

# The 1st Election for Journalists in the Time of Corona

—— 2021 ——

A Reading Between the Lines





## **Journalism Freedom Program**

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The General Assembly of Journalists was held on April 2, 2021, at the Teachers Club in Zamalek, Giza Governorate, after being postponed twice. The first time was on March 5, 2021 for not completing the quorum for holding the “assembly”, the second time was on March 19, 2020 due to the inability to hold elections inside the union building only for what represents unavoidable harm, in the light of COVID-19 pandemic, after the Ministry of Interior refused setting up a marquee in front of the Syndicate, and the Ministry of Health refused to supervise the elections.

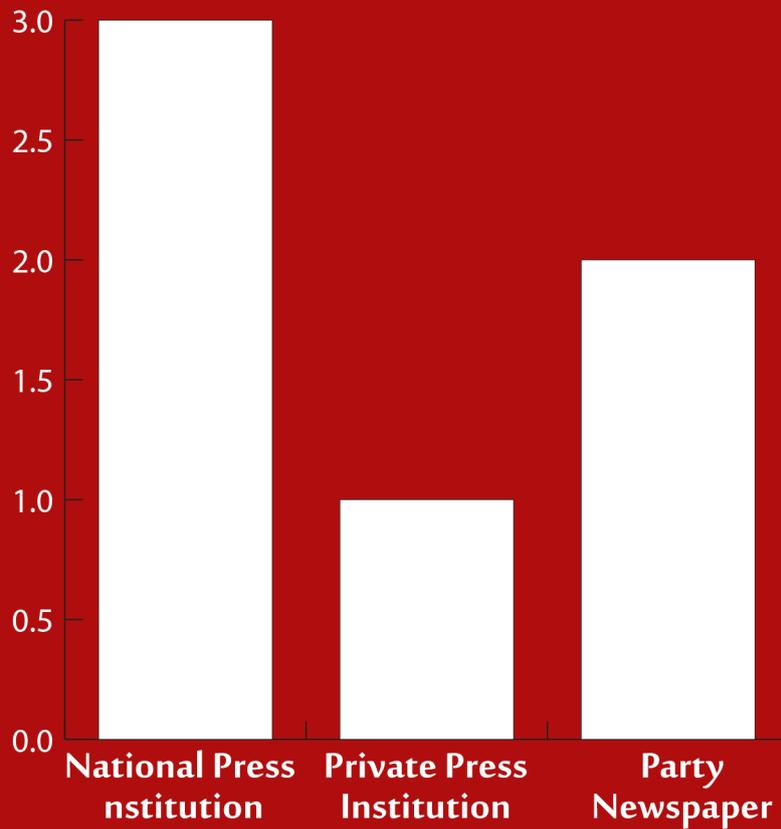
The Teachers Club welcomed the Syndicate’s members amid strict precursory measures to confront COVID-19 by applying thermal detection on the journalists to ensure the journalists didn’t have an infection, distributing masks and alcohol to journalists in front of the club’s main gate, and sterilizing the committees throughout the day. Journalists began registering their names in the General Assembly lists at 10 am and the committee announced that the quorum had been completed in the presence of 2,432 journalists at 3 pm, after extending the registration hours in the association’s lists for three times as a violation of the Syndicate’s law and its bylaws that give the right to the Supervisory Committee to extend for a one-hour period.

After completing the quorum of the General Assembly, the elections observing committee called the journalists to hold the General Assembly and discuss the agenda. The Assembly ended with reject the Syndicate’s budget for the past 2 years, and the members decided to renegotiate with the government and the parliament to amend press law and abolish the partial detention in publishing cases.

Once the agenda is completed, the journalists directed to participate in the midterm renewal elections voting to elect the president among 6 candidates applied for the position, all of them were males as there were no females applied for the position.



