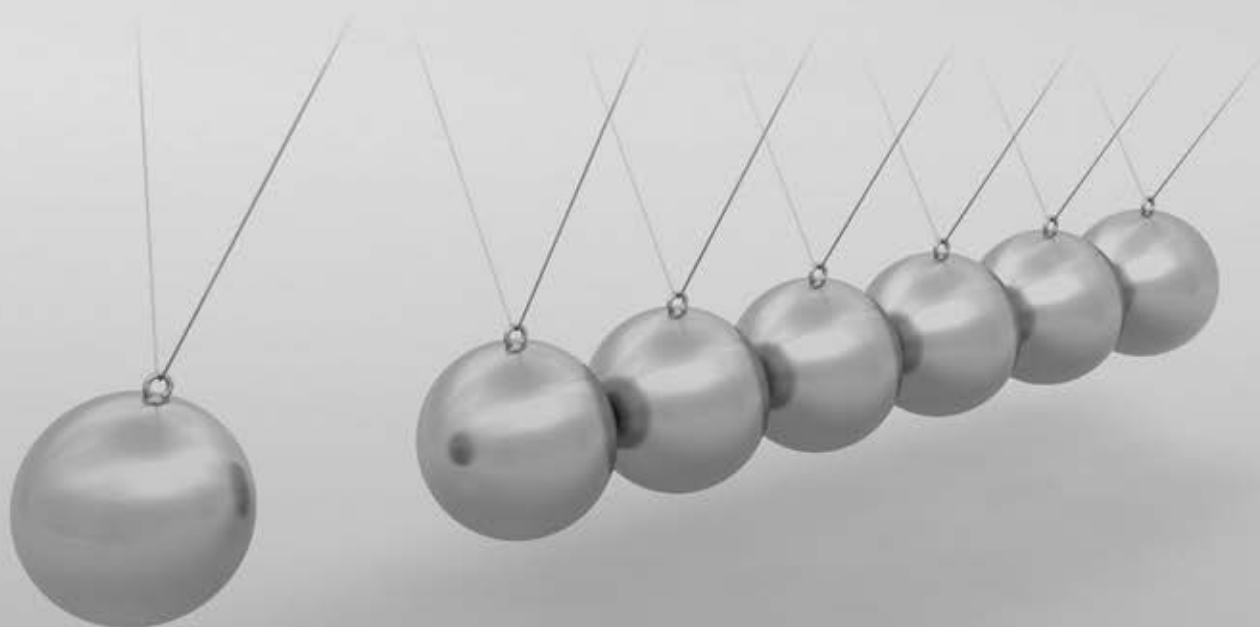


Standstill

Jordan Free Media Index

2023



Executive Summary:

Jordan has achieved positive progress in the Media Status Index for the year 2023, as it obtained (91) points out of a total of (200) points in the Index. According to the criteria adopted in calculating the Index, this result falls into the “acceptable” classification, as the media freedom section advanced 9 points, 'obtaining 42 points, compared to 33 points last year (2022), and this is considered a remarkable progress, moving from a “restricted” rating to “partially restricted.” This is the highest score recorded by the Index since its implementation in 2020. The second section, “new developments and changes in the media work environment for the year 2023,” scored 20.7 points out of 35, which is described as “good.” The third section, “the impact of digital transformations and social media platforms on the media,” scored 16.5 points out of 35, described as “acceptable.” Finally, the section, “job security for male and female journalists,” scored 11.7 points out of 30, which means it is “acceptable.”

This progress coincided with a relative decline in serious violations against journalists, as 83% of journalists who responded to the Index questionnaire confirmed that they were not subjected to any violations or harassment during 2023.

Despite the positive progress shown by the 2023 Media Status Index, there are still challenges and problems that cannot be ignored or overlooked. The continuation of freedom-depriving sanctions (arrest and imprisonment) is a major challenge for the media work environment. What journalists most unanimously reject and consider to be a restriction on media freedom are freedom-depriving sanctions. 63.4% believe that they greatly limit media freedom, and 14.4% believe that they limit media freedom to an average extent.

The Index has warned of a significant worsening of the problem of job security for journalists, as more than 80% of journalists expressed a lack of feeling of job security. Added to the list of recurring challenges are the invisible violations that have expanded in recent years, most notably the growing phenomenon of self-censorship, prior censorship, and withholding of information.

After 25 years of the CDFJ's work, it was necessary to stop for review, to evaluate the report, to study the extent of its suitability to with regards the developments that the media has undergone, and to consider whether the measurement tools and methodologies it has developed need to be scrutinized and reconsidered, noting that the media that we knew 25 years ago has changed to a great extent, as the written press that dominated the scene

is facing a state of decline, and all traditional media in all its forms is are facing unprecedented challenges to survive and continue with their previous patterns.

The transformations in the media scene imposed a view of freedoms as a single component within the state of the media as the broader umbrella, with every detail affecting and being affected. Job security's impact can be more influential than many serious and non-serious violations.

Accordingly, CDFJ relied on 4 research tools in the index methodology. The first is collecting information related to the media environment in Jordan, and monitoring and documenting violations of media freedom. The second tool is conducting in-depth interviews with government officials, parliamentarians, media professionals, human rights activists, and experts. The third tool is conducting 4 focus group discussions with media workers and relevant parties. Finally, the fourth tool is the Media Status Index, which measures the opinions, impressions, and satisfaction of male and female media professionals. The center conducted 26 interviews that discussed and examined the report's axes in the finest detail, in addition to four focused dialogue sessions titled: “The Legislative Environment for the Media,” “The Professional Status and the Effects of Technology and Digital Platforms on Freedom of Expression and the Media,” “Journalists and the Challenges of Job and Living Security,” and “The Reality of Media Freedoms in 2023,” in which 30 male and female individuals participated.

