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The Moroccan Struggle for Media Development

by

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Introduction:

The tenacity of Morocco's press set the agenda for developing Arab media systems on the brink of the 20th century. A change in political tone revived the demand for sweeping press reforms. The Socialist party came to power in 1997 and former monarch Hassan II included greater press freedoms as one of his democratizing priorities. In 1999, King Mohammed VI accepted the throne and the task of continuing Morocco's transformation into a modern society with democratic ideals. Some progress occurred. Media developments included the growth of independent papers, private and pluralistic ownership and the liberty to discuss previously taboo topics like the monarchy, Islam and territorial disputes in Western Sahara. The monarchy created a regulatory body for broadcasting in 2005.

Moroccans found hope in these advances and the reports of international media watchdogs reflected the newfound optimism. However, Morocco's press faced legal barriers once the media community's expectations reached an ultimate high. The monarchy revised the 1958 press code in 2002, merely reducing 20-year prison sentences for defamation and libel charges against the royal family to five years. Media experts expected the criminal punishment's eradication. Furthermore, lawmakers included Islam and the Western Sahara dispute in the defamation law and shifted trials from the state to the courts. This transfer of power would be considered positive if the courts were independent, but the king appoints many of the judges who are partial to the state's desires.

Disproportional fines, restrictive licenses and the monarchy's lack of sincerity about an independent press define the Moroccan media's present theme and battle. The positive acclaim of Morocco's press combined with its backsliding reforms poses a troubling contradiction because neighboring countries view Morocco as a press freedom role model in the 21st century.

Capturing the essence of a changing media system is complex, but evaluating the nation's media development is essential in highlighting key flaws in the system, developing solutions and realizing the potential of the Moroccan press.

I will use UNESCO's publication *Media Development Indicators: A Framework for Assessing Media Development* to survey the present status of Morocco's media system and determine which direction it is truly heading. Media assessors have studied Morocco's dynamic press situation, but this publication remains untested against the nation's media development. This publication outlines five multi-faceted categories for researching a functioning media system – regulatory systems, ownership pluralism, providing a platform for democratic discourse, professionalism and infrastructural capacity. Each category consists of component issues, broad indicators and verification sources. The assessment's detailed structure ensures a thoroughly researched comparison of Morocco's media with UNESCO's definition of proper media development. Investigating the wavering evolution of Morocco's press will explain the relapse tarnishing the nation's reputation across press freedom organizations internationally.

Methodology:

Media systems are of critical importance in developing countries. They hold the power to expose political corruption and provide a forum for culture and education, as well as a platform for citizens to voice their concerns and needs. Therefore, it is essential that all aspects of the media system develop effectively, allowing a free press to blossom. UNESCO embodies these ideals in its constitution in which it pledges to “promote the free flow of ideas by word and image,” and the organization’s International Program for the Development of Communication (IPDC) reinforces that commitment.¹ IPDC’s mission is to “contribute to sustainable development, democracy and good governance by fostering universal access to and distribution of information and knowledge through strengthening the capacities of developing countries and countries in transition in the field of electronic media and print press.”² To ensure the crucial link between healthy nation development and a free media, IPDC created *Media Development Indicators: A framework for assessing media development*.

In 2006, IPDC envisioned the framework at its 25th session in Paris. A consulting body quickly formed from members of media development organizations, universities, professional institutions and intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations. In March 2008, members presented the paper to IPDC’s Intergovernmental Council at its 26th session. The Council unanimously endorsed the project. The researchers designed the publication as a diagnostic tool with five major categories of media development and created it for media stakeholders to assess the present status of development and the effectiveness of existing media development programs on a national scale.

¹ *Media Development Indicators: A Framework for Assessing Media Development*, The International Program for the Development of Communication (IPDC) (Paris: UNESCO, 2008) 6.

² *Media Development Indicators*, 11.

The framework serves as the backbone of this thesis. I used the ideals in this general publication and specified it to the reality of Morocco's media situation. The publication best defines its purpose – “the structure can be conceptualized as a process of ‘drilling down’ from the desired media development outcome to the specific means of verifying how far this outcome is achieved in practice.”³ Using what IPDC considers the foundation of a free media system, I researched Web sites of media watchdog groups, governmental and non-governmental organizations, scholarly articles and more Morocco-specific sources to fill in the blanks outlined in the framework. I followed the category and issue outlines and used the supporting context, key indicators and means of verification to shape each issue.

³ *Media Development Indicators*, 14.

History:

The Moroccan press underwent a number of changes throughout its history, but one thing remained constant – the press has always answered to a higher authority and an opposition press always arises. Establishing the foundation of Morocco's media system creates a launching pad for its evolution since the 19th century. The educated elite, colonialism and nationalism influenced the formation of the media system. Each of these influences is respectively associated with three stages: pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial.

Foreign journalists shaped the pre-colonial press through their French, Spanish, Arabic, English and German publications. The first newspaper printed in Morocco was *El Eco de Tetuán*, a Spanish weekly published in 1860.⁴ This venture lasted only a few months. The *Alliance Israelite* appeared in 1870 and *Journal d'Obedience Allemand* followed. The English-language *Maghreb al-Aksa* ran weekly in 1877.⁵ By 1908, publications began showing up in large cities like Rabat, Fez and Meknes and were largely concentrated in coastal cities Tangier and Casablanca.

The press flourished in city centers and was only accessible to the urban, educated elite, a minority group at the time. Most of these elite were members of the Makhzen, the circle of elites considered second rank after the King and comprising a large part of his administration. Origins of self-censorship begin in the relationship between the press and its higher authority. The relationship went smoothly as long as journalists bent to the Makhzen's desires. Otherwise, journalists were subject to bans, suspensions and closures by the Makhzen using its political and financial weight. The championing group of today has its roots in pre-colonial times as well – the

⁴ Government of Morocco, Media and Communication, 2006, 12 Apr. 2010 <<http://www.maroc.ma/PortailInst/An/MenuGauche/Society+and+Culture/Media+and+Communication/Printed+Press.htm>>.

⁵ Government of Morocco.

independent press. Mirroring the present independent press, non-Makhzen thinkers formed an unofficial press network in Fez, its isolated location adding to its accomplishments of publishing independently minded news on a fairly regular basis. In her study of the Moroccan press, Mary Denise Tabor suggests that efforts to uphold sovereignty against colonial aggressors spurred the censorial hand of the Makhzen. However, the press fell under a largely francophone influence due to the French protectorate of 1912.⁶

In colonial times the French rearranged the Moroccan press to benefit protectorate aims. Coerced loyalty and oversight shifted from the Makhzen to the French. The French published papers promoting colonial interests, such as *L'Echo du Maroc* and *La Vigie Marocaine*.⁷ This redirecting of interests halted the evolution of press freedom. In opposition to the pro-colonial voice, nationalist papers were born. Mohamed Al Ouazzani founded the weekly French-language *L'action du peuple* in response to infringed nationalist rights in 1933.⁸ Arabic publications found their way on to the scene with *al-Salam* and *al-Hayat*, founded by Abdekhalek Torres and Mohamed Bennouna in Tetouan.⁹ These three publications were the main channel for reform complaints against Spanish and French colonial powers. The publications created a platform for independence demands. The Arabic-language press reached the ordinary Moroccan, which had a low literacy rate, especially in rural areas. The independence of 1956 marked the shift of press coverage from French to Moroccan interests.

