dispute between two persons and escalated into a conflict between the two families, leading to six deaths. "The media reported it as a conflict between Sunni and Shia, while they could have decreased the tensions and focused on it as an individual incident," he said.

## Conclusion

In Lebanon, the hope that the media environment would change after Syrian forces left has not come to fruition. There was a brief period of more openness in the media environment, in part due to wider adoption of new media technologies, but the political forces adjusted and the situation is back to where it stood in 2005, more or less. One big change is that news seems to be getting further squeezed by both reality television and "news" that is really nothing more than entertainment, with a dangerous edge of inciting hatred thanks to guests who have fringe—yet loud—opinions that espouse intolerance.

Until the dominance of politically funded media ends, independent media will have little chance to unseat them as the main sources of news in Lebanon. Advertisers will still gravitate toward the slick media that money can buy, leaving those who rely solely on advertising to face artificially low advertising rates and an uneven playing field.

The real losers in this are average Lebanese. While they will be able to, if they wish and if they have time, continue to triangulate between many biased news sources to get close to the truth, unfortunately important discussions about Lebanon's future will be sidelined and accountability of political leaders will be limited mostly to cases where one side can gain a political advantage by exposing the other.

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*Amid manipulation and political influence peddling, however, readers of this report should note that there are many hardworking journalists in Lebanon who, at risk to themselves and showing considerable courage, use as their guiding light that old newsroom maxim: “The public deserves one good shot at the truth.”*



# LEBANON

Each year since 2006, Lebanon's MSI score has consistently declined as the small country's sectarian and political divides have grown wider, accelerated by the both domestic political situation and, for the last three years, by the brutal civil war in neighboring Syria. This year's results show a small but important drop in overall score from 2.01 to 1.96; falling below 2.00 has moved the country from a position of the very bottom of "near sustainability" to the upper reaches of "unsustainable, mixed system" according to the MSI score definitions.

What political center might occasionally exist in Lebanon no longer holds with any reliability. The mutual animosity of the two main political parties, March 14 and March 8 is such that while Lebanon's security and economic situation has been steadily sinking, the two rivals find no common ground. As of this writing, the Sunni/Shiite sectarian/political split has reached a critical point in Lebanon and perhaps only awaits a fatal tipping point to spur open war again.

Much is in the balance in the coming months as the government makes yet another attempt at forming a national unity cabinet amid an upswing in end-of-year bombings and assassinations directly related to proxy battles transferred to Lebanon from Syria. The Lebanese government has been largely inactive since last spring's pro-forma resignation of Prime Minister Najib Mikati, who ultimately remained as caretaker as political leaders were unable to form a new government. This untenable situation has persisted for nine months.

It has become almost a stereotype for studies of Lebanon's media outlets (television, radio, newspaper, and some blogs) to note that they are allied by party or ideological affiliation, indeed owned and funded by respective political interests. The agenda of their political coverage ranges from what could be considered close to objective to sometimes simply allowing themselves their own facts or omitting important details.

The senior journalist on the panel, *L'Orient-Le Jour's* Issa Goraieb—the unofficial "dean" of Levantine journalism, with 47 years on the job—said scathingly of the state of Lebanese media, "Sectarian venom infects the press and corporate life. Every day it's harder to make objective news and independent media or transparent media."

Amid manipulation and political influence peddling, however, readers of this report should note that there are many hardworking journalists in Lebanon who, at risk to themselves and showing considerable courage, use as their guiding light that old newsroom maxim: "The public deserves one good shot at the truth."

# LEBANON at a glance

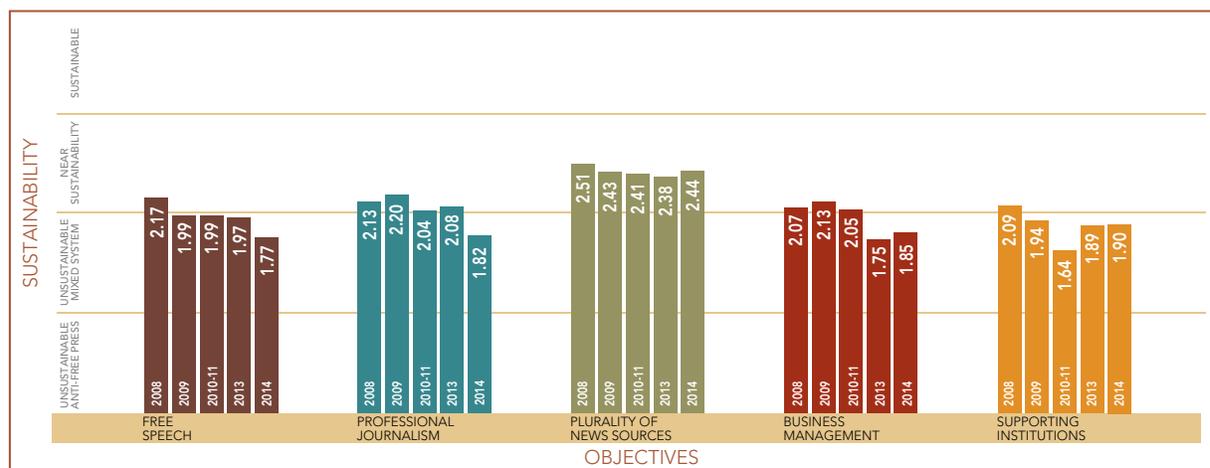
## GENERAL

- > Population: 4,131,583 (July 2013 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 (2012-Atlas): \$40.67 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2013)
- > GNI per capita (2012-PPP): \$14,160 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2013)
- > Literacy rate: 89.6% (2007 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: Estimates as to circulation are highly unreliable, with various publications giving their figures in the tens-of-thousands; knowledgeable sources usually say even the largest of the dailies, such as *An Nahar*, have a circulation closer to 10,000.
- > Broadcast ratings: N/A
- > News Agencies: National News Agency (state-owned), Central News Agency (private)
- > 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: 1.77

Lebanon's score of 1.77 in Objective 1 represents a modest decrease of one-fifth of a point compared with last year. Much of the loss is due to lower panelist evaluations of indicators 5 (legal protection of public media's editorial independence), 6 (libel laws), and 7 (freedom of information laws). These indicators also received scores more than half a point lower than the objective score. The loss was offset slightly by an improved score for indicator 2 (media licensing). Other indicators remains mostly static; as with last year, indicators 8 (media access to and use of news sources) and 9 (unfettered entry into the journalism profession) received the highest scores in the objective, outperforming the objective average by a point-and-a-half and three-quarters of a point, respectively.

The consensus opinion among the panel was that there is "free speech in the media, until there isn't," meaning that despite a framework of legal protections, the feeling is that the rug can be pulled out from under the exercise of free speech depending on the circumstances.

This need not come in the form of government censorship, but instead can be the result of sectarian assaults, threats, and political/private economic pressure to silence a media organization. Pressure is not so ham-handed at this point that news in the larger sense is stopped, but rather

### 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.

Well-known journalist Habib Battah said, "In journalism you're on your own. It takes guts. But it's worth something to take a risk," adding hopefully, "We can do something, me and my audience, to make a change."

that individual correspondents and organizations find their exercise of free speech challenged by inside and outside pressures.

In discussing indicator 1, legal and social protections for free speech, Ayman Mhanna, the director of the Samir Kassir Foundation, noted, "The legislative framework is antiquated. Protection of press freedom comes more from practice rather from text [the law itself]."

In a related matter, Mhanna added, "The number of violations targeting journalists by mainly non-state-actors is particularly high and met with total impunity. Without a strong and assertive judiciary, protection of journalists—media professionals—working for traditional media outlets will never be able to exercise their profession independently and according to top international standards."

Investigative reporter Rami Aysha, who has worked for *Time* magazine, added, "Legal norms protect free speech but upon application the legal norms are not respected as we see daily aggressions against journalists," noting that, "There are a big number of journalists who are being harassed on a daily basis while trying to do their work and some journalists are banned from entering into certain districts in Lebanon."

