

3.9. Jordan

In the midst of regional conflicts, Jordan has been trying to strike a balance between internal security, democratisation and moderate political reforms since it reintroduced free parliamentary elections in 1989. Since assuming office in 1999, King Abdullah II has focused on economic structural adjustment and liberalisation processes. These have not yet led to an essential improvement in living conditions for most of Jordan's population of 5.5 million, out of which still 25 per cent live below the poverty line. Jordan is on its way to becoming a 'constitutional monarchy'.

Following King Abdullah's rule by decree for more than two years, reasonably free and transparent parliamentary and municipal elections were held in 2003. Some restrictions on freedom of expression were lifted during that year, but freedom of expression is still constrained. The state owns all broadcast media and has wide discretionary powers to close print publications. The Information Ministry was scrapped in October 2003, and regulation of the media is now the responsibility of an appointed Higher Media Council. Although the law still allows journalists to be jailed by the civilian judiciary, government officials have pledged that journalists will no longer be sent to prison for their writings.

In 2004, King Abdullah II called again for comprehensive political reforms to develop Jordan into a model of an Arab and Muslim democracy, built on economic development, equality and justice, political pluralism, freedom of the media and the rule of law. The King has successfully portrayed Jordan as a leader in political reform and repeatedly praised the Bush administration's efforts to promote democracy in the Arab world.

Nevertheless, it remains to be seen whether King Abdullah's promise of a 'new era' of political and civil liberties will come to fruition.

I. General Conditions

Jordan enjoys relatively high literacy rates in comparison to the region and to its recent past. Illiteracy rates were reduced from 68 per cent in 1961 to 34 per cent in 1981 and

Illiteracy
and education

to less than 10 per cent in 2003.¹ Illiteracy rates are higher for females than males and higher in the rural areas than in the urban areas. The high literacy rates in the country have many causes. First, the government commitment to education is high with basic education (grades 1 to 10) being universal, free and compulsory. The enrolment in basic education is over 97 per cent with almost complete gender parity. In addition, the government had and continues to have comprehensive and widespread adult literacy programmes covering all regions of the country. Moreover, there are very active and diverse literacy programmes which are implemented by a large network of national and international NGOs. Finally, there is a strong social emphasis on education among Jordanians, because it has been important for social mobility.

- Local media
- Radio
- TV
- Print
- There are several radio stations in the country. There is a national radio station that is government-owned, three international radio stations that are based and operating in the country, and one privately owned Internet radio. Jordanian television used to have Arabic and English channels as well as a satellite sender; however, the English channel is no longer in service, although some of its programmes such as the English news are incorporated into the main Arabic channel. There are no privately owned TV or radio stations (Radio Sawa is an exception, but it is not a Jordanian radio station. There is an application for a new radio broadcaster, Mood, but it has not yet been granted permission). Jordanians, however, have access to wider sources of information due to the small size and geographical location of the country. People in Jordan have access to more than ten TV and radio stations from neighbouring countries and those who have satellite television have access to more than 100 Arabic channels and to a large number of international TV and radio stations.
- With regard to the printed media, there are 6 daily papers, 27 weekly papers (one in English), and more than 350 specialised newspapers and magazines. Two of the daily newspapers are mostly owned by the government (one Arabic, *Al-Ra'i* and one English, *The Jordan Times*, which are indirectly owned through the Social Security Corporation, which has 65 per cent of the shares). These two papers are considered to be the mouthpiece of the

¹ Shteivi, Musa: *The Annual Social Development Report for 2003*, Amman 2003.

government. The remainder of the newspapers are privately owned and the government holds no shares except in *Al-Dustour* (35 per cent). The other publications are not general newspapers, but rather specialise either in social, cultural, or economic issues, and some are locally based. Individuals, civil society organisations, cultural and sport clubs and universities, for example, own and produce these publications.

