World Trends in
Freedom
of Expression
and Media
Development

REGIONAL OVERVIEW OF **ARAB STATES** 2017/2018

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REGIONAL OVERVIEW 2017/2018

ARAB STATES

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Introduction

Introduction

This regional report discusses media trends regarding freedom, pluralism, independence and the safety of journalists in Member States of the Arab League across the Middle East and North Africa. It is difficult to generalize media developments in the Arab region holistically since conditions vary significantly across the 19 Arab countries under consideration in this report. In addition to the socio-economic differences between the Gulf region and the rest of the Arab states, conflict and post-conflict situations in a number of countries impact media developments in various ways depending on the particular conditions existent in each context.

An overarching trend within the Arab region between 2012 and 2017 is that the rise in expectations of the potential to foster a more open and pluralistic media during and in the aftermath of the uprisings that occurred in the region in 2011, has been followed by the subsiding of these prospects, as governments have renewed their efforts to curb dissident voices, and due to renewed security concerns. Media freedoms in the Arab region have generally been either stagnant or in decline between 2012 and 2017. Nonetheless, there are some exceptions and the long-term trend in the region, most especially evidenced in the ways that people use media and social media, continues toward concerted efforts to practice freedom of speech and challenge censorship, while data in some cases is only available up to 2015, it is cited for its relevance to possible trends.

Recent trends include the strengthening of a pan-regional media industry, in terms of the transnational character of media production and consumption. This regionalization occurs in contestation with increasing demands for more local media content.[1] In addition, while there is an increase in the choice of media outlets, that proliferation does not correspond to a media culture that respects and perpetuates the values of pluralism and diversity.[2] An increasing trend in Arab news coverage is the politicized fragmentation of the media sphere and the intensifying sectarian nature of media content, contributing to divisiveness rather than a respect for difference.

The Arab region has been the most unsafe for journalists globally, reflecting the highest number of journalist killings between 2012 and 2017. Internet journalists have been at more risk than before, the number of imprisoned journalists has increased steadily, and women journalists are increasingly targeted with threats to their safety. The rate of impunity related to the killing of journalists in this region has been near absolute.

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[1] Khalil 2016
[2] Arab States Broadcasting Union 2015

Trends in
Media Freedom

Overview

Between 2012 and 2017, there has been an expansion of user-generated content in the Arab region, predominantly via social media platforms. The resultant changes to the media ecology in some countries of the region are accompanied by new forms of government control. This new digital media environment has commonly prompted governments to extend control over media through a variety of coercive and restrictive means. Previous positive gains in opportunities for media reform have been halted, with a few exceptions, and replaced with the application of harsh measures to control and intimidate media outlets and practitioners. In this environment, many journalists and activists continue to freely express themselves and disseminate information, despite risks to their lives and safety.

In some countries, the margin of permissible speech on pro-government broadcast media and social media has widened. While still in the process of rooting in, the expansion of permissible speech in these contexts seems largely due to a government-led adaptation to the boom of the internet and satellite television channels, as well as the rise of dissident alternative outlets and activist media.[3] The availability of alternative sources has in some instances encouraged official media to react to certain events, rather than perform a media blackout. Media outlets with a greater degree of independence have also partially widened the scope of permissible speech in pro-government media. While government response to the media may have changed in order to adapt to a new media ecology, government incentives to use the media to consolidate power remains the same. Government concerns over media control have also been aggravated by the unprecedented dissemination of a sophisticated media output by certain terrorist and insurgent groups.

Nonetheless, journalists' work in reporting events, whether breaking or unfolding, is often severely restricted in a number of countries. In these countries journalists face increasing pressures, violence and punitive measures. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has documented cases of raids on press syndicates and journalists' private houses, in addition to the expulsion of foreign journalists from countries within the region.[4] There have also been several cases of local journalists being banned from traveling abroad. In some countries, the personal consequences that journalists and media practitioners face for criticizing the government, or deviating from what governments deem as acceptable speech, are becoming more serious. In conflict areas, the difficulty for journalists to obtain visas or to travel safely results in an effective media blackout on independent reporting. In some cases, even the small number of journalists who are allowed into a conflict area are escorted and closely monitored by government agents in a manner that restricts their access to people and locations, which consequently shapes the nature of news media reporting. In places where anti-government forces operate, journalists face major restrictions on their freedom of movement and reporting. Insurgent groups tend to rely on their own (mostly online) media mechanisms that aim to aggressively promote their activities.

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[3] Barkisa 2017.
[4] Ensor 2016.

TRENDS IN **MEDIA FREEDOM**

In the past few years, a number of Arab countries have either faced civil wars and conflicts or have been involved in wars abroad, mainly against insurgent groups. This leaves many Arab media users and practitioners facing one of two situations. In most contexts, they experience restrictions on their freedom of expression through an overarching government bureaucracy, legal mechanisms, and harsh punitive measures. The second scenario relates to the civil conflicts in some countries and areas, which in terms of media operation, means that the threats against freedoms emanate from a plethora of players, including armed groups, tribal authorities, and clandestine gangs. The lack of an adequate rule of law in these cases also means that many journalists or online users are mostly defenceless when subjected to charges of defamation, or intimidation.

Due to the violent conflict and consequent displacement that destabilised some countries, stability and security have become the most important priority for many people across the region, and extremism is a priority concern.[5] Within this context, most governments in the affected countries narratively frame political and media openness as factors which work against achieving security and stability. Framing political life through this alleged choice between freedoms and security has grown out of widespread fears of instability, war and chaos. Within this environment, popular media narratives hail patriotism often equalling it with the support of governments and state institutions, which in turn consolidates government control over the media. In countries that have experienced war and violence, amateur and citizen journalists have experienced a backlash from the state and sometimes also from the public, as they can be perceived as associated with conflict and insecurity.

A number of Arab governments have represented the region's wars and conflicts as existential battles that require the loyalty of citizens. In the fight against terrorism, those governments have targeted media outlets associated with an Islamist worldview, and journalists, citizen journalists and social media users who may have links to Islamist groups. Equally, a number of governments have tended to simultaneously increase the harassment and persecution of opposition secular Arab liberals and leftists, as if to 'balance out' their focus on Islamists, through targeting any speech that may be perceived as violating religious sensibilities. In this way, these governments seek to portray themselves as protecting the security of their country against terrorism and radical interpretations of Islam, and at the same time, of protecting Islam and society from activists who may initiate debate about social and political taboos.[6] The result is the perpetuation and deepening of a culture of self-censorship on the part of journalists and ordinary media users, as well as the expansion of government interference on media organizations.

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[5] Arab Youth Survey 2016.
[6] Withnall 2014.

Though conditions in Arab countries vary, trends in media freedom in the Arab region include the following:

- Declining freedom of expression and media freedom in the large number of countries;

- The expansion of the digital media environment is coupled with increasing government control over media outlets through a variety of coercive and restrictive means;

- Opportunities for media reforms have been halted in the majority of countries, and replaced with the application of harsh measures to control and intimidate media outlets and practitioners;

- Journalism is mostly restricted, especially within conflict regions;

- Media developments are intricately influenced by the security situation regarding conflicts, terrorism and insurgent groups;

- The war on terrorism is used by authorities and governments to motivate for the control of the media sphere, leading to the censorship and self-censorship of dissident Islamist and secular voices;

- Women are commonly harassed or trolled online, face an array of restrictions to practicing as journalists, and are vulnerable to targeted efforts of intimidation, censorship, and allegations of defamation.

Limitations on media freedom

An overall culture of censorship and self-censorship continues in the Arab region. The Worlds of Journalism Study (2016) compiled data globally, and Figure 1-1 below compares the perceived influence of censorship on journalism in the region to the world average. The Arab states (48 per cent) have higher perceived censorship compared to the total of 67 countries studied, which has an average rate of 35 per cent.

Most countries reflect an overall trend of stasis or regression regarding media freedom, since with few exceptions no progress has been made with regard to diminishing the culture of censorship between 2012 and 2017. Mainstream government-controlled media rarely feature independent reporting or counter-narratives, relative to the positions of authorities. Among countries that reflected certain improvement after 2011, some experienced setbacks or even major turns for the worse in relation to media freedom by 2014. Other countries continue to reflect slow and unstable openness. In general, the majority of countries saw a decline in their levels of media freedom between 2012 and 2017, and these declines are reported by press freedom non-governmental organizations. However, since 2016, heads of state in Jordan, Palestine, Sudan and Tunisia signed the Declaration on Media Freedom in the Arab World in support of establishing a regional mechanism to promote media freedom in the Arab world.

Figure 1-1: Journalists' perceptions that there is censorship

%
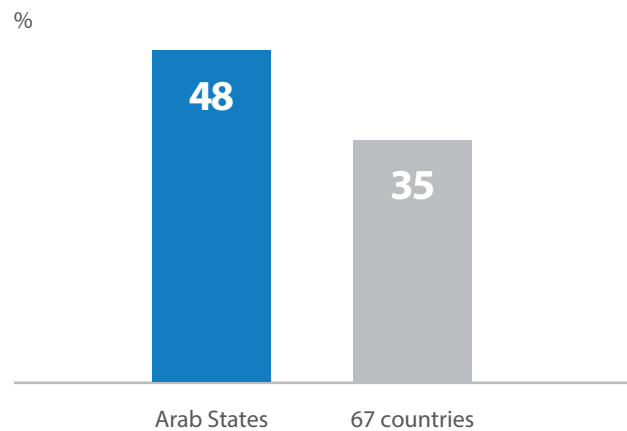
Source: Worlds of Journalism Study 2016

DEFAMATION AND OTHER LEGAL RESTRICTIONS ON JOURNALISTS

In countries, which are shaping the trend aimed to reinforce the decline of media freedom, governmental measures in enforcing censorship takes varied forms. The most common measure involves intimidation carried out by state institutions, mainly by the police and heavy penalties decided by the judiciary. Censorship is sometimes enforced through arresting and intimidating media practitioners. In relation to television, censorship measures range from bureaucratic hurdles, which prevent broadcasters from acquiring the authorization to cover particular events, to the direct banning of television programmes or contested episodes of news talk shows or entertainment programs. In some countries, the press and online media have been subject to closures or disruptions. In addition, governments sometimes deny journalists access to locations of news-worthy events. Importantly, censorship is not limited to the production of media content but has also affected academics, novelists, artists, intellectuals and filmmakers who may adopt critical and independent positions, or tackle a broad array of other sensitive topics, which may relate to sexuality, religious issues, monarchies, or to the rights of foreign labourers.

In some countries, legal protections for freedom of speech have been strengthened between 2012 and 2017 with revised media law frameworks as a culmination of overdue reform processes. However, at the same time, several of these new laws include limitations on freedoms of expression which are either vaguely-worded or not justifiable according to international standards, that is, non-proportionate nor containing acceptable justifications. In some countries, dissident voices can be outlawed by invoking an array of possible legal breaches including insulting leaders, violating national interest, attacking territorial integrity, endangering the security of the homeland, aiding terrorism, diminishing national morale, offending public morality, or disrespecting religious sensitivities.[7] In some countries, blasphemy laws are also used to ensure that voices in the media do not steer away from what authorities consider politically and socially acceptable speech.

Libel, defamation, slander, as well as emergency and anti-terrorism laws, are frequently used in the region as tools of government control on media. Emergency laws often supersede the general law. Emergency laws are put in place under the auspices that they are only applicable in limited and exceptional circumstances, or at least only during a defined period of time. However, they tend to be applied for extended periods without specification of how long they will be enforced, or they are subject to several renewals, making the exceptional situation the status quo. In other areas, there is a lack of legal frameworks to protect freedom of speech. In addition, defamation laws tend to favour those who can afford costly legal expenses.

Within this environment, it has become commonplace for journalists to be jailed for years without trial. When tried, journalists and media activists sometimes face criminal charges rather than charges under media laws.[8]

INTERNET CURBS, CUT-OFFS AND CONTENT REMOVAL

Internet censorship is common in the Arab region, as many governments routinely censor websites and digital platforms, exert pressures on online activists and journalists, and create cumbersome legal and bureaucratic mechanisms for news websites.[9] Social media users have been at the centre of the contestation between governments and citizens regarding standards of free speech, since social media have been crucial to the disruption of governmental control over media content since 2011. Activists have relied on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter or Skype, to organize and mobilize political action.[10] However, by 2014, it became clear that governments can also use social media efficiently to further their interests whether through surveillance, dissemination of pro-government narratives, or the projection of a culture of suspicion over, and disbelief of, opposition and alternative digital media content. According to the digital rights advocacy organization, Access Now, governments in several countries in the region are blocking a growing number of websites.[11] Google transparency reports also show that several governments in the Arab region make requests to remove content, such as YouTube videos, based on allegations of insulting religion and also of defamation against powerful figures. Figure 1-2 below shows the number of tweets that have been withheld by Twitter on account of government requests in the Arab state region, for the years 2013, 2014 and 2015.