CDFJ developed its index to measure and evaluate the state of the media in Jordan for the year 2023, by preparing a questionnaire that was answered by a random stratified sample of 254 male and female journalists, representing 21.7% of the 1,169 on the list of male and female media workers whose information the Center was able to collect.

First: Freedom of the media

Media freedom remains stagnant

The views of politicians, media leaders, experts, and human rights activists who were interviewed or participated in focus group discussions are that media freedom remains stagnant. It has neither advanced nor declined, according to many who spoke regarding the report, including Senate member and former Minister of Information Mohammed Al-Momani, who said, «he state of media freedoms remained the same in 2023,» describing the reality of media freedom as being in the

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gray area, Former Minister of State for Media Affairs and government spokesman, Sakher Dudin, says that the state of the media has remained the same, neither deteriorating nor advancing, but the circumstances of the aggression on Gaza have contributed to giving people the opportunity to express their opinions. The editor-in-chief of Al-Ghad daily newspaper, Makram Tarawneh, believes that the state of media freedoms has not declined much, and this is confirmed by MP Omar Ayasrah, who says that the most accurate description of media freedoms, and even public freedoms in general, is stagnation in the same place compared to previous years. Also, the media professional Dana Al-Sayegh, the general manager of Al-Mamlaka TV at the time of the interview, believes that the state of the media has remained the same, and has not changed much, and local affairs are no longer the only indicator of freedoms due to the preoccupation of the state as a whole with the war on Gaza.

Executive authority interference is an existing reality

82.7% of those surveyed believe that the executive authority interferes greatly or moderately in the work of the media, compared to only 17.3% who absolutely deny any interference by the executive authority in this regard. This result is consistent with the opinion of media professional and presenter on Roya TV, Mohammed Al-Khalidi, who says that there are constant interventions, but they happen indirectly, as communication does not take place directly, but rather through other parties. He stressed that the administration is exposed to pressure, whether the news administration or the institution's administration. Media personality and presenter on Al-Mamlaka TV, Amer Al-Rajoub, disagrees with him, saying that there is no type of interference. He declared "No one from the security institutions, the Royal Court, or the government has ever contacted me to interfere in the course of the program I present, or even in the selection of guests". The Minister of Government Communication and official government spokesman, Muhannad Mobaideen, denies any government interference in the will and positions of journalists, adding that in some cases the government has the right to obtain clarifications on topics or press coverage related to governmental work. Mohammad Al-Momani believes that interference in the work of the media is an unhealthy practice. An official who tries to stop a

report or an opinion of a journalist in an unprofessional manner is a weak official. The official should correct the error if it exists. He stressed that for years he was Minister of Information and did not ask any media institution to remove a news item, unless the news item was unprofessional. "However, if the news item was professional and based on information, then I thank them for monitoring the government's performance".

The majority agree that the negative impact of custodial sanctions on media freedom is negative

Nearly two-thirds of respondents, at a rate of 63.4%, believe that custodial sanctions contribute significantly to limiting media freedom. An additional 14.4% believe that they contribute to this to an average extent, compared to 12.2% who believe that they do not contribute at all.

Prior censorship in media institutions is a lived reality

According to respondents, 60.5% of journalists admit to being subjected to prior censorship by their institutions to a large extent, and 28.4% believe this to be moderate, compared to only 11% who reported that they are not subjected to prior censorship by media managements at all. Journalist and Reporters Without Borders representative in Jordan, Mohammad Shamma, says that it is difficult to monitor non-serious forms of violations, because journalists do not disclose the prior censorship that sometimes occurs by media institutions, or the understandings that this cannot be written about, and this can be written about.

The executive authority exercises prior censorship over the media

44.1% of male and female journalists believe that the media is subject to prior censorship, directly and indirectly, by the executive authority to a large extent, while 42.2% believe that the media is subject to prior censorship, directly and indirectly, by the executive authority to a medium extent, compared to 13% of male and female journalists who believe that the media is not subject to prior censorship, directly or indirectly, by the executive authority at all.

Dr. Muhammad Abu Rumman says regarding prior censorship; there is an engineering of the media situation that ensures that media institutions, whether private or public, proceed through many dynamics in a specific path with framed ceilings and in certain directions, and thus this has been reflected in the level of media freedom in Jordan to a great extent. Abu Rumman adds that he has not read for a long time an article in the Jordanian media that talks about serious and major issues that the media has exposed, such as political corruption or economic corruption, and the state of the media in Jordan has become based on the principle of "you live and you receive."

Self-censorship is a never-ending phenomenon

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96.8% of journalists believe that journalists impose self-censorship on themselves to a large extent during their media work. In detail, more than two-thirds of journalists, at a rate of 74.8%, believe that journalists impose self-censorship on themselves to a large extent during their media work, while 22% of them believe that journalists impose self-censorship on themselves to a medium extent during their media work. A rate not exceeding 3.2% of those surveyed believe that journalists do not impose self-censorship on themselves during their media work.

It can be said that the self-censorship index has remained relatively stable over the past ten years. The following table shows the percentage of those who answered “yes,” meaning that they impose self-censorship on themselves. It should be noted that the 2019 report did not include a survey of journalists’ opinions because the report was prepared in exceptional circumstances that coincided with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, there is no specific numerical percentage for self-censorship:

Year	Percentage
2014	95.2%
2015	93.2
2016	93.6
2017	94%
2018	92
2019	-
2020	93.6
2021	91.3
2022	96.2%
2023	96.8%

The Minister of Government Communication, Muhannad Mobaideen, believes that self-censorship is increasing among journalists, not because of legal restrictions and oppression, but rather as part of the withdrawal from public affairs.

