# Shomrim T

## The Center for Media and Democracy in Israel





















### Dear Stakeholders,

**We are proud to present Shomrim's 2022 Annual Report**. Established in late 2019 by philanthropists Gary and Laura Lauder, Shomrim has taken upon itself to be at the forefront of protecting Israeli democracy through investigative journalism that generates change. By means of in-depth, data-based and unique journalism projects that inform and build trust and credibility with readers, we hold power accountable.

The making of this unique organization, which combines elements from journalism and the nonprofit world, has allowed us to focus on values such as transparency, accountability and quality. From day one, our aim was to collaborate with all the media outlets in Israel – an unprecedented goal. Today, three years into our endeavor, we are proud to say that our work is being published by the vast majority of Israel's media outlets.

As this report will demonstrate, in 2022, we increased our impact model and are currently introducing further improvements. Our unique model has enabled us to put a spotlight on important issues such as residential care facilities for disabled people; Palestinian LGBTQ seeking asylum in Israel; the opioid pandemic in Israel; greenwashing by the Nature and Parks Authority; hungry school children and other core issues addressing life in Israel today, wrongdoings and misuse of power.

In this day and age, as the world grows increasingly intertwined, so do journalism and journalistic work. It is often the case that understanding local events and phenomena requires us to examine a multitude of angles, including tracing their international origins and uncovering foreign connections and ramifications. Early along the way, Shomrim recognized that in order to create high-level and groundbreaking journalism, working with professional media outlets overseas would be essential. This Annual Report highlights our international reach to unveil the truth. In 2022, Shomrim collaborated with ProPublica, ICIJ, OCCRP and Bloomberg Newsweek. A great deal of effort was invested in these collaborations, which will undoubtedly manifest in impactful joint investigations in 2023.

On a personal note from both CEO and Editor, we wish to thank our founders, board of directors and supporters for trusting our capacity to undertake this vital role. We have the privilege of leading an organization that is a watchdog of justice and a safeguarder of truth. We also wish to express our thanks to our brilliant team for their extraordinary work and our Advisory Committee for their support and invaluable consult. We are proud of this year's achievements and look ahead to the considerable work that lies ahead to foster a more robust Israeli democracy. We are determined and motivated and believe that we can make a difference together.

## Investigative Journalism in the Public Interest

Launched in December 2019, The Center for Media and Democracy in Israel, Shomrim (the Guardians) is an independent news organization established to strengthen Israeli democracy through investigative journalism. We are a free of commercial or political bias newsroom that aims to strengthen the flow of trustworthy fact-based and data-driven information to the public; incubate investigative reporting projects with potential for social impact; highlight new voices, and examine issues of importance to communities that are overlooked. From investigations and documentary projects to data journalism and photojournalism, Shomrim tells stories that might otherwise go untold and empowers Israelis to participate meaningfully in their democracy.

#### Inspired by ProPublica, Shomrim is a new player in the local media field.

Unlike most media outlets, we are a non-profit dedicated exclusively to investigative reporting. Shomrim's unique model is to conduct independent investigations and to work in partnership with other media organizations to publish them in print, broadcast, and digital outlets across the entire political spectrum to achieve maximum exposure and impact. Our newsroom consists of in-house and freelance journalists who implement the Freedom of Information Law and navigate big open data sources.

Shomrim also lays the foundation for a vibrant investigative journalist community by developing training resources and building strategic relationships with media outlets, academic institutions and civil society organizations.

### Topics Covered in 2022

- 19 articles on Institutions & Rule of Law
  - 9 articles on **Human Rights & Democratic Values**
- 13 articles on Marginalized Communities
- 14 articles on Health
- 10 articles on **Economy, Finances & Poverty** 
  - 8 articles on Transportation & Environment
  - 7 articles on Welfare
- 12 articles on **Education & Society**



### **Highlights of the Year**

### Here is a selection of impactful investigative stories curated by the Shomrim team in 2022.

### **Neglect, Ltd**

In an in-depth investigation spanning more than six months, **Shomrim Reporter Roni Singer** delved deep into the conduct of residential care facilities for people with disabilities. Shomrim received dozens of shocking testimonies about severe violence inflicted on residents by the caregivers employed in these facilities and disturbing evidence of neglect and misconduct. **In** a series of investigations published on Shomrim's platforms and in Kan 11's investigative TV show Zman Emet, Shomrim revealed the mechanism that enables private companies to make a fortune at the expense of society's most vulnerable.

