

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.

Perhaps the most relevant and memorable event for the media community was the official launch of Al Jazeera English in November 2006. The 24-hour news and current affairs television channel became the first global news network originating from a developing country.



QATAR

Over the past year, Qatar remained politically stable and awareness of democracy there has risen, though not at the same level of more politically active neighbors such as Kuwait and Bahrain. Qatar reportedly bypassed Indonesia and Malaysia in 2006 to become the world's largest liquid natural gas supplier. Its GDP per capita increased by 15.5 percent to reach a record high of \$57,350, and is estimated to increase to \$66,115 by the end of 2008. If this growth is maintained, economists predict Qatar could be the world's richest country in a few years. More good news came from London-based Transparency International, which ranked Qatar 32 among 163 countries in its Corruption Perceptions Index, in which higher ranks indicate less perceived corruption in a given country. Qatar ranked ahead of all Arab countries except the United Arab Emirates.

Perhaps the most relevant and memorable event for the media community was the official launch of Al Jazeera English in November 2006. The 24-hour news and current affairs television channel became the first global news network originating from a developing country. The channel claims a reach of 80 million viewers worldwide, placing it third after CNN International and BBC World.

Meanwhile, the gap between Al Jazeera's professional standards and those of local Qatari media may have grown even larger. The MSI panel cited this incongruity as one reason Qatar's score fell from 2.48 in 2005 to 2.36 this year. Qatar's local media sector, comprising the Qatar Radio and Television Corporation and four private newspaper publishing companies, has not lived up to its aspirations and seems to have lost interest in competing with the progressive Al Jazeera network, some MSI panelists noted. While Qatar's regime was more forward-looking in terms of press freedom compared to other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, this vision was either not understood or embraced in the local media. Management of local media mostly remained loyal to their old, conservative styles of reporting.

The two weakest points in Qatar's media scene noted in this study have not changed since 2005. The total dependence on foreign journalists in covering domestic issues and the astonishingly low activity in civil society concerning media development held Qatar back from improving its ranking this year. MSI panelists stressed Qatar's need to develop a strategy to tackle those two issues and improve its media sustainability. In particular, Objective 3, plurality of news sources, Objective 4, business management, and Objective 5, supporting institutions, all fell noticeably compared to 2005. Significantly, Objective 5 fell to below 2 (1.83). These losses more than offset a modest gain in Objective 1, free speech.

QATAR AT A GLANCE

GENERAL

Population: 928,635 (July 2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

Capital city: Doha

Ethnic groups (% of population): Arab 40%, Indian 18%, Pakistani 18%, Iranian 10%, other 14% (*CIA World Factbook*)

Religions (% of population): Muslim 77.5%, Christian 8.5%, other 14% (2004 census, *CIA World Factbook*)

Languages (% of population): Arabic (official), English commonly used as a second language (*CIA World Factbook*)

GNI (2006-Atlas): N/A (*World Bank Development Indicators, 2007*)

GNI per capita (2006-PPP): Exact figure N/A, but estimated to be in top five using Atlas method (*World Bank Development Indicators, 2007*)

Literacy rate: 89.0% (male 89.1%, female 88.6%) (2004 census, *CIA World Factbook*)

President or top authority: Amir Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani (since June 27, 1995)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:

Print: 15 (6 papers, 9 magazines); Radio: 3 main stations; Television Stations: 6 main stations

Newspaper circulation statistics: Top 3 by circulation: *Al-Raya* (private, circulation 18,000), *Gulf Times* (private, circulation 18,000), *The Peninsula* (private, circulation 18,000)

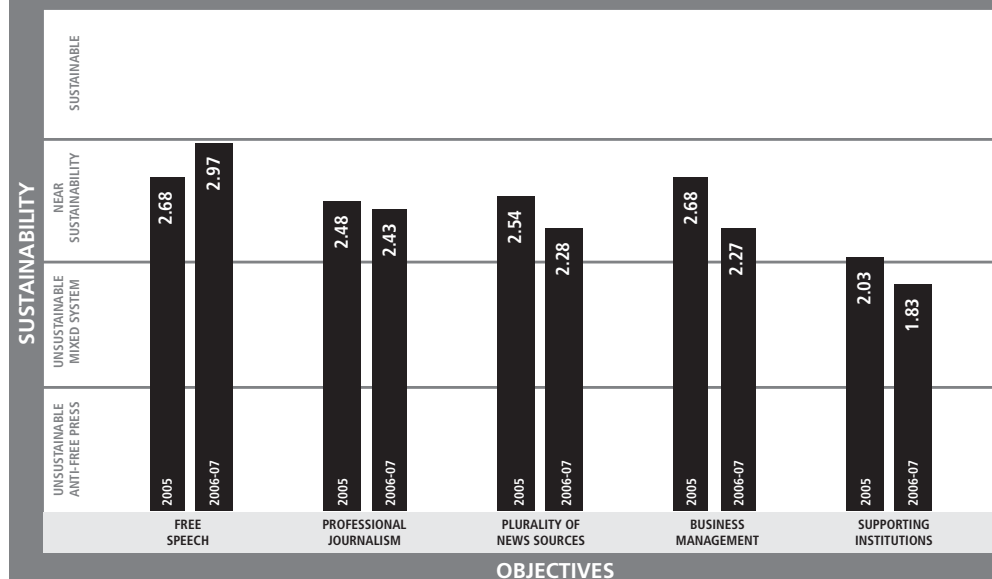
Broadcast ratings: N/A

News agencies: Qatar News Agency (state-owned)

Annual advertising revenue in media sector: N/A

Internet usage: 289,900 (2006 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: QATAR



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

Qatar Objective Score: 2.97

Qatar is unique compared to other GCC countries when it comes to free speech. Despite having an obsolete and restrictive press law, Qatar is home to Al Jazeera, the freest pan-Arab news television channel in the world. The emergence of the global Al Jazeera English channel further raised the country's profile on freedom of expression. MSI panelists gave Qatar a boost in this objective by scoring it 2.97 this year from 2.68 in 2005. One panelist said it was the "Al Jazeera effect" that made them feel freer and secure when doing their job regardless of the old restrictive press law that is still in place.

