

Lebanon - Media Landscape

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Overview

Despite its inevitable entanglement in regional turmoil, Lebanon is now viewed as the most stable and safe country in the Middle East. This reflects on its media environment which enjoys the same relative safety, even in a context that has become

increasingly polarised and radicalised. Currently the Lebanese media landscape is in fact an arena of political patronage and domestic and foreign influence peddling.

The Lebanese media sector is facing a profound crisis and there are many journalists and media staff, working in the local and pan-Arab media outlets based in Beirut, who have not been paid for long time or have lost their jobs. *As-Safir*, a historic newspaper, was forced to close, and *An-Nahar* has weakened and had to restructure. Even *Al-Arabiya* and *Al-Jazeera* offices in Beirut and in the region have reduced the number of their staff members. The only media outlets that resist are those financed by large investors, linked to political-sectarian actors in the region.

In the 1970s, Lebanon offered a unique cultural openness and freedom of expression. Beirut was the region's media hub and the target of important funding for its publications. Investors included Iraq's former president Saddam Hussein, Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, deposed Tunisian president Ben Ali, as well as Saudi royals. Lebanese newspapers were read throughout the Arab world and used to feature articles and op-eds by personalities from all over the region. Gulf countries, but also Iraq and Libya, used to finance Lebanese newsrooms to carry out and support their political battles. As a result, the injection of foreign funding was abundant and steady. Nowadays, with the global economic crises and the new channels of the Gulf, that money has been inexorably vanishing.

From the second half of the 19th century, decades before the creation of independent Lebanon in 1946, Beirut boasted pre-eminence in the surrounding Arab regions for the freedom of expression enjoyed by its several newspapers. These are indeed the oldest and most important in the area. Even today, the smallest country in the Middle East is an exception compared to its Arab neighbours in terms of pluralism of the press and broad range of readers.

Despite a history of turmoil, Lebanon's well-educated and critical population has led to one of the most diverse and sophisticated press and media landscapes in the Arab Levant. With newspapers and media outlets in four different languages (Arabic, French, English and Armenian), Beirut has a vibrant media community with relatively high professional standards and free from State control. The Lebanese press does, however, reflect the limitations of the sectarian system that dominates the country, where a newspaper or a TV station is more often than not identified with one of the main religious and political groups.

With the media being entangled to the national politics and international influence peddling, journalists are often required to act like political activists. On the one hand the Lebanese State does not control media outlets, contrary to what happens in many other Arab countries; however, on the other hand, political parties have the power to influence and direct the majority of Lebanese media institutions, which therefore reflect the country's sectarian politics and all too often serve as the mouthpiece for political propaganda.

Since media outlets do not rely on readership, but rather on investors as a source of revenue, there is little – if any – interest in producing quality journalism.

It is unfortunately a common practice to bribe journalists to publish a certain piece of information, or – on the contrary – to avoid any further analysis on specific matters. With the financial crisis newsrooms have been facing, it is even harder for journalists to resist such offers.

Lebanese syndicates have asked the government to support the country's media. Former minister of information Ramzi Joreige announced in 2016 the creation of a \$10m fund to back Lebanese newspapers, but the plan was never voted on in parliament. The newly appointed minister of information Melhem Riachy, a former journalist himself, has repeatedly promised he would make any efforts to protect journalists, but no concrete measures have been adopted so far.

With the escalation of the conflict in neighbouring Syria and with the emergence of the so-called Islamic State (IS) in some regions between Iraq and Syria, Lebanon has been increasingly caught in profound political divisions mirroring the regional fault lines. In the early times of the Syrian war, the political-sectarian parties in parliament were divided over the conflict, being deeply connected to one player or another in the region. In particular, the impact of Hezbollah's open and numerically significant involvement in Syria since 2012 has had an impact not just on the battlefield, where the Syrian government and its allies have gained momentum in many areas, but also in Lebanon. Here rising sectarian tensions have undermined the country's security and stability, with spillovers of violence from the Syrian conflict. A number of bomb attacks and deadly clashes between supporters and opponents of the Syrian president occurred mainly in Tripoli and Beirut (the twin attacks of August 2013 to two mosques in Tripoli are the deadliest in Lebanon since the end of the civil war). Moreover, the influx of Syrian refugees fleeing the war in their home country have resulted in strained relations between locals and newcomers. The UN estimates that more than one million Syrian refugees are hosted in Lebanon, which is approximately one fourth of all the people living in the country. At the same time and for more than two years, since President Michel Suleiman's mandate finished in May 2014, until October 2016, when the parliament eventually elected Michel Aoun as his successor, a power vacuum paralysed Lebanon's political institutions.

Not only have the local media been deeply influenced by this dangerous polarisation, but they have gradually become sharp tools of propaganda in the hands of opposing Lebanese political and sectarian groups, pursuing their specific political agendas. Today none of the newspapers, TVs and radios can be described as immune to the ongoing conflict, and very few attempt to maintain a neutral attitude. The Lebanese press corps has also suffered many casualties over recent years due to targeted attacks and armed conflicts, mostly connected to the war in Syria and its counter effects in Lebanese areas close to the porous border.

With the 1996 implementation of the Audiovisual Media Law (no. 382 of 1994), Lebanon became the first Arab State to authorise private radio and TV stations to operate within its borders (although a few private channels have existed since 1975). However, a huge number of small radios and TVs were subsequently declared "illegal" and thus closed, with the new licenses – due also to their extremely high fees – being given to corporate conglomerates linked to influential politicians.

According to the Internews Network Report of April 2009, many media institutions suffer from a lack of human resources, written job descriptions, organisational policies and regular performance appraisals and rely heavily on part-time staff. Moreover, 40 percent of Beirut-based media has no mission statement or organisational chart.

While about 45 percent of the surveyed organisations has over half of their staffs made up of women – notably in broadcast media – few of the women are admitted into the male-dominated areas of political journalism. Interestingly, 29 percent of the organisations do not employ women at all.

Politicians account for up to a third of many media boards of directors and often use these outlets as tools to promote their platforms, influence public opinion and seek public support. Overall they have the power to shape the entire media system: From the hiring process, to content development and internal governance. It comes as no surprise that in the majority of the cases when journalists are sued for defamation, the plaintiffs are usually politicians. Journalists charged with defamation or dissemination of false information are normally fined, but a prison sentence is still legally possible. The Internews report also found that most of the larger Lebanese media "proved to be very opaque and resistant towards revealing information about their internal operations and management."

In addition to all this, a Censorship Bureau within General Security controls the content of the information outlets. However, being its regulations vague and lacking clear standards, a high level of inconsistency and subjectivity characterise the whole censorship system. (*MARCH*, a Lebanese NGO, has researched and compiled cases of government censorship since the

1940's in an online "Virtual Museum of Censorship").

