



Media Reform Efforts In Fragile Democracies: A Comparative Study Of National Media Forums In Kurdistan And Taiwan

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Abstract

This research investigates the processes, challenges, and outcomes associated with media reform and the protection of digital rights in two fragile or transitional democracies: the kurdistan region of iraq and taiwan in the republic of china. The study emphasizes the role of these reforms in advancing democratic communication within the contemporary digital landscape. Employing thematic and discourse analysis, the research critically examines the proceedings of kurdistan's first and second chmk national forums on media reform (2021 and 2025), alongside taiwan's prominent initiatives, including rightscon taipei and the asian journalism forum. Through this comparative lens, the study explores how legal frameworks, political dynamics, and professional development intersect within each context. Findings reveal that kurdistan's media reform efforts signify important progress toward shifting from politically controlled media systems to those prioritizing transparency, journalistic professionalism, and media literacy. However, entrenched structural and institutional obstacles (such as political party influence and outdated legislation) continue to impede comprehensive reform. In contrast, taiwan has established itself as a global exemplar in protecting press freedom and digital rights, proactively addressing challenges like artificial intelligence regulation, misinformation, and foreign interference. The comparative analysis highlights that despite differing political and institutional environments, both regions underscore the critical need for holistic media reform, facilitated by coordinated engagement among government bodies, media practitioners, academic institutions, and civil society. To promote media reform in fragile democratic settings, the study recommends: depoliticizing media by severing partisan dominance; enhancing journalistic standards through education and ethics training; instituting robust legal safeguards to protect media freedom and journalist safety; advancing media literacy to foster informed citizen participation; and supporting the financial and operational autonomy of media organizations. The research further underscores kurdistan's ongoing dedication to legislative and institutional reform as essential for maintaining media independence, while taiwan's strategic international advocacy provides a valuable model for resisting authoritarian encroachments on digital democracy.

Keywords: Media reform, rights on taipei, asian journalism forum, chmk national forum, kurdistan

1. Research introduction

In the 21st century, media reform is increasingly shaped by the interplay between democratic communication, evolving technological landscapes, and entrenched structures of political and market control (napoli, 2021; pickard, 2020). In transitional democratic contexts such as the kurdistan region of iraq and taiwan in the republic of china, the debate converges on reforming

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regulatory frameworks, enhancing freedom of expression, and safeguarding digital rights (aivas, 2025a; freedman, 2023; hallin & mancini, 2020).

In the kurdistan, the first and second national forums on media reform, organized in 2021 and 2025 by the independent kurdish media watchdog organization (chmk.org), represent key milestones in the effort to transition from a politically penetrated and centrally controlled media system toward one grounded in openness, accountability, and professional standards. These gatherings convened policymakers, journalists, and academics to deliberate on critical issues including legislative reform, the mitigation of political interference, and the integration of journalism training and media literacy into educational systems. A discourse and thematic analysis of forum proceedings reveals persistent structural challenges (most notably insufficient political will and limited institutional capacity) yet also identifies emerging opportunities for institutional transformation (aivas, 2025b; ahmad & aivas, 2025; waisbord, 2020; voltmer, 2021). Conversely, taiwan has established itself as a regional and global leader in promoting press freedom, defending digital rights, and countering the encroachment of authoritarian influence in the information space (aziz & aivas, 2025; chadwick & stromer-galley, 2023; nielsen, 2022). High-profile events such as rightscon taipei 2025 and the asian journalism forum 2025, together with the ongoing initiatives of the taiwan foundation for continued communication (tfcc), have positioned taiwan at the forefront of debates on digital sovereignty, journalistic integrity, and media system resilience. These platforms address pressing contemporary challenges, including the ethical implications of artificial intelligence, the proliferation of disinformation, and foreign interference in national media systems (martens, 2024; winseck, 2023).

By undertaking a comparative analysis of media reform in kurdistan and taiwan, this paper examines how divergent political contexts, institutional arrangements, and normative commitments shape approaches to protecting media freedom and digital rights. It argues that while kurdistan's reforms are situated within the constraints of post-conflict state-building and political entrenchment, taiwan's initiatives exemplify proactive resistance to digital authoritarianism. Together, these cases provide valuable insights into the global struggle to promote media pluralism, strengthen democratic communication, and adapt governance structures to the demands of the digital age.