Self-censorship creeps into social media platforms;

95.2% of journalists believe that they impose self-censorship on themselves while publishing media content on social media platforms to a large to medium extent, and again more than two-thirds of journalists, at a rate of 73.2%, believe that journalists impose self-censorship on themselves while publishing media content on social media platforms to a large extent, while 22% of them believe that journalists impose self-censorship on themselves when publishing media content on social media platforms, and on average, and at a rate not exceeding 4.7% of those surveyed believe

that journalists do not impose self-censorship on themselves when publishing media content on social media platforms at all.

Sexual harassment is not a phenomenon in the media

Female journalists’ exposure to “physical and verbal” sexual harassment in the work environment is not a widespread phenomenon, or a publicly acknowledged one, and this was confirmed by 65.2% who denied the existence of harassment at all, while 23.7% believed it to be moderate, compared to only 11.1% who acknowledged its existence to a large extent. In the study “Under the Microscope: Diagnosing the Reality of the Media in Jordan”, issued by CDFJ in 2015, the answers of those surveyed to the question “are female journalists exposed to sexual harassment due to their media work?” 73% of the responding sample believed that female journalists were exposed to sexual harassment, whereas 18% believed it to a large extent, and 28% believed they were exposed to sexual harassment to a medium degree, 27% believed they were exposed to sexual harassment to a small degree, compared to 18% who did not believe that female journalists were exposed to sexual harassment, 8% did not know or were not sure, and 1% refused to answer the question.

Exposure to violations is a source of concern for journalists

51.2% of journalists say that journalists are worried about being harassed or violated due to their practice of media work to a large extent, while 36.6% believe that journalists are worried about being harassed or violated due to their practice of media work to an average extent, compared to only 12% who believe that journalists are not worried about being harassed or violated due to their practice of media work at all. Osama Al-Ramini, publisher of Akhbar Al-Balad website, says that there are no serious violations, but there are serious violations in the form of interference, in addition to the fact that the Media Commission has begun to file lawsuits against media institutions, and the state has begun to deal in a different way, fighting people with a piece of bread. The editor-in-chief of the Diratna News website, journalist Susan Mobaideen, agrees with him, saying that cases of serious violations in Jordan are very few, but there are non-serious violations such as instilling fear, which increased after the Cybercrime Law.

Second: Developments and changes in the media work environment for the year 2023

The Cybercrime Law imposes restrictions on media freedom

Those who believe that the Cybercrime Law in general imposes restrictions on media freedom to a large and to medium degree

constitute 86.3% of the total sample. In the details of the answers, 44.9% of journalists believe that the Cybercrime Law of 2023, which was approved by the National Assembly, imposes restrictions on media freedom to a large extent, while 41.4% believe that the Cybercrime Law of 2023 imposes restrictions on media freedom to a medium extent, and 13.7% believe that the Cybercrime Law of 2023 does not impose restrictions on media freedom at all.

Dana Al-Sayegh, General Manager of Al-Mamlaka TV, believes that the cybercrime law has not been discussed at all, and that a large number of questions related to the law were posed to officials on live television, and they did not have answers to them.

The former judge and member of the Board of Trustees of the National Center for Human Rights, Muhammad Al-Tarawneh, believes that some articles in the law restrict freedom of opinion and expression, and some of them are not befitting of Jordan's reputation, and have affected Jordan in global indicators that deal with rights and freedoms, while the Managing Editor of Al-Ghad newspaper, Abdul Karim Al-Wahsh, admits that the law has pushed journalists to look for ways to circumvent professional media, "before publishing we think about why we publish? When we publish? And where we publish? in order to avoid prosecution under the law".

The government, represented by the Minister of State for Communications, Muhannad Mobaideen, said that the Cybercrime Law has not yet been tested, but His Majesty the King met with the National Center for Human Rights and directed work to implement training courses for judges regarding human rights and freedom of expression, adding that the King requested a study of the legislative impact of the law, as it requires building supportive media policies for it, indicating that prior disclosure of information and correct interaction with topics limits the writing of misleading news and provides an urgent flow of news "making us not need to use the law in a way that affects freedoms".

In a session on the reality of media legislation implemented by the Center, the head of the Legal Committee in Parliament, MP Ghazi Al-Thunaibat, said, "from a legislative perspective, I am satisfied with what has been accomplished, and I do not find any shame in saying - despite all the fuss and all the talk that has been raised about some laws and some legislation - that they have achieved tangible results on the ground in the field of reducing crime, and in the field of controlling the digital space from quarrels, insults, abuse, and blackmail, as there are now some controls to limit them in the Electronic Crimes Law."

Former Director of the Media Commission and expert lawyer in media issues, Mohammad Qteishat, said in favor of the report, "the cybercrime law will not have an impact in the short term on freedom of expression and the media," he expected an increase in the number of cases that will be referred to the judiciary under the law; due to the existence of new crimes, formulated in flexible

verbal forms, and inconsistent with the rules of legislation. He pointed out that the long-term impact of the law is represented by the excessive increase in the phenomena of prior and self-censorship.

Lawyer and media expert Khaled Khalifat explains to the Center that anything related to the Internet is subject to the Cybercrime Law, and the only outlet or escape for a journalist who fears publishing journalistic material in the digital space is to keep it on paper so that it is subject to the Press and Publications Law, and avoid the Cybercrime Law.

The majority believe that the amendments to the Right to Access Information Law contribute to enhancing the space for media freedom

56.7% of them believe that it will contribute moderately to enhancing the space for media freedom, 24.2% believe that it will contribute significantly to enhancing the space for media freedom, compared to only 16% of journalists, both male and female, who believe that the new amendments to the Right to Access Information Law will not contribute to enhancing the space for media freedom at all.

What is certain is that the amendments to the Right to Access Information Law are a step in the right direction. They have expanded the membership of the Information Council, reduced the time required to respond to a request for information, and adjusted some of the exceptions contained in Article 13 of the law before the amendment.