The investigation revealed how the Ministry of Welfare and Social Services, which is the primary body responsible for budgeting the care facilities, and as such is also compelled to supervise the living conditions and the degree to which the private contractors are generating profit from service delivery, is supplying the funding but is rarely present on site to oversee and inspect. The Welfare Ministry

also refused to disclose its supervision policy. Shomrim's journalist was able to place a hidden camera in one of the care facilities, which exposed dire neglect and a daily routine that crushes the human soul and spirit.

This series of investigations on government-contracted care facilities prompted a heated public debate and received follow-ups in the major media outlets. In the wake of Shomrim's findings,



the Welfare Ministry announced the early retirement of a Chief Deputy Director, whose demeaning behavior towards residents' family members who wished to report improper conduct was exposed. The police opened an investigation following Shomrim's exposé of a suspected sexual assault of a young woman with autism in the care of one of the facilities. The main findings of Shomrim's investigation reached the table of a special committee assembled by the Welfare Ministry to examine the conduct of contracted care facilities.

Screenshot Kan11 investigative tv show "Zman Emet"

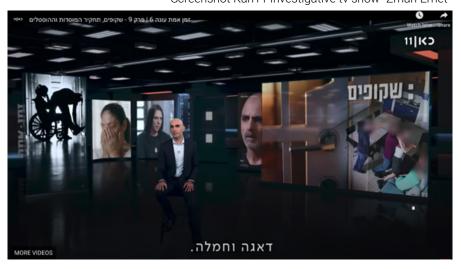




Illustration: Moran Barak

### **Opioids**

Towards the end of 2021, Shomrim reporter Daniel Dolev published a series of groundbreaking articles in collaboration with The Marker (Haaretz group financial newspaper) exposing deficiencies in monitoring widely prescribed opioid medication and painkillers, which can be misused, abused, or diverted for nonmedical purposes. Shomrim's exposé raised concern about a potential public health crisis due to the absence of an effective supervision mechanism on behalf of the Health Ministry and major stakeholders in the healthcare system.

During 2022 Shomrim continued to follow up on the story. In April, Shomrim revealed that the Health Ministry distributed an internal memo to the hospitals and national health funds detailing new regulations for monitoring and restricting prescription opioids. In this memo, the Ministry confirmed Shomrim's findings, including the sharp rise in consumption, frequency of use and dosage. In July, while a petition to the High Court

of Justice about the conduct of the Health Ministry looms in the background and following Shomrim's investigations, the Health Ministry announced a series of steps to counter the growing use of prescription opioids.

Among others, the Ministry updated the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance and regulations limiting the use of handwritten prescriptions and obligated health facilities to identify patients who developed an addiction. The majority of these requirements have yet to be finalized, and some require specific legislation, which will no doubt impede their coming into action. In November, Shomrim revealed new data from the discussions of a special committee appointed by the Health Ministry to examine the increased use of opioids, namely that the number of patients with prescribed high dose strong opioids has multiplied in the last five years, despite a series of steps set forth by the Health Ministry and national health funds to change prescribing practices and policies.

At one committee meeting, a senior official from the Health Ministry, revealed that in 2018, more than 9 percent of the Israeli population was prescribed long and short-term opioid painkillers. That adds up to about 800,000 people – up from 700,000 in 2014.



#### **Palestinian LGBTQ**

In June, Shomrim Reporter Fadi Amun brought the stories of Palestinian LGBTQ fleeing persecution in the West Bank or reprisal from family members for openly identifying as LGBTQ. After escaping the Palestinian Authority to Israel, they are granted a short-term residency permit due to their highly precarious situation. However, this permit does not enable them to access work, health care, or welfare services. Instead, it subjects them to illegal employment under exploitative conditions and renders them highly vulnerable to abuse and prostitution. The story was also published in Mako online news site and Amun was invited to present his findings before a Special Knesset Committee on Foreign Workers led by former MK Ibtisam Mara'ana

Shortly after releasing the investigation, in response to a joint petition by several human rights groups, which was deliberated in the Supreme Court for over three years, the Israeli government changed its position and announced that LGBTQ Palestinians fleeing persecution in the West Bank would be allowed to work in the country and receive health insurance, ending years of policy allowing them to reside in Israel but little else. The newly announced change in government policy is an important step in allowing Palestinian LGBTQ to live with basic dignity in Israel while they seek asylum in a third country, where they will be able to build safe lives.