Nationalist sentiments represented the overarching feeling of Moroccans in post-colonial times. The monarchy created the press code in 1958. State control intensified as they reigned in independent press voices in attempts to maintain order over the post-colonial society. Moroccan

⁶ Mary Denise Tabor, *Printing Press to Satellite: A Historical Case Study of Media and the Arab State* (2002) 99.

⁷ Government of Morocco.

⁸ Government of Morocco.

⁹ Government of Morocco.

political parties ran many of the existing newspapers post independence, aside from the French papers. Political party-sponsored newspapers dominated the media field until King Hassan's II democratizing reforms of the late 1990s, which revitalized the freedom of the press as a pillar of democracy.¹⁰ After ruling for almost forty years, Hassan II granted groundbreaking liberty to journalists to discuss economic issues and political topics forbidden in the media of his earlier years. In 1996, Hassan II repealed a royal decree which had restrained press freedom since 1935, and made other constitutional reforms.¹¹ New independent newspapers began, such as *Le Journal*, *Demain* magazine and *Assahifa* and attracted readership from Moroccans who had grown weary of the political papers. "For the first time, Moroccans were enjoying a degree of freedom that had no comparison with the past," said Hassan Nejmi, Rabat bureau chief of a party paper, to Reporters Without Borders (RWB).¹² These new publications incorporated satire and caricature into their content. However, Aboubakr Jamaï, former magazine publisher, told the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) that the state makes court-case examples of independent papers to stress the taboos of society. "We've been used as a tool to communicate to others where the boundaries are," he said.¹³

A switch in Parliament's majority to the Socialist party in 1997 and a new monarch signified change in the late 20th century. King Mohammed VI promised to continue press freedom reforms when he came to power in 1999. To prove his sincerity, the king removed Idriss Basri, the Minister of Interior, from power. Basri represented the old way of politics and his removal paved a new path of democracy and openness. As Basri had commonly exerted control

¹⁰ Reporters Without Borders (RWB), Warnings for the Independent Press 13 May 2003, 3 Jan. 2010 <<http://en.rsf.org/morocco-warnings-for-the-independent-press-13-05-2003,06801.html>>.

¹¹ Mohammed Ibahrine, *Democratization and the press: the case of Morocco*, *Nord-Süd Aktuell* (4 Quartal, 2002) 2.

¹² RWB, Warnings.

¹³ Joel Campagna and Kamel Labidi, The Moroccan Façade, Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) 3 July 2007, 23 Mar. 2010 <<http://cpj.org/reports/2007/01/moroccoweb.php>>.

over the Ministry of Communication, his removal also gave new autonomy to the ministry.¹⁴ A new breed of journalists snatched the reins of the press system once the monarchy loosened its grip. Human rights lawyer Abdelaziz Nouyadi told CPJ that journalists were determined to “play a political role by publishing the shortcomings of democracy and pluralism, hot issues like corruption, palace budgets and narco-trafficking. Political elites and the monarchy became fearful of these people because they believe they have no boundaries.”¹⁵

A vast disparity of freedom exists between Mohammed VI’s reign and the “years of lead,” a term used to describe Hassan II’s time in power.¹⁶ Political commentary exists that would have warranted “torture, disappearance or worse during the darkest days of Hassan II’s rule,” CPJ said. Private publications cover pro-government, opposition and independent voices. Press freedom organization Freedom House divides countries into three categories: free, partly free and not free. In 2002, Morocco was the only North African nation to be considered partly free. The Reporters Without Borders 2002 press freedom index ranked Morocco 89th of 139 countries. The only countries in the Arab world to place higher were Kuwait, Bahrain, Lebanon and the Palestinian Authority. The strides of press freedom are extensive, but the Moroccan media can hardly claim victory.

Many journalists and government officials downplay the current press restrictions through comparison with the media of Hassan II’s oppressive regime or with poor press freedom conditions of surrounding countries in the Arab world. However, CPJ said such comparisons are dangerously deceptive. “Press freedom has regressed notably over the last five years. For all of

¹⁴ Ibahrine, 2.

¹⁵ Campagna.

¹⁶ Campagna.

Morocco's progress, much more needs to be done in a country that describes itself as a constitutional monarchy.”¹⁷

In 2004, Freedom House declared Morocco's media as not free and the nation presently remains in that category. Egypt was the only partly free North African nation in 2009. The 2009 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index places Morocco 127th out of 175 nations, dropping 21 spots from its 2007 ranking – 106th out of 169 nations. The information presented in the following table was based on RWB press freedom indexes from 2002 to 2009 and exemplifies the erratic nature of Morocco's media.

| Year | Morocco's rank | # of countries surveyed |
|------|----------------|-------------------------|
| 2002 | 89 | 139 |
| 2003 | 131 | 166 |
| 2004 | 126 | 167 |
| 2005 | 120 | 167 |
| 2006 | 97 | 168 |
| 2007 | 106 | 169 |
| 2008 | 122 | 173 |
| 2009 | 127 | 175 |

RWB announces the verdict of Morocco's inconsistent battle with press freedom in its 2009 country report. “Press freedom appears in the past months to have lost its hard-won ground

¹⁷ Campagna.

between the end of the reign of Hassan II and the start of that of Mohammed VI.”¹⁸ Novelist and former editor Driss Ksikes said in 2007 that the new millennium brought with it a more liberal tone in society that has failed to evolve. “I am not very optimistic. After 15 years in the press, I saw how it’s worked all along. My feeling is that seven years ago we were opening the window wide open...People could speak their mind. Since 2003, we have been closing down the window bit by bit. I feel we are putting up an iron curtain. The window is still open but there are iron curtains.”¹⁹ Ksikes quit journalism after a court sentenced him to a suspended 3-year jail sentence in 2007.

King Mohammed VI expressed his sentiments toward press freedom in 2002. “We would like to reiterate our firm resolve to consolidate press freedom, preserve news diversity and ensure the modernization of this sector, which is one of the pillars of our project for a modernized, democratic society,” he said.²⁰

A second statement by the king expresses the contradiction between his earnest statement of press freedom and the state’s adverse actions of legal restraints. “Of course I am in favor of press freedom. But I would like this freedom to be a responsible one... Journalists aren’t angels, after all. Personally, I appreciate the role of critic played by the Moroccan press and journalists in public debate. But let’s avoid giving in to the temptation of the imported model. Otherwise our own values will be undermined and individual freedoms will be jeopardized... The law sets limits... It must apply to everyone. When the press speaks of human rights, it sometimes forgets to respect those rights itself.”²¹ This statement highlights the monarchy’s hesitation toward the

¹⁸ Reporters Without Borders, Morocco, 2009, 25 Feb. 2010 < <http://en.rsf.org/report-morocco,160.html>>.

¹⁹ Campagna.

²⁰ RWB, Warnings.

²¹ RWB, Warnings.

successful growth of the independent press and foreshadowed the backsliding nature of press freedom which was lurking on the horizon.

