



## Freedom of the Press 2007

---

### Middle East and North Africa

#### *Draft Country Reports and Ratings*

May 2, 2007

#### **Algeria**

**Status: Not Free**

**Legal Environment: 22**

**Political Environment: 23**

**Economic Environment: 17**

**Total Score: 62**

According to Algeria's constitution, press freedom is a guaranteed right, but this has not stopped authorities from using legal and extralegal methods to harass the independent press. The laws were amended in 2001 to criminalize defamation of the president, the parliament, the judiciary, and the military. Algerian courts are subject to government pressure when adjudicating cases of libel and related offenses. Free expression was dealt another blow in 2006 as a result of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's plan for national reconciliation after the civil conflict of the 1990s. In February, the cabinet passed a decree that granted immunity to perpetrators of violence during the conflict, and authorized up to five years' imprisonment for "anyone who by speech, writing, or any other act, uses or exploits the wounds of the National Tragedy to harm the institutions of the Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria, to weaken the state, or to undermine the good reputation of its agents who honorably served it, or to tarnish the image of Algeria internationally."

The pattern of harassment aimed at critical or partisan Algerian journalists over the past several years continued in 2006. Journalists were arrested and charged with criminal violations in February after their newspapers published controversial cartoons of the prophet Muhammad, which first appeared in a Danish newspaper and sparked riots and demonstrations across the Muslim world. As was often the case in Algeria, the journalists were soon released, but the arrests illustrated the unpredictable nature of the authorities. In January, reporter Bachir Larabi of the independent daily *El-Khabar* was imprisoned for a month in the southwestern town of El-Bayadh after he was found guilty of defaming a local mayor. In June, journalist Mohamed Benchicou was released from prison after completing his two-year sentence for violating Algerian currency transportation laws. Benchicou's case was politically motivated—his defunct newspaper, *Le Matin*, had published harsh criticism of the government, and Benchicou himself had

written a book that pilloried the president. Bouteflika issued a pardon for journalists in July, but the laws used to punish them remained on the books and several other journalists were charged and sentenced to jail terms for their writing in the months after the pardon. Despite such persistent government harassment, Algeria's newspapers remained feisty and assertive in their opinions. Columnists and editorial cartoonists skewer the authorities on a regular basis.

Radio and television, two of the main sources of news, are largely under government direction. Popular pan-Arab satellite television stations, like Qatar-based Al-Jazeera, provide an alternate source of information. The government uses its control over the country's printing presses and a state advertising agency to influence the independent print media. Internet penetration is still quite low at only 5 percent of the population, but access is not restricted by the government.

## **Bahrain**

**Status: Not Free**

**Legal Environment: 23**

**Political Environment: 26**

**Economic Environment: 22**

**Total Score: 71**

The government in Bahrain continues to restrict media reporting, including the internet, despite laws providing for freedom of the press and of expression. Despite claims to further the democratic processes, media restrictions were tightened in 2006. Articles 23 and 24 of Bahrain's Constitution guarantee freedom of expression and the press. However, a suspended 2002 Press Law (No. 47) continues to be enacted to prosecute journalists based on 17 categories of offences. Offences against Islam, the king, and "the unity of the people," as well as acts of inciting division or sectarianism are punishable with six months to five years in prison. Conflicting conservative and liberal efforts to reform the 2002 press law continued in 2006, with two emergency sessions for debate called in April. Despite government commitments to a more democratic society, three laws were passed in 2006 which have the potential to undermine the rights to free expression. On July 20, amendments to the association law (Law 18/1973) were ratified that forbade any speech or discussion infringing on "public order or morals." A counterterrorism bill was signed into law on August 12 which contains excessively broad definitions of terrorism and terrorist acts, and which criminalizes advocating terrorist acts as well as the possession of documents promoting the same. An amendment to the Penal Code (Act 65/2006) in September made it a crime to publish the names or pictures of accused persons before a court verdict and without the permission of the public prosecutor.

News regarding international issues, local economic and commercial issues, and opposition politics are generally less restricted than are issues concerning the royal family, the Saudi royal family, national security, and judges. Two reporters from local papers *Al Mithak* and *Al Wasat* received anonymous telephone threats in October for writing about the Bandargate scandal that centered on a report written by Sudanese-born

British citizen Salah al-Bandar regarding alleged election fraud and involved members of the royal family and politicians.

Despite governmental censorship and self-censorship among journalists, many local and foreign media outlets are able to cover a diversity of issues without restriction. Nevertheless, some subjects of local concern continue to be untouchable. Print media are privately owned and there are nearly 100 Bahraini newspapers and journals in circulation. A number of new Arabic daily newspapers have opened since the reforms of 2002, including *Al-Watan*, which debuted in December of 2005, and *Al-Waqt* which entered the market in 2006. While privately-owned, the government still retains the right to control publishing policies, appoint the paper's officials, and dismiss journalists. All local radio and television stations are state-run; however, satellite television is widely available, providing access to international broadcasts. The country's first private radio station, which began broadcasting from Manama in October 2005, was shut down in 2006 by the authorities, alleging irregularities.

While the internet has provided journalists in Bahrain with greater freedom to report and more diverse access to critical forms of information, it has also served as yet another medium for the government to censor and regulate. The only internet provider in Bahrain is the government-owned Batelco, which reported that 135,000 persons used their service, about 21 percent of the population. Batelco prohibits user access to antigovernment or anti-Islamic websites, as well as human rights websites. On August 8, a government decree was issued to block access to Google Earth, Google Video, and Google Maps, but was lifted days later due to pressure from civil society. The media block on the scandal "Bandargate" extended beyond traditional media outlets to the internet, where blogs were forbidden to discuss the issue. In October, many websites and blogs were banned in the month leading up to the elections. On November 16, Dr. Mohammed Saeed Al-Sahlawi and Husain Abdulaziz Al Hebshi were arrested for possessing publications downloaded from the internet calling for the boycott of the November elections. The two activists were charged with promoting an illegal change of the state and spreading false news and rumours, which would disrupt public security, and damage public interest. The two remained in prison at the end of 2006. By the end of the year, almost two dozen websites were blocked.

## **Egypt**

**Status: Not Free**

**Legal Environment: 22**

**Political Environment: 22**

**Economic Environment: 18**

**Total Score: 62**

Though journalists increasingly cross the "red lines" that previously constrained the media, press freedom in Egypt continues to suffer from repressive laws and extralegal intimidation of journalists. The Emergency Law, the Press Law, and provisions of the Penal Code regulate the press, despite constitutional guarantees of press freedom. Much-

anticipated amendments to the Press Law were enacted in July 2006, but they did not alter provisions that criminalized the publication of “false news” and criticism of the president and foreign leaders. Publishing material that constitutes “an attack against the dignity and honor of individuals” or an “outrage of the reputation of families” also remains a criminal offense. In June, Ibrahim ‘Issa, editor of the weekly *Al-Dustur*, and Sahar Zaki, a journalist at the same paper, were sentenced to one year in prison for “insulting the president” and “spreading false or tendentious rumors” after reporting on an antigovernment lawsuit. At year’s end, ‘Issa and Zaki were free on 10,000 Egyptian pounds (\$1,700) in bail, pending an appeal. Shahinda Miqlid, author of *From the Papers of Shahinda Miqlid*; Shirin Abu al-Naga, the book’s editor; and award-winning publisher Muhammad Hashim all faced criminal charges at the end of the year because of the book’s portrayal of a prominent landowning family.

Journalists continued to face harassment and violence in 2006. Over the course of the year, police detained over a dozen journalists and assaulted many more. Hussein ‘Abd al-Ghani, the Cairo bureau chief of the Qatar-based satellite television channel Al-Jazeera, was detained in April while reporting on bombings in southern Sinai. He was accused of disseminating “inaccurate news harmful to the country’s reputation” after mistakenly reporting violence between security forces and terrorists elsewhere in Egypt that had apparently never occurred; several other news outlets made the same error. Although he was freed, ‘Abd al-Ghani was still barred from leaving Egypt at the end of the year. In May, riot police attacked more than a dozen local and foreign journalists at peaceful demonstrations in support of judicial independence.

