

Release and Then Catch: Jordan's Experience with Media Capture

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I, the undersigned *Ian Graham* hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the use of soft power tactics by the Jordanian government to capture media during the country's most recent period of democratic reform. Jordan has been engaged in efforts to liberalize its media system for the better part of 30 years. Most recently, international organizations like the European Union and UNESCO have pledged tens of millions of dollars as well as technical assistance to support media reforms that had initially been instigated by the Jordanian government in the wake of the Arab Spring in 2011. Despite ongoing assistance for reform and the disappearance of various forms of hard censorship, Journalists inside Jordan report that media freedom and independence is rapidly declining. Drawing on interviews with Jordanian journalists and media analysts, this thesis highlights how media liberalization in Jordan has proceeded hand in hand with the rise of a new soft-censorship that relies on regulatory capture and financial manipulation.

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Introduction

The Jordanian press has existed in a state of paradox for the past 30 years. While the Jordanian state has gradually relegated many of its most blatant and repressive forms of censorship to the dustbin of history, press freedom has stagnated if not retrograded. Since the 90's, the government has relinquished its right to close news outlets by decree and has opened up both its print and broadcast sectors to market forces through a process of privatization. Multiple periods of media reform have charted ambitious agendas to reshape media regulation and ownership while fostering professionalism. Despite this, Jordan's scores on press freedom indices have moved little over time. Effectively all journalists in the country admit to practicing self-censorship for one reason or another and report year after year that their freedoms remain curtailed and languish in a familiar state of restriction.

This paradoxical coexistence of liberalization and restriction poses questions of fundamental importance to international actors who have been engaged in efforts to strengthen independent media and democracy in Jordan. Since the Arab Spring, Jordan has been one of the only countries in the greater Middle East and North African region willing to accept assistance from the international community to reform its media. Jolted to action in 2011 by largescale protests and public frustration over corruption and political mismanagement, the Jordanian government pledged to take action to improve media freedom in the country as part of a larger program of political reform. Viewing Jordan as an important ally in a tumultuous region, foreign donors like the United States and European Union spent heavily on media programs meant to reinforce the apparent drive for a more independent press, hoping that successful political reform would bolster prospects for long-term stability. Years later, however, it is apparent that

internationally-financed reform has not led to tangible gains in press freedom. In Spring 2018, record numbers of protestors took to the streets again to call for many of the same political changes that had been promised following the Arab Spring, suggesting that international donors could back yet another round of reforms in the near future. To design more effective programs in support of press freedom in Jordan, it will be important to first understand why three decades of reform efforts including legislative changes, the promotion of private media ownership, and donor-sponsored media trainings have not resulted in the media reaching a state of autonomy from the state.

Ultimately, an analysis of media reform over the past thirty years in Jordan reveals that periods of liberalization have been accompanied by a process of media capture where the government employs soft power tactics that rely on politicized regulation and financial incentives to achieve what used to be accomplished by formal censorship. Scholars and practitioners have primarily used the term “media capture” to describe how political forces working within the confines of democratic political systems use compromised regulatory bodies and allies in the business world to ensure that the media serves their own interests instead of playing a watchdog role. In a semi-authoritarian state like Jordan, however, a similar path of media capture provides the possibility of appeasing demands for political liberalization emanating from the international community and the Jordanian public while still retaining control over national information space.

Media reform efforts in the 90s and 2000s established a clear pattern of capture that has helped the Jordanian state retain control of news media after the Arab Spring. While protests over the cost of living initially led to the privatization of print media in the 90s, subsequent security concerns linked to regional politics produced an initial period of targeted oppression

against the press followed by the introduction of regulatory measures and structures that heavily shaped the contours of the market for daily and weekly newspapers. Privatization of broadcast media in Jordan proceeded along similar lines as a newly liberalized media sector came to be controlled through new regulatory processes and economic incentives. Protests backed by digital and social media during the Arab Spring in 2011 forced the Jordanian state to promise media reform to placate the public but also created new incentives to reign in online media. Reverting to a tried and tested strategy, the government modified regulatory structures under the pretext of reform to limit the types of players who could participate in online media. Other reform efforts, like the creation of community media, were pursued in a selective manner that only provided circumstances for media outlets operated by semi-state entities to thrive. In the end, all of these actions have created a media environment that appears diverse on paper while all news-related content remains concentrated in the hands of the state.

Methodology

This thesis sets out to outline a 30-year process of media capture in Jordan in large part to explain why reform efforts and the disappearance of various forms of hard censorship have not resulted in tangible gains in press freedom. Media capture as a method for dominating news media relies on forms of soft power that are intentionally subtle and often difficult to discern for those not working in journalism in a given national context. As such, this study had to rely on both interviews with media experts in Jordan as a tool of primary orientation and an analysis of secondary texts and media legislation.

The first stage of research focused on conducting semi-structured expert interviews with four media practitioners in Jordan. Interviewees were all active journalists, many of whom had also worked as advisors and consultants for institutions like the UN or had been active in media watchdog organizations. Interviews took place with journalists and staff members at the following organizations.

- 7iber, an independent online news magazine in Jordan
- Radio al-Balad, an independent community radio station in Jordan
- Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ), an organization promoting independent investigative journalism in the MENA region

The interviews themselves all took place over Skype, and largely served as an introduction to major themes related to the practice of soft power in Jordan that would later be pursued through secondary research. Interviewees proved valuable in explaining how changes in media funding and regulation during their professional lives had impacted the viability of operating an independent media outlet. They highlighted trends and potential case studies and

also suggested materials from organizations with relevant data. As such, they proved invaluable in determining thematic areas of focus secondary research.

From these expert interviews, it became possible to discern several key themes that could be backed up and highlighted with reference to various forms of existing primary and secondary literature. To this end, annual reports from Jordanian media watchdogs, relevant legislation, publications produced by international media development organizations, and news stories that could serve as the basis of case studies for individual trends were analyzed. A native Arabic Speaker, Dena Elian, helped with the translation of key news articles and reports from Arabic into English.

1: Theory of Media Capture and Reform in Jordan

A body of literature on a phenomenon called “media capture” helps explain Jordan’s evolving approach to soft power as a form of media control. Once used to describe a general state of affairs where news media is subordinated to the interests of powerful political entities, media capture has become an increasingly popular term to describe how political forces use specific forms of soft-power to subtly and indirectly gain control over national media landscapes. Although most of the studies that outline processes of media capture focus on developments in democratic states, Jordan typifies a more recently analyzed trend where autocratic states adopt policies that apply soft-censorship to newly “liberalized” media markets in order to enjoy the benefits of reform while still retaining control over news media. Such an approach might appear appealing to the Jordanian state as it is sustained by both heavy foreign investment and aid and a dated rentier political system.