However, the amended law could have come out better if the government had approved the draft vision presented by the committee formed by a decision of the Minister of Culture, Chairman of the Information Council, which focused on ensuring that the exceptions are in line with international standards, and that the classification of information and confidential documents is subject to two tests: harm and public interest.

However, the government did not accept the draft law sent to it by the Supreme Committee, and made its amendments with the Legislation and Opinion Bureau, despite its awareness that these governmental amendments, along with the original law itself, do not meet international standards, best practices, and international applications. The law remained in the drawers of the House of Representatives until it was discussed and approved in March 2024.

MP Ghazi Al-Dhunaibat said, regarding the amendments to the Right to Information Law, "we have presented a gift to the country with this law. The law has been in place since 2019, and it was gathering dust in the drawers of the House of Representatives. Perhaps the Cybercrime Law was the spark that set this law in motion. So that it would not be understood that the Cybercrime

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Law aims to hide information, cover up corruption, or anything like that, the direction from His Majesty the King personally was that this law must be released, discussed, and approved, which is what actually happened.”

Samar Al-Hajj Hassan, the head of the trustees of the National Center for Human Rights, believes that the amendments to the law guaranteeing the right to access information are a preliminary step and a positive direction in the issue of freedom of expression, because the right to access information is one of the foundations on which people rely in expressing their opinions.

Local media covered the Israeli aggression on Gaza freely and without restrictions

73.6% of male and female journalists believe that the local media covered the aggression on Gaza freely and without restrictions to a large extent, and 18.6% believe the same to an average extent, compared to only 7.8% who believe that the local media did not cover the aggression on Gaza freely and without restrictions at all. Dr. Muhannad Mobaideen describes the Jordanian media's coverage of the Israeli aggression on Gaza as a success story, saying that all opinions and voices appeared, both opposition and support, and no one was prevented from appearing as long as the situation required it.

The media professional and presenter, Omar Kallab, confirms this by saying, “historically, foreign affairs in Jordan are less sensitive than domestic affairs, and historically, Palestinian affairs have the highest ceiling in foreign affairs. Therefore, the events of October 7 necessarily raised the ceiling of freedom of expression and the media, but they collided with a more dangerous issue, which is the fear of the growing spirit of confrontation and the ability to achieve great and distant dreams.”

Editor-in-Chief of Al Rai newspaper, Khaled Al Shaqran, also takes the same view, saying that there is relative progress in media freedom in 2023, due to the nature of the events witnessed in the region, most notably the criminal war on Gaza. This fact raised the level of public debate at the overall level in the country, and this was reflected in the media in general, even on the ceilings of dialogue and political debate.

Third: The impact of digital transformations and social media platforms on the media

Social media platforms have contributed to enhancing freedom of expression in Jordan

58.2% of journalists believe that social media platforms have contributed to enhancing freedom of expression in Jordan to a large extent, and 35.5% believe that they have contributed to enhancing freedom of expression in Jordan to an average extent, compared to only 6.2% who believe that they have not contributed

to enhancing freedom of expression in Jordan at all. Dr. Muhammad Abu Rumman believes that social media platforms have contributed to raising the ceiling of freedom in Jordan to some extent.

Social media platforms have contributed to enhancing media freedom;

55.2% of male and female journalists believe that social media platforms have contributed to enhancing media freedom in Jordan to a significant extent, and 37.4% believe that they have contributed to enhancing media freedom in Jordan to an average extent, compared to only 7.5% who believe that they have not contributed to enhancing media freedom in Jordan at all.

In this regard, Nour El-Din Khamaisa, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Al-Ghad newspaper, says that social media platforms are a supporter and a factor that helps raise the level of freedom of expression and freedom of the media. Khaled Al-Shaqran agrees with him, as he also believes that social media platforms have had a positive impact, not a negative one, as they have provided tools to help spread the media and reach a wider audience. Digital expert Raed Sammour points out that there is a flaw in the definition of new media, as new media is the clash of social media platforms with traditional media, they feed off each other, there is a complementary relationship between them, and one cannot continue without the other.

Fourth: Job security for male and female journalists

Journalists feel a lack of job security

46% of journalists believe that journalists feel that there is no longer a significant lack of job security at work, 40.1% believe that journalists feel that there is no longer a moderate lack of job security at work, compared to 13.8% who believe that journalists do not feel that there is no longer a lack of job security at work at all.

Roya TV News Director Saad Hattar believes that the changes that have occurred in the past 20 years, such as the collapse of print newspapers and the rise of social media platforms, have made journalists feel unsafe in their jobs. Unfortunately, journalists do not receive fixed salaries, income rates have declined significantly, and they do not have continuity in work.

The publisher of Al-Shaheen News website, Dawood Shaheen, believes that it is necessary for the publisher to feel job security in order to secure job security for his employees. Publishers in the private sector do not have an official body that defends them and works in their interest, and there is no official recognition from the government of them except on a discretionary basis.

Dr. Mohammed Al-Momani sees an overlap between media freedom and job security, and says that any fair-minded person

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must realize the impact of the stability of institutions, job security, and livelihood security of journalists on their freedoms and practice, because of self-censorship and their ability to cover freely away from any influences is related to the economic dimension of their work, believing that the financial stability of media institutions must be an essential and pivotal part of determining the state of the media in our country.

MP Omar Ayasrah stresses that the state of freedoms is not isolated from the status of institutions, the media industry, the reality of job security for journalists, the professional status, and technological developments, especially the livelihood security of media professionals. Makram Tarawneh says, «Media freedom cannot be separated from job security at all.» Senator Dr. Mustafa Hamarneh, CEO of the Jordan Media Institute, stresses that press freedoms and freedom of expression cannot be isolated from the issue of livelihood security, building media institutions, and technological development. He stressed the importance of media professionalism and its relationship to freedoms because it is sufficient to prevent journalists from placing restrictions or red lines on themselves.