While there are more than 500 newspapers, magazines, journals, and other periodicals in Egypt, this apparent diversity disguises the government’s role as a media owner and sponsor. The government owns shares in Egypt’s three largest newspapers, whose editors are appointed by the president. Opposition parties may form their own newspapers, and in recent years the Shura Council—one-third of whose members are appointed by the president—has granted licenses to the Ghad and Karama parties to publish eponymous weekly newspapers. The Ministry of Information controls content in the state-owned broadcast media. Privately owned domestic broadcasters are not allowed to air news bulletins and focus instead on music and entertainment. However, Egypt permits the establishment of locally based private satellite television stations, and the government does not block foreign satellite channels.

Thanks in large part to government efforts to aggressively promote internet use, the number of Egyptians with access to the internet has more than quadrupled over the past several years, but it still amounts to just 7 percent of the population. The Egyptian government does not engage in widespread online censorship, but in June, the Supreme Administrative Court ruled that the information and communications ministries had the authority to block, suspend, or shut down websites that were considered a threat to “national security.” In November, blogger ‘Abd al-Karim Nabil Suleiman, better known as Karim Amer, was detained for insulting Islam, the authorities at Al-Azhar University, and President Hosni Mubarak. He remained in pretrial detention at year’s end, and was set to become the first blogger in Egypt to be prosecuted for his online writings, though others had been detained without charge.

## **Iraq**

**Status: Not Free**

**Legal Environment: 22**

**Political Environment: 32**

**Economic Environment: 16**

**Total Score: 70**

Restrictions on the press took new forms in 2006 as the new Iraqi government for the first time took action against reporters. The 2005 Iraqi constitution outlines a legal framework concerning the activities of the press, including provisions guaranteeing freedom of press and expression “in a way that does not violate public order or morality,” according to Article 38. In addition, Articles 101 and 102 outline a financially and administratively independent National Communications and Media Commission. However, like many other articles in the constitution, they do not specify the commission’s mandate or define the implementation of regulations and legislation. Legal analysts have noted that some archaic laws dating from Saddam Hussein’s rule remain on the books, including restrictive insult, anti-defamation, and state secrets laws.

In 2006, Iraqi authorities imposed restrictions on the media that could endanger news diversity. Iraqi security forces detained at least 30 journalists over the course of the year, with four still held without charge at the year’s end. Moreover, the US military arrested eight media workers. Four were still in custody at the end of the year. Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki’s government threatened to close media outlets for “inciting violence” and TV stations were banned from showing violent footage of events within Iraq. In November, the government shut down two television stations, Al-Zawra` and Salah al-Din, for showing footage of Iraqis protesting Saddam Hussein’s death sentence. Neither had been allowed back on air at the end of the year. The Interior Ministry established a monitoring unit tasked with requesting that journalists broadcast corrections of “false news.” Local and regional officials have been particularly aggressive in bringing charges against critical journalists. In January, the Kurdish regional government upheld a thirty year prison sentence for Kamal Syid Qadir, who was charged with defaming public institutions. Two editors and a journalist for the Kurdish weekly Hawlati were also charged with defamation in May following an article critical of Kurdish political parties. The government placed restrictions on foreign media as well: In October, authorities briefly closed the Baghdad bureau of satellite news channel Al-`Arabiya for inciting “sectarianism” and “violence,” and Al-Jazeera’s Arabic service was still barred from opening a bureau in Baghdad. In 2005, it was revealed that the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) had hired a public relations firm to place stories with media outlets in Iraq that were written by U.S. military officers and depicted conditions in the country in a favorable light. In December 2006, during an internal investigation, the DOD concluded that the program had been legal under the rules of psychological warfare. However, the U.S. faced criticism from international watchdog groups for trying to manipulate press coverage and spread propaganda in the Iraqi media.

Ongoing instability and violence remain the biggest threats to press freedom, with Iraqi insurgent groups conducting targeted kidnappings and attacks on the media. Several dozen journalists and media workers were killed in 2006, many in deliberate attacks. Reporters Sans Frontieres reported that armed groups kidnapped twenty media workers, and executed seven. Gunmen in the `Adil neighborhood of Baghdad kidnapped US journalist Jill Carroll on January 7 and released her three months later. The fate of two Iraqi reporters, Rim Zaid and her colleague Marwan Khazal of Al-Sumariya TV was still unknown at the end of 2006. Armed groups have targeted local journalists who work with foreign media and have accused them of being spies. Self-censorship increased as a result of intimidation from violent groups, including sectarian militias. Much of the violence against journalists in 2006 occurred during the last months of the year, as hostilities among insurgent groups increased significantly. In the deadliest incident of the 2006, gunmen raided the offices of the radio station Al-Shaabiya in October, killing six journalists and four guards. The station, owned by the National and Justice Party, was created in July but had yet to broadcast.

Iraq has more than 100 daily and weekly publications, and dozens of new private television and radio channels have emerged throughout the country. The financial viability of these outlets is severely threatened by the security situation. Nearly all media outlets are privately owned and operated, but most of these outlets are affiliated with ethnic, sectarian, or partisan groups. Satellite TV is watched by around 70% of Iraqi viewers; the pan-Arab news stations Al-Arabiya and Al-Jazeera are popular. Iran's Al-Alam TV, which broadcasts in Arabic, can be received in Baghdad without a dish. Access to foreign satellite television, previously banned in all of Iraq under Saddam Hussein (except in the northern Kurdish regions since 1991), grew in 2006. Internet usage also increased during the year, with many internet cafés opening up in Iraqi cities and no direct government restriction on access to, or operation of, the internet.

## **Iran**

**Status: Not Free**

**Legal Environment: 29**

**Political Environment: 34**

**Economic Environment: 21**

**Total Score: 84**

Press freedom in Iran continued to deteriorate in 2006 as the regime's conservative leaders cracked down on critical publications and journalists through arrests, detentions, closures, and the establishment of new restrictions on internet media. At the same time, a striking contrast has emerged between government efforts to restrict information and the public's efforts and ability to access it, particularly through satellite and other foreign broadcasts that remain beyond government control.

The constitution provides for limited freedom of opinion and of the press. While it protects individuals from punishment for holding a certain belief, Article 24 of the

charter, along with the vaguely worded 2000 Press Law, forbids the publication of ideas that are contrary to Islamic principles or detrimental to public rights. The government regularly invokes vaguely worded legislation to criminalize critical opinions, and punishments for violations are harsh. 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”; the code leaves “propaganda” undefined. Under Article 513, offenses deemed to be an “insult to religion” can be punished by death or up to five years’ imprisonment, with “insult” similarly undefined. Other articles provide sentences of up to two years in prison, up to 74 lashes, or a fine for those convicted of intentionally creating “anxiety and unease in the public’s mind,” spreading “false rumors,” writing about “acts that are not true,” or criticizing state officials. Iran’s judiciary frequently denies accused journalists due process by referring their cases to the Islamic Revolutionary Court, an emergency venue intended for those suspected of seeking to overthrow the regime. The Preventive Restraint Act is used regularly to temporarily ban publications without legal proceedings.

Critical journalists are deterred by a range of obstacles in the legal system. Charges against journalists, bloggers, editors, and publications are often arbitrary; prosecutions, trial dates, and sentences are delayed; and bail sums for provisional release while awaiting trial are substantial. While fewer journalists are imprisoned today than in the past, laws prohibit editors and publishers from hiring journalists who have previously been sentenced, and imprisoned journalists have complained of solitary confinement and torture.

In 2006, many of those targeted by the Office of the Supreme Leader and the Iranian judiciary, led by Tehran prosecutor-general Saeed Mortazavi, were well known for their critical stance toward the government or advocacy of human rights and freedom of expression. In one of the year’s more prominent cases, reformist intellectual and journalist Ramin Jahanbeglo was arrested in April, presumably in response to an article in which he challenged President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s denial of the Holocaust. Jahanbeglo was held in northern Tehran’s Evin prison without charge until his release in August. In July, the minister of intelligence accused Jahanbeglo of “taking part in a U.S. attempt to carry out a velvet revolution in Iran,” prompting rights groups to view the case as the beginning of an intensified crackdown. Later that month, Hassan Hadad, a judge with a record of prosecuting journalists and personally torturing prisoners at Evin prison, was made deputy prosecutor for security issues. He was assigned the task of “forcefully cracking down on threats to overthrow the regime.”