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[7] Duffy 2014.
[8] Ben Hassin 2016.
[9] Aboulenein 2017.
[10] Faris 2013.
[11] Dada & Sayadi 2017

NATIONAL SECURITY, COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM, AND POPULISM

Populism, a mode of political communication based on praise for the imagined unity and goodness of a majoritarian group, and condemnation of an allegedly elite or powerful community,[12] is another trend that has infringed on media freedoms globally as well as in the Arab region. It can be perpetrated by both governments and opposition groups, and is particularly harmful when positions claiming to represent the majority are weaponised against minority or disempowered groups. Populist media narratives may silence and 'drown out' dissident and controversial voices. Populism can set the standards of what is an acceptable interpretation and expression of religiosity and/ or patriotism.

In media content, the use of language that defines patriotism in terms of support for those

Figure 1-2: Tweets withheld by Twitter as per requests received from governments in the Arab region between 2013 and 2015

Source: Twitter

in power, and treason in terms of political opposition, provides implicit justification for crackdowns on media freedoms and seeks to intimidate expressions of divergent views. In some cases, media professionals and organizations attack and criticise figures from minority religious groups or those expressing unpopular views. Television news and entertainment programmes also deploy populist agenda-setting mechanisms that often dictate which voices are represented, and which are not.

Ordinary media users, particularly online users, contribute to enforcing populist standards, whether through producing populist social media user generated content, trolling, or commenting online. In the Arab online sphere, user generated comments on news and social media items are often used to 'police' social standards and attack public figures or media organizations when they publish material perceived as controversial. It is commonplace to 'police' critical speech through accusations of apostasy, or of indulging in conspiratorial anti-Islamic or anti-Arab activities. These trends perpetuate a social culture that works against media freedoms

Terrorism is often perceived as an increasing trend in the Arab region. In 2014, the terrorist group that calls itself the "Islamic State" (also known as Daesh) took control of large territories and main cities in two Arab countries, Syria and Iraq, and was reportedly active in or posing threats to several others. Consequently, combatting terrorism is a priority for many Arab countries, including the neutralisation of terrorist organizations' propaganda and online means of recruitment and communication. An array of anti-terrorism laws and decrees have emerged in the region. However, neither national laws nor the United Nations offer a specific definition of terrorism. Furthermore, the implementation of anti-terrorism laws is not confined to violent acts against ordinary citizens. This ambiguity allows for the application of these laws in their use against opposition political parties and individuals. In some cases, secular voices are legally designated as terrorists as a way to discipline public discourse.[13]

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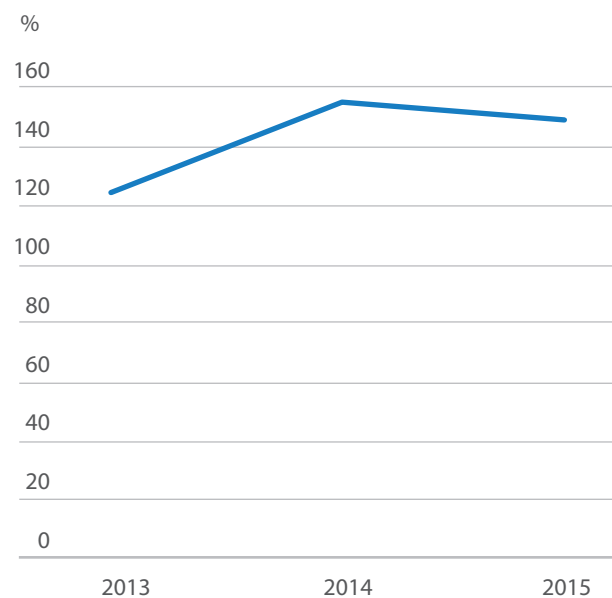
[12] Walgrave 2016.
[13] Withnall 2014.

There is a lack of agreement between Arab states on how to define terrorism or on what/who is responsible for its rise and spread. Arab governments often accuse each other of supporting, funding and harbouring terrorism. This is in contrast to their policies in the aftermath of Al-Qaida's 9-11 attacks against the United States in 2001, when Arab countries conducted an international diplomatic campaign to define terrorism, seeking to distinguish between armed struggle against foreign occupation and terrorism. Following 2011, and particularly by 2014, the word "terrorism" became ubiquitous in Arab media and was used to describe not only various armed groups fighting in wars, including those represented in national parliaments, but also unarmed political parties, individual activists, as well as politicians and officials from other Arab countries. It has also become common for governments to accuse media outlets owned by rival Arab countries of supporting terrorism.

Access to information and privacy protections

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Arab countries tend to include theoretical guarantees and protections for freedoms of speech and of the media in their constitutions. Most countries are signatories of the International Covenant of Political and Civil Rights, where article 19 guarantees freedom of expression. Arab states are also signatories of the Arab League's human rights charter, which reaffirms international treaties for human rights. In addition, North African states are members of the African Union, which calls for the respect of human and peoples' rights in the African continent.

Public access to information is contested in Arab societies. Despite the constitutional or legal commitment in a growing number of Arab countries to guarantee public access to information, delayed implementation is still barring access to information at the expense of the public interest. In addition to authoritarian overreach and abuse of law, the main impediments to free access to information lies within the power of religious authorities to set the norms of acceptable public discourse.[14]

However, these restrictive and punitive measures have not succeeded in eliminating dissent or the pursuit of access to information. In some countries, this quest was translated into concrete legal frameworks. The new constitutions of Morocco (2011), Tunisia (2014) and Algeria (2016) have enhanced guarantees on freedom of expression and specifically enshrined the right to access to information.

In Tunisia, in line with the principle set by the new Constitution, a law on the access to information was adopted in 2016. Ranked by independent observers as one of the best according to international standards the law entered into force mid-2017, with the creation of the independent national access to information authority.[15]

In Morocco, the new legal framework on access to information became law in early 2018. The approval of this law was the result of a much-debated legislative process in the country, redrafted and improved, largely because the government, allowing civil society organizations to contribute significantly, operated through a the multi-stakeholder process.

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[14] Arab Reform Initiative 2016.
[15] https://www.rti-rating.org/country-detail/?country=Tunisia

Despite the positive trends in some countries, the long-term trend in the region is a continuance of challenging barriers to acquiring and disseminating information, even if at great personal risk to individuals. Regardless of resurgent media control, there are many examples of journalists and media practitioners showing courage and paying a heavy price with their personal safety and freedom, for disseminating criticism of governments, militias, or forces of occupation. In a number of countries, new civil society coalitions are gaining experience in public and political life, and reaching out to reformers in governments and parliaments.[16] Furthermore, banned materials, whether in print or audio-visual media, often circulate in alternative ways online and offline.

Public pressure to widen the margin of media freedom and to support independent outlets has not abated. Social media are often used to push the limits of legally acceptable speech, despite that national legal restrictions apply to not only the mass media but very often to social media also. The inclusion of online media and social media content within the purview of new press laws has resulted in many cases of persecution of ordinary citizens, who may face harsh judicial sentences.[17] This legal culture often leads to self-censorship by journalists, media professionals, as well as increasingly by citizen media users. Breaches of the right of privacy and fears of defamation-related charges also fuel self-censorship, especially amid a widespread mistrust of legal structures and protections, which many see as corrupt and vulnerable to political pressures.

PRIVACY, SURVEILLANCE AND ENCRYPTION

Privacy is an often misunderstood and an insufficiently discussed issue in Arab public discourse. In terms of policy, the issue of privacy as a fundamental right is absent from government agendas when dealing with critical voices, opposition groups or security challenges. In many countries of the region, privacy is often a privilege reserved for powerful and political elites only. While social media has offered positive political effects in their potential to empower users, they have also often become platforms for enabling government surveillance.

Despite the proliferation of government surveillance and corporate data gathering, privacy is not usually a main theme for demanding political and social rights in the Arab region. This is partly due to cultural norms, and particularly due to popular presumptions that concerns over individual privacy imply that one has something to hide or is attempting to break away from public social and religious norms. Research on social media in the region suggests that concerns about privacy are acute, especially in relation to social pressures for group assimilation and adherence to particular versions of Islamic teachings.[18] The practices of media organizations also exacerbate breaches of privacy. For instance, news and entertainment television shows regularly violate the privaczy of people, who may be victims of security incidents, witnesses, passers-by, or even those caught up in candid camera shows. Vulnerable groups, particularly refugees, are regularly subject to privacy violations.

PROTECTION OF CONFIDENTIAL SOURCES AND WHISTLE-BLOWING

Whistle-blowers, including those who expose corruption, are afforded very limited legal protection. The following graph illustrates the number of Arab countries that have subscribed, in some way, to the UN Convention Against Corruption.

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[16] Ibid.
[17] El-Issawi 2016a.
[18] Abokhodair and Viewig 2016.

Internet governance and media freedom

The issue of Internet governance is receiving more attention in the region from governments and from civil society organizations. For instance, the Arab Internet Governance Forum was established in recent years as a platform for dialogue about topics in digital media with the aims of "promoting access to the Internet and ensuring its security, stability and development" and reaching "a common understanding of the priorities of Internet governance and mechanisms to respond to the specific needs of Arab countries."[20]

Gender equality and media freedom

Figure 1-3: Status on the Convention against Corruption in the Arab region

Source: United Nations Convention against Corruption[19]

Women face widespread restrictions in practicing as media professionals and in expressing themselves. They are vulnerable to targeted efforts at intimidation, censorship, and allegations of defamation. Moreover, they face, as in other parts of the world, patriarchal stereotypes. Women journalists' freedom of movement tends to be more restricted and policed than that of their male counterparts. Their access to sources and to information is made more difficult on multiple levels. Politicians and the public at large seem to be less tolerant of controversial views when they are expressed by women. Women in the Arab region are disproportionately victims of privacy violations. One 2015 case involved a woman who had been harassed and assaulted by a man in a shopping mall. When she spoke out about the incident, a television channel broadcast unrelated private pictures of the victim in order to portray her as leading an inappropriate lifestyle and, by implication, as deserving of assault.[21] While this case may have been extreme and led to legal repercussions, it is indicative of the kinds of challenges women can face.

Within this context, social media have provided platforms for women to amplify their voices, but also for misogynists to harass women. Social media are commonly used to intimidate dissident female voices and to 'police' what is considered acceptable behaviour or opinion. For instance, Twitter hashtags are sometimes initiated to attack or troll particular women. Generally, women are more prone to find themselves as targets of social media campaigns that seek to enforce social and political norms.[22] That said, there are several examples of women, whether journalists, artists, or ordinary citizens, who are popular on social media for their social and political commentary.
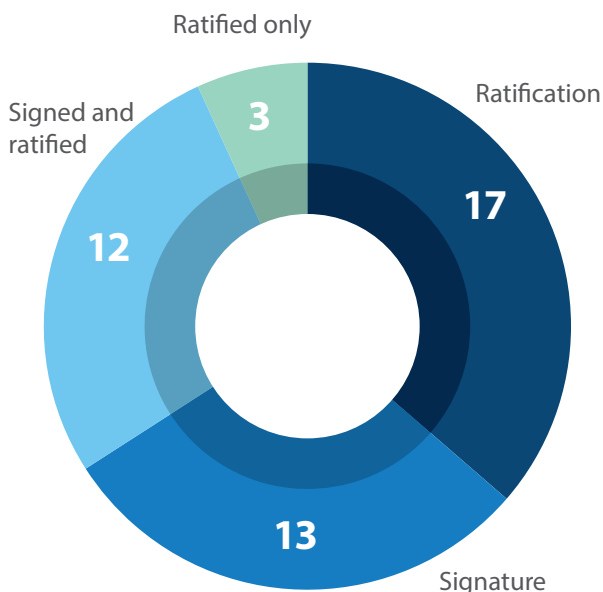
[19] https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=XVIII-14&chapter=18&lang=en
[20] Arab IGF report 2015
[21] AFTE 2015.
[22] El Ariss 2018.