Academics in the fields of economics and political science first began using the term “media capture” in the mid-2000s to explain how the media’s relationship with political forces could subvert its utility as a public good. University of Chicago economist George Stigler famously coined the term “regulatory capture” to describe the process where government regulatory agencies begin promoting the interests of the industries they are tasked to monitor (George Stigler, 1971). Drawing on Stigler’s theory, the idea of media capture has its roots in the idea that the media is a public good similar to an industry regulator since it plays a watchdog role in auditing corporate, state, and social power (Besley and Prat, 2006). As such, the media becomes “captured” when it ceases auditing powerful institutions and instead begins working on their behalf. Tim Besley and Andrea Prat were the first to use the term media capture in 2006

and argued that it helped conceptualize how a particularly cozy relationship between journalism and the state could produce a situation where heavily politically influenced news media exists without formal policies of censorship. Political scientists eventually applied this concept of media capture to discussions of corruption in the democratizing post-communist world. In 2013, Alina Pippidi Mungiu asserted that despite decades of democratization, many of the media systems in East-Central Europe should be considered “captured” as they had not managed to attain sufficient autonomy to fulfill universalist functions necessary for transparent and accountable governance and instead carried out particular tasks demanded by their powerful financial and political benefactors (Alina Mungiu Pippidi, 2013, p. 35). As such, capture represented the transformation of a public good into an individualist tool.

While early scholarship in economics and political science focused on establishing media capture as a general phenomenon, much of the recent scholarship has focused on the specific tools and methods used to “capture” the media. Columbia University’s Anya Schiffrin argues that the involvement of the private sector in enabling political forces to manipulate the unique structures of national media markets is what distinguishes media capture from other forms of government media control.(Anya Schiffrin 2017, 3) Over the past decade, literature produced by practitioners in the field of media development on “soft censorship” has categorized the tools states possess to capture media markets. Research produced by the Open Society Foundations and the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers divides soft censorship into five general groups: “advertising and influence,” “subsidies,” “paid news,” “bribes and payments,” and “license, import, and audits”(“Soft-Censorship, Hard Impact: A Global Review,” 2014). Among the most studied methods, “advertising and influence” refers to practices where the state abuses its role as a major advertiser and its connections to other major advertisers to reward loyal

press outlets with advertising funds while starving outlets that dissent (Podesta, 2009). Also frequently mentioned in literature on capture, “license, import, and audits” mainly include strategies where the state gains control of media regulators and then designs processes of licensing and taxation that disproportionately harm independent media. Additionally, most soft-censorship tactics also appear alongside restrictive libel and privacy laws that are designed to make journalists internalize the risks of fines and self-censor their own work accordingly (“Bad Practices, Bad Faith: Soft Censorship in Macedonia,” 2015). Taken as a whole, methods of soft-censorship help explain how states can use financial incentives as a substitute for more blatant forms of censorship.

Research has suggested that democratic states and developing democracies have significant incentives to capture media via soft power tactics, and that many are applying similar steps and sequences. Methods of “hard” censorship are off the table for many governments who wish to use media to advance their political agendas but must appear to conform to democratic norms and standards. In seeking to control news media within a democratic system, states attempt to solidify influence over what Marius Dragomir of the Center for Media, Data and Society (CMDS) has called the pillars of media capture, which include regulation, funding, ownership, public service media, and technology (*Democracy Digest*, 2017). Case studies produced by the Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA) on media capture in Hungary, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Serbia, Mexico and Argentina largely affirm this and point towards particular sequential patterns (“Soft-Censorship, Hard Impact: A Global Review,” 2014). Processes of media capture in most countries analyzed only take place once states are able to politicize media regulatory bodies through appointment structures and funding. At roughly the same stage, most states also curb the independence of public service media through similar

means. From this point onwards, states use government advertising funds with little to no oversight to strengthen loyal press while punishing opposition outlets (WAN-IFRA, 2015, 10). With control over regulation and funding consolidated, governments are then in a position to strengthen influence over existing owners or otherwise reshuffle media ownership patterns to their own advantage. Taken as a whole, these steps provide a sort of blueprint for media capture.

Although most analysis of media capture has examined democratic and semi-democratic national contexts, new literature explains why more authoritarian states like Burma, China, and even Jordan might wish to liberalize and then “re-capture” their own media systems via soft-censorship. Yiling Pan has shown that while official censorship still reigns supreme in China, the state has allowed for the development of privately run digital media that it then manages through economic incentives and self-censorship (Pan, 2017). Allowing moderate media liberalization promotes a modern image, encourages investment in China and its ICT sector, and further facilitates integration into the world economy. The use of soft-censorship means that none of these gains come at the expense of the state’s control of media. In other authoritarian countries like Burma, moderate media reform has recently been allowed to take place while the state has taken steps to make sure that each liberalized space is filled by soft-censorship control mechanisms.(McElhone, 2017) As such, Burma has benefitted from global development spending and assistance while minimizing its loss of influence over the Burmese public sphere. In authoritarian contexts, media capture provides an appealing path as it suggests that states do not have to choose between the benefits that come from reform and control over information space.

Theories about the dynamics of the rentier state in Jordan further suggest that exactly this liberalize-and-capture tactic would serve the unique needs of the Jordanian monarchy as well as

the country's political and economic elite. Most scholars agree that the Jordanian monarchy's political survival relies in great part on its ability to secure foreign investment and aid funding that often comes as a result of the state's image as a regional beacon of stability that is open to reform and political liberalization (Sakr 2013, 98). These funds in turn finance a rentier political system in which Jordan's economic elite, bureaucratic elite, and security services pledge loyalty to the monarchy in return for privileges (Wils 2004, 134). Ironically, while reforming and liberalizing media and governance might in some cases boost investment, aid dollars, or access to loans, these same measures could become destabilizing politically if they threaten the mutually beneficial exchange of privileges for loyalty. This suggests that the monarchy might prove reluctant to engage in reform activities that endanger the privileges of its core supporters in the first place. It also suggests that even genuine reform efforts instigated by progressive forces in institutions like the Royal Court are likely to be stifled in moments or venues in which the bureaucratic elite or security services hold the upper hand politically (Muasher 2011). As such media reform that simply replaces hard censorship with soft power might appear to be a way out of this conundrum by appeasing domestic bases of support for the monarchy while continuing to attract foreign funding and assistance.

Overall, thinking about media capture as an alternative to more direct forms of censorship highlights a particular set of policies one might expect the Jordanian state to employ to balance demands for reform with a desire to maintain hegemony over information space. Capture proves to be a particularly appealing form of censorship for both democracies and those states who hold stand to benefit from engagement in reform and democratization efforts. As such, while highly visible forms of censorship might disappear, theories of capture would anticipate increased state manipulation of advertising, ownership structures, and regulatory bodies to incentivize self-

censorship among journalists and media professionals. Pursuing these tactics during periods of reform would in theory enable Jordan to continue to attract foreign investment, appease domestic and international demands for reform, and maintain a system of power that relies on trading privilege for loyalty and political support.

