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The Effectiveness of Journalistic Associations and Syndicates in Algeria: A Survey Study on Algerian Journalists

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the development of journalistic associations and syndicates in Algeria since independence, as well as explains the most essential shortcomings and difficulties of these entities in Algeria which could undermine journalistic practice's improvement and prosperity. The study sought to evaluate and assess the level of journalistic associations by using an online survey of 25 members of media associations and unions to explore its effectiveness on Algeria's media landscape. As a result, journalistic association and syndicate demonstrated the critical needs for a more democratic environment in order to carry out their duty effectively without any restrictions, based on the autonomy, pluralism, and diversity in Algeria media landscape.

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АНОТАЦІЯ

У цій статті розглядається розвиток журналістських асоціацій та синдикатів в Алжирі з моменту здобуття незалежності, а також пояснюються найсуттєвіші недоліки та труднощі в діяльності цих утворень в Алжирі, які можуть підірвати вдосконалення та процвітання журналістської практики. Це дослідження прагнуло оцінити рівень журналістських асоціацій, використовуючи онлайн-опитування 25 членів асоціацій та спілок засобів масової інформації для вивчення його ефективності у медіаландшафті Алжиру. У результаті журналістська асоціація та синдикат продемонстрували гостру потребу у більш демократичному середовищі для ефективного виконання своїх обов'язків без жодних обмежень на основі автономії, плюралізму та різноманітності медіа-ландшафту Алжиру.

КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА: медіа, журналістські асоціації та синдикати, підзвітність медіа.

Introduction

In some countries, the state has exclusive control over the media by dictating the terms of public debate and setting more onerous statutory regulations under the guise of protecting the audience from manipulation, potential harm or legitimate private interests, that may undermine the journalistic practice and reduce media freedom, those countries characterized through limited freedom of information or expression, restricting licensing of media system, violations of international human rights conventions. While there is another indirect way used to impair journalistic practice and media performance, through several barriers on journalistic association and syndicate which strives to uphold the quality of journalism and support the responsibility of mass media throughout fostering pluralism to acting as the fourth estate and providing a market for ideas and opinions. In this vein, the Algerian media landscape experienced various attempts to promote media freedom and independence, following the 2019 revolution, which resulted in the adoption of a new constitution subjected to support various freedoms and diversity, coincidentally with huge criticism from many academics and journalists, to Algerian system due to ineffectiveness of reforms that appeared to uphold and support the journalistic practice, in contrast to the shortcomings and the barriers that restricted their activity due to several inadequacies that's lead us to propose this significant hypothesis; that *journalistic associations and syndicates in Algeria face a number of constraints and shortcomings, which have hampered their efficacy in improving journalistic activity in Algeria.*

Literature review

Journalistic unions have striven to play unique and vital roles in promoting democracy in communities around the world, historically. Journalistic unions and associations were formed to help improve and protect media landscape by supporting journalist's activities and promoting ethical standards. In 1879 the first journalism associations emerged in France. Whereas the media that time endeavored to set journalistic organizations and syndicates to fill the gaps and the lack of producing, practicing, and creating different media materials and support freedoms (Mahdi, 2022). This high level of responsibility towards journalistic practice led many media scholars to consider journalistic unions as essential entities to develop media landscape in this way Petra defined journalists' unions and associations as *entities that protect the labor, social and professional status of all employees in the media, through social dialogue, improvement of media regulation and collective agreements* (Petra, 2022). These entities have become influential actors in the professionalization of journalistic activities, by empowering journalists to make their demands publicly, share their ideas, promote, and obtain legal recognition for their profession. That helped organize not only discourses and practices but also communication systems of solidarity at both national and international levels (Florence, 2020). Most journalistic unions' initiatives that seek to protect and strengthen journalists' rights and freedoms have frequently pursued similar

goals around the world by developing emergency responses as relocating threatened journalists, emergency funding, legal assistance, and safety training. In some cases, they have resulted in the conviction of suspects in journalist murders, the release or imprisonment of journalists, and significant public figures around the world. This could help retain the credibility and editorial independence of the media. A beneficial impact of media associations on media freedom is the moderation of state interference in the media field. A majority of press councils have been indeed created to avoid some state regulation. According to Kleinstaubert "this type of association is working under the 'shadow of the state', meaning that all sides act under the threat that the state may intervene if no compromise is found or public interests are seriously threatened" (Kleinstaubert, 2004).

