

Global Communications

EDITED BY CAROLA RICHTER AND CLAUDIA KOZMAN

# Arab Media Systems





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# 17. Algeria: The Costs of Clientelism

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Translated by Abdelhak Bouifer

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This chapter highlights Algeria's media development, which is shaped by trajectories of French colonialism and a socialist-clientelist regime of governance since the 1960s. The rich history of its media is contrasted by major challenges on the political, economic, and professional levels.

## Background

Algeria is located in the northwestern part of Africa. It shares borders with six countries: Morocco and Mauritania to the west, Mali and Niger to the south, and Libya and Tunisia to the east. With a 1,644-kilometer coastline along the Mediterranean Sea to the north and a land area of 2,400,000 square kilometers, Algeria is the largest country in Africa, the Arab world, and among the Mediterranean countries.

According to the latest calculations of January 2019, the Algerian population is 43,000,000, of which young people from 15 to 24 years of age make up 16%. The majority of Algerians are Muslims. Christians, on the other hand, represent a tiny percentage, which was estimated to be below 1% in 2009.

Algeria's history goes back thousands of years during which various tribal communities fought many wars on its territory. Despite these ongoing conflicts the country was put under Turkish protectorate rule in 1615, which was ended only by the French invasion of 1830. The

Algerians began to retaliate against French colonialism in multiple ways, starting with the popular revolts (1830–1871), expanding into political and cultural resistance (1900–1954), and finally culminating in a war for independence (November 1954–July 1962). The heavy colonial heritage had a huge impact on political and media system in Algeria's post-independence period.

Facing a high level of illiteracy among children following the colonial era, Algeria put an enormous effort into eradicating this phenomenon by increasing the number of learners over the age of 15 from 15% in 1962 to 75% between 2005 and 2016. The two official languages are Arabic, the language of the majority of Algerians, and Tamazight, spoken by the indigenous Imazighen (Berbers). The latter was declared an official language in 2016 after a long and fierce struggle, following the events of the Amazigh Spring in 1980 and the uprising in the Kabyle region in 2001. As a result, the Tamazight language has been taught at various levels of education since 1995. Similarly, the Arabic language in Algeria has faced difficulties in expanding into other sectors, as French is still used in the financial, economic, and education sectors as well as in the scientific fields.

The amendment of the Family Code in 2005 reflected the Algerian legislators' desire to build bridges between the principles of Islamic law and the requirements of contemporary life. Thus, Algerian women obtained additional rights after amendments to the nationality law, including the right to grant Algerian citizenship to their children if their husband is a foreigner. The most significant gain for Algerian women has been their increased presence in elected councils; for example, their representation in parliament jumped from 5% in 1962 to 31% in 2012. However, this statistic does not reflect the everyday reality of Algerian women. According to data provided by the National Centre for Statistics for 2015, women workers did not exceed 18% of all 11,000,000 Algerian workers. The rate of women with a university degree who are unemployed is estimated at about 9% compared with almost 52% of men with a university degree.

## Historical Developments

After the conquest of Algeria, the French colonial army brought a printing press to print the first newspaper, *L'Estafette d'Alger*, to promote the expansion of the colonial army's control across Algerian territory. It was replaced in 1932 by another weekly newspaper, *Le Moniteur Algérien*, which was regarded as the official voice of colonialism in Algeria.

The French authorities encouraged settlers to launch their own newspapers in Algeria's largest cities to preserve their interests, and set up other newspapers that targeted the local population, for instance, *Le Messager* (1848–1928), which was published bi-monthly in two versions: French and Arabic. It was the third newspaper published in the Arab world at that time.

The French Press Law of 1881 abolished the system of prior authorization and financial guarantee. It established a system which repressed the crime of defamation without any possibility of prior censorship. This enabled French newspaper publishers to thrive. However, Algerian publishers were not entitled to benefit from this law because they did not enjoy their civil rights. The system imposed by this law partly explains why Algerians delayed launching their own newspapers until the end of the last decade of the nineteenth century. They were also subject to indigenous laws (1865) which stripped them of their identity and their civil rights.