Panelists acknowledged that the government is not directly interfering in or otherwise restricting press freedom, but also said that journalists are not using their freedom effectively. Another panelist, however, said that the lack of a political opposition meant that Qatar's commitment to freedom of expression has not yet been tested in any real way. Therefore, reforms in the press law, libel law and broadcast regulation remain an urgent priority. This was reflected in the scoring; while most indicators scored above a 3 in Objective 1, those for Indicator 1, legal and social protections for free speech, Indicator 6, libel laws, and Indicator 7, access to public information, all scored below 3. Indicator 2, broadcast licensing, scored nearly a point and a half less than the overall objective score.

Even though Qatar's constitution guarantees freedom of expression, the press law constrains this freedom. Qatar's law 8 of 1979 for Printing and Publishing is extremely restrictive, containing 15 prohibitions that range from criticizing the emir to publishing false facts. The penalties for such crimes could be based on the Penal Code and/or press law, which allows the imprisonment of journalists and may also result in the closure of the newspapers that employ them. One panelist noted that the law may punish a journalist "for anything, even in cases of suspicion."

On the other hand, the law is so obsolete that many of its articles are impossible to implement, particularly those that deal with the Ministry of Information, which was eliminated more than a decade ago. Furthermore, some panelists noted that no journalist had ever been imprisoned and that maximum fines do not exceed QAR 3,000 (\$820).

Most panelists agreed on the urgent need to replace the outdated press law with one that is compatible with the country's pace of development. The plan to establish a media city, where media enterprises can flourish and develop, may

have put efforts to reform the press law on hold, one panelist said. Panelist Jaber Al-Harami, the deputy editor-in-chief of *Al-Sharq* daily newspaper, said efforts are being made to speed up the drafting and approval of a new press law that would be less restrictive and promote press freedom and professionalism. Al-Harami also noted that the old press law is not being strictly applied because the regime had issued general instructions to the judiciary and executive branch to treat the media "in a special way until the new press law is issued."

However Al Jazeera's deputy editor-in-chief Aiman Gaballah stressed that his 24-hour Arabic television channel is an exception. "When Qatar established Al Jazeera, it granted it a high level [of freedom]," he said, adding that Al Jazeera was "never treated as a local media organ."

Society, on the other hand, may have held press freedom back due to deeply rooted traditions entrenched in the minds of older generations. The issue of press freedom for many elders is seen as incompatible with social traditions, which in some ways cause further delays to Qatar's ongoing transformation. Mohammed Al-Musfir, a lecturer at Qatar University, said the society is divided into three groups: one demanding high levels of press freedom, a second accepting press freedom that limits coverage to issues that do not deal with sensitive social problems, and a third that wants to abolish the press altogether.

The emir of Qatar, Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, acknowledged the need for time to change popular perceptions about democracy and press freedom. "We do not plan to wave a magic wand to carry out the changes that we need overnight," he said in a lecture he gave at Georgetown University in 1997, explaining that the country's traditions and values need to be preserved while transforming the country politically and economically.

Panelist Mohamed Hijji, the assistant editor-in-chief of *Al-Arab*, a newly founded daily newspaper, noted with irony that the emir and government are more open-minded about press freedom than society itself. He joined a few other panelists who felt the emir may have been too forward-looking, resulting in a wide gap between him and the rest of society. Gradually, society is beginning to accept press freedom as a fact of life, according to panelist Hashim Karrar, head of the foreign news department of *Al-Watan* daily newspaper. "Society has started pushing the press towards a greater level of press freedom," he said.

Obtaining a license for a new media enterprise is extremely difficult, if not impossible, most panelists agreed. The law names the Ministry of Information as the licensing authority for media outlets, but the Ministry was abolished in 1995, creating legal and procedural confusion. Although current

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media establishments can easily start new magazines and newspapers, licenses to establish a new newspaper have not been granted for years. One panelist went further in saying that “there is no right for any person to issue a [new] publication today,” but added that this may change in the near future. Licenses for broadcast media were also out of the question, at least until the establishment of the media city.

Al-Arab, which was re-launched in November 2007 to be the fourth daily Arabic newspaper in Qatar, is itself not a new newspaper. Its original license dates back to the early 1970s but was recently sold to a new company. Panelist Ahmed Abdul Malik, a media expert and researcher, said that there were a few new licenses issued for a number of magazines. But, he added, they were only granted based on “social and political factors” and were subject to preferential treatment. “As an example, a citizen applied to open a media office five years ago but was never given a license, while another

person working for the emir applied for a license to produce a magazine and was given a license within just one month,” he said.

Once a specific media outlet is licensed however, it enjoys the benefits of operating in a tax-free country where profit is easily attainable and with infrastructure and other investment-friendly features favoring business. Apart from some extra zoning conditions that may be set by municipalities where newspapers are to be established, there are no obstacles facing media companies’ entry into the market, said panelist Jaber Al-Harami. Other panelists noted that established newspapers in Qatar have been running smoothly for more than two decades and have been able to take advantage of the tax-friendly environment.

When it comes to crimes against journalists, all panelists agreed that conventional crimes such as physical attacks, unlawful detentions or threats are extremely rare in Qatar. Al-Musfir went on to say that “there have been no crimes committed against journalists during the last twenty years except for one case, which was due to a personal matter that had nothing to do with journalistic work.” Al-Musfir was referring to the 2001 attack against the editor-in-chief of *Al-Watan*, Ahmed Ali. The assault was widely reported in the Qatari press and condemned by local journalists and international advocacy institutions such as Paris-based Reporters sans Frontières. The authorities investigated the matter and three people were detained in relation to the attack, but they were later released upon reaching an informal settlement.

Occasionally however, some journalists may be unduly fired from their jobs while others could be summoned for questioning by police or prosecuted in the courts. However, there was consensus that most expatriate journalists, who constitute about 98 percent of journalists in Qatar according to panelist Al-Musfir, tend not to publish what could be deemed as offensive to any person or entity. Because there are only four daily newspapers, expatriate journalists who are fired may have difficulty finding another job and thus face deportation due to Qatar’s strict guest worker rules.

