



Challenges for Independent Media

2017

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FOR MORE INFORMATION:

House No. 14A, St. 392, Sangkat Beoung Keng Kang I,
Khan Chamkarmon, Phnom Penh, Kingdom of Cambodia
www.ccimcambodia.org
communications@ccimcambodia.org
+855 (0)23 726 842

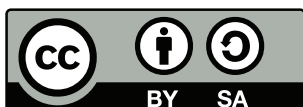


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Executive Summary

“We are concerned. We have to be careful. Now there aren’t many independent media outlets [left]. When we are alone it is very difficult. The future is unclear.”

Cambodia’s facade of media freedom collapsed in 2017. Authorities shuttered 32 radio stations carrying opposition, U.S.-funded or independent content,¹ hit often-critical media outlets with tax investigations that closed down newsrooms, and threatened and arrested journalists for “incitement” and “espionage” amid heated rhetoric that claimed foreign agents were attempting to topple the government.

A sector that once offered a semblance of democracy with pockets of free and critical news coverage—amid a sea of ruling-party affiliated television and newspapers—has been cut down and left reeling; reporters say they work with a keen awareness that they could be next to be targeted for their work. They say sources are now reluctant to talk, while local authorities have ramped up threats against them.

Consecutive years of journalists expressing hope that Cambodian media was moving in the right direction² have been overturned; just 11 percent of journalists surveyed this year said the sector was moving in the right direction. About 83 percent said media freedom had decreased over the past year. Many commented that this was so obvious as to make the question ridiculous.

Looking to the future, journalists are unsure whether the year’s turmoil—which 92 percent consider to have been a politically motivated media crackdown—is likely to continue. Some think the turmoil is over: Following the dissolution of the opposition party in November, the ruling CPP had secured a dominant one-party rule with no need to press further, they said.

Separately, a proliferation of digital news outlets has raised both hopes and concerns. More Cambodians are sharing information and opinions on Facebook, but authorities have arrested or sought the arrest of at least seven people this year whom they deemed to have gone too far. The journalists surveyed were split on whether the rise of online information sources was helping media freedom in Cambodia. As news breaks rapidly throughout the day, a cacophony of unverified leaks and reports compete against traditional reporting.

For many journalists in the country, however, life goes on much the same as before. On average, they are mildly satisfied with their jobs (with an average rating of 3.4 out of 5), and are receiving frequent training sessions including from the Information Ministry and ruling party-linked journalists’ unions. At government-aligned newspapers and television stations, reporters typically said they would continue to file stories in the way their superiors demanded: as a showcase of Cambodia’s progress and positive development.

KEY FINDINGS

Only 11 percent of 75 surveyed journalists said Cambodian media was headed in the right direction, down from 71 percent in 2015

83 percent said media freedom had decreased in the past year

92 percent consider the shutdowns of independent media outlets this year to have been political

38 percent said they had been verbally or physically attacked sometime during their careers in Cambodia, and 47 percent said they had been threatened at one point, up from 26 and 29 percent in 2015

14 percent said they had been verbally or physically attacked during the past year, and 20 percent said they had been threatened

67 percent of journalists said they do not feel completely free to report on all subjects without fear of interference or repercussions, up from 58 percent in 2015 and 47 percent in 2014

91 percent use encrypted messaging service WhatsApp for work communications

Corruption was rated as the most difficult topic to report on in Cambodia, with an average score of 4.2 out of 5

60 percent said they had participated in more than five training sessions during their careers in Cambodia

85 percent said they did not think the majority of journalists in Cambodia conducted themselves with sufficient professionalism

The Cambodia Daily, Phnom Penh Post and Voice of America were rated as the most independent media outlets in Cambodia in 2017

Fresh News, Nice TV and Bayon were rated the least independent

1 <http://www.licadho-cambodia.org/articles/20170909/148/index.html>

2 CCIM, Challenges for Independent Media 2015 (71%), 2014 (63%). The 2016 survey was truncated and conducted in early 2017.

Seventy-five reporters, photographers, editors, producers, educators and publishers working in Cambodia gave their views on the country's media industry. They spoke about working conditions, difficulties in accessing information, digital developments, journalism ethics, and the threats and attacks they have faced.

The survey follows a template started by the Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM) in 2014, when 78 journalists were interviewed face-to-face. The following year, 102 were surveyed in person, over the phone and online. The 2016 report was delayed till earlier this year, when a truncated survey of 22 media professionals was carried out.

The 2017 survey was done in November, and was conducted face-to-face for those working in Phnom Penh, and over the phone for those in the provinces (17 percent). Identities are kept anonymous to let interviewees speak more freely about their workplaces and threats. Their answers inform both the quantitative and qualitative analyses that follow.

Limitations

The survey aims to capture a broad range of voices—both men and women, those who work for government-aligned and foreign-owned media, a variety of ages, levels of experience and positions—but it is not a rigorously random sampling. For example, 50 percent of respondents professing a certain view cannot be considered as representing what 50 percent of all journalists in Cambodia would say. It is best to interpret the results only as what a relatively large number of journalists in the country have said, without extrapolating further.

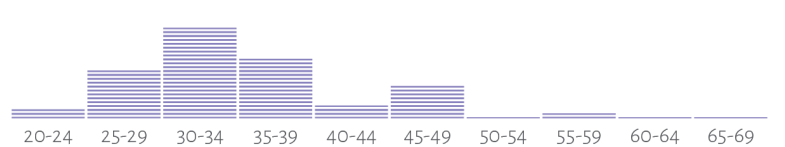
The survey was also conducted amid active developments in both politics and media. Some journalists were interviewed before the arrests of two journalists for espionage on November 14 and the opposition party's dissolution on November 16; others were interviewed after. It is likely that there will be further developments between the time this report was written (in late November) and the end of 2017.

SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

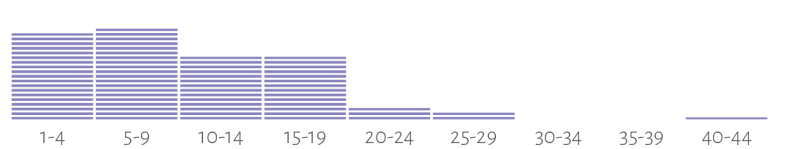
GENDER



AGE



YEARS OF EXPERIENCE



NATIONALITY



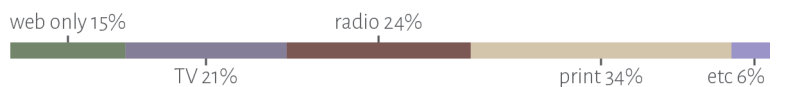
LOCATION



POSITION



TYPE OF MEDIA OUTLET



NUMBER OF PUBLICATIONS

41

Media Landscape

“It doesn’t affect us. I work in a different type of media institution. Our content stays the same. It only affects media outlets that aren’t pro-government.”

The country’s media landscape had long been split between ruling-party linked Khmer-language newspapers and television stations—tightly controlled and commonly distrusted in previous journalists’ surveys—and a few, mostly foreign-owned newspapers and radio services given surprisingly free rein to scrutinize those in power.

The old lines are breaking down for two key reasons: Independent media has been significantly dismantled this year through a series of at-times dramatic developments, and media outlets, whether originally TV, print or radio, are jostling for control over the digital future.

Internet

Online news sources supplanted television as the country’s most popular news medium in 2016 with a 30 percent share,¹ and Facebook in particular is dominant as a digital platform in Cambodia. TV stations have begun streaming some of their programming live on Facebook, while some radio services are disseminating their content online after being blocked from the airwaves. Forty-eight percent of Cambodians say they have at least one smartphone; an equal number say they have accessed the internet.¹

Arguably the most controversial and notable player in the digital space is Fresh News, a go-to for government announcements that pushes the limits of news and opinion with attack pieces and leaks. Started in 2012 and headed by chief executive Lim Cheavutha, the website has been at the center of several recent political controversies, including its repeated trumpeting of allegations of an international conspiracy involving the opposition party, the U.S., media outlets and NGOs. Journalists surveyed this year rated Fresh News as the least independent news outlet with a score of 4.8 out of 5. Its reputation, however, has not held back its popularity: Web analytics firm Alexa lists Fresh News as the country’s third most visited local site, trailing only entertainment websites Khmerload and Sabay. Post News (unrelated to newspaper Phnom Penh Post) and the website of daily newspaper Koh Santepheap follow.

The digital sector was considered to have the potential to break up Cambodia’s concentration of media ownership in the hands of a few wealthy, government-linked businesspeople. In 2015, just four of the top 10 popular news sites were associated with the ruling party, according to Media Ownership Monitoring (MOM), a joint research project between the Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM) and Reporters Without Borders.

Even with more diverse ownership, however, many journalists admit to self-censorship, saying that politics—particularly anything critical of the government—is off-limits. Arrests for critical posts on Facebook and legal threats against journalists, particularly those from the U.S.-funded Radio Free Asia (RFA), have created a fear of repercussions. Overall, only 33 percent of surveyed journalists said they felt free to report on all subjects without interference or fear of repercussions, down from 42 percent in 2015.

Of web-only outlets, the surveyed journalists considered Thmey Thmey, a privately owned website launched in 2012 by Cambodian-American philanthropist Mengly Jandy Quach and ex-Radio France Internationale correspondents, and Sabay, which has recently launched news site Kley Kley, to be relatively independent.

TV

Television remains the second-most popular medium for news and is notoriously entwined with ruling party interests. MOM says eight of the top 10 stations are owned by ruling party affiliates, including Prime Minister Hun Sen’s daughter Hun Mana; Kao Kim Hourn, a senior official in the prime minister’s office; and Kith Meng, a major tycoon known to be linked to the Cambodian People’s Party (CPP).

In September, the Interior Ministry also officially launched Nice TV, a China-backed television station promising to disseminate “homeland security news.” It covers law enforcement activities as well as entertainment.

Overall, journalists rated TV stations as the least independent of all mediums, on average, with a score of 4.5 out of 5. Nice TV and Bayon were considered the worst, both with scores of 4.7, while Hang Meas was rated the most independent at 4.3.

Radio

Radio services witnessed the biggest disruption this year amid an intensified political climate. Though declining in popularity, radio is nevertheless considered vital in disseminating news to rural provinces. This was particularly true before most radio programming willing to criticize the government was knocked off the air in August.

The opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party’s (CNRP) broadcasts, via local radio stations, were shut down by authorities a couple months before the party itself was dissolved in November. The U.S.-funded RFA—started in the 1950s as anti-communist

¹ http://www.open.org.kh/research/phones_2016.pdf

propaganda and routinely jammed in China—found itself under attack publicly and legally. Accused of being part of an American conspiracy to overthrow Hun Sen, its broadcasts were taken off the air and two of its Cambodian journalists arrested for espionage. A similar U.S.-backed radio service, VOA, was also blocked from local stations, though at the time of writing, its newsroom continues to operate in Phnom Penh. CCIM's own non-profit Voice of Democracy (VOD) radio service was also disrupted. VOD was founded in 2003 and is funded by foreign donors. RFA, VOA and VOD continue to post news bulletins online, and VOA Khmer in particular has a popular Facebook page of 6.2 million followers.

Print

Print's ongoing decline is counterbalanced by some newspapers' relatively strong digital versions. Koh Santepheap—according to MOM the most popular newspaper in the country—runs one of the most popular Cambodian websites. Deum Ampil, with only a 2 percent share in print,² also has a top 10 local website.³

MOM notes, however, that many local newspapers also have close ties to the ruling party. Koh Santepheap has many reporters also working at the Interior Ministry, while Rasmei Kampuchea is owned by Senate president Say Chhum, and Kampuchea Thmey by Hun Mana, it says.

Among English-language newspapers, Australian-owned Phnom Penh Post is considered one of the most independent media outlets in the country and has a popular Post Khmer local-language edition, though its content diverges from the English. Relatively new entrant Khmer Times has garnered a reputation, particularly among foreigners, as being biased in favor of the government. Foreign journalists rated it 4.1 out of 5 (veering toward “never independent”), while Cambodian journalists gave it an average score of 3.1, one of the widest divergences in the survey. (Websites Thmey Thmey and Cambonomist were also judged significantly more harshly by foreigners.) Finally, The Cambodia Daily, rated the most independent this year by surveyed journalists, stopped printing in September due to a tax dispute.

