

# JOURNALISM AT THE WHIRL OF VIOLENCE

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## Abbreviations

<b>DT:</b>	Direcotarte of Telecommunication
<b>BIT:</b>	Board of Information Technologies
<b>AAP:</b>	Association of Access Providers
<b>SCRT:</b>	Supreme Council of Radio and Television

# INTRODUCTION

Authoritarianization is often treated as a political phenomenon in current academic literature. Undoubtedly, there is nothing strange about this. In conventional political thinking, authoritarianization refers to the oppression and unlawful practices of the state mechanism or political power against its citizens. This is not also partly wrong. On the other hand, in the face of authoritarianizing political power, civil society is usually treated as innocent, victimized and the direct addressee of this state oppression. Such kind introduction, which does not seem to be very relevant to the subject of this research, may be unfamiliar to the reader. However, authoritarianism before becoming a political phenomenon, it emerged in social realm. Authoritarian personalities and authoritarian political characters are the main source of political authoritarianism. Political authoritarianism goes hand in hand with authoritariation of institutions, organizations and, internal human and professional relations in social life. After a while, political authoritarianism feeds on the authoritarianism that is well entrenched in the social structure; authoritarianism in society shapes the type of people and the ground of human relations that political authoritarianism needs.

Freedom of thought and freedom of expression are two fundamental categories of human rights and freedoms that are undoubtedly targeted by authoritarian regimes. In the most general sense, the press is the main source of public expression of ideas. Especially in a world where the use of social media and the internet has become so widespread and the

content and form of the concept of the press has expanded so much, the press has become the main focus of pressure for authoritarian regimes. On the other hand, authoritarian regimes want to prevent the public from being objectively informed about what is happening in society. Therefore, the press once again becomes the primary target of political authoritarianism.

Today, however, the press in its broadest sense, and journalism in particular, is not only facing pressure from political sphere. Unfortunately, press and journalism, parallel to these political pressures, is faced with the changes in technology and hence also undergoing a professional transformation. It can be said that this unfinished transition process has not only positive effects on the journalism, but also brings with it problems that are still blurred. Classical printed and broadcast media and journalism are rapidly being replaced by internet journalism and online news reporting. This, in turn, brings with it a blur that has yet to be clarified on many issues ranging from the understanding of journalists and reporters, the definition of news and news sources, principles of press ethics, forms of employment and working conditions of press workers. This study aims to make an assessment on the situation of human rights-based journalism in Turkey based on the three aforementioned findings. In the face of an increasingly authoritarian regime in Turkey, safety of journalists and press freedom remain one of the main problems. Many journalists are arrested and detained, many websites operating in the field of visual and print journalism and publishing are suspended by court order and/or decree law; access to many news articles is banned; and correspondents face different forms of police violence.

Especially with sectoral transformation of journalism, internal professional right violations, underground employment, mobbing, flexible employment, low wages, difficulty of working conditions, gender inequality, editorial pressure or the issue of "insider violations" such as censorship is often being ignored.

Until now, there have been many research studies and reports on violations of freedom of press and state violence against journalism. Currently, various human rights defender NGOs, trade unions and press organizations periodically publish reports, including statistical data, on the rights violations faced by press and correspondents. The general tendency



observed in these valuable studies is that they focus on the rights violations suffered by the press and media organs defined as the mainstream media, the majority of which operate in big cities, and journalists. Therefore, what makes our study different from previous reports is that it analyzes the rights violations faced by local correspondents, internet news websites and local news agencies and reveals the depth of the repression.

Undoubtedly, the concept of human rights has been changing and expanding in meaning and content over time, depending on the struggles that have been done for this issue. Today, when we think about human rights violations, it has become impossible to talk only about violations committed by the state against different segments of society. As we have emphasized above, the political pressures cannot be separated from social authoritarianization. Therefore, correspondents who constitute the target audience of this study do not only face pressure and violations from different institutions and organizations of the state. Especially since journalism has become a sector, the issue of "internal rights violations" such as violations of professional rights, underground employment, mobbing, flexible employment, low wages, difficult working conditions, gender inequality, editorial pressure or censorship are often ignored or have not been the main problematic of studies on freedom of the press until now.

In addition to the violations experienced by reporter journalists who have been subjected to police violence, sued, arrested and violated their right to a fair trial while practicing journalism, another feature of this study is to emphasize on "rights violations from the civilian side". Journalists engaged in human rights and public oriented journalism may frequently face pressure, violence and obstruction from the individuals, families, professional groups, associations, related to the events they cover. In some cases, the pressures coming from these parties not only make reporting impossible, but also cause correspondents to practice self-censorship, to face civilian violence and pressure, to be forced to retract news threats against the news channel.

Finally, it is necessary to emphasize the violations that journalists who follow news and try to report the rights violations on the Syrian border, where state of war and chaos has been lived for a long time. From

this point of view, we have tried to show a different aspect of the rights violations faced by correspondent journalism, namely that freedom of the press and freedom of expression are violated even more intensely under conditions of aggravated war and emergency.

To summarize, this study aims to analyze the problem of rights violations suffered by human rights defender journalists from the perspective of "human rights and freedoms" defined from an extremely broad perspective, and to analyze the issue on a socio-economic level, rather than only focusing on judicial cases that correspondents faced.



# METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

The main target group of this study, which was conducted in the context of the problematic of rights violations suffered by human rights defender journalists, consists of reporters, local news channels (TV and radio stations), internet news websites and news agencies and their employees. The study was conducted in the provinces of Mersin, Adana, Hatay, Gaziantep, Şanlı Urfa, Mardin and Diyarbakır. At the beginning, a general overview on recent research, reports and news articles on the state of journalism in Turkey in general and has been done. Then, reports on the rights violations suffered by journalists was evaluated. Later, to reach a clearer picture on this issue, this analysis was narrowed down to the provinces covered by our research.

The primary objective of the preliminary study was to provide a general breakdown of the rights violations faced by journalists. In this framework, four general categories were created: violations of rights perpetrated on different state institutions, violations of rights suffered by journalists due to professional conditions, violations against coming from private institutions and individuals who are the subject of the news, and violations from the civilian sphere.



These categories were categorized under more detailed sub-headings. For example, violations such as detentions, arrests, blocking news monitoring, broadcast bans, access block, fines, closures and etc., were labeled as violence from the state side. Informal employment, low wages, editorial censorship or pressure, unequal working conditions, occupational mobbing and gender inequality can be counted among the violations of rights within the profession. Violence against reporters in the field, threats to retract stories, insistence on retractions, self-censorship, etc. were also listed under the category of civilian rights violations.

In addition, the topics followed and covered by human rights defender journalists were also limited depending on the problematic of the research. In particular, journalists who cover the oppression and rights violations that citizens and civil society are subjected to in social life in the face of intensifying authoritarianism and political repression were taken as the main target audience. Just as importantly as these topics, we targeted journalists and local press organs who report on the problem of gender inequality and the environmental destruction caused by the state and the business world. We will also focus on the pressures that journalists face while reporting on human rights violations against migrants, refugees and citizens living in these regions. In doing so, we tried to focus primarily on the problems of women journalists reporting on the situation of women refugees, LGBTI+ individuals and migrants. In this way, we tried to em-



phasize the issue of gender through women journalists and the women refugees and migrants they deal with.

On the other hand, the rights violations that journalists are exposed to due to the environmental problems they cover on a local scale were tried to be emphasized. Cities such as Mersin and Adana were chosen for this reason. This is because Mersin and Adana are among the most industrialized provinces and therefore environmental problems are frequently on the agenda. The construction of the nuclear power plant in Mersin and the situation of journalists covering the news about it is of interest. Therefore, these two cities are among the cities where journalists dealing with environmental issues are most exposed to human rights violations. In addition, Adana province, together with its hinterland, provides most of Turkey's agricultural food needs. It is known that environmentally harmful chemicals used in the agricultural production process are used intensively in these regions. Within the scope of this project, the problems of local journalists reporting on these environmental problems were also monitored.

We prefer to limit our research from 2016 to 2022. As is known, press rights and violations in Turkey have a long history. However, especially with the state of emergency declared after July 2016, these violations and political repression against journalism have become more severe and intensified than ever before. For this reason, it was preferred to prioritize the rights violations that took place after this date for both the compilation of quantitative data and in-depth interviews. Beyond the necessity of research technique, we believe that press rights violations since the aforementioned date will shed light on the past period.

After determining these qualitative criteria, open-ended questionnaires were sent to more than eighty journalists, correspondents, news channels and online news websites in the provinces covered by the spatial limitation of the research via e-mail, cell phone, social media and by hand. Forty journalists, correspondents, media organization and news websites were selected from the returned questionnaires among those that were meaningful in terms of the problematic of the research. In-depth interviews were then conducted with this narrowed sample of journalists and

media organization representatives, accompanied by audio and video recordings. The methodological goal of this study is qualitative analysis rather than quantitative analysis based on demographic data and predetermined criteria. In this way, based on a limited spatial limitation and sample, we aimed to make a general assessment that can be adapted to the rights violations faced by human rights and public-oriented journalism in Turkey.



# GENERAL SITUATION

Authoritarian regimes resort to two important strategic methods to ensure their continuity. The first and primary one is the claim that there is an internal threat within the country. Through an intensive media bombardment and via state institutions, the idea and impression that the state and social order are facing threats from within and from outside is spread. This strategy is concretized under the discourse of "terrorism", while any criticism and protest against the regime is subjected to the general accusation of an act of terrorism. History is subject to such a reversal in the human mind that the development of phenomena and the concepts that are necessarily used to express these phenomena often stand upside down. Such kind of rever, also applies to the phenomenon and concept of terrorism.

