



On the Divide Press Freedom at Risk in Egypt

A special report by the Committee to Protect Journalists



Committee to Protect Journalists

On the Divide

Press Freedom at Risk in Egypt

Hopes for press freedom were high after the 2011 revolution ousted Hosni Mubarak, led to an explosion of private media outlets, and set the country on a path to a landmark presidential election. But more than two years later, a deeply polarized Egyptian press has been battered by an array of repressive tactics, from the legal and physical intimidation of Mohamed Morsi's tenure to the wide censorship of the new military-backed government. **A CPJ special report by Sherif Mansour with reporting by Shaimaa Abu Elkhair from Cairo**



A July protest in Cairo. (Reuters/Mohamed Abd El Ghany)

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1. Morsi's Failures

By Sherif Mansour

In June 2012, three days before Mohamed Morsi was declared winner of the presidential election, Bassem Youssef, satirist and host of Egypt's "Al-Bernameg," defended the Muslim Brotherhood candidate during an appearance on Jon Stewart's "The Daily Show." He asked the U.S. audience to give democracy in Egypt a chance. So long as Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood remained accountable to the people and respected human rights, Youssef reasoned, there was no reason they could not lead Egypt's historic transition to democratic rule.



Morsi and throngs of supporters in November 2012. (AP)

In the year that followed, a Morsi-led government that Youssef once defended pursued criminal charges against him on broad counts of "insulting the president," "insulting Islam," and "reporting false news." On his nightly television program, Youssef had used sharp humor to critique government failures to improve the economy, public services, and safety, and its efforts to suppress opinion in the name of religion. The criminal case did nothing to blunt his sarcastic edge. "I will not tone down my criticism," Youssef told CPJ in June 2013, just days before Morsi was ousted. "Freedom of speech is not a gift, it's a birthright."

Youssef's story in many ways epitomized Morsi's failure to tolerate diversity of views, one of the crucial missteps that led to his fall. An analysis by the Committee to Protect Journalists found that Morsi and his supporters used politicized regulations, ignored differing views to push through a repressive new constitution, pursued a drumbeat of retaliatory criminal investigations, and employed widespread rhetorical and physical intimidation of critics. CPJ documented dozens of outright anti-press assaults, the large majority committed by Muslim Brotherhood members and supporters, virtually all of which went unpunished. Those assaults included a fatal attack on reporter Al-Hosseiny Abou Deif, the circumstances of which senior government officials sought to obscure.

An early signal

One of Morsi's earliest decisions—to retain the Mubarak-era cabinet position of Information Minister and fill the post with one of his closest allies, Salah Abdul Maqsoud—immediately alarmed journalists. The post, long used to manage the flow of information, primarily through its editorial control of state media, had been temporarily suspended during the military transition. Many had hoped Morsi would abolish the post altogether and create an independent media regulator

instead.

Not only did Morsi fail to eliminate the post, he allowed the Information Minister and the Shura Council, the upper chamber of Parliament, to expand their grip on state media by appointing political allies as heads of outlets. State media journalists soon reported that critical columns and coverage were being pulled. Ibrahim Abdel Meguid, a prominent weekly columnist for *Al-Akhbar* and outspoken critic of the Muslim Brotherhood, was among those who lost his platform.

By the end of 2012, Morsi and his allies in the Constituent Assembly drafted and passed a controversial new constitution with little input or support from opposition and human rights groups. The intent of the charter was clear, outlining new constraints that would “ensure the media would adhere to sensible, professional, administrative, and economic standards.” CPJ and others criticized the charter for introducing new limits on free speech, for example adding the criminal charge of “insulting the prophets” and allowing authorities to shut media outlets if a judicial review found employees had failed to “respect the sanctity of the private lives of citizens and the requirements of national security.”

The Morsi government also left intact the repressive legal framework that existed under Hosni Mubarak. Nearly 70 articles in eight different laws restrict freedom of the press and freedom of expression, according to an October 2012 study by the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information. Broad aspects of public discourse are limited by legal prohibitions against, among other things, blasphemy; anti-state propaganda; insults to public officials and states; incitement to disobedience in the army; disruption of national peace; and publication of material inimical to public taste.

Soon after Morsi took office, Muslim Brotherhood supporters unleashed a wave of criminal complaints against media critics on vague allegations of “spreading wrong information,” “disrupting peace,” “insulting the president,” and “insulting religion.” In the first nine months of the Morsi presidency, the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights counted at least 600 criminal defamation cases, far outpacing the rate of such cases during Hosni Mubarak’s reign.