#### **Greenwash Inc**

In 2021 a Shomrim investigation revealed that the list of contributors to the Israel Nature and Parks Authority includes the country's most polluting corporations. Such donations raised concern about greenwashing and the dangers of conflict of interest, considering that the Authority is a public corporation with enforcement power and influence on planning procedures, policy building and decision making. During 2022, we continued to follow up on this story and our investigation, published in collaboration with Kan11 News, uncovered the annual list of contributors again, which still featured the same companies. This exposure sparked debate among environmental NGOs and the Minister of Environmental Protection announced that contributions from companies with severe environmental impact where there is also potential for conflict of interest will cease.

Photos: Ofer Vaknin and Reuters







Illustration: Moran Barak

### School Children Facing Hunger and Nutrition Insecurity

A Shomrim investigation uncovered the prevalence of food and nutrition insecurity among Israeli school children. Teachers and education professionals, who were interviewed for the first time by Shomrim, expressed the escalating food insecurity experienced by a larger number of students and families. The investigation was published in collaboration with Calcalist (Israel's leading financial newspaper) and received follow-up coverage in several media outlets, including Galei Zahal radio.

The release of the story, along with public pressure led by 121 Engine for Social Change NGO, propelled the Minister of Education to approach the Ministry of Finance and request that surplus funds from the Education Ministry budget will be transferred to expanding the Feeding Enterprise, to include warm meals for high school students.

In addition, four private members' bills were submitted to the Knesset by different MKs from

the current coalition and opposition with the aim of expanding the feeding program by the Ministry of Education to include pupils after primary school and at-risk youth. Shomrim will continue to follow up on this issue.



"I can tell you that 90 percent of the families with children in my classes, from first grade to sixth grade, are in very severe financial distress," says Nurit, who works at an after-school childcare facility in Kiryat Gat.

### **Congestion Charge**

In June 2022, Shomrim's Editor-in-Chief, Eyal Abrahami, published an investigation on the legislation process and approval by the government and the Knesset's Finance Committee of a new congestion charge. The new tax aims to reduce heavy traffic in the Tel Aviv Metropolitan by introducing a congestion charge on private vehicles entering the area during rush hours, It is planned to come into force in 2025.

Shomrim's investigation revealed that the approval process was flawed, the information presented to the Finance Committee by the Finance Ministry was partial, and transportation experts thought the approved model would be ineffective.

The data published by the Ministry of Finance was partial, incorrect, and manipulative at best. For instance, the "positive" results from a transportation experiment conducted to show the supposed effects of the congestion charge were collected during the four COVID waves in 2020-21 and the transportation turmoil they caused. Furthermore, it was not disclosed that the experiment had not been completed and that the results shown to the committee had little to do with the actual data collected from the experiment.

In addition, Shomrim revealed that an academic staff that was supposed to examine, among others, the effectiveness of various tax rates was discontinued before the matter was even discussed. It turned out that Israel did not have any data on the extent of transportation in the Tel Aviv Metropolitan. Transportation experts with whom Shomrim consulted believed that the effect

of the congestion charge on heavy traffic would be marginal at best. Despite all the problems in assessing the effectiveness of the congestion charge, the tax was approved by the Finance Committee.

Shomrim's investigation was published in collaboration with The Marker, which led to a rise in public awareness and active discussion on the congestion charge and its effectiveness. Following the publication, additional media outlets covered the issue, which, before the publication by Shomrim, had not received any media attention. In December 2022, in a Coalition agreement of the new government, it was agreed that the congestion charge would be canceled, and its effectiveness would be re-examined.



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Photo: Bea Bar Kallos

### The Commission for Equal Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The Commission for Equal Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the Israeli Ministry of Justice was established in 2000 to supervise and enforce the implementation of the Equal Rights for Persons with Disabilities Law. However, a Shormim investigation from June 2021 revealed that from its very inception, the Ministry of Justice has purposely issued guidelines and used interpretations of the law to obstruct the Commission's operations precisely where its scrutiny is crucial: toward state institutions and government offices.

