

Policy Briefing

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Fragile states: the role of media and communication

James Deane

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Front cover

The media is being transformed in most fragile states. Here, a rebel soldier, armed with a Kalashnikov rifle, listens to a radio near the village of Ouandago in the Central African Republic ahead of peace talks in 2009.

SVEN TORFINN/
PANOS PICTURES

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Left Fragile states are often fractured states, divided along religious, political, ethnic or other factional fault lines. In this image from Kathmandu, protestors support a strike called by the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (UCPN) to remove the ruling government.

Executive summary

Fragile states are an increasing priority for international diplomatic and development attention. The media – defined here as both traditional and digital media – is being transformed in most fragile states. Such transformations are unleashing unprecedented democratic energy, with profound political and social consequences.

Fragile states are often fractured states, divided along religious, political, ethnic or other factional fault lines. For all the fresh potential they offer citizens to hold government to account, new media landscapes are also increasingly fractured – and are often fragmenting along the same fault lines that divide society. Co-option of the media by narrow factional interests appears to be growing.

Successful political settlements in fractured fragile states depend on societies developing a stronger sense of shared identity. In the past, critics of support to media in fragile states have argued that a free and diverse media can foster division, reinforce factional identities and undermine state stability. The prospects of more open, free and vibrant media environments have prompted wariness in the past among those working to support state stability where government and governance is sometimes weak.

This briefing examines how current media trends are affecting state and societal fragility, both positively and negatively. It argues that development actors should

embrace the reality and opportunities provided by changed media and communication environments and that the role of a free and plural media should be prioritised rather than – as seems the case at present – marginalised in much fragile states policy.

It argues that shared identity and sustainable political settlements will be best enabled by national and local dialogue. Such dialogue is dependent on a free media that is independent of undue factional or governmental control. Efforts to shut down the media, even if feasible, risk doing more harm than good in fragile states as elsewhere. Support to the media in fragile states designed to minimise the risk of division and maximise the opportunities for dialogue should feature more prominently in assistance to such states.

The briefing is designed principally for policy-makers working to support development in fragile states. It draws on and summarises some of the conclusions drawn from earlier policy briefings published by BBC Media Action on the role of the media and communication in four fragile states – Afghanistan, Iraq, Kenya and Somalia. The central section (pages 14–28) provides a summary of each of these briefings. The rest of the document seeks to draw some insights and conclusions from this and other BBC Media Action research and experience relevant to fragile states.

“Efforts to shut down the media, even if feasible, risk doing more harm than good.”

INTRODUCTION

Why media matters in fragile states

Definitions of “fragile states” vary but they are, as the term implies, states where it takes little for them to fall apart. These are countries where government and governance is weak, where the rule of law does not run across the country and where there is tension and conflict in society. According to The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), “A fragile region or state has weak capacity to carry out basic governance functions, and lacks the ability to develop mutually constructive relations with society. Fragile states are also more vulnerable to internal or external shocks such as economic crises or natural disasters.”¹

This briefing focuses on fragile states that are also “fractured states”. These are states where the existence of different politics, religions or ethnicities makes relationships between communities difficult, and where the building of shared identity can be especially challenging.

There is a great deal more media now in fragile states than there was a decade ago (for the purposes of this briefing, “media” encompasses all means of information and communication available to

people, including mobile and internet technologies). Over the past decade broadcast and print media outlets have generally increased in fragile states, mobile telephony has become increasingly ubiquitous and social media more widespread. This briefing highlights the positive, sometimes democratically transformative, effect that new media and communication environments and renewed freedom of expression can have in fragile states. It also

highlights some of the challenges posed when, as is also increasingly the case in some countries, media fractures along religious, sectarian or other factional lines.

Fragile states matter. With less than two years to go, no low-income fragile state has yet achieved any of the Millennium Development Goals. The percentage of people classed as extremely poor who live in fragile states has doubled from 20% to 40% and is expected to exceed 50% by 2015.² Fragile states tend to be conflict-affected states and about 70% of them have been in conflict since 1989.³ Such states are considered drivers of international insecurity and their perception as a breeding ground for international radicalisation and

terrorism has been a central factor in making them a greater development priority.

The UK Department for International Development (DFID) has made support to fragile states a major priority for some years,⁴ arguing that “we will not achieve the Millennium Development Goals or eliminate global poverty if the international community does not address conflict and fragility more effectively”.⁵ So too has the United States of America⁶ and many other bilateral donors. The European Union now spends half of its development budget in fragile states⁷ and around 30% of all global development aid is devoted to them.⁸ In 2011, the international development community, convened by OECD, agreed a landmark New Deal on Fragile States to prioritise support to these countries, together with a set of principles to underpin that support.⁹

The main conclusion of this briefing is that media and communication increasingly matter in fragile states. They matter in different ways in different countries, but the growth and fragmentation of the media – and the resulting increase in access to information and communication – are having increased impact on many levels. Media and communication sectors sometimes create the conditions for, and sometimes undermine the chances of, sustainable political settlements. They are having profound social impact, sometimes intensifying the politics of identity and at other times transcending such politics. They are in part shaping, but are more often shaped by, the fragile economics of these states. This briefing argues that these effects are not well-researched and the role of the media rarely features substantively in policy considerations focused on support to fragile states.

Part 1 examines what makes states fragile and argues that conventional definitions of fragility rarely reflect the fractured character of many fragile states.

Part 2 looks at some of the main media and communication factors affecting the prospects for sustainable political settlements in fragile states.

Part 3 examines some of the main academic and policy debates that have characterised discussion around media and fragile states.

Part 4 provides some overarching insights derived from the country case studies that form the spine of this briefing.

Part 5 asks how, and under what conditions, the media might reduce or increase state fragility. It focuses especially on whether new media environments are

“We will not achieve the Millennium Development Goals or eliminate global poverty if the international community does not address conflict and fragility more effectively.”

DFID

enabling shared identities to emerge in fragile states. It also considers the role of public service broadcasting in fragile states.

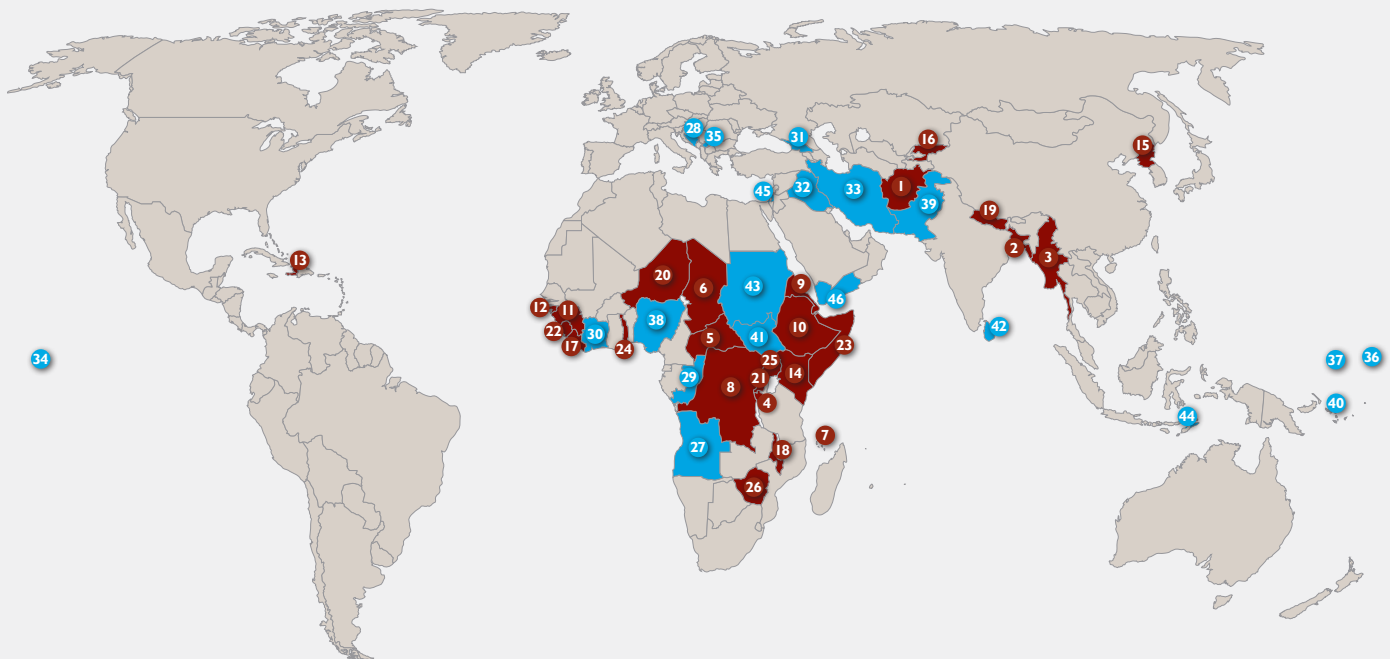
Part 6 examines how the role of the media is currently prioritised within international development strategies, and especially within policy discussions around fragile states. It suggests that much needs to change if such issues are to be properly addressed in the future.

