



Palestinian Center for Development & Media
Freedoms (MADA)

Media Freedom Survey in Palestine

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Preamble:

The Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA) conducted an opinion poll among a representative sample of Palestinian journalists in an attempt to reach a comprehensive and realistic assessment of the current status of media freedoms in Palestine. The survey aims to contribute to a better understanding of the environment in which media outlets and journalists operate within as well as the different factors influencing it. The results are hoped to reveal penitential areas of intervention that could bring about improvements and elevate media freedoms in Palestine.

The poll consisted of 30 questions that were addressed to respondents covering four major areas of journalistic work in Palestine and the working environment in which the media operates. These areas are: the legal environment and regulatory framework, violations and violence towards journalists, the degree of independence of the Palestinian press and the extent of external influences, and the media working environment and the level of self-censorship.

The survey was carried out between 15-12-2017 and 15-1-2018 targeting 300 journalists -both male and female- from the Gaza Strip and West Bank including East Jerusalem. They were guided to fill out an online questionnaire MADA had received a total of 182 completed responses from the targeted journalists, around 9.1% of the Palestinian journalists syndicate (i.e. an estimated of 2,000 journalists members of the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate) work in West Bank and Gaza Strip), noting that, other 300 journalists their membership is still pending approval, whereas, the same amount are not members in the syndicate, according to the director of the Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate, Yousef Maharmeh. The margin of error reached around 7%.

The Main Findings¹:

- 76% of surveyed journalists believe that media laws in Palestine do not promote freedom of the press and 73% say that these laws do not guarantee protection for journalists.
- 85% believe that the Cyber Crimes Law does not promote freedom of the press.
- 89% expressed that there are legal procedures in Palestine that actually prevent journalists from accessing information related to public affairs.
- 91% said that Palestinian journalists are subjugated to violations related to their work.
- 83% say there is a lack of transparency and fair means to prosecuting public authorities that violate media freedoms.
- 90% of journalists said that they practice self-censorship out of fear of being interrogated by security agencies in Palestine.
- 89% of journalists said that they practiced self-censorship out of fear of societal pressure or public scrutiny.
- 83% believe that the media in Palestine is not independent; 97% believe that it is influenced by political and partisan biases, while 87% believe that it is influenced by the interests of the private sector.
- 92% say there is mismanagement on the part of media organizations that negatively affects the level of professionalism practiced.

Distribution of the Surveyed Sample:

First: By Gender

The surveyed sample consisted of 112 males (representing 61.5%) and 70 females (38.5%).

Second: By Age Group:

The surveyed sample can be divided into the following five age groups:

- Category 1: Ages 20-24= 43 (23.6%).
- Category 2: Ages 25-29= 45 (24.7%).
- Category 3: Ages 30-34= 44 (24.2%).
- Category 4: Ages 35-39= 20 (11%).

¹ In this section, percentages were rounded up to the nearest whole number. The values presented with further decimals are included in the body of the report as well as in the detailed lists enclosed for your review.

- Category 5: Ages 40 and above= 40 (16.4%).

Third: According to Sector

1. Public Sector: 46 individuals (25.3%).
2. Private Sector: 106 individuals (58.2%).
3. Civil Society/ Non-Governmental: 30 individuals (16.5%).

Fourth: According to Occupational Level

1. Employer or Self-Employed: 43 individuals (23.6%).
2. Permanent /Full Time Employees:118 individuals (64.9%).
3. Part-time Employees: 21 individuals (11.5%).

Fifth: According to Geographical Area

1. West Bank & Jerusalem: 142 individuals (78%).
2. Gaza Strip: 40 individuals (22%).

Sixth: According to type of Residency Area (i.e. city, village, or refugee camp)

1. City: 121 individuals (66.5%).
2. Village: 47 individuals (25.8%).
3. Refugee Camp: 14 individuals (7.7%).

Seventh: According to Educational Level

1. Diploma: 13 individuals (7.1%).
2. B.A.: 114 individuals (62.6%).
3. M.A.: 39 individuals (21.4%).
4. PhD: 16 individuals (8.8%).

