Policy Briefing

After the Arab uprisings

The prospects for a media that serves the public

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Contents

Front cover
A woman watches from a balcony as demonstrators gather in Tahrir Square, Cairo, in May 2011
PETER MACDIARMID/ GETTY IMAGES

Abbreviations

ACA Authority for Audio-visual Communication (Tunisia)

ERTU Egyptian Radio and Television Union

GCC Gulf Co-operation Council

HAICA Independent High Authority for Audiovisual Communication

INRIC National Body for the Reform of Information and Communication (Tunisia)

JANA Jamahiriya National News Agency (Libya)

LBCI Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International

MBC Middle East Broadcasting Corporation

NAVC National Audio-Visual Council (Lebanon)

OPT Occupied Palestinian Territories

TTV Tunisian Television

UEA United Arab Emirates

UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

IBRAHIM EL MAYET

Executive summary

Since national broadcasters were first established in the Arab world in the mid-twentieth century, the media has always been used as a platform for taking or asserting power. Over the last 25 years, however, there has been a gradual opening up of that media space, first through the advent of satellite broadcasting, and subsequently through the explosion of new media. Although this pluralism has undoubtedly had a liberalising effect on the political landscape of the region, it has also fuelled an increasingly polarised political discourse.

With this wider political context as a backdrop, this briefing suggests that national broadcasters may have the potential to help to bridge social divides, if they can be reformed to serve the interests of the public rather than the state. In addition to their extensive infrastructure and reach, these institutions also have a cultural standing that enables them to serve diverse audiences with programmes tailored to their needs and interests. But in order to realise that mission, these organisations will need to reorient their programming so that it responds less to government policies and more to the needs of citizens.

Specifically, the briefing suggests that state broadcasters can do this by instilling the twin public service values of universality and diversity into their programming, underpinned by a clear commitment to editorial independence. Formats that enable inclusive dialogue, rational debate and clear and trusted information can, at least in theory, mitigate conflict by facilitating tolerance, mutual understanding and representation.

Above As part of a BBC Media Action initiative, a team of experts worked with Al Wataniya's outside broadcast team on location in Libya

The fact that infrastructure exists to deliver public service content does not necessarily mean that this infrastructure will be put to good use or that the conditions in a country – political, economic, social or otherwise – will enable those public service values to be realised to their fullest extent. To illustrate this point, the briefing explores four countries undergoing political change – Libya, Egypt, Lebanon and Tunisia – to examine the opportunities and constraints conditioning the national broadcasters' ability to deliver content that enhances universality and diversity.

In Libya, the ability to build an inclusive national broadcaster has failed because of factional control and in-fighting between groups, resulting in a media marked by bias, defamation and incitement on the Libyan airwaves. Until that conflict subsides, this briefing argues that the best one can hope for may be to bring in unbiased public service content from outside the country's borders and to use that programming to provide basic information for all groups and slowly build tolerance over time.

In the last few years, Egypt has undergone a period of turbulence and political instability, much of which has been played out in a highly polarised media environment. The country benefits from a long-standing national broadcaster with the potential to reach large swathes of the country and a programming heritage that has shaped the collective imagination of generations. However, its bloated bureaucracy, concerns over its editorial independence, inadequate regulation, and a narrowing of media and political freedoms places real limits on the broadcaster's ability to play a much-needed social cohesion role for its audiences.

Lebanon, which emerged from civil war back in the 1990s, is often held up as having the most vibrant private media sector in the region. The country also boasts a recently reformed national broadcaster with recognised potential to help to bridge the social divides that have lingered long after the civil war subsided. But without deeper economic and political buy-in from the different political actors who make up the Lebanese state, this institution is falling short of being truly innovative in its programming and attracting sustained audiences.

Tunisia – which has an embryonic and fragile democratic system – has made great strides in reforming its media regulation in recent years. The national television station commands significant reach and a substantial loyal audience. Although this broadcaster is undergoing a process of institutional reform, it still lacks the administrative and financial independence that can protect it from government control.

While the political context across these countries varies enormously, all four cases underscore the essential need for institutional reform of the media sector if public service values are to be sustained in the long run. While it is outside the scope of this briefing to address that issue in detail, the briefing concludes with a call for audience research that better understands people's needs, more programming aimed at the region's rising young population, more diverse media interventions and greater attention given to the political incentives facing actors in these countries to enable them to embark on serious reform of their media sectors.

Introduction: Beyond the "Arab Spring"

December 2014 saw the fourth anniversary of the start of the Tunisian uprising that swept President Ben Ali from power. This was followed by a series of uprisings across the Arab world, in what subsequently became known as the Arab Spring. Dubbed by some as the Facebook or Twitter Revolutions because of the role played by social media, these uprisings brought global attention and scrutiny to the region's media environment.[1]

In truth, Arab media platforms have always been used as tools for taking or asserting power. But, in helping to overturn decades of centralised political control, social media appeared – at first glance – to have fundamentally altered the rules of the political game in these countries.[2]

In the years since the uprisings, it has become clear that the democratising potential of social media for the region may have been overstated. Much like the satellite broadcasters that preceded it, social media broke the government's monopoly on the provision of information, giving people access to a range of viewpoints. It also afforded a novel, democratic and dynamic space for civic organisation and participation unmediated by government officials. But, with the flowering of identities and new claimants to political power, come divisions, and media landscapes in some parts of the Arab world are increasingly fracturing along ethnic, religious and factional lines.[3] And those divides, in turn, fuel conflict.

Given such a backdrop, this briefing asks how Arab media can best reflect the freedom that people in the region hunger for, as the uprisings showed, while contributing to the kind of political stability and social cohesion that societies also crave.

This briefing explores two arguments. First, in an environment characterised by rising distrust and discord, the need for media programming that can support the sort of "public service values" – in particular, universality and diversity – that bring societies together across divides is arguably greater than ever.

Second, the paper suggests that, although it seems rather unlikely, one particular media actor – the national broadcaster – may paradoxically emerge as being well positioned to deliver those values. Historically, the state's role in Arab media has been lamented as restrictive, with national broadcasters seen as "true emanations of the states".[4] But given their extensive infrastructure, reach and cultural salience, it is worth asking whether Arab national broadcasters could harness that potential to embrace a mission that is less about serving those in power and much more about serving the public.

To support this hypothesis, the briefing looks closely at four cases in the region – Libya, Egypt, Lebanon and Tunisia – to examine the potential for national broadcasters to play a role that is more explicitly geared towards social cohesion. The case studies were chosen to represent the range of political contexts currently emerging from places where the state has failed to others where democratic ideals are under pressure.

The briefing finds that, in all four cases, there is at least some degree of scope for programming that delivers dialogue, inclusion and representation. But while the potential is there, its ultimate realisation hinges critically on a politically enabling environment that does not, by and large, exist yet.

This briefing is organised as follows:

Part 1 sketches out some of the central trends in the Arab world's media landscape today.

Part 2 maps the relationship between media and power over time, in order to set the scene for the current period of profound political polarisation in the region.

Part 3 explains how and why a media geared towards the public service values of universality and diversity may be of particular utility at this moment in time in this region.

Part 4 explores the national broadcaster as a potential vehicle for reinforcing social cohesion in these countries.

Part 5 examines this potential in four countries in the region that are currently undergoing political change.

Part 6 concludes with a discussion of the long-term institutional reforms needed to sustain these values over time.

Above Social media played an important role in the Arab uprisings. Here, a young person films the aftermath of a tear gas volley fired by police on protestors near Tahrir Square, Cairo, in November 2011

PART 1

The Arab media context

Figure 1: The sub-regions of the Arab world

- GCC countries & Yemen
- The Levant region & Iraq
- North Africa region

The Arab world, its culture and its media are commonly divided into three sub-regions: the Levant (on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean), North Africa, and the oil-rich Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) states, which tend to be singled out because of their high GDP and more advanced communications infrastructure.[5] (See Figure 1.) In addition to the economic differences across these three sub-regions, there is also a socio-economic divide within each region, between high-density urban areas and scattered rural populations, which results in a noticeable "digital divide" in media consumption.

Bearing this complexity in mind, there are five key media trends that characterise the region:

1. The end of state monopoly

Until the 1990s, Arab media sectors were dominated by state broadcasters. The introduction of satellite technology in the mid-1980s brought about a liberalisation of media ownership. Early on, satellite dishes were very expensive and few people used them. But the launch of pan-Arab channels such as the MBC (Middle East Broadcasting Corporation) in 1991, capable of beaming their signal into other nations and offering attractive content in the process, triggered a fast migration from terrestrial to satellite home receivers. As the cost of satellite dishes

> **"TV will always remain relevant, because of illiteracy, but also because of an extremely oral family-oriented culture … most people in Egypt live with seven or eight people and one small TV set … and they watch TV together."**
>
> Naila Hamdy

continued to drop throughout the 1990s, and technology improved, the number of satellite channels – regional and national – increased significantly. Between 2011 and 2014, for example, the number of channels grew from 1,096 to 1,294, the vast majority of which are privately owned.[6]

2. A surge in digital media

As of 2013, there were over 135 million internet users in the Arab region, and internet penetration rates were growing rapidly.[7] To put this in perspective, from 2006 to 2011, the number of internet users in Arab countries increased by 23% annually. Global internet users, by comparison, increased by only 14% annually over the same period.[8] Social networks exhibit a similar trend: in 2014, Facebook reached 74 million users in the region, of which 42 million are daily users, while the total number of active Twitter users rose to over 5 million by March of that year.[9] YouTube viewership from the Middle East and North Africa ranks second behind the United States for total You Tube views, with over 300 million daily views.[10] The use of Whatsapp and Instagram are also rapidly increasing. On the whole, however, the penetration of internet and social media sites relative to the region's total population still remains low outside the Gulf Co-operation Council (see Table 1).

3. A surge in mobile telephony

Today, more people in the region have access to a mobile phone than electricity. Smartphone penetration is also

increasing, but remains below the global average of 29%.[11] Not surprisingly, smartphone adoption rates are particularly high in the Gulf region, with Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) the highest in the world (80%).[12] As mobile usage increasingly takes hold, television and radio content may therefore be consumed increasingly by telephone and in private.

4. The importance of young audiences

People aged 15 to 35 constitute 40% of the population in the Arab world. This is a far higher percentage than the global average.[13] Much like in the rest of the world, this is a generation that grew up on digital technology: in a 2015 survey of several countries in the Arab world, for

Above Men gather in a Cairo cafe to watch the opening of the Egyptian Parliament on 23 January 2012

Table 1: Internet users in Arab countries

Country	Population (2014 est.)	Internet users in 2000	Internet users in 2014	Penetration (% population)	Facebook in 2012
Algeria	38,813,722	50,000	6,669,927	17.2 %	4,111,320
Bahrain	1,346,613	40,000	1,297,500	96.4 %	413,200
Egypt	86,895,099	450,000	46,200,000	53.2 %	12,173,540
Iraq	33,309,836	12,500	2,997,884	9.0 %	2,555,140
Jordan	6,623,279	127,300	5,700,000	86.1 %	2,558,140
Kuwait	3,996,899	150,000	3,022,010	75.6 %	890,780
Lebanon	4,151,234	300,000	3,336,517	80.4 %	1,587,060
Libya	6,244,174	10,000	1,362,604	21.8 %	781,700
Morocco	32,987,206	100,000	20,207,154	61.3 %	5,091,760
Oman	3,286,936	90,000	2,584,316	78.6 %	584,900
OPT (West Bk.)	2,785,366	35,000	1,687,739	60.6 %	966,960
OPT (Gaza Strip)	1,869,055	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Qatar	2,194,817	30,000	2,016,400	91.9 %	671,720
Saudi Arabia	27,752,316	200,000	18,300,000	65.9 %	5,852,520
Sudan	35,482,233	30,000	9,307,189	26.2 %	n/a
Syria	22,878,524	30,000	5,920,553	25.9 %	n/a
Tunisia	10,937,521	100,000	5,053,704	46.2 %	3,328,300
United Arab Emirates	9,445,624	735,000	8,807,226	93.2 %	3,442,940
Yemen	26,737,317	15,000	5,210,593	19.5 %	495,440

Notes: (1) Internet Statistics for Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia were updated on June 30, 2014. Internet Statistics for Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates and Yemen were updated on December 31, 2014 (2) Facebook subscribers were updated on December 31, 2012. (3) Population numbers estimates are mainly based mainly on data from the U.S. Census Bureau and local census offices. (4) Internet usage information comes mainly from data published by Nielsen Online, WWW, ITU, Facebook, and other trustworthy sources. (5) For Internet growth comparison purposes, baseline Internet usage data for the year 2000 is displayed.