In political history, the concept of terror was first used in the form of "state terror". State terrorism was defined as the use of power by a group, person, caste

or class that had seized political power in order to protect and maintain its power, to exert pressure, fear and intimidation on different segments of society. Over time, as the state and the political regime became sterile, any civilian objection, struggle or opposition to it was labeled as an act

of "terror". It is within this framework that the increasingly gangrenous authoritarian regime in Turkey today views all forms of criticism and dissent as terrorist activities.

...political repression, increasingly aggravated in all areas of social life should not be announced, expressed and criticized. To reach such an aim, freedom of speech, freedom of expression, and right to inform what is happening must be restricted.

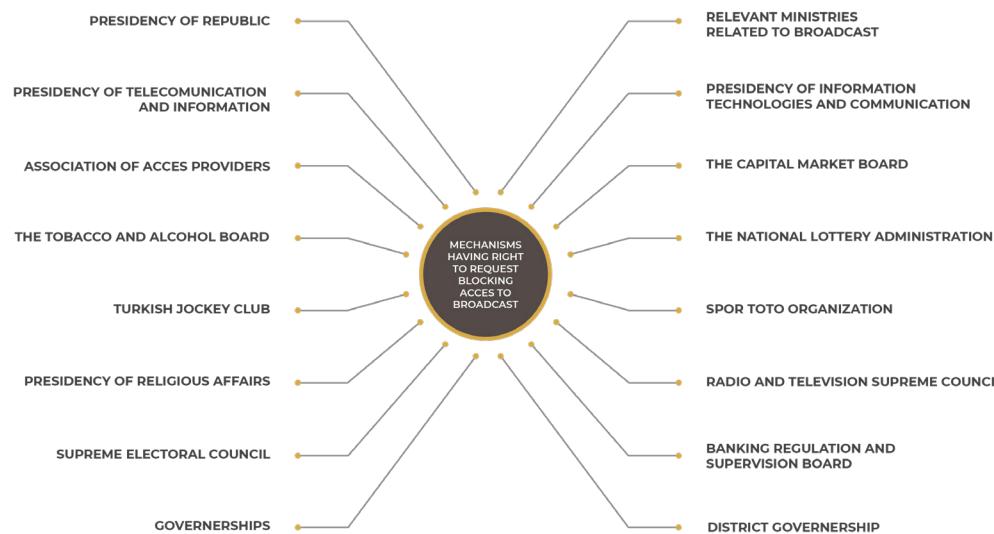


On the other hand, in order to prevent the political oppression, which is getting heavier and heavier in all areas of social life and to prevent the public's right to be informed about all that is going on, especially freedom of expression, freedom of press and are tried to be prevented. In another words, authoritarian government tries to limits public's right to reach information. Undoubtedly, it is of primary importance for the government to put pressure on the press and journalism, which is one of the most important means of expressing opinions, being informed about the violations of rights and the pressure exerted on different segments of social life. In this context, it can be said that freedom of the press and censorship of journalism in Turkey is at an extremely grave point.

The internet and social media, which were frequently claimed to be a free space to escape from the control of the state and political powers when they first started to become widespread in social life, are today among the primary channels that are the focus of authoritarian regimes in terms of control, banning and censorship. In Turkey, this control, banning and censorship is mostly carried out through administrative institutions and courts. Unfortunately, the law has turned into an instrument of the political and social oppression and order that the authoritarian regime wants to establish, rather than a mechanism for citizens to claim their rights against political power.

In addition to criminal court of peace, many public or semi-public institutions in Turkey, from the Presidency Telecommunication and Information (PTI) to the Presidency of Information Technologies and Communication (PITC), from the Turkish Jockey Club to the National Lottery Administration, have the authority to directly block or to request the blocking of access to internet news websites. Criminal courts of peace and prosecutor's offices have been given the authority to impose access blocking/prohibition, as well as many administrative institutions. To list, the Presidency of the Republic and the relevant ministries related to the news, information and media, PTI, PITC, the Association of Access Providers (AAP), the Capital Markets Board, the Tobacco and Alcohol Department, the National Lottery Administration, the Turkish Jockey Club, the Spor Toto Organization, the Presidency of Religious Affairs, the Radio and Television

Supreme Council, the Supreme Electoral Council, the Banking Regulation and Supervision Board, governorships and district governorships.



As can be seen from this table, broadcast bans are mostly used not by only criminal courts of peace or prosecutors' offices, but also by administrative institutions, in other words, by bureaucratic mechanisms appointed by the government. Through the Law No. 5651 about "Regulating Publications on the Internet and Combating Crimes Committed Through These Publications", which entered into force in 2007, approximately access to 33,358 websites on average have been blocked annually until 2020. According to the report published by the Freedom of Expression Association, 5,819 news addresses (URLs) were blocked through 819 different decisions of 236 criminal courts of peace in 2021. In the same year, 58,809 websites were blocked. In the last 14 years, a total of 467,011 websites have been censored.<sup>1</sup> What is noteworthy here is that the number of bans imposed upon the request and decision of administrative institutions is as high as the number of bans imposed by law and courts. As a general assessment, more than 95% of the decisions to impose access bans on internet journalism were taken or requested by administrative ins-

titutions, primarily the PITC, and only 5% were court-ordered. Even this simple observation is enough to see the intense political/bureaucratic pressure on freedom of the press and freedom of expression.

In particular, the left-wing news websites, news agencies such as sendika.org, Etkin News Agency (ETHA), Pir News Agency (PİRHA), news agencies such as Mezopotamya, Yenişam newspaper, Kurdish-language newspapers such as Xwebun, and special women news agencies such as JinNews have been banned countless times. The restriction on access to Kurdish, left-socialist and Alevi broadcast agencies and newspapers corresponding against conservative, Turkish-Islamic oriented ideology of the government stand out. Similarly, media institutions, including television channels, newspapers, magazines, broadcasting organizations and news agencies, have been subjected to these bans and closures. In particular, 177 media organization (radio, television, newspapers, news agencies) were shut down by the Decree Laws issued after the July 2016 coup attempt. The list of organizations shut down by emergency decrees includes 5 broadcast agencies, 28 televisions, 34 radios, 62 newspapers, 19 magazines and 29 publishing houses. Following these closures, nearly 2,500 journalists and media workers became unemployed. In the same period, more than 4,000 journalists' press cards had been revoked and most of the requests of applying for press cards are either delayed or rejected on various grounds.<sup>2</sup>

Practices such as direct access bans, removal or blocking of news articles, especially against online news websites and digital media are among the most frequent violations of freedom of expression and freedom of publication in recent years. Despite the Constitutional Court's decisions in favor of journalism, on the violation of rights regarding these closures and access bans, unfortunately, the administrative blocking and crackdowns continue unabated. The access ban imposed on Pir news agency and can tv, while this research continues, is the latest example of such kind of implementation. The Pir news agency, which corresponds on the Alevi community, was banned from access by the Hatay 1st Criminal

1 [https://ifade.org.tr/reports/EngelliWeb\\_2020.pdf](https://ifade.org.tr/reports/EngelliWeb_2020.pdf), 16.08.2022

2 <https://diclefiratgazeteciler.org/raporlar/dort-duvar-a... Dört Duvar Arasında Gazetecilik, s. 5, 2022.>

Judicature of Peace on March 8, 2022 without any justification. The objection made by the lawyers to this decision was also rejected without any justification.

In addition to the institutional dimension of the pressure and rights violations against freedom of expression and thought through media and journalism, the pressure on journalists, columnists, editors and correspondents constitutes another painful dimension of the problem. In the last few years, the pressure, obstruction, harassment and physical violence against journalists have increased. In addition, it can be said that there is an increasing trend in the number of investigations, lawsuits, detentions and arrests against journalists. As of February 2022, when this research began, there were 51 journalists who were prosecuted, 54 journalists who were investigated, and 47 journalists who were sentenced to over 133 years in prison. The number of journalists still on trial and in pre-trial detention was over 60 as of this year.<sup>3</sup>

Various human rights organizations periodically announce quantitative reports, mostly including statistical data, on the repression and censorship of the press in Turkey and the physical and legal violence against journalists. However, the issue has become so widespread and a routine of daily life that it is almost impossible to report on repression and rights violations against journalists and journalism outside of metropolitan cities and popular media. Especially in small cities, it is almost impossible to fully record the pressure, intimidation and rights violations that local news channels, correspondents and journalists, who try to practice journalism with their own means, face from the local administrators of the provincial organization of the central government and local administrators belonging to the ruling party.

Another form of repression and violation of freedom of the press and freedom of expression is the financial pressure imposed on media organizations and journalists. The Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTSC), which is emphasized to be an independent institution in its founding law, frequently imposes fines on several TV and radio channels that

report news that is biased towards the government. Only in 2021, RTSC fined 59 different TV and radio channels 158 times for the programs they broadcast. In the first three months of 2022, this number reached 61. The amount of fines imposed in these first three months reached 20,880,031 TL. In addition, RTSC can impose broadcast suspensions, administrative fines, warnings, program suspensions, removal of programs from the catalogue, suspension of broadcast transmission, cancellation of the broadcast license and cancellation of the transmission authorization certificate, sealing and closure with the authority granted by the law. TV channels known for their "opposition" nature, such as Halk tv, Tele1, Foxtv, Krt, are at the top of the list of fines. Between 2019 and 2010, Halk tv ranked first with 10 administrative fines and 3 broadcast suspensions (12 programs in total), Tele1 ranked second with 8 administrative fines and 3 broadcast suspensions (10 programs in total), Foxtv ranked third with 7 administrative fines and one broadcast suspension (3 programs in total).

