

# Unconventional Summons

## Journalistic Immunity at Stake



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## Introduction

On March 30, 2023, [Megaphone](#) director Jean Kassir was summoned to the Central Investigation Directorate of the General Directorate of State Security. However, the notification deviated from the legal procedure as Kassir's car was intercepted by two members of the State Security apparatus instead of receiving the information at his home or workplace. The summoning was partly due to [the piece](#) Megaphone published earlier in the month, which referred to wanted Lebanese government officials as "fugitives." Public Prosecutor Judge Ghassan Oueidat, whose name was mentioned in the piece, was responsible for the summons. Due to Kassir's non-attendance following the initial notification, Judge Oueidat sent him a second notice. It should be noted that the Public Prosecution Office is not allowed to investigate journalists for matters related to their work, making Judge Oueidat's action a violation of proper legal procedure for the second time. Diala Shehadeh, Kassir's attorney, attended the summons on his behalf and requested "respect for the immunity guaranteed under the Publications Law for journalists with regard to their journalistic activities."

To gauge the Lebanese public opinion on key freedom of expression debates, the Samir Kassir Foundation (SKF) monitored social media reactions in Lebanon regarding this matter. In order to ensure accuracy and efficiency in the monitoring process, SKF has partnered with [Reputell](#), a data service provider with access to extensive data and the software to filter through it and extract relevant content. This approach offers a safer means of understanding whether the discussion surrounding the case study was reflected in the digital arena and, if so, how. It is important to note that this study does not provide a comprehensive view of the entire digital landscape, but rather aims to highlight prominent actors, platforms used, and discern possible patterns that closely resemble real-life situations.

This report is the third in a series that employs such technology to provide a clearer picture of the discussions taking place in the Lebanese online sphere regarding controversial freedom of expression debates.

Monitoring Period: March 30 – April 12, 2023

The keywords fed into the machine learning monitoring software are as follows:

Jean Kassir  
State Security  
General Inspection Directorate  
Diala Chehade  
Megaphone / Megaphone News  
Ghassan Oueidat

جان قصير  
جهاز أمن الدولة  
مديرية التحقيق  
ديالة شحادة  
ميغافون  
غسان عويدات  
القاضي عويدات

