

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

2006/2007

**The Development
of Sustainable
Independent Media
in the Middle East
and North Africa**



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The Development of Sustainable Independent Media in the Middle East and North Africa

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USAID

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is an independent agency that provides economic, development, and humanitarian assistance around the world in support of the foreign policy goals of the United States. The agency works to support long-term and sustainable economic growth and advances US foreign policy objectives by supporting economic growth, agriculture, and trade; global health; and democracy, conflict prevention, and humanitarian assistance.

USAID provides assistance in four regions of the world: Sub-Saharan Africa; Asia and the Near East; Latin America and the Caribbean; and Europe and Eurasia.

With headquarters in Washington, DC, USAID's strength is its field offices around the world. They work in close partnership with private voluntary organizations, indigenous organizations, universities, American businesses, international agencies, other governments, and other US government agencies. USAID has working relationships with more than 3,500 American companies and over 300 US-based private voluntary organizations.

MEPI

The United States Department of State's Middle East Partnership Initiative provides tangible support to reformers in the Middle East and North Africa so democracy can spread, education can thrive, economies can grow, and women can be empowered. In four years, this presidential initiative has devoted \$293 million to more than 350 programs in 15 countries and the Palestinian territories to support the aspirations of those working to build a more peaceful and prosperous Middle East. Examples of the initiative's work includes campaign schools, independent media training, civic education, entrepreneurship skill building, youth leadership development, trade transparency promotion, business hubs for women, and judicial and legal reform training.

UNESCO

UNESCO, the United Nations' Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, maintains a Communication and Information (CI) sector that is guided by the principles of freedom of expression and freedom of the press as basic human rights. Since 2003, the CI sector has supported the Iraqi people in their transition to democracy. Among other projects, UNESCO facilitated initiatives to develop a national media policy and provided practical guidance for journalists and civil society prior to the elections. Training and networking opportunities were made available to more than 550 media workers and professionals.

IREX

IREX is an international nonprofit organization providing leadership and innovative programs to improve the quality of education, strengthen independent media, and foster pluralistic civil society development.

Founded in 1968, IREX has an annual portfolio of \$50 million and a staff of over 500 professionals worldwide. IREX and its partner IREX Europe deliver cross-cutting programs and consulting expertise in more than 50 countries.

Panelists agreed that the new laws have put new restrictions on freedom of expression because of articles that impose high fines and civil charges on any media outlet for publishing information that was prohibited by law even if the information was correct. For example, publishing international treaties or agreements that Kuwait signed before their official announcement is not allowed, even if published by others outside Kuwait.



KUWAIT

In July 2007 the Kuwaiti Parliament approved a new broadcasting law providing for the licensing of new television and radio-television channels and stations. The new law requires more than \$1 million in capital to establish a television station and more than \$300,000 for a radio station. Until 2005 only a music radio station could be established. In Kuwait there is one private radio (Marina FM) and several private television channels (Al-Rai being the first and most popular). With the issuance of the new law the number is expected to increase. The law includes the same limitations and punishments included in the new publication law issued in 2006.

The new publication and broadcasting laws have raised hope among journalists that new media outlets will flourish. Since the 2006 publication law, three newspapers were licensed and started operating. Journalists' salaries rose as a result as the need for professional journalists made the job market more competitive. According to panelists the new publication law has ended the monopoly by a few families over the newspaper industry.

However, panelists agreed that the new laws have put new restrictions on freedom of expression because of articles that impose high fines and civil charges on any media outlet for publishing information that was prohibited by law even if the information was correct. For example, publishing international treaties or agreements that Kuwait signed before their official announcement is not allowed, even if published by others outside Kuwait.

Kuwait's overall score for this year is 2.04, down somewhat from last year's score of 2.30. This drop is driven by lower scores in Objectives 1, free speech, Objective 3, plurality of news sources, and Objective 5, supporting institutions. Objectives 1 and 5, in particular, pulled the score down, as each received scores less than 2. Objective 4, business management, received a strong score of 2.71 and returned the highest score among the five objectives.