Media

Print

Historically, Lebanon has had one of the highest ratios of private newspapers per head in the Arab world. However, with the rise in popularity and the rapid development of online media outlets, pan-Arab TVs and news sharing in social networks, printed newspapers have become increasingly less popular, causing a decrease in advertising revenues and sales. If this is true all over the world, in Lebanon the situation is more complicated. In fact, since their creation, Lebanese media have been receiving funding from foreign investors, who pursue their interest in the country's politics. The withdrawal of foreign funding from the Lebanese media industry started when Gulf countries launched their own TV channels and networks and it intensified more recently with the global financial crisis and the fall in oil prices. For instance, *As-Safir*, which used to be one of the most popular newspaper selling over 50,000 copies a day in 2010, was only selling about 10,000 copies by 2016.

Anyway, if one stops at a newsstand in Beirut he will still be surprised at the plethora of daily, weekly, monthly local newspapers and magazines, that are offered to the reader. A daily newspaper costs from €0.50 to €1. For those who cannot read Arabic, along with a rich variety of dailies, Lebanon offers a vast repertoire of weeklies and periodicals. Those focusing mainly on internal and regional political affairs and on social gossip (*Al-Hawadeth*, *Al-Jaras*, *Al-Watan Al-Arabi*, *Ash-Shiraa*, *Al-Masira/An-Najwa* – all in Arabic except for the two francophone *L'Hebdo Magazine* and *La Revue du Liban*, alongside with the English-language *Monday Morning*) – are scarcely reliable as journalistic sources, whilst the ones dedicated to business and finance – most of them in English and French (*Executive*, *Lebanon Opportunities*, *Le Commerce du Levant*, *al-Iktissad Wal-Aamaal*) – include a number of interesting insight features on social, economic and cultural aspects of Lebanon, in each issue.

Beirut, long before it became the capital of Lebanon, was and still is the capital of the so-called free media of the Middle East. The first Arab *Jarida* (newspaper), the Garden of the News (*Hadiqat al-Akhbar*), was published in 1858 in Beirut and was followed by other illustrious gazettes. Since the 19th century, the urban elite has also played a crucial role in establishing some of the most prestigious newspapers in Egypt and in the new destinations of the Arab diaspora, such as Argentina, Brazil, France.

From a legal point of view, Lebanon has two types of licenses: one for political and another for non-political outlets. Following the 1964 press law, the number of periodicals was limited and it has since been stabilised. The Lebanese press includes about 60 licensed political publications, including around ten dailies, almost 40 weeklies and four monthly magazines reporting a total circulation of 220,000 (2008).

However, there are no accurate figures on circulation and distribution of newspapers in Lebanon and each paper makes self-promoting claims. According to the Ministry of Information, formerly *As-Safir* (The Messenger) and *An-Nahar* (The Day) supposedly were the most read newspapers in Arabic language, with respectively 50,000 and 45,000 issues daily. However, Wissam Chehabeddine, director of planning at Media Direction OMD, estimated that *An-Nahar's* circulation does not exceed 15,000, a figure consistent with a 2004 [study](#) on Arab media by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. In any case, after the recent closure of *As-Safir*, it is fair to say the largest circulation dailies are *An-Nahar* and *Al-Akhbar* (The News, founded in 2006). If on the one hand, *Al-Akhbar* has always been praised for its focus on audacious and historically

taboo subjects; on the other hand, it has been widely accused of being the mouthpiece of Hezbollah. Founded in 2003, *Al-Balad* (The Country) also registered a large circulation at an initial stage, which subsequently decreased. It is a commercial newspaper printed in tabloid format. It promotes aggressive and controversial campaigns, focusing on political, social, and cultural issues often in sensationalistic terms.

As-Safir was founded in 1974 and belongs to Talal Salman. For all its history, it has claimed to be “the voice of the voiceless” and throughout the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990), it was known for its support to the Palestinian cause and to Arab nationalism. In wider terms, for years, and at least until 1989, it represented the secular left-wing Arab *intelligentsia*, opposed to Washington policies and loyal to pan-Arab ideals. However, in the last decade its orientation partly shifted towards more radical positions, often supporting conservative authoritarian regimes in the region. In March 2016, it was announced that *As-Safir* was to close, due to financial issues, and a final edition was published. However, the newspaper was still in existence until the end of 2016, thanks to a last-minute injection of funding. This proved not to be enough though and, on 31 December 2016, after 42 years in publication, *As-Safir* closed down.

Also *An-Nahar* newspaper could soon follow the fate of *As-Safir*, due to the economic crisis that has hit many local and regional Beirut-based media outlets. Established in 1933 by the Orthodox Christian Tueni family, *An-Nahar* has been characterised by a liberal orientation, which, without denying its roots and Arab affiliations, looks to Europe and the West in general as a political and cultural reference point. Nowadays, this historical newspaper has gradually lost its role of the leading public voice of a certain segment of the Lebanese intellectual landscape. *An-Nahar* is no longer a reference point for the readership, in fact it has become a collectanea of local affairs news and articles concerning the immutable domestic policy debate among the usual political/sectarian actors. As many observers and readers have pointed out, the paper now “is neither fish nor fowl”.

Nowadays, in addition to *An-Nahar*, the pro-Hezbollah *Al-Akhbar* and the commercial *Al-Balad*, smaller portions of readers are shared by the francophone *L'Orient-Le Jour* (resulting from the 1971 merger between *L'Orient*, founded in 1904, and *Le Jour* established in 1897) and the English-language *The Daily Star* (1952), which is a valuable news source for local expats and the diaspora. In 2010 a group of entrepreneurs close to the Hariri family bought the newspaper that has since adopted a stance more inclined towards the Future Movement led by current Prime Minister Saad Hariri. Malik Mroue is its chairman, but has no executive role or power. In 2015 *The Daily Star* started charging an online fee of US\$12 a month for readers based outside Lebanon. There is also the pro-Saudi *Al-Mustaqbal* (The Future, established in 1995), which is the organ of the Future Movement and is owned by current prime minister and Lebanese-Saudi business tycoon Saad Hariri, son and political heir of the former premier Rafiq Hariri, killed in a blast in Beirut in 2005.

The latest additions to the Lebanese newspaper scene are *Al-Jumhuriyya* (The Republic) and *Al-Bina'* (The Construction). In fact, these papers were founded respectively in 1924 and 1958, but then their publication was suspended and only recently relaunched, appearing for the first time as daily political newspapers. The Syrian Social Nationalist Party controls *Al-Bina'*, whilst the ownership of *Al-Jumhuriyya* belongs to former Minister of Defence, Elias Murr, from the Murr family's media empire.

