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The confluence of several negative developments affected the media adversely in 2008. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's government continued to clamp down on civil society, freedom of expression, and the media, detaining more than 30 journalists and putting more pressure on minority-language publications and writers. In the second half of 2008, as Iran moved closer to its June 2009 presidential elections, the government shut down two of Iran's most prominent reformist publications, the daily *Kargozaran*, and the weekly *Shahrvande-Emrooz*. Then in late 2008, it shut down seven arts and culture publications in one day.

In all, about thirty publications were shut down in 2008, many of them in minority-concentrated areas such as Kordestan, East and West Azerbaijan provinces, and the regions in the south populated by Iranian Arabs.

In August, Iran's conservative parliament reversed a 2004 law that guaranteed a randomly selected jury from the general public for media crimes to its former 2000 version, which mandates that the press jury be handpicked by heads of conservative government organs.

Also over the last year, the Supreme Council for National Security fully standardized its procedure of controlling media coverage through directives sent to newspaper editors. According to Reporters Without Borders, Tehran's chief prosecutor Said Mortazavi is in regular touch with newspaper editors "to demand their silence on some subjects and to dictate their front page to them."¹ These directives became so frequent over the last two years that the Association of Iranian Journalists (AoIJ) issued a statement protesting the illegality of this procedure. Not long thereafter, in June 2008, the Ministry of Labor announced that the AoIJ, which had been actively working for the rights of journalists since 1999, would be dissolved.

The launch of new foreign entrants into the market, chief among them BBC Persian TV, caused the migration of young Iranian journalists to Persian-language media abroad in 2008. There is no exact data, but some sources estimate that more than 500 journalists have left Iran for positions abroad. The new foreign channels broadcast uncensored news and programming into Iran that Iranian media is unable to provide for viewers. However, this migration means there are fewer journalists left inside Iran who are willing to push the envelope. The government has in effect silenced the media and civil society so effectively that it is now virtually unchallenged, and dictates the parameters under which the media is allowed to operate.

Despite a large degree of adversity, journalism remains a prestigious career field, as demonstrated by the large number of university journalism graduates. It appears that the more restrictions Iranian journalists have to put up with, the more value they see in their own profession, and the harder they work on improving their craft.

¹ Reporters Without Borders, 2008 Iran Annual Report, <http://www.rsf.org/en-rapport153-iran.html>

IRAN AT A GLANCE

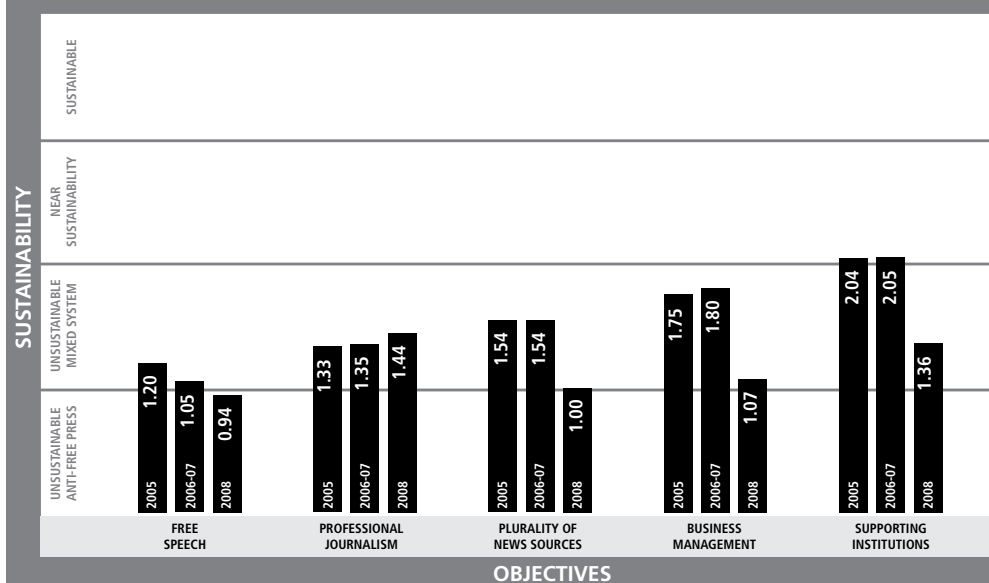
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 66,429,284 (July 2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Tehran
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Persian 51%, Azeri 24%, Gilaki and Mazandarani 8%, Kurd 7%, Arab 3%, Lur 2%, Baloch 2%, Turkmen 2%, other 1% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 98% (Shia 89%, Sunni 9%), other (includes Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian, and Baha'i) 2% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Persian and Persian dialects 58%, Turkic and Turkic dialects 26%, Kurdish 9%, Luri 2%, Balochi 1%, Arabic 1%, Turkish 1%, other 2% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2008-Atlas):** \$251.5 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2008)
- > **GNI per capita (2008-PPP):** \$10,840 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2008)
- > **Literacy rate:** 77% (male 83.5%, female 70.4%) (2002 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** Supreme Leader Ali Hoseini-Khamenei (since June 4, 1989)

