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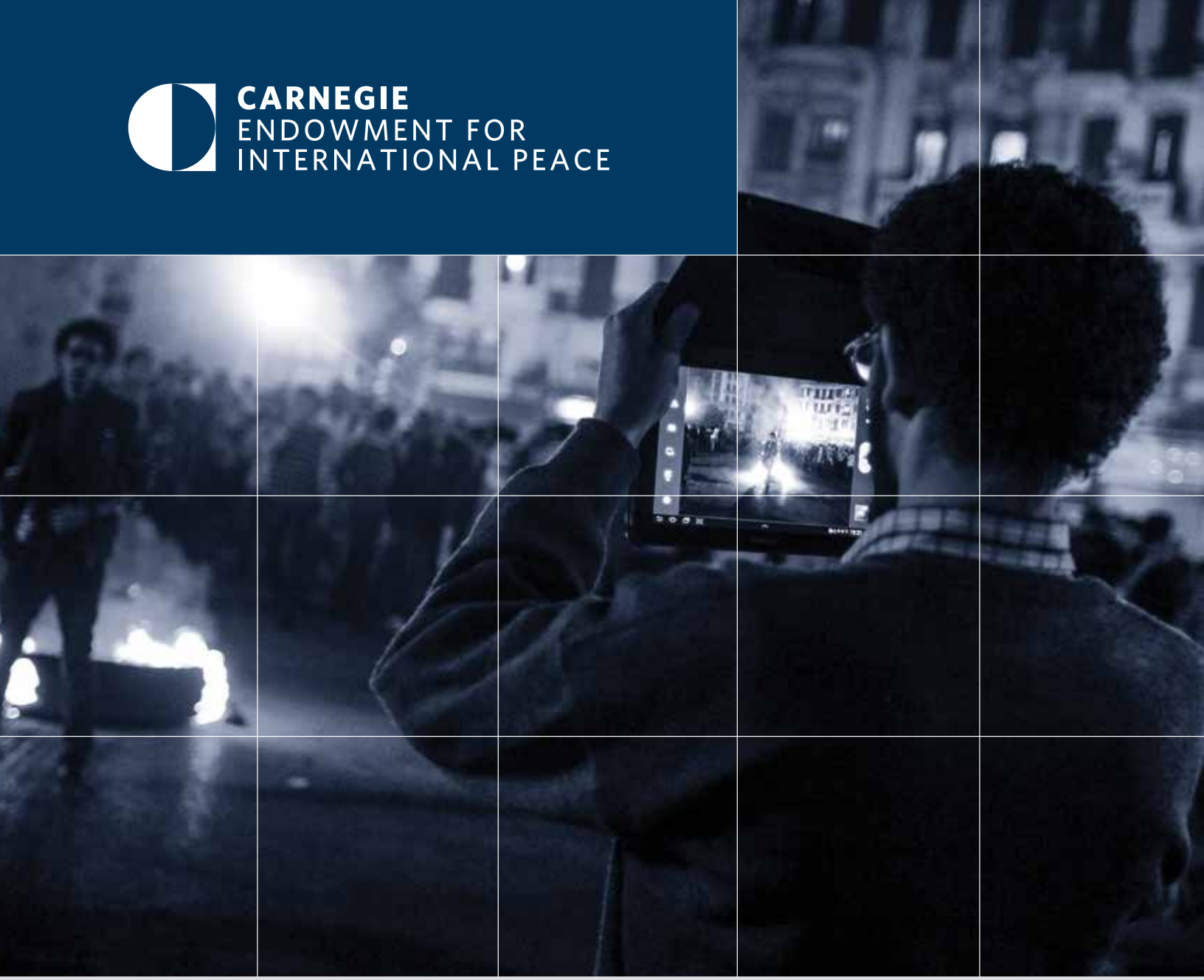

EGYPT'S MEDIA IN THE MIDST OF REVOLUTION

Rasha Abdulla

JULY 2014

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About the Author

Rasha Abdulla is an associate professor and former chair of the journalism and mass communication department at the American University in Cairo. She has a PhD in communication from the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Florida. She is the recipient of several teaching and research awards, including the AUC Excellence in Research and Creative Endeavors Award for her research on social media and political activism leading to and during Egypt's revolution (2011).

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Abdulla is an advocate for freedom of thought and expression. She is also an avid tweep. You can follow her on Twitter at @RashaAbdulla.

Summary

More than three years after the January 25 revolution toppled then Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, Egypt continues to struggle with an authoritarian media sector and constraints on freedom of expression. Postrevolution regimes have not capitalized on opportunities to reform state and private media, and critical voices have been harassed and marginalized by state and nonstate actors. As long as Egypt continues to be governed by rulers who believe controlling the media is in their best interest, reform will only come about through the few dissident voices in the media backed up by support from civil society and the masses.

Egyptian Media Since the January 25 Revolution

- Successive Egyptian regimes following the revolution have taken steps to limit freedom of expression and control the narrative in Egyptian media coverage.
- Hopes for a more professional media sector have been dashed by a state media apparatus that has for all intents and purposes supported whatever regime is in power, private media outlets influenced by wealthy owners with ties to the Mubarak regime, and severe polarization between Islamist and non-Islamist media outlets.
- Social media played a key role in the January 25 revolution, and this platform has provided new avenues for expressing critical views, challenging established media entities, and organizing against the government.

The Future of Egyptian Media

Finding a place for critical voices in established media outlets has become increasingly difficult. Much of Egypt's media has strongly supported the regime's narrative since the Muslim Brotherhood–backed president, Mohamed Morsi, was ousted from power in July 2013. Dissenting voices are almost absent from newspapers and television shows, and Islamist-affiliated outlets have been shut down by the government.

Social media outlets continue to offer a platform for otherwise marginalized views. Though also polarized, social media platforms provide one of the few forums in which activists pursuing the middle ground can voice their opinions and document human rights violations.

Reform of state media is needed more than ever before, but political will is lacking. The current regime, led by Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, has so far shown little interest in making state media more open and democratic. For now, these outlets remain in the service of the regime, not the people.

Many hope that the current regime will reduce repression of the media, but early signs have not been encouraging. These include the termination of popular political satire show *Al Bernameg* and a request for proposals from the Ministry of Interior for software to monitor online social networks.

Introduction

The Egyptian media have always played an important role in Egypt and the Middle East. Significant changes have taken place during the past two decades though, culminating in the introduction of social media that were strategically used by the revolutionary forces to advance their cause and topple Hosni Mubarak, Egypt's dictator of thirty years.

Since the revolution broke out in 2011, the changes have been fast and frequent, with the state media trying to figure out their new masters. The private media are trying not to alienate the people while maintaining the interests of their owners, most of whom were closely allied with the old regime.

Following Mubarak's downfall, each regime that came to power until most recently that of former head of the Egyptian military Abdel Fattah el-Sisi seems to have been more brutal on the media than its predecessor. Social media remain an independent force, though the state has tried to clamp down on dissident voices in every type of media.

Social media remain an independent force in Egypt, though the state has tried to clamp down on dissident voices in every type of media.

Major changes in media laws and structure need to take place to help Egypt's transition to democracy. The problem seems to be that such changes are dependent on political will more than anything else, and the changes might not be in the best interest of the current regime, which uses the media to disseminate information about its causes. The only way out, short of political will, seems to be reform through the few dissident voices inside the media backed up by support from civil society and the masses.

Background

Historically, Egypt has maintained a reputation as a leader in the production of media content, which is the main reason why the Egyptian dialect of Arabic is widely understood all over the Arab world. Since the country gained independence from the British in the early 1950s, Egyptian rulers have realized the importance of the media to the country's position as a political and cultural leader, as well as to their regimes' ability to control the masses.

The government has typically used the media to serve its political agenda and spread its messages. When radio was introduced, Gamal Abdel Nasser broadcast his socialist, pan-Arab messages to the rest of the Arab world through stations like Voice of the Arabs and Middle East Radio. When Anwar el-Sadat

signed the 1979 peace agreement with Israel, causing the Arab countries to boycott Egypt, radio was used to counter attacks from these countries.