Ali Akbar Monsavi Khoini, a former member of parliament who was critical of the country’s detention practices and prison conditions, was detained in June for participating in a peaceful women’s rights demonstration. In another strike against human rights advocates, the Interior Ministry in August closed down the country’s leading human rights organization, the Center for Defense of Human Rights, founded by Nobel laureate Shirin Ebadi, claiming that it did not have the proper permit. In a more positive development, Akbar Ganji, a well-known writer sentenced in 2001 to six years in prison for “spreading propaganda” and “collecting confidential state documents to jeopardize state security,” was released in March.

The Iranian government has forcibly closed or banned more than 100 publications since 2000. This trend continued in 2006, with a particular focus on critical media outlets.

The most significant closure of the year occurred in September, when the *Sharq* daily, the country's most prominent and last remaining reformist newspaper, was shuttered for failing to heed Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance orders to replace its managing director. The director had been charged with more than 70 wide-ranging violations immediately after the paper ran a satirical report on the president. *Sharq* had previously come under pressure from the authorities for its editorial stance and particularly for criticizing the rulings of the Supreme National Security Council, which oversaw Iran's nuclear negotiations with the international community. Another daily, *Rouzegar*, was banned in October after taking in many former *Sharq* staff members.

The government continued to intimidate and harass journalists who covered ethnic minority issues in the country, where the dominant Persian ethnic group made up just over half of the population of roughly 70 million. In May, the Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance invoked Article 12 of the Press Law to close *Iran Friday*, a state paper, and arrest an editor and a cartoonist for "fomenting discord" by publishing a cartoon deemed insulting to the Azeri minority; Azeris made up about a quarter of the population. The editor was ultimately acquitted and the cartoonist fined, and the ban of the paper was lifted in September; it has since published under a largely new staff. In December, one of Iran's leading ayatollahs, Fazel Lankarani, issued a fatwa calling for the death of an Azeri journalist and his editor after the publication of an article claiming that European values were superior to those of Muslim countries.

The country's numerous legal restrictions and successive closings and arrests make self-censorship common. However, critical reporting was particularly prevalent in 2006 before and after the elections for the Assembly of Experts and municipal governments in December. Criticism of the government among the hard-line and conservative press notably increased following the poor electoral performance of Ahmadinejad's allies, with some publications questioning the president's stance on the nuclear issue. Some observers attribute this development to a growing rift between Ahmadinejad and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.

Iran is home to more than 20 daily newspapers, though most Iranians do not read newspapers on a regular basis. The most widely distributed paper is the government-supported *Keyhan*, with a circulation of 350,000. More than 80 percent of residents receive their news from television, and the government directly maintains a monopoly over all domestic broadcast media, which present only official political and religious viewpoints. The Islamic Republic News Agency is the chief supplier of news to radio, television, print, and internet media. It falls under the authority of the Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance, headed by Mohammed-Hossein Saffar-Harandi, a former *Keyhan* employee with a long history of cracking down on the reformist press.

Although satellite dishes that receive foreign broadcasts are forbidden, an increasing number of people own them, allowing many of Iran's more prosperous city dwellers to access international news sources. Satellite radio allows a larger portion of the population to hear international broadcasts. Radio Farda, a joint initiative of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Voice of America, broadcasts news twice an hour, seven days a week, along with popular Persian and Western music, in an effort to reach Iran's growing youth population. According to the *Washington Post*, a survey conducted in 2006 found that roughly 13.6 percent of the adult population listened to Radio Farda each week.

Internet usage continues to increase, with more than seven million Iranians able to access the internet in 2006, but the press freedom watchdog Article 19 maintains that the government's heightened online censorship campaign has left fewer citizens willing to challenge the status quo. Still, websites continue to express opinions that the country's print media would never carry. Moreover, the internet provides a forum for political debate, with both conservatives and reform advocates using it to promote their political agendas. The internet has also provided a key platform for international initiatives—such as Article 19's *Persianimpediment.org*, Freedom House's *Gozaar*, and *Rooz Online*—to promote freedom of expression and inform the Iranian public on human rights issues.

Iran has roughly 100,000 bloggers, most of whom oppose the regime and publish anonymously to avoid detection, reflecting the extent to which journalists and dissidents have turned to the internet in the last several years in an effort to circumvent official control. The judiciary began targeting online journalists, bloggers, and technical support staff in 2004, and all of those detained in 2004 and 2005 were held in solitary confinement at a secret detention center, subjected to torture, and denied access to lawyers and medical care. Most of those imprisoned in 2004 were released in 2005. In January 2006, Arash Sigardi, a blogger who actively campaigned for the promotion of diverse viewpoints through internet journalism, was sentenced to three years in prison for “insulting the Supreme Guide” and publishing “propaganda against the regime.” A number of other online activists received jail sentences for critical online publications during the year.

There was a hike in internet filtering in the name of morality over the summer, followed by a series of new restrictions aimed at preserving Islamic culture, especially for Iran's younger generation, according to Britain's *Guardian* newspaper. Sites dealing with the condition of women were targeted in particular. According to Information and Technology, the company responsible for internet filtering, 90 percent of filtered sites are proscribed due to immoral character, and 1,000 new online publications are added to the blacklist each month. Public use of high-speed internet connections was banned in October, and a cabinet decision in November ordered all websites dealing with Iran to register with the authorities. The decision also officially outlawed all sites that insulted Islam and monotheism in general, disseminated separatist ideologies, published false information, or threatened individual privacy. While the registration of the country's tens of thousands of websites would be difficult to implement, the new edict established an ominous legal pretext for arbitrarily banning more sites. YouTube, the *New York Times* website, and the English version of Wikipedia were all blacklisted in December.

## **Israel**

**Status: Free**

**Legal Environment: 6**

**Political Environment: 13**

**Economic Environment: 10**

**Total Score: 29**

Press freedom is generally respected in Israel, and the country features a vibrant media landscape. Journalists are occasionally subject to official restrictions, but an independent judiciary and an active civil society adequately protect the free media. Hate speech and publishing praise of violence is prohibited, and the 1948 Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance prohibits expressions of support for terrorist organizations or groups that call for the destruction of Israel. In 2004, the Supreme Court denied a government appeal seeking to uphold a ban on granting press credentials to Palestinians. Israel's Government Press Office (GPO) had earlier ceased issuing press cards to Palestinians on security grounds, claiming that some Palestinians posing as journalists used the cards to enter Israel and carry out or abet terrorist attacks. Israeli press freedom organizations have since accused the GPO of continuing to restrict press credentials for Palestinians.

While newspaper and magazine articles on security matters are subject to a military censor, the scope of permissible reporting is wide and there is a broad range of published material. Editors may appeal a censorship decision to a three-member tribunal that includes two civilians, and publications cannot be shuttered because of censorship violations. Arabic-language publications are censored more frequently than those in Hebrew, and Arab Israeli journalists are subject to greater restrictions than their Jewish counterparts. In 2005, the daily *Ha'aretz*, Channel 2 television station, and BBC News were made to apologize to the government for failing to submit stories containing "sensitive" information for review. In July 2006, Al-Jazeera reporters Walid Al-Omary and Elias Karram were briefly detained by Israeli security forces while covering Hezbollah rocket attacks in northern Israel; Israeli officials claimed that the reporters were assisting Hezbollah by revealing the locations of rocket hits. The 2004 release of Mordechai Vanunu, an Israeli citizen imprisoned for 18 years for espionage and disclosing information about Israel's nuclear weapons program, was conditioned on a series of restrictions on his speech and movement; these restrictions have been condemned by the International Federation of Journalists.

