

**AFTER THE
REVOLUTION
WHAT DO
LIBYANS AND
TUNISIANS
BELIEVE ABOUT
THEIR MEDIA?**

Media and audience research: a key part of BBC Media Action's work

BBC Media Action, the BBC's international development charity, uses the power of media and communication to support people to shape their own lives. Working with broadcasters, governments, other organisations and donors, we provide information and stimulate positive change in the areas of health, governance, resilience and humanitarian response. The UK Department for International Development (DFID) supports us to work with the media in 14 countries across Africa, Asia and the Middle East, and we have projects in more than 25 countries overall. This research briefing was prepared thanks to DFID funding.

The briefing will contribute to state–society relations and support the empowerment of individuals to hold their government to account. Using research, evaluation and learning reviews, it also aims to contribute to the evidence base on the role of media and communication in development.

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After the revolution: what do Libyans and Tunisians believe about their media?

What do the people of Libya and Tunisia believe about their media after the Arab Spring? What opinions do audiences in the two countries share, what are the differences between them and what information sources do they trust? This briefing shares findings from BBC Media Action's research on these questions, which was among the first conducted after the two countries' 2011 revolutions.

BBC Media Action has helped to build the capacity of the state broadcasters in Tunisia since 2011 and in Libya since 2012 with support from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). To inform our programmes and help to fill the gap in knowledge of how Libyans and Tunisians use their media, BBC Media Action carried out audience research in 2013 and 2014.

Libyan and Tunisian media before the revolution

The two countries' media landscapes before 2011 reflected their former regimes. In Tunisia, two state television channels under the umbrella of Tunisie 7 dominated the broadcast sector. Both followed the government line and mostly covered the daily schedule of the president, members of his government

and their families. The two large private channels had links to the president's family and were forbidden to report on politics, while online expression was monitored and restricted.

Corruption is something that we are living every day ... it is from the streets and from real life.

Focus group participant, Tunis, Tunisia

In Libya, the state broadcaster set up by Gaddafi – al-Jamahiriya – acted as the regime's mouthpiece. Al-Libiya, a second broadcaster, was founded by Gaddafi's son to allow greater editorial freedom, but Gaddafi later forced it to remove anything that could be seen as critical of the regime.

Parallel fates

Tunisia and Libya share a border and thousands of years of history, having been ruled at times by the same empires and sometimes by warring regimes. After Tunisia achieved independence from France in 1956 and Libya declared independence from Italian rule in 1951, the new states were founded as constitutional monarchies. Colonel Muammar Gaddafi came to power in Libya in 1969 after army officers ousted the king, while in Tunisia

President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali seized power in a coup in 1989. Both leaders set limits to personal expression and political opinion, although Libyans faced a more tightly controlled dictatorship.

After the Arab Spring began in 2011, Ben Ali swiftly fled the country for asylum in Saudi Arabia while Gaddafi was shot by opposition forces after months of armed conflict.

Libyan and Tunisian media after 2011

In Libya, many private channels sprang up after the revolution, often associated with political factions. The flagship station al-Jamahiriyah was rebranded as al-Wataniya, and al-Libiya was renamed al-Rasmiya. Al-Wataniya in Tripoli was taken over by pro-Islamist militias in August 2014 and the station became their mouthpiece. The channel is now split in two, with rival satellite feeds from Tripoli (pro-Islamist) and Tobruk (anti-Islamist). At the time of writing, al-Rasmiya, also in the hands of a pro-Islamist militia, was also taken off the air by the authorities in Tobruk. It has a rival feed from the east, which is dominated by the House of Representatives. Freedom House now categorises Libya's media as "not free"; media freedom, like so much else in the country, hangs in the balance.

There are some media channels that are pro-government and others that are against the government. There is no one channel that gives a clear picture.

Man, Misrata, Libya

I see that the media is playing a certain role because after the revolution everything has changed and they started to talk about everything even if they don't know their limits or the studio was oriented [towards one point of view] a little bit. Still it is better and they are talking about different things which they didn't dare talk about before, like terrorism.