Journalists' Associations

The Club of Cambodian Journalists (CCJ) and the new Union of Journalist Federations of Cambodia (UJFC), started in August 2016 by Interior Ministry undersecretary of state Huy Vannak, comprise the main jour-

MEDIA INDEPENDENCE SCORES

CAMBODIA DAILY*	1.7
PHNOM PENH POST	1.9
VOA*	2.0
RFI	2.3
VOD*	2.4
RFA*	2.4
WOMEN'S MEDIA CENTRE	2.7
THMEY THMEY	3.0
VAYO FM	3.0
BEEHIVE	3.3
KHMER TIMES	3.3
SABAY/KLEY KLEY	3.4
CAMBONOMIST	3.6
POST NEWS	3.9
CAMPOS	4.0
KOH SANTEPHEAP	4.2
HANG MEAS	4.3
RASMEI KAMPUCHEA	4.4
KAMPUCHEA THMEY	4.4
DAP	4.5
CEN	4.5
CNC/CTN	4.5
TV5	4.5
SEA TV	4.5
TV3	4.6
TV9	4.6
TVK	4.6
AKP	4.6
APSARA	4.6
SWIFT NEWS	4.6
BAYON	4.7
NICE TV	4.7
FRESH NEWS	4.8

*Severely disrupted in 2017

1 = Always independent and unbiased; 5 = Never independent

nalists' associations in the country. UJFC has quickly garnered support and claims to have more than 1,000 members. CCJ, meanwhile, is led by Pen Bonnar, editor-in-chief of CPP senator Ly Yong Phat's PNN television station. Neither union has spoken out amid the arrests of journalists this year.⁴ A smaller union, Cambodia Association for Protection of Journalists, says it caters to Cambodian journalists at foreign outlets. The last update posted to its website was in March.⁵

Rankings

The latest Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders reports on media freedom, both released before this year's media shutdowns, deemed Cambodian media to be “not free” and 132nd most free out of 180 countries, respectively. Though rated higher than neighbors Thailand, Laos and Vietnam, Cambodian media was “under close watch” by the government, Reporters Without Borders noted. Ninety percent of surveyed journalists said they at least somewhat agreed with Freedom House's assessment.

2 http://mom-kh.com/en/print_media/29

3 <https://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/KH>

4 <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/local-journalism-organisations-silent-ex-rfa-pairs-case>

5 <http://www.capjkhmer.org/>

Challenges for Independent Media

“The authorities have warned us: ‘Don’t be so brave.’”

Threats and Jailings—as Usual?

In early February, political analyst Kim Sok joined a roundtable discussion on RFA and launched into criticism against the ruling Cambodia People's Party (CPP). He said that “they” had assassinated popular government critic Kem Ley in July 2016. Openly defiant, Kim Sok kept railing against the government as he was sued by Prime Minister Hun Sen and jailed for incitement and defamation.

Three months later, the government gathered regional leaders and international journalists in Phnom Penh for the World Economic Forum on Asean, and Hun Sen hosted a press conference at the five-star Sokha Hotel on the Chroy Changvar peninsula. He fielded two questions: one from an RFA reporter and another from a business journalist at the Daily, both about economic issues. Hun Sen used the rest of the 37-minute session to scold the two reporters, warning that they were the “servants of foreigners.”

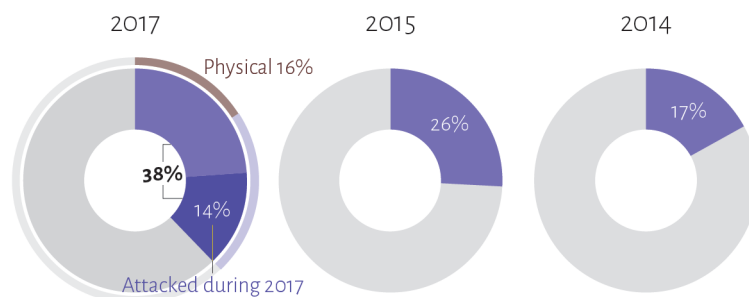
In many ways, this was business as usual.

Kim Sok was the third person prosecuted for linking Kem Ley's assassination to the CPP (the other two were politicians; they evaded arrest abroad), and the U.S.-funded, opposition-friendly RFA has regularly been the butt of Hun Sen's criticism—but RFA had nevertheless been allowed to keep working, excepting short-lived bans such as around the 2013 national election.

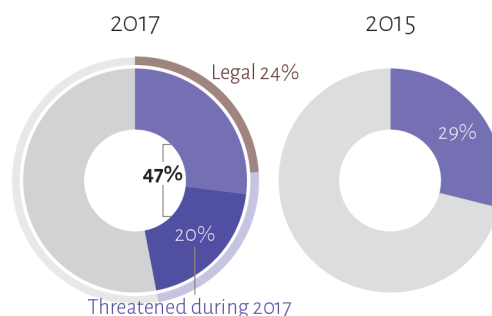
Several other media-related incidents occurred in the first half of the year. Several Cambodian citizens were arrested for criticizing the prime minister on Facebook (see sidebar: Facebook Arrests, page 10) and provincial journalists—many with questionable credentials—were charged with allegedly extorting timber traders and farmers on state land (sidebar: Extortionists? page 12). RFA journalist Huot Vuthy, known on air as Chun Chanboth, fled the country to escape an arrest warrant for false declaration after visiting Prey Sar prison in April with opposition politicians. An ex-Daily reporter, Saing Soenthrith, accused his former employer of failing to meet its severance obligations after he fell ill in 2016 and was put on unpaid leave. He received gifts of cash from the prime minister and others soon after he went public.

And around commune elections in June, two Daily reporters, Aun Pheap and Zsombor Peter, became the target of a court complaint accusing them of

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN ATTACKED? PHYSICALLY/VERBALLY



HAVE YOU EVER BEEN THREATENED? PHYSICALLY/LEGALLY/VERBALLY



inciting people to commit felonies. They had interviewed locals in Ratanakkiri province as part of their election coverage, asking questions such as: “What party did people vote for in 2012?” Meanwhile, Australian filmmaker James Ricketson was arrested a day after he was seen flying a drone at an opposition election rally. He has been charged with espionage, and faces 10 years in prison.