A wide variety of newspapers, reflecting a broad range of political viewpoints and religious outlooks, is available in Israel. All newspapers are privately owned and freely criticize government policy. Newspapers must be licensed by the locality in which they are published. A diverse selection of broadcast media is also available. The Israel Broadcasting Authority (IBA) operates public radio and television services, including the popular Kol Israel radio station. There are also commercial television networks and radio stations, and most Israelis subscribe to cable or satellite television. Internet access is widespread and available to approximate 50 percent, and it is not restricted by the government.

[This rating and report reflect the state of press freedom within Israel proper, not in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which are covered in the following report on the Israeli-Occupied Territories and Palestinian Authority.]

## **Israeli Occupied Territories/Palestinian Authority**

**Status: Not Free**

**Legal Environment: 28**

**Political Environment: 34**

**Economic Environment: 22**

**Total Score: 84**

Events in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are covered extensively by international media, but both Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) severely restrict press freedom and often impede journalists' ability to report safely and accurately. The Palestinian Basic Law provides for freedom of the press, and a 1995 Press Law calls for free and independent media, but the latter statute also stipulates that journalists may be punished and newspapers closed for publishing material deemed harmful to national unity or that might incite violence. The Palestinian Legislative Council's 2005 deliberations on a draft law on access to information were stalled after legislative elections in January 2006 resulted in an upset victory for the Islamist party Hamas.

Israel's army and security services continued to commit a range of press abuses in 2006. Journalists were subject to gunfire, physical abuse, arrest, and substantial limits on their freedom of movement. In April, Israeli soldiers were accused on two separate occasions of firing at journalists covering unrest in the West Bank city of Nablus. During a major Israeli military incursion into the Gaza Strip that began in June, several journalists were wounded by Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) gunfire: in early July, two photographers, Hamid al-Khur and Mohammad Az Zanon, were shot and wounded; later that month, Palestinian television cameraman Ibrahim al-Atlah was seriously wounded by Israeli tank fire; in August, an Israeli tank fired on a marked Reuters press vehicle in Gaza. In December, Reporters Sans Frontieres released a report accusing the IDF of attacking or threatening 16 journalists and destroying the facilities of three news outlets in 2006. In April, a British Coroner's Court declared the 2003 death of British journalist James Miller an unlawful killing on the part of the IDF, to which Israel responded with a promise to further examine the incident. Israel denies that it deliberately targets journalists and maintains that reporters covering the conflict bear responsibility for placing themselves in danger.

Journalists reporting from the Israeli-occupied territories are required to carry Israeli-issued press cards; for Palestinian journalists and Arab journalists more generally, these cards are very difficult to obtain. In December 2005, Al-Arabiya reporter Bassem el-Jamal was denied entry to the West Bank for the third time that year by Israeli authorities, who cited his "contacts with hostile groups." For one day after an attack on Israeli troops in southern Israel by Gaza-based militants, the IDF closed the Erez crossing to Gaza to the media; while protests from foreign journalists led Israel to reopen the border, the IDF prohibited Israeli passport holders from entering Gaza for several days afterward.

The Palestinian media have also faced pressure from the PA to provide positive coverage or forgo reporting on certain stories, and journalists who have filed stories considered unfavorable to the PA have been harassed. Threats, arrests, and abuse of journalists deemed critical of the PA, the president's Fatah party, and now Hamas have become routine. With the legislative victory of Hamas in January, Palestinian media outlets have become targets of factional violence between Hamas and Fatah. In June,

about 50 members of Hamas's military wing (Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades) attacked Palestinian national television installations in Khan Yunis, destroying equipment and beating journalists. A Fatah-linked radio station in northern Gaza was attacked with light arms and destroyed in October by gunmen allegedly associated with Hamas. In November, a radio station associated with the militant Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) was attacked during a live broadcast; the attack was believed to have been spurred by an incorrect news report about a PA cabinet shuffle. In its December report, Reporters Sans Frontieres cited attacks on seven news outlets in 2006 by various Palestinian factions.

The political instability that followed Israel's 2005 withdrawal from Gaza, greater internecine conflict between Hamas and Fatah, and the existence of renegade political factions all created dangerous conditions for journalists in the territories. Six foreign journalists were kidnapped by Palestinian militants in 2006. In March, reporter Caroline Laurent and photographers Yong Tae-young and Alfred Yaghobzadeh were briefly abducted by PFLP members in Gaza. In August, Fox News journalist Steve Centanni and cameraman Olaf Wiig were kidnapped and held for nearly two weeks by a group called the Holy Jihad Brigades; they were released unharmed. Associated Press photojournalist Emilio Morenatti was kidnapped and held for a few hours in October. French journalist Didier Francois was shot and wounded while covering clashes between Hamas and Fatah gunmen in December.

There are three Palestinian dailies in addition to several weekly and monthly periodicals, and the territories host roughly 30 independently owned television stations and 25 radio stations. The one television station and one radio station run by the PA function as government mouthpieces, though control of these outlets is being contested by Hamas and Fatah. Most independent media outlets exercise cautious self-censorship, particularly on the issue of internal Palestinian politics. Israeli checkpoints often prevent newspaper distribution in the territories. Access to satellite television is increasing, and unrestricted internet access is available to just under 10 percent of the population.

## **Jordan**

**Status: Not Free**

**Legal Environment: 21**

**Political Environment: 22**

**Economic Environment: 18**

**Total Score: 61**

Although King Abdullah II has repeatedly pledged reform, the Jordanian government in 2006 again failed to enact a long-awaited new press law. The draft before the parliament at the end of the year did not eliminate jail sentences for journalists in connection with their work, and allowed for the enforcement of laws like Article 150 of the Penal Code, which bans all writing and speech that is "intended to, or results in, stirring up sectarian or racial tension or strife among different elements of the nation." While the Jordanian

constitution guarantees citizens the right to freedom of expression and of the press, articles of the penal and press codes restrict criticism of the royal family, the National Assembly, public officials, and the armed forces, as well as speech that might harm Jordan's foreign relations. In practice, limited criticism of the Jordanian government and its allies is tolerated, as is speech in favor of Islamist movements, but criticism of the royal family is still taboo. Journalists must be members of the Jordan Press Association (JPA) to work legally. In the past, critical journalists have been excluded from the JPA and prevented from practicing their profession.

Intelligence agencies watch journalists closely, and the government of Prime Minister Ma'ruf al-Bakhit has given free rein to these agencies, the police, and prosecutors to clamp down on legitimate speech. Editors and journalists report that they have received official warnings to refrain from publishing certain articles or to avoid certain topics, and that security officials have pressured printers to hold publications until editors agree to remove sensitive stories. Several journalists were arrested in 2006 for articles criticizing the government or detailing sensitive political information. In January and February, the Jordanian weeklies *Al-Mihwar* and *Shihan* published caricatures of the prophet Muhammad that had first appeared in Denmark's *Jyllands-Posten* in September 2005. The two papers' respective editors, Hisham al-Khalidi and Jihad Mu'mini, were charged with "offending religious feelings" and given two-month prison sentences in May; they were released pending their appeal. The death of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian-born terrorist leader in Iraq, also proved contentious, as Jordanian authorities interrupted a June interview with his brother-in-law on the Qatar-based satellite television station Al-Jazeera and briefly detained the station's Amman bureau chief, Yassir Abu Hilala. Several members of parliament were arrested for consoling members of al-Zarqawi's family and charged under Article 150 of the Penal Code. A state security court in August sentenced two of the lawmakers to prison terms and fines, but they were pardoned by the king in September. In December, three photojournalists were assaulted in parliament after taking photos of an altercation between two legislators.

The government owns substantial shares in Jordan's two leading daily newspapers, and all publications must obtain licenses from the state. There are high taxes on the media industry and tariffs on paper, and the government has been criticized for advertising primarily in newspapers in which it owns a stake. In 2003 the government officially gave up its monopoly on domestic television and radio broadcasting by creating a new Audiovisual Licensing Authority, which in 2004 began to license and regulate private radio and television outlets. No restrictions are placed on satellite broadcasts, and satellite dishes continue to proliferate. The Jordanian government is actively seeking to promote access to the internet and says it places no restrictions on access to information for 11 percent of the population with internet access.