KUWAIT AT A GLANCE

GENERAL

Population: 2,596,799 (July 2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

Capital city: Kuwait

Ethnic groups (% of population): Kuwaiti 45%, other Arab 35%, South Asian 9%, Iranian 4%, other 7% (*CIA World Factbook*)

Religions (% of population): Sunni Muslim 70%, Shi'a Muslim 30%, other 15% (*CIA World Factbook*)

Languages (% of population): Arabic (official), English widely spoken (*CIA World Factbook*)

GNI (2006-Atlas): \$77.66 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)

GNI per capita (2006-PPP): \$48,310 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)

Literacy rate: 93.3% (male 94.4%, female 91.0%) (2005 census, *CIA World Factbook*)

President or top authority: Amir Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jabir al-Sabah (since January 29, 2006)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations: Print: 8 Arabic language newspapers, 2 English language newspapers, some weekly newspapers, 70-75 magazines; Radio: 1 private (Marina FM0, many other state-owned stations; Television Stations: 1 private (Al-Rai TV), 9 other restricted stations

Newspaper circulation statistics: N/A

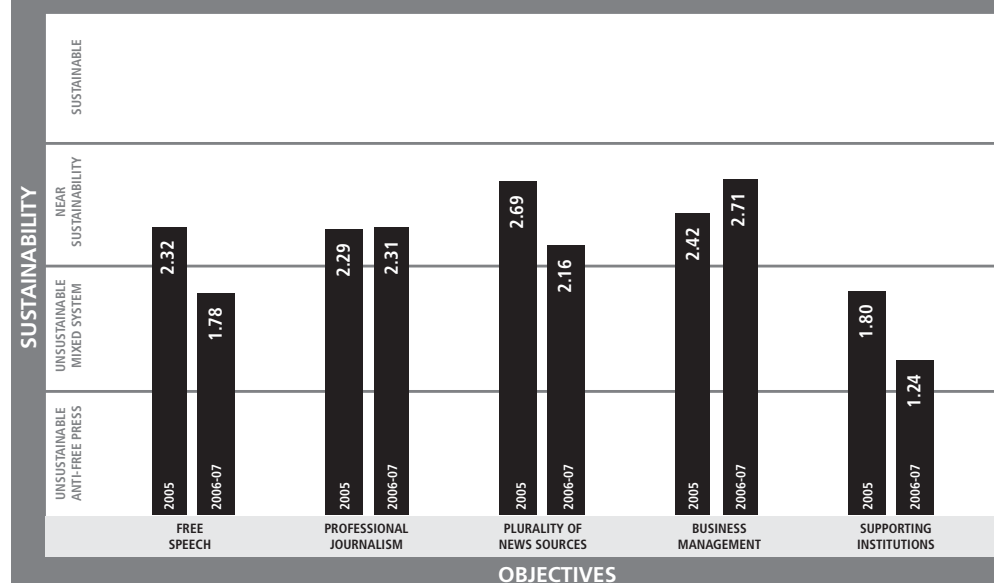
Broadcast ratings: N/A

News agencies: Kuwait News Agency

Annual advertising revenue in media sector: \$350 million in 2006

Internet usage: 816,700 (2006 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: KUWAIT



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

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

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):

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

Near Sustainability (2-3):

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

Sustainable (3-4):

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

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Kuwait Objective Score: 1.78

The score for freedom of speech fell to 1.78 this year, from 2.32 last year. Few indicator scores fell close to this average, highlighting the fact that certain areas of the media are free, while, in the view of the panelists, others much less so. Panelists gave much higher scores to Indicators 8 and 9, media access to international news sources and free entry to the media profession. They also gave a higher score to Indicator 6, libel laws; despite the existence of criminal penalties, panelists felt that the court system generally handles these cases fairly. However, Indicators 2, 3, and 7, broadcast licensing, market entry, and access to information, all about three-quarters of a point lower than the average. Further, panelists gave a score of more than a point lower to Indicator 5, legal treatment and editorial independence of state media.

Article 36 of the Kuwaiti constitution and the publication and printing laws grant the freedom of expression and freedom of the press. Journalists in Kuwait do believe that they have a relatively free media compared to other countries in the region. Social conventions generally approve of the freedom of opinion. Freedom of expression is, as MSI panelists described it, one of the main pillars of the Kuwaiti social structure; a kind of contract between society and the government since the state of Kuwait was established.

Abdulkareem Al-Shamali, head of the sports department at daily newspaper *Al-Jarida* mentioned that, despite the fact that Kuwaiti society defends the freedom of speech, there are some religious groups, which are allies of the government, playing the role of censor by watching closely every word published or broadcast. This action leads to limited press freedom, he asserted. Similarly, Al-Rai, a private television station, was under severe attack from tribal interests because of a mistake committed by an actor who was performing in a play aired by the station.

