

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

2006/2007

**The Development
of Sustainable
Independent Media
in Europe and Eurasia**



MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2006/2007

The Development of Sustainable Independent Media in Europe and Eurasia
www.irex.org/msi

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USAID

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is an independent agency that provides economic, development, and humanitarian assistance around the world in support of the foreign policy goals of the United States. The agency works to support long-term and sustainable economic growth and advances US foreign policy objectives by supporting:

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- Europe and Eurasia

With headquarters in Washington, DC, USAID's strength is its field offices around the world. They work in close partnership with private voluntary organizations, indigenous organizations, universities, American businesses, international agencies, other governments, and other US government agencies. USAID has working relationships with more than 3,500 American companies and over 300 US-based private voluntary organizations.

IREX

IREX is an international nonprofit organization specializing in education, independent media, Internet development, and civil society programs. Through training, partnerships, education, research, and grant programs, IREX develops the capacity of individuals and institutions to contribute to their societies.

Since its founding in 1968, IREX has supported over 20,000 students, scholars, policymakers, business leaders, journalists, and other professionals. Currently, IREX is implementing 40 programs in more than 50 countries with offices in 17 countries across Europe, Eurasia, the Middle East and North Africa, and the United States. IREX serves as a major resource for universities, governments, and the corporate sector in understanding international political, social, economic, and business developments.

In the media sector, 2006 meant ongoing government consolidation over media outlets, control over content, and continuing harassment of journalists. In 2005, the government told citizens that foreigners and their allies in the country were launching “(an) information war against Uzbekistan which was launched in connection with the Andijan events.” Frequently referring to this “information war,” the government justified its crackdown.



UZBEKISTAN

The 2005 events in Andijan continue to define the political environment in Uzbekistan. The crackdown on media, civil society, foreign NGOs, and independent political groups continues unabated. After Andijan, where by government accounts 190 people died and by independent accounts several times more unarmed civilians were killed by government forces, President Islam Karimov set about tightening control in Uzbekistan by forcing foreign human rights and democracy-oriented organizations out of the country, asserting even greater control over the media, and ensuring that little independent civil society remains to challenge his authority or offer alternative visions for Uzbekistan's future.

The Uzbek government continued to refuse an international investigation into the Andijan incident, despite pressure and widespread condemnation from Western countries and international organizations. With little economic or political leverage over Uzbekistan, Western governments and the European Union were unable to gain cooperation into this investigation. Meanwhile, Karimov positioned Uzbekistan closer to Russia and China, moving distinctly away from the West. The US military, which had cooperated with the Karimov government since September 2001, was kicked out of Uzbekistan.

In the media sector, 2006 meant ongoing government consolidation over media outlets, control over content, and continuing harassment of journalists. In 2005, the government told citizens that foreigners and their allies in the country were launching "(an) information war against Uzbekistan which was launched in connection with the Andijan events." Frequently referring to this "information war," the government justified its crackdown. Major newspapers and broadcast outlets are owned by the government or political parties and individuals loyal to the government; media with views independent of the government are not registered; censors are reported to work inside major media outlets; journalists continue to face harassment; and international media such as RFE/RL, VOA, and BBC remain banned.

The supporting environment for independent media and more broadly, for democratically oriented Uzbek groups, continues to rate the lowest in Europe and Eurasia. International NGOs were forced to close operations because of government audits, lawsuits, and other forms of legal harassment. IREX, ACTR/ACCELS, Counterpart, and Freedom House were among the many NGOs forced to leave the country during the year. Therefore, virtually no professional foreign engagement in training journalists or supporting independent media development remained in 2006. Local NGOs offering independent views and supportive of democratic reforms, human rights, and international engagement with the West were further repressed and most effectively closed by government actions.