Newspapers published by Algerians, notably in Arabic, were characterized by their short life due to a lack of funding, but more importantly, as a result of the 1895 law that prohibited the publication of any foreign language newspaper, since the 1838 law defined Arabic as a foreign language.

The historian Ali Merad (1964) argued that the Islamic press (or the indigenous press) in Algeria symbolized the formation of a civil society (p. 9). It partially replaced the absence of political parties, spreading reformist ideas within the local community. The emergence of this press can be seen to reflect the change in Algerian society's social and cultural structure under French colonial rule, which established a new elite consisting of two categories. First was that of the urban youth loyal to the French culture, who were employed as administrative agents or employees in sectors such as education, medicine, judiciary,

and translation. The second category was the Arabized elite, who were teachers at religious schools, Imams, and judges who believed in the Arabic culture. They played a pivotal role in the rise of the indigenous press. In fact, the two categories were not actually separated, and both helped to launch the indigenous press, but the fear of its impact led the colonial authorities blocking its expansion and development.

The national movement parties, which were formed at the beginning of the twentieth century, used newspapers to promote their reformist ideas for equal rights between the Algerians and French and to revive the cultural, linguistic, and religious components of the Algerian nation as well as to claim national independence. The National Liberation Front (FLN) relied on the media in its liberation struggle, creating the *El-Moudjahid* newspaper on 22 June 1956 as the official voice of the FLN.

On the radio, the FLN launched the *Voice of Fighting Algeria* on 16 December 1956. This station changed Algerians' relationship with radio broadcasting. As Frantz Fanon (1972) noted, the radio in the colonial era was initially intended for Europeans and was perceived as a tool through which they imposed cultural pressure on people under colonial domination (p. 52). Therefore, its audience among the Algerians was very limited. Nevertheless, the armed revolution transformed the radio into a tool of liberation that helped to turn Algerian audiences into one nation.

After independence in 1962, Algeria established its Radio and Television Company by taking advantage of what was inherited from the French Radio and Television Company in Algeria. Radio and television were the best means to mobilize Algerians around the goals of the revolution due to the country's high percentage of illiteracy, which sat at 85% during this period. The public radio company launched 50 local stations, in addition to its three national Arabic, Tamazight, and French-language stations. It also established an international station (broadcasting in Arabic, French, English, and Spanish) and other stations dedicated to culture, religion, and youth.

Algeria had only one television channel prior to 1994 when the French-language channel *Canal Algérie* was established and began broadcasting to the Algerian community in Europe and North America. In 2001, *Algeria 3* channel launched programs for Algerian audiences living in Arab countries. On 18 March 2009, two other channels, a

Tamazight-language channel and the *Holy Qur'an* channel, were introduced to 'protect' Algerian viewers from religious extremist discourse promoted by some foreign satellite channels.

The rising number of public radio stations and television channels was encouraged by competition from foreign television channels and radio stations, and was financially supported by the increase in oil revenues that constituted the backbone of Algeria's national economy.

Fearing that the events of the Arab uprisings would spread to Algeria and promote Abdel-Aziz Bouteflika's election campaign for a fourth presidential term, a branch of the Algerian regime set up television channels in 2012 that only broadcasted from outside Algeria. Within three years, the number of these "hybrid legal" channels jumped to 45. Private television has been broadcasting in this informal manner since 2012. In 2013, the Algerian authorities granted only five of these channels (*Ennahar TV*, *Echourouk TV*, *Dzair TV*, *El Djazairia One*, and *Hogar TV*) licenses to operate for a yearly renewable term. Even today, these five channels continue to function as offices of foreign channels and not as Algerian channels, and are consequently referred to by the Algerian media as "Offshore Channels". Moreover, the government has turned a blind eye to the activity of other television channels broadcasting from abroad. However, if any channel opposes the political regime, its equipment will be confiscated and all activity will be banned under the pretext that the channel does not have a legal license, which is what happened to *Atlas TV* in 2014 and *Al Watan TV* in 2015.

After all colonial printed media became nationalized after independence, the Algerian authorities began to build their own press system. They initiated this process by launching the Arabic-language newspaper *El-Chaab*, on 11 December 1962, *Le Peuple* newspaper on 19 December, 1962, which was the country's first French-language newspaper, and *El-Moudjahid* newspaper on 5 July 1965.