In Aysha's case, he was kidnapped by Hezbollah on August 30, 2012. "The first thing I did was show my Press Card thinking it will provide me with some cover but despite that I was kidnapped and tortured," he said.

This was by no means the end of his horrific ordeal, as when his custody was transferred from Hezbollah to Lebanese Intelligence, Aysha said, "my torture continued and the investigators swore at all journalists and this shows how upon application the laws of free speech are not respected in Lebanon."

Well-known journalist Habib Battah said, "In journalism you're on your own. It takes guts. But it's worth something to take a risk," adding hopefully, "We can do something, me and my audience, to make a change."

Dagher wrote in his questionnaire, "I never witnessed Internet censorship on any news sources, and sometimes Lebanese newspapers (such as *Al Balad*) have sections that contain articles from Israeli newspapers such as *Haaretz* and the *Jerusalem Post*."

Mhanna agreed with Battah, but added that the Samir Kassir Foundation has changed its strategy regarding legal defense of journalists in trouble. "In the past we were ready to provide lawyers in every instance, but we are stopping doing this every time a journo is detained or beaten, we decided instead to build landmark cases. We are currently working on five or six such cases," he said.

According to Samir Kassir Foundation figures, the level of distrust in media is dangerous. What the statistics report is that no single professional group gets physically assaulted as much as journalists: there were 51 cases in 2001; 35 in 2012; and 40 in 2013.

Political blogger Ramez Dagher of Moulahazat.com noted that there is no actual "constitutional" guarantee of freedom of speech, but instead this basic right is codified vaguely in a law that stipulates "The freedom to express one's opinion orally or in writing, the freedom of the press, the freedom of assembly, and the freedom of association shall be guaranteed within the limit established by law." Dagher said in answer to IREX's questionnaire that "Not only does the Lebanese legislation deny absolute freedom of speech, but the fact that there's no constitutional protection means that the current law can be amended and freedom of speech can be reduced."

In a point-by-point list, Dagher elaborated how freedom of the press has been abrogated:

- "The press law does not promote free speech. Article 75 prohibits publishing news that 'contradicts public ethics or is inimical to national or religious feelings or national duty.' Not only the head of state, but also foreign leaders, cannot be criticized.
- "The penal code, in article 473, can punish blasphemy with one year in prison even though freedom of conscience is under constitutional protection (article 14 of the constitution states that 'There shall be absolute freedom of conscience. The state in rendering homage to the God Almighty shall respect

all religions and creeds and shall guarantee, under its protection, the free exercise of all religious rites provided that public order is not disturbed. It shall also guarantee that the personal status and religious interests of the population, to whatever religious sect they belong, shall be respected.')

- "The Lebanese General Security can censor anything they want with no transparent rules for their decision making. An ironic example this year is the banning of a play [by Lucien Bourjeili] on censorship by the General Security."

"The Lebanese the constitution doesn't guarantee an absolute freedom of speech; and that the law implicitly prohibits certain aspects of speech," Dagher said. "Many persons don't want to hear of religious criticism while political parties make it hard for independent journalists to work in peace by harassing them and making them feel uncomfortable in their region or among their coreligionists."

Laury Haytayan, director of government watchdog group Revenue Watch, noted in her questionnaire "We can talk of [so-called] confessional free speech. You can say whatever you want about the other but you have to avoid talking about your own 'clan.' This is a direct result of the divisions of licensing among political/confessional parties." Comparisons are valuable; and Justin Salhani, bureau chief for *Atlantic Post*, noted, "We do have freedom of speech in Lebanon to a certain extent," adding, "We aren't jailed or tortured on someone's whim like in other MENA countries. However there are restrictions in regards to reporting certain facts that might damage someone of importance."

His overall opinion, however, was that support for the media by the law is not very strong, violations cause no outrage; and the judiciary is not independent, though it might be. On the second and third set of Objective 1 indicators—whether licensing of media is fair, competitive, and apolitical; and whether market entry into the media business is comparable to other industries—the consensus answer was no.

The 1962 Press law, which remains in force today, requires that any newspaper or periodical that wants to publish news on political events must first obtain a legislative decree granting it a Category 1 license. That resulted from the fact that the number of "political" publications had risen considerably in the 1950s.

There are currently 105 Category 1 licenses for publications, comprising 53 dailies, 48 weeklies and four monthly magazines. In an attempt to reduce the number of print media with Category 1 licenses, the government ceased

granting new licenses and required a publisher wanting to start a daily newspaper to acquire two existing licenses from publishers who were going out of business. There is, therefore, a market in Category 1 licenses, with the price for any particular license varying according to the name, history, and goodwill associated with the publication that is up for sale.

At the time, the cost of launching *Al Mustaqbal (The Future)*, a daily owned by the late Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, is said to have exceeded \$300,000. Hariri bought two titles: one owned by the Najjadah Party, a defunct Arab nationalist organization, and another from *Sawt Al Uruba (Voice of Arabism)*. Most media executives in Lebanon consider these sums to be prohibitive.

Rabih Haber said the cost is more in line with \$150,000 currently for a print publication.

The 1994 Audio Visual Media law, legislated several years after the end of the 15-year civil war, came in response to the wartime launching of many ideologically-based television and radio broadcasters. Its purpose was to re-establish the central government's control over licensing of broadcast media. According to the Lebanese Commission on Electoral law, between 150 and 300 unlicensed radio stations, many quite local, went on and off the air between 1975 and 1989.

Where the government does not exert control—despite an attempt by the legislature at passing an Internet publishing law—is in the area of blogging. A proposed bill suffered defeat after withering criticism from civil society activists and the general public, sufficient enough to alter the political equation on the issue.

Other than the licensing issues, panelists had no complaints about other legal barriers to entry or restrictive tax regimes. However, panelists from past years have noted that bribes are often necessary in order to process business registrations or other filings with the government.

Laws governing the independence of Lebanese state media are observed in the sense that such media cover the activities of key governmental figures who represent competing political factions, but coverage is presented in an antiseptic, uncritical way. So while they do not favor particularly one party over another, they are also not instrumental in allowing Lebanese to form opinions of the country's leadership or holding that leadership to account.

Although libel cases against journalists do result in fines, these are not deemed to be excessive. The court handling these cases has proved to be mostly resistant to forces of

corruption that might try to exact punishment against a journalist. However, criticism of the president or the army is a red line; the courts in these cases have not looked kindly upon defendants.

On Freedom of Speech indicators seven and eight, regarding access to public information and unfettered access to information in general, the assembled panel gave indicator seven at best a mixed critique, most panelists giving the question a thumbs down.

The Lebanese press is in concept allowed access to all government information—other than classified or security information—however, the various ministries are notoriously lacking in transparency and the individuals working at the ministries know that government departments are not inclined to give information to all media outlets equally. Though it could be said this is the case in many countries, where elected representatives and bureaucrats have their “favorite” media, in Lebanon it is not just a matter of favoritism but of also of family, sect, and party affiliation, according to panelists.

Salhani noted on his questionnaire, “There is no Freedom of Information Act, though there are some NGOs working on that. Secondly to contact a ministry requires an official fax, and I am sorry, but as a freelancer working out of my apartment I don't have a fax with a stack of various media outlet letterhead lying around.” He added, “It is also very difficult to find contact numbers, and even if you are lucky enough to find one, getting someone to answer the phone is the next step before the whole fax debacle ensues. To my knowledge I don't think the government works hard to thwart media, it's just that they don't do anything in the least to help it.”

The panel gave indicator eight—access to local and international news and news sources are not restricted by law—a relatively high score. Lebanese laws protect the freedom of journalists to access broad swaths of information, and many panelists said that because of ubiquitous Internet and satellite access there is little problem in Lebanon to access local or international news. Dagher wrote in his questionnaire, “I never witnessed Internet censorship on any news sources, and sometimes Lebanese newspapers (such as *Al Balad*) have sections that contain articles from Israeli newspapers such as *Haaretz* and the *Jerusalem Post*.”