Furthermore, public support does not typically manifest itself in action. There are few incidents of crimes or violations against journalists that generate broad public outcry. Dr. Fatima Al- Abdali, a writer and women's rights activist, added "when writers Laila Al-Othman and Laila Shoaib were arrested, there were protests and strikes," but in general panelists thought that people's reactions were not significant. Al-Shamali mentioned a national democratic coalition called (36), after the article granting freedom of speech in the Kuwaiti constitution. He said this kind of group and coalition can build pressure and make grass-roots movements more effective.

The new publication law was controversial. Some journalists think it supported freedom of expression by breaking the monopoly of media outlet ownership. Others think the law is one step forwards and two steps backwards. They feel the law puts up new barriers to freedom of speech by prohibiting the publishing of certain events regardless of the subjectivity and the credibility of the news.

Panelist Saud Al-anzy, assistant managing editor of *Al-Jarida*, said "the new law does not allow us to publish discussions conducted in the Parliament or the Cabinet unless it was permitted previously. We used to publish the events and discussion without any limitations. Now we can only publish about the discussions that are constitutionally licensed. We can only publish the official press releases issued by these bodies. If one newspaper published any of the discussion, it would be punished, even if what it published was correct."

Anwar Al-Rasheed, a consultant and civil society activist, said "this law leaves lots of room for interpretation by the Ministry of Information. This interpretation is different every time and sometimes against international laws and treaties. According to this law, journalists are taken to the same department that deals with alcoholics and drug crimes." He added, however, "But there is opportunity to enforce the law by Parliament and through pressure of public opinion and political powers."

The Ministry of Information issues media licenses. Panelists said it is not really competitive, as only those who have sufficient capital—almost one million dollars for daily

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.

newspapers and more than a million dollars for television stations—may apply. In 2006, the Ministry received 120 applications for newspapers, 50 were approved, and only three of them started to publish. Rejected applicants have the right to appeal and ask for reconsideration, but few applicants do that. Ministry officials put a lot of weight on government interests and then decide applications based on a very difficult set of criteria. However, panelists said the process is transparent because the standards are clear.

As a result of the difficulty to obtain a license, many media professionals prefer to establish websites to publish their news and opinions to avoid the complexity of the application process.

The parliament approved in July 2007 a new law regarding broadcasting media. Panelist Ahmed Essa, the director of *Al Shark el Awsat*, said “We expect the number of TV channels and radio stations to increase and the competition to improve the quality of programs and professionals.” He added, “This law is very much like the publication law in terms of the limitations it puts on freedom of speech.”

For radio before 2006, only music format stations were allowed to operate commercially. Now such stations are allowed to broadcast news stories but with restrictions. In Kuwait one private radio (Marina FM) is producing news now and there is another application with the Ministry.

Beyond the difficult licensing regime, however, entering the media market is fair and based on principles of competition. There are no additional taxes on media outlets and the legal framework is transparent without difficult conditions, except for the high capitalization requirements monitored by the ministry of information.

Crimes against journalists and officially sponsored violations of freedom of expression are usually hidden and not well publicized. Such crimes most often take the form of harassment, which may also be aimed at families and relatives. Opinion writers are the most frequent targets. In very rare cases, a newspaper might be closed or stopped from publishing.

On the night of August 18, 2007 state security officers arrested two journalists as they left the *Al-Jarida* building. Bashr Al-Sayegh was arrested without any explanation. Jasim Al-Qamis was arrested because he was photographing the arrest of his colleague. Al-Qamis was released a day later but not before being beaten by staff of the Interior Ministry. Bashar Al-Sayegh was released three days later. An article by *Al-Jarida* speculated that Al-Saygh's arrest may have been because of a story he wrote criticizing the president of Jordan's House of Representatives, who suggested that

Kuwait should have a Senate. The official reason given was that an anonymous post on *Al-Jarida's* on-line discussion forum had insulted the emir.

Many representatives in the Al-Ummah council (Parliament) condemned the arrest, characterizing it as unconstitutional and contrary to the spirit of freedom of expression. Ayedh Al-Barazi of the Parliament's information section expressed hope because of the Parliament's stand in support of freedom of expression and that it takes such incidents seriously.

However, while most panelists agreed that society appreciates freedom of expression, they noted that public reaction to crimes against journalists is limited and weak. Violations against writers and journalists do not generally cause anger among people. Shoaab Al-Qati, editorial secretary of the Kuwait News Agency, said, “People get information about the violations but their reaction is limited. Civil society organizations don't organize campaigns to raise awareness and pressure the government.” On the other hand, Maha Al-Berges of *Al-Qabas* daily newspaper added, “when writer Ahmed Al-Baghdadi was arrested, because he expressed his opinion, all columns writers boycotted publishing in newspapers for one day. NGOs issued statements.”