“Before, I was accused of insulting Mubarak,” the editor, columnist, and television commentator Ibrahim Eissa told CPJ in March. But Eissa, long a target of the Mubarak government because of his critical coverage, faced an even broader array of charges under the Morsi government, including charges of insulting religion. “It is like walking through a minefield,” he said.

Wave of intolerance

Former talk show host Dina Abdel Fattah thought she had a scoop: a powerful interview with members of a violent underground youth group, a piece she believed would deepen the public’s understanding of the unrest roiling the nation and, perhaps, win her appreciation for some difficult reporting. “Instead,” she said, “I had more than 300 legal complaints standing against me and eventually I had to leave my work.”

It was back in January when Abdel Fattah, working for Al-Tahrir television, interviewed members of Black Bloc, which had waged violent protests against Morsi. In the interview, which focused on the turn to violent protest, the group defended its tactics by arguing that it was responding to violence waged by police and the Muslim Brotherhood in Port Said and in clashes with protesters at the presidential palace the month before.

Leading members of the Muslim Brotherhood soon convened a general session of the Shura Council to accuse Abdel Fattah of endangering national security. After a torrent of criminal complaints, the general prosecutor’s office summoned her for interrogation on allegations of inciting violence and encouraging terrorism. Abdel Fattah was released in the face of pressure from watchdog groups, but she resigned from Al-Tahrir after perceiving that she had

lost the support of her employer. Al-Tahrir manager Waleed Hosni told CPJ that Abdel Fattah never explicitly sought support, but he acknowledged the station had grown uncomfortable with what he called her “partisanship”

Time and again, Morsi and his allies used highly charged rhetoric to intimidate journalists. At a public conference on women’s rights in March, Morsi claimed his critics had used “the media to incite violence,” and warned that “whoever is found involved will not escape punishment. Whoever participates in incitement is an accomplice in crime.” Essam el-Erian, a Muslim Brotherhood leader in the Shura Council, told an *Al-Watan* newspaper correspondent covering council sessions that he had a “surprise” for the newspaper “that would make everyone in the media know their limits,” the paper reported in March.

As in other countries hostile to the press, from Syria to China, Morsi allies waged online harassment and intimidation campaigns against critics. Amro Selim, a cartoonist who regularly criticized Morsi in the daily newspaper, *Al-Shorouk*, told CPJ in March that he was receiving threats against his life every day on Facebook. “There is nothing new about getting death threats; I used to get those all the time. But instead of being called unpatriotic, I was being called *kafir*”—an infidel—“which was more worrisome for me.”

Morsi’s supporters used physical intimidation as well. Thousands of Muslim Brotherhood supporters surrounded Media Production City, a complex housing numerous private news outlets in Cairo, three times to intimidate both journalists and the television guests trying to enter the complex. The shows of force were staged whenever Morsi wanted to push through initiatives with the least amount of criticism.

The first siege was held in August 2012 when Morsi’s supporters demonstrated against Al-FaraeenTV, which provided coverage sympathetic to the military when Morsi fired top military and intelligence leaders. The crowd beat three journalists who worked for the station and attacked the car of Youssef al-Hosiny, a radio and television presenter who hosted a program on the private satellite broadcaster ONTV.

Similarly, in December 2012, Morsi supporters accused the media of spreading misinformation about the draft constitution. They prevented media personnel and hosts from entering the TV stations. In March 2013, Morsi’s supporters surrounded five private satellite channels—Al-Hayat, ONTV, Al-Nahar, Al-Qahira wal Nas, and CBC—and accused the outlets of inciting violence. Their menacing chants said, among other things, that journalists would be slaughtered for insulting Morsi. At least two journalists were attacked and others were prevented from entering the compound.

In all, CPJ documented at least 78 assaults against journalists from August 2012 until Morsi’s fall on July 3, 2013. Muslim Brotherhood supporters, seeking to obstruct coverage of opposition protests, were responsible for 72 of the attacks, CPJ research shows.

During the same period, CPJ documented a handful of assaults committed by opposition groups against journalists aligned with the Muslim Brotherhood. In the most serious case, a gunman believed to be firing from among anti-government protesters shot Ibrahim al-Masry as the *Al-Wady* photographer was covering an April Muslim Brotherhood-sponsored demonstration against the judiciary. He spent five days hospitalized in intensive care before his condition stabilized.

Partisan news media

The leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood had a near-universal view that the news media were biased against Morsi’s government. “The media lost their credibility for neutral coverage, their journalistic ethics, and their professional standards,” Abdel-Moneim Abdel-Maksoud, a top lawyer for the Muslim Brotherhood, told CPJ in a May interview.