2: History of Jordanian Media Reform: Release and Capture

Important trends related to simultaneous processes of media reform and capture become clearly visible when examining media policy in Jordan during a 20-year window beginning with democratization efforts in 1990. First, a combination of internal pressure and external incentives jumpstart reforms that liberalize spaces previously closed-off for private media. These reform efforts are often opposed by an established political class primarily interested in protecting its existing privileges and by Jordan's security services who often treat media freedom as a potential security threat. During periods of geopolitical disruption and unrest, Jordanian authorities often seek to cull the private media that has grown out of processes of liberalization by reverting to harsh forms of censorship and oppression. Afterwards, however, the state makes use of financial incentives and licensing procedures to both discourage new private media from forming and to gain influence over those few outlets that manage to survive. The result has been de jure freedom for private print and broadcast media with a de facto ban on the establishment of a truly independent private news media.

Liberalizing and Capturing Print Media in the 1990s

Prior to 1989, the policies and practices that governed the media in Jordan could not be said to be anything but authoritarian. Following an attempted coup in 1957, the Jordanian Hashemite monarchy declared martial law, outlawed political parties, shut down most privately-run newspapers, and jammed signals for Pan-Arab radio stations (Sakr, 2001, 108). Since by 1970 well over 50% of Jordan's 1.7 million inhabitants were of Palestinian origin, Jordanian media policy during this period encouraged state agencies to take whatever actions deemed

necessary to censor speech seen to support Palestinian nationalism or criticize Jordanian actions vis-à-vis the state of Israel (Sakr, 2001, 108). The Jordanian state owned shares in two private newspapers, Al Ra'i and Al Dustor, but the few other print outlets that existed operated in full knowledge that they could be shut down on the whim of royal authorities (UNESCO, 2015, 59).

The nakedly authoritarian nature of this media system became increasingly untenable as an unprecedented political crisis beginning in 1989 produced calls from dissidents and supporters of the monarchy alike to reform governance and roll back three decades of heavy media restriction. Stemming from a period of unsustainable public spending, Jordan's national debt reached 190 percent of GDP in 1989 ("Jordan's Economic Upturn," 2003). In an attempt to save the country from financial ruin, the Jordanian state obtained loans from the IMF and in return was required to cut government spending and subsidies while simultaneously generating new funds ("Jordan's Economic Upturn," 2003). This process proved to be particularly painful for average Jordanians who saw prices for basic commodities such as food and gasoline rise by as much as much as 50% (Robinson, 1998, 391). Responding to these hardships, over 4,000 people in the southern city of Ma'an took to the streets to riot, and the unrest soon spread to neighboring towns (Cowell, 1989). Crucially, those burning tires in the streets of southern Jordan were not from the Palestinian segments of society the state had long feared as sources of rebellion but were instead largely Bedouin peoples traditionally in support of the monarchy (Robinson, 1998). The demands of protestors soon moved from food prices and took on an increasingly political tone as they railed against corruption and called upon authorities to reform governance to become more transparent and accountable. Coming up against unprecedented resistance from traditional bases of support, King Hussein announced the first elections in decades and that a

process of limited democratization and reform would take place that included opening up space for free speech and the press (Robinson, 1998).

The unprecedented pressure placed on the Hashemite monarchy from the ranks of its own supporters led to a nearly 4-year liberalization of Jordan's media sector. In 1991, King Hussein announced the lifting of martial law, ending a 22 year period where "limited" censorship of newspapers, publications, books, and broadcasts were permitted as a security measure ("JORDAN: Clamping Down on Critics," 1997, 10). Soon after, a 60-member Royal Commission issued a "National Charter" that affirmed Jordan's commitment to passing legislation that fully empowered citizens as well as members of the press to freely express their opinions through mass media (*Jordanian National Charter of 1991* 1991). Also, the government issued a new Press and Publications Law for the first time in 20 years. While it became easier to start a privately-owned publication, a license from the Council of Ministers, part of Jordan's executive branch, was still necessary to begin operation. That said, this licensing process was subject to judicial review, and the government agreed to reduce its shares in private newspapers to a maximum level of 30% by 1997 (Sakr, 2001, 110). Despite progress, the law still penalized offending the dignity of members of the royal family and diplomats and called on journalists to fulfill vague tasks such preserving "national unity"(Sakr, 2001, 110). The state also retained its monopoly over broadcast media while oversight over the entire print sector remained in the hands of the Ministry of Information which possessed no independence from the executive branch (Sakr, 2001, 110) Taken as a whole, while media reform left much of Jordan's authoritarian media infrastructure intact, it ultimately opened up new space for the establishment of private print media to a previously unimaginable degree.

In the years immediately following press liberalization, Jordan witnessed a proliferation of print media which adhered to varying standards of professionalism. Soon after liberalization the private daily newspapers *Al-Arab Al Yawm* and *Al Aswaq* were established and began competing in a market largely dominated by state-funded *Al Rai* and *Al Dustor* (Sakr, 2001, 115). The largest growth in private media, however, occurred in the market for weekly newspapers where the number of publications grew to 18, three times the number in existence prior to 1993 (Sakr, 2001, 115). *Al-Arab Al Yawm* began covering issues such as government corruption that had previously been taboo for both *Al Rai* and *Al Dustor*. In the process, *Al-Arab Al Yawm* forced both of its competitors to follow similar topics in order to remain relevant and retain readers (Sakr, 2001, 115). Some of the newly-formed weekly papers like *Shihan* gained a reputation for sleazy stories on crime and sex, but they also managed to generate high enough revenues from large numbers of readers that they were not dependent on large advertisers or the government for funding (Jones, 2002, 177). Further, *Shihan* in particular occasionally conducted avant-garde investigative journalism on issues related to human rights and political reform that often irked state officials (Jones, 2002, 178). While Jordan's bureaucratic elite rightfully pointed to the weekly press' penchant for sensationalism and questionable professionalism, these outlets often ran afoul of the government as they did not treat state officials and the monarchy with the same deference as more established outlets (Jones, 2002, 179). As such, the style of the new press made the Jordanian government begin to re-think the media reform they had instigated.