The media professional and presenter on Roya TV, Mohammed Al-Khalidi, believes that there is a very strong correlation between the loss and/or fragility of job security for journalists and contributing to avoiding criticism of the government. "Budgets are based on the market, and the market is controlled by the state, and all the keys are in its hands. If the state is satisfied with you, it leaves the doors open, and if it is not satisfied, it closes the doors in your face and puts you in a crisis".

Amer Rajoub says in Jordan, journalism is a job, but there is no security of life even if salaries are high. Journalists must be given rights, like representatives because they are a fourth authority. There must also be a distinction between the activist on social media and the journalist.

Fifth: Violations and harassment

- 17% of male and female journalists who responded to the index questionnaire reported that they were subjected to one or more forms of harassment or violations during 2023, while 83% reported that they were not subjected to harassment or violations.
- The forms of harassment and violations that journalists who responded said that they were subjected to varied violations during 2023, but they were only 17% of the sample. The most common form of harassment they were subjected to was "pressure and harassment" at 21%, while preventing publication came in second place at 12%, followed by post-publication censorship in third place at 11%, and defamation and slander in fourth place at 10%, while threats came in fifth place at 8%, and prior censorship at 7%, and both withholding information and deleting written or photographed material came in seventh place at 5% each.
- The monitoring and documentation records documented by the "Ain" unit at CDFJ, in 2023, revealed 7 cases, including 9 forms of violations and transgressions. In the details:

Type of violation	Repetition	Percentage
Assault on work tools	2	22.2%
Ban on coverage	2	22.2%
Damage to property	2	22.2%
Hacking and cyber attacks	1	11.1%
Block websites	1	11.1%
Abuse and defamation	1	11.1%
Calculation	9	100%

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1. On 10/01/2023, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Ahmed Al-Safadi, issued a decision to prevent the media from attending and covering all sessions of the parliamentary committee discussing the general budget for the year 2023. Al-Safadi did not issue any justification for his decision, and the media carried out a protest stand in front of the House of Representatives due to their prevention from covering the parliamentary committees, a decision that hinders their work and was not justified. The Secretary-General of the House of Representatives stated to «Al-Mamlaka Channel» that the decision to close the parliamentary committee sessions to the media, or reopen them, will be discussed after the return of the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Ahmed Al-Safadi, from his official visit to Iraq, stressing that the Permanent Office will seek to resolve the dispute and facilitate the work of the media and journalists.
2. On 12/01/2023, Al-Ghad newspaper photojournalist Amir Khalifa was assaulted by a number of members of the Domestic Workers Recruitment and Employment Syndicate, which resulted in many bruises and a broken camera, preventing him from completing his coverage of the Syndicate meeting. In the details, colleague Amir Khalifa said, «I went to cover the meeting announced by the Domestic Workers Recruitment Syndicate at its headquarters, and while I was filming still shots of the meeting, a person from the Syndicate blocked the view of the camera lens more than once, so I asked him to change his place so that I could take pictures, which annoyed him and led to an altercation between him and me.» Khalifa added, «During the verbal altercation between us, I suddenly found myself under the feet of dozens of those present at the meeting, most of whom were owners of domestic workers recruitment offices, who beat me up and broke my camera, but someone from outside intervened after hearing the sound of the quarrel, and took me out of the place,» indicating that he went to the hospital for treatment due to the swelling in his face from the severity of the beating”.
3. The office of «Downtown» channel in the capital Amman was stormed by unknown individuals on 21/2/2023, where they broke and destroyed its contents of furniture and equipment, according to the video that shows the extent of the destruction that befell the office. No one from the channel’s work team was present during the attack on the office, and the channel’s managers informed the security services, who arrived at the office and began investigating the incident. According to what journalist Jihad Abu Baidar, the owner and director of the channel, stated to local media, the security services arrived at the site and inspected the incidents, and began their investigation to reach the perpetrators, highlighting that the Downtown channel is located in a very vital commercial area, and surveillance cameras are available as a precaution against theft, vandalism, or any cause that may harm the work of the shops and companies that use the Gardens as their headquarters in particular.
4. On 26/06/2023, the Media Commission blocked the satirical website “Border Network” from internet platforms in Jordan, without providing any comment or justification for the blocking. An official in the “Border Network” office said in press statements that “many messages began to reach us from readers and followers of Border Network in Jordan, that they are facing problems writing comments on the articles we publish, and those problems developed to the point that we noticed technical problems on the network’s website in Jordan, until the matter ended with the site being completely blocked,” adding: “I cannot confirm the real reason for the Jordanian authorities blocking our website in Jordan, but the most recent material we published on the website that pertains to Jordanian affairs is the wedding of Crown Prince Hussein bin Abdullah. However, there is nothing to confirm that this is the actual reason, because we cover all Arab political affairs in our articles, and it is possible that there are comments on it from the Jordanian side.” Neither the government nor the Media Commission has officially announced the blocking of “Al-Hudood”, while the Jordanian Open Source Association (JOSA) confirmed that the “Al-Hudood” website has been blocked in Jordan since June 26, 2023. The association said via its Twitter account that “similar to previous blocking cases in Jordan, Zain and Orange Telecom are using Deep Packet Inspection (DPI) technology to prevent traffic to the website.”
5. On 18/10/2023, the security services prevented journalists and correspondents of Arab and foreign agencies from reaching the vicinity of the US embassy in Amman to cover the demonstrations that were supposed to be held there in protest of

the massacre that took place at the Baptist Hospital in Gaza. However, the Jordanian security services quickly prevented them from being held, as the security services informed the journalists that they were prohibited from reaching the front of the embassy for “security” reasons.