Section One: The Legal Environment and Regulatory Framework

Media Licensing Procedures:

63.2% of all surveyed journalists believe that the existing licensing procedures for media outlets and newspapers in Palestine to be unfair and influenced by political affiliation (i.e. “politicized”). Only 27.4% of the respondents said that these licensing procedures were fair and non-politicized, while 9.3% said they do not know.

In the Gaza Strip, 55% qualify the licensing procedures to be fair and non-politicized, compared to mere 19.7% of surveyed their nationals in the West Bank.

On the other hand, the percentage of surveyed responds that consider the licensing system to be unfair and politicized reached 69.7% in the West Bank and 40% in the Gaza Strip.

When analyzing the survey results based on the employment level, it is worth noting that the majority of managers and/or owners of media outlets (58.6%) believe that it is in fact unfair and politicized. This category of journalists can be considered the most experienced among the surveyed journalists and may have had a first-hand encounter with licensing procedures.

Are private media outlets subject to a fair tax law?

A majority of 46.2% of the respondents said that private media is subject to an unfair tax law, compared to 26.9% who believe it is fair. It is notable the high percentage of those who answered "I do not know" reaching 27.9%.

According to geographical area, 57% in the Gaza Strip stated that the tax law was fair, compared to 43% in the West Bank.

On the other hand, 30% of all respondents and 27% of those in the West Bank believe that the media is subject to a fair tax law.

Once considering the results based on occupational level, 41.4% of surveyed employers in the West Bank and 31.7% in the Gaza Strip maintained that the tax law was in fact fair.

It was also observed that a high percentage of respondents did not know whether the law was fair or not, especially among employers reaching 26.8%

Media Laws in Palestine and its Role in Promoting Freedom of the Press:

The existence of a legal system that protects journalistic work and one that keeps up with its evolving needs is considered one of the most important foundations for strengthening the freedom of the press in any country.

When asked about the extent to which Palestinian media specific laws are able to protect and strengthen freedom of the press, 76.4% of respondents said that media laws do not promote freedom of the press in Palestine, compared to a minority of 23.1% who stated that it in fact does.

Based on geographical area, 35% of surveyed journalists in Gaza believe the media laws enhance freedom of the press (5% strongly agreeing, while the remaining 30% agreeing to a certain extent). In return, 19.9% of the surveyed sample in the West Bank answering similarly to their peers in Gaza (4.3% strongly agreeing, while 15.6% agreeing to a certain extent).

As can be observed, of those who stated that media laws do enhance freedom of the press, the majority did not unequivocally support that statement by answering “to a certain extent”.

On the other hand, the overwhelming majority of respondents do not believe that media laws protect or enhance freedom of the press in Palestine, namely 79.6% in the West Bank and 65% in Gaza.

The General Legal Environment (Laws and Procedures) and Its Role in Strengthening Freedom of the Press

In the same context, the general legal environment (laws and procedures) directly affects public freedoms and freedom of the press in particular.

In this regard, 81.3% of the respondents considered that the general legal environment in Palestine does not promote freedom of the press. This brings to light a widespread dissatisfaction among members of the media (journalists) with the legal environment in its current form in Palestine.

In the West Bank 83.8% expressed their dissatisfaction with the general legal environment, compared to 72.5% in Gaza.

Among all surveyed employers, 85.4% of expressed the same sentiment.

Do Media Organizations in Palestine suffer from weaknesses? Does that affect their professionalism?

The answers to this question in the survey gave out some of the most significant results. The overwhelming majority of journalists (91.7%) said that media organizations suffer from mismanagement which affects their professionalism. This is compared to a very small minority of 4.9% who say that there is no mismanagement in media organizations that affects its professionalism.