But what is more tragic is that journalists have been detained, arrested and fined for charges of "insulting the president" via social media and their news reports and share these news on social media. From August 2014, when Erdoğan was elected President, to April 1, 2021, at least 70 journalists have been sentenced to imprisonment, suspended imprisonment and fines for "insulting the President" under Article 299 of the Penal Code. In the first three months of 2022, President Erdoğan and the President's sons-in-law Selçuk Bayraktar and former Treasury and Finance Minister Berat Albayrak were named in compensation lawsuits against five journalists (Çiğdem Toker, Şirin Payzın, Sedef Kabaş, Mustafa Sönmez and Hazal Ocak) and three media institutions (Halk TV, Tele1 and Sözcü) for a total of 850,000 TL. Insulting the President sometimes extends beyond borders. For example, DieWelt newspaper correspondent Deniz Yücel, who lives in Germany, was sentenced in absentia to a judicial fine of 7080 TL for allegedly "insulting" Hasan Yılmaz, then Deputy Chief Prosecutor of Istanbul and Deputy Minister of Justice, through a tweet.

Even more strikingly, targeting journalists on grounds of defamation and attacks on personal rights has begun to extend to the civilian sphere. Journalist Çiğdem Toker and Sözcü newspaper, who published

3 Dört Duvar arasında gazetecilik, s.7

a report on policies of İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality during Justice and Development Party were sentenced to 30 thousand TL. The court found Selçuk Bayraktar and Baykar Makine Company, of which he is an official, unjust in the 100 thousand TL compensation lawsuit he demanded from Mustafa Sönmez due to a tweet. Former Mayor of Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality Asım Güzelbey was demanding

...the government, who has almost monopolized ninety percent of the press, acts like a media owners. The remaining ten percent were seen as rival, opposition and terrorist media.

compensation from Ruhi Aytaç, the publisher of Gaziantep Haber newspaper. BirGün journalist Can Uğur was also detained at İstanbul Sabiha Gökçen Airport on charges of "insulting the President" due to an article from 2015. In the same period, President Erdoğan also filed a 250,000 TL compensation lawsuit against journalist Sedef Kabaş and Tele1 official Fırat Sakar, whom he had caused to be arrested for insulting him, on the grounds of "attacking their personal rights".

Finally, Erdoğan initiated tax inspections against journalists who criticize the government's economic management and authoritarian practices in online newspapers and news channels, as well as journalists who use the YouTube channel to criticize the government's economic management and authoritarian practices.

In general, pressures on the media go hand in hand with political corruption and economic pollution. Starting in the 1980s, the transformation of the media into a profit-oriented sector resulted in businessmen investing in different fields pouring serious money into television and journalism. At the point we have reached today, there is a media sector that revolves around the triangle of government-procurement-media owners, which calls for questioning. In addition to the small number of independent media organizations that remain outside this pollution, we can now talk about the media of government that has come to be known as the "pool media". Undoubtedly, this pathologization of the media-economy-politics relationship has a negative impact on the economic conditions, working life and professional relations of employees, and turns into an element of pressure on employees that is not visible at first glance. The most striking damage caused by the transformation of

the field into a profit-oriented sector can be listed as inequality in income distribution among employees, informal employment, de-unionization, precariousness and economic mobbing.

It is not uncommon for journalists and correspondents working for newspapers and media company known to be close to the government, or more accurately, indirectly owned by the government, to be dismissed for resisting editorial censorship, disagreeing with the editorial policy of the media outlet, working unregistered and underpaid, or unionizing. In the first three months of 2022, 75 journalists were dismissed on various grounds, which is striking in terms of showing the gravity of this situation. According to 2021 data, the unionization rate among journalists in Turkey is only 8%. It is almost commonplace for journalists who are or intend to become union members to be fired. And this applies not only to media outlets known to be close to the government, but also to opposition media outlets. In 2021, Cumhuriyet dismissed eight journalists who were members of the Journalists' Union of Turkey and Halk TV refused to negotiate collective bargaining agreements with Union's authority. Again, many workers at newspapers affiliated with the Demirören media group, known as close and visible relationship to the government, were dismissed because they were unionized.

The picture drawn so far can be considered as typical examples of the general situation observed in all authoritarian regimes. It should not be strange that the media, which are the most important channel through which the public's right to information is obstructed, political and civil institutions opposing the political regime can exercise their right to criticize, express themselves and convey their thoughts to the public, is under such pressure. Pressures and rights violations against freedom of the press, freedom of information and freedom of expression have become so gangrenous that critical media organizations are now seen by the regime as part of the opposition. Journalism, which by its very nature is supposed to question and be critical, is so much inappropriate that in Turkey, journalism that acts in accordance with these principles is referred to as the "OPPOSITIONIST PRESS". Leaving aside the fact that in a democratic political climate, journalism must be critical by nature, all channels and journalists

who exercise this right are treated as potential criminals.

When we look at the grounds for the prosecution of journalists who have been investigated in the last few years, and whose investigations have turned into legal cases, and the charges brought against them, it will be seen that almost no journalist has been prosecuted directly for their journalistic activities. Many articles of the Anti-Terror Law and the Turkish Penal Code, which have nothing to do with journalism and freedom of expression, are included in the prosecution indictments in journalist cases. Journalists are generally prosecuted under articles of the Anti-Terror Law that refer to these laws, such as "making propaganda for a terrorist organization", "printing or publishing declarations or statements of terrorist organizations", "targeting public officials who have taken part in the fight against terrorism", "disclosing information that must remain confidential for the security or political interests of the state for the purpose of political or military espionage", "using force or threats against a public official to prevent him from performing his duty".<sup>4</sup>

This general assessment has so far been addressed in different studies aiming to paint a picture of the situation. It should not be wrong to emphasize that the repression and rights violations against the press and journalists in Turkey are the product of a highly systematic, planned and conscious policy. The political power has embarked on an offensive against journalism by using almost all means of physical, legal and ideological violence monopolized by the state. On the other hand, while the above-mentioned forms of oppression continue, it should be emphasized that in the recent period, government practices such as police violence against journalists and correspondents, transform to the form of preventing them from taking video and preventing them from reporting news. In particular, prevention, using violence, detaining or targeting as terrorists on social media journalists who try to cover the demonstrations, marches and press statements of social groups who have been subjected to police violence while exercising their right to criticize and express their criticism and expression against the government, as well as their right to hold me-

etings, demonstrations and marches, has become the latest link in this systematic oppression.

### JOURNALISTS ARE NOW FACED WITH THE TRAGEDY OF BEING THE SUBJECT OF NEWS ON THEIR WAY TO THE NEWS

On August 12, 2022, Zeynep Kuray, who was covering the news of workers protesting for not receiving their rights at the construction site of a financial center in Istanbul, was beaten and detained by the police. Kuray made a statement after her release, saying that "with the guidance of police, the bosses of the company filed a complaint against her for damaging public property. The pressure The scene of journalists who were beaten by the police while covering the violence of police and security guards against citizens in Diyarbakır after the HDP meeting was one of the gravest examples in this tendency.



Journalists who report on gender and women-oriented journalism are particularly at the center of state violence. Bülent Kılıç, a journalist covering the Pride march in Istanbul in 2022, was beaten by the police by stepping on his throat.



<sup>4</sup> Yargılanan, haklarında soruşturma açılan gazetecilerin davalarının ele alınacağı çalışmaya ek raporlamada, bu mesele daha detaylı biçimde ele alınacak.

Many women journalists, covering women's protests in many cities to the government's decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention, have declared being subjected to verbal and physical violence. The journalists stated that they were often tried to be removed from the area by the police before the protests started, and when this was not successful, they were beaten during the protest and prevented from taking video footage. For example, Confederation of Progressive Worker Union's Branches of Press and Media, seek redress in court the beating of journalists who tried to cover the press statement organized by health workers on July 7 to protest the violence they face at their workplaces. Many journalists were beaten and prevented from covering the 1st May Workers Solidarity Day meetings organized in different cities of the country in 2022.



## JOURNALISM AT THE WHIRL OF VIOLENCE

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In the first six months since we started this work, 16 journalists we interviewed in Diyarbakır were arrested. They have been in prison for more than two months and it is not known what they are accused of. In the past two months, the prosecutor's office has yet to file an indictment did not prepare it. A journalist, known as reporting ecological destruction in Batman, was put on trial for making propaganda for a terrorist organization. Two journalists who we plan to have conference, were detained during a demonstration they went to cover. They were released afterwards but, they were charged with organizing an illegal demonstration. A journalist we interviewed in Hatay were beaten to death by unidentified persons. He was in intensive care for a long time. A woman journalist we interviewed in Diyarbakır was detained for four days because of the letter she wrote to her colleague in prison.

