

Press Freedom in Lebanon

SUMMARY

In recent years, the state of press freedom in Lebanon has significantly deteriorated, facilitated both by the **country's legal framework and its violative practices**. Particularly since protests began in October 2019, there has been a **steady rise in incidents of violence against journalists and media workers**, including targeted attacks and the excessive use of force by Lebanese security forces with the **use of rubber bullets**. There has also been a **rise in attacks on media outlets and newsrooms** by security forces and partisan groups associated with political parties. In addition to physical attacks, journalists critical of the Lebanese government and those reporting on corruption and human rights violations have been subjected to **prosecution on various charges, most notably defamation and false news**. Criticism of public figures and political parties by media outlets and social media users has been curtailed as well. Authorities **frequently summon journalists and social media users for questioning** about articles and social media posts critical of local authorities. Lebanese authorities have also **utilized surveillance technologies** to further rights violations against journalists.

In addition to these violative practices, **multiple laws and legal frameworks further restrict and have a chilling effect on press freedom** in Lebanon. For example, the country's **Penal Code** contains numerous articles with ambiguous language that have been employed to curtail the work of journalists, including provisions on provoking sectarian tensions and insulting the President. Lebanon's **Press Law**, passed in 1962, furthers discriminatory and contradictory requirements to become a licensed journalist. Other laws, including the **Audiovisual Broadcast Law of 1994** and the **Satellite Broadcast Law of 1996**, restrict

programming and the ability to establish television and radio stations. Lebanon's more recent **E-Transactions Law of 2018** allows the shutting down and censoring of websites. The Lebanese government is currently debating a new draft media law that would punish allegations of slander and defamation with fines and prison sentences. 🗡️

Recommendations

- Ensure that journalists and media workers are able to practice their professions in a free and safe environment by halting attacks and the use of excessive force against journalists and media workers and by investigating all cases of attacks, harassment, and intimidation.
- Bring to a halt the practice of calling in journalists, bloggers, and social media users for questioning before the Cybercrimes Bureau and other security agencies, and drop all charges against journalists prosecuted for doing their work and exercising their right to freedom of expression.
- Amend all laws and legal frameworks that unduly restrict press freedom and the profession of journalism, including Articles 384, 385, and 582 of the Penal Code; Articles 22 and 77 of the 1962 Press Law; certain provisions of the Audiovisual Broadcast Law of 1994, the Satellite Broadcast Law of 1996, and the E-Transactions Law of 2018, and bring them in line with Lebanon's international obligations, including the right to freedom of expression under Article 19 of the ICCPR.