Already by 1994, new geopolitical challenges related to relations with Israel gave the Jordanian government cause to start reigning in press freedom, initially with the use of harsher forms of repression. In 1994 Jordan signed a peace treaty with Israel that normalized relations between the two states. The agreement enraged a great deal of Jordan's populace, more than half

of whom were of Palestinian descent. Movements against normalization united Islamist political factions with secular political parties (“JORDAN: Clamping Down on Critics,” 1997, 9). Importantly, the weekly press in particular became known for its vocal opposition to normalization and its condemnation of those involved in the treaty process (“JORDAN: Clamping Down on Critics,” 1997, 9). Once again fearing the potential political destabilization from Jordanians of Palestinian origin, the security services began taking bold measures to prevent public demonstrations and the government soon slapped the weekly newspapers with lawsuits (“JORDAN: Clamping Down on Critics,” 1997). Human Rights Watch noted in a 1997 policy brief that 62 lawsuits had been filed against Jordanian newspapers since 1993 for infringements related to provisions in the Press and Publications Law on national unity, slander, and defaming the royal family and state officials. 58 of these lawsuits were brought against the weekly newspapers (“JORDAN: Clamping Down on Critics,” 1997, 11). The fines resulting from the suits could be as high as US\$ 35,000 (the value at the time) and forced some publications to merge and many others to halt operations entirely (Sakr, 2001, 115).

Once the period of mass lawsuits had managed to reduce the number of troublesome weekly papers, the government created new financial regulations for print publications that imposed hardship on existing publications while discouraging the establishment of new papers. The period of mass litigation against newspapers had slowed by 1997, but state officials claimed that the unprofessional and vicious nature of the weekly press had endangered relations with neighboring states and contributed to a state of insecurity (“JORDAN: Clamping Down on Critics,” 1997, 15). In early 1997, the government announced that the 1993 Press and Publications Law would be revised to include minimum capital requirements publications would have to meet in order to receive or retain mandatory print licenses (Mendel, 2016, 4). The move

was framed as a measure to promote professionalism. Daily newspapers were required to have a registered capital at or above US\$ 845,000 to operate, while any other publication had to hold US\$ 422,000 (Mendel, 2016, 4). Having been given a few months to comply with new regulations, 13 weekly newspapers had their licenses suspended for not meeting capital requirements (“JORDAN: Clamping Down on Critics,” 1997). The country’s leading daily paper, *Al Arab Al Yawm*, and the largest weekly paper, *Shihan* managed to survive the series of lawsuits and capital requirements but later had their freedom curtailed since they were both operated by a media group in which Jordan’s National Bank and Engineering Association had investments (Sakr, 2001, 115). These investments enabled the government to operationally and financially hinder their activities.

Liberalizing and Capturing Broadcast Media in the 2000s

In the early 2000s, a new King’s attempts to privatize broadcast media and create independent regulation took much the same course as print media reform in the 1990s. The death of King Hussein in 1999 came some two years after the height of the state’s attack on the weekly press and its passage of a tightened Press and Publications Law. Despite this, there were many reasons for advocates of free expression to be optimistic about the rise of King Abdullah II who after all wasted no time after his accession to publicly voice his support for modernizing and liberalizing the media sector and Jordan’s image. Still in his 30’s when he assumed the throne, King Abdullah held that a freer system of media could be vital in projecting a more modern vision of Jordan and its aspirations as a state to domestic and international audiences (Sakr, 2013, 102). This in turn could drive investment from in the country and bolster relations with Europe and the United States. While appointing Ali Abu Ragheb as Prime Minister in 2000,

Abdullah emphasized to the new executive that promoting free press represented a high priority for the country and represented the best interests of the nation (Muasher, 2011, 5).

Abdullah soon moved from affirming support for modernizing the media to making the first tangible steps towards establishing independent regulation and privatized broadcast media. In 2000, the bylaws for Jordan's state broadcaster, JRTV, were amended to legally abolish its monopoly on broadcast media ("Attacks on the Press 2001: Jordan," n.d.). Not long after in 2001, Prime Minister Ragheb established a new 11-member Higher Media Council that was endowed with executive powers and broadly tasked with formulating a new framework for media regulation and creating a new code of ethics for journalists (George, 2005, 220). The King instructed the Council to build a legislative groundwork that would transform the media into an attractive target for private investment internationally and domestically (Sakr, 2013, 101). The members appointed to the Council represented an achievement in and of themselves as newspaper editors and academics, among them the Council's head, constituted some of the leading figures (Sakr, 2007). Among the earliest tasks the Council faced was determining how to set rules for entry into the newly opened space for private broadcast and how to ensure a greater degree of autonomy for the Council in the future.

Unfortunately, instability with roots in regional politics and security complicated media reform at an even earlier stage of reform than it had in the 1990s. Just as Prime Minister Ragheb and the Higher Media Council had begun determining how to best achieve the media reforms demanded by King Abdullah, events across the border in the Occupied Palestinian Territories put Jordan's security services on alert. In 2000, the outbreak of the Second Palestinian Intifada sparked fears among Jordanian political elite of domestic unrest and the possibility that free speech and expression of Jordanians of Palestinian descent could put Jordan in a difficult

situation with the United States, a vital donor and an ally of both Jordan and Israel (Sakr, 2013, 101) Partially as a result of this, Parliament was dissolved and the government began cracking down on Palestinian activists (“Jordan,” 2012). Years later, instability stemming from the US invasion of Iraq spilled into Jordan, and in 2005 an arm of Al-Qaeda in Iraq bombed three hotels in Jordan, killing 60 (Muasher, 2011, 15). Bureaucratic and political elites cited these events as evidence that opening space for free speech could be dangerous because it could potentially strengthen radical elements in Jordanian society (Muasher, 2011, 15). Security above all else soon became the driving force behind a whole host of policy areas in Jordan regardless of the reformist aspirations Abdullah had brought to the monarchy.

The new primacy of security stopped reform and the “modernization” of the media dead in its tracks. The Higher Media Council met significant resistance from bureaucratic elites and the security services in attempting to promote independent regulation and media freedom, and this prompted the president and other prominent members of the Council to resign in 2002 (George, 2005, 220). The monarchy then made the Council’s role less ambitious and progressive, evidenced by the fact that future chairmen and members came to understand their duty as being related to articulating a vision of the role of the media that could also be shared by old guard elites (Sakr, 2007). The Council’s initial plans to form a truly independent media regulator for a new private broadcast sector never came to fruition. Instead, the government passed an Audio-Visual Law in 2002 that established a new regulatory body, the Audiovisual Commission to oversee the market for private television and radio. The government publicly lauded the Audiovisual Commission as progress and evidence of modern independent regulation, claiming that the new body marked the first time that media regulation had been carried out by an entity that was not a ministry answering directly to the executive branch (Toby Mendel, 2016) In

reality, however, the new body was just as open to political influence from the executive branch as a ministry.