UZBEKISTAN AT A GLANCE

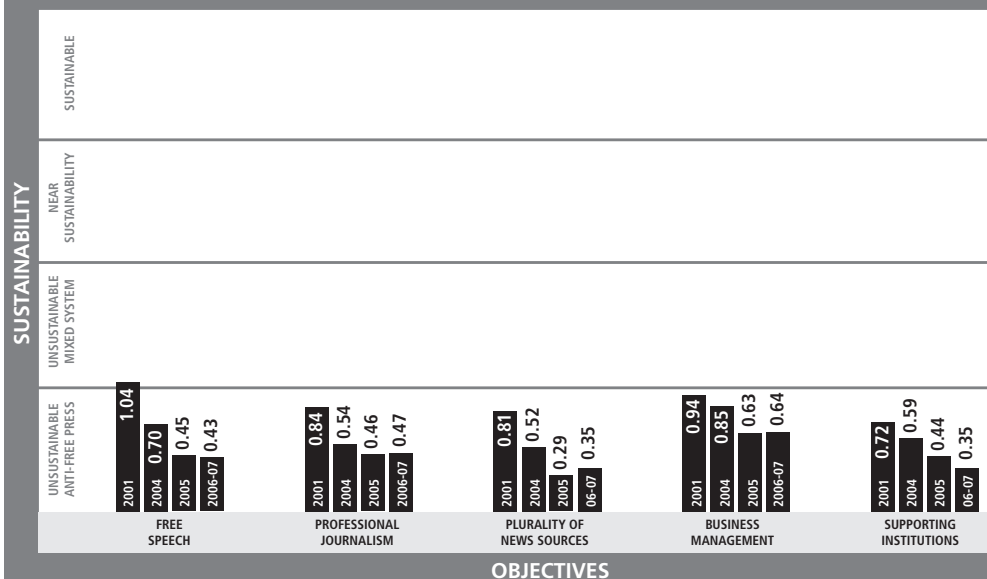
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 27,780,059 (July 2007 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Tashkent
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Uzbek 80%, Russian 5.5%, Tajik 5%, Kazakh 3%, Karakalpak 2.5%, Tatar 1.5%, other 2.5% (1996 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 88% (mostly Sunnis), Eastern Orthodox 9%, other 3% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Uzbek 74.3%, Russian 14.2%, Tajik 4.4%, other 7.1%
- > **GNI (2006-Atlas):** \$16.18 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **GNI per capita (2006-PPP):** \$2,240 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **Literacy rate:** 99.3% (male 99.6%, female 99.0%) (2003 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** Prime Minister Shavkat Mirziyayev (since December 11, 2003)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** 968 registered media outlets, including 96 Internet providers (www.freeuz.org)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** top two by circulation: *Darakchi* (250,000), *Tasvir* (around 10,000 copies)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** highest-rated television outlets: Eshlar telekanali, UzTV-1 (covers all regions); highest-rated radio outlets: Uzbegim, Eho doliny, Grand, Oriat FM, Poitaht
- > **News agencies:** Uzbek, Turkiston Press, Djahon, Karakalpak
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 880,000 (2005, *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: UZBEKISTAN



Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1):

Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):

Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

Near Sustainability (2-3):

Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media. Advances have survived changes in government and have been codified in law and practice. However, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism and the media business environment are sustainable.

Sustainable (3-4):

Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives. Systems supporting independent media have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.

Given this state of affairs, the average MSI score for Uzbekistan registered a .45 (Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press)—the lowest score in Europe and Eurasia and only one of two countries (Belarus was the other) to score below 1.0. This score is unchanged since 2005, and none of the five objectives witnessed any significant change. Uzbekistan remains a country highly unfriendly to free and professional media, and it has, for now, succeeded in controlling and eliminating virtually any independence in the sector.

Due to the repressive environment in Uzbekistan, IREX did not conduct a panel for Uzbekistan. This chapter represents research conducted on the situation and discussions with various professionals knowledgeable about the situation in Uzbekistan. The names of those contacted will not be published to protect their personal security. This chapter, therefore, provides a summary of the state of media in Uzbekistan.

OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH

Uzbekistan Objective Score: 0.43/4.00

As with many of the post-Soviet countries, Uzbekistan's constitutional and legal framework does provide protections for the media. The Constitution has articles guaranteeing freedom of speech and access to information. Additionally, several articles of the Uzbek Law on Defending the

LEGAL AND SOCIAL NORMS PROTECT AND PROMOTE FREE SPEECH AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION.

FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

- > Legal and social protections of free speech exist and are enforced.
- > Licensing of broadcast media is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- > Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- > Crimes against journalists or media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- > State or public media do not receive preferential legal treatment, and law guarantees editorial independence.
- > Libel is a civil law issue; public officials are held to higher standards, and offended parties must prove falsity and malice.
- > Public information is easily accessible; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Media outlets have unrestricted access to information; this is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Entry into the journalism profession is free, and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

Public criticism of the president is punishable by prison; articles that incite religious or ethnic discord or confrontation are banned; articles that advocate subverting or overthrowing the constitutional order are also punishable by imprisonment; and slander of the security forces is criminalized; libel and slander penalties have been strengthened; and accreditation of foreign journalists and local assistants provide means to tightly control content.

Professional Work of Journalists prohibit censorship, the confiscation of equipment, and the detention of journalists.