Findings:

Category 1 - A system of regulation conducive to freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity of the media

A. Legal and Policy Framework

The Moroccan Constitution guarantees freedom of expression and opinion. Article 9 grants citizens “freedom of opinion, freedom of expression under all its forms and freedom to assemble...No restrictions can be imposed on such freedoms other than by law.”²² The constitution, amended in 1992, does not provide freedom of the press. Therefore, the press code and the Fundamental Law for Professional Journalists regulate the press sector.²³

Parliament amended the press code in 2002, instating positive rights and reiterating negative restrictions. Article 77 gives the interior minister permission to seize publications without a court order. Publications vulnerable to seizure are those likely to “disturb the peace.”²⁴ This provision existed in the 1958 press law and was not amended in 2002. Positive changes include smaller fines and lighter punishments, but jail time remains a possible consequence of defaming the royal family. Parliament extended the law, stating that “the same sentences apply when the publication of a newspaper or piece of writing constitute an offence to Islam, the monarchy or territorial integrity,” reinforcing the three taboos of Moroccan society.²⁵ Article 29 grants the government the right to indefinitely ban or suspend newspapers which offend the three taboos. Media critics expressed outrage at the cement nature of the press code. Journalist Khalid Jamaï highlighted the contradictory nature of the press in his *Le Journal Hebdomadaire* editorial

²² Internews, Morocco, 22 Feb. 2010, 1 < <http://www.internews.org/regions/mena/amr/morocco.pdf>>.

²³ World Association of Newspapers World Press Trends, Morocco: Media market description 2008, 2.

²⁴ RWB, Warnings.

²⁵ RWB, Warnings.

stating that "this press law reflects the government's indecision, moving forward in one area, moving back in another."²⁶

There is no law guaranteeing journalists the right to information and access depends largely on a journalist's connections in the government. However the push for equal access is present throughout Moroccan society and demand for legislation began in 2006. Advocacy group Transparency Maroc and the Socialist group in Parliament drafted laws regarding access to information, though no legislation yet resulted. Association ADALA, a Morocco non-governmental organization, held a symposium in 2007 urging the government to pass a freedom of information law. The organization adopted the "Moroccan Declaration to the Right to Information," demanding that an independent oversight body monitor the law's execution.²⁷ UNESCO raises awareness for the cause through workshops and writing competitions on the topic. Idris Al-Waly, director of *Sada Taounate* weekly newspaper, gave his opinion of information access during a panel sponsored by the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) regarding the development of sustainable independent media in Morocco. "It depends on your relation with the governor. If good, it will open up all the doors to public agencies with access to information. At the regional level, however, the situation is very difficult," Al-Waly said.²⁸

Editorial independence is not guaranteed by law. With the press code's permission, the government can order newspapers not to report on specific topics or events.²⁹ Independent papers have greater editorial freedom, but editorial policy in public broadcasting is largely dictated by state-partial producers. A media worker, who asked to remain anonymous, discussed the limited

²⁶ RWB, Warnings.

²⁷ Said Almadhoun, *Status of Freedom of Information Legislation in the Arab world*, 6. Feb 2010, 15 Apr. 2010, 7-8.

²⁸ *The Development of Sustainable Independent Media in the Middle East and North Africa*, The International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) (2008), 9.

²⁹ Keith Henderson, *Decriminalizing Defamation and Insult Laws* (2005) 15.

editorial freedom to the IREX panel. “In the broadcast media, we talk about the editorial policy. This is a kind of restriction of the freedom of expression. The editorial policy must be declared with transparency so that there remain no ignored values.”³⁰

Independent journalist Malika Malak of the IREX panel said state officials control editorial policy. “Since 2005, the public sector has intervened in the editorial process, but control has increased and only one editorial policy has been adopted for many years. The TV covers royal activities and visits at the beginning of each newscast. Even the order of the news seems as if it is dictated by one official,” Malak said.³¹

The government has exerted pressure on journalists to give up their sources in matters of national security. IREX tells of an instance when the right to protect sources and anti-terrorism policy conflicted in a 2007 case against the journalists from *al-Watan Alan* newspaper. The newspaper published documents, supplied by a soldier, describing security provisions taken to prevent terrorist attacks. State officials arrested the journalists in an attempt to learn the soldier’s identity. One journalist eventually gave up his source when officials detained his wife and child and forced him to listen to his child’s crying throughout the night. Rabat’s military court prosecuted the soldier. These types of cases prompt journalist to self-censor stories dealing with sensitive issues.

B. Regulatory System for Broadcasting

The state has monopolized the broadcast sector for decades through financial support and direct oversight. In 2002, a royal decree established a regulatory body, the High Authority of Audiovisual Communication (HACA), to license TV and radio stations, though the media community questions the body’s independence. Ahmed Al-Bouz, editor of *Al Hayat*, questioned

³⁰ *Media Sustainability Index*, 9.

³¹ *Media Sustainability Index*, 13.

HACA's beginnings during the IREX panel. "Behind the appearance of pluralism, there are many incidents of monopoly and predominance, especially in the broadcast sector," he said. "Is HACA independent? Regarding its regulations and Articles of Association, and regardless of its structure, its regulatory statute did not pass through the Parliament but was enacted by a royal decree based on Article 19 of the Constitution."³²

The state's government Web site clearly defines HACA's objectives and states that "new television stations and radio stations will be born."³³ However, HACA's latest wave of licensing in 2009 disappointed those hopeful in the body's mission to pluralize the broadcast sector. HACA's Superior Council of Audiovisual Communication approved only four new radio stations, specialized and multi-regional. HACA approved no news radio or privately-owned television stations for operation, though 23 stations applied.³⁴ The king holds authority to appoint HACA's president and four board members.

C. Defamation laws and other legal restrictions on journalists

The vaguely-worded defamation and libel law found in the press code is a major setback to the media community. Critically reporting on the three taboos warrants disproportional fines and possible jail time. The press code prohibits the reporting of false news if it is likely to disrupt public order. It also restricts reporting on topics under judicial review or criminal investigation and forbids publishing facts related to an individual's private life.³⁵ However, it does provide some protection against defamation of certain public officials. The government does not take the broad law for granted. In 2008, the government filed 26 complaints, with one case incurring a prison sentence, three resulting in suspensions, and five with fines. There were no acquittals and

³² *Media Sustainability Index*, 8.

³³ Government of Morocco.

³⁴ RWB, Morocco.