At the same time, the state's investment in content production led Egypt to become the leading producer in the Arab world for many years. Egyptian programs and drama productions were, and still are today, exported to most Arab countries and constitute a main component of overall content on Arab media channels.[1]

Newspapers mostly followed the same pattern, although in this traditionally oral society where illiteracy rates are still above one-third of the population, broadcast media have always been deemed more powerful. The print media were nationalized under Nasser, and the major newspapers eventually became mouthpieces for the government. Party and independent papers started to appear in the 1980s and 1990s and managed to gain some ground against the mainstream government newspapers, which remained steadily and unmistakably loyal to the government. Until the introduction of satellite broadcasting and the Internet, Egyptians would tune in to foreign radio stations as an alternative source of news, particularly at times of crises.

Legislation

While Egyptian constitutions have guaranteed freedom of expression on paper, the reality has been a different matter. The government has often relied on laws that impede freedom of expression, including emergency laws and articles from the penal code, and has used them to censor content and intimidate journalists, bloggers, and broadcasters. Over the years this has caused many of those involved in media to censor themselves and has led to the acknowledgement of redlines that mark areas deemed too sensitive to tackle.

While Egyptian constitutions have guaranteed freedom of expression on paper, the reality has been a different matter.

Broadcasting in Egypt is mainly regulated through the charter of the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU). Drafted in 1979, and modified in 1989 only to give almost absolute power to the minister of information, the charter is problematic in more ways than one. It does not allow any entity other than ERTU the right to broadcast in Egypt. Moreover, it states that ERTU is to broadcast anything the government officially asks it to broadcast, a legal provision which means that ERTU, the closest thing Egypt has to a public broadcaster, inevitably must side with the regime. There are no guidelines in the charter regarding diversity of content.[2]

The charter specifies that ERTU is the only broadcaster in the country. To get around this rule, when Egypt decided to allow private satellite broadcasters on the market, the state had to declare its Media Production City a free zone so broadcasters operating there could be granted a license. Licenses had to be issued by the country's General Authority for Investment, an entity that

has nothing to do with broadcasting and that in reality depended mainly on state security reports for granting satellite broadcasting licenses to businessmen closely allied with the Mubarak regime. Otherwise, there are no known criteria for the granting of satellite broadcasting licenses in Egypt.[3]

ERTU is financially dependent on the government, which is another serious threat to the independence of the union. The union's budget for the year 2012 shows a debit of 19 billion Egyptian pounds (EGP), which was about $3.2 billion based on the exchange rate at that time, a clear sign of the failure of the management of ERTU.

Major Developments Over the Past Twenty-Five Years

Egyptian media went through some major developments in the 1990s as a result of the introduction of CNN to the Arab world, the launch of Al Jazeera, and the advent of the Internet.

CNN

CNN became a sensation in Egypt in 1991, when it beamed live coverage of the Gulf War into every home on broadcast television. Satellite television was very new in Egypt at the time, and television journalism in the Western sense was nonexistent. News bulletins mostly consisted of a broadcaster reading the news without so much as looking into the camera, and news items were centered around the meetings of the president and high government officials.

CNN's presentation was shocking in comparison to the boring, state-controlled Egyptian news, and changed not only viewers' expectations but the media's approach as well. Those in charge of state media realized that they were going to have to adjust to the attractive production style of CNN or risk losing their viewers. They reacted quickly by introducing sound and visual effects and, more important, inverted-pyramid-style journalism, with news items presented in order of newsworthiness and interest.

The government also realized that, with the introduction of satellite television, it was no longer possible to conceal information. At around that same time, Egypt introduced the first Arab satellite channel. Within three to five years of its introduction, a surge of new Arab satellite channels came into existence, most of which learned their production lessons well and relied heavily on American-style news and Egyptian drama productions.

Al Jazeera

The second major factor that influenced the development of the media in Egypt was the launch of Al Jazeera in 1996. The channel, the first around-the-clock Arab news channel, was launched by the emir of Qatar and depended

on well-trained Arab reporters and television journalists who were laid off by BBC Arabic.

The independence of Al Jazeera's content has often been questioned because of its financial dependence on the state of Qatar and the fact that it is currently headed by a member of the Qatari royal family. However, until very recently, Al Jazeera brought professional television journalism to the Arab world and presented a sharp contrast to the news presented on Egyptian television. The channel routinely criticized Egyptian and Arab officials and heads of state. However, it never criticized Qatari officials or the Muslim Brotherhood.[4] Al Jazeera frequently acted as a stand-in for the abolished Qatari Ministry of Information and sometimes even as the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with a clear political agenda that pushed the channel to criticize certain countries or leaders and avoid or praise others, while staying clear of Qatari politics. This became ever clearer after the ouster of former Egyptian president Mohamed Morsi, when the channel took a one-sided position supporting the Muslim Brotherhood. In doing so, the channel made significant factual errors, including broadcasting major anti-Morsi protests and labeling them pro-Morsi.

Until very recently, Al Jazeera brought professional television journalism to the Arab world and presented a sharp contrast to the news presented on Egyptian television.

Al Jazeera is credited with broadcasting the first Arab talk show, modeled after CNN's *Crossfire*. Talk shows became the viable alternative to news programs in Egypt, since the ERTU charter stipulated that only state television had the right to broadcast news. The talk show presenter "conversed" about the news of the day in an informal style and then invited guests to discuss these or other important issues.

Talk shows enjoyed phenomenal success in Egypt, complete with citizen participation through phone calls and later also through social media. Watching live debates every night, even on topics that fell within redlines, exposed Egyptians to a fresh form of conversation and a diversity of opinions. The practice of citizen participation was a new type of democracy, and the exercise helped build a sense of involvement that had not existed before. This was coupled with another important development in 2001, when Egypt allowed private satellite channels on the scene, starting with Dream Television in 2001 and El Mehwar in 2002. Other channels followed in 2008, including Al Hayat and OnTV. These channels carry some of the most popular evening talk shows in the Arab world.

The Internet

The Internet was introduced to Egypt in 1993, before any other Arab country. This was around the same time that satellite technologies were booming in the region and becoming more affordable. By the mid-1990s, Egyptians found at their fingertips an unprecedented amount of information.

The Internet was a new democratic agent in the region, whose impact surpassed that of satellite channels since ownership of these channels was still concentrated in the hands of a few businessmen, all allies of the Mubarak regime. The Internet, with its decentralized framework and vast amounts of information, carried the idea of a public sphere to a new level in Egypt.[5]

The Internet provided access to credible international news websites such as CNN, BBC, Reuters, and so on. However, access to information jumped to an entirely different level with the introduction of Web 2.0 technologies, which allowed greater interactivity and made it much easier for the average Internet user to become a content provider and a news source him or herself through blogs and social media, thus creating a new public sphere in Egypt.[6] Having access to credible news websites meant that the Internet user had unlimited access to information in a manner that would make it impossible for the government to censor it. Even at times when the government tried to force an Egyptian publication to omit a story, the story rapidly became available either on the publication's website or through email and, later, social media.[7]

Internet Activism in Egypt

The January 25 revolution was an Internet-*based* or Internet-*assisted* revolution. The Internet was not the cause of the revolution, but it acted as a catalyst and helped facilitate, organize, and expedite matters. The Internet, and social media in particular, played an important role in preparing particular sectors of society for this moment and in organizing them and helping them mobilize once the moment was right.

In this regard, it is important to note that the January 25 revolution did not start in 2011, and it did not end then either—it is still ongoing. Moreover, many, if not most, of those who filled the squares of Egypt over the eighteen days that toppled Mubarak were not Internet users. However, it is true that the Internet provided the starting point that organized the crowd and brought it together.[8]

The Rise of Bloggers

The concept of Internet activism emerged in Egypt early, with the introduction of the interactive technologies that made the concept of Web 2.0 come to life. Around 2005, a blogging culture focused on political issues erupted in Egypt in a way unprecedented in the Arab world. A few Egyptian bloggers soon became stars among the youth of the Arab world, as they ventured into topics no one had dared to address before. The honesty, indeed bluntness, with which some of these star bloggers tackled political issues was surprising, and sometimes shocking, in a country known to have serious redlines, particularly relating to the presidency. Most Egyptian political bloggers chose to blog

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under their real names rather than anonymously, which gave their posts more credibility and made the bloggers more admirable in the eyes of their followers. Although the Egyptian government never blocked websites or censored blog entries, the bloggers themselves were subject to state security harassment, mostly off-line. Several of them were detained or at least questioned by security agents, which was a testament to their perceived potential impact.[9]

Blogging created a space for political awareness and discussion that was new to the region. Some young bloggers realized they had a following that exceeded the circulation figures of major daily Egyptian newspapers, which encouraged them to carry on and try to widen their circles of influence.