Media associations and syndicates in Algeria: a hard path to freedom

Media associations and syndicates in Algeria began shortly after Algeria's independence in 1962, with the formation of the first union of journalists on July 11, 1964, this union was financially and ideologically supported by the Algerian government and the Algerian liberation party FLN. However, the main purpose as mentioned in the union's fundamental law was to advocate and assist the communist revolution by devoting journalists to publishing information that promotes and raises public awareness of socialist philosophy (bin Bouza, 1996). Subsequently, in 1984, the Algerian system established the "High Council of Information" as the first media accountability authority in Algeria, in order to strengthen and regulate public-sector media activities (Mostefaoui, 2013). This body's structure, which was clearly linked to the FLN's party framework, specified its tasks as "to ensure the equality of the right to information for all citizens in all parts of the country, as well as to defend the various components of the social group, especially the younger generation against any attack on national identity and values". This council had a variety of responsibilities such as ensuring equal access to media for all Algerian citizens and promoting the dissemination of accurate information that supports national unity and identity (Badji, 2021). Meanwhile, many attempts to form journalist associations persisted. This time with a number of independent journalists that were able to form the so-called free journalist's movement on May 9, 1988, as a result of a loss of trust in the Algerian ex-union of journalists (the latter had become more concerned with political and ideological interests rather than motivated to support media freedom or journalistic practice). However, for the first time, Algerian journalists highlighted the obstacles that impacted their practice, such as difficulties in accessing information sources and several bureaucratic cases, as well as the arbitrary pressures by their leaders in editorial officials, marginalization, censorship, with a slew of restrictions inside media companies (Charef, 1989).

During Algeria's democratic prosperity at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, the journalistic movement contributed and enriched the discussion of media law, which has been later enacted. In the meantime, due to various ambiguities and restrictions in it, the press freedom movement urged the authority to review the citizen's right to objective, reliable information, as well as the freedom of journalistic practice, and to ensure mass media independence. This period witnessed, the repeal of laws enacted by the single-party system, while, the Superior Council of Information (CSI) was established by decree No. 90-07 on 3 April 1990, pertaining to information as a regulatory mechanism, in this way article 59 of the 1990 Information code defines the CSI's rules as to ensure the independence and impartiality of public sector in audio broadcasting and television bodies, as well as the autonomy of the sector's professions maintain a degree of autonomy in programming and productions (Brahimi, 2000). Furthermore, an Association of Algerian Journalists was founded on February 3, 1992, by independent journalists who resolved to establish a professional association to fill the void left by the Free Journalists Movement. It was formed during Algeria's media plurality and political diversity, which coincided shortly with the suspension of the electoral process in January 1992 and the implementation of emergency provisions in February 1992. As a result of those unexpected circumstances, the security situation deteriorated, and the wave of terrorism claimed the lives of

numerous journalists, most notably “Taher Jalut”. This association has a partisan and political tendency, some of its members have used it for personal and political advantage. Due to that and numerous disagreements between members and the association's general secretary, the members submitted their resignation, and the Association was disbanded on July 5, 1995 (Mehanna, 1995). Despite efforts in 1998 to establish a new association called National Union of Journalists (SNJ), this endeavor failed, because of the hazardous conditions as a result of the country's security state during that decade. This league did not achieve any improvement, although the General Assembly set up many principles which included promoting professional practice, securing journalists' activities, raising the professional level, and strengthening ties with Arab journalists (bin Zaidoun, 2000). While, on May 28, 2009, the Algerian Journalists Federation was established, and overseen by the General Union of Algerian Workers (UGTA). The federation's primary objective is to enhance the socio-professional conditions of journalists. In addition, the Autonomous National Council of Algerian Journalists (CNJA) was established on May 2, 2019. This independent council aspires to improve journalistic practice as well as create a framework for the defence of the professional journalistic practice in Algeria. Recently, after the Algerian popular revolt on February 22, 2019, the Collective of Independent Algerian Journalists (COJAA) appeared; this association seeks to establish media freedom and freedom of expression, as well as to defend journalists who have been detained or imprisoned in Algeria (Fengler, S., Kurkowski, I., & Lengauer, M., 2021). After decades Algerian media landscape still suffers from the absence of strong journalistic association and syndicate or media accountability that could uphold journalistic practice and media responsibility.