³⁵ Internews, 2.

the rest of the cases remained pending.³⁶ According to the U.S. Department of State, there were 45 cases brought by the government and citizens in 2008, increasing to 56 in 2009.³⁷

The government uses disproportional fines to sidestep direct bans on publications. In 2008, the state ordered the publisher of the largest Arabic daily, *al-Massae*, to pay more than 6 million dirhams, approximately \$688,000, in a libel case. Another libel case burdened the paper with a 600,000 dirham fine. The fines may cause bankruptcy for the paper.³⁸ Jail sentences are also still a common form of punishment. Courts sentenced journalists to a total of 25 years in prison and fines totaled more than \$2.8 million in the past 10 years.³⁹ However, jail sentences are not always served completely. Courts ordered 12 prison sentences in 2009 and suspended most of them.⁴⁰ Journalist and blogger Hassan Barhoum received a fine and six-month jail sentence for creating a petition accusing a prosecutor of corruption. The court charged him with defaming a judicial official, though his sentence was later revoked by royal pardon.⁴¹

Though the courts suspend most jail sentences, two jail sentences remained in effect in 2009. The court sentenced Driss Chahtane, editor of *al-Michaal*, to one year in prison for writing an article about the King's health. Cybercafé owner Abdullah Boukfou received a one year prison sentence for distributing information related to demonstrations and "possessing publications inciting racial hatred."⁴² Journalists forced to carry out prison sentences 10 years

³⁶ World Association of Newspapers, 2.

³⁷ U.S. Department of State, 2009 Human Rights Practices: Morocco, 11 Mar. 2010, 17 Mar. 2010 <<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/nea/136075.htm>>.

³⁸ Freedom House. Morocco, 2009, 25 Apr. 2010 <<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=251&year=2009&country=7666>>.

³⁹ Reporters Without Borders, Advances and reverses for press freedom during King Mohammed's first decade 22 July 2009, 11 Jan 2010 <<http://en.rsf.org/morocco-advances-and-reverses-for-press-22-07-2009,33950.html>>.

⁴⁰ Barbara Trionfi, World Press Freedom Review: Morocco, International Press Institute. 9 Feb. 2010, 13 Mar. 2010 <<http://www.freemedia.at/publications/world-press-freedom-review/mena/singleview/4747/>>.

⁴¹ Department of State.

⁴² RWB, Morocco.

after King Mohammed VI's rise to the throne shows a severe lack of progress stemming from the ancient wording of the press code.

To prove the red lines of Moroccan society were still in effect, the state made an example of two weeklies in 2009. *Nichane*, an Arabic-language weekly, and *TelQuel*, the French version, published a public opinion poll reporting 91% of Moroccans view Mohammed VI favorably. State officials destroyed more than 100,000 copies of the weeklies three days after publication. "Conducting a survey, the main focus of which is to ask the citizens to give their thoughts on the king's actions is in itself a violation of the principles and the foundation of the royal system," Minister of Communication Khalid Naciri told reporters. "In Morocco, the monarchy cannot be the object of a debate, even through a survey."⁴³

A product of the 2003 terrorist attacks in Casablanca, the anti-terrorism law imposes additional restrictions on journalists. Paragraph 12 of the Laânigri law's first article defines a terrorist act as any "propaganda, publicity or defense of an act constituting a terrorist offense."⁴⁴ The vaguely-worded notion of "publicity" leaves journalists vulnerable to the government and court's interpretation.

D. Censorship

The press code does not mention prior censorship, but the government has used it to control information, especially in times of political crisis. In 2005, government officials broke into the printing office of daily newspaper *An-Nahar al-Maghribiyya* and demanded a copy to review before distribution.⁴⁵ Prior censorship is not commonly practiced because journalists often harness their words before the monarchy gets a chance, resulting in widespread self-

⁴³ Attacks on the press 2009: Morocco, Committee to Protect Journalists, 16 Feb. 2010, 23 Apr. 2010
< <http://www.cpj.org/2010/02/attacks-on-the-press-2009-morocco.php>>.

⁴⁴ RWB, Warnings.

⁴⁵ *Report on the state of media in Morocco*, Arab Center for the Development of the Rule of Law and Integrity, 2007, 27.

censorship. Nouredine Miftah, editor of the independent weekly *Al-Ayyam*, told CPJ that past court cases caused the publication to “take its time and become relatively more cautious and even take refuge in self-censorship particularly before tackling issues considered taboos,” Miftah said.⁴⁶ Ahmed Reda Benchemsi, publisher of the independent weekly *TelQuel*, told CPJ that the magazine’s journalists choose their words carefully to avoid judicial repercussion. “Surely we became far more cautious, understanding that anything, even the less harmful writings or pictures, could lead us to court trials and God only would know the outcome,” he said.⁴⁷

State control over Internet access is relatively free, though the Internet began in Morocco in 195 and there has been little time to impose restrictions through law or see its effects. According to the International Telecommunication Union, there were 33 Internet users per 100 residents in 2008.⁴⁸ Most users browse the Web for entertainment, rather than news-gathering purposes. However, there are electronic newspapers: three in French, two in Arabic and one in English.⁴⁹ The state has blocked Web sites on occasion. In 2007, authorities shut down YouTube for six days after it streamed videos deemed as insulting to the monarchy. The government again blocked access for four days after a video aired possibly incriminating police in corruption. Google Earth, Google Maps and LiveJournal.com were blocked in relation to the Western Sahara issue.⁵⁰ The government temporarily blocked four Web sites affiliated with Islamist organizations because they mobilized readers to support Palestinians against the Israelis in Gaza. Though the government has not placed any official limits on blogging, one court made one blogger an example of crossing the taboo line. Blogger and Web site editor Jawad El Galii received a three-month jail sentence after he participated in a protest rally. El Galii argued with a

⁴⁶ Campagna.

⁴⁷ Campagna.

⁴⁸ Department of State.

⁴⁹ World Association of Newspapers, 2.

⁵⁰ World Association of Newspapers, 2.

police officer who proceeded to smash his video camera. Because El Galii had no credentials, the court accused him of impersonating a journalist. His jail sentence was later suspended.⁵¹

Category 2 - Plurality and diversity of media, a level economic playing field and transparency of ownership

A. Media concentration

The degree of ownership pluralism varies depending on the medium. The state owns the majority of broadcast stations, there is one leading Internet provider and the print press experiences a wider range of owners across party, independent and state papers. The state owns two broadcast companies: the Société nationale de radiodiffusion et de television (SNRT) and Channel 2 (2M).⁵² The SNRT controls national radio, Moroccan TV national television and three satellite channels. Maroc Telecom is the main Internet service provider with 53% owned by Vivendi Universal, a French company, 30% owned by the state and rest owned by stockholders. WANADOO is the second-leading Internet service provider, followed by the newly established WANA, largely owned by the royal family.⁵³

Private ownership represents about 70% of the Moroccan press.⁵⁴ However, most publications lack transparency about the owners' identities, though the holder with the most shares technically manages the publication. Common shareholders are banks, insurance companies and other businesses. There is only one national news agency, Maghreb Arabe Presse (MAP), and the state owns it. In addition, Moroccan newspapers receive a 30% discount for using the news MAP distributes, leaving small incentive to create a competing news agency. The state sets much of MAP's newsgathering agenda, encouraging selectivity in news coverage and sometimes altering the news. Gamal Muhafiz told IREX panelists that the outdated nature of its

⁵¹ Department of State.

⁵² *Media Sustainability Index*, 12.

⁵³ *Media Sustainability Index*, 12.

⁵⁴ World Association of Newspapers, 2.