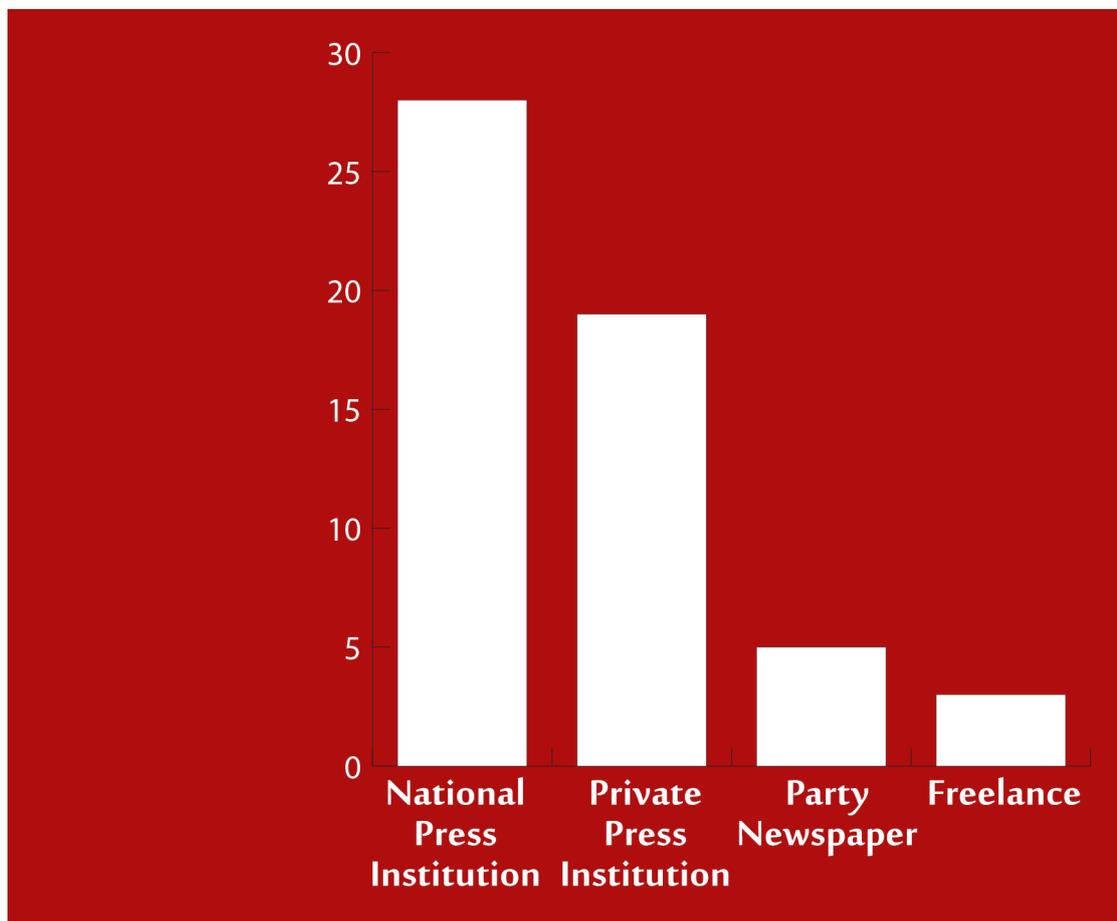
Shape (1) Distribution of Candidates for the Syndicate’s President according to Gender



Shape (2) Distribution of Candidates for the Syndicate's President according to the work place

The candidates from the national institutions on the president seat ranked the highest percentage between the other candidates with 50% of the total candidates (3 candidates), while two journalists from party newspapers nominated and one journalist from "Al-Mashhad" private newspaper.

In addition to electing the Syndicate's president, the journalists elected 6 members for the Syndicate's council out of 55 candidates, half of them belong to national institutions with 28 candidates in exchange for 19 journalists belong to the private newspapers representing 34.5%, while 5 journalists belong to the party newspapers representing 9% were nominated as well as nominating 3 freelance journalists representing no more than 5.5% of the total candidates.



Shape (3) Distribution of Candidates for the council's membership according to the work place

The candidates for the council's membership distributed according to the gender to 47 males with 85% of the candidates and 8 females with 15% of the total candidates.



Shape (4) Distribution of Candidates for the council's membership according to the gender

At the end of the second day of April 2021, the attendances in the general committees at the Teachers Club were about 3944 journalists, and the results of the elections resulted in staying the previous Syndicate's president "Diaa Rashwan" for the second session with 1956 votes. Each of "Mohammed Kharaga" won with 1338 votes, "Ibrahim AbouKila" 1277 votes, "Hussein Elzanaty" with 1201 votes for the membership seats above age. While the seats of underage council membership were won by "Ayman Abdel Megeed" with 1864 votes, "Doaa Elnaggar" with 1078 votes, "Mohammed Saad Abdelhafeez" 1045 votes. Therefore, these results included two new members "Doaa Elnaggar" and "Ibrahim AbouKila" rather than "Gamal Abdelreheem" and "Amr Badr".

The journalist "Doaa Alnaggar" winning is considered the most positive points which occurred in the election results as she is the first female wins a seat in the Syndicate's council since 2015. The journalist fought the elections among the majority of females with a percentage exceeded 85% of the total candidates, meanwhile 8 female journalists represented 14.5% of the total candidates.

The results of the elections resulted in winning of 5 candidates belong to the national institutions, distributed between (Al-Akhbar – Al-Ahram – Rosalyoussef- Al-Tahrir) while the journalist "Mohammed Saad Abdel-Hafiz", from the private newspaper Al-Shorouk, won a single seat which refers to the mobilization and the direction that the national institutions were accused of to support their candidates.

