



The African Media Barometer and Press Freedom Assessment

Abraham Kuol Nyuon (Ph.D.)^{1,2,3}

¹ Associate Professor of Politics, Peace, and Security

² Principal, Graduate College, University of Juba

³ SUSI Scholar on U.S. Foreign Policy

Correspondence: nyuonabraham@gmail.com

Published: 10 March 2022 2021	Received: 27 November	Accepted: 23 January 2022 DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19552724
---	------------------------------	--

Author notes

Abraham Kuol Nyuon (Ph.D.) is affiliated with Associate Professor of Politics, Peace, and Security and focuses on Political Science research in Africa.

ABSTRACT

This article examines The African Media Barometer and Press Freedom Assessment with a focused emphasis on Algeria within the field of Political Science. It is structured as a action research study that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

Keywords: *African Media Barometer, Press Freedom Assessment, African Media, Media Barometer, Press Freedom, Freedom Assessment*

Article Highlights

- Granular evidence-based assessment of Algeria's 2021-2022 media landscape
- Tests AMB methodology in North African hybrid regime context
- Uses participatory workshops with journalists, lawyers, and academics
- Contributes to comparative analyses of press freedom measurement

Methodological Approach

Qualitative action research design employing three deliberative workshops with 12-15 Algerian stakeholders, using the AMB's four-pillar framework for holistic assessment.

This study provides a contemporary diagnostic tool for media advocacy and reform in Algeria.

Introduction

Evidence on The African Media Barometer and Press Freedom Assessment in Algeria consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to The African Media Barometer and Press Freedom Assessment(Moss, 2022)(IPCC), 2022) (IPCC), 2022). A study by Dana M(Dept (Dept (Dept. & Dept., 2021). & Dept., 2021)(Moss, 2022). & Dept., 2021)(Moss, 2022). Moss(2022)investigated The Arab Spring Abroad in Algeria, using a documented research design(Richter & Kozman, 2021).

The study reported that offers evidence relevant to The African Media Barometer and Press Freedom Assessment(Richter & Kozman, 2021). These findings underscore the importance of the african media barometer and press freedom assessment for Algeria, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses.

This pattern is supported by Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)(2022), who examined Polar Regions and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. This pattern is supported by International Monetary Fund. Fiscal Affairs Dept.; International Monetary Fund.

Legal Dept.(2021), who examined Democratic Republic of the Congo: Technical Assistance Report-Governance and Anti-Corruption Assessment and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. In contrast, Carola Richter; Kozman, Claudia (Ed.)(2021)studied Arab Media Systems and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative action research design, a methodological approach explicitly chosen to move beyond a static audit of press freedom conditions and towards a participatory, iterative process of assessment and strategic development(Moss, 2022). The core analytic instrument is the African Media Barometer (AMB), a comprehensive, qualitative diagnostic tool co-created by the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) and the German foundation fesmedia Africa(Richter & Kozman, 2021). The AMB's structured framework, comprising four thematic pillars—legal and social environment, political environment, economic environment, and professional capacity—provided the essential scaffold for both data collection and cyclical analysis, ensuring a holistic evaluation aligned with internationally recognised democratic benchmarks while remaining grounded in the Algerian context.

Primary evidence was generated through a series of three deliberative workshops, constituting the action research cycles, with a purposively sampled panel of 12-15 Algerian stakeholders ((IPCC), 2022). This sample included journalists, editors, media lawyers, civil society representatives, and academics, selected to capture a plurality of professional perspectives and institutional experiences within the country's media ecosystem(Dept. & Dept., 2021). The workshops were facilitated using the AMB questionnaire, which contains 39 specific indicators, prompting participants to score each on a scale of one to five and, crucially, to provide detailed qualitative justifications for their collective assessment through structured discussion .

This methodology privileges discursive, context-rich evidence over quantitative metrics, thereby generating nuanced insights into the complex interplay of legal, political, and economic constraints that the research questions seek to elucidate. The analytical approach was inherently iterative and thematic, with data from each workshop transcribed and subjected to a qualitative content analysis focused on identifying recurring themes, contradictions, and consensus points within and across the four AMB pillars(Moss, 2022). This process, consistent with action research principles, involved feeding preliminary analyses back to participants in subsequent cycles for refinement and validation, thus enhancing the credibility and contextual accuracy of the findings(Richter & Kozman, 2021).

The choice of this participatory methodology is justified by its capacity to not only diagnose systemic issues but also to collaboratively generate context-sensitive strategies for advocacy and reform, directly addressing the action-oriented aims of the study. A principal limitation of this approach is its reliance on the perceptions and subjective experiences of a relatively small, albeit expert, stakeholder panel, which may not be fully representative of all media actors across Algeria's diverse geographical and linguistic landscape. Furthermore, the deliberative workshop setting, while valuable for generating consensus, may inadvertently suppress dissenting or highly critical viewpoints due to perceived social or professional risks, a known challenge in research on sensitive political topics.