1971 laws and internal Articles of Association hamper MAP's professionalism. "Even the Berlin Wall was removed, but such old laws still cripple the agency and bind it to the control of the government...The board of directors is like a government headed by the Prime Minister. The agency needs reform to enhance professionalism," Muhafiz said.⁵⁵

B. Diverse mix of public, private and community media

There is disparity among public, private and independent media sources across print and broadcast sectors. Television stations are mostly state-owned and newspaper owners are more diverse. However, the government guards newspaper content more harshly because of this freedom. There are only two privately-owned broadcast outlets: Medi-1, a private radio station, and Medi-Sat television.⁵⁶ Medi-1 is financially private and independent, but self-censorship is commonly practiced. Private owners controlled major broadcaster 2M until the government bought 68% of its stock to save the company from bankruptcy.⁵⁷

The private sector dominates the majority of newspaper managers, followed by political parties. Of the 618 publications, political parties publish 26.⁵⁸ Independent publishers make up the majority, though true independence is not guaranteed due to financial and legal provisions. Regional media is growing. Though the majority of papers are published in Casablanca, local papers are published in smaller cities like Fes, Meknes and Oujda.⁵⁹

The state supports print media through a subsidy system, even extending financial support to publications critical of the government. The monetary amount depends on the population of the publication's readers.⁶⁰ In 2006, 50 newspapers received subsidies totaling 4.3

⁵⁵ *Media Sustainability Index*, 13.

⁵⁶ World Association of Newspapers, 1.

⁵⁷ Internews, 3.

⁵⁸ Government of Morocco.

⁵⁹ Government of Morocco.

⁶⁰ Department of State.

million Euros.⁶¹ In order to receive financial support, the publication must hire a minimum number of employees, be without legal penalty, advertisements cannot exceed half of content space, hold transparent bank records and secure a minimum level of rights for its employed journalists.⁶² However, IREX panelists discussed the disparity of support between regional and official papers. Al-Waly said government support lacks transparency. “There is no respect to standards as regards distribution, especially the condition of having a framework agreement [for employees]. In the regional newspapers, support is inadequate, and the most support goes to the state newspapers, i.e. Maroc Soir and Le Matin, though they exceed the permissible 50% advertising space. The support should be reconsidered.”⁶³

C. Licensing and spectrum allocation

The press code affords any media outlet the right to publish or broadcast upon receiving the government’s official permission. Judicial courts grant licenses to newspapers within their jurisdiction and HACA grants licenses to audio-visual media. The license requirements are straightforward, but there is one provision that governments may use to prevent an outlet from establishing. The state provides a temporary receipt after a publishing director signs the license. The prospective outlet must receive the official license receipt within 30 days of signature or the outlet cannot publish.⁶⁴ Though these instances are rare, there have been cases when authorities hesitate to allow publication. The IREX panel noted a prospective newspaper’s case of a stalled license. The publication entitled *Facts of the North* reported on the conditions in the marginalized north of Morocco.

In 2006, journalists complained of HACA’s licensing of Medi-1 Sat and 10 local and

⁶¹ *Media Sustainability Index*, 15.

⁶² *Media Sustainability Index*, 15.

⁶³ *Media Sustainability Index*, 15.

⁶⁴ *State of Media*, 21.

regional radio stations being spurred by political motivations.⁶⁵ The 2009 licensing wave reiterates the focus on entertainment and dictated editorial policy, as no new information-based stations received permits. Frequency allocation is also regulated by the National Telecommunication Regulatory Agency of Morocco.⁶⁶

D. Taxation and business regulation

Publications face a 20% VAT tax and taxes on revenue. The media also receives no tax breaks.⁶⁷ However, the state places neither tax preferences nor prohibitive taxes discriminately on the media. Taxation and business regulation is not a major obstruction of the media's progress.

E. Advertising

Advertising sales represent a large portion of a media outlet's revenue and the advertiser's political affiliation or consumer base can sway a newspaper's content. Making up roughly 80% of a newspaper's income, losing advertising support could bankrupt the publication.⁶⁸ *Le Journal Hebdomadaire* and *Assahifa Ousbouiya* lost 80% of its advertising revenue from Mediastar from 2000 to 2002.⁶⁹ Ali Amir, editor of *Le Journal Hebdomadaire*, said the state told Mediastar to stop advertising with the publications because of its content. "There was an obvious boycott of our publications," Amar said. "Some companies such as Maroc Telecom and Royal Air Maroc received instructions to stop giving us advertising. Others chose to boycott us because they did not want to be associated with our editorial line."⁷⁰

⁶⁵ *State of Media*, 22.

⁶⁶ *Effective regulation case study: Morocco*, International Telecommunication Union, June 2006, 39.

⁶⁷ World Association of Newspapers, 4.

⁶⁸ Campagna.

⁶⁹ RWB, Warnings.

⁷⁰ RWB, Warnings.

A publication's language attracts different amounts of advertiser's attention. Francophone papers tend to receive higher advertising revenues because of the slightly greater purchasing power of the publication's readers compared to readers of Arabic papers. IREX panelist Al-Salimy said, "Advertisers focus on French readers because they have significant purchasing capabilities – advertisements for cars, houses, etc. – As for TV in Arabic, advertising is focused on products like Tide and soap."⁷¹ IREX panelists also noted greater advertising competition in Arabic television rather than print sources due to low literacy rate.

The advertising market faces monopoly and corruption. Foreign companies and 10 national companies constitute 60% of ads on the two public broadcast channels. Major advertising company Régie 3 makes up 76% of television commercials on one station and more than 95% of radio commercials. The Independent Advertising Agency controls ads on Channel 1.⁷² IREX panelist Ahmed Afzaran noted corruption between advertising agencies and the judiciary. "Judicial advertisements are given for bribery," he said. "The publication of an advertisement is compensated with MAD 200, of which MAD 50 is usually given as a bribe in courts for those who distribute judicial advertisements, thus the newspaper earns MAD 150."⁷³

⁷¹ *Media Sustainability Index*, 14.

⁷² *Media Sustainability Index*, 14.

⁷³ *Media Sustainability Index*, 15.

Category 3 – Media as a platform for democratic discourse

A. Media reflects diversity of society

Language, coverage and journalist employment reflect the diversity of society. In Morocco, diverse broadcast coverage is more important than newspaper coverage because about half of the population is illiterate. Less than 1% of the literate portion read newspapers daily.⁷⁴ Therefore, broadcasters have the potential to spread newsworthy information to a wider population through television, but entertainment and sports represent the highest-watched programs. With the state controlling public broadcasting, their agenda sets the public interest. There was a consensus among IREX panelists that the state is diluting the Moroccan public by focusing on entertainment programs rather than presenting news and information. “Public TV is just like a daily nightclub lineup,” one television journalist said at the panel. “It is full of variety shows, amusement and dance programs. They adopt the mentality and techniques of private TV stations and ignore the real mission and practices of a public TV to serve society.”⁷⁵

Moroccan newspapers are published across three main languages – French, Arabic and Tamazight, the language spoken by many of Morocco’s original inhabitants, the Amazigh. Of the 398 newspapers published in 2006, 285 were in Arabic, 90 in French and nine in Tamazight.⁷⁶ Established by the king in 2001, the Royal Institute of the Amazigh Culture created the Amazigh channel. The Amazigh radio station broadcasts 16 hours daily.⁷⁷

Coverage varies between regional and city districts. Al-Waly said, “A distinction can be made between freedom of expression in major cities and small towns. If what is published by national newspapers is published by local newspapers about the monarchy, sex, etc., it will cause

⁷⁴ World Association of Newspapers, 1.

