

Media and Politics in the Muslim World: Unfriendly Relationship Between Press Freedom and Illiberal Government

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Abstract: The research assesses media freedom or media sustainability and politics in 37 Muslim majority countries. Media sustainability is measured using the International Researches and Exchange Board (IREX) score whereas political regime is measured using the Economist Intelligence Unit's Index of Democracy. The analysis indicates that three countries fall in the unsustainable media category; about 20th countries fall in the "unsustainable mixed system" of media. However, another set of eight countries are characterized as "near sustainability" category. None of the countries studied has an average score to enable it to be in the "sustainable" category.

Key words: Media, politics, Muslim world, democracy, press freedom, economist

INTRODUCTION

The mass media plays an important role in shaping the society and politics. It mediates between society and politics through informing the people of public issues, persons or organizations; enforcing social norms by reporting deviations and helping to shape people's political choice (Kemp *et al.*, 2016; McQuail, 1994). It is due to such sensitivity that governments adopt policies to impose press censorship due to certain political or national interests. In this way, often media and politics come into conflict. At times media tries to maintain its own autonomy and hegemony and in another times it co-opts with the government policies. Mostly, news in the media is filtered to a certain extent that the media act as a gatekeeper that regulates the content of public information and communication in the political system (Prat, 2014; Braber, 2012; Bennett, 1998).

On the other hand, media freedom is considered to be a universal right, so it should not be controlled by the government. Low (2003) stated that the way media functions as the "connection tissue" linking the government to its citizens can affect the nature of politics, the accountability of politicians to the public and the quality of democracy. Therefore, media freedom is linked to people's rights and smooth functioning of democracy based on the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights approved by in 1948: "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers." However, in reality media and

politics are at loggerhead in many countries, especially in the developing or under-developed countries. The capacity of media institutions is, inter alia, to play a role in the democratization of societies in creating a public sphere through which people could be empowered to take part in civic affairs, in enhancing national and cultural identity in promoting creative expression and dialogue. Raboy (1998) argued that the debate on media and democratization has always has a dual focus which are democratizing media as positive value in and of itself and fostering a role for media in the democratization of societies. For some, the media have tended to be seen as value free containers of information but they are in fact contested spaces, objects of contention in their own right.

From the viewpoint of democratic legitimacy, media power remains innocent to the extent that journalists operate within a functionally specific and self regulating media system. The relative independence of mass media from the political and the economic systems was a necessary precondition for the rise of what is now called media society (Habermas, 2006). There are three elements of the institutional design of democracies: the private autonomy of the citizens, democratic citizenship and the independence of a public sphere that operates as an intermediary system between state and society. The public sphere, at the periphery of the political system is rooted in the networks for flows of messages-news, reports, commentaries, talks, scenes, shows, movies with an informative, polemical, educational or entertaining content which originate from various types of actors-politicians, political parties, lobbyists, pressure

groups. They are selected and shaped by mass-media without which the political public sphere could not be put to work (Lengauer *et al.*, 2014; Cohen *et al.*, 2008).

According to McConnell and Becker (2002), the nature of democracy suggests that free and open communication through a variety of channels is necessary to foster critical practices found in democratic societies. According to this argument, the mass media in a stable democracy are the principal institutions from which members of the public can better understand their society.

The political tsunami that some of the core Arab Muslim countries experienced recently in the name of Arab Spring was arguably caused by the mass media and more specifically the informal mass media. The sudden explosion of people's political anger indicates a sharp divide between society and politics which the formal media either could not mediate or it simply remained locked in political bondage. Clearly, the formal media did not play a part to inform the people of politics, political offices and executives, policies and decisions. As such the people could not hold the political authorities accountable in these countries. The sudden explosion of people's anger is a testimony that the entire society remained under long political suppression, yet the media failed to create a meaningful bridge between people and politics. Like these, Arab countries many non-Arab Muslim countries have estrange relationship between media and politics (Freedman and Walton, 2006). The questions that naturally emerge are what is the nature of media in these countries? Are they free to operate or are they under tight government control?