# Sentiment Analysis

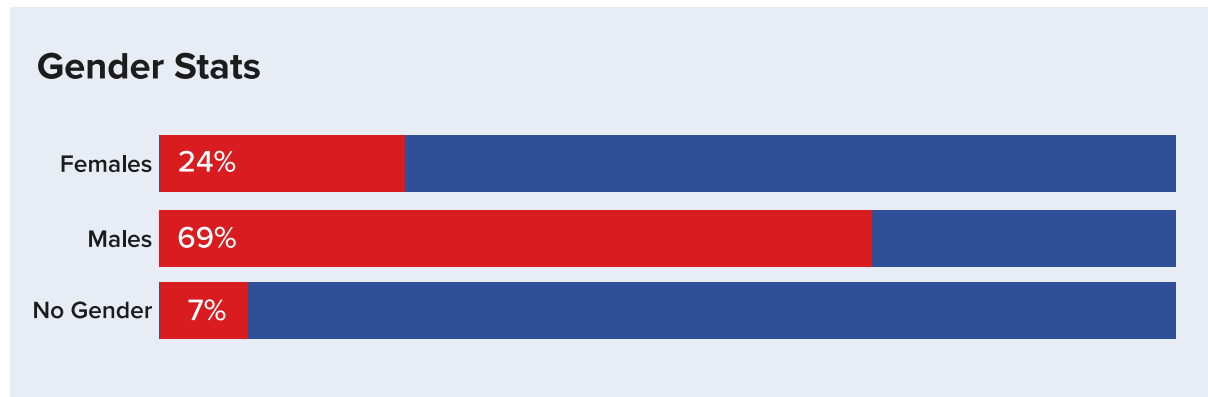


Figure 1: Account distribution by gender

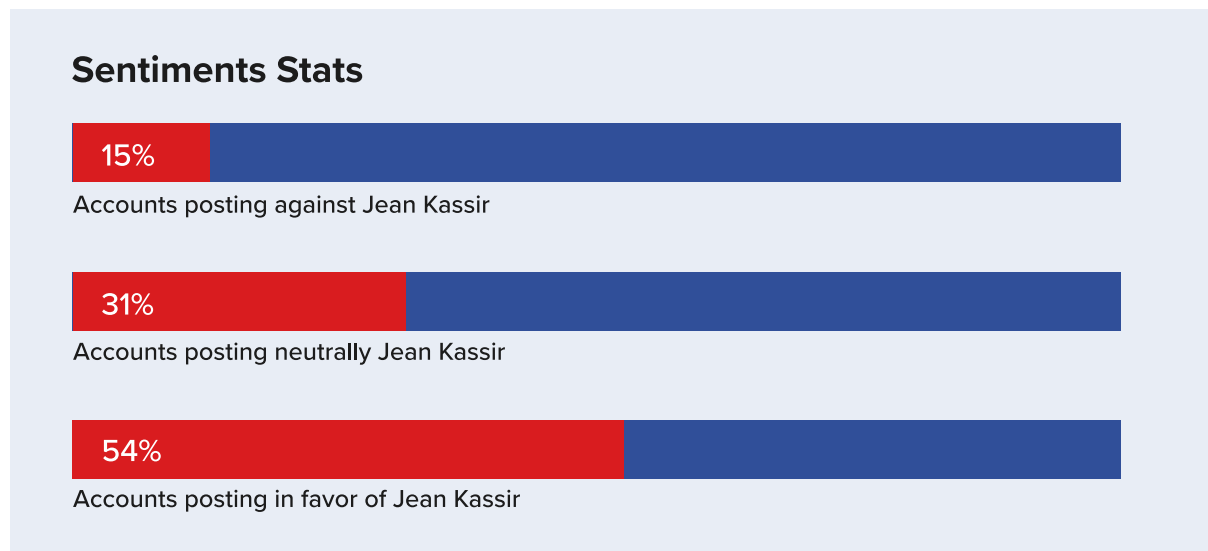


Figure 2: Account distribution by position

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution by gender among Male, Female, and unidentifiable gender contributors. The vast majority of contributors were Male, accounting for 69% of the total. Female authors constituted 24% of the contributors, while the remaining 7% of the accounts did not have an identifiable gender.

Regarding the public's stance on the topic, Figure 2 indicates that a significant portion of the accounts, 54%, supported Jean Kassir and/or criticized Judge Oueidat. This was followed by 31% of accounts that maintained a neutral tone, either reporting on the incident or seeking further details. On the other hand, only 15% of the accounts expressed opposition to Jean Kassir and/or support for the summons.

Figure 3 below showcases some of the positive posts that were circulated by prominent public figures and activists. These posts include simple expression of solidarity with Megaphone, Jean Kassir, and their work, often accompanied by Kassir's picture. Frustration was also evident in these posts, as solidarity alone no longer seemed sufficient for some contributors. Questions were raised about the trajectory that Lebanon is taking, expressing concerns towards the overall state of human rights in the country, while far greater scandals involving government officials remain unaddressed. The lawless and downright oppressive measures taken to notify Jean Kassir of his summons received frequent criticism, with many calling for a protest the following day. In general, the positive tweets consistently focused on the increasing frequency and intensity of these violations.