Source: Africa and Middle East Internet users, Internetworldstats.com Copyright 2014, © Miniwatts Marketing Group. All rights reserved worldwide.

example, younger adults (18-24 year olds) were online for an average of 31 hours a week and spent 19 hours watching TV. In contrast, those 45 and older watched an average of 23 hours of television per week and were online for 19 hours.[14] Crucially, digital tools also allow young people to produce content themselves, such as YouTube shows or online radio.

5. Ongoing relevance of traditional media

Nevertheless, while behaviours are shifting, especially for youth, around media access and consumption, traditional forms of media remain highly relevant. According to a recent study, nearly everyone in the region watches a TV (97%) and two in three listen to the radio (65%).[15] As Naila Hamdy, Associate Professor and Chair of Journalism and Mass Communication at the American University in Cairo, explains: "TV will always remain relevant, because

of illiteracy, but also because of an extremely oral, family-oriented culture … for example, most people in Egypt live with seven or eight people and one small TV set … and they watch TV together."[16] The liberalisation of the media market in several Arab countries has also allowed for the introduction of a number of privately owned radio stations.[17] Radio remains particularly relevant in rural areas with low electricity or internet connectivity and in cities because of listening habits during rush hour commute (see Figure 2).

Arab media cannot be considered as a monolithic bloc and there are strong disparities across countries in terms of consumption, penetration and ownership. But it is useful to track the impact of these general trends on the region's broader political evolution before turning to examine specific national media environments.

Figure 2: Different types of media consumption
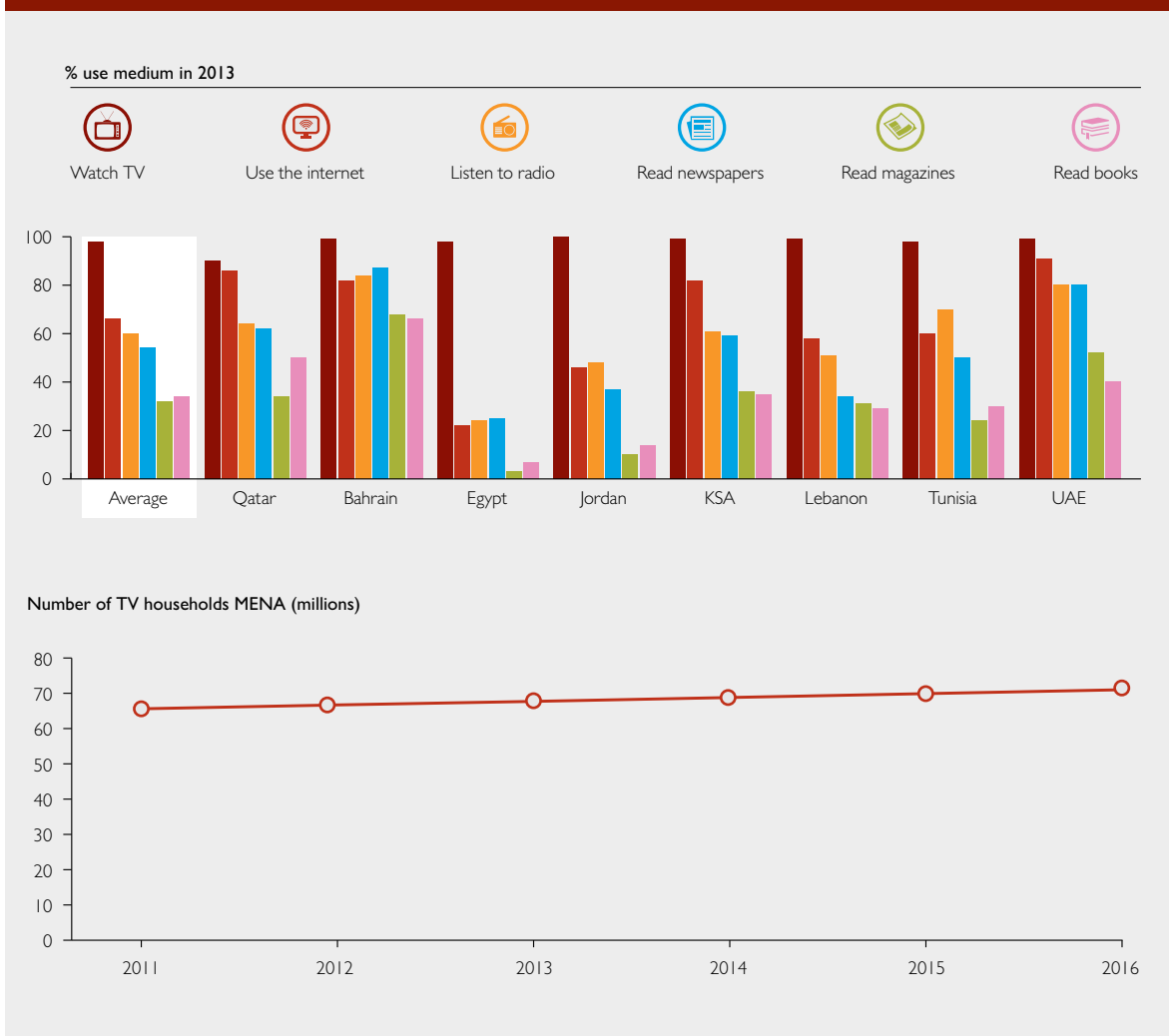
Source: Media Use in the Middle East by Northwestern University in Qatar, 2013, Statista 2015

SOPHIA BARAKET FOR MEDMEDIA

PART 2

Parallel worlds, virtual islands: The new politics of media in the Arab world

The media landscape has always been political in the Arab world. What has changed over the past 25 years is the shift from one sole voice dominating that landscape to a plethora of claimants to political power. While this pluralism has undoubtedly had a democratising effect, it has also meant that the media is susceptible to being co-opted by political and other interests and to an increasingly polarised political discourse.

From its earliest beginnings, broadcast media in the Arab world has been tied to political power. As Arab countries began gaining independence from colonial powers, broadcasting systems became a crucial instrument in the nation-building process, one in which radio and television outlets were seen as national assets, controlled by the state. For much of the 20th century, therefore, governments in the region "had the final say on what went on the air, and to a large extent could

influence what their populations listened to and watched," according to media scholar Marwan Kraidy.[18] Because of their ability to transmit across borders, radio – and subsequently television – was also used by Arab regimes "as a weapon to undermine their regional rivals … and consolidate their national positions," according to a BBC Media Action policy briefing on the Iraqi media.[19] A 2005 Economist article notes that "the only critical or independent voices audiences were likely to hear came from the BBC's Arabic Service, the French government's Radio Monte Carlo, or from the propaganda broadcasts of neighbouring … regimes."[20]

All of this changed with the advent of satellite television

Above Satellite dishes dot many rooftops across Algeria

> **❝** For much of the 20th century, governments in the region 'had the final say on what went on the air, and to a large extent could influence what their populations listened to and watched'. **❞**

> 66 By greatly expanding the content and the format – both what could be said and the way in which it could be presented – satellite television cracked open the previously closed media space in the Arab world. 99

Below In Cairo, angry anti-government protesters stand outside the national television building after Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's February 10 speech to the nation in 2011

in the 1980s and 1990s. Greater political liberalisation coupled with the expansion of national privatisation programmes and the diffusion of new communication technologies led to a spectacular surge of pan-Arab broadcast empires, funded largely by Gulf fortunes.[21] By providing content from outlets not under the control of the sovereign government, satellite television exposed audiences to a greater plurality of voices than had previously been aired on state television, including views and information that contradicted the "official" line. It also introduced audiences to a new set of reporting and interview techniques on the news and to a more diverse array of television formats, including live broadcasts, political talk shows, documentaries and more daring dramas covering topics such as women's rights. Competition in turn forced state broadcasters to be more innovative in their own programming, although – precisely because these remained under the tight control of the government – many consider those changes to have been largely cosmetic.[22]

In short, by greatly expanding the content and the format – both what could be said and the way in which it could be presented – satellite television cracked open the previously closed media space in the Arab world. Together with foreign broadcasters, satellite television cultivated an appetite for more diverse and higher-quality content, thus serving as an important catalyst for subsequent social and political change in the region.[23]

The next big wave of media change was, of course, the internet. As satellite television had, but to an even greater degree, the blogs, social networking sites and other digital content that gradually made their way onto the Arab media scene in the mid-2000s made it increasingly difficult to control communication in a highly centralised fashion. This rapidly diversifying media landscape appeared – at least initially – to be an unprecedented democratisation of the public sphere.

Since 2011, a deluge of works have been written claiming the centrality of digital and social media in the political uprisings that swept through the Arab world in countries such as Tunisia, Egypt and Syria. There is no doubt that social media allowed for the expression of dissident and marginalised voices, new citizenship practices in the form of online activity, and some reshaping of the news agenda.[24] At the same time, social media also allowed people to organise outside of government-controlled spaces and to mobilise social movements around identities and political causes in a way that had not been possible before.

However, a more nuanced reading of the politics of social media subsequently followed, and commentators gradually came to terms with the fact that, for all its democratising potential, social media had not fundamentally altered the rules of the political game.[25] Indeed, while the events of the Arab uprisings may have caught the Arab regimes off guard, these governments would quickly learn new ways to contain dissent, whether by trying to control the online space themselves or by using their security apparatuses to crack down on opposition protesters in the streets. In many Arab countries, journalists and bloggers bravely risked their own safety to defend their profession in the face of immense odds. In this way, the online narrative that was so popular in the immediate aftermath of the Arab uprisings masked a separate offline conversation in which the balance of power drastically differed.