In July 2022, the Commission changed its policy and, for the first time in its history, filed a lawsuit against the State alleging discrimination.

This policy change can prove to be significant in enforcing the implementation of the Equal Rights for Persons with Disability Law vis-à-vis one of the most significant employers in the Israeli labor market – the government.

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### A Spotlight on our International Collaborations

2022 was a breakthrough year for Shomrim in terms of building international collaborations. Due to the impact that the Pandora Papers Investigation (2021) had on positioning Shomrim as an important player in the Israeli media environment, we decided that collaborations across countries and organizations would be a primary objective. Shomrim began regularly working with Investigative Journalist Uri Blau. Stationed in Washington DC, Blau led the Pandora Papers Investigation and, throughout 2022, deepened significant relationships with **ProPublica, The International Consortium** of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), and the **Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting** Project (OCCRP). Shomrim is the only Israeli representative in both these organizations.



Illustration: Rocco Fazzari, ICIJ

### The Uber Files Investigation

A global investigation into a trove of 124,000 confidential documents from the tech company that were leaked to the Guardian revealed how Uber flouted the law, duped police, exploited violence against drivers and secretly lobbied governments worldwide. To facilitate a global investigation, the Guardian shared the data with 180 journalists at more than 40 media organizations via the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), including the Washington Post, Le Monde and the BBC. Shomrim is the only Israeli representative in ICIJ.

The Israeli angle of the leaked documents uncovered Uber's lobbying operation in Israel

in an effort to enter the local market, including legislative bill drafted by uber, to be submitted by Members of Knesset, that would change regulations to enable the company entry into the Israeli market, meetings with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and concurrent appeals to ambassadors in Israel and the USA in an attempt to stop an investigation against the tech company which opened in Israel. Shomrim's investigation received wide coverage in the major broadcast media, including Kan 11 News, Channel 12 News and Galie Zahal, and in the news websites and newspapers of Haaretz, Calcalist, The Marker, and Ynet.

### **Shadow Diplomats**

An international investigation by ICIJ, ProPublica, and 45 media outlets, including Shomrim, exposed how the Hezbollah

Lebanese terror organization used honorary consuls, who enjoy partial diplomatic immunity, as its financial arm to smuggle and launder money

After exposing the investigation, officials from the US intelligence services stated that the use of honorary consuls

had been largely overlooked by global intelligence agencies and represented a giant leap forward

in their international law enforcement capacities. The article also revealed that around 170 honorary consuls from various foreign countries serve in Israel, some with ties to Benjamin Netanyahu and business people. Shomrim's investigation was published in Ynet, Mako and Galie Zahal.

Illustration: ICIJ

SHADOW



Illustration: Armando.info

### A Mossad Source is Suspected of Extorting Millions of Dollars

In December, Shomrim published another international joint investigation with the ICIJ and media outlets in the USA, Portugal, Spain, and Venezuela. The investigation revealed that Martin Rodil, a Venezuelan-born businessman, is suspected of extorting huge sums of money from Venezuelan millionaires who wished to flee the country.

Rodil, a Mossad source and US intelligence agency consultant, had contacts with Israeli elite intelligence to whom he supplied information on the then-expanding relationship between Iran and Venezuela. In addition, Rodil received Israeli citizenship under unclear circumstances.

The investigation revealed that during his time as an intelligence source, Rodil used his connections to allegedly extort vast sums of money from Venezuelan millionaires, with dubious pasts of their own, wishing to immigrate from the country. It seems some of that money landed in Israel, and additional amounts were transferred to the US bank accounts of Efrat, an Israeli anti-abortion group, and Rabbi Yoshua Pinto.

The investigation was a rare opportunity to uncover a hidden world where intelligence agencies, vital security interests, international struggles, suspicion of money laundering, extortion, and vast amounts of money are intertwined. The investigation was published in the printed and online versions of Haaretz and the economic supplement of The Marker.





### **Ericsson Payoffs to ISIS**

Another investigativion Shomrim took part of, led by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) exposed the secret dealings of Swedish telecom giant Ericsson with ISIS in war-torn Iraq to sustain it's business and haul cell towers and equipment across a rout under ISIS control known as the "Speedway". Ericsson also asked ISIS for permission to continue to work in ISIS-held Mosul. Moreover, the investigation revealed a spreadsheet listing the company's probes into possible bribery, money laundering, and embezzlement in Iraq and ten other countries. Shomrim's story was published in the financial newspaper Calcalist.