2. Research theoretical framework

In fragile democracies, challenging contexts such as the kurdistan region of iraq and taiwan in the republic of china serve as instructive case studies for examining global media freedom. Despite both regions experiencing intricate political dynamics and external as well as internal pressures (from governmental authorities and market forces) they diverge markedly in institutional maturity, legal safeguards, and democratic media practices. This section undertakes a comparative analysis centered on recent developments, conference findings, and international benchmarks, highlighting how these distinct environments navigate evolving frameworks of media regulation and freedom of expression. Media reform initiatives within fragile democracies establish a complex and multifaceted field shaped by political, social, and economic influences. This literature review synthesizes extant scholarship on media reform in two distinct yet comparably vulnerable democratic settings: the kurdistan and taiwan. Both have embarked on significant democratic transitions but face distinct obstacles in fostering independent, pluralistic media systems. Kurdistan confronts issues such as political interference and media capture, whereas taiwan grapples with challenges including disinformation and the consolidation of democratic media institutions. The review further



incorporates the contributions of prominent scholars specializing in kurdish and taiwanese media landscapes, illustrating how their work enriches broader debates on media reform in fragile democratic contexts. The comparative study of media reform is a dynamic and continuously evolving discipline, rooted in foundational scholarship exploring the intersections of media, politics, and society. This review highlights the pivotal contributions of ten leading academics who have significantly influenced ongoing discourse.

First and foremost, the influential framework developed by hallin and mancini (2004) remains central to comparative media analysis. Their typology identifies three media system models prevalent in western democracies, including the liberal, democratic corporatist, and polarized pluralist models, which based on four dimensions: media market structures, political parallelism, journalistic professionalism, and state intervention. Despite critiques regarding western-centric bias, their subsequent work (hallin & mancini, 2012) extends this analysis globally, acknowledging the necessity for broader perspectives. In addition, the political and economic determinants shaping media systems receive substantial scholarly attention. Mcchesney (1999) foregrounds concerns over media ownership concentration and commercialization as threats to democratic processes, advocating for vigorous reform to diminish conglomerate dominance and bolster democratic media. Building on this tradition, pickard (2019) examines historical media reform movements in the united states, underscoring the importance of structural changes to support public service journalism. Similarly, winseck's (2018) global media and internet concentration project provides critical data illuminating media ownership trends worldwide. Similarly, digital media's emergence has transformed the media landscape, posing novel challenges and reform opportunities. Chadwick's (2013) concept of the "hybrid media system" elucidates the interplay between traditional and new media logics in shaping information dissemination. Nielsen (2020), through his leadership at the reuters institute for the study of journalism, offers empirical insights into digital news consumption, payment willingness, and platform roles in news distribution. In this context, efforts to expand comparative media reform research beyond western contexts are exemplified by waisbord's (2013) advocacy for "de-westernizing" communication studies to better appreciate diverse national media systems. Freedman (2014), through the edited volume *strategies for media reform: international perspectives*, aggregates global case studies of media reform initiatives. Martens (2015) contributes with her examination of latin american media reform, highlighting community media and digital activism's role in social transformation in conclusion, the reviewed scholars collectively advance the understanding of comparative media reform by providing foundational models, critical political economy analyses, and digital-era perspectives. Their work underscores the necessity of embracing global diversity in media reform scholarship, ensuring its relevance amid the complex realities of 21st century media environments.

2.1 kurdish media reform: challenges of political influence and media capture

The indicators of media development in the kurdistan region of iraq (kri) are intricately connected to the region's complex political history and its ongoing post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Following decades of repression under saddam hussein's regime, the 1990s marked a pivotal era during which the kurdish autonomous region began to develop a nascent media sector characterized by increasing freedoms and pluralism (aivas, 2022; gunter, 2019). However, the lasting effects of conflict and political fragmentation have posed significant challenges to the establishment of a fully independent and institutionalized media landscape. Between 2005 and 2025, key thematic challenges in kurdish media reform identified by scholars' research include: the pervasive influence and control of dominant political parties over media outlets, undermining journalistic independence and professional standards (aivas,