Among the first generation of Egyptian star bloggers were Alaa Abdel Fattah and his wife Manal Hassan, who were awarded the Special Award from Reporters Without Borders in the 2005 Deutsche Welle International Weblog Awards (Best of Blogs) contest. They ran *Manal and Alaa's Bit Bucket*, a very active blog and blog aggregator that documented off-line activism and heated issues concerning politics in Egypt. The Best of Blogs cited their blog as an instrumental information source for the country's human rights and democratic reform movement.

Another award-winning Egyptian blogger was Wael Abbas, who received, among several other honors, the 2007 Knight International Journalism Award of the International Center for Journalists for "raising the standards of media excellence" in his country. This was an important development for several reasons. Wael (and his blogger colleagues) had been quite active in trying to bring to the foreground issues that would have otherwise gone unnoticed, including issues of election rigging and police brutality. His work (and that of others) on a particular case where police tortured and sodomized a microbus driver in Egypt helped push the Egyptian government to bring the officers to court, where two policemen were convicted and sentenced to three years in jail. This was also the first time that a blogger, not a traditional journalist, received this prestigious journalism award, which was a testament to the value of blogging and an acknowledgment that good citizen journalism is in fact journalism.

Around the time that blogging was becoming popular in Egypt, a few political movements were beginning to create an online presence to help them organize their off-line activities. The Kefaya (Enough) movement was foremost among these.[10] Kefaya's demonstrations, while not covered by traditional media, were publicized to Egyptian Internet users through blogs and YouTube, which served as the medium through which many Egyptians heard the phrase "down with Hosni Mubarak" for the first time. The ability of bloggers to link to videos on YouTube gave them even more credibility and a greater following, as followers could view the videos to confirm the content of the blogs and get a glimpse of the general atmosphere. Egyptian star bloggers like Abdel Fattah, Hassan, Abbas, Malek Mostafa, and others uploaded hundreds of videos of police brutality, election rigging, sexual harassment during demonstrations, and numerous other violations of human, civic, and political rights.

The Impact of Facebook

The next big thing was social media, which completely changed the dynamics of online interaction. This was a space that users could claim as their own, in which they could gain a following, keep tabs on the latest happenings, and interact with others, all with the click of a mouse. Facebook, and later Twitter, gained a good deal of popularity with young Egyptians. The structure of Facebook in particular (and the way activists used it) ultimately taught the Egyptian youth a few lessons in democracy.[11]

Young Egyptians who were previously not politically engaged or maybe even interested have been the ones most affected by social media in terms of activism. This group was drawn into politics (and into democratic practices including the right to form a political opinion and speak their minds) through Facebook. They were drawn in both by seasoned online activists and by other, nonpolitical aspects of Facebook, such as the horizontal structure around which the social medium is built.

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The unique structure of Facebook, with pages where each user can control the experience and discourse, taught the Egyptian youth several lessons. The first lesson was that there was a space that they could claim as their own. In a repressive country where opinions, particularly political opinions, are not always tolerated, that is significant. Social networks provided a space not previously available where the young people of Egypt could speak their minds. Second, Facebook exposed and accustomed Egyptian youth to a pattern of "horizontal communication" that had not been much afforded to them in their country. The norm for young people in Egypt used to be that they were talked at, rather than talked to or engaged in conversation. Communication with the youth was usually vertical, directed at them by figures of authority, including their parents, their teachers, and the government. The youth did not have opportunities to be engaged in conversations about the social issues that mattered to them and that affected their daily lives; horizontal communication that stems from an assumption of equality did not exist.

Furthermore, communication was vertical for everyone, not just the youth, within a political context. Authoritarian regimes do not allow for much horizontal communication; the government essentially tells everyone what to do. There was little or no chance for feedback or for anyone's voice to be heard.

Social networks changed that, first through conversations that were not necessarily political in nature but that resulted in a more democratic type of communication. This helped young Egyptians learn that they have a voice and a right to express that voice.

It is possible that young Egyptians developed a sense of loyalty toward certain Facebook functions because Facebook afforded them more democracy than Egypt did. Facebook afforded them the opportunity to speak their minds

with no boundaries and with no interference from authority. Unlike leaders in their own government, Facebook officials did not torture political dissidents and did not jail citizen journalists. Frequent use might have created a sense of community that was not present in Egypt's off-line communities, which helped make the Egyptian youth bolder in their political demands as they learned that they were not alone and that there is power in numbers, particularly when undertaking a sensitive or potentially dangerous activity (such as a protest).[12]

The first time that Egyptians saw this in action was in 2008. There was a protest to demand higher wages and more socially just benefits organized by workers in the industrial city of Al-Mahalla Al-Kobra. Esraa Abdel Fattah, then a twenty-eight-year-old female activist, decided to form a group on Facebook and set an activity for an "April 6 Strike," calling on people to support the struggle of the Mahalla workers by, for instance, not going to work, not sending their children to school, and not shopping for a day. News of the Facebook group hit the traditional media, and to everyone's surprise (including Abdel Fattah's), more than 73,000 people joined the group—an unprecedented number for an Egyptian Facebook group. Encouraged by a bad sandstorm and by fear of excessive police presence on the streets, many decided to stay home that day in solidarity with the Mahalla workers, leaving Egypt's streets virtually empty.

Although Abdel Fattah was detained for two weeks afterward, the incident helped political activists realize the power of social media in exposing an idea and generating support for it in terms of action. Out of the experience grew the April 6 Youth Movement, which attracted many young people and was instrumental in organizing for the revolution.

The "We Are All Khaled Said" page was another on Facebook that played an instrumental role in preparing the youth for the revolution while demonstrating the power and safety of numbers. Khaled Said was a twenty-eight-year-old Egyptian who was brutally beaten to death by police informants outside an Internet café in Alexandria in June 2010. His friends started the "We Are All Khaled Said" page on Facebook shortly thereafter. Its first activity was to invite its members, who were steadily increasing in numbers, to go out on silent standing protests in black shirts with their back to the streets. The protests started in Alexandria and soon spread all over Egypt, with numbers swelling with every protest.

The Khaled Said page was highly effective at organizing its members and gained significant credibility over time. Protesters were provided with exact times and locations and given specific instructions on what to wear and what to do, as well as emergency numbers to contact in case of trouble. The page administrators made it a habit to poll their users, asking them to vote on the place or time of the next protest. The responses would be in the thousands, and the administrators would then give a breakdown of the votes and go with the wishes of the majority, thereby giving the users a taste of democracy that was otherwise nonexistent at the time. Eventually, the page became very popular;

when the right moment came, it was the Khaled Said page that posted the "event" for a massive demonstration on January 25—Egypt's Police Day.

The event posted by the page was very well organized, with detailed gathering places in major squares in all Egyptian governorates, detailed instructions on dress code and things protesters should carry with them, and emergency contact information in every governorate. Before long, the invitation had reached over a million people on Facebook, with over 100,000 indicating they were "attending."

These numbers encouraged many who had never been to a demonstration before to go out and take a chance on January 25. The large number of those indicating they would attend, even if only a small percentage actually went out, seemed to ensure relative safety. And the numbers were further boosted by news of January 25 hitting the traditional media, particularly the popular evening talk shows. These evening talk shows were and remain an important source of information for the average Egyptian, who may not have access to the Internet. They were also of major importance during the five days when the Egyptian government cut off all Internet communication in an attempt to break the momentum of the protesters.

Egypt's Media Treading the Waves of the Revolution

The Eighteen Days (January 25–February 11, 2011)

As far as state-owned and -controlled media are concerned, nothing much changed with the first wave of the revolution.