Other articles in the legal framework, however, lay the groundwork to curtail these freedoms. Public criticism of the president is punishable by prison; articles that incite religious or ethnic discord or confrontation are banned; articles that advocate subverting or overthrowing the constitutional order are punishable by imprisonment; slander of the security forces is criminalized; libel and slander penalties have been strengthened; and accreditation of foreign journalists and local assistants provide means to tightly control content.

A February 24, 2006 cabinet resolution tightened control over foreign journalists, regulating what they can and cannot report on and forcing accreditation of journalists and media outlets. This decree effectively renders negative reporting on the government illegal. It also had stringent controls on Uzbek citizens working for foreign media or journalists, causing them to take great risks to work with foreign journalists. Against this backdrop, for example, Deutsche Welle journalist Obid Shabanov had his credentials revoked in 2006 for critical reporting on labor migration. Two others were also imprisoned.

However, the government does not necessarily have to rely on the law or its legal interpretation to control media and its content. Since the government increased direct control over media during 2006, legal proceedings against media and journalists might be characterized as a necessary supporting action to ensure tight control. Also, given the lack of an independent judiciary in the country, legal proceedings initiated by the government or its supporters generally meet with "success."

The media licensing process in Uzbekistan remains completely controlled by the state without transparency or fair and consistent standards. All media outlets must register or re-register every year to obtain a license. Particularly since 2005, many did not receive licenses if they were deemed to be against the government.

International journalists' rights groups, such as the Committee to Protect Journalists and Reporters sans Frontières, list dozens of cases against journalists over the past year with few outcomes in the journalists' favor. In all cases, these groups report that the actions targeted journalists who had written critically of the government. In some cases, they are charged with general criminal acts, such as the case of independent journalist Ulugbek Khaidarov, who was set up for extortion. He was acquitted after two months in jail. Independent journalist and researcher Umida Niyazova was charged with smuggling subversive literature. Others have been charged with undermining the constitutional order.

The media licensing process in Uzbekistan remains completely controlled by the state without transparency or fair and consistent standards. All media outlets must register or re-register every year to obtain a license. Particularly since 2005, many did not receive licenses if they were deemed to be against the government. Media are licensed by the Interagency Coordination Committee (MKK). MKK can issue or revoke licenses without court orders. The Center for Electromagnetic Compatibility issues frequency licenses for broadcast outlets. Any media registering must present a board of directors acceptable to the government.

However, one also must note the role of the National Association of Electronic Media (NAESMI), founded in 2004. NAESMI forces local television stations to join the association and restricts the content of their programming. It has been reported that stations that had refused to join lost their broadcast licenses or were subjected to harassment such as tax inspections. At times, NAESMI ordered local television stations to broadcast programming of NAESMI's choosing.

There is little difference from last year in the ability to obtain government information. It is virtually impossible to obtain information except that which the government wishes to use for its advantage. However, with the crackdown on the press, there are not independent journalists seeking such information.

The government also tightly controls the Internet. It has blocked access to critical sites such as www.freeuz.org, www.ferghana.ru, and RFE/RL. Several of the foreign NGOs forced to close and leave Uzbekistan, including IREX, were accused of offering Internet access without a license, demonstrating the fear of the government in allowing unfettered access to the information on the Web.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Uzbekistan Objective Score: 0.47/4.00

Professional journalism remains mired in a downward spiral in Uzbekistan. Government control over media content, harassment and prosecution of critical journalists and the ensuing self-censorship, and the lack of training to international standards at the university or mid-career level have all contributed to a journalism profession that more and more resembles the government propagandists of the Soviet state.

Alternative viewpoints are rare in the media; most examples come from foreign-based media who continue to report on Uzbekistan, including the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), RFE/RL, and BBC. Among local journalists working for Uzbekistan's media, self-censorship is the norm. Editors will not publish critical stories and will punish those journalists who present such stories for publication. Those who seek to report critically are exposed to the full force of the legal system. In the past year, Uzbek journalists for IWPR, Deutsche Welle, and Oasis, among others, have been sentenced to prison terms for their reporting. Karimov's own

JOURNALISM MEETS PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF QUALITY.

PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

- > Reporting is fair, objective, and well sourced.
- > Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards.
- > Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.
- > Journalists cover key events and issues.
- > Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption.
- > Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming.
- > Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- > Media outlets have unrestricted access to information; this is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Quality niche reporting and programming exists (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

nephew was allegedly detained and sent to a psychiatric hospital for his work for IWPR. The message is clear and heard by most all Uzbek journalists.