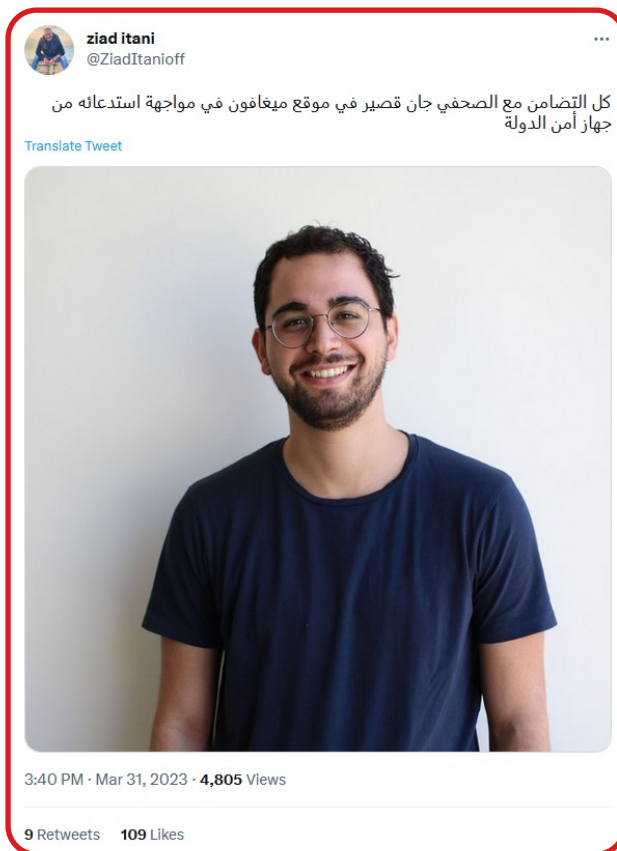


Figure 3: Posts supporting Jean Kassir and Megaphone

As for the negative posts, there were various types observed. For instance, the first tweet in Figure 4 makes a joke about the low number of likes that some of Megaphone's posts receive. In nearly all the other tweets, Megaphone is described as a leftist propaganda machine. According to the authors of these negative tweets, the violation of both the law and freedom of expression appears justified simply because they disagree with Megaphone's editorial line. Ironically, the third tweet in Figure 4 is a retweet that quotes another author who supports Megaphone despite explicitly disagreeing with their perspectives.

Overall, there is a recurring focus on the external funding received by Megaphone and other alternative media outlets such as Daraj and The Public Source, as if no other outlet in Lebanon receives foreign financial support. However, it is worth noting that throughout SKF's monitoring projects, traditional and sectarian outlets are rarely subjected to the same level of scrutiny as alternative and non-sectarian media, hinting at a bias that is very real and tangible.

The image shows a screenshot of a tweet on a mobile device. The tweet is from Marie-Lina Hraoui (@Hraoui17) and is in Arabic. It contains a satirical poem about Megaphone. Below the tweet is a retweet from Jean Riachi (@riachi\_jean) dated April 2, 2023. The retweet includes a quote in French by Voltaire: "Je défendrai mes opinions jusqu'à ma mort, mais je donnerai ma vie pour que vous puissiez défendre les vôtres. Voltaire." The quote is displayed on a blue background with white text and a logo for "DICOOTATIONS" at the bottom.

Marie-Lina Hraoui ن 🇵🇸 🇸🇪 🇱🇧  
@Hraoui17

تحصد ميغافون اليوم ما زرعت من بربواغاندا يسارية ووك مقبته  
ما بنكر حقن بحرية التعبير، ومش رح صف مع قمع الجريات  
بس حرة اني ما اتضامن مع هيك منصة بتسوق لأجندات خارجية من اهدافن تفكك  
العائلة واستبدالها بالدولة بتفتري وبتجزأ  
منصة ممولة من جهات خارجية مشبوهة

#لست\_متضامنة\_مع\_ميغافون

Translate Tweet

Jean Riachi @riachi\_jean · Apr 2  
متضامن رغم كل الاختلافات ...twitter.com/Hraoui17/statu

“  
Je défendrai mes opinions  
jusqu'à ma mort, mais je  
donnerai ma vie pour que vous  
puissiez défendre les vôtres.  
Voltaire.  
”

DICOOTATIONS

8:16 PM · Apr 2, 2023 · 8,229 Views

2 Retweets 1 Quote 65 Likes

**علي** @alouush

ميغافون — اللي عم يذكرها التهتول @GinoRaidy — عندن شي ٣٥ ألف متابع، وممولين من الغرب، وأكثر بوست عندن بيحيب ٦ لايكس وتسن..! هيدا اعلام بديل أو بطاطا؟ 🤔🤔🤔

Translate Tweet

@megaphone\_news



5:48 PM · Mar 31, 2023 · 7,218 Views

2 Retweets 98 Likes

**أسعد أبو خليل** @asadabukhalil

ألف مبروك. المزيد من التمويل سيتردق على المواقع "المستقلة" الممولة من حكومات حلف شمال الأطلسي. تقرير من منظمة "الوقف الأوروبي (الحكومي) للديمقراطية" يشيد بـ"درج" و"ميغافون" ويطالب بمزيد من التمويل لهم ومواقع المعارضة السورية. وينوه كيف ان "درج" عملت حملة ضد برنامج أونروا

Translate Tweet



8:42 PM · Apr 3, 2023 · 17K Views

6 Retweets 1 Quote 95 Likes 7 Bookmarks

Tweet your reply!

