

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	466
Land:	Libanon
Kilde:	Freedom House
Titel:	Freedom of the press 2015 – Lebanon
Udgivet:	28. september 2015
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	6. januar 2016



Freedom of the Press 2015 - Lebanon

Publisher [Freedom House](#)

Publication Date 28 September 2015

Cite as Freedom House, *Freedom of the Press 2015 - Lebanon*, 28 September 2015, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/560d1b542f.html> [accessed 11 December 2015]

Disclaimer This is not a UNHCR publication. UNHCR is not responsible for, nor does it necessarily endorse, its content. Any views expressed are solely those of the author or publisher and do not necessarily reflect those of UNHCR, the United Nations or its Member States.

2015 Scores

Press Status: Partly Free

Press Freedom Score (0 = best, 100 = worst): 55

Legal Environment (0 = best, 30 = worst): 20

Political Environment (0 = best, 40 = worst): 21

Economic Environment (0 = best, 30 = worst): 14

Press freedom in Lebanon deteriorated significantly in 2014, though the country's media environment remained among the freest in the region. Violence and instability from the Syrian conflict bled into Lebanon, compounding domestic issues that restricted the press. Authorities reportedly beat, detained, or confiscated equipment while journalists covered bombings or clashes. One journalist was sentenced to jail over political commentary posted online, and several others were summoned to security offices for questioning in similar instances.

Legal Environment

The constitution provides for press freedom, but vague laws banning news deemed contrary to "national ethics" or "religious feelings" remain on the books. It is a crime to insult the head of state or foreign leaders, and journalists charged with press offenses may be prosecuted either in a military tribunal or a special publications court. Lebanese journalists complain that media laws are chaotic, contradictory, and ambiguously worded. Provisions concerning the media, which justify government prosecution of journalists, can be found in the penal code, the Publications Law, the 1994 Audiovisual Media Law, and the military justice code. The Audiovisual Media Law prohibits broadcasting of unauthorized political or religious gatherings, and bans "commentary seeking to affect directly or indirectly the well-being of the nation's economy and finances, material that is propagandistic or promotional, or promotes a relationship with Israel."

In 2014, dozens of civil and criminal legal cases targeted members of print and online media, revealing a politicized judiciary incapable of guaranteeing press freedom. By November, Lebanon's Court of Publications had ruled against journalists and media outlets in 37 out of 40 cases brought, the majority of which involved defamation claims. Verdicts often resulted in exorbitant fines that appeared to be politically motivated. High-profile Lebanese officials brought multiple claims against the same critical outlets throughout the year, using the system to silence

critics, often for personal gain. In February, journalist Mohamed Nazzal and his employer *Al-Akhbar* were each fined 12 million Lebanese pounds (\$7,910) – with interest of 15 million Lebanese pounds (\$9,900) – on defamation charges linked to Nazzal's 2013 article on judicial corruption. Rasha Abou Zaki, another *Al-Akhbar* journalist, faced libel charges for an article she published investigating corruption and embezzlement linked to the Ministry of Finance. In the most egregious instance, Member of Parliament Michel Aoun of the Free Patriotic Movement won nine judgments in the court – eight against the newspaper *Al-Mustaqbal* – and received more than €100,000 (\$136,450) in compensation, 90 percent of which came from *Al-Mustaqbal*. Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil also sued *Executive Magazine* in March following its investigation of alleged malpractice in the oil and gas sector during his tenure as energy minister. Web developer Jean Assy was sentenced to two months in prison in February over his tweets critical of Lebanese president Michel Suleiman, commentary a judge declared "defamation and libel." Although Assy is not a journalist, activists expressed concern over the ruling's inevitable chilling effect on media critical of the authorities. Lebanon has no access to information law.

Created by the 1994 Audiovisual Law, the National Audio-Visual Council (NAVC) is responsible for licensing media outlets. Broadcast licenses are allocated to ensure that each sectarian group is represented in the media landscape. The 1962 Press Law limits the number of political dailies to 110 and requires the minister of information to withdraw unused licenses for use by other prospective applicants. In practice, licenses are rarely withdrawn; instead, owners sell unused licenses for exorbitant prices, making it cost-prohibitive to establish a licensed media outlet without significant resources. The Ministry of Information and the NAVC can refuse to renew licenses for radio and television and require foreign publications to register for a license prior to distribution in the country.

