

Chapter 2

Media Landscape in Bangladesh, Norway and Tunisia

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For decades, researchers have compared journalism across nations, as this anthology does. In our opinion, media and journalism may have an impact on social structures and politics. But there is no doubt that, in turn, politics, political institutions and their laws, as well as the economic, cultural and social structures of a country, shape the development of the media (Hallin & Mancini 2004:297).

As a backdrop to the anthology, this chapter outlines the cultural and historical context as well as the media landscape in the countries of Bangladesh, Norway and Tunisia. Historically, media systems have been ‘rooted in the institutions of the national state, in part because of their close relationship to the political world’ (ibid:13). While it is not possible to identify all causes and effects in a short text, such as this chapter, patterns and a basic understanding of the three countries can be imparted.

A table outlining the major characteristics is presented below (Table 1).

Table 1. Some characteristics of Bangladesh, Norway and Tunisia

	Bangladesh	Norway	Tunisia
Country facts			
Country size (sq km) ¹	148,460	323,802	163,610
Population (millions of inhabitants) ²	164,8	5,3	11,5
Population density (no inhabitants/sq km)	1,110	16	70
GDP per capita 2016 (current US\$) ³	1,359	70,812	3,689
Media facts			
Share of Internet users (per cent) ⁴	41	100	51
Number of newspapers ⁵	2,320	227	44
Number of online news sites ⁶	1,781	268	180
Number of radio channels (local/national) ⁷	72	300	45
Number of television channels (local/national) ⁸	43	98	13
Public service	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of organized journalists ⁹	17,300	8,400	1,400

Comment: Concerning radio stations, not all stations in the table are on the air, but the table shows the total of radio licenses.

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Bangladesh

Surrounded by India on most of its three sides, with a small common border with Myanmar, Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. Being a low-lying riverine land, Bangladesh is traversed by the many branches and tributaries of the Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers.

In 1947, India was politically divided into two countries, India and Pakistan. Pakistan was composed of two wings, one eastern and one western, with a distance of about 1500 km between them. The eastern wing, with a Muslim majority and a multicultural background, was known as East Pakistan.

Despite winning a majority of seats in the Pakistani election of 1947, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman – leader of the political party the Awami League – was not allowed into power. Concerning the political-historical background, Barman, Rahman and Siddiqui write:

For nearly a quarter century, East Pakistan faced discrimination on several fronts, creating the conditions in which the astute and charismatic Sheikh Mujibur Rahman scored his decisive electoral victory. The struggle for independence of Bangladesh thus began (Barman, Rahman & Siddiqui 2002:13).

On 26 March 1971, the day after a brutal crackdown, Bangladesh declared itself independent. During the liberation war that followed, an estimated three million Bangladeshis were killed, and 10 million people had to take refuge in India.

The ‘father of the nation’, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was assassinated by military officers in a coup on 15 August 1975, and the following 15 years were troubled, with a series of military coups and near-coups.

However, in 1990, after many years of political turmoil and conflict, civilian discontent forced the military to step down from power, and the journey towards democracy began. Since the early 1990s, there have been two main competitors for political power: the Bangladesh National Party and the Awami League.

During 2012 and 2013, there was, once again, widespread political unrest that led to huge property damage, economic losses and the death of hundreds of people in the country.

The 10th general election took place in January 2014 and was won by Sheikh Hasina of the Awami League, though the election was boycotted by the other major political party, the Bangladesh National Party.

The Constitution

Through article 39, the Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees freedom of thought and conscience and the right of every citizen to freedom of speech and expression. Thus, freedom of the press is guaranteed by law, although, in practice, it is a freedom with limits: the freedom of the press is subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interests of the security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states,

public order, decency or morality or, in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence (Constitution of Bangladesh 2011).

Media history

Rangpur Bartaboho, the first Bangladeshi newspaper, started in the late 1840s and was published in Rangpur, East Bengal; the first English weekly, Dhaka News, appeared roughly a decade later, in 1856.