Legislation does not grant state-owned media preferential treatment, but in practice government institutions give them better access to information. The government considers state media as a public relations tool to promote government policies. Editors are not independent. In this regard, state media does not have the ability to compete with the private media.

Libel is a crime, typically penalized through fines. Lawyers specializing in media cases are available to represent those accused of such crimes. If media uncover corruption or crimes, journalists are typically not punished for doing so, panelists said. Most other violations of media laws fall under the publication law, but sometimes these are punished under the criminal code.

All panelists agreed that the law does not grant the right to access public information. Journalists generally believe that this runs contrary to democratic principals and feel the Ministry of Information should propose legislation granting this right.

Journalists therefore depend on personal relations in order to get information. Panelists characterized these sources as a “double-edged sword:” it is fine when ethical standards are followed, but sometimes sources use journalists and mislead them by purposely giving incorrect or false information. Al-Anzy explained, “Some officials will mislead or fool or refuse to give information, because they know there is no

obligation to force them to tell what they don't want to." Sometimes journalists, especially junior ones, may accept a kind of agreement with sources in order to receive the benefit of access.

MSI panelists mentioned another right that should be included in the law to help access information: the right of protecting sources. Journalists do not have this right by law and they are sometimes forced to announce the identity of their sources. Panelists gave the 2005 example of Adel Al-Eidan, a correspondent for Al-Arabiya satellite television. Al Arabiya broadcast news of a raid by security forces against suspected militants that erupted into a gun battle. Al-Eidan was detained for four days—and he charged that he was tortured during his detention—in order to force him to reveal a source in Kuwait's security apparatus that had tipped him off to the raid.

Foreign media and publications are available inside Kuwait, and local media may cite such a source if it does not include prohibited information or issues considered sensitive to the state or a friendly country. Journalists can easily use the Internet to access information. The government rarely blocks web sites, but Saud Al-Anzy noted, "the Ministry of Communications and Internet companies may block some websites according to orders from the state security." For example, a local website created by writer and journalist Mohammed Al-Jasim was blocked several times. The *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* website (located in London) and the Liberal Arab Network website have been blocked as well.

Al-Shamali said "In open environments and at the various media outlets it is easy to get news and information from many different sources. The government does not interfere in this area. I think the government is smart for not trying to ban or block the flow of information. In fact, the government can not control various and different views through local or international media outlets, coming from many sources around the world. It is better for the government to gain a point instead of risking failure."

The journalism profession is open to anyone without limitations. Foreign media correspondents need licenses and permission Ministry of Information to cover events in Kuwait and send their reports outside the country. Permission must be given by other ministries in order to cover events related to those ministries. These conditions do not apply to local media.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Kuwait Objective Score: 2.31

The Objective 2 score remained essentially the same this year compared to last year, and most indicators fell close to the overall objective average. Indicator 4, journalists cover key events, received a noticeably higher score, while Indicator 8, niche reporting, scored well behind the average.

Most MSI panelists agreed that articles and reports are more or less professionally written and include information from various sources. They agreed that freedom of expression in Kuwait allows writers and journalists to write about most issues if they have sufficient evidence, but obtaining information is the main challenge. The law does not grant this right or the right of keeping a source of information confidential.

Al-Rasheed said, "In general, articles and reports are credible and include different opinions and ideas. Writers do depend on various sources. But sometimes the objectivity of reports or article depends on the media outlet or the ownership and on the writers or the journalists themselves. I can say from my follow-ups that reports mostly are done professionally and experts and specialists are used in the information sources." Al-Barazi did not agree: "Writers write articles that are not fair or balanced and usually they don't use credible sources." He added that writers and journalist make up the stories. "It is not professional at all," he said.

Al-Qati explained, "In the news agency, we are sometimes under time pressure and, according to official instructions, include whatever information we have found. It is unprofessional but that happens occasionally." She continued, "Sometimes one person covers a major event and all other media outlets use that person or from KUNA. One source is not enough, but some journalists don't want to make effort, preferring ready-made news."

Maha Al-Barges commented, "In fact, reports are completed only sometimes. Journalists don't finish their work. Sometimes they publish the press release as they received them from the ministries and NGOs."

Experts and specialists are not always consulted in preparing reports. Panelist Ahmed Essa said, "Journalists sometimes choose the easy way out. For example in our media there is a lot of talk and articles about separating the Kuwaiti dinar from US dollar. We read often about that in the economics page, but no journalist offers us the answer of 'what does that mean?' and 'how is that affecting our economy?' This kind of information is not [considered by the government to

be] sensitive and journalists need to pick up the phone and ask an expert about it.”