For researchers, the object of study is often defined as cold data having any non-emotional connection outside of researcher. Throughout this study, we have witnessed to the issue which is problematized. At the beginning, the title of the study is determined as 'Journalism At Risk'. However, what we encountered in the field after the striking experiences and interviews we conducted, we realized that the definition of risk is too light. And it would be more accurate to say that

journalism is directly besieged to a whirl of violence.

Violence, by its common definition, is not only characterized by destructive physical and psychological damage. What is at stake is the state penetration of every fields of society through different institutions and violence mechanism, the result is absolutely destructive. It is not customary to mention the outcome of a research from the beginning. However, in the path where we set out to identify the problems of local journalism and local correspondants, we have observed that the universal definition of journalism, the professional ethics that it possesses and that are attributed to the field, are facing a fierce attack by the state aimed at its total elimination.

The researcher determines the conceptual framework of the problem at the beginning. However, concrete data may sometimes falsify or invalidate this framework. In the process of the study, We also realized that the term "local journalism" is too static and unrealistic. Especially, in the provinces bordering Syria, journalism and news monitoring are extremely focusing on universal and general problems so that even national and international media organizations feed on this news. On the other hand, gender and violence against women journalism, ecology-oriented journalism cannot be narrowed in a local-national-international dichotomies. Hence, we aware that these issues are universal even at the most micro level. And the gentle warnings of the journalists and correspondants we interviewed, in raising such anawareness, cannot be denied.

As a result, starting with the provinces bordering Syria, in nine provinces, including Adana, Mersin, Hatay, Urfa, Mardin, Van and Bitlis, Urfa, Gaziantep, Diyarbakir, interviews were held with over fifty journalists, correspondants, news agencies, local newspaper and TV/radio owners. In these interviews, in particular, we tried to focus on the challenges of corresponding on gender, ecology and human rights violations. These challenges can be traced back to local politics.power centers, pressures from civil society and internal professional structuring and censorship and obstructions by organizations, and finally social/different institutionalized organizations, such as cultural conditions as barriers to news reporting. and forms of social violence were identified.

## ELEMENTS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST LOCAL JOURNALISM

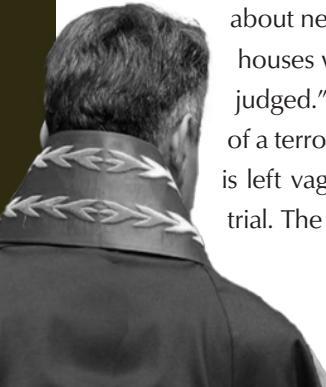
- 1. Local Law Enforcement**  
Authorities: Police, gendarmerie and guards
- 2. Provincial organizations of central government:** Governors, Chief of District organizations
- 3. Municipalities**
- 4. Business Community and Non-Governmental Organizations**
- 5. Provincial organizations of journalists (Worker Unions and Journalist Organizations)**
- 6. Social power centers, tribes, economically powerful families (especially on news about gender and violence against women.)**
- 7. Intervention at national level to news about human right violations in Syrian border.**
- 8. Economic pressure on Journalists:**
  - 8.a. Informal employment of journalists covering news for mainstream media.**
- 8.b. Free-lance journalism, piecework news production.**
- 8.c. Creation of local pro-media by municipalities; Journalists who report and produce critical news are threatened with money.**
- 8.d. Financial blackmail through the Press Advertisement Agency.**
- 8.e. Monopolization of journalism at local level.**
- 8.f. Mafiaization of the media; mafia infiltration of the media.**
- 9. Trustees and symbiotic relation between them and local media.**
- 10. Establishment of pro-media at local level.**

# JUDICIAL VIOLENCE OVER LOCAL MEDIA AND JOURNALISM

The sword of justice, which has turned into an instrument of violence in the hands of the government against journalists continues to shake. At the local level, journalism have been affected from this violence at extreme level. Local journalists as a reflection of journalism of national level, are grappling with lawsuits filed against them with reference to the Turkish Penal Code and the Anti-Terror Law. Among the journalists interviewed, there are over thirty cases, lawsuits and investigations against them. And many of them has been imprisoned at least once, tried under arrest, convicted, sentenced, sentenced postponed, monetized.

## JOURNALISM IS FACING WITH AN ASSASSINATION OF REPUTATION

The dangle of violence of judiciary over journalism, which is now almost maked journalism impossible, pushes journalists to act cautiously about news and publishing which will be subject to new lawsuit. "In courthouses where we used to go to follow the news, nowadays we are being judged.", said journalists. Journalists have been charged with membership of a terrorist organization (usually the name and nature of this organization is left vague), with making propaganda of a terrorist organization are on trial. The news they report, the images they share are evaluated by public



prosecutors as criminal evidence. While no legal action was taken for news channel which journalist work for, correspondents faced with police investigation regarding the news they shared on their social media accounts.

When they follow and make news on meeting of an opposition political party, trade union or any human rights organization, these news may directly be subject of new lawsuits. Or, if any speeches of political authorities correspond by journalist, it may also used prosecutors for making propaganda for illegal organizations.

Journalists detained without prosecution indictment; they are held in prisons for months until indictments are prepared; and the result is "serious accusations against journalists, frivolous indictments."

"During my thirty years as a journalist, there has not been a year without a lawsuit and that I haven't been called to testify at the police station."

While this project is in progress, the opposition party, in order to draw attention to government's human rights violations, organized to a meeting and march. Later, a police investigation was launched against correspondent who follow this meeting, for being a member of the organizing committee. The photos taken by the police were used as evidence was accused of being the organizer of the march. In this country, the camera of correspondent was treated as a molotov cocktail and as criminal evidence. "In the police report of a case against me, the camera I was filming while reporting the news was registered as a lethal weapon was passed", said correspondent.

**IF A MOBILIZATION OCCURS IN SOCIETY BECAUSE OF A NEWS REPORT YOU MADE, LOCAL AUTHORITIES THINKS THAT THIS MOBILIZATION IS BACause OF YOU. IN THE PAST, A JOURNALIST'S REPORT ON CORRUPTION OR HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS WERE CONSIDERED AS DENUNCIATION BY PROSECUTORS. THE JOURNALIST WHO MADE THIS KINDS OF NEWS IS NOW ON TRIAL.**

**Article 125/1, designed "insult through the press" is an insult to the press:**

Perhaps the most common legal lawsuits or investigation faced by local media workers is being depended on Turkish Penal Code Article

125/1, regulating defamation through the media. When you criticize a person or organization (public or private) by reporting and publishing a news, you are subject to this article and you are on trial. When you reported, for example, that health workers who worked day and night during the covid pandemic were not paid their additional wages, the Provincial Health Director goes to the courthouse and files a defamation lawsuit against journalist. When a journalist reports on the mayor for illegally zoning public land, mayor immediately files a defamation suit against journalist. A private factory that reports by journalist for the reason that the factory is dumping its wastes into the nature, you don't hear a word from the factory owner, but the governor of the province takes it upon himself and files a lawsuit against journalist.

Speaking of the pandemic, it is important to note that law enforcement agencies seem to have invented unthinkable ways of blocking journalists. Many journalists in the provinces where the research was conducted were punished with a fine during the period of pandemic.



## LAW ENFORCEMENT VIOLENCE ON JOURNALISTS

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The instrumentalization of the law and the whirl of violence against journalism has long been almost taken for granted, or at least it has become a phenomenon that is no longer unusual. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that the dose and forms of violence against journalists by law enforcement officers and the way it is practiced are gradually increasing. This form of pressure and violence has become increasingly systematized. It seems here that the main goal is to restrain the correspondent to make news and to prevent the public from receiving information.

Recently, the violence against correspondent who follow the actions of oppositional social groups against the government, political activities, labor strikes, resistance against the plunder of nature, women's the protests of violence against women and has permanently increased. The main purpose of this violence is also constrain journalists from reporting the news. In doing this, law enforcement agencies (police, watchmen, gendarmerie) use different techniques and methods. Undoubtedly one of the most frequently used prevention vay is physical



violence and verbal abuse. Direct use of batons, water cannons or pepper spray, handcuffing the correspondant or detention in a vehicle temporary or different forms of violence. Women journalists are undoubtedly the primary recipients of verbal violence often escalates to sexual harassment. From the clothes they wear, to the searches at police checkpoints and to their make-up women journalists have been subjected to verbal violence with different themes.

## LAW ENFORCEMENT VIOLENCE AGAINST JOURNALISTS

- 1. Physical violence during news reporting
- 2. Verbal abuse
- 3. Detention during news report
- 4. Blocking image acquisition or shooting
- 5. Removing journalists before the news event starts.
- 6. Threatening or forcing journalist to leave the city.
- 7. Raiding journalists' homes.
- 8. Confiscation of cameras, cameras, computers, memory cards, etc.
- 9. Denying the news.
- 10. Targeting the journalist who broke the news on social media.
- 11. Plugging journalists.
- 12. Forcing the people or institutions that are the subject of the news to file a complaint against the journalist.

When these do not seem as efficient way, arrest and detention at a police station or in a vehicle, are put in place. Law enforcement officers tried to restrain journalism by blockading the journalist group and creating a wall or by blocking them in a certain area to prevent them from filming or taking photos. Using police shields to prevent journalist is another news-blocking technique. Additionally, the camera seizing, destroying or delaying the memory cards are another forms of violence. Journalists state that their digital media tools and computers were confiscated during house raids.

The government is as much concerned with the group that carries out the oppositional action as it is with the group that reports on this

action. They also see the journalist as an enemy. Journalists started to become the subject of the news on their way to the news.