Trends in
Media Pluralism

Overview

Between 2012 and 2017, the Arab region has seen a steady rise in active mobile-broadband subscriptions, internet users and households with internet access. Digital platforms continue to show high potential for growth, particularly given the favourable young demographics of the region (50 per cent are below the age of 25).[23] This trend has led to increasing convergence not only in the technology but also, as elsewhere, in media content. While news programmes regularly incorporate social media commentary into their programming, entertainment programmes based on social media participation have become more common and more popular. Arab politicians regularly take to Twitter to communicate policies. While social media provide the opportunity for some, including women, to bypass traditional communication barriers, they are also often used to reinforce social norms and to silence unpopular views.

A growing trend of fragmentation and sectarianism has surfaced in the Arab media. While national media were traditionally used to strengthen a sense of national identity in individual countries, in addition to maintaining a rhetorical appearance of regional cooperation, more recently media outlets commonly attack and stigmatise groups accused of threatening regional or national peace and security. Several media outlets in Arab states have played a role in deepening the Sunni-Shia divide in the Middle East through the use of sectarian terminologies and news narratives.[24] Several cases of talk shows on government-controlled Arab channels have advocated violence against political groups and communities. Conversely, there have also been some positive developments in terms of language pluralism in the region. Following decades-long efforts by rights groups, media in languages such as Tamazight in North Africa are becoming more established.

After a period of uncertainty and change in media content following the 2011 uprisings, a more recent emerging trend is a limit in content diversity as a result of a rise in censorship, incarceration of dissident voices, and resurgent dissemination of pro-government narratives in the media. In the Arab countries in which governments did not see a loss of control over media during the 2011 uprisings and their aftermath, governments nonetheless grapple with a new media ecology marked by the proliferation of amateur and alternative media outlets. By 2014, many of these amateur outlets either closed down or became diasporic projects.

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[23] Arab Media Outlook 2012.
[24] Abdo 2013.

Trends in media pluralism in the Arab region include the following:

- A steady rise in active mobile-broadband subscriptions, internet users and households with internet access. Digital platforms continue to show high potential for growth, coupled with increasing convergence in technology and media content;

- An increasing appearance of fragmentation and sectarianism is surfacing in the Arab media;

- Following the 2011 regional uprisings, in a large number of countries there has been a rising trend of censorship, incarceration of dissident voices, and resurgent dissemination of pro-government narratives in the media;

- A declining trend in the number of public broadcasting channels and a rise in national private and non-Arab stations: this trend has deepened the marginalization of national broadcast channels under state ownership, while increasing in the diversity of international choices;

- An increasing trend of both privately owned television channels and private radio stations operating under the ownership of figures who have close relationships to governments;

- Newspaper readership declined in several countries in the region, where the youth increasingly adopt digital news sources, and within the context of a post-2011 renewed authoritarian trend of controlling newspaper reporting;

- Women continue to have far lower access to social media platforms than men, and continue to encounter structural obstacles that hamper their representation, participation, and advancement in the media industry.

Access

INTERNET AND MOBILE

There continues to be a digital divide between the Gulf region and the rest of the Arab States. Gulf countries top the region's ICT Development Index rankings and rates of internet use. On the other hand, most Arab countries outside the Gulf continue to rank below the global average in the ICT Development Index, due to widespread poverty, illiteracy and limited ICT knowledge. However, Arab countries across the Middle East and North Africa are achieving gains across internet connectivity indicators. Within individual countries, there are signs that a digital divide between social classes and age categories is narrowing as well. Figure 2-1 below shows the percentage trend of individuals using internet in the Arab region. From 2011 to 2015, internet penetration increased among all age groups in a number of countries, although young people remain the most likely to use the internet.[25] Figure 2-1 graph shows a persistent increase in internet usage and there are no signs of slowdown in the growth.

Figure 2-1: Percentage of individuals using the internet in Arab region
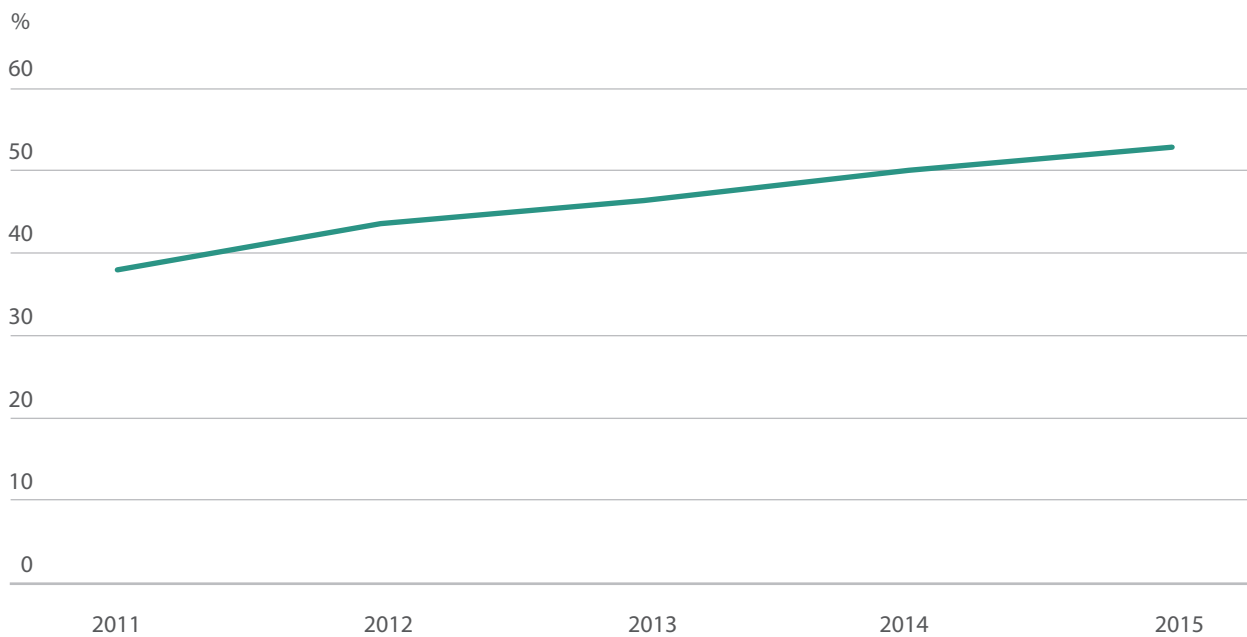
For 2017 country reports please see:
https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS?end=2017&name_desc=false&start=1960&view=chart

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[25] North Western University in Qatar 2016.

BROADCAST MEDIA

The Middle East and North Africa region's television market exceeds 60 million television households,[26] and is dominated by satellite television.[27] According to the 2015 report of the Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU), 1,230 television stations are broadcast via Arab and international satellites covering the region. Public or state television channels amount to 133. The other 1097 television stations are either privately operated or based outside the region. According to the ASBU report, these numbers reflect a trend of decline in the percentage of public channels and a rise in national private and non-Arab stations broadcasting within the Arab region. The report identifies this trend as deepening the marginalization of national public broadcasting, while increasing the diversity of international choices.[28]

In radio broadcasting, the new regional trend is convergence with digital technologies and broadcasting via the internet. This includes a rise in the popularity of podcasts, but this popularity is still marginal compared to some other parts of the world. The trend of convergence is also notable with regard to radio content. Many radio programs offer interactions with audiences not only through calling-in, but also texting and social media use. Figure 2-2 below shows the digital terrestrial switchover status of the Arab region in percentages. The digital migration project is currently ongoing in about 47 per cent of the Arab states, and 18 per cent have finished the digital switchover program.

Figure 2-2: Status of digital terrestrial television switch over in the Arab Region

Completed
16%

Not started
16%

Unknown
31%

Ongoing
37%
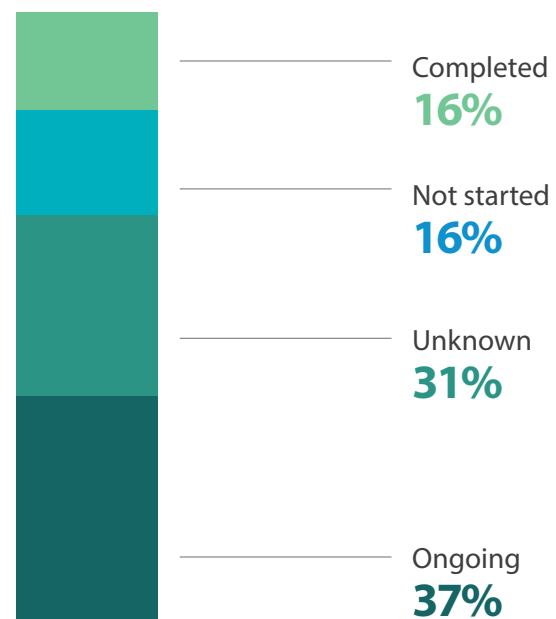
Source: ITU
For country information please see: https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Spectrum-Broadcasting/Pages/DSO/Default.aspx

NEWSPAPER INDUSTRY

Newspaper readership declined in several countries in the region. As shown in Figure 2-3 below, newspaper readership declined from 62 per cent in 2013 to about 42 per cent in 2015. A 2016 survey by North Western University in Qatar on media consumption trends in six Arab countries also found that 47 per cent of people read newspapers, which is down from 54 per cent in 2014.[29] Young people are leading the movement in readership away from print press.[30] While television remains the most popular news platform in the Arab region, a third of respondents in the Arab Youth Survey said they consume their news content via social media. According to the survey, more than half of Arab youths share stories with their friends on Facebook, which reflects the growing trend of 'social sharing' and 'social news.' Figures also show that paying for online news services is uncommon amongst readers.

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[26] Statista 2017.
[27] North Western University in Qatar 2016.
[28] Arab States Broadcasting Union 2015.
[29] North Western University in Qatar 2016.
[30] Arab Youth Survey 2016.

One dimension of the decline in newspaper readership has been related to the inhibition of free speech, and to the relative stabilization of the political and security situation in certain countries. Countries emerging from a period of political vibrancy and flux saw a decline in the level of news consumption across print, online and television platforms since 2014.[31] Accordingly, the decline in newspaper readership is partially attributed to government attempts to halt a post-2011 expansion in the freedom of the press, a flurry in political activity, and a proliferation of new political parties and movements. The renewed authoritarian trend of controlling newspaper reporting has correlated with the decline in readership numbers.

Economic models

PLURALISM AND MEDIA OWNERSHIP

Figure 2-3: Newspaper reach, readership and media consumption

Source: World Press Trends database. Data is for United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Egypt, Lebanon, Kuwait, Jordan, and Iraq.

The pattern of ownership in radio and television is that it is mostly government-run. The number of private broadcasters, which are owned by figures who have close ties to governments, is an increasing trend.

The proliferation of media cities in the Arab region, which are government-designated spaces for media operation and development, is a trend in Arab media production, but this has not necessarily led to content pluralism. There are currently at least eight media cities in the region. These cities were not established to improve the content of audio-visual media or enhance pluralism, but to compete over obtaining foreign investments in communication services and in the knowledge economy.[32]

ADVERTISING, BETWEEN OLD AND NEW MODELS

Regarding the future of the television industry, trends indicate an increase in convergence, increasing consumer demand for wider choice in content, a rise in profit-driven motivations to exploit consumers' interest in technological capabilities (digital, HD, time shifting), and further support by Arab states for media development spaces.[33] Satellite accounts for almost 80 per cent of the region's television households[34] and its revenues continue to increase systematically, being expected to reach USD 3.74 billion in 2020.[35] Television in the region has one of the highest shares of media advertising spend in the world, which has increased from 37 per cent in 2010 to 43 per cent in 2015.[36] There are positive indicators for market expansion prospects for pay-television, with an estimated total market revenue of USD 2.5 billion between 2013 and 2015. Nonetheless, viewers are still reluctant to pay for programmes that they believe should be free, or are easily available on pirated platforms.[37]
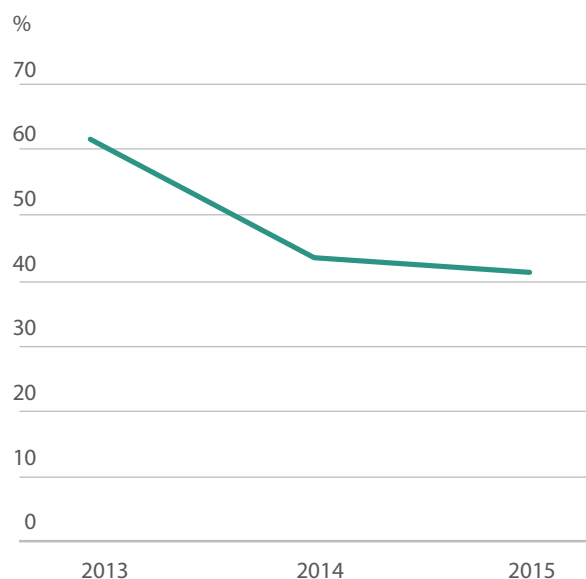
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[31] North Western University in Qatar 2016.
[32] Khalil 2015.
[33] Khalil 2015.
[34] Northwestern University in Qatar 2016.
[35] Khalil 2015.
[36] Northwestern University in Qatar 2016.
[37] Khalil 2015.