2022); a nascent journalistic culture often shaped by politically aligned practices that compromise ethical norms during times of political unrest (aivas, 2025b); a fragile legal and regulatory environment lacking comprehensive protections for media freedom and ethical media conduct (aivas, 2025c); the urgent need for media sector development focusing on independent ownership, enhanced regulatory mechanisms, and journalist training (aivas, 2019; 2014); and technological challenges, where digital media advancements have outpaced ethical standards, exposing platforms to political exploitation (aivas et al., 2025a, b, c). According to early scholarship who highlights kurdish media's role in cultivating political identity and expression amidst aspirations for autonomy. Despite rapid growth in broadcast and print media, political affiliations (particularly with parties such as the kurdistan democratic party-kdp and the patriotic union of kurdistan-puk) continue to dominate the media landscape, complicating efforts toward journalistic autonomy (barzani & mohammed, 2021; aivas, 2017). Partisan ownership and institutional weaknesses remain prevalent. Although the 2007 press law enshrines freedom of expression and prohibits journalist imprisonment, its enforcement has been inconsistent, undermined by unofficial political pressures and vague legal provisions (jalal et al., 2025; kamal & salih, 2022; majeed, 2020). Political monopolization of media outlets persists, blurring lines between independent journalism and partisan propaganda (aivas et al., 2025a; yaseen, 2019). Critical journalists frequently face intimidation and prosecution under ambiguous defamation and national security statutes (metro center, 2021). Consequently, the kurdish media sector has attracted significant scholarly attention concerning its transformation within a post-conflict transitional democracy. Hussein (2023) emphasizes the critical role of media in supporting emerging democratic institutions, outlining the unique challenges faced by media in fragile democratic contexts. More recent studies by aivas (2025a) document dynamic media reform efforts, emphasizing civil society's role and national forums aimed at reforming legislation and governance. These forums, including the first and second national forums for media reform led by kurdish media watchdog organizations (chmk.org), focus on regulatory gaps, professional norms, and transparency in media ownership. Nonetheless, ongoing political interference and media capture continue to obstruct comprehensive reform (ahmed & shwani, 2022). Rashid (2020) and bali (2021) further discuss the precarious state of media freedom in kri, highlighting issues such as harassment, censorship, and inadequate legal protections. While the 2007 press law marked progress, its uneven application and loopholes have limited protections for journalists and accountability. Kurdish media reform studies also recognize the increasing influence of digital media and social platforms, which broaden civic engagement but also introduce misinformation and polarization risks (hussein, 2022).

As kurdistan transitions from conflict to democracy, media reform remains an evolving process requiring sustained institutional dedication, political will, and inclusivity to achieve a genuinely pluralistic media environment (aivas, 2025b). Central to scholarship on kurdish media reform is the concept of media capture; political dominance over media institutions that compromises journalistic independence. Faris (2024) explicates how political actors in transitional democracies manipulate media outlets, undermining their objectivity. In the kri, many media organizations have formal or informal political affiliations, hindering unbiased journalistic function (hussein et al., 2025; aivas, 2022). This political entanglement remains a major barrier to media freedom. Gharib (2023) shows that kurdish media often reflect political patron interests rather than public service goals, especially on sensitive topics like corruption and governance reforms. Rashid (2022) and bali (2023) confirm the detrimental impact of political pressure on journalistic autonomy and information accessibility. Beyond political control, scholarship also explores media's role in democratization and national security amid instability, though entrenched capture and control limit its democratic capacity. The expanding



role of social media is a growing research focus, examining its effects on traditional media and democratic engagement.

In summary, academic discourse consistently identifies political interference and media capture as key constraints on kurdish media's democratic potential. The political economy surrounding the media system fundamentally restricts progress toward independence and professionalism. The efforts of media governance reform have centered on two major initiatives: the first chmk national forum for media reform in july 2021 and the second forum in may 2025, organized by the chmk.org. These forums convened policymakers, academics, legal experts, and journalists to discuss reform pathways. The initial forum diagnosed systemic challenges and aligned existing legal frameworks, while the latter proposed concrete policies including a national media regulatory authority, digital media legislation, and enhanced journalism education (chmk, 2021; 2025). Nevertheless, critiques highlight that these forums remain elite-driven, with limited grassroots participation and weak policy enforcement mechanisms (ahmed & shwani, 2023). These forums have been critically analyzed by aivas (2025) as pivotal in kri's post-conflict democratization. Through qualitative thematic and discourse analyses, his research explores the tension among political interference, institutional constraints, and journalistic capacity building. While structural barriers persist, opportunities for fostering an independent, accountable media sector are evident. The forums emerge as foundational in shaping kurdish media reform and democratic communication, emphasizing institutional priorities, contested reforms, and media's evolving societal role. The first forum gathered diverse stakeholders to review regulatory systems and advocated for cohesive reform strategies. A central issue was the conflict between centralized and decentralized media control, reflecting political party ideologies. This debate highlighted media reform as both a technical and political contestation (chmk national forum, 2021). The second forum expanded to legislative proposals addressing outdated laws, media tribunals, digital regulation, data protection, and cybercrime, recognizing digital transformation's risks and opportunities. The proposed multi-pillar reform model underscored collaborative efforts among legislative, executive, and citizen sectors, signaling policy maturation and institutional reform interconnectedness.