Part 7 concludes and offers recommendations.

The central section of the briefing provides case studies on the role and impact of the media in four fragile states – Afghanistan, Iraq, Kenya and Somalia – asking whether the media has, or is likely to, drive greater political polarisation and fracturing or have more positive effects. These are summarised accounts of earlier policy briefings published by BBC Media Action.

Which states are fragile?

The OECD lists the following states as fragile.



Low-income fragile states

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 1 Afghanistan | 14 Kenya |
| 2 Bangladesh | 15 Democratic People's Republic of Korea |
| 3 Burma/Myanmar | 16 Kyrgyz Republic |
| 4 Burundi | 17 Liberia |
| 5 Central African Republic | 18 Malawi |
| 6 Chad | 19 Nepal |
| 7 Comoros | 20 Niger |
| 8 Democratic Republic of Congo | 21 Rwanda |
| 9 Eritrea | 22 Sierra Leone |
| 10 Ethiopia | 23 Somalia |
| 11 Guinea | 24 Togo |
| 12 Guinea-Bissau | 25 Uganda |
| 13 Haiti | 26 Zimbabwe |

Middle-income fragile states

- | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 27 Angola | 41 South Sudan |
| 28 Bosnia and Herzegovina | 42 Sri Lanka |
| 29 Republic of the Congo | 43 Sudan |
| 30 Côte d'Ivoire | 44 Timor-Leste |
| 31 Georgia | 45 West Bank and Gaza |
| 32 Iraq | 46 Republic of Yemen ¹⁰ |
| 33 Islamic Republic of Iran | |
| 34 Kiribati | |
| 35 Kosovo | |
| 36 Marshall Islands | |
| 37 Federal States of Micronesia | |
| 38 Nigeria | |
| 39 Pakistan | |
| 40 Solomon Islands | |

Right A view of a destroyed building in Mogadishu, Somalia. Rebuilding the country will depend on people, and not just elites, overcoming their differences.



SVEN TORFINN / PANOS PICTURES

PART I

What makes states fragile?

“The fundamental mistake of our approach to state-building has been to forget that well-functioning states are built not just on shared interests but on shared identity.”

PAUL COLLIER

The establishment of security, the rule of law and the institutions that enable the state to function and provide services to its citizens should be a core focus of policy support to fragile states. However, as Professor Paul Collier argued in his book, *Wars, Guns and Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places*, “The fundamental mistake of our approach to state-building has been to forget that well-functioning states are built not just on shared interests but on shared identity.”¹¹

Most fragile states are fractured states – states where often deep fault lines divide communities along ethnic, religious, political or other factional lines. Whether because of scarce resources, corruption, inequality or artificial colonial boundaries that ignore socio-political, geographic or economic conditions, these societies are both politically fragmented and often dislocated from – and ambivalent towards – the state. Conflict, or the threat of conflict, is high.¹²

This briefing focuses mostly on fractured fragile states where the politics of identity is played out, and often fuelled by, where and how people get their information, what shapes their opinion and loyalty and how they find views like their own reflected in the public domain.

Identity politics in such states can take myriad forms. In Somalia, an ethnically homogeneous country, the

country’s fracturing is in part driven by the complex clan system, in part by extremist religion and in part by more traditional political factionalism. Kenya is an ethnically fractured country, whose fragility was most dramatically illustrated around the violent 2007–08 elections. In Afghanistan, ethnic fault lines are compounded by religious and associated political divides, as well as by resistance to international intervention. In Iraq, ethnicity and sectarianism have come to define the power struggle hindering the rebuilding of a stable and functioning state.

The politics of identity in these states may be intensified by their demographics. Fragile states have among the youngest populations and highest fertility rates in the world.¹³ The countries covered by this briefing – Afghanistan, Kenya, Iraq and Somalia – all feature in the 20 states with the highest fertility rates. So too do the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Yemen and several other fractured fragile states. In sub-Saharan Africa, over 70% of the population is aged below 30.¹⁴ More than half of Afghanistan’s population is under the age of 18.¹⁵

The next section will argue that as the media fragments in fractured states, many current media and communication trends are reinforcing and intensifying separate identities rather than encouraging the development of shared identity. However, this briefing highlights the fact that these trends have positive as well as worrying implications. It also argues that encouraging shared identity is something that will need to be driven by people, not just by elites, and that the role of the media will be critical to that process.

PART 2

Is the media increasing or reducing fragility?

Media and communication systems in most fragile states are expanding rapidly. This story of growth applies to states that have suddenly liberalised (such as Iraq and Afghanistan), those typified by state failure or ongoing conflict (such as Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo and Nepal), and those balanced between stability and fragility (such as Kenya, Nigeria and Uganda).

From the ebullient 24-hour news channels of Pakistan to the one-party broadcast sterility of Eritrea, and from the bustling commercial media and technology dynamism of Kenya to the post-conflict UN radio stations of the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan and the booming telecommunication penetration of Bangladesh, media and communication environments in fragile states are as varied as the states themselves. Drawing common trends across such states can be dangerous but four trends can be said to apply to the media in most fragile states.

The first notable media trend in fragile states is the explosion in people's access to information and their capacity to communicate and express themselves. Access to traditional broadcast media has been booming for years, typified by the accelerating access to satellite TV and other forms of independent media since the 1990s.¹⁶ Mobile phone use has mushroomed in nearly all fragile states, growing almost six-fold in five years – from 7% of the population in 2005 to 40% in 2010, according to the OECD.¹⁷ In some countries such as Burma and Somalia, mobile phone access remains relatively low but the expectation is that access will grow substantially in most fragile states. By 2025, “there could be near-universal mobile phone coverage”, according to a report from the Overseas Development Institute.¹⁸ And while access to the internet is still limited in many parts of the developing world, it is only likely to increase as the cost of technical equipment declines.¹⁹ Development policy has never before confronted the situation of an almost universally connected world.

Hand in hand with increased access has been the appropriation of the media by ordinary citizens, particularly through social media. These new technologies have had transformative effects because citizens have occupied the online space and made it their own. The means of communication – traditionally in the hands of the state or a relatively small number

of commercial and other actors – is being diffused and democratised, often over less than a decade. In most fragile states, which often have a very limited history of citizens being able to organise themselves politically, this capacity to communicate has influenced a dramatic and rapid shift in the capacity of citizens with common interests or identities to forge new networks and organise collectively.

A third media trend in fragile states is the fragmentation of media environments. Access to media and communication has increased not just because of technological innovation, but because the sheer number of media organisations in most fragile states has mushroomed. After 1989, the near-monopoly that governments held over the media broke down in all but a few of the most repressive regimes. Driven by journalistic energy, popular demand for new forms of information and entertainment, as well as the liberalisation of rules governing commercial investment, privately owned – and in some cases community media – flourished in many parts of the developing world. Some states, such as Ethiopia, Rwanda, Zimbabwe and, until recently, Burma have resisted this trend, keeping a tight rein on the number of media outlets allowed to broadcast. But in states as diverse as Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Kenya, the number of media organisations has boomed since the turn of the millennium. In Afghanistan, for example, TV and radio expanded by about 20% a year from 2006 onwards and by September 2010 there were over 75 terrestrial TV stations and 175 FM stations, with the broadcast spectrum now nearly saturated.²⁰

This fragmentation of media is increasingly characterised by the fracturing of media markets. Local, minority and vernacular language media has become far more common, and fractured states are often characterised by fractured media. Both commercial and political drivers have fuelled the growth of media catering for specific communities – linguistic, ethnic, religious and political. Commercial forces have opened new markets in these communities, especially when advertising markets in the majority or mainstream languages or communities have become saturated. Alongside this, technological innovation has lowered the cost of entry into media markets, including broadcast markets,

“Mobile phone use has mushroomed in nearly all fragile states, growing almost six-fold in five years.”



ADAM HINTON/PANOS PICTURES

Above Street art from Cairo depicting a videographer coming face to face with a soldier. Dramatic changes in access to media and communication helped spark the Arab Spring. Their lasting impact remains to be seen.

“Fractured media markets are also increasingly co-opted media environments.”

making it easier to start media operations focused on niche populations.

Where politics is fractured, as it is in most fragile states, political actors have strong incentives to support – and sometimes create – media outlets that enable them to reach the constituencies that comprise their support base. Particularly in fragile states, the newly independent media that emerged in the 1990s and 2000s has increasingly become a target for factional actors. In these states, where power is so often exercised through patronage and loyalty, the usefulness of being able to shape public opinion and attract attention by influencing – and if necessary controlling – the media has been increasingly realised. Media outlets have become more vulnerable to political parties and religious, ethnic or other factional actors exerting influence over or buying up the media, or starting up their own media houses. In short, fractured media markets are also increasingly co-opted media environments.