## **Kuwait**

**Status: Partly Free**

**Legal Environment: 19**

**Political Environment: 21**  
**Economic Environment: 16**  
**Total Score: 56**

The constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press and Kuwait is frequently considered to be relatively free, but there are numerous limitations to these rights. A new law passed in 2006 was met with internal approval and displeasure. Freedom of the press is protected under Articles 36 and 37 of the constitution with the restriction that such rights be exercised within the limitations of the law. On March 6, after 20 years of debates, the country passed a new press and publications law. While the new press law ends the government's monopoly on licensing new media outlets, it retains many of the repressive laws used to prosecute journalists in the past. Journalists can no longer be detained without a court order, but they may still be prosecuted under the penal code for a number of offenses. Those found guilty of criticizing Islam may be imprisoned for up to one year and fined up to \$70,000. The new law also criminalizes the publication of material that criticizes the constitution, the emir, or Islam, calls for the overthrow of the regime, or incites acts that will offend public morality, religious sensibilities, or the basic convictions of the nation; insulting the Emir is no longer punishable by jail terms but by staggeringly high fines. Slander is also considered a crime under the new press and publications law. A number of journalists were also arrested under the new press law. Hamid Buyabis was jailed on May 15 and released the next day for directly quoting criticism of the emir. Kuwaiti journalist, Khaled Obaysan al-Mutairi was arrested for an article published in the Kuwaiti daily *Al-Sissya* that praised Saddam Hussein and called upon the Arab League to support the Iraqi resistance. The Information Minister stated that the paper had been charged with "publishing reports that negatively impact Kuwaiti society," but the charges were dropped and al-Mutairi was released the next day. On November 18, journalist Aziza al-Mufarig of the daily *Al Watan* was fined 1000 dinars (US\$3500) and given a three-month suspended sentence and three years probation for an article she had written that questioned the independence of a Kuwaiti judge.

In general, the Ministry of Information (MOI) does not actively interfere or restrict access to local or international news, and the Kuwaiti media are known to provide more critical and outspoken coverage of the government and politics than the rest of the region. Nevertheless, given the on-going restrictions in the new press law, journalists continued to practice self-censorship. The MOI can also censor all books, films, and periodicals it deems morally offensive.. Although there are five Arabic and two English daily newspapers in Kuwait, all privately-owned, the last government-issued license was in 1976. The old press law of 1963 had limited the press to five dailies. While all publishers are required to obtain an operating license from the MOI in order to launch a daily under the new 2006 press law, the MOI must now issue the license or provide an explanation for its refusal within 90 days of application. Those denied licenses may also appeal in court. Nevertheless, the financial conditions required to establish a paper under the new press law make it very difficult; 250,000 dinars (US\$950,000) is the required minimum capital. There are nine state-owned radio stations and television stations, and the government has finally granted licenses to a few private television and radio stations, such as satellite television channel *Al-Rai* and Marina FM radio. However, the content of these private stations tends to be more entertainment-oriented than critical news

coverage. The government tried to shut down a number of satellite stations that were broadcasting programs related to the June parliamentary elections. 25 percent of the population accessed the internet in 2006, although the government has blocked websites considered to promote terrorism and political instability; several websites were blocked during the year. The U.S. State Department reports that internet cafe owners are required to obtain names and identification of internet users and must submit the information if required by the Ministry of Communication.

## **Lebanon**

**Status: Partly Free**

**Legal Environment: 19**

**Political Environment: 25**

**Economic Environment: 15**

**Total Score: 59**

While the media has more freedom in Lebanon than in other countries in the region, they still face political and judicial obstacles. The constitution provides for freedom of the press, and while the press does not face direct interference from the government, recent political developments have resulted in an increase of self-censorship among journalists. Under law, pornography or political and religious material deemed a threat to national security can be censored by the government. Security services are authorized to censor all foreign magazines, books, and films before they are distributed in Lebanon. Journalists and publications accused of press offenses may be prosecuted in a special publications court. In March, criminal libel charges were brought against two journalists accused of insulting and defaming the president. However, in general government efforts to limit journalists are much less effective than previously, as the diversity of media outlets and the momentum of political events have made it increasingly difficult to restrict press coverage.

The most significant development of 2006 was the July military conflict between Israel and Lebanon. Israeli strikes killed two journalists and injured 10. Israeli warplanes bombed Al-Manar television, which is funded and operated by Hizballah, and destroyed the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation (LBC)'s transmission tower in Fatla, temporarily taking the station off the air, killing LBC technician Sleiman Chidiac and injuring two other employees. Press photographer Layal Najib, 23, was killed while covering Israeli attacks in southern Lebanon when a missile exploded near her car in Qana. Significant damage to roads and bridges limited journalists' ability to travel within the country throughout the conflict. Increased tension as a result of the violence also led to greater dangers for journalists covering the news; there were several cases late in the year in which journalists covering Hezbollah demonstrations were attacked and injured.

No significant progress was made in the investigations of the 2005 attacks on media workers who spoke out against Syria's role in Lebanon. All victims of car bombs, Samir Kassir, and Jibrán Tuéni were both killed, while May Chidiac survived but lost an arm and a leg as a result of the attack. French prosecuting Judge Jean-Louis Bruguière,

known for his prosecution of high-profile terrorism cases, went to Beirut in July to investigate the death of Franco-Lebanese journalist Samir Kassir, who was killed on June 2, 2005. On June 17, a prosecuting judge was assigned to pursue the murder case of Jibrán Tuéni, managing editor of the daily paper *Al-Nahar*. Those responsible for all three attacks have yet to be identified or prosecuted.

Lebanon features dozens of newspapers and hundreds of periodicals, many of which publish criticism of the government. Because almost a dozen daily newspapers are published in Lebanon, competition for readers is quite stiff. Newspapers have experienced a dramatic drop in advertising revenues since the beginning of the conflict with Israel over the summer. All national daily newspapers are privately owned, as are most television and radio stations, including six independent television and satellite stations and nearly three dozen independent radio stations. However, many media outlets are linked to political and/or confessional interests that exert significant influence over content. Access to satellite television has grown substantially over the last decade, and unrestricted internet access is widely available.

## **Libya**

**Status: Not Free**

**Legal Environment: 29**

**Political Environment: 38**

**Economic Environment: 29**

**Total Score: 96**

Libya's press remains tightly controlled despite the regime's continued efforts to curry favor with the west by presenting Libya as a changed nation. Libyan law provides for freedom of speech and of press within the confines of the "principles of the Revolution." The government strictly controls these freedoms, especially criticisms of the government. The press laws are draconian and regime opponents face punishments as harsh as death for crossing the government. All unsanctioned political acts are illegal, and therefore many forms of expression are illegal as well. Foreign publications are censored and occasionally outlawed. Any criticism of Qaddafi can lead to prison sentences. The General Press Office, a branch of the information ministry, owns three of the major newspapers, while the fourth is owned by the Movement of Revolutionary Committees, the state-supported ideological organization.

Much of Libya's local press is moribund and pro-government party newspapers publish Soviet-era regime praises daily. Editors and journalists who want to keep their jobs are close to the regime. There is no independent press. Challenging the regime in any meaningful way is not part of public discourse in Libya. A vast network of secret police and informers exists to ensure that state-critics are known to the regime. The same is true of broadcast media. Television and radio are state-controlled and popular pan-Arab station like Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya do not have local correspondents covering Libya. The only person to offer harsh criticism about the lack of democracy is Qaddafi's

son, Saif al-Islam, who in August admitted that there is “no press” and “no democracy” in Libya and recognized that this fact was known by all.

Internet use is reported at only 3 percent, and internet usage is carefully monitored. Few have access to news and information from outside the country, but more people are turning to the internet for information, to which authorities have responded by cracking down on online dissent. Most critics of Libya are political activist Libyans living outside the country. These critics publish information about human rights abuses and other domestic events on the internet. But the government is well aware of these activities and Libyans who take public positions critical of the regime can be imprisoned if they travel to Libya. The General Press Institute supposedly installed a web-proxy blocking access to certain websites, severely restricting the ability of the journalists from the Press Institute-financed newspapers to access papers from outside of Libya. Cyber-dissident Abd al-Raziq al-Mansur, arrested in January 2005 for publishing critical articles on a London-based website, was released in March 2006. However, another cyber-dissident, Idrees Mohammed Boufayed, has not been heard from since November, when he was required to attend a meeting with the Internal Security Agency.