Under Mubarak, editors in chief of state newspapers had been appointed by the Shura Council (the "Consultative Council," Egypt's Upper House of the Parliament) and were always closely tied to the regime. This insured favorable coverage of the regime at all times and extensive coverage of Mubarak's every move within the rhetoric of the supreme leader, the father figure, and the wise protector of the state and the people. Readers of the government-owned and -controlled newspapers were accustomed to headlines such as "Mubarak Is the Most Trusted Leader in the World,"[13] or to finding out that the picture of Mubarak in the White House leading U.S. President Barack Obama and other world leaders had actually been manipulated to place Mubarak at the front of the pack.[14]

The so-called national press maintained that allegiance up until a few days before Mubarak's ouster on February 11, 2011: on February 3, *Al Ahram*'s main headline was "Millions March to Support Mubarak Nationwide," when the millions on the streets were calling on him to leave. On February 12, *Al*

Ahram completely changed its tone with the main headline "The People Have Toppled the Regime."

Quickly, however, the state-owned newspapers continued their previous rhetoric, with the only difference being that Mubarak was replaced by the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF). The same newspapers that glorified Mubarak and then, very briefly, the people of Egypt, soon started glorifying the SCAF and its leader at the time, General Hussein Tantawi.[15] The authoritarian mind-set was still in place, as reflected by the media. The army became the savior, and anyone who spoke against it or attacked it was under the threat of a military tribunal.

State television was no different from its print counterpart. During the eighteen days of the first wave of the revolution, the government-owned and -controlled television stations focused on glorifying Mubarak, while ignoring protests against the regime to step down, and on smearing the protesters. Talk show presenters and guests on state-owned television called Khaled Said a drug dealer and accused the protesters of everything from being a bunch of lost kids performing sexual orgies in Tahrir Square to being agents of foreign governments. Cameras around the downtown Cairo area focused on the tranquil Nile view from nearby bridges while protesters were being killed a few hundred meters away. News channels featured pieces about the types of elephants in Africa rather than continuous coverage of Tahrir and other major demonstrations in every city.[16] Some protesters around Egypt carried banners calling state media liars.[17]

Some individual journalists and broadcasters within state media institutions tried resisting. The deputy head of Nile TV resigned in protest of the channel's biased coverage in favor of the regime, revealing that she was not allowed to say that protesters demanded Mubarak's resignation. A few younger journalists threatened to resign if they were not allowed to cover the massive anti-Mubarak protests. This pressure on editors increased as two *Al Ahram* journalists were killed and dozens were rounded up by the government.[18] As the tide seemed to be turning toward the revolution, editors leaned toward the revolutionaries to various degrees until the afternoon of February 11, when Mubarak stepped down. Then, state media began to widely praise the revolutionaries as their own.

The private satellite channels differed in their level of support for Mubarak or for the protesters who vowed to bring him down. Many of these channels are owned by businessmen who were closely allied to the Mubarak regime and so tried as much as possible to defend the regime and discredit the protesters. One evening talk show presented by two state journalists featured a young woman who had come forward to give her confessions before the Egyptian people. She claimed to have accompanied some of the leading activists on sponsored trips to Serbia during which they were each given $50,000 and attended workshops on how to overthrow the regime by trainers from Iran and Israel. She broke down in tears of despair as she begged the audience to forgive her and to stand by Mubarak against the traitors who were trying to sell their country to foreign

agents. The young woman was later identified as a colleague of the talk show presenter and admitted to the whole episode being fabricated.[19]

There were a few private television channels and some select programs on other channels that chose to stand by the revolution during the first eighteen days and to attempt to cover what was happening in Egyptian squares to the best of their ability. They endeavored to bring in balanced guests, including activists and intellectuals as well as government and National Democratic Party representatives. These programs, as well as coverage by non-Egyptian channels such as Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, and CNN, were popular with audiences who were trying to find out what was going on in Egyptian squares. Many of these outlets faced some government harassment, including Al Jazeera, whose offices were shut down by the government during the eighteen days.[20]

Given the important role social media played in fomenting the revolution, no consideration of media during the eighteen days would be complete without a discussion of the Internet and mobile telephony. The government started its censorship efforts by denying access to Twitter on January 25. When Twitter service was interrupted, activists immediately started circulating information on Facebook about proxy servers and software that users could download to evade censorship. By the time Facebook access was blocked a few hours later, many users had already downloaded alternative ways to access the blocked websites.

By January 28, the government realized that the only way to completely deny access was to cut off all Internet access. Both mobile telephone and Internet services were shut down across the entire country. Mobile phone access was shut down for about a day and a half. The Internet as well as messaging services remained shut down for over five days.[21]

Under the SCAF (February 12, 2011–June 29, 2012)

Many Egyptians had high hopes for media reform in Egypt following the outbreak of the revolution. With Mubarak falling after thirty years of dictatorship, many thought that going forward, all of their dreams for the country would come true—including the dream of an independent media.

In the first few weeks of the SCAF's rule authorities said that state security approvals were no longer needed to approve licenses for broadcasting on television. Hopes for freedom of expression and a plurality of voices increased as sixteen new private satellite television channels started operating. The Ministry of Information was abolished in February 2011, to the great delight of freedom-of-expression advocates. However, these trends did not last long.

Immediately following Mubarak's fall, state-owned media glorified the revolutionaries as long as that did not contradict with the glorification of the army. Everything that had to do with the revolution was the order of the day. Activists became regular guests on talk shows and gave frequent press interviews. The editorial lines seemed to suggest that Mubarak had always been

the absolute menace, the revolutionaries the absolute angels, and the army the savior of the revolution.

After a very brief honeymoon period, the state media's glorification of the activists began to diminish in the SCAF's favor. At the same time, the inefficiencies of the SCAF's administration of the transitional period began to surface. It became clear that the people's initial dreams of a free media system were not realized. On the contrary, freedom of expression started facing some serious threats and challenges as the regime began cracking down heavily on media freedoms. The Ministry of Information was reinstated in July, a move perceived as alarming by many media advocates.[22] The appointed minister, Ossama Heikal, had started his career as a military correspondent for *Al Wafd* newspaper.

Shortly thereafter, the state media became a staunch supporter of the military regime, including carrying out smear campaigns to vilify the revolutionaries. A *Time* magazine report pointed out that talk shows on the state media stations were filled with anti-protester rhetoric that portrayed the revolutionaries as "thugs" and warned of "'foreign' interference in Egyptian affairs, rising insecurity, and crime." Anti-military demonstrations were "labeled dangerous and destabilizing events, driven by foreign agents."[23]

Those who criticized the army were intimidated by the regime in several ways. As early as March 2011, the army started subjecting bloggers and journalists to military trials and investigations.

Among the cases that received the most media attention was that of blogger Maikel Nabil Sanad, who was sentenced in March 2011 by a military court to three years in prison for "insulting the military" after writing a blog post with the title "The Army and the People Were Never One Hand." He was released through a pardon in January 2012 after a massive campaign by human rights activists.[24]

Blogger Hossam el-Hamalawy appeared on a television talk show in May 2011 where he criticized the political scene, saying the only thing that seemed to have changed was the titles of the songs in support of the regime, which went from glorifying Mubarak to glorifying the army and the SCAF. He held the army responsible for the detention and torture of several protesters during demonstrations. A few days later, Hamalawy and talk show host Reem Magued were asked to appear before a military tribunal. They were later released and told that they had been called in for "a chat."[25]

Journalist Rasha Azab and her editor Adel Hammouda were summoned before the military prosecutor in early June and accused of "publishing false information with the potential to cause public disorder." Azab had reported about a meeting between SCAF members and activists belonging to the group "No to Military Trials for Civilians."[26]

Other journalists and bloggers who were subjected to military tribunals included Yosri Fouda, Alaa Abdel Fattah, Nawara Negm, Bothayna Kamel, Asmaa Mahfouz, Nabil Sharaf Eldin, Ahmed Ramadan, and Islam Abu al-Ezz. Talk show host Yosri Fouda took his popular show off the air twice in 2011 in protest of pressures to censor material or guests.[27] Blogger Alaa Abdel Fattah

was detained and accused of inciting violence against the military during the October 9 demonstrations outside of Egyptian state television's Maspero building, in which 28 died and more than 321 were injured.[28] He spent fifty-six days in prison pending investigation before being released and eventually found innocent.[29] In total, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) documented over a hundred cases of abuses against journalists and bloggers during the reign of the Supreme Council of Armed Forces.