As mentioned before, as a result of “financial difficulties”, *An-Nahar* dismissed 50 employees in September 2009, announcing that in the following months its staff would be reduced from 300 to 220 journalists and print workers. A few months prior to that, also *Al-Akhbar* and *Al-Mustaqbal* terminated the employment of a large number of their staff writers. Moreover, in January 2009 the printing of *The Daily Star* was suspended for two weeks by a Lebanese court order after financial difficulties. The newspaper resumed publishing the following month, thanks to agreements with creditors on payment of accumulating debt. In this context, new business models for the media are being actively considered, with an eye to increased commercialisation, aggressive marketing and online media investments, aimed at regional audiences and

competitors.

Radio

By the end of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990), around 180 unlicensed radio stations were on air. The government announced its intention to reorganize and regulate the media sector, which led to the adoption of the Audiovisual Media Law (1994). Quotas and technical criteria for licensing radio stations were established which are yet to be overhauled.

Currently there are five major radio stations in the country and a dozen of small ones, broadcasting to 85 percent of the Lebanese population (2.85 million receivers according to the latest available statistics) in the four main languages spoken in the country: Arabic, English, French, Armenian. Five of them account for the majority of listeners and there are dozens of local radio stations. The majority of the country's radio stations have commercial licenses, broadcasting music, socio-cultural programs and entertainment talk shows. Following the example of television, only a few of them have "class-A" licenses that entitle them to broadcast political content and news (the government owned *Idhaat Lubnan*, then *Sawt Lubnan*, *Sawt ash-Shaab*, *Sawt al-Ghad*, *Sawt Lubnan al-Hurr* and *Idhaat an-Nur*). As is the case for other Lebanese news media, also radio news providers, with the exception of the state-owned *Idhaat Lubnan/Radio Liban* (Radio of Lebanon, one of the first radios in the Arab world, founded in 1939), reflect their different political and religious affiliations.

Sawt Lubnan (Voice of Lebanon, 1975) is the voice of the pro-Western Christian-Maronite 'Lebanese Phalanges' party, while *Idhaat an-Nur* (Radio of Light) is linked to the Shiite pro-Iranian movement Hezbollah. *Sawt al-Ghad* (Voice of Tomorrow, 1997) is owned by the Free Patriotic Movement (Fpm) led by Maronite retired general and Hezbollah ally Michel Aoun, who was elected President of Lebanon at the end of 2016, while *Sawt Lubnan al-Hurr* (Voice of Free Lebanon, 1985) is affiliated with the pro-Western Christian-Maronite 'Lebanese Forces' party; *Sawt ash-Shaab* (Voice of the People, 1987) is controlled by the once-powerful Lebanese Communist Party.

According to the latest available statistics, the leading news radio station is *Sawt al-Ghad* that can boast a 19 percent reach (2010). On the other hand, *Sawt Lubnan* is the first commercial radio station in the country and it reached 17 percent of the population in 2010. *Sawt Lubnan al-Hurr* ranks third – with 15 percent audience reach in 2010 – and it mainly broadcasts Arabic-language political programs and news bulletins.

In more recent times, Lebanese radio companies have been diversifying their offer and providing a wider range of digital services, with online streaming, dedicated websites and mobile apps. Not only does this enable them to broadcast internationally, it also allows them to take advantage of new technology, like programmatic advertising.

Television

Until the mid-1980s, Lebanon's television scene was limited to two private stations, *La Compagnie Libanaise de Télévision* and *Télé-Orient*. These were acquired by the government in 1977 and merged into one company called *Télé-Liban*.

In 1985, Christian businessmen founded LBC as the mouthpiece of the Lebanese Forces party. Soon, it became the most popular station in the country and its success encouraged other political parties and financiers to venture into the field. Subsequently, TV stations rapidly proliferated until the 1994 Audiovisual Law limited their number to a handful of stations distributed among the major politicians who also represented the major religious sects.

There are nine television broadcast stations in Lebanon. These reach more than 97 percent of the adult Lebanese audience; the country also has five digital cable television companies, *Cable Vision*, *Econet*, *City TV*, *Digiteck* and *UCL*. Although hundreds of thousands of viewers subscribe to cable and satellite services, many providers operate without a license. For

instance, in May 2015, eight Lebanese television stations filed a lawsuit against cable and satellite companies, alleging that they violated Articles 87 and 88 of the intellectual property law and Article 6 of the Audiovisual Law by not paying fees for the right to carry the broadcast stations' content.

With the exception of the state-owned and scarcely viewed *Télé-Liban*, all the other eight Lebanese TV stations are directly linked to the different political and religious rival factions of the country (the pro-Western parliamentary majority vs. the pro-Iranian opposition). The result is a general lack of professional standards in reporting local, regional and international events, whilst the news agenda is deeply influenced by the different affiliations. Moreover, the success (and the granting of licences) of these TV stations is directly related to the fortunes of the political parties that support them.

LBC is owned by Pierre Daher with Saudi Prince Walid b. Talal as one of its main shareholders. When in the mid-1980s *LBC* started broadcastings as the first Lebanese private TV, its popularity rapidly breached Lebanon borders. For years and long before the appearance of pan-Arab TV *Al Jazeera* in 1996, *LBC* was the most-viewed station not only in Lebanon but also in Syria and the entire Middle East. In recent years, its audience share has been declining (54 percent in 2005, 48 percent in 2007, and 43 percent in 2010, AGB-Ipsos Stat). Politically it is one of the stations belonging to the so-called 'pro-Western' spheres and its schedule mainly focuses on local talk shows and news programs and imported entertainment formats adapted to the local market.

MTV (Murr Television) belongs to the same sphere of influence. Originally created in 1991 by businessman Gabriel Murr (not connected to the Michel Murr media group), it was closed under strong Syrian pressures in 2002 and finally re-launched at the beginning of 2009. In September 2009 *MTV* and *LBC* have announced the dismissal of dozens of their employees.

The *Future Television* is owned by the Hariri family and its first TV channel was launched in 1993, right after the first general elections held in the country in the post civil war era. The 1992 elections were dominated by Rafiq Hariri, a long-standing key political figure representing the Saudi interests in Lebanon. It is worth mentioning that the *Future News* headquarter was assaulted (alongside with *Al-Mustaqbal* newspaper) by scores of Hezbollah-led militiamen in central Beirut and forced into closing for some days in May 2008 during the short and bloody Lebanese internal conflict. After these events, the *Future Television* relocated its main premises in a Christian-dominated suburb on the Eastern outskirts of the Lebanese capital for security reasons.