The incidents added up to a tense climate. Journalists were harassed and intimidated, and the courts took serious action based on seemingly flimsy pretexts. Threats and attacks against journalists, however, are recurring in Cambodia. Thirty-eight percent of surveyed journalists said they had been verbally or physically attacked sometime during their careers in Cambodia, and 47 percent said they had been threatened at one point. This is up from 26 and 29 percent in 2015. The numbers are 14 and 20 percent, respectively, for attacks and threats in the past year.

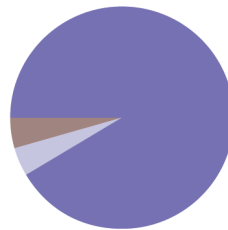
'Crackdown'

Formally, Cambodia has been a multiparty democracy since 1993. It has also had traces of a free press since the English-language Phnom Penh Post and Cambodia Daily were set up around that time. Any such illusions, however, fell apart in the latter half of 2017.

On August 5, a tax bill appeared on Fresh News claiming that the owners of The Cambodia Daily owed \$6.3 million in unpaid taxes stretching back 10 years. The newspaper's owners claimed the bill had been posted to Fresh News before it had even been delivered to them; they also claimed there had been no audit that could have come up with the correct 10-year amount.

In the weeks that followed, RFA and VOA were similarly dragged publicly into tax investigations. On August 19, tax head Kong Vibol told Fresh News that the Daily would be closed down on September 4 unless it paid up. Hun Sen called the newspaper the "chief thief" three days later. Stories of a color revolution conspiracy began to flood Fresh News at that time, linking opposition leader Kem Sokha's family, foreign journalists, U.S. intelligence agencies and local NGOs in an alleged scheme to topple the government. American journalist Geoff Cain, based outside Cambodia, was accused of being a spy, while U.S. elections group National Democratic Institute was

Were the media closures primarily political?



"It is not political. Those newspapers and radios did not broadcast what the government had achieved, but they always reported the mistakes of the government."

kicked out of the country. RFA and VOA were branded as being tools of the conspiracy.

On August 21, the first of dozens of local radio stations carrying RFA, VOA, VOD and opposition CNRP content was ordered to close. As the number of shuttered stations reached as high as 32, cutting off independent and opposition content from the airwaves, the Information Ministry broadly explained that the stations had violated their contracts with the government.

On September 3, opposition leader Kem Sokha was arrested at his house for treason. The Cambodia Daily printed its final issue the morning after, its owners arguing that it was financially unviable to continue. RFA shuttered its Phnom Penh newsroom the week after.

Ninety-two percent said the closures were primarily a matter of politics.

"There's probably many organizations in Cambodia that aren't paying taxes, and they haven't been forced to leave the country. Obviously, there are elections next year, and it seems a little bit too coincidental," one journalist said.

"It was in preparation for this large crackdown on the opposition," another said.

Ongoing Arrests

The harassment of journalists continued as the opposition CNRP was dissolved by Supreme Court ruling on November 16 based on allegations of an international conspiracy centered around Kem Sokha.

Two former RFA journalists, Oun Chhin and Yeang Socheameta, were arrested two days earlier for espionage for allegedly continuing to report for the American radio service, while two other journalists—Andrew Nachemson, working for the Phnom Penh Post, and Leng Len, a former Daily reporter—were detained on the day of the CNRP's Supreme Court hearing for not having proper identification or media passes. They were later released.

The two Daily reporters facing court prosecution in Ratanakkiri have reportedly left the country, while former RFA journalists in Phnom Penh say they are being monitored and followed. Many have changed their phone numbers and have been unreachable.

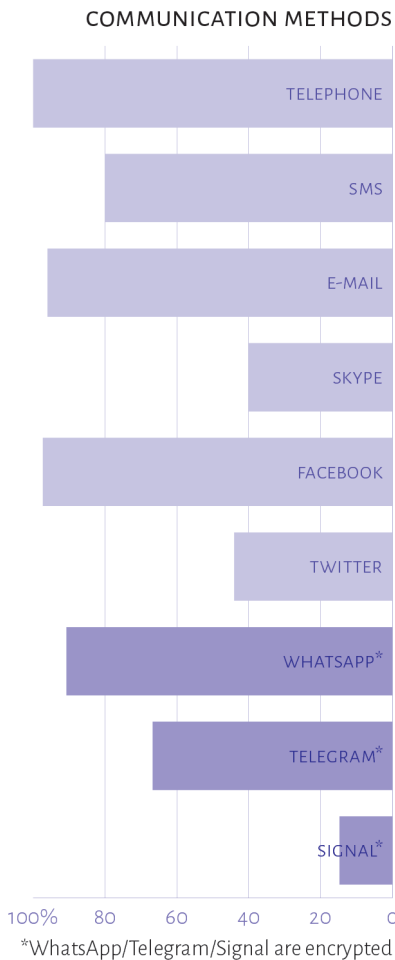
Surveyed journalists were unsure where the continued crackdown was headed: 33 percent said they expected more media outlets to be closed down; 25 percent said it was over.

"They've pretty much swept all the opposition content off the airwaves already, and they've made a good example of [newspapers] and radio stations. I think people have got the message," one journalist said.

Others disagreed. "I just think the crackdown on any critical voices is increasing," an interviewee said. Another shared his concern that there was no way to push back against Hun Sen. "He dared to dissolve even the big opposition party, so what about us as a media outlet that is small?"

RFA, VOA and VOD continue to post daily news bulletins and other content online, while the Daily has been posting nominal updates on its website and Facebook page.

"There is no freedom.... You face imprisonment just by writing on Facebook. We're not even talking about what you might write for a newspaper."



Silence and Paranoia

Journalists continuing to work for independent outlets have faced increased pressure.

“When we go out to cover stories, we are blocked by authorities. They threaten us,” one journalist said. “For any media that’s not pro-government, it’s difficult to access some places to get information, and you are being observed,” another reported.

Many said they felt they were being watched. Journalists have reported being photographed by authorities while on the job and blocked from entering the National Assembly and other venues. Authorities were on the lookout for an excuse to persecute them, they said.

“Reporters have to be careful. They face the threat of lawsuits at all times. It could happen anytime.”