On the final indicator nine, whether entry into the journalism field is free and requires no licensing fee to the government to become an accredited journalist, the opinions of panelists were positive overall. The only exception is in the

[Mhanna] noted on his questionnaire that instead of independent professionalism, “Journalists have to strictly adhere to the editorial line, have little or no incentive to investigate and are not provided with a real opportunity to enhance their skills and build their abilities.”

case of foreign correspondents who must register with the Ministry of Information to receive a government accredited press credential for which there is a relatively large fee.

The hundreds of new Levantine bloggers, some extremely critical of the government, simply entered the journalism field by fiat, and they flourish or not based on the simple principal of *vox populi*—they either have large regular readerships or they do not.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Lebanon Objective Score: 1.82

Panelists this year downgraded the score for professional journalism by a bit more than a quarter point. Every indicator suffered, except indicator 6 (entertainment content does not eclipse news content), which showed modest improvement. On the low end were indicators 1

### 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).

(fair and objective reporting), 2 (journalists follow ethical standards), and 5 (pay levels for media professionals); each scored more than half a point lower than the objective. Panelists gave the highest scores to indicators 4 (media cover key events), 6 (entertainment does not eclipse news), and 7 (media equipment); these outscored the objective by more than half a point.

Underpaid, undertrained, overworked, and under constant sectarian pressure, the professionalism of the Lebanese journalist is much like driving in the chaotic traffic of Beirut; it is the art of the possible made necessary by adapting to an unclear set of standards and ethics. “Nowadays, media in Lebanon is a media of war. No rules, everything is acceptable to make their parties win the war—war for politics and ratings. Journalists working in media have become soldiers that need to obey their leaders,” said Revenue Watch’s Laury Haytayan.

Mhanna said, “The extreme polarization and politicization of the media landscape in Lebanon heavily affects the professional standards of quality of Lebanese media.” He noted on his questionnaire that instead of independent professionalism, “Journalists have to strictly adhere to the editorial line, have little or no incentive to investigate and are not provided with a real opportunity to enhance their skills and build their abilities.”

He added, “Independent, young journalists strive to meet the professional standards, but need more support and economically sustainable professional frameworks to be able to achieve their goals.”

Justin Salhani, currently the Beirut bureau chief for the *Atlantic Post* (and an alumnus of *The Daily Star* and *Now Lebanon*) said, “Local press is usually quite poor in getting sources from all sides or at least more than one side. In fact, to get a good idea of the whole story, often a reader has to hope that each news outlets covers the story; then you can take the opinion of each one and decide for yourself.”

He added, “Sources are poorly cited if they are cited at all and a lot is clearly not fact checked and many times facts are twisted to fit a certain agenda.”

Mhanna lamented the lack of more sophisticated techniques to research or tell a story including rare use of info graphics or crowd sourcing. He concluded that overall there is a large gap between technical knowledge and the resulting reporting.

Aysha made the oft repeated complaint about professionalism: “Most of the journalists in Lebanon are a

tool in the hands of the political party that funds this or that media station and this is due to the political and sectarian split in the country,” adding, “Most of the news reports are not reliable because both sides in the country have their own political agendas and you rarely see some reliable news reports.”

He added that it cannot be said that “there is an independent media in Lebanon because most of them—if not all—serve the political interests of this party or that. For example a journalist (while doing a news report) will not dare to mention anything about the political party that funds the media station and this is a kind of self-censorship.” It commonly observed among the media community that the growing war in Syria hampers attempts at independent media, if for just the simple reason that sectarian tensions are such that any divergent point of view within a sect/ religion is *de facto* considered to be an act of “treachery” to the sect/religion. “Traditional media is far away from being fair, objective, and well sourced. Each medium has its own understanding of fairness and objectivity and has its own sources” Haytan said.

Though somewhat dated, the UN international commission investigating the assassination of Rafiq Hariri noted in a preliminary report that “certain Lebanese media had the unfortunate and constant tendency to spread rumors, nurture speculation, offer information as facts without prior checking and at times use materials obtained under dubious circumstances from sources that had been briefed by the Commission, thereby creating distress and anxiety among the public at large.”

This very much still characterizes the nature of the Lebanese media in 2014, particularly television media.

On indicator two, the ratings were universally low regarding Levantine journalist and editors following accepted standards. Fundamentally there is a large question among journalist and media experts alike: what *is* the professional standard in Lebanon for the media? Finding a definitive answer is quixotic.

A great deal of the discussion on following professional standards focused around the “New TV incident” and whether these broadcast journalists were perhaps creating a new standard, which several on the panel called “naming and shaming.”

Assad Thebian, digital strategist, said, “I wouldn’t call it wrong [to call people out]; it is a new method. This is really the first time they’ve named and shamed an official. But the moment they were beaten up, everything changed. Blaming and naming is necessary.”

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Talal Chami, a communications professor at American University for Science and Technology, wrote regarding a search for a guiding professional standard, “In the midst of chaos and anarchy, media seems to find a way! It is inevitable. Yet, we cannot reform irreparable damage to a society, so divided, so torn into extremes, and in constant agitation, unless we determine the core of the problem first. It is a chaotic situation in which journalists strive to cohabit with the unimaginable! The government—once the father-like figure, creator of the law—seems to contradict itself on a daily basis.”

Mhanna said, “There is a low professional standard of quality. For covering daily events—on daily assignments—there is a lack of preparation; there is a lack of technical knowledge, and no clear way of providing training.” He added, “Also, there is an unacceptable level of collusion with official and ‘non-official’ press attaches. People are not ashamed.”

On the question of indicator three regarding journalists and editors practicing self-censorship, if not all, a decided majority of the panel agreed that self-censorship is a fundamental part of the industry—it comes, however, in many forms.

Rabih Haber said “Most journalists practice self-censorship—this has been a habit since the Syrian occupation.”

Salhani said, “Self-censorship I have seen many times; I will use an obvious example that everyone here probably knows about as it was picked up by the blogosphere, so I don’t worry about bad-mouthing an ex-employer of mine. When I was at NOW [online news portal] an editorial ran on PM Mikati’s tenure, and it was taken off the website shortly there afterward.” He added, “The official reason given was something along the lines, of ‘it gave bad arguments, not because our backers were mad.’ In the end the journalists fought to get it back up, regardless of the politics; it was a matter of journalistic ethics.”

Regarding indicator four, do media cover key events and issues, the assembled panel had little question that the Lebanese media were out in force at every key event and gave wall-to-wall coverage on the political issues of the day. Salahni noted, "The blogosphere picks up most things." Haber said, "Most of the events, issue are very well covered by media. Two main factors make for coverage decisions. One: public attraction; two: the event by itself." Dagher noted, "Most journalists compete to be the first to report, and while that can lead to exaggeration of reporting it's a good thing because you know that you won't miss anything new (even though the report is more likely biased). That's the advantage of having plurality of news."

Salahni wrote, "Overall every issue gets covered, however it depends on the papers. Some media don't report certain stories, others downplay them. It depends on the media outlet and who is backing them. Sometimes you will switch on a channel and they will just ignore an issue altogether. But sometimes too you notice people [local residents] will expel certain media. I can't imagine Al Manar being allowed in Bab al Tabbaneh and we saw the reaction of one of the Azaz hostages when he was handed a microphone from Future TV after his release."

Dagher wrote, "What mainly get washed off are the independent stances. A small example: If I miss a Sami Gemayel speech that I would like to comment on, I will probably find it for the next two days in the usual news sources and I'll always be able to dig it up from the Kataeb party website. But if it's a statement of someone who is not a member of a political party and isn't affiliated with any camp, it's a much harder task."

Each panelist agreed that pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are insufficiently high to discourage corruption. Although entry into the profession is free, typically low wages make it almost a necessity for many Lebanese journalists to seek "income supplements." Those working in the media profession report that is common for various staff to receive an extra payment from the owner or from some party boss. The low wages leave journalists at all levels a devil's bargain of how much they should abrogate their ethics to gain a living wage.

Salhani wryly noted, "Journalists are paid equal to everyone else in Lebanon, which is not enough." Aysha wrote in his questionnaire, "The low wages of journalists make them vulnerable for corruption, with the average wage of journalists being hard to make a living on." He added during the panel discussion, "I am on salary, but I put myself in danger to keep myself on that salary."