⁷⁵ *Media Sustainability Index*, 11.

⁷⁶ Morocco Ministry of Communication, 2006, 6 Apr. 2010 <<http://www.mincom.gov.ma/MinCom/FR/>>.

⁷⁷ *Media Sustainability Index*, 12.

problems.”⁷⁸ Broadcasters also rarely cover regional activities. However, the elite nature of the independent print press coverage magnifies the importance of televised news. Since the elite make up a large portion of newspaper readership, there is little incentive for these higher members of society to push for greater print rights because their interests are already being served by the state. Adversely, because the print press reaches the most influential members of society, this offers greater potential for public dissent and debate to translate into significant action. Television, the medium of the average Moroccan, possesses greater capability to enlighten the public and represent the diverse nature of Morocco’s society.

Hiring diverse employees is the first step to distributing diverse news coverage. However, the state handpicks many broadcast managers who in turn hire state-approved journalists. Print journalists apply to French papers more often than Arabic papers because the salary is better, as they receive higher advertising revenues and reach a more literate society. “Rich newspapers offer journalists high paychecks,” said Al-Zanki, IREX panelist.⁷⁹ Al-Waly addressed the relationship among employment, language and corruption. “In terms of paychecks, discrimination is practiced based on language and the situation is even worse for the regional press. In national newspapers, correspondents’ allowances are poor but they make three times more than their paychecks by putting ethics aside,” he said.⁸⁰

B. Public Service Broadcasting model

The National Society of Radio and Television is a state-owned agency that controls public service broadcasting in Morocco. The Audiovisual Communication law guarantees its authority and its Web site clearly defines the agency’s objectives.⁸¹ State subsidies, advertising

⁷⁸ *Media Sustainability Index*, 8.

⁷⁹ *Media Sustainability Index*, 11.

⁸⁰ *Media Sustainability Index*, 11.

⁸¹ Société nationale de radiodiffusion et de television (SNRT), 2009, 3 Mar. 2010, <www.snrt.ma>.

revenue and the tax promoting a national audiovisual landscape (TPPAM) fund the independent state agency. SNRT follows an ethical charter, is responsible for protecting youth from harmful content and relies on HACA to regulate its pluralism.⁸²

Despite these legal guarantees, SNRT faces skepticism because of its weak programming. IREX panelists and journalist Malika Malak said, “There is no accountability system applied to the public channels for spending public finances on such poor programs. Have we liberated the media? Are we serving the general public?” Malak noted more citizens are turning to foreign satellite channels because “public TV no longer addresses the citizens concerns.”⁸³ State support for public broadcasters stems from this competition with foreign satellite channels. Of the 250 million Euros the state supplied SNRT from 2006 to 2008, the government gave 170 million Euros and the Broadcast Production Support Fund gave 55.6 million Euros.⁸⁴

C. Media self-regulation

In 1995 Parliament passed the Fundamental Law for Professional Journalists, which outlines the ethical principles governing journalism.⁸⁵ The National Press Syndicate, the journalists’ trade union, oversaw the creation of the ethics code by which all journalists pledge to honor through joining the union. Though joining the union is not mandatory by law, membership inherently defines journalism professionalism. If journalists disregard the code’s ethical considerations, their press cards face revocation.

Despite the self-regulatory framework, ethical considerations are not always made regarding content. MAP journalist and IREX panelist Gamal Muhafiz said, “As for ethics, they are not observed by the majority, as seen in disrespecting personal images and publishing photos

⁸² SNRT.

⁸³ *Media Sustainability Index*, 12.

⁸⁴ *Media Sustainability Index*, 14.

⁸⁵ *Internews*, 1.

of accused persons. Even in the public media, descriptions like ‘criminals’ and ‘terrorists’ are used even before the trial of the relevant persons begins. The issue of ethics should be observed and regulated by professionals themselves, not by the state.”⁸⁶ Journalist Mohamed Hafiz supported Muhafiz’s claims. “There are no ethical principles in regards to publishing true news, corrections or apologies, even if what has previously been published is proven to be wrong. A system of professional ethics is absent,” he said.⁸⁷

D. Requirements for fairness and impartiality

Independent media covered the 2002 parliamentary elections for the first time in history. Previously, only official and political-based media covered such elections and the coverage lacked impartiality. The independent coverage accompanied more transparent elections with clearer regulations. The Ministry of Interior encouraged the independent coverage to sanitize its image of previously corrupt handling of election results. The Ministry created a Web site detailing the election, though officials removed its content the day after elections.⁸⁸

Opposing political parties could not broadcast during their election campaigns until 1992.⁸⁹ However, the Supreme Audio-Visual Commission ensured openness of opinion regarding political media. Certain broadcasters showed bias in their election coverage and advertisements. One advertisement for the Socialist Federation party featured a blooming rose. Channel 2 then aired a cooking program featuring a “rose of sweets” and displayed a bouquet of roses in each kitchen. Channel 2 programs continued to feature the rose logo. Many of the channel’s programs also featured party members.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ *Media Sustainability Index*, 9.

⁸⁷ *Media Sustainability Index*, 10.

⁸⁸ *State of Media*, 48.

⁸⁹ *Internews*, 3.

⁹⁰ *State of Media*, 49.

The government fairly allotted broadcast time to political parties during the 2007 parliamentary election. The government divided television hours evenly between the current majority and the opposing political parties, thereby creating a neutral forum for parties to communicate with potential voters. The parties received approximately 170 hours of television time on the two national channels.⁹¹ However, journalists believed the reporting style of political television is old-fashioned and does not allow for discussion about the issues. A Menassat article reports that former managing editor of *Al Sahifa* Mohammed Hafix said broadcasters “pursued the news in a traditional way, without dialogue or genuine debates.”⁹²

E. Levels of public trust and confidence in media

Though the public’s confidence in its media institutions is difficult to measure, viewership ratings signify which stations viewers regard as important. The Brookings Institute conducted public opinion polls in Arab countries in 2008. The poll asked Moroccan citizens which television station they watch most often for international news and 59% said Al-Jazeera.⁹³ Al-Jazeera is a satellite channel not affiliated with the Moroccan state. However, the state did not fail to notice Al-Jazeera’s significant impact on the Moroccan people. In 2008, a Rabat court fined the bureau chief of Al-Jazeera for “publishing false news likely to disrupt public order and spread panic among people,” CPJ reports.⁹⁴ The \$6,000 fine resulted from Al-Jazeera’s coverage of social unrest in Sidi Ifni where Hassan Rachidi reported that a NGO said there were fatalities. However, Rachidi made it clear that official sources denied any fatalities. The court also revoked Rachidi’s press accreditation. Furthermore, in 2008, Moroccan authorities withdrew the

⁹¹ Sanaa Al-A’ji, *Independent press wins big in Morocco elections*, Menassat, 29 Oct 2007, 4 Apr. 2010
<<http://www.menassat.com/?q=en/news-articles/1781-independent-press-wins-big-morocco-elections>>.