Because of political activism and national resurgence, there was a significant growth of the print medium during the first half of the twentieth century. In 1921, Jyoti, the first daily newspaper, was published in Chittagong, East Bengal. Examples of other newspapers that appeared during these years are Paigam, Zindegi and the Daily Azad.

In the early 1950s, the Bangla-speaking population – led by ‘The Language Movement’ – began to more persistently claim that Bangla should be recognized as a state language, and several students and political activists were killed during protests at the campus of Dhaka University on 21 February 1952.

Bangla language newspapers, such as the Azad and the Dainik Sangbad, marked the killings with evocative articles, ignoring the threats and risks posed by the Pakistani occupation forces. Every newspaper of then East Pakistan carried the same editorial, condemning the killings and criticizing the Pakistani government for its brutal murder of innocents (Yusuf 2015).

Before 1971, roughly 30 dailies and 109 weeklies and three bi-weeklies were published in the territory of Bangladesh. During the Liberation War, the Pakistan army burnt down three leading newspapers from Dhaka – Dainik Ittefaq, The People and Sangbad.

Yusuf states that a research book by Hasina Ahmed recounts that, ‘with the help of freedom fighters, journalists brought out the latest information about the war and made public unity against Pakistani militants. At the time, almost 65 newspapers were published’ (ibid.).

After the liberation, the new government took over the management of some of the newspapers, and in June 1975, the government banned the publication of all newspapers, except for four dailies: Dainik Ittefaq, Dainik Bangla, Bangladesh Observer and Bangladesh Times (Rahman & Ahmed 2015).

After the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the ‘father of the nation’, many newspapers that had been banned started to reappear. However, between 1982 and 1989, the newspapers were kept under strict control, and around 50 newspapers and periodicals were closed down for having published materials critical of the government. During these years, there were instructions on what should or should not be published.

A huge number of newspapers and periodicals representing different opinions and policies were published during the 1990s, and all the major ones were from the capital Dhaka.

Bangladesh Television (BTV) and Bangladesh Betar (Radio Bangladesh) operate under government ownership and control. Although BTV provides the audience with public service information, it is also known to serve the purposes of the incumbent government and therefore refrains from telecasting news and views that criticize the party in power.

Media regulations

Bangladesh struggles for stable press freedom and sustainable democracy, and freedom of expression is indirectly restrained through a couple of restrictive laws. Some of them are: The Penal Code 1860, The Code of Criminal Procedure 1898, the Official Secrets Act 1923, Printing Presses and Publications Act 1973, Press Council Act 1974, Law of Defamation, The Newspapers (Annulment of Declaration) Ordinance 1975, ICT Act 2006 (amended in 2013), Advertisement Distribution Policy 1976 & 1987, and Oath of Secrecy.

In the past, the Special Powers Act was frequently used to ban newspapers and to detain journalists in the country; the act allowed detention of up to 90 days without trial. Journalists could be arrested for stories that were critical of government officials or policies, or they could be charged with contempt of court. To eliminate the provisions that curbed the freedom of the press in the country, some amendments were brought out in the 'Printing Press and Publications Act'.

The government has made legislative changes, such as with the Right to Information Act, 2009, which contains provisions for ensuring the free flow of information and people's right to information. If any citizen wants to know about the activities, planning and services of any government and non-government organization, office, department, division and ministry, then he/she can get the requested information within a defined time on payment of a nominal fee that covers the reproduction. Through this law, not only can the citizens get information, but there is also the opportunity to establish accountability and transparency in the administration.

Another dimension of the press situation in Bangladesh is marked by Islamist attacks on journalists. Twelve journalists have been murdered in connection with their work since 1992, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ 2013). Since 2013, there has been an increase in attacks on a number of secularist and so-called atheist writers, bloggers and publishers in Bangladesh. Foreigners and religious minorities, such as Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and Shias, have also been targeted. Attacks of this kind have killed more than 20 people since 2013, and they are believed to be the work of Islamic extremists in Bangladesh (BBC 2016).