Professionalizing journalism and improving education for emerging media professionals were prioritized. The first forum identified curriculum gaps, supported by scholarly input. The second advocated specialized training centers in universities, digital skill integration, and research incentives. Post-forum interviews revealed consensus on challenges such as ambiguous laws, political interference, and limited institutional capacity to prepare journalists for new media realities (aivas, 2025b). A critical theme was balancing freedom of expression and censorship, evolving from a binary debate to considering accountability and human rights. Discussions included parliament and journalists' syndicate roles in media regulation. The second forum emphasized judicial protections for journalists, proposing media-specialized courts and judicial capacity building in media law. These measures reflect a growing institutional vision to protect journalistic independence and social responsibility.

Forum discourses framed kurdish media reform as a modernization imperative linked to democratization and international standards, using terms like "comprehensive approaches," "professional standards," and "transparent frameworks" to legitimize reform as part of state-building and governance (chmk national forum, 2025). The reform process drew global comparisons to scandinavia, tunisia, and the uk, though the discourse risked technocratic marginalization of grassroots voices and dissenting perspectives (brown, 2022). Despite portraying civil society as an agent of change, reform remains elite-driven with limited



inclusion of freelance journalists, marginalized media, and community broadcasters (kurdistan journalists syndicate, 2023). Another key concern was the lack of clear constitutional or legal foundations for media operations, seen as a structural barrier to media freedom and investigative journalism. Comprehensive legislation was deemed necessary for legitimizing media actors amid legal uncertainty. Both forums concluded with calls for coordinated action across government, judiciary, academia, media, and civil society, recognizing media reform as a holistic and collaborative endeavor. However, concerns remain regarding the feasibility, enforcement, and political will to realize these reforms (chmk national forum recommendations, 2021; 2025; aivas et al., 2025b).

Overall, analyses of the two chmk national forums reveal the complex interaction among institutional reform, professionalization, legal modernization, and tensions between censorship and freedom of expression. While framed as elite, technocratic projects aligned with international norms, the reform processes have been critiqued for lacking inclusivity and deeper structural transformation. Despite establishing a reform foundation, practical institutional change remains uncertain (kurdistan journalists syndicate, 2023).

2.2 taiwanese media reform: addressing disinformation and economic influence

Taiwan's trajectory of media reform diverges markedly from that of kurdistan, shaped predominantly by its transformation from an authoritarian regime to a robust democracy. Academic analyses frequently highlight the post-martial law era, beginning in 1987, as a critical juncture that facilitated increased press freedom and media pluralism. Scholars such as g.d. rawnsley and m.y.t. rawnsley have extensively chronicled this evolution, emphasizing the ongoing challenges within taiwan's media environment (rawnsley & rawnsley, 2019). Central to taiwanese media studies is the examination of the dismantling of authoritarian controls and the establishment of a diverse and competitive media ecosystem. This transition encompasses diversification of media ownership and the rise of a more autonomous press. Nevertheless, complexities persist, notably regarding media pluralism and political polarization across outlets. J. Sullivan (2020) underscores these challenges, particularly the regulatory difficulties posed by the rapidly expanding digital media landscape. In recent years, combating the proliferation of disinformation has emerged as a paramount issue within taiwanese media reform. As taiwan's democratic institutions mature, the impact of misinformation, especially via social media platforms, presents significant threats. Researchers such as rauchfleisch et al. (2022) have examined public discourse on disinformation in taiwan, stressing the vital roles played by journalism, academia, and political actors in counteracting misinformation. Media literacy initiatives have been identified as essential for empowering citizens to critically assess information and resist manipulation. Concurrently, ongoing debates surrounding journalistic ethics and regulatory frameworks highlight the tension between commercial pressures and the maintenance of media independence. Huang's (2021) comparative work on taiwan's political economy of media freedom offers insights into the dynamics influencing media autonomy.

Taiwan's proactive stance on digital democracy and civic technology further intersects with media reform efforts. Collaborative initiatives involving government bodies and civil society harness technological tools to enhance transparency and foster citizen engagement, thereby shaping the media environment (aivas, 2025c; hsiao & lin, 2023). Since the lifting of martial law in 1987, taiwan's media reform has been recognized as integral to its democratic consolidation. This watershed moment precipitated the gradual liberalization of a media landscape once characterized by state control and censorship (chien, 2018). The subsequent emergence of a pluralistic media sphere has been instrumental to democratic development (hsiao, 2019). Taiwanese scholar hsiao a-chin (2019) notes that media deregulation in the 1990s



effectively dismantled the authoritarian media infrastructure, enabling the rise of independent print and broadcast outlets.