“We are very careful when reporting. We try not to make any mistakes. We follow [strict] journalistic [principles] to make sure the government cannot catch us making any mistakes,” a reporter said.

Journalists at outlets considered to be independent were more than twice as likely to have been verbally or physically attacked this year, at 20 percent, compared to journalists working at organizations rated not free, at 7 percent.

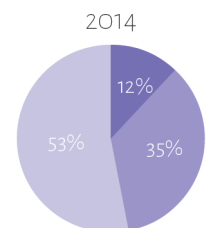
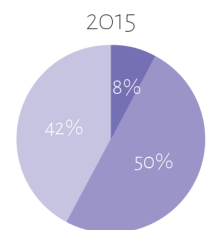
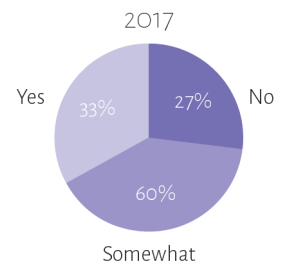
Their troubles were compounded by rising fear among their sources, they said. “We want to report but our sources don’t dare to talk, so the content of our articles is diminished.”

“They should back down. They should not fight against the government. They should accept what they have done wrong so far.”

Some journalists said sources were now demanding that they use only encrypted communications, and the prevalence of the technology was a notable trend: More journalists said they use the encrypted WhatsApp, at 91 percent, than the easily intercepted SMS, at 80 percent. (SMS is thought to have been exploited for the repeated hacks of email accounts in Cambodia over the past couple of years, particularly of activists and politicians.)

Sixty-seven percent of journalists said they do not feel completely free to report on all subjects without fear of interference or repercussions, an increase from 58 percent in 2015 and 47 percent in 2014.

Do you feel free to report on all subjects without interference or fear of repercussions?



1 <https://www.cambodiadaily.com/weekend/surveillance-state-127681/>

“Once our editors have changed [our stories] one or two times, we start to understand, and, moreover, we become worried that our boss will consider us as a dissident.”

The Untouched

The divide between government-aligned and relatively independent media remains, and journalists working at outlets deemed to be less independent (rated higher than 3 out of 5) acknowledged their lack of independence: Only 17 percent said their organizations were free from political and business influence, compared to 52 percent overall and 90 percent among journalists working at outlets rated by their peers as being independent. Self-perceptions generally matched the perceptions of their peers.

Those journalists working at non-free outlets were also half as likely to say Cambodian media was headed in the wrong direction, and four times as likely to say it was staying the same.

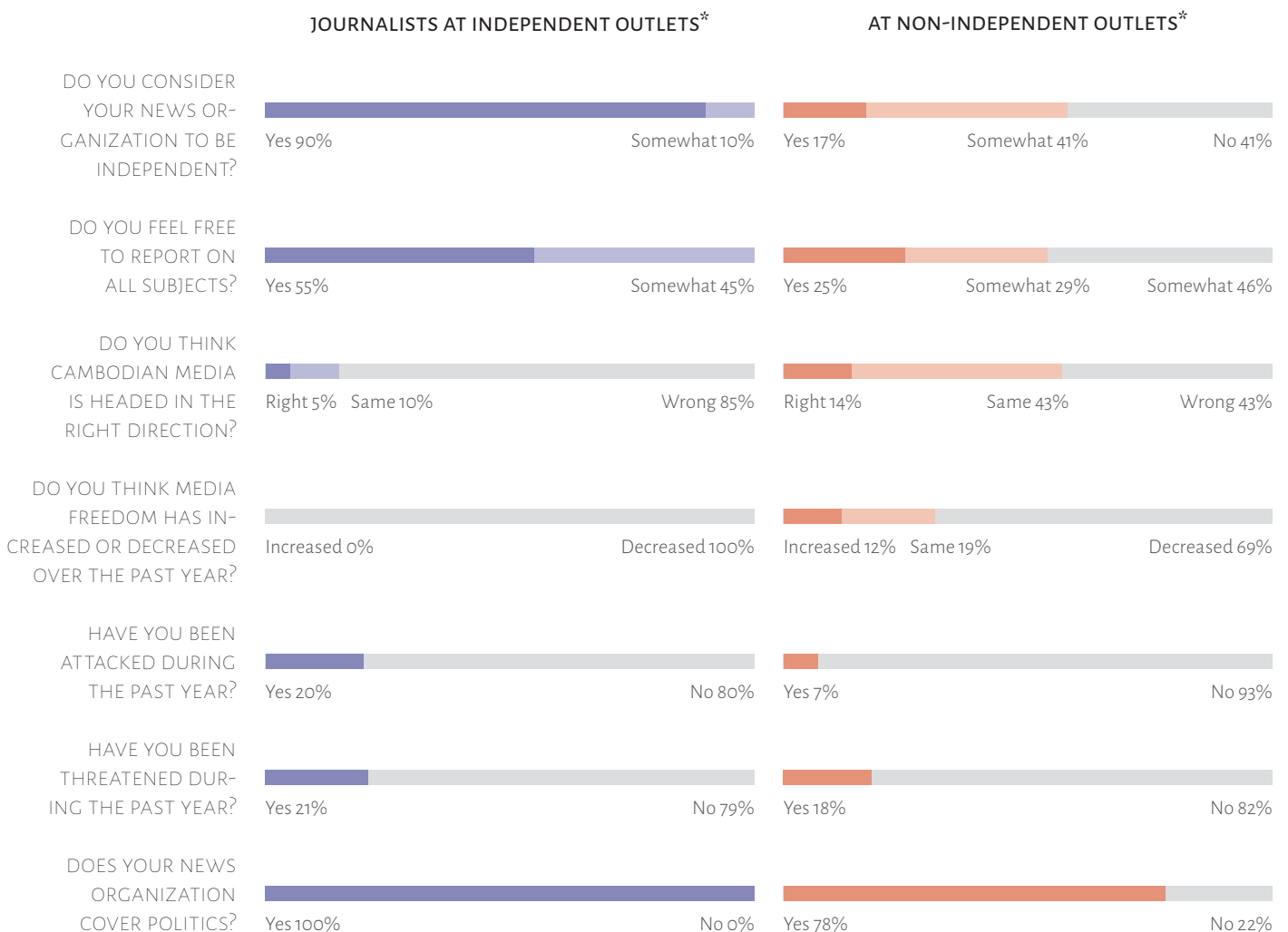
As one journalist put it: “Freedom for independent

media outlets has decreased, but for local media it is still the same.”