“Unlike the Mubarak era, Egypt’s Morsi has open and free press that allows constructive criticism, if journalists wanted.” (Abdel-Maksoud was arrested on July 5 on charges of “insulting the judiciary” when he sought to defend Muslim Brotherhood leaders arrested after Morsi’s ouster.)

Egypt’s media landscape has grown tremendously, although the most dramatic expansion traces to the period immediately after Mubarak’s 2011 ouster when journalists and business people seized the opportunity to enter a field that had been tightly controlled. As of March 2012, according to a UNESCO report, 567 newspapers had been registered, up from 142 in the pre-revolution period. The same report charted “important” growth in television, with 15 new channels that included CBC, a leading private station; the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Misr25; and Al-Masry, which is associated with the liberal Al-Wafd party.

Much of the Egyptian press was sharply political under Morsi, divided roughly into pro-government and opposition camps, a CPJ analysis found. Most of the new private newspapers and TV channels and websites were sponsored by businessmen who wanted to reconcile with the post-revolutionary forces by supporting independent journalists, activists, and politicians. Most of the outlets opposed President Morsi, said he was responsible for a deterioration of economic and political conditions, and adopted an activist tone.

Supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood accused these businessmen of being corrupt former regime men who were controlling the editorial line against Morsi to stop him from achieving the revolution’s demands. While some media executives were once aligned with Mubarak, CPJ found that many stations were in practice run by veteran journalists who injected a strong dose of commentary into the reporting.

Journalism and politics blurred to a considerable degree. A number of journalists took an overtly activist stance during Morsi’s tenure in response, they said, to his adversarial relationship with the media and their perception that the Muslim Brotherhood exerted too much control over the public space. Talk show host Reem Maged told CPJ that she had taken part in political protests on her own time, although she tried her best to draw a distinction between her journalistic duties and her personal views. “It’s really difficult,” she acknowledged, “to separate the two.”

Muslim Brotherhood leaders, while harshly critical of what they viewed as coverage biased against them, seemed unconcerned about press neutrality when it came to Muslim Brotherhood-aligned media. Muslim Brotherhood newspapers and TV channels were aggressive in defending the president and attacking his critics, portraying them as self-interested and counter-revolutionary. The outlets also used highly charged religious rhetoric to discredit other journalists, going so far as to suggest direct attacks against some.

In the week before the June 30 protests, oblivious to the extent and depth of public discontent and having already lost the military’s support, the Morsi government issued what turned out to be a series of empty threats and toothless decrees against the news media. The government said it would shut down critical satellite channels and reopen criminal investigations of journalists seen as insulting the president. It issued arrest warrants and imposed travel bans on media personnel.

Within a week, those same sorts of measures would be turned against Morsi and the media that supported him.

Sherif Mansour is coordinator of CPJ’s Middle East and North Africa program. CPJ consultant Shaimaa Abu Elkhair contributed reporting from Cairo.

The Killing of Al-Hosseiny Abou Deif

By Sherif Mansour

The fatal shooting of *El-Fagr* reporter Al-Hosseiny Abou Deif during clashes between anti-government protesters and Muslim Brotherhood supporters outside the presidential palace last December seemed, at first blush, to fit a sadly familiar pattern: a journalist killed covering a political demonstration, the victim of a stray bullet fired recklessly in the heat of street violence.



Protesters seek justice for Abou Deif. (AP/Nasser Nasser)

But as the case unfolded in the ensuing months, the details began to reveal much more: that Abou Deif had reported being followed and threatened in recent days; that forensic evidence pointed to a targeted killing; that a witness saw a Muslim Brotherhood supporter shine a laser penlight at Abou Deif shortly before the shooting; and that government officials, including a senior spokesman for the president, sought to obscure the nature of the shooting.

Eight months after Abou Deif's death, his family and colleagues are pressing prosecutors to conduct an investigation they say should have been done from the start.

"I left my hometown in Upper Egypt and for months I have done nothing in Cairo but try to find out who killed my brother, Al-Hosseiny," Salem Abou Deif told CPJ. "I am confident that the Muslim Brotherhood targeted him because of what he wrote against the president."

Four months before the shooting, Abou Deif had written a piece saying that President Mohamed Morsi had included a brother-in-law in a mass July 2012 presidential pardon that encompassed 572 people. Morsi's brother-in-law, Mahmoud Aly, had been serving a three-year sentence on a bribery conviction. Morsi didn't publicly respond to the report. Soon after, Abou Deif told his brother and several colleagues that he was being followed on the streets and was receiving threats on his Facebook page from people he identified as Muslim Brotherhood supporters, according to CPJ interviews with the brother and fellow journalists.