Regarding major events, no amount of money at the street level or as an extra in the pay envelope can affect the publication of large story; censorship of a major breaking story would be too ham-handed and obvious. But money can change the tone of a news report.

When discussing whether entertainment programing eclipses news and information programing, the majority of the panel conceded that there is a balance between showbiz television and news programming. Dagher wrote that entertainment programming does not eclipse news at all. Whenever there is an important political personage giving a speech, the television station affiliated with his party usually stops the entertainment program and broadcasts the speech. "So, one rarely misses anything."

Habib Battah said that correspondents have to work at gaining viewership or readers interests given greater popularity of entertainment broadcasts or newspaper feature news.

Panelists awarded their highest scores to indicator 7, which asks panelists to consider how modern and efficient media equipment is. Lebanese media have access to, and make use of as a rule, modern technical equipment.

Mhanna asked rhetorically if there are too many editorials, and if investigative journalists and their stories simply have receded into the background in comparison. While investigative journalism does exist—and as shown in Objective 1, above, it can be a dangerous undertaking—it is relatively rare. Battah added that many media outlets run themselves on shoestring operations with no beat reporters for specialized topics and shallow reporting. Yet, he added, "I'm optimistic over new media."

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Lebanon Objective Score: 2.44

Lebanese readers are information junkies and each party and sect provides several different media outlets to fulfill this taste for news. Even if an example of a pluralistic media outlet is hard to find, overall the media in Lebanon can be described as supporting pluralism.

Therefore, as in past years, this objective received the highest score from panelists although essentially unchanged. Most indicators remained static as well. The exceptions were indicator 4 (news agencies), which received a lower score, and indicators 6 (transparency of media ownership) and 7 (coverage of minorities), to which panelists awarded

modestly higher scores. In terms of relative performance, indicators 3 (state media are pluralistic) and 6 received the lowest scores, lagging behind the objective score by little more than half a point. Indicator 2 (unfettered access to media) scored more than three-quarters of a point higher than the objective. Other indicators scored close to the objective score.

Haber wrote in his questionnaire, "A wide range of Lebanese media allow multiple points of view, even those owned by the rival political parties host guests with opposing points of view." Dagher added that the current number of news sources is more than enough, noting that each political party has its own "mouthpiece" newspaper, television, and/or radio station, explaining, "One can find more independent newspapers or TV stations but even those are affiliated with a certain camp on a particular issue." He added, "The only news sources that are rare are the independent ones. But that's not necessarily bad as long as we have plurality and independent media is allowed to work in peace." He concluded, "I base a lot of my analysis on the newspapers stances following certain events. They are usually similar to an *avant-première* of what the political party will do and give me an idea to where things are going in the near future."

According to [lebanonaggregator.org](http://lebanonaggregator.org) there are nearly 800 blogs registered with the site. Of the political blogs, some have a relatively large following of political cognoscenti. The blogs currently enjoy the greatest autonomy of all media types, although that does not mean that they are free from harassment. Dagher noted that the blog aggregator [Lebaneseblogs.com](http://Lebaneseblogs.com) is both useful to bloggers as a kind of self-supporting club and a convenient jumping-off point for readers wanting a tour of the Lebanese blogosphere. Chami

#### 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.

Dagher added that the current number of news sources is more than enough, noting that each political party has its own "mouthpiece" newspaper, television, and/or radio station, explaining, "One can find more independent newspapers or TV stations but even those are affiliated with a certain camp on a particular issue."

repeated what has often been observed: "Social media is replacing traditional media!"

Citizen access to media is generally uninhibited and only money to pay for service, particularly the Internet, is an issue that has been pointed out as a stumbling block. While some Lebanese may lack the resources to access all types of media, almost all have access to at least some of the many media in the country and the wider Middle East.

The activist group OpenNet Initiative notes that Lebanon is one of the few states in the Middle East where they have found no evidence of Internet filtering of various taboo topics common in much of the region. In "Arab Media," a recently published book looking at the evolution and current status of media in the Middle East, the authors observe that, with the exception of Lebanon, "Arab Internet users are besieged by a triangle of social, religious, and political censorship, which prevents free access to the Internet."

As proof, recounting his average research day, Dagher wrote in his questionnaire, "As a blogger who accesses international media a lot for regional news, I can say that I was always able to reach the international and domestic media (even the Israeli one)."

News and information programming produced by state media rarely deviate from rather bland coverage of the main political factions. Haber pointed out, "The state media are only restricted by the narrow scope of their mandate and budgets, which are limited." However, this narrow scope means that most Lebanese do not rely on state media as their chief news source.

Lebanon has two state-owned news agencies; the National News Agency and the Central News Agency. Both are known for being—if not comprehensive—at least objective and an official source of statements from the government. For many issues journalists are more dependent on foreign news

Future TV's Barber noted that while top media executives are educated and trained to a certain extent, "they push with a lack of vision, not a sustainable several-year plan."

agencies because they are deemed more trustworthy. The absence of a centrist, private, national news agency makes Lebanese society vulnerable in its dependence on news provided for them by the media that serve political interests.

However, given the lack of influence exhibited by both state media and the state-run news agencies, news production is overwhelmingly in the realm of non-state media. Therefore, as in past year, indicator 5, which states "Private media produce their own news," received a relatively high score from panelists.

On the other hand, receiving one of the lowest scores 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.

Lebanon's media is 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.

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: 1.85

This objective showed a slight improvement compared with last year. None of the indicator scores deviated noticeably from the objective score, and only indicator 4 (balance of advertising revenue with other sources) showed marked improvement.

Issa Goraieb said that, while not wishing to be immodest, "L'Orient is the only true independent publication in the Levant [in the business sense]... We have been in bankruptcy and every time we stood back up by our own means. We are

no one's property, not owned by a single person, sect, or party. Independence starts with financing. This is so evident, and very clear." Goraieb added, "We never parted from this, I can testify. Any respective chairman does not give political instructions to the staff. It's hard to believe in Lebanon that this exists." He also defended their independence from influences within and without Lebanon by stating, "Members of the board would never fail the paper; all the board is Lebanese."

Aysha said that there is "no editorial independence at any of the TV stations. One of the biggest incidents of the year was the expulsion of the famous presenter Joe Maalouf, the host of *Inta Hor*, after he criticized the owners of MTV."

Future TV's Barber noted that while top media executives are educated and trained to a certain extent, "they push with a lack of vision, not a sustainable several-year plan."

Most of the advertising market is controlled and run by tycoons in Lebanon. Currently the advertisement market in Lebanon is still weak and it does not bring sufficient revenues to the media. Most of the media are dependent on political money and advertisements represent a very small amount of the revenues, not exceeding in the best cases 20 percent of the total income.

Future's Barber noted that the usual practices for advertising companies is to spread the risk, as it were, and advertise equally across the political and sectarian spectrum, thus giving equal money to competing media outlets. Given some scrutiny, this is not as cynical as it might seem. To an advertising giant with a product that reaches several demographics, such as Persil clothing detergent, on LBC they advertise Persil white, on other stations, Persil black. It has

#### 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.

been shown in endless focus group testing throughout the world that viewers like to see something of themselves in an advertisement, and companies oblige in order to build a relationship between customer and brand.

Mhanna said that there are three key media business models in Lebanon:

One is purely advertising supported. These media outlets have to deal with the current economic situation, which is has been rapidly declining the last several years and brought down by the knock-on effect of the raging Syrian civil war. In this context, advertisers are spending less simply as the Lebanese consumer is spending less, as they are worried about the future.

A second model, he noted, is no advertising. Politically-funded media outlets are owned by one party or one person—operating regardless of the media outlets’ business balance sheet. The purpose of the outlet is to publish content for which there will be continual funding. This, Mhanna noted, can lead to an eventual decrease in quality.

The third model is being part of a larger media corporation. The *Time Out* entertainment magazine is part of the worldwide OnTime franchise and also owns the Entrepreneur worldwide name.