There was also agreement among panelists that the government does not interfere in internal affairs of the private media. But according to panelist Abdul Malik, state-owned media are sometimes subjected to meddling by government officials, who may be involved in the appointment or dismissal of heads of departments, managers and even anchors.

Libel is considered a criminal offense in Qatar and is punishable under the press law and Penal Code, which may include imprisonment. Prosecutions of journalists is limited

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.

compared to other countries in the region, but the reason behind that, according to one panelist, is due to Qatar's high number of expatriate journalists. They tend to avoid using any language that may be considered libelous so as not to jeopardize their careers and risk deportation.

One panelist said because libel is a criminal offense, journalists and editors-in-chief may be summoned to a police station for the simplest of reasons and upon the request by anyone at all. He then recalled a case when he was called to a police station based on a complaint by a citizen for publishing accounts of an incident, which was also reported in other newspapers. But upon asking why he was summoned to the police station, the policeman told him "you published the story in four columns, while it should have been published in one just like other newspapers did." "Imagine when anybody could complain to the police against journalists for the stupidest of things," he said.

Access to information is still a challenge for journalists, panelists said. Others noted some progress in this respect during the last few years. There is no reference in the constitution or the press law to the right to access information, making it possible for officials to reject calls for interviews and deprive the press from accessing specific documents and information. On many occasions, information provided by the national Qatar News Agency (QNA) becomes the only available data for journalists, who often struggle to get statements and detailed facts from governmental officials.

One panelist noted that the difficulty in accessing information, particularly from government sources, does not lie in the laws but is a result of an inherited culture that evolved over decades of working in a restrictive environment. He explained that there is a feeling of fear and wariness among officials when dealing with the press. Hence, what officials end up doing is simply instructing "the public relations department to print a bulletin describing the activities of the establishment and that is basically it."

Access to international news, on the other hand, is extremely easy. Internet penetration in Qatar is very high; about half of the households using the Internet have broadband access, making international news online quite common and accessible. Furthermore, there is no political censorship of websites, making access to the most controversial political content possible. Panelists also noted that Qatar may be the only Arab country that does not block political publications from entering the country even if those publications contain harsh criticism or even insults against the government, the royal family or the emir himself.

Panelists agreed that anyone who is at least 21 years old is allowed to enter the media profession and, in fact, Qatari

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nationals are often encouraged to do so. This is the case despite article 10 of the 1979 press law stipulating that a license must be issued by the Ministry of Information before entering the profession. But given that the Ministry itself was dissolved years ago, this article was deemed inapplicable. There are also a few conditions that should be met according to the press law. But panelist Ahmed Abdul Malik noted that he has never seen article 10 implemented, engendering a sense in the media community that some, if not all, of the articles of the press law are disregarded by the authorities.

Panelist Jaber Al-Harami of *Al-Sharq* daily newspaper pointed out that his newspaper offered free training courses and on-the-job training to encourage young Qataris to join its staff. "We even allocate cash prizes!" he said. Despite such attempts however, the number of Qataris applying for jobs in the private media sector remains quite low.

There are, however, some regulations concerning foreign media correspondents, who need to register at the Foreign Information Agency. Panelist Mohammed Hijji said that such a move should not be seen as an obstacle but as a useful measure to keep correspondents informed about various activities and announcements that may be of interest to them. But most panelists said the government usually grants permission to all correspondents and does not interfere in their appointments in any way.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Qatar Objective Score: 2.43

As in many other GCC countries, most journalists working in the Qatari media are non-Qatari. Some of those expatriates have low professional standards, while others are more qualified. Locals usually hold senior managerial positions. Panelists scored this objective 2.43, nearly unchanged from 2005's score of 2.48. Most indicators scored close to this average, with two exceptions. Salaries of journalists are generally low and unattractive to young Qatari graduates, who prefer better paying posts with the government.

Some newspapers tend to hire journalists without properly assessing their credentials and qualifications. The process is repeated for most journalists resulting in cadres that are not well-qualified and that fail to produce high quality journalism.

Indicator 5, therefore, scored more than a point lower than the average. Indicator 7, modern equipment, scored more than a point higher than the average.

MSI panelists agreed that the level of professionalism in Qatar's journalism industry is not satisfactory. Despite an overwhelming number of foreign journalists working in various newspapers, many of them do not approach all sources and do not tackle their stories from all angles. On the other hand, highly qualified journalists who seem to excel in their work tend to apply for higher paying posts with more prestigious media enterprises such as Al Jazeera.

Some newspapers tend to hire journalists without properly assessing their credentials and qualifications. The process is repeated for most journalists resulting in cadres that are not well-qualified and that fail to produce high quality journalism. One panelist noted that many of those journalists come from countries where there is a deficiency in democracy and no free press. When they come to Qatar, they bring with them baggage in the form of poor journalistic practices suited only for countries where there is little if any democracy, one panelist noted.

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).

But many panelists acknowledged that this certainly does not apply to Al Jazeera, whose cadres are the cream of the crop and were brought in from renowned international media institutions such as the BBC. Panelist Aiman Gaballah, who started working for Al Jazeera in 1996, confirmed this view, noting that the channel's policy was to judge its journalists by their skills potential, not their nationality. But Gaballah also acknowledged the deficiency in the number of properly trained journalists in Qatar as well as in the wider Arab world. He noted that when the competing pan-Arab news channel Al-Arabiya emerged in 2003, about fifteen to twenty journalists left Al Jazeera to join the rival channel, underlining a severe shortage of skilled journalists in the region.

Similarly, panelist Mohamed Hijji noted that the emergence of Al Jazeera encouraged qualified journalists at *Al-Sharq*, where Hijji worked before, to leave the newspaper for the popular television channel for many reasons including higher pay, prestige, and a broader audience.

When it comes to the ethical standards of journalism in Qatar, many panelists were concerned about the lack of a common code of ethics. Although Al Jazeera does have such a code, journalists usually end up reacting to sensitive situations based on their personal understanding and judgments. Most expatriate journalists in particular fall in line with their manager's desires, even if it means writing reports that do not conform to the profession's standards.