Over time, it also became clear that, while a more diverse Arab media landscape had increased pluralism, it had also arguably enabled polarisation. In the years since 2011, existing tensions and conflicts that have dominated the region for millennia have come to the fore, pitting rival ideologies against each other and leading to further instability and division between differing ethnic and
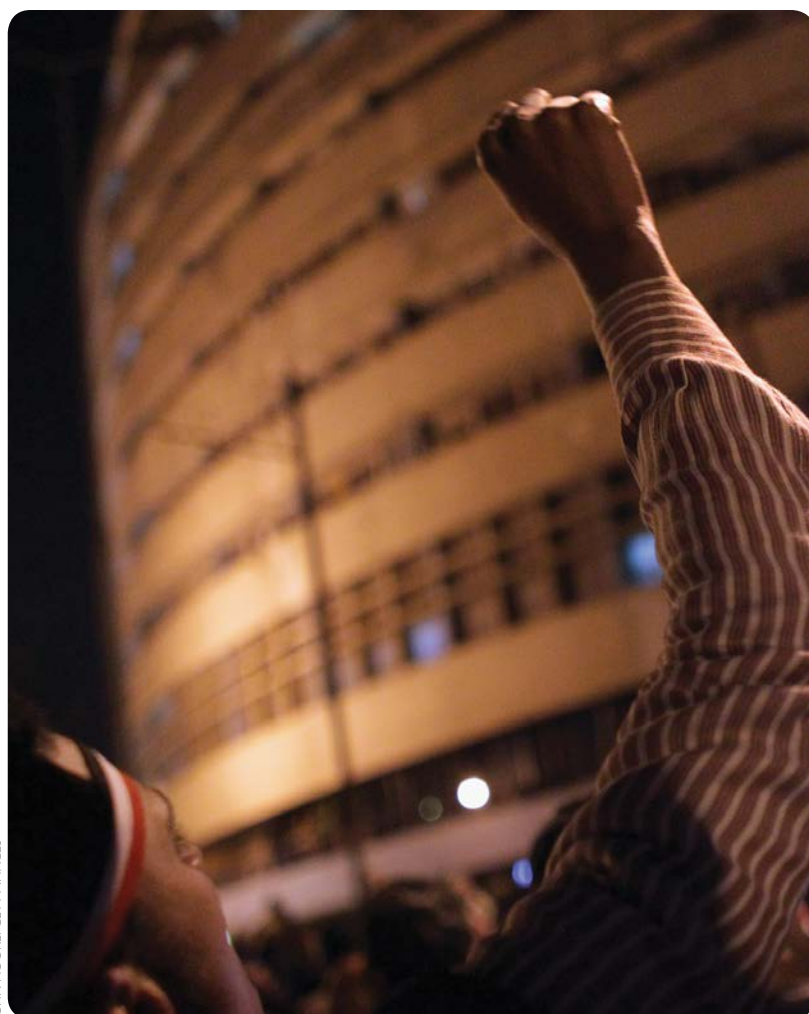
JOHN MOORE/GETTY IMAGES

PHOTO BY JIM RANKIN/TORONTO STAR VIA GETTY IMAGES

religious factions, as well as between regime-backed and opposition groups. These tensions have played out differently in each country. Yemen, Libya and Syria are all countries riven by civil wars that threaten the stability of the state itself. The divisions in Tunisia and Egypt, in contrast, are largely political and ideological, although Tunisia has a fragile and embryonic democratic system for negotiating difference, while Egypt is struggling with pluralism.

As these political and identity-based conflicts unfold, many have argued that the media has been increasingly co-opted by various interests, wishing to gain influence and shape public opinion, sometimes with violent intent. Because satellite television channels are mainly owned by political and commercial actors with specific agendas, for example, coverage of identical events in the region is often heavily influenced by the political stance of the stations' owners. According to media scholar Lina Khatib, these stations are thus often "proxy" platforms for rivalries between Arab countries, clashing political groups and international political agents, whose primary motive "is the propagation of messages favourable to the self while discrediting others."[26] Media scholar Marwan Kraidy also argues that "sectarian incitement and mobilization have become both unabashed and systematic" in the region. [27] In this way, Khatib argues, "Satellite television coverage in the region has not only been a tool of communication, it has also been a symptom and sometimes even a cause of power struggles in the Arab world."[28]

The same can be said for other forms of media – including and perhaps especially – social media. By increasing selective exposure to ideas, "mutual exclusion processes, fragmentation mechanisms, and non-responsive communication" took place online, as media scholar Marc Lynch put it, resulting in a retreat to separate ideological camps.[29] Similarly in Egypt, according to a study by the British Council, "by emphasising sectarian rhetoric, the media has created parallel worlds that enhance intolerance to difference, casting Egyptians into virtual islands."[30] Hate speech and defamatory language have also been a feature of this new media landscape.[31] At the extreme, there is Libya, which is much closer to resembling a conglomeration of militias at war with one another, and where the media is used as a weapon.

In sum, a more pluralistic Arab media environment has undeniably led to an improvement in freedom of expression, but it has also simultaneously allowed the media to be increasingly co-opted in the service of narrow political interests. The next section of this briefing begins to tease out how media institutions – some of which have become part of the problem – could also become part of the solution.

> "Over time, it became clear that, while a more diverse Arab media landscape had increased pluralism, it had also arguably enabled polarisation."

PART 3

Public service values: Diversity, universality and social cohesion

> **" ** Even though media is not a panacea for the sorts of political divisions affecting the Arab world at the moment, it can still help to mitigate them. **"**

The media is not – nor can it be – an all-purpose solution to social and political problems. As BBC Media Action's Regional Director for the Middle East and Europe, Simon Derry, observes, "Media can't hold the state together. If people will go fight each other, in the end that will happen whether or not you have a good media."[32] But, even though media is not a panacea for the sorts of political divisions affecting the Arab world at the moment, it can still help to mitigate them.

Building on UNESCO's Media Development Indicators, Naomi Sakr has usefully highlighted the need for "public service media" in the Arab world, which "give prominence to public affairs, report them impartially, and give space to all sections of society and all parts of a country, thereby serving free and open collective public deliberation".[33] The virtue of thinking about the media in terms of its public remit is that this is not confined to one institutional form. Rather, it encourages one to think about a country's overall "media ecology" across public, private, community and (now) online, and how those different spaces cumulatively enable a society to realise what UNESCO and others have defined as "public service values". These include: *universality*, where the entire populace has access either through the use of different languages or through the provision of a platform for all components in society; *diversity*, both in programming and content provided as well as in target audience; *independence* from political and commercial pressures; and *distinctiveness*, through a remit to innovate and set high standards, which is enabled by political and commercial independence.[34]

All four values are vital to the flourishing of a country's media sector. This briefing will focus primarily on the first two: universality and diversity. The reason for this is because, in a political environment characterised by growing factionalisation of the sort described in Part 2, having a media that can bridge societal difference through inclusion and representation is paramount. But in order to be meaningful, universality and diversity must also be underpinned by a clear commitment to independence.

Public service values

1. Universality (meaning the entire population has access to the service)

2. Diversity (in the programmes offered, the audiences targeted and the subjects discussed)

3. Independence (guaranteed through protection from political and commercial pressures)

4. Distinctiveness in programming (through a remit to innovate and set high standards)

How does the media further these two, arguably more "developmental" values?[35] BBC Media Action projects suggest that media can help to reduce societal tensions through four primary mechanisms, which promote diversity and universality. First, media can include a broader range of voices in the public sphere. Even where conflict exists, a debate show can provide the public with constructive, moderated, audience-driven discussion.[36] Second, media can create discussion across societal divides, helping citizens to reach rational consensus on issues of importance to them through debate and discussion, which is, of course, the very essence of deliberative democracy.[37] Third, media can – at least in principle – change attitudes towards "the other" and diminish the use of violence.[38]

Fourth, media can provide clear and trusted information to dispel rumour and encourage discussion rooted in facts.

In short, media can play a role in building "social cohesion", enabling divided communities to recognise and better understand themselves – and their neighbours – in programming and to strengthen their shared identity. There are many ways to do this. Enabling dialogue across a society's fracture points via debate programmes is clearly one option. But news and talk-show formats, while traditionally popular among donors and media development organisations, are not the only mechanisms for furthering mutual understanding and tolerance. Drama formats are particularly well suited to reflecting the interests of people from all walks of life, including youth, minorities and women, and for engaging audiences around important social issues like identity.[39] Comedy can also be useful in this regard.

Thinking about media in terms of public service values has two further advantages. First, all Arab states are members of UNESCO so they already officially subscribe to these four public service values. Additionally, a number of Arab states have signed various official declarations, in which they have explicitly embraced these principles of

> **"** Drama formats are particularly well suited to reflecting the interests of people from all walks of life, including youth, minorities and women, and for engaging audiences around important social issues like identity.**"**

JOSEPH EID/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Left Lebanese actors film an episode of the online series Shankaboot, in the Bekaa Valley. The award-winning series was produced by Batoota Films in association with BBC Media Action

universality and diversity in their national media.[40] The challenge is therefore not so much a question of imposing a foreign institutional structure on the region's media as it is of cultivating commitments that are already there, at least on paper.

Second – and for the purposes of this briefing, perhaps more importantly – audiences in the region seem to be welcoming these values in their own assessment of what is needed from their national media. Audience research remains a sensitive topic in the Arab world due to historical constraints on collecting such data imposed by governments in the region.[41] The lack of an institutionalised media rating system such as Nielsen's, combined with a more general reluctance to carry out survey research and disclose financial information, make the process of conducting opinion polls both cumbersome and problematic.[42] The picture of audience attitudes towards media in the region is thus necessarily fragmented and incomplete. That said, a handful of studies conducted recently suggest that audiences are beginning to evaluate their national media critically, in terms of some of these public service values, and find it wanting (see box on attitudes to media in the Arab world).

In short, even in the absence of public service broadcasters in the historically specific, European sense,[43] audiences in the Arab region have articulated a desire for media content that is not only accurate, but inclusive. In what follows, the briefing explores the scope that exists for one regional institution in particular – the national broadcaster – to embody these public service values.

Attitudes to media in the Arab world

With respect to the public service value of editorial independence, for example, a recent study by Northwestern University found that fewer than half of those polled within Lebanon, Egypt and Tunisia believed that news media organisations in their countries were credible.[44] Indeed, "trust" was deemed most important to media consumers in a 2015 survey of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates conducted by Deloitte, with almost a third of respondents identifying it as paramount when choosing a news provider.[45]

Concerns about the values of universality and diversity are also present in the region. A 2013 British Council study of the gap between youth expectations and aspirations in 2011-2012, comparing revolutionary promises made during the uprisings in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia with actual experience, underscored a rising preoccupation – especially among youth – about the increasingly partisan nature of media in the region. Participants in the survey from Egypt accused the media, whether state owned or private, of actively spreading lies that have contributed to the current fragmentation of Egyptian society. This also held true in Libya, where the media is seen as politically biased and taking a subjective approach that has diminished its integrity in the eyes of young Libyans. Only in Tunisia was there a persistent conviction among youth that media could be used as a tool for democratic development. But even there, the media was seen as manipulative and agenda-driven rather than truth-driven. The report concludes: "One of the key factors in creating or undermining trust is the set of institutions responsible for allowing information to circulate, dialogue to emerge and understanding to emerge – the media. Yet trust in the media is dangerously low in all three countries."[46]

A recent research report by BBC Media Action in Libya and Tunisia further suggests that audiences are looking to their media to do more than just present the news in a balanced fashion. They want their media to "discuss solutions to everyday problems and act as a force for good", rather than simply serving as a form of mud-slinging.[47]

The underlying issue, then, even across these two very different political contexts, is that the viewing public wants a broadcaster that is independent, and that produces credible news output that tells them "how it is", alongside social content that helps to further the twin social objectives of cohesion and tolerance. This desire for a media with an explicitly social mission is corroborated by a 2011 eight-country study from the media support organisation, Panos. When asked what they expected from a public service broadcaster, the interviewees for that study said they welcomed programming that allowed for "the expression of diverse opinions", catered "to the needs of all sectors of society" and opened up public television to "those sectors of society who are normally deprived of their right to expression in the media".[48]

PART 4

The national broadcaster:
Infrastructure, reach and culture

Even in some of the most chaotic political circumstances within the region, then, audiences are looking for a media they can respect and trust to help bridge social divides. This section will argue that in the current media ecology of the Arab world, the state broadcaster can – at least in principle – be well positioned to deliver on some of these public service values.

There are plenty of reasons to consider this proposition far-fetched. For much of the past half century, these entities were part and parcel of a politically centralised model of development, one in which the broadcaster's central purpose was largely one of social control. Nearly all of them remain unreformed, in the hands of and heavily biased towards the government that funds them. Even in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings, national broadcasters can still seem more preoccupied with ensuring a regime's survival than with lobbying for independent and professional broadcasting.[49]

But if media environments are deeply polarised, there may be reasons why reforming national broadcasters deserve a fresh look. The first has to do with their

extensive infrastructure. Amid the recent political turmoil in the region, audiences are increasingly seeking out news relating to their own countries, and regional broadcasters are beginning to lose audience share.[50] While national satellite stations might conceivably meet this demand, these stations tend to concentrate their coverage on large urban areas. As a result, audiences outside the capitals and big cities struggle to find content relevant to their regions. In contrast, state broadcasters often own a network of regional and local channels in local languages, an important asset for connecting a large and diverse population of viewers.