Legal reforms such as; the freedom of the press act (1992), amendments to the government information law facilitated transparency, and public access to information (tsai, 2020). By the early 2000s, the focus of media reform shifted toward safeguarding media pluralism and addressing ownership concentration and political interference (chao & chen, 2017). Chen and chao (2021) highlight efforts to balance commercial media interests with public service obligations, citing the establishment of the national communications commission (ncc) in 2006 as a pivotal regulatory development promoting fairness and oversight. More recent scholarship by lee and wu (2022) explores the challenges posed by digital transformation, including the rise of social media and disinformation. Taiwanese media reformers have responded by advancing legislation reinforcing digital rights, enhancing media literacy, and promoting responsible journalism that illustrated by laws such as; the personal data protection act (2015), and anti-fake news initiatives that aim to preserve free expression while curbing misinformation. Thus, taiwan's media reform narrative reflects an ongoing negotiation among market dynamics, political actors, and civil society engagement. Chen (2024) argues that taiwan exemplifies how robust legal protections, active civic participation, and independent regulatory bodies contribute to building a resilient democratic media system emerging from authoritarianism.

In 2025, taiwan's participation in international digital and media rights forums marks an important continuation of discourse on free media, digital rights, and democratic communication. Through major events such as rightscon taipei 2025, the asian journalism forum 2025, and activities led by the taiwan fact-checking center (tfcc), taiwan asserts its leadership in global efforts to defend digital democracy and freedom of expression. These platforms address critical issues including ai governance in journalism, challenges of misinformation and foreign interference, and the imperative for balanced regulatory frameworks. In this sense, hosting rightscon in taipei is emblematic of taiwan's prominence as a champion of digital rights and a counter-model to authoritarian digital governance. The 24–27 february 2025, event prioritizes ai regulation, cybersecurity, and protection of digital civil rights, aligning with taiwan's commitments to combat authoritarianism and disinformation. The asian journalism forum, scheduled for 5–6 july 2025, at national taiwan university, will focus on the transformative role of ai and algorithmic systems in journalism. The forum aims to redefine journalism for the digital era by enhancing audience trust, advancing digital literacy, and reinforcing ethical journalism practices (asian journalism forum, 2025). Additionally, the tfcc's february 2025 briefing on “foreign interference and media's role” contextualizes taiwan's media challenges within broader international concerns, emphasizing the rising threat posed by cross-border disinformation campaigns to media resilience and integrity. Collectively, these initiatives portray taiwan as a model of transparent and democratic digital governance, distinctly contrasting with neighboring states characterized by authoritarian digital policies.

2.3 comparative analysis of media reform initiatives in kurdistan and taiwan

Taiwan in the republic of china and the kurdistan region of iraq (kri) present markedly different trajectories in media reform reflective of their distinct political and social contexts. While taiwan has successfully transitioned from authoritarianism to a pluralistic media ecosystem underpinned by robust institutional guarantees, kurdistan remains within a fragile post-conflict phase where the roles of the state, civil society, and media are still fluid and contested (gunter, 2022). Kurdish media reform predominantly centers on normative institution-building (such as



creating regulatory bodies and revising ethical codes) yet often overlooks deeper systemic issues including entrenched media capture and regulatory enforcement challenges (barzani & mohammed, 2024; aivas, 2019). Moreover, independent and community media voices tend to be sidelined in reform dialogues, constraining the scope for meaningful transformation. Both cases yield instructive lessons for international media reform. Taiwan exemplifies a rights-based, participatory framework wherein legal protections are buttressed by vibrant civil society engagement and autonomous regulatory oversight. The country's 2025 initiatives mark a significant global advancement for media freedom and digital rights, addressing contemporary threats and articulating a progressive vision for democratic communication in the digital era (tmss.net). In contrast, kurdistan illustrates the perils of technocratic and elite-driven reform processes that lack political pluralism and effective implementation mechanisms.

Despite their imperfections, the kurdistan media reform forums signify important steps toward recognizing the necessity for holistic institutional restructuring and the integration of digital rights into media policy (chmk national forum for media reform, 2021 & 2025). As global anxieties mount over censorship, disinformation, and authoritarian encroachment, comparative analyses between taiwan and kurdistan provide vital insights. They demonstrate that media freedom cannot be secured solely through piecemeal legal amendments or externally driven capacity-building initiatives. Sustainable reform requires sustained commitments to transparency, legal clarity, and political willpower to realize transformative governance at all levels. This approach aligns with broader struggles for media reform, wherein both institutional modernization and capacity-building for media professionals, alongside press freedom protection, remain critical challenges (chmk national forum for media reform, 2021 & 2025). Increasingly, both societies recognize the need to reconcile technological innovation with rights protection in a media environment shaped by democratic values in a digital age.