While official censorship does not exist, in practice the government is deeply involved in censorship, according to most reports. There are unofficial bans on certain topics (corruption, poverty, Andijan), and there are de facto censors allegedly working at most major media outlets to ensure the coverage is favorable to the government. NAEMSI and the Uzbekistan News Agency monitor news coverage, and it is clear to media that this means they must toe to government line.

Journalists regularly accept bribes (cash and gifts) in exchange for favorable coverage or made-to-order reporting. However, the general positive coverage of the government and lack of controversial issues need not be ensured by bribes, given the elaborate control system. Instead the bribes are reserved more for individuals wanting positive coverage of their activities. Some local issues are able to be covered, such as local petty corruption or mismanagement, if it suits the government agenda.

Entertainment programming continues to dominate news and information reporting. Russian channels remain popular in this regard. Other broadcasters focus on sports or advertising. Print media focus on celebrities, sports, and other non-threatening topics.

Niche journalism remains infrequent, if not functionally impossible in Uzbekistan. Given the danger that such reporting might touch on something controversial, media outlets are reluctant to support such reporting. Technical facilities remain largely outdated, with equipment at many outlets functionally obsolete or rapidly approaching that state.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

Uzbekistan Objective Score: 0.35/4.00

As noted in the 2005 MSI report, while “the number of ‘news’ sources has increased significantly since independence in 1991, that does not mean that Uzbekistani citizens have access to more and better-quality information.” Particularly following the crackdown in 2005 after Andijan, the government sought to ensure that there remained a “surface appearance of choice,” but in reality the choices did not allow for acquiring different viewpoints and alternate reporting on events and issues in Uzbekistan. As such, Uzbekistan witnessed no real change in this objective, scoring 0.35.

Foreign media are allowed only to the extent the government approves of their news coverage or they avoid news and focus on entertainment. Russian media are popular for their entertainment, and the news provided is generally sympathetic to Karimov. Foreign news agencies such as RFE/RL, IWPR, BBC, VOA, and Deutsche Welle are prohibited from working or broadcasting in the country, and their websites are generally inaccessible due to the Uzbek government blocking them.

Other independent Uzbek media or regional online media also have a hard time being accessible to the populace given government blocking. Popular sites such as ferghana.ru are hard to access inside the country. However, regardless of government interference, Internet penetration remains low at 6.6 percent (according to the government), so Internet news does not yet pose a threat on a mass scale to the Karimov regime.

The state-controlled media, which are now the vast majority of media in the country, are completely partisan and offer no alternative viewpoints and do not contribute to real plurality. State television and radio dominate the media space, with other state-owned media and private media filling the remaining media space.

Privately owned Russian and Uzbek papers, such as *Novosti Uzbekistana*, *Noviy Vek*, *Biznes Vestnik Vostoka*, *Hurriyat*, and *Mohiyat*, are managed in ways to ensure their content is friendly to the government, while the state papers, such as *Pravda Vostoka* or *Khalq Sozi*, are clearly propaganda-oriented publications.

MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE AND OBJECTIVE NEWS.

PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

- > A plurality of affordable public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet) exists.
- > Citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media.
- > Independent broadcast media produce their own news programs.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.
- > A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources.

There are 24 regional television stations and 14 regional radio stations, but they offer little diversity in news other than the government line. As discussed above, they can occasionally report on local issues of corruption or mismanagement but usually in a circumspect manner and with the government's blessing.

Uzbekistan has no independent news agency.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Uzbekistan Objective Score: 0.64/4.00

Nothing of note has changed in Uzbekistan since last year in the field of media management as reflected in the MSI score, which remains relatively unchanged at 0.64. Private media are not run as businesses, state-controlled media have little incentive to operate efficiently, there is not a rational advertising market, and supporting services such as market research are grossly underdeveloped.

State television claims it uses only 2.9 percent of its airtime for advertising when it is permitted 10 percent, indicating that if the country's most influential broadcaster cannot fill its allocated advertising time, the market must be weak. With the growing control of the state over the media sector, even the private media, the primary goal of those outlets is not to operate as a profit-generating business, and the incentives for sound management are limited. In addition, the media sector has few skilled managers. Even before the crackdown following Andijan, business-management skills in the media were weak and the depth of talented professionals shallow.

In November 2005, the government created the "Public Fund for the Support and Development of Independent Print Media and News Agencies of Uzbekistan." Ostensibly created at the initiative of the Union of Writers of Uzbekistan and the Creative Union of Journalists of Uzbekistan together with private companies, it was set up by presidential decree. The fund provides support for media outlets and has supported non-political articles on tourism and business. To what extent the fund will develop remains uncertain, but it is seen as a means of supporting loyal media and does not appear to operate to also develop the business management of those it assists.