Given this tremendous reach, it is perhaps not surprising that national broadcasters remain a more trusted source of news than might otherwise be expected. Of the six countries covered in the Northwestern University survey, for example, respondents in four of them said that they valued

Above The audience participatory debate show, Sa'at Hissab (BBC Arabic Question Time), was co-produced by BBC Arabic and Tunisian Television in Tunisia in December 2013

"State broadcasters often own a network of regional and local channels in local languages, an important asset for connecting a large and diverse population of viewers."

" The younger generation of Arab citizens played a key role during the 2011 uprisings. If the governments of the region are truly interested in social and political stability, then there is a political incentive for them to engage audiences – especially youth audiences – in this emerging 'public sphere'. "

state-owned news companies above privately owned ones as a source of news.[51] Similarly, the Libyan and Tunisian state broadcasters featured in the BBC Media Action audience research carried out in 2013 and 2014 attracted large audiences, acted as important sources of news, and were often trusted more than private channels.[52]

These broadcasters are also still valued by large parts of their society for representing culture and tradition. "[They] are a cultural entity in themselves and are respected in that," says BBC Media Action's Simon Derry.[53] In Tunisia, for example, watching the evening news bulletin is akin to a "national institution" and nearly three-quarters (72%) of people reported watching the news on the state channels.[54]

This cultural role extends beyond the comfortable reliability of the evening broadcast, however. Research commissioned by BBC Media Action in 2010 highlighted near-universal agreement in Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen (and to a slightly lesser extent, Egypt) that the ideal role of the media is to "create national pride and unity" and to "portray my country in a good light".[55] This survey was conducted before the 'Arab Spring', but it gives some indication of the decidedly patriotic attitude many audiences have towards national broadcasters, underscoring their potential to serve as a forum for national conversation and identity.

None of which is to imply that national broadcasters, even if they were reformed to become genuinely independent of the governments that still generally control them, can be considered the exclusive guardians of public interest values. In Tunisia, for example, the online platform marsad. tn, managed by Tunisian NGO Al-Bawsala, monitors the work of the Tunisian parliament and local city halls across the country to make information, such as budget analysis and the performance of officials, accessible to citizens.[56] In Lebanon, privately owned media, such Al-Jadeed and the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International (LBCI), run popular social programmes tackling issues ranging from food safety to corruption and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights.

But internet penetration remains quite unequal across the region and is prone to "echo chambers," wherein people consume media that reinforces their ideological beliefs and discount information that challenges them. The political co-option of private media similarly appears to be accelerating, rather than slowing down. There are also real political difficulties in implementing public service obligations for satellite broadcasters in countries such as Lebanon, where the state is weak and the laws are laxly applied, if at all. At the end of the day, as Nesryn Bouziane, Senior Project Manager at BBC Media Action notes: "[Commercial media] can complement … but their focus is on getting high audience rates rather than fulfilling the service of providing educational programming and reliable information."[57]

For all of these reasons, transforming online or privately owned media into purveyors of public service values

Right BBC Media Action's online, radio and television initiative Saloan Al Libyeen (The Libyan Sofa) puts issues involved with the building of the Libyan constitution forward for constructive debate

IBRAHIM EL MAYET

Left A woman is interviewed outside the capital Tunis

seems unlikely at scale. The question, then, is whether national broadcasters can overcome what BBC Media Action's Simon Derry has dubbed their "existential problem" and pivot from being organisations that respond primarily to the government's needs to being organisations that put citizens first, through more diverse and representative programming that is both creative and editorially independent.[58]

There are challenges, to be sure. As noted in Part 1, Arab countries are characterised by an overwhelmingly young population, commonly referred to as the "youth bulge". Despite the continuing popularity of state television overall, younger viewers in the region are much less interested in traditional broadcasting than they are in the internet. A detailed analysis of programme content by state broadcasters conducted in 2010 in eight countries in the region found that, apart from children's cartoons, any programming aimed specifically at children or youth was limited.[59]

If national broadcasters are to claim credibly to be both inclusive and representative, they need to bring the youth audience with them. This will entail two things. First, a wholescale rethink of the content offer to make it relevant and credible to young audiences. Second, making that content available where these audiences "are", for example online. But the rationale for engaging youth is not simply to increase viewers. The younger generation of Arab citizens played a key role during the 2011 uprisings. If the governments of the region are truly interested in social and political stability, then there is a political incentive for them to engage audiences – especially youth audiences – in this emerging "public sphere".

Finally, a consideration of personnel is in order. Journalists who work at state broadcasters in the Arab world do not necessarily define themselves as "journalists", and are more likely to think of themselves as "civil servants". They may thus prioritise welfare benefits such as pensions and salaries over and above issues such as editorial independence.[60] In Egypt, for example, where the state broadcaster employs between 38,000 and 45,000 people, media reform is intimately bound up with civil service reform.

This picture can be further complicated by the role of unions. In most countries around the world, trade unions are a crucial body for protecting the independence of journalists. This is certainly the case in Tunisia, for example, where the National Union of Journalists played a key role in expediting the formation of the country's media regulatory body post-2011. But journalists' syndicates in most other Arab countries grew out of the now-defunct International Organization of Journalists, a soviet-founded organisation, which advocated on behalf of journalists' rights but which equally had strong links to the governments of the day. In Egypt, for example, journalists have been engaged in an active struggle over the past several years to change the Egyptian Journalist Syndicate so it is less co-opted by the state and more active in advocating for journalists' safety and fighting against detention, harassment, censorship and exploitation.[61] Ultimately, how journalists employed by state broadcasters are contracted – and how they perceive their roles – are both vital variables in determining whether these broadcasters can shift their allegiance from those in government to service of the public.

> "In Tunisia … watching the evening news bulletin is akin to a 'national institution' and nearly three-quarters (72%) of people reported watching the news on the state channels."

Part 5 discusses four countries in the region with radically different political contexts, and examines the space available for the national broadcaster to pursue the values of universality and diversity. Part 6 sketches out a host of longer-term institutional considerations that would need to underpin any sort of shift in this direction.

SCOTT PETERSON/GETTY IMAGES

PART 5

Case studies

Libya
Few voices rise above the sound of the battle

Libya today is in dire straits. With two parallel and competing governments, feuding militias and dwindling oil production, some Libyans have started to reminisce nostalgically about the pre-uprising period under authoritarian leader Muammar Gaddafi. This section assesses the prospects for the Libyan media to help to unite a country at war, which is ethnically and politically diverse with strong regional identities.

After Gaddafi seized power in a coup in 1969, the media was transformed into a propaganda tool for the new regime. The regime-approved Jamahiriya National News Agency (JANA) had a monopoly over political news, which meant that the regime could continuously control content. While local print and radio outlets were afforded a marginal degree of autonomy, the press on the whole avoided publishing any material that could be deemed offensive or threatening to the government. In 2007, Gaddafi's son, Saif al-Islam, launched a second state broadcaster, Al-Libiya, which constituted a more open environment in which censorship was limited, but

this was short-lived.[62] The uprising against Gaddafi that unfolded in 2011 pitted Libyan state media, trumpeting the government's position, against regional satellite broadcasters, which were regarded as "the main voice of the rebellion".[63]

The 2011 uprising, which culminated in the overthrow of Gaddafi, thus paved the way for the first real taste of media pluralism in Libya. By 2012, there were more than 50 television channels and dozens of newspapers and radio stations and a variety of international media support initiatives followed suit. Many were politically aligned, yet several journalists were determined to act as independent voices. Young people, in particular, were "volunteering, launching radio stations … there was a lot of optimism," said Aya al-Amead, a young Libyan journalist. "Soon after this all changed."[64]

Indeed it did. Libya is currently in the midst of the worst conflict since the uprising against Gaddafi in 2011. The country is divided between armed factions and rival

Above An Al Jazeera English cameraman films damage from a rocket fired by troops loyal to Muammar Gaddafi inside a school playground in Zintan, Libya

governments with competing areas of control, extremist groups are gaining ground and most national institutions have collapsed. The current, violently polarised political environment increasingly resembles that of a failed state, with the potential to destabilise the wider region.

As the rival militia groups solidified their strength, they began to show little tolerance for the new-found press freedoms. Indeed, although there was progress in moving away from the entrenched practices of Gaddafi's hegemonic regime, "the existence of an unbiased and free media industry may have been an illusion", as one analyst put it.[65] Most radio stations stopped airing political news, and almost all newspapers were closed down. The media organisations that had proliferated in 2011 were often run by amateur journalists, and a large number of outlets later collapsed in the wake of the deteriorating security situation and lack of funds. As a result, the Libyan media landscape today largely reflects the profound divisions that have engulfed Libya in the aftermath of the uprising, with some outlets supporting the pro-Islamist pro-Dawn factions in Tripoli and others backing the pro-Dignity anti-Islamist grouping in Tobruk.

During the "short blossoming of journalism", as BBC Media Action Libya Country Director Anne Reevell refers to it, the state media sector also underwent minor changes.[66] There was an attempt at creating a Ministry of Media to oversee the emerging media sector as a whole, which was set up to address the "absence of competent media authorities", the "absence of regulations to organise media discourse" and the "absence of efficient and professional media offices in ministries". However, this also quickly became riven by factionalism.[67]

The main state broadcaster, Al-Jamahiriya, was renamed Al-Wataniya, but attempts at reform were largely unsuccessful. Al-Rasmiya – a rebranded version of Saif Gaddafi's modernising experiment in state television, Al-Libiya – was leaner and better equipped. But this station closed down a year after the uprising, once the occupying militia was accused of using the channel as a base from which to carry out its activities.

Some of the obstacles facing Al-Wataniya and its attempt to reform and deliver public service values included legal ambiguity relating to its remit, its small budget and bloated size, staff's limited journalistic skills and the worsening security situation. According to an internal review of the station carried out for BBC Media Action, there were very few actual journalists at the broadcaster, with nearly 70% of the 3,500 employees either not qualified for their positions or lacking interest.[68] Not surprisingly, perhaps, these state employees were reluctant to venture out and report, leaving then Director General Tarek el-Houny to accompany a few hardy cameramen to the streets of Tripoli to cover unfolding events.[69]

SOPHIA BARAKET FOR MED MEDIA

Above Journalists work together at the El Kul (For Everyone) newsroom

The lack of financial support for the broadcaster was also identified by el-Houny as a key obstacle to developing Al-Wataniya's capacity: "The budget only covered salaries… There was no… support for the media to develop, bridge the gaps and serve the audiences… we are reaping the results of this [neglect] today."[70] BBC Media Action's Anne Reevell attributes the government's reluctance to support the state broadcaster to the General National Congress' fear that empowering the media might eventually harm its political interests, as an independent broadcaster could potentially hold legislators accountable and criticise their performance.[71] The government was reluctant to step in and reform the station because it feared that staff redundancies could increase discontent.