Among all problems noted by panelists, the issue of self-censorship stood out as the biggest and most difficult to overcome. Panelist Ahmed Abdul Malik went as far as claiming that "self-censorship has become even stronger than the governmental censorship of the past," referring to the decision in 1995 by Emir Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani to lift prepress censorship of publications. Panelist Al-Harami echoed this opinion, saying "journalists and media establishments suffer greater liability," and noted that journalists may be subject to prosecutions and summoning by the police for their writings.

Panelists noted that the problem of self-censorship is most severe in the case of expatriate journalists who have to ensure their articles do not anger the owners of their media corporation, their senior editors, the government, advertisers or society at large. One panelist said the government had given the private press total freedom, allowing managers to exercise full authority over employees who they may fire and thus subject to deportation for the simplest of reasons. Hence it is natural for most expatriate journalists to avoid critical reporting, investigative stories that involve influential individuals or entities, and strongly worded opinion pieces. The same does not apply to Qatari journalists, who are an extremely small percentage of the journalism community.

One panelist noted that the situation will remain stagnant unless locals take the initiative. "Expatriates look for a place where they could live, work in peace, and ultimately leave. But it is the national citizen whom we could rely on in achieving real change," he said.

Apart from self-censorship, journalists often find themselves lacking the initiative to tackle important stories that may be of interest to the public such as social problems such as divorce, crime, prostitution, corruption, government inefficiency and so on. Therefore, they usually end up accepting instructions from editors and other decision-makers on what to cover and what to avoid.

Furthermore, journalists working in countries with limited democracy often fail to serve the interests of the general public, one panelist said. Journalists in such countries usually put senior governmental officials on top of the list of people to impress with a story, followed by their editors and colleagues at work. The general public comes third in journalists' list of priorities, which is the case for many Arab countries including Qatar, the panelist said.

Panelists also agreed that, unlike Al Jazeera, local media in Qatar may not have the ability to offer attractive salaries for a variety of reasons. The fact that expatriate journalists willing to work for nominal salaries flock to the country helps make journalism a relatively low paying profession for Qatari nationals. Panelist Hipashie Roshdie of *Al-Watan* daily newspaper noted that the pay for journalists in the local media is extremely low. Many panelists expressed the need to raise salaries of journalists amid rising inflation and soaring prices.

But panelist Hashim Karrar said that despite those low wages, most journalists still have the minimum integrity that prevents them from succumbing to corruption. Agreeing with Karrar was panelist Abdulaziz Al-Sayed, who heads the anchors unit at the Qatar Broadcasting Corporation and has his own debate program on Qatar Radio. "Despite the low wages that have not risen to the needed and aspired level, I don't believe they have resulted in corruption," said Al-Sayed. However, he stressed that he cannot rule out instances of corruption by some reporters, as this ultimately depends on the "conscience of the journalists" concerned.

Some panelists noted that the habit of recruiting journalists who accept low salaries has backfired on some newspapers, whose editorial and news quality had fallen off the charts of acceptable standards. Ahmed Abdul Malik demonstrated the gap between state-owned Qatar TV news programming and that of Al Jazeera, both funded by the same government and even located in the same compound. While Al Jazeera journalists are paid handsomely, journalists working for Qatar TV are not. Consequently, Al Jazeera's news is of much higher

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quality. Similarly, the governmental Al-Kass sports channel pays journalists much higher salaries than Qatar TV, Abdul Malik said.

When it comes to entertainment programming, panelists agreed that newspapers are on the whole more balanced than Qatar TV, which, according to Abdul Malik, allows entertainment to make up most of the channel's programming. "Entertainment programming is dominant in all official media, especially in live coverage as they try to squeeze in as many songs as possible pointlessly," he said. Meanwhile, on the other side of the spectrum, Aiman Gaballah of Al Jazeera said his channel needs to allow entertainment content to appear more often. He compared his channel to Al-Arabiya, which he claims has allocated too much time for entertainment programming.

Most panelists agreed that Qatari media in general have the latest technical equipment. However, they also noted that there was obvious favoritism for Al Jazeera at the expense of Qatar TV, whose equipment, according to Ahmed Abdul Malik, is somewhat out of date. Furthermore, while some privately owned media have better facilities than others, none of the private newspapers have substandard equipment.

Panelists noted that Al Jazeera's productions have become superior to any other specialized production that local Qatari broadcast or printed media can afford to do. Whether due to its highly qualified media professionals or sizeable financial means, this gap exists and has been growing for several years. One panelist, however, said that despite the existence of modern technology, some media workers from poor countries continue to practice obsolete methods. "Some of the internal procedures are backward even in the case of designing layouts... A designer uses a pen and ruler to design the newspaper's pages." He said, noting that such mechanisms are obsolete and demonstrate the contradictions in the local media.

Regarding niche reporting, some newspapers do publish regular supplements covering different themes such as sports and family. The companies that produce those newspapers also publish specialized magazines and other publications, but

their quality is similar to that of the newspapers themselves because the journalists used to produce those supplements are the ones producing the newspaper's content. Panelist Jaber Al-Harami said his newspaper, *Al-Sharq*, appoints specialized journalists for the different supplements it issues based on their skills and experience.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

Qatar Objective Score: 2.28

Plurality of news sources received a score of 2.28 from this year's MSI panel, noticeably lower than 2005's score of 2.54. Some panelists explained that the lack of diverse political views in the local media is partly to blame for this decline. Although Al Jazeera does bring various critical reports and confrontational open debates, its coverage remains focused on Arab and international affairs. Individual indicator scores were mostly spread out from the overall objective score. Indicators 1 and 2, number of news sources and public access to news sources, both scored solidly above 3. However, Indicators 4 and 5, independent news agencies and independent broadcasters produce their own news programming, both scored well below the average; panelists noted that Qatar's only news agency and national television and radio stations are all state-owned.

Local and international news can be accessed using a variety of sources including broadcast media, print media and the Internet, which has a very high penetration rate. However, private newspapers are unable to provide sufficient coverage

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.

of issues relevant to sensitive social and political issues and give most of their coverage to pro-government and international news. There are no private broadcast media or news agencies covering domestic issues although international radio and news agencies are allowed open access.

