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KUWAIT

Kuwait ranks high in regional classifications for its relative media freedoms, but its status is somewhat insecure and fluctuates annually. In 2009, Kuwait led the Arab world in press freedom, earning a ranking of 60th in the Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF) *World Press Freedom Index*.¹ Yet serious concerns about self-censorship, bans on media outlets, and the risk of criminal penalties for journalists threaten Kuwait's standing.

Governmental attempts to limit free expression and hinder sectarian debate continued throughout 2009. In particular, the country's popular online media faced more stress in 2009, especially as the 2006 printing and publication law does not include protections for media on the Internet. Reportedly, the country's general prosecutor has drafted a bill that criminalizes promoting vice, incitement against the country's leadership, divulging state secrets, or insulting Islam on the web—hinting at more challenges for online media in the coming years.

In Kuwait, all newspapers are private, and most represent political groups. The strengths and weaknesses of the printing and publication law continue to be a source of debate in the media community. The law helped cause a media boom, sending many new papers to the press and providing an appeals process for refused applications. At the same time, the law expanded the scope of media crimes and stipulated prohibitions on materials that offend public morality or criticize Islam, the Emir, or the constitution. In addition, the number of media misdemeanors rose after Kuwait adopted the new law in 2008.

With its adoption of a new broadcasting law in 2007, the Kuwaiti parliament opened up licenses for new television channels and radio stations—but the legislation mirrors the restrictions and punishments included in the new printing and publication law. Although the number of television stations increased in 2008 and 2009, growth in the broadcast sector is not expected to match that seen in the print media. The popularity of online media and new media platforms, such as SMS news, offer ample alternatives.

Panelists also described the impact of the global financial crisis on Kuwait's media sector in 2009. Following the proliferation of newspapers in 2007-2008, no new newspapers appeared in 2009. Furthermore, publication of *Al Sawt* halted abruptly, leaving dozens of journalists unemployed.

¹ *World Press Freedom Index 2009*. Reporters Sans Frontières. Available at: <http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index-2009,1001.html>

KUWAIT AT A GLANCE

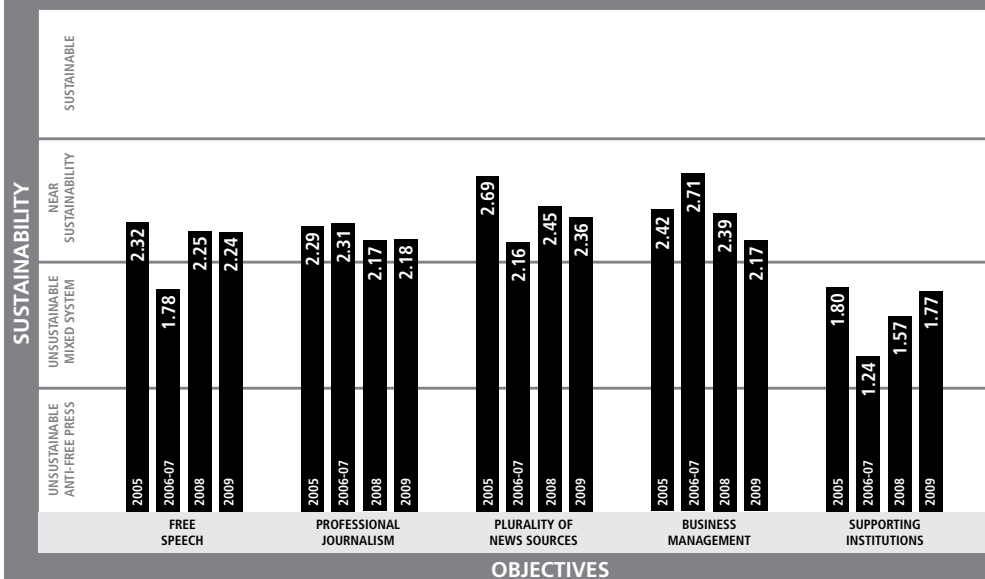
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 2,595,628 (July 2011 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Kuwait
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Kuwaiti 45%, other Arab 35%, South Asian 9%, Iranian 4%, other 7% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Sunni Muslim 70%, Shi'a Muslim 30%, other (includes Christian, Hindu, Parsi) 15% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages:** Arabic (official), English widely spoken (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2009-Atlas):** \$116.98 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **GNI per capita (2009-PPP):** \$53,890 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **Literacy rate:** 93.3% (male 94.4%, female 91.0%) (2005 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** Amir Sabah al Ahmad al Jabir al Sabah (since January 29, 2006)