As a study by North Western University in Qatar indicates that radio companies in the Middle East and North Africa, as in other markets, are diversifying their revenue streams and offering a wider range of digital services. The study also indicates that while radio advertising revenues are comparatively small, they have remained relatively stable relative to other world regions. Radio stations are exploring additional revenue streams, such as integrated advertising campaigns, content syndication, and event management.[38]

Content

MEDIA CONTENT

Television continues to be a popular and resilient platform in the Arab region. There are two competing trends regarding pluralism in television content. Firstly, country-specific and, within countries, regional and local media and media content are in high demand. Conversely, content producers in the television, film and music industries are catering to a pan-Arab audience and tastes, which entails more conservative content that steers away from controversial topics with regard to social, religious, or country-specific sensitivities. In addition, the industry predictably targets wealthier markets, which means more attention is given to Gulf audiences. This trend entails exposure of the political and cultural influence of Gulf countries to the rest of the Arabic-speaking world through the 'Gulfisation' of pan-Arab content. However, generally, there is a trend of increasing interest in the consumption of media from the Arab world as the quantity of Arabic-language scripted programs continues to increase in most Arabic-speaking countries.

According to the 2015 Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU) report, 291 channels out of 1230 television channels that broadcast on Arab satellites, offer general content. Out of these 291 channels, there are 56 state-owned and 236 private stations. 48 channels offer only entertainment television series and films. 55 channels offer exclusively religious content, only five of which are state-owned and 50 are private, reflecting a continuing rise in the number of channels providing exclusively religious content. Most of these are Islamic, but a number are also Christian, representing various denominations. In terms of news content, there are 61 Arabic news channels, five of which are state-owned and the other 56 are private. 16 Arabic news channels are funded by non-Arab governments

The proliferation of Arab satellite channels is a fairly new development: until recently there were very few options in the region in terms of television broadcasting and programming. However, as the 2015 ASBU report notes, the broadcasting ecology is mired with problems and limitations, in part because of a reliance of both state-owned and private channels on government or pro-government funding. Pluralism of outlets has not always resulted in a diversity and plurality of voices and views, neither has it necessarily led to media independence. The largest media organizations in the region continue to be controlled by governments, which regulate content and editorial lines. The 2015 ASBU report adds that the dramatic rise in the quantity of Arab television channels is not reflected in the quality of programming. The proliferation of television channels has shifted the focus of media production to entertainment and expanding viewership, at the expense of public interest content that aims to raise awareness or educate the viewer.

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[38] North Western University in Qatar, Media Use in the Middle East 2016.

Competition between channels for viewers has also had an impact on ethical considerations in news reporting, particularly in the reporting of breaking news of violent incidents and terrorist attacks. The priority of news channels often seems to be on reporting breaking news and sensational images, rather than to consider the rights and interests of persons who are the subject of reporting, including victims of violence, or the public in general. Arab television news culture, relative to most Western news culture, does not shy away from showing footage of violence and atrocity. Images from wars and violent incidents in the region are regularly broadcast on Arab news channels, which, while representing the horrors of war, may also have a desensitizing effect in regards to viewers' reception of violent images as well as invoke ethical implications. It may also reinforce fear-mongering by both governmental and terroristic actors.

Wars have not only had an impact on news content but also on entertainment television production. Instability and war in countries that were important centres of television production, such as Syria, has led to further transnationalism in the Arab media system, with television series and scripted programs involving media workers from multiple countries and being produced in several locations across countries. Plots of television series have reflected this process by dramatizing stories that take place across different countries. Another trend has been the steady popularity of Turkish soap operas dubbed into Arabic.

Radio content in the Arab region varies from entertainment, news and religious programmes. While content is not considered to be at the forefront of innovation or political relevance, there are cases of local and decentralized radio stations, which allow members of civil society and ordinary citizens to speak out in ways that they may prefer not to on television. For instance, in Tunisia the FM community radios have been officially recognised and are free to broadcast. Furthermore, online radio stations have mushroomed in several countries in the region, providing a platform for political and social pluralism. Local web radios are common in the Maghreb countries. Migration and refugee movement in the past four years has led to a rise in Europe-based web radio stations that consolidate diaspora communities and connect them with their home-countries, particularly Syria.

USER-GENERATED CONTENT

There has been a sizeable increase in the number of individuals using internet in the Arab region. Data from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in Figure 2-4 shows an increase in the internet usage from 38 per cent in 2011 to 55 per cent in 2015. A major driver for this increasing trend in internet usage has been the growing use of the social media.

During the years 2010 and 2011 immediately thereafter, and as part of the protests and unrest that took place across the region, the use of social media, particularly Twitter, in the political realm seemed dominated by opposition activists and dissidents. In contrast, in the period after 2014, the use of social media has permeated across the political spectrum, including amongst those in power. Politicians and governments now communicate policies, positions and reactions on Twitter. News media regularly report on tweets in their news stories, whether about trending hashtags or particular tweets from government officials, political figures or ordinary citizens. Reliance on social media for news content has sometimes resulted in ethically questionable journalism practices that fuel rumours.

Figure 2-4: Percentage of individuals using the internet in the Arab region

%

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
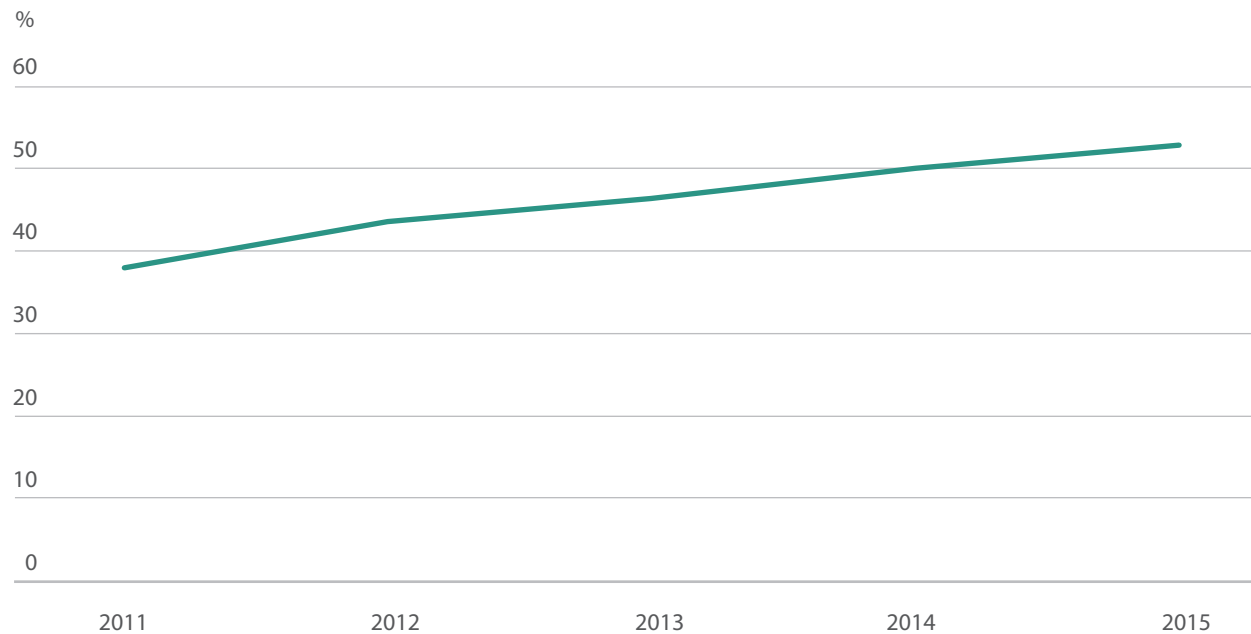
Source: ITU 2015

Facebook and WhatsApp are the dominant social media platforms in the Arab region. In 2016, four years after Facebook opened in Dubai, "the number of its active monthly users has more than tripled to 136 million across the Middle East and North Africa," 93 per cent of whom access it on their mobile devices.[39] Instagram, which is estimated to have 63 million users in the Middle East and North Africa, has overtaken Twitter in popularity in a number of countries.[40] WhatsApp is more popular among the older groups of internet users (45 years of age and older).[41] Snapchat use is also increasing, with usage tripling from 2014 to 2016 in two countries in the Gulf region,[42] and an increasing number of young people using it as a platform to follow news.

Most internet users spend time online for entertainment, including watching videos and films and listening to music. For instance, the Middle East and North Africa region hosts the fastest growing number of consumers of videos on Facebook.[43] Watching videos on YouTube is another trend that continues to grow. In 2015, it was estimated that 66 per cent of internet users access YouTube every day. YouTube continues to improve its Arabic-language content and means of access. In September 2016, YouTube launched a new hub called Mosalsalat (Arabic for television drama series), which features more than 500 Arabic series making up more than 7,000 hours of searchable content, some of which was produced as far back as the 1960s.[44]

In the past few years, an increasing trend is the emergence of social media celebrities. These are ordinary young people, mostly men, who take to platforms such as YouTube to produce short videos with content ranging from religious commentary, to social and political criticism, and comedy sketches.

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[39] Wenderl 2016.
[40] Khaleejtimes 2017.
[41] North Western University in Qatar 2016.

[42] Radcliffe 2016.
[43] Radcliffe 2015.
[44] Radcliffe 2016.

Many such social media stars have launched YouTube channels and achieved a base of followers in the hundreds of thousands, in addition to appearing on mainstream television channels. Some of these newly famous social media celebrities are part of the Arab diaspora in Europe and the United States, and they offer content that represents diasporic experiences. Many of these stars shy away from explicit political content and may contribute to reinforcing dominant social and political attitudes. However, others engage with subjects such as homosexuality, gender roles, and atheism. With the rise of ISIS, amateur YouTube productions emerged as a key platform for dark humour that rejects and mocks the organization's terrorist activities and claims to represent the Islamic religion. Instagram stars have also become a phenomenon in advertising as Arab trendsetters gather followers in the tens of thousands.

HATE SPEECH, POLITICIZATION AND POLARIZATION

In many ways, the Arab media environment offers a diverse range of political perspectives, particularly within news content. The region is also the target of multiple non-Arab channels that broadcast in the Arabic language. However, at the same time, the majority of media channels offer clearly politicized content. News consumers tend to be media savvy in understanding and choosing the political affiliation of their choice of news source. This has also led to the fragmentation of the public sphere on national and regional levels. Consequently, the politicization of media has contributed to the echo chamber effect within the media ecology.

The strenuous political and economic situation and the continuing violence and conflict in a number of Arab countries have led to highly emotional and contentious exchanges in the public sphere. Experiences of violence place strains on social and political processes, including the use of media. This emotionally-charged stratification and division exacerbates the echo chamber effect. It contributes to the decline in the journalistic values of objectivity and neutrality. It also contributes to a trend among users, where individuals elect to exclusively follow media sources, which offer news narratives and amplify views that are congruent with the particular user's own already established positions. Social media reflect and contribute to this phenomenon, including the personal decisions of who to follow on Twitter or who to 'unfriend' on Facebook. In line with these global trends, social media in the Arab region contribute to two opposing phenomena. While providing opportunities to amplify citizens' voices and to break through the controlled media environments, they also contribute to the echo chamber effect, in which users only follow and take part in conversations with others with whom they share the same political opinion. Given the turmoil in the region, Arab societies have been generally split in their interpretations and reactions to the political and security events affecting all aspects of their lives.