**Reply**

**asad abukhalil** @asadabukhalil · Apr 3

وبعدهم عاملين مظاهرة عن تعرضهم للقمع والاضطهاد من قبل النظام البوليسي الاستبدادي اللبناني الذي فاق قمع أنظمة السعودية والإمارات وسوريا. هذه ستساعد أيضاً.

2 25 2,912

Figure 4: Posts against Jean Kassir and Megaphone



Finally, despite the small number of neutral accounts' posting, the report highlights the significant number of retweets for such posts, which will be discussed later. Many contributors took this opportunity not only to discuss Jean Kassir and Megaphone's case but also to raise awareness about recent similar incidents, as shown in Figure 5.

Interestingly, even Megaphone's [post](#) itself was identified as having a neutral tone by the machine learning algorithm. However, it is worth noting that even the most unbiased posts expressed some concern about freedom of expression, often referencing the escalating trend of violations against journalists and outspoken activists in Lebanon.

**Reina Wehbi** (@ReinaWehbi)

Recent summonses issued to journalists Jean Kassir & Lara Bitar by security agencies, and to lawyer Nizar Saghiey by the Beirut Bar Association warrant concern about the restricting environment for freedom of expression and defense of the public interest.

amnesty.org  
Lebanese authorities must respect freedoms of the press and legal profession  
The increasing number of summonses for investigation aim to restrict freedom of expression.

3:10 PM · Apr 5, 2023 · 13.5K Views

21 Retweets 3 Quotes 62 Likes 5 Bookmarks

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**Mada Masr** مدي مصر (@MadaMasr)

استدعى جهاز أمن الدولة اللبناني جان قصير، المدير التنفيذي لموقع «ميغافون» الإلكتروني اللبناني، وذلك بعد أن اعترض شخصان سيارته الخميس الماضي، طالبين منه التوجه للمديرية العامة للجهاز في الغد.

Translate Tweet

النشرة السبت 1 أبريل

السلطات اللبنانية تستدعي صحفيين لنشرهم تقارير حول «انفجار مرفأ بيروت»

الصحفي جان قصير (يمين) والقاضي غسان تويرات (الصدر) معكاتبان

6:32 PM · Apr 1, 2023 · 11.2K Views

11 Retweets 30 Likes 2 Bookmarks

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**Karim Emile Bitar** (@karimbitar)

“Jean Kassir, l'un des deux fondateurs du site libanais en ligne @megaphone\_news, a été convoqué par la Sécurité de l'État. Megaphone affirme que le procureur général près la Cour de cassation, Ghassan Oueidate, est à l'origine de cette directive.”

Translate Tweet

lorientlejour.com  
Deux médias libanais convoqués par les services de sécurité  
Un fondateur de Megaphone News interpellé par la Sécurité de l'État ; la rédactrice en chef du site The Public Source convoquée par le Bureau de lutt...

7:21 PM · Mar 31, 2023 · 1,815 Views

11 Retweets 20 Likes

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**Ziad T. Makary** (@ZiadMakary)

تابعت موضوع استدعاء رئيسة تحرير "مصدر عام" لارا بيطار، ومدير عام "ميغافون" جان قصير. وجددت حرصي على احترام حرية الرأي والتعبير التي يكفلها الدستور، وأكدت متابعة الاستدعاءين بشكل حثيث لوضع الامور في اطارها الصحيح.