Mhanna said, “These models do not allow media outlets to venture into sensitive topics. Also, these business models face a challenge from the rapid rise in popularity of new media, such as blogs.”

There are, of course, variations on this theme, for example part advertising funded and part tycoon funded but still nevertheless suffering from financial problems. Though a media outlet may produce consistently a quality publication, the staff are likely constantly concerned about their next paycheck as the finances of the owner ebb and flow.

Adding to the overall financial problems of media in Lebanon and in some ways being an original cause of the all the political and sectarian subsidies is that the total population of Lebanon is in itself too small to allow for the financial independence of the 110 licensed political newspapers, the key television stations, and the myriad of radio stations.

Also a challenge is anecdotal evidence implying that most Lebanese do not prefer to read, though having a high rate of literacy. Even for such popular papers as *An Nahar*, the press run is estimated at only 10,000, and the *The Daily Star* has an estimated press run of 5,000. The dominance of electronic media is certainly not unique to Lebanon, but press runs in the Levant still are subpar considering there are four-million plus citizens, not including more than

Salhani was somewhat scornful of the various “hostile environment” trainings on offer, most of which are based in the UK. “I think it is crazy how many programs there are in London, especially dealing with war zones. Why not host them in areas like Dubai, Amman, or Beirut and Istanbul,” his point being that these locales are closer to the MENA conflict regions.

half-a-million multi-generational Palestinian refugees and around a million Syrian refugees.

The estimates of press runs, cited above, are not official. Newspapers themselves boast of circulations into the tens of thousands. However, there is no independent body to monitor these claims. Similarly, research of broadcast audiences does take place but to date the results have not been widely accepted as accurate by the media industry or advertisers.

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Lebanon Objective Score: 1.90

Objective 5 received a score nearly identical to last year’s. Only indicator 6 (free access to media equipment and materials) showed any change, with an improvement of about half a point. And as with last year, the high- and low-scoring

### 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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indicators were the same: indicator 1 (trade associations) lagged behind the objective score by about three-quarters of a point while indicator 3 (supporting NGOs) exceeded the objective score also by three-quarters of a point.

On supporting institutions such as trade associations or unions, Mhanna said, "Fewer than five percent of journo's are members of syndicates." He noted that in the case of the Broadcast Syndicate—after years of trying to get one—the membership split between the March 8 and the March 14 political movements, with March 8 currently running it. The opinion of most panelists is that the three various syndicates do not really represent the profession.

For Aysha the journalism syndicates and the unions in Lebanon are nearly irrelevant and in practice do nothing to protect the journalist in the course of his or her work. That work brings them into confrontation not only with government but also with sects and political interests, all of which have their own thugs who are glad to hand out a beating or, in the case of the government, arrest or detain a journalist on spurious grounds. He added that a journalist depends on getting support from his or her media organization.

However, most of the panelists said they also depend on local NGOs and international organizations to protect them if they are questioned by authorities or taken in for interrogation.

Regarding the potential for a government-sponsored supporting institution, Goraieb said, "Media is a means of moral pressure on authorities. How can [the government] really help with improving the performance of the press?"

Lebanon, and Beirut in particular, play host to a number of top regional universities, several of which boast well-regarded schools of communications and journalism covering broadcast, new media, and print. The Lebanese American University (LAU) has a very active and vibrant School of Communications Arts. The program describes itself as "a trailblazer in the teaching of mass communication and drama. Its curriculum and facilities are geared to staying abreast of all developments in those fields." Also according to its website, "Seniors are required to undergo internships, in their respective emphasis areas, before graduating."

The American University of Science and Technology, an up-and-coming smaller school, boasts an active communications department that includes a growing journalism curriculum. This department focused not only on the vocational aspects of journalism—how to write a story,

covering a beat, working on deadline—but also includes classes in media theory and media analysis.

All the panelists agreed that there is little or no support on the part of their respective media organizations to supply any kind of further educational support or skillset training once a journalist has been hired. Unlike U.S. institutions such as the Poynter Institute or Investigative Reporters and Editors, there are no fellowship opportunities or formal training provided in specialist coverage areas (such as economics, health, or energy reporting) and certainly no training in computer-aided investigative journalism, which has become a hallmark elsewhere in the world of how investigative reports are researched and prepared.

On the whole the Lebanese media—or rather the controlling executives and editors—have not only an insufficient budget for training, but perhaps more importantly, they have little to no interest in training their staff. If a media outlet hires someone with expertise that person will earn a little extra money for having an advanced skill set. For anyone wanting to get further skills, training, and appropriate education for covering anything from politics to municipal planning to infrastructure to local energy markets—not to mention computer-aided investigative reporting—one must rely on learning on-the-job or footing the bill themselves for a class or certificate program.

Salhani was somewhat scornful of the various "hostile environment" trainings on offer, most of which are based in the UK. "I think it is crazy how many programs there are in London, especially dealing with war zones. Why not host them in areas like Dubai, Amman, or Beirut and Istanbul," his point being that these locales are closer to the MENA conflict regions.

Most modern newspapers include their print operations within their own organizations as part of a long-time horizontal integration plan.

Media distribution is not apolitical, with the exception of the Internet. Mhanna did note with some emphasis that the proposed "Internet Law," which would have enacted some restrictions on media distributed on the Internet, is dead. In a positive development, it never achieved enough political or popular support to reach passage.

Telecommunications infrastructure is a source of frustration and yet also a boon to media. On the one hand, spotty electrical service and relatively high prices for Internet service hold back the potential of media to reach new audiences online or on the latest mobile technologies. However, the potential is clearly there and media are making use, as best the situation allows, of such technology.

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## List of Panel Participants

**Rabih Haber**, director, LebanonStatistics.com, Beirut

**Talal Chami**, media and film professor, American University of Science & Technology, Beirut

**Laury Haytayan**, director, RevenueWatch.com, Beirut

**Justin Salhani**, Beirut bureau chief, *Atlantic Post*; freelance reporter, Beirut

**Issa Goraieb**, chief editorial writer, *L'Orient-Le Jour*, Beirut

**Ramez Dagher**, political blogger, Moulahazat.com, Beirut

**Rami Aysha**, reporter, Der Spiegel online; freelance television producer, Beirut

**Habib Battah**, freelance journalist, Beirut

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

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

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

## Moderator and Author

**Timothy K. Maloy**, Lebanon correspondent, Marcopolis Business News Service; freelance reporter, Beirut

## Coordinator

**Joy Cherfan**, freelance project and special events coordinator, Beirut

*The panel discussion was convened on December 14, 2013.*

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*In fact, they said, this trend of online journalists/activists has allowed mainstream media to cover issues based solely on social media activity, giving them an excuse for coverage of unverified rumors: the source is simply “this news is circulating in social media.”*



# LEBANON

"The media are just fooling us, giving their primetime to astrologers and fortune tellers. It is really shameful to see all these clairvoyants on all channels on New Year's Eve; and the media analyzing their predictions and showing off how many previous predictions were fulfilled while they all have connections with intelligence bodies or analysts helping them to present general forecasts of highly probable events." This how Riad Issa, a human rights and labor activist, characterized Lebanon's overall media performance.

The panelists agreed that the live coverage of explosions and societal tensions continues to be the main showcase of the lack of professionalism within the media. Such coverage opens the door for inflammatory speeches featuring provocative persona as the main hosts. The panelists listed a few recent examples: "Media outlets conveying the image of a boy holding weapons in Bab el Tebbane is not ethical. Nor is it acceptable that media interview field commanders like Ziad Allouki in Bab el Tebbane, who is a known criminal. Marcel Ghanem hosted Ali Hujjeiri, the head of Arsal Municipality and referred to him as 'rayyis,' a term reserved for presidents and leaders. Airing footage of dead bodies after each explosion during the daytime without any consideration to the dead or the audience. What would the mother of Mohammad Chaar, a boy who was injured and later died in the explosion targeting the former finance minister Chateh, feel when she sees her son live on cameras before even she knows that he was hurt?"