Focus group participant, Tunis, Tunisia

Following the revolution, Tunisia's state-run media was restructured: state television was renamed Watania 1 and 2 and there are now nine radio stations. Tunisia's media landscape "remains in transition" according to Freedom House, an organisation that monitors freedom of expression around the world.



Tunisia's post-revolution media has brought both new openness and new challenges. Credit: BBC Media Action



People in Libya wanted a free and open media but felt concerned about its consequences.

Credit: BBC Media Action

For instance, the HAICA (Independent High Authority for Audio-visual Communication), Tunisia's audiovisual regulatory body, is only the second independent regulator in the Arab world. However, the National Constituent Assembly did not amend pre-revolution laws that allowed prosecution of journalists and bloggers, and in March 2013 a blogger was charged with criminal defamation for alleging that a former foreign minister misused public funds.¹ Police brutality against journalists is also a cause for concern; for example, a journalist was unable to work for 35 days after being attacked by police when covering a protest in July 2014.²

Watania and al-Wataniya

The names of the state broadcasters in Libya and Tunisia both mean “national”. To avoid confusion, this briefing refers to Tunisia’s state broadcaster as Watania and Libya’s as al-Wataniya.

Research approach

Research in Libya included:

- A national survey of 3,196 Libyans from March to April 2013 (commissioned by FCO – all other research was commissioned by BBC Media Action)
- A nationally representative survey of 1,146 Libyans in August 2013
- Six focus group discussions during March 2014 in three cities – Tripoli, Benghazi and Misrata – plus a card sorting exercise to facilitate discussion about the values associated with an ideal broadcaster

[Watania] is stronger after the revolution of 14 January.

Man, Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia

Research in Tunisia included:

- A nationally representative survey of 1,000 Tunisians
- 12 audience focus groups in urban and rural areas across Tunisia on news coverage (six in December 2013 and six in March 2014)
- 14 audience focus groups across Tunisia on media consumption in March 2014

Focus group participants represented a mixture of ages, gender, marital status and socio-economic classes.

If you want free media the state shouldn't be involved . . .
If the state funds channels or any project, it will certainly lie and make it a promotional tool.

Man, Tripoli, Libya

Libyans and their media: frustrated and poorly served

Our research found that Libyans wanted reliable news and information, did not often find it, did not know which sources to trust or did not trust any source. As a result, they turned to all sources – state, national, international and social media, as well as non-media – for stories they could verify themselves.

If a presenter shows reality ... you will find him dead ... there isn't freedom of speech ... if you say a word of truth, you are killed.

Man, Benghazi, Libya

Trust and the news

Nearly half (48%) of people watched the national news. While participants in focus group discussions said that they wanted reporting that played a role in holding government to account, they thought that their national broadcasters – state and private – did not have the skills and objectivity to do this.

In my view all Libyan media is biased ... when you sit in front of the TV [you get] depressed. There is no credibility and no transparency around events that happen in Libya.

Man, Misrata, Libya

In focus groups, Libyans said that they believed that channels had pro- or anti-government agendas reflecting their funders' interests. Many said that private-sector funding would impede media's objectivity; however, most also said that a state-funded broadcaster could not fulfil the

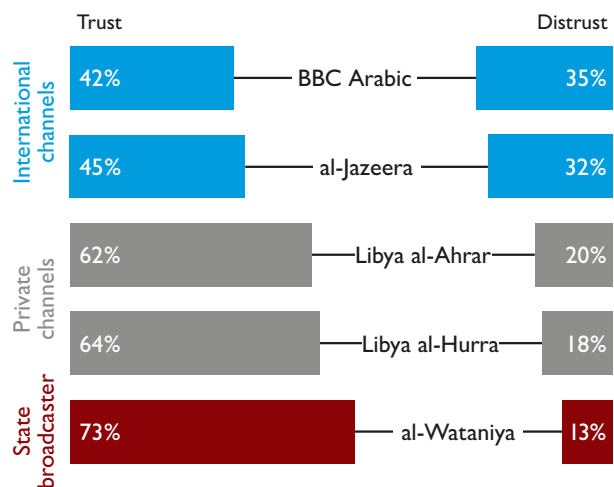
role of the "ideal" broadcaster. International media, while often least trusted, was an important new secondary source.