In the pro-Iranian sphere, *Al-Mayadin* (The Squares) stands out. It is a pan-Arab satellite television channel launched in June 2012 and broadcasting from Beirut. It has partially taken the place of *Al-Manar Tv* (Talifizyun al-Manar) affiliated with the Shiite movement Hezbollah. Its 'beacon' was launched in 1991 with the help of Iranian funds, and its harshly anti-Israel and anti-US rhetoric is now estimated to reach 15 million daily viewers worldwide. Between December 2015 and April 2016, in the midst of raising political and diplomatic tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia, the two major Arab satellite providers – Arabsat and Nilesat – stopped broadcasting *Al-Manar TV* under heavy Saudi pressures.

In addition to *Al-Mayadin* and *Al-Manar*, the pro-Iranian and pro-Syrian government sphere of Lebanese public opinion could count on *NBN* (National Broadcasting Network). This was founded in 1996 by the Shiite speaker of the Parliament and leader of the *Amal* (Hope) movement Nabih Berri. In fact *NBN* is widely and sarcastically known in Lebanon as the acronym of 'Nabih Berri News'. In 2000, it launched its satellite channel in order to reach the Lebanese Shiite diaspora in the Arab World, Africa and Europe.

Formerly known as *NewTv*, the station has become *Al-Jadid TV* since 2001 (when it was relaunched after it reacquired the broadcasting licence following its forced closure by the government). It is owned by the local business tycoon Tahsin Khayyat and is Lebanon's fastest growing local station. *Al-Jadid TV* has been expanding its audience reach (21 percent in 2005, 29 percent in 2008 and 32 percent in 2010, AGB-Ipsos Stat), climbing from fourth to second rank in two years. It has a populist

approach and its growing popularity is partly due to investigative reports of public relevance, which sometimes make it a real embarrassment to the people in power and have caused legal issues to Khayyat.

In the midst of this predominantly Shiite media landscape, the pro-Iranian sphere can also count on the third main Christian channel, *OTV* (Orange TV), created in 2007 as the first Lebanese publicly-traded company by the current President of the Lebanese Republic, Fpm leader Michel Aoun. A minor TV station is *Télé-Lumière* (TV of Light), a religious educationally-based station launched in 1991 and owned by the Maronite Church.

Digital Media

With regard to Internet services, there are currently more than 4.5 million Internet Users in Lebanon in 2016, 75.9 percent of the country population.

Through the *Ogero* company, the telecommunications ministry provides wireless Internet and DSL. DSL was offered for the first time in April 2007. According to recent Telecommunication Ministry figures, in few years the number of DSL subscribers has strongly increased, passing from around 18,000 in 2009 to 537,135 in 2016. Available in the main cities, the network is still under development in some rural areas. DSL services typically cost from €12 a month (2 Mbps) to €50 a month (above 8 Mbps), while wireless Internet services, offered for the first time in 2006, cost around €25 a month.

According to the [Broadband Manifesto](#) (May 2008), the economic growth and the social development of the country depend also on the availability of real broadband connectivity for citizens and enterprises. Despite the pressure from civil society groups, Lebanon still lacks infrastructures permitting access to a broadband connection. The country does not have a special network to transport data, which is presently being transported over the existing landline telephone network. Moreover, the international bandwidth is very low and limited, and the Telecommunications Ministry has exclusivity in establishing international gateways and transporting international traffic. There is no true competition in the Lebanese telecom market as *Ogero* dominates the market in a stagnant status quo environment.

Thanks to digitisation, Lebanon's residents have access to a variety of news platforms, from 24-hour cable and satellite channels to Internet sites and text message services. But this wide range of available media outlets does not translate into a greater plurality of opinions. Many new sources simply replicate the voices expressed through traditional media. The same political agendas reflected in traditional media also exist online. Even the new players, previously marginalised for political reasons and now entering the media arena, simply imitate the established and partisan status quo. Journalists interviewed by Open Society for the 2012 Mapping Digital Media report evince a distrust for the uncontrolled quality of online material and suggest that digital media outlets, which support citizen journalism, actually exacerbate partisan bias.

According to the Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013 report, the top news websites in Lebanon belong to, or mirror, the same political parties that own the country's traditional media. Regarding online media, the same study noted that 23 percent of Lebanese people read news online more than five times a week, whilst 40 percent do so between one and four times a week, and 37 percent four times a month or less. Among the most popular websites there are mainly locally created news: *Lbcgroup.tv*, *Aljadeed.tv*, the websites of the namesake TV channels, *Lebanon24*, a TV station based in Tripoli, in the North of the country, and *Tayyar.org*, mouthpiece of the FPM and close to the pro-Iranian and pro-Syrian government sphere. In particular, according to the Effective Measure report based upon data collected from 11,937 individuals who were active online in Lebanon during September 2016, *Lbcgroup.tv* showed the largest audience in Lebanon, with almost 1.2m unique browsers visiting the site during the month. *Lebanon24* and *Tayyar.org* ranked second and third. Of the top 20 sites, *Lebanonfiles* and *Sayidaty* registered the longest average visit durations, with visitors to both sites staying for an average of 13 minutes and over.

In 2012 the magazine *Forbes Middle East* released the top-50 list of online newspapers in the MENA region, based on their “presence online, their content and the number of followers they generate.” Three Lebanese newspapers were included in the first 20 websites (*Al-Akhbar* at number 12; *An-Nahar* at 13 and *As-Safir* at 17).

Even though it is not always a reliable source of information, the two main mobile operators (Alfa and Mtc) and many media outlets offer a breaking-news service via text messages. This service is valid in Lebanon and abroad and usually available for a \$10 fee a month. In more recent times, the websites of the major newspapers and TV stations (also pan-Arab satellite channels) have all started developing their own app for Android and iOS to promote their contents and send alerts for breaking news to mobile phones and other devices. Web television and video news are still scarcely used on Internet newspapers. The dominating source of web TV is Youtube and the various social network platforms such as Facebook.

Social Networks

With the birth and rise of social media, Lebanese people have quickly used new technologies to connect, communicate and share information with each other. Over the past years, a slight dip in the demographic trend has been observed, as users over the age of 30 have steadily uptaken social media usage.

Facebook and WhatsApp are the most used social media channels in Lebanon. According to data from the Internet World Stats, with 3.1 million Facebook subscribers (Jun 2016), Facebook penetration in Lebanon is above 50 percent, a rate that indicates a continuous growth and a pervasive use of this social network in the society. The Arab Social Media Report (ASMR 2014) reveals that English is the dominant language on Facebook, with the largest percentage of Facebook posts from Lebanese accounts written in English (78 percent, 32 percent in Arabic and 10 percent in French).