Research for a BBC Media Action policy briefing on the Afghan media, published in 2012, found that much of the dynamism and relative independence of the media in the country was the product of private investment as well as donor funding. However, it also found that “Afghanistan’s open licensing regime has also permitted politicians and religious leaders to set up their own media and many have done so over the past five or six years. They are sometimes referred to as ‘warlord’ channels because they have more restricted agendas than mainstream commercial media. In some cases, they have provoked divisive conflicts and prompted concerns that they are exacerbating an already worrying trend towards the ethnicisation of Afghan politics.”²¹

The case studies that form the central section (pages 14–19) of this briefing provide some insight into the political effects of the fragmentation and fracturing of media and communication environments. More intensive research on the implications of such fragmentation has taken place in the industrialised world, especially in the USA. Much commentary from industrialised countries

in recent years has focused on concerns that more fragmented media systems are increasing political polarisation and driving greater extremism in society.²² It argues that as people become increasingly exposed only to information and opinion with which they already agree, the resulting “echo chamber” effect drives a process of group polarisation.²³

Research on such effects in industrialised countries is not always conclusive and very little similar research has taken place in fragile states.²⁴ It is difficult to find clear research to support a conclusion that fragmentation is driving polarisation in fragile states. But given their fragmentation, 21st-century media and communication environments appear unlikely to provide the conditions best suited to nurturing the development of shared identity in fragile states.

Finally, the fourth emerging trend relates to the changing media consumption habits of young people within fragile states. Young populations are highly adept at using new communication technologies to form their own identities and communities. They may also be targeted by factional interests intent on manipulating the media and social media to recruit them to their cause.

Several of these trends were dramatically encapsulated in the 2011 Arab Spring. The decentralisation of communication was readily on display in the form of increased access to social and digital media, as was the increased availability of trusted media in the form of channels such as the BBC and Al Jazeera available via satellite across the Arab world.²⁵ The enhanced communicative capacity of individuals to organise themselves and find a common purpose via peer-to-peer social networks greatly increased their power to effect change. Such shifts in communicative power, alongside

the frustrated aspirations of young, increasingly educated populations, were universal drivers of the Arab Spring revolutions.²⁶

None of the Arab Spring countries (save Yemen) was put onto the OECD 2012 list of fragile states, although many would argue that several of them now fulfil many of the characteristics of fractured fragile states. The role of both social and traditional media in the revolutions themselves is well documented. Less well documented are their effects now (which is likely to form the subject of another BBC Media Action policy briefing in the future). It is still too early to assess whether the dramatic impact of shifts in media and communication environments in Arab Spring countries may have similar effects in other currently less well connected, and often poorer, fragile states. However, the Arab Spring clearly demonstrated the potential power of such changes to communication access.

In sum, the capacity of citizens to exercise freedom and agency, and to take control of their own political, social and economic destiny has grown immensely over the past decade as media output has exploded and communication technologies have spread. At the same time, the capacity of factional interests to co-opt and manipulate the media and communication has also grown in many fragile states.

Some of these trends are new and some are long-standing. The next section looks at earlier debates about the role of the media and communication in fragile states.

“21st-century media and communication environments seem less likely to provide the conditions best suited to nurturing the development of shared identity in fragile states.”

PART 3

Support to media in fragile states: the case for and against

There has been a long-standing assumption within the international donor community that a free and plural media can, and should, be a force for democratic change in fragile states – as in other countries.

It is difficult to find clear estimates for the amount of money dedicated to support for the media in fragile states as it has always formed part of more generalised support for democracy and governance in the developing world. A 2007 survey by the prestigious National Endowment for Democracy Center for International Media Assistance estimated that US\$142 million per year was being spent “to develop independent media”.²⁷

Although such spending is small in the context of overall development spending, development actors have regarded the media as a check on overweening state power. This is significant in settings where other mechanisms for holding government to account – such as elections and taxation – are notoriously weak and where patronage can easily undermine formal accountability institutions such as the judiciary and parliament.²⁸

Thomas Carothers of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace summed this view up nicely: “Opening up a closed media will allow greater public scrutiny of poorly performing areas of state function.”²⁹

The role of the media as an accountability mechanism can sometimes coincide with its role in mitigating conflict. The World Bank’s 2011 World Development Report on Conflict, Security and Development argued that “an inclusive public dialogue requires capacity and resources, not just of state institutions or of civil society, but also of the media, which can play an important role in ensuring public accountability and act as a citizen voice.”³⁰

But while donor attitudes towards media support in developing countries in general tend to be positive, many have expressed caution about encouraging a free and plural media in fragile states.

The priority for most actors working to support fragile states is to make the countries stable and to help governments provide services, the rule of law and

Right The divisive nature of the media has been a feature of elections in several countries in recent years, including Kenya. In this picture taken in January 2012, newspapers in Nairobi announce the decision of the International Criminal Court to charge four prominent Kenyans, including the current president Uhuru Kenyatta, with crimes against humanity.



security for their citizens. A dominant theme of research and debate over recent years is whether external support for democratic reform – including media liberalisation – decreases or increases the prospects for sustainable political settlements that can deliver these outcomes. This and other debates³¹ over “democratic sequencing”³² have set the context for difficult – occasionally bitter – arguments over the wisdom of encouraging more free and open media in unstable and fragile states.

There is substantial unease about external support for media reform among some, much of it focused on concerns that more open, liberalised and complex media systems can encourage division and reinforce the politics of identity in fragile states. These concerns gained particular currency following the Rwandan genocide in 1991, when Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines provided the most notorious example of hate media being used to advance atrocity.³³ The International Criminal Tribunal of Rwanda found three journalists guilty of genocide and incitement to genocide. The role of media in the Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s,³⁴ especially the state media controlled by Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia as well as in Croatia, has been well documented. More recently, the divisive nature of the media has been a feature of elections in several countries, including Côte d’Ivoire³⁵ and Kenya.

Such examples remain comparatively rare, however, and the causes of hate media are deeply contested. The use of media in Serbia and Rwanda as a weapon of hate was through the cynical deployment of state power co-opting media in its own interests. Media freedom and rights activists point to a panoply of examples where extraordinary journalistic courage – generally for very little reward – has succeeded in exposing corruption and rights abuses in fragile states and acted as a check on often brutal governments or other forces of power. Nevertheless, examples such as Rwanda and Serbia have prompted scholars to question support for media in fragile states.

Snyder and Ballentine (1996) concluded that the promotion of unconditional freedom of public debate in newly democratising societies can often exacerbate tensions in society. “From the French Revolution to Rwanda, sudden liberalisations of press freedom have been associated with bloody outbursts of popular nationalism. The most dangerous situation is precisely when the government’s press monopoly begins to break down.”³⁶ They went on to urge non-governmental organisations and other aid donors to reconsider projects that provide ethnic minorities with their own media outlets.

An influential report prepared by the London School of Economics Crisis States Centre (Putzel and van der Zwan, 2005) similarly argued that: “In situations where

the state is fragile... and where the political process is unstable and de-legitimated... unsophisticated liberalisation of the media can potentially undermine the state-building project.” In such situations, they argued, “it may also be misguided and potentially dangerous to assume that encouraging the creation of free and independent media will automatically strengthen civil society, or help establish a democratic system that will hold governments accountable.”³⁷

More recent concerns have focused less on the capture of the media by one dominant actor or set of actors but on a more complex interaction between a fragmented liberalised media and fractured political systems, particularly around elections. Nicole Stremlau, writing in 2012 on the challenges facing Somaliland in determining its approach to media liberalisation, wrote: “Independent or ‘free’ media are intended to perform a role similar to that of elections in facilitating political conflict in a controlled, non-violent way, providing a platform for citizens to express their support or discontent with leadership and offering space to debate, which helps to legitimise outcomes, whether democratically determined or not.”

Stremlau argued that the role of the media in countries emerging from violence is vulnerable to being used to fuel conflict, especially around the time of elections: “Weak institutions and fragile rule of law make orderly succession difficult to achieve. Across the continent [Africa], as elections have become more competitive, they have also become more violent, particularly in the post-election period. As media systems have opened to competition and the variety of platforms have spread, particularly with the use of new technologies, the media have had an increasingly central role in violence.”³⁸

Stremlau’s concerns were prompted in part by the Kenyan elections of 2007–08, which saw some of Kenya’s minority language media implicated in fuelling appalling violence (see the central section on pages 14–19 for a summary of BBC Media Action’s analysis of this situation).

This briefing reaches a conclusion at odds with much critical analysis of media support to fragile states, arguing that media pluralism and freedom of expression should provide a core foundation for the successful emergence of sustainable political settlements. Nevertheless, these critiques note that problems emerge in fragile states if the principal role of the media is to reinforce the separation of identities without also having the capacity, means or will to enable the kind of dialogue that can create shared identities.