Accustomed to years of interference from business and politicians, journalists at pro-government organizations toe the line. Only 78 percent of interviewees at outlets that are considered not free said their organizations covered politics at all. Politics was the least covered category overall.

“No, I cannot report everything. We need to report everything as good,” a reporter explained.

In September, even as some independent media outlets were shuttered, the Interior Ministry officially launched its own China-backed television station, Nice TV, while Fresh News started up an internet radio service, further shifting the balance between the two sides of the industry.



*As rated by peers (see Media Independence Scores, p 5)

“I do believe in the democratization of information, but there’s just so many fake stories and unverified stories out there, and unfortunately people believe them.”

FACEBOOK ARRESTS

JUNE 13

Leang La, 45, deputy chief of the Interior Ministry’s accounting and logistics office, arrested in Phnom Penh over a comment on Hun Sen’s Facebook page saying, “Hun Sen is about to die, a warning to all the Hun family to flee before 2018.... Your fate to die or go to jail is unavoidable.”

JUNE 27

Arrest warrant issued for Sam Sokha, 38, for incitement to discriminate and insulting a public official after she uploaded a video in April showing her throwing a sandal at a billboard featuring Hun Sen.

JULY 13

Pich Roth Tha, 24, arrested in Preah Sihanouk province after he went to police to report that his Facebook account had been hacked and a threatening message to Hun Sen posted on it. “One day, I will shoot your head, Sen, the blind,” the post says. “Sen, you killed so many people, and no longer. You will die by my hand.”

AUGUST 13

Khmer Power Party leader Sourn Serey Ratha arrested for inciting soldiers to disobey orders after criticizing the deployment of troops to the Laotian border. “The Cambodian children in the army will die horribly on the battlefield, but their commanders will be promoted, collect money and have fun with girls,” he wrote on Facebook.

AUGUST 26

Mao Linda, 31, arrested for insult and defamation in Poipet City for calling Hun Sen a traitor on Facebook.

SEPTEMBER 15

Moeung Lihor, 20, a fruit vendor working in Thailand, arrested in Poipet City for incitement and public insult over Facebook posts labeling the prime minister a “traitor” and “murderer.”

OCTOBER 24

Chhun Sithy, commune councilor in Pailin province, arrested for incitement to discriminate over a Facebook video rejecting Hun Sen’s invitation for opposition officials to defect.

Digital Proliferation

Social media use has become standard across Cambodian media, with all respondents saying their organizations use social media at least weekly. Eighty-seven percent said their organizations posted on social media at least five times a day. Facebook was used by all and Twitter by about half, and only one respondent said social media was not helpful to her organization’s strategy.

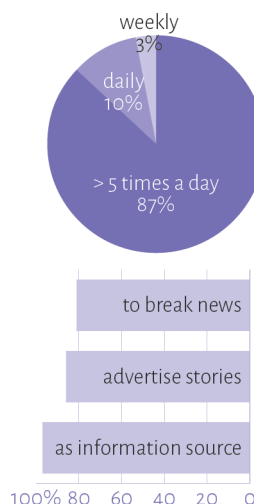
The burgeoning amount of content online, however, has split the opinions of journalists. Fifty-eight percent of those surveyed said the growing number of information sources online and on social media was contributing to greater media freedom. Thirty-eight percent disagreed. Just 4 percent were neutral. Both the benefits and costs are clear: There is more information and more people publishing and accessing information, but there is also a lot more bad information that potentially crowds out the good.

Journalists in traditional newsrooms said the competition online skewed their work. “It’s enabled organizations purely based on speed with no verification to prosper, which naturally hurts those who do verify and do their jobs properly,” a reporter said.

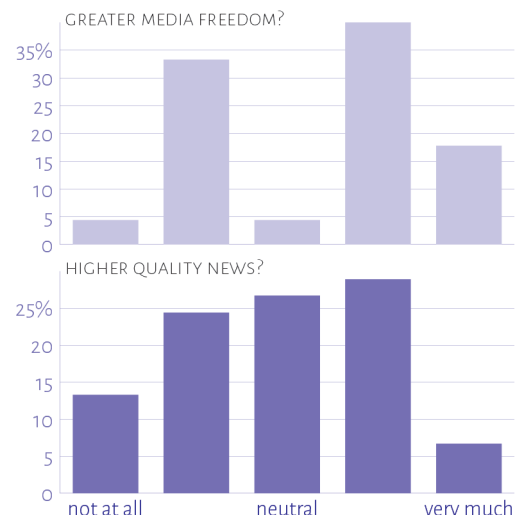
“Some media just take it without doing more reporting. They just copy it and it’s like copy trash,” another said.

Anonymous and unverified stories have spread quickly on websites and Facebook. The sharing of graphic images, often of victims of crimes, has also caused controversy. The government has taken some action in response to online behavior by arresting social media critics of Hun Sen based on the charges of incitement, insult and defamation. A cybercrime law is currently being drafted by the Interior and Telecommunications ministries that could more explicitly regulate the field.