In the west of the country, the French-speaking newspaper *La République* began publication on 29 March 1963, and the French-speaking newspaper *El-Nasr* was established on 28 September 1963 in eastern Algeria. The historical newspaper *El-Moudjahid*, the official voice of the FLN, was transformed from a daily newspaper to a weekly paper in July 1964, and only the Arabic version of this publication was retained. The *African Revolution* magazine was published in French in November 1962

to express Algeria's solidarity with other liberation movements around the world.

After independence in 1962, Algeria abolished regional and local media in favor of centralizing the media system. This was done because the idea of "regional", which in the official Algerian political dictionary refers to the division and dispersion of Algerian people, is assumed to hamper the national effort to build a strong central state that unites the aspirations of the people and underpins the construction of socialism. This is why Algeria's newspaper market maintained its national character and included only two newspapers outside the capital, Algiers.

The fusion of political and ideological streams in the FLN during the liberation war became a reference for political and media practices in the post-independence era. These practices were fed by populist ideologies that betrayed the political opposition and eventually led to the abolishment of political and media pluralism.

In 1990, a major change occurred following the deadly protests of 5 October 1988 (Rahal, 2017), and before the approval of the Information Law in 1990 which ended the state's media monopoly. On 19 March 1990, the government of Mouloud Hamrouche instructed all journalists working in public media to either join newspapers belonging to political parties or to create groups to publish their own newspapers and magazines. Pursuant to this order, 150 journalists left their media organizations to launch their own companies, most of which were printed media that enjoyed partial freedom of expression. The regime used these publications as a democratic interface with the political system, a cover for the transition to a market economy, and a forum for readers to express their anger over poor living conditions as well as the abuse of power.

The press in Algeria has remained an urban phenomenon, despite significant changes in its quantitative and linguistic dimensions. The number of daily newspapers jumped from six in 1989, with nearly 670,450 copies per day, to 140 in 2014, with 2,469,616 copies per day (Ministry of Communication, 2014). The numbers of newspapers in 2016 increased significantly to 150 editions, but only 21 of these ran 10,000 or more copies per day.



## Political and Legal Framework

Since its independence in 1962, Algeria has chosen the socialist system for its development. It adopted a single-party political system that dominated the political and media landscapes. The proclaimed “unity of perception and socialist thought” framed the structure of media organizations and regulated journalistic activity. This was supported by the first Information Law in 1982, which entrenched state monopoly of the media. This law granted the authority to direct media companies by means of the political leadership represented by the Ministry of Information and Culture and the ruling party information officer. It also made media managers merely an operational means. As an example, Article 35 states that a professional journalist is a combatant who “practices his profession responsibly and with commitment in order to fulfill the objectives of the revolution as defined by the official texts of the National Liberation Front.”

Algeria’s economy is dependent on oil revenues which constitute 97% of its total revenue. As oil prices declined in 1986 to less than USD 15 a barrel, the authorities adopted an austerity policy on importing consumer products. Protests increased across the country through a series of demonstrations, with the most notable on 5 October 1988, leading the regime to promulgate a new liberal constitution in 1989 that recognized the right to private property, and freedom of belief, expression, and the press. Furthermore, it recognized the freedom to establish political parties, which led Algeria to reach a total of almost 60 parties. At the same time, a new Information Law was passed in 1990 to divide up the media management methods that had prevailed over the previous 28 years. This law opened the door to media pluralism in the press and audiovisual sector; it also put an end to the state’s monopoly of the media. To be more specific, its fourth article highlighted the right of political parties and natural persons, subject to Algerian law, to establish newspapers and magazines and to own a media company.

The years 1990–1992 were exceptional in the history of Algerian media. In addition to the publication of private newspapers, which openly discussed societal issues and political trends in the country, the public media, especially television, offered a platform for opposition parties to

take part in political debates about Algeria's future. Nevertheless, the democratic transition in Algeria has not been achieved because the state has systematically rejected the idea of a rotation of power. Although the ruling authority sought to renew itself by establishing a "monitored" political pluralism and allowing the FLN to assume a dominant position over other political forces, it ultimately failed in its mission. The 1992 legislative elections resulted in the victory of another dominant party, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), which threatened Algeria's political system and its adherents and alarmed Western countries (Addi, 2006, pp. 139–62).