Method

The data that is used in this article originate from online survey on the views of Algerian journalists about the effectiveness of journalistic unions and syndicates that exist in Algeria's media landscape, in order to determine the shortcomings and challenges on it. A web-based survey was used for e-surveying based on developments in modern communication technologies. To target the sampling objectives, we relied on a purposeful sampling that included various journalists and academics that are involved in and have experience with journalistic unions and syndicates in Algeria, that would be able to share the risks based on their work-related experience. Purposive sampling known as *“elements selected for the sample is chosen by the judgment of the researcher. Researchers often believe that they can obtain a representative sample by using a sound judgment, which will result in saving time and money”* (Black, 2010). Hannes also defined and highlighted the benefits of purposeful sampling, such as *“The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling. Studying information-rich cases yields”* (Hannes, 2011). In order to achieve the objective of this research we used Google Forms Questioning to conduct an online survey. Anomalies and cases with incomplete data were not found, resulting in a final sample size of 25 participants for the study.

Results and Discussion

In response to the hypothesis that assumes journalistic unions and associations in Algeria subjected to several impediments and difficulties that led to significant impact on their efforts to support journalistic practice, the following research questions were devised:

RQ 1. How would you rate the effectiveness of Algerian journalistic Associations and syndicates to hold Algerian mass media to account?

RQ 2. Does the activity of journalist's Unions and Associations or syndicates support and advocate ethical standards among journalists?

RQ 3. How would you rate the importance of journalistic association and syndicate and accountability in your workplace by establishing a set of value professional standards?

RQ 4. What are the greatest difficulties for the Algerian media unions and associations or syndicates?

RQ 5. What are the most significant challenges to Journalistic association and syndicate and accountability in Algeria?

The efficiency of the journalistic associations and syndicates to hold Algerian mass media to account

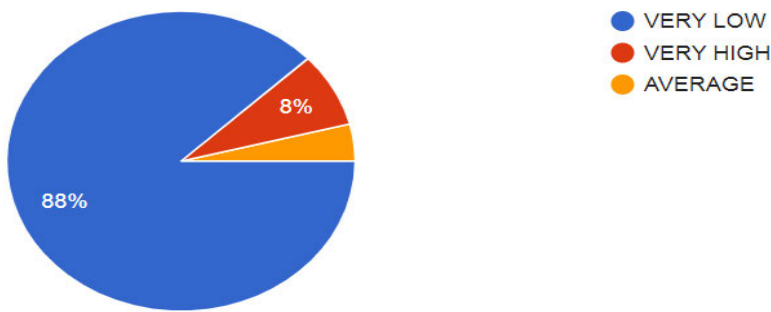


Figure 1. Efficiency of the journalistic associations and syndicates in Algeria.

According to the majority of respondents, 88% of reviews from the targeted sample show that the media associations and syndicates in Algeria have not the ability to hold the mass media accountable due to a variety of factors, implying the ineffectiveness of those associations in evaluating the quality of journalistic practice, which Algerians desperately need, especially given Algerian media outlets' widespread and extreme reliance on sensational content has a negative influence on audiences' awareness and the credibility of mass media in Algeria.

The activity of journalist's unions and associations or syndicates to support and advocate ethical standards among journalists.