Within media reform challenges, aivas (2017)'s doctoral thesis, primarily situated within the context of iraqi kurdistan, offers a critical framework for understanding the multifaceted nature of media reform in fragile democratic settings. His scholarship intersects with broader academic dialogues surrounding the nexus of political influence, media autonomy, and democratic consolidation, especially in comparative contexts such as kurdistan and taiwan. In terms of the political economy of media in fragile democracies: aivas's sustained inquiry into journalistic objectivity amid political pressures in kurdistan enriches the discourse on the political economy of media within fragile democracies. His findings elucidate the entrenched influence of political parties over media outlets in the kri, exemplifying the phenomenon of "media capture" widely examined in scholarly literature (e.g., faris). This issue is emblematic of many transitional democracies, where nascent institutions struggle to cultivate independent media free from partisan or state control. Although taiwan has largely diminished overt state media control, political and commercial interests continue to shape its media ecosystem, manifesting in phenomena such as media polarization. Aivas's work starkly illustrates the vulnerability of media independence in contexts where democratic norms remain fragile and evolving. With regard to media development and journalistic practice; his analysis of media evolution in post-conflict societies and the shifting institutional roles of journalism offers vital insights into the practical challenges journalists face in transformative political environments.

In that context, aivas's observations regarding the fluidity and contestation of journalistic norms resonate with broader academic discussions on the adaptability of journalistic ethics across varied socio-political landscapes. While taiwan's media has trended towards greater professionalism and market orientation, he highlights how foundational journalistic principles continue to be negotiated under external pressures in fragile democracies, influencing journalists' daily practices. Although for a comparative lens of disinformation and media



literacy; aivas's research does not explicitly center on disinformation in the same manner as taiwanese scholarship, his work indirectly addresses information manipulation through the lens of political influence and media capture. Politically compromised media outlets often act as vectors for biased narratives or propaganda, constituting a form of disinformation. Therefore, his identification of structural vulnerabilities in kurdistan's media complements taiwan's more advanced engagement with disinformation challenges via media literacy initiatives. This comparison underscores differing stages of media reform: kurdistan grapples with foundational issues of media autonomy and political manipulation, while taiwan contends with sophisticated disinformation dynamics within a freer media environment.

3. Research data collection

This study adopts a qualitative research design that integrates thematic content analysis and critical discourse analysis (cda) to systematically examine the textual and discursive construction of media reform in the first and second chmk national forums in the kurdistan region, alongside taiwan's recent participation in major international media rights events (aivas, 2025; braun & clarke, 2022; van dijk, 2021; fairclough, 2015). In this sense, data collection extended to key international platforms, notably *rightscon taipei 2025* and the *asian journalism forum 2025*, both of which provided rich textual and audiovisual records addressing ai governance, misinformation, digital rights, and the evolving regulatory landscape in journalism. These events yielded high-value data sources, including conference handbooks, workshop summaries, and post-event policy briefs, which were systematically archived and coded. In this study, the primary dataset was assembled from diverse sources to facilitate methodological triangulation. Core materials included official forum records such as: agendas, resolutions, outcome statements, and policy recommendation reports, which collectively documented the institutional trajectory of media reform initiatives. These were complemented by verbatim transcripts and audio recordings of keynote addresses, panel deliberations, interactive q&a segments, and inter-panel dialogues, allowing for in-depth textual and linguistic examination. Besides, contemporary media outputs, including institutional press releases, televised news segments, online journalistic reports, and expert analyses from participating entities that were incorporated to assess how the forums were represented within public discourse. Supplementary datasets were also drawn from academic commentators, engaged institutions, and civil society representatives, offering interpretive depth and comparative insights (silverman, 2021; mcquail & deuze, 2020; entman, 2019; flick, 2018).

For analytical rigor, *thematic content analysis* was employed to inductively identify and categorize recurrent issues, including judicial reform, professional capacity-building, and the balancing of freedom of expression with regulatory oversight (hallin & mancini, 2017; voltmer, 2013). This process involved iterative coding cycles, with themes derived directly from participant discourse and institutional outputs. Complementarily, *critical discourse analysis* was applied to interrogate the linguistic strategies, ideological underpinnings, and power asymmetries embedded within the debates (wodak & meyer, 2016). Particular attention was given to the framing of modernization, transparency, and adherence to international standards, as well as the selective inclusion or exclusion of specific stakeholder groups (such as freelance journalists and grassroots media actors) within the reform process (curran & park, 2000; norris & inglehart, 2019). By combining these qualitative data collection tools and analytical approaches, the research captures both the *substantive policy content* and the *discursive frameworks* shaping media reform, situating these forums as critical arenas for institutional agenda-setting, symbolic representation, and contested visions of media governance in post-conflict and democratic contexts.