In discussing ethics, Al-Barazi said, “Journalists don’t practice any self-censorship, and they need to do so. The personal benefits and interests are playing a big role in what is published.” He added, “Writers and journalist don’t follow the minimum of professional or moral ethics.” Abdulkareem Al-Shamali, the head of *Al-Jarida’s* sports section confirmed this opinion: “The families’ journalism is the code of ethics which our media is following. Articles are published and programs are broadcasted according to personal views and desires; public interest is the last thing to be considered.” He added, “How can we talk about objective news in our outlets in cases like the following? *Al-Watan* daily is owned by a former minister of information who was accused of embezzling millions of dinars. How could a journalist in that particular newspaper write anything about the government or anything related to that ministry? How can journalists and writers in any other media outlets write about this former minister’s corruption or mention anything that might upset him? How can we talk about independent media in general?”

Al-Rasheed had a different point of view. According to him, most media outlets seek their readers’ and audience’s trust. Media outlets follow ethical standards and try to publish and broadcast credible news and stories. This all depends on the editors and their objectives. In Kuwait there are some media establishments that follow international ethical standards and they are well developed.

Censorship is practiced at many levels, with self-censorship by journalists, editors, and editors-in-chief as a result of pressure from the government, various other groups, and society as

a whole. Editors exercise censorship over their journalists because of the risks they face from lawsuits. It is safer to not publish controversial articles and avoid the possibility of legal trouble. Al-Rasheed said, “The pressure they go through is not because of fear, it is because of the responsibility they are taking. They want their outlets to remain credible and objective. Newspapers and other media outlets are obliged to gain and keep readers’ and audiences’ trust.”

For example, some ministries are more sensitive than others and have more power to enforce their preferences on the media. The Ministry of Defense is one of them. Al-Anzy noted, “*Al-Qabas* daily republished once a list of promoted military officers which had already been published in the ministry’s magazine *Humat Al-Watan*. The ministry sued the newspaper and the punishment was millions of Kuwaiti dinars.”

Further, journalists and reporters sometimes do not want to upset their sources and spoil a beneficial relationship by publishing negative information about them. Al-Anzy said journalists may be afraid of losing their sources. If a journalist covering a ministry has good sources there, and then discovers something negative, often the journalist will choose to keep the source and hide the information. Panelists noted the importance of an access to information law to help mitigate this dilemma faced by journalists.

Panelists also mentioned that the new publication law has increased the self-censorship among journalists. Editors-in-chief became censors because they are afraid of large fines. Al-Qati noted that, “Instead of having two people revising the news before publishing, now we have five people doing the same job in order to avoid any trouble with the governments or individuals.”

Al-Barges added, “It also should be mentioned that journalists do not always have the choice to write and publish professional stories and reports. Sometimes they are forced to follow certain instructions from editors or owners or the government. For instance, writing about international issues is always done more professionally because of the freedom available and the diminished sensitivity of the government or any local party to these issues. But writing and criticizing Saudi Arabia or another country within the GCC is fraught with many troubles.”

Journalists in Kuwait cover all major events in the country and in the Gulf region. In some rare occasions, a media outlet might be under pressure not to publish about a certain event, but other media outlets, especially newspapers, will manage to cover it. Private media are freer to cover local or regional events, while state-owned media typically follow the wishes of the government in line with state policies. In general,

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).

however, covering local and regional events is allowed without any restriction.

Panelists thought that in general salaries are low for journalists. They noted, however, that many Kuwaiti journalists have two jobs, the second being journalism. Therefore many do not depend on the salary they receive from their media outlet. Some journalists work part time for a company that advertises in the newspaper they work for. Al-Qati mentioned that many journalists and editors jockey to be included in the annual Hala February Festival committee, as it is lucrative work.

After the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, more than 60 percent of journalists left the country. Media in Kuwait came to depend on other Arab journalists. Now around 100 Kuwaiti journalists work in the country, and the rest, the majority, are other Arab nationals. However, since liberation in 1991 the need for locally based journalists started to increase and salaries became higher than they used to be. Al-Anzy said, "Nowadays Kuwaiti journalists have more financial support if they work as full-time journalists." Licensing new newspapers and broadcast media outlets has resulted in increased salaries as well, but according to panelists not enough to prevent corruption among journalists.