Some of these outcomes were the result of self-censorship on the part of channel owners or managers who were not tolerant of viewpoints that might have been perceived as against the military. For example, talk show host Dina Abdel Rahman was fired in July 2011 by Dream TV's owner, businessman Ahmed Bahgat, after she featured an anti-SCAF opinion piece written by journalist Naglaa Bedeir. A high-ranking army officer called the show live to object to the piece being featured, and Abdel Rahman was fired soon thereafter.[30]

The crackdown was not only on individual journalists and bloggers but also on institutions. As early as March 2011, the SCAF issued a warning to journalists and editors against publishing or broadcasting "any (topics, news, statements, complaints, advertisements, pictures) pertaining to the Armed Forces or to commanders of the Armed Forces without first consulting with the Morale Affairs Directorate and the Directorate of Military Intelligence and Information Gathering, as they are the authorities specialized in reviewing such issues." At that time, the CPJ described this development as "the single worst setback for press freedom in Egypt since the fall of President Hosni Mubarak."[31]

In September 2011, a few days after the government extended the use of emergency laws against entities accused of "spreading rumors," security forces again raided the offices of Al Jazeera Mubasher Misr, which had started broadcasting from Egypt after Mubarak's fall. The channel, allegedly missing a permit, was barred from broadcasting. Also in September 2011, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces and the cabinet decided to suspend granting new permits to satellite channels and, according to an article in the *Egypt Independent*, to "prosecute satellite channels deemed threatening to the stability of the country."[32]

On October 9, 2011, Egyptian state television ignored the crackdown on a mostly Coptic Christian group of protesters outside its own Maspero building. Most of the dead had been crushed under the army's armored vehicles. During the events, state television first claimed that the Coptic protesters had been throwing rocks and Molotov cocktails at members of the military and had killed three army officers and injured 30. State television then called upon "the good Samaritans of Egypt" to go down to the streets and "support the Egyptian army against the Copts." No one was held accountable for this performance by the state-owned media.[33]

Meanwhile, on the same evening, army officers stormed the offices of two other channels, Al Hurra and 25, as the channels were showing live coverage of

what was happening outside of Maspero. State television's coverage throughout was unprofessional and neither impartial nor balanced, to put it mildly.[34]

During the rule of the SCAF journalists covering demonstrations were also physically harmed. The Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) documented several such cases, including that of photojournalist Ahmed Abdel Fattah, who received a pellet in the eye while covering the clashes that occurred on Mohamed Mahmoud Street in November 2011. Abdel Fattah gave testimony stating, according to the CIHRS, that "the officer who shot him appeared to be directly targeting him because of the camera he was holding."[35] Abdel Fattah told *Al Ahram Online* (the online English version of *Al Ahram* newspaper, which is much more progressive than the traditional Arabic version) that "five *Al Masry Al Youm* reporters, in addition to ten working for other media institutions, were injured that day and they all had cameras."[36] Also in November 2011, the Egyptian Journalists' Syndicate released a statement regarding the use of force against five journalists who were covering clashes in Alexandria. The statement condemned the use of violence by security forces against the journalists, one of whom was, according to an article in *Al Ahram Online*, "detained, forced to strip, blindfolded, and beaten with a wooden stick for five hours."[37]

The CIHRS also documented the case of journalist Hassan Shahin, who was "attacked, beaten, and dragged by military officers while covering the crackdown on the sit-in in front of the Cabinet in December 2011."[38] The *Al Ahram Online* article said that, in covering the events, "media personnel and cameras became a primary target. Men in military uniform, assisted by plainclothes men, confiscated cameras and smashed them."[39] Reporters Without Borders said the process involved "systematic use of violence against media personnel." The organization published what it said was an incomplete list of reporters and members of the media who were beaten, detained, or both by the military and called on the Egyptian authorities "to put an immediate stop to the violence against media personnel."[40]

Citizen journalists stepped forward to counter the biased and sometimes violence-inciting performance of state media and the difficulties journalists had in reporting and accessing information.

The pattern continued, however. In February 2012, correspondent Mahmoud El Ghazaly of state-owned Nile TV was shot in the eye while covering clashes outside the Ministry of Interior. He confirmed that security forces had been routinely using rubber bullets and birdshot in direct confrontation with protesters in recent months.[41] In May 2012, Reporters Without Borders documented that at least 32 journalists and media personnel were beaten, detained, and sometimes tortured by army officers or regime-affiliated thugs while covering the dispersal of al-Abbaseya protests, near the Ministry of Defense.[42]

Citizen journalists stepped forward to counter the biased and sometimes violence-inciting performance of state media and the difficulties journalists had in reporting and accessing information. Bloggers and online activists were faced with the responsibility of bringing to the masses the images that the state

and private media either ignored or were not allowed to cover. In an attempt to organize these efforts, Egyptian citizens started groups such as Mosireen (Insistent) and Askar Kazeboon (Lying Generals).

Mosireen is a social media cooperative with the goal of covering any revolution-related activities, and particularly documenting police and army brutalities against civilian protesters. Kazeboon is an initiative that organizes public screenings of Mosireen videos on the streets of Egypt. Both entities are open and decentralized in terms of structure and ownership; for example, all Mosireen videos and footage are available online for anyone to download, their equipment and office space is shared with others who request it, and they try to train and engage as many citizen journalists as possible throughout Egypt.

Kazeboon had posted simple guidelines online about how to organize a show, and it asked people all over Egypt to try to organize one in their neighborhoods. The idea was to take to the streets with authentic footage and information that the mainstream media were not covering. All that was needed for a show was to download the videos (or get a free DVD from Mosireen), get a screen (some have used a white linen sheet spread on a wall or between two trees), and rent a projector and speakers for the evening. Kazeboon shows, which were held by individuals all over Egypt, including on the walls of the Maspero ERTU building and the walls of the Ministry of Defense, were hugely successful and forced other traditional media, even state media on occasion, to cover their events or show their videos. The phenomenon also indirectly eased the pressure on the private satellite channels to cover what was happening because the regime knew the citizen journalists would have a record of it and that therefore it would likely surface anyway. By January 2012, Mosireen was the most viewed nonprofit channel on YouTube worldwide and by far the most viewed in Egypt.[43] One of Mosireen's founders, activist Salma Said, was reportedly shot by security forces multiple times while covering clashes between the police and protesters in February 2012.[44]

Under Morsi (June 30, 2012–July 3, 2013)

When Mohamed Morsi, who was supported by the Muslim Brotherhood, took over as president on June 30, 2012, a new wave of attacks on media freedoms began. During this era, an unprecedented number of court cases were brought against journalists and media personalities for "insulting the president." Despite a pledge by Morsi to guarantee freedom of expression when he took over, the Arab Network for Human Rights Information reported that 24 such cases were filed in the first 200 days of Morsi's rule compared to 23 cases in the previous one hundred twenty-six years.[45] Other commonly used charges in cases involving the media were defamation of the president, defamation of the judiciary, defamation of the military, and defamation of Islam (blasphemy), in addition to publishing or broadcasting false news and inciting hatred.

During this period, several journalists were attacked, and some were targeted for kidnapping or beating. Journalist Al Husseiny Abou Deif, who wrote critically of Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood, was shot in the head with rubber bullets outside the Itihadiya Presidential Palace during one of the protests and died of his injuries. The shots were allegedly fired by Morsi supporters after one of them pointed a green laser at Abou Deif.[46]

Egypt's status in the Freedom House *Freedom of the Press 2013* report changed from "partly free" to "not free," mainly because of "officially tolerated campaigns to intimidate journalists, increased efforts to prosecute reporters and commentators for insulting the political leadership or defaming religion, and intensified polarization of the pro– and anti–Muslim Brotherhood press, which reduced the availability of balanced coverage."[47]

Intimidation of journalists and bloggers intensified during Morsi's year in power. Journalists were beaten, harassed, and detained by the regime or by regime-affiliated thugs. In December 2012, blogger Alber Saber received a three-year prison sentence for insulting religion and the president after he posted a link to the trailer for the anti-Islam film *The Innocence of Muslims* on his Facebook account.[48] Popular talk show host Mahmoud Saad was investigated in December 2012 on charges of insulting the president. Popular political satirist Bassem Youssef, known as Egypt's Jon Stewart, was accused in January 2013 of insulting the president and undermining his standing. His case was covered prominently in the local and international media, especially after Jon Stewart featured it (and Youssef) repeatedly on his show.