Sometimes we live the news.

Woman, Tripoli, Libya

Libyans confidently shopped around to reject or validate stories, using the internet and social media to confirm the accuracy of TV news. Audiences often afforded the most credibility to people whom they knew and trusted, or to their own experience.

Levels of trust in television channels: Libya



Q: How much do you trust these types of media?

BASE: Respondents who reported watching television – BBC Arabic (2,750), al-Jazeera (3,028), Libya al-Ahrar (2,969), Libya al-Hurra (2,944), al-Wataniya (2,902).

All respondents were asked to score each of the channels on a scale. The varied number of responses per channel is likely to be a result of respondents not feeling able to give a score to a channel that they were not familiar with or that they had no particular view.

SOURCE: FCO Libya survey, 2013.

Facebook brings you the news while it's still happening ... that's the best thing.

Woman, Tripoli, Libya

People trusted al-Wataniya, with reservations

One in three people strongly trusted – and 73% had some trust in – al-Wataniya, the state broadcaster and former Gaddafi mouthpiece. In focus group discussions there was a range of opinions about al-Wataniya's agenda: some saw it as pro-government, others as less biased than private broadcasters and some as unbiased. Nevertheless, 78% thought there should be a government-funded national broadcaster because it would tell the truth.

Truth vs positivity

Two particular tensions emerged among people in focus group discussions: the desire for credible, objective coverage and the desire for media to play a positive, non-divisive role.

People understood that journalists and the media face serious challenges, including physical danger, suggesting that they recognise that the media they hope for may not be realistic at this stage.

The desire for honest and truthful news conflicted with the fear of the negative impact of covering particular topics. Participants in all focus groups warned that truthful reporting – or even any report about or focus on – particularly divisive issues could cause conflict and encourage division and hatred.

If there was a channel like this they would bomb it, they would kill them.

Man, Benghazi, Libya

How Libyans use media

Television and radio

- 99% have a satellite television in their home
- 76% report that they watch TV every day
- Libyan channels are most popular, particularly the state broadcaster al-Wataniya
- 74% cite television as their main source of information
- 58% have a radio at home
- 37% listen to the radio every day
- 45% of men listen to the radio daily compared with just 25% of women
- 4% cite radio as their main source of information

Internet and social media

- 32% use the internet regularly (daily or weekly)
- 10% use international websites as a main source of information
- 26% of Libyans have a Facebook account (58% of all those who have access to the internet)
- 52% who have a Facebook account spend a lot or quite a lot of their time on it reading Libyan national news

Family and friends

- 7% named family and friends as their main source of information
- Family and friends are important supplementary sources of information

Tunisia: a discerning audience hopes for more

Nearly four years after Tunisia's revolution, media was seen to have made progress, albeit not enough for a media-literate and savvy audience. While people seemed resigned to having only limited trust in the media, they consumed a broad range of outputs.

You can know whether the video is real or not ... From people's comments ... [and] you can stop the video [and] go back to check, which is not the case for TV.