Being connectivity the main reason for people to use social media in the first place, it comes as no surprise that Twitter is by far less popular than Facebook, and Lebanon is no exception. The penetration of Twitter in Lebanon is slightly below 2 percent – as the statistics provided by the aforementioned ASMR demonstrate – with a total number of active users in Lebanon of 178,000 people as of March 2014. As officially defined by Twitter, an “active user” is someone who logs in (but does not necessarily tweets) once a month. As with Facebook, Lebanon is the most gender-balanced country in the Arab world. The estimated number of tweets produced by Twitter users in Lebanon in March 2014 surpassed 18m tweets.

Opinion Makers

Some emerging voices – often not aligned with any political group – have recently created a space with blogs and online social networking tools forming a growing community of online activists. These people might exert some influence in the socio-political and cultural realms, especially among the youngest generations, but they still have to compete with the power of traditional media.

At the same time, social activism has benefited from digitisation. As the report entitled Mapping Digital Media by Open Society points out, the first draft of a comprehensive animal rights law, the banning of the honour crime code from the law, the protection of 170 historic buildings slated for demolition and greater media coverage of issues concerning migrant/domestic workers were all achieved through digital activism. These organisations’ official websites and Facebook pages and groups are the most commonly used digital tools, and have the greatest impact.

Despite a number of disadvantages (ie. poor Internet speed, lack of specific regulations, censorship and scarce government support) activists broadly agree that overall digitisation has positively affected their online activities and their impact.

According to the website 2Famous, which ranks blogs using Google PageRank, the Alexa global ranking system and links to

the websites, the top ten Lebanese blogs in 2012 were:

+961, *Blog Baladi*, *The Angry Arab News Service*, *Anissa's blog*, *Design Fetish*, *All Day I Dream of Photography*, *Strawberry Blu*, *NittyGriddy*, *Beirut Spring*, *Gino's Blog*. This list reveals a dominance of blogs about current events, lifestyle and food.

The *Angry Arab News Service* was launched in September 2003 by Lebanese-American professor of political science As'ad Abu Khalil. The blog is known for its insightful political analysis, peppered with sarcastic commentary. Lebanese composer, pianist and playwright, Ziad Rahbani, has been also a charismatic figure who has always satirised Lebanese politics and criticised the traditional political establishment. Since 2006 he has had a political column on *Al-Akhbar* and has received a lot of criticism and divided his long-time fans, due to his controversial positions in favour of the Syrian government and its Russian and Iranian supporters in the context of the ongoing conflict.

Among the ten most followed Twitter accounts in Lebanon, only one does not belong to a star of the entertainment world: the Lebanese *Al-Arabiyya* TV presenter and award-winning journalist Rima Makatabi, with more than 2 million followers. Other important personalities that are particularly followed from the media sector are mainly TV political talk show hosts such as Marcel Ghanem (LBC) and Imad Marmal (*Al-Manar*), as well as Ghassan Ben Jiddo, the director of *Al-Mayadin*, and Gisèle Khoury (former *LBC* and *Al-Arabiya*, now BBC Arabic). Among influent opinion makers there are newspapers columnists, such as Ghassan Charbil and Jihad Khazen from the pan-Arab newspaper *Al-Hayat*, Michel Hajj Georgeou, writing for the French speaking *L'Orient-Le Jour*, Ibrahim al Amin, co-founder and editor in chief of *Al-Akhbar*.

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- [The Daily Star](#)

Radio

- [Idhaat an-Nur](#)
- [Radio Liban](#)
- [Radio Voix du Liban](#)
- [Sawt al-Ghad](#)
- [Sawt al-Shaab](#)

TV

- [Al-Manar Tv](#)
- [Future News](#)
- [FutureTv](#)
- [LBC](#)
- [MTV](#)
- [NBN](#)
- [New TV](#)
- [OTV](#)

Online media

- [Elnasrha.com](#)
- [Lbcgroup.tv](#)
- [Lebanon24L](#)
- [Lebanonfiles](#)
- [Naharnet.com](#)
- [NowLebanon.com](#)
- [Saydaty](#)
- [Tayyar.org](#)

Opinion makers

- [+961](#)
- [All Day I Dream of Photography](#)
- [Anissa's blog](#)
- [Beirut Spring](#)
- [Blog Baladi](#)
- [Design Fetish](#)
- [Gino's Blog](#)
- [NittyGriddy](#)
- [Strawberry Blu](#)
- [The Angry Arab News Service](#)

Organisations

Trade Unions

As of today, Lebanon still lacks an association of journalists to protect and guarantee the rights of the people who cover the many varied roles associated with the news world. In an expression of the lively activism of the early modern Levantine press that had come into being in Beirut in the second half of the 20th century, dozens of reporters and local newspaper owners gathered in 1911 at the Grand Hotel Bassoul on the city's sea-front to give birth to the "Journalists Commission" (*al-Lajna as-sahafiyya*), the first institution created to regulate relations among journalists, publishers and political authorities. After almost a century, Lebanese journalists maintain the fervour of their ancestors but still complain about the absence of official bodies to protect their rights and denounce violations. In this respect, the "Samir Kassir Foundation for the defence of media and cultural freedoms in the Arab World" (*SKeyes*, see below) is *de facto* the only organisation in Lebanon to criticize and repeatedly denounce the Press syndicates' failure to effectively support the journalists. Over the last years, *SKeyes* has become increasingly more effective in reporting violations against journalists and press workers and in its awareness campaigns for freedom of press.

The 1962 Press Law formally organised journalists into two syndicates: the Lebanese Press Syndicate (*LPS*, *Niqabat as-sahafa al-lubnaniyya*, owners) and the Lebanese Press Editors Syndicate (*LPES*, *Niqabat muharriri as-sahafa al-lubnaniyya*, editors and reporters). A Higher Press Council was also created, along with other committees, to consider other issues pertinent to journalists, including the task of devising a retirement plan.

As established in its charter, the Press Editors Syndicate formally performs the functions of both a trade union protecting the interests of its members and an accountability body monitoring the conduct of journalists as well as providing guarantees for their professionalism and ethics. However, many reporters interviewed in Beirut in 2009 stated on condition of anonymity that both the Press and the Press Editors syndicates have for decades been two ineffectual institutions created merely in order to give the impression that Lebanon respects international press organisation standards. Around 75 percent of Lebanese journalists accredited by the Information Ministry do not appear as *LPES* members. The latter actually performs neither the function of a trade union nor that of an accountability institution. Moreover, in Beirut, officials of neither the *LPS* nor the *LPES*, when contacted were able to clearly describe the nature and the function of the Higher Press Council.

According to local observers, there is no doubt that today the two bodies continue to be dominated by the political and sectarian carve-up, with a Maronite heading the *LPES* and a Sunni as *LPS*'s chief. In 2012, Aouni al-Kaaki, owner and editor-in-chief of daily *ash-Sharq* newspaper, was voted *LPS* president, succeeding Mohammad Baalbaki who had served in the post for over three decades; and last year the Press Editors Syndicate re-elected Elias Aoun.