Despite all these obstacles, if the news is made in one way or another, then other techniques are being used by police forces. For example, Law enforcement, the governor's office or provincial police deny the news or a news service that is the opposite of the news is doing so. In the face of the press, law enforcement agencies are a kind of disinformation center as if it were a fake social media. This misinformation is sometimes spread through fake social media accounts, often with official statements. Declaring correspondant or media web sites as terrorist on social media and launching campaigns on social media are also common methods used by law enforcement.

"Where the press becomes silent, society sinks into darkness."

In particular, public journalism, community-oriented journalism, ecological and/or gender-oriented journalists who are concerned about the exploitation, have been tagged, records have been created about them, their social media accounts were monitored and their phones were tapped by law enforcement officer. Correspondent who share news of their own making on their individual social media accounts, are being investigated. This evidens shows that social media accounts of the most of the correspondant have been monitored by law enforcement agencies.

There is a government and news that government wants or does not want to be heard. As a journalist, when you report topics that the government does not want, you are confronted with a whirl of violence.

The government is as much concerned with the group that carries out the oppositional action as it is with the group that reports on this action. They also see the journalist as an enemy. Journalists started to become the subject of the news on their way to the news.



Journalists, following a press statement organization of a political party in Van, were threatened by law enforcement police by pulling a gun. Moments when the police pulled a gun were caught on camera.

The authoritarian mentality's syndrome of obstructing the public's right to information is so became chronic that sometimes tragicomic situations are encountered. For example, Correspondent, reporting on demonstration of workers of shopping mall for having not received their wages for months, might be fined for damaging private property by owner with the suggestion. Such kind of stories show us that the violence faced by journalists coming from non-state institutions constitute another dimension of the whirl of violence.



# LOCAL POLITICS AND JOURNALISM

With the influence of authoritarianism that has permeated every part of the country, almost every kind of social relationship, there seems a local media surrounded by many different locally situated power centers. Undoubtedly, local media is at the forefront of these power centers such as municipalities, provincial organization of the central government and local civil organizations.

Governorships, District Governorships and Mayors send press release and visuals to local correspondant via their own media organizations, and WhatsApp groups and they are dictated to report and make news by using these releases. Hence, most of the news channels and news papers at local level function as press agencies of governorship and municipalities. Correspondants, to identify such kind of tendency, are used the term "BESPOKE JOURNALISM". In this case, there seems a conflict between journalists ready to report news for the service of the governorship or the municipality. And those who insist to make critical and independent journalism. Local news channel, newspapers and journalists, preferring to stay outside this ordering mechanism, usually faced with local Administrations/managers, physical, political and financial embargo.



Press Advertisement Agency, does not function as a censorship mechanism but regulating hush money for local media. It is observed that newspapers and news channels that receive a share from the Press Advertisement Agency are far from critical journalism. Press releases, prepared by district governors, governors and mayors, are being published by local media who supported by the Press Advertisement Agency, without changing a single point or comma being touched. In addition, there are special "hush-money funds" allocated by governorships, district governorships and municipalities to the local media institutions, editors, columnist and correspondents.

"Most of the local media institutions are trying to survive by taking advertisements from local shopkeepers. The district governors and/or mayors, sometimes may visit shopkeepers and prevent them from giving advertisements to opposition media and press. Cutting subscriptions to local news agencies is used as a tool of intimidation by local political and administrative authorities."

"MUNICIPALITIES SEE US AS AGENCIES TO ADVERTISED THEMSELVES; THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT WANTS US LIKE ITS OWN TROLLS AND THE OPPOSITION WANTS US TO ACT AS GUNSLINGER". And it's impossible to make independent journalism in the conditions authoritarianism infected with both power and opposition.

## AUTHORITIES WHO ADMINISTER THE CITY ARE VERY INFLUENTIAL IN DESIGNING THE LOCAL MEDIA AND PRESS

The general view of local governments, considering as an indispensable part of democracy, is problematic and strictly affected authoritarian atmosphere spreading to all areas society and politics in general. Using violence by elected mayors from the ruling party, has become a general tendency. In particular, municipalities such as Diyarbakır, Mardin, Van governed by appointed trustees (governors), appointed to replace the elected mayor, "opposition journalists" banned from even entering any institution of the municipality or getting information from local bureaucrats. Journalists who report news at critical style, are being forced to leave the city, their homes are raided by law enforcement and they. If these tactics

are not effective, correspondants can be subjected to investigations and detentions based on the news they report.

This strained relationship between local governments and local media journalists is not limited to the municipalities belonging to party in power.

**MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR:**

"This news made the Mayor very upset. We used to advertise in your newspaper, but from now on we will pass it. If you don't take into account the sensitivities of this city, one day you may face these sensitivities."

It can be argued that the mayors of the main opposition party also adopt a similar attitude when it comes to news about them that they do not like. For example, in Mersin,

a local newspaper was attacked by members of the party's provincial youth branch for its reporting on the CHP municipality and journalists were manhandled.

On the other hand, we observed that municipalities have a serious incentive to create a partisan press at the local level. At this point, funding local media by municipalities, warning of local media elements that report unfavorable news cutting off their income channels, forcing editors to dismiss of journalist who reports the news or forcing to retract the news are general tendency at local level.

"WE ARE NOT TALKING ABOUT CORRUPTION IN THE MUNICIPALITIES RUN BY APOINTED TRUSTEES, BUT WHY JOURNALIST REPORTING ON IT."

"That's why we don't report on corruption; if we did, they would destroy us", said correspondant. This fear pushes journalists to violate the ethical rules of journalism. Self-censorship, to put aside the news, to prefer the cases that won't get correspondat in truble are very common behaviours.

During the pandemic, a journalist who reported on a private factory that did not organize its working conditions in a healthy way and did not show the necessary sensitivity in this regard was subjected to a legal investigation through the governorship. A journalist who reported on irregularities in newly zoned areas was prosecuted for "INSULTING THE MUNICIPAL MAYOR". In other words, similar defamation cases, like a

lawsuit filed by the President against journalists, are also seen at the local government level.

A woman journalist who made a news on "Corruption and bribery in the Gaziantep governorship", governor's office blocked access to the news,. Afterwards, a lawsuit for 400 thousand Turkish liras in damages was filed against the journalist. When these pressures fail to prevent journalism, governors complain to the Press Advertisement Agency about the newspaper whose news they are uncomfortable with and hence resort to financial intimidation of newspapers.

In this context, especially insistence of correspondants making news about the corruption by appointed trustee governors in replace to elected mayors, in Diyarbakır, Mardin and Van, feedbacked as pressure, detentions and arrest.

# A BOTTOMLESS PIT: THE JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION OF TURKEY

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The journalists Association of Turkey, unlike many other professional organizations in Turkey, does not have the status of a quasi-public professional organization. In other words, it does not have the status of bar associations, chambers of architects and engineers or chambers of medicians. Rather, the journalists' association has the structure of a non-governmental organization. In this case, in the face of violations of the rights of journalists and journalism, it is also becoming more difficult to be an advocate. At the same time, the association also has no sanctioning power over journalists who do not act in accordance with press ethics principles.

On the other hand, it would not be wrong to say that the reality of pro-mediaization and monopolization observed in the mainstream media across Turkey is also reflected in the local press. Under these conditions, journalists' associations constitute the local ground for the power struggle. The profile of the president of a journalists' association at local level is that, they have more than one newspapers, television and radio channels, news agencies and have also investments outside the media sector. In addition, most of the heads of journalists' associations who have organic relations with mayors, local governments, governors and district governors, decide which newspapers and/or news channels will receive official advertisement. Because of the weight of the conditions for receiving an advertisement from Press Advertisement Agency, most of the media institutions, struggling with economic problems, are unable to meet the necessary conditions and therefore cannot benefit from this opportunity. Therefore, the journalists' associations in general are not a typical professional solidarity organization, but rather play the role of central government's policies of intimidating the local media and whirl of violence.

A few examples on the role of journalists' associations from the provinces we surveyed will give a clearer picture. In Mardin, for instance, a newspaper and the editor-in-chief, criticizing the policies of the trustee mayor, was criminalized by another newspaper owned by the chairman of a Mardin journalists' association. The newspaper accused editor-in-chief of being a terrorist organization sympathizer. A journalist was attacked with a gun by several people while getting into his car in Gaziantep. After the investigation, the chairman of Gaziantep Journalists Association arrested for solicitation to commit murder. The chairman of Van journalists association is at the same the press consultant of the appointed trustee mayor of Van metropolitan municipality. Even these few examples show us how the power-media-economic power relations is complicated at local level. There are of course exceptions to this general picture. For example, the chairman of Bitlis Association of Journalists was on trial in dozens of cases because of his journalistic activities.. Shortly after we met, he was arrested and imprisoned for one of the cases against him.

## AN INTERESTING STORY: A PUBLIC WORKER'S ADVENTURE AS A JOURNALIST:

Unlike the industrialized journalism of the so-called mainstream media, local journalism is a matter of the heart, is an endeavor in which the amateur spirit resists surrendering to the calculating rationality of professionalization. Let alone making money from journalism, many journalists are crazy enough to risk losing everything they have for this cause. To carry a good camera on their shoulders, they prefer to sacrifice for their daily life needs.

In our example, a journalist who works as a public sector worker in Hatay, he has the resilient spirit to persist in journalism. He has been exiled thirty-five times for the sake of journalism; his newspaper building was attacked, the printing house was sabotaged. We are talking about a journalism that despite all the pressure, insisting on to run a newspaper in all cities where he exiled.