MEDIA SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 14 Arabic language newspapers, 2 English language newspapers, some weekly newspapers, 70-75 magazines; Radio: 1 private (Marina FM) and many other state-owned stations; Television Stations: 1 private (Al Rai TV), 9 other restricted stations
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** N/A
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Kuwait News Agency; it has an independent budget and 33 bureaus and correspondents outside of Kuwait
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** \$375 million in 2007
- > **Internet usage:** 1.1 million (2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: KUWAIT



Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1): Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2): Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

Near Sustainability (2-3): Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media. Advances have survived changes in government and have been codified in law and practice. However, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism and the media business environment are sustainable.

Sustainable (3-4): Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives. Systems supporting independent media have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Kuwait Objective Score: 2.24

Kuwait's constitution guarantees the freedom of speech, and Kuwaiti citizens, with their diversity of political views and approaches, value this freedom. Article 36 of the Kuwaiti constitution outlines press freedom: "Freedom of opinion and scientific research is guaranteed. Every person has the right to express and propagate his opinion verbally, in writing or otherwise, in accordance with the conditions and procedures specified by law." Furthermore, Article 37 stipulates: "Freedom of the press, printing, and publishing is guaranteed in accordance with the conditions and manner specified by law."

But there are also vague, subjective laws that contradict key principles in the constitution, according to Iman Al Baddah, a journalist and writer. Some of these laws empower the authorities—particularly the Ministry of Information—to impose limitations on the press, and they have long prevented true implementation of free speech protections. Kuwaiti journalists are also painfully aware of "red lines" not to be crossed when covering certain topics, including the Emir, tribes, and religion.

Additionally, although the 2006 printing and publication law abolished imprisonment for journalists, often authorities deal with defamation actions under the criminal code. This law expanded the scope of media crimes, and many offenses are

According to Dahem Al Qahtani, a journalist at Al Rai, prison sentences are not provided for under the 2006 printing and publication law unless a journalist "insults God or the Emir," but Al Baddah noted that any citizen can sue a journalist, who may be punished according to penal law.

worded vaguely, leading to difficulties interpreting the law and understanding its implementation. Ghanem Al Najjar, a political science professor at Kuwait University, commented that the current printing and publication law expands the number of violations with which the press may be charged, and it reveals many deficiencies in Kuwait's legal fabric regarding media freedom.

According to Dahem Al Qahtani, a journalist at *Al Rai*, prison sentences are not provided for under the 2006 printing and publication law unless a journalist "insults God or the Emir," but Al Baddah noted that any citizen can sue a journalist, who may be punished according to penal law. Ibrahim Al Mlaifi, a journalist at *Al Arabi*, also noted that the laws in Kuwait permit litigation for political causes.

Panelists agreed that the real risk for journalists is that the printing and publication law opens up a dangerous path to penal law. At its most severe, this law may allow for a journalist to be sentenced to death for publishing anything "seeking to change the regime." Al Qahtani commented, "Journalists may be held in the state security headquarters—as though they threaten the country's security—while the mission of this state apparatus is to face terrorist groups."

Yet most of the panelists agreed that the judicial system in Kuwait supports journalists strongly—the panelists estimated that 99 percent of court decisions are in journalists' favor, especially regarding their right to protect sources. Al Najjar also remarked that Kuwait's media enjoy a high ceiling in the sense that no one other than the Emir is protected explicitly in the media, and the panelists pointed to more press criticism of the ruling family in 2009.

However, media outlets also face the threat of bans. RSF condemned the information minister's decisions to ban a satirical television program, *Sawtak Wasal*, on Scope TV, a private outlet, in August 2009, for its parody of Kuwaiti politicians.² RSF wrote, "The ban has triggered an outcry from

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.