Ownership of radio and TV stations is in the hands of the state and neither political parties nor the private sector are yet allowed to own and operate them. However, the political parties law in Jordan allows political parties to publish their own newspapers without being subjected to the same financial requirements as the private sector under the Press and Publication Law. This does not have a negative effect, as most parties do not have the financial means to meet that requirement. There are more than 30 political parties in Jordan, but only four weekly newspapers are published by political parties and they have very limited circulations. Political parties, however, do disseminate special issues of news and analysis on an irregular basis.

Media
ownership

Unlike other countries, there are no Internet newspapers, independent or otherwise, in Jordan. There are, however, several Internet information providers, the most important being Amman Net, the first and the only Internet radio network. There is also an online news provider called Jo-news. These information providers are available for free and are uncensored.

Internet
media

Access to media sources in Jordan is widespread and distribution of print media covers all parts of the country. In 2002, 80 per cent of Jordanians had radios, 97.7 per cent owned televisions and 47 per cent had satellite television. While more than one-fifth of the population had computers, those who used computers made up more than one-third of the population (35 per cent at work, universities, etc.). Approximately 7 per cent of the Jordanian population had access to the Internet, but the number of those who used the Internet was 17.5 per cent.²

Media
access
TV, Radio

Internet

People very often rely on the media as a source of information. In a recent national survey, people were asked about which sources of information they used or relied upon to get information about various aspects of Jordanian

Media
consumption

² Department of Statistics: *Jordan in Figures: 2003*, Amman 2003.

Radio, TV, Print, Internet	society. ³ The results were as follows: TV 87.7 per cent [<u>very often</u> : 4], radio 3.9 per cent [<u>occasionally</u> : 2], press 4.3 per cent [2], friends and informal networks 2.5 per cent [<u>almost never</u> : 1], and the Internet 1.5 per cent [1]. Also, in the same survey, it was found that only 18 per cent of the respondents (aged 18 years and older) mentioned that they read the newspapers regularly. This indicates that the media in general – and television in particular – are very important sources of information for the Jordanian people.
Media influence on political opinion	The influence of the national and international media on the formation of political opinions in Jordan is <u>highly significant</u> [4]. The advent of Arab satellite television networks has given Jordanians the opportunity to view alternative sources of information, especially about the region. The most important of the Arab satellite TV news channels is the Al-Jazeera network, particularly among the middle and upper classes. As is evident from the data mentioned above, people depend very heavily upon the media for their information, especially TV; thus, the influence of other sources of information, such as political parties, on the shaping of public opinion is very weak.
State-owned media	The state in Jordan owns the TV and radio stations and has a controlling interest in the most important Arabic and English daily newspapers (<i>Al-Ra'i</i> and <i>The Jordan Times</i> respectively), which have been acting as the semi-official state newspapers. In addition, the government owns more than one-third of the shares of the second most read newspaper. Although privately owned newspapers do exist, there are no privately owned TV or radio stations. The government has suggested that allowing the private ownership of radio and television stations is under consideration, although no changes have yet been made. There is no law that protects editorial departments from the influence of the government, a fact that holds true for both the state-owned and privately owned media houses. It is widely known that the government exerts a great deal of influence over the editorial departments of almost all newspapers. The government alone appoints individuals to the leading positions in the state-owned newspapers and TV stations. It also always chooses the general directors and editors-in-chief in a process which is almost always less than

³ Jordan Centre for Social Research: *The Jordanian Attitudes Towards Democracy*, Amman 2004.

transparent.⁴ This greatly affects the ability of these people to act independently, as they are not protected from being dismissed without cause. Although there is a board of directors for the state-owned media networks, they are nominal and similarly dependent upon the state, rarely challenging the position or the wishes of the government. It is almost always the case that the general directors and editors keep very close to the official government policy line and are frequently subject to a great deal of pressure from different government offices and departments. Political parties and civil society organisations play no role in the appointments of individuals to these posts.

The state-owned media to a great extent determine broadcast opinion, resulting in further dominance by the state-owned media. Its coverage is very friendly towards the government [+2], sometimes even functioning as a propaganda tool. Private media coverage is also relatively close to the official government position. There are significant differences, however, between print media reporting and radio and TV coverage. Whereas the government tightly controls and monitors TV and radio coverage, newspapers enjoy a much freer rein. Consequently, although the state-owned press might have greater freedom in comparison to state-owned TV and radio stations, the non-state print media, especially the weekly papers, enjoy even more independence in their editorials, news coverage and opinions.