MEDIA SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:**
Print: About 500 national publications; Radio: 9 national stations, and more than 100 local stations, all state-owned; Television: 6 national TV stations in Persian, 1 Arabic station, the *Sahar* network in various languages, and 1 English news network (all state-owned)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Largest paper in terms of circulation is the governmental *Hamshahri*, at a circulation of about 300,000 to 400,000, followed by the governmental *Iran* and *Jame-Jam*; published circulation numbers are not available, though it has been estimated that the daily circulation of newspapers lies at around 3 million. The reformist daily with the largest circulation is *Etemade-Melli* with about 42,000, followed by *Etemaad* with a circulation of about 30,000
- > **Broadcast ratings:** *Payam Radio* is generally believed to be the most popular radio station, followed by *Javan Radio* (Youth Radio); overall broadcast ratings are not available
- > **News agencies:** IRNA, ISNA, IRIBNEWS, ITNA, Moj News Agency, Qods News Agency, ISCA, IPNA, IANA, SNN, Advar, Aftab, Fars, Mehr, Raja, Rasa, Alborz, Press TV News, Cultural Heritage News Agency, Ana News Agency, Arya News Agency, Center for Young Journalists News Agency, Shabestan News Agency, IKNA- Quranic News Agency of Iran, Shana-News Agency of Oil and Energy, Resa News Agency, Iran Book News Agency, Pana News Agency (Center for Student Journalists), ITKA News Agency.
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 23,000,000 (2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: IRAN



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.

Due to the repressive environment in Iran, IREX did not conduct a panel discussion in Iran. This chapter represents research conducted on the situation and discussions with various professionals knowledgeable about the situation in Iran. The names of those contacted will not be published to protect their personal security. This chapter therefore provides a summary of the state of the media in Iran.

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Iran Objective Score: 0.94

Since the election of President Ahmadinejad in 2005, there has been an intensified crackdown on freedom of expression in general, and on the press in particular. This is a reversal of the trend that began during the two-term presidency of reform-minded President Mohammad Khatami. Although more than one hundred newspapers were shut down in 2000 after the “spring of freedom,” the government was aspiring to ideals of greater freedom. Now, not only do moderate publications get shut down frequently, but the government has also reversed the social and political trend toward greater democratic aspirations by suppressing civil society.

In both letter and spirit, Iran’s constitutional provisions fall short in fully guaranteeing free speech and freedom of expression for the media. At the very least, they leave a lot of room for interpretational abuse. The constitution was adopted following the 1979 revolution, and amended again in 1989, after the country’s devastating 8-year war with Iraq. For years, experts and journalists have argued that Iran’s constitution, in its Article 24 titled “Freedom of the Press,” provides the necessary protection for the media’s freedom of expression. The article reads, “Publications and the press have freedom of expression except when it is detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam or the rights of the public. The details of this exception will be specified by law.”

The constitution, in Article 23, also states that “the investigation of individuals’ beliefs is forbidden, and no one may be molested or taken to task simply for holding a certain belief.” However, Iran’s press is discriminated against based on the views and beliefs of its writers and editors. Reporters charged with inciting the public to act against the Islamic Republic have been thrown in jail without justification.

The Iranian Press Law was formulated in the first parliament following the revolution, amended in 1986, and set the legal framework for media activity in Iran. The government frequently uses clauses under Article 6 of the Press Law to prosecute “offenders” and limit freedom of expression. Many of these clauses are vague and open-ended, and

include phrases that vilify journalists for “publication of issues that are against Islam and damaging to the foundation of the Islamic Republic,” or “inciting people or groups to perpetrating acts against the security, honor, and interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran inside or outside of Iran.”