Panelists did not argue about the fact that some journalists might take bribes and gifts, but they noted that this does not include all journalists. Al-Qati said, "Salaries are not high but that is not a reason for a journalist to take money or a gift to write an article or hide information or to publish false information." Al-Barges added, "Salaries are not the reason at all; journalists might take money or gifts whether they have high or low salaries. In fact the price [of the bribe] is higher when the journalist is more important." Panelists noted that some media organizations punish journalists found to have violated ethical standards.

Entertainment programs and related articles take up more air time and space than news stories or information. The state media include more entertainment than the private media, which try to provide more balance. Panelists mentioned that the morning of the 1990 Iraqi invasion, that people tuning into the state media found nothing about the invasion at all. Although an old example, it helped generate a public perception of news on the state broadcast media.

Recently, some media outlets are looking to specialize in news and information. But, as Al-Rasheed said, it is very hard to keep readers and audience engaged if the media outlet does not provide a wide range of various programming and articles that cover the readers' interests and keep the majority of them linked to the outlet.

All panelists agreed that media outlets should own and use new equipment of the latest technology. However, this is not always the case in practice: panelists noted that television stations are somewhat behind, although newspapers use better equipment. More importantly, they said, is the need for Kuwaiti media outlets to raise the level of professionalism among the technical staff that operate the equipment.

Although there is some investigative reporting, panelists brought into doubt its impact. Crimes uncovered by journalists languish in police departments and courts, even with no follow-up at all sometimes.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

Kuwait Objective Score: 2.16

Panelists harshly scored Indicators 3 and 4, state media reflect the views of the political spectrum and independent news agencies, and these scores help to account for a drop of over half a point for Objective 3 compared to last year. However, panelists did rate four of the indicators much higher, with scores near or above a 3: these include Indicators 1, 2, 6, and 7, covering plurality of sources, access to news sources, transparency of ownership, and representation of various social interests in the media.

Panelists agreed that people in Kuwait have multiple sources of news and information because of the many media outlets. Newspapers represent the dominant media, even in terms of advertising. Twelve daily newspapers are published in Kuwait; 10 in Arabic and two in English. After the passage of

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.

the publications law in 2006, five new private dailies quickly joined the media landscape: *Al-Jarida*, *Al-Wasat*, *An-Nahar*, *Alam Al-Yawm* and *Awan*. The new dailies feature fewer sections than the older, more established ones. The state does not own a daily newspaper. All daily newspapers are private and they represent wider views and interests of different social and political groups.

There are more than a dozen television channels in Kuwait, and most are private. Of the private ones, Al-Rai is the best known and offers well regarded news programs. It is part of the Al-Rai Media Group, which also owns the leading *Al-Rai* daily newspaper. Others are owned by individuals and these are either religious or arts and music channels. Marina FM is a private radio station that began with an all-music format and was recently allowed to include news bulletins and information programs. Panelists expected that the number of television and radio channels will increase in the next few years due to the issuance of the new broadcasting law.

Despite the diversity of sources, however, panelists felt that the diversity of viewpoint is wanting. They noted that it can be very difficult to notice a significant difference between the state media and the private media in regards to editorial content, especially when it comes to the state public policy or relations with other countries.

In terms of accessing media, as a small country, Kuwait has no problem with print media distribution to areas outside the capital, and broadcast media are accessible in all areas. Many citizens own satellite dishes. International news is available through satellite televisions. Foreign publications are allowed in Kuwait, but need official permission. The Internet is widely used and few Internet sites are blocked by the government.

State media represent government views and do not allow views representing other, dissenting groups. The state media are not independent and its news programs are not balanced; political bias is quite evident. Most panelists felt that the state media does not serve the public interest. Panelists also agreed that the state-owned media are far behind the private media and, with new television and radio channels, few Kuwaitis will keep watching or listening to the state media.

There is one local news agency in the country, Kuwait news agency (Kuna), which is owned by the state. It covers and publishes local, regional, and international news. Most media outlets in Kuwait publish reports taken from Kuna and it is considered the official Kuwaiti news source. Al-Barazi expressed his wish that Kuwait might some day have more than one news agency in order to increase local information sources and create a healthy competitive media environment. However, regional and international news agencies are available and accessible and are often used by Kuwaiti media.

Regarding media ownership, panelists felt that there is a fair level of transparency that allows most citizens to judge possible bias in favor of the ownership.