These results are a clear indication of journalists’ awareness and recognition of the importance of proper management in media institutions and its effects on the level of professionalism practiced. It may also be interpreted that journalists perceive mismanagement in their institutions as yet additional obstacle to the fulfillment of media freedoms in Palestine.

According to geographical area, 92.2% of surveyed journalists in the West Bank recognize the negative effects of mismanagement in media outlets on their level of professionalism. Similarly, 90% of journalists in Gaza concur with this statement.

What is rather astounding about the results from this survey question is the fact that 90.2% of employers, supposedly the individuals either primarily or partially responsible for managerial tasks, admit to mismanagement in their own institutions. They also agree that this affects the level of professionalism practiced. This goes to show that there is somewhat of a consensus

among journalists regarding the need to improve management of media bodies in order to elevate the level of professionalism practiced.

Do media laws impose protection on Palestinian journalists?

The results of the survey showed that 73.1% of the journalists believe that media laws enforce in Palestine do not guarantee protection to journalists, while 24.7% said they did.

It is noteworthy that there is a strong agreement among surveyed journalists across the different occupational level on this particular issue; with 74.2% of the permanent employees, 66.6% of part-time employees, and 73.2% of employers all agreeing that that current laws enforced do not provide protection to journalists.

In view of the fact that 81.3% of the respondents also said that the legal environment in Palestine does not promote freedom of the press, indicates strongly that the legal system in Palestine needs to be reviewed and that it may in fact be considered one of the main obstacles to the hindrance of media freedoms.

The impact of the cyber-crimes law on media freedoms

The recently adopted and controversial cyber-crimes decree, adopted and published in the Palestinian gazette on 09th of July 2017, raised concerns and was met with opposition from a wide spectrum of journalists and human rights organizations who identified, within its clauses, a breach of freedom of expression and opinion. It has also been widely recognized to as a tool to oppress media freedoms and freedom of the press in Palestine, which was resulted in the formation of a committee demanding the immediate freeze and amendment of the decree.

In this regard, 84.6% of those polled believe that the Cyber- Crimes Law does not promote media freedoms in Palestine, compared with a minority of only 12.6% who believe that this law enhances media freedoms.

Are there legal procedures that prevent the media from accessing information related to public affairs?

It is undeniable that the obstruction to access information pertaining to public affairs directly affects human rights and the interests of the citizens of a particular country. On the contrary, allowing citizen to access public information not only promotes transparency but it also a pillar of democracy and a tool that ensures the involvement of citizens in political and social affairs.

When asked about this, an overwhelming majority of 88.5% of respondents said that there are legal procedures that prevent the Palestinian media from accessing information related to public affairs, compared to only 8.6% who denied the existence of such legal procedures, while 2.7% of the sample answered with “I don’t know”.

The percentage of those who believe that such procedures exist among Gazan journalists reached 95% and 86.6% among those in the West Bank.

Protection of the sources of information and media freedoms in Palestine

The protection of information resources and its disclosure to journalists are important factors in enhancing the press' ability to work freely, especially when it comes to issues of corruption and misuse of public funds.

In this regard, 66% of the sample considered protecting the sources of information vital to protecting and enhancing media freedoms in Palestine.

In this regard, it is noteworthy that only a small percentage (25.8%, a quarter of the respondents) believes that the protection of information sources has nothing to do with the promotion of media freedoms or in other words that they do not believe it affects media freedoms. 8.2% responded with "I do not know".

Such results raise the question of the extend of knowledge among journalists on the link between the protection of information sources and the protection of media freedoms in Palestine and perhaps even in their daily practices.

The Second Section: Assaults and violations against journalists

Are journalists exposed to violations by the Palestinian security services in relation to their press work?

This question attempts to reveal whether journalists are subjected to violations by Palestinian security services in connection to their journalistic work. 90.7% of the sample said that journalists were subjected to violations by the Palestinian security services in connection to their journalistic work, compared to a minority of 7.1 % who said that journalists are not subjected to violations in the same context.