The present study is an attempt to assess the state of media freedom in the 37 out of 57 Muslim-majority countries and evaluate the extent to which they can be categorized as having sustainable media freedom. It seeks to undertake an in depth understanding on the relationship between media and politics, i.e., freedom of information in the Muslim world.

Literature review: The media comprise those institutions that are concerned with the production and distribution of all forms of knowledge, information and entertainment. The 'mass' character of the media is derived from the fact that the media channel communication towards a large and undifferentiated audience using relatively advance technology. Grammatically and politically, the mass media are plural. Different messages may be put out by the broadcast media (television and radio) and the print media (newspaper and magazines). Similarly tabloid and broadsheet newspaper may exhibit different sympathies. The advent of the so called new media (cable and satellite telecommunications, the internet and so on) has arguably,

transformed the notion of mass media by dramatically increasing both output and audience fragmentation. The new social networking media such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter has saturated the information domain and created a new trend in the production of knowledge and sharing of it.

The study of media commonly concerns primarily six basic types of studies that are leadership, circulation, management, typography, make up, readability and on-line media usage. Thus much of early studies of media was qualitative. As the techniques of quantitative research became more widely known and adopted, newspaper and magazines research become more empirical. However, media today is much wider than the conventional understanding, its role and functions are further complicated (Wolfsfeld, 2011).

Arora and Laswell (1969) itemized three functions performed by the mass media; namely surveillance of the world to report on-going events, interpretation of the meaning of events and socialization of individuals into their cultural settings. In support of this, Fleur and Ball-Rokeach (1982) said that newspapers, radios, television sets and the like are not insidious devices for evil but faithful servants or even saviors in that they are exposing irregularities and corruption, acting as guardians of precious free speech, bringing at least some culture to millions, providing harmless daily entertainment for the tired masses of the labour force, informing people of the world's events and making more bountiful the standard of living. Thus, the theory of dependency between media and other social systems emerged.

Politically speaking, the mass media has long been thought as indisputably a very powerful vehicle which can sway public opinions from one direction to another (McCombs *et al.*, 2011; Shirky, 2011; Chong and Druckman, 2007). It can also be used to the advantage of society or be misused to the society's disadvantage. The people rely on the media for concepts for images of their heroes for guiding information for emotional changes for recognition of public values for symbols in general and even for language. It has become the core system for the distribution of concepts, ideas and opinions.

To a large extent, media shape the political system in some countries. Some media are free and some are with least degrees of freedom. What then constitute freedom of the media? Freedom of media is where news is available to everyone who may wish to express an opinion. The basic assumption is simple where each individual and society has their own basic rights.

Gunther and Mughan (2000) called mass media the connective tissue of democracy while Agbese (2007) views that without the freedom of communication for

mass media, the foundation of democratic rule is undermined. McQuail goes even further to claim that the conduct of democratic (or undemocratic) politics, nationally and internationally depends more and more on mass media. Becker *et al.* (2004) in reference to McQuail (2007) asserted that the concept of media freedom covers both the degree of freedom enjoyed by the media and the degree of freedom and access of citizens to media content.

Djankov *et al.* (2003) argued that throughout the world, governments regulate media using measures ranging from content restrictions in broadcasting licenses to constitutional freedom of expression provisions (Allen *et al.*, 1994). The types of regulations and their enforcement vary significantly. For instance in Saudi Arabia, the government approves the appointment of editors-in-chief of newspapers and also has the right to dismiss them which shows the influence of the state on press content. In Malaysia, newspapers are required to renew their licenses annually and self-censorship becomes a norm. Media content can also be influenced by government through subsidies and state advertisement.