Another example of restrictions is the arrest of an editor and the closing down of two television stations. The editors of 15 newspapers demanded the unconditional release of Amar Desh's acting editor, Mahmudur Rahman. The statement also called for the removal of the ban on three media outlets. The minister of information, Hasanul Haq Inu, stated that Mahmudur Rahman was arrested on allegations of lying, hack-

ing and instigating religious fanaticism. Furthermore, he said that the two television stations had broadcasted misleading information and news (Dhaka Tribune 2013).

To amend the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act, legislation covering online crimes – including defamation and blasphemy – was adopted in 2013. Concerning the new legislation, Article 57 is much criticized, since it enables abuse and harassment of journalists and people using social media.

Moreover, the right of law enforcement agencies to arrest and indefinitely detain a suspect without bail was upheld, and the law gives officials unlimited powers during the investigatory period. Besides, ‘penalties for online offences are set at between 7 and 14 years in prison, regardless of whether the crime is related to defamation or national security’ (Freedom House 2017).

Press ethics

The Press Council of Bangladesh, in operation since 1974, developed a set of codes of conduct in 1993. In 2002, they were amended specifically for the newspapers, news agencies and journalists of Bangladesh (Press Council of Bangladesh 2017). The journalist community did not approve these codes, and journalists do not comply with them. Instead, every media organization abides by its own set of internal codes. Many outlets do not have written codes but rely on traditional experience, house policies and fair practice, which makes them complacent.

Norway

Norway is a monarchy and a democracy situated way up in the north of Europe. For most of the time since 1935, the social democratic Labour party has governed the country.

From the Middle Ages onwards, Norway has been in a union with Denmark. The autocratic king ruled from Copenhagen, and the capital was the political, economic and cultural centre of Denmark-Norway.

After the British raid on Copenhagen in 1807, as part of the Napoleonic Wars, Denmark-Norway joined Napoleon’s side. Already in July 1812, the Tsar of Russia had promised Norway to Sweden (Høyer 1995:142), and after the war, Denmark had to cede Norway to Sweden.

However, the Norwegians defied the decision, and elections for a Constitutional Assembly were held in February 1814. Some months later, on 17 May, the Constitution was approved. Despite this, in October of the same year, Norway was forced into a union with Sweden – this union lasted until 1905.

Industrialization started in the last decades before the union with Sweden was dissolved and then jumped ahead (Furre 1972:13f). In the late 1960s, drilling for oil in the North Sea took place, and since the 1970s, Norway has been an oil and a gas nation.

A radical Constitution

Article 100 of the 1814 Constitution said there should be freedom of printing, later changed to freedom of expression. Anyone has the right to speak frankly and gain access to documents of the state and the communities, as well as a right to follow court sessions and debate in democratically elected bodies. The authorities are responsible for creating ‘conditions that facilitate open and enlightened public discourse’ (Stortinget 2012).

Accordingly, the main goals of the media, in political terms, are to secure freedom of expression, public and legal security and a living democracy (Kulturdepartementet 2010). Furthermore, there is a goal to have diversity of media – in a geographical sense and in terms of ideological value and journalistic content (ibid).

In 1814, the Norwegian Constitution was radical, giving the right to vote to around 40 per cent of the male population over the age of 25. Since 1898, all adult men have had the right to vote, and in 1913, women got the right to vote (Aftenposten 2013).

Media history

In 1814, Norway had only seven newspapers; just over a century later, there were 231 newspapers (Høyer 1995), many of them local. The newspapers have played a significant role in building a Norwegian culture and in the journey towards independence.

Much later, starting slowly in the 1960s and accelerating in the 1980s, the newspapers broke their ties to the political parties, and Norwegian journalism became more professionalized. In media researcher Sigurd Høst’s opinion, Norway’s particular tradition of local newspapers is due to its topography, characterized by fjords and mountains and by the fact that it is a small country with many small communes that possess great and important municipal responsibilities (Høst 2003:93ff). State support for the media is also important (Høst 2003).

In the beginning of the 1990s, the Norwegians read the largest number of newspapers in the world (Høst 2003). Today, eight out of 10 Norwegians over the age of 12 read news every day from Norwegian media outlets – online¹⁰, on paper or on their phones (Mediebedriftene 2016).