The percentage of those who think such violations exist in the Gaza Strip rises to 95% and 89.4% in the West Bank.

In addition, 95.2% of employers stated that journalists are subjected to violations in connection to their journalistic work, which shows a near consensus among them on the issues. This reveals the general situation and the circumstances under which the media and journalists operate within both the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Do media organizations protect and defend journalists exposed to violations?

In contrast, 45.6% of the respondents said that media organizations do not protect and/or defend journalists, compared to a slightly higher percentage of 51.7% of the surveyed sample who said that media organizations protect and defend their journalists.

As for those who said that media organizations do protect and defend journalists, the majority (44% out of the 51.7%) stated that they "protect journalists to a certain extent", while the remaining 7.7% were convinced that media organizations do fully protect their journalists. This raises questions regarding the extent, capability and limitations of media institutions in protecting their employees.

What supports these results is the fact that 41.5% of employers themselves acknowledged that media organizations do not protect journalists and do not defend them if they were exposed to violations.

To what extent are journalists aware of their rights and duties?

The survey found that 67% of the surveyed sample believes that journalists are aware of their rights and duties, while 29.7% disagreed with that statement.

However, out of those who agreed with the statement, the majority answered that they agreed only “to a certain extent”, which begs the question as to what extent journalists are really aware of their rights and duties. This issue may constitute a major obstacle for journalists in their work and in defending their rights and media freedoms in Palestine. It also holds especially true as a weakness in prosecuting the perpetrators of these violations. Additionally, it reveals an environment of impunity is still the prevailing feature in attacks against journalists and media freedoms, which was re-emphasized by respondents in response to another question in this regard.

Are perpetrators of violations against media freedoms prosecuted transparently and fairly?

82.5% of the respondents said that the Palestinian entities that violate media freedoms are not prosecuted in a transparent and fair manner, compared to a very small minority of 10.9% who said that those who violate media freedoms are being prosecuted transparently and fairly.

Failure to prosecute violators of media freedoms is not only a breach to Human Rights and prevents the attainment of justice but is also an indirect authorization to continue committing such violations.

83% of the respondents in the West Bank said that the Palestinian perpetrators are not prosecuted in a transparent and fair manner, whereas 80% of Gaza Strip and 85.3% of the surveyed employers in both geographical regions expressed the same opinion.

To what extent are violations against journalists circulated in a neutral and transparent manner?

The publication of violations against journalists in a neutral and transparent manner is the first step towards confronting and curbing these attacks. Once such violations are exposed raises public opinion awareness on the issue, which may culminate to public pressure and opposition against these actions and their perpetrators. This can also provide incentive to the perpetrators, whether as individuals or as institutional bodies, to re-assess their course of action and even make positive reforms.

In this regard, 76.9% of respondents said that human rights organizations publish violations against journalists impartially and transparently, while 18.7% believe that human rights organizations do not publish violations impartially and transparently.

However, it is also noteworthy out of the 76.9% that supported the performance of human right organization 59.9% (i.e the majority) replied with “somewhat agree” as opposed to an absolute agreement, which indicates the inconsistency and differing policy of publishing violations in a fair and transparent manner.

In the same context, the results showed that 86.3% of the surveyed sample believes that Palestinian Authority (PA) institutions do not publish their violations against journalists in a neutral and transparent manner, while a mere 9.3% believes the opposite.

There is somewhat of an agreement in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip on notion that the PA abstains from publishing violations committed against journalists by its different agencies and the transparency by its violations are reported. The percentage of those in Gaza supporting this statement reached 90% and compared to 85.2% in the West Bank.

It is interesting to note that about a third of respondents (32.4%) said that media outlets themselves do not publish violations against journalists in a neutral and transparent manner, while 64.3% think they do.

The percentages of those who believe that media institutions do not publish violations impartially and transparently reached 37.5% in Gaza and 30.9% in the West Bank.