Journalists face challenges trying to cover certain social interests and including those views and opinions in their reporting. For example, some sources refuse to give information about certain issues, and this is exacerbated by the absence of a law granting the right to public information. In particular, covering issues related to minorities such as foreign workers, can prove difficult because of the pressure to not cover such issues in a way deemed critical of state policies.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Kuwait Objective Score: 2.71

The score for business management improved to a 2.71 this year, up from 2.42 last year. A few of the indicators outperformed the overall average by more than half a point: Indicators 2, 3, and 4, which measure multiple sources of revenue, the strength of the advertising market, and advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue. However, Indicator 7, audience and circulation measurement, kept the average down with a score more than two points lower than the average.

Al-Shamali began the discussions of Objective 4 by saying that independent media are successful businesses and the sector is growing fast. Abdulhameed Al-Daas, the editor-in-chief of *Alam Al-Yawm*, one of the new dailies, was quoted in a 2007 interview as saying, "A newspaper needs around KD 7,000 of advertisement and 6 pages of advertisement supplements monthly to cover its expenses. *Alam Al-Yawm* daily did not reach that level, but we are optimistic that we will if we continue to progress the same way we have been." He also mentioned that the local market has the capacity to support 15 newspapers.

The editor-in-chief of *Al-Wast* daily newspaper, Mohammed Saad Al-Odah, said in an interview that one should not consider a newspaper as a commercial project. It is in the primarily a social and political project. Newspapers are expensive projects, although in the long run they turn a profit. He said "we should look outside Kuwait to the regional market. The number of newspapers is not a problem; the problem is the similarity among the dailies. Kuwaitis access news and information through newspapers more than through other media outlets. So creativity and difference are needed."

In general, the advertising market in the gulf region is growing. The size of newspaper advertisements in Kuwait is the third largest in the gulf after Saudi Arabia and

UAE. Panelists referred to a study that showed annual advertisement sales by daily newspapers in Kuwait to be KD 110 million (more than \$350 million).

Panelists believed that it takes time for advertisers to accumulate more details about their readership bases and circulation figures. So far, the advertising agencies have not developed large sales plans for these new dailies. The old newspapers have the advertisers' trust because their readership is high.

While overall the business outlook for media in Kuwait is good, the diversity of revenue is still not enough to guarantee financial independence. Panelists reported pressure and interference by advertisers and investors. Media outlets must therefore understand the preferences and off-limit topics of important advertisers and investors. Many media outlets can not touch the interests of investors and advertisers, let alone write about possible corruption they might be involved in.

Panelists agreed that the advertising market is competitive and growing. Al-Barazi said newspapers are full of advertisements. In fact, newspapers are able to publish commercial supplements because of the demand for advertising. However, only two percent of advertisements are placed through agencies. The rest are placed through either personal connections or individual agents. Companies creating advertisements are robust, according to panelists.

The government gives annual subsidies to all newspapers published before the new publication law went into effect, regardless of their editorial policy. The government does not interfere in the newspapers' editorial content, although panelists felt that the size of the subsidy is not enough to

create pressure in any case. Some of the subsidy comes in the form of government subscriptions and advertising; panelists felt that government advertisements are distributed equally and not according to editorial policy.

Advertisement agencies depend on independent research and statistics before deciding where to place their commercials. However, among the media, panelists agreed that independent research and studies are few. Circulation figures and research to determine the composition of readers or audience for media outlets are not common. Panelists felt that organizations with these specialties are needed.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Kuwait Objective Score: 1.24

Panelists noted again this year the weakness of media supporting institutions, and Objective 5 again received the lowest score of the five objectives. Most of the indicators received scores within a half point of the average, the exceptions being Indicator 1, trade associations, which received a score close to 0, and Indicator 3, NGOs, which finished with a score more than one-and-a-half points above the average.

In Kuwait there is only one professional media organization: the Kuwait Journalists Association, established in 1964. There are no unions or other media associations. Panelists believed that the journalists association does not generally represent journalists or other media professionals.

Al-Barazi said "This association is supervised by the government and it follows official instructions. The association abandoned the real professional journalists." He added that Kuwaiti journalists number not more than one 100, yet the association membership is listed as being between 1500 and 1900. "Who are they, and how did they become members?" he asked. Al-Anzy explained, "The association board used these people for the elections so the same people remain in charge and keep the professionals away. *Al-Qabas* has reported on the association election and the number of members. The report listed the members who voted. Some of them were carpenters while others were beauticians. The association did not sue the newspaper. If it were wrong or false information, they would definitely sue the newspaper."