@megaphone\_news @ThePublicSource @JeanKassir @LaraJBitar

Translate Tweet

3:26 PM · Apr 1, 2023 · 1,944 Views

7 Retweets 33 Likes

Figure 5: Neutral posts concerning Jean Kassir and Megaphone

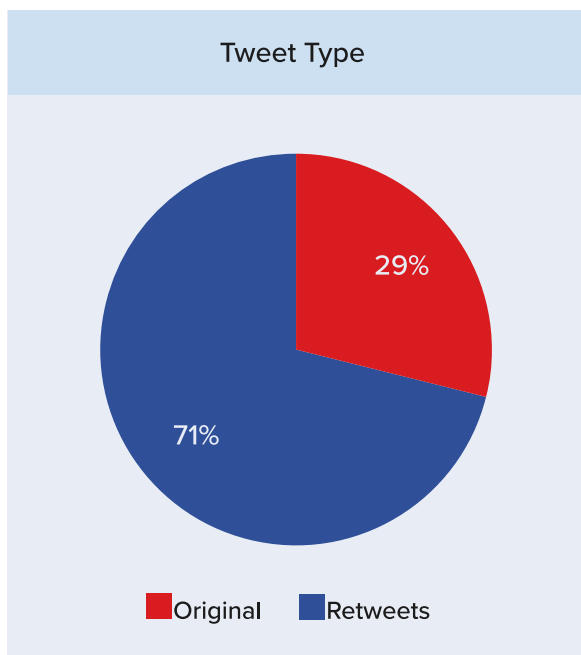


Figure 6: Tweet distribution by type

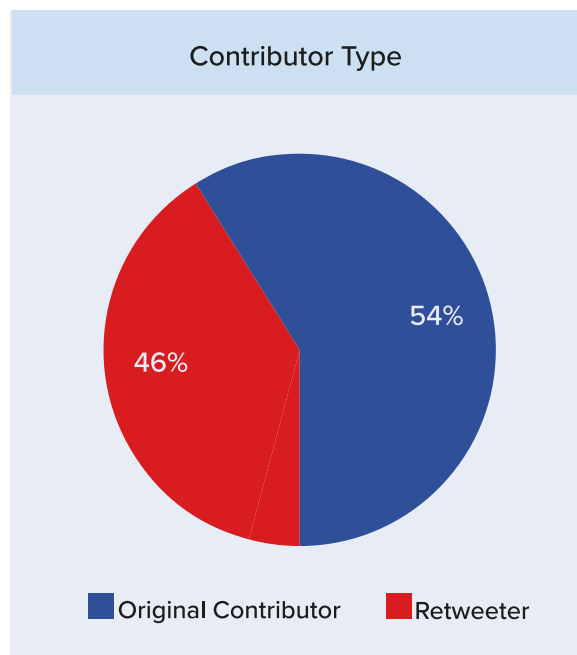


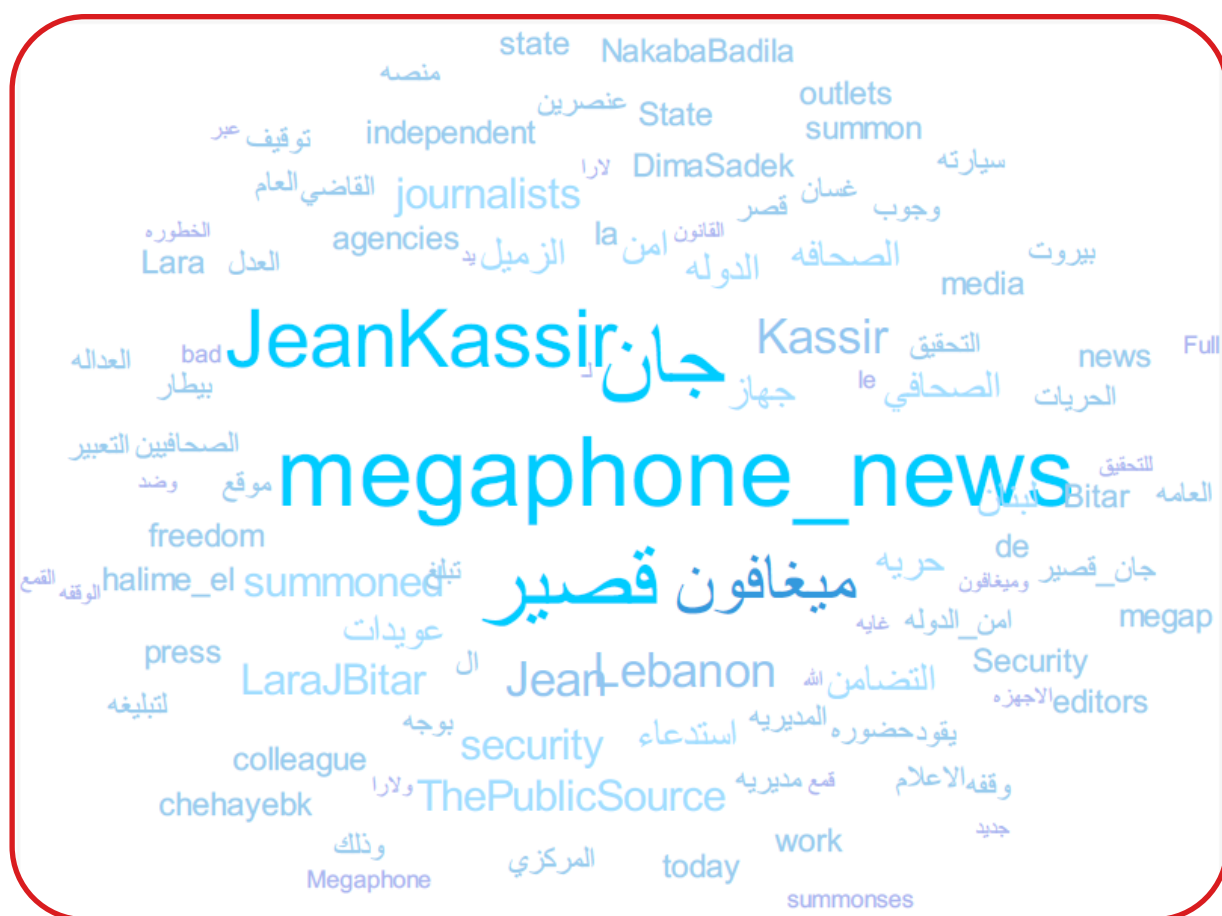
Figure 7: Tweet distribution by contributor