As for the results of the three questions that were addressed to the research sample regarding the publication of violations by human rights organizations, institutions of the Palestinian Authority and media institutions, the human rights organizations ranked first with 76.9%, followed by media institutions with 64.3%, then and with huge margin, only 9.3% said that PA institutions publish violations of journalists impartially and transparently.

The third section: Media independence and how distanced it is from being influenced.

Is the Palestinian media independent?

An overwhelming majority of respondents (83%) stated that Palestinian media is not independent, compared to 17% who believe it is independent (15.4% out of the 17% said it was “somewhat independent”) and only 1.6% asserting its independent.

The percentage of those who believe that Palestinian media is not independent reached 90% in the Gaza Strip compared to 81% in the West Bank.

These findings seem logical when linked to the results of different survey questions addressing issues such as the media’s level of professionalism, the publication of violations to journalists, the difficulty in accessing and disseminating information on public affairs, the weak protection of journalists, the wide range of violations they face, and legal obstacles and other issues that directly or indirectly to undermining the media’s independence in Palestine.

Is the Palestinian media influenced by specific political partisan affiliations and agendas?

In a related context, the results showed that 96.7% of respondents believe that the Palestinian media is influenced by certain political partisan agendas, and only 2.1% asserted that the media is not influenced such factors.

This percentage was very close among respondents from both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, with 96.5% and 96.5% respectively saying that the Palestinian press was influenced by specific partisan agendas, while 100% of employers and managers acknowledged that the Palestinian media is in fact influenced by specific political and partisan affiliations and associated agendas.

Is the Palestinian media influenced by the interests of the private sector?

The results showed that an overwhelming majority of 87.4% believe that the Palestinian media is also affected by the agendas of the private sector, which was also expressed by 85.4% of surveyed employers, compared to 10.4% of the poll sample denying this influence.

Furthermore, 88.5% of respondents agreed that published materials and publication policies in general controlled or influenced by interest relationships between media institution administrators and businesses. Only 4.4% of respondents dismissed this notion and said that publication policies are not subjected to interest relationship. Meanwhile, 7.1% said they do not know.

The percentage of those who believe in the existence of such influences on Palestinian media institutions rises to 92.9% among male journalists and 81.2% female journalists

The percentage of respondents in the Gaza Strip to support this notion rose to 95%, compared to 86.7% in the West Bank.

It is noticeable that 85.4% of the employers themselves (i.e. media policy and decision makers) believe that the publication agenda is subjected to certain benefit relationships that involves owners or upper management levels of media institutions. This reveals the existence of a real and significant, which inevitably affects the level of professionalism and objectivity of the media and freedom of the press in general.

To what extent do Palestinian Media outlets disclose its editorial policies to the public?

In connection with the preceding findings, the absence of published editorial policies by media outlets in Palestine further exacerbates the influence of external factors on publication policies, agendas and freedom of the press in general.

In this regard, a majority of 68.1% of all respondents denied that media outlets disclose their editorial policies to the general public, whereas 25.8% reported the opposite, and 6.1% said they do not know.

However, 22.5% out of the 25.8% who believe media outlets disclose their editorial policies chose the answer of "somewhat agreeable", leaving only 3.3% who said that there are declared editorial policies and opted for the answer of "very agreeable".

Furthermore, 70.4% of the respondents in the West Bank said that the editorial policies of Palestinian media outlets are not disclosed to the public whereas 60% of samples in Gaza reported the same.

On the other hand, the percentage of those who confirm that editorial policies of media outlets are disclosed to the public reached 35% in the Gaza Strip and 23.2% in the West Bank.

In the survey, 58.5% of employers (ie, owners or decision-makers) reported that editorial policies in Palestinian media outlets are not publicly disclosed, and only 34.1% of employers said that editorial policies were disclosed to the public.

Section Four: the media working environment, self-censorship and objectivity

How influential is the working environment of the Palestinian media on its development?