Ultimately, the electoral process was cancelled, and a High State Council (HSC) was created to assume presidential powers after the resignation of President Chadli Bendjedid. Parliament was dissolved and replaced by an "advisory council," followed by a transitional council made up of appointed members. A state of emergency was declared on 9 February 1992. The High Media Council, which had seized control of part of the Authority of the Ministry of Information, was abolished, even though its role had been more consultative than regulatory in terms of media practice. Public freedoms and freedom of the press declined following the establishment of special anti-terrorism courts and the circulation of a decree issued on 14 June 1994 to direct press managers on how to deal with security news. As a consequence, print media were pressured to reproduce the official discourse of the ruling authority, leading to the impoverishment of the media. The number of newspapers multiplied, but without producing real media pluralism. In addition, journalists who sought to oppose the official government line were prosecuted and their newspapers were suspended or even banned. In the aftermath of 1992, Algeria fell into a cycle of violence that claimed the lives of thousands of Algerians, including 103 journalists.

Following the events of the Arab uprisings in 2012, a new Information Law was passed to emphasize the general principles of freedom of expression and media pluralism. However, in reality, nothing changed. This new law intended to establish the Print Press Regulatory Authority, which was to have more of a censorship role than a regulating one for journalistic activity. Yet, after five years, this body still had not begun functioning.

The Audiovisual Law of 2014 tightened restrictions on the creation of private television channels permitting only thematic channels to be launched. The Audiovisual Regulatory Authority (ARAV) was stripped of its role to control audiovisual activity. Since then, this body has not carried out any activity beyond issuing occasional statements that remind certain television channels to respect the principles and ethics of journalistic work. The abovementioned Information Law did not allow journalists to be imprisoned for various misdemeanors, including libel, defamation, and insulting others. Nevertheless, a review of the Criminal Procedure Code in July 2015 made temporary detention an exceptional measure, and this did not exclude journalists from being subject to detention.

The impact of the Information Law on media practices in Algeria has been very limited, perhaps even nonexistent, because its implementation is subject to political and special interest considerations. Many of its articles have remained meaningless, while some are applied selectively. For example, the authority allowed Ali Haddad, president of the Business Leaders Forum (FCE), to publish the newspapers *Le Temps d'Algérie* in French and *Time of Algeria* in Arabic, although Article 25 of the Media Law of 2012 prohibits owning both a French and an Arabic newspaper. Under this same law the contract for purchasing the businessman Issad Rabrab's *El-Khabar* newspaper was dissolved in 2017 as Rabrab also owned the newspaper *Liberté*. In 2014, it allowed Ali Haddad<sup>1</sup> to own both *Dzair TV* and *Dzair News*, and permitted other oligarchs who financed the election campaign of the president, Bouteflika, to create private television channels. This practice promotes "neo-patrimonialism," which indicates the unusual marriage between the autocratic system and modern state institutions. It is manifested through a "clientelism" character (Roudakova, 2008, p. 42) that is seen as a structural factor in societies where there are few or no borders between public and personal interests, or between public and private property. This type of clientelism can also be understood as a cultural feature of the idea that systemic and universal rules are less important than personal connections.

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1 Ali Haddad's media empire began to collapse after President Bouteflika was removed from power on 2 April 2019, and since then, he has been in prison with other figures of the regime charged with unlawful accumulation of wealth.

## Economy and Ownership Patterns

The state monopolized the ownership of newspapers from 1962 to 1990. Today, however, it owns only six newspapers, compared with 144 privately-owned newspapers in Algeria. These private newspapers consist predominantly of journalists who have left public media. As a first step, they launched their own newspapers with their previous salaries received over a three-year period. As a second step, the government provided them with a wide range of indirect subsidies, such as interest-free bank loans, tax exemptions, and share of advertising proceeds, and headquarters for their newspapers. Finally, the government eased the payment procedure for printing costs at state printing companies by either subsidizing the price of paper or erasing the debts of some newspapers. The 1991 Finance Act established a special fund of USD 22,000,000 as an additional form of support for private newspapers. This fund existed until 2015. However, it was distributed in an unfair and unequal method.