Political Environment

Lebanese law does not restrict access to the internet. In 2012, the Ministry of Information failed to win parliamentary support for a bill that would have allowed the government to restrict online expression. However, the Internal Security Forces' Cyber Crimes Unit detained and questioned bloggers and journalists working for digital outlets throughout 2014, despite the press and publications law, which stipulates that courts – not members of the security sector – oversee investigations of journalists. The armed forces' army intelligence unit also detained an activist over a political cartoon published on the *Beirut Observer* website that was critical of Army Chief General Jean Kahwagi.

The Lebanese censorship bureau has sweeping authority to censor all foreign magazines, books, and films prior to distribution on the basis of defending political or religious views and protecting national security. Religious authorities also wield substantial influence in the review process and are frequently consulted in enacting state bans on publications. There are no clear standards for bans: a film might be banned in cinemas but approved for DVD release; a song title may be omitted on an album cover but not removed from the disc itself. Of the hundreds of publications screened each year, the censorship bureau bans or censors only a handful, though it still butts heads with free-speech activists. In November 2014, activists decried as politically motivated the ban on a film about Iran's 2009 protest movement.

Although Lebanon boasts a diverse media landscape, news content is politicized, and an outlet's coverage tends to reflect the political views of its leadership. Accordingly, journalists can most easily access politicians with a sectarian or political affiliation that aligns with their outlet, as politicians seek out journalists more inclined to agree with their politics. Ambiguous media laws and partisan pressure compel journalists to self-censor, but the spread of online media has helped fill the gap this leaves.

Lebanon fell prey to violence from Syria's civil war in 2014, and journalists are both caught in the crossfire and deliberately targeted. In January, a reporter for the Al-Manar television station was killed in a suicide bombing in a neighborhood of southern Beirut. In February, forces against Syrian president Bashar al-Assad kidnapped a Danish freelancer and a Lebanese-Palestinian journalist in the Lebanese town of Aarsal in the Bekaa Valley; both were reportedly beaten while in custody until their release one month later. Lebanese security forces also clashed with journalists on several occasions. In August, guards assigned to Prime Minister Tammam Salam's security detail attacked reporters covering the election of Lebanon's new Sunni grand mufti, which the premier attended. Hezbollah also attacked members of the press accused of investigating the group's activities, including the detention of an MTV news crew in the Bekaa Valley in March, and the severe beating, verbal abuse, and threatening of a website owner who had criticized the group in July.

Economic Environment

Lebanon's media landscape includes more than a dozen privately owned daily newspapers in English, Arabic, and French, and more than 1,500 weekly and monthly periodicals. Outlets are often affiliated with religious, ethnic, or political groups. Shiite Muslim and Orthodox Christian families own the two largest Arabic-language dailies, *As-Safir* and *An-Nahar*, respectively. Similarly, nine television stations, two digital cable companies, and about 40 radio stations have sectarian affiliation. Nearly three-quarters of the Lebanese population had access to the internet in 2014. Use of digital and social media to disseminate and share news and information is widespread and has expanded access to a range of viewpoints.

Lebanese media observers estimate that advertisement-driven revenue is insufficient to finance most outlets. To compensate, companies rely on donations from politicians or sell shares to well-connected individuals, despite a provision in the law on audiovisual media banning funding from sources external to advertising and production. The Choueiri Group, a marketing and advertising company, manages advertising for 25 satellite channels, 15 print publications, and 10 radio stations, as well as for web portals, cinema, and billboards. *Executive Magazine*, a Lebanese business monthly, estimated that the group controls as much as 70 percent of the advertising in Lebanon.

Copyright notice: © Freedom House, Inc. · All Rights Reserved

Search Refworld

by keyword
and / or country 

[Advanced Search](#) | [Search Tips](#)

Countries

- [Lebanon](#)

Topics

- [Freedom of expression](#)
- [Freedom of information](#)