More investigations resulting from leaks and international collaborations include the money trail behind the space flight of billionaire Eytan Stibbe, slated to be the "second Israeli astronaut," and the money trail of right-wing NGOs purchasing property in East Jerusalem.

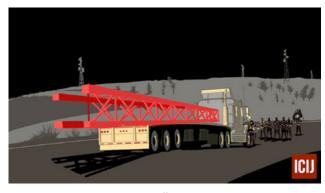


Illustration: Rocco Fazzari, ICIJ



#### **Suisse Secrets**

Shomrim was also part of an international investigation into one of the world's wealthiest and most important banks and Switzerland's second-largest lender – Credit Suisse, spearheaded by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) and German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung.

Shomrim's Uri Blau, the Israeli representative to the project, revealed that Miki Ganor, one of the key figures in the Submarine Affair, held hundreds of thousands of dollars in Credit Suisse during the years when he made efforts to promote a submarine deal to purchase naval vessels from German shipbuilder - ThyssenKrupp.

The secret bank account is not mentioned in the indictment against Ganor and it seems that its very existence was unknown to the police, even though Ganor was cooperating in the probe.

Shomrim's investigation was published in the major financial newspapers Calcalist, The Marker, and Haaretz.





### **Postmortem Sperm Retrieval**

Shomrim made an international breakthrough thanks to a collaboration with Bloomberg Businessweek on postmortem sperm retrieval. Ethan Bronner, Senior Editor at Bloomberg News and one of Shomrim's founders, together with Shomrim's reporter Chen Shalita dug deep into this unique and complex growing phenomenon in Israel whereby sperm is extracted from a recently deceased man or frozen sperm is used post-mortem for reproduction.

This highly controversial procedure has been banned by many countries due to moral and ethical considerations. In Israel, postmortem sperm retrieval requests come mainly from bereaved family members of fallen IDF soldiers. At this time, without legislation to regulate this increasingly common practice, and when questions arise about consent, the respectful treatment of the dead body, and the welfare of the offspring, the State relies on guidelines published by the Attorney General of Israel in 2003 and on a Supreme Court ruling dated five years ago. Shomrim published a series of articles that examined the social, ethical, and legal dilemmas of post-mortem sperm retrieval. A collaboration between Bronner and Shalita, which evolved shortly after, led to their publication in Bloomberg News and its affiliated media outlets.

Israel is considered one of the leading countries to address these dilemmas, where post-mortem sperm retrieval is practiced more frequently.



Shomrim's articles led to broad public debate, and parallel to these discussions, the Knesset, before dissolving, approved an initial bill to regulate postmortem sperm retrieval and set clear specifications and boundaries that define when the procedure is permissible.

Illustration: Moran Barak



### **2022 International Collaborations**



Israel's Outgoing Government Approved a First-Ever Outreach Program to Progressive American Jews, Published: The Forward (US), November 2022



International Collaboration Exposes: A Mossad Source is Suspected of Extorting Millions of Dollars, Published: Moncloa (Spain), December 19, 2022



International Collaboration Exposes: A Mossad Source is Suspected of Extorting Millions of Dollars, Published: ICIJ (US), December 19, 2022



Israel's Outgoing Government Approved a First-Ever Outreach Program to Progressive American Jews, Published: The Forward (JTA), November 2022



International Collaboration Exposes: A Mossad Source is Suspected of Extorting Millions of Dollars, Published: Armando (Venezuela), December 19, 2022



Postmortem Sperm Retrieval, Published: Bloomberg (US), July 19, 2022



NSO, Maker of Pegasus Spyware, is Conducting a Lobbying Campaign, Published: ProPublica (US), July 6, 2022



NSO, Maker of Pegasus Spyware, is Conducting a Lobbying Campaign, Published Gizmodo (US), July 12, 2022



NSO, Maker of Pegasus Spyware, is Conducting a Lobbying Campaign, Published: The Wire (US), July 12, 2022



Suisse Secrets Project, Published: OCCRP (US), February 20, 2022



Palestine Workers in Israel, Published: The Forward (US), July 1, 2022



Suisse Secrets Project, Published: OCCRP (US), February 20, 2022

### Shomrim The Center for Media and Democracy

Our Stories | Knesset Database | Newsletter Subscription | Annual Report

### The Knesset Database: A New Knesset, New Database

The 25th Knesset was sworn and with the opening of its parliamentary activity, Shomrim will monitor the activity of every Knesset memberFrom proposing legislation and showing up for committee meetings to activity in the plenum and overseeing the government. Shomrim has created several indexes to follow the work of Knesset Members. Click on each index for an overview and the name of the MK for a closer look at each elected official.