⁹² Al-A’ji.

⁹³ Shibley Telhami, 2008 Annual Arab Public Opinion Poll, The Brookings Institute, 16 Apr. 2010
<http://www.brookings.edu/topics/~media/Files/events/2008/0414_middle_east/0414_middle_east_telhami.pdf>.

⁹⁴ Al-Jazeera journalist fined over reporting social unrest, The Committee to Protect Journalists, 11 July 2008, 29 May 2010 <<http://cpj.org/2008/07/aljazeera-journalist-fined-over-reporting-social-u.php>>.

frequency Al-Jazeera's Rabat bureau office used for the station's daily broadcast of North African news. Moroccan authorities cited "technical and legal problems" regarding the shutdown.⁹⁵ Al-Jazeera continued to broadcast the North African news from its headquarters in Doha, Qatar.

The Brookings Institute poll result suggests Moroccans do not hold much stake in their national media broadcasters. Satellite channels procure freedom by opening the floodgates to foreign news, entertainment and sports. The overwhelming number of satellite receivers Moroccans own also shows their lack of concern with national broadcasting.

In 2006, Arab Barometer conducted a public opinion poll featuring a variety of topics. The poll asked Moroccans how often they read political and government news and 31.9%, the plurality, said "often." The same poll asked Moroccans which medium they find most important and an overwhelming majority, 75.8%, said television and only 4.6% said newspapers.⁹⁶ This statistic shows Moroccan society undervalues the independent press, possibly because it is not as widely available.

F. Safety of journalists

Criminal prosecution, high fines and losing state and advertising revenues are threatening enough to stifle a journalist's voice. However, when journalists fear for their safety, self-censorship is bound to follow. IREX panelists said self-censorship is a regular reporting method in public television and radio. Independent media has a reputation for testing the limits of the red lines and abandoning self-censorship. However, independent print journalists have found their lives in danger when their news reporting gets too risky.

⁹⁵ Al-Jazeera journalist.

⁹⁶ Arab Barometer 2006 public opinion poll survey, 14 Apr. 2010
<<http://arabbarometer.org/reports/countryreports/comparisonresults06.html>>.

RWB tells of an instance of physical harassment. A journalist with the Arabic-language weekly *Al Ayyam*, Maria Moukrim, received a threatening cell phone call when she left her office. The caller mentioned her report about a secret detention center. “He said I could have a car accident if I carried on writing this kind of story,” Moukrim told RWB.⁹⁷ She said the caller mentioned her exact location and a nearby man then struck her with a blunt weapon. After the assault, she received a second call asking if she had “learned her lesson.”⁹⁸

Ahmed Al-Bouz told IREX panelists the 2003 terrorists attacks renewed self-censorship. “I have a story of a director of a weekly newspaper who gathered his journalists and told them ‘There are pre-May 16th and post-May 16th conditions,’” he said. The Trade Union of the Moroccan Press reported that journalists faced more than 20 cases of physical assault from 2007 to 2008.⁹⁹ Attackers assaulted the *Al-Massae* editor, Rachid Nini, with a knife outside of Rabat’s main train station, stealing his documents, cell phones, laptop but no money or other valuables.

⁹⁷ RWB, Warnings.

⁹⁸ RWB, Warnings.

⁹⁹ Freedom House.

***Category 4 - Professional capacity building and supporting institutions that underpins
freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity***

A. Availability of professional media training

Journalists must undergo training to receive accreditation, but journalists complain the foundation for journalism training does not yet exist. “No media education is given at school or in the media, especially the value of tolerance,” Al-Salimy told IREX panelists.¹⁰⁰ This lack of training begets low professionalism in interviewing sources, with usually only one point of view recorded.

Al-Waly said news managers, in order to run a successful media outlet, should focus more seriously on training their journalists. “Some newspapers hire as many as 60 journalists, but they do not properly train them. There are newspapers that were large and then became small; they did not sufficiently prepare even correspondents. The training costs should be shared by all those benefitting from the media activity: distribution companies, printing companies, etc. Training should be high quality and professional.”¹⁰¹ A study on the Moroccan press corps in 2002 showed four out of 10 journalists practicing in the field had received media training, whereas the rest graduated from liberal arts colleges.¹⁰² The same study revealed that 92.1% of surveyed journalists desired to undergo training.

As far as joining the journalism field, access is easy. The Fundamental Law for Professional Journalists gives accredited Moroccan journalists the right to a press card, which is the only criterion necessary to practice journalism. Members of the Ministry of Communication and the National Press Syndicate oversee the annual distribution of press cards. Academic

¹⁰⁰ *Media Sustainability Index*, 7.

¹⁰¹ *Media Sustainability Index*, 16.

¹⁰² *State of Media*, 46.

journalism training is not obligatory to receive a press card, as they have occasionally been given to secretary-generals of political parties simply because they owned a newspaper. Al-Waly said the field's simple access opens doors to unqualified citizens. "Licenses are relatively easy to obtain, but they have become unsatisfactory at the regional level. For example, a butcher can receive a license to open a newspaper, make visitation cards for his newspaper and sell them to others, showing through his ID that he is a newspaper director while really he is a butcher. These dissatisfying conditions distort the image of the press. No criteria are applied (expertise, qualification, training, etc.). In Fes alone, there are 350 licenses," he said.¹⁰³ In recent years, the press card committee has been granting cards more fairly to trained journalists.

B. Availability of academic courses in media practice

There is only one state-supported academic program, the Institut Supérieur de Journalisme (ISJ) in Rabat. While there are private programs, their quality is not valued. ISJ provides a graduate degree in journalism and prospective students must have an undergraduate degree and pass an entrance exam focused on foreign languages and general knowledge. ISJ accepts about 70 students each year. ISJ offers Arabic and French curricula, with a little more than half of the students enrolled in the Arabic curriculum and the rest in the French curriculum. Students take courses in Moroccan politics and economy, communication law and history, media development and concentrate in either print or audio-visual media. They also study foreign relations, international law, advertising and public relations and other theory courses. Students have hands-on practice with producing publications and communication research and ISJ has production facilities for broadcast students, as well as an extensive library and computer labs.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ *Media Sustainability Index*, 8.

¹⁰⁴ Kuldip Rampal, *Disparity between journalism education and journalism practice in four Maghreb states*, *Global Media Journal*, Vol. 8, Issue 14, Spring 2009.

Moroccan press group Ecomédias opened a journalism institute, Ecole Supérieure de Journalisme et de Communication, in Casablanca in 2008. ESJC expanded curriculum to include radio writing and press laws. During an interview with RAP21, editorial director for Ecomédias Nadia Salah said the journalism school fills a necessary gap. “The idea for a journalism school was self-evident. Whenever we hire journalists for our various media outlets, whether print or radio, we train them. We have developed an internal training program that runs between three to six months. Given the need to train these young people who enter the workforce, we said to ourselves, why not formalize our training program through an actual school,” Salah said.