> **"The media organisations that had proliferated in 2011 were often run by amateur journalists, and a large number of outlets later collapsed in the wake of the deteriorating security situation and lack of funds."**

Even so, with the help of capacity-building endeavours by media support organisations, the channel was able to improve its content. According to a BBC Media Action audience survey carried out in 2013, Al-Wataniya emerged as the most popular and most trusted television station in Libya. Although this could be chalked up to mere familiarity and the lack of credible alternatives, nearly half of the 1,146 respondents said that the station's content addressed all Libyans.[72] "Our programmes allowed for dialogue and bridged trust between MPs and citizens… I tried to liberate the staff and push the notion that this is a public not a state broadcaster," said former director El-Houny.[73]

> **"I was told to amend my coverage in favour of the 'right' political side. Either you are with us or not, so I left."**
> Raafat Belkhair

As the security situation deteriorated, however, with journalists and activists murdered and others subjected to considerable threats and arrests, journalistic work became untenable.[74] By 2014, the Committee to Protect

Journalists classified Libya as the second most dangerous country for media workers – after Syria – in terms of the numbers forced to flee their country.[75] In this declining security environment, many journalists reverted to the self-censorship of the Gaddafi days, while others took up lucrative positions in the well-financed "privately owned" media, supported by warring factions and regional governments. Raafat Belkhair, a reporter working for Al-Wataniya from 2012 to 2014, decided to resign after he realised that he could no longer cover all the aspects of a story. "I was told to amend my coverage in favour of the 'right' political side. Either you are with us or not, so I left," he said.[76]

> **"** BBC Media Action's Anne Reevell attributes the government's reluctance to support the state broadcaster to the General National Congress' fear that empowering the media might eventually harm its political interests, as an independent broadcaster could potentially hold legislators accountable and criticise their performance. **"**

Meanwhile, reflecting broader societal divides, Al-Wataniya and Al-Rasmiya also both split in two, with the pro-Islamists occupying the stations in Tripoli and the anti-Islamist factions setting up rival Al-Wataniya and Al-Rasmiya in the east of the country. Al-Wataniya Director General ElHouny resigned in summer 2014 when the Dawn militias took over Tripoli. Rejecting an invitation to join the Tobruk-based government, he moved to Tunisia, where disillusioned Libyan journalists have congregated, monitoring the many media violations in nearby Libya.

In this environment of endless echo chambers, there are few opportunities for exposure to alternative points of view or platforms for shared identity.

In the absence of a trusted broadcast partner, different approaches have been tried by media development agencies to enable the sort of universality and diversity that is otherwise missing from the Libyan media landscape right now. Deutsche Welle Akademie, for example, is hoping to launch its virtual news agency Libyan Cloud News Agency later this year using satellite technology to link a virtual community of regional correspondents.[77] For its part, BBC Media Action has launched El Kul (Arabic for "For Everyone"), operating out of Tunis.[78] This initiative trains Libyan journalists to gain media skills and provides balanced, impartial reporting on events in Libya with stories of interest to all Libyans. Content, including a daily news bulletin and interviews with decision-makers is hosted on a dedicated website and on Facebook. According to one of its audience members, El Kul is perceived as "trying for reconciliation between the two parties … and for the unification of Libya".[79] Interviewees assessing the performance of El Kul since its launch in February 2015 identified diversity of content and political viewpoints as key strengths.[80]

As of July 2015, El Kul had managed to reach an audience of an estimated 500,000 per week within Libya and to engage young audiences, which have long been excluded from content produced by the country's state broadcasters.[81] Moreover, plans are currently underway to transfer this initiative to entities based in Libya, run by Libyans and funded by advertising and sponsorship to ensure its sustainability over time.

Waiting for state television to be restored is not a viable strategy in Libya right now. El Kul and other virtual public media programmes like it may be the only means of providing unbiased public service content that crosses social divides, aimed at all Libyans. To the extent that they succeed, they go some distance towards refuting the age-old Arab adage that "no voice rises above the sound of the battle".[82]

VALERIANNE NICOLAOU-GAMBINI

Egypt
Political polarisation and the endless promise of reform

Media reform in Egypt has been talked about for decades, but the overthrow of long-time President Hosni Mubarak in 2011 was singled out as a unique moment of hope. "The call for media reform was one of the demands of the revolution of Egypt," explains media scholar Naila Hamdy.[83]

In the aftermath of this initial euphoria, however, a period of political instability set in. Extreme divisions in Egyptian society began to emerge, particularly after the election of the Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohamed Morsi in the 2012 presidential elections, and the tensions often spilled over into violence on the streets. This political unrest culminated in a massive citizen mobilisation and the removal by the army of Mohamed Morsi in July 2013.

In this increasingly divided political environment, the media shifted from a universal discourse championing freedom of expression into what media scholar Adel Iskandar describes as two camps: "either watchdog or lapdog for those in power".[84] And although a Media Code of Ethics to ensure "professional standards, credibility and impartiality" was seen as a priority for the "roadmap for transition" after Morsi's removal, it never materialised.[85] Instead, media has become an integral actor in the political conflict, increasing polarisation. In a 2013 interview with Daily News Egypt, Ahmed Kheir, Executive Director of the Support for Information Technology Centre, explained:

"What we have today is media that aims at inciting people. It is one-sided and deprives the audience's right to access comprehensive information about the situation in Egypt."[86] This volatile political context raises the question of whether the country's national broadcaster, the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU), could play a useful role in helping this country confront some of its social and political problems.

There are sceptics. As one of the very first state broadcasters in the region, ERTU remains, at least in part, a holdover from the Nasserist propaganda machine.[87] The broadcaster was strongly criticised, for example, during the 2011 uprising for what was perceived as its pro-regime coverage. In October 2011, a peaceful protest made up of largely Coptic demonstrators suddenly turned violent in front of "Maspero" – the ERTU headquarters. As events unfolded, state television called on "honourable citizens" to defend the military against "attacks" by Coptic demonstrators, resulting in more violence. Hundreds were injured and 27 people were killed, shot or run over by armoured vehicles.[88] What became known as "the Maspero massacre" triggered a wave of shock and anger,

> "When a regular citizen watches the news on state television, it's because we want to know what the government is saying. State media is like a government spokesperson."
>
> Naila Hamdy

Above Graffiti from a wall in Cairo in 2011. It says 'their weapon' (rifle) and 'our weapon' (video camera)

KHALED DESOUKI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Above "Maspero", the ERTU headquarters in Cairo

In addition to issues concerning its editorial independence, ERTU has also been plagued for years by debts, corruption scandals and a bloated administrative structure of approximately 40,000 employees.[92] The organisation has been trying to address its chronic over-staffing problem – and has even contemplated the privatisation of some departments – according to Mohamed el-Morsi, Head of the Radio and Television Department at Cairo University of Mass Communications. But according to El-Morsi, the dysfunctional structure that has come to define ERTU staffing has made it difficult for the organisation to fulfil a public service mission: "We look at state media to be public service media, not the regime's or the government's media. Unfortunately, the system as a whole suggests that it is still working in the orbit of the government."[93]

Budget cuts have also affected the quality of ERTU's output. Since the early 2000s, private stations multiplied and started vying for audience attention with state television. A number of prime time talk shows played a key role in raising awareness on social and political issues, encouraging debate.[94] After the uprising, the number of private media outlets increased, further competing for audience share. According to Albert Shafik, CEO of ONTV, a gradual decrease in state television viewership in Egypt has increased the influence of non-state media players: "Commercial media is taking the place of state TV … We are a very important player … They have to take our ideas seriously, otherwise there is no media."[95] By way of example, the first ever presidential debates ahead of the 2012 elections were held on private stations Dream and ONTV instead of on state television. Shafik maintains that some private stations, including his, do deliver on public service values such as universality: "Our mission is to enlighten people: showing all points of view … giving the opportunity to everyone."

That said, and despite attempts to produce pockets of public service content, it does not seem that private stations are filling this niche either. In addition to ongoing concerns around ownership, transparency, advertising interests and political influence in their editorial content, several private stations have been accused of benefiting from the country's legal vacuum to broadcast sensationalist and/or defamatory content. "What kind of content is that?" asks Cairo University's Mohamed el-Morsi. "Sex and black magic on private television just to boost advertising and viewership?"[96] Other media experts expressed similar concerns about the lack of professionalism and the superficiality of topics discussed on Egyptian media, thus failing to tackle issues relevant to audiences. Writer and scholar Mohamed Bassiouny, for example, feels that media in Egypt operates on the basis of financial interests, owners agendas and consequently is not fulfilling its social responsibility.[97]

as protesters marched to the ERTU building to "occupy" and "purify" it, according to news accounts.[89] Since the uprising, ERTU journalists have periodically staged sit-ins and strikes to denounce interference in media affairs and to discuss possible policy recommendations for the future of ERTU.

ERTU employees were far from sympathetic towards the Muslim Brotherhood Minister of Information installed following the election of Mohamed Morsi in 2012, whom they accused of heavy-handed editorial interference. Once Morsi was removed, ERTU re-aligned its coverage with the new authorities under Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. ERTU's current chairman, Essam al-Amir, who holds de facto Ministerial powers, insists: "We are the reflection of the streets' pulse and people's will. If we expressed views against the people, the people will remove us as they removed powerful presidents."[90] But media scholar Naila Hamdy points out that the public is not naive: "When a regular citizen watches the news on state television, it's because we want to know what the government is saying. State media is like a government spokesperson."[91]

Several interviewees felt that, despite its bloated institutional structure and compromised editorial independence, ERTU has an important role to play in providing public service values in Egypt right now. As Cairo University's Mahmoud Alam Eddine put it, ERTU could be "the genie waiting to be freed".[98] This hope stems principally from ERTU's cultural status as a national institution with a long-standing heritage that has shaped the collective imagination of generations of Egyptians through its radio and television content. ERTU was instrumental in forging a shared Egyptian national identity after independence. For years, it was the dominant television producer in the country – not only of news – but also of a series of highly respected, socially resonant dramas, avidly consumed around the Arab world.

Through social drama in particular, ERTU has, over the years, contributed to raising awareness about topics like education, family planning and women's rights.[99] Research commissioned by BBC Media Action, for example, demonstrated that viewers in Egypt look to social dramas to inspire them to resolve problems and confront dilemmas in their daily lives.[100] ERTU also owns a wide archive of cultural productions. Despite debates around the quality of storage, the archiving process and piracy of content, the broadcaster did manage to digitise a selection of landmark radio, television dramas and music rarities, and uploaded these onto YouTube. Even with fierce competition from satellite television, a revival of ERTU's production potential – especially in drama – could enable the station to revive the social cohesion role it once played within Egyptian society.

ERTU's potential to play this social cohesion role is enhanced by the fact that it retains a monopoly on terrestrial broadcasting through its large network of thematic television channels (Nile Culture, Drama, Education, Higher Education, Family and Children), which currently suffer from a lack of investment. ERTU is also uniquely positioned to provide content tailored for audiences outside the capital city, as it owns a network of six regional television stations and 10 local radio stations. In terms of sheer scope and size, the station has assets, facilities, equipment and studios in quantities that far outstrip rival channels.

In addition to the obvious economic challenge of being able to compete with private channels, one of the most pressing questions facing the future of the ERTU is whether its infrastructural and creative potential will be backed by the political will for reform. As Dalia Hassouna, radio presenter at ERTU explains: "We hoped that after a revolution, you would revolt against everything. But none of the politicians are ready to restructure a building which employs 43,000 people."[101]

Another obstacle is the lack of adequate regulation. The 2014 Egyptian Constitution devotes an entire chapter to the rights of citizens, including freedom of expression and the media. The Constitution also sets out a regulatory framework for the media in a series of articles, including the establishment of a Higher Regulatory Authority to regulate all media outlets (both state-owned and private as well as digital), a National Council for state newspapers and a National Council for the state broadcaster. So far, however, little progress has been made to make these laws a reality. Instead, the process has devolved into a raging battle between media stakeholders and the government, and among media stakeholders themselves, and has resulted in a proliferation of committees – and political deadlock.[102]

Media professionals have expressed concerns that potential new media laws could be used to reduce freedoms. In his meetings with media practitioners, President Sisi has said that freedoms must be balanced with national security and sees the media's role as "preserving the Egyptian state".[103] Some Egyptian journalists identify themselves as "patriots", viewing it as their "national duty" to take the side of the armed forces in the context of a "war on terrorism", according to an unpublished report by the Arab Network for Media Support.[104] Since 2013, there have been debates about the return of self-censorship practices and repressive control mechanisms.[105] Following a series of deadly attacks by extremists, the prospect of a draft anti-terrorism law which punishes publishing "false information on terrorist attacks that contradict official statements" triggered a fierce battle between the Egyptian Journalist Syndicate, rights organisations and the government.[106]

Whether, in the wake of these multiple and conflicting political pressures, ERTU can emerge as a platform for national conversation and social cohesion remains to be seen. According to Naila Hamdy: "Certainly everybody at ERTU knows that reforming them is part of changing Egypt."[107] At the moment, however, the likelihood of government policy shifting in the direction of greater political openness and independence in general, let alone of moving in this direction with the state broadcaster, appears remote. Local and international media freedom organisations continue to intensify their concerns over the state of media freedom in the country. Dalia Hassouna points out that, "For a fresh start, you need to ensure one thing for your employees: the possibility for them to be independent. Today, the government nominates your boss, the head of the channel, etc… and as long as you are threatened, you cannot be free."[108]

> 66 Research commissioned by BBC Media Action, for example, demonstrated that viewers in Egypt look to social dramas to inspire them to resolve problems and confront dilemmas in their daily lives. 99

> 66 We hoped that after a revolution you would revolt against everything...but none of the politicians are ready to restructure [the Egyptian Radio and Television Union] which employs 43,000 people. 99
>
> Dalia Hassouna

Above TV presenter Lina Doughan at Future TV, a station owned by Saad El Hariri, leader of the Future Movement party

Lebanon
Sowing social cohesion?