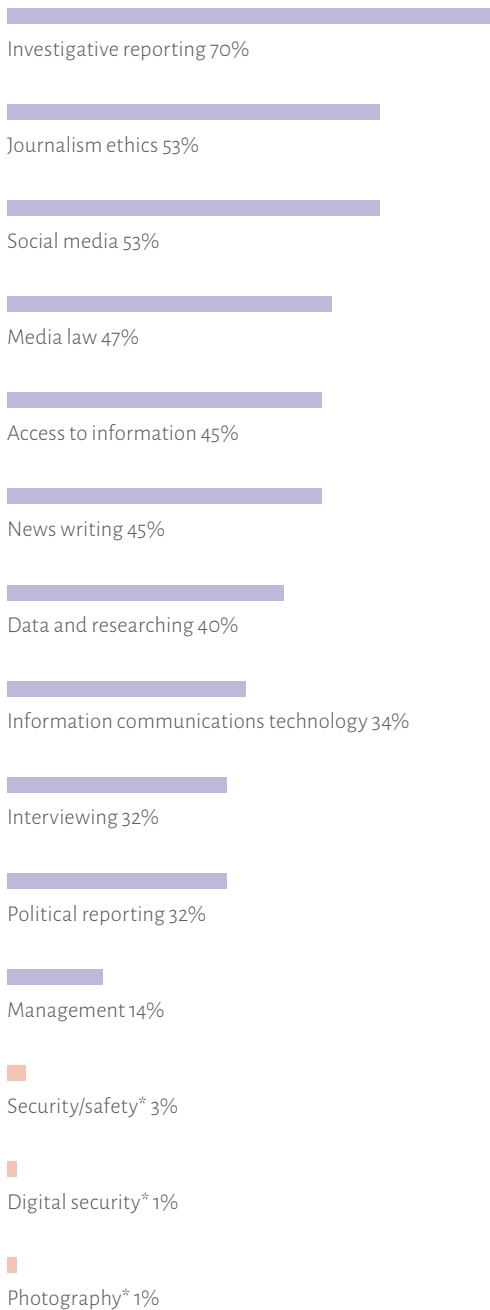
SOCIAL MEDIA USE (OUTLETS)



GROWTH IN ONLINE INFORMATION SOURCES IS LEADING TO:



TRAINING THAT WOULD BE MOST BENEFICIAL



*Unprompted

“Compared to five years ago, journalists now understand [professional conduct] a lot more. They’ve changed a lot because of training courses and social media. The government and their departments have also curbed [unethical behavior]. Their journalism is much better.”

More Training, More Oversight

Eighty percent of Cambodian journalists in the survey said they had participated in more than five training sessions during their careers. (Sixty percent overall.) In 2015, just 28 percent overall said they had, and in previous surveys the lack of education and training was raised as a major challenge for the media sector.

Huy Vannak, president of the Union of Journalist Federations of Cambodia, established in August 2016, said his union had so far held two multi-day training sessions attended by a total of more than 200 participants.

The five main topics at the sessions were news writing, interviewing, the business of news, media law and the role of spokespeople, said Mr. Vannak, who is also undersecretary of state at the Interior Ministry and head of news for Cambodian Television Network (CTN).

“We tell them very honestly.... If you’re a private media organization, you have to balance and listen to your boss and your editor. They let you stay in the job,” he said.

Mr. Vannak said the goal was to raise the professionalism among journalists in the country and provide news that goes beyond just the facts. Based on experts’ opinions, “you have to build your capacity to decide what’s the truth and move beyond and explain why this happened and what will happen,” he said.

Mr. Vannak added that the union’s more than 1,000 members were kept up-to-date and given advice through the mobile app Telegram.

“I share about content direction, what content would be good, what should be the basis for a story at the moment, what’s better for us to provide, if we’ve missed the importance or do too much about politics that brings people too much hardship,” he said.

Mr. Vannak said the industry also needed clearer laws, and said he admired the way Singapore regulated its media. (Singapore currently ranks lower than Cambodia on Reporters Without Borders’ World Press Freedom Index. Reporters Without Borders notes that Singapore’s Media Development Authority “has the power to censor journalistic content, both in the traditional media and online.”)

More than three-quarters of surveyed journalists said they had completed at least some university study in a wide range of fields, with journalism and media the most common and English and law tied for second.

Lack of Professionalism

Eighty-five percent of interviewees said they did not think the majority of journalists conducted themselves with sufficient professionalism, a jump from 44 percent in 2015. Many interviewees said the situation was improving, but too many journalists were still taking bribes.

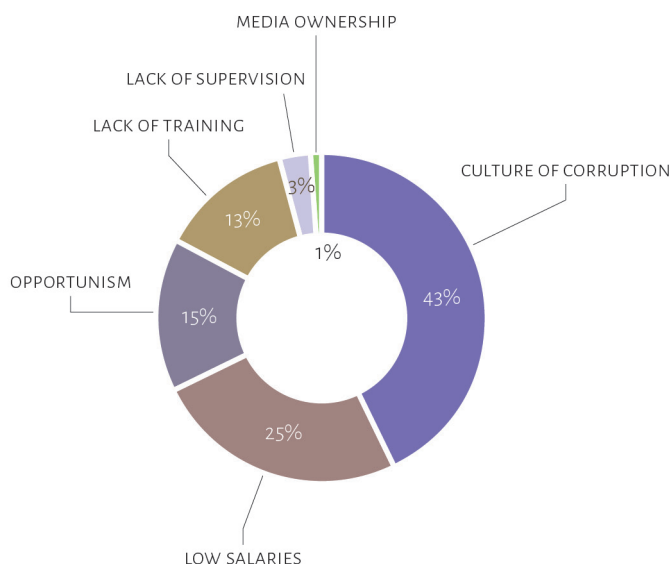
“They’ve tried. They’ve improved a lot. They have the knowledge, but sometime they close their eyes to get an extra income. It’s an issue that affects the reputation of journalism,” an interviewee said.

Twenty-five percent said low salaries were at the root of the unethical behavior. “The important thing is that people need to survive. If their salary is enough, they will do everything in line with professionalism.”

However, the biggest share of interviewees, at 43 percent, said a culture of corruption in Cambodia was the main cause of unethical behavior. This is a departure from previous surveys, which cited low pay as the leading cause, and may indicate that the perceived lack of professionalism has expanded from the practice of taking bribes to also encompass biased and careless reporting.

“All TV stations have been created by powerful people and government officials. The journalists cannot do a professional job. They can report only good things about the government,” one journalist said.

MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR CONTRIBUTING TO UNETHICAL BEHAVIOR



Do the majority of journalists conduct themselves with sufficient professionalism?



EXTORTIONISTS?

It has often been reported that journalists—as well as extortionists masquerading as reporters—have sought bribes from illegal timber traffickers in exchange for withholding the publication of stories and photographs. In many cases, the publications the journalists have purported to be working for have been non-existent or merely a rarely updated blog.

However, the scenario is now being used as a way to threaten legitimate journalists, one provincial reporter said.

“Illegal businessmen always collude with powerful officials and related authorities to set traps to arrest reporters for extortion. This is the biggest challenge. When there is a threat, our reporters mostly do not dare to report because they worry about retaliation and being put in jail,” he said.