86.3% of respondents agreed that the working environment within which the media operates negatively impacts the development of the media, compared to 10.5% of the respondents who believe that it does not adversely affect the development of the media.

It is also noticeable that an overwhelming majority of employers (92.7%) agreed that the environment within Palestinian media institutions has a negative impact on media development.

Professionalism encourages media freedoms

The vast majority (93.4%) of the surveyed journalists agreed that professionalism actually incentivizes media freedoms and 87.8% of employers agreed with is statement. This is compared to mere 5% of respondents who did not agree and 2.8% said they do not know.

Independent decision-making with media institutions enhances freedom of the press

A large majority of the respondents agreed that the independence of the decision making within media institutions enhances freedom of the press, with 91.7% concurring, compared to only 5.5% who do not agree.

Additionally, the overwhelming majority of employers (92.7%) also supported this statement.

How committed are journalists and media institutions in general to the work ethics associated with professionalism?

While 58.2% said that journalists are committed to the ethics of professional work, 40.1% of respondents said that journalists do not adhere to such ethics.

The 40.1% who said that journalists do not abide by the ethics of professional work is a rather high and disturbing percentage worth observing.

When asked about the extent to which media outlets are committed to these work ethics, the respondents were split into nearly two equal halves between agreement and disagreement on this statement.

49.4% said that Palestinian media organizations are committed to professional work ethics. The majority of those (45.6% out of 49.4%) answered "somewhat agree" and only 3.8% were very affirmative in their response and chose "strongly agree".

In contrast, 47.2% of the sample considered that media organizations are not committed to these ethics, which reveals an imbalance regarding the extent of commitment of media professionals and media organizations to work ethics.

On the other hand, 64.3% of respondents said that "journalists are cautious in transmitting information or publishing information that may harm citizens and society."

However, a considerable proportion (34.1%) said that journalists are not careful in publishing information that may harm citizens and society. This indicates a limited commitment to the ethical code of journalistic work, affecting the structure of journalism and its intended service to the community.

If we correlated the results that reflect a "fairly good" commitment to working ethics with previous results indicating the lack of independence of media outlets and the extent to which these outlets are influenced with political views and other factors, this all can explain the shift from adhering to the ethical code and working ethics of professionalism. In other words, non-compliance with ethical codes may not exactly be a personal choice on the part of journalists (or even whole media outlets), but rather the natural result of the negative environment within which the media operates. As the results of this survey go to show, the media suffers from lack of independence, lack of sufficient protection to journalists, as well as dysfunction in the management of media outlets.

All these factors reveal certain obstacles that hinder the development of the Palestinian media and disables the means to achieving a higher level of freedom of the press.

The practice of self-censorship among journalist out of fear from public scrutiny or being targeted by security agencies.

In this poll, three questions addressed issues related to self-censorship, the extent to which it is practiced, the major reasons behind it, as well as the limitations felt by journalists to be able to discuss political topics freely.

An overwhelming majority of the respondents (88.5%) said that journalists practice self-censored out of fear of societal criticism or pressure – especially in topics such as religion, customs and traditions ...", while only 7.7% felt that journalists do not practice self-censored for these reasons.

The percentage of those who believes that journalists practice self-censorship due to societal factors reached 90.1% in the West Bank and 90% in the Gaza Strip.

When journalists were asked whether they practiced self-censorship out of fear of being pursued or targeted by security agencies (otherwise known as "security accountability"), 90.1% of respondents agreed. The proportion of those who supported this statement reached 95% in Gaza

Strip and 88.7% in the West Bank. On the other hand, only 8.8% denied that journalists practiced self-censorship due to factor.

While the results provided by poll show that both societal pressures and fear of being targeted by security agencies play a role in journalists practicing self-censorship, the one pertaining to security agencies is slightly higher and appears to be a major issue in Palestine.

Finally, similar to reasons above, 91.2% of respondents reported that journalists practice self-censorship when discussing political issues, while only 8.1% disagreed.