Some of the panelists said that although the journalist/activist concept is being introduced, it is not leading to more in-depth coverage of political, social, or economic issues. In fact, they said, this trend of online journalists/activists has allowed mainstream media to cover issues based solely on social media activity, giving them an excuse for coverage of unverified rumors: the source is simply "this news is circulating in social media."

During the discussions, Samer Abdallah, a program officer at the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections, suggested identifying citizens' needs and expectations from the media. Abdallah considered whether the media should be measured as a separate phenomenon, isolated from the rest of society, or instead treated as a part of the whole scene. Are the media required to hide the communal conflict or show the reality? Lebanese politics, he noted, are not based on citizens' concerns, yet politicians continue to have loyal followers. Thus the media cannot but follow what people want to hear. The problem, Abdallah said, is not in the media.

At the end of the discussions, Bilal Ayoubi, senior projects development specialist with Chemonics International, shared with the panelists that he had made the decision to stop following the news, but he thought he was the only one disgusted. "It is good to hear today in this panel that our views are the same," he said.

*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).*

Rouba el Helou, a journalism and media studies lecturer at Notre-Dame University, said that the investigative journalists act as if they are filmmakers, following Michael Moore's steps.

## OBJECTIVE 6: SERVING PUBLIC NEEDS

Lebanon Objective Score: 1.23

The score for Objective 6 fell by more than a third of a point this year, with the loss of score resulting from poorer evaluations of indicators 2, 3, 6, and 7. All indicators performed poorly; none of the indicator scores deviated from the objective score by more than half a point.

Lebanese media facilitate discussions about different issues that are important to citizens especially on radio and television talk shows. However, the discussions are usually influenced by the political division in the country. Ayoubi said, "The debates in media are oriented depending on events tackled by politicians. The discussions that are important to citizens are not considered a priority and the public discourse goes mainly around politicians' interests. If we look at current headlines, we only see the government

### 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.

issue [the fact that it is a caretaker government] as a priority while others that might be more important to citizens are secondary."

Abd Monhem Amiri, a media student and Beirut Arab University, added that whenever important discussions are promoted in the media, the approach turns immediately to narrow political tensions. As a resident of the Bekaa, Amiri said that he is not pleased with the Walid Abboud program on MTV that was promoted as highlighting development in the Bekaa. Development issues were addressed for the first 30 minutes while the remaining part of the episode turned to same political speech heard in other talk shows.

Issa echoed these concerns, saying that media do not give enough time and space for issues that are important to citizens like development, decentralization, agriculture, rural areas.

Bachar Nasrallah, an instructor at Beirut Arab University, stated that sometimes there are important debates, but the media do not go in-depth in these discussions. Nasrallah noticed that there are some red lines that cannot be crossed. He gave the example of journalist Riad Kubeissi's investigative program on Al Jadeed that does not lead to accountability. Most of the panelists agreed with Nasrallah: that investigative journalism is more for entertainment purposes. Rouba el Helou, a journalism and media studies lecturer at Notre-Dame University, said that the investigative journalists act as if they are filmmakers, following Michael Moore's steps.

Issa agreed that even the programs presented as fighting corruption, like Ghada Eid's show on Al Jadeed, have their own agendas. He said, "Eid refused to tackle the herbs traders' phenomenon even as they are misleading the citizens, as one of the famous traders, Zein al Atat, is supported by high level people."

Maya Ammar, media coordinator with Kafa (Enough) Violence and Exploitation, was more positive. She said some journalists are being activists at the same time, thus they are adopting some causes that are important to citizens. Ammar said, "We can feel that a new concept of journalist/activist is born, which is leading to some change, although these causes are not yet considered priorities." She then cited examples of media outlets giving more space to important issues related to citizens: "It is the case in some newspapers like *Al Akhbar*, *Assafir*, and, lately, in *An Nahar*, especially in covering civil society issues. LBCI has changed its editorial policy as well, Al Jadeed follows, and, at a third level, MTV, although the reports are not deep enough yet."

This outlook was not shared by Berthe Daccache, an economist, who considered that all debates serve political

purposes. “Newspapers’ pages only irritate politicians without laying constructive arguments,” she added. Abdallah was convinced as well that the media are not promoting deep discussions. “When they need to fill the air, they bring experts. But there is no seriousness in raising the issues,” he said. Siba Bizri, a psychologist, agreed, adding that civil society experts are not given enough space in the media.

Mohammad Cheblak, the information and communications manager with Abaad, decried the fact that media are sometimes providing inaccurate news but are not held accountable for diffusing false information.

The media are indeed a platform but the public debates are not achieving any goal, concluded el Helou. “We can see only bluster in the talk shows to reach high ratings, nothing leading to change. The information and data provided by media are not accurate and the sources are not clear.”

Regarding indicator 2, the panelists’ consensus was that reporting is not geared toward affecting policymaking or transparency, as all media outlets are affiliated with political parties. Holding officials accountable through media does not exist, either; only mutual accusations depending on the political affiliation of the outlet. Motiaa Hallak, a sociologist, argued that media are not able to support democratic policymaking, mainly due to the practice of substituting mutual accusations for the concepts of democratic policies and transparency.

Abdallah said that there are no scientific criteria followed by the media; even the interpretation of the Lebanese constitution is different from outlet to outlet. He gave the example of the electoral reform issue that has been covered by the media but only discussed by politicians. The fact that no media outlet tried to conduct serious research did not contribute in raising the political awareness of citizens. On the contrary, it distorted their knowledge regarding proportional representation and other reforms and negatively influenced their political choices.

Another example echoed during the panel discussion was coverage of people being stranded for hours after heavy rains caused flooding. This incident led to accusations between minister Ghazi Aridi and finance minister Safadi. The media did not follow the issue from an accountability angle, said Issa. He continued, “It only highlighted the end of minister Ghazi Aridi’s political life and his accusations against Safadi about committing violations. The media did not go beyond following the responsibility of the ministry or the violations made by the finance ministry in regard to the coastal properties. Media do not confront and do not follow; meanwhile a silly issue like the crocodile in the Beirut River took lot of space in the media and was followed well.”

**Ammar said, “We can feel that a new concept of journalist/activist is born, which is leading to some change, although these causes are not yet considered priorities.”**

Daccache agreed that the media only shed light on enforcement of laws or transparency whenever it is related to politics. This was the case during the coverage of the flooding: it was given priority coverage because it led to the end of Aridi’s political career and not because people drowned and got stuck for hours. Daccache added, “It is not only the media that is to blame; they are a reflection of the Lebanese society that is politically divided and does not respect even death, as they turn it political. The coverage of the explosions contributes in this division where media focus on the assassinated politician while other victims are just numbers that will be forgotten the next day.”

Rabih Hourani, who writes the blog Fawdastan.org (“Anarchy-stan”), continued, “We should not put all the load on the media; at the end there is a whole society behind it. Lebanese citizens should move against the paralysis of the institutions for example, including the Parliament. Media cover sometimes the politicians’ violations but the society forgets easily. However, it is not acceptable that the media cover ‘Alexa Storm’ for ten days or follow the crocodile story while the Aridi Safidi case goes unnoticed.”

Nasrallah agreed that “Citizens are aware of the corruption and the waste but they do not act; they become frustrated, tense, and submissive. This is affecting the role of media, which is not following and seeking to make change. It is a vicious circle.”

Furthermore, Ammar said, “Media cover only as a reaction, after the occurrence of a certain incident.” Ammar gave some examples: “Media never tackled the national strategy to protect women from violence except after Roula Yaacoub was killed after being beaten by her husband. The same for the protection of children, the issue was only raised after 13-year-old Eva Ghazal was kidnapped and raped; media did not follow policies related to child protection beyond this incident. Often these incidents are tackled from a scandal perspective instead of going deeper... At this level, media depend on the civil society to provide the story and the data instead of researching and leading the initiative.”