Price *et al.* (2002) is of the view that the ideal media environment is one with two media sectors: a market-led media sector and a non market sector. For both to exist there must be both legal and institutional support for them as well as socio-cultural support. For example, the market sector can exist only if laws are in place protecting media from government interference. Audiences must also be protected via defamation laws from media abuse. Anti-trust legislation, ownership laws limiting concentration, licensing laws and rules on advertising are also needed. For the non market-sector to exist there must be legal and institutional support for the right to publish and the right of access. Citizens are guaranteed the right to information and the various voices in society are guaranteed the right to communicate.

However, Siebert *et al.* (1972) and Ochilo (1993) argued that the media under the liberal systems of government have their critical role and functions embodied in these countries constitutions or fundamental laws. Primarily the media is free from government controls and has the key function of keeping the government from overstepping its bounds (the watchdog role) that is without undue hindrance from the government. However, the role and function of the media are much different under authoritarian regimes whereby truth is not seen and understood as a universal function of many people in these societies. There were only few 'wise men' who were the only ones in a position to guide and direct their people. This is more visible in countries outside the

Western democracies. Ochilo (1993) is of the view that media in many African countries have tended to fall in the authoritarian regime except Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Egypt and Kenya with some form of limited freedom; nevertheless not in any way comparable to the media known to exist in the United States, Britain, France, Germany and Denmark.

According to Bennett (1998, 2016), the myth of "a free press and a free people" and its guiding principle of objective reporting provide different but compelling benefits for different groups. Media ownership is a critical matter in media and politics. The ownership varies from person to company to government (Noam, 2009). Professional media today has rather become a corporate business. The groups at the top of the power structure gain the material advantages of control while the groups at the bottom trade real power (since the myth works in reality to limit their political involvement) for psychological reassurances. It is also worthy to note that some medias may not be free from the pressure of interest groups that pressure the media over unfavorable reports. Apart from that, the media is also not free from violence and intimidation, legal pressure and threats. Such legal pressure includes consumer rights, bankruptcy, state emergency laws and state secrets (Low, 2003).

A free press environment reflects political openness. Therefore, pluralism of opinions especially by politicians, political commentators and political opponents are made possible by the rapid growth of news and media sources. This is very much true provided that the information is not political rhetoric or politically motivated (Prior, 2005).

Djankov *et al.* (2003) reported that state ownership of newspaper and television is significantly higher in African, Middle East and North African countries. On average, governments in Africa control 61% of the top five daily newspaper circulations and reach 85% of the audience for the top 5 television stations. Two-thirds of African countries have state monopolies on television broadcasting. Gunaratne (1999) states that press freedom is higher in the low income countries of South Asia than in the middle-income countries of South East Asia.

Assessment of media freedom: Becker *et al.* (2004) have reviewed work of major and minor organizations that attempt to assess media freedom and related concepts. According to them there are >100 organizations throughout the world that are currently engaged in some form of media assessment. They selected 14 organizations, 3 NGOs-Freedom House (United States), the International Researches and Exchange Board (IREX) (United States) and Reporters Sans Frontiers (Reporters

Without Borders) (France) and 8 other NGOs-Arab Press Freedom Watch (United Kingdom), Committee to Protect Journalists (United States), Center for Journalists in Extreme Situations (Russia), the European Institute for the Media (France, Germany), the Inter-American Press Association (United States), the International Federation of Journalists (Belgium), the International Press Institute (Austria) and the Media Institute of Southern Africa (Namibia). It was found that there is a strong relationship between IREX score and both RSF and the Freedom House ratings. IREX Sustainability Index seems to include more of the positive features of press operation rather than the other two organizations.

Conceptualization and operationalization

Media: The media comprise those institutions that are concerned with the production and distribution of all forms of knowledge and entertainment. They include broadcast media (television and radio), the print media (newspaper and magazines).

Muslim world: The term Muslim world comprises 57 nations based on membership in the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC). The Muslim world are in bound with their common faith to Islam despite their differences and division. Thus, Muslim world is spread through various cultures, historical, geographic and political differences. However, in this study Muslim world refers to the countries with majority Muslim population. For the purpose of this study, data for 37 Muslim countries will be analyzed based on the availability of data provided by the International Researches and Exchange Board (IREX).