These organisations have proved to be weak and ineffective in their actions: the Press Syndicate must take decisions jointly with the owners' syndicate. As the employees usually have conflicting interests with their employers, collective action is paralysed. Moreover, both the syndicates are usually led by constantly re-elected octogenarians clinging to power and derisively referred to by detractors as "Jurassic Park". This system benefits only a handful of their executives and some faithful members.

Recently, when along with *LBC* and *MTV*, the *An-Nahar* newspaper announced the dismissal of a total of more than 150 employees, the *LPES* took almost a week to issue a weak statement to "express solidarity with the colleagues" without taking any firm and effective position against these measures.

Given the financial crisis newsrooms are now facing, a lot of workers of the media sector have been unpaid for long time. Many of them have remained silent and searched for other jobs to do at the same time, also because the Lebanese legal system offers few chances for journalists to fight for their rights. When asked if they had gone on strike, the majority said they had not. Another possibility for unpaid staff is to ask for mediation at the Ministry of Labour. The minister then summons the two parties to find common ground on the matter. Several journalists from *Al-Mustaqbal* and *An-Nahar* have begun such procedures. If mediation fails, journalists can sue their employers in court, but this procedure is obviously costly and it might take years to reach a final verdict. As a witness recalls, a small group of journalists once attempted to strike and block the broadcast of a programme on *Future News*. After a meeting with the management, to which only the editors were invited, the strike attempt was aborted without explanation.

Journalist Associations

In the last decade, some independent associations were created in Lebanon to fill the vacuum left by the absence of effective trade associations and accountability institutions.

The *Samir Kassir Foundation* (named after the Lebanese journalist and historian killed in Beirut in 2005) in November 2007 created its 'armed wing' *SKeyes* not only to support the new generation of reporters but also to monitor violations against press freedom in Lebanon and the Arab world. *Samir Kassir Eyes* is based in Beirut and has regional correspondents – some of them undercover – in Jordan, Syria, the Palestinian Occupied Territories and Israel. Its aims are to defend freedom in academic and scientific research, to act within the framework of civil society forces for defending freedoms while respecting the law and to build a media and cultural lobby at Arab and international levels.

The *SKeyes* centre was established through a grant from the Foundation for the Future, an international organisation based in Amman (Jordan), whose work is dedicated to freedom of expression. *SKeyes* has mainly financial support from the European Union. The *SKeyes* centre periodically organises workshops, exhibitions and conferences on specific issues, prepares regular reports and protest petitions by journalists and intellectuals, participates in organising awareness campaigns, offers its legal staff to help journalists and intellectuals subjected to prosecution, lawsuits and prison, and liaises with local and international committees that defend journalism, culture and human rights.

One of the most active independent associations is the *Maharat Foundation*, a group of journalists who have worked together and personally experienced the obstacles to free journalism in Lebanon. Their aims are among other things to develop media skills and limit the effect of self- and government-imposed censorship on media.

In 1993 another "group of young journalists", trained in the media departments of the Beirut universities, formed the *Club de la Presse (Nadi as-Sahafa)*, a non-for-profit organisation with the ambition to become a "free journalistic pulpit". In 2006 thanks to several private donations from Lebanese and Arab businessmen, the *Club de la Presse* opened its prestigious headquarters in one of the newly restored buildings in central Beirut, where it regularly organises workshops, press conferences, book presentations and training courses with the declared aim of "helping young journalists find employment and overcome the difficulties of the Lebanese media system". In recent years the *Club de la Presse* has gradually lost its role of reference point for local and foreign journalists.

News Agencies

The main Lebanese news agency is the state-owned *National News Agency*. Founded in 1961 and now located in the

Ministry of Information building in central Hamra Street, the *Nna* has dozens of reporters in Beirut and other regions, from the northern borders with Syria to the southern Blue Line of demarcation with Israel, from the Mediterranean coast to the eastern fields of the Beqaa Valley. In the last years, its Arabic website has improved in terms of accessibility and frequency of update of the news, whilst its French and English versions are not updated with the same pace of the Arabic page.

Another local news service is the private and more modest *Central News Agency* (*Wikalat al-anba' al-markaziyya*), better known as *Al-Markaziyya*. Created in 1983 and directed by the Pierre Abi Aql, it has the ambition to compete with the *Nna* in the local market, but does not seem to have the same penetration in the Lebanese territories.

On the other hand, political, economic, social and cultural features published by the Arabic services of *Reuters*, *Agence France Press* (AFP), *Deutsche Presse-Agentur* (DPA) and *Adnkronos International* (AKI) usually find considerable space in Lebanese media outlets, as do their “bulletins” (breaking news), which are often quoted by the local TVs, radios and news web sites.

Audience measurement organisations

Neither on the official website of the Lebanese Ministry of Information, nor on the page of the Ministry of Telecommunications it is possible to find available data on radio and TV audience.

Since 1999, IPSOS, an international leading media measurement company, has been providing complete Television Audience Measurement (TAM) data to the Lebanese market. IPSOS has the almost absolute monopoly on statistics on audience measurement in the country, a monopoly only partially broken in 2012 by the German market research company GFK Media Research. Being IPSOS funded primarily by LBCI (the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation), there is a clear conflict of interest in this matter. In fact, in October 2014, five television stations (MTV, Future TV, NBN, al-Jadid and Télé-Liban) decided to withdraw from IPSOS surveys, tired of its “inaccurate ratings” and of what they described as the company’s “opaque” measures and relationships with LBCI.

In addition to this, the provision of TAM meters throughout the entire country cannot take into account demographic changes, due to the scarcity of national statistics on population and its distribution (the last official census in Lebanon was conducted in 1932). As a direct consequence, representative audience samples can hardly be obtained. As media expert Sara El-Richani points out, the unreliability of the figures on audience depends also on the limited number of TAM meters in the country. In fact, these devices, primarily for security reasons, are absent from densely populated area, such as Hezbollah strongholds in the Southern suburbs of Beirut or in the South of Lebanon, or the Palestinian camps.

Sources

Trade unions

- [Lebanese Press Editors Syndicate](#)
- [Lebanese Press Syndicate](#)

Journalists associations

- [Mahara Foundation](#)
- [SKeyes Media](#)

News agencies

- [Adnronos International](#)(AKI)
- [Agence France Press in Arabic](#) (AFP)
- [Central News Agency](#)
- [Deutsche Presse-Agentur in Arabic](#) (DPA)
- [National News Agency](#) (NNA)
- [Reuters in Arabic](#)

Audience measurement organisations

- [IPSOS](#)

Policies

Media legislation

Lebanese media are formally organised under the 1962 Press Law and the 1994 Audiovisual Media Law, but in many aspects rules are respected only on paper. The 1962 Law was officially enacted in order to “protect the press from random abusive interventions” and to shield the State and its citizens from biased campaigns in the press. The law defines a journalist as being at least 21 years of age, having a baccalaureate degree and having apprenticed for at least four years. Practicing journalists do not require certification, although those with a degree in journalism must register with the *LPES*, whilst it is the Ministry of Information that issues annual press cards.