Issa reminded panelists that the media did not provide time and space to report on Energy Minister Gebran Bassil’s self-promotional comic book, nor did they endeavor to find

Rabih Hourani, who writes the blog Fawdastan.org (“Anarchy-stan”), continued, “We should not put all the load on the media; at the end there is a whole society behind it. Lebanese citizens should move against the paralysis of the institutions for example, including the Parliament.”

out whether it was produced with public money. “We did not see reports on the costly booklet showing the successes of the education minister, Hassan Diab,” added el Helou.

Ayoubi recalled that even when media tried to promote democracy and transparency they failed, as was the case with the Parliament’s extension. Media got lost between justifying the extension and condemning it; even when they considered the extension contrary to democracy, they were unable to convince the public, he said.

Bizri steered the discussion to the choice of guests on talk shows. She said, “It happened on *Ahmar Bel Khat El Arid* program on LBCI during an episode about civil marriage conducted in Lebanese territories. While in its news bulletin introduction, LBCI was completely supporting civil marriage, the choice of the guests in *Ahmar Bel Khat El Arid* was not also in agreement. The audience showed compassion with the Bekaa mufti who was against civil marriage and who withdrew from the studio. LBCI was not able in this case to support this cause and to promote the adoption of a civil law.”

Amiri suggested that transparency takes a backseat to the personalities in the news. He used as an example how media do not cover issues of waste inside the High Relief Commission as a corruption issue, but only as news related to the dismissal of the head of the commission, Ibrahim Bachir.

When the discussion turned to indicator 3, which assesses how media provide information that is relevant to citizens and informs their choices, Issa said considering this question is the most important when assessing media performance.

Issa explained that at the sociopolitical level, the role of media is very negative. “Instead of hosting moderate figures pushing for reconciliation, media choose provocative figures like Wiam Wahab, Sheik Omar Bakri Fustok, Salem Zahran, and others. Media show dead bodies after an explosion, a boy carrying a rifle in Bab el Tebbane, field commanders portrayed as heroes... These are not citizens’ choices even

if they were entertained by the insults on air. Media sign on to play this provocative role,” he said. Issa added that the social and economic issues that are relevant to citizens’ rights are not covered. He gave many examples that could be important to citizens. “Who knows anything today about the unemployment rate in Lebanon? Numbers are a point of view, unfortunately,” he said. “An important issue like the [supermarket chain] Spinneys workers affair, who were deprived of their rights, was not covered by media as Spinneys prevented media from covering their workers’ social and economic rights under the threat of withdrawing all its advertisements.”

Estelle Sahyoun, a media studies student at Lebanese University, argued that news coverage by the media is relevant to citizens’ choices, as it all follows the same political divisions and affiliations. Nasrallah continued this argument and considered that media provide many kinds of news and that citizens follow media accordingly, depending on their choices. Citizens’ choices might be negative but each will find his or her own media. “There is a large rift between media outlets that are only a reflection of the same rift in the Lebanese society. It is indeed shocking when we zap from Al Manar to MTV, each one representing a segment of the society,” he said.

Firas Talhouk, a researcher with the Samir Kassir Foundation, noted that there are no statistics in Lebanon showing what citizens’ choices are. “This is why media are selective,” he said, addin, “If we took the case of the Beirut Governmental University Hospital, we do not know if it is a priority for citizens or if they consider it a political issue.”

Ammar said, “In all cases our issues are not a priority and are considered by media as charity. The agendas are not imposed by citizens.”

Hourani went as far as to say, “There are no media; only institutions that are mouthpieces for politicians. Media cannot call for reform unless they are independent.” He added, “We cannot find one independent media tackling social and economic issues. As for politics, media provide relevant information to the citizens with the same affiliation. Even if media give two choices, citizens choose only one source. In addition, media institutions do not have long term plans such as following a story like health and bringing in experts. [For example,] some media started with psychological health but did not continue.”

Daccache considered that social, health, and education are not covered. She continued, “We can only see programs presenting artistic talents and not one program highlighting Lebanese youth successes or inventions or accomplishments. It is sad to see Lebanese young people, who invented a car, honored in a Dubai exhibition but not covered in their

own Lebanese media.” Daccache concluded by saying that whenever media tackle issues related to citizens’ interests it is only to provoke debate but without details and analysis.

El Helou shared her view that media cannot inform citizen choices throughout Lebanon because media are centralized. She said they are not interested in coverage beyond Beirut unless it is a story about Syrian refugees. Issues of poverty in general are not covered by media although there are plenty of examples even in regions like Keserwan, in Mount Lebanon. As for the reason why the media are less present in rural areas, Abdallah said that perhaps local authorities do not make enough effort to attract media coverage in their localities.

Cheblak said that he is interested in getting information about health, education, youth, theater, alternative music, and literature; “all that is not found in Lebanese media.”

Moutiaa agreed, saying that media provide information but lots of things are absent. “I used to watch a health program, *Doctors*, but it ended,” she said. “Lot of current programs are superficial and underestimate citizen concerns like the new program *The Ladies* on Al Jadeed,” she concluded.

Bizri was more positive in outlook on this indicator than others, considering that there are some programs, especially the morning shows, covering many issues. However Bizri quickly added, “All those programs do not help citizens to develop their political choices.” She defended media somewhat by noting, “It is not only the role of media at this point; the role of education is crucial.”

During the discussion Abdallah questioned again the role of media. He said, “We have to agree whether media is a message or whether it has a political or commercial purpose. I see that the media freedom is absolute; thus it does not fall in people’s interests all the time. But media will not disregard the movement of social powers.” He compared between the electoral reform that was covered from politicians’ points of views, and the parliament extension that was covered from the civil movement view. Media was obliged to follow the movement, he noted. “The media will provide information relevant to citizens’ choices only if citizens expressed and pushed for these choices. It is clear that media are not taking the initiative but are following the lead of citizens.” He continued, “Some would argue that the media covered the civil movement against the parliament extension because it caused tensions which were appealing to the media, but it is not important why the media covered this. The civil society should spin its causes to thrill and attract the media.” Daccache did not agree with Abdallah and said, “This is a sign that our media are immature.” Ayoubi continued, saying “How many times has a report on health or education been linked to public policies or

legislation? It can be linked to a certain minister or politician but never to the legislative role of the parliament or the parliament members who were not part of the reform. Media highlights violations or scandals but without referring to public policies and this is not a good sign.”

As panelists discussed indicator 4 (citizens trust in the news) it was obvious that all panelists felt that media do not reflect reality. Issa gave a brief explanation that every audience trusts its “own” media. Carla Abi Ramia, an activist, agreed that citizens trust the media aligned with their political affiliation even if they know that it is biased. Abdallah argued that some citizens trust the information provided by the media aligned with their political leanings and they never think it is biased. Ayoubi added that citizens do not care about objectivity and they trust the information provided by media even if they have doubts. Ammar said that citizens are not stupid; they know that they need several outlets to get information that reflects reality.

El Helou gave an example of media not being precise, undercutting their trustworthiness: “When media reported that former minister Elias el Murr became the president of Interpol, they did not explain the real job, which was [that he had become] the head of the Interpol Foundation for a Safer World. The media contributed to misleading public opinion, which did not argue later to hold media accountable.”

Talhok recalled the incident when a Lebanese soldier killed an Israeli soldier: Future and MTV reported the incident saying that the Israeli Army was on alert, as if clashes could occur at any moment. The next day, audiences aligned with the March 14 movement were not convinced by a Lebanese Army press release that said this was not the case. Amiri, who lives in Tarik Jdide in the Bekaa, shared that a lot of rumors circulate about car bombs or armed groups in the streets. In some cases media pass on these rumors, saying that the source is social media. This is a new trend, he noted, allowing the media to disseminate inaccurate information without verifying the source and denying responsibility. “A lot of false information circulates followed by a correction but with no apologies. This is why citizens have more trust in international agencies like Reuters and AFP,” concluded Amiri.

In the discussion of indicator 5, (it is possible for citizens to recognize partisan, editorial, or advertorial content as such), Daccache noted that whoever wants to recognize partisan or advertorial news can. Cheblak continued, saying, “No one cares whether it is an opinion or if it is verified or if it is a political agenda; either we take it or we leave it.” Talhok added that citizens can recognize biased or even false information if they want. He gave an example of pictures

of charred bodies aired on Marcel Ghanem's talk show after the Tripoli explosions; these pictures were revealed half an hour later as pictures of dead corpses in Morocco, not in Tripoli.