In 2000, the outgoing conservative *Majles*, or parliament, ratified a set of amendments to the Press Law that dealt a serious blow to the rights of media. As noted in last year’s report, the Press Supervisory Board expanded by two members, guaranteeing a conservative majority. The two new members were determined to be a seminary professor from the religious city of Qom, and a member of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, a body responsible for promoting the role of Islam in the cultural field.

Article 34 of the Press Law requires that press offenses be prosecuted in a general court before a specially constituted press jury. Under articles 12 and 36 of the Press Law, prosecutions are initiated by a council within the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, which is empowered to refer cases to the press court. But in many instances, other courts have been used to punish media professionals. Additionally, newspapers and media outlets are often closed down by an administrative order, by the special court for clergy, as well as by the revolutionary court despite the constitution’s stipulation in article 168 that “political and press offences will be tried openly and in the presence of a jury...”

More often than not in the past three decades, journalists have been tried in closed sessions, without jury, and sometimes even by the revolutionary court, which does not even have a jury in its makeup. The practice of trying journalists without a press jury became more frequent after the 2000 amendments, one of which stipulated that not only the editor-in-chief would be held responsible for published material, but also writers. According to the 2008 Freedom House Report, the Press Court has extensive power to prosecute journalists for such vaguely worded offenses as “insulting Islam” and “damaging the foundations of the Islamic Republic.” But acting authorities do not bestow the benefit of jury trials on writers, and try them as criminals according to the Islamic penal code on libel (Article 697).

Since 2008, Iranian intelligence and security forces have detained a number of important women’s rights activists, journalists, students, and human rights defenders, often charging them with “acting against national security.” The courts have typically convicted activists on these charges and sentenced them to lengthy prison terms. Some prominent examples include Mohammad Sadiq Kaboudvand, a Kurdish journalist and founder of the Human Rights Organization of Kurdistan, Emadeddin Baghi, journalist and founder of the Association for Defense of Prisoners’ Rights, Zaynab

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Bayazidi, a 26-year old journalist and women's rights activist, and Parvin Ardalan, a leading women's rights activist and winner of the 2008 Olaf Palme prize. Nahid Keshavarz, Jelveh Javaheri, and Maryam Hosseinkhah, all colleagues of Ardalan, were sentenced along with Ardalan to six months imprisonment for articles they published in the on-line magazines *Zanestan* and *Tanir Barabari*.

The state has also continued its intimidation of dual-national journalists, accusing them of assisting the U.S. government's attempts to promote regime change in Iran. The latest high-profile cases include that of Hossein Derakhshan, an outspoken Iranian blogger who was arrested in late 2008 and accused of spying for Israel, and Roxanna Saberi, a journalist who had previously worked for various media outlets including the BBC, NPR, and Feature News Story, but had remained in Iran to do research for a book three years after her permits had been revoked in 2005.

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.

Yet another deterioration of the rights of the media came when the current *Majles* decided in August 2008 to revert the part of the Press Law concerning the assemblage of the press jury from its 2004 status to a previous version, ratified in 2000 by the conservative fifth *Majles*. While according to the 2004 version jury members would be chosen by random lottery from the general public, the 2000 version stipulates that a handful of officials heading conservative organs such as the judiciary and the policy council of Friday prayer Imams will choose a pool of 21 people of "public respect and trust" for the duration of two years. As a result, the same pool of 21 government-picked officials in Tehran (and 14 in the provinces) serves as jury for two years.

According to Article 3 of the Press Law, "the press has the right to publish the opinions, constructive criticisms, suggestions, and explanations of individuals and government officials for public information while duly observing the Islamic teachings and the best interest of the community." However, as mentioned before, the ambiguous language of the Press Law regarding observing Islamic teachings and the interest of the community has been an area of contention. This has given the Judiciary and the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance wide ranging opportunities to censor, ban, and find offenses at various media outlets. Furthermore, vaguely-worded legislation serves the judiciary in sentencing journalists. Article 500 of the penal code states that "Anyone who undertakes any form of propaganda against the state... will be sentenced to between three months and one year in prison," but leaves "propaganda" undefined.

Other additions to the Press Law in 2000 included provisions that any publisher or editor applying for a publication license from the Supervisory Board had to seek clearance from the Ministry of Intelligence, the Ministry of Justice, and the police, and that journalists were legally obliged to reveal their sources and could not criticize the constitution.