## **Morocco**

**Status: Not Free**

**Legal Environment: 23**

**Political Environment: 22**

**Economic Environment: 17**

**Total Score: 62**

The Moroccan constitution offers freedom of expression, but the press law prohibits criticism of the monarchy and Islam and effectively bars material challenging the government’s position on the status of Western Sahara. Government promises to reform the press law have largely gone unfulfilled. While some international human rights activists have pointed to evidence that Morocco is turning the page on its troubled past and moving toward more openness and democratization, the story of the country’s press paints a somewhat different picture. Over the past decade, as the pioneering independent press continued to tackle taboo subjects despite the harsh press laws, the government began to adopt a subtler approach in its responses to critics who crossed the “red lines.” Rather than imprisoning journalists, which would draw unwanted attention, the government now employs a series of tactics that make it nearly impossible for them to practice their profession.

The state largely refrained from direct censorship and manipulation of the licensing process in 2006, but the imposition of punitive fines and suspended prison sentences, and the use of third parties to apply indirect pressure, served to encourage self-censorship in the media. *Le Journal Hebdomadaire*, published and edited by journalists Aboubakr Jamaï and Ali Amar, respectively, suffered such government harassment throughout the year. In February, the weekly ran a small photograph of someone holding

a newspaper that had published controversial cartoons of the prophet Muhammad. Within days, the magazine's office was besieged by protesters who were apparently bused in by the government. Meanwhile, progovernment media outlets attacked *Le Journal* in print and on the airwaves. Later in February, a Rabat court awarded security analyst Claude Moniquet a record 3 million Moroccan dirhams (US\$340,000) in a defamation suit he brought against *Le Journal*. Moniquet's Brussels-based think tank, the European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center, had published a report on the Western Sahara, and *Le Journal's* editors questioned the study's independence. An appeals court subsequently confirmed the damages sum. The case appeared to have been a politically motivated effort to bankrupt the magazine. In order to save it, Jamai relinquished his position, which was taken up by Amar. In addition to *Le Journal*, several other publications suffered legal harassment during the year. The weekly *Nichane* was banned in December after it ran jokes about religion. The paper's editor and a reporter were charged with defamation of Islam and faced possible prison time; the publication would remain shuttered until their trial's completion. Foreign journalists can work with relative ease in Morocco, but face government pressure and even expulsion from the country if they report on the Western Sahara in a manner that offends authorities.

Morocco is home to a large number of private print publications, many of them critical of the government. However, circulation is limited, and most papers receive some government subsidies. Broadcast media that report news are still dominated by the state, but as in most Arab countries, residents can access critical reports through pan-Arab satellite channels. The few Moroccans with internet access (roughly 15 percent of the population) also receive alternative viewpoints from online sources, though the government sometimes blocks certain websites.

## **Oman**

**Status: Not Free**

**Legal Environment: 24**

**Political Environment: 28**

**Economic Environment: 19**

**Total Score: 71**

Although Oman's basic charter provides for freedom of the press, government laws and actions tightly restrict this freedom in practice. A journalists' union was created in 2006, although it is often thought to be too closely connected to government agencies.

Article 29 of the Basic Law provides for freedom of the press "within the limits of the law," but this right is restricted in practice by the government and the repressive 1984 Press and Publication Law. Article 61 of the Press Law prohibits criticism of longtime ruler Sultan Qaboos and provides for criminal punishment for abuses of this law; libel and direct criticism are both considered punishable by imprisonment and fines. The Ministry of Information may censor any material regarded as politically, culturally, or sexually offensive in both domestic and foreign media. Articles 61 and 62 of the 2002 Telecommunications Act prohibit individuals from knowingly sending a message over

any form of telecommunication device that violates laws for public order and morals, or is harmful to an individual's safety. On January 30, Taybah al-Ma'wali, a former parliamentarian, was released from prison after serving a six-month term for insulting public officials via telephone and internet. No independent body exists to judge violations of the press law. Therefore, journalists practice a high degree of self-censorship out of fear of transgressing vague laws that criminalize the publication of material that may lead to public discord, the abuse of a person's dignity, or violate the security of the state. The penal code allows for defendants considered to have endangered national security to be prosecuted before the State Security Court where fewer due process rights exist. The government is authorized under the Press and Publication Law to censor any domestic or foreign print or broadcast material deemed politically, culturally, or sexually offensive. Nevertheless, information was widely available and "constructive" criticism of the government was allowed, particularly in online publications.

Journalists do not have open or equal access to sources and are not able to cover the news freely. There were no reported cases of physical intimidation of journalists, although they are generally subject to self-censorship to avoid trouble with the law. Public information, which is usually in favor of the government, is often made available through the official Oman News Agency before being distributed to media outlets. While journalists do not often face obstacles in acquiring the required licenses to practice journalism, increased requirements regarding journalistic identification cards were introduced in 2005. Every journalist had to reapply for a new ID card in 2005 and must now reapply every year on behalf of a specific media outlet, thus forbidding the practice of freelance journalism. The first Oman Journalists Association was officially launched in early 2006.

Print media serves as the main source for local news. There are four privately-owned daily newspapers and two state-run dailies: three in Arabic and three in English. Each daily has its own printing press; however, the government places regulations on the use of printing materials and distribution. Privately-owned publications reportedly receive government subsidies, although the increasing amount of Western advertising revenue is slowly allowing some private publications to rely less on state funding. The government's monopoly on radio and television broadcast continued in 2006, with three radio stations and two television stations. The licensing conditions for establishing private broadcast media, as established in the 2004 Private Radio and Television Companies Law, are difficult to meet, limiting applicants to Omani nationals with high capital; \$1.25 million is required to establish a daily. However, in October 2005, the state issued licenses to two different companies to establish a private television station and three private radio stations, which are expected to launch in 2007. Satellite access in mostly urban areas provided foreign broadcast information.

Internet access was also widely available and heavily filtered by the government-owned internet service provider, Omantel. High fees limit the number of internet users, approximately 12% of the population. Because of such restrictions, fewer local blogs and websites exist, and those that do are monitored. Authorities created an Internet Service Manual, which contains a lengthy list of prohibited online topics, including defamation of the royal family and false data or rumors.

## **Qatar**

**Status: Not Free**

**Legal Environment: 18**

**Political Environment: 24**

**Economic Environment: 21**

**Total Score: 63**

The Qatari government professes freedom of the press, but aside from a few passages in the Constitution, there are no laws that protect journalists. While section 47 of the 2003 Qatari Constitution provides in principle for the freedom of speech and press, it qualifies these freedoms within the limits and definitions of the law. In practice, the government uses its judicial and executive branches to restrict those rights. Journalists and editors working for both the press and private associations' publications practice a high degree of self-censorship. Qatari press laws fall under the Penal Code and are administered by the criminal courts. Under these laws, journalists can face jail sentences if convicted of libel or slander. For example, a non-citizen journalist was convicted and sentenced to one year in prison for slander of a Qatari citizen. The disparity in the application of these laws for Qatari and non-Qatari journalists, who represent the majority of journalists in Qatar, is widely known. As a result, most journalists censor themselves heavily.

Journalists in Qatar suffer several forms of intimidation, although there were no reports of physical violence directed at journalists. While native journalists usually face warnings and threats whenever the government feels they've crossed a line, non-citizens face harsher measures, including termination, deportation and jail time. Under Qatari press law, all publications are subject to licensing by the government; journalists are forbidden from leveling any criticism against the government, and can be subjected to prosecution under the Penal Code for doing so. Press laws in Qatar authorize the government, its censorship office in the Qatar Radio and Television Corporation, and Custom officers to censor both domestic and foreign publications, broadcast programs and movies for religious, political and sexual content prior to distribution. As with its regional neighbors, journalists are forbidden from criticizing the ruling family, Islam or government policies. Local coverage of the issues must be conducted with great sensitivity.