"A unified news bulletin for a unified Lebanon." This was how a Télé Liban news anchor began a newscast at the height of the civil war in the 1980s when Télé Liban, Lebanon's national broadcaster, was intermittently divided in two.[109] This mantra embodies the aspirations that many Lebanese have for the national broadcaster and the role it could play in sowing national cohesion in this long-embattled country.

But Télé Liban, the oldest television channel in the Middle East, has struggled to fulfil a public service role. This is largely due to the nature of the Lebanese political system. Although Lebanon has long been regarded as unique in the Arab world, with a sometimes-functioning democracy, relative freedoms and 18 recognised religious groups, the power-sharing system in place has strengthened the system of patronage between political actors and their clients, at the expense of the state.

The media reflects these political realities. Although the Lebanese media system is pluralistic, with a number of privately owned media channels, these channels typically serve the interests of their owners or political/religious groups, rather than the general public. The state struggles to regulate them effectively, while its own broadcaster is correspondingly weak. In addition, repeated attempts to set up a union to represent the interests of broadcast journalists have also been stymied by political divisions.[110]

With this political backdrop, the Lebanese case offers a number of instructive lessons for public service media in countries riven by conflict, in terms of both its potential and its reality. The end of the nearly 15-year civil war in 1989 heralded a significant change in the country's broadcasting system in legal terms. The Audio-Visual law introduced in 1994 led to the formation of the National Audio-Visual Council (NAVC), consisting of members appointed by the Council of Ministers and Parliament. This body, which only has consultative authority, was tasked with processing licensing applications and monitoring the performance of Lebanese broadcasters. In theory, this law officially broke Télé Liban's monopoly on broadcasting in Lebanon.[111] Rather than granting licences according to compliance with the newly created regulatory specifications, however, the NAVC was pressured by

> **❝** Some of the political shows have turned into wrestling arenas where tense and fanatical rhetoric reigns as opposed to sober and objective debate. **❞**
>
> Ramzi Joreige

political elites into granting licences along political and sectarian lines.[112]

The regulatory specifications also stipulated a number of public service obligations for the newly legitimated privately owned broadcasters, such as supporting content aimed at "fostering national cohesion" and abstaining from "sectarian-based coverage". But, due to the state's weakness, these changes were never fully implemented. As a result, content aiming to serve the Lebanese public as a whole is only broadcast by privately owned broadcasters such as LBCI if it is seen to improve audience ratings. "To say 'public service' alone – just doing it because it's useful – without at the same time having an impact on ratings – I won't do it… so I try to get both simultaneously," said Pierre Daher, CEO of the leading commercial Lebanese broadcaster LBCI.[113]

In the rare instances where the NAVC has used its prerogative to monitor the commercial media's performance and suggest penalties to the Minister of Information, its suggestions were not acted upon. The former Minister of Information, Tarek Mitri, has candidly stated that the privately backed television channels were more powerful than the Minister of Information, and that even if he had wanted to take action against an infraction, this would have been vetoed by the Cabinet.[114]

The state broadcaster is further weakened by the country's small and limited advertising market, which means that the competing media have to rely on political money from political parties, stakeholders or even foreign states to cover their considerable deficits.[115] The stiff competition over the limited advertising, and an increasingly fragmented audience, has also meant that rather than balanced, objective content, sensationalist polemical content "known to elicit controversy dominates the programme grids".[116] "Some of the political shows have turned into wrestling arenas where tense and fanatical rhetoric reigns as opposed to sober and objective debate," said Minister of Information Ramzi Joreige.[117]

In light of this polarised political landscape, there are often calls for a revamping of the state broadcaster, since Télé Liban is perceived as "the only outlet that can put out a convincing image of objectivity and impartiality … and that can strengthen civic values and societal cohesion," as described by The Daily Star's Lebanon Desk Editor Mirella Hodeib.[118] Minister Joreige agrees: "[Private broadcasters] are tied to political parties and movements, whereas Télé Liban represents the Lebanese society in all its diversity, and provides accurate news and objective commentary."[119]

After years of neglect, the appointment of Talal Makdessi as interim Director General of Télé Liban in July 2013 – following an unusual process – paved the way for some much-needed improvements and breathed new life into this long-neglected and ailing broadcaster.[120] The recent revamp has seen the switch to digital broadcasting, a new, more modern studio and the introduction of new programmes, for example a political talk show fronted by the renowned host Shada Omar, who previously worked in commercial media. In addition to discussing politics on her show, Omar has been shedding light on socio-economic issues of interest to many Lebanese, such as corruption and civil marriage. She sees her show as an attempt to facilitate constructive dialogue across the different factions that make up her country and effectively serve as a platform for all: "The aim is to have constructive dialogue which could reach consensus without sensationalism and bring together opponents to calmly discuss matters of interest. I want to be able to facilitate dialogue, which is missing in the country."[121]

These improvements are dismissed by Roula Mikhael, Director of the Maharat Foundation, a Lebanese NGO working for freedom of expression and media development, as a mere "retouch".[122] Mikhael points to the gargantuan task ahead, not least relating to the appointment of an administrative board for Télé Liban, a process that, again due to political and sectarian considerations, has been stalled. While Makdessi is adamant that Télé Liban has a "very, very promising future", the periodic initiatives to reinvigorate the channel over the years have often been stalled by the political class, which, according to a former Minister of Information, are not keen on having a strong broadcaster competing with their affiliated broadcasters in what is already an inadequate advertising market.[123]

> **"Reforming the national broadcaster is inextricably linked to state reform, which remains remote."**
>
> Roula Mikhael

Below Lebanese women watch an episode of the drama series Asmahan

RAMZI HAIDAR/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

In addition to overcoming these political hurdles, the channel would also need to do more to beef up its programming in a way that could help to lure in a broader audience. Although Télé Liban offers a popular cooking show, a show that helps citizens to resolve complaints, and an educational competition show for youth, these still lack sufficient creativity to truly compete with the private sector.[124] The nightly news bulletin, for example, is dominated by official reports of leaders hosting visitors, and boasts few features or original reporting; it was singled out by The Daily Star's Hodeib as "old school".[125]

Omar has similarly lamented that some politicians have refrained from appearing on her talk show because it still does not have a large enough audience.[126] One analyst has suggested that focusing on "well-crafted" non-political programming "that does not cater to the particularistic ideologies of confessional groups" could potentially circumvent what is often a quite politicised and fragmented local audience and attract wider viewing.[127] The fact that broadcasting the popular World Cup matches was Télé Liban's most watched programme in 2014 is a case in point.[128]

There is a palpable eagerness in Lebanon for a Télé Liban renaissance, perhaps linked to the feeling of nostalgia that some Lebanese have towards the channel or perhaps to a deeper, underlying desire to see a concrete manifestation of the Lebanese nation: "Télé Liban is needed in the country as much as the army … the station can bridge a gap between the groups as it is for no one but the nation," said Makdessi.[129] Despite a limited annual budget, which is equivalent to what some local privately owned broadcasters spend per month, Télé Liban has in its favour its small size (owing to a brief closure in 2001 which allowed it to trim down considerably from 530 to 110 employees) and a driven and committed, albeit interim, Director General. [130] Unlike some of the other state broadcasters considered in this briefing, Télé Liban therefore seems better positioned to manage any personnel battles that might arise from civil service reform in the broadcaster, were that to happen in the future.

But for all of the reasons noted above, Télé Liban's ability to provide the Lebanese audience with diverse content that speaks to and for all segments of society, reflecting their concerns and allowing for dialogue, would require both a strong commitment from the state and a considerably larger budget. As long as the state remains weaker than the elite groups with interests in the privately owned media, the station's ability to embrace its public service mission remains in the balance. As the Maharat Foundation's Mikhael puts it, "reforming the national broadcaster is inextricably linked to state reform, which remains remote".[131]

MARTIN BUREAU / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

Tunisia
Reform in process

Tunisia has taken strides towards democracy since the ousting of its long-time President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali in January 2011. It was singled out by Freedom House in 2015 as the only "free" country in the Arab world, and this is due to a series of reforms carried out in the past few years, including the adoption of a new constitution on 26 January 2014 and the holding of elections.[132] Still, this does not mean that this small country, which is facing a serious economic crisis, high unemployment rates and security concerns, has completed its transition to democracy.

In this evolving political context, the potential for the media sector – and the national broadcaster in particular – to serve as a locus for public debate and discussion in support of the transition is well worth considering. As Neji Bghouri, head of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists sums it up: "Tunisia is neither democratic nor authoritarian, we are emerging from the latter to reach the former … the media is the main sphere where pluralism, participation and freedoms are being practised."[133]

Already, media reform efforts have transformed a once repressive environment into a pluralistic media landscape. Although a couple of privately owned media institutions existed before the uprising, alongside the state media, these corporations complied with the authoritarian government's strict editorial line and served the Ben Ali clan's political and business interests.[134] After Ben Ali was removed from power, the Ministry of Information was quickly abolished. In 2013, and after much lobbying by civil society and the National Body for the Reform of Information and Communication (INRIC), the Independent High Authority for Audiovisual Communication (HAICA) – a regulatory body – was established, tasked with licensing private broadcasters and ensuring they respected regulatory specifications, and with monitoring election coverage to ensure that the media steers clear of legal and ethical violations. In spite of some stumbling blocks, all are in agreement that the reforms undertaken alongside the establishment of the HAICA have been a "turning point" in the media reform process.[135]

After a long struggle with the government, in January 2014 the HAICA succeeded in appointing a Director General, Mustapha Ben Letaief, for the national broadcaster, Tunisian Television (TTV).[136] The HAICA is next set to prepare a charter for reform of the state broadcaster. While laws pertaining to the national broadcaster date back to 2007 and are thus obsolete, Ben Letaief has already made some headway in attempting to reform what is a large and cumbersome organisation, aiming to

Above A Tunisian protester holding a baguette talks to riot policemen during a demonstration in Tunis on 18 January 2011

transform it into a public service broadcaster that "does not serve the government, but the citizens".[137]

There are many reasons to think that a reformed state broadcaster could play a crucial social cohesion role in the country's nascent democracy. First and foremost, TTV already serves a broad and diverse public. According to a BBC Media Action survey conducted in 2013, 91.9% of respondents across diverse demographic and socio-economic sectors had watched TTV within the last week, of which 75.8% reported having watched the news.[138] A second survey commissioned by BBC Media Action in 2015 similarly found Wataniya 1 and 2 to be the most trusted channels for information on local and national issues.[139] In a country where much of the rest of the media is seen to increase political divisions, both the reach and stature of the national broadcaster point to its potential role in facilitating a national conversation.