Intimidation of journalists and bloggers intensified during Morsi's year in power.

The private satellite television channel Al Faraeen was shut down in August 2012 by an administrative decision, and its owner Tawfik Okasha faced over 30 different court cases in which he was accused of defaming Morsi, inciting to kill him, and inciting hatred against the Brotherhood. Okasha was sentenced to four months in prison in absentia by a Luxor court on charges of defaming the president.[49] He was later acquitted by another court.[50] The August 11, 2012, issue of *Al Dostour* newspaper was pulled for allegedly insulting the president, inciting chaos, and inciting sectarian strife. The newspaper's editor in chief, Islam Afifi, was charged with insulting Morsi and inciting to overthrow the regime.[51]

Nothing much changed under Morsi in terms of how the government dealt with the independence (or the lack thereof) of state-owned media. A new minister of information who was loyal to the Muslim Brotherhood and new editors in chief were appointed by an all-Islamist Shura Council, which meant that state media were mostly in the hands of Islamists. Yet, the picture was not as clear-cut as it was under Mubarak or the SCAF because many of the closely tied networks within these institutions remained loyal to the Mubarak regime. The struggle, however, was still one of power and loyalty to one regime over the other, rather than loyalty to professional journalistic standards or to the people.

The government-owned *Al Akhbar* newspaper refused to publish several opinion pieces by regular contributors, including Ibrahim Abdel Meguid, Abla Al Rowaini, Ahmed Taha Al Naqr, Medhat Al Adl, and Yousef Al Qaeed, all of which carried criticism of Morsi or the Brotherhood. Similarly, the government-owned *Al Ahram* newspaper refused to publish an opinion piece by managing editor Ahmed Moussa that criticized Morsi's constitutional declaration. Morsi had issued the declaration in November 2012, giving himself unprecedented powers as president to, as summarized in the *Egypt Independent*, "take any measures he sees fit in order to preserve and safeguard the revolution, national unity or national security,"[52] and the move caused widespread unrest and was sharply criticized by the opposition. *Al Ahram* also stopped former Muslim Brotherhood member Tharwat Al Kharbawy from writing his column.[53] Al Kharbawy had been outspoken against the Brotherhood, which the government-owned newspaper did not tolerate.

A report by the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression cited newspaper reports that Egyptian state television had directives to include an Islamist, particularly from the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party, in every segment of every program, otherwise the segment would be cancelled. The report also stated that state television presenters had specific directives regarding the choice of guests, as well as the editorial lines of the programs, and that the presenters were threatened with withheld paychecks if they did not follow orders. The report also indicated severe interference in the specific "scripts" of certain programs and directives to focus on the "achievements" of the government.[54]

There were some attempts by the private media to fight back against these encroachments on journalistic freedom. In December 2012, five television channels and twelve newspapers went on strike on the same day to protest against Morsi's constitutional declaration and the draft constitution, both of which curtailed media freedoms. The draft constitution had failed to include an article to guard against the potential imprisonment of journalists in cases related to freedom of expression.

Some individuals within the state media institutions tried to fight back and were penalized by the regime. For example, several presenters and producers of state television programs were investigated after featuring guests who spoke against the program of the Freedom and Justice Party or the performance of the regime.[55] Overall, a report by the Arab Network for Human Rights Information cited 28 such investigations against state television anchors or producers. The report concluded that state television featured a series of continued violations against freedom of expression and showed no intent on the part of the government for reform.[56]

The media became polarized during Morsi's rule, and such polarization became more severe over time. The polarization was mainly between the private, Islamist channels, most prominently Al Hafez and Al Nas, on one side, and the "secular" media, particularly private outlets, on the other.

Secular media channels were filled with expressions such as "the Brotherhoodization of the state," which portrayed the country's growing concern with members of the Muslim Brotherhood taking over most of the vital positions in the government. As violence erupted in anti-Brotherhood demonstrations, these media started using terms such as "Muslim Brotherhood militias" to refer to Brotherhood-affiliated thugs who would attack protesters. But the secular, private channels still maintained a degree of balance in terms of regularly featuring Brotherhood guests on popular evening talk shows, thereby giving them an outlet for expressing their views.

This was not the case on the Islamist channels, which rarely featured a non-Islamist guest. These channels regularly referred to the non-Islamists as "atheists" and accused them of being remnants of the old regime or spying agents for foreign countries. These channels also regularly used rhetoric that implied that anything against the Muslim Brotherhood was considered to be against Islam. Misr 25, the satellite television station affiliated with the Freedom and Justice Party of the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as the party's newspaper, *Freedom and Justice*, became staunch supporters of Morsi while vilifying the opposition and accusing it of blasphemy or working for the interests of outside powers.

Online activism remained high under Morsi, with many citizen journalists using the Internet to publish or broadcast material.

Online activism remained high under Morsi, with many citizen journalists using the Internet to publish or broadcast material. Mosireen remained active, focusing its efforts on exposing and documenting violations committed by the Muslim Brotherhood regime and its affiliates or by the security apparatus. Kazeboon modified its name to Ikhwan Kazeboon (Lying Brothers), with the words *Besm El Din* (in the name of religion) and the logo of the Muslim Brotherhood appearing next to its name.

Civic society has made some attempts to introduce a model of an independent regulator that would at least be in charge of the broadcast media. More recently, the formation of such a body has been included in the new draft of the Egyptian constitution. The problem remains, however, that the formation of the board of such a body will make or break its independence. As the recommendations of Egypt's Public Service Broadcasting country report specified, political will is a necessary prerequisite to the independence of a regulatory body. Otherwise, the problems of the regime-loyal Ministry of Information will simply be transferred to the regulator.[57] In 2012, when the idea was introduced, it was proposed that the regulatory body would be in charge of granting broadcasting licenses, assigning frequencies, and handling cases of alleged violations. The proposal was submitted to the parliament before that body was dissolved in 2012.[58] It is unclear what the regime's plan is regarding such a body at this time.

Under Adly Mansour, Interim President (July 3, 2013–June 8, 2014)

On June 30, 2013, one year after Morsi was sworn into office, millions of Egyptians once again took to the streets, this time demanding Morsi's resignation and early presidential elections. Over the previous two months, it was reported that more than 22 million Egyptians had signed forms asking for early presidential elections, but Morsi refused. On July 3, the Egyptian army intervened to oust Morsi and install the head of the High Constitutional Court, Adly Mansour, as president of Egypt for a transitional period, after which new parliamentary and presidential elections would take place. Many Egyptians welcomed this move, which resulted from exceedingly high dissatisfaction with Morsi's policies and favoring of the Muslim Brotherhood, but some were alarmed by the interference of the army. International debates sprang up regarding whether what happened was a second wave of the revolution or a military coup.[59]

While many hoped that the change in regime would mean a break from the crackdown on media freedoms that Egypt had witnessed under Morsi, media advocates were alarmed by the fact that the army closed down Islamist channels Misr 25, Al Hafez, and Al Nas within hours of ousting Morsi. Al Jazeera Mubasher Misr was also raided while on air, and five employees were detained.[60] Emergency laws were declared in August for three months following the violent dispersal of two major Muslim Brotherhood sit-ins, which left hundreds dead and over a thousand injured. In September, a court ordered Al Jazeera Mubasher Misr and three other Islamist channels, Ahrar 25, Al Quds, and Al Yarmuk, to stop broadcasting. The court cited missing permits that made the channels' operations illegal, an allegation that came after government officials called Al Jazeera a national threat and a danger to the country's national security and interests.[61] Later in September, authorities shut down the offices of the Muslim Brotherhood's party newspaper, *Freedom and Justice*.