Information is not easily obtainable from local sources due to low awareness of the media's role and the conservative social values. Because there are no political parties and no opposition, finding politically critical views of the government proves challenging. Owners of private newspapers are generally known to be close to the regime, but the public is generally not so keen to learn about the shareholders given that the various newspapers are similar in their government-friendly attitude.

There was total agreement among MSI panelists that residents in Qatar enjoy a host of news sources. They also noted that the costs are affordable even to the poorest segments of the society. However, accessing those sources does not necessarily mean that their content is of satisfactory standards. According to panelist Ahmed Abdul Malik, local news coverage lacks interviews and investigative stories that delve into important issues.

There are two television channels, Qatar Satellite TV and Al-Kass Sports, and two radio channels, Qatar General Radio and Sout Al-Khaleej entertainment channel targeting a domestic audience. Although panelists noted that Al-Kass and Sout Al-Khaleej are editorially independent, both stations are state-owned and do not produce political reports. Furthermore, there are three independent private publishing companies producing four Arabic dailies: *Al-Raya*, *Al-Sharq*, *Al-Watan* and *Al-Arab*. Complementing these are three English-language dailies: *Gulf Times*, *The Peninsula*, and *Qatar Tribune*. However, most panelists agreed that the owners of those newspapers are powerful individuals close to or even part of the regime.

The launch of Al Jazeera English (AJE) on November 15, 2006, was also a milestone for Qatar, which became the first developing country to create a global 24-hour English-language news channel. In a few months, AJE expanded its outreach to more than 100 million viewers worldwide. On its website, it states that it "will balance the information flow from South to North," which makes it unique compared to other global news networks such as CNN International and BBC World. Though AJE covers very little about Qatar, it is another source of pride for all Qataris, most panelists said.

Panelists noted however that even though Al Jazeera does not primarily target audiences inside Qatar, it remains an inspiration to journalists and citizens of the country as a whole.

Panelist Aiman Gaballah, an Egyptian journalist working with Al Jazeera but with experience in dealing with Qatari society, said Al Jazeera is watched in every home in Qatar. From his personal experience, Gaballah noted that Al Jazeera “succeeded in making Qataris feel that despite not being a domestic channel, Al Jazeera is a fine representative of Qatar.”

An MSI panelist said that Al Jazeera has also created what is often referred to as the “Al Jazeera effect,” a jolt to some media enterprises in the Arab world. Panelist Mohamed Hijji said, “Certainly, Al Jazeera’s effect was felt. It was felt in media across the Arab world, so you could imagine its influence on the Qatari media.” He and other panelists noted how Al Jazeera effectively pushed the limit of press freedom in the local media to unprecedented heights. Nevertheless, panelists acknowledged that the extra attention given to Al Jazeera and the ongoing shortage of human and financial resources in domestic media contributed to the widening gap between the two.

Given that Qatar is among the richest countries in the world, citizens can afford satellite television and Internet access, which has become the dominant news source for a growing percentage of the population. With an Internet penetration rate of 26.6 percent and growing, Qatar was second only to the United Arab Emirates. Internet accessibility is provided by mostly state-owned Qatar Telecom (QTel), which is the exclusive telecommunications provider in the country. Qatar is the only GCC country that does not filter websites for their political content. But websites that contained nudity or other similar offensive content are automatically blocked by QTel’s filtering software.

Arab periodicals and publications are allowed into the country freely and are not subject to inspection for political content, while foreign publications are usually blocked if they had culturally offensive content. All panelists agreed that the government ensured that publications that are critical of Qatar and its regime are allowed to the country and sold freely in the market, which is in total contrast to all other GCC countries.

Ironically, the government’s strategy in not blocking any Arabic publication has drawn criticism from within the country, some panelists noted. Panelist Jaber Al-Harami of *Al-Sharq* said that occasionally “we call upon the government to prevent those newspapers from entering because sometimes they interfere in personal issues,” referring to opinions published in non-Qatari dailies that contained “harsh and personal attacks” against the regime.

Most MSI panelists agreed that the state-owned media remain tilted in favor of the government but are slowly opening up to initiatives and live talk show programs that

may include criticism of the authorities. Some panelists noted that the editorial line of those media is not being influenced by the emir, who is known to encourage editorial independence in state-owned media. Enlightened and open-minded media professionals in the state media have started producing live debate programs on national television and radio discussing problems of concern to the public.

Another panelist noted that radio in particular is becoming more engaged with the public as it occasionally hosts senior officials to answer audience questions in live broadcasts. Such programs may occasionally be quite critical of some governmental agencies, but they rarely result in direct criticism of the emir or the royal family. One famous radio program that often includes views critical of governmental agencies is *My Beloved Country: Good Morning* and is produced by Ilhab Badr, an outspoken female pro-press freedom journalist. But panelist Hashim Karrar noted that the program mostly tackles day-to-day social and cultural issues concerning the public and mostly lacks critical political views.

Panelist Mohamed Hijji also noted that Qatar TV has started producing programs that have gained tangible public acclaim. Among them is a program entitled *The Decision is Yours*, which is a debate program between senior officials and a group of young Qatari students. There have been times when a confrontational debate would take place between officials as senior as the Crown Prince, who was asked blunt questions during the first episode of the program.

Given the unprecedented economic growth and problems that are associated with it, Qatar TV started producing debate programs concerning the economic sector. Hijji noted that some of the sessions were “extremely hot.” Among the themes discussed were the stock market, inflation, and price and rental fee hikes.

Whether to allow critical voices to be heard in state broadcast media is based on the personal judgment of the decision-makers in those institutions, some panelists noted. Therefore, it may occasionally be the case that an individual prevents a specific critical view to be broadcast or published, but this is essentially a personal decision, not a political move influenced by the government, panelist Al-Harami stressed.