Focus group participant, Tunis, Tunisia

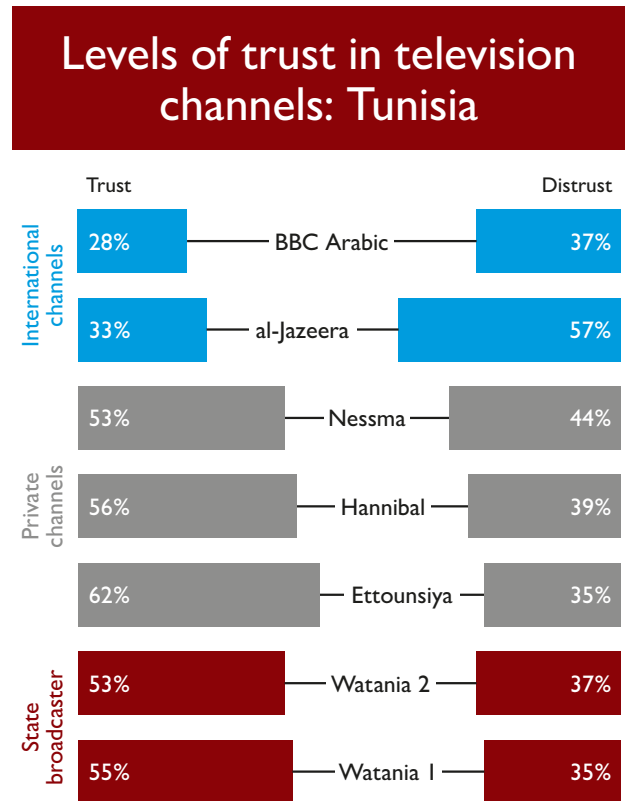
Trust and the media

Although 74% of Tunisians said that they were interested in news about politics and current affairs, no media source was widely trusted, with all TV channels seen as having political agendas based on their funders' politics. Most people used television as their main news source, but only 51% trusted it in general and 56% trusted Watania, the state broadcaster. While people criticised Watania, its evening news was seen as part of Tunisian culture.

Friends and family were the most trusted news source, at 77%. Some people trusted the internet and social media because it was seen as being created by ordinary citizens and it was used to cross-check the TV news.

It is more credible when I watch a Tunisian channel talk about something happening in Tunisia.

Man, Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia



Q: How much do you trust the following channels for information on issues that matter to you?

BASE: Respondents who reported watching television (993). All respondents were asked to score each of the channels on a scale. The varied number of responses per channel is likely to be a result of respondents not feeling able to give a score to a channel that they were not familiar with or that they had no particular view on.

SOURCE: BBC Media Action Tunisia survey, 2013.

I have to use my intelligence; I can't watch television passively. I watch, and say "This person is telling me the news, and will try to get me to focus on a certain thing."

Focus group participant, Tunis, Tunisia

Media as an accountability mechanism

Fifty-five per cent of Tunisians agreed that traditional media (TV, radio, newspapers, etc.) was important in holding leaders to account and 51% also thought that social media should do this. However, only 27% saw Watania as “holding government officials to account” and many believed that biased and agenda-led coverage also stopped other TV channels from playing this role. While participants in focus group discussions thought that international channels were somewhat better at this, many said that an “ideal” broadcaster was still just a “wish” in Tunisia.

We've got used to the fact that when we hear news on the state broadcaster, we know there's a 95% chance that it is true. We now don't want to listen to any other news.

Focus group participant, Tunis, Tunisia

Towards a more positive media

Audiences wanted media to help to provide solutions and not just to highlight problems, most commonly saying that programmes were their favourites because they were “useful to society”. Focus group participants did not necessarily have a clear vision of what a positive, useful media might look like, but identified several themes:

- Media to provide a platform for national dialogue
- Ordinary people to have a voice through the media
- Media to pass on information and raise awareness

Disagreement as to whether media coverage that might upset people was positive or negative raised some tensions. While people desired open, truthful reporting, there were also concerns that a free media could address topics and taboos that broke moral and ethical codes.