Early on the day of the shooting, December 5, 2012, Abou Deif was struck by a rubber bullet while covering the violent street clashes and sought treatment at a local hospital, a colleague, Hossam Sioufi, told CPJ. By that time, Abou Deif had shot video showing Muslim Brotherhood supporters assaulting anti-government protesters, according to Sioufi. (A number of reporters and others later published videos showing Muslim Brotherhood supporters beating, intimidating, and detaining protesters that day.)

After being treated for minor injuries, Abou Deif returned to the demonstration and began showing to other protesters the video he had taken earlier that day, according to Mahmoud Abd al-Qader, a friend who was nearby and who witnessed the fatal shooting.

A few moments later, Abou Deif was struck in the head by a single gunshot, said Abd al-Qader, who gave his account to the public prosecutor and an investigator hired by the journalist's family. "I was standing by [Abou Deif's] side directly, and I heard a humming sound like a bee, which turned out to be a bullet that settled in his head from the right side," Abd al-Qader said in his official testimony to the public prosecutor, given in May and published by *Al-Watan*.

Abou Deif was taken to a local hospital, Al-Zahraa, and then transferred to Kasr El Aini, a better equipped facility, but he lapsed into a coma and died a week later, on December 12. The attending physicians said the fatal shot had to have been fired from just a few feet away, according to the family and news accounts.

Journalists soon charged that Muslim Brotherhood supporters were behind the shooting. Hassan Shahin, an activist who was at the scene, told Abou Deif's family that someone he knew to be a Muslim Brotherhood supporter from prior demonstrations had focused a laser penlight on Abou Deif shortly before the shooting. The laser pen tactic had been used by Muslim Brotherhood supporters and police during demonstrations to identify activists for harassment or attack, according to news accounts. Shahin later gave a statement to the prosecutor's office.

In January, a senior Morsi spokesman, Yassir Ali, disputed any Muslim Brotherhood connection to the killing and seemed to point a finger elsewhere. In a January 16 letter to the *Washington Post*, Ali said "forensic reports confirmed that Abu Deif was killed by the same type of bullet that killed seven pro-Morsi protesters at the same demonstrations."

Yet no such forensic report had been issued by that time. The government's Forensics Administration issued its report more than a month later, on February 22. The official report summary was obtained by CPJ through Abou Deif's family.

The report states that Abou Deif died of "brain laceration and hemorrhage associated with meningeal rupture (or cutting of the meninges) and fractures of skull bones due to gunshot." The report refers only vaguely to the distance at which the shot was fired, saying it came from "more than a meter" away. The report does not specify the type of weapon or bullet used, although it described the slug as having expanded after entering Abou Deif's skull.

The Forensics Administration said it had not received an investigative memorandum from police, a key document that would typically include witness testimony and other details from the scene. The memorandum, which investigators are normally obligated to file in such cases, would ordinarily be used by the Forensics Administration to determine the source and distance of the shot and other salient circumstances that would guide the prosecutor in pursuing charges.

The witnesses' testimony and pressure from the Egyptian Journalists' Syndicate prompted authorities in April to summon three Muslim Brotherhood youth leaders for six hours of questioning. Authorities released them, however, citing lack of evidence. The suspects were publicly identified as Ahmed Sibia, Abdel Rahman Ezz, and Ahmed al-Moghier. Sibia was also the director of Hamas-affiliated Al-Aqsa television office in Cairo. The three denied involvement in the killing and said their own lives had been threatened by opposition activists, according to news reports.

That month, Abou Deif's family hired Fakhry Saleh, former head of the Forensics Administration, to conduct its own investigation. Saleh, using the official medical report and eyewitness testimony, concluded that a gunman fired one shot at close range using a "dumdum" bullet designed to expand on impact to intensify the injury.

Faced with the family's findings, the public prosecutor's office reopened the investigation in late May—only to close the case a month later with the vague explanation that it could not identify the "original killer." The office referred al-Moghier for trial on charges of torturing and detaining opposition protesters during the same clashes in which Abou Deif was killed.

The case took another turn after Morsi's ouster in July, when the prosecutor general's office, which oversees all public prosecutors, asked a Cairo judge to examine the case independently, a step that encouraged Abou Dief's family and lawyers. Despite all of the political tumult, they say, authorities must not abandon the case.

"We believe we put forward enough evidence to show that this was not crossfire incident, but a targeted murder," Negad El Borai, Abou Deif's lawyer, told CPJ. "We are hopeful now that there is new leadership in Egypt. ... They will agree to our request to conduct serious investigations."