4. Research data analysis

This section presents the thematic and discourse analysis of two case studies: the kurdistan region of iraq and taiwan in the republic of china. Both contexts offer critical insights into contemporary debates on media reform, professionalization, legal frameworks, and freedom of expression.

4.1 media reform in kurdistan

The first and second national forums for media reform, convened by the kurdish media monitoring organization (chmk.org), represent pivotal moments in shaping the trajectory of media regulation, journalistic professionalism, and democratic communication in the region. Thematically, both forums prioritized systemic reform, particularly the revision of legal frameworks governing media operations. The first forum initiated these discussions by bringing together policymakers, political representatives, journalists, and academics to critically assess existing regulatory structures and propose more transparent and consistent frameworks. Central debates addressed tensions between centralized political control and localized editorial autonomy, revealing the deeply politicized nature of media governance. Contributions from the patriotic union of kurdistan (puk), kurdistan justice group (kjjg), gorran movement (gm), and kurdistan islamic union (kiu) underscored that media reform is not merely technical but inherently tied to questions of political legitimacy and narrative authority. The second chmk forum (2025) expanded the legal-institutional discourse through targeted legislative proposals, including the modernization of media laws, establishment of a national regulatory authority, digital media legislation, data protection mechanisms, and electronic crime prevention. This reflects a growing policy sophistication in addressing the complexities of the digital media environment, structured around a multi-pillar reform model involving legislative, executive, judicial, and civil society actors. A second recurring theme concerned the professionalization of journalism, with emphasis on sustainable pedagogical pathways for future media practitioners. While the first forum initiated this conversation by contrasting academic curricula with market demands, the second forum proposed concrete measures: establishing university training centers, integrating digital competencies into media projects, expanding research output, and formulating a national media education plan. This highlights a shared recognition among stakeholders that legal uncertainty and political interference are compounded by insufficient institutional capacity for professional training. A third thematic strand addressed the limits of free speech, freedom of expression, and censorship. In the first forum, this was framed as a binary tension between maintaining oversight and safeguarding press freedom. The second forum expanded this by examining the judiciary's role in protecting journalists from harassment and ensuring access to information, including proposals for specialized media courts and judicial training in media law. From a discourse-analytical perspective, reform was consistently framed as modernization aligned with international standards of democracy and good governance. Lexical choices such as "integrated approaches," "transparent frameworks," and "professional benchmarks" served both as policy objectives and as legitimizing devices. References to comparative examples (e.g., scandinavia, tunisia, united kingdom) reinforced the perception of reform as globally validated. However, the discourse often shifted towards technical-administrative solutions such as: harmonizing laws or creating regulatory bodies, which risked obscuring underlying issues of power, access, and representation. Civil society was discursively positioned as a collaborative partner in reform, yet the forums remained predominantly elite-led, with minimal engagement from freelance journalists, alternative media, or grassroots actors. The recurrent framing of the absence of a constitutional or political framework for media in kurdistan reframed legal uncertainty as a structural impediment to press freedom, underscoring the urgency for legislative intervention. Both forums concluded with multi-sectoral appeals for cooperation



between parliament, government, judiciary, academia, media, and civil society that emphasizing sustainable reform requires institutional integration, though questions of enforcement and political will remain unresolved.