Despite this, state-run broadcast media are still not showing enough voices critical of the government because there are in fact not many such voices, many panelists said. Even though the emir had explicitly encouraged the state media to open up, some panelists agreed that it is far too early for Qatar to have outspoken critical voices. This will only emerge over time when democracy and a multi-party system are established. Furthermore, individuals refrain from speaking out to the media because they fear the repercussions of

Panelist Hapashie Roshdie of Al-Watan said his newspaper depends heavily on news feeds from foreign and local news agencies, which serve as a main source of news beyond the newspaper's journalists and correspondents. "It would not be impossible, but it will be difficult" for his newspaper to cope without news feeds from those agencies," Roshdie said.

addressing sensitive cultural, religious and social issues. One panelist said there is a need to take the risk of matching Qatar's skyrocketing economic development with a similar degree of openness.

In contrast to the wealth of international news sources, there is only one news agency, Qatar News Agency (QNA), which is controlled by the state and usually disseminates information and footage to newspapers and national radio. According to panelist Ahmed Abdul Malik, the agency's operations and activities have slowed down in recent years as more alternative sources have become accessible.

There are, however, offices and correspondents for international news agencies such as Reuters, AFP and AP, whose correspondents operate freely. All media in Qatar depend heavily on the content provided by those agencies for international and regional news, but they depend more on their own reporters and on QNA for local news. Panelist Hapashie Roshdie of *Al-Watan* said his newspaper depends heavily on news feeds from foreign and local news agencies, which serve as a main source of news beyond the newspaper's journalists and correspondents. "It would not be impossible, but it will be difficult" for his newspaper to cope without news feeds from those agencies," Roshdie said.

Among the other international sources accessible in Qatar are Radio Monte Carlo, BBC Arabic, Radio Sawa and MBC Radio. Panelist Jaber Al-Harami noted that some of those stations were able to broadcast directly from Qatar, though their programs were usually produced outside the country.

There are no privately owned Qatari TV and radio stations. There was disagreement among panelists whether to consider Al Jazeera truly independent since it is funded by the state of Qatar. One panelist even contended that despite what is being said about its editorial independence, there is some truth in criticisms that the channel does not report critically about Qatar. Al Jazeera "does not criticize the state. This is obvious,"

he said. But he added that in general, the channel does not promote Qatar or praise its government. "Advertisements are another matter," he added, hinting to the fact that the bulk of advertisements appearing on Al Jazeera do promote the country and many of its state-owned companies.

On the other hand, there are times when the channel invites guests in debate programs to discuss issues related to Qatar even if those guests are known to have hostile opinions of the country's regime. Similarly, there were reports on Al Jazeera covering demonstrations against Qatar for allowing a U.S. base to be established in the country, or for once allowing the opening of an Israeli commercial office in Doha. Human rights reports criticizing Qatar's performance were also occasionally dealt with on Al Jazeera.

However, the bombing of Al Jazeera's offices in Kabul and Baghdad, the closure of its offices in a number of Arab and Islamic countries, and the harassments and violations committed against journalists across the world have stood as evidence of the channel's power and influence. The reasons behind those measures were mostly attributed to the high degree of freedom Al Jazeera enjoys in its reports and debate programs that often include harsh criticism of Arab leaders and regimes, which in the past were out of reach for the Arab media.

Countries upset with Al Jazeera's coverage have pressured the Qatari regime to alter the channel's policies in the past. But when those policies remained unchanged, the aggrieved countries took tough measures against the channel, affecting Qatar's relations with them. There were even claims that Saudi Arabia, which was one of the countries deeply aggrieved with Al Jazeera's coverage, helped establish rival Al-Arabiya, which has been steadily growing in outreach and popularity since it was launched about four years ago.

Despite the positive appeal of Al Jazeera, panelists agreed that it should not be seen as a local station. Some panelists expressed hope that the government would in the near future allow private broadcast media to emerge through the establishment of a free media city, where local, regional and international broadcast and print media could produce and disseminate their products and compete with the successful Dubai Media City in the United Arab Emirates.

In terms of transparency, most panelists agreed that it is relatively easy to access information about the shareholders of the private publishing companies operating in the country. But they also noted that their ownership is largely limited to a small group of individuals, some of whom are closely affiliated to the royal family and have significant influence in the country. Given that the country's system is not democratic in the sense that there are no political parties, readers find

very similar editorial biases among the different newspapers. Panelist Mohamed Al-Musfir noted this by saying, "If you examine any newspaper in Qatar, you'll find that they contain the same governmental news and the very same international news." He also added that only wealthy individuals with enough capital could afford to establish a private newspaper.

But because the one million-strong population of Qatar is composed of diverse ethnic groups, coverage of international news relevant to the countries where expatriates come from makes up a substantial portion of content. Only about 15 percent of the population is Qatari, while the remainder is mostly Arab and Indo-Pakistani residing as skilled guest workers. Given this diversity, newspapers ensure that expatriate community activities are covered regularly. The fact that journalists working for those newspapers come from those communities has also helped maintain a high level of coverage of interest to expatriates. But the amount of coverage of each community is not necessarily proportionate to its size.

Panelist Jaber Al-Harami said that private newspapers including his own, *Al-Sharq*, ensure that each and every activity of the expatriate communities is covered in a timely manner to keep readers' loyalty. "Even if that community does not have an assigned page in a specific edition, we may end up placing its news item in the local news section," he said.

There are three English-language dailies in Qatar, which makes it possible for English-speaking expatriates to learn of events and activities happening in Qatar as well as in their own home countries. Panelist Al-Harami noted that *Al-Sharq*, which issues *The Peninsula* English daily newspaper, also prints newspapers in other languages including one in Nepalese and another in Malayalam.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Qatar Objective Score: 2.27

Being one of the richest countries in the world with a GDP per capita approaching \$60,000, media businesses are able to sustain a high level of profitability in Qatar. Several of the indicators received high scores. However, panelists gave low scores to three indicators, resulting in a score of 2.27, a significant drop from last year's level of 2.68. Panelists criticized the limited number of important advertising sources as well as a lack of both market research and reliable ratings or circulation figures. Therefore, they gave low scores to Indicators 2, 6 and 7.