Freedom of media: Freedom of media/information/press is where news is available to everyone who may wish to express an opinion. The basic assumption is simple where each individual and society has their own basic rights. This definition is aligned with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Instrument of assessment: Media freedom will be assessed based on the media sustainability index issued by IREX. The index includes 5 indicators which are (Rules and regulations) multiple news sources; supporting institutions; business management; professional journalism. Each of these indicators has fundamental elements as pointed out below.

Rules and regulations: The elements of rules and regulations are:

- Legal and social protections of free speech exist and are enforced
- Licensing of broadcast media is fair, competitive and political

- State or public media do not receive preferential legal treatment and law guarantees editorial independence
- Public information is easily accessible; right to access to information this is equally enforced for all media and journalists

Multiple news sources: The elements of multiple news sources are:

- A plurality of affordable public and private news sources
- Citizen's access to domestic or international media is not restricted
- State or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum are nonpartisan and serve public interest
- Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates

Supporting institutions: The elements of supporting institutions are:

- Professional associations work to protect journalist's rights
- NGOs support free speech and independent media
- Sources of newsprint and printing facilities are in private hands, apolitical and unrestricted
- Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, internet) are private, apolitical and unrestricted

Business management: The elements of business management are:

- Media outlets and supporting firms operate as efficient, professional and profit-generating businesses
- Media receive revenue from a multitude of sources
- Independent media do not receive government subsidies
- Broadcast ratings and circulation figures are reliably and independently produced

Professional journalism: The elements of professional journalism are:

- Reporting is fair, objective and well sourced
- Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards
- Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship
- Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption

Table 1: REX score of media sustainability index/freedom in 37 Muslim countries

Countries	Freedom of speech	Multiple news sources	Supporting institutions	Business management	Journalism professional	Average score	Type of regime*
Albania	2.38	2.22	2.26	1.87	2.28	2.20	Hybrid regime
Azerbaijan	1.94	1.60	1.78	1.44	1.60	1.67	Authoritarian
Bahrain	1.47	1.93	1.73	2.14	1.84	1.82	Authoritarian
Benin	2.28	2.04	2.43	1.35	3.07	2.23	Flawed democracy
Burkina Faso	2.23	1.86	2.17	1.81	2.64	2.14	Authoritarian
Cameroon	1.31	1.51	1.91	1.33	1.68	1.55	Authoritarian
Chad	1.91	2.03	1.54	1.37	1.93	1.76	Authoritarian
Cote D'ivoire	2.10	1.48	2.33	1.70	2.43	2.01	Authoritarian
Djibouti	1.54	1.43	1.35	1.18	1.38	1.38	Authoritarian
Gabon	1.99	1.60	2.38	1.07	2.02	1.81	Authoritarian
Gambia	1.38	1.96	1.82	1.52	1.69	1.68	Hybrid regime
Guinea	2.15	2.20	2.43	1.95	2.31	2.21	Authoritarian
Iran	1.20	1.33	1.54	1.75	2.04	1.57	Authoritarian
Iraq	1.27	1.18	1.25	1.02	1.06	1.16	Hybrid regime
Kazakhstan	1.47	1.74	1.43	1.90	1.85	1.68	Authoritarian
Kuwait	2.32	2.29	2.69	2.42	1.80	2.30	Authoritarian
Kyrgystan	2.02	1.81	2.25	1.48	2.08	1.93	Hybrid regime
Mali	2.37	1.85	2.09	1.62	1.94	1.97	Hybrid regime
Mauritania	1.97	1.98	2.02	1.76	1.92	1.93	Authoritarian
Mozambique	2.27	2.06	2.34	1.91	2.37	2.19	Hybrid regime
Niger	2.10	2.02	2.23	1.46	2.35	2.03	Authoritarian
Nigeria	1.58	1.89	2.12	2.24	2.38	2.04	Authoritarian
Oman	1.97	2.13	1.91	2.05	1.38	1.89	Authoritarian
Qatar	2.68	2.48	2.54	2.68	2.03	2.48	Authoritarian
Saudi Arabia	1.78	2.05	2.24	2.43	1.70	2.04	Authoritarian
Senegal	2.02	2.09	2.30	1.57	2.40	2.07	Hybrid regime
Sierra Leone	2.36	2.04	2.26	1.48	2.66	2.16	Hybrid regime
Somalia	1.32	1.52	1.65	1.45	1.67	1.52	Not available
Sudan	1.47	1.42	1.61	1.58	1.29	1.47	Authoritarian
Tajikistan	1.64	1.46	1.70	1.22	1.30	1.46	Authoritarian
Togo	2.43	1.30	1.46	1.04	1.58	1.26	Authoritarian
Tunisia	0.50	0.94	0.75	1.25	1.00	0.89	Authoritarian
Turkmenistan	0.30	0.74	0.21	0.11	0.23	0.32	Authoritarian
Uganda	2.36	2.28	2.26	2.25	2.67	2.43	Hybrid regime
United Arab emirates	1.66	1.89	1.79	2.37	1.62	1.87	Authoritarian
Uzbekistan	0.30	0.64	0.39	0.41	0.38	0.45	Authoritarian
Yemen	1.11	1.31	1.13	1.02	1.76	1.27	Authoritarian