The total number of monitored tweets is 1,620, with 467 classified as original tweets (authored by the accounts themselves) and 1,153 as retweets (shared from the original tweets). The average of 2.5 retweets per tweet suggests a certain level of influence and trust among the authors, as well as a certain degree of homogeneity within the networks.

Alternatively, by observing Figure 7, the numbers indicate that out of the 578 accounts contributing to the online discussions, 312 were “original” creators, while 266 were “retweeters.” On average, each “original” account posted approximately 1.5 tweets, whereas each account that retweeted did so 4.3 times. This not only reflects interest in the conversation but also indicates strong opinions, given the high proportion of retweeting accounts.

When comparing Figures 6 and 7, it may come as a surprise that in Figure 6, the number of retweets exceeds that of the original tweets, while in Figure 7, the number of retweeters is lower than that of the original contributors. This suggests the existence of certain accounts that are frequently retweeted. It can therefore be understood that the online audience engaged in this matter holds strong sentiments and is actively participating in the online debate.

## Word Cloud and Hashtags



Keyword	Word Count
megaphone_news	313
جان	310
قصير	304
JeanKassir	230
ميغافون	201

Figure 8: Top keywords used

Hashtag	Number of posts	Contributors (authors)
lebanon#	66	58
#امن_الدوله	42	39
#جان_قصير	37	36
#لبنان	22	21
#ميغافون	22	22

Figure 9: Top hashtags used

The conversation surrounding Jean Kassir's case was highly polarized. Among the hundreds of monitored tweets during the selected period, the top three keywords/hashtags used were "megaphone\_news," "جان" (Jean) and "قصير" (Kassir). Even the hashtags in the second table were similar, regardless of the language in which they were written. This reaffirms that the selected keyword entered into the monitoring software effectively captured the most relevant conversations to the case study. However, neither keywords nor the hashtags indicate the overall sentiment of the conversation, whether positive or negative. Given the nuanced nature of some opinions expressed, this lack of a single word or phrase tilting the sentiment one way or another is an indicator of a debate that goes beyond mere point-scoring.

## Conclusion

In a country grappling with impunity and lack of accountability, the role of journalism is more critical than ever in challenging such a culture and promoting a democratic society. It is vital to emphasize the importance of respecting the legal protections granted to journalists under the Publications Law. Those who oppose Kassir may argue that Megaphone crossed traditional boundaries by referring to public officials as “fugitives.” However, this pales in comparison to the violation of legal procedure in Kassir’s summons, as well as the plethora of other crimes committed by several public officials. Such actions set a detrimental precedent for future cases of similar nature. Furthermore, demonizing opposing perspectives and dismissing their rights solely based on disagreement are symptoms of a polarized society. Therefore, fostering a shared and proper understanding of the concept of accountability is essential. Finally, it is worth reiterating that genuine progress in the realm of freedom of expression occurs when freedom of expression itself is treated as non-negotiable.



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Netherlands

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