Television viewership reflects this trend where viewers select news stations whose editorial lines reinforce their political disposition, not only with regard to news content reporting on the local context, but in relation to the multiple conflicts across the region. In other words, because of the political alignments and polarizations in the region, it is likely that if one holds a strong opinion on one conflict, he/ she is likely to hold parallel opinions on what is happening in other regional hotspots. As such, choice of television station has become a good indicator of political opinions and attitudes because Arab media tend to be partisan, reflecting and contributing to fragmentation through editorial policies. This is not only related to news bulletins but also to popular talk shows that discuss current affairs.

These programs are often used by governments to disseminate political narratives about changing events. They involve moderators beginning the show with opening monologues that comment on the news from a particular standpoint.[45]

The polarized media sphere and the politicization of news content indicate that audiences are able to recognize the political orientation of broadcast news media. On the other hand, in terms of social media, the proliferation of unverifiable user generated material has led to widespread suspicions over authenticity of digital media content.[46]

Hate speech has increased in the region in tandem with an increase in internal and international conflicts, while hate speech is often directed at minority populations, such as Christians or Shi'as and other Muslim minorities, or members of vulnerable social groups. Examples from broadcast media include referring to feminists and female activists as "widows" or sex workers, dubbing government critics "mentally disturbed," claiming that "the people" demand capital punishment sentences against opposition figures, accusing intellectuals of treason and/ or blasphemy, and insulting religious leaders or leaders and peoples of other countries.[47]

'FAKE NEWS'

As in many other regions, the term "fake news" is instrumentalised by some actors to signal disinformation dressed up as news, and by other actors who seek to discredit genuine news information.

With the proliferation of amateur videos on YouTube, which critique government narratives and often show police and army brutality, pro-government media have often responded by attempting to cast doubts over digital media. These efforts are inadvertently supported when anti-government claims made on social media are revealed to be false. As a result, activists have launched social media initiatives to distinguish between "fake" and authentic news and digital content more broadly.

To counter "fake news" there has been growing academic interest in media and information literacy in the region, particularly in studies that report on low media and information literacy levels and awareness in some countries.[48]

As in many other regions against the background of hate speech, "fake news", filter bubbles and algorithms, policy decisions in the field of media in the Arab region are being discussed and translated into legal frameworks. In some countries, new legislation aimed to counter "fake news" has been used as a new basis to monitor and prosecute social media users, who due to their popularity are also being designated as media outlets.

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[45] El-Issawi 2016b.
[46] Al-Ghazzi 2017.
[47] Hamdy 2017.
[48] Melki 2015.

REPORTING ON MARGINALIZED GROUPS

Generally speaking, mainstream media in the Middle East and North Africa tend to contribute to discrimination against marginalized groups, rather than to promote equality and empowerment. This applies to targeted groups such as domestic workers, who are often stereotyped and de-humanized by media, in addition to migrant labourers and LGBT groups and individuals. The portrayal of ethnic and religious minorities is more context-dependent. However, even when more positive images of marginalized groups circulate in Arab media, media narratives based on pity seem more common than those based on notions of equality and respect for difference.

In several countries that host large numbers of refugees, refugee populations have been targeted by de-humanizing and discriminatory depictions, particularly in broadcast news and entertainment programs. While discriminatory narratives have circulated on social media, since 2014, digital and social media, as used by refugees, have also been instrumental during the migration flows from the Arab region to Europe in 2015-2016. Smart phones and their use to access social media platforms have been crucial for sharing information among refugees throughout the long journey to Western Europe, including about the easiest routes to travel through, threats from security forces or violent groups, and the conditions in camps. In addition, social media were key to connecting refugees and migrants with smugglers. Facebook groups have acted as platforms to share information and connect with others at every step of the asylum and migration process, including after people have settled in destination countries.

MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY

The general lack in media literacy is a pressing concern in countries with multi-religious, sectarian and ethnic communities. In these contexts, particularly in times of war and political upheavals, hate speech and sectarian language become commonplace on broadcast media and social media. Within this context, the case for digital media literacy as a way to combat social divisions and radicalization for violent extremism online has been getting more attention.[49] The link between social media and ideological radicalization in the name of religion has increasingly formed the focus of research studies about the Arab region. Youth identity struggles, behavioral problems, and delinquency are identified as vulnerability factors in relation to indoctrination.[50]

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[49] Al-Rawi 2016.
[50] Alava et al 2017.

Gender equality and media pluralism

GENDER EQUALITY IN THE MEDIA WORKFORCE

Inequality and gender-based discrimination represent another hindrance to media pluralism in the Arab world. Women continue to face structural obstacles that hamper their representation, participation, and advancement in the media industry. Though the situation varies across countries and sub-regions, the problem of gender equality in media is serious throughout the Arab world, where men outnumber women (often in large ratios) in the media industry. Women also encounter a difficult work environment, particularly in relation to prevalent and often unreported sexual harassment.

The gender gap in media access in the Arab region is notable on social media, as women remain underrepresented across social media platforms. According to a region-wide academic study, only 1 out of 3 Arab social media users are female. In the Gulf region, the figure is 1 out of 4. For instance, only about a third of Facebook and Twitter users in the region is female. On the professional networking platform LinkedIn, the percentage of female users is lower and stands at 28 per cent. These figures have largely remained constant, and in some cases declined between 2013 and 2017, indicating women continue to encounter barriers in terms of access to technology and education.[51]

WOMEN AND DECISION-MAKING

Figures also suggest the existence of a 'glass ceiling' that blocks the professional advancement of women in journalistic and media organizations. In some countries, that glass ceiling is in middle management, in others it is in more senior roles. Men also tend to have higher salaries than women in the media industry.[52]

GENDER AND REPRESENTATION

Relative to the past, media content targeting women in the Arab region is growing. Most of that content, however, frames women's affairs as limited to domestic and private matters rather than related to public affairs or policy changes. In politics, a new study has found that women are often stereotyped, and issues affecting women, such as violence in domestic and public spaces, do not get the attention they deserve on media.[53]   There are exceptions. For example, some television programs and drama series have dealt with social and political themes from women's perspectives.

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[51] Salem 2017.
[52] International Women's Media Foundation 2011.
[53] Al-Araby Al-Jadid 2016.

Trends in Media Independence

Overview

Government control and influence over the media in much of Arab region continues to be strong as shown in Figure 3-1, which compares the government official news influence in the Arab states with the world average. The elusiveness of robust media independence is the result of controlled licensing systems, direct state ownership of media outlets, and state financial investment and influence in private outlets. Since 2014, there have been cases of the targeted application of laws leading to the forced closure of certain media outlets.

Given the highly transnational media system in the Arab region, questions of independence and pluralism pertain not only to individual countries, but also at regional level, where whether as television viewers or social media users, audiences often consume media content that is produced in a country different from their country of residence or citizenship.

In the context of cultural and political proximity between Arab countries, and the interconnectedness in the Arab media sphere, governments have sought to establish a region-wide system of rules and conventions that would prevent the media in any country from criticizing the government in another. This culminated in 2008 with the Arab League media charter, which sought to end the use of national media to criticize other Arab governments. However, following the political changes which occurred in the region since 2011, relations between several Arab countries have become strained, and many in the Arab media have become weaponized as part of the contestation between different governments. In 2017, four Arab states demanded the closure of Al-Jazeera, one of the most prominent Arab news channels.

Figure 3-1: Journalists' perceptions of the influence of government officials on the media

Source: Worlds of Journalism Study, 2016

The prevailing top-down approach by governments in the region to control the media environment and impede media independence has not wholly succeeded. From the perspective of audiences, regional schisms allow for the distribution of counter information that circumvents government control and which is then available in any given country. This content often takes the character of counter-propaganda, and professional independent journalistic news content is often scarce. The professionalism and independence of even the most respected television news media outlets seems to have dropped following the 2011 Arab uprisings. The proliferation of social media continues to provide access to new sources of information and vehicles for discussion that are difficult to control by individual governments.

Trends in media independence in the Arab region include the following:

- In a majority of countries of the region, restrictive government regulation of the media continues, with a lack of reform regarding the roles of ministries of information and a lack of independent regulators;

- In several countries vague regulations coupled with a lack of suitable legal frameworks impedes media independence and the media therefore commonly serve the interests of the powerful, whether militias, politicians or the state;

- While the predominance of government ownership of television broadcasters has lessened, privately owned broadcasters are nonetheless politically captured where such owners have close relationships to governments;

- Declines in politically-motivated funding for newspapers in favour of broadcasting, have resulted in financial instability for the newsprint sector;

- State funds in the form of advertising are selectively allocated to ensure the financial sustainability of pro-government outlets, while placing other media outlets under financial strain;

- In contexts of armed conflict, and with an increasing number of armed groups or militia, a multiplying number of topics are considered off-limits, which impedes journalistic independence.

Trends and transitions in regulation

INDEPENDENCE AND GOVERNMENT REGULATION

Overarching constitutional frameworks in the Arab region include provisions that protect many freedoms. However, in application, restrictions are common as legal interpretation is often typically in line with the interests of those in power. In most Arab countries, ministries of information shape the media landscape with direct control and through an array of regulations that often disenable freedom of expression.

Attempts to limit the function of ministries of information as governments' public relations offices have been generally unsuccessful. Governments continue to use such ministries in order to "ensure that media content is not infringing on entrenched redlines and to preserve their ability to enforce predetermined narratives and autocratic practices."[54] Across the Arab region, media regulatory bodies maintain close relations to the state. In most cases, there is also ambiguity in the mandate of regulatory institutions and in the application of the law, whether in terms of licensing or allocation of the terrestrial spectrum for broadcasting.

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[54] El-Issawi 2016b.

TRENDS IN **MEDIA INDEPENDENCE**

Beyond the lack of independent regulators, complex institutional structures make it difficult to identify a clear path for reform amidst the multitude of existing institutions that regulate the media.[55] The vagueness in the ways which laws are applied furthers the state's influence over media regulation in several countries. Also contributing to the erosion of media independence are legal directives, which tend to be selectively applied against critical media outlets or journalists. Distrust of the judicial system contributes to a culture of self-censorship in parts of the post-2011 Arab region.

In some contexts, a lack of legal structures, as well as an absence of laws that can protect the disempowered, compounds pressures on media independence. In the most extreme cases of dysfunctional governance, there is an absence of legal frameworks and laws to regulate the media or to guide editorial practices. This lack of legal frameworks means that the media often serve the interests of the powerful, whether militias, politicians or the state. Libellous claims and verbal attacks against opposing politicians and citizens are common, and are made without legal ramifications or options of recourse. In the past few years, there have been numerous reports accusing partisan media of making libellous and slanderous allegations for extortion purposes against individuals, and in order to apply pressure on political groups. In these contexts, media activists often call for measures to protect reputations against media claims and fabrications. Similarly, there are demands to fight back against a media culture that targets groups through hate speech and sectarian language. In one country, UNESCO effectively brought rival media owners together to agree on common standards that refrained from incitement to violence.

SELF-REGULATION

The model of regulation and its level of independence differs within each country. A number of countries in the region have taken steps to enhance media independence through establishing new regulatory bodies. While this initially appears as a positive development, the official media regulators across the region continue to be dominated by state oversight and control. Typically, the heads and members of public regulators are appointed by the government, and the majority of members of regulatory bodies are not media professionals.[56]

Political and economic influences in media systems

MEDIA CAPTURE

The most discernible mechanism that negatively impacts media independence is the ownership of media outlets. State-owned media tend to have the most controlled and clearly defined government-dictated editorial policies and limitations. However, the independence of privately owned media outlets is also compromised. There are strong links between business communities and governments across the Arab region, which have important implications for media independence. As mentioned, in many cases, private media outlets are owned by individuals with close ties to governments, often with

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[55] Mendel 2014.
[56] El-Issawi 2016b.

kinship ties to those in positions of power.