As for the parameters of the authority of the Press Supervisory Board, the law stipulates that in exceptional circumstances the Supervisory Press Board within the Ministry of Culture is empowered to close newspapers or magazines by administrative order before a trial. The two instances specified in the law are for insulting the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic or the "recognized sources of emulation" (*marja-e taghlid*), as well as for repeatedly insulting public morals. Another charge that has been frequently used since 2000 to arrest activists and journalists is a "threat to national security," often used by the Intelligence Ministry.

Another development indicative of the diminishing freedoms of the media was the lack of public debate about such freedom. While in past years reformist newspapers had published letters of protest by writers and intellectuals

asking for greater freedoms, in 2008 no such letters were to be found in the press as papers feared this would result in dissolution. Only the Association for the Defense of Press Freedom continues to issue statements against government action, and its statements get very little attention because they are only published online and exercise no weight on government policy.

Licensing does not appear to be fair, competitive, or objective. Conservative publishers and people with connections to government, especially those with the intention of publishing material that supports the conservative agenda, have much better chances of getting permits. A survey of all licenses issued in 2008 shows that most of the granted licenses were given to scientific and research publications belonging to universities and other higher education institutions. Those licenses that were granted to publications with a political orientation belonged to government organs or individuals connected in some way to the government, such as the quarterly *Foreign Affairs*, granted to Hassan Rohani, former head of Iran's Supreme Council of National Security and currently the managing director the Expediency Council's research institute, as well as the daily *Road to Progress*, granted to Mohammad Reza Bahonar, the conservative deputy speaker of Iran's parliament.

Currently, reformists have little chance of getting permits for new publications. What they have managed to achieve several times, however, is to revive suspended permits that were previously issued for non-political publications.

One example is Iran's highest-quality news magazine of recent times, *Shahr-vande-Emrooz*, which was run on a permit that had been previously issued to a publication that was supposed to deal mostly with "economic, cultural, and sports" subjects. After seventy weekly issues, the magazine was shut down in November 2008, and the Press Supervisory Board's official charge was that the magazine's editors had acted against articles 7 and 12 of the Press Law, which prescribe that publications must adhere in content to the subjects for which the permit has been issued. In 2008, the Press Supervisory Board withdrew licenses for other publications and made it increasingly difficult for reformist publications to obtain permits—especially those with a political and cultural emphasis.

Meanwhile, other important and popular publications had their permits withdrawn, including the daily newspaper *Kargozaran* on December 31 2008, which next to *Etemaad* and *Etemad-e Melli*, was the only other high-circulation reformist newspaper of import. Also losing their licenses were *Zanan*, a progressive women's magazine that had been publishing for 16 years, *Tehran Emrooz* (a daily with leanings toward Tehran mayor Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf, a rival of

Currently, reformists have little chance of getting permits for new publications. What they have managed to achieve several times, however, is to revive suspended permits that were previously issued for non-political publications.

Ahmadinejad), and several arts and culture publications, including the progressive monthly *Haft* as well as the biweekly *Donyaye Tasvir*.

Several provincial publications were also closed down in 2008, and in general, provincial journalists, especially Kurdish ones, were put under greater pressures, facing prison terms and other fines. Among the most well-known publications to have been shut down were the Kurdish weekly *Karftoo*, the Lori weekly *Bootak* in the province of Ilam, and the weekly *Bahar-e Boroujerd*.

Serious speculation exists that the closure of such high-quality publications was in preparation for the 2009 presidential elections, as Ahmadinejad was trying to secure his victory without contest or a fraud investigation. Indeed, Iran's former Prime Minister Mir-Hossein Mousavi, who was urged to run as a candidate, said he would only run if he was able to have a media platform. Without a newspaper, any reformist candidate is unable to express his opinions through the non-electronic media, since all government print outlets as well as state television and radio support pro-state sanctioned conservative candidates. However, Mousavi, who is also liked by some factions within the conservatives, was ultimately able to obtain a license for a newspaper by the name of *Green*.