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2. Military Censorship

By Sherif Mansour

A swarm of police vehicles converged on Media Production City moments after Gen. Abdul-Fattah al-Sisi announced on July 3 that Mohamed Morsi had been ousted. The compound outside Cairo is home to nearly every TV station in Egypt, but the police were targeting five particular stations that night: the Muslim Brotherhood-run Misr25, and four pro-Morsi Islamist stations. One by one, the stations' live coverage went off the air, while police herded and handcuffed about 200 employees, confiscated equipment, and seized cell phones. Taken to a security facility, the employees were interrogated about their associations with the Muslim Brotherhood. Most of the administrative and support workers were released in a few hours, but 22 journalists were kept for more than a day on accusations of conspiring to overthrow the regime.



At a Tahrir Square rally, an image of al-Sisi. (Reuters/Mohamed Abd El Ghany)

"I didn't have time to say a word against the coup," said Mohamed Gamal, who was anchoring Misr25's live coverage when police stormed into his studio and took him off the air. "So I am not sure what they meant with these charges."

Beginning in the minutes after seizing control, and then over the days and weeks since, the Egyptian military imposed widespread censorship against pro-Morsi news media and obstructed coverage supportive of the Muslim Brotherhood and the toppled president. At least three journalists remained in detention as of August 1. If the repression thus far has been aimed at one segment of the news media, there are ominous signs for the press across the political spectrum. The military and the transitional government say they want to create a journalistic code of ethics, and have conditioned the lifting of existing censorship on its adoption. The process by which such a code would be drafted and approved and the extent of government involvement in its enforcement have been vague until now, but various official statements indicate that authorities intend to have a strong hand throughout.

Morsi's overthrow also cast into stark relief a deeply partisan and polarized Egyptian press. The divide between pro- and anti-Morsi news media—two camps constituting much of the Egyptian media landscape—had been growing for many months before the overthrow. After the ouster, these news media competed to own the narrative and even the terminology: Was this a coup, a popular uprising, or something else? Most journalists who had opposed Morsi failed to speak out forcefully against military censorship in the initial days of the takeover, although some have grown more critical.

Seeking to justify censorship

As they were shutting down Misr25 and the four Islamist stations—Al-Hafez, Al-Nas, Al-Rahma, and Al-Khalijya—authorities raided Al-Jazeera Mubashir, briefly interrupting studio commentary on pro-Morsi protests and detaining several of its employees. The day before, special army units occupied state television newsrooms, and they kicked Morsi's minister of information, Salah Abdul Maqsood, out of the building.

Over the following weeks, several steps were taken to extend censorship of pro-Morsi media. Al-Ahram, the government printing house, refused to print the Muslim Brotherhood's *Freedom and Justice* daily, and Egypt's Nilesat satellite operator jammed three pan-Arab satellite television stations, the Hamas-affiliated stations Al-Quds and Al-Aqsa, and the Jordanian Al-Yarmouk, when they tried to broadcast pro-Morsi demonstrations.

Al-Jazeera Mubashir and the Turkish news agency Anadolu, which are among the few remaining outlets considered sympathetic to Morsi and Muslim Brotherhood, have faced obstruction. In some cases, crews working for the two stations have been denied access to official press conferences and events. One Al-Jazeera staffer, photographer Mohammad Bader, was being held on charges of weapons possession as of August 1.

Two other journalists remained in detention on August 1: Misr25 commentator Mohamed al-Omdah and Al-Nas host Khaled Abdullah, both held on charges of incitement to violence. Both routinely voiced harsh views. Two weeks before Morsi's ouster, for example, al-Omdah threatened to declare "jihad" if the presidential palace was stormed by demonstrators during the June 30 protests. Abdullah often called critics of Morsi "infidels" who were carrying out the devil's plan and, on June 23, he hosted a Salafi leader who sought to justify the killings of several Shia.

Although the order shutting down the five pro-Morsi stations only vaguely described the censorship as "exceptional measures," a military spokesman, sympathetic media, and military allies have all invoked incitement to violence as justification. Over time, the Islamist stations have hosted extreme views. In December 2012, for example, a Salafi leader who was a guest on Al-Hafez vowed that his supporters would beat talk show hosts and Morsi critics such as Ibrahim Eissa. In February, another Salafi sheikh said on Al-Hafez that leaders of the opposition National Salvation Front should be killed.

Incitement to violence in the context of national security, as defined in the internationally recognized Johannesburg Principles, must be "intended to incite imminent violence," "likely to incite such violence," and have a "direct and immediate connection between the expression and the likelihood or occurrence of such violence." National law must provide adequate safeguards against abuse, including "prompt, full and effective judicial scrutiny," according to the principles, which were adopted in 1995 by experts in international law, national security, and freedom of expression.