While Arab government monopolies of television broadcasting are not predominant, not least since many channels that broadcast to the region are based outside of it, political funding continues to shape the Arab broadcasting mediascape. Many Arab governments have managed to maintain and even increase their influence over media content through circumventing the pattern of ownership of satellite television. Some of the most popular Arab television channels are privately owned, but importantly, they are owned by figures with close connections to government, and often with family ties with those in power. The 2015 ASBU report suggests that this politically motivated privatization comes at the expense of serious government investment in public service television. Politically-motivated privatization has led to the side-lining of audiences' interests in promoting independent media, content quality, and the values of diversity.[57]

Newspapers in many countries have faced renewed financial stress since 2014. In 2016, various news reports on Arab media addressed the financial woes of the Arab press following the closure of the high profile Assafir newspaper, a prominent Lebanese daily, which enjoyed regional standing and readership since its establishment in 1974. Arab news media reported rumours that other high profile papers, including prominent London-based and pan-Arab dailies, are facing financial difficulties. For instance, Saudi-funded Al-Hayat has closed its London headquarters and has expanded its digital content while slashing the printing of paper copies.[58] In addition to a loss of readers to digital news sources, and competition over advertisements, the decline in what is termed in Arabic as 'political money' [al-mal al-siyasi] has been cited as a reason for these financial troubles. 'Political money', as discussed in Arab media coverage, refers to the funding of Arabic-language newspapers by local politicians and governments, both within and across countries, in order to influence a paper's editorial line and content. In recent years, there has allegedly been a sharp decline in politically-motivated funding for newspapers in the region as 'political money' shifts to the ownership of and influence over television news stations.

In countries with a weaker central government, and a more pluralistic media system, media independence is similarly compromised by political ownership of media outlets. Generally, media outlets tend to be owned by different politicians. This often means that each outlet is limited and constrained by the interests of particular political figures and groups. Staff in these media outlets are accordingly obliged to abide by politically motivated editorial policies and redlines that limit their independence and freedom of speech. As a result, despite the appearance of a more pluralistic media system in these countries, mechanisms of control continue to steer the operation of individual media outlets. On the whole, these media systems allow space for limited diversity in different political points of view. However, that does not translate to an environment of independence and autonomy in media practice.

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[57] Arab States Broadcasting Union 2015.
[58] Al-Hayat 2018.

TRENDS IN **MEDIA INDEPENDENCE**

FINANCIAL REGULATIONS AND BUSINESS MODELS

Financial autonomy is another area that varies significantly from one country to another. Financial autonomy is compromised by advertising decisions that are politically motivated. In the more restrictive Arab countries, there are no legislative provisions laying out the process or underlying principles of advertising or funding by state organs. The lack of clear regulations on state aid and funds in the form of advertising is paralleled by the unavailability of data on the allocation of state funds to the media. This non-transparency is considered a major obstacle for media reform and independence. Arab governments in many countries commonly apply a financial pressure on media outlets in order to exert political influence.[59] While officially aiming to encourage pluralism, state financing and allocation of advertisements often acts as a 'stick and carrot' policy to reward media outlets that are loyal to governments and to punish those that are critical.[60]

State funds can be used to ensure the financial sustainability of pro-government outlets regardless of circulation. And they can be used to put more popular outlets under pressure through threatening their business interests, not only by diminishing or halting the allocation of state funds but also by pressuring private businesses not to advertise with such outlets.[61] Financial pressures also lead some media outlets to distribute more sensational content, which undermines the quality of news reporting and the public interest provision of the news media. In addition, a culture of nepotism prevails in licensing regulation, which also works against transparency and independence in the Arab media sphere.

PROFESSIONALISM AND EFFORTS TO MITIGATE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC INTERFERENCE

Decades-old press laws in many countries in the Arab region continue to set the conditions which determine who is able to practice journalism or be recognized as a media professional. Press laws can restrict the recognition of journalists' labour, leaving many unrecognized as practising journalists and thus without labour protections. Restrictive laws also determine the issuing of press cards which grant journalists the access and ability to cover stories. Governments or administrative entities can also withdraw press cards based on vaguely defined offences phrased around ethical rules and immoral behaviour.[62]

Legal provisions also regulate whether journalists are able to 'legally' operate and to pursue membership in official unions, on the basis of age, nationality, and education. In countries with large refugee or undocumented populations, this forms a barrier to entering the profession and comprises discrimination. Some laws specify a minimum amount of capital to allow the launch of new media outlets, whether a television station, radio station, newspaper, or website, which can form a financial barrier for new entrants. Laws also sometimes prohibit journalists from engaging in any other profession. In addition, although there are legal provisions that protect journalists' rights to divulge confidential sources of information, in practice the implementation of these protections is dependent on broader media freedoms. Within the sphere of online media, bloggers and online journalists are often not considered as journalists and therefore have no legal framework to protect them.

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[59] Rozgonyi 2015.
[60] El-Issawi 2016b.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Centre for Law and Democracy 2015.

Broadly speaking, it is helpful to distinguish between countries with strong central governments that deploy a heavy-handed control on media institutions, and countries that are facing civil conflicts and challenges in establishing control and implementing laws. In countries with strong central governments, there is a direct relationship of control that sees governments targeting the independence of media institutions. Recently renewed government and police crackdowns on media institutions, such as press syndicates, is an emerging trend.[63] In the Arab region, press unions and syndicates vary from institutions that extend government power over the media to bodies that resist and undermine government control. Sometimes, governments deploy less direct means of control. For instance, official influence over journalists' associations is often exercised through providing special state benefits to media workers in ways that indirectly undermine and curtail their ability to speak freely and criticize public officials.[64]

In certain cases, and despite political restraints and difficult conditions, press syndicates have managed to build and maintain a reputation for protecting and strengthening media independence and journalists' safety. Nonetheless, in such cases, unions have recently faced renewed pressure from governments and sometimes police raids. For instance, journalists' unions in a growing number of Arab countries have worked with the International Federation for Journalists to promote and lobby representatives from government and political parties to sign the Declaration on Media Freedom in the Arab World, which reaffirms commitment to freedom of expression principles.

In countries with weak central governments or countries facing civil conflicts, pressures on media outlets and relevant institutions are more diffused but are no less detrimental to media independence. In contexts of armed conflict, militias commonly intimidate and sometimes attack and assault journalists. In some instances armed groups have attacked, intimidated, and demonstrated control over media outlets through the armed occupation of media premises. Within these contexts, and due to the increasing number of armed groups and coercive political forces, a multiplying number of redlines negatively impact the independence of journalists and media practitioners.[65]

Furthermore, the conflicts and violence that some counties in the region have been facing have exacerbated divisions. The weaponization of media within regional wars has led to a continuing drop in pursuing independence and in applying editorial standards that reflect journalistic values of verification, balance and public interest. Instead of advocating for more freedom and balance in the Arab media space, respected Arab news channels have been increasingly engaged in lobbying for political causes. This contributes to the echo chamber media effect, as people and audiences only trust media narratives that confirm their worldviews and political orientations.

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[63] Reuters 2016.
[64] Centre for Law and Democracy 2015.
[65] Dabbous 2015.

TRENDS IN **MEDIA INDEPENDENCE**

In countries facing war and unrest, a new media ecology, characterized by the mushrooming of alternative citizen media, has developed. What began as citizen journalism and amateur media in 2011, became an alternative professionalized media by 2014 partly with the support of Western NGO funding and training. However, the NGO funding of media outlets has not been unproblematic, due to the dependence of a new media sector on foreign funding that risks unsustainability. In addition, the independence of new media outlets is often seen as compromised by an NGO agenda, which sometimes encourages certain understandings of the role of media in conflict, including the promotion of what is termed as peace journalism or a conflict resolution agenda. Some countries in the region have also placed restrictions on foreign funding for independent media and supporting NGOs.

Another dimension of media independence in the Arab world is related to the conditions on university campuses, particularly schools of journalism and media studies. Arab media and journalism departments, especially in public universities, tend to be underfunded and lack the technology and expertise to teach digital media practices. Curricula are commonly outdated, overly theoretical and lacking in terms of teaching the importance of democratic and pluralistic values in media practice. From the student perspective, university campuses have been at the heart of political activism in Arab countries, and as a result, they are also spaces that are subject to surveillance, control and political struggle. There have been cases in several universities where students and professors of media and journalism have been censored, silenced and intimidated. Arguably, the culture of self-censorship in the media begins on campuses and in media and journalism departments.

Gender equality and media independence

GENDER EQUALITY IN THE MEDIA WORKPLACE

While the region reflects disparities across countries and sub-regions, significant gender inequality in media persists throughout the Arab world, where men greatly outnumber women in the media industry. Women are outnumbered across media roles as producers, directors, journalists, and as guests on radio and television. The percentage of women is particularly low in higher positions and in relation to media ownership.[66] Figures also suggest the existence of a glass ceiling that blocks the professional advancement of women in media organizations. In some countries, that glass ceiling is in middle management, in others it is in more senior roles. There have also been complaints that a number of women in top roles "inherited" their positions from prominent deceased husbands or fathers or were promoted by men to circumvent certain laws.[67] Men commonly have higher salaries than women in the media industry.[68] Women also face a difficult work environment, particularly in relation to prevalent and often unreported sexual harassment.

Within the legal environment, a number of Arab countries strengthened their media laws in relation to gender representation and women's protection.[69] However, there is widespread agreement among women activists that much more needs to be done to address the disparities between men and women in relation to the region's media.

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[66] Al-Qadri 2015.
[67] Ibid.
[68] International Women's Media Foundation 2011.
[69] Al-Qadri 2015.

Trends in
Safety of
Journalists

Overview

Ongoing armed conflict and the political unrest that marked the start of the decade has made the 5-year period between 2012 and the end of 2016 especially dangerous for journalists in parts of the Arab region. Journalists have been targeted by various actors during escalating civil wars. While the emergence of armed groups and terrorist organizations brought new threats to the safety of journalists, government forces and pro-government groups also attacked and threatened journalists in conflict zones. The high number of journalist killings has been met with near-total impunity.

The growing influence of internet media outlets and citizen journalism was responded to by an increase in state regulation over the internet under the aegis of national security and stability. The imprisonment of bloggers and other online journalists became more commonplace in recent years, as several states introduced cybercrime laws and other legislation that extends criminal penalties to online activities.

Some states in the region are beginning to respond to the need to improve safety conditions for journalists. Under the auspices of the UN Plan of Action for the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, several initiatives have been initiated to ease tensions between security forces and the media including formal multi-stakeholder dialogues and training programs.

Trends in the safety of journalists in the Arab region include the following:

- The region is host to the highest number of killings of journalists globally. The 2012 to 2016 period reflects a substantial increase in the number of killings in the Arab region of over 120 per cent when compared to the previous 5-year period;

- The number of killings of journalists in the Arab region peaked in the year 2012, but by the end of 2016 the rate of killings had slowed, indicating a decreasing trend over this 5-year period;

- The risks to internet journalists have greatly increased. At least 42 online journalists were killed between 2012 and 2016, which comprised the second largest group of casualties according to media type, and more than for the print and radio sectors. During the previous 5-year period, only three web-based journalists were killed in the region;

- The rate of killings of women journalists has escalated forming an increasing trend. 6 per cent (12) of the journalists killed in the Arab region were women, the highest number for any region globally between 2012 and 2016. No women journalists were killed in the Arab region in the previous 5-year period;

- The numbers of journalists in prison have increased each year since 2012. By the end of 2017, the number of jailed journalists in Arab states was 51, nearly double the figure for 2012;

- Since 2012, states have established new laws, or expanded existing legislation that extends criminal and civil penalties from traditional mediums to online activity. Resultantly, the number of internet journalists imprisoned since 2012 has surged, and the imprisonment of online digital journalists is an increasing trend;

- While no states established formal protection or investigative mechanisms dedicated to addressing threats and attacks against the media, several countries have taken intermediary steps since 2012 such as dialogue, training of security forces, and monitoring.

TRENDS IN **SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS**

Physical safety and impunity

Physical security for journalists in the Arab region has declined enormously since the beginning of 2012. Despite seeing a significant drop in the number of killings by the end of 2016, the region remains host to the highest number of killings and rates of impunity worldwide.

UNESCO's Director-General condemned the killings of 191 journalists and media workers that took place in nine Arab States between 2012 and the end of 2016[69] . This number forms a substantial increase of over 120 per cent when compared to the previous 5-year period between 2007 and 2011, when 84 killings were recorded and condemned. The highest number of killings (86) to occur in one country took place within an environment of protracted civil war. Three other countries in conflict saw high levels of fatalities among journalists. Collectively, these four countries claimed nearly 90 per cent of the media casualties in the Arab region between 2012 and 2017. The rate and numbers of killings slowed by the end of 2016, following a peak in killings of journalists from 2012 onwards. In 2012, UNESCO's Director-General had condemned 50 killings of journalists that took place in the region. By 2016, the number of killings per year had dropped to 32
.