Qatar has six newspapers, four of them Arabic-language (*Al-Rayah*, *Al-Sharq* and *Al-Watan*), and two English language (*Gulf News* and the *Peninsula*). These six newspapers, while not owned by the Qatari government, are owned by members of the ruling family, or businessmen with close business ties to the ruling family. The Qatari government owns and operates all broadcast media. There are only two TV networks in the country, Qatar TV and Al-Jazeera Satellite Channel. While Qatar TV broadcasts mostly official government news and views, Al-Jazeera focuses solely on coverage and commentary of international news topics. As a government-subsidized channel, Al-Jazeera is commissioned to focus on all news except local. The channel refrains from any criticism of its subsidizer, and covers any Qatari local news only if it has an international angle to it, with no critical commentary. Shows on the local radio station are more accommodating to voices criticizing government services and operations. While Al-

Jazeera claims editorial freedom, it will continue to find it difficult to back this claim, given the absence of critical coverage of local Qatari issues and events. The concentration of media ownership within the ruling family, and the high financial and citizenship requirements for granting media ownership licenses, continue to hinder the expansion, and freedom, of the press. Through licensing regulations, the Qatari government is able to control the growth and content of media in the country.

The internet is used by almost 27% of Qataris. Through its ownership and operation of the local internet service provider (ISP), the Qatari government restricts freedom of expression and censors the internet for political, religious and pornographic content. Both high-speed and dial-up internet users find themselves directed to a proxy server that blocks materials deemed inconsistent with the “religious, cultural, political and moral values of the country.” This proxy server maintains a list of banned Web sites and blocks users from accessing them, with the Qatari ISP frequently updating its filtering software to maintain its grip.

## **Saudi Arabia**

**Status: Not Free**

**Legal Environment: 28**

**Political Environment: 30**

**Economic Environment: 24**

**Total Score: 82**

Since no constitution in Saudi Arabia guarantees the freedom of press and speech, freedom of press is regulated under the Publishing and Printing law of 1963. The 49 provisions of this law cover the establishment of media outlets, address the rights and responsibilities of journalists, and explain the penalties that can be imposed on them. This lack of a theoretical framework for the freedom of the press in Saudi Arabia is largely due to how the government views the role of the press in society. The press, according to the government, is a tool to educate the masses, propagate government views on issues, and promote national unity. This very narrow view of the media shapes how both the government and its strategic allies, the conservative religious establishment, deal with freedom of press in the kingdom. Through harsh measures, and with the help of heavy self-censorship, the government is able to control the media in the country. The strategic alliance between the royal family and the ultra-conservative religious establishment proved strong enough to overcome all attempts by journalists to wrestle away some breathing room. In 2006, the Saudi government approved the first law to combat “electronic crimes,” defined by the government as defamation on the Internet and hacking. Online journalists suffer the same fate as their colleagues in the print world when it comes to expressing their views.

Even when the government has been inclined to permit some freedom of expression, it finds itself at odds – and sometimes near conflict – with the strong ultra-

conservative Islamic forces in the kingdom. In many instances, it was forced to back down. Several episodes of the very popular television sitcom “Tash Ma Tash” were canceled after protests and threats from the ultra-religious right and a Fatwa was issued. An episode criticizing the powerful religious agency of “Promoting the Good and Forbidding the Evil” was killed as soon as the agency learned of its content.

Journalists in the kingdom face threats, harassment and detention if they cross the official red line. In February of 2006, journalist Battal Alkus, editor of the privately-owned daily Shams, was dismissed from his job after his newspaper published some of the cartoons about prophet Mohamed. In March, journalist Mohsen Al-Awajy was detained for ten days for criticizing the King, while journalist Rabah El-Queay was detained and harassed for posting a comment on an online forum. In April, journalist Fawaz Turki was dismissed from the daily “Arab News” newspaper for writing about the Indonesian atrocities committed by the government in East Timor. Writer and women’s rights activist Wajiha Al-Howaider was arrested in August, threatened with loss of her job, and forced to sign a pledge to cease all activities including writing and talking to the media. In November, journalist Kinan Ben Abdallah Ghamidi was banned from writing for the government daily Al-Watan, after previously being forced to resign as its editor in 2002 for criticizing the government. These extreme measures of arrest, interrogation, dismissal and harassment have forced journalists and editors to practice and enforce extreme levels of self-censorship in order to protect themselves and their staff.

There are ten daily newspapers in Saudi Arabia, all either owned by the government, members of the royal family or close associates of the royal family. Broadcast media also falls in the hands of the government, which owns and operates the television and radio stations. Satellite television has become widespread despite its illegal status and is an important source of foreign news. King Abdul-Aziz City for Science and Technology (KACST) is the sole gateway for Internet users. Although the Saudi government approved applications for over 40 privately-owned Internet Service Providers (ISP) in 1998, all of them are linked to the main server at KACST, the government institution charged with developing and coordinating Internet-related policies. Through this agency, the Saudi government continues to block and filter Web sites deemed offensive, critical or immoral. All sites carrying out activities at odds with the Kingdom’s social, political, cultural and religious values are blocked. Updated lists of undesirable websites are continuously fed to the filters. Users attempting to access banned sites receive warnings and are told that their attempts are being logged.

## **Syria**

**Status: Not Free**

**Legal Environment: 29**

**Political Environment: 33**

**Economic Environment: 21**

**Total Score: 83**

The Syrian government continued to place severe restrictions on press freedom in 2006. Although the constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press, a constellation of repressive laws restrict Syrians' rights to freedom of expression and information. First among them is the Emergency Law, in place since December 1962, which broadly mandates the censorship of letters, publications, broadcasts, and other forms of communication. The 2001 Press Law sets out sweeping controls over newspapers, magazines, and other periodicals, as well as virtually anything else printed in Syria. The decree forbids writing on a wide variety of topics, including reports that touch on what authorities consider to be "national security" or "national unity." Articles 286 and 287 of the penal code criminalize spreading news abroad. Decree No. 6 of 1965 criminalizes "publishing news aimed at shaking the people's confidence in the revolution." Other laws criminalize "opposition to the revolution, its goals, or socialism." At the June 2005 conference of the ruling Baath Party, the Ministry of Information announced that it would issue a new press law. This law not been introduced by the end of 2006.

Private and party newspapers sometimes publish mild criticism of the government. The internet has also been increasingly used by critical journalists to voice dissent, although the government has aggressively cracked down on internet freedom in recent years. Syria's first independent media union was created in May 2005 by journalists and human rights activists hoping to liberalize the media. The union, called Hurriyat (Freedom), was still in existence at the end of 2006.

Eight journalists and cyber-dissidents were imprisoned in 2006 and dozens of people who had spoken out or were suspected of opposition to the government were detained. On February 7 authorities arrested Adel Mahfouz, who had published an article arguing that violent protests in reaction to cartoons caricaturing the prophet Mohammed could reinforce inaccurate perceptions of Islam as a violent religion. Mahfouz was charged with insulting public religious sentiment and could face up to three years in prison. His trial was pending at the end of the year. Freelance journalist Ali `Abd-Allah, who wrote for the Emirati daily *Al-Khalij* and Lebanese dailies *Al-Nahar* and *Al-Safir*, was charged with six months in prison in March for criticizing the country's weak economy. His son was given the same sentence after contacting Al-Jazeera to report his father's arrest. In August, security forces arrested Ali Sayed al-Shihabi, an English professor, for his posting articles on left-wing websites. He was still in detention at the end of 2006.

Except for a handful of radio stations that do not broadcast news or report on political issues, radio and television outlets are all state owned. Satellite dishes are common, and the government makes no attempt to interfere with satellite broadcasts. Recently, Syrian TV has broached topics formerly considered taboo, including interviews with opposition figures. The government censors the internet and monitors its use, but Syrians employ a range of technical tricks to circumvent censorship, and a handful of blocked domestic Syrian websites and e-mail lists openly criticize the government.