State-owned
media and
published
opinion

Currently, the government holds weekly press conferences to inform the public about its programmes and policies, with additional conferences being held if the need arises. Furthermore, there is a government spokesman with a ministerial portfolio, who often holds joint press conferences with other relevant ministries or departments. In addition, different ministries occasionally hold press conferences when the need arises. All journalists have the right to attend all press conferences, on an equal basis, but they must be representing a newspaper or TV station. Sometimes the press conferences are broadcast live on state television and radio.

Government
press
conferences

⁴ Several months ago, the editor in chief of the government-controlled *Al-Ra'i* was fired after a change in the cabinet mainly because of what is believed to be his more liberal views. He was replaced by somebody who was close to the more conservative media establishment.

II. Legal Environment

Freedom of expression
Media coverage

Freedom of opinion and freedom of expression are established as a fundamental individual right in the Jordanian Constitution under Article 31. Freedom of the press is also established in the Constitution and guaranteed. There are no amendments to the Constitution which restrict freedom of opinion or freedom of the press, but the Press and Publication Law regulates both. Article 7 of the Press and Publication Law stipulates that the press should respect the public freedom of others and respect their privacy. It also specifies that the press should not report anything or about anything that might incite violence or create division between people or affect national unity. Thus, any restrictions on the freedom of the press should be covered in the Press and Publication Law. However, in that law there are no specific restrictions on any type of individual or group in society expressing their own opinions. That being said, this does not necessarily mean that free press coverage is guaranteed in practice.

Regulation of media coverage

In Jordan, there are defamation laws that protect individuals and office bearers and the press is liable if it violates the rights and privacies of public officials and individuals. The media is not allowed to encroach upon the privacy of citizens and officials alike or to use words and descriptions that could be interpreted as defamation. Journalists are liable for such actions. The Defamation Law is not based in the Press and Publication Law, but in other laws, which apply to everybody, not just journalists. Yet, the right to access of information is established in the Press and Publication Law and journalists have the right not to disclose their sources.

Since 1993, the Press and Publication Law has regulated the implementation of media coverage. The law does not permit censorship by the state; however the Press and Publication Department is under state authority and is both responsible for the implementation of the law and entitled to take legal action against those who violate it. The only restrictions are those stipulated by the law and have to do with the violation of privacy and the rights of individuals and groups, defamation of individuals and state officials, inciting violence or calling for national disunity. Neither is any member of the press permitted to criticise the royal family, heads of Arab and friendly states, or the armed and security forces. Violation of the law is resolved in the courts, with

editorial and legal actions possibly being applied in the latter cases.

The Press and Publication Law of 1993 was considered by most people to be a great step towards democracy and freedom of the press in the country. The law established the freedom of the press in Jordan and restricted the government's ability to interfere in media coverage. This resulted in a truly vibrant and free press that was able to break many of the country's earlier taboos. Five years later though, unhappy with the level of criticism of its policies, the government introduced a new Press and Publication Law that retracted most of the achievements of the previous law. The 1998 law largely curtailed the freedom of the press and journalists. The reformed law imposed a number of restrictions on the content of media coverage, placed very high fines on violators, raised the amount of capital needed to establish newspapers, granted the government the right to close newspapers indefinitely, and established the censorship of foreign media.

There are no groups excluded by law from working as journalists or expressing their opinions and views. These rights are constitutionally guaranteed and protected by the law. Media reports do not have to be reviewed and approved by state authorities before publication; yet, the absence of legal censorship does not necessarily mean that informal pressure or censorship does not exist and that in some cases it would not be applied. An example of informal censorship would be an attempt to stop an editorial or a column through informal networks.