Figure 4-1: Journalist killed in the Arab region each year between 2012 and 2016

Total:
191

50

41

38

30

32

2012   2013   2014   2015   2016

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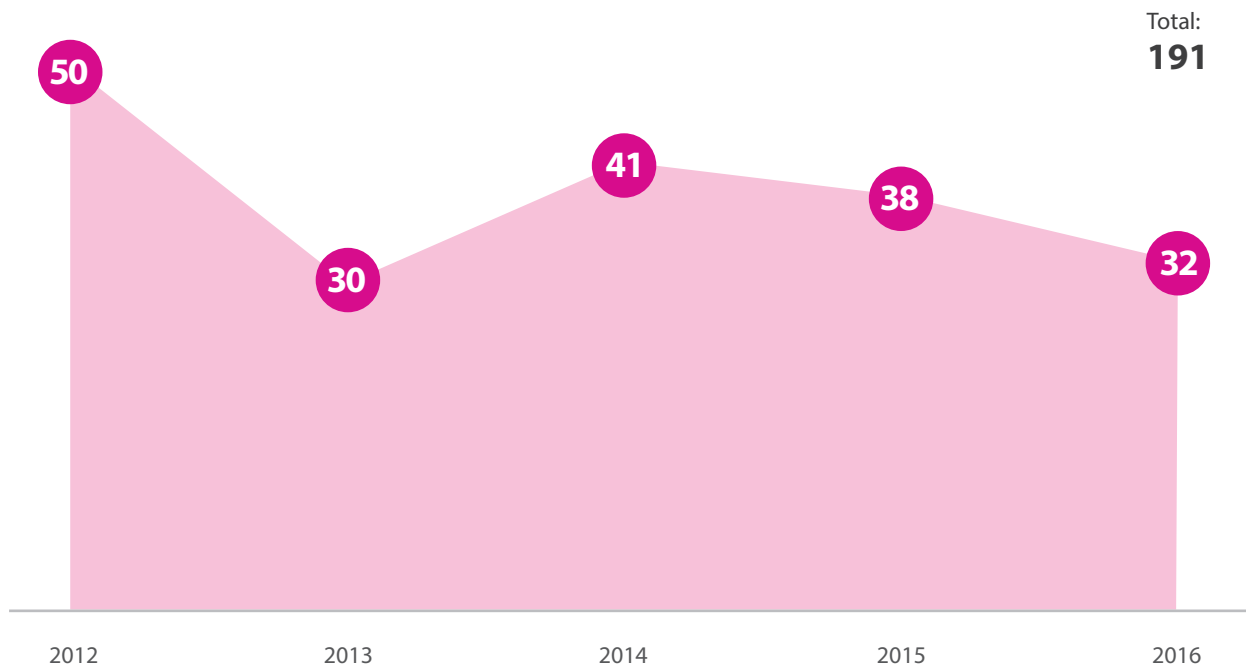
[69] UNESCO's internal database of Journalist Killings and Status of Judicial Inquiry, from January 1, 2012 to December 31, 2016.
Unless stated otherwise, the figures on killings of journalists that follow are taken from this database.

Figure 4-2: Journalist killed in the Arab region by country

Syrian Arab Republic		86
Iraq		46
Yemen		21
Libya		17
Palestine		11
Egypt		7
Bahrain		1
Jordan		1
Lebanon		1

Total: **191**
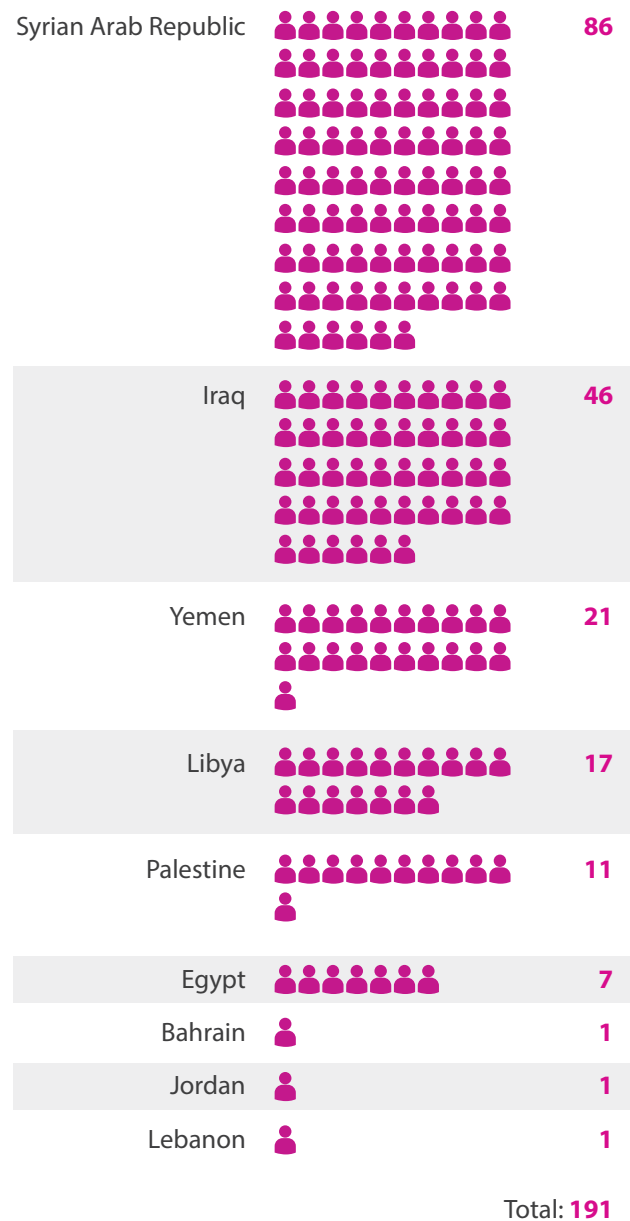
Most of the victims were locally based journalists, but foreign journalists made up 12 per cent, of the casualties, which is higher than the global average of 8 per cent. Most of the foreign journalists killed were reporting from the same country which saw the majority of overall killings, and within the context of civil war. The 2012 to 2016 period also saw a rise in the number of freelance journalists killed. At least 61 of the victims killed in the region were freelance journalists compared with 15 from the previous 5-year period, a reflection of the growing reliance of the media industry on freelancers and citizen journalism.

Journalists, cameramen and technicians affiliated with television media comprised the largest group of victims per medium, but the risks to internet journalists have greatly increased. At least 42 online journalists were killed, the second largest group of casualties, and more than for the print and radio sectors. During the previous period, only three web-based journalists were among the number of killings as tallied by UNESCO.

Near absolute impunity exists for the killers of journalists in the countries where killings of journalists were recorded. By mid-2017, five of the nine Member States in the region where journalists had been killed provided information in response to requests by UNESCO's Director-General for an update on the status of judicial inquiry in some of the cases. Only one case[70] was reported as resolved. In 43 cases (23 per cent of all killings) states noted that investigations were ongoing. No information was provided for the further 147[71] cases which were condemned by UNESCO's Director-General.

[70] Jordan reported suspect convicted for 2016 killing of writer Nahed Hatter.
[71] This number includes 7 cases for which states acknowledged receipt of the Director General's inquiry but no information and 140 cases for which there was no response or acknowledgement.

Figure 4-3: **Journalists killed in the Arab region according to news medium**

Total: 191   % of total

Television	97	51%
Online	42	22%
Print	33	17%
Radio	11	6%
Crossover	8	4%
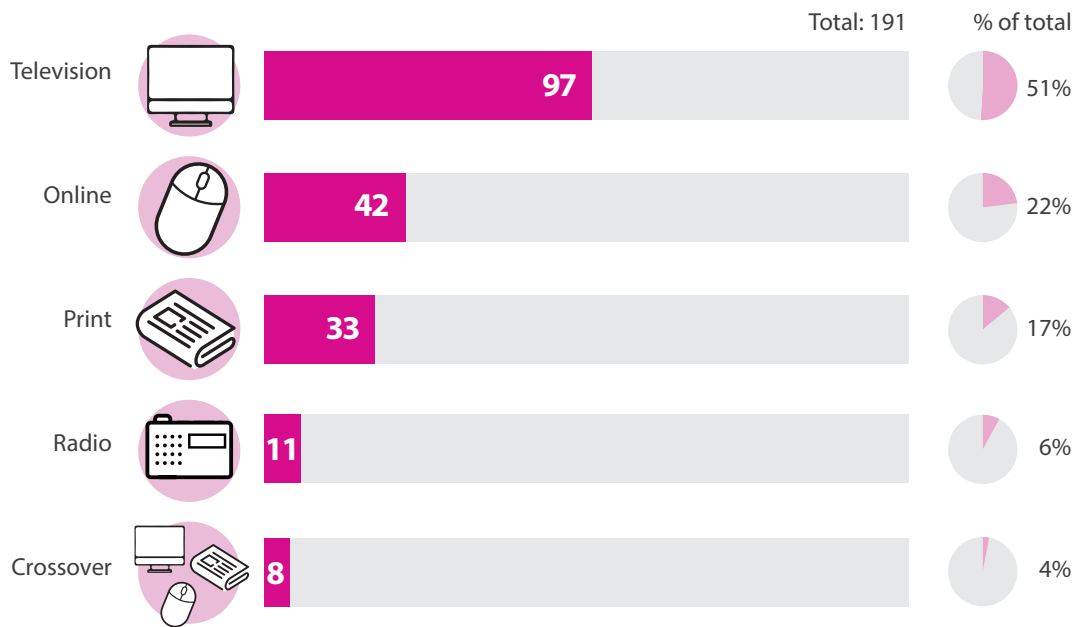
Figure 4-4: **Responses provided by Arab Member States to the UNESCO Director-General's requests for judicial status of journalist killings**

■ No Response
(140)
■ Unresolved per response
(43)
■ Acknowledged but
no information provided
(7)
■ Resolved
(1)

140	43	7	1
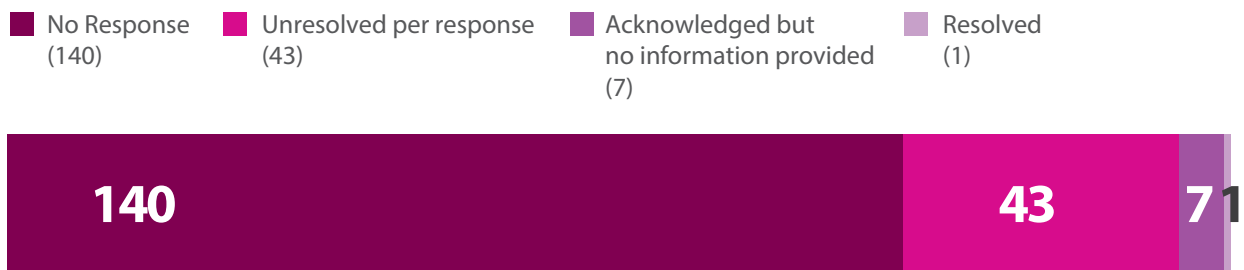
In addition to the killing of journalists, the 5-year period from 2012 through 2016 also reflected an increase in other attacks, including abductions, arbitrary detentions, torture, beatings, media center closures, and death threats.[72] Bombings and other terrorist attacks also restricted journalists from operating freely.[73] The hostage-taking of journalists is an increasing trend. According to Reporters Without Borders, by 2017, 52 journalists, citizen journalists and media workers were being held hostage by insurgent groups in Iraq, Syria and Yemen, the majority of whom are local journalists.[74]

Armed extremists and militant groups operating in countries experiencing conflict are responsible for many attacks. Journalists in these countries are regularly caught in the middle of conflict situations, targeted by different sides, including the by government and government backed sectarian groups[75]. Journalists and bloggers in countries that are not in conflict have also faced violent attacks, threats and harassment often by security forces[76] , government officials and other powerful individuals.

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[72] Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) 2016b.
[73] Ibid 4; Sarsam and Mohammed 2017; Shilad 2017.
[74] Reporters without Borders (RSF) 2017.
[75] Sarsam and Mohammed 2017.
[76] Article 19 2015; Bahrain Center for Human Rights, CIVICUS and GCHR 2016.

Gender equality and the safety of journalists

While women journalists were targeted in physical attacks less frequently than male journalists, an increasing number of women in the region joined the profession, exposing them to greater risks and the number of women targeted in physical attacks is therefore likely to rise in future. In addition to attacks for their reporting, women journalist were targeted with sexual violence. The imprisonment of women bloggers for writing on human rights and gender issues has become more common.