Since June 30, 2013, journalists have faced varying degrees of harassment, particularly from the authorities as well as from supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood, who now constitute underground opposition since the Brotherhood was deemed an illegal terrorist organization (first by the government in December 2013, then by a court in February 2014). The CIHRS issued a report in which it documented 205 cases of local journalists who had faced violations between June 28 and August 30, 2013, including eight fatalities, at least six of whom were covering the events.[62] The report accused security forces of being responsible for at least two of these fatalities: one in the vicinity of the National Security Guards headquarters on July 3 and the other when the army shot a journalist from *Al Ahram* newspaper after he allegedly failed to stop his car at a checkpoint after curfew on August 20. Other than the fatalities, the violations included chasing, detaining, and beating journalists, sometimes severely; armed robbery; shooting with birdshot; and damaging cameras and equipment.

The report also documented 39 violations against foreign journalists and correspondents and stated that this number underrepresented the true size of the problem, given that many foreign journalists refused to give testimony or to state the news outlets for which they worked. The report pointed out cases in which foreign journalists were detained, photographed, videotaped, or had their pictures shown on national television as "terrorists" who had been detained by the authorities. Those experiencing the latter included a team of correspondents for CNN.[63]

The CIHRS report stated that Morsi's supporters were allegedly responsible for 41 percent of the incidents (85 violations), while state security forces and the army were allegedly responsible for 20 percent (42 violations). The remaining violations were allegedly committed by anti–Muslim Brotherhood and anti-Morsi "local residents," including what the Islamist media said were "thugs employed by the security apparatus." The report documented that "although quantitatively speaking the Muslim Brotherhood and its supporters were responsible for the largest number of violations, the gravest abuses were perpetrated by the Transitional Authorities and by the Security and Armed Forces." At the time the report was issued in September 2013, thirteen journalists were still detained pending investigations, and 29 had been released.[64]

On June 3, 2014, an article published by the CPJ stated that there were sixteen journalists still imprisoned in Egypt, in addition to at least six killed and dozens detained and released since Morsi was removed from power, which has created "a climate of fear and repression that has dampened the ability of journalists to cover political developments." The article also stated that while "things were never good for the press in Egypt . . . they have worsened significantly since former President Mohamed Morsi was ousted."[65] Egypt appeared on the CPJ's "Risk List," indicating a "significant deterioration of the media climate during 2013."[66]

The sixteen imprisoned journalists as of May 19, 2014, included three from Al Jazeera English, who are charged in a case that became known in the media as the Marriott cell case, since the three were operating from the Marriott hotel. They have been in custody since December 29, 2013, and are accused of distorting Egypt's image abroad and fabricating news to aid the Muslim Brotherhood. A fourth Al Jazeera journalist, Abdullah Al Shami, has been in custody since August 14, 2013. Al Shami started a hunger strike on January 21, 2014.

Military trials for civilians have continued in the post-Morsi era, including one involving three journalists. Journalist Ahmed Abu Deraa, who works for *Al Masry Al Youm* newspaper and OnTV satellite station, was accused of appearing in restricted military areas and intentionally spreading false news about the army. He was given a six-month suspended jail sentence.[67] The case was brought against him after he had reported on a military operation in the vicinity of the North Sinai village of Sheikh Zewaid, which he claimed ended up damaging a mosque and several civilian houses and wounding four people.[68] Mohamed Sabry, a stringer for Reuters, was accused of filming military

areas and also given a six-month suspended sentence.[69] Journalist Hatem Aboul Nour of *Al Watan* newspaper was charged with impersonating an army officer and given a one-year prison sentence.[70]

The polarization of the media that started under Morsi intensified for a period after his ouster, before most if not all media outlets were speaking in support of the regime. Soon after Morsi's ouster, the media scene was divided into mainstream pro-regime outlets on one hand and Al Jazeera on the other. In the middle, a few individual voices tried to remain more objective.

The media's polarization was a reflection of the polarization in society.[71] There is no question that the ousting of Morsi was demanded and supported by millions of Egyptians after he had proved to have represented only the Muslim Brotherhood, even though some of those who supported his ouster had questions about the role of the army in the future political life of Egypt. Similarly, most if not all of the media outlets in Egypt backed Morsi's ouster, with only Al Jazeera firmly taking the side of the Muslim Brotherhood.

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The current media scene in Egypt is generally unprofessional, save a few exceptions. Al Jazeera's reputation suffered severely when it attempted to ally itself with the Brotherhood, and it has lost credibility among Egyptians, with the exception of the Brotherhood and its sympathizers.[72] After making factual errors, such as broadcasting huge anti-Morsi protests and calling them pro-Morsi,[73] or interviewing allegedly wounded protesters who turned out to be falsely representing their injuries for the cameras,[74] the channel has lost most of the reputation for professional news reporting it had long held among Egyptians. In one incident, Al Jazeera's veteran presenter Ahmed Mansour appeared in a video addressing Muslim Brotherhood supporters on how to change their messages to win over the Egyptian people.[75] At least 22 media personnel who worked for Al Jazeera resigned a week after Morsi's ouster, saying the channel was "airing lies and misleading viewers." One of them said that the channel has become "an enemy of Egypt" and that the "orders had changed" regarding the media coverage of political events.[76]

Meanwhile, most of the other Egyptian media outlets have gone to extremes to support the post-Morsi regime, with a few individual exceptions trying to maintain some balance. On the whole, the radio and television waves are filled with patriotic songs and talk show programs that strive to glorify the military. For weeks following Morsi's ouster, Egyptian state television as well as most private satellite channels ran a graphic banner with the Egyptian flag that stated "Egypt fights terrorism," in reference to the struggle between the post-Morsi regime and the Muslim Brotherhood. Most talk show hosts do not shy away from biased commentary and leading questions, and their carefully selected guests respond with exclusively pro-regime answers. Facts are routinely mixed

with opinions on these highly popular shows, which have become the main source of news for many Egyptians.

Some talk shows went as far as to wage an intense campaign against activists associated with the events of January 25, 2011, calling them "traitors," "spies," and "agents of foreign countries." Leaked personal phone conversations from some activists appeared on one talk show and were then picked up by others. The conversations were framed as evidence that the activists were less than loyal to Egypt, although the conversations themselves did not support that claim. The leaked conversations mostly included members of the April 6 Youth Movement,[77] as well as other leading activists, such as Wael Ghonim, the administrator of the "We Are All Khaled Said" Facebook page, and Mohamed Elbaradei, Egypt's vice president in the post-Morsi regime who resigned in mid-August 2013 over the violent dispersion of the Muslim Brotherhood sit-in in Rabaa El Adaweya.[78]

Media personalities striving for independence find it difficult to present their shows and have at times willingly withdrawn from the airwaves. Yosri Fouda, who presents a popular talk show on OnTV, went off the air from July 9 to November 25, 2013. He had issued a statement at the end of July on his Facebook page stating, "I'd like to note my reservations and extreme sadness over the local and international detrimental media coverage in Egypt, including my own channel, with very few exceptions."[79] Reem Magued, who presented another popular talk show on the same channel, has been off the air since June 30, 2013. In late August, she tweeted that she was not suspended or forced off the air, but that "sometimes to be silent is the most honest news, so I chose silence until further notice."[80]

As Georgetown University media scholar Adel Iskandar observed, "By and large, the majority of the Egyptian press is marching to the tune of the military . . . willfully and with conviction. . . . If you're with the Brotherhood, it's as if you're a separate breed of Egyptian."[81] Indeed, one song that was popular on the airwaves for some time was entitled "We Are a People; They Are Another," categorizing the Muslim Brotherhood and their sympathizers as a different people.