Local and national competition in the newspaper market is seen as a stronghold for democracy, as is the public service channel Norwegian Broadcasting Company (NRK) and its competition with the commercial public service broadcasting TV2, as well as other commercial channels. Before 1981, NRK had a monopoly, and the channel is still funded by licence. Two propositions are up for debate in Stortinget about finding alternative ways of funding NRK and TV2 (Kulturdepartementet 2016a, 2016b).

Due to convergence, more and more Norwegians are streaming on portable units instead of watching linear television. In addition to this, newspapers are encroaching on traditional TV – videos are important to the online newspapers, and the newspaper Verdens Gang has its own TV channel.

Still, NRK's three channels have more than 40 per cent of television viewers. On radio, NRK's channels dominate the market (NRK 2016), even though there are several private, national and regional radio stations and 238 local radio stations (Medienorge 2016).

Regulating the media

Although heavily debated, direct financial media support for newspapers was introduced in 1969, and in 2016, 151 newspapers received a production subsidy (Medietilsynet 2016a).

In 2016, Stortinget decided that not only newspapers but also all news media on paper, computers, mobile units, radio and TV should be exempt from VAT¹¹. Due to global competition – technological developments that have altered media use and reduced income and the downsizing of editorial staff – there are concerns today about the plurality of the media as well as journalism's continued influence on the public debate (Kulturdepartementet 2017). Hence, on 7 March 2017, a committee presented suggestions on changes to media support. Direct support will continue but with major alterations (ibid:3.1.4).

The law 'Act relating to transparency of media ownership' enables openness on who the media owners are (Medietilsynet 2016b). Different laws refer to the editor's rights and responsibilities, particularly a law from 2009 about editorial freedom. This law says that the owner cannot instruct or overrule the editor in editorial matters (Kulturdepartementet 2008). The editors themselves have made a declaration on the 'Rights and Duties of the Editor' where it is stated that the...

... editor is expected to share the fundamental views and aims of his/her publication. But within this framework the editor is entitled to a free and independent leadership of the editorial department and editorial work and full freedom to shape the opinions of the paper even if they in single matters are not shared by the publisher or the board (Norsk Redaktørforening 2004).

A committee has looked into the regulations on media responsibility, how regulation could be platform neutral and if the different laws could be unified in one media regulation law. While the majority did not favour a new law (Kulturdepartementet 2011), the opposition at Stortinget and the media organizations are still asking for an exposition on editorial responsibility, which includes the question of user-generated content (Johansen 2016).

In 1933, the author Arnulf Øverland was acquitted of blasphemy after having written an essay describing Christianity as the 'tenth plague'¹². Since then, Article 142 of the Penal Code, the blasphemy article, has been a sleeping article.

The debate, however, was revived in 1993, when the Norwegian publisher of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*¹³ was shot in his garden, and it flared up again with the Mohammed cartoons in 2005–2006¹⁴. Many Norwegians think, like Francis Sejersted, that freedom of speech must be used for protection and that one has a kind of

obligation to test its limits (Sejersted 1999). Daily speech does not need freedom of expression; we are in need of the right to freedom of expression for exceptional and even horrible and offending speech.

On 5 May 2015, Stortinget voted to revoke the blasphemy article. In the debate, the Minister of Justice said that, although the blasphemy article should be repealed, it is still forbidden to make hateful and discriminating expressions (Stortinget 2015).

Further, while two Norwegian laws give the news media the right to keep their sources anonymous, the court can order the editorial staff to disclose the name of a source. However, Norwegian editors and journalists do not state their sources, even if the court requires them to do so.¹⁵ Still, the Union of Norwegian Journalists, Norsk Journalistlag (NJ), works to enforce and broaden the protection of sources, with a right to keep silent towards any authorities about anonymous sources, and a ban on any investigation (NJ 2015).