Transparency in the funding of private newspapers is a constant demand of publishers and readers. *L'Expression*, for example, a newspaper which publishes 20,000 copies per day, barely sells 50% of its copies on average, and has no influence on national political life, generated significant annual profits during the period of 2009–2016 through government advertising evaluated to be between USD 506,000 and USD 1,500,000. It became the most cost-effective newspaper in the press sector. This is one example that has led to the call for more transparency in the newspaper market.

The two largest private newspapers, *El-Watan* (a French-language newspaper) and *El-Khabar* (an Arabic-language newspaper), were exempt from the monopoly exercised by authorities on printing companies. Although they set up their own printing companies, which have reduced their expenses, the financial situation of these publications has not substantially improved. For example, *El-Khabar's* sales contributed only 50% of its total income, while *El-Watan's* sales only generated 30% of its overall revenue despite the fact that these two newspapers have consistently raised the price of their issues. Advertising remains the main income source for newspapers in Algeria, contributing anywhere between USD 25,000 and USD 50,000 to the proceeds of a single issue of

a newspaper. However, the state controls almost 85% of the advertising market through the National Publishing and Advertising Company (ANEP). Private companies and public institutions have been banned from purchasing advertising pages directly from newspapers. Thus, the distribution of advertising to newspapers and the rest of the media is still not subject to market logic, and for that reason, media pluralism in Algeria has not been strengthened.

Powerful and dominant media groups have been forming in Algeria since 2012. One of these is led by Mohammed Moukaddam, who owns two newspapers, *Ennahar El-Djadid* and the sports newspaper *El-Chibak*, as well as other news websites, such as *Algérie 24* and *Algérie Confidentiel*, published in the French language. There is also the group owned by the businessman Ali Haddad, the owner of one of the largest construction companies (ETRHB) and publisher of the newspaper *Le Temps d'Algérie* in Arabic and French. Ali Fodil leads another group and is the owner of the *El-Chourouk Daily* and the weekly magazine *El-Chourouk El-Arabi*, in addition to other websites, including *El-Chourouk Sport*, *Jawaher El-Chourouk*, and *El-Chourouk Markets*. These three newspaper owners also own television channels. Moukaddam has one channel, Haddad has two channels, and Fodil has three channels: *El-Chourouk TV*, *El-Chourouk News*, and *El-Echourouk Bana* (a cooking channel). Other examples of oligarch media investors are Mahieddine Tahkout, owner of the Car Installation Company and the Student Bus Company, and Bachir Ould Zamirli, an "investor" in the field of real estate promotion. The owners of these channels dominate Algeria's television viewing market. However, the ownership of these channels is a debatable point; it is contrary to the Organic Audiovisual Law which affirms in Article 23 that "a natural person or a private person subject to Algerian law cannot be a contributor to more than one service of audiovisual communication."

Moreover, Article 45 states that the same shareholder of a television channel may not hold, directly or through the intermediary of other persons, including ascendants and descendants of the 4th degree, more than 40% of its share capital.

In addition to their legal status, the economy of private television channels in Algeria has attracted significant attention from researchers (Cherif, 2014; Djaballah, 2019; Mostefaoui, 2019; Dimitrakis, 2019; Djaballah, 2018).

Considering the practices of clientelism, which control the relationship of power and the media, can explain how channels belonging to Algerian oligarchs are funded. First and foremost, they took advantage of the state advertising windfall. Second, the price of one minute of advertising at peak time on private channels is estimated between USD 109 and USD 181 (Belfarag, 2016). This relatively low cost negatively affected the public media, for which the price of one minute of advertising at the same peak time is estimated between USD 2,000 and USD 4,500. Such practices have not only undermined the economic framework of public television channels, but have undermined all forms of media, such as one minute of prime time on radio is priced at USD 346, newspapers that sell the color pages to advertisers for USD 3,500, half colored page for USD 1,756, and a quarter page for USD 920.<sup>2</sup>

There are no laws that organize or regulate unfair competition among the media in Algeria's booming advertising market, which jumped from EUR 19,000,000 in 1999 to EUR 200,000,000 in 2016 due to high oil revenues. The budget of any one private television channel cannot be compared with that of the public television system with its five channels. In 2012, the public system's revenues came from the license fee imposed on citizens, which was estimated at USD 9,000,000, and advertising revenues and rebroadcast rights exceeding USD 18,000,000. However, these two amounts were not enough to cover its expenses, especially the salaries of 3,447 workers. This forced the state to award the company more than USD 90,000,000 to meet the public service requirements and pay for its satellite broadcasting (Ali, 2014).