The design of the new Audiovisual Commission left it highly vulnerable to political meddling through both funding and appointment structures. The Council of Ministers alone appointed the Commission's head and set the organization's annual budget in a way that ruled out any possibilities for alternative sources of funding (*Jordan Provisional Law for Audiovisual Media* 2002, vol. 71, secs. 10–12). As it turned out, the Audiovisual Commission did not even possess the legal ability to approve applications for broadcast licenses. It merely reviewed applications before passing them onto the Council of Ministers who made the final decision on whether a station was to be licensed or not (Fabio Del Alisal 2015, 7). The licensing procedure itself was open to interpretation and decisions took place behind the closed doors of Council of Ministers' meetings. The Ministers had wide-reaching powers to make problems for outlets even if they had all the necessary paperwork. For example, in 2007 a private television channel named ATV was set to become the country's first terrestrial TV station, but its license was revoked at the last minute with little justification ("Jordan's ATV: The Untelevised Revolution," 2007). Information since has suggested that security fears led the executive branch to wish to maintain its de facto monopoly on terrestrial TV broadcasts.

Beyond discrimination in decision making, the fees for licensing broadcast significantly restricted entry into the broadcast market. Fees for broadcast licenses were exorbitantly expensive in the first place as the cheapest radio license costed US \$14,000 while licenses for television were set at around US \$140,000 (*Jordan Provisional Law for Audiovisual Media* 2002). In addition to this, there were costs associated with broadcast and relay tower fees that amounted to about US \$28,000 for radio stations (UNESCO, 2015, 110). Like the market for

print, radio and television stations there was a minimum capital requirement that still stands at about US\$70,000 for radio stations (UNESCO, 2015, 110). Finally, the Audio-Visual Law from 2002 slapped a 50% surcharge on the price of a license for those television and radio stations that aired programming related to politics and news (UNESCO, 2015, 23). These financial barriers significantly restricted the entry into the market for broadcast media, and the differences in licensing costs encouraged new broadcasters to focus on entertainment rather than politics. Additionally, since departments of the government were and continue to be exempt from the fines and capital requirements set out under law, numerous government entities like the armed forces, police, and municipal governments formed their own radio stations (UNESCO, 2015, 110).

Chapter Conclusion

Print and broadcast liberalization set important trends for the way the Jordanian state utilized soft power tactics to capture media. Both periods of reform highlighted that the government would initially seek to curb reform during periods of security concerns and largely with older forms of censorship. Later, regulation came to be used to create financial burden on existing outlets, while preventing would-be media owners from entering the market. Print and broadcast media became open for business but only on paper. In reality, regulation had helped create media markets that reflected the status quo of government dominance.

3: Capturing Online Media, Capturing Reform

Only a few years separated the end of Jordan's liberalization and capture of broadcast media from the onset of the Arab Spring. Developments in 2011 suddenly thrust Jordan into an all too familiar form of political turmoil that bore a striking resemblance to what had taken place in the early 90s. In 2011 and 2012 tens of thousands of Jordanians took to the streets to voice frustration over reduced government subsidies and a rising cost of living and gradually adopted a more political tone. While the Arab Spring proved to be less explosive in Jordan than in neighboring states, street protests and public anger pressured the Jordanian state to appear committed to reforming political systems and the media. Viewing Jordan's ability to implement these reforms as related to the state's ability to serve as a strategic partner in an increasingly tumultuous region, international actors like the European Union soon pledged finances and technical assistance to bolster media freedom and independence in Jordan. Problematically, however, while appearing to reform seemed to present the best way to ease public frustration, the regional experience of the Arab Spring had also taught the Jordanian government that the growth of online media could be explosive if left unchecked. Because of this, the Jordanian government employed a tried and true method to engage in pro forma reform while clamping down on media freedom and independence through regulatory capture. Initially, taking action against online media meant pursuing slander and libel lawsuits as well as loosely-worded terrorism and national security legislation. Eventually, however, the government erected obstacles for online media that were both financial and administrative, all the while claiming that state actions advanced aims to create independent regulation and foster professionalism in media. Further, a shift in priorities for international donors away from general support for reform and towards programs to manage

migration issues created financial hardship for many independent media outlets. At the same time, the Jordanian government's efforts to build community media produced a ballooning number of state or semi-state operated local channels, while community groups and non-profits were sidelined.

The Arab Spring and Online Media: Context for Reform

In many ways the Arab Spring in Jordan and the resulting demands for political reform can only be understood by first grasping the rapid rise of online and social media. Internet penetration grew from around 20% in 2005 to 50% just 6 years later in 2011 largely due to a very high rate of mobile phone ownership and growing access to 3G wireless broadband (Sweis and Baslan, 2013, 17). Accompanying rising internet access rates, Jordan also witnessed a spike in the number of active bloggers in the country, and by 2008 the country boasted some 10,000 blogs for a population of only around 6 million people (Sweis and Baslan, 2013, 32). Daily newspapers like *Al Ghad* launched websites, and hundreds of other news websites with no presence in the print industry similarly formed (Sweis and Baslan, 2013, 18). AmmanNet formed the country's first online radio station and quickly gained a reputation for picking up stories of public interest that were off-limits for traditional print and broadcast media (Open Society Foundations, n.d). While online media created new possibilities for independence, both the government and journalists themselves expressed concerns about levels of professionalism in the sector (Sweis and Baslan, 2013, 25). From a government perspective, however, what was most important about online media was that it fell outside the jurisdiction of its regulation and ability to influence coverage with financial incentives.

Online and social media proved capable of elevating voices calling for reform in Jordan during the Arab Spring. Street protests organized by social media that would unseat political

authorities in countries like Egypt and Tunisia had a softer impact in Jordan but nonetheless appeared similar to the political unrest the country had experienced in the early 1990s. In 2011, crowds in Amman and smaller towns across the country gathered in the streets to rally against rising unemployment and the cost of living (“Thousands Protest in Jordan,” 2011). The scrapping of fuel subsidies in November 2012, a move called for by the IMF as a condition for a bailout loan, sparked protests in Amman, Irbid, Maan, and Kerak as costs for transportation and food saw significant rises (“Protests in Jordan After Fuel Subsidy Cut,” 2012). Demands from protestors were also political in nature as crowds consisting of Islamists, leftists, and trade unions alike soon demanded the resignation of the Prime Minister, an end to corruption, and political reform (“Jordanian Protestors Demand Political Reform,” 2011). Unlike previous periods of political crisis, social media and blogs enabled broader segments of society to contribute to protest in an online public sphere, raising the prominence of protest in both domestic and international media (Tobin, 2012).