Data Journalism Editor: Miki Levy | Research: Doron Sela | Design: Noam Tamari | Contact us: data@shomrim.org



In an era of social media, prominence in the political realm is often achieved through provocation, incendiary political language and inflammatory rhetoric. At the same time, a range of Knesset responsibilities, such as legislation, supervision and reform, are neglected.

In 2022, Shomrim's Data Division launched the Parliamentary Database to expose parliamentary work's less-reported sides.

**Twelve quantitative indexes were created**, each highlighting a different aspect of the Knesset's work: bill proposals,

committee membership and committee participation, questions submitted, votes made, speeches delivered and other parameters. These indexes enable us to access data quickly and efficiently and compare how the parliamentary efforts of MKs correspond with their rhetoric. Yet more so, the Database supports Shomrim's mission to promote a fact-based public debate. Since its launch, the Database has been acknowledged by MKs and journalists. Shomrim's Head of the Data Division, Miki Levy, was invited to host a regular TV spot on the Knesset Channel.

### Below is an example of the different indexes for two members of the Knesset out of 120 that can be found in Shomrim's Knesset database

### Gilad Kariv Labor



- Urgent Motion Index
- Motion for the Agenda Index
- Parliamentary Question Index
- 1,112 Parliamentary Vote Index
  - 2 Committee Membership Index
  - 41 Legislation Index
  - 251 Committee Participation Index
- 3,590 Most Searched-For MKs
  - 56 Speech Index
    - White Paper Index
    - Abstention Index
    - No Vote Index

#### Yariv Levin Likud



- 6 Urgent Motion Index
- Motion for the Agenda Index
- 25 Parliamentary Question Index
- **1,844** Parliamentary Vote Index
  - Committee Membership Index
  - 46 Legislation Index
  - Committee
    Participation Index
- 2,070 Most Searched-For MKs
  - 57 Speech Index
    - White Paper Index
    - Abstention Index
    - No Vote Index

<sup>\*</sup> Data for the 24th Knesset (April 6, 2021 - November 15, 2022)

<sup>\*\*</sup> Photos by: Noam Moskovich and Danny Shem-Tov

### **Shomrim By the Numbers** —

### **Journalistic Outputs**

- ▶ 93 Articles
- $\triangleright 124$  Collaborations
- ▶ 103 Infographics and data stories

### Financial Information \_\_\_\_\_

### 2022 Budget

Income (USD)		Expenses (USD)	
Laura and Gary Lauder Venture Philanthropy Fund	1,000,000	Projects Salaries	790,000 265,000
Additional Donations	326,000	Rent & Office	96,000
2021 Outstanding Legal Reserves	170,000	Legal & Reserves Operating Expenses Outstanding	219,000 48,000 78,000
Total	1,496,000	Total	1,496,000

- \* Figures as of November 30, 2022, and prior to financial audit.
- \*\* For the full report submitted to the Registrar of Associations, please visit Guidestar (Hebrew).

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**Kan 11** 

**Channel 12** 

**Channel 13** 

**Channel 14** 

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Ha'aretz

**The Marker** 

**Calcalist** 

**Israel Ha'Yom** 

Globes

Maariv

Mishpacha (Haredi Newspaper)

### Online Outlets

Ynet

Mako

**Walla News** 

**Haaretz Arabic** 

Bukra (Arabic)

**Times of Israel** 

**Srugim** 

Bechadrei Haredim (Haredi website)

Kikar HaShabat (Haredi website)

### Radio

Galei Tzahal

**Kan Bet** 

103FM

104FM (local radio)

Radio Jerusalem (local radio)

Radio Haifa (local radio)

Kol Ba'Rama (Haredi Radio)

Kol Hachi (Haredi Radio)

### International Media

**Bloomberg Businessweek** 

**ProPublica** 

AP

ICIJ

**OCCRP** 

The Wire

**Forward** 

**JTA**