6. On 03/11/2023, the website of Al-Mamlaka TV was subjected to a violent cyber-attack with the aim of disrupting the publishing and broadcasting systems, coinciding with the channel's coverage of the Israeli aggression on Gaza since its beginning. The channel indicated in a statement published on its social media pages that “after the technical department tracked the cyber-attacks that the website was subjected to, it was found that they were launched from digital addresses located outside Jordan.” The engineering teams succeeded in confronting the attack that occurred around 2:00 pm on Friday 01/11/2023. The statement touched on the fact that “the size of the most violent and unprecedented cyber-attack and its escalating and continuous behavior reveals the intent of the attacking parties behind the targeting to cause damage and disrupt the ongoing coverage of the aggression on Gaza.” The statement concluded by saying that the channel will reserve its legal right to pursue and hold accountable the parties behind the targeting.
7. On 27/11/2023, cartoonist Emad Hajjaj was subjected to a broad electronic attack on social media, under the pretext of “serving the Western narrative” in its dealings with the war on Gaza, due to some cartoons about the exchange of prisoners and the war on Gaza.

Al-Hajjaj published a statement on his social media accounts stating, “My dear followers, yes, I try hard and I may be right or wrong. Whoever does not like the translated drawing of the prisoner exchange between Hamas and Israel, or the previously published drawing comparing Israel to the jihadist groups, or the drawing of the Israeli occupation in the form of a masked terrorist, do not judge me based on one or two drawings, but rather based on a complete context and a known history of drawings biased towards the Palestinian resistance and hostile to the occupation without a doubt. These are difficult times in which we are trying to convey the voice of Gaza and its people to the whole world, in all languages, with all lines and colors. I try hard and excel in that, yes. Whoever sees my work in the media

and Western websites, I invite them to read my entire work in them to know where I stand, without audacity, embettlement, treachery and slander. If you do not like my drawings, forgive me, and I promise you more creativity in serving all the issues of the nation as you have known me, and it is an effort... drawing on the iPad.” CDFJ monitored three other cases of violations, which occurred against two male journalists and one female journalist, including two cases of arrest and one case of imprisonment. After reviewing, monitoring and documenting the three cases, the Center found that they were not related to publishing through professional media outlets, but rather were closely related to freedom of expression on social media platforms. The details are as follows:

- The security services arrested the journalist and publisher of the Kul Al-Urdun website, Khaled Al-Majali, on 26/07/2023. The arrest came following a decision by the Amman Court of First Instance in its appellate capacity, which included convicting the journalist Al-Majali of the crime of defaming an official body within the limits of Article (191) of the Penal Code, in conjunction with Article (15) of the Electronic Crimes Law, and in accordance with the provisions of the same article, he was sentenced to three months in prison, with fees. On 09/08/2023, the court rejected the request to replace the prison sentence with a fine after the defense team tried to find a legal way out for the writer, and implemented the decision to imprison the writer Khaled Al-Majali for three months. The court justified its decision by saying that Al-Majali “defamed an official body” and that he addressed the government in an “inappropriate” manner, against the backdrop of his publication on his social media accounts during the truck strike at the end of 2022. The text of the publication was: “There is no alternative to a real reduction in all fuel prices and the formation of a national salvation government. Enough mockery and farce against the people. We will not back down from today.”
- On 08/08/2023, the security services arrested the media figure Hiba Abu Taha, while she was returning from Jerash Governorate to Amman, and transferred her to the security center, following a previous judicial decision to imprison her for three months, before she was released one day after her arrest. On 09/06/2022, a judicial ruling was issued

in absentia against her, subject to appeal, convicting her of the crime of defaming an official body within the limits of Article (191) of the Penal Code, and in accordance with Article 15 of the Electronic Crimes Law, sentencing her to three months in prison with fees. The court's ruling, after the referral decision issued by the Public Prosecutor of Amman in the investigative case that was initiated based on the information provided by the electronic patrols affiliated with the Electronic Crimes Combating Unit, was that the attached post that was published on the social media site Facebook bearing the name (Hiba Abu Taha) was viewed, and its content was about the events in Al-Aqsa Mosque, and included insulting King Abdullah II, accusing him of normalization, and attaching a picture of the King with the flag of the Israeli entity.

- On 09/08/2023, the Amman Magistrate Court, in its capacity as an appellate court, decided to sentence the owner and publisher of the Sawalif website, journalist Ahmed Hassan Al-Zoubi, to one year in prison with a fine, based on a lawsuit filed against him by the "public right." The case dates back to a post Al-Zoubi wrote on his page during the truck strike at the end of 2022. This decision came after the Magistrate Court had decided to imprison Al-Zoubi for two months, but the Public Prosecution appealed the ruling. The appeal was accepted and the "punishment" on Al-Zoubi was "heavier." Al-Zoubi wrote in his post (quoting the court's decision in case No. 2694/2023) "How much of our sons' blood do you need to be satisfied? (If blood flows, oil will not flow) Blood has flowed, Your Excellency the Minister, we are the firewood for your fireplaces." Al-Zoubi was charged with two counts: "committing an act that led to the incitement of conflict between the elements of the nation" and "inciting hatred." On 23/09/2023, the Bar Association assigned to defend Al-Zoubi announced its rejection of the appeal with written permission submitted to the Minister of Justice. Al-Zoubi remained free without the implementation of the imprisonment decision against him until 2/7/2024, when he was arrested to serve the sentence. His defense team's request to replace the imprisonment with community punishment was rejected.

Sixth: Recommendations

Since launching the Jordan Media Status Index report more than 20 years ago, CDFJ has been keen to provide decision-makers in the country with recommendations to improve the media environment with regards to legislation, policies, and practices.