² "Ban on satirical TV program damages Kuwait's image." Reporters Sans Frontières, September 1, 2009. Available at: <http://en.rsf.org/kuwait-ban-on-satirical-tv-programme-01-09-2009,34367.html>

civil society leaders and parliamentarians, who have voiced concern about this step backwards for free expression and the damage to Kuwait's reputation in the Arab world. At the same time, it has led to self-censorship on the part of other television stations, with Al Watan deciding to withdraw one of its own satirical programs."

No official restrictions guide the authority's approach to Internet media, although some panelists said that the Internet is covered by the provision of 2006 press law that mentions: "any other publishing tools." Beyond that, the prosecutor general, Hamed Al Othman, has said many times that there is a will to prepare legislation that criminalizes web content promoting vice, incitement against the country's leadership, divulging state secrets, or insulting Islam. He indicated that a draft bill is in progress that proposes sentences to up to one year in jail and/or a fine for convicted offenders, and seven years in prison if their victims are minors.

Regarding the freedom of expression more generally, the panelists pointed to cases in 2009 in which politicians paid a price for exercising this right. On April 17, police detained former member of parliament Dhaifallah Bu Ramya for his comments during an election rally. He declared that the minister of defense, Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al Sabah—a senior member of the ruling family—is unfit to become prime minister. Bu Ramya faced charges for questioning the powers of the Emir, who appoints the prime minister. After a three-day detention, authorities released Ramya on bail. A couple of days later, police detained parliamentary candidate Khalifa Al Kharafi for saying during a television interview that neither the Emir nor the defense minister possess the power needed to run the state. But no charges were brought against him.

According to Iman Hussein, a journalist at *Al Jarida*, licensing of newspapers is just. She said that many political groups with vastly different ideologies have launched newspapers. She added that political groups own many television stations also, although ownership is not always reflected in program content. Hussein commented that some people who have obtained newspaper licenses have failed to publish, perhaps because of the current market saturation.

Al Qahtani shared his view that licensing is no longer a problem in Kuwait, and Al Mlaifi agreed, noting that while few licenses were issued in 2009, this could be explained by low demand. In the event that a license is denied, the law now provides an appeals process, and the panelists pointed to progress with such efforts. Still, they also noted an indirect restriction: steep license fees. A newspaper must deposit \$950,000 to obtain a license, a television station must pay more than \$1 million, and a radio station must put down about \$300,000.

Television continues to be a weak medium in Kuwait, although some stations opened in 2009 and programs showed some progress with diversity and professionalism. In addition, some newspapers received television licenses along with their publication licenses. A handful of stations, including Al Rai, Al Watan, and Al Shahed, pair with newspapers. Many television channels have obtained licenses but still have not launched operations.

Market entry is relatively free for media outlets, once they pass licensing hurdles. Taxes do not apply, and panelists agreed that the parliament would likely never approve proposals to set new taxes. Kuwait is a tax-free country: there is no sales tax, and there is no individual income tax, other than *zakat*—charitable deductions required of Muslims.

Panelists agreed that crimes against journalists in Kuwait are very rare, and when they occur, usually individuals are responsible, rather than organized efforts. For example, sometimes police treat photographers, or journalists covering accidents, harshly. The panelists emphasized that greater punishment of such behavior would prevent its recurrence and hinder any police attempt to breach the law. According to Hussein, though, no incidents in Kuwait are serious enough to be labeled "crimes against journalists."

Public media, essentially Kuwait TV and the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), are fairly limited, leaving little basis on which to compare competitiveness with private media or evaluate favoritism toward state media. However, in one advantage for public media, typically the Ministry of Information releases its news through public channels.

Al Najjar noted that Kuwait has no public newspapers but it is difficult to classify newspapers outside of that, given that many fully represent the government but are owned by the private sector. It is also public knowledge that senior governmental officials finance and support some newspapers, so those outlets may receive preferential treatment in the form of special access to information—but the panelists said that happens only rarely.