At least three of the shuttered Egyptian stations have filed appeals to Egypt's administrative court, but no action has been taken in response to their complaints. Mohamed Zarea, director of the Arab Penal Reform Organization, which has argued cases before the court, said he was optimistic the panel would act independently but said a ruling could take some time.

Many journalists and liberal thinkers did not speak out against the military's censorship and suppression and, in some instances, seemed to support the military's actions. Some suggested the censorship would be short-term. "I believe those actions against religious channels were not justified, but I also believed the army when they said they were temporary measures," said Magdy el-Galad, the editor-in-chief of *Al-Watan* and a leading voice in the effort to oust Morsi. His newspaper had consistently criticized Morsi and, in turn, been subjected to numerous physical and legal attacks by Morsi supporters.

But Gamal Eid, director of the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, said the military's censorship should be rejected outright as a "group punishment" that reflects Mubarak-era principles. Wholesale censorship of a particular

perspective, he said, punishes viewers and denies citizens their right to receive information. “Before we look forward to what needs to happen,” Eid said, “those TV stations should be allowed to resume as soon as possible.”

Bassem Youssef, a political satirist who often skewered Morsi on his TV show “Al-Bernameg,” told CPJ that he’s concerned that a highly patriotic atmosphere could slip into an Egyptian version of McCarthyism, in which politicized charges are made without regard to evidence or law. The liberal press, generally supportive of the military, has yet to be targeted by restrictions, he noted. But that could change. “We have to wait for people to criticize the army and see if this will have a negative impact on press,” he added.

Morsi supporters say censorship imposed temporarily will inevitably become permanent. Wael Haddara, Morsi’s former communication adviser, said he expects independent voices to “be silenced, muzzled, or compromised by the use of the so-called ‘safety valve’ method deployed by Hosni Mubarak, where some people are allowed to speak out as window dressing.”

The military has not tried to impose restrictions on social media thus far. Online censorship would draw international criticism, but a domestic political calculus is also at work. The Muslim Brotherhood uses social media, but it has traditionally relied more heavily on television and direct calls to action from clerics. Morsi’s opponents, on the other hand, are a much more active presence on social media.

Despite the closing of the pro-Morsi media outlets, the country has been gripped by violence. In the weeks following Morsi’s fall, hundreds have been killed and thousands more injured in clashes across Egypt. On July 8, after more than 60 pro-Morsi demonstrators were killed by military fire when they surrounded the Republican Guard headquarters, the Muslim Brotherhood was largely unable to raise questions or voice its response through the press. Most Egyptian television channels reported only the military account—that Brotherhood supporters who camped outside the Republican Guards headquarters were killed when they tried to break into the building. But international media and human rights groups such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International concluded, after examining video evidence and interviewing eyewitnesses, that the military had launched a coordinated assault against the protesters. Human rights groups called for an investigation into excessive use of force against the protesters. An Egyptian photographer working for a newspaper affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood was among those killed by military fire that day. Three weeks later, on July 27, a fierce police crackdown on pro-Morsi demonstrators led to the deaths of at least 80 more people.

A polarized climate

In the months before the military overthrow, particularly after the 2012 passage of the repressive and highly criticized Muslim Brotherhood-backed constitution, private news media had fallen into two increasingly hardened camps—pro- and anti-Morsi, author and Georgetown professor Adel Iskandar wrote on the CPJ Blog. “Transnational private stations like Al-Jazeera Arabic, Al-Jazeera Mubashir, and Al-Arabiya also took sides, with the Al-Jazeeras anchoring their support for Morsi and the Brotherhood and the Saudi Al-Arabiya siding with the then-president’s opponents,” he said. “In this polarized environment, journalistic professionalism went out of the window as each camp drummed up support for its side and demonized the other.”

The sharp divisions in the press are reflected in competing narratives over the military-backed transition and its impact on the press. Emad Eddin Hussein, editor-in-chief of *Al-Shorouk*, an independent daily, told CPJ that the political divide has taken a toll on the press. “It is almost impossible for the media to operate freely and present professional journalism as both religious and nationalist forces produce polarizing narratives that reject the other side and escalate divisions and potential for armed confrontations,” he said.

Another editor said she had discerned a different trend in coverage after the takeover. Lina Attalah, chief editor and co-founder of independent news website *Mada Masr*, told CPJ that much news media coverage seemed to have fallen closely in line behind the interim government. She said it's not clear whether that resulted from pressure from management or the military, or from more generalized self-censorship. "Either way, it is a problem," she said.

At least initially, many supporters of the overthrow said they believed repression of the pro-Morsi news media would be lifted once the Muslim Brotherhood engaged with the transitional government. Transitional President Adly Mansour, who promised parliamentary and presidential elections within six months, invited the Muslim Brotherhood to join in national reconciliation.