It was noticed that three editors-in-chief of national newspapers won out of total 6 council members were elected otherwise the president, which represent a problematic at the level of increasing the influence of the decision makers and decline the young journalists' representatives in the council. The presence of the Syndicate's Council editors-in-chief increased to 5 members, with 1 seat increase comparing to the previous elections as well as 3 seats compared to the elections in 2017.

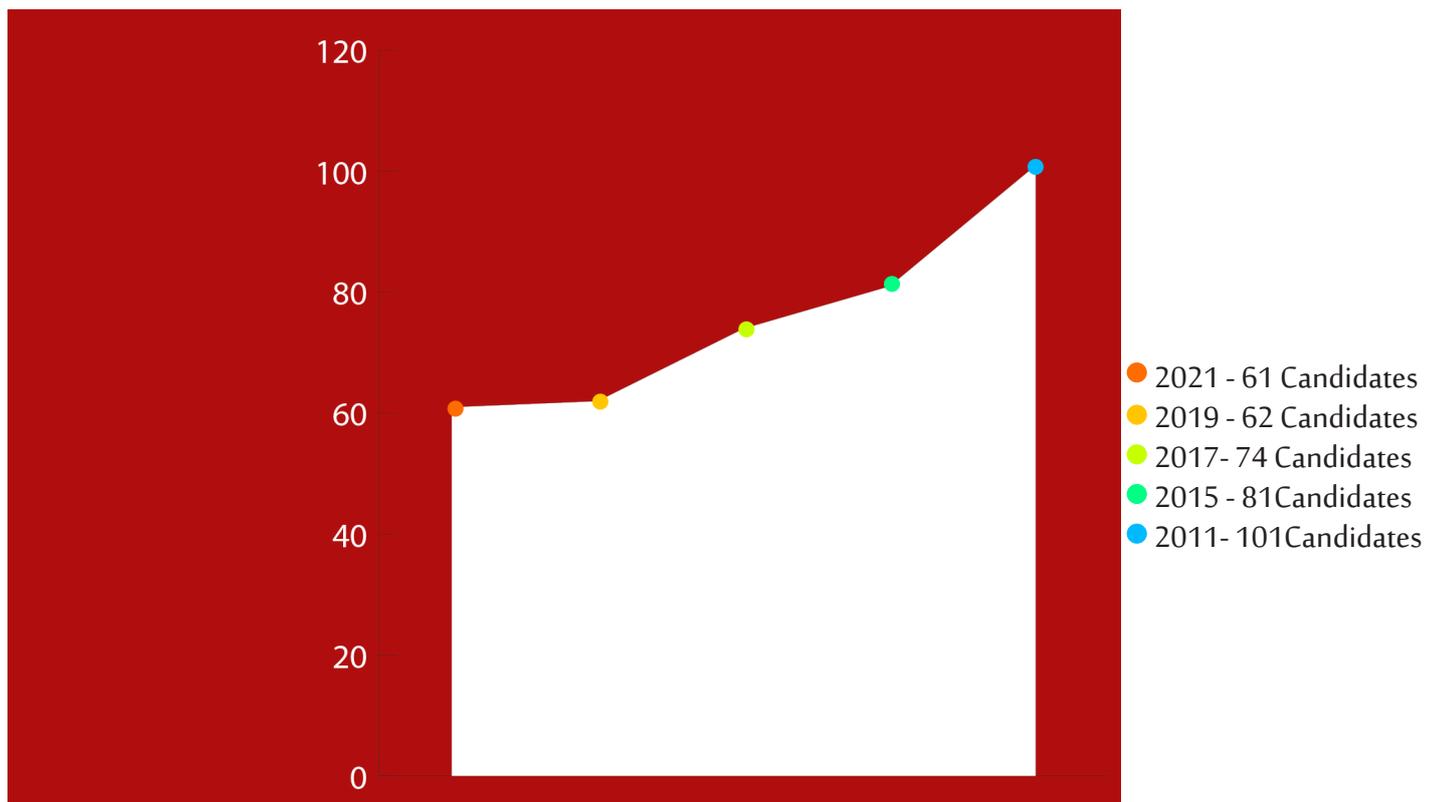
The results also kept the President of the Journalists' Syndicate in addition to four members from the previous council, and both Jamal Abdul Rahim, the union's first undersecretary, and Amr Badr, the head of the Freedoms Committee, lost their seats, despite the fact that the two journalists have a large division within the circles of journalists. Both are considered the most prominent leaders of the union work, supporters of freedom of press, defenders of the Syndicate's independence and one of the most prominent parties concerned with defending journalists against violations and arbitrary measures that were committed against them.