State-owned newspapers have found their way back to supporting an obvious boss in the post-Morsi regime. The most popular stories are those detailing alleged plots by the Muslim Brotherhood to divide and conquer Egypt from the eighteen days of the first wave of the revolution to plans to give the Sinai to Hamas and its affiliates. One such story, written by *Al Ahram*'s editor in chief and appearing on the front page of the flagship newspaper, implicated the United States in an alleged conspiracy with the Brotherhood to "sabotage" Egypt. The story prompted the then U.S. ambassador to Egypt to issue a public response, calling the article "outrageous, fictitious, and thoroughly unprofessional." The ambassador added, "This article isn't bad journalism; it isn't journalism at all. It is fiction, serving only to deliberately misinform the Egyptian public."[82]

It has become increasingly difficult to air or publish voices that are not in total harmony with pro-regime propaganda. Indeed, several private, supposedly independent newspapers have refused to publish pieces by contributors that failed to follow that editorial line. One example was this author's article against the closure of satellite television channels including Al Jazeera, which later appeared at a different outlet.[83] Examples also include an opinion piece by *Al Ahram*'s former chief executive officer and head of the press syndicate Mamdouh El Wali, who ended up publishing the piece on his Facebook page. Activist Mostafa El Naggar published an article entitled "The Army: An Institution or a State" on his Facebook page after being denied publication in at least two major newspapers.[84] Other authors whose articles ended up appearing on less prominent web portals than their originally intended publications or on the author's individual blog or Facebook page include Ahmed Mansour, Reem Saad, Wael Abou Hendi, Tamer Abu Arab, Seif Abdel Fattah, Hossam Moanes, Amr Ezzat, Ahmed El Doreni, and Abdul Rahman Yousef.

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Another censorship episode took place with political satirist Bassem Youssef, whose popular show *Al-Bernameg* (The Program) had been off the air for four months. Youssef aired the first episode of his new season on the CBC channel on October 25, 2013, poking fun at the post-Morsi regime and those who idolized it. The program included a joking reference to the ousting of Morsi as a "coup." As viewers awaited the second episode a week later, the channel released a statement minutes before the scheduled airing saying that the show had been suspended for violating the editorial policy of the channel.[85]

Youssef moved to the MBC Masr channel and aired his first episode there on February 7, 2014. At the end of April, he announced that his program would stop until the presidential election was held in late May. After former Egyptian military chief Abdel Fattah el-Sisi won the election by a landslide, Youssef announced on June 2 that *Al-Bernameg* would be terminated.[86] Youssef was selected as one of *Time* magazine's 100 most influential people in 2013.[87]

In the absence of much balanced reporting even by international entities, which mostly lack context and an understanding of Egyptian culture, online news sources and social media still provide an important alternative outlet, although in a different manner than before. Many voices on social networks are also polarized, but these networks can give a voice to those who choose a middle ground or who are trying to maintain their objectivity and point out human rights violations on the part of both camps regardless of their own political views, a stance that has become increasingly difficult to maintain or portray through the mainstream media. Social media also offer a voice to those who are against both the Muslim Brotherhood and the current regime, and those who fear the country may be slipping back into rule by the military or remnants of the old regime.

Some attempts to offer more balanced coverage of events are also taking place online. *Mada Masr*,[88] an online newspaper that launched on June 30, 2013, is run by a group of young journalists and is one good example of truly independent media. The portal mostly provides news and commentary in English but has also established an Arabic section and a photojournalism section. Identifying itself as a portal for "independent, progressive journalism," *Mada Masr* plans to expand its services by offering multimedia news coverage.

Another newly established news portal is *Yanair*, the Arabic word for "January."[89] Established by a group of young journalists, this portal provides Arabic-only news and commentary. As of June 2014, it receives no funding and is therefore funded by its founders, who are still navigating their way to a working business model. The portal does not have news correspondents of its own other than the few founding journalists, so to date it has been more dependent on commentary than on news. It does not shy away from publishing content that does not agree with the mainstream pro-regime tone.

While the regime has gone after online activists in the past, to date online content has not been blocked, and no confirmed reports of mass online surveillance have surfaced. That could change, however. On June 1, 2014, the newspaper *El Watan* published a leaked request for proposals (RFP) by the Ministry of Interior for an ambitious plan for software to monitor online social networks. The RFP listed 54 technical specifications required for the software, including the preferred ability to monitor not only public posts on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube but also private messaging and telephony applications such as WhatsApp and Viber. It required the abilities to view all communications by an infinite number of users on a timeline and to conduct public opinion analysis for the most popular topics over time. It also stipulated the ability to closely monitor certain users and to follow their interactions with their online friends and followers. The preface to the RFP stated that the purpose of the required software was to face the "grave dangers" and the "eminent security threats and challenges" posed by social networks and to limit the "increasingly destructive" thoughts and ideologies abundant on such networks, including calls for insulting or questioning religions, publishing rumors and distorting facts, insulting others or calling them names, and calls to break societal norms, protest, strike, or engage in other forms of civil disobedience.[90]

The leaked RFP for online mass surveillance was not well received by activists or human rights organizations. Amnesty International issued a strongly worded statement, calling it "a devastating blow to the rights to privacy and freedom of expression in the country." The statement quoted Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa deputy director as saying, "The plans by the Egyptian authorities to indiscriminately monitor social media a few months after the adoption of a new constitution guaranteeing the right to privacy shows the little regard they have for human rights or the rule of law. The plans also spark serious fears that systematic monitoring of social media

networks will be used by the authorities to further clamp down on the slightest sign of dissent."[91]

What's Next?

It is difficult to assess the future of the media in Egypt given the current political climate. Government-owned media institutions do not seem to have been affected by the revolution and have missed out on the opportunity to act as public media rather than state media. Institutional media reform is for the most part dependent on political will, which seems largely absent at the moment. State media remain in the service of the regime rather than the people. Private satellite channels primarily serve the interests of the businesspeople that own them, most of whom were closely allied with the old Mubarak regime and seem to be adamantly behind the current regime of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

Generally speaking, the media in Egypt are currently characterized by their seemingly unanimous support for the regime and an inflated portrayal of high hopes for the new president. This is coupled with a continuing tendency to vilify the Muslim Brotherhood and a campaign to smear the activists of the January 25 revolution, while ignoring any human rights violations committed by the current regime and any efforts to counter them.

Under these circumstances, it has become increasingly difficult for the slim minority that is trying to sing a tune different from that of the mainstream media to find a place for itself in these outlets. Voices trying to raise awareness of the danger of a comeback of military rule or to highlight violations and call for the release of imprisoned activists and journalists, including some who used to be regular guests on Egypt's popular evening talk shows, are now persona non grata on the same shows that welcomed them almost every night. Online media, including social media, seem to provide the best opportunities for exposure for the opposition and for activists at this time.

The future state of the media depends in large part on developments over the next few months, which will establish el-Sisi as either the civilian president he says he is or as a former field marshal still in military mode. The country is also getting ready for parliamentary elections, which if carried out properly, might afford Egypt a chance at a more democratic climate than currently exists.

Many hope that el-Sisi will pardon the activists and journalists currently in prison or annul their trials and that he will encourage a more democratic climate if only as part of an effort to refute the potential feeling that the military is back in power. Discouraging signs have included political satirist Bassem Youssef's termination of his show days before el-Sisi was officially inaugurated and the Ministry of Interior's bold defense of its RFP for mass surveillance of the Internet. However, many hope that once el-Sisi has settled into his presidential term, more balanced voices, including talk show host Reem Magued and Bassem Youssef, would find their way back onto the airwaves, thus forcing

some objectivity into the coverage of daily events and the analysis of the political situation. A few voices have also started discussing (on social media) ways to publicly finance an independent satellite channel, although the legal and logistical procedures remain major issues. For now, online media continue to play an important role in exposing what the state-owned media will not cover, and activists and citizen journalists on the ground try to push their material as far as they can on social media.

Short of political will for reform, dissident voices inside the media will need significant backup from civil society and their audiences to make progress.

Egypt's revolution will continue until it achieves its goals and young people on the streets reach the democratic Egypt of their dreams. A more democratic political leadership would give way to a revolution in Egyptian media, making possible the expansion of small efforts that are currently trying to emerge from within Maspero and the national newspapers. Despite a few bad signs, it remains to be seen if the new regime will manage to bring about some guarantees of freedom of speech and expression and pave the way for a more democratic process or if it will revert back to a state of direct or indirect military rule. Short of political will for reform, dissident voices inside the media will need significant backup from civil society and their audiences to make progress.

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