4.2 media reform in taiwan

Between 25 and 27 february 2025, taiwan emerged as a prominent regional champion for media freedom, digital rights, and democratic communication within the asia–pacific. This prominence was underscored by its hosting of *rightscon taipei 2025*, which are marking the first occasion that the globally influential digital rights summit convened in taiwan. The program was further enriched by the *asian journalism forum 2025* and a series of collaborative initiatives organized in partnership with the *taiwan foreign correspondents' club (tfcc)*, collectively positioning the country at the forefront of media reform and advocacy in the region. Collectively, they addressed structural, technological, and geopolitical threats to media ecosystems, with a thematic focus on artificial intelligence, algorithmic governance, disinformation, and foreign interference. The selection of taipei as host for rightscon carried symbolic and geopolitical significance, framing taiwan as both a normative counterweight to authoritarian digital governance models and a hub for civic technology and free expression. In this context, rightscon's agenda foregrounded debates on ai regulation, cybersecurity, and the protection of digital civil rights, embedding taiwan within a discourse of democratic resilience and strategic resistance to authoritarian influence. Similarly, the asian journalism forum examined how algorithmic content distribution and ai-generated news challenge traditional newsroom practices, audience trust, and business sustainability. Discussions also addressed the “firehose of falsehood” phenomenon, where information overload erodes public capacity to distinguish credible reporting from disinformation, which are highlighting digital literacy as a critical dimension of media resilience. The thematic focus of the tfcc's programming was further consolidated through critical engagement with the issue of cross-border disinformation, framed as a pressing national security challenge. Within this context, journalism was positioned as an integral component of democratic resilience, where the securitization of the information sphere redefined the press as both a public good and a strategic safeguard against external influence campaigns. Discursively, these events positioned taiwan as a moral and normative alternative to illiberal media governance in the region. The language of transparency, human rights, and technological innovation functioned both as self-definition and geopolitical differentiation. Furthermore, the forums served as sites of institutional self-reflection and global coordination, strengthening linkages between journalists, policymakers, academics, and civil society actors. This collaborative framing advanced an understanding of journalism as an ethical, civic, and technologically adaptive practice. In sum, 2025 emerged as a pivotal year in taiwan's global media diplomacy. By convening and contributing to high-profile international forums, taiwan articulated a forward-looking vision for democratic communication in a digitally mediated world, reinforcing its leadership role in the defence of media freedom and digital rights at a moment when foundational definitions of truth, journalism, and accountability are under intense contestation.

5. Research conclusion

In conclusion, the media reform efforts in the fragile democratic settings of the kurdistan region of iraq and taiwan in the republic of china illustrate key aspects of the role that media systems play in advancing democratic communication and safeguarding freedom of expression within the digital age. In kurdistan, the chmk national forums in 2021 and 2025 have foregrounded the challenges of transitioning from politically dominated media to a more transparent, professional, and socially responsive sector. These forums have emphasized legal reforms, journalistic professionalism, and sustainable education as foundations for a more accountable



and participatory media environment. However, entrenched political interests and institutional barriers remain significant obstacles to effective implementation. Conversely, taiwan's leadership in digital rights and media freedom (highlighted by its role in hosting international forums such as rightscon taipei 2025 and the asian journalism forum 2025) demonstrates the importance of robust regulatory frameworks that balance innovation with rights protection. Taiwan's resilience against authoritarian digital trends in the asia-pacific underscores the need for global governance structures that safeguard media freedom and democratic communication, particularly as challenges related to artificial intelligence, misinformation, and cross-border disinformation intensify.

A comparative analysis reveals that despite differing political and institutional contexts, both kurdistan and taiwan underscore the necessity of comprehensive media reform to foster open, responsible, and democratic media systems. This requires coordinated efforts across government, media, academia, and civil society to address structural, legal, and technological challenges. Kurdistan's ongoing commitment to legislative and institutional reform is essential for safeguarding media independence, while taiwan's strategic use of international platforms serves as a model for advancing digital democracy globally. The chmk national forums in kurdistan have been pivotal in advancing media regulation and journalistic standards, particularly by addressing the tension between centralized control and political party influence. Legislative reform, including updated media laws and the establishment of regulatory bodies, remains a priority, alongside efforts to professionalize journalism and create sustainable career paths. Debates on balancing freedom of expression with appropriate regulation continue to shape the reform agenda, reflecting broader democratization and modernization processes. In taiwan, discussions around governance of ai, cybersecurity, and digital civil liberties highlight the evolving challenges facing journalism in the digital age. Taiwan's initiatives reinforce its role as a hub for media freedom and digital rights, contributing valuable lessons to the global discourse. Synthesizing these insights with shwan adam aivas's academic works, several core themes emerge relevant to fragile democracies: the interplay between institutional strength and civil society engagement, the constraints imposed by political economy on media autonomy, the adaptation of journalistic norms under political pressure, and the dual role of emerging technologies in both enabling reform and introducing new risks such as disinformation and surveillance. As a result, key priorities for advancing media reform in both contexts include: de-politicizing media by severing partisan control over outlets; enhancing journalistic professionalism through education and ethical training; establishing robust legal protections for journalists and media freedom; promoting media literacy to empower audiences; supporting the financial and operational independence of media organizations. Ultimately, aivas (2020)'s critical analysis of kurdish journalism cultures enriches understanding of the complex political, legal, and economic factors shaping media reform in fragile democracies. His work, situated alongside comparative studies of taiwan, highlights the multifaceted and ongoing struggle to build independent, pluralistic, and democratically accountable media institutions in transitional societies.

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