May be these results indicate the plausibility of the irregularities that accompanied the election procedures, most notably the accusations that were raised regarding directing the vote to a unified list agreed upon by one of the security agencies, especially since the deported journalists are people whose speeches the executive authorities do not like, in addition to the journalists' voting towards candidates interested in providing services directing to journalists, and moving away from journalists defending freedoms. The candidate Mohammed Kharaga got the highest votes among the overage candidates, and the candidate Ayman Abdel-Majid got the highest votes among the underage candidates, Mohammed has been active during previous years by providing banking services and providing training opportunities for journalists and their children, while Ayman emerged during his chairmanship of the Syndicate's Social Care Committee, and he made great efforts during the Corona crisis as well as he was able to provide places for journalists infected with COVID-19 in the governmental hospitals.

With the announced results, the new council's members of as called "Services Stream" were increased to 9 members, at the same time the members of "Independence Stream" were decreased to 3 members, which is considered an indicator raises the concern and fairs about the Syndicate's future about media freedoms cases and the detained journalists' case. The members of Al-Ahram foundation's number in the new council reached 4 members

in addition to the president and 3 members from Al-Ahram foundation, 2 members from Al-Tahrir foundation, one member from Ros-Alyoussef foundation, in an overwhelming presence of the representatives of the national foundations and a dim presence of the private and party newspapers who were the most exposure to violations and arbitrary dismissals.

All in all, the candidates' turnout for the midterm elections for the Journalists' Syndicate council 2021 comparing to the previous elections. The elections in 2019 witnessed nominating 62 journalists, in 2017 nominated 74 journalists and in 2015 nominated 81 journalists. The elections of 2011 witnessed 101 journalists, at the same time the voters decreased comparing to the previous years as the attendees in the in the General Committees in the Teachers Club about 3944 journalists, compared to 4588 journalists voted in 2019 elections and 4800 journalists in 2017.



Shape (5) Comparison between the candidates' nominations number during the last years

After the elections end; a section of journalists announced that they had monitored major violations that might nullify the elections procedures and the voting results, including:

- Inserting the supervising committee on the midterm elections of the Journalists' Syndicate a name of a candidate although he didn't present his nomination papers to the committee.
- Violating the Journalists' Syndicate decision that the member of the General Assembly who is staying as an observer inside each committee with signing the counting report.
- Preventing the candidates and their delegates from attending and following the secreting process within the committees, and after strenuous attempts to allow some delegates to attend the secreting process after a long time of starting it. However, they couldn't follow the process because committees' chairmen asked the delegates to sit down far from the elections papers.
- Number of committees' chairmen has sorted the membership IDs at first, or sorting the president and membership votes at the same time, in contravention of the instructions of the Judicial Committee head of the subcommittees heads to start counting the position of president votes.
- Detecting fundamental errors in collecting and calculating the votes. Some candidates were able to correct the errors after verbal altercations with the committee heads.

In another context; The Corona crisis, which made direct contact between the journalists and the candidates considered a danger that could lead to infection with the virus, had a clear impact on the electoral campaign as the candidates turned to “social media” which became an alternative to field visits, and the candidates relied on the “Facebook” and “Zoom” to display Their electoral programs.

Despite the diversity of these electoral programs, the Observatory observed, while reading them, a number of negatives, which represented patterns that were repeated in the majority of the announced programs. The most prominent of these negatives were:

- The lack of clear and specific program points that can be applied to address the issues raised by the “Observatory” to the candidates.
- The abundance of unrealistic electoral slogans and difficult to achieve, as opposed to the reduction of realistic programmatic points.
- A number of candidates were not aware of some of the issues raised by the “Observatory” despite its obsession with discussions within the press community what indicates that these journalists are not eligible or qualified to the union work.
- Conflicting ideas about cases, dealing with each case separately, and as a result of this, an illegal program points were raised because of their violation of the current laws, without any explanation of how to bypass or achieve that.



## Egyptian Observatory for Journalism and Media

An Egyptian civil society organization established by Resolution No. 5805 of 2016. The Foundation takes the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, international treaties and charters on freedom of the press and media, and the Egyptian Constitution as its reference.

The Foundation aims to defend and promote press and media freedoms, work to provide a safe work environment for journalists and media professionals in Egyptian society on the one hand, and work to support the independence and professionalism of the press and media on the other hand.

In order to achieve these goals, the Observatory works through various programs and mechanisms; Some of them monitor and document violations against journalists and media professionals on the one hand, and monitor and criticize some patterns of unprofessionalism in a number of newspapers, websites and media on the other hand. The Foundation also provides direct or indirect legal support to journalists or media professionals accused in cases related to the exercise of their profession. The Foundation also conducts research and studies on the status of press and media freedom in society, and also provides a set of training and educational seminars in order to enhance the capabilities of journalists and media professionals, raise their professional level, and familiarize them with their rights, duties, and methods of security and safety while performing their work.

### our vision

Support and promote the freedom and independence of the press and media, access to a professional environment and a safe and appropriate environment for the work of journalists and media professionals in a state based on the rule of law and respect for human rights.