Although restrictions on foreign press and blocking of international news websites are a common occurrence in the Islamic Republic, there are no specified limitations mentioned in law. The blocking of international news websites or private weblogs is often justified by authorities on grounds of "national security," "moral corruption," and "threat to the values of the Islamic Revolution." Currently, the *Majles* is working on ways of legally sanctioning limitations on Internet access. According to the BBC, reformist and opposition journalists have increasingly moved onto the Internet, opening news sites and blogs to bypass press censorship. Iran's Internet filtering system blocks the most prominent sites, but despite authorities' efforts, Iranians are still able to receive information that challenges state broadcasters.²

² http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4804328.stm

However, it should be noted here that while non-governmental media are barred access to certain news sites such as the BBC Persian Service or the U.S. government funded Radio Farda and Voice of America, government media such as the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) and Press TV have ready access to these sites and all others, creating uneven and unfair access to information between governmental and private media. Section 5 of the Press Law specifies that “acquiring and publication of domestic and foreign news used to increase public knowledge...” is the legal right of all media. As such, all media have access to the big foreign news agencies, such as Reuters, Agence France Presse, as well as the American Bloomberg News and Associated Press.

Journalists are required by law to obtain a permit from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance for their reporting. The license can be revoked at any time and must be renewed every few months. Also, journalists intending to report on politically sensitive issues and matters of national security must obtain permission from the ministry in advance.

In general, there are no specified limitations on journalism schools and they are subject to the overall laws of the country. While there are also no specified legal limitations for joining state media, informally, there are certain selection procedures that are well known. Those employed by state run media must conform to the political and ideological stance of the government. State media jobs are highly sought after as they are well-paid, and often require political connections to secure.

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).

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Iran Objective Score: 1.44

The Iranian press has been at the forefront of political battles, and while the state has tried to diminish the importance of the media by censoring it, sensitivity towards the media has also boosted its importance. Publishing a high-quality publication has become a serious goal for many. For example, the front page of *Jame'e* newspaper, one of Iran's most popular newspapers in 1999, pales in comparison to one of the high-circulation paper's front pages today. The headline, for example, often had no relation to the front page photo in the past. Overall journalistic reporting in Iran has made strong gains.

The case of the impeached Interior Minister Ali Kordan is a positive sign for professional journalism. According to a CNN report, the proceedings received a large amount of press and culminated in a vote of 188 for and 45 against impeachment, despite Ahmadinejad's claim that the impeachment was illegal.³ Kordan had lied about his educational degrees, claiming that England's Oxford University had bestowed him with an honorary law degree. The fact that the state did not interfere at all in the press coverage of the issue shows less eagerness to censor subjects that are not viewed as a threat to Iran's national security or the regime's stability.

Objectivity is difficult to maintain when Iranian journalists risk imprisonment without justification. One trend that has been on the rise is the practice of giving journalists gifts for attending press conferences, or even after interviews (usually gold coins). One story exposing such government ministry handouts resulted in the dismissal of that ministry's public relations manager. Due to the larger number of journalism school graduates in the media, the level of understanding and practice of ethical journalism has improved within the past years.

Due to the risk of closure, there is widespread self-censorship among Iranian journalists and editors. Many reformist journalists have experienced interrogations and sometimes punishment for their writing, and have seen their papers shut down. According to the International Press Institute, journalists who are jailed often end up at the Evin prison, infamous for torture. Charges of spying or collaborating with foreign enemies are frequently waged against Iranian journalists; both offenses carry heavy penalties. While held in solitary confinement, prisoners can be abused, denied medical treatment, and interrogated without representation.⁴

³ <http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/meast/11/04/iran.impeachment/index.html>

⁴ International Press Institute, May 2008, [http://www.freemedia.at/index.php?id=227&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=2519&cHash=1fc10f8e69](http://www.freemedia.at/index.php?id=227&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=2519&cHash=1fc10f8e69)

The media cover most key events, but also cannot report on some of Iran's most important stories. Certain subjects are clearly off-limits, including anything seen as insulting Islam and the Prophet Mohammad and criticism of the supreme leader or other pro-government persons or institutions. There are also several other subjects that are deemed very sensitive. The government sends out written directives to editors that ban them from covering certain subjects, or asks them not to cover a subject in a certain manner. Sensitive subjects include Iran's nuclear program, student demonstrations, coverage of certain persona-non-grata such as former politicians who have been sidelined, increasing energy prices, international sanctions, negotiations with the U.S., and inflation.

The AoIJ made a public statement that the Supreme Council for National Security's practice of sending these directives was in clear violation of the constitution as well as Iran's Press Law. In its statement, the AoIJ noted: "The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance must be at the forefront of complying with the law. Sending letters to publications ordering them to comply with illegal demands is against article 4 of the press law of the Islamic Constitution." After making this public statement, the AOIJ came under increased pressure and its status was declared suspended until further notice on June 24, 2008. Furthermore, another directive was sent to newspaper editors instructing them not to publish any material relating to the association.