Most of Algeria's online newspapers belong to the private sector. Their economic situation is more complex than that of the print media. Each online newspaper pays nearly USD 2,630 a month for hosting and maintaining its sites, which is in addition to Internet subscription and phone connectivity costs. Some online newspapers, such as *Maghreb Emergent*, have tried to get their users to contribute to their crowd funding, but to no avail. Alternatively, many online publications provide training course and other services for companies to gain revenues.

For its part, *Radio M* appealed to the French Agency for Media Cooperation for a subsidy to ensure its survival. From 2006 onwards,

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2 According to the prices supplied by the daily newspaper *Liberté* on 13 July 2019.

the state's monopoly on radio broadcasting and the low cost of Internet broadcasting encouraged companies to create web broadcasts to provide different content from government radio stations. This trend began with *Radio Algiers* and was then reinforced by radio stations with music content and associations' radio stations, such as *The Voice of Women*, a subsidiary of an association called Women in Communication. It is crucial to note that it is difficult to limit the number of web television programs in Algeria, which have a different legal status to radio. There is a variety of news, music, and sports television broadcasts online, including those of state-owned companies, such as the *Algeria Press Agency (APS)* and other private entities.

## Technology and Infrastructure

Eight satellites, including *Alcomsat-1*, which was the latest satellite launched by Algeria in cooperation with China on 10 December 2017, broadcast the country's five public television channels and programs from 50 public radio stations, including local, national, and thematic ones. To modernize technological infrastructure, Algerian authorities have completed 7,000 km of digital microwave networks as well as 14 medium and large networks for television broadcasting, and have built 400 stations for rebroadcasting to cover the shadow regions and the Algerian Sahara, and four stations for powerful broadcasting on micro- and medium waves.

Algeria began building digital terrestrial television in 2010 and was able to cover 85% of the national territory by 2013. This figure rose to 95% by the end of 2019. Algeria was on the verge of completely abandoning analog technology in June 2020. During the mid-1980s, Algerians turned to French and Arabic satellite television programs to avoid watching the only public television channel that existed at the time. Today, 97% of Algerian homes own a satellite dish.

Although computers were first introduced in major companies in Algeria in 1980, the computer system has remained on the sidelines of industrial activity. One explanation for Algeria's delay in developing its digital economy can be attributed to the fact that the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications developed modern communication technologies instead of the Ministry of Industry (Khelfaoui, 2007, pp. 71–90. To be

more specific, the development of the Internet in Algeria has been influenced by ongoing struggles for power between those advocating urgent socioeconomic claims and the political forces that fear losing control over the use of the Internet. This explains the slow development of the Internet and the continued monopoly of Algerian Telecom's fixed and mobile Internet for the last 17 years. Furthermore, the license to use 3G networks was delayed until 2013, and the mobile phone and Internet market is currently exclusively shared by three economic operators (*Algérie Télécom*, Algeria's public communications company *Djezzy*, which owns 51% of its shares, and Qatar's *Ooredoo*).

According to the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, the number of mobile subscribers (GSM, 3G, 4G) of the three operators jumped from 33,000,000 in 2010 to 51,000,000 in 2018. The number of mobile Internet subscribers (3G, 4G) increased from 300,000 subscribers in 2013 to 40,000,000 subscribers in 2018. Despite this, Internet speed remains slow, with an average estimated at 9 Mbps. Algerians who actively use social media platforms constituted 54% of the total population (i.e., 23,000,000 people) as of January 2019. More than half of all Algerians (22,000,000) use the social platform *Facebook* (Kemp, 2019).