As a defensive measure to stave off the instability of protest, the Jordanian monarchy promised to instigate processes of political liberalization that included media reform. In 2011, the government formed a National Dialogue Committee that was tasked with developing a “National Media Strategy” for the years 2011-2015 (UNESCO, 2015, 12). The Committee consulted with a broad array of actors ranging from state broadcasters to private print outlets and local media freedom organizations to discuss issues related to press freedom and independence. Ultimately, the Media Strategy highlighted three principles that were determined to be necessary to modernize the country’s media and lead it to adhere to international standards. The media strategy targeted the achievement of “a favorable legislative environment that balances freedom with responsibility,” “high levels of professionalism based on objective sustainable training,”

and “self-regulation and adherence to ethical standards” (UNESCO, 2015, 30). The first objective clearly related to improving legal guarantees for media freedom and suitable independent regulation, while the second two demonstrated a prominent concern for the professionalism of the media sector and a problematically vague notion of “responsibility” (UNESCO, 2015). The plan also contained a specific commitment to de-centralize a highly Amman-centric media scene by supporting the growth of local media in Jordan’s various governorates. (UNESCO, 2015, 99). Taken as a whole, the Media Strategy represented a broad statement of intent that nonetheless became a point of reference in the future for determining whether the government had or had not delivered on its promises.

Shortly after the launch of the National Dialogue, important international actors like the European Union pledged significant support for media reform. In 2012, the European Union announced that it would devote 10 million Euros to a project strengthening civil society and media in Jordan under the EU Neighborhood Policy (ENP) (European Commission, 2012, 1). The ENP Action Program for Jordan in 2012 indicated that supporting reform was a top priority and that the Jordanian media represented the target of reform efforts itself but also was viewed as a potential tool to make economic and political reforms across the board more inclusive (European Commission, 2012, 1). As such, the EU proposed to first conduct a large-scale analysis of the media environment in Jordan and work with the Jordanian government to refine its media action plan. Then, the next stage of EU funding would focus on establishing independent regulation of the media sector, promoting professionalism and forms of professional “self-regulation,” building the capacity of local and community media, and transforming state broadcasters into public service media outlets (European Commission, 2012, 7). Both stages of funding were implemented by UNESCO, with the second phase being referred to as “Support to

Media in Jordan” (“Support to Media in Jordan Project Brief,” n.d.). Despite an early interest in reform, escalating violence in Syria and Jordan’s ability to receive large numbers of refugees quickly became the EU’s primary concern in the country starting in around 2013 (“Action Fiche for Jordan,” 2013). Previously instigated programs for media reform continued but sometimes attempted to incorporate a focus on migration management by giving voices to Syrian refugees in Jordan (“Sa’a Suriya Radio Programme,” n.d.). Similarly, a large chunk of the new EU funding earmarked for media programming in Jordan emphasized refugee and migration issues (“Supporting Syrian Refugees in Lebanon and Jordan,” n.d.).

Regulation and Capture of Online Media

Prior to 2013 the Jordanian government lacked regulatory options for controlling online media and instead relied on a combination of targeted lawsuits and self-censorship. While online media was not regulated like print or broadcast, a rich tapestry of legislation meted out fines for vaguely-defined instances of harmful speech. For instance, Jordanian courts heard and continue to hear cases that allege that journalists for news websites have violated libel and slander laws that constituted part of the state’s Penal Code (“Media Freedom Status in Jordan 2012: Repression by Force of Law,” 2012, 38). Similarly, a new Cyber Security Law passed in 2010 created new legal peril for those creating online content. According to the law, posting “defaming” or “insulting” comments was met with a fine between US \$200 to US \$2,000 dollars (*Jordan Information Systems Crime Law*, 2010). Also, those found guilty of using the internet to make previously unpublished material related to foreign affairs or national security available to the public were required to pay a fine between US \$500 to US \$5,000 (*Jordan Information Systems Crime Law*, 2010, sec. 11). In one case in 2013, the editor and chief of the website Jafra News was arrested for supposedly endangering relations with the country of Qatar (“Jordan:

Journalists Jailed for Website Posting,” 2013). Along with the possibility of bringing financial hardship upon critical media outlets, targeted lawsuits have been and remain instrumental in building up an environment of self-censorship for online media. Even after a brief period of optimism for the Jordanian press following the Arab Spring, 86% of journalists surveyed for a large-scale media freedom study admitted to self-censoring content (“Media Freedom Status in Jordan 2012,” 2012). While self-censorship is a powerful tool to control media, it did not give politicized regulators direct jurisdiction over outlets as was practiced with print and broadcast media.

By the end of 2012, the Jordanian government claimed that it had decided to make online media subject to media regulation in order to promote reform goals of independent regulation and higher professional standards. While it appeared a bold move, concerns about the professionalism of online media were indeed widespread in Jordan, and polling conducted in 2011 by the Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists reported that nearly 80% of journalists surveyed agreed a new law was needed to regulate online media (“Media Freedom Status in Jordan 2011” n.d., 17). According to 2012 amendments to the Print and Publications Law, news websites became subject to the same regulations as printed publications. In practice, this meant that websites that were categorized as “news” required a license to operate and had to have an Editor-In-Chief who was a member of the Jordan Press Association (JPA) (UNESCO, 2015, 69). In 2017, new procedures further stipulated that online outlets needed 5 journalists to receive a license (Azzeh, 2017). The government held that all the measures constituted necessary steps towards the professionalization of an online media sector that had often acted in a brash and even exploitative manner (UNESCO, 2015, 69). Shortly after arranging for the regulation of online media, the government announced it would establish an independent regulatory agency that

would govern print, broadcast, and the newly-regulated online media sector. The new body was called the Jordan Media Commission (JMC), and it acted as an umbrella organization for both the Audiovisual Commission and the Print and Publications Department that had been under direct executive branch control.(UNESCO, 2015, 62) The establishment of the body was hailed as a step in the right direction for establishing independent media regulation, especially given that print and online media would no longer be overseen directly by a government ministry.

Despite talk of improving professionalism and establishing independent regulation, new rules related to online media exposed news websites to political influence and financial hardship. The Jordan Media Commission adopted the same funding and appointment structures used for the older Audiovisual Commission, meaning that the Prime Minister selects the head of the JMC who in turn carries out all executive functions of the body as there is not an independent governing board (UNESCO 2015, 62–63). The Council of Ministers determines the entirety of the JMC’s funding in creating the state’s general budget. Ultimately, the head of the JMC has wide-ranging powers to declare if a website is news and must therefore obtain a license since what constitutes a “news” is broadly defined in an amendment to the 2012 Press and Publications Law (El Rayyes, 2015). Websites labeled as news only have 90 days to comply with licensing requirements, and the decision of whether to grant a license still rests solely in the hands of the Council of Ministers and not the JMC (Fabio Del Alisal, 2015, 7). Additionally, the license itself costs about \$1,400 and as such represents a significant financial burden for smaller websites and individual bloggers in a country with a high cost of living and an average salary of just over \$600 (“Jordan: A Move to Censor Online Expression,” 2012). The requirement to have an Editor-in-Chief registered with the Jordan Press Association (JPA) provides additional potential for influence. While the JPA in theory admits members based on professional and educational

credentials, membership is often political, and the government influences the self-regulatory body as representatives from the largest government-controlled newspapers and state broadcasters dominate the board (UNESCO, 2015, 147). The requirement for JPA membership saddled many news websites with additional cost as many outlets had to hire a new staff member to serve as Editor and Chief (“7iber Is Unblocked,” 2014). Operation costs for news websites rose even further in 2017 since 5 full-time journalists were required to be a licensed outlet, a difficult feat for many small sites, especially during a period of historic financial hardship for news.