As is the case for other Arab states’ press laws, the Lebanese text states vaguely that “nothing may be published that endangers national security [...] national unity [...] or that insults high-ranking Lebanese officials [...] or a foreign head of State”. It is difficult not to perceive a subtle warning to reporters behind these loaded and ambiguous expressions. In the recent past, several episodes have focused attention on the concrete danger posed by these controversial articles in the Law.

According to the 1962 Press Law, in order to own a newspaper, both the owner and all stockholders of a joint-stock company must be Lebanese citizens. However, in practice the law is often dodged by foreigners who buy stocks under Lebanese names. As a result, a number of Lebanese newspapers depend on foreign funding.

The 1994 Audiovisual Media Law separated TV and radio stations into two categories: those licensed for broadcasting news and political coverage and those focusing only on entertainment or general interest content. As mentioned before, the new rule on the one hand abolished the State broadcasting monopoly; whilst, on the other hand, it forced dozens of TVs and radio stations to close, thus favouring the emergence of a few powerful local and regional tycoons at the expense of pluralism and freedom of expression.

Flagrant contradictions in the country’s media laws and regulations have been periodically reported, revealing the lack of an effective framework to regulate media work and the legal rights of media workers. Not only laws governing media in Lebanon are outdated, but also they can be found in the penal code, the Elections Law, the Press Law, the Military Justice Code, and the Audiovisual Media Law, creating a logistical nightmare of overlapping jurisdictions. The digitisation and new digital media also necessitate the establishment of new laws and regulations. In 2010, Mr Tariq Mitri, who was then minister of information, launched a series of consultations with journalists, media owners, advocacy groups, and politicians to identify priorities and

guidelines for a new comprehensive legal framework. The heated debate that was taking place got stopped when the unity government collapsed in January 2011, and then stalled by the ensued political paralysis.

A 2013 Ministry of Telecommunication [report](#) (the minister in charge was then Nicolas Sehnaoui) stated that a new media law, “essential to the development of the sector”, was still awaiting approval by the parliament. The draft included several key amendments to comprise digital television and various broadcast formats (Internet Protocol Television and Mobile TV). The report, however, did not mention any substantial overhaul to control the many flaws of the current legal frame.

Accountability systems

Censorship and Self-Censorship

Lebanon’s media environment is known to be one the freest in the Arab Near Est. However, the country is plagued by a confessional government system, with most of the leaders supported by foreign countries, which inevitably influences media. Digitisation has not affected the business model Lebanese media rely on and that is fostered by partisan and foreign financial support. Most of the country’s news outlets support and represent public personalities and/or a political party with little room for independent and marginalised voices, or for diversity. And the vast majority of these outlets are owned, managed, or financed by local or regional powers. News media all too often become propagandists for their patrons. Publishers are often politicians themselves linked to religious sects. They exert indirect and direct pressure on journalists. In some cases, reporters transform into political activists who reproduce a narrative, censoring and exaggerating it, without caring about professional ethics.

In 1967, censorship on foreign publications was abolished and three years later the government decided to withdraw censors from TV stations. But formally the *Suret  G n ral* (General Security) still maintains power to control and censor the press and media. Between 2008 and 2009 Tariq Mitri, who was then the Information minister, repeatedly expressed his willingness to abolish any form of censorship and on this point he has presented a draft law in Parliament that is still being debated in parliamentary committees. However, it is not difficult to imagine that reporters in fact practise self-censorship so as not to be subjected to various kinds of pressure and in order to protect themselves and their relatives both physically and psychologically.

Nevertheless, in 2016 Lebanon was ranked 98th in the Reporters Without Borders world press freedom index, before Israel (101st) and second among Arab States (after Tunisia, 96th). In the past years, Lebanon has been significantly downgraded, as it was 61th in 2009, 78th in 2010 and 93rd in 2011.

In this period, the government has targeted social media activists and bloggers to reduce online criticism and track down those responsible of it: Low-profile police arrests, interrogations, and intimidations have not been rare in the new media sphere. In June-July 2010, the public prosecutor accused three citizens of defaming President Michel Suleiman on their blogs and Facebook. In the same period, a local blogger was interrogated by military intelligence for posts critical of the armed forces and the president.

As the report entitled Mapping Digital Media by Open Society points out, extra-legal methods have been used to identify people behind anonymous online content, but such episodes are mostly low-profile and little known, partly because they are often not reported due to intimidations and threatens.

Regulatory authorities

The regulations governing the press in the current time have been sharply criticised for promoting a highly conservative

conception of journalism, based on a corporatist approach and treating the press as a distinct and insular profession rather than as a general activity that any person may engage in. After the promulgation of the 1994 Media Law, the National Council for Audiovisual Media (*al-Majlis al-watani li-l'lam al-mar'y w-al-masmu*) was created in order to monitor respect of the 1994 Law. But the council continues to be an ineffective institution and its reports of violations perpetrated by politicians, parties and intelligence services against the press go unheeded. Moreover, it is clear that its members are chosen mainly along sectarian lines, as is always the case for Lebanese institutions.

Suspension of the press and confiscation of journalists' press cards can occur in case of breach of professional ethic, disrespect for national sovereignty, spread of false or confidential information, defamation of heads of states, threat to national integrity and security. In Lebanon, public prosecutors do not possess the power to close any media outlet. They are only entitled to seize the controversial publications and then refer the matter to the competent authorities. This being the general procedure, the minister of information can close any television channel.

The application of these laws has been all too often politically motivated and characterised by arbitrariness. A famous case was the coerced closure in 2002 of MTV channel and *Mount Lebanon* radio station, owned by Gabriel Murr, which resumed broadcasting only in 2009. The publication court accused the stations of violating the law that prohibits airing on behalf of candidates during elections, but, since also other Lebanese channels did not comply with the elections law, some observers suspected that the closure was due to MTV's criticism of the Lebanese government and of Syria.

In 2010, the aforementioned Maharat Foundation, together with MP Ghassan Moukhybar proposed a draft media law ("Maharat Bill") to modernise the legislation of the media sector. The bill proposes to abolish prison sentences for speech offences committed by journalists (a right to which only journalists registered in the Editors Syndicate are currently entitled) when communicating their opinion, whether on a print media outlet or online. Moreover, it puts the cancellation of the licensing for newspapers, the Press Union and all the requirements to practice journalism, forward for discussion. Furthermore, it aims to guarantee online freedom of expression without any interference from the government that is not allowed to block or filter online content or to impose any licensing for online media. The Maharat Bill is still under consideration by the information and communication parliamentary committee.