Press ethics

Independence and critical journalism are important concepts for Norwegian journalism, as they are closely linked to journalists' understanding of the role of the press in society. The first section of the Code of Ethics connects journalism to freedom of expression and press freedom. Here, free and independent news media are seen as 'among the most important institutions in a democratic society' (Norsk Presseforbund 2015). In some ways, the Code of Ethics goes further than legal laws. That is the case, for instance, when it comes to the protection of sources.¹⁶

The Code of Ethics is part of a self-regulating system organized by the Norwegian Press Association (NP), to which all media organizations belong. The Norwegian Press Association also organizes the Press Complaints Commission, which deals with complaints about the media's content and conduct. The Press Complaints Commission has seven members – four from the press and three from the public. If it finds that a media outlet has published a story that is not in compliance with the Code of Ethics, the media outlet has to publish the Commission's critical statement for the public to see.

Tunisia

Tunisia is a small north-African country that is known to be the only full democracy in the Arab World (Bernas 2016), and its form of government is regarded as a unitary semi-presidential representative democracy (Gaddes 2014). Tunisia is a melting pot, where 'several elements mix to give birth to an original union which looks like all its components but doesn't totally identify with any of them' (Boulares 2012:15).

Tunisia was first granted a Constitution under the Ottoman¹⁷ reformists in 1861, even though it was not applied according to the spirit of the promulgators (Boulares 2012:470). Twenty years later, Tunisia was under French occupation (1881–1956).

The independence in March 1956 brought a new political system, established by Habib Bourguiba¹⁸ and based on one political party (ibid). The Bourguiba-era lasted until 7 November 1987, when his Prime Minister Ben Ali¹⁹ took power.

The lack of freedom, combined with ‘the economic development model failure led to the first uprisings in 2008’ (Ben Hamouda 2016:101) and to the revolution of December 2010/January 2011.

The new Constitution

The new Constitution was approved on 27 January 2014. It stresses, in Article 31, the freedom of speech, of the press, and of opinion, and says that there is no censorship on these rights (Constitution of Tunisia 2014).

In order to avoid the return of a dictatorship, the Constitution prescribes a mixture of parliamentary and presidential rule. The Parliament, with 217 members, has the legislative power, and the majority party chooses the Prime Minister – in the Constitution called ‘the President of the government’.

However, the Parliament has the mission to control the government, and the executive power is shared between the President of the government and the President of the republic (Gaddes 2014). Moreover, the constitution created five independent constitutional instances, among them the instance regulating the broadcast media.

Media history

In 1860, the first Tunisian newspaper, *Erraied Ettounsi* (the Tunisian Leader) was founded. It became, decades later, the Official Gazette of the Republic of Tunisia (Chelbi 1986:15).

Many of the newspapers that appeared at the end of the nineteenth century were French speaking and stood by the settlers, while some of them were Arabic-speaking newspapers. Among the latter group, the most important newspapers were created by Tunisian nationalists in order to fight against the occupation (Boulares 2012:522).

After 14 January 2011, more than one hundred political parties were created, many related to figures who were not allowed to have any kind of political activity during the regime of Ben Ali. This diverse political scene, however, had to cope with an old media scene inherited from the propaganda system – especially public media had to make a quick change from serving the government and the party in power to serving the public and its right to information. Consequently, Tunisian media coverage of the election to the Constituent National Assembly was, for the first time, quite neutral and not clearly biased.

Then, during the parliamentary and presidential elections of 2014, the media coverage contributed largely to polarize the attention between two political parties, the Islamist party *Ennahdha* and its opponent at that time, *Nidaa Tounes* (HAICA 2014).

After the 14 January 2011 revolution, many media outlets were founded, but the crisis among the printed press did hurt them badly, and more than 170 newspapers

have now closed (Businessnews 2016). The media in Tunisia is mainly privately owned, but some TV channels, radio stations, newspapers and news agencies are owned by the state. All of them are free to deal with any kind of issue.

Regulating the media

In 1975, under President Bourguiba, all laws linked to the media were gathered in one text, the Press Code, with restrictions to press freedom: ‘The most significant of these were protecting internal and external state security, preserving public order and misdemeanours such as defamation and slander committed against persons and against heads of state and foreign diplomats’ (INRIC 2012:12). This policy of tightly controlling the media was reinforced under Ben Ali’s regime (LTDH 2003:7).