As might be expected, the implementation of licensing requirements has led to the blocking and closure of numerous news websites since 2013 in the name of fostering professionalism. In June 2003, the Print and Publications Department ordered over 250 news websites to be blocked since they had not complied with demands for licensing laid out in 2012 (“Authorities Block Hundreds of Websites,” 2013). Some websites, among them many citizen journalism platforms and small investigative outfits, simply did not meet standards to obtain licenses. Other websites like 7iber, an online magazine funded by the European Endowment for Democracy (EED), Hivos, and various embassies in Amman, refused to obtain licenses out of principle and were blocked (“7iber Is Unblocked,” 2014). The Jordanian government revealed that in an attempt to avoid onerous registration, numerous sites shifted their focus away from news and politics and instead began specializing in issues such as education or technology (Ghazal 2014). This change, in turn, meant that these sites no longer required licensing and registration and could continue operation as a “specialized website.” As such, while culling media outlets via blocking brought the most tangible impact of website registration, increasingly apolitical online content and a shift away from news were also important outcomes.

Reform, Funding, and Amplifying Government Voices

Contrasting fortunes for independent media and government sponsored broadcast media have arisen over the past 5 years because of shifting donor priorities and the Jordanian government's efforts to establish "community media" exclusively through state entities. While the EU and even the US showed support for media and political reform in the immediate aftermath of the Arab Spring, international donors gradually shifted their focus to Jordan's security and capacity to take in refugees as conflict raged in Syria and Iraq. This shift impacted the type of media programs being funded by the international community, decreasing funding going directly to newsrooms. At the same time, the Jordanian government has capitalized on reform promises to establish community media by backing the growth of local broadcast stations vulnerable to state influence.

While independent media initially benefitted greatly from international support for Jordanian media freedom, a shift in focus towards security and migration issues has complicated the financial viability of independent media outlets. The international community has played a strong role in the development of Jordan's independent media. AmmanNet, Jordan's first internet radio station and a pioneer in community radio started in the early 2000s with support from UNESCO ("Internet Radio in Amman," n.d.). Similarly, independent online news magazines like 7iber continue to receive support from foreign embassies as well as media development organizations like Hivos and International Media Support (IMS)("7iber," n.d.). All journalists interviewed for this study felt that EU and UN-backed projects immediately after the Arab Spring maintained a broader focus on media freedom and proved more willing to provide independent outlets with general operating funds than today. Problematically, the same

practitioners claimed that donors have over the past three to four years prioritized media funding for refugees, women, and youth. One interviewee noted that independent outlets might receive one-off grants to pay for programs on these priority topics, but fewer donors remained willing to give money for core support costs (Kuttab 2018). This trend came at a time when media across the country have struggled to obtain sufficient funding and in many cases have been burdened with additional costs from licensing and registration.

While many independent news outlets experience hardship, the Jordanian government has energetically thrown its weight behind support for “community media” run by state entities. Under the banner of “community media,” new radio stations operated by municipalities, universities, and various other state bodies have sprung up across Jordan. In 2014, the JMC awarded Jordan’s Zarqa Municipality a broadcast license to launch a community broadcast service that focuses exclusively on community issues (“Zarqa Municipality Granted Radio Broadcasting License,” 2014). The Jordanian government has energetically publicized community radio content produced by students and staff at Yarmouk University, and the JMC licensed a radio station operated by Al al-Bayt University in 2016 to produce local news and community content. Al al-Bayt University’s new radio station has hosted UNESCO radio trainings, and both Al al-Bayt University and Yarmouk University have been the primary beneficiaries of a 1.5 million Euro donation from the EU to provide equipment for local media (“UNESCO, EU Media Training Yields Radio Talents,” 2018). While not funded by international donors, even Amen FM, a radio station owned by the Public Security Department, has branded itself as “community media,” claiming that the station has played a vital role in building trust between security services and communities across Jordan (Freij 2015).

Unfortunately, this approach to community media has given rise to a ballooning number of quasi-state media organizations that are vulnerable to state influence and has excluded broader participation from civil society because of rules related to broadcast licensing. Radio stations owned by state entities like municipalities and universities have grown under media reform. Currently out of 42 licensed radio stations in Jordan, 6 are run by universities, 3 are run by municipalities, and 6 are run by other government departments including the armed forces (“Licensed Radio,” n.d.). While locally-focused programming produced by university and municipality radio does fill a gap in what has been a heavily Amman-centric media landscape, questions of independence remain for newly established “community” stations. In 2012, student volunteers at Yarmouk FM began protesting against what they claimed were routine practices of interference where university staff overstepped professional bounds to determine the content of broadcasts (“An Open Strike by Employees of Yarmouk University Radio,” 2012). One of the students involved in the protests later revealed that she had been prevented from discussing Jordanian national identity on air by university administrators (“The Yarmouk FM Broadcast Stopped a Program,” n.d.). Beyond issues of censorship, the current drive for community media has proved to be deficient because existing broadcast regulations prevent civil society and grass roots organizations from operating local radio stations. Under the current laws governing broadcast media, only public entities are exempt from having to pay licensing fees and no distinction exists between private radio and community radios operated by non-profits for example (UNESCO 2015, 108–9). In practice, this means that non-profits wishing to produce public interest journalism still must pay \$20,000 annually for licensing (Catherine Smajda-Froguel 2016, 26) This has in effect cut most of civil society out of community radio, while encouraging the proliferation of government-influenced local media.

Chapter Conclusion

Developments since the Arab Spring have driven efforts to both reform and capture media. Digital media proved instrumental in forming the movement that successfully pushed the Jordanian state to undertake a defensive series of political reforms. Perhaps because of this, the Jordanian government determined that it had to constrain the freedom of news websites in a way that exceeded the capacity of methods relying on using legal pressure to encourage self-censorship. Ultimately, the state used the pretext of promoting independent media regulation and professionalism to cut the number of websites providing news and discourage new websites from forming. In a similar manner, Jordan has delivered on promises to foster community media by allowing the growth of municipal and university broadcasters. This has occurred at a time when independent media has seen financial fortunes take a downturn amid shifting priorities for international donors. This most recent period of capture has heavily shaped the supply of online news content, while promoting the growth of local news stations that can be influenced by the state.