Criticism of senior government officials, including ministers and the prime minister, remained widespread in 2009, and many lawsuits were filed in response. Media legal actions have increased in Kuwait recently, mostly through personal cases brought to courts by individuals—including deputies. Most panelists said that they consider it a very positive attribute of free speech that executive authorities bring cases to courts as opposed to unilateral action. Although the 2006 printing and publication law abolished imprisonment for journalists, often defamation actions fall under the criminal code. *Hesba* lawsuits (filed by individuals or groups that believe that God has been insulted) remain a concern, with

outspoken writers, filmmakers, and poets targeted. The law also mandates jail terms for anyone who “defames religion.” Defaming religion is punishable with a one-year prison term and a fine of about KWD 20,000 (about \$75,000). The number of such cases filed against journalists and television stations continues to increase. Many cases were filed during 2009, and most resulted in fines.

The panelists described two prominent libel cases heard in 2009. In November, police held journalist Mohammed Abdel Qader Al Jassem at the headquarters of the criminal investigation department, following a libel suit by Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser Mohamad Al Sabah. Al Jassem faced charges of making slanderous remarks against the prime minister during a *diwaniya*, a traditional meeting to discuss issues of the day. After Al Jassem refused to pay bail of KWD 1000 (about \$3,500), the police held him for 12 days, until the court set another hearing. He then paid the bail and was released.

In another case, police arrested former parliamentary candidate Mohammed Al Juwaihel on December 24 upon his return into the country, on charges of broadcasting without a license, making false claims, and compromising national security. Some MPs took offense to remarks broadcast by Al Juwaihel’s satellite television station Al Soor. Al Juwaihel was released on a KWD 5,000 (about \$18,100) bail on December 31.

Kuwait still lacks a law to ensure access to public information, although Al Qahtani noted that some NGOs have called for a law ensuring greater access. In practice, access varies a great deal and depends on the type of information requested. Some news, declarations, or press releases are sent to all media, on a just and equal basis, while some important information is limited to journalists that have connections and the proper path to sources. Several panelists confirmed the importance of personal connections in obtaining public information. According to Al Najjar, a journalist cannot go to a public institute and ask for information. It is also well known in Kuwait that often journalists try to call ministers privately for more information following meetings of the council of ministers.

The panelists noted that journalists have much better luck accessing international news. “It is not easy to get true and credible public information, yet it is so easy to get international news, especially on the Internet,” Hussein remarked. Fares Al Salman, head of *Al Anbaa’s* parliamentary section, noted that most local media outlets depend on government ministries for local news, while international news comes from foreign news agencies, to which all newspapers have access.

On the other hand, panelists said that it is common knowledge that many journalists essentially buy their access to information (and compromise their objectivity) by drawing “monthly salaries” paid by some officials, politicians, or social figures, in exchange for influence in their coverage. Al Najjar said that every newspaper has journalists that work as delegates to ministries, and in one way or another these journalists are being led by the key powers in the ministry. The journalists fear that otherwise, their contacts will cut off future access to information.

The government places no restrictions on entering the journalism profession, nor do journalists receive any special rights. However, reporters must have authorization from the Ministry of Information, and foreign media correspondents need permission in order to work in Kuwait. Al Najjar commented that many journalists work in the public sector also, despite a public service law (provision 25) that forbids public employees from working in any other job.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Kuwait Objective Score: 2.18

The panelists did not report any improvements regarding professional standards of journalism. Professionalism varies among media outlets in Kuwait, but overall the trend of weak commitment to quality journalism continues, especially regarding news writing, style, and accuracy. Many newspapers show a particular weakness in editing and run stories with grammar mistakes. Media members rarely discuss this shortcoming, further reinforcing the idea that it is acceptable practice.

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).

The quality of layout and design also varies greatly among newspapers. Although some have well designed pages, others appear unprofessional. Al Salman expressed the opinion that while some newspapers may show professionalism in layout, appearance, or printing quality, they still suffer from the pressing and widespread issue of poor news writing.