Although King Hussein ordered the lifting of censorship of foreign media and publications shortly after the law was passed by Parliament, the law was considered by many to be a black day for Jordanian democracy and in violation of the Constitution as well. This law, however, was amended a year later – after King Abdullah II ascended the throne – and some of the most restrictive articles were changed. However, the alterations still fell short both of the rights that were established in the 1993 law and of the expectations of the media and human rights groups. The situation remained the same until a new and temporary Press and Publication Law was enacted in 2002 while Parliament was adjourned and elections postponed. The new law had some positive changes including reduced fines for violators, the settlement of all violations by the courts and the lifting of almost all

restrictions on content. One of the most important changes affected journalists who were deemed in violation of the law: these journalists were no longer to be imprisoned before the court had issued its verdict, as was the practice under the previous law. The changes that were introduced were well received by the media community.

Changes in
the past five
years

After Parliament was elected, all temporary laws were suspended and have yet to be passed by Parliament. Hence, the temporary law was changed into a draft that must be circulated before being resubmitted to Parliament. The events of 11 September have not had any consequences on media coverage in Jordan. No new laws in relation to those events were introduced in the country. Instead, there has been a strong improvement [+2] in the freedom of coverage with only minor restrictions.

While there have not been any significant changes or modifications made to free media coverage over the last five years, it's fair to say that there is a greater degree of tolerance towards criticism on the part of the government. In fact, even on state-run TV, where the government view is represented, programmes offering critical evaluations of government performance are aired. In addition, there are programmes that allow individuals opposed to government policies and initiatives to voice their opinions. In the press, it is also common to find articles by writers who are opposed to the government line and sometimes these writers even have columns – in the state-owned papers too! In general, the freedom of media coverage depends on the area that is covered. There is more room for criticism on a whole host of policies, but less on political issues and even less on foreign policy topics. For instance, during the American invasion of Iraq, there were some restrictions imposed on the media especially in reporting on the Jordanian role in the war and the military cooperation between the two countries. Freedom to cover that aspect of the war was restricted and the media kept silent about it, only publishing what the government released. For example, the media was unable to report on the presence of the US army in Jordan and whether or not locations on the Jordanian borders with Iraq were used to launch attacks on Iraq. Normally, weekly and political party newspapers are more daring and tend not to abide by such restrictions, but they do not enjoy a high level of professionalism, which affects the creditability of their coverage. All in all, free media coverage has strongly improved [+2] over the past five years.

Formal censorship no longer exists, but as mentioned above, the law prohibits discussions and criticism of news and reports that defame people or institutions, opinions that might incite violence in the country and endanger national unity. This is very general and might be interpreted to mean many things, yet it is important to note that there is no censorship or restrictions on criticising the government or its actions. Journalists have the right to report on court deliberations, but courts have the right to ban reporting on a case-by-case basis. There are no groups or individuals who – because of their social background (class, religion, ethnicity) or political affiliation – are barred or excluded from working as journalists or from their right to free speech.

Censorship
under the
law

As stated, there is no censorship law, but there is the Press and Publication Law which journalists have to observe. Individuals or newspapers that violate the Press and Publication Law are taken to court. The law stipulates that the reporter who violated the law and the editor-in-chief of the press are liable. The court then rules on the case and if individuals are found guilty they can face financial fines, short-term imprisonment, and even a possible temporary closure of the newspaper. No long-term imprisonment, physical punishment, life sentence or death penalty exists in relation to the violation of the Press and Publication Law. Newspapers temporarily closed because they broke the law can resume their work once these violations are corrected. Over the past five years though there has not been a single case of newspaper closure in the country. The current Press and Publication Law allows state authorities to stop publication and for the administrative detention of violators pending the court decision. In the new proposed law, however, action against violators (detention and closure) can only take place after the court rulings.

All press, publications, and radio and TV stations have to be licensed before they can be allowed to publish or broadcast. The Press and Publication Law specifies the requirements that have to be met for a given type of the media to obtain a licence. Some of the requirements are financial, with a certain amount of money specified for each type of media such as a weekly or daily paper. For daily newspapers, the capital needed is 500,000 JD; 50,000 JD is required for a weekly newspaper, and 5,000 JD for specialised papers. Some of the requirements have to do with the professional credentials of the applicants or the editors responsible. Chief-editors have to be licensed and have to have served as

Media
licences

journalists for a certain number of years. No journalist can have a criminal record if they wish to practise journalism. Political parties who wish to publish a newspaper are exempted from meeting the financial requirement, thus making it easier for them to have their own press.