Panelists had little doubt about the profitability of private newspapers but did not agree on whether they were run

Panelist Jaber Al-Harami said Qatar's tremendous economic growth in recent years had increased commercial activity, which resulted in greater revenues for all Qatari media. He noted that profitability in his newspaper, Al-Sharq, had increased so high that the management decided to distribute a portion of the profit to all employees for the first time in the newspaper's history.

effectively. Given that there are only four publishing houses, with each producing at least one Arabic and all but *Al-Arab* also publishing one English newspaper, panelists noted it is possible to split the advertising income between them to achieve high profitability. One panelist however questioned newspapers' efficiency, particularly as the market has been monopolized by those newspapers for many years, allowing them to generate tremendous profit without serious competition from newcomers.

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In contrast to private newspapers, state-run broadcast media fail to achieve a high level of profitability. Advertising sold by television and radio stations is limited and would not be enough to sustain them. Panelists noted that broadcast media rely heavily on government funding, making them somewhat relaxed and indifferent toward new sources of income. However, panelist Abdul Malik said the reason may lie in the fact that senior decision-makers in the state-run media are inefficient and unqualified. He added that their abilities "do not match up to the country and its pace of development."

Al Jazeera's management, however, is seen as more efficiently run compared to local television and radio, but its income remains well below the threshold to make it financially independent due to a huge overhead budget, particularly given the massive budget allocated for Al Jazeera English. The channel depends on state funding to cover about half of its budget.

Panelist Jaber Al-Harami said there is a growing concern about the dominance of commercial content in his newspaper *Al-Sharq*. “We give priority to editorial content,” he said.

But according to its deputy editor, panelist Aiman Gaballah, Al Jazeera is trying to generate income through means other than advertising, most of which comes from Qatari state-owned companies. Among the other income sources are fees coming from the Al Jazeera Media Training and Development Centre. Some income also comes from selling documentary programs, footage, and video productions. But Gaballah believes the path towards self-sufficiency is long. He argues that there are no state-owned television stations “capable of sustaining themselves without governmental money.”

Given Qatar’s small population of less than one million, circulation of local newspapers is too low to produce substantial income from sales and subscriptions. The largest share of income is from advertising, panelists said. This is one of the vulnerabilities of the newspaper businesses in Qatar, particularly as advertisement levels fluctuate and cannot be guaranteed. If the licensing of new newspapers is allowed, this would probably result in spreading advertisement income more thinly.

Some panelists admitted the need for the newspaper industry to diversify its income sources. “Our dependence on advertisements is exactly like the dependence of oil-producing countries on their revenues from oil,” panelist

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.

Jaber Al-Harami said, adding that *Al-Sharq* started to explore new sources to generate income. Commercial printing and training of journalists for a fee are two more sources that have contributed somewhat to generate more income for *Al-Sharq*. But overall, advertising remains the chief source of income for private media in Qatar. He noted that this is a risky situation because if a newspaper does not sell enough advertising, it will certainly have to close down. This has already happened for other smaller publications; panelist Ahmed Abdul Malik noted that three magazines died out because they could not garner enough advertisements.

But advertisements in private media often come through advertising agencies, of which privately-owned Qatar Media (QMedia) is the most prominent. QMedia is trying to seal exclusive agreements with most newspapers, panelist Mohamed Hijji noted. Panelist Abdul Malik said this agency is “exerting pressure to prevent the publishing of advertisements that do not go through it.”

Hijji acknowledged that advertising agencies concentrate on advertisements in the printed media because they are thought to be more effective than outdoor advertisements and commercials in the broadcast media. He argued that in Qatar, where the literacy rate is about 90 percent, newspapers make for effective advertising.

There was emphasis by some panelists on the need to reduce the number of advertisements in the printed media. Panelist Mohamed Al-Musfir, who used to be the editor-in-chief of *Al-Raya* daily newspaper, noted that advertisements occasionally make up about 45 percent of the newspaper’s contents. Mohamed Hijji went further, saying that advertisements sometimes constitute more than 50 percent of the newspaper’s content. He argued that there must be a set ceiling for commercial content in relation to editorial material in printed media. “This is because of newspaper’s excessive dependence on advertisements,” he said.

Meanwhile, panelist Jaber Al-Harami said there is a growing concern about the dominance of commercial content in his newspaper *Al-Sharq*. “We give priority to editorial content,” he said, adding that on occasions when a specific article needs to be published on a page that contains an advertisement, the newspaper calls the advertiser and lets them choose between moving it to another page, delaying or even canceling the advertisement altogether. Some panelists noted that on some occasions, newspapers may increase the number of pages to accommodate a higher number of advertisements.

Panelists agreed that the government does not give private newspapers any subsidies. Newspapers used to receive funding from the state more than a decade ago, panelist Hashim Karrar said. But since subsidies were suspended,

newspapers depend on their own sources of income to survive. Some ministries provide advertisements in the form of tenders and other official announcements, but these constitute only a small portion of the total volume, and the government does not use advertisements as a tool to pressure or persuade newspapers, panelists said.

Market research by Qatari media is not common, according to panelists. Occasionally, however, foreign companies may do some market research about media outreach in the region. In 2006, a French company did some market research for the whole Gulf region including Qatar, panelist Jaber Al-Harami noted. Al-Harami said *Al-Sharq* is planning to distribute a questionnaire in the newspaper. To encourage readers to participate, it will give away prizes to those who participate in the survey.

Furthermore, newspapers do not often measure their impact in the market or their readership levels, panelists agreed. There is also no transparency in terms of circulation of the different newspapers and no independent entity to confirm or refute circulation figures. A panelist said some newspapers claiming to be the most widely read may hire private research companies to prove their claims. Such attempts are often not transparent and biased in their results. "You can bring a company from abroad to do the market research. But when the company is brought by you, you will turn out to be the best," he said, noting how the public may be easily misled by such surveys.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Qatar Objective Score: 1.83

The weakest point in the MSI evaluation of Qatar's media for this year, as was the case for last year, is in the role of supporting institutions. MSI panelists gave this objective a low score of 1.83, which is a noticeable decline compared to last year's score of 2.03. There are no unions in Qatar, and it is the only GCC member that does not have a journalists' association of any sort. There are also no independent NGOs dealing with the media. Applications to form them are rare and usually go through bureaucratic procedures that may take years. Journalism curriculum in general is substandard. Short-term training programs are useful to a certain degree but participation is limited, particularly by Qatari nationals. Meanwhile, panelists agreed that the liberal economic policies of the country allow newspapers to import printing and other material directly without governmental interference. Similarly, they can sell their products freely, but access to the Internet is only allowed through a mostly government-owned Internet service provider (ISP).