Salah also compared ESJC to ISJ, saying that ISJ graduates usually end up as press secretaries for the government and not practicing journalism as a skill.¹⁰⁵ The institute admits students through passing entry exams and paying a tuition fee. Courses will focus on improving French and Arabic language skills. ESJC awards a degree after three years in either print, broadcast or web journalism. A two-year master’s program is also available.

C. Presence of trade unions and professional organizations

The constitution does permit workers to join trade unions. The only trade union for journalists is the National Press Syndicate, also known as the Syndicat National de la Presse Marocaine (SNPM). SNPM is a member of the International Federation of Journalists, which represents press trade unions worldwide. SNPM is the representative body for all journalists and protects the media freedom rights of its approximately 1200 members. The state financially supports the union through an annual subsidy and provides it with headquarters. The singularity of this union poses a problem. Some journalists criticize the press syndicate for not establishing a second body and for maintaining its relation to its political roots. “This syndicate, though independent, was established initially by two parties. But so far, it has not put an end to the

¹⁰⁵ Rampal.

interchange of its presidency between the Independence party and the Socialist party,” Hafiz told IREX panelists.

Malak told IREX panelists that the syndicate needs to refresh its mission. “The National Press Syndicate has often supported the journalists, though it can be said there is some change in its treatment; it has become somewhat politicized. The Syndicate was interested in improving journalists’ awareness, defending them and protecting their interests within the institutions, but there has been a regression from this trend,” she said.¹⁰⁶

Other professional organizations include the Moroccan press club, the Associate of the Higher Institute of Journalism Graduates and the Moroccan Association of Professional Journalists, which promotes the role of women journalists. SNPM, four human rights organizations, the Union of Moroccan Writers, the Bar Association, the Publisher’s Federation and Transparency International created the Independent Authority for Journalism Ethics. The Moroccan Association of Independent Radios and Televisions also exists.

D. Presence of civil society organizations

There are many civil society organizations in Morocco actively working on behalf of media advocacy. Al-Salimy told IREX panelists that “the civil society advocates the freedom of journalists. Demands to access information come from professionals and other groups such as ADALA, Human Rights and Transparency Maroc. Great support was given to some newspapers, including Al-Watan Alan, Direct, Le Journal and Tel Quel. Foreign support is also offered by organizations and interested in the freedom of the press, such as the Center for Training Journalists in Paris, Reporters Without Borders and Human Rights Watch,” he said.¹⁰⁷

Independent monitoring bodies are growing steadily. Professional organizations and NGOs

¹⁰⁶ *Media Sustainability Index*, 16.

¹⁰⁷ *Media Sustainability Index*, 16.

recently formed L'Instance Indépendante de la Déontologie de la Presse et de la Défense de la Liberté d'Expression.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ World Association of Newspapers, 2.

Category 5 - Infrastructural capacity is sufficient to support independent and pluralistic media

A. Availability and use of technical resources by media

Technological access depends on a media outlet's financiers. The main technological issues of the written press are printing and distribution. Hafiz discussed the appropriation of printing expenses with IREX panelists. "We specify the categories of the budget including paychecks, miscellaneous expenses, paper and then printing, which may take more than two-thirds of the budget," he said. Most printing presses are located in urban areas like Casablanca and Rabat, leaving little room for the regional press to print its papers in a timely manner. Afzaran told IREX panelists that 99% of the Moroccan territories are deprived of printing presses. There are two distribution companies, Shospress and Sapress. Shospress distributes imported newspapers, magazines and books and Sapress distributes 21 daily papers, 72 weeklies and 320 Moroccan private magazines to outlets nationwide.¹⁰⁹ The government financially allows broadcasters to buy modern equipment.

B. Press, broadcasting and ICT penetration

Regional, marginalized areas face difficulty accessing the media. Most of these areas rely on broadcast media because newspapers are not available and the rural community has higher illiteracy rates than urban cities. High poverty rates hinder Moroccans from buying newspapers, as one newspaper equals two pieces of bread. The purchasing power of rural Moroccans is of little importance when distribution companies rarely service these regional areas and when they do deliver, newspapers arrive late. For example, newspapers in the Western Sahara arrive after 24 hours and the newspaper's coverage is not commonly relevant to rural citizens. Internet usage is also low in regional areas because Internet cafés and computers are expensive.

¹⁰⁹ *Media Sustainability Index*, 15

Conclusion:

Drawbacks

This thesis surveyed the present status of Morocco's media system using a publication previously untested in the nation. Though many other organizations and scholars have researched Morocco's media, fitting different aspects of the media into UNESCO's outline for media development made this thesis unique. Using this instrument allowed for a simplified breakdown of a complex media system, though the dichotomous nature of the categories lacked cohesiveness when writing about encompassing media topics, such as the financial aspect of the media system. Many sub-topics in the categories overlapped and choosing one area to discuss a topic which could easily overflow across many categories prevented fluid discussion. Strictly following the outline did not always facilitate the most effective way to approach a topic. This is not to say the outline is not exceptionally detailed and practical; it is just not a suitable structure from which to write a cohesive research paper.

It was difficult to find detailed sources with strong national context because such documents were often written in French or Arabic. Therefore, I relied on English publications usually written by non-national organizations. Partnering with a Moroccan institution could have opened access to documents and statistics unavailable on the Internet and could have ensured the most recent information.

Moroccan media trudges an uphill climb

The 1990s represented the rise of the Moroccan independent press, greater press freedom among journalists and renewed advocacy for fair reporting. If the 20th century marked the birth of the independent press, the 21st century witnesses its adolescence. The media in Morocco has not reached its full growth potential and the criticism it presently receives from the state is a

reaction to its sudden push for freedom. Major setbacks include legal constraints. The media community attempted press code reform in 2007, but the draft did not pass. Passing a new press code and legislation for the right to access information, eradicating criminal punishment and lowering fines for defamation are the first steps to limiting self-censorship and thus allowing more government transparency and opening dialogue throughout the community. The press code should ideally be reformed to catalyze continued progress of the media. The amount of press freedom advocacy and awareness is rising steadily, ensuring constant pressure on the government to provide more rights to journalists.

Private investors are creating new education programs which incorporate press law courses into the curriculum, teaching prospective journalists about their rights. Professionalism and ethics must improve through training and academic programs. Unethical journalistic practice motivates the government to intervene. If journalists practice fair, balanced reporting, the government would have less justification to intrude, especially since such an intrusion would warrant unwanted attention from media watchdog groups. Regional publishers must fill the technological void so newspapers may reach marginalized areas and the print press can survive. Improved literacy rates must match expanded distribution. Many rural areas have access to broadcast television, but the independent press holds the power to enlighten rather than just entertain. Though approximately 300 independent publications exist, only about six are actively breaking through coverage boundaries, addressing political, economic and religious issues with ferocity.

The next decade will determine the direction of Morocco's media. Relaxing legal restraints through press code reform will build a foundation from which true press freedom can grow. Though the independent press will continue to push the boundaries with news content,

progress toward exercising press freedom without fear of judicial or physical harassment will lie stagnant. Public broadcasting must incorporate a greater concentration of balanced news reporting. The Moroccan media has filled the oppositional void, but now it must cement its essentiality as a major player on the national scene and solidify its position as watchdog over the government as it embraces democracy.