Though fewer women journalists were killed compared to men, the number of fatalities among women journalists in Arab states increased between 2012 and 2016 relative to the previous 5-year period. Six per cent (12) of journalist killings in the Arab region were women, the highest number for any region out of all the journalist killings condemned by UNESCO's Director-General that took place between 2012 and 2016. From 2007 to 2011, UNESCO's data reflects that no women journalists were killed in the Arab region. Therefore, the killing of women journalists forms an increasing trend. .

Figure 4-5: Number of journalist killings condemned by UNESCO Director-General between 2012 and 2016 according to gender in the Arab region

Female   Male

12

179

Total:
191
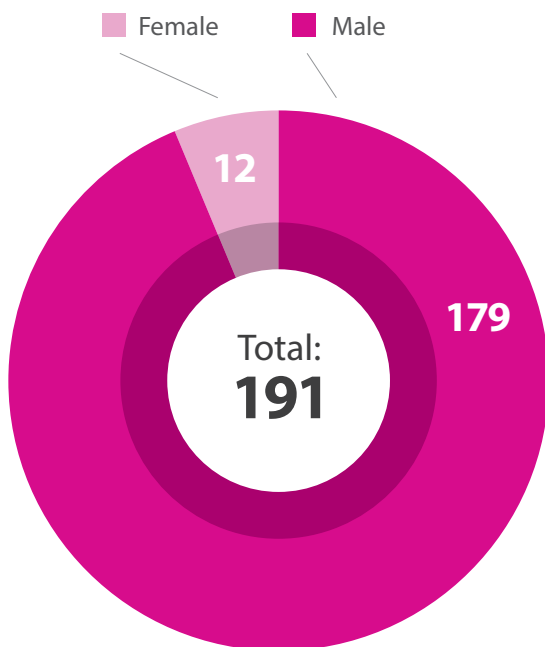
Mob assaults on women journalists during mass demonstrations drew international attention in 2011, and were followed by several similar incidents in 2012 and 2013[77]. Other violations against women journalists include arrests, kidnappings and beatings[78]. A lack of mobility due to security concerns in territories controlled by extremist groups impede women's ability to practice journalism[79]. Women journalists in the region experienced online harassment, defamation of character, and threats to themselves and their families.[80]

Several studies report that women journalists in the region rarely reach decision-making positions in the media industry, and are subjected to sexual harassment, unwanted advances in exchange for access,[81] and low pay. In addition, newsrooms lack the resources to deliver training which addresses gender-based violence and discrimination.[82]

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[77] Burleigh, 2012; Hussein 2012; Rivers 2012 and Sheikh and Kirkpatrick 2013

[78] Syrian Journalists Association 2017.

[79] IBID 10

[80] Nalu 2016; Rezaian 2017.

[81] IBID 12; IBID 5 Sharsan and Mohammed.

[82] Kilman 2017.

Other dimensions in the safety of journalists

Following the political disturbances associated with the Arab Spring, the last five years have seen a tightening of control over the media in the region, particularly with regard to online digital publishing.

The numbers of journalists in prison have increased each year since 2012. By the end of 2017, the number of jailed journalists in Arab states was 51, which is nearly double the figure for 2012[83]. Imprisonments have been concentrated within five to eight countries, depending on the year. Journalists were predominantly jailed under anti-state laws, with charges ranging from "spreading chaos," "promoting terrorism," "inciting dissidence" to "incitement against the ruling government." Charges for publishing or spreading false news were the next most frequently employed. Other defamation or religious insult laws were laid against journalists in several cases. At least eight journalists were imprisoned, some for over 5 years, without charges. Journalists have also been jailed under charges that are not directly relevant media content, such as participating in protests, regardless of whether the individual was present in a journalistic capacity.[84]

Since 2012, states throughout the region have put in place new, or expanded existing, legislation that extends criminal and civil penalties from traditional mediums to online activity, often under umbrella aspects of cyber security, preserving stability and preventing terrorism[85]. As a result, journalists who increasingly turned to the online sphere to navigate around the restrictions governing traditional media[86] , now find themselves vulnerable to arrest and other legal action. In this context, the number of internet journalists imprisoned since 2012 has surged. By 2017, 44 of the journalists in prison, or 86 per cent, were bloggers, or journalists who worked for online news sites or published through social media. In 2012, only nine, or 33 per cent of imprisoned journalists that year used internet as their primary medium. One state, revoked its cybercrime law following a civil society campaign against it.[87]

Electronic surveillance, website monitoring, and cyber-attacks, including trolling, have also become common since 2012.[88] These factors, along with the threats of arrest, fines, and violent attacks, have broadly motivated independent journalists of all mediums to practice self-censorship. In addition, fear of instability, nationalist sentiments, and financial pressures negatively affect media coverage[89] . Travel bans imposed against bloggers and other journalists in the last five years are another hindrance to independent reporting.

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[83] Unless otherwise noted, the figures for imprisoned and exiled journalists have been compiled from reports by the Committee to Protect Journalists.
[84] For example, United Arab Emirates v. Al-Najjar, Supreme Court, 2014.

[85] Gulf Center for Human Rights 2016a; Radsch 2015.
[86] Article 19 2014.
[87] Sarsam and Mohammed 2017.
[88] Radsch 2015.
[89] Elmeshad 2015.

The civil conflict currently ongoing in one country, has become one of the most deadly conflicts ever recorded for journalists, and has driven many journalists out of the region. At least 100 journalists went into exile from Arab countries between 2012 and 2016, which is more than a third of the global total of exiled journalists according to case data compiled by the Committee to Protect Journalists.[90] Over 80 per cent fled from one country alone. The predominant causes for journalists entering exile are the threat of violence, followed by harassment, and the threat of imprisonment. While reliable figures are not available for 2016, according to reports by freedom of expression groups, many more journalists fled the region due to threats by state and non-state actors in that year[91]. In at least four cases, journalists were located and assassinated in exile[92]. In a global political climate that is increasingly unfriendly to refugees and asylum seekers, journalists can experience difficulty in securing safe havens once entering exile.

Actions taken to enhance the safety of journalists

Between 2012 and 2017, a number of Arab states backed international resolutions on the safety of journalists. 10 states, or over 50 per cent of the region, sponsored at least one or more of the 11 resolutions addressing the safety of journalists adopted by UN bodies between 2012 and 2017. Countries which sponsored the most resolutions are Morocco (10) and Tunisia (9), followed by Lebanon (7) and Qatar (7).

Five Arab countries are members of the 'Group of Friends on the Safety of Journalists', an informal working group of states committed to strengthening the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity and its implementation at the national level. There are three main centers of coordination, which are the UN headquarters in New York, at UNESCO in Paris and at the UN in Geneva. Lebanon and Tunisia participate in both New York and Paris. In addition, Jordan is a member in New York. Kuwait and Morocco participate in Paris.

While no states established formal protection or investigative mechanisms dedicated to addressing threats and attacks against the media, several countries have taken intermediary steps since 2012 such as dialogue, training of security forces, and monitoring. Starting in 2013, Iraq, in coordination with civil society groups and UNESCO, engaged in a series of dialogues between the media sector and security forces, aimed at reducing tensions between the two groups, and resulting in a memorandum of understanding in 2014 as well as subsequent training workshops for media and security forces[93]. Similar training sessions were held in Libya, Palestine and Tunisia between 2013 and 2017. In March 2017, stakeholders in Tunisia launched a monitoring mechanism to track attacks against journalists[94].

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[90] Rezaian 2017.
[91] Shilad 2017.
[92] Massih 2016.
[93] Sarsam and Mohammed 2017.

[94] The mechanism will be coordinated by the National Union of Tunisian journalists (SNJT) and is supported by UNESCO and the Tunisia Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). UNESCO 2017.

Figure 4-6: **Arab member states sponsoring UN resolutions on the safety of journalists since 2012**

	2012	2013	2014	2014	2015	2015	2015	2016	2017	2017	2017	2017
	HRC	UNGA	HRC	UNGA	UNESCO	UNSC	UNGA	UNHRC	UNESCO	UNESCO	UNGA	GROUP OF FRIENDS
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Algeria									●	●		
Bahrain												
Egypt	●											
Iraq												
Jordan						●	●					
Kuwait												●
Lebanon	●	●	●	●		●	●		●	●	●	●
Libya	●										●	
Mauritania												
Morocco	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		
Oman												
Palestine	●		●									
Qatar	●	●	●	●			●	●				
Saudi Arabia												
Sudan												
Syrian Arab Republic												
Tunisia												
United Arab Emirates	●	●	●	●	●		●	●		●	●	
Yemen			●									

Appendices

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Regional Groupings

WESTERN EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA (27)

Andorra	Greece	Norway
Austria	Iceland	Portugal
Belgium	Ireland	San Marino
Canada	Israel	Spain
Cyprus	Italy	Sweden
Denmark	Luxembourg	Switzerland
Finland	Malta	Turkey
France	Monaco	United Kingdom of Great
Germany	Netherlands	Britain and Northern Ireland
		United States of America

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE (25)

Albania	Estonia	Republic of Moldova
Armenia	The Former Yugoslav	Romania
Azerbaijan	Republic of Macedonia	Ukraine
Belarus	Georgia	Uzbekistan
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Hungary	Russian Federation
Bulgaria	Latvia	Serbia
Croatia	Lithuania	Slovakia
Czech Republic	Montenegro	Slovenia
	Poland	Tajikistan

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN (33)

Antigua and Barbuda	Dominican Republic	Paraguay
Argentina	Ecuador	Peru
Bahamas	El Salvador	Saint Kitts and Nevis
Barbados	Grenada	Saint Lucia
Belize	Guatemala	Saint Vincent and the
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Guyana	Grenadines
Brazil	Haiti	Suriname
Chile	Honduras	Trinidad and Tobago
Colombia	Jamaica	Uruguay
Costa Rica	Mexico	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)
Cuba	Nicaragua	
Dominica	Panama	

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC (44)

Afghanistan	Kazakhstan	Timor-Leste
Australia	Kiribati	Malaysia
Bangladesh	Kyrgyzstan	Maldives
Bhutan	Lao People's Democratic	Marshall Islands
Brunei Darussalam	Republic	Micronesia (Federated States of)
Cambodia	Niue	Mongolia
China	Pakistan	Myanmar
Cook Islands	Palau	Nauru
Democratic People's	Papua New Guinea	Nepal
Republic of Korea	Philippines	New Zealand
Fiji	Republic of Korea	Tonga
India	Samoa	Turkmenistan
Indonesia	Singapore	Tuvalu
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	Solomon Islands	Vanuatu
Japan	Sri Lanka	Viet Nam
	Thailand	

AFRICA (47)

Angola	Ethiopia	Nigeria
Benin	Gabon	Rwanda
Botswana	Gambia	Sao Tome and Principe
Burkina Faso	Ghana	Senegal
Burundi	Guinea	Seychelles
Cameroon	Guinea-Bissau	Sierra Leone
Cape Verde	Kenya	Somalia
Central African Republic	Lesotho	South Africa
Chad	Liberia	South Sudan
Comoros	Madagascar	Swaziland
Congo	Malawi	Togo
Côte d'Ivoire	Mali	Uganda
Democratic Republic of	Mauritius	United Republic of Tanzania
the Congo	Mozambique	Zambia
Djibouti	Namibia	Zimbabwe
Equatorial Guinea	Niger	
Eritrea		

ARAB REGION (19)

Algeria	Libya	Saudi Arabia
Bahrain	Mauritania	Sudan
Egypt	Morocco	Syrian Arab Republic
Iraq	Oman	Tunisia
Jordan	Palestine	United Arab Emirates
Kuwait	Qatar	Yemen
Lebanon		

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World Trends in
Freedom of Expression and Media Development

REGIONAL OVERVIEW 2017/2018

ARAB STATES

Across the world, journalism is under fire. While more individuals have access to content than ever before, the combination of political polarization and technological change have facilitated the rapid spread of hate speech, misogyny and unverified 'fake news', often leading to disproportionate restrictions on freedom of expression. In an ever-growing number of countries, journalists face physical and verbal attacks that threaten their ability to report news and information to the public.

In the face of such challenges, this new volume in the World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development series offers a critical analysis of new trends in media freedom, pluralism, independence and the safety of journalists. With a special focus on gender equality in the media, the report provides a global perspective that serves as an essential resource for UNESCO Member States, international organizations, civil society groups, academia and individuals seeking to understand the changing global media landscape.

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