However, there is advertising, and advertising agencies do exist, but the pool and depth of professional agencies is limited. According to experts, they also must follow political preferences, for if they were to unduly support

more independent outlets with advertising, they would face pressure from the state. In addition, many of these agencies are owned by media companies and do not represent the market as a whole but their owners' interests. Personal announcements have been a major source of revenue for media in Uzbekistan for several years, as consistent high-paying consumer advertising has been scarce.

Uzbekistan has a relatively well-developed printing and distribution industry, but it remains under government control and serves the interests of the government and does not operate under market principles. For instance, printing of the Russian paper *Trud* was suspended in June 2006 after publishing critical articles—the printing house claimed technical difficulties. As with the ad agencies, printing and distribution companies are driven by self-interest and fear of angering authorities, and they are not always partners with the media outlets they serve.

Market research continues to remain sorely underdeveloped. Some advertising agencies state that they conduct market research and base rates on such research, but there is little if any publicly available research based on international standards and doubts about the ability of media managers' ability to use such research if it was available. Media outlets themselves cannot afford sophisticated market research. Uzbekistan, as with many of the countries in the former Soviet Union, lacks a system to produce audited newspaper circulation figures. Newspapers must rely on reports from the distributors, which do not technically correspond to actual circulation and are suspect themselves.

INDEPENDENT MEDIA ARE WELL-MANAGED BUSINESSES, ALLOWING EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

- > Media outlets and supporting firms operate as efficient, professional, and profit-generating businesses.
- > Media receive revenue from a multitude of sources.
- > Advertising agencies and related industries support an advertising market.
- > Advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue is in line with accepted standards at commercial outlets.
- > Independent media do not receive government subsidies.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor products to the needs and interests of audiences.
- > Broadcast ratings and circulation figures are reliably and independently produced.

Business management training had been offered by international organizations such as Internews (as well as supporting market research studies in 2004). But with the crackdown on international NGOs and the subsequent departure from the country of most of these, including Internews, little training and support for impartial research is offered.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Uzbekistan Objective Score: 0.35/4.00

As can be expected in a country that has systematically repressed civil-society organizations in the wake of Andijan, professional and independent supporting institutions are few in Uzbekistan, rating an MSI score of 0.35—more than a 50 percent drop since 2001.

Professional organizations representing journalists and owners/managers generally are friendly to the government. The Creative Union of Journalists was founded in 2004 at the initiative of the government. It has not been active in defending the rights of journalists as the government crackdown has continued.

The National Association of Electronic Media (NAESMI) was also founded in 2004 by government initiative and designed according to observers as a mechanism to exert state control over broadcasting. NAESMI's stated goal was to provide equal market conditions for all broadcasters in Uzbekistan. However, NAESMI essentially required media outlets to join or risk losing their licenses and going out of business, a process that continued into 2006 and 2007. In addition, as described above, NAESMI exerted control over content, at times supplanting locally produced content with content it dictated.

The crackdown since 2005, and indeed actions prior to the Andijan incident, has affected human-rights NGOs that have been supportive of media freedoms. Banking changes made it difficult for Uzbek NGOs to receive outside funding, and burdensome registration requirements helped the government strip international and domestic democracy or human-rights NGOs of their registration and denied registration to others. It has been estimated that the government crackdown forced up to 75 percent of local NGOs to close or suspend their work. Many of these local organizations, while not directly media support organizations, promoted human rights and democracy and were important to creating an environment in which independent media could survive.

Journalism education remains of low quality in Uzbekistan. The Uzbekistan National University and the State University of World Languages both have journalism faculties, but in general the curriculum at both is theoretical and lacks practical experiences for students. Journalism professionals consistently maintain that it takes several years of training to re-train graduates of these schools. The State University of World Languages program was created largely to train journalists and public relations specialists to represent Uzbekistan's interests abroad. And given the political environment, it seems that neither will in the near term turn out professional journalists approaching international standards, creating another generation of journalists lacking practical experience and taught that journalism serves the interests of the state.

Short-term professional training for media professionals has largely disappeared in Uzbekistan. Internews and IWPR offered training and practical experience to young and mid-career journalists. However, both have been forced out of the country. Other programs continue to exist but are often focused on topics the government supports, such as narrowly focused topics with international organizations and with the full approval of the Uzbek government.

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SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- > Trade associations represent the interests of private media owners and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs that provide substantial practical experience exist.
- > Short-term training and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of newsprint and printing facilities are in private hands, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.