“There is substantial unease about external support to media reform among some, much of it focused on concerns that more open, liberalised and complex media systems can encourage division and reinforce the politics of identity in fragile states.”

Right Drivers of fragility vary across different states. The role of the media – positive and negative – is similarly varied but some common conclusions can be reached from earlier analysis from BBC Media Action.

Policy Briefing BBC WORLD SERVICE TRUST

POLICY BRIEFING #1 APRIL 2008

The Kenyan 2007 elections and their aftermath: the role of media and communication

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POLICY BRIEFING #4 NOVEMBER 2011

The media of Somalia: A force for moderation?

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PART 4

The media in fragile states: four case studies

This section provides summaries from earlier BBC Media Action policy briefings focused on Kenya, Somalia, Afghanistan and Iraq. These briefings explored the role of the media in these countries, and especially whether that role increased or reduced fragility.

These four case studies are not necessarily typical of all fragile states. Untypically, three of them have suffered invasions by international forces with very mixed effects.

“How vulnerable the media is to political co-option depends on history, culture and economics as well as politics.”

Through these case studies, this briefing aims to reach beyond the role of media in actively fostering hate and violence to explore its role in underpinning or undermining the fragility of fragile states.

The first conclusion that can be drawn from this analysis is that diverse factors can shape the role of media in fragile states. How vulnerable the media is to political co-option depends on history, culture and economics as well as politics and myriad other factors, often including extraordinary journalistic courage. The effects of media on state fragility are complex, and context-specific analysis is required if effective support strategies are to be possible.

Before 2008 in Kenya, for example, economics helped to drive a process of media fragmentation which, in conjunction with the charged and divided politics of the

country, created the conditions for parts of the media to act as a force for division in society. Economics in Somalia, in conjunction with the demands of ordinary Somalis, are helping to drive a more moderate media in the face of extreme political pressure. In Kenya, a market existed for people to hear anger over the airwaves. In Somalia, at least to some extent, the opposite is true, making the business of fostering division through the media a difficult one. In Afghanistan in 2013, the lack of an economic model to sustain a free, independent and moderate media is a cause of immense concern. The media in Afghanistan is heavily subsidised, but who provides that subsidy and with what intent seems likely to play a large role in shaping its future. Here, as in all four case studies, politics remains a dominant factor – nowhere more so than in Iraq, where a historical legacy of political control and co-option of the media continues to shape its prospects.

The second conclusion arising from these case studies is that the media can foster division and conflict, but can also ameliorate it. In all four countries, parts of the media have arguably strengthened ethnic and sectarian identity, especially at key moments such as elections. The media in these countries has also been manipulated by warlords or other actors to advance political agendas allied to ethnic or sectarian interests. This has often spilled over into encouraging violence. However, the same media

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POLICY BRIEFING # 5 MARCH 2012

**The media of Afghanistan:
The challenges of transition**

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POLICY BRIEFING # 8 MARCH 2013

**The media of Iraq
ten years on**

The problems, the progress, the prospects

Abir Awad and Tim Eaton

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has at different times played a positive role. Some of the vernacular media in Kenya so implicated in fuelling the 2007–08 violence was also instrumental in calling for calm when the violence escalated. The “ethno-sectarian” media empires that have emerged in the last decade in Iraq and which were accused of fostering tension are now arguably playing a role in affirming and giving legitimate voice to long-suppressed identities. The media of Somalia that glorified war and warlords in the 1990s is arguably now a force for moderation, at least in parts of that divided country.

The case studies suggest that a simple narrative painting an increasingly liberalised and decentralised media and communication environment in the role of villain or hero in fostering peace and inclusion can be misleading. Just because some media organisations are established to serve and reflect the perspectives of specific groups in society does not mean their role is to inflame tension and suspicion of others outside those groups. Another BBC Media Action policy briefing, *The media of Pakistan: Fostering inclusion in a fragile democracy*, published in 2013, found that media outlets serving particular linguistic and ethnic communities had a positive influence. Their principal effect was to enhance local-level accountability: “In striving to present the demands of their province or ethno-linguistic community to the federation and in their articulation of a specific constituency’s interest, regional-language outlets have increasingly become power representatives of local interests.” Research suggested such media was becoming more popular as a result.³⁹

Third, in all these countries, the role of the media has been poorly considered in strategies designed to support the governance or transition of these countries. The role of the media and communication does not appear to have featured substantively in research or scoping exercises designed to underpin development support for these countries, and strategic focus on its role within the development – and even diplomatic – communities appears low. The case studies appear to suggest that media and communication can have substantial positive and negative effects on the prospects of sustainable political settlements emerging. In short, they warrant greater attention from policy-makers.

And, finally, the trend towards the media reflecting specific identities in society is not being counterbalanced by media that transcends those identities. There is no obvious emergence of a media sector that enables constructive, unifying debate and dialogue among groups of people who consider themselves different to one another. Neither market nor political forces seem likely to encourage such a media sector as politics, economics and technology foster more fragmented media and communication environments. The lack of platforms for such dialogue potentially presents a significant challenge to efforts to build countries based on shared, as well as fragmented, identities (see the box on Afghanistan on page 23). The next section argues that this presents a major challenge to fragile states and those working to support them.

“The media can foster division and conflict, but can also ameliorate it.”

Bloody outbursts or force for moderation? Four case studies on the role of media in fragile states

This section summarises the findings of policy briefings on the role of media in four fragile states. These are highly abbreviated and should ideally be read in conjunction with the more detailed analysis in the briefings themselves.



The media of Afghanistan and the challenges of transition⁴⁰

In 2003 there was no media to speak of in Afghanistan. The creation today of what is one of the most dynamic, inventive and plural media sectors of any fragile state is arguably one of the most significant achievements resulting from international intervention in the country. The Taliban, famous for stringing up music cassette tape from trees in Kabul, banned all media except its own. Today, conservative estimates put the number of journalists and others working in the Afghan media at more than 10,000.

The role of the media in today's Afghanistan is complex and subject to the same pressures of influence, intimidation and control as in many fragile states. By and large, however, the Afghan media is considered to be seeking to work in the public interest, provides at least some checks on executive power and has become more professional and more trusted by its audiences. Afghanistan has an extremely liberal licensing regime, which has allowed almost anyone with the will and the resources to establish a broadcast presence. This means that the broadcast spectrum in Kabul and some other Afghan urban centres is saturated.



Right Afghanistan has developed one of the most dynamic and plural media sectors of any fragile state. In this picture, a woman in Kabul makes her first mobile phone call.

NATALIE BEHRING-CHISHOLM/GETTY IMAGES

This is, however, a heavily subsidised media sector. It has largely been created through private investment by Afghans from the diaspora, but many millions of dollars have been spent by international donors, either with the aim of nourishing a fragile new journalistic sector and fostering media freedom or to inform Afghan citizens about issues of most concern to external donors.

Afghanistan is now in transition. Donors and international actors are drawing down their support in many sectors, including the media. The industrial base of the country remains extremely weak and the advertising market in the country is small – by the best estimates around US\$20 million per year. The advertising income available to the media appears far too little to sustain the sector that has evolved over the last decade.

Two consequences follow from this situation.

The first is that the relatively independent media that has evolved in Afghanistan will consolidate and to some extent shrink, with the media that remains – at least beyond the state broadcaster Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA) – focusing on audiences that are most attractive to advertisers.

The second is that the Afghan media will increasingly be paid for, and to a significant extent co-opted by, those who can afford to subsidise it. For several years, the same licensing regime that has permitted an explosion in relatively independent media has also enabled warlords and other power brokers to establish their own radio and TV presence, often with international funding and generally with the clear aim of advancing their political agenda and attracting popular support and loyalty. Some of this media presence is externally funded, with several experts arguing that Iran may be the largest funder of media in Afghanistan after the US.

Added to this potentially divisive mix is the Taliban's sophisticated use of both online and traditional media. Journalists travelling in Taliban-controlled parts of the country report that the Taliban uses video clips of bombed convoys or slain commanders in a highly systematic and effective way to create support for its cause. These clips are distributed by mobile phone to supporters and local media to keep them informed of Taliban activities. "The speed at which these clips appear is extraordinary," said one Afghan journalist who had been travelling widely in the north of the country, "all young people have at least one on their mobile phones."⁴¹

Afghanistan is a deeply fractured country. The media is now becoming more fractured and the incentives for political, religious, ethnic and other factional actors to own, control or co-opt the media appear to be very strong. The opportunities for these actors to do so appear to be increasing as both international forces and

funding withdraw. The ability of the independent media that does exist to maintain – let alone increase – its independence and provide a home for free and effective journalism appears to be diminishing. The influence of both the Taliban and warlords is expected to grow, with potentially devastating consequences for journalists – especially women journalists – in the country.