*Based on the economist intelligence unit's index of democracy; indicator scoring: 0 = country does not meet the indicator; government or social forces may actively oppose its implementation; 1 = country minimally meets aspects of the indicator; forces may not actively oppose its implementation but business environment may not support it and government or profession do not fully and actively support change; 2 = country has begun to meet many aspects of the indicator but progress may be too recent to judge or still dependent on current government or political forces; 3 = country meets most aspects of the indicator; implementation of the indicator has occurred over several years and/or through changes in government, indicating likely sustainability; 4 = country meets the aspects of the indicator; implementation has remained intact over multiple changes in government, economic fluctuations, changes in public opinion and/or changing social conventions

Data source: The data for this comes from the media sustainability index produced by IREX and the economist intelligence unit's index of democracy. The data are gathered just once over a period of weeks or months which is one-shot (cross-sectional).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

All the five indicators (rules and regulations, multiple news sources, supporting institutions, business management and professional journalism) are scored using the following scale: 0 = country does not meet the indicator, 1 = country minimally meets aspects of the indicators; 2 = country has begun to meet many aspects of the indicator but progress may be too recent to judge, 3 = country meets most aspects of the indicator and 4 = country meets the aspects of the

indicator. The score is then interpreted as “unsustainable, anti-free press” if the score is between 0-1, “unsustainable mixed system” for the score between 1-2, “near sustainability” for the score between 2-3 and “sustainable” for 3-4. The full scores for the countries appear in Table 1.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Rules and regulations: Rules and regulation subject media to legal subjectivity. Media in Muslim majority countries, in terms of free speech can be divided into four categories. Following IREX's score, the Muslim countries are categorized as “unsustainable”, “unsustainable mixed system”, “near sustainability”, “sustainable”. The “sustainable” anti free press include Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan all of which are authoritarian

countries. In Turkmenistan, the constitution proclaims the right to freedom of conviction and of expression and freedom of information where that information is not a state secret. Government licenses are needed for all print and broadcast media but the fees differ depending on the application. Government entities do not have to pay a licensing fee to launch a newspaper in Turkmenistan. Nevertheless, Turkmen individuals or corporations must pay 100 times the size of the estimated average monthly wage. Virtually all newspapers, magazines, television stations and radio stations are owned and tightly controlled by the government. The only news agency in the country is the government's Turkmendovlethabarlary (TDH). Upper-level editors are appointed and dismissed by the president.