*El-Watan* was the first Algerian newspaper to have a website (1997). Today, all Algerian newspapers have their own websites; some of them are hosted abroad, in countries such as France and Switzerland to avoid possible censorship. Some newspapers have set up electronic editions, television channels and news websites, such as *El-Chourouk* and *El-Nahar*, however, they cannot live up to the expected level of convergence, in the sense of producing content suitable for presentation on a variety of platforms.

## Challenges

The media system faces a number of major challenges, which can be summarized in terms of the following overlapping levels.

On the political level, the "neo-patrimonial" political system that is hampering Algeria's democratic transition represents the biggest challenge for the media system in Algeria. Although the state's monopoly on print and audiovisual media and the establishment of



private media was extinguished, this did not guarantee freedom of expression and media pluralism because these institutions were not based upon transparent and fair media competition. This was potentially due to the fact that the state failed to apply many of the laws' provisions relating to the organization of media companies (some of which are mentioned above), as well as those relating to financial transparency, and thus allowed private television companies to operate in a hybrid legal situation. The failure to announce the criteria based upon which the government granted authorization to only four private television channels as foreign television channels in Algeria is also one of the factors that confirms the logic of clientelism that frames the Algerian media landscape.

On the economic level, the financial situation of media companies has become fragile and more difficult in the absence of a clear and transparent national policy, which has forced some broadcasters such as *KBC Television*, as well as dozens of newspapers, such as *La Tribune*, to declare bankruptcy. The newspaper crisis has been amplified by its turbulent relationship with printing companies, which is not based strictly on commercial interests but is also subject to political considerations. It is difficult to ascertain the size of the debts of private newspapers owed to state printing companies. The Ministry of Communication intentionally pays no attention to some oligarchs' newspapers that have set up television channels without paying their debts, such as *El-Adjwa*, *El-Nahar*, and *El-Chourouk*, whose debts alone amounted to about USD 5,000,000 (Djaafer, 2017).

The Algerian authorities use printing houses to exert pressure on refractory newspapers in several ways. For instance, they may reduce the number of copies printed temporarily or permanently suspend printing if a company fails to pay their debts, as was the case with *La Nation* in 1997 and *Algeria News* in 2014. In addition, the state still has a monopoly on the advertising market, and its revenues are distributed to newspapers outside market logic and not in keeping with the requirements of public service and freedom of expression.

For more than a decade, publicity has not been used to defend the directions of the ruling power as originally intended but has deviated from its economic and political role. Its proceeds have been turned into rents shared by those who have the power to distribute those without

control or accountability. In this way, advertising—the key financier of the media—has become an obstacle to media pluralism.

On the professional level, the historical context in which the Algerian media were formed and developed has pushed the media to play a propaganda role. It has led them to violate their professional and ethical commitment by frequently publishing anonymous news without justification, resorting to slander and insulting others, and preventing the legally recognized right of reply. These practices have been reinforced by the predominance of the commercial character in the activities of many private media companies that have violated journalists' professional rights and taken advantage of their deteriorating social conditions and professional instability. They have also benefited from their failure to organize themselves in order to issue a code of ethics and to hold their activities accountable to the rules.

## Outlook

As in many countries, the Algerian press is in a major state of decline. For example, the largest Arabic language newspaper *El-Khabar* dropped from 1,200,000 copies per day in 2000 to 200,000 copies in 2017. The French-language newspaper *El-Watan* also experienced a decline from 160,000 copies per day in 2012 to 90,000 copies in 2017. The future of Algeria's press will be dominated by online newspapers whose increased demand has resulted from the development of basic technological infrastructure. This has required the state to develop a national policy that will assist the media in their necessary transition to the digital environment and help them to establish their economic strategy.

The increasing number of Algerians using the Internet and social networks, as well as the establishment of 15 web radio sites and ten web television sites, have prompted the state to monopolize radio and television broadcasting, exercise censorship over media content, shut down newspapers and television channels, prevent new radio stations and television channels from broadcasting from Algeria, and implement other practices that restrict freedom of expression. However, new developments might lie ahead; when Ammar Belhimer took office as Minister of Communication and spokesman of the government on 13

January 2020, he promised to hold workshops and engage in dialogue with journalists before launching a media reform.

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