But authorities were simultaneously detaining Morsi and dozens of senior aides for weeks incommunicado and in undisclosed locations. Morsi was charged in late July with espionage, his top aides with incitement to violence. Murad Mohamed Ali, spokesman of the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party, told CPJ there is no future for press freedom under a military-backed government. "If the military can give us freedom, then they can deny it," he said. "The military coup is the real disease and oppressing press is just a symptom. We need to reverse the coup first as medication."

The press freedom record of the Supreme Council for the Armed Forces, which ruled Egypt between Hosni Mubarak's 2011 fall and Morsi's 2012 election, offers plenty of reason for concern. CPJ research shows that during that time authorities raided broadcasters, censored newspapers, and arrested critical bloggers; staged politicized trials and interrogations to intimidate reporters; and detained several journalists, brutalizing at least two in custody. An October 2011 confrontation between the military and civilians in front of the Television and Radio Union left dozens dead, including a journalist.

Signals ahead

How and when—or if—the pro-Morsi stations are allowed to resume operations is an important signal of authorities' intentions. The military has told several political leaders that reopening the stations is linked to the adoption of a media ethics code to prevent inciting violence. In his speech announcing Morsi's overthrow, al-Sisi proposed that as part of the transitional road map a "media charter of honor shall be designed in a way that ensures media freedom; observes professional rules, credibility, and neutrality; and advances the homeland's top interests." The proposal seems to echo suggestions, made in February by Muslim Brotherhood supporters when Morsi was still in power, to regulate private media channels and start a "dialogue" about media ethics. That the discussion has come full circle reflects a core issue in Egypt's press freedom climate: Journalistic ethics and government repression are seen through a political lens.

Government officials have spoken broadly about having a restructured High Council for Journalism to handle all press issues, raising the possibility that this entity would oversee an ethics code discussion. Interim Prime Minister Hazem al-Beblawi announced in late July that the council's 15 members would be now appointed directly by the interim president; in the past, the Shura Council, the upper chamber of parliament, had appointed its members. Al-Beblawi would not say specifically whether the council would lead the ethics code discussion, but he said it would handle all press-related matters.

Any government-appointed body would lack the independence sought by many journalists. The Journalists' Syndicate, which met on July 10 with Mansour, the interim president, called for civil society representatives to take charge of the development of any professional code of ethics and regulatory mechanism, and that it be done outside of government control.

"Once ethics are engineered by those in power, it becomes automatically an instrument of censorship," the editor

Attalah told CPJ.

The interim government is promising changes for the better. In late July, the interim government announced that it would remove prison penalties for the crime of insulting the president. This glimmer of positive news, though, was offset by the interim president's decision to retain the cabinet position of Information Minister. The minister, from the Mubarak era through the Morsi tenure, has been seen as a key means of controlling the flow of information, particularly through tight editorial control of state media. Although President Mansour would not abolish the position immediately, spokesman Ahmed al-Mosallamany said, the interim government would consult with media experts about the possibility of eventually replacing the ministry with a more independent body.

The spokesman also promised constitutional changes to improve press freedom. "We are not going to replace Islamist fascism," al-Mosallamany said, "with a civil one."

Sherif Mansour is coordinator of CPJ's Middle East and North Africa program. CPJ consultant Shaimaa Abu Elkhir contributed reporting from Cairo.

NGO Case Criminalizes Human Rights Work

By Jean-Paul Marthoz

A criminal case that was launched under the previous transitional military government has cast a shadow over the current government, with its implications that international human rights and democracy workers are somehow foreign agents working against national security.



Courtroom spectators were stunned when verdicts were announced in June. (AP/Ahmed Abd El Latif)

In December 2011, security forces acting under orders of the military ruling council shut down the offices of 10 NGOs, seizing documents, computers, and cell phones. U.S.-based organizations—such as Freedom House, the National Democratic Institute, and the International Republican Institute—were among the targeted NGOs, as was the German Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

Three months later, in a move that shocked the human rights community, authorities filed criminal charges against 43 people on claims that they were unlawfully operating internationally financed programs. The NGOs were operating democracy-building and human rights projects with local partners. The defendants included Sherif Mansour, who worked for Freedom House at the time and who is now CPJ's Middle East and North Africa program coordinator. The authorities used "a discredited Mubarak-era law" to launch the case, said Joe Stork, Human Rights Watch's deputy Middle East and North Africa director. Russia has recently used similar tactics, thwarting international human rights work by branding it a foreign threat.