In particular, the panelists expressed varying degrees of concern about the lack of objectivity in news reporting. While Al Najjar said that he sees little objectivity, Al Mlaifi noted that this has not always been the case; reporting was stronger when Kuwait had only five newspapers (before 2007), he said. After the newspaper boom, new publications hired people with low professional standards, dragging down the quality of reporting. However, panelists noted that the growing number of newspapers is likely to boost competitiveness in the long term.

On the question of balance and objectivity in reporting, Al Najjar divided reporting into two categories: local and foreign coverage. Standards are especially low in local news; reporters seem uncertain of facts, or might base their work on anonymous sources. Foreign reporting, on the other hand, appears to be more objective—perhaps because it is issued mostly from outside Kuwait, through a foreign editor or news agency.

Generally, Kuwait media outlets fail to abide by professional standards. Al Azemi, a reporter for *Al Watan*, agreed that professional standards in Kuwaiti media are very low, except for a small minority of journalists. Al Salman noted that typically, newspapers are not very interested in the academic degrees of applicants for journalist jobs, and even if a journalist is prone to many grammatical errors, the desk editor will edit what the journalist writes. He added: “Unfortunately, this kind of journalist is the most common in Kuwait—particularly among Kuwaitis, not among foreigners working in Kuwait.”

As in the case of professionalism, journalists vary in their respect for ethical standards, and Hussein noted that newspapers and television differ in their ethics. The panelists also said that sometimes journalists exercise their freedom irresponsibly, attacking political views, persons, or ideologies, which has led to some lawsuits. An example of the panelists’ ethical concerns is the attacks on individuals appearing on television, without clear norms of protection. Al Najjar said that the implementation of international guidelines prohibiting hate speech and media attacks on individuals needs to be enhanced in Kuwait, and Al Baddah pointed to the need for a code of ethics, separate from the law, to enhance adherence to ethical standards.

Al Qahtani emphasized that in Kuwait, no separation exists between a media outlet’s editorial line and the political leanings of its owner. According to Hussein, sometimes when a newspaper owner decides to launch a certain campaign, the journalists disregard ethical standards and objectivity to support the owner’s goals.

Again in 2009, newspapers produced many examples of unprofessional use of print media as a forum for reciprocal attacks between owners or political opponents, ranging from sarcasm, rudeness, and personal attacks to defamation and libel.

Despite a good measure of media freedom, self-censorship persists in Kuwait media, especially in newspapers, according to some of the panelists; Al Najjar emphasized that this is the most dangerous type of censorship. In general, journalists in Kuwait are used to not crossing “red lines.” Journalists exercise caution also when reporting on leaders of Arab and other nations, to avoid disturbing relations with friendly countries.

Kuwaiti media cover key events fairly well, but not always in great detail or objectively—especially with stories on political groups or key figures. In general, stories about the Emir, tribal issues, and religion are off limits. Al Mlaifi also noted that in some cases, newspapers defy the orders of the attorney general and publish articles about issues that he has banned expressly.

In terms of job security and standards of pay, the standard of living in oil-rich Kuwait is relatively high, and about two-thirds of all residents are foreigners. Typically, media institutions employ many foreigners, especially Lebanese, Egyptians, Syrians, Palestinians, and Jordanians. Generally, foreigners find higher salaries in Kuwait than in their native countries.

Most local journalists hold extra jobs, often at public institutions. Al Salman said that journalist salaries are low and do not allow for making a decent living, so they deem extra jobs necessary. Other panelists said this trend may reflect the status quo for many Kuwaitis in other fields as well, who hold more than one job. Furthermore, the panelists mentioned, journalists in Kuwait are not eligible for social security so they have more anxiety about planning for the future.

In addition to taking on second jobs, journalists accept gifts from politicians or key persons as a fairly common practice. In some cases, such gifts might even amount to informal monthly salaries. Al Najjar confirmed this phenomenon in last year’s MSI, adding that some journalists simply go and pick up an envelope with money each month from politicians or other influential people, and some journalists specialize in distributing money to other journalists. In

exchange, journalists might pass on inside information about a newspaper's planned stories. According to Al Najjar, in this way "all newspapers are breached."