Tunisian Television's coverage of the 2014 legislative and presidential elections also provides reason for optimism that the national broadcaster already serves as a source of credible information. HAICA members interviewed by BBC Media Action observed that in general that the coverage was balanced, and pointed out that TTV had followed its election guidelines closely and not contravened any rules. A report by BBC Media Action also found that audiences assessed TTV's election coverage to be clear and to adequately cover all major issues from the campaign, although audiences expressed a desire for a greater level of contextualisation and analysis of reporting, in order to help viewers understand the implications of these stories. [140]

Yet despite these positive developments, the state broadcaster still has a long way to go before it fully embraces public service values. With respect to the value of universality, for instance, only 36% of respondents in the 2015 BBC Media Action study believe that Wataniya 1 and 2 provide them with the chance to express their opinions and engage in debates.[141] And although 50% of respondents said that the channel's prime-time news show offers a diversity of views, subsequent qualitative research suggested that audiences felt women, youth and regional voices were under-represented.[142] Young viewers, in particular, seemed more cynical about TTV's output and were more likely to trust the private channel Ettounsiya on issues that mattered to them.[143]

The current Director General of TTV, Mustapha Ben Letaief, has also spoken of a number of obstacles facing the development of the state broadcaster as it attempts

> **"**The number of employees [at TTV] … is not a problem in and of itself; rather [the problem] is the number of employees who are in positions they are not qualified for.**"**
>
> Ben Letaief

Right BBC Media Action training at Tunisian Television in September 2012

STEPHEN BRIND FOR BBC MEDIA ACTION

to evolve into a more creative and autonomous institution. One of these obstacles has been securing the broadcaster's independence in the face of political pressures exerted not only from the government, but also from political parties across the spectrum, who have grumbled about where coverage of them appears in the running order on the nightly news.

Ben Letaief does not want to exaggerate these pressures, "because the state is still fragile, and the mentality is still in transition".[144] But Neji Bghouri, the head of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists, feared that the political pressure exerted on the broadcaster could be "an indicator that there could be a return to old practices where the authorities interfere in the public media because they perceive it as state media". Indeed, more than half of the respondents in a survey conducted for BBC Media Action in 2015 believe that TTV is "very close to the government".[145]

Furthermore, the legacy of despotism under Ben Ali's rule also saw the employment of hundreds of staff members in TTV on the basis of political loyalty rather than qualifications. "The number of employees, which is estimated at about 1,200, is not a problem in and of itself, rather [the problem] is the number of employees who are in positions they are not qualified for," said Ben Letaief.[146]

The station also has substantial deficits, with 28 million Tunisian Dinars (approximately £9 million or $14 million) covering salaries alone.[147] "How can there be a revival of TTV without resolving this issue boldly and courageously with some compromise between unions and government?" asks Kamel Labidi, a Tunisian journalist and the former head of INRIC.[148]

BBC Media Action Country Director for Tunisia, Eve Sabbagh, agrees that human resources have to be part of a long-term plan for TTV reform, despite the political difficulty. "Discussion between management and unions are always confrontational and surrealistic with some unrealistic requests. Union negotiation needs to be developed."[149] In light of high unemployment rates in Tunisia, such a move would require strong political will on the part of the government, although it is unclear how feasible this is at the moment.

The newly created regulatory body has struggled to gain its footing. Although its accomplishments have been regarded as largely positive by a number of commentators, the HAICA has also faced challenges in exerting its authority. Some of the concerns may be related to fears of what one analyst attributes to a "return to the former repressive system, mistrust of the true political motivations of certain HAICA members, the novelty in the Tunisian media landscape and the hegemonic financial interests of certain advertising executives".[150] The on-air ripping up of a fine imposed by the HAICA on Zitouna TV for

running political advertisements during the 2014 elections aptly symbolises the resistance faced by the HAICA.[151]

In April 2015, two members of the HAICA board resigned citing political and commercial pressures influencing the allocation of licences.[152] Labidi agrees that the HAICA could be a stronger regulatory presence, although it is under a lot of pressure as it stands; but, it will change its name and transition to a more permanent structure – the Authority for Audio-visual Communication (ACA) – in the near future, as per the rules of its creation. (The remit for the new ACA is still being debated.) It is worth noting that the most significant challenges facing the HAICA – which also previously affected the INRIC – have been spearheaded by private-media owners who resist regulation, arguing that it represents a threat to media freedom.

Although the Tunisian case emerges as the most positive of the four cases considered in this briefing, where media reform is concerned, the road ahead is still long and arduous. Without real financial security and independence, TTV will not be able to reform itself, despite Ben Letaief's best efforts. Nor do the instability in neighbouring Libya, the manifestations of violent extremism in Tunisia itself or the socio-economic challenges facing the country help. "We are not there yet," summarises Bghouri. "We have to overcome the tyrannical legacy. The media is playing an important role in promoting and supporting the transition. After all, authoritarianism was brought by domesticating the media, and media has a key role in ensuring we transition to democracy."[153]

> "The media is playing an important role in promoting and supporting the transition … Authoritarianism was brought by domesticating the media, and media has a key role in ensuring we transition to democracy."
> Neji Bghouri

FRANCISCO LEONG/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

PART 6

Conclusions, recommendations and the case for institutional reform

Media in the Arab world has always been a platform for political battles and narratives. But in an environment where the media has become ever more fragmented and polarised, this briefing has argued that state media institutions, provided they can be reformed to work in the public rather than state interest, could adopt a new role that supports social cohesion more effectively. The detailed analysis of this proposition in four case studies from the region yields the following set of recommendations for policy-makers and practitioners alike.

1. **There is no substitute for a free media, which effectively holds political leaders to account.** A lack of space for a free media to report hampers the ability of states to have an open discourse on how a country is run, and will always undermine the capacity for citizens to hold government to account. The power of national public service media must be tempered by its responsibility to report accurately, fairly and in the interest of the public, not the government, parliament or state bureaucracy. It must be impartial and inclusive to all sectors of society. It is a tough

task, but governments and citizens should expect nothing less from their national broadcasters. These broadcasters must earn the trust of their public. Only by earning the trust of the public will they be truly public service broadcasters.

2. **National broadcasters may be an under-appreciated asset for delivering public service values.** Despite their long history as a mouthpiece for the state, national broadcasters have the infrastructure, reach and cultural status to produce programming that promotes inclusive dialogue and debate and represents the public. To say that they can do this does not necessarily mean that they will, and the international donor community can help to support this evolution.

3. **National broadcasters are not the only game in town.** In keeping with the "public service media" model, public service values are relevant to a country's entire media ecology. Particularly during times of conflict or in strict authoritarian systems, alternative conduits such as internet platforms can help to circumvent logistical

hurdles and may, in the short run, be the only feasible option. This was the main lesson from the Libyan case. However, such solutions are, often through necessity, external in design and it is preferable to work with local organisations that are already embedded in the society and can take on the inevitably rocky process of making sure the platform is sustainable over the long term.

4. **As broadcasters gain a better understanding of what audiences want, programming needs to reflect their concerns.** At present, citizens of the Arab world are not regularly consulted about their views and concerns and thus do not feel included in much of the programming that exists. The data that is collected by broadcasters is largely commissioned for commercial reasons, whether to gauge the competition or to determine advertising rates. But audience research can also be used to pre-test audience concerns and design programmes that meet their needs. The little data available suggests that audiences in the Arab world are troubled by pervasive bias and want their media to serve as a source of trusted, impartial information. At least in some countries, they are also looking to the media to play a role in conflict resolution. Donors and practitioners alike need to take these concerns seriously and fashion programmes accordingly.

5. **Youth audiences, in particular, cannot be ignored.** The media landscape in these countries remains quite varied and heterogeneous, both across the Arab world and within countries. But internet access and mobile phone usage are growing, and with a large demographic under the age of 25 who grew up on new media, state broadcasters ignore this audience at their peril. Programming needs to be relevant to this segment of the population and it should be increasingly rolled out on the new media formats where young people consume content.

6. **To maximise inclusiveness and representation, formats need to go beyond news.** For 20-odd years, media development organisations have focused primarily on supporting journalism and news outputs. While news can help to build an understanding of key societal issues at hand, other formats – including debate and talk shows, as well as drama – may be better suited to tackling the objectives of universality and diversity. Drama and comedy have both been extremely popular formats in the region, and evidence from Egypt suggests that viewers are inspired by characters that they can relate to in social dramas.

7. **Institutional reform is vital.** Ultimately, pluralism and universality cannot be enshrined in public service content without meaningful reform of the institutional environment, which encompasses some combination of legal guarantees for media freedom, regulation and

monitoring of content to ensure that it is in the public's interest, a properly designed regulatory body that can regulate a market for economic – rather than political – reasons, and independence for the state broadcaster in terms of its financing and its personnel. While it is outside the scope of this paper to provide a detailed analysis of this process, it would necessarily entail looking carefully at issues such as the rules pertaining to who makes appointments to government media bodies, how these positions are recruited and their term limits, who governs budgets, what sorts of labour laws are in place, how media practitioners and politically vested interests are represented within these bodies (if at all), etc.

To date, of those countries that experienced political uprisings in 2011, only Tunisia has really moved forward with the creation of truly independent media oversight bodies in the substantive sense of the word (i.e., so that government does not control the regulatory body by controlling the process of making appointments to the board.) And even there, this process has been riddled by delays and attempts to undermine the effectiveness of the new bodies. In Egypt, and despite near uniform consensus from across the sector that a functioning regulatory system is essential to move the country's media sector forward, the politics of progressing this has so far resulted in near paralysis.[154]

8. **The political context is crucial.** A functioning institutional environment that supports the delivery of public service values on paper is meaningless if the political environment does not enable these to be put into action. International donors, as well as media support organisations, need to think about whether the political incentives are in place to support efforts at genuine reform, and if they are not, whether anything useful can be done to help to create those incentives. That would require a nuanced understanding of the incentives political actors might need – including and possibly especially those in the current Ministries of Information – to cede control over an agency that regulates the flow of information. It would also require a close examination of the incentives other key stakeholders – including journalists and other employees of national broadcasters – might need to accept reforms that may end up depriving them of key benefits and pensions. The interests and political clout of public-sector employees was a key issue blocking efforts at reform of the state broadcaster in all four of the cases examined. How unions are organised in Arab countries, whom they represent and how freely members can speak is all relevant here.

List of interviews conducted

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2. Aya al-Amead, Libyan journalist

3. Abir Awad, Country Director, Iraq, BBC Media Action

4. Walid Batrawi, Director, Palestinian Territories, BBC Media Action

5. Neji Bghouri, Head of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists

6. Raafat Belkhair, formerly reporter, Al-Wataniya

7. Mustapha Ben Letaief, Director General, TTV

8. Nesryn Bouziane, Senior Project Manager, BBC Media Action

9. Simon Derry, Regional Director for the Middle East and Europe, BBC Media Action

10. Jean-Michel Duffrène, Team Leader, BBC Media Action Media Neighbourhood Project

11. Naila Hamdy, Associate Professor and Chair of Journalism and Mass Communication, American University in Cairo

12. Dalia Hassouna, radio presenter, ERTU, and member of the Independent Media Professionals Coalition

13. Gavin Hill, journalism trainer

14. Abdelkarim Hizaoui, Director, African Center for Continued Development of Journalists

15. Mirella Hodeib, Desk Editor, The Daily Star, Lebanon

16. Tareq el-Houny, formerly Director General, Al-Wataniya

17. Ramzi Joreige, Minister of Information, Lebanon

18. Kamel Labidi, Tunisian journalist and former Head of INRIC

19. Nouri Lajmi, President of the HAICA

20. Talal Makdessi, interim Director General, Télé Liban

21. Roula Mikhael, Executive Director, Maharat Foundation

22. Mohamed el-Morsi, Head of the Radio and Television Department, Cairo University of Mass Communications

23. Shada Omar, political talk-show host, Télé Liban

24. Anne Reevell, Country Director, Libya, BBC Media Action

25. Eve Sabbagh, Country Director, Tunisia, BBC Media Action

26. Albert Shafik, former CEO, ONTV

27. Maha Taki, Project Manager, BBC Media Action

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54. Dowson-Zeidan et al. (2015) *After the revolution* (p. 4).