How Tunisians use media

Television and radio

- 99% have at least one television and satellite device in their home
- 88% report watching television at least once a day
- Private channel Ettounsiya, which focuses on social and entertainment programming, is the most popular
- 83% cite television as one of their sources for information on politics and current affairs
- 77% of households own at least one radio
- 56% of radio listeners say that they listen at least once a day
- 34% cite radio as one of their sources for information on politics and current affairs

Internet and social media

- 30% used the internet “today or yesterday”
- 42% used it within the last 12 months
- 60% of internet users access it at least once a day
- 80% of internet users access social media sites
- 27% access Facebook at least once a day
- 53% of social media users receive news and other important information and opinions through it

Friends and family

- 50% cite friends as one of their sources for information on politics and current affairs
- 43% mention family as a source

Findings

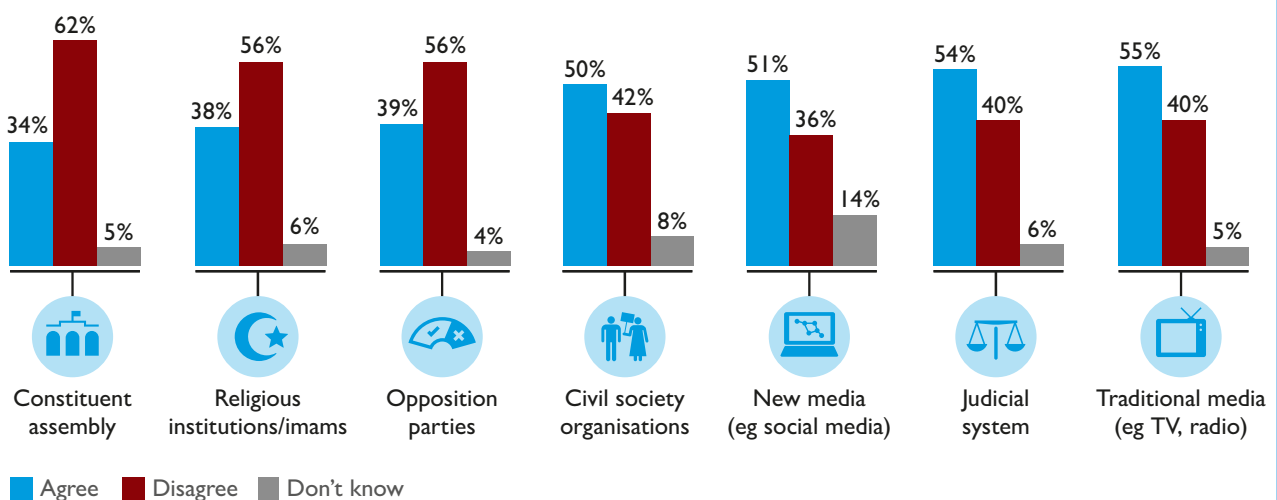
While the two states are at different junctures following their respective revolutions, our research shows that Libyans and Tunisians had similar hopes for and criticisms of their media. They also shared the belief that a credible, accurate and objective media is an important element of their countries' future.

- Libyans and Tunisians were tired of coverage that represents the interests of those who run or fund the channels and consequently place little trust in the media. Perhaps as a result, audiences were savvy and discerning consumers who shopped around to access information and verify what they found.
- Social media was a growing source of up-to-date news and information for many people, helping to counteract traditional media's shortcomings. However, while levels of trust in all forms of media were low, people still tended to trust traditional media more than social media.
- The Libyan and Tunisian state broadcasters continued to attract large audiences, acted as

important sources of news, and were generally trusted more than private channels at the time of data collection. In Tunisia, watching the evening news was akin to a national institution, with nearly three-quarters (72%) watching it on the state channels. Fifty-five per cent of Tunisians agreed that traditional media (TV, radio, newspapers, etc.) played an important role in holding leaders to account, ranking alongside the judicial system (54%) and more highly than any other institution mentioned in the survey.

- Rather than just highlight problems that might foster division, people in both countries wanted the media to discuss solutions and act as a force for good. While the degree to which this may be possible varies by state, people wanted the media to debate the issues that matter to them and not just engage in mud-slinging. However, Libyans believed that there was a real prospect of violent recrimination against the media and understood that their "ideal" journalism was not always possible.