News and information are balanced mostly, especially in newspapers. Some newspapers devote substantial space to cultural and scientific topics. Television stations, on the other hand, devote more time to pure entertainment programming at the expense of news or culturally valuable programming. The problem is particularly pronounced with public television stations.

Most media institutions are fairly well equipped, with modern facilities, and follow sophisticated procedures throughout the phases of production. As reported in last year's MSI, public media now have updated equipment as well. With just a few exceptions, newsrooms are computerized and linked to news agencies. Most newspapers now have their own websites. In addition, many newspapers are distributed promptly.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Kuwait Objective Score: 2.36

A diverse array of media outlets, including many credible sources, inform Kuwait's citizens, the panelists said. With the relatively new printing and publications law, private newspapers have received a great boost, and they now claim the greatest distribution in the country. However, many newspapers stick to one political perspective, and people often restrict themselves to one or two newspapers to which they are accustomed or that fit their political or ideological

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.

path. Politicians, on the other hand, often read most of the newspapers.

Mobile services continue to play an extremely important role in keeping Kuwaitis well connected and informed. SMS remains the most essential form of news flow in Kuwait, especially for urgent matters. The Internet is another vital and essential form of communications. The popularity of blogs continues to climb, as well, with a number of bloggers addressing political, social, and entertainment topics.

According to Hussein, newspapers and television alike concentrate heavily on local news and tend to fixate on politics. Furthermore, broadcasting outlets are still limited, with few radio and television stations. Kuwait has one public television station (Kuwait TV) and five private stations: Al Sabah and Scope, launched in 2009; and Al Shahed, Al Soor, and Al Adala, launched in 2008. All five remain weak compared to the previously launched private stations Al Rai and Al Watan.

Foreign publications that obtain official permission are allowed in Kuwait. One example is an Indian paper that serves Kuwait's large number of Indian residents. The government places no limitations on foreign agencies that send news to media outlets; media editors and owners make the final publication decisions on such materials.

Almost all homes in Kuwait have access to satellite television, which eclipses local stations and offers less filtered access to foreign news. Satellite television expands options immensely, providing Kuwaitis with about 500 channel choices. Some foreign radio stations are very familiar in Kuwait as well, especially the BBC and Radio Sawa. A handful of local stations, mainly Marina FM and Kuwait FM and the newer Mix FM, draw large audiences as well.

Although in theory, citizens have access to all media outlets, the government bans some foreign publications and blocks websites that it deems offensive. Often, the government cites "national security" to justify its decisions to block political and religious websites. As Al Najjar explained last year, Internet providers as well as the government may block websites. Although it lacks the legal authority, the Ministry of Interior sometimes directs Internet providers to block some websites. Aside from posting a notice on the blocked website, there is no legal way to protest website bans. Yet savvy consumers are learning how to bypass the blockades; the Al Jarida website even published directions for one method for its readers.

The printing and publication law does not apply to the Internet, but the government is showing signs of moving to impose more restrictions on online news. As mentioned previously, General Prosecutor Hamed Al Othman has

announced his efforts to prepare a bill that criminalizes promoting vice, incitement against the country's leadership, divulging state secrets, or insulting Islam on the web.

As noted in last year's MSI, public media reflect the official viewpoint primarily.

The public news agency KUNA gathers and distributes a wide variety of news, but the panelists commented that outlets cover local news with less diversity in viewpoints. Kuwait still has no independent news agencies, and media outlets depend on the main foreign agencies, including Agence France-Presse, Reuters, Associated Press, and Deutsche Presse-Agentur.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Kuwait Objective Score: 2.17

Much of the panelists' discussion of media business management focused on the print media—particularly newspapers, given their dominance in the media landscape. Most media outlets are in fairly good standing financially, and some are profit-minded. Other outlets seem indifferent, content to rely on strong political, ideological, or family support, and backing by huge budgets and supplies from allies. Panelists noted that financial problems led to the shutdown of one paper, *Al Sawt*, in 2009, bringing the total number of newspapers in the country to 14.