Pay levels vary across the board, but generally, government media staffers, as well as people working in broadcasting, are much better paid than journalists working for independent press outlets. Not surprisingly, considering the pressures as well as low pay levels in independent media, many young Iranian journalists who used to work for the independent press have left the country for jobs with Persian-language media organizations in the West.

Overall, there is no serious risk of entertainment eclipsing serious news in Iranian media, as viewers and readers continue to be interested in political reporting. However, people often have to get news and information from multiple sources in order to obtain a more complete, balanced picture on any subject.

The oil windfall of the past years has meant that government media organizations have updated media technologies, but lack the proper skills and staffing to put them to full use. Independent media organizations have the necessary equipment to operate, but do not have access to the most current technology.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Iran Objective Score: 1.00

Due to restrictive government measures in Iran, the variety of news sources and opinions within the official and sanctioned realm is limited. However, this does not mean that Iranians do not have access to other worldwide sources. This is in large part due to modern information and communications technology, including satellite television and the Internet. A large majority of Iranians, even those living in small towns and villages, have access to satellite television. Although owning a satellite dish is officially banned, the state generally does not enforce the law. Now and then, such as in early spring 2008, the government will announce a crackdown on satellite dishes and round up some to set an example. During these periods, people will often take their satellite dishes down from rooftops, only to install them a few days later.

Market research companies estimate that some 23 million Iranians, close to 35 percent of the population, use the Internet, a growth rate of 9000 percent since 2000. However, satellite television viewing and Internet access are dependent on income, and the majority of Iranians do not have personal access to these communications media. Iran's state broadcasting is the sole source of news, information and entertainment for many Iranians lacking such means in the provinces. A recent study has shown that even among city-dwellers and the young, the majority of Iranians receive their information mostly from state television and radio. Within state media, the diversity of views and opinions is

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.

While Iran's most popular blogs oppose the political regime, the stronger their voice becomes, the greater the risk they will be shut down. Although reformist sites may be at greatest risk for government censorship, it should be noted here that the government sometimes even shuts down conservative websites, as it did with the hard-line Fars New Agency in June 2008...

limited, although not totally uncritical. Radio Javan (Youth Radio), for example, is often irreverent and critical of the government.

As noted earlier, the press has seen a higher number of closures since President Ahmadinejad's government took office in June 2005, although the number of closures was high during Khatemi's term as well. A report by the AolJ stated that the profession has suffered in quality and financial stability since the conservative government began cracking down on independent newspapers. According to Freedom House, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance has banned or closed more than 100 publications since 2000.⁵ The true number may be nearly double, as closures continued to rise in preparation for Ahmadinejad's reelection campaign. The number of newspapers and periodicals published in 2008 decreased, down to about 2,800, with about 500 constituting national and Persian-language dailies, and the rest either specialist periodicals or regional publications in non-Persian languages. Kurdish newspapers were hardest hit in 2008, with about a dozen closed and their licenses revoked.

Iranians living in the cities, especially Tehran, have much better access to national newspapers. It can even be difficult to obtain national papers in larger cities, such as Mashhad or Esfahan. This is largely due to a dysfunctional distribution system. Rising inflation has also caused price increases by independent newspapers. Whereas an independent newspaper cost about IRR 1000 (\$0.10) in 2005, the same newspaper costs IRR 3000 (\$0.30) today. Still, due to government paper and ink subsidies, the price of newspapers continues to remain low, allowing most people the financial capability to purchase them.

Internet access is relatively inexpensive, although the need for a computer may present a hindrance to poorer Iranians. In the past few years, Internet sites have taken up the role that the reformist press used to play. Currently, however, the Iranian government blocks about 5 million sites, including most reformist sites. In November 2006, government passed a law that all websites dealing with Iran must register with the Ministry of Culture. While the state has a multitude of legal options for closing down sites, this law is often invoked to shut down websites that have not registered with the government, in fear of being denied a permit. Still, according to Freedom House, "websites continue to communicate opinions that the country's print media would never publish, with both reform advocates and conservatives promoting their political agendas."⁶ While Iran's most popular blogs oppose the political regime, the stronger their voice becomes, the greater the risk they will be shut down. Although reformist sites may be at greatest risk for government censorship, it should be noted here that the government sometimes even shuts down conservative websites, as it did with the hard-line *Fars New Agency* in June 2008, for reporting a scoop on the changing head of Iran's Central Bank.