The Press and Publication Department is responsible for deciding on licensing cases. It is a semi-independent and autonomous government department. The department must decide on the status of the application within 30 days. If it fails to do so, the applicant may start his or her operation and the media outlet will be considered licensed. The law does not allow for the rejection of an application on the basis of any political or social affiliations or beliefs. If the Press and Publication Department rejects the application, then the matter can be taken to court. The courts will decide on the constitutionality of the decision and the decision will be binding for both parties. Reasons for not granting a licence have to be explained. In the past licences were revoked in cases where the holder was deemed in violation of the law. However, the media houses were allowed to operate again after the court ruled against the government action. Revocation happens rarely.

Journalists'
status

The state does not require a licence for people to practice the profession of journalism, but the Journalistic Association requires that journalist be licensed. Membership of the association is mandatory. Media institutions do not always abide by this, meaning that individuals can work in the media as reporters without being members of the association. It is only a state requirement that the editor-in-chief of a paper and all other news correspondents be licensed journalists. It is also a state requirement that journalists who officially represent their media at official events be licensed journalists. The state does not have the right to take away a work permit or licence from anybody; this is the responsibility of the association. The licences are almost never taken away and in past incidents where newspaper licences were revoked, permission to work is rarely removed from journalists.

Participation in public meetings and parliamentary meetings is on an institutional, not an individual basis. Therefore, the media institutions chose the journalists who represent them at these meetings. All media institutions have the right to attend these meetings and have equal access to them. All meetings can be broadcast or reported in the printed media

in full with the exception of closed parliamentary meetings. Journalists representing the media in these meetings, however, have to be accredited. Normally, parliamentary sessions are reported in full on the only national TV station and the discussion is also reported in full in the daily newspapers. Legally, journalists have the right to challenge state repression, but this rarely happens. The courts are open to journalists and if their rights are violated they can press charges against the government. In the past, there have been occasions when the courts have ruled against the government in such disputes. Thus, the media and journalists have the right and opportunity to challenge and stop state repression if it occurs, but such challenges are quite rare.

The Press and Publication Law makes no reference to the formation of media monopolies or cartels and no private media monopolies or cartels exist in the country. The only monopoly is a state monopoly over the TV and radio stations.

Monopolies
and cartels

III. Political Conditions

There are no specific groups that are excluded in an official sense or systematically, but there are certain groups that do not have media outlets to express their views. Some of these groups are the poor, the unemployed, and the disadvantaged in general. The issue here has to do with the social rather than the legal exclusion. In addition, the media and the others have the right to access to information as stipulated in the press law. Government authorities are obliged to furnish the information if requested. Most information is published, but even the unpublished information cannot be obtained by specialists and concerned people. In practice, bureaucrats do hinder access to information.

Coverage of
marginal
groups

Although there is no legal censorship applied in the country, there is a great deal of self-censorship by members of the media themselves. This happens on two levels: the individual and the institutional. Individual journalists and media people practise censorship on themselves and others out of the fear that their superiors or editors will reject their work or that the government might consider them as part of the opposition. The institutional censorship occurs when editors censor their employees. This practice is prevalent in all sectors of the media, but it occurs more often in TV and radio networks, and probably less in the press, especially if

Self-
censorship

the press represents the opposition. Still, self-censorship varies from one newspaper to another. Overall, it is still very strong.

The most frequent subjects of self-censorship are the life of the royal family, the armed and police forces, minority issues, political alliances of the country especially during times of war and crises, and sexual and religious issues. This cycle of self-censorship and the avoidance of controversial issues is only broken occasionally. In addition, self-censorship is practised out of the fear that discussing particular issues or allowing certain views to be mentioned might result in a negative response from certain segments or groups in the wider society. Thus, those who practise self-censorship are either afraid of the state or society. It can be argued that in this respect, the ceiling that journalist and others operate under is rather low.