4: Conclusion- State Influence Over Media and Future Reform Possibilities

The end result of a three-decade period of capture encompassing print, broadcast, and online media during periods of reform now manifests itself in a media ecosystem in which news production still rests concentrated in the hands of media outlets vulnerable to state influence. For each sector, processes of reform and liberalization that presented the possibility of private media ownership were reigned in initially by targeted oppression and later by ensuring new forms of regulation significantly limited participation in media. The controlled growth of a private media primarily focused on apolitical forms of entertainment has masked the full extent of the capture that now grips news media, leading many to conclude that media in Jordan is becoming more diverse and vibrant, while in reality the state's control of information related to politics and current events has changed very little over time. Looking to the future, there are already signals that further media reforms could be on the horizon, perhaps focusing on public service broadcasting and the liberalization of community radio. If this turns out to be the case, international actors can improve forms of media support by making sure future assistance for reform reflects an understanding of the tactics and tools of capture that have allowed decades of liberalization to lead back to the same point of government-dominated news media.

The Present: News Concentration across Sectors

Nearly thirty years after print liberalization, the Jordanian state influences nearly every major stakeholder dealing in printed news media. The market for newspapers remains heavily dominated by three newspapers, *Al Rai*, *Al Dustour*, and *Al Ghad*, each reaching at least of 18 times more readers than the 4th largest newspaper ("Licensed Newspapers," n.d.). The Jordanian

government still owns over half of *Al Rai* and around a third of *Al Dustour* through investments from the State's Social Security Investment Fund ("Al Rai Celebrates 45th Anniversary," 2016). While *Al Ghad* has had a reputation for being the most independent print source in Jordan, the paper's senior leadership appear to have grown closer to King Abdullah and the Royal Court since 2013, and coverage of topics related to the monarchy and government have converged significantly with that of *Al Rai* and *Al Dustour* (Zaidah, 2014b). Research by the Jordan Media Institute has also shown that over 60% of the content in these daily newspapers comes from the state news agency, Petra, or from press releases in an often unedited form that does not inform readers about the origins of content (Ghazal, 2014b).

Almost fifteen years after the government privatized broadcast media, the state still owns almost all of the popular radio and television stations that produce news content. Jordan's state broadcaster JRTV, the Armed Forces, and the Public Security Department operate the 3 most popular radio stations that create news programming (Hala Radio, Amman FM, and Amen FM) ("Licensed Radio," n.d.). Private broadcasters operate dozens of primarily apolitical radio stations that air popular music, religious content, and various forms of entertainment. State or government-funded entities dominate "community media" with five universities, two municipalities, and one economic zone operating radio stations airing local radio content ("Licensed Radio," n.d.). On television, JTV, the state broadcaster, and Roya TV are the most popular domestic channels by some margin and air the country's most popular news bulletins ("Audience Measurement for Jordanian Media" 2016). Roya is one of only two private television stations providing news content to have been licensed since broadcast liberalization. Regardless, content analysis of Roya's programming shows that while guests speaking on Roya talk shows voice views not espoused by the Jordanian government, the station's daily news bulletin orders

stories and cites government sources in manner strikingly similar manner to JTV (Zaidah, 2014a).

Six years after the regulation of online media, news websites present the freest form of media in Jordan, but the government has succeeded in slowing the growth of online news and information significantly. Following the introduction of new licensing requirements, the government blocked close to 300 unlicensed “news websites” in 2013. By 2017, there were only 187 websites licensed to provide information about “current events” in Jordan with only around 10 new websites being registered each year (“49 TV Channels Registered,” 2017). Websites like 7iber continue to be pioneers in independent journalism in Jordan, and online news often publishes stories that do not get picked up by print and broadcast media. At the same time, however, the Jordan Media Institute has shown many websites licensed as news deal in re-published material from print and online sources and clickbait as a way to boost website traffic (“Re-Publication of Previous News,” 2018).

Looking Forward: Potential Future Reform

Thirty years of reform have accompanied a process of capture that has maintained the status quo of government control of news media, and current political developments suggest that grounds for similar processes of reform and capture could materialize in the future. The public frustration over corruption, opaque governance, and economic mismanagement that sparked media reform in the 1990s and in 2011 has not abated. In May and June 2018, protests over a proposed tax hike that threatened to exacerbate an already unsustainable cost of living drew crowds in sizes not seen since the Arab Spring (“Jordan Protests,” 2018). Demonstrators demanded an end to corruption, competent management of Jordan’s debt-saddled economy, and changes to make the country’s political system more accountable to the general public. Protests

forced Prime Minister Hani Mulki to resign, and King Abdullah has since called for the launch of a new National Dialogue process. Under similar circumstances in the past, this has entailed promises for political and economic reforms.

Looking specifically at media, there are signs that public service media and community media might be set to become targets for reform and liberalization in the near future. Later this year, the Jordanian government will launch a new television channel, *Al Mamlaka*, that it claims will function as an independent public service broadcaster in a manner entirely different than the country's state broadcaster JTV. Debates over how the state can truly ensure the independence of this new public service broadcaster are ongoing (Azzeh, 2015). Additionally, in 2017 a group of 8 independent media outlets banded together to petition the state to recognize grassroots community radio and to drop exorbitant fees that prevent NGOs and community groups from broadcasting (Kuttab, 2018). Discussions with state regulators about potential liberalization are underway, and both public service media or community radio could present the next phase of reform.

Present State of Capture and Future Reform

Ongoing political crisis and discontent in Jordan coupled with talk of possible forms of media liberalization appear to indicate that attempts at political reform including media could well materialize in the future. Just as in the past, both the United States and the European Union would likely play some part in supporting reform given that Jordan remains a vital partner in the Middle East. Both governments have already spent millions on programs aimed at complementing structural changes in Jordan that the state claims will make the media more independent only to arrive at today's status quo: de facto government hegemony over print, broadcast, and online media. Understanding regulatory and economic tactics the Jordanian state

has used to liberalize and then re-capture news media should direct the efforts of international actors to design future forms of support and metrics to measure success or failure. 30 years of liberalization and capture in print, broadcast, and online markets show that legal amendments, formal privatization, and the swearing off of forms of blatant censorship will not suffice as indicators of improved media freedom and independence. In supporting reform, international actors should anticipate that regulatory and financial instruments could be used after the fact to determine the shape of newly “liberalized” media sectors. Instead of looking for the types of undisguised and ham fisted forms censorship from Jordan’s pre-1990 history, analysts should expect the use of subtle soft-power tactics that are increasingly deployed successfully in both democratic and authoritarian contexts.

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Appendix A: Abbreviations

AVC- Audiovisual Committee of Jordan

CIMA- Center for International Media Assistance

CMDS- Center for Media, Data and Society

EU- European Union

JMC- Jordan Media Commission

JPA- Jordan Press Association

PPD- Print and Publications Department

UNESCO- United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

US- United States of America