Many observers expected the charges to be dismissed after the Muslim Brotherhood government was voted into power in June 2012. The United States, after all, provides \$1.5 billion in annual military and economic aid. The country's international image has significant bearing on its large tourism sector and its standing as a leading diplomatic actor in the region.

In June 2013, however, a Cairo Criminal Court judge convicted the NGO workers and imposed prison sentences of one to five years on charges of "illegally operating in Egypt and receiving foreign funding without authorization." The court verdict accused the NGOs of working to "undermine Egypt's national security and lay out a sectarian, political map that serves U.S. and Israeli interests." Mansour, who is an Egyptian-born U.S. citizen based in New York, was convicted in absentia, as were more than two dozen others.

"We stand fully with Sherif Mansour and will support him in his efforts to secure justice for himself and the other defendants," said CPJ Executive Director Joel Simon after the verdict was delivered. "We trust that this unjust verdict

will be reversed on appeal." Freedom House said the prosecution was motivated by the "determination to shut down civil society. None of those indicted did anything wrong. They were simply working with Egyptians to help them realize their dream of a free Egypt."

Jean-Paul Marthoz is CPJ's Brussels-based senior adviser.

3. CPJ's Recommendations

The Committee to Protect Journalists offers the following recommendations to Egyptian authorities, political parties, and news media, and to the international community.

To Egyptian authorities:

- End censorship. Allow all news media, including outlets supportive of former President Mohamed Morsi, to resume operations immediately and without condition. Egypt's path to peace and freedom depends on authorities respecting the rule of law and human rights for all people. All voices, including those of the Muslim Brotherhood, must be heard.
- Drop all efforts to have any government entity participate in, review, or approve any journalistic code of ethics. Decisions on whether to develop such a code, and what such a code might include, must be made at the sole discretion of Egyptian journalists.
- As an immediate step, abolish prison sentences for all press-related violations and remove all insult laws from the penal code. Pending criminal cases against journalists facing such insult charges should be dropped in consideration of this change.
- Develop clear and unequivocal constitutional articles that enshrine press freedom, freedom of speech, and citizens' right to information.
- Undertake thorough statutory reform to bring all laws in conformance with international standards for freedom of expression. Ensure that statutes regarding incitement to violence adhere to international standards.
- Ensure that all local and international journalists are allowed access to all public events, and ensure they can work without fear of harassment or obstruction.
- Investigate thoroughly and prosecute all those responsible for the killing of journalist Al-Hosseiny Abou Deif, who was shot while covering a protest in Cairo on December 2012. Numerous questions have arisen concerning the thoroughness and impartiality of the investigation. In addition, investigate the deaths of Salah al-Din Hassan and Ahmed Assem el-Senousy, who were killed while covering demonstrations in June and July 2013.
- Ensure the Egyptian judiciary is able to conduct independent and impartial reviews of all cases involving press freedom.

To Egyptian political parties:

- All parties should respect the role played by all journalists in covering news events, providing diverse perspectives, and giving voice to all sectors of society. All parties must condemn anti-press aggression, state in unequivocal terms that such violence is not condoned, and work actively to prevent supporters from attacking members of the press. All parties should agree that, regardless of their political differences, Egyptian democracy will not flourish without a diverse, vibrant, and secure media environment.

To Egyptian news media:

- Bridge the intense polarization within the Egyptian media that makes all Egyptian journalists more vulnerable. Speak out against all attacks on the press, including acts of censorship, obstruction, harassment, threat, and assault.

To the international community:

- Insist on respect for press freedom and the complete end to ongoing censorship as conditions for bilateral and multilateral support.
- Speak out against ongoing press violations in both public statements and private communications with the Egyptian government.

About the Author and Contributors

Author

Sherif Mansour is coordinator of CPJ's Middle East and North Africa program. He previously worked with Freedom House in Washington, where he managed advocacy training for activists in the Middle East and North Africa. In 2010, Mansour co-founded the Egyptian Association for Change, a Washington-based nonprofit that mobilized Egyptians in the U.S. to support an opposition coalition led by Mohamed ElBaradei that sought free and fair elections and human rights in Egypt. He has monitored Egyptian elections for the Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies and has worked as a freelance journalist. In 2004, he was honored by the Al-Kalema Center for Human Rights for his work in defending freedom of expression in Egypt. Mansour has written several articles and conducted research on civil society and the role of the news media in achieving democracy.

Research

Shaimaa Abu Elkhair is an Egyptian journalist and human rights defender who serves as CPJ's Cairo-based consultant. She previously worked as the Regional Media and Communications Officer at the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network. In 2008, she was awarded a fellowship at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of North Carolina. She has reported for several Egyptian newspapers and television stations.

Contributor

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