In the summary of Somalia below, this briefing argues that the media of Somalia is increasingly becoming a force for moderation. Afghanistan's media may be heading in the opposite direction. As international support declines, the ability of the media to provide a check on power will diminish and its vulnerability to those who plan to advance specific political agendas and foster greater division – and potentially further violence – in the country is increasing. Overall, Afghanistan is a country where an increasingly fragmented media is in danger of being co-opted to make the state even more fragile.

In these circumstances it is perhaps not surprising that the Afghan government shows every sign of retaining control of the state broadcaster RTA, despite passing a media law in 2009 proposing its independence. However, while RTA remains under government control, it is difficult to see how it can provide a platform for independent national public debate in the country (see box on page 23 for information on how BBC Media Action is working with RTA to provide independent public service broadcast programming).

The future of Afghanistan will be substantially determined by its political leaders and by the political settlement that may or may not emerge in coming months and years. Ultimately, the country Afghanistan is to become – its identity, its aspirations, its character, its prosperity – will be shaped by its people. If that is to happen successfully, the country will need a media sector capable of enabling the kind of dialogue – national as well as local – through which they can resolve their differences peacefully and air their perspectives, ideas and concerns in ways that can lead to resolution rather than conflict. It is difficult to see, given current trends in the country, how that situation will come about.

Despite this, strategies designed to safeguard the future of the Afghan media do not appear to feature significantly in any of the processes designed to prepare the country for its post-transition future. It is difficult to discern where in the development or diplomatic system responsibility lies for understanding media challenges. If the media is to play the role it is capable of, and if it is to avoid being used to serve the interests of those most intent on further fracturing this already fragile state, the Afghan media needs a clearer support framework. It is not currently clear how such a framework might develop, or whose responsibility it is.



The media of Somalia: a force for moderation?⁴²

Somalia is slowly emerging from decades of state failure. At different times the Somali media has been deployed as a tool of political control by the government and warlords, and of extremism by Al-Shabaab, an organisation affiliated to Al Qaeda. At the time of publishing its 2011 policy briefing, *The media of Somalia: a force for moderation?* BBC Media Action concluded that the media was becoming increasingly successful at reflecting a diversity of perspectives in Somali society.

In the 1980s, during Muhammad Siad Barre's dictatorship, freedom of the media in general – and radio in particular – was only possible from outside the country. Barre exerted a monopoly on the media and used government-controlled Radio Mogadishu and Radio Hargeisa to control the political agenda and advance his own interests in ways familiar to most dictatorships.

After Barre's fall in 1991, broadcast media became part of the terrain of war as clan-based warlords sought to establish and control radio to advance their own interests and claim political loyalty. Next came a hopeful phase of private investment heralded by the opening of Radio HornAfrik in 1999, financed – like Radio Shabelle and others that followed – as a business enterprise by members of the Somali diaspora. Then came the era of Al-Shabaab and, from 2008, the reign of terror imposed on journalists, resulting in a slow near-death of independent media in the country as the organisation either took over or closed down independent radio stations.

Below Somalia, largely as a consequence of war and division, is becoming one of the most media-literate countries in Africa. Here Somali journalist Abdukadir Hassan Abdurahman – armed with a camera and a pistol – films a scene in Baidoa, outside Mogadishu.



With Al-Shabaab weakened – though still active – and a new and democratically elected government starting to assert itself, there is now rekindled hope for the media in Somalia. The media in 2013 appears to be more a force for moderation than one fuelling division and conflict.

The question is, why? Why did the media behave in the way it did at different stages of this recent history and, to the extent that something as diverse as the media of Somalia in 2013 can be characterised in any way, why is it a force for moderation now?

Part of the explanation is simple. Political actors intent on authoritarian domination of their country have always wanted as much control over the media as possible. Barre was no different from all those dictators whose first act in a coup is to seize control of the state broadcaster.

Part of it has deep social and cultural roots. The establishment of warlord radio following Barre's fall was partly a product of the leaders of Somalia's complex clan system either establishing or taking over radio stations to advance their own interests in a political vacuum. The dominant effect of newly formed radio stations on Somali society in the years immediately following Barre's downfall are widely held to have been very damaging and, in the words of one journalist, "fomented social hatred". However, constitutional expert Professor Mohamed Sheikh Osman Jawari argued that the glorifying of war has strong cultural and historical roots. "Back in Somali history, culturally speaking, you will find that every clan had a poet who would speak on the bravery of the clan. After Barre fell, stations started mushrooming and it seemed like they were trying to replace the poets of the clans. [These stations] need to know that the pen of the journalist and holding of the microphone is a [position of] trust, people have entrusted them to act fairly, justly and impartially about the news that they find."

The demand for such trusted information arguably creates the greatest optimism for the future role of the media in Somalia. In surveys and research carried out by BBC Media Action in 2011, a key conclusion was that Somalia, largely as a consequence of war and division, was becoming one of the most media-literate countries in Africa. The research found that, just as people were tired of war, they were also sick of hearing just one side of an argument. Most radio stations, especially the largest and most successful ones, responded to audience demand and increasingly attempted to achieve balance in their coverage.

"This is how radio evolved in Somalia," argued Rashid Abdi of the International Crisis Group. "It was part of a clan agenda then it tried to become balanced." Violence, intimidation and forceful co-option of the media had previously been successful in closing down a plurality of voices in Somalia, but it has proved of limited usefulness for those bent on using the media to command loyalty.

Trusted information was provided in part by international stations such as the BBC, which has a higher percentage of listeners in Somalia than any country outside the UK (another key international broadcaster being Voice of America). It was also provided by a new generation of commercial radio stations established largely as business enterprises by the Somali diaspora.

The capacity of radio to inspire trust, the tendency of Somali people to value only those media they can trust, and the fact that the most trusted media channels tend to be those that represent multiple perspectives in society, has made the media a source of moderation rather than extremism in Somali society. In Somalia, a balance of perspectives seems more likely to generate audiences and therefore create a strong business model for commercial investors – extreme media content ended up being bad business. When Al-Shabaab was in power and either operated radio stations or intimidated them into covering its content, it struggled to attract significant audiences – making control of the radio less effective and difficult to sustain.

Many factors create reasons for optimism about the future of the media in Somalia, including the improved security and political climate and the extraordinary courage, resilience and determination of journalists in the country to defend their profession in the face of immense odds. However, a key factor is that there is a major demand for a trustworthy media that transcends factionalism, and a clear history of media providers – commercial, national and international – capable of supplying such information.

This is a simplified analysis of a highly complex media and political environment, not least because these issues play out differently in Somalia, Somaliland and Puntland. However, even against a backdrop where the media has been co-opted to serve the narrow interests of governments, factions or religions, there is nothing inevitable about a diverse media landscape fuelling extremism or violence. Even in a society as broken as Somalia, the media can play an important role in fostering political participation and dialogue.

Media and elections in Kenya⁴³

On 4 March 2013 Kenyans took to the polls in an election that proved – to their relief and joy – to be largely peaceful. This was in stark contrast to Kenya’s 2007–08 elections, which proved the most violent in the country’s history.

In March 2008 BBC Media Action published a policy briefing: *The 2007 elections and their aftermath: the role of media and communication*. Many factors have been held responsible for the 2008 violence, among them the famously free and vigorous Kenyan media



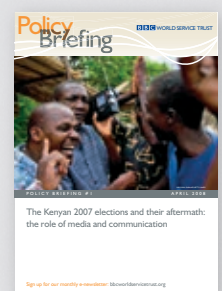
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– particularly the vernacular media. “The violence after the announcement of the polls was due to the polarity in the media, which were turned into political tools,” Samuel Poghiso, Kenya’s information minister said at the time. One of the six people arraigned before the International Criminal Court (along with the current Prime Minister Uhuru Kenyatta and his 2013 election running mate William Ruto) is Joshua Arap Sang, a journalist with Kass FM, a Kalenjin language station. He is accused of inciting violence.

Some have bracketed the role of the media in the Kenya crisis (which claimed around 1,200 lives⁴⁴ and displaced 664,000 people⁴⁵) with that in Rwanda, a genocide that claimed the lives of almost a million. Not only was the scale of the crisis entirely different, the factors that led to media’s role in the crisis are barely comparable. In Rwanda, Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM) was made to serve a genocidal machine. Despite Sang’s arrest, the role of the media in Kenya was far less organised and the factors behind its behaviour more complex.