In June, about 50 provincial journalists gathered at the Information Ministry headquarters in Phnom Penh to protest the arrests of four journalists in Ratanakkiri province for alleged extortion. The visiting journalists said

authorities were trying to intimidate reporters by accusing them of extortion—and were failing to arrest the timber traffickers—while authorities said the four journalists had been extorting the plaintiff for years.

Two other similar cases were reported in 2017:

On June 9, three journalists were arrested for allegedly accusing a rice farmer of illegally exploiting state land in Kompong Thom province and demanding \$800 in exchange for their silence.

On February 1, seven journalists were attacked by villagers in Ratanakkiri for allegedly extorting them for transporting “a little wood to sell for money to support their families and earn a living,” according to a local official.¹

1 <https://www.cambodiadaily.com/morenews/journalists-and-local-residents-face-off-in-ratanakkiri-124904/>

Further Trends

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Journalists rated their access to various types of governmental information as somewhere between “able to obtain with some effort” and “difficult to obtain.” Court documents, records of land sales and rosters of public employees were perceived as the most difficult to obtain, while the prices of public services and National Assembly records were deemed the easiest.

As the Information Ministry and Unesco continue to work on an Access to Information Law, few journalists held out hope that it would make any difference. Sixty-five percent doubted the law would improve the situation for journalists’ access to information, compared to 31 percent who thought it would.

WORKING CONDITIONS

Thirty-nine percent of interviewees said they were somewhat or very satisfied with their jobs, for a score of 3.4 out of 5. This represents mild satisfaction, though it is down significantly from 2015, when 80 percent said they were satisfied with their jobs overall.

Interestingly, the surveyed journalists were less satisfied with specific components of their work—their salaries, benefits, working hours, stress levels and safety—than they were overall. They were least satisfied with their stress levels, at 2.8 out of 5, and most satisfied with their working hours, at 3.3.

GENDER

On average, the female journalists surveyed were moderately younger and less experienced. The average female journalist was 30 years old compared to 39 for men, and had seven years of experience compared to 12 for men. They were about as likely to have experienced an attack during their careers in Cambodia, but less likely to have been threatened at 35 percent, compared to 57 percent for men.

Lack of media sensitivity toward gender issues caused controversy this year, particularly when popular Hang Meas television news host Meas Rithy discussed a rape-murder case on air in August and advised rapists against murdering their victims: “Why not keep her for using again?” Meas Rithy said.¹ The

1 <https://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/petition-calls-for-tv-boss-to-apologize-over-rape-remarks-133578/>

DIFFICULTY ACCESSING INFORMATION

→ MORE DIFFICULT

Records of land sales/concessions	2.9/4
Court decisions/documents	2.8
Rosters of public employees	2.8
National/local budgets	2.6
Salaries of public officials	2.5
Draft laws	2.4
National Assembly records	2.1
Prices of public services	2.0

DIFFICULTY REPORTING

→ MORE DIFFICULT

Corruption	4.2/5
Land concessions	3.7
Border issues	3.5
Courts	3.4
Politics/politicians	3.4
Human rights	3.3
Laws/policies	3.1
Environment	3.0
Protests	2.8
Crime	2.6
Media issues	2.4
Business deals	2.4
Health	2.0
Religion	1.9
Education	1.9

BIGGEST CHALLENGE

Government control/influence	49%
Prosecution and legal threats	18%
Low pay	8%
Lack of skills or education	7%
Restricted online press freedom	7%
Lack of access to information	6%
Lack of objectivity/personal biases	3%
Unethical practices by journalists	3%

incident sparked an online petition and led to an on-air apology. About a month earlier in July, the information and women’s affairs ministries signed a new code of conduct for reporting on violence against women, urging media to avoid blaming the victim, among other guidelines.

BIGGEST CHALLENGE

Overall, following a tumultuous year for media, interviewees said that government influence was the biggest problem facing journalists today. Forty-nine percent said government influence and control was the biggest problem, followed by 18 percent saying it was prosecutions and legal threats against journalists.

Though journalists overwhelmingly decried the increased threats and pressure against independent media, one interviewee said the situation could be worse: “Despite the latest restrictions of some outlets, people still have relatively good access to information. Radio Free Asia, VOA and others still can be read and heard.”

Recommendations

“The less independent media you have, the more freedom the powers-that-be have to act with impunity. It’s a bad situation for everyone in the country that trickles down, but not everyone will realize it.”

“True media freedom means that there are both admirers and critics.”

Based on developments in the Cambodian media sector during 2017 and on data collected from its survey of professional journalists’ attitudes and perceptions, CCIM makes the following recommendations aimed at increasing the independence and professionalism of Cambodian journalists and news outlets:

Media

1. Media organizations should commit to providing all support necessary to their reporters in case of an emergency related to their work. All media organizations should develop security policies and plans detailing emergency procedures as well as the types of assistance they will provide to their staff, including but not limited to legal representation, medical treatment and temporary relocation to a safe house. All media organizations should, at minimum, provide their workers with NSSF, or accident compensation, as required by law, and should consider offering medical insurance.
2. Journalists’ associations should work independently and without a political agenda to protect journalists and to promote professional journalism and media freedom.

Civil Society

1. Work with media outlets to promote the safety and protection of journalists by offering courses in physical and digital security.
2. Prioritize capacity building of journalists as a means of increasing citizen access to information and freedom of expression. In particular, focus on areas identified by journalists as priorities, including investigative reporting and journalism ethics.
3. International donors should continue to support the development of independent media in Cambodia.

Government

1. Create a politically independent body responsible for the issuance of media licenses so that public airwaves are open to a range of voices, opinions and independent news. Ensure transparency in the licensing and registrations of media outlets and the issuing of media passes to journalists.
2. Expedite work on the Access to Information Law in collaboration with civil society, and commit to the principles of access to information including having open meetings and fair access for journalists from all media outlets.
3. Regarding any amendments to the Press Law, seek input from a wide range of stakeholders, including civil society and media associations, and study international best practices to clearly promote independent media and protect journalists.
4. Espionage charges should not be used to prosecute working journalists.
5. De-escalate the mounting pressure on journalists and independent media, and recommit to protecting media freedom in Cambodia.

*Everybody well informed.
Everybody empowered.*