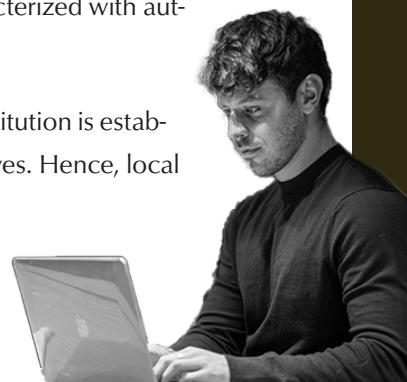
## POLLUTION CREATED BY DIGITAL MEDIA

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It is so easy to open a news site on the internet especially local level that there are countless news web sites opened by people who have no experience in journalism. So much so that this field has turned into a source of income for those whose profession is not journalism.

For example there are over 250 internet journalism websites in Urfa. Municipalities bill every one and his uncle. When the news web site that doesn't get paid, report against the municipality, mayor have to pay that bill. This uncontrolled digital media inflation and circulation of unverified information coming from many sources, has shaken confidence in journalism. Unfortunately, despite so many principled journalists as well as the administrative mechanisms that pave the way for the establishment of these conditions and a new typology of journalists who easily adapt to these power relations is also remarkable. It is also important how the person, who defines itself as a journalist, is engaged in such kind of media environment in which is imposed by political power, characterized with authoritarianism and corruption.

Her a local TV channel or digital media institution is established not to employ journalist but open a gate for relatives. Hence, local media evolved into a field in which employs relatives.



Since the mainstream media is often subservient to political power, a kind of journalism that hides the news, manipulates it, and turns it into a PROPAGANDA for the political power, become prominent. Therefore, at the local level we are confronted with a media engineering carried out by provincial extensions of the State. The partisan/oppositional journalist division among journalists has reached such a point that some journalists directly target their colleagues and report on them to prosecutors.

Hence, there is an informal pressure on journalist results in an internalized fear. This is a fear that journalists have built up over the years. Because social media shortens the distance between journalists and political/economic lobbies, correspondent who made news on gender, ecology or local government practices, may be subjected to a "DIGITAL FORCE CAMPAIGN". It is common case for journalist to being blamed on social media, being threatened and being targeted in social media accounts run by the police or the governor's office.

Targeting and criminalization of journalists is not coming only from the government side but how sad it is they are frequently accused by their own colleagues. A correspondent we made interview said that: "In a meeting launched by Democratic People's Party in Mersin I observed the police intervention. As a journalist I was also subjected to intense gas bombardment, and I reported this case. Upon this news, another journalist sent a message to the owner of the newspaper I work for and complained me as reporting news terrorist organization's point of view."

At the local level, journalists do not only face with pressure from the ruling party. As mentioned earlier, authoritarianism is a social problem, and as it becomes socialized, those who oppose it as well as those in power infect from this authoritarianism. Such kind of attacks on journalists may sometimes come from the civilian sphere. As a typical example, the suspension of a journalist who reported on Mersin Bar Association, from all communication channels of Association due to a news on Bar Association. The Bar Association organized an event for Lawyers' Day. A journalist reports on the poor attendance at this event. The chairman of the bar association, upon this news, decided to remove both journalist and the newspaper she works for, from the mailing list of association.

Journalists Vedat Örütç and Elif Kurttaş were reporting on the dumping of plastic waste in nature after processing.

Journalists who report and make news on private sector are often independent of holistic violence and sometimes even more grave practices can be encountered. Vedat and Elif, two young reporters in Adana and Mersin, reported a news on waste coming from Europe, visited two factories in the Adana Industrial Zone that process this waste. They reported that the pulp of the waste after processing is released into nature, employment of immigrant labor in the factory illegally and non-compliance with sanitary conditions in the factory. Afterwards, they are detained, beaten physically by factory owners and relatives. They were subjected to verbal violence and memory cards were confiscated.



#### **WE ARE PRO-GOVERNMENT, NOTHING WILL HAPPEN TO US, YOU ARE DIVISIONIST, YOU WILL PAY FOR THIS**

It is a common and familiar story that even if the accusation came from the civilian side: Journalist are accused of being separatists and traitors.

Correspondents, doing ecology-oriented journalism, are subject to whirl of violence coming from business world and what's even worse is that you cannot find an interlocutor. For example, a private plastic processing factory in Mersin waste into an agricultural irrigation canal and a stream that runs near the city, neither the factory owner nor the municipality that issued the license to the factory and provincial directorate of the ministry of environment announced any response.

One of the most interesting examples of ecologically sensitive journalism is the ambivalent attitude of the local press towards the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant under construction in Mersin. While at the begin-

ning of the process, almost all of the local press exhibit a journalism that was critical of the construction of power plants, the situation seems to be change. While some of the local press maintain this attitude, some media institutions are contributing to segregation by remaining silent and others by reporting favorably. This ambivalent change is undoubtedly due to the fact that the company building the power plant the considerable budget allocated for advertising and public relations, and the fact that from this budget, some newspapers and allocating advertising shares to news websites, lobbying journalists activity can be said to be effective.

Unfortunately, this is the current state of journalism: A terrorist in the eyes of the government and law enforcements; a traitor and separatist in the eyes of the businessman, a member of gang, for seeking his rights, in the eyes of the newspaper boss who does not even pay him minimum wage... In the past, journalists were being killed, now journalism is being killed.



#### NEWS SITES AT UNDER THE COUNTER AND INFORMATION POLLUTION:

We are going through a period in which anyone with a good cell phone is a journalist. Local digital news websites that publish news from social media accounts they follow at the local level without checking their accuracy are quite common. In the cities where the research was conducted, there are dozens, in some cases over a hundred, online news web-

sites, but only a few of them are officially registered. Sometimes it takes a days to create, report and publish. Someone a social media influencer or youtuber with a large number of followers on social media can claim your news with a single click. There is no real journalist, There is a reality of exploitation of invisible labor.

This moral and principled erosion of journalism, caused by technological development, has many dimensions. Publishing someone else's news as your own, not specifying the news source, creating a news from images circulating on the internet with questionable accuracy, copy and paste journalism are some of these dimensions of this erosion.

So much so that many institutionalized news channels or websites or journalists even sending news received from other channels or journalists to the source and publish it as their own news without using a logo. In this regard perhaps one of the news organizations whose rights and labor have been usurped is the Mesopotamia News Agency. Almost all of the correspondents and employees of this agency have been identified by the state and law enforcement agencies as members of terrorist organizations. Ironically the news about the civil war in Syria and its impact on the border provinces. And reflections on rights violations in the region are frequently reported by this agency without citing the logo of the Mesopotamia agency. In this case, "the under counter journalism" ascribe to local journalism is more appropriate for mainstream media.

# UNDERGROUND JOURNALISM

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The majority of local journalists do not have press cards or accreditation to official institutions. Journalists who do not have turquoise press card even by the Presidency, are not considered journalists. Despite the decision of the Council of State that "a yellow press card is not required to be a journalist", journalists are prevented by the law enforcement to follow any news on the ground that they have not press card. The law enforcement prevents journalism without any court decision. Unlawful circulators Interior Ministry are used to prevent journalists from working. Most of

the journalists are not allowed to follow press releases by ministries or their provincial organizations, meetings of governorships and district governorships that are open to the public. This situation results in a type of journalist who shuttle between media and local administrators and politicians, who reports for money, who uses his channels to blackmail local politicians. This is not a preference, but rather a result of local power centers.on their imperious, anti-democratic and oppressive behavior. Some newspapers and broadcasting organs have been worked like an OFFICIAL PRESS organ of local governments. Especially among internet news sites

in the digital world, they rapidly increasing and are not very well-controlled, that are only set up for this purpose.

WE ARE IN A PERIOD WHERE ANYONE WITH A GOOD CELL PHONE IS A JOURNALIST. There are hundreds of internet news sites in Mersin: EVEN CEZERY SELLERS ARE OPENING NEWS WEBSITES IN DIGITAL WORLD. They have neither journalist nor correspondent; they make copy-paste news that comes into their e-mail systems.

Such kind of digital broadcastin channels, local TV/Radio stations that indulge in this kind of underground journalism receive funding from the mayor of whichever party attacking the opposite municipality.

# JOURNALISM ON THE SYRIAN BORDER



The Syrian civil war has been a war in which the Turkish state and government from the very beginning, was a party of this war and directly intervened. This intervention did not mean in the sense that supporting one side of the warriors. To change demographics structure in the war zones, to create an institution that suits their political ideology to establish order and to build a war economy for the benefit of certain interest groups are also within the scope of these interventions. It was also necessary to prevent public opinion being aware of anti-democratic and anti-human rights practice occurred during the establishment of this order. Therefore, on the Syrian border, independent journalism is again targeted by the Turkish state. Since the beginning of the war in Syria, journalists working on the border are seen as dangerous from paramilitary ISIS gangs.