Illegal state repression Journalists and private media organisations currently and generally do not have to fear state repression, but it has happened in the past. That does not mean that it never occurs or that it will not happen in the future. However, the normal practice is that all state action is taken within the context of the Press and Publication Law.

Obstacles to Internet access Access to the Internet in Jordan is not hindered by any regulation or restriction. Individuals and institutions are free to access the Internet in their private homes and at their places of employment. Moreover, there is no declared policy of censorship or of blocking certain sites. In fact, the state policy is to encourage the use of Internet and information technology. In the beginning, the high cost of a personal computer and an Internet connection hindered the use of the Internet, but now the prices of both have declined, making it easier for many public institutions such as universities and schools to introduce the Internet to their students and faculty. There are several companies, which provide Internet services. What is more, Jordan is known for its large number of Internet cafés, spread out even to the rural areas, where access to the Internet is available to groups that could not afford the initial high cost of the Internet or do not have access to telephone lines. Today, approximately one-fifth of the population uses the Internet.

Changes in the past five years State repression of the media has changed significantly over the last five years. The main reason behind this strong improvement [+2] might be the fact that there is no major opposition to the state and the country enjoys relative

political stability. Also, under the new leadership of King Abdullah II, the state has shown more commitment to political development and openness, which reflects very positively on the overall freedom of expression in Jordan. Additionally, it can be said that the relationships that Jordan enjoys with international organisations and countries has helped to promote greater freedom of the press.

With regard to publishing and distributing the printed media, the state-owned media have never played a role in the monitoring of production and distribution in the past and there is none now. Even the distribution of the government's own print media is done by the private sector. The production and distribution of the print media are done either by the newspapers themselves (the daily newspapers have their own printing shops) or by private companies and corporations for the weekly papers and the other media. If there is any monitoring of the printing, it is normally done by the press and publication authorities. Monitoring, however, is not mentioned in the law and if it happened in practice, it would be considered illegal.

Government
control over
print media

IV. Economic Pressures

In general, economic pressures do not exist for the simple reason that the government owns the TV and radio stations and it has a controlling interest in one of the main newspapers. Having said that, the government publishes its advertisements in the major daily newspapers and any interruption of this would have negative consequences for the private media. It is difficult to estimate how much the government spends on political advertisements in the media because there is not much advertising on political issues except during elections or specific events, in which case the government does not pay because it owns the media. Therefore, the economic leverage of the government over the private media is not very strong.

State
subsidies

There are two main economic aspects which could disadvantage the media houses. First, the financial requirements mentioned above that are needed to establish a newspaper might be a major obstacle for certain groups and organisations. Second, the cost of printing and distribution is rather high and that might be an obstacle for some of the weekly or political parties' newspapers. Therefore, if

Further
aspects

newspapers could not secure advertisements, it would be difficult for them to succeed or survive.

V. Non-state Repression

Repression by non-state groups

There are no specific groups that repress journalists, but it could happen that a particular group might accuse a journalist of violating an important principle such as a religious matter or the issue of normalisation with Israel. These groups are either political Islamic groups or the Union of Professional Associations. The repression might be in the form of attacks in newspapers or defamation of the journalist. This rarely happens and most of the time the matter is either resolved in an informal way or it ends up in court. These occurrences, however, are infrequent and do not usually exceed one or two cases a year. In the instances where these events do take place, the state intervenes by resorting to the rule of law. State authorities can protect the journalist through the application of the law.

Changes in the past five years

The most serious non-state repression could come from the Journalists Association. Membership of the association is obligatory for journalists who want to practise, thereby affecting the right of individuals and their freedom to work in this profession. The other issue is that if journalists are deemed to be in violation of the association's regulations or policies, they run the risk of having their membership revoked.

The issue of normalisation with Israel provides a clear example of repression against the media. Journalists are banned from dealing with Israel and violation of this policy could result in defamation or blacklisting (publishing their names in public in order to discredit them) or banning them from journalism. This practice, however, has led to confrontation with the government and the law, making such actions rare. In fact, practices have changed and strongly improved [+2] during the last few years, so repression seldom occurs.