Until the middle of the last decade the only broadcast media available in Kenya were in Swahili and English. In the early part of the 2000s, Kenya experienced an economic boom, providing advertisers with a strong incentive to open up new markets beyond Nairobi and other urban centres. While Swahili and English are the national languages, most people prefer to communicate in their own vernacular and there is a significant minority that does not speak Swahili. To attract new consumers, commercial actors applied pressure on government to further liberalise the airwaves so that radio stations could be established to serve – and sell to – particular ethnic

Above More than 664,000 people were displaced following post-election violence in Kenya in 2008, in which the media played a role, chiefly through broadcasting hate speech. The Kenyan government has since made hate speech a crime.



and linguistic communities. In 2004, a new law further liberalised the media, paving the way for a wave of new local language radio stations targeting listeners from the country's main ethnic communities.

The rationale behind these newly opened stations was principally commercial. As a result, those hired to present the programmes – including moderating talk shows – were largely entertainers, local celebrities and others most likely to attract a large audience. However, for the first time in Kenya's history, a broadcast public space had opened where minority language communities, many of whom were the most politically and economically marginalised in the country, had the opportunity to voice their anger over the airwaves to their own communities in their own languages.

During the 2007–08 elections, and especially when the election results were questioned, anger turned into something more. “The ethnic hate our radio station was propagating about those from outside the community was unbelievable,” one journalist told a forum organised by the media support organisation Internews at the time. “The unfortunate thing is that we let these callers speak bile and laughed about it,” the journalist said. Unsurprisingly, many of those tasked with moderating these debates were wholly unequipped to do so. Significant evidence exists that these radio stations also attempted to calm the violence once it had flared up.

Unlike the other case studies presented here, the process of media liberalisation in Kenya was substantially driven from within the country rather than as a result of external pressure to democratise the airwaves. However, much could have been done to prevent the media's role in the 2007–08 violence, both from within the country and through external support to the media. The role of the media did not, however, feature significant support strategies designed to facilitate a successful election.

The Kenyan government's response to the violence has been substantial, including passing new legislation making hate speech a crime and ensuring that all mobile phone users must register before getting a Sim card (viral hate text messaging was also a feature in the 2008 violence).

The Kenyan media's behaviour during the 2013 elections was characterised by a determination across the media sector to support peaceful elections. The chair of the Independent Electoral Boundaries Commission, Isack Hasan, lauded this when he announced the results, saying: “If there was ever a time we needed a partner to moderate the rising temperatures, this was it and the local media came through in a special way.”⁴⁶ The concern expressed by some is that the determination by the media to ensure a peaceful election prevented the airing of legitimate concerns and grievances that any democracy needs in order to ensure a proper electoral contest. According to *The Economist* magazine, “Kenya's

normally feisty media have been supine after their owners agreed to avoid coverage that might incite ethnic passions. In place of analysis, TV stations broadcast pre-recorded messages urging peace.”⁴⁷

Many in Kenya disagree with that analysis but this – one of the most innovative, creative and digitally entrepreneurial media and communication environments in the world – provides key lessons for the ever-changing role of a highly fragmented media in a fractured and fragile country.

The media of Iraq: 10 years on⁴⁸

The media of Iraq, like that of Afghanistan, has received many millions of dollars to help establish it as the bastion of democracy those who invaded the country hoped it would become. The investment in Afghanistan's media can, at least until now, be considered a real but limited success story. The degree to which the media in Iraq is ameliorating or accentuating fragility is more complex still.

Unlike in Afghanistan, Iraq had a functioning media system before 2003 but it was entirely and brutally controlled by Saddam Hussein and those around him. As in much of the Arab world, there was never a significant tradition of free and independent media in Iraq. Since the country's independence, the broadcast media's purpose was to foster national identity and unity under the vice-like grip of the ruling party.

Following the Allied invasion in 2003, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) tried to recreate the media in its own image. In January 2003, a now declassified US Department of Defense White Paper detailed the establishment of a rapid response media team that was to operate as the “quick-start bridge” between Saddam Hussein's state-controlled media network and a longer-term “Iraqi free media” network. BBC Media Action's briefing stated that:

“Having professional US-trained Iraqi media teams immediately in place to portray a new Iraq (by Iraqis for Iraqis) with hopes for a prosperous, democratic future, will have a profound psychological and political impact on the Iraqi people. It will be as if... the North Korean people turned off their TVs at night, and turned them on in the morning to find the rich fare of South Korean TV.”

In the years immediately following the invasion, privately owned media flourished and the number of media outlets in the country mushroomed. More than 150 non-state-owned newspapers and magazines, 80 radio stations and 21 TV stations reportedly opened for business between 2003 and 2004 alone. As is the case elsewhere in the Arab world, satellite TV channels have now become the dominant medium. Today Iraqis have access to an estimated 30–40 Iraqi-facing TV channels, as well as a



BRENT STIRTON/GETTY IMAGES



Left The case of Iraq suggests that even when the media is partial, polarised and fractured, it can play a positive as well as a negative role. In this picture, taken in 2004, freelance Iraqi photographer Wathiq Khuzaie shows off his photos to onlookers in Baghdad.

huge array of pan-Arab channels offering entertainment, news and current affairs and religious content. Research commissioned by BBC Media Action in the nine southern provinces of Iraq found that access to satellite TV is near-universal at 97%.

However, Iraq remains deeply fractured and the media has fractured with it. The degree to which the US vision of a free and open media came to pass is disputed but few people, including those in the international community, argue that it is the democratic media that was initially conceived. The reasons why such a media did not materialise are complex. In part it was due to the CPA's own co-optation of the state media, which was used to advance the position of the international coalition rather than being put at the service of the Iraqi public. In part it was the difficulties in understanding the extent to which media systems were entrenched in the Iraqi state apparatus for so many years. And in part it was because the rapid liberalisation of the media unleashed powerful ethnic and sectarian forces with strong incentives to establish or use media to advance their interests.

The establishment of new non-state broadcasters corresponded with the increased struggle for power in Iraq. In his influential 2007 study, Ibrahim Al Marashi characterised Iraq's non-state media as being formed of "ethno-sectarian media empires" that operate in the vanguard of partisan political interests. This problem persists today, as most media houses play to the narratives of Iraq's divided communities rather than seek to provide objective content. Statistical surveys generally support the widely held view in Iraq that people tune into the TV or radio service that reflects their own

ethnicity and religious/tribal affiliation.

Some Iraqi experts interviewed for the briefing argued that deregulation did more harm than good in Iraq, with the media proving to have a divisive effect, and that Iraqis lacked the skills and experience necessary to know how to use their new-found media and communication freedom.

Divisiveness is one thing – incitement to violence is another. The conclusion of the policy briefing was that "despite lingering low professional standards and partisan agendas, Iraq's media has nonetheless stopped short of inciting violence. In a country so marred by appalling acts of political violence, this should not be underestimated."

Marashi was conducting his research at the height of Iraq's sectarian insurgency and found no evidence that Iraq's non-state media was directly airing calls to violence. Today, he believes that the media has moved on, arguing that: "The nature of ethno-sectarianism in Iraq is quite different than it was a couple of years ago... where you were getting information from your side during pitched battle, so to speak... Today, these channels serve as an incubator of identity in Iraq. Each of these channels portrays what it means to belong to a particular ethno-sectarian community and what it means to be an Iraqi after the fall of Saddam Hussein."

The case of Iraq suggests that even when the media is partial, polarised and fractured, it can play a positive as well as a negative role. Long-suppressed identities find free and legitimate expression over the airwaves, something that at least in theory may be mitigating the need for violent clashes on the streets.

Right The UN has sponsored radio stations in several fragile states, including Radio UNAMSIL (pictured) which was established by the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone in 2000. It was transferred to Sierra Leonean management in 2010.



FREDRIK NAUMANN/PANOS PICTURES

PART 5

Building shared identity in fragile states

Collier's argument that state-building needs to encourage the development of shared identity as well as shared interests comes with an observation. "Shared identity", he argued, "does not grow out of the soil: it is politically constructed."⁴⁹

The political construction of shared identity has historically depended on control of the media. To the extent that creating a sense of shared identity is critical to the long-term stability and success of fragile states (and this paper shares Collier's view that it is), how that political construction takes place is critical. This cannot now be achieved through centralised control of the media, but instead through enhanced support to a free and plural media capable of generating the kind of dialogue that can generate shared identity. Shared identity may not grow out of the soil, but, given today's media and communication environments, it does at least in part need to grow from society's roots.

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The role of the media in constructing shared identity can be highly contentious. In the past, political leaders have relied heavily on control of the media to establish shared identities in their countries. Building a national identity in the image of a national leader has been a core theme of state-building in the past. It has ranged from the

aggressive nationalism deployed by Nasser and other post-independence Arab leaders in the 1960s to those political leaders intent on muffling regional, ethnic and religious identities to advance their own national vision – Suharto in Indonesia and Nyerere in Tanzania being

prime historic examples. All of these have counted their control over national media as vital assets.