"While these paramilitary groups move freely on the streets of border provinces and districts without the intervention of law enforcement, journalists have faced with unreasonable obstacles by law enforcement". Journalists working in the region are trying to hide themselves.. "To make sure that your's

reporting from the border doesn't give the state a headache, they use unprecedented forms of physical and psychological violence". In doing a real journalism on the border, you are accused of undermining the indivisible integrity of the country and questioned on charges such as disrupting relations with neighboring countries. For example, you cannot make a broadcast report about the widespread illegal gasoline trade in Syrian border. Or if you report on Syrian women who sold by ISIS in Hatay border villages to prostitution gangs under the name of marriage, and when you expose the political and local connections of this case, you are blocked. In the first years of the war, in the villages along the Syrian border in Hatay, fertilizer factories in the villages along Hatay's border increasingly proliferated. And these factories were used to make bombs for cross-border paramilitary groups. When you report such kind of challenges, you can be arrested and tried on charges of "using confidential state information for political and military espionage". Mezopotamya News Agency correspondent, Erdogan Alayumat who reported on this situation is still on trial for the case in which he was arrested.

## THERE ARE PRINTING HOUSES CLOSED AND SET ON FIRE IN THE 21st CENTURY IN TURKEY AND JOURNALISTS FORCED TO RELOCATE THEIR PRINTING PRESSES TO ANOTHER CITY

A journalist reports that Syrian migrants were employed illegally and informally by Altinözü municipality in Syrian border. He has reported on gun trafficking involving state officials. He reported on 11 migrants who died when a truck carrying migrants overturned. AFTER THE NEWS, HE WAS THREATENED BY MAYOR THAT SAYS I WON'T LET YOU INTO THE DISTRICT PRESIDENT.

Mahmut Şan, a journalist in Hatay's Altinozu district, REPORTS ON corruption and rights violations at the Syrian border, and publishes news articles about the environmental problems in the district. After that, first his newspaper is being looted; the municipality did not give a license to the printing house. As a result of these pressures, Mahmut Şan had to transport his printing press to the center of Antakya. After the interview conducted with him, Mahmut was attacked by unknown assailants about a month later. Şan was in intensive care for days.

# GENDER BROADCASTING AND WOMAN-ORIENTED JOURNALISM

Being a woman journalist in a society dominated by a male-dominated culture is just as difficult. In this study, the majority of journalists we interviewed are women. It is observed that, women journalists face their first problems within the family, even at the stage of professional choice. Since journalism is seen as a male profession, the first reaction to women who want to study journalism starts in the family.

The level of pressure, obstruction and violence women journalists' face from different levels of the state is higher than that of male journalists. In addition to arrests and investigations, the masculine language, psychological harassment and detention by law enforcement are additional forms of violence women journalists are faced with.

It has been observed that the mobbing and discrimination from



their male colleagues is worse and gangrenous a problem. First and foremost, women journalists, who are activists sensitive to gender issues, struggle against masculine domination within the profession.

Women journalists are fighting against being forced to work in the office. Actually male editors or owner of journal do not want woman journalist to go out in the field. They forced woman journalists to do official works such as page design. In the field, they faced with verbal harassment from male colleagues as well as the law enforcement. "YOU ARE A WOMAN, HOW WILL YOU CARRY THE CAMERA". A woman journalist is imposed to work in the office both fetching and delivering tea, cook for lunch. They are forced to work in visual media such as local TV or radio as visible face and voice of the channel in audio media organs and as announcers. And this attitude is itself a masculine understanding.

Women journalists are not only concerned with individuals such as their colleagues or law enforcement, but also with the pervasive sexist language dominated media and they also have to struggle with this. "EVEN WHEN YOU WRITE AND SEND THE NEWS FROM A WOMAN'S POINT OF VIEW, IT IS FILTERED AND MASCULINIZED BY EDITORIAL BOARD."

Women journalist are the first to be discharged both in mainstream and local media. Demirören Haber, one of Turkey's most comprehensive media organizations may discharge a female journalist on the grounds that she was pregnant. Women journalists are seen as weak employees whose position can easily be filled by a man. In their field of work women journalists who have been subjected to masculine violence of the state and this forced them to publish more news to break down the masculine language. According to reports of Coalition for Women in Journalism (CFWIJ), at least 19 women journalists are subjected to violence and harassment because of their professional activities, 16 women journalists face charges for their journalistic activities and lawsuits were charged against them him. In February 2022.

A woman journalist was sent to prison due to an approved prison sentence. In addition, a woman journalist was subjected to violence by the

police while following the news and was prevented from taking image.<sup>5</sup>

Women journalists are mostly prosecuted for their news reports and social media posts. Women journalists in local provinces, mostly on charges for being “member of an illegal organization” and “making propaganda for an illegal organization”. Nurcan Yalçın, the journalist we interviewed during this study, was raided at night from home and she was taken into custody. Despite any indictment against her she was detained for 4 days at counter-terrorism branches of police department and was denied access to his lawyer.

One of the most important problems faced by women journalists is being attacked by perpetrators of sexual abuse and violence against children.. Threats from perpetrators have become extremely common situation. Together with the increasing threats against women journalists, Mesopotamia Women Journalists Platform issued a press release emphasizing the threats against women journalists pointed out the magnitude of the problem: “After the news on sexual harassment, threats over journalists were intensified. Both the reporters and the news agency receive phone calls and threats. Not satisfied with that, they try to raid the news agency. They demand the address information of the reporters who made the news. They want us to remove the news and when they get a negative response, they start threatening”.

Social Discrimination against women journalists can also be observed in employment rates. An example which is given through Mersin will suffice to explain the gravity of the situation., There are 10 newspapers, 16 radios and 3 TV channels, two of which are on satellite in Mersin. The rate of women journalists working in these media institutions is around 20%. Women journalists respond to this discrimination by publishing their own newspapers. In Mersin “KADINDAN HABER”, which publishes online and in print, is an example, but the most striking one is the JinNews News Agency.

## A FIRST IN WOMEN-ORIENTED JOURNALISM IN TURKEY: JINNEWS NEWS AGENCY

JinNews, the first and only women-focused news agency in Turkey, was founded on March 8, 2012 under the name Jin News Agency. It was founded with the aim of transforming women-oriented journalism and challenging the masculine language of the media. They aimed to expose the masculine language of the media on the one hand and the gender discrimination and violence that women journalists see from many different political and social fronts on the other. Therefore, they tried to make a journalism in which both women-oriented journalism and the struggle against gender discrimination are intertwined. Jin News Agency was shut down by a decree with the force of law In 2016. Afterwards, women journalists insisted to continue the struggle by publishing a newspaper called Şujin. Sujin, which does not even last a year, is published in 2017. In August 2017, it was shut down again by a decree.



Women who continue to struggle against all these oppressions, they founded JinNews News Agency in 2018, which continues its broadcasting life today. All the employees are women. They broadcast mainly in Kurdish, Arabic Turkish and English. JinNews has struggled against unimaginable pressure since its establishment. The agency's website has

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.womeninjournalism.org/reports-2>, 28.08.2022

been 'blocked access to the website' 41 times a year. Broadcasting bans on countless news put in place. Almost all women journalists have been prosecuted more than one lawsuit. Additionally, they have to deal with hundreds of lawsuits filed against the agency by the perpetrators of sexual assault and child abuse.

Women journalists are trying to develop different forms of struggle against increasing right violations. In addition to trade unions and associations, they tried to organize struggles within women journalists platforms to draw attention to the problems of women journalism. The Mesopotamia Women Journalists Platform is one of them. According to report announced by this platform, in the first six months of 2022, at least 161 women journalists were subjected to rights violations; 18 women journalists were faced with physical attacks by law enforcement officers and many of them were being subjected to sexist insults and verbal attacks by men on social media. 14 women journalists were subjected to violence, 6 journalists lost their jobs; 10 journalists' homes raided; 26 journalists detained, 1 journalist was harassed. 31 journalists were harassed for following news, 1 journalist was banned from travelling; 6 journalists were subjected to threats; 1 journalist was forced to work as a spy, 1 journalist was arrested for giving birth.<sup>6</sup> Women journalists are also subjected to violence through legal and administrative mechanisms. The report draws attention to the investigations 10 women journalists; 12 journalists' investigations turned into lawsuits; 12 women journalists 23 years 10 months and 27 days in total was sentenced to imprisonment; 4 journalists were fined a total of 190.250 TL.TL. 105 women journalists are on trial in 73 cases, while 10 journalists are under arrest.

In the process of writing the report of this study, three women reporters Habibe Eren, Derya Ren and Öznur Değer were arrested during night raids and were taken into custody from their homes.

<sup>6</sup> <https://mkgp.org/kadin-gazetecilere-yonelik-6-aylik-ocak-haziran-2022-hak-ihlalleri-raporu/>, 22.09.2022

## ECONOMIC-POLITICS OF JOURNALISM

It is a well-known fact that journalism is one of the professions in Turkey where informal and flexible employment are most prevalent. The situation of local journalists is no different. The vast majority of local journalists work without insurance and therefore earn minimum wage. The situation of journalists who work in the name of mainstream media at local level, is deplorable. Almost all of these journalists all of them refused to accept our request for an interview because of the fear of losing their job.

Especially most of the young journalists, who receive academic education work in multiple jobs at the same time. - They try to provide necessary materials for journalism such as cameras, tripods, memory cards etc., with their own funds. Most of them meet their own needs such as transport, accommodation

"SELLING NEWS": Free-Lance journalism is widespread among local correspondents, particularly in provinces bordering Syria. Most of the correspondents in these areas, are selling news about the war to the national and inter-



national press. They live off by selling ecological, gender and political news that will attract mainstream media attention. Most of the journalists at local level, perform their profession as something like "PIACEWORKER". Besides that, at least in the provinces under investigation, News Agencies like Mesopotamia, JinNews, Pirha, Etha are in exception. We observed that these organisations have established professional and economic solidarity networks within themselves.