VI. Conclusions

Evaluation of media coverage

The freedom of media coverage has changed considerably over the last five years. The most important of these changes have been the amendments to the 1998 Press and Publication Law and the declared intentions of the government for free and responsible media to play a greater

role in the democratic process. These changes have created a more relaxed atmosphere for the media.

It must also be said that the rise of international Arab media networks (especially news channels) and the spread of the Internet have made censorship of the media rather difficult and politically costly.

Consequently, it can and must be said that free media coverage has indeed strongly improved [+2].

In support of the democratisation efforts, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation has highlighted through its activities the importance of free media in this process. A seminar and subsequent publication in English and Arabic on 'The Role of the Media in a Democracy' in 1994 identified the problem areas. This led to several training workshops for journalists, who are also involved in all of KAF's activities. They are important multipliers who focus on major issues and encourage civil society to discuss them. In regional projects since 2002, KAF has opened dialogue on 'New Media and Change in the Arab World' to discuss the role of the Internet and satellite TV and their contribution to freedom of expression and information access and how rapid technological development affects change.

KAF
support

The general situation of the media can be characterised as being free with minor restrictions. In general, evaluations of the freedom of expression in the country have offered positive results. In a recent public opinion poll, Jordanians were asked to assess the extent to which freedom of expression is guaranteed.⁵ Only 14.7 per cent said that freedom of expression is not guaranteed, whereas the rest of the respondents reported that freedom of expression is guaranteed to various degrees. (Exact figures were as follows: guaranteed to a great extent – 17 per cent; to a medium extent – 45.7 per cent; and to a small extent – 18.8 per cent.) Another question asked the people of Jordan to assess the extent to which freedom of the press is guaranteed. The results show similar trends to the previous question with 11.4 per cent of the people feeling it was not guaranteed, 19.6 per cent claiming freedom of the press was guaranteed to a great extent, 44.7 per cent to a medium extent, and 18.4 per cent to a small extent.

Freedom of
the media:
general
situation

⁵ The Centre of Strategic Studies: *Attitudes Towards Democracy Poll*, Amman 2004.

The results in both questions reveal an overall positive assessment of freedom of expression and the press as well. Furthermore, the last few years have witnessed the emergence of new newspapers, magazines, and Internet media outlets. It is also noticeable that even in the government-owned media, there has been improvement regarding the types of coverage and the topics discussed. There are, however, still certain issues that the media is not able to discuss, or to discuss freely, in Jordan.

Major
obstacles

The development of free media networks in Jordan faces many obstacles and has a long way to go. In the view of both journalists and academics, the following are the major obstacles.

First, the Press and Publication Law, which is a much better one than the 1998 law, is still too restrictive in many ways, especially with regard to issues that journalist are not supposed to mention. Also, the slow response of the government in allowing the private sector to open their own TV and radio stations is a major obstacle to the development of free media in the country.

Second, the self-censorship that is practised by the journalists themselves and the institutions for which they work is another hurdle for the free press in Jordan. Many of those in charge of the media, especially the state-owned media, are not necessarily in favour of a free press and their appointments are not based on their qualifications, but rather on their loyalties to the government. In fact some have mentioned that self-censorship operates under too rigid constraints. The present situation would allow the media to be more open.

The third reason has to do with the level of professionalism that exists in the media, which is considered to be rather low. This varies from one type of media to another, but is another important reason for the delay in the development of free media.

Fourth, the regional situation, which is characterised by conflict and instability, makes both the state and members of the media very cautious in their attempts to expand the margin of freedom of expression. Because of the fear that external powers might use the free atmosphere to push their own agenda, the state and the media are nervous about unbridled freedom. An example of such external influence would be if some journalists or papers received financial

support from an outside government and then tried to push that government's agenda. For example, it has been determined that some of the government's best-known critics were receiving financial support from Saddam Hussein before his fall.

Fifth, there is also a social dimension, which has to do with the extent to which the public can tolerate strong views and discuss taboo issues of religion and sexuality.

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