Such strategies seem decreasingly relevant to the political construction of shared identity in 2013. State broadcasters under tight control of central government retain by and large the infrastructure that allows leaders to reach the whole of their countries, but in general their programming has over many years become increasingly stale, unpopular, less trusted and less influential than other media. State broadcasters increasingly have to compete for financial income with their more nimble private sector competitors and state subsidy of such media is often in decline.⁵⁰ A few countries retain tight centralised control of the media but, in a time of digital diversity, increasingly ubiquitous access to mobile telephony and in many places an explosion of private and other media, the relevance of state media to building national identity seems tenuous.

State-owned and state-controlled media today is only rarely available as a key tool to political leaders to construct their own vision of national identity. Rather, it seems necessary to build shared identity through dialogue and debate between groups who are confident that their own identity is secure and valued. As a recent World Bank CommGAP report put it: "National dialogue is not a consequence of state-building, but a prerequisite for its success."⁵¹

This suggests two things.

First, the evolution of media and communication environments that affirm and provide legitimate outlets for specific groupings in society can be as healthy

for state-building as it can – when it tips over into fostering violence – be devastating. Strategies that simply seek to limit people’s freedom of expression, access to information or to establish media entities that cater for particular communities are as likely to foster discontent and violence as they are to prevent it. Controlling information in fragile states would require huge state resources with consequences that are less likely to lead to sustainable, inclusive political settlements. Those intent on supporting state-building would do better to encourage engagement in highly complex and decentralised media and communication environments and to support strategies that minimise media fostering of violence and maximise its potential to enhance community and national dialogue.

Second, a shared national identity seems most likely to emerge when there are trusted platforms through which all citizens of a fragile state can engage in a shared national dialogue. In countries with highly fragmented media environments, the opportunities for the media to foster such a dialogue are as limited as they are important.

Many different media models might be harnessed to create the conditions for such dialogue.⁵² In several fragile states, the UN has sponsored radio stations, the most famous example being Radio Okapi in the Democratic Republic of Congo, managed by Fondation Hirondelle. This is widely credited with helping to reduce the level of inter-communal enmity and the prospects for electoral violence in that

country. Other UN-sponsored radio stations have been founded in Angola, Cambodia, Côte d’Ivoire, Croatia, East Timor, Haiti, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan and Sudan-Darfur, though with mixed results. “From Cambodia to Liberia, these UN stations have helped end violent conflict and make political transition possible. They have provided citizens with trusted local news programmes and non-partisan discussion forums, often for the first time”, argued a report from the National Endowment for Democracy Center for International Media Assistance.

Shared identity might also emerge organically from the peer-to-peer networking⁵³ that is increasingly taking place via social media or through networks of citizen journalists. For example, the Tunisian blog Nawaat, founded in 2006, has formed a national network of alternative and citizen media.

Shared identity can also emerge through public service broadcasting. BBC Media Action’s own work is designed to support more accountable, inclusive and peaceful states and societies. Some of BBC Media Action’s experience is derived from attempts to support national public conversations in fragile states. While not trying to replicate the BBC, this is rooted in the public service broadcasting values that underpin the organisation (see box, *Building shared identity through public service broadcasting*).

“Strategies that seek to limit people’s freedom of expression and access to information are as likely to foster discontent and violence as to prevent it.”

Building shared identity through public service broadcasting

Public service broadcasting exists to serve all citizens of a country in order to inform, educate and entertain. It does so by providing trusted, impartial sources of information and platforms for public discussion and engagement. The principles that underpin public service broadcasting include universality (in terms of access and appeal to all parts of society), independence from all vested interests including government, and the importance of its contribution to a sense of national identity and community.

Supporting models built on public service broadcasting values to encourage a greater sense of shared identity can emerge from work with a single broadcaster or highly connected networks of private or community broadcast media. BBC Media Action’s work on a DFID-funded project in Angola, Sierra Leone and Tanzania suggests that, in certain political settings, a series of national public conversations can be built through partnerships through – and among – local community broadcasters.

Public service broadcasting can work very effectively from the ground up. For example, BBC Media Action has worked with the BBC Swahili service in Tanzania to produce the national radio discussion programme *Haba Na Haba* (Little by Little) while working with six local partner radio stations to build local capacity and programming. The organisation’s work in Sierra Leone includes support for the Independent Radio Network

(IRN) which, during the November 2012 elections, involved producing election-specific programming with 28 partner stations including a 24-hour broadcast on election day.

In Zambia, BBC Media Action has worked with both the national broadcaster ZNBC and three community radio stations around the country – Yatsani Radio, Radio Chikuni and Radio Liseli – to air live and “as live” debate shows. In Nepal, the debate programme *Sajha Sawal* (Common Questions) is broadcast over national TV and on more than 100 FM and community radio stations. Research carried out around *Sajha Sawal* found that 86% of people exposed to the programme reported that it is their right to say how a country is run, compared with 65% of those who had not been exposed to the programme. Some 69% of the former said they intended to vote in the next general election, compared to 59% of the latter. Similar programmes have been produced in Bangladesh, Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Palestinian Territories, Tunisia and Libya, among other countries. Elsewhere, such as in Nigeria, radio drama has been produced – with more than a third of listeners saying that they acted differently as a result of listening to the programme (such as registering to vote).

BBC Media Action continues to engage in promising training and capacity-building programmes focused on these values in countries such as Burma.

“A genuinely trusted national media capable of providing a platform for national conversations that enable divided communities to strengthen their shared identity seems increasingly important to fragile states.”

In some countries, only the national broadcaster is able to reach and engage all people and all communities in a country. In most fragile states, the national broadcaster is the state broadcaster. State broadcasters are defined here as broadcasters that are controlled and owned by the state and that work in the interests defined by the government of the time. National public service

broadcasters are independent of the state and work solely in the interests of, and at the service of, their audience.

Various attempts to transform state broadcasters into politically independent and financially sustainable public service broadcasters have had mixed results. Strategies have included regulatory reform, institutional reform, training and capacity

building. Increasingly, attempts to transform national broadcasting involve support for programming that is characterised by public service broadcasting values: putting the audience first, being impartial, insisting on editorial independence, building trust and being creative.

However, the challenges of the wholesale reform of state broadcasters – and the obstacles to their transition to public service broadcasters – are many. Some problems can be overcome with clear strategic focus and long-term

engagement but others are intractable and explain why reform efforts present serious challenges. The most significant problems tend to be political rather than technical. Governments, especially relatively weak governments in fragile states – operating in communication environments where many other actors control or influence their own media – find it very difficult to surrender control of what they regard as their own state media.

A genuinely trusted national media capable of providing a platform for national public debate that enables divided communities to strengthen their shared identity seems increasingly important in fragile states. It is very difficult to see how, for example, post-transition Afghanistan is to develop a shared identity without a way for its people to engage in dialogue with each other, understand each other better and resolve their differences in the public sphere. In 2013 no obvious trusted national space for that dialogue among citizens exists, and market forces in Afghanistan seem unlikely to foster such a space. The same can be said of many Arab Spring states struggling to reinvent their fractured countries and searching for mechanisms to help find shared values, aspirations and identities, rather than those which divide them.

A sustained and creative debate on how to transform state broadcasters into public service broadcasters, or develop alternative models of national public service broadcasting, is especially necessary in fragile states.

Right The media can help to foster a sense of shared identity. Here some of the team behind the Libyan radio station Tribute FM – which started during the uprising – present a show from their studio in Fuhwaat district of Benghazi.



The challenges and opportunities of building shared identity: the case of Radio Television Afghanistan

The BBC Media Action policy briefing, *The media of Afghanistan: the challenges of transition*, paid special attention to whether and how the media could help build a stronger sense of shared identity in the country. Members of the public, politicians and journalists alike who were interviewed for the briefing, stressed that a lack of shared identity was a major obstacle to successful transition in the country.

“Stations have not been created on the basis of the needs of the people; they have been set up to serve the interests of foreign countries or powerful warlords,” said one former independent MP. “We still don’t have a country-wide media. In Afghanistan today, we seem to lack confidence to build institutions,” commented one experienced journalist. “The biggest need in the media sector is unity, consensus and national understanding”, said another, “otherwise, we will never pull ourselves out of this difficulty.”

Much comment focused on the need for a national public service broadcaster and on the weaknesses and strengths of the state broadcaster, Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA). Focus groups gauged the perceptions of ordinary Afghans, especially those outside of Kabul. “National TV is the best” said a Hazara woman, “because it has broadcasts in all the languages like Hazara, Pashto, Tajik, even Uzbek, Balooch and Pashayee”. “It is a symbol of union and coalition,” said one of her colleagues. A worker in Herat liked RTA programmes “because they are produced according to Afghan culture”. An illiterate woman in Kabul district said one of the benefits of RTA is that “All their programmes are suitable for elders, young people, kids and women.”

At the same time, there is a sense that it does not live up to its name. “It should not act partially,” said one Herati middle-class woman. “As its name is *Meli* (national), it should always tell the facts and realities to the people.” Another commented: “Actually, a national TV... should not have one-sided programmes; it has to convey people’s views, whether they are government or opposition. People expect more of the national channel. It has to be responsive to people’s needs.”