Al-Qati continued, noting, "Members of the journalists association are not journalists. The administration of the association gathered hundreds of people working in the media organization such as typists and proofreaders and others who don't work directly as reporters, writers or journalists." Ahmed Essa, the director of *Al Shark el Awsat* said, "The membership conditions are not transparent and

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.

unfair. Membership is divided into groups: active and inactive; this division is based on the nationality of the journalist, whether Kuwaiti or not.”

Panelists agreed that a professional association or a union should be fair and protect the rights of all journalists regardless of their race, sex, or nationality.

Journalists attempted to establish a union but it was refused. The position of the Ministry of Legal Affairs is that there is no article in the constitution that allows the formation of unions. Journalists have argued that the constitution and other laws do in fact allow professional unions, in addition to the international treaties Kuwait has signed. The union operates nonetheless, but unofficially and is severely hampered without official legal status. Applications to form a competing professional association for media professionals have also been turned down by the government.

The situation with NGOs that support freedom of speech and related issues is not strong, either. Individual activists and a few groups try to raise awareness among people and build pressure groups in the parliament and other legal bodies. However, Reem Al-Mee, a journalist with *Al-Rai*, said that regional and international NGOs are much more active than the local NGOs when it comes to defending journalists’ rights and freedom of speech. In general, panelists felt, local NGOs do care and do react when violations against journalists’ rights or freedom of expression occur, but their influence is weak and they fail to galvanize public towards action and pressuring the government.

Kuwait University offers a degree in journalism and media studies. Working media professionals also attended journalism schools elsewhere in the region or the world. Panelists indicated that the size of the program at Kuwait

University is sufficient in terms of number of graduates and curriculum. However, most Kuwaiti graduates do not work in the field, however; they prefer government jobs because of the higher salaries. Panelists lamented the fact that graduates think working as a journalist is not a rewarding job.

Panelists stressed the importance of training for journalists’ professional development and the improvement of media outlets generally. Some media outlets in Kuwait provide training for journalists in the form of workshops and short term courses. “Kuna provides good training and it is available for journalists from the region,” said Al-Qati, Kuna’s editorial secretary. *Al-Qabas* newspaper used to have good training programs during the eighties, panelists said, but not any longer. Eman Husain, a journalist with *Al-Jarida*, said “It depends on the establishment. Some of them don’t realize the importance of training; some do and would send their staff outside the country to get good professional training.” Al-Anzy added, “In our new newspaper, we cover all the sections using computers and our staff are trained to use them. This action made the working environment more professional.” However, there panelists noted that there is no dedicated training institution and supported the need to develop one.

Panelists mentioned other training programs conducted by the government, such as a program called “Rehabilitation of Workforces.” This program trained a group of middle school graduates to work in the media. Evaluating this program, Al-Anzy said “I have a personal experience with this program. It is difficult to turn a middle school graduate into a journalist or a reporter. Working as a journalist is not only about training; it needs talent and passion.”

Printing companies are accessible and operate freely in terms of setting prices and choosing clients. For non-periodical publications, however, permission is required from the Ministry of Information. One publishing house is owned by the government and the rest are private.

Panelists noted that sources of newsprint are somewhat limited. One businessman controls almost 75 percent of the paper market. One panelist said “That makes writing anything opposite to his interests very dangerous, despite talks about his corruption. This businessman also comes from a very powerful political family.” All of the older, established newspapers buy from his company. The new dailies, however, have found other sources.

Satellite television channels and the Internet are operated by private companies, but they are required to have permission to operate in Kuwait. There are around 10 private television channels and two Internet providers. The Ministry of Information supervises those channels and companies, but there is no censorship prior to broadcasting their programs.

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.

List of Panel Participants

Saud Al-Anzy, assistant managing editor, *Al-Jarida Daily*, Kuwait

Shoaa Al-Qati, editorial secretary, Kuwait News Agency, Kuwait

Fatima Al-Abdali, writer and women's rights activist, Kuwait

Anwar Al-Rasheed, independent consultant and activist, Kuwait

Ayedh Al-Barazi, parliamentarian, Media Section of Kuwaiti Parliament, Kuwait

Maha Al-Barges, secretary, Graduates Association of Kuwait, Kuwait

Ahmed Essa, director, *Al Shark el Awsat*, Kuwait

Eman Husain, journalist, *Al-Jarida*, Kuwait

Abdulkareem Al-Shamali, head of sports section, *Al-Jarida*, Kuwait

Abdullah Al-Otaibi, senior journalist, *Al-Jarida*, Kuwait

Reem Al-Mee, journalist, *Al- Rai*, Kuwait

Fatima Dashti, reporter, *Al-Jarida*, Kuwait

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