Nasrallah stated that while some advertorial content is obvious, other content is more difficult to discern. He gave the example of what he called "the propagandist UNIFIL episodes, not really reflecting the truth in the south."

Ammar confirmed that citizens are aware that some media content is partisan and/or advertorial, especially in the news bulletin introductions. In some other articles it is more direct like stories by journalists praising Qatar, Saudi Arabia, or Iran. Hallak stressed, "Sometimes, when reading an analysis, I cannot figure out whether this is information or opinion." Nasrallah reminded the other panelists about Leila Solh's stories that are advertorial but presented as news content.

Amiri pointed out that citizens recognize biased content according to the financing of the outlet: on OTV, 20 percent of the news is related to the accomplishments of ministers from the Free Patriotic Movement and meetings held by the party's leader, Michel Aoun. NBN holds monopoly rights to cover parliament's activities, as it is owned by Speaker Nabih Berri. While there is little official transparency regarding the ownership of Lebanese media institutions, citizens know generally who is backing each important media outlet. Ayoubi stated that the financing of the media outlets is not a primary concern of citizens.

Hourani argued that many citizens lack the sophistication to judge the objectivity and accuracy of news and information based on the outlet's source of financing. Al Jadeed is not the mouthpiece of a certain political party, he said, unlike other clear affiliations like Future, OTV, NBN, and Manar, he added. He also noted that audience loyalty is strong, even if different media outlets offer choice within the same political alignment: he said that citizens "switching between MTV and Al Manar is a huge achievement."

The spirit of indicator 6 (editorial content is constructive and media refrain from hate speech) was present throughout the discussion due to the abundant examples of hate speech found in the media. Ayoubi said, "Hate speech today in media is at its highest levels; even during the civil war, it was not that abundant. Media is dedicating time and space to field commanders like Ziad Allouki and this is insane." Ayoubi reminded panelists of isolated incidents that were turned into communal clashes by the media. He described an incident in Sweiri village in Western Bekaa that started as a traffic dispute between two persons and escalated into a conflict between the two families, leading to six deaths. "The media reported it as a conflict between Sunni and Shia,

while they could have decreased the tensions and focused on it as an individual incident," he said.

Hallak stated that media's editorial content is not constructive. "The hate speech can be detected even in the expressions of the anchor reading the news. Also, the war in Tripoli is covered by the media as a war between Sunni and Alaouite; this is not true, the war is political and not confessional as shown in media," she said.

The coverage of the arson attack on Tripoli's *Maktabat al Sa'eh* (The Pilgrim's Bookshop), owned by a Greek Orthodox priest, was proof to Hallak that journalists are playing a negative role. She said that it is not the journalist's role to insult the people of Tripoli and to call on Christians to leave. "While OTV ran an episode trying to support the owner, LBC was only interested by the tension caused after Lebanese Forces member-of-parliament Antoine Zahra arrived to support the owner. The reporter put someone on the air just to insult the politician while they could highlight other features like a Muslim girl mourning the bookstore and supporting the priest. This shows that media cover news only to support an agenda," Hallak concluded.

El Helou noticed that whenever media cover live incidents like explosions or funerals, "hate speech fills the air." Amiri stressed that hate speech is found in all news and political shows through the hosting of provocative figures to increase the ratings. Issa added, "We should not forget the comedy programs diffusing negative messages, contributing to hate speech and discrimination."

Daccache agreed that talk shows are not being constructive; on the contrary they deepen the rifts and increase the gaps in the country. "It is too bad," she added, "that humanity is missing media coverage where victims are considered as a recurring consequence, open to dispute in some cases, so that only Sunnis mourn Sunni victims and the same for all other communities."

Hourani expressed the view to the other panelists that the media play a negative role by maligning a whole community—if that community stands in opposition to the viewpoints of that media outlet's political backers—whenever a negative incident occurs within that community. Issa chimed in with the example of "Al Akhbar newspaper reported that my village in the South has turned into a gathering of Takfiri fanatics while I know that it is not true as I am from that village. Such information has for sure a political aim." Hourani concluded by sharing his belief that citizens are more susceptible to the negativity spread in the media rather than being uplifted by the positive news.

Issa added, "The media's tone is most of the time provocative; thus media are not interested in covering

an initiative to gather people from Arsal and Labwe [two conflicting Sunni and Shia neighborhoods] aimed at reducing tensions.”

Abdallah agreed that all media include hate speech by providing coverage of provocative figures, but he disagreed with other panelists, saying that perhaps media have a right to cover, for example, a controversial sheikh diffusing hate because media should not hide reality.

As regards indicator 7, panelists said that media try to expose citizens to multiple viewpoints. Talhouk noted that pluralistic views are hosted in political talk shows but with different orientations depending on the affiliation of the media outlet. Nasrallah added that there are indeed pluralistic views but within the same political alignment.

As for social issues, they are not important to media; they are covered as scandals or as lectures, said Hallak. El Helou cited many examples proving that social issues are not covered deeply, rather they focus on the superficial or the headline-grabbing elements. She used as examples a Lebanese woman who committed suicide while her husband recorded the event on video (the media did not react with coverage related to suicide prevention or mental health issues, etc.); or the video a prisoner being tortured (the media did not delve into human rights issues or holding those responsible accountable). She also said that citizens like gossip: Wiam Wahab’s playful slap of a questioner at a press conference took up more news space in the media than any other important issue.

Abdallah pointed out that LBCI has tried lately to represent many viewpoints in its news programming and talk shows. But overall, divisions remain. Ammar said that men have more space than women in talk shows, reports, as expert sources, and even in vox pops. Motiaa agreed that women are stereotyped in the media, for example, she said, on some news programs a female anchor does not have any role except to be seen. In other reports, she said, women only appear as subservient partners of men.

Mohamad added that some communities, such as foreign workers, do not receive sufficient coverage. For example, a spate of suicides by foreign workers have been reported without any context or investigation into their working and living conditions. Daccache noted that there is no diversity promoted in the media; even entertainment programs are a copy and paste from other cultures. Media show a picture that is not in step with reality.

Another observation was shared by el Helou about the lack of coverage of regions outside Beirut. She said, “It is cynical that the Syrian refugees made the media turn to Akkar or Bekaa as if poverty, lack of development, absence of job

opportunities, education problems, youth in despair, and health care issues were not widespread in these regions before the Syrian refugees. This shows how much media are centralized and have no interest in covering poverty.”

## List of Panel Participants

**Riad Issa**, human rights and labor activist, Liban-Sud

**Rouba el Helou**, journalism and media studies lecturer, Department of Mass Communication, Notre-Dame University, Zouk Mosbeh

**Siba Bizri**, psychologist, Tripoli

**Bachar Nasrallah**, instructor, Beirut Arab University, Tarik Jdide

**Mohammad Cheblak**, information and communications manager, Abaad, Furn el Chebbak

**Firas Talhouk**, researcher, Samir Kassir Foundation, Beirut

**Maya Ammar**, media coordinator, Kafa (Enough) Violence and Exploitation, Beirut

**Estelle Sahyoun**, student, media faculty, Lebanese University, Fanar

**Abed Monhem Amiri**, student, media faculty, Beirut Arab University, Bekaa

**Carla Abi Ramia**, activist, Chouf

**Motiaa Hallak**, sociologist, Tripoli

**Samer Abdallah**, program officer, Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections, Khiam

**Berthe Daccache**, economist, Keserwan

**Rabih Hourani**, blogger, Choeifat

**Bilal Ayoubi**, senior projects development specialist, Chemonics International Inc., Beirut

## 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 was convened on January 9, 2014.*

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*Abdallah considered whether the media should be measured as a separate phenomenon, isolated from the rest of rest of society, or instead treated as a part of the whole scene. Are the media required to hide the communal conflict or show the reality?*



# 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.

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