Such perceptions have led some to argue that the state broadcaster RTA could play a vital national role if it reformed and became more effective. The Media Law of 2009, passed by the previous parliament by a two-thirds majority, was an attempt to equip RTA for that purpose. It allows RTA to play a more independent national role, with a governance structure representing government, parliament and civil society organisations. But it has not been fully implemented. President Karzai, initially a strong supporter of the idea, has proved

reluctant to give up direct control of the state media.

Whether RTA is capable of fulfilling such a role is another question. It is already much weakened and would require visionary leadership to transcend a highly fractured Afghan society. But RTA has some distinct advantages. BBC Media Action’s research suggests that, despite widespread scepticism about its news, which concentrates too much on the comings and goings of ministers, RTA is still seen as a custodian of national culture and values, reaching out to all major ethnic groups in their own languages. It also has a decentralised structure, which provides scope for provincial radio and TV stations to offer a customised service to local areas.

Imminent structural reform of RTA seems unlikely, but BBC Media Action has been working with the organisation to enable it to produce editorially balanced, national public debates designed as a series of national conversations. Recorded in Dari and Pashto, *Open Jirga* reaches out to all Afghans. The programme brings together men and women from across Afghanistan’s diverse communities and provides them with a space to engage with national leaders on the country’s future. President Karzai appeared on the programme in February 2013, the first time in the country’s history that an Afghan head of state had appeared on national media to be publicly questioned by Afghan citizens.

Shirazuddin Siddiqi, BBC Media Action’s country director and conceiver of *Open Jirga*, said “I didn’t get enthused by [the concept in Afghanistan] until I was convinced in 2010 that the whole decade of investment in blood and effort and goodwill [in nation building] was at stake.” He added that millions poured into Afghan media development “left the provinces behind”, and that most media – because they choose to operate in either Dari or Pashto languages – were not inclusive: “My idea was to create a national dialogue and adopt the Afghan concept of *jirga*, opening it to educate everyone, so it naturally fit into Afghan culture.”⁵⁴

The apparent popularity of *Open Jirga* may in time lead to other broadcasters investing more of their own resources in similar public debate programmes capable of bringing diverse communities together.



Above Afghan President Hamid Karzai takes questions from the audience on the BBC Media Action debate programme *Open Jirga* (Open Assembly). BBC Media Action has been supporting Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA) to produce editorially balanced public debates.

PART 6

Prioritising the media in fragile states

It is not clear how the role of the media, and the associated huge transformations in access to digital technologies, are positioned within current development discussions focused on support to fragile states. There are very few fragile states where responsibility for strategic planning and support to the media is obviously identified within any one agency. The analysis carried out in BBC Media Action's policy briefings on the media in Afghanistan, Iraq, Kenya and Somalia suggested a lack of a clear focal point for ensuring coherent and strategic support for, or analysis of, the media in each country except Somalia.

In Afghanistan, for example, intensive development discussion is focused on strengthening post-transition security, the economy, the health and education systems and much else besides. There is little or no obvious strategic consideration of, or nominated lead agency focused on, the future of the media – despite the evolution of the country's media being widely considered a relative success story of international development support.

At the international level, and even within agencies that significantly support the media in fragile states, there are questions over where responsibility sits. In his National Endowment for Democracy report on support to UN radio stations, for example, Bill Orme argued that: “The management, impact, and ultimate fate of these UN stations... has largely escaped the notice of policy-makers... To this day, there is not even an official record of past and present UN mission radio services.”⁵⁵ There is no lead agency in the development sector tasked with understanding the role of the media in fragile states,

and offering guidance, strategic leadership and coordination on how development agencies could best respond to these issues.

Support for the media is not obviously integrated into mainstream development discourse on fragile states. In 2011, a New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States between donors and governments of fragile states was agreed at the Fourth High Level Conference on Aid Effectiveness, held in Busan, South Korea. The New Deal outlined five peace-building and state-building goals, the first of which is to achieve legitimate politics and to foster inclusive political settlements and conflict resolution (others focused on security, justice, economic foundations, and revenues and services). The fact that there is no reference to the role of the media and communication in this deal is not a concern given the broad principles it was focused on, but there is scant evidence that these and associated issues are being substantively reflected or highlighted in discussions on fragile states.

The complex role of the media in fragile states is somewhat lost in the aid architecture. Political, messy and difficult as it is, there is no obvious source of impetus for the development sector to make it a priority. Country governments, increasingly the main driver of aid priorities within the international development system, rarely want to make media issues a priority. Even if governments started to support an independent and professional media, it is not something that sits comfortably within traditional conceptions of “country ownership”. Some recommendations on how to address these issues are provided in the final section of this briefing.

“There are very few fragile states where responsibility for strategic planning and support to the media is obviously identified within any one agency.”

PART 7

Conclusions and recommendations

This briefing is mainly aimed at development actors in a position to support the successful achievement of sustainable political settlements and development outcomes in fragile states. Conclusions and recommendations resulting from BBC Media Action's research and analysis follow.

Media matters in fragile states

Media and communication environments are changing rapidly, as are the ways that people access and use information and communication. These changes are having increasing and sometimes profound political and developmental effects. Some of these have negative impacts and others are positive. Stronger analysis of, research into and strategic support to media in fragile states are increasingly warranted.

Freedom of expression need not be sacrificed for state stability

A key conclusion of this report is that sacrificing media freedom and freedom of expression with the aim of making the state more stable is likely to be ineffective and counterproductive.

Some critics of media liberalisation strategies suggest that some form of censorship and containment of the media may be a logical option in support to fragile states, at least until the state becomes more stable and governable. It is difficult to see from these case studies how such censorship would have produced better outcomes for the media, state, society or citizens. Greater control exercised over the media could in fact lead to further anger building within the pressure cooker of political fragmentation in fragile states. More effective support and engagement to media in fragile states would be a more effective response.

These case studies do suggest, however, that there are real dangers if media is routinely co-opted by factional actors, and that fragmentation of the media can lead to the reinforcement of factional identities. Media and other communication systems do need to be better understood and supported to help prevent fuelling factional tensions.

Enabling a national public conversation

Special challenges exist in enabling the kind of media and communication system best able to provide a platform for a national public conversation to facilitate the development of shared identity. Market forces alone seem unlikely to bring into being media that is both independent of government, national in scope and scale and capable of engaging all sections of society, including the poorest and most marginalised. More creative strategies and external support will be required if national public service broadcasting systems are to be more successful in providing such platforms in the future.

Media regulation has to be part of the political settlement in any fragile state. The regulatory framework needs to include rules

for proportionate political coverage of parties and mechanisms for including minority political and cultural interests. It must also include transparent guidelines for setting licences for stations under terms which allow all media actors – even small ones – to participate. The international community is particularly well situated to promote regulatory reform, as the latter draws extensively on international norms and treaties.

Integrating support to media into the post-Millennium Development Goal framework

Following the publication in May 2013 of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons Report on the post-2015 development agenda, there is a historic opportunity for the values of freedom of the media and access to information to play a more central role in the post-2015 development agenda.⁵⁶ The report proposes integrating into the set of goals designed to replace the existing Millennium Development Goals, one ensuring “good governance and effective institutions”. It identifies five elements necessary for achieving this goal. One of these is to “ensure people enjoy freedom of speech, association, peaceful protest and access to independent media and information”. Such a goal should be welcomed.⁵⁷

Integrating media and communication issues into the fragile states agenda

Issues relevant to state fragility arising from transformations of media and communication landscapes could be more effectively integrated into debate and strategic action around fragile states. These issues could be better considered within national, bilateral and multilateral development strategies, and better integrated into established mechanisms already set up to underpin support to fragile states.

Nearly all bilateral, and several multilateral, actors are investing in tools to understand better the political complexity and drivers influencing political and development outcomes, especially in fragile states. The issues raised in this briefing – the role of the media, new technologies and access to information – could be better integrated into political economy analysis and similar exercises.

Both the positive and negative aspects of the media tend to become more pronounced during elections. The electoral cycle approach, pioneered by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the European Commission and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), is a major step forward in systematically planning support to elections, with special value in fractured fragile states. Building media and communication issues within this approach so proper analysis can take place years before an election would have real benefit in enabling effective long-term support strategies.

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Authors: James Deane

Commissioning editors: James Deane and Delia Lloyd

Editorial team: Anna Egan, Rachel Simpson, Charlotte Wells

Copy editor: Lorna Fray

Designer: Lance Bellers



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Registered office: Broadcasting House, Portland Place, London W1A 1AA.

Tel +44 (0) 20 8008 0001

Fax +44 (0) 20 8008 5970

Email media.action@bbc.co.uk

Web bbcmediaaction.org

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