Two months after the uprising, the INRIC was created to ‘present its suggestions in regard to reforming the media and communication sector, all the while taking into consideration the international standards’ (Decree N10/2011).

On 2 November 2011, two main laws were issued in order to regulate the media: The Decree law 115 and the Decree law 116. In its first article, Decree law 115 guarantees press freedom and freedom of expression, according to international conventions on civic and political rights. Moreover, article 11 pledges the protection of sources, unless the motive of the breach is linked to state security and national defense (Decree law 115).

The same spirit is found in Decree law 116, which relates to broadcast freedom. In Article 3 of this law, it is stated that the freedom of broadcast communication is guaranteed and that each citizen has the right to information and broadcast communication (Decree law 116).

Article 69 of Decree law 115 declares that, in cases of defamation and hate speech against a category of people of a certain race, religion or origin, the public prosecution is empowered to sue the author (Decree law 115). The Decree laws 115 and 116 will be changed, and the debate between the NGOs and the government is about finding the appropriate mechanisms to reinforce the independence of the media.

In 2016, a new law on access to information was issued, guaranteeing everyone the right to access information (JORT 2016:26).

Still, restrictive post-revolution laws are at play, but they are now being removed (read more in Chapter 8).

Press ethics

Since 1983, the journalists have traditionally had their code of ethics printed on the backs of their membership cards for the journalists’ union, SNJT (Zran 2009:93). Called the Code of Honor, the code prescribes the rights and duties of the journalists. Among these principles are the responsibilities of ‘seeking the truth’ and ‘defense of press freedom’ (ibid:94).

However, on 22 April 2017 – after a three-year-long process – the Press Council was officially launched. Its intention is to promote quality journalism and protect press freedom (TAP 2017). This is the first time ever that the print media in Tunisia have tried some kind of self-regulation in order to respect professional standards and ethics (El Bour 2016:338).

Conclusion

Despite the fact that Bangladesh, Norway and Tunisia have very different historical and political backgrounds, freedom of speech and press freedom are now guaranteed by the Constitution of all three countries.

However, for Bangladesh and Tunisia – both countries with comparatively newly settled democratic systems – the difficulties and challenges are numerous. As for Norway, stability and democratic observance are words that describe the situation for press freedom, although that is not to be taken for granted in a rapidly changing media environment and a global world.

For all three countries, changes in the media domain will remain an ongoing process for many reasons – especially because of technological evolution and social and political developments.

Notes

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 10. The first Norwegian online newspaper was established in 1995, and Norway is one of the most digitally sophisticated markets in Europe (Ottosen & Krumsvik 2012).
 11. As opposed to ordinary VAT, which is 25 per cent.
 12. Arnulf Øverland was a Norwegian poet (1889-1968) known for writing against violence, oppression and the German occupation of Norway 1940-1945. His essay about Christianity as the tenth plague refers to the plagues in the Bible.
 13. Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa on 14 February 1989 against the author Salman Rushdie and the publishers of *The Satanic Verses* (Austenå 2011:26, 33).
 14. The Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten published 12 drawings, among them drawings of the prophet Muhammed, on 30 September 2005.
 15. An example of this is the fact that no editor or journalist has been sentenced to jail since 1952, when an editor spent two weeks in prison because he refused to name his source (Lindahl 2009).
 16. The Code of Ethics states that the source must be identified for the public, unless this conflicts with source protection or consideration for a third party (Norsk Presseforbund 2015).
 17. 'The Ottomans' refers to the Ottoman Empire (1299-1922), founded at the end of the thirteenth century by Osman I in Anatolia, Turkey (Shaw & Yapp 2016).
 18. Habib Bourguiba was the first President of the Republic of Tunisia, 1956–1987. The second Constitution was approved in 1959 (Chouikha & Gobe 2015).
 19. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, second President of Tunisia (1987-2011). The revolution of 17 December 2010 – 14 January 2011 ended Ben Ali's regime, and he fled the country on 14 January 2011.

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