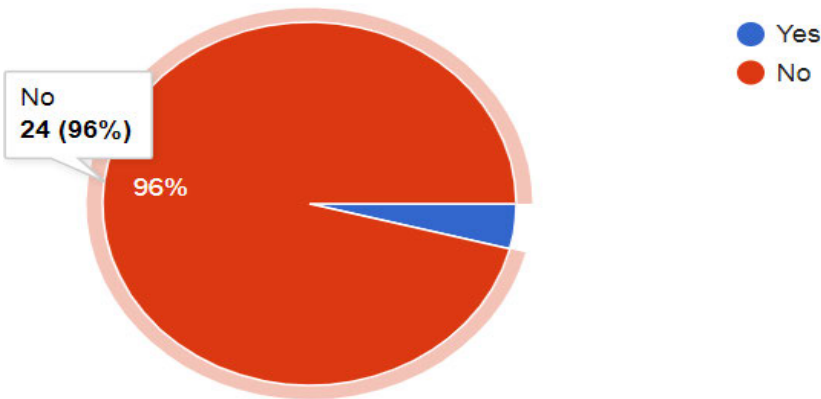


Figure 2. Activity of journalist's unions and syndicates to support ethical standards.

The vast majority of participants (96%) believe that journalistic associations and syndicates' activities did not upraise ethical standards among Algerian journalists, owing to the failure to establish a general code of conduct for Algerian journalists in various mass media. The lack of self-independent standards to serve as a general reference for journalists resulted in a persistent breach of journalistic practice, especially with the absence media regulatory authorities' rules to review media content. Thus, the important of code of behavior in Algeria's media landscape is crucial to developing and perfecting the journalistic practice.

The importance of media accountability in the workplace by establishing a set of value professional standards.

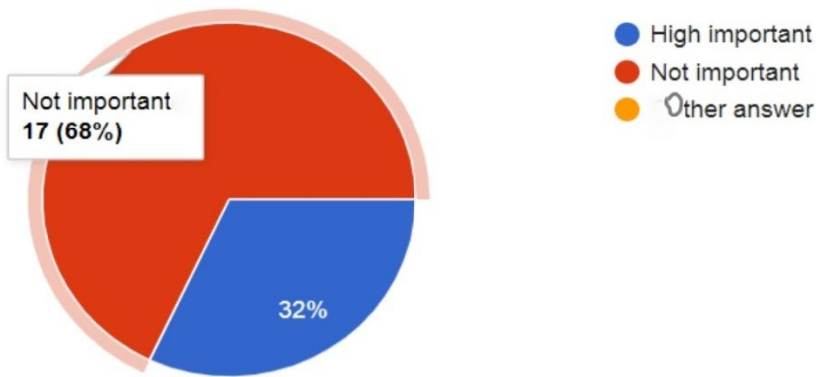


Figure 3. Importance of media accountability to set ethical standards in Algeria media outlets.

According to 68% of our respondents, media outlets in Algeria did not place a premium on the establishment of a set of value and ethical standards for journalists in their editorial office, caused to the media content in Algeria is oriented to serve a specific agenda, this kind of mass media is not required to set such standards that may let the journalists be more productive and free in their practice, in contrast to a western journalistic value which supports media freedom and independence. While (32%) of participants see that ethical standards are highly valued in their workplace, this leads to ambiguity and contradiction when we look at the media landscape in Algeria which is full of sensational journalism and far away from objectivity and other principles of professional journalism practice.

The greatest difficulties in the Algerian journalistic unions and associations or syndicates.

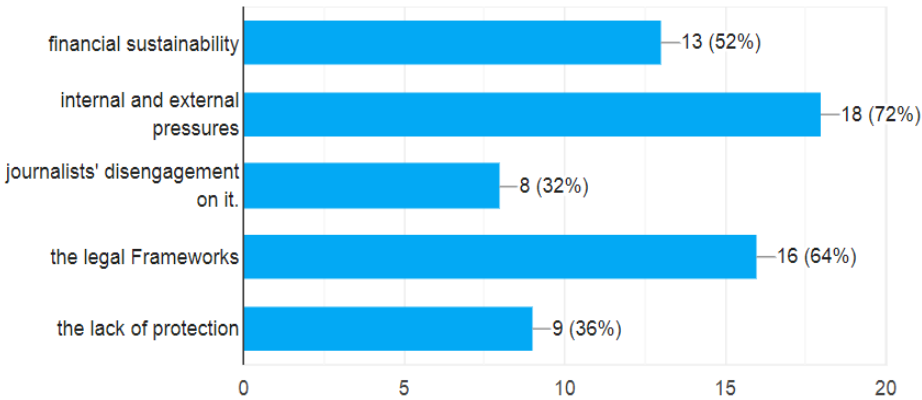


Figure 4. Different difficulties in the Algerian Journalistic Unions and associations or syndicates.