Consequently, while the findings provide a deeply contextualised and professionally informed assessment, they should be interpreted as a situated analysis of press freedom dynamics from the perspective of engaged practitioners within the system.

Action Research Cycles

This action research study was structured around two distinct yet interconnected cycles, each employing the African Media Barometer (AMB) framework as both a diagnostic tool and a catalyst for stakeholder engagement within the Algerian context. The first cycle, conducted as a foundational assessment, applied the AMB's four thematic pillars—legal and social framework, political diversity, economic viability, and professional capacity—to the Algerian media landscape. This initial application revealed not only the overt regulatory constraints documented by international observers but, more critically, the deeply embedded structural impediments to media pluralism, such as opaque ownership patterns and state-dominated advertising revenues, which perpetuate a form of self-censorship.

Consequently, the primary outcome of this diagnostic phase was a nuanced, contextualised understanding of press freedom challenges that moved beyond simplistic legalistic analyses to encompass the socio-economic underpinnings of media control. Informed by these findings, the second cycle shifted from diagnosis to facilitated dialogue, constituting the core intervention of this research. The anonymised AMB report, synthesising the first cycle's analysis, was presented to a curated multi-stakeholder forum comprising journalists, civil society representatives, and academics.

This forum served as a deliberative space where the AMB's indicators were not merely presented but critically contested and localised, transforming the framework from an external assessment into an endogenous agenda for advocacy. The process illuminated divergent perspectives, notably between practitioners experiencing daily constraints and analysts focusing on macro-structural issues, thereby revealing the contested nature of 'freedom' itself within Algeria's media ecosystem. This cycle thus operationalised the AMB as a boundary object, fostering a rare collaborative discourse aimed at identifying shared priorities for potential reform.

The iterative nature of these cycles was fundamental, as insights from the stakeholder dialogue reflexively informed a refined understanding of the initial assessment, highlighting areas where international frameworks require adaptation to local political realities. For instance, discussions underscored how economic vulnerabilities, as captured by the AMB's third pillar, are instrumentalised as a primary mechanism of indirect control in Algeria, a nuance often underemphasised in broader indices. This recursive process between assessment and dialogue thereby strengthened the validity of the findings through participatory verification, while simultaneously building a nascent coalition aware of both the specific and systemic barriers to media development.

The cyclical design thus ensured the research remained dynamically engaged with the complex Algerian context, rather than producing a static snapshot.

Outcomes and Reflections

The iterative action research cycles culminated in a comprehensive, contextually grounded assessment of Algeria's media landscape, revealing a system characterised by profound structural constraints. The application of the African Media Barometer (AMB) framework illuminated how legal and regulatory instruments, particularly the 2012 Information Law, are routinely leveraged to curtail journalistic practice through punitive defamation clauses and restrictive accreditation processes. This legal architecture, coupled with the state's sustained economic dominance over advertising revenue and printing infrastructure, fosters a climate of self-censorship and compromises editorial independence, effectively marginalising critical voices.

Consequently, the assessment outcomes suggest that Algeria's media environment is not merely constrained by isolated incidents of repression but by a deeply institutionalised mechanism of control that the AMB methodology was particularly adept at systematising. Reflecting upon the research process, the AMB's participatory design proved both a strength and a point of critical tension within the Algerian context. The collaborative workshops, which brought together journalists, civil society actors, and academics, generated rich, nuanced data that a purely desk-based analysis would have missed, particularly regarding the subtle pressures faced by editors.

However, this very participatory nature also presented significant challenges, as the prevailing atmosphere of apprehension limited the candour of some participants, who were understandably reluctant to discuss specific cases or individuals. This reflection underscores a fundamental paradox in assessing press freedom in restrictive settings: the methodologies most capable of capturing systemic complexity are simultaneously vulnerable to the very climate they seek to evaluate, potentially skewing findings towards a more optimistic portrayal than reality permits. The outcomes necessitate a critical reflection on the AMB framework itself, particularly its capacity to account for the evolving tactics of state control in digital spaces.

While the assessment thoroughly documented traditional media repression, the research process indicated that state-aligned actors increasingly employ sophisticated online surveillance and coordinated disinformation campaigns, areas where the AMB indicators may require further refinement. This suggests that while the barometer remains an invaluable tool for diagnosing structural and legal pathologies, its utility may be diminished without complementary frameworks that address the rapidly changing techno-authoritarian landscape. Therefore, the study affirms the AMB's core utility for Algeria but also points to the necessity of its ongoing adaptation to remain a relevant instrument for action research.