Nineteen states fall in the second category, "unsustainable mixed system" sixteen of which are authoritarian regimes and two hybrid regimes. The authoritarian regimes are Mauritania, Gabon, Nigeria, Sudan, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Iran. On the other hand, hybrid regimes are Gambia and Iraq. Somalia also falls under unsustainable mixed system but the data of political regime is not available. In the case of Gambia, its constitution guarantees freedom of speech, however, the provisions of the constitution are strictly cosmetic. Despite the guarantees, freedoms of expression and the press are the most violated rights in Gambia. Affected by the "culture of silence", most Gambians mostly reluctant to come out and fight for their rights. Licensing broadcasting is the prerogative of the secretary of state that is biased, very unfair without checks and balances and far from being transparent. The entire process is highly politicized.

Fifteen countries fall in the third category "near sustainability". They consist of seven hybrid regimes: namely Kyrgyzstan, Albania, Uganda, Mali, Senegal, Mozambique and Sierra Leone; seven authoritarian regimes: Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Togo, Guinea, Niger, Qatar and Kuwait. A flawed democracy regime in this category is Benin. Niger is one of the countries in Western Africa where the exercise of freedom of expression is legally and socially guaranteed. Any newspaper or written text of general interest may be published without prior authorization.

Supporting institutions: In terms of supporting institutions, only three Muslim countries with authoritarian regimes Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tunisia are "unsustainable".

Apart from that, fifteen Muslim countries have "unsustainable mixed system" with authoritarian regimes. They are Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Cameroon, Chad, Djibouti, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Mauritania, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tajikistan, Togo, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. Three others Muslim countries with hybrid

regimes in this category are Gambia, Iraq and Mali. Somalia also falls in this category. For instance, there are laws limiting the rights to assemble such as government approval for public meeting in Oman or the need for government approval for men and women to gather in the same meeting, thus hampering the ability for association and civil society to support the work of media and lobby for reform. In addition, Kuwaiti government refuses to allow the formation of recognized trade union of media professionals.

The remaining fourteen Muslim countries fall in "near sustainability" with eight of them are authoritarian regimes: Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Guinea, Iran, Niger, Nigeria and Qatar. Six other countries are hybrid regimes-Albania, Kyrgyzstan, Mozambique, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Uganda. In the case of Iran, the Association of Iranian Journalists as an independent and trusted institution is increasingly coming under government pressure. Benin is the only Muslim country that falls under "sustainable" category. In Benin, media is one of the rare sectors with well structured and organized associations. Media professionals too have created the Union of Benin (UMPB) which functions independently from owners and the government to better address the grievances of journalists and defend their interests with one voice.

Multiple news sources: In term of "unsustainable" category three countries fall in this category which are Turkmenistan, Tunisia and Uzbekistan. Meanwhile, "unsustainable mixed system" accounts for sixteen countries that are Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Cameroon, Chad, Djibouti, Gambia, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Oman, Somalia, Sudan, Tajikistan, Togo, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. Thus, in "unsustainable mixed system" there are thirteen countries that are authoritarians such as Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Cameroon, Chad, Djibouti, Gambia, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Oman, Somalia, Sudan, Tajikistan, Togo, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. Countries such as Iraq and Gambia are considered hybrid regimes.

"Near sustainability" category includes Albania, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Guinea, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Uganda. Among these, eighteen countries belong to hybrid regimes that are Albania, Benin, Kyrgyzstan, Mali, Mozambique, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Uganda. The remaining countries such as Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Guinea, Kuwait, Niger, Nigeria, Qatar and Saudi Arabia are authoritarian. Only Benin is a flawed democracy country.