There are close to 1,000 operational Internet Service Providers in Iran, and since November 2006, all have been prohibited by law to provide larger than 256K broadband service to non-governmental or private organizations or persons. While most Internet users know how to circumvent Internet filters, they are unable to bypass the bandwidth limitation, making the viewing or downloading of large audio or video files difficult or impossible.

Satellite television and Internet aside, there are about twenty Persian news agencies working and producing news in Iran today. They range from governmental news agencies such as the Islamic Republic News Agency to privately owned agencies such as the Iran Labor News Agency (ILNA) and Moj. The July 2007 suspension of ILNA was lifted a year later, readmitting an important voice to news agencies. The moderate news agency had covered protests by the truck drivers' union, as well as teachers, students, and women before its closure. The news agencies' reporting is used by print publications, and they are quoted for their work.

While print media and news agencies can be privately owned, broadcast media cannot. There are no independently produced broadcast programs, but some variety exists through the channels' content. Channels 1 and 2, for example, focus on politics and more serious programming, while Channel 6 is a 24-hour news channel.

⁵ Press Freedom, Freedom House <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=251&year=2008>

⁶ Freedom House data, [http://www.freemedia.at/index.php?id=227&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=2519&cHash=1fc10f8e69](http://www.freemedia.at/index.php?id=227&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=2519&cHash=1fc10f8e69)

The variety in news and views has been widely enhanced since the launch of BBC Persian TV in January 2009. While a large number of satellite-owning viewers were watching Voice of America's Persian-language news broadcast out of Washington, DC, the launch of BBC's Persian TV is said to have attracted a much larger viewership since its launch. Many of the journalists working for the BBC were working as journalists in Iran until recently, so they have a strong grasp of Iranian affairs and good credibility.

Financial ownership of print publications is often obscure, even among the largest and most influential. While the Press Law specifies that the managing director and editor-in-chief of every publication must be made public, there are no laws that require public disclosure of monetary sponsors or investors of publications.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Iran Objective Score: 1.07

There is a serious business management crisis within Iranian media, which can largely be attributed to state subsidies. Because the state heavily subsidizes all government publications broadcast outlets, there is not true competition among the media. The state also subsidizes paper and ink for private publications, although to a lesser degree. The Iranian government spends about \$30 million annually on newspaper subsidies, and only about 20 percent of that goes to independent publications. In addition, government owned publications and papers do not pay taxes.

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.

Advertisements are the main source of income for many newspapers, but there is a substantial imbalance of advertising revenues between private and government owned publications. This is due to the fact that all government organs or businesses give their advertisements to publications owned by the government. Privately owned publications cannot tap into this important source of revenue.

The cost of paper and printing increased substantially in 2008, but government subsidies in this area have not changed. Reformist newspapers have more trouble securing funding, as they cannot guarantee returns to their investors.

While the allocated budget for research of communications and expansion of telecommunication networks and media in the government budget (March 2008 - March 2009) makes up nearly 10 percent of the overall annual budget, most of this media budget goes to state-run IRIB.

The largest government subsidies are given to state television and radio, which also have high revenues independently with a monopoly on broadcast advertising as the only permitted broadcast media in Iran. Also, larger government dailies such as *Kayhan*, *Ettela'at*, *Hamshahri*, *Iran* and others receive subsidies such as office hardware as well as extra funds that allow for higher salaries, while independent publications only receive paper and ink subsidies. Furthermore, it is within the purview of the Press Supervisory Board to determine the amount of subsidy that each publication receives, which means that within the current conservative climate, moderate newspapers receive little in subsidies.

The subscription system does not function in Iran because of a missing distribution system. Subscription revenues are important for weekly or monthly publications, but daily papers rely solely on government subsidies, advertisement, and kiosk sales for their revenue. Readers often pay motorbike drivers to deliver the papers of their choice to their homes, and they rarely arrive before noon. Several newspapers have started in the past only to shut down weeks later because they were unable to sustain themselves.

The most successful newspaper business venture is the governmental *Hamshahri*, with a circulation of about 300,000 - 400,000. *Hamshahri* remains cost effective because of its large classifieds section, which is the largest section of its kind in any newspaper. Sales remain high because anyone who wants to buy or sell something must buy *Hamshahri*.