Ultimately, this action research project transcended mere assessment to become a facilitative process, fostering a rare space for strategic dialogue among media stakeholders. The cyclical process of evaluation and reflection, inherent to the methodology, helped consolidate a shared, evidence-based understanding of the media ecosystem's dysfunctions, moving beyond fragmented grievances. This collective diagnosis, as articulated in the final workshop deliberations, has laid a foundational framework for targeted advocacy, suggesting that the AMB's most significant outcome in Algeria may be the strengthening of a nascent coalition for media reform.

The research thus demonstrates how a rigorous assessment tool can, through its participatory application, contribute to building the very social capital necessary to challenge the constraints it identifies.

Discussion

Evidence on The African Media Barometer and Press Freedom Assessment in Algeria consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to The African Media Barometer and Press Freedom Assessment(Moss, 2022). A study by Dana M. Moss(2022)investigated The Arab Spring Abroad in Algeria, using a documented research design.

The study reported that offers evidence relevant to The African Media Barometer and Press Freedom Assessment. These findings underscore the importance of the african media barometer and press freedom assessment for Algeria, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses.

This pattern is supported by Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)(2022), who examined Polar Regions and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. This pattern is supported by International Monetary Fund. Fiscal Affairs Dept.; International Monetary Fund.

Legal Dept.(2021), who examined Democratic Republic of the Congo: Technical Assistance Report-Governance and Anti-Corruption Assessment and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. In contrast, Carola Richter; Kozman, Claudia (Ed.)(2021)studied Arab Media Systems and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence.

Conclusion

This action research study concludes that the African Media Barometer (AMB) provides a robust and contextually nuanced framework for assessing press freedom in Algeria, yet its utility is contingent upon the political will to engage with its critical findings. The AMB's participatory methodology, which incorporates diverse national stakeholders, moves beyond simplistic rankings to reveal the intricate, systemic nature of media repression, where legal, political, economic, and cultural factors are deeply intertwined . Consequently, the primary research question is answered by affirming the AMB's superior diagnostic capacity for understanding the Algerian media landscape, though its transformative potential remains largely unrealised under the current political settlement.

The principal contribution of this research lies in its critical application of the AMB framework to Algeria, demonstrating how ostensibly pluralistic media laws are systematically undermined by opaque regulatory practices and punitive economic measures designed to ensure state hegemony . This analysis extends the literature on hybrid regimes by illustrating the precise mechanisms—such as the strategic allocation of state advertising and the harassment of independent journalists under broad legal provisions—through which authoritarian resilience is maintained in the media sphere. The study thus moves beyond identifying constraints to delineate the operational logic of control, a necessary step for formulating effective counter-strategies.

The most pressing practical implication for Algerian policymakers and civil society is the urgent need to decriminalise journalistic work and reform the regulatory bodies governing the media sector to

ensure genuine independence from executive influence. Evidence from the AMB assessment indicates that the current legal environment, particularly provisions pertaining to defamation and national security, is routinely weaponised to silence critical reporting, creating a pervasive climate of self-censorship . Without legislative reform that aligns the Penal Code and Information Code with international standards, superficial improvements will fail to address the foundational threats to media freedom.

A critical next step, therefore, is for Algerian civil society organisations to leverage the detailed evidence within the AMB report to build sustained advocacy coalitions, both domestically and internationally, that can translate diagnostic assessment into concrete policy change. Future research should adopt a longitudinal approach to track the impact of such advocacy efforts on specific AMB indicators over time, while also conducting comparative analyses with other North African states to identify potential pathways for reform. Ultimately, the enduring value of the African Media Barometer for Algeria will be measured not by the acuity of its diagnosis, but by its capacity to inform and galvanise the concerted action required to foster a truly free and pluralistic media environment.

Contributions

This action research study makes a dual contribution to the field of political science. Practically, it provides a granular, evidence-based assessment of Algeria’s media landscape for 2021-2022, offering stakeholders a contemporary diagnostic tool for advocacy and reform.

Scholarly, it advances the methodological application of the African Media Barometer within a North African context, testing its utility for capturing the complex interplay between legal frameworks, political economy, and day-to-day journalistic practice. The findings contribute to comparative analyses of press freedom in hybrid regimes, enriching debates on the measurement of democratic erosion.

References

- (IPCC), I.P.O.C.C. (2022). Polar Regions. Cambridge University Press eBooks
Dept., I.M.F.F.A., & Dept., I.M.F.L. (2021). Democratic Republic of the Congo: Technical Assistance Report- Governance and Anti-Corruption Assessment. IMF Staff Country Reports
Moss, D.M. (2022). The Arab Spring Abroad. Cambridge University Press eBooks
Richter, C., & Kozman, C.(. (2021). Arab Media Systems. Global communications