The role of institutions in holding leaders to account

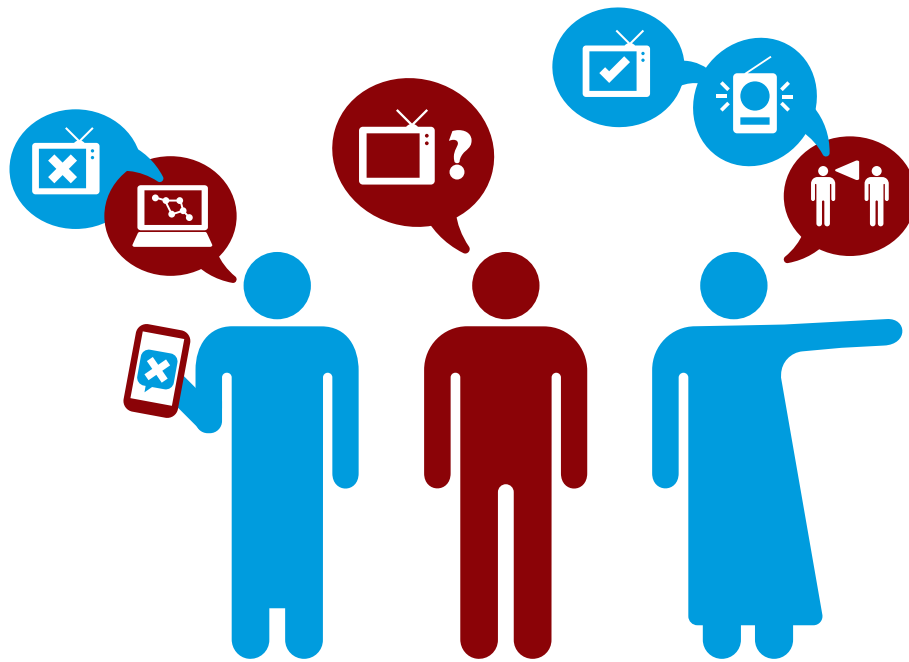


Q: Do you agree or disagree that the following are playing an important role in holding leaders to account in Tunisia?

BASE: All respondents (999). SOURCE: BBC Media Action Tunisia survey, 2013.

Totals may add up to more or less than 100% because of rounding.

Libyans and Tunisians: savvy media consumers who check many sources



Implications

With Libyans and Tunisians hungry for a more open and accountable media, our research suggests several implications:

- **Tunisians would benefit from clear, consistent and coherent support to their media sectors in future years, as far as the political situations and conflict allow.** Such support may be possible for Libya in the future. State broadcasters were an integral part of the media environment for Libyans and Tunisians at the time of this research. Al-Wataniya in Libya was the most trusted (73%) and one of the most relevant broadcasters for Libyan audiences. And, while Ettounsiya was the favourite channel of Tunisian audiences, it did not air regular news bulletins; 72% of Tunisians tuned into the news on Watania, the state broadcaster.

Support to state broadcasters can help them to work in the service of the public rather than the state, and particularly to improve their news

and current affairs offering. It is here that they are most influential and, arguably, that they are most needed.

- **Where possible, programme makers should explore producing solutions-focused programming.** At the time of our research, Libyans and Tunisians expressed weariness of being told of the problems that their countries face and would welcome programming that put forward the views and opinions of those who are proposing potential solutions.

Such programming may come in a number of formats and may vary by country. In a more volatile context such as Libya, an indirect approach using drama may be the most effective to foster progressive debate on taboo topics that Libyans believe would be too dangerous to cover elsewhere – such as how to support communication between regional groups.

Endnotes

¹ Reporters Without Borders (2014) *Sheratongate: blogger's allegations against foreign minister land her in court* [online]. Available from: <http://en.rsf.org/tunisia-sheratongate-blogger-s-allegations-17-01-2013,43926.html> [Accessed 5 March 2014].

² Reporters Without Borders (2014) *Un journaliste d'Ech Chourouk violemment agressé par deux policiers à Djerba* [online]. Available from: <http://fr.rsf.org/tunisie-un-journaliste-d-ech-chourouk-17-07-2014,46643.html> [Accessed 26 March 2015].

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