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As a result, Indicators 1 through 3, covering trade associations, professional associations and NGOs received poor scores. Indicators 4 and 5, dealing with academic journalism programs and short-term in-serve training received scores slightly above a 2. Indicators 6 and 7, which consider access to printing facilities and distribution channels, showed the only strength, scoring more than a point higher than the overall average.

No trade association has been formed for media owners and there are no plans in sight for such an association, panelists said. The small number of newspapers operating in the country makes such a move of little significance, some panelists noted. However, occasionally, editors-in-chief and general managers of different newspapers meet to coordinate their moves for the good of the newspaper industry, panelist Jaber Al-Harami said. But such coordination efforts are not done on an institutional level between the newspapers. Panelist Abdulaziz Al-Sayed confirmed such coordination, but he noted that they may take place "for raising prices," referring to the prices of advertisements and sales. Panelist Mohamed Hijji said that all Qatari newspapers are members of the Gulf Press Association (GPA). Established in 2005 in Bahrain, the GPA is a regional independent organization meant to develop and coordinate between newspapers in the GCC region.

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.

The situation is not much better for the journalism community as a whole. Despite waiting for more than five years, the Qatari Journalists Association has not been given a license to operate despite the urgent need for such a body, panelists said. There are no obvious reasons for not allowing the formation of the association, whose role would be to protect journalists' rights and promote journalism practices and standards in the country. But panelist Mohamed Hijji said he believes the issuance of the license has been deliberately delayed to ensure that the association is allowed to operate only after the anticipated new press law is approved.

Despite this deficiency, panelist Aiman Gaballah noted that some of the expatriate journalists working in Qatar are members of their own country's journalists syndicate or regional advocacy groups.

Similarly, there are no NGOs supporting press freedom in the country. There are also no international or regional NGOs operating in Qatar, panelists said. The only body that may be relevant to press freedom is the National Human Rights Committee, which is a semi-independent organization financed by the government. Panelist Jaber Al-Harami said the Committee is striving to support human rights issues including press freedom, but he acknowledged the non-existence of an NGO that deals directly with the media.

Meanwhile, some panelists noted that the low level of activity in the civil society sector is due to the lack of local activists willing to move press freedom forward. Despite the fact that law 14 of 2004 allows the formation of independent assemblies and associations, apart from an association for journalists, no applications were submitted to form an association that would support the media. Panelist Mohamed Hijji summed up this issue by saying "I believe the biggest challenge is the lack of national cadres," meaning that most of the problems facing journalism in Qatar could be resolved if there were a sufficient number of locals involved in journalism.

At the academic level, bachelor degree graduates of the Mass Communication and Information Science Department of Qatar University are usually not ready to start working as journalists, most panelists said. A panelist noted that Qatar University seems to like hiring Western university scholars, particularly from the United States and the United Kingdom, but he believes that the university's media academicians are not sufficiently qualified. Some panelists did acknowledge that steps are being taken by the university to enhance the program's quality.

Another problem pointed out by a number of MSI panelists is the lack of enthusiasm and desire among Qatari students to work as journalists. According to panelist Abdul Malik, "only

20 percent of its graduates do enter the media profession." Many graduates tend to seek jobs at governmental agencies, preferably as employees in the public relations departments. Other weak points of the academic program are the lack of sufficient technical training and too much focus on theoretical classes, some panelists said.

Short-term training programs on the other hand, are helping in qualifying fresh university graduates. There are various programs and opportunities offered to young graduates willing to enhance their skills. Among the most popular are courses offered at the Al Jazeera Media Training and Development Centre, which focuses on providing training to potential and current Al Jazeera journalists and media workers. Meanwhile, Dar Al-Sharq Center for Information, Studies and Training focuses on trainees working for the local media. But not all panelists were satisfied with those training programs. Hashim Karrar of *Al-Watan* newspaper complained that the courses, which usually last from seven to ten days, are too short to develop substantial new skills. One panelist went as far as claiming that those training programs "never graduate journalists," noting that upon completing those courses, graduates do not pursue a career in journalism at all.

Panelists agreed however that newsprint and other printing material is imported directly through the publishing companies themselves and sometimes through private agencies that operate outside of governmental control. Each of the daily newspapers has its own printing press while smaller publications print at one of many private printing presses available.

Newspapers and other commercial periodicals are sold at points defined by the publishing company without governmental restrictions. However, the government banned selling papers at crossroads to protect salesmen from the potential health hazards caused by long hours of exposure to sunlight and extreme humidity, panelist Hashim Karrar said. When it comes to distributing newspapers, given Qatar's small area, each individual publishing company has its own distribution unit that covers the whole country, which is just over eleven square kilometers in area.

The only ISP in the country is Qatar Telecom, which allows its subscribers access without discrimination. Panelist Mohamed Hijji mentioned plans to allow new private companies to operate a separate ISP, giving more options to the general public. Meanwhile, some foreign privately-owned broadcast centers do exist and the content they broadcast is not monitored or filtered by the state.

List of Panel Participants

Abdulaziz Al-Sayed, presenter, Qatar Broadcasting Corporation, Doha

Ahmed Abdul Malik, media expert and researcher, Doha

Mohammed Al-Musfir, lecturer, Qatar University, Doha

Hapashie Roshdie, journalist, *Al-Watan*, Doha

Hashim Karrar, editor, *Al-Watan*, Doha

Jaber Al-Haram, deputy editor-in-chief, *Al-Sharq*, Doha

Mohammed Hijji, assistant editor-in-chief, *Al-Arab*, Doha

Aiman Gaballah, deputy editor-in-chief, Al Jazeera, Doha

There were also two additional participants whose names were kept anonymous based upon their request.

Moderator

Walid Al-Saqaf, media consultant, Gulf Forum for Citizenship, Sana'a, Yemen

The Qatar study was coordinated by, and conducted in partnership with, Gulf Forum for Citizenship, Muscat, Oman.