In parallel with the general economic situation in the country, print media is gradually losing its influence and digital media is coming to the fore. Local news agencies and online news websites are looking for different financial resources to sustain their profession in the face of increasing economic difficulties. In particular, receiving long and medium-term support from international funding organisations is one of them. In almost every province there is at least one TV channel, a newspaper or a news agency trying to survive with these funds.

# KURDISH JOURNALISM AT THE WHIRL OF VIOLENCE : MEZOPOTAMIA NEWS AGENCY

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Dicle News Agency (DİHA) was launched on April 4, 2002 with the motto "The truth is never compromised". This agency, in the 14 years since its establishment, the agency resulted in a radical on the perception of the press in Turkey, was shut down by decree on October 30, 2016. Over the past 14 years, it has subjected to numerous and different types of repression and attacks. In 2004, dozens of employees were detained in raids on the agency's headquarters and offices..

DİHA was the first agency to inform the world about the sexual abuse of a 13-year-old girl in Mardin by 26 people, including police, soldiers and civil servants. Turkish Armed Forces aircraft on 28 December 2011 in Uludere, Şırnak's Roboski village bombarded civilians, including children. and DİHA was the first to announce the photos and images of this bloodbath, that 34 people lost their lives, to the world. It was again DİHA that broke the news about the sexual abuse and harrassment of 7 children, who were political prisoners in Adana Pozantı Prison in 2012, for months after they were placed in the forensic ward. The Pozantı Prison was closed after the news.

On 20 December 2011, 48 Kurdish journalists were detained overnight with police operation named "KCK press operation". Thirty-five journalists, including dozens of DİHA reporters, were arrested. The police officers, judges and prosecutors who tried DİHA reporters that day Even if they are arrested today on the grounds of a "coup investigation", their The government is continuing the work it left unfinished.

DİHA's website was arbitrarily and illegally blocked 48 times. It was finally shut down in 2016 with a Decree Law. Dihaber, which was established immediately, afterwards, was only on the air for 9 months. and then shut down again in August 2017, by law decree decree. The internet website of agency was banned on access to broadcast 15 times with this 9-month period.

In an environment where journalism has been turned into a profession of confession, slander, vigilantism, and racket-cutting by the government, this understanding of journalism has resisted in real journalism. The agency have been directly report free mobilization of paramilitary groups on the Syrian border, the tragedy of migrant women pushing into prostitution, until its close down. The agency Dihabe was one of the few meadi drawing attention to Syrian civil war and the refugee problem and following the military operations within Syria, and writing, reporting about the war in all its naked reality. Destruction of the historical city of Hasankeyf, forest fires for military purposes, labour murders, children sexual abusees, violence and harrassment against women and cultural genocide were never dropped from its agenda.

As a continuation of this permanent journalistic tradition, Mezopotamya Agency (MA) went online on September 20 in 2017. Since then, MA, which has been repeatedly banned from access broadcast, has made news that made not only nationwide but also worldwide impact. The agency is based in Istanbul and publishes in three languages (Kurdish, Turkish, English) and just like its predecessors, it has its share of repression.



After this study, 21 of the journalist who we conducted long-term interviews in Diyarbakır. were taken from their homes in night raids, 16 journalists were arrested on a judge's order. The content of the charges against the journalists, who have been imprisoned for months, is not yet known. The prosecutor's indictment has not yet been prepared. In different cities in Turkey hardly any of their reporters have been prosecuted, has not been charged with membership of a terrorist organization or terrorist propaganda not even a reporter. While this study was being finalised, 8 journalists of the Mesopotamia Agency from Urfa, Mardin and Van, were detained in house raids. In the first statement released by the police, the detention "making news inciting the public to hatred and enmity" was shown.

Almost all of the journalists who are not currently under arrest have more than one case pending against them. Kemal Korkut, a university student, was killed by a police bullet in Diyarbakır on March 21, 2017. The governor's office announced that Kemal Korkut was shot on the grounds that he was a suicide bomber. Mezopotamya Agency correspondent and journalist Abdurrahman Gök published a news report showing that the person killed was not a suicide bomber with the photographs



he took during the incident. Since the day he reported this news, numerous investigations have been launched against Abdurrahman Gök, with preposterous allegations. In Van, one of the two citizens who were dropped from a military helicopter lost his life and one

survived with serious injuries. Four correspondents and journalists, reported this unbelievable incident, have been on trial since the incident for "making news that damages the reputation of the state".

There have been numerous lawsuits against all of the agency's correspondents for their journalistic activities on Syrian civil war relating to human rights violations both across the border and within the border provinces. They have been subjected to law suits and legal pressure because of their reports and news about rights violations against migrants, migrant women abuses and harassment, the corruption of which public officials were a part. Starting with the principles of public opinion's right to access information, Mezopotamya Agency journalists were under pressure from the state, judiciary, law enforcement and administrative superiors. In the context of Syrian Civil War, Turkish state is in full force, "you can't report news that we don't want you to report".

## CONCLUSION AND EVALUATION

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For social scientist, it is common to act from empirical or phenomena data which spatially and temporally distant from researcher. For researcher, it is not customary to be in close contact with the interlocutors of the subject he/she is dealing with. This study, which aims to identify the problems of journalism in Turkey by starting from a narrow field to reach a general evaluation, constitutes an exception in this respect. Researcher who tries to prove pre-identified problems through interviews with the addressees of the problemreses is also not uncommon.

### WHILE THIS WORK IS BEING CARRIED OUT;

21 journalist and correspondent in Diyarbakır were taken into custody in midnight raids without any justification. They were taken from their homes and arrested. They are still in detention.

A woman journalist was sentenced to 2 years and 6 months in prison for a case against her.

The president of the Bitlis Journalists Association, whom we interviewed in Bitlis, was taken into custody.

A journalist we interviewed in Hatay was attacked by unidentified persons.

Journalists covering a social protest in Van were threatened with gun by law enforcement armed police threatened by the police.

A female and a male journalist in Adana were taken hostage, beaten and verbally harassed by owners of factory where they aim to report on a factory that converts garbage.

A woman journalist, who follow the Pride March of LGBTI+ individuals, was subjected to physical and verbal harassment of the law enforcement.

A local online newspaper that publishes an article against a municipality belonging to the ruling party, was sealed by the law enforcement.

A journalist in Batman, who mostly reports on ecology, was charged with making propaganda for a terrorist organization.

A female journalist we interviewed in Diyarbakır, was detained for four days for writing a letter told her colleague in prison.

The Chairman of DİSK Press Labor President we met in Istanbul, was tried to be beaten and detained by law enforcement in Istanbul Çağlayan courthouse.

A local newspaper in Mardin, whose owner is the chairman of the Mardin Journalists Association, was targeted and accused another newspaper and its journalists for making propaganda for a terrorist organization..

A local newspaper in Mersin has published an article that criticize the CHP Metropolitan Municipality and was attacked by the members of the party's youth wing.

In Van, Urfa and Mardin provinces, 11 journalists were arrested and detained by the law enforcement police during night raids.

Even these incidents, which we witnessed during the research period are striking to see the multidimensional aspect of the spiral of violence on journalism. The fact that the journalists will appear in 6 different hearings in a week, in September the 12th of 2022, is only an indication of the judicial dimension of this violence.

Turkey is facing with an increasing dose of political authoritarianism. Authoritarian regimes primarily target freedom of expression and thought to restrict them. In this sense, it is inevitable that independent journalism, aiming to inform the public about what is happening is at the center of the whirl of violence. The state and its judicial and administrative mechanism are trying to control the press, mostly by using the accusation "terrorism", "terrorist", "terrorist organization membership", "terrorist organization propaganda". There is no doubt that the main goal is to prevent the public's right to inform. But authoritarianization is seen as only a political phenomenon, the whole picture becomes invisible. Political authoritarianism develops simultaneously with social authoritarianism, even that the political often feeds on the authoritarianization of social life.

In political literature, while civil society and the public sphere are evaluated as more innocent and is considered to be functioning as a democratic environment, general tendency is to focus on the state authoritarianism,. This understanding is actually, a general and generalized view of the state as an independent mechanism separates from society. It is the product of so much misunderstanding. In fact, the state is a form of compensatory and sterile projection of society. Social violence produce and reproduce violence refracted both in the language and mechanisms of the state. In the case of journalists, intolerance of freedom of expression and violent suppression of the reporting of the truth, are coming not only from the political sphere but also from civil society. For example, journalist, those labeled as "terrorists" in the eyes of the state, can be accused of being terrorist or traitor by a businessman, while covering an environmental disaster. Not only the mayors of ruling party but also the opposition mayors can perpetrate similar violence to journalists critical

of their actions Worse still, when journalists, working under unfavorable and extremely poor economic conditions, defend their professional rights, improvement of wages and when they raise their voices, they are also criticized by the newspaper bosses for being disruptive. Especially journalists, who focused on gender oriented journalism, have to be aware that the perpetrators of sexual abuse, their families, their clans, must also withstand the attacks of the power centers behind. Journalism based on this principle of free and critical thinking is the enemy and target of authoritarian society. And those who practice journalism based on these principles are seen as an enemy of order and stability. And for this reason, it may be said that the main attack is not on journalists, but directly on journalism.