## **United Arab Emirates**

**Status: Not Free**

**Legal Environment: 23**

**Political Environment: 23**

**Economic Environment: 22**

**Total Score: 68**

While the constitution in the United Arab Emirates provides, at least in principle, for the freedom of speech and press, in practice the government uses its judicial and executive branches to restrict those rights. UAE Federal Law No 15 of 1980 for Printed Matter and Publications, which extends to all aspects of the media, including book publishing, is considered one of the toughest in the Arab World. Through this law, the government controls all content. It prohibits any criticism of government, rulers and ruling families, and friendly governments. Under this law, all publications are subjected to licensing by the government; journalists are forbidden from leveling any criticism against the government, and can be subjected to prosecution under the Penal Code for doing so. Press laws in the UAE authorize the government to censor both domestic and foreign publications prior to distribution. In 2006, the UAE abolished the Ministry of Information, the government's arm of media control and censorship, and replaced it with the High Media Council. This council has the task of controlling and overseeing the press, enforcing media-related laws, issuing licenses, and approving editors. Both the larger press and private associations' publications are censored by the government. Meanwhile, the much-celebrated Dubai Media Free Zone is considered an island of freedom, a zone where foreign media can operate freely, producing content intended for audiences outside the country. However, media outlets and journalists operating out of this Media Free Zone find themselves regulated by the Free Zone Authority for Technology and Media. Foreign media outlets in the Media Free Zone focus solely on International issues and refrain from covering any local concerns. These outlets and their journalists, like their local counterparts, are subject to the 1980 law and Penal Code whenever they cross the line in covering local UAE issues.

Journalists in the UAE suffer from several forms of intimidation. While native journalists usually face warnings and threats whenever the government feels they've crossed a line, non-citizen journalists, who account for more than 90 percent of all journalists in UAE, face harsher measures, including termination and deportation. Extreme forms of self-censorship are widely practiced whenever they write or broadcast about topics such as politics, culture, religion, friendly governments, or whatever the government deems to be politically or culturally sensitive.

All UAE media outlets are either owned outright by the government or closely affiliated with it. Privately owned newspapers, such as Arabic daily *Al-Khaleej* and its sister, English-language *Gulf News*, are heavily influenced by the government, which provides subsidies, and both rely heavily on the official UAE news agencies for content. All broadcast media, also solely owned by the government, provides only the official view on local issues. In 2005 the government of Dubai formed the Arab Media Group to operate as its media arm. The group publishes two newspapers and controls two local radio stations. Even though it promises a freer and more professional outlook, the group is still operating under the 1980 UAE local press law. This concentration of media ownership in the hands of the government and its close business allies has hindered the country's ability to practice freedom of speech and develop its independence. The close

alliance between the few business owners and the ruling families makes any criticism of the government and its laws impossible.

Furthermore, the UAE is considered a regional leader when it comes to the practice and promotion of internet censorship. 35 percent of the population uses the internet. The only Internet Service Provider (ISP) in the country is owned and operated by the government under the auspices of The Emirates Telecommunications Corporation (Etisalat). Both high-speed and dial-up users find themselves directed to a proxy server that blocks materials deemed inconsistent with the “religious, cultural, political and moral values of the country.” This proxy server maintains a list of banned websites and blocks users from accessing them, with Etisalat frequently updating its filtering software to maintain its grip. It also blocks all voice-chat, as well as Voice-Over-Internet Protocol (VOIP) websites and services. In January, the government enacted a sweeping Information and Privacy cyber crime law. The new law criminalizes the use of the internet to commit a range of crimes including violating political, social, and religious norms, subject to prison terms and fines.

## **Yemen**

**Status: Not Free**

**Legal Environment: 28**

**Political Environment: 31**

**Economic Environment: 21**

**Total Score: 80**

The constitution supports free speech “within the limits of the law,” and Article 3 of the 1990 Press and Publication Law supports the right to “freedom of knowledge, thought, the press, personal expression, communication and access to information.” Nevertheless, the government does not respect these rights in practice, and few legal or social protections exist for journalists. Debates around the creation of a new press law continued in 2006, after the Ministry of Information submitted a draft to the Majlis al-Shura in 2005. While the draft press law under consideration removes jail terms for press offenses, journalists can still face imprisonment under the country’s penal code. In addition, restrictions remain in place against criticizing the president and harming national interests, more stringent regulations on entering the field of journalism have been introduced, and the capital required to launch a print publication was increased. Meanwhile, journalists were criminalized under the 1990 Press Law, continuing an alarming trend that began in 2004, partly in reaction to the media’s increasing coverage of sensitive topics such as state policies towards the southern region of the country, relations with neighboring Arab states, corruption, security issues, and anti-terrorism policy. The judiciary is biased towards the state, and public officials, ministries, corporations, and the president of the republic all filed lawsuits against the press, charging criminal defamation and libel. One opposition paper, *Al-Thawri*, and its editor-in-chief, Khalid Salman, were involved in 14 separate civil lawsuits in 2006. In February, three journalists were temporarily imprisoned and charged with insulting the Prophet

under both the penal code and the press law for reprinting cartoons caricaturing the prophet Mohammed that originally appeared in a Danish daily in September 2005. Kamal al-Olufi of *Al-Rai al-Am*, Mohammed al-Assadi, the editor of the *Yemen Observer*, and two journalists from *Al-Hurriya* were all convicted at the end of the year and received various sentences ranging from the suspension of their papers, temporary writing bans, fines, and prison terms.

In addition to being targeted in the courts for their critical reporting, journalists faced direct and indirect attacks at the hands of both state and non-state actors. They were victims of assault, verbal and physical intimidation, imprisonment, loss of jobs, travel bans, and public smear campaigns. Newspapers had their editions seized, their offices vandalized, their publications suspended, and their companies confiscated. A noticeable increase in offenses against the press occurred in the months leading up to the presidential elections of September. Yemeni “Women Journalists Without Chains” reported 67 cases of violations committed against journalists in 2006 solely for expressing their opinions. Jamal Amer, editor-in-chief of the independent newspaper *Al-Wasat*, who was abducted, beaten, and threatened by suspected government agents in August 2005, continued to be harassed in 2006. On April 10, security officials interrogated his neighbors for personal information on his family. Journalist Abed al-Osaily from the newspaper *Al-Nahar* was murdered in July after writing an article that criticized government handling of a local irrigation project. Police failed to arrest the perpetrators. A number of other journalists were physically attacked both on and off the job, often while covering protests, sit-ins, political rallies, and sensitive topics. Qaed al-Tairi of *Al-Thawri* was kidnapped and assaulted in March for his writings criticizing public figures. On April 1, a journalist who had been fired for his critical writings from the state-run newspaper, *14 October*, was sprayed with a toxic gas while in his car. Abed al-Mahthari of the independent weekly *Al-Deyar*, escaped an attack by suspected weapons traffickers on April 19; a topic he had investigated in the past. Perpetrators of violence against the press are rarely prosecuted and the government seems to support an environment of complete impunity for these crimes, failing to conduct serious investigations or denounce the assaults. There were very few developments in the cases of crimes committed in 2005, such as the November 2005 stabbing of journalist Nabil Sabaie, the December 2005 attack of journalist Muhammed Sadiq al-Odaini, or the injury of *Al-Nahar* editor Haga’ al-Jehafi by an exploding file folder. The president and the defense minister continued to instigate violence towards oppositional journalists through speeches that insinuated that they were traitors or separatists, financed by external enemies.

A wide and diverse range of print publications are available that express the different perspectives of the government and the opposition, as well as independent and international views. Nevertheless, more than 70 percent of the population lives in rural areas where newspapers are not distributed and the country has a high rate of illiteracy. Most people receive their news from the radio and television; however, the state maintains a monopoly on all broadcast media. There is currently no procedure for licensing independent media. Satellite television and the Internet provide sources of domestic and international news, but are available in mostly urban areas. Little more than one percent of the population utilizes the Internet. The government inspects all printed

material that arrives from abroad and filters Internet content. Websites were blocked in the months surrounding the September presidential elections.