Each year, the Center deliberately repeats some recommendations that it finds necessary to consider and deal with as a priority to move forward. The following are the Center's recommendations for 2023:

Legislative review:

- Amending the Cybercrime Law of 2023, and getting rid of custodial sentences and heavy fines: the system of legislation, regulations, and instructions related to the media is partially restrictive, and does not adhere to or comply with the agreements and treaties ratified by Jordan. It is necessary to recall that the government has formed a ministerial committee to review the legislation and its consistency with treaties and agreements related to human rights. Any review must take into account getting rid of custodial sentences, reducing fines, and ensuring freedom of expression and the media, as follows:
 - Reviewing legal articles No. (15, 16, 17, 20, 24, 25, 31, 32, and 37) which are considered a restriction on freedom of expression and media.
 - Reviewing the terms and measures provided by the law for dealing with social media platforms.
 - Amending and canceling the legal articles that hold media outlets, including their websites and pages on social media platforms, as well as social media users, legally responsible for any content published on their pages without their will, as they are not the party that authorizes or controls publication.
 - Amending the uncontrolled and vague terms contained in the law, which allow multiple interpretations that may be used in a way that constitutes a restriction on freedom of expression and media.
 - Reviewing the legal texts that allow legal prosecution for crimes of defamation and slander without the need to file complaints or claim personal rights.
 - The necessity of holding general national consultations when reviewing the law because it affects personal freedoms, the system of freedom of expression, the media, and human rights.

- Cancelling mandatory membership in the Journalists Syndicate: the principle of mandatory membership in unions conflicts with Article (22) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which upholds voluntary membership in unions and their multiplicity. The government must harmonize legislation with the treaties and international agreements that it has ratified.

Policies:

- The government should adopt a strategy and plans that support freedom of expression and the media, linked to measurement indicators and a time frame: The last strategy developed by the Jordanian government to develop and support the media was in 2011, for a period of 5 years, and was supported by the European Union, with the participation of UNESCO. Since that date, the state has not developed its strategic visions for dealing with the media.
- After technological developments, the dominance of social media platforms, and the transformations facing traditional journalism, it is necessary to form a working group that is engaged in national consultations to prepare a media strategy that crosses governments.
- Find effective mechanisms to enforce the law guaranteeing the right to access information: Jordan amended the law guaranteeing the right to access information in a positive direction despite the presence of observations that, if taken into account, the law would turn the law into a lever to guarantee the right to access information, the problem that requires attention and government intervention is the interest in enforcing the law within public institutions, the need for bodies tasked with monitoring the enforcement of the law, and the creation of accountability mechanisms.
- In this context, since 2020, the government has approved three protocols related to the right to access information, the first for enforcement mechanisms, the second for information classification, and the third for information management, archiving, and preservation. They have been published in the Official Gazette, and there are no reports on compliance with them. An effective plan is required to implement these protocols without delay.
- Establishing a national fund to support the media:

Media institutions are suffering from a worsening resource crisis after the decline in commercial advertisements in newspapers and traditional media, and their shift to social media platforms. There is a growing global trend to support the media as a pillar for consolidating democracy and as essential platforms to ensure people's right to knowledge and enhance diversity of opinions. Therefore, there are calls to allocate financial resources from the state's general budget, to be deposited in an independent fund, with an independent management that includes representatives of stakeholders, and its resources can be enhanced from other national sources. Direct negotiations should be initiated with search engines to demand compensation and fees for the free use of media content, and also demand that social media platforms pay a tax on the advertisements they receive from users in Jordan.

- Job security: It has become the biggest threat to journalists, both male and female. Many media outlets are facing the risk of closure, and many small media institutions are not governed with decent work standards. Salaries are limited and not paid regularly, and there is no protection (social security and health insurance). This situation requires an urgent rescue plan, linked to the idea of a national fund to support the media. It should help the media in training and qualification to engage in the era of digital media, and provide tax exemptions. The most important step is to encourage the media industry to be free from political and security concerns, and to overcome bureaucratic obstacles.
- Developing a protocol for independent coverage in crises: adopting a protocol that protects the right of journalists, both male and female, to provide independent coverage in areas of tension and crises, based on the Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials adopted by the United Nations.

Practices:

- Establishing an observatory for violations of freedom of the media and expression, especially those that occur on social media platforms.
- Increasing interest in providing assistance and legal aid to victims of violations from journalists, both male and female, and providing these services to activists, both male and female, on social media platforms, and defenders of freedom of the media and expression.

Executive Summary:

- Preventing impunity and holding accountable those who violate freedom of the media and expression and those who violate the rights of journalists, both male and female, related to their media and journalistic work. Providing justice to all those who are violated as a result of exercising freedom of expression and the media.
- Calling on the government to stop effectively limiting access to the Internet to express their opinions, especially since complaints have increased about the government's attempts to exert pressure on Internet service providers, in order to weaken speeds in times of tension and crises, to restrict journalists, protesters, and activists from divulging what is happening in gatherings and protests, especially through the live broadcast feature.

Media landscape background:

Since the return of parliamentary life in 1989 and the end of the era of martial law, the state of the media in Jordan has remained unstable, has been greatly affected by political, economic, and social data, and has never been far from tensions and conflicts. What can be observed and confirmed is that the media in Jordan has had margins of freedom, and the movement has continued to use them, and sometimes maneuver to expand them. For more than 3 decades the press has remained under pressure, and after the return of democratic life it was not disconnected from what preceded it, as the independence of the media in its absolute sense did not exist or was not available, interventions remained in place, and the three references in the state (the Royal Court, the government, and intelligence) remained in constant contact with the media, sometimes providing it with support, and at other times pressuring it. Sometimes the Royal Court's directives to the media prevail, in certain files the media becomes purely a security matter, and the government often seeks with its strength to hold the threads of communication.