Generally, great secrecy surrounds circulations numbers, as papers do not publicize their circulation. Similarly, little is done in way of broadcast ratings or market research, and if any is done, the information is not public. Because the state keeps a monopoly over all broadcast media, any surveys and

statistics could be considered sensitive material and published data is nonexistent.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Iran Objective Score: 1.36

The AoIJ is arguably the only functioning journalists' professional association. Founded in 1999 with a permit from the Ministry of Labor, it has seen its member base grow from 730 to a current membership of about 4,000. It is the only recognized Iranian member of the International Federation of Journalists.

Over the years, the association has actively represented its members' rights vis-à-vis employers, providing members with traffic cards to enable them access to off-limit zones, and invested in a fund to provide members with the opportunity to purchase co-op apartments. However, the association has also been active in providing legal defense for charged or detained journalists (including most of the high-profile journalists who were jailed, such as Akbar Ganji, Emadeddin Baghi, and Sina Motallebi), as well as helping meet the needs of the families of jailed journalists. Furthermore, it has been vocal in protesting certain government policies, and has set up a training where students can study journalism and mid-level professionals can learn new skills, or refresh old ones.

With the onset of Ahmadinejad's term, the government, which traditionally provided the funds for the association, started withdrawing its support, both financially and politically. While the members of the AoIJ are from both reformist and conservative media, the board tended to be occupied by journalists of reformist backgrounds, elected to their positions by AoIJ members. The government had expressed dissatisfaction with the nature of the board and repeatedly asked that conservative journalists occupy these positions. Then in June 2008, in an unprecedented move, the government declared that the association was deemed to have the necessary "criteria for dissolution," and cut all funding.

Simultaneously, the Ministry of Islamic Guidance and Culture declared that it was illegal for the press to publish material containing the name of the association, presumably because it had been declared illegal as an entity. This was a major blow to the journalism profession, as it showed the government's disregard for press rights as inscribed in the constitution. The International Federation of Journalists and Reporters Without Borders issued statements condemning the treatment of the AoIJ and calling for the removal of these measures. The AoIJ organized a protest the next day, and has continued activities while its case is pending.

It was not surprising that in March 2009 a new organization by the name of Association of Iranian Journalists and Reporters was established, with its board as well as the 250 general members all hailing from conservative media. Government media reported that this new association replaced the old AoIJ.

There are other press associations in Iran such as Iran's Association of Muslim Journalists, a conservative association that was in effect established to counter the AoIJ, the Association of Iranian Women Journalists, the Association of Young Journalists (connected to IRIB), and the Association for the Defense of Press Freedom. However, none offer the level of services and moral support of the AoIJ. The Association for the Defense of Press Freedom has since taken on more of the outreach and public awareness responsibilities of the AoIJ, although it, too, can only publish on the Internet and hold gatherings.

Despite the government's interference in professional societies, journalism education had improved over the last years. Journalism is perhaps one of the hardest jobs to hold in Iran, but there is a stream of young enthusiasts willing to enter the profession every year. There are about 370 journalism graduates annually that enter the job market. In October 2007, the AoIJ launched its own college of journalism, which is considered to be one of its shining accomplishments. The program is counted among the best in the country. Most journalism higher education departments belong to public universities that teach communications, such as Azad, Tehran, Imam Sadeq, Allameh Tabatabai, Elmi va Karbordi, and Sureh universities, as well as the Faculty of News and Journalism at IRIB.

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.

While journalism departments are numerous, the lack of connection between academic teaching centers and employers means many students are unable to find jobs after their graduation. According to one source, only about 7 percent of the approximate 350 annual graduates are able to land jobs in the media. Oftentimes due to the lack of practical experience on behalf of journalism professors, students graduate from their respective institutions ill-equipped to deal with the practical realities of the journalism industry.

As reported last year, other institutions, such as the IRNA News Agency, the IRIB, and the Center for Media Studies and Research, which is connected to the Ministry of Culture, offer short courses and workshops to current professionals.

List of Panel Participants

Due to the repressive environment in Iran, IREX did not conduct a panel discussion in Iran. This chapter represents research conducted on the situation and discussions with various professionals knowledgeable about the situation in Iran. The names of those contacted will not be published to protect their personal security. This chapter therefore provides a summary of the state of the media in Iran.