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65. El Issawi (2013) *Transitional Libyan Media: Free at last?* (p. 22).

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70. Ibid.

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72. BBC Media Action (2013) *Libya El Wataniya Audience* [unpublished].

73. Phone interview with Tarek el-Houny.

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79. Ibid.

80. Ibid.

81. This estimate comes from an email exchange with BBC Media Action Country Director Anne Reevell on 17 July 2015, but has not yet been independently verified through research.

82. Phone interview with Tarek el-Houny. Gamal Abdul Nasser first said this to justify restrictions on the media in the 1960s and 1970s in the service of broader patriotic goals. In this instance, El-Houny is invoking the phrase to mean that, during war, independent voices and media are lost.

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91. Interview with Naila Hamdy.

92. Forrester, C. (2013) Egypt's public TV in huge debt. Advanced Television, 21 February. Available from: http://advanced-television.com/2013/02/21/egypts-public-tv-in-huge-debt/ [Accessed 15 April 2015].

93. Interview with Mohamed el-Morsi, Cairo, 6 May 2015.

94. Buccianti, A. (2010) *Les Talk-shows d'Egypte parlent aux Egyptiens: un vecteur de changement sous contrôles*. MA, Sciences Po, Paris.

95. Interview with Albert Shafik, Cairo, 5 May 2015

96. Interview with Mohamed el-Morsi.

97. Hamdy, A (2015) The Media Agenda: Safinaz in the frontline and the excuse is "People watch this" [online]. *Al Masry Al Youm*, 7 May. Available from: www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/726237 [Accessed 6 June 2015].

98. Egynews (2015). *Dr. Mahmoud Alam Eddine to "45 minutes": Egyptian television is a genie waiting to be freed* [online]. 25 May. Available from: www.egynews.net/%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%85%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%84%D9%80-%D9%A4%D9%A5-%D8%AF%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%81%D8%B2%D9%8A/ [Accessed 7 July 2015].

99. For more information on the historical role of drama in Egypt, see: Abu-Lughod, L. (2014) *Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt*. Chicago, IL, USA: University of Chicago Press.

100. This research was commissioned by BBC Media Action as part of the Socially Responsible Media Platforms project in 2010 – 2011. In this project, BBC Media Action worked with Misr International Films on the production of two successful dramas in Egypt. *Dawaran Shoubra* (Shoubra Roundabout, 2011) tells the story of

Cairo's inner-city neighbourhood of Shoubra where a cross-section of society – rich and poor, Muslims and Christians – live; and *Bent Esamaha Zaat* (A Girl Named Zaat, 2013) is an allegory of modern Egypt told through the daily struggles of a woman called Zaat.

101. Interview with Dalia Hassouna, Cairo, 7 May 2015.

102. Committees to draft the law establishing the Higher Regulatory Authority were formed but quickly increased in size and multiplied. The prime minister also set up a parallel committee, which includes two former ministers of information. This generated a backlash from media practitioners, and this commission's role was then made consultative. In parallel, a consortium of nine private stations came together as the Chamber for Audio-visual Media Industry (CAMI) to defend their interests and discuss their own regulatory project.

103. Michael, M (2014) Egypt's el-Sissi tells media not to push freedoms. *AP The Big Story*, 8 May [online]. Available from: http://bigstory. ap.org/article/egypts-el-sissi-tells-media-not-push-freedoms [Accessed 15 April]. This vision is echoed by Article 71 of the current Constitution, which protects media from any form of censorship, except "in a limited manner, during times of war or general mobilisation".

104. See examples in El-Emary, N. and Schothorst, P. (2014) *Editorial Guidelines and Media in Egypt* (p. 17) [unpublished]. Arab Network for Media Support.

105. El-Meshad, M. (2015) We completely agree: Egyptian media in the era of President el-Sisi [online]. *CPJ* blog, 27 April. Available from: https://cpj.org/2015/04/attacks-on-the-press-egyptian-media-in-the-era-of-president-el-sisi.php#more [Accessed 30 April 2015].

106. The draft law followed reports from unknown sources of contradicting death tolls after a wave of attacks by extremists against the army in Sinai. The text initially included an article threatening a minimum of two years in prison. It was later reduced to a heavy fine. See: Saied, M. (2015) *Egypt's journalists worry new anti-terror law could send them to jail* [online]. Available from: www. al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/07/egypt-anti-terrorism-law-journalists-union-criticism-sisi.html [Accessed 30 July 2015].

107. Interview with Naila Hamdy.

108. Interview with Dalia Hassouna.

109. Boulos, J.C. (1995) *La Télé, quelle histoire!* (p. 135). Beirut: Editions FMA.

110. Broadcasters are barred from joining the Journalists' Union for print journalists and have been unable to unite to form a broadcasters' union due to the political divisions.

111. In practice, it had already been broken in the 1980s when a number of private stations proliferated during the civil war.

112. Rugh, W. (2004) *Arab mass media. Newspapers, radio, and television in Arab politics* (pp. 202–204). Westport: Praeger.

113. El-Richani, S. (2015) Pierre Daher: Sheikh, Baron and Mogul of LBC (pp. 60–61). In Della Ratta, D., Sakr, N. and Skovgaard-Petersen, J. (eds.) *Arab Media Moguls* (pp. 49–61). London, New York: I.B. Tauris.

114. El-Richani, S. (2013) The Lebanese Broadcasting System: A Battle Between Political Parallelism, Commercialization and De Facto Liberalism (p. 75). In Guaaybess, T. (ed.) *National Broadcasting and State Policy in Arab Countries* (pp. 69-82). Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

115. The reliance of the Lebanese media on donations from political actors, whether local or foreign, is common knowledge (El-Richani, 2015, Pierre Daher: Sheikh, Baron and Mogul of LBC). This has been confirmed by leaks, such as the recently published Saudi

cables revealing the extent of funds granted to like-minded media corporations. See Hendawi, H. and Mroue, B. (2015) Saudi cables suggest money links with media [online]. AP The Big Story, 23 June. Available from: http://bigstory.ap.org/article/ b5c8506f7113402eb6941d2ea79256aa/saudi-cables-suggest-money-links-media [Accessed 29 July 2015]. Another leaked recording of a phone conversation of the former Qatari Emir reveals his country's link to Al-Jadeed. Meanwhile, one infamous publisher wrote an editorial justifying increasing the cost of his newspaper because local and regional political actors had not been contributing adequately.

116. Kraidy, M. and Khalil, J. (2009) *Arab Television Industries* (p. 51). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

117. Phone interview and correspondence with Ramzi Joreige, 27 April 2015 and 8 May 2015.

118. Phone interview with Mirella Hodeib, 30 April 2015.

119. Phone interview and correspondence with Ramzi Joreige.

120. Rather than being appointed by the Council of Ministers, Makdessi was appointed by the Court of Urgent Matters after the resignation of the government in early 2013. Because of this unusual appointment process, Makdessi's position is temporary. See: Lakkis, H. and Lutz, M. (2013) Judge appoints Talal Makdessi as new head of Télé Liban [online]. *The Daily Star*, 9 June. Available from: www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2013/Jul-09/223018-judge-appoints-talal-makdessi-as-new-head-of-tele-liban.ashx#ixzz2yQS6aRSq [Accessed 6 June 2015].

121. Phone interview with Shada Omar, 27 April 2015.

122. Phone interview with Roula Mikhael, 22 April 2015.

123. El-Richani, S. (2013) The Lebanese Broadcasting System (p. 75).

124. The audience ratings are rising incrementally. Data provided by the IPSOS market research company to El-Richani reveals a 2% increase in audiences from 7.9% in 2013 to 9.9% in 2014.

125. Phone interview with Mirella Hodeib.

126. Phone interview with Shada Omar.

127. Kraidy, M.M. (2005) Globalization avant la Lettre? Cultural hybridity and media power in Lebanon (p. 289). In Murphy, P.D. and Kraidy, M.M. (eds.) *Global media studies: Ethnographic perspectives* (pp. 276–295). New York: Routledge.

128. Data kindly provided by IPSOS to El-Richani. After a tug of war with private interests over broadcasting rights, Télé Liban was able to broadcast the matches terrestrially. It then faced a lawsuit which was subsequently dismissed by a Beirut court. See The Daily Star (2014). Court throws out World Cup lawsuit against Tele Liban [online]. *The Daily Star,* 5 July. Available from: www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2014/Jul-05/262745-court-throws-out-world-cup-lawsuit-against-tele-liban.ashx [Accessed 5 June 2015].

129. Phone interview with Talal Makdessi, 24 April 2015.

130. Nötzold, K. (2009) *Defining the Nation? Lebanese Television and Political Elites, 1990–2005* (p. 242). Berlin: Frank & Timme.

131. Phone interview with Roula Mikhael.

132. Freedom House (2015) *Freedom in the World – Tunisia* [online]. Available from: https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/tunisia#.VViLiJOYK-s [Accessed 5 June 2015].

133. Phone interview with Neji Bghouri, 28 April 2015.

134. Barata, J. (2013) Tunisian Media under the Authoritarian Structure of Ben Ali's Regime and After (pp. 119–122). In Guaaybess, T. (ed.) *National Broadcasting and State Policy in Arab Countries* (pp. 117–130). Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

135. Phone interview with Neji Bghouri.

136. Its name is officially Établissement de la télévision tunisienne.

137. Phone interview with Mustapha Ben Letaief, 4 May 2015.

138. BBC Media Action (2013) *Media and Audiences in Tunisia: National Survey Findings* (p. 21) [unpublished].

139. BBC Media Action (March 2015) *Audiences in Tunisia and the 2014 Elections* (p. 15) [unpublished].

140. Ibid. (p. 42).

141. Ibid. (p. 28).

142. Ibid. (p. 37).

143. Ibid. (p. 5).

144. Phone interview with Mustapha Ben Letaief.

145. BBC Media Action (2015) *Audiences in Tunisia and the 2014 Elections* (p. 15).

146. Phone interview with Mustapha Ben Letaief.

147. These figures were revealed during a press conference held by the TTV Director General in April 2015. See: Mourad, S. (2015) La masse salariale la Télévision Nationale attaint 29 millions de dinars par an [online]. *Tunisie Numeric*, 21 April. Available from: www.tunisienumerique.com/tunisie-la-masse-salariale-la-television-nationale-atteint-29-millions-de-dinars-par-an/252856 [Accessed 17 August 2015].

148. Phone interview with Kamel Labidi, 25 April 2015.

149. Phone interview with Eve Sabbagh, 16 April 2015.

150. Ben Chaabane, T. (March 2015) *Media matters – can Tunisia walk the tightrope between a free press and regulation?* Arab Reform Initiative, Policy Alternatives. Available from: www.arab-reform.net/sites/default/files/Media%20matters%20%E2%80%93%20can%20Tunisia%20walk%20the%20tightrope%20between%20a%20free%20press%20and%20regulation.pdf [Accessed 5 June 2015].

151. Gharbi, A. (2014) Tunisie: Un animateur de la Zitouna TV déchire à l'antenne une "décision" de la HAICA: Les raisons d'un tel acte [online]. *Al Huffington Post Maghreb*, 10 October. Available from: www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2014/10/10/zitouna-tv-dechire-haica_n_5964300.html [Accessed 29 July 2015].

152. BouAzizi, M. (2015) The resignation of Rachida al-Nufayr and Riyadh al-Farjani from the HAICA [online]. *Al-chourouk*, 27 April. Available from: www.alchourouk.com/106229/566/1/-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%84:_%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9_%D8%B1%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%B1_%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B6_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A_%D9%85%D9%86_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%80%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%8A%D9%83%D8%A7_-.html [Accessed 10 August 2015].

153. Phone interview with Neji Bghouri.

154. Although it is still too soon to tell, Iraq may well prove to be one encouraging story in the region on this score. In 2015, a law was passed firmly re-establishing the Iraqi Media Network as a public service broadcaster, independent of the government and accountable to parliament.

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