In any case, the various authorities maintained a thread of communication, and the communication was never interrupted. The policy of containment in dealing with the media was preferred over the policy of coercion and pressure. What is important to note is that Jordan in its modern history has never known the phenomenon of killing journalists, enforced disappearance, or deliberate and systematic torture, which are serious violations that do not exist in the country, and have never been monitored or documented, although they were widespread and occurred in neighboring countries. Even the minor violations remained subject to change, and

Jordan did not know a prevailing pattern throughout the time. If the beginning of the nineties witnessed blatant interventions to control and dominate the content, then in the past few years this phenomenon has been publicly hidden, and it was replaced by the administrations of media institutions carrying out prior censorship of the content, and identifying more with the policies of governments, and their green and red lines. The matter is no longer, as the editors-in-chief say with their tongues, due to direct interventions or daily directives, as they have come to know what should be passed, and what should be prevented and not published.

They do this voluntarily, because they value the state's interest, and they never deny that the main means of support for the media come primarily from the government. Therefore they need it, and their margin of maneuver with it is limited.

Pressures and interventions have taken on other titles and forms. There is no longer a need to expand the phenomenon of arresting journalists. The media's transgression of ceilings and margins has become limited, and physical assaults are almost disappearing. The press' presence in the field has diminished, and coverage of protests and demonstrations during which friction occurs - mostly as was the case in what was called the «Arab Spring» - has become limited to a few cases, perhaps repeated less during the Israeli aggression on Gaza since October 7, 2023. The prevailing patterns of violations are invisible violations that are difficult to monitor and document unless journalists disclose them, and there are no systematic mechanisms to document them. The most prominent of these violations and transgressions are withholding information and the phenomenon of self-censorship, in addition to prior censorship by editorial departments and media institutions, followed to a lesser extent by publication ban orders that were previously issued by the Media Authority, and were later issued by judicial orders.

The observer of the media scene since 1989 notices the rise and fall of phenomena. In the early nineties of the last century, weekly newspapers dominated the media scene, working to expand the margins of freedom and criticism, and attracting the public's attention. It is easy to say that they turned into a source of concern and annoyance for the executive authority and other authorities. The tensions between the weekly press, with its multiplicity and diversity, remained present, which prompted the government to use legislation to limit its influence. The temporary Press and Publications Law of 1997 resulted in the closure of most existing weekly newspapers, and set difficult financial conditions for their establishment and continuation. Had it not

been for the Supreme Court of Justice - at that time - invalidating the law for its unconstitutionality, the newspapers would have remained closed. Despite the court's decision that the law was unconstitutional, the government returned with an amended law a year later, and the struggle continued with restrictive laws and the drying up of financial resources until the weekly newspapers declined and then disappeared from the scene.

Once the weekly press cracked and collapsed, while daily newspapers continued to enjoy patronage and financial abundance as a result of commercial and official advertisements and subscriptions, until the profits of one daily newspaper reached more than 20 million dinars, websites appeared on the scene and began to occupy the main interest. The public turned towards them, as websites provided followers with a voice to participate through comments, the government became busy controlling them, and that was a more difficult challenge, as they do not require licenses, nor do they need printing, nor do their establishment require large financial resources, and most importantly, they are not subject to control. The government quickly became fed up with this rapidly growing phenomenon, which was somewhat out of control. The quickest solution was to return to using legislation to curb its rampage, limit its uncontrollability, and legalize its existence. The amended Press and Publications Law of 2012 came into effect, requiring the registration and licensing of these sites, and increasing the penalties. The first result was the closure of hundreds of sites before most of them moved to register and obtain licensing, adhering to the conditions that were set. This was later an introduction to regulating their financial resources, controlling them, and linking them to conditions, the first of which was the annual renewal of the license, and the necessity of having an editor-in-chief who is a member of the Journalists Syndicate, under certain conditions.

In light of the technological developments and transformations, it was only a few years until social media platforms dominated the media scene, and the public migrated to them, abandoning professional journalism. Little by little, the press that did not secure a foothold on social media platforms was no longer watched and lost its presence. Even professional journalists were crowded by «influencers», and in many cases they surpassed them, and became famous celebrities. The new situation generated other challenges for political authority, not only in Jordan, but everywhere in the world, and controlling content became impossible. Every person could become a transmitter of information, the term «citizen journalist» became widespread, and on the margins of this new and complex situation the

government turned once again to legislation to restore control. It recreated the Electronic Crimes Law of 2015, and approved Article (11) that allowed the suspension and imprisonment of everything considered defamation and slander via digital platforms (this applies to websites and social media platforms).

Despite the protest against the text of this legal article and its application, which limited freedom of the media and expression, the dominance of social media platforms, the expansion of the margins of freedom of expression, and the accompanying increase in misleading and fake news and the emergence of hate speech, prompted the government to amend the Cybercrime Law again in 2023 by increasing the penalties of deprivation of freedom and financial penalties. This sparked a wave of protests and controversy between supporters and opponents and is still ongoing to this moment, and the image in which the law came out united international organizations defending human rights and media freedoms against it. King Abdullah's speech was decisive that the law would be reviewed in light of its application if it was found to affect rights and freedoms.

After 35 years of democratic transformations, the media scene has not stabilized. There is progress and success stories that can be documented and monitored. On the other hand, there are challenges that cannot be denied or overlooked. There were and still are opportunities to achieve remarkable successes and establish a media reality that is a model that distinguishes Jordan. The problem that we have not overcome to this day is that Jordan did not give importance to a pioneering media industry. Many ideas were put forward, such as the «Free Media City» at the beginning of the King's reign, but they were abandoned and attracted by Arab countries. This reality kept the media under pressure, did not foster Jordanian professional competencies, and deepened the job security crisis. The state did not pump financial resources to prevent the «collapse» of the existing press, nor did it build a strong, diverse «public media» that would keep the press standing on its feet, nor did it rescue private sector media initiatives.

Serious violations have declined significantly in recent years, including 2023, but they have not ended completely, and it is not known where the trends will go after the Cybercrime Law. With the increasing financial crisis stifling the media, and after society has turned towards social media platforms, and as it turned its back on professional media.

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