According to 72 % of participants Algerian journalistic unions and syndicates are subjected to extreme pressures whether been internal or external that's negatively impacted the performance of those entities to develop and upraise the journalistic practice. Meanwhile (64%) emphasized also that the legal frameworks as other obstacles that have hampered the activities of those unions and syndicates in Algeria due to some legislation restricted and deprived to support the development of media independence and freedom. Furthermore, financial sustainability has a huge impact on the existence of these autonomous bodies. Yet, a lack of financial resources and flexibility would lead to their end, as happened in Algerian media landscape. While, some of the respondent's sample highlighted the greatest difficulty in Algerian media unions, associations or syndicates due the lack of involvement by journalists in the activities of these unions since the extreme meddling of foreign persons in the media profession in Algeria.

The most significant challenges to journalistic unions and associations in Algeria.

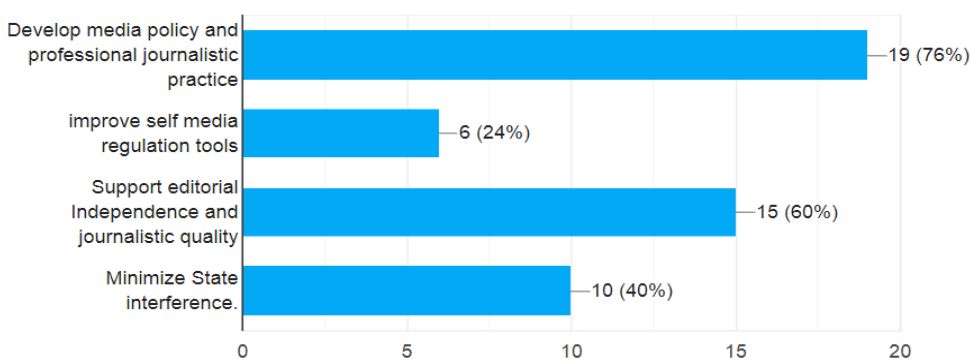


Figure 5. Journalistic associations and syndicates' challenges in Algeria.

The most respondents have emphasized the significant challenges to media unions and associations throughout the deep needs to develop media policy and support editorial independence offices in order to strengthen journalism quality and professionalism in Algeria. However, unions and associations should support the mechanisms of removing those obstacles by reshaping the legal environment which cannot be done without supporting of an independent judiciary system

in Algeria. As well, minimizing state interference is considered a big challenge to 40% of respondents. Hence, journalistic association authority should set a comprehensive behavioral guide in all Algerian mass media that shows the journalists' rights and duties in their professional practice. This code should describe the procedures of their activity, particularly in the event of any infringement of their rights by any party, whether internally or externally, with legal action taken against violators in accordance with Algerian law.

Conclusions

Algeria's journalistic associations and syndicates significantly need a more open democratic environment based on the independence of institutions and a fresh democratic representation, that will allow them to perform their rules more effectively, the effectiveness of journalistic associations would open up the power to strengthen inclusiveness, responsiveness, and accountability in Algerian media landscape. This strategy could be done only by establishing and adopting all legal and legislative mechanisms to frame, supervise, and evaluate media content in Algeria, as well as the setting out a basic code of behavior to which Algerian journalists would adhere to respect ethical standards, with a deep need to involve all official bodies and institutions to adopt a new media policy based on media freedom, independence, and transparency. As a result, we can regard the validity of the proposal that says journalistic associations in Algeria face a number of constraints and shortcomings, which have hampered their efficacy in improving journalistic practice in Algeria.

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