Al Salman added that influential people own most newspapers in Kuwait, and they tend to impose their views on their newspaper. Thus, greater financial security does not always equal editorial independence in Kuwait. Al Azemi

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.

argued that there is no true editorial independence in Kuwait, since each media outlet is either a business project or a podium for some ideologies and personal opinions.

The Kuwaiti government does not subsidize independent media. Bulk subscriptions are the only form of subsidies that the government offers; for example, the Ministry of Information buys about 1,000 subscriptions from each newspaper. Hussein commented that before the press law of 2006, the government offered KWD 20,000 (about \$72,400) to each newspaper in addition to land grants, but assistance dried up because the new law has allowed so many new newspapers to join the market.

Despite the increase of newspapers owned by different political groups—and the increasing diversity of consumer interests, from an advertising perspective—advertising revenues have not diffused to new newspapers. The older papers still tend to possess bigger shares, due to their longstanding cooperation with advertising companies. Al Salman noted that in 2009, some newspapers, especially the older papers, pulled in huge advertising profits.

Securing advertising has proved a much greater struggle for most of the newly launched newspapers. Still, panelists expressed optimism that the advertising booms that come along with occasional events—national holidays, deaths of important figures, or visits from foreign leaders—may extend to the newer newspapers eventually. During these events, some newspapers seem to double or triple their size—sometimes exceeding 160 pages. In this case, the advertisements get lost in the pages, casting doubt on the effectiveness of this approach by advertisers.

Media outlets prepare advertising strategies, trying especially to market their products to advertising companies and to tailor themselves to the needs of the market. But ultimately, the advertising companies make most of the advertisement placement decisions.

Some newspapers conduct independent research and studies to inform their programming and marketing decisions, and sometimes they seek help from advertising companies to conduct the studies. Such research remains unusual, however.

Although print circulation numbers can be obtained, there is a cloud of doubt surrounding them, and a perception that the numbers are abstract at best and misleading at worst. Hussein said that the companies that measure ratings and circulation are corrupt, and essentially sell rankings. As Al Najjar charged in the 2008 report, other companies that evaluate circulation figures provide inaccurate numbers despite their long histories of operating in Kuwait. It appears that sometimes they count the quantity of papers published, rather than the circulated copies. He suggested that to reveal

true circulation numbers, such companies should count the number of returned copies as well.

Moreover, the emergence of a lottery phenomenon has hindered attempts to measure true circulation. Many newspapers present expensive gifts for subscribers, and people in turn subscribe just to obtain the gifts, making it difficult to determine actual readership of the newspaper.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Kuwait Objective Score: 1.77

The Kuwaiti media sector has no trade associations. Furthermore, the panelists stressed that it is not likely that any associations will be established, as media outlets belong to political opponents and rivals that are not interested in working toward common goals. Some ad hoc gatherings for editors-in-chief take place, often in reaction to specific incidents or events.

An organization for journalists, the Kuwait Journalists Association, was established in 1964. But the panelists said that this association does not truly represent journalists; hundreds of its members are not journalists and do not pay membership fees.

As reported in last year's MSI, a journalists' syndicate was founded in July 2008 by a court order, after the Ministry of Social Affairs refused to authorize it. Some panelists expressed concern about the sustainability of the syndicate, fearing that it will collapse due to conflicts and infighting among the country's many political and ideological groups.

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.

Al Najjar clarified that there is an important difference between the association and the syndicate: the association can be dissolved by the minister of Social Affairs, whereas the syndicate can be dissolved only by a court verdict.

Kuwait has no real media NGOs, although the Kuwait Graduates Association includes a committee for defending journalists.

Occasionally, foreign agencies conduct journalism training programs, as does KUNA. In general, though, training programs remain rare. The 2008 MSI study reported that media faculty members at Kuwait University are interested in cooperating with foreign organizations to improve opportunities, but this year's panelists did not report any progress toward this goal.

A few key players in the country monopolize the printing paper supply, and sometimes block their competitors (owners of newspapers with different political leanings, for example) from obtaining newsprint. To get around this problem, some newspapers turn to foreign paper sources.

List of Panel Participants

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