In the case of Iran, there are broad spectrums of social interest that are reflected and represented in the media including minority language information

sources. Perhaps, after President Mohammad Khatomi's election in 1997, a society witnessed a comparatively high degree of freedom and the number of newspapers grew dramatically to about 850 publications, it was known as "Tehran Spring". Most of the newspapers in Iran can be categorized into liberal reformist or conservative hard line. Accordingly in many countries, the relative wealth of consumers allows them to access many sources of information including the internet. Free media zones also encourage plurality in the Gulf. In the case of Lebanon, the countries have the liberal licensing framework that allows the many competing voices into the media landscape. The strength enjoyed by Lebanon is a key weakness in most other countries. As mentioned above, regional satellite news channels based in United Arab Emirates and Qatar especially al-Jazeera rarely cover local news because local media must abide by a different and more stringent, set off regulations.

Business management: Business management is where independent media are well-managed businesses that allow editorial independence. Countries that fall into "unsustainable" score are Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Meanwhile, there are twenty seven countries that fall into "unsustainable mixed system". These countries are Albania, Azerbaijan, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad and Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Tajikistan, Togo, Tunisia and Yemen. In addition, countries such as Bahrain, Kuwait, Nigeria, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Uganda and United Arab Emirates fall into "near sustainability" category.

In term of democracy rating, all countries under "unsustainable" category are authoritarian. Besides, in "unsustainable mixed system", majority countries such as Azerbaijan, Burkino Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Cote Divore, Djibouti, Garbon, Gambia, Guinea, Iran, Kazakhstan, Mauritania, Niger, Sudan, Tajikistan, Togo, Tunisia and Yemen are authoritarian. Nevertheless, Mozambique, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Albania, Gambia, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, Mali, Togo, Tunisia and Yemen are hybrid regimes. Exceptionally, only Benin is a flawed democracy country. In regards of democracy rating in countries under "near sustainability", majority countries such as Bahrain, Kuwait, Nigeria, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Uganda and United Arab Emirates are authoritarian. Thus, only Uganda is a hybrid regime country.

In case of Cote d'Ivoire, most of their media outlets and supporting firms operate as efficient, professional and profit generating business. Although, most Ivorian private media are struggling to achieve profitability, many

of their newspapers have very high rates of unsold copies. The basic argument is the media companies are not really profitable but they survive because of the current stability. Meanwhile in Gambia, the state media are woefully dependent on funding from the government. Thus, the private media try to generate enough business to remain afloat. Thus, gambia also faces many obstacles especially in the private media and political situation that creates causes for avoiding business in newspapers for fear of reprisals. In addition, media outlets in Nigeria both private and public are professionally managed and operated efficiently and professionally. The private media operate as commercial, profit generating businesses. In addition, all the private media in Qatar are owned mainly by members of the royal family and enjoy a wealth of financial and marketing resources. This is not surprising because Qatar is well-known as the host of the global media al-Jazeera.

Professional journalism: Professional journalism is that which meets professional standards of quality. On this issue Uzbekistan, Tunisia and Turkmenistan fall under "unsustainable" category. Journalists in Turkmenistan work in the state media producing pro-government reports under the pressure of political censorship and fear not in a position to produce fair, balanced, high quality journalism. Similarly in Tunisia, journalism is dependent on the government view transmitted by the state news agency and the presidential broadcast unit. Therefore, the media is biased in their treatment of the opposition and certain civil-society groups.

Twenty one Muslim countries fall in "unsustainable mixed system" category, of which sixteen are authoritarian regimes and four are hybrid regimes. The sixteen countries are Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Gabon, Iran, Kuwait, Mauritania, Nigeria, Sudan, Tajiskistan, Togo, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. The hybrid regimes are Gambia, Iraq, Kyrgystan and Mali. Somalia is also in this category of "unsustainable mixed system". True professional journalism is rare in Azerbaijan partly due to journalist's own shortcomings and difficulties in accessing information. Meanwhile Iraqi journalists have not yet reached a high standard of professionalism. Most of the new publication outlets are backed by political or other interests and there is substantial pressure on their staffs to reflect the sponsor's perspectives. There is also the drive to publish sensational issues that are thought to attract Iraqi readers.