The new digital media environment also necessitates the establishment of new laws and regulations for media and telecommunications. There is currently a great deal of confusion as to which legal framework is applicable to online media outlets, because the Publication Law and the Audiovisual Media Law respectively regulate print and audiovisual broadcasting and are not easily transposed to digital media. Nonetheless, the legislation designed for traditional media has partly been applied to the digital media, and special laws and regulations for the Internet, mobile telephony, and other digital media have yet to be established. In June 2010, a number of groups of the civil society successfully delayed a vote in the Lebanese parliament on a draft for a "New Information Technology Law". This draft contained a large amount of restrictive measures of the online freedom of expression and would have severely affected privacy rights of citizens and corporations, as well as reduced journalistic freedom in the digital sphere.

In the same year, the Ministry of Information launched consultations with media owners, journalists, advocacy groups and politicians to identify parameters for a new comprehensive legal framework in order to improve the current situation.

The laws and regulations that have been proposed so far, mainly serve the interests of the operators and businessmen and do not try to put a limit to the power of the dominant politicians and sectarian groups. The digital media are in fact firmly in the hands of the same dominant political sectarian groups that control also the traditional media.

The licensing of Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and the operation of mobile phone services are allocated to the dominant

political powers that already control the broadcast license.

Sources

Laws, regulations and institutions

- [Arabic textes of 1962 and 1994 Media laws](#)
- [Internet Legislation Atlas](#)
- [Maharat Foundation](#)
- [Media Law](#)
- [Ministry of Telecommunication](#)
- [Reporters Without Borders on Lebanon](#)
- [Virtual Museum of Censorship](#)

Education

Universities and schools

In recent years, Lebanese universities have expanded and developed their focus on contemporary global issues and their attention to new technologies. Almost all the major universities in the country offer a programme of study for a degree in Journalism. All these programmes try to balance between theoretical and practical courses, so to be in line with all the developments in the fields of communication.

In the early 1990s journalism programmes were set up at the main academic institutions. The public Lebanese University and the four main private universities of the country (American University of Beirut - *AUB*, Université Saint-Joseph - *USJ*, Lebanese American University - *LAU*, Notre Dame University - *NDU*) started to offer degrees in journalism, including postgraduate studies, even though the nature of the syllabuses differed somewhat. The total study period is five to six years (three to four years for a BA and one to two years for an MA programme).

The public Lebanese University has the longest tradition in journalism education; a number of working editors and publishers have graduated from this institute, which now has an information and documentation centre and offers a French-language degree course, which combines theory and practical study.

The Journalism Training Program (*JTP*) at *AUB* is a programme for working professionals and not for university students, providing training in investigative journalism, elections coverage and newsroom management, with courses in Arabic, English and French, whilst the Maronite *NDU* offers a three-year course in English. In addition to this programme, *AUB* hosts a Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Media Studies where students can delve into a more academic-oriented path to better understand the Arab media environment from a theoretical point of view.

Rather than a BA in Journalism, the *LAU* has one in Communication Arts. The degree offers three areas of emphasis, one of which is journalism, often described as “the poor orphan” of the trio. The other two areas are drama and Radio/TV/Film combined. At the same time, *LAU* is home to the Institute for Media Training and Research (IMTR). Created in 2007 as the result of the merging of the Institute for Media Arts (BIMA) and the Institute for Professional Journalist (IPJ), the IMTR aims to

help reporters, editors and managers improve their operational skills in the new media techniques. It also focuses on issues in media law, ethics and freedom of the press in the Lebanese and Arab contexts. Further education and training for practising journalists are rare. Media groups that have the resources provide occasional internships.

More recently, also other universities started programmes aimed to prepare students to media professions. The Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, a private Catholic university, for example, has introduced both an undergraduate and a graduate curriculum within the department of Journalism and Communication in the Faculty of Letters; the school of Arts and sciences at the Lebanese International University also offers a BA programme of study for the journalism major; the University of Balamand, has a relatively new and more generic programme in Mass Communication with three different curricula (Radio/TV Performance and Production, Journalism and News Management, Marketing Communication).

Professional development

Young graduates from a journalism programme have no preferential path to make their way as professionals. Firstly, they have to do an internship in a media outlet, which is usually unpaid. Then, to succeed in the profession, not only should they count on their talent, but also on family connections and community networks.

Sources

Comprehensive and complete compilations of media statistics and prime sources for detailed information do not exist in Lebanon, but scattered news and few reports can be found on the Internet. These are published, for instance, by the aforementioned SKeyes, Maharat (Skills) Foundation and IPJ and include Media Unlimited, an English- and Arabic-language web platform founded by Magda Abu-Fadil, former director of the abovementioned Journalism Training Program at AUB.

Journalism studies

- [American University of Beirut](#)
- [Holy Spirit University of KaslikH](#)
- [IPJ at Lebanese American University](#)
- [Journalism Training Program at AUB](#)
- [Lebanese International University](#)
- [Magda Abu-Fadil](#) (Twitter)
- [Maharat \(Skills\) Foundation](#)
- [Media Unlimited](#)
- [Notre Dame University](#)
- [SKeyes](#)
- [University of Balamand](#)
- [University of Lebanon](#)

Conclusions

Conclusion

In recent years, the Lebanese media landscape has been facing one of its deepest crisis since the formal end of the civil war more than a quarter of century ago. In a highly polarised regional ecosystem characterised by a proliferation of extremist, simplistic (“with us or against us”) and populist language, local reporters and news editors are exposed on a daily basis to huge pressures from the upper echelons of their respective media institutions. The priority of the newsrooms and of the agenda-setting makers has increasingly become the safeguard of the “security-and-stability” *vis-à-vis* the “terroristic threats” at the expense of the needs to reaffirm the principles of freedom of press and media independency. Moreover, in comparison with the 2000s, the economic crisis has deepened the precarious conditions of many journalist, photo reporters and cameramen, making them more vulnerable and more easily subjected to blackmail by politicians and local and regional media tycoons.

However, despite the absence of a real and effective protection mechanism for harassed or abused reporters and within a context where there is no clear path toward professionalisation, Lebanese journalists continue to seem to be the most lively and active in the region. Most of them are fluent in at least one European language and many are very familiar with European and North-American media contexts. Furthermore, they enjoy a long tradition of access to foreign media. This is the reason why, against the profound difficulties and constant threats clouding the Lebanese media landscape, signs of hope still remain on the horizon indicating that journalists will continue to report in relatively free conditions compared to the surrounding countries.

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