On the other hand, there are thirteen Muslim countries that fall in the "near sustainability" category. They include seven authoritarian regimes, five hybrid

regimes and one flawed democracy regime. The authoritarian regimes are Chad, Guinea, Kuwait, Niger, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, whereas the hybrid regimes are Mozambique, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Chad and Uganda. The flawed democracy country is Benin. For example, the media community in Qatar censors itself particularly in reporting of critical political, social or religious issues. This has hindered journalism professionalism in Qatari media except for al-Jazeera which focuses mainly on non-local issues.

Analysis: Democratic values and media freedom are complementary to each other. The Muslim world lacks democratic values (Fatah, 2006) which much about the state of media there. The five indicators used to assess media and politics in the Muslim world show a number of points clearly. Firstly, none of the countries qualify for the sustainable category and majority of the countries in all the five indicators score either unsustainable or unsustainable mixed category. This tells clearly about the unfriendly nature of political environment existing in the Muslim world. Evidence of such unfriendly environment varies from country to country.

The situations in Arab countries bear similarities. In most of these countries journalists practice self-censorship to avoid their media from being banned inflicting huge financial loss. Khazen (1999) who was editor-in-chief of Al Hayat until June 1998 in London purported that each Arab country has its own sensitive story that might get the media banned. They are the Front Islamique Socialist du Salut (Islamic Salvation Front) in Algeria, the Al-Nahda Party in Tunisia, the Islamic Opposition in Libya, the terrorist groups in Egypt and Halayeb border conflict in both Sudan and Egypt as well as border dispute in Bahrain and Qatar and Polisario rebels in Morocco. In addition, sensitive stories in Saudi Arabia include religions, women and the military. In most Arab countries, it is a taboo to criticize the head of the state and his immediate family members. For example, Al Hayat was banned in certain Arab countries sixty times in 1994, thirty 5 times in 1995 and twenty times in both 1996 and 1997. Jihad also pointed out the power of Arab satellite service and the Internet which are increasing particularly al-Jazeera which is owned by the Qatari government. According to a 2002 Gallup poll conducted in nine Arab countries (Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and Indonesia), al-Jazeera is widely watched (Zayani, 2006). Part of the appeal of the channel is its ability to expand what people in the Arab Middle East can talk about. Lynch (2006) and Hafez (2001) reiterated that the absence of real democracy in the region makes the new media outlets even more

powerful, since they face few real rivals in setting the public agenda. Another different story emerges in Central Asia consisting of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan where like in other Muslim countries, religion is interwoven with politics. All governments in Central Asia are secular but take Islamic parties as threat to their power. Freedman and Walton (2006) identified that the media are classified as “authoritarian-democratic” in Kazakhstan and Krgyzstan; “post-conflict” in Tajikistan and “total control” in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. In spite of guaranteed media freedom on study in all five constitutions of those states, the media is still believed as a threat and that a controlled media is a potent tool for the governments to retain power. Most print and broadcast media are either owned by the government or tightly controlled with incidents of repression on journalists. Despite internet access being difficult, governments have blocked foreign websites in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan for posting articles and purported official corruption with limited and sporadic censorship of religious websites with extensive controls in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. As a result, some Central Asia journalists prefer to shield their identities by using pseudonym.

CONCLUSION

Media is an important institution that keeps constant watch on society and politics. Media can keep the people informed about society and politics protecting their rights and holding the public officials more accountable. However, media can be subject to political control in favor of the interest of the ruling elites, business class and other interest groups. Therefore, the nature of media in terms of the degree of freedom can tell about the nature of politics. Tighter the control on media from the state authority, lower the media freedom.

Based on the data and its analysis this research found that all the 37 Muslim countries have no “sustainable media system”. Most of them have an “unsustainable mixed system” with less free press advocacy, most still dependent on current government or political forces. Segments of the legal system and government